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Strait entering Hall of Fame

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With a career nearing three decades of highlights, country music superstar and South Texas native George Strait says he usually struggles when asked to name the biggest.

Now comes an easy answer — his membership in the Country Music Hall of Fame, the industry's top tribute, which was announced Wednesday.

"I think this is, without a doubt, the most special thing that's ever happened, and I don't know how anything could top getting put in the hall of fame," Strait said in a statement. "It's just the very highest honor that you can get in this business."

Two other new members also were announced: Sonny James, a hit singer from the late 1950s through the '70s, and session guitarist Harold Bradley.

They'll be inducted at the 40th annual Country Music Association Awards on Nov. 6 in Nashville, Tenn.

Strait, who was born in Poteet, raised in Pearsall and now lives in the Dominion in San Antonio, is just the second recipient of the award for entertainers achieving fame since 1975. The band Alabama became the first inductee in that category last year.

Fellow Hall of Famer Ray Price, 80, whose six-decade career is the focus of a current exhibit at the hall, wasn't surprised.

"When he first started, he went on tour with me out in California, and I made a prediction then that he was going to be a big one," Price said. "So I wasn't wrong."

"I can't say enough good things about George."

Neither could CMA Chief Operating Officer Tammy Genovese, who said no other artist approaches Strait's ongoing success.

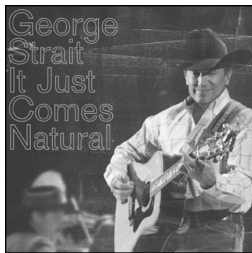
"For him to be inducted at this point in his career speaks volumes for his accomplishments, his work ethic — everything that George Strait is all about,"

she said, adding that the new category allows artists to be honored while they still are thriving.

"This is not about fans voting you into a hall of fame," she said, "these are your peers, the people you compete with every day in the business world of touring, making records, trying to get radio play and all the things artists have to get through to be successful."

Strait, 54, landed the first of a record-setting 52 No. 1 singles with "Fool Hearted Memory" in 1982.

He plans to release his 34th MCA Nashville album, "It Just Comes Natural," Oct. 3.



His first top 10 hit, "Unwound," came out 25 years ago, Strait publicist Kathy Best said.

"To still be having No. 1 after No. 1, selling out every time he does a show and selling more than 62 million albums, it's not like this happened a while back," Best said. "This is every single, every album and every show today."

Hall of Fame inductees are chosen by about 300 anonymous voters appointed by the CMA board of directors.