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*This month we induct our 75th member, Wayne Hancock*  
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## Wayne "The Train" Hancock

Wayne "the Train" Hancock is a Texas artist who beat the system and found his own path to fame. His sound is often compared to Hank Williams, whom he imitated in his childhood, or the nasal-like yodel of Jimmie Rodgers.

Born on May 1, 1965, in Dallas, Texas, Hancock stumbled into music in a roundabout way. As a child, his family followed his father around to various government engineering jobs. They had a large collection of big band and country-and-western albums. "I was raised on it," he said, "I just never got into anything else, can't relate to anything else. Rock 'n' roll just didn't get it for me." Hank Williams was his idol, he continued. "When I first heard Hank Williams I stopped listening to everybody else. And I was also 12 at the time so I started drinking at 13, trying to be like him. That definitely put a dent in my way of thinking!" Hancock taught himself how to play the guitar and starting hanging out in honky-tonks. "If you hung around long enough, the band would let you play, if only to shut you up, but I didn't really take music seriously till the early '90s. I got out of the service and took to traveling around the country without direction. When I ran out of gas, I'd go in a bar and play. I found out they'd rather buy you a beer than give you a buck for gas money."

Hancock started writing songs when he was 12, playing at juke joints and belting out his songs for anyone who would listen. At 15 he started performing, but the idea of a music career was more of a dream than a possibility. He won the Wrangler Country Showdown at age 18, but was unable to collect the prize because he had already joined the Marines, straight out of high school.

After six years with the military, he drifted and wandered, trying to find where he fit in. "I bounced from job to job, and just couldn't keep my mind on anything," Hancock says. He went downhill, drinking more and unable to settle down. He was fired for being drunk on the job at the factory where his father worked as an engineer. "When I was younger, I kept thinking I needed a straight job," Hancock said "I always got fired, which was good for the music in the long run, but was humiliating for me at the time."

Hancock headed for Nashville. "I was playing in the street, sleeping under bridges. I was drinking so much I probably shot my own self in the foot," Hancock recalled. Once in Nashville, Hancock was discouraged by the response he got from the music industry. "Those guys told me I was no good at singing, no good at writing, no good at nothing. They told me I was too country for country. To this day, I don't understand what that means."

Hancock gave up on his musical career. "It's not like going over to your friend's house to play guitar on his porch for him and his buddies," Hancock recalled, "It's more like going over to some rich guy's house and the minute you get there he shoots you down in front of everybody, and kicks you out. That was Nashville, in a nutshell, for me."

He was living in a housing project in West Dallas when a friend invited him to go to Austin. He explains: "At first I said no. I was going to stay home and drink. Then the guy next door blew his buddy's brains out. I just heard several shots fired next door, and I was on my way." In Austin, Hancock faced his drinking problem. "I quit drinking," Hancock told the Morning Call, "because I'd lost so much in my life--my family wasn't talking to me, I'd burned a lot of bridges, lost a lot of jobs--I was looking at annihilation by my own hand. I guess that was a pretty damn low point."

He finally got a break as a featured guest singer with the western swing band Asleep at the Wheel, then caught the attention of Joe Ely, a leader of Austin's progressive country movement. In 1994 Ely invited him to join the cast of a stage musical/country opera that showcased a variety of Texas talent called Chippy, in which Hancock sang "Thunderstorms and Neon Signs," a song he had written. The tune caught Warner Brothers' attention, but the company lost interest when Hancock refused to change his sound to fit their mold. He was encouraged enough, however, to pull a band together and record his first album, named for its title track, "Thunderstorms and Neon Signs." It was recorded on a little-known label out of San Marcos called Dejadisc and produced by steel-guitar legend Loyd Maines. His music was immediately compared to Hank Williams and Jimmie Rodgers.

Hancock was soon playing 250 dates a year throughout the country, including performances on Austin City Limits and National Public Radio's A Prairie Home Companion, appearances that helped sell over 22,000 copies of his album. In 1997 he signed with Ark 21, a new label owned by former Police manager, Miles Copeland. His second album, That's What Daddy Wants, recorded in three days, gained such wide and immediate recognition that it was taken aboard the space shuttle Columbia. The album's success inspired Ark 21 to reissue Thunderstorms and Neon Signs, this time using the worldwide distribution muscle of EMI. In 1999 Hancock released Wild, Free & Reckless.

Hancock travels the country in a van with enough room for his musicians and equipment. "I'm happiest on the road," he said in an interview for Contemporary Musicians. It may not seem like a deluxe life, but he loves it. "The fact that I'm out here and ain't washing dishes is my idea of success," he says.

Hancock switched to Bloodshot Records, continuing to record and tour. A-Town Blues was released in 2001, followed by Swing Time in 2003. Hancock figures he'll continue in the music business as long as possible. "I'd like to be in business for the next 30 years," Hancock told me. "Put me in the chair, put a pen in my hand, and I'll write a song!"

Wayne manages himself, drives his own tour bus, and does not have any aura of superstardom to taint his sincere personality. He says his favorite gigs are sitting on the porch jamming with friends. Even if you don't care for country (and I don't), you'll like Wayne's music. It's very real and righteous in a painfully plastic world.

**GATOR**