
STRAIT TALK

George Strait Delivers Country Like Music Of Old And Best Of The New

by Rick Mitchell - Houston Chronicle
Houston, Texas

If anyone had any lingering doubts, George Strait has laid them to rest. In the world of mainstream country music, he's till the man.

At a time when country music is experiencing flat sales and declining radio listenership, Strait's touring country music festival with fellow stars Tim McGraw, John Michael Montgomery, Faith Hill, Lee Ann Womack, Lila McCann and Asleep at the Wheel has been setting attendance records cross the country.

The tour, which played to more than 1 million people in 18 stops this spring, finished up in Houston under a blue clear sky unday before a crowd of more than 0,000 people at Rice Stadium.

Backed by his peerless Ace In The Hole band, Strait closed the show with a superet that lasted an hour and forty minutes ncluding encores. His arrival was preceded y a 15-minute barrage of commercials on e video screen at the side of the stage ighlighting the tour's numerous corporate sponsers.

Strait is the strongest commercially viable ink between country's glorious past in onky-tonk and western-swing and its vatered-down pop-county present.

As if trying to remind the youthful audience what actual country music is supposed o sound like, he opened his set with Bob Vills' "Take Me Back To Tulsa" and continued to balance his own hits with classic overs by Wills, Merle Haggard, Conway witty and others.

When he followed the western-swing

standard "Milk Cow Blues" with his recent hit "Carrying Your Love With Me," the point was made: It's not about Young Country, or New Country, or Hot Country, or any other catchy real country, thank you very much.

Although he's balanced traditional and contemporary influences throughout his career, Strait has never forgotten this basic truth. The same can't be said for some of the other acts on the bill.

In general, the women fared better than men. Womack was the most successful new country artist of 1997. Like Strait, she balances traditional and contemporary influences, but her heart is clearly with the former.

Hill's set was a revelation. Her albums are well-produced pop-country that only hint at the soulful power of her voice. The sight of the singer, who is seven months pregnant, belting out a bloozy, rockin' version of Rod Stewart and the Faces' "Stay With Me" was priceless.

Hill reappeared during McGraw's set to sing the duet "It's Your Love." The couple are married, and McGraw sang his hit "I Like It, I Love It" while holding their 1-year-old daughter.

It was a poignant moment that can't disguise the fact that the song is country-disco pablum, as are too man of McGraw's other hits. While he may be a Renegade, as he declares in one of his songs, he's got a factory-approved brand stamped on his hide.

But the weakest link in the day's chain was Montgomery, who continues to squander his early potential with such sappy drivel as the current song "Love Workin' On You." And do we really need another end-


less version of "Sweet Home Alabama?"

During the breaks between sets on the mainstage, up-and-coming acts Jesse Dayton, Big House and Shane Stockton performed on a second stage outside the stadium. These acts offered a rough and ready contrast to the radio-safe sounds inside.

Jesse Dayton kicked off the day's music shortly after noon with a set that combined rock energy and volume with hardcore country soul. A native of Beaumont, Dayton is signed to Houston's Justice Records. His second album, "Wayward Soul," is due out in August pending the completion of partnership negotiations between Justice and a major label.

Big House, a band from Bakersfield, California, that released its second album on MCA Nashville last week, performed two sets of bluesy country-rock. Lead vocalist Monty Byrom recalled the Eagles' Don Henley on the band's current single, the bittersweet balled "Faith," while guitarists David Neuhauser and Chuck Seaton supplied taut rhythms and sizzling leads on the chugging country-rockers "Cold Outside" and "You Ain't Lonely Yet."

In the second set, the band stretched out a slow blues that featured harmonica player Sonny California and Brian Thomas from Dayton's band sitting in on pedal steel guitar. Big House is not a traditional country band, but the traditional vs. contemporary debate sometimes misses the bigger question: It is real music?

Dayton and Big House are both for-real talents, and if the house of country music isn't big enough to accommodate them, maybe it's time to build a new house. 

Daylong Country Fest Draws Legions

by Michael Mehle - Rocky

Mountain News, Denver, CO

Stadium shows routinely are big productions that match the egos of the stars on stage, such as the high-tech, top-dollar extravaganzas captained by U2's Bono and the Rolling Stones' Mick Jagger.

