

Montgomery, Gray



One Man Country Band

Mr. Gray Montgomery was born in 1927, in Jonesville, Louisiana. He is a real estate broker associate in Vidalia, Louisiana, where he lives with his family.

Gray Montgomery is a walking, talking, singing, one-man band. He performs in full cowboy regalia and has a talented cocker spaniel that has been known to sing along with him. He started playing the guitar when he was fourteen years old. "I took up the guitar," Montgomery explains, "when a kid who played real good, moved to our neighborhood, and the girls went crazy over him." The Vidalia native expanded his repertoire listening to other great artist of the times and became a veteran of Louisiana Delta roadhouses. His experiences are wide, though he's stayed at home in Concordia Parish over the years. He mentions Jerry Lee "Great Balls of Fire" Lewis with great nonchalance. Montgomery knew Lewis when the pianist was still learning to play the piano. "When Lewis first tried to join our band, he was real young. He wasn't a good enough piano man, and we told him, so he started learning." Lewis eventually got good enough, and so did Gray Montgomery. Lewis went on to achieve major stardom, but Montgomery's life took a quieter turn. He plays his music his own way. When Sam Phillips of Sun Records, who signed Lewis and Elvis Presley, wanted to change Montgomery's song "Right Now," Montgomery would not agree. "He wanted to dress it up and make it too slick," and when I didn't agree, the deal fell through," Montgomery explains.

In some way, Gray is a second, generation folk festival performer. "I met Brownie Ford down at the state festival in Eunice several years ago. He said, 'I like your music.' He said, 'I've been helping carry these festivals for fifteen years, but I'm about to wear out. Maybe you're the man to carry on, you know, keep the old songs alive.' You know that's why I became the one man band. Lots of my music buddies quit or died. People I played with got younger, the music got louder, and they didn't want to play the music I wanted to play."

Mr. Montgomery plays the blues, country tunes from the 1930s, rockabilly, rock and roll, and softer tunes. He has performed at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival and folklife festivals throughout the state.