

SPECIAL REPORT: WHAT IT'S REALLY LIKE TO WORK FOR A SUPERSTAR

COUNTRYMUSIC

MARCH 2002

GARTH BROOKS

Inside the mind of country's most perplexing megastar

OVER **40** REVIEWS

TRACE ADKINS
Tells it like it is

REBA MCENTIRE
TV mom

DAVID BALL
Rides again

The real
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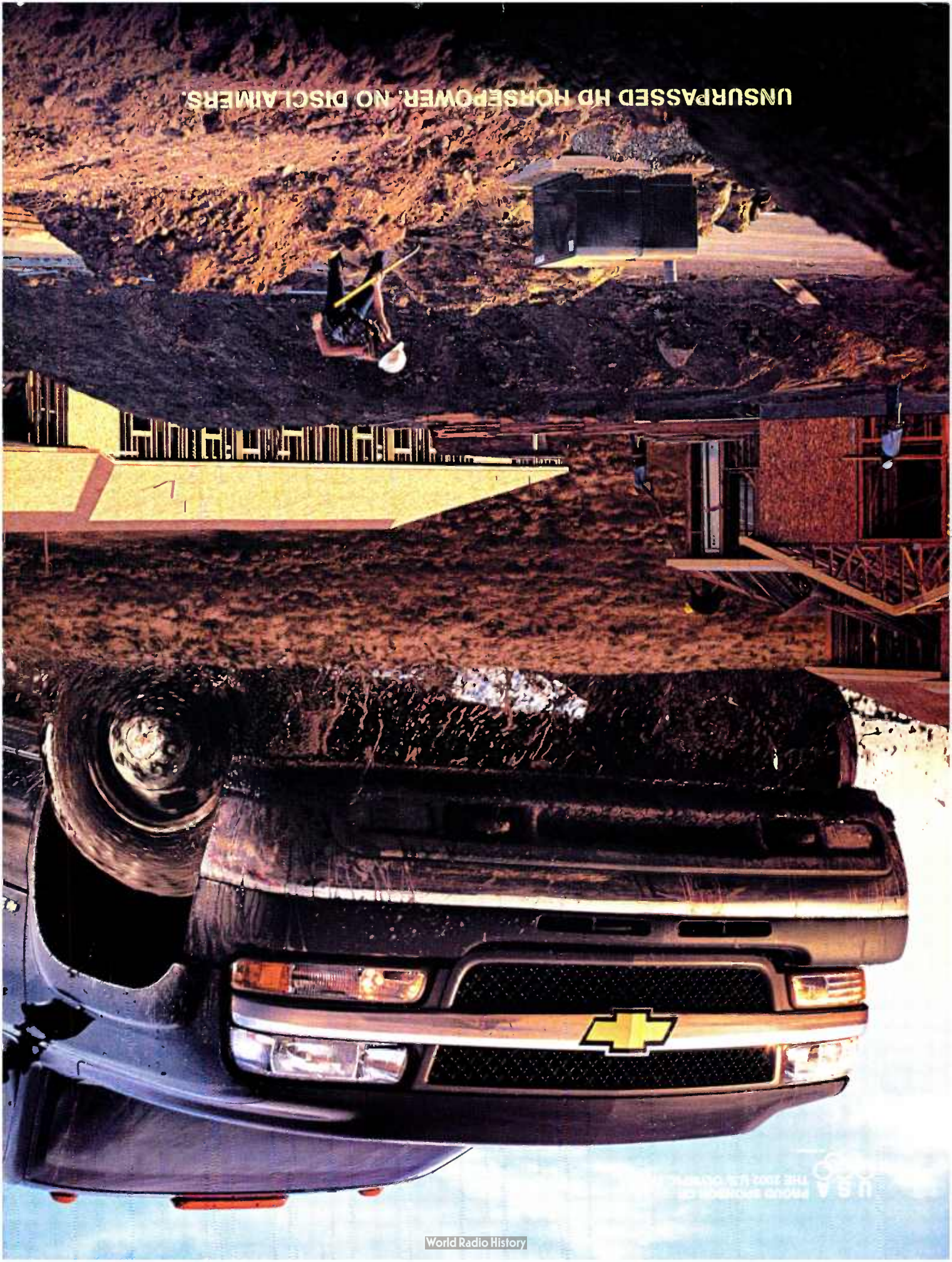


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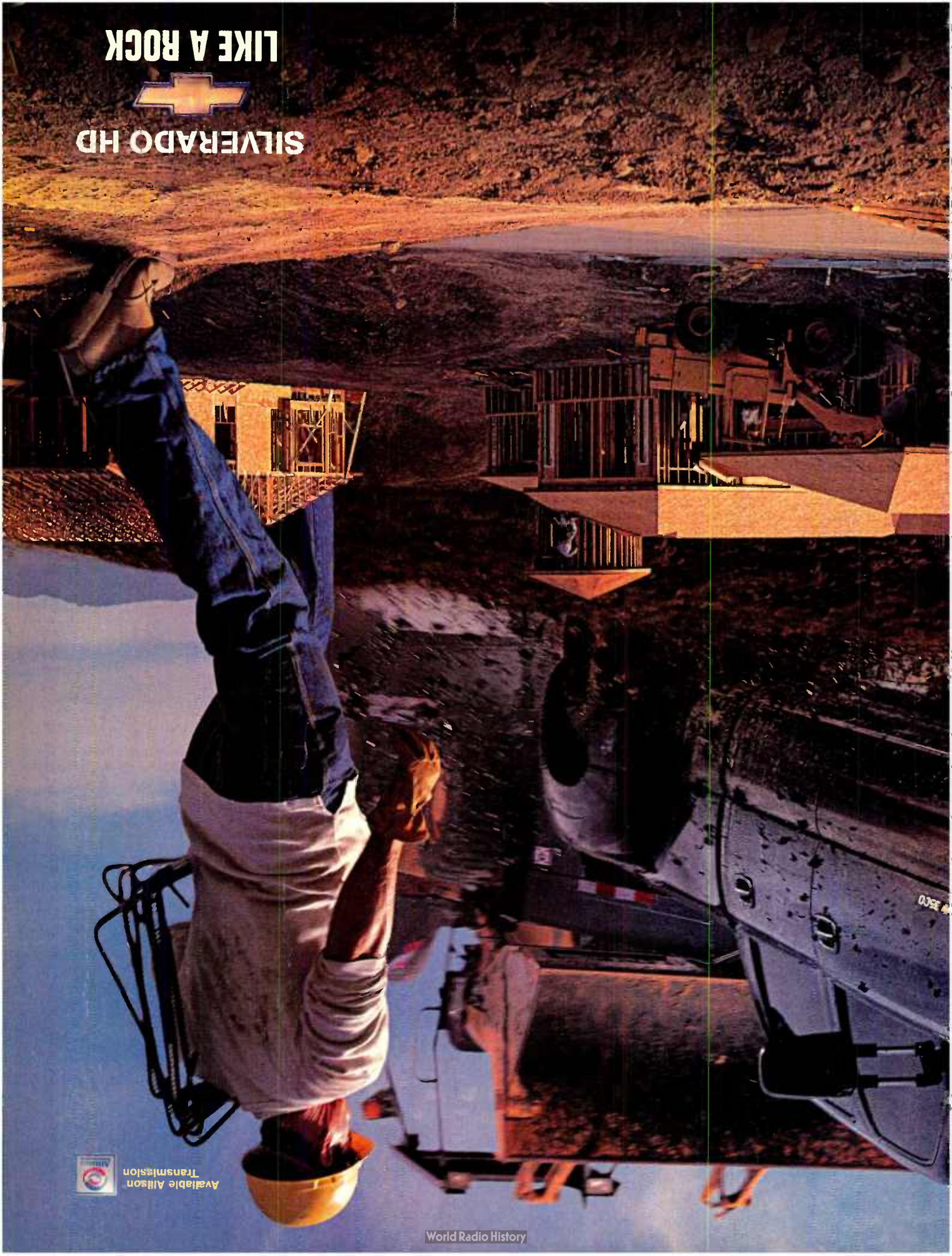


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COVER

22 Solving The Garth Puzzle

Who is Garth Brooks? His supporters see an American icon who stays grounded despite his incredible fame. His detractors see a power-hungry egomaniac who calculates every emotion he displays and bulldozes past all who get in his way. Could they both be right?

By *Alanna Nash*

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Though they provide the foundation no star can live without, members of side bands toil in obscurity. What unsung personal sacrifices do they make? Hard truths about life on the road.

By *Nancy Burns*

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If a picture paints a thousand words, then a meaningful lyric conjures just as many pictures. *Country Music* pairs classic songs with powerful images of life in America.

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A singer from Oklahoma reaches the top of her profession, then keeps going. She turns to movies – and wins praise for her acting. She's invited to Broadway – and is the toast of the town. Now Reba McEntire sets her sights on television. Her self-named sitcom looks like a hit, making the redhead the most versatile superstar in modern music.

By *Tom Roland*

74 A Country Boy Can Survive

Like the dogged protagonist in his hit song "I'm Tryin'," Trace Adkins handles whatever comes his way, whether enduring record label maneuvering or debating showbiz liberals.

By *Miriam Pace Longino*

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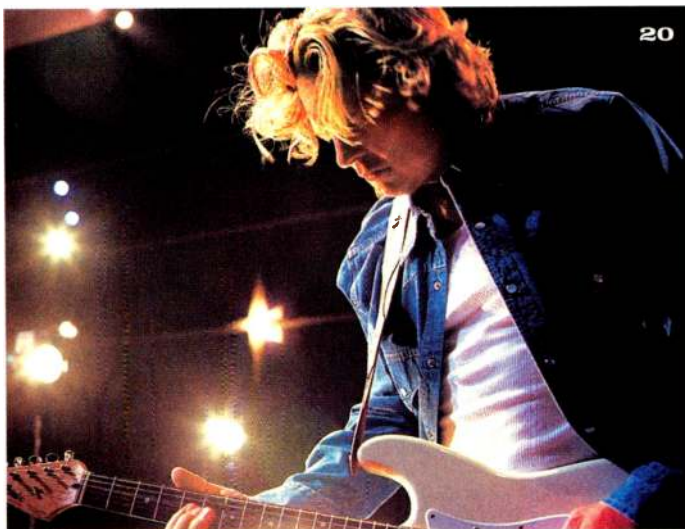
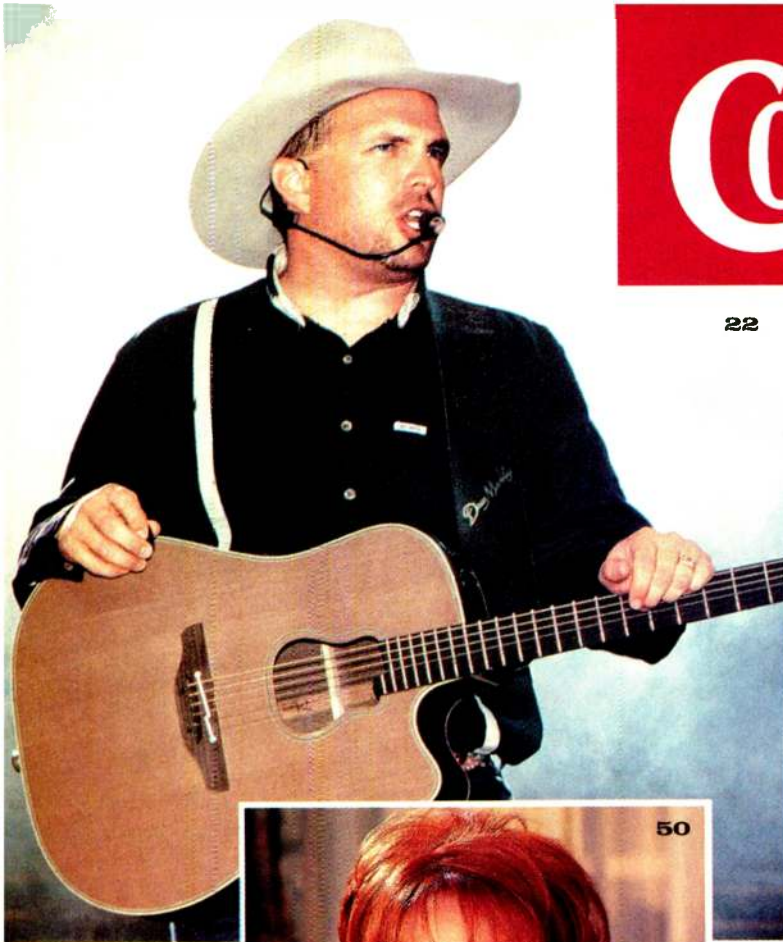
When Dan Tyminski wailed "I Am A Man Of Constant Sorrow," he never imagined what would come next. Multiplatinum sales and a CMA Award overwhelmed the unassuming singer/musician who plays with Alison Krauss in Union Station. Everyone agrees it couldn't have happened to a nicer guy.

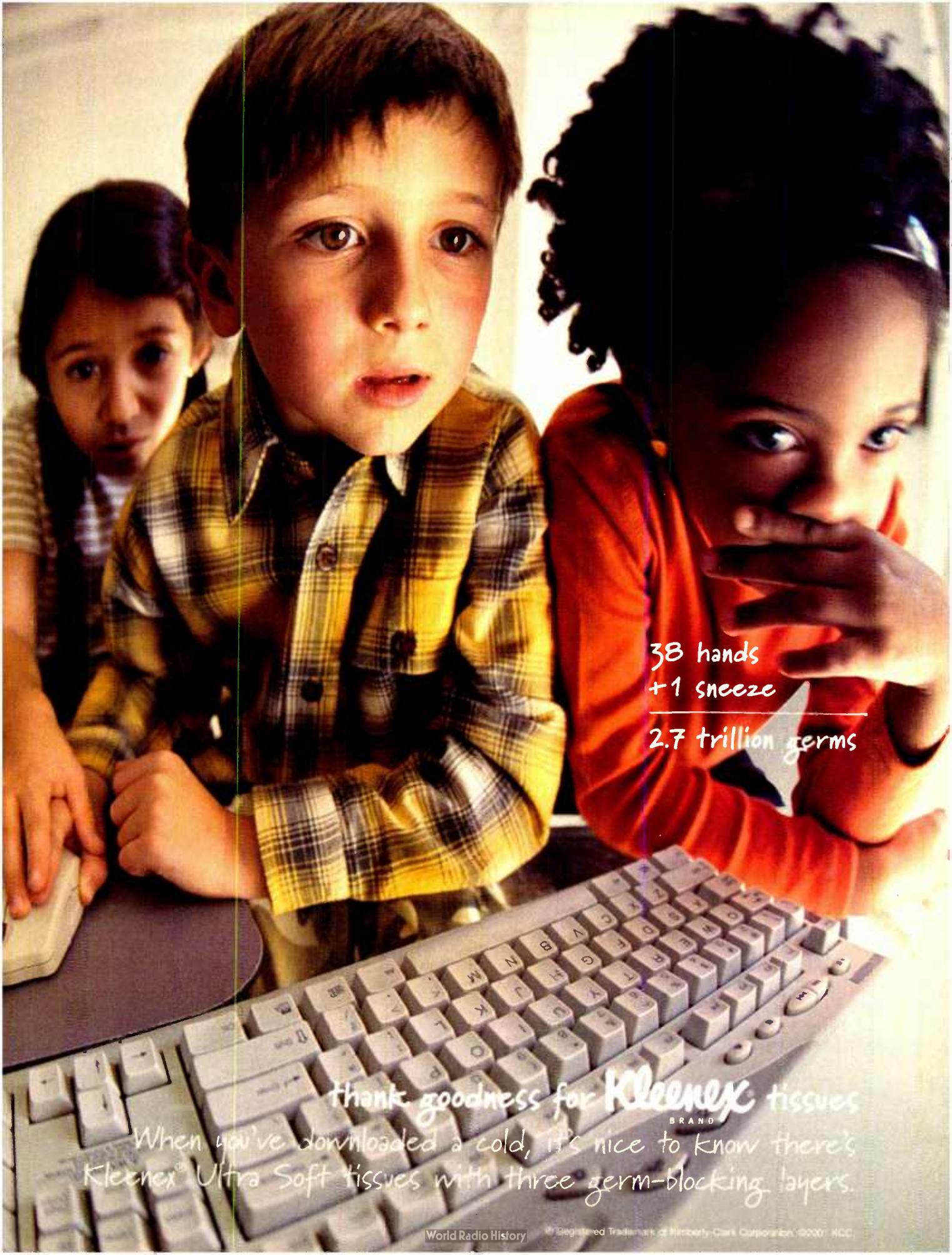
By *Jack Hurst*

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Years of experience told David Ball that he had just heard a hit song. With his major label deal a few years behind him most experts would've said he didn't have a chance to see it through. But a poignant tale of a Vietnam soldier soon had Ball riding high again, with "Private Malone."

By *Geoffrey Himes*





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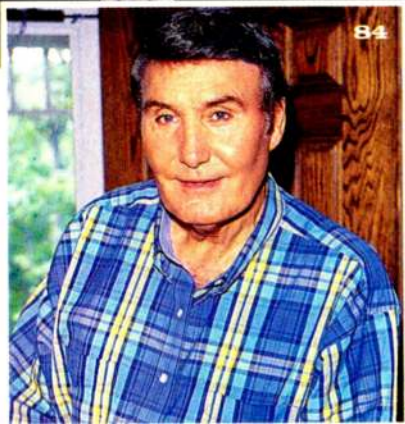
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SARA EVANS "BORN TO FLY"
BILLY GILMAN "ONE VOICE"
LONESTAR "WITH ME"
MARTINA McBRIDE "THERE YOU ARE"
MONTGOMERY GENTRY "SHE COULDN'T CHANGE ME"
JOHN MICHAEL MONTGOMERY "THE LITTLE GIRL"
TRICK PONY "ON A NIGHT LIKE THIS"
KENNY ROGERS "BUY ME A ROSE"
BLAKE SHELTON "AUSTIN"
TRAVIS TRITT "IT'S A GREAT DAY TO BE ALIVE"
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TURNING PAGES

I have been a subscriber to *Country Music* for some time now and have always liked it. I noticed in the past year that the magazine content took a turn. It became more true country, and I have to tell you I love it. I realize it doesn't have the glitz it had before (with the centerfolds, etc.). There is more concentration on the original country era, as well as current entertainers who are trying to maintain the original country style. I agree with many that country music has gone more mainstream and has lost its country-ness. It is people like Alan Jackson, Charlie Daniels, George Strait, Randy Travis and others who keep it in the traditional vein.

The layout of the magazine is fantastic as well. The diversity is refreshing. Thanks for a great magazine, and keep up the good work.

LINDA O'KEEFE

MOUNTAIN RANCH, CALIFORNIA

THAT JONES BOY

Thank you for putting George Jones on the cover of *Country Music* (December/January), and for the wonderful write-up of him. George Jones was always one of my favorite singers. I wish they would play his music on the radio more often. He's still a great singer.

MARION VOLKER

WEBSTER, WISCONSIN



LETTERS



BR549

TAPHIE ARROYO

Your story about George Jones, the living legend, was excellent. I have been a fan of his for 42 years. I am one of many real country music fans who have stopped listening to the radio because they don't play true country music like George's anymore. His last two CDs, *Cold Hard Truth* and *The Rock* were fantastic, but they received no airplay. I wish radio would wake up and play what the real country music fans want to hear. George Jones is country music. Let's keep it country.

CHAR KNORR
MINOOKA, ILLINOIS

CHANGING LANES?

Thanks for including the article on BR549 (*December/January*). It isn't often that so much ink is dedicated to praising this truly talented group. I do, however, take issue with the notion that their new "mainstream image might better fit with the new middle-of-the-road sound."

Middle of the road? While their latest album had a more polished sound, the band remains firmly on the dusty *shoulder* of the road, trying to thumb a ride on country radio stations. I tried to get stations to play their stirring rendition of "A Little Good News" after the September 11 attacks, only to be greeted by that old Anne Murray chestnut. One station even admitted that their copy of the BR549 CD was locked in a cabinet! Fans all over the country have

requested BR549 songs, only to be told BR549 is too "experimental" for country radio.

Experimental? Like cloning humans, ice-pick lobotomies or the vocal stylings of Yoko Ono? Maybe they are referring to the fact that the guys from BR549 actually play instruments, write songs, have exceptional talent, have two lead singers who graciously complement each other with awesome harmony, put on amazing live shows and take time to talk to the fans. These days, I guess that could be termed "experimental."

Call them "experimental," call them "retro." Just don't call them "middle of the road."

JENNY SUE BRADSHAW
GREENFIELD, INDIANA

I was so happy to see an article about one of my favorites, BR549. Hyphen or no hyphen, I love those guys. I did not buy their CDs for their clothes but for the great music. What a refreshing change from most of the crap we hear on the radio.

SOLLENGE ST. DENIS
OTTAWA, CANADA

DISSED MISS

I was happy to read Andrew Barbay's letter (*October/November*) about the Carter Sisters not being considered for the Country Music Hall of Fame. The original Carter Family - A.P., Sarah, and Mother

CONTRIBUTORS

Meet this issue's esteemed guest stars

Jack Hurst, who profiles award-winning singer-guitarist Dan Tyminski in this issue, thought Alison Krauss & Union Station were the most artful aggregation in Nashville years before *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* made them mar-quee names. A veteran journalist, Hurst covered entertainment for the *Chicago Tribune* and *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. He was the first full-time music reporter at *The Tennessean*, and the initial Nashville contributing editor for then-New York-based *Country Music* magazine.



LARRY HILL



COURTESY BOB OERHMAN

Patsy Bruce never met a field she didn't conquer. She co-wrote several of country's greatest hits, including "Texas When I Die," "When You Fall In Love Everything's A Waltz," and "Mammas Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up To Be Cowboys." She's been a casting director for such

films as *Urban Cowboy* and *This is Elvis* and she produced the TNN special *SoulMates*. She currently writes a column for the Nashville daily *City Paper* and is penning a book. She also owns an event management company, Events Unlimited, and a sports and Vegas-style games company, Casino Games Unlimited.

Once known as the Johnny Carson of cable, popular TV host **Ralph Emery** began interviewing country stars in 1957 at Nashville's WSM radio. He hosted TV's long-running *Nashville Now* and, before that, *The Ralph Emery Show*. In 1991 he became a best-selling author with *Memories*, then followed with *More Memories* and *The View From Nashville*. Our *Journal* cover story on Patsy Cline is taken from his latest book, *50 Years Down A Country Road*.



COURTESY TNN



Nancy Burns, who writes our special report on the role of concert bands, is an award-winning technical writer who left her job with a major computer company to pursue a career as a singer, voice-over artist and freelance writer. Her articles have appeared in *Working Mother*, medical publications and various newspapers, including the *Boston Herald*. This is her first article for *Country Music*.

LETTERS

Maybelle – established country music in America. Although many others followed, had it not been for the Carter Sisters (daughters of Mother Maybelle), country music in its purest form would not have continued to survive. I agree with Mr. Barbay that June, Anita and Helen should have been inducted into the hall long ago. There are many of us who still appreciate country in the purest form. I hardly hear any of it on the radio anymore, and I have difficulty creating a taste for what I do hear, including the *Grand Ole Opry*.

ROBERT BERTRAND
GREENVILLE, ALABAMA

DERAILERS DELIGHT

I enjoyed the picture and write-up on The Deraillers (*December/January*). Please do a more in-depth profile on them in a future issue. They are the best thing since Buck Owens.

GLENN JONES
NEWPORT, TENNESSEE

HIGH ARCHES

Your pan of Garth Brooks' cover of Billy Joel's gem "Shameless" (*December/January*) used the word "flat-footed." Is your radio broken? Garth has brought more people to country music than anybody, ever! His rendition of "Shameless" alone

converted millions. Perhaps you should write your own song (write about what you know) and title it "Jealous."

DARRELL KEITH JONES
ELIZABETH CITY, NORTH CAROLINA

GENE AND "ABILENE"

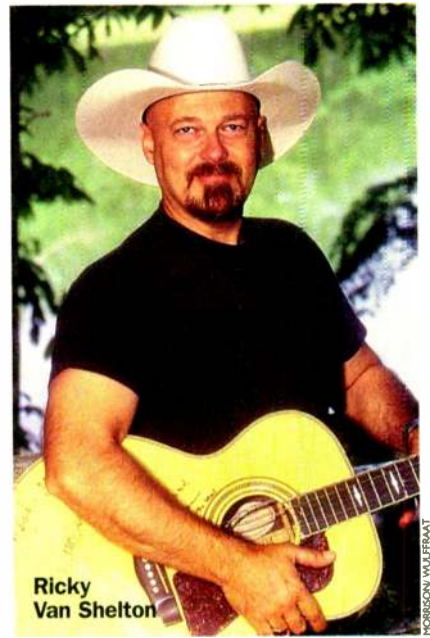
I am writing to thank Rick Pretreycik (and Gene Parsons as well) for crediting Bob Gibson as the composer of "Abilene" in the article about Parsons (*December/January*). The song is mentioned frequently, but it is extremely rare to see Gibson properly recognized for writing this classic.

JENNY ZIV
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

TOBY'S TOPS

I was so excited about seeing Toby Keith on your cover (*October/November*). He makes me feel happy even when I'm down and out. I have a 7-year-old autistic grandson whom I am raising, and he just loves Toby. He sings almost all of his songs and keeps a copy of your magazine with Toby on the cover with him all the time. He told his teacher that he wanted to be Toby Keith when he grows up. Thanks again for the Toby coverage. Let's see some more.

PAMELA CHAPMAN
MOORE, OKLAHOMA



Ricky Van Shelton

HOBBSON WULFRAT

WHERE'S RICKY?

I was glad to see a mention of Ricky Van Shelton in "This Date In Country Music" (*December/January*), citing his first No. 1 hit and also his January birthday. But I was a bit upset when the calendar section didn't acknowledge the anniversary of the day he joined the Grand Ole Opry in June. Then in your readers' survey in your August/September issue, I could not believe you didn't have him in the list of favorite country music performers! Please do not overlook him. He continues to be one of the best artists in country music. He may do things a bit more his way now, but every time I hear him sing, I wonder why we don't hear him more on radio. We recently saw him again in concert, and he just gets better all the time. Since he will be 50 next month, it would be nice to have an article in your magazine honoring him.

LORAIN KEEHN
KEARNEY, NEBRASKA



Toby Keith

HOBBSON WULFRAT

Have a comment? A complaint? A compliment? Send your letter by e-mail to letters@countrymusicmagazine.com or by regular mail to Country Music magazine, 118 16th Ave. S., Suite 230, Nashville, TN 37203. Mark envelope: Attention: Letters. We will not print any letters that do not contain a name and contact address. We reserve the right to edit.

COUNTRYMUSIC

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

We're planning a couple of new things for your *Country Music* magazine in the next couple of issues, and we need your input.

For starters, we're looking for high school students who are into country music. Do you know of any you'd recommend – or are *you* one? I can't divulge too many details yet, but we're working on a new column for the magazine built around young people, and we're looking far and wide for country-loving teens – especially groups of teens from the same high school. If you can help us make a *Country Music* "teen connection," please send a letter to "Teen Country" at the address below; be sure to include a phone number at which you can be reached during the daytime.

Another feature we're going to be starting soon will give you the opportunity to be published in the Reviews section of the magazine. If you've listened to a new or recent country CD, send us a brief mini-review (no more than 100 words), and we may print it. You can also write about a current country song you've heard on the radio. Be honest – did you love it or hate it? How did it compare to the artist's other work? Was it worth the money you spent to buy it, or was it a disappointment? Send your mini-reviews to "Reader Reviews" at the address below, and make sure you tell us your city and state.

We've got a couple of other things up our editorial sleeve, things we'll unveil this summer that I hope you'll enjoy as much as we think you'll enjoy them! More about them later.

Until then, keep reading ... and let me know if you've got any ideas for Teen Country or if you'd like to share your thoughts on current CDs or songs.

I'm anxious to hear from you!

Yours in country music,



Neil Pond
Editor in Chief



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THE INSIDER

BY HAZEL SMITH



Can Garth be serious about quitting?

PHOTO: VALLEY MORNING STAR, BIC MAGAZINE

MAGIC MAN

Watching **Garth Brooks** perform on his CBS specials was like watching a 2-year-old let out of a playpen. Onstage he comes alive, giving out energy and love and getting it right back from the audience. His smile becomes a maniacal laugh as he sings from the heart to touch his fans.

I honestly cannot comprehend how this unbelievable performer, who obviously enjoys performing so much, can give that up to go back to his playpen. Lord knows, as a mother and grandmother, I respect his decision. But I will miss this man's magic, and I am so selfish that I want him around for me and the fans.

GUITAR MAN

In the early '60s, the distorted guitar sound was invented by accident on a **Marty Robbins** session at Columbia Studios in Nashville. A tube went out during the recording of "Don't Worry." The guitarist on the session, **Grady Martin**, played the song's great guitar riff anyway, and

everyone liked the raw, rough sound so much that they kept it. Later a good tube replaced the bad one, but whenever they wanted that distorted sound again, they would simply put a blown tube into the amp.

A few years later, a soldier stationed 70 miles up the road at Fort Campbell, Ky., would come to Nashville and follow Martin, his hero, around Nashville studios and nightclubs. By this time a workable distortion had been invented by pairing two amps and removing the tube in one. The soldier was so impressed with this new sound that he later took it to new heights.

The soldier's name was **PFC Jimi Hendrix**.

Grady Martin passed away on Dec. 3, but his innovative ways as a guitarist will resonate for ages.

COUNTRY HARMONIZERS

"The Jordanares are not country," I've heard it said, but whoever made that statement reminds me of some of these youngsters in today's media. They may be cute, but

they don't know squat about the history of country music. **The Jordanares** were Grand Ole Opry members long before they became world famous backup singers for Elvis Presley.

As Opry members, the Jordanares used to sing all the commercials. Don't want to tell my age, but I remember the quartet harmonizing about Jefferson Island Salt so beautifully that a non-salt user would want to buy a case. Matter of fact, Elvis heard the group singing on the *Opry*, and that's how he came to hire them.

NO FAKING IT

Lee Ann Womack, the current CMA Female Vocalist of the Year, proved why she won the award recently when she refused to pre-record her version of "The Star-Spangled Banner" and then lip-sync her performance on live TV. "There was no way I was going to get up in front of the state of Texas, let alone this whole country, and lip-sync," exclaims our heroine. "If you grow up in Texas, football and the Dallas Cowboys are the biggest deal

after your mama's dressing and veggie casseroles."

Doing the national anthem on network TV was a nerve-racking big deal for Womack. Powers that be did all they could to put the singer at ease, but the notion of lip-syncing was more than little Ms. Texas could handle.

FAMILY AFFAIR

In a vote of five to two, the Kentucky Supreme Court cleared violation charges brought against **John Michael Montgomery** by his stepmother, **Barbara Montgomery**. Barbara was incensed when John Michael used his late father Harold Montgomery's images and gravestone in a 1997 video, "I Miss You A Little." She took the case all the way to the state supreme court! The court concluded in favor of John Michael, declaring he did not violate his dad's estate's rights of privacy.

John Michael loved and respected his dad so much. He played music, hunted and fished with his dad. His dad was his hero. It's so sad this had to happen, but it's good that it all turned out in his favor.

ADMITTING A MISTAKE

On a hot July day, **Trace Adkins** was stopped in the small town of Nolensville, Tenn., for speeding. He had an open bottle of beer in his truck and was arrested for speeding and violation of the state's open-container law. At the trial, Trace pled guilty before a Williamson County judge, who sentenced the

singer to 11 months and 29 days probation and 48 hours in jail, which he served without complaint. His driver's license was suspended for a year, and he was fined \$350.

It grieves me to print this, but it's news. Let it be known, however, that Trace Adkins is a friend of mine and a good man who made a mistake doing something that too many people do – drinking a beer while driving home from working in the hot sun. I'm glad Trace admitted he was wrong, and I know that next time he'll wait until he gets home before cooling off.

ROYAL TREATMENT

When **President and Mrs. Bush** journeyed to the army base in Fort Campbell, Ky., country music turned out to salute. Following a 10-year stint in the armed forces, singer **Craig Morgan** had been called back into service as a reservist, and he showed up to sing. So did **Sara Evans**, **SheDAISY**, **Phil Vassar** and **Carolyn Dawn Johnson**.

Evans planned to close her set with "God Bless America," but those servicemen and women of the 101st Airborne were screaming "No Place That Far," so she changed her tune. Backstage, Sara told the guest of honor, "Mr. President, we are praying for you." Answered Bush, "There is nothing more comforting to hear than that the entire country is praying."

Amen, brother. You ain't no burning Bush.

THE PRESIDENT SWINGS

When **President Bush** invited Russian President **Vladimir Putin** to his ranch for some down-home barbecue and Texas swing music, all the big national network reporters kept me in stitches because not a one of them had a clue as to what Bush meant by "Texas swing music." Leave it to **Don Imus**, the undeniable king of NYC morning radio. As shown on the MSNBC telecast of his radio

show, Imus said, "Texas swing – that's **Bob Wills** music!" Praise be, somebody knew! Lordy-fiddle, steel, a dance floor and "San Antonio Rose." Sounds like heaven to me.

SUPERSTAR TRACK

Ending the year with a sold-out show in his home state of Tennessee, **Kenny Chesney** knew his Fall Of The Greatest Hits Tour was more successful than he'd imagined. Almost all 21 of Kenny Chesney's concerts drew capacity crowds. Declares the singer, "There was a moment during the last show, right before we went into 'What I Need To Do,' when I was on the riser and I looked out and I saw all those



people out there cheering, and I just kinda got lost. All I could think of was sitting on my little chair with my guitar and tip jar, playing requests while people smoked Marlboros and ate Mexican food. It kinda freaked me out ... In some ways it just seems like a moment, but it took 10 years to get here."

No two ways about it, Chesney is a train on a superstar track.

TWIN KIN

Sony blew a goodbye kiss to **The Kinleys**, who are looking for a new label home. But their fans can expect to hear from them again. The identical twins,

Jennifer and Heather, have been in the studio for several months working on a new album with super-producer **Scott Hendricks**, who helped launch the careers of **Faith Hill**, **John Michael Montgomery** and **Brooks & Dunn**. And Jennifer is pregnant.

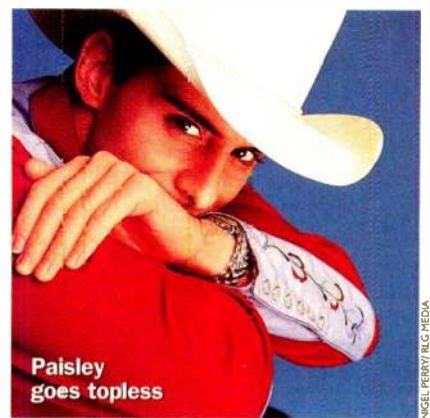
SMART YET DUMB

I cannot for the life of me decide if the folks at *People* magazine are smart or dumb. When they named **Brad Paisley** as one of the 21 sexiest men alive, I thought they sure were smart for a bunch of Yankees. However, in the same article they called the *Grand Ole Opry* non-hip. Them's fighting words, enough to make saints like **Roy Acuff** and **Bill Monroe** turn over in their graves.

Speaking of Brad, he's now going topless onstage! He starts his show topless – i.e., sans hat – and midway through the set, a band member slips a hat on his head. He can't decide if the girls like his hair or his hat. **Pat White**, matriarch of **The Whites**, informed me in the shadow of the church Sunday morning that she was a Texan and she knows hats, and Brad is a hat wearer. Frankly, I don't pay nearly as much attention to Brad's hat as I do his briches.

TRAVIS NO TROUBLE

Nashville's Havana Lounge hosted a platinum-sales party for **Travis Tritt** – the man who **Louise** (Mrs. Earl) **Scruggs** calls the best male singer in country music. Of course, he's much more than just a singer; he's also a songwriter, musician, producer, actor, entertainer and husband. Travis is so busy these days that one no longer hears any bad thoughts – much less wild stories – about the one-time wild Georgia child. That his current album, *Down The Road I Go*, has sold more



Paisley goes topless

than a million copies is cause for celebrating, but he's also got chart-topping singles and sold-out concerts, too. Now I hear he's gonna star in a movie, but he's not quite ready to talk about it. The cute party invitation suggested the singer is protecting Nashville's past while shaping its future. That's what happens when a boy is not ashamed to pick a little bluegrass and not afraid to add a dash of Southern rock for good measure.

CREDIT DESERVED

Let me thank the Honorable **Mac Collins**, who represents the great state of Georgia in the House of Representatives in Washington, D.C. Collins entered the lyrics for **Alan Jackson's** song "Where Were You (When The World Stopped Turning)" into the Congressional Record. Collins told the political body, "On Sept. 11, 2001, our nation suffered a cataclysmic attack of unprecedented proportion. More than 6,000 Americans lost their lives in less than one-hour's time. In the two months following that tragic day, our citizens have struggled for ways to accept and deal with such a horrific loss. We have held candlelight vigils and all-night prayer groups and talked of memorials and rebuilding. We have launched a major military campaign to seek justice for those victims.

"But one young man, whose name is known to many of

this body and many of the American people, has found a way to genuinely memorialize those victims and that day in song. Alan Jackson was born in Newnan, Ga., in 1958. Since that time he has grown into one of the nation's most loved country music stars. Some have called him the conscience of Nashville for his actions and the type of music he makes.

"On Nov. 7 at the CMA Awards, Alan sang a song he wrote, which more than any other that I have heard, expressed the wide range of emotions experienced on Sept. 11, 2001. I would like to read those lyrics to you now."

The fine congressman then entered Alan's wonderfully moving lyrics into history – where it belongs.

After reading the song, Collins added, "I would like to take this opportunity to commend and congratulate my former constituent, a great American who has used his gifts as a songwriter and performer to lift the American spirit in this great pursuit of justice ... Alan Jackson has crafted a thoughtful memorial to the victims of Sept. 11 and serves as an example of how all Americans can help heal our nation from the wounds we suffered on that tragic day."

Amen again.

AN OUTLAW RECOVERS

Even after recent surgery to help circulation problems in his leg caused by diabetes, **Waylon Jennings** had his foot amputated in a hospital in Phoenix, where he now resides with his wife, **Jessi Colter**. But Waylon is as tough as they come, and he says he's recovering well and expects to be back performing this summer. He's always overcome his setbacks, but still my heart goes out to Waylon and

Jessi. Here's to seeing him back onstage soon.

O BROTHER

Every country fan surely has heard about the fine *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* soundtrack by now. But most of us don't know how it came about, so I set out to find out. First, I spoke with Dobro expert **Jerry Douglas**, who filled me in on the album's producer, **T-Bone Burnett**. "He has a reputation for not going mainstream, yet widening the spectrum to force radio to play music they normally ignore – that best describes T-Bone," Jerry says.

Burnett's connection with the *O Brother* producers/writers, the **Coen Brothers**, began when he served as producer of music for their film *The Big Lebowski*, their first major soundtrack. For *O Brother*, T-Bone leaned heavily on another acoustic music aficionado, **Denise Stiff**, who manages **Alison Krauss & Union Station** and **Gillian Welch & Dave Rawlings**. As the soundtrack proves, Stiff has her fingers in the pie and on the pulse of the music, since they recruited such outstanding musicians as **Ralph Stanley**, **The Cox Family**, **The Whites**, **Nashville Bluegrass Band**, **Fairfield Four**, **Norman Blake**, **Emmylou Harris**, **John Hartford**, the **Peasall Sisters** and all the other players who took part in the film's music.

STIFF PERSPECTIVE

In talking about her participation in *O Brother*, **Denise Stiff** relates how impressed she was as she watched **George Clooney** working on his Southern accent. Clooney had an uncle in Kentucky read the lines into a tape recorder. But every time the "g.d." word came up, he would say, "gosh darn." When the filming started, they had to

stop shooting several times to remind Clooney that "gosh darn" didn't get it. They told him he had to swear. So he did.

Both **Jerry Douglas** and **Denise** were impressed with how Clooney hung out with the band during the filming, proving once and for all that even a big-time movie star can be a nice guy.

KID ROCKS

Kid Rock likes roots music and was influenced by country and bluegrass, he says. He's listened a lot to the soundtrack of *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*, he says. Kid calls the CD amazing. Kid also says **Hank Williams Jr.** is like a father to him. The last I heard, **Hank Williams III** was wishing *his* daddy, **Hank Williams Jr.**, would be like a father to *him*.

TOP GAL

Didja know the top-selling female country singer in 2002 was none other than **Lee Ann Womack**?

PARADE

Brooks & Dunn's Kix Brooks and wife **Barbara** went to a parade in New York. You didn't know Brooks & Dunn were in a NYC parade? Well, they weren't, silly. They were watching – their 14-year-old

daughter was marching in the parade with the Brentwood High School Band. Flute-playing freshman **Molly**, like her mom, is a real beauty.

JERRY NOT CONTRARY

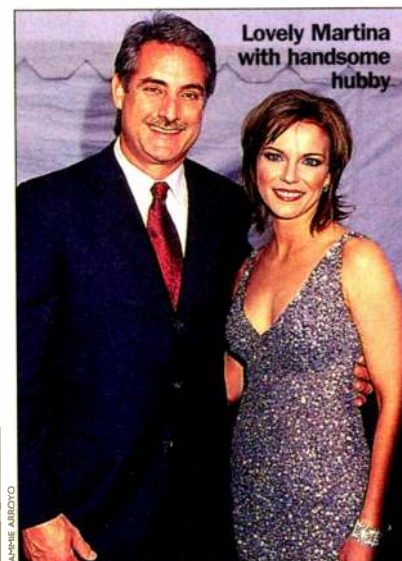
Speaking of **Jerry Douglas**, he hosted a benefit to help one of his Dobro-playing heroes, the great **Josh Graves**. For many years a musician with **Flatt & Scruggs**, the much-loved Graves has recently been enduring severe health problems, including the removal of a leg at the hip. Douglas organized a benefit show featuring the legendary **Earl Scruggs**, **The Whites**, **Alison Krauss** and **Blue Highway**. They drew a full house to the **Gibson Bluegrass Showcase** in Nashville and collected a large amount of money to defray **Josh's** medical costs. God bless **Josh Graves**, the man every Dobro player in the world learned from. Let's pray he doesn't lose his other leg.

