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Bobby Bones Extends His Reign At Country Radio And Beyond

Annie Reuter Contributor



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TAYLOR KELLY

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The 2020 ACM Award-winning National On-Air Personality of the Year, Bones and his team at iHeart Radio's *The Bobby Bones Show* have garnered the coveted trophy for the fourth time. The No. 1 country morning show in the nation, *The Bobby Bones Show* has grown into over 160 markets with 170 weekday affiliates and is also available in the U.K. and Canada.

"We have listeners all over the world," Bones tells me. "The growth has been amazing. I've never taken it for granted and hopefully in a year I can still say the same thing. We've been lucky to find a group of folks that listen and trust us every morning and I'm super happy to be able to still do my job every day."

According to Nielsen Audio, the radio show ranks No. 1 in 19 major U.S. markets while The Bobby Bones Show Podcast is up by 25% in listenership this year according to [Megaphone.com](https://www.megaphone.com). It's a major feat for Bones, who transitioned into the country genre

eight years ago after working in the pop world where he built his syndication company with his own money and just about broke even.

Bones, born Bobby Estell, dreamed of working in radio since he was a kid. He started calling the local radio station in Arkansas when he was 12, hoping his determination would land him a job. "It's always been the goal to be able to pay the mortgage and buy groceries by doing something I love," he says.

When he first moved to Nashville in 2013, Bones' radio show wasn't immediately embraced by the country community. *The Bobby Bones Show* took over the slot of beloved DJ Gerry House and although Bones was ready for the challenge, it took several years to gain the respect of Music City.

"We were all a bit more progressive at the time and now we're hopefully the ones that people look to and want to emulate," Bones says. "We're all diehard country music fans. I've been lucky enough to put together an amazing team and we have great listeners and now the show is really thriving ... To be recognized by the ACMs, they were the first to give us an award in country music. When we came to town, we were considered the crazy outlaw show. Everyone was kind of scared to go on the show. Now we've created the template for country radio."

With over 10 million weekly listeners, Bones takes his audience into his world every morning. In the era of Covid-19, his familiar voice has provided escape and hope to those going through a difficult time. Thanks to money raised by listeners, a home was built in partnership with Homes For Heroes for a member of the military who had been injured in the line of duty. Bones gives back on his own as well, frequently asking those struggling to share their Venmo name on [social media](#) so he can personally assist them financially and asks listeners to help out any way they can.

"It's always been a priority for the show to give back," Bones, who helped champion the #PimpinJoy movement where proceeds from the clothing line go to those in need, says. "Because of Covid-19, it's harder for charities and nonprofits to make money right now to keep going. My audience has trusted us and we've been able to maintain what we feel fulfills us on the show and that's really giving back as much as possible. [We're] definitely making a difference in folks' lives. Our listeners do so much."

At the beginning of the pandemic, Bones worked from his bedroom. Now he's back in the studio with limited guests. He takes a Covid test three times a week for the safety of his team and ahead of traveling weekends while filming his upcoming 2021 television series *Breaking Bobby Bones* on National Geographic.

Each of the 16 episodes has Bones traveling to a new destination across the country to find people with unique jobs, skills and hobbies. He then is challenged to conquer their trade, which includes everything from whitewater kayaking to protecting a flock of sheep at night from wolves and bears. He compares the show to Anthony Bourdain meets *Dirty Jobs* meets *Jackass*. "The show's really about people who have stories like mine. Hopefully I don't get physically broken," he says.

A Renaissance man himself, when he's not traveling for his upcoming television series or on-air as part of *The Bobby Bones Show*, Bones is juggling several other passions. He has created an online game show, penned two *NY Times* #1 best-selling books, serves as an official *American Idol* in-house mentor and won Season 27 of *Dancing With the Stars*. The youngest inductee into the National Radio Hall of Fame says winning the Mirrorball Trophy was one of his career highlights.

"Nobody expected me to win a dance show. That seemed trivial for someone who's never danced before," he says. "When Vegas put out the odds I was in last place and I was getting slammed because [people were saying] is he even famous? [Winning] that was pretty cool to me, not because of the dancing but because of the, 'Hey, no one expects you to do well.'"

Bones thrives on being the underdog and his five-year plan remains ambitious. He wants his own late night or daytime talk show and he's still toying with the idea of becoming governor of Arkansas. He says he's already shared so much of his life with the public that he's not worried about the scrutiny of a political career.

"There have been some really intense conversations with people in that world. They want me to declare by November of next year, because it's going to take a year of campaigning to run for the spot and I'd have to give up everything here," he says. "At this point, I just want to do what fulfills me and it may be that."

As he reflects on his career so far, Bones credits his success to his work ethic and letting others know what his goals are. He encourages others to do the same.

"The key has been hard work and even though it doesn't happen for me the first or 13th time, every time that it doesn't work, I learn something new and eventually patch all that together in creating my own path," he says. "If you let people know what your goals are, they can actually help you."

"Most people love helping folks, so if you just let people know your goals and you work hard at them, you get to do them so much faster," he continues. "That's what I want to encourage people to do: You have to let people know. So many instances in life that's been a big factor for me — just telling people I want to do this. Sometimes they can't make it happen right then, but it's always been something that has come back around."