

If there's a list of the Seven Wonders of the music world somewhere, the voice of Gene Watson is surely on it.

This masterful country stylist has been thrilling audiences for more than 30 years. The depth of emotion in his singing, his brilliant phrasing, his jaw-dropping range and the power in the lyrics he chooses are all factors in the awe he inspires in both fans and his musical peers. Gene Watson's tally of 73 charted titles, 23 top-10 hits and five number-one records has led to membership in the Texas Country Music Hall of Fame. Radio listeners are still transfixed whenever classics like "Farewell Party," "Fourteen Carat Mind" or "Love in the Hot Afternoon" are played.

Now, at an age when most people are contemplating retirement, Gene Watson has made the record of a lifetime. In a Perfect World is a towering reminder of what great country music is supposed to sound like.

"I don't believe in half-doing anything," says the man with the amazing voice. "If it's something I like, I'll give it everything I have."

His album's title tune is a painful portrait of a man who has lost it all. Watson broods darkly in the bluesy "This Side of the Door." "A Good Place to Turn Around" is a prayer for redemption. "She's Already Gone" and "Like I Wasn't Even There" are classic country weepers. On "Let Me Be the First to Go," the vocalist aches with commitment. Watson matches tones with those of the steel guitar in "What Was I Thinking" and is positively haunting on the minor-key masterpiece "I Buried Our Love."

Gene Watson's staggering performances on In a Perfect World also include his reinventions of such standards as Merle Haggard's "Today I Started Loving You Again," Ray Price's "Don't You Ever Get Tired of Hurting Me" and Buck Owens' "Together Again." Country songs don't come much better than those collected on this extraordinary album.

Adding luster to many of the tracks are vocal contributions by a who's-who of contemporary country music. Vince Gill, Connie Smith, Lee Ann Womack, Joe Nichols, Mark Chesnutt and Rhonda Vincent all eagerly lined up to harmonize with this force-of-nature vocalist. Once the buzz about this record was out in Nashville, dozens of others clamored to participate. But producer Brent Rowan wanted the record's focus to stay on Gene Watson's extraordinary voice.

"Gene is a timeless artist," says Rowan. "He sings from such a deep well, a spiritual place. I wanted to make a timeless and important record. Most of the icons of our business are no longer at the top of their game, musically. But he is."

Rowan's resume indicates that he knows what he's talking about. As a guitarist, Brent Rowan has been heard on records that have sold more than 100 million copies. As

a producer, he works with such hit makers as Blake Shelton, Charley Pride, Joe Nichols and Julie Roberts. Gene Watson says he was thrilled when the stellar producer agreed to work with him.

“I had no idea that I would ever have a record produced by Brent Rowan,” says a grateful Watson. “I just thought that was too far out of reach. But he gave me one of the greatest compliments a man can receive. He said, ‘I want to produce you because you are a real artist, and there aren’t very many of them out there.’”

Rowan says that working with Gene Watson has been a highlight of his career: “This was simply a record I had to make for my soul, for my spirit,” says the famed producer. “Some things you have to do purely for the music, for the kind of person he is.”

The kind of person Gene Watson is, is a humble man of the soil who has no idea of his own greatness. When he sings at the Grand Ole Opry, other artists gather at the side of the stage to watch him. Rowan says he noticed the same phenomenon when he first encountered Watson at a multi-artist TV taping where the guitarist was the bandleader. But the singer, himself, seems incapable of pride or self congratulation.

“I can remember singing before I can remember talking,” Watson reports. “Even when I was a kid, if I heard a song twice, I knew it. But I never planned to be an entertainer. I knew I could sing, but that wasn’t out of the ordinary. My whole family could.”

In fact, Watson doesn’t even think he was the best singer in the seven-child household. Make that “bus-hold.” The itinerant Watson family moved from shack to shack until his father customized an old school bus for living quarters and transportation from job to job.

