



Insights

A Study Guide to the Utah Shakespeare Festival



*Always . . .
Patsy Cline*

The articles in this study guide are not meant to mirror or interpret any productions at the Utah Shakespeare Festival. They are meant, instead, to be an educational jumping-off point to understanding and enjoying the plays (in any production at any theatre) a bit more thoroughly. Therefore the stories of the plays and the interpretative articles (and even characters, at times) may differ dramatically from what is ultimately produced on the Festival's stages.

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Always. . . Patsy Cline

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Synopsis: *Always . . . Patsy Cline*

Always . . . Patsy Cline is based on the true story of Patsy Cline's friendship with Houston housewife Louise Seger.

Having first heard Cline on the *Arthur Godfrey Show* in 1957, Seger became an immediate and avid fan of Cline's and she constantly hounded the local disc jockey to play Cline's records on the radio.

In 1961 when Cline went to Houston for a show, Seger and her buddies arrived about an hour-and-a-half early and, by coincidence, met Cline who was traveling alone. The two women struck up a friendship that was to culminate in Cline spending the night at Seger's house—a friendship that lasted until Cline's untimely death in a plane crash in 1963.

The relationship, which began as fan worship evolved into one of mutual respect. It is the kind of relationship that many fans would like to have with their heroes.

Over a pot of strong coffee, the two women chatted about their common concerns. When Cline finally left for Dallas, her next job, the two women had exchanged addresses and telephone numbers. Seger never expected to hear from Cline again, but soon after she left, Seger received the first of many letters and phone calls from Cline. The pen-pal relationship provides much of the plot of the show.

The play focuses on the fateful evening at Houston's Esquire Ballroom when Seger hears of Cline's death in a plane crash. Seger supplies a narrative while Cline floats in and out of the set singing tunes that made her famous—"Anytime", "Walkin' After Midnight", "She's Got You", "Sweet Dreams", and "Crazy"—to name a few.

The show combines humor, sadness, and reality. It offers fans who remember Cline while she was alive a chance to look back, while giving new fans an idea of what seeing her was like and what she meant to her original fans.

Characters: *Always . . . Patsy Cline*

Patsy Cline: The first female solo singer inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame.

Louise Seger: A Houston housewife who became a genuine friend to Patsy Cline.

About the Playwright: Ted Swindley

"Patsy Cline," says *Always . . . Patsy Cline* creator, Ted Swindley, "has now taken on the mantle of a legend. Patsy endures—in fact she gets bigger—decade after decade as she is discovered by new fans and revered by the faithful who grew up with her."

In twenty years, Ted Swindley has directed and produced over 200 plays. He is nationally known in the United States for creating the hit musical *Always . . . Patsy Cline*, which premiered in 1990 and continues to play throughout the world.

Most recently Swindley has premiered three new musicals, *Step into My Parlor* (Tulsa, Oklahoma), *Summer of '66* (Myrtle Beach, South Carolina), and *Swingstep* (Toronto, Canada). *Swingstep* was nominated for the Best Musical award in Canada, (comparable to the Tony awards in America). He also directed *The Honky Tonk Angels* and *Step into My Parlor* at the prestigious Piccolo Spoleto Festival in Charleston, SC.

Who Was Patsy Cline?

Patsy Cline (September 8, 1932 – March 5, 1963), born Virginia Patterson Hensley, was an American country music singer who enjoyed pop music crossover success during the era of the Nashville sound in the early 1960s. Since her death in 1963 at age thirty in a private airplane crash at the height of her career, she has been considered one of the most influential, successful, and acclaimed female vocalists of the twentieth century.

Cline was best known for her rich tone and emotionally expressive bold contralto voice, which, along with her role as a mover and shaker in the country music industry, has been cited as an inspiration by many vocalists of various music genres. Her life and career have been the subject of numerous books, movies, documentaries, articles and stage plays.

Her hits included “Walkin’ after Midnight”, “I Fall to Pieces”, “She’s Got You”, “Crazy”, and “Sweet Dreams.” Posthumously, millions of her albums have sold over the past fifty years. She has earned numerous awards, which have given her an iconic status with some fans similar to that of legends Johnny Cash and Elvis Presley. Ten years after her death, she became the first female solo artist inducted to the Country Music Hall of Fame.

