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COUNTRY MUSICTM

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Letters

Thank you for fighting to bring back *Country Music Magazine* to the subscribers. I hope I can be the first to respond to the comeback of the magazine. First, I loved the little tidbit (in the September/October issue) on the Parton family. I would like to see more about Dolly in an interview. I do have one complaint. I don't like the record review she got from John Pugh. He's the only one I have read that had something bad to say about *Burlap & Satin*. It's been getting good reviews. I get very sensitive on the topic of Dolly. I love her so much.

Tracey White
Jamaica, New York

We love Dolly, too, as we've said many times, in many ways, in this magazine. However, when our reviewers reach their independent conclusions about a record, we don't change what they say. Theirs is not the only valid opinion, which is why we like people like you to challenge our reviews, if you disagree, and why we print your letters.

As much as we love all the letters of praise in connection with the "new" Country Music, someday the honeymoon will be over and it will be time to get back to work, so the more opinions of all kinds we hear from readers, such as expressed in your letter and in the letters below, the more valuable the Letters section will be to everybody. Thanks.—R.D.B.

Now you're probably going to think that I'm a fan who's going to put you down for giving Dolly's album, *Burlap & Satin*, a bad review. But I'm not, although I do think it is one of her best albums. I am going to put you down for saying, "Perhaps Dolly has gotten to a place now where she really... doesn't even have to try." If you don't like the record, fine. But to put in something so cruel about an artist is something else. Next time think before saying things that could cause hurt feelings, especially about someone like Dolly Parton, who always tries her best.

Michael Craft
Orangeburg, New York

I have recently received my first two issues of *Country Music*. The first was your September/October issue, which I enjoyed reading with the exception of the review of Waylon's *It's Only Rock & Roll*

album, written by John Morthland. In the review, Morthland writes, "Despite the occasional catchy single, his albums were badly overproduced." He goes on to say, "Waylon's voice is strained and not up to the task in a few places." My first reaction when I read the review was to write you a nasty letter and cancel my subscription. Within two days I received my second issue, November/December. This has a very good photo of Waylon on the cover with a good article written by Bob Allen. The article was not hostile, like a lot of articles I have read on Waylon. After reading this article, I have decided to give your magazine another chance.

In my opinion Waylon Jennings is the best performer around. I own forty of his albums now, and will continue buying any album that I can find that I don't have. There isn't a song on any of the albums that I have, that I don't like. They are all done very well. I've seen him in concert three times and enjoyed each and every one. His San Carlos show at the Circle Star Theatre was the first I saw. Waylon had the flu, but went on anyway and put on a hell of a show. Every time I see him makes me want to see him all the more.

I have yet to read an article that gives him the review he deserves. I've always said, anyone who doesn't like Waylon's music has never listened to it. *Really listened.*

Christi Underwood
Santa Cruz, California

P.S. I noticed in your November/December issue that Johnny Cash, another of my favorites, reads your magazine. Maybe Waylon does too, and you could suggest to both of them that they get together again on a duet album.

I can't believe I'm getting *Country Music* again! But I am! Two copies came this past week! I didn't stir from my chair until I had read them cover to cover—I was so starved for this kind of coverage.

Could we have an article on Con Hunley? Around St. Louis (my niece says), he's H-O-T. But around here, the D.J.s say "Who?" when someone requests a record.

Anyway, Praise the Lord and pass the *Country Music Magazine!*

Bernadine Ray
Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin

I *loved* the editor's comments about Bill Monroe on page 58 of the November/December issue. That *Master of Bluegrass* album is so beautiful, it will almost make you cry. I saw Bill Monroe at a jamboree last month, and in a crowd of two or three thousand when just he and his bass player played "My Last Days on Earth." I think you could've heard a pin drop. It's lovely on the album, but with only mandolin and bass it put chills down your spine.

The article on Ray Charles was good, too. While I've never *met* him, I have had the chance to talk to him a little on the phone. I'm senior switchboard operator at the hotel where Mr. Charles stayed when he performed in Tampa last year. We frequently have musical groups stay in the hotel. I must tell you that, at least on the phone to a hotel switchboard operator, Mr. Charles is one of the nicest, most polite, cleanest talking stars I've ever met. You wouldn't believe some of the language I've heard from other "stars." I love country and western and bluegrass music, and the stars in those areas almost always are exceptionally nice and polite.

While I can't afford \$12 to \$15 for a two-to-three-hour concert at a civic center (would love to have seen Ricky and the Whites recently in Lakeland, Florida), I do attend all the bluegrass jamborees I can, and I'm one of the "parking lot pickers" too... a little bit of mandolin... and I've written a couple of songs.

I'm one of the hundred or so volunteers at a local, non-commercial, listener-sponsored FM stereo radio station in Tampa. Occasionally I fill in for one of the bluegrass disc jockeys. The station plays bluegrass Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday from 4:00 to 6:30 p.m. On Tuesdays in that time slot, the volunteer DJ plays "country music memories." This past Tuesday he played a two-and-a-half hour tribute to Marty Robbins. I especially enjoyed your recent article on Marty.

I realize you're not *Bluegrass Unlimited*, but how about an issue on those folks who *are* bluegrass or have bluegrass backgrounds—like Ricky Skaggs, Emmylou, Vern Gosdin, Bill Monroe, the Earl Scruggs Review, the Louvins, the Osbornes, Mac Wiseman, the Seldom Scene, the Country Gentlemen, Hot Rize, Alabama, David Grisman, Chris Hill-

man, Tony Trischka, Mark O'Conner. Even Bob Dylan and Buffy St. Marie have songs that are used frequently by bluegrass groups.

Genie Houghtaling
Tampa, Florida

Several of these items are on our list. So keep watching these pages. For example, the article by Charles Wolfe in this issue's Essential Collector covers some of your points.—Ed.

Concerning Merle Haggard's album, *That's the Way Love Goes*, John Morthland really offended me, as I know he's bound to have offended a lot of Merle Haggard fans. He stated that all through the album the songs were supposed to be about Leona Williams, Merle's ex-wife. How does he know that? If that's the case, every recording artist that ever recorded a love song was singing about his wife or girl friend.

John Morthland said that Merle Haggard used to shamelessly imitate Lefty Frizzell. In Merle Haggard's mind he wasn't imitating Lefty Frizzell; he was paying tribute to Lefty. Lefty Frizzell played Bakersfield when Merle was only eighteen years old, and Lefty called him up on the stage and let him sing to a packed auditorium when Merle was a nobody. Lefty was Merle's idol. To this

day when Lefty's brother mentions Merle Haggard, he calls him the Great Mighty Merle Haggard.

I bought the album *That's the Way Love Goes* and think it's one of the best albums Merle ever made. Furthermore, I think he's the greatest country singer that ever sang a country song.

Junior Cox
Cousin of Lefty Frizzell
Tipton, California

Thank you so much for publishing *Country Music*. I received the first issue today. It is *fantastic*. The day I received your letter saying you were starting publication again was a happy one for me. I mailed my check in right away. I subscribed to a tabloid paper about country music, but it just doesn't keep me informed about what is going on like your magazine does.

Opal Osbirn
Florence, Alabama

We are going to have to send all these letters in to the Pulitzer Prize committee, or something. Thanks for your good review.—Ed.

What a pleasant gift for Christmas: my first copy of *Country Music Magazine*. And my main favorite on the cover, Mr. Waylon Jennings. Fantastic story. Record

reviews were very good. Have Hank Jr.'s, Waylon's, Johnny's, but didn't hear a thing about the new Bill Monroe album. Will run out tomorrow and buy it. Sounds like my kind of music.

Keep up the good work.

Donna Church
Duluth, Minnesota

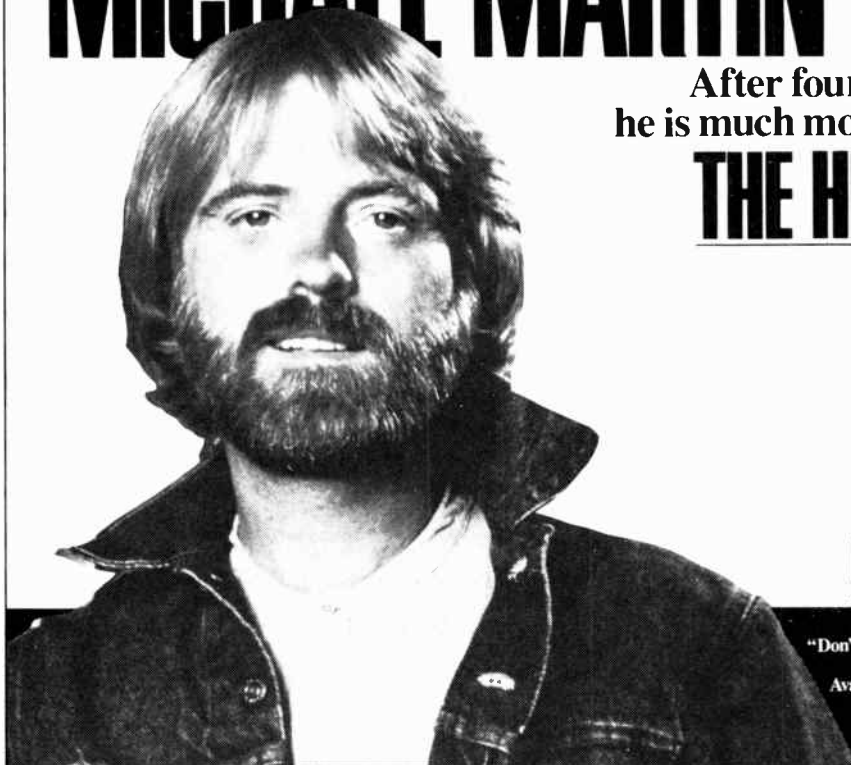
I can't tell you how very pleased I am that *Country Music* is being published again, and want to thank you for keeping my old subscription in force. When I got the September/October issue from the mailbox, I couldn't wait to start reading it. Today my November/December issue came, and I am ecstatic. It's like renewing an old friendship.

I love Willie Nelson, so publish any bit of information on him you possibly can. I read with disbelief that he had been sued for running over on a concert at a state fair. How asinine can people be? I only hope and pray it wasn't the Illinois State Fair, for I would be forever shamed. He did run over there once. We had tickets for the second show, which was to start at 9:00. Willie didn't finish the first show until almost 11:00 and immediately went into the second while we were still finding our seats. He performed without stopping until almost 1:30 A.M. When his bus pulled out of the parking lot, we were still standing applauding. Willie is

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asked to come back to our fair every year, and every performance every year is a complete sellout. Don't that say it all?

Johnny Cash is also a big favorite of mine. I have belonged to his Fan Club for a number of years and don't ever miss seeing his concerts if they are in reasonable traveling distance.

Keep bringing us all the news of the entertainers and what's going on in the business.

Betty Anderson
Peoria Heights, Illinois

We'll try. Thanks to you, we have now heard—and printed—another interesting story about Willie. —Ed.

I can't believe my good fortune—to receive two issues of *Country Music Magazine* in two days. September/October and November/December! After the dearth of country music information the past two years or so, it's so welcome.

