

Karl Farr

Farr, Karl. Country and swing guitar player, born April 25, 1909, in Rochelle, Texas, Karl Farr died in West Springfield, Massachusetts, on September 20, 1961. Besides playing music as a young child in the family home, Farr performed in a variety of bands throughout his life. At age thirteen, he began playing several instruments in Chet Miller's band in Big Springs, Texas. Later, in Long Beach, California, Farr played with Len Nash and His Country Boys, which helped Farr land a staff position at KFOX radio.



In 1934, he quit the radio station and joined Jimmie LeFevre and His Saddle Pals.

After performing with a number of bands during those early years, Karl Farr, along with his brother Hugh Farr, joined the popular group the Sons of the Pioneers in 1934, and would remain members for much of the rest of their careers. Although the band's original name was the Pioneer Trio, the members changed it to the Sons of the Pioneers shortly after the Farr brothers joined. The Sons of the Pioneers became one of the most popular "singing cowboy" bands of the 1930s through 1950s, releasing several popular records and appearing in films with Gene Autry, Bing Crosby, Roy Rogers, and others.

The Sons of the Pioneers not only traditional folk and country tunes, but they also wrote their own material, including such hits as Bob Nolan's "Tumbling Tumbleweeds" and "Way Out There," and Tim Spencer's "Room Full of Roses." The group also was known for its intricate three and four-part harmonies and its polished stage presence, which helped earn the members a reputation as being more "genteel" than many other cowboy groups of the time. The Sons of the Pioneers' arrangements also reflected a strong jazz influence, and they were as adept at playing a hot swing number as they were crooning a romantic ballad. The group was both versatile and prolific, performing everything from square dances to waltzes and recording some 151 songs for the Standard Radio Transcription Company in one year alone, from August 1934 to September 1935.

In recognition of their contributions to country music, the Sons of the Pioneers were inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1976. The Smithsonian Institute also has listed the group as a "national treasure." Unfortunately, Karl Farr would not live long enough to share in these accolades. After performing with the Sons of the Pioneers for 26 years, Farr suffered a fatal heart attack in 1961 while performing at the Eastern States Exposition in West Springfield, Massachusetts.