



All the Best Podcast
Episode 50: “Measure of a Man”
Featuring Country Music Artist, Jack Ingram.

Jack: March 16th, 1983. I love country music. I know the names of some of the big stars, but I couldn't go through and give you a list of all the records, and yet when I hear them, I know them and I love them. I don't know why country music sticks with me. I like listening to symphonies and I don't know the names of them, but I know what I like in it and I can relax and go to sleep with that music. I love the lyrics of country. I love the patriotism of people. I would rather see this Country-Western show, Hee Haw, or the Grand Ole Opry than go to a ballgame. I really would. It's a great mix of music, lyrics, barrooms, mother, the flag, and good-looking, large women. There's something earthy and strong about it all. George H.W. Bush.

George: In the first place, I believe that character is a part of being President.

Barbara: And life really must have joy.

Sam: This is "All the Best." The official podcast of the George and Barbara Bush Foundation. I'm your host, Sam LeBlond, one of their many grandchildren. Here, we celebrate the legacy of these two incredible Americans through friends, family, and the foundation. This is "All the Best."

George: I remember something my dad taught me. He said, write your mother, serve your country, and he said, tell the truth. And I've tried to do that in public life. All through it.

Barbara: You are a human being first and those human connections with children, with friends are the most important investments you will ever make.

George: We stand tonight before a new world of hope and possibilities for our children. A world we could not have contemplated a few years ago.

Sam: On behalf of our family and the George and Barbara Bush Foundation. This is "All the Best."

Sam: Houston born Jack Ingram is an American country music artist who over his music career spanning decades has released 10 studio albums, one extended play, six live albums and 19 singles. In 2005 Jack's song, "Whatever You Are" became his first number one hit on the Billboard Country Charts and also went on to become the first number one hit for his label, Big Machine Records. Jack's other hits include "Love you, "Lips of an Angel," "Measure of a Man," "Maybe She'll Get Lonely," "That's a Man," and "Barefoot and Crazy." Outside the studio, Jack is a founding member of Mack, Jack and McConaughey, a fundraiser for children's charities sponsored by Jack, Matthew McConaughey and former "All the Best" guest, coach Mack Brown. Jack, thanks so much for joining us today on "All the Best."

Jack: How are you buddy? Good to see you.

Sam: Good to see you, man. Well, as a lot of our listeners know, this podcast is dedicated to the concept of service. And I remember my grandfather once said, "You don't have to be a president to be a leader, and you certainly don't have to be a first lady to make a difference in someone else's life. All you have to do is care and then act." Helping others is clearly important to you too, Jack. So let's start there. Why does service matter to you?

Jack: I was playing some private birthday party for a guy a couple years ago. His friends were making fun of him because it was in the Hamptons and they were going like... He was doing something and they go, "Hey man, shut up. You were born rounding third." And you know, like remember that one criticism that it was meant as a criticism that Ann Richards said about your granddad, you know, "Poor George. He was born with a silver spoon in his mouth." I don't shy away from the fact that, you know, I grew up in the Woodlands, Texas, which is a planted community and I went to SMU, which is a private school. I had a grandfather who was incredibly successful as well. He knew your grandfather and your uncle. Service is important to me because guys like me, I've been lucky. I have talent. I was born into a family that knew how to cater to that talent and make it grow. I think about some of the situations that other people are born into that they can't control. They're not born rounding first or second. They're born behind the eight ball. Anybody that's been given a lot or has earned a lot, has a responsibility to give back.

Sam: Yeah, I think that's true. And I think one of the biggest manifestations of your desire to serve and help others is the annual Mack, Jack and McConaughey event held in Austin, Texas with your friends, Coach Mack Brown who's a previous guest on "All the Best." And actor Matthew McConaughey, I think we're still negotiating with him as we speak.

Jack: Good luck nailing him down.

Sam: Can you tell our audience about this amazing event and the incredible causes you help support?

Jack: So it started long time ago. My dad went to this event called the Darryl and Willie. Darrell Royal and Willie Nelson and later on Ben Crenshaw. They had an event where Willie invited all his favorite songwriters and all his artists buddies and Daryl brought a bunch of athletes and coaches and whatever. They had a golf tournament and a concert. I was lucky enough to go see that with my dad. My dad played in it. It really struck me because it was a great event that raised money but for me, I was 13 year old kid that was really interested in music. I got to see... The very first time I went to the event, I saw a guy named Don Schlitz play "The Gambler," which at the time was a huge song for Kenny Rogers. And I wasn't really that into that song at the time.