And to see Waylon's smiling face on the November/December issue is well worth the wait. I've been so tired of the mean-looking pictures that have been printed for so long. Also, you've blessed us with several good record reviews about Waylon's music (and Willie's, of course), plus the special interview with Waylon, and also the retrospective of the original "Outlaws" article. It's like the

best Christmas present in the world. Thanks so much.

I'm a very old fan of Waylon's, both in age (67) and in years as a fan (20). And I sure am happy to see him recuperating, and getting back some of his old charm. Many of his fans agree with me, I'm sure. Our hearts were aching for him, and his problems were almost like ours.

Dave Hickey got right to the point when he said his record collection was like a non-prescription drug cabinet. I couldn't have expressed it any better. I firmly believe the main reason I'm a happy, healthy "senior" is because I play records a lot of my spare time, and escape in the music, if I need an escape. Mostly I just enjoy music and prefer that as my source of entertainment. No soap operas for me!

Thanks again for reactivating *Country Music Magazine*.

Jean Butler
A long-time subscriber

We can't improve on how you've put it. Thanks for writing. —Ed.

Just received my first copy of *Country Music*, and it was superb. All the stories were fantastic, and thank you for having Waylon Jennings on the front cover. He is my No. 1 Country Singer! I never put my magazine down until I had read it all.

Congratulations!

One thing I did notice, though. In the People section, you have Tony Geary listed as being on *One Life to Live*. That should be *General Hospital*.

Also, could you let us know what has happened to Johnny Paycheck and Freddy Fender? Haven't heard anything about them for a long time.

Bes Lammert
Grand Island, Nebraska

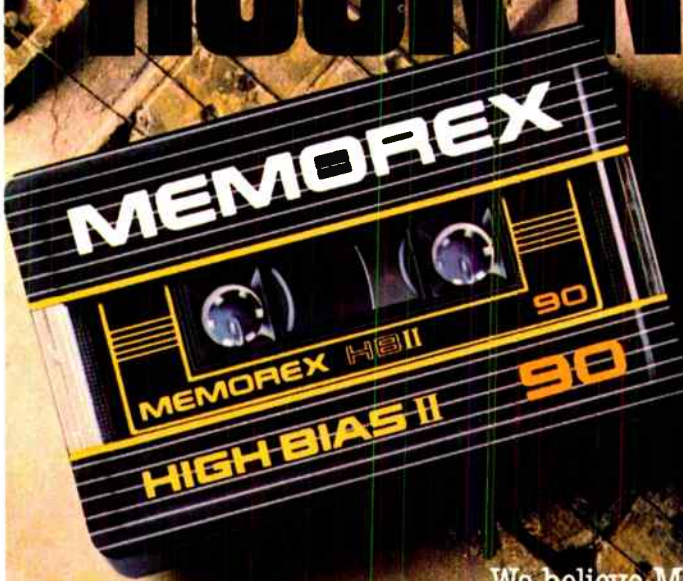
You are not the only one to write us about Tony Geary. Is our face red! As for Johnny Paycheck and Freddy Fender, stay tuned. —Ed.

It sure felt good to be receiving *Country Music Magazine* again. I have saved all the copies for years. However, that article about Kenny Rogers not including love scenes with Linda Evans in *The Gambler II* almost gagged me. Ole Ken better wish he could make "make-believe" love to such a beautiful and talented person. She's probably grateful she doesn't have to go through that ordeal! I bet Marianne isn't too worried!

Pauline Moye
Miami, Florida

We agree that Linda Evans is impressive. But so is Kenny—he had a principle and stuck to it. —Ed.

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Thank you so much for resurrecting *Country Music Magazine*. I have received the first two issues and enjoy them immensely.

My favorite entertainers, for years, have been the Statler Brothers. I still like them, but miss Lew DeWitt's beautiful voice. Could you please print an article about him, and maybe a picture, and let us know how he is and what he is doing?

Catherine Young
Safford, Arizona

Watch the People section.—Ed.

I don't mean to be prejudiced, but I hope that Alabama keeps winning everything. Randy Owen, the lead singer, is my third cousin, and they are my very favorite group. Next to them is Conway Twitty. I love him. And as for women, there's Barbara Mandrell. She's so sweet and pretty. And I like Janie Fricke and her album, *It Ain't Easy*. So I just hope Alabama and Barbara Mandrell stay winners. We're rooting for them in Alabama.

Lynn Tucker
Glen Allen, Alabama

If you're prejudiced, Lynn, a lot of other people are too. So far, Alabama is the leader in our Country Music Society of America poll, and Barbara Mandrell and Janie Fricke are right up there too!—Ed.

Thanks so much for sending my issue of *Country Music*. I really enjoyed it and am looking forward to many, many more. I enjoy reading about all the stars, many of whom I have seen. I would like to read about some of the people that I've seen and enjoyed in the past, but they seem to be forgotten with all the new stars that are making it. I especially like Billy "Crash" Craddock, and would like to hear more about him. Also Charlie Rich, Freddy Fender, and Narvel Felts. How is Donna Fargo doing?

I went to Fan Fair this year, and it was just great.

Thanks again for publishing *Country Music Magazine*. It's a way to stay close to country music and its stars.

Pat White
Dundee, Michigan

I was saddened by the recent news of the death of Merle Travis. I, as well as many thousands, had the pleasure of meeting him. I talked with him on two occasions last year as he played locally. I could tell his health wasn't good, but he still produced excellent shows. His guitar picking was great, the same as I heard on records as a child.

I also had the opportunity of photographing Merle. He told me he was a photographer, and he even used my camera.

The last time I saw him, I gave him a snapshot of him and his manager, Rod Kepler, which he really seemed to appreciate.

I am sending some photos of Merle Travis which I would like you to look over. Maybe you'll see something interesting. I have taken photos of other artists. Some of these include: Johnny Gimble, Willie Nelson, Johnny Bush, Earl Thomas Conley, Jerry Lee Lewis, Floyd Tillman and Steve Young. My best is of Merle Haggard in which the lighting is perfect. It looks like a portrait done in a studio. I also have an excellent one of Leona Williams.



Please, if interested in anything I have, let me know. I am very ambitious and very dedicated to my work, but I would rather be doing it for more than just a hobby.

Terry Stephenson
Hamilton, Texas

From time to time we hear from people like yourself who would like to work for us. Our policy is that our first assignments go to our regular writers and photographers—to help them pay the rent. So, for the present, all we can do is keep your name, and the names of others like you, on file.

At the same time, we are starting the Country Music Society of America Newsletter and are interested in material of various kinds to publish there. For more about what to submit and how to submit it, see the "For Members Only" page later in this issue.

In the meantime, thanks for the photo of you and Merle, which we publish here with your permission. This is the first time we have run a photo in the Letters section.—R.D.B.

I'm so glad you have the original writers back with you. They have the talent to make the interviews interesting. In the last issue of the old subscription, the articles weren't very good, and the cover photo had dropped in quality too. I'm sure it is very hard to do stories about these people and get a different angle on it after so many articles have been written about them. So keep up the good

work. I'm very glad to have you back, not just because I had been gypped out of a lot of money, but because I had enjoyed the magazine so much in the beginning of its run.

Karen Arft
Britton, Michigan

Our writers will be happy to see your letter. As we said in our 10th Anniversary Issue, this magazine is Readers, Writers and Pickers. What makes the difference is that our writers are also fans.—R.D.B.

I don't write fan letters as a rule, but I did want to tell you how much I am enjoying *Country Music*. I had subscribed two years ago, or thereabouts, and it was pitiful. Then it just stopped coming and I said, "Good riddance!" But this is great, thanks to you and your staff.

I have a suggestion to make that would be helpful to those of us who are newcomers. If you could print a calendar for coming events and the person to contact for more information, it would help—such as the Jimmie Rodgers Week in Meridian, Nashville Music Association Entertainment Expo '84, etc. Could you work on that?

Bonnie N. Pyle
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Such information is available on the Country Music Foundation's 1984 Calendar and is also in the Answer Book which all Country Music Society of America members receive and which other subscribers may order from the magazine.—Ed.

A friend of mine loaned me her first two issues of *Country Music*. When I started reading them, I could not put them down until I had read each of them from cover to cover. I am enclosing an application for membership in the Country Music Society of America. I can't wait to start receiving my own copies of this great magazine. Please tell me how I can get my own copies of the issues I have missed. I would like to have a complete library, and my friend wants to keep hers intact.

Delez Martin
Paris, Tennessee

Send us \$2.25 for each issue you would like, and we will mail them to you.—Ed.

Stop Reading Now

Your letters are interesting in themselves. More important, they help us know how to develop the magazine for the future. So don't finish this issue without sitting down and writing us a letter. We write for you; you write for us too!—R.D.B.

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Miller's King of the Road • Tom T. Hall's Homecoming • Dolly Parton's Coat of Many Colors • Merle Haggard's Mama Tried • Loretta Lynn's Coal Miners Daughter • Tammy Wynette's D-i-v-o-r-c-e • and 117 more!

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People

THAT'S ENTERTAINMENT

Sesame Jamboree, a ninety-minute show featuring **The Muppets** of Sesame Street, currently in its second season, played in Nashville recently. So what's country about Big Bird and Bert and Ernie? Well, added to their regular line-up are two very decidedly country characters, **Wooly Nelson** and **Furlin Wailin** and their **Blue Fur Mountain Band**. They play oversized instruments including a washboard, a tambourine, a saw, a guitar, a banjo, a fiddle and the world's largest harmonica. Furlin dubs Wooly and himself "the wild and crazy guys of country music." Watch for it. The production runs through May and might turn up in your town soon.

When we first told you about the **Dolly Parton/Sylvester Stallone** movie project, "Rhinestone," in our September/October issue, we reported that Dolly was the musical director of the film and was writing the original musical score and supervising its production. Well, it seems that she has gotten some of her family and friends involved in the project. Her brothers **Randy** and **Floyd** will sing vocals on one song for the soundtrack and will also appear on screen singing "Waltz Me to Heaven." Also lending their voices are the **Jordanaires** and **David Cobb** and **Speck Rhodes**. **Karen Brooks** didn't get a part herself, but her son **Luken** and her husband **Jack Lawrence** will appear as extras.

As CMM went to press, Dolly's new album *The Great Pretender* was due out from RCA, her single "Save the Last Dance for Me" was out already, and she had been nominated for two Grammys.

Meanwhile, on the small screen, both **Waylon Jennings** and **Janie Fricke** appeared on *Late Night with David Letterman* in New York City not too long ago. Waylon was in good spirits. He sang one song for Letterman, and talked about

When it comes to taking your boy on vacation, who better to visit than Mickey and Minnie? That's Waylon on the opposite page with his son Shooter at Disney World.



Wooly and Furlin and the Blue Fur Mountain Band.

his early career with **Buddy Holly**. When Janie appeared on the show a few weeks later, she sang "Tell Me a Lie" and "He's a Heartache" with two back-up singers and Letterman's house band, **Laurie Leonard**, a member of Letterman's staff, told CMM that Janie was "real up" and the audience reaction was "great."

Yes, that is **Priscilla Presley** you've been seeing on *Dallas* lately. Presley has taken on the very meaty role of Jenna Wade, Bobby Ewing's girlfriend, on the popular nighttime soap. Priscilla was also a guest on *The Tonight Show*, while an unusually humble **Joan Rivers** hosted. When Joan asked Priscilla what it was like to have been married to The King (and wanted details), a very self-assured Priscilla said, "Let's have lunch." Must be too much to give away on nighttime TV. Priscilla also said that she's active in maintaining Graceland, her former husband's mansion.

