



Chickie Williams - *Music and Fine Arts*

Jessie Wanda Crupe (Smik), known by the stage name Chickie Williams, was born February 13, 1919, in Bethany, WV, to Harriet Ann and John Lester Crupe. In a fan letter she addressed as a teenager to "Buck Williams and the Border Riders" she asked to hire the group to play for a square dance in Hickory, PA. When Doc Williams met Jessie Wanda, he nicknamed her "Chickie" because he thought she was a "cute chick." Crupe and Williams soon began a romance.

She married Doc Williams (Wheeling Hall of Fame class of 1984) on October 9, 1939. In 1940, Chickie and Doc moved to Memphis and then moved to Wheeling where they raised their three daughters, Barbara, Madeline, and Karen. The daughters were known on the air as "Peeper," "Pooch," and "Punkin." In 1946, after the birth of their three daughters, Chickie joined her husband's Jamboree radio group, contributing harmony vocals and later upright bass. Chickie greatly valued her family and the girls did travel with their parents in the summer during their tours and sometimes performed with them.

Chickie was an American female country music pioneer best known for performing on the Wheeling Jamboree radio program on Wheeling's WWVA with Doc and their band the Border Riders. In 1947, Chickie's original arrangement of the hymn, "Beyond the Sunset," was charted No. 3 in Billboard trade magazine's Top 100 Country Music Songs. The song was later recorded by Hank Williams and Red Foley. Recording of "Beyond the Sunset" initiated when Chickie, who was fond of blind twin singers from North Wheeling, Maxine and Eileen Newcomer, would visit them. The twins had their own disc cutter which Chickie used to record a poem called "Should You Go First and I Remain" by "Rosey" Rowswell as a gift to Doc on their anniversary. Jean Miller, Doc and Chickie's secretary, heard the poem and suggested Chickie record the classic hymn.

Chickie tended to favor old ballads and hymns which made it difficult to attract existing record labels to take notice of her recordings. So the couple used their own money and her albums were released through Wheeling Records, founded by her husband. Extreme popularity of the recording of "Beyond the Sunset" resulted in selling out of the original record release and was followed by offers from other recording labels to release the song. One record label was later allowed to distribute that recording. This success led stars Jimmy Walker and Tex Ritter to encourage her to go to Hollywood for a screen test as they felt she could be a western film star. There were other opportunities and offers to tour and perform solo in nightclubs and on cruise boats. Chickie chose not to pursue these opportunities as she preferred staying close to home where family came first and she enjoyed performing with Doc.

Chickie was known to her fans as "The Girl with the Lullaby Voice." She remained a Jamboree cast member for 52 years, retiring alongside Doc in 1998.

Her contribution to country music included a discography of nine albums, 11 singles and EPs, and three compilations. She, with Doc, performed throughout the Eastern United States and Canada and were inducted into Jamboree USA's Walkway of Stars. They have been made honorary citizens in Maine, Vermont, and New Hampshire. In 2008, the state of West Virginia named a section of Interstate 70 in Wheeling the "Doc and Chickie Williams Highway; Country Music Royal Couple." Chickie and Doc were inducted into the West Virginia Music Hall of Fame in 2009.

Chickie Williams died on November 18, 2007, at the age of 88 in Wheeling.

A collection of manuscripts, photographs, and audiovisual items from Chickie's and Doc's collection are maintained at the West Virginia State Archives. Chickie's influence on female country music is notable and is recognized even today in female performers who have followed in her talented path.