



Mike in a Nashville studio in 2008, where he recorded with Ricky Skaggs

MIKE HUCKABEE'S COUNTRY SOUL

STORY BY PAT GALLAGHER

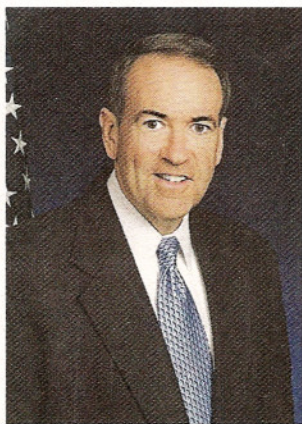
How a former governor brought country music to Fox News.

Mike Huckabee is not one-dimensional. He's an ordained Southern Baptist minister, former Republican governor of Arkansas, former candidate for president of the United States, author of several best-selling books, current host of his own political talk show (*Huckabee*, on Fox News Channel), provides a daily commentary on ABC Radio Networks, is a public speaker *and* a musician.

He cut his teeth on

country music (and a little bit of rock 'n' roll) when he was a small child growing up in Hope, Ark. "I was raised on [country music] as a kid," confesses

Mike. "Even though as a young child I got into The Beatles and The Rolling Stones and all the rock music, I was never really that far from country. It was always a part of not only our house and the way we lived, but I had to spend every Saturday watching the country-western television shows . . . Ernest Tubb and Porter

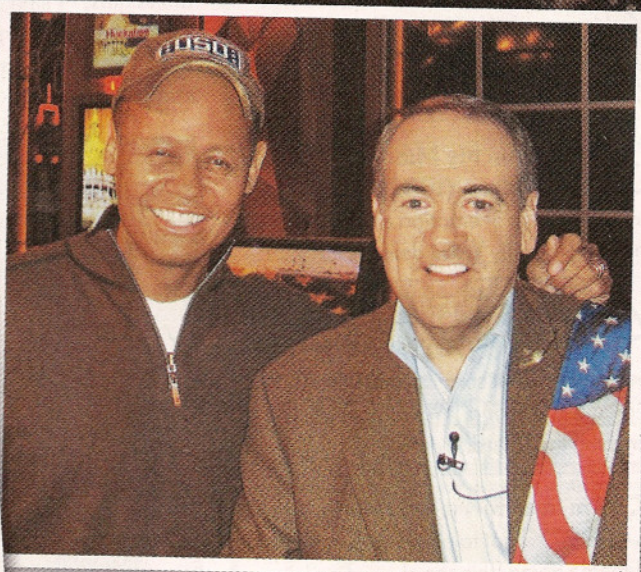
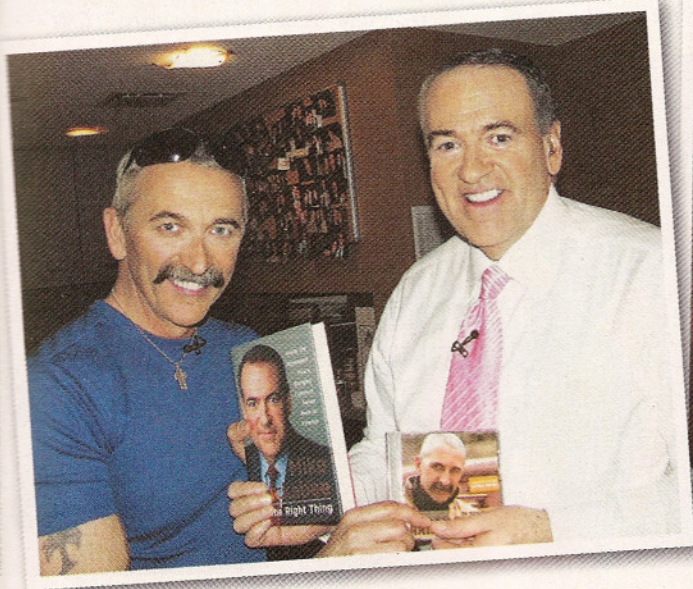


Wagoner and the Wilburn Brothers."

Mike began playing guitar at age 11, eventually performing with both rock and country bands as a teen. At the same time, he got his first job as a disc jockey on a station that played both—you guessed it—rock and country. "I still remember the sign-on to the station. I can still repeat it: 'Good morning, this is KXAR broadcasting on fourteen hundred ninety kilocycles with an operating power of one thousand watts as authorized by the Federal Communications [Commission]. We hope you'll join us for our entire broadcast day. Ladies and gentlemen, we'll begin with our national anthem.'"



MIKE WITH RICKY SKAGGS BY MATTHEW WILLIAMS/OLYMPIA PRESS; MIKE HUCKABEE PORTRAIT COURTESY MIKE HUCKABEE; MIKE IN STUDIO IN NASHVILLE BY MATTHEW WILLIAMS/OLYMPIA PRESS



Mike with country stars Aaron Tippin (left) and Neal McCoy



Mike onstage playing bass

5 Mike's Favorites

1 "Folsom Prison Blues," Johnny Cash (1968) "It was the definitive country song. I ended up playing it on three different instruments in bands."

2 "The Fightin' Side of Me," Merle Haggard (1970) "It was one of the first stand-up-and-cheer protest songs that I remember in country."

3 "Always on My Mind," Willie Nelson (1982) "You just hear this sense of emotion and pathos in the song the way Willie delivers it."

4 "For the Good Times," Ray Price (1970) "I was a disc jockey when that song came out and I remember thinking, 'Wow, this is unlike anything I've heard.'"

5 "I'm in a Hurry," Alabama (1992) "I got to play onstage with Alabama doing [this song] ... when I was governor and they were playing a concert in Little Rock."

MIKE HUCKABEE CONTINUED

Fast-forward 40-plus years. Mike now hosts a weekend show, *Huckabee*, on Fox News, which includes a music segment. "It's really unique for Fox," says Mike. "They first said, 'We don't do music,' and I said, 'We ought to do music, everybody loves it. I think it will be well received.'"

Fox officials countered by saying the network couldn't afford to hire musicians. "I said, 'You don't have to, you've got them all over this building,'" Mike recalls. "'It's a creative atmosphere. I promise you there are

musicians crawling all over this place. Give me a chance to pull some together and see what we can do.'"

Mike put together a house band nicknamed The Little Rockers. Aaron Tippin was the first guest to perform with the new band. "I'll always love Aaron for this," Mike says with a laugh. "He was willing to put it all on the line and come play with these amateur musicians. He was terrific."

The music segment, which has featured Neal McCoy and Tracy Lawrence, among others, has become the most popular part of the show, according to Mike. "Sometimes they'll come in and bring a few members of their band and they'll be augmented with our amateur musicians; sometimes they will play with the amateurs; sometimes they'll bring their entire band and I'll play bass."

Lynyrd Skynyrd, Neil Sedaka, Ricky Skaggs, George Jones and Ronnie Milsap are among the other stars who've performed on the show. "We've had such a great collection," Mike says.

He counts Merle Haggard among the artists he'd still like to meet. "I love all the artists, but the ones who have been able to do it for 50 years, that's amazing to me. When Ray Price was on the show ... he walked out there and was in total command of that stage. The difference between an entertainer and an artist is that an entertainer can take music and he can make you listen to it. An artist has you completely in his hands. If a guy can go out there day after day, year after year, and deliver and just completely own that arena, that's an artist." **CW**



Mike with Lynyrd Skynyrd