

Farewell Dolly Parton: Local musician reflects on the late singer's legacy

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Music lovers across the globe are mourning the loss of country music legend Dolly Parton, who died at age 80 after a brief battle with cancer on Aug. 25.

The late singer touched the hearts of so many through her iconic discography and positive persona, including the heart of Eden Prairie-based musician and longtime fan Pamela McNeill, who regularly covers Parton's songs and even met her in 2025.

"She was probably our best human," McNeill says. "She left that mark on everyone. Anyone who ever met her. There's no one that has an unkind word to say about her and in all of her philanthropy and giving back. I mean, I could go on and on and on. But she was a treasure, a true treasure."

As a country-rock musician herself, McNeill has taken artistic



From left: Max Krauth, Chad Whittaker, Pamela McNeill, Mary Jane Alm, Cassandra Mae and Frank Merchlewitz perform during the "Janis, Stevie, Dolly and Me" show earlier this year.

inspiration from Parton in her own career. Earlier this year, the local singer-songwriter opened her new show "Janis, Stevie, Dolly and me," where she plays a mix of original music and popular songs from her three most beloved musical influences, including hits like "Jolene," "Me and Bobby McGee," "Stand Back," and others.

Her personal adoration for the country legend wasn't her only inspiration for the new production. McNeill credits a surprise run-in with

Parton in 2005 as another motivation for the creation of her show.

The two met briefly while backstage at the Mayo Civic Center in Rochester. McNeill and her friend, who was a sound engineer for the late singer at the time, met Parton before the start of her concert during soundcheck. She recalls being in awe of the icon's extravagant wigs and wardrobe changes.

"We walked up to her and she said, 'Y'all look like show people, are you?' There's nobody who could make someone feel more like they really wanted to know, [and feel] more comfortable," McNeill said. "It was a real gift and we talked about songwriting and singing and she was completely present."

Unfortunately, McNeill's camera broke as she took it out for a photo. But that wasn't a problem for Parton, who asked her

See **DOLLY** | **PAGE 10**



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