

ON THE ROAD: Country's top stars hit the highway

YOUR ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO THE STARS, MUSIC & TRADITION

COUNTRYMUSIC

JULY 2003

Dixie Chicks

Disaster. Spin. Recovery.
How the biggest backlash in
country music history clipped
their wings – and the long road
to recovery still ahead.

SAMMY KERSHAW
‘I got greedy’

JESSICA ANDREWS
Grows up

PHIL VASSAR
& a message from ‘God’

TAMMY COCHRAN
Finally finds self-esteem

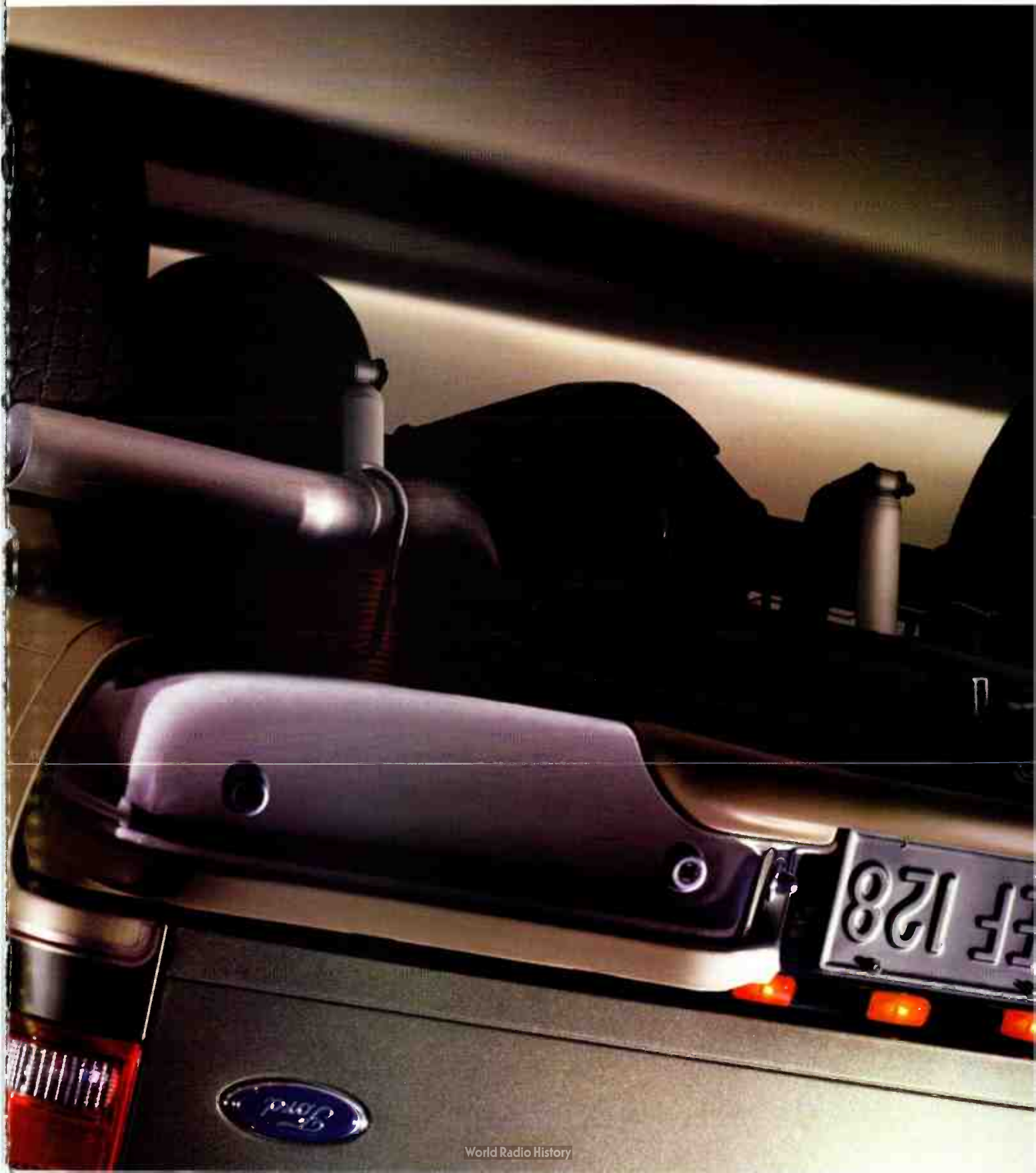
GARY ALLAN
Brings back
the drinkin’ song

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LOOK AGAIN.





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COUNTRYMUSIC

JUNE 2003

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Dixie Chicks

A brash remark about President Bush led to a serious backlash for the trio, but it's not the first time they've courted trouble.

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THE Journal

OF TRADITIONAL COUNTRY MUSIC

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COURTESY LUCKY DOG RECORDS

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SALUTE

Thank you so much for the Trace Adkins article (*April/May*). It was a treat to read an article in Trace's own words about his trip to entertain U.S. troops in the Persian Gulf. I enjoyed the part where he describes taking off in the plane from the deck of the aircraft carrier. He describes the danger and enjoyment he experienced, and it reminded me of how thankful I am for the sacrifices the soldiers are making to keep me safe in a free country.

PAULA STEC
ALMA, MICHIGAN

RECENT HISTORY

I really liked the story on "The Dance" (*April/May*). I'm only 14 years old – but, hey, who says you can't like an older song? I'm a big fan of Garth, and "The Dance" is one of my favorite songs. I was only two when it was released, but my mom tells me she remembers every time a song of Garth's came on, I'd be dancing and singing to it.

LAURA BROWN
BUCKHANNON, WEST VIRGINIA

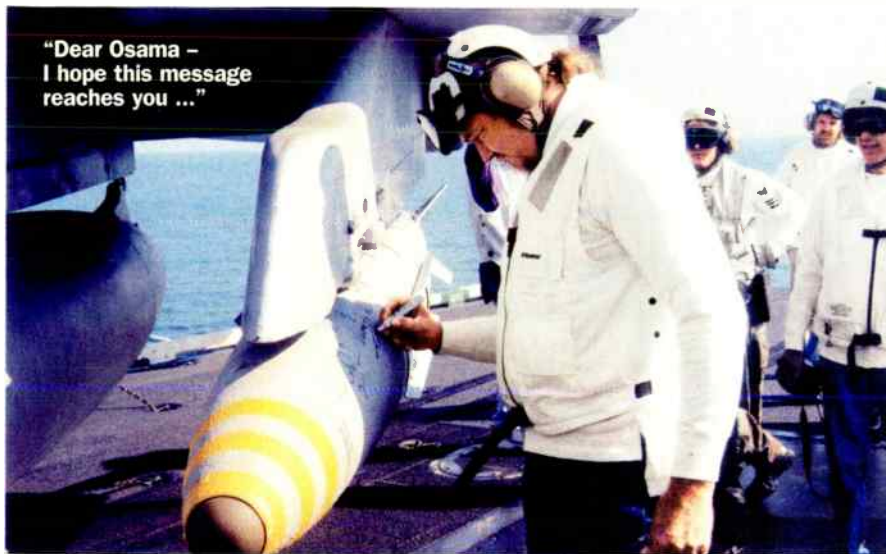
COE DEPENDENT

It was great to see your article on David Allan Coe (*April/May*). It was by far the best article I have read in



From
Russia,
with love

LETTERS



"Dear Osama -
I hope this message
reaches you ..."

COURTESY TRACE ADAMS

several years. Coe is the last of a dying breed and it seems as if the country music world has forgotten a living legend. Radio stations rarely play songs he has recorded or acknowledge songs he has written. Coe truly is one of a kind. Now how long will it be before somebody realizes it's time David Allan Coe was honored in the Country Music Hall of Fame?

BRANDON JAMES
FORT WORTH, TEXAS

HIDDEN TALENT

I read with interest the review of a CD by a Russian group, Bering Strait (*April/May*). Within a short time, CMT had an excellent documentary about the group and its record label struggles. I was impressed both with the voices of the two female singers and the musical skill of the band members. I felt they could be a force in country music. I reread the review and a couple of quotes from it stood out: "Nashville has a tendency to homogenize country music of its exotic characteristics, and here's the latest glaring example." Also, "Bering Strait, in its ambition to be accepted in America, feels like a square peg hammered into the same ol' Music Row hole."

Here again is an example of why country music sales continue to decline, and why people like me cannot listen to country radio for very long. This group is excellent. The CD, apparently, is not.

BILL HAUSLER
SUMMERVILLE, SOUTH CAROLINA

TRUE COUNTRY?

As a fan of country, it's sad to see how fake what passes these days for country really is. No one plays on their own albums, and studio players are now the standard when it comes to making records (*April/May*). Then again, no one seems to be able to write their own songs, so it should not be surprising that country is so fake. What is probably most shameful is how country music preaches patriotism and Americana when it has such stringent rules and limits for its artists. So much for musical freedom and realism in such an American form of music.

GEORGE ANTHONY
HARRISON, NEW JERSEY

TERRI-FIC

Terri Clark is way overdue to get recognition for her music (*Reviews, April/May*). This woman gives 100 percent of her heart and soul to her music and takes the spotlight with such grace. She is the woman of all women and takes true pride in her work. She knows what living like a "regular" person is all about.

ROBIN E. FRYMAN
LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY

PORTER'S PARTNER

I enjoyed the article on Porter Wagoner (*April/May*). I wish his new singing partner, Penny DeHaven, would have been mentioned, though. I have enjoyed hearing them on the *Grand Ole Opry*, and they also have a CD out, *Porter & Penny*.

DON EWERT
MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN

CONTRIBUTORS

Meet this issue's esteemed
guest stars

★ BILL FRISKICS-

WARREN is music editor of the *Nashville Scene* and co-author of *Heartaches by the Number: Country Music's 500 Greatest Singles*. His writing also appears in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *No Depression* and the *Oxford American*. In this issue, he examines the Dixie Chicks and their place in the middle of the biggest controversy to hit country music in years. Meanwhile, Friskics-Warren reports that he and his wife, Kate, are still dancing to "Wide Open Spaces" and "There's Your Trouble" – and with more relish than ever.



★ MIRIAM PACE

LONGINO hadn't been to an off-the-beaten-path bluegrass festival in years until we asked her to check in on Rhonda Vincent at Jekyll Island, Ga. "I was delightfully surprised to see that this folksy, under-the-radar circuit was pretty much the same as when I saw Bill Monroe back in college," she says.

"Vincent was a refreshing look at how a talented, young bluegrass performer can use contemporary marketing savvy to take this tradition to the next level." A regular contributor to *Country Music*, Longino also wrote the story on Jessica Andrews in this issue.

★ **BOB ALLEN**, a contributor to *Country Music* since 1977, wrote our piece on Tammy Cochran. "I first met Tammy in New York City several years ago before her debut album came out," Allen recalls. "Back then she was very green – very much the 'Ohio country girl come to the big city.' To get a chance to chat with Cochran again, three years down the road, and see how far she's come and how well she's been received, really makes me happy for her."



★ **CHUCK ALY** wrote the "New Ring of Fire" article about controversy in country music. "Being topical always gets a reaction," he says, "but you can't always predict what it will be. Darryl Worley knew by testing his song in concert." Aly spent six years writing for the trade

magazine *Music Row* and now freelances for several publications. His first novel is due this summer, and he's working with *Country Music* columnist Hazel Smith on her autobiography.

RE-REVIEWED

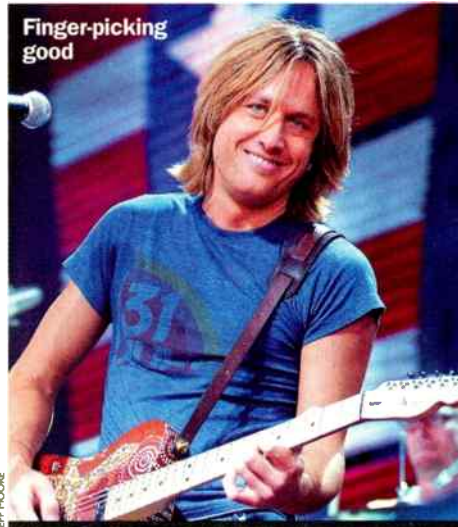
I was disappointed with Nick Krewen's review of Bering Strait's new CD. I saw this group on the *Grand Ole Opry* and knew I had to purchase the album. If the song "I Could Be Persuaded" was the only song on the CD, I feel I would have got my money's worth. This is one of the best traditional country songs I've heard in a long time. It blew me away. Then there's the song "Only This Love," which is the perfect song to be played for a bride and groom's first dance. As far as "Porushka-Paranya," I don't have any idea what they are singing about, and I really don't care. All I know is that it's a fun song. I challenge anyone to listen to it without a little foot tapping.

There isn't a song I don't like on the album. Not only are they a great group of musicians, but their harmony is incredible. It takes a lot these days to excite me about a new artist, and lead singer Natasha Borzilova did it. She could sing anything. Hopefully, people will take their chances on this new group and listen for themselves.

LOIS BECKER
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

BLASTING MAINES

I am stationed on the USS Cleveland out of San Diego, Calif. I am currently part of Operation Iraqi Freedom, and I received an e-mail from my wife about what the Dixie Chicks said while performing in London – that they were ashamed the President of the United States was from Texas. I would like to know how they can sing "Travelin' Soldier" while they criticize the president? I am one of the many American men and women who proudly



JEFF MOORE

serve in the armed forces of the United States. I am taking back every CD I ever bought by the Dixie Chicks and putting them on the list with the rest of the Americans who are against the war and against the president.

D. REACH
USS CLEVELAND

I was embarrassed, ashamed and flat out in disbelief when I heard what Natalie Maines said about America, President Bush and the war in Iraq. Was this her real feeling or was she just putting on airs while she was in Europe for a concert and wanted to feel close to the fans that evening? Regardless, she should leave her feelings in her blouse and not on her sleeve. If the Chicks would read the history of this great nation, they would find that it was the American country boys who won WWII for us – their expert marksmanship, hard fighting and

URBAN AMENDS

Thank you for the article on Keith Urban (*February/March*). I recently got to see him in concert and he really puts on a show! You can see that he's enjoying himself onstage and he's nice to the audience. I like both of his CDs and admire him for his brave songwriting on his past drug addiction and his faith in God. He has had some hard times and made mistakes, but he doesn't try to hide it. His music really lets us see into his life and heart and what we see is a good person who tries hard, loves life and loves music.

CHRISTINA TELESINO
SCRANTON, PENNSYLVANIA

freedom-loving nature was the reason for America's win in the global conflict. I will no longer listen to, attend a concert by or purchase a CD by the Chicks due to the distasteful manner in which lead singer heralded her country and president. How can Natalie sit back and say she is country with the horrible attitude she has? To trash talk the president is absurd!

BILL KLEINSCHMIDT
CLEVELAND, OHIO

KID ROCKS COUNTRY

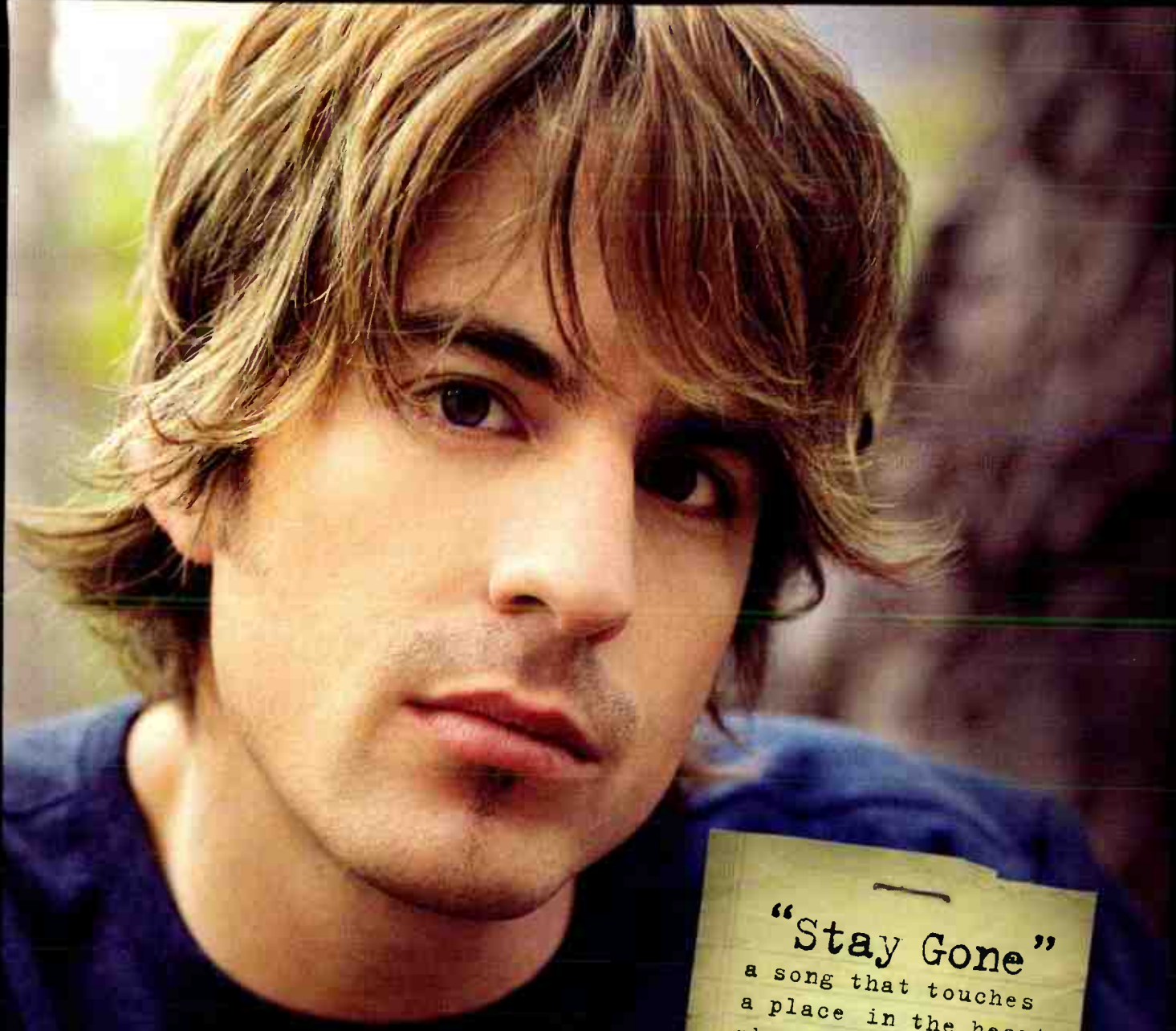
I have listened to nothing but country music all my life and am writing to respond to those downing the country artists who are "crossing over" to other fields of music. I want to tell them that this works both ways. Right now we have an artist from another style of music who came over to "our" side and, by doing so, gave us a terrific country song. Thank you, Kid Rock, for "Picture" featuring Sheryl Crow. The more I hear it the more I like it. I know it's always going to be a favorite of mine right along with "He Stopped Loving Her Today" by George Jones.

CATHY NUNN
SAINT CLAIR, MISSOURI

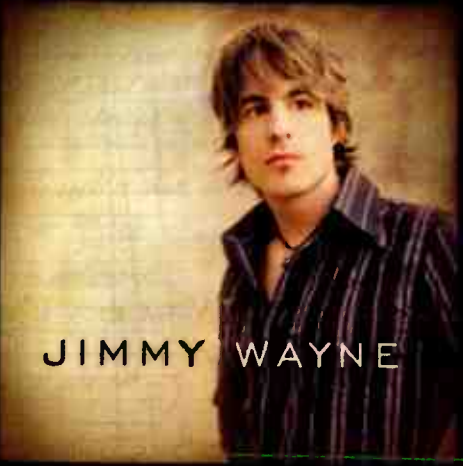
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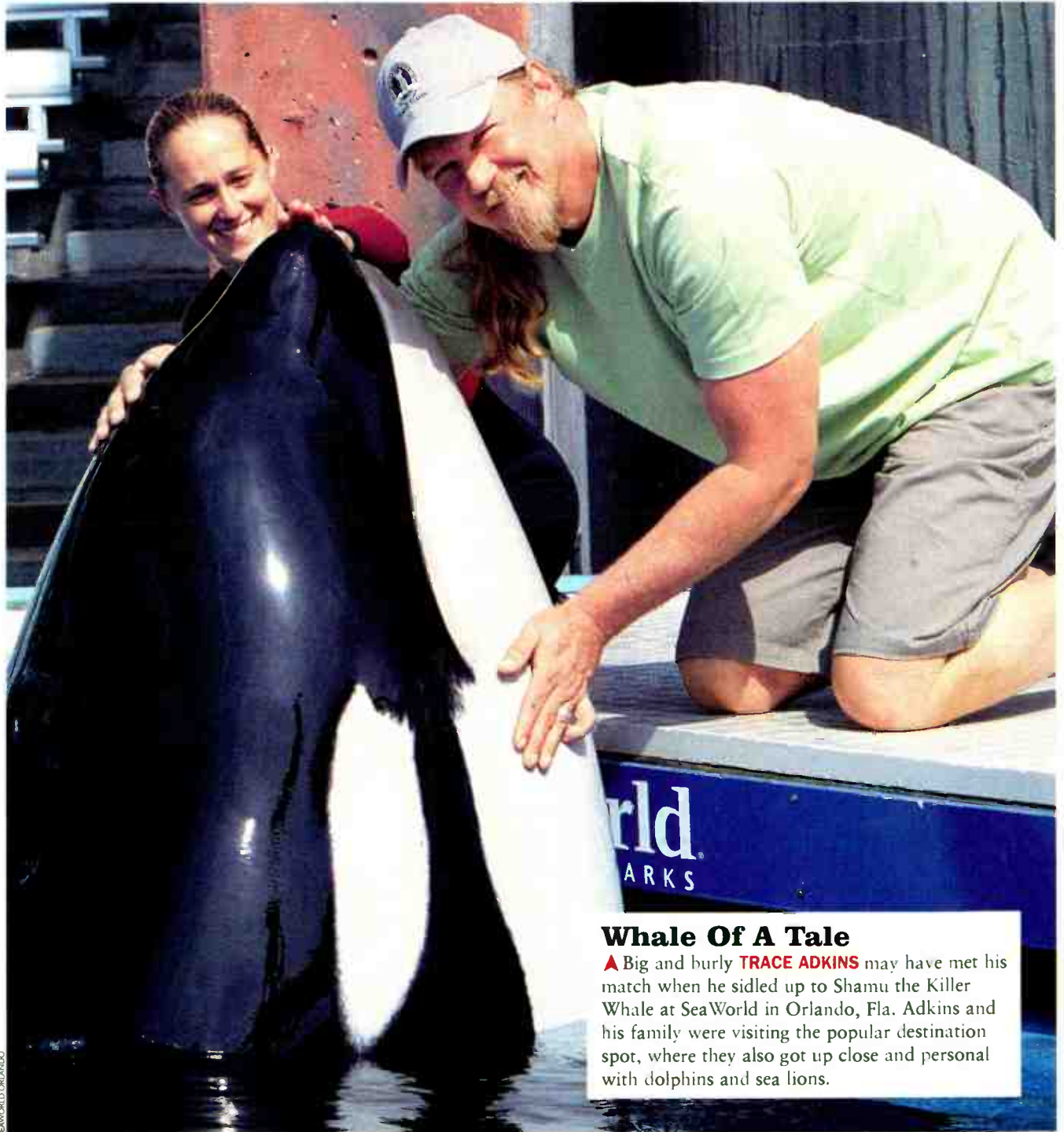
Jimmy Wayne
a singer/songwriter who
knows a lot about both.

Also includes
"I LOVE YOU THIS MUCH"
and "PAPER ANGELS."



COUNTRY ON THE TOWN

PARTIES • PEOPLE • NEWS • HAPPENINGS



Whale Of A Tale

▲ Big and burly **TRACE ADKINS** may have met his match when he sidled up to Shamu the Killer Whale at SeaWorld in Orlando, Fla. Adkins and his family were visiting the popular destination spot, where they also got up close and personal with dolphins and sea lions.

SEAWORLD ORLANDO



Blue Collar Dollar

◀ Funnymen **JEFF FOXWORTHY**, **BILL ENGVALL** and **LARRY THE CABLE GUY** mixed it up at the premiere of their new *Blue Collar Comedy Tour* movie. The film features the threesome and comic **RON WHITE**. Also on hand for the festivities were Trick Pony's **IRA DEAN** and **TRACY LAWRENCE** and his then-pregnant wife **BECCA** (below left), who recently gave birth to a baby girl.



Reba Rocks

▶ **REBA McENTIRE** made the Hollywood rounds as a Hollywood Square. The star of her own hit TV series, *Reba*, popped up on *Hollywood Squares* and visited with buddy **KERMIT THE FROG** and real-life stars **JOHN RITTER** and "The Fonz" himself, **HENRY WINKLER**.



Viva Divas

◀ It was billed as "An Unforgettable Evening," and rightly so – with **FAITH HILL** and **NATALIE COLE** taking center stage and belting out country, pop and soul favorites. The two reigning divas performed on the benefit show, presented by Saks Fifth Avenue, at the Regent Beverly Wilshire in Los Angeles. Proceeds from the performance went to Cedars-Sinai's Research for Women's Cancers.

COUNTRY ON THE TOWN

PARTIES • PEOPLE • NEWS • HAPPENINGS



Sara Sings For The Kids

▲ **SARA EVANS** paid a visit to the Vanderbilt Children's Hospital to kick off the Music City Tennis Invitational sponsored by Mercedes-Benz of Nashville. The event raises funds for the Nashville hospital's Center for Child Development and Research. While visiting the facility, Evans took time to sing for some of the patients and pose with the event's mascot.



Cline Clones

▲ A bunch of Patsys? That's what Michael Stomat, Jo Mama and Marsha Spencer were hoping as they entered the annual **PATSY CLINE** Look-alike Contest at New York City's Cowgirl Hall of Fame restaurant.

Rays Of Hope

► Actor **DAVID KEITH** and country stars **PAM TILLIS**, **PHIL VASSAR** and **JAMIE O'NEAL** helped kick off Childhelp USA National Day of Hope at a ceremony in Nashville. Childhelp USA is dedicated to the treatment and prevention of child abuse.



From The Heart

► **BILLY GILMAN** was one of many stars who visited the Muscular Dystrophy Association's clinic at Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center in New York City. And singer **LINDA DAVIS** (below) will be working closely with MDA in her recently appointed role as the 2003 MDA Spokesperson in Nashville. In her new role, Davis will help educate the public on MDA services and fundraising programs.



Brad Celebrates Celebrity

◀ **BRAD PAISLEY**'s new hit "Celebrity" takes a tongue-in-cheek look at our obsession with fame. But this past spring, Paisley hit Hollywood for a real dose of celebrity as a panelist on *Celebrity Jeopardy!*, hosted by **ALEX TREBEK** (third from left). Cheered on by his new bride, actress **KIMBERLY WILLIAMS**, Paisley matched wits with *Enterprise* star **LINDA PARK** and **WILL ESTES** of *American Dreams*.



Good Expo-sure

► Fleet-fingered **STEVE WARINER** made a new friend in newcomer **JIMMY "Stay Gone" WAYNE** at the hhgregg Country Music Expo in Indianapolis. Wariner shared tips from his three decades of entertaining, and presented Wayne with one of his signature Takamine guitars.



When Doves Fly

▲ The 34th annual Dove Awards were presented to the top acts in contemporary Christian music, but they brought out some of country's heaviest hitters, too. **BILLY RAY CYRUS** (inset) presented an award with Christian artist **JACI VELASQUEZ**. One of the evening's highlights featured a performance by **AMY GRANT** and **VINCE GILL** (above), who also shared an award for Country Recorded Song of the Year, "The River's Gonna Keep on Rolling" from Grant's album *Legacy ... Hymns & Faith*.



THE INSIDER

WITH HAZEL SMITH

COUNTRY HEROES

During the conflict in Iraq, we had a hero in **Jessica Lynch** from West Virginia. Mountain girls sure love America, and Jessica proved they sure know how to fight as well.

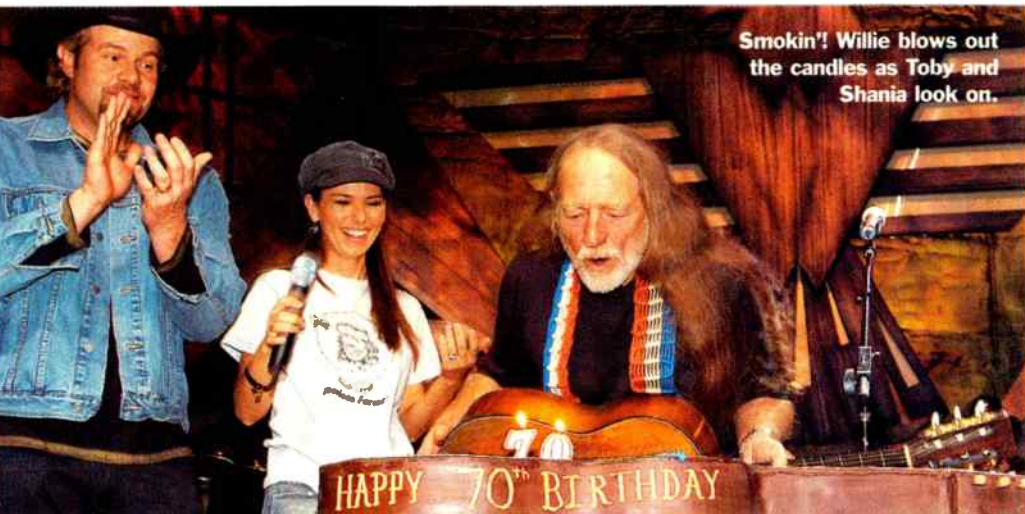
Country music newcomer **Jennifer Hanson** pitched in to help our troops when she performed a benefit concert for the Officers Wives' Club Welfare Fund at Fort Campbell, Ky., home of the elite 101st Airborne Division. Some 17,000 soldiers from Fort Campbell were deployed to the Middle East.

Just so you know, the money is set aside to aid families of military personnel. Said Jennifer at the end of the day, "These wonderful women put on a smiling face and made me feel totally welcome." Thank God for the men and the women in uniform, and God bless the families waiting at home.

TWO PATRIOTS

James Stroud, the drummer and record producer, runs DreamWorks Records, the label for two of country's hottest, **Toby Keith** and **Darryl Worley**. He was working with Toby on his new record in Key West at **Jimmy Buffett's** recording studio when they got the word that the White House wanted Toby and Darryl at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa the next day.

Darryl came in from Nashville to meet up with Stroud and Toby, and 10,000 people crammed into the hangar. When Darryl sang "Have You Forgotten?" many people cried, Stroud says. And when Toby asked if there were any angry Americans present, the



Smokin'! Willie blows out the candles as Toby and Shania look on.

★ WILLIE KEEPS COOKING

Take one guess how the great **Willie Nelson** celebrated his 70th birthday? By going on the road again, of course! Willie performed 18 days during the month of April. Besides taking time to pay off the IRS – that's one thing he now makes sure he gets done! – he also taped a TV special honoring his turning the big 7-0. Some of the stars taking part were **Kenny Chesney, Ray Charles, Eric Clapton, Elvis Costello, Sheryl Crow, Norah**

Jones, Toby Keith, Kris Kristofferson, Lyle Lovett, Shelby Lynne, Ray Price, Shania Twain, John Mellencamp, Leon Russell, Wyclef Jean, Paul Simon, Aerosmith's Steven Tyler and ZZ Top. I hear Toby sang a hilarious song about how he won't smoke pot with Willie ever again.

Willie's fan club has a cookbook for sale, too. If you want it, send in \$16 for *Willie's Cookbook* c/o WNFC, P.O. Box 7104, Lancaster, PA 17604.

response was deafeningly loud.

The president's plane was late arriving, so he missed Toby and Darryl's performance, but after his speech the two singers were ushered into a back room with several dignitaries.

President George W. Bush unbuttoned his coat and took time to give two hillbilly singers a war update. He told Toby and Darryl that what they expressed in their music was important for America to hear in this day and time.

ANSWERING DUTY'S CALL

Travis Tritt did his part to help the morale of service-people as well. Travis has visited troops and their families at Fort Bragg, N.C., and

most recently he joined **U.S. Senator Sam Brownback** in a visit to Fort Riley, Kan. Active soldiers, reserves and National Guard were on alert to deploy to the Middle East when Travis dropped by.

HANK'S TANK

Hank Williams Jr. got a sudden jolt recently when he received word that a tank commander in Kuwait said he'd painted "Bocephus" on the side of his tank as a tribute to Hank Jr. Of course, **Hank Sr.** gave his son the nickname "Bocephus" when Junior was just a toddler.

Hank Jr. sent the soldier a message: "Turn out Saddam's lights in Baghdad, son, and get back home quick. You're a

man whose hand I want to personally shake." Don't we all!

LONESTAR CONNECTION

Lonestar performed for **President Bush**, the **First Lady**, 20,000 troops and their families at Camp Lejeune, N.C. The group did a short set just prior to Bush's speech. "I want to thank Lonestar," said the president, who of course was once the governor of the Lone Star State. "We kinda like that name!"

Later, band members were escorted to a tent to greet the Bushes. "I know these guys," Bush said when turning to meet the band, then told them, "you don't know how much this means."

WATCH THE FLAME

The 2003 CMT Flameworthy Awards were red, white and blue from start to finish.

Darryl Worley performed his No. 1 smash "Have You Forgotten?" Co-host **Toby Keith** won three awards – Male Video, Cocky Video, Video of the Year – for "Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue (The Angry American)" and performed the winning song following his cool rendition of the **Merle Haggard** classic "Fightin' Side of Me."

Keith's co-host **Pamela Anderson** was compared to **Dolly Parton**, but the comparison comes because they sport the same-sized cups – and ends there. Anderson's boyfriend is the talented **Kid Rock**, who's certainly showing that he's got some country bones in his body. He and **Sheryl Crow** performed the countryest song of the evening, "Picture," a story of drinking, drugging, cheating and sinning – the subjects that put country music in the hearts, on the charts and in the honky-tonks!

Faith Hill took home Hottest Female Video for "When the Lights Go Down," a clip of the song taken from her television special that aired Thanksgiving 2002. I don't understand that. Faith's video for the song "Cry" was artistic, original, sexy and required acting on her part, while the winning video was of her standing onstage singing during a TV show. I think "Cry" deserved the award.

BYRD WATCHING

Tracy Byrd's big weekend of fishing, singing and golfing, a benefit for the Children's Miracle Network, was a huge success this year. The bass tournament attracted 536 participants – and a female caught the biggest fish! I'm proud to report her catch weighed nearly nine pounds. Overall, the fishing

folk took home more than \$100,000 in cash and prizes.

A FISHING STORY

Another bass fisherman, newly married **Brad Paisley**, has penned his first book, *Jug Fishing for Greazy & Other Brad Paisley Fishing Stories*. I read it and enjoyed it tremendously. I recommend the book for anyone who loves to fish. Now that Brad's married, I wonder if he will find time to fish or just stay home and kiss? If you recollect, in his self-penned song "I'm Gonna Miss Her (The Fishin' Song)," Brad chose fishing over the girl.

