

Parton performs routines others find embarrassing

By Joe Starita

Observed from high in a balcony seat, the center stage of the Nebraska Sports Complex looks like an orbital space station trapped in an ant colony.

It's four hours before showtime and a colony of denim-clad technicians are swarming atop the slowly revolving stage, hoisting banks of wall-size speakers, tapping microphones, plugging cables into amplifiers, assembling spotlights.

"Turn that piano up."

"Get the bass down a little."

"That's better. It sounds good. Sounds good."

"Is Dolly ready? Let's run a soundcheck."

Dolly Parton—of the million-selling records, million-dollar figure, spectacular hairdos, Marie Antoinette gowns and good 'ol girlish giggles—strolls casually into the arena, hands jammed into a hip-hugging jean-jacket top that flares above a pair of sprayed-on black slacks.

The grand dame

Her electrified bouffant is replaced by a tame blond wig, bunned at the back. With teeth the color of piano keys and skin as flawlessly white as the enamel of a new bathtub, she looks every bit the Grand Dame of country/pop that she has become this last year. Right down to the day-glo red lipstick that frames each "Hello, how are you, glad to be here."

Parton steps onstage, grabs a mike and belts out a chorus or two of "Applejack," and "Two Doors Down," her voice soaring and dipping through the empty Sports Complex.

After each soundcheck, she calls out a few suggestions to her backup musicians, laughs and jokes with them in a low-keyed professional manner at odds with a group that has traveled by bus from the Minnesota State Fair Wednesday night, to a Sioux City, Iowa concert Thursday night, to the Nebraska State Fair Friday night.

In the plushly-equipped bus after the soundcheck, Parton explains how 22 persons can travel to 200 concerts annually in three buses without becoming refugees from a bad dream.

'Best of friends'

"We all love each other and are the best of friends," says Parton, drumming a handful of two-inch red fingernails on a breakfast nook countertop for emphasis.

"I've spent years rounding up the best people I could

find. I've found them and I think it shows in every concert we do."



Photo by Ted Kirk

Dolly Parton, the famed lady from Tennessee, laughs, jokes and sings her way into Nebraska fans' hearts Friday night at the state fair.

The last concert they'll do before breaking for two weeks is the Colorado State Fair this week. Parton says she'll break to Los Angeles to tape a Johnny Carson show on Sept. 12, work on a winter TV special with Carol Burnett and get ready to launch a month-long tour with Neil Young on Sept. 18.

Asked what music she likes to listen to after a long day or night, Parton is quick with an answer.

"One thing I don't like to do after a long day or night is listen to anybody, including myself," she laughs. "But I always try and keep up on what other people in the country/music field are doing. People I know in the business. I always get their new albums."

Springsteen fan

Asked who she'd pay to see, Parton is equally quick to answer: "Cat Stevens, Bob Seger and Bruce Springsteen."

"What I keep hearing about Springsteen's concerts, I'd pay some big money to see that man perform. When even the people in our business start raving about a performance, you know he's put on a whale of a show."

At 8:45 Dolly Parton again climbs the stage steps as 7,600 fans roar their approval to the appearance of the figure in white sequined gown, broken only by a pink sash drawn at the waist.

Parton gives a magnificent performance, her stage confidence allowing her to get away with songs and routines other performers would find embarrassing.

She laughs, cracks corny jokes, pokes fun at her pair of celebrated endowments, does an a capella number that juices up the hand-clapping crowd, shifts into a hurt little girl voice that pleads for sympathy and gets total silence from every grown man, teenager, grandmother and granddaughter.

Dolly doing it

An hour later, Dolly is still laughing, still preambing with cornpone humor, still has the crowd clapping at her energy, enthusiasm, down-to-earth sensibility and her magnificent voice that sweeps and pleads and makes everyone feel at home.

Parton will be home from Thanksgiving to April 1, back in the Smoky Mountains of east Tennessee where she said she wants to slow down and step out of the fast lane for a while.

"I really want to keep doing some good music. To do that, you have to keep writing and I love to write."

"I've been working so hard this last year I haven't really noticed where the time has gone."

"What I need to do now is stroll through the woods with my dogs, do a little cooking and a lot less eating, get my writing done and still have enough time to sit on the porch at night and listen to the crickets chirp."

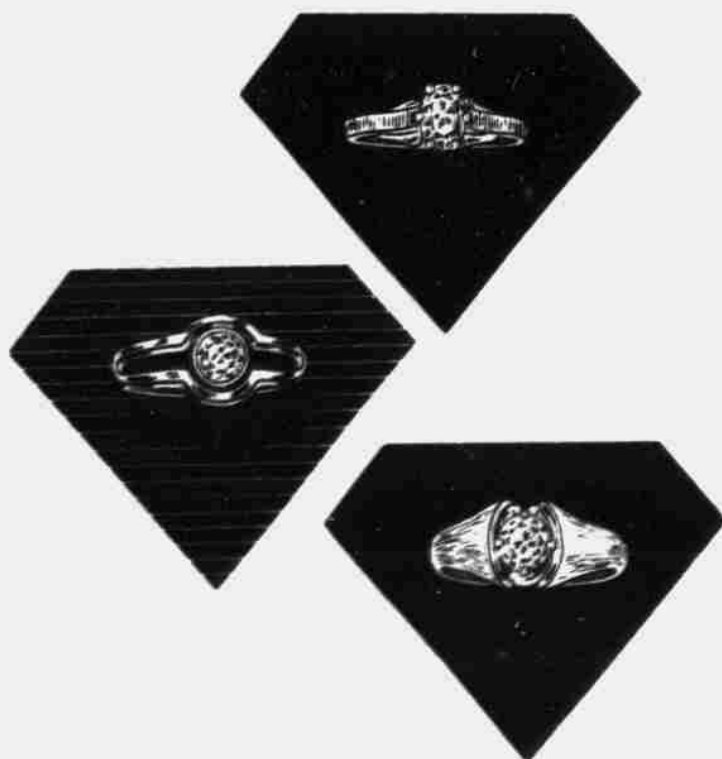
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