

STATESIDE | NASHVILLE



The Show Must Go On

Nashville stages a big comeback. BY KATHLEEN WALLS

Legendary Greats:
Famous country music singers' memorabilia on display at the Country Music Hall of Fame

PHOTO: © LEQUINT

They call it Music City for a reason. Music remains one of Nashville's top economic drivers, and tourists flock here specifically for the entertainment. The COVID years hit Nashville hard, however, resulting in a loss of about \$30 billion during 2020 alone. Some venues, like The George Jones, a combination museum, restaurant, event space and rooftop bar, permanently closed. Others managed to hang on. But Nashville always demonstrates its resiliency, and it's staging a comeback.

In June 2022 Nashville International Airport announced New Horizon, a \$1.4 billion improvement and expansion plan for two concourses, a new air freight building, terminal roadway improvements and additional upgrades. The project includes a new Hilton hotel with 292 guestrooms, meeting space, a rooftop pool and Sky Bar, fitness center, lobby bar and full-service restaurant. Construction began in October 2022, with an opening expected in late 2023, Nashville Mayor John Cooper said,

"With this great news, BNA can say, 'We're back.' We had the pandemic, and we're back. Not everybody can say that."

On a recent visit, riding Old Town Trolley along Broadway and Music Row, we noticed construction everywhere we looked. Whenever someone asked what was being built, our driver said, "No idea. They're building here 24/7."

The construction no doubt included the dozen or so hotels adding finishing touches for last year's openings, such as Four Seasons, 1 Hotel, Conrad and Hotel Fraye (Curio Collection by Hilton). New attractions also opened recently, joining the city's already impressive Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum with Historic RCA Studio B, Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame Gallery and Musicians Hall of Fame and Museum.

The National Museum of African American Music, the only museum dedicated to preserving the history of Black music in America, opened in 2021. An experiential entertainment multiplex, Lighthouse ArtSpace, opened in 2022 with Immersive Van Gogh. The venue partnered

with Disney to present Disney Animation: Immersive Experience, opened Feb. 9 and running through May 14.

Shiners — a hilarious Broadway-meets-circus play about a family of moonshiners — opened in September 2022 in the revitalized Woolworth Theatre, located in the former Woolworth store where peaceful civil rights sit-ins took place at the lunch counter in the 1960s. The show features two-time Tony Award-nominated Broadway actress Laura Osnes and Chuck Wicks, songwriter, radio show co-host and two-time Academy of Country Music Award nominee for National On-Air Personality of the Year.

According to Mark Logsdon, vice president, PLA Media, one of Nashville's premier public relations companies, the city is also looking at its foothold on the global scene. "We executed PR on a multicultural and government agreement between Liverpool and Nashville via The Unity of Faiths Foundation's The Road to Nashville mental health-anchored songwriting contest," said Logsdon. "Also, with Apple Music opening a studio and office here, we now have international radio shows being created and broadcast from right here in Nashville."

He noted the city is seeing a trend in Vegas-style entertainment, citing the cowboy-esque *Ranch Hands* at Nashville Palace, offering a sexy mix of improv comedy, crowd interaction, choreographed dancing and singing. A perfect fit since Nashville ranks as one of the top bachelorette party destinations in the country.

Miranda Lambert's new four-level restaurant, Casa Rosa, proves a favorite. Lambert is the first female artist to have a venue on lower Broadway,



serving a Tex-Mex menu inspired by her Texas roots. The country music star drops in often. You'll notice lots of girlie touches from pink lighting to tufted pink booths. And don't miss The Pink House, a room displaying her memorabilia including costumes, the famous bird cage from her No. 1 song "Bluebird" and a rhinestone saddle above the second-floor restaurant.

Mary Skinner, former marketing and communications manager, Tennessee State Museum, currently works with several local hospitality organizations. "2020 was especially hard for Nashville because along with the pandemic, the city experienced a deadly tornado and the Christmas Day bombing in the downtown historic district. Now 2022 visitation exceeded pre-pandemic numbers. The city has a new soccer stadium and is planning a new football stadium."

Besides music attractions, others like The Parthenon, Andrew Jackson's Hermitage, Cheekwood Estate & Gardens, Belmont Mansion, Nashville Zoo and Tennessee State Museum continue to thrive. Nashville is not simply recovering ... it's booming.

Music History:
Bus mural at Studio B

PHOTO: © KATHLEEN WALLS

SCENIC DRIVES

Drive about 22 miles south to Franklin, famous for Civil War history and the site of one of the war's bloodiest battles. The historic Carter House sits at the battle site. Carnton, made famous by the award-winning book *Widow of the South*, functioned as a hospital. Lotz House still bears battle scars. McLemore House Museum is the oldest African-American home in Franklin. Franklin's historic downtown is on the National Register of Historic Places, and The Williamson Museum recreates downtown Franklin of the 1800s and early 1900s. Visit The Factory at Franklin, once a stove factory, now housing shops, dining, Bluebird Theater and, on Saturdays, a farmers market. Overlooking Harpeth River, Fort Granger served as a Union fort during the Second Battle of Franklin.

Drive about 10 miles west to Leipers Fork, where you'll think they crossed Hazzard County with Mayberry. The General Lee from *The Dukes of Hazzard* and Barney Fife's cruiser from *The Andy Griffith Show* sit on the roadside. Art galleries, antique shops and down-home restaurants fill the streets of the quaint village.

Continue another hour southwest to London. Commodore Hotel downtown makes a good stop. Even if you're not staying overnight, you'll enjoy Music Café and Speakeasy Lounge. Explore downtown's art galleries, unique shops and colorful Main Street with murals.