REBA RENEWED

Reba McEntire's sitcom *Reba* has been renewed for a third season – and no wonder. It's the No. 1 most watched show for females between 18 and 34 in its time slot.

The National Organization for Women gave *Reba* a

thumbs up on their annual report, *Watch Out, Listen Up*. NOW likes the way Reba portrays a single mom who has to make effective parenting decisions.

Also, since Reba had been co-writing songs with pop legend **Carole King** and Nashville crossover songwriter **Gary Burr**, I thought, "Oh Lordy, Reba's gonna record a **Celine Dion**-sounding record." But I've been told I'm wrong. Reba has requested the talents of **Kenny Chesney**'s hot producers, **Buddy Cannon** and **Norro Wilson**, to produce her album. Word is that Reba will record a real down-to-earth country album this time. Glory be!

TUG ON THE HEART

Tug McGraw, the famous father of **Tim McGraw**, was diagnosed with a brain tumor

It's a Reba world!



that required surgery. After a few days the legendary baseball pitcher was released from the hospital. The family requested no other information be released.

Tim had been quietly honoring his father in various ways during his concert tour. We all pray for the best.

DELUXE DONATION

Fans, friends and family packed the Ford Theater at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum to salute 85-year-old **Eddy Arnold** and to celebrate his massive contribution of career memorabilia to the establishment. The largest collection of material centered on a single artist ever donated, it includes 5,000 live radio shows, 2,000 photos, 2,000 cans of film from Arnold's TV shows, 32 file-cabinet drawers filled with press clippings, 1,000 pieces of sheet music, gold records, industry awards, business documents, personal correspondence and handcrafted presents from fans.

Kyle Young, director of the Hall of Fame and Museum, recounted the details of Arnold's remarkable career. **Cowboy Jack Clement** led a six-piece all-star band performing some of Arnold's best-known songs. Other performers included **Suzy Bogguss**, **Bobby Bare**, **Jim Lauderdale** and **Billy Burnette**. Articles from the collection will go on display in June.

★ CHICK CHAT

There's no better singer than **Natalie Maines**, and there's no better music than that heard on the **Dixie Chicks** CD *Home*. I wish Natalie had been singing instead of talking at the London concert where she bashed the president. Because since then, negative comments about the Chicks have replaced their music on the airwaves.

My opinion is that Natalie got caught up in the moment. I was reminded of a time in the mid-'60s when **John Lennon** got caught up in the moment, too. Lennon remarked that **The Beatles** were bigger than **Jesus**. Beatles records, like Dixie Chicks CDs, were smashed and burned. Preachers went in the pulpit pointing their fingers condemning Lennon.

At the time, many people wondered if it was the end of The Beatles. History proved otherwise.

I believe the Good Book says you without sin cast the first stone. I say, "Only those who always think before they speak can condemn." For me and my house, we think country music needs the marvelous music of the Dixie Chicks.



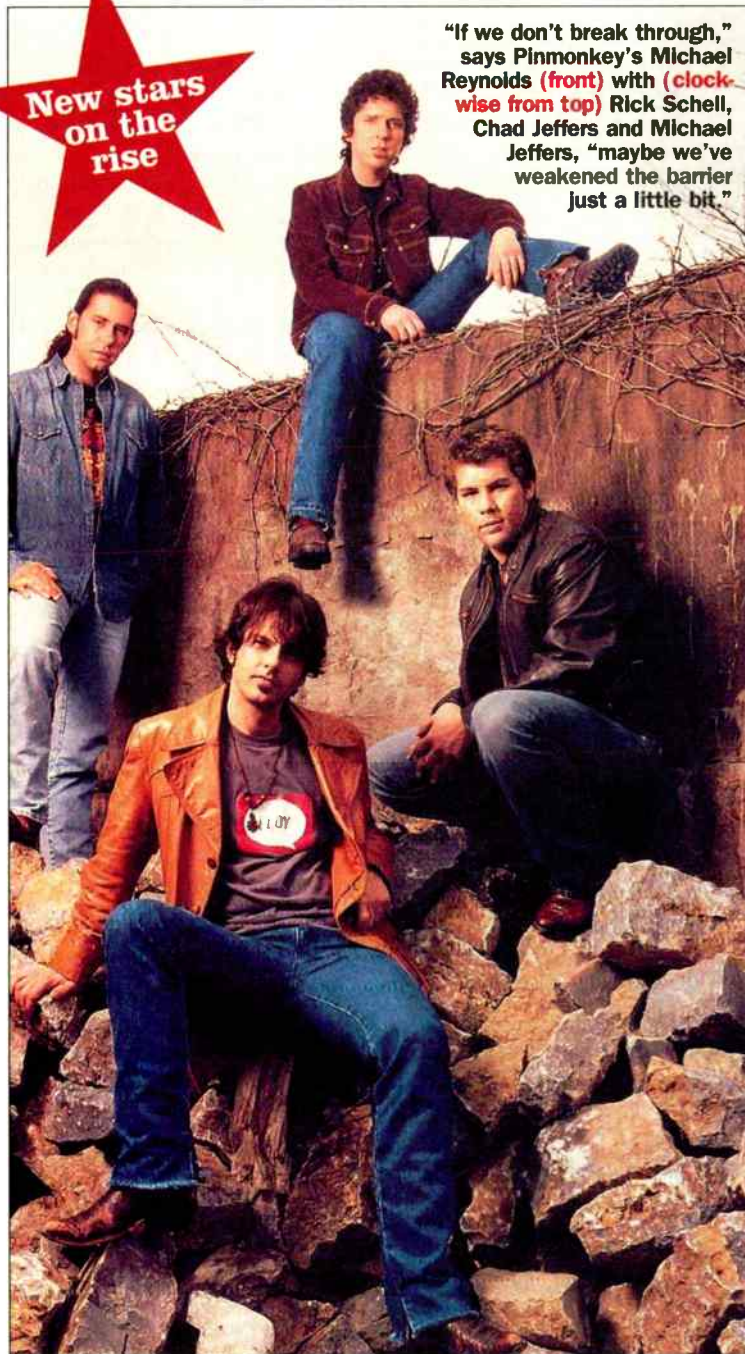
Natalie Maines ruffled everyone's feathers.

What's in a Name

Pinmonkey's odd moniker is a good indication of their adventurous musical spirit

New stars
on the
rise

"If we don't break through," says Pinmonkey's Michael Reynolds (front) with (clockwise from top) Rick Schell, Chad Jeffers and Michael Jeffers, "maybe we've weakened the barrier just a little bit."



COURTESY: IRLG

Pinmonkey bass player Michael Jeffers has a problem. A seasoned road veteran who logged some 200 tour dates last year, Jeffers reaches an inevitable roadblock making small talk on airplanes.

"[People] say, 'You're a musician, what's the name of your band?'" explains Jeffers. "Then you have to say 'Pinmonkey.' After they stop laughing, they say, 'Well, what kind of music is it?' I always just say it's good music. It's real music."

It's a lot easier than trying to explain the uncanny amalgam of bluegrass, Southern rock, bluesy soul and pop that is Pinmonkey. How uncanny? Well, for starters, their self-titled debut album includes covers of songs by ska/punk band Sugar Ray, gospel greats The Staple Singers and Dolly Parton, who joins in on harmony.

You know that popular local club band you always think is so much better than what's on the radio? That's Pinmonkey – except they *are* on the radio. The four band members are veteran Nashville musicians who started playing together for fun. Singer Michael Reynolds did writers' nights with multi-instrumentalist Chad Jeffers. Older brother Michael Jeffers eventually joined on bass, followed by drummer/high harmony singer Rick Schell. The group had already begun an independent album when they were snatched up by major Nashville label BNA.

For critics complaining that too many new country acts are cut from the same focus-grouped mold, Pinmonkey is a refreshing blast from left field. Even their impish name – inspired by an episode of *The Simpsons* wherein Homer's avowed dream job was setting up pins at a bowling alley -- betrays an appealing nonconformity.

Pinmonkey hopes their category-defying sound will break through a sea of soundalikes. "And if we don't break through, then maybe we've weakened the barrier just a little bit for the next person," Reynolds says.

Though they've received lavish critical praise, conservative country radio doesn't quite know what to do with Pinmonkey. Their first single "Barbed Wire and Roses," reached a respectable No. 25 on the *Billboard* country charts.

Pinmonkey's secret weapon seems to be a studied indifference to the vagaries of the music business. Whether they find mainstream success or not, they claim their only real goal is to have fun making music they believe in – and to do so on their own terms.

"They've given us enough rope to hang ourselves," explains Schell.

"And we really do appreciate that rope, because we can hang ourselves or we can swing up to the next level," adds Reynolds.

There's a momentary pause as Reynolds' comment gets mulled over. "Wow, that's deep," jokes Chad Jeffers.

"Sound bite?" asks Reynolds with faux eagerness. "Sound bite?"

All four men erupt in laughter. Pinmonkey knows it's all just a game, and no one's having more fun playing it than they are.

— Jennifer Mendelsohn

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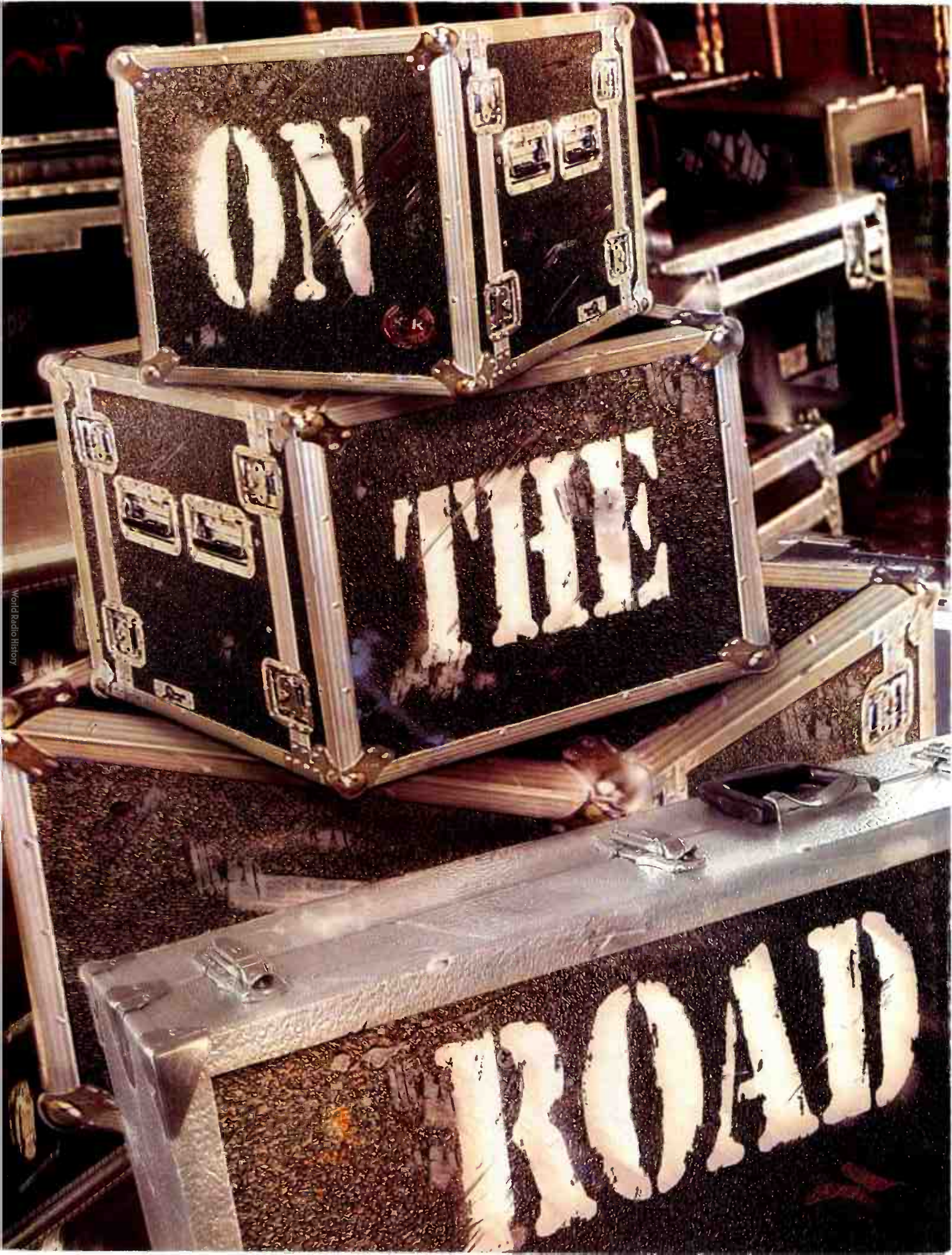
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Stars are taking the music to the fans this summer — in record numbers. What's behind country's rush to get on the road?

Wars may rage and the economy may falter, but nothing can stop the juggernaut that is country music in 2003. Nowhere is this more evident than on the concert trail. Every major name in the industry is launching a major tour this year, with one notable exception: Faith Hill is working on film projects and has no immediate plans to perform.

All this activity marks a huge turnaround from last year, when so many major names took the summer off, and the industry questioned whether country artists were still the road warriors they had been historically.

"This will be a watershed year for country, primarily because everybody that's really big is going out," says William Morris Agency VP Greg Oswald, whose clients include Alabama, Brooks & Dunn and Dwight Yoakam. "Everybody

that is an arena-sized act or bigger is working." War, terrorism fears or even rising gasoline prices can bottleneck the concert glut. "The first weekend we went to war our ticket sales were a little bit down, but during the week it all picked up again," says Rod Essig of Creative Artists Agency, which books Tim McGraw, Shania Twain and Martina McBride. "What's happening in the world really means that a lot of people are staying closer to home. Rather than going on vacations, they are choosing to go to shows. People need an escape, whether it's going to a concert or doing some other activity."

With so many big shows on the road this year, artists have been pushed to be smarter about how they schedule their dates. In an unusual display of cooperation, agents and promoters are carefully booking dates around each other, avoiding competition wherever possible. "You look out for each other to the degree that it's possible," Oswald says.

Big-name tours have

been spread out fairly evenly, however. Of the arena acts, Kenny Chesney and Tim McGraw got an early jump with major spring tours. Toby Keith's landmark *Unleashed Tour* wrapped in late March but picks back up in July, and Alabama's Farewell Tour will play arenas and amphitheaters from June through November.

Meanwhile, George Strait, the Dixie Chicks, Brooks & Dunn's Neon Circus & Wild West Show and an Alan Jackson/Martina McBride package will fill amphitheaters this summer. As for Shania Twain, she's expected to head out in the fall. Rounding out this superstar cavalcade are fair, festival and casino dates by the likes of Travis Tritt, Sara Evans, Lonestar and pretty much every other star imaginable.

With concert action like this, even the most die-hard country music fan is bound to find his appetite sated. Over the next 13 pages we run down who's on the road, what you can expect to see and how much, in most cases, it'll cost you. (As always, schedules are subject to change.)

— Lisa Zhitto

ILLUSTRATIONS BY BRAD WALKER

COUNTRY
ARTISTS
HIT THE
HIGHWAY



STEVE JENNINGS/IMAGE.COM

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Ringmasters Brooks & Dunn bring the Neon Circus to town once again, with fire-eaters, the world's strongest man, clowns – and a truckload of music, too. No other country tour can match it for sheer spectacle.



THE CIRCUS ROLLS ON

As they ready their eighth studio album, Kix Brooks and Ronnie Dunn put the tents back up for the third version of their celebrated Neon Circus & Wild West Show – a combination of music, mayhem and midway fun that makes the cowboy-booted duo the modern-day answer to Buffalo Bill Cody.

Annie Oakley may be long gone, but Brooks & Dunn saddle up no less spectacular talent in their continuing tradition of spotlighting country's breakout stars. Joining them this year for the smell of the greasepaint and the roar of the crowd are the double-platinum-selling band Rascal Flatts, guitar-slinger Brad Paisley, hitmaker Aaron Lines, maverick newcomer Jeff Bates and everyone's favorite crazy man, host Cledus T. Judd.

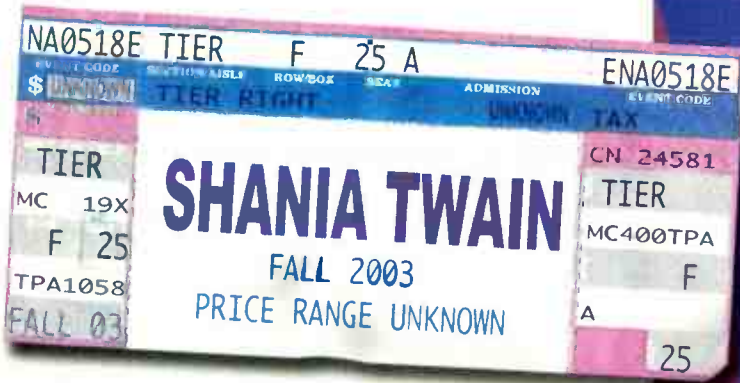


"People work hard for their money – and they want two things: to see something they've never seen before and to have a great time," says the stage-hopping Brooks.

Dunn concurs. "There's an excitement that comes from seeing acts that are on the verge, who're kicking in the stall and have something to prove every night," he says. "That keeps the energy high all day – and builds it into just the place we like to be when we hit the stage: red hot and ready to rock."

Since the second Neon Circus was the highest grossing per date tour in all of country music last year, expect tickets to sell briskly. The guest talent is a huge draw in itself, and the energetic headliners continue to outdo themselves. Their career totals include 17 No. 1 singles and 24 million albums sold, with three consecutive No. 1 singles from their No. 1 debuting platinum-plus *Steers & Stripes*, their first chart-topping album since 1996's *Borderline*.

— Alanna Nash



In the fall, Shania Twain embarks on the tour the world awaits like no other. She plans to circle the globe and will stay on the concert trail into 2004.



MUM'S THE WORD

Shania Twain's tour plans are a more closely guarded secret than Osama bin Laden's hiding place. But word from her booking agency is that Twain will hit arenas in September in a global outing that will span many months and many continents. Beyond that, however, everyone's lips are sealed.

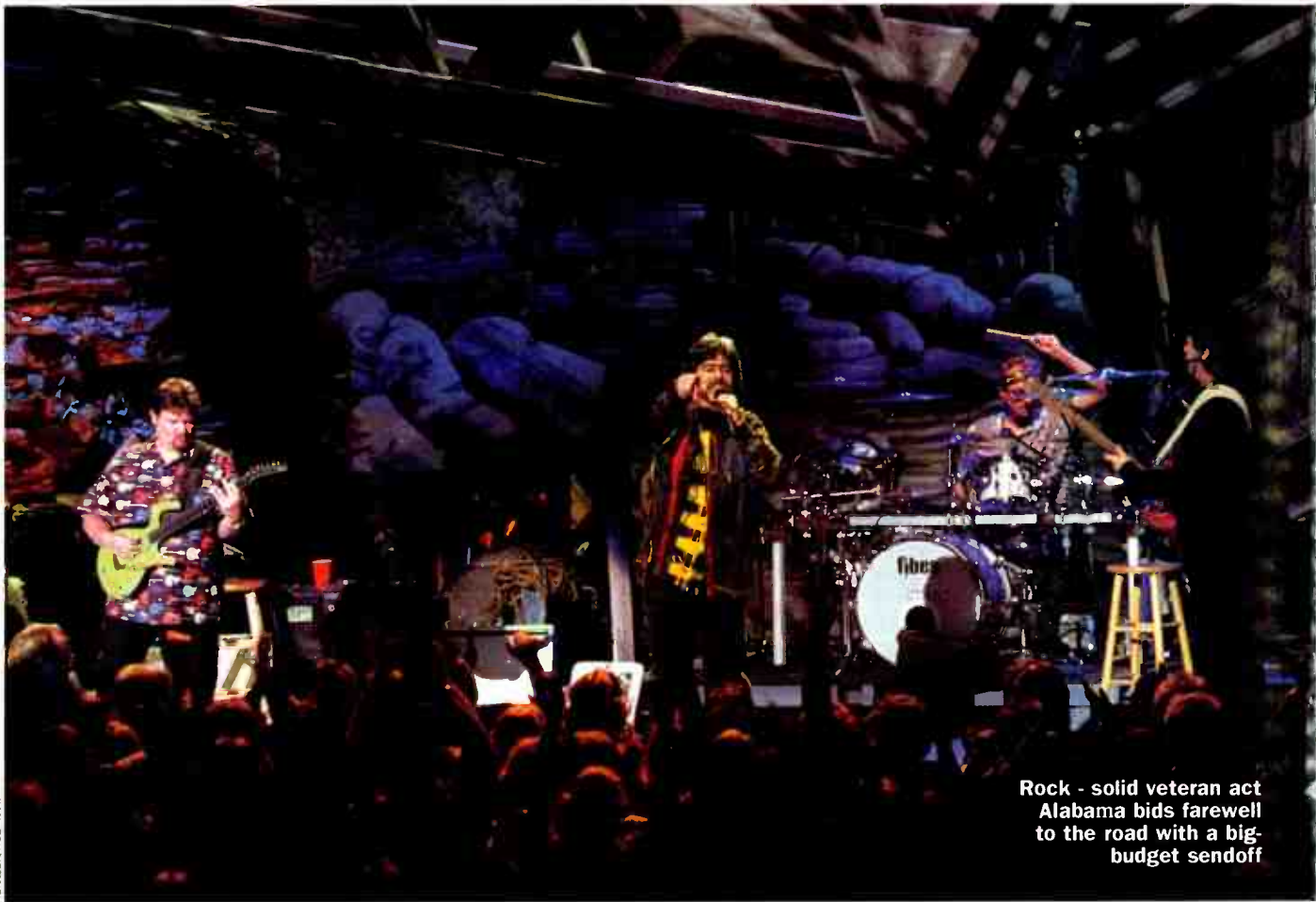
"When Shania goes out, she wants to have enough new material so that the show will be fresh, and that requires that a number of singles be released," explains her agent, Ron Baird. "She doesn't want to do the same show she's done before. Just like her new album is an advancement and a logical progression for her, she wants to do the same thing with her concert tour."

No wonder that a significant amount of anticipation has surrounded this issue: Twain's *Come on Over* concert outing in '98 and '99 earned more than \$63 million, making it the year's No. 1 tour by a female artist as well as the top country tour.

With Twain hitting the road, country music's overall performance will no doubt get a huge shot in the arm — and that makes Music Row execs happy. So watch out Tim, Toby and Kenny — this girl just may give you boys a run for your money!

— Lisa Zbito





Rock-solid veteran act Alabama bids farewell to the road with a big-budget sendoff

FOND FAREWELL

Sure, there are some hot stars out there this year, but none can match the sentimental punch of Alabama. After more than 20 years of near-constant touring, country's reigning supergroup will bid adieu to the road following this 38-city stretch.

In keeping with the farewell theme, the show makes use of a massive video production and stage show tracing Alabama's long, successful history in country music. Fans of Randy Owen, Teddy Gentry, Mark Herndon and Jeff Cook will no doubt find this show an emotional one; they might also get some insight into the band's uncertain future at these shows, something which the group has refrained from discussing publicly.

Though pricey, the concerts are geared toward fans. Die-hard followers willing to shell out big bucks for premium and Golden Circle tickets will go home with a museum's worth of collectibles, everything from limited-edition Gibson guitars and lithographs to a commemorative tour book. The more budget-conscious, however, can still find upper-level or lawn seats for as low as \$18.50 in some markets.

As with so much Alabama has accomplished over the years, this tour embraces a number of unique



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elements. It started with an Internet ticket pre-sale tied to the February release of the group's final album for RCA, *In the Mood: The Love Songs*. Then the tour was booked to play almost exclusively on Friday and Saturday nights – there's just one midweek date and two Sunday night gigs. That's unheard of in the touring industry, but was important to the band because they wanted their fans to enjoy the evening, not worry about getting up early the next morning and going to work.

"The whole idea is to give every single person at every single show goosebumps," says tour producer Mark Oswald.

What a fitting farewell, indeed.

— L. Z.



WHERE HE COMES FROM

Showered with industry awards over the last two years and knighted as a hero by lovers of traditional country, Alan Jackson has ranked among the hottest tickets of the year since opening with a sold-out show in Peoria, Ill. Making things even more enticing, the lanky Georgian has added punch to his ongoing *Drive* concert tour by adding Martina McBride and Joe Nichols as opening acts on various dates.

Jackson will perform songs from his more than 40 Top 10 hits, including "That'd Be Alright," his current Top 5 hit, and "Where Were You (When the World Stopped Turning)," the stirring 9/11 anthem that continues to provoke tears and a house full of flickering cigarette lighters whenever it's performed.

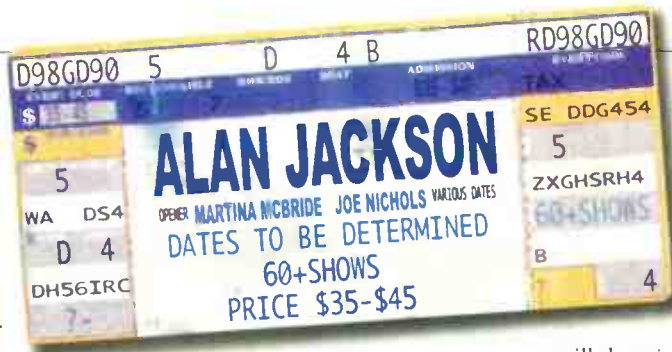
He's also added a special touch to his shows: Video footage of each city's landmarks appear on big screens during Jackson's performance of "Where I Come From," one of many tunes that celebrate small-town roots and the importance of home.

The Grammy-winning singer always puts the emphasis on good times at his live shows, dipping down into the lower part of his vocal register to give a playful spin to "Summertime Blues"



LARRY BUSACCA/REMPAGE.COM

Alan Jackson's fan-friendly shows combine fun, big hits and a celebration of smalltown values.



— and to emphasize the fact that he doesn't take himself all that seriously.

"Well, especially live, you know, we try to use those songs that are fun," he says. "I think my character onstage is not much different than me normally. I guess if I went out there with some tight leather

pants and tried to look sexy, it would be one thing, but I just stand there and sing."

But he is into putting out the best traditional music possible. His acclaimed, nine-piece band, the Strayhorns, is still keeping it country and honest — without technical embellishment.

"A lot of people now have all of their harmonies and stuff on a disc or something," Jackson says. "But I just can't do it. I'm still using monitors on the floor."

— A. N.

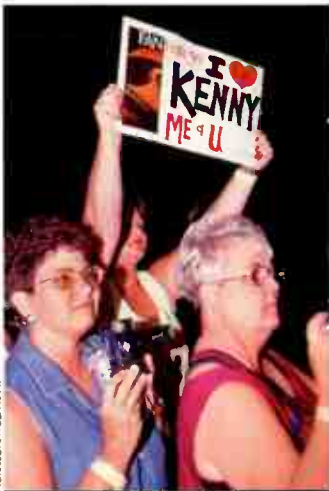


KEVIN MAZUR/WIREIMAGE.COM

Kenny Chesney's 2002 road show was named the Top Country Concert Tour. The momentum continues with his '03 Margaritas 'n' Señoritas tour, the hottest ticket in all of music.



KEVIN MAZUR/WIREIMAGE.COM



MORRISON WULFRIMAT

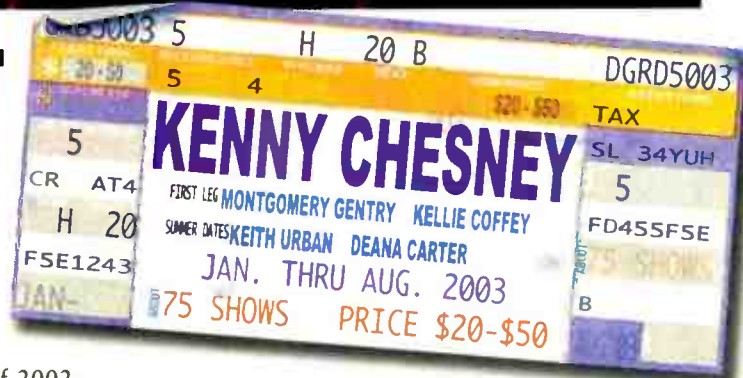
ALL-NIGHT PARTY

Kenny Chesney entered the ranks of superstar headliners when his *No Shoes, No Shirt, No Problems* Tour earned \$24 million and was designated the Top Country Concert Tour of 2002.

This year he's still gaining speed. Chesney's *Margaritas 'n' Señoritas* Tour was recently tabbed the No. 1 ticket seller in all of pop music for the first quarter of 2003.

"Who knew so many people were coming?" Chesney says. "It's not about the head count for us, it's all about how loud they get! We said all last year, 'You can sit down if you want to, or you can stand up and get rowdy with the rest of us.' Hearing about this makes me think a whole lot more people were getting rowdy with us than we ever realized."

Fronted by Montgomery Gentry and Kellie Coffey on the first leg of the tour, and Keith Urban and Deana Carter on his summer dates, Chesney believes in giving fans a full



evening of entertainment. It's a lesson he says he learned from Brooks & Dunn, whose *Neon Circus* has taken Nashville's hottest new names on the road for the past two years.

"I just think as a headliner I wanted to give people their money's worth," says Chesney. "When these people come to the show, I want them to feel like they're getting bang for their buck. 'A Night With Kenny Chesney' would be awesome, but I think there's a little more excitement if you bring people with you; there's 31 flavors you know?"

True, but clearly, he's a lot of folks' favorite flavor.

— L. Z.





THE COWBOY'S LONG RIDE

After limiting himself to a dozen or so shows a year as part of his acclaimed Straitfest stadium package shows, George Strait has returned to traditional arena dates and hit more cities than he has in years.

His *Road Less Traveled* Tour started with a 24-dates schedule with opening act Jo Dee Messina last fall. After selling out several of the shows, the Texan returned with a 20-city jaunt with Tammy Cochran as his partner.

Now Strait plans to return with yet another series of shows later this year, though plans are still being hammered out.

"We definitely had a great time doing the stadiums," Strait said of the festival tours, but added that he returned to the arenas because he was "excited about seeing some faces again. Not that 20,000 seats are exactly intimate settings, but you can tell a difference."

So could his fans. The Texas troubadour, who has racked up 38 *Billboard* No. 1 hits while becoming the second best-selling artist in country music history, performed his latest tour in a square-stage format with microphones set up on all four sides. After singing several songs to one section of the crowd, he moved on to the next to better connect with fans throughout the arena.

"Simply put," wrote the *Albany Times Union*, "Strait made every person in the sold-out house feel like he was singing straight to them."

"That's how he used to do his shows before the big festivals," explains his publicist, Mindy Tobin. "He loves doing his shows like that because there are no bad seats in the house, and he's always so much closer. If you were in the front row you were right up next to the stage - *very* close."

One of country's highest ranking concert artists, Strait played to an estimated 358,000 fans and earned more than \$18 million on the first leg of his tour. His upcoming summer shows also will feature songs from his new album, *Honkytonkville*.

— A. N.



FRANK MULLEN/WIREIMAGE.COM

George Strait abandoned festival extravaganzas for smaller, more intimate venues. His fall tour did so well that he added more dates for 2003.



MORRISON/WIREIMAGE.COM



BOB KING/AP/WIREIMAGE.COM

The concert question of the year: Will the Dixie Chicks get a welcome "home" reception? Scaling down their production, the Chicks plan an in-the-round format and acoustic-themed set list.

HOT IN THE HENHOUSE

The Dixie Chicks are hardly in need of publicity these days, given the furor raised by lead singer Natalie Maines' disparaging comment about President George W. Bush.

But the question is how will the feisty Texan's declaration affect the trio's 51-city American tour. On March 1, the Chicks had the biggest one-day ticket sale in music history, bringing in more than \$49 million for some 867,000 tickets – surpassing rock superstars U2, The Rolling Stones, Paul McCartney and 'N Sync.

Rumors abound about organized protests inside as well as outside the Chicks' shows. Some who bought tickets before Maines' comment, which happened nine days after most shows sold out, have said they plan to boycott the show – or attend with pro-Bush signs, give the tickets to military personnel or engage in other means of protest.

Those who do attend can expect a more acoustic and low-key show, which is more in keeping with the theme and tone of the trio's recent album, *Home*, than what the Chicks presented on the *Fly* tour. The Chicks will employ an in-the-round stage configuration, creating a more inti-

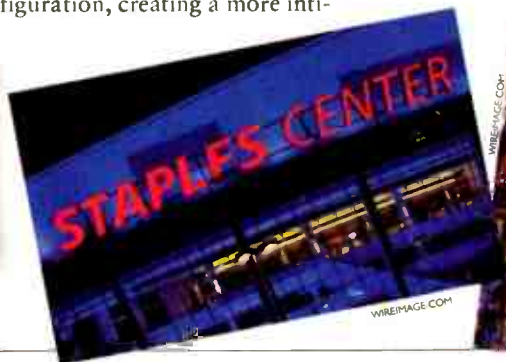


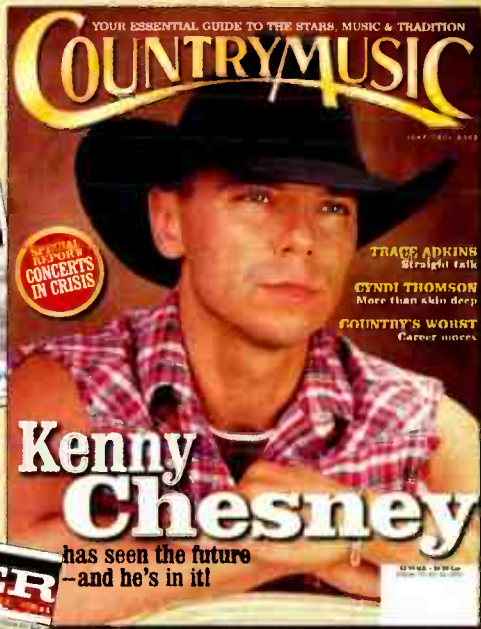
mate setting and ostensibly better view for everyone in the house.

"Our goal is to eliminate that typical audience-performer barrier and to be able to practically reach out and touch our fans," Maines said of the tour. "To be separate and far off is not what this music is about."

In addition to tracks from *Home*, the trio will perform many of the hits that have made them one of the most important acts in all of contemporary music. Blues rocker Joan Osborne and rock ingenue Michelle Branch will open select dates – and their very presence demonstrates the massive, bigger-than-country, crossover appeal of the Texas trio.

— L. Z.





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LOOSENING UP

After a successful club tour earlier this year, Vince Gill has resumed a regular schedule of dates in arenas and casinos. Though details were still being planned at press time, Gill wanted to present an

Vince Gill opted for the best of both worlds, playing both small clubs and large arenas. He plans to load his summer shows with past hits.



KEVIN FERGIJON

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amounted to a live listening party, combining a set of hits with another set that featured every song from his new album, *Next Big Thing*. His summer tour will probably be more of a cavalcade of hits.

