

GOOD TIMES



Charlie Mac at work in the studio with Tom T. Hall.

Celebrating life, love,
music, and sports
with
**CHARLIE
MCALEXANDER**



With the Vanderbilt radio crew: Roger May, Jim Curry, Charlie Mac, and Paul Kennedy.

BY JIM "FISH" MICHIE
PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHARLIE MCALEXANDER



Left to right: Archie Manning, Louisiana State University football coach Charlie McClendon, Memphis State football coach Spook Murphy, Ole Miss football coach Johnny Vaught, Dr. Faser Triplett, Indiana basketball coach Bobby Knight, former Ole Miss athletic director and captain of national champion football team Warner Alford, with Charlie McAlexander.

“We’re gonna celebrate something tonight. Something! Anything!” the band leader onstage shouts enthusiastically to the boisterous crowd. He spins around to his band of Nashville studio and road musicians and shouts the count-off to the band. The celebrant is Charlie McAlexander, better known to his friends as Charlie Mac or CMac (See-Mac). It has been a long journey to this point in his career. He has been a coach, a teacher, and an award-winning radio and TV sports broadcaster, and throughout the journey, he has had a love affair with rock and roll as a singer.

Charlie Mac was born and raised in Holly Springs, Mississippi, a little over seventy-seven years ago. He grew up playing all sports and listening to the music played by radio DJs Hoss Allen and Wolfman Jack. He absorbed the swamp-music of Muscle Shoals and the horn section-driven hot sounds of Memphis Soul music. These influences are evident as Charlie Mac performs with his current band, CMac and The Rhythm Machine.

But Charlie Mac’s career in broadcasting was preceded by another success—making the freshman baseball team at Ole Miss as a walk-on. Along with securing a spot on the Rebel roster, he sang with a rock and roll group in Oxford known as The Ole Miss Wanted. McAlexander recalls, “Rock and roll did not agree with my academic choices, and I was unable to continue playing at Ole Miss due to my grade point average suffering from a bad case of the blues.”

During this time, The Ole Miss Wanted rehearsed in the back room of Kiamie’s original restaurant. Also in that group were Richie Burnette, a native of Clarksdale, and Gerald Chatham, now a federal judge in North Mississippi. Burnette still performs with his group, The Doo Vays. When asked about CMac’s prowess performing the college dance favorite, “the alligator” he confirmed, “Oh yeah, he could throw it down. CMac would try anything. His zest for life was as passionate as his love of wild clothes and rock and roll.

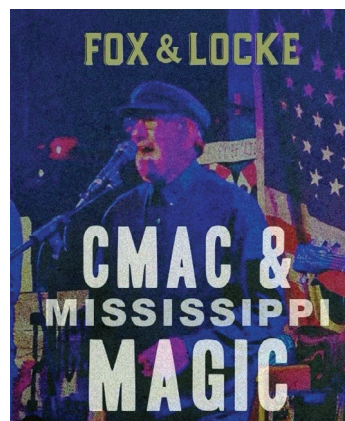
“I remember we got one gig in 1966 in Panama City, Florida,



REBEL RADIO TEAM—Charlie McAlexander (left), sports director of WLBT in Jackson, presents Ole Miss football as the play-by-play announcer. Lyman Hellums of Terry handles game highlights.

and we all thought that it would surely land us on *The Ed Sullivan Show* as our next stop. Not quite. We barely made it to the gig. My dad’s car broke down on the way to Florida!” laughs Burnette. “Charlie Mac and I rode together, and he had on a loud polka dot shirt and red octagonal sunglasses, and his hair was a bit longer than most folks of that time. We had to go to a truck stop to repair the car, and I was praying we would get out of that place unscathed after the good old boys saw Charlie Mac’s get up. Prayers were answered, and we made the gig. The Sullivan show decided not to call, but we kept on playing.”

After a brief stint at Northwest Community College in Senatobia, McAlexander headed to Delta State College in Cleveland, where he tried out for the baseball team and where he was to meet one of the major influences of his life. Legendary Coach Boo Ferris was at the helm of the Delta State baseball program at that time, and Charlie Mac recalls, “I learned more about life and how to carry myself in life than I learned about baseball.”





Charlie Mac's wife, Betty (center), with daughters Emily and Carrie.



Jim and Charlie Mac at Carol Ann's Blues club in Nashville, Tennessee.



Charlie Mac with former voice of Mississippi State University Bulldogs Jack Cristall.

"Oh, he coached me with intensity, but as Coach Ferriss's reputation attests, he taught more than baseball. He taught me HOW to live. In fact, he and one other Delta native are the two I most admire in all my years of sports and broadcasting."