Little wonder, then, that George Strait headlined his own festival Sunday at Mile High Stadium with a stage that had lost of lights but little else. As plain-spoken as he is popular, the Texan opted to wow the crowd with his classic country sound rather than any extracurricular props or pyrotechnics.

Of course, he did have his stellar Ace in the hole ensemble, which played "Down In The Heart Of Texas" as Strait ambled onto stage wearing a red shirt, creased Wranglers and a big, bashful grin.

For the next 90 minutes, the 46-year-old singer and his band stuck to classic country, padded with all the twang allowed by law. His style shifted throughout the evening, ranging from Western swing to honky-tonk to blues to ballads. There was nothing overly fancy about the show, but Strait's genuine touch was enough to send couples out into the aisles to slow dance to such tender ballads as "I Can't Make Cheyenne."

Most of the fans (though not all) even stuck with Strait as the night grew colder and the rain fell harder. After all, some came from as far away as South Dakota and Wyoming and waited eight hours or longer for the singer to top the all-day fest that's traveling to 18 U.S. cities this summer.

It's tempting to tag Strait's fete as a colopalooza with 10 gallon hats, but that would be slighting Sunday's event: colopalooza never attracted 50,000 people, and its appeal wanted to the point of needing a summer off. Meanwhile, country's crowd keeps growing, attracted by a spectrum of styles that's wider than the state of Texas. Indeed, if the six acts on the bill before Strait showed anything, it's that there are few rules to today's country.

Tim McGraw sounded a lot like Jimmy Buffett on the Caribbean-flavored "Refried Dreams," while John Michael Montgomery closed out his set with an extended, foot-tomping rendition of Lynyrd Skynyrd's "Sweet Home Alabama."

And talk about mixing genres: Faith Hill explored the audience to "raise the roof" — a hip-hop plea to push your arms up in the air — while belting out "Heartbreakers," a bluesy rocker borrowed from Janis Joplin's repertoire. Hill brought life to the day after early-after-

noon performances from honky-tonk stalwarts Asleep at the Wheel and top newcomers Lila McCann and Lee Ann Womack. A year after giving birth to her's and McGraw's first child and three months from delivering their second, Hill showed a touch of R&B and rock'n'roll with rousing songs such as "You Can't Lose Sleep" and "Wild One." Then she blew her set open with a cover of Rod Stewart and the Face's "Stay With Me."

Montgomery couldn't keep the momentum, as his set was weighed down by his weepy piano ballads and didn't hit high gear until the energetic ending of "Sold (The Grundy County

Auction Incident)" and "Sweet Home Alabama."

Fellow hat-pack leader McGraw employed the same sort of formula, but had a better start ("Indian Outlaw"), and ending ("I Like It, I Love It"). He also shared the evening's most emotional moment when wife Hill joined him on stage for the heartachingly tender "It's Your Love."

You could see lightbulbs flashing like fireflies all over the stadium as the couple met at the center of the stage and swayed arm-in-arm while the crowd carried the chorus. ♪

Hot Times At Carter Finley

By Jack Bernhardt - Raleigh, NC

The hottest country show of the year hit town on the hottest day of the year, as the George Strait Country Music Festival played to a festive crowd Saturday at Carter-Finley Stadium.

The 9-1/2 hour extravaganza began at 1 p.m. with the Western swing band Asleep at the Wheel, and ended about 10:30 with superstar headliner George Strait. In between, fans enjoyed a parade of artists, representing state-of-the-art country music: teen sensation Lila McCann, traditionalist Lee Ann Womack, country-pop stylist Faith Hill, balladeer John Michael Montgomery and country-rocker Tim McGraw.

With temperatures in the low 90s, and even hotter at stage level on the field, fans sought relief in the covered concourse or outside the stadium at "Straitland," a combination amusement park, food court and headquarters for the concert's corporate sponsors.

The event began slowly as the first few acts played to a small but appreciative audience. Of course, it was the better-known, big-name acts folks came to see, and by the time Montgomery took the stage at 5:30 p.m., the day began to cool and the stadium to fill.

Montgomery and McGraw offered workman-like performances of their hits while carrying out one of their chief duties, building anticipation for the arrival of Strait. Of the two artists, McGraw is the more personable and talented. Montgomery did serviceable work on "I Swear" and other ballads, but when a song required more volume and dynamics, he turned into a shouter and sang excruciatingly off-pitch.