"People want to hear 'When I Call Your Name' and 'Look At Us,'" Gill says. "I did a tour with Roy Orbison in the mid-'80s, and I would sit every night and watch Roy sing hit after hit, and I would think, 'Wouldn't it be fun to someday be able to play an hour and a half of all hits?'"

Now, 25 years later, Gill can realize that dream. "But still," he adds, "I grew up a guitar player and loved playing in a band, and that environment is still the most rewarding."

Lately Gill has been more talkative onstage, showing more of a wicked sense of humor, telling stories in which he pokes fun at himself and sharing poignant stories about his late father and his growing up years. It's all in keeping with the intimate and reflective nature of his recent albums.

"I'm 46, so I'd *better* start reflecting," he says with a laugh. "It's really kind of that simple. When you have enough life experience, you've kind of earned it."

— A. N.



HOUSE CALLS

Not many performers showcase their bands beyond a quick introduction or the occasional spotlighted solo. But Tim McGraw did just that on his recent tour, following on the heels of their double-platinum-selling album, *Tim McGraw and the Dancehall Doctors*, and a book of the same name.

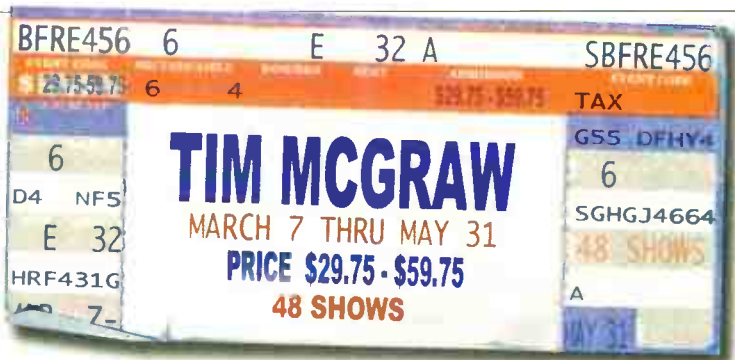
"Making that record was the most fun I've ever had in the studio – and the most rewarding musical experience I've ever had," says the star, who broke with industry practice of employing the usual session musicians in favor of his loyal, longtime road band.

His goal for the tour: to give fans a show that has "heart and soul all the way through – a groove, a vibe."

Tim McGraw & The Dancehall Doctors' One Band Show, which played 48 cities, featured two and a half hours of music from the singer and his band – with no opening act. Beginning in Birmingham, Ala., and ending in Greenville, S.C., it was one of the most anticipated and best-attended tours of the year.

How successful? The Detroit show alone sold out in three hours, convincing promoters that another performance should be added. The combined ticket sales for the two shows came to \$1,681,486.

The tour employed a T-shaped stage so McGraw could walk a narrow strip out into the audience, and most fans warmly received his idea to give his band members



their due. In Louisville, a fan held up a sign that said, "When I grow up, I want to be a Doctor."

"All these guys have invested somewhere from eight to 13 years in the band," explains Mark Hurt, one of Tim's managers. "Every show Tim's played, they've played with him, from the days when they were struggling to just stay alive, and then getting \$2,500 to go play some dance hall somewhere, to becoming a superstar and playing the top 100 buildings in the country."

As such, they enjoy an easy camaraderie, especially in McGraw's good-natured bantering with keyboard man Jeff McMahan, who once made a joke about McGraw's pants being so tight, he looked like he could fit into Kenny Chesney's jeans. "I know one place they'd be too small," McGraw shot back, and the fans roared.

— A. N.

On the strength of his recent hit CD, *Tim McGraw and the Dancehall Doctors*, McGraw and his band operated one of the year's top tours.





UNLEASHED AND UNCUT

Toby Keith's aptly named *Unleashed* tour has torn across America like a tornado, playing to more than one million fans since last fall. Along with Kenny Chesney, Keith is country's breakthrough concert success story of the new millennium. His rise to headliner status is one

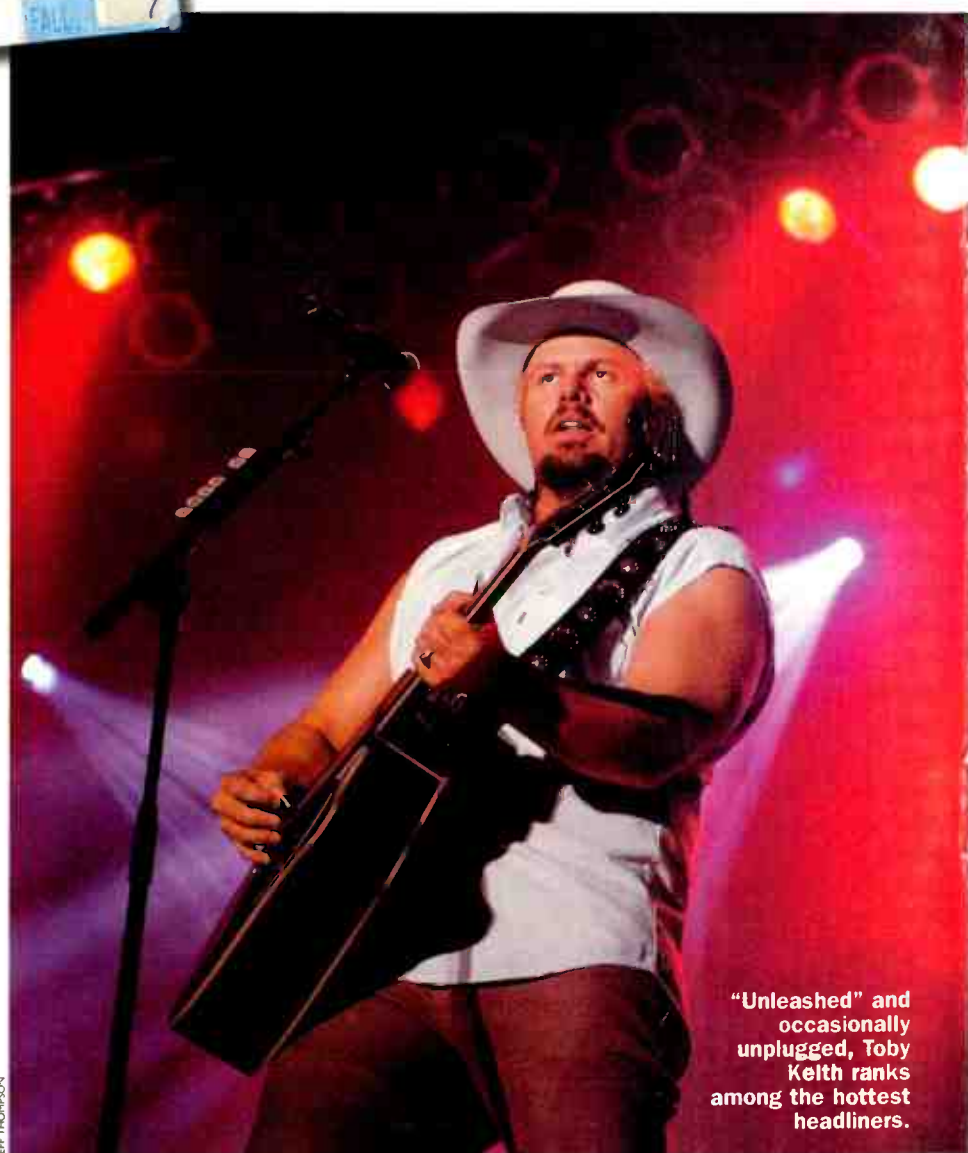
of those benchmarks industry watchers frequently use to demonstrate the strength of the genre's future.

Keith is planning to hit the road again in July, when he'll roll out a new production. Still in the plan-

ning stages at press time, this outing will reportedly hit arenas, amphitheaters and a handful of fair and festival dates. The leg will run at least through the fall.

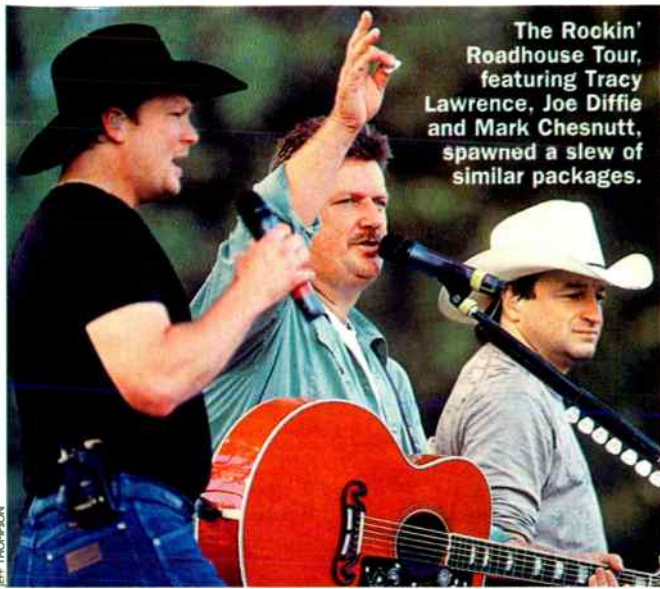
Some new headliners might think twice about touring when faced with the double-whammy of economic recession and unprecedented competition from other tours on the road. But Keith is almost a shoo-in for continued success: His unwavering support of President Bush and the war in Iraq, not to mention his No. 1 anthem "Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue (The Angry American)," has struck a nerve with the flag-waving mood that prevails among country audiences. So as the dog days of summer unfold, look for Toby Keith to unleash his patriotic pride on fans all across America.

— L. Z.



"Unleashed" and occasionally unplugged, Toby Keith ranks among the hottest headliners.

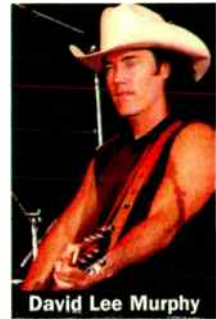
The Rockin' Roadhouse Tour, featuring Tracy Lawrence, Joe Diffie and Mark Chesnutt, spawned a slew of similar packages.



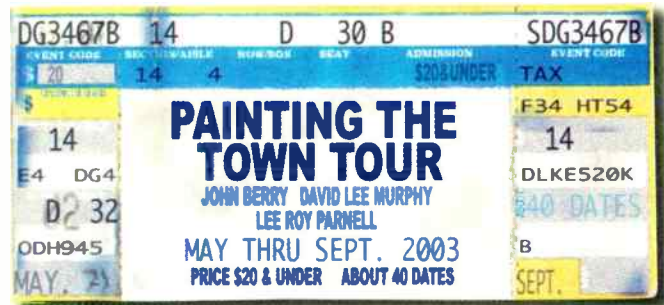
Lee Roy Parnell



John Berry



David Lee Murphy

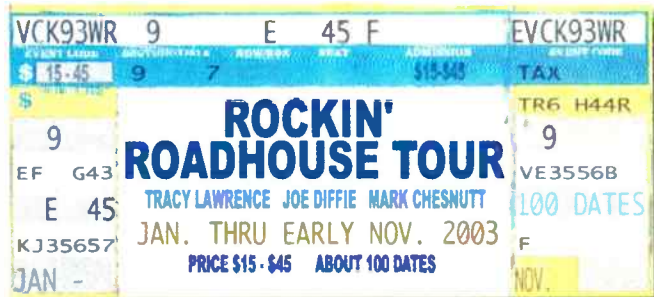
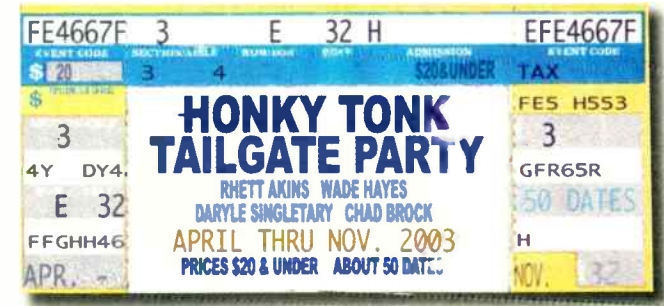


Rhett Akins

Chad Brock

Wade Hayes

Daryle Singletary



THE MORE THE MERRIER

When stars hitch their wagons and hit the road together, everybody wins.

Tour packages are nothing new, but recent years have seen a renewed interest in the "more bang for your buck" concept. Still industry watchers were stunned when last year's Rockin' Roadhouse Tour with Tracy Lawrence, Mark Chesnutt and Joe Diffie became the sleeper hit of the season.

The show performed about 80 dates before some 750,000 fans – not bad for a triumvirate that hadn't seen the top of the charts since Chesnutt's "I Don't Want to Miss a Thing" went to No. 1 in February 1999.

"I think this whole tour is so different and unique for the marketplace," Lawrence says of their success. "There's nothing like it out there, not at the level that we're doing these shows. It may not be the biggest tour on the road but it definitely has its place."

Tourmates explain that the Roadhouse concept is similar to the Highwaymen tours of the '80s and '90s that saw Johnny Cash, Kris Kristofferson, Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings jamming together onstage.

"The show starts and for two, two and a half hours it's nonstop music, nonstop show," explains Chesnutt. "There's no downtime, no break, no set change."

There's always one of us or all of us onstage. There's always something going on."

The success of the Rockin' Roadhouse Tour has led a wave of similar packages. Also returning after a successful 2002 run is the Honky Tonk Tailgate Party with Rhett Akins, Wade Hayes, Daryle Singletary and Chad Brock. Then there's the Painting The Town Tour featuring John Berry, David Lee Murphy and Lee Roy Parnell, which plays fairs and festivals from May through September.

A strong selling point for fans is the affordability of these packages. Most shows are included with the price of admission to a fair or festival. Other dates are \$20 or less, a far cry from the \$30-\$60 most tours levy. Plus, these tours tend to play smaller markets, leaving the big cities to the bigger names, like Tim McGraw, Alabama and Toby Keith. For rural fans who rock the roadhouse, paint the town or let down the tailgate, these shows are just the ticket. *

— L. Z.

Looking Greener

Bluegrass music may be the latest discovery among the trendy, but there aren't many fans from the Brie-and-chardonnay set milling about the annual Jekyll Island Bluegrass Festival in Georgia. This is the bluegrass world in one of its most typical and authentic settings – a concrete exhibition hall with a stage that could be in a high school auditorium.

Vendors have set up rows of card tables hawking homemade CDs, pocket knives and jars of preserves. Men sport Dickie's work wear and their wives wear craft-kit sweatshirts painted with bright acrylics. The parking lot is full of campers, where people are barbecuing and sitting in folding chairs.

Then Rhonda Vincent descends. The 40-year-old darling of the bluegrass community is dressed in a red-velvet gown under a sumptuous, floor-length black evening coat. She resembles Snow White – a tiny perfect size 6, with flawless skin and professionally applied makeup. It's as if a piece of the Hollywood sign broke off and floated down to a remote yard sale.

Vincent poses for pictures, signs autographs, calls people by their first names. Nobody walks away disappointed, because Vincent stays until the very last request, talking at length with an elderly fan about his bypass operation. In the world of bluegrass, this is simply the way it's done.

But as good as Vincent is at carrying on a traditional bluegrass career, she hopes to help bring change to the world she knows so well. Following the leads of crossover superstars Alison Krauss and Ricky Skaggs, Vincent's goal is to jet beyond the just-under-the-radar world of the bluegrass circuit to a broader, more wide-open audience.

If the past year serves as a barometer, she may pull it off. In 2001, the powerful vocalist was named the International Bluegrass Music Association's Entertainer of the Year and, for the third year running, Female Vocalist. Her 2001 album, *The Storm Still Rages*, has sold 50,000 copies – a figure considered small change on Nashville's Music Row, but a substantive sum in bluegrass.

"That's unheard of in bluegrass music," she says, a bit awestruck. "It's a new ballgame for me now."

With her latest, highly anticipated album, *One Step Ahead*, Vincent will start a carefully calculated drive to market herself and bluegrass to a larger audience without compromising her sound. "I have had people tell me in making this record, 'Wow, you should listen to the Dixie Chicks,'"

ROBERT SCHLEGEL/ROUNDIE RECORDS

FOR Grass

Bluegrass queen Rhonda Vincent keeps her fingers on the strings and her eyes on the horizon



Vincent's early training (above, right, with her family's band) eventually paved the way to Entertainer and Female Vocalist honors at the 2001 International Bluegrass Music Association awards.



she says, relaxing on her bus between shows. "But I'm not about that. I'm not making my record to be like someone else. I'm in hopes people will discover what I do, and then that's what will make them go 'wow.'"

It's a lesson she learned firsthand. In the early '90s, Vincent recorded two mainstream country albums for Giant Records.

"That was when Shania came along, and everything was very contemporary," she says. "They wanted to put me in these pink and silver pants. It looked like a spacesuit. I said no."

Still, Vincent says the time she spent working with Nashville experts – from stylists to makeup artists to musicians in the studio – was "like going to university."

Vincent lives with her husband of two decades and her two teenage daughters in Kirksville, Mo., the same town where she grew up, just 10 miles down the road from her parents.

"It's a small town, but I really don't like the trappings of

anything more than that," she says. She spent 300 days on the road last year, and expects 2003 to be no less hectic as she embarks on an aggressive marketing campaign and touring schedule.

She's purposely playing a lot of venues – small urban theaters, California wineries, fairs – not necessarily frequented by traditional bluegrass fans. Still she's quick to point out she's not abandoning the audience that brought her to the dance.

"I'll be playing bluegrass festivals somewhere the rest of my life," she says. "I'll always play at this local level. And if it never gets any better than this, I'll be happy."

But Vincent, who studied accounting in college, believes she can use a contemporary strategy to change the way bluegrass musicians market themselves. She makes sure each and every CD sold – even the ones off the merchandising table at small festivals – is reported to SoundScan, the company that tallies music sales, so that every transaction gets officially recorded.

"I would probably make more money if I just recorded it myself and wasn't on a label, which is what a lot of bands do," she says. "That way it's all profit for them. But bluegrass is never going to get on the shelf of Wal-Mart or Tower Records if we don't report sales. They'll say '[You sold] just one thousand [copies]? Well, that's not enough to get in our store.'"

She also uses the Internet to her advantage. Her website, *rhondavincient.com*, has become one of her most effective tools in building her fan base. "We were on the *Opry* last night, and it's already all over the message board," she says. "These are the folks calling up CMT and requesting the video."

The site also allows fans to buy her merchandise with credit cards, a practice light-years away from the typical bluegrass style of cash-in-the-lockbox. "Before, they had to write a check, put it in an envelope, send it in," Vincent says. "Now it's *bam*, here's your merchandise and it's done."

Despite her head for business, Vincent stays accessible. "I love visiting," she says. "What greater reward than to have people come up and talk to you, get you to sign stuff and get their picture taken? People aren't used to an artist coming out to the merchandise table after the show. They're going 'Wow, you go out there? I can't believe you would do that.'"

She smiles.

"Bluegrass people do that."

— Miriam Pace Longino

Mark Wills

Mark Wills ain't just whistling Dixie when he talks about "making hay while the sun shines"—not many performers are able to put out a *Greatest Hits* CD before their 30th birthday. Off the road Wills can be found at his hometown ice cream parlor buying cones for his family. And don't bother asking him if he's any relation to legendary Bob Wills — even his band is sometimes called "Nokintobob."



PHIL COCERO

I'D LIKE TO MEET ... ▶

Elvis, but he's dead.

HOW DO I KNOW?

Because if my daughter married Michael Jackson, I'd be there.

COOKING ▶

As little as I have to. I'm a great cereal guy.



A DAD'S NO. 1 RULE

Whatever the girls want, that's what we do.

COOL CAR

I'm not a car guy. If I was tearing a car down and putting it back together there'd be a lot of *extra* parts.



LGJ ARCHIVES



JOHN PACHAU/CELEBRITY

TRAVELING

It beats sitting at home — wishing I was working.

CRUSH ◀

Elisabeth Shue. She's just, like, *wow*. That's OK though — my wife has a crush on Bon Jovi.

SONG I WISH I'D GOTTEN TO FIRST

"Just to See You Smile"

SUPERSTITION ▼

I call my wife and daughters before I get on the airplane and we have a certain thing we say to each other.

FAVORITE QUOTE

Never been a person that lived my life by one sentence.



COURTESY BOEING CORP

MAKING IT BIG

I think if you're ever content, that's the first step of decline.

PET ▶

A 105-pound golden retriever named Kirby. He's a big boy.



TIM CAMPBELL

PLAN B

I've never thought about a back-up plan.

HOW TO STAY EXCITED ABOUT A JOB



RAEANNE RUBENSTEIN

Marty Stuart said it best: "This is entertainment, and when it gets to the point when it's not fun, you should quit." At the end of the day, I'm getting paid for doing something I'd be doing for free.

— Danny Solomon

Celebrate over 100 years of 4-H with...

Emily

THE FIRST 4-H COLLECTOR DOLL

A heartwarming porcelain collector doll capturing the spirit of a dedicated 4-H member.

For generations, diverse youth across America have learned firsthand lifelong skills in leadership, community service, agriculture and other subjects through 4-H...and little Emily is no exception. She knows you're never too young to lend a helping hand! Now, the Danbury Mint presents *Emily, The First 4-H Collector Doll*, celebrating over 100 years of 4-H.

Remarkably lifelike; hand-tailored attire.

Emily is a devoted 4-H member, carefully feeding her little lamb. Her head, arms and legs are crafted of fine, hand painted porcelain. *Emily's* adorable lamb is sculpted of cold-cast porcelain, a blend of powdered porcelain and resin able to hold fine detail. She wears a T-shirt with the 4-H emblem and cap bearing "I lead, Heart, Hands and Health," from the 4-H pledge. Rugged blue jeans and boots complete her outfit.

Attractively priced.

Available exclusively from the Danbury Mint, *Emily* is priced at only \$99, payable in three monthly installments of just \$33 (plus a \$12 total shipping and service charge). Her "grassy" base is included at no extra charge. What's more, a portion of the sales of this product will be used to promote 4-H educational programs. Your satisfaction is guaranteed. Order today!



The 4-H Name and Emblem are protected under 18 U.S.C. 707. Authorization granted by United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

HEAD HEART
HANDS HEALTH

Officially authorized!



Doll shown smaller than actual seated height of 9 1/4".



the Danbury Mint

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Emily

THE FIRST 4-H COLLECTOR DOLL

RESERVATION APPLICATION

Send
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(Please print clearly.)

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City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Signature _____

(Orders subject to acceptance.)

World Radio History

Allow 4 to 8 weeks after initial payment for shipment.

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THERE'S YOUR TROUBLE

Natalie Maines didn't know how prophetic the opening line of the Dixie Chicks' new single would become. *You don't like the sound of the truth!* Coming from my mouth, she sings on "Truth No. 2." Maines is addressing honesty in a relationship, but it just as easily could be a rejoinder to those who've criticized her for her now-infamous quote – that she was ashamed President Bush was from her home state of Texas.

Made during a London concert in March, Maines' quip triggered a firestorm of controversy unlike any seen in popular music since John Lennon observed in 1966 that The Beatles were "more popular than Jesus." Swamped with calls and letters from angry listeners who found Maines' comment un-American, radio stations across the nation pulled the Chicks' records from their playlists. Among the boycotters was Cumulus Broadcasting, a media network that banished the Chicks from its 42 country stations. Their then-No. 1 single, "Travelin' Soldier," dropped completely from the air-play charts, and sales of their current album, *Home*, took a nosedive.

Maines eventually attempted to clarify her remarks, first in a press release and then with her bandmates in an hourlong televised interview with ABC-TV's Diane Sawyer. Both times, Maines said her statement was "disrespectful." In the ABC interview, she and sisters Martie Maguire and Emily Robison described themselves as patriotic, proud Americans who supported the troops but had questions about the speed of Bush's decision to go to war.

"I feel regret for, you know, the choice of words – or the non-choice," Maines told

The Dixie Chicks have thrived on sass, attitude and defying conventional wisdom. But this time – as they spark a national debate about patriotism, free speech and the future of country music – have they gone too far?

Sawyer. "Am I sorry that I asked questions and that I don't just follow? No."

Their explanation didn't seem to appease critics. Making matters worse, some who'd initially applauded Maines for her candor later criticized her for caving to industry pressure and popular opinion.

All of which raises a bigger question: What will the controversy cost the Grammy-winning Chicks in the long run? And how will it affect the future of country music, and artists who might otherwise feel inclined to speak their minds?

The Dixie Chicks have never shied from expressing opinions or fighting for what they believe in. After signing with Monument

BY BILL FRISKICS-WARREN





Records, they fought with the record label for the right to play their own instruments on their debut album, *Wide Open Spaces*. Over record company objections, they insisted that a banjo be featured on the album's title cut, which went on to become a No. 1 hit and helped put acoustic, bluegrass accompaniment back in the country music mainstream.

On their 10-million-selling second album, *Fly*, they gambled further when they sang about domestic violence in

never been intentional. We're more lighthearted than that."

The Chicks are indeed a fun-loving trio. But even if Maines' jab at the president was just a flippant response prompted by the antiwar sentiment the group encountered overseas on their tour of Europe in the weeks leading up to the U.S.-led bombing of Baghdad, few people on either side of the debate found humor in it. Defenders of free speech and those opposed to the war in Iraq heard it as a rallying cry and rushed to sup-

port the trio. But a sizeable portion of country's core audience – a constituency that historically embraces the military and the flag – blasted back at the band. Some even destroyed their Chicks CDs in public displays of backlash, often orchestrated by radio stations.

Chet Flippo, editorial director of the cable network CMT, however, insists that the number of defectors from the Chicks fold is much higher than Orr's observation might suggest. "Maines in effect filed for divorce from country audiences," Flippo wrote on *CMT.com*, the company's website. "Maines' attack on Bush was in effect a direct attack on the country music audience. And its values. And its patriotism."

Country historian Bill C. Malone, on the other hand, believes that the country music audience isn't as single-minded as Flippo portrays it.

"Many of us spend large sums of money on country music concerts, CDs and literature, and have done so for many years – and we were part of the majority who voted against George Bush back in 2000," Malone wrote in response to Flippo's column. "Some of us vehemently oppose the war that Bush has instigated, and, like Natalie Maines, we worry about the consequences that the war will have not only for men and women who have to fight it, but also for other people who may suffer from its ravages."

One thing's certain: The Chicks have felt the sting of the boycotts and of the negative response of fans. Sales of *Home* dropped markedly, from 123,952 copies the week Maines made her comment to 33,127 just four weeks later.

The Chicks suffered in terms of airplay as well. "Travelin' Soldier," their wrenching – and timely – ballad about the human costs of war, plunged from No. 1 the week that Darryl Worley's call-to-arms "Have You Forgotten?" hit the top spot.

The backlash continued in April. At the fan-voted CMT Flameworthy Awards in Nashville, the Chicks were booed by the audience of some 20,000 fans – and the trio wasn't even in attendance. Just the mention of their name sparked a roar of disapproval.

But a true measure of the Chicks' ability to bounce back will come from fan response on their current U.S. tour, which began May 1 in Greenville, S.C. The opening show proved positive for the trio. Protests outside the arena were minimal, and inside the group received several rousing ovations from the sold-out crowd. Ten minutes into the show, Maines addressed the fact that protestors may be among the crowd. "We have a plan for this," she told the crowd. "If you're here to boo, we welcome that. We're going to give you 15 seconds to do that." Instead, the crowd of



DIXIE CHICKS

In an hourlong interview with ABC-TV's Diane Sawyer, the Chicks attempted to stop the bleeding over the comment Maines later admitted was "disrespectful."

IDA MAE ASTUTER/ABC

"Goodbye Earl," and about "mattress dancing" in "Sin Wagon." Both cuts went on to become hit singles.

In 2001 they put their careers on the line when they made their dispute with Sony Music public by suing the label for withholding royalties – and winning. They defied convention yet again when they released *Home*, a grass-roots, acoustic-flavored album recorded in Austin, instead of Nashville. The CD's first single, "Long Time Gone," attacked the soullessness of country radio and still received enough airplay to emerge as a Top 5 hit.

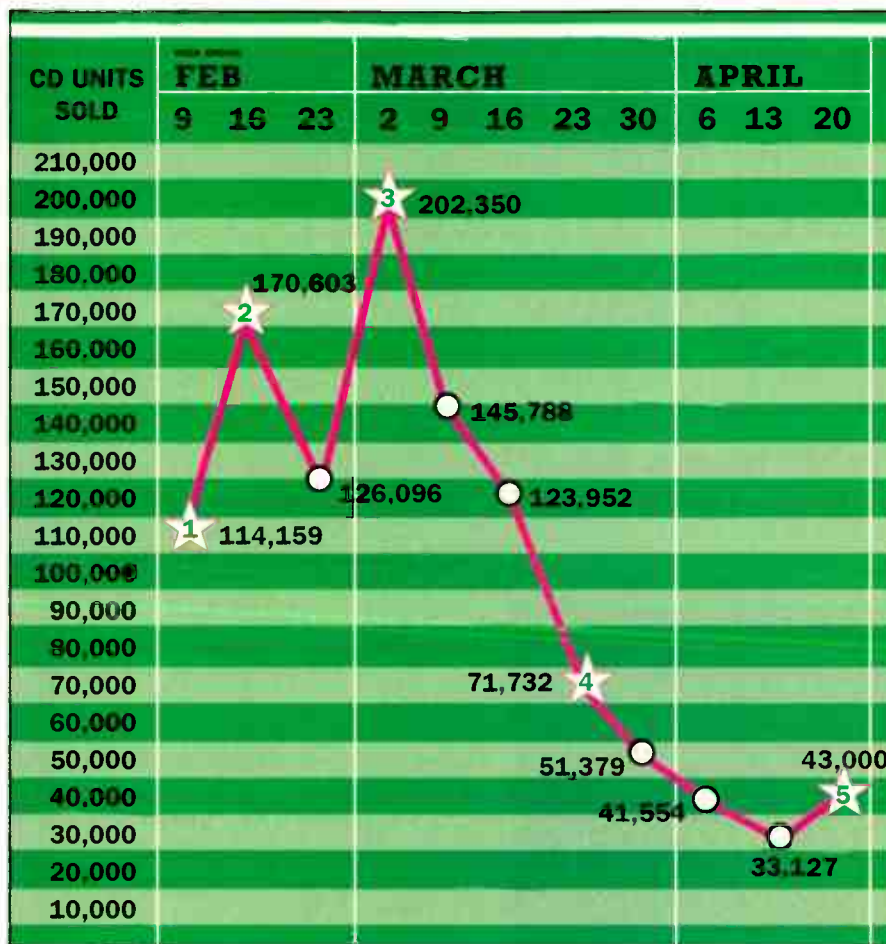
Each time the Chicks stirred up a potential storm, they somehow managed to weather it. In fact, their nerviness always worked in their favor, further endearing them to fans and ultimately enabling them to become the best-selling female group in the history of country and pop music.

"We've had a lot of controversy in our career," fiddler Maguire said in an interview prior to the recent flap. "It's

port the trio. But a sizeable portion of country's core audience – a constituency that historically embraces the military and the flag – blasted back at the band. Some even destroyed their Chicks CDs in public displays of backlash, often orchestrated by radio stations.

Jim Shields, the vice president of programming for Forever Broadcasting, a corporate owner of 27 radio stations, believes the matter eventually will blow over. "People care about the Dixie Chicks for their music, not their politics," Shields said.

Jay Orr, the senior museum editor at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, tends to agree. "I think that in this day and age, when we are so bombarded with images and information, it's hard to retain the memory of something – especially something that inspires resentment," Orr said. "I think the Dixie Chicks' fans are very loyal and passionate about them, and that any who were alienated by Maines' comment were



COUNTING THE NUMBERS

The Dixie Chicks album *Home* had set up residence at No. 1 on the country charts through the first three months of 2003. The week prior to Feb. 9, sales rose to 114,159 (1), pushed by the trio's Super Bowl performance. On Feb. 16, after appearing on *Saturday Night Live*, sales shot to 170,603 (2). After the Chicks won four Grammy Awards, *Home* topped out with weekly sales of 202,350 CDs (3).

Sales remained over 100,000 when Maines lashed out at President Bush. As the anti-Chicks backlash grew, sales fell to 71,732 (4), then to a low of 33,127. At that point, sales leveled off, then even climbed a bit to 43,000 (5), perhaps driven by fans wanting to support the trio during its crisis.

15,000 roared with cheers and applause.

Will other cities react with similar support? At the group's date in Houston in July, some concertgoers have said they plan to show up in military uniforms as a way of expressing their disapproval of Maines' remarks in the Astrodome when the band plays there this summer.

Receptions like this haven't just been limited to irate fans. Fellow country hitmaker Travis Tritt issued a statement chiding Maines to "get behind the troops" – and daring her to repeat her "offending" remarks in the Astrodome when the band plays there this summer.

At a show in Huntsville, Ala., Toby Keith dressed down Maines for "denouncing our president on foreign soil." A doctored image of Maines standing with Saddam Hussein was projected across a giant video screen while Keith had his say. Similar altered photos, complete with captions like "introducing the New Dixie Duo," have been circulated widely on the Internet.

Some of the backlash has turned even uglier. While on tour in Australia and New Zealand in early April, the three women received what they described as

"threatening mail," and the front gate of banjo player Emily Robison's ranch outside San Antonio was vandalized.

"They're crucifying this girl," commented Rosanne Cash. "It's so ludicrous. I think she got blindsided. I don't think she knew what hit her."

Cash wasn't the only artist to come to the trio's defense.

Bruce Springsteen, in a statement posted on his website, *bruce.springsteen.net*, said of the Dixie Chicks: "To me, they're terrific American artists expressing American values by using their American right to free speech. For them to be banished wholesale from radio stations, and even entire radio networks, for speaking out is un-American. The pressure coming from the government and big business to enforce conformity of thought concerning the war and politics goes against everything that this country is about – namely freedom."

Issues larger than the enduring popularity of the Dixie Chicks are at stake here, not the least of which are those pertaining to the First Amendment.

"Natalie Maines was well within her rights to speak her mind," said Ken Paulson, the executive director of the First Amendment Center at Nashville's Vanderbilt University. "At the same time, others can use their free-speech rights to speak out against her. That means the system works."

Paulson, however, was quick to add that the First Amendment protects us only from government infringement on our speech, not from expressions of disagreement. "It does nothing," he notes, "to protect us from each other."

First Amendment considerations nevertheless come into play when radio stations – which are licensed by the federal government – boycott the Chicks' music. Especially prickly is the extent to which deregulation of the communications industry has given giant conglomerates like Cumulus Broadcasting the power to sanction entertainers who hold viewpoints with which they don't agree. Indeed, allowing so much power to be consolidated in the hands of one corporation, as the Telecommunications Act of 1996 does, effectively blesses the efforts of Cumulus and others to "blacklist"

outspoken performers like the Chicks.

In a memo sent to Sony Music Group, which owns the Chicks' recording contract, Cumulus said they would lift their ban on the trio's music only after Maines personally made a public apology for her remarks – in other words, not a statement released through a media handler, as was the case with her earlier attempt at amends.