I wasn't a huge Kenny Rogers fan, but when I heard the song writers, he wrote that song, when I heard him play it, it changed the direction of my life pretty much because it showed me what music can do and how it can be transformed by the guy who wrote it. All of a sudden that song brought tears to my eyes. So anyway, fast forward, 25 years, I called up Mack Brown one time, at one in the morning on a Friday. And I said, "Hey, man," I probably had a few colas. I asked him if he'd ever been to that event and he said, yes. And he said, why? I said, "Well, you know, I'm not Willie Nelson and you're not Darryl Royal, but maybe we could start this event together and bring back the spirit of what that was. It will alleviate us to doing so many charity events, because we'll have our own worry about we can give back." And so it was his bright idea to call Matthew and ask him. So we started that next year with nothing. Just kind of, maybe we can make this happen. And the first year we raised a couple million dollars.

Sam: Wow.

Jack: It was a big success and now we're going into our ninth year, I think. Maybe eighth year. I'm not sure, but we've raised over \$15 million for charities. It's all charities that are meant to empower children that need help.

Sam: Well, you touched on music a little bit and the COVID-19 pandemic has taken a terrible toll on so many facets of our society, such as the live music business.

Jack: You can say that again.

Sam: And it's not just the musicians that are affected, right? It's the people who work at these events, security, concessions, parking.

Jack: Oh yeah.

Sam: Where do things stand today, and how long will it take to get back to some sense of normalcy in your industry?

Jack: Well, this last weekend is the first weekend that I had three shows in a row. That was the fifth show I've had in seven months. So it's been rough, not just economically, which obviously that's a big dent, but also just getting on stage every night and getting the applause and getting to express myself and get that adrenaline rush. I was talking to a doctor buddy of mine and he was just like, "how's it going?" I said, "it sucks. This is terrible." And he's like, "well, think about it, man. Don't be too hard on yourself because for 30 years, three or four nights a week, you've gotten to get this, basically, a dopamine shot in the brain, you know, it says you're okay and everything's cool. And that, you know, you didn't ask to quit. You just had to stop cold turkey." And so it's been rough.

As far as when it's going to come back, I don't know. I mean, I have no idea. It's the only time I get kind of political about stuff like that. It's just like, you know, until we have some leadership that gets everybody on the same page, who knows what's going to happen. Because it keeps dipping and then coming back and dipping and coming back. And I'm glad that we're starting to learn how to live with it. This last weekend, I played some venues that were a third full that had a higher ticket price because that's how it works. And so I know the big tours aren't going to start probably until at least next summer, probably '22.

Sam: Well, just like you said, you like the shot that you get three, four days a week, people who are in the crowd, they get that same dopamine shot too by

seeing live music. And you know, for me and my wife, we met at a live music venue and it's just part of our life that's now gone.

Jack: One of the benefits of it, if there is any benefit for what's been going on, is that, A. we're learning about how important leadership is and B. we're also learning not to take things for granted so much, you know. This last weekend I was truly grateful to be playing for a third of the crowd that I normally play for. And I was like, I don't care if I play for one person, just give me a chance to feel all right for a few hours.

Sam: And is that how it feels for you? Do you have just this energy that you need to get out? I mean, if you just sit idle, is that a problem for you? Do you like the creative juices flowing and they'll burst if you don't get them out there?

Jack: Well, yeah, for the first couple of months when I thought it would come and go, I wrote a bunch of songs which does fill that void. However, in my world a song is not really real until you play it for a crowd because you can feel the energy just like if I'm playing a song and it's not connecting, I can tell you which lines were wrong. That's the kind of energy that comes from a crowd. Like, Oh, I lost them on that one line, I better go back and fix that. After a couple of months writing songs wasn't doing it either. It's like, man, I need to play. I ended up taking my guitar to a neighbor's house at the lake that didn't even know me. They knew who I was, but I didn't know them on a first name basis and I just heard them out on their back porch. I was like, "Hey, wanna hear some songs?" They're like, "Hell yeah, we do."

Sam: So you kind of touched on it earlier and seeing Willie when you were 13 years old, was it that connection there or how did you get into music? How did you get your start?