Speaking of Graceland, officials there are planning to clean up the neighborhood surrounding it. They plan a \$1 million face-lift of the small shopping center across Elvis Presley Boulevard. The center is currently owned by a group

of Kansas City investors and will now be managed by the Graceland Corp. Under the terms of the new agreement, Graceland will have an option to purchase the property in ten years.

The King is still the King in Brooklyn, New York, where he is first in the heart, musically speaking, of Brooklyn resident **Diane Pullman**. Almost single-handedly, Diane carried on a campaign to establish Elvis's birthday as Elvis Presley Day throughout New York State. Finally the governor agreed and a proclamation was signed. The local celebration was held this past January 8th at a Brooklyn restaurant with entertainment by a local rock group. As reported in the *New York Sunday News*, Governor Cuomo's favorite Elvis song is "Love Me Tender."

IN THE GROOVE

Gus Hardin has been working long and hard in the Muscle Shoals studio with producer **Rick Hall**. Hall says that this is probably the hardest album he's cut in two years because the pressure was on to follow up on Gus's successful first album.

by Rochelle Friedman and Helen Barnard

People



What do Terri Gibbs, Barbara Mandrell, Dolly Parton, Janie Fricke, Rosanne Cash and Leona Williams have in common? Well, they are all tentatively scheduled to record duet cuts with George Jones. Like the Mandrell/Greenwood album, this one is a ten-song album starring George and his favorite ladies. Leona is currently writing the song she and George will record, and word has it that the first person George picked to appear with him on the project was Terri.

Songwriter and long-time Opry star **Billy Walker** has co-written and recorded a new song, "He Sang the Songs about El Paso," in honor of **Marty Robbins**. Marty and Billy were good professional friends. When they worked together, they "played off of each other," Billy said recently. The *Marty Robbins Spotlight* show they did together was the most frequently re-run show of that entire series, according to Billy. The song, co-written by Billy and songwriters **Ronnie Cochran**, **Dominic Carestia** and **Van Manakas**, is out on Billy's own Tall Texan label. He says he is receiving "hundreds of orders." Asked why he decided to make the record, in which he has invested his own money, Billy said, "Not enough of a commemorative nature has been done about Marty. I enjoyed not only his singing—he was a very great singer—but also his songwriting. Marty did not ever get *all* the awards he deserved. In those days, and this goes back thirty years, even in this business a person had to *work* for everything." The new song refers to many of Marty's greatest songs, including "El Paso," "El Paso City," "My Woman, My Woman, My Wife" and one that Billy has sung many times on the Opry, "You Gave Me a Mountain." On the anniversary of Marty's death, this past December 8th, his fellow NASCAR drivers played a tape of the song at their national convention at the

Waldorf Astoria in New York.

Alabama's new album, *Roll On*, includes the trucker song "Roll On, Eighteen Wheeler." So, with that in mind, Alabama has been selected to be part of a special promotion with *American Trucker Magazine*. A picture of the boys wearing *American Trucker* tee-shirts will be put on posters in truckstops across the country.

EVERYTHING HAPPENS IN LAS VEGAS

Las Vegas must be a lucky town for the **Oak Ridge Boys**. **William Lee Golden** recently became engaged to marry **Louetta Calloway**, a model from that city, whom he has been dating for about a year.

Readers who plan to visit Vegas, and want to have lunch there with **Eddie Rabbitt**, will get the chance. The MGM Grand Hotel has a new menu selection titled "Reaching for the Stars," and the number one entry is called "Eddie Rabbitt." It's a ham, turkey and cheese sandwich. Other stars listed on the menu include **Clark Gable**, **Jimmy Durante** and **Donna Summer**.

The **Statler Brothers** made a landmark appearance in Vegas in February when they made their debut headlining engagement there, with **Reba McEntire** opening their show.

ON THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

When **George Jones** sneezes, everybody hears it. At least that's how it seems. George had to cancel a show at a Houston club after he fell ill with an upset stomach. He was taken to the hospital, but the complaint wasn't serious enough for him to be admitted. But reporters from newspapers around the country found out about it, and word got out that George had cancelled again. Wonder what would happen if George came down with the measles?

Johnny Cash "Dies" on Operating Table. That was the headline on a recent *National Enquirer* article. "Johnny Cash actually 'died' on the operating table for nearly a minute when his heart stopped during recent emergency surgery for bleeding ulcers," the article began. An anonymous "hospital staff member" was quoted: "Cash died for 45 seconds."

The article went on to describe most of the facts accurately: that Cash was hospitalized with severe blood poisoning, apparently due to a spider bite received in England a few days earlier; that the bleeding ulcers were discovered and surgery performed; that the blood poisoning and blood loss had left Cash very weak before the surgery, and that all this

STRAIGHT SHOOTERS

Minnesota Fats and **Johnny Rodriguez**? We're not hustling you. They were just shooting the breeze and shooting pool when Minnesota was in Nashville not too long ago for the Music City Pool Tournament. They shot a few friendly rounds together before Minnesota took up his stick professionally. Johnny has also been warming the winter nights with songs from his new album, *Foolin' With Fire*, which is due out this spring.



People



Speaking of give-aways, Emmylou Harris recently donated her guitar to the *Styles of Country Music* exhibit at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum. There are six styles featured, including bluegrass, Western swing, cajun, honky tonk, cowboy and contemporary music. Emmylou, of course, falls in the contemporary category, which changes yearly to reflect the most current trends of the music, and includes personal items of the hottest country music artists. Pictured with Emmylou are Diana Johnson and Bill Ivey of the Foundation.

would require a slow recovery.

The interesting part of all this is that Dr. Harold Dennison, who performed the surgery, says that Cash's heart did not stop. We asked Roger Capetini of the *Enquirer* for a reaction to Dr. Dennison's denial, and he said the *Enquirer* had been unable to get a comment from the doctor but had gotten their information from "someone who was in the operating room." This may be making headlines out of molehills!

Two weeks later, when the article appeared, Cash was well enough to be off to the Betty Ford Center in Palm Springs, California for recuperation. Cash had experienced severe allergic reaction to the heavy doses of painkillers and sedatives his Nashville doctors had used after his stomach surgery, so he chose the Betty Ford Center partly for the Palm Springs climate but mainly for its skills in treating drug-related problems. You guessed it—that gave the *National Enquirer* another molehill to cultivate.

COURTROOM CAPERS

The trouble we heard about in the Frizzell/West corral has now surfaced. As of this writing, both Shelly West and her husband Allen Frizzell are suing each other for divorce. There have been some heavy accusations from both parties, including adultery, illegal spending and drug abuse. Both are charging that

the other has used drugs in the course of their marriage, and Allen stated that Shelly partook of illegal substances in front of their daughter, Tess Marie. Which brings us to the most important subject—custody of the child. Frizzell

wants joint custody, while West has asked for custody and child support from Frizzell. Both parties are denying each other's charges, and waiting for their day in court.

Jerry Lee Lewis has also had his share of courtroom troubles lately. He recently appeared in federal court to give a deposition in a \$2.7 million lawsuit filed against him by a former girlfriend. She charged him with malicious prosecution, false imprisonment, and illegal use of the judicial system to violate her civil rights. She was arrested on charges of stealing a \$40,000 bracelet after she and the Killer broke up, but the charges were later dropped. The suit may go to trial in the spring.

When Ray Charles performed at a concert at the Civic Coliseum in Knoxville, back in 1980, he expected the \$10,000 the Knoxville Association for the Blind had contracted for him. But when he arrived, the group said they did not have the promised ten grand. So, Coliseum officials gave him a City of Knoxville check for the amount to ensure the concert. That settled the matter, right? Wrong. After the performance, the city stopped payment on the check, claiming there had been no valid contract between them. Well, Ray brought the matter to court and it was dismissed. End of story, yes? No. Ray then took the case to the

YOUR FAVORITES' FAVORITES

Last issue we introduced a new section in the People column called "Your Favorites' Favorites," where we included some all-time top choices of albums, artists and songs by Bill Monroe and Larry Gatlin. In this installment we present T.G. Sheppard's and Eddie Rabbit's ten favorite songs. Both of these successful country singers came up with a variety of songs that might be found on anyone's list, country or not.



Eddie Rabbit's tastes range from pop to classical. He listed "Vincent," by Don McLean, John Hartford's "Gentle on my Mind," Ray Charles's "Worried Mind," "When You're in Love With a Beautiful Woman," by Dr. Hook, Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata" (that's class), "If You Could Read My Mind," by Gordon Lightfoot, Jim Croce's "Leroy

Brown," and "Danny Boy." His last two choices were "Beautiful Dreamer" and "Little Sir Echo."



T.G. Sheppard's tastes are a little more straightforward, although as you'll see by his favorites, he chose only three country songs for his top ten. His list: "Help Me Make It Through the Night," "Sailing," "The Theme from *A Summer Place*," "Why Me, Lord" (last issue we told you that this was a favorite of many), "She Works Hard for the Money," "The Look of Love," "The Days of Wine and Roses" (seems that T.G. likes those movie themes), "Diana," "Evergreen" (another movie theme) and "I Will Always Love You."

Next issue we'll find out Lee Greenwood's and Terri Gibbs's favorites. Stay tuned.

People

State Court of Appeals, which reversed the decision and sent the case back to the city for further consideration. When we find out the outcome, we'll let you know.

IN SHAPE

If Ted L. Ridings, a Nashville insurance executive, has anything to do with it, Webb Pierce won't be the only person with a guitar-shaped edifice in his backyard. Ridings says he will submit to the members of the newly formed Governor's Baseball Commission a proposal for a unique guitar-shaped multi-purpose stadium to be erected in the downtown area in Nashville. The real goal is to bring major league baseball to Nashville, but in addition Ridings sees "Pickers' Stadium" as a multi-purpose facility offering a lasting salute to the music industry in Nashville.

Regarding that other guitar-shaped monument owned by Pierce, it (along with his house) is up for sale for about \$1 million.

TIDBITS

Jumping from the frying pan into the fire? Or is it the other way around? We'll let you decide. Singer/songwriter Larry Willoughby spent several years as a member of the Houston Fire Department, but his musical talents won over his fire-fighting activities. Seems that his cousin, a man by the name of Rodney Crowell, suggested that he audition for an opening in Guy Clark's band. Larry took the advice and was hired on the spot.

APRIL 1, 1984—MERLE HAGGARD GIVES GOLD SERVING TRAY AWARD TO LEADING HEAD WAITERS



Seven winners of the coveted Gold Serving Tray award were honored by a special gala presentation from Merle Haggard, this year's awards committee chairman for the prestigious Cowboy Singer and Honky Tonk Pickers Association. Members vote on this award to show that country musicians care about those "without whose tireless efforts, none of this would be possible." The awards were taped for a TV extravaganza which will not be shown in this world. It is, however, being sent in a space capsule to distant galaxies as a part of the Association's never-ending effort to promote country music to people or beings who don't already like it. **APRIL FOOL!**

You knew we were kidding, didn't you? Actually, these CBS Records executives were acknowledging Merle Haggard's Number One status. Since 1981 he has had six Number One singles, one Number One album, and two gold certifications. His Number One singles include "My Favorite Memory," "Big City," "A Taste of Yesterday's Wine," (with George Jones) "Going Where the Lonely Go," "You Take Me for Granted," and "Pancho and Lefty" (a duet with Willie Nelson). Bravo, Merle.

