

Episode Title: Vince Gill Is On the Road Again

Episode Summary:

In this week's episode, Sid Evans, Editor-in-Chief of Southern Living Magazine, welcomes back Vince Gill to Biscuits & Jam. Today, Vince talks about getting his first real break from touring in almost five decades, playing to an empty audience at the Grand Ole Opry, and embarking on his first big solo tour in three years. Plus, Vince shares the stories of his stint as a vocalist with Pure Prairie League, the time Don Henley asked him to play with the Eagles, and the Grammy-winning song he wrote for his late brother, "Go Rest High on That Mountain".

Episode Transcript:

(Biscuits and Jam Theme begins)

Voice Over from Sid: Welcome to the Summer Tour edition of Biscuits and Jam, from Southern Living. I'm Sid Evans, editor-in-chief of Southern Living Magazine, and my guest today is the Oklahoma native and Nashville legend Vince Gill. The last time he visited with us was in October of 2020, right before his Christmas shows at the Ryman were canceled, and we are so happy to have him back.

Today, Vince talks about getting his first real break from touring in almost five decades, playing to an empty audience at the Grand Ole Opry, and embarking on his first big solo tour in three years.

Plus, Vince shares the stories of his stint as a vocalist with Pure Prairie League, the time Don Henley asked him to play with the Eagles, and the Grammy-winning song he wrote for his late brother, Go Rest High on That Mountain. All that and more this week on Biscuits & Jam.

Sid Evans: Well, Vince Gill, welcome back to Biscuits & Jam.

Vince Gill: Thank you. Good to be back. I must have done something right. You invited me back. Or wrong, and we're gonna fix it. I don't know. (laughs)

Sid Evans: So Vince, the last time I talked to you was October of 2020.

Vince Gill: No kidding.

Sid Evans: And we were really kind of at the peak of the pandemic-

Vince Gill: Right.

Sid Evans: ... or one of the peaks, anyway. and a lot of people went through that in different ways, and, of course, a lot of people suffered. but when you look back on that couple of years, how did you spend that time?

Vince Gill: Well, you know, it dawned on me at some point, when it all started, that all of a sudden my calendar was clear, and that had never happened, you know, in like 47 years. And I looked at it and I went, "Oh. This is a stretch. You know, this is different." And, it's not very kind to say, but I actually was

grateful for the break. I mean, I know so many people suffered and passed, and, and it was horrible, and, and what it did to our country and, and around the world is, obviously tragic. but I tried to find the peaks in it, for myself, is all I could do. You know? I played the guitar. I wish I could have figured out a way to fix it, but I just played the guitar. And so with that, I, I went home, and it was kind of good, 'cause I, I hadn't had a real break in, like I said, 47, 48 years. And so it, it was kind of peaceful, in a way. Amy and I both got COVID, mild cases. All of our kids got it, but, little by little, we worked our way back and were careful and got to go back to work again. And that's been, when something's taken away from you, you have a tendency when it, when you have it all going on, of, of not being as gracious as maybe you should, or grateful. And I was. I was just grateful that it was, that I could go back out and, and play music. I played a lot of shows at the Opry during COVID, they were really bizarre because no one was in the audience.

Sid Evans: Hm.

Vince Gill: We were basically just playing. They filmed it for Circle television and showed it around the country that way, but there was no audience. And it was still just, it kind of reminded me of the early days of the Opry when it was only a radio show. And so you'd finish your song, and, and you'd hear nothing.

Sid Evans: (laughs) So strange.

Vince Gill: It was weird, but it was kind of beautiful, you know? And, with there not being a crowd there, you didn't necessarily have to play to anybody. You could just get lost in the song that you were performing. And so through all of that, I wrote a lot of songs. I got creative. I worked hard on a, a new record I made with my longtime friend, Paul Franklin, steel guitar virtuoso here in Nashville. And we made a record some years ago called Bakersfield, where we did half Merle Haggard songs and half Buck Owens songs. And we're working on another one that's all Ray Price music, so we're trying to do our part to, to love and respect a, a lot of great, traditional country music.

