

A DREAM COME TRUE CONTEST WINNER COMES TO AMERICA

BY JUDY MASSA



Zhou Zuo-Ren (left), Judy Massa, and Zheng Rong Xin on the steps of the U.S. Capitol.



FIRST TRIP on an airplane. First time in America. First time to speak English outside of the classroom. First time to see a live concert. First time to be interviewed by reporters and journalists. First time to eat American food. First time to use a knife and fork instead of chopsticks. All these firsts — and more — occurred within a span of two weeks to VOA *Country Music USA* listener Zhou Zuo-Ren, a 23-year-old international business student from Shanghai, China.

Mr. Zhou and some 3,000 other country music fans around the world participated in an essay contest I organized in cooperation with the Country Music Association and the Grand Ole Opry. VOA listeners were asked to write an essay in English — not the native language for most — on “What Country Music Means to Me.” The prize for the winning essay was a trip for two to Washington, D.C., and Nashville, Tennessee, the home of country music, where the winner would attend the 19th International Country Music Fan Fair, a week-long gathering of country music artists and their fans that takes place each year.

While I expected to receive many thoughtful and interesting responses, I was truly overwhelmed by the descrip-



tions of how this American art form has affected people in all walks of life and in all corners of the world. With very few exceptions, the essays were marvelous and insightful, making my job as one of the three judges very difficult. Joining me in selecting the winning essay were Jo Walker-Meador, executive director of the Country Music Association, and Hal Durham, general manager of the Grand Ole Opry. After many hours of reading and discussing the entries, we finally chose the one submitted by Zhou Zuo-Ren.

Mr. Zhou’s essay — reprinted on page 8 — showed a tremendous depth of feeling for country music. He had also demonstrated his love for the mu-



In Nashville (clockwise from left): Naomi Judd (left), Zhou Zuo-Ren, Judy Massa, and Wynonna Judd (right); Judy and Zhou with Charlie Daniels; Zhou (center) being introduced to 20,000 country music fans by George Jones and Lynn Anderson; Zhou with Dan Seals; Zhou meeting Keith Whitley.

sic by writing and broadcasting a program on American country music over the Shanghai People's Broadcasting Station. His sole knowledge of the songs and artists comes from listening to *Country Music USA*.

He writes down the names of recordings that particularly appeal to him and, since country music records are not available in Shanghai, he then sends a plea to an uncle in Hong Kong, asking if he can find any of these recordings and send them to him. In this way, Mr. Zhou has acquired a collection of some thirty country music recordings.

We judges notified Mr. Zhou of our decision and, after securing passports

and other needed documents, he and his guest, Zheng Rong Xin, a professor at Shanghai University, were on their way to the United States. I was there to welcome them when they landed at Dulles International Airport outside Washington, D.C.

Driving them to their hotel that night, I was delighted to discover just how thoroughly immersed Mr. Zhou is in the music. In fact, throughout our two weeks together, he knew facts and figures about every musician we met. The artists themselves were tremendously impressed with his enthusiasm and knowledge.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. While in Washington, Mr. Zhou told

me he had adopted the nickname "Willie" because of his love for Willie Nelson's music. So we dubbed him Willie and called Mr. Zheng "John."

Willie and John had the opportunity to take a special tour of the White House and the Capitol, as well as visit the National Gallery of Art and the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum. They also visited with all of us here at VOA, and Willie was my special guest that week on *Country Music USA*.

Then, finally, it was on to Nashville — Music City USA! On the first full day, we toured the Country Music Hall of Fame; visited the offices of the Country Music Association; chatted with legendary guitarist Chet Atkins in his office, filled with instruments and awards; watched Eddy Raven have his name inscribed in the Walkway of the Stars; and attended the nationally televised *Music City News Awards Show*.

Each year, subscribers to the *Music City News* magazine select their favorite artists in a variety of categories. Country artists have a special feeling of kinship with their fans; since these awards are chosen by the fans, artists go out of their way to attend. The three of us had seats in the second row, and it seemed that just about every star in country music was there — Barbara Mandrell, Reba McEntire, George Strait, Randy Travis, Alabama, and the Oak Ridge Boys, to name just a few. We went backstage after the show, and Willie and John had their first chance to shake hands, get autographs, and have photos taken with their favorite stars.

That was the busy start to an entire week filled with concerts and autograph sessions. We drove from one end of Nashville to the other, visiting record companies and attending the famous Grand Ole Opry. We not only interviewed lots of artists, but were the subject of many interviews ourselves, including one on the nationally televised *Nashville Now* talk show.

Not everything we did was related to music. We went to the motion picture *Crocodile Dundee II*, enjoyed the rides at Opryland Amusement Park, and visited the lovely, sweeping grounds of Vanderbilt University, where student Zhou and Professor Zheng enjoyed conversing with their American counterparts.

The two weeks passed all too quickly. When it was time to bid farewell, we enjoyed reminiscing about some special moments. For Willie, they included the time we were leaving the press center at the Country Music Fan Fair, and we heard a female voice call, "Willie,

A&E

Front Page News Sports Business Lifestyles Opinion **A&E**

Home > Featured Articles > **Country Music Association**

Countries` Music

Voa Announcer Tells World About America

January 03, 1988 | By Jack Hurst, Country music writer.

Recommend 0

Tweet 0

8+ 0

Her first visit to the Country Music Association`s annual Nashville awards ceremonies in 1979 had Judy Massa feeling as much like an outsider as her far-flung international radio audiences on the Voice of America.

The big winner that year was Charlie Daniels for ``The Devil Went Down To Georgia,`` and Massa found herself standing uncertainly outside Nashville`s Grand Ole Opry House at the edge of a crowd of press people surrounding Daniels.

Eventually, Massa recalls, Daniels turned and walked away. The outsider thought she saw her chance.

``He started walking back toward the Opry House by himself,`` she says,

``and, like any journalist, I started to trot along beside him telling him I was with the VOA, that I would be in town most of the week and asking if he would be available for an interview, blah, blah, blah.

``He kept walking toward the Opry House. He went through some swinging doors, so I went through some. Then he went through some more, and I went through some. Then he stopped, looked down at me, and said, `Lady, do you know you`re in the men`s room?`

``I DIDN`T know it, never having been in the Opry House before in my life, but, by gum by golly, that`s where I was. I turned scarlet red. The guard came running in and said, `Lady, lady,` and I said, `I know, I`m in the men`s room,` and left-quickly.

