

Ronny Cox's Wikipedia entry describes him as an actor, singer-songwriter and storyteller, but as far as he's concerned, "storyteller" definitely comes first.

He confirms it while delivering one fascinating anecdote after another about his music career, his myriad stage and screen roles, and even his marriage to Mary, his high-school sweetheart.

In concert, Ronny captivates with stories spoken and sung, employing that age-old art form to forge connections he can't as an actor.

"I love acting," he insists. "But not as much as music. With acting, there's an imaginary fourth wall between you and the audience. With my show, a profound one-on-one sharing can take place."

Personally greeting arriving audiences, he sets a tone of warmth and familiarity even before taking the stage.

"I want it to feel like when we were kids sharing stories and songs with our family," he says, adding, "To me, the story is as important as the song."

He didn't begin telling his own until he hit 50, when he took a break from acting, went to Nashville and got a record deal. He learned songcraft from the label's hired guns; they liked his knack for creating vivid, cinematic imagery — a byproduct of his work in productions from *Deliverance*, *Bound for Glory*, *RoboCop*, *The Onion Field*, *Total Recall* and *Beverly Hills Cop I* and *II* to the final season of TV's *Nashville*.

Obviously, Ronny's guitar-strumming "Dueling Banjos" scene in *Deliverance* wouldn't have become one of film's most iconic moments if he couldn't connect as an actor. But he's proud that his debut role, and many since, came because he could play.

Born in Cloudcroft, New Mexico, Ronny began calling square dances at 10 with his dad. That led to performing throughout high school in Portales, where they'd moved when he was 13, and college at Eastern New Mexico University. First, it was western swing; later, he embraced the "folk scare." He also performed shows containing only Mickey Newbury songs.

But for decades, acting paid the bills. He began at Washington, D.C.'s Arena Stage, where he worked as a production intern while Mary earned a doctorate in chemistry from Georgetown University. By graduation, they had two sons. During her post-doctoral residency at Manhattan's Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, Ronny made his Broadway debut.

Then came *Deliverance*, and his first series, *Apple's Way*. He's since played dozens of "men of authority: bad guys and presidents and all those *Robocop* and *Total Recall* characters." But *Cop Rock*, the police procedural/ensemble musical series from *Hill Street Blues* creator Steven Bochco, inspired his return to music.

“It was a miserable failure,” Ronny notes. “But it's the only show I've ever been in where every cast member came to work every day, whether we were called or not, because we couldn't stay away. I realized then how much I missed music.”

He combined his talents for the 2017 film *Pure Country: Pure Heart*, with Willie Nelson. In it, he sings an original, “Silver City.” Another, “I’ll Waltz You Home,” is on *Nashville’s* final soundtrack, as well as his 2012 album, *Ronny, Rad and Karen*, with Radoslav Lorković and Karen Mal. On that version, his timeless tenor goes melancholy, as if he’s addressing Mary, who died on the 50th anniversary of their first date.

Since then, he’s emphasized singing, often at events such as the Folk Alliance International Conference; Woodyfest, in Woody Guthrie’s Okemah, Oklahoma, hometown; or Florida’s 30A Songwriters Festival. He’s also recorded 10 albums, a DVD (*Songs, Stories ... and Out & Out Lies*) and an audio autobiography (*Dueling Banjos: the Deliverance of Drew*); 2017’s *Lost in the Words, Lost in the Music* was recorded live.

“I never feel more alive and vital than when I'm performing in front of an audience,” Ronny reveals.

That album’s “Bus to Baltimore,” about Alzheimer’s disease, earned him a 2018 Roundglass Music Award for creating “socially responsible music for wellness, environmental consciousness and peace.”

But Ronny isn’t resting on his laurels. He’s still recording and touring, while occasionally convincing strangers he’s not their uncle — or, as one woman insisted, her gynecologist.

“I almost never get recognized as an actor, but people think they know me,” Ronny says.

Once they hear his stories, they will.

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