Sid Evans: That's great. So it was a creative period for you.

Vince Gill: Very much so, yeah.

Sid Evans: Vince, are you still going to, uh, Nashville for breakfast every now and then?

Vince Gill: I just got home. (laughs) Every day. I've eaten the same breakfast for about 40 straight days. But I, I find something I like and I stick with it. And it's kind of fun to sit down and say, "You want the usual?" "Yeah, that'll work."

Sid Evans: (laughs) Do you and Amy cook very often, or did you cook more when the whole pandemic kicked in?

Vince Gill: Yeah, I guess we did. We ate a lot at home, and, you know, I guess there were some places where you could go pick stuff up and things like that. But yeah, we, we made it. We made it all right.

Sid Evans: What are some of her specialties?

Vince Gill: Well, my favorite thing she makes are these cheese grits. We only get them once or twice a year for Easter and, and Thanksgiving, it seems like, but that's some of the best soul food I've ever eaten what she does with that. And, you know, she cooks, but not over the top. nothing insane, but she's good at it when she wants to.

Sid Evans: Well, we're gonna have to get her cheese grits recipe.

Vince Gill: Man, it's good.

Sid Evans: (laughs) So Vince, there were a lot of things that I didn't get to ask you last time, and, and one was about your time with the Pure Prairie League.

Vince Gill: Mm-hmm.

Sid Evans: And they were famous for a song called Amie.

Vince Gill: Exactly.

Sid Evans: And I've just got to ask if that song had any special meaning for you and your Amy.

Vince Gill: Well, the funny thing is, it's spelled different.

Sid Evans: Right. (laughs)

Vince Gill: But I mean, I knew the song and my band since school, when I was still in high school. That, that record came out, I think in about 1971, if I'm not mistaken. And then nothing happened with that band, and they were dropped from their record contract. And the guy that wrote and sang Amie was a fellow named Craig Fuller, really talented guy. He had left the band after they were let go by the record company. And so then this song catches fire with all the college radio stations around the country in about 1974 and 1975, and it's everywhere, you know, and it becomes this monster record for them. And so they go and re-sign the band to a record deal, but Craig is no longer in the band, so they never had Craig's voice in songs to follow up the success of Amie with. I think they would have been a much bigger band had that happened. And then a few years down the road, I showed up three or four years later and wrote some songs for them, and sang most of the lead vocals for them. And we had a couple of hits, and once was called Let Me Love You Tonight in 1980. And that's a big deal for me. I was pretty young at the time, 22, 23 years old, and, and on American Bandstand, Solid Gold, and The Merv Griffin Show, and Don Kirshner's Rock Concert and all these shows I was, you know, would have watched when I was young. And, and so it was a great learning experience. I got to really learn how, how record production really worked, how record companies really worked, and promoting records, and, and all the stuff. It was real professional stuff at a time when I was really young, and I took a lot of it in and paid attention and tried to learn.

Sid Evans: Well, it was a great band and a, and a great song, and I remember buying that at a record store. I bought the 45. It was one of the first records I ever, ever brought home. I still got it. (laughs)

Vince Gill: Yeah. I got to sing the song while I was in the band for three and a half years, and that was a pretty neat experience to sing something that was so familiar to a crowd, a big crowd in an arena and

have them sing it with you. And, and that was, that was the first of, of anything like that to happen for me. You know, when I was in those bluegrass bands, nobody really knew whatever song you were playing or you'd written, and so that was fun to be on a stage and have a few songs that were familiar that really excited a crowd. It was fun for me.

Sid Evans: Yeah. You might need to bring it back.

Vince Gill: (laughs) I should. I, you know, I just feel like it, I have no claim to it,

Sid Evans: Right. Right.

Vince Gill: It feels disingenuous for me to sing that song because it's Craig's song, and, and he sang it, and he, he made the record that was popular of it. And obviously, I sang it, but I don't think that entitles me, the gratis to be the one to sing that song out there.

Sid Evans: Well, Vince, you're about to head out on a big summer tour and really, this is the first solo tour that you've had since 2019, I think.

