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Overnight Sensation,
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Volume Four, Number Seven, April 1976

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COVER PHOTO: LEONARD KAMSLER
CENTERFOLD PHOTO: JOHN LEE

Letters

In regards to "The Man Who Beat the System" by Patrick Carr (February COUNTRY MUSIC), I would like to point out that had record companies such as Liberty Records and RCA not been willing to take a chance on a country songwriter, and release that product at the label's expense, Willie Nelson would never have succeeded in creating the so-called Austin Sound. So in effect, Willie succeeded in beating the system only by first joining it. I think it is a great disservice to the record companies who gave Willie an opportunity to record, to omit the fact from your story.

JOHN B. HENDERSON
SAN ANTONIO, TEX.

Being an avid fan of bluegrass and Ralph Stanley in particular, I was pleased indeed to see a major article on bluegrass music in your magazine. (February COUNTRY MUSIC.) It is very obvious that the authors, Martha Hume and Henry Horenstein, have a very deep appreciation for Ralph and his music. This is undoubtedly the finest and best handled article about Ralph I have seen.

The only way Ralph can be thoroughly appreciated is to see the man in person. So much could be said about Ralph and his spell-binding control over an audience that it would fill your magazine three times over. The man has made himself a standard of measure for the countless semi-professional bands in the country. These are the men who pay homage to Ralph by attempting to duplicate his sound.

DENZIL HAMBLIN
HOUSTON, TEX.

I read with interest your article "George Jones, Trouble, Trouble, Trouble" (December COUNTRY MUSIC) by Carr and Nusser and in the interest of good journalism the statement "he had to sign over all his royalty rights to Pappy" is incorrect.

In fact George relinquished his royalties to Musicor Records in order to satisfy his contract with Musicor

against the advice of Pappy Daily who advised him to record the sides owed to Musicor, wait one year and be free of any obligation. George chose to give up his royalties to record with Tammy.

DONALD M. DAILY,
PRESIDENT, H. W. DAILY, INC.
HOUSTON, TEX.

The statement by Bob Wallace that Waylon Jennings should have been given a bath instead of an award is inexcusable. For crying out loud, the man was wearing a tux! Could it be that Mr. Wallace is so narrow-minded that he automatically thinks anyone with long hair and a beard is dirty? Waylon's the best, he's been the best for years, and as Glen Campbell said, "It's about damn time" the CMA acknowledged that fact.

CAROLYNG FULLER
FORT SMITH, ARK.

Two letters from readers, in your February issue, contained some very unkind remarks regarding Charlie Rich's appearance at the CMA Awards. If Charlie were a weaker man this would not have happened, but being of strong character and knowing that the "show must go on," he made his appearance, in spite of the fact that he was suffering from a fracture of the foot and should have been in a hospital.

To those of us who are Charlie's true friends and fans he certainly did not lose face. I am only sorry that so many people want to "kick" a man when they don't have any basis in fact for so doing. The pen is mightier than the sword and can be more deadly in some people's hands.

NORA A. DEVLIN
PHILADELPHIA, PA.

The cover photo on your February issue is a masterpiece. To look into the face of Willie Nelson is like getting a glimpse of God himself.

BERNICE GALLAGHER
MADISON, TENN.

I am an amateur singer/songwriter trying to become a professional. Your

"Songwriter's Guide," (January COUNTRY MUSIC) saved me a great deal of money. I have a contract that I have been trying to make a decision on, which I will not sign now because of your informative article.

Also the article, "The Strange and Private World of Loretta Lynn," was very interesting. Besides being a remarkable singer, I feel she is a warm, real person.

W. CLARK
WINSTON-SALEM, N.C.

The "Pity The Poor Guitar Pick" cartoon (February COUNTRY MUSIC) could have gotten away with being merely boring. Instead you managed to make it downright offensive with that "Lesbo Limbo" book title. It's bad enough gay women have to put up with sexist lyrics in the songs (of the music I *really* like). I can only wish the gay (male and female) country singers could come out and we wouldn't have to put up with this anymore. But I guess their families (many of them are family men) wouldn't react too well, not to mention their fans.

VERY EX-SUBSCRIBER

Why do we, the solid, middle class and staunch backbone of citizenry have to put up with the moral decay of our beloved type of music?

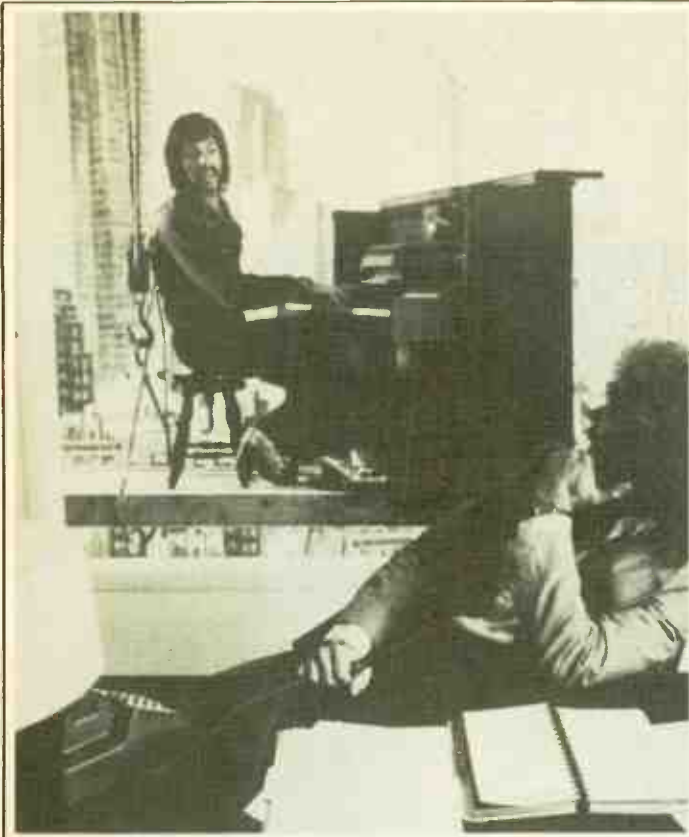
Here is what we need: Censorship by each publisher and recording company. Legislation against immoral lyrics. Encouragement of writers like myself who still have some principles and patriotism and the fear of Almighty God in them.

BRUCE E. TOMLIN
EUGENE, ORE.

Thanks to COUNTRY MUSIC and Alanna Nash for the article about Charlie Monroe's funeral (January COUNTRY MUSIC). I attended the Opry on September 27 and no mention was made of his death. Sometimes we are so concerned about the new people in country music that we forget the old ones.

LORETTA WORKMAN
RICHLAND, MO.

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People on the Scene

TAMMY AND DONNA MAKE WORST-DRESSED LIST
THE BICENTENNIAL HILLBILLY MEDITATION WAR
JOHNNY AND JUNE VISIT THE PRESIDENT

by AUDREY WINTERS



Donna: Gets dressing down from Blackwell.



Faron Young: Charged with indecent exposure in Oklahoma—is it just an open and shut case?

Most country entertainers are getting pretty much used to awards of one sort or another; they seem to be given every other week these days. But here's something different. The lucky winners are **Donna Fargo** and **Tammy Wynette**, and the honor in question? Both ladies have been declared to be among the ten worst-dressed women in America by one **Mr. Blackwell**, a noted Hollywood designer. They share the limelight with **Caroline Kennedy** and **Nancy Kissinger**, among others.

Tammy's reaction was—publicly, anyway—brief: "I hope my singing is appreciated more than my wardrobe," she said, and added that she thought she was in great company. Donna remarked that "my husband Stan will be happy to hear this because he thinks I spend too much money on clothes anyway."

Wondering where **Tom T. Hall** is these days? Well, as usual, he's writing, but this time it's a book, not a song. The Storyteller has decided not to make any personal appearances until the end of April and has temporarily disbanded the **Storytellers** so that he can work on the book, *How To Write A Song . . . And How You Can*. Tom T. announced that "I plan to complete a couple of albums and other entertainment-related projects, and I just looked at my schedule, and I can't even find time enough to schedule lunch."

Show business can be scary, you know. A recent example: ABC recording artist **Jeris Ross** likes to involve her audience with her show, so one night recently, she asked a lady from the audience to join her

onstage for a song. The lady, however, got so embarrassed up there that she lost control of herself. Jeris tried to comfort the poor woman by confiding that she too had wet her pants the first time she was on a stage . . . and, still in the same general area, the latest on **Faron Young's** indecent exposure charge in Oklahoma. In what we hope is the final word on that subject, some Nashville wag called the affair "an open and shut case."

Elvis was in Nashville recently—for about 45 minutes. The King of Rock and Roll has a new Convair 880 jet (it's about the size of a 707), and on Christmas day he got the urge to show it off to some friends. So he packed them in in Memphis, flew them to Nashville, landed on a private strip close to midnight, then turned around

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Dolly Parton: Headed for Las Vegas.

and flew them back to Memphis again. It's got nothing to do with that story, but there is a rumor around that Elvis is thinking about recording soon at **Chip Young's** Murfreesboro, Tenn. studio.

More luxury travel notes: **Loretta Lynn's** new bus has arrived. It's silver-colored, with trim in two shades of green, and there's a drawing of a coal miner with his pick on either side. The interior is brown-and-beige in the boys' section, and shades of pink in Loretta's quarters . . . **Conway Twitty** has a new one, too. He sold his old one (it wasn't that old, either—a mere three years) to **Mickey Gilley** . . . **Cal Smith** has gotten his first big bus. Interior color is three shades of blue . . . **Karen Wheeler**, not yet big enough for a full-scale bus, has opted for a new Cadillac . . . both **Nat Stuckey** and **Crystal Gayle** have picked up new Lincoln Continentals . . . and **Barbara Mandrell** is re-decorating her home on wheels. She says that since she spends more time on the bus than at home, she might as well smarten things up a bit. She's doing the boys' quarters in blue, and her own in royal purple.

Johnny Rodriguez has split with manager **Happy Shahan** . . . **Marty Robbins** has moved to Columbia, and will be recording with **Billy Sherril** . . . **Jerry Reed's** television show is coming along nicely. His 15-year-old daughter **Sadena** guested on the pilot

show. Her mother is singer **Prissy Mitchell**, who did backup work on many records before retiring . . . **Johnny Cash's** book, *Man In Black* got an award from the Laymen's National Bible Conference. Johnny and June visited with **President Ford** in the Oval Office recently . . . **Narvel Felts** has named his band *The Drift Aways* after the title of his first hit record . . . **Connie Smith** is going to have another baby. This one, expected in July, will make it five. Connie has two sons from a previous marriage and two young daughters by husband **Marshall Haynes** . . . and **Mr. & Mrs. Johnny Paycheck** are expecting their first child in May. Johnny also has two daughters by a previous marriage . . . **Ray Price**, meanwhile, has had twins. Not humans, though—this is his first set of bulls born on his ranch near Dallas . . . **Conway Twitty** has reason to be proud, too. His daughter **Joni Lee** (19) just married the drummer of her Washington, D.C. band. Joni was attending college in the nation's capital, and working clubs there. Now that she has a hit song on her own and a duet with Daddy, an album will soon be available. She and her husband plan to live in Nashville. . . . While others may be, **Tammy Wynette** and **George Jones** are definitely not planning to get together (again). There had been some speculation about the couple maybe getting back with each other after some well-publicized "dates," but close associates of Tammy and George now report that

nothing's cooking. Then again, we write this stuff about a month before you read it, so you never know.

Hank Williams, Jr. and **Lycretia Morris**, the two children of the late **Audrey Williams**, have been named Administrators of the Williams estate. Hank Jr. has said that he is interested in buying the house in which Audrey and Hank Sr. lived, and which Audrey had turned into a **Hank Williams** museum. Hank Jr. wants to finish the work on the museum, which was not completed at the time of his mother's death. Currently, he is living in Cullman, Alabama, and still recovering from his near-fatal hunting accident. He plans to have more plastic surgery work done on his face by a California doctor recommended by **Ray Price**. . . . Songwriter **Harlan Howard** had a narrow escape recently. He was involved in a serious auto accident in Nashville, and for a while it seemed that his lungs might have been very badly damaged. Harlan is now reported on the mend.

Dolly Parton is heading for the big time. She and her **Travelling Family Band** have all gotten new outfits for her new TV show, *Dolly*, currently filming in Nashville. Dolly has also hired a choreographer to groom the band for that show and—get this, hillbillies!—for upcoming appearances in Las Vegas. Dolly Parton in Las Vegas . . . the mind boggles. . . . Meanwhile, the **Blackwood Singers** have a new look. For the first part of their show, they come out in studs and rhinestones. For the second part, they change into red, white and blue outfits with red, white and blue rhinestones.

Shelby Singleton, who produced **Jeanie C. Riley's** "Harper Valley P.T.A." and brought **Webb Pierce** out of retirement this year with a tune called "The Lord Giveth and Uncle Sam Taketh Away," has recorded **Hank Locklin** and signed him to his record label. Shelby has also embarked on an album about America's newest craze, Transcendental Meditation. After a local news story about the TM album, Shelby received a telephone call from chief TM honcho **the Maharishi's** lawyer. The lawyer told Shelby that he couldn't put the album out. "The hell I can't," said Shelby. "You just watch me!" Watch out for more shots in the Great Bicentennial Hillbilly Meditation War.

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Both have the distinctive Dreadnought shape to make the sound mellow and woody in the bass range, even in midrange, and clear, clean and sustaining in treble range.

The Martin (on the left) costs about \$1,470 and is well worth it. The Takamine? About \$700. And worth a lot more.

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by HAZEL SMITH

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Jeannie Seely and hubby Hank Cochran purchased a yacht in California, sailed it through the Panama Canal, arrived in Miami, then off to Jamaica, where family and friends flew

down for the Christmas holidays . . .

Bill Monroe's back from Japan, where he received a royal welcome and played 20 days to his most appreciative audience in the world . . .

Roger Miller's sold a country music cartoon to Walt Disney for a reported 6½ mil . . . thought Walt Disney passed away????? Aw, well, Roger's been walking on water for some time now. Reckon he just went "up there" and made the deal in person . . .

Me and Johnny Paycheck came in

Darco Funky

Two words to play on from Darco Strings
A part of the CF Martin Organisation, Nazareth, Pennsylvania

on the Interstate at the same time this morning. Somehow, we kept passing each other. Reckon I was trying to prove to Paycheck that a Chevy can keep up with a Cadillac . . .

Alex Harvey just signed a contract with Buddah Records. The writer of such great songs as "Delta Dawn," "Reuben James" and "Rings" just purchased a farm outside Lebanon, Tenn., and will make a transit from Swanannoa, N.C. in the immediate future . . . Speaking of Alex Harvey reminds me of the goodness of many, including him, when **Danny Findlay** (Panama Red), who is Alex's lead guitar player, had his house and all furnishings destroyed by fire. Those who graciously came through with a love offering for the Findlays (who were expecting a baby "at any time" and had no insurance on the house) were Alex, **Waylon Jennings**, **Harlan Howard**, **Billy Swan**, **Tompall Glaser**, **Chuck Glaser**, **Colleen Mills** and **Gordon Payne** (Waylon's secretary and lead guitar player), *Country Music Magazine's* **Martha Hume** and **Nick Tosches** and **Dave Hickey**, Tompall's pickers **Mel Brown**, **Charles Polk**, **Billy Williams** and secretary **Janet Slusser**, plus **Combine Music**, **Chet Flippo**, **Willie Fong Young**, **Charlie Williams**, **Don Light**, **Del Bryant**, **Vickie** at **ATV Music**, and others. You can bet your life, when the chips are down, the hillbillies will come through and help one another . . .

Me and **Eddy Arnold** dined at the Hall of Fame restaurant at the same time. The Hall of Famer looks youthful enough to have just started in the business he's been in for 30 years . . .

For all you racing fans—**Ronnie Robbins**, singing son of **Marty** (who is a racing enthusiast, as you must know) already drives a Dodge just like his Daddy drives when he races. How do I know? Me and him bank at the same bank . . .

The holidays brought sadness to Music City with news of the death of **Cari Bare**, 15-year-old daughter of **Bobby and Jeannie Bare**. The music family is very close, and there had been prayer chains throughout the city during the child's illness. Deepest sympathy to the family from *Country Music Magazine's* people and all the people on Music Row. **Bobby Bare** is certainly well loved in the business . . .

The scene takes place at the Burger Boy around a flashing pinball machine that is surrounded by **Waylon**, **Tompall**, and the inimitable **Captain Midnite**. Nobody is winning, and

Tompall is out of—let's say cigarettes for print . . . Later . . . the night is old and morning is new. Tompall has not won. Is not happy. Goes to get in his Cadillac. Has no car keys. Then it dawns on him . . . where is Captain? He's got my car keys. He left with Waylon about an hour ago to go home and get some sleep . . . and neither of them were too happy about not winning . . . So . . . the great Tompall had to take a cab, leave his Cadillac at the Burger Boy, which made him none too happy, to say the least . . . another saga from the city where songs are sung, sold, and sworn at . . .

John Hartford, who spent Christmas in Nashville, has a new LP on the Flying Fish label. Flying Fish boasts the recordings of such underground greats as **Benny Martin**, **Vassar Clements**, **Lester Flatt**, **Norman Blake**, **Tut Taylor**. With heroes like that on a label, surely the radio stations will program the product . . .

Play a bluegrass album a day. I do . . .

Saw *Country Music's* own **Patrick Carr** in Music City on business. Saw him dining with **Johnny Darrell** . . .

Marie Cain—another name to remember. Just signed with Columbia. Has a rock and area LP on your way, recorded in Music City. I heard a preview and it rocked me out . . .

Looks like the **Exit/In** might exit out. Filed for bankruptcy. Nashville needs the **Exit/In** like New York needs not to go broke!! Help, Mr. Ford!!! Lordy, Mr. Ford!!!

All that glitters is not gold. Heard one of the top Gospel groups is "might near" broke . . .

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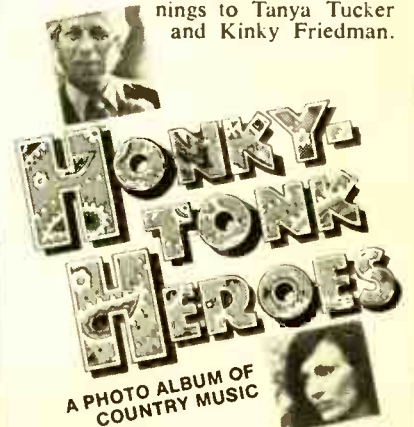
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COUNTRY NEWS

WWVA Will Censor Records

The management of radio station WWVA in Wheeling, West Virginia, has instituted a policy of censorship of records which contain "suggestive" or "profane" lyrics. The action means that records which the management finds objectionable will not be aired on WWVA.