That's not the only good deed by **Jerry Douglas** for one of his influences. The night Dobroist **Gene Wooten** died, Jerry went by the hospital and played **Wooten's** Dobro until **Wooten** went to sleep at 1 a.m. to awake no more. Jerry kept **Wooten's** picks.

The night that **Gene** died, Jerry used one of his picks on the CMA Awards to play Dobro on the award-winning "I Am A Man Of Constant Sorrow." And he played like an angel.

MARTINA'S CLAN

Wanna see what **Martina McBride's** hubby and daughters look like? Well just watch her video "Blessed" and get an eyeful of hubby **John** and children **Delaney** and **Emma** *



Lovely Martina with handsome hubby



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COUNTRY ON THE TOWN

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CLINT BLACK/THE DISNEYLAND RESORT

Live With Regis & Kelly & Clint

A CLINT BLACK had Regis Philbin and Kelly Ripa spellbound on a recent edition of *Live With Regis & Kelly*. The popular TV talk show was taped from Disneyland in California, where Clint performed some new tunes for his admiring hosts.



COURTESY SEAWORLD ORLANDO © 2002

The Wills Get Wet

◀ **MARK WILLS** and wife Kelly took a dip in Florida's Discovery Cove and found a delightful swimming partner, a dolphin named C.J. Discovery Cove, in Orlando, offers guests the chance to get wet and wild with dolphins and rays, snorkel with tropical fish and hand-feed exotic birds.



COURTESY DOWN SYNDROME ASSOC. OF MIDDLE TN

Down Home Country 2002

A calendar featuring individuals with Down Syndrome photographed with some of country music's greatest artists

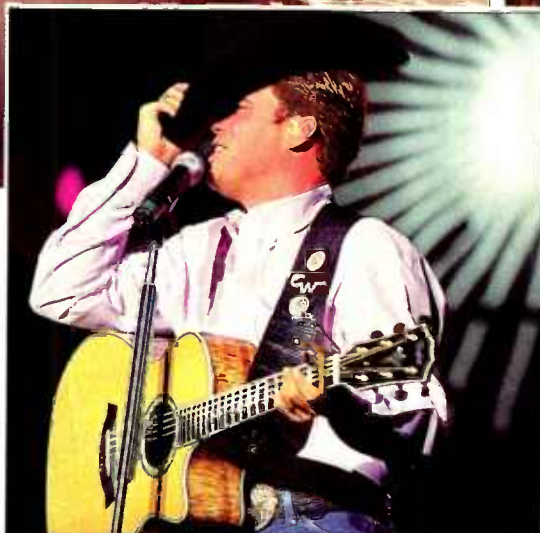
Down Home Dates

◀ **SARA EVANS, ALAN JACKSON, VINCE GILL** and other stars donated their time to benefit the Down Home Country 2002 calendar. The stars posed with children who suffer from Down syndrome, such as Evans' buddy Brian C. To order the Down Home Country 2002 calendar, contact Tina Swanson at (615) 599-1019.

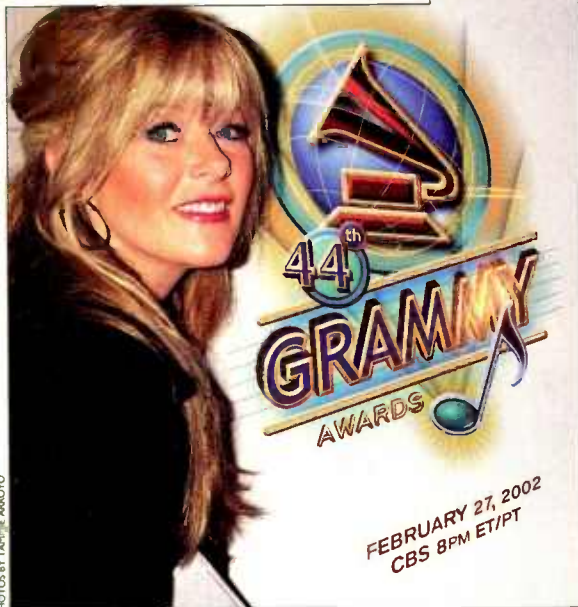


Rompin' At The Rodeo In Vegas

▲ The National Finals Rodeo in Las Vegas rounds up the top country talent for two wild weeks at many of the plush Glitter City hotels. **CLAY WALKER** (right) and **MARK CHESNUTT** (far right) were among the stars getting their rodeo grooves on, but no one lit it up quite like **CHRIS LEDOUX** and his fire-breathing guitar.



COUNTRY ON THE TOWN

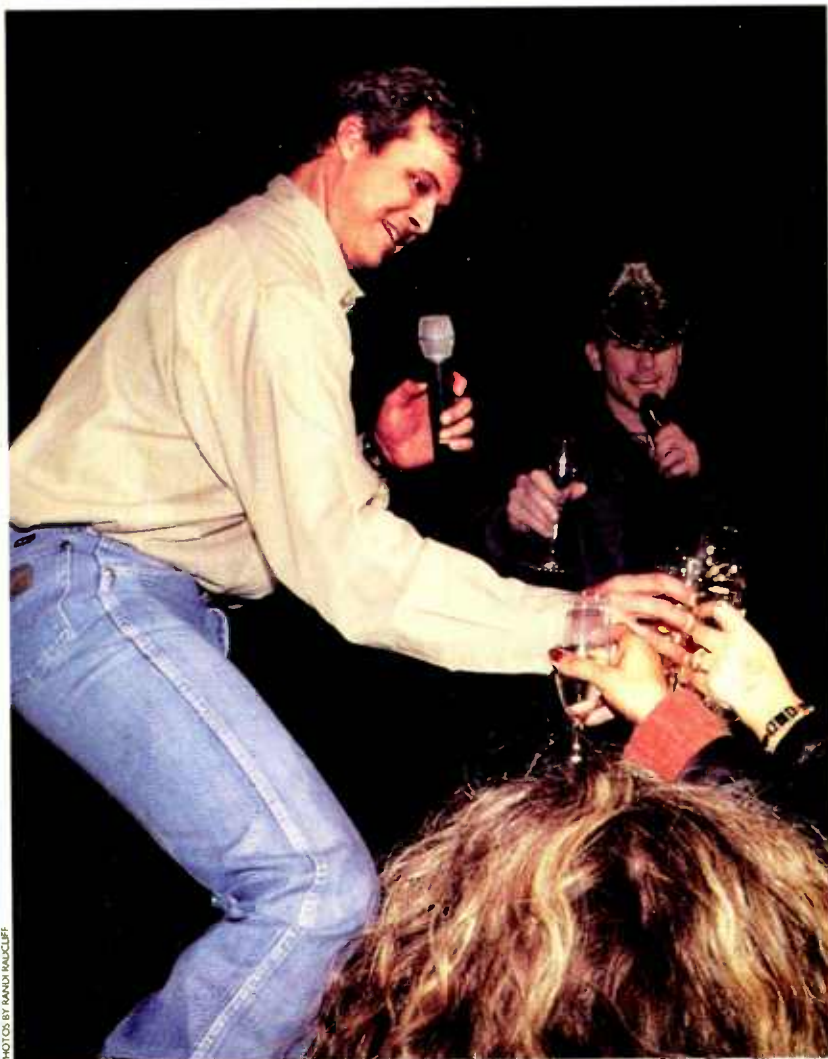


PHOTOS BY TAYLOR ARBOVO

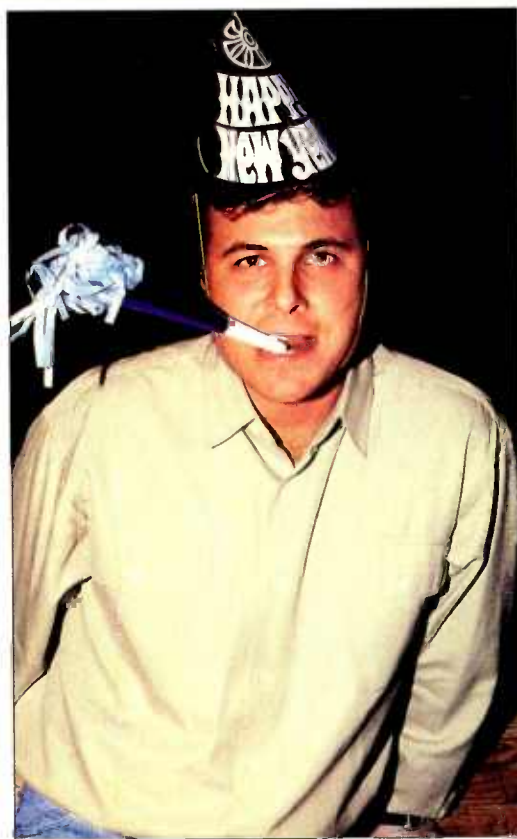


Going For Grammys

▲ **JAMIE O'NEAL** stood tall as country music's representative in announcing the nominees for the 2002 Grammy Awards. Later, she heard her own name called in the Best Country Vocal Performance, Female, category for "There Is No Arizona," then joined fellow stars JA Rule, Nelly Furtado and Stevie Nicks for a backstage photo op.



PHOTOS BY RANDY KNUDSEN



Shine On, Shane

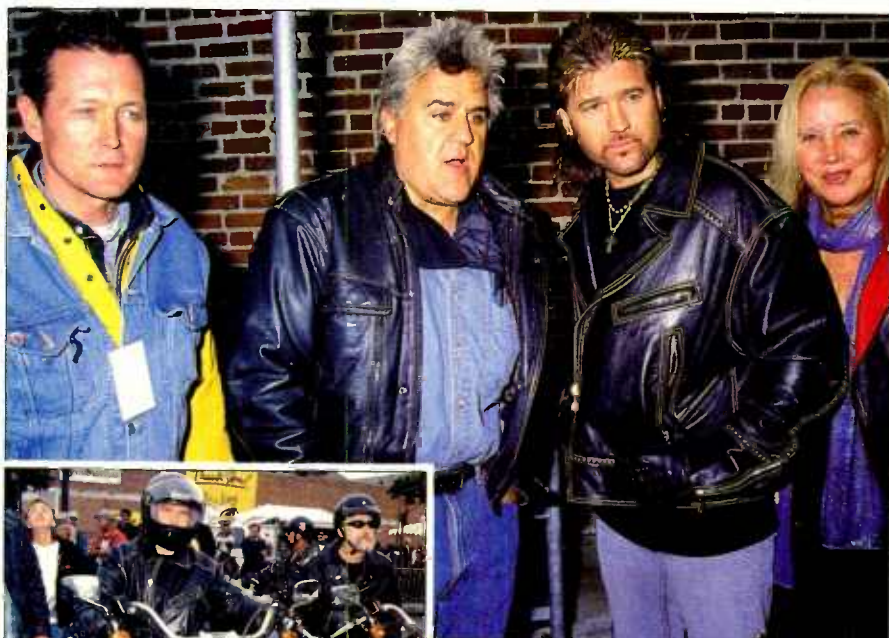
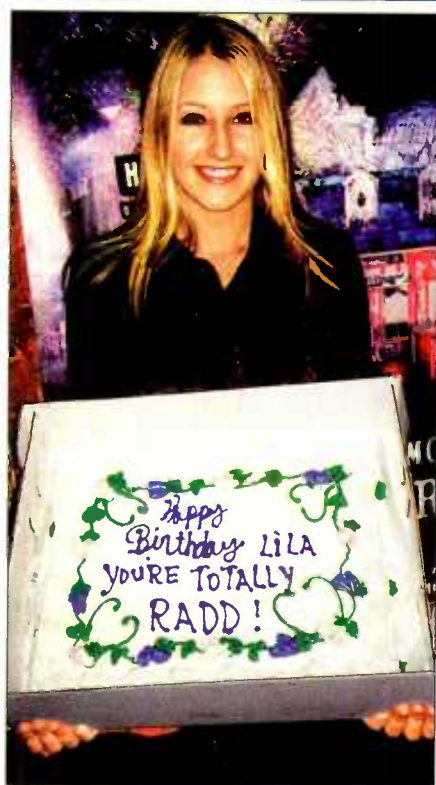
▲ **SHANE MINOR** helped Nashville partygoers ring in the New Year with a rousing New Year's Eve performance at the Wildhorse Saloon. He showed his party spirit by toasting the Wildhorse revelers at midnight, donning a festive hat and hamming it up with a noisemaker.



PHOTOS: COURTESY: LUCK MEDIA

Down Game A Birthday

A LILA MCCANN celebrated her continuing entry into adulthood at her 20th birthday party at the House of Blues in Los Angeles. She was a guest of the RADD – Recording Artists, Actors and Athletes Against Drunk Driving – organization and performed the Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young classic “Teach Your Children” in honor of the event. Funk rapper Warren G was on hand to help Lila celebrate her big day.



ROGER KARNIAD/CELEBRITY PHOTO

Riding For Charity

BILLY RAY CYRUS and pals – actor Robert Patrick, TV host Jay Leno and actress Sally Kirkland – revved up their big bikes for Love Ride 18 in Glendale, Calif., the world’s largest motorcycle fund-raising event. Before he got his motor running and headed out on the highway, Billy Ray honored American servicemen and women with his patriotic “Some Gave All” to kick off the event.



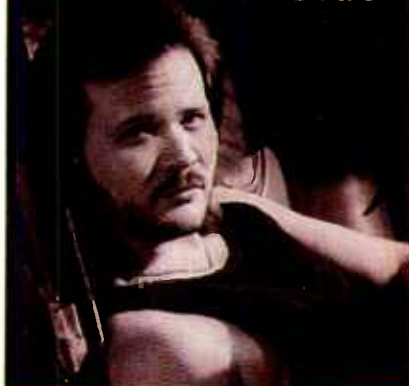
TILL JOHNSON/UP

EVERY STORY HAS TWO SIDES



TRAVIS TRITT

The Lovin' Side



16 songs from the heart including “Help Me Hold On” “More Than You’ll Ever Know” “Can I Trust You With My Heart”

TRAVIS TRITT

The Rockin' Side



16 more from the hip including “T-R-O-U-B-L-E” “Looking Out For Number One” “Put Some Drive In Your Country”



Man Of Steele

Jeffrey Steele takes a second shot at fame with his first solo album

Already hot as a songwriter, Steele now looks to catch fire as an artist.



Jeffrey Steele didn't think he would make another album. In fact, he didn't want to make another album. He no longer cared about getting a record contract or stepping into the spotlight. He'd been there, done that, and probably has a box full of T-shirts in the attic to show for it.

As the former lead singer of the California country band Boy Howdy, Steele had tasted country music success, if only briefly. In 1994, after nearly a decade of struggle, the band scored two Top 10 hits, "She'd Give Anything" and "They Don't Make Them Like That Anymore." But when the follow-up songs failed to gain attention, the group disbanded.

Steele may have been burned out on chasing stardom, but he wasn't ready to give up his career. In 1995, he moved his family from Los Angeles to Nashville. He continued under contract to Curb Records, the label that had signed Boy Howdy, but the company never released any of the solo recordings he created.

In the meantime, the brawny, blond singer garnered some major breaks as a songwriter, quickly gaining a reputation for penning some of the most driving and distinctive tunes in country music.

In the last three years, Steele has had nearly 60 songs recorded, including Tim McGraw's "The Cowboy In Me," Diamond Rio's "Unbelievable," LeAnn Rimes' "Big Deal" and Trace Adkins' "I'm Tryin'." Eventually, record executives began to notice the singer as well as the songs.

"I got a call one day from a guy at Sony saying, 'Man, we sure like the way these demos sound. You ever think about making another record?'" Steele replied, "Naw, not really. I'm happy doing what I'm doing. But thanks."

Sony persisted, persuading Steele to record a few tunes. Once in the studio, the singer remembered why he loved performing in the first place. When Sony responded positively to his initial recordings, the singer signed a contract and, working with coproducer Scott Baggett, recorded his spirited solo debut, *Somethin' In The Water*.

The album's 13 songs romp with a brash electricity and ram-paging tempo. Balancing the upbeat, high-energy arrangements are searing images of gritty reality: a gal smooching a musician on a 15-minute break in a back alley, a woman who takes off on an all-night Hollywood-to-Bakersfield motel lark packing only a bikini and a derriere tattoo, and a young mother who gives birth in a car's back seat.

Now that the album is out, Steele finds himself once again hawking his music by taking any performance he can get. He doesn't require a band, he says. He's happy to do a 10-minute opening stint on somebody else's show with just an acoustic guitar. Should *Somethin' In The Water* succeed where Boy Howdy failed, Steele will enthusiastically embrace the life he once walked away from.

"If we get a hit record, I'll be ready to go," he says. "I look forward to getting out there. I'm having so much fun now that I'm like, 'Wow, I gotta get this thing going.'"

— Jack Hurst

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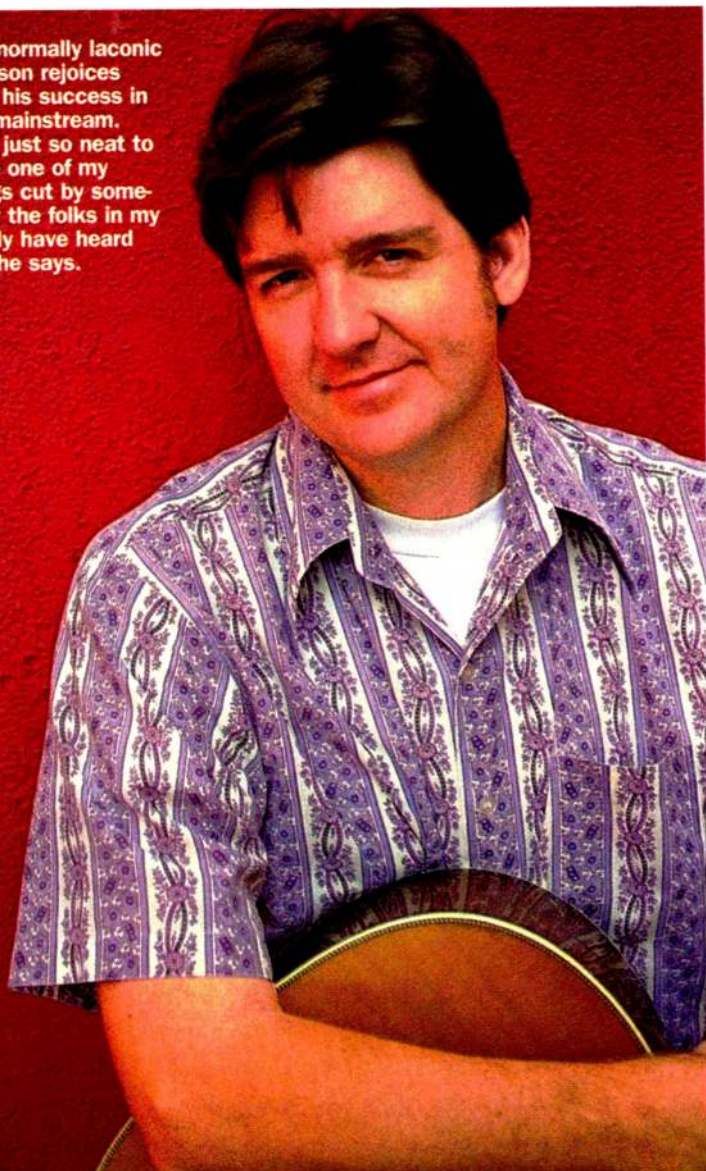
Happy All the Time

Songwriter Bruce Robison quietly enjoys his newfound success

Bruce Robison already had respect. Now it looks like the Texan will have to adapt to success as songwriter, too.

His breakthrough was crowned with back-to-back accomplishments during one week in November. Tim McGraw reached No. 1 with Robison's "Angry All The Time," and the Dixie Chicks used the nationally televised CMA Awards to unveil their version of his "Travelin' Soldier."

The normally laconic Robison rejoices over his success in the mainstream. "It's just so neat to have one of my songs cut by somebody the folks in my family have heard of," he says.



COURTESY FRONT PAGE PUBLICITY

The sudden burst of success has pleasantly surprised the unassuming, pragmatic Texan. "It's just so neat to have one of my songs cut by somebody the folks in my family have heard of," Robison muses. "I can say, 'Yes, Grandma, that Tim McGraw and Faith Hill.'"

The triumphs follow a decade of struggle. When Robison initially sought support in Nashville, execs responded with a backhanded compliment, claiming his songs were "too smart" for radio. He eventually signed to upstart Lucky Dog Records, a Sony Music label designed for non-mainstream country acts, and released two albums, 1998's *Wrapped* and 1999's *Long Way Home From Anywhere* (which, respectively, included the original versions of "Angry All The Time" and "Travelin' Soldier").

Both albums earned critical acclaim, but a lack of radio exposure resulted in poor sales. When Sony greenlighted a third album, Robison thanked them for their patience but left the label.

"I'm just a weird guy," Robison says of his declaration of independence. "I enjoy the mechanics of the business. And I'm a control freak – it's really important to me that I own my own records."

Ironically, Robison is now making the most radio-friendly music of his career: *Country Sunshine* is packed with catchy choruses and compelling narratives. Indeed, two of the new album's songs have already been cut by Nashville artists: Allison Moorer has recorded "Can't Get There From Here" for her next CD, and Gary Allan included the irreverent "What Would Willie Do?" on his *Alright Guy* album.

The latter song, which touts Willie Nelson as a role model for disenfranchised souls, surprised many Robison fans. "People don't look to me for funny songs, so it's a real neat curveball to throw," he says. "People ask if I'm worried that the song will offend him, but Willie has never taken himself too seriously. He's got such a great disposition."

Meanwhile, Robison is trying to keep his newfound success in perspective. He's quick to point that he wasn't thinking about radio programmers or getting big stars to cut his songs when he wrote "Angry All The Time."

"There's a lot of real stuff in that song," he notes. "My parents' divorce was pretty messy. In fact, my sister recently called to congratulate me. She said 'It's just like you – we're all dealing with this in therapy, and you're getting rich off it.'"

Robison lets out a modest laugh. Then, nice guy that he is, he makes sure the comment from his sister isn't misinterpreted. "I know she's proud of me," he says. "She knows how sweet this is."

— Andy Langer

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THIS PRODUCT
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MOUTH CANCER

*Some hunters we're
stuck with. So far it's
8 breaks for Creek and a
big goose egg for birds.*

What a pair of jerks!



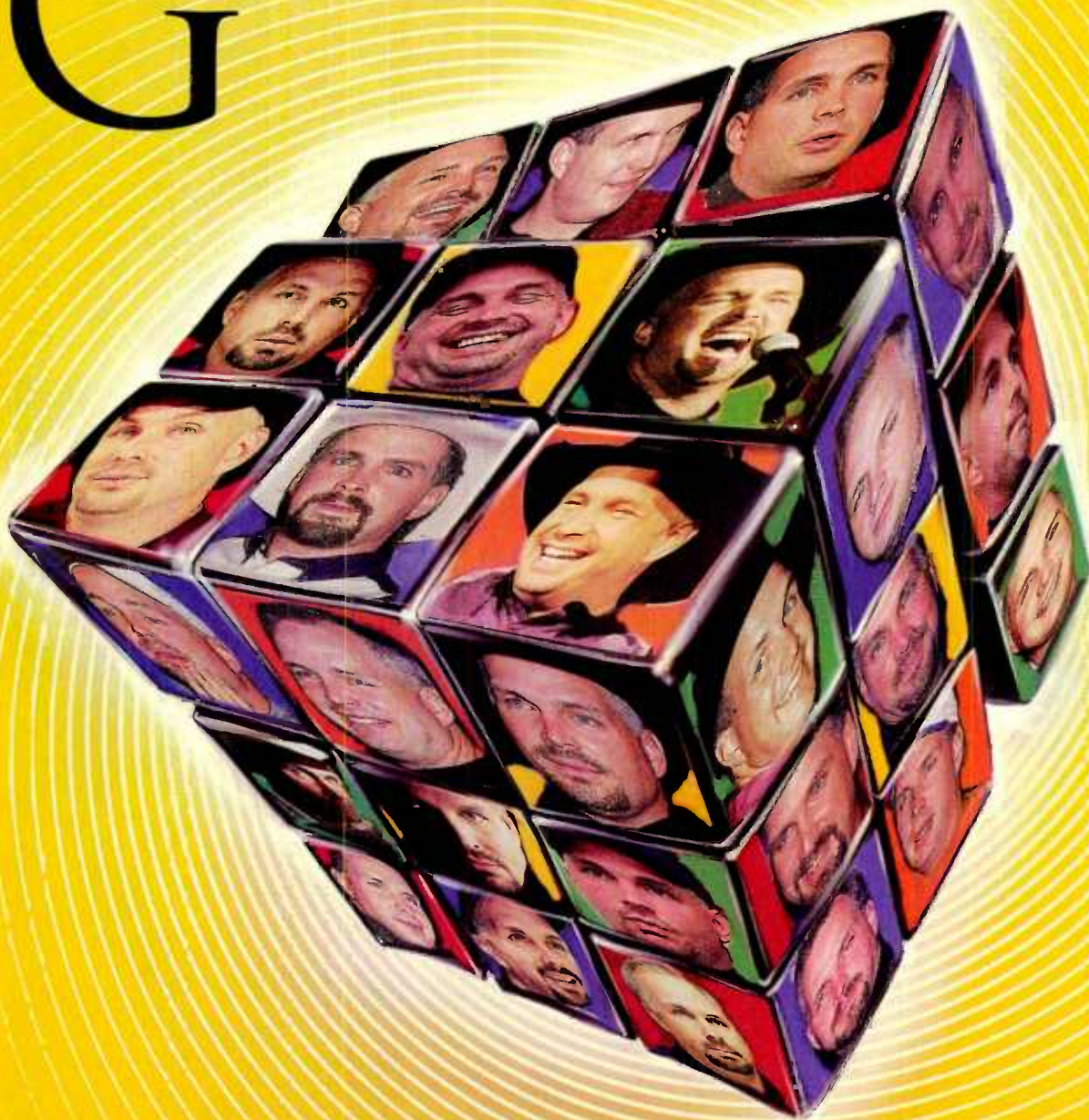
SOLVING THE GARTH PUZZLE

By Alanna Nash

Illustrations by
Brad Walker

Understanding the many moods and maneuvers of country's mega-platinum superstar has never been easy. Now his latest – and perhaps his last – career moves are perplexing people anew.

G



Last October, a month after America's greatest domestic tragedy, Garth Brooks stood with pride at the Country Music Hall of Fame as a color guard presented an American flag and a chorus of first-graders warbled "God Bless America." The occasion for all this pomp and parading: The announcement of Brooks' first new album in four years, *Scarecrow*.

The singer's rabid fans viewed the combination of patriotism and promotion as nothing more than an American icon stepping up as a leader in a time of mourning. "Ever since Sept. 11," he has said, "I've tried to figure out what my role is, and my participation and input as an entertainer, representing country music and America."

But others, especially some music insiders, saw his volley of *Scarecrow* promotion, including staging one of three television specials on the aircraft carrier USS Enterprise, as crass opportunism. After all, Brooks turned down opportunities to participate in several nationally televised fund-raisers, including Nashville's *Country Freedom Concert*, which included Alan Jackson, George Strait and Tim McGraw, and the cross-genre *America: A Tribute to Heroes*, which included country singers Faith Hill, the Dixie Chicks and Willie Nelson. He focused his efforts on promot-



ing his new record rather than contributing his enormous marquee clout to a charity fund-raiser.

Such is the puzzle that is Garth Brooks. His career has been full of similarly polarizing moments. There's simply never been another country star like him.

With *Scarecrow*, which sold three million copies in less than two months, Brooks proved that he once again could bring country music buyers into stores at a level unprecedented among his peers. "There's really few artists in any format that roll out a record like this," said Capitol Records' Fletcher Foster, who is working with Brooks for the first time after a career that included working with top pop and country stars at Arista Records. "It far exceeds when I worked with Whitney Houston or Toni Braxton."

There are those in Nashville who look at Brooks and see an honest, ambitious man who does as well as can be expected in dealing with the tremendous pressures of monstrous popularity. "I think Garth has handled his extraordinary fame and wealth better than most of us could have," said Ed Morris, a former Nashville bureau chief of *Billboard* magazine who wrote the unauthorized biography, *Garth Brooks: Platinum Cowboy*. "He's not overdosed or shown any inclination to ride at the head of a column of SUVs from nightspot to nightspot."

Yet as the business depends on Brooks once again for its economic well-being, there are fans and industry executives who have turned against its greatest cash cow. "There is a sizable portion of the [radio] audience who have been expressing clear indications of Garth aversion these past few years," writes radio consultant Steve Warren in his industry newsletter, *Country Playlist Advisory*.

Brooks achieved his gargantuan success by wedding country neo-traditionalism with soft pop, the energy of rock and the kind of marketing granted only to the industry's top megastars. But his personal behavior in the wake of his success has bred contempt as well as adulation. The examples are many, and revolve mostly around his reputation, right or wrong, as an emotionally needy egotist.

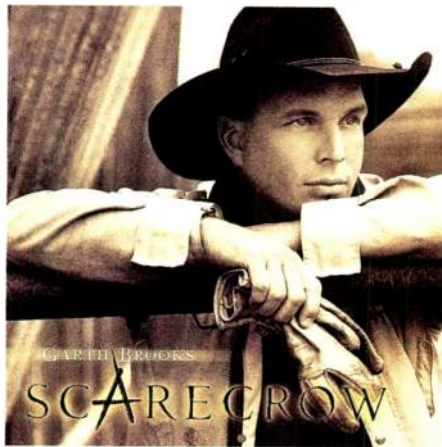
An example can be found in March 2001, when Brooks took the lunchtime stage at a schmoozy disc jockey convention in Nashville. It was his first public appearance in nearly six months, and audience members murmured when he walked out. Dressed in dumpy jeans, flannel shirt and ball cap, he instantly

cracked a self-deprecating joke about not being able to fit into his clothes. He gave the past "rough year" as an excuse for his appearance.

Between plucking out songs for the crowd, he then defended his failed *Garth Brooks ... In The Life Of Chris Gaines* project. "Good music is good music," he said. Then he launched into an emotional, rambling monologue about his then-pending divorce.

Radio programmers are a notoriously smug and cynical bunch, and afterwards it was hoot 'n' holler time – with Brooks as the target. "He can crank those tears out so quick, he's like Barbara Mandrell in jeans and a hat," one radio insider smirked. "Does he really think he's the first guy to ever get separated from his wife?"

On the other hand, Bill Miller, editor



"The Scarecrow thought with his heart," explains Brooks of his new CD's title.

and publisher of *The Blue Chip Radio Report*, found Garth's performance "a masterful PR move." While he acknowledged "all those daggers in his back," Miller said, "I felt so sorry for the well-intentioned but misunderstood guy that I wanted to go out and buy a Chris Gaines CD just to show my support."

On *Scarecrow*, however, there's little woe-is-me content to be found. The record, which has enjoyed good reviews, recalls Brooks' early work in tone and represents, he says, who – and where – he is today.

The singer admits that he went through an identity crisis during the making of *Scarecrow*. He wanted to quit three times "because country music has gone to a place that is its own thing now, and sometimes I don't feel like I understand it or that it is speaking to me personally."

He found the impetus to go on, he

says, when producer Allen Reynolds advised him "to think with your heart." Yet it was Brooks' children who inspired the title, after the *Wizard Of Oz* character. "The Scarecrow thought with his heart because that's all he had to think with," Brooks told Jay Leno's *Tonight Show* audience, drawing oohs and ahhs of sentiment.

Still, sympathy for the 40-year-old Oklahoman has been in short supply in Nashville. Behind closed doors, many criticize his obsession with image and myth-making, the control he's wrested from his record label, and what they view as arrogance, betrayal and artistic hypocrisy.

Voices on both sides of the Garth debate are passionate and loud: Those who love him claim he's been stunned by the viciousness of his critics and say he's handled himself with grace and generosity, and insist he's only misunderstood. They say that negotiating unparalleled royalty contracts and forcing high-level changes in the Capitol Nashville office struck a universal blow for artists' rights.

"This is a business that eats its own," says author Patsi Cox, who has written all of Brooks' press kits since 1990's *No Fences*. She contends that Brooks' troubles stem purely from jealousy and fear, mostly from competitors. "The extent of control Garth was able to get was unknown in this town. Anybody who bad-mouths him is just hoping they don't have an artist who gets that kind of power."

However, those who loathe him point to a trail of executives' heads littering the hallways of Capitol Nashville. They blame Brooks for "selling out" country and opening the doors to making Nashville too much like New York and Los Angeles, with label presidents now falling over themselves to sign pop-oriented singers whose crossover sales figures can match those of rock counterparts.

"I imagine the thing that's hit him hardest has been the viciousness of his critics, not just toward the Chris Gaines project but toward him personally," says biographer Morris. "It must be puzzling and painful for someone who's pleased so many fans, jump-started an entire industry and given so much to charity to hear himself described as a 'megalomaniac.' I think he can handle the criticism of his music. But the vileness with which he's been assailed disturbs even me – and I have no vested interest in him."

HEART-FILLED OR BRAINLESS?

What the critics are saying about Garth Brooks' *Scarecrow*

CHEERS

Scarecrow ... is a reminder that Brooks is a man with a significant gift. Like Elvis and Sinatra, Brooks isn't just a singer, but an interpreter.

— *Time*

Never accused of playing it safe (remember Chris Gaines?), Garth Brooks offers up a comparatively focused effort on *Scarecrow*, having zeroed in on his vocal strengths. If this is indeed a swan song for Brooks, it's like calling it a career with a championship-winning shot at the buzzer.

— *Billboard*

His best work to date: It pulses with human feeling, from "Mr. Midnight," about the plight of an overnight deejay, to "When You Come Back To Me Again," a tune for those who've loved and lost. If this is to be the last disc from a superstar, what a way to go!

— *People*

Despite some excess melodrama, *Scarecrow* is a welcome return to country music for Brooks after the dishearteningly generic pop-rock offerings on his 1999 Chris Gaines project. Rather than opening new doors, however, *Scarecrow* works best when it revisits old themes.

— *Los Angeles Times*

The few among us who like quality Garth but think he sometimes swings for the fences and winds up whiffing will be pleased with *Scarecrow*. It's among his best albums, occasionally faltering, but most often presenting Brooks as an emotionally engaging singer of above-average songs.

— *The Tennessean*

JEERS

Unlike Dorothy's pal in Oz, this *Scarecrow* could use more heart.

— *The Arizona Republic*

Listening to Brooks trying to keep up with George Jones on "Beer Run" you can't help but compare the latest album by the country megastar with that of the country legend. What it reveals is clear: With *Stone Cold Country 2001*, Jones gives you heart and soul, gravity and grace; with *Scarecrow*, Brooks again gives you the Disney-fied version of country — i.e. sanitized for your protection.

— *The Philadelphia Inquirer*

If Garth realizes he's out of tricks and is serious about retirement, good for him. And if he's just doing it to be the best father he can be, good for him again. Either way you've got to give him respect for not just going on and on and on forever. But that doesn't obscure just how mediocre an effort this is.

— *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*

GARTH BROOKS

As for Brooks, the controversy seems to alternately amuse and anger him. "I don't think I'm misunderstood by the public," he told *Billboard*. "I think the public sees me as a guy who will fight for his music, will die for his music, and has been tough about that. I think the industry, as a majority, feels I do things for numbers. And the people that think that about Garth Brooks don't have a friggin' clue who I am."

Maybe not, since Nashville often talks about Brooks as two people: the polite, warmhearted, *aw-shucks* Garth, a humble cowboy figure who kicks at the dirt as he talks and addresses women as "ma'am"; and the grown-up GB — as he likes to be known in his aggressive-mogul mode — when he tends to be more calculated, cutthroat and Messianic.

As Morris says, the only disturbing trait he's seen in Brooks is his penchant for taking himself too seriously. "Like the Judds, I believe he's often mistaken fame for profundity and come to regard his every utterance as golden," Morris says.

What angers people, according to journalist Bruce Feiler, who spent 50 hours with Brooks for his book *Dreaming Out Loud*, is that "in the beginning, no one saw the second half because they were so impressed by the first. He was always able to keep that self-obsessed, demonic side of himself in check. In large quarters of Nashville he's reviled, because now the grown-up side of him is gnawing away at the side of him that we all found so appealing."

But few see how he got that way, and only a handful know the darker forces that left their emotional imprint on the Boy Who Would Be Garth. He was raised in Yukon, Okla., a wheat and oil town of 23,000 on the outskirts of Oklahoma City, where teenage boys put monster tires on their pick-up trucks to boost their testosterone, and high-haired women stand behind counters in fast-food restaurants wearing name tags framed with Old Glory. It's the kind of town where people say things like, "I can't carry a Christian's shoelaces, but I know that I ain't nothin' without the good Lord," as Brooks himself has said.



It's town like a lot of towns in America, where God, flag and family intersect.

Troyal Garth Brooks grew up as the baby of six kids (four of which were half-siblings). "In the middle of average Oklahoma, right in the middle of average America," as he likes to say. However, his mother, a beauty-shop blonde with an effusive personality and a ring on every finger, always maintained that their economic class was certainly below average. "We've been at the bottom where we didn't know how in the world we were gonna feed six kids," she said in an interview a few years before her death in 1999.

Her husband, Raymond, brought home \$25,000 a year as a draftsman for the oil company Unocal. "I was always a mama's boy - still am," Garth once told me. But that connotation could be misleading: Colleen Carroll Brooks wasn't a typical Southern mother. She was herself a country recording artist with a Capitol Records contract in the '50s, and she performed alongside Red Foley on the *Ozark Jubilee*. Two months before Garth was born in February 1962, she sang publicly on New Year's Eve. "No one knew I was pregnant," she admitted in an exclusive conversation with this writer in 1991, "because I held it in."

Once he arrived, Garth wasted no time in establishing his authority. At slightly more than 12 months, he put his first sentence together. "I'm the boss around here," he proclaimed with high drama, his mother remembered - and not just because he'd heard his father say it to the older children, but because Garth was the little one they otherwise ignored.

From the crib, Garth developed a fierce sense of rivalry, nurtured on the thrice-weekly "family nights," during which the Brooks clan would put on skits, make up games and tell jokes - all trying to outdo each other. It was a practice that greatly influenced Garth's competitive edge. "The goal of being the biggest and best has to be everyone's goal," he would later say, "or why the hell are you going out there?"

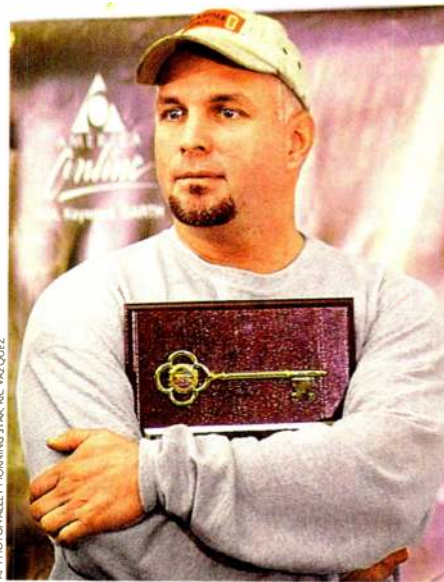
The two youngest kids, Garth and brother Kelly (16 months Garth's senior), pitted themselves against the oldest. "From the time he was in diapers, that Garth would come up with some of the darnedest stuff you've ever heard in your life," his mother recalled. More important, she encouraged it. "We just had rules that so much was expected, and if they had the ability to live up to it, they

would succeed. We demanded it."

"With six kids," says Kelly, who grew up to become Garth's accountant and co-manager, "there was always a drive to distinguish yourself, and both of us were in awe of our brothers and sister, who were quite a bit older. They were like gods to look up to, and there was someone in front of us all the time, setting goals and standards for us to pass. It was a very competitive atmosphere."

One sibling became a cop, two became teachers, one of which, Michael, doubles as a Catholic lay priest. Sister Betsy, the only child not to earn a college degree, became a musician who played in Brooks' band in the early '90s.

Despite displaying an independent streak, Garth's attachment to his mother remained firm. "He sat on my hip until



When his *Coast to Coast Live* televised concert special aired from South Padre Island, Texas, Garth received the key to the city.

my spine was crooked," his mother said. "He didn't want to walk."

The solution came when Colleen, who called baseball her "first love," made him a uniform (number "0"), and little Garth became the mascot on the Babe Ruth ballteam that his father coached. He later starred as a football and baseball player in high school.

For a time, Garth tagged along on his mother's singing engagements. "We were very, very close," she said. Nonetheless, the mother-son dynamic produced a man whose difficulty in processing his feelings for women may have played a foundational part in his admitted inability, years later, to remain faithful in his marriage.

"Garth has a lot of demons. That's part of what has made him successful," says Pam Lewis, who co-managed him for many years. "But it is also at times what seems to make him unstable and unhappy. That look in his eyes can be very scary."

"There is a dark side to Garth," admits ex-wife Sandy Brooks. "There's a side of him that I think he doesn't like. He hides it. I don't even see it the majority of the time, but every once in a while, I will see a side of it when he's very tired."

Taking risks and pushing the envelope is a part of his personality, whether it means toppling popular music's power structure or performing dangerous physical antics like swinging from the rafters or jumping through fire.

