

A Cowboy's Cowboy-song Singer

Male Vocalist of the Year Bill Barwick's voice rings true.

Everybody loves the Westerns Channel—beloved reruns of famous Westerns, with TV legends Gene Autry and Hopalong Cassidy, and classic cowboys like Bill Barwick and Lash LaRue.

Bill Barwick? Yep. He's the Sam Elliot look-alike who's the official spokesperson for cable TV's answer to a Western movie fix. He's the one with the deep, rich voice that sounds like the West itself. As a sought after narrator, he delivers passages with the kind of authority that only his voice can convey. Besides making people run for pancakes after viewing his Village Inn commercials, he has even been the voice of a life-sized, singing buffalo head at a store in Denver International Airport.

Not surprisingly, you may also hear him speaking on behalf of clients such as Western Rural Electric or Wyoming Tourism. (Says Barwick, "I've got the perfect face for radio.") One of his latest endeavors includes narrating and making music for *Kit Carson: The Musical*, which is a recent production for Douglas County, Colorado TV.

But Bill's voice shines best on six CDs of Western music, the latest of which, *Wide Open Range*, earned him the 2005 Will Rogers Western Music Male Vocalist of the Year Award, given by the Academy of Western Artists. Up against some of the finest artists in the business, Bill's peers and fans finally gave him his due: the top accolade for what he does so well—bring the Western dream to life.



Singer and Westerns Channel spokesman Bill Barwick has long been a cowboy. He even donned the duds one Christmas in 1952 (at right) with his brother Ian, who is also a musician.

— COURTESY BILL BARWICK —



Bill's albums span the saga of the American cowboy. He records many covers better than the people who first sang them, adding superb accompaniment on his Taylor guitar, and often, the talents of other

musicians and vocalists as well. Bill's own songs have lyrics with grit and guts. His melodies are endearing. Sometimes he's wistful; other times, defiant. He's got a great sense of humor that will make you smile, and he'll definitely make you cry. Barwick's a poet, seer, romantic and a realist, and his music is strictly Western to boot. He's been called "a cowboy's cowboy-song singer" for a reason.

A Colorado transplant, he's been a weekly regular at Denver's historic Buckhorn Exchange with sidekick Roz Brown since 1984. His full ensemble, the Sons of the Tumbleweed, includes bass player Steve McCartney and legendary fiddler Johnny Neill, and they're often seen at cowboy gatherings throughout the West. For the last 17 years, Bill's also been a major part of one of the largest acoustic music events in America—the Walnut Valley Festival in Winfield, Kansas. From emcee to performer, he's a part of the magic, and one of the reasons that thousands of fans return every year.

Other bookings have taken him to stages from Anchorage to Boston. "It's all about the music," he confirms. "I enjoy the connection with the audience. I'm just lucky I get paid for doing what I love."

In the spirit of his favorite heroes, Leonard Sly (Roy Rogers) and Don Edwards, Bill's not ashamed to admit that he didn't grow up on a ranch and doesn't live on one now. Hailing originally from North Carolina, he started making music at the age of eight. He came West in the 1970s and stayed. Bill's internalized the very essence of the "cowboy way" and is known to be a man of his word, armed with integrity and accountability. He travels light, is always prepared and has never put a horse away wet.

He can sing you a Colorado sunset and make you see the last rays of light—just one of the few still riding for the brand.

Visit twmag.com to hear Bill Barwick's song, "There Ain't No Quit."