Vince Gill: Yeah, it'll be three years.

Sid Evans: And I know you've been out on the road for a long time but I'm wondering if this tour feels different in some ways.

Vince Gill: Well, once again, I feel grateful, to go out there and play my songs, I can't even describe how much I've loved getting to tour with the Eagles for the last six years, and get to, to be on stage and facilitate in some way, some small way, those songs, getting to live on. And, it hasn't been lost on me, but it, it's made me miss the songs I wrote, and the, and the career that I accomplished. And so I, I'm anxious to go out there and sing songs for the people that invested in me so, so kindly over all these years, and, just to get to ride around on the bus and crack jokes and hang with my old buddies. It's gonna be a blast.

Sid Evans: Do you have to kind of get in shape for a tour like this? I mean, are you playing your guitar every day and rehearsing and practicing, or, or is this sort of old hat for you?

Vince Gill: Well, I am 65. If I was smart, I might woodshed a little more than I usually do. (laughs) But I usually just strap a guitar on and walk out and, and go play and sing, and, and it's come pretty easy over the years. And I kind of feel like I'll just go with whatever I've got that night, you know? And there's nothing I can do about it either way. But I've been doing so much work with the Eagles that we've worked plenty, and I'm in decent shape in, playing-wise and singing-wise, so it should be just fine.

Sid Evans: Well, you talked about the Eagles, and we talked about this a little bit last time, but I didn't get to ask you when you got to know Don Henley. When did that happen?

Vince Gill: My ex-brother-in-law from my first marriage was in a band that opened for them on a lot of their dates on The Long Run tour. So back in about 1980, I would have briefly met all of them, um, but it would have just been, "Hi, how you doing," and that was it, so no reason for any of them to remember me. And then fast forward a bunch of years, and, I, I did a song on the tribute to the Eagles record that they did here out of Nashville, and, and I did I Can't Tell You Why that Timothy sang. And Timothy came

and sang backgrounds on the version of that song that I did. And so little by little, I got to know everybody, and Don was the last one that I ever really got to know. And he called and asked if I would come work on his record called Cass County and asked me to come sing and play on a few things. And I had a great experience, you know? I knew what a detail guy he was, and he wanted things just so, and I like that. I like trying to work that hard and that studious. So we, we hit it off, you know? And then, uh, we did a duet sometime later, of a song called Sacrifice, an Elton John song, Elton and Bernie song. They were doing a tribute record to them, and we did a really neat duet of Sacrifice. And then after Glenn's passing, they tracked me down, said, "Hey, we're kind of thinking about doing this. Would you have any interest?" And I said, "When do we leave?" That's not a hard one. I'm in. You know? Once again, the word grateful keeps coming up today, but I am, because there's a lot of people they could have called to go and continue that, and they, they picked me, so that was a pretty unbelievable validation of, of a lot of hard work for a long, long time.

Sid Evans: That's a pretty special assignment. Well, Don grew up in a small town in Texas.

Vince Gill: Mm-hmm. Linden.

Sid Evans: And you grew up-

Vince Gill: Linden, Texas.

Sid Evans: Right. And you grew up in Oklahoma, and I'm wondering if there's kind of a cultural connection for y'all in terms of the music that you were into or how y'all grew up.

Vince Gill: Yeah, I would say there is. You know, he knows a lot of the music I knew when I was young. He learned a lot of the same things. And, it makes sense. You know, I mean, there's a big rivalry between (laughs) Oklahoma and Texas that has gone on forever, and we have fun with that. But-

Sid Evans: Especially if you're a sports fan. (laughs)

