

COUNTRYMUSIC

YOUR ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO THE STARS, MUSIC & TRADITION

DECEMBER/JANUARY 2003



TIM McGRAW

leaves town to find a
New York state of mind

LEE ANN WOMACK
A new look

DARRYL WORLEY
True tall tales

PHIL VASSAR
Piano man

SAWYER BROWN
vs. Rolling Stones

**TOMMY SHANE
STEINER**
No bull

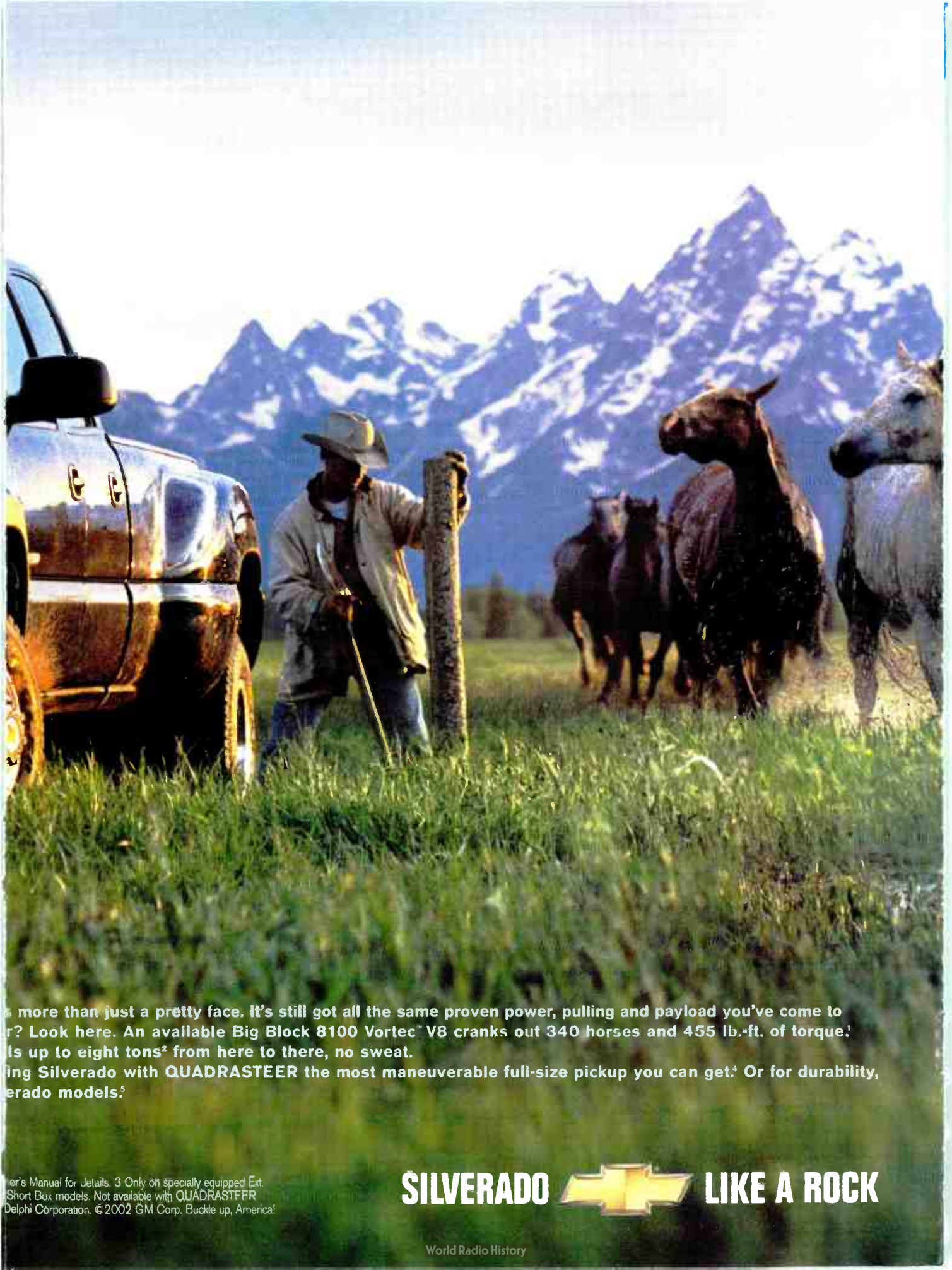
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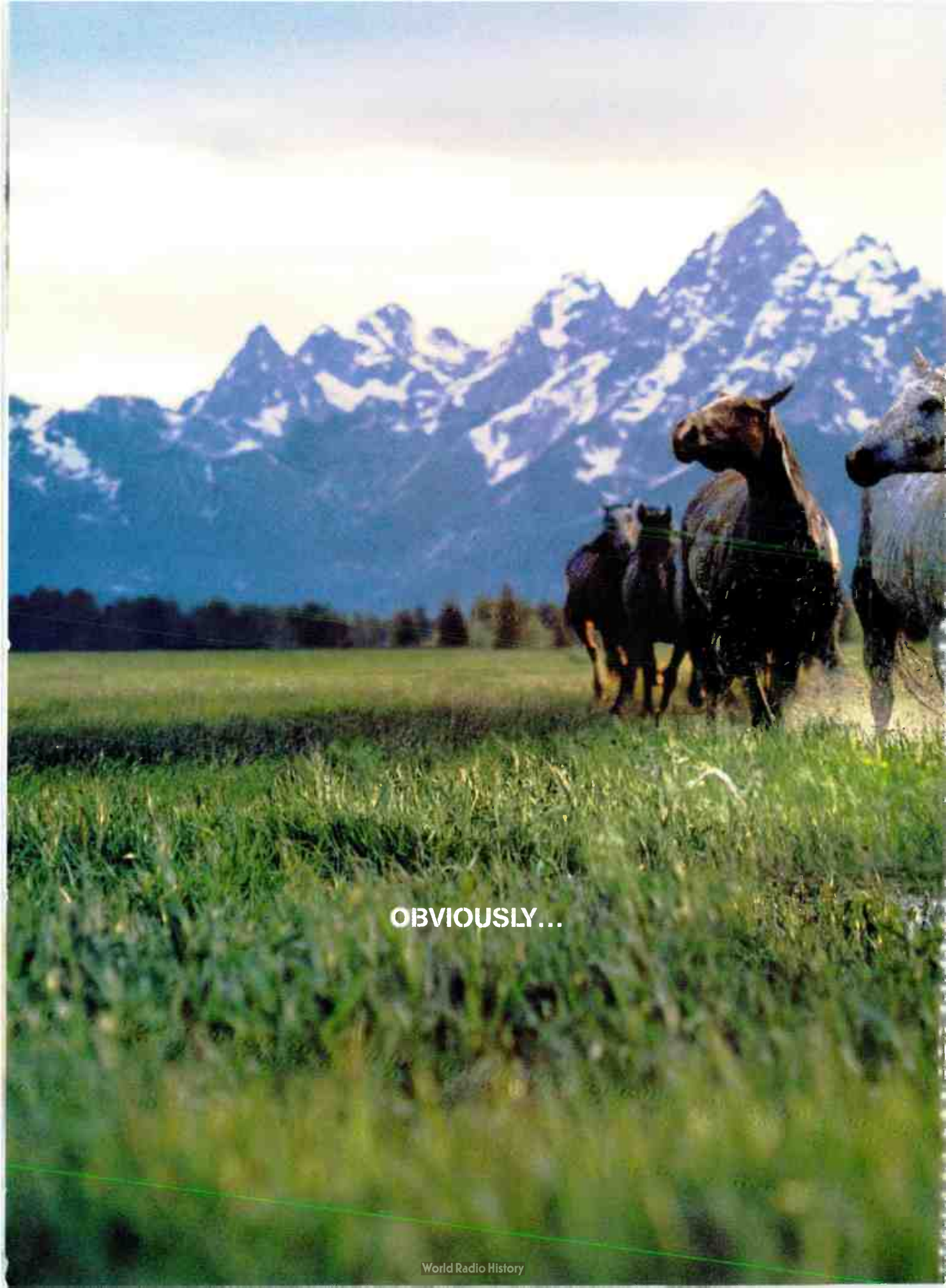




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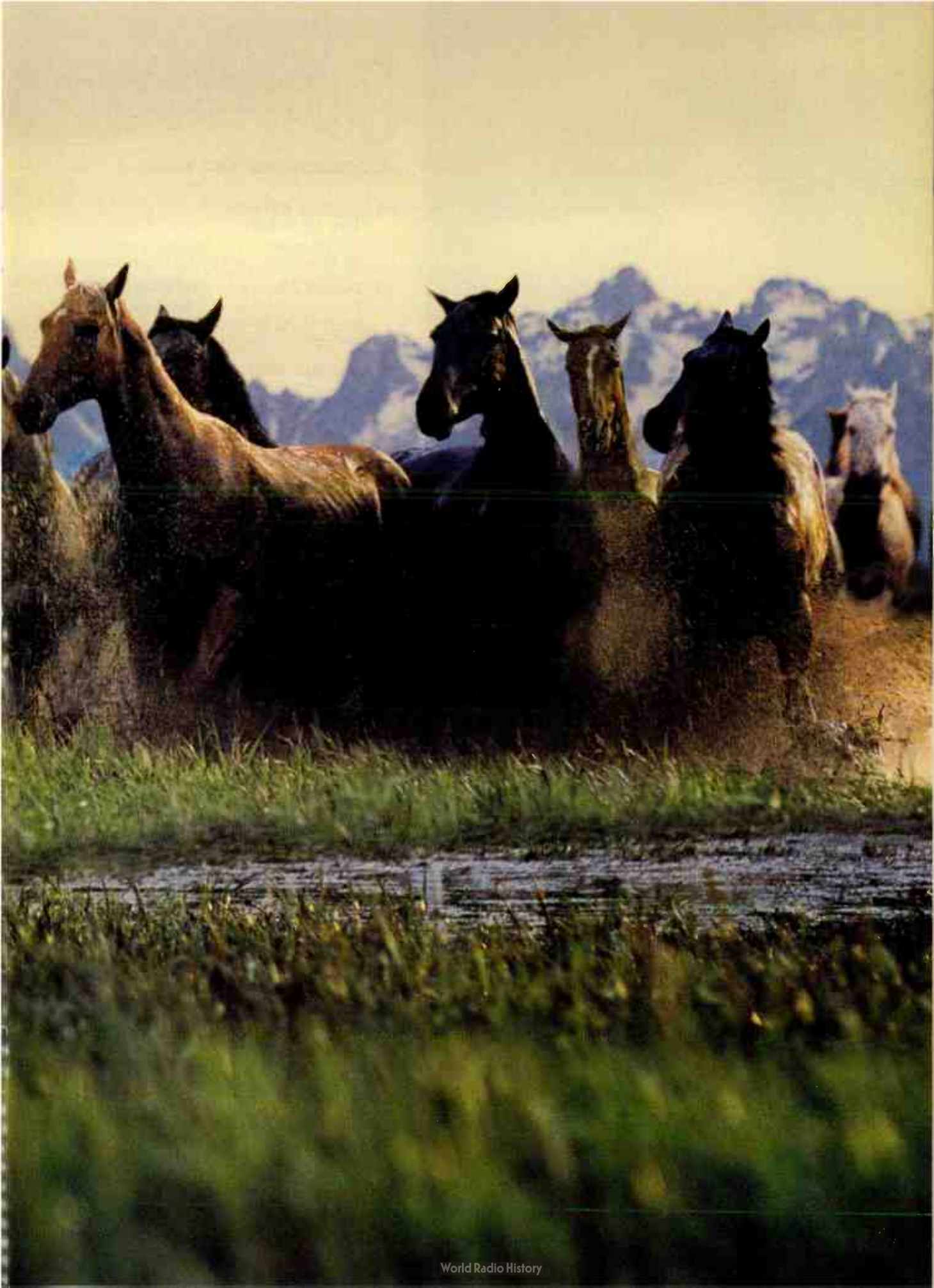
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COUNTRY MUSIC

DECEMBER/JANUARY 2003



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THE Journal

OF TRADITIONAL COUNTRY MUSIC

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COURTESY LYRIC STREET RECORDS

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COUNTRYMUSIC

CHAIRMAN, PRESIDENT & CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

David Pecker

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VICE PRESIDENT/EDITORIAL DIRECTOR Neil Pond

GROUP MANAGING EDITOR Rick Taylor

SENIOR EDITOR Michael McCall

ASSISTANT EDITOR Nancy Henderson

EDITOR-AT-LARGE Robert K. Oermann

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT Hazel Smith

DESIGN EDITOR Jerry Holthouse

ASSOCIATE DESIGN EDITOR Eva Elliott

DESIGNERS Holly Blue, Amy Reid

PHOTO EDITOR Lisa Konicki

ASSOCIATE PHOTO EDITOR Nicole Kopperud

PHOTO ASSISTANT Jennifer Anderson

COPY EDITORS Katie Dodd, John Reiman, John Vasile

OPERATIONS MANAGER Cassie Freeman

OPERATIONS ASSISTANT Kristin Russell

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT Tony Seibert

ADVERTISING OFFICES

NASHVILLE/SOUTHEAST/SOUTHWEST

PUBLISHER Tori Hughes, 615-259-1111

ADVERTISING SPECIALIST Michele Alford

NEW YORK

646-521-2815

DETROIT

AD MANAGER Chris Ruppel, 248-353-1665

MIDWEST

AD MANAGER Molly MacKenzie 312-670-4470

WEST COAST

AD MANAGER Bob Perkins 310-271-8521

PRODUCTION MANAGER Gioia Diot, 561-989-1205

ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER/MARKETING & PROMOTIONS Tracy Rogers

MARKETING COORDINATOR Traci Williams

American Media, Inc.

5401 NW Broken Sound Blvd., Boca Raton, FL 33487 / 561-997-7733

EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT FINANCE/CFO John Miley

EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT/CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER Kevin Hyson

SVP GROUP PUBLISHER/AMI CONSUMER MAGAZINES Steven Aaron

PRESIDENT, DIRECT RESPONSE MARKETING/
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SR. VICE PRESIDENT - COUNSEL Michael B. Kahane

CORPORATE CREATIVE DIRECTOR Colin Jenkins

SUBSCRIBERS

For subscription queries, please e-mail countrymusic@palmcoastd.com or call toll-free 1-877-485-6428 (outside U.S. dial direct to 1-904-445-4662).

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY

What a wonderful issue for your 30th anniversary (*October/November*). Each and every article is well done and interesting. But I must thank you for the super, in-depth articles on The Statler Brothers and George Strait. Keep it up – and don't forget to include Ricky Van Shelton at any and all times.

CAROL EVANETZ
WARMINSTER, PENNSYLVANIA

Hazel Smith, George Strait and The Statler Brothers all in one issue – plus great pictures. Thank you!

K.J. JOHNSON
CANYON LAKE, TEXAS

Loved the 30th anniversary edition. I have only one complaint about your informative magazine – Hazel Smith's column is not long enough.

ROSEMARY M. MALONE
ST. PETERS, MISSOURI

Thank you for the special 13-page section on George Strait. It is good to read about such a fantastic performer who has been faithful to his wife, his music and his fans. No run-ins with the law or stupid immature antics. George is rare today. I'm tired of the talk of who will replace him. Forget it. I hope he will continue to do shows for many years.

PAT WILLHITE
OWATONNA, MINNESOTA

Keep it
Strait.



COURTESY: MCA RECORDS

LETTERS

I really enjoyed your 30th anniversary issue, which touched on most of the things that changed the face of country music. But I think it is about time someone acknowledged what really changed country music to the sounds of today. I often tell people that it was Randy Travis who turned the knob on the door, Garth Brooks who opened the door, and Billy Ray Cyrus who blew it off its hinges. The new wave of music being played on radio today all started with the frenzy and explosion of "Achy Breaky Heart." It's still the biggest song to come out of Nashville, and his *Some Gave All* album spent 17 weeks at No. 1 on the *Billboard* pop album charts. That deserves mention.

DENISE MARTINSON
STERLING HEIGHTS, MICHIGAN

SNUBBING TIM?

I got my magazine and to me it is not an anniversary edition without acknowledging Tim McGraw. From his album *Not A Moment Too Soon*, predominant on the charts in 1994, he has continued to be at the top of country music. Kenny Chesney and Toby Keith are all over your book. They have not accomplished more than Tim McGraw. You do not give him the credit he deserves.

SHIRLEY GREENE
PALATINE BRIDGE, NEW YORK

GENERATION GAP

I'm writing in response to the Teen Country Q&A column (*October/November*) about older country artists getting played on the radio. I think traditional country music is ignored in this day and age. Although I have been a huge fan of traditional country since the age of 5, there are middle-aged people, not just teens, who have never heard the names of Eddy Arnold, Kitty Wells or Lefty Frizzell. I think if young people could be exposed to this music like they are the music of Shania Twain and Garth Brooks, they would appreciate it as much as I do. I admire new artists like Alan Jackson and Elizabeth Cook; their music is still patterned after the music of country music legends. Quite frankly, country music needs to get back on track!

BEN HALL, 13
OKOLONA, MISSISSIPPI



Little Big Town deserves respect.

TAPHIE ARROYO

ARTLESS CODGER?

Your review of Little Big Town (*October/November*) was rude, sarcastic and uncalled for! From the first line to the last, the comments Mr. McCall made were biased and untruthful. First of all, teen pop is not over, maybe to some of those over the age of 30, but not for younger people. And please don't compare Little Big Town to Britney Spears and 'N Sync. Not only do members of Little Big Town write most of their songs, they also co-produced [the album]. These are real artists. If you keep telling youngsters like me not to buy these terrific albums, country music will die. For country music's sake, buy Little Big Town's CD.

RICK RAMIREZ, 24
NASHVILLE

UNDERSTANDING BEAUTY

One of Bob Dylan's best lines is "don't criticize things you don't understand." Critics shouldn't review recordings when they don't understand what they're reviewing. The person who reviewed Ralph Stanley's latest solo effort (*August/September*) obviously doesn't understand Ralph's music. Ralph Stanley's voice is shot? Nonsense! It is better than ever. And now he has a producer who knows how to get more out of it. By the standards of most performers of commercial music, Ralph has always had limitations. His voice wavers and takes quirky twists and turns. He doesn't hit conventional notes on the head. It is purposely primitive. T Bone Burnett is a producer who understands Ralph's singing. He has Ralph singing in a lower register for greater flexibility, and when

CONTRIBUTORS

Meet this issue's esteemed guest stars

★ BRIAN MANSFIELD

Like Darryl Worley, Mansfield enjoys chocolate gravy on homemade biscuits. Unlike the towering 6-foot-6-inch Worley, Mansfield came out on the shorter side of a tall family. Mansfield is the Nashville correspondent for *USA Today* and senior editor for *CDNOW*. His article on Worley is his first for *Country Music*. His book *Remembering Patsy*, a Patsy Cline biography, is scheduled for release by Rutledge Hill Press in early 2003.

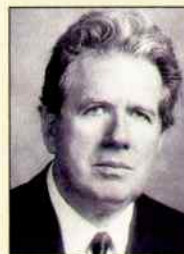


★ JAMES HUNTER

a native of West Virginia, first wrote about cover subject Tim McGraw during his "Indian Outlaw" era for *Entertainment Weekly*. A veteran music journalist who also works in record production, his articles have appeared in *Rolling Stone*, *Blender*, *The Village Voice*, *The New York Times*, *Vibe*, *Details*, *Spin* and others. He recently completed work as a creative consultant for pop singer Duncan Sheik's current *Daylight* album on Atlantic Records.

★ KATH HANSEN

As *Country Music's* "Say What?" columnist, Hansen has been asking artists left-field questions for more than three years. Having talked with everyone from Toby Keith to Kitty Wells, she now dreams up quirky questions while riding the New York City subways to and from her full-time job with a publishing house. One of the eeriest coincidences she can remember was discussing the CIA and issues of national security with Naomi Judd just days before Sept. 11, 2001. She also fondly remembers Shania Twain offering up tips to avoid a bear attack.



★ ED MORRIS

who writes this issue's story about the evolution of sex in country music, started researching the topic as a teenager in the 1950s: "From such canonical jukebox texts as Flatt & Scruggs' 'I'll Go Steppin' Too' and Webb Pierce's 'Back Street Affair,' I pieced together the intelligence that love might be messy – and probably wasn't very interesting if it wasn't." As an adult, Morris has been the Nashville bureau chief of *Billboard* and has written for *The Journal Of Country Music*, *Bluegrass Unlimited* and other publications.

there is accompaniment, it is somewhat different than standard bluegrass. To my ears, the results are beautiful. The reviewer should remember he is not reviewing country-pop, honky-tonk or even standard bluegrass. It is an ancient type of music with innovative touches. The next time Ralph puts out an album, give it to a reviewer who has some understanding of what he is trying to do.

JERRY BARNEY
FERGUS FALLS, MINNESOTA

COWBOY'S LAMENT

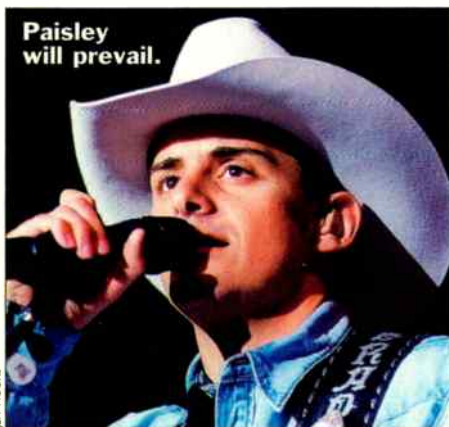
In your fine 30th anniversary issue, editor Neil Pond referred to "old country, new country or even somewhere-in-between country" – and there are audiences for each and every group. It seems fair to me that your reviewers should be favorable to the genre they are reviewing; i.e., if you hate country rock, don't critique it. In that issue, I disagree with the review of Michael Martin Murphey's latest, *Cowboy Classics: Playing Favorites II*. I grew up on Western ballads and the music of the original Sons Of The Pioneers. You don't hear much of it anymore, but I still love it and am grateful to people like Michael Martin Murphey who are keeping it alive.

BETTY DAVIS
NATHROP, COLORADO

SORRY, CHARLIE

Thank you for your article on Brad Paisley (*August/September*). He is the real deal and will be in Nashville many years after people forget who Charlie Robison is. Thank goodness Brad isn't too good to be true.

KENNETH ROE
EAST MEREDITH, NEW YORK



JEFF MOORE



COLD CALL

I was highly irritated by a comment made in the review of Mark Chesnutt's new album (*October/November*). Lisa Zhito stated, "for every gem there's a clunker ... the sappy, cliché-filled ode to mama 'She Was' ... the whiny strings and earnest vocals don't help." In the beginning of the review she stated that "few singers do stone-cold country as well as Chesnutt" and then she turns around and complains about the very kind of song that makes him the great artist that he is. Many artists have done songs along these lines, and they are a large part of the classic country we all know and love. To me, this tribute to his mother seemed like his way of dealing with her loss, and it helped me as well to deal with my loss, even though it was two years ago. I understand that no one is going to like every song by every artist, but the reviewer seemed to be a very unfeeling person with her opinion of this song. I won't be reading her reviews anymore.

REGINA GIPSON
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

ELVIS TRIBUTE

I read the article about Elvis (*August/September*) and thought you would like to know that he is well remembered in Indiana. Fans have erected a time capsule/memorial at the site where he performed his last concert at Market Square Arena on June 26, 1977.

DWAYNE CARTER
INDIANAPOLIS

ANGRY AMERICANS

A plethora of post-Sept. 11 songs helped the nation grieve the loss of countless innocent American citizens at the hands of heartless terrorists. Yet the music world repressed an emotion central in the grieving process – the emotion of anger. Toby Keith's "Courtesy Of The Red, White And Blue (The Angry American)," containing a vitriolic expression of anger in response to the terrible acts of Sept. 11, expands the range of expression to include this core emotion. When news anchor Peter Jennings allegedly prohibited Toby Keith from performing the song on a July 4 celebration he was to host, Jennings touched a nerve that jammed radio stations with requests for the song. The song propelled Keith's album to the very top of the charts. Was Jennings acting correctly in his expression of moral indignation? I wonder what Jesus would do. Though Jesus was known to have tossed around a few tables in his time, would he ever go as far as Keith in expressing his anger? In his song, Keith puts terrorists like bin Laden on notice by proclaiming in graphic detail exactly where he planned to shove his cowboy boot. No, Jesus wouldn't go there. After all, everybody knows Jesus wore sandals.

BRUCE L. THIESSEN, PH.D.
SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA

How dare Natalie Maines of the Dixie Chicks call Toby's song ignorant. She has no room to speak. The Dixie Chicks are a disgrace to country music – "Earl had to die" wasn't ignorant? I have never cared for the Dixie Chicks and now I know why. You go, Toby! All of us real country rednecks love your song.

MEICHELLE BUCK
INTERLACHEN, FLORIDA

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Hatching more hits

◀ The **DIXIE CHICKS** have been on the road promoting their latest chart-topping album, *Home*, as their current single, "Landslide," perks up radio. They shared some laughs with *Saturday Night Live*'s **JIMMY FALLON** and host **JAY LENO** on *The Tonight Show* and took center stage for a taping of CMT's *Crossroads* (inset) with pop legend **JAMES TAYLOR**.



Hail, Brenda!

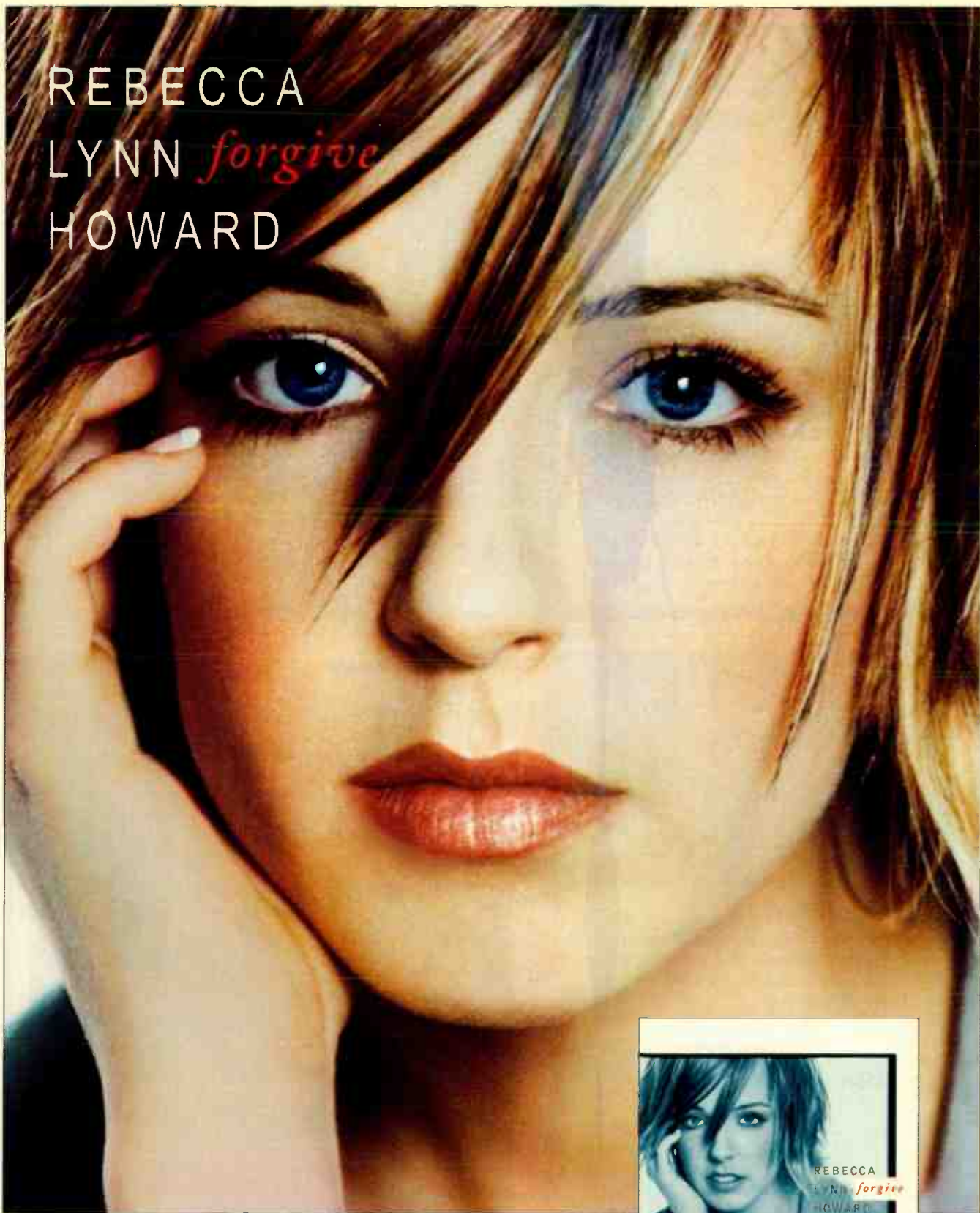
◀ The legendary **BRENDA LEE** signed autographs at the RC Cola & MoonPie Festival in historic Bell Buckle, Tenn., where she was crowned RC Cola & MoonPie Queen after riding in a parade through town. She also signed copies of her new autobiography, *Little Miss Dynamite*, but opted not to compete in the MoonPie toss.



Why is this man smiling?

▲ Former high school quarterback **PHIL VASSAR** worked hard at the *very tough* job of shooting a local television promotional spot with the Tennessee Titans cheerleaders.

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World Radio History

COUNTRY ON THE TOWN

ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY NEWS HAPPENINGS



Still pickin'

▲ The legendary **EARL SCRUGGS** and his son, **RANDY**, show off a copy of the banjo king's acclaimed *Earl Scruggs And Friends* CD, on which they collaborated, at an event in Nashville where the Hall of Famer proudly unveiled a limited-edition Gibson banjo (insert) that pays tribute to his amazing six-decade career.



LARRY HILL (2)

Ringside seat

▼ Newcomer **BRAD MARTIN** checked out **HANK WILLIAMS JR.**'s bejeweled fingers following a performance together in Raleigh, N.C. "It was the most amazing night!" declared Martin after the show. "When you think you've encountered all the surprises the music business has to offer, there is still one more awesome experience to come."



COURTESY: ANITA PECCA



RANDI RAZZLEFF

Among friends

▲ **DARRYL WORLEY** signed copies of his hit album *I Miss My Friend* during an in-store appearance in Nashville. Worley recently scored his first No. 1 with the album's title cut.

Big trouble

► **TRACE ADKINS** put the squeeze on "disguised" newcomer **JAMESON CLARK** on the set of Clark's new video, "You Da Man," in which Clark is accused of hitting on Adkins' girlfriend – big mistake!