``But before I did, I said to Charlie, `Please don`t forget me`-meaning,

``Here I`ve given you this whole song and dance about the VOA, and I really want this interview.`

``And he said, `Lady, I`ll NEVER forget YOU.``

Two days later, Massa got her interview with Daniels, who ever since has referred to her as his ``bathroom buddy.``

From that bizarre beginning, she has gone on to make Daniels` annual, Nashville-based Volunteer Jam a cornerstone of Voice of America programming-programming that for a decade has given country music increasingly

distinguished and serious presentation outside the United States.

In recognition of Massa's influence on a worldwide radio audience conservatively estimated at 130 million, Nashville has long since made an insider of the tall, blond U.S. Information Service employee-and no wonder.

She possesses a fandom whose length and breadth makes that of most country music stars look minuscule, and her mail makes the usual American correspondence look trivial. Note the sort of letters her weekly 30-minute

'Country Music U.S.A.' show generates every day:

- (from a youth in Iran) 'When I listen to Loretta Lynn's song 'Coal Miner's Daughter,' I sense the power of success. The power which tells me,

'You can succeed! Don't care about failure. Care about victory!'

- (from the People's Republic of China) 'I'm an 18-year-old girl. I'm a regular of your wonderful programme. I always listen to it at 7:30 p.m.

(Beijing time) every Friday. I enjoy it very much. Your voice is very sweet and charming, and the country musicians sing so well that I really can't tear myself from the radio. You know, I'm mad about American country music.'

With Nashville talent moguls only now beginning to sense the future market potential of western Europe, Massa is way ahead of them, viewing Europe as fully as 'finite' and 'almost saturated' as the American market.

She says she dreams of emceeding a two-month country tour of the Soviet Union and other nations few Nashville talent agents have yet considered.

Massa's show runs every Friday evening as part of a weekly block of music programming that offers a half-hour of big-band music on Mondays and rock 'n' roll, rhythm and blues and soul on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays.

Her background is unlikely for a country disc jockey, but perfect for her job. The wife of another VOA career employee and the mother to two sons, Massa was born in Panama, the daughter of an American schoolteacher and schools administrator. She grew up in Latin America, coming to the United States only to attend DePauw University in Greencastle, Ind.

Much of the music she heard in her formative years, she says, was via Armed Forces Radio, which played some country music. Although her tastes leaned more toward pop and rock 'n' roll then, she vividly recalls the moment country music first really caught her ear: when an AFN broadcaster played Tex Ritter's classic 'Hillbilly Heaven.'

'To this day, I don't really know why, but I was intrigued with that recording,' she recalls. 'I even called up the radio station, which I had never done, and asked them to please play that song again.'

Her job, which started with producing VOA dramatizations and documentaries in Spanish and Portuguese, is now by no means limited to writing and putting her voice to the 'Country Music U.S.A.' show.

In 1984, she became VOA's first music director, coordinating music programming by VOA's 44 non-English-language services.

That first Nashville visit in 1979 was made to cover the annual Country Music Association awards show, because Massa persuaded her supervisors it was an important international event.

A&E

Front Page News Sports Business Lifestyles Opinion **A&E**

Home > Featured Articles > **Country Music Association**

(Page 2 of 2)

Countries` Music

Voa Announcer Tells World About America

January 03, 1988 | By Jack Hurst, Country music writer.

Recommend 0 Tweet 0 +1 0

Her fast friendship with Charlie Daniels resulted in a Daniels proposal that VOA cover his 10th annual Volunteer Jam in 1985; Massa says the one-hour live international broadcast that resulted produced an international audience response that was ``mind-boggling,`` prompting VOA to cover two subsequent Jams.

Other projects-these all part of her regular ``Country Music U.S.A.``

programming-include five weeks of live-recorded segments of the inimitable Grand Ole Opry, plus an 11-week series on the instruments of country music, featuring interviews with such great Nashville instrumentalists as Chet Atkins, Mark O`Connor, Jerry Douglas and Terry McMillan.

``Our show ranges from this type of real concentration on one area to the newest releases out right now,`` Massa says.

Her show obviously is a breath of very fresh air-compared to mainstream American country radio with its tight playlists, 10-in-a-row programming and slavish adherence to the current hit charts.

Don`t expect to hear it, however, unless you`re on an overseas vacation-for it to be broadcast in the United States would be against the law.

``We`re under a congressional mandate not to `disseminate our product domestically,`` Massa says. ``There`s a good reason for that: To prevent any administration that would come to power here in the United States from attempting to propagandize or influence the American public.

``Our mandate is to tell the world about America, not to tell Americans about America.``

Prev | 1 | 2

Featured Articles

MORE:

Related Articles

By Judy Massa

VOA Celebrates Years With Live Concert Broadcast

Top musical stars perform 'Gift of Song' musical tribute for listeners worldwide

"Kenny Rogers. If I could get Kenny to agree, it would all work out." Those were my first thoughts as the idea of organizing a concert to be broadcast live and worldwide in honor of VOA's 50th Anniversary began to crystallize in my head. The concert—to feature numerous stars and styles—would be held in honor of our millions of listeners around the world, and also in honor of the power of music to bring the world together as one.

For many of our listeners worldwide, Kenny Rogers represents the best of America. His music and his many humanitarian efforts have made him an international superstar. I was hoping he would agree to not only sing, but also to co-host the show with me, and to do it for *free*! After all, VOA has no budget for putting on a concert. The moneys for such things as production costs, feeding of artists, travel, lodging, and other associated expenses would have to come from donations from the private sector. All of that lay ahead—and what a challenge it was to raise money during these economic times!

Artist Lineup

First, though, I had to line up the artists (after all, no individual or corporation would contribute to this without knowing who would be performing).

I tracked down Kenny's manager, Ken Kragen, during my June 1991 trip to Nashville's Fan Fair. He was enthusiastic and would talk with Kenny. I was optimistic that Kenny would agree; after all, I've seen Kenny and talked with him many times since our first interview back in 1979, and had covered many awards shows where he's been honored, had traveled to New York several times to attend his Annual World Hunger Media Awards,



Photos by Carmelo Ciancio

The star-studded cast delighting in the applause from the VOA Auditorium audience at the conclusion of the broadcast, from left: Mark O'Connor, Clamma Dale, Howard Levy (Flecktones), Adam Makowicz, Bela Fleck (Flecktones), Clark Terry, John Sebastian, Judy Massa, Chet Atkins, Kenny Rogers, Grover Washington Jr., Craig Richey (Clamma Dale's accompanist), Victor Wooten (Flecktones), Jeff Skunk Baxter, Joe Walsh, Roy "Future Man" Wooten (Flecktones). Offstage were Garth Brooks and Dan Seals.

and had covered his participation in such humanitarian efforts as Hands Across America and USA For Africa's "We Are The World."

