

Forbes

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How Bobby Bones Became The Most Powerful Man In Country Music

Over the past three years, iHeart's syndicated radio star Bobby Bones has slowly and methodically become the most powerful man in country music. He is also—without a doubt—the busiest man in country music. He might be the most insecure, too...but more on that later.

If you aren't familiar with Bobby Bones (born Bobby Estell in Hot Springs, Arkansas), the 36-year-old is the host of iHeart's marquee morning program, The Bobby Bones Show. The program is syndicated on nearly 100 stations coast to coast to more than 3 million listeners each weekday morning. He also hosts the weekly countdown show Country Top 30 with Bobby Bones. Washington Post fittingly described him as "sort of the Ryan Seacrest of the country music world, if Seacrest was more polarizing and didn't have a filter."

The unfiltered nature of his personality has endeared Bones and his eponymous show to millions of fans—and landed him in hot water on more than one occasion. "I'm really not a dick, but sometimes you get that reputation," he said to Rolling Stone. One notable hot water situation was a \$1 million fine from the FCC for an on-air prank in 2014. ("That was the worst, because I let everyone who believed in me down," he says now.) On-air pranks have also landed Bones and members of his entourage in jail on misdemeanor charges.

When Bones was tapped by iHeart executives to move to Nashville to host a syndicated morning show in 2013, he admittedly wasn't much of a country-music guy. His radio background—which he detailed in his 2016 No.

1 New York Times Best Selling, rags-to-riches memoir—had always been in other formats. The Bobby Bones Show began as a Top 40 format show broadcast out of Austin. But, Bones' on-air antics, relatable interview style ("I'm the best interviewer in the whole format. Except for Howard Stern, I'd put myself against anybody,") and unorthodox cast of show characters have since won over country fans, artists and eventually even Nashville's tradition-loving industry insiders.



His interviews and lightning-quick quips keep listeners in every market tuning in. Bones' fanbase is so rabid that it's not uncommon for him to kick-start country careers with one spin. In the past two years, he's helped spur both Cam and Chris Janson to No. 1 on the charts—for songs that weren't even singles before Bones spun them. (Janson, a longtime friend of Bones, didn't even have a label deal when the DJ played "Buy Me A Boat," which became a platinum-selling smash hit.)