With better songs and more charisma, McGraw had no trouble engaging the audi-

ence, which sang enthusiastically on such radio favorites as "Don't Take The Girl" and "I Like It, I Love It." But the biggest moment came when McGraw was accompanied on stage by his wife, Faith Hill, who is pregnant with their second child. Hill and McGraw seemed to glow with affection as they joined on their hit duet, "It's Your Love."

Finally, at 8:40, it was the big man's turn. Backed by his superb eight-piece Ace in the Hole Band, Strait delivered a 27-song, 100-minute set as inspired and artful as any country performance to hit the Triangle in recent memory. His playlist ranged throughout his 17-year career and included such fan favorites as "The Chair," "Amarillo By Morning,"

"Cross My Heart," "I Can Still Make Cheyenne" and "The Cowboy Rides Away." He also showcased songs from his latest CD, "One Step At A Time," with Robert Earl Keen's "Maria," the rockabilly bopper, "We Really Shouldn't Be Doing This," and this week's No. 1 country single, "I Just Want To Dance With You."

But it was his enchanting choice of covers that made the set special. A protege of the late Bob Wills, Strait kicked things off with Wills' Texas dance hall gem, "Take Me Back To Tulsa," and cleverly sprinkled others throughout the set, including "Milk Cow Blues" and the celebratory "Big Balls in Cow Town." And he gave older fans more memories with Conway Twitty's "Linda On My Mind" and Merle Haggard's "Mama Tried."

As usual, Strait performed with few distractions and no Garth-like antics. Yet, he maintained a close band with his fans, who have come to expect simple, stellar country music at its no-frills best from one of country music's all-time great performers. ♪

Fan Collectable Column

August/September 1998

- Country America Magazine, July 1998. P. 32, 52, 57 mentioned. Nashville, TN.
- San Antonio Express News, June 5, 1998. Section G, p.1 mentioned. San Antonio, TX.
- Houston Chronicle Newspaper, June 3, 1998. P. 6 mentioned. Houston, TX.
- Valley Morning Star, June 7, 1998. P. D-2, article w/photo. Harlingen, TX.
- Modern Screen George Strait & The Strait Men Of Country, August 1998 issue - A MUST for all George Strait fans - a lot of beautiful colored pictures of George and Norma, almost entire magazine devoted to George.
- Country Song, July 1998 issue. Cover picture of "George Strait's World's Most Popular Cowboy" says the caption. Cover story on pages 22-25, with caption "George Strait, World's Most Loved Cowboy" with more gorgeous, colored pictures of George and Norma.
- Country Weekly, June 2, 1998. Pages 3, 7, 8, 43 and 58 naming new album "One Step At A Time" #1 this week and the last week.
- Country Weekly, June 9, 1998. Pages 6, 8, 55, and 58.
- Country Weekly, June 23, 1998. Pages 3, 53, and picture, p. 54.
 - "Lefty Frizzell" - written by Daniel Cooper, mentioned pgs. 277 & 278.
 - Abilene Reporter News, June 14, 1998. Page 7D - Sports section mentioned about National High School Rodeo Association Finals. Abilene, TX.
 - San Antonio Express-News, SA Life section. Section E, June 15, 1998 - photo/mentioned p. 1E. San Antonio, TX.
 - Music City News, July 1998. Page 10 letter/photo, pg. 19 list of awards, pg. 26 checklist pg. photo/paragraph, pgs. 50-57, pg. 97 top country LP, pg. 88 photo. Nashville, TN.
 - Ellwood City Ledger, June 17, 1998, pg. 7 Ellwood City, PA. Wed. issue mentioned.
 - Country Weekly, June 30, 1998, pg. 26 mentioned Vol. 5 #26, p. 20 mentioned, p. 54 mentioned, p. 25 photo w/Crook & Chase. Nashville, TN
 - The San Antonio Star, June 21, 1998. P. 17-18 mentioned. San Antonio, TX.
 - The Spokesman Review, June 19, 1998. P. 4 mentioned, p. E4 mentioned.
 - Snyder Daily News, June 21, 1998. Ad, photo for Resistol Hats. Vol. 50, No. 43. Snyder, TX.
 - Texas Highways, June 1998. Pgs. 7 mentioned, pg. 13 mentioned. Vol. 45, No. 6.
 - Country Weekly, July 7, 1998. Cover picture, pg. 6-7 article/mentioned, pg. 19 photo, pgs. 20-25 feature article and photos, pg. 37 crossword puzzle - mentioned twice. Nashville, TN.
 - The Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal, June 19, 1998. Pg. 3C mentioned in Top Country Singles. Fulton, MS.
 - Country Line, June 1998. Austin, TX. Cover page photo, pg. 2 mentioned, pg. 3 photo, pg. 5 question section, pg. 6 mentioned, pg. 9 mentioned, pg. 11 photo and facts on G.S., p. 13 mentioned.
 - Entertainment Weekly, June 26, 1998. Mentioned/The Concert Charts p. 127. New York, NY.
 - The Star Phoenix, June 17, 1998. Mentioned p. D2 - Lifestyle. TNN/Music City News Awards. Saskatoon, \ Saskatchewan, Canada.

