



New Zealand Gold Guitar Awards History

The **New Zealand Gold Guitar Awards** have come a long way over the years and continue to be the biggest and most prestigious Country Music Event in New Zealand.

The Gold Guitar Awards started back in 1974 after a group called **Country Style Promotions** presented the Gold Guitar Trophy to the Gore Country Music Club to be competed for at an annual Gold Guitar Awards.

A mere 38 entries competed for the 1974 Gold Guitar Award at a one-day event in the James Cumming Wing, Gore. Entries now reach well over 450 with a record of 560 in one year. 1974 saw a young singer from Putarura, Patsy Riggir, take out the first Gold Guitar Award and to this day she would still rate as our most successful winner.

In 1979 the first Junior Gold Guitar Award was competed for, after a need was seen for juniors to have their own Award.

From that one day event back in 1974, the Gold Guitar Awards went to a weekend and has now developed into several sections and events held over a 10 day period.

In the seventies, Gold Guitar Awards started a **Miss Gold Guitar Contest**. This proved most successful and has carried on annually. 1986 saw the first Tamworth Country Music Festival Queen make an appearance at the Awards, and each year since, Gore's Australian Sister City has sent a Queen representative. Married women were included by 1996 and the name was eventually changed to the Gore New Zealand Gold Guitar Queen. Treacy Farquhar was our first Miss Gold Guitar. Our Queen, as part of her prize, attended the Tamworth Country Music Festival each January. In 2005 however, the Gold Guitar Awards Committee joined with the Gore District Council to enlarge and enhance the event. It is now called the Gore Gold Guitar Young Ambassador Award and is open to men & women..

The Truck Shows, introduced in the early eighties, were an outstanding success with thousands of people lining the route. However other clubs started using the same idea and after some years, the Truck Shows were replaced. It was pleasing to see that the Truck Show was revived for our 25th Anniversary and is continuing annually.

1978 saw our wagon proclaiming Gore as New Zealand's **Capital of Country Music** erected at the northern entrance to the town. Also in the seventies, we had our own radio station to cover the Awards. A caravan was set up at the old Plunket rooms in Main Street. It was called "Hokonui Mountain Radio" with announcers such as Jim Healey and John O'Connor. It was a huge success.

In 1980 the **MLT Country Songwriting Contest** was introduced. Jeff Rea from Crookston was the first winner with his song, "Life on the Road". Over the years, the contest has grown in popularity, with many entries coming from Australia and U.S.A...

1984 saw the **Gold Guitar Awards** move into the Town and Country Club. We had long since outlived the seating capacity of the James Cumming Wing, which only seated 700. The Town and Country Club Stadium seats 1,500 and is also adjacent to the other halls we use.



In 1987, the Gore Country Music Club bought their own Club Rooms which were formerly the Dalgetys' Building in Tamworth Lane. That same year, we erected our large guitar in Main Street, only to have it vandalised by youths pelting it with potatoes! Since then, the guitar is erected each year, advertising our Awards.

1988 saw 500 First Day Covers issued by the Otago Philatelic Club, depicting the 'wagon'. That same year, John Martin of New Plymouth bred a rose for the Gold Guitar Awards and called it the "Gold Guitar Rose". Two hundred "Gold Guitar" roses went on sale at \$15.00 per plant - of which \$2.00 went to the Gold Guitars.

Because of the Gold Guitar Awards and Country Music, Tamworth and Gore formed a **Sister City Relationship** in 1992 which has certainly flourished. Now pupils from schools and sporting teams visit Tamworth each year and vice-versa. The Tamworth Mayor, Sister City Chairman and Tourism Tamworth regularly attend our festival, while a large Gore contingent, including our Mayor and Councillors visit Tamworth each January for their Country Music Festival. In 1998, Gore Country Music Club Member, Jessie McChlery-Tytler, because of her hard work and dedication in fostering the Sister City relationship, was awarded the title of Special Ambassador for Tamworth by the Tamworth City Council.

The Mardi Gras and fireworks displays were incorporated into the Gold Guitars events in 1996 and have proved to be an exciting addition to the Awards each year. Other added attractions have been the Talent Quests, held in various retail businesses throughout that week and the colourful buskers who liven up the town centre. The New Zealand Line Dancing Championships were introduced into the Gold Guitar Awards in 1997 and this proved to be a very successful move until 2002 when small entry numbers saw the last linedancing Competition.

All past Gold Guitar Award winners were invited back for the 1998 **25th Silver Anniversary** to perform the songs that won them the Gold Guitar trophy. While some had moved to Australia, and their addresses were unknown, the Gold Guitars were thrilled to have 12 past winners returning to perform at the Silver Anniversary Winners' Show. Past bands, comperes and radio people also attended.

Inductees into the "Hands of Fame" have been taken for about 14 years now and we had some fifty-five hand prints awaiting the time when our "Hands of Fame" structure was erected in town. Hopes were high that it would be erected for our 25th Anniversary but sadly bureaucracy and red tape prevented that.