Pending word from Kenny's camp, I moved ahead to acquire a number of additional artists. After all, my idea was to present a cross section of musical styles, performed by a number of our top musical stars who were involved in more than one style of music—artists who would delight in "stretching out" on the show, and leave

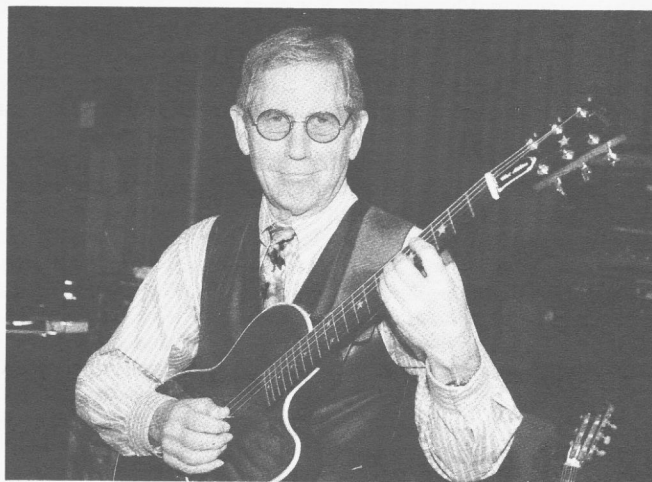
"genres" and "categories" behind.

By the time the call came from Kenny's manager that "Yes, Kenny would love to do it," I had a wonderful lineup taking shape, with artists covering everything from classical, blues and rock, to jazz, folk and country.

My last target was Garth Brooks. Garth and I had really hit it off when we sat down together for our first interview two years ago. He had struck up a friendship with my two sons, who idolize him.



Saxophonist Grover Washington Jr. and banjoist Bela Fleck performing "The Sinister Minister." Host Kenny Rogers described the collaboration as representing "the beauty of good music."



The legendary "Certified Guitar Player," Chet Atkins, whose very presence on the show brought a standing ovation.

I tracked him down during my October trip to Nashville to cover the Country Music Association Awards for my weekly VOA program, "Country Music USA." He was quietly standing alone in the shadowy backstage area of the Grand Ole Opry House, watching the stage hands rearrange the props for the nationally televised show that would take place that evening.

Here was the most publicized and popular artist in America, the man whose three albums have sold some 20 million copies, and who, in late 1991 and early 1992, was turning down more than eight million dollars in bookings in order to take some time off to spend at home with his wife and to write songs—and I was going to ask him to travel to Washington to perform for free for VOA!

His response was immediate: "Sure, as long as you keep it simple for me." Since he had disbanded his band, he wanted to do a solo acoustic set—just he and his guitar. That sounded fine with me—a handshake and a hug sealed the agreement.

Joining in Collaboration

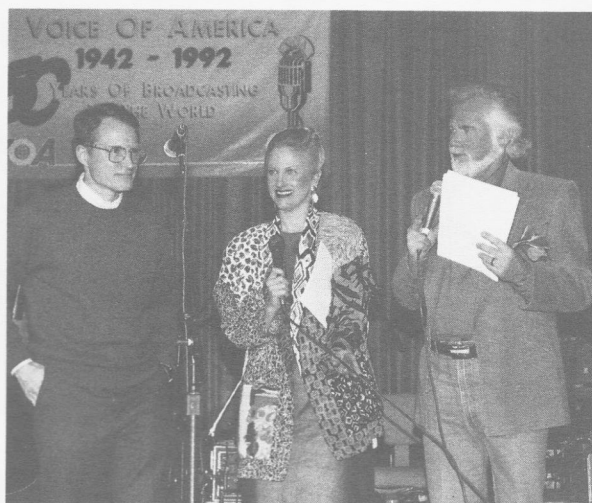
The artists were intrigued with the idea of meeting and playing with other performers whose music they admire. Noted saxophonist Grover Washington Jr. was so pleased to find that banjo player Bela Fleck and his Flecktones were going to be on the show that he asked his manager to call me to ask if Grover could jam with Bela on one of Bela's songs.

I didn't think Bela had ever used a sax on his recordings, but called him in Nashville to let him know of Grover's interest. "I really admire Grover," said Bela. "Please tell him I'd love to jam with him, but I'm curious to know which song he's referring to." So, back to Grover's office



Garth Brooks, the most talked-about performer in the USA, as he sang and played his "music of the heart" and spoke out on behalf of tolerance and understanding between individuals, cultures and nations.

Associate Director for Broadcasting Chase Untermeyer addressing the worldwide audience at the invitation of the evening's co-hosts, Judy Massa and Kenny Rogers. In his comments, Untermeyer expressed gratitude for the cultural contributions made to the U.S. by the peoples and nations of the world.



in Philadelphia to find out. After a few calls back and forth, I wised up and asked Bela if I could simply give his home telephone number to Grover so they could talk it over themselves.

As it turned out, Grover wanted to play "The Sinister Minister" with Bela and the Flecktones, and he also wanted to know if Bela and his band would provide the backup for his set. Their collaboration on the March 21st show was truly a special moment.

Special Moments

The three-hour live broadcast was full of special moments, as each act came forward to perform three selections. From Kenny Rogers' opening set that included "The Gambler," to Clamma Dale's touching rendition of the George Gershwin/DuBose Heyward classic "Summertime," and Adam Makowicz's rollicking piano version of Cole Porter's "Just One of Those Things."

Thirty-year-old violin master Mark O'Connor wowed the audience with his ability to jump from a mountain hoe-down to his classically oriented, self-penned "Miniatures."