"Radio stations are given great latitude in deciding what they choose to put on the air," says Paulson. "You have to wonder if it's in our national interest to

consultant with Houston's Shane Media Services, which does polling and focus group research for country radio, believes that the Chicks controversy can be healthy because Maines' remarks – and the more combative sentiments expressed in recent hit singles by Toby Keith and Darryl Worley – engage both sides of the debate over the war in Iraq.

"Country music and radio have been blessed to have Toby Keith and the Dixie Chicks during the last couple of years," Shane wrote on her company's website. "Not only have they made music that the

God," for instance, shared space on the *Billboard* airplay charts recently. As counterpoints to bellicose salvos like Red Foley's "Smoke on the Water" and Merle Haggard's "The Fightin' Side of Me," there have been poignant country singles that directly and indirectly count the cost of war, from Loretta Lynn's "Dear Uncle Sam" to Glen Campbell's "Galveston."

"Travelin' Soldier," the Dixie Chicks single that became the first casualty of the current controversy, is very much of a piece with "Galveston," even to the point of being set in the Vietnam era. Written

DIXIE CHICKS

"We've had a lot of controversy in our career. It's never been intentional. We're more lighthearted than that."

— Dixie Chick Martie Maguire



have one company entirely ban the music of a band because of the political comments of one of its members. You also have to wonder whether radio stations are so aggressively formatted now that we'll ever hear any real diversity of opinion again.

"Contrast today with the '60s," Paulson continues. "In the '60s, you could have No. 1 records for and against the war in Vietnam. Barry McGuire went to No. 1 [in 1965] with 'Eve of Destruction.' A year later, Staff Sergeant Barry Sadler went to No. 1 with 'The Ballad of the Green Berets.' We have to ask ourselves, would radio stations play that same range of music today?"

Maybe not. But Pam Shane, a radio

public has responded to, but Toby and Natalie are opinionated people who take firm stands and are always ready to make controversial remarks. They get real people talking about country music, which has been pretty rare in pop cultural discourse since the early '90s. And that's good for country radio."

Even though no country hit past or present qualifies as an antiwar anthem akin to Edwin Starr's 1970 No. 1 pop hit "War," throughout its history, country radio – a format stereotypically associated with nationalism – has aired records that expressed different viewpoints about armed conflict. Clint Black's pro-war "I Raq and Roll" and Phil Vassar's more contemplative "This Is

by Bruce Robison, the brother-in-law of Dixie Chick Emily Robison, "Soldier" finds a high school girl falling for a classmate who gets shipped to Vietnam only to come home in a body bag. The song doesn't take sides, nor does the Chicks' mournful rendering of it. All we are left with, as the record ends, is Maines' subdued vocal, the sound of heartbreak that inevitably accompanies the ravages of war, wherever it occurs.

"More Love," another track from the Chicks' current album, also speaks to issues of war and peace. *Just look out around us/People fightin' their wars/They think they'll be happy/When they've settled their scores*, Maines sings to the bittersweet strains of banjo, fiddle and mandolin. *Let's lay down our weapons/That hold us apart/Be still for just a minute/Try to open our hearts*. These lines, written by Tim O'Brien and Gary Nicholson, express Maines' hopes and fears about the state of the world better than anything she's said onstage. They also just might be a balm for healing the rift between the Dixie Chicks and their estranged fans.

"Great music can overcome feelings of resentment or distrust inspired by offhand comments," says Jay Orr of the Country Music Hall of Fame. "The Dixie Chicks are incredibly talented artists. They make compelling music, and I think we're only just beginning to hear what they are capable of doing artistically.

"I think the Dixie Chicks are bigger than this controversy and have a lot of people who will stick with them.*"

A Higher Power

In these troubled times, Phil Vassar taps into spirituality with a song of prayer and atonement

It takes guts to write a song called “This Is God,” but Phil Vassar proves that his heart and mind – as well as his stomach – are in the right place.

Moreover, it takes nerve to release such a song as a single, and credit should go to Vassar and Arista Records for taking a chance and presenting such a daringly thought-provoking song on the public airwaves. At a time when another country song suggests giving a boot to those who cross us, Vassar takes a step back and, with a prophetic voice, asks the world to consider a different tack – one that involves prayer, thoughtfulness and compassion.

Like most country songs, “This Is God” is about relationships. However, this time the relationship isn’t between a man and woman, but between the world and God. Calling on a higher power is nothing new for country music. Its history is distinguished by traditional hymns and parallels between love for God, mama and a good woman.

Recent songs, such as Collin Raye’s “What If Jesus Comes Back Like That” and Randy Travis’ “Three Wooden Crosses,” offer other examples of country music making a direct statement of faith. Many other songs evoke faith in less blatant fashion but still contain images or allusion to the holy, such as Vince Gill’s “I Still Believe in You” or Lee Ann Womack’s “I Hope You Dance.”

However, Vassar transcends music history, intervening for God through song during a strenuous time for the world. Rarely has a hit country song so directly intervened on God’s behalf. Vassar personifies God through his voice, offering an opinion of what God may think of current world relations.

“This Is God” is intentional at moving the focus off the audience, which can be consumed by identity, and onto something larger. It is a petition for humanity to reexamine itself and act in goodness. Dodging responsibility is not an available option. With verses declaring *What’s with this attitude and hate/You grow more ignorant with age*, Vassar doesn’t paint a feel-good picture. The song is a

reminder that we are accountable for our outcome, and our only enemy is ourselves, humankind.

“This Is God” is a raw, honest look at what the world has become and what we already truly know. In some ways, the three-and-a-half-minute song is uncomfortable to hear because its weighty lyrics resonate truth – a truth that Vassar has the courage to identify.

“This Is God” also reclaims country music’s roots in spirituality. During past decades, nearly every country artist recorded all-gospel albums and featured at least a spiritual song or two in their concerts. But as country grew larger and more cosmopolitan, such influences were left out, becoming a discarded part of its past, like the banjo or other old-time instruments.

Vassar’s song, to its credit, acknowledges that country music is more than broken relationships between men and women. Music has the ability to inspire and empower; it can move the lens of society to see life in a different way, provoking change and

encouraging the world to act with love.

As Tim McGraw sings in “Where the Green Grass Grows,” we know we want to live in the world, in a safe space surrounded by the green beauty of nature and encircled by those we love. As Garth Brooks describes in the majestic chorus of “We Shall Be Free,” we know how the world should be.

Unfortunately, it’s not always as we wish it would be. Martina McBride sings of an abused little girl in “Concrete Angel,” and Alan Jackson reminds the world of the crushing events of 9/11 in “Where Were You (When the World Stopped Turning).”

With his song, Vassar, taking God’s perspective, pleads for compassion: *All I’m asking for is love/I’ve seen you hurt yourselves enough/Oh, I’ve been waiting for a change in you.*

“This Is God” is an explanation of how to get there by changing our attitudes to love.

It’s important to understand that this isn’t necessarily an anti-war song, though its timely release makes it appear as such. It is, however, a timely song. At a period when the world is consumed in fear with violent killings in our schools, environmental problems and war, we feel helpless and immobilized. “This Is God” is an intervention to wake up the world. It reminds us that the universe does not revolve around an individual or country, but around the good of all humanity. This song is for the world, for those we call enemies and for ourselves, asking people of all traditions to take responsibility and unite in love.

— Hollie Woodruff



Recent hits by Martina McBride (left), Tim McGraw (below) and Phil Vassar address society’s weightier matters.



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New Ring of Fire

Country stars are taking controversial stands and reaping the rewards – and also paying the costs

Country music has always craved media attention. The media has always pursued controversy. This year, each are giving the other what they want.

Even before Natalie Maines of the Dixie Chicks shot holes in the adage “there’s no such thing as bad publicity,” an ever-lengthening roster of country artists had made headlines by taking bold stances with outspoken songs and political statements.

Taken together, it suggests that the clean-cut, cautious images adopted by country singers in the late ’90s have been shoved aside by a new type of star. Bluntness is in, political correctness is out.

The war with Iraq and 9/11 certainly stoked the fire in certain artists’ souls and inspired songs that have drawn passionate responses. Recently, Darryl Worley’s “Have You Forgotten?” shot to the top of the radio charts as quickly as any song since the heyday of Garth Brooks. The song instantly put Worley in the hot seat of national news programs and sparked debates about its strongly pro-war assertions.

Toby Keith’s antagonistic anthem “Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue (The Angry American)” aroused similar media strife, pulling into the fray ABC News anchorman Peter Jennings, who was blamed for canceling Keith’s invitation to perform the song to open a Fourth of July TV special.

And even Alan Jackson’s 9/11 reflective epic “Where Were You (When the World Stopped Turning)” had its detractors, espe-

cially outside the realm of country music where some pundits made light of Jackson’s simple-man admission that he didn’t know the difference “between Iraq and Iran.”

Controversies have also reached beyond the topics of war and terrorism. Tim McGraw’s hit “Red Ragtop” built an emotionally poignant story around an abortion. Martina McBride, who frequently sings passionately on important social issues, confronted child abuse in her recent hit “Concrete Angel.”

Topics including homelessness, non-traditional families, childhood bullying, the demise of small business and Music Row’s neglect of tradition have all made appearances on the charts in recent years. Be it market forces, rekindled social consciousness or simply the times, country music and its artists have America talking.

“It was getting pretty vanilla out there in the late ’90s,” says Tim Wiperman, president of Warner Chappell Music in Nashville and co-publisher of Worley’s “Have You Forgotten?” Wiperman believes that the music’s previously soft focus may have led to the dip in popularity the genre experienced at the time.

Controversy is certainly nothing new to country. Merle Haggard’s “Okie From Muskogee” resonated deeply with conservative, Vietnam-era Americans who didn’t take kindly to the anti-war movement. Loretta Lynn’s 1975 hit “The Pill” inflamed religious groups and endured its own radio boycotts. Even Tammy Wynette’s “Stand

BY CHUCK ALY ★ ILLUSTRATION BY BRAD WALKER





by Your Man" drew criticism from those who saw it as anti-feminist.

Worley, whose "Have You Forgotten?" is akin to Haggard's "Okie," says he had U.S. soldiers in mind when he wrote the song. "It was inspired by my USO trip to Afghanistan," he says. "I was impressed by

600,000 records in its first week, so I guess he made the right decision."

Country once was known for addressing the hard truths of life, dealing with everything from domestic problems to national issues. But as the genre grew in popularity, it stepped

By the late '90s, the PC movement had snowballed and songwriters stopped tackling difficult and divisive subjects. "They knew they might not be able to get a song played if it dealt with that kind of topic, so they didn't write as many," Siman says of Nashville's songwriters. "Artists didn't cut

CONTROVERSY

While controversy in country songs isn't new, the public expression of personal political beliefs by a growing number of country stars is truly extraordinary.

the character of the troop and wanted to honor them."

Worley admits being troubled by peace protests and the sense of complacency settling over a country viciously attacked just 15 months earlier.

"Those pictures from September 11 got replayed so much, but then it just kind of stopped," Worley says. "We need to move on, I understand that. But we need to remember, too. Maybe we need to look at those pictures some more."

By coincidence, the song came out just as America was gearing up for war, and country radio quickly adopted it as a patriotic anthem. "Have You Forgotten?" raced up the charts; it also received widespread airplay on other formats, including talk radio.

"The song was written more about the Afghanistan conflict and the protests that existed to that war," Worley says. "It is pure timing that it came out around the start of war with Iraq."

Not all controversy has focused on current events. "Red Ragtop," the first single from Tim McGraw's *Dancehall Doctors* album, takes an apolitical, nonjudgmental tone in addressing the perennially divisive topic of abortion. Still, the song struggled with radio acceptance.

"I didn't think it would be this controversial," explains McGraw. "It doesn't get on a soapbox and preach about anything. I don't care what side of the issue you fall on - the lyrics don't jeopardize your integrity or your feelings on the subject. It's just a great song that tells a story."

McGraw's manager, Scott Siman, says his client felt strongly about the song from the start. "When it came time to pick the first single, Tim never hesitated," Siman recalls. "He had everybody around him going, 'Are we sure? What do we think?' He just said, 'My gut tells me this is what we need to come with.' The album sold

away from material that might offend.

For instance, when drinking songs came under fire from Mothers Against Drunk Driving, artists started leaving the bottle and its consequences out of their tunes.

those kinds of songs, and when they did, record companies didn't put them out. Every filter reacted, and it built on itself."

Martina McBride is an exception: She's never shied from recording songs with



Alan Jackson's response to Sept. 11, "Where Were You (When the World Stopped Turning)," was widely embraced (above), though some media pundits sneered at its political naiveté. Charlie Daniels (below left) lashed out at celebrities who protested the war with Iraq. Martina McBride's "Independence Day," a song about a woman's defiant response to domestic violence, found new life as a rallying cry for American solidarity against a brutal enemy.



challenging topics. "It's not done consciously," she says. "I don't set out to find these types of songs, but when you hear something like 'Concrete Angel,' it's hard to just say, 'Nah.'"

Still, she wrestles with knowing when and where to take a stand with her music. "There are a lot of factors. How passionate am I about the song? Will it do some good? Is it true to my personal beliefs? If you can answer all those questions, then you should do it. Releasing a controversial song just to stir the pot probably isn't smart. Fans will recognize if it's real."

McBride was still relatively new when she released what became her signature hit, "Independence Day." The topic – an abused woman exacting revenge by burning down the family home, presumably with her loutish husband inside – drew some initial resistance. "A lot of radio stations wouldn't play it," she recalls.

McBride, however, had the last word with the dissenters as the song became a huge fan favorite and, to this day, the song most closely associated with her. "They play it now," she says.

While controversy in country songs isn't new, the public expression of personal political beliefs by a growing number of country stars is truly extraordinary. Which brings us back to Natalie Maines.

Her March 10 comments that she was ashamed that the president is from her home state of Texas wasn't the first controversy her words had created. In August 2002, Maines ignited fireworks with Toby Keith when she told a reporter she "hated" the song "Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue (The Angry American)." "It's ignorant," she said, "and it makes country music sound ignorant."

Keith expressed his disdain for Maines' opinions early and often, most recently at a March 23 show in Huntsville, Ala. Introducing "Courtesy," Keith told the crowd he was angry about "a singer in a band called the Dixie Chicks" before flashing a doctored photo on the stage video screen showing Maines with Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein.

James Stroud, head of DreamWorks Nashville, the recording base of Toby Keith and Darryl Worley, is quick to defend his artists. "Toby Keith is a very intelligent, articulate artist who believes in his country no matter who says what. He will continue to feel that way in spite of any negative comments by uninformed, narrow-minded people – whoever they may be."



COURTESY SCHMIDT RELATIONS



HOBBS/WULFRANT

Taking a stance can have consequences. Tim McGraw (above left) found some radio stations were reluctant to play "Red Ragtop" due to its reference to an abortion. Toby Keith (above right) says he was disinvited from playing on a July 4 TV special because host Peter Jennings didn't like the message of "Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue," and Natalie Maines (below left) spurred fans and radio to boycott the Dixie Chicks after she insulted President Bush. The current taste for confrontation recalls days of yore when Merle Haggard (below right) blasted hippies in "Okie From Muskogee."



KEVIN MAZUR/WIREIMAGE



R. RUBINSTEIN

Other artists have also spoken out. Sara Evans discussed her pro-Republican stance in *Glamour* magazine. Travis Tritt publicly released a lengthy essay that opened, "As an entertainer I've never felt it was my place to get in the middle of any political debate waged by other celebrities. But with the recent comments made by some of my fellow entertainers, I can hold my tongue no longer."

Charlie Daniels, always quick to air his staunchly conservative viewpoint, penned an open letter to anti-war Hollywood actors, calling them "some of the most disgusting examples of a waste of protoplasm I've ever had the displeasure to hear about."

Opinion polls show that few Americans are influenced by a celebrity's political stance, and many in Nashville

wonder what, if anything, all the talk is accomplishing.

EMI Music's Gary Overton, publisher of "Where Were You" and co-publisher of "Have You Forgotten?," recalls an interesting story about one country music legend.

"Someone asked Conway Twitty why he didn't speak out more," Overton says. "And Conway said, 'My name's Harold Jenkins. Conway Twitty's an entertainer. Why would I put his career in jeopardy by doing something like that?'"

For better or worse, several of today's stars don't share that philosophy. One thing's certain: With the media now nudging country music for its opinionated views, we haven't heard the last from our stars – or seen the end of the genre's controversial side. *

All Right, Guy

Gary Allan riffs on shootin' craps, drinkin' songs and why Mom hates his tattoo

He's played in honky-tonks since his teens. He's served in the Army. He knows his way around a surfboard. And he's been deemed one of *People* magazine's sexiest men. After struggling a few years, Californian Gary Allan broke through in 1999 with his first platinum album, *Smoke Rings in the Dark*. Gary proves there's truth in his current album's title, *Alright Guy*, as he affably tackles a few odd questions.

Who's cooler: Elvis Presley or Johnny Cash? That's a tough one. I'm gonna have to say Elvis, because he was the first. Though Johnny is still with us, and that makes him pretty cool. I listen to both about equally, so that shows you how cool I think they both are.

What's in your pocket right now?
A guitar pick and Chapstick.

Which celebrity do you most resemble? I have no idea. Maybe Eddie Cochran. I was told once I looked like Eddie Cochran, and then I got to play him in a movie.

Some say you look a bit like Kevin Bacon. Really? That's a compliment. I've never been told that. Maybe people tell him he looks like Gary Allan.

Do you ever listen to country radio? Hardly ever. I listen to CDs mostly. Older country stuff.

Did you realize your skull tattoo was the topic of much discussion on the Web? Really? I have had this same tattoo since I was 15, so it seems like most of my fans would be bored with it by now. My mom cried when I got it – she said it made me look like a bank robber.

How do you feel when you hear yourself on the radio?
It's a strange thing but it's kind of cool. I'm getting paid when I'm on the radio. But I usually change to something else I'd rather hear; I've already heard myself plenty.

Whatever happened to all the great drinking songs?
Well, I am trying to keep that tradition going. We have "Doing My Best," which I consider a great drinking song, and "Alright Guy" is sort of a drinking song.

What would you never eat? Brussels sprouts. They are so stinky.

Do you ever wonder why you ended up playing country instead of another type of music? Well, my dad played country and so did my brother, and I played in bars with them since I was 11 or 12, so it was a natural thing. I did play a little punk rock when I was in 7th or 8th grade. I was in all kinds of bands when I was younger, but I made money playing country. That made a big impression on me!

Can you dance? I'm horrible. I stay on the stage side of the dance floor.

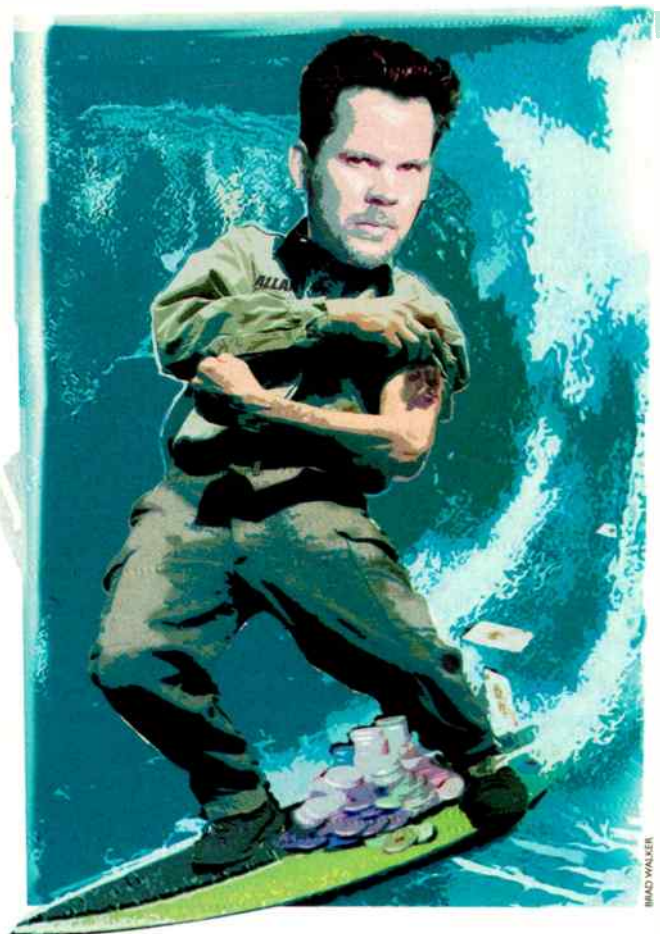
What's the most important rule of surfing etiquette? Don't drop in front of somebody. If there's somebody behind you, you're wrong. You have to watch who's around you before you get on the board.

Describe your worst surfing wipeout. You know, I've never been hurt, only had minor cuts. But probably my craziest surfing experience was I was out the day the Huntington Beach Pier got knocked down. I think it was 1986, a big swell just knocked down that whole pier. I am lucky I didn't get hurt that day, because I heard of a lot of people who did.

Do you have any luck at gambling? I'm a terrible gambler. I can't walk away, so even when I'm winning, I'll just stand there until I give it all back. Craps is my game. When I was younger, I had a friend whose dad ran a casino, so that's where I learned how to play craps – or rather, *lose* at craps.

What's the best advice you've ever received? Be nice to everyone on the way up, because you're gonna see them on the way back down.

— Kath Hansen



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Rosanne Cash had not intended to wait seven years before releasing another studio album.

She was in the studio ready to record five years ago, but a nasty little inconvenience waylaid her: Cash lost her voice, a condition that lasted more than two years.

Given her history – of laying bare the emotions that rule her relationships, unsparingly examining herself and the men in her life – it's easy to assume that the loss of her voice grew from an inner defense mechanism, a reaction to opening herself up one more time in the process of recording another collection of deeply personal songs.

That's an assumption that provokes Cash to laughter – not just a chuckle, but a gut laugh.

"I knew," she says, "that people would think that because it was me, that it was just a metaphor for some emotional thing. But the truth is there were just physical problems."

Cash started recording in the summer of 1998, then discovered she was pregnant. Shortly afterward, a polyp appeared on her vocal cord, and she was scheduled for surgery to remove it. Fate provided a roadblock for the scalpel.

"My doctor, a voice doctor who specializes in singers, went to a seminar in Paris," she explains, "She heard a colleague give a paper on hormones and vocal polyps. She went up to him afterwards and said, 'I have a patient, she's scheduled for surgery. She lost her voice when she was five months pregnant.' He said, 'Don't operate. Wait until six months after she stops nursing, and the body is back to normal, and see where she is.' Six months after I stopped nursing, the polyps went away. It was really remarkable."

With her voice revived, she returned to the studio to make the long-awaited new album, *Rules of Travel*. Though absent from the charts for years, Cash's country credentials are well-established – she scored nearly a dozen No. 1 hits in the '80s. Her 1981 album, *Seven Year Ache*, proved that she was different than the usual Nashville artist.

With a noticeable cynicism in her voice, she challenged the genre's boundaries during the *Urban Cowboy* era. She followed a rousing rockabilly number like "My Baby Thinks He's a Train" with a spare, artful ballad, "Blue Moon With

Heartache," infusing soul in "The Way We Make a Broken Heart" and torchy swing in "I Wonder." She had the guts to ignore the confines of genre, instead recording songs from such divergent talents as rocker Tom Petty and country hard-liner Merle Haggard.

Rules of Travel defies categorization even more nobly. She enlists such talents as Sheryl Crow, Steve Earle and father Johnny Cash to create an album that's at once personal and universal. It places relationships under a microscope and examines the fine threads that bind people together.

The opening track, "Beautiful Pain," sets a tone that's maintained throughout as she sifts through insecurities, differences, passions and physical limitation, exploring emotions with an uncommon dignity. She unveils her

again, her husband became her producer, and those same issues – setting boundaries between work and family – resurfaced.

"You would hope that you'd be smart enough to have the overview going in," she says, laughing heartily again. "But usually I'm not. So I had to learn it with John, too, how not to bring our stuff to the studio. The good thing is that I don't micromanage. I'm so much more relaxed about it than I used to be. If I feel really strongly about something, either lyrically or musically or arrangement-wise, then I stick to my guns and ultimately get my way, 'cause it's my record. If I don't feel so strongly, but there's a dialogue about it, a lot of times I change my mind, or I compromise. It's a much more friendly, kind of relaxed process."

SEVEN Year Itch

soul without exposing the details.

"What I feel is not that different from what you feel, and that's what I've really learned," she notes. "There's nothing so unique about me. I mean, our experiences may be different, but pretty much we're gonna encounter the same themes in our life: regret, loss, longing – the big things. And that hopefully is the level people relate on. They can personalize it to themselves."

Even when the details remain mysterious, Cash's own life has long been a point of intrigue. She famously married fellow singer/songwriter Rodney Crowell in 1979 and spent 13 years as half of country's most commercially daring musical couple. Crowell produced most of her material during that time, and feuds in the studio often spilled over into their home life – and vice versa.

"Sometimes it was great," she reflects. "Sometimes it was really hard."

After their relationship ended, Cash got married again in April 1995 to producer/guitarist John Leventhal, whom she met through Crowell. Once

The dynamics of another family relationship come forward as *Rules of Travel* unfolds. Cash has recorded with her dad before, bringing him in for a duet on "That's How I Got to Memphis" in 1982, then teaming with The Everly Brothers to lend support on a re-recording of his classic "Ballad of a Teenage Queen." This time, their work together is more poignant. "September When It Comes" features an appearance by Johnny Cash that feels quietly ominous.

Rosanne intended to perform the song on her own; it was only after her father added his voice that the depth of her lyrics hit her.

I cannot be who I was then, he sings, and his once-stately voice is amazingly fragile on the performance as he ponders what remains of his existence.

"I didn't fully understand what it meant to face up to mortality, your parents' mortality or to live with unresolved questions," Cash says, her own voice cracking faintly. "I'm just starting to understand some of what I was writing about there."

— Tom Roland

After
overcoming a
career-
threatening
ailment,
Rosanne Cash
digs deep with
her first new
album since
1996

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THE Journal

OF TRADITIONAL COUNTRY MUSIC



Freddy Fender

The wasted days
and changed ways
of a Texas legend

PRECIOUS MEMORIES FROM THE COUNTRY MUSIC HALL OF FAME AND MUSEUM



STRINGS ATTACHED

A little-remembered Kitty Cora Cline introduced the hammered dulcimer to the *Opry* 75 years ago

Kitty Cora Cline may not be a name that ranks among country's legends, but she nonetheless played an important part in the early *Grand Ole Opry* years. The *Opry*'s first female soloist introduced a wide audience to the hammered dulcimer, an ancient, stringed instrument that stands on legs and is played with wooden mallets. (Related to the harpsichord, Cline's instrument has little in common with the smaller, lap-held mountain dulcimer with which it shares a name.)

For the six years she appeared on the *Opry*, she was introduced on-air as "Mrs. Cline," never as Cora or Kitty Cline. Announcers always referred to her instrument as a "zither," never by its correct name. And she was paid \$1 per minute of air time.

Born in 1876 in Fairfield, Tenn., she began playing the hammered dulcimer at age 4, a point at which she was so small she had to climb onto a chair to reach the strings.

She lived the first half of her life as a housewife, raising nine children with husband Grundy Cline, a timber worker, in their home in Westmoreland, north of Nashville.

Her first documented *Grand Ole Opry* performance came in 1928 when she was 52. Prior to that, she had played her dulcimer on Nashville radio station WDAD.

Audiences loved the sweet, multilayered

sound she coaxed from her instrument, played with a small pair of mallets that she used to strike the strings on such folk songs as "Going Up Cripple Creek" or "Chippy Get Your Hair Cut."

Cline's *Opry* career ended suddenly. On March 31, 1934, during one of her 30-mile commutes into Nashville, she witnessed a gruesome automobile accident on a bridge crossing the Cumberland River. Already afraid of road travel, she vowed to never again ride in a car.

Shortly after she left the *Opry*, the show's program became more tightly organized and aggressively promoted. Its growing popularity necessitated a move into the Hillsboro Theater in October 1934, then the larger Dixie Tabernacle in 1936. By 1939, a 30-minute portion of the *Opry* was broadcast nationally on the NBC radio network.

While regulars like Roy Acuff, Uncle Dave Macon and Bill Monroe became stars, Cline never did, but she had no remorse about leaving the show. Nurturing her nine kids, Cline settled



"Mrs. Cline," as the *Opry*'s first female soloist was always called, coaxed a sweet, multilayered sound from her instrument.

back into being a housewife. For the rest of her life she performed only for friends and family.

Cline lived to be 96. Her last years were spent on a farm near Portland, Tenn., with one of her daughters. She died March 10, 1973.

Today, Cline's unusual-looking instrument is on display at the Country Music Hall of Fame, where it continues to speak of the memory and the impact of the *Grand Ole Opry*'s first female solo star. It also reminds us of the many lesser known but integral stories in the history of country music.

— Mark Medley and Robert K. Oermann

THIS DATE IN COUNTRY MUSIC

JULY

July 1

1894 Renfro Valley Barn Dance king John Lair born
1924 Everett Lilly born
1950 Hank Snow's theme song "I'm Movin' On" is released
1955 Keith Whitley born
1961 Michelle Wright born



Michelle Wright

1990 Hank Williams Jr. marries wife Mary Jane

July 2

1925 "Gonna Find Me a Bluebird" singer Marvin Rainwater born
1964 Last recording session for Jim Reeves

July 3

1946 Johnny Lee born
1958 Aaron Tippin born
1993 Alison Krauss becomes a member of the Grand Ole Opry
2001 Johnny Russell dies
2001 Guitarist Roy Nichols dies

July 4

1903 Charlie Monroe born
1937 Opry star Ray Pillow born

1942 Peter Rowan born
1973 First Willie Nelson 4th of July Picnic staged
1981 Marty Robbins performs for President Ronald Reagan in D.C.
1981 Barbara Mandrell hits No. 1 with "I Was Country When Country Wasn't Cool"

1992 Wynonna goes No. 1 with "I Saw the Light"

July 5

1915 Guy Willis of The Willis Brothers born
1939 Opry moves from Dixie Tabernacle to War Memorial Auditorium
1969 Merle Haggard's "Workin' Man Blues" enters the charts

1980 George Jones hits No. 1 with "He Stopped Loving Her Today"

July 6

1925 Bill Haley born
1940 Jeannie Seely born
1954 Elvis Presley records "Blue Moon of Kentucky" for Sun Records
1993 Reba McEntire lands her first platinum record for her *Whoever's in New England*

1998 Roy Rogers dies

July 7

1917 John Sullivan, "Lonzo" of comic duo Lonzo & Oscar, born
1927 Charlie Louvin born
1930 Doyle Wilburn born
1975 George Morgan dies

July 8

1924 Uncle Dave Macon's first recording session
1961 Toby Keith born
1997 Marty Stuart and Connie Smith married

July 9

1907 Singing cowboy Eddie Dean born
1923 Mountain singer Molly O'Day born



Jesse McReynolds

1929 Mandolinist Jesse McReynolds of Jim & Jesse born
1952 June Carter and Carl Smith marry
1953 David Ball born

July 10

1958 Banjo great Béla Fleck born
1960 BR549's Hawkshaw Wilson born
1970 Johnny Cash records the CMA Song of the Year, Kris Kristofferson's "Sunday Morning Coming Down"
1971 "Easy Loving" debuts on charts for Freddie Hart

1982 Janie Fricke's "Don't Worry 'Bout Me Baby" becomes her first No. 1 hit

July 11

1947 Jeff Hanna of Nitty Gritty Dirt Band born
1981 Earl Thomas Conley scores first No. 1, "Fire & Smoke"

1984 Ezra Cline of The Lonesome Pine Fiddlers dies

July 12

1943 Roy Rogers & Trigger on cover of *Life* magazine
1998 Jimmy Driftwood dies

July 13

1895 Folk singer Bradley Kincaid born
1946 Old-time singer Riley Puckett dies
1954 Louise Mandrell born



Rhonda Vincent

1962 Rhonda Vincent born

1962 Victoria Shaw born

July 14

1933 Del Reeves born

1961 Bill Anderson

joins Opry

1973 The Everly Brothers announce their breakup

1987 *Always and Forever*

LP goes platinum for

Randy Travis

July 15

1913 Cowboy Copas born

1946 Linda Ronstadt born

1957 Mac McAnally born

July 16

1954 Nanci Griffith born

1986 Dollywood opens

July 17

1918 Red Sovine born

1951 "Jole Blon" singer

Harry Choates dies

1954 *The Ozark Jubilee*

debuts as a radio show

1993 Alan Jackson hits

No. 1 with "Chattahoochie"

July 18

1954 Ricky Skaggs born

1964 "Dang Me" becomes

Roger Miller's first No. 1 hit

July 19

1937 George Hamilton

IV born

1947 Tex Williams hits

No. 1 with "Smoke!

Smoke! Smoke!

(That Cigarette)"

1952 "It Wasn't God Who

Made Honky Tonk Angels"

debuts on charts for

Kitty Wells

1969 Kenny Rogers debuts on country charts with "Ruby, Don't Take Your Love to Town"

1975 Lefty Frizzell dies

1980 *Urban Cowboy* movie

song "Lookin' for Love"

enters charts for Johnny Lee

July 20

1898 String band leader

J.E. Mainer born

1944 T.G. Sheppard born

1945 Kim Carnes born

1959 Rodney Foster born

1978 Willie Nelson's

Stardust declared a

gold record

July 21

1895 Singing cowboy

pioneer Ken Maynard born

1899 Birth of Sara Carter,

lead singer of The

Carter Family

1933 Bobby Hicks born

1951 Lefty Frizzell debuts

on the *Grand Ole Opry*

1956 Johnny Cash gets

his first No. 1 hit, "I Walk

the Line"

1972 Paul Brandt born

1973 Jeanne Pruett joins

the *Opry* cast

July 22

1874 Old-time singer

Obed "Dad" Pickard born

1995 Shania Twain's CD

The Woman in Me tops

the charts, and "Any Man

of Mine" becomes her first

No. 1 hit

July 23

1943 Tony Joe White born

1971 Alison Krauss born



Alison Krauss

1975 Sonya Isaacs born

1977 Alabama debuts on

charts with "I Wanna Be

With You Tonight"

1983 Willie Nelson and

Merle Haggard snag a No. 1

duet with "Pancho and Lefty"

July 24

1926 The Crook Brothers

make their first appearance

on the *Opry*

1957 Pam Tillis born

July 25

1948 "City of New

Orleans" songwriter Steve

Goodman born

1965 Bob Dylan scandalizes Newport Folk Festival by playing with electric guitar

1965 Marty Brown born

1967 Death of Tommy

Duncan, lead singer of the

Texas Playboys

1995 Charlie Rich dies

July 26

1942 Gene Autry

joins the Army

1968 Jeannie C. Riley

records "Harper Valley P.T.A."

