

# SONS *of the* PIONEERS

LEGENDS OF WESTERN MUSIC

## 90 YEARS AND COUNTING, SONS OF THE PIONEERS KEEP WESTERN MUSIC'S CAMPFIRE BURNING BRIGHT

The Sons of the Pioneers, the most influential and revered of all western music groups, celebrate an unparalleled 90 unbroken years of performance, thrilling audiences with enchanting harmonies and picturesque images of the majestic American West.

In 2024, the legendary group extends its remarkable run through nine decades, carrying the legacy of the outfit's landmark, Grammy-honored music to new ears. Originals like "Cool Water," "Tumbling Tumbleweeds," and "The Timber Trail" have come to define western music itself and are now also deeply rooted in American culture. "They are just as influential to American culture—and Americana—as Levis, baseball, and Betsy Ross," observes a Rhapsody.com reviewer.

When Roy Rogers (then Leonard Slye) and gifted songwriters Bob Nolan and Tim Spencer founded the group in 1934 and developed their trademark "Pioneer sound," little did they realize they were launching a juggernaut that would become perhaps the longest-lived group in American music history, creating a vast catalog of treasured music along the way.

"These songs are masterpieces and are just a part of who we are as Americans," says Tommy Nallie, the current leader and only the fourth "trail boss" in the group's nine decades. "We stay true to the music, and audiences just love it."

Through the years, more than 40 gifted singers and instrumentalists have rotated into the group to build the Pioneers' historic musical legacy. In addition to Nallie, who sings the "middle" part in the Pioneers' unique vocal trio and plays lead guitar, the group's other four members are: Ken Lattimore (tenor and lead vocals, fiddle), John Fullerton (baritone and lead vocals, rhythm guitar), Paul Elliott (lead fiddle, harmony vocals), and Chuck Ervin (string bass, harmony vocals).

On the heels of the group's *85 Years of Harmony* (2018) and *Red River Valley* (2022), the prolific Pioneers have now also finished recording an album of campfire hymns and spirituals, set for a 2024 release. "Our fans have been asking us for a gospel album for a long time," says Nallie, "and we couldn't be happier with how it sounds."

Over the years, the Pioneers' songs have been recorded by an astonishing array of performers, including Bing Crosby, the Boston Pops, Diana Ross and the Supremes, Frankie Laine, Johnny Cash, Riders in the Sky, Michael Martin Murphey, and even the Muppets. Their songs are in more than 100 western films and continue to be used widely, such as in the Coen brothers' *The Big Lebowski* (1998) and *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* (2018), Clint Eastwood's *The Mule* (2018), and in Ken Burns' epic *Country Music* TV documentary (2019). A musical about "King of the Cowboys" Roy Rogers and "Queen of the West" Dale Evans, titled *Accidental Heroes*, is also under development for the stage.

The Pioneers are the most decorated group in the history of western music, earning membership in the Country Music Hall of Fame, the Western Music Association Hall of Fame, the National Cowboy Hall of Fame, the Texas Swing Hall of Fame, and the Hollywood Walk of Fame, to name a few. The group's music has been honored by the Grammy Hall of Fame, and the Smithsonian Institution named the group one of America's "National Treasures."

"No other group had as profound an effect on the history of Western music," writes music historian Douglas B. Green, also known as Ranger Doug of Riders in the Sky. "Their lyrical musical portraits virtually define the romanticized West ... painting its colors as no one had done before or has done since."

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