Nashville's "certified guitar player" Chet Atkins performed his own set of country-inflected pop favorites early in the



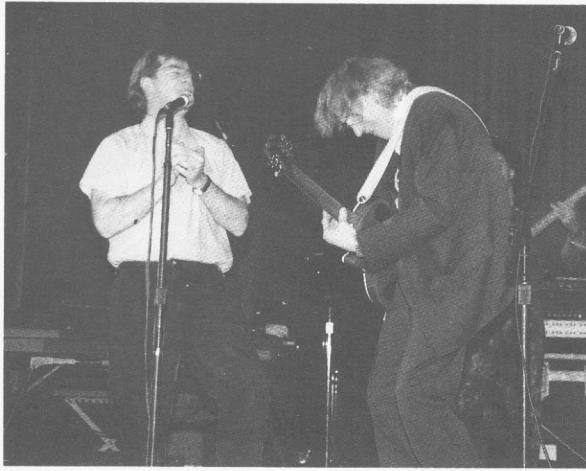
Described as a "legend in the making," Clamma Dale crossed genres by performing classical, Broadway, and pop classics, accompanied by pianist Craig Richey.

The Music Show Hosts

VOA music show hosts who participated in the live broadcast were: Bernie Bernard, Music Branch; Willis Conover, WorldWide English; Sandra Dominique, Creole; Rachel Jordan, Bulgarian; Rich Kleinfeldt, WorldWide English; Doug Levine, Music Branch; Ray McDonald, WorldWide English; Rob McLean, VOA Europe; Ramesh, Farsi; Inna Sinulingga, Indonesian; Bill Skundrich, Russian; and Yeheyes Wuhib, Amharic. □



VOA Music hosts Ray McDonald and Bill Skundrich greet VOA's worldwide audience. Judy Massa is in the background.



A high-energy blast of Rock 'n' Roll from former Lovin' Spoonful leader, John Sebastian and former Eagle, Joe Walsh. During the afternoon press conference, Walsh recalled that, as a ham radio operator for almost 30 years, he "kind of grew up listening to the Voice of America." For Sebastian, his presence on the 50th Anniversary broadcast was payment for "a musical debt of gratitude." He had spent part of his childhood in Italy and first heard Rock 'n' Roll—Elvis' "Heartbreak Hotel"—over the VOA airwaves.

show, then returned at the invitation of the rock 'n' rollers—Jeff "Skunk" Baxter, Joe Walsh, and John Sebastian—to set fire to "Train, Train."

Legendary trumpeter Clark Terry added his personal touch to the evening while performing with Bela Fleck and Grover Washington Jr.

Dan Seals stressed the message of world harmony by performing "One Family."

And Garth Brooks closed the show with songs that stressed the same theme of universal brotherhood and understanding, including a soft rendition of the old folk hit, "Last Night I Had the Strangest Dream."

As I and Kenny bid adieu to our worldwide audience, all of the performers gathered on stage for a rousing jam rendition of "Take The 'A' Train."

Comments from listeners around the world have indicated that this VOA 50th Anniversary "Gift of Song" Musical Tribute was truly extraordinary and unforgettable. The artists, too, felt it had been a truly special event.

A few days after the broadcast, Mark O'Connor wrote this note: "Thank you for including me on such a great broadcast. You pulled together an incredible lineup of American artists to come together and play for the rest of the world! It is awesome to think about. Thanks for allowing my music to reach all of these people."

It was also an awesome, extraordinary, and unforgettable evening for all of us, including the many agency staffers who worked so hard to make it a reality and the various VOA music show hosts who stepped to center stage to greet our worldwide audience.

Kenny Rogers closed the evening by stating that, when VOA turns 100, he will be 103, but he still plans to return to co-host that big anniversary show! I don't know if I'll make it then, but this year's event just goes to prove that dreams can come true—and that music truly is the universal language! □

Judy Massa is VOA music director.

By Gary Keith

Costa Rica Lauds VOA's 50th Anniversary

The Costa Rican media heavily covered VOA's golden anniversary. One and a half million Costa Ricans heard Costa Rican President Rafael Calderon's radio message honoring VOA: "...During these years the Voice has been a lighthouse in defense of the principles of liberty and democracy..."

USIS San Jose could have opened a florist shop with the arrangements that stations sent. The press published five large paid congratulatory messages and a Wireless File article about the anniversary.

Is this fanfare surprising? No. For years the Voice has garnered saturation placement on the Costa Rican airwaves. Of the country's 68 stations, 32 of them, including the most popular ones, use VOA news

reports. Furthermore, 37 stations regularly use one or more VOA package programs.

San Jose Public Affairs Officer (PAO) Louise Kelleher Crane hosted a reception to mark the big occasion. U.S. Ambassador Luis Guinot Jr. delivered a speech underscoring the importance of a free and unfettered press. He also described how VOA's efforts had spread and strengthened democracy around the globe.

During the reception, one radio station conducted lengthy live interviews (using the PAO's kitchen phone) with VOA regional correspondent Gregory Flakus and other USIS personnel. □

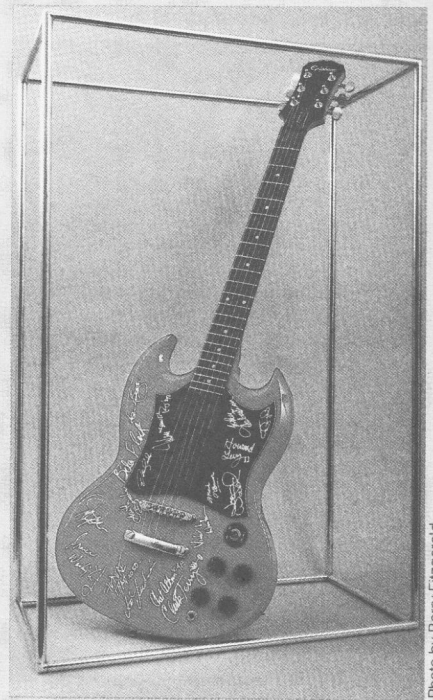
Gary Keith is information officer, USIS San Jose.

Playing a Special Part

The successful drive to acquire private sector funding and donations for the concert in honor of VOA's 50th Anniversary was due in great part to the efforts of Louise Wheeler, Bill Codus, Patti Burke, and Tom Stillitano. Major donors included former VOA Director Kenneth Giddens and Mrs. Giddens; Gerard Souham, member of USIA's Private Sector Public Relations Committee; as well as US Air, which provided air transportation for artist participants.