Vince Gill: Exactly. But, I'd like to think we're so much closer than I thought we would ever be. I think what it is, there's a really beautiful mutual respect, you know, that we have for each other. And I think he's one of the best lyricists and singers I've ever heard, period, and what they've accomplished bears that out. He treats me with respect, and, and likes to know what I think, like to know all those kinds of things. It's been pretty awesome. I'm once again, just a little overwhelmed sometimes standing on that stage with those guys, and song after song after song after song is so iconic. I asked him when we first started working together, I said, "Okay, shoot me straight. What's the first song you and Glenn ever wrote?" And he smiled and he said, "Desperado." I said, "Come on. You had to write five or six crappy songs." And he started laughing, (laughs) he goes, "No. That was the very first song we ever wrote." It's like, to me, it was like game over, you know? You just can't, you can't get any better than Desperado. And when we play it live, it's always during the encore, and it always is emotional for me to hear that song, 'cause it's so good. I'll be over there, you know, after we finish, just applauding, and he'll look at me and go, "Quit it. Stop it. Quit it." And I go, "Uh-uh." (laughs) It's great. It deserves it. (laughs)

Sid Evans: I mean, I'm sure you have their whole catalog down pat by now, but is there one song that you really love to sing the most?

Vince Gill: Well, I mean, I, obviously, I get to show off a good bit on Take It to the Limit, 'cause it goes so stratospherically high, and, and it's a big showstopper song for them and always has been, especially when Randy sang it, you know? but for me, Desperado is the one that really, because it was their first song, and because that was the song that, that led to, to all of it. It's pretty astounding, you know, that that's your, that's your starting point, is Desperado. (laughs) Okay. Good luck. Try to follow that up. But damned if they didn't, you know? They just did. And I have so much respect for, for all of them, you know? I mean, obviously so many of the guys are gone and, and moved on, and they're doing different things, but, I met everybody. I knew Bernie. I knew Randy. I knew Don. and so it feels really familiar to be in that band, in a way. You know, I tell people, I said, "Yeah, I was in Pure Prairie League, but I wanted to be in the Eagles." (laughs) So that was, that was a great thrill, you know, just, once again, that they tracked me down and said, "Hey, come do this with us."

Sid Evans: Well, it seems like you've always got about 17 different projects going on. And you recorded a song called Love Changes Everything-

Vince Gill: Oh, yeah.

Sid Evans: ... with Mickey Guyton-

Vince Gill: Mm-hmm.

Sid Evans: ... who's also been on this podcast. Tell me a little bit about how you got to know Mickey and how that collaboration happened.

Vince Gill: It's been several years ago. We were on the same label, Universal, MCA. I'm not sure what they call themselves now. But she was a new artist, and, and I heard her sing, and I walked over and introduced myself and said, "I've been here a long time, but you and I'll do something together someday. You're really, I think you're really gifted." And it took a while, but the right thing finally showed up, you know? And she sounds beautiful on that song.

Vince's song, "Love Changes Everything" comes in and we hear the following at full volume then fades out:

*Love can break your heart and heal your soul
Warm the winter years when you're gray and old
When you start to fall, back's against the wall
Makes you fly, fly, fly with a broken wing*

Vince Gill: I love that song. It's the same, same guy that wrote The House That Built Me. Tom Douglas. Tom is a brilliant songwriter. I've always loved his work and his ideas and his thoughts, and a beautiful song. And, and Mickey came and gave it what it needed.

Sid Evans: Yeah, she sure did. It's a great song. Vince, you're headed out on the road with a woman named Wendy Moten, who I believe is from my hometown of Memphis.

Vince Gill: She's a Memphis girl, preacher's kid. Yeah, she's unbelievable.

Sid Evans: She has this killer voice. and she was actually runner-up on The Voice.

Vince Gill: Right.

Sid Evans: Tell me how y'all met and what it's like being on stage with her.