Immediate targets of the airplay ban were Faron Young's recording of "Here I Am In Dallas," Conway Twitty's "You've Never Been This Far Before," and Tanya Tucker's "Would You Lay With Me In A Field of Stone." A partial ban has been placed on some records like Kenny Starr's "Blind Man In The Bleachers," which contains the word "hell," and is only being played on the all-night show. Another song mentioned as possibly offensive was Freddie Hart's "Wake Up On The Warm Side Of You."

Program Director, Ron Thompson (who has since been replaced by Bob Knight) said in an open letter to the radio industry that "we are tired of receiving letters from parents asking us to explain 'one-night stands' to their children. Hell and damn have become old hat and the sensationalism being used to sell records today has gone too far. It is not our policy to be moral crusaders, but we will not jeopardize our standing in the community. We feel that country music and modern country music stations are the last oasis in the industry. We will not ignore our responsibility. . . ."

Thompson said that the station will not air "suggestive" or "profane" lyrics, would delete questionable words or phrases before playing a record, and will not air a record at all if editing is impossible or if the title of the song does not meet WWVA standards. Decisions on what records



Faron Young, Tanya Tucker, Conway Twitty, Freddie Hart—rated X.

will not be played will be made by the program director and the music director, said Knight, the new program director.

Knight said that the policy had met with "overwhelming, tremendous" response in the Wheeling area and that the station had received only one negative letter as opposed to about 350 favorable letters. In addition, he said that area churches have endorsed the policy.

As far as can be determined, no other country music radio station has a public policy regarding airplay of records which contain profanity or sexually suggestive material, although it is known that some stations have refused to play particular records (Loretta Lynn's "The Pill," for example) in the past. Knight said that radio stations who wished information on how the WWVA policy works are welcome to call him.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, JOHNNY!



Johnny Rodriguez says he's still "sweet 16," but that didn't stop Mercury's surprise birthday party for him in LA in December. No matter—Johnny's old enough for girls.



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Bradshaw Tries QB Sneak Through Studio

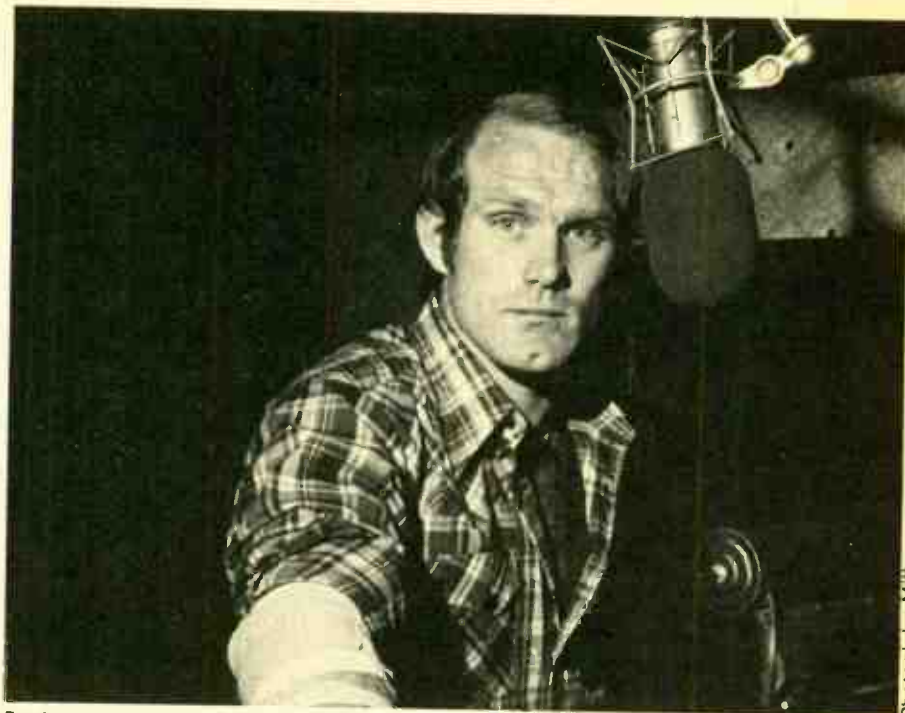
Pittsburgh Steeler quarterback Terry Bradshaw, his manager Tillman Franks, and Steeler right guard Gerry Mullins are having an early breakfast at their hotel's restaurant. They are in Nashville and it is an hour before Terry's first recording session. Just eighteen hours earlier he was pummeled, run over, tackled and stomped by the Cleveland Browns first string front line, average weight approximately 240 pounds. It didn't phase him, and his team won. Today he will face nine of Nashville's first string session musicians, average weight 165 pounds. He is scared. Terry Bradshaw, one of the leading NFL quarterbacks, is a rookie all over again.

It started last summer when Tillman Franks, long-time Louisiana country music impresario, had a plane change at the Dallas-Ft. Worth airport on his way back from watching Elvis in Las Vegas. He ran into fellow Louisianan Bradshaw returning from speaking at Oral Roberts University. Although both the silver-haired heavy-set Franks and the husky 27-year-old quarterback had never met, they knew of each other through common friends in Shreveport.

Franks had heard that Bradshaw liked singing and loved country music, and asked if he had ever thought of recording. "Why not?" Bradshaw replied, and within days they were in Franks's living room, Tillman plunking guitar strings and Bradshaw stretching his vocal cords. Tillman knew a good prospect when he heard one, so he called an old friend, the mother of Mercury Records producer Jerry Kennedy and had Terry sing for her over the phone. "She said, 'Why he sings good! Who is that?'" recalls Franks with a grin. "And I said, 'Oh, that's Terry Bradshaw.'" So Mrs. Kennedy told me, "Better call up Jerry and let him hear, too!" Within a couple of months Bradshaw had a recording contract.

"What if the record's a bust?" I ask on the way over to the session.

"Well, I'm lucky," he replies. "I've got another job to fall back on. I don't



Steelers star quarterback, Terry Bradshaw, is a rookie at the mike.

play guitar and I don't have an ear for music. If someone would teach me, I know I'd pick it up right away. If it doesn't work out, well, I'll know I tried.

"When I was growing up, I'd catch the 'Louisiana Hayride.' I've always confined my singin' to the bathroom and just around the house, so this is a big step for me." Filled with understatement, Bradshaw continues: "I'm the biggest fan Johnny Rodriguez ever had. Merle Haggard and Glen Campbell, too. I could just listen to those guys all night."

The studio has thick plush carpeting; it is the kind which, after you've walked on it you're afraid to touch a metal door-knob because you know—you just know—you're going to get a minor shock. Inside, the musicians and engineer Tom Sparkman are huddling, waiting for the eleventh man and coach Kennedy to show. When Bradshaw strolls in, looking every inch the Marlboro Man, each musician is introduced. Terry asks, "Are you guys as nervous as I am?"

When Bradshaw's record is released, Terry will be what is called a crossover singer, which normally means drawing on both country and pop audiences. For Bradshaw, though, this means drawing on both country and football audiences.

And that is the crux of the problem with all-pro quarterback Terry Brad-

shaw. He and his record company are justifiably defensive about this. With literally hundreds of hungry pickers taking odd jobs around Nashville dreaming to some day see the inside of a studio, here is this guy who has never strummed a chord who breezes into town and cuts a record with a major label. And so, comfortable in my fifty-yard-line seat for the session, I set out to answer the question which has been plaguing me all morning: After all the brouhaha from the manager and the record company, after all the smiles and knowing winks, can Terry Bradshaw carry a tune inside the thirty-yard line?

The answer is a surprising yes. His voice sounds seasoned, not like the raw crackly noises of a beginner. In one session he made it through four old standards—"Burnin' Bridges," "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry," "Makin' Plans," and "Four Walls"—without tiring. He has a voice similar to Johnny Rodriguez, but with a more hollow timbre and a less harsh 'R' sound. With a dose of Jerry Kennedy's production wizardry and some more practice, it seems Terry Bradshaw's singing career is at second down and long yardage. So now, with a possible show business career ahead of him, if Terry Bradshaw's quarterbacking days fall short, he can always stay around and do half-time shows.

TOM MILLER

BARES MOURN TRAGIC DEATH OF DAUGHTER

The country music community is mourning the untimely death of Bobby Bare's 15-year-old daughter, Cari Jean, who fell victim to Adult Respiratory Distress Syndrome, an extremely rare disease causing complete lung failure, when attempts to find a suitable lung donor failed.

Cari was first stricken at the family's Hendersonville, Tennessee home on Thanksgiving Eve. When she did not respond to treatment in nearby Madison Hospital, Bobby arranged to have the U.S. Air Force fly Cari to Boston's Harvard-affiliated Massachusetts General Hospital, where it was determined that the only hope for the child's life would be a transplant. During the desperate search for donors, Cari was kept alive by a special heart-lung machine—the only one of its kind in the world.

Tragically, though numerous acceptable donors were found, none of their next-of-kin would permit remov-



Bobby Bare and family after their "Singin' In The Kitchen" hit—daughter Cari Jean is at left.

al of the organs for transplant purposes, making death inevitable. Cari died at 4 a.m., on December 19—just three weeks after her illness struck.

Cari, who was a 10th grade student and freshman Homecoming Queen attendant at B.C. Goodpasture Christian Academy in Madison, was also

active in the Methodist Youth Fellowship at the Madison Methodist Church. Last fall she joined her parents and her two brothers, Shannon and Bobby Jr., on the popular RCA album, *Singin' In the Kitchen*, which led to a round of public appearances by Bobby Bare and The Family.

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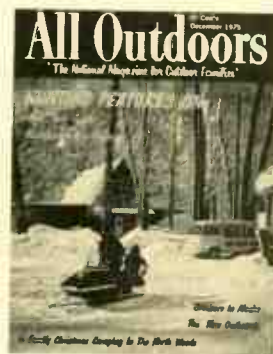
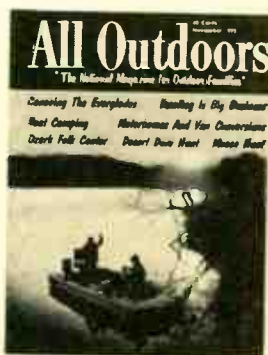
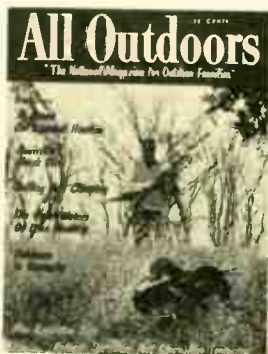


Waylon, Willie, and Jessi ushered in the New Year at Houston's posh Summit Club. And, appearances aside, Waylon and Willie, above, maintain they're "just good friends." Jessi, left, was there to make sure.

Photos: Charlyn Zlotnik

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RADIO FORUM: Can New York Take The Real Thing?

New York—Country music has hit New York City and the question is, who cares?

The executives at WHN, the only country music radio station in New York City, care very much. They care because in February 1973 the station switched from MOR (middle of the road) music to country music at a time when country seemed to be growing popular in the city. This year the interest in country music has waned, but WHN is still playing its own bland brand of country and insisting that country music is more popular than ever before in New York city.

"To some people, country music conjures up the image of the Okie from Fenokie, but we believe country music radio is mass appeal radio," said Ed Saloman, 28, the music director at WHN who has been with the station since August. Saloman was formerly the music director at WEEP in Pitts-

burg and weathered that station's change from MOR to country.

Saloman believes that the definition of country music has broadened considerably during the past five years and that more people are listening to it. "Different kinds of people have started playing country music and different kinds of people have started listening to it," Saloman said. "Today you will hear everything from Hank Williams to the Eagles and it will all be country music." With this definition of country music, it is easy to understand why WHN's brand of country sounds very much like MOR music.

Dale Pon, 30, the director of promotion at WHN, who has never worked with country music before, said "We have had people call in and say that they didn't know we were a country station, but that's a little hard for me to believe."

To this listener, it's not so hard to

believe. If the disk jockeys were not continually announcing that WHN is country, the station could pass for any MOR station that focuses on songs by Olivia Newton-John, Glen Campbell, and John Denver.

WHN's weekly play list, which ranges from 35 to 50 songs, also includes more traditional artists like Conway Twitty, Loretta Lynn, and Charley Pride. But there is no attempt to bring out the historical roots of country music. "We don't get many requests for really old country songs, so we just don't play many," said Saloman. Pon, however, boasted that occasionally the station will play a song that dates "all the way back to Roger Miller."

The New York City audience is not familiar with a wide range of country music stars, according to Ed Cohen, the director of promotion at Madison Square Garden. "People will come to hear stars like Charlie Rich or Buck Owens," Cohen said, "but they aren't familiar with people like Willie Nelson or even Dolly Parton." Cohen thinks the interest in country music that flared up in New York City not long ago has died.

In spite of Cohen's pessimism, Pon claims WHN has an audience of 1-million people and submitted ARB (American Research Bureau) statistics to substantiate the claim. But Pon would not release the advertising demographics that would show where the listeners live. "I can't let you see the demographics because we have to protect our advertising department," Pon said. "What you try to do in business sometimes is to be all things to all people. Sometimes in advertising we can do that. We actually get all kinds of advertising."

Most of WHN's advertising seems to come from the New Jersey and Long Island suburbs of New York City. This could indicate that country music is not yet marketable in the streets of New York City, in spite of WHN's enthusiasm. Or it could mean that WHN's country-bland brand of country is not marketable, and that hustling New Yorkers, true to form, need the real thing to make them wake up and listen.

MARY SUE PRICE

Cains Ballroom Lives!

By daylight the building at 423 North Main in Tulsa looks like just another pile of boards waiting for the wrecker's steel ball. But at night, when the bright neon light comes to life, Tulsa and the world knows that the mecca of Western Swing lives. The light spells C-A-I-N-S.

Cains Ballroom was built in 1924 to cater to the dance crowds of that era, but it wasn't until Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys began playing there that the place gained the reputation it holds today as the "home of Western Swing." (Actually, Wills's brother Johnnie Lee played there more often than Bob himself did).

With the recent resurgence of interest in Wills's music, it was only natural that someone would resurrect Cains. Jeff Nix, an attorney, and R.C. Bradley, a local promoter, leased Cains from its original owner and started booking acts like Asleep At The Wheel, David Allan Coe, Don White (one of Oklahoma's better country acts), Commander Cody and Vassar Clements.

But, for all of that, Cains is still Cains. The dance floor has worn out

more shoes than a 1975 college grad looking for a job. The walls are lined with pictures of people like Hank Williams, Kitty Wells, Gene Autry, Spade Cooley, Eddy Arnold and about 20 others who saw country through its lean days. And there's still something about hearing a good steel guitar bouncing off walls that have heard the best of them.

Today, the average Cains patron is young, drinks Coors and tequila, and does a whole lot of things that people didn't do in public when Bob and Johnnie Lee Wills played to a packed house there, but still it isn't unusual to hear customers say "my folks used to come here all the time."

And so, after fifty years, Cains hasn't really changed. The music is the same, the crowd is the same, save for a few changes in lifestyle, and Cains is still the place to go for country music. A young waitress, not well-versed in the history of her place of employment, said one night, "I don't know what it is, but this building seems to just *like* this kind of music."

Maybe it does.

RICHARD L. FRICKER

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Watch This Face:

When Doug Jones was a child growing up in the country outside Chillicothe, Ohio, he and his brothers would sit on their porch and sing for the motorists passing on the dirt road in front of their house. "We had quite a time, especially on Saturday, listening to the Opry on a battery-operated radio," Jones says, recalling that as he collected the pennies pitched in appreciation, he dreamed of the day he'd make the bigtime as a country singer.

Not an unusual dream for a country boy, but for one fact. Jones, you see, is black. "I've just always liked country music and the stories behind it," he says when asked why he sings a traditionally white form of music. "I never even sang any soul music. A lot of people say, 'Man, you?' But I've got country in my blood, I guess."

Although those words sound as if they could have come from another, better-known country singer, had it not been for a twist of fate, reading about Charley Pride might have reminded you of Doug Jones, instead of the other way around. "I did a show with Red Sovine in 1963, and a lot of people told me Red said he was impressed with me," Jones says. Jones never saw Sovine again, but about a year later, Sovine encouraged a young baseball player named Pride to seek a recording contract. "I don't know if Red and I did that show before he met Charley," Jones says, "but I know it was some time before Charley came out. I've often thought it could have been me."

Anyone who hears Jones inevitably compares him with Pride, and he admits that Pride has been a big influence on him. "People say I sound like him," he says, "but it's not an intentional thing. It's just the way I sing." One tends to believe him, for Jones is a singer's singer—smooth, effortless, easy. He enunciates every word clearly and crisply, and his wide range lends itself well to a variety of materials, especially the ballads. Since he has written only one song, he relies primarily upon tried-and-true hits, among them "Kiss an Angel Good Morning." While that may be Charley Pride's song, it was Doug Jones's when he sang it at the Kentucky State



Photo: Alanna Nash

DOUG JONES

Fair, and the crowd responded with a cry of "Look out, Charley Pride."

While he doesn't have Charley Pride running scared, Jones, a shipping clerk at a motor truck factory ("We build the big rigs"), with no manager and only partial representation by a booking agent, has done well. He has appeared on the Opry twice, and on shows all over the country with such stars as Hank Snow, Jim Ed Brown, Bobby Helms, Jack Greene, Jeannie Seely, the late Lefty Frizzell, and Tommy Cash. Says Pee Wee King, who worked with Jones three years ago and now books him on his show: "He's a gentleman and a trouper, and for an unknown to come out and receive a standing ovation is very unusual, but he does it."

Jones concedes he receives such ac-

claim everywhere he goes, and that "Everything I do is pretty much with top-notch people." For those reasons, the 39-year-old singer can't understand why after "eight or nine years" of working professionally, he still hasn't been offered the recording contract he's dreamed of so long. "It's a mystery to me, and it's a mystery to a lot of people," he says. Does he think it has anything to do with his being black? "Right now, I wouldn't think it would," he answers. "Everybody tells me that's in my favor, and I've been all over and never had a bad reception. No, I think all I need is a good piece of material and somebody who's willing to take it and go with it. But it's hard to come up with someone with the financial backing in Chillicothe, Ohio."

If Jones is short on cash and opportunity, he is long on talent and perseverance. Married, with a child, he is reluctant to leave his five-day-a-week factory job to pursue his singing career.

