

- 3,699 yodels (7.4 yodels per appearance)
- 38,604 times people have asked “Where’s Woody?”
- 89 times Woody has walked onstage with his fly unzipped
- August 24, 2033—the projected date when Riders in the Sky makes their 10,000th appearance

Milestone 5,000

Riders in the Sky still makes us laugh.

Space cowboys? Not a chance.

These Grammy Award-winning artists are one of the longest running acts in the business, knocking audiences off their feet and into the stratosphere with classic cowboy songs sung in perfect four-part harmony. Add their zany brand of entertainment full of vaudeville humor, slapstick antics and old-

and his bandmates are comic wit Too Slim on bass, fiddler and lead singer Woody Paul and accordionist Joey the Cowpolka King.

Side Meat, a memorable character, is an old codger sidekick, a la Gabby Hayes, who’s played by Slim. He’s equally versatile as a smart aleck horse called Two Jaws—a wired horse’s skull, worked like a hand puppet, with the personality of George Burns. Slim’s other unique talent, playing “face music,” is indescribable. (But if you’ve seen it, do not try it at home.)

Between the humor and the music, four adult men who act like kids have the time of their lives. Brilliant on stage in colorful, sequined and fringed vintage-style shirts (custom-made by Nashville designer Manuel), they provoke laughs from the onset. “We’ve been inspired by the best,” confirms Doug, “from the Smothers Brothers to Jack Benny.”

With over 5,000 performances under their belt, the group tours year round. Venues include symphonies, dinner theatres, cowboy gatherings, even the Hollywood Bowl—just about any place where folks enjoy music. Renditions of classic favorites like “Cool Water” or “Don’t Fence Me In” bring audiences to wild applause. Requests are welcome—the Riders know them all. And just to prove that they do, they’ll sing as many as they can at the same time.

If you plan on going to a concert, be sure not to tell any 10-year-olds—they may want to tag along. Riders in the Sky was featured

on the Disney soundtrack, *Woody’s Round-up*, now made famous by their contribution to the film *Toy Story 2*. Another Disney release was *Monsters Inc.—Scream Factory Favorites*, which won them a Grammy for Best Musical Album for Children in 2001.

In 1982, the Riders were invited to join the Grand Ole Opry, the first exclusively Western music artists ever to do so. Seven years later, they began recording seasonal episodes of Rider Radio Theater, still broadcast by 170 public and commercial radio stations. They continue to compose, record and preserve Western music with the passion of zealots and have even franchised the act. You can now take them home by getting a CD, T-shirt, coloring book or even a handy Riders in the Sky fly swatter (fitting somehow).

If you’ve never heard Riders in the Sky before (say it ain’t so!), the best way to get acquainted with their music is via their award-winning *Silver Jubilee* double CD, which contains earlier tunes that have been superbly re-recorded along with newer material. And if you don’t know the history behind the singing cowboy, you may appreciate the music more after reading Ranger Doug’s Western Heritage award-winning book *Singin’ in the Saddle*. Unfortunately, the book doesn’t yodel like he can.

Leave it to Too Slim to find a farewell that touches people on many levels by his Yoda-like adieu: “May the Horse be with You.”



This year, Riders in the Sky marked their 5,000th performance—equivalent to performing every other day for 25 years—so why shouldn’t they get their own mountain? See next page for other Riders milestones provided by Too Slim.

—COURTESY RIDERS IN THE SKY—

fashioned sentiment, and you’ll understand why they’ve become an American legend.

The magic behind their success lies in their split-second timing, a benefit from being together longer than most marriages last. (“The secret,” boasts Ranger Doug, “is separate hotel rooms.”) Baritone Ranger Doug is a world-class vocalist and yodeler,

Solo Rider Kicks Up Dust

Founder of the original Riders of the Purple Sage, Buck Page is back on the music scene. He’s received his 65th-year endorsement from Gretsch Guitars. He’s just released his first solo album since forming his groundbreaking group at the age of 13 in 1936 (the album features new material but includes a six-minute cut of “Ghost Riders in the Sky,” which the Riders were the first to record). And Buck’s the focus of a documentary that features on-camera interviews from Don Edwards, Ginny Mac and R.W. Hampton. He’s even a music historian for the online music museum, www.kickingupdust.com—yippee-yi-ya, like Edgar Potter would say: Buck’s busier than a prairie dog after a gully washer.

Visit twmag.com to hear Riders in the Sky’s “That’s How the Yodel was Born.”

Colorado Western music groupie and cowgirl crooner wanna-be, Corinne Brown’s been on both sides of the stage. But after meeting Riders in the Sky, she’s convinced she’d rather sit in the audience