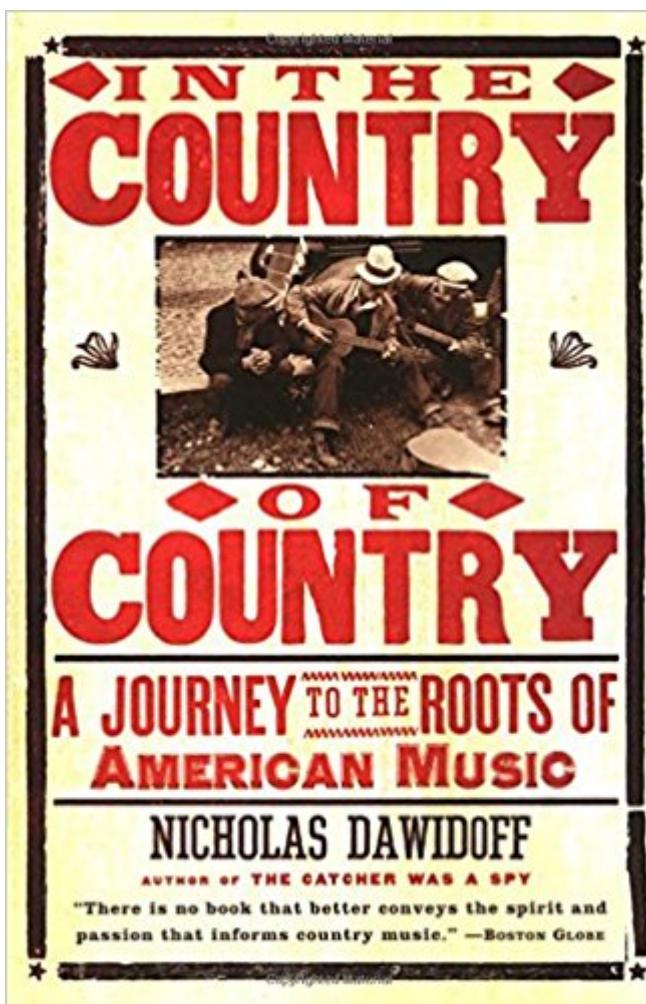


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# In The Country Of Country: A Journey To The Roots Of American Music



## Synopsis

In a series of indelible portraits of country music stars, Dawidoff reveals, among others, Jimmie Rodgers, the “father of Country”; Johnny Cash, the “Man in Black”; and Patsy Cline, a lonely figure striding out bravely in a man’s world. In the Country of Country is a passionate and expansive account of a quintessentially American art form and the performers that made country music what it is today. Both deeply personal and endlessly evocative, In the Country of Country pays tribute to the music that sprang from places like Maces Springs, Virginia, home of the Carter Family, and Bakersfield, California, where Buck Owens held sway. Bestselling author Nicholas Dawidoff takes readers to the back roads and country hollows that were home to Chet Atkins, Doc Watson, Emmylou Harris, and many more.

## Book Information

Paperback: 386 pages

Publisher: Vintage Books / Random House; 1st edition (April 28, 1998)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 037570082X

ISBN-13: 978-0375700828

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.8 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 14.9 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars 26 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #551,660 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #267 in Books > Arts & Photography > Music > Musical Genres > Country #830 in Books > Arts & Photography > Music > Reference #919 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Customs & Traditions

## Customer Reviews

“There is no book that better conveys the spirit and passion that informs country music.” The Boston Globe “A fine portrait of country musicians and the places that spawned them.” The New Yorker “Dawidoff’s passion for his subject shines on every page . . . [His] search for personal messages in the lives of country music has a resonance and grace that is likely to find readers for a long while to come.” The Chicago Tribune

From the author of the bestselling *The Catcher Was a Spy* comes an exhilarating exploration of the

performers, places, and experiences which form country music--a genre which is uniquely and authentically American. 40 photos. "From the Hardcover edition.

In the Country of Country by Nicholas Dawidoff (Random House, 1997, 365 pp., \$18.95/14.99) explores country music from its earliest recognized and recorded luminaries (The Carter Family & Jimmy Rodgers) through the great periods of classic and outlaw country to the newest musicians on tour at the time of the book's writing in the late 1990's. The book is filled with anecdotes that surprise and enlighten. For instance, Dawidoff recounts a story heard from Charlie Louvin about a boy near a show in Dyess Arkansas who showed him to the nearest bathroom. On the way back, Charlie ate a soda cracker. When the boy asked him why, he said, "To keep from starving." The kicker: that's why Johnny Cash ate crackers before every performance. Such connections between the early practitioners who emerged in the 1940's and great stars of the last decades of the twentieth century appear everywhere. While I read the book, I listened to recordings of the subjects of each chapter, thereby enriching my experience and deepening my understanding. Individual chapters focus on major figures in the development of country music, including bluegrass. Dawidoff interviewed all of his subjects, including Bill Monroe, Earl Scruggs, George Jones, Kitty Wells, Doc Watson, Buck Owens, EmmyLou Harris, and more) except Jimmie Rodgers, Sara Carter, and Patsy Cline, all of whom were deceased at the time of the writing. One other luminary is strangely not included, although his name crops up in almost every chapter: Hank Williams. Perhaps Williams, who died in 1953) was simply too big and dominating a character to be adequately covered in simply a chapter. It's a joy to read a book about music by a writer who's taking on a subject rather than a fan who decided to write. The use of lively imagery, thoughtful narrative, careful structure and apt description raise Dawidoff's writing above the pedestrian, bringing life to the characters who've enriched country music for nearly a hundred years. Published in 1998, the book uses living artists and extensive interviews with those who knew the subjects, bringing them to life in a way no other book I've read has managed. In the chapter on Doc Watson, the actual voices of Tom Ashley and Ralph Rinzler give the descriptive passages a greater reality that brings Watson's background and development as a performer to life. Insights, such as the fact that Doc grew up with music he heard on an old gramophone and the radio differentiated his music from that of others who learned theirs in church or on the front porch, giving it the distinctive precision that other country and bluegrass musicians of the time lacked. Such connections, found in each chapter distinguish Dawidoff's pellucid writing as they permeate Watson's playing. The Johnny Cash chapter examines the role of celebrity on productive song writing along with his image, life,