Other donors included Broadcast Music Inc. (BMI), the Country Music Association, the Grand Ole Opry, Cosmair and L'Oreal S.A., The Fluor Foundation, and Avon. Bosendorfer U.S.A. provided an Imperial Concert Grand piano for our artists to play that evening, and Gibson Guitars presented us with an Epiphone guitar to be autographed by all of our artists and placed on display at VOA.

There was much behind-the-scenes organizing and effort that contributed to the success of the event. The members of VOA's Music Branch made everything run smoothly: Mary Anne Hovatter, Mary Morningstar, Helen Johnson, Doug Levine, Bernie Bernard, Diane Gaylor, and Coleen Keelan. Mimi Levich and Dan Bolger handled the on-air production, while Gary Jaffe and Joe Selden were our sound technicians. Many others—such as Michelle Brescia and Rosie Hall and the folks from Security and Facilities—contributed their time and energies to making this event so very special. □



The guitar that the artists autographed.

Photo by Barry Fitzgerald

judy massa

voice of america

As the music director of the Voice of America, she oversees the vast record library of 110,000 titles and helps the various programmers with their shows.

More importantly for Nashville, though, she is also the host, writer and producer of Country Music USA, a weekly, half-hour radio program that features and promotes one of America's most popular exports to a worldwide audience.

For years Massa has tried to educate her audience about American Country Music, so instead of just playing hits, she has often built shows around particular instruments or musical forms. When someone listens, she wants it to mean something. "I try to show what those little muses are that drive people. Something about the lyric, the melody, or the artist," she explains.

In March the hungry listeners were treated to a magical event: a live concert featuring some of the best American performers making music today.

"It was a dream I'd always had, to do something very special specifically for music lovers around the world," Massa says. "It was put on in honor of the role music plays in reaching out to people."

The performers selected were those who had been on the air before and who had elicited strong responses from listeners. Not surprisingly, many were country artists, including Warner/Reprise Nashville acts Kenny Rogers, Mark O'Connor, Dan Seals and Bela Fleck and the Flecktones. Other notables Massa included were Chet Atkins, Garth Brooks, Grover Washington, Jr., Joe Walsh, Jeff "Skunk" Baxter and John Sebastian. The three hour concert was broadcast from Washington D.C. live, and a small audience of 600 was on hand to add to the atmosphere. The folks in the studio and listeners around the world from China to Brazil, heard something rare.

The assembled acts not only performed separately, but they often teamed up in ways American audiences rarely get to hear. "We're the only nation in the world that puts music in such hard clad, impenetrable borders," she says. Indeed, having Grover Washington, Jr., play a sax solo during Fleck's "Sinister Minister" gives new meaning to the word crossover. "It was just an incredible musical event. At the very end everybody got on-stage, did "Take The A-Train," and jammed. We had rock 'n' rollers, country stylists, and all others in between performing. It was a real musical moment that I don't think could be equalled," Massa says, adding that the three-hour show ran over its time limit. "I kept telling everyone, 'Don't worry, it's our radio station.' The director was in the audience, so I figured as long as he didn't jump up and yell 'Cut,' I was okay," she recalls with a laugh.

Massa has cultivated real friendships with most of the artists that were on the program, and she says Kenny Rogers, whom she's known for 13 years, was the first person she thought of for the show. "He's always gone out of his way to be friendly and honest, and I admire his humanitarian efforts. He's somebody who looks further than himself. The concert was planned to present many very different styles of music demonstrating the broad dimension of American music that VOA carries over its

"I knew he'd

"He's done every kind of music from rock to folk to jazz and his personality is one of the best in the business."

Rogers not only performed, but co-hosted the show with Massa. Her relationships with Fleck and O'Connor stem from a series she did on the major instruments. "I was so impressed with how articulate he (Fleck) was about music, his instrument, his role, what he wants to do with music, and what he knows about the international music scene," she says. "I had also talked with Mark and he said he'd love to do it. I put Mark in the same category with Bela; they're both incredible musicians and wonderful to talk to. I just enjoyed them so much as people—they're some of the nicest people I'd ever met—and our links kept developing so when it came time to do the show, I knew exactly who I'd invite."

As for Seals, Massa has as much respect for his actions as she does for his music. "Dan has been one of those people who believes so passionately but quietly about the universality of music. His music has been very well-received overseas. He's probably a bigger name over there," she says. Massa remembers getting a call from the State Department two years ago asking for Country Music artists to send to Bulgaria because they were having a pro-Democracy rally. "I said, 'Well, I know someone who I think would be interested.' Within a week, Dan and his crew were on a plane."

"Dan is that kind of person," Massa says. There was a national fair held in Indonesia and they wanted to set up a two-way between our studio and the fairgrounds. I said, "Why not invite an artist," and they said "If you can get somebody." Dan came and did it—he's ready to pack up and go on a mission. And there's always a wonderful message in his music."

A message in the music is why Massa thinks worldwide audiences respond so strongly to Country Music. She says the mail, which she gets from more than 100 countries, is full of reasons why the music touches people. In 1988 the VOA held an essay contest on why listeners like Country Music and what they thought of it. A Chinese student won it, but Massa says all the responses were eye-opening.

"They had almost universally certain themes," relates Massa. One was that it's music that helps people get by and gives them guidance in their lives. They listened for songs to tell them how to deal with things in their

lives. For others it was that the music reminded them of their ethnic folk music, and of course the more acoustic it is, the better. It didn't matter if the writer was living in the Soviet Union or the deepest jungles of Africa, they would mention some particular ethnic folk music of their region and say Country Music is very similar to that."

Another thing Massa mentions besides the music is the lyrics. She says we wrongly assume that English is not understandable. "You'd be surprised at the number of people around the world who have a rudimentary understanding of English." In China, she points out, the government wanted people to learn English and encouraged citizens to listen to the VOA. Professors often tape her program and play it for class during the week. Of course, she says with a laugh, many of the people learning English from Country Music radio are acquiring down-home accents in the process. Others who responded to the contest said the music brought back memories of their grandmother or father who loved Country Music and respected family values. "It's almost the same reason that it's popular in America. There's always some positive edge to it," she explains.

Massa is pleased to see Nashville's efforts to reach out and market the music worldwide. The biggest problem she sees is a lack of distribution, which fuels the pirate taping industry. "One of the saddest lamentations I get is,

"I love all this music, but I can't find it in any of my record stores." And this is in big cities in major nations." She says Nashville needs to realize the power and importance of simply performing live for world audiences. "I would really hope the record labels would somehow get some of their acts to pare down their road shows a bit (they don't have to have all the lasers and lights and smoke) and get out there and proselytize this music in front of people."