Vince Gill: Well, the woman that sang with me for, oh God, 25, 30 years, was a woman named Dawn Sears. She sadly passed a few years back. And I knew I had to find somebody, but I didn't want to. I didn't want anybody else up there singing with me. And somebody said, "There, there's a woman you should hear named Wendy Moten." And I went and did my research and, and heard her sing, and just went, "My God." And to me, she's got, she's got one of those voices that's as special as Aretha. it's as special as Whitney Houston or, or Gladys Knight, or any of these great soul singers of, of all time. And I tracked her down and I said, "Hey, I don't know what you're up to, but I could sure use some help in my band and touring." And she goes, "I'd love to go. I always liked what you did." And, and I, as I heard her gift, you know, I said, " why aren't you an artist? " And she said, "Well, I was kind of being groomed to be the heir apparent to Whitney back in the mid '90s," and for whatever reason it didn't take, or it didn't happen, or she didn't like it, or I, I don't know any of the details. But, she took a job with Julio Iglesias and went off, traveled the world with him for 15 or 20 years as his duet singer. And, uh, the more I heard her sing, I said, "The world should hear you sing, Wendy. You're, you're just, you're too gifted, and that's my dream for you." And I said, "Would you consider making a record, letting me help you make a record?" And I wanted to do it in the spirit of the Ray Charles record that was made in 1961 or '62. I'm not sure the exact date but the Modern Sounds of Country and Western Music that Ray Charles did where he did these soulful versions of all these really, really, really great country songs. And I asked Ray, I said, "Why did you want to do that?" And he said, "Well, I like the stories. I love the stories in those songs." So I presented Wendy a collection of songs. I said, "I think we can make a really cool record." And she didn't know most of the songs which was fun to, for me to be able to turn her on to some really great songs from the past. And, and she torched them all. She just torched them all, and it's the coolest record. And sadly, nobody was interested in putting the record out and, and signing her and all that. but I think it'll, eventually come to light. And even in the, over the past few years, I've featured her in, in, in my shows, just telling people, I said, "You have to hear this person sing." She's too good, and would be wrong to not let her share the stage, and so I have, and we've done a bunch of those songs over the years. And now since she did what she did on The Voice, you know, there's a little heat around Wendy and a little attention, and so I said, "Man, rather than opening the shows for me, why don't we do it like we did, and maybe a little bit longer, but feature you in the middle of the show? I think it'll go better and you'll get a little bit more attention that way, rather than coming out and singing six or seven songs before we play and all that." So we're excited about, you know, getting to work up some of those songs and watch her shine. I, I just love sharing a stage. I don't worry too much about who gets the lion's share or the attention, or how much someone sings or doesn't sing or gets to shine. I d- I like to see everybody that has a gift be able to share that gift, and stage is kind of pretty democratic in my world. And so I like that.

Sid Evans: Well, she's, she is wonderful, and I would encourage anybody to, that can, to go out and see y'all play. Those are gonna be great shows.

Vince Gill: Yeah.

(Instrumental music break of Biscuits and Jam theme)

Voice over from Sid: I'll be back with more from Vince Gill after the break.

(AD BREAK)

(Instrumental music break of Biscuits and Jam theme)

Voice over from Sid: Welcome back to Biscuits & Jam, from Southern Living. I'm Sid Evans, and today I'm talking with Vince Gill.

Sid Evans: Vince, you've been supporting the military in various ways for years, and you've done all sorts of concerts, tributes, you name it. Where does your connection to the military come from, and what kind of relationship do you have with that community?

Vince Gill: You know, I respect what they have the courage to do, I think a lot of it is probably the era that I grew up in. When I was fairly young, Vietnam was going on, and I, I witnessed firsthand how they were treated when they came home, it crawled all over me. It was disrespectful. And they were just doing what they were told to do and did it to the best of their abilities, but yet came home and, and were not treated as respectfully as I think they all, all, all deserved. And so I just think no matter what it is, whether it's the military or it's kids with cancer or it's this, I like chipping in. It's just my heart. and I feel that's a good way to live if you're willing to help somebody out that can maybe use a little help. Nobody's gonna get hurt doing that. All that kind of spirit and all that kind of kindness would cure most every problem we have. You know, all the problems we have, we create them ourselves. And if we didn't act the way we did and treat people the way we treat them, they'd all go away, you know, no matter which one it is. And I know that sounds simple and, and, and all of that, but it, it's kind of true. You know, take anything that, that's going on, and with a little kindness and a little respect, I think we could probably get most things to get fixed. And I don't think the answer is to, to ask the politicians to fix everything that we're, that's just as big a part of messing up.