“Yeah, we were poor,” says the singer. “Today, people live in motor homes. Ours was yellow. We traveled to Arkansas, Oklahoma and Texas until one day my dad came in and decided we were going to Phoenix, Arizona. We didn’t have the money to go to Phoenix, so we worked our way out there, stopped to pick crops and all that stuff. My dad was kind of a gypsy. He always said, ‘I’m fixin’ to leave in the morning. If there’s a dollar out there, I’m going to get 50 cents of it.’ I always kept that in mind.

“My dad worked hard at whatever it took to put food on the table. He worked in the log woods. He worked at the tire shops. He was a crop worker. We would cut spinach. We would pull radishes. We would pick potatoes. We would pick cotton. Whatever it took, we did it. That’s the only life I knew.

“I was a poor boy. But I wouldn’t take nothing for my raising --as far as my teachings, the way my mother raised me, the way my dad worked and everything. I think it took all that to get all this.”

Born in Palestine, Texas in 1943, Gene Watson was singing in holiness churches with his family at an early age. His father played blues harmonica and guitar alongside African-American field laborers. Watson grew up loving both bluesman Jimmy Reed and honky-tonk king Lefty Frizzell. His earliest public country performance came when he was just 12 years old. Watson dropped out of school in the ninth grade to work fulltime. He initially supported his family by doing auto body repair, so by day he worked on cars, and at night he sang in clubs.

“But doing music professionally was never a goal of mine. I always wanted to work on cars. I always say I never did go looking for music. Music found me.

“Before I ever made a record, The Wilburn Brothers heard me sing down in Houston at a nightclub one night. They said they’d like for me to go with them and do a couple of shows. So I came up to Nashville and traveled to North Carolina with them. They got me on the Grand Ole Opry, and I got a standing ovation and an encore singing the Hank Williams song ‘I Can’t Help It if I’m Still in Love With You.’ and ‘It Is No Secret What God Can Do’. After that, they carried me down to the Ernest Tubb Record Shop and I got on stage and broadcast on The Midnight Jamboree. That was my first experience with the Big Time. I was 21.”

His superb singing attracted local backers who financed several small-label singles in Houston in the early 1970s. Watson first made the country charts with a single called “Bad Water” in 1975. Its follow-up was the sultry, provocative “Love in the Hot Afternoon.” Capitol Records picked it up for national distribution, launching Gene Watson’s long hit-making career.

“Paper Rosie” (1977), “One Sided Conversation” (1978), “Farewell Party” (1979), “Nothing Sure Looked Good on You” (1980), “Fourteen Carat Mind” (1981) and other hits made him a star. His streak continued with “Speak Softly” (1982), “Sometimes I Get Lucky and Forget” (1983), “Got No Reason Now for Goin’ Home” (1984), “Memories to Burn” (1985) and more.

His remarkable voice actually became even better as he aged. Watson says that is because he learned to care for it properly.

“I used to drink. I used to smoke like a freight train. I gave up all that. You know, I got so tired of drinking I just one night quit [in 1980]. Most people didn’t know I drank that much. But most people never saw me sober. It is an occupational hazard. I even used to drink in the studio when I was recording. I’m not proud of it, for sure. I just quit. I decided I’d had enough, and I was going to see how the other half lives. I haven’t had even a beer or a glass of wine since. That’s the same way I quit smoking [in 1990].”

By the time of “Don’t Waste it on the Blues” (1988), “Back in the Fire” (1989) and his singles of the early 1990s, an entire generation of stars was worshipping at his feet. Randy Travis, George Strait, Tracy Byrd, Clint Black, Tracy Lawrence, Doug Stone and Alan Jackson are among the dozens who have praised this singer’s singer.

Watson recorded new CDs in 1993, 1996 and 1997. But in 2000-01 he was diagnosed with cancer, underwent surgery and endured chemotherapy. Remarkably, he kept singing through it all.

“The disease was extremely devastating to me financially. I didn’t have any insurance and didn’t know what I was going to do. I am so grateful to my fans and to all the entertainers, my comrades who got behind me and helped me with their fundraisers and their prayers. I kept working as much as I could. It’s what I had to do. I couldn’t lay down. I had to be doing something, sick or not. I think it made me a stronger person. If I had to do it over again, I wouldn’t change anything.”