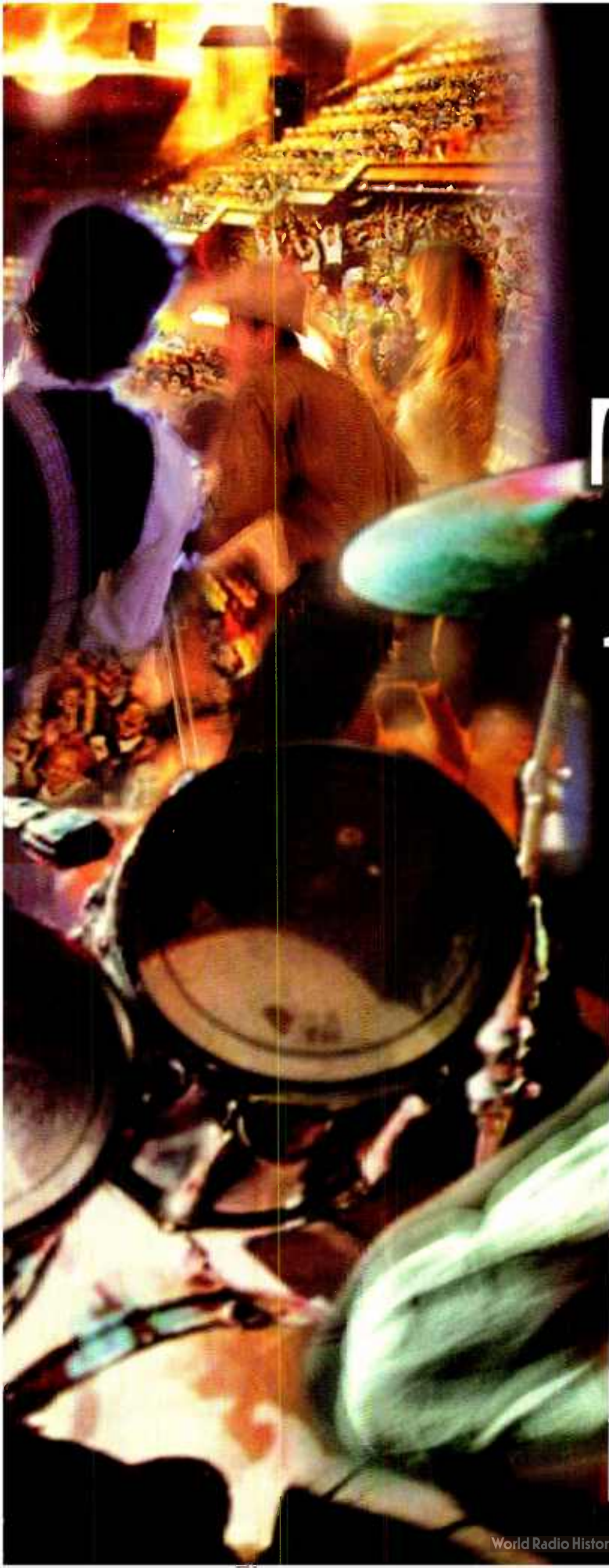
That's part of the Brooks dichotomy, of course. Pop music is filled with bad-boy rockers and petulant folkies, but country music was always a kinder, gentler genre that stood for bedrock family values and looked for humble heroes to embody them. Brooks is anything but humble onstage, yet his mother said this about him: "Garth wants to bring prayer back to the dinner table and an American flag back to the front porch."

These days, after the funk of his divorce and his Chris Gaines defeat, Brooks has been in the mood for mending fences. He's been co-writing with his old partners, even refusing a well-deserved co-writing credit and royalties for melding two songs by fellow Oklahoman Kevin Welch into the version of "Pushing Up Daisies" that appears on *Scarecrow*. He's stepped up his charitable work and floated rumors that he might buy the sainted Ryman Auditorium from its corporate owners in a symbolic move to return country music to the common folk. Then there was his most astonishing gesture of selflessness: offering Chris LeDoux part of his liver when the iconic cowboy singer desperately needed a transplant.

Of course, nothing is ever really simple - not healing old wounds, not fixing country music, not taming his unpredictable side. But the success of *Scarecrow*, both commercially and artistically, suggests Brooks can still grab the public's attention.

Still, no matter how often Brooks says he's retiring, his erratic nature will keep people asking questions and wondering whether he's sincere - or setting them up for yet another career move. Is *Scarecrow* a commendable swan song, or just another step in an evolving, unpredictable career? Can anyone, even Garth Brooks, say for sure? *





I'M WITH THE BAND

**An inside look at
the challenges and
rewards of playing
with country's
biggest stars**

Jeff White will never forget his first night as a member of Vince Gill's band. It was 1992, and Gill, an emerging country superstar, hired White for the important position of guitar player and harmony singer. "We'll get together and rehearse a few of these songs," promised Gill. But every time they set up a practice session, the singer would cancel due to another commitment.

by Nancy Burns

Illustrations by Brad Walker

I'M WITH THE BAND

"Finally he said, 'Well, we'll just have to meet at the *Opry* and go over it,'" White recalls with a laugh. "That was the very first thing that I did with him – the *Grand Old Opry*! And when we were starting the song, Vince looked over and said, 'Isn't this cool?'"

When the song ended, White took a deep breath and felt the thrill of the applause race through his veins. He smiled broadly and thought, "Yes, this is very cool."

It's the kind of moment that fuels any musician's dreams. But as Nashville's veteran traveling players are quick to point out, a road musician's life is not always so blessed.

Nearly every active Nashville musician will agree on one thing: Being a sideman at the top level of country music stardom is indeed a special job. It takes an immense level of skill and varying degrees of dues-paying and good fortune to attain the brass ring of a big-time band position with a country superstar.

But while there are the highs of basking in success, the road to the top can be wildly unpredictable and fraught with stress, both personal and professional.

Working in a field that's highly competitive with little job security, road musicians lead complex, often draining lives that can be physically and emotionally

challenging. Their jobs – with extensive travel and on-again, off-again schedules – can exact a fierce toll on personal relationships. Accepting a spot with a major star means intensely demanding periods of road work paired with extended, anxiety-ridden stretches of downtime. The uniquely odd nature of the work makes those who thrive in its environment a close-knit breed.

We interviewed several veteran top-level band members – fiddler Heather Risser,



A veteran road dog like Bill Cooley may hook up with several headline acts through the years. Here he gets in tune with Kathy Mattea before a show.

keyboardists Johnny Freeman and David Gant, and guitarists White, Bill Cooley and Marty Schiff – to discuss the challenges and rewards of the lives they lead.

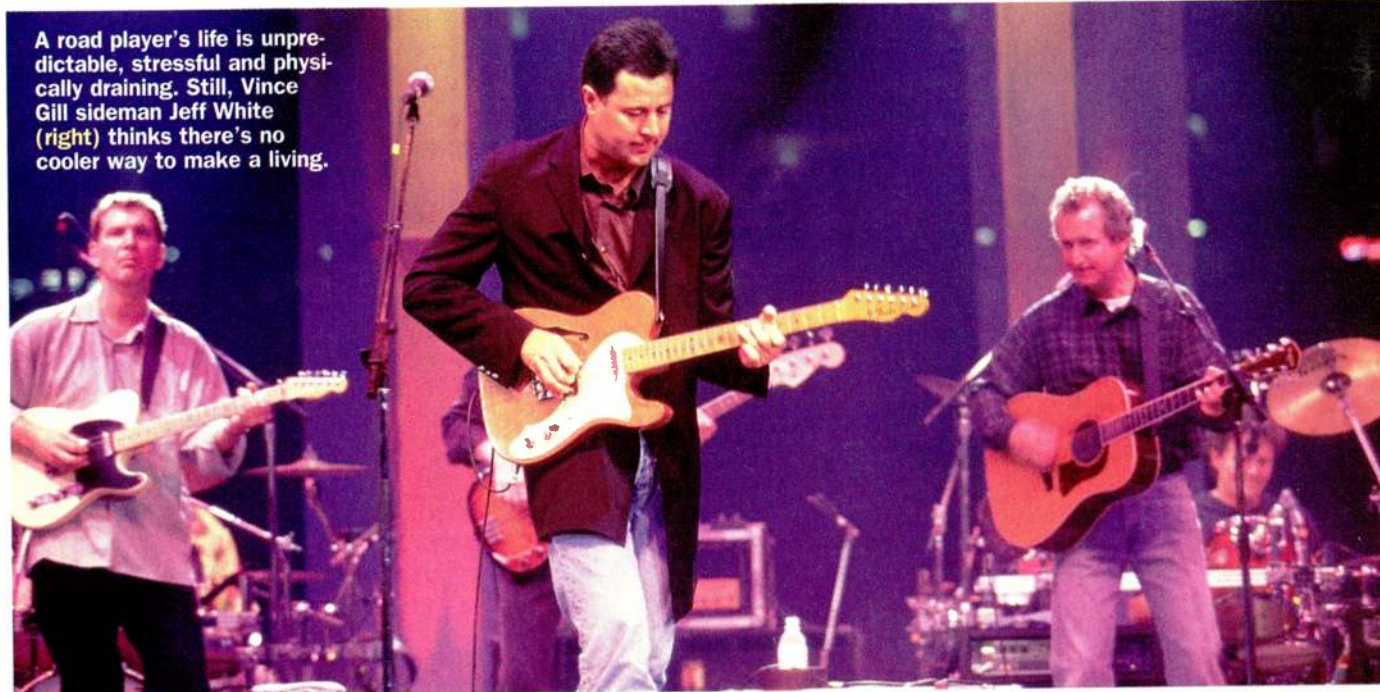
Risser is an example of how a lucky break can play into a musician's career. A Baylor University graduate, she played

fiddle in a bluegrass-country band at the Opryland theme park and as a strolling musician at the Opryland Hotel. While walking the hallways and playing one day, she spied Trisha Yearwood. Risser introduced herself and gave the singer her phone number. Three months later Risser received a call inviting her to audition for Yearwood's band. She got the job.

But not every talented musician leaps right into top-rung bands. Keyboardist David Gant is an example of a 20-year overnight success. The multi-instrumentalist played at University of Oklahoma fraternity parties and Texas roadhouses with singer/songwriter Ray Wylie Hubbard before landing in Los Angeles, where he made a living as a nightclub musician. Burned out and about to change careers, Gant decided to load up his station wagon and move to Nashville for one last stab at big-time success.

Five days into town, he met a fellow Oklahoman, an unknown singer named Garth Brooks who was looking for someone who could double as a keyboardist and fiddler – Gant's two specialties. Ever since, Gant has remained Brooks' bandleader as the singer went on to alter music history.

Martina McBride, whose band includes her brother Marty Schiff on guitar, says fitting into a road band depends on temperament as well as talent.



A road player's life is unpredictable, stressful and physically draining. Still, Vince Gill sideman Jeff White (right) thinks there's no cooler way to make a living.

"It is important to me that my musicians fit certain criteria not only musically, but personally," McBride says. "It goes without saying that they have to be able to play well. Aside from that, the most important thing I look for in putting a band together – or adding to one – is attitude. A good attitude is 90 percent of this job. Willingness to work together; a respect for me, themselves, and everyone involved on the road; and a general 'happy-to-be-here' attitude is critical to making things work smoothly."

When musicians finally achieve their hard-won success, the results can be heady. White will always cherish the time he sang with Vince Gill and Dolly Parton on the internationally telecast CMA Awards. He recalls that as they were about to perform, Parton inquired, "Is there a third singer on this? Oh, turn him up on my monitor."

"It's just something that not everybody gets to do," he marvels. "Sometimes you just pinch yourself, because you can't believe how cool it is, what you're doing."

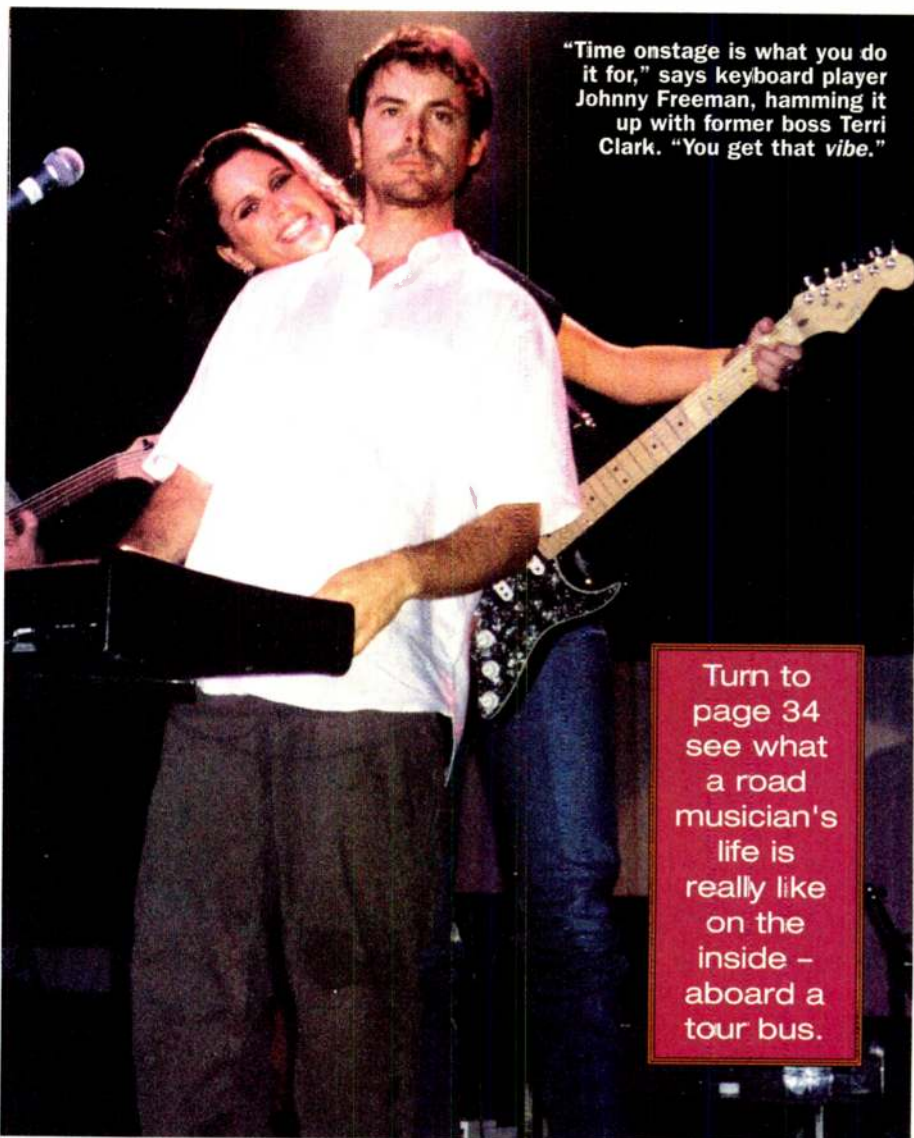
Johnny Freeman, who spent three years as Terri Clark's keyboardist, climbed the ladder from regional groups to up-and-coming Nashville bands before getting hired by the Canadian country star. Immediately, he noticed how different it was to play for a popular act.

"When we headlined Toronto the first time," he says, "Terri was 'the thing' up in Canada. We played the Molson Center, and when we heard the decibel level of the crowd after our second song, it was like, 'Man, she's made it!'"

Those were the highs, Freeman recalls, when Clark's career was on the rise and the band was opening for superstar acts Brooks & Dunn and Reba McEntire in arenas and stadiums. Of course, there's a downside too. When a headliner's career hits some bumps, the band shares the singer's frustrations and disappointments.

Bands tend to struggle the most when a performer is new and trying to break through or when an established performer dips in popularity, performing to smaller crowds and booking fewer live dates. During difficult times, bands cut back on members, and musicians often double up duties.

Moreover, tours become less organized and concert dates get booked farther apart, meaning the band members must endure endless road trips between performances. The musical perks also diminish: Venues aren't as agreeable, and the sound systems aren't as top-notch.



"Time onstage is what you do it for," says keyboard player Johnny Freeman, hamming it up with former boss Terri Clark. "You get that *vibe*."

Turn to page 34 see what a road musician's life is really like on the inside – aboard a tour bus.

A high-rolling band can be compared to a championship ball team, with everyone hitting their marks and everything flowing in sync. But when a band starts to struggle, it's like a once-winning team hitting a losing streak. Interaction and communication start misfiring; the shows lose that special spark, and tensions can arise.

"It can be like an office job that starts closing in on you," Freeman says.

As Gant points out, though, success can be grueling, too. Onstage with Brooks, life appeared to be an eternal, high-octane party. But maintaining that level of energy night after night takes its toll.

"It's a whole different thing, being in the middle of it," Gant says. "You'd see these Beatle-like crowds every night, with everybody just screaming their heads off. There was a period, especially around the

Central Park concert, where we were doing six to eight shows per city. We were working up to 25 days a month. Which in the music business – at *that* level of energy and *that* level of show – is just insane!"

But just as skilled athletes live for the field or the court, musicians savor the electrifying moments when they hit the stage.

"Time onstage is what you do it for,"

It can be like an office job that starts closing in on you.

exclaims Freeman. "You get that *vibe*. That's the only reason you keep doing it. And then you look at other jobs and say, 'I'm grateful for this.'"

Risser agrees. "That's why we got into this, for the hour that we're onstage. It's the other 23 hours when we're gone that we get paid for. Not the time onstage – that's the fun part."

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AN INSIDE JOB

Road Rule #1 – If your name's on the front of bus, you get the back – the stateroom and the big bed, reserved for the star.

Mirrors, on the walls and ceiling, help give the illusion that the limited space is bigger than it really is – about 45 feet from fore to aft.

Ear plugs – essential equipment. Buses are loud; band members can even hear if the driver gets too close to tree branches. Also, band members may be on different sleep schedules – so while one is trying to catch some Zs, others may be milling around, talking or laughing ... just inches away.

The generator also runs on diesel, so running out of fuel is a major no-no! It means replacing filters and making other unpleasant engine touch-ups. A driver who runs out of fuel isn't a driver for long.

Doors separate the stateroom, the bunk area and the front seating area.

Band members know to bring flannel and sweatshirts if they're cold-natured, because the temp is set for the artist, not the musicians.

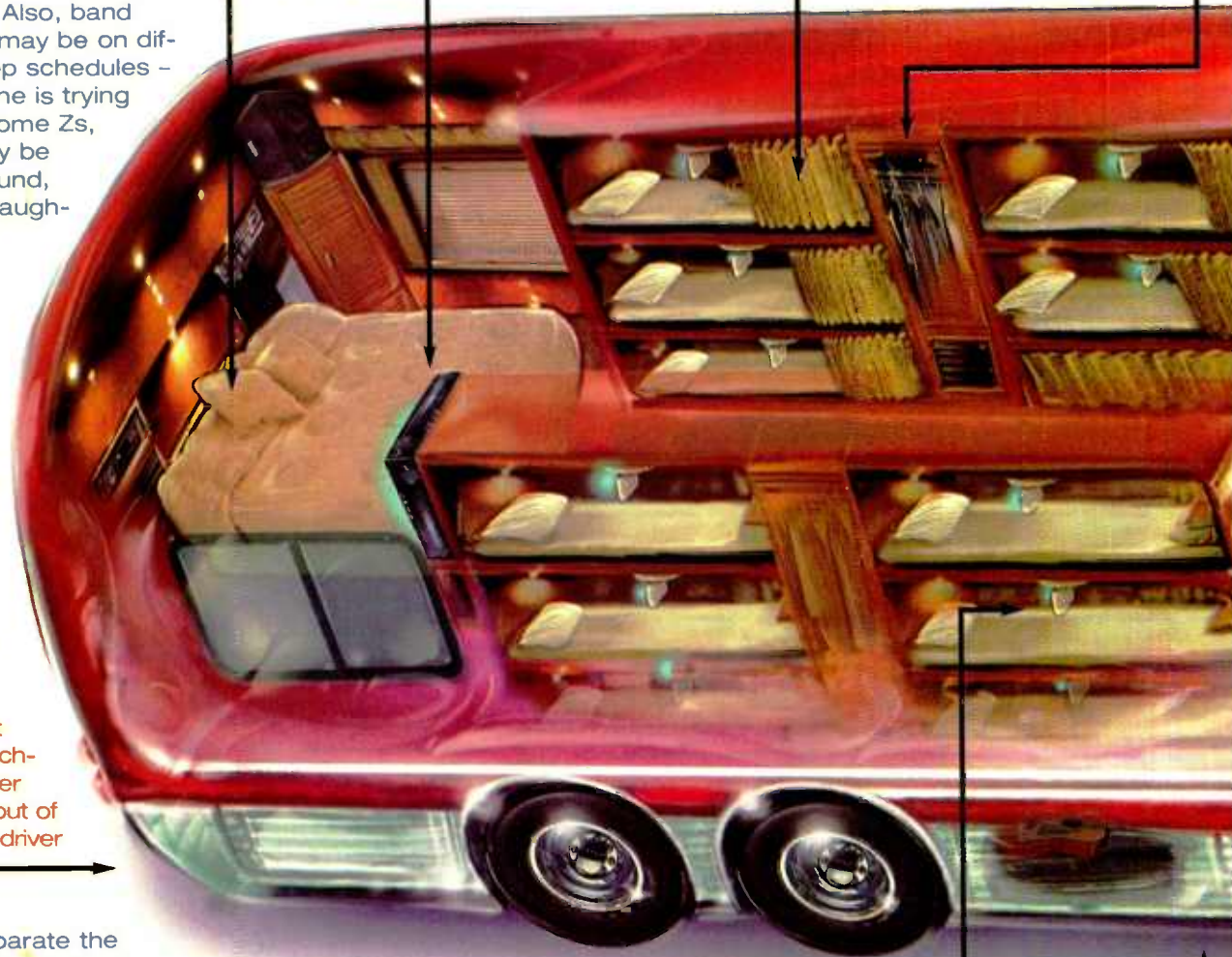
The headliner's personal audio/video system lets the star watch whatever he or she – alone – wants. Meanwhile, up front, the band decides whether they'll watch *Die Hard 3*, *Independence Day* or *Three Stooges* classics – for the 200th time.

OK, smaller guys in the top. The top bunks are usually slightly smaller because they follow the curved contour of the top of the bus.

The middle bunks ride the smoothest; the bottom bunks are the loudest.

Usually, sleeping space is doled out according to seniority in the band, not band-member size. Most are decorated with pics of family or even glow-in-the-dark stars to make "private space" feel more homey.

Band closets are usually only about 12 inches wide, and the first musicians to the bus, when it first pulls out, get the coveted space. The rest are forced to get creative in finding space for their personal belongings.



That thumping sound was probably an armadillo if you're in Texas, a possum if you're in Tennessee or a groundhog if you're in Punxsutawney.

And you thought your vehicle was a gas guzzler! This baby holds a whopping 150 gallons of diesel, gets 9 miles per gallon and only costs about \$225 to fill up!

If there's a fold-down video screen for each bunk, the star riding in the back is a high roller. If there's an Etch A Sketch instead, he or she is watching the budget.

Lower storage bays accommodate instruments, luggage, golf clubs, rollerblades, tennis rackets and concert merchandise (like T-shirts) for sale.

For country musicians, the tour bus is a home on wheels

The technology has changed a bit over the decades, but most country pickers still get to the job the same way they've always done – by piling into a vehicle and hitting the road. These days, however, the vehicle is likely to be a state-of-the-art tour bus, equipped with many of the comforts of home ... and yes, even the kitchen sink!

Only the headliner uses the shower. Band members wait to clean up at the venue or hotel – or pass around a box of Handy Wipes. Ah, the glamour of showbiz

The gourmet cooking center – also known as a microwave. If it can't be cooked in 60 seconds, it's not bus fare. The kitchen area also has hot plates and a coffee maker.

Hey! Your mom's not on the bus – dirty dishes go in the dishwasher! Even so, most tidy-up duties fall to the driver, who empties the trash, wipes up spills and washes bed linens between trips.

The refrigerator contents give a clue to how health-conscious the band is.

Personal items can be stashed in compartments under the front bench seat.

The entertainment system contains a radio (which isn't usually used since it's hard to get good reception when the vehicle is constantly moving), tape player, CD player, VCR – all of which have to be shared, because not everyone has the same taste in music or movies!

If you ever see a bus repeatedly changing position in an arena parking lot, the driver is likely trying to follow a sports telecast – or pick up *The Andy Griffith Show* – or the satellite.

The jump seat lets a band member chat with the driver or take a look down the highway. It also lets them be the first one off the bus if there's an accident – or a pit stop.

Keep your key with you at all times, because it's always locked

Sitting space up front is limited, and not everyone can fit at the same time. Most seasoned travelers know to bring a good book – or two – to read in their bunks!

The water tank holds 200 gallons for the shower, bath and kitchen.

Toilet paper stops up the "throne," so the stool is liquid-only. The number-two bathroom function requires the bus to pull over at a rest stop; drivers will stop immediately for the headliner, but lowly band members may just have to wait, depending on the schedule the driver is trying to keep. Onboard sewage tanks are dumped at RV stations or truck stops – or (illegally) on the side of the road.

If you blow an inside tire – a bogey – just keep on truckin' until the next stop, then fix it. If you blow a front tire, assume crash positions. You're in for a rough landing.



I'M WITH THE BAND

But, as several of the band members intimate, a not-so-fun part also lurks. Fans see the band for an hour or two onstage, unaware of the gargantuan efforts behind a smooth show, from the weeks of rehearsals to the last-minute sound checks.

As McBride's brother, guitarist Marty Schiff, points out, "It's a lot more work than most people think. It's not like we just hang out on the bus, play a show and eat, and go to the next town. A lot of it is exhausting. Imagine living on a moving vehicle for a couple of months at a time, eating food that's not familiar and sleeping in unfamiliar places. It's

That's why we got into this, for the hour that we're onstage.

harder than what I thought it was."

Guitarist Bill Cooley, a road veteran who has played with scores of major country bands, likes it that longtime boss Kathy Mattea limits her tours to stretches of a week or two. "The years of me being gone for months at a time are over, I hope," he says. "I did that with Reba McEntire back in the late '80s. We saw more of each other than we did of our families. That is tough on a home life."

Still, Cooley knows that when he was in the midst of that punishing schedule, his children found a way to adapt. "All these years, this has been Dad's life, and it's all the kids have known: Dad goes out on the

road and plays music and comes home," he says. "If you miss a birthday or an anniversary, you learn to shift celebrations."

Time on the road also means long periods of free time. When David Gant was spending up to six days at a stretch in one city after another while touring with Brooks, he whiled away the hours in his hotel room working on a CD of religious hymns. Risser occupies herself with jogging, workouts and shopping. Freeman took up Rollerblading.

To combat the mundaneness of seeing little more than the insides of buses, hotels and drab backstage areas, the musicians tend to stir up their own entertainment. "Being on the bus was pretty much a three-ring circus," Gant laughs.

"It was just one-liner after one-liner, all pretty entertaining. I think Garth had us around as much for entertainment as to play [music]."

The band also turned into pranksters, which Risser remembers from the days when her boss Trisha Yearwood opened for Brooks. "Garth's tour had a stage with a grate on the bottom," Risser recalls. "So, the guys would go underneath the stage and stick toilet paper on the bottom of your shoe. When you walked across the stage, that stream of toilet paper was probably six feet long. But of course, you never knew about it!"

The jocular nature of bands – from The Buckaroos to The Beatles, from the Texas Playboys to Alan Jackson's



Strayhorns – fits a fraternal, locker-room stereotype of musicians on the road. Women only recently started infiltrating country bands in significant numbers. And while women often provide harmony from the back of the stage, not nearly as many can be found romping next to the star with their instruments.

Risser recalls many occasions where she was the only female on the tour bus, but she insists that the disparity is not an issue of discrimination. Rather, she suspects, most women simply find the lifestyle less appealing. "Especially when women get into their 30s, it would be really hard to be out there with a family," Risser contends, hastening to point out, "I've always felt respected, but generally not treated any different."

In fact, in her outings with Yearwood, being female has proven to be an asset. "The guys on our bus say they like to have the women around," Risser claims, "because it's more of a natural environment than getting on the bus with a bunch of men for six months."

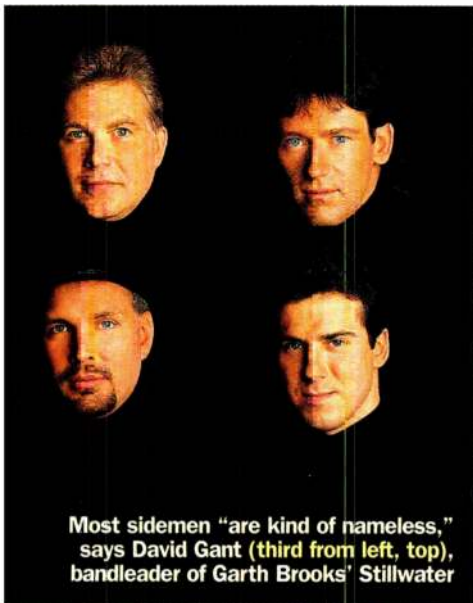
While the lighthearted camaraderie of band mates can ease the day-to-day tensions of traveling in tight spaces, the players realize that success doesn't mean security. In addition to long layoffs between tours, the job can end suddenly because of a shift in musical direction, because a career is slipping or simply because the leader feels like making a change – for whatever reason.

Freeman was already yearning for a more settled life when his wife became pregnant with their first child, who was



Fiddle player Heather Risser, onstage with Trisha Yearwood, is one of the few females playing the road game.

DAVID JASTUTIS/ABC



Most sidemen "are kind of nameless," says David Gant (third from left, top), bandleader of Garth Brooks' Stillwater

COURTESY CAPITOL RECORDS

born in the summer of 2001. So he found it a blessing when Terri Clark chose an acoustic focus that excluded keyboards.

Most often, though, such news is unsettling. Having seen poignant examples of what can happen to his fellow artists over the course of a career, Gant made some particularly shrewd decisions. "I was out in Los Angeles for 10 years and saw all these guys who worked with Elvis or Glen Campbell or Neil Diamond, and at 52 years old could still outplay anybody. But they weren't as cute and skinny as they once were, and they got replaced. That made a big impression on me."

Gant pauses to gather his thoughts.

"All those people, after working for years, were being literally put out to pasture. I decided that by the time I'm 45 to

50, I at least want to retool and have a viable skill – so I'm not one of those people doing graveyard at a convenience store."

Gant went back to school and earned Microsoft and Novell certification, which qualifies him for a new role as a networking engineer.

Headliners vary in the degree of loyalty they show to their side bands. Some are known for giving their bands time to play onstage and treating the musicians with respect. Those are often the stars whose bands have little turnover.

"I would like to think my band and crew has stayed with me for so long because they feel respected, they like the music and they know that this is a great work environment," McBride says. "I really try hard to create an environment where they know they are appreciated and secure – and there isn't a lot of crazy, unpredictable, diva behavior. They pretty much know that what you see is what you get."

Cooley suggests that the actual, physical distance stars put between themselves and their band members can indicate how they view the importance of the musicians' contributions. "If I'm any more than four feet away from Kathy, she wants to know what's going on. She's right in the thick of it, and wants her band set right around her. Take a look at anybody else's stage show visually, such as George Strait and the Ace In The Hole Band. He's always back there, checking out what they're doing. Whereas some other stars might be 30 feet away from their bands."

Unfortunately, a sideman's loyalty is not always rewarded. "There's definitely a hired-gun kind of mentality," Gant observes. "A lot of people turn bands over – sometimes every year." He also cites the anonymity factor. "All in all, most sidemen are kind of nameless. That's sad in a way, because so many of them are important to an artist's career."

Anonymity does have its own rewards, though. Having spent years in the corridors of fame and power, musicians learn to be cautious about ambitions toward the top spot. They recognize themselves as essentially different, in many respects,

Band members offer their own musical projects

ON THE SIDE

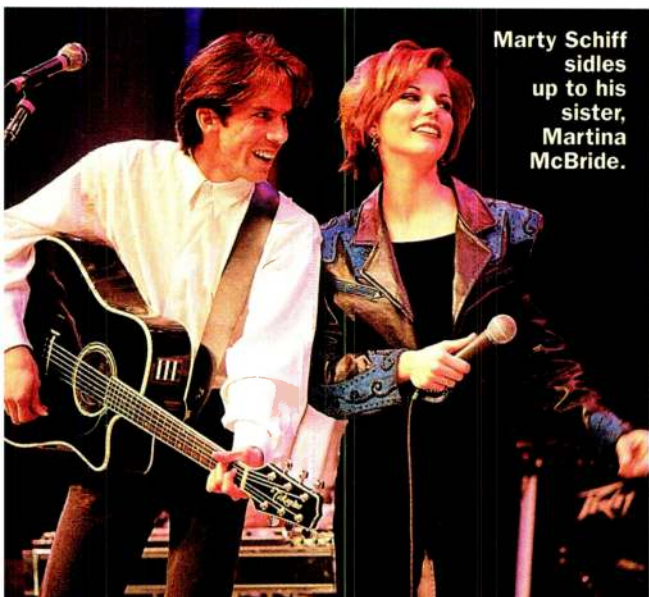
Dave Gant, *Hymns Of Praise* (www.hymns-of-praise.com). An orchestrated gospel album by the 12-year veteran of Garth Brooks' Stillwater.

Bill Cooley, *Unravel'd* (www.mattea.com/cooley). An acclaimed instrumental album by Kathy Mattea's longtime guitarist.

Jeff White, *The White Album and The Broken Road* (Rouder Records). Both bluegrass recordings feature Vince Gill, Alison Krauss and Jerry Douglas.

Marty Schiff has released a series of CDs for guitar instruction (www.martins-guitar.com)

Johnny Freeman, *Positivity* (e-mail to powerinpositivity@yahoo.com). The singer/songwriter's own brand of "R&B funk for the soul."



Marty Schiff sidles up to his sister, Martina McBride.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFFREY MANT

from the artists who employ them.

"If the hall is half full, it's not our problem, though the artists will be concerned with that," Cooley observes. "Our responsibility is to show up and play well, and make the artist sound good."

As one of the core of musicians who supported the biggest act in music history, would Dave Gant have wanted to be Garth Brooks?

"I wouldn't trade places with the man at all," Gant says firmly. "There's a burden carried there. And the image Garth portrayed – that carried a lot of extra responsibility, which was pretty heavy for him to maintain."

In some of the larger venues, Gant would be recognized, so people would ask to take pictures with him.

"That was enough," he smiles. "It was fun being the sideman." *

common threads

Country music remains connected to its past by songs of home, faith and hard work

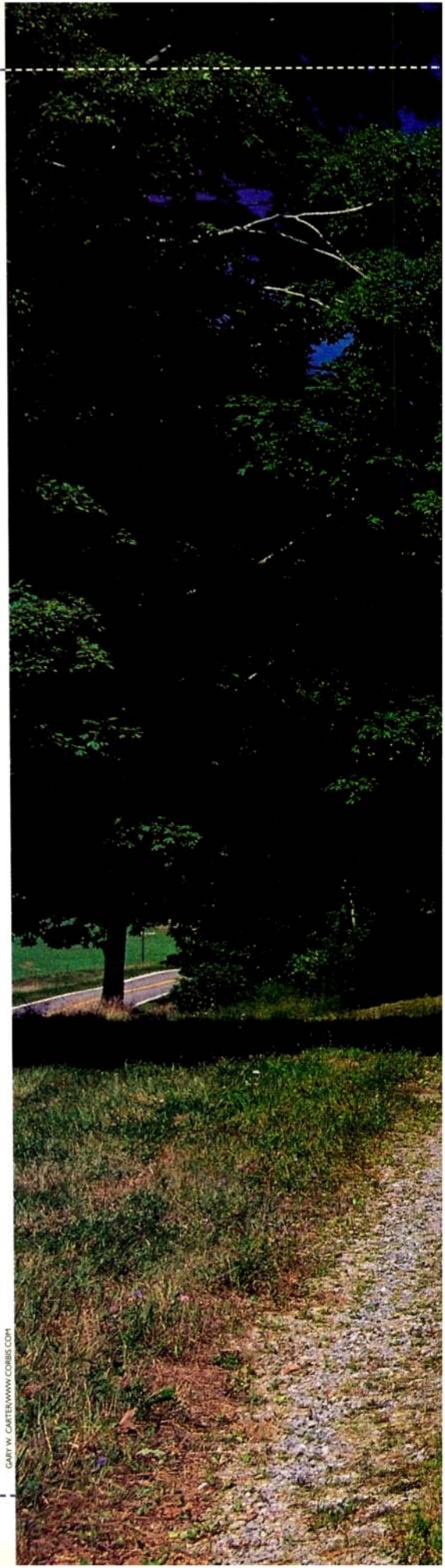
Long before it got its name, country music got its start. Pieced together from the fiddle jigs, church hymns, funeral dirges and folk ballads brought over to the New World by Scottish, Irish and English settlers; forged from the fire of experience as America grew up and put down domestic and industrial roots; and stirred into a stew of regional and ethnic influences from the plains and the valleys and the bayous and the hills ... it finally emerged just before the middle of the 20th century as a distinctly American commercial entity called *country music*.

It was a title that fit, and one that stuck. It harkened back to the music's true roots in the hard work, hopes, fears, open roads, sweat and tears of a pre-technologized America. The simple combination of the two words implied not only the music's rural heritage – in the country – but also America itself, *the* country. Country was America's music, and it became the soundtrack to the way its people lived their lives.

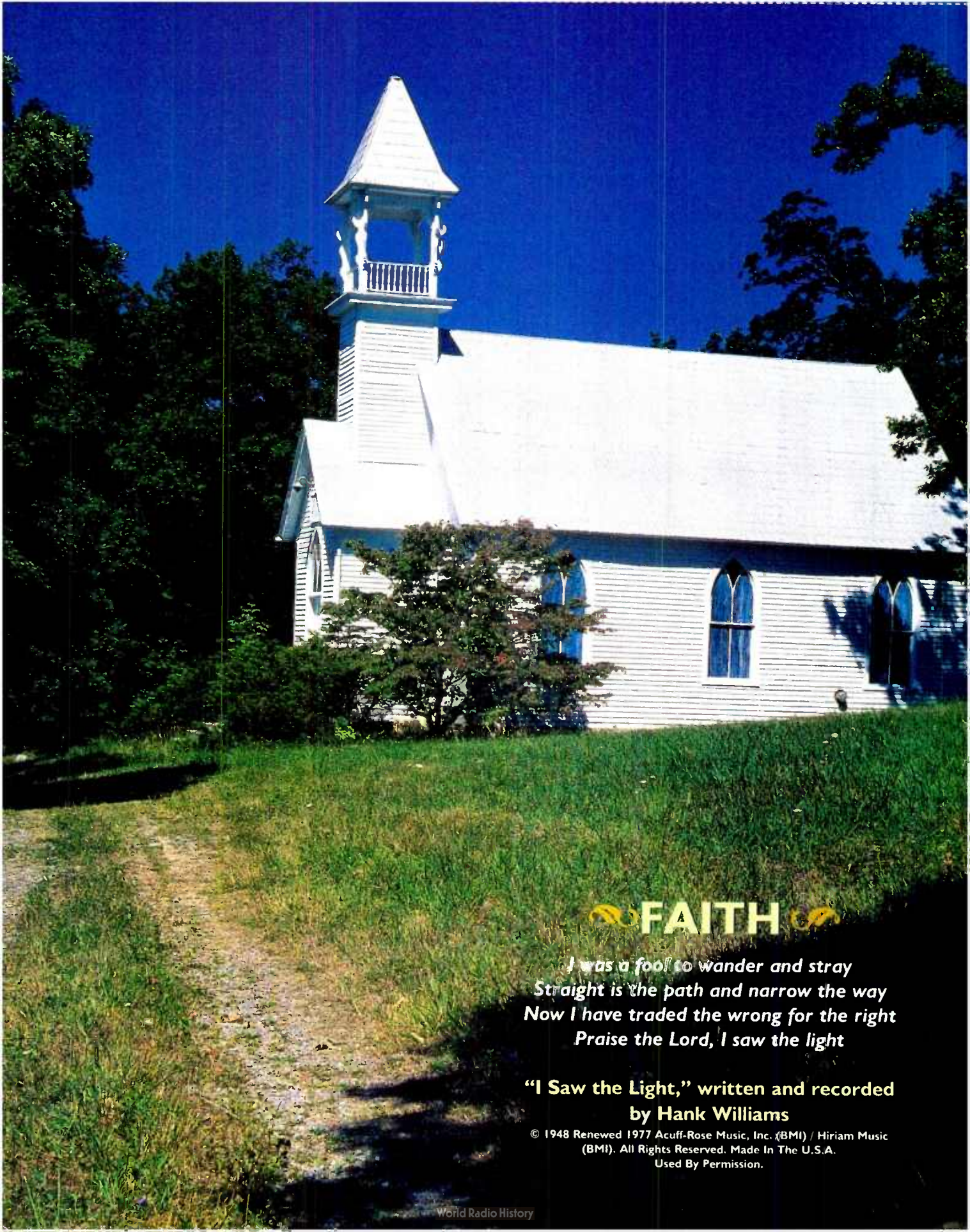
In the decades that would follow, country music would grow and evolve and wander far away from those roots. But they were never far from its surface. Even today, as it dresses up in fancy new clothes, country continues to be joined together by common threads that transcend time and trends, songs that unearth its earliest roots, songs that continue to draw from its great, enduring themes – straightforward songs about home, family, faith, work and the many other facets of life as we actually live it.

These threads connect country's past with its present and continue to give it durability, resonance and emotional potency. They spin a tapestry of tradition that country music still flies as a flag of honor. They promote a shared bond of experience that unites the musicians who started it, the ones who have carried it across the years and the multitudes who found – and continue to find – truth, comfort, inspiration and sometimes simply entertainment in its message.

In the pages that follow, you'll see these common threads in a unique way, as a melding of poignant images and insightful song lyrics. As country music moves forward, it's important to remember where it's been – and in the case of these common threads, comforting to know that they continue to hold it secure.



