

CHELY WRIGHT

b. October 25, 1970

AWARD-WINNING COUNTRY MUSIC STAR

"I hear the word 'tolerance'... I am gay, and I am not seeking to be 'tolerated.' One tolerates a toothache, rush-hour traffic, an annoying neighbor with a cluttered yard. I am not a negative to be tolerated."

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Chely Wright is an award-winning country singer-songwriter and LGBT activist. She is widely regarded as the first major American country music artist to come out publicly.

Raised in a musical family in Wellsville, Kansas, Wright started piano lessons at age 4. She knew she was a lesbian by age 9. Growing up Christian in a small farming town, she believed her feelings were "sinful" and kept her sexuality secret long into adulthood.

Wright always dreamed of becoming a country star. She started to sing professionally when she was 11. In her senior year of high school, she began performing in the

Ozark Jubilee, a music show in Branson, Missouri. After graduation, Wright sang as part of a production in Opryland USA, a theme park outside of Nashville.

Wright's career took off in her mid 20s. In 1995 she earned the Academy of Country Music Award for Top New Female Vocalist on the merits of her debut album, "Woman in the Moon." Some of her most famous hits include "Shut Up and Drive" (1997), "I Already Do" (1998) and "Single White Female" (1999), which reached No. 1 on the country music charts. The song earned her several award nominations, most notably for top female artist and best music video.

Wright's 2001 album, "Never Love You Enough," reached the Top 5. Her 2005 ballad "The Bumper of My SUV" was nominated for Best Patriotic Song by the Country Weekly Awards. She performed it while entertaining U.S. troops in Kuwait, Iraq and Germany. By 2006 Wright had grown severely depressed and suicidal. No longer able to hide her sexuality, she poured her soul into a memoir, "Like Me: Confessions of a Heartland Country Singer." When the book was published in May 2010, Wright came out on NBC's "The Today Show" and in People.com. Her widely publicized coming out was chronicled in the award-winning documentary, "Wish Me Away."

Wright founded the LIKEME® Organization to promote LGBT equality and prevent bullying in classrooms. The organization expanded to offer college scholarships to young LGBT advocates, and in 2012 opened the LIKEME Lighthouse, a community center for LGBT youth in Kansas City, Missouri.

Wright has released eight studio albums and more than 19 singles. She continues to perform and advocate for LGBT rights. Among other honors, she has received a Lambda Literary Award for her autobiography; the Family Equality Council's award for Outstanding Work as an LGBT Activist; and the Black Tie Media Award.

Wright married Lauren Blitzer in 2011. They are the parents of identical twins.



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