He also continued to record, issuing new collections in 2001, 2003 and 2005. But all three albums vanished when, incredibly, each label that marketed them went out of business. Despite the setbacks, there were triumphs, too. In 2002, Gene Watson was inducted into the Texas Country Music Hall of Fame.

“I have been on top. And I’ve been just as low as you can go,” he says philosophically.

“That’s why I’m so grateful for this new record. For these stars to take the time to do this with me is so much more than I could have ever asked for. I’m overwhelmed. I’m flabbergasted. I get goose bumps just thinking about it.”

But it’s not the guests who are the power behind In a Perfect World. It is the soulful sound of Gene Watson’s voice. There is no studio trickery here. This is a man who can stand and deliver in the studio, flawlessly.

“I’m old school,” he says without apology. “With me, it’s so important to do the vocals at the same time the musicians are playing, live. I’m adamant about that. I mean, if one of those players hits a good lick, it will inspire me to sing a good lick. Sometime I think I’m out of date because I stick with that. But that’s all I have ever known as far as recording. In so many ways, I’m so elementary, so basic.”

And so inspiring. Gene Watson admired the songs of Tim Mensy so much that he included five of them on In a Perfect World and asked the songwriter for an autographed photo. Mensy’s inscription on the picture says it all:

“Gene – Thanks for teaching us how to sing.”

GENE WATSON – DISCOGRAPHY

1972	<u>Gene Watson</u>	Stoneway Records
	“If I’m a Fool for Leaving”	
1975	<u>Love in the Hot Afternoon</u>	Capitol Records
	“Love in the Hot Afternoon”	#3
	“Where Love Begins”	#1
	“You Could Know as Much About a Stranger”	#10
1976	<u>Because You Believed in Me</u>	Capitol Records
	“Because You Believed in Me”	#20
1977	<u>Paper Rosie</u>	Capitol Records
	“Paper Rosie”	#1
1977	<u>Beautiful Country</u>	Capitol Records
	“The Old Man and His Horn”	#11
	“I Don’t Need a Thing at All”	#8
	“Cowboys Don’t Get Lucky All the Time”	#11
1978	<u>Reflections</u>	Capitol Records
	“One Sided Conversation”	#8
	“Farewell Party”	#5
	“Pick the Wildwood Flower”	#5
	“I Wonder How it Is in Colorado”	
1978	<u>The Best of Gene Watson</u>	Capitol Records
1979	<u>Should I Come Home</u>	Capitol Records
	“Should I Come Home (Or Should I Go Crazy)”	#1
	“Nothing Sure Looked Good on You”	#4
	“Bedroom Ballad”	#18
1980	<u>No One Will Ever Know</u>	Capitol Records
	“Raisin’ Cane in Texas”	#15
	“No One Will Ever Know”	#13
1981	<u>The Best of Gene Watson, Volume Two</u>	Capitol Records
1981	<u>Between This Time and the Next Time</u>	MCA Records
	“Between This Time and the Next Time”	#17
1981	<u>Old Loves Never Die</u>	MCA Records
	“Fourteen Carat Mind”	#1
	“Speak Softly (You’re Talking to My Heart)”	#9
1982	<u>This Dream’s on Me</u>	MCA Records
	“This Dream’s on Me”	#8
	“What She Don’t Know Won’t Hurt Her”	#5
	“Baby Me, Baby”	
1982	<u>Gene Watson’s Greatest Hits</u>	MCA Records
1983	<u>Sometimes I Get Lucky</u>	MCA Records
	“You’re Out Doing What I’m Here Doing Without”	#1
	“Sometimes I Get Lucky and Forget”	#9
	“If I Were You I’d Fall in Love with Me”	
	“You Put Out an Old Flame Last Night”	