Later, he began writing songs and became affiliated with the Oak Ridge Boys' publishing company, while also doing some background singing with a number of major artists. Today Larry has an album of his own, *Building*

Bridges. The first single, "Heart on the Line (Operator, Operator)" was produced by Rodney and features harmonies by none other than Rosanne Cash. Now, that's hot stuff.

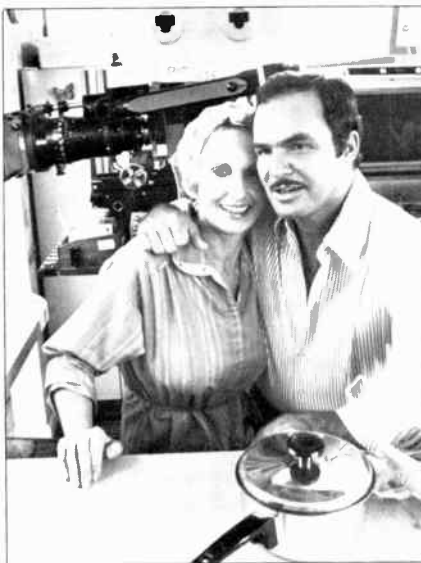
When Larry McBride, manager of the group Atlanta, heard Johnny Cash say that most of the new country music stars haven't even seen a horse, let alone been on one, he thought he'd change the Man in Black's mind. So the group and McBride decided to incorporate all the things that real cowboys do in their new video, *Sweet Country Music*, also the title of their new single. They rode wild broncos, rodeo-style, they had a real-life hoe-down, and then they mounted up on tamer steeds for a short ride through the grounds of Stone Mountain Highway Rodeo Park in Lithonia, Georgia, right outside of (where else?) Atlanta. Now J.R. can see that the members of at least one new group have tried their hands (and other parts) at truly Western activities.

Also keeping Atlanta busy is President Reagan. They performed for him and other dignitaries recently at the Southern Republican Conference in (guess where?) Atlanta.

COOKING ON THE FRONT BURNER

Tammy Wynette and Burt Reynolds are making beautiful music together again—in the kitchen. Tammy is taking the role of Burt's ex-wife in Burt's new film, *Streak*. The two have been snapping the beans you see there on the counter, getting on well together, and enjoying their work in a medium which Tammy finds surprisingly easy and rewarding. Which was no surprise to Burt. "I knew, without doubt, that she would be a terrific actress," he said in a recent interview on the *Nashville Now* cable TV show. The movie, to be released by Universal Pictures, is due out later this year.

COURTESY: KATHY GANOWISCH



People

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY

This March, The Nashville Network celebrates its first anniversary with a sense of good times past and even better times to come. Following a "wait-and-see" period, labels and artists are now giving the Network "tremendous support," Paul Corbin, Director of Programming, told CMM. "It kind of had to evolve. We had to earn their trust." Asked if the artists' appearances on the Network seemed to interfere with their touring, Corbin noted that one seemed to complement the other. "We think it helps ticket sales and bookings and record sales, and the artists seem to think so too."

Nashville Now, the Network's most popular show, will continue, as will *Tumbleweed Theater* and *I-40 Paradise*. Doug Green of *Tumbleweed Theater* told CMM that, "It's every cowboy's dream to grow up and be just like the guys on the Saturday morning TV shows, and our dreams have come true." Green and the other *Riders in the Sky* plan to feature films of Fred Scott, Gene Autry, and Tex Ritter in their shows this year. *I-40 Paradise* may spin off a new weekly show, *Pickin' at the Paradise*, featuring I-40's house band, **The Mighty Notes**. Pilots of the new show ran on TNN in January.

Church Street Station makes its debut this spring. Shows already in production feature Terri Gibbs, Tanya Tucker,

Charlie Rich, Razy Bailey and T.G. Sheppard. Denise Price, winner of the 1982 Wrangler Country Showdown, has joined *Church Street Station* as a regular performer.

In the early stages of planning as CMM went to press were two new series tentatively titled *New Country* and *Country Clips*. And just a gleam in somebody's eye is the idea of a series based in part on the *Ernest Tubb Show* from the early days of color TV, with introductions by E.T.'s son, Justin Tubb.



Louise Mandrell and host Ralph Emery on "Nashville Now," (above right). Cast of "I-40 Paradise," (below).



COURTESY THE NASHVILLE NETWORK

JUNIOR SAMPLES: 1927-1983

No more BR-549; no more 25-cent words mangled beyond recognition; no more weird commentary like "I saw a dawg fall down." Alvin "Junior" Samples, a member of *Hee Haw*'s cast since the show began in 1969, has kicked his last tire. Plagued by heart trouble since 1981, he'd been released from an Atlanta hospital only days before he died of cardiac arrest at his Cumming, Georgia home on Sunday, November 13th, 1983. He was 56 years old.

Samples, who spent much of his life working in a Cumming sawmill, was dragged into performing indirectly through his hobby, fishing. In the Sixties he caught a fish he claimed was the world's biggest largemouth bass. A Georgia game protector recorded his account, and even though a biologist determined it wasn't a large-



mouth bass, Junior's tape wound up on a local radio station. Chart Records released it as a single, and an album's worth of tall tales followed. A second album teaming him with Archie Campbell brought him to the attention of *Hee Haw* producers.

On a show that's become increasingly polished and synthetic, Junior, unlike the rest of the cast, never lost his rough edges. He was the only real link with the rural Southern culture the show tries to emulate. His dry humor and candor lent an invaluable spontaneity to the show. "Ed, what are you doing here?" he once said to guest Ed McMahon, adding, "He ain't country."

On November 15th, Junior was buried at the Sawneeview Memorial Gardens near Cumming. He is survived by his wife Grace, six children and eleven grandchildren.

—RICH KIENZLE

COURTESY THE JOE TAYLOR AGENCY



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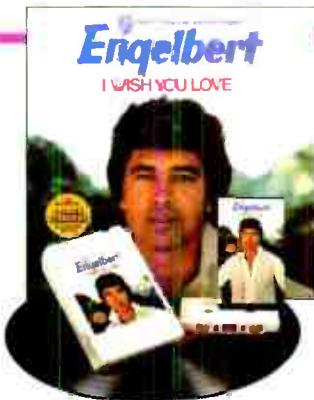
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WHISTLIN' DIXIE

THE BELLAMY BROTHERS

"We don't have to worry about what goes on in Nashville. We run our own little world."

The mist lies across the green land like a thin veil already beginning to vanish at the first touch of the warm Florida sunshine. It is a landscape painted in shades of green—the deep green of the live oak hung with long whiskers of gray Spanish moss, the pale green of the newly budded pecan, the shades of field grass. Brahma cattle munch their stately way across the pasture, their huge ears slapping at the errant insect. It is morning in Darby, Florida—population five hundred on its good days—and the only noise is the cry of exotic birds and the steady *creeek* of David Bellamy's wooden rocker on the cypress porch of the recording studio. It is a moment preserved in the amber light of a Florida morning, the payoff, perhaps, of twenty long years on the road.

*These are a few things I'm in love with
A small part of the reason I go back...**

The rocking chair moves slowly back and forth, its noises blending into the morning silence. People begin to appear from the houses, four generations of Bellamys stirring around the farm the family has owned since the Civil War. From across the compound comes the low rumble of a diesel tour bus cranking up.

"You know," David says, rocking slowly as family and band converge upon the bus marked with the distinctive flying

heart logo of the Bellamy Brothers, "we used to sit there"—he points at a spot of ground now occupied by a gleaming blue swimming pool—"Howard and I, when we were little kids, in these old lawn chairs, and listen to the Jamaican workers who picked the oranges. One of them would call out, the others would answer. Always that rhythm, that reggae beat. We always remembered that beat."

There are still groves on the Bellamys' 85 acres, still cattle and a large, rich vegetable garden. Grandma Bellamy does the cooking. Frances Bellamy and her husband Homer—who once busted brones and worked in a Western swing band—run the farm and the family business, which is now centered around the 24-track recording studio and the shiny tour bus. Howard and David's houses are already filled with another generation of Bellamys. This is a lifestyle that was old when the South was young, a lifestyle that has changed amazingly little since the first Bellamy moved from the Carolinas to central Florida to recover from Civil War wounds.

"We don't have time to worry about what goes on in Nashville," says David Bellamy. "We run our own little world."

Very few acts in country music have been as successful as the Bellamy Brothers. What we're talking about here, folks, is hit records, one right after the other. They're as consistent as the afternoon

thunderstorms in Darby, Florida; Howard and David Bellamy just have this knack for making hit records.

The knack first surfaced in 1975, when the brothers first recorded "Let Your Love Flow," an up-tempo, infectious ballad that had originally been offered to Johnny Rivers, who turned the song down. It went on to become a hit in America and a dozen or so other countries.

They followed that song with an impressive string of off-beat country hits—"Sugar Daddy," "Dancin' Cowboys," "Lovers Live Longer," "Do You Love as Good as You Look," "For All the Wrong Reasons," "Get Into Reggae, Cowboy," "Redneck Girl," "We're Just a Little Ole Country Band," and, of course, one of the most painful puns in country music, "If I Said You Have a Beautiful Body, Would You Hold it Against Me."

Like Ole Waylon and Ole Willie, Howard and David Bellamy have refused, through this string of hits, to compromise either their music or their lifestyles. They have held their ground, despite pressure from all over the place to change, to run with the pack, to be a part of the crowd.

So they ought to be heroes, right? Like Waylon and Willie, right? Wrong.

The reason may be that the music the Bellamy Brothers have fought to play is pop-flavored, up-beat, a slick blend of country, pop and a host of other sounds. It's not "outlaw," "Texas," "high-lonesome sound," "old-time country," "Vegas," or any of the other nit-wit categories Nash-

by Michael Bane



Another backstage warmup: The Bellamys are seldom at home. . .

ville uses to pigeonhole everything from Jim Reeves to Kinky Friedman. And the lifestyle the Bellamys have refused to change has nothing to do with cowboy boots, Mercedes Benzes, tasteless houses in over-priced Nashville suburbs, grindingly dull music business parties, faded designer jeans and the other trappings of Music City success. Keep that in mind.

*You ain't just whistling Dixie
You ain't just slapping your knee
I'm a grandson of the Southland
And heir to the Confederacy...**

In some ways, the music of the Bellamy Brothers is a road map of the journey they made growing up in the 1960s (Howard is 35; David 32). It is a seamless blend of hard Florida country, Southern bar music, rhythm and blues, choral church music, the lyrical West Coast rock of the late 1960s and early 1970s, and the Jamaican beat the brothers heard as boys.

Unlike too many groups, though, the Bellamys have fused these sounds into a singular style—none of this “here’s our blues song; here’s our reggae song” stuff. It is a particularly lilting style; one would be almost tempted to call it happy music. Yet no matter how many layers it’s filtered through, it is at root the country music of central Florida.

