

INTERNATIONAL COUNTRY MUSIC CONFERENCE MARKS 42ND YEAR AT BELMONT UNIVERSITY

Nashville's premier academic country music gathering returns May 28–30, 2026 with 42nd edition bringing scholars to Belmont University in Tennessee.

NASHVILLE, TN, UNITED STATES, May 11, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The International Country Music Conference (ICMC) celebrates its 42nd annual gathering this year, bringing together scholars, journalists, authors, and music enthusiasts from around the globe to Belmont University in Nashville, Tennessee, for three days of presentations, dialogue, and recognition of outstanding contributions to country music scholarship and journalism. The conference is scheduled for Thursday, May 28 through Saturday, May 30, 2026, on the weekend following Memorial Day — a tradition that has defined the ICMC's Nashville chapter since 1998.



International Country Music Conference logo (courtesy ICMC)

The International Country Music Conference was founded in 1983 by James Akenson and Charles Wolfe, and during its first fourteen years was held at Mississippi State University in Meridian, Mississippi, as part of the Jimmie Rodgers Festival. That festival, which began in 1953, was held the weekend before Memorial Day — near the May 26 birthdate of Meridian native Jimmie Rodgers — to celebrate the life and career of the legendary country music pioneer often called "The Father of Country Music." The academic conference was added to encourage scholarly study of Rodgers, as well as broader presentations on other artists and aspects of country music.

In 1997, the Jimmie Rodgers Festival organizers elected to discontinue the academic conference. Don Cusic, who had attended the conference on multiple occasions, received a call in 1998 from



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Don Cusic

co-founder James Akenson asking whether it might be possible to host the event at Belmont University. Cusic agreed without hesitation. That year, with Cusic and Akenson serving as co-hosts, the ICMC relocated to Nashville — and has been held at Belmont University every year since.

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Music Conference is the highlight of the year," says Don Cusic. "Scholars from across the country as well as internationally come and share their research as well as network. I always look forward to this conference—it puts country music in college!"

The ICMC broadly defines country music to include variants sharing common historical and cultural roots, ranging from Americana, alt-country, bluegrass, Cajun, country rock, crossover, and honky tonk to the Nashville Sound, new traditionalist, old-time country, and western swing. The conference is truly international, with scholars participating from Australia, Austria, Canada, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Japan, Norway, and the United Kingdom, and averages around 100 attendees with all presentations held in one room, making it a welcoming community for first-time participants.

Each year, the ICMC presents two prestigious honors recognizing outstanding work in country music writing and scholarship. The Chet Flippo Award for Excellence in Country Music Journalism honors a piece of writing on country music published during the preceding year in a newspaper, magazine, website, or other appropriate channel, and carries a \$1,000 prize funded by Dean Beverly Keel of Middle Tennessee State University. The 2025 honoree was Natalie Weiner, recognized for "How Midland's Drinkin' Problem Became a Texas Standard in English and Spanish." The Belmont University Curb Music Industry Award for Country Music Book of the Year recognizes the best book published on or about country music in a given calendar year; the 2025 honoree was *Cold War Country: How Nashville's Music Row and the Pentagon Created the Sound of American Patriotism* by Joseph M. Thompson. The 2026 awards will be presented on Friday, May 29, during the conference.

For a full schedule of events, you can click here to visit the [conference's website](#).

About the International Country Music Conference

Founded in 1983, the International Country Music Conference is the leading academic forum dedicated to the scholarly study of country music in all its forms. Now in its 42nd year, the ICMC continues its mission of fostering rigorous, wide-ranging, and inclusive scholarship on one of America's most enduring and influential musical traditions.

For more information, visit www.internationalcountrymusic.org or follow the conference on social media at @icmc_country.

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