In 2002, Cline was voted by artists and members of the country music industry as number one on CMT’s television special, *The 40 Greatest Women of Country Music*, and in 1999 she was voted number eleven on VH1’s special *The 100 Greatest Women in Rock and Roll* by members and artists of the rock industry. She was also ranked forty-sixth in *Rolling Stone’s 100 Greatest Singers of all Time*. According to her 1973 Country Music Hall of Fame plaque, “Her heritage of timeless recordings is testimony to her artistic capacity.”

Knowing of Your Own Death

Patsy Cline died in a plane crash in March of 1963, near Camden, Tennessee. The plane flew into severe weather, and according to Cline's wristwatch, crashed at 6:20 p.m. in a forest outside of Camden, Tennessee, ninety miles from the destination. Everyone died instantly from their injuries. Throughout the night, reports of the missing plane flooded the radio airwaves.

As stated in the Nassour biography, *Patsy Cline*, friends Dottie West and June Carter Cash both recalled Cline telling them that she felt a sense of impending doom and didn't expect to live much longer in the months leading up to her death. Cline also told Loretta Lynn of this, along with Carter and West, as early as September 1962. Cline, though known for her extreme generosity, even began giving away personal items to friends, writing out her own last will on Delta Air Lines stationery and asking close friends to care for her children if anything should happen to her. She reportedly told Jordanaire back up singer Ray Walker as she exited the Grand Ole Opry a week before her death: "Honey, I've had two bad ones (accidents). The third one will either be a charm or it'll kill me."

On March 3, 1963, Cline, though ill with the flu, gave a performance at a benefit show at the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Hall, Kansas City, Kansas, for the family of a disc jockey, Cactus Jack Call, who had recently died in an automobile accident. Also performing on the show were George Jones, George Riddle and The Jones Boys, Billy Walker, Dottie West, Cowboy Copas, Hawkshaw Hawkins, Wilma Lee and Stoney Cooper, and George McCormick and the Clinch Mountain Clan. The three shows, at 2:00, 5:15 and 8:00 p.m. were standing-room only. For the 2 p.m. show, she wore a sky-blue tulle-laden dress, for the 5:15 show a red shocker and for the closing show at 8 p.m. Cline wore a white chiffon gown and closed the show with her performance to a thunderous ovation. Her last song was the last one she recorded during her last sessions the previous month, "I'll Sail My Ship Alone."

Dottie West, wary of Cline flying, asked her to ride back in the car with her and her husband, Bill. Cline, anxious to get home to her children, refused West's offer, saying, "Don't worry about me, Hoss. When it's my time to go, it's my time." Poor weather delayed their departure by a day, and on March 5, she called her mother from the airport and then boarded a Piper Comanche bound for Nashville. The pilot was her manager Randy Hughes, with passengers Cowboy Copas and Hawkshaw Hawkins, who had taken Billy Walker's seat. After stopping to refuel in Dyersburg, Tennessee, the plane took off at 6:07 p.m. CT. According to revelations by the airfield manager in the Nassour biography, he suggested that they stay the night after advising of high winds and inclement weather on the flight path, but Hughes responded, "I've already come this far. We'll be there before you know it."

Roger Miller told Patsy Cline author Nassour that he and a friend went searching for survivors in the early hours of the morning: "As fast as I could, I ran through the woods screaming their names—through the brush and the trees, and I came up over this little rise, oh, my God, there they were. It was ghastly. The plane had crashed nose down." Not long after the bodies were removed, scavengers came to take what they could of the stars' personal belongings and pieces of the plane. Many of these items were later donated to The Country Music Hall of Fame, including Patsy's beloved Confederate Flag cigarette lighter which played "Dixie," her wrist watch, belt with "Patsy Cline" studded across it and one of three pairs of her gold lamé slippers which were featured on the revised version of her Showcase with The Jordanaires album. However, the white chiffon dress that Cline had worn for her last performance and the money bag carrying the star's payment for their last concert were never found.

As per her wishes, Cline was brought home to her dream house for the last time before her

memorial service, which thousands attended. Hours later, news surfaced that singer Jack Anglin of country duo Johnnie & Jack fame had died on the way to her service, and the Opry mounted a tribute show to honor the victims.

She was buried in her hometown of Winchester, Virginia, at Shenandoah Memorial Park. Her grave is marked with a simple bronze plaque, which reads: Virginia H (Patsy) Cline “Death Cannot Kill What Never Dies: Love.” A bell tower in her memory at the cemetery, erected with the help of Loretta Lynn and Dottie West, plays hymns daily at 6 p.m., the hour of her death. A memorial marks the place where the plane crashed in the still-remote forest outside of Camden, Tennessee.