1986 Randy Travis scores

his first No. 1 hit, "On the

Other Hand"

July 27

1920 Birth of Homer

Haynes of Homer & Jethro

1925 First recording session

for Charlie Poole & The

North Carolina Ramblers

1944 Bobbie Gentry born



Bobbie Gentry

1963 "Ring of Fire," complete with Mexicali trumpets,

hits No. 1 for Johnny Cash

1996 LeAnn Rimes' debut

CD hits No. 1

July 28

1962 "Mama Sang a

Song." Bill Anderson's

first No.1. debuts on the

charts

1971 Charley Pride

records "Kiss an Angel

Good Mornin' "

1984 "Angel in Disguise"

hits No. 1 for Earl Thomas

Conley, making his LP

Don't Make It Easy for Me

the first to yield four chart-

topping country hits

July 29

1966 Martina McBride born

1972 Barbara Mandrell

joins the Opry

1988 Steel guitarist and

producer Pete Drake dies

1999 Death of Anita

Carter of The Carter Family

July 30

1958 Neal McCoy born

July 31

1937 Birth of Bonnie

Brown of The Browns

1963 Chad Brock born

1964 Jim Reeves dies in a

plane crash

Better Days Better Nights

BY ROB PATTERSON

Freddy Fender is in pain. Just a few weeks ago, he was riding one of his motorcycles near his home in Corpus Christi, Texas, when another driver pulled in front of him, forcing Fender to hit the pavement with the bike. "I did a number on the highway and flipped and flopped for about 50 or 60 feet," he explains. "It banged up my bones pretty badly."

It also shook up his priorities. The accident came less than a year after Fender underwent kidney transplant surgery, receiving the organ from his daughter Marla.

As he lay on his back, recovering from his street tumble, he had time to think. "My daughter was visiting and I felt real humbled that I was so irresponsible with the kidney that she gave me with all her heart – just for some kicks on a motorcycle. I promised her, 'You haven't asked me, but I'm

going to tell you now, as hard as it is for me – this is it.' So I'm going to have to sell my motorcycles. I'm 65, and I'm finally giving up motorcycles and going back to old sports cars. I like little Triumph convertibles, like a 1960 or '50-something."

It's a big step for Fender. Motorcycles have been his refuge. "All I had to do was get on a bike and get some air in my face, and that's all I had to do to enjoy a good day. But I think it's time for a change."

Part of the change means adjusting his idea of himself as a swaggering risk-taker. "In my mind, I've *always* been cool," he says, offering a self-deprecating laugh. "But the only thing is, the only one who thought I was cool was me! I'm so cool the world has never understood me! I have had my ups and downs, but now I seem to

enjoy my life like I never did before. I like just sitting outside on the porch and watching the old mesquite trees sway in the wind."

Those kind of quiet, reflective moments haven't been a big part of Fender's life until now. His life has been a constant swirl of music, traveling and partying, even before he established himself as country music's first Hispanic star in the mid-1970s with the hits "Before the Next Teardrop Falls" and "Wasted Days and Wasted Nights."

Born with the name Baldemar Huerta, which he changed to Freddy Fender when he began performing, he grew up dirt poor in San Benito, Texas, and was still a child when he lost his father to tuberculosis. With his mother and siblings, he followed the harvest seasons as a migrant farm worker through Michigan, Ohio, Indiana and Alabama. But when he got his first guitar – cracked, with only three strings – a light shone into his life.

"I started playing the corners there in my little barrio. And the kids were really impressed. I said, 'Well, I didn't know I could impress people. I like this,'" he recalls with a chuckle. "So I got into that every night. They'd be waiting for me. I started playing and it became sort of a ritual."

At age 10 he made his first appearance on the radio in Harlingen, Texas. He also won his family a tub of food worth \$10 – no small change in those days – in a talent contest. His fate was sealed.

At 16 Fender quit school and joined the Marines for a three-year hitch. While in the service he discovered that the music that charmed his friends on the corner also worked on the base.

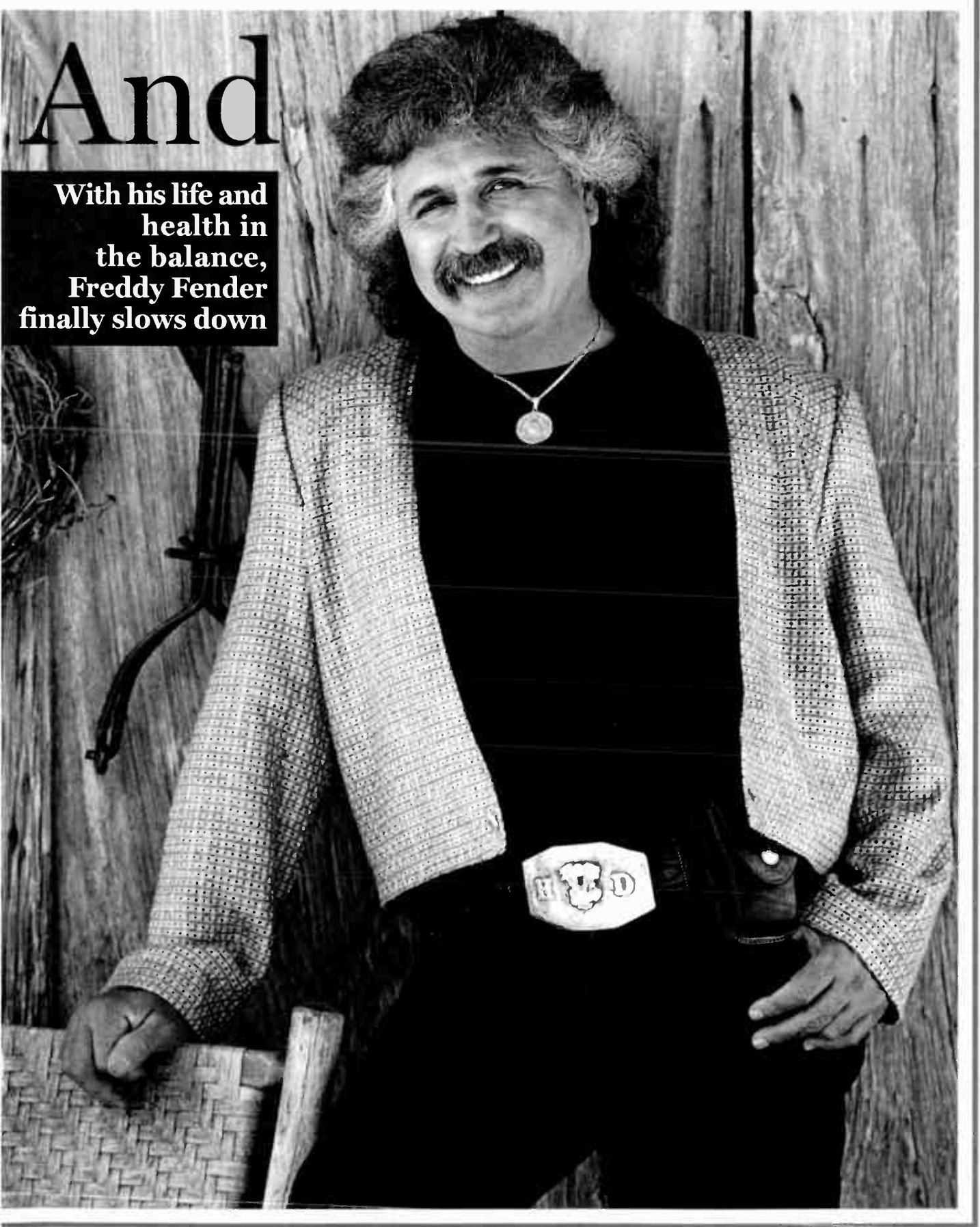
"I would impress my superiors to get



Fender (fourth from left) lent his vocal talents to the acclaimed Los Super Seven collaboration.

And

With his life and health in the balance, Freddy Fender finally slows down



Freddy Fender

them off my ass," he recalls. "Music has always been what has gotten me out of a lot of trouble. My greatest friend has been music."

When Fender returned from duty in Japan in the late 1950s, he was bitten by the rock 'n' roll bug. "I just enjoyed the hell out of all that new stuff," he recalls. "I put the Vaseline in my hair and let my sideburns flap in the breeze."

When he returned to South Texas, he started to make a name for himself as a rocker. Actually, Fender made *several* names for himself, recording and performing as El Bebop Kid, Eddie Medina and Scotty Wayne as well as Freddy Fender, taking his surname from the headstock of his electric guitar. He scored No. 1 hits in Mexico and South America with his Spanish-language versions of Elvis Presley's "Don't Be Cruel" ("*No Seas Cruel*") and Harry Belafonte's "Jamaica Farewell" in 1957, arguably becoming the godfather of the current *Rock en Español* movement.

"I was very good at stealing ideas," explains Fender. "I'm still very good at that. I think that all good musicians ought to be the best thieves in the world when it comes to stealing ideas in music. Because let's face it, very few people are born with it already. You have to pick it up or develop what you got and polish it up." He also had a regional Texas hit with his original recording of "Wasted Days and Wasted Nights." But in 1960 he was arrested – on a Friday the 13th – in Louisiana with his bass player for possessing two joints of marijuana. Sentenced to five years at the notorious Angola Penitentiary, Fender was paroled after three years by Governor Jimmie Davis (of "You Are My Sunshine" fame). As a condition of his parole, Fender was to stay away from music.

He still sneaked in some gigs in New Orleans and back in South Texas. He also went back to school and took college courses in sociology.

Fender confined his musical endeavors to local weekend gigs until the early 1970s. Fellow Texas musician Doug Sahn, who had by that time



The all-star group Texas Tornados, which mixed Tex-Mex with roadhouse rock, featured Fender (second from left) and friends Flaco Jimenez, Doug Sahn and Augie Meyers.

incorporated "Wasted Days and Wasted Nights" into his repertoire, persuaded Fender to record with notorious Houston record producer Huey P. Meaux.

The result, "Before the Next Teardrop Falls," launched Fender to country and pop stardom in 1975. One of the first Hispanic artists to make it into the mainstream, Fender broke both racial and language barriers with his success. The follow-up, a re-recording of "Wasted Days and Wasted Nights," also topped the country and pop charts. From 1975 to 1977, Fender landed six more Top 10 country hits.

But Fender's best career years were also some of the hardest of his life. He was headlining shows and appearing on TV, but he wasn't paying attention to his finances. Problems with alcohol that began when he was young intensified with success. Drugs followed.

Still, he survived, becoming clean and sober at the insistence of his wife, Vangie – whom he married in 1958, then, after a brief divorce, remarried in 1964.

"For some reason, the good Lord works overtime with me," Fender says. "If I have any guardian angels on the payroll, I keep them busy."

By the time he did clean up, though, his career was in disarray, and he was in danger of fading from the public eye.

But he once again managed to stage a comeback. In 1988, he took

up acting with a starring role in Robert Redford's film *The Milagro Beanfield War*. Soon after, he teamed up with Sahn, Flaco Jimenez and Augie Meyers in the Texas Tornados to international success. He also participated in the acclaimed Los Super Seven collaboration in the 1990s.

In 2002 – just one month after his kidney transplant – he won his third Grammy, for Best Latin Pop Performance for *La Musica De Baldemar Huerta*, an album of traditional Mexican and South American music from his youth.

Today, he continues to enjoy popularity on his own as a performer.

"I've done so many things that my cup runneth over. But I wish my pocket would runneth over," Fender says, chuckling. "I have had a small portion of everything in life, except the eight-to-five kind of life, which to me is boring. But people around me, like the wife, who are concerned about me, would rather that I be one of the square old people."

Despite promises to slow down, a square he is not. "I'm a survivor all right, but it has cost me," Fender concludes. "I asked my wife, 'How many times have I cheated death?' She said, 'I don't know. I've lost count.'"

Even though Fender he now enjoys each day for what it offers, he's still as full of life as ever. "I tell my wife sometimes, I can hardly wait for tomorrow," he says. "I don't know what God has in store for me. But he has *something* in store for me, because he doesn't want me to go." ❁

THE STORY BEHIND THE SONG

“I’m Gonna Hire a Wino to Decorate Our Home”

“I’m Gonna Hire a Wino to Decorate Our Home”

BY DEWAYNE BLACKWELL

I came crawling home last night
Like many nights before:
I finally made it to my feet as she opened up the door
And she said, “You’re not gonna do this anymore.”

Chorus:

She said: “I’m gonna’ hire a wino to decorate our home
So you’ll feel more at ease here
and you won’t need to roam
We’ll take out the dining room table
put a bar along that wall
And a neon sign will point the way
to our bathroom down the hall.”

She said: “Just bring those Friday paychecks
and I’ll cash them all right here
And I’ll keep on tap – for all your friends –
their favorite kind of beer
And for you, I’ll always keep in stock
those soft aluminum cans
And when you’re feeling macho
you can crush them like a man.”

She said: “We’ll rip out all the carpet
and put sawdust on the floor
Serve hard-boiled eggs and pretzels
and I won’t cook no more
There’ll be Monday night football
on T.V. above the bar
And a pay phone in the hallway
when your friends can’t find their car.”

(Repeat chorus)

She said: “You’ll get friendly service
and Friday atmosphere
I’ll slip on something sexy, and I’ll cut it clear to here
Then you can slap my bottom
every time you tell a joke
Just as long as you keep tipping, well
I’ll laugh until you’re broke.”

She said: “Instead of family quarrels
we’ll have a barroom brawl
When the Hamm’s bear says it’s closing time
you won’t have far to crawl
And when you run out of money
you’ll have me to thank
You can sleep it off next morning
while I’m putting it in the bank.”

She said: “I’m gonna hire a wino
to decorate our home
So you can feel more at ease here
and you won’t need to roam
Then when you and your friends get off from work
and you have a powerful thirst
Well, there won’t be any reason
why you can’t stop off here first.”

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Written by Dewayne Blackwell

One evening, as Dewayne Blackwell headed out for a recurring job as a nightclub singer, his wife called out a refrain familiar to spouses and parents everywhere. “If you go out after the show, call me,” she said. “No matter how late.”

The well-worn request roundaboutly inspired Blackwell to write “I’m Gonna Hire a Wino to Decorate Our Home,” which became David Frizzell’s best-known song.

Born in Corpus Christi, Texas, Blackwell grew up in a family of migrant farmers who worked primarily in Oregon and California. While still a teenager, he formed The Blackwells with his brother and sister. One of his songs, “Mr. Blue,” became a No. 1 pop hit for The Fleetwoods in 1959. He didn’t score another big hit until he penned his first country smash, “Wino,” in 1982.

“I wrote ‘I’m Gonna Hire a Wino to Decorate Our Home’ in less than an hour,” Blackwell says. “I was playing five nights a week at the Levee House, a classy nightclub in Marysville, Calif. My wife was worried about me, wanted me to call so she’d know I wasn’t drunk or hadn’t driven into a ditch.”

One night, between late-night sets, some club regulars suggested Blackwell join them for breakfast after the show. He remembered his

wife’s instructions – and realized that she’d frown on the idea. “I said, ‘Guys, I’d love to, but I’d be hiring a wino to decorate my home,’” Blackwell recalls. “It just came out. When I went back onstage, I started looking around. I’d write down a few lines, someone would make a request, I’d sing it. Then I’d write a couple more lines. Before I finished my set, I’d written the whole song.”

At first he planned to record it himself. He met with L.A. music executive Snuff Garrett, who’d launched a music publishing firm with Clint Eastwood. “I’m Gonna Hire a Wino” was the first song Blackwell played for Garrett.

Garrett took it to David Frizzell, who was enjoying a string of duet hits with Shelly West. “I gotta have that song,” Frizzell demanded.

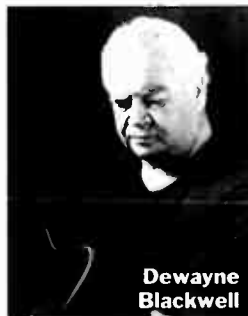
Released in May 1982, “I’m Gonna Hire a Wino” shot to No. 1, earning Grammy, CMA and ACM Award nominations.

Blackwell also wrote Marty Robbins’ “Honky Tonk Man,” the title song from Eastwood’s film of the same name. Blackwell’s catalog also includes “Make My Day,” the Eastwood/T.G. Sheppard duet from the movie *Sudden Impact*, Conway Twitty’s controversial “Saturday Night Special” and Sammy Kershaw’s hit “Yard Sale.”

But Blackwell’s biggest hit, “Friends in Low Places,” became a genuine barroom national anthem. Co-written with Earl “Bud” Lee, it ranks as Garth Brooks’ most-played single on radio.

Now living near Nashville, Dewayne Blackwell is still writing songs, 44 years after his first hit. And he still calls home if he’s running late coming back from the bar.

— John Lomax III



Dewayne Blackwell

SERIOUSLY GOOFY

BY BOB MILLARD

Everything sounded funny when the Hoosier Hot Shots started to play

“Are you ready, Hezzie?” From the early 1930s through the late 1950s, Ken Trietsch delivered this quirky, familiar question with a twinkle of cornball humor to brother and musical partner Paul (Hezzie) Trietsch. Just like Minnie Pearl’s “How-dee! I’m just so proud to be here!” Trietsch’s “Are you ready, Hezzie?” was the trademark of this singular American music act.

The Hoosier Hot Shots performed a uniquely inventive form of Midwestern rural jazz. The joyous whimsicality of their sound inspired such descriptions as “fractured Dixieland” and “a cornball blend of bad jokes, ragtime sounds, and a little jazz.”

They wrote original tunes with titles like “I Like Bananas (Because They Have No Bones),” “From the Indies to the Andes in His Undies” and “Those Hillbillies Are Mountain Williams

Now,” which characterized their zany attitude. They also whipped up parodies of well-known pop or country hits of the day, or they’d rewrite arrangements in their own hilarious style, which they did with “Sweet Sue” and “Take Me Out to the Ballgame.”

Sure, these were uproariously goofy. But in the depths of the Depression laughter was a powerful salve for an audience mired in a desperate economy. “What we had to sell was a product called stupid,” said longtime Hot Shots member Gabe Ward, late in his life. “That’s what it was – stupid – but it’s what was needed at the time. We were about the only people who could make people laugh after only four bars of music.”

Ward’s sweet clarinet and Hezzie’s expressive slide whistle would swap

the melody and harmony back and forth. “People laughed as soon as we started to play,” Ward said. “We had a funny sound with the clarinet and whistle – especially the way Hezzie played it, it was funny.”

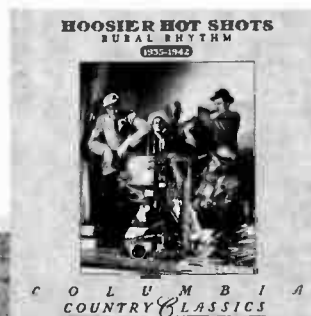
Onstage, their antics were priceless. They mugged, goofed, clowned and acted as if their merry music was simply an accidental offshoot of their crazy personalities. On the contrary, though, what they created was tightly arranged and executed. They simply made it look easy.

Born in Arcadia, Ind., brothers Ken and Paul Trietsch came from a large family of musical talents. Four Trietsch brothers and their father toured Canada and America’s upper Midwest for several years. But it was Paul’s unquenchable interest in the percussive and melodic possibilities of common kitchen utensils and

containers that led to the Hot Shots’ musical mayhem.

The Hoosier Hot Shots – formed by the Trietsch brothers and clarinetist Charles Otto “Gabe” Ward – began during the early days of radio near the start of the Great Depression. Fellow Indiana resident Frank Kettering joined shortly thereafter as bassist and arranger. All had played in what were called rube bands on vaudeville circuits, where they honed the art of musical novelty.

They started building an audience while working at various Midwest radio stations, eventually landing a prized invitation to join Chicago’s WLS *National Barn Dance* in 1933. WLS exposed the Hoosier Hot Shots to a



WLS radio star Uncle Ezra kicks up his heels to the lively music of the Hoosier Hot Shots in this 1938 photo. A 1992 CD (above) introduced modern-day country fans to the wacky sound of the band.

According to WLS publicity in 1936, "Oddly enough for one of the fastest-moving and most frolicsome music groups, these boys when off duty are quiet, reserved and serious minded."



vast audience. They became major stars alongside other *National Barn Dance* headliners Gene Autry, Lulu Belle & Scotty, Red Foley and Patsy Montana.

The original Hot Shots were talented multi-instrumentalists, but Paul Trietsch was a veritable one-man band, a clown prince of found sounds. He not only blew the laugh-provoking slide whistle, but played other whistles of all descriptions. He clanked cowbells, honked bicycle horns and struck pie pans, wood blocks, garbage can lids and anything else he thought looked and sounded funny. He played rhythm

by scratching on a rural homemaker's washboard, a sound and image central to the band's fame.

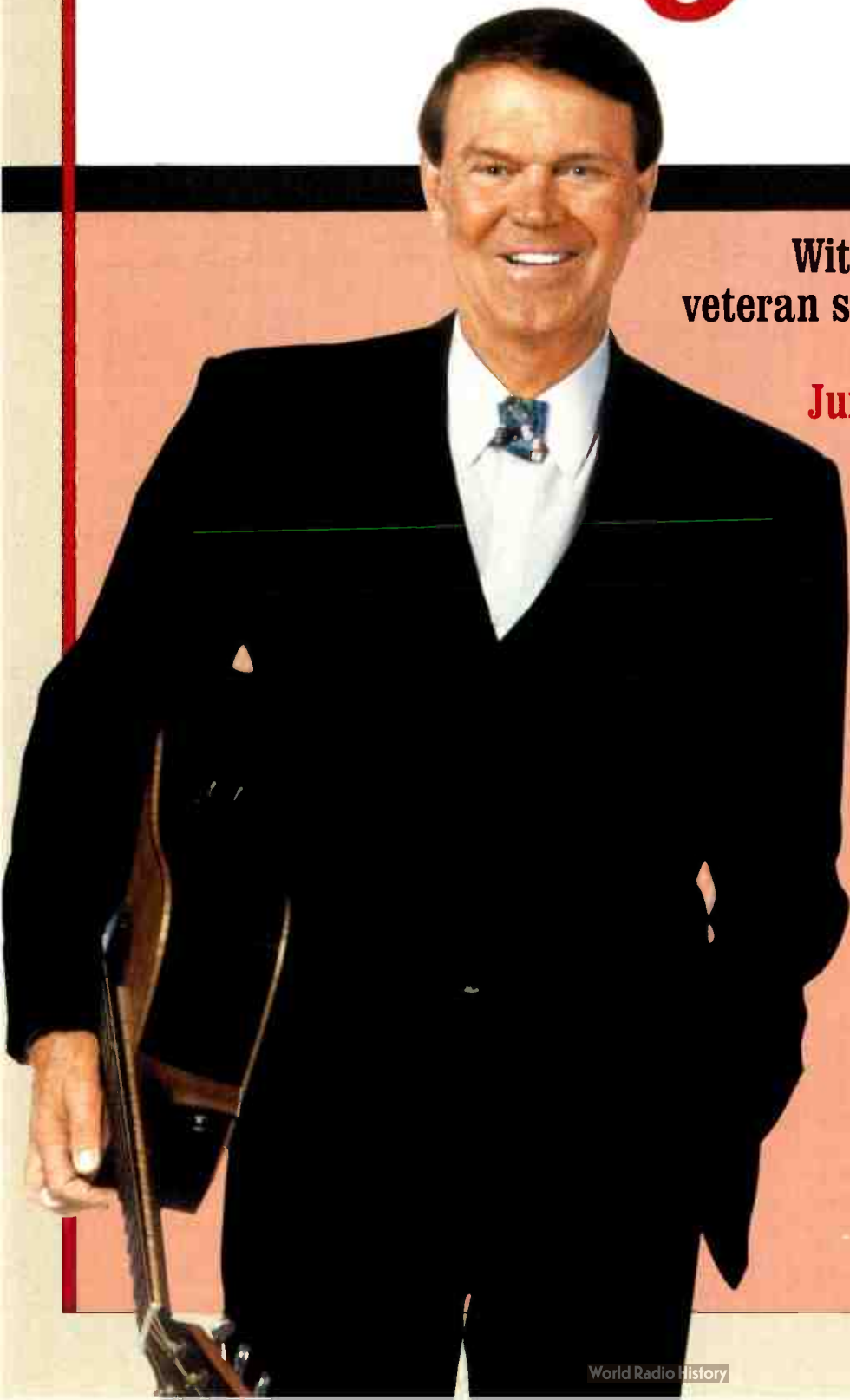
Thanks to producer Art Satherley's sensibilities, the Hot Shots enjoyed a long string of jukebox hits. Ordinarily suave and reserved, Satherley would dance for the boys in the studio to demonstrate the tempo he wanted them to play. "We never did more than two takes," Ward reported. "And he always picked the worst one ... He wanted it to sound strictly ad lib."

Kettering, the youngest Hot Shot, was called to military service during

World War II. Alabama-bred guitarist and crooner Gil Taylor replaced him just before the band left for Hollywood, where they appeared in more than 20 musical Westerns.

The Hoosier Hot Shots inspired Spike Jones and His City Slickers and prefigured Country Music Hall of Fame members Homer & Jethro as well. Their wacky parodies laid obvious groundwork for Sheb Wooley, "Weird Al" Yankovic, Cledus T. Judd and others. The Hoosier Hot Shots are gone, but they should be remembered as the treasures they were. ●

Staying Aii



With radio ignoring them, veteran stars like **Anne Murray**, **Glen Campbell** and **Juice Newton** are finding new ways to keep their careers going

Country music careers used to last decades. Legends from Kitty Wells and Eddy Arnold to George Jones and Johnny Cash enjoyed careers that stretched for 50 years or more.

These days, however, most older artists find little or no room for them on record label rosters or radio stations. Youth is in, and age means being put out to pasture.

What's a veteran artist to do? Increasingly, country's over-40 set is bypassing the pursuit of radio altogether. Instead they are issuing live concert DVDs, promoting CDs with targeted TV advertising and aiming their tours at smaller venues.

Their success suggests that there is indeed life for country veterans – at least for those willing to try new ideas to reach fans.

BY PAUL KINGSBURY

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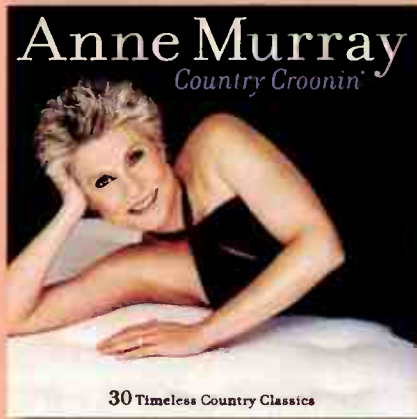
"Radio and major labels may leave great artists, but the fans never do," says an executive whose company makes DVDs for a number of veteran country artists. Glen Campbell, Juice Newton (right) and Anne Murray serve as proof.



'THE PRESSURE'S OFF'

Anne Murray, now 57, says that she's happy not to be aiming for No. 1 hits anymore. "The pressure's off," she says. "It's kind of nice. There was a great deal of pressure through most of my career to come up with a hit, and that's gone. Now it's just television. Really that's what's doing it."

Murray's 1999 two-CD collection of

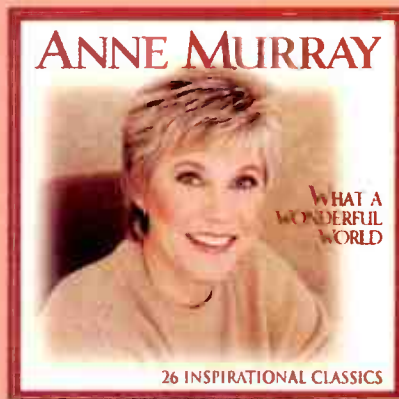


gospel and inspirational songs, *What a Wonderful World*, was marketed only on television and has sold more than a million copies – a feat only a handful of current, younger, radio-hot acts can claim. The album's success came as a pleasant surprise for Murray, who thought her recording career was winding down after more than 30 years and 30 Top 20 country hits.

But Bill Hearn, president of EMI's Christian Music Group, and his team had other ideas.

"We'd had some success in the past with high-profile artists and television personalities doing inspirational albums," says Hearn. "We thought it would be a good idea for Anne to consider that."

Murray wasn't so convinced, at first. "I was sort of dragged kicking and screaming into that whole project," she recalls with a laugh. "I was raised Catholic, and all these hymns were Presbyterian and Baptist-kind of



hymns. I just didn't feel it was honest for me. But when we put together hymns with some contemporary songs with an inspirational message, like 'Bridge Over Troubled Water,' 'I Can See Clearly Now,' 'Let It Be' – those classic songs – it worked so well. The minute we came up with that idea, I was very excited."

Targeted advertising spots on cable

STAYING Alive

REACHING OUT TO MIDDLE AMERICA

At age 67, Glen Campbell is also happy to be playing the music game his way, living in the Phoenix area with his wife and three teenage children, touring regularly and playing golf as often as he can. "It's good exercise – walking from the cart to the ball," he jokes.

Despite a laid-back attitude, Campbell has been in the public eye as much as any of his contemporaries



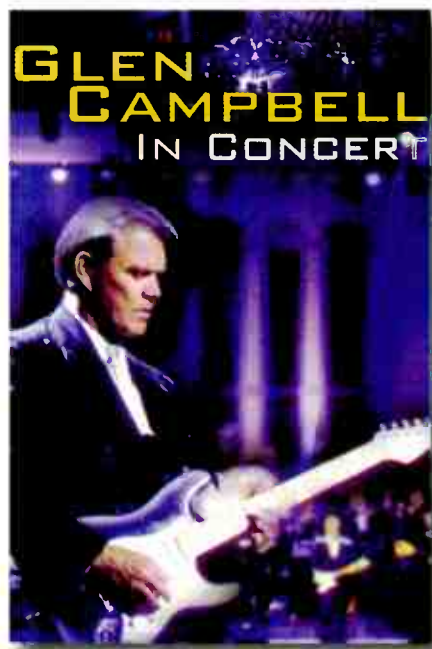
over the past two or three years. Since 1999, he's had high-profile appearances on National Public Radio's *Morning Edition*, VH-1's *Behind the Music*, CMT's *Inside Fame* and CMT's reruns of the *Glen Campbell Goodtime Hour*. A 2001 live concert special with the South Dakota Symphony on PBS-TV has been turned into a DVD release.

Media coups aside, Campbell insists that he isn't doing anything different. "I've just got a good publicist," he says, referring to Sandy Brokaw, the L.A.-based publicity veteran who has been handling Campbell for the past 13 years. Campbell credits Brokaw with the recent media coverage and jump-starting the PBS special, which led to the DVD.

Campbell's string of recent successes continued this past January, when he released *All the Best*, a new collection of his classic Capitol hits. His secret? As with Anne Murray, Capitol Records invested in a TV promotion blitz of two-minute advertising spots.

"We needed to reach out to Middle America," says Mark Copeland, senior director of commercial markets for

Capitol Records. "You know, 50 million people a week used to watch his TV show. There's an enormous number of fans still out there who aren't going into music stores or reading the latest magazines. So people have been discovering this [new release] on TV."



TV networks got the message out and allowed customers to purchase the CD through 800 numbers. Without access to radio, says Murray, "that was really the only way to let people know that I'm still doing albums."

Murray's stellar sales led directly to the 2002 release of a new, two-CD set, *Country Croonin'*, which showcases Murray's renditions of country standards. With sales topping 200,000, the album has done well enough to earn Murray a two-album extension on her contract with EMI.

Meanwhile, Murray is happily touring the U.S. and Canada, doing about 80 dates a year at 1,500- to 3,000-seat theaters as well as casinos. "This is what I do and what I love to do," she says. "The minute I'm not happy with the way I'm singing, I'll just pack it in. But so far that hasn't happened."

For his part, Campbell lets his old record company, Capitol, do what it does best. "They've been very good to me," he says of Capitol. "They sold a lot of albums over the years. I can't complain at all."

Meanwhile, he concentrates on touring – about 100 dates a year with two-month engagements in the spring and fall in Branson, Mo. – and tries to reach out to the fans in person.

"My strategy?" he says. "Really, it's just go play. Go do it."

THE FANS NEVER LEAVE

Barry Gordon, senior vice president of Image, believes older country artists still have a lot of potential in the marketplace. "Radio and major labels may leave great artists, but the fans never do," Gordon says. "We knew that if you have credible artists who can release credible products, we can help them to find their audience."

Though none of the DVDs for these

'WE'RE FLYING COACH'

Juice Newton, now 51, certainly understands the importance of achieving a balance between family life and music. After notching 10 Top 20 country hits in the '80s as well as pop crossover successes, Newton dropped out of the music business at the end of the decade to raise her son Tyler and daughter Jessica with husband Tom Goodspeed, general manager of the San Diego Polo Club. She really didn't make a major push to get back into music until 1995.

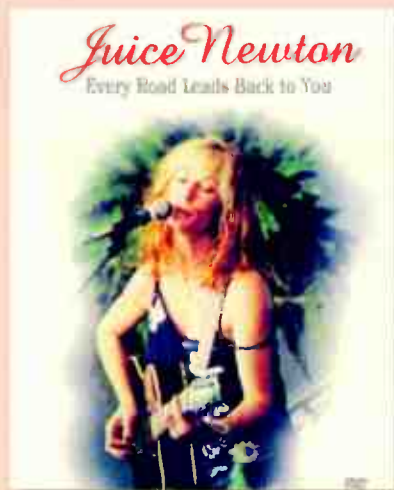
"I knew it was a risk," she says of the decision to drop out. "I feel comfortable saying I've never regained that momentum. But that was my choice. And I made the right choice."

Based in the San Diego area, Newton tours steadily, doing about 100 dates a year now. But she does it at a whole different level from her heyday in the '80s. "My son will say, 'But Mom, you're Juice Newton.' And I'll say, 'That's right, but we're flying coach,'" she laughs.

To illustrate her point, Newton says she recently drove herself to a show she performed in Upland, Calif. "I took my daughter and her boyfriend and a third friend, and they had a great time," she says. "You know, it impressed her boyfriend, and they were dancing, and it was great fun. And the food was great. So they get to see it all. And then they slept as I drove home."

Though she has given up some glamour and clout, Newton finds she has more flexibility in her career now that she's no longer trying to churn out hit singles. "Once you move away from the singles game," she says, "the boundaries become limitless. Like they were before you had a career."

Now Newton headlines small shows



or opens for acts ranging from Willie Nelson to Hall & Oates. She does voiceovers for radio ads, such as Pringles Potato Chips, or narration for audiobooks.

She's continuing to release new music too. In 2002, she filmed a live concert in Los Angeles for simultaneous DVD/CD release. "That was one night, one shoot, five cameras," says Newton, emphasizing that she had basically one shot at it. "I'm not Sheryl Crow, so I had the opportunity to shoot it [only] one time, one night. And we got it."

Titled *Every Road Leads Back to You*, the DVD includes not only concert footage, but also behind-the-scenes interviews with Newton, her husband Tom and her longtime guitarist and producer Otha Young. The DVD was produced and released by Image Entertainment, one of the leading firms in the growing DVD market. Image has also released simultaneous DVD and CDs for a number of veteran country music artists, including Ronnie Milsap, Randy Travis and Lorrie Morgan.

veteran artists has broken beyond five figures in unit sales, they keep the artists in the music game in an appealing new technology that allows for interviews and other extras that fans appreciate.