GARY W. CARTER/WWW.CORBIS.COM



FAITH

*I was a fool to wander and stray
Straight is the path and narrow the way
Now I have traded the wrong for the right
Praise the Lord, I saw the light*

**“I Saw the Light,” written and recorded
by Hank Williams**

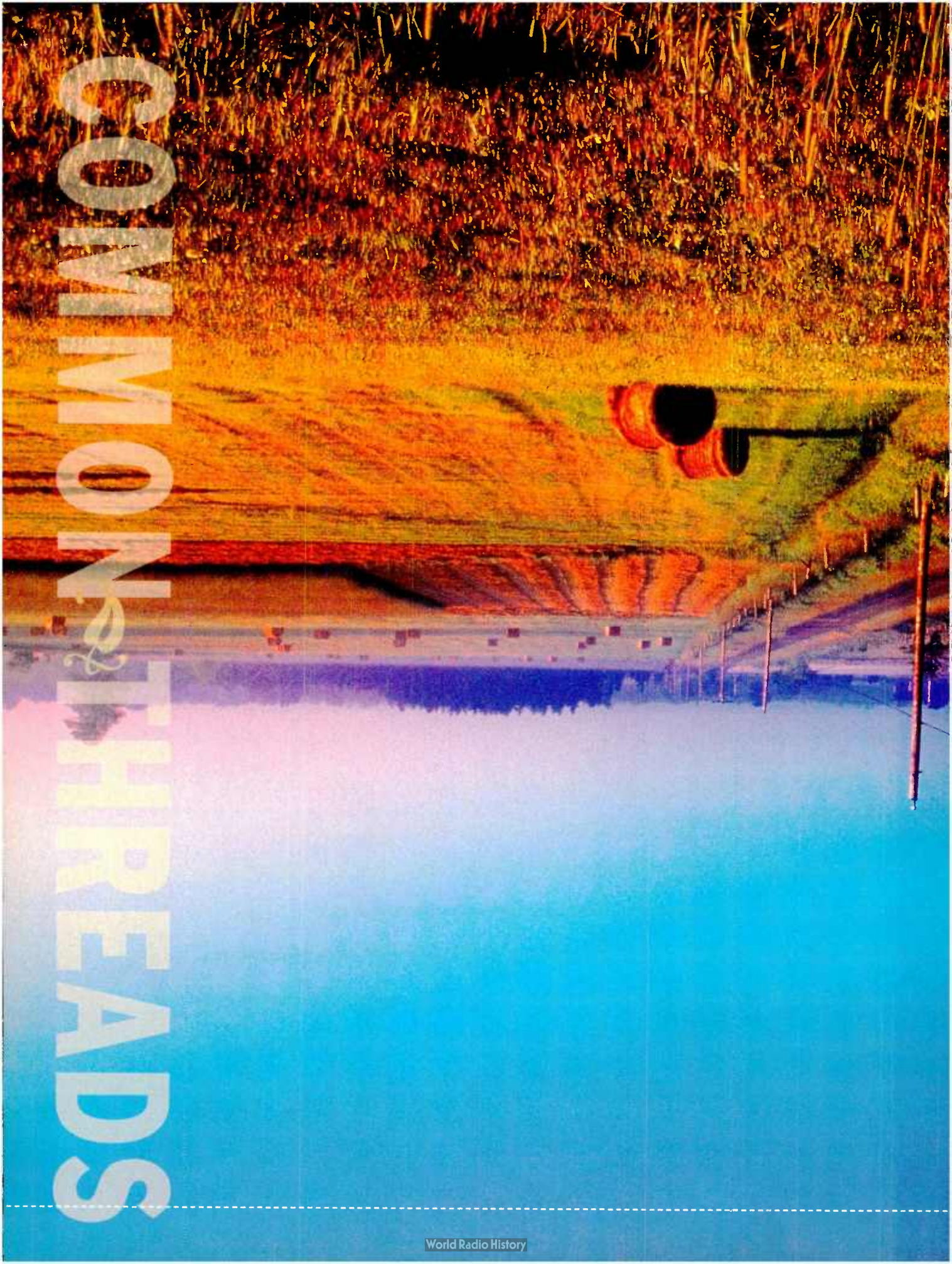
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THE LAND

*I was raised on country sunshine
Green grass beneath my feet
Running through fields of daisies
Wading through the creek*

**“Country Sunshine,” written by Dottie West,
Billy Davis and Diane Whiles and recorded
by Dottie West**

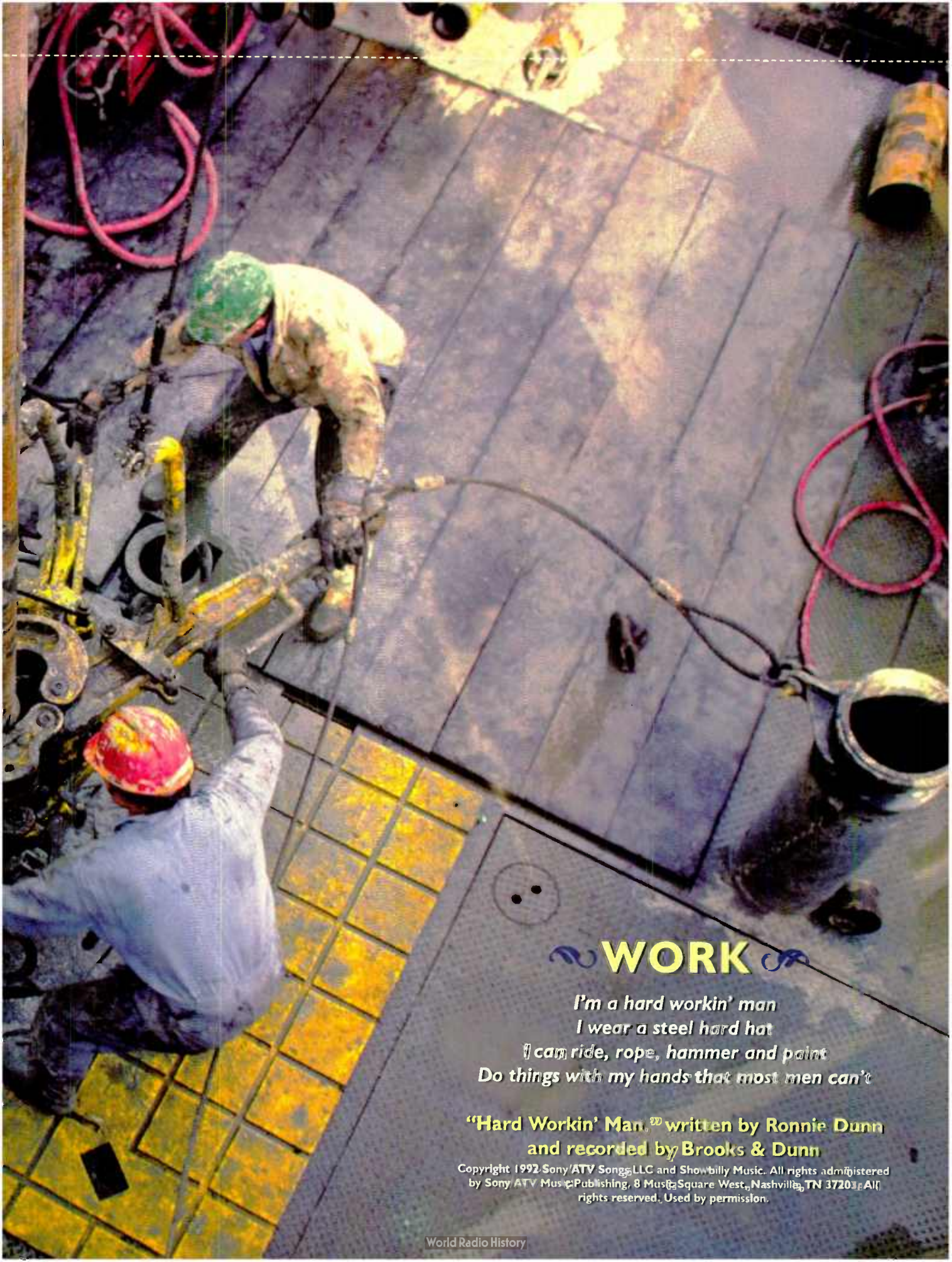
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COMMON THREADS

COMMUNICATIONS & FIRE

LARRY LEE PHOTOGRAPHY CORP.



WORK

*I'm a hard workin' man
I wear a steel hard hat
I can ride, rope, hammer and paint
Do things with my hands that most men can't*

**"Hard Workin' Man," written by Ronnie Dunn
and recorded by Brooks & Dunn**

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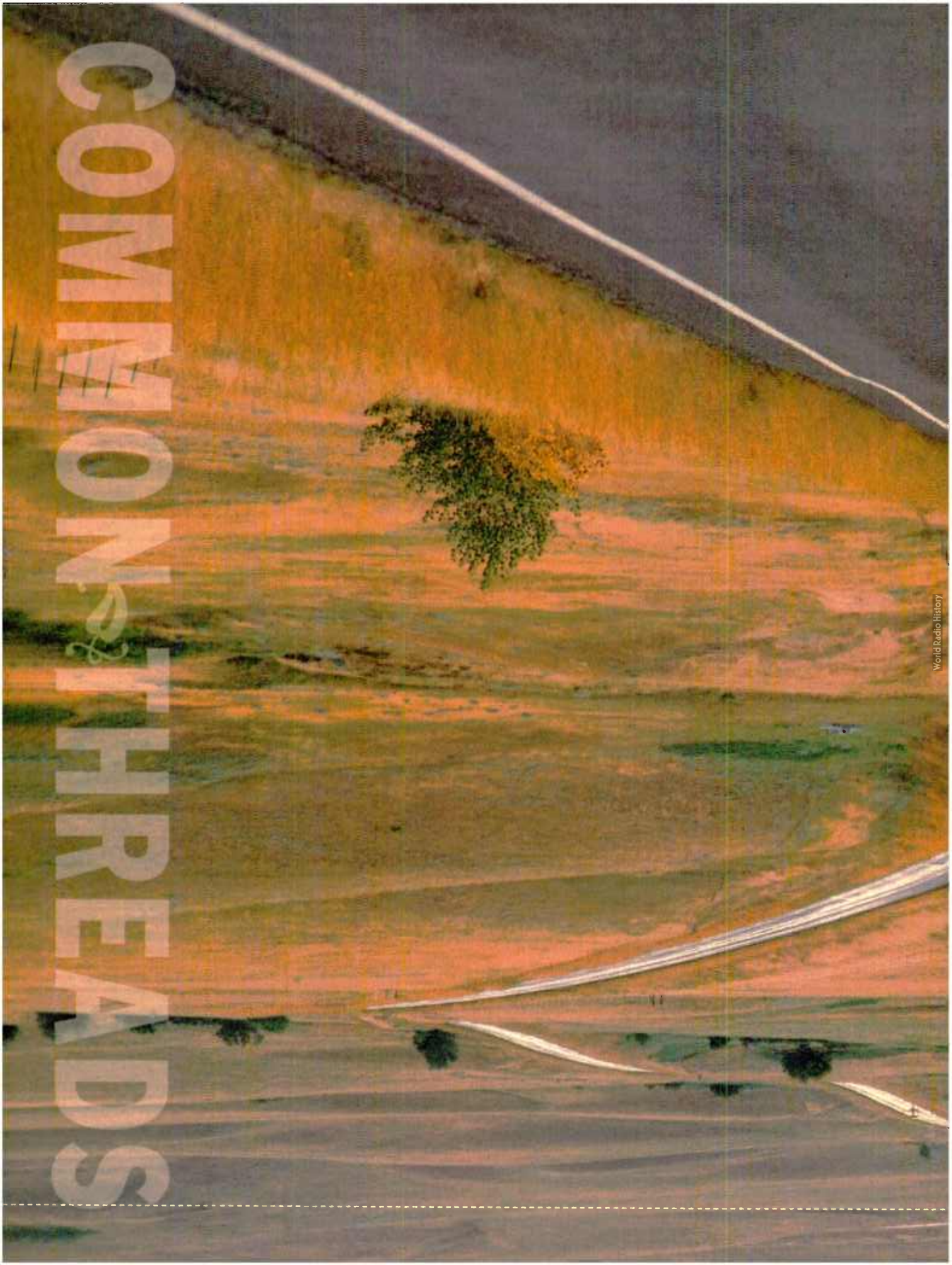


THE ROAD

*My hat don't hang on the same nail too long
My ears can't stand to hear the same old song
And I don't leave the highway long enough
To bog down in the mud
I've got ramblin' fever in my blood*

**"Ramblin' Fever," written and recorded
by Merle Haggard**

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COMMON & THREADS

~ FAMILY ~

*Home was an easy chair with my daddy there
And the smell of Sunday supper on the stove
My footsteps carry me away
But in my mind I'm always going home*

"Home," written by Andrew Spooner and William Lehner and recorded by Joe Diffie
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THE COUNTRY

*If tomorrow all the things were gone
I'd worked for all my life
And I had to start again with just
my children and my wife
I'd thank my lucky stars to be living here today
'Cause the flag still stands for freedom and they
can't take that away*

"God Bless The USA," written and
recorded by **Lee Greenwood**

Songs of Universal, Inc. (BMI).



Road Manager

David Milam has been Toby Keith's road manager since 1994. Whether Keith is filming long-distance commercials or barreling down the highway to the next concert, 39-year-old Milam, a former booking agent, is by his side, handling every detail along the way. He lives in Fort Worth, Texas, but spends most of his time on a tour bus, often working 12-hour days.

When I started working with Toby, we had nine guys and one bus. We had time to do all kinds of things; we played golf every day. Now we've got 19 people, three buses and a truck. My days are completely slammed. I haven't picked up a set of golf clubs in two years.

A typical day starts around nine. It's rare that any of us go to bed before three in the morning. We try to get to the venue by 1 p.m., so we're usually still en route to the next show by the time I get up and get started. That's when I try to catch up on phone calls and prepare for the day.

Toby and I are on one bus, the band is on another and the crew is on a third. After we arrive at the venue, we see what the ticket sales look like, touch base with the promoter and start working out guest tickets and arranging meet-and-greets. Usually Toby will do a couple of media interviews, and then we'll find him a good place to work out. Next, we try to catch a bite to eat, and by the time we're done it's just an hour or two before the show, so it's time to get cleaned up and get ready.

When Toby's onstage it's a good time for me to kick back and watch it all come together. I usually settle the money with the venue during the show, which leaves me with a load of tour accounting at the end of each week (which I am always behind on!).

The best part of the job has to be the perks. You meet a lot of really good people and there's always something fun to do, like going to other shows. And there are always tickets available to sporting events on the road.

The worst part is being away from home so much. During the Brooks & Dunn Neon Circus tour, I was out for nearly five months. I got home twice for a total of four days. In between shows, we had to do commercials,

videos, TV shows and recording in the studio.

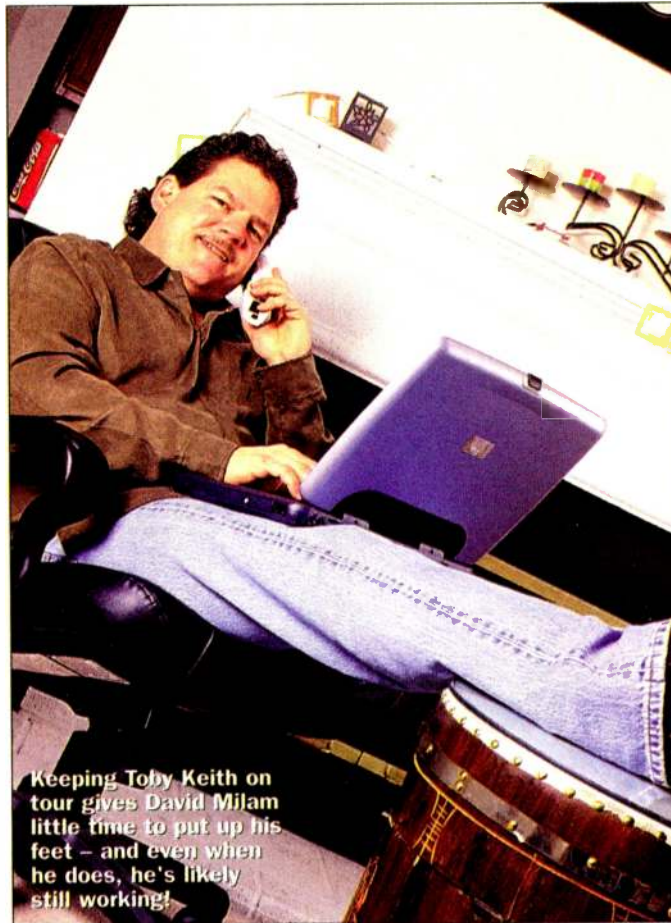
Copping an ego is a big no-no in my road manager's handbook. There is a huge competition out here among artists and their crews, and people will always take jabs at each other. Artists will make fun of other artists and crews will talk smack about other crews, but 99 percent of the time it's just in fun. But you've got to watch what you say because it will get back to somebody and you might hurt their feelings.

To be a good road manager, you have to pay attention to detail. You always have to remember that, above all, your job is to take care of the artist. You have to protect your artists, and there are times when you take the heat for them. When their schedule is tight and one more request for

their time comes in, you have to be the guy who says no.

Since I've known Toby for so long, I know when he wants to shoot the bull and when he wants to be left alone. Mine is as much of a personal relationship as it is business.

I don't know if I would enjoy working with another artist like I do with Toby. You get the same guy every day. He's really even-tempered and probably the fairest guy I know. There hasn't been a day that I don't get up and enjoy my work. And a lot of people can't say that of their jobs.



Keeping Toby Keith on tour gives David Milam little time to put up his feet – and even when he does, he's likely still working!

KATH HANSEN PHOTOGRAPHY

BY KATH HANSEN

Country fans love COUNTRYMUSIC MAGAZINE

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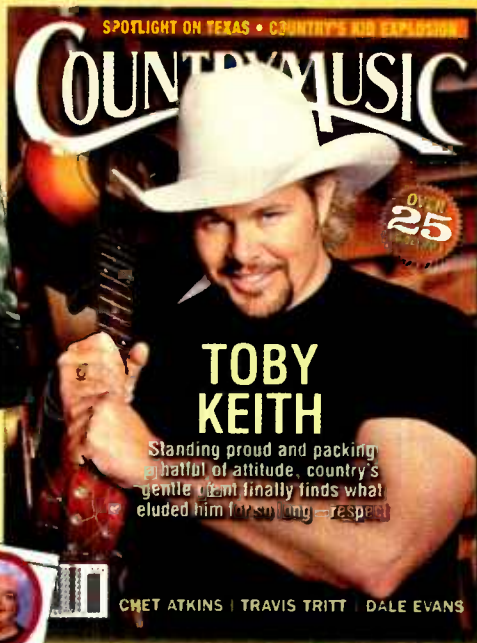
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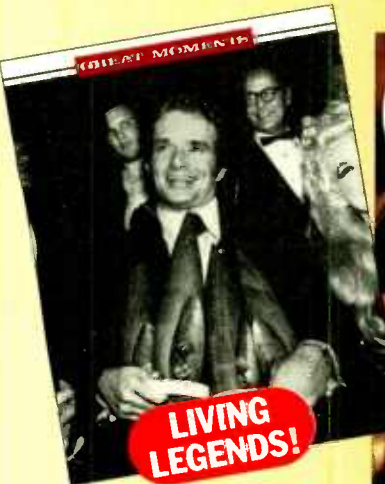


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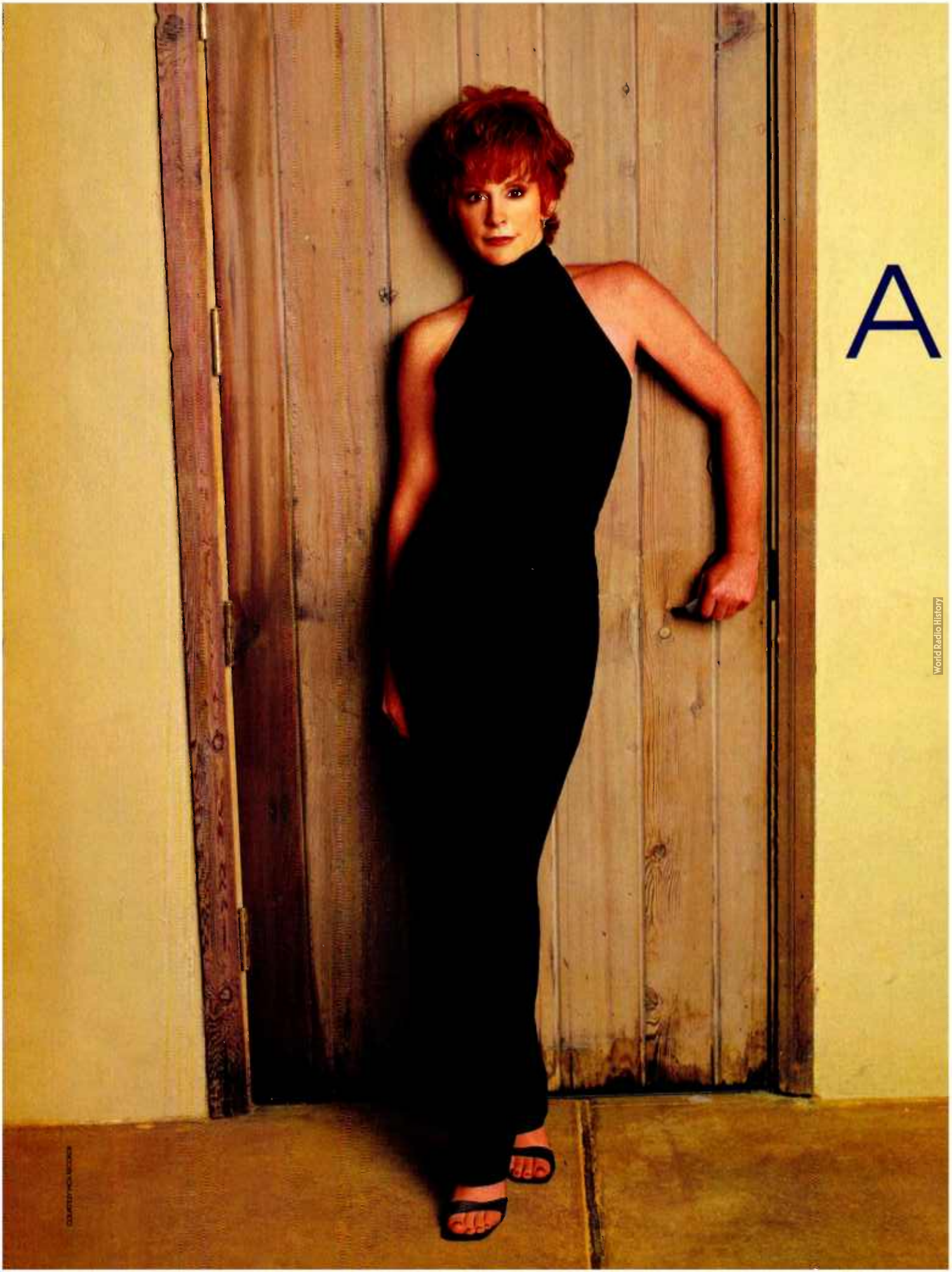


GOSSIP
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REVIEWS
THAT TELL IT
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A

STAR'S TREK

From Nashville to Hollywood to Broadway, Reba McEntire proves she's master of many fields

Reba McEntire stands on a soundstage lecturing her make-believe children about how to behave when her make-believe parents visit. Through it all, what's most striking about the scene is how believable she is.

Acting as Reba Hart, the singer's not-so-alter ego who runs a Texas household in the new hit sitcom *Reba*, McEntire hits every mark and enlivens her role with a vivacious naturalness that gives her character a genuine, convincing warmth. "I want everyone to be on their best behavior," she tells the children, "to show them how great we're all getting along."

"In other words," replies her smart-aleck TV daughter Kyra, "lie."

McEntire cocks her head to the side in a manner that draws the intended laughter. There's no need to say anything, for the simple gesture implies all the meanings necessary: frustration with the situation, recognition that she's put her

kids in a double bind and basic understanding that her children see through any attempt to put window dressing on the situation.

More important, it demonstrates the strength of McEntire's acting abilities. McEntire has explored the nuances of individual songs for more than 25 years, and when she's succeeded, she's been able to extract the joy, pain and heartbreak latent in the material. On television, physical expression is as important as vocal inflection, and McEntire seems to have mastered it, particularly when the expressions convey multiple meanings.

"She has a charisma that comes across onscreen," says Cynthia Littleton, deputy editor of the trade magazine *The Hollywood Reporter*. "I

by Tom Roland

REBA McENTIRE

think the show works because of Reba. I don't think this is a show that you could insert just any strong, funny actress in."

Reba is most certainly working on a commercial level. Shortly after the series began airing last fall, the WB Network extended its contract, ordering a full season of episodes. During a recent week, the show drew 4.5 million viewers, making it the fourth most successful program on the WB Network for that ratings period.

That's not anywhere near the audience drawn by the top sitcom of the same week, *Everybody Loves Raymond*, which pulled in more than 20 million viewers. But it's a conspicuously good response for a new program on WB, the smallest of the six major TV networks. More important,

Reba is the No. 1 draw in its time period for female viewers between the ages of 12 and 34 – the age bracket advertisers covet the most. The program is also the highest-rated TV show on Friday for teens, making it a gold mine for the WB Network.

"If you think about it," Littleton suggests, "the WB has had its biggest success with shows like *Dawson's Creek*, *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*, *Felicity* – shows that were hour-long serial dramas. *Reba* appeals to a slightly older audience than the Clearasil crowd that is the WB's strength. So on many levels, *Reba* is a success for the network, which is looking to broaden out a little bit."

The program also works on a creative level, enough so that a media insider like Littleton is willing to go "a little out on the limb," as she puts it, when looking

into the future. When the final competition for the Emmy Awards is announced in July, she wouldn't be surprised to see *Reba* land a nomination. Should that happen, it would provide concrete evidence that McEntire has turned yet another corner in her career.

At the beginning of 2001, the country-singing dynamo started a five-month run on Broadway as Annie Oakley, receiving rave reviews. *The New York Times* wrote, "She glides into the title role of *Annie Get Your Gun* like a seabird landing on water," and even fans and fellow artists who had watched her for more than 20 years were impressed with her growth.


"She blew my mind in *Annie Get Your Gun*," Trisha Yearwood observes. "I sat there in tears most of the time. First of all, I love Broadway and wish I was onstage anyway, but I sat there and watched her and thought, 'She is really coming into her own.'"

Michael Hanel, a co-executive producer for *Reba* and a veteran of the New York theater, was among the others stunned by how well McEntire took to Broadway. "When I went to see her, what she brought to her role was a fierce determination," Hanel says. "The *Annie Get Your Gun* experience certainly gave her a lot of confidence as an actress, but also that particular role tapped into a little bit of what she had to experience in her own career. She really had to figure out a way to make it in a world that she wasn't a part of originally."

Which pretty much sums up McEntire's history. A self-proclaimed "rodeo brat" from Oklahoma, she had to work hard to find success in Nashville after arriving with few contacts and little support. Then she became a successful movie actress, though she was clearly an outsider when she first approached Hollywood. And Broadway, while it involves acting, is an entirely different world than Hollywood – and she conquered that, too.

Now she's tackling TV, with its constantly changing scripts, an unforgiving weekly schedule and the unrelenting scrutiny of four cameras. "It's kinda like once you've had a baby, you can do anything," McEntire suggests. "That's kinda like Broadway. You do 160 shows before the [first] half of the year is over, it gives you confidence. You can do anything. I feel like I'm a full-fledged actress now. I don't have any inhibitions, any fears."

McEntire underscored that point during the taping of her show's "Meet The

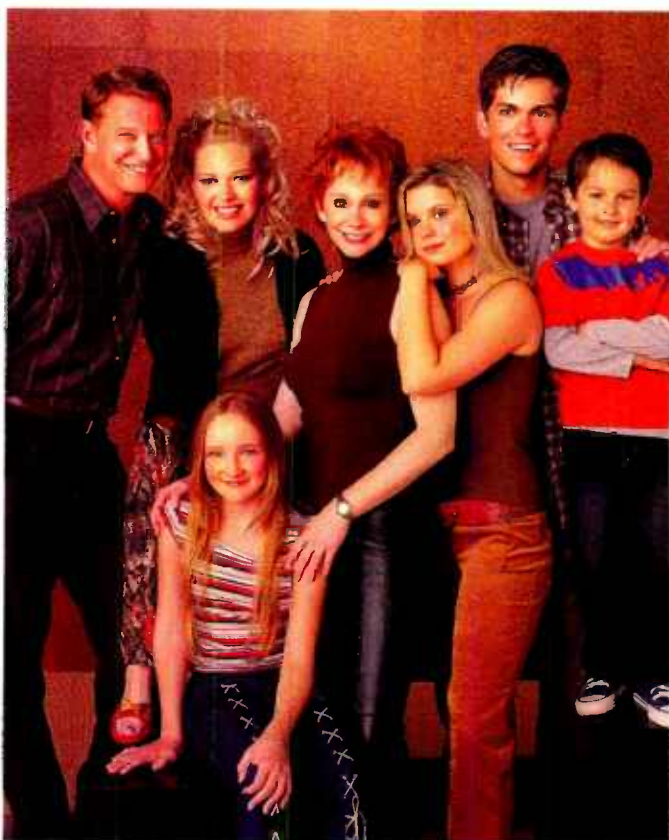


"I feel like I'm a full-fledged actress now," says McEntire.

THE WB/ANDREW ECCLES



As sitcom mom, McEntire solves a variety of family problems involving her TV daughter (played by Joanna Garcia), son (Steve Howey) and ex-husband (Christopher Rich). Right: with fellow cast members Rich, Melissa Peterman, Garcia, Howey, Mitch Holleman and (front) Scarlett Pomers.



Parents" episode. On the fly, producers suggested she join two members of the cast, Melissa Peterman (Barbra Jean, the girlfriend of Reba's ex-husband) and Dorothy Lyman (Reba Hart's mom, Helen), for a kitschy, impromptu dance to the R&B chestnut "Respect." McEntire let herself go, throwing her right hand around in a manner that aped John Travolta's moves in *Saturday Night Fever*. Enacted on a soundstage in front of a live audience of 160 or more, it could have been undignified and embarrassing. Instead, McEntire came across as an ordinary girl, looking to have a good time.

Her willingness to try such potential pratfalls recalls Lucille Ball, another redhead who, coincidentally, began her first sitcom exactly 50 years ago. McEntire is a big enough fan of Ball that she included a satirical, black-and-white skit, *I Love Flucy*, on her 1995 video, and she admits some influence from the TV maven. "When you do facial expressions," McEntire relates, "that's kinda who pops in your mind."

Several reviews of McEntire's Broadway appearances compared her to Ball and Carol Burnett, and *Reba* creator Allison M. Gibson sees a similarity in their approach. "The biggest surprise for me,

doing the pilot, was how good she is with the physical stuff," Gibson says. "She loved running around the kitchen and doing the physical stuff. Sometimes, big stars are not willing to risk looking silly, because they have a persona. She's a huge star as a singer, and comedies won't work unless you can come in and be willing to do that.

"People who develop truly great comic timing are willing to go out and risk, try this, try that, make mistakes, and do something too big, then try it too small, then find a happy medium. Reba's definitely a gamer with that. She's not afraid to go out there and make a fool of herself. It makes her so endearing and lovable as a character."

Her willingness to try new territory is, in fact, what has made Reba McEntire one of the most flexible, multi-faceted performers of her generation. She has repeatedly challenged herself with new media, and new forms of expression in her established media, making her a contemporary version of Dolly Parton or Gene Autry.

When McEntire first signed with Mercury Records in 1975, she willingly

followed the advice of the business people around her. It took more than four years before she earned a Top 10 hit, and she began to make a career out of old-fashioned waltzes and syrupy mid-tempo numbers. She didn't really show her headstrong individualism until she moved to MCA in 1984.

Once there she eschewed her professional past, finding songs with a more traditional sound and discarding the spandex britches she had worn in favor of outfits that more closely resembled the rodeo life in which she was raised. It was only after she made those choices that her career took off.

Even when she gained success — claiming the Country Music Association's Entertainer of the Year award in 1986 — Reba didn't stop re-inventing herself. She

began taking more gambles: She recorded pop-flavored material (when she covered Aretha Franklin's "Respect" in the late 1980s, many were outraged at her perceived snub of country tradition). She played with fashion, embracing clothing styles that ranged from elegant to risqué. She entirely reworked her concerts, adding dancers, props, wardrobe changes and elaborate lighting schemes.



Accepting her 1986 CMA Award for Entertainer of the Year.

REBA McENTIRE

Sometimes her efforts worked. At other times, the productions became so big that the music felt like a sideshow.

Those changes in her public image coincided with her efforts to conquer the film world. Beginning with her 1990 appearance in the sci-fi picture *Tremors*, she actively pursued – and snagged – acting roles in such TV movies as *Is There Life Out There?*, *Forever Love* and *The Gambler Returns: The Luck Of The Draw*, as well as guest roles on *One Life To Live* and *Evening Shade*. She even opened her own production company, with a specific eye toward building her on-camera presence.

McEntire's audience was extremely loyal, and some, when pressed, admitted that they preferred the uncluttered Reba, singing from the heart without all the bells

and whistles. But, they would quickly add, if all the extra stuff kept her happy, they would go along with the bigger-than-life Reba, regardless of the outcome.

Her Broadway success not only improved her acting, it also improved her concerts. When McEntire headlined the Girls' Night Out Tour last summer, she combined all of the facets of her career – the big-production show, the dramatic material, the acting nuances and, of course, her singular vocal approach – in a way that seemed entirely natural. It no longer felt as if she was trying to impress the audience, or herself. Instead, she was simply living the material.

"Annie affected my overall confidence and my secureness onstage, and made me realize that I don't have to be somethin' dif-

ferent onstage to impress my fans," she says. "I just have to be me, and I think there was a difference this tour. I think I was a different person."

But the situation places McEntire in a strong, feminine role that has long been the bread-and-butter of her career. "I'm fighting in every episode to hold the family together, and to defend myself," she says. And always, McEntire is clearly conscientious about the extent of the sexual content. "If something's said that's inappropriate, Reba responds as a parent, usually cutting it off quickly," Gibson says. "I feel like we're honoring the audience in that respect."

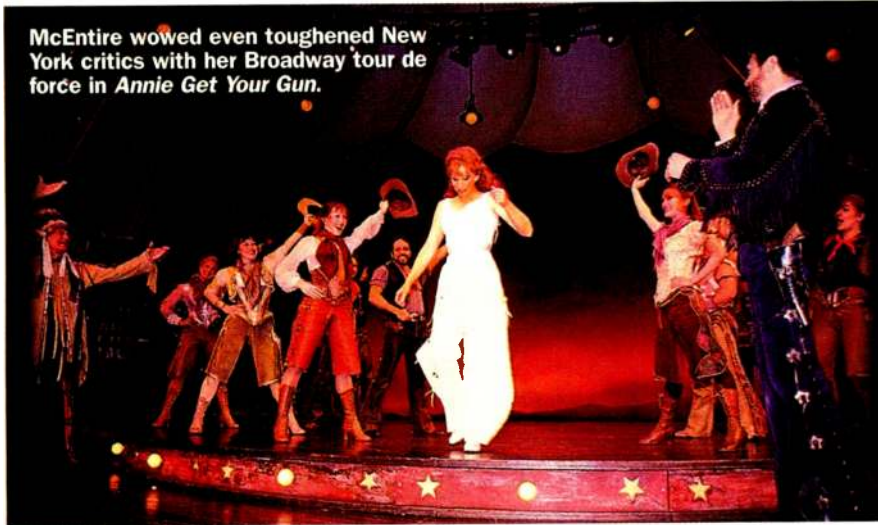
Besides, says *The Hollywood Reporter's* Littleton, a modern-day sitcom, even one geared toward a family audience, has to accept that teens and young adults can handle sophisticated stories these days.

"It's the 21st century," Littleton offers, "and there is a sense that the audience – even the teenagers and the young adults – are very sophisticated. These things happen in this world, especially in the world where *Reba* is set. Ten or 12 years ago, the *Roseanne* show struck some people as, 'My God, this is no role model for mothers!' But to many others it felt very much like real life. That's what people are responding to in *Reba*."

They are also responding to yet another successful incarnation of Reba McEntire. In the pilot, shot in April 2001, she had a couple of moments where her movements seemed awkward or self-conscious. By the time she taped her second episode, in September, she was comfortable in the role. By the 10th episode, it was easy to forget that she was a singer rather than a veteran actor. "I don't think I've ever worked with anyone who has such a tremendous learning curve," Hanel notes. "It comes from that place of determination and grace that she seems to move through life with."

Determination, grace, persistence – all qualities those who follow Reba McEntire have come to expect and admire. After more than a decade of expanding from a singer to an all-around entertainer, McEntire's relentless journey has elevated her to a place she alone occupies. Whether singing or acting, dramatic or comedic, onscreen or onstage, she simply is one of country music's most gifted interpreters. *

McEntire wowed even toughened New York critics with her Broadway tour de force in *Annie Get Your Gun*.



SUE CORPIN

and whistles. But, they would quickly add, if all the extra stuff kept her happy, they would go along with the bigger-than-life Reba, regardless of the outcome.

Often, the props distracted from the music instead of enhancing it, but that seemed to change after she tackled *Annie Get Your Gun*. During her time on Broadway, she went through a notable transformation, guided by the repetition of the performances and the immediate reaction of a live audience – something that had been missing in her film endeavors.

"Eight shows a week was so hard, doin' the same thing over and over again," she recalls. "But you can reinvent yourself every time you say a line in *Annie Get Your Gun*."

Plus, she got instant feedback. When the audience responded strongly to something she worried was hokey, or didn't respond

ferent onstage to impress my fans," she says. "I just have to be me, and I think there was a difference this tour. I think I was a different person."

That change was particularly evident in Reba's performance of the song "And Still." Her facial expressions, revealed through a video closeup, made the concertgoer feel all the emotion that accompanies the storyline, as the woman in the song meets an ex with his new love at his side. For three minutes, she was spellbindingly believable.

"The experience of really relating to a song, like I did in *Annie Get Your Gun*, carried over to doin' a song like 'And Still,' " she concurs.

The challenges and re-inventions, however, have not stopped. The *Reba* show takes some risks in its subject matter. Her TV daughter, Cheyenne, is a pregnant

OLGA MARTIN CONFESSES:

How I lost 42 pounds while continuing to eat everything that I liked, and...

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Before this astonishing experience, I weighed 166 pounds (I'm 5'6"). I was conscious of the fact that this was too much. But when you've tried everything to lose weight without any success, like I had, you start to give up...

Before I begin, I have to declare to you that in my family, all the women are stout. My grandmother always said: "It's better to look well-padded and strong than puny and weak". Even when I felt full, I was told, "finish what you've got on your plate." And I can assure you that I didn't have any choice!

At only 12 years of age, I had one fear: "getting big". More than anything in world. I did not want to look like my aunts or my cousins. I wanted to be slim, like the models in the fashion magazine pictures that I taped to my bedroom wall!

Unfortunately - and I don't know if heredity is the cause - but as soon as I hit my 14th birthday, I started to round out; I had a slim waist, but large thighs and heavy calves. And I can tell you that, from when I was 15 until I was 20, I battled with my extra pounds... and with myself.

One day, I was ashamed!

When I married, I was 21. My husband and I decided that I would stay at home. At first, everything was new and wonderful! This new life made me happy: it was nice being at home, the house was pretty...but very quickly, I started to get bored.

I hardly ever went out, and the minute I was feeling down, I had to nibble on something...a piece of pie here, a cookie there, I could have eaten all day. I had to hold back to keep from emptying the fridge!

I had a feeling that the episodes of binging from my adolescence were

returning...but I couldn't do anything—it was too strong for me.

So, I started getting even larger than before. At first, my figure pleased my husband, who thought my pleasant plumpness suited me well—especially my larger bustline - but then, I could see him turning away from me. He'd tell me "you have a lovely face and you'd look 10 years younger if you weren't so big". And I felt really bad. I was so ashamed, I didn't even try to wear jeans...to say nothing of a bathing suit.

Within 2 years, the situation was catastrophic: I weighed 166 pounds. Sometimes, with a diet that deprived me of everything I loved, I could manage to lose 5 or 6 pounds. Which I only regained in a couple of days. I even spoke to a doctor about medication and appetite suppressants, but they made my stomach hurt...I slept badly and I didn't lose weight at all!

I couldn't stay like that.

I felt atrocious, enomous! I avoided walking around in a slip and brassiere like I used to do before. My husband wasn't that interested in me anymore and at night, when we went to bed, he'd very often turn his back to me and fall asleep...without saying a word!

Just like everyone, I watch television and I've read the many testimonials of young women close to my own age who had succeeded to quickly and easily lose 20, 30 and even 50 pounds. And all this without effort, without medication and while continuing to eat as they pleased!

It was a question of using an elixir called Algoxyl, a weight-loss plan based on fresh seaweeds and Chinese herbs, which they drank before each main meal. It was easy, with no constraints, and I said to myself "you should try it. Chinese medicine is famous for being natural. And if so many women have already lost weight with this drink, then it could very well be the miracle I'd been waiting for."

And then I made a remarkable discovery.

So, without consulting my husband, I telephoned the distributor and asked them to mail me the Algoxyl weight-loss plan in a discreet package. The trial was risk-free and I had a formal guarantee: if I didn't lose 25 pounds in 4 weeks, the trial would have cost me nothing.