"Singing weekends and driving all night to make it home to my job on Monday morning—well, it's been a long time with no sleep. But I believe in myself pretty strongly, and I guess that's half the battle. I've always wanted to do this. I remember way back, Acuff, Dickens—all of them really got to me. It's the sort of thing I've always promised myself I was going to do. I believe if I can get the break, I'll make it. Everybody I've worked with, from Hank Snow on down, has said, 'One day it'll happen.'"

Meanwhile, Doug Jones is waiting, and hoping, and above all, dreaming.

ALANNA NASH

IHMA: Keepin' It Country

The International Heritage Music Association, a group whose motto is "Heritage Music is Country *Before* it 'Went to Town!'" has begun work on its official publication, *IHMA*, and has announced the following officers to hold two year terms:

President: Ralph Compton, Birmingham, Ala.

Vice President: Johnny Henderson, San Antonio, Tex.

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MILSAP

Ronnie Does It All With Feeling

by Dave Hickey

It's the middle of December and we are cruising down the Sunset Strip in the PR man's convertible, on our way from the Continental Hyatt House to a taping of the Merv Griffin show. Ronnie Milsap and Steve Holt, Ronnie's drummer and long-time friend, are in the back seat and I am up front with the PR guy. The wind is blowing, clattering dry palms along the boulevard and making the neon cast strange shadows as we cruise beneath the giant billboards. George Carlin gazes down on us wistfully, and an enormous Sly Stone, caught mid-leap, grins maniacally into the night. Amidst all this studied frivolity, it's easy to see why writers in Los Angeles so often find themselves thinking about the end of the world.

"Do you know what you're going to talk to Merv about?" I ask Ronnie.

"Oh yeah," Ronnie says, and the PR man beside me reaches into a folder with one hand and presents me with an onion-skin script of three or four pages.

"You have a *script*?" I ask. Ronnie, after all, is blind.

"Not really," Ronnie says. "That's just a transcription of what Merv and I talked about on the phone this afternoon. It's just a guide, you know."

Ronnie sticks his hand in the air to feel the breeze.

"Sure don't feel like Christmas," he says.

"It will when we get back to Nashville, you can bet," Holt says. "And it damn sure did in Canada."

"You *know* it, son," Ronnie says as I

glance over the script, which contains a harrowing narration of the cold weather and warm welcome Milsap received earlier this week on a tour through western Canada. Gradually the conversation in the back seat gets around to food, a favorite subject of Milsap's. "Hey, Brokaw, that was some nut-burger," Ronnie says, addressing the PR man. "I could eat at the Source for a week."

"It's the best place," Brokaw says.

"You *know* it," Milsap says. "Another week of Canadian french fries and I couldn't get into my cowboy suits. Which reminds me, are we gonna have time to do some shopping while we're here? I gotta get out to Nudies and get me some new duds. Porter's old stuff just won't fit me."

"Whatever you want to do, that's what we'll do," Brokaw says.

"Right!" Ronnie says. "You know ol' Jack Johnson thinks I'm getting to be such a class act I ought to wear a suit, or a tux, you know, but I figger if I get me a bunch of new hillbilly clothes, he's gonna let economics outweigh his good taste. What suit am I wearing tonight, Steve?"

"The purple one," Holt says.

"Ah yes," Ronnie says, "I am gonna *shine* on the television."

At this point we suddenly wheel into the parking lot of a building which looks like a neighborhood theatre, but THE MERV GRIFFIN SHOW is on the marquee and there is a desultory crowd gathered under the overhang. We pull up to the parking attendant, followed

by the station wagon bearing equipment, clothes and Ronnie's steel player.

"You can't park here," the attendant says.

"This is Ronnie Milsap," Brokaw says. "He's on the show tonight."

The attendant actually looks disappointed that he can't turn us away, and gestures to an empty parking space. When the station wagon starts to follow, he steps in front of it. "This car can't park here," he says, once again laying claim to his territory.

The PR man counts ten and lets out a long slow breath. "It has to park here," he says. "It's got our equipment in it."

"Can't park here," the attendant says.

"Look damn it, there's Al Green's *bus* over there it's taking up *five* spaces."

"It's just *one* vehicle," the attendant says. At this point the PR man gets out of the convertible and, putting a friendly arm around the attendant's shoulder, leads him away, talking to him as if he were a child.

"Say, does Al have a *bus* now?" Ronnie says.

"Sho' do," Holt says, "Biggern' Dallas."

"I bet he's one of the first non-country acts to use a bus," Ronnie says. "We're gonna have to get old Al to give us the tour."

At this point the PR man returns to the car. "Jeez," he says, slipping behind the wheel and gesturing to the station wagon to follow us into the lot. After we



Here's Ronnie working and charming his way across the USA. On the left, he and Dinah Shore exchange memories of the South; above, he gets the glad hand from Larry Gatlin at the CMA Awards, 1974; below, he works out with his bassman in L.A.

have parked and are walking to the stage entrance, the parking attendant, not so easily robbed of his authority, shouts, "Hey, Mon, that's two dollars for the extra vehicle!"

Holt says, "I'll get it," and dashes off as several fans stop Ronnie for autographs. Holt hands the attendant a bill and when he returns, the PR man says, "Welcome to L.A."

We are nearly to the door when the attendant yells, "Hey! What the hell is this? What the hell am I gonna do with this crap?"

What's eating him?" Ronnie says, as we stroll into the building.

"I gave him Canadian money," Holt says, grinning. "It's the little victories that count."

* * *

The first person we see when we get inside the theatre is George Carlin, the comedian, whose giant image had gazed down upon us so benignly as we left the Hyatt House. The effect is eerie.

When we are introduced, I tell him we noticed his sign.

"Oh yeah," Carlin says. "Did you think it was big enough?" He gives us a strange grin that lets us know that looking up at a thirty-foot version of yourself is not the most soul-satisfying of experiences, at least not for an Irish boy from the Bronx.

At this point we allow ourselves to be taken in tow by a six-foot blond in some kind of official mini-dress and she guides us across the set to the dressing

rooms. Griffin's band, in pink and black tuxedos, is already in place on the sliding stage. They don't look too enthusiastic, or too sober for that matter. In the hallway, Ronnie suddenly finds his hand being pumped by a diminutive, animated black man.

"Al!" Ronnie says, before the soul singer can introduce himself, "how are things in Memphis? I see you got yourself a bus."

"Oh yes, we do," Al Green says, "and it's *be-you-tee-ful*. You're gonna have to let me take you on the tour. You remember Larry, don't you?"

"Lee!" Ronnie says, reaching out unerringly and grabbing the arm of Larry Lee, Green's sterling guitarist. "What's happening, man?"

"You're happening, man," Lee says with a grin, grasping Milsap's hand. "I *knew* we should have never let you out of Memphis."

While Ronnie and Holt remain in the crowded hall, renewing acquaintances from Memphis where Ronnie had worked for several years between Atlanta and Nashville, I slip into the dressing room where Milsap's wife, Joyce, is waiting for him.

I introduce myself and for a few minutes we discuss the vagaries of press-coverage of stars. "You know, you just never can tell what will come out," she says. "A paper came out to the house to do a family picture story and took all these pictures of us around the house and all, and then when the story came out there were no pictures of our

little boy. It's not a big deal, but he sure was disappointed."

"Not only that" Ronnie says, coming into the cubicle, "I have this room at home where I have all my shortwave stuff set up, and my tape recorders and my video tape machine. I'm a great TV freak, strange to say. And they wrote in the paper that nobody else in the family could come in the room—that it was my inner sanctum, or something. Which, again, is no big deal, but I really encourage people to come in there. Truthfully, I don't enjoy being alone that much. Hell, back in the old days we had the shortwave right in the bedroom, and Todd's crib at the foot of the bed. Todd would cry and gurgle all night, and the shortwave would just crackle away and I was happy as a clam.

"Actually, that's the main thing I like about being a country musician, you can kinda relax and talk to other artists. When I was in rock and roll, I was all the time meeting artists that I admired, and we could never quite relax and talk. It's just so much more competitive, I guess. But with hillbillies, hell, you tell them that you like their singing and they'll talk to you for days. Like, we come across Merle on the road not long ago, up in Virginia, found him on the CB, and we all pulled over to the side of the highway and had us a confab and dinner-on-the-ground, so to speak. I really like that.

"On the other hand, I guess, I miss the give and take that you have with a

rock and roll band in concert. Sometimes something in the band can get you off, make you wanta do something you haven't done before. I get that sometimes, but performing country is a lot more self-contained. The folks usually want to hear it the way it comes out on the record, of course, and I'm only too happy to do it for them, 'cause I don't do songs that I can't feel, and feel every-time I play."

"Do you miss playing rock and roll?" I ask.

"Well, like I said, I miss the give and take with the band, but I really do just about whatever the spirit moves me to do in concert. We do a rock and roll medley every once in a while, and the people love it. They know I'm honest about the music I play, and I don't pretend to be anything that I'm not. Hell, they're just like me and you, they grew up on country and rock and roll . . . and the blues, of course. I spent a large portion of my early career playing nothing but black music, as Steven here will tell you, but you don't have to be onstage to play the blues. Hell, it's all the same anyway. I sat down in the office the other day and started playing 'Daydreams About Night Things' as a blues, real Bobby Bland. Thought Jack Johnson was gonna have a kitten," he says, laughing. "Nah, really, it's all the same, if you love it and put feeling into it."

* * *

I remember the first night I saw Ronnie Milsap sing. It was in the year before his record contract, when he had the house band at the King of the Road in Nashville. In the course of a two-hour set he performed songs by Mel Tillis, The Temptations, Curtis Mayfield, Neal Sedaka, Chuck Berry, Merle

Haggard, Mentor Williams—modulating from country to Memphis funk to Motown to New York pop to honky rock and roll with absolute facility and equal authority—but he never did lose his own identity.

And I remember being at Quadrofonic Studios not long after he signed with RCA as a country act. One of the house writers there was listening to some of Ronnie's new country tapes.

"They're great, aren't they?" I said, and the writer said, "Yeah, of course they're great—but Jesus, using Ronnie to sing nothing but country ballads is like crop-dusting with a 747."

"True enough," I said. "But it sure is good for the crops."

The songwriter paused. "Yeah, I guess you're right," he said, "and I guess there's a lot of people ain't ready to go all the places that 747 can take 'em. Their loss, though."

Ronnie's gift goes way beyond sheer versatility: He knows that in performance (or in conversation, for that matter) he can make sighted people see—through their own eyes and through the eyes of a song—by communicating his desire for vision, and it obviously gives him pleasure, and frees him from guilt.

Now, if his joy in doing this were not so open and complete, his gift would be a little sinister. There is more than a little of the country slicker about Ronnie, a little of the cracker horse-trader, a lot of the riverboat gambler, and a healthy dose of the golden-tongued, Hell-fire and sweet-Jesus revival meeting con man—but it's all made less offensive by the fact that, like all great con men, Ronnie doesn't hide anything. There is something in his manner which says, "Now, look, head, I'm gonna charm the socks right off you and convince you

that black is white." Then he proceeds to do it. In performance, his command of the emotional world of a song is so complete and his rapport with the audience is so natural, that the con always works. You can't really fear a blind man who so gladly helps you see and feel, and you can't feel sorry for him either.

It's miraculous to watch him. Because of his blindness, there is always a person or a song mediating between Ronnie and the world of light, distance, and color, and he adapts himself instinctively to his medium. When he is performing, he puts on a song like a suit of clothes, occupying it completely, adapting himself to the attitudes and points of view of the song, and in doing so he uses the songwriter's eyes and heart as his connection to the world. In everyday life you can watch this process as he subtly adopts the mannerisms and speech cadences—even the world view—of the person who is escorting him. It is as if, by identifying himself with his guide, he is able to pull the visual world that much closer to him. To see him alternatively with his wife, with Steve Holt, with Melva Matthews (his road manager), with Jack Johnson (his business manager), is to see Ronnie through four different pairs of eyes—or rather, to see Ronnie looking at the world through four different visions. In the company of two or more of these people, it is easy to forget that he is blind, so sure is he of his identification with each of them. In a room with Steve, his wife, and Melva, Ronnie has three pairs of eyes, and he is "seeing" through all of them.

* * *

While he has been talking about his music, Ronnie has been changing into a purple denim outfit with fringe on the sleeves and rhinestone studs on the back. Finally, he stuffs the shirt into his pants and turns in front of a mirror he somehow knows is there.

"How do I look?"

"Great," Steven and Joyce say.

"Make-up, Mr. Milsap," says the six-foot blond from the door.

As they walk out the door, Steven is saying, "Don't get your hopes up about the band, Ronnie, they got about as much soul as a Vegas hooker."

"Well, at least we got our own steel along," Ronnie says as he heads downstairs for make-up.

The musical tapings are first, so I go out front with the PR man to watch the performances. Holt's prediction about the band is not all that wrong, but Ronnie pounds the keyboards and



pretty much solos thru "Daydreams About Night Things" and "Just In Case."

"Not bad," the PR man says, but he has spoken too soon, because as soon as Ronnie is seated opposite Griffin, it becomes obvious that, whatever they have talked about on the phone, Griffin has decided to talk about Ronnie's blindness, and to milk it for every ounce of emotional slush he can.

Leaning forward, earnestly, elbow on his knee, Griffin says, "You've been blind since birth, haven't you, Ronnie?"

"So far," Ronnie says brightly, which draws a laugh, which isn't what Griffin has in mind, and he continues to pursue the subject of Ronnie's blindness. Ronnie throws Griffin subject after subject to change the flow, but Merv is relentless. Finally Ronnie launches into a story about a recent show in Atlanta.

"Well, as you know, I perform at the piano, but I'd like to get up and move around from time to time, just to keep

the show from getting static. Of course, every time I do, everybody's afraid I'm gonna fall off the stage. Well it so happens that this time, I did. Just wandered right off into the pit. And let me tell you, son, I saw some *stars*, but like I told 'em when I got back on stage, it was all right 'cause it was the first thing I'd seen in fifteen years."

This again draws a laugh, and Merv, finally aware that he isn't going to make anybody cry, brings the interview to a rather lame conclusion. As I glance over my shoulder the PR man is leaning into the wall, quietly banging his head against the panelling, saying, "Jesus, Merv, Jesus"

Back in the dressing room, Ronnie closes the door. He is not visibly upset, but he is irritated. "You know," he says, deadpan, "I think he was interested in blind people."

"Honey . . ." Joyce says.

"I don't mind, but Jesus, I know about ten thousand more interesting things to talk about. I could talk about Bach, Mozart, Elvis, ham radios, health food, sex, hillbillies, dope, Alabama, Canada . . ." he trails off, for a moment, then he says, "One of these days, you know, I'm just gonna give them what they want. I'm gonna jump up like this." He goes into an Al Jolson pose, and say "MERV, I HATE IT. I HATE BEING BLIND AND I HATE PEOPLE WHO WANTA TALK ABOUT IT ALL THE TIME!"

His tone is so ironic that everybody in the room collapses in laughter, and as

we are going out the door, Steve Holt puts his hand on his shoulder and says, in an unctious Merv Griffin voice, "Tell me, Ronnie, and I hope you don't mind me calling you Ronnie, but is it true that blind people have more fun?"

"Well, I'll tell you Merv," Ronnie says as we pick our way across the stage, "It sure can be a lot of laughs. I mean, like when you walk into a wall."

* * *

The next morning we are waiting for a taping of the Dinah Shore Show in the Green Room at CBS, again with Al Green and band in attendance. Also on the show is David Geddes, the young singer whose bubble-gum tune, "Blind Man In The Bleachers," is currently tearing up the charts. When Ms. Shore comes in to greet the artists, it is obvious that we are involved in a classier operation than Merv's, or at least one less tinged with Vegas sleaze.

On the monitor, Dinah comes onto the screen, and leans on the piano in the little living room set to talk to Ronnie; their rapport is immediately obvious, as they talk about growing up in the South, about Ronnie's early classical training, his ham radios and finally about the musical influences that both Ronnie and Ms. Shore grew up among. As an illustration, Ronnie does eight bars of "Daydreams About Night Things" as a low down blues. He stops suddenly, with that con man's grin that lets everybody know that he *knows* that he had grabbed them.

Then Ronnie shifts into the up-tempo two-beat country version of the same song and hooks everybody again. The tempo is different, and the line of sight has a little different angle, but the feeling is still there in the song. When he finishes, the Green Room is once again filled with appreciative murmurs, and in a few moments Ronnie comes grinning into the room. "Son," he says, "I have done it, and I am done with it." Then he flops down happily on the couch as David Geddes comes on camera to sing "Blind Man in the Bleachers."

"How'd you like to go into studio with a bunch of growed up musicians and teach 'em that song?" someone says. "It would take half the session to get them to stop giggling."

At this point, Ronnie reaches over and pokes my knee. "Hey, son, do you know they called me over to Tree Music to *pitch* me that song? I'm not kidding. Buddy says, 'Ronnie, this is the tune for you!' And I said, 'Maybe, Buddy, but I just can't *see* it, ya know.'" ■



Rare moments of Milsap alone: Above, he rolls out "Night Things" as a pure soul blues. Below, away from his friends, he waits to go onstage.

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THE COUNTRY MUSIC BOOK REPORT

A Country Fan's Guide To Good Reading

by nick tosches

In 1870, seven years before Edison invented his first, primitive phonograph, one Hawley Smart published a novel, *A Race For A Wife*, in which one may read that "the dear old country fiddles are playing." Since then, there has been a great deal of writing on country music. The current spate of books occasioned by country music's growing popularity may seem to some like a long-awaited discovery of a virgin field, but that really isn't the case: for as long as there has been country music, people have written about it. What follows is a look at that publishing history—its highs, its lows, and its current progress.

Eighteen years before the first country disk was recorded, the June, 1904, issue of *Harper's* published "Some Real American Music" by Emma Bell Miles. This was the earliest feature article about country music to appear in a major magazine. By the end of World War Two, *Collier's*, *Time*, *Life*, and *The Saturday Evening Post* had all published articles on country music. By the mid-forties, two magazines satisfied the growing thirst for country song lyrics: *Barn Dance* and *Hillbilly Hit Parade*.