The following George Strait Fan Club Members submitted to the Collectable Column -

And We Thank You!

As a GSFC member, you can join in and earn Strait Cash, receive your Strait Talk 1st Class and a Collector's Card. This is all you need to do - collect magazine or newspaper articles, photos or reviews - send them in and if we use them, your name is added to the list. It's easy. Remember to enclose the article, where it came from, date, page #, issue and your name and address. Thank You!

Nancy Piechota - Golden, CO
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Judy Shisk - San Antonio, TX
Carolyn Evans - Harrisburg, MO
Donald R. Minter - Ellwood City, PA
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Fay Ross - Euless, TX
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Rhonda Steelman - Frisco, TX
Beverly Enlow - Louisville, KY

STRAIT WORD SEARCH GAME

Created by: Terri Beese of Alta Loma, California

Words are always in a straight line and may read up, down, forward, backward, and diagonally.

THESE NAMES AND ITEMS MAY BE FOUND ON THE GEORGE STRAIT WEBSITES:

.SLEEP AT THE WHEEL	L E H V S E L E G N A S O L X Y I K R C R C A
.TLANTA	S I K D F T L G H J A E S T N O T S U O H O B
.IRMINGHAM	J R L A S T R A I T C H I C A G O G E L R U T
.HICAGO	A M E A N E W O R L E A N S T S A N O U R N O
.OLUMBUS	T V T C M S B U B B A E H L Z X K E F M M T U
.OUNTRY MUSIC FESTIVAL	L I G K E C A N T J O D C I D C L B Z B A R R
.ENVER	B E O T C C C S M A L K W Q U E A A L U A Y B
.ETROIT	I T M R O W Z A C K M U E R S K N M S S U M U
.AITH HILL	R R B C T U N Y N I R V I N G D D F T N O U S
.AN CLUB SEATING	M O R E M E U G S N T I D C M A Y X S M L S G
.EORGE STRAIT	I I V T I M D U C G A Y A A L T A J S P E I S
.IOUSTON	N Z L U O R M S A B L U L E R A X I O A D C T
.RVING	G D U L E S S T R A I T L A N D D G P S G F G
.OHN MICHAEL MONTGOMERY	H M I C M O U Y D I S N A E T S B M K D B E N
.ANSAS CITY	A S T L O U I S J D C K S O U K A A E I H S I
.INGSVILLE	M I G T I M M C G R A W D A C T T C C M G T T
.EE ANN WOMACK	D L A T H E N G A T X S R E V N E D A A I I A
.ILA McCANN	Z O O O A I E K C A M O W N A A E E L L E V E
.OS ANGELES	B P I L V L D W V R A D B O P R A W H I L A S
.INNNEAPOLIS	C A L E A O R B L U E S K Y A T N A L T A L B
.EW ORLEANS	X E G S F C R T L L I H H T I A F L E E R G U
.AKLAND	U N X G U S N P O L H F R D W G F J B C S L L
.HOENIX	A N I W S G E O R G E S T R A I T T B A R S C
.ROVO	D I N L E E H W E H T T A P E E L S A O G S N
.ALEIGH	H M E M U S I C K I N G E L L I V S G N I K A
.T LOUIS	K C O K R B F W Q Y U N D L E A E A J E Q W F
.TRAITLAND	J O H N M I C H A E L M O N T G O M E R Y G S
.AMPA	H P P I O U K H F E C Q L M S Z K A Y T B K I
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The George Strait Fan Club is happy to offer a full life-size standup of George Strait. The cardboard standup is in full color and when open stands a good six feet in height. The beautiful four-color piece is a photograph of George leaning on an old weathered wooded fence. The Stand Up was designed by MCA Records and is the same as will be seen in Record Shops across the country.