BY CLARK PARSONS



A&E

Front Page News Sports Business Lifestyles Opinion **A&E**

Home > Featured Articles > **Country Music Association**

Countries` Music

Voa Announcer Tells World About America

January 03, 1988 | By Jack Hurst, Country music writer.

Recommend 0 Tweet 0 8+1 0

Her first visit to the Country Music Association`s annual Nashville awards ceremonies in 1979 had Judy Massa feeling as much like an outsider as her far-flung international radio audiences on the Voice of America.

The big winner that year was Charlie Daniels for ``The Devil Went Down To Georgia,`` and Massa found herself standing uncertainly outside Nashville`s Grand Ole Opry House at the edge of a crowd of press people surrounding Daniels.

Eventually, Massa recalls, Daniels turned and walked away. The outsider thought she saw her chance.

``He started walking back toward the Opry House by himself,`` she says,

``and, like any journalist, I started to trot along beside him telling him I was with the VOA, that I would be in town most of the week and asking if he would be available for an interview, blah, blah, blah.

``He kept walking toward the Opry House. He went through some swinging doors, so I went through some. Then he went through some more, and I went through some. Then he stopped, looked down at me, and said, `Lady, do you know you`re in the men`s room?`

``I DIDN`T know it, never having been in the Opry House before in my life, but, by gum by golly, that`s where I was. I turned scarlet red. The guard came running in and said, `Lady, lady,` and I said, `I know, I`m in the men`s room,` and left-quickly.

``But before I did, I said to Charlie, `Please don`t forget me`-meaning,

`Here I`ve given you this whole song and dance about the VOA, and I really want this interview.`

``And he said, `Lady, I`ll NEVER forget YOU.``

Two days later, Massa got her interview with Daniels, who ever since has referred to her as his ``bathroom buddy.``

From that bizarre beginning, she has gone on to make Daniels` annual, Nashville-based Volunteer Jam a cornerstone of Voice of America programming-programming that for a decade has given country music increasingly

distinguished and serious presentation outside the United States.

In recognition of Massa's influence on a worldwide radio audience conservatively estimated at 130 million, Nashville has long since made an insider of the tall, blond U.S. Information Service employee-and no wonder.

She possesses a fandom whose length and breadth makes that of most country music stars look minuscule, and her mail makes the usual American correspondence look trivial. Note the sort of letters her weekly 30-minute

Country Music U.S.A. show generates every day:

- (from a youth in Iran) "When I listen to Loretta Lynn's song 'Coal Miner's Daughter,' I sense the power of success. The power which tells me,

"You can succeed! Don't care about failure. Care about victory!"

- (from the People's Republic of China) "I'm an 18-year-old girl. I'm a regular of your wonderful programme. I always listen to it at 7:30 p.m.

(Beijing time) every Friday. I enjoy it very much. Your voice is very sweet and charming, and the country musicians sing so well that I really can't tear myself from the radio. You know, I'm mad about American country music."

With Nashville talent moguls only now beginning to sense the future market potential of western Europe, Massa is way ahead of them, viewing Europe as fully as "finite" and "almost saturated" as the American market.

She says she dreams of emceeding a two-month country tour of the Soviet Union and other nations few Nashville talent agents have yet considered.

Massa's show runs every Friday evening as part of a weekly block of music programming that offers a half-hour of big-band music on Mondays and rock 'n' roll, rhythm and blues and soul on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays.

Her background is unlikely for a country disc jockey, but perfect for her job. The wife of another VOA career employee and the mother to two sons, Massa was born in Panama, the daughter of an American schoolteacher and schools administrator. She grew up in Latin America, coming to the United States only to attend DePauw University in Greencastle, Ind.

Much of the music she heard in her formative years, she says, was via Armed Forces Radio, which played some country music. Although her tastes leaned more toward pop and rock 'n' roll then, she vividly recalls the moment country music first really caught her ear: when an AFN broadcaster played Tex Ritter's classic "Hillbilly Heaven."

"To this day, I don't really know why, but I was intrigued with that recording," she recalls. "I even called up the radio station, which I had never done, and asked them to please play that song again."

Her job, which started with producing VOA dramatizations and documentaries in Spanish and Portuguese, is now by no means limited to writing and putting her voice to the "Country Music U.S.A." show.

In 1984, she became VOA's first music director, coordinating music programming by VOA's 44 non-English-language services.

That first Nashville visit in 1979 was made to cover the annual Country Music Association awards show, because Massa persuaded her supervisors it was an important international event.

What Country Music Means to Me

BY ZHOU ZUO-REN

When I hum ... "Half Past Forever Till I'm Blue In The Heart," "You Still Move Me," "Daddy's Hands," "The Moon Is Still over Her Shoulder," and "Living in the Promiseland," I am transported with strong emotion, my heart is filled with nostalgia, love and hope.

Country music means music of the people, composed by the people, sung by the people. It offers romantic longing, mystical transcendence, Western imagery.

Combining folk songs, jazz, rhythm 'n' blues and gospel, American country music is especially rich in its components. It displays one of the best American vernacular styles.

Its form is lively and diverse. The singing and playing are occasionally intertwined with improvised speech, which greatly enlivens the atmosphere of the performance.

Its contents are full of the flavor of life and familiar to common people. The singers praise their graceful, fertile land and beautiful pastoral scene, express sincere love of their hometown and sweetheart, reveal their yearnings for the happy life and bright future. It conveys the common feelings of common people and evokes ready sympathy from the hearts of common people.

Its charm also lies in the accompanying music. It perfectly reflects the emotional mood of the song and the

rhythm of American life.

Besides, its admiration is derived from the talents of the country music artists who are performers, composers and instrument players at once. Such artistic versatility is rarely seen in China. Each one contributes to the music something of his own, distinguishing himself from others by his own unique tone and style.... Their performances are so vivid that they often inspire one's innermost feeling, and make the audience voluntarily participate in the performance.

When I listen to "hillbilly songs," one picture after another of American country life looms in front of me; the joy and frustration so graphically conveyed through the music often carries me away. I cannot help singing with the American singers. The delicate harmonies, lively lyrical byplay, and the sweet Nashville ballads have always seized me and afforded me with boundless pleasure. I am so enchanted that I am always waiting for the results of the weekly "Hit Parade" with breathless attention.

