

# Billy Gray

Billy Gray was born in 1924 in Paris, Texas. After purchasing his first guitar from a local pawnshop, at 19, Gray organized a band based on the western swing style popular in the area. He hosted his own radio show in Paris, featuring his band, and they spent the next few years on a successful touring circuit around Texas and the Southwest.

In the early 1950s Gray relocated to Dallas, where he met and befriended Hank Thompson. He became the bandleader and guitarist of Thompson's Brazos Valley Boys. He and Thompson began writing songs together, and founded two publishing companies, the Texoma Music Publishing Company and the Brazos Valley Publishing Company. The two co-wrote some of Thompson's greatest hits, including "Waiting in the Lobby of Your Heart", "The New Wears Off Too Fast", and "A Fool, a Faker."

In 1954, Gray released a duet with rockabilly vamp Wanda Jackson. "You Can't Have My Love" became a chart hit. The following year, Gray and his band, the Western Oakies, released *Dance-O-Rama*, but the album did not produce any hit singles. In 1956 he and his band released a single called "Tennessee Toddy," which has been reissued countless times on rockabilly and hillbilly compilation records.

Gray worked steadily throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s as a guitarist for bands such as the Nuggets and the Cowtowners, and he also appeared on the TV show *Music Country Style*. In 1965 he made what was to be his last recording for Longhorn Records. Although his songwriting and publishing endeavors were successful, stardom under his own name proved elusive, and he retired from the public arena. Billy Gray died in 1975 while undergoing heart surgery.