Sid Evans: Right. Well, you know, you have had your own experiences with loss and injury, and your brother had a, a tragic car accident that left him with brain damage back when you were, I think 11 years old?

Vince Gill: Something like that.

Sid Evans: Tell me about your brother before that accident and what he was like.

Vince Gill: Well, he was, you know, he was awesome after his accident, too. his personality didn't change. He was still the kindhearted guy that he always was. And he was, he was really good at taking care of me. I don't see old pictures where he's not caring for me, holding me, carrying me, playing guitar with me, shooting pool with me. He was good to me. He was a great big brother, what you dream of. And he was even after the accident, you know? And, um, the problem that he was he didn't get all the way back, you know, mentally, probably, where he had been, but he got a lot further back than they ever thought he would. So with that, he struggled. The, where he would struggle was just simple things he wouldn't think to remember, put oil in his car, or, you know, just normal things that you, you shouldn't have to think about doing. They're pretty, pretty easy, but he couldn't ever stay on task with that kind of stuff. And so he, he, he never could keep a job, and, he kind of lived a homeless lifestyle to some degree. You know, he would disappear for long periods of time. Mom wouldn't know where he was, and, and

he'd be staying at the mission or working on a Salvation Army truck, or... The last story I remember was, he called from somewhere in the Northeast, like, in Massachusetts or something, and he, I think he was, like, a janitor or a cook or something at a, a prison up there, and finally said, "I, I want to come home." So Mom sent him a bus ticket home, and he came home and stayed home until he passed in '93. You know, what was cool about my, my brother was, he was dealt a pretty rough hand, but he never complained about it. he never whined about, you know, his lot in life. He treated it with, with great dignity and great character, and that's what I got to watch more than anything, and that was a great lesson. I didn't realize it at the time, being a young kid, but, you know, just never hearing him saying, "I got, I got screwed. I got a raw deal. It was somebody else's fault." I, you know, that's the way we are these days, is everything sad or negative or bad that happens, it's somebody else's fault. And he wouldn't go there, that was a great sign of character in my eyes as a young kid admiring his big brother. And so I don't do a lot of whining. (laughs) there's always somebody that's got it better than you, and there's always somebody that got it worse than you, so you know.

Sid Evans: (laughs) Yeah.

Vince Gill: It's, it's, it's pretty simple. But, he, you know, had a bad, bad drinking problem, and even did before the accident, and that's what caused the accident,, I think go- they said going well over 100 miles an hour, and then had too, too many beers, sideswiped a semi, and a bunch of flips, and hit a cement embankment, they all said he wouldn't live, and if he did, it'd be in a vegetative state probably for the rest of his life. But he made it out. You know, he made it a million times further than anybody ever thought he could. You know, I don't think they knew much about head injuries back then, you know, like they do now, So any time I hear about somebody that's, you know, had a little, little head injury or that kind of stuff, it makes me think of, of my big brother.

Sid Evans: You wrote a song called Go Rest High On That Mountain, which I believe was inspired by your brother. Is that right?

Vince Gill: It was. Correct.

Vince's song, "Go Rest High On That Mountain" comes in and we hear the following at full volume then fades out:

*Oh, how we cried the day you left us
We gathered 'round your grave to grieve
Wish I could see the angels faces
When they hear your sweet voice sing*

Sid Evans: And this has become a song that you're really known for. It's won Grammy Awards. It was a CMA song of the year. And you've sung it at some very famous funerals.

Vince Gill: (laughs) All of them. (laughs)

Sid Evans: George Jones, Charlie Daniels. (laughs)

Vince Gill: Yeah.

Sid Evans: Talk to me about what that song means to you.