and the road with comments from Bob Dylan and Bruce Springsteen. In the George Jones chapter, I learned more about the reality of Jones in one short chapter than I did in the entire Grand Tour bio by Rich Kienzle. Part of this comes from the quality of Dawidoff's writing, and I think also from the distance he achieves by not being fully tied to the music community. While the book is often admiring, it never falls into hero worship as it keeps a clear, though sympathetic but never sycophantical eye on the character and development of each person in every profile. Dawidoff gives attention to the social and geographical mass movements of the mid- and late-twentieth century. Often, this is a book of displacement and connection. Most of the singers profiled came to stardom in music when they brought their music to honky tonks, theaters, and recording studios far removed from the southern poverty so many of them were born into during the depression. Even performers, like Rose Maddox and Buck Owens, who were from California, are the product of southern migrations to places where they or their parents could find more lucrative employment or escape the rigors of depression era farming conditions. His insights punctuate and extend the insight that today's country musicians don't share that experience, leading their music to go into other directions, because it has often come from less challenging circumstances. EmmyLou Harris represents a changing voice and sensibility in country music. Discussing her view of country's past and future, she says, "We're bringing a different experience to it, and that's right. Mimicking the past because the past is a safe bet is the worst thing to do." Nicholas Dawidoff is the author of six books. One of them, *The Fly Swatter*, was a Pulitzer Prize finalist, and another, *In the Country of Country*, was named one of the greatest all-time works of travel literature by Conde Nast Traveller. His first book, *The Catcher Was A Spy: The Mysterious Life Of Moe Berg* was a national bestseller and appeared on many 1994 best book lists. His latest book, *Collision Low Crossers: Inside the Turbulent World of NFL Football* was published in 2014. A graduate of Harvard University, he has been a Guggenheim, Civitella Ranieri and Berlin Prize Fellow, and is a contributor to *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times Magazine* and the *American Scholar*. The fact that he chooses a wide range of topics, including sports, family history, and country music suggests that Dawidoff brings broad experience to his writing, allowing unusual, piercing insights to emerge. *In the Country of Country* by Nicholas Dawidoff (Random House, 1997, 365 pp., \$18.95/14.99) was written after all the people he interviewed were well past their prime. Fortunately, he was able to interview them in their own contemporary setting before they left us. He portrays a time when what so many people today call "real country" was still a close memory, even while it had been replaced in popular music by rock and roll, contemporary pop, and hip hop. His vivid profiles, along with my listening contemporaneously to the performers themselves, helped

clarify their place in music history for me and to realize why the music so many people seem to yearn for lies in our past rather than our present. I consider this book to be essential reading for anyone interested in the growth and development of country music. I read *In the Country of Country* in a used trade paperback version I bought through Thriftbooks. Note: All books mentioned in my reviews are linked to the book through my .com account. If you wish to purchase the title in any format, you can do so thorough my link. This will result in a small commission to me with no increase in the price for you. It helps maintain our travels, writing, and photography while assuring your complete privacy

What this book does is bring country music -real country music- into the 21st century. It does so by going back to the roots and examining the beginnings of this musical genre with detail and love. Going from Jimmie Rodgers, the Carter family, onto Bill Monroe and the Louvin Brothers, Dock Watson, Johnny Cash, George Jones, Patsy Cline, Kitty Wells, and onto the current torch carriers of country, Iris DeMent, The Flatlanders, and Emmylou Harris, the writer Nicholas Dawidoff shows how this music is genuine. The book includes a wonderful discography, and extensive notes. For those of you who can't stand the current crop of Nashville country posers, this book gives heart to the true music of America.

A bit thin in parts, but frankly, if it gets you digging deeper on your own, it's a good book, and this is. Refreshing look at the roots of real country, especially at a time like this, when once again, 'country' music has become little more than pop tunes with a little fiddle...

I truly loved this book and was sorry it had to end. It has greatly enhanced my appreciation of the music and given me lot of new music to listen to. I would recommend it to any lover of good music.

This book is a must for anyone who appreciates and remembers when country was country. Great background and personal insights to the legends that lived their songs and sang about their lives.

Beautifully written and packed with information about the great names that shaped the true American country music from Jimmie Rodgers to Johnny Cash and Emmylou Harris going through seminal names such as Bill Monroe and Earl Scruggs.

This is a must read for the serious Country Music fan. Dawidoff gives his usual detailed account, the

detail does not weigh the book down but brings life to all the subjects. Dawidoff starts off by stating that Garth Brooks represents all that is bad with County Western and then restates it several times throughout the book in case we have forgotten it. I agree with him 100% so I much enjoyed his introduction to the people behind the history of American music. No phonies here!

I am a huge fan of traditional country music and found this book to be entertaining and informative. Nicholas Dawidoff brought entertainers like Jimmie Rodgers and Kitty Wells to life. I would highly recommend this book to anyone who enjoys today's alternative country like The Flatlanders, Paul Thorn, and Son Volt.

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