COURTESY: HOT SHOTS

Star 'n' cars

► **STEVE AZAR** took a break from touring with his current hit, "Waitin' On Joe," to go on another tour – of the Saturn automobile plant in Spring Hill, Tenn. He even helped the quality-control department by putting a Saturn door through the special Azar Stress Test!



LARRY HILL (2)





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THE INSIDER

WITH HAZEL SMITH

The mountain came down to the Ryman stage.



BETH GRAY/LOST HIGHWAY RECORDS

FAME FOR OPRY STARS

Porter Wagoner and Bill Carlisle often get ushered onto the stage of the *Grand Ole Opry*. But the two legends had no idea why the Dixie Chicks asked them to come out into the spotlight during the superstar trio's set on a special Saturday night in late August.

Porter, ever the neighborly gentleman, stopped to chat with pregnant Chick Emily Robison. He was still talking and joking when Emily's sister, Martie Maguire, made the surprise announcement that Porter and 93-year-old Jumpin' Bill Carlisle were to be the 2003 inductees into the Country Music Hall of Fame.

Only Porter didn't hear her at first. When asked by Martie what he thought about the announcement, Porter improvised. He said how much he loved the Chicks and their music and how happy he was to have them guesting at the *Opry*. Carlisle didn't hear the announcement either, but he graciously stepped to the microphone and offered a

★ MOUNTAIN HISTORY

Performers from the marvelous movie soundtrack *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* wound down the 60-day *Down From The Mountain* Tour with a sold-out performance at the Ryman Auditorium – back where it started two years ago with a premiere performance (which can now be seen on video and DVD).

Some of the world's greatest voices lifted to the rafters, bringing laughter, applause, encores, standing ovations and tears.

Performers included Emmylou Harris, Alison Krauss, Gillian Welch and Dave

Rawlings, The Whites, The Del McCoury Band, Ricky Skaggs, The Fairfield Four, Nashville Bluegrass Band, Dan Tyminski, The Peasall Sisters, Norman & Nancy Blake, Chris Thomas King, host Rodney Crowell and the talented legend Ralph Stanley.

Stanley ended the evening by having the audience stand, join hands and, with every one of the night's performers onstage, sing an a cappella version of "Amazing Grace." With more than 3,000 voices filling that beautiful concert theater, it provided a stunning end to an unforgettable concert tour.

few words of thanks. Neither knew what a momentous milestone had just been bestowed upon them.

Backstage moments later, Porter and Bill were both deeply moved when they found out the news. Porter told everyone he was in shock. He also said he'd dreamed of being in the Hall of Fame, and that he had talked to the Lord about it and even had a speech prepared that he'd rehearsed over and over.

Porter pointed upward and said, "Now He's the only one who knows what I wanted to say."

It had to be hard on Porter to be overlooked while watching his protégée, Dolly Parton, *Opry* mate Bill

Anderson and a bevy of others over the years get their rightful due with a plaque in the Hall of Fame. Porter certainly deserves the honor: He's had a career full of hit albums and singles; his syndicated TV show was an important, highly rated country music program for seven years; and he took Parton to RCA, got her a record deal and oversaw her record production without taking producer credit. His fancy suits and boots are still a favorite of country fans – and though past 70 years old, he still thrills crowds every time he walks out onstage.

STAR TRACK

Did you know that piano man Phil Vassar was a high

school track star? He won three state championships in his homestate of Virginia at high jump, long jump and hurdles. And that ain't all: Vassar went to college at James Madison University on a track scholarship.

HOWDY!

When the *Grand Ole Opry* honored the late first lady of country comedy, Cousin Minnie Pearl, the auditorium filled with friends who loved her.

Host Vince Gill charmed his way through a full hour onstage, sharing stories, singing songs and introducing guests. His wife, Amy Grant, a close pal of the late Sarah Cannon, the woman known onstage



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1 cranky king
of the jungle



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as Cousin Minnie, sang a duet with Vince and talked about how she named her daughter **Sarah** after her cherished friend.

Clint Black performed a couple of songs, and he also reminded everyone that he too named a daughter, **Lily Pearl**, for the night's honoree.

The wonderful **Kathy Mattea**, recipient of the 2001 Minnie Pearl Humanitarian Award, presented a surprised **Steve Wariner** with this year's trophy. "Miss Minnie must be looking down through 'Holes In The Floor Of Heaven' tonight," Kathy beamed.

Wariner turned red when he heard Kathy say the title of his self-penned song. "I was at the side of the stage telling jokes to Vince," said a tearful Wariner, "when I realized Kathy was talking about *me*."

THAT'S COUNTRY

Eating Vienna sausages, sardines and crackers? Sleeping on the ground? You call that a vacation? **Andy Griggs** and **Blake Shelton** do! The two up-and-comers took their dads and their bows and arrows and hit the wilds of Colorado looking for elk. Andy claims that's how he charges his batteries. No



COURTESY SCHMIDT RELATIONS

★ **BIGHEARTED GUY**

Steve Wariner's stepdaughter, **Holly**, was diagnosed with diabetes as a child. Steve served as honorary celebrity chairman in 2000 and 2001 for a charity walk to raise money to cure diabetes in Nashville. In 2001, he joined the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation in Washington, D.C., to raise awareness of the need for research and to lobby for stem cell research. This year, the Middle Tennessee chapter honored Steve at its Red, White & Tunes Gala for his work on behalf of the organization. Steve performed during the event and donated several items to the silent auction, all of which helped to raise \$650,000. It went to the **Johnny Russell** Memorial Grant for juvenile diabetes research at Nashville's Vanderbilt University Medical Center. *Grand Ole Opry* star Johnny Russell, a close Wariner pal, died last year from diabetes.

baths. Bad breath. Country boys living off the land.

GREAT WOMEN

Nervy CMT revealed its list of the 40 Greatest Women Of Country Music in a program that began airing in September. They covered the gamut pretty well. They gave **Patsy Cline** the deserved No. 1 spot. Two, three and four were **Tammy Wynette**, **Loretta Lynn** and **Dolly Parton**, respectively.

As you might expect, the list stirred lots of discussing and cussing. If they had chosen the most heartfelt, Loretta would have been No. 2. If they were voting on the most successful, Dolly would have

been No. 2. Since Tammy had passed away, there are those who thought that's why she was named second to Patsy. Dying does tend to make one more famous in Music City.

Granted, Tammy sold a lot of records in the late '60s and early '70s, but neither Tammy nor Loretta wrote a song as successful as "I Will Always Love You." And Dolly is the *only* one of the three who is famous worldwide.

Another who deserved a higher ranking was **Kitty Wells**. She led the way. Before Kitty, there were no solo female country music stars. Surely she deserves to be higher than 15.

BIRTHDAY POSSUM

Besides being a saint, **Nancy Jones** is the most unselfish human on planet Earth. She must be, for she shared the birthday of her husband **George Jones** with the *Grand Ole Opry* audience live on CMT. Opry member/Hall of Fame legend **Little Jimmy Dickens** hosted the show and introduced **Lee Ann Womack**, **Kenny Chesney**, **Alan Jackson** and **Jim Lauderdale**.

Highlights included Chesney's version of "White Lightning," the first No. 1 for Jones. Chesney had chartered a private Learjet from Los Angeles for the event, then returned to L.A. afterward. But he said he wouldn't have missed it for anything – and that George Jones is the main reason he wanted a singing career in the first place.

I've heard many other singers try and fail, but that Jackson boy did a perfect rendition of Jones' signature song, "He Stopped Loving Her Today." Alan's duet of "Golden Ring" with Womack was really good, too, and his version of his own hit "Don't Rock The Jukebox" was perfect.

Singer/songwriter Jim Lauderdale, who has played Jones in a musical based on the life of **Tammy Wynette**, got a standing ovation for his version of the Jones standard "Who's Gonna Fill Their Shoes." To cap it off, the greatest singer who ever lived, George Jones himself, took the stage. He performed "I Don't Need Your Rockin' Chair," and my heart almost stopped. His greatness has never been and never will be equaled.

★ **A GOLDEN EGG**

Leave it to the **Dixie Chicks** to break their own records, and that's what they did with their new CD, *Home*, a beautifully uncluttered acoustic/bluegrass album. With the first week's sales of 780,000 the Texas trio had the highest first-week sales of *any* female group in history.

To celebrate the release, the Chicks uncorked a well-earned bottle of good champagne – though a very pregnant **Emily Robison** had to celebrate with sparkling apple cider while clinking glasses with sister **Martie Maguire** and partner **Natalie Maines**.



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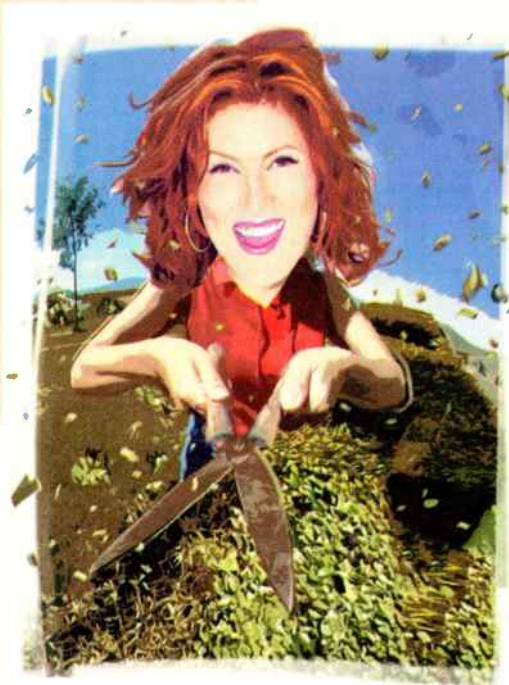
Jo Dee Messina harps on bald guys, tattoos, race cars and hedge-trimming

Jo Dee Messina is speaking in a rasp instead of her usual mile-a-minute roar. The Massachusetts native is fighting a throat infection and the audio evidence suggests she's losing. Still, the vibrant, flame-haired singer is trying to press on, though she's worried about performing her hit "Dare To Dream" on TV's *The Late Late Show* within hours. "I just hope I don't cough and that my nose doesn't dribble on the microphone!" she laughs. Ever the trouper, Jo Dee refused to reschedule this interview. So when she says "I'm Alright," you'd best believe her.

Are bald men sexy? Sure. It depends on the guy, though — like Bruce Willis. And I think Ron Howard is sexy; that Opie is so sexy in a cute, little, loving way! Michael Jordan is unbelievably sexy. How about Sean Connery!?

You filmed the "Dare To Dream" video on a racetrack. Have you ever taken a ride in a race car? No — and I never would. It's very intimidating. When we did that video, I was walking on the tracks around the cars, and it's just so intimidating to have them so near you. Those guys do such a great job driving those cars, I think I'll just sit back and watch! When I was a kid, I used to go to see the rebuilt old racing cars before there was a NASCAR track up in New Hampshire.

Do you have any tattoos? One I'm trying to get rid of. When I was 12 years old, me and a bunch of friends at boarding school did some self-tattoos with pen ink. I'm waiting for laser surgery to be at a level where I feel comfortable having it removed. It's on my back, and it's really tiny and you can barely see it.



BRAD WALLEN

Is working out a chore or a pleasure? The results are a pleasure, the actual working out is a chore. I grit my teeth during every step of my run. It's 40 minutes every day, day in and day out. And I have to have a Walkman to entertain me or I just get hopelessly bored.

How far do you run? Between four to six miles.

Are you planning to run a marathon? I'm hoping within the next year I'll be able to complete one. It will probably end up being a half-marathon, but I like to be optimistic.

What fashion trend do you hate? All of them! I'm not a fashion queen, so if I'm forced to follow fashion trends — it just drives me nuts.

Are you a Home Depot kind of gal? Oh yeah. My favorite things to do are whacking away at the hedges, mowing the lawn, cleaning the pool. I just love doing house stuff. I really miss it when I'm on the road.

Who is your favorite comedian? I love Robin Williams, though his latest movies have not been comedies. Jerry Seinfeld. Tom Hanks can be really funny, but I think he's put that comedy phase of his career behind him. Mike Myers as Austin Powers just cracks me up. The man has no shame!

How do you feel about doing photo shoots? I like them about half the time. I've been getting my hair cut so many different ways, it's good to get it on film so I'll remember it! But sometimes, going through all the wardrobe changes and sitting still for hair and makeup can be trying. But it's fun to get a new image once in a while.

Do you own any vinyl records? I still have the first 45 record I ever bought.

It's a song called "Undercover Angel" by Alan O'Day. But now I don't have a record player, so I don't have anything to play it on.

Paper or plastic? Are you talking about money? Plastic for money, paper for plates!

What is your favorite smell? I love the smell of spring and lilacs. I love fresh air.

Don't visit New York, then! That's funny, because I was just in Central Park, and some of the flowers there smell amazing. I think the flowers smell stronger in New York, because they have to work so hard to overcome the smell of the horse parking, if you get my drift!

— Kath Hansen

No Bull

Tommy Shane Steiner, from a legendary rodeo family, chose music over steer wrestling

His looks shout Southern California. His music sounds Nashville. But his heart – and his home – is quite definitely in Austin.

“I like Nashville,” says Tommy Shane Steiner, relaxing in a Mexican restaurant in the Texas capital. “I enjoy hanging out there, and I respect the city for all that it’s meant to my career. But it’s difficult sometimes to be me when I’m there. You can’t go anywhere – the grocery store, a bar, Sonic – without running into someone who wants to talk about a recording session or a song or a deal.”

Although the 29-year-old Steiner is as serious about his career as any ambitious newcomer, he’s just as serious about enjoying time *away* from the business. “I’ll want to go out with friends and do something goofy,” Steiner says, “like wear a trendy shirt or dye my hair blue or something.”

In Nashville, such eccentricities garner gossip. “I’ll hear from a couple of people, ‘Yeah, Steiner, I heard you were at so-and-so the other night wearing ...,’” he says, trailing off and rolling his eyes. “In Austin,” he adds, “I don’t have to worry about that.”

Judging from the success of his debut album, *Then Came The Night*, Steiner need not worry about finding his place within the country music industry. His first single, “What If She’s An Angel,” climbed to No. 2 on the country singles charts – making him one of a small handful of new artists to enjoy immediate success in recent years.

These days, the still-single crooner with the surfer-boy looks is working overtime to

meet the obligations of his newfound celebrity while trying to sneak in time for his two primary hobbies, free diving and weight-lifting.

Free diving, where a diver goes as deep underwater as possible without an oxygen tank, may sound dangerous. But, then, Steiner grew up in a family where danger is commonplace.

“My entire family is involved in rodeo – everyone but me,” grins Steiner, whose last name is well known on the

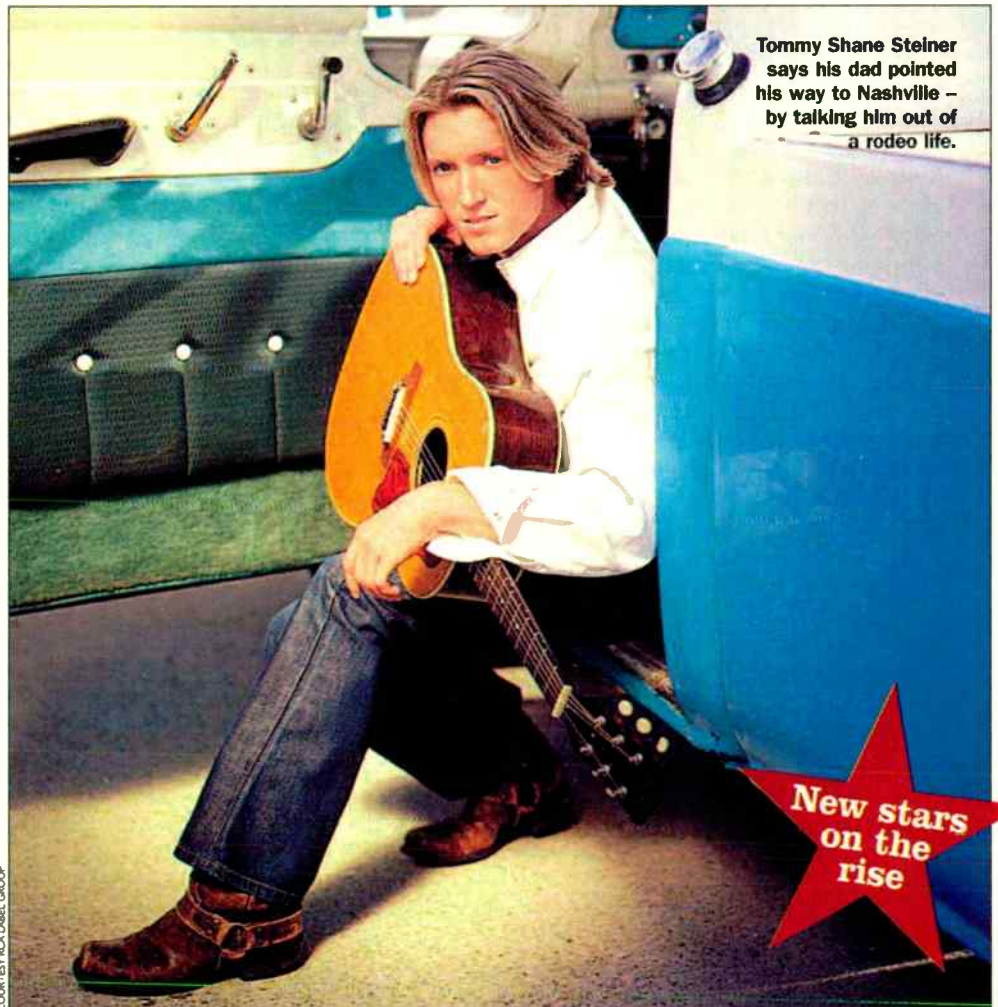
bull-riding circuit. His great-grandfather, T.C. “Buck” Steiner, is a member of the Cowboy Hall of Fame and rode with legends Pancho Villa, Wild Bill Elliott and Annie Oakley. His grandfather, Tommy Steiner, is an inductee of both the Cowboy Hall of Fame and the Rodeo Hall of Fame. He passed the baton to Tommy Shane’s father, Bobby, who was the 1973 World Champion bull rider. Even his mom, Joleen, is a barrel racer.

The legacy has continued into the current generation as well. Tommy’s brother Sid is a champion bull wrestler and one of the stars of the modern-day rodeo circuit.

So what made this true-life cowboy choose music over wrestling steers?

“My dad actually talked me out of it,” says Steiner, “and used his broken bones as an example of what I could look forward to. In that respect, he really helped set me on the road to a music career.”

— Betsy Model



Tommy Shane Steiner says his dad pointed his way to Nashville – by talking him out of a rodeo life.

New stars on the rise

COURTESY: RCA LABEL GROUP

NUMBER ONE WITH A BULLET

Darryl Worley won't leave his fingernail alone. Constantly looking down at his left middle finger as he talks, he can't stop fooling with the oddly shaped tip.

He clips it, files it smooth, brushes away dead skin. Then he examines it closely again.

Why the obsession? Because Worley knows he's fortunate to still have the finger at all.

Frankly, he says, he's lucky to be alive – and lucky that a misshapen finger is all that remains to remind him of a hunting accident that could have ended up much, much worse.

As a teen, Worley and his two cousins had been riding in an old Plymouth Satellite through the bottomland that flooded whenever the Tennessee River overflowed its banks. Filled with birds, snakes and turtles, it was a fine place for young men to hunt. Whenever somebody spotted something, the driver would slam the car into park. The boys would grab their rifles and leap out, ready to fire. Throughout the day, Worley always managed to squeeze off the first round. The tallest of the boys, he sat in the front passenger's seat – and, well, there's a reason they called it "riding shotgun."

When the driver spotted a row of old bottles, it proved too tempting a target to pass up. Once the car skidded to a stop, Worley flung open his door but stayed in his seat. He had leaned slightly out of the doorway, the top of his head even with the top of the car, and drew a bead. But the driving cousin refused to be denied this time, jumping up as soon as the car stopped and angling his rifle barrel, using the Satellite's roof to steady his aim.

He didn't see Worley's head sticking

DARRYL WORLEY

SURVIVES A DANGEROUS RIDE TO THE TOP OF THE CHARTS

up from the other side of the car.

The first blast creased Worley's scalp, the bullet singeing hair and blistering skin as it passed. When Worley reached to see if his fool cousin had blown the top of his head off, a second shot ripped through his fingertip, spraying flesh and blood and bone chips everywhere.

The doctor told him the nail would never grow back, but sometimes persistence pays off. Worley continually massaged his finger, rubbing it so regularly that he got to where he barely realized he was doing it. At first the nail grew straight up, perpendicular to the finger. Little by little, it began to lay down.

Today that finger is a bit shorter than the corresponding digit on Worley's right hand. But it's still plenty long, considering that Worley stretches out to 6 feet, 6 inches tall.

"Look," he says, pointing to a tiny indentation near the end of the finger. "You can see just perfectly where the bullet went in."

Worley approaches his career every bit as methodically as he did the rehabilitation

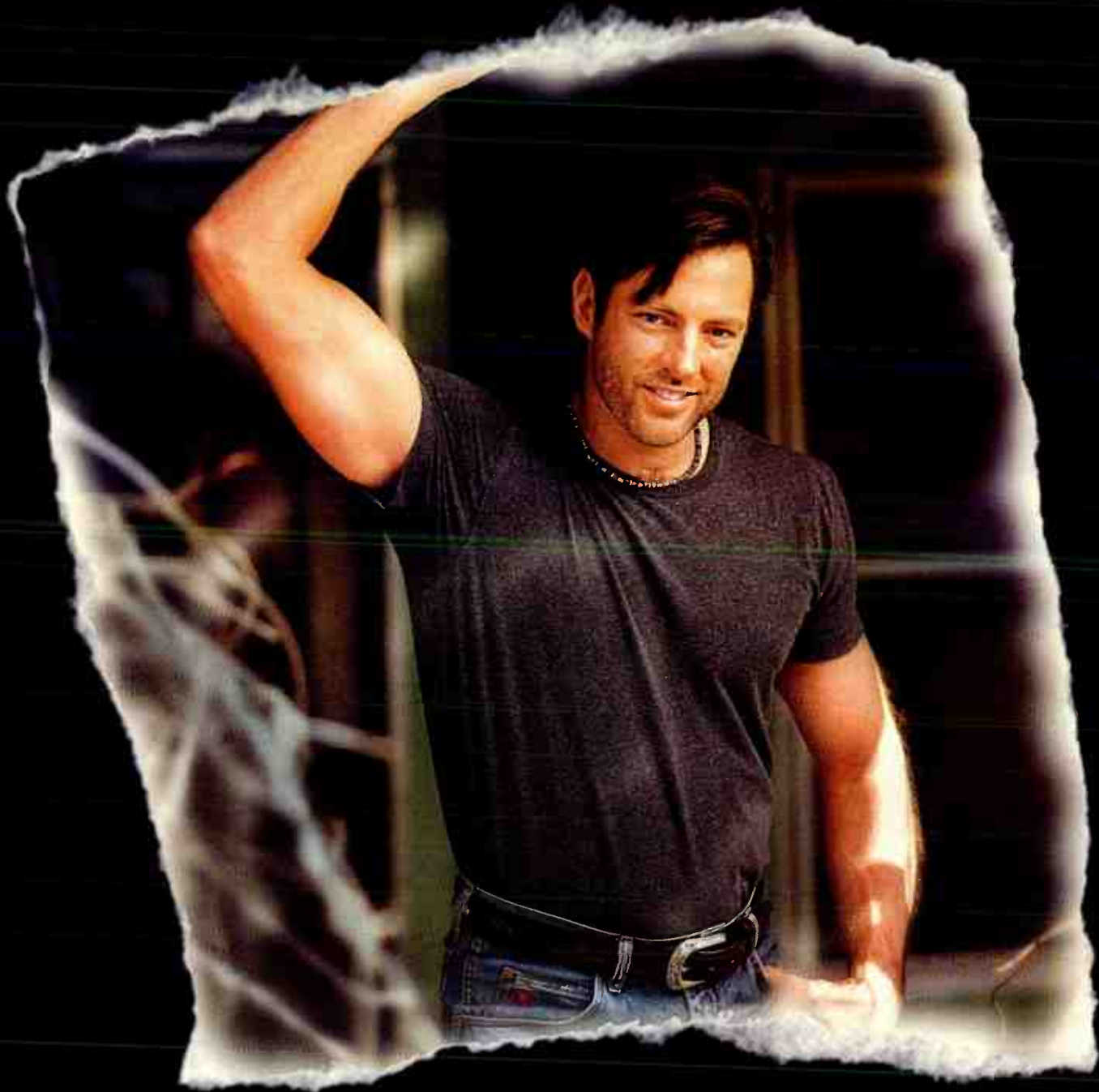
of his fingernail. "It moves at a snail's pace sometimes," says the 38-year-old singer, "because that's the way you lay groundwork. If you don't get your foundation right on your house, you're going to have problems with it for the rest of your life."

Worley could've taken his shot earlier. He came to Nashville in the early '90s, when every label wanted a hat act. A few record labels offered him a contract – after all, who's not going to go after a tall, good-looking guy who can write solid songs and sing them well? But the executives wanted a GQ cowboy to fit a Western-cut jacket and sing contemporary, pop-country music. The same execs told Worley that he'd be an old man before traditional styles returned to favor. So Worley declined the offers and bided his time.

He eventually hooked up with aspiring producer Frank Rogers, who also was working with a young singer from West Virginia named Brad Paisley. Paisley's debut record beat Worley's introductory *Hard Rain Don't Last* to record stores by about a year. But in the long run, that didn't make much difference. *Hard Rain Don't Last* set Worley up with a quartet of well-regarded singles – "When You Need My Love," "A Good Day To Run," "Sideways," "Second Wind." While none were huge hits ("A Good Day To Run," the biggest, peaked at No. 12 on the *Billboard* charts), fans and industry insiders alike knew the real deal when they heard it.

"The fact that we didn't have No. 1 singles on the first album, there wasn't anybody that was set back by that," Worley says. "We didn't expect, really, to blow the top out of the charts. My music is the kind that takes a little longer to grab ahold. Then you

BY BRIAN MANSFIELD • PHOTOS BY MARK TUCKER/DREAMWORKS



build a huge fan base and go from there. Like George Strait.”

Worley’s persistence seems to be paying off. He surprised a lot of people in July 2002 when his second album, *I Miss My Friend*, debuted at No. 1 on the country album sales charts. Just a couple of months later, the title track hit the top spot on the singles charts.

With a cluster of new male artists like Joe Nichols, Anthony Smith, Kevin Denney and Josh Turner starting to gain

attention with traditional sounds, Worley has found himself at the front of a trend rather than on the tail end of one.

“We’re kind of like an alternative act in this sea of crossover, pop-country, contemporary music,” Worley says. “We come with more of a broke-down, almost acoustic, traditional sound. Of course, it’s not acoustic in a lot of cases, with the more up-tempo, rocking songs. But it’s a throwback to Merle Haggard and Buck Owens and George Jones. It’s

most like what Alan Jackson does.”

Worley may have plenty of patience, but he also sets his sights high. “I don’t want to do anything half-assed. If I can’t go out and play the stadium tour and be successful at it, I won’t ever reach what I see as my ultimate goal,” he states matter-of-factly. “I don’t know that there’s any goal in country music that’s any more ultimate than that, to do it and do it successfully, to be a huge thing.”

But Worley realizes that even George

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Darryl Worley

Strait built his career for two decades before attempting to tour in venues that size. "I don't look for that this time next year," he admits.

Most singers try to expand their audiences by broadening their scope. Worley plans to narrow his focus. "I went in the very first time and made the album as country as I could make it and still keep my record deal," he says. "This time, it may be a little more traditional than before in some instances. That's what I'd like to do every time. I would like to get a little closer to who I am and what I am musically every time we make an album. I'd like to cut a country shuffle that was recorded the way they did records when Haggard was first getting started. That'd be a cool number to have on an album, you know?"

Worley and wife Beverly, whom he married in 2001, live in Savannah, Tenn., a small town near the state's southern border. But weeks can pass before Worley gets home sometimes, so he keeps an apartment in Nashville with a revolving cast of roommates.

He comes by his rambling fever naturally. Three generations of

Worleys worked on riverboats before his father took a job with the local paper mill. "The paper mill coming to that area and setting up shop brought the Worley men in off the river," the singer says. But the steady work of the paper mill couldn't assuage his father's wanderlust, so for a while he became a traveling preacher.

Where his father had the preaching circuit and his grandfather and great-grandfather had the river, Worley has the road. It's not so bad when he's on the bus, but getting behind the wheel of a car can present problems.

"I have an odd form of narcolepsy that only manifests itself when I'm driving," he says. What's worse is he tends to nod off more when his luck is running better. It's almost as if his body starts telling him, "Life is good; let's take a nap."

"I've had wrecks eight or nine times," he says.

Worley's often wondered why, with death so close to him so many times, that he's still here.

Worley's life has been filled with close calls. He also believes that there is a reason why he's still here. "Dad says that the good Lord ain't through with me yet," he says with a smile. "I hope he's right." *

“Dad says that the good Lord ain't through with me yet . . .



I hope he's right.”

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Tim McGraw is pumped. "I've always wanted to do it this way," he says, sitting in his Nashville management office in a black cowboy hat and boots, beat-up jeans, and a black BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN AND THE E STREET BAND T-shirt. "But we worked so much on the road, we were always so busy, there just never was time."

Tim McGraw breaks Nashville convention and bets on his faithful road band

McGraw is not using the grand "we" often heard from stars seated on Jay Leno's couch. No, when Tim McGraw says "we," he's talking about himself and The Dancehall Doctors, his band, whose name comes from a Conway Twitty tune. The Dancehall Doctors are the story of McGraw's new album: They made it.

At 35, McGraw is the king of go-your-own-way country, having sold over 25 million albums worldwide. A proud father of three, he is married, happily and famously, to Faith Hill, one of America's biggest stars. In recent years, he has demonstrated — with mature collections like 1997's *Everywhere*, 1999's *A Place In The Sun* and 2001's *Set This Circus Down* — that his music could stretch beyond the novelty of 1994's "Indian Outlaw," the gigantic single that put him on the map. McGraw's music now eclipses the other story that the media clung to in the wake of his breakout: McGraw's discovery, at age 11, that his bio-



logical father was star baseball pitcher Tug McGraw.

Subsequently, even as the papers reported on what European designed his wedding suit — or on his run-in with police in Buffalo, N.Y., in a post-concert incident involving his friend Kenny Chesney and an officer's horse — McGraw fans know that behind the boldface type lies big-time country music with a heart and manner all its own.

This is a country singer who will say of his more intense ballads, "Deep and emotional songs, I love to do 'em. But I don't want to do 'em just to prove that I'm deep and serious and emotional. Then it's like when you see somebody trying to be cool. That's different from being cool."

