



Looking Back to See: A Country Music Memoir

Maxine Brown

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The Browns—Maxine, Bonnie, and Jim Ed—are a trio of siblings that had tremendous success in the 1950s and 60s. Following in the tradition of the best of such books, such as Loretta Lynn's *Coal Miner's Daughter*, this memoir, told in Maxine's own plucky, spirited style, delves deeply into the Browns' remarkable past, beginning with a Depression-era childhood in rural south Arkansas. From it emerged a duo, Maxine and Jim Ed, and in 1954 they had a Top Ten hit with "Looking Back to See." Sister Bonnie later joined them, and strengthened by shared experience they sang their way on to Little Rock's *Barnyard Frolic* in 1952, and were soon regulars on the well-known *Louisiana Hayride*. They would eventually help a young Elvis Presley get started on the show and toured with him as their opening act, and it wasn't long before he became a close friend of the family. Other hits followed, including "I Take the Chance" and "I Heard the Bluebirds Sing."

Early mismanagement (which Maxine describes quite graphically in her own gutsy style) couldn't prevent the Browns' careers from soaring. The group began a long relationship with RCA, and with Chet Atkins, and later joined the *Grand Ole Opry* cast. In 1959 their rendition of Edith Piaf's song, "The Three Bells" not only went to the top of the country charts but spent weeks at number one on the pop charts, and led to appearances on *The Ed Sullivan Show* and *American Bandstand*.

A vocal group without peer, The Browns were central artists in the changing sound of country and American popular music at mid-century. They were part of major changes in the entertainment business and American culture, participated in the folk music movement in the '60s, and saw the steady birth of rock 'n' roll up close as they worked with Presley and others. Illustrated with many never-before-published photographs, *Looking Back to See* is a remarkable story told here for the first time.

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