

Dave Burgess, 88, of The Champs & Winner of 1958 Grammy for Tequila, Is Still Rock n Rollin' with New Sony Deal

Dave Burgess of The Champs is not only alive and well, but actively recording and storytelling. In fact, he has a new deal with Sony!

NASHVILLE, TN, UNITED STATES, April 6, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Sadly, many first-generation rock n rollers—those wildly-talented trailblazers who forever changed music and pop culture—have taken their final bows. So, how lucky are we that rock pioneer Dave Burgess—winner of the first R&B Grammy ever, for the 1958 hit “[Tequila](#)”—is not only alive and well, but actively recording and storytelling? In fact, he has a new deal with Sony!

After 60+ years in the business and 700+ tunes to his credit, he has more than a few songs left to sing—plus, dozens of riveting stories to tell.

From his childhood in Beverly Hills (his father, Tex Burgess, was a transplanted cowboy who taught horseback riding to the stars)...to his days on the American Bandstand circuit...to his new record deal, Burgess has never lived an ordinary life.

“

I was there at the beginning of rock n' roll and I was fortunate the timing was right.”

Dave Burgess

Oh, and he's done it all: musician, songwriter, producer, music executive—while partnering with some timeless rock legends.



The Champs

For example, he's credited with discovering Glen Campbell. He managed the million-dollar song catalog of Hank Williams, Jr. for decades. He wrote 10 tunes for teen-idol Ricky Nelson before his untimely death and produced six albums for Don McLean of "American Pie" fame. Fittingly, he played guitar with The Wrecking Crew, the famously-anonymous studio musicians behind countless '60s hits.

"In those early days, there were a lot of great musicians who knew how to play guitar, but didn't yet know how to play rock," he remembers. "Although I always considered myself more of a 'guitar beater' than a 'guitar player,' to be honest."

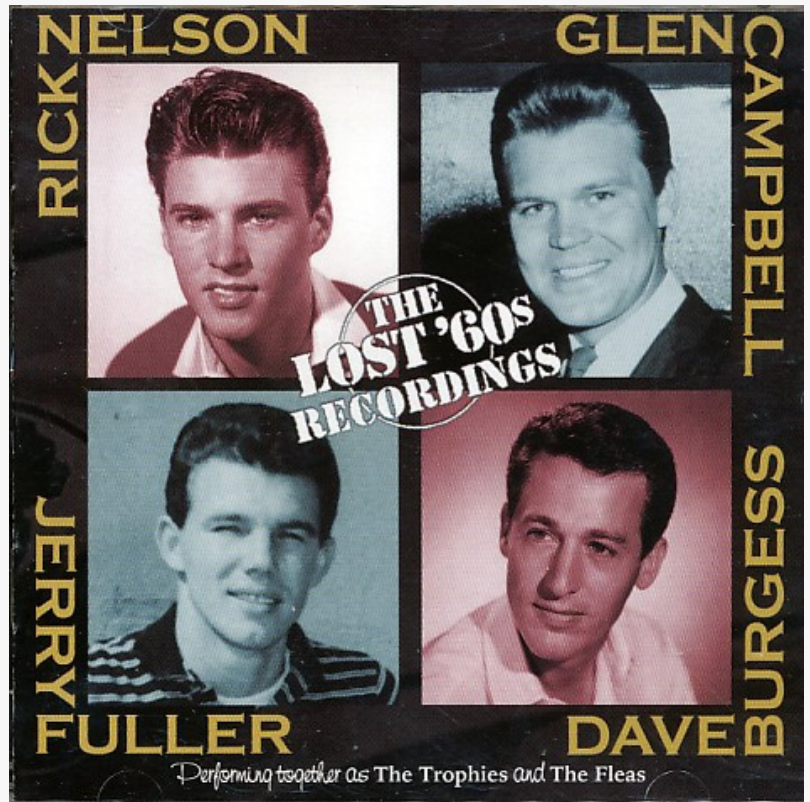
But none of it would have happened without the tidal wave wrought by "Tequila."

From B Side to Top of the Charts
The opening riff of "Tequila" is instantly unmistakable—an eight-note call to dance that's recognized around the world. A jukebox standard, it's been used in countless movies, notably Pee-Wee's Big Adventure. Yet it began as a B-side filler, written on the fly.

In 1957, while still a teenager, Burgess started songwriting, quickly scoring Top 20 hits with "I'm Available" (a rockabilly tune recorded by Margie Rayburn) and "I'll Be There" (a country song recorded by Ray Price). This led singing cowboy Gene Autrey to sign Burgess to his label, Challenge Records, as an all-purpose songwriter, singer and musician.



Dave Burgess



Lost 60s album cover.

One day, wrapping up a recording session, Burgess asked his fellow musicians to help write a B-side tune for his soon-to-be-released single, "Train to Nowhere." Their off-the-cuff jam resulted in "Tequila"—which went largely unheard until a Cleveland deejay decided to give it a spin.

The infectious instrumental—with its Latin beat, jazz-infused Sax solo and earworm refrain—became an instant hit. In a flash, the impromptu band that was named to honor Gene Autry's horse, Champion, sold more than a million records.

The following year, the inaugural Grammy Awards were held. "Tequila" was awarded the Rhythm and Blues Grammy, putting Burgess and [The Champs](#) in company with fellow-winners Frank Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald, Perry Como and Count Basie.

"I was there at the beginning of rock n roll," says Burgess. "I was fortunate and the timing was right."

An Eye for Talent—and a Head for the Business

Burgess also had a gift for spotting talent. In 1960, he hired a young Glen Campbell to play rhythm guitar for The Champs—along with Jim Seals and Dash Crofts (later Seals & Crofts) and Delaney Bramlett (of Delaney and Bonnie).

He remained a sought-after songwriter (he has 700+ BMI copyrights). Among those who covered his tunes: Dean Martin, Lou Rawls, The Lettermen, Anne Murray, Engelbert Humperdinck, Johnny Rivers and Bing Crosby.

In addition to producing The Champs and Don McLean, Burgess produced albums for Darlene Love and Marty Balin, who'd go on to form Jefferson Airplane. A savvy businessman, he managed the publishing affairs of Hank Williams, Jr. for 40+ years, owned two successful record companies, and earned numerous industry awards.

Along the way, he befriended, wrote for, and collaborated with countless rock n roll luminaries, formally and for fun—like when he partnered with Ricky Nelson and Glen Campbell to form The Fleas, a short-lived doo-wop group, in 1961.

From Songwriter to Storyteller

Burgess doesn't just know rock n roll history, he lived it. With his laidback delivery and quick wit, he's a rock historian's dream-come-true, with a treasure trove of fascinating stories to tell.

Like the time he, his wife and Tom Jones attended a birthday party thrown for Elvis Presley. Dave's wife, Deon, was an actress/dancer who appeared in three Elvis movies. With Elvis at piano, he sang a duet with British pop star Jones. Later, Elvis confided to Dave that he was reluctant to sing with Jones because he was so in awe of his voice.

And the time Les Paul—renowned creator of the solid-body electric guitar—gifted him with one

of his legendary 1959 Gold Tops. Now highly-collectible, the guitar was so heavy, it left a bruise on Burgess' hip, leading him to give it away while on tour in Australia. It's a move he still regrets.

These days, Burgess and Deon, his wife of 64 years, live in Nashville, where he is also part of the country music scene. You can checkout Burgess' latest rock anthem, "Light It Up" here.

"I'm a rocker, no question about that—but I write a lot of country songs," he says. "There's not much of a line between them these days—and I've always liked riding the fence, anyway."

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