Vince Gill: Well, it's, it's so much deeper than a hit record could ever be, you know, 'cause it wasn't a number one record or anything. It got on the charts and performed well and got close to being a top 10 record, but, you know, a five minute funeral song is not everybody's idea of, of fun country radio, you know? (laughs) I don't even think I intended to record it. And I'd written it a- you know, I started the first couple of lines after the passing of Keith Whitley. He was a friend of mine in the bluegrass world, and he's being inducted into the Hall of Fame in this next class, and it's really great to see. But there was a line in the first verse, "You weren't afraid to face the devil. You were no stranger to the rain." He had a song called I'm No Stranger to the Rain, and that's where that, that came from. But then I, I felt awkward about writing it, and I put it away, and for several years. And then when my brother passed, I remembered, hey, I had a neat idea for the start of a song. And that's when the chorus came, "Go rest high," and, And then a couple years ago, I wrote a, a third verse for it. all these years I've done it and sung it, and heard it sung and played it funeral after funeral. I, as a songwriter, I felt like it never was complete. You know, once again, a third verse in that song would have made it six minutes long. (laughs) Nobody would have touched it. So I finally wrote a third verse, and, and it, it feels like it finally is complete. And I've been singing that third verse for the last few years, and it, it feels great to, to kind of have the song button up and, and really finally complete the story.

Sid Evans: You sang a beautiful and emotional version of that song with Patty Loveless at George Jones's funeral-

Vince Gill: I tried. (laughs)

Sid Evans: ... years ago. (laughs)

Vince Gill: I tried real hard. (laughs)

Sid Evans: I think it's got, it's got, like, 12 million views on, uh-

Vince Gill: Oh, yeah.

Sid Evans: ... YouTube, I think. Was George Jones someone that you had gotten to know really well?

Vince Gill: Yeah, he was. I knew him really, really well, got to tour with him in my early days when I first had a couple of hits. And, and he was kind to me, took me under his wing. I sang on some of his records, and we helped make that record he made in the '90s called The Bradley Barn Sessions. And we were really great friends, and he called me sweet pea. Arguably the greatest country singer of all time. You know, they, everybody's gonna name the same, same three or four people when they say who's the best of all time, and he's always in the conversation. But he was a great friend, but what tore me up at that funeral was the sound of Patty Loveless's voice, 'cause I hadn't sung with her in a, a good, long while. And, and our voices have been pretty unbelievable together. She sang on, on the record of Go Rest High On That Mountain with me, along with Ricky Skaggs, and I sang on some of her very first records back in the mid to late '80s, and she sang on When, When I Call Your Name, my first hit record. So we're, we're brother and sister in, in so many ways. And so she started singing that chorus, and, there was her voice, and it just took me down, took me out, and I just couldn't recover. You know, I tried and tried and tried. I just kept playing the guitar. I kept playing the guitar for, for the longest time (laughs) until I could get my

composure enough to try to squawk out the rest of the song. But, just a, a beautiful moment. You know, I, I remember a time, there's a great disc jockey up here named Eddie Stubbs who was on WSM for years and was one of the announcers on the Grand Ole Opry, and real dear friend, and a bluegrass buddy and great fiddle player. And, he always was the guy they asked to eulogize at a hillbilly singer's funeral, and I'm the guy they always asked to sing Go Rest High (laughs) On That Mountain. So there was a period of time for, I don't know, couple months, two or three months, where we sang at a half a dozen hillbilly singer funerals, you know? He put his arm around me, and he said to me, he said, "Hoss." He said, "I believe you and me are gonna bury them all." I said, "I think we are, too." (laughs) And that's-

Sid Evans: Oh, God. (laughs)

Vince Gill: ... that's about come true. But you know what, what it is about that song is I'm so taken because people want that song during their hardest and most struggling of times. And the fact that they'd pick something that I came up with, it's like I said earlier, it's so much deeper and so much more impactful than a hit song could ever be.

Sid Evans: Hm. Yeah, well, it sure is. It's a very special song, and it's a powerful song, and, and I can see why (laughs) people would want to go out on that one.

Vince Gill: (laughs) Yeah.

Sid Evans: (laughs) So Vince, you and Amy have been playing a run of Christmas shows at the Ryman for a bunch of years now, but of course that got interrupted during COVID, and, and we talked about that back in October of 2020. What was it like for y'all on that first night back at the Ryman in 2021?

