

Country Contrast

Back in 1964 when Nick Breen first got up on stage with a guitar he could never have imagined that over 40 years later with his wife, Anita he would be entertaining audiences far and wide with their unique style of Country music.

Way back then Nick was a roadie for a band whose lead singer/guitarist was having personal troubles and had been drowning his sorrows a bit too much one night with the result that he was in no fit state to even walk onto the stage, let alone perform. So in a mad panic, one of the other members of the band came up with the wonderful suggestion that Nick could fill in. Not being too keen on the idea it was pointed out to Nick that he knew the lyrics to the songs just as well as the members of the band. So, after Nick's 'well rehearsed' first appearance on stage, the rest, as they say, is history. By the late 1980s, Nick had been half of a duo that first called themselves Nickels & Dimes before changing the name to Country And Contrast - used to describe the style of music that they played, Country and non-Country - although when being introduced on stage the comperes often missed out the word 'and' and so the duo came to be known more and more as Country Contrast. Not that this meant that their style of music changed. Well, not until Anita joined Nick. Having met and married in the early 1980s, Nick & Anita shared a passion for all styles of music and Anita usually accompanied Nick to his various gigs. One evening, the other half of the Country And Contrast duo fell ill and Nick persuaded Anita to have a go at joining him on stage as part of the act. Having been used to teaching guitar at Sunday School her debut appearance meant a new Country performer was born and her fate was sealed.

The duo were so well received that night that Nick subsequently decided to dissolve the current Country And Contrast duo and persuade Anita to switch from the six-string guitar to bass and join him on stage permanently. So, with Nick on rhythm guitar and lead vocals, the new-look, Lincoln-based, Country Contrast line-up took to the road. That was in February 1989.

By autumn of that year, Nick & Anita had become confident enough to put together their first cassette, *Always On My Mind* and by the summer of 1991, and with Anita now singing harmony vocals, they recorded their much-requested second cassette, *Country Gospel Requests* which contained four of their favourite hymns.

With Anita's confidence on stage increasing, she started singing more harmonies and occasionally even taking on the lead vocals. This added confidence was illustrated on the duo's next cassette,

Sentimental Country, which contained some unusual numbers as well as more popular songs. These early compilations were mastered and recorded onto cd and added to with three more albums - *Country Contrast Sing British Country*, *Ten Years Down The Road* and *An Evening With Nick And Anita*. In 2002 they released another album, *Blue Roses On A Navajo Rug*.

With their enthusiasm and dedication to, Country music they formed the Lincoln Hospital Country Music Club which was disbanded after seven years and they



continued with another club, *The Silver Star CMC*, which still meets on Monday evenings.

Whether they are on stage or recording an album, they prefer to sing songs that come from the heart and those they can put some emotion into.

In 2004, long-time friend and pedal steel player, Ken Wood joined Nick & Anita and the Country Contrast Trio became an option for the larger venues. Their album, *Where The Two Rivers Meet*, was completed in Nick's own studio and features Ken both as pedal-steel guitar support and also as a lead performer.

It seems that between the two of them, apart from their musical talents, Nick & Anita are born organisers and for a number of years they ran their own Country music weekends in Skegness. These became so popular, that a large holiday park, also in Skegness, asked them to organise twice-yearly Country music weekend festivals. They can also be seen helping Noel Taylor with the *Walesby* festival.

Of course, things could have turned out so differently if it hadn't been for a certain lead singer's troubled love life all those years ago. You never know.