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TEAM ROPING SHIRTS AND CAPS AVAILABLE FOR A LIMITED TIME

The 1998 T-shirts and caps for the 16th annual George Strait Team Roping Classic are available now as a limited edition item from the George Strait Fan Club. The shirts and caps are zipping now to members who would like to have them but were unable to make the trip to Kingsville, Texas for the event or would like additional items. The T-shirt features a new design on the front with 1998 on the back while the embroidered cap is also a new design. The T-shirt sells for \$20 each plus \$4 for shipping and handling. The embroidered caps are \$17 plus \$3 for shipping and handling. Neither the cap or T-shirt are regular catalog items and must be special ordered. The T-shirt is a safari green with a very colorful design (pictured). The items may also be seen by checking out our website at www.georgestraitfans.com. Both items are ready for shipping immediately. To order using your MasterCard or Visa, please call our Toll Free Number at 1-800-338-GSFC using the order numbers listed below.



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Anita's Notes

Here we are again. Hot mid-summer days ngering as we listen to George's #1 hit "One Step At A Time." The next single "True" is climbing the charts and hopefully y the next issue of STRAIT TALK it will e in the Top 10.

With the completion of George's Country Music Festival, this opens up time for family and roping plus a little golf. We usually ave pages of photos and a Team Roping tory in the August/ September issue of TRAIT TALK but, with the way the date /as, it would delay the production of the ewsletter too much. We will have the com-lete story with photos in the ctober/November issue. If you can't wait, lease check out the GSFC website at /www.georgestraitfans.com and we will post ie complete story there. We hope to have otographs as well.

Fan Fair 1998 was fun as usual and we njoyed visiting with so many fan club embers. Obviously the United States was ypresented the best but, we did get to visit ith many fans from around the world from laces like Great Britain, Germany, inland, Norway, Japan and Australia. hank you for a memorable week. Also, a hank you to Pam, Judy, Katie, Cheryl,arci, Darrin, Vicki, Terry and Ryan 'alonge for helping us set the booth up. We re always happy to put up the booth on unday but, extra happy to take it down on riday.

George did not win any TNN Music City ews Awards this year, but we still appreci-ate your vote.

We have a few new items in the merchand-ise catalog that we hope you will like. We ink they will make great holiday gifts but ou be the judge. If you panicked at the 'ord holiday, consider that it is not that far way and I know that I always have to plan head. Here is a great chance for you to use hat Strait Cash that you have been saving. he new stand up is hotter than the Fourth f July. It has been flying out the door so on't delay in ordering one as the quantities re limited and we are not sure whether they ill ever be available again. We also have a eautiful new custom leather jacket and we ave had so many requests for them that we ecided to have a new one made. If you ant to see the jacket in full color, please

check it out on our website. A photo of it is available elsewhere in the newsletter. We are also offering, for a limited time, the T-shirts and Caps from the 16th Annual George Strait Team Roping Classic. A photo and order form are also available in the newsletter.

Remember, Fan Club members can earn Strait Cash very easily. If you have a photo, comment, game or a collectible column article, please send it in. If we use it we will send you \$5 in Strait Cash, a collectors card and your STRAIT TALK by 1st Class Mail. Pretty easy.

We appreciate the fan club members that notify us when their addresses change. It is very important to have your correct address as all newsletters are sent by bulk mail and the post office will not forward them.

The website is continuing to do well. We have had millions of hits since it went online in September of 1996. The new User Name and Password for this issue are as follows:

User Name: **blue**
Password: **sable**

We have had several calls about the Strait Premium products that have been sold in stores in the southwest. They are now being offered by mail if you would like to order them. You can order by calling 1-

800-934-8792.