Country Song Roundup, the first magazine devoted entirely to country music, made its debut in the summer of 1949. (And those of us who like to gnash and yelp about how country music has been polluted by pop commercialism in recent years might enjoy a look at the first issues of *Country Song Roundup*, for as early as the third issue the magazine was running such pieces as "Frankie Yankovic: No. 1 on the Polka Parade.") Other country music periodicals bloomed: *Disc Collector* (1951), *Country and Western Spotlight* (1953), *Country and Western Jamboree* (1955), *Country Directory* (1960), *Music City News*

(1963), *John Edwards Memorial Foundation Quarterly* (1965), *The Journal of Country Music* (1970), *Old Time Music* (1971), *Country Music* (1972), *Nashville Sound* (1975). Of these various magazines, six are still published. *JEMF Quarterly*, *The Journal of Country Music*, and *Old Time Music* are scholarly publications concerned with unearthing and interpreting the data of country music's murky history. *Country Song Roundup*, its offspring *Nashville Sound*, and *Music City News* are fan magazines which combine the literary flash of a parking ticket with the graphic layout of a YMCA bulletin board. (*Music City News*, however, is often a good source of interesting photos and news items.) *Country Music* is what you have in your hands.

As for books, the earliest volumes dealing with country music were scholarly folklore studies, such as John A. Lomax's *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads* (1910), Josephine McGill's *Folk Songs of the Kentucky Mountains* (1917), and Cecil Sharp's *Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians* (1917). The first country music books intended for a popular market were *My Husband, Jimmie Rodgers* (1935) and *Hubbin' It: The Life of Bob Wills* (1938). It wasn't until the last decade that serious books about commercial country music started to appear.

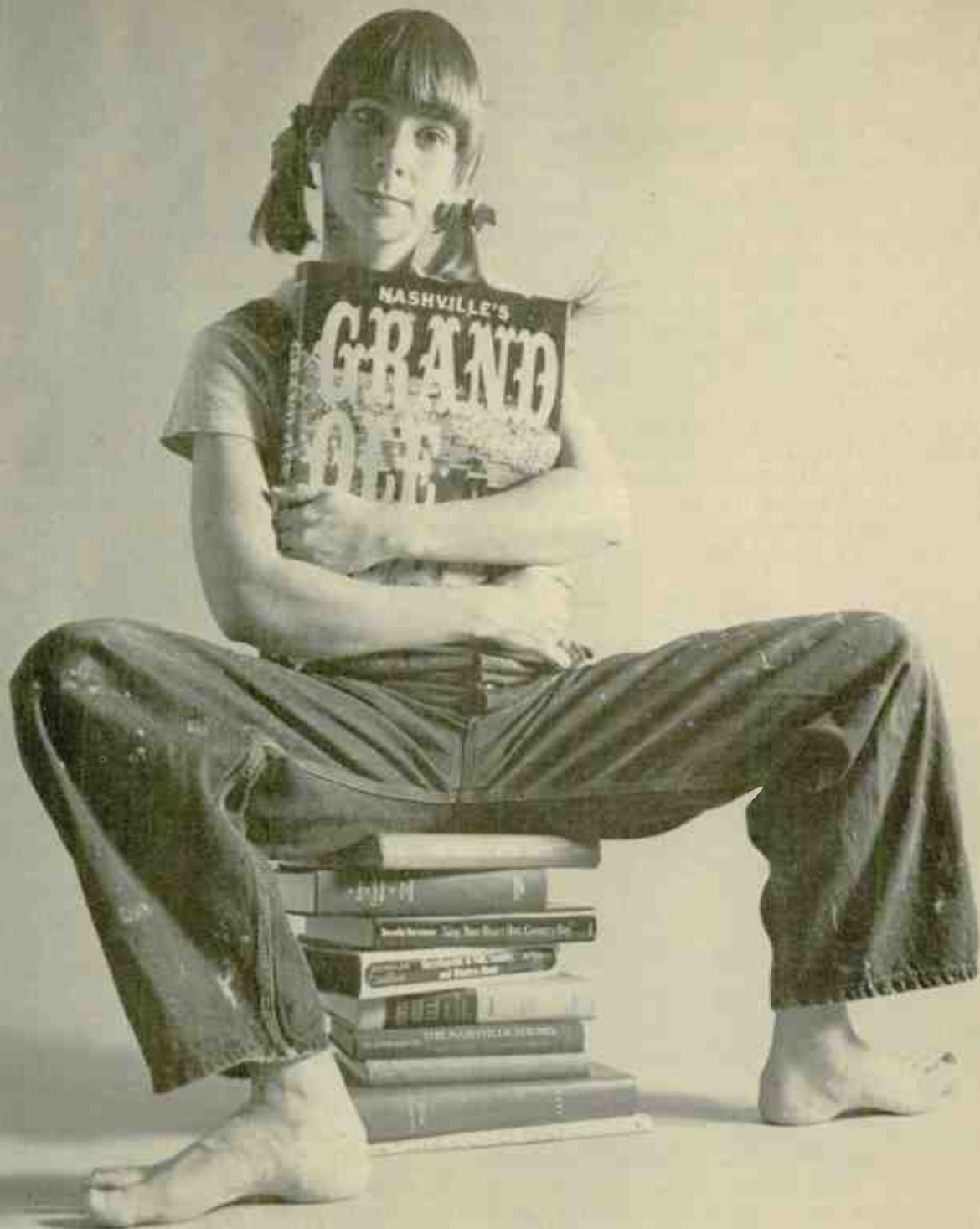
The first such book was *A History and Encyclopedia of Country, Western, and Gospel Music* by Linnell Gentry (McQuiddy Press, 1961; reprinted by Scholarly Press, 1972). For the most part, Gentry's book is an anthology of articles. Well-culled and arranged chronologically, the pieces form both a valuable source book and an account of the ways in which country music has been viewed by the media over the years. There's also a

section of thumbnail biographies of country artists past and present. While this isn't the most available country music book, it's surely one of the most intriguing and most useful.

After Gentry's book came *The Country Music Story* by Robert Shelton and Burt Goldblatt (Castle Books, 1966). There are more than two hundred photos here, most of them rarities that you won't find in print elsewhere, and the text is as cogent today as it was ten years ago. If you're interested in an illustrated history of country music, start here, because this one still hasn't been surpassed.

As opposed to illustrated books, we also have what they call picture books or art books. In recent months there have been three country music picture books published. Jack Hurst's *Grand Ole Opry* (Abrams, 1975), thick, brimming with quality color photos, and expensive, is a full-fledged coffee-table book. *Honky-Tonk Heroes* by Peter McCabe and Raeanne Rubenstein (Harper & Row, 1975) is a revealing excursion into the characters of present-day Nashville. At their best, the photos are excellent, and the book's design gives them plenty of room to breathe. Peter McCabe's copy is bland and unrevealing, but as purely a photo book this one works nicely. *Fifty Years at the Grand Ole Opry* by Myron Tassin and Jerry Henderson (Pelican, 1975) is a sorry excuse for a book. In the copy I have, several of the color prints, bland to begin with, are printed ridiculously out of register. This is the sort of book that country music doesn't need, and neither do you.

While researching *The Country Music Story*, Robert Shelton drew heavily on an unpublished thesis by Bill C. Malone. In 1968 the University of Texas Press published an expanded version of Malone's thesis as *Country*



Photos: Leonard Kamsler

Music U.S.A. Although a lot of the scholarly types might deny it, this is the book from which everyone who writes about country music steals his information. If you're going to buy just one country music book, this should be it. There's a wealth of data here, and Malone puts it all in perspective.

Bill Malone's second book, *Stars of Country Music* (University of Illinois Press, 1975), is an anthology he edited

with Judith McCulloh. There are twenty-one comprehensive essays here, and their subjects range from Uncle Dave Macon and Gene Autry to Ernest Tubb and Merle Haggard. The various authors are experts, and it shows. The overtones here are scholarly, but an honest love for country music pulses throughout and prevents the whole thing from coming off as pedantic.

In 1969 came Irwin Stambler and

Grelun Landon's *Encyclopedia of Folk, Country, and Western Music* (St. Martin's Press). Unlike Linnell Gentry's book, this is an encyclopedia in the true sense of the word. It's a useful book with informative listings of all but the most obscure country artists. *The Country Music Encyclopedia* by Melvin Shestack (Crowell, 1974), on the other hand, is a bit unreliable as a reference work. But for the reader who prefers entertainment

rather than reams of scholarly detail, there are enough good articles reprinted here from *Country Music* to supply many hours of interesting reading.

In 1970 two books were published which observed country music as a cultural phenomenon. Paul Hemphill's *The Nashville Sound: Bright Lights and Country Music* (Simon and Schuster) is a fine book in every sense. Hemphill's portrait of the multifaceted country music industry is concise, wry, and intelligent, and his writing style is one of the tightest in modern non-fiction. John Grissim's *Country Music: White Man's Blues* (Paperback Library) is a bouncy, freakshowy kind of book, written in vintage *Rolling Stone* style. There's a lot of great stuff here, though, and Grissim's perceptions are usually so on-target that you'll forgive him his occasional factual errors.

There are two quite good country music biographies available. *Elvis* by Jerry Hopkins (Simon and Schuster, 1971) is an exhaustively researched, well-written, and honest book about the most influential cultural force of

novel by Babs H. Deal (Doubleday, 1971) is a bit of fun, but not that important. If you enjoyed the film *Payday*, you should like this book. (An aside about country music fiction: the jewel of the genre is William Price Fox's *Ruby Red*.) *Hank Williams: From Life to Legend* by Jerry Rivers (Heather Publications, 1967) is a forty-page booklet that includes a couple dozen interesting photos. Rivers was Hank's fiddler, so you can be assured that he knows his subject, even if he does have tendencies to both sugar-coat and write as if he were Hesiod describing Zeus. *Hank Williams: The Legend*, edited by Thurston Moore (Heather Publications, 1972), a somewhat thicker booklet than the Jerry Rivers volume, contains articles, photos, lyrics, documents, a discography, a ghoulish snapshot of Hank in his coffin, and even recipes for jambalaya. Since bookstores don't usually stock these two booklets, you'll have to order directly from the publisher in Denver, Colorado.

Perhaps the least interesting country music biography is Christopher Wren's *Winners Got Scars Too: The*

Gentleman by Chet Atkins with Bill Neely (Henry Regnery, 1974). Atkins is smart, honest, and unpretentious here. His seeming disconcert for dates and details is annoying at times, but when he eases back and reminisces about Archie Campbell's insatiable sexual appetite or Elvis Presley's first RCA recording session, he more than makes up for it.

Two recent books deal with country lyrics. Dorothy A. Horstman's *Sing Your Heart Out, Country Boy* (E.P. Dutton, 1975) contains hundreds of song lyrics, most of them prefaced by brief, pertinent quotes from the songs' authors. It's a useful book and also fun to read. *Dixie Fried: The Poetry of Country Music* by me (Bantam, 1976) is also a collection of lyrics, annotated and arranged thematically. Ah, modesty, where is thy sting?

There are a few special-interest country music books. Perhaps the most important of these is Tony Russell's *Blacks, Whites and Blues* (Stein and Day, 1970). What Russell set out to do here, and what he succeeded in doing, was to examine the cross-pollination of country music and the blues. If you want to find the answer to the question: What came first, country music or the blues?, then read *Blacks, Whites and Blues*. You won't find the answer, but you'll be a lot smarter.

Tony Russell is also the editor of the British magazine *Old Time Music*. In 1975 he published a book bearing the Old Time Music imprint, *The Grand Ole Opry: The Early Years, 1925-35* by Charles K. Wolfe. While most casual readers would find this book dull, those interested in the dawn of the Opry will definitely get a rise out of it.

Jan Reid's *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock* (Heidelberg, 1974) purports to chronicle and explain the growth of the cosmic cowboy scene centered in Austin. It doesn't.

The John Edwards Memorial Foundation at the University of California in Los Angeles publishes a series of interesting books and monographs, such as John L. Smith's *Johnny Cash Discography and Recording History (1955-1968)* (1969) and Ken Griffis's *Hear My Song: The Story of the Celebrated Sons of the Pioneers* (1974). You can write to the Foundation for a complete catalogue of available titles.

By the end of 1976, there'll be another half dozen or so country music books on the market: a study of Bob

(Continued on page 62)



the twentieth century. Even if you're not overly interested in the Tupelo Flash, there's enough incidental country music history and gossip here to merit a reading. Roger M. Williams's *Sing a Sad Song: The Life of Hank Williams* (Doubleday, 1970) is not quite as thorough a job. There's much amateurish psychologizing, little data, and a general sense of shallowness. But the author gathered enough stories from folks who actually knew Hank to make the book a must-read for anyone interested in the man and his songs.

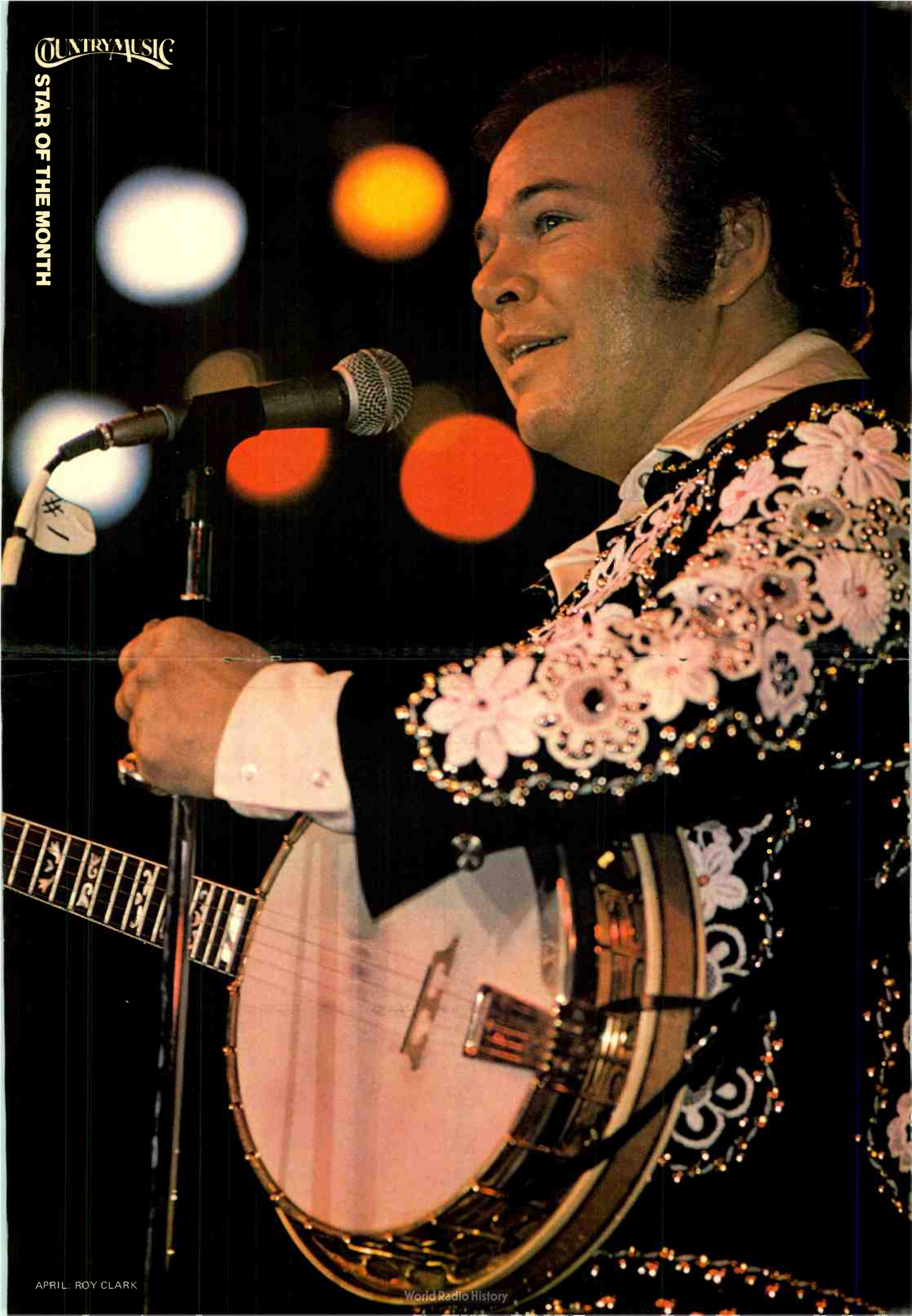
There are three other books about Hank Williams. *High, Lonesome World: Death of a Country Singer*, a

Life and Legends of Johnny Cash (Dial Press, 1971). Alternately dull, cloying, melodramatic, and plain silly, Wren's book seems to try to impress us that its subject is bigger than life, but instead ends up painting us a picture of a pasteboard hero. Cash's own autobiography, *Man in Black* (Zondervan, 1975), is also pretty mushy. It would have been wonderful if Cash had just given us an honest, ungolded account of his life and career, instead of the pop catechism of *Man in Black*. Hopefully, an older, mellower Cash will have another go at storying his life and present us with the real JRC autobiography.

A better autobiography is *Country*

COUNTRYMUSIC

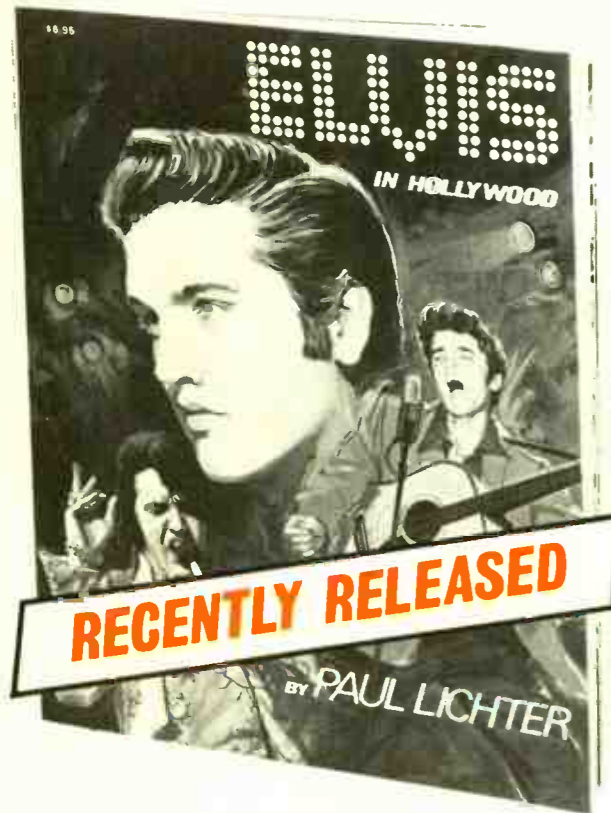
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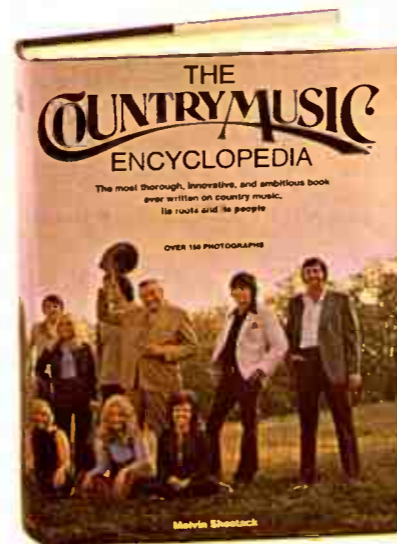
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BIG DON

Quiet Man, Slow Fuse: Don Williams Sticks To His Guns

by Patrick Carr

The sound is quite out of place with the main current of the times. It's almost as if, in some unlikely circumstance, Jim Reeves had been raised again today, given a Texas accent and sent downtown in blue jeans to cut sweet country songs without the violins—or, in another scheme of things, it's as if Johnny Cash had never run into stardom or amphetamines or Jesus, but instead had hung around Sun Records, growing progressively less dramatic and more secure (but no less musical) as the years rolled by and recording techniques progressed. At times you can actually hear these improbable echoes in the Don Williams Sound; mostly, you're just conscious of the fact that Don Williams records don't sound at all like they came out of Nashville in the countrypolitan era of the 'seventies.' To an ear raised on the smoother country ballads of the

40's and 50's, the sound is quite classically, purely country in feeling.