Jack: Well, it was that connection. I remember meeting Willie Nelson when I was, I don't really remember. There's a picture my dad has. We went down to the KPFT in Houston, the little local public station. Supposedly Willy held me in his arms and said, "Hey there." And I go, "I like the songs you sing Mr. Nelson." So from an early age, I was into music. I didn't know I was going to play it. Nobody in my family really plays music. So when I got to be a teenager, you know, I'd fall asleep with headphones on listening to Don Williams or Willie Nelson or whatever. And it was at some point in my late teens that I wasn't enjoying listening to music as much anymore. because I really wanted to be inside of it. And it kind of felt like I just had this urge. So I picked up a guitar and a buddy of mine taught me some chords. And then I learned how

easy it was. And then most songs, especially in country or rock and roll, there's a method to the madness. Then it becomes about truly self-expression because you're kind of working within a framework of chord structures that are pretty easy to grab onto. And then it became about the lyrics for me. And that's when I started playing.

Sam: You once said, "Great music only happens when the artist is willing to lay it all out there and fall on his face. It's one thing to be able to sing as well as you can, but it's another to write a great song in the first place." What's your process?

Jack: For me, it's normally built around a lyric, either a title or just an idea. And then once I pick up a guitar, that's where it's kind of magical. I remember reading about Willie, "First, you gotta be able to tell the truth." There's no reason to do it unless you're going to be honest because that's the only thing I can bring to the table in 2020, every idea has been written about already. So the only thing that I bring is my unique perspective, which is just unique because it's only me, you know? And so that's the most important thing. And that's where I talk about falling on your face or telling the truth. Sometimes I've written with people where they'll say, "I don't want to say, I love you." Like if it fits right here, it's like, "no, man, I don't want to say, I love you. Everybody says it in the song." I go, "that's BS."

The way I say those three words is different than anybody else in the whole wide world and the way contextually where it is and how I'm saying it matters. That's the idea of being able to fall on your face. It's like, no, that's my truth and I'm going to say it. And if anybody likes it, I don't really, I mean, I hope they like it, but they're certainly not going to like it unless I mean it. And so that's kinda, my process is just tell the truth. The thing that I've picked up from Willy is I don't lead with melodies, like real musical melodies, but the right melody finds the lyric for me. And it's all swirling up above your head. Like you just got to reach up and grab it and put it to music, you know? Put it, put your words in there.

Sam: Jack, you've been a force in country music now for over 20 years, if you had to pick one or two top career memories, what would they be?

Jack: Well, it's been pretty much... by the way I'm wearing your grandfather's jacket that I stole.

Sam: It fits you well, I think it's like 42 long, right?

Jack: That's right. It looks good. Remember when we were at the house, when you and I met, they were like, "Well Jack, where's your jacket?" I go, "I don't have a jacket, what do you mean? I got my leather jacket." And they said, "You need a sport coat to go to this party." And I was like, "well, I guess I can't go." Marshall ran into your granddad's closet and found the jacket. I was like, "you ain't getting this back. You know that right?"

Sam: He didn't notice, he's got a lot of those, but he's right off the rack.

Jack: So anyway, as far as the highlights go, I've gotten to do a lot of great stuff with a lot of my favorite artists. As far as me being in this business and having an impact, I think the last couple of years, aside from my recording career and my touring career, which has been great and you're right, that's been a highlight, but I've gotten to write a bunch of songs in the last four or five years with Miranda Lambert. And we'd go down to Marfa, Texas and go out to a ranch in the middle of nowhere with our buddy John Randall. And that's where we wrote Tin Man, that won song of the year, last year. And I have to say that's a pretty big highlight to have a continued friendship and musical relationship with, you know, Miranda's going to go down in history as one of the all-time greats. And to be a part of that is pretty heavy stuff.

Sam: Well, Jack, I had Natalie and Jonathan Stewart on the show and we talked about that night when you played for my grandfather. And it was a pretty special night from my perspective, but I'd love to hear your perspective of playing out there in the back of the big house.

Jack: Yeah, that was really cool. That was really... Talk about a highlight. When your grandfather came in and he was in his wheelchair, remember it was close to the end of his life. The best part for me was first of all, getting to play some songs for a President of the United States, it's pretty shocking, really. I didn't really prepare for the weight of that room. And so about 10 minutes before we were going to go over to the house, I have a tendency to do this. I just didn't think about it. I guess it would have made me nervous or something. And so, about 10 minutes before, I was like, "Holy," like my breath started getting short and I was like, "what am I going to play?"