Before we conclude another STRAIT TALK I would like to address the George Strait Country Music Festival in Houston, Texas. I'm not going to string you along or tell you something off the wall. I just want to tell you that I HAD A BLAST! It was great. I enjoyed every aspect of the festival. Yes, it was hot. Yes, I did sweat. Yes, I paid to buy a bottle of water! I came to the festival as a fan and left an even bigger fan. The whole concept of the festival was phenomenal. From the beginning to the end of the concert, I could not wait for the next act to start. I was a fan for a day and I loved it. I visited with so many fan club members and thoroughly enjoyed it. You are true Strait Troopers. When George appeared on stage as the sun set, fans roared like lions that were hungry for their last meal. It was great. I guess you need to be there to experience the true, total effects of the festival. I hope by looking through the photo pages it will help you grasp a little of the great time I had in Houston. You Houston fans made me feel right at home. I am happy to tell you that the Strait office is already hard at work drawing up the plans for the 1999 George Strait Country Music Festival Tour.

We hope to see you again. Til then, STRAIT UP!

Strait Premium Products



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direct from our corporate offices.
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From The Mailbox

Hi George,

A bunch of us from Bismarck, North Dakota, were at Straitland in Minneapolis, MN, on May 17th. What a show!!! Your performance was the best ever!! And it was our pleasure singing "Happy Birthday" to you. After putting together an event like this, you're definitely the Entertainer of the Year" in our eyes. Don't forget all of us fans up north when you schedule your next tour.

Lynette Lewis, Konnie Kunz,
Lorna Strand, Jim Fetter
Bismarck, North Dakota

Dear George,

Congratulations on your great 1998 Country Music Festival Tour" at the Carter-Finley Stadium in Raleigh, North Carolina.

My daughters and I rode 10 hours to see you perform and you were first "fantastic," as usual, as was your great "Ace in the Hole Band" and all the other performers involved.

A devoted fan club member,
Nellie Leo, Middletown, NY

George Strait and Co.,

I was at the concert in Detroit at the Silverdome. It was great. George was awesome! I had a fantastic time. His new music as well as the old is heart felt and seems to relate to a lot of people. Every time I hear him, I can't help but feel good and smile.

I have now been to his last 2 concerts here in Michigan.

Also, Happy Birthday to George and his son.

Keep up the good work.

Sincerely,
Jerri L. Yalk, Richmond, MI

Dear George,

Thanks for coming to New Orleans with your Country Music Festival. It was just fabulous. Every performer was just great. Of course, George was the best of all of them.

I hope to see George again in New Orleans next year. Thanks for a great show.

Sincerely,
Harriet M. Moll
New Orleans, LA

George Strait Fan Club,

This past weekend I flew round trip from New York to Raleigh, NC just to see the George Strait Country Music Festival. All I can say was that it was really awesome! It was a wonderful 9-1/2 hours plus concert to say the least!

Thank you,
Becky Peters, Endicott, NY

Dear G.S.F.C.,

Yesterday I attended the George Strait Country Music Festival in Provo, UT. I was fortunate enough to have seats front row and center thanks to George and the Fan Club. This was the fourth time I had seen George in concert. WHAT A SHOW!! He just gets better with age. It was great how he interacted with us in the audience. He was even nice enough to sign my CD.

Thank you George for continuing to bring us pure country music that I can enjoy with my teenage daughters and for being a great example in the way you live your life.

Sincerely,
Chris Lewis, Roy, UT

Dear Anita,

Without a doubt, the George Strait Festival Tour was the best show I've attended in a long time. When he comes back to the Chicago area, I'll be there. Had he showed up alone, he still could have filled the stadium. The Straitland area was fun too, even though I didn't win anything.

Sincerely,
Patricia Van Cleave
Washington, IL

Dear G.S.F.C.,

Hello everyone at the George Strait fan club. Yesterday my husband and I attended the George Strait country music festival in Atlanta, Georgia, and what a festival it was! We enjoyed every minute of it. We drove from Anderson, South Carolina to see the concert. I would go back tomorrow to see George. Thanks for all the fun.

Strait Fan,
Renee Burden, Anderson, SC

Pen Pals

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 1998

(Fans that exchange letters through mail)

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