

The Shelton Brothers

Shelton Brothers. Country group comprised initially of Robert (Bob) Attlesey (b. July 4, 1909) and Joe Attlesey (b. Jan. 27, 1911), but later joined by other musicians, including a third brother Merle Attlesey (b. March 1917) in the late 1930s. All three brothers were born in Reilly Springs, Texas, and little is known of their early childhood or the identities of their parents. During the 1920s, two brothers (Bob and Joe) were playing locally and styled themselves after such artists as Peg Moreland and Jimmie Rodgers, with Bob singing and playing guitar and fiddle, while Joe also sang and played mandolin and guitar. The brothers moved to Longview, Texas, in 1929, and performed for tips at local venues, including Clint Aycock's café. They then relocated to Tyler, Texas, where they added another member, Leon Chappelle, who was with the group when it recorded under the name of the Lone Star Cowboys for the Bluebird label in 1933. The brothers also recorded with Jimmie Davis (former governor of Louisiana) for RCA-Victor Records.

In 1935, the Attlesey brothers began their prodigious recording career with Decca Records. They began calling themselves the Shelton Brothers at the behest of record producer Dave Kapp, who believed the group needed a more commercially recognizable name. The Decca label became successful because of its low-priced records and its aggressive recording efforts in the Southwest, and, the Shelton Brothers soon became one of Decca's most prolific Texas groups, recording some 150 sides for the label. The band recorded both traditional and modern country music and was generally "more reflective of southeastern hillbilly styles than of the 'swing' rhythms of the Southwest." With a wide-ranging repertoire, which included such songs as "Just Because," "Deep Elem Blues," "Sitting On Top of the World," "Matchbox Blues" and numerous others, the Shelton Brothers also represented the nascent honky-tonk sound that was developing at the time.

In addition to recording for Decca, the band also made regular appearances for radio stations in Shreveport, New Orleans, and the Dallas-Fort Worth area. At the time, the Shelton Brothers mostly played on KWKH, where they also went by the name of the Sunshine Boys, and on WFAA in Dallas, which became a mainstay for the group for nearly a decade. It was also during the late 1930s that the third brother, Merle, joined the band. For nearly a decade, the group, which included Bob, Joe, Merle, Joe Molina, Preacher Harkness, and Bernie Harkness, remained popular with radio audiences. However, by the end of the 1940s, the band's popularity had waned, and it eventually stopped recording altogether, although Bob and Joe continued performing on KWKH in Shreveport (made famous by its association with the Louisiana Hayride). Bob later went into comedy, but both Joe and Merle continued to play music in the Dallas area. Bob died in November of 1986 in Savoy, Texas. Joe passed away in December 1980, in Yantis, Texas, and Merle died in June 1997, in Dripping Springs, Texas.

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