

OKLAHOMA SONGWRITER



JIMMY LAYNE WEBB
SONGWRITER, COMPOSER,
AND SINGER

Jimmy Webb is an American songwriter, composer, and singer. He wrote numerous platinum-selling classics, including *Up, Up and Away*, *By the Time I Get to Phoenix*, *Wichita Lineman*, *Galveston*, *The Worst That Could Happen*, *All I Know*, and *MacArthur Park*. His songs have been performed by major artists of our time.

Jimmy Layne Webb was born August 15, 1946, in Elk City, Oklahoma. His father, Robert Lee Webb, was a Baptist minister and former member of the United States Marine Corps. With his mother's **encouragement**, Webb learned piano and organ, and by age 12 played in the choir of his father's churches. Webb grew up in a conservative religious home where his father restricted radio listening to country music and white gospel music.

He began writing songs during the late 1950s. In 1964, the family moved to Southern California and, after attending San Bernardino Valley College, Webb decided to pursue a songwriting career in Los Angeles rather than return to Oklahoma when his father did.

Soon, Webb signed a songwriting contract with the publishing arm of Motown Records. The first commercial recording of a Jimmy Webb song was *My Christmas Tree* by The Supremes on their 1965 *Merry Christmas* album. The following year, singer-producer Johnny Rivers signed a publishing deal with Webb and recorded Webb's *By the Time I Get to Phoenix*.

A string of hits followed, among them *Up, Up and Away*, *The Worst That Could Happen*, and the Glen Campbell version of *By the Time I Get to Phoenix*. At the 1967 Grammy Awards, *Up, Up and Away* was named Record of the Year and Song of the Year. *Up, Up and Away* and *By the Time I Get to Phoenix* received eight Grammy Awards between them.

In 1968, Webb formed his own production and publishing company, Canopy, and scored a hit with its first project, Richard Harris singing an album of all Jimmy Webb songs including *MacArthur Park*. At the 1968 Grammy Awards, Webb accepted awards for *By the Time I Get to Phoenix*, *Wichita Lineman*, and *MacArthur Park*.

In the 1970s, Webb continued to write songs for numerous

well-known singing artists and released albums of himself performing his numbers.

From 1982 to 1992, Webb turned his focus from solo performing to larger-scale projects, such as film scores, Broadway musicals, and classical music. In 1982, he produced the soundtrack for the film *The Last Unicorn*, an animated children's tale, with the musical group America performing Webb's songs. That same year, he composed the soundtrack to all episodes of the TV series *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*.

Since 1993, Jimmy Webb produced four critically acclaimed solo albums — *Suspending Disbelief* in 1993, *Ten Easy Pieces* in 1996, *Twilight of the Renegades* in 2005, and *Just Across the River* in 2010. He has continued to expand his creative landscape to include musicals, commercial jingles, and film scores.

In the 2000s, Webb has talked more openly about his return to the Christian faith. In an October 2007 interview Webb was explicit about his renewed faith:

I couldn't write a song without God. Sure, I could hack out hackneyed phrases and clichés, but to write anything meaningful, I have to be in tune with God. He is the great source, my inspiration, the current that I have to connect to. Sadly, I've not always used the gift He's given me—the answered prayer—as best as I could or should have. I've made mistakes. I've done things I wish I hadn't done.

In 2011, Webb was unanimously elected Chairman of the Songwriters Hall of Fame, replacing Hal David who retired after ten years in that position.