The voice is slow and easy, a comfortable baritone devoid of flash or stress or edges, a slow rolling low which ambles through a landscape of almost perfectly sympathetic production with loving care and a thinking man's attention to detail. The voice is unique, but it's not that unusual—there are comparisons in the voices of, say, Bobby Bare and Waylon Jennings. The *sound*, however, is rare indeed. It features a complete lack of cuteness and a considerable portion of good taste; it is restrained and it is economical. It hangs together; more than that, it *fits* together. It is, in fact, very like its creator; it is *very* careful, and it is quite serious, and it is anything but commonplace.

So here's Don Williams, who at the time of this writing has just won the Number One Male Country Singer award in England, (where they tend to like their country minus the pop) and has, furthermore, committed something close to country sacrilege by cancelling his road dates for a month while he concentrates on producing his next album—this in a business where most everybody else springs a few days here and there between revenue-producing activities.

First we see him in Tulsa, Oklahoma, at an all-star showcase for Jim Halsey's phalanx of country talent. Don, standing tall (because he's tall; that's no metaphor), is waiting to go onstage, and while all around him are either glad-handing fans or colleagues in a kind of frenetic merry-go-round of high-pressure friends-'n-neighborism, he is standing still and talking slow and grinning serenely from sideburn to sideburn. I study his face, and I find something missing. In the faces of most public personalities you can find some clue to the nature of their specialness, some indication of a rare, quirky, always up-front ego. There is no such indication in the face of Don Williams—it's a face you'd like to see on the man washing your windscreen on a long night drive; peacefully alert, earnest, secure, responsible.

Then there is his dress, which is neither the Mod Look of the country-politan crowd nor its antithesis, the customized funk of the Outlaws. Don Williams's attire is simple working man's Western, mostly unadorned denim. Also, his hair looks like it's never seen the inside of a male styling salon. In short, he looks distinctly out of place. It is obvious that Don Williams has travelled to stardom by a very non-standard route, and that once there he has proceeded to occupy a very non-standard area of his own creation.

* * *

He came out of Texas (Portland, a small settlement near Corpus Christi) 36 years ago, grew up to sing Platters-style vocal harmonies in high school, progressed to the service and a rock-cum-country-cum-easy-listening outfit (Don sang the ballads: "Most of the rock and roll stuff, there was a black guy in the group who could really *nail* that"), came out in '61 and proceeded to occupy himself as a bread truck driver (three months), an oilfield worker (one year), a member of a bull gang, a credit manager for a finance company (two years: "I just don't like to deal with people in a capacity like that. Money gets very personal."), then as an employee of the Pittsburg Glass Chemical Company for another two years. In this last capacity, he formed the Pozo Seco Singers, a mellow pop vocal group, and became a full-time singer. Pozo Seco, which never really worked (though hits *were* produced) lasted another couple of years until the combination of talent finally gave up on trying to work together. And hence to country music.

"I knew I had to get into a form to get back to what I really understand," he says, "and for my expression, it seems like the country people have understood what I'm trying to say." He also stresses the fact that he doesn't really like to work with groups. "I believe in making an honest living and doing the best I can, and I've just never been the kind of person—regardless of what kind of job it is, or what I'm doing—will put up with someone telling me to do something in a way I really don't feel is right. It either goes against the grain, or it's dishonest, or it's a little immoral or whatever. Anyway, if it happens, then I



Laid-back Don Williams is Mr. Cool. But just try telling him to change an arrangement sometime.

have to leave." He amplifies the point, which is significant: "Maybe I'm just a maverick or a loner or something. I'm not a big social person, either. My family and my music are really my biggest thing in life."

He came to Nashville, and was immediately employed. Allen Reynolds, producer and ally of Jack Clement in the JMI record label and associated publishing operation, hired him, and thus it was that Don Williams entered the somewhat unique, slightly crazed but musically worthy world of Clementism. From the start, naturally, he was a stabilizing influence, working with Reynolds on the publishing end of the business to cut the operation down to size and increase the output of quality material that might also qualify for commercial success. He also became Reynolds's right-hand man in the studio, thereby learning the tricks of *that* trade at the hands of a master.

Eventually, he was ready to work on his own project, and so it came to pass that he showed up in the studio to record all the prime material that nobody else in town wanted—those magnificent songs by Bob McDill, Rey-

nolds, himself and others that graced his first album, *Don Williams, Volume 1*. It was then, however, that the perfectly straight head of Mr. Williams and the erratically brilliant procedures of JMI clashed.

You can almost see it, in fact—Don Williams, serious and straight, businesslike and determined, an on-with-the-job kind of individual, gnashing teeth while the JMI house crew of old did their hang-it-loose-and-see-what-you-get thing in various states of elevation. No deal. Williams went to Reynolds, and Reynolds—“a very encouraging person” in Don’s words—adapted the procedures. The sessions which gave rise to *Don Williams, Volume 1* were tight. And the product from Williams, Reynolds, and a cast of expert session freelancers, accomplished something quite unique: The JMI Sound—that precise, gentle, economical affair invented by Reynolds and Clement—became the Don Williams Sound, and there was a whole album’s worth of it. If you’re looking to peg that sound at its essential best, think of Don’s cut of Bob McDill’s gorgeous “Amanda.”

The JMI relationship continued for three albums, by which time Don had learned the tricks of the sound, and gotten big enough to transfer to the ABC/Dot label—meaning more staff, more promotion bucks, and—with his own self-production deal—just as much artistic control with which to perpetuate the brilliantly precise country purist sound he had learned at JMI. That’s the process by which Don Williams arrived into the country bigtime league sounding like no other singer on any major label, quite prepared to do things like take a month off the road to get an album right, and ready to express an opinion on others who do not see fit to do likewise.

“You know,” he says, “it got to the point where a few years ago I just stopped buying records. It got to the point—and it’s still there—where you were getting maybe three good songs per album, and the rest is just filler. I’ve never been big on this business of ‘cut three new songs, throw in your last couple of hits, then cut everybody else’s hits.’ What for? The marketing people, they love it—they think it’s the greatest marketing idea, you know? But I’ve never agreed with it. And I think it’s just about as fair as somebody paying ten or twelve bucks and going to a show, and the guy, or whoever, is so drunk that he can hardly walk on the stage. I draw just about exactly the same comparison, one to the other. It’s taking people for granted, and it’s very disrespectful to the artist himself and the public. I would rather hear original songs that the person feels involved with. At least that way I can feel like he’s *saying* something to me . . . I like songs, and I like to hear songs done *right*.”

He remembers his experiences trying to sell songs to other artists while working at JMI: “Every single song on that first album of mine had been pitched all over Nashville,” he says incredulously. “Waylon Jennings, *everybody*. *Nobody* would do those songs. I didn’t believe it. I just didn’t believe that people couldn’t see how good those songs were. So we just cut ‘em ourselves.”

Now he smiles. “Sure gave me the opportunity to have a lot of good songs,” he says. “All to myself.”

* * *

So now we are in New York, watching Don Williams perform with his guitar and a two-piece band at The Other

End, scene of much recent folk-pop razzle-dazzle and showcase for whomever the various record companies happen to be pushing. Don Williams is up there in his blue jeans and permanent, ratty-looking cowboy hat, so laid-back that for a moment it seems like there might be a considerable danger of slumber just around the corner.

He begins his set, and pretty soon it becomes obvious to even these New York press-’n-promo personalities that you can’t talk through a Don Williams performance in a small place. You’ll be heard and he’ll get mad. Therefore the set proceeds in the context of one great hush.

Now, Don Williams makes damn good records, but in New York, under pressure, he sounds, frankly, boring. There is no variety in his set, no spark to his act, nothing but that careful music minus the addition of record production. It becomes obvious at this point that Don Williams is not a performer. Rather he is a songwriter, (“There’s a satisfaction in writing a song that *means* something you just can’t get any other place,” he says) singer, producer, arranger and self-manager. It’s not the New York pressure that makes his set lacklustre; it’s the fact that when placed on a strange stage, he cannot get the kind of total control he needs. Don, despite his famed mellow nature, needs to be in charge.

Now we are in Nashville in the offices of ABC/Dot Records, talking to Jerry Bailey, who is the label’s Nashville publicity chief. Bailey has been talking about how Don Williams is unlike most of the other country artists he deals with. Williams doesn’t push for publicity, while most country artists crave it. He likes to keep his family out of his career where most country artists are only too happy to promote the family image. He’s still married to a hometown girl where most artists have gone through the usual showbiz divorce or divorces. He doesn’t hang out—not with the outlaw mafia, not with the songwriters, not at Tootsie’s, nowhere. He goes home. He doesn’t talk about his ambitions, while most others just can’t stop. Also, he always arrives at the company offices in a pickup truck.

Bailey likes that idea, but it blows his circuits somewhat. “Doesn’t he have any other means of transportation?” I ask, thinking that perhaps four Number One country singles and two Number One country albums in one year might not be enough to provide even *one* Cadillac in these inflationary times.

“Oh, yeah, sure, he has other cars,” says Bailey. “He just *likes* the pickup. Guess he’s used to it. Why, a couple of months back he came in with a brand new one, and we all went down to the parking lot and stood around and admired it.” He lets that rather odd image sink in, then speculates. “He’s real, y’know,” he says. “In fact, he’s got even more set in his ways since he’s been a star—y’know, just to compensate. He’s *like* that, man.”

“Does he have his pickup all tooled out and dolled up, like Jerry Reed’s?” I ask.

“No,” says Bailey. “It’s just a pickup truck. Y’know—a *pickup truck*.”

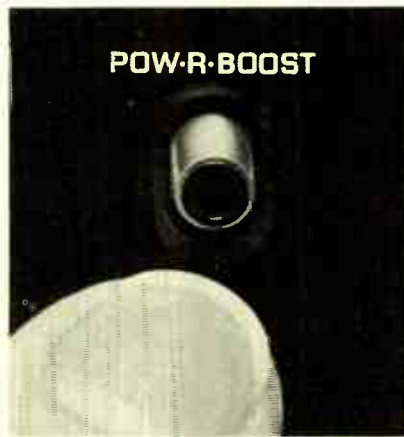
“Oh,” I say. “What else is there about him?”

“Well,” says Bailey, “you know how he’s so laid-back and everything? Y’know—how you never really know what he’s feeling, where he’s coming from, how he’s kind of like an iceberg, all under the surface?”

“Yeah?” say I.

“Well, that’s right enough,” Bailey continues, “but you just try telling him he should change the arrangement on a song sometime.” ■

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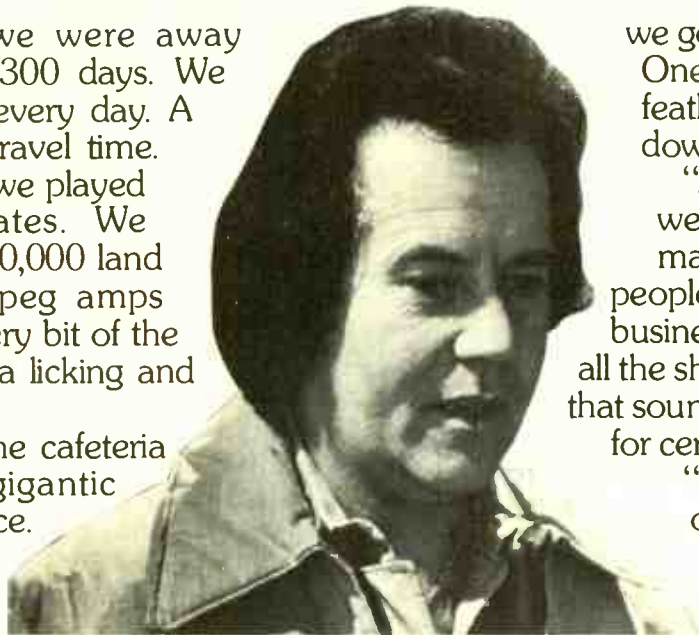


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We were in the cafeteria of Chicago's gigantic McCormick Place. Within an hour, Tommy Overstreet and his Nashville Express band were to perform in the Arie Crown Theater along with Roy Clark and Barbara Fairchild. Tommy lit up a cigarette, took a slug of coffee, and in-between signing autographs, told us why he



"If the sound isn't there you're hurtin' for certain."

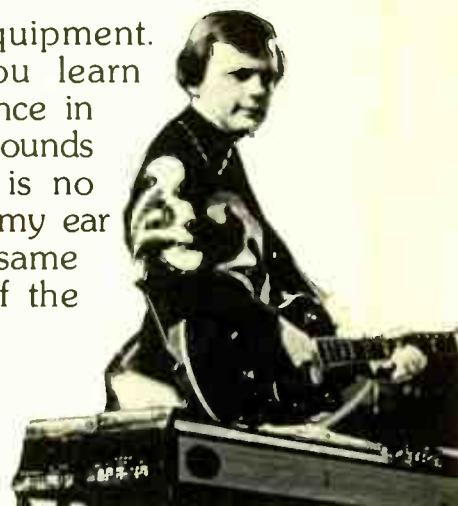
we go it's a different acoustic setting. One day it's chicken, next day it's feathers. But Ampeg never lets us down. It's versatile."

"Ampeg gives us the best sound we've ever had. We've had too many compliments from too many people — both in and out of show business — to fool with it. You can have all the showmanship in the world, but if that sound isn't there, then you're hurtin' for certain."

"Sometimes we're forced to use other equipment. We've played in clubs where the drums were actually nailed down to the floor. No way we could set

up our own equipment. That's when you learn there is a difference in amps. The band sounds different. There is no togetherness. To my ear it's just not the same and it throws off the performance."

"Is Ampeg tough? Let me tell you. Last summer we played a place



"Bob Rippy has already cleaned up his."

called Cullpepper, Virginia. It was an outdoor gig. You see all the people sitting out in their lawn chairs and they're digging country music. Well, I was on stage and all of a sudden lightning started dancing across the sky. Within minutes there was a cloudburst. I mean it rained like somebody unzipped the heavens. Our electrical equipment was totally, absolutely soaked. We didn't have time to dry it off. The next gig we just plugged them in and they worked perfectly."

Bob Rippy, the lead guitarist, strolled up to the table. Smiley Roberts who plays the steel guitar was with him. Rip added another war



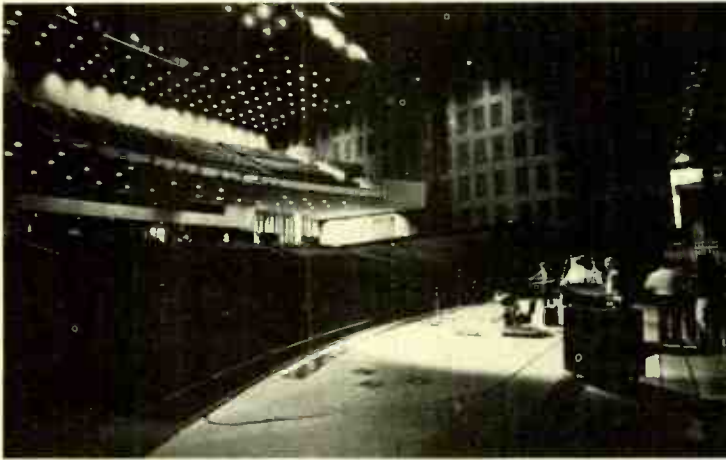
"Smiley Roberts cleans up his act."

prefers Ampeg over any other amplifier.

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st sound we've ever had."

Tommy Overstreet
The Nashville Express



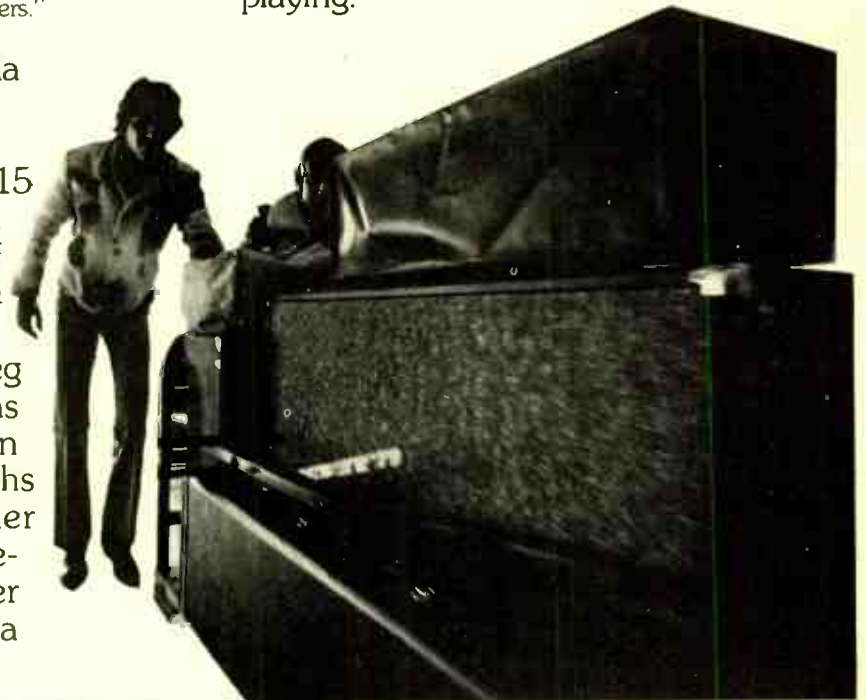
"One day it's chicken, next day it's feathers."

story. "One time we flew up to Canada and when the airlines people were unloading the baggage section they dropped one of our Ampegs. All 115 pounds of it fell from the belly of the plane clear to the ground. Two of the supports broke but it worked fine that night."