Anne Murray, for instance, says she's game to try the latest technology – she's now in discussions with EMI about releasing another concert DVD later this year. But she's also philosophical about what it takes to remain

an artist in country's youth culture.

"Once you've tasted success and you've been on top, it's not easy to settle for less," she says. "But you have to bite the bullet and do what you can. And there are other things you can do. I'm 57 years old, and I'm out playing to sold-out theaters.

"So there's a place for us out here. It's not playing to 10,000 seats, but in many ways it's more satisfying. It's more intimate, and it's more fun."*



Starting Over Starting Over Startin

Starting Over, Again

After conquering a midlife crisis, Marty Stuart returns with a forward-looking album that draws on his love of the past – as always

Backstage, Marty Stuart walks by a catering table that is anything but lavish – a bowl of chips, some salsa, a pot of coffee, a bottle of cranberry juice. Stuart's contract clearly doesn't make the extravagant demands many stars require for their dressing rooms. It's that way by design.

"It's all about the music," he shrugs, as he and his three-piece supporting band, The Fabulous Superlatives, prepare for sound check on a sunny afternoon at the Galaxy Theatre in Santa Ana, Calif.

Even during warm-ups, the band's excitement about the music is evident; they play with intensity. Blues progressions, bluegrass harmonies, gospel tones – the material is all over the map. Nevertheless, there's no questioning the country origins at the heart of it all.

A take on a Porter Wagoner classic, "A Satisfied Mind," nicely summarizes what's happening in Stuart's musical world these days. Written as a mournful waltz, the song is stripped then refashioned as a rockin', driving Western theme. The music shines and glimmers in a surprisingly stirring rendition that partially disguises the dire nature of the lyrics' warning about greed.

"Satisfied Mind" mirrors Stuart's musical approach. It's a classic country song, given due respect, even as it's reworked with 21st-century energy nearly 50 years after it was introduced. And it serves as an appropriate introduction to the Mississippi native's first album of the new millennium, which bears a very direct title: *Country Music*.

With this CD, Stuart figures he's starting over – despite everything he's already experienced and achieved.

He's paid his dues, big time. In his teens, he worked as a sideman to bluegrass legend Lester Flatt. Then, in his 20s, he played guitar and mandolin with American icon Johnny Cash. He built a solo presence in the '90s that

hinged on rockabilly-tinged tunes, flashy style and cunning musicianship.

He scored a half-dozen Top 10 hits, including "Hillbilly Rock" and "Tempted," plus a couple gold albums and a Grand Ole Opry membership. In addition, he's recorded with everybody from Travis Tritt and The Staple Singers to Earl Scruggs and Rolling Stone Keith Richards.

But by decade's end, Stuart felt stifled. His 1999 theme album, *The Pilgrim*, attracted such guest performers as Ralph Stanley, George Jones and Emmylou Harris. The CD earned him critical praise and a couple of Grammy nominations, but was dismissed by radio and therefore never stirred any significant sales. "*The Pilgrim* was a bit of the *War and Peace* of my mind at the time," Stuart ruminates. "It was a love letter to country music."

It hurt to see his letter mostly ignored, but Stuart was able to view it with just enough objectivity that he could make a reasonable decision: He decided to back away from the music business.

"It's the band member in me," he explains. "I know when to lay out."

Stuart gave his road band time to look around for new jobs, playing their final concert in northern Mississippi on the last day of 1999. After the show, Stuart and his wife, Grand Ole Opry stalwart Connie Smith, headed off with no specific plans about how to start the next year.

"It was a quarter to 12 on New Year's Eve, the new millennium," he recalls, "and I remember Connie and I saying that we'd give anything if we had a church to go to. 'Wait,' we said. 'There's one.' A little cinder-block church. We walked up, a little black church, and it was rockin', man, it was rockin'. And that's where I started the new millennium."

Talk about new beginnings. Filled with the spirit, Stuart and Smith shipped off to Hawaii for a month of

BY TOM ROLAND

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Marty Stuart

relaxation – and, a mere 16 months after he turned 40, Stuart found himself with plenty of time to ponder how he would approach the last half of his life.

“I came back a different person,” he says. “It was time to start over. I took every gold record off the wall, every award off the wall, wrapped ‘em up in paper and started over.”

Stuart avoided listening to the radio. He and Smith sold their house and redecorated a new one. They took time to enjoy their life as a couple, and he began to look at the world in a way he could not during a lifetime of one-night concerts and endless sessions in windowless buildings.

“I remember one day somebody came up to me and said, ‘What’s goin’ on?’ I said, ‘I’ve been watchin’ a bird’s nest in my yard, and four little birds finally hatched today, and they’re like robins. Then a cardinal came and fed ‘em.’ They said, ‘Have you heard the new George Strait single?’ ‘No.’

“What nobody understood is, man, I left home when I was 12. I never had a summer to watch birds hatch, so it was like a totally different world – and I loved that.”

Unusual things began to happen. Instead of making hit records, Stuart scored the music for three different movies, earning a Golden Globe nomination for his work on *All the Pretty Horses*. He wrote two songs on the Dixie Chicks’ *Home* album and produced an album for actor Billy Bob Thornton. He also got an opportunity to produce another album – a tribute to his mentor and former father-in-law, Johnny Cash.

Sony executive Blake Chancey suggested a collection of Cash songs with interpretations from the current crop of hitmakers, such as Toby Keith, Tim McGraw and Kenny Chesney. Stuart turned him down.

“I couldn’t play that record for Johnny Cash,” he explains. “I don’t know why, but it just doesn’t ring true to me.”

Instead, he thought of a Cash tribute done for television in 1999, one that drew on Bob Dylan, Bruce Springsteen and Sheryl Crow. The idea took, and Stuart oversaw the development of

Kindred Spirits, which had contributions from those artists, as well as Steve Earle, Little Richard, Keb’ Mo’, Mary Chapin Carpenter and Rosanne Cash.

The album served as an appropriate bridge. It proved to Stuart that he could stand his ground artistically and still deliver music that would interest Music Row’s decision-makers.

Through *Kindred Spirits*, the Chicks album and a Grammy-winning song, “Same Old Train,” that he wrote for a 1998 tribute to country tradition, Sony had established a relationship with Stuart, and the label gave him another chance.

He was sidetracked briefly a year ago by a DUI charge. It was eventually dis-



In the 1970s, a teenage Stuart hit the road as a sideman for one of his musical idols, bluegrass legend Lester Flatt.

missed in court, though Stuart – who admits he had been drinking – refused a sobriety test. As a result, his license was restricted for a year.

“It was embarrassing, but it was a great wake-up call,” he says.

After altering his life with a 12-step program, Stuart is now free to concentrate on his new opportunity. He approaches it with typical creative vigor. Instead of hitting major markets, he decided to organize what he calls the Electric Barnyard Tour, which features several acts – including Merle Haggard, Connie Smith, Rhonda Vincent and BR549 – along with some fair-style side attractions. Instead of hitting the nation’s top population centers, he’s focused on what he calls “the backroads,” the places where real people still do real labor to fund their slice of the American dream.

A record executive told Stuart he was crazy. The suburbs are where

country music lives, not the farms and little towns. Stuart dismissed the advice, placing more weight on Haggard’s assessment: “What we’re doing is remembering the forgotten.”

In some respects, the songs on Stuart’s new album do the same thing. “Sundown in Nashville” utilizes a Ray Price-like shuffle beat; “Farmer’s Blues” finds Merle Haggard yodeling like Jimmie Rodgers while plying a rootsy, rural lyric; and “Walls of a Prison” effectively reincarnates an ominous Cash song from 1968.

But Stuart naturally imports outside musical influences, inflecting a mysterious, Chris Isaak-style vibe in “Fool for Love” and pouring Memphis soul into “Here I Am.”

Further demonstrating his ability to walk with ease in multiple eras, “Tip Your Hat” name-checks a vast array of standards – “El Paso,” “Crazy Arms,” “Cherokee Maiden,” “King of the Road” – even as Stuart shouts out a chorus that mimics Loverboy’s “Lovin’ Every Minute of It,” a song written by Robert John “Mutt” Lange in 1985, some eight years before Lange became Shania Twain’s husband and producer.

It’s one of the ways in which Stuart has rededicated himself to country music. He demonstrates that country’s past does not have to be ignored, even as the genre continues to move forward.

That parallels his own story. He’s recorded with Clint Black and Little Richard, with Tammy Wynette and Mark Knopfler, but he’s very clear on who he wants to work with in the future.

“Nobody,” he says emphatically.

“There comes a time when you get your diploma,” he explains. “Collaboration is good, and I’m still doin’ it, but I look at guys like [Ricky] Skaggs, I look at Vince [Gill], myself, Alison [Krauss] – there’s a handful of us, and we’ve gotta do it now. We’ve gotta carry the torch on.”

It’s important to Stuart to do that in a commercially viable way. But it’s even more important to do it in a way that gives him a satisfied mind. ★

Skirting Danger

Bold country divas take a fashion risk when they decide to don a mini

After this year's Grammy Awards, the media was abuzz about fashion choices. A *USA Today* forum in particular addressed the appearance of a famous country singer.

Why would Faith Hill wear something like she did? She's supposed to be a loving mother to her daughters and wife to her husband. She should be embarrassed to dress like that.

Well, yes, the dress *was* short. Really, really, *really* short. Any shorter and it would be a shirt. Many country fans gasped when they saw Hill standing on that Grammy stage in her Stella McCartney-designed gold-beaded micro-mini. On the other hand, some wolf-whistled.

Every time the miniskirt comes back into fashion, that's the reaction it draws – there's shock, and there's awe.

Created by London designer Mary Quant in the early '60s, the mini can't escape its association with that "swinging" decade. It represents the sexual revolution, rebellious youth and female empowerment, making a strong statement about the person who wears it, even today. "It's really about an attitude," says Los Angeles-based stylist Lee Moore of the daring style, "that sexy self-confidence that some women enjoy and love to flaunt."

Grand Ole Opry star Jeannie Seely discovered that flaunting your self-confidence and singing country music don't always mix. She shocked the *Opry* powers that be in 1966 when she strode onstage in a height-of-fashion miniskirt.

At the time, female country singers wore frilly, modest dresses when they came out to sing. Seely's leggy appearance got her called into the *Opry* manager's office. He mumbled about his concerns at the uproar her dress had caused.

"I said, 'Did I do something wrong here? This is the way I dress. I didn't know there was a dress code.'" she remembers. There wasn't, and she kept wearing what she wanted to wear.

Two years later, country music had an anthem that revolved around the controversial mini and all it stood for. Jeannie C. Riley hit big with "Harper Valley P.T.A.," a song about a bold, miniskirted mama fighting hypocrites in her small town. The song won a Grammy award, and Riley was standing backstage in a long gown when her name was announced. Before she knew it, the head of her record label had taken a pair of scissors to her dress, quickly converting it into a knee-baring mini. From then on it was all short skirts and boots for Riley.

"It made her appear to be that woman from the song. Her label thought it was cute, but she was so obviously uncomfortable dressing that way," says Patsi Bale Cox, co-author of Loretta Lynn's autobiography *Still Woman Enough* and a long-time observer of country music. Riley eventually dropped her hemlines to reflect herself instead of a character in a song.



Shania Twain raised eyebrows with a raised hemline.

Eventually the mini went out of style and attempts to revive it refused to take hold. But this year's spring fashion shows featured models sporting dress after dress that stopped short at the top of the thigh. Fashion-savvy stars picked up on the trend, wearing designer minis to formal events.

Country artists were right there with them. "A few years ago, you might have said that female country artists had stricter fashion rules to follow than other types of artists, but that's changed," says Cox. "Just look at some of the videos they make now – some of them are practically pornographic. I don't think you can equate short skirts with that kind of overt sexuality. They're really just kinky and fun."

Sexual or not, the look definitely displays a lot of skin. "There's no place to hide, so it's a style she really has to look and feel right with," says Moore.

Faith Hill feels right with it. Deana Carter, who caused a few gasps of her own when she wore a super-short dress to last year's CMA Awards show, has no problem with the look. Shania Twain may have been the first of today's country women to wow an audience by wearing a tiny skirt when she donned that black strapless number at the 1999 Grammys, though she seems to prefer wearing pants lately.

All of them are striking, confident women, who often find themselves battling against country music's conventional wisdom. More often than not they win those battles.

So, wearing a mini? That's no big thing.

— Nancy Henderson

In an Austin coffee shop, The Derailers have found enlightenment at the bottom of their second refill. In fact, co-founders Tony Villanueva and Brian Hofeldt seem to have stumbled onto the impossible; there might just be a way for the self-proclaimed “Hardest Working Band in Country Music” to keep their 250-dates-a-year touring schedule without leaving home.

“We can start farming it out,” laughs Hofeldt, who shares vocal and guitar duties with Villanueva. “We’ll recruit a younger, stronger batch of Derailers and send ’em out on the road for a third of our salary plus a sack of onions. With franchising our shelf life is forever.”

Although the audition process might make a fascinating television reality show, the hitch in the plan is finding stand-ins who can come close to the seamless fusion of Bakersfield country and ’60s pop that Hofeldt and Villanueva have developed over the last 10 years.

Buying an extra set of suits is another potential pitfall. The Derailers have earned a reputation as modern country’s impeccably sharp-dressed men. With their tailored suits and well-oiled hairdos, Hofeldt, Villanueva, bassist Ed Adkins and drummer Scott Matthews have never joined the rest of the nation’s casual-Friday movement; they’re a throwback to the theory that show business folk are obligated to dress the part.

But the biggest hitch is the timing. Their brand-new album, *Genuine*,

wants. What we have going for us is that even as our records get more polished, they’re still very straightforward. I think there’s a lot of people who have fond memories of country music that was a little more stripped down.”

Villanueva is the first to admit that their distinctive sound has long been a blessing and curse. While it works great on the dancehall circuit and in Europe, they’ve been unfairly tagged as an alt-country band when their sound is more steeped in country tradition than most acts on the radio.

Villanueva believes they get called “alternative” simply because that’s the box for anything that doesn’t fit the current country radio formula. “We’re more left coast than left field,” says Villanueva. “We like to say we’re here to put the ‘Western’ back in ‘country & Western.’”

Although they’ve lived in Austin for 10 years, The Derailers’ fascination with West Coast country reaches back to Villanueva and Hofeldt’s Oregon upbringings. Villanueva admits a childhood obsession with Glen Campbell, while Hofeldt found Owens by retracing The Beatles’ influences.

one of Texas’ most venerable honky-tonks, the Broken Spoke.

“Playing our stuff and standards from folks like Harlan Howard, Roger Miller and Whisperin’ Bill Anderson at the Spoke was our trade school,” Villanueva says. “Our job was to keep people on the dance floor for four hours, so you can’t help but learn what

makes a great song. The history of country music comes in through your pores as you do it – along with the smoke.”

As a band of Oregonians who call Texas home, The Derailers seem to hold absolutely no grudge toward Nashville or country radio for the tough road they’ve had to travel.

“We’re not anti-Nashville,” says Villanueva. “It’s the home of country music. I get there and as soon as I’m in the rental car I turn on WSM radio. The heritage is amazing, and it’s a living tradition. It wouldn’t just be crazy to bite the hand that feeds you, it would be downright disrespectful. If you say you love country music, how could you say you hate Nashville?”

While Villanueva has long been a happy-go-lucky optimist, he says the



Unfortunate timing and unplanned sidelines aside, the retro-leaning Derailers keep the faith by working hard and aiming for that elusive hit

STAYING

finds the band adding an extra layer of commercial polish to their self-styled sound. So this is not the time for stand-ins: No one else can blend Buck Owens and The Beatles with the same verve as this well-practiced quartet.

“We’re not afraid to say our goal is to be on the radio,” Villanueva says. “The tough part is bridging the gap between what we do and what radio

“Family is important to both of us,” Villanueva says, “only his parents showed him their Beatles records and mine said we couldn’t bring that in the house.”

They met in Portland when both were 21 years old, and the pair agreed they were in the wrong city for traditional country. That’s when they packed the van for Austin and worked their way into the regular schedule of

last two years have only strengthened his sunny disposition. Not long after seeing their major-label debut, *Here Come the Derailers*, get lost in the shuffle of its unfortunate release date – Sept. 11, 2001 – Villanueva found himself serving a monthlong stint in an Austin intensive-care unit with a nasty case of pneumonia. True to form, he asked Hofeldt to honor the band’s



The Derailers insist they're not an "alternative" band. "We're more left coast than left field," says Villanueva (second from left), with bandmates Hofeldt, Adkins and Matthews.

THE

COURSE

dates without him and began penning what would become the closing song on *Genuine* – the rousing gospel tune called "The Wheel."

"I learned a lot flat on my back," he says. "And it's summed up on 'The Wheel.' I had to learn to really let go of things and to be really grateful for good friends. It was a good learning experience."

Not even the grace of gospel could

save The Derailers from being dealt another unfortunate record release date – *Genuine* hit stores March 25, right in the midst of America's march toward Baghdad.

But bad timing hasn't pushed them any closer toward holding auditions and lining up their fantasy franchise. In fact, it too seems to have only strengthened their resolve to keep on

playing any beer joint or honky-tonk that'll have them.

"We've been blessed to be able to do what we want to do and to have found people who enjoy it," Hofeldt says. "We like to stay busy. It's fast and exciting. There will be time to celebrate later. Right now, it's just great fun with great rewards."

— Andy Langer

COURTESY LUCKY DOG RECORDS

The Kentucky HeadHunters have been performing "Walk Softly on This Heart of Mine" from their Grammy-winning album, *Pickin' on Nashville*, for nearly 14 years now. But these days the song has a whole new meaning.

Three years ago, Richard Young – the band's heavy, hairy guitarist and primary spokesman – suffered a heart attack onstage. "You know how a penicillin shot hurts?" the 48-year-old Young relates. "Well, imagine that, except you're feeling like they're sticking it in your heart."

But the band, whose survival instincts make Methuselah seem suicidal, treated the setback like just another hump on a long, combative road. Within a month, Young was back onstage, making his return in 100-degree Birmingham heat and rocking out as hard as ever. And the band –



"Independent, bombastic spirits" (clockwise from left) Richard Young, Anthony Kenney, Greg Martin, Fred Young and Doug Phelps

Heart of the HeadHunters

From a key member's coronary to Music Row's cold shoulder, nothing seems to slow down country's hard-driving rockers from Kentucky

Young, his coonskin-capped drummer brother Fred Young, their guitarist cousins Greg Martin and Anthony Kenney, and lead vocalist Doug Phelps – stepped right back into their 100-shows-a-year routine.

Indeed, to illustrate how quickly they returned to normal, Young recalls a verbal "knockdown-dragout" that occurred in West Virginia shortly after his return to the fold. The melee got so intense that the HeadHunters' driver tried to mediate – and, while looking backward, ran their bus into a tree.

"They said I was trying too hard to be the boss, and we got to yelling, and the bus driver turned around," explains Young. "We were playing a big fair, and to get out you had to go through a residential section. And

there were a couple of tight turns."

The bus ended up stuck between a steel gas line and a water tank. While trying to back out, the vehicle struck a stubby tree branch that busted out a window. "That was the only thing that stopped the fight," Young says with a grin.

The band's latest album, *Soul*, emphasizes their R&B influences, especially the rocked-up soul of Memphis and Muscle Shoals, Ala. The album proves there are still plenty of ideas in these aging, hard-working longhairs.

For the last couple of years, the band has toured as part of the Easyriders Bike Show Tour, a string of large-hall extravaganzas affiliated with *Easyriders* magazine. The HeadHunters and the events' atten-

dees seem to be a good fit: Bikers tend to be independent, bombastic spirits, and so do the HeadHunters.

Young contends that the HeadHunters have lasted as long as they have because of their hard-headed aversion to taking orders. It was a trait they showed from the beginning of their major-label career. For instance, Young remembers, when Mercury Records was about to sign them in 1989 for what turned out to be their glory days, the label's then-boss, Harold Shedd, offered them a contract with one request: Young had to lose some weight.

Young, whose burly appearance has remained basically unchanged since high school, shot back with a good-humored steeliness that is vintage HeadHunters. "Harold," he quipped, "who's gonna hug the fat girls?"

End of discussion.

"There never was another word said about it," Young remembers. "That was it. So I'm still huggin' the fat girls ... and the skinny ones, too."

— Jack Hurst

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Finding Her Wings

After a psychologically abusive marriage, Tammy Cochran takes flight by trusting her instincts and making the right choices

Tammy Cochran isn't going to let a few empty seats deter her. She recognizes that an invitation to open the show for a George Strait concert tour rates as a career breakthrough.

But she also realizes that it presents a challenge: How does a newcomer attract attention when some fans are arriving in the middle of her show and others are there only to see the superstar headliner?

Yet Cochran, dressed sensibly in blouse and slacks, her long blond hair pulled back, soldiers on during this particular night with confidence and poise as she gamely presents her opening set to a crowd inside Washington, D.C.'s MCI Center – most of whom have come, obviously, to see one of the few live appearances scheduled this year by Strait. For her efforts, she's rewarded with politely enthusiastic applause.

"People who know me have told me that I'm a totally different person when I step on the stage," says the 33-year-old Ohio native. "I guess it's true. Growing up, I sang for an escape, to not think about my brothers being sick and other stuff going on in my life. And I still find it's an escape. I really don't think I'm myself when I'm up there. I have a lot more confidence when I'm singing."

Cochran's finale is a full-tilt rendition of "Angels in Waiting," her first hit. The powerful, deeply felt ballad is her tribute to her two older brothers, Shawn and Alan, her only siblings, who both died from cystic fibrosis, a genetic lung disease.

The disease so rocked the family that Cochran admits she was "a mistake." As she explains, "Once my mom and dad found out the boys had it, they said, 'OK, we can't do this anymore. We can't put another person through this.'" And then baby Tammy came along – healthy and free of the disease.

As Cochran launches fervently into "Angels," a hush falls over the crowd. People put down their popcorn, shut off their cell-phones and listen. As always, "Angels" strikes a profound sense of recognition in everyone who has ever suffered the premature loss of someone they loved.

But the song nearly didn't make her debut album. And when it did, no one – not even Cochran herself – envisioned

the song as a possible single. "Angels" wasn't supposed to become what it became," she says.

Cochran remembers having to lobby just to get it included on her self-titled album. "My contract called for 10 songs, and we cut 11 just to be on the safe side," she says. "When it came time to cut one song from the list, there were people who said, 'Well, "Angels" is probably the song with the least single potential.'" The record company wanted her to pull it.

"But I told them, 'I just can't cut it; I may never have another chance to do this.' I told them they could drop anything else from the album, but I had to keep 'Angels in Waiting' on there."

As it turns out, the song's candor and sensitivity turn out to typify part of what makes Cochran so refreshing. Both her albums, *Tammy Cochran* and the more recent *Life Happened*, grapple not only with lost love and roads not taken, but also with the deeper implications of loss and change.

Cochran insists that all the emotions in her songs are drawn at least indirectly from her own life. *Life Happened* doesn't feature anything as overtly autobiographical as "Angels," yet Cochran recalls that she purposefully searched for emotionally

hard-hitting songs. At one point, she stalled after recording the first five songs. Working with producer Billy



Cochran wrote four of the songs on her new album.

"If people don't like them, you feel like, 'Well, they don't like me.' But I sat down and told him my

feelings are not going to get hurt. I know I'm not the best songwriter in town, but everyone gets lucky once in a while."

As it turns out she got lucky with four of her own songs. A few, she admits, were inspired by scenes from her brief but spectacularly unhappy marriage.

"My ex-husband was jealous," recalls the singer, who married a few years after moving to Nashville in 1991. "He didn't want me to sing; it just wasn't allowed." One of her efforts, "I Used to Be That Woman," is a song about infidelity, while her "All in How You Look at Things" and "Go Slow" find her expressing lessons she had to learn the hard way.

"I was in a marriage where I wasn't allowed to be who I am," she recalls without apparent bitterness. "I was being put down a lot, and after a while of people putting you down, you start to believe it. It takes a while to get out of that."

Even after getting out of a bad situation, Cochran says, it takes time to rebuild self-esteem. "You finally realize, 'Hey, nobody's puttin' me down anymore. What am I gonna do now?'" she laughs. "Then you have to go through the process of, 'Well, then what exactly am I?'"

Not everything on the album draws on her hard-knock life. The second single, "Love Won't Let Me," finds a woman experiencing the joys of the first blush of love – despite her tendency to want to be cautious with her heart.

"I tried to keep the song selection pretty much like the first album. Of course there's a different producer, and it was a different experience in the studio. Before, I was kind of intimidated – 'Oh, I don't know if I should expose that much of how I feel!'"

"This time I got over that," she says with a soft smile. "I've gotten in touch more with who I am."

— Bob Allen



"He didn't want me to sing – it just wasn't allowed," Cochran says of her former husband.

Haunted

Sammy Kershaw's face registers shock when he's told that 10 years have passed since "She Don't Know She's Beautiful" became a No. 1 hit.

"Is that right? *Ten* years?" asks the muscular, ruggedly handsome singer with the boyish grin. "Are you sure about that?"

Featured on Kershaw's second album, *Haunted Heart*, the song indeed topped the charts in the spring of 1993. He shakes his head in disbelief as he thinks back to the excitement that accompanied the time when the Louisiana native established himself as a country star.

Another date sticks more painfully in his memory – his last hit, "Love of My Life," which came out as 1997 drew to a close. A smash for the singer, it's also the one, in hindsight, that he now says caused him to lose his focus – and nearly lose his career.

While dates may cause him consternation, he nonetheless can pinpoint exactly how long – four and a half years – it took him to recover from the highs and the lows that "Love of My Life" brought him. If the initial years of stardom flew by, the recent ones of career reflection have moved with a crawl.

These days, the brash Cajun displays the quiet conviction of a man who has looked deep inside himself. He admits his mistakes, and he shows the peace and grace that such acceptance can deliver. He believes he now is ready to move on, to rediscover the man and the singer he once was.

His new album, *I Want My Money Back*, benefits from the confidence

gained from all those personal insights. The 11-song album – full of powerful, message-laden songs – is unmistakably country; his voice, with its distinctive, Cajun-flavored soul, is unmistakably Sammy Kershaw.

"'Love of My Life' was a great song, but it wasn't really a Sammy Kershaw song," he says, dressed in jeans, a white T-shirt and work boots in the kitchen of the modest house that serves as his office. "No one thought I could do a song like that. That's probably one of the reasons it was a hit – no one expected it from me."

The song marked Kershaw's attempt to broaden his audience beyond country's core consistency. "At the time, it seemed to me that everybody was crossing over," he says. "I was sure that song was gonna cross over, too. I got greedy. The song was a huge hit on country radio, but that wasn't enough for me. I wanted more."

He stops, sinking back in contemplation, then continues. "You know, people think that money is the root of all evil, but it is the *want* of money that is the root of evil. I had plenty, but I wanted more. And that's what got me in trouble. When that song didn't cross over, it broke my heart, killed my spirit. There were strong words between the label and me, and I probably made some enemies ... After that, none of my songs ever did as well.

"By the time I left Mercury, I was such a mess I didn't even want a record deal. I had totally messed myself up. It was all my fault, no one but me. And I have to live with those mistakes."

Though Kershaw took a self-imposed sabbatical from recording, he by no means became a recluse. He continued to perform live, and, during this time, his long friendship with singer Lorrie Morgan turned romantic. They married nearly two years ago. It was her fifth marriage, his fourth, but that didn't deter either.



The new CD marks Kershaw's first solo effort in four years.



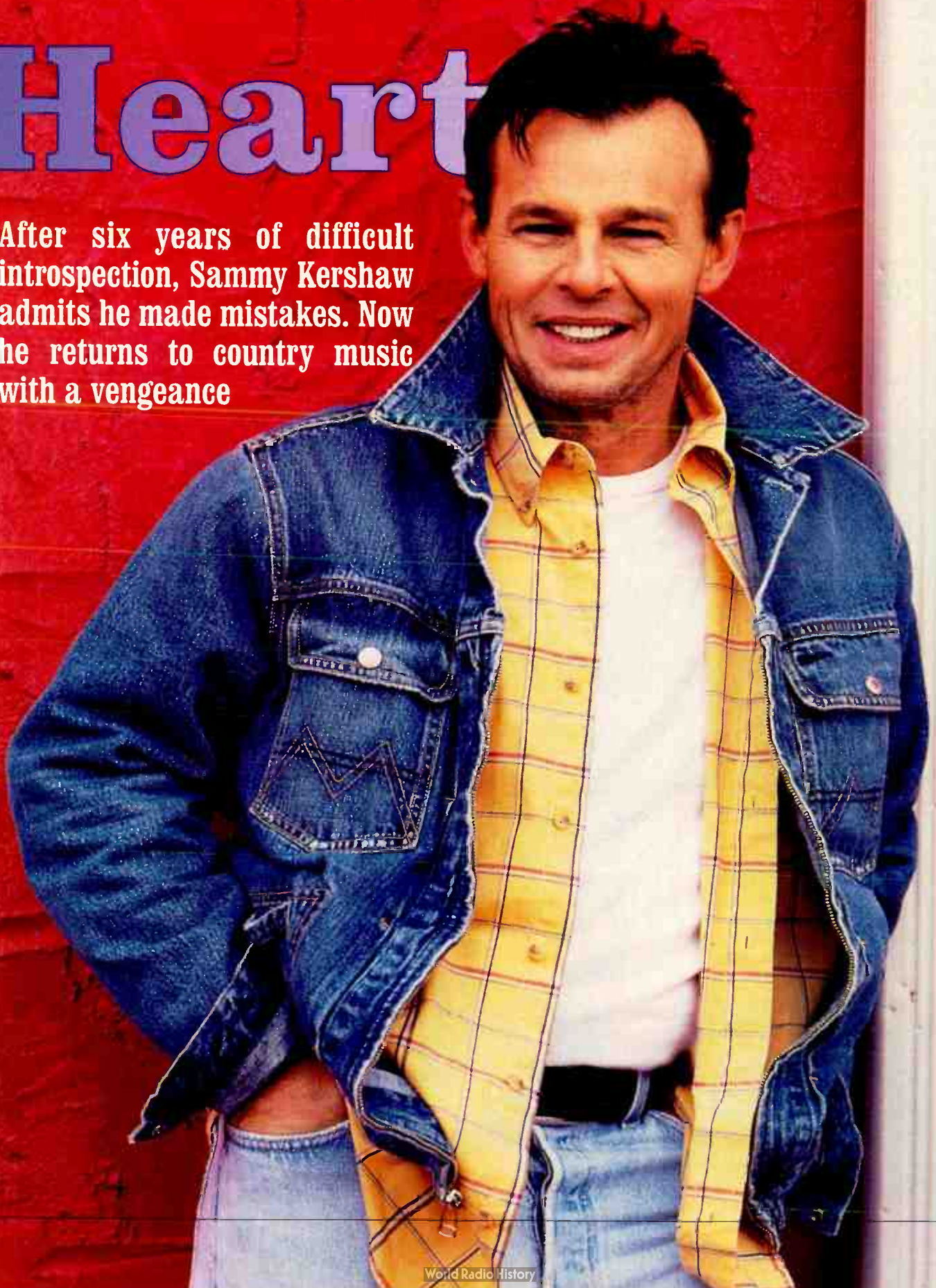
Kershaw "took a chance on love" when he married Lorrie Morgan in 2001.

PHOTOGRAPHY

BY KAY WEST

Heart

After six years of difficult introspection, Sammy Kershaw admits he made mistakes. Now he returns to country music with a vengeance



Sammy Kershaw

"If you reach a certain age, you have a past," he says. "Everybody has one. Hopefully, you learn some things from that past. I'm not perfect, and neither is she, but we have both lived enough not to expect that of each other. There are no guarantees in life, but that can't stop you if you truly love someone. If you won't take a chance on love, then what good is it?"

Between tours, he settled into a new life with Morgan and their large, incorporated family of seven children. He also devoted time to things he loves – hunting, fishing, working on a farm he bought six years ago, and helping run Hotchickens.com, the Nashville restaurant he owns with Morgan.

"I'm an outdoorsman," he says with a grin. "I love to be outside, and I love doing things with my hands. I'm a carpenter by trade, and I'm not afraid to get dirty."

About a year ago, Kershaw was leaving his office when FedEx delivered a package. It was addressed to his manager, but feeling a CD inside and recognizing the name on the envelope, he opened the package. Inside he found the song that would give him direction out of his funk.

"I put the CD in my car, and this song came on, and by the time I got to



"I may not have had what I once had," says Kershaw (fishing on his farm), "but I've got plenty."

the end of the driveway, I was crying like a sissy," he remembers. "It takes me about 30 minutes to get to the house from the farm; I played that song over and over, and I cried all the way. By the time I got home, I knew I had to record that song."

The song, "Paper Heart," is a poignant tear-jerker about a father and his daughter. It prompted him to call his manager. "I told him I was ready to get back in the studio," he says.

A former Mercury colleague worked for Audium Records, an independent label that has become home to several country veterans. Kershaw agreed to record for Audium after discussing the terms over the phone.

"It was like being back in the studio for the first time, that excitement of thinking anything can happen, but not expecting anything," he says. "I hadn't felt like that since my first album."

That excitement and joy are evident on *I Want My Money Back*. Kershaw's favorite song on the album is "Metropolis," a bitter-sweet ode to leaving home and coming back – and the grace that can come with maturity.

These days, Kershaw is happy right where he is. "I'd like to get back on country radio again," he says. "I'm taking the gamble and I hope it works. You have to take chances sometimes, 'cause scared money don't win. But, I'm not looking for anything more than what keeps me comfortable ever again. I'm not gonna wish for any more than I've got; I may not have what I once had, but I've got plenty."

"I don't give a damn if I die a pauper, as long as I can play my music and have my family close to me." *



Pretty As A Peach

Nothing tastes more like summer than biting into one of Georgia's finest

George du Maurier, a 19th century French novelist and illustrator, once pledged his support for what is arguably the tastiest of summer fruits. "An apple is an excellent thing," he said, "until you have tried a peach."

His esteem for the peach is no doubt shared by 21st century Southerners. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, peaches are the third most popular fruit behind the apple and the orange. An argument could be made that the first- and second-ranked fruits owe their status to the fact that a good portion of their sales come in the form of fruit juice – there's not much call for bottled or frozen peach juice, after all – and their abundant, year-round availability.

Moreover, apples and oranges simply do not inspire the catchy and descriptive expressions provoked by the peach. Pretty as a peach. Peachy keen. Just peachy. A peaches-and-cream complexion. Ain't she a peach!