This is a country singer who watches the MTV video awards, turns to Faith Hill and complains, "None of these guys are cool. They're all trying to be, but none are cool."

He thinks for himself. Only Tim McGraw, standing in the middle of country music,



Billy Mason
drums

John Marcus
bass

Bob Minner
acoustic guitar,
banjo

Jeff McMahan
keyboards

BY JAMES HUNTER

ambler



Darran Smith
lead
electric
guitar

Denny Hemingson
acoustic,
electric &
steel guitar

Dean Brown
acoustic
guitar,
fiddle

David Dunkley
percussion

The Doctors are in! For his latest album, McGraw chose to operate with his own road band, The Dancehall Doctors, rather than the traditional Nashville session players.

might pose the question: "Are you sure Led Zep done it this a-way?"

Tim McGraw & The Dancehall Doctors fits right in with that part of the superstar's tradition. This year, McGraw moved to pursue a longtime creative urge he believed would render his new effort more alive than just "the next Tim McGraw album." He set upon a course that, among country singers, is as rare as hen's teeth, something commercially risky since the days of Buck Owens and Merle Haggard: He decided to break Music Row custom and record his seventh album with his longtime band outside Nashville.

He encountered some resistance. "Everybody was like, 'Why in the world would you go do this?'"

player Dean Brown, steel and rhythm guitarist Denny Hemingson, drummer Billy Mason and percussionist David Dunkley. Out went the small cadre of studio musicians who play on nearly every mainstream country session.

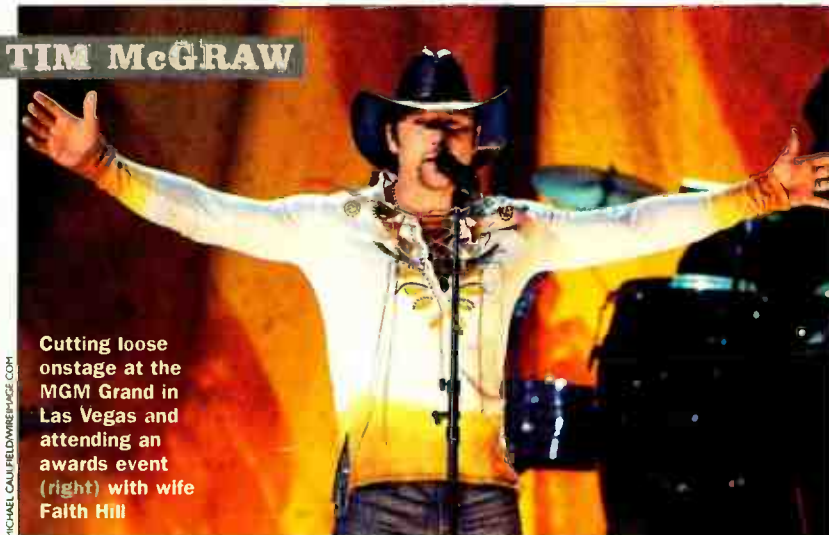
McGraw loves the romantic line of classic-rock and outlaw-country albums where bands charged into the studio, living and breathing songs until the musicians emerged with finished collections that bore their own stylistic stamps. So McGraw chose to make an album in this old school, rock 'n' roll way.

Darran Smith, The Dancehall Doctors' lead guitarist and bandleader since 1989 who co-produced the album along with the singer and Byron

Byron Gallimore concurs. "Tim has had enough success," he says, "that he can spend extra money cutting a record. Not everybody can do that; the labels are not going to permit and tolerate that type of budget. In most situations we're forced to go and cut a song in three hours, and try to walk out of there with a record."

Tim McGraw & The Dancehall Doctors emerged from a slower process. "We spent six to seven weeks at our warehouse in Nashville with these songs," McGraw says, "turning 'em inside out, starting them backwards to forwards, doing anything we could - trying different sounds, running different amps, different guitars."

The extended process allowed



Cutting loose onstage at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas and attending an awards event (right) with wife Faith Hill

MICHAEL CAULFIELD/REX USA



MOBBACK/WIREIMAGE

McGraw laughs, then stops, growing serious. "To me, there was no other choice. It was complete freedom."

In Nashville, most major label recordings involve input from a committee of record executives, managers and other insiders. McGraw has always operated with relative autonomy, yet with his new album he pushed his independence a step further. Still as hungry for artistic kicks as a debut dude, he ignored the conventional Nashville wisdom that tight recording budgets compel artists to rely on studio hotshots who can yield polished sounds in minimum time. Instead, he tapped his own road band.

In came lead guitarist/band leader Darran Smith, keyboardist Jeff McMahan, bassist John Marcus, acoustic guitarist Bob Minner, fiddle

Gallimore, explains that most musicians dislike the Nashville establishment's separation of them into studio players or live players, with little opportunity for crossing over once the creative lines are drawn. "It's almost like they tried to make this feud," says Smith. McGraw's decision to use his band on *Dancehall Doctors* erased that two-tier system, giving his band a much-appreciated opportunity to take part in the recording process. "There were always a couple of people who recorded with their live bands - Waylon Jennings, and I think Billy Ray Cyrus used his band. It takes somebody like Tim - one of the biggest stars there is, but also one of the most loyal, honest, down-to-earth millionaire cats I know - to say, 'Hey, I used my own band, and it rocks.'"

McGraw and his band to explore different musical possibilities. "Tim would come in with songs," Smith says, "and he'd say, 'I kinda want it to feel this way.' We'd just sit and work on them, throw ideas around." Next, McGraw and The Dancehall Doctors traveled to Allaire Studios in upstate New York, in the Catskill Mountains near Woodstock.

"David Bowie did his last album there," McGraw says. "It's a big, U-shaped kind of house, an old Dutch farmhouse. It's like an old hotel, with a courtyard you walk across. We had a lot of fun. We gave Landy Gardner, the interior decorator who did our house, a budget. He went up there with a semi-truck with furniture, Persian rugs, candelabras, curtains. Every room, every bedroom the guys were staying in, he

HE ALSO PLAYS A COWBOY IN **REAL LIFE**



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did something cool with. In the studio itself, we had a huge fireplace – a big stone thing – and big scenic windows looking out over the valley.”

With the majority of the music recorded at Allaire, *Tim McGraw & The Dancehall Doctors* presents the natural evolution of McGraw’s always earthy and soulful sound. “It made me a better singer,” McGraw says of the music recorded in New York, “absolutely – just the honesty of the tracks, just by osmosis I was going to be more honest singing them.” The songs range from the first single, “Red Ragtop,” an emotion-charged look at romantic entanglements, to a stirring ballad, “My Kind Of Rain,” which could be McGraw and Gallimore’s musical apex to date. The album ends with McGraw’s cover of Elton John’s “Tiny Dancer,” a nod to concertgoers who loved the cover during McGraw’s last tour.

McGraw seems transported when recalling the atmospheric rock aura of the mountaintop studio. “Everybody was in one room,” he says. “It wasn’t a big room, either; the mixing board, the console, everything was in one room. The drum kit was across the courtyard in the other studio, one they were still building. So we had to run a 300-ft. snake all the way to the drum kit. Our drummer Billy Mason was in this big empty studio – it was, like, a cathedral at one time.”

The band shared McGraw’s enthusiasm for old-school music-making. “Tim wanted to do the album with a ’70s rock ‘n’ roll vibe to it,” bandleader Smith says. “He wanted to cut it like the old acts, like Zeppelin and some of those who used to go live in a castle for six months, go and write an album and play it.”

For McGraw, the mix of the old and the new proved intoxicating. “It was like when you were just starting to play music, starting to get little garage bands together,” he says. “You’d hang out and play anything you could think of until 4 or 5 in the morning. That’s what it was like, except we had a great place that was decked out. It was like you’d died and gone to garage-band heaven.”

Most of the time, only superstars enjoy the prerogative of going their own ways. But McGraw has always kept his own counsel. In 1994, after his first album for Curb Records flopped, everything changed with “Indian Outlaw,” which he had performed live to rousing response. He had to fight to record the song, and its ultimate success taught him to trust his instincts and continue to ensure that his music be made the way he deemed it should. He has believed that you can be “cool and commercial at the same time,” as he puts it. Yet McGraw’s notions of the “cool” and the

“commercial” have increasingly become strictly his own; he is neither a predictable Music Row monster hitmaker nor a standard issue alt-country type.

“I wanted to make my records, like everybody expects my records to be,” he says. “But to do it with my hand. I wanted this warm, tubey, analog sound, but I didn’t want to lose the edgy, new sound, either. My whole thing was that there was this razor-blade line that I needed to walk on this kind of record. I wanted to keep that organic-ness, but I didn’t want to sound drastically different than everything else on the radio.”

With his focus on making, as he puts it, “the best record by far I’ve ever made, from a soul standpoint, from a feel standpoint, from a hittin’-you-at-all-levels standpoint,” McGraw ignored the old ongoing country vs. pop debate. Yet it’s naturally something that swims in the air around him, given how Faith Hill, in the absence of Shania Twain, is the world’s top example of a successful crossover artist.

“I don’t even care about that argument anymore,” he says. “It’s like beating a dead horse. All artists are exposed to so many different kinds of music now that it’s ridiculous to think that we have to play music that comes from 1968 – which I do love hearing – to be considered country.”

Instead, McGraw concerns himself with one important distinction. “Is it good? If it’s good, people are going to want to hear it. And I don’t care who they are and where they are and what they’re listening to.”

And with that, Tim McGraw smiles, gets up, and begins to move on to his next appointment. As he walks out the door, he turns and starts talking about his favorite female singer’s upcoming new album – about how ultra-cool Faith Hill’s new one is. About how popular it looks to be. It’s the one thing, this sunny afternoon, that matches his excitement about *Tim McGraw & The Dancehall Doctors*.

McGraw sighs, returning for one last reflection on the experience of what he feels will be yet another creative milestone. “I’m not always going to have the luxury of doing an album like this,” he says. “And look, there are great records that aren’t made like this; I think we have made great records that way, and we’ll do it again.”

He pauses, then grins slyly, like a kid determined to return to the place his parents have forbade him to hang out. “I’ll tell you what, though,” McGraw says. “It’s going to be hard to talk me into doing it another way for a while.”*

TIM MCGRAW “Everybody was like, ‘Why in the world would you go do this?’ To me, there was no other choice. It was complete freedom.”



McGraw and band retreated to upstate New York this past winter to record the new album.

COURTESY: RPM/HCMT

ROLLIN' THE DICE

Other stars who've gambled with their careers on the line

Country music stars must strike a balance between moving forward artistically and maintaining a sound that pleases radio and fans. Once in a while, a star will gamble with a chancy creative decision – like Tim did by recording with his road band instead of time-tested, hit-primed studio musicians. Some times it pays off big-time – other times, their career momentum takes a hit.

WAYLON JENNINGS

Despite his enormous charisma, Jennings remained a B-level country artist until he wrestled control of his recordings away from record execs. When he started using his own musicians and co-producing his own records, he came up with a distinctive sound that elevated him into one of the biggest stars of his generation.



WILLIE NELSON

Nelson was a successful songwriter but failed recording artist until he left Nashville in the early '70s, and later released *Red Headed Stranger*, which he made in Austin. The bare-boned album exploded commercially and had repercussions throughout the industry.



DOLLY PARTON

Because Parton is such an enormous icon today, it would be easy to overlook what a controversial move it was when she split from her mentor and producer, Porter Wagoner, in 1974. But the furor died as she quickly went on to become an international star of the highest order.

BILLY RAY CYRUS

When Cyrus' third album, *Storm In The Heartland*, only sold a half-million copies, he thought he'd shake up his routine. For the first time, he used his road band in the studio on *Trail Of Tears*, but sales and airplay continued to slide downward.

DIXIE CHICKS

The best-selling country group took an enormous chance when it filed a lawsuit against Sony Entertainment, charging the company with cheating the trio out of record royalties. The Chicks stuck to their ideals and eventually worked out a more lucrative arrangement. As chart-topping sales of their new album prove, their gamble paid off.

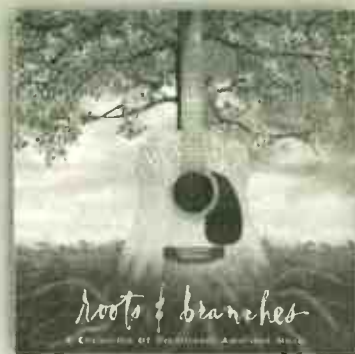
GARTH BROOKS

Two words: Chris Gaines. Brooks has taken bold gambles his entire career, often winning big. But his rock project came up snake eyes.



— Michael McCall

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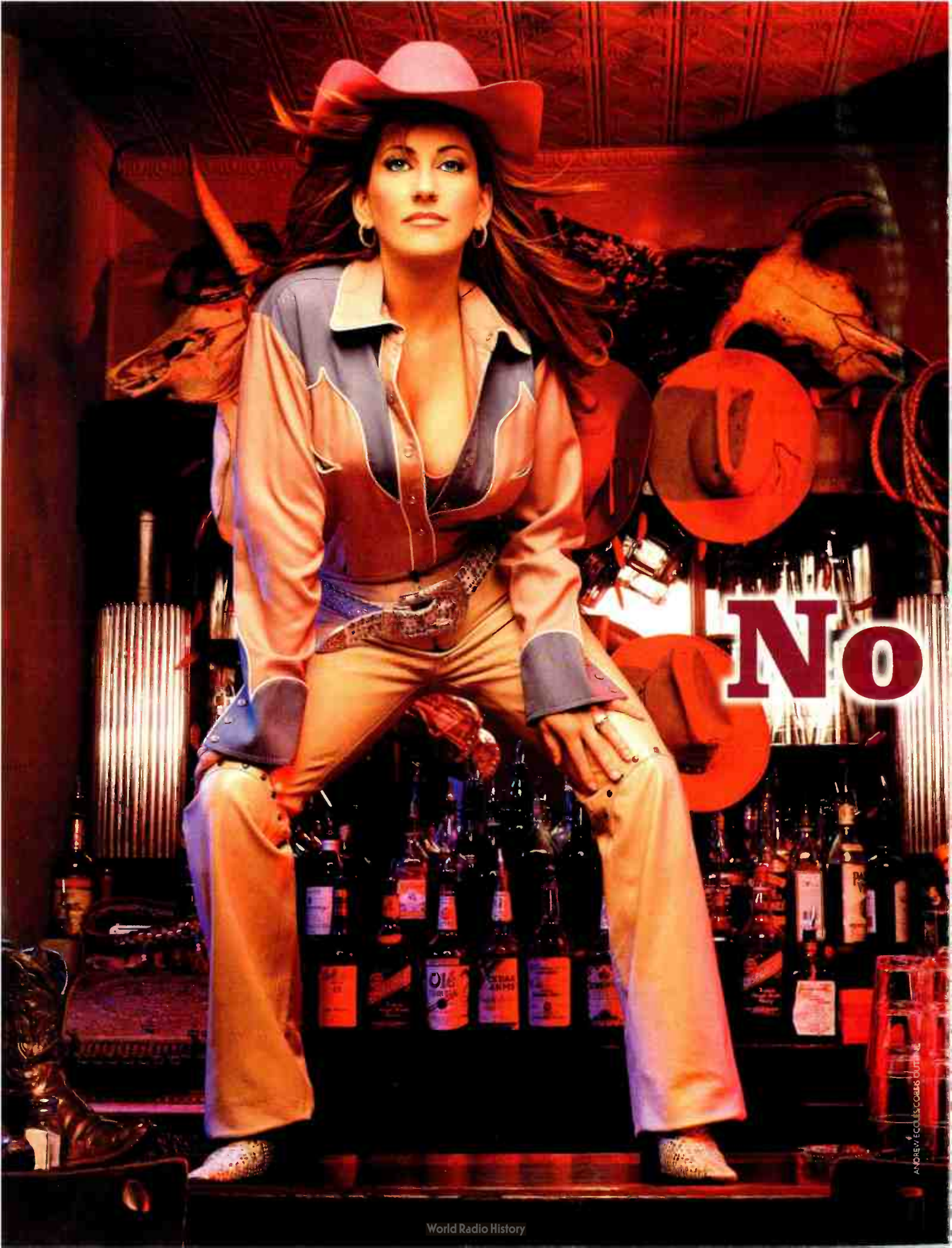
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NO

ANDREW ECCLES CORBIS OUTLINE

Lee Ann Womack's first epiphany came while wading in unfamiliar waters.

In the summer of 2001, as her award-winning hit "I Hope You Dance" scaled the pop charts, a Boston pop radio station invited her to take part in a concert. The Texas singer accepted, joining an outdoor show that included pop singers Jessica Simpson and Shaggy, among others.

"I figured the audience might be mostly teenagers," Womack recalls with a wry laugh. "But when I looked out there, all I saw were kids! And they were screaming!"

Womack played a short set, acoustic bassist and all, and the kids sang along with "I Hope You Dance," as they do at all her shows. Afterward, as she signed autographs at a booth on the amphitheater's pavilion, she noticed a cluster of moms, talking and smoking.

"I looked at them, they looked at me, and there was this thing between us," she says. "I felt more of a connection with the moms than with the audience. It was then I realized something I

legs and tugging on the bottom seam of a tiny, strapless orange mini-dress while sitting on a couch in her Nashville business office. Her hair, now longer and lighter-toned, is tied in a flip behind her head. "Watching him reassures every instinct I have about what is right for my career. Being around Willie, being around his music, being around his organization, seeing the look on his face when he's playing – everything is about putting the music first and treating people well."

Womack has toured with her idols before; she's been the opening act for George Strait and Alan Jackson, both of whom she greatly admires. But the main lesson she culled from Nelson, whose career spans five decades, is that it's good for artists to take risks with their music.

"Seeing Willie pack them in, even though he hasn't been on the radio a lot lately, reminds me that it's OK if I put out a song that doesn't go to No. 1," says Womack, whose duet with Nelson, "Mendocino County Line," was a minor radio hit earlier this year.

I've made in my career."

Womack's newly released fourth album, *Something Worth Leaving Behind*, bears the influence of the singer's Boston epiphany. Her previous album, *I Hope You Dance*, ushered the sweet-voiced Texan from critically acclaimed up-and-comer to award-winning star. The smash title song also introduced her to pop audiences, and *Something Worth Leaving Behind* seems designed to extend that relationship.

With a greater emphasis on electric guitars and string orchestrations, the new album is Womack's most contemporary collection yet. While she may be purposely recasting her music and image to expand her appeal beyond the country faithful, she's forgoing the funky rhythms and teen themes of Shania Twain, Faith Hill and LeAnn Rimes. Instead, she offers richly textured arrangements and mature themes aimed at a broad base of adult listeners.

"I have always made a very conscious effort to separate myself from everyone else," Womack says matter-of-factly. "From the start, I wanted to be

Boundaries

With a new look and sound, Lee Ann Womack reaches for greater heights

BY MICHAEL MCCALL

hadn't really thought about: My music is for adults.

"A lot of little girls loved 'I Hope You Dance.' And a lot of little girls are going to love 'Something Worth Leaving Behind.' But that's not my main audience. That's not who my songs are for."

Her second epiphany came in the summer of 2002, this time while swimming through a more familiar pool.

"I got back from being on tour with Willie Nelson, and I swear to you, I'm a new person," she says, crossing her

"When I put out a song like 'Does My Ring Burn Your Finger' or 'Why They Call It Falling,' or even my first single, 'Never Again, Again,' I know they probably won't be No. 1 records. But they're important songs to me, so I put them out and think, 'I hope this is OK to do, I hope it doesn't hurt my career.' After being with Willie, now I know it's OK."

In other words, that's what Willie would do. "Watching Willie Nelson and thinking about his career," she says, "made me feel better about the choices

different. I knew 'Never Again, Again,' my very first single, wouldn't be a No. 1 song. But I knew it would separate me from other female singers. I continue to do that, especially with this record."

As for the Willie epiphany, its influence can be heard on her new Christmas album, *A Season For Romance*. Recorded with a jazzy big band and featuring a duet with Harry Connick Jr. on the standard "Baby, It's Cold Outside," the holiday collection finds Womack indulging her love of war-era jazz and classic pop.

"It was an excuse for me to sing big-band music and torchy songs," Womack says. "That kind of music comes as natural to me as singing country music. Growing up, I heard so much Kay Starr, Rosemary Clooney, Dean Martin and Nat King Cole. Everybody who knows me knows I love that stuff."

Of course, Nelson is known for theme discs, such as his 1978 classic

Lee Ann Womack

Stardust, and for dramatic changes from album to album. "Willie has made so many different types of music," Womack says. "He made me realize that I haven't made near enough music in the five years since I started. That's going to change."

Change is something Womack obviously embraces these days. It's not only evident on her new albums, but also in her look. Once a down-home Texas mom photographed in jeans and casual blouses, pantsuits or print dresses, Womack now regularly is pictured in high-fashion

Rolston's credits include photographs of Madonna, Michael Jackson and Whitney Houston as well as numerous covers for *Vogue*, *Rolling Stone* and *Entertainment Weekly*. At his rates, Womack wasn't likely to be pictured in modest makeup relaxing in jeans and a comfy blouse.

"So, yeah, there's definitely an image change," Womack relates. "Matthew has a team of people he works with. I just went in and said, 'Do what you do best. Make me look the way you think I should look.' So when it comes to style, we've upped the ante a notch. I'm

with her sound. As Wright explains, "Lee Ann wants to grow. She wants to be challenged to try new things, and we don't want to repeat ourselves. With the new album, we wanted to toughen it up a little. I put more guitar tracks on it, and I used a lot of weaving lines from the orchestral strings, letting them come in and out instead of creating a wall of sound."

Wright feels comfortable asking Womack to try something new, such as the drum loops heard on her new recordings "Orphan Train" and "Surrender." But he also knows that Womack will be the first to tell him if



MOBILSON/WULFRAAT



KEVIN WINTER/IMAGEDIRECT

Lee Ann was already a hot ticket on the concert trail, and an award winner, when she hit the road in the summer of 2002 to tour with Willie Nelson.



CURTIS HILBUN

clothes, carefully tousled hair and extravagant makeup.

Indeed, her image makeover may be the most dramatic change she's undergone – so much so that a columnist for the trade magazine *Music Row* recently asked for someone to explain "why Lee Ann Womack looks like Suzanne Somers in her new photos."

Womack deflects the question: Instead of answering why she looks different, she explains how it came about, saying her new look is the result of working with a world-renowned celebrity photographer and top hair and makeup artists. "I'm very competitive, and I always want to do the very best I can," she says. "I'm now in a position to go get the best photographer in the business, so I went and got Matthew Rolston."

just thankful I'm at a place where I can do this. Hopefully, it's a change for the better."

Part of the changes her image and music have undergone, she insists, come from learning to delegate responsibility and put more trust in her collaborators.

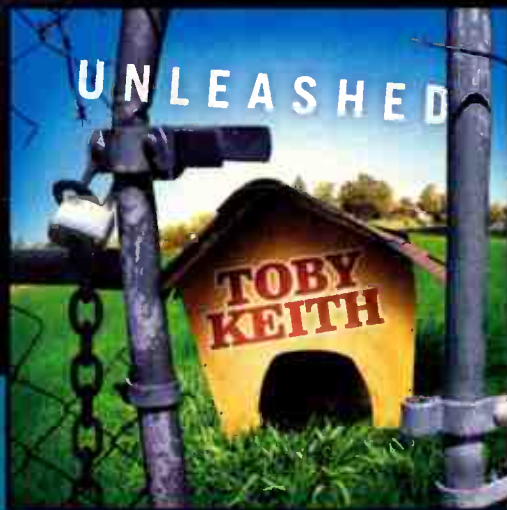
The biggest difference in my career since 'I Hope You Dance' is that I'm so much busier," she says. "I've always been a control freak, but I've learned to let other people take care of things – and to listen to their suggestions."

With her music, she now allows her longtime producer, Mark Wright, and her husband and co-producer, Frank Liddell, to push her into new areas and to experiment

something doesn't feel right for her.

"When we go into the studio, she knows that I'm going to try some different things," Wright says. "But I also know she's really picky. She's willing to try stuff, but she's also the first to say that it should be canned if it's not working. It's a healthy way for an artist to be."

Womack acknowledges that she feels as if she's entered a period of artistic transition. "I feel like I'm constantly changing," she says. "Even in my live show – we'll do one of our hits, then we'll do a bluegrass song, then we might do a Paul McCartney song or something by Etta James. I like the shock of doing something totally different. That's what keeps me fresh. I don't feel there are any boundaries in what I can or can't do."*



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World Radio History

Movin' T

Critics take aim at Rascal Flatts, but the trio stays the course

Don't call them a boy band. Not if you want to be friends with the three men of Rascal Flatts, whose self-titled CD spawned four Top 10 hits and put them in league with the Dixie Chicks and SHeDAISY as the only country groups of the last five years whose debut albums sold a million copies.

Still, the "boy band" label remains a sore subject.

"You know what?" begins Jay DeMarcus, the group's multi-instrumentalist and second lead vocalist. "Anybody who says that didn't come down and see us five hours a night at the [Nashville club] Fiddle and Steel when we were getting started. Not one time did we dance or wear headset mikes. People who think that are just ignorant, because we were not manufactured or put together by some label executive. We're very serious about the business of making country music."

If DeMarcus sounds defensive, he has a right to be. Onstage, the group offers solid musicianship behind lead singer Gary LeVox's punchy power vocals. They also paid their dues before coming together as Rascal Flatts, each gaining experience in backup bands and playing in clubs before finally landing a record deal.

Yet the confusion is understandable, stemming from the group's youthful, un-country-like name, the four-on-the-floor energy of many of their songs and their look. (DeMarcus wears a soul patch and earring.)

One critic, typical of many, noting that the group is signed to the Disney label Lyric Street, called them "suburban cowboys [who] play country music for Friday-afternoon drive times and Saturday nights at the mall, not the honky-tonk, the ranch or the porch. In fact, they seem to take pride in their distance from hard-core country roots."

But teens, unfazed by pop influences in country music, love the trio's tightknit

harmonies, as well as the easily digestible melodies, sunny sentiments and frenetic rhythms of their bouncy love songs. When the group played the *Grand Ole Opry*, they were surprised to find the audience rife with screaming girls of the "tween" generation, who

ran to the front of the stage to dance and sing along to such hits as "Prayin' For Daylight" and "This Everyday Love."

"Pretty amazing," says Joe Don Rooney, sitting in a backstage dressing room in Louisville, Ky. "The most gratifying thing is having grandparents or parents thank us for doing the music we do because they can enjoy it with their kids."

Yet therein lies Rascal Flatts' image problem. How can a young band



BY ALANNA NASH



arget



Critics who continue to cast Rascal Flatts as a "boy band" are "Ignorant," says Jay DeMarcus, left, with bandmates Gary LeVox and Joe Don Rooney. "We were not manufactured or put-together."

RASCAL FLATTS

adored by screaming little girls and their grandmas prove it has depth?

The group answered that question – and silenced some of their critics – with the megawatt success of their fourth single, “I’m Movin’ On,” a poignant ballad about recovery, self-forgiveness and fortitude in the face of leveling adversity.

Written by Phillip White and D. Vincent Williams, the message song has been received in much the same way as “I Hope You Dance,” as a healing balm for life’s larger wounds such as substance abuse, death or divorce. Its success pushed the sales of Rascal Flatts’ debut album beyond platinum.

Their popularity should soar even higher with the release of their sophomore album, *Melt*. The first single, “These Days,” boasts all of Rascal Flatts’ pop-ish hallmarks, while the album’s closer, “My Worst Fear,” is pure country, set to the tears of a crying steel guitar. *Melt*, which the group co-produced, showcases the trio’s songwriting abilities and features all three musicians playing their instruments, though that idea was met with some resistance.

“Joe Don is just an amazing guitar player,” DeMarcus says. “I’m not the best bass player in the world, but my argument all along was, I play in Rascal Flatts, so why would I not play on my record? We’re certainly not rookies. And I didn’t stand in front of a mirror when I was 9 years old with the hopes of letting some other studio cat play on my records when I finally got a deal.”

Rascal Flatts found its genesis in Columbus, Ohio, home of second cousins LeVox and DeMarcus. They grew up together as typical kids – making crank phone calls and playing music on occasion, discovering the gift of family harmony.

Both men felt the strong pull of music, but DeMarcus was the one who pursued it. He left for Nashville in 1992 and became part of the Christian group East to West, while LeVox pursued a career with the Ohio Department of Mental Retardation. As a supervisor to 85 employees, he taught basic work

skills to help get the disabled into jobs and independent living.

“You are everything to them,” he says, “mother, father, best friend, girlfriend, boyfriend. It was the most rewarding thing that I have ever done.”

Distance didn’t affect the friendship between DeMarcus and LeVox. “Whenever we would see each other back in town, it was just like there was no time lost,” says DeMarcus. “We could always pick right back up where we left off because of that special bond we had as kids.”

Since LeVox’s vocal gifts awed his cousin, DeMarcus invited him to Nashville frequently and encouraged him to move there. But the singer was reluctant to leave the stability of his life in Ohio to chase his musical dreams.

“I started going down there every other weekend because I just couldn’t take sitting at work,” LeVox recalls. “I’d call Jay 50 times an hour, or he would call me. I prayed about it, and I was confident that I would achieve my dreams in some way.”

In 1997, LeVox loaded up his truck. “I just felt that was what God had called me to do. And God’s timing was perfect.”

Rascal Flatts strives to take their music in new directions.



Almost simultaneously, Joe Don Rooney – already a veteran of shows at the Grand Lake Opry in Grove, Okla. – was sitting at home in the small town of Picher thinking about how he might break into the big time. One day, he heard the Dixie Chicks on the radio.

“I was just thinking, ‘Man, there’s three beautiful, cool girls, and they play and sing their butts off. There needs to be three guys like that.’ That was very bizarre, but I think it was destiny,” says Rooney.

Soon Rooney made it to Nashville, where he joined Chely Wright’s band, which by now included Jay DeMarcus. LeVox had a gig singing and touring with Michael English, but he and DeMarcus also played at the Fiddle and Steel club in Nashville’s famed Printer’s Alley with a part-time guitarist. One night when the guitarist couldn’t make it, DeMarcus invited Rooney to sit in.

“It was weird,” remembers Rooney. “I’d played Top 40 country for about five years, and I knew all of the songs they were doing. As soon as they started singing Shenandoah’s ‘The Church On Cumberland Road,’ I knew exactly what to do on it, including the solo. We just fit for some reason.”

The group got their record contract when singer Mila Mason heard them and mentioned them to producer Marty Williams, who set up a live audition with producer Mark Bright. (Williams and Bright now manage them.) Their demos found their way to industry honcho Dann Huff, who called a Lyric Street vice-president.

As the group racks up hits and influences other young musicians to come to Nashville, Rascal Flatts knows that criticism will follow them, just as it has

every performer who has attempted to take country in new directions. But they remain undaunted.