Smiley is the one who puts Ampeg to the acid test. His steel guitar has two necks, each with a set of ten strings. There are tremendous highs and lows. "Ampeg gives a ballsier sound. That's the only way I can describe it. I've played through other equipment but when I'd punch it up a

"We logged 250,000 land miles last year."

little the sound would start breaking up. Ampeg gives me all the highs I want. And a lot of bottom. It's not a booming bass bottom, not a thud like another amp I could name. I use a heavy reverb for a violin effect. I use it in combination with the fuzz tone and it gives me a kind of simulated eight or nine violins playing. If I didn't have Ampeg to give me that desired tone or sound it would affect my playing. Because you know, when it doesn't sound right you don't put your whole heart and soul in your playing."



"And Ampeg was with us every mile of the way."



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On several occasions Johnny Horton had told Merle Kilgore, "If there is any way of communicating from the other side after death, I'll be in touch..."

The two of them were young, good looking and wild as a March wind, and they were both really hot. One was a songwriter with one giant million seller on the books and the other was a singer with a couple of million sellers and one more to come. The younger guy was Merle Kilgore. His pal was tall, angular and a big star. His name was Johnny Horton.

Merle and Johnny and their two families were neighbors in that fair-to-middling neighborhood located in Shreveport, La. The two families were close, real close, but Merle and Johnny were even closer. They were blood brothers. To the end.

That was what startled Merle Kilgore that day late in the summer of 1960. It hit him so hard he had to sit down. Johnny Horton had walked across the yard that separated the houses of the two families, and into the Kilgore house. Walking up to Merle, he put his arm on Merle's shoulder, looked him dead in the eye and drawled, "Ole buddy, I gotta tell you that ole John ain't gonna be around much longer. I don't know how or why, but I'll be gone before another month rolls around."

Merle looked hard and long at his tall, wide-smiling pal.

"Chief, what are you talking about?" Merle scowled.

"Ole John is just goin' on," Johnny Horton replied with that same easy half-grin. "I'm serious, Merle. Somehow I know it's almost my time."

Then Horton set down the guitar case he had been holding in one hand. He opened the leather case and took out the beautiful guitar with the dazzling inlaid design.

"I want you to have something of mine, Merle. Something to remember ole John by." Then Horton held the guitar out to his pal. As Merle reached out and took it, Johnny clapped him on the shoulder and spun on his heel and, looking over his shoulder, he

tossed a simple parting shot: "So long, brother."

Before the next month rolled around, Johnny Horton was dead. A car he was riding in was hit head-on by a drunk in an oncoming auto. The three riding with Horton, including his manager Tilman Franks, were all treated and released at the hospital, as was the driver of the other car. Johnny was killed instantly.

* * *

Today, Merle still has that guitar, and more than the memory of an old pal lingers to haunt him. On several occasions Johnny Horton had told Merle, "If there is any way of communicating from the other side after death, then I'll be in touch."

Horton said the same thing to his wife, Billie Jean (formerly married to Hank Williams), and Tilman Franks.

So far, no one has heard from Johnny from the other side, but hovering over Horton's circle of friends is an aura of mystery that speaks as loud as a voice. And it has been almost sixteen years since Horton died.

Horton may easily have single-handedly been responsible for many of today's country stars having a deep interest in spiritualism. In other words, directly or indirectly, Horton is probably responsible for those in the country music world who hold seances and consult ouija boards, fortune tellers and other spiritual sources.

Horton definitely influenced Johnny Cash—but not to the extent that those stories making the rounds a few years back would have it. The word was that Horton had impressed Johnny Cash that he believed in reincarnation. He supposedly told Cash and others that he knew in his mind that he would come back after death in the form of an animal. Consequently, according to the fable that went around, after Horton was killed in that car wreck, Cash would be driving down a highway with any of his friends (such as Merle Kilgore, for instance), when he would supposedly slam on the brakes

suddenly, leap out of the car and run out into a herd of cows grazing alongside the right of way. And that crazy story allowed as how Cash and Kilgore would run from one cow to another shouting, "Johnny, is that you?"

The story, of course, is not true. When this writer asked Kilgore about the tale some years ago, he just laughed. He did, however, admit that Horton had been a believer in reincarnation. Merle admitted that *he* believed in it, too.

In fact, at a point not too far back there, Merle was of the mind that he had been reincarnated from another life. Straight-faced as a judge, Merle explained to me one day that he believed that he had been Stephen Foster in another life. Right after telling me this news, Merle would sort of wander off humming a few bars of "Way down upon the Sewanee River." Then he would turn back to me and say, "Not a bad idea for a song. I'll have to finish it one day."

The bit about the song was for laughs. The part about Stephen Foster was for real. Merle has some pretty strong facts to at least give some sort of basis for his feeling. It seems that way back there somewhere in the Kilgore family tree there is a distant relative of the famous composer. This, plus a few incidents that Merle prefers not to discuss publicly, started him on the Stephen Foster thing.

Reincarnation is probably one of the milder beliefs among the music world folks who lean toward the field of spiritualism. Marijohn Wilkin, a famous songwriter ("Long Black Veil," "Waterloo") who is a very dear friend of Merle Kilgore, is a very firm believer in reincarnation. She even has the time and place where she lived her life the first time around—Marijohn says she has had fortune tellers and others who have studied this particular field tell her that in her other life she had ridden with Atilla The Hun.

Now, Merle and Marijohn are both rational, well-balanced people who are highly thought of in the music



Music City Mystics

In Nashville, they take their spirits seriously.

by Roger "Captain Michite" Schutt

community. Marijohn runs her own publishing company, and she discovered Kris Kristofferson. Her company, Buckhorn Music, has such million-sellers as Kristofferson's "For The Good Times," and Marijohn herself had a giant hit with "One Day At A Time." Merle, now active in both music and the movies (he had parts in *W. W. And The Dixie Dancekings* and



Framed), used to direct the giant Starday King publishing operation. These days, both Marijohn and Merle try to steer clear of the supernatural as much as possible—which might not be much, because Marijohn recently spent a whole day depressed and crying for some reason she couldn't pinpoint. Later she learned that the daughter of Bobby Bare, a close friend, had died that day.

* * *

Although it was Johnny Horton who had the strongest overall effect on Merle Kilgore's belief in the psychic, there was another dramatic influence that came by way of a Sunday afternoon incident back in the time when the Kilgores lived next door to the Hortons in Shreveport.

There is a man in Shreveport named Bernard Rix who is a nationally known psychic. In his field he is called a "reader"—the term means that he can make predictions and such, similar to a fortune teller. Rix is on a very high academic level, however, and is a noted scholar in the field of spiritualism on a university level.

On this particular Sunday afternoon, Mr. Rix and his wife had taken a little auto ride and when they returned to their home Bernard Rix asked his wife to look up the name Merle Kilgore in the telephone directory. He explained that he had seen the name on a mailbox while they were riding, and that he felt that he must talk to Merle right away.

Once Merle was on the line, Mr. Rix took the phone from his wife and spoke into the mouthpiece. "Hello," he said, "My name is Bernard Rix. You don't know me, Mr. Kilgore, but I don't have time to explain. You must put down the phone and go to your baby. She needs you desperately right this moment."

Merle recovered from the startling statement and dashed to the room where his baby daughter was sleeping.

He found the infant with its head caught in the slats of the crib. Merle's tiny daughter might have strangled to death if not for the call.

From then on, Merle was very much into the realm of spiritualism. And he became a close friend of Bernard Rix.

Rix receives frequent telephone calls from Merle and his friends. Some of the calls are from points a long long way from Shreveport, but they're all made for the same reason. One of Rix's country music acquaintances wants him to answer some question about the past, present or future.

In the course of these psychic-oriented phone calls, Rix has made some incredible probes into the future. Marijohn Wilkin once called Rix from her home in Nashville and while they were talking, Rix strayed from the line of conversation and told Marijohn abruptly, "I see you here in Shreveport. But it is not routine business or a social trip. It is a death in your family."

Two weeks later Marijohn found herself in Shreveport attending the funeral of a great aunt.

* * *

A few years ago, it was sort of the "in" thing to believe in spirits and such. Seances, ouija boards, fortune tellers and miscellaneous other mystic types were scattered quite liberally throughout the population of the country music world. A lot of artists and songwriters talked about it. Some thought about it. And there were some who believed it deeply.

Close to 10 years ago, Marijohn lived on a farm 10 miles outside of Nashville. It was a rustic setting in

those lonely rolling Middle Tennessee hills where her house was neatly tucked away, almost a mile from the nearest highway. It was an ideal backdrop for things of a psychic nature and as a result, that farm was the scene of several rather elaborate attempted meetings with the spirits.

Scores of country stars including Faron Young, Webb Pierce, Bonnie Guitar, Roger Miller, Mel Tillis and others sat around the oak dining table at Marijohn's farm, hoping for at least a quick glimpse of that "other world" while the darkened room danced to the tune of the flickering candlelight. Whether or not spirits from the world of the dead were contacted or not is up for grabs. One thing was always quite evident—namely that the principals of those seances were very serious about their involvement.

Merle and Marijohn had lots of company in their pursuit of the mystic beyond. Some of the others were very close friends, others were passing acquaintances.

One of the very close friends involved in spiritualism a few years ago was John D. Loudermilk. He had co-written tunes like "Waterloo" and "P.T. 109" with Marijohn and he had been her co-pilot on many a flight from reality in search of a better understanding of the beyond. John D. was involved in many of those seances at Marijohn's farm.

John D. was very serious about his spirit world workings, just as Kilgore and Marijohn were. And John D. would go to elaborate means to track down various legends and tales about mysterious places and things.

It wasn't all grim and serious, though. One time three or four years ago, a newspaper reporter in Nashville called John D. Loudermilk and informed the singer/writer that he was doing an article about spiritualism. He said he had heard about the seances that John D. and friends had staged, and he asked if it would be possible to witness the calling up of the spirits.

John D. said that the reporter was more or less asking for "instant spirits." So it followed that John D. felt it only fair to provide the reporter with just that—instant ghosts. Loudermilk put in calls to a couple of pals like Boyce Hawkins, recording artist-TV personality, and Byron Binkley, WSM TV producer/director. A seance was set up for the reporter, but the newsman never knew that he was being

(Continued on page 60)

What Do You Know?



by DON HUMPHREYS

Country Behind Bars

Musicologists John and Alan Lomax have written that those of us who do not indulge in violence enjoy hearing about such behavior and its consequences. Certainly that is one explanation for the many prison tunes in the country music songbook, for from the earliest folk ballad days to the latest jukebox hit, prison songs have been country music favorites. A more recent development has been the rise of several exciting performers with prison backgrounds to the top of country music as singers and songwriters. This month's quiz explores the phenomenon of country music and its prison influences.

1. Which superstar once found himself in solitary confinement beside the condemned Caryl Chessman?

2. One of the most recorded songs of the sixties was Curley Putman's classic tune about a condemned man's dream prior to his execution. Name the song.

3. "I Made the Prison Band" was a tune with a little different attitude about prison life. Name the California singer who recorded it.

4. One of country music's most exciting new talents spent eighteen years behind bars and did time on Death Row before being released and starting his successful career as a singer-songwriter. Name him.

5. Merle Haggard has written impressively about prison life in many of his songs, but one of his early hits about being on the wrong side of the law was written by Liz and Casey Anderson. Name the song.

6. This Jimmie Rodgers tune was

one in a long line of Webb Pierce hits. Name the song.

7. This popular entertainer was actually discovered while in jail by the same Texas Ranger who had earlier arrested him for goat rustling. Who is he?

8. The singer-songwriter of "Grey-stone Chapel" was discovered by Johnny Cash in Folsom Prison. After his release from prison, he joined the Cash organization. Name him.

9. The Everly Brothers turned this Felice and Boudleaux Bryant tale of a frontier man gone wrong into a hit. Name the song.

10. "Tupelo County Jail" was a hit for Webb Pierce, and also for one of the most famous family groups in country music. Name them.

11. "Folsom Prison Blues #2" was a satire of Johnny Cash's famous song. Name the well-known comic who recorded the later version.

12. Johnny Cash's live album at San Quentin served as the introduction for "A Boy Named Sue." The song was written by one of country music's most original talents. He also wrote the hanging song "25 Minutes To Go," on the Cash album recorded at Folsom. Name this multi-talented writer.

13. This title tune from an Elvis Presley picture gained popularity on both rock and country charts.

14. "If I Had The Wings Of An Angel/Over These Prison Walls I Would Fly," are lines from the biggest-selling record in Victor's pre-electric recording history. Name this classic tune recorded by Vernon Dalhart.

15. This often recorded tune, written by Marijohn Wilkin and Danny Dill, tells of the dilemma of a

condemned man who conceals information that could save his life. Name the tune.

16. Tom T. Hall wrote and recorded this humorous story about what happened to a man arrested for speeding through a small town. Name the tune.

17. George Jones' prison ballad "Life To Go" was turned into a hit by what Columbia Recording star?

18. It is reported that Bill Anderson wrote this prison song after watching a drifting moon that caused him to think of the man in prison for whom the moon did not move. Name this song.

19. "The Chair" is a dramatic rendering about execution by what country music superstar?

20. Another dramatic recording in keeping with the prison tradition, but with a different emphasis, is "Blackjack County Chain." Name the recording artist.

ANSWERS

1. Merle Haggard
2. "Green Grass of Home"
3. Tommy Collins
4. David Allan Coe
5. "I'm A Lonesome Fugitive"
6. "I'm In The Jailhouse Now"
7. Johnny Rodriguez
8. Glen Sherley
9. "Take A Message To Mary"
10. The Stonemans
11. Don Bowman
12. Shel Silverstein
13. "Jailhouse Rock"
14. "The Prisoner's Song"
15. "The Long Black Veil"
16. "A Week In A Country Jail"
17. Stonewall Jackson
18. "99 Years"
19. Marty Robbins
20. Willie Nelson

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Records

READER'S DISCOUNT

\$1.00 discount on all records and tapes reviewed this month. See page 52 for details.

Jerry Lee Lewis

Odd Man In

Mercury SRM-1-1064 \$6.95

MC-8-1-1064 (tape) \$7.95

On the minus side, Jerry Lee's voice is nearly shot, and his piano playing disinterested, as if he were just tossing off those trademark trills and keyboard sweeps because he's got nothing else to do. (Pig Robbins is even given some piano credits, which is like putting in a pinch-hitter for Babe Ruth.) On the plus side, the new material is honky-



tonk tough. The Killer has dealt himself a pretty shaky hand this time, but he's determined to play it out.

Two songs come off just right, quite possibly because they relate so obviously to the Killer's personal lifestyle. In "Don't Boogie Woogie (When You Say Your Prayers Tonight)," Jerry Lee is ordered by his

doctor to give up rock and roll, his favorite foods, and demon alcohol in favor of God. Somehow, I don't think he's about to do that, though "When I Take My Vacation in Heaven" indicates that he's anxious for the best of both those worlds. Donnie Fritts's "A Damn Good Country Song" accurately captures the Killer's own particular brand of mania.

But four of these songs he recorded long ago in superior performances. And while "You Ought To See My Mind" and "That Kind of Fool" are the type of song you'd expect Jerry Lee to put in his hip pocket, these versions don't measure up to his own high standards. They sound better next to much of what's on the radio these days, but they pale when held up against a prime Jerry Lee cut.

Two good cards showing and a couple more so-so ones underneath are often enough to win, especially if you're cagey and confident enough to bluff convincingly. If anyone is, it's the Killer, but I hope there aren't too many chips at stake, because he could sure use a stronger hand.

JOHN MORTHLAND

Rita Coolidge

It's Only Love

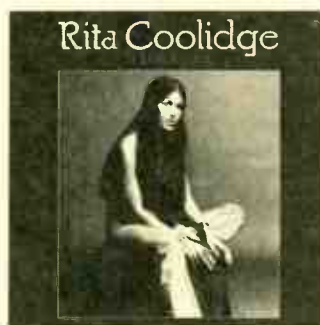
A&M SP-4531 \$6.98

SP-8-4531 (tape) \$7.98

Unlike her spouse Kris, who has reached the heights and hit the pits with his records, Rita Coolidge always presents us with even, enjoyable albums

filled with her long, cool river of a voice. While *It's Only Love* veers a few steps into a new world of jazz, the album remains relaxed and steady in her rich and full country style.

Fortunately, in view of David Anderle's rather stiff production, Coolidge is blessed with the help of long-associated session people. The guitar of Fred Thackett, Mike Utley's keyboards, and the steel work of Al Perkins, Jr., are im-



peccable.

Rita's performance is free, but disciplined; mellow, but powerful. She strolls the Benny Gallagher-Graham Lyle tap dance, "Keep the Candles Burning," sways Kristofferson's "Late Again," and puts a natural lean on Donnie Fritts's and Eddie Hinton's "Don't Let Love Pass You By." She's at her best in the fully orchestrated songs, "My Rock-and-Roll Man" and "I Wanted It All," which touch her life in a biographical sense.

Coolidge's most dramatic efforts are, of course, her torch treatments of the 1929 standards, "Mean to Me" and "Am I Blue" with the help of jazz pianist Barbara Carroll. The songs, unusual

for a lady from Nashville, are quite versatile and pleasant on Rita's part, but unlikely to cause *Downbeat* to revamp its poll.

The album's best moments come from the pen of an unknown Nashville writer, Bob Morrison. His "Born To Love Me" and "It's Only Love" will remind you immediately of a young and hungry Kristofferson.

What we have here is another Rita Coolidge album; that is, another excellent album from an excellent songstress.

DENNIS METRANO

Ray Price

Say I Do

ABC-Dot DOSD-2037 \$6.98

DOSD-8-2037 (tape) \$7.95

Ray Price, the Cherokee Cowboy, was Hank Williams's protege and heir to the Drifting Cowboys after Hank's death in 1953. Later in the decade when a lot of young country singers dropped their fiddlers and steel players in favor of the loudest drummers they could find, Price continued



to sing his Texas beer-joint music with that distinctive shuffle beat as if nothing had happened. Country fans

Records

rewarded his stubbornness by making "Crazy Arms" and "City Lights" massive hits that influenced a legion of singers from Mel Tillis to Moe Bandy.

