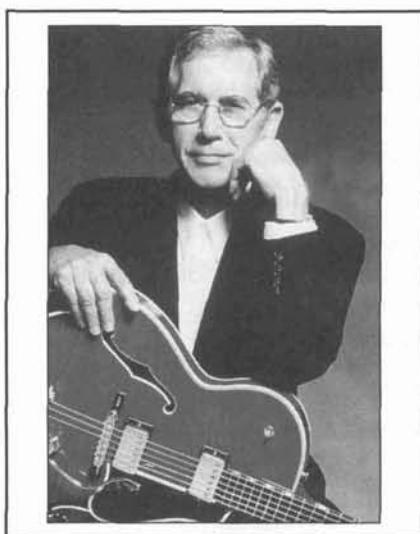


In Memoriam



Chet Atkins, honorary AES member, died on June 30 at his home in Nashville, Tennessee. He was 77 years old.

A leading guitarist, Atkins was credited with turning Nashville into a major country music empire. Born in 1924 on his grandfather's farm in Tennessee, he described his poverty in his autobiography, *Country Gentleman*. His grandfather was a champion fiddler and his father a music teacher, piano tuner, and evangelical singer. His brother also played guitar. Atkins learned to play the banjo as a youth, often saying that he played "until the strings broke." At the age of 9 he began playing at local parties and roadhouses, after learning the ukulele and fiddle. He learned guitar styles by listening to various groups on radio.

In 1941 Atkins was fascinated by the style of guitarist Merle Travis. He invested his salary in equipment to convert his acoustic guitar to electric. In an effort to imitate the Travis style he began to pick with his thumb and three fingers. By the age of 17 Atkins was a professional musician. After the outbreak of World War II Southern rural music spread. He quit high school and got a job as a fiddler with the Jumpin' Bill Carlisle-Archie Campbell program broadcast on WNOX, Knoxville, TN. The director of the radio station put Atkins on the station's "Midday Merry-Go-Round." After the Carlisle-Campbell show was canceled, he became rhythm guitarist in the station's staff band.

He teamed up with a touring band and performed on nationally syndicated radio shows. His reputation grew and he appeared with the Carter sisters at the Grand Ole Opry. Atkins recorded for RCA Victor in 1946 and had his first hit, "The Galloping Guitar," in 1949. He began working as a studio musician and played in a group that performed on most RCA country sessions. He was appointed manager of recording operations in Nashville for RCA. He later built a recording studio in Nashville where, as a producer, he guided other country artists' careers. He arranged Elvis Presley's first Nashville sessions and produced artists such as Dolly Parton, Roy Orbison and the Everly Brothers.

In the 1950s and 60s Atkins was able to modify the sound of country music to changing American tastes. The "uptown" sound, as he called it, was marketed as "countryopolitan," which later became known as "the Nashville Sound." The softening also suited the producers, who thought that steel guitars and fiddles had become old-fashioned.

In 1967 Atkins became vice-president in charge of country music for RCA. He found producing stressful, and after three years began concert tours of Europe, Asia, Africa. His style was a thumb-pick and fingers rather than a flat pick. He flaunted his dexterity by playing two melodies at the same time on different strings. He began to play the classical guitar and became a guest artist with many symphony orchestras. Despite the offer of honorary degrees from several universities, he declined acceptance, saying he wanted only to be known as the Guitar Picker or C.G.P. He received 14 Grammy Awards and recorded more than 120 albums. Two of his hit songs he wrote in one day: "Oh, Lonesome Me," and "I Can't Stop Loving You."

The AES paid tribute to him in 1999 when it awarded him an honorary membership. He accepted at the 107th convention in New York.

Reticent and unassuming, Atkins was low-key and humble. He once told a reporter that the reason he continued playing guitar was because he was "still trying to get it right."