

**THE HALL OF FAME UNVEILS
NEW KEITH URBAN EXHIBIT**

**CHRIS YOUNG & DIERKS BENTLEY HIT
THE ICE FOR AN ALL-STAR WEEKEND**

NASH **Country** Weekly

COUNTRY FOR LIFE | JANUARY 18, 2016

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THANKS TO A NEARLY 20-YEAR-OLD
SONG, **BRYAN WHITE** HAS REKINDLED
HIS OVERSEAS POPULARITY.

NEW SENSATION

STORY BY BOB PAXMAN

The date was Dec. 1, 2015, but Bryan White was partying like it was 1999.

Well, as much “partying” as he does, anyway. Call it more of a “celebration,” but whatever term you use, Bryan was riding an emotional high during his concert that night in the Philippines. The still boyish-looking singer, who will turn 42 in February, has become a veritable phenomenon in that country, and it’s all because of a single he released in the U.S. in 1999, “God Gave Me You.”

That tune, not to be confused with the Blake Shelton No. 1 hit of the same title, has been embraced by the Filipino audience through a popular variety show in the Philippines, *Eat Bulaga!*, which essentially translates to “Lunchtime Surprise.” The show features a co-hosting team made up of Alden Richards and Maine “Yaya Dub” Mendoza, known as the National Couple with the combined nickname of AlDub. The

romantic twosome has incorporated “God Gave Me You” as a theme song, giving Bryan’s past hit a cachet and substantial exposure it never enjoyed during its time on the Amercian country charts. The single, from Bryan’s album *How Lucky I Am*, peaked at the No. 40 spot in the U.S., barely qualifying it as a hit.

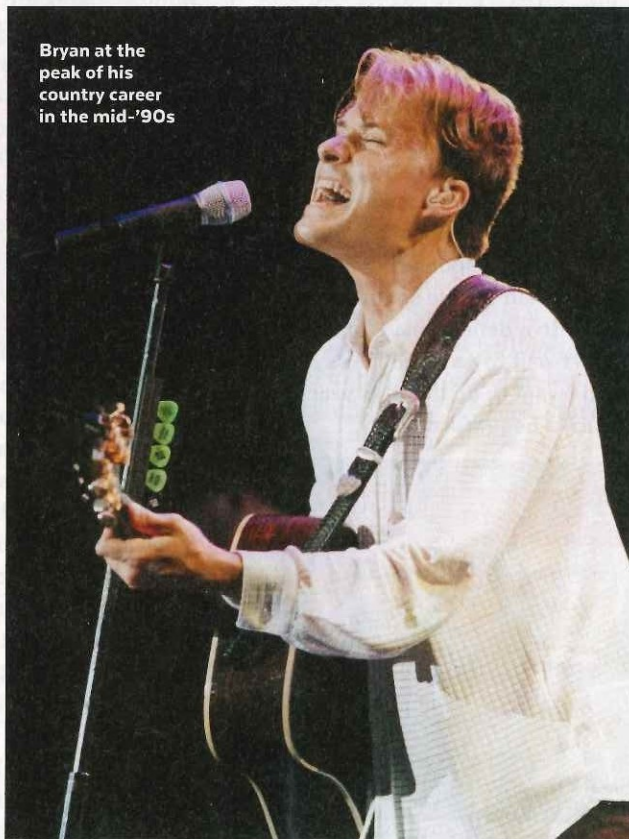
Even Bryan himself is somewhat dumbfounded, though happily so, at all this newfound attention. “I really can’t explain the phenomenon,” Bryan begins, after settling into a chair at the *Nash Country Weekly* office. “I think it was 2011 that I first found out through social media that this song had become popular. The song is about giving credit to God for all these enormous blessings and maybe that is what they love about it. The show that it’s played on is, I believe, the longest-running TV show ever in that country. I guess it would be equivalent to maybe the *Tonight Show* here, as far as the status of it or the popularity.”