Then, in the mid-sixties, Price made an abrupt turn. Orchestras and choirs emerged on his records; he appeared on the Louisiana Hayride backed by a fifteen-piece band complete with vibes and string section. His Cherokee Cowboy days were forgotten except for an occasional Golden Oldie segment on country radio stations. Of course there was plenty of flak about his pop leanings. His response was, "Nothing can exist without expansion." True, but if *Say I Do* is any indication, Ray Price may be expanding himself right out of country music.

Unlike Jim Reeves, who sang solid country material arranged in a pop style, Price relies on the mushy romantic pop compositions of Jim Weatherly, who wrote nine of the eleven songs here. Every Weatherly number is characterized by silly, forgettable lyrics ("I remember the day when we were kids/ You rode in my wagon/ And how mad I got/ When I turned around saw your feet were draggin'") coupled with unimaginative mood music. Ben Peters's "Let It Be Love" attempts to recall the old Price sound with a few shuffle beats here and there, but it fails miserably.

Ray Price needs to make another abrupt turn. He should find some good country material and record it with a band consisting

of fiddles, bass, steel, guitar, keyboard, drums, the Jordanares, and *nothing else*. The results could be gratifying.

I hate to be rough on Ray Price, but it's frustrating to see him wasting his immense talents on innocuous throw-aways like this one. He recorded some of the greatest country music of all time. But listening to *Say I Do*, you'd never know it.

RICH KIENZLE

Charlie McCoy
Harpin' the Blues
 Monument KZ-33802 \$5.98
 ZA-33802 (tape) \$6.98



Harpin' the Blues, drawn from a wide frame of reference that extends from W.C. Handy to Hank Williams to Little Walter to Merle Haggard, is a depar-



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ture for McCoy. Charlie has always been stigmatized by a clinical, technically perfect, and sometimes listless professionalism, but confronted here with the emotive demands of the material at hand, he manages to get off his complacent, Grammy-winning tail and blow quite meanly.

The usual cast is present, joined by some distinguished visitors, most notably clarinetist Pete Fountain and trumpeter Al Hirt, who add a solid legitimacy to "Basin Street Blues." Although there's a cautious foray into black blues (a slow, honking "Tribute to Little Walter"), most of *Harpin'* is a survey of the seamier side of country-and-western. Harped to a sad persona beyond their original intent, stand-bys such

as "(I Heard that) Lonesome Whistle" and "Blue Yodel No. 1" reveal a churning, wailing Hohner. Merle Haggard's "Working Man's Blues" is another gem, with Charlie's pedestrian but believable vocal an added element.

In any case, the Chicago South Side to Bakersfield via Goodlettsville is a lot of territory, and Charlie McCoy covers it well.

RUSSEL SHAW

Anne Murray
Together
Capitol ST-11433 \$6.98
8ST-11433 (tape) \$7.98

For most of her career, Canadian songstress Anne Murray has been fortunate to find songs that go well with her uniquely cool, almost detached style

of singing. *Together* is a rather daring album in that it takes her completely away from her sources of strength, country and soft rock, and tries some new



genres on for size. Unfortunately the fit isn't too good, and the songs themselves ultimately cause the album's downfall.

Most of Murray's time here is split between semi-jazz big-band swingers

("Everything Old is New Again" and "Blue-Finger Lou") and sticky sweet ballads (the 1928 title song and David Gates's "Part-Time Love"), and the result is a set of songs that have little to do with each other except that Murray is singing them. With other, more emotional singers (Anne is perhaps the only singer blander than Helen Reddy), that might be okay, but Murray low-keys herself right out of most tracks, and stuff like Steve Eaton's "Out on the Road" and Gene MacLellan's "The Call" fall flat quickly and quietly.

"Blue-Finger Lou" is really the only stand-out cut, if just for its complete otherliness. On the whole, though, Anne Murray seems, at this point, to be

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more mixed up than together.

BILLY ALTMAN

Delbert McClinton

Victim of Life's
Circumstances
ABC ABCD-907 \$6.98
ABCD-8-907 (tape) \$7.95

Delbert McClinton is the kind of hood you remember from high school who slicked his hair back, smoked cigarettes out behind the basketball courts, and eventually found his element in some smoky



Delbert arrives in big time country music as the *coolest* white-black C&W-R&B force since Narvel Felts.

He has but one songwriting preoccupation: constantly ending up on the short side of woman, money, fighting, or drinking arbitrations. Yet he doesn't cheapen his predicament by licking his wounds to the whine of a Pete Drake pedal steel. He sings as a stoic, hardened enough to know it sure won't be the last time (two consecutive songs have the self-deprecating word "fool" in their titles), and easily enough soothed, for example, simply because "it's midnight and I got two more bottles of wine." In his visions, filled with voodoo women, tinkling glass, and occasional spurts of blood, Delbert sees himself as an existential honky-tonk Everyman.

But then those Blue Bland horns rare up in the background, and one has to try to explain Delbert as both a soul act and a kicker. Instead of sweetening the sound as Huey Meaux does when transferring black music to white, Delbert hits it raw, letting the two ingredients mix powerfully and chaotically. His "Do It" is hot big-band shuffle all the way and one of the few spots where Delbert shows off his gutsy free-style mouth harp (yep, the very same one that backed Bruce Channel's 1962 pop hit "Hey Baby"). But this non-country approach has to do penance and ends up offset by straight, albeit Muscle Shoalsian, country cut-ups such as "Ruby Louise" and "Victim of Life's Circumstances."

The problem is that *Victim*, like the out-of-print Delbert & Glen albums of a few years back, lacks one discernable hook to pull in

a casual listener. Delbert almost delivers the goods with this initial solo effort. He should make it inside the front door next time around.

JOE NICK PATOSKI

Tommy Overstreet Show

Live from the Velvet Slipper
ABC-Dot DOSD-2038 \$6.98
DOSD-8-2038 (tape) \$7.95

The Entertainment Capital of the World has generally had unsettling effects on country artists, attracting them with a steady cash flow and at the same time demanding from them a broadened perspective in order to draw a wider audience. A few artists such as Elvis, Charlie Rich, and Mac Davis fit right into the soulless vacuum, not so much on the basis of their countriness but because of their star stature. But these are exceptions and, overall, country in Vegas is a cold proposition, just another diversion along the Neon Strip.

Using the performance concept on album, replete with introductions, stage patter, and a grand finale,

Words or Less" and the climactic medley of "I Don't Know You (Anymore)," "Ann (Don't Go Runnin')," and "Gwen (Congratulations)," works well; the latter made-for-Vegas stuff doesn't.

Despite acoustic qualities that make the audience sound as if it were clapping inside a bathtub, Overstreet fronts a well-oiled revue. His Nashville Express band projects a professional big-band image; his back-up singers, Three of a Kind, do a decent rave-up of the Andrews Sisters on "Beer Barrel Polka," and Tommy himself recites a poem (in headdress, although the listener at home must envision this) called "Old Warriors Never Cry." But "Okie from Muskogee" with fag-lisping and purposely off-key passages does little to bolster the case for this sort of overworked showbiz corn.

If you'd never heard a country band before, I could imagine the Overstreet entourage being a good introduction. But I'd prefer a straight-ahead set with more of the two-fisted punch of "I Think I'll Drink Myself into the Past," and less of the sparkling diversion of the bright lights.

JOE NICK PATOSKI

Rusty Weir

Rusty Weir
20th Century T-495 \$6.98
T8-495 (tape) \$7.98



Tommy Overstreet, a Vegas fixture, combines two basic elements in his act: his own, proven material and the necessary crowd-pleasers, i.e., country standards recognizable to non-country listeners. On record, the former, especially "25

Much of Rusty Weir's last decade was spent singing in barrooms in and around his hometown of Austin, and although he was one of the originators of the so-called Austin Sound, others such as Willie Nelson and Michael Murphy have received most of the attention. But Weir's latest album promises to bring him into the national spotlight as well.

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TAMMY WYNETTE - BG-33773
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OSBORN BROTHERS - MCA-2-4086
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Records

This album is his third, and has some fine songs, including the rocking spiritual "Fly Away," on which the Fisk University Choir contributes background vocals.

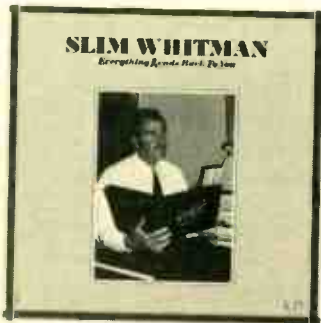
deficiencies, lack of lyrical strength and vocal urgency, and inconsistency of material will prevent it from solid critical success, despite its many strengths.

DOUG WACHHOLZ



Slim Whitman
Everything Leads Back to You
 United Artists UA-LA513-G
 \$6.98
 UA-LA513-H (tape) \$7.98

Back when I was a little booger growing up in my Kerrville, Texas, area, my three great heroes were Jimmie Rodgers, Hank Wil-



liams, and Slim Whitman. They were my Holy Trinity—the Old Man, the Boy, and the Spook, as Preacher

Will Campbell once said. Now I ain't callin' Slim Whitman a spook. I'm just saying that Jimmie's up there now swingin' that golden lantern on the ol' Transcendental Railroad, and Hank and Audrey are reunited in their mansion on the hill, and Slim still possesses the most beautiful voice I think I've ever heard.

There is a timeless quality to everything Slim sings. He's a man who lives for now, looks to the future, and loves what is gone; and he weaves these sentiments into his songs so smoothly as to rival the ol' parlor spinning-wheel.

It ain't every day that Slim Whitman comes out with a new album, but when he does you always want to have your bird-books and binoculars ready for the little booger. And this one, entitled *Everything Leads Back to You*, will please everybody but reggae enthusiasts.

Tastefully produced by Pete Drake, Slim's got himself a very strong item here. "Now Is the Hour" is brain candy. Takes me right back to the island of Cmoniwannalaya. This tune was always in my Top Ten area, but Slim's rendition is particularly wired and inspired. It would take some gonads for most artists today to record "Now Is the Hour," Mexicali Rose," or "Silver Spurs," but Slim breathes so much power and style into these items that they come alive again in a very strong way.

"My Elusive Dreams" has never been sung better than it is here. Sounds as if Slim were singing it from a hurt locker. The word "Utah" jumps right out of the victrola and does about forty squat-thrusts in your medulla oblongata.

Slim Whitman is not in your cosmic cowboy area.

Nor is he particularly an outlaw. But his music and his style bring a freshness, a beauty, and a dignity to a field in which tomorrow can often sound older than yesterday. It's a great album. Mellow as a cello.

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Tanya Tucker makes me feel good about the South, teenagers, America, and last but not least, the Human Race. So to start off, hey Tanya, thank you so much.

I don't know if she chooses any, some, or all of her songs, but the party or parties responsible sure pick good ones. Most are just plain first rate, the rest are solid B-plusses. One cut though—Fats Domino's immortal "Ain't That a Shame." In her version the arranger changed the beat from a solid 2/4 to a stiff 4/4 that has all the grace of Nixon doing the twist.



All the other arrangements are excellent. The excessive "sweetning" that has been a Nashville trademark, as well as one of its worse traits, since the late 60's is thankfully absent here.

No need to wait for the next "Best of," Tanya is the cream of her own crop. Long may she wave.

PETER STAMPFEL

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JUST OL' MICKEY

MICKEY GILLEY GOES HOME

by bob claypool

The cowboy at the bar can't believe his eyes. He chokes the Lone Star off, gulpingly, in mid-swig, and begins to grin—a wide, toothy grin that spreads out from behind the still-attached beer bottle.

"Shhhheeeee-AT! Look at that!"

The blonde at his side, decked out in tight denims and a barely serviceable halter made out of a Western shirt, is busy staring down into her beer, which she is sipping, ladylike, from a glass. But she interrupts her reverie long enough to mutter a fuzzy "What?"

"THAT," he replies, nodding toward the door of the club. "That's him right there. I didn't hardly know him with that long hair . . . and that SUIT! But it's old Mickey all right. Hah, look at him!"

The blonde, picking up both interest and energy now, considers the figure in the pale blue suit, sips her beer again and says, "He's gorgeous."

"I don't know about that," the cowboy says defensively, "but from the look of him, I'd say he was definitely strutting through some high cotton now . . ."

Mickey Gilley *does* look good, anyone can see that. His suit is a suburban cowboy's dream—lean, tight-fitting flared trousers matched up with a plush, hip-length wool and leather vest. Shiny metal studs dot the leather panels on the vest and plunge a tight line down the outer seam of the pants.

The effect is topped off with square-toed, patent leather boots and a wildly flowered shirt unbuttoned a bit to reveal a tangled mat of chest fur. Overall, the ensemble de-emphasizes Gilley's blocky physique and slight

paunch, and makes him look like a sexy countrypolititan on the town.

But the most revealing feature, one that provides a key to the man's style, is his hair. It's worn longer now, a concession to contemporary fashion, but the new style is really no more than an extension of the gassed-back semi-DA that Gilley has worn for years. The only difference is that now the sides are swooped back and down over the ears to spill over his shirt collar.

Gilley looks just like what he is—the flat-out star of the evening, the main reason why nearly 3,000 paying customers have flocked into this huge dance hall. In hundreds of other places around the country his appearance would be accepted with simple admiration, perhaps even awe, by the waiting fans.

But this is different—this is his home base, Pasadena, Texas, right smack in the dance hall that bears his name on a big sign over the door. Gilley's Club is where it all started for him, and hundreds of customers out there on the huge dance floor remember when "old Mickey's" hair wasn't styled and his clothes weren't contemporary cowboy-flash. They remember when he could walk off the bandstand free and clear—just "old Mickey"—and make his way across the entire club alone and uninterrupted. Now, he can hardly break away from the autograph-seekers long enough to get to the men's room.

They remember him, and they want him to know it. Gilley is barely inside the door when a crowd of the faithful come up to press the flesh, wish him well, compliment him on his latest hit, or quietly ask if maybe, just maybe, Mickey might be able to reach back

and do "Lonely Wine" tonight, just for them?

"Sure, be glad to," Mickey says, smiling while he pumps the fan's outstretched hand. "And I'm glad y'all could come out tonight. Thank you."

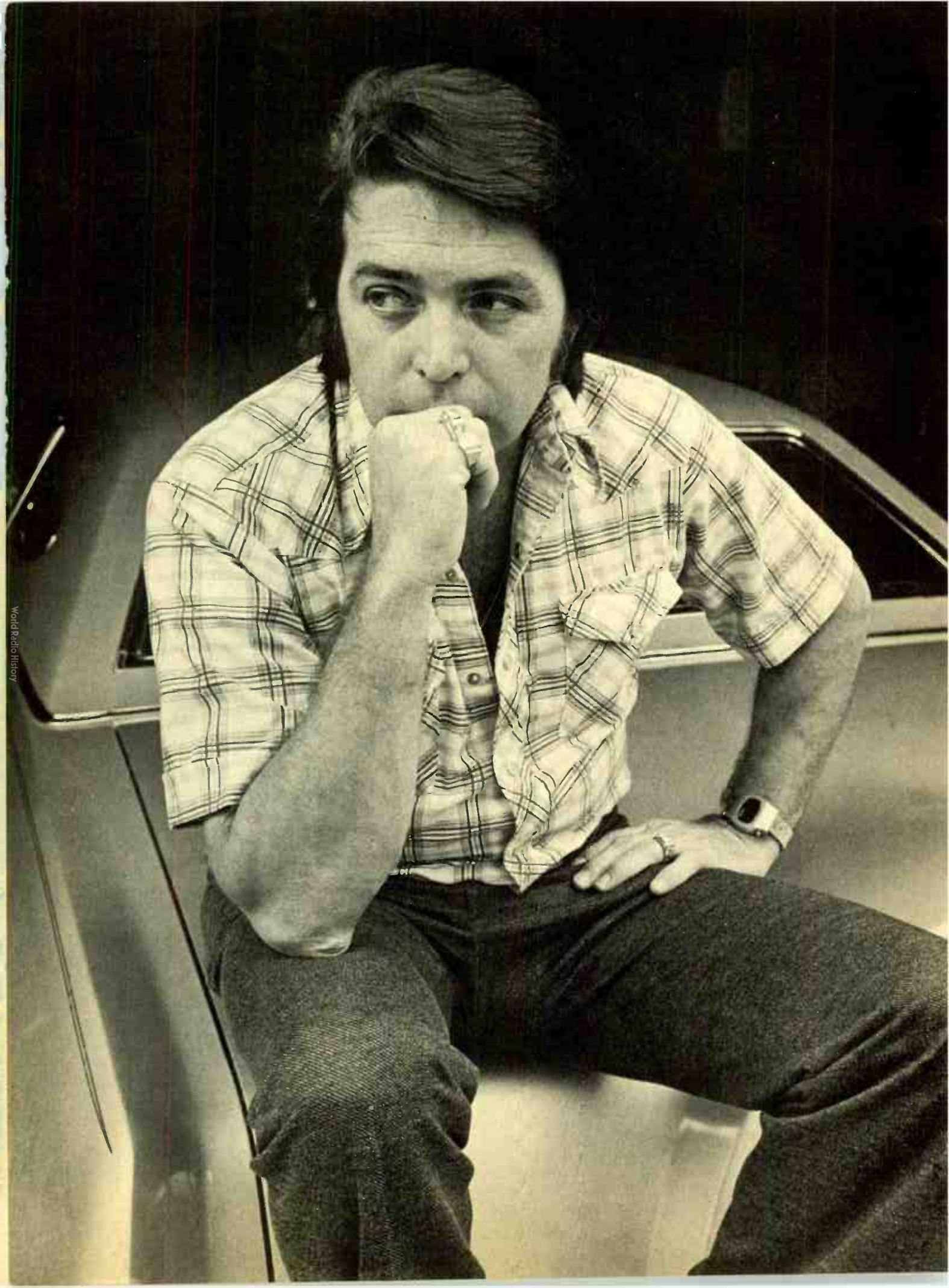
It takes him a long time to make his way to the bandstand, and he's shaking hands and signing autographs on cocktail napkins right up to showtime.

* * *

There were three of them, originally, three cousins who grew up together in Ferriday, Louisiana. They went to the Assembly of God church, listened to country music and rhythm and blues and, eventually, each piano-pounded his way out of Ferriday.

Jerry Lee Lewis was the first—the savage "Killer" who put aside his Bible studies for rock and roll fame. The second was Jimmy Lee Swaggart, who also pounded the keys but stuck with the Lord to become Rev. Jimmy Swaggart, one of the Gulf Coast's most successful preachers and gospel singers. He has a syndicated TV show, plus his own pressing plant to turn out his albums. ("Actually," Gilley said once, "Reverend Jimmy has made more money than me and Jerry put together.")