“We always considered ourselves partly country,” says David Bellamy. “A big part, really, just because of the way we grew up and what influenced us at first. We always listened to country and never really went away from it. It’s just that we

picked up different sounds to add to it.”

Howard and David Bellamy grew up on the family farm in Darby, 35 miles north of Tampa. Back then—and now, as a matter of fact—Darby was smack in the middle of Florida’s cattle country. Cowboys rode the range where serawny gray Brahma cattle grazed on the scrub grasses and ten-foot alligators lay beside creeks the color of strong coffee. Homer and Frances Bellamy worked the farm, as had other Bellamys before them. For recreation, Homer Bellamy played in a swing band—a little bit of Western swing for the cowboys, a little bit of polka for the nearby Czechoslovakian community.

In 1961 the Bellamy Brothers, with Homer Bellamy, premiered at the San Antonio (Florida, not Texas) Rattlesnake Roundup, where they stood under a live oak tree and played for free: Homer on dobro, Howard on guitar, David on accordion.

By then, the boys were hooked. In addition to singing in the local Southern Baptist church, they began making pilgrimages to Tampa’s Fort Homer Hesterly Armory, where Teddy Roosevelt and the Rough Riders once spent the night, to see such soul music legends as Otis Redding and James Brown.

“I’ll tell you,” David says. “I guess we’ve seen James Brown more times than any white men.”

“We were always putting groups together and playing locally,” says Howard Bellamy. The brothers put together a soul band of their own, added a black singer, and began playing for some of the big-name soul acts that came to central Florida: Percy Sledge, Eddie Floyd, Little

Anthony and the Imperials—“people like that,” Howard says.

All things considered, it was an incredibly mixed bag. Homer was listening to Jimmie Rodgers and playing Bob Wills; the brothers’ older sister was listening to Elvis Presley and Ricky Nelson; the Jamaicans were singing in the south forty, and Howard and David were picking behind the best of soul while listening to Merle Haggard and the Beatles. In his spare time, Howard served as a midwife for the Brahma cattle, helping along the tough deliveries.

With that kind of background, there was nothing to do but go on the road.

The road took them first to Atlanta and the tough Florida-Georgia bar circuit, where they hung out with folks like the Allman Brothers Band, also scrabbling to make it big. The time wasn’t right, though, and Howard and David returned to the sanctuary of Darby, where David continued his songwriting. His break came in the early 1970s when another local boy, Jim Stafford, was looking for a song to follow his moderately successful hit, “Swamp Witch.”

David sent him the first in what was to be a long string of off-beat Bellamy hits, “Spiders and Snakes,” which launched Stafford’s career to the tune of three million copies worldwide. It also earned the Bellamy brothers an invitation to Los Angeles and the big time. They accepted. Once established, they recorded “Let Your Love Flow,” and everything seemed rosy.

“By that point, we’d had a lot of bands, and Howard and I were always the two left over when everybody split and stole the equipment,” David says, laughing now. Howard laughs too, but it’s a pained laugh. “So we decided to hell with it,” he says. “We’d just stay the two of us and call ourselves the Bellamy Brothers.”

After “Love Flow,” the Bellamy Brothers hit a dry spell. “A song that big is hard to follow,” Howard says. “We weren’t really associated with the right people, either.”

They kept releasing albums, but concentrated their career in Europe, where audiences weren’t so obsessed with what was rock, what was pop, what was country. Europe was also a good place to ride out some bad contracts and disco-mania. “We’d rather have starved than do disco,” says Howard.

When they came back to the United States, they made an important decision: They would stick to the kind of music they wanted to make, and they would do it out of Darby, Florida, succeed or fail.

“It was like starting over,” Frances Bellamy says. “First we got a little van to tour, then a motor home, then a bus.”

“And country’s base had really broadened,” Howard says. “Country had come to where we were all the time.”

Of the two brothers, David is the most

Chickens, peacocks, geese, a Rhodesian Ridgeback puppy, a herd of cattle, and heaven knows what other creatures roam the Bellamy estate.

outspoken. There is a trace of bitterness when David talks about Nashville. "For six months they're going pop; for six months they're swinging back traditional," he says. "A good song is a good song. That's it."

Howard is more philosophical. "We're still doing what we were doing all the time. That's what we do, you know."

One of the ironies is that the Bellamys' music hasn't received the critical attention it deserves because it is light-hearted. Some has even been controversial. "Get Into Reggae, Cowboy," a song that pays homage to those Jamaican orange pickers, sent some country stations into fits.

"There was a taste of reggae rhythm in 'You're My Favorite Star,'" David says. "We were in New York City one day, me and Howard and our agent, walking down the street in our cowboy boots and hats. And this guy jumps off these stairs in front of this big church. He had this big tape recorder on his shoulder playing Bob Marley, and he looks at us and yells, 'Get into reggae, cowboy!' Scared us at first. Then we thought it was funny. Then I went home and wrote it. We did it on an album, and everybody thought it was cool, so we decided to release it as a

single. That's when the backlash came."

Howard and David Bellamy laugh.

"We'd like to be able to be diversified and to do different things and have it accepted," David says. "We think that by doing that on our records, it has both helped us and hurt us. I think that in the long run, it's been worth it."

Howard Bellamy built a fence around his garden and ear so the chickens could run around loose. Chickens, peacocks, geese, a Rhodesian Ridgeback puppy, a herd of cattle, and heaven knows what other creatures roam the Bellamy estate. Right now, Howard is tired after breaking a new colt to reins.

Both brothers have been shuttling back and forth to Miami to work on the new album. While they like working at the studio on the ranch, the siren song of 48-track digital recording drew them to the Criterion studio in Miami—"Even the engineer has his own engineer," David says.

After a show tonight in St. Petersburg, it's back on the road in earnest, and it'll be months before either of the brothers

can spend another calm day in Darby. Modern transportation, they say, has changed the whole idea of a "tour." "There are no more tours," David says, "just a collection of dates." But the Florida sun is setting. Things seem to be going smoothly: the whole operation's very low-key.

There is a sense here that the Bellamy Brothers have nothing to prove, no hidden chips on their musical shoulders. In a business filled with new cowboy boots that'll never be broken in and Caribbean melodies from Teaneck, New Jersey, the Bellamy Brothers are the genuine item. They have been cowboys and hippies, L.A. trendies and European superstars. They've seen the good side and the bad side and a couple of sides they'd rather not talk about. And, perhaps luckiest of all, they've discovered that you can go home again, if your heart has never left.

*So put me down there where I want
to be
Plant my feet with Robert E. Lee
Bury my bones under a cypress tree
And never let me roam...**

**"You Ain't Just Whistlin' Dixie." © Famous Music Corp./Bellamy Brothers Music, ASCAP*



... but when they are, it's peaceful: David, writer Bane, Howard, and a laid-back Brahma.

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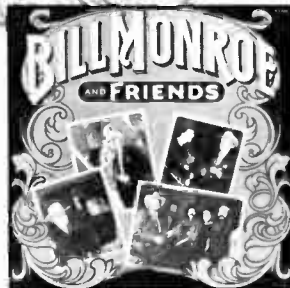
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LEONA WILLIAMS

Breaking Up Is Hard to Do

Interview by Bob Allen

Leona Williams, the talented Oklahoman singer/songwriter who wrote “You Take Me for Granted” and many other country songs, was with Merle Haggard for more than eight years, five of them as his wife. It was a stormy relationship, with several separations along the way, and now, according to both parties, it is over. Merle’s feelings in the wake of the breakup, expressed on his *That’s the Way Love Goes* album, are public property, but what about Leona? Contributing Editor Bob Allen talked with her at a show date in Texas as she began the process of stepping out of her husband’s personal and professional shadow.



CM: So you’re doing quite a few shows on your own now?

Leona: Well, I’m starting to accept bookings right now, you know—whatever I can pick up. Some of the agents are afraid to really start booking me because they’re afraid I’ll go back to Merle and I’ll have to cancel. That’s happened before. What they don’t know is that they don’t have to worry about that no more.

CM: When we talked before, we discussed the problem of having your own talent to develop when you’re in a marriage with somebody who has the same career as you do...

Leona: Yeah. When I was up on stage with Merle, I never felt like I was anything but a guitar player or something, a person who couldn’t get on the bus, a person to give the guys an aspirin or something, sing a bit of harmony and go out and open the show, and all that the people would remember was that dark-haired girl up there. I thought about that a lot of times, and finally I said to myself, “I’m gonna quit thinking that way. I’m going to be pacified to be what I am because there’s no way to get away. Merle’s my husband, and I’m gonna push him and not worry about myself.” So I just got out there behind Merle, and I started writing songs, and I tried to do everything I could to make him happy—which is almost impossible a lot of times. But I did the best I could to do it right, but in the back of my mind I was thinking that I might like to do something on my own someday.

CM: Are you now picking up

plans that you suspended or put aside when you got married to Merle?

Leona: Yeah. When I got married to Merle, we had a Top Ten duet record out, and I bet we didn’t sing that song three times on stage. At that time, I wasn’t working with him; I was working by myself. Then, when I started back working with him two-and-a-half years ago, it worked real fine for a while. We’ve always had our ups and downs—it’s always been stormy—but now I’ve kinda got control of my own self, and I can be my own boss. I’m not intimidated and I’m not being “put down”—I guess that’s the word—all the time, and my confidence is building up, and I’m ready.

CM: On the basis of that show today, it seems like you’re off to a good start.

Leona: I have more confidence. You know, one time Mel Tillis told Merle, “Help that woman get her confidence up,” because Merle intimidated the best singers in the world. He’s a great singer, you know. I mean, everybody knows Merle Haggard, and I knew that, too, and instead of pushing myself, I was pushing Merle. But he does things so great, and he doesn’t even realize it. He doesn’t realize how great he is.

CM: We used to talk about that, about how he would always say that he admired Grady Martin’s stuff more than he admired anything of his own.

Leona: Really. Merle doesn’t realize how big a star he is, and how great he really is. I’m

still pushing Merle, you know (*laughs*). I want him to be happy. I know there's a woman somewhere—you know he's got several girlfriends—that someday can make him happy. I couldn't. I did everything I knew (*laughs*).

CM: How long were you married to Merle?

Leona: Five years, but I was with him for eight-and-a-half—it's probably over eight-and-a-half years, now, that I've been with him, helping him do everything I could help him with. I tried to get him straightened out many times. He and I bought a house together a couple of years before we were married. We stayed together all this time.

CM: He does seem to be a moody sort of person, a little bit ill at ease in a lot of situations his work seems to force him into.

Leona: Yeah, he's moody. I always felt sorry for Merle, you know. It's like George Jones and some of the other people in the music business. They're such big stars, and people demand so much of them, that I can imagine it getting old to them. But they don't realize how much people think of them. They don't realize how much people love them. I know it's probably real hard to be a big star, from what I've seen.

CM: Does that affect the way you see your career?

Leona: Well, seeing Merle put up with all that—we were both on the road, and it was pretty bad for both of us—I can see that being a problem, but with me, having the experience I've got, being around those people and seeing them go through all these things, I believe I can handle it. In fact, I know I could.

CM: One time I interviewed you all down in Texas. I went from a show in some little town whose name I can't remember and rode up to Lubbock on the bus with you, and I remember that everyone was sick, everyone was real tired. And it's strange to realize that Merle is one of the most respected country music people alive today, but what he inflicts on himself—or what his career inflicts on him—makes him seem almost miserable.