Let it be said loud and clear — country music is forever a mirror reflecting American people's ideals, ambitions, depressions and hopes. It possesses great vitality and artistic power. I believe it is not only the treasure of American people, but the treasure of all country music fans in the world.

Judy, Willie, Judy!" At that moment, we were approaching a large crowd of people, who were looking behind us with great anticipation and delight. We turned to see who was calling and saw Wynonna Judd and her mother Naomi (known to millions of country music fans as The Judds) beckoning us to join them in their silver-colored limousine. As we retraced our steps and climbed into the car for a chat with the two talented red-headed ladies, we knew everyone in the crowd would have gladly traded places with us.

My favorite memories include the times spent driving through the streets of Nashville, with the radio turned to a local country music station, and the three of us singing along with every song at the top of our voices. It was a

very merry time, and one I will always remember.

Willie and John are now back in Shanghai, and I am back in my busy office in Washington. But each time I hear a country song sung by an artist we met in Nashville, my thoughts return to those special times we shared together.

It has long been said that "music is an international language." This contest showed me that music is much more. It is a powerful force for understanding and friendship. I hope we will have another contest like this someday. Stay tuned! □

Judy Massa is the music director of VOA and producer/host of Country Music USA, heard Friday evenings.

What Country Music Means to Me

BY ZHOU ZUO-REN

When I hum ... "Half Past Forever Till I'm Blue In The Heart," "You Still Move Me," "Daddy's Hands," "The Moon Is Still over Her Shoulder," and "Living in the Promiseland," I am transported with strong emotion, my heart is filled with nostalgia, love and hope.

Country music means music of the people, composed by the people, sung by the people. It offers romantic longing, mystical transcendence, Western imagery.

Combining folk songs, jazz, rhythm 'n' blues and gospel, American country music is especially rich in its components. It displays one of the best American vernacular styles.

Its form is lively and diverse. The singing and playing are occasionally intertwined with improvised speech, which greatly enlivens the atmosphere of the performance.

Its contents are full of the flavor of life and familiar to common people. The singers praise their graceful, fertile land and beautiful pastoral scene, express sincere love of their hometown and sweetheart, reveal their yearnings for the happy life and bright future. It conveys the common feelings of common people and evokes ready sympathy from the hearts of common people.

Its charm also lies in the accompanying music. It perfectly reflects the emotional mood of the song and the

rhythm of American life.

Besides, its admiration is derived from the talents of the country music artists who are performers, composers and instrument players at once. Such artistic versatility is rarely seen in China. Each one contributes to the music something of his own, distinguishing himself from others by his own unique tone and style.... Their performances are so vivid that they often inspire one's innermost feeling, and make the audience voluntarily participate in the performance.

When I listen to "hillbilly songs," one picture after another of American country life looms in front of me; the joy and frustration so graphically conveyed through the music often carries me away. I cannot help singing with the American singers. The delicate harmonies, lively lyrical byplay, and the sweet Nashville ballads have always seized me and afforded me with boundless pleasure. I am so enchanted that I am always waiting for the results of the weekly "Hit Parade" with breathless attention.

Let it be said loud and clear — country music is forever a mirror reflecting American people's ideals, ambitions, depressions and hopes. It possesses great vitality and artistic power. I believe it is not only the treasure of American people, but the treasure of all country music fans in the world.

On the Record

Nawab Saleem, a spokesman for the mujahedeen, the resistance fighters, in Afghanistan, on the likely effect the removal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan will have on the regime installed and supported by the Soviet Union:

Since the Soviets talked of their withdrawal from Afghanistan, it in fact has broken the morale of the regime supporters. Hundreds of army personnel and higher-ups in the government are in constant contact with the mujahedeen, and they are just waiting for the time to defect. —Close-Up

Jody Powell, former White House press secretary in the Carter administration, on the possibility of a rift between supporters of former Democratic presidential candidate Jesse Jackson and the Democratic Party:

There is an underlying issue that is going to continue and that is the role of the black community and black voters in the Democratic Party, and clearly it's going to have to be a bigger role than it has been in the past. The other thing that can be said is that probably the tension and the threats of some sort of schism were greatly exaggerated to begin with. You have to look at this in the context of the past twenty or thirty years in which black and white leaders, but particularly black leaders, have been as much as anything else dedicated to convincing black people that it was important for them to register to vote. The idea that in some sense of pique that we are now going to turn all that around and say in effect — "No, forget what we have been saying for twenty years. Don't come out and vote" — that could have happened, but it would have been a step that would have cost black political leadership itself tremendously. —Focus

Chester Crocker, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, on the accord aimed at reaching a settlement in southwestern Africa, which calls for a withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola and South African troops from Namibia:

We have a lot of work ahead of us. For example, the existing gap in the timing of Cuban troop withdrawals is a major issue. I think the parties agreed that this wasn't the time to come to grips with that, and we agree with that judgment. But they do recognize that there is going to have to be a compromise, that there are going to have to be no losers, and that it's going to have to be something that can be verified to the satisfaction of everybody. —Focus

VOA's charter requires that its programs reflect a diversity of views. The excerpts reprinted above from recent programs represent such a variety. They do not necessarily reflect the position of the U.S. government, the Voice of America, or VOICE Magazine.

Democratic Party, and clearly it's going to have to be a bigger role than it has been in the past. The other thing that can be said is that probably the tension and the threats of some sort of schism were greatly exaggerated to begin with. You have to look at this in the context of the past twenty or thirty years in which black and white leaders, but particularly black leaders, have been as much as anything else dedicated to convincing black people that it was important for them to register to vote. The idea that in some sense of pique that we are now going to turn all that around and say in effect — "No, forget what we have been saying for twenty years. Don't come out and vote" — that could have happened, but it would have been a step that would have cost black political leadership itself tremendously.

—Focus

Chester Crocker, *U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs*, on the accord aimed at reaching a settlement in southwestern Africa, which calls for a withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola and South African troops from Namibia:

We have a lot of work ahead of us. For example, the existing gap in the timing of Cuban troop withdrawals is a major issue. I think the parties agreed that this wasn't the time to come to grips with that, and we agree with that judgment. But they do recognize that there is going to have to be a compromise, that there are going to have to be no losers, and that it's going to have to be something that can be verified to the satisfaction of everybody.