“I want people to know we have a deep love and passion for what we do in country music,” insists DeMarcus. “I hope that 20 years from now, people can look back on ‘I’m Movin’ On’ and say, ‘I still love that song, and it holds up to everything else that’s come along.’ Above all, I want to leave our mark on country music.”*



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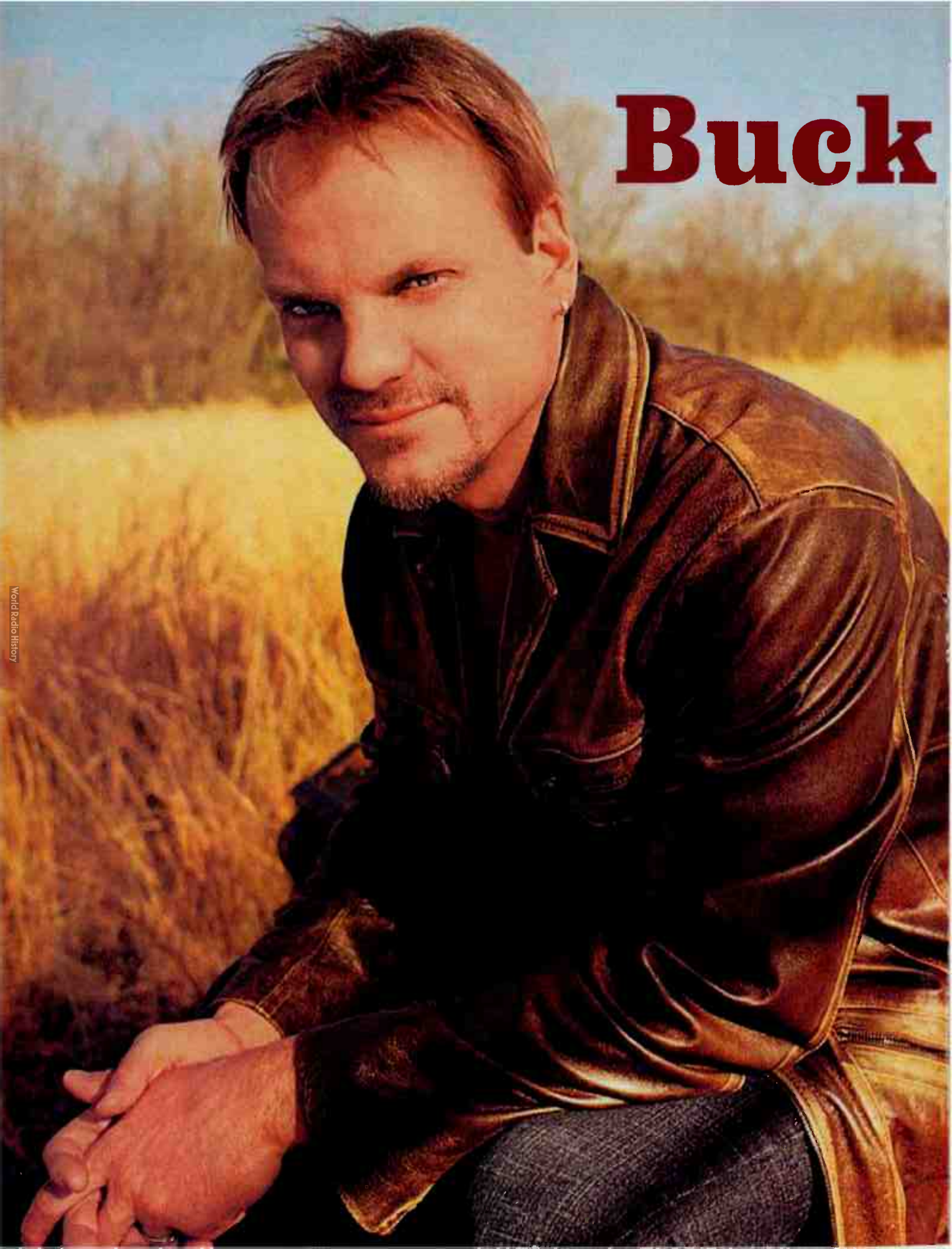
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Phil Vassar picked his battles – and won – on his climb to the top

Phil Vassar grew up as a normal American child, except for one thing. Along with a boyhood filled with ballfields, classrooms and shopping malls, there were ... nightclubs.

Vassar's father, a lounge singer, performed regularly in the restaurant he owned in Lynchburg, Va. Young Phil spent many nights watching how much his dad enjoyed entertaining people.

So it's no wonder he ended up owning a Nashville nightclub and pursuing music as a career, right? And no wonder he attacks a stage with such comfortable composure, right?

Well, not exactly. Though Vassar grew up baptized in live music, his father discouraged his son's desire to step into his stage shoes. Instead, Vassar's father insisted that his son better himself with a college education and a business career.

"It's strange how the relationships between fathers and sons can be," said the broad-shouldered, youthful 37-year-old. "My father and I never agreed on anything. Owning a nightclub or becoming a professional musician were things he definitely did not approve of. But I think his disapproval made me fight

even harder to realize those goals."

Watch Vassar perform, and his chest-thumping, fist-pumping, high-energy attack displays just how loose and self-assured he feels onstage. Though standing in front of large audiences is still relatively new to him, Vassar works a crowd like a veteran.

Vassar is confident presenting himself as he is – a rebel who has also dealt with the unpleasant reality of divorce, and a musician influenced as much by pop artists Elton John, Billy Joel and Bruce Hornsby as by country stars Merle Haggard and Steve Wariner.

He's also among a new breed of country up-and-comers who have zero connection to the *Hee Haw* days of old. Speaking in a flat, mid-Atlantic accent devoid of the Southern affectations and *ab-shucks* colloquialisms, Vassar is not afraid to allow his college education to be reflected in his conversation and songwriting.

He's also among the new breed who

BY JOHN SWENSON

Phil Vassar

demands to write the bulk of his material. "A few years ago it was unusual to be able to make an album of your own songs," he said. "But things are changing. It's an advantage to write your own material because the process of finding the right songs can be really difficult."

Indeed, Vassar's skills as a songwriter

opened the door for his long-desired chance to make it as a performer. In the past few years, he'd provided an extensive string of successful songs for other artists, including the No. 1 hits "I'm Alright" and "Bye Bye" for Jo Dee Messina, "My Next Thirty Years" for Tim McGraw, "Right On The Money" for Alan Jackson and two Top 5 hits, McGraw's "For A Little While" and Collin Raye's "Little Red Rodeo."

Nowadays, Vassar's star potential might seem obvious. Tall, blue-eyed and sandy-haired, he is a gilt-edged American sex symbol with the build and confidence of an athlete. He was, in fact, the star quarterback on his football team – and he exudes the intelligence, instincts and take-charge attitude of a natural leader.

So why did it take him nearly a decade in Nashville before he got his big break? As he remembers it, after moving to Nashville in 1987, he had to scale a wall of skepticism. "I got turned down by every publisher on Music Row," he says. "They told me that I didn't sound like a country singer. But what bothered them even more was the fact that I played the piano. There's this sense that country singers are supposed to accompany themselves on guitar."

But Vassar never let rejection discourage him. After the experiences with his father, he became accustomed to overcoming the disapproval of authority figures, and he never lost his quarterback's confidence in his own ability to get the job done.

"I told them, 'A guy named Jerry Lee Lewis did pretty well as a piano player, and Elton John and Billy Joel have sold a few records over the years,'" Vassar recalls.

Vassar, as it turns out, has done pretty well, too. His self-titled, 2000 debut featured a No. 1 hit, "Just Another Day In Paradise," and three other Top 10s. He spent the spring and summer opening for Kenny Chesney on one of the year's most successful country music concert



Onstage, Vassar's a one-man act, but at home he plays the role of devoted dad to daughter Haley – who helped inspire his "American Child" single.



TAMME ARROYO

packages, the *No Shoes, No Shirt, No Problems Tour*.

He's also excited about the prospects of his second album, *American Child*, which has already received a reaction to its title song. "It's one of the most personal songs I've ever written," Vassar says. "That's me with the baseball glove



COURTESY PHIL VASSAR

As a youth, Vassar played keyboards in the band of his dad, Phil Sr. (at mic); today he tours with contemporaries like Kenny Chesney (far left) and Alan Jackson.

as a kid," he notes, referring to one of the song's lines. "I wasn't trying to write a patriotic song. I was just writing a song about what it is to be an American, how fortunate we are to have been born here."

And to bring it all back home, "American Child" wasn't just inspired by his own childhood, but also that of his daughter.

"The verse about being 'anyone's equal' was written for my daughter, Haley," Vassar confirms. "I was watching the reports about Afghanistan and how women are treated over there. I wrote that in response. I want my daugh-



PATYCA PREELEY

ter to know she can grow up and have an equal chance to live the life she wants."

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TRADITIONAL MUSIC IS HOT AGAIN - BUT WILL IT LAST?

Emmylou Harris, Gillian Welch and Alison Krauss have seen the musical updraft from their participation on the *O Brother* soundtrack.



KEVIN WINTER/PAGEONE

It's appropriate that the title of country music's most surprising success story ends in a question mark. For *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*, a modest movie soundtrack that became a national phenomenon, continues to raise questions about the future direction of country music.

BY ALANNA NASH

The success of *O Brother's* soundtrack, which has sold more than six million copies, has sent a jolt of excitement into the talent-rich, attention-starved world of bluegrass and acoustic country.

But will the rise in roots-music popularity have an impact on Nashville or country radio? Will *O Brother* be viewed as a movie-inspired fluke hit, or as a landmark moment that affected the course of country music history?

It depends on who you ask.

Those who have benefited claim that interest in roots music had been growing steadily for several years, and the movie and soundtrack served as a catalyst to spark a real resurgence.

"Alison Krauss' *New Favorite* went gold in six months," says Ken Irwin, head of Cambridge, Mass.-based Rounder Records. "When you consider that Alison's greatest-hits compilation sold an unprecedented two and a half million copies four years ago, you see that things have been building, at least in bluegrass and acoustic country. But certainly not to these proportions."

In the '90s, most bluegrass acts rarely sold more than 50,000 copies of an album, while compilations usually topped out in the 10,000 to 20,000 range.

But lately the numbers have skyrocketed. Rounder's *O Sister* album – which showcases a variety of female bluegrass artists – has sold more than 120,000 copies. "If we had put out a compilation of women doing bluegrass three years ago," Irwin says, "it wouldn't have sold anywhere near this amount."

Individual performers have seen similar growth. "Artists like Rhonda Vincent and Blue Highway are selling two to three times as much as they did on their last records," says Paul Foley, Rounder's general manager.

The interest in roots music isn't confined to independent record labels like Rounder. When the 30th anniversary edition of the groundbreaking *Will The Circle Be Unbroken* started showing up on *Amazon.com's* best-seller list, John McEuen of the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band wasn't surprised.

"I think in general the health of acoustic roots music has never been better," says the veteran musician, who believes the sound appeals to all age groups, from former hippies driving BMWs to young jam-band fans who are buying old Volkswagen buses.

McEuen believes the new audience enjoys the music because it evokes a kind of American authenticity and secular spirituality, something they find inviting in the aftermath of Sept. 11, 2001. That's one reason statistics show sales of *O Brother* and *Circle* have soared in urban areas like Los Angeles, San Francisco and Chicago.

"Roots music is a wonderful, safe place to go to get away from it all," McEuen says. "And it's something that comes from actual people. A lot of modern music is depersonalizing, with a sense that the music itself isn't coming from human beings."

Some country stars have joined the movement toward more organic, roots-oriented music. Ricky Skaggs abandoned commercial country for bluegrass in the

late '90s. Dolly Parton created the first of a trio of bluegrass-inspired albums in 1999. Patty Loveless returned to her Kentucky roots with 2001's *Mountain Soul*. The Dixie Chicks, who brought the banjo to the top of the record charts, recently released an acoustic-based album (titled, not insignificantly, *Home*). And George Jones has planned a Southern gospel project.

However, one important segment of the country music world hasn't embraced the back-to-basics trend: radio. When *O Brother* won several key Grammy Awards, including 2001 Album of the Year, radio programmers told Luke Lewis, the top executive at Mercury Nashville, not to expect the soundtrack's success to influence the country format.

"Don't get any ideas," a programmer said. "We're not going to start playing Alison Krauss and Nickel Creek because of this."

Bev Paul, the general manager of Sugar Hill Records, says a few adventurous radio stations *have* played Nickel Creek. But so far television – especially videos and specials on CMT and Great American Country – has shown far more support for acoustic music than has radio.

But is radio making a crucial mistake by ignoring signs that the public wants to hear more roots music?

"We saw the *O Brother* soundtrack as a huge statement to country radio," Paul says. "Their ratings are slipping. They know there's something wrong and that they need to do some tweaking. It's almost devolved to the point where they're sticking to their guns because they just won't admit that maybe they've goofed."

Without the support of radio, Nashville labels won't likely rush to sign new bluegrass or traditional artists. But it just might make country's leading record companies more adventurous in their choices.

"The upside is that record labels aren't going to be as fearful of stuff that's off the



Ralph Stanley



Dolly Parton



John Hartford



Patty Loveless



Norman Blake

BROTHERLY BENEFICIARIES

The phenomenal success of the *O Brother* soundtrack beamed a spotlight on roots-based artists. Here are some whose talents were rightfully illuminated.

ALISON KRAUSS & UNION STATION

In blending bluegrass, folk, pop, soft country and jazzy newgrass, Krauss, a teen fiddle champion, has refashioned "high lonesome" into an irresistible form with mass appeal. While the impeccable Union Station includes several virtuoso pickers, it's Krauss' feathery soprano – softer than a cloud, but capable of enough force to carry down a mountain holler – that makes this band so memorable.

DAN TYMINSKI

His years in the Lonesome River Band and Union Station earned him a solid reputation as an instrumentalist. But Tyminski found unexpected fame by recording the *O Brother* soundtrack's cornerstone tune, "I Am A Man Of Constant Sorrow," giving the song – which was previously best known for The Stanley Brothers' arrangement – a world-weary tone.

RALPH STANLEY

At 75, Stanley has been a bluegrass icon for more than 50 years, forging the genesis of his career with his late brother, Carter. Though his longtime band the Clinch Mountain Boys – which spawned both Ricky Skaggs and

Keith Whitley – share credit for his stature, Stanley, with his pained, primal tenor, ranks second only to Bill Monroe in importance to the genre. A recent Grammy winner, the Virginia native continues to perform more than 150 shows per year, ranging from county fairs and bingo halls to Carnegie Hall.

JOHN HARTFORD

Best-known for writing "Gentle On My Mind," Hartford used the tune's royalties to pursue his own eccentric path – performing highly stylized, old-time music with wry, contemporary lyrics. The multi-instrumentalist died in June 2001 at the age of 63.

GILLIAN WELCH

A literate singer/songwriter, Welch, with her Depression-era look and penchant for showcasing the bleaker side of human nature, seems to hail from a timeless oasis. As associate producer on *O Brother*, she helped assemble the musicians for the film and soundtrack. She also wrote one of the movie's showcase songs, "Didn't Leave Nobody But The Baby."

NORMAN BLAKE

Flat-picker Blake has played behind nearly

every notable folk and country performer, from the Carter Family to Bob Dylan to Steve Earle. A six-time Grammy nominee who helped to spark the bluegrass revival of the 1970s, he is renowned for his clean, sparse style and technical dexterity. His mastery of old-time rural string music has influenced generations of musicians.

FAIRFIELD FOUR

One of America's most recognized and revered gospel groups, this dignified, all-black quintet formed in the early '20s at Nashville's Fairfield Baptist Church. While the individual members have changed through the years, the group has retained its passion and thrilling a cappella harmony, winning its first Grammy in 1997.

NASHVILLE BLUEGRASS BAND

This much-awarded quintet, formed in 1985, is one of the few bluegrass acts to land a video in heavy rotation on CMT. Often employed for studio session work with Nashville's mainstream country stars, the band has made its mark with exemplary musicianship and a style that mates classic bluegrass with blues and black gospel.

— A.N.

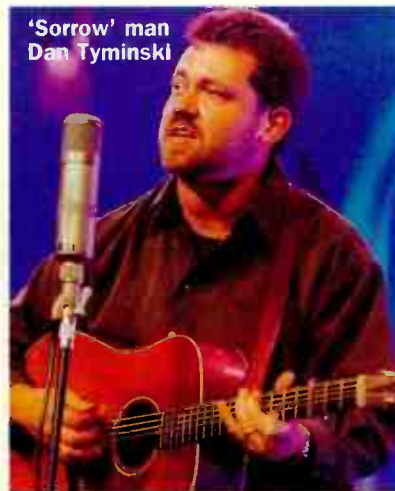
NEW BLOOM

beaten track," Lewis says. "I think you'd have to have your head in the sand to not realize there's an underserved audience out there. Radio programmers aren't stupid, though it might take 'em a while, because they're risk-averse. But there's an appetite for roots music out there that not many people are taking advantage of, either on the label or radio side."

At least one Nashville exec says Music Row just isn't convinced that roots-based music is a viable trend that's going to last. "The main reason Nashville labels have not embraced traditional artists is because they don't really believe in that kind of music," says Nick Hunter, a top-level exec at Warner Bros. and Giant Records before founding Audium Entertainment. "They look at *O Brother* as a freak, because it's a movie soundtrack and not an act."

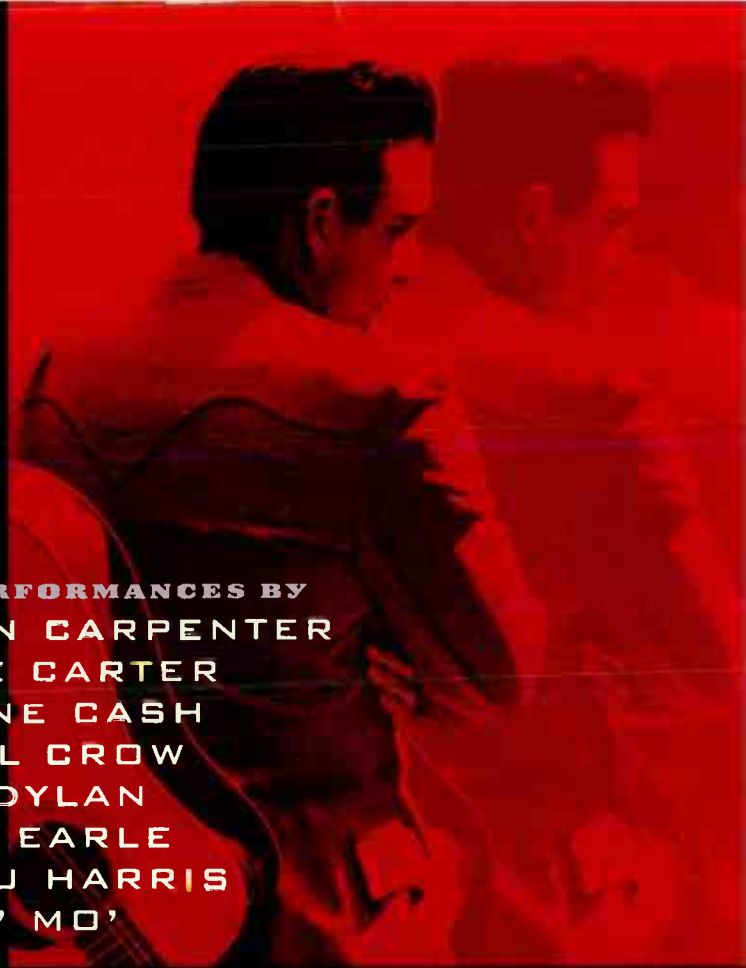
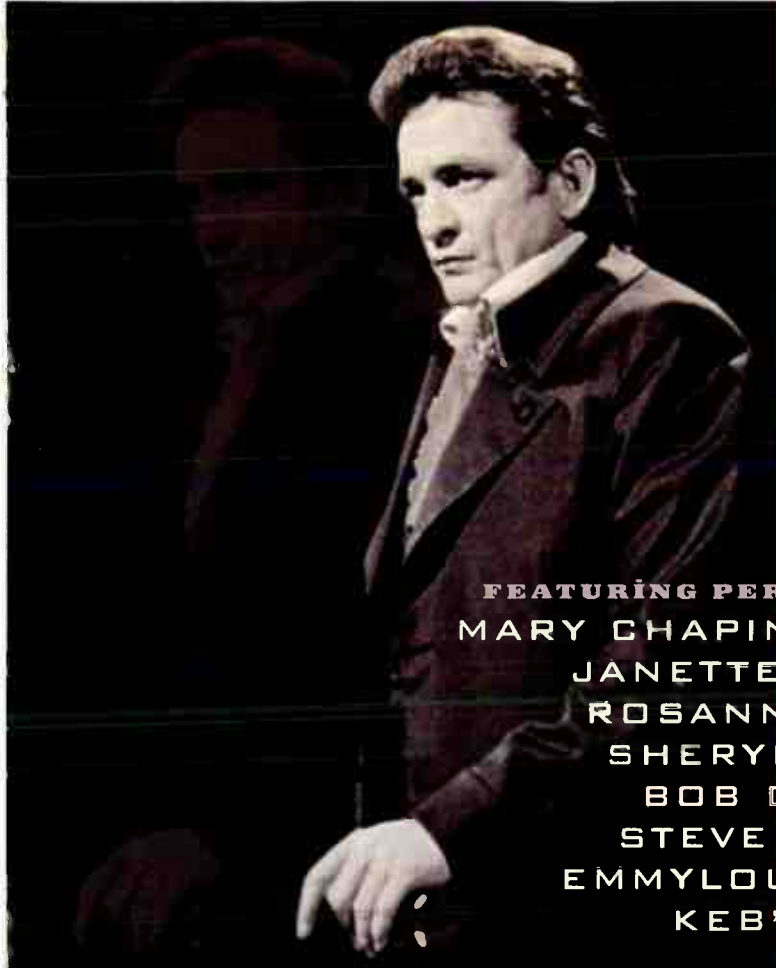
The flashpoint, he contends, may come with the Dixie Chicks record. "If one of the biggest acts in the business has a lot of success with a roots album," Hunter says, "then I think the bandwagon will begin rolling."

If not, then it's business as usual. Still, with 75-year-old Ralph Stanley dressing in a black leather jacket and shades while tooling around town in his new Jaguar, one thing is certain: "It's finally OK to say you like this music," asserts Sugar Hill's Paul. "It's not some kind of statement about your lack of culture. Roots music is cool again."★



'Sorrow' man Dan Tyminski

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Rhythm & Country

Does Ray Charles belong in the Country Music Hall of Fame?



JOHN HAYES/PHOTO

Country music is still on Ray Charles' mind. This year marks the 40th anniversary of his landmark album *Modern Sounds In Country And Western Music*, and he remains actively interested in the genre.

The coffee table in his two-story office in downtown Los Angeles includes current issues of three publications: a music-industry weekly, a keyboard magazine and *Country Music*.

"I always loved country music," he says. "You must understand that."

Charles is also on country's mind. When Nashville's Hall of Fame hosted a ceremony for its recent inductees, he was on the guest list. And several music executives have suggested the singer deserves his own Hall of Fame plaque.

"I'd vote for Ray Charles in one-half of one millisecond," beams Sun Records founder Sam Phillips, a 2001 inductee who calls *Modern Sounds* "one of the great masterpieces of all time."

Charles shrugs off such talk. "I'll leave it up to them, man," he says.

As it is, *Modern Sounds In Country And Western Music* stands as an acknowledged American classic. Beyond its critical acclaim, it garnered

Charles a No. 1 pop single for his lush interpretation of Don Gibson's "I Can't Stop Loving You" and brought together divergent fan bases in an era of racial division.

"Let's face it, good music is good music," explains Charles, who'll be joining Travis Tritt in the latest installment of CMT's *Crossroads* series. "For me to do a song, it has to be me. If I can't put me into it, I won't record it. But I always related with country music."

In recording songs written by Hank Williams, Cindy Walker and Ted Daffan, Charles helped redefine the creative possibilities for country classics. His gritty vocals, thick horn sections and classy strings also warmed pop radio to the burgeoning Nashville Sound, in which smooth background vocals and

prominent orchestration replaced the twang of fiddles and steel guitars.

Charles, a Georgia native raised in Florida, developed an appreciation for gospel, jazz and blues – not surprising for an African-American who grew up in the South. But he also heard the *Grand Ole Opry* and was enamored with country's ripe emotions, which he compares to the hurt in the best black music. In 1984, Charles released *Friendship*, an album of country duets, including his only No. 1 country hit, "Seven Spanish Angels," a duet with his friend Willie Nelson. Whether or not Charles receives a bronze plaque



With good friend Willie Nelson

MICHAEL CAULFIELD/PHOTO

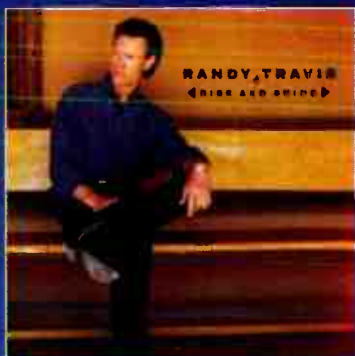
of his own, he feels no need to campaign. "I got many awards," he says, "all kinds of keys to the city and declarations. So I'm not out hunting for things, or wishing. But I'm grateful if people think enough of me to say, 'Hey, Ray Charles did a lot for country music. We should have him in the Country Hall of Fame.'"

— Tom Roland

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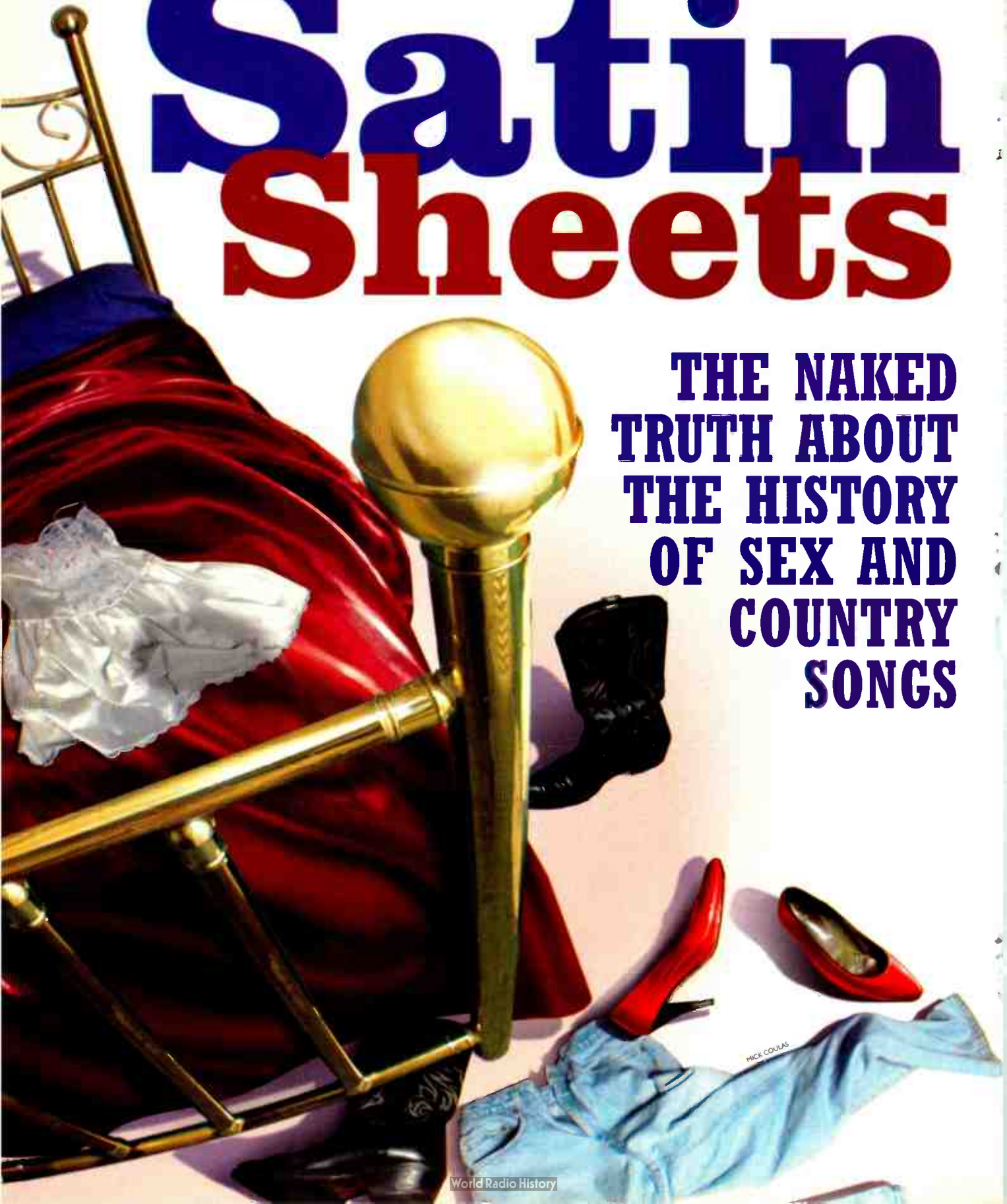


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World Radio History

Satin Sheets

**THE NAKED
TRUTH ABOUT
THE HISTORY
OF SEX AND
COUNTRY
SONGS**



For most of its history, country music treated sex as conservative people thought it should be treated – as something furtive, dirty and ... irresistible.

BY EDWARD MORRIS

Songs chronicled attraction, courtship, marriage, family, disillusionment, betrayal and divorce. But they rarely centered on the carnal act itself.

Other musical styles have never been so discreet. Long before rappers and long-haired shock rockers raised eyebrows, famous young men wailed through "Good Golly Miss Molly," blues singers growled through "Hoochie Coochie Man" and jazz vocalists finger-snapped through "Teach Me Tonight."

From its earliest days, popular music has presented suggestive songs and cheeky double-entendres that pressed against societal limits. But for decades, country music resisted. Sex may have been implied in scores of great country cheating songs – "Slippin' Around," "Back Street Affair," "One Has My Name, The Other Has My Heart," etc. – but it nearly always came steeped in guilt. The primary emotion was dread, not delight.

But the sexual revolution of the '60s finally took root in country music lyrics. In 1969, the disabled husband in Kenny Rogers & The First Edition's "Ruby, Don't Take Your Love To Town" acknowledges, *It's hard to love a man whose legs are bent and paralyzed/And the wants and the needs of a woman your age, Ruby, I realize.*

In a similarly heated vein, the erring husband in Bobby Bare's 1969 hit "(Margie's At) The Lincoln Park Inn" can't get his mind off the fleshly delights that await him at the nearby motel, even as he reflects on his life as a Boy Scout leader, Sunday school teacher and dutiful father.