Leona: Yeah. It seems to me

"It is over. Over and done. As the old country boy says, 'You can stick a fork in me. I'm done!' "



from my experience that it's almost like Merle tries to live his childhood days. Also he tries to get mad and do things to upset himself. It's almost like he's mad at himself at times. I never could figure that out; I still can't. The first thing you've got to do is to be good to yourself, I think.

CM: What about your songwriting? Are you doing more of it now?

Leona: Yeah, I've written several things. I wrote "You Take Me for Granted," which was Number One... I have some real good things that I've written lately. I've had a good situation lately. You might say it's good, or you might say it's bad, but for songwriting it's a good situation to write about, and I think I've got some real good things that people are going to record in the future.

CM: Did you write "You Take Me for Granted" recently?

Leona: I'll tell you a story on that song, okay? We were on a long tour—we worked eighteen days in a row—and I was real tired, and it just seemed like I did everything I could for everybody but myself, and nobody appreciated it. Nobody

said "thank you." Once in a while you get that "ugh" feeling, and you know somebody's got to pat you on the back and say "Hey, you did good" once in a while, instead of getting on you all the time—I mean, putting you down. Anyway, Merle had gotten mad at me for something or other—I forget what it was—but I had cried. I wrote that song on the last day of the tour, and I cried 'til I got tired of crying, I guess, and I said "I've got to get myself together." So some of the guys were in the front of the bus singing each other their songs, and I had tears in my eyes, and I came up there and listened for a bit, and I got over my crying spell. I don't cry a lot, but sometimes things hurt real bad. Anyway, I said, "Could I sing you a song I just wrote?" and I sang "You Take Me for Granted." And Merle, he got these big tears in his eyes, and he said, "You really feel that way?" I said, "Yes, I do." Anyway, that's when he heard the song, I went into the studio and recorded it, and I thought it would be a real good song for me, you know? And Merle liked it and he

went ahead and recorded it a couple of days later for a single.

CM: The duet album you did with Merle—that's on Polygram? And you have a solo contract with Polygram?

Leona: Right. That's my label, and I recorded the duet album with Merle, and we're hoping that they'll get together and put out a solo single right away. I need it so I can get some work, so I can get on the road. Since I don't have a duet partner, it's hard to get up there and do half of it (*laughs*). But I'm smiling. I'm doing real good.

CM: It must be good, getting a career started up. It must keep you looking more towards the future, rather than dwelling on "Did I do my part?" as we all tend to do when we go through this kind of breakup.

Leona: Well, I'm real good at being my own psychiatrist. I mean, I've had to do that mentally to keep from losing my mind. I've had to work on my own head, you might say, because of so many situations I've had to experience, and it was real hard on me. I've been gone from Merle three months now, and the first few weeks there I was pretty—what's that word? Disoriented? (*laughs*). I didn't know my direction, but I got myself together, and I'm real happy and I smile more than I ever have. I mean, it's this freedom! I have this ton lifted off my shoulders, and I have to say I'm real happy. And I have more friends than I realized I had, plus I get to go back to my own friends and renew old friendships with all the people that I knew from before all this happened. I didn't realize how many of them were behind me.

CM: Are you living in Nashville now, or are you and Merle still living in different parts of California?

Leona: I was living in Sacramento, and I still have a place there, but I'm not really living anywhere right now. I have a daughter who lives in Tennessee, and I told her, "If you'll just let me borrow one of your bedrooms for a while, I want to just stay until I make up my mind where I want to live." I have my little boys—one's fourteen and the other's nine—going to school in Tennessee, and I spend most of my time

there, but I'm not actually living anywhere... I've thought about lots of things, but I'm not satisfied yet. It's a real big change.

CM: It takes a while to reach those decisions.

Leona: Yeah. Because, you know, you've got a nice big home, and you've got cars, and you've got other things. You had these things before you got married—and all of a sudden, you leave with nothing. I did that. And I'm gaining it back. I will survive, like the song (*laughs*). But I'm happy doing this.

CM: You're real good friends with George Jones and his wife, Nancy. What do you think is the secret of his recovery? He was somebody who was in a nose-dive, and who came out of it just in the nick of time.

Leona: I'll tell you what. George Jones is a very fine human being, and he has got, I mean, a *lady*. Nancy has stood by him through thick and thin, just like I stood by Merle, but they pulled themselves together. George may have got off on the wrong track, but he wasn't off for too long. I mean, he didn't stay on the wrong track long enough to lose it. George Jones! I'm so proud of him and Nancy. I really think they're the sweetest couple I've ever seen, and both of them are happy! And that's the name of the game: Be happy. Respect each other. Be nice to each other, because all these other people will someday be out of their way, and those two will still be together. That's what I've always tried to get through to somebody—when everybody else fails, when everything else is gone, those two will still be together. They love each other, and I think they will stay together, from what I've seen. I don't even want to think the other way. I want to see them both happy.

CM: You are going out there as a solo act now. You're not opening the show; you actually have a show of your own. Has that changed your attitude?

Leona: Yeah. It's a real good feeling. I know that I'm going out there and I'm not a big star, and I know all that stuff. But before, when I was opening the show for Merle, I felt like all these people wanted me to be better than I was. You know, I felt they were saying,

"I don't ever want to get hollered at again in my life. If I get hollered at I'm going to get going out the door."



Laura Schiermeier

"Here she is out there; she can't sing." I had all these complexes. I never actually *heard* anything like that, but I thought it, and I thought they would never remember my name. I was racing my tires, spinning my wheels, but now I feel that when I'm out there, I'm out there because they know I'm going to be there. I've been advertized, and they expect me to be there. Before, I felt like they were saying, "We came to see Merle Haggard. We didn't come to see this dark-haired lady!" It's a whole new world for me, and it gives me a good feeling. "Hey, I can do something for myself, and I'm getting after it!" You know? That's how I feel: "Here it comes."

CM: What do you do about the questions? You must hear people yelling "Where's Merle?" and stuff like that. Do you get used to that after a while?

Leona: Well, I'll tell you what. That's one reason I'm not working any show dates, 'cause I wasn't ready to hear that. I wasn't ready to hear all those fans say, "Where's Merle? Poor Merle—where's *he*?" I'm ready for that now. I can handle

anything. I am the strongest woman you've ever seen. And as far as where Merle is, I haven't heard a word from him. I don't know where he is, but I hope he's happy, I hope he's doing good. And you know, I've got control of myself now. I don't have to worry about that. It's his problem and somebody else's.

CM: I don't want to dwell on anything, but after all the speculation that's gone on, is this it? I mean, is the divorce going to be finalized?

Leona: That's as definite as anything you can ever imagine. It is over. Over and done. As the old country boy says, "You can stick a fork in me. I'm done!"

CM: Do you see it in the cards that you and Merle will record duets again?

Leona: I ain't looked that far into the future, but I don't know. I've just got to count it out at the moment, though. Like George's song, "I Ain't Ready Yet."

CM: Do you have a lot of shows lined up?

Leona: I'm just going to do what I can, and I'm putting my band together. It's not easy

to get right out there and have everything come your way immediately. I knew that when I left Merle. When I left, I said, "I ain't going to think about my career; I'm not going to think about my house, my cars, whatever I might have that I'm leaving. This is it." And if I build my career that way, I'll be fine. My kids are fine; that's another thing. We're doing real good. I mean, sometimes you have to give up something, and I did. I hope the fans out there understand. I don't want to go into full details about *why* and all that stuff. I hope they understand, 'cause I know they're thinking, "Poor Merle. I feel sorry for Merle," and they ain't thinking about me. But *I'm* thinking about me, and I was thinking about both of us, and that's the way I look at it.

CM: Who is producing your records at Polygram?

Leona: Ray Baker.

CM: Is that working out?

Leona: Real good. I like Ray a lot. He's a nice man. His voice tone is soft and nice. He doesn't holler at me, he doesn't raise his voice, and I like that. I don't ever want to get hollered at again in my life. If I get hollered at, I'm going to get going out the door.

CM: Do you get to put a lot of your own ideas into your records?

Leona: Yeah, and now I can't wait to go record again, 'cause it's going to be a whole lot different, 'cause my whole mind has opened up, and my writing, the way I phrase, the way I sing—everything's different now. It's almost like I was like *this* (*goes rigid*). Everything was tight. My nerves were just shot, almost.

CM: On your albums, are you going to do as much of your own material as possible?

Leona: Yeah... I've got lots of new material. So far, I'm in a situation where I need to go into a studio and put these things down, and maybe get them off to other artists to hear. Or some of them, I might like to do. Save 'em for me. Merle was saying he'd like a chance to hear my best songs, and now, if he wants to record one of my songs, I'd appreciate it. I'd love it—but anyone who gets to them first, if they want 'em, they've got 'em. ■



OUR MAN FROM LAS VEGAS

LEE GREENWOOD

Only nine years earlier, in 1974, Olivia Newton-John performed the same trick which won Lee Greenwood his 1983 Country Music Association Male Vocalist of the Year award. The wispy-voiced blonde blew in from the glitzy regions of Vegas and the West Coast, had one pop record after another hit the country charts, and then captured the CMA's coveted Female Vocalist of the Year award. At that time, the fact that an "outsider," a "pop singer" (and a foreigner at that!) had slipped in and taken the award away from the likes of Lynn Anderson and Tammy Wynette and Loretta Lynn was heresy to many of Nashville's country stars. Porter Wagoner, trying to turn back the clock and "purify" country music, led the charge of traditionalists who, stuck with their rhinestones and the same-old-state-fair circuit, felt passed by.

Porter failed. The clock could not be turned back, and in 1983, when ex-Vegas showman Lee Greenwood waltzed off with the honors on the CMA awards show, there was not a word of protest in the house (except perhaps from Merle Haggard, who reportedly thought that thirteen years between Male Vocalist of the Year awards was long enough in his case).

When the speeches of undying gratitude which always follow the CMA awards had died down, Lee Greenwood put it all in perspective. Life in the record and concert business following his award, he said, was "not that much different, but busier. The award is more advertisement."

Which is true. CMA awards are *damn* good advertisements, endorsements which look just great on a show poster—but it's the strength of the last record and the promise of the next that keeps so-called rising stars like Greenwood filling the airwaves and sharing the bill with top-drawing acts like the Oak Ridge Boys and Barbara Mandrell through the rest of the year. And since he burst forth full-grown and glorious with "(It Turns Me) Inside Out" two years ago, Lee Greenwood has had the records.

"I paid a lot of hard dues in a lot of places—which for anyone else might have dug them a grave. Me, I just kept working at it til I got out."



by Bob Millard

That first song hit the country like a nine-pound hammer hits a railroad spike. It drove home Number One chart positions in most localities, but MCA Records simply couldn't get all the scattered radio stations to play it at the same time, so they ended up with a long-running Top Twenty hit instead of a *Billboard* Number One. "Ring on Her Finger, Time on Her Hands" followed as a hit, as did "She's Lying" and "Ain't No Trick," but it wasn't until "Somebody's Gonna Love You" that Greenwood got his first actual chart-topper. It's unlikely that another two years will pass before he gets his next, however. As we go to press, his duet with Barbara Mandrell is probably doing that trick for him.