Each morning, I waited impatiently by the mailbox, but I didn't have to wait for long: a few days later, I received the package! It was a tiny package that looked completely anonymous, and inside it held

the vials of Algoxyl elixir.

I was sold on it right away: it was well presented and, what's more, it looked easy to use. I read the instructions and discovered that, for my situation, I had to take 3 doses before each meal. I was raring to go!

(please, turn over...)

Now I eat whatever I want - even fries. Plus, nothing makes me gain weight, so I don't see why I should deprive myself!



My husband still can't believe it. I lost 42 pounds like that, without even noticing. Today, I have the feeling that I've found a way to start a new life.

THE **Journal**

OF TRADITIONAL COUNTRY MUSIC

**The man with
the golden ear**

**A tale of
two typewriters**

**"Kiss An Angel
Good Mornin' "**



The Real Patsy Cline

By Ralph Emery

Editor: Robert K. Oermann

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An essential marketplace for buyers, sellers and traders, as well as a forum for readers to share their views.

WHO AM I?

How much do you know about your country music favorites? Here's your chance to find out. Test your trivia knowledge about one of the greats.

CLUE #1 I was a baseball pitcher for the St. Louis Cardinals' minor league team, but an ankle injury ended my athletic career.

CLUE #2 In the early days of my career, I worked as a radio announcer as well as a vocalist.

CLUE #3 A tavern in Dallas named itself Three Teardrops after a line in one of my hit songs.

CLUE #4 I was a member of the *Louisiana Hayride*, then joined the cast of the *Grand Ole Opry* on Oct. 19, 1955.

CLUE #5 My band was called The Blue Boys.

CLUE #6 I was particularly popular overseas, making a movie in South Africa and having 30 hits on the British pop charts.

CLUE #7 I continued to make the charts for 20 years after my untimely death in 1964.

CLUE #8 My posthumous duet partners were Deborah Allen and Patsy Cline; during my lifetime I harmonized with Dottie West.

CLUE #9 My intimate vocal delivery was described as "velvet."

CLUE #10 I was elected to The Country Music Hall of Fame in 1967.



* Answers on page J16



PRECIOUS MEMORIES

FROM THE COUNTRY MUSIC HALL OF FAME AND MUSEUM

HITTING THE RIGHT KEYS

Why does the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum have two typewriters on display?



COURTESY COUNTRY MUSIC HALL OF FAME AND MUSEUM

PHOTOGRAPH BY MCKELARY

Though the typewriter doesn't make music, it *has* been instrumental in creating many classic country songs. Recognizing that fact, the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum artifact collection includes the typewriters of two of country's greatest songwriters.

A late-1940s, manual Royal Typewriter with a pink finish comes from Cindy Walker, the great Texas writer responsible for more than 50 Bob Wills recordings, including "Cherokee Maiden" and "Bubbles In My Beer," as well as Webb Pierce's "I Don't Care," Jim Reeves' "Distant Drums" and Roy Orbison's "Dream Baby (How Long Must I Dream)."

Walker used her distinctly feminine Royal to tap out the lyrics to two of the most recorded songs in popular history, "You Don't Know Me" and "When My Blue Moon Turns To Gold Again." The former became a country hit by Eddy Arnold and has been covered by Ray Charles, Elvis Presley, Emmylou Harris, Bette Midler and Meryl Streep, among many others. Walker herself first recorded "When My Blue Moon Turns To Gold Again," turning it into a pop hit in 1944. It has since been recorded by Presley, Bing Crosby, Jerry Lee Lewis, Merle Haggard, Bill Monroe and others.

Bill Anderson also favored the Royal brand, though his was an electric. A former journalist, Anderson got his music-business break in 1958 when singer Ray Price recorded a million-selling version of his composition "City Lights." Anderson then moved to Nashville, got an electric Royal and went on to type dozens of seminal country songs, including Connie Smith's "Once A Day" and Lefty Frizzell's "Saginaw, Michigan." His catalog stretches through six decades of country music history, and includes such recent recordings as Mark Wills' "Wish You Were Here," Steve Wariner's "Two Teardrops," Vince Gill's "Which Bridge To Cross, Which Bridge To Burn" and Brad Paisley's "Too Country."

Amazingly, Bill Anderson found time to pursue his own recording career and write a long list of hits for himself, too. He's garnered more than 30 Top 10 hits in his career.

Both Anderson and Walker are Hall of Fame songwriters who put a premium on lyrics. Country music is richer for their words, so it only makes sense that the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum would consider their typewriters to be historical "musical" instruments.

— Mark Medley

For information or to contribute to the Hall of Fame, please contact the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, 222 Fifth Avenue South, Nashville, TN 37203; phone (615) 416-2001; or visit www.countrymusichalloffame.com.

The

Famed TV mystery of

Ralph Emery remains country music's most beloved talk show host. His 10 years in the anchor seat of TNN's Nashville Now capped a long-running career as a radio and TV personality known for his warm connection to country stars and his folksy, knowledgeable manner in interviews. Emery's fourth book, *50 Years Down A Country Road*, was issued in paperback in December 2001. An excerpt from his chapter on his friend Patsy Cline follows.

By Ralph Emery

Patsy Cline was a complex woman. She could cry herself to sleep from missing her children when she was on the road and still be one of the boys who would drink a beer with the guys and keep right up with Faron Young when he got to cussing.

The combination of vulnerability and

Before Patsy Cline struck gold, she constantly battled poverty. She took on a series of odd jobs, including one at Gaunt's Drug Store in Virginia, from the time she was a teenager. "Even after she had a hit song and had married Charlie Dick," notes Ralph Emery, "she had no real security."



Real Patsy Cline

host peels away the
a country music legend

tough street smarts made her both interesting and convincing. She could sing about heartbreak with conviction, but underneath it all, you knew she'd pull through. There wasn't a hint of weakness in her soulful performances of sorrowful lyrics.

Patsy did get irritated when she thought someone was looking down his nose at her. Maybe that came from the days when her father ran off and the 15-year-old had to quit school and go to work to help support the family. The lack of money, even after she was a star, played heavily in her life.

Sometimes the slight was real. When a group of *Opry* stars played New York's Carnegie Hall in 1961, it was quite a group: Jim Reeves, Marty Robbins, Patsy Cline, Minnie Pearl, Faron Young, Bill Monroe, The Jordanaires, Grandpa Jones and The Stony Mountain Cloggers. T. Tommy Cutrer was the show's emcee.

Ironically, in light of some of the press' anti-country bias, the show was a symphony fund-raiser. New York columnist Dorothy Kilgallen, never one to miss a barb, called the performers coming to the Big Apple "hicks from the sticks." She also wrote: "You hipsters who have been planning a fall vacation might want to leave earlier. *Grand Ole Opry* does a gig at Carnegie Hall this month. (Remember when Carnegie Hall was associated with MUSIC?)"

That fired Patsy up. A few days before the New York show, she played a date in Winston-Salem, N.C., and referred to Dorothy as "the Wicked Witch of the East." Then Patsy said, "At least we ain't standing on some street corner with itty-bitty cans in our hands, collecting coins to keep up the opera and symphonies."

Patsy received ovations throughout her Manhattan show. The *New York Times* reviewer raved about the show. He noted, "Patsy Cline, a modern popular singer, had a convincing way with 'heart songs,' the country cousin of the torch song."

I want to talk about Patsy and Loretta Lynn. I think what Patsy loved about Loretta Lynn was that with Loretta there is no pretense, no B.S. I love to listen to some of the old radio interviews with Loretta. Her demeanor has never changed. I remember her telling me about a time when both [her husband] Doo and the housekeeper at Loretta's farm, Hurricane Mills, were ready to walk out. Here's how the 1974 conversation went:

"Why do you think your housekeeper wants to quit and Doo is ready to run off?" I asked Loretta.

"It's them animals," she said. "I got turkeys a gobble-gobbling, guinea hens a screamin' and a hollerin', pigs a rootin' around. And I'll tell you the truth, Ralph, that housekeeper and Doo can just go on if they want to. I'm a keeping my pigs whether they root



With daughter Julie in 1959

COURTESY GUY SHACKLEFORD

or not! And I ain't lettin' Doo take 'em to the market, neither. I like my animals to die of old age."

A no-bull person like Patsy couldn't help but be completely charmed with Loretta's equally straight-shooting character.

I believe a bond was formed that first night when the hospitalized Patsy heard Loretta sing "I Fall To Pieces" on Ernest Tubb's *Mid-Nite Jamboree*. Indeed, the two met under trying times for both. Patsy was slowly healing from her near-fatal car crash. She feared for her future, and she was in

Country came to New York's famed Carnegie Hall in 1961 with a bill that featured (from left) Grandpa Jones, Minnie Pearl, Faron Young, Bill Monroe and Cline. Cline completely won over a *New York Times* reviewer with her powerful performance.



LESLIE PERRY

PATSY CLINE

a philosophical state of mind. She'd told her neighbor of a spiritual experience she had right after the wreck. Jesus, she said, had come to her and said, "Not Yet."

Loretta Lynn was a new girl in town, full of fear and confidence all rolled into one. When Patsy sent her husband, Charlie Dick, to find Loretta and bring her to the hospital room, it was almost as if it was providence, as if the planets had lined up right. They were instantly fast friends.

Part of Patsy's legacy is wrapped up in Loretta Lynn's legacy. Patsy had guts. Loretta says she usually has guts as well, but she admits that Patsy's strength has always been a part of her risk-taking personality. Remember, Loretta was the first woman to have a song, "The Pill," banned. She took a lot of criticism for her take-no-prisoners tunes and her honesty, too. Yet since her chart debut with "I'm A Honky Tonk Girl" in 1960 she has become one of the most important artists, male or female, of the genre.

Had Patsy Cline lived, she would have been an even bigger legend than she is now. Patsy and her producer, Decca's Owen Bradley, were making brilliant records, and nothing in her personal life seemed to be standing in the way of more success. The biggest and most long-lasting problem Patsy ever faced was lack of money.

She faced poverty from the time her father abandoned the family when



COURTESY MCA NASHVILLE



Cline and Loretta Lynn formed a mutual bond after meeting in Patsy's hospital room. "Loretta admits that Patsy's strength has always been a part of her risk-taking personality," writes Emery. On one of her frequent visits to Cline's home, Lynn (above, right) works up a new song while husband Mooney takes notes.

she was 15. Those were the days when she worked at a poultry shop, at a drugstore and at any club where she could make a few dollars singing.

Even after she had a hit song, 1957's "Walking After Midnight," and had married Charlie Dick, she had no real security. When Charlie was released from the military in 1957, they knew they should move to Nashville. yet to do so meant a little case of fraud against the U.S. government. The government mistakenly sent seven additional allotment checks of \$138 to Patsy after Charlie was no longer serving his country. Charlie recalls that they spent the first one, then put six in a drawer, knowing the money wasn't theirs to keep. When the time came to move, the two threw caution to the wind and cashed all six checks. That's how Patsy Cline made it to Music City.

In her letters to a young woman named Treva Miller, Patsy revealed a great deal about her life prior to 1960. Treva had approached Patsy in 1955 about starting a fan club, and Patsy was enthusiastic about it. By that time she was a regular on Connie B. Gay's *Town & Country* regional television broadcasts and had signed the contract with Four Star Records.

Two things stood out when I read those letters, now on display at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum in Nashville (also available in the book *Love Always, Patsy* by Cindy Hazen and Mike Freeman). The first thing that will cause fans to shake their heads is how broke Patsy remained until "I Fall To Pieces" was released on April 3, 1961. I'd known about her financial situation, though perhaps not how heavily it weighed on her mind.

But there was one story I found astonishing. On Jan. 16, 1956, Patsy wrote Treva that she was just back from a trip to Nashville, where she'd been at the *Opry* and accompanied some people to the Plantation Club after the show. The Plantation Club was our one big nightclub back then. Patsy sang two songs and the audience insisted she come back out for a third. And who accompanied this relatively unknown artist to the Plantation Club that night? Eddy Arnold, Bill Morgan (a deejay and brother of *Opry* star George Morgan), Audrey Williams,

Ray Price and Tony Bennett! That's pretty heavy company for a girl from Winchester, Va., signed to a small label and with no charted records. I think everyone who heard her sing knew she was destined for greatness.

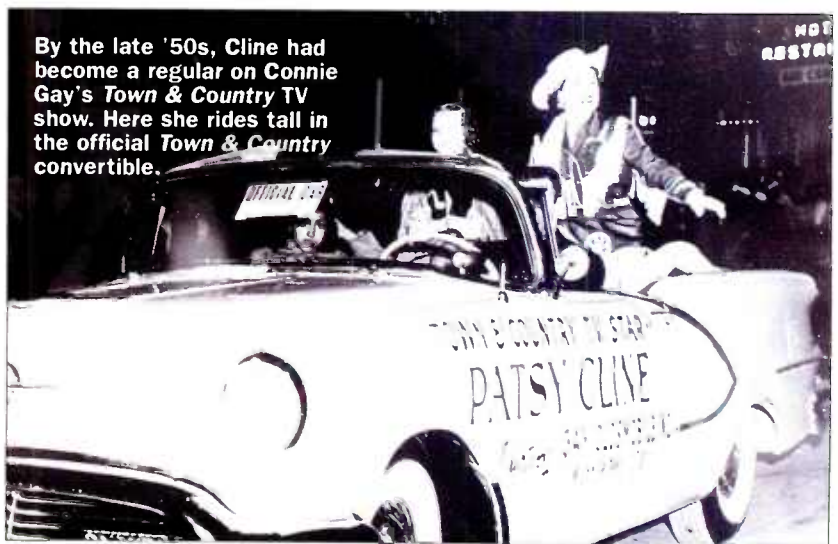
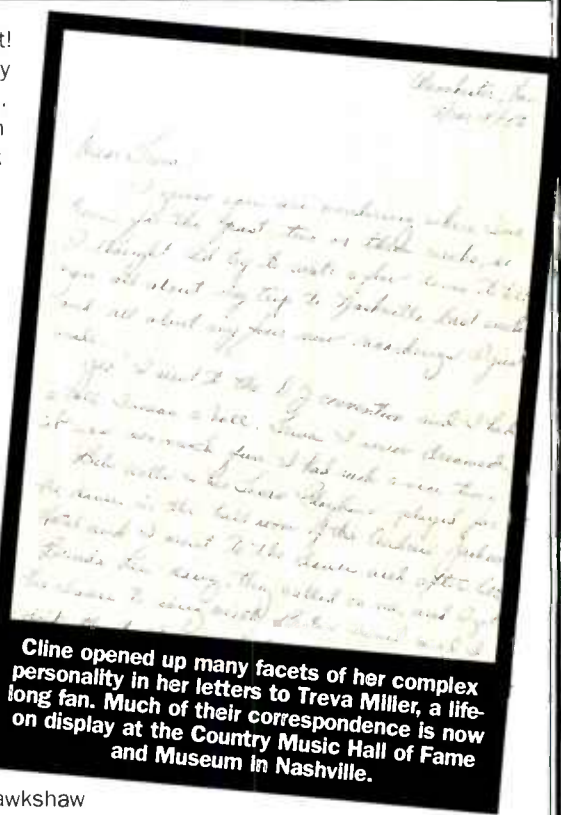
During the few years of solvency Patsy Cline had, between 1961 and 1963, she spread her money around among friends. Dottie West told of a time when she was behind on the rent, and Patsy slipped her a check for the \$75 payment. Loretta and other friends of Patsy have similar stories.

What a short time she had to enjoy the financial rewards of superstardom. On March 5, 1963, she died in a plane crash with her manager Randy Hughes, who was piloting the plane, and *Opry* stars Hawkshaw Hawkins and Cowboy Copas. It was a crash that never should have happened. The four were returning to Nashville from a benefit show in Kansas City. The weather was bad and showed no signs of clearing despite Randy's assurances to Patsy when they set down in Dyersburg, Tenn. Bill Braese, the airport manager, even pulled Randy aside and warned him not to take off. But Randy was a daredevil at heart. I can remember his bragging to me on numerous occasions about how quickly he'd made a drive from Texas to Tennessee. I'd try to figure out how

fast he must have been driving, and I was always taken aback. It was a bad call, and country music lost some great talents that day.

As we got to the 1980s and 1990s, we saw women become very important as headline acts and trendsetters. Most of them remember Patsy's opening the door, and I hope they remember the advice she often gave new entertainers: "Hoss, if you can't do it with feeling, don't." *

From the book *50 Years Down A Country Road* by Ralph Emery, © 2000 by Ralph Emery. Reprinted by permission of William Morrow, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers.





The 90-year-old Nelson traveled from Los Angeles to Nashville to attend last year's Country Music Hall of Fame inductions (inset). "I'm just glad I made it here," he announced, "because my family will now know that I'm recognized for something I worked at all those years."

The Quiet Voice Behind The Curtain

Hall of Fame producer Ken Nelson got results by staying out of the way

Because the Country Music Association decided to instate 12 new members in 2001 instead of the usual two, the list of inductees proved to be an especially monumental group – ranging from groundbreakers like The Everly Brothers, Waylon Jennings and super-producer Sam Phillips to enduring country stars Bill Anderson, Don Gibson and The Louvin Brothers.

By David Simons

However, the new member who most influenced the direction of country music was a quiet man with the least name recognition – producer and record executive Ken Nelson.

As chief of Capitol Records' country division from the '50s to the '70s, Nelson signed and recorded milestone country acts Faron Young, Tommy Collins, Rose Maddox, Red Simpson and The Louvin Brothers, to name a few. More important, Nelson worked with fellow Hall of Famers Buck Owens and Merle Haggard, as well as embryonic rocker Gene Vincent.

Nelson's contributions finally got their due with his induction into the Hall of Fame.

"I'm just glad I made it here, mostly because my family will now know that I'm recognized for something I worked at all those years," said the spry 90-year-old. Traveling to Nashville from his residence in Los Angeles to participate in the ceremony prompted Nelson to remember his role in helping form the Country Music Association in 1958; he later served as the organization's president. "To be a part of it today is really incredible," Nelson beamed.

It's particularly incredible considering the obstacles Nelson overcame in becoming an integral force in American music history. Raised in a Midwest

orphanage and living on his own by age 14, Nelson started his music career in the early 1930s as a member of the Campus Kids vocal trio in Chicago. A short time later, he took a job as a classical music disc jockey at the city's WJJD.

When WJJD changed to a country format, Nelson suddenly was put in a position to become well-versed in popular country styles.

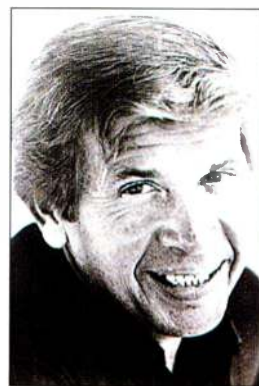
Lee Gillette, a former member of the Campus Kids who had become a producer at Capitol, asked his country-savvy friend to oversee a recording date with Uncle Henry's Kentucky

Mountaineers. Nelson accepted the job. But because he had little technical know-how, he simply watched and listened as the session progressed.

"It worked," says Nelson, chuckling as he recalls the origins of the laid-back production style that became his hallmark.

Nelson relocated to Los Angeles in 1948, and three years later took over Capitol's country music division, where he stayed through the '70s. Rather than wait for talent to converge on his office at Hollywood and Vine, Nelson made regular treks to the South in search of the next big thing. Among the sensations he discovered was a charismatic Louisiana singer, Faron Young.

But Nelson's biggest find came in his own backyard. Buck Owens had been working for Nelson as a session guitarist since the early 1950s, making the 100-mile trek back and forth between Hollywood and his hometown of Bakersfield. Nelson noticed that



Nelson produced and mentored a long line of country stars from Gene Vincent to The Louvin Brothers. Three of his biggest acts – Merle Haggard, Buck Owens and Faron Young – forged Hall of Fame careers of their own.

KEN NELSON

Owens' playing sounded tougher and sharper than that of other guitarists. Sensing a movement afoot, he pounced on the young, talented Owens.

In 1957, Owens and Nelson began an historic alliance that, in the 1960s, would result in a string of No. 1 hits, including "Act Naturally," "Love's Gonna Live Here" and "I've Got A Tiger By The Tail."

In 1965, another of Nelson's Bakersfield recruits, Merle Haggard, reached the Top 10 for the first time with "(My Friends Are Gonna Be) Strangers." Over the next decade, Nelson would produce many of Haggard's enduring early classics, including "Sing Me Back Home," "Mama Tried," "Workin' Man Blues" and "Okie From Muskogee."

Despite his profound impact on the Bakersfield scene, Nelson politely refuses to take credit for the evolution of what would later come to be perceived – and rightly so – as a bona fide musical movement.

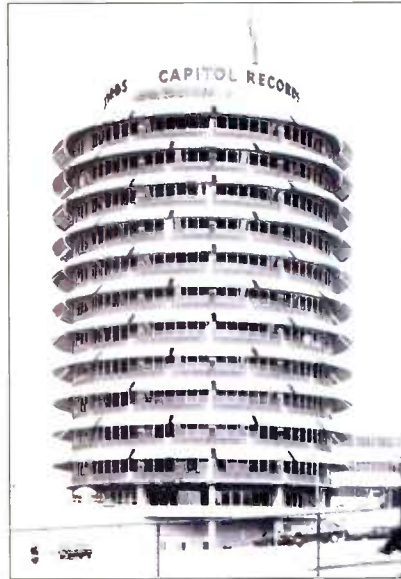
"Those records depended exclusively upon the musicians involved and the way guys like Buck and his guitarist Don Rich played," Nelson says. "The same holds true for the Nashville Sound – Grady Martin, Chet Atkins and all those people. There was really nothing technical about it. I'll tell you how the producer got involved – by *not* getting involved, by letting a good sound evolve naturally. I saw so many producers, and I won't name names, who were always trying to insert their own beliefs during a recording session. And from what I heard, it seldom worked."

While refusing to take credit himself, Nelson does praise engineers John Kraus, Hugh Davies and John Paladino, who helped capture the stunning new sounds with expert clarity. "They were engineers who, like all great engineers, had real musical ability," notes Nelson.

Of course, the modest producer *did* contribute to the recordings he worked on. For example, in 1956 he ran The Jordanares' vocals through

an improvised echo chamber during the taping of Ferlin Husky's "Gone," a pop-influenced song regarded as an early example of the Nashville Sound.

Typically, though, a studio date would find Nelson perched quietly in his Capitol control-room chair, doodling away on a sketch pad apparently oblivious to the proceedings on the



Nelson helped take Capitol Records to the top in the 1950s and '60s. Two of his fellow Hall of Famers, Sam Phillips (middle) and Bill Anderson, shared a jovial moment at the 2001 induction ceremonies.



other side of the glass.

"It was my belief that really good artists didn't need to be told how to go about their business," notes Nelson. "You hired an artist for what he or she could do – not what you could do for them. Sure, you had to occasionally offer guidance and advice. To me, the most important

issue was signing artists who would be well prepared, knew their songs and, most of all, were great performers. And then just let them do what came naturally in the studio."

For Nelson's many clients, the hands-off approach was a welcome relief in an otherwise highly controlling recording industry.

"In his nice, easygoing style, he was always listening and always working – and always trying to stay out of our way except to be of assistance," Buck Owens once remarked. "The best damn producer Merle Haggard and I could ever have."

Nelson also defied a Nashville edict by utilizing an artist's regular backing band, rather than calling session musicians for studio dates. Such was the case on May 4, 1956, when Nelson, desperately searching for a way to cash in on the nascent rock-and-roll boom, arranged for a session with an unknown Gene Vincent inside Owen Bradley's Quonset Hut studio in Nashville.

The usual contingent of session players were on hand – but only to watch as Vincent's Blue Caps shook the 16th Avenue residence with the sound of Vincent's "Be-Bop-A-Lula." Everything was going just fine when drummer Dickie Harrell suddenly let out a scream halfway into the recording.

"I turned to their manager, Tex Davis, and asked what were going on," laughs Nelson. "Tex said it was OK, it's just part of the feeling of the song. Later I find out that Dickie just wanted to make sure his parents heard him on the record, that's all!"

Though Nelson managed to snag more than his share of luminaries during his lengthy career with Capitol, there were at least two that got away.

"I just met Phil Everly this evening," says Nelson. "It reminded me of the time Chet Atkins and I had gone to a Merle Travis celebration, and The Everly Brothers were there performing. I gave a listen and turned to Chet and said, 'You know, I'd really like to sign those kids.' And he said, 'Too late, Ken – they're already with me.'" ❁

THIS DATE IN COUNTRY MUSIC

MARCH

March 1

1949 The Stanley Brothers record their classic "White Dove"
1952 Webb Pierce's No. 1 hit "Wondering" enters the charts



Webb Pierce

1957 Kristine Arnold (of Sweethearts Of The Rodeo) born
1966 Clinton Gregory born
1968 June Carter and Johnny Cash wed
1972 Merle Haggard pardoned by Gov. Ronald Reagan

March 2

1923 Doc Watson born
1967 Jeannie Seely's "Don't Touch Me" wins a Grammy Award
1996 Martina McBride scores first No. 1 hit, "Wild Angels"

March 3

1922 Jimmy Heap born
1959 Larry Stewart born
1968 Henson Cargill's "Skip A Rope" begins the last of its five consecutive weeks at No. 1
1980 Waylon Jennings's album *What Goes Around* goes gold
1996 Kyle Bailes (of The Bailes Brothers) dies

March 4

1932 Betty Jack Davis (of The Davis Sisters) born
1934 John Duffey (of Seldom Scene) born
1978 Waylon & Willie's "Mammas Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up To Be Cowboys" hits No. 1 and becomes the year's biggest country smash
1980 *Coal Miner's Daughter* movie premieres in Nashville
1996 Minnie Pearl dies

1999 Singing Cowboy Eddie Dean dies

March 5

1963 Patsy Cline, Cowboy Copas, Hawkshaw Hawkins and Randy Hughes die in plane crash

March 6

1905 Bob Wills born
1937 Doug Dillard born
1964 Skip Ewing born
1968 *The Best of Buck Owens* LP awarded gold record

1983 CMT launches as country's version of MTV

March 7

1963 Jack Anglin of Johnny & Jack die in a car crash en route to Patsy Cline's memorial service

1964 Jim & Jesse join the *Grand Ole Opry* cast
1983 Roy Acuff and Patti Page preside at the launch of the TNN cable channel

1985 Randy Travis' first appearance on the *Grand Ole Opry*

2000 Hall of Famer Pee Wee King dies

March 8

1933 Johnny Dollar born
1938 Statler Brother Lew DeWitt born
1989 Stuart Hamblen dies

March 9

1936 Mickey Gilley born
1948 Jimmie Fadden (of the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band) born

1991 Alan Jackson's "I'd Love You All Over Again" becomes his first No. 1 hit



Alan Jackson

March 10

1920 Jethro Burns born
1933 Ralph Emery born
1938 Norman Blake born
1963 Burial of Patsy Cline in Winchester, Va.

1971 Daryle Singletary born

March 11

1939 Tex-Mex star Flaco Jimenez born

1955 Statler Brother Jimmy Fortune born

1970 Tammy Wynette wins a Grammy for "Stand By Your Man"

March 12

1980 *Opry* clog dance master Ralph Sloan dies

March 13

1930 Liz Anderson born
1930 Jan Howard born



Liz Anderson

1975 George Jones and Tammy Wynette divorce

1976 The Bellamy Brothers' "Let Your Love Flow" becomes their first song on the country charts

March 14

1942 Jerry Jeff Walker born

1945 Michael Martin Murphy born

1954 Jann Browne born

1992 John Anderson scores a comeback as "Straight Tequila Night" reaches No. 1 on the charts

1996 Fiddler Dale Potter dies

2000 Tommy Collins dies

March 15

1927 Carl Smith born

1966 Roger Miller sets a country record by winning six Grammy Awards

1974 The *Opry* bids farewell to the Ryman Auditorium

1975 Freddy Fender hits No. 1 with "Before The Next Teardrop Falls"

1997 Gail Davis, TV's Annie Oakley, dies

March 16

1922 WSB in Atlanta goes on the air and becomes a country broadcasting pioneer

1951 Ray Benson (founder of Asleep At The Wheel) born

1954 Tim O'Brien born

1967 Ronnie McCoury (of The Del McCoury

Band) born

1974 The new *Opry* House opens with President Nixon in attendance

1991 A San Diego plane crash kills eight members of Reba McEntire's band and crew

March 17

1955 Paul Overstreet born

1956 Elvis Presley's "Heartbreak Hotel" becomes a No. 1 country hit

1980 Hugh Farr of the Sons Of The Pioneers dies

1996 Singer/songwriter Terry Stafford ("Suspicious," "Amarillo By Morning") dies

March 18

1938 Charley Pride born

March 19

1921 Martha Carson born

1968 Tom T. Hall weds *Music City News* journalist Dixie Dean

1988 Grand Ole Opry pioneer Fiddlin' Sid Harkreader dies

1988 Ricky Van Shelton hits No. 1 with Harlan Howard's "Life Turned Her That Way"

1989 WLS *National Barn Dance* director George Biggar dies

2000 Comic Speck Rhodes dies

March 20

1937 Jerry Reed born



Jerry Reed

1946 Doug Green (of Riders In The Sky) born

1984 First concert performance by The Judds (opening for The Statler Brothers in Omaha, Neb.)

1982 Folk-music great Bascom Lamar Lunsford born

1991 Guitar maker Leo Fender dies

March 22

1892 Charlie Poole born



Uncle Dave Macon

1952 Uncle Dave Macon dies

1955 James House born
1977 Stoney Cooper dies

March 23

1868 Fiddlin' John Carson born

1926 Ezra and Maybelle Carter wed

1945 David Grisman born

1996 Songwriter J.D. Miller ("It Wasn't God Who Made Honky-Tonk Angels") dies

March 24

1957 Carson J. Robison dies

1958 Elvis sworn into the Army

March 25

1924 Bonnie Guitar born
1934 Johnny Burnette born

1938 Hoyt Axton born

March 26

1950 Ronnie McDowell born

1955 Dean Dillon born
1956 Charly McClain born

1968 Kenny Chesney born

March 27

1965 Roger Miller's "King Of The Road" hits No. 1

1971 Jan Howard joins the *Opry* cast

March 28

1941 Charlie McCoy born
1954 Reba McEntire born

March 29

1909 Moon Mullican born

1963 Texas Ruby dies in a trailer fire

1969 Brady Seals (of Little Texas) born

March 30

1942 Bobby Wright born

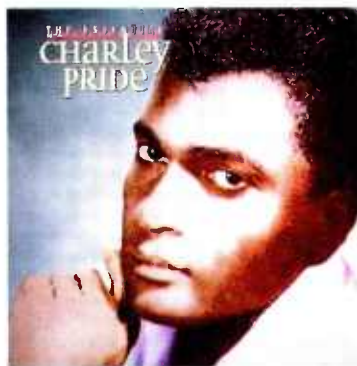
March 31

1922 Fiddler Howdy Forrester born

1926 Fiddler Tommy Jackson born

1928 Lefty Frizzell born
1934 Anita Carter born

1954 Greg Martin (of The Kentucky HeadHunters) born



“Kiss An Angel Good Mornin’ ”

by Ben Peters

Whenever I chance to meet
Some old friends on the street
They wonder how does a man
get to feel this way
I've always got a smiling face
Any time and any place
And every time they ask me why
I just smile and say

CHORUS

You've got to kiss an angel
good mornin'
And let her know you think
about her when you're gone
Kiss an angel good mornin'
And love her like the devil when
you get back home

SECOND VERSE

Well, people may try to guess
The secret of my happiness
But some of them never learn
it's a simple thing
The secret that I'm speaking of
Is a woman and a man in love
And the answer is in this song
that I always sing

Copyright 1971 Ben Peters Music (BMI)

“KISS AN ANGEL GOOD (Written by Ben

In 1971, Ben Peters would start each day kissing his baby daughter Angela good morning and end it kissing her good night. For the veteran country songwriter, it was only a short step from this routine to writing one of his most successful songs ever.

“I used to carry around a little notepad in my pocket,” recalls Peters. “I just thought about writing a song about how wonderful it is to wake up and kiss an angel good morning.”

The title stayed in Peters' notepad while he thought about what musical arrangement the song should have. Eventually the other half of the chorus came to him: *Kiss an angel good mornin', and love her like the devil when you get back home*. As Peters – who admits he was also thinking about his wife, Jackie – recalls, “When I got the play on the angel and devil, that’s when I decided to write it.”



Charley Pride rode an angel's wings to the top of the charts in 1971.



Ben Peters wrote more than 90 songs for Pride.

Though he didn't tailor “Kiss An Angel Good Mornin’ ” for Charley Pride, Peters put the singer at the top of his pitch list. It was 1971 and Pride was the hottest star in country music, with seven straight No. 1 records. All but the first one spent multiple weeks at the top spot on the chart.

“Kiss An Angel Good Mornin’ ” surpassed all of Pride's previous records; it remains the most successful song of his career. It shot to No. 1 on the country charts in late 1971 and stayed there for five weeks. On the pop charts, it went to No. 21. Peters took home a Grammy when the hit was named Best Country Song the following year.

Ironically, Ben Peters had never intended to be a songwriter, much less a country songwriter.

Born in Greenville, Miss., and raised in nearby Hollandale, Peters joined his first band at age 14 and kept playing through college at the University of Southern Mississippi

HIND THE SONG

MORNIN' ”

Peters)

and, after graduation, as a sailor in the U.S. Navy.

He started writing songs when he was stationed in Pensacola, Fla. "I was an officer," Peters explained, "and I wound up entertaining enlisted men. I didn't think that was the thing to do, so I quit. And the only thing you can do at home is write."

Once out of the Navy, he pursued a songwriting career, eventually landing a job with a Nashville publishing company. Upon his arrival in Nashville in 1966, the 33-year-old Peters immersed himself in country. "I started going backstage at the *Opry* and listening to country radio 24 hours a day," he recalled.

He learned quickly. Eddy Arnold took Peters' "Turn The World Around" to No. 1 in 1967. Two years later Lynn Anderson had a hit with his "That's A No No."

In 1972, Peters furnished Charley Pride another chart-topping tune, "It's Gonna Take A Little Bit Longer." In the years to come, Pride would continue drawing from Peters' well of songs, recording more than 50 of them.

The Nashville Songwriters Association International elected him to its Hall of Fame. His country hits include Brenda Lee's Grammy-nominated "Tell Me What It's Like," Kenny Rogers' chart-topping "Daytime Friends" and multiple songs for Charlie Rich, Billie Jo Spears, John Conlee and more.

After more than 1,000 recorded songs with total sales exceeding 100 million, Peters is semi-retired and lives in Nashville.

— Walter Carter



"Kiss An Angel Good Mornin' " also wielded crossover power for Pride, hitting No. 21 on the pop charts.



NEW AGAIN NOTEWORTHY DISCOVERIES



MERLE HAGGARD & THE STRANGERS Train Whistle Blues

(Rounder Select)

Recorded for Capitol Records between 1968 and 1977, these tunes document Hag's long fascination with rail-roading. He is, after all, someone who once titled an LP *My Love Affair With Trains*. The bulk of the material is drawn from that collection, as well as from Haggard's Jimmie Rodgers tribute album *Same Train, Different Time*. It's all choice stuff.



SWEETHEARTS OF THE RODEO Anthology

(Renaissance)

Sisters Janis Gill and Kristine Arnold brought a hip, fashion-conscious California sensibility to Nashville in the 1980s. Performing as Sweethearts Of The Rodeo, the team signed with Columbia Records and enjoyed a string of hits between 1986 and 1991. Their singles are presented

here in chronological order. Their sound holds up extremely well, coming across as a sort of "Everly Sisters" updated for the times. I particularly enjoyed "Since I Found You" (1986), "Chains Of Gold" (1987) and "If I Never See Midnight Again" (1989) again. Why the heck aren't these little gems being played as country oldies on the radio?

In addition to the Sweethearts' 12 charted titles, the set also includes eight more pleasures, including their remake of the Everlys' "So Sad (To Watch Good Love Go Bad)." At 20 tracks, that makes this a bargain as well as an audio delight.

FLATT & SCRUGGS Classics: 36 All-Time Greatest Hits

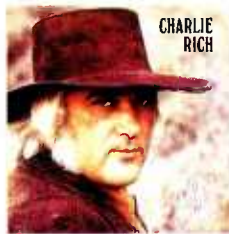
(Sony Music Special Products, 3 CDs)

This three-CD set collects many of the popular high points of this legendary bluegrass ensemble – including "Foggy Mountain Breakdown," "The Ballad of Jed Clampett," "The Martha White Theme," "Salty Dog Blues," "Cabin In The Hills," "You Are My Flower," "Pearl, Pearl, Pearl" and even "Petticoat Junction." But *All-Time*



Greatest Hits? I think not. There are several titles inexplicably missing, notably "Crying My Heart Out Over You" (revived by Ricky Skaggs in 1982), "Polka On A Banjo" (a longtime crowd pleaser), "'Tis Sweet To Be Remembered" (the group's first hit) and "Go Home" (a Top 10 in 1961). Those would have been preferable to "Kansas City," "Memphis" or "Jackson" – all included here.

This is a budget-priced compilation; there is no booklet or accompanying liner notes.



CHARLIE RICH Behind Closed Doors

(Epic Legacy)

Bluesy, soulful Charlie Rich had tasted success before this album, notably with 1960's "Lonely Weekends" and 1965's "Mohair Sam." But the Silver Fox became a superstar thanks to this blockbuster collection of 1973.

Rich was a 40-year-old veteran when producer Billy Sherrill surrounded his moaning, expressive vocals with arrangements dominated by strings, steel guitar and

piano. In addition to the title tune, this landmark album spawned the brilliant country hit "I Take It On Home" and Rich's No. 1 pop-crossover success "The Most Beautiful Girl."

Like all the Legacy reissues, this one provides the complete original album plus extras. These include new liner notes, session information and four bonus tracks – three tunes recorded earlier in his Epic career and one previously unissued title, the gospel-flavored "I've Got Mine."



VARIOUS ARTISTS Old Time Music From Southwest Virginia

(County)

Has your whistle been whetted by *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* Would you like to experience the real thing – old-time music as it was originally recorded? Well, step right up to this nicely assembled collection.

These Appalachian fiddlers, songsters, vagabonds and string bands were mostly recorded prior to Victor Records' famed Bristol Sessions, which unearthed Jimmie Rodgers and The Carter Family in the summer of 1927. What's presented here are remnants of 19th-century rural music making – country music before there was a music industry.

For instance, one of the artists, James Cowan "Fiddlin' "

Powers, was born in 1877 and performing professionally by the turn of the century. By 1918, before any country recordings were being made, Cowan was traveling with his daughters in a family band. The troupe is represented here by some sides recorded in 1924. The old-time fiddle style is also evident in the sprightly 1927 tunes recorded by Dykes Magic City Trio.

Byrd Moore is an obscure name in the annals of old-time music, but his 1928 performance of "Bed Bugs Makin' Their Last Go-Round" suggests that he should have recorded his jaunty, Jimmie Rodgers-like tunes more often than he did. Emry Arthur, who recorded the first version of "I Am A Man Of Constant Sorrow," is here with some sturdy vocals on "She Lied To Me," "Reuben Oh Reuben," "Careless Love" and "Short Life Of Trouble." Of equal interest are the bluesy, banjo-accompanied 1927–29 performances of Dock Boggs.

These and the other early recordings preserved on this collection come from musicians who were active in the Virginia Appalachians. If you could multiply their contributions by those recorded in dozens of other states you'd have a glimpse into a big, innocent, rural world that has sadly slipped out of existence.

TOM T. HALL Ultimate Collection

(Hip-O)

Can't afford Tom T. Hall's Mercury Records boxed set? This is the next best thing, a 24-track



compilation of performances by one of the greatest singer/songwriters in the history of country music.

In addition to 19 of his Mercury hits, you get four RCA singles. Just about every well-known Tom T. Hall title is here – “I Love,” “Old Dogs, Children And Watermelon Wine,” “The Year That Clayton Delaney Died,” “Fox On The Run,” “I Like Beer,” “That Song Is Driving Me Crazy,” “Homecoming” and the rest. The bonus is Hall’s previously unissued demo of “Harper Valley P.T.A.” An illustrated booklet is included.



**BELLAMY BROTHERS
The 25 Year Collection**

(Bellamy Brothers/Delta Disc. 2 CDs)

There is no information on this double-disc set about the source of these recordings. They sound like re-recordings of the brothers’ best-known tunes of 1976–91, rather than the original recordings on MCA, Warner, Elektra, Curb and the duo’s other label homes. However, the re-creations are almost note perfect and hard to distinguish from the originals – except for

the live-in-concert recordings of “If I Said You Have A Beautiful Body Would You Hold It Against Me,” “I Could Be Persuaded,” “Redneck Girl,” “Kids of the Baby Boom” and a couple more.

After 1991, the Bellamys began recording for their own company. So “Rip Off The Knob,” “Hard Way To Make An Easy Livin’,” “Cowboy Beat” and other tunes dating from the past decade are, indeed, the original masters. The discs are accompanied by photo scrapbooks that document this act’s remarkable career: however, there are no liner notes.

**VARIOUS ARTISTS
O Sister! The Women’s
Bluegrass Collection**

(Rounder)

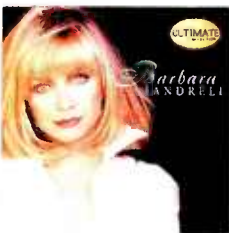
A decade ago, a collection like this would have been unthinkable because bluegrass was the most male dominated of all country’s styles. There were even bumper stickers at festivals that read BLUEGRASS IS MAN’S MUSIC, and a typical backhanded compliment was “She picks pretty good ... for a girl.” If you found a woman in a bluegrass act, she was probably a non-singing instrumentalist.

But something revolutionary happened in the 1990s. Women not only invaded bluegrass, they became the style’s artistic



leaders. At one time or another, virtually all of the major distaff voices recorded for Rounder, which chronicles their rise with this CD.