When Sammi Smith whispered "Help Me Make It Through The Night" in her 1970 hit, she wasn't holding out for an engagement ring. Even prim Barbara Mandrell was willing to spark libidinal impulses in her 1973 hit "The Midnight Oil." Mandrell sings from the point of view of a wife who regularly fashions excuses to leave her home at night to ... well, you know. *Tonight I'll cheat again, she moans, And tomorrow I'll be sorry/And I'll feel kind of dirty/Cause I'll have that midnight oil all over me.*

Before long, nearly every country singer felt obliged to be explicit. Charlie Rich may have praised his woman for not letting her hair down until she got behind closed doors, but other singers weren't interested in discretion. In 1975 alone, Gene Watson warmed up the radio with "Love In The Hot Afternoon," Ronnie Milsap celebrated "Daydreams About Night Things" and Don Williams pleaded "(Turn Out The Light And) Love Me Tonight."

A few years later, Merle Haggard followed the lead of Watson and Milsap by suggesting that amorous activities need not wait until dark, declaring that "It's Been A Great Afternoon" while giving enough details to explain exactly what made his day so good. That same year, Dolly Parton spoke just as blatantly in "It's All Wrong, But It's All Right." After asking her intended partner, *Could I use you for a while?* she goes on to observe, *It may be wrong if we make love/But I just need someone so much.*

But when it came to recording country

Just listen to Faith Hill "ooing" orgasmically through "The Way You Love Me" and Cyndi Thomson heavy-breathing through a catalog of sensations in "I Always Liked That Best."

songs with carnal content, Conway Twitty proved to be the king. In 1973, Twitty's bedroom baritone moaned "You've Never Been This Far Before," a song that spent three weeks at No. 1. Thus encouraged, Twitty followed up with "I See The Want To In Your Eyes" and 1975's "Touch The Hand," in which he stated, *Touch the hand of the man who made you a woman/And tell me you don't love me anymore.* By the time he got to 1980's "I'd Love To Lay You Down," such frankness was old hat to Twitty, which made it natural for him to remake The Pointer Sisters' salacious "Slow Hand" into a No. 1 country song.

Garth Brooks, whose early albums were a veritable *Kama Sutra* of sexual technique, showed up to take the baton from Twitty. Not surprisingly, Brooks shared his prede-

cessors' affinity for daytime dalliances. We see this first in "Everytime That It Rains," from his 1989 debut album, a song in which he recalls being trapped by a rainstorm in a roadside café with only a waitress for company. As the storm rages on, he plays her "favorite song" on the jukebox, and the two dance. Pretty soon the waitress is stripping off her apron and effectively moving the storm inside.

Brooks commonly uses harsh weather as a sexual metaphor. In 1992's "Somewhere Other Than The Night," a storm drives a farmer in from the field. He finds his wife waiting for him, wearing an apron – and *only* an apron. That's the kind of hint even a tired farmer can take. The point Brooks makes is that love works best when it's not scheduled and ritualized.

And, of course, there's the steamy setting of 1993's "That Summer," in which a "teenage kid so far from home" goes to work on a remote wheat farm for a "lonely widow woman." Once again, Brooks likens their coming together to a storm.

Other country stars celebrate their lust in more casual fashion. Hank Williams Jr. rhapsodized about having "Women I've Never Had," Tim McGraw was similarly transparent in "I Like It, I Love It," and Toby Keith offered a more recent incarnation with his leering "I'm Just Talkin' About Tonight." Even Patty Loveless espoused the temporal delights of finding

an overnight partner in "Lonely Too Long." *We ain't done nothing wrong, she reasons, we've just been lonely too long.*

These days, in fact, women in country music are as frank about their sexual longings as men. Just listen to the Dixie Chicks crowing about their desire to do some "mattress dancing" on the "Sin Wagon," Faith Hill "ooing" orgasmically through "The Way You Love Me" and Cyndi Thomson heavy-breathing through a catalog of sensations in "I Always Liked That Best."

In other words, country music is not as conservative as it once was – though it is still a far cry from being as racy as its rock 'n' roll cousins. As Hank Jr. puts it, in country music we still don't use the F-word. But that doesn't mean country artists are ignoring what goes on behind closed doors. *

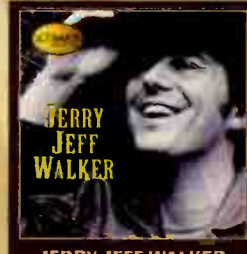
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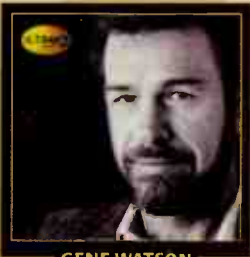


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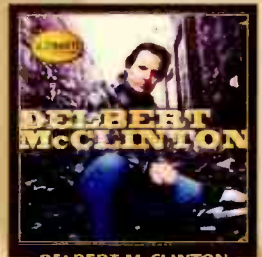
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 & "Memories To Burn"



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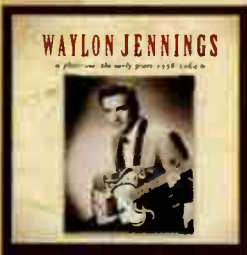


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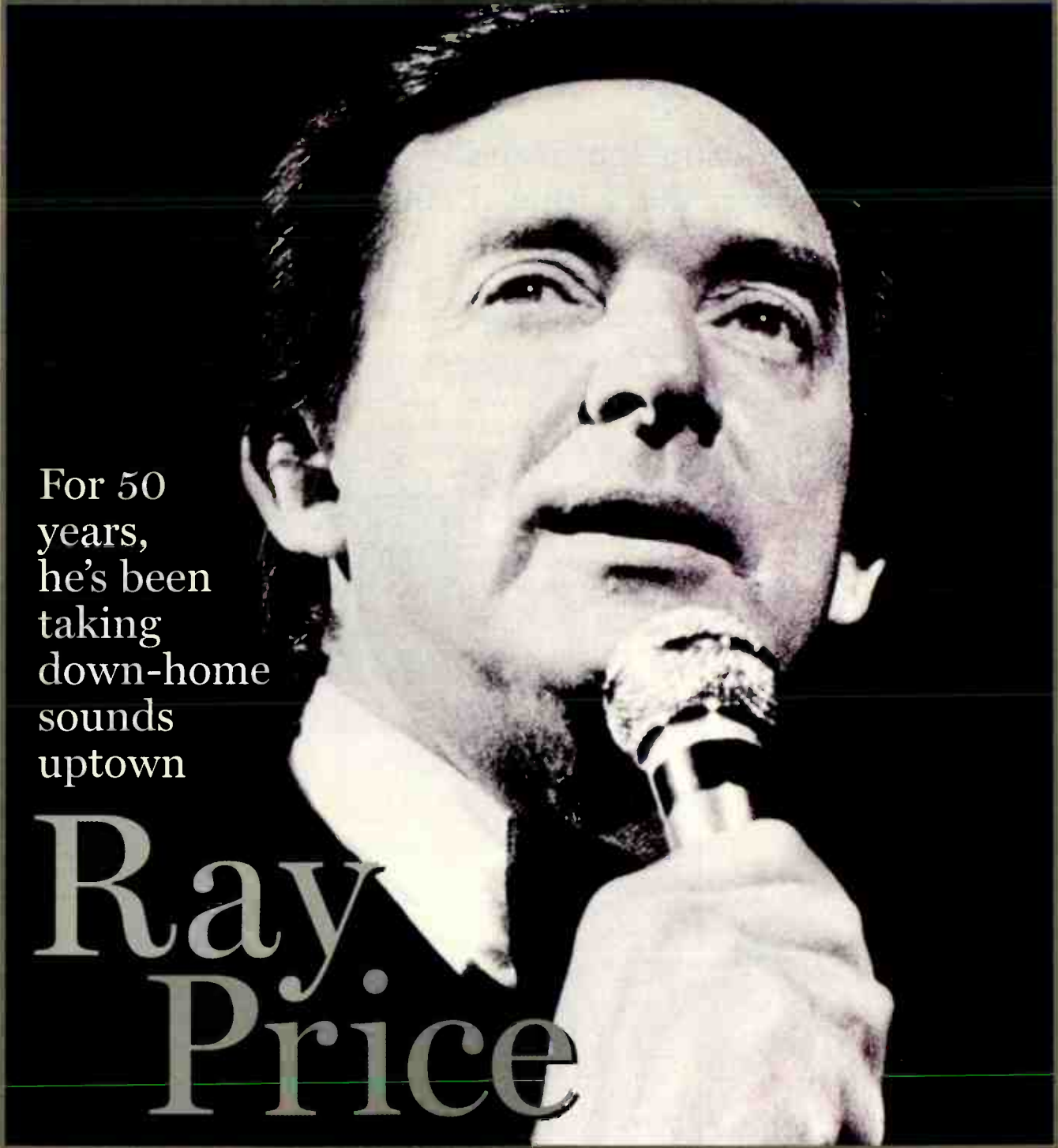
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THE Journal

OF TRADITIONAL COUNTRY MUSIC

A black and white close-up photograph of Ray Price. He is looking upwards and to the right, singing into a vintage microphone held in his right hand. He is wearing a dark suit jacket over a white collared shirt. The background is dark, making his face and the microphone stand out.

For 50
years,
he's been
taking
down-home
sounds
uptown

Ray
Price

PRECIOUS MEMORIES FROM THE COUNTRY MUSIC HALL OF FAME AND MUSEUM



Jimmie Rodgers' 'Mystery' Solved

A lyric sheet lends insight into the creative process of the legendary Blue Yodeler

Late in June of 1930, Jimmie Rodgers and his wife Carrie arrived in Hollywood for a vacation. His tuberculosis was worsening, and he probably hoped the

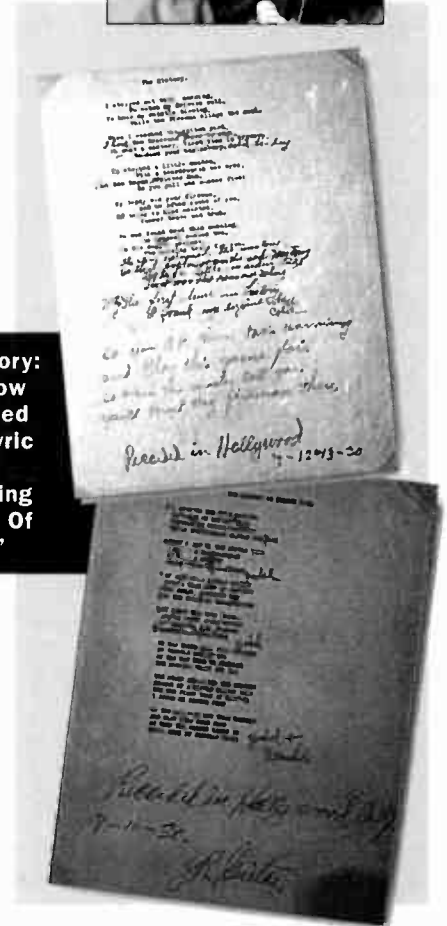
arid climate would improve his physical condition. But Rodgers also booked a series of sessions at the Victor Company's new recording studio on Santa Monica Boulevard. Over the following two weeks, he recorded 14 tunes, including the self-penned "The Mystery Of Number Five."

A train song, "The Mystery Of Number Five" is performed from the perspective of an engineer who one morning finds his engine cold and silent for the first time. This is a mystery to him until he is told that his fireman has passed away. In the final stanza, the engineer admonishes, *So you railroad men take warning and play this game fair/So when the master calls us we'll meet my fireman there.*

Two copies of the lyrics for "The Mystery Of Number Five" were made for the session that took place on July 11, 1930. Today these pages provide a glimpse of Jimmie Rodgers' creative process by showing how he edited the typewritten lyrics.

One page contains additional lyrics handwritten into the margins by Rodgers, while a second page shows the consolidation of these new lyrics into a revised draft. This second draft also contains chord changes and arrangement instructions.

"The Mystery Of Number Five" lyric sheets are now on display at the



Pages of history: Rodgers' widow Carrie collected the original lyric sheets to his songs, including "The Mystery Of Number Five."

Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum for the first time. They are part of an exhibit entitled "Treasures Untold: Unique Collections from Devoted Fans." This exhibit runs through March 2003.

— Mark Medley

THE Journal OF TRADITIONAL COUNTRY MUSIC

Editor: Robert K. Oermann

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The man who caused a fuss by switching from honky-tonker to smooth crooner.
- J8 Jeannie Seely**
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"Then You Can Tell Me Goodbye"
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Notable reissues
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An essential marketplace for buyers, sellers and traders

THIS DATE IN COUNTRY MUSIC

DECEMBER

December 1

1954 Fred Rose dies
1956 Kim Richey born

December 2

1947 Pee Wee King records "The Tennessee Waltz"

December 3

1927 Ferlin Husky born



Ferlin Husky

December 4

1955 Diamond Rio's Brian Prout born
1971 Charley Pride's "Kiss An Angel Good Mornin'" rises to No. 1

December 5

1901 Singing cowboy Ray Whitley born
1967 Gary Allan born
1933 Delmore Brothers record their first hit. "Brown's Ferry Blues"

December 7

1931 Bobby Osborne (The Osborne Brothers) born

1948 Gary Morris born

December 8

1928 George D. Hay dubs WSM's weekly show "Grand Ole Opry"

1982 Marty Robbins dies

December 9

1980 Waylon Jennings' *The Dukes Of Hazzard* theme song is certified gold. He's also the narrator for the popular TV series.

December 10

1951 Johnny Rodriguez born
1996 Faron Young commits suicide

December 11

1944 Brenda Lee born
1949 Fiddlin' John Carson dies

December 12

1972 Hank Williams III born

December 13

1930 Buck White born (The Whites)

1949 Alabama's Randy Owen born
1954 John Anderson born

December 14

1899 DeFord Bailey born
1934 Charlie Rich born

December 15

1891 A.P. Carter (The Carter Family) born
1959 Everly Brothers record "Let It Be Me" in New York

December 16

1964 Jeff Carson born
1997 Nicolette Larson dies

December 17

1955 "Sixteen Tons" goes No. 1 for Tennessee Ernie Ford
1983 Chart debut of The Judds ("Had A Dream")

December 18

1904 Wilf Carter, "Montana Slim," born
1964 Cledus T. Judd born
1966 Tracy Byrd born

December 19

1908 Bill Carlisle born
1920 Jimmy Dickens born



Jimmy Dickens

1980 Dolly Parton's first movie, *9 To 5*, opens nationwide

December 20

1966 Johnny Horton's "Battle Of New Orleans" receives gold record
1975 At the height of the CB craze, "Convoy" hits No. 1 for C.W. McCall

December 21

1928 Freddie Hart born
1956 Lee Roy Parnell born

December 22

1948 Hank Williams records "Lovesick Blues"

December 23

1957 Chart debut of "Jingle Bell Rock" by Bobby Helms

December 24

1913 LuluBelle born
1988 Keith Whitley hits No. 1 with "When You Say Nothing At All"

December 25

1948 Barbara Mandrell born
1954 Steve Wariner born
1971 George Jones & Tammy Wynette debut on the charts with the duet "Take Me"

December 26

1911 Brother Oswald (Pete Kirby) born
1955 Alan O'Bryant (Nashville Bluegrass Band) born

1970 Lynn Anderson's "Rose Garden" rises to No. 1

December 27

1931 Elvis guitarist Scotty Moore born
1978 Bob Luman dies

December 28

1958 Joe Diffie born
1960 Diamond Rio's Marty Roe born
1963 Merle Haggard debuts on charts

December 29

1962 Glen Campbell debuts on charts
1983 Jessica Andrews born
2001 Alan Jackson's "Where Were You (When The World Stopped Turning)" hits No. 1

December 30

1931 Skeeter Davis born
1937 John Hartford born

December 31

1924 Rex Allen born

January 1

1953 Hank Williams found dead

January 2

1936 Roger Miller born
1974 Tex Ritter dies

January 3

1917 Leon McAuliffe, steel guitarist, born

January 4

1957 Patty Loveless born



Patty Loveless

1966 Deana Carter born
1970 Fiddler Clayton McMichen dies

January 5

1952 Chart debut of "Wandering," Webb Pierce's first hit

1961 Iris DeMent born

January 6

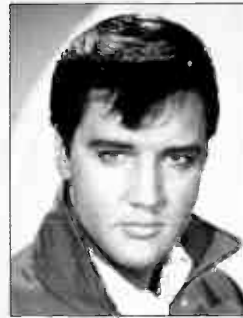
1924 Earl Scruggs born
1996 Fiddler Chubby Wise dies

January 7

1930 Jack Greene born
1933 *WWVA's Wheeling Jamboree* begins
1949 "Rudolph The Red Nosed Reindeer" ascends to No. 1 for Gene Autry

January 8

1935 Elvis Presley born



Elvis Presley

1979 Sara Carter dies

1983 Reba scores first No. 1 hit ("Can't Even Get The Blues")

January 9

1919 Rollin "Oscar" Sullivan (Lonzo & Oscar) born

1951 Crystal Gayle born

January 10

1948 Loretta marries Oliver "Mooney" Lynn

1991 Clint Black joins the Opry

January 11

1911 Tommy Duncan born
1933 Goldie Hill born

1946 Naomi Judd born

1975 "Before The Next Teardrop Falls" debuts on charts for Freddy Fender

January 12

1905 Tex Ritter born

1926 Ray Price born

January 13

1962 Trace Adkins born
1996 Lonestar makes chart debut

January 14

1929 Billy Walker born
1937 Billie Jo Spears born

1950 Delmore Brothers hit No. 1 with "Blues Stay Away From Me"

January 15

1950 David Lynn Jones born

January 16

1946 Ronnie Milsap born

January 17

1955 Steve Earle born
1981 Eddie Rabbitt hits No. 1 with "I Love A Rainy Night," which also crosses over to top pop charts

January 18

1941 Bobby Goldsboro born

1956 Mark Collie born

January 19

1939 Phil Everly born
1946 Dolly Parton born
1963 Flatt & Scruggs go No. 1 with "The Ballad Of Jed Clampett," theme song for TV's popular *The Beverly Hillbillies*

January 20

1924 Slim Whitman born
1965 John Michael Montgomery born

January 21

1942 Mac Davis born
1950 "Chattanooga Shoe Shine Boy," Nashville's first million-selling country hit, goes No. 1 for Red Foley
1987 Dwight Yoakam's debut LP certified gold

January 22

1952 Alabama's Teddy Gentry born

January 23

1940 Johnny Russell born
1956 Harley Allen born

January 24

1936 Doug Kershaw born
1939 Ray Stevens born



Ray Stevens

January 25

1986 Rosanne Cash's "Never Be You" hits No. 1

1942 Dave Rowland (Dave & Sugar) born

January 27

1968 Tracy Lawrence born
1996 "Heads Carolina, Tails California" introduces newcomer Jo Dee Messina on charts

January 28

1956 First national TV appearance by Elvis (*The Dorsey Brothers' Stage Show*)

January 29

1955 "Let Me Go, Lover" hits No. 1 for Hank Snow

January 30

1937 Jeanne Pruett born

January 31

1936 Guitar maker C.F. Martin born



City Lights, Country Nights

After 50 years, Ray Price is still straddling the uptown and the down-home

BY ROB PATTERSON

Ray Price is a man of many worlds. One night he'll work in Nashville, recording his latest album. On the following morning, he's back at his East Texas ranch, raising thoroughbred horses.

One year he'll cut a full-out, pop-crooner album, as he did with 2000's *Prisoner Of Love*. On his following album, *Time*, he returns to the bare-knuckle honky-tonk sounds of the '50s and '60s, back when he was king of the barroom singers while leading the brilliant Cherokee Cowboys band.

"I know both sides of it," he says proudly. "I love the people that live in the city, and I've lived there myself. But I'm a country boy, that's just the way it is."

At 76, the Country Music Hall of Famer still plays both sides of the fence and shows no signs of slowing down. In addition to managing his ranch, he keeps up a full concert schedule. "Everybody's telling me I'm singing better than I've ever sang," he cracks, "and I'm beginning to believe it."

Indeed, though he agreed to an interview, Price warns that he's not going to have time to simply sit and answer questions. After all, he's a busy man, and there's work to do. "I may have to interrupt you every now

and then because I'm loading my help in and going to go get some horse feed," he says on his cellphone. "But hell, we can do it while I'm working. Gotta make a living."

Price laughs deeply to punctuate the comment. Nonetheless, he's eager to talk about his new music. "It's the old-fashioned, real country sound," he explains.

Nashville veteran Fred Foster produced the sessions with legendary players like steel guitarist Buddy Emmons, drummer Buddy Harmon, bassist Bob Moore and guitarists Harold Bradley and Pete Wade, all of whom worked with the singer when he was one of country music's most consistent chart-toppers.

"I like something Buddy Emmons said," Price recalls. "We're making history. All of us old ones are here doing new things."

Price has experience making history. In 1956, his hit "Crazy Arms" knocked Elvis Presley out of the top slot of the country radio chart and stayed at No. 1 for a record-setting 45 weeks.

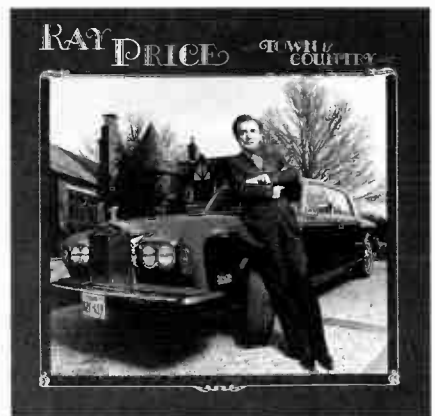
The song, built from the bottom by bassist Buddy Killen and the soaring fiddle of Tommy Jackson, gave Price a sound of his own. From

then on, he emphasized the shuffle rhythms of his sound, a style that can be heard on such classic Price hits as "City Lights," "Invitation To The Blues" and "Heartaches By The Number." That driving, 4/4 rhythm paired with honky-tonk fiddle and steel guitar became so identified with the singer that it became known as the "the Ray Price beat."

Through the late '50s and early '60s, Price's Cherokee Cowboys band was an amazing incubator of talent, employing such future stars as Willie Nelson, Johnny Paycheck, Roger Miller, Johnny Bush and Darrell McCall.

"The reason those people were in my band is that they were good," Price says. "That's all that I required."

His recruitment skills went beyond musicians. His publishing company, Pamper Music, brought tunesmith Harlan Howard to



The Price sound often incorporated citified pop with hard-driving country, which angered a few purists. "They rubbed my nose in it," remembers Price, "and it kind of hurt for a few years."

Ray Price

Nashville and helped give hit writer Hank Cochran his start.

By the mid-'60s, Price began exploring different musical facets, moving into a lush sound with pop overtones. Discs like 1967's orchestrated "Danny Boy" had purists crying betrayal.

"They all said I deserted country music," Price says. "They never did look down and see the boots on my feet. Every time I walked onstage, even with a tuxedo, I've never forgotten where my boots were."

Price eventually felt validated when record buyers responded to his cosmopolitan country songs. His 1970 recording of "For The Good Times" ranks among the best-selling country singles of all-time and boosted the fledgling career of the song's writer, Kris Kristofferson, now himself a country legend.

Nonetheless, the outcry over changes in Price's musical direction still rankles him. "When they said I was pop because I was using strings, it was still country songs," he notes. "All I did was try to make them prettier. But they rubbed my nose in it. It kind of hurt for a few years."

But Price understood that country and classic pop were two sides of the same musical coin; both styles were based on great singers doing great songs. "In my opinion, music is music if it's pretty and it's beautiful," he explains. "And I don't care what kind of song it is. A good song doesn't care who sings it."

And who better than Ray Price to fashion some of the earliest country crossovers – and do it in style?

Throughout his life, he has been both down-home and uptown. His parents broke up when he was four, and he divided his time between cosmopolitan Dallas with his mother during the school year and summers working with his father on a rural farm in Perryville, Texas.

He studied opera as a youngster in Dallas, a practice that surely helped develop his powerful voice and flexible range. At his father's farm in East Texas, he heard the records of Jimmie Rodgers and Bob Wills.

After serving with the Marines in World War II, Price began studying veterinary science at North Texas



"I'm not a very politically minded person," says Price, who always maintained a firm stance about bucking the Nashville system.

Agricultural College. On the side, he sang in Dallas clubs with some friends who had a small combo. Even then his shows embraced a wide range of music, from country and swing favorites to hits by pop groups like the Ink Spots.

In 1949, Price signed with Bullet Records and recorded a debut single. Tellingly, the single was in the smooth style of Eddy Arnold rather than the rougher, honky-tonk sound of Hank Williams. The song wasn't successful, but it landed him a spot on Dallas' leading live radio program, *The Big D Jamboree*.

By 1952, Price had moved to Nashville, signed with Columbia Records and scored his first hit, the Top 5 "Talk To Your Heart." He was befriended by Hank Williams, who helped Price get onto the *Grand Ole Opry*. The two even shared a house during the last year of Williams life.

"It was one of those instant friendship things," Price recalls. "And it worked out great. I took care of him a little bit in his last year, until I moved out. I just couldn't take it anymore. He was an alcoholic, big time. Anyway, he was a friend, and I never forgot him, never will. I always pay homage to him. As far as I'm concerned, it was a good lesson to watch him work."

It was Williams who inspired Price to take his music to pop audiences years later. Price observed how pop singers



Price and wife Janie, whom he married in 1970, live near Dallas, where they raise horses and other farm animals. At one time, Price considered becoming a veterinarian – but chose a more artistic course.

scored hits with songs by Williams, thanks to the efforts of Hank's mentor and publisher, Fred Rose. Yet the pop audience had dismissed Williams as a hillbilly singer. So when Price forged his crossover, he says, "It was no different than Fred Rose getting the big pop stars to sing country songs. I just reversed it, that's all."

It's ironic that at a time when Music City has gone whole hog on adding rock and pop flavors to country, the man who helped forge the crossover path is now bringing back the true country sound with a new album.

"I was talking with my old friends who played on the session, and they asked, 'How come you called us?' And I said, well, the man who runs the record company said he wanted some of that old-fashioned country music like back in the 1950s. So I had to find musicians whose heads stopped working back in the '50s."

Price chuckles at his own joke, but one senses that his biggest laugh is at the oddity of it all. Once again, Price is doing things contrary to the current Nashville system. "I'm not a very politically minded person, if you know what I'm saying," Price explains. "I didn't play the

game. Might be my fault, but I have to live with myself."

That approach explains why Price qualifies his answer when asked what his proudest career moments might be. "I'm proud of winning the Grammy, and I'd have to be an idiot to say I'm not happy to be in the Hall of Fame. I just thought they waited an awful long time to put me in."

After all, Price wasn't inducted until 1996 – 15 years after the last of his 46 Top 10 hits. "I thought I deserved to go in earlier than I did," he says. "But that doesn't matter; I'm in."

So right now, fresh from cutting his new album, Price feels as if he's "got both barrels loaded," as he puts it. "As far as I'm concerned, things look great. I'm selling out every show. I haven't lost my popularity. It actually seems like it's getting better, like I've got a hit record out. It's kind of strange. But I'll take it. I won't complain."

Hence the man who sang "For The Good Times" is still having the time of his life making music. "I think it's because the fans know I've always tried to give them good music," he concludes. "I don't stand up onstage and tell jokes. I don't use smoke, I don't use mirrors, I don't slide down ropes. I don't ride up on the stage on a Harley.

"I just get up there and sing. It's all I know how to do." ●



Friend, mentor and former roommate Hank Williams helped Price land a spot on the *Grand Ole Opry* in the '50s.

Career Woman

Groundbreaking Jeannie Seely balances singing and acting

Jeannie Seely can testify that country music's obsession with young artists isn't a new phenomenon. In 1973, at age 33, Seely lost her recording contract when a label executive informed her that she was "too old." But the spirited Seely persevered, buoyed by smart business sense and her status as a high-profile regular on the *Grand Ole Opry*.

Then, in the 1980s, a new door unexpectedly opened.

A theatrical director offered her a major part in a community drama production. Then she accepted another role for a musical in a Nashville dinner theater. Since then, Seely has put together an impressive résumé of acting credits, which includes roles in stage productions of *The Best Little Whorehouse In Texas*, *Everybody Loves Opal* and *Takin' It Home*. She even played the fan - rather than the lead - in a production of *Always, Patsy Cline*.

Now 62, Seely recently took on what might be her most widely seen role yet. In the theatrical-release movie *Colored Eggs*, she appears alongside stars Faye Dunaway, Tom Skerritt and Lauren Holly in a screenplay that the director described as "a cross between *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest* and *Steel Magnolias*."

During the filming, Seely became fast friends with veteran character actor Janet Carroll, who also appeared in the movie *Enough* and held recurring roles in the TV series *Murphy Brown* and *Melrose Place*.

"I learned so much from her," Seely says. "Six of us - including the *Grand Ole Opry*'s Jan Howard and singer Rita

BY JACK HURST

Coolidge - play Southern Baptist church ladies who volunteer at this cancer hospital. We're the comic relief."

The movie's producer told Seely that her work with Carroll, Coolidge and Howard contains more on-screen magic than he had seen between four women since *The Golden Girls*.

Not surprising. Seely ranks among the most intriguing and enduring vet-



Seely backed up her revolutionary look with progressive ideas, such as allowing women to host segments of the *Grand Ole Opry*. The business-school graduate also became known as country's first "career" female.



Sporting long hair and short skirts, Seely went against the *Opry* grain and ushered in a new image for female stars.

erans on the *Opry* cast. The striking blonde native of little Townville, Pa., began spicing up the *Opry* from the night she first walked onto its stage in 1966 - in a miniskirt.

The *Opry* was stunned, she remembers. At the time, the cast's female mainstays stuck primarily to cotton ruffles and calico prints, and song themes never directly addressed a woman's sexuality.

After Seely's appearance, *Opry* manager Ott Devine called her into his office, then began to stammer. "He didn't know how to talk to me about it," she laughs. "I don't know that Ott was upset about the miniskirt. I think he was embarrassed and trying to figure out, 'OK, to please people I'll talk to her, but what do I say?' He kept going around and around like somebody trying to - pardon the expression - skirt the issue.

"I finally said, 'Have I done something wrong here? This is just the way I dress. I didn't know there was a dress code.' He said, 'I never thought about it as a dress code, but I guess everybody pretty much dresses the same.' I said, 'Is there a rule that you're supposed to?' He said, 'No.'"

So she dressed as she desired and became a brand-new type of *Opry* female. Where the images of Wilma Lee Cooper and Loretta Lynn were that of mountain women, and Jean Shepard, Dottie West and others were seen as "singing house-

wives," Seely was the show's first "career" female.

It was a natural fit. A business-school graduate who left rural northwest Pennsylvania for Hollywood, she once worked at Union Bank at the corner of Wilshire Boulevard and Beverly Drive in Los Angeles. Then she took half the pay to become a secretary at Liberty Records because she wanted to learn the music business.

