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MIDSTATE

DAVIDSON

Don Pierce, a pioneer in developing concept of the music album, dies



PIERCE
in 1960

By LAKENDRA LEWIS
For the Tennessean

Don Pierce, the former owner of Starday Records whose marketing concepts helped popularize country music in the early 1950s and '60s, died of a heart attack Sunday. He was 89.

Pierce was best known for his savvy as a record entrepreneur and producer who worked with bluegrass and country artists such as Johnny Cash, Minnie Pearl, Dottie West and George Jones, who got his start on the Starday label.

Jones remembered Pierce as a man who knew the record business. He said Pierce promoted country artists when industry critics felt the advent of rock 'n' roll had all but stamped it out.

"He was very good at what he

did," Jones said. "He knew how to promote. A lot of people don't know his name but they should, because he's one of the pioneers that did so much to broaden country music. People like him proved what country music could do and how much people liked it."

John Rumble, senior historian for the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum and a friend of Pierce's for the past 10 years, said Pierce was great at marketing artists.

"He was a pioneer in developing the concept of the album," Rumble said. "When he entered the business, it was pretty much a singles market. It wasn't until the late '50s that albums really became popular."

Rumble said Pierce arranged to

have very bright, eye-catching album jackets. He said he wanted the artist's name and album title printed at the top so it would catch people's eyes in the record stores.

A Seattle native, Pierce graduated from the University of Washington and served in the Army during World War II.

In 1953, he invested \$333 in the fledgling Starday Record Co., run by Harold "Pappy" Daily and Jack Starnes. He purchased the company in 1958, producing hits such as *Alabam* for Cowboy Copas in 1963 and *Ten Little Bottles* for Johnny Bond in 1965. He also established the "Don Pierce Golden Eagle Awards" for the Reunion of Professional Entertainers to honor country stars who had not been recog-

nized for their musical contributions. Pierce sold Starday in 1970 and focused on developing real estate.

Pierce was chosen Country Music's Man of the Year in 1959 and was a founding member of the Country Music Association. He also founded Music City Pro-Celebrity Golf Invitational and was nominated for induction into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1988.

Pierce is survived by his wife, Vadis of Hendersonville; a daughter, Victoria Pierce Turner of Nashville; and a grandchild.

Visitation will be 6-7:30 p.m. today in Hendersonville Funeral Home. Memorial services will be at 1 p.m. tomorrow in Hendersonville Funeral Home. ■