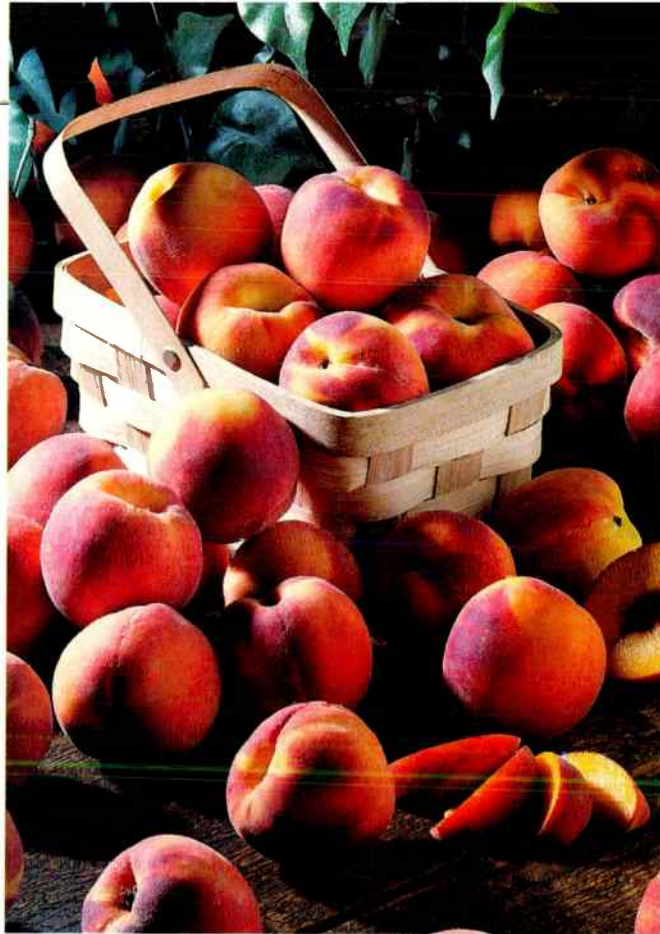
Though one can find peaches in the grocery store in the middle of November, they are a pale imitator of what we find stacked in handbaskets in a humble roadside stand around the Fourth of July. Winter peaches have probably traveled all the way from South America. In order to make that lengthy and time-consuming journey, they'd be picked before they were ripe, then packed tight in a box and shipped north. Thus, taking a bite of a cold-weather peach is about as satisfying as gnawing a tennis ball – though the ball has more fuzz these days than commercially grown peaches, which now go through a de-fuzzing machine.

As peach season begins in May, growers look at color and the "power of pressure" – the squeeze test to know the right time to pick. The harvest is first put through a hydra-cooler machine, which takes out the field heat. Peaches can be as hot as 90° when plucked from the tree in midsummer, and the hydra-cooler brings the temperature down to about 32° – not frozen, but cold enough to keep them from spoiling during the shipping process. After cooling, they are sent through the washing and brushing system.

When the first yellow and white peaches arrive in farmers' markets and along roadside stands – the earliest harvest begins in mid-May – it is a celebratory signal that summer has arrived. The sensual experience of sinking their teeth into a sweet Southern peach can drive food writers to drool ecstatic plaudits onto their keyboards.

Nathalie Dupree, award-winning cookbook author and food-show hostess, writes in an essay on peaches: "I greet the first summer peaches eagerly, eating them as I do my first tomatoes – over the sink, juice dribbling down my chin."

In his fine Southern food cookbook, *Beans, Greens, and Sweet*



Georgia Peaches, author Damon Lee Fowler writes: "The only place I could go through a summer without eating a single peach is Bonaventure Cemetery – because I'd have to be dead as a doornail. Peaches are the very essence of a Southern summer, lending their spicy, floral perfume and tart, mellow flavor to countless buttery cobblers, soothing ice creams, potent, bourbon-laced conserves, and spicy chutneys. But the best way to eat them is still the simplest – right out of your hand."

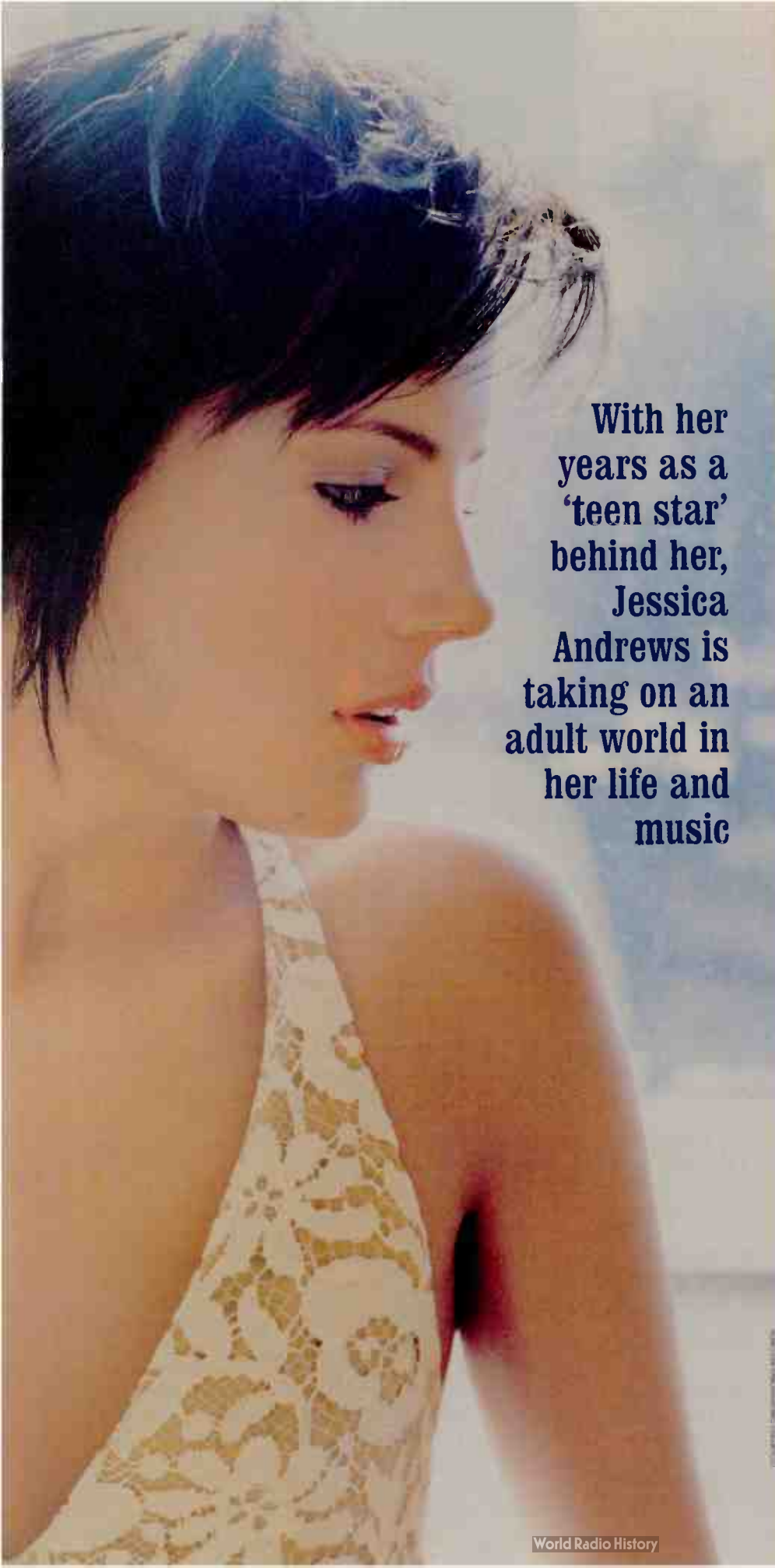
Country stars love their peaches too, especially those who proudly hail from Georgia. "There is nothing like a Georgia peach," says Travis Tritt, who grew up in Marietta. "I love them any way you can eat 'em. Right out of the basket, slice 'em up and sprinkle a little sugar on 'em, homemade peach ice cream. But the best way to eat Georgia peaches is peach cobbler, and no one makes a peach cobbler like my mama."

Peaches are believed to have been first cultivated in ancient China; they were introduced to Greece around 322 B.C., and finally brought to America by the Spaniards. Peaches were first grown in Georgia during the 1700s.

California may be the leading grower of peaches in the country, but peach pride reigns in the South, particularly South Carolina and Georgia. Georgia is officially known as the Peach State, sporting a peach on its state license plates and lottery tickets.

Today, there are nearly 300 types of peaches – quite a bushel of choices. "Southern peaches are the best," says Martin Eubanks of the South Carolina Department of Agriculture. "Peaches in the south have a good, high sugar content. The trees are rooted in acidic soil and live in humid growing conditions. All of that together brings out the flavor of the peach. When you bite into a Southern peach, you know you are going to get flavor."

— Kay West



With her years as a 'teen star' behind her, Jessica Andrews is taking on an adult world in her life and music

At 19, Jessica Andrews looks exactly like what she is, and what she isn't.

Dressed in jeans and straw flip-flops, she eases into a chair at a trendy sidewalk café with the Gap-ad confidence of a young woman who recently moved out of her parents' nest and into her own apartment — which she did. Her long, girlish hair has been trimmed into a wispy salon cut, which makes her blend with the students and young professionals who are munching on mixed greens and

Ind

sipping tea. No one notices Andrews as a celebrity, probably because of her low-key style. She's basking in both her success and anonymity under the sun-splashed Nashville skyline. And that's exactly the way she wants it.

With the release of her third CD, Andrews is that intangible mixture of what ultimately makes a country music artist a star: She can dress up, make charming videos and sing the heck out of a song while managing to keep her feet firmly planted in the no-nonsense values with which she was raised. Anyone seeing her here would be surprised to learn this teenager-for-only-six-more-months with the pink polish on her toes has entertained in huge arenas as an opening act for Tim McGraw, scored a No. 1 single with the family-pride anthem "Who I Am" and become a barefoot video darling on the CMT countdown.

There's been some growing up in the two years since Andrews swung from a rope swing into our living rooms with "Who I Am." The shorter hair, she says, represents "moving on" — not just out of her parents' house, but on to new ground as an artist. While "Who I Am" was a major career breakthrough, the pressure is on to stretch and grow musically with this album, simply called *Now*.

The first single signals the arrival of the "new" Jessica. "There's More to Me Than You" is no little-girl tribute to

her grandmother. The sassy, take-charge lyrics find her dusting off a bad relationship and finding the strength to move on: *You always said it was your way or the highway/So I'm shiftin' my life into drive.*

"The biggest thing about this record is that I have grown up a lot in the last few years," she says, twirling pasta with a fork. "I listened to songs day in and day out. Tons of songs. I really tried to figure out where I wanted to go on this record. What did I want to accomplish? I had a vision. I knew I didn't want it to be a repeat of *Who I*

"He played the song for me, and it was special for both of us because it kind of said what we were feeling at the time," she says. "We were kind of like a magnet to each other from day one."

The new relationship came at a time of bittersweet transition for the singer. Since the day her father quit his factory job in Huntingdon, Tenn., to move the family to Nashville when she was just 14, Andrews had lived with her parents. After the success of the last album, she paid them back by buying them a new home in West Tennessee.

Her mom, Vicki Andrews, says she's

shunned by an artist. We were the ones knocking on the bus doors for so long. I always told her that those are the people who are putting her where she is. I think the reason she is so level-headed is that she didn't have stardom right away. She had time to grow and experience life."

Andrews has two dreams for her immediate future. She plans to buy a house this year. "I want something very Southwest – you know, a terra-cotta roof, lots of pottery, kind of exotic looking on the outside, very homey, full of antique pieces. I can't wait to start

Independence Day

Am. I know I affected a lot of people's lives with that song, but I felt like I've been there and done that. I'm older now. I live on my own. I have new things in my life and I want to sing about that."

Andrews told her producer, noted hit-maker Byron Gallimore (whose clientele includes superstars Tim McGraw and Faith Hill) to find her songs "about anything and everything – having kids, being in wrong relationships, things that I had to set limits on before because of my age."

The result: a more mature collection of songs about going it alone, hitting a few stumbling blocks and falling in love.

And if the album focuses a lot on falling in love, it's for a reason. He's 28-year-old singer/songwriter Marcel (he dropped his last name, Chagnon), whom Andrews met while on tour with McGraw last year. They've been inseparable ever since, spending time writing songs and enjoying such everyday things as watching movies and playing putt-putt golf. "He has made all the difference in the world and made it all fall into place for me," she says.

Marcel wrote one of the most passionate tunes on *Now*, the hot torch song "You're the Man (That Brings the Woman Out of Me)." The song has an especially significant meaning for Andrews. She first heard it in Ottawa, Canada, when Marcel flew up to see her while she was on tour.



"I have new things in my life and I want to sing about that," says Andrews, with a more mature look, a steady boyfriend, Marcel (above) and a new CD.



looking at floor plans."

And she intends to explore another passion: "Absolutely. I want to be in movies." She's quite serious. Andrews has an agent in Los Angeles who is shopping her talents. She recently made her network television debut on the WB series *Greetings From Tucson*, playing a cheerleader. But she says her greater goal is to take on roles like the daughter in *White Oleander* or even the heroine in her favorite film of all time, *Titanic*.

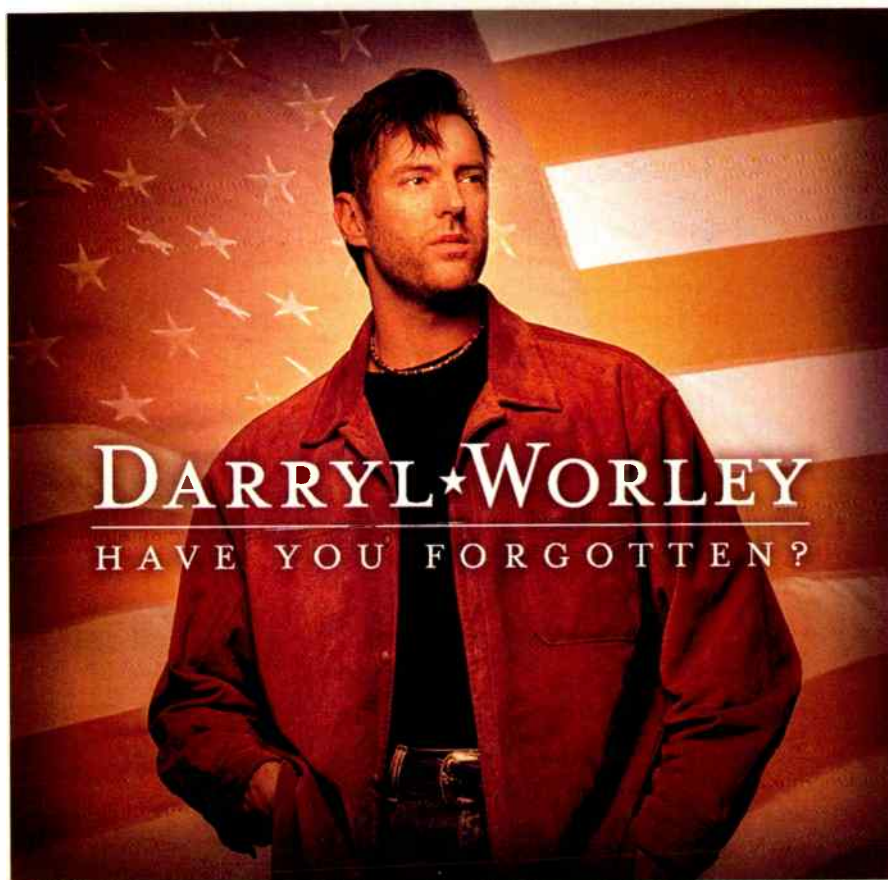
"There has been a lot of stuff I've learned, and learned quickly, in the last few years," she reflects. "Probably the thing I've learned most, and it's taken me a while, is to know what you want and always be true to yourself. I know that's a cliché, but it really is the truth. When you're a new artist and you're pushed in a lot of different directions, it's easy to lose focus on what you want to do."

"I come from the South, and a small little town. There is nothing fake about that. I have the strength that will always keep me grounded. It's about staying true to yourself, and staying on that path of what you want to do."

— Miriam Pace Longino

very happy that her daughter's success has come gradually, allowing her to mature as a person and an artist.

"From the beginning, we talked a lot about how she doesn't need to get above herself. It's so easy to do that," Vicki says. "Watching everything that has happened to LeAnn Rimes, you see that it can be just overwhelming. It happens so fast. I always told Jessica to focus on remembering who she was, because most of her life we were fans. We know what it feels like to be



DARRYL WORLEY
HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN?

DARRYL WORLEY

Have You Forgotten?

DREAMWORKS

★★★

A 2002 visit to troops in Afghanistan, on the hunt for 9/11 villain Osama bin Laden, prompted Worley and his songwriting buddy Wynn Varble to come up with "Have You Forgotten?" Released months later on the eve of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, most listeners took it as a rallying cry for the bombing of Baghdad, a bit of retrospective misinterpretation that Worley did little to discourage.

Because the single received such a huge response, Worley hastily prepared an album to go along with it. It's not exactly a new release, combining four new songs with a dozen selections taken from Worley's first two CDs.

Though it struck an instant nerve with fans, the title track won't likely have a long shelf life. With its bombastic arrangement and heavy-handed lyrics, it lacks the universal touch that makes Alan Jackson's "Where Were You (When the World Stopped Turning)" a

better candidate for immortality.

By comparison, the other new songs are stronger. In "I Will Hold My Ground," Worley declares his willingness to stand up to threats over a hard-charging country beat. "Shiloh," which offsets the belligerence of the title cut, presents a sobering, emotional reflection on the consequences of war. "I Need a Breather" is a light-hearted change of pace with coconut-oil-and-señoritas lyrics set to Nashville's version of a Caribbean beat.

For listeners unfamiliar with Worley's earlier albums, the previously issued tracks should come as a wake-up call. Well-crafted and varied, the songs are firmly grounded in country tradition while making intelligent, creative use of recent influences and innovations. Some, like "A Good Day to Run" and "I Miss My Friend," were hits; others could – and should – have been.

While "Have You Forgotten?" has brought Worley more attention, it's in the rest of this ample collection that the best evidence of his considerable talents can be found.

— Jon Weisberger

RHONDA VINCENT

One Step Ahead

ROUNDER

★★★★

The title track on Vincent's new album finds her singing harmony on the chorus with Alison Krauss. The two have been friends since they were young girls playing bluegrass on the same Midwestern circuit of festivals and music parks. Now they're two of the biggest bluegrass stars around – but they also have evolved two very different styles. Krauss' tender, understated soprano and lilting fiddle emphasize folk-ish lyrics and pop melodies. Vincent's hard-edged soprano and mandolin chops stress the rhythmic drive and high lonesome sound of traditional bluegrass. This is a matter of emphasis rather than exclusivity – Krauss can surely push the rhythm and Vincent can certainly interpret a ballad – but the differences are impossible to ignore.

On the song "One Step Ahead of the Blues," for example, Vincent begins by singing *Sometimes I feel confident like I'm in control*, and few vocalists have ever sounded so self-assured. She brings a ferocious self-confidence to



every vocal and band arrangement that she does, and that's a large part of her appeal. But when she tries to confess a loss of nerve later in the song, she's unconvincing; she's unable to drop her psychological armor for even a moment. For that, she needs Krauss.

Vincent's aggressive edge makes her records quite exciting, but her inability to sound vulnerable limits her impact. She can sing the part of the victim on a ballad, but the betrayed wife in "You

Can't Take It With You When You Go," the son of divorced parents on "Caught in the Crossfire" and the abandoned lover in "Pathway of Teardrops" are so blameless that they seem like abstractions rather than real human beings. But when Vincent roars through an up-tempo number, her piercing voice and focused arrangements are matchless.

— Geoffrey Himes



JESSICA ANDREWS

Now
DREAMWORKS
★★★

Things change, and so have I, Jessica Andrews announces on her new album. Understandably, the 19-year-old wants the world to know she's grown up since her 1999 debut, *Heart Shaped World*. But do all of these personal developments translate into growth in her music? Yes and no.

Working once again with producer Byron Gallimore, Andrews continues to impress with her vocal talent, and with her phrasing sometimes reminiscent of Faith Hill. Heavy-hitting Nashville songwriters abound, and Andrews even contributes to two of the cuts, reflecting a confidence in her still-developing craft.

But while there are some gems such as "When Gentry Plays Guitar" and "Good Time" (the album's most engaging and country-sounding cut, in the tradition of a sassy Tammy Wynette or Trisha Yearwood), as a whole the collection seems to emphasize the upbeat a bit too stridently.

To be fair, the sentiment is probably authentic. Why shouldn't she be happy? When you're 19 and in love — as Andrews is — who isn't full of

sunny-day dreams and optimism?

Younger listeners may identify with this heart-shaped world of bright-eyed love and blue skies ahead. However, country fans who have lived a little longer know that sometimes dreams shatter, and *Now* may leave mature listeners unsatisfied, like pizza without pepperoni — it's good, but not quite everything it could (and should) have been.

Even the pensive reflection of "Windows on a Train," the plea of "God Don't Give Up on Us" or the in-your-face independence of "There's More to Me Than You" (which is featured twice on the album, in up-tempo and ballad versions) aren't

quite enough to balance the blindingly bright attitude of *Now*.

— Shannon Wayne Turner

GEORGE JONES
The Gospel Collection

BNA
★★

As Hank Williams proved with his classic "I Saw the Light," it takes a real sinner — or at least a former one — to sing gospel at its most moving. On that count, George Jones' bona fides are in order. A living legend who survived years of hard-core booze and drug addiction, Jones doesn't just give lip service to salvation on his new two-disc gospel collection.

CRAIG MORGAN

I Love It
BROKEN BOW
★★★★

Though not the only budding artist pushed aside in the long list of recent record company closings, Morgan may prove to be one of the best. His self-titled Atlantic debut gave those who heard it a glimpse of something special. *I Love It*, on independent Broken Bow Records, now offers an extended and enjoyable perusal of his considerable talent.

The press hook on Morgan is his elite status as a former special forces soldier. While that connection brings meaning to a new song like "God, Family and Country," it only speaks to a small part of his artistry. Much more broadly, *I Love It* reveals Morgan's uncommon eye for character. He's at his best when the issues and emotions are at their most acute.

Take the album's first single, "Almost Home." A cinematic story song about a homeless man shaken awake on a frigid street, the piece is richly detailed and understated in its sentimentality. The listener can almost see the stark grays and browns of homelessness convert into the vivid childhood colors of the man's dream.

"You Never Know" is a trilogy of true stories, including a deftly crafted verse about an adulterous preacher: *Silver-tongued Sarah was a holy terror! She took*



him somewhere he didn't want to go! Said he was a sinner and later that winter it showed. "Every Friday Afternoon" is a gut-wrencher about a man whose ex-wife is moving cross-country with his young son. Equally moving is "Always Be Mine," which turns a straight-up love song on its ear.

Unfortunately, Morgan doesn't fare as well with lighter material, tending to fall easily into cliché, most notably "Money," a predictable ditty about ... well, you can figure it out.

Shortcomings aside, Morgan writes and sings about real people, substantive issues and palpable pain. Around here, we used to call that country music.

— Chuck Aly

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.

REVIEWS

Unlike Johnny Cash, whose voice has increasingly crumbled beneath the ravages of time and illness, Jones' pipes largely remain pillars of resilience. Although his vocals occasionally ease down where they might have previously soared, Jones is in overall fine voice.

That voice, however, is undercut too often by the musical arrangements. Legendary producer Billy Sherrill, who worked on many of Jones' best efforts in past years, came out of retirement to work with his old partner. Known for both genius and excess, Sherrill unfortunately opts too often here for



countrified Lawrence Welk arrangements and a smooth production that sounds snoozy when it should sound urgent. We're singing about the soul here, after all. After one too many sedate numbers, you long for the Possum to cut loose and roar.

As in his greatest secular material, Jones sounds better when his heart is heavier. He brings a deep, mournful sensibility to the Kris Kristofferson classic "Why Me Lord." And "Amazing Grace" has to be one of the most overplayed songs in our culture, a song so overexposed it's in danger of losing its essential, heartbreaking beauty. So it's a credit to Jones that he breathes real life into this ubiquitous staple, infusing the a cappella intro with genuine melancholy.

Unfortunately, that moment is one of the few genuine highlights.

— Chrissie Dickinson

THE KENDALLS Love Is a Long Hard Road

VARÈSE VINTAGE

★★★★

With Jeannie Kendall launching a solo career, the time couldn't be better to look back at the classic music she's

JEANNIE KENDALL

Jeannie Kendall

ROUNDER

★★★★

Jeannie Kendall belongs on the short list of country music's finest singers. Some fans will recall that she began her career singing with her father, Royce, as The Kendalls, a duet team that in the late '70s and early '80s scored major hits with records like "Pittsburgh Stealers," "Thank God for the Radio" and, most famously, "Heaven's Just a Sin Away."

When country radio changed in the '80s, there was no longer a home for Royce and Jeannie's old-school close harmonies, but they never ceased performing for the faithful. Royce died in 1998, just as he and Jeannie were preparing to make a new album.

But now comes *Jeannie Kendall*, which spotlights Jeannie's shimmering country soprano. Her voice has the delicacy and breathiness of Alison Krauss' but with the sheer gut-punch power of Dolly Parton's. The album also includes Royce's harmonies on two poignant tracks that were cut just before he and Jeannie left for their final tour together.

There are other stars here as well, a testament to how respected Kendall remains by the singers who grew up hearing her on the radio: Krauss, country-soul vocalist Allison Moorer, and bluegrass singers Ricky Skaggs, Rhonda Vincent and Steve Gulley all contribute vocal turns, and Alan Jackson, who says the first concert he

already made. Recorded in 1989, this 14-track collection represents the final full album she recorded with her late father, Royce Kendall.

The set reprises several Kendall favorites, including "I'm Already Blue," "Just Like Real People" and the great "Thank God for the Radio." More than simply re-recording old hits, though, the album also shows just how potent the duo was at interpreting country chestnuts. They shine on memorable versions of "Crying Time," "Bye Bye Love," "Pick Me Up on Your Way Down," "Heartaches by the Number" and the Osborne Brothers gem "Once More."

Jeannie's shimmering hillbilly soprano stays front and center throughout. But this CD proves that when we lost Royce in



ever saw was a Kendalls show outside Atlanta, duets with Jeannie on "Timeless and True Love."

Still, the real highlight here is Kendall herself. Framed in spare, acoustic settings that are almost-but-not-quite bluegrass, she is never less than 100 percent emotionally present in her performances. Even potentially cloying moments come off not sentimental so much as just invested with honest and deeply felt sentiment.

Best of all is "Smoky Lonesome." Trailed by boo-hooing Dobro and mandolin fills that sound like an arm around her shoulder, Jeannie warbles in a voice that is both bruised and beautiful. *You're right beside me/But all the crowd sees/Is a cloud of smoky lonesome over me*, she cries. It's not hard to imagine that, somewhere, father Royce is joining her in close, comforting harmony.

— David Cantwell



1998, we lost one of the greatest harmony singers in the history of country music.

— Robert K. Oermann

RICKY SKAGGS & KENTUCKY THUNDER

Live at the Charleston Music Hall

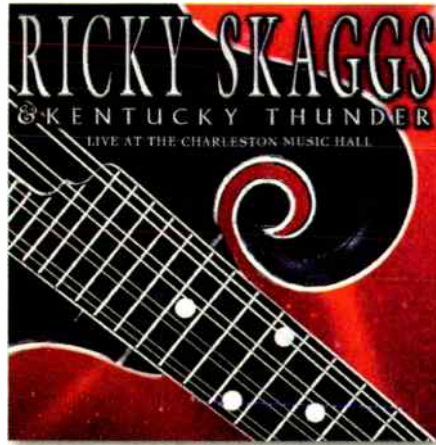
SKAGGS FAMILY

★★★★

Skaggs is pioneering a new concept: the bluegrass big band. On his new release, he showcases his seven-member Kentucky Thunder band, featuring twin fiddles and three guitars, along with bass, banjo, accordion and his own mandolin. These numbers create a sound so big and full that it's unlike any string band that came before it.

Skaggs gets away with this for two reasons. One, he's one of the few bluegrass artists who could afford such a big payroll. And, two, he's one of the few arrangers who could deploy all these players for maximum force and minimum clutter.

The best example is the nine-minute version of Bill Monroe's "Get Up John" that closes this album. It begins with all the fretted instruments locked into the same, fast rhythm figure behind Skaggs' mandolin lead. The phrasing is so clean that the three guitars sound like one giant, amped-up six-string. Then the twin fiddles jump in and lift the energy a notch. Before long, everyone's playing slightly different varia-



tions on the same theme. So much is going on that the effect is dizzying, but Skaggs fits the puzzle pieces together so that you can hear each one.

Something similar happens on the album's three other instrumentals and 11 vocal numbers. Skaggs masses his forces when he needs a rhythmic punch, and he draws them back when he needs to emphasize a personal lyric. There are three Monroe tunes and three from The Stanley Brothers, but Skaggs also introduces a pair of strong new songs, Harley Allen's tribute

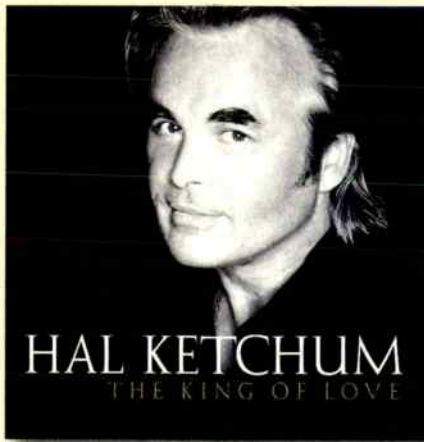
HAL KETCHUM
The King of Love

CURB
★★★★

Ketchum makes it all sound oh so easy. First, there's his seamless songwriting, which carries an emotional commonality that is universally accessible. Then there's his voice, a soothing elixir that flows so effortlessly you barely notice his presence on your stereo. Add in his prowess as producer on *The King of Love*, and you'll know that he has an impeccable sense of arrangement that never overpowers.

So why isn't Hal Ketchum enjoying the stature of a Tim McGraw or a Vince Gill? One answer may be that the ex-carpenter does his job so well that you don't notice the work that has gone into his efforts.

The King of Love boasts 15 fine songs that are emotionally substantial yet dwell on optimistic, lighthearted matters. "Everytime I Look in Your Eyes" sets smooth romanticism to a pulsating tempo and attractive acoustic hook. The percolating Cajun jumper "Run Loretta Run" is an effusive, good-time gumbo. "God Makes Stars" is the perfect fusion of humility and twang, and "The Carpenter's Way" adds the crusty vocal



of Guy Clark to its waltzy mix about salt-of-the-earth men who work with their hands.

There's plenty of diversity, too. "The Ruby and the Rose" is a whistling duet between Ketchum and drums; "Evangeline" is a Charlie Daniels co-write that offers a touch of swampland intrigue to the singer's deeper-than-usual register.

The King of Love is primo Ketchum, built on as strong an artistic foundation as any singer or songwriter could wish for.

— Nick Krauen

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REVIEWS

to "A Simple Life" and Mac McAnally's dying-mother ballad "Somewhere Nice Forever."

Like the jazz big-band leaders of the midcentury, Skaggs has discovered that you can do things with a large ensemble that just aren't possible with a small combo.

— G. H.

DUSTY DRAKE

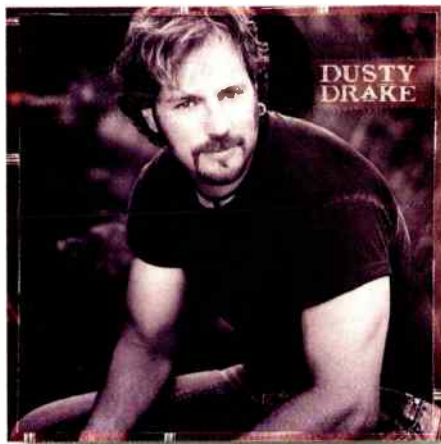
Dusty Drake

WARNER BROS.

★★★

With a name that sounds like it could have come from central casting, Dusty Drake plays a variety of roles on his debut album.

He's a tattooed biker on "Ain't Nobody's Business" (written with co-producer Billy Crain, once of the country-rocking Outlaws), which conjures a vision of Jesus returning on a revved-up Harley. He's a hot-to-trot farm boy on "Too Wet to Plow," a lovesick sap on "Smaller Pieces," a devoted family man on the tear-jerker "One Last Time" and a guy who can never



grow up on "Going on Eighteen."

O! Dusty may well be all of these things, but he's trying so hard to make a strong impression that he ends up not leaving much of one.

With breathy phrasing that carries a hint of John Anderson, he sings as if he believes that anything worth doing is worth overdoing. When he lightens up a little, as on "Not Bad for a Good Ole Boy," he sounds a lot more convincing, celebrating the rich life of an ordinary guy with a *house full of love and a yard full of kids, a car, a truck, a fishin' boat and a dozen best friends.*

"Good Ole Boy" is one of six of 11 cuts Drake helped write, and it's promising that they're generally the high-lights. But after years of scuffling as a Nashville songwriter and demo singer, he has yet to project the sort of identity

JEFF FOXWORTHY, BILL ENGVALL, RON WHITE, LARRY THE CABLE GUY

Blue Collar Comedy Tour: The Movie

WARNER BROTHERS

★★★

At the top of his monologue, Jeff Foxworthy offers this definition of the often-misunderstood label "redneck": "For the record, 'redneck' is a glorious absence of sophistication. It can be full-time or part-time, but most of us are guilty of it. If we're not, we have relatives who are."

No wonder country music fans find Foxworthy and his colleagues Bill Engvall, Ron White and Larry the Cable Guy such bottom-feeding fun. From the Waffle House snapshots in the liner notes to jokes about topless bars and NASCAR, their unpretentious humor is like listening to a bunch of middle-aged guys away from their wives on a fishing trip.

Foxworthy is a classic Southern humorist who knows how to get a giggle from life's everyday ironies. (On child safety seats, or the lack thereof: "I can vividly recall driving all the way to Florida – lying in the back window of the car!") He draws heavily from his 2000 CD *Big Funny*, with stories about ice fishing ("and you thought *Southerners* were stupid") and the guy who got his nipple bitten off by a beaver.

Engvall adds new material that brings a smarter edge to his sometimes-pedestrian guy-next-door shtick. "My wife and I got *hot hot hot*. She was arching her back and moaning, and I said, 'Yes ma'am, you are welcome!'

that distinguishes a recording artist.

The album ends on a fitting note with "Radio," an ode to music's power to transform and transport the listener – how each song can make you feel like a different person. Like Drake sings, *I'm not a star, but I know how it feels on my radio.*

— Don McLeese

JIMMY MARTIN

Songs of a Free Born Man: Recordings 1959-1992

CMH

★★★

Don't be misled by the packaging of this new Martin compilation. It's not an



'No,' she said. 'You're on my hair!'

With his slurred speech and deadpan delivery, Texan Ron White is a bright spot – a Dean Martin gone South. His self-deprecating stories about DUIs and sitting naked eating Cheetos are perhaps the funniest bits on the live album. Larry the Cable Guy is the roughest around the edges, with a Goober-meets-Ernest T. Bass dumbness that's sheer class-clown goofiness. "I had a horrible nightmare last night," he says. "I drank the world's largest margarita." Pause. "I woke up this morning and there was salt on the toilet lid."