Songwriter Hank Cochran, whom she would later marry and divorce, convinced her to move to Nashville in 1965. She went to work for a music publisher and worked with Porter Wagoner's road show, eventually signing with Monument Records.

She also sang material with bold topics. Her most famous song remains the alluring female paean "Don't Touch Me," a Grammy-winning hit written by Cochran.

But Seely wasn't just outspoken on record. At the *Opry*, she protested how stage introductions often reduced adult female performers to "pretty little girls in pretty little outfits." And she challenged the *Opry*'s longstanding rule that only men could host *Opry* segments.

Her friend and mentor Dottie West begged her to stop, voicing fear that if she didn't quit complaining she would find herself booted off the show. Seely retorted that if nobody complained, the practice would never change.

Eventually, change did occur. Male hosts, their consciousness raised, began to treat women artists as equals. In addition, female stars now have hosting duties.

Seely also went against the grain in how she dealt with her income. A high-powered record producer once suggested Seely buy a showplace house to entertain powerful industry people, but she declined. "That's not what I wanted," she explains. "Once you're in debt, you have to keep working, and that's how all those people live off you."

Unlike many country stars, the singer chose to live modestly and save her money. By keeping it simple, she says, "I can work less and clean my own house."

Today her house is clean, and her future looks good. ●



THE STORY BEHIND THE SONG

“Then You Can Tell Me Goodbye”



Eddy Arnold's version spent two weeks at No. 1 in 1968.

“Then You Can Tell Me Goodbye”

BY JOHN D. LOUDERMILK

Kiss me each morning
for a million years
Hold me each evening by your side
Tell me you'll love me
for a million years
Then if it don't work out
Then if it don't work out
Then you can tell me goodbye

Sweeten my coffee with a morning kiss
Soften my dreams with your sighs
Tell me you'll love me
for a million years
Then if it don't work out
Then if it don't work out
Then you can tell me goodbye

If you must go, oh, no, I won't grieve
If you wait a lifetime before you leave

But if you must go, I won't tell you no
Just so that we can say we tried
Tell me you'll love me
for a million years
Then if it don't work out
Then if it don't work out
Then you can tell me goodbye

© 1962 ACUFF-ROSE INC.

Written by John D. Loudermilk

When John D. Loudermilk wrote one of the all-time great love songs, he was married.

But he wasn't in love.

He says he would have never written “Then You Can Tell Me Goodbye” had the relationship been a strong, solid one.

“As soon as you get happy as a songwriter, you quit writing,” explains the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Famer, who offers his second marriage as proof. “I haven't written anything since I met Susan, and that's been 33 years.”

“Then You Can Tell Me Goodbye” is among three songs written in the early 1960s that Loudermilk considers his best work. “Tobacco Road,” a pop hit by the Nashville Teens in 1964, delves into the love-hate relationship Loudermilk has with his poverty-stricken childhood in Durham, N.C. “Indian Reservation,” the 1971 No. 1 hit by Paul Revere and the Raiders, also represents what Loudermilk describes as his “blood talking” - even though he didn't find out until recently that his great-grandparents were Cherokees who'd been forced to walk the Trail of Tears from North Carolina to Oklahoma.

There is no such obvious inspiration for “Then You Can Tell Me Goodbye,” however. Loudermilk says it comes from his “collective unconscious,” a term first used by the psychologist Carl Jung. “Everything that happens to you is stored in your mind,” says Loudermilk, who studied psychology in North Carolina's Campbell

College in the 1950s. “It's your own personal collective unconscious.”

“Then You Can Tell Me Goodbye” may have come from Loudermilk's unconscious mind as it grappled with the conflicted emotions of his less-than-blissful marriage, but the emotions it captured were shared by millions. The song initially appeared

on one of Loudermilk's solo albums, then was recorded by a Cincinnati pop group, The Casinos. The Casinos' 1967 arrangement, with lush horn parts and an organ solo, went to No. 6 on the pop charts and became a slow-dance standard at high school and college gatherings.

The simplicity and honesty of its lyrics gave “Then You Can Tell Me Goodbye” a built-in appeal to country audiences, and Eddy Arnold's 1968 version spent two weeks at the top of the country charts. Neal McCoy revived the song again with a Top 5 hit in 1996.

Loudermilk's other hits include “Waterloo” by Stonewall Jackson, “A Rose And A Baby Ruth” and “Abilene” by George Hamilton IV, “Break My Mind” by Vern Gosdin, “Amigo's Guitar” by Kitty Wells and “Talk Back Trembling Lips,” a hit for both Ernie Ashworth and Johnny Tillotson.

These days, Loudermilk, 68, spends his time on his farm in Christiana, Tenn. “I know it's better to be happy and not write than to be unhappy and write,” he says. “Of course, you can only say that after you've made your life's income first.”

— Walter Carter



John D. Loudermilk



“Goodbye” was sweet sorrow for The Casinos, who made it a pop hit in 1967.

NEW AGAIN

NOTEWORTHY DISCOVERIES

In honor of the 70th birthday of **JOHNNY CASH**, Columbia Records has rolled out a string of reissues that brings back some of his greatest recorded works.

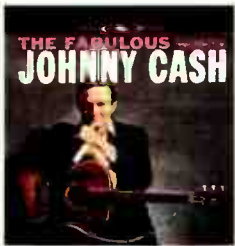
The Essential **JOHNNY CASH**



THE ESSENTIAL JOHNNY CASH

Columbia/Legacy (2 CDs)

If you're just discovering Cash, this is the place to start. This two-CD set covers highlights from five decades of music. It begins with eight of his cornerstone hits made for Sun Records in Memphis in 1955–58, including "Big River," "I Walk The Line," "Get Rhythm" and "Cry, Cry, Cry." The first disc continues through the mid-'60s after his shift to Columbia Records. The second CD takes us from his superstardom in the late '60s through his '80s collaboration with the Highwaymen, his move to Mercury Records 1987 and his 1993 recording with U2, "The Wanderer." Essential, indeed.



THE FABULOUS JOHNNY CASH

Columbia/Legacy

His first album for Columbia, issued in 1958,

featured the hit singles "Frankie's Man Johnny" and "Don't Take Your Guns To Town." His standard "I Still Miss Someone" was also first issued here.



HYMNS BY JOHNNY CASH

Columbia/Legacy

In 1959, when this album was originally issued, every major country artist was expected to put out a gospel LP. Since many of Cash's earliest songwriting attempts were gospel tunes, making a religious album was a natural fit.

RIDE THIS TRAIN

Columbia/Legacy

Cash would become one of the first country artists to issue concept albums, and this 1960 collection was a step toward that. Despite the title and cover art, it is not comprised



wholly of train songs. It is, however, a travelogue that takes listeners to different areas of the country and introduces them to different characters portrayed by the singer.

ORANGE BLOSSOM SPECIAL

Columbia/Legacy

This 1965 collection is a snapshot of what a typical country album was at the time. It includes a big hit ("Orange Blossom Special"), some cover versions of others' hits



("The Long Black Veil," "When It's Springtime In Alaska") and a gospel tune ("Amen"). But listen closely, for even within the formula, Cash is pushing the envelope.

CARRYIN' ON WITH JOHNNY CASH & JUNE CARTER

Columbia/Legacy

Carter's mountaineer twang and Cash's Arkansas-bred drawl were not an ideal match. Because each was such an individualistic, rough-hewn stylist, they never melted together in melody the

way that George and Tammy, Loretta and Conway or Porter and Dolly did. The reason they were effective as a team was that they had personality.



On such humorous hits as "Jackson" and "Long-Legged Guitar Pickin' Man," they made listeners feel as if they were eavesdropping on conversations. The warmth and intimacy were no act. The year after this was issued in 1967, the couple married.

AMERICA: A 200-YEAR SALUTE IN STORY AND SONG

Columbia/Legacy

By 1973, when this was originally issued, Cash was a veteran of such concept albums as *Blood, Sweat & Tears* (working man's music, 1963), *Bitter Tears* (songs about Native Americans, 1964) and *Ballads Of The True West* (Western songs,



1965). This ambitious undertaking was nothing less than telling the history of America in

song, with Cash's self-penned narrations linking the performances. "Paul Revere" visits the War of Independence. "The Battle Of New Orleans" salutes the War of 1812. "Remember The Alamo" leads to the Civil War classic "Lorena" and then to Cash's reading of "The Gettysburg Address." And that's how it goes – "Mister Garfield," "The Big Battle," "Come Take A Trip In My Airship."

RAGGED OLD FLAG

Columbia/Legacy

Perhaps the most overlooked aspect of this legend is the fact that Cash is one of the great country songwriters of all time. Diamonds of his compositions are sprinkled throughout his



album career. But surprisingly Cash never devoted an entire album to his own songs until 1974's *Ragged Old Flag*. With a clutch of new songs in hand, he entered the studio with his trusty Tennessee Three, and a handful of Nashville session musicians. Earl Scruggs dropped by to play banjo on the title tune. The Oak Ridge Boys offered their harmonies on several tracks. No big hits resulted, but the album remains consistently pleasurable.

Collections

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

QUESTIONS

A few years ago there was a song out called "Navajo Rug." Do you know who sang it? Seems like it was a Canadian artist.

Shirley Gross
13558 Myers Lane S.
Jefferson, OR 97352-9751

EDITOR'S NOTE: "Navajo Rug," written by Ian Tyson and Tom Russell, appears on the Tyson's 1987 album, *Cowboyography*, and his 1996 best-of collection, *All The Good 'Uns*. Tyson is, indeed, a Canadian. It also can be found on Russell's *Song Of The West: The Cowboy Collection* and Jerry Jeff Walker's *Navajo Rug* album.

Could you tell me what happened to John Duffey of the bluegrass group *Seldom Scene*?

Judy Adkins
5017 First St. NW
Lakeland, FL 33810

EDITOR'S NOTE: John Duffey's final performance with *Seldom Scene* was in Englewood, N.J. on Dec. 7, 1996. He died three days later of a heart attack at age 62.

Years ago, I saw George Jones in concert with a singer named Melba Montgomery. What happened to her?

Gladys B. Hamilton
520 Tremont Dr. Apt. 4
Westminster, MD 21157

EDITOR'S NOTE: Melba Montgomery made several fine albums in the '60s and '70s. She scored a No. 1 hit in 1974 with "No Charge." Today she remains a successful Nashville songwriter. Recent hits she's written include George Strait's 1999 single "What Do You Say To That" as well as the recent Patty Loveless/Travis Tritt duet "Out Of Control Raging Fire."

WANTED

I'm looking for the album by Hank Snow *This Is My Story*. Will buy it or pay to have a copy made. Also, does anyone have a video of Snow?

Don Linhares
501 Main St.
Somerset, MA 02726

I would like to find a CD or tape with the song "My Old Yellow Car." Ernest Morris
155 Race St.
Westfield, PA 16950

EDITOR'S NOTE: "My Old Yellow Car" was a Top 10 hit for Dan Seals in 1985. It appears on his CDs *Certified Hits* and *The Best Of Dan Seals*.

I am looking for any albums recorded by Harlan Howard. Will buy.
Yvonne Roark
510 Heritage Dr. No. 118
Madison, TN 37115

Wanted: Merle Haggard's gospel album *For The Mama Who Tried* on cassette or CD.

Irene Owens
1606 N. Park
Spokane, WA 99212

I am trying to find videos of Bobby Bare.

Catherine Hendrix
808 Clark Ave. No. 6
Yuba City, CA 95991-4348

I am looking for the story book *Coat Of Many Colors*, based on the Dolly Parton song. Willing to pay.

Mr. Laverne D. Elmore
2203 Fairview Ave.
Fairmont, MN 56031-4054

I have all of Tom T. Hall's albums except one. *Homecoming*. I'd like this on vinyl in good condition. Will buy and work out shipping.

Steve Freed
33500 Barley Ln
Wildomar, CA 92595

I am looking for the words to the Tex Ritter song "Beyond The Moon."

Martha J. Brown
32 Marmack Rd.
Amherst, NH 03031-3106

Country music movies wanted: *Nashville Rebel* starring Waylon Jennings, *Honeysuckle Rose* starring Willie Nelson, *Doc Elliott* starring Merle Haggard and *Musketees Of The West* starring Carl Smith, Webb Pierce and Marty Robbins. Does Johnny Lee have a fan club?

Virginia Lavergne
401 North Waco #F-4
Russellville, AR 72801

EDITOR'S NOTE: The original title of the film co-starring Smith, Pierce and Robbins was *Buffalo Gun (1962)* rather than *Musketees Of The West*. The only vintage movie I'm aware of starring Haggard is *Killers Three (1968)*. The most recent address I've found for a Johnny Lee fan club is P.O. Box 368,

Old Hickory, TN 37138. I don't know whether it is still active or not.

I've been looking for Porter Wagoner's album *Confessions Of A Broken Man*.

Lola Ellis
78 S. Kerkes St., Lot 14
Wickenburg, AZ 85390

I'm looking for the group Atlanta on cassette or LP. They sang the song "Sweet Country Music."

Michelle R. Winchester
15 Winchester Loop
Parrish, AL 35580

Seeking a back copy of *Country Music* magazine. Vol. 3, No. 7 dated July 1975.

Sam D'Agostino
96 Watson Dr.
Dover, NJ 07801

I'm looking for the song "I Never See Maggie Alone." Who recorded it? P.S. I love your magazine.

Joan Hurst
Box 328
Coulterville, IL 62237

EDITOR'S NOTE: This British music-hall song was originally a pop hit in the U.S. by Irving Aaronson in 1927. It was also recorded by Eddie Cantor and Art Mooney's Orchestra. In country music, the best-known version was by yodeler Kenny Roberts, who had a Top 10 hit with it in 1949. It is available on the German import CD *Jumpin' & Yodelin' (Bear Family Records)*. Kenny's later remake is on the CD *Indian Love Call (Starday Records)*. Other country acts who have recorded the tune include Slim Whitman and Red Smiley.

Interested in buying Waylon Jennings memorabilia – autographed pictures, show posters, etc.

Kelly Stanley
P.O. Box 1080
Aberdeen, WA 98520

Would like Hank Williams' *Health & Happiness Shows* from 1949 on cassette or CD.

Cy Dave Covey
54 Vicki St.
Dyersburg, TN 38024-7868

I am looking for any songs by Leon Everette.

Cathy Bailes
1414 Lloyd White Rd.
Clover, SC 29710

Does anyone have the Moon Mullican album with the gospel song "Where Beautiful Flowers Grow"? I wrote the song, and Mr. Mullican recorded it in 1954.

Velma Ford
623 25th Ave. NE
Paris, TX 75460

EDITOR'S NOTE: Mullican's 1959 album *Old Texan (King Records)* contains this song. It's available at the Amazon.com and CDNow.com websites.

FOR SALE

For sale. Buddy Holly LPs, including reissues and imports, some still sealed. Most in great condition. Also a Buddy Holly Fan Pack 1983.

Anne Thompson
22196 McClaren St.
Grand Terrace, CA 92313

I've just inherited more than 4,000 records, mostly country. Also some comedy and rock 'n' roll, Elvis. Can provide list.

Carolyn English
156 Firwood Dr.
Bridgeville, PA 15017

I have 23 of the WLS Family Albums with pictures of Chicago's *National Barn Dance*'s families from 1933 on up. They published one each year. Best offer takes them.

Edward Bergmann
1106 N. Grant St.
Harvard, IL 60033-1824

I have every issue of *Country America* magazine that was published, all in A-1 shape. Will sell to best offer.

Agnes M. Lamb
620 W. Main St.
Washington, IN 47501

Chet Atkins' All-Access badge, worn by Mr. Atkins during the Grand Ole Opry's 70th Anniversary. Best offer.

Harold R. Hoffman
P.O. Box 90
Gratis, OH 45330

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Hammin' It Up

A true country ham has a salty personality and a sweet flavor

Say the words “old ham” in Boston, Chicago or Los Angeles, and people will presume you mean an aging superstar desperately hanging on to the spotlight. However, “old ham” in Smithfield, Va., has a far different, nearly sacred connotation. In that community, it means carefully cured country ham.

According to John Egerton, author of *Southern Food: At Home, On The Road, In History*, Smithfield is the undisputed birthplace of Southern-style country ham, at least as it was popularly introduced. In the late 1700s, Mallory Todd began shipping Smithfield hams out of the little oceanside village. Todd started an industry, and entering the 20th century, Smithfield ham producers were shipping 40,000 hams a year. By the end of the century, their annual output was 40,000 *a day*.

The state of Virginia, trying to stave off rising competition from other Southern states, now legally defines Smithfield ham as “hams processed, treated, smoked, aged, cured by the long-cure, dry-salt method and aged for a minimum period of six months,” all within the town limits of Smithfield.

But Virginia does not maintain a monopoly on country hams, and the method of preserving ham became a culinary calling card spread throughout Kentucky, Tennessee, Georgia, North Carolina, Arkansas and Alabama. Though the general process – curing in salt, then smoking, then hanging them to sweat – is essentially the same, country ham producers have their own tricks for producing distinctive flavors.

For instance, the salt-to-sugar ratio that hams are dipped in to cure differs from place to place; the chips used to smoke the ham might be apple wood, sassafras wood or hickory; in Smithfield, a heavy coat of black pepper is applied to the hams, but not in Cadiz, Ky., another small, rural community that has made a name for itself among country ham aficionados.

Many commercial producers take shortcuts that chafe country-ham purists. Injections of brine, “liquid smoke” or no smoke at all make these companies capable of turning out a country ham in

less than 90 days. Genuine country hams are becoming rarer, but those who know their hams say the additional effort is well worth it.

Daisy King, noted Nashville restaurateur and author of the acclaimed *Original Tennessee Homecoming Cookbook*, has been serving country ham all of her life. A Smithfield ham, she claims, is truly something special. “They are so good, and they have a much stronger taste. There is no mistaking a Smithfield ham for anything else.”

Country hams can be boiled or baked, though the latter method requires the former first. A boiled ham can be covered with a glaze, then baked. Thin slices of boiled ham can be cut, then fried. Pieces of ham can be used in

casseroles or to add flavor to beans and greens, two more regional favorites.

“For breakfast, fry it up in a skillet, take it out and to the juices in the skillet add some strong black coffee and a little bit of brown sugar to make red-eye gravy,” King says. “Country ham always comes with biscuits, and the biscuits *have* to be homemade. Country ham is very salty and fatty. A little bit goes a long way.”

Try telling that to Trace Adkins, who proudly defends Southern cooking, with all of its blemishes. “Country ham *may* not be good for you, but no one can say it doesn’t taste good. I’ll eat it anytime, any way.”

— Kay West



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Follow That Dream

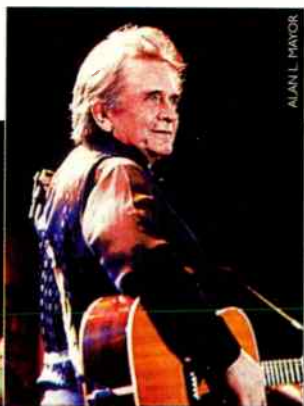
Movement fills the Dixie Chicks' "Long Time Gone." The title may suggest the past, but everything in the toe-tapping song addresses how the world keeps evolving and pushing forward.

Lyrically, the song portrays each of its subjects at one stage of change or another – whether they like it or not. The father looks at an empty field and sadly remembers the days when it was filled with tobacco he would harvest. The mother cooks as if preparing to feed a family of five, even though brother now lives in Indiana, sister is working as a nurse and the song's subject has followed her country-music-loving heart to Nashville.

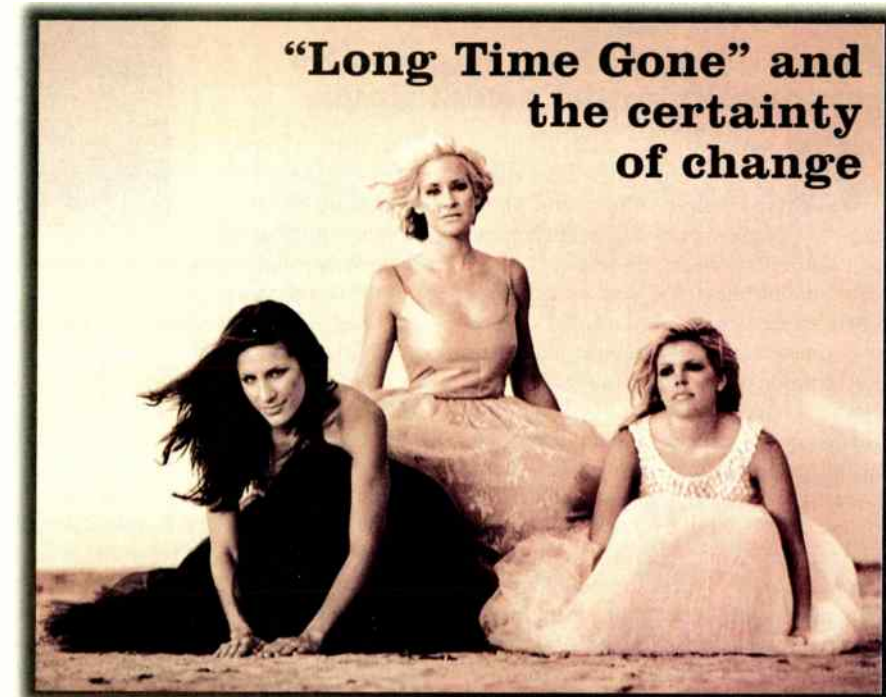
Musically, the song conveys a sense of movement, too. Martie Maguire's opening violin melody and the accents of Emily Robison's Dobro capture the feeling of bouncing along a highway to a new destination. Meanwhile, singer Natalie Maines accelerates through the hyper-imagery of the song with super-fueled glee.

Initially, the feel is that of heightened expectation: "Long Time Gone," written by Darrell Scott, grasps the excitement and energy a woman experiences as she makes her move to fulfill a long-lived dream to sing country music in Nashville.

To make dreams come true, people must summon their passion and conviction in order to find the courage to take a chance. It means breaking out of one's routine and risking failure. But without risk, without leaving behind what is comfortable, dreams cannot take shape.



Modern music lacks masters like Haggard (left), Cash and Williams, say the Chicks.



In the case of "Long Time Gone," the singer takes the risk and pursues her dream. An explosive bridge in the song perfectly communicates the thrill she feels after landing in Nashville and starting to pay her dues: *Playing down on Broadway, gettin' there the hard way, livin' from a tip jar ... yeah, I'm gonna be a star!*

But, as is often the case, stardom doesn't come. The woman discovers that Nashville isn't what she expected and that change has affected country music as well.

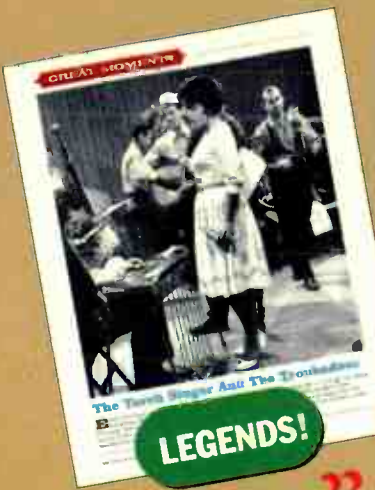
She gives up on the dreams, and returns home to sing in a Sunday choir, raise children and tend to a garden.

In a nice twist, she accepts that this dream wasn't to be and seems content to have blended back into the community in which she was raised. Now she can accept that she gave it her best shot but, as the song states, *it ain't comin' back again.*

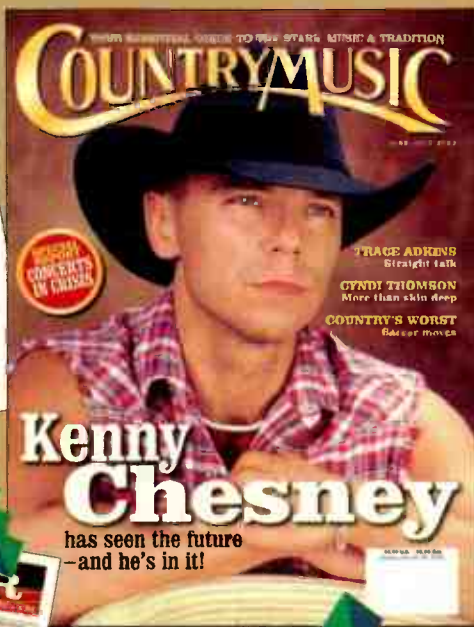
That said, she makes it clear that she's not happy with country music and where its sound has moved; she prefers the long-time-gone styles of past masters. *We listen to the radio to hear what's cookin', she sings, but the music ain't got no soul. Now they sound tired, but they don't sound Haggard. They got money, but they don't have Cash. They've got Junior, but they don't have Hank. I think, I think, I think the rest is a long time gone.*

This is not the voice of bitterness and regret, but the voice of someone who knows that life can be redefined as it moves along. As Maines emphatically articulates it, the message is not just about marshaling the courage to chase a dream, but also owning the resolve to accept the consequences – for everything eventually will be a "long time gone."

— Hollie Woodruff



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Sawyer Brown's leader explains why his band is still shakin' it up after 20 years

BY NICK KREWEN

MILLER

Sawyer Brown Fact No. 1

Lead singer Mark Miller can take criticism. After all, his band, Sawyer Brown, has survived for 20 years, even though the quintet has never been a favorite of critics and Nashville insiders.

"We've been on a roller coaster our whole career, but I think we've thrived on the ups and downs of it," says Miller, 44, lead singer, songwriter and spokesman for the fan-fueled quintet that includes keyboardist Gregg "Hobie" Hubbard, guitarist Duncan Cameron, bass player Jim Scholten and drummer Joe Smyth.

"There's part of us that needs to be the underdog once in a while, so we



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can fight back. That's as responsible as anything for our survival. We would always think things were going great, then we'd hit a wall and have to hunker down. So we're all about surviving by working harder than the next guy."

Sawyer Brown Fact No. 2

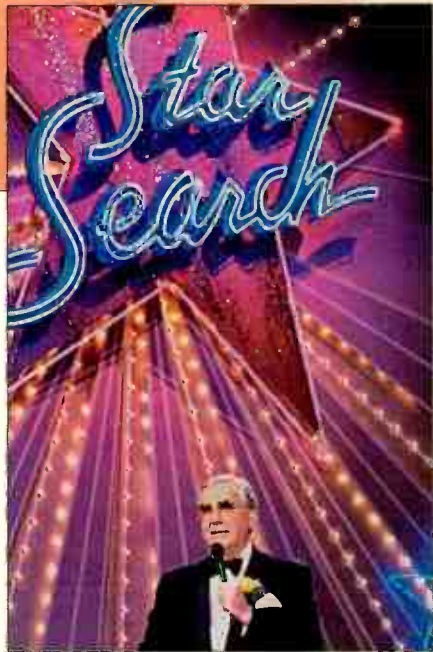
Mark Miller wouldn't mind a little respect. They've done fine without it, but that doesn't mean they wouldn't like it.

Miller certainly thinks they deserve it. They've sold more than 15 million copies of their albums, the latest of which, *Can You Hear Me Now*, is their

18th. They've scored 19 Top 10 hits and, in concert, they've continually drawn enthusiastic responses from loyal ticket buyers.

Looking back, Miller realizes that the TV show that gave the band its break also tagged them as an act that wasn't to be taken seriously. Never mind that the band had struggled for a break for two years before winning the \$100,000 first prize on *Star Search* in 1984. The victory led to a recording contract with Curb Records, but it also colored the band as entertainment lightweights.

"*Star Search* wasn't the vehicle that the country music industry wanted," Miller notes. "We were considered bubblegum. For a while, I wouldn't



Ed McMahon's *Star Search* branded Sawyer Brown with a "bubblegum" image that the band worked hard to shake.

SAWYER BROWN

even mention being on that show; we wanted to get as far from it as we could. But, in reality, it was the most exciting six months of our careers, and I let people take that excitement away from me for a while. We went from literally having nothing to putting down payments on houses. *Star Search* started all that.”

But the fans embraced the band from the start. Its first No. 1, 1985’s “Step That Step,” seemed to set the tone for the band’s success: It was a playful, upbeat ditty, a description that also fit most of their follow-up hits, including “Betty’s Bein’ Bad” and “Shakin’.” Taken together, the songs helped shape the band’s reputation as sugar over substance.

“You know what? We were just kids, and I sang what kids sing about,” Miller explains. “I was a 23-year-old kid out of college, a knucklehead, when I wrote ‘Step That Step.’ But I’m not the one who made it a hit. We would get hammered by critics and the industry, and I would go, ‘Somebody likes this. My mom’s not buying all the records.’”

Sawyer Brown Fact No. 3

Mark Miller works hard. That can be seen onstage, where the husky-voiced singer shimmies like an overwound toy. But it can be seen offstage as well.

The ultimate multi-tasker, Miller stays busy with more than his music career. Until recently, he was the point guard for the now-defunct Fort Wayne Fury of the Continental Basketball Association. He’s also co-owner of Dirt Road Farms with his brother Frank, a company that consists of four properties spread over 942 acres.

“It’s real,” Miller says of his farm, on which he raises cattle and Tennessee walking horses. “I get out and work some days with the guys on my farm. If the creek washes out, you’ve got to build a rock wall. If a cow’s having trouble calving, you’ve got to go out there in the field and pull a calf.

“I want my kids to be around that, to know that if there’s something to be done, you just don’t pick up the phone and call somebody to do it. You do it yourself. It’s a big fear of mine that my kids are going to grow up spoiled rich kids. That would kill me. The music is not going to be my legacy. It’s my kids, and hopefully how people perceive me as a person.”



A family man to the core, Miller spends some quality time (above) with the two women in his life – wife Lisa and mom Jackie. When not onstage, he’s likely to be found working the cattle and horses on his farm (below).



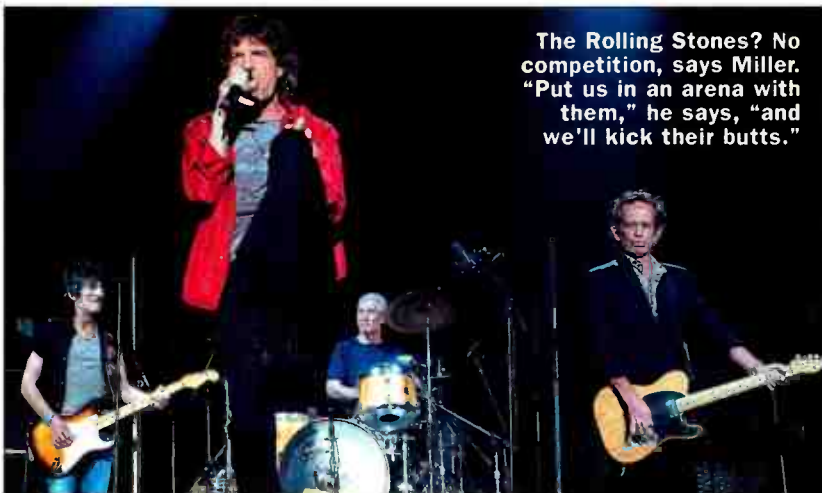
Sawyer Brown Fact No. 4

Mark Miller, a born-again Christian, strives to stay positive about life and work. “I never dwell on the negative, because I’m getting to do this for a living, and I feel so incredibly blessed,” he states. “Even when I’m upset about something that somebody said, or the way that they treated the band, I still get to write songs for a living and sing. It’s been an incredible blessing to be in this band, no matter what anybody says.”