Lee Greenwood leans up against a door jamb in the kitchen of his home in Donelson, Tennessee, and snickers up his sweater sleeve. "Man, I wish I could play this tape for you," he says.

"I just demo-ed this great song with Vicki Carrioca for me and Barbara Mandrell, and I wish you guys could hear it," he repeats when neither I, nor his wife Melanie, nor the MCA publicist take the bait on the first cast.

"Why can't we hear it?" says the publicist. "Don't you have it here?"

"Sure, it's downstairs," Greenwood replies.

"Well, let's go hear it," we all chime in, as he giggles like a kid who has just teased a little girl into giving him his first schoolyard kiss. He leads the way.

Greenwood has to move a few guitars and drum cases out of the way and sit on an amplifier to get to the cassette player in the corner of his storage/practice room. He plays the tape. The demo has a strength and power that come equally from the vocal duo, a combination of raspy, rhythm-and-blues-flavored deliveries not unlike the actual Mandrell-Greenwood release, and from the fact that as a songwriter, Greenwood has surpassed even the pop ballad potential of his earlier "Love Song," a huge hit for Kenny Rogers. The song's melody climbs

the scale with spine-chilling push: It's goosebump time for everyone in the crowded little music room in the basement of the Greenwood household.

"When I first wrote that song I thought, 'I ought to take this over to Kenny, it'd make a great followup for Dolly and him after 'Islands In The Stream.'," he says. "But then I thought, 'Nah, this one's for me.'"

That same "This one's for me" attitude is what took Greenwood to Nashville a few years back. He shucked a comfortable niche as a lounge headliner in Las Vegas, Lake Tahoe, and Reno to follow Mel Tillis's former road manager, Larry McI'adden, to Music City for a shot at songwriting. Approaching the age of forty, the move was a now-or-never proposition in his mind. Brenda Lee and Dottie West recorded his songs, but it was only after his own singing career took off that he scored big as a writer for Kenny Rogers.

"They knew when I left Vegas that I was going for the marbles," he says. "I had a real good income there. There was a period that was really rough [before] when I had gone to California to record [in 1971]. It was just a disaster, and I had to come back to Vegas that way. I don't want to say I was square, because I have always considered myself a person who's hip enough to get by, but in that fast society I just didn't fit. I was recording for Paramount. They were trying to push me pop and I wasn't pop. I lost everything I had, a couple of cars, my house in Vegas, I wound up selling Dixie Chicken, cooking and selling it. It was a long way back, so when I left Vegas for Nashville I wanted to be really sure.

"It wasn't really *sure*, but it was a lot easier to get a handle on than L.A.," he says. "I felt I fit here. Nashville is a very easy community and a lot better gamble than L.A. I had friends here already, more than I had in L.A. even, and that's where I was from."

Greenwood went back to Las Vegas recently for the first time since leaving for Nashville. He went not for a holiday visit, though it turned into that, but as opening act for the Oak Ridge Boys at the MGM Grand Hotel. A confirmed team player and a talented multi-instrumentalist, Greenwood filled in several nights with the Oaks when their saxophone player fell ill. He made mucho brownie points with the MCA brass when new MCA Records president Irving Azoff and Nashville office head Jim Foglesong came to see the show, and found Greenwood unassumingly blasting the bejesus out of the sax solo on the show's closing number, "Bobby Sue." The Oaks presented him with a \$2,000 Selmer sax, personally inscribed to him, by way of thanks. It must have been like old times in Vegas for Greenwood, who used to close one of his own early shows

by running across the stage, jumping on one of his band member's back, and playing "Flamingo" while hanging upside down with the instrument straight up in the air.

"I didn't know I had that many friends in Vegas," Greenwood says, laughing. "I found bunches. People I hadn't seen in fifteen or twenty years, even when I was in Vegas I didn't see them. When I went back, I saw them all, and I made it a point. I got about four or five hours of sleep a night, because I made it a point to call every person that called me and visit with every person who wanted to visit with me, so that none of them could say 'Oh, you're too big for us now.' That's an important issue. That gossip can spread real fast, and I don't want that to get started because that's not the case.

"The town itself remembers me and accepts me and is proud of my success.



STILL COUNTRY

Our man with his mentor, Kenny Rogers.

That makes me very happy and warm inside, 'cause I spent a lot of time there. I paid a lot of hard dues in a lot of places—which for anyone else might have dug them a grave. Me, I just kept working at it til I got out."

Greenwood escaped from Las Vegas the same way he had escaped his Sacramento, California farm childhood. He just kept working at it til he got out. When his parents split before he was a year old, he was given into the custody of his maternal grandparents, and there he spent a secure, but strained, childhood and adolescence. He worked hard at his farm chores, had few friends even in school, and spent all his time concentrating on baseball and

music. Neither was a hobby, since both represented his only hopes of breaking out of the stultifying backwaters of Los Angeles. One or the other would be his ticket to fame and excitement, he hoped. As it turned out, he would turn down a college athletic scholarship to lam out for a gig in Reno, with the back seat of his old car filled with instruments, at the age of sixteen, the day he graduated from high school.

"I wasn't raised in a tract home," Greenwood recalls. "Being isolated on that ranch—it was more a farm than a ranch—I had nobody to play with, no friends. You have to have somebody to relate to so you know how you're growing up. I couldn't find it at my grammar school. That's where all my shocks came from, until I got into high school and was able to experience what it was like to get a little attention. I began to excel in my sports, began to excel in my music, and all of a sudden it was like everybody started paying attention. But until that time I was just lost in the shuffle as far as my peers were concerned."

Once he discovered how easily his skill in sports and music gained him recognition, he latched onto both pursuits with a vengeance. He spent two years of high school playing in a gospel-country band led by Chester Smith, then working up and down the California coast with Del Reeves's band. But neither sports nor music ended his acceptance problems.

"I was bright," he says. "A little *too* bright, I guess, and the kids didn't like that, either." He laughs sharply. "Nobody likes a smartass. . . . School was an interesting experience."

School was so "interesting," in fact, that he leaped at the chance to blow off that shot at college and get himself to Reno.

"I wanted to get away from the farm, I wanted to get to do something that was very hip," he explains. "I wanted to grow. At home we had all this very old stuff around us all the time. There was all this antique furniture, and we lived in a very old house that was sagging on one side, and we had very little wealth, and I really wanted to have something that was worth a lot. Not expensive, necessarily, but worth something, something nice. I really wanted to get out and make a lot of money and be able to support my grandparents, because their life was phasing out. Farm life was going down the dumper."

His grandmother died before he reached his current heights, and his grandfather recently got out of the hospital—always a nice turn of events when you're 85—but they had succeeded in imparting a clean-living philosophy that kept Lee Greenwood sober and straight throughout his career. The only way he could have kept up the pace of all-night playing at the Rock 'n' Roller Rink with Del

"I wanted to get away from the farm, I wanted to do something that was very hip. I wanted to grow."

Reeves, then going to school the next day, was to stay away from booze, pills and the smokier temptations prevalent even then in that close-to-Mexico area.

"The only trouble I had was women," he says gleefully. "Like being married that early in life. I was married at seventeen. We were married in Reno. I was already on the road by then, and Edna and I eloped. I gained my father's consent kind of deviously. My mother and father were divorced for a long time, and I couldn't get her consent, so I got his. But the women always seemed to be a controlling influence in my life. I had to get clear of that controlling influence

seem to have paid off, or at least broken even, there have been other gambles which didn't go so well for Greenwood. He lost his entire paycheck in the casinos during his first week in Reno.

"Again another woman," he says. "They had women dealers at that time, and I just couldn't believe it. This girl was so gorgeous that I just sat there and threw my money away while I was watching her deal. It was great. I ate crackers and butter for two weeks, but I would not call home for money. That lesson came again later in Vegas when I was a dealer. I learned a lot more about the games and thought I knew a lot more. It cost me

jerker. They may win an award here and there, but ten years from now nobody will remember a single one of their songs. In ten years it is hard *not* to imagine that lines like "Lovin' you to me came easy/Now losing you will change my life no doubt/In a way I'm glad it's over/In another way it turns me inside out" will still cause a catch in the throat of anyone who ever had a love affair hit the rocks.

"I'm thankful that my emotion comes out in my songs," he says. "I think that that's a natural thing that happens because I'm a very emotional person. I mean, I'll cry at a *Lassie* show. That's good for me as an artist, but it used to be that as a man, you know, you weren't supposed to cry. So you can hit my hand with a hammer and I won't cry, but when you talk about an emotional subject... I can relate a story to an audience, and I can make 'em feel that same emotion that the writer intended. I really work at it. That's something that I've tried to cultivate, and I think I've got it."

If he cultivated the emotive qualities in his voice, he most certainly did not cultivate the raspy, sandy qualities that make him stand out as a stylist today.

"At first it scared me," he said. "At first I thought I'd lost the range that I really thought made me a singer. I had a voice that had the highs of a Roy Orbison, but I developed this raspiness in my voice that never went away. I did that in Vegas. They build those places out there as hotels, then they add a lounge, and then they'll build a showroom, and after that maybe they'll think about putting in a sound system. But when my voice began to take a turn, I was about 33 and it wasn't age, it was abuse. It was kind of like moonlighting, because I was dealing cards and singing, and I didn't know which job was the moonlight job because they were both important to me, and I kept them both for four years. I can still sing the high harmonies, but I need a week off in the Bahamas to do it."

Now that fame has caught up with his prodigious talents, Greenwood is hanging onto it like a vise. He almost never takes a day off. Even on his occasional two or three days in Nashville he is either recording, doing interviews or working with manager Larry McFadden to iron out some business detail. This guy is a *serious* workaholic.

"Maybe that's the only thing that I gained from it having taken so long for me to find success—that I know how easily it can escape me," he says. "And it isn't going to get away from me. Not this time." ■



COURTESY KATHY GANGWISCH

Returning to Vegas and his old job, Lee deals blackjack for the Oaks.

before I could decide what I was going to do with myself."

He has been married four times now, twice to his first wife, and finally to Melanie, a red-headed, attractive dancer he met in his last big Vegas show, Bare Touch of Las Vegas. She took the Nashville gamble with him, and is as active as he is in that town, serving as choreographer for The Nashville Network's *Dancin' USA* program. She is not the wife who saw Lee blow it all in L.A. and come back home smelling like fried chicken down to the roots of his thinning hair. Three nearly-grown offspring of those earlier marriages, two natural and one adopted, live with Lee and Melanie in Nashville off and on.

If the marriage and career gambles

several thousand dollars and a fancy home. Guess you can't beat it. I don't gamble anymore."

All those losses—in love, in his career, at the gambling tables and as a child, when he lost a life with his mother and father—seem to have rolled around in Lee Greenwood's guts like stones in a gemcutter's wheel, and out of all that rumbling has come an edge of raw emotion that adds to his already emotively raspy voice to hit you like a tidal wave on songs like "Inside Out" and the recent "Going, Going, Gone." There are singers who wear the same old plastic smile for an up-tempo love song and a supposed tear

Remember Mel Tillis, the guy with the funny voice in all those Burt Reynolds movies, or on the Johnny Carson Show? The guy with the stutter? The guy who wrote "Ruby, Don't Take Your Lore to Town" and "Detroit City"? That Mel Tillis? We caught up with Mel in Hollywood, Florida, where he was filming another series of commercials for F...F...Fina gasoline. The entire interview, incidentally, has been translated from stutters.