McAlexander cites Archie Manning as the other significant influence. "Those two have the best template ever for living a good, solid, productive, and caring life. The fact that both of these guys were born and raised in the Mississippi Delta does not surprise me one bit. My years in the Delta were magical and abundant, with so many examples of giving and caring from the entire community. Archie and Coach Ferriss both exemplify the caring and love that I felt at Delta State and in Cleveland. It is such a special place, and



Charlie Mac interviewing Charlie Chase of Crook and Chase fame on Nashville channel 4.



Charlie Mac with Grand Ole Opry member T.G. Brown and Brown's wife, Sheila.

anywhere I go now, I brag on Cleveland and Delta State. The Delta is a unique area of Mississippi that remains in my heart and soul and will always be with me. "

Charlie Mac's baseball career at Delta State was cut short once he joined the National Guard at the height of the Vietnam conflict, and it was after that he made the decision to go into sportscasting.

Charlie Mac's career in broadcasting is akin to following a path in a maze. He has been the sports director and the sports anchor for WABG-TV in Greenwood (where he says he learned a newfound respect for water moccasin snakes going to work daily in that little building in the middle of a cotton field.) He also worked at WLBT-TV in Jackson, WREG-TV in Memphis, and finally at WSMV-TV in Nashville.

During his broadcasting career, he was also the play-by-play voice of the Ole Miss Rebels, the Kentucky Wildcats, the South Carolina Gamecocks, and the Vanderbilt Commodores. He received Broadcaster of the Year award at each of these SEC schools, setting a record, as the only broadcaster to have ever received that award at four Southeastern Conference Schools.

While in Nashville, he changed the name of his group to Charlie



Charlie Mac performing at Fox and Locke in Leiper's Fork, Tennessee.



Charlie Mac with Loretta Lynn.



Charlie Mac (kneeling) with NFL Hall of Fame member Ray Guy of the University of Southern Mississippi and Bill Lee.

Charlie Mac won Broadcaster of the Year honors at four different SEC schools: Ole Miss, Kentucky, South Carolina, and Vanderbilt.

Mac and The Heart Attacks, as a hat tip to his cardiologist and the team that helped him get through a cardiac arrest. This team, along with a changed diet and exercise, helped him return to the stage to perform with his band. During his early days in Nashville, he recorded two songs that made the regional charts.

Friends, fellow musicians, and media icons seem to have the same response when asked about CMac—"Everybody loves CMac!" Country star and Grand Ole Opry member T. Graham Brown confirms, "They broke the mold when they made Charlie Mac. He is a great guy with a musical soul. His personality is as big as his jackets are wild. God bless Charlie Mac, and long may he continue to celebrate something, anything!"

Elizabeth Carter Scott, a Memphis Realtor and former Queen of Memphi, the oldest secret society with the Memphis Cotton Carnival, noted, "...the era of the '60s was truly magical. People would come from all over North Mississippi to hear bands like Tommy Burke and The Counts, The Gants, The Gentrys, Joe Frank and the Knights—and Charlie Mac was right there in the middle with them. In fact he still ends many of his shows with the anthem, "Shout," which ended most of the shows back then."

One accolade that truly resonated was by Archie Manning, the beloved former quarterback at Ole Miss and the New Orleans Saints,



Charlie Mac far right with fellow Mississippians, Jim Michie, Stevie Ray Anderson, and Sid Herring.

who has known Charlie Mac for over fifty years. McAlexander recounts seeing a documentary on the Manning family when Archie tells the story of his father driving him back to Ole Miss from Drew at the start of his sophomore year when his star was rising quickly on the national scene. His father told him "...through all the fame, press, and glory, always remember to just be a good guy." Charlie Mac's voice filled with emotion when he shared, "That one comment says it all to me."

Manning confirmed it was the best he had ever received and its simplicity was monumental in his daily life. Manning added, "I love Charlie Mac. Heck, everybody loves Charlie Mac. He was a great sportscaster on the radio and on TV. His love and passion for rock and roll is evident as he continues to sing regularly with his band. Charlie Mac has passion. Always has had it. Whether it be sports or rock and roll, he attacks it with that passion. I mentioned earlier that everybody loves Charlie Mac, and that's because he is a good guy."

Charlie Mac appears regularly throughout the Nashville area with his band, CMac and The Rhythm Machine. He resides in Nashville with his wife, Betty. He has two daughters, Emily and Carrie. [DU](http://charlie.mcalexander@gmail.com)

For more information about Charlie Mac, visit his website charlie.mcalexander@gmail.com