Included are selections from Claire Lynch, Laurie Lewis, Alison Krauss, the Cox Family, Delia Bell, Rhonda Vincent, the Stevens Sisters, Lynn Morris and Suzanne Thomas, as well as their foremothers Hazel & Alice, Wilma Lee Cooper and Phyllis Boyens.



**BARBARA MANDRELL
Ultimate Collection**

(Hip O)

Mandrell has never been a critics’ favorite. An unashamed crowd-pleasing and unapologetic entertainer, she seldom made musical statements. And although she was a multi-instrumental whiz kid, she did not compose.

But this 23-track set allows us to re-evaluate her work. Her early cuts for Columbia included the propulsive, classic trucker tune “Tonight My Baby’s Coming Home,” as well as one of the frankest statements of female sexuality of the era. “The Midnight Oil.”

While her ABC/Dot/MCA period did include such embarrassments as “Crackers” and “Sleeping Single In A Double Bed,” she also recorded the strong-woman-themed “Standing Room Only”

and the hard-times lyric “In Times Like These.” She proves to be a capable blue-eyed soul stylist on “Woman To Woman,” “(If Loving You Is Wrong) I Don’t Want To Be Right” and “Married But Not To Each Other.” And among the prettiest ballad melodies of the ’70s and ’80s were such Mandrell discs as “Tonight,” “Years,” “The Best Of Strangers” and “Only A Lonely Heart Knows.” She reverted to hard country when she switched to Capitol, illustrated here by 1988’s “I Wish That I Could Fall In Love Today.”

Many of us thought she was too pop back then. Judged against many of today’s Music Row productions, these tracks sound practically barefoot in overalls.



**MIMI & RICHARD
FARIÑA
The Complete Vanguard
Recordings**

(Vanguard 2 CDs)

Richard Fariña was the first prominent folk star of the ’60s to feature the mountain dulcimer as his chosen instrument. His wife, Mimi, was the younger sister of Joan Baez and an excellent acoustic guitarist. When this couple married and began to perform together, they made magic. Richard and Mimi Fariña’s debut LP contained the folk classic “Pack Up Your

Sorrows,” memorably recorded by Johnny Cash, among many others. The LP also presented such dazzling instrumental works as “Dandelion River Run” and “Tommy Makem Fantasy.” The album-closing “Celebration For A Grey Day” knit together such traditional melodies as “Old Joe Clark.” “Bonaparte’s Retreat,” “Darling Corey” and “Boil ’Em Cabbage Down” to create a dazzling audio tapestry. No fan of Appalachian dulcimer playing should be without these masterworks on the instrument.

The duo’s second album appeared in 1965 and was colored by the political climate of the day. Richard’s lyrics were never more haunting and chilling. But again, there were extraordinary instrumentals as well. This time, the dulcimer/guitar lineup was sometimes augmented by a small pop combo.

After Richard’s tragic death in a 1966 motorcycle accident, Mimi and Joan assembled the 1968 LP *Memories*. The second CD in this set contains that, as well as the couple’s entire performance at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival. Included is their collaboration with the legendary Kentucky mountain woman Jean Ritchie on “Shady Grove.”

Mimi Fariña died of cancer in the summer of 2001. If you’re a folkie who has never been exposed to the music that she and her husband made, prepare to be dazzled.

— Robert K. Oermann

COLLECTIONS

ATTENTION, READERS! The Collections page is your source for buying, selling or trading country music-related merchandise and memorabilia. Entries are printed at the discretion of the editors. Please keep in mind the following guidelines when submitting your entry: 1) Entries must be kept to 40 words or less. 2) Only one entry per member per issue. 3) We reserve the right to edit for space and style. Please write each other directly about information or items.

COMMENTS

Thank you for printing the letter I wrote asking for song titles and where I could get them. I've been informed by several of your readers about them. It is gratifying to know that your readers are so gracious and helpful.

Robert Kager
18281 Dike Road
Mount Vernon, WA
98273 6518

The Mildred Keith/Patsy Cline article was moving to me, especially after meeting and chatting at length with Mildred at the Country Music Hall of Fame. Thank you for all you do for the music.

David Andersen
111 Whitsett Road, A4
Nashville, TN 37210

EDITOR'S NOTE: David Andersen is the accomplished guitarist who plays during lunch at *The Sobro Grill*, located in the conservatory of the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum in Nashville. He is also an excellent visual artist who has done portraits of his idol, Chet Atkins, and others.

WANTED

I am looking for a CD of the best of the Oak Ridge Boys that includes the songs "The Baptism Of Jesse Taylor," "Why Me," "Family Reunion" and "Freedom For The Stallion."

Gloria Rhodes
P.O. Box 1463
Templeton, CA 93465

Can someone send me the words to the song "Tippy Toein'" by The Hardin Trio?

Lola L. Anderson
Box 25324
Eugene, OR 97402-0448

I would like to know if anyone has a video copy of a Loretta Lynn TV special titled *The Lady And The Legend*. I am willing to pay.

Ralph James
P.O. Box KBC
Fort Yukon, AK 99740

Where can I get the soundtrack to the movie *That*

Tennessee Beat?

Clarence Kimmet
16231 East Alabama Drive
Aurora, CO 80017

EDITOR'S NOTE: I don't think a soundtrack album to the movie ever existed.

I am looking for records by Norma Jean, Del Reeves, Del Wood, Jean Shepard, Charley Pride, Wanda Jackson, Daniel March, Kitty Wells, Connie Smith and other country singers.

Albert Arndt
111 East 20th St.,
Apt. 204, Spencer, IA 51301

I'd like a 45 rpm single of "Their Hearts Are Dancing" by The Forester Sisters.

Delda McHugh
203 S. Bredeick St.
Delphos, OH 45833-1805

I'd like to have a book of country-western singers like Marty Robbins, Gene Autry, Roy Rogers and others who recorded from the 1940s through the 1970s.

Pat Sheridan
2206 Pine Cone Rd.
Poplar Bluff, MO 63901

I am looking for anything on Shania Twain, printouts from her Internet site or her museum's site. Also newsletters and photos from her fan club and her first CD.

Cathy Lee
607 East Republic Street
Peoria, IL 61603-2517

I'd like music by Marvin Rainwater, Freddy Fender, Asleep At The Wheel, Joe Maphis, Patsy Montana and Bob Wills.

T.O. Miller
61 S. 16th St.
Terre Haute, IN 47807

Is there any way I can get the November/December 1995 issue of this magazine? I was going through my collection and found I don't have that issue.

Denise Grimmert
256 Township 1026
South Point, OH 45680

QUESTIONS

Loretta Lynn wrote and performed a song about America called "God Bless America Again." I think this song could do America a world of good right now. Could you find out for me?

Gloria Edwards
205 Parton St.
Spindale, NC 28160-1216

EDITOR'S NOTE: "God Bless America Again" was co-written by Bobby Bare and Boyce Hawkins, and Bare had the hit single with this tune in 1969. Lynn recorded it as "May God Bless America Again" the following year and made it the title tune of her 1972 inspirational album. Between the time of her original recording and the song's release, Conway Twitty recorded the recitation section of the song.

I'd like to know about the availability of any printed matter on Jim Reeves and Marty Robbins.

Pauline McWilliams
7505 Arlington Ave.
Raytown, MO 64138

EDITOR'S NOTE: The 1998 Jim Reeves biography, *Like A Moth To A Flame: The Jim Reeves Story*, by Michael Streissguth is available from Nashville's Rutledge Hill Press. There is no Marty Robbins biography, but Barbara J. Pruett has published a discography and extensive bibliography relating to his life and career. It is called *Marty Robbins: Fast Cars And Country Music* and was published by The Scarecrow Press in 1991.

What has happened to some of my favorites from the old Nashville Now TV show? Where are Becky Hobbs, Vickie Bird, Darlene Austin, R.C. Bannon and Margo Smith? Do any of them have albums out that can still be purchased?

Dorothy Shamblyn
662 Oxford Oaks Lane
Oxford, MI 48371

STUMPERS

Searching for the words to a song of the '50s, "On Your Knees." Some of the words are, *On your knees, you are taller than trees. You can look over your heartaches and fears.* I don't remember the singer.

Aurelia McLendon
629 E. Troy St.
Brundidge, AL 36010

In 1970 or earlier there was a song called "One Sweet Hello, One Sad Goodbye." Can you locate this?

Robbie Horton
132 N. Candlewood
Cabot, AR 72023



Trivia answer: Jim Reeves

Could you tell me where I could find a song on cassette that I heard several years ago about a rebel soldier? I believe part of it goes like this: *Tell me, Parson, will my soul pass through the Southland?* I believe it to be bluegrass, maybe by The Country Gentlemen.

Bill Holder
610 Hawthorne St.
Hudson, NC 28638

FOR SALE

I have a classic Johnny Cash cassette, *Johnny Cash: Columbia Records 1958-1986*. I will sell it to my first offer.

Calvin Cook
5460 Beth Ann Drive
Baton Rouge, LA 70812

For sale: 8x10 color photos of Garth Brooks, Reba McEntire, LeAnn Rimes, Judds, Elvis Presley, Gene Autry, Roy Rogers, Lisa Hartman Black, Trisha Yearwood, others.

David Hume
1150 Logan Street, Apt. 1
Denver, CO 80203

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A COUN C

**Trace
Adkins'**
career
rebounds,
thanks
to his big-
shouldered,
deep-
voiced
realism

Adkins' current album, *Chrome*, evokes life's hard times and past mistakes. "Life ain't always about 'I love you, you love me.' We could sit here for an hour and talk about the things I regret. But you learn from that stuff," he says.

TRY BOY AN SURVIVE

Along the two-lane roads that run straight and flat through this remote slice of South Carolina, bright colors bleed red, white and blue over the lingering tufts of cotton left in the fields. American flags are everywhere, flapping their public-spirited message on billboards, windshields, mailboxes, jackets and car antennas.

At the new Carolina Amphitheater, where Trace Adkins is preparing to take the stage, the American color scheme continues. The scene looks like a pep rally for the Comeback of Patriotism, and the strapping, straight-talking Adkins perfectly fits the bill.

After encountering a career dip in the last few years, Adkins is clearly on the rebound. He has a hot single with the emotionally effective "I'm Tryin'," a testosterone-fueled album, *Chrome*, and an unlikely gig as a recurring commentator on the ABC-TV show *Politically Incorrect*.

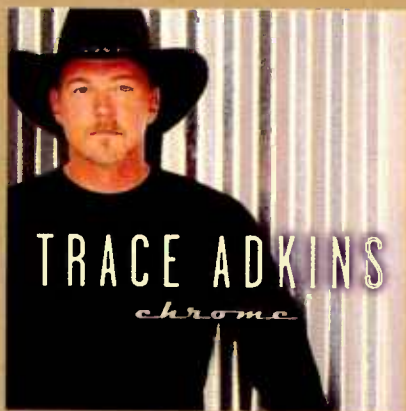
A face-to-face encounter with the 40-year-old entertainer illustrates why his baritone voice is in demand these days.

Relaxing in a double-wide dressing room before the show, Adkins epitomizes the good-old-boy style that flourishes on the rural backroads that snake into the American heartland. Dressed in a T-shirt emblazoned with the omnipresent American flag that reads THESE COLORS DON'T RUN, he towers over bystanders, scanning the situation as if perched on an emotional deer stand.

"Rather than whitewash something, I don't say anything at all," he says, carefully mapping his way into the interview. "Then there are times they just

couldn't stop me, because I will always stay true to who I am."

The initial restraint may come from Adkins' reputation as a shoot-on-sight guy who says exactly what he thinks, often to the chagrin of his advisers. His



bluntness may have gotten him into trouble in the past, but his is the kind of honesty that has made so many country music figures so interesting.

That candor also seeps into Adkins' latest album. From the black leather on the cover to songs about Harley-driving babes and Hollywood lunatics, *Chrome* fits squarely in the new country music renaissance of scratch-and-spit guy music as represented by the macho

stances, of Toby Keith and Gary Allan.

The album also takes Adkins to a new level musically, particularly with the first single, "I'm Tryin'" – a powerful, real-life tune about an ordinary man pulling double shifts to pay alimony and just get by. The song brought country squarely back to the adult themes many fans have been missing.

"Life ain't always about 'I love you, you love me,'" he says. "I'm on my third marriage now. We could sit here for an hour and talk about the things I regret. But you learn from that stuff. I think that's why so many of my peers and fans have come up to me to tell me how much they like that song."

When the conversation turns to politics, Adkins' energy jolts to the surface. As he speaks about Sept. 11, he leans over and rests his arm on his long legs. The thick Louisiana accent and steely determination make him sound like a high school football coach giving half-time orders to his team.

"Look, the only reason I'm here doing this show is I've gotten too damn old and busted up for the military to take me, or I'd be gone," he says. "I'd be killing people."

Adkins means it.

From a self-described "ultra-conservative" hometown – Springhill, La., a place he says "has 1,000 people and five churches" – he embraces the values that make this Carolina crowd cruise around the rural countryside with flags waving and middle fingers raised.

His shotgun style has made him an eight-time guest on *Politically Incorrect*,

by Miriam Pace Longino

TRACE ADKINS

where host Bill Maher delights in watching Adkins play John Wayne while he rides over the opinions of liberals with all the delicacy of a bush hog. Even aggressive debaters, such as comedian Elayne Boosler, stare drop-jawed as the country star – wearing a black cowboy hat over his long ponytail – drops Southern-accented bombshells on the show, such as, “They want to kill us, so we’ve got to kill them first.” Snap open shotgun, eject shells.

“I disconnect the filter between my brain and my mouth when I go on there,” Adkins says. “I pretty much say whatever I want to. Bill [Maher] knows that when I say something, it’s honest and coming from a truthful place. He loves

radio and onstage at the 1997 Academy of Country Music Awards show to pick up the trophy for best new male vocalist. His second album, 1997’s *Big Time*, arrived with the No. 4 hit, “The Rest Of Mine.”

Then, as Adkins puts it, “The wheels came off.”

Capitol’s biggest-selling artist, Garth Brooks, forced the firing of Adkins’ producer/mentor Scott Hendricks, who was at the time the head of the label. After that, Adkins no longer received the same level of marketing and promotional support.

“The music business is not as easy as I thought it was going to be,” he says cautiously. “When I first came out and fairly quickly sold a million records and had two No. 1 hits and won those awards, I thought, ‘Man,

resent it,” he says. “Who’s to say if I had that kind of power that I wouldn’t do the same thing. The leadership has changed, and it’s a beautiful thing now. [Quigley was replaced in 2000, breathing new life into the Capitol roster.] There’s a new attitude and the vibe at the label now is so positive and everybody is so happy.”

But don’t paint a smiley face on Adkins just yet. He’s not a backslapping kind of guy, preferring quiet contemplation to the party circuit. Much of the new album, *Chrome*, puts him in a private place as he sings about divorce, lost dreams and living paycheck to paycheck.

“If it were left up to me, I would just do the darker kind of stuff because I relate to that so much better,” he says. “I’ve never really been in a happy place anytime in my life, except maybe when I was in high school. I’m basically not a happy person. I’m very pessimistic in my outlook on life.”

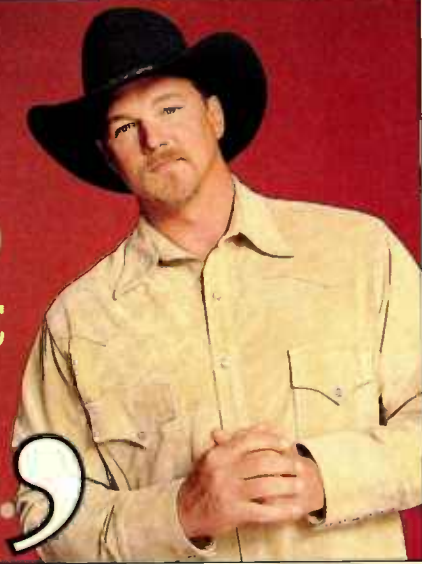
But onstage at the Carolina Amphitheater, Adkins is more confident than morose. He rips through the hits – “(This Ain’t) No Thinkin’ Thing,” “Every Light In The House Is On,” “I’m Tryin’” – even tossing in some old-school tunes such as “Streets Of Laredo.” Fans bundle up in the chilly night air, chugging Budweiser out of plastic cups. A large female contingency squeals each time Adkins does his signature pelvic thrust, which he uses like a B-1 bomber to strafe fans from time to time.

The screams of approval, and the red-white-and-blue audience, seem to indicate that things have turned Adkins’ way, both professionally and politically.

“To me, this whole thing hasn’t just cracked the door open,” Adkins intones. “It breaks it down and takes it completely off the hinges, not just for conservative opinion to be accepted, but for conservative people to say this is our opinion – and we don’t give a s--t if you accept it or not.”

Adkins may not care if others like his opinion. But from the effort he puts forth onstage, it’s obvious that he cares whether others like his music or not. But, right here and right now, it feels good. And he’s tryin’. ★

“They want to kill us, so we’ve got to kill them first.”



that, because he gets so many people on there who are plastic. They don’t really have an opinion. They just say things to get a rise out of people, and they don’t really mean it.”

Adkins has been equally unyielding when it comes to his career. With his 1996 debut album, *Dreamin’ Out Loud*, the big guy with the deep voice scored loudly on the applause meter. Fueled by the sexy singles “(This Ain’t) No Thinkin’ Thing” and “I Left Something Turned On At Home,” his hip-pumping style attracted female fans while his unapologetic, working-class attitude brought the guys along for the ride.

All of sudden, Adkins was everywhere – Leno, Letterman, all over the

this is going to be onward and upward from here. I’m going to be king of the world in five years.’ Then all of a sudden, the whole thing went to hell. I was in Foxboro, Conn., playing in the casino when I got the phone call telling me that Hendricks was gone. I knew right then, ‘We are fixing to face some hard times now.’ And we did, for three years.”

Adkins is referring to the period of time when Capitol brought in marketing executive Pat Quigley to focus the company’s attention on Garth Brooks. Many in Nashville believe other hit acts on the label’s roster, such as Adkins and Deana Carter, suffered as a result.

But Adkins holds no ill will. “I don’t

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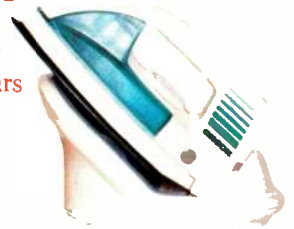
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THE
★ ★ ★
VOICE
OF A
STAR

Dan Tyminski
shines in the
spotlight, but
don't expect him
to stay there

By Jack Hurst

A quiet family man with strong religious convictions, Dan Tyminski may be the most modest award winner the CMA Awards ever crowned. When his name was announced as the Single of the Year winner last November, his face went blank with shock.



"I thought, 'They've mispronounced somebody's name, because that sounds like mine,'" Tyminski recalls with a laugh.

A member of Alison Krauss & Union Station, Tyminski isn't used to the attention showered on those who typically win network-televised music awards. He's an ensemble player, content to hold down the position of guitarist and male vocalist in a group where talent abounds and the spotlight is readily shared.

But his profile leapt toward the stars after he agreed to sing "I Am A Man Of Constant Sorrow," the award-winning, centerpiece tune in the hit film *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* Thanks to a multi-million-selling soundtrack album and a high-profile video wherein actor George Clooney lip-syncs to Tyminski's voice, the modest musician suddenly found himself responsible for one of the most-talked-about songs of 2001.

The CMA award crowned his year of living famously. "It was extremely flattering," Tyminski says. "I had several of my heroes in the crowd, and, watching them stand and cheer that I won that award, well, I was filled with emotion to see that they were excited about it."

After years as a sideman, such recognition no doubt set his head spinning. Considering that Tyminski had just a year earlier issued his debut solo album, *Carry Me Across The Mountain*, it might seem natural to consider using the award as a springboard to a solo career. But the 34-year-old Tyminski insists that Union Station

will remain his home.

"It's hard to receive that much attention and not consider, do you go out and do your own thing?" he admits. "But when I weigh it all out, I don't think I'm best suited for that. I think what makes me up is exactly what this band needs. I couldn't imagine having a better position. The people who play in this band are all my favorite musicians – and some of my favorite people outside of music."

Meanwhile, *O Brother* has passed

first pleases us and that, hopefully, other people like."

He didn't reach this musical nirvana overnight.

A mechanic's son from Rutland, Vt., Tyminski grew up in a family of rabid bluegrass fans. In his early teens, he played banjo and sang harmony in Green Mountain Bluegrass, a band led by his older brother Stan. That's pretty much the way he has lived his musical life, he notes – doing whatever somebody needed.

A few years out of high school, he accepted an invitation to join the Virginia-based Lonesome River Band. At that point, he performed on both mandolin and guitar, and, despite some hesitance, got nudged into lead singing.

During his four-year run with the Lonesome River Band, Alison Krauss called and offered him a job with her band. He turned down the first invitation. But when Krauss issued another offer more than a year later, the bearded musician took the job.

"When I got the call the next time, we had become friends," Tyminski says.

What happened next says much about the man. A low-key churchgoer whose clean-

spoken geniality hints at deeper qualities, he was so overcome with guilt at having left Lonesome River Band that he went back. He spent another year and a half with the all-male group, and finally returned to work with Krauss and Union Station.

That Lonesome River would take him back, and that Union Station would do the same, reflects not only



Tyminski never entertains thoughts of leaving his true musical family, Alison Krauss & Union Station. "The people in this band are all my favorite musicians – and some of my favorite people outside of music," he says.

three million in sales, and Union Station albums regularly sell in the hundreds of thousands without major radio play. The most recent, *New Favorite*, debuted at No. 6 on the country charts and has logged steady, significant sales since its release.

"We have been blessed," Tyminski notes. "We have a formula that works, which is sticking to playing music that



Tyminski provided the singing voice for George Clooney (left) in "I Am A Man Of Constant Sorrow," which he performed on the 2001 CMA Awards (right). He also shared the CMA Award for Single of the Year with producer T-Bone Burnett.



DAN TYMINSKI

his talent but also their recognition of his unusual depth of character. The people in both bands remain such loyal friends that they helped him record *Carry Me Across The Mountain*, which was released on Doobie Shea Records.

With Union Station, Tyminski has the freedom to embrace the diverse music he prefers while also providing time for his wife and three children back in Ferrum, the small (pop. 1,600), south-central Virginia town he has called home since departing Vermont in the '80s.

He was more than happy carrying on as a well-regarded bluegrass musician – then came the chance to sing a classic old song, "I Am A Man Of Constant Sorrow," that was best known as a staple of the repertoire of the Stanley Brothers and, later, Ralph Stanley & The Clinch Mountain Boys.

Even though it's a bluegrass archetype, Tyminski had never sung "I Am A Man Of Constant Sorrow" before going into the studio with producer T-Bone Burnett and filmmakers Joel and Ethan Coen.

He still hasn't a clue why he was chosen to perform it. Initially, Krauss had been invited to sing on the soundtrack while the

remaining members of Union Station were recruited to play some background tracks. But sometime after they began participating in the project, Tyminski was asked to audition for the role of George Clooney's singing voice.

"I went into the studio with George," he recalls. "Contrary to what he says, he can sing. But after he tried it a couple of times, he walked out and said, 'You know what, Dan? I'm gonna make you a deal.' I said, 'Yes, sir?' He said, 'I'll act, you sing.'

I thought, 'They've mispronounced
 "somebody's name, because"
 that sounds like mine.'



"I of course thanked him. What an impact that decision had on my life."

Still, it took a while to come up with the version of the song heard in the movie. "If it weren't for T-Bone Burnett and the Coens trying to get a certain feel out of that song, I don't think I would've ever done it that way," he confides. "It's probably a couple of keys lower than I would normally do it in."

"They tried to give us a mindset of what to be thinking while we were playing the song so that it would work in the

movie. They told me, 'Okay, you're devil-posessed, you just sold your soul to the devil for your talent on the guitar, and you're trying to play rock 'n' roll – it just hasn't been invented yet.'"

Tyminski laughs out loud as he tells the story. "At one point I remember them going, 'Okay, it's kind of a four-four timing, but it's kind of a shuffle.' That's like saying something is an apple *and* an orange. It can't be."

Still, Tyminski gamely forged ahead, trying different takes on the song as producer Burnett and the Coens urged him on.

"To start off, they had another guitar player," he remembers. "I was just going to sing the song. We kept experimenting, doing it different ways, but it wasn't what they were looking for. Finally I just grabbed the guitar and said, 'What if we try something like this?' I tuned down the string and played something really raspy and cruddy-sounding. They both lit up at the same time. They said, 'That's *exactly* what we want, right there.'"

Tyminski still can't believe his fate. "Have you ever gone to take a sip of something you thought was a Coke and it was really iced tea?" he says. "It was like that. It's *still* kind of like that." ★



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Veteran's

Experience helped David Ball recognize the comeback potential of a simple song about young Private Malone

David Ball had all but given up on attaining another hit song. Seven years had passed since "Thinkin' Problem," a fine honky-tonk shuffle that introduced Ball to country music fans, cracked the Top 5. Other hits followed – "When The Thought Of You Catches Up With Me," "Look What Followed Me Home" – but when country radio took a pop turn in the mid-'90s, it left traditionalists like Ball behind in the honky-tonk dust. After three albums, he parted with Warner Bros. Records and worked off his days on the airwaves were over.

Then "Riding With Private Malone" steered him back onto the scene. "I knew it was a hit the first time I heard it," Ball contends. "Anyone who listens to the lyric from start to finish gets it. You never know if a song will get a chance on radio. I knew if it got a chance, it would be a hit."

That chance was provided by a Nashville disc jockey. "He played it, and the phones lit up," Ball recalls. "So we had a story to tell the other stations, and when they tried it, their phones lit up, too."

For Ball, the hit confirms the qualities he loves about country music. It's not about good-looking videos, TV specials or critical praise; it's about that one song that reaches out from the radio, grabs a listener and won't let go.

"This industry was built on hits," he points out. "That's what motivates me. Ever since I was a kid, I've looked for that song that will hook me on some emotion – any emotion – and carry me along. It'll get on your mind and won't leave; it'll give you chills up and down your spine. When you hear a hit record, you want to buy it; you want to tell your friends about it."

A tall fellow with a long, freckled face, Ball sings with a clear, buttery tenor that perfectly fits the narrative of "Private Malone." When he performs the song live, he makes the crowd believe he's driving a 1966 Corvette down a backwoods two-

lane blacktop. The song isn't complicated – just compelling. And that's what Ball seeks. "You can have a great song," he explains, "and it won't necessarily be a hit. To be a hit, it needs to have an immediate impact. To do that, it has to be simple. You have to tell *one* story and stick to it; if it has a deeper meaning, so much the better."

A South Carolina native, Ball first had a musical impact in Austin, where he was a member of the influential acoustic trio Uncle Walt's Band with Walter Hyatt and Champ Hood. During his 11 years in Texas, Ball became a devotee of Western swing and honky-tonk.

"The first time I walked into a Texas dance hall," he recalls, "and heard that big band with all that hot picking and all those



In Austin, Ball honed his chops with the acoustic trio Uncle Walt's Band.

old Bob Wills songs, I fell in love. I had never heard anything like it. I decided that *that's* what I wanted to do."

So when George Strait, Randy Travis and Ricky Van Shelton led a back-to-basics country movement in the 1980s, Ball decided to move to Nashville. He arrived in 1988, signed with a successful music publishing company and found himself co-writing with another recent arrival, Allen Shamblin.

"We were both new and feeling our way," Ball remembers, "but one day in the office, he said, 'What about a song called "Thinkin'

Problem"?' I just loved the idea, because you hear the title and you know immediately it's about a man who keeps reaching for a memory the way some keep reaching for a bottle. Once we had the title, the song just wrote itself. I knew it was a hit."

Ball signed a contract with RCA Records in 1988, but they rejected the hard-core sound of Ball's "Thinkin' Problem." He went on to cut nearly two albums worth of material for RCA, but the label only released three singles before cutting him loose.

But producer Blake Chancey convinced Warner Bros. that Ball's "Thinkin' Problem" could be a smash. The label signed him, and Ball's debut album sold more than a million copies. But the two follow-up albums, 1996's *Starlite Lounge* and 1999's *Play*, failed to repeat that initial success. Ball left Warner Bros. in early 2000.

"I'd been unhappy for a while," he admits. "I couldn't get on the radio with those last two albums. And I stand by those records. I kept hearing that my music was 'too country,' and I still don't know what that means. I kept hearing that my music was 'too different.' But that's what makes a hit – it doesn't sound like everything else."

So Ball went back to writing songs and struggling to reach an audience. Though he remained in Tennessee, he made a living playing the dance halls of Texas, Oklahoma and Louisiana.

"I never could have made an album with this kind of Texas swing feel at a major label," Ball argues. "At Warner Bros., we had to be in a big studio with the usual A-team players. Those guys are great musicians, but they don't swing like guys from Texas. So we just did it on our own."

Rather than try to convince a record company to finance his recording, Ball and co-writer Wood Newton decided to make it themselves. Once they finished, they played the tape for several music executives.

"We were lucky," Ball admits. "We played it for Dualtone Records; they liked it, and a month later it was out. We didn't have to sit

Day

around for a year's worth of marketing meetings before it was released."

Dualtone was launched in early 2001 by two former Arista executives, Scott Robinson and Dan Herrington. Their first signings – Ball, Jim Lauderdale, Radney Foster and Chris Knight – reflected their strategy of focusing on strong songwriters cast aside by Music Row's now-or-never approach to success. "When we started this label," Robinson says, "we looked at why so many independent labels fail. Most start with the best intentions – they're music and passion driven – but they don't have any experience getting records in stores, songs on radio and coverage from the media. We know how to do that."

As fate would have it, Dualtone offered Ball a record deal before hearing "Private Malone," which was by Newton and Thom Shepherd. The label had expected to release a traditional country album packed with familiar Texas rhythms and honky-tonk tunes. But at the last minute Ball played them "Private Malone," and the experienced executives knew they had something special. "Private Malone" was added to the completed album, and it went on to become that rare triumph – a huge hit record from a new, independent label.

In the midst of Ball's triumphant career resurgence, however, is a note of sadness. In November, five years after Walter Hyatt died in the Everglades ValuJet plane crash, Champ Hood died of cancer. That leaves Ball as the last living member of the tightknit Uncle Walt's Band.

Ball played at Hood's memorial service in Austin, and he will support next spring's release of a Hyatt tribute album on Antone's Records, which includes musical contributions by Lyle Lovett and Shawn Colvin, among others.

"I got my sense of rhythm from that band," Ball says, "that swing feel, that South Carolina *thang*. I also got the courage to sing whatever I want, because there were no boundaries in Uncle Walt's Band. Walter could sing Louis Armstrong, Champ could sing rock 'n' roll and I could sing Bob Wills and Ernest Tubb.

"I didn't have to apologize for my tastes then," he says with a smile. "I'm not going to start now."

— Geoffrey Himes



"This industry was built on hits," says Ball, whose "Riding With Private Malone" vaulted him back to the charts. "That's what motivates me."

TH CAMPBELL

TRAILBLAZERS

The usually laid-back Walker can also be a caustic observer of the current country scene. "Nobody plays the melody anymore," he says. "It's kind of like rap lyrics to a different kind of beat, and they call it country music."



MICHAEL STRESS/SOUTH COLLECTION

Shootin' From The Hip

Billy Walker is steeped in country music's history – but wonders about its future

Billy Walker has intimately witnessed country music tragedy and triumph. He was the opening act on Hank Williams' last tour in December 1952, then, less than two years later, headlined a concert featuring Elvis Presley's first major Memphis performance. In 1963, Walker shared a stage with Patsy Cline during her final show and nearly boarded her tragic plane flight.

But Walker is more than an observer to history; he's also a part of it. His imposing career encompasses more than 30 country hits, including the 1962 smash "Charlie's Shoes" and 1966's "A Million And One."

Today, Walker continues to pursue his career like a hungry youngster. At age 73, the tall Texan still towers over his band with an authoritative charisma, performing regularly from the *Grand Ole Opry* to stages across the nation and Europe – and tirelessly preaching his unflinching vision of what country music should be. He's also still active as a recording artist, recently releasing a tribute album to Hank Williams and Hank Snow.

Tell me about your tribute to the two Hanks.

We were doing a casino show up in Michigan with Bill Anderson, Jimmy Dickens, Jack Greene, Jeannie Seely. And somebody says, "Why did you do this album?" I said, "Just for the heck of it." And Jack Greene piped up and said, "You ought to call it *Just For The Hank of It*." So that's what we called it.

You worked with them both, didn't you?

I first worked with Hank Snow back in 1949 before he got "I'm Movin' On." I was an opening act for him on some shows. And then I was the opening act for Hank Williams. I did this album simply because I just wanted people to remember how great their music was, and how different it was.

When you say "how different," what do you mean?

Melodically structured songs that told a story about love and life and tragedy. You can't hardly find that anymore with the new songs that are out. Nobody plays the melody anymore. It's kind of like rap lyrics to a different kind of beat, and they call it country music. What we had were plaintive songs about real-life situations.

You were on Hank Williams' last tour in December of '52. Could you see what was happening to him at that point?

He rode with me all the time. [It was] me and him and that quack doctor he had, Toby Marshall. Hank knew he was getting messed up. This Toby Marshall had him on some kind of drugs he didn't like. He was having real back pains because of an operation he had. He told me that after his

New Year's date that he was gonna take some time off, and he planned on going somewhere to get rehabilitated. He intimated that it was going to be in the Caribbean somewhere. I was supposed to come to the *Grand Ole Opry* with him because he had made a deal to come back to the *Opry* on February 1. He said, "I want to take you to the *Grand Ole Opry* and help you." But it never worked out. It took me another eight years to get there.

You're celebrating your 42nd year on the Grand Ole Opry. What's your opinion about the status of the Opry and where it's going?

It's really difficult to say. You'd like to think that there will be some people who sacrificed, like we sacrificed, to keep the *Grand Ole Opry* going. I

sacrificed a lot of weekends to come and keep the tradition alive. It cost me money. I'd work tours to California, wind up doing a Friday night show and catch a midnight special back to Nashville. Get in there, sleep three or four hours, do the *Grand Ole Opry*, and catch a plane back out that night and fly back to California. You know what it paid me in those days? Fifteen dollars. I probably spent \$250 coming back and

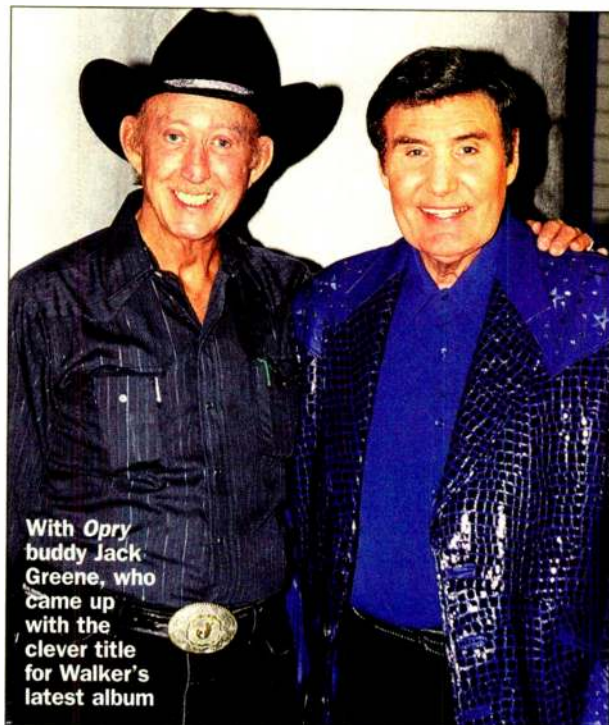


PHOTO: JACQUES PIF



MICHAEL STREISSGUTH COLLECTION

forth. I can tell you several artists who have used the *Grand Ole Opry* as a stepping stone to their career, and they say how much they've enjoyed it and how much it means to them. They get all that publicity and all that hype, and then you don't see them for three or four years. They might come back when the network wants them. But they don't care anything

about the music, and they don't care anything about the show. They're just users. They use the name. They use the association. It's not like they had to have it to make their



LARRY HILL

Walker's early publicity photos, such as this one (above) from the '70s, billed him as "The Tall Texan." These days, he maintains a busy concert schedule with the help of wife Bettie, who handles his merchandising and booking.

career, but they chose to. They chose to be a part of it, but they don't have any loyalty to it. Vince Gill does. Garth Brooks does. Outside of that, there's not many others who do.

After your generation of Opry performers retires, who's going to carry that torch?

I don't really know, because it was different when we were working. We were owned by an insurance company, and the *Grand Ole Opry* was never designed to be a big money-maker. It was designed to entertain people and help sell insurance by the identification. It never was designed to be a "ticket item" like it's having to become now. They say, "The *Grand Ole Opry* ain't makin' as much money as we want it to make." Well, hey, that whole complex would not be there unless we paid the price for keeping it alive. But they don't see it that way because they didn't have to make it; they just bought it. You can buy the name but you can't buy the show. The show ain't for sale.

What do you think of the country music industry overall? Where is it headed?

The success of the soundtrack of *O Brother, Where Are Thou?* shows that people are hungry for some type of music other than this pop-rock stuff that they call country nowadays – something real, something substantial. You got rock 'n' roll artists who can't get a job, so they come and infiltrate Nashville and try to tell everybody [they're performing] country music. And that's what I resent. I resent California and New York taking over a business that we created and calling it their own and making it something else.

We weren't platinum-album people, but we sold enough to make [major record] companies big money. We didn't have to spend \$100,000 to make a singer. We could do it on \$250 when I first started. I never had an album that cost more than \$5,000 to make. Now it's \$150,000 to \$200,000. There's so much graft and greed going on that the poor old artist don't know what he's doing. Graft and greed is what caused this business to change. I guess that I'm telling you a lot of things that are probably detrimental to me. Well, what are they going to do to my career? Kill it?

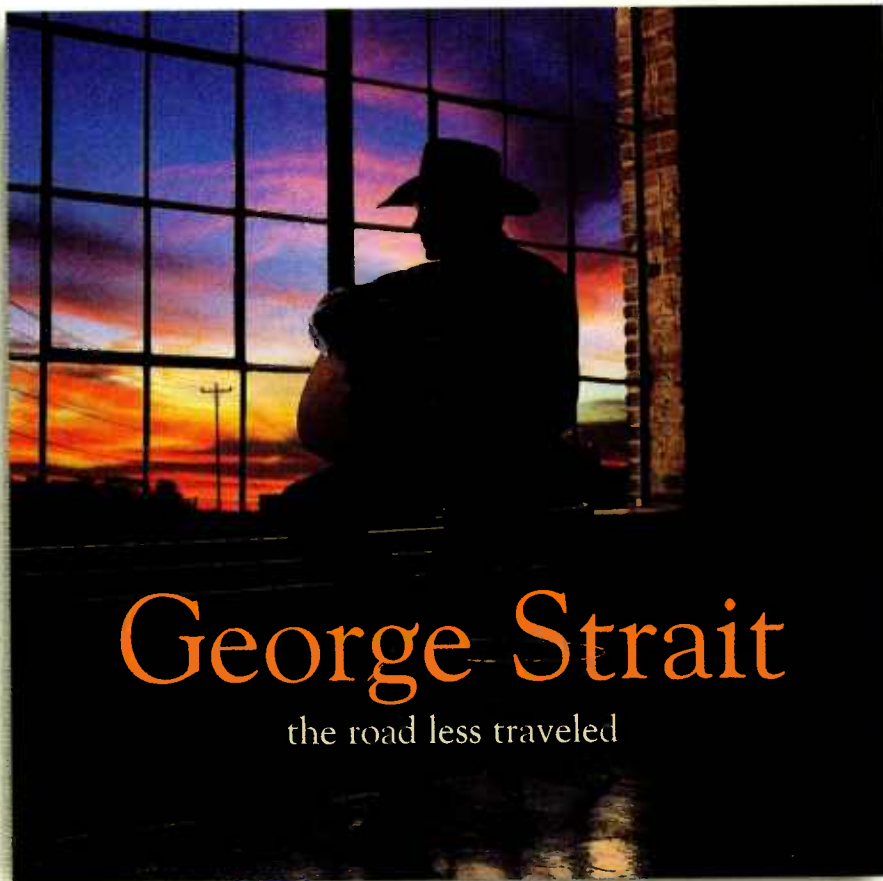
— Michael Streissguth



NICHELLE LOVIN-RICCA

Walker has been a *Grand Ole Opry* mainstay since 1960.

REVIEWS



George Strait

the road less traveled

GEORGE STRAIT The Road Less Traveled

MCA

★★★

As the title suggests, Strait's latest album forsakes the four-lane highway of mainstream Nashville for more experimental musical backroads and byways – and there's a surprise at every turn. Not since *I Am Shelby Lynne* has a country singer issued such a bold declaration of artistic identity. Not since Vince Gill's *The Key* has a chart-topper probed the depths of his soul with such conviction. Not since ...

Gotcha!

This is George Strait, remember? Musical surprises don't seem to be a part of the low-key Texan's identity. Most of *The Road Less Traveled*, like

dozens of Strait records before it, more accurately could have been titled *If It Ain't Broke, Don't Fix It*.

That said, some Strait albums are more consistent than others, and the latest falters more than it should. The highlights are those performances that seem to come most easily to the unflappable Strait, from the low-key balladry of "She'll Leave You With a Smile" and "Run" through the anthem of domestic contentment, "Living And Living Well."

But when he strays from his comfort level, the results can range from wooden to awkward. Where Rodney Crowell's original "Stars On The Water" glowed with poetic luminosity, Strait reduces it to rote shuffle. His rendition of Chip Taylor's "The Real Thing," a celebration of unbridled rockabilly, makes it hard

Country Music rates all recordings as follows:

- ★★★★★ **Excellent.** A classic from start to finish.
- ★★★★ **Very Good.** An important addition to your collection.
- ★★★ **Respectable.** Recommended with minor reservations.
- ★★ **Fair.** For loyal and forgiving fans.
- ★ **Poor.** Seriously flawed.