The year 2001 saw a revamp of the Songwriting Awards with the formation of the **MLT Songwriters' Trust** - with finalists performing their own songs. A songwriting seminar was also introduced, with guest speakers - including experienced New Zealand Songwriters, and Recording Industry Representatives, such as Mike Chunn. It was most successful and has become an important New Zealand songwriting competition.

2001 also saw the Minister of Arts, Culture and Heritage, the Prime Minister of New Zealand, Helen Clark, open the Awards. She acknowledged in her speech that the New Zealand Gold Guitar Awards had put Gore on the map - nationally and internationally.

In January 2003, the Gore Tamworth Sister City relationship was further enhanced by the opening of the **Gore Garden** in the Tamworth Botanical Gardens. The Tamworth 2002



Queen of Country Music, Rebecca Redfern, made the announcement at the Gore NZ Gold Guitar Queen Finals held in May, 2002. When our Queen, Natasha Houlahan, visited Tamworth in January 2003 for their Country Music Festival, she and the new Tamworth Queen carried out the first of an annual tree planting to celebrate the important and continuing relationship between the two Country Music Capitals.

In 2004, the **Recording Industry Association of New Zealand** decided that the Gold Guitar Awards were prestigious enough to implement, organize and stage the New Zealand Country Music awards in partnership with RIANZ. It was the first time these awards have been held outside Auckland. During the evening where finalists sang their selected numbers, the Tui Trophy was presented for the Best Country Music Album of the Year and the best Country Music Song of the year. Such was the success of the evening, with its guest star, Gary Morris, from USA, that it will become an annual event. In 2005 the **Australasian Performing Right Association**, APRA joined with the New Zealand Gold Guitar Awards to provide the support and Award for the Best Country Music Song. This significant partnership of RIANZ, APRA and the New Zealand Gold Guitar Awards in staging these professional awards, promotes an important recognition of the New Zealand Country Music scene.

On 9th May, 2004, just three weeks before the 2004 Awards were to commence, the town of Gore was shocked when their Gore Country Music centre was torched by an arsonist. The Clubrooms were razed to the ground and much priceless memorabilia and also preparations for the 2004 Awards were lost. In spite of this setback, the Awards went ahead and were bigger and better than ever. Such is the determination and the resilience of Club Members, that the decision was made to find new clubrooms.

The following year, 31 May 2005, saw the Grand Opening and unveiling of the **Hands of Fame** Structure. After 13 years of negotiating, finally, we had made it! It was opened by the Gore mayor, Tracy Hicks on site and followed by refreshments at Croydon Lodge. 18 past inductees travelled from all over New Zealand and Australia to perform at the successful celebration show which was held in the Gore Town & Country Stadium that night. Some of the famous hand prints are - Kenny Rogers, Eddie Low, Patsy Riggir, Ricky Skaggs and Suzanne Prentice - to name a few.

In May 2006 the **Tamworth Garden**, situated beside the Hands of Fame Structure, was officially opened. The Mayor of Tamworth James Treloar, Gore Mayor Tracy Hicks, the Tamworth Queen of Country Music Kasey McCulloch and our own Tamworth Ambassador, Jessie McChlery-Tytler, planted 6 Australian native plants to reinforce the special relationship with our Sister City, Tamworth. The plantings will be an annual event in Gore to coincide with the New Zealand Gold Guitar Awards.

In 2006, the Gore Country Music Club's dilemma about the building or purchase of new clubrooms was over when the Matura Licensing Trust offered to sell the club their 'Longford Function Centre' and its chattels at a very reasonable price. It is an ideal home base to hold meetings and concerts. The building will reinforce Gore's title of **Country Music Capital of New Zealand** and provide a venue for visiting travellers, clubs, artists and entertainers. Since the devastating fire in May 2004, the past two years had been difficult with no common base. This will now be put in the history books and the club can move on.

2007 saw large Gold Guitar restored to its glittering best and the club is awaiting resource consent to have it erected permanently in Gore.



Winning the New Zealand Gold Guitar Awards has been a significant stepping stone for some of New Zealand's and Australia's most outstanding Country Music artists. Singers such as Patsy Riggir, the Warratahs, Noel Parlane, Kylie Harris, Bob Mason & the Apache and songwriters such as Jeff Rea, Ian Betteridge, Rosy Parsons, Allan Barron, Joy Adams, Eddie Low, Terry Gavin and Judy McTaggart have gained much recognition, both nationally and internationally.

The New Zealand Gold Guitar Awards have come a long way since 1974, each year bringing thousands of people to Gore. For ten days in May/June, the whole town comes alive and the Awards would be rated as the most successful annual musical event held in New Zealand.

Gore certainly deserves the title:
'New Zealand's Capital of Country Music'.