Miller lives on his farm with wife Lisa, daughter Madison and son Gunnar. Brother Frank, who also handles the band’s business affairs, lives in a separate house on the property with his wife and two children, as do mother Jackie and stepfather Troy. There are tennis and basketball courts and a recording studio, where the band worked on the new *Can You Hear Me Now* album.

Sawyer Brown Fact No. 5

They’re not done yet. “We really are an incredible team because we all trust each other,” says Miller. And honestly, I’ll put us up against anybody as the best live band on the planet. Every time I walk out onstage, we’re packing heat. I’ll go up against the Stones, Van Halen, anybody! You put us in an arena with them, and we will kick their butts.”*



The Rolling Stones? No competition, says Miller. “Put us in an arena with them,” he says, “and we’ll kick their butts.”

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**Collin Raye
has divorced his
record company,
but vows to
stay true
to his music**

RONALD C. MODRA

Better Or Worse

Clad in a black T-shirt and khakis, Collin Raye looks relaxed as he nestles into a large brown leather chair and sips from a Styrofoam cup in a photographer's studio in downtown Nashville.

But don't let his calm demeanor fool you.

Raye, 43, stands at a major crossroads. He recently walked his 19-year-old daughter down the aisle, officially stepping aside for the new man in her life. "I always thought it would be a day I would dread, but I really like my son-in-law," he says.

Simultaneously, he's embarking on the next chapter of his career. He doesn't expect this transition to go quite so smoothly and cheerfully.

With his debut album, 1991's *All I Can Be*, Raye achieved immediate success. His second single "Love, Me," spent three weeks at No. 1, and nearly 20 Top 10s followed in the next six years. Some of his admirers are so ardent that they had the lyrics of "Love, Me" engraved on their tombstones. He's also attracted non-country listeners because of his willingness to address social issues in such songs as "Little Rock" (alcoholism), "Not That Different" (human unity) and "I Think About You" (domestic abuse).

But his outspoken personality had a polarizing effect on the industry. He's the first to admit that he's never fit comfortably on Music Row. In a business where most artists stay clear of political commentary, Raye's a staunch, ultra-conservative Republican, and very vocal about it. He believes his unapologetic views have negatively affected his support and he has never received the respect that usually goes with his level of success.

"When it comes to the ACMs or CMAs, I felt a little bit of a cold shoulder," he says. "There was almost a hesitance

to include me in stuff. It was like, what did I do?"

By the late '90s, Raye had more problems. His record sales plummeted; his most recent release, 2001's *Can't Back Down*, only sold about 19,000 copies. For the first time in a decade, he found himself without a record deal.

Raye left Sony in January 2002, the only label with which he's ever worked as a solo act. "It was something I asked to do," he says. "We had just gotten to the point where making records and trying to promote those records was a fight."

For instance, on his last CD, *Can't Back Down*, he recorded 18 songs with producer James Stroud, and they needed to cut it down to 12. "I was all ready to slice off six songs," he says. "The one that was No. 1 on my list to slice was the one that everyone at Sony believed was the record to put out as a single. I was like, 'You're kidding me!' I thought it was a dull three minutes. There are songs on that album that could've been some of the biggest hits I've ever had."

Raye felt his former label never gave him the promotional push his success warranted. "All I ever wanted was one big push, one time. I wanted to be the guy they focused on for six months. There was a period of about seven years where I was told I was keeping the doors open because I was selling product and a lot of their acts weren't. I thought, 'Thanks for the compliment. Now pay me back and give me six months of full attention,' especially when the [Dixie] Chicks [another act on the Sony roster] decided they were going to take a break.

"I was like, 'Focus on me. Come on, I've been here 11 years, and sold five platinum records in a row! Give me that push, that extra little bit of money maybe.'" (A spokesperson for Sony Music declined to comment for this story.)

The stress made him dread what he had always loved: making music. "I thought, this is killing me; it's doing a number on me psychologically. It wasn't personal; it was business. I thought, if I stay here, my recording career is going to end. Let me go to a record label that's excited about me being there."

But before he began shopping a deal with a new label, Raye wanted to take advantage of his momentary independence. He decided to record an album with his own money – before the record executives get involved. This way, he says, he can be certain he'll make music his way, with no interference.

He describes his new, in-progress CD as sounding different than what he's done in the past. Every song will feature the mandolin. The driving instrument will be the acoustic guitar, instead of a piano or rhythm section, and it will be flush with banjos, cellos and even the accordion.

"I call it the most 'wooden' record I've ever done," he says. "By that I mean I'm using instruments I've always loved, but that we've never had the freedom to use before. I haven't had this much fun in the studio since ... well, I've never had this much fun in the studio ever, because I'm doing it myself."

"I'll mix the songs and finish them the way I want, and then go to the labels that we've been talking with and say, 'Look, if you think this is as cool as I do, then let's do something together.'

"If they say, 'I don't like this at all,' I'll say, 'I really want to do this – and I'll go down the street and try elsewhere.'"

— Beverly Keel

SURFIN' COWBOY

With his career riding a big wave, Gary Allan still finds time to hang 10





From the outside, surfing seems so mindless. Paddle out into the ocean, stand up on the board, ride a wave back in. Repeat. Discuss the sport with Gary Allan on the sand near his home at Huntington Beach, Calif., and he makes it clear that surfing is more of a challenge than it might appear. Even the simplest of everyday actions becomes difficult when it involves balancing on a board in a churning ocean.

"The hardest part to do is stand up, and that's the first thing," says Allan, who's played football and baseball, boxed and earned a brown belt in Tae Kwon Do. "It's the most frustrating sport I ever learned." While country music is associated with many sports, surfing is not one of them. Stars are more likely to be found on a golf course or in

BY TOM ROLAND
PHOTOS BY TONY BAKER

a fishing boat than paddling surfboards into the Pacific Ocean.

"It's kind of a loner's sport," Allan observes. "It's just a great way to mentally relax."

Despite the stereotype of surfers as dim beach bums whose favorite word is "dude," the sport also can be as complex as a chess game – with Mother Nature as the opponent. The experienced surfer is constantly monitoring wind direction, the tides and the size of the swells in an attempt to maximize the length of the ride.

And nothing is constant. As the

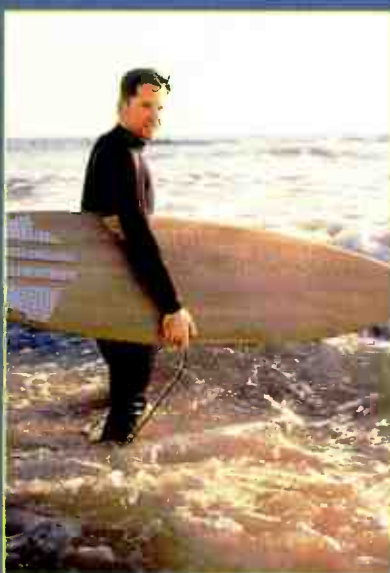
a ride with him before school, so I was out there every day."

By high school, Allan gave up other sports to concentrate on surfing. He started competing in tournaments, although he quickly soured on the experience. Turning it into competition "ruined surfing for me," he says. "It took some of the fun out of it."

A day at the beach is almost always unpredictable for a surfer; it might be a relaxing day of riding small waves or a thrill-filled one with massive swells. "When the

out, the lifeguards said, 'Hey, if somethin' goes wrong, we're not comin' after you. You need to know that.' I was 16, and I paddled out. I broke my surfboard in the first half-hour. But I got to experience two or three waves."

Now that Allan is on the concert trail so often, singing songs like "The One" and "What Would Willie Do," he's only able to ride the waves about three days a month. But surfing is how he stays in touch with his roots. Huntington Beach has its own Walk of Fame and museum for surfers. In that setting, Allan's no



GARY ALLAN

Surfing, says Allan, who's been hitting the waves since he was a kid, is "kind of a loner's sport. It's just a great way to relax."

waves ride to shore, they rearrange sediment on the ocean floor, constantly shifting the sand bars that affect the size of the waves. A surfer must continually evaluate the playing surface, much as an expert golfer reads the green or a fishing fanatic surveys a lake.

Allan has negotiated waves for the better part of his 35 years. As a native Southern Californian, he practically grew up at the beach with his older brother Greg.

"My brother used to surf for P.E. class," Allan recalls. "I would bum

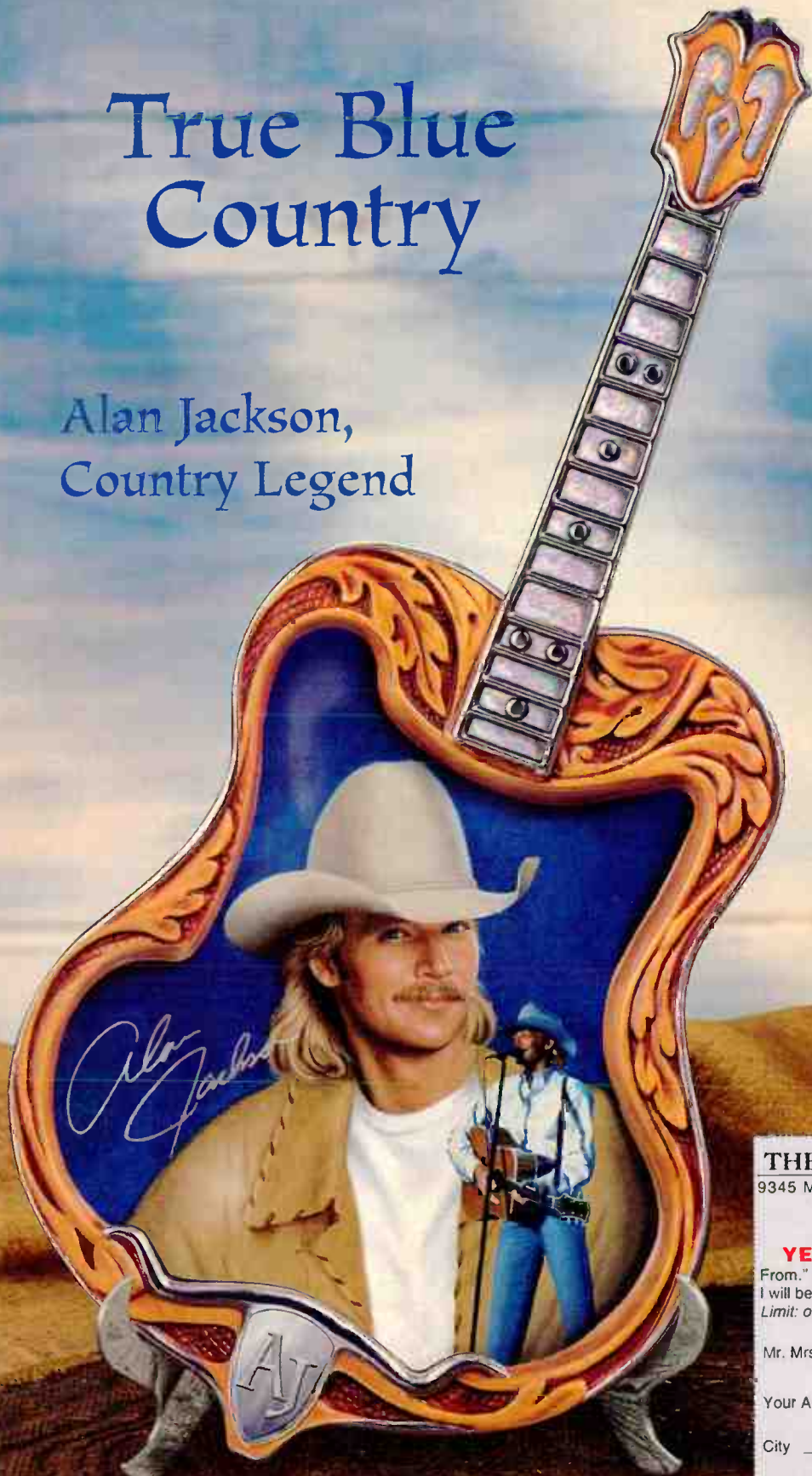
waves get big, man, it's the biggest rush – a high-energy, balls-in-your-throat kind of a vibe," Allan observes. "It's just super, super intense."

He saw that intensity at its peak in the mid-1980s at Huntington Beach. The waves grew so large and powerful that they destroyed the end of the pier, which stands 50 to 80 feet above the tide under normal conditions. Even though several surfers died that weekend, Allan was among those bold enough to test the giant waves. "As I paddled

longer a star but just another alright guy. He surfs with his Texas-born wife and kids occasionally, and still hits the Pacific with some of the same buddies he skipped school with in the 1980s. "There's definitely the people you knew before you had a record deal, and the people you knew after," he says. "With my true friends, you're still Gary. They don't always return your phone calls. You're just one of the guys to them. I think you crave that." That's reason enough for Allan to remain a beach boy.*

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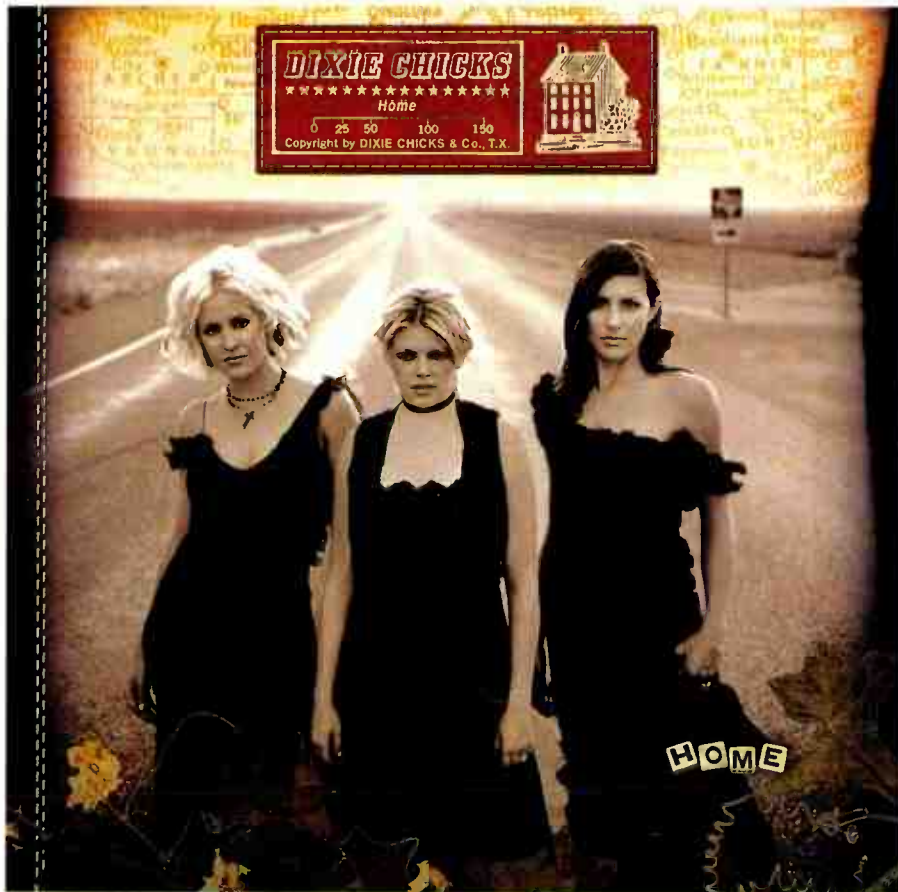
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REVIEWS



DIXIE CHICKS

Home

OPEN WIDE/SONY

★★★★★

Four years ago, the Dixie Chicks' hit "Wide Open Spaces" portrayed a young woman leaving her parents' house to pursue a dream and a life of her own. Yet the song reminded us that with freedom comes the room to make a big mistake. Heard in light of the Chicks' emergence as the biggest country act on the planet, the single rings out like a statement of purpose – especially given the gambles the three women take on their breathtakingly spare new album, *Home*.

The trio recorded the album not on Music Row, but in Texas with co-producer Lloyd Maines, father of lead singer Natalie Maines. They eschewed the

ditties of Nashville in favor of raw-boned material from the likes of Patty Griffin, Bruce Robison and Darrell Scott. Then they handpicked hotshot bluegrass musicians to record the songs, and Maines, Martie Maguire and Emily Robison rose to the occasion and played the fire out of their own instruments.

The result is a record closer in sound and sensibility to Alison Krauss' recent work than to the rock-leaning twang of *Wide Open Spaces* and *Fly*.

"Long Time Gone," the imperious opening romp, even goes so far as to take country radio to task for its narrow playlists. *They sound tired but they don't sound Haggard/They got money but they don't have Cash*, Maines sings, resisting her tendency to overemote.

The album's biggest risks, though, are

its ethereal cover of Fleetwood Mac's "Landslide," the trailer park mess-around "White Trash Wedding" and a barnstorming instrumental, "Jackson Slade," named for Maines' young son.

Self-appointed traditionalists doubtless will herald *Home* as the trio's "integrity move." Yet from their early cowgirl shtick to their insistence on keeping the banjo on "Wide Open Spaces," the Chicks have always done things their way – the way they apparently learned to do them back home.

— Bill Friskics-Warren

PATTY LOVELESS

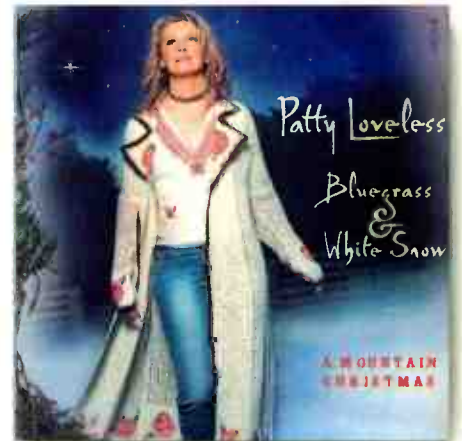
Bluegrass & White Snow: A Mountain Christmas

EPIC

★★★★★

Too many Christmas albums sound like producers' projects, as if the star's performance was mailed in as an afterthought. But when Patty Loveless' voice aches till it cracks on the very first note of "Away In A Manger," it's obvious she's in control of this heartfelt effort.

Using an A-team of bluegrass players, including fiddler Stuart Duncan and Bill Monroe alumnus Blake Williams, Loveless combines traditional Christmas tunes with three self-penned originals to create one of



the more beguiling Yuletide albums in recent memory. Loveless breathes new life into these chestnuts by creating a chamber-music atmosphere that's equal parts mountain music and Celtic soul, as she did on last year's stunning *Mountain Soul* album and on the *Songcatcher* soundtrack.

"Silent Night" contains some nifty fiddle and mandolin twists topped off with gorgeous harmonies by Claire Lynch and Trisha Yearwood. Loveless duets with

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.

Jon Randall on a sublime "Joy To The World," and Emmylou Harris adds a heavenly descant to create an inspired madrigal effect. Loveless acolyte Rebecca Lynn Howard adds her suitably youthful pipes to "The Little Drummer Boy," and Loveless herself delivers a spine-tingling take on "O Little Town Of Bethlehem."

The best, though, is the high-lonesome finale, "Bluegrass, White Snow," written by Loveless and husband Emory Gordy Jr. With Dolly Parton and Ricky Skaggs adding paint-peeling harmonies, its infectious melody and spirited delivery make it the high point of the set.

All in all, *Bluegrass & White Snow* scores points for its rustic feel and living room atmosphere. Though most of the material is familiar fare, Loveless hits the heart of every tune.

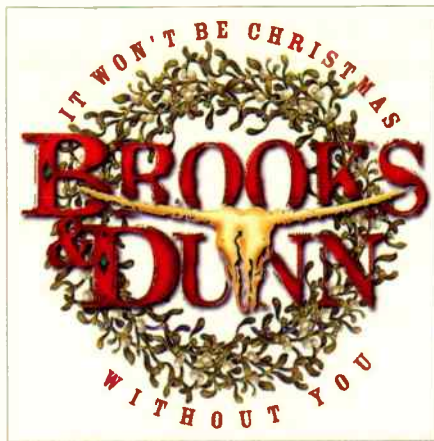
— Bob Cannon

BROOKS & DUNN **It Won't Be Christmas** **Without You**

ARISTA

★ ★ ★

As most successful acts do, Brooks & Dunn have finally recorded a Christmas



album. The ACM Entertainer of the Year winners are giving their fans a holiday present with *It Won't Be Christmas Without You*, an 11-cut set of engaging yuletide originals and uninspired staples, laced with plenty of the familiar Brooks & Dunn stomp.

The best gifts are the new offerings. They include "Hangin' Round The Mistletoe," in which Dunn serenades with a spirit perfect for listening while trimming the tree, and the title track, a holiday heart-breaker in the best country tradition.

Other goodies include Deborah Allen's "Rockin' Little Christmas," which should heat up honky-tonk dance floors this winter with strong vocals from Brooks. Indeed, Brooks handles lead vocals on several of the album's strongest cuts, including the bass-throbbing "Santa's Coming Over To Your House" and the homespun "Who Says There Ain't No Santa," which would make a good Norman Rockwell painting if it were put on canvas instead of in front of a jazzy horn section.

Unfortunately, most of the classics on *It Won't Be Christmas Without You* lack creativity in the arrangements or conviction in the vocals. With so many less-trodden and whimsical options, why do so many artists insist on recording overcooked chestnuts like "Santa Claus Is Coming To Town"? The only cover that shows imagination is the biting, bluesy take on "Winter Wonderland."

It Won't Be Christmas Without You features a few memorable holiday treats. But as is, it's more like leaving Santa cookies without any milk.

— Shannon Wayne Turner

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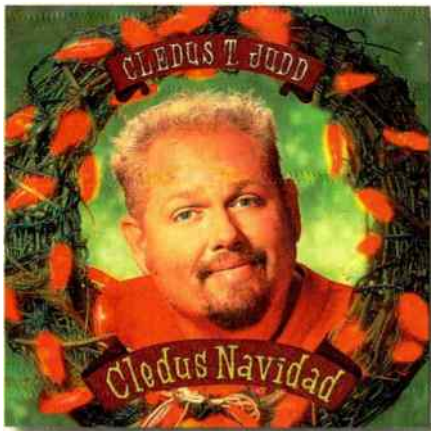
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CLEDUS T. JUDD

Cledus Navidad

MONUMENT

★★★

Lowbrow and politically incorrect, as always, Cledus T. takes comedy pot-shots at Christmas. Luckily, he only wings it.

Opening with an offensive one-joke double-entendre, "Cledus' Christmas Ball," the musical comic slides down further with "Stephon The Alternative Lifestyle Reindeer." With swing-time bigotry, Judd laments, tongue in snuff-packed cheek, that civilized society no longer tolerates gay bashing. Even as satire, the attempt at humor is ill-advised and beneath contempt. Writer Mac McAnally, usually a font of gentle wisdom, ought to be ashamed.

On the plus side, Judd updates Elmo and Patsy's goofy holiday classic, "Grandma Got Run Over By A Reindeer," mixing the swampy Southern rock of the Charlie Daniels Band with spirited twin Texas fiddles. The two best original country comedy numbers are "Only 364 More Shopping Days 'Til Christmas" and "Hazel's Homemade Hallelujah Punch." Neither will replace Brenda Lee's timeless "Rockin' Around The Christmas Tree," but they're cute.

As for his trademark song parody, Judd serves up an approximation of Johnny Cash singing a three-alarm funny "Tree's On Fire," an effective takeoff on "Ring Of Fire." He also mocks hip-hop in "All I Want For Christmas Is Two Gold Front Teeth."

Inexplicably, on the one true Christmas comedy classic in the whole collection, Judd attaches lame new verses to Ray Stevens' maniacally hilarious 1960s hit, "Santa Claus Is Watchin' You." The question is why: The original was a Top 40 and country radio holiday must-play for more than a decade. Listeners too

TOBY KEITH

Unleashed

DREAMWORKS

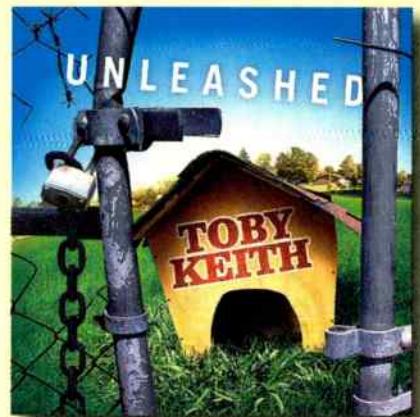
★★★

Toby Keith's latest album arrived on the heels of its controversial piece of fist-shaking patriotism, "Courtesy Of The Red, White And Blue (The Angry American)." Country has long been the music of the fighting kind, and if Keith's song is a little too blood-and-guts for Peter Jennings and ABC – well, it's easy to argue either side of that standoff.

One thing's for sure: Keith got his sentiment across, from the Fourth of July imagery of raining bombs to the mild profanity (*We'll put a boot in your ass/It's the American way*) of his fury.

Keith wrote all 12 cuts on *Unleashed*, from the love ballad "Rock You Baby" to the sexual come-on of "Who's Your Daddy" and the twin salutes to the Wild West – "Beer For My Horses," a duet with Willie Nelson that calls for frontier justice, and "Rodeo Moon," written with Chris LeDoux, which takes a bittersweet look at life on the prize-money circuit.

There's a lot to like, from the kicked-back mood of "It's All Good" to the



vulnerable feel of "That's Not How It Is," in which a sleepless man searches for clues in his failed love affair. 2001's CMA Male Vocalist, Keith is playful when he needs to be, tender when the song calls for it and self-assured every step of the way.

But in launching the collection with his patriotic burner, then closing it with a spoken introduction to the same song, he sets a heavy tone that the album doesn't overcome. Next time, let's hope for a little more country cool to balance that red-hot temper.

— Alanna Nash

young to recall Stevens' madcap original may find Judd's version mildly humorous. But this is one case where Judd should have left the original alone.

— Bob Millard

CLAY WALKER

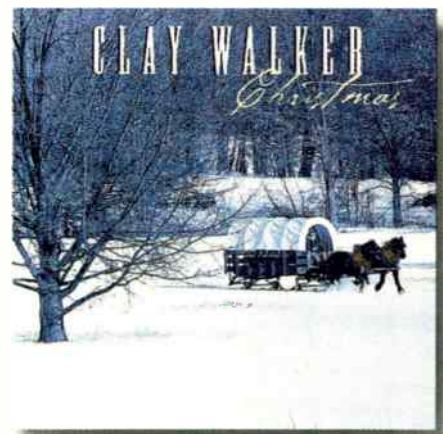
Christmas

WARNER BROS.

★★★★

Why Clay Walker is one of Nashville's most underrated artists remains a mystery. Blessed with a rich tenor, a knack for country phrasing and halfway decent song sense, it's puzzling that when awards get handed out every year, Walker always goes away empty-handed.

Christmas, his eighth release, adds more fuel to the conundrum. Offering 11 tasty holiday chestnuts, Walker's smooth twang powers its way through a variety of country traditions. We have "Rudolph The Red-Nosed Reindeer" and "Winter Wonderland" swinging with dance-hall pizazz and "I'll Be Home For Christmas" presented with Nashville Sound-style polish; we have the rousing gospel of "Go Tell It



On The Mountain" and the festive Tejano of "Feliz Navidad." Walker pulls off all this and more, evoking the warmth and holiday spirit of the most cherished Christmas memories.

In fact the only real criticism, and it's a minor one, is that Walker chose to tackle familiar holiday fare rather than put his stamp on the genre by finding some fresher material.

No matter: Walker is such a distinctive stylist, he makes such treasures as

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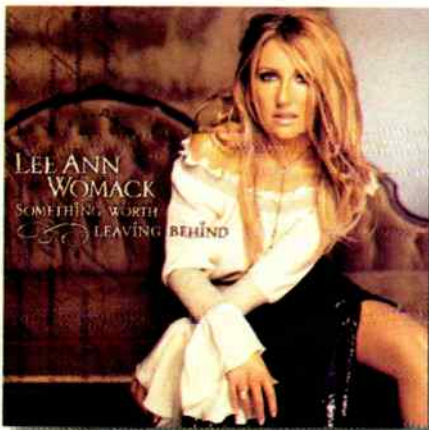
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— Lisa Zbito



LEE ANN WOMACK
Something Worth Leaving Behind

MCA NASHVILLE

★★

I Hope You Dance surprised a lot of people. The country music faithful had pegged Lee Ann Womack as one of the finest young traditional voices from the very first bars of her very first single, “Never Again, Again.” But a chart-topping, adult-contemporary hit and more than three million in album sales? It seemed more than one could hope for.

Something Worth Leaving Behind is not an album of surprises. Past are the days when Womack could open an album with a quiet little bluegrass ballad like “The Healing Kind.” She’s a Multiplatinum Artist now, with a lot invested in keeping her there, so the album leads with its money shot – the title-track, first-single big ballad.

There’s only one problem: “Something Worth Leaving Behind” is a mess of a song, the kind of thing big-name songwriters come up with when they’re trying to sound “wise” and “meaningful.” The song doesn’t mix metaphors so much as it is a mix of metaphors – da Vinci as Warhol, Mozart as Elvis, familial legacy as artistic accomplishment. And in case you missed the point that “Something Worth Leaving Behind” is an Important Statement – and that Womack’s corporate backer, MCA, has designs on making her a Big Crossover Artist – that song both opens and closes the album. (MCA

WILL THE CIRCLE BE UNBROKEN, VOL. 3

Nitty Gritty Dirt Band

CAPITOL

★★★★★

There’s perhaps no more perfect album title than *Will The Circle Be Unbroken*, named for a song by country music’s first family, the Carter Family.

As on the first *Circle* volume 30 years ago, the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band here once again organizes an intergenerational, cross-cultural meeting in which they gather a landmark collection of their elders, idols and peers to toast the traditional music that they’re helping carry on. The new, 28-song collection brings together heartfelt performances that feature the same precise playing, classic songcraft and creative camaraderie as the first volume, which was released by the Dirt Band in 1972.

Several of the stars of the original set – Mother Maybelle Carter, Roy Acuff and Merle Travis – have passed on, which lends poignancy to this recording. Hearing Maybelle’s daughter June and son-in-law Johnny Cash raspily pay tribute to the Carter Family (“Diamonds In The Rough” and “Tears In The Holston River,” respectively) serves as a reminder that many country masters are no longer with us, or are getting on in years.