Vince Gill: It felt good for us and for them, and for the crowd. The crowd missed it too, you know? The crowd, I think, kind of sees that as part of tradition, of holiday tradition. It's pretty cool when, when people want to do something because of the tradition of it, you know? And, and that has long... That's how Amy and I met back in 1993, was doing a, a Christmas special together. I was doing a Christmas special in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and I invited Chet Atkins and I invited Michael McDonald, and I said, "Well, hey, if we invited this Amy Grant girl, she's got a pretty big gospel following." (laughs) "You know, we could, we could really kill it." So I invited her, and she walked in the rehearsal hall, and I haven't been the same since.

Sid Evans: (laughs) I didn't know y'all met in Oklahoma. That's great.

Vince Gill: Well, we met briefly a time or two in Nashville, but never, never really long enough to have a conversation other than, "Hey, how you doing," at a celebrity basketball game or this or that. They'd have celebrity softball games and basketball games and things like that we'd always turn up at, but we never really did have a visit until we sat down in makeup chairs and got acquainted and found out we were pretty compatible.

Sid Evans: (laughs) I'll say. Well, you grew up in Oklahoma, and, and you're playing some dates in Oklahoma, on this tour. And you've lived in Nashville for a lot longer than you ever lived in Oklahoma but I'm wondering if that still feels like home when you go back and visit and perform.

Vince Gill: It does. There's just something about that red dirt that feels familiar. Climate feels familiar. The, everything that's surrounding you feels familiar, even more so than it does here. I've lived in Nashville for almost 40 years, it's home, but so is Oklahoma, you know, in a deeper way because those formative years of learning to play and learning to sing and playing baseball and basketball and anything with a ball, you know, we, just learning how to fi- you know, so much of that, deep-seated stuff is, is driven by that red dirt in Oklahoma, so it'll always be home. And you always feel like you're gonna get that welcoming home of, of the home town kid that did okay, you know? That ran off and did all right, and came back and hadn't forgotten where he came from.

Sid Evans: (laughs) Well, you've kind of already answered this question, Vince, but, you know, usually I end this asking what it means to them to be Southern, and I asked your wife Amy that question. But what does it mean to you to be from Oklahoma, and how has that kind of stayed with you through the years?

Vince Gill: Well, the thing I think about where I'm from is, because of where it is, it doesn't feel like it's Southern, doesn't feel like it's a part of the South, doesn't feel like it's a part of the West, doesn't feel like the Northeast or, or the North or, or any of it. You know, it's just kind of this center section. Between Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska all up in there, that's, that's all the farmland. It's all the hard dirt, hard working, cattle farming. I think what I, I feel the most out of people from that part of the world is common sense. You know? It's simple. It's hard work. There's no perception of sorts of, of what, what an Okie's like. You know, the term was, being called an Okie was a derogative term, you know, when the Dust Bowl happened and they all migrated out West. You know, they were looked down upon, and here come those damn Okies. They meant it ugly, you know? (laughs) So, but there's, there's a lot of pride, you know, in being a Texan or being an Okie or a Jayhawk, and, or a, or a Cornhusker, or... You know, that, that part of the world is, is prideful, too, like, like most, most places are, but, without a whole lot of bravado. Little more simple-minded to it.

Sid Evans: Well, Vince, it's been great having you back on Biscuits & Jam.

Vince Gill: Yay. Thanks. My pleasure. I, I didn't realize it'd been so long. I remember doing it, but I couldn't have laid claim to when. (laughs)

Sid Evans: (laughs) Well, I hope you'll come back sometime.

Vince Gill: Any time. Just holler.

Sid Evans: (laughs) All right.

Vince Gill: All right, man. We'll see you next time.

Voice Over from Sid: Thanks for listening to my conversation with Vince Gill. Make sure to visit VinceGill.com for music, tour dates, social media and more. Southern Living is based in Birmingham, AL. Be sure to follow Biscuits & Jam on Apple Podcasts, Spotify or wherever you listen. And we'd love your feedback. If you could rate this podcast and leave us a review we'd really appreciate it. You can also find us online at southernliving.com/biscuitsandjam Make sure to come back here next week for my conversation with the Texas troubadour Robert Earl Keen.