And through the show, Bryan has established an entirely new fan base. “Because of that song, the audiences there have gone back and found some of my other material,” Bryan notes with a smile. “They like the duet I did with Shania Twain, ‘From This Moment On,’ and a few others.” When the show’s co-star Maine Mendoza tweeted this past fall that she hoped to see Bryan perform in the Philippines someday, social media turned into national mania. Filipino fans took to Twitter to encourage Bryan to come to their country. Bryan worked out his schedule to make it happen, and performed in Manila’s main concert venue the night of Dec. 1 (see sidebar).

This would all seem some form of poetic justice. After all, Bryan seemed a full-of-potential, “can’t miss” artist from the time he released his debut single, “Eugene You Genius,” in 1994. He was essentially the Hunter Hayes of his time, a good-looking,



(Above) Bryan (third from right) and Asylum Records officials celebrate the platinum success of *Between Now and Forever* in 1997; (below left) with his 1996 CMA Horizon Award; (below right) Bryan shows off his 1996 ACM Award for Top New Male Vocalist.



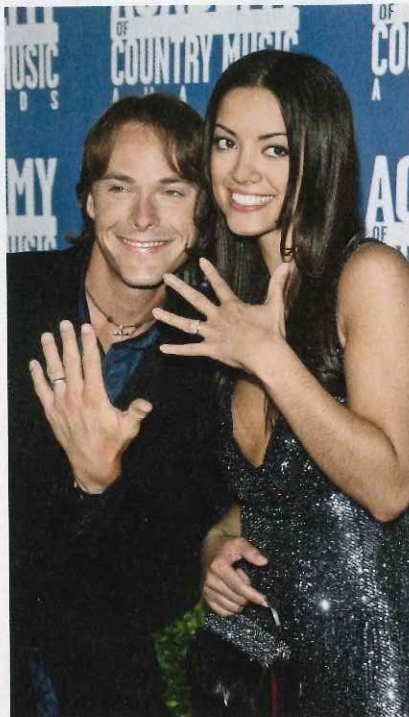
Bryan at the peak of his country career in the mid-'90s

FLIPPING FOR THE PHILIPPINES

The phrase “by popular demand” may be a bit overused, but it definitely applies to Bryan White and his Dec. 1 concert in the Philippines. Bryan was trending like Taylor Swift as Twitter followers in the island country repeatedly encouraged Bryan to play a concert there. His song “God Gave Me You” prompted the demand, having been heard regularly on the Philippines’ wildly popular variety show *Eat Bulaga!*.

Bryan offers nothing but raves about the experience. “The people were just so kind and humble and really went out of their way to make us feel welcome,” Bryan recalls. “The show was incredible. We actually had to play ‘God Gave Me You’ twice because they kept screaming for the song. We let them sing a little bit of it by themselves. It seemed to me like every song got a good reception. There was a real erupting of applause on ‘I’m Not Supposed to Love You Anymore,’ and there were other songs of mine that they were familiar with.”

As to the question of a return visit, Bryan’s response is more “when” than “if.” He sounds like a man with a definite plan for 2016. “I can’t wait to go back,” he says. “And I want to do that this year. It is such a beautiful country.”



(Left) Bryan and his wife, actress Erika Page, show off their rings at the ACM Awards in 2001; (below) Bryan visits with needy families in the Philippines in 2015.



BRYAN WHITE CONTINUED

boy-next-door type, proficient on a variety of instruments (mainly guitar and drums) and profoundly humble and polite.

Bryan picked up his first No. 1 single in 1995, “Someone Else’s Star,” followed immediately by “Rebecca Lynn” and another chart-topper in 1996, “So Much for Pretending.” In 1996, he won the CMA Horizon award, given to artists on the rise. The same year, the Academy of Country Music named him the Top New Male Vocalist. Those accolades had all come his way by the time he was 22.