—Focus

VOA's charter requires that its programs reflect a diversity of views. The excerpts reprinted



On a recent visit to the Voice of America headquarters in Washington, D.C., Charlie Daniels, right, greets VOA correspondents, left to right, Peter Fedynsky (Ukrainian service), Jawahar Kalsi (Hindi), Hetty Badroen (Indonesian), Marta Cantella (Spanish),

Rose Nowotarska (Polish) and Judith Massa (worldwide English broadcaster and music editor). The VOA broadcast of last February's Volunteer Jam X proved to be one of the most successful ever for the global radio network.

Volunteer Jam Fans Sing Praises From All Corners of the World

By SANDY NEESE

The Voice of America is calling its coverage of Charlie Daniels Band's Volunteer Jam X last February possibly VOA's most successful worldwide broadcast ever.

Since the airing, literally hundreds of letters have poured into the Washington, D.C., headquarters of VOA, the global radio network of the United States Information Agency, regarding the marathon concert.

"We may have done more successful broadcasts at the Voice of America than the one which originated from Nashville, but if we have, I'm not aware of it," said VOA program director Eugene Pell.

"These letters are especially gratifying and touching when you realize that in many countries, the postage was the equivalent of a day's wages," explained Judith Massa, VOA music editor and worldwide English broadcaster. Massa headed the team of radio journalists during their first visit, and returned with another group to cover the recent Fan Fair.

"We didn't receive a single unfavorable response," she said of the letters received. "Generally, our listeners praised the music, complained that the broadcast wasn't long enough, and begged for more music next time."

For example, from Poland came this: "That is great that somebody would like to sing for all people in the world, no matter what color of the skin and religion... It shows that he [Daniels] is a true friend of the people. We appreciate that he spoke to us in Polish. God knows it is a difficult language. And we love him for that."

Another Polish listener wrote, "Jam X session in Nashville was wonderful. I hope Charlie Daniels will fulfill his dream: brotherhood through music."

When the broadcasters came to Music City back in the winter, it marked the first time that representatives from every major VOA division had been involved in on-the-spot coverage of such an event.

The coverage included live broadcasts from the scene at Municipal Auditorium, as well as programs that were put together for

later airing in areas where broadcasting on-the-spot was impossible. Portions of the musical montage were carried to listeners in Latin America, Africa, Europe, the Far East and all English-speaking countries.

"It was a unique undertaking for us," Pell said. "Number one, to send a group this diverse to 'foreign' territory. Number two, to take that risk we all know and love—the live broadcast. The logistics in this one, of course, were much more demanding than most of those things that we try to do here. And the payoff, I think, has been in what must be an unprecedented amount of mail. And it has come from all over the world."

"There are many pleasant times in a man's life," wrote a listener in Aba, Nigeria. "One of the most interesting days in my life was dancing to the music of Charlie Daniels."

From Sri Lanka came this praise: "The music was great and the spontaneous presentation by VOA's reporter Judith Massa was

very enjoyable... especially her interview with Charlie Daniels. How wonderful it was to hear Roy Acuff and a Boxcar Willie and the other performers who played and sang."

During a recent visit to VOA headquarters, in a random drawing, Daniels selected the names of 200 letter writers who'll soon receive their own CDB T-shirts.

VOA also has sent out over 400 postcards, personally signed by Daniels, that read, "My music knows no ideologies, no borders, and no politics. It's people-to-people love, and I'm glad that you're one of those people. Thank you for listening to the Volunteer Jam on the Voice of America. God Bless you, Charlie Daniels."

The VOA broadcast of Volunteer Jam X was made possible through special funding by The U.S. Tobacco Company smokeless brand Skoal, official sponsor of the event.

The Voice of America is heard by more than 100 million people around the world on a weekly basis.

ARTS • LEISURE

THE TENNESSEAN

FRIDAY, November 21, 1986



THOMAS
GOLDSMITH

Opry spotlight

VOA helps Opry grow 'grander'

The "Ole Opry is becoming grander through the years" is the consensus of international fans who wrote the Voice of America after hearing recent Opry shows broadcast worldwide.

Judith Massa, the VOA's director of music and host of its *Country Music USA* show, asked listeners for their opinions of broadcasts of the Opry birthday celebration. Massa, whose voice is heard in dozens of countries as she hosts VOA programs, forwarded to the Opry a few examples of the overwhelming response she received.

"Thanks for sharing your music with our listeners around the world," she wrote Opry cast members. "You made a big impact."

WE IN NASHVILLE sometimes forget the effect that the Opry continues to have on music fans in other parts of the country and the world. Letters from several continents showed that listeners far removed from our easy access to the show find deep satisfaction in the homey mixture of music and fun offered by the Opry.

"I would prefer to miss my meals than to miss the show," wrote a listener from Cameroon.

Responding to an offer of an illustrated book on the Opry, a listener in the Philippines also took sides in the perennial tradition-versus-innovation battle in country music.

"Please send one of the books, 'cause ever since I was small, country music is my music, especially when one sings and yodels," the listener wrote. "The old-time songs are the best, the real country music the way country music should be sung and played."

VOA FANS' expressed their appreciation of the Opry in various and sometimes colorful ways.

"Is it against any law for me to become a country boy and let country music be a part of me?" queried a letter-writer from Paramaribo, Surinam. "Let me say thanks to the folks at the Opry for doing such a wonderful job for us."

Some listeners—among them one from Kaduna State, Nigeria—proclaimed their preference for particular Opry stars.

"I would be very happy to have the history copy of Grandpa Jones in my collection, because his music thrills me to infinity," the Nigerian fan wrote.

People listening by radios in far-off lands often found in country music a closer link with the United States and its people.

"Lifestyles of these people become so strong and vivid through their songs, that listening to them is the next best thing to being there," wrote a student from Calcutta, India. "And me being an honours student of geography you can clearly understand how these can help me to study the characteristics of these people."

Wrote a listener from Bahr-Dar, Ethiopia:

"One the date mentioned above, on Friday evening at 17:30 GMT, I heard beautiful country music presentation. With this night transmission of music, I developed a new mood and I feel happiness."

Fans of the Opry via VOA wrote from the West Indies, West Australia, Denmark, England, Sri Lanka, Guyana, Sweden, Indonesia, Maritius, Ghana, Indonesia and many other lands.

"So, the Ole Opry is becoming grander with the years as it spreads worldwide to fans like me," was the conclusion of a nun who is a teacher at the Nazareth Nursing School in Bihar, India.