What's my set list for a president? So then we started playing and I think the first song I played, remember we weren't drinking. Because everybody said, "Hey, if y'all are drinking, he's going to want to drink." And at that time he was on a lot of medications.

Sam: He couldn't fire up his regular vodka that he usually likes to have.

Jack: Well he was going to have one at dinner so he couldn't have one before dinner, something like that. Well, I'm playing the first song, I remember looking up at him, he's into it, he's digging it and he whispers over to Marshall about something and she goes "no, no, no." And then he whispered it again. She goes "no granddad" or whatever. And when I was done, I go, "what's going on over there?" What are you whispering about?" He goes, well, I was asking for a beer. I go, "I guess my music is doing the right thing then." If it made you want a cold beer, that means I'm doing a good job.

Sam: That's awesome.

Jack: But I also remember the main highlight that I remember from that particular experience was looking down when I was playing, we use within arm shot reaching distance of me and I looked down and his foot is tapping to the music and he had the presidential seal on his house slippers. I was like, I'm the only one in the whole world that's ever going to have this moment exactly of watching a former president toe tapping with his house slippers on. It was really cool.

Sam: Oh, that was such a fun night and there wasn't a dry eye. Remember we're a family of criers so anytime something like that happens, we can't help ourselves. So it was a really special night and I wanted to hear from your perspective, because that was a highlight that Natalie and Jonathan talked about at length about how special of a night that was.

Jack: And then I think we ended that night by playing Greed with some dice.

Sam: Oh yeah, yeah. Always some sort of competition going on. You gotta have a winner and a loser of the night.

Jack: That was fun, man. That was truly a highlight.

Sam: Thanks so much for spending time with us and chatting. I want to end with this and we're going to keep it simple because you know, there's a lot of people now, especially with live music, kind of in flux, what do you see with young artists? I mean, do any come to you and say, how do I navigate this new normal for music? Because now it's like 10,000 songs go on Spotify every day.

What is the business going to look like? And what would you say to someone young who's trying to break in?

Jack: It's funny you say that because I sometimes wonder myself just when I'm driving down the road thinking about "what would it be like to be getting into this business now when there's, you know, it used to be, there was a roadmap." I mean, I guess there's going to be a roadmap. It's all going to settle into whatever it ends up being and the great thing about there being 10,000 new songs a day on Spotify is that none of that matters. It's never mattered. The only thing that matters is, you know, let's take Jonathan Stewart for example, or your family of politicians. There's 10 million politicians trying to run for office that the end goal would be to be the president. And so how do you do that? Well, you tell the truth and you do the best you can. And the cream rises to the top and that's just the way it is. And so it's with athletics, with business. It's like, you don't have to worry about how many other people are doing it just as long as you make sure that you're doing your best. And then sometimes your best is better than their best. And that's how it works. I mean, yeah, that's what Darwinism is. You know, that's how it goes.

Sam: Survival of the fittest. I.

Jack: That's right, man, if you're not good enough, you'll figure out where you land on the ladder and you'll go, "Oh, I can't be the songwriter I wanted to be" but a lot of people end up being producers or being managers or being booking agents. Every booking agent that I've ever had at some point wanted to be an artist.

Sam: So the biggest thing you miss is getting on stage and performing live. Is that fair to say?

Jack: Yeah. Yeah.

Sam: That's just been part of your life forever.

Jack: I knew what I was going to be, not because I was great at music when I picked up a guitar. I knew what I was going to be when I walked on stage. And I said, "Oh," and my blood started pumping and cute girls turned around and dudes wanted to have a beer with me. I was like, yeah, this is what I do.

Sam: That's great. Well, Jack, thanks so much for joining us on "All the Best." You're awesome. Hope to see you live somewhere soon.

Jack: No kidding. You and me both. Great talking with you, Sam. All the best.

Sam: I'm Sam LeBlond reminding you to listen, share, and subscribe to "All the Best" on Apple podcasts, Spotify and everywhere great podcasts are found. Thank you for joining me as we celebrate All the Best.

Barbara: Both George and I believe that while the White House is important, the country's future is in your house. Every house, all over America.

George: Preparedness, strength, decency, and honor. Courage, sacrifice, the willingness to fight, even die for one's country. America, the land of the free and the brave. And God bless the United States of America. The greatest country on the face of the Earth.