Then there was Mickey, who was also touched by the demon of rockabilly. The only problem was that Gilley was younger, and his style was always a bit too similar to that of his most famous cousin. Gilley drifted to Houston at 17, eventually working his way into the clubs in nearby Pasadena. He started recording, too, for anyone who'd have him—raw, stomping rockabilly numbers in the Lewis piano-slashing style. A few became regional hits, but none made it into



the national charts. (Years later, some of those primitive recordings would be collectors' items, highly prized treasures for which hard-core rockabilly freaks would pay dearly, particularly in England, where the stomping "Call Me Shirty" on Dot would fetch a fast \$50 every day of the week.)

While his recording career faltered, Gilley concentrated on his club work, churning out endless nights of rock and roll and country in various clubs on Spencer Highway. His local reputation grew steadily and, in 1971, a nonsense welder-turned-businessman named Sherwood Cryer hired him to work at a ramshackle joint called Shelley's. Cryer put Gilley's name over the door and began a string of remodeling "improvements" that eventually turned the place into the classic Texas dance hall it is today, complete with a mirror-ball over the dance floor, scores of pinball machines and pool tables and seating capacity for 3,000.

By 1974, Gilley was quite possibly the highest paid regional star in Texas, earning, according to most reports, some \$50,000 a year for his "sit-down job." That, and such fringe benefits as having his own local TV show, helped to salve his ego a bit, and Mickey claimed to be through with making records. He went so far as to tell one Houston record engineer, "Hell, I make more from the game concessions at the club *in one week* than I have from all my records."

Then it happened—a fluke, really. A friend asked Gilley to record one single just for use on the string of jukeboxes she owned around Houston. Gilley went into Jones Studio and laid down a Harlan Howard tune, "She Called Me Baby." For the B-side, he recorded an old George Morgan hit (written by Tim Spencer), "Room Full of Roses."

By March, 1974, "Roses" was a hit in Houston, and had been picked up for national distribution by Playboy Records. Gilley was surprised, elated, a bit nervous and, yes, hungry too. You could see it in his eyes then—a spooky sort of thing that seemed to ask "Is this it?" while wondering if maybe, once again, he wasn't just getting his hopes up for nothing.

"I don't know how to explain it," he said then. "I've tried, you know, all these years to come up with a hit record and nothing happened . . . and now this. It's weird. I don't think my style has changed all that much. Back when I started, they were calling it 'rock and roll' or 'teenybopper' music,

but basically I feel like I'm playing the same kind of music I always have. If 'Room Full of Roses' hits, I don't know what I'll do, but I'm ready for it," he laughed.

"See, only two things have bothered me during my career. One is that I've never been able to sell records nationally. If I could have sold them nationwide the way I have in Houston, I would have been a star years ago. Then, the second thing is this constant comparing me with Jerry Lee. That's been the biggest drawback in my career, I think. And . . . yeah, it's the thing that's hurt me most, because it's something I can't help. Mainly, it's because we grew up together, you know. I mean, when I do one of Jerry's tunes, I intentionally try to do it like he does. *But*—when I turn around and do something he's never done, people still say, 'Aw, he sounds like Jerry Lee,' and that really hurts.

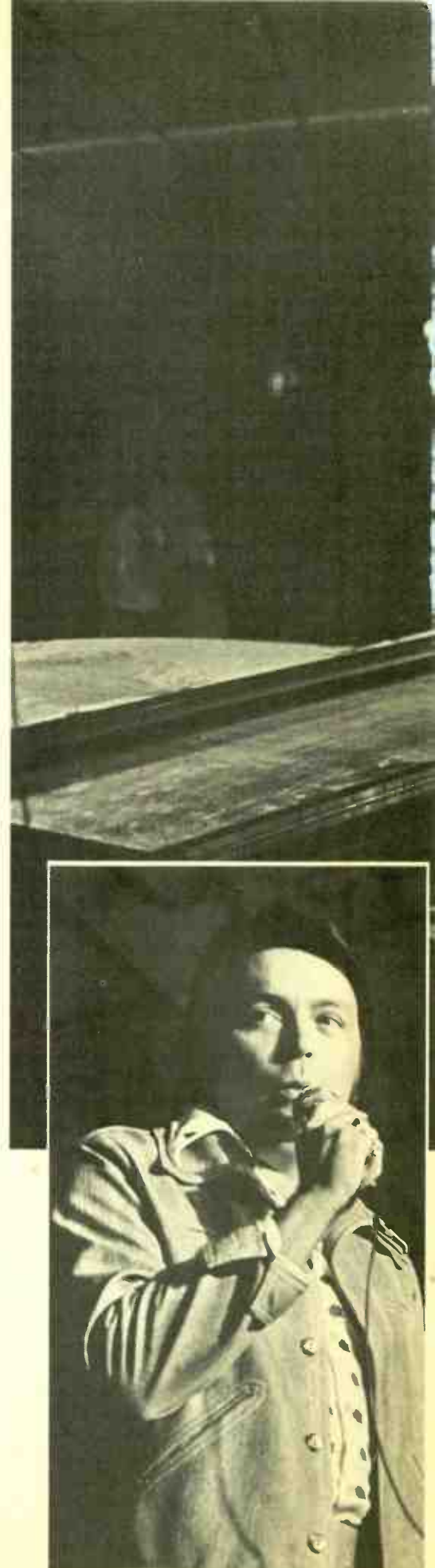
"Then there's another side to the problem, because some people don't believe that we're cousins. They think I'm just some guy up there imitating him. A year and a half ago, I went out to see Jerry when he was playing at the Winchester Club, and he had me come up onstage with him. He introduced me as his cousin and we sang 'Drinking Champagne' together. That helped to convince some people that we're really kin, but, in the long run, the comparison to him has definitely hurt me."

Gilley winced a bit, shook his head sadly and said, "Wanna know something else? After all these years, that night at the Winchester was the first time Jerry ever asked me to come onstage with him. The very first time . . ."

* * *

That pain is gone now, forgotten in the rush of success that Gilley's enjoyed since "Room Full of Roses" climbed to the top of the national charts. He took to the road immediately, touring with the likes of Conway Twitty, Loretta Lynn and Cal Smith, acquiring confidence and polish as he went along. Then he followed "Roses" with a solid string of hits, including "I Overlooked an Orchid," "City Lights," "Window Up Above," "Bouquet of Roses" and "Overnight Sensation."

He acquired a national audience and kept his old Texas fans simply by continuing on in the same style he'd used all those years on Spencer Highway. The music was still full of that





Ol' Mickey's been pounding the keys at Gilley's Club in Pasadena, Texas, since 1971, becoming one of the highest paid regional stars in the business in the process. Then he recorded "Room Full of Roses" as a favor for a friend who owned some jukeboxes and Presto!—he became Mickey Gilley, "overnight sensation." He doesn't get to spend much time with wife Vivian, left, but she doesn't mind—"He's waited so very long," she says.

piano-pumping, highly danceable rhythm, and the material was still split evenly between up-tempo, uncomplicated rockers and soulful heart songs that were meant to be sung in smokey places. That was the clincher for Houston country fans—that “old Mickey” had made it by being himself. His albums were full of things he’d showcased in club performances throughout his career (such as his tersely rocking version of Stonewall Jackson’s “Don’t Be Angry”), and some of the tracks were re-makes of things Mickey had cut way back in his own rock and roll past (such as “Where Do You Go To Lose A Heartache”).

No, the music hadn’t changed, and, from all appearances, neither had the man. On those rare trips back home, he still drove his pickup out to the club, still hung out with the same old cronies; still, in fact, seemed the embodiment of a doubleknit “kicker” who not only believed in, but actually cherished his middle class values.

In essence, the 38-year-old Gilley’s personality remained surprisingly, well, *normal*. He was devoted to his wife and four children, liked to play

golf, didn’t mind a drink or two but never got drunk, liked to have good-natured arguments with his friends but never seemed to get angry. He remained, in short, the kind of unaffected star fan club presidents dream of—a “nice guy” who would never cause a scandal. Mickey, in fact, is as well socialized as his Killer cousin is wild. Nobody remembers the last time Mickey hit someone.

If success has changed him in any way, it has only been to provide him with a new-found sense of security. Now, when he comes off the road long enough to play “The Club” he seems content to the point of blissfulness, a man seemingly devoid of worries.

“Right now, my only real complaint is with Playboy, because I don’t think they’re promoting my records right,” he says. “We’ve had some differences with them. It was their idea for me to do that duet record, ‘Roll You Like a Wheel,’ with Barbi Benton, and that was definitely a *mistake!* But,” Gilley sighs, “you can’t have everything. Right?”

A moment later, he’s on his way to the stage to begin his second set of the night for the home town crowd. He

stops by a table near the front door and manages to get in a few words with his blonde wife, Vivian, before the fans start closing in again.

“I don’t get to see as much of him as I’d like to anymore,” Vivian says, “but Mickey waited so long, you know—all those years—for a break, and now that it’s happened, he feels like he’s got to get out on the road as much as possible. I think his spending all of those years here in a sit-down job is one reason he’s not tired of traveling yet. He waited so long for it—so *very* long.”

Mickey’s gone again now, off towards the stage. Vivian watches the crowd close around her husband, then quietly goes back to her seat at the table where Gilley records, tapes, t-shirts and bumper stickers are sold. With Mickey on the road so much these days, Vivian devotes her time to the children and to running the newly-formed Mickey Gilley Fan Club.

As she supervises this retail end of the star business, we hear a fan shout to the now-invisible Mickey: “Goin’ back to work tonight, Mickey?”

“Ahhhhh, this isn’t work,” Mickey replies. “This is HOME!” ■

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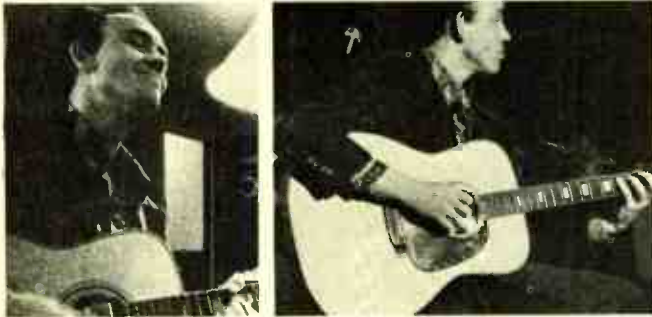


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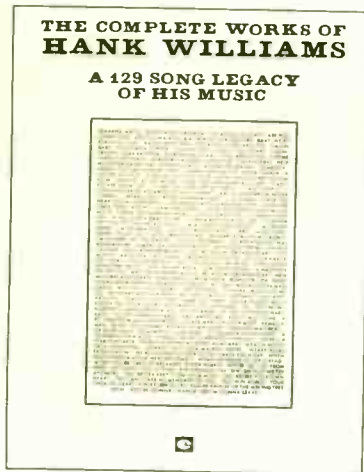


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Mystics

(Continued from page 44)

had. He did a fairly long article for the Sunday magazine section of the local paper he worked for, detailing the ins and outs of the recording stars who have an in to getting out of this world. The newspaper story told how the reporter heard mysterious sounds, saw strange and scary lights and other sights and got pretty well spooked. That reporter's story never so much as dropped a hint that the spirit sights and sounds conjured up by John D. (on cue at that) were anything but the real thing. If spirits were trying to communicate from the other side at that particular seance, they probably got drowned out by calculated sound effects and electric light tricks triggered by Boyce and Byron, John D.'s pals who hid out in the bushes around the house.

* * *

Ironically, one person who says she doesn't believe in spiritualism is the woman to whom Horton was married when he died, Billie Jean Horton. She never discredited any claims or beliefs that Johnny expressed, but she admits now that she doesn't feel the same way he did about it all. And her late husband told her (like he told the others) that he would be in touch from the grave. Billy Jean just smiles and says, "So far I ain't heard a word."

Merle Kilgore admits also that he hasn't heard a word from Johnny, either, but he says he hears something from somewhere. He calls them the "little voices," and he swears that he always heeds what the "little voices" say. Something on the order of the voice of your conscience, Merle's little voices have been speaking to him off and on for the past several years.

"Those little voices have saved my life . . . literally, many, many times," Kilgore declares strongly. "You know, it could be something like, 'Don't go to this place or that.' So I don't go. Later on I find out that if I had gone, something disastrous would have happened to me. Maybe an accident. Bad luck financially or career-wise. Or maybe some dreadful consequence would have struck my family."

This writer had a brush with Merle and his little voices.

Kilgore was headlining at one of the top Nashville night clubs in Printers Alley a few years ago when I dropped in just briefly to give him something.

I had come across one of the few copies of a Tom Jones recording of "Ring of Fire." Only deejay copies of that record got out before the label put something else out instead.

When I got inside the club, Merle was between sets but obviously tied up in a conversation with a group of people that I didn't know. I was in a hurry so I scribbled a note on the envelope I had the record in, stepped up to where Merle was sitting, handed him the envelope, and told him I'd see him later.

"Later" turned out to be *much* later—two or three weeks, to be exact. Stepping out of the bright summer sunshine into the pitch blackness of a barely lighted record row watering hole called Wally's (a food and drink hangout lounge for the music crowd), I heard a booming voice hollering my name. Floundering over tables, people, chairs and what have you, I stumbled over toward the voice. Suddenly big chunky hands grabbed my shoulders and Merle was greeting me like he was doing the welcome home scene from "Gone With The Wind."

His booming voice dropped to the conversational deep-throated Kilgore roar as he said, "My boy, my boy! You don't know how glad I am to see you."

Then he was stuffing a couple of bills in my shirt pocket, talking all the while. "Man, I tried to find you . . . I couldn't figure out where you went." I was trying to get the dollar bills out of my pocket.

Merle wasn't going for it. Still talking, still stuffing the money back into the shirt pocket, he said, "I even sent people out to find you."

I started getting the drift as he was saying, "Right after you gave me the envelope with the Tom Jones record I left those people I was talking to and started up those three stairs going up to the dressing room at the club, when all of a sudden I just stopped. And I heard the voices. They were saying, 'Find Midnight and give him \$25.'"

I had the envelope with the \$25 in my hand now. I figured I would give him one more chance to keep it.

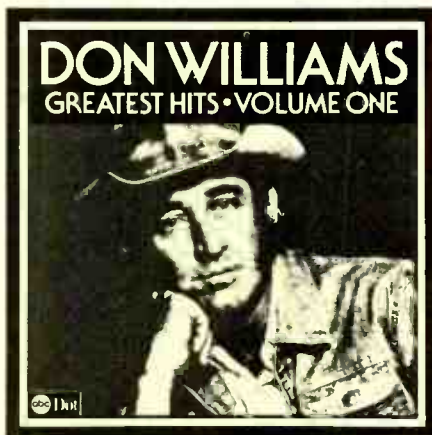
Merle pushed my hand away and shook his head. "No, man, you keep it. You know I never go against the little voices." He paused, then roared as he pounded the table with a big fist. "Keep the \$25, Midnite. I'm just thankful the little voices didn't say 'Give Midnite a hundred dollars!'"

I've never been quite sure whether I believe in Merle's little voices. But I kept his money. ■

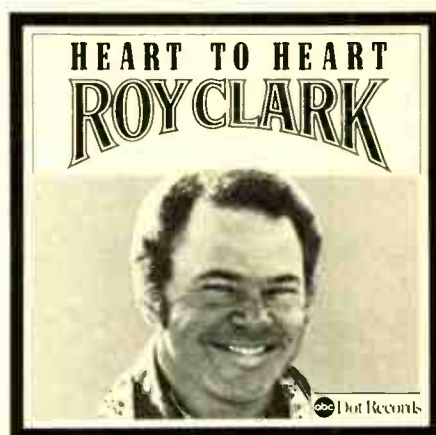
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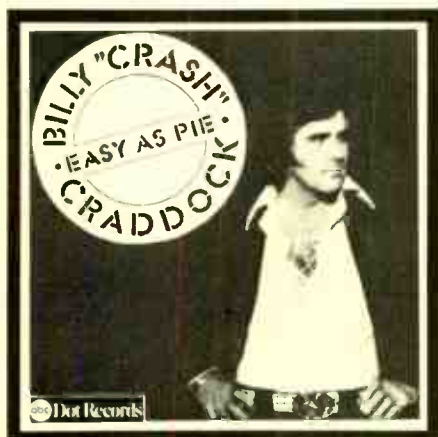
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BOOKS

(Continued from page 30)

Wills and Jimmie Rodgers, a Loretta Lynn autobiography, a new illustrated history of country music, a monster called *Living Legends and Dying Metaphors*, and others. Some will be good, some will be great, and some will be awful. All of them will be more fun to read than *War and Peace* (1869).

Turn to page 34 for special discounts on 7 of the books discussed in this article.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Chet Atkins, *Country Gentleman*, Henry Regnery Co., 180 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. 60601.

Johnny Cash, *Man in Black*, \$6.95, Zondervan Pub., 1415 Lake Drive, S.E., Grand Rapids, Mich. 49506.

Babs H. Deal, *High Lonesome World: Death of a Country Singer*, Doubleday & Co., Inc., 245 Park Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

William Price Fox, *Ruby Red*, \$6.95, Lippincott Co., 521 Fifth Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

Linnell Gentry, *A History and Encyclopedia of Country, Western and Gospel*

Music, \$24.50, Scholarly Press, 22929 Industrial Drive, E., St. Claire Shores, Mich. 48080.

Ken Griffis, *Hear My Song: The Story of the Celebrated Sons of the Pioneers*, John Edwards Memorial Foundation, Folklore and Mythology Center, University of California, Los Angeles, Calif. 90024.

John Grissim, *Country Music: White Man's Blues*, Warner's Paperback Library, 75 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N.Y. 10019.

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Bill C. Malone, *Country Music U.S.A.*, \$15.95 (hardbound); \$4.95 (paper), University of Texas Press, P.O. Box 7819, University Station, Austin, Tex. 78712.

Bill C. Malone, *Stars of Country Music*, \$10, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, Ill. 61801.

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Irwin Stambler, *Encyclopedia of Folk, Country, and Western Music*, \$17.50, St. Martin's Press, Inc., 175 Fifth Ave., New York, N.Y. 10010.

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Roger Williams, *Sing a Sad Song: The Life of Hank Williams*, paper, \$1.75, Ballantine Books Inc., 201 E. 50th St., New York, N.Y. 10022; hardbound, Doubleday & Co., Inc., 245 Park Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017. ■

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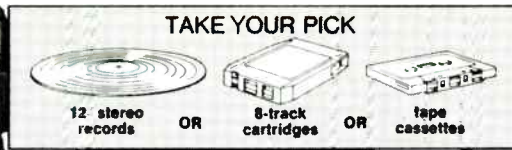
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