Foxworthy and company keep the language PG while managing to make you chuckle at the absurdities of life as played out in small towns. The finale – Foxworthy's "you-might-be-a-redneck" jokes and Engvall's "here's your sign" routine – may be less than fresh, but they're necessary, like a greatest-hits wrap-up. If you get tired of the radio, pop this in the CD player on a road trip for a silly diversion.

— Miriam Pace Longino

anthology of his best or best-selling sides; it's a collection of rarities that will be of interest to the hard-core bluegrass fans but less so to the more typical country listener.

If you're looking for a good introduction to Martin's music, find the 2001 anthology *The King of Bluegrass*. Those 18 tracks, taken from his classic 1956-70 Decca sessions, constitute one of the most brilliant single-disc bluegrass albums ever released. *Songs of a Free Born Man*, by contrast, is a poorly organized, poorly annotated grab bag of odds and ends. Ten tracks come from a 1992 session that found Martin sharing the microphone with guests Marty Stuart, Ricky Skaggs



and Leona Williams; eight tracks come from an overdubbed 1990 live concert that reprised his big Decca hits; and five tracks are from a 1959 living-room tape with recent additions dubbed onto it.

The live sides feature a typically solid Martin band (led by mandolinist Audie Blaylock and fiddler Vernon Derrick); the remakes can't touch the Decca originals, but Martin does show his old fire on

Tom T. Hall's "Pete, the Best Coon Dog in the State of Tennessee." The 1992 sides share the plusses and minuses of any tribute or guest-duet album; it's fun to hear unusual collaborations, but the musicians sound underrehearsed, especially when compared to Martin's well-drilled ensembles. Included is the version of "Darlin' Corey" that led to Martin's famous feud with Skaggs.

The 1959 tapes suffer predictably from the lo-fi recording and impromptu circumstances. But it features contributions from Paul Williams and J.D. Crowe, who, with Martin, made up one of the greatest bluegrass bands of all time, and it's fun to hear them cut loose on a handful of standards.

— G. H.

SEAN WATKINS

26 Miles

SUGAR HILL

★★

Watkins is the guitar-playing member of the Grammy-winning, platinum-selling, pop-bluegrass trio Nickel Creek, a

LARRY SPARKS

The Coldest Part of Winter

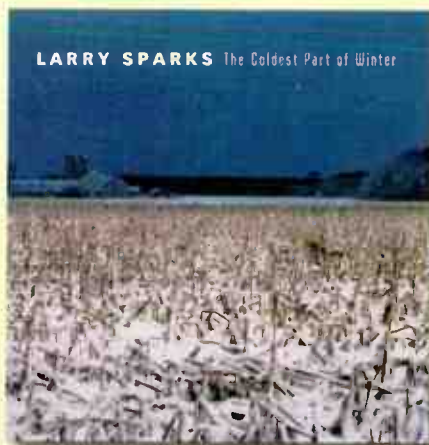
REBEL

★★★★

Living proof that you don't have to be from the mountains to sound lonesome, Indiana's Sparks has been making soulful bluegrass since Ralph Stanley drafted him to become lead singer in his band in 1967. Yet despite the devotion of his fans and the admiration of colleagues like Alison Krauss, Sparks has never garnered the widespread acclaim he's deserved. An enigmatic, imposing figure, he's the antithesis of a media-friendly star, an artist who lets his music speak for itself.

On his latest release, that music speaks loud and clear, telling stories of lost loves, moonlit nights and the simple lifestyle that still holds sway in the farm country where Sparks has made his home for decades. Aside from the ancient tune "Soldier's Joy" – with guest fiddler Michael Cleveland leading the Lonesome Ramblers through a blistering version – all of the songs are new, or at least of recent vintage.

Young mandolinist Scott Napier contributes a nifty Bill Monroe-like instrumental and Sparks offers his own heartfelt gospel song "Lord, Show Me the Way." Almost all the rest of the



songs are from the pens of writers David Norris and Marshal Warwick. There are some gems among them, too, including the latter's country-flavored "Winter in Miami."

As always, Sparks holds center stage with his remarkable voice and his blues-inspired lead guitar work. The result is a thoroughly distinctive, instantly recognizable sound that Sparks has pursued for almost 40 years without regard to passing fads and fashions. With *The Coldest Part of Winter*, he's added a fine new album to a discography already shining with consistency and brilliance.

— J. W.

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REVIEWS

groundbreaking band with as many detractors as admirers.

Fans love the Creek's progressive sound, instrumental prowess and willingness to drop a bit of pop sensibility into the mix. Naysayers dislike them for the very same reasons; their arrangements stray from the traditions of bluegrass to feature jazzy improvising, distortion pedals and other so-called sacrilegious trappings.

Both camps may be left scratching their heads over *26 Miles*, Watkins' second solo outing.

On *Let It Fall*, his previous solo album, he showed an occasional jazzy inclination. But for the most part he stayed close to the traditional style that got him into the finals of the National Flatpicking Championship in 1993.

The new album features some of San Diego's better-known jazz players wailing away on bassoons, saxophones, piano, organ, electric bass and drums. The overall sound owes more to Steely Dan than



Nickel Creek and moves Watkins closer to the pop mainstream.

While it's not a country album, it does have its moments. Watkins' vocals bring to mind the minimal melancholy of Michael Franks; the melodies are serviceable, with the folky "Letters Never Sent" and the Celtic jazz instrumental "Chutes & Ladders" particular standouts.

The musicians do the best with what they've got, but most of the tunes inhabit that undefined gray area between pop, jazz and folk. The other drawback is Watkins' lyrical style; he uses words that have to stretch and strain to fit the rhythm of the melodies. But he displays a surprising lack of maturity for a musician whose playing is so sophisticated.

— J. Poet

WILDFIRE

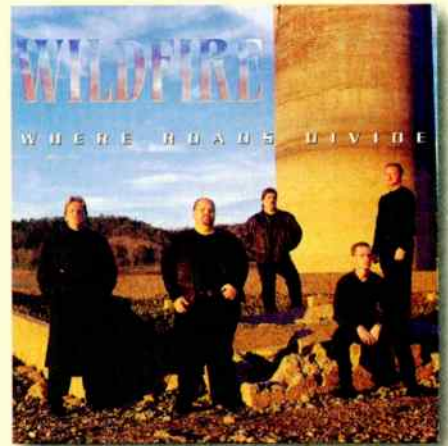
Where Roads Divide

PINECASTLE

★★★★

Songs written or recorded by Hank Williams, George Jones, Merle Haggard, Buck Owens and others have long been staples of the bluegrass repertoire, but it's a different story when it comes to more contemporary country fare. That's one big reason why Wildfire's second album stands out from the bluegrass pack. Sprinkled among the originals and bluegrass classics, the quintet offers songs from Keith Urban, Steve Wariner, Deryl Dodd and Keith Whitley.

The wide range of material works because of Robert Hale and Darrell Webb, Wildfire's two lead singers. Hale's is the deeper voice, and while he can convincingly sing straightforward bluegrass and classic country songs, it's also a perfect vehicle for Urban's "My Last Name," a modern tale of a failed marriage. Mandolin player Webb has a strong tenor that takes center stage on "All Because of Me" and an undeservedly obscure gem written by Bill Monroe and banjo great Don Reno, "I'm Afraid My Darlin's Gone." The rest of the time, Webb's sky-high harmonies give a sharp edge to Hale's mellower leads, and when the two trade lines on Jimmy Martin's tragicomic "The Last Song," it's clear just



how complementary their voices are. Add resonator guitarist Phil Leadbetter's supportive baritone, and you've got a vocal trio that can tackle just about anything with glowing results – and all three are adept, creative instrumentalists who can find just the right touch to suit each song.

Banjo man Barry Crabtree, too, can shift effortlessly from blistering bluegrass to subtle mainstream country accompaniment, while bassist Curt Chapman holds it all together regardless of the musical flavor.

There's a lot to be gained when talented bluegrass musicians look beyond the tried and true for their material, and no one makes the case more effectively – and enjoyably – than Wildfire.

— J. W.

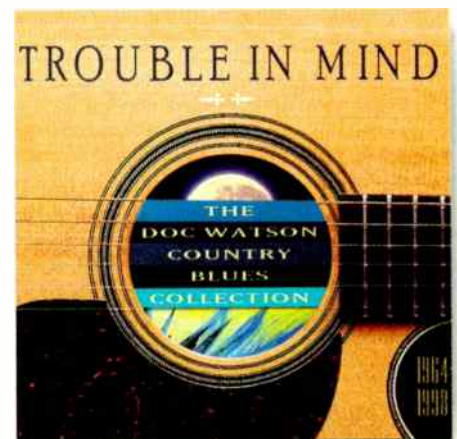
TROUBLE IN MIND: THE DOC WATSON COUNTRY BLUES COLLECTION

SUGAR HILL

★★★★

Drawn mostly from his tenure on Vanguard Records, these recordings from 1964 to 1998 spotlight the blues side of Watson's vast repertoire. Generally accompanied only by his own banjo, harmonica or guitar, Watson is such a talented player that his recordings sound completely full even when he's performing solo, which he does on six of these 17 cuts. His late son, Merle Watson, added a second guitar or banjo on 10 tracks, and his brother Arnold plays banjo on one.

The wealth of material in the country-blues song bag is impressive when you hear it this way. "Sitting on Top of the World," the Delmore Brothers' "Gambler's Yodel" and two Jimmie Rodgers numbers, "Anniversary Blues"



and "Never No More Blues," are representative of the wide-ranging contents. And it is indicative of how deep the roots of this style run that so many of these songs come from folk tradition.

Years before Doc Watson came to fame, people in Appalachia were singing

these songs. That he brought them back for us to enjoy again is just one of the reasons he's a national treasure.

— R. K. O.

LYNN MORRIS BAND

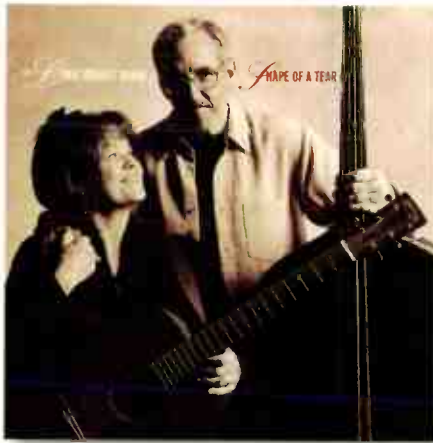
Shape of a Tear

ROUNDER
★★★★

On the cover of her first album in four years, Morris is paired with her husband and bassist, Marshall Wilborn. It's a fitting image, for *Shape of a Tear* finds Wilborn taking a heightened role in his wife's music.

As usual, Morris' vocal approach is both smooth and twangy, and it blends perfectly with Wilborn's genial tenor. Her work on guitar and clawhammer banjo is clean and bright and blends well with bandmates Jesse Brock on mandolin and Ron Stewart on banjo, fiddle and mandolin. Together, they give the Lynn Morris Band a fluid sound that can only come from a band that's played together for years.

That synergy is most evident on hard-edged bluegrass numbers like "Lonesome Highway Blues," "Shoulder to Shoulder"



and the Stewart banjo romp "Road Rage." The title track is a touching duet from Morris and Wilborn, who sing effortlessly – and most likely autobiographically – about how a lifelong love is built on anticipating, sharing and savoring small moments together.

Morris' take on "I Wish It Would Rain," penned by fellow Texan Nanci Griffith, showcases her ability to make you feel good with a sad song; so does her wry reading of "Goodbye to the Blues," complete with extra-funky

clawhammer banjo.

Wilborn takes the lead on a swingin' version of Hank Williams' "Move It on Over" and one of his own compositions, the reflective "I'll Take Them With Me."

Add cameos from Junior Brown (pedal steel on Buck Owens' "Gonna Have Love"), Dobro whiz Rob Ickes and soulful singer Dudley Connell, and you can hear that Lynn Morris has shaped another worthy collection.

— Aaron Harris

RAY WYLIE HUBBARD

Growl

PHILO
★★★★

Hubbard, a veteran Texas songwriter, describes *Growl* as his low-down rock record – but that depends on what you consider rock. If bluesmen Lightnin' Hopkins, Mance Lipscomb and Fred McDowell are rock, then this is, indeed, a rock album.

The title comes from producer Gurf Morlix, who kept telling Hubbard to "put some growl on it" while they recorded the songs. He wanted Hubbard to get funky and nasty; they succeeded.

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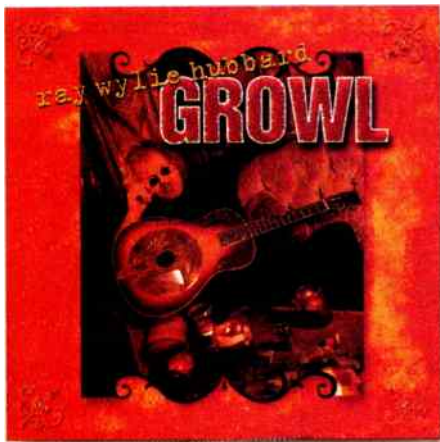
REVIEWS

As unslick as a record can be, *Growl* is a celebration of the primal force that music is supposed to be. It's also a more groove-oriented project than Hubbard's previous releases, which have been more literary and spiritual in nature.

On "The Knives of Spain," his world-weary vocals paint a picture of how words can cut deeply into the soul. The joyous "Name Droppin'" allows Hubbard to do just what the title says – name drop – while jamming with several Austin musicians sitting in as guests.

"Bones" is a gambling song that makes you want to visit a hot Mississippi juke joint to shake hands with sin.

"Rock-and-Roll Is a Vicious Game"



explores the dark side of the rock experience, from picking up a guitar to meet girls to the VH1 *Behind the Music* special. The album's last cut, "Screw You, We're From Texas," is a rocker that celebrates the unique Texas music scene. It's bound to become an anthem in Austin – and probably will get him crucified everywhere else. "Screw You" finally gives rowdy fans a wonderfully obnoxious Hubbard song to request other than "Up Against the Wall (Redneck Mother)," a tune he wrote more than 30 years ago.

— Jeff Wall

ORVILLE COUCH

Hello Trouble

AUDIUM/KOCH

★★★★

Couch, who died in 2002 at age 67, had only two notable hits, 1962's "Hello Trouble" and 1963's "Did I Miss You." His lone VeeJay Records LP has been out of print for years. So it's understandable if most folks have forgotten him or never heard of him.

This reissue shows Couch as a rockabilly-

CAITLIN GARY

I'm Staying Out

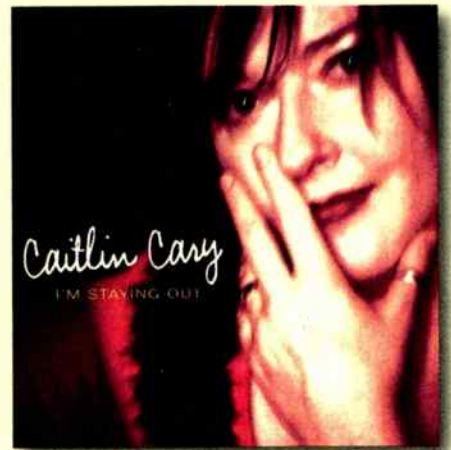
YEP ROC

★★★★

Caitlin Cary has a warm, neighborly singing voice that never feels threatening and always seems to comfort. Formerly Ryan Adams' partner in Whiskeytown, her second album continues to reveal her once-hidden talents as a songwriter and front-woman with soft-focus tunes that are as inviting as the aroma of blueberry pie cooling on the windowsill.

Like many of her Americana contemporaries, Cary is all over the map musically. But there's a cohesive vision to her material that many of her peers lack. She can jump from a punky "Cello Girl" through the vaguely Celtic phrasings of the title track and not miss a beat. Likewise, the shiny Nashville pop of "You Don't Have to Hide" can sit kissin'-cousin-close to the torchy "Please Break My Heart" and not seem at all out of place.

Is Cary a new Mary Chapin Carpenter for the post-millennial set? Could be – and Carpenter *does* pop up here, pro-



viding background vocals on three songs.

In fact, the only negative thing you could mention about this up-and-comer is her humility – she's *not* out boasting about her talents and hungry for headlines, *a la* her loudmouthed former colleague Adams.

Then again, what was that old adage about the meek and how they'll one day inherit? When that day comes, Cary's *I'm Staying Out* suggests she's ready for her crown.

— Tom Lanham



inflected stylist backed by some solid players. Harmonica passages are common, and the pianist, steel player and lead guitarist shine on the honky-tonk tunes. Major Bill Smith's productions generally didn't ape the prevailing arranged Nashville Sound creaminess of the day, so the musical settings are simple, yet effective. Couch was a Texan, but this sounds more like Bakersfield than Music City.

Couch's two hits are included, as are worthwhile covers of "Honky Tonk Man," "(Since You've) Gone," "His and Hers" and "Fraulein." Best of all, the CD features

several dandy, old-school country tunes, the kind they don't write anymore, including "Dance Her by Me," "Uncle Red," "Hello Doll" and "Lonesomes."

Oh, one more thing: Only one performance is longer than two-and-a-half minutes. Orville Couch was a master of economy.

— R. K. O.

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Texas Outlaws

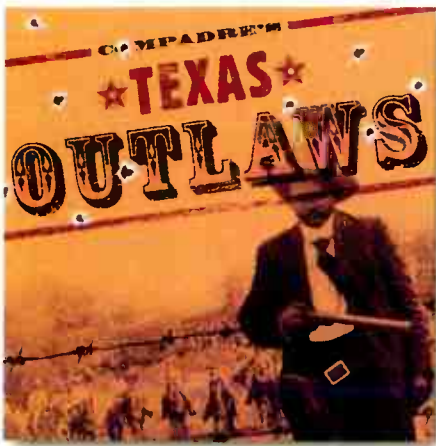
COMPADRE

★★★★

Going back to the early-'70s heyday of Waylon & Willie, outlaw music – about jaded anti-heroes, losers and hard livers – has largely been a Texas phenomenon.

This 18-song compilation suggests it continues to be.

Firstly, *Texas Outlaws* gives a fresh hearing to some noteworthy outlaw anthems of the past. Secondly, this inspired collection also showcases some of the fine Lone Star artists presently carrying on the tradition – some of them relatively unknown outside their home state. Sturdy cuts like Pat Green's live version of Joe Ely's "Me & Billy the Kid," Jack Ingram's revival of Waylon Jennings' "Only Daddy That'll Walk the



Line,” Roger Creager’s muscular cover of Steve Earle’s “Guitar Town,” Max Stalling’s take on Marty Robbins’ “El Paso,” Cooder Graw’s revival of Rodney Crowell’s “Ain’t Livin’ Long Like This” and others succeed because they’re great songs getting a fine update from the next generation of Texas roadhouse heroes.

A few veterans show up to revive or newly translate their own classics. Billy Joe Shaver contributes a lighthearted, live rendition of “Georgia on a Fast Train,” and Ray Wylie Hubbard and Robert Earl Keen have their shining moments as well. Willie Nelson even makes an appearance, joining rapper Lil’ Black on a quirky rewrite of “On the Road Again.” If you have a soft spot for musical outlawry or want a sampling of some worthy Texas up-and-comers, you’ll find this rowdy collection as satisfying as a shot and a beer.
— Bob Allen

JORMA KAUKONEN
Blue Country Heart
COLUMBIA
★★★

Casual Jorma Kaukonen fans be warned: This album of early-20th-century country blues is first and foremost for acoustic-music enthusiasts. And with Sam Bush on mandolin and fiddle, Jerry Douglas

OLD & IN THE GRAY
Old & In The Gray
ACOUSTIC DISC
★★★

The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band’s 1972 album *Will the Circle Be Unbroken?* has consistently been touted as a breakthrough session that helped convince a generation of young rock fans that they could listen to country music and still be cool. But it wasn’t alone. The original *Old & in the Way* album, released the following year, also played an itegral role in introducing string-band music to younger fans.

Featuring Grateful Dead leader Jerry Garcia on banjo, David Grisman on mandolin, Peter Rowan on guitar, John Kahn on bass and bluegrass veteran Vassar Clements on fiddle, *Old & in the Way* captured a smoking live band diving into the bluegrass canon.

Now another generation of fans is becoming captivated by the old-time sounds, thanks to the *O Brother* phenomenon. Along with it has come a new set of sequels, including a third *Circle* album and the cheekily titled *Old & in the Gray*, a reference to the advancing years of the principal players.

The lineup is altered because of the deaths of Garcia and Kahn. Desert

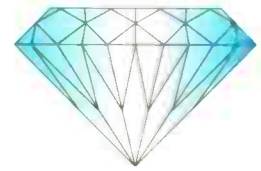


Rose Band veteran Herb Pedersen steps in for the former, and not-yet-gray bassist Bryn Bright for the latter. And while *Old & in the Gray* won’t carry the cultural impact of its predecessor, it sure is a pleasurable pickin’ party.

With Grisman and Rowan trading lead vocals, the quintet zips through a superbly selected set that balances vintage tunes by Bill Monroe, The Stanley Brothers and the Louvin Brothers with charming takes on more modern songs by John Hartford, Townes Van Zandt and the Rolling Stones.

These guys may be old, but they haven’t outlived their usefulness just yet.
— Dan DeLuca

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REVIEWS

on Dobro, Byron House on bass and Béla Fleck on banjo, *Blue Country Heart* delivers ample sonic charm.

Kaukonen and his guests get off to a lively start with The Delmore Brothers' "Blue Railroad Train" and continue rolling through the Delmores' "Big River Blues," Jimmie Davis' "Red River Blues" and a lot of other songs with "Blues" in the title.

JORMA KAUKONEN



Only one thing: Don't expect to hear "Blues From an Airplane." Any vestige of Kaukonen's past as Jefferson Airplane's acid-tinged lead guitarist, or even his good-natured leadership of the erratic folk-blues outfit Hot Tuna, fades as Jorma stays in step with the contemporary masters of acoustic music who he's recruited. And the guys find a cheerful camaraderie born of their shared affection for these old tunes.

If anything, the mood might be a bit too breezy. There's little to anchor the emotions until late in the album, when the accompanists simmer down and Jorma settles into a wistful conversation with his instrument on Jimmie Rodgers' "You and My Old Guitar." The moment for reflection is a welcome one that extends to the album's closer, the traditional "What Are They Doing in Heaven Today."

Anyone looking for an emotionally riveting blues journey should move on. But if a sunny riverboat ride with a cluster of pickers on deck sounds nice, then get onboard.

— John Vasile

PETER ROWAN & DON EDWARDS High Lonesome Cowboy

SHANACHIE

★★★★

On the opening track of *High Lonesome Cowboy*, Edwards and Rowan join

STEVE RIPLEY

Ripley

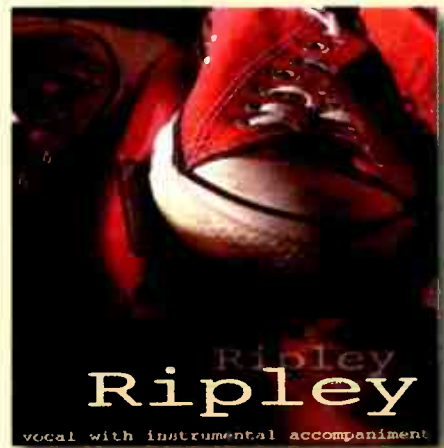
BOY ROCKING RECORDS/AUDIUM

★★★★

Tractors leader Steve Ripley ranks along with J.J. Cale and Mark Knopfler as one of the greatest practitioners of lackadaisical music. You know it when you hear it: Music that sounds as if it's been written and performed on a hazy day while the musician was lazing in a hammock in a sunny backyard.

But that doesn't mean it's lacking for power. For instance, check out the opening seven-minute salvo, "Gone Away," on Ripley's first solo album, *Ripley*. The most powerful song on the album, it's a blissful country blues tune laced with an enticing Debbie Campbell vocal that builds slowly into a gospel dirge.

"Gone Away" is an unusual opener, not only because of its length but also because of its snail's pace. It sets the tone for this album, which varies between slo-mo, dirt-road blues and breezy, chugging rhythms reminiscent



of the Tractors' biggest hit, "Baby Likes to Rock It."

But what catches you by surprise is how this master of the sly hook and languid rhythm infuses such a powerful spiritual ambience into his songs.

Don't be fooled by the easygoing nature of the songs; Ripley is a powerful songwriter and a performer of substance and depth.

— N. K.

Peter Rowan & Don Edwards



voices to sing the phrase, *Take me back to the range and the campfire*. It aptly sums up the atmosphere of this fine, understated acoustic album, which feels as spontaneous and straightforward as a campfire singalong.

Rowan has been a force in bluegrass and folk music since he joined Bill Monroe's Blue Grass Boys in the mid-'60s; Edwards has been singing traditional cowboy songs for just about as long. The two have been friends for a decade, and their collaboration is appropriately easygoing and seamless.

As it turns out, the cowboy side of the equation has a larger presence than the

bluegrass side. The tempos tend to be laid-back rather than revved-up, and Edwards' gruff baritone takes the lead on most of the numbers, with Rowan's tenor usually pitching in on high harmonies.

Eight of the eleven tracks are traditional cowboy folk songs like "The Old Chisholm Trail" and "Goodbye Old Paint," and they snugly tie them together with gracefully arranged versions of Woody Guthrie's "Reno Blues" (also known as "Philadelphia Lawyer"), Maybelle Carter's "Buddies in the Saddle" and the traditional bluegrass song "Midnight on the Stormy Deep."

Even though Rowan and Edwards get top billing, they're not the only luminaries involved. Acoustic superpickers Tony Rice and Norman Blake intertwine concise and shimmering acoustic guitar runs on several cuts. Indeed one track, "The Old Grey Mare Came Tearing Out of the Wilderness," is an instrumental featuring just Blake and his wife Nancy on guitars.

This album comes highly recommended to fans of folk, bluegrass and traditional cowboy music. But young country fans beware: You may find these weathered old voices a bit too honest, the solos too economical and the songs too plainspoken for your taste. It's the cowboy way.

— Paul Kingsbury

BOOKS

**TEMPLES OF SOUND:
INSIDE THE GREAT
RECORDING STUDIOS**

**By Jim Cogan
and William Clark**

(CHRONICLE BOOKS, \$24.95)

In the early history of country music, the recording studio was often a hotel room, its windows shuttered to mute bothersome street noise, or a radio station available to artists after hours. In 2003, engineers and

producers “punch in” sounds for digital storage; vocalizers refine and enhance singing; and singers, all alone, croon their lyrics over canned music.

Somewhere between, the golden age of recording blossomed.

Temples of Sound focuses on that era from the mid-'40s to 1970, when multi-tracking – with its ability to record instruments and vocals separately, then put them together – began to swallow live recording.

The book offers a virtual tour of America's greatest recording studios, from Chess in Chicago, the playground of bluesmen Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf, to Capitol in Hollywood, where Frank Sinatra and Tennessee Ernie Ford spun aural gold.

Country fans will savor the stops at Sun Studios in Memphis and RCA's Studio B in Nashville, hot spots that unleashed some of music's most memorable performances in the 1950s and 1960s.

At Sun, the authors write of madcap producer-proprietor Sam Phillips chas-ing down every angle on the way to pressing classics like Elvis Presley's “Mystery Train” and Johnny Cash's “I Walk the Line.” RCA producer Chet Atkins and engineer Bill Porter preferred coaxing to cajoling. In Studio B, with artists such as Jim Reeves and Eddy Arnold, they created luminosity and a warm perfection that helped define The Nashville Sound.

Its snappy prose and lush photographs offer an irresistible entry into *Temples of Sound*.

**VINYL HAYRIDE: COUNTRY
MUSIC ALBUM COVERS
1947-1989**

**By Paul Kingsbury
and the staff of the Country
Music Hall of Fame**

(CHRONICLE BOOKS, \$24.95)

The compact disc has its positive points, but it eliminated one of record buying's pleasures: the 12-by-12 LP

cover's delightful, easy-to-see artwork. *Vinyl Hayride* pays tribute to country music's best album covers, recreating their lifelike warmth and visual drama.



**RODEO QUEENS AND THE
AMERICAN DREAM**

By Joan Burbick

(PUBLIC AFFAIRS, \$26)

A sort of star-spangled homecoming princess, the rodeo queen has adorned those rugged cowboy contests for 80 years. Contributing to the resilient myth of the American West, she celebrates the grace and sturdiness of the idealized Western woman. Burbick's book about these queens has many sides: It is all at once social history, travelogue, dime store novel and epitaph.



**THE WOMEN OF COUNTRY
MUSIC: A READER**

**By Charles Wolfe and James
Akenson, Editors**

(UNIVERSITY PRESS OF KENTUCKY, \$28)

From the electric Roni Stoneman to the plucky Polly Jenkins, the women pre-sented in this collection of essays pioneered trails for women in country music and received little thanks – until now. *The Women of Country Music* turns over new earth, pointing out that it wasn't just the Jimmie Rodgerses and Roy Acuffs who did the heavy lifting in the early years of country music.

— Michael Streissguth



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Generations come together as Chris Thile of Nickel Creek and the legendary Doc Watson rip it up at Merlefest.

For The Record

It began in 1988 with a couple of flatbed trucks for a stage and 4,000 people in the audience. Now more than 75,000 descend upon Wilkesboro, N.C., every April for Merlefest, a four-day celebration of the best acoustic music has to offer.

Organized by Doc Watson as a tribute to his son and musical partner Merle, who died in 1985, the festival

boasts a reputation for outstanding musicianship. For the first time, a sample of those performances are available on CD, DVD and video. *Merlefest Live* presents portions of last year's 15th Anniversary Jam, a musical love-in led by Watson, joined onstage by Alison Krauss, Earl Scruggs, Patty Loveless, Jerry Douglas, Chris Thile, Sam Bush and others.

If you're not among the hordes who trekked to North Carolina for this year's Merlefest, don't worry. A camera crew captured footage for an upcoming TV documentary about the famed annual event.

Hush Your Mouth

What is it about country artists that makes them so susceptible to vocal problems? After all, Pam Tillis, Keith Urban, Randy Travis, Alison Krauss and Heidi Newfield of Trick Pony have all been ordered to stop singing and give their voices a rest at some point this year.

Vanderbilt Voice Center singing specialist Tom Cleveland, Ph.D., points to two common causes. "A lot of country artists start singing without any kind of voice training," he says. "I know that it's a point of pride for some of them

to achieve success without it, but it is a disadvantage to be without any instruction. Even the best football players receive coaching in how to play. Singers need coaching too.

"Second," he adds, "country artists usually overextend themselves." Playing 200 to 300 concerts a year, rehearsing, visiting radio stations and doing interviews, plus chatting with fans at meet-and-greets after a show all add up to strain the voice.

Cleveland and others at the Voice Center teach artists how to use their voices more efficiently, reducing the stress on their vocal cords. And that's something to sing about.



SCOTT WEINERT/AGENCE MEDIA

Tillis



CURTIS HILBUN

Urban



SCOTT WEINERT/AGENCE MEDIA

Newfield



FROM CM CONTRIBUTORS

Look for Robert K. Oermann's *Finding Her Voice: The Saga of Women in Country Music*, republished with updates on today's artists ... and Alanna Nash's biography of Elvis' colorful manager, Colonel Tom Parker, *The Colonel: The Extraordinary Story of Colonel Tom Parker and Elvis Presley*, as well as newly republished editions of her books *Dolly: The Biography* and *Behind Closed Doors: Talking With the Legends of Country Music*.

New Life For 'O Death'

In 1916, a young man from Marshall, N.C., got hold of some bad moonshine that briefly left him nearly paralyzed. Convinced that the icy hands of death were upon him, 20-year-old Lloyd Chandler spoke directly to the Grim Reaper.

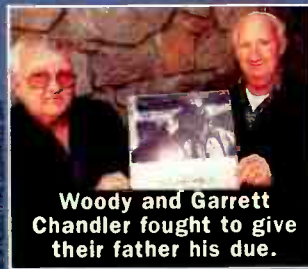
After surviving the ordeal, Chandler realized the experience had transformed him. He turned his fearful conversation into a song, "O Death," and became a preacher, using the song as a powerful case for salvation.

Chandler didn't know or care about copyrighting, and over the years, his connection to "O Death" was lost - except for his family. The preacher's sons, Woody and Garrett, have spent years trying to prove their father's authorship of the song, collecting documents and enlisting experts.

When the movie *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* came out three years ago, the song was featured prominently. "It set a fire under me when I heard 'O Death' in the scene of a Ku Klux Klan lynching," says

Garrett Chandler, "That song was given to my dad in a vision. He wrote it and carried it as testimony. When I saw it used that way, it broke my heart."

The soundtrack to the movie sold millions, and Ralph Stanley sang the song on the Grammy awards, but



Woody and Garrett Chandler fought to give their father his due.

Lloyd Chandler was never mentioned. Meanwhile, evidence proving his authorship kept piling up.

Finally in February, the Chandlers' quest to give their father his due was met. "We got the copyright," says Garrett, with triumph in his voice. The next hurdle: Getting record labels to recognize that copyright so the family can collect royalties from the various recordings of the song.

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Looking to pass the time while waiting for the concert to start? Nintendo has issued the new handheld Game Boy Advance SP with a front-lit screen so you can play it anywhere – even “when the lights go down,” so it should be a must-have for Faith! It offers more than 350 games and a rechargeable battery that lasts 10 to 18 hours. Best of all, virtually all the games you already own are compatible with the \$99 model. [store.nintendo.com / (800) 255-3700]

SHOOT TO THRILL

Going hunting with Hank Williams Jr.? Time for a little target practice. Thanks to Laser Shot's Home Theater Shooting Simulator, you can hunt big game, skeet or even tin cans in the comfort of your home. Utilizing a high-tech projector and laser rifles, Laser Shot's HT 1000 has already scored a bull's-eye with Irlene Mandrell and George W. himself – both of whom have purchased one, despite the hefty price tag starting at \$1,995. [lasershot.com / (281) 240-1122]



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Terri Clark, Mary Chapin Carpenter and Jamie O'Neal are among the stars who take their dogs everywhere. But if pooch has to stay home they might consider using Comfort Zone with D.A.P. – short for Dog Appeasing Pheromone. Plug it into the wall like an air freshener, and Comfort Zone releases a reassuring chemical that won't make your dog feel so lonely while the owner is away. The odorless, \$39 device is also good for calming dogs who show any stress-related behavior. It's also available for cats and – in liquid form only – horses. [famam.com / (800) 234-2269]

COUNTER MEASURES

Loretta Lynn didn't have one of these when she was cooking for six kids, but it sure would've made the kitchen work go smoother. Sony's new \$129 kitchen clock radio and CD player is designed to attach to the bottom of a kitchen cabinet – so you can shake while you bake. [sonystyle.com / (877) 865-SONY]



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— Nick Krewen



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formed her classic hit "Stand By Your Man" at the banquet, which was hosted by Mississippi congressman Trent Lott. Wynette was 41 years old; Reagan was 72 and in his third year as the 40th President of the United States.

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