..... Ratings are supervised by Country Music editors.

to imagine an artist farther afield from early Elvis than modern-day, stay-pressed George. And when he gushes, *You can tell me you're afraid/I am too and that's okay*, on "Don't Tell Me You're Not In Love," the squishy sentiment sounds somehow foreign to this taciturn Texan. He saves the best for last, with his breezy revival of Merle Haggard's "My Life's Been Grand," where every note rings as true as personal testament.

Though the title cut proposes an alternative to the straight and narrow, Strait knows that the narrow is exactly where he belongs.

— Don McLeese



HANK WILLIAMS JR. Almeria Club & Other Select Venues

CURB

★★★★★

Most well-established country performers seem content to toe a conservative, predictable line. But there are the exceptions: Dolly Parton, Willie Nelson, Kathy Mattea, Emmylou Harris and Hank Williams Jr. are among the artists who continue to take risks while striving to put fresh artistic statements on disk.

And now let me tell you, ol' Randall Hank has knocked out a hot, vital piece of country music with *Almeria Club & Other Select Venues*.

As the story goes, on a muggy night in 1947, Hank Williams Sr. and his wife, Audrey, barely escaped a melee of flying chairs, broken whiskey bottles and gun shots by crawling out the back window of a one-room schoolhouse-cum-roadhouse called the Almeria Club outside Troy, Ala. Over half a century later,

inspired by this legend, Hank Jr. laid rugs on the old club's wood floor and filled it with top-notch pickers and some state-of-the-art recording equipment to capture the raw immediacy of country blues and boogie like they were meant to be heard – live in a resonant little room.

Although Hank Jr. took his mobile studio elsewhere, too, in the process of recording the album (including a Kansas City Pentecostal church and Shreveport's Municipal Auditorium), it's Almeria that truly gives the project its soul. A classic swing shuffle, "If The Good Lord's Willin' (And The Creeks Don't Rise)," opens this potent organic antidote to sterile studio sleight-of-hand. Sonically, country blues like "Last Pork Chop," "Tee Tot Song" and "Almeria Jam" have no parallel today. Live, open-room recording means the music must be right when it happens, because each microphone picks up some of every sound made. And, by God, Bocephus and band were on the money on these tunes. Straight from country's deepest roots, this is knee-slappin', boogie shufflin', moon howlin' brilliance from start to finish.

Proving once again he's one of the most original creative forces in American music, Williams reminds us of how great country music *used* to be made – and ought to be made more often. Do your country-lovin' heart a favor. Play this record loud and just *try* to sit still.

— Bob Millard

CHAD BROCK

III

WARNER BROS.

★

Chad Brock's new album ends with three bonus tracks, a sampling of his earlier hits. *Thunder's just a noise, boys*, he sings on the last of these. *Lightning does the work*. If only Brock had listened to his own good advice.

Appropriately titled, *III* presents Brock as just as one more in a series of big-hat-wearing good ol' boys. Like those who preceded him, Brock gets flustered around the ladies on "Park The Pickup (Kiss The Girl)," even as he pretends, on "I'd Like To See You Try," that he's too much of a rolling stone to be tied down. He also loves mama and misses his small-town girlfriend. Yet there's nothing here musically or lyrically to distinguish Brock's version of these stereotypes from anyone else's.



Not that he could be expected to do much with such a superficial batch of songs. "The Lie," for instance, is about a wife who chooses to keep an affair secret from her husband. The song wants her decision to be purely altruistic – *She knows the truth would tear his world apart* – but this fails to illuminate the tangled motivations inherent in even the healthiest human relationships: As any grown-up knows, this kind of deception is likely designed to preserve the liar's world, too.

Regrettably, *III* overflows with such fairy tales. There's not a lightning bolt's worth of insight into human nature on the entire album.

There is plenty of thunder, though. The radio-ready arrangements, from co-producers Norro Wilson and Buddy Cannon, are antiseptic, heard-it-before examples of today's pop-country. And they are *loud*. Every drum booms, every guitar solo sounds lifted from an arena-rock show circa 1978, and every gushy ballad must eventually aspire to the volume of a jet engine. The notes bellow for our attention. But, like thunder in a sunny sky, they herald nothing but hot air.

— David Cantwell

SHELBY LYNNE

Love, Shelby

ISLAND DEF JAM

★★★

Over the course of six albums, Shelby Lynne has tackled Nashville-by-numbers country, big-band swing and finally the scintillating Southern white soul of *I Am Shelby Lynne*, which earned her a 2001 Grammy Award for Best New Artist.

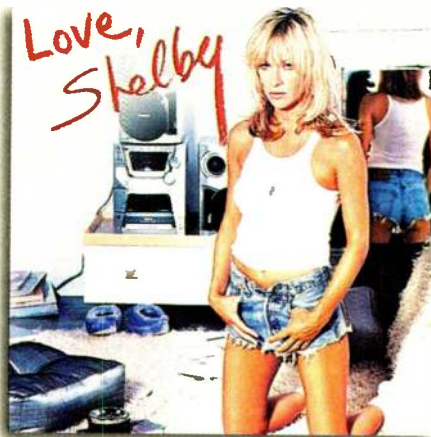
But awards and great reviews don't pay the rent, so for *Love, Shelby* the singer recruited producer Glen Ballard,

the man behind Alanis Morissette's mega-platinum *Jagged Little Pill*. Unfortunately, Ballard eschews the previous album's gritty approach in favor of an eclectic pop sheen. The new album makes Lynne sound more radio-ready, but – alas – much less distinctive.

To be sure, there are moments of visceral emotion. The light soul of "Bend" settles into a sexy Al Green groove, with Lynne's sultry whisper adding the necessary bedroom touch. "Wall In Your Heart" is anguished yet provocative, and "Ain't It The Truth" treads on Bonnie Raitt territory, with raunchy slide guitar and horns punctuating Lynne's catlike howls. Taken together, these tunes prove what her fans already know: This woman can sing.

At the same time, it seems that Lynne (or perhaps producer Ballard) is trying on a series of other artists' hats, unsure of what best suits her. "I Can't Wait" offers a caressing acoustic verse that's ruined by an Alanis-style "wall of thrash" on the chorus. Likewise, "Killin' Kind" is straight pop that suffers from an avalanche of guitars and strings. Finally, a cover of John Lennon's primal-scream workout "Mother" is too slick to be effective.

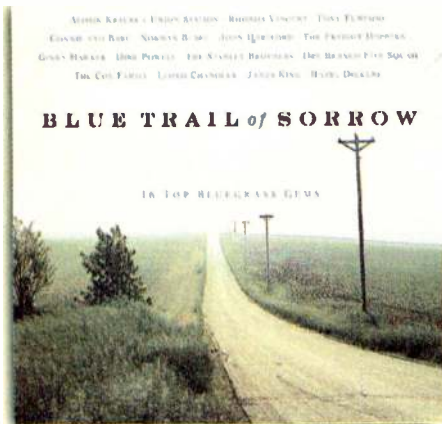
Lynne herself shines when she can escape all that clutter. "Tarpoleon Napoleon" is a steamy, string-drenched, supper-club number that positively oozes sex. "Jesus On A Greyhound" sounds



like Sheryl Crow in a gospel mood, showcasing Lynne's vibrant wail with the impact of an arrow shattering a window.

Cuts like these make you wish Lynne (who had a hand in writing all but one song here) would call her own shots and let her own fiery personality dominate. Then you'll hear everyone else trying to imitate *her*.

— Bob Cannon



VARIOUS ARTISTS
Blue Trail Of Sorrow: 16 Top Bluegrass Gems
 ROUNDER
 ★★ ★

Many record-label executives have marveled at how the *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* soundtrack dominated the 2001 country charts without the benefit of radio. Why, each of them has asked, can't I put together my own compilation album with some old-timey mountain music and some yearning hymns, and reap the rewards of a few million in album sales? Rounder Records follows that recipe in assembling the new compilation *Blue Trail of Sorrow: 16 Top Bluegrass Gems*, but the resulting disc is unlikely to go multiplatinum. For one thing, it doesn't have the promotional clout of a wonderful movie like *O Brother*. For another, the new package doesn't have a performance as compelling as the Soggy Bottom Boys' "I Am A Man of Constant Sorrow" or Alison Krauss' "Down To The River To Pray." Nonetheless, *Blue Trail* offers a satisfying meal for *O Brother* fans hungering for more. Krauss, Norman Blake, Dan Tyminski, The Cox Family, The Stanley Brothers and John Hartford are holdovers from the soundtrack, and they are joined by IBMA Entertainer of the Year Rhonda Vincent and the late, great old-timey band The Freight Hoppers. Other highlights include Hazel Dickens' achingly autobiographical "Hills Of Home," the hymnal harmonies of Krauss and The Cox Family on "Everybody Wants To Go To Heaven" and a previously unreleased Stanley Brothers track, "Meet Me in the Moonlight."

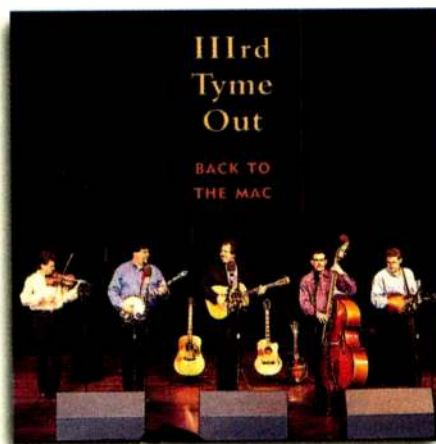
For those wanting to augment the pleasures found on *O Brother*, this *Blue Trail* will extend the trip.

— Geoffrey Himes

IIIrd TYME OUT
Back To The MAC
 ROUNDER
 ★★ ★

There's a reason IIIrd Tyme Out has been voted the International Bluegrass Music Association's Vocal Group of the Year seven times. It's not just because lead singer Russell Moore has such a buttery baritone or that Ray Deaton, Steve Dilling and Wayne Benson are such pleasing backups. It's because this Georgia-based quintet has mastered three different styles of harmony singing – the high, lonesome bluegrass sound of The Stanley Brothers, the warm sustaining Southern gospel sound of the Blackwood Brothers and the clever counterpoint of pop groups such as The Platters and The Lettermen. IIIrd Tyme Out's ability to mix and match these styles gives the group a versatility few bluegrass acts can match.

Their skills are obvious on this CD, the sequel to their popular 1998 live

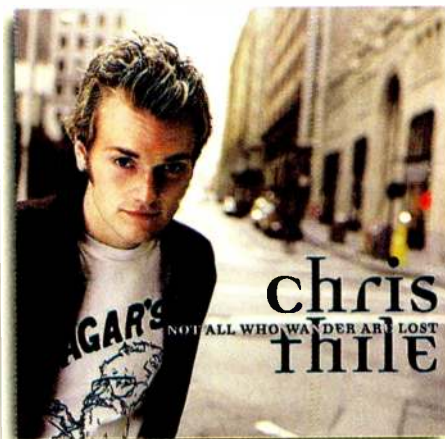


album, *Live At The MAC*. The MAC is Prestonburg's Mountain Arts Center in the heart of Appalachian East Kentucky. Many cities would be glad to claim this handsome building as a concert hall, but few could fill it with so many rabid, down-home bluegrass fans – and that combination of sophistication and rootsiness fits IIIrd Tyme Out to a T.

When the quintet returned to the MAC at the end of 2000, they drew their set list from bluegrass standards by Bill Monroe, Flatt & Scruggs, The Osborne Brothers and Doyle Lawson, as well as from country crooners Lefty Frizzell, George Jones and Jimmie Davis. The string-band arrangements give honky-tonk tunes like Frizzell's "A Little Unfair" a

breath of mountain air, while velvety vocals impart a bright pop shine to bluegrass tunes like Lawson's "Please Search Your Heart." Like many live albums, this is neither as ambitious nor as accomplished as the band's best studio sessions. But it does provide an excellent introduction for newcomers and a welcome supplement for old fans.

— Geoffrey Himes



CHRIS THILE
Not All Who Wander Are Lost
 SUGAR HILL
 ★★ ★

It's just coincidence that Nickel Creek's Chris Thile was awarded the prestigious Mandolin Player of the Year title by the International Bluegrass Music Association less than a week before the release of his third solo album. Even so, the virtuosity displayed on the collection offers convincing proof that the 21-year-old phenom is a worthy title holder. *Not All Who Wander Are Lost* is a stunning, if sometimes problematic, revelation of just how deep his abilities run.

The album splits the difference between Thile's previous work, combining the bluegrass flavor of his last solo outing with the blend of bluegrass, classical and jazz on last year's Nickel Creek CD. With veterans like Dobroist Jerry Douglas and banjo trailblazer Béla Fleck onboard, Thile explores a dozen original compositions with an exhilarating combination of finesse and abandon.

It should come as no surprise that Thile can craft sinuous, elegant, genre-bending melodies offering plenty of inspiration to the ensembles. Yet without the simple structures that underpin more traditional tunes, a listener's interest can wander, especially when the music stretches beyond

REVIEWS

the usual three or four minutes – and few selections here keep to that limit.

When they do, as on the deft bluegrass workout “Wolfcreek Pass,” the results are concise and punchy; otherwise, the outcome is sometimes less than compelling. It’s obvious that the musicians have a fine time playing off of one another, but that in itself doesn’t always stir the blood of a listener, and the disappointment is sometimes aggravated by a reliance on formulaic arrangements.

In the end, though, these are hardly fatal flaws. *Not All Who Wander* may not command undivided attention through a complete listening, but taken in smaller doses, it has more than its share of substance and charm.

— Jon Weisberger



DOYLE LAWSON & QUICKSILVER Gospel Parade

SUGAR HILL
★★★

When done right, vocal harmony, particularly as it’s used in gospel music, can call up human trials and triumphs that mere words – or a solitary singer – can only suggest. Doyle Lawson & Quicksilver master this inspiring and aspiring art.

When Lawson’s imperturbable rasp soars in song with the high bass of Dale Perry and the emotive tenors of Barry Scott and Jamie Dailey, each voice blends with the others even as it stands distinctive. The glorious result is the very model of what a blessed community can accomplish with arms entwined.

Lawson’s group is arguably the finest purveyor of bluegrass harmony working today. And not just bluegrass. Their latest album, *Gospel Parade*, places the group’s trio and quartet harmonies in a variety

of settings. In addition to the freewheeling bluegrass arrangements that bookend the album, *Gospel Parade* features the bluesy a cappella of the traditional “I Heard Zion Moan” as well as the straight-ahead country of songwriter Paul Overstreet’s “He Is Risen.” The latter combines honky-tonk piano and fiddle with shimmering pedal steel, the set’s lone moment of amplification.

But the sound Lawson really highlights here is Southern gospel, a choice inspired by the group’s recent appearances at the National Quartet Convention in Louisville. Several songs, including two by Swanee River Boy Buford Abner, are performed the old-school way – just four voices accompanied by church piano. And on “Some Of These Days,” Lawson, Scott and Dailey soar to a gorgeously keening crescendo while Perry lets his bass stretch downward like taffy. It’s in that climax that Quicksilver best captures the bounce, range and effervescence that are hallmarks of the Southern gospel style.

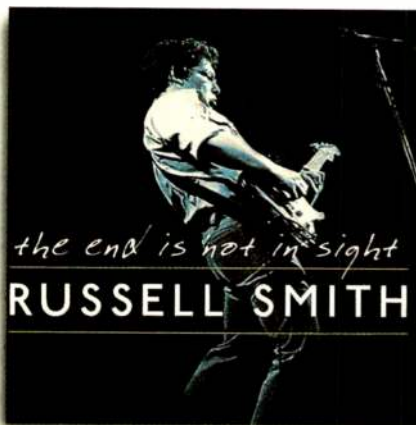
— David Cantwell

THE END IS NOT IN SIGHT Russell Smith

MUSCLE SHOALS
★★★

If the only thing you know about Russell Smith is that he wrote and sang “Third Rate Romance” in the early ’70s when he led the Amazing Rhythm Aces, you know enough to suspect that his new record might be worth hearing.

For the last 25 years, Smith has been active on the Nashville scene, writing such hits as T. Graham Brown’s “Don’t Go To Strangers,” Ricky Van Shelton’s “Keep It Between The Lines” and Randy



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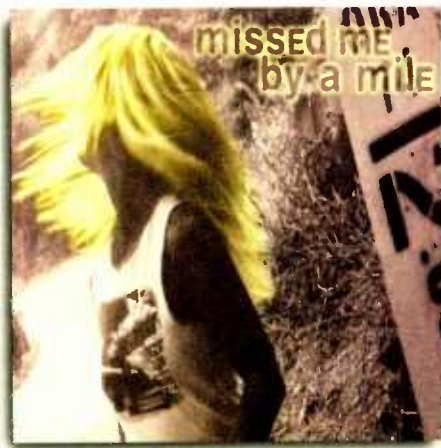
SAA912

Travis' "Look Heart, No Hands."

On his new album, a 12-song mix of re-cut hits and excellent new songs, Smith gives each of the tunes his patented rhythm, country 'n' blues treatment. He went to legendary Muscle Shoals in Alabama to record these bluesy, low-key tracks. Included are new covers of Aces' hits "The End Is Not In Sight (The Cowboy Song)" and "Third Rate Romance" (in a wonderful New Orleans gris-gris arrangement that keeps it fresh), as well as "Old School" from Smith's major-label solo effort from a decade ago. My favorites among the new gems are "Jesse," about Confederate-era outlaws the James Gang, and the poignant "The King Is In His Castle."

Smith's voice has mellowed and relaxed a little with age, and some of his new themes mine the rich world of the not-so-young. Throughout, the performances prove that Smith maintains a rare ability to get to the heart with a few words, and to punctuate the nuances with a quintessentially Southern voice. Russell Smith has written, performed and recorded exquisitely distinctive music for 30 years or so. Fortunately, the end is not in sight.

— Bob Millard



JANN BROWNE
Missed Me By A Mile

PLAN B
★★★★

Why Jann Browne has slipped beneath the radar for so long is anybody's guess. The California singer has been strumming her hipster brand of down-home country for more than a decade with hardly any recognition. So, like Kieran Kane and Kevin Welch before her, she had to launch her own label – the aptly named Plan B Records – to get new material out.

Missed Me By A Mile proves Browne is right on target. Working with guitarist and co-writer Matt Barnes, she swaggers through this twangy soundscape like a confident champion. Alternative-country before the tag was even coined, Browne injects her songs with a sultry, serpentine suggestiveness that's more hip-shaking than hillbilly, more roadhouse than ranch house. She feels every blues-soaked syllable, and it shows.

Browne can whip up a fluffy tearjerker of a ballad with Julia Child expertise, as she does on "The Lonesome Mile." She also can get down 'n' dirty with the decidedly un-ladylike hotel-room reflection "Thought I Had It All."

Obviously, she's following a muse that takes a different direction than those followed by most Nashville singers. As she shows on *Missed Me By A Mile*, it's a journey worth taking with her.

— Tom Lanham

SHAWN CAMP
Lucky Silver Dollar
SKEETERBIT

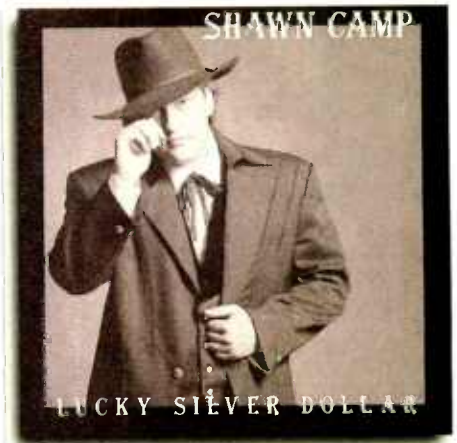
★★★★

Fate's wheel is hard to predict. Back in '93, Warner Bros. released a pair of auspicious debuts: one a collection of pop-influenced romps by then-unknown Faith Hill, the other an earthier, brainier set of barnstormers by Shawn Camp.

As fortune had it, the telegenic Hill got the hero's welcome while Camp got the heave-ho. Nonetheless, Camp remained a behind-the-scenes Nashville favorite, penning crafty songs for country stars while presenting memorable nightclub shows around town.

But the world-at-large deserves a better chance to hear Camp, which now arrives in *Lucky Silver Dollar*, a crafty follow-up that features writing packed with Dr. Seuss-clever couplets. He almost attains the genius of Roger Miller here, with songwriting that balances kooky levity and country legacy with surreal, stirring harmony. In "Baby's Gone Home To Mama," for example, he rhymes "mama" with "Nostradamus," "pajamas" and "chihuahua."

Performed in Camp's likable hillbilly drawl, his metaphors cavalcade past. There's the disgruntled circus worker declaring he's "Off To Join The World"; the Bret Harte-era minstrel wooing a dancing girl at the "Fallen Star Saloon"; and a philandering Lothario letting us



know that "I Ain't The Hero."

In fact, Camp turns so many smart phrases that it would be easy to overlook his brilliant, retro-sharp arrangements. But study how he and John Scott Sherrill construct their steel-guitar-and-marimbas-backed "Middle Of Nowhere" – it sounds familiar yet exotic, as if "Margaritaville" collided headlong into "Luckenbach, Texas."

Camp makes it sound simple, but a great deal of thought, heart and soul had to be expended to create an album that feels this peppy and perfect.

— Tom Lanham

AMY ALLISON
Sad Girl

DIESEL ONLY
★★★★

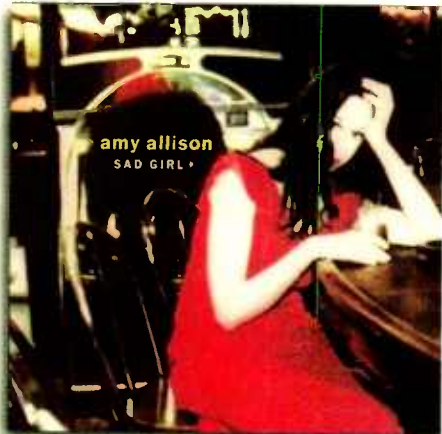
New York-based country singer Amy Allison's latest is an elegant, heart-rending narrative of love's diminished returns that continues the melancholic work of her 1996 debut, *The Maudlin Years*. Recorded in New York and Los Angeles by four separate producers – Jim Scott, Mark Spencer, Al Houghton and Justin Asher – *Sad Girl's* spare, tidy backing tracks perfectly enable Allison's pathos as a songwriter, and her openness as a performer.

Long a favorite of Manhattan's discerning downtown club scene, Allison's aggrieved material carries a sweetness and resiliency that's more about emotional maturity than about sniveling over bagged opportunities. In "Do I Miss You?" for example, she wonders of an ex-suitor, *Do I miss you, who can say/It's all a mystery anyway/Do I miss you, I'm not sure/I miss the you I thought you were*. The daughter of blues-jazz great Mose Allison, the singer doesn't just focus on romance, as evidenced by her poignant tune "Family," which

REVIEWS

asks, *Who gives you life/Who gives you hell/Who makes you sick/Who makes you well/Who drives you crazy/Who keeps you sane/Who else but the people who share your name?*

Vocally, Allison's nasality may cause split decisions among first-time listeners; her high-pitched tone lies somewhere between the Williams women, Lucinda and Victoria. However, her ability to evoke intense empathy without wasted effort measures up well with these two highly regarded singer/songwriters. Such technical efficiency serves



Sad Girl's emotional position effectively. Life's disappointments are expected; they're a requisite, mysterious part of what sometimes makes it worth living. That might just be what maturity is all about.

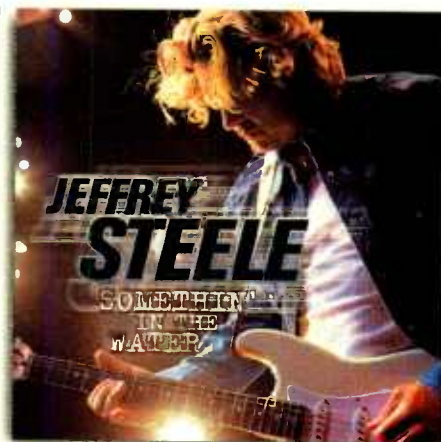
— Paul Griffith

JEFFREY STEELE Somethin' In The Water MONUMENT

★★★

Steele has come a long, long way from his baby-faced days as the lead singer of California country band Boy Howdy. On *Somethin' In The Water*, his first solo album, the broad-shouldered Steele pumps out testosterone to spare. In recent years, he's kept busy as a successful songwriter, conceiving such hits as Diamond Rio's "Unbelievable" and John Michael Montgomery's "Hello L-O-V-E." But his list of well-known songs doesn't adequately prepare a listener for the swaggering, country-rock forcefulness of *Somethin' In The Water*.

Several tunes jolt out of the speakers with a full-on electrical charge, including the meaty rocker "We're Makin' Up" and the title tune, in which Steele shouts his lust



over a pounding piano track. Less successful rockers include a rampaging name-dropper, "Tip Your Hat To The Teacher," and a contrived rap 'n' rock anthem, "And The Crowd Goes Wild."

Expanding the album's wide-ranging variety is a sentimental, string-laden ballad, "I Can Give You Love Like That," and a jaunty swinger, "That's What I Keep Tellin' Myself." Steel also takes a Midwestern roots-rock detour with the banjo-introduced "The Whole Idea" and the reflective "I Was Younger Then."

Earnhardt Honored On U.S. Silver Dollar

Racing Legend Joins Presidents on U.S. Coinage

Washington DC - Dale Earnhardt's legendary status was further enhanced today with the announcement that Racing's All-Time Greatest Driver is being honored on a genuine United States Silver Dollar. The image of racing's Man in Black with his #3 Chevy is added to the coin by a revolutionary new process where an extraordinarily detailed color image is actually fused onto the silver coin. "As soon as word got out about this unique commemorative, collectors and Earnhardt's fans overwhelmed our phone center," said George Hubbard of the International Collectors Society, marketers of Limited Edition collectibles.

"Earnhardt memorabilia and authentic U.S. silver coins are two of the hottest col-

lectibles on the market today," stated Hubbard. "The Dale Earnhardt silver dollar, which is made of .999 pure silver, combines the overwhelming popularity of stock car racing's most popular hero with the enduring value of official U.S. Mint struck silver coinage. This represents a true collector's treasure that will be passed on to future generations with a great deal of pride."

The coins used in this touching memento have been obtained directly from the U.S. mint, all in brilliant uncirculated condition. After the high-tech colorization process is applied, the coin is permanently sealed inside a crystal-clear capsule to assure the dazzling luster will never tarnish.

"Collectors and race fans alike will appreciate the remarkable attention to detail this painstaking colorization process pro-

vides," continued Hubbard. "It features a razor-sharp image of Earnhardt in his trademark dark sunglasses against a backdrop of his legendary #3 Chevy. The coin is completed with a bright red facsimile of Dale Earnhardt's highly sought-after signature."

The Earnhardt silver dollar comes in a stunning black felt presentation case suitable for display with your finest collectibles. Each Limited Edition coin is backed by the International Collectors Society 100% Buy Back Guarantee and comes complete with a Certificate of Authenticity.

"Given Earnhardt's popularity and the laws of supply and demand, we don't know how long we can hold our current pricing."



Each Dale Earnhardt Colorized Coin is one full ounce of .999 pure silver.

Actual Size of Coin: 40 mm in diameter

Hubbard said. For now you can still obtain this unique piece of racing history for just \$29.95 (plus \$5.95 postage and handling). Send your check or money order to ICS, 10045 Red Run Boulevard, Suite 350CMMEN2, Owings Mills, MD 21117. Credit card holders may call toll free

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While inconsistent, *Somethin' In The Water* is never dull. This man of Steele may not quite be an artistic superman, but his first solo album isn't packed with kryptonite, either.

— Nick Krewen

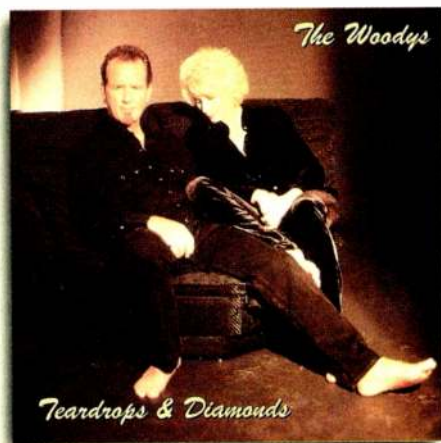
THE WOODYS
Teardrops & Diamonds

DYNAMIKE

★★★★

In the late 1980s, country music rediscovered its rock roots when Foster & Lloyd and the Desert Rose Band brought the sounds of The Beatles, the Everlys and Buck Owens' Buckaroos back to radio. That sound may have been eclipsed by hatted hunks and pop princesses, but it isn't totally dead. The evidence is on the Woodys' second release, *Teardrops & Diamonds*. Combining strong romantic songwriting with warm Everlys-style vocals, Michael and Dyann Woody create an almost carnal strain of roots-rock. Translation: Whether it's lust or heartbreak, the Woodys make you feel it.

For instance, on the opening title track the pair manages to convey a glimmer of hope with their creamy harmonies, despite the song's mordant message: *Teardrops and diamonds/They're just water and stone*. They follow it with a cover of Steve Earle's "Hearts Don't Break," which is taken at a dynamic Buddy Holly gallop. Then there's the gorgeous Everlys-style ballad "Don't Blame Me," on which Michael Woody's desperation practically seeps out of the speakers.



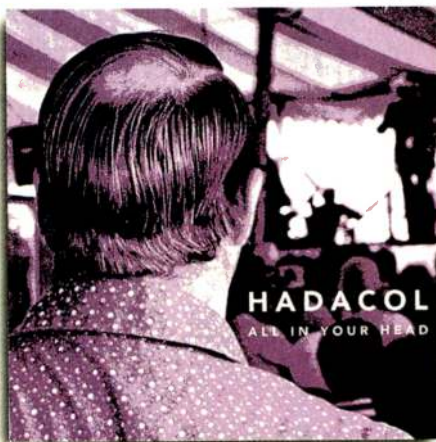
For hard country, consider the bouncy "Honey I'm Wrong," a winking lovers' spat that recalls Conway Twitty and Loretta Lynn's feistier duets, and "Hello Heartache," a partly spoken weeper that's affecting but never maudlin. And just in case you thought

the Woodys are content to merely coo at one another, they fire off "Every Minute Counts," which sounds like a great lost Gram Parsons-Emmylou Harris rocker.

The Woodys also manage to stress their contributions to country-rock history by including their version of Michael's "He's Back And I'm Blue," a late-'80s hit for the Desert Rose Band. In addition, they offer a haunting eulogy for their friend, the late Byrds drummer Michael Clarke. The closing "Sweet Destiny" acts as a soothing benediction, telling the roots-rock flock that it's okay to drop the cool stance and wear your heart on your sleeve.

In the end, while the Woodys pay homage to country music's most vital influences, they also lay claim to their own corner of country-rock heaven.

— Bob Cannon



HADACOL
All In Your Head

SLEWFOOT

★★★★

A distinctive Missouri sound is emerging in the alternative-country world. Show-Me State bands like the Bottle Rockets, Skeletons, Morells and Hadacol all share a common aesthetic: twangy vocals, garage-rock guitars, emphatic sock-hop rhythms, an irreverent sense of humor and simple honky-tonk storytelling that often camouflages a more serious intent. Hadacol is the least well known of these four bands, but the quarter's second album, *All In Your Head*, reaffirms the notion that they are creating some of the smartest, catchiest country-rock around.

It's not just that Hadacol avoids common alt-country sins (*Hee Haw* costumes, trailer-park slumming, general musical incompetence), but also that this band knows how to make a tune swing and sing. "What I'm Doin' Wrong," for example,

boasts a sing-along chorus, a two-step rhythm that never falters and one self-deprecating joke after another. In little more than two no-fuss minutes, it gets us bobbing to the beat and chuckling at the hapless Romeo singing the song. It could have been a Roger Miller tune – but it was, in fact, written by the band's own Greg Wickham, who shares the songwriting, singing and guitar-picking duties with his brother Fred. On their dozen originals (plus a revved-up version of the hillbilly murder frolic "Little Sadie"), the Wickham brothers demonstrate the power of simplicity. The lyrics, melodies, grooves and riffs are all boiled down to essentials, so each piece can shine without any clutter getting in the way. The mood can be romantic ("Be With You"), satirical ("Gerald Ford"), wistful ("Another Day") or ominous ("Watch It Burn"), but the feeling is sharply focused every time, thanks in no small part to producer Lou Whitney of the Skeletons and Morells.

— Geoffrey Himes

GEORGE JONES
The Rock: Stone Cold
Country 2001

BANDIT

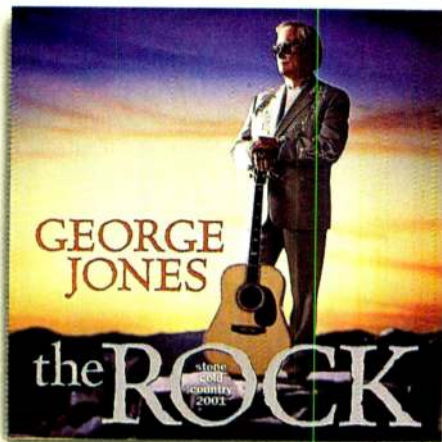
★★★

Stakes are high for George Jones right now. If a post-crash, post-drink comeback for the King of Broken Hearts repeats a story too-often told, the artistic and commercial success of his last album, *Cold Hard Truth*, reasserted the relevance of country's greatest stylist. That album was a fully realized statement, a powerful expression of how much country can mean in the hands of a master. *The Rock*, on the other hand, is an unfinished, awkward phrase.

Jones obviously knew it was an important album. He worked with three astute producers, Emory Gordy Jr., Keith Stegall and Allen Reynolds. And they recruited an A-plus team of Nashville cats, including fiddler Stuart Duncan, guitarists Brent Mason and Richard Bennett, steel player Paul Franklin and drummer Eddie Bayers, all capable of providing essential complements for Jones' singular voice. And while Jones' phrasing may be shorter of breath and range these days, it has lost none of its smooth adaptability to melody or its supple, rhythmic instinct.

What's missing, though, is material befitting that voice. "Beer Run," a pun-crazed jaunt with Garth Brooks at the

REVIEWS



wheel, ranks among the worst singles Jones has ever released; this joyride is as cloying as it is sophomoric. The fact of the Possum's own history with sobriety tests hardly helps matters.

The Al Anderson and Jim Hoke collaboration "I Got Everything" is merely Nashville assembly-line songwriting, and "I Am" and "Around Here" barely improve on the formula. Whatever emotion resonates in "Wood And Wire," a song that at least recognizes the existence of metaphor, is undercut once the listener realizes how closely it resembles Johnny Staats' 2000 recording, "Wires And Wood."

Such dodgy song selection never allows Jones to settle into a cohesive, enduring mood. In contrast, the gospel-like title track and the harrowing "50,000 Names" – a sober, effective reflection on war – reveal what that voice, against all age and odds, can do. The same goes for Jones' version of Billy Joe Shaver's powerful "Tramp On Your Street" and the gorgeous, agonizing "What I Didn't Do," a mid-'80s hit for Steve Wariner.

What Jones hasn't done, though, is apply that voice to songs more truly worth the singing.

— Roy Kasten

GARTH BROOKS Scarecrow

CAPITOL
★★★★

Last March, Garth Brooks seemed confused about his musical direction, confessing group-therapy-style to a convention of radio programmers: "What Bob Seger was in the '70s is where I want to be right now."

At the time, the mascara from the ill-conceived Chris Gaines pop project was barely dry. In the months afterwards,

though, Brooks nicely integrated his multiple personalities to produce an excellent, if not groundbreaking, farewell CD.

Scarecrow, which he says will be his last album, is a surprising and enjoyable sampler of his rock-influenced country style, which – when he first unleashed it a decade ago – changed the genre forever. He opens with the Seger-flavored "Why Ain't I Running," a piano anthem that serves as a perfect example of how Brooks can take the energy of '70s rock and splice it with country genes. The rest of the CD is like a well-oiled circus train carrying something for everyone.

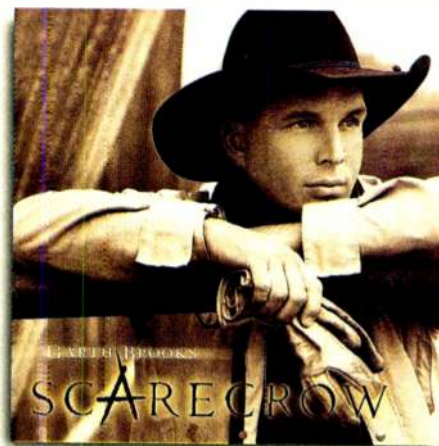
On "The Storm," a big ballad that conjures up the lonely woman in "Somewhere Other Than The Night" (both written by Kent Blazy), Brooks sings like he's Zeus tossing down lightning bolts just before an opera's intermission. *The door, it slammed like thunder, he sings, the tears fell down like rain.*

On the Texas shuffle "Big Money," he deftly straps on a pair of musical spurs to become the cocky cowboy from his early, Chris LeDoux-inspired years. The duet with Trisha Yearwood, "Squeeze Me In," is a raucous roadhouse tune (by Delbert

McClinton, no surprise), and neither singer has ever given a sassier call or response. The vocally raw "Rodeo Or Mexico" finds Brooks exploring the understated hipness of Americana (sounding a lot like Steve Earle in the process).

On "Pushing Up Daisies," his voice becomes as languid as John Prine's, and elsewhere he turns in a gutsy bluegrass cover of America's 1973 soft-rock "Don't Cross the River."

That said, the real jewel here is the joy-riding duet with George Jones, "Beer



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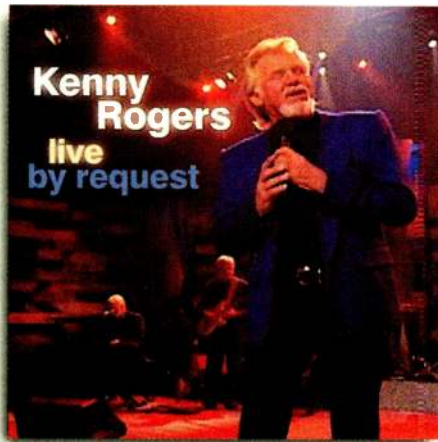
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Run.” This instant classic has a hellbent attitude that has been sorely missing in country music – it makes you want to pop a top, throw the bottle at a road sign and let out a howl to Faron Young. The only clunker on the album is the first single, “Wrapped Up In You,” a bland pop ballad that sounds as if the ghost of Chris Gaines has come back from the dead.

If *Scarecrow* is indeed a swan song, it at least finds Brooks taking a pleasant swim toward the sunset.

— Miriam Pace Longino



KENNY ROGERS

Live By Request

DREAMCATCHER

★★★

It's such a good idea, we're surprised Garth Brooks didn't think of it first: a live/greatest hits recording where all the music is selected by fans. That's the premise behind cable channel A&E's interactive music show *Live By Request*, in which fans call in or use the Internet to request favorite songs.

The program carries a winning formula: amiable chitchat between the star and giddy fans, short interview segments guided by affable CBS News personality Mark McEwen and performances of artists' biggest hits. It's like experiencing Fan Fair from the comfort of your sofa.

With that in mind, it's puzzling that so few artists have issued their *Live By Request* appearances on CD. But Kenny Rogers has, and, remarkably, it's his first live recording.

As it turns out, the format makes an ideal setting for Rogers' first live album. It takes good advantage of his engaging personality and enables him to dig deep into his inventory of chart-toppers without sounding like just another connect-the-dots greatest-hits album.

That said, a collection like 1999's

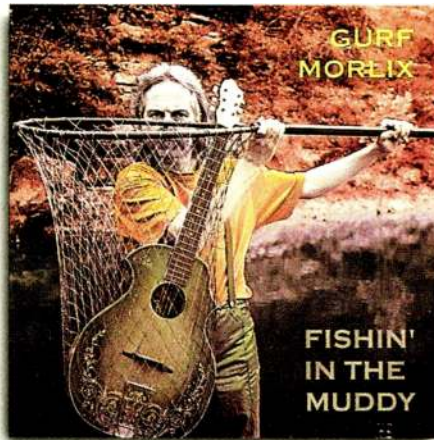
four-CD set, *Through The Years*, is probably a better bet if you merely want “Daytime Friends” in your music library. Rogers' vocals are gravelly on *By Request*, and the studio band sounds like it's only going through the motions, though Rogers' duets with Linda Davis provide a nice shot of adrenaline.

Live By Request is definitely a fan's album, directed at those who love Kenny Rogers the entertainer. You can't bear hearing Rogers tell the story behind such classics as “Lucille,” or yukking it up with McEwen over the Rastafarians who sang “The Gambler” to him on a trip to Jamaica.

If some of the fan dialogue is a tad banal (“We hope to see you in San Diego soon ...”), hearing that Lionel Richie finished writing “Lady” in a recording studio bathroom while Rogers tracked the first verse more than makes up for it. Gems like that – and his good-natured ribbing of the studio audience during “Lucille” – make *Live By Request* a winner.

There are albums you buy because you love an artist's music, and then there are those albums you buy because you love the artist. This is definitely one of the latter.

— Lisa Zhito



GURF MORLIX

Fishing In The Muddy

CATAMOUNT

★★★

On this second release, veteran guitarist/producer Morlix adheres to principles suggesting an Old West gunslinger, a hard-boiled detective, even occasionally a Zen mystic. From the deadpan funny “My Lesson” to the deadly serious “Driftin' Apart,” his songwriting refuses to waste a word, while his singing would rather express no emotion than a fake or forced one.

