

Ben Adler, Rockabilly Hall of Fame Member, Lives a Country Song

As the lights go down, smoke from a hundred cigarettes mingles in the air with the smell of beer and booze.

Patrons at the bar swivel on their seats as they hear the announcer speak softly into the microphone.

The entertainer they've been waiting on all night is about to walk out of the wings and onto the stage whose boards have been sanded smooth by thousands of boots.

As all the lights go dark except for one spotlight that shines on the master of ceremonies and the silver microphone, middle age couples stop talking.

"...Ladies and gentlemen....the man you've been waiting for....needs no introduction...Rockabilly Hall of Fame member....Ben Adler..."

Applause starts to scatter throughout the room. First it's light, polite acknowledgement. Then as the noise washes from the front of the room to the back and careens off the walls, Adler strolls to the microphone and adjusts it to suit his height as he smiles into the spotlight.

Swinging his guitar around, he strums and goes into his first song.

He has the crowd in the palm of his hand the rest of the night.

It's been a long road for Adler. Born in Baden-Wurtemberg where his mother grew up near Bavaria after her mother escaped from Budapest just ahead of the Nazis, Adler grew up in Helena, Arkansas. Tucked into the Mississippi River, Mark Twain called Helena "... one of the prettiest situations on the river."

It was in Helena that Harold Lloyd Jenkins formed his first band called Phillips County Ramblers. The Ramblers wouldn't be around long, but Harold would change his name to Conway Twitty and go on to stardom.

While Adler never had the chance to meet Twitty, he does admit to being influenced by Twitty's music which was everywhere in town.

"I used to hear his music on our local jukeboxes in the clubs I played. I loved his music ...," says Adler. Twitty was "one of the reasons I became more of a Country musician.

Adler shows his versatility well on the stage. Going from drums, to guitar to bass guitar he also sings lead vocals and is able to keep the crowd entertained between songs with a monologue that draws them in as he shares his thoughts on life, music, women and spirituality -- a combination that works well for Adler who loves people.

When Adler was asked one time why he does what he does, he replied simply, "...because I love people and I want to share some happiness through music."

Adler continues the nightly grind of shows because he loves making new friends and writing and singing. "I love working for myself at something I'm good at. The short answer is I love my job," Adler says.

But life on the road can take its toll and after 30 years of playing smoky bars, clubs and honkytonks, Adler decided he had had enough.

"I wanted out," Adler says. "Music had changed, the people coming to the shows had changed, drugs & fights were becoming all too frequent and it seemed the crowds weren't there to dance and have a good time anymore."

Along with the change in crowds came a change in the money that could be made. As fewer people went to honkytonks to see and be seen, the money started to dry up. Adler knew he needed to make some changes.

"I started doing Family Theaters and Outdoor Events & Festivals and in 1999 I went to work with the Legendary Eddie Bond in Tenn.," says Adler. "I met a lot of good people there and my career was starting to get an upswing."

It's a cliché to say that sometimes life is like a country song, but there still is some truth in it. Following the career 'upswing', Adler's home burned down. Recovering from that setback, he put together a new band called Cross Country -- only to be stopped by a heart attack.

Inducted into the Rockabilly Hall of Fame on June 3, 2011, Adler has played with many country greats. Artists such as Elvis, Johnny Cash, Carl Perkins, Roy Orbison, Charlie Rich and Jerry Lee Lewis are just of the few 'Rockabilly Kings' that share the distinction of membership in the HoF with Adler.

Adler's musical style is not confined to one genre. His talent and voice make him easy to listen to whether he's singing traditional country, pop, soul, classic rock, rockabilly, big band & jazz and even Motown.

Adler enjoys most types of music "...other than Rap or Heavy Metal," he says.

While Adler was starting his career he was influenced by the sound of many of the musicians he played with.

"The best advice I was given," says Adler "...was don't try to be another Merle Haggard or Johnny Cash. Do what you do. Be different...be unique...make your own way...find your own niche."

With a smile, Adler says, "You have to be very determined and dedicated to do what you love. Don't ever let anyone crush your dreams. If you want to play music, do it. Learn and most of all, thank God for your talent. Remember to keep him in your heart."

Despite the set backs and challenges, Adler still loves traveling the world doing shows. Ulf Neilson, a friend of Adler's, has invited Adler to Sweden this fall to play with 'The Cadillac Band'. Started by Neilson and D.J. Fontana, Elvis Presley's first drummer, Adler is looking forward to a tour of Rockabilly with The Cadillac Band at it's finest.

When Adler is asked what is the biggest thing he wishes that people knew about him, he pauses, tilts his head as he thinks before he grins and says, "I have no FANS...just FRIENDS!"