

Hall, Hurst



Musician

Hurst Hall grew up in Toccopola, Mississippi, a little town located between Oxford and Pontotoc. His family had a farm, located forty miles below the Tennessee state line, and raised cotton and corn. Hall was often allowed to pick scrapping cotton, what was left after the cotton had already been picked, for extra money. At the age of five, he picked enough scrapping cotton to buy his first guitar. It was an “old Sivertone from Sears and Roebuck that cost \$4.75 back in 1934”. Music would come naturally for Hall, as he had music in his blood. His father played the piano and the violin, and his mother played the organ.

This musical inspiration rubbed off on Hall, as he and his brother played music together after learning by ear from listening to what was played on the radio. Batteries were expensive, so Hall’s father allowed the boys to listen only to the news and the Grand Ole Opry on their 1935 battery-powered radio. Hall and his brother copied what they heard on the radio and what others played, which is why the two played a variety of music, including old time country, mountain music, gospel, and parlor songs or “tear jerkers” like “The Prisoner” and “Letter Edged in Black”, around the house and at community events. They would often play at school house concerts that charged five cent admissions. Hall later joined with local groups in Mississippi and played with people like Arkansas Slim. He continued to play in college at Ole Miss and in the Air Force.

Hall later moved to Natchitoches in 1959 to get a job at Northwestern State University in the Psychology department, where he taught for forty years. This is where he met Dr. Bill Bryant and Dr. Bill Hunt in the Creative and Performing Arts Department. The three created a band called Mountain Music. Mountain Music performed at the Slabtown Festival, the Rebel State Commemorative Park, and the Natchitoches-NSU Folk Festival on several occasions. During this time, Hall also learned to make banjos, guitars, and Irish harps, all of which he learned to make from Bill Bryant, a master builder.

The band later became known as the Back Porch Band when others joined the group. Back Porch is an interesting group of musicians, as some members have formal training, can read sheet music, and know how to play classical music, while others like Hall can not. To this day, Hall still plays by ear and memorizes his music for performances. Back Porch plays at festivals and churches in Texas and central Louisiana, and at the Natchitoches Green Market. Hurst Hall was inducted into the Louisiana Folklife Center’s Hall of Master Folk Artists in 2000.

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