Fortunately, the buoyed spirits of veterans Earl Scruggs, Doc Watson, Vassar Clements and the indomitable



Jimmy Martin can be felt throughout. And contemporary country luminaries Emmylou Harris, Dwight Yoakam and Vince Gill fit right in, as do bluegrass stalwarts the Del McCoury Band, Ricky Skaggs, Rodney Dillard, the Nashville Bluegrass Band, Alison Krauss, Jerry Douglas and Sam Bush.

The song choices maintain the album’s cyclical theme, though Vol. 3’s repertoire is more diverse than its two predecessors. In addition to folk, hillbilly, gospel and honky-tonk, this collection pushes out the fences to include blues guitarist Taj Mahal doing “Fishin’ Blues,” rocker Tom Petty joining Willie Nelson on Lead Belly’s “Goodnight Irene” and Dwight Yoakam tearing through the Flying Burrito Brothers’ country-rock gem “Wheels.”

All of which suggests that the circle will, indeed, be unbroken.

— Holly George-Warren

Nashville exec Mark Wright produced the first version, matchbox twenty producer Matt Serletic the second.)

Womack still finds wonderful material by mining the catalogs of favored songwriters like Julie Miller (“Orphan Train,” “I Need You”) and Bruce Robison (“Blame It On Me”). But even those songs fall victim to this mystifying, overwhelming desire to make everything bigger, louder, more blatant. The simple treasures of previous albums are gone, trampled in the mad rush to make Womack over as a crossover queen. Perhaps Womack will find a few million more people that missed out on “I Hope You Dance,” but many of her existing fans may find that this album is, indeed, something worth leaving behind – in the store’s CD bin.

— Brian Mansfield

MONTGOMERY GENTRY
My Town

COLUMBIA

★★★★★

Montgomery Gentry are wearing their success quite well. Prime contenders to follow in the Brooks & Dunn mold, the Kentucky duo has staked out its own turf in the populist realm in between country and Southern redneck rock (which are close cousins to begin with). On their third album, Eddie Montgomery and Troy Gentry hammer home their identity and make a bid to be considered far more seriously than most commercial country acts. Guess what? They hit the mark squarely.

My Town may not be a concept album, but it plays like one, which is a nifty trick. The centerpiece title song sets the theme of small-town existence,

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and the 12 tracks that follow – each a winner – all talk compellingly of real life, which is what country music should do.

The singing partners may not have written these tunes, but the folks back home will relate to every one of them. The authoritative Montgomery baritone and charming Gentry tenor have never sounded so natural, assured and complementary.

Due credit for this album's leap forward goes to producer Blake Chancey, a consistent Music City master at making smart, artful records that work on the charts. Rich and deliciously musical, the album strikes the perfect balance between rural and rocking.

Sure, things get a little rowdy in this town, and sometimes life is tough and a bit blue. But *My Town* is the sort of place you can hang for a good, long time.

— Rob Patterson

REBECCA LYNN HOWARD

Forgive
MCA NASHVILLE
★★★

Rebecca Lynn Howard took it hard when her debut album failed to meet the expectations she and MCA Records had for it two years ago. The first label she had signed with had closed before she could get a record out, and now here she was, an obviously talented singer unable to get a single into the Top 50.

Howard knew only the most fortunate singers get even one shot at the big time. Barely 21, she'd watched two chances pass through her hands.

Forgive improves her odds significantly. The title song is already a hit, a powerful ballad that depicts the shock and betrayal a woman feels at the moment her spouse reveals his unfaithfulness. The rest of the album, packed with depth

RASCAL FLATTS

Melt
LYRIC STREET
★★★

On Rascal Flatts' second album, the country trio waves *bye-bye-bye* to comparisons to 'N Sync and other boy bands. Easing back on the glossy production, Gary LeVox, Jay DeMarcus and Joe Don Rooney take a lighter, more acoustic approach, creating an airy, sweetly melodic sound that better showcases the group's sunny harmonies.

What *Melt* doesn't do, however, is build upon the emotional substance the trio briefly flashed on its 2002 hit "I'm Movin' On." While they may have ditched the overpolished surfaces of their 2000 debut, the second album's song selection relies too heavily on lightweight love ditties. It's the equivalent of a popsicle in the Sahara – refreshing for a little while, but what you really need is a sustaining glass of cool water and not all that sticky syrup.

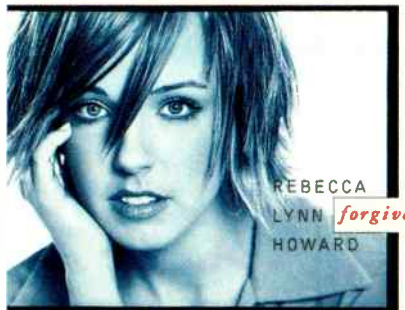
Certainly Rascal Flatts has plenty of potential. Lead singer LeVox has a powerful voice, and he uses it effectively throughout *Melt*. Especially strong is the



bluegrass-inflected "Shine On," which the band wrote. Another standout comes with "I Melt," a powerful, genuine love song that could be this year's "I Swear."

While the rest of the album is pleasing enough, the uniformity of the arrangements and themes makes it all dissolve into an up-tempo-love-song sameness that is neither brave nor disagreeable. Rascal Flatts has the talent to be so much more.

— L. Z.



and balance, reveals volumes about Howard's abilities and character.

She sets things up wonderfully. "Beautiful To You" begins the album with drum loops and rock guitars; then Howard heads straight for the backwoods with "Dancin' In God's Country." When that song's fiddle and banjo notes finally fade, Howard has established her range, and she spends the rest of *Forgive* moving easily between diva-sized country-pop and more down-to-earth fare.

Any hardship and soul-searching Howard endured because of her initial set-

backs obviously have served to strengthen and mature her. Whatever the outcome of the story in the title track might be, *Forgive* certainly offers Howard a fresh start.

— B. M.

PHIL VASSAR

American Child
ARISTA
★★

Few Nashville songwriters concoct melodies as catchy as Phil Vassar or deliver them with as much summer-breeze fun. With the hits "Just Another Day In Paradise" and "Carlene," Vassar established himself as an updated version of Ronnie Milsap – a charming master of light, sing-along tunes perfect for cruising Main Street.

Unfortunately, on his second CD, Vassar sounds as if he's afraid to explore new territory – or run any red lights. The 12 new tunes, mostly slick jingles, are virtually interchangeable with the sweetly sentimental batch he gave us in 2000.

The high points still remain; Vassar's distinctive voice and enthusiastic delivery carry an earnestness reminiscent of early Billy Joel, and he's good at selling love anthems with lyrics as unapologetically sweet as a mash note.

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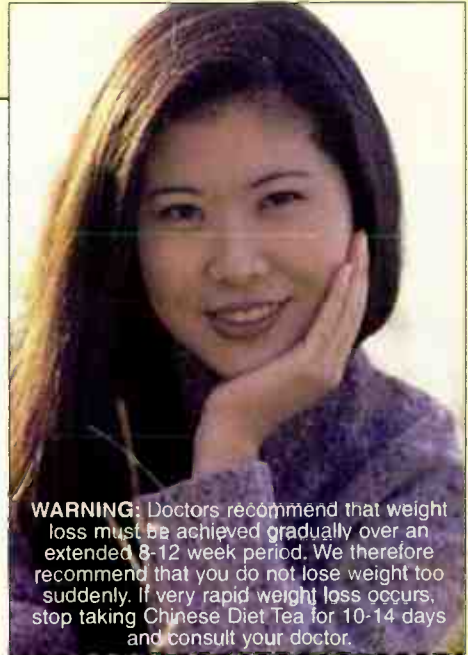
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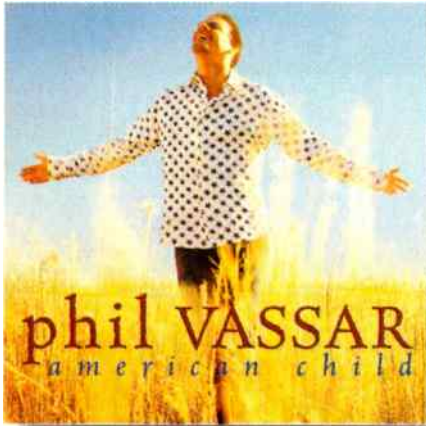
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Whether he's looking through an old box of souvenirs ("I Thought I Never Would Forget"), remembering a goofy karaoke contest ("Ultimate Love") or gushing about how much he's in love ("Stand Still"), Vassar exudes all-American, good-guy, likeable-big-brother appeal. He's not edgy enough to throw pebbles at your window in the middle of the night, but you know he'll show up as promised. Your dad would even like him.

The problem is he's so predictable. Producer Byron Gallimore sticks to his

well-worn formula of '70s pop, pairing a meandering piano with soaring, Journey-style guitar and a dash of fiddle here and there. "I'm Already Gone" is a clone of Lonestar's tiring ballad formula, while "Athens Grease" has clever lyrics, but the melody and arrangement are lifted from ZZ Top's "Sharp Dressed Man."

The theme here is usually love, but Vassar doesn't give any song an individual heartbeat. Hit the shuffle button, and it's hard to tell which tune is which.

— Miriam Pace Longino

JAMESON CLARK
Workin' On A Groove

CAPITOL
★★

There's not much food for the soul on Jameson Clark's loud, overproduced debut. Still, this extroverted newcomer offers plenty of raucous fodder for the libido on this album of chandelier-swinging, testosterone-fueled songs.

Although working at maximum volume, Clark offers a minimum amount of music. Only eight songs make up *Workin' On A Groove*, down



from the dozen originally included on an early version circulated to press and radio in early 2002.

Maybe that's a blessing. Within this more limited offering, Clark's guffawing machismo is balanced a little more effectively by his oafish humor. At his best, as on the title tune, Clark manages to refine his braying hedonism into something resembling artistry. But too often his brash, lighthearted music is forgettable rather than heartfelt or engaging.

— Bob Allen

Elvis Presley® 25th Anniversary Tennessee State Quarter Tribute

"King of Rock & Roll" Joins Presidents on U.S. Coinage



Collectors scramble to get the new Elvis Presley 25th Anniversary Tennessee State Quarter Tribute.

Memphis, TN – Elvis Presley fans are "all shook up" over the announcement that the King of Rock & Roll has become the first recording artist ever honored on genuine U.S. coinage. The Collector's Edition coin, a colorized Tennessee Statehood Quarter from Elvis' home-state, commemorates the 25th Anniversary of Elvis' untimely passing in 1977. Reaction to the tribute has been nothing short of spectacular as droves of fans are scrambling to obtain the coin before any possible sellout occurs.

The 2002 Tennessee Statehood Quarter is colorized by a revolutionary new process that actually fuses a color portrait of Elvis into the face of the coin. Each collectible tribute is completed with the Official 25th Anniversary logo from Graceland along with a reproduction of Elvis' signature.

"Elvis Presley is perhaps the most collected icon of the 20th century," stated George Hubbard of the International Collectors Society, exclusive distributors of the coins. "This uniquely American collectible combines the

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The official Elvis Presley 25th Anniversary Tennessee State Quarter Tribute. © 2002 International Collectors Society, Inc.

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CASH



JOHNNY CASH
American IV:
The Man Comes Around

LOST HIGHWAY
 ★★★

It's fitting that the music of Johnny Cash and the movies of Clint Eastwood seem to be heading into the sunset along parallel tracks. All-American icons of steely strength, these septuagenarians wear their decades like merit badges, refusing to mask the passage of time or deny the infirmities of age as they anticipate the inevitable.

Cash's fourth collaboration with rebel producer Rick Rubin isn't as consistently compelling as its predecessors, but you can't hear it without thinking that this is how an indomitable artist says goodbye. Practically every number either directly addresses death or uses intimations of immortality as a thematic backdrop.

From the apocalyptic vision of the title track through the condemned man's defiance of "Sam Hall" and the dying cowboy's funeral wishes of "Streets Of Laredo," Cash's phrasing combines fortitude and frailty. The cracks in his voice show more conviction than many of country's current generation of smooth-cheeked hunks are likely to muster over an entire career, while his teaming with Nick Cave on a revival of "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry" and his rendition of "Hurt" by Nine Inch Nails' Trent Reznor suggest that he's more likely to find kindred spirits among rock renegades than in the Nashville mainstream these days.

Some of the selections make for painful listening (the last-gasp balladry of "Bridge Over Troubled Water," "The First Time Ever I Saw Your

Face" and "In My Life") or are painfully obvious ("Desperado"). Yet, like Billie Holiday on her album *Lady In Satin* or Sinatra on "September Of My Years," Cash has seen his expressive resonance deepen as his vocal power has diminished.

— Don McLeese

VARIOUS ARTISTS

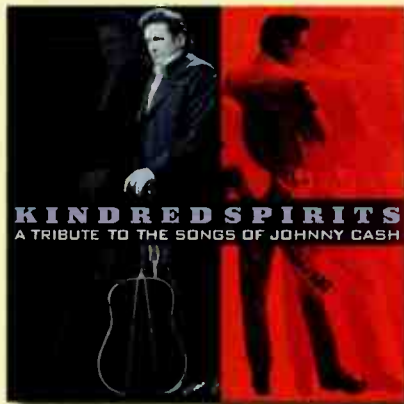
Kindred Spirits:
A Tribute To The
Songs Of Johnny Cash

LUCKY DOG/SONY MUSIC
 ★★★★★

Dressed In Black:
A Tribute To Johnny Cash

DUALTONE
 ★★★★★

The 70th year in the life of Johnny Cash has unleashed a deluge of Man-In-Black mania not seen since his American Recordings renaissance eight years ago. Much of the deluge should be considered important, including the reissues of Cash's Columbia albums and a recent article by Patrick Carr in



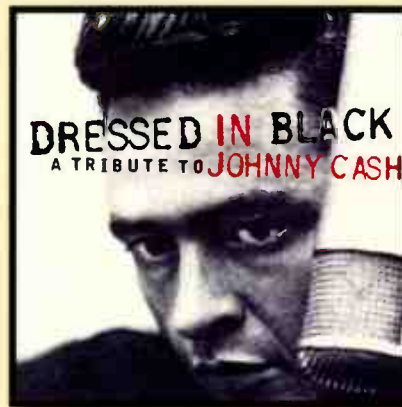
the Country Music Hall of Fame's *Journal Of Country Music*, which reveals personal glimpses of the man from earlier times as well as the vulnerability that has grown in the autumn of his life.

Not as important, but fitting nonetheless, are two tribute albums featuring various covers of Cash performances. Both ultimately point back to Cash, especially after hearing the new renditions of Cash's stark original compositions, which are so much more at home when enveloped in the grave, growling, authoritative voice of Cash himself.

Be that as it may, *Kindred Spirits*,

produced by Cash disciple Marty Stuart, and *Dressed In Black*, produced by Cash band alum Dave Roe and Chuck Mead of the country band BR549, feature a number of sparkling performances.

On *Kindred Spirits*, Bob Dylan bottles the sadness and panic of losing love in "Train Of Love," and Hank Williams Jr. comes on wide and formi-



dable, just like the Mississippi, when he takes on "Big River." On the alt-country dominated *Dressed In Black*, Robbie Fulks wrings a few good tears from "Cry, Cry, Cry," and Damon Bramblett rocks easy on the often-overlooked "I'm Gonna Sit On The Porch And Pick On My Old Guitar."

The albums derail only when the stars plow through songs like an out-of-control tractor: Steve Earle on "Hardin Wouldn't Run," Marty Stuart on "Hey Porter," Hank Williams III on "Wreck Of The Old '97" and Kenny Vaughn on his version of "Train Of Love."

Both albums, though, confirm the endurance and versatility of Cash's songwriting. Many of the songs may well be bigger than Cash, still having something to say in the hands of other artists – which is really the ultimate tribute to a song and songwriter.

Yet the most haunting and poignant moment belongs to the tributee: When Cash appears on *Kindred Spirits'* "Meet Me In Heaven Someday," he beckons us to this celestial rendezvous, as he has whenever he's sung the song over the years. Only this time the lyrics fall hard because, at 70, his words pack a more ominous gravity than in earlier versions.

— Michael Streissguth



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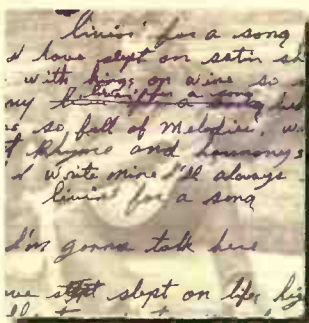
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Kathy Mattea
Roses

(Narada) ★★★ For Mattea, freedom means being as serious and as spiritual as she desires. The 43-year-old recently separated from the Nashville machine after Music City trends moved away from her strengths as a mature-minded, acoustic-based performer. No longer concerned with radio, Mattea now concentrates on literate lyrics that contemplate weighty topics, and she heightens the Celtic influences that have long informed her music. The musical equivalent of church candles and quiet sanctuaries, *Roses* highlights Mattea's abilities as a sensitive interpreter who uses her burnished alto with gentle power.



Hank Cochran
Livin' For A Song

(Gifted Few) ★★★ A member of the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame, Cochran confirms two truths with his solo album: He's a soulful writer who deserves his celebrated status, and his talent resides in his pen, not his voice. But Cochran doesn't

let that hold him back: At 67, he charges fearlessly through these songs, pouring all he can give into hard-core country ballads and rocking through a fireball version of "Wild Side Of Life" (which he calls "Honky Tonk Angels"). Ignoring the tidy professionalism Nashville usually accords his songs, Cochran offers an album for those who prefer scuffed edges and heart-on-the-sleeve sentiment.



Mike McClure
Twelve Pieces

(Compadre) ★★★ Sometimes running into a wall leads a person to the right path. Since Oklahoma country-rockers The Great Divide left Atlantic Records three years ago, the group's passionate leader, Mike McClure, has been on fire creatively. As with his band's recordings, McClure's first solo album suggests he's more interested in spontaneous inspiration than polished craft. Whether he's singing about his love for his family or his reckless bohemian spirit, his words and emotions come across as unadorned and drawn from real life. In most cases, the rawness works in his favor, although some of the acoustic songs would have benefited from being fleshed out lyrically and musically. But those who prefer songwriters who travel the rough back roads of the soul will find McClure a maturing talent worth discovering.

Lynn Miles

Unravel
(Okra-Tone) ★★★★★ *I can stare at the gloom*, Miles sings in the opening song of her latest release, then goes on to prove



just how evocative and touching she can sound while scrutinizing the bleaker side of her emotions. A Canadian singer/songwriter, Miles continues to develop her sturdy talents: a beautiful alto, a powerful way with melodies and a stunning ability to create concise, incisive lyrics that conjure deep emotions. Working with sonic textures in a style reminiscent of Emmylou Harris on *Wrecking Ball*, Miles assembles an effective portrait of the devastation of loss in a manner that is consistently tender yet unflinchingly honest.



John Bunzow
Darkness And Light

(Sideburn) ★★★ The title may suggest a balance of desolation and transcendence, but Bunzow's songs focus on desperate characters stuck in the shadows and trying to find a beacon to guide them out. Although

fixated on the wild side, Bunzow gives his characters a sense of hope through the spirit of his voice and the blues-band roughness of his working-class country rock. Bunzow has overcome misfortune himself: A fine 1996 album he recorded for Liberty Records was scrapped when the label folded. With *Darkness And Light*, the Oregon resident makes a compelling argument that, like the characters in his songs, he deserves another chance.



Rodney Redman
Rodney Redman

(Audium) ★★★ – A young, stout, deep-voiced Arkansas native, Redman recalls the fading Hat Act era in ways beyond his dark Stetson. Influenced by Garth Brooks and other '90s country singers, Redman balances rowdy boot-scooters with reflective ballads. The arrangements are spare and nicely focused, if a bit generic, but it's the bold material that makes Redman stand out. He opens with a chorus that states *I'm talking to God more these days* and closes with a down-to-earth love song that says he's ready to better understand the woman he loves. In between, he wrestles with wildness and making the right choices, sometimes seeking escape in whiskey and tequila but ultimately realizing he'd prefer to walk in the light.

— Michael McCall

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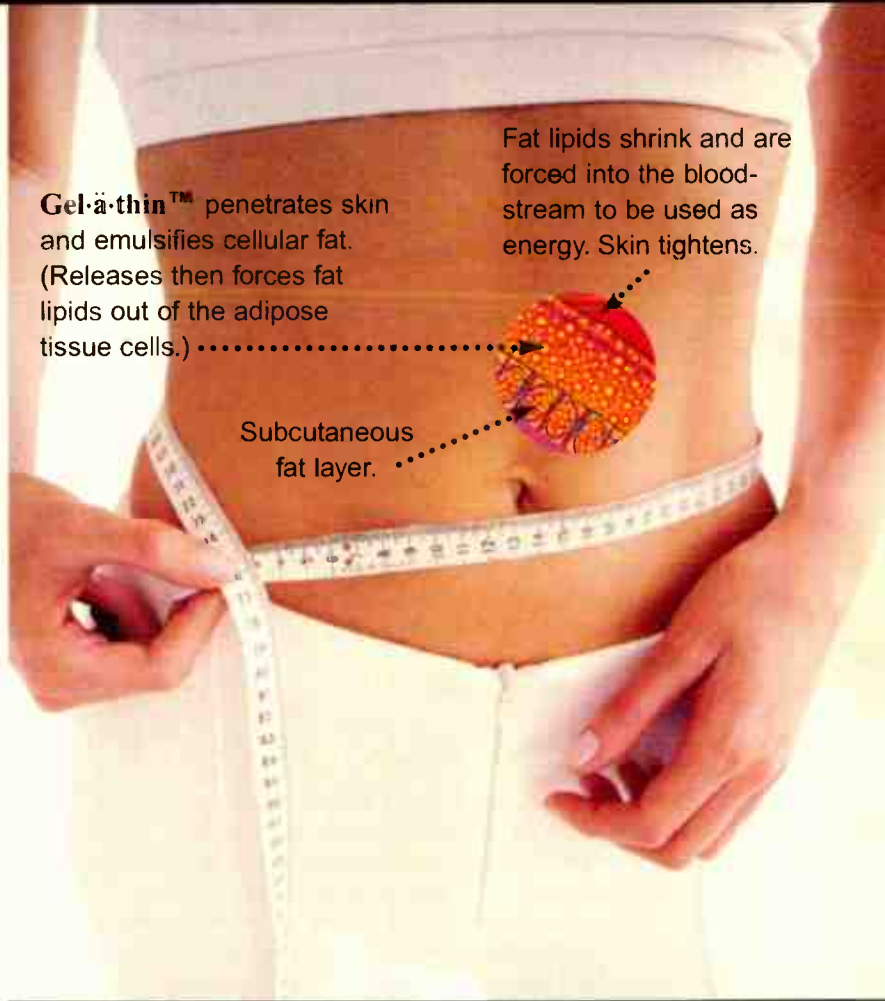
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OFF THE CHARTS

THE COUNTRY BUZZ OUTSIDE THE MUSIC BIZ

Alabama, the most awarded band in country music history, has succeeded by sticking to an old business adage: "The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing." For the quartet, the main thing for more than a quarter of a century has been the music – and pleasing their legion of fans.

"That's what it's always been about for us," says Randy Owen, lead singer of country music's first and most enduring supergroup.

Now the boys from Fort Payne, Ala., are – well, they don't want to say they're quitting. They're not breaking up; they're just saying farewell to the highway. "I've always said that I want to leave when I can still run offstage and not have to be carried off," quips Owen.

The group's final tour, dubbed "The American Farewell Tour," kicks off on New Year's Eve in Las Vegas and continues through October 2003.

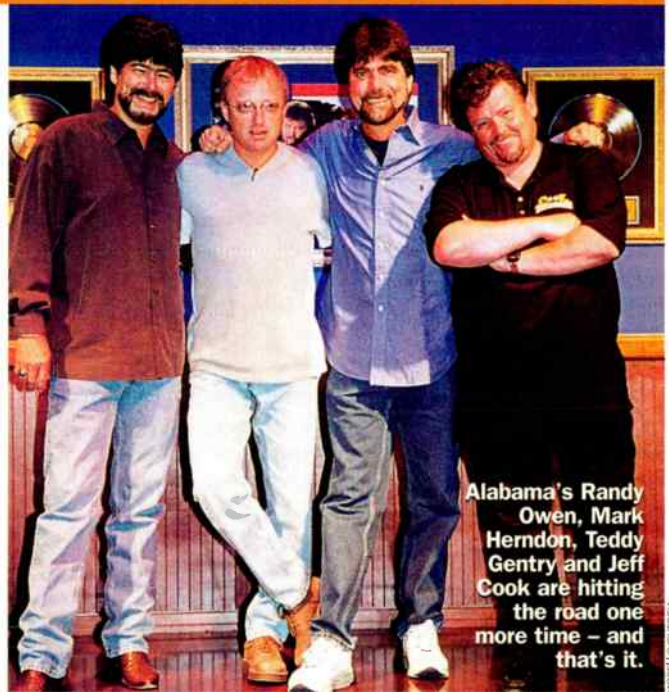
Owen, his cousins Jeff Cook and Teddy Gentry, and drummer Mark Herndon shot out of the box in 1980 when their first RCA single, "Tennessee River," went to No. 1. Their

Bye Bye, Alabama

After 25 years, country music's supergroup prepares to take a final bow

effusive blend of bluegrass, country and rock, capped with powerful harmonies and dazzling musicianship, struck a chord with the American public, and a remarkable career was launched.

Alabama has won more than 150 music awards, including best vocal group 20 times. The first group in country music history to win an Entertainer of the Year statue, they went on to garner that top prize three years running from the CMA and five consecutive years from the ACM. They won two Grammys for best country vocal performance. In 1989 they were the ACM, *Cashbox* and *Billboard* Artist of the Decade, and 10 years later the RIAA deemed them



Alabama's Randy Owen, Mark Herndon, Teddy Gentry and Jeff Cook are hitting the road one more time – and that's it.

Country Group of the Century.

"I think one of the things we can take some pride in is that we knocked down some doors for other groups, and we continue to stay together as a band," says Gentry. "I feel like the more we do and the more longevity we have, that's the true mark of artists, especially with bands. If they can stay together, get through their personal problems and concentrate on the music, then our track record speaks

for itself. You can be successful for a long time if you continue to work at it."

As they embark on their farewell tour, it would be natural to reflect on the past, but the band prefers to focus outside themselves. "We want the fans who've stood behind us all these years to see this tour," says Owen. "If it honors the fans, then I think we can be at peace with what we decided to do."

— Charlene Blevins

Country To The Bone

Help name our new best friend



LARRY HILL

"Think About Angels" is about both her deceased doggie and his successor, Angel.

Now *Country Music* has our own canine mascot. But we haven't come up with the right name yet. So we're asking you – our readers – for suggestions. Have the perfect name for our pooch? Send your entry to: Country To The Bone Contest, *Country Music* Magazine, 118 16th Ave. South, Suite 230, Nashville, TN 37203.

Country music has always had a strong case of puppy love. There's Old Shep, that faithful friend to Red Foley, Elvis Presley and others. There's Jake, the always-fed canine companion of the Pirates Of The Mississippi. There's Ol' Red, Blake Shelton's lovesick prison hound. Jamie O'Neal even fessed up that her hit "When I

If your entry is selected, you will be awarded \$100, a year's subscription to *Country Music*, your own cuddly mascot dog, and other goodies. Ten second-place winners will each receive a *Country Music* T-shirt, hat and a mascot dog, and 10 runners-up will each get a mascot dog.

Deadline is Dec. 15 – so don't drag your tail!

a music club is only as good as the selection it offers

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Single File

The record labels don't like it, but many teens today use their computers to get the music they love, often copying songs onto their own homemade CDs. Many computer users refer to this transfer of songs, technically from one user to another, as "sharing." Music Row is more likely to call it "stealing," because it deprives writers, artists and publishers of royalties they would otherwise receive from the sale of a CD or a tape. We asked teens who listen to country music about their downloading and buying habits.



Kyle M., 15
Clearwater, Fla.
I used to download songs all the time and make CDs, until my computer gave out. Right now, I'm making a list of

songs for my friend to download for me. I make CD compilations of my favorite songs by various artists that I hear on the radio or CMT. I buy albums once or twice a month, mostly country and Christian music.



Sarah F., 18
Findlay, Ohio
I use the Internet quite a bit and am always downloading song clips, but I have never downloaded complete songs or albums. I probably buy five or six albums a year, and all of them are country. If it's a new artist, I like to hear at least two or three songs before I buy a CD to make sure I like the person's voice, not just one song that I heard on the radio. If it's an album by one of my favorite artists, most of the time I know I'll like the entire CD without hearing even one single. Another factor is cost. I will not pay \$18 for a CD knowing it will be \$11 if I wait a few months. It seems like the music stores that put such high prices on their CDs are driving

the public away and forcing them to find new ways of getting music.



Gwen H., 15
Forkville, Pa.
I download about 20 songs a month on my cousin's computer, both country and not country. When I hear a song I like, the next time I go to my cousin's I download it. Or a song will come into my head, so then I'll download it. Country artists that I mainly download are George Strait, John Michael Montgomery, Kenny Chesney, Alan Jackson, Diamond Rio, Garth Brooks, Leroy Van Dyke, Lonestar, Brooks & Dunn, Reba McEntire, Travis Tritt and Tim McGraw. I'm a sucker for love songs. I buy CDs probably once every five months. When George Strait comes out with a new CD, I go and get it.

Interested in becoming a contributor to Teen Country? Drop us a line, enclose a recent photo, tell us a little bit about yourself and include a phone number where you can be reached. Write to Teen Country, c/o Country Music, 118 16th Ave. South, Suite 230, Nashville, TN 37203 or email to nhenderson@countrymusicmagazine.com.

Mickey Newbury Dies At 62



Songwriter Mickey Newbury, immortalized in Waylon Jennings' hit "Luckenbach, Texas" (which referred to "Newbury's train songs" as one of life's great pleasures), died on Sept. 28 at age 62 after a long battle with emphysema.

The Houston-born songwriter had his compositions recorded by the elite artists of his generation, including Elvis Presley, Ray Charles, Jerry Lee Lewis, Willie Nelson, Eddy Arnold, Kenny Rogers and Ronnie Milsap. His most famous copyright may have been "An American Trilogly," an arrangement he conceived

that linked portions of "Dixie," "Battle Hymn Of The Republic" and "All My Trials." Elvis Presley recorded it and performed it in his concerts in the 1970s.

For many fans, though, Newbury's haunted, soaring voice presented the most memorable interpretations of his poetic songs, which included "San Francisco Mabel Joy," "Heaven Help The Child," "The Thirty-Third Of August" and "Just Dropped In (To See What Condition My Condition Was In)," the song that put Kenny Rogers on the musical map back in 1968.

— Michael McCall

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