1984	<u>Little by Little</u>	MCA Records
	“Drinkin’ My Way Back Home”	#10
	“Forever Again”	#10
1984	<u>Heartaches, Love and Stuff</u>	Curb/MCA Records
	“Got No Reason Now for Goin’ Home”	#7
1985	<u>Gene Watson’s Greatest Hits</u>	Curb/MCA Records
1985	<u>Texas Saturday Night</u>	Curb/MCA Records
1985	<u>Memories to Burn</u>	Epic Records
	“Memories to Burn”	#5
	“Carmen”	#32
1986	<u>Starting New Memories</u>	Epic Records
	“Everything I Used to Do”	#29
1987	<u>Honky Tonk Crazy</u>	Epic Records
	“Everybody Needs a Hero”	#28
	“I Didn’t Think of You at All”	
1988	<u>Back in the Fire</u>	Warner Bros. Records
	“Don’t Waste it on the Blues”	#5
	“Back in the Fire”	#20
	“The Jukebox Played Along”	#24
1991	<u>At Last</u>	Warner Bros. Records
	“At Last”	#61
	“You Can’t Take it With You When You Go”	#67
	“Only Yesterday”	
	“I Catch Myself”	
1992	<u>In Other Words</u>	Broadland International
	“One and One and One”	#66
1993	<u>Uncharted Mind</u>	SOR Records
1996	<u>The Good Ole Days</u>	SOR Records
	“Change Her Mind”	#44
	“No Goodbyes”	#73
1997	<u>Jesus Is All I Need</u>	SOR Records
1997	<u>A Way to Survive</u>	SOR Records
	“A Way to Survive”	
1999	<u>Eighteen Greatest Hits</u>	King/Tee Vee Records
2001	<u>From the Heart</u>	RMG Records
	“Next to Nothin’”	
	“The Man an’ Me and You”	
	“No Trash in My Trailer”	
2001	<u>Gene Watson Ultimate Collection</u>	Hip-O Records
2003	<u>Gene Watson Sings</u>	Compendia/Intersound
	“New Woman”	
	“The Coast of Texas”	
2005	<u>Then and Now</u>	Koch Records
	“I Catch Myself”	
2007	<u>In a Perfect World</u>	Sha nachie Records
	“I Buried Our Love”	

GENE WATSON - KEY SINGLES

1975	“Bad Water”	#87
	“Love in the Hot Afternoon”	#3
	“Where Love Begins”	#1
1976	“You Could Know as Much About a Stranger”	#10
	“Because You Believed in Me”	#20
1977	“Paper Rosie”	#1
	“The Old Man and His Horn”	#11
	“I Don’t Need a Thing at All”	#8
1978	“Cowboys Don’t Get Lucky All the Time”	#11
	“One Sided Conversation”	#8
1979	“Farewell Party”	#5
	“Pick the Wildwood Flower”	#5
	“Should I Come Home (Or Should I Go Crazy)”	#1
1980	“Nothing Sure Looked Good on You”	#4
	“Bedroom Ballad”	#18
	“Raisin’ Cane in Texas”	#15
	“No One Will Ever Know”	#13
1981	“Any Way You Want Me”	#33
	“Between This Time and the Next Time”	#17
	“Fourteen Carat Mind”	#1
1982	“Speak Softly (You’re Talking to My Heart)”	#9
	“This Dream’s on Me”	#8
	“What She Don’t Know Won’t Hurt Her”	#5
1983	“You’re Out Doing What I’m Here Doing Without”	#1
	“Sometimes I Get Lucky and Forget”	#9
	“Drinkin’ My Way Back Home”	#10
1984	“Forever Again”	#10
	“Got No Reason Now for Goin’ Home”	#7
1985	“Memories to Burn”	#5
	“Carmen”	#32
1986	“Everything I Used to Do”	#29
1987	“Everybody Needs a Hero”	#28
1988	“Don’t Waste it on the Blues”	#5
1989	“Back in the Fire”	#20
	“The Jukebox Played Along”	#24
1991	“At Last”	#61
1993	“One and One and One”	#66
1997	“Change Her Mind”	#44
	“No Goodbyes”	#73
2007	“I Buried Our Love”	