Though some tunes sound skeletal on first listen – with drummer Rick Richards and organist Ian McLagan providing the only support – the sturdy simplicity of the music practically amounts to a code of honor. Think “Amazing Grace” or “You Are My Sunshine,” and you'll recognize the essence that Morlix is trying to distill through the bare-bones songcraft of “I'm Hungry And I'm Cold.”

Morlix remains best known for his long association with Lucinda Williams (which ended with her acclaimed *Car Wheels On A Gravel Road* album.) On “Center Of The Universe,” he addresses the relationship between sideman and star, through an anthem that channels the jangle of classic Byrds and Tom Petty and deserves to be a hit for someone.

Other highlights extend from the country-tinged balladry of “How To Be” to the bluesier strains of “Big Eye” and “Your Picture.” On the title track, Morlix takes the traditional spiritual “Workin' On A Building” and gets his hands dirty with it, while the album-closing “Let the Rhythm Rule” provides a sequel of sorts to Sonny Bono's “The Beat Goes On” (as if one were really necessary).

Though Morlix's laconic singing lacks range, his voice is so tightly tied to the lyric's emotional core that it's hard to separate the singer from the song. As producer, he remains a master of musical understatement, his guitar perfectly punctuating the material but never overwhelming it.

— Don McLeese

WILLIE NELSON

The Great Divide

LOST HIGHWAY

★★★

This is one of those silly-Willie, Willie-nilly albums, sometimes engagingly odd and interestingly unfocused, sometimes just plain daft. I mean, does the world really need a Nelson version of Cyndi Lauper's much-covered “Time After Time,” even if the consequent creation of a whole new musical sub-genre – full-nasal Top 40 – is (kind of) an accomplishment all by itself? And as we listen to our dear old gypsy troubadour cavorting with Ricky Martin's “Maria” on a nice springy bed of soft-core border flamenco, can we believe that it could happen? Well, maybe we can. The old goat. Never mind.

Still, the questions abound. Whose



idea was this anyway? To whom did it make sense when someone said, "I know! Let's do a Willie Nelson album of other people's pop songs?" Who wanted to recruit the supporting celebrity singers – Sheryl Crow at her blandest for the *Friends* TV show theme, Kid Rock with his expletives deleted on Bernie Taupin's vivid "Last Stand In Open Country," Brian McKnight for the generic mush of "Don't Fade Away"?

Was it the record company? Or was it New Age, boy-genius producer Matt Serletic, valued for having flung other famous but relatively slow-selling semi-geezers (Santana, Aerosmith) to the top of the pops. Was that the whole point of this exercise?

Maybe it'll work. If not, fans will still have the project's hidden gems, including a cool take on the darkly semi-psychedelic "Just Dropped In (To See What Condition My Condition Was In)" and "Mendocino County Line," which Willie performs as a genuine duet with Lee Ann Womack. "You Remain," with Bonnie Raitt, isn't bad either, though a tad sluggish.

What's next for Willie? A real record, or someone else's bright idea? Is neo-disco done yet? Probably, so that won't cut it. How about a SoCal beach tune revival – could that be on its way? Perhaps. But naw. Forget it. Willie might golf, but Willie don't surf.

— Patrick Carr

R.W. HAMPTON
Always In My Heart

REAL WEST

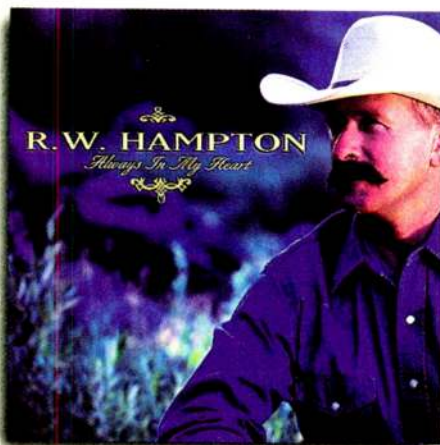
★★★

America's ongoing love affair with the West remains unbridled thanks largely to cowboy singers Don Edwards, Red Steagali, Michael Martin Murphey and Wylie Gustafson, who paint romantic images of

golden adobe walls, Technicolor-blue skies and loping steeds. They keep the Western fantasy alive for the rest of America.

R.W. Hampton rides in the same company. On his seventh album, the singer/songwriter invokes most of the dreamy cowboy clichés, including the three Ps: plains, pines and pintos. But *Always In My Heart* is more than a litany of dusty old themes or a Gene Autry revival; it's a dispatch from Hampton's West that expresses his love of sharing the range and the ranching lifestyle with his wife. Think Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton on the high chaparral.

Hampton's visions of love in the West emerge in "When It Rains" and

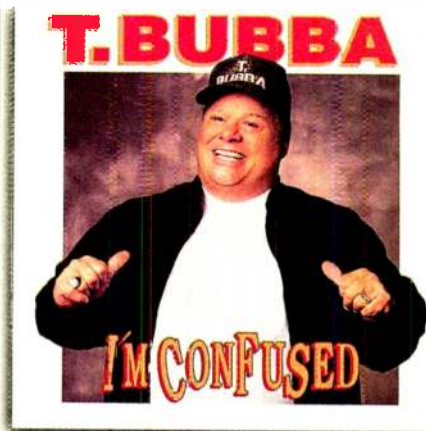


"Cowboy And The Queen" and in covers of Merle Haggard's "Shelly's Winter Love" and Marty Robbins' "Bend in the River." On the flipside, plains and river bends become cursed reminders of lost love in "When She Cries 'Don't Go'" (written with Canadian troubadour Ian Tyson), and bleak skies and cruel snow stand between a cowboy and his woman in "Back Home To Lisa."

This sage of the sage undoubtedly refreshes the Western genre, but presentation threatens to stem his strengths. Hampton's voice seems stuck in a wagon rut; it's manly, and therefore appropriate for the West, but often it comes off flat and plodding, leaving one yearning for the intensity of Tex Ritter or the versatility of the Sons Of The San Joaquin. And there's no redemption in the instrumentation, which is flaccid, giving the album an aura of elevator music.

Nonetheless, *Always In My Heart* paints a vivid picture of the West, thanks more to poetry than production.

— Michael Streissguth



T. BUBBA
I'm Confused

MCA

★★

Jerry Clower once described a comedian as someone who tells funny stories and a humorist as someone who tells stories funny. T. Bubba bills himself as both, but comes up short on each count.

Unfortunately, Bubba relies too much on decades-old Southern jokes or material drawn from his predecessors. He rehashes Lewis Grizzard's notion that God speaks with a Southern accent and that sushi is "bait," and he revisits Jeff Foxworthy's bit about Southern phrases sounding like their own peculiar, made-up words. His old jokes include bits about Baptists and dancing, Braille on a light switch and the size of his own belt buckle.

T. Bubba (who has dropped his last name, Bechtol) does nicely utilize running jokes to evoke recurring laughs from his Pensacola, Fla., audience, where *I'm Confused* was recorded live. His best concerns how Southerners can say anything bad about anyone as long as we add "Bless his heart." Though that notion is also a well-worn joke, Bubba uses it as a punchline when slamming igmos (ignorant morons), tourons (tourist morons), Democrats, Vermont and certain other "bubbas."

He offers a couple of other clever comments, such as one about Strom Thurmond's age ("A lot of Senators are hard of hearing, but Strom's the only one who could blame it on Yankee cannon fire") and Bill Clinton's legacy ("The President who played around between the Bushes").

Perhaps those who grew up without the benefit of familial Southern lore might find T. Bubba funny. For the rest of us, he's old news. Bless his heart.

— Charlene Blevins



WYLIE & THE WILD WEST

Paradise

(Rounder) ★★★★★

At this point in time, the cowboy lifestyle and traditional honky-tonk music are purely romantic pursuits that purposely cut against the grain of modern American culture. Wylie Gustafson is not only a true romantic, he's also a craftsman and a perfectionist – and one of the most consistently fine cowboy singers of his generation.

A real-life rancher in rural eastern Washington, Gustafson has become a leading figure in Western music by performing songs that extol the virtues of life on the range and setting them to the catchy meter of old-time country dancehall music. On *Paradise*, he proves that he's grown into a master of his niche, enlivening nicely detailed songs about saddle bums and Yukon trails with one of the sharpest, most relaxed honky-tonk combos around. It's like Gene Autry fronting Ernest Tubb's Texas Troubadours with a fiddle sitting in, and Gustafson lifts it all with a clear, engaging voice that is as sincere and believable as a Henry Fonda monologue.

YONDER MOUNTAIN

STRING BAND

Town By Town

(Frog Pad) ★★★

Yonder Mountain String Band joins a movement of acoustic groups combining the dynamics of bluegrass with the amiable looseness of

rock jam bands like Phish and Widespread Panic. The Colorado quartet follows peers like Leftover Salmon and String Cheese Incident in emphasizing the organic sound of mountain music, though with a decidedly longhaired bent. But unlike some peers, Yonder Mountain has done its homework: Their original songs have a crisp drive, and their harmonies feature a soaring power. At this point, the band lacks a



strong lead voice, and their songs lean too hard on one-dimensional elegies to nature and the road. But at their best they combine a fresh lyrical perspective (“Must’ve Had Your Reasons”) with interesting takes on traditional themes (“Loved You Enough”). That they persuaded Tim O’Brien to produce *Town By Town* suggests that they’ve got the respect of elders and tags them as an emerging band worth watching.

MOUNTAIN HEART

The Journey

(Doobie Shea) ★★★★★

With its second album, Mountain Heart proves that the enthusiasm that met its 1999 debut was well warranted. A past winner of the International Bluegrass Music Association’s Emerging Artists of the Year Award, the young quintet devotes its second album to



gospel songs. But while the album may focus its lyrics on Baptist-style Bible-thumping, the music expands to show what a wide range of styles the band can master. From stunning a cappella harmonies to old-style religious stompers and polished contemporary tunes, Mountain Heart manages to testify to both its faith and its abilities.

COWBOY NATION

We Do As We Please

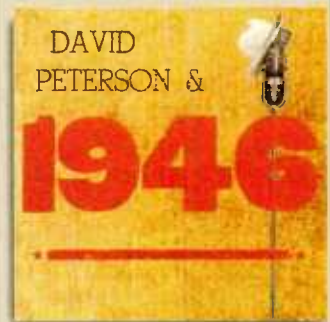
(Real West) ★★★

Most modern Western singers aim for a romantic version of the cowboy singer; the Cowboy Nation duo instead presents low-and-onesome songs marked by a quiet tension that can erupt in violence. Cowboy Nation consists of brothers Tony



and Chip Kinman, who’ve made a career of creating groundbreaking music, from the ’70s populist punk of the Dils to the ’80s roots rock of Rank ‘n’ File. They smartly identify the stark, forsaken tone of traditional Western classics like “Cowboy’s Lament” and

“Old Paint,” then emphasize their haunting qualities with bareboned melodies and Tony’s deep, desolate baritone. *We Do As We Please* crosses the raw, plaintive sound of alternative-rock bands Mazzy Star and early Cowboy Junkies with Tex Ritter and Marty Robbins, both of whom acknowledged the darker aspects of Western life. For those interested in a moody, ephemeral take on roots music, Cowboy Nation has come up with something strange and striking.



DAVID PETERSON & 1946

David Peterson & 1946

(www.1946band.com) ★★★★★

Young bluegrass vigilante David Peterson and his quintet play string music as if World War II just ended. They not only look at the introduction of Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs to Bill Monroe’s Blue Grass Boys as the big bang of bluegrass; they see it as the music’s end-all and be-all. Questions of tradition vs. progression aside, though, 1946 sure gets it right.

Explosive and emotional, this high-powered acoustic band blows and bops through this collection of standards made famous by Jimmie Rodgers, Flatt & Scruggs, The Stanley Brothers and Monroe. They prove themselves to be more than fierce devotees; they’re also accomplished and smart enough to re-work the arrangements in fresh ways that stay true to tradition without carbon-copying it.

THE BE GOOD TANYAS

Blue Horse

(Nettwerk) ★★★

Listening to the trio The Be Good Tanyas is like hearing the lessons of some particularly precocious music students. It's obvious that band members Frazey Ford, Samantha Parton and Trish Klein aren't well-trained musicians or singers yet, but there's something compelling in their wholehearted commitment and their sense of discovery. Blending banjo, mandolin, stand-up bass and fiddle with electric guitar and drums, their stripped-down songs own an austere charm reminiscent of Michelle Shocked's *The Texas Campfire Tapes*, which – like the Tanyas' work – strives to bring a punk-rock aesthetic to old-time folk music. The Vancouver-based group isn't going to dazzle any-



one with technical expertise. But if the idea of bohemian, art-school types exploring new ways to express themselves through string-band music strikes you as appealing, then check out The Be Good Tanyas.

VARIOUS ARTISTS

In Memory Of A Friend: A Tribute To The Music Of Randall Hylton

(Pinecastle) ★★★

Hylton was a modern-day rarity: a bluegrass singer and performer best known for his songwriting talent. These days, bluegrass players tend to draw attention to their instrumental flash or their vocal



power; songs too often seem to be the last consideration. Hylton, however, strived to create new material that stood up well with the mountain classics of the '40s and '50s. The Nashville resident died too young of a brain aneurysm at age 55 in March of 2001, but he left behind an extensive legacy. To honor his memory, Pinecastle Records drew recordings of Hylton songs from its catalog, compiling previous cuts by Continental Divide, Special Consensus, Wildfire, The Rarely Herd and the Larry Stephenson Band. Veterans Eddie and Martha Adcock recorded a Hylton song just for the tribute, and Rebel Records generously contributed a fine duet by Hylton and Charlie Waller. The album ends with Hylton performing his most famous song, "Room At The Top Of The Stairs." By then, this collection of story songs, love ballads and allegorical tales underscores why Hylton was so revered among his peers.

TROY OLSEN

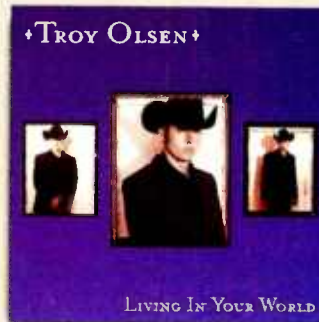
Living In Your World (Honky-Tonk Hacienda)

★★★★

Troy Olsen's musical resemblance to Dwight Yoakam isn't accidental. Not only does the Tucson-based hard-country singer write rightly wound, potent tunes packed with canny ideas; not only does he update classic Bakersfield and Texas sounds with fire

and spirit; he also collaborates with several California musicians associated with Yoakam, including keyboardist Skip Edwards and fiddler Scott Joss. Also onboard are such well-regarded L.A. country veterans as pedal steel player Jay Dee Maness and guitarists James Intveld and Michael Turner, the latter two of whom co-produced the collection.

It's clear why such heavy-weights would hook up with little-known Olsen: Unlike



many Yoakam acolytes, he delivers an album that honors the tradition while helping move it forward. An expressive singer and a clever writer, Olsen likely would have already drawn attention in Nashville by now in an earlier era. And, truth is, those who love propulsive dance-floor tunes driven along by fiddle and steel will find more sustenance in songs like "Who Gave You The Right" and "Stronger Than The Wine" than in most anything on the radio these days. If Olsen keeps making albums as good as this, his time will come, whether Nashville helps out or not.

BILLY YATES
If I Could Go Back (M.O.D.)

★★★★

*I'm too country and proud of it, Billy Yates declares to start *If I Could Go Back*, and he spends the rest of the*

album cashing in on those fighting words. As a songwriter, Yates' pedigree is exemplary: He penned George Jones' exceptional "Choices" as well as such other memorable Possum cuts as "Walls Can Fall" and "I Don't Need Your Rockin' Chair." As those songs suggest, Yates has a fine grasp of writing contemporary songs steeped in the best values of traditional country. He's as good a vocalist as he is a writer, too, but until now he's been shackled by trying to fit his rectangular talents into Nashville's round holes.

Yates has decided to put his music out on his own M.O.D. label (it stands for My Own Damn Records). The rewards of this decision are immediate: *If I Could Go Back* ranks up there with the pleasures of solid records by Alan Jackson and George Strait.

As with those artists, Yates combines romantic balladry with tradition-tinged romps.



He draws wholly from his own song bag, and after several years of being misunderstood by a couple of top record labels, it's clear that Yates had been stockpiling good material in anticipation of an opportunity to make an album that showed off his abilities. *If I Could Go Back* is that record.

— Michael McCall

Chick

Lorrie Morgan talks about bad bears, turning down a Broadway part and her plans to write a tell-all book

Country music is all in the family for Lorrie Morgan. Her dad is country music Hall of Famer George Morgan, her husband is country Cajun Sammy Kershaw and her son, Jesse, carries on the name of her late husband, Keith Whitley. Known for her songs of female empowerment,

including "Watch Me" and "I Didn't Know My Own Strength," Morgan is now releasing *Color Of Roses*, her first DVD, this spring. She also recently opened a Nashville restaurant, Hotchickens.com, with Kershaw. We caught up with the blond bombshell in her Nashville home.

What would you do if you came across a bear while hiking in the woods? It's funny that you ask that question. Since Sammy and my son and I have been hunting, I have had two dreams about bears attacking me. But I guess what I would do is just lay down and hope he thought I was dead. Maybe that way he'd mangle me just a little bit and not a lot.

Are you new to hunting? I've always been good with a gun, but this is my first year to really go out and hunt. Sammy and my son are waiting for me to get my first buck this year. I've got a brand-new bow, and let me tell you, I am awesome with the bow.

Are you chronically late or always on time? I am always on time, unless there is some really serious reason for me to be late. It drives me crazy when people are late, and it drives me crazy when I am late to get somewhere. Sammy makes me late a lot. I think it's a guy thing.

What is the most challenging board game? Chess. I've tried to learn to play chess, but for some reason, I can't seem to learn it. It really frustrates me, because normally I'm really smart at stuff like that.

Did you ever imagine in the 20-plus years you've known Sammy that you'd wind up marrying him? It never, ever entered my mind! I always thought he was so handsome and charming, but he was married, or else I was. Once neither of us was married anymore, it all of a sudden hit me in the face: Here was the guy I'd been waiting for all my life, and he's been right by me all this time.

Have you ever thought about writing a novel? Well, I did write the autobiography [*Forever Yours, Faithfully*]. I have almost finished writing a book about country music

now versus country music then. It's going to be very eye-opening to a lot of people; it's a very juicy read, no holds barred. Since I've been an insider in the country music business my whole life, I feel like my perspective is unique.

Would you ever consider doing a Broadway musical?

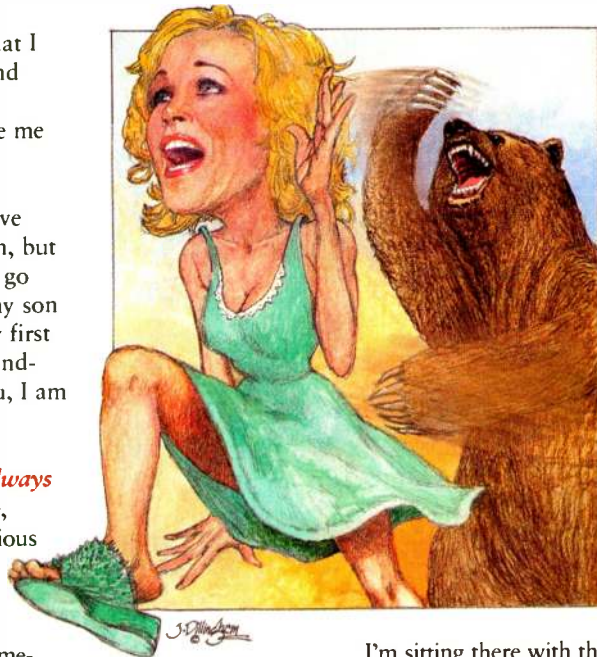
I was asked, before Reba was asked, to do *Annie Get Your Gun* on Broadway. I was asked to fill in for Bernadette Peters. I turned it down because I didn't want to be away from home. Also, I didn't want to be away from Jesse. He's my last child here at home, and he's my priority. I still feel like it was the best decision.

Tell me about the worst haircut you've ever had. I had been using Sun-In on my hair, which was fine until my girlfriend decided I needed a perm. I forgot to tell her about the Sun-In. So

I'm sitting there with the perm cap on my head and I hear this horrible crackling noise. I said to her, "My hair is burning off!" We started taking the rollers off, and they just started falling off my head with the hair still on them. And I'm supposed to do Ralph Emery's *Nashville Now* show that night. So I got there and the hairdresser had no choice but to give me a buzz cut, which was not in style then. Ralph Emery raked me over the coals for weeks about that haircut!

Which is more interesting, the supermarket or the stock market? Oh, definitely the supermarket. Especially now that you can get stuff like makeup, candles, potpourri and fresh flowers at the supermarket. I'm hopeless with the stock market – that's Sammy's department!

What do you do when you make your famed spicy chicken a little too spicy? Well, when it's too spicy, you just have to take little bites. Once it's hot and spicy, you cannot make it less spicy. You just suffer and eat through it.



BY KATH HANSEN

ILLUSTRATION BY JERRY DILLINGHAM

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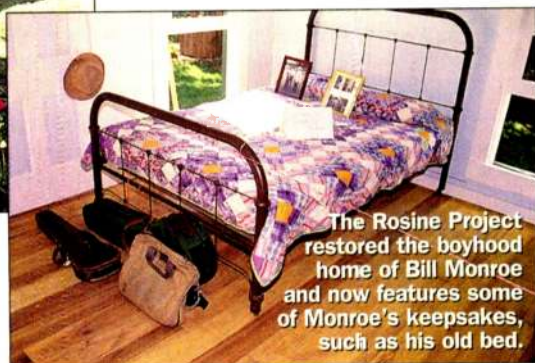
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OFF THE CHARTS

THE COUNTRY BUZZ OUTSIDE THE MUSIC BIZ

House Of Bluegrass

Bill Monroe's childhood home returned to glory



Four years after his death, the house he immortalized in music was about two months away from caving in and becoming a pile of rubble.

That's when Campbell Mercer stepped in. A mandolin-playing veterinarian who now heads the Bill Monroe Foundation, Mercer recalls the day he first investigated the crumbling treasure in the hills. "We just said, 'We've got to do this, and we'll worry about the money later.'" He quickly called in a restoration expert whose credits include President Andrew Jackson's Nashville residence, The Hermitage. Then he lined up a grant and got to work.

A year later, in August 2001, the renovated Monroe home opened to the public. The ribbon-cutting ceremony drew an unexpectedly large audience, including Kentucky Gov. Paul Patton, Ricky Skaggs, Ralph Stanley, Tom T. Hall and James Monroe, son of the legendary Father of Bluegrass. Other bluegrass groups were on hand, too, picking the night away on the nearby bluff that

inspired one of Monroe's best fiddle tunes, "Jerusalem Ridge."

Mercer has since drawn up ambitious plans that would make the homestead – and a \$2 million museum – the brightest points in a revitalized Rosine. Other buildings slated for purchase and restoration include the cabin belonging to Monroe's uncle, Pendleton Vandiver

(the subject of Monroe's classic "Uncle Pen," a No. 1 hit for Skaggs in 1984), and the home of his brother Charlie, who rose to fame with Bill in the 1930s as

part of the Monroe Brothers.

Eventually, Mercer's goal is to surround these historic residences with renovated stores and restaurants, a music hall, residents in period dress and more – a "living history experience," as he eagerly puts it.

"If it takes 10 years, it's going to be a good 10 years, and if it takes three years, it's going to be a really fast three years," says Mercer. "The main thing is the goal at the end. Whether it's three or 10 years doesn't



A scale model

bother me, as long as we are self-sufficient and not dependent on any one entity too much, because we want to maintain integrity."

While he doesn't feel rushed by the full Rosine Project, Mercer does face pressure in another area. The Foundation won a bidding war for Monroe's historic mandolin, agreeing to pay \$1.125 million for the instrument that the Father of Bluegrass played throughout his career. So far, they've made the initial down payment, but still need to complete the purchase.

"We have the mandolin – but we do not own it forever until bluegrass fans line up behind this," says Mercer. "We've got about another year to pay it off."

To do so, Mercer and his foundation will offer shares in the mandolin. Mercer clearly loves the idea of the next generation owning a piece of musical history. "You'll get a certificate, and you can say to your kids, 'Let's go see our mandolin – it created a musical genre.'"

— Jon Weisberger



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Book Beat

The Facts Of Life And Other Dirty Jokes

By Willie Nelson
(Random House, \$21.95)

Perhaps Willie Nelson's *The Facts Of Life And Other Dirty Jokes* seems so real and so "Willie" because of passages like the one about his dad, Ira: "He was the best damn Ford mechanic that ever lived," Nelson writes. Magnanimous and nonjudgmental, he is as proud of his dad and his mechanical abilities as he is of the famous singers, writers and Hollywood *glitterati* who pepper the stories of this book from cover to cover.

Throughout *Facts Of Life*, Willie offers

pearls of wisdom as only he can. Commenting on sad songs, he allows, "Sometimes I believe the reason a lot of country singers and writers have gone off the deep end was because they never could recover from the evening that caused them to write the song."

On music, he notes, "Every song is a gospel song. All music is sacred. Every note of music in the universe is spiritual and sacred ... and that's the gospel truth. Amen."

The Facts Of Life contains lyrics to many of Willie's songs, as well as to the Lord's Prayer. (Following the prayer's text, he writes, "This is an affirmation that you can always repeat ... It always seems to help me. I keep it on a loop

in my mind ... I didn't write it, but I highly recommend it.")

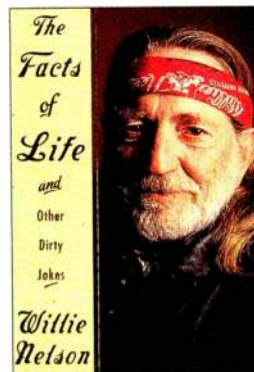
Nelson's look at life on the road is often humorous, and the singer obviously has as much fun writing it as fans will

reading it. As he writes: "Joke-telling is therapeutic in a sick kind of way. Laughter is still the best medicine."

Still, the real Willie Nelson is best summed up by a glimpse of his more serious side. At one of the black-tie affairs that took place in Nashville during Country Music Week 2001, he spent most of the evening sitting at the table with some of New York City's fire and

police personnel in town to receive a bravery award – bypassing his own assigned table of celebrities.

— Patsy Bruce



Grateful Documentary

New video documents bond between Grateful Dead's Jerry Garcia and longtime bluegrass collaborator

Growing up as the child of a famous musician isn't always glamorous. Sometimes it's just plain boring.

"I've spent a lifetime trying to entertain myself backstage while my father was playing onstage," says Gillian Grisman, daughter of mandolin master David Grisman.

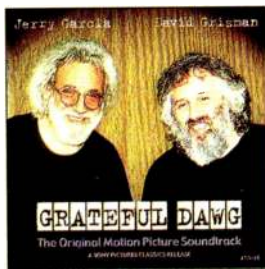
So in 1991, when she was 22, Gillian and her friend Justin Kreutzmann (son of Grateful Dead

percussionist Bill Kreutzmann) decided to film a performance by Jerry Garcia and her father at San Francisco's Warfield Theater.

"On one hand, we were fledgling filmmakers, trying to hone our chops and get as much experience shooting as possible," says Gillian. "On the other hand, we were entertaining ourselves."

Little did the aspiring directors know that their amateur footage would become the basis for a documentary film, a soundtrack and a DVD. *Grateful Dawg*, the first theatrical release directed by Gillian

Grisman, uses the 1991 concert as a focal point to chronicle the history of the friendship and musical partnership of Garcia and her father.



The documentary covers the duo's first meeting at a Bill Monroe concert in 1964, their founding of the bluegrass band Old And In The Way and the creation of their duet albums in the 1990s. Garcia, best known as the leader of the Grateful Dead, died of a

drug-induced heart attack in 1995.

In addition to concert footage, the film features archival photographs, scenes of recording sessions and casual jams filmed in David's living room. Interviews with family members and musical collaborators, including Béla Fleck, Ronnie McCourey and Peter Rowan, are woven into the musical footage.

The elder Grisman financed *Grateful Dawg* through his own record label, Acoustic Disc. Though he didn't participate in the editing process, he was determined that the project would be different than traditional documentaries

like the PBS series *Ken Burns' Jazz*.

"Almost every music documentary bothers me because they'll show you 30 seconds of something, and then go to something else," he says. "I want to see the whole song, especially when it's someone like Django Reinhardt or Charlie Parker. You see about 30 seconds, and then wonder, 'Why are we now listening to Wynton Marsalis talk about this?'"

So he gave his daughter one iron-clad rule: She had to use complete songs. This restriction presented a monumental hurdle when Gillian was creating a montage for the epic, 16-minute instrumental "Arabia."

"I had all this footage of Jerry and my father in the studio creating this song, but I also had a phenomenal onstage performance," she explains. "I wanted to juxtapose the live environment with the studio environment because they were so radically different. Not only that, I wanted to give people an in-depth look at the creative process of writing music and what happens in the recording process."

The film proves she ultimately achieved her goal by capturing the intimate interaction between two friends who spent a lifetime entertaining themselves – and creating some wonderful music in the process.

— Bobby Reed

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Book Beat

Red Desert Sky: The Amazing Adventures Of The Chambers Family

By John Lomax III

(Allen & Unwin, available in U.S. through www.villagerecords.com, \$17.99)

Red Desert Sky is the tale of one family surviving two equally savage environments – the uninhabited plains of the Australian Outback, and the fiercely competitive music business.

Though Australian alt-country artist Kasey Chambers has alluded to her nomadic upbringing in interviews, author John Lomax III looks deeper into the Chambers family history. He remains an objective narrator, letting each family member tell the story in his or her own words.

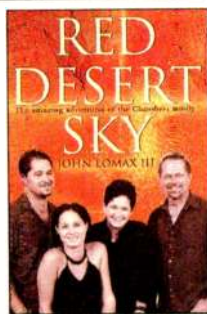
The heart of the biography begins in 1976, when parents Bill and Diane – who had performed as a country duo in Australia – took their 2-year-old son Nash and newborn daughter Kasey into

the desolate, rocky Nullarbor Plains, so Bill could turn his lucrative fox hunting hobby into a full-time career.

For 10 years, the Chambers family traveled and camped on the dry, treeless terrain, facing stresses incomprehensible to high-tech, convenience-oriented Americans. For weeks at a time, the only other living beings the Chambers encountered were poisonous snakes, wild cats and other undesirable companions.

They worked hard just to survive and found relief by singing around the campfire and taking summer vacations at a nearby fishing village. As Nash recalls, “It was just a very peaceful existence. We’ve seen some magnificent sunsets and sunrises and a couple of times at night, we’ve seen meteors shooting across the sky ... It was absolutely magnificent to see the sky out there.”

When fox furs became unfashionable in the mid-1980s, the Chambers family moved back to civilization to “live a normal life.” Bill and Diane started performing again. Kasey and Nash soon joined their parents onstage, and in 1992 the



Dead Ringer Band was born.

Lomax (who managed both the Dead Ringer Band and Kasey Chambers from 1996 to 2001) devotes the second half of the book to the family’s rise to fame. The Dead Ringer Band released seven albums in Australia in the ‘90s, earning the group a pile of Australian music awards. In 1999, Kasey left the

nest to become an award-winning solo artist, reaching double-platinum status in her native country as well as success in America with her Warner Bros. debut, *The Captain*, and its recent follow-up, *Barricades & Brickwalls*.

Red Desert Sky’s conversational tone, complete with Australian slang, makes for a fun, easy read. Both parents and children often spin the same yarn but provide four markedly different perspectives. As they candidly share details of their family ancestry and gypsy lifestyle, readers get an intimate glimpse into a close-knit family that persevered through unimaginable conditions to achieve amazing success in a field where there are few survivors.

— Heather Johnson

Star Math

Mathematicians claim they can explain just about anything with the right formula. With that in mind, we came up with our own figures to determine the makeup of these stars. Does it all add up? You make the call.

$$\begin{array}{c}
 \text{Tim McGraw} + \text{Garth Brooks} - \text{Stacks of Money} + \text{Armadillo} = \text{Chris Cagle}
 \end{array}$$

$$\begin{array}{c}
 (\text{Gallagher} - \text{Watermelon}) + \text{Buddy Holly} \times \frac{\text{Pete Seeger}}{2} = \text{Mark McGuinn}
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by Kelly RuBert

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Rocking The Gender Line

Women rockabilly singers kick at cultural conventions in new documentary

Most thumbnail sketches of '50s rockabilly make it look like an exclusive club of young, wild men: Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins, Johnny Cash, Eddie Cochran, Gene Vincent.

But filmmaker Beth Harrington knows better. Her new documentary, *Welcome To The Club: The Women Of Rockabilly*, highlights the spirited contributions of four leading female rockers – Janis Martin, Wanda Jackson, Lorrie Collins and Brenda Lee

(who is now a member of both the country and rock halls of fame).

Harrington clearly states her argument: These and other rockabilly women made raw,

powerful music deserving of more recognition, both now and then. But undue discrimination within the record industry and larger, prevailing attitudes in

American culture kept them from getting the same breaks given their male peers.

Harrington makes her case well, too. Her documentary, which will air nationally on PBS stations in March, lets the women tell their stories.

They're not bitter, but instead acutely aware of the restraints that held them back.

Martin tells of signing with RCA Records at age 15 in 1956, and how the company positioned her as the "female Elvis" until they discovered that she had become pregnant. By age 16, her contract was withdrawn. Lorrie Collins, who performed with her brother Larry in the Collins Kids, saw her promising career at Columbia Records come to a halt when, at age 19, she married a 32-year-old man against the wishes of her family and her label.

Wanda Jackson – "a sweet woman with a nasty voice," as she recalls one article describing her – tells of her own

difficult path. She faced harsh stereotyping because of the way she danced when she sang, and she remembers leaving the *Grand Ole Opry* in tears after Ernest Tubbs refused to let her onstage unless she covered her bare-shouldered, low-cut dress.

The women, all in their 60s now, still show the strength of character they picked up in those days. And thanks to the documentary's wonderful, historic performance clips, the vibrancy and force of their music remains clear – and still alive today on CD.

Welcome To The Club closes with shots of the women performing recently at a Las Vegas rockabilly convention, and speaks of the crowds they still draw at European festivals. They're long from gone, but as Harrington makes clear, their music still deserves the attention it has never received.



Brenda Lee



Lorrie Collins



Janis Martin



Wanda Jackson

Book Beat

Classic Country: Legends Of Country Music

By Charles K. Wolfe
(Routledge, \$17.95)

For decades, names such as Karl and Harty, Arthur Q. Smith, Wayne Raney and the Brown's Ferry Four popped up only in the fine print of country music history books. Charles Wolfe, the esteemed researcher and author of well-received books on the *Grand Ole Opry* and Southern fiddling, finally brings those names – and more – to the forefront in *Classic Country: Legends Of Country Music*.

He lets us peek in on songwriter Smith in the 1940s, hawking songs at a radio station like a blind man selling pencils. He brings us along to eavesdrop on the original Brown's Ferry Four – composed of Grandpa Jones, Merle Travis and the Delmore Brothers – as they conspire like schoolboys to name their

gospel band after one of the Delmores' risqué songs. Whether it's the image of old-time banjo player Charlie Poole chugging moonshine in a general store or the glimpse of Lew Childre scampering off into the woods to learn the guitar, Wolfe always delivers the small details that enrich and enliven his profiles.

The essays, most of which have appeared previously in magazines and journals, also consider the stars of country music. But, more than anything, those pieces – on legends Kitty Wells, Hank Snow, Bill Monroe and others – help put the lives and careers of the unheralded in clearer perspective: We can measure small against big.

Not so helpful are the book's editing gaffes. According to the text, Hank Williams recorded a song Harlan Howard wrote in 1991 – apparently someone along the line dropped the "Jr." that belongs at the end of the singer's name. And the book says Don

Gibson was toiling anonymously on Knoxville's *Tennessee Barndance* in 1965, when it actually was a full decade earlier.



Also frustrating is the book's failure to integrate groups of related articles into a seamless whole. At the outset, in a collection of Wolfe's previously published essays on The Carter Family, we read no less than three times that Sara and A.P. divorced in 1939. Such repetition appears regularly in the book's first section.

But that minor annoyance is outweighed by the payoff – a flush of information about country music's little-known journeymen and women. Wolfe has successfully splashed a few cans of bright paint on these formerly faded bits of history. For that reason, *Classic Country* is sure to prove indispensable, in keeping with the tradition of other books in the Wolfe library.

— Michael Streissguth

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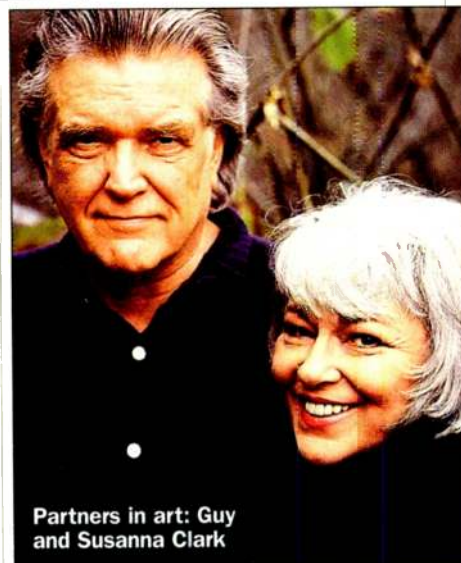
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Married To Multimedia

Guy and Susanna Clark exhibit their mutual, multifaceted talents

Guy Clark ambled to the microphone, the familiar tug of a guitar strap weighing on his shoulders, and looked out at a gathering of family, friends and fans.

craft and stunningly unadorned expression found in the Clarks' songs and in their paintings, which will remain on display through April at the Nashville-based Hall of Fame.



Partners in art: Guy and Susanna Clark



Guy Clark's Hall of Fame exhibit includes this portrait of a pensive Rodney Crowell.

Guy is the more prolific writer of the two. Besides his own albums – including such landmarks as 1975's *Old No. 1*, 1989's *Old Friends* and 1995's *Dublin Blues* – his songs have been recorded by Ricky Skaggs (“Heartbroke”), Vince Gill (“Jenny Dreamed Of Trains”), Jerry Jeff Walker (“L.A. Freeway”), Bobby Bare (“New Cut Road,” “Let It Roll”), The Highwaymen (“Desperadoes Waiting

songs, her husband returned the favor and picked up a paintbrush. The Hall of Fame exhibit celebrates these dual family talents.

Susanna's paintings, as shown in the exhibit, have been used as album covers on Willie Nelson's *Stardust*, Emmylou Harris' *Quarter Moon In A Ten Cent Town*, Guy Clark's *Old No. 1* and Nanci Griffith's *Dust Bowl Symphony*. Guy's self-portrait was used on the cover of his *Old Friends* album. The Hall of Fame exhibit also presents Clark's 1990 portrait of Rodney Crowell and a striking still life of some cowboy boots.

As Clark finished singing, he smiled. “That wasn't so hard after all,” he noted. Having absorbed the power of the Clarks' songs, the crowd then filed upstairs to take a look at their paintings.

— Michael McCall

“This is just *real* civilized,” he cracked. In front of him, a crowd of 200 had quietly filled the Country Music Hall of Fame's Ford Theater as part of the opening of *Workshirts And Stardust: Paintings By Guy And Susanna Clark*, the first major art exhibit of the acclaimed songwriting couple. To kick

For A Train”), Rodney Crowell (“She's Crazy For Leaving,” “Stuff That Works”), Foster & Lloyd (“Fair Shake”) and Steve Wariner (“Baby, I'm Yours”).

However, he's his own best interpreter. His casual manner can turn darkly intense on incisive story songs like “The Randall Knife,” and his tough-guy demeanor can adopt a sly bounce on playful songs like “Homegrown Tomatoes.”

To perform his wife's songs, Clark got assistance from Rodney Crowell and Emmylou Harris.

Susanna Clark's compositions – including “Easy From Now On,” “Come From The Heart,” “The Cape” and “Old Friends” – have a sensitive, sharp beauty, and the same knack for hard truths and distilled experience found in her husband's work.

That same direct, uncomplicated style informs their paintings as well. After Susanna, a lifelong painter and former art teacher, started writing

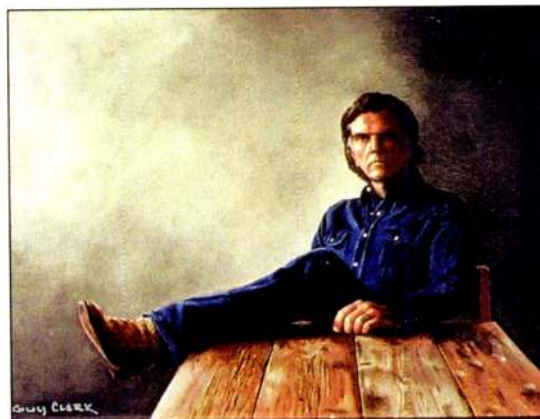


Guy's still life of a pair of cowboy boots is a study in composition and perspective.

off the opening, Clark picked up his guitar and, along with longtime collaborator Verlon Thompson on flat-top, performed more than two hours of songs drawn from his and his wife's catalog.

“Don't worry, we have a lot of experience,” he said before starting the first song.

The experience showed in the careful



One more for the archives: Guy's self-portrait made a striking cover for his *Old Friends* album.

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Elvis Comes Home

The smile and the charisma were still intact, and the women and the press still swooned and swarmed in his presence. But for Elvis Presley, everything had changed during two years of military service in West Germany. After this final uniformed press conference on March 1, 1960, the King of

Rock 'n' Roll returned to America a more worldly man. His kingdom would soon face the invasion of The Beatles, the upheavals of Vietnam and the assassination of John F. Kennedy. And Elvis would escape to Hollywood, leaving his moment of supreme musical relevance behind him.

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