The pressures of trying to stay on top and the frenetic pace of the music business have taken their measure of more than a few artists. They claimed Bryan as well. He scored his fourth career No. 1, “Sittin’ on Go,” in 1997, but his last Top 5 hit happened that same year with “Love Is the Right Place.” His album sales plummeted and his record label closed its country division as the new century rolled in. Bryan admitted to a bout with depression in the aftermath of the turmoil.

“I had to get away,” Bryan concedes. He married actress Erika Page in 2000, and the couple now has two young sons, Justin, 12, and Jackson, 10. And though he still tours and makes records, Bryan has left the major-label life. He does not attend the CMA Awards, rarely socializes and does his recording in the studio of his home outside Nashville. Family is now the focus of his attention.

“My biggest kick is driving the kids to school and picking them up in the afternoon,” Bryan says. “We talk a lot and laugh with each other.” The boys seem to show an affinity for music, Bryan observes, but haven’t expressed a burning interest to follow in Dad’s footsteps. “They’re more into soccer and basketball, kind of the typical kid things,” Bryan says. “My younger one, Jack, can definitely sing. He’ll turn the radio to the pop station and he’ll sing out loud to me.”

There will be no “stage dad” pressures from Dad’s end—of that, Bryan is most certain. “I’m just going to let them do their thing,” he says. “If that’s what they want to do, well, I do know a little bit about



Bryan's popularity in the Philippines now rivals his mid-'90s stardom in the U.S.

that world. I can help them out and give them advice, but I'm not going to push them."

When he's not spending time with the family, Bryan heads downstairs to the home studio to write and record. Lately, he's been more visible on the Nashville performing scene, playing local venues with his band. In a wistful moment, Bryan will concede that he does, on occasion, miss the "social aspect" of the music business. "I stay in touch with a lot of people, like Steve Wariner, who I've been friends with since I started," Bryan explains. "But I'm more content being with my kids." Indeed, that is where he spent last year's CMA Awards celebration, on the couch with Erika and the boys. "It's the best seat in the house as far as I'm concerned," he says, flashing a broad grin that nonetheless bears a bittersweet hint. Bryan admits, "That is sort of a sentimental week for me. I will always remember hearing my name called for that award and how exciting that was. I would love to go back and be a presenter if they ask me, or in some

other capacity. But I really haven't attended in a few years."

On the musical front, the last we heard from Bryan was his 2013 album, *Shine*. He funded that through the interactive fan platform Kickstarter, which essentially offers perks and other rewards to fans who actually contribute to funding a project. It's become the method of choice for artists without the machinery of a major record label. "I was pretty hesitant to do it that way," Bryan says, his eyes cast downward for a brief moment. "If it doesn't reach its goal, you kind of have to tuck your tail. But a few of my artist friends had done it and they recommended it."

There are no plans for new music on the current horizon, Bryan reveals, though he seems to work constantly at the craft. "I try to write when I'm home," he explains. "I don't have that pressure to always make new records, and there is no timetable." Sounds enviable, of course, but drawbacks do exist. "When you're doing it yourself, you can slip into complacency.

You have to stay on yourself and be disciplined. Of course," Bryan adds laughing, "my wife is pretty good about that, too. She can be like, 'Could you get down there and finish that record?' So, I've got that working for me. I'm more comfortable doing it this way."

And this will be his way for the foreseeable future. "I try and keep up with what's going on in the market and who's making records," he maintains. "And I have to say, I'm not nuts about all the subject matter. Some of it is not what children should be listening to. But I'm not in control of that. I don't try and write for that market, anyway. I still want to make records and I think I'll always be able to do that. I'll just be doing it the way I want to."

Apparently, there is no burning desire to jump back into the fast lane. "I know I have given up some things by not being on a label anymore," Bryan adds with matter-of-fact honesty. "But I don't regret anything. I'm grateful and blessed to still do this." And obviously, that's good enough for him. **NCW**