20 QUESTIONS WITH MEL TILLIS

1

We've heard that your daughter Pam is a punk rock singer. Is that true?

Well, I guess she's sort of moderately punk.

2

How do you get to be "moderately" punk?

I mean, her hair's not purple or green or anything like that. Moderate.

3

Do you listen to her music?

Yeah, I listen to it when she gets a song finished. She comes and plays me some songs now and then. They're okay for what they are. I mean, that kind of music, I'm not a judge of it. I can't really say, "Oh, that's nice" or "That's marvellous."

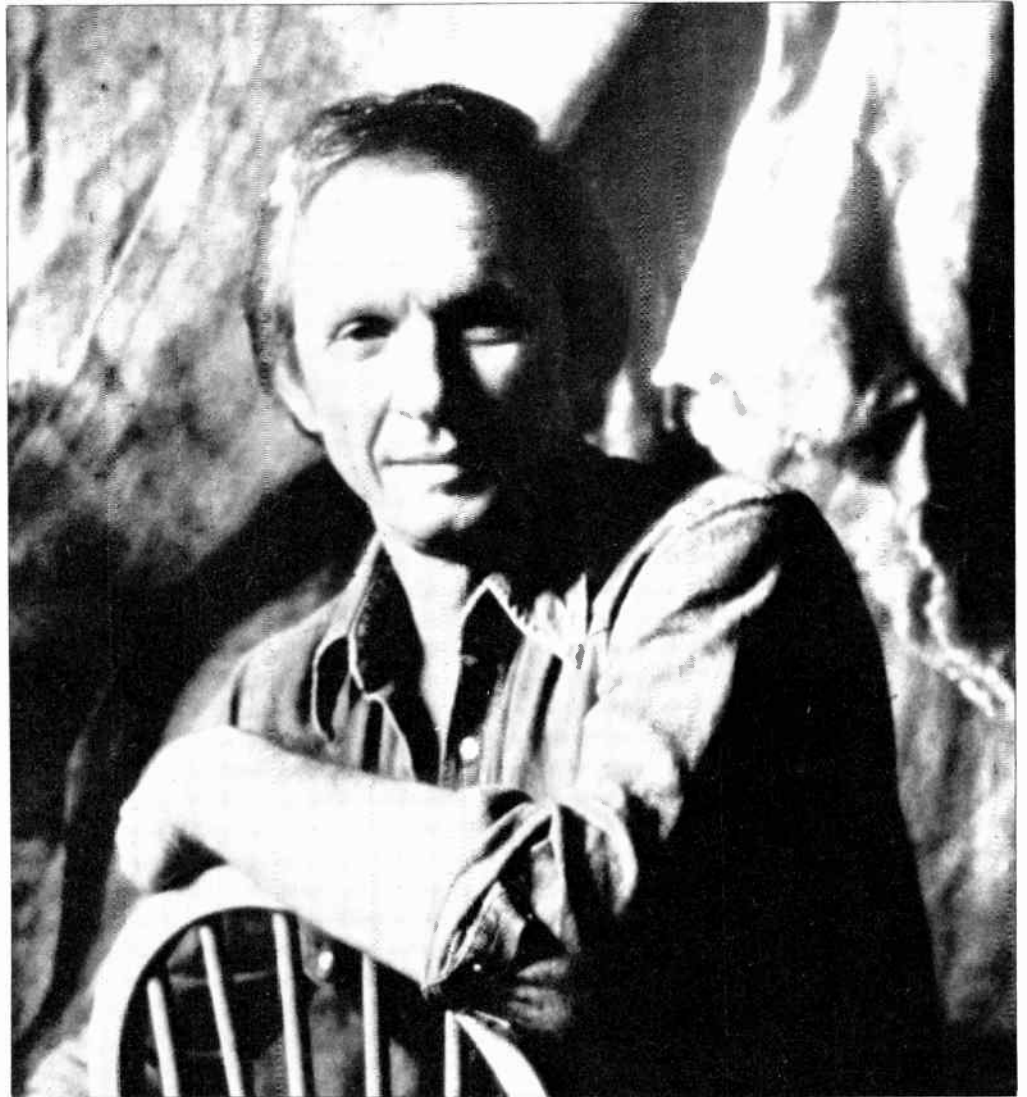
4

Who do you think are the best young songwriters in Nashville today?

Dean Dillon, Bob Dorbin, Dave Hanner.

5

Do you think that those guys are as good as that first group of songwriters that you were part of, the guys who hung around Tootsie's Orchid Lounge in the Sixties?



by Michael Bane

Well, I wouldn't say they are. No, they're good. It's different. It's a whole different ballgame now. A lot more chords are in people's songs, and they're a lot more difficult to sing. Speaking for myself, I'm writing a song. It's called "I'm a Demographic Fool." (*sings*)

*Every song I put out
Seems the son of a bitch
ain't cool*

*I write a song and I think
it's a hit
And it turns out to be a
piece of shit
My folks would think I
haven't gone to school
Yeah, I guess I'm a
demographic fool.*

I'm a little confused about all this, what's going on. I've got to have an extra, extra, extra good song to make the Top

Ten. A new act can come up, and have a mediocre song, and go to Number One.

6

Why do you think that is?

I don't know, unless it's the new disk jockeys. Hell, people like me have been around so long, like 99 years, that they

say. "Yeah, Mel Tillis, yeah, okay, great."

7

Mel who? Right?

Right. And I'm not the only one experiencing that. You can look at Hank Snow, one of the legends—ain't even on a label. Ernest Tubb is another one. And you can go on and on. Little Jimmy Dickens. The legends ain't even on labels, man!

8

I think the last Mel Tillis song I heard on the radio was "Mental Revenge," and it was like an "oldie." It's as if they peg you as an "oldie."

Yeah. I was on the *rotation* list—a golden oldie. I just bought me another radio station, in Mobile, and I went down there to sign it on the air under its new call letters, and found I was on their golden oldie rotation thing. I've got two stations in Amarillo, and it's the same thing. My own stations!

9

It is a strange situation, isn't it?

It's *wrong*. I know performers have to step down gracefully, and I understand that—but *let* them step down gracefully. Don't just kick them out to the damn pasture. I'm really concerned about this. I'm set financially, and so are a lot of the other guys, but they want to work. They have egos.

10

Why should they step down if they still have something to offer? It's not as if they no longer have talent.

Right. When they want somebody to draw people, they call me. I still draw good crowds. And these new acts, they can't do it. I'm not knocking them—it just seems that some way or other, it should balance out.

11

Do you think that the record companies are not behind some of the older acts?

They'll break their ass pushing somebody else. Which is okay: I'm not complaining against any of this. But they should let the older guys down a little easier.

12

Ironically, some of the biggest hits right now are "old" or "traditional" country. Ricky Skaggs's latest single, for example, is a re-make of a Webb Pierce version of your song, "Honey."

Right. And if I put it out, they would say, "Oh my God, why did he do *that*?" Dolly Parton hadn't had a hit in two or three years until she came out with that song with Kenny Rogers. Tammy Wynette had one of the best records I've heard in a long time recently. It came on the charts, and fell right out. They just won't climb up there.

13

It's hard to tell what makes a good country song now, isn't it?

That's right, and that's because they're getting away from country. But it has to do that: I can see that. But I still think there's a place for letting the older people down easier.

14

You and Willie Nelson and Harlan Howard and Hank Cochran and the others changed country music in the Sixties, but everybody except Willie has sort of disappeared, right?

We brought about the change then, and I guess these new people are doing the same thing. They're bringing in the new style. I understand that, but what I'm saying is that there should be room for all of us. And we should be able to

die gracefully. (*laughs*)

15

You just purchased Cedarwood Publishing, one of the largest publishing houses in Nashville and the place you first worked when you went to Nashville. That must feel great.

Oh, God, yeah! I bought back all my old songs and about eight thousand others. There's a great country catalog—you won't *believe* the country songs that are in there. I'm talking about traditional country. It's a Ricky Skaggs goldmine.

16

Is there anything that stands out in your mind from the Tootsie's days? Any single incident?

Oh, there were a *lot* of incidents! But Jim Reeves—he really liked me. He was one of the singers who hung out with the songwriters, the boys. There were only a few of them—Webb Pierce, Faron Young, they would hang out with us. And Jim took an interest in me, and wanted to send me to speech school. I said "Jim, I can't. I've got a little girl, my wife's pregnant again, and I've got to work." I'm sure glad I didn't take him up on it.

17

Do you think you would have been such a big success if you didn't stutter?

Oh, yeah (*laughs*). I think so. Nobody knew I stuttered until I went on the *Porter Waggoner Show*. Hell, I already had a six-figure income by the time I went on the show. I had already established myself as a writer—and when you write, you don't stutter.

18

You've got an autobiography, "Stutterin' Boy," coming out. Is it going to be the whole truth about Mel Tillis?

Oh, no. I'm leaving out a lot! There's enough in there to let you know it's the truth. I don't want it to be a lie. I want it to be me.

19

You've got a new movie coming out in the summer?

Yeah, *Cannonball II*. I had a great part this time. It was something I could actually say I was proud of. I got a new driver for this one. Terry Bradshaw was replaced by Clyde, the orangutan—who was actually named Poppy—from Clint Eastwood's movies.

20

What was it like working with an orangutan?

I fell in love. We were on the set nine days, and when I left, Poppy and I were discussing furniture. ■



Hiram King Williams was born on September 17th, 1923, to Lon and Lilly Williams in Georgiana, Alabama. When “Hank” was seven his father went to live permanently in a V.A. hospital. Hank learned music from Rufus Payne, “Tee-Tot,” a black street musician. Later in Nashville, his partner was the New Yorker and music business sophisticate Fred Rose. Hank’s life in music was also accompanied by his mother, who was his original manager, and his wife Audrey, who pursued her own

musical star.

Hank’s star burned very brightly indeed during his brief reign at the top, and continues to burn today; he was, and is, the ultimate country singer. After several years of alcohol and drug abuse, he was found dead in the back seat of a powder-blue Cadillac convertible in the early hours of New Year’s Day, 1953. He had been on his way to a show in Canton, Ohio. Hank is survived by Hank Williams, Jr., the son he called “Bocephus.”

Hank Williams and the Glass Bottomed Cadillac

It was on New Year’s Day, 1984, the anniversary of Hank Williams’s death, that I suddenly realized that he had been dead longer than he had been alive. In remembrance, I started playing his records, and while I listened I wondered what he would have to say from beyond the sunset. To find out (and knowing full well that we each have our own “Hank Williams”), I listened to the songs for quite a while longer, then I just listened. And this is what my Hank Williams had to say. —D.H.

First, say *Hi!* to Bocephus, and tell everybody else that the ghost in that David Allan Coe song is Frizzell, not me. Okay? Then let me reassure you that hell, yes, it was one terrible sad life. Why do you think they call them “hankies”?

To tell you the truth, however, I ran so hard and stayed so crazy that “sad” hardly mattered. “Sad” I could deal with. “Sad” I could put into a song, and if it was a good song that “tasted” good in your mouth when you sang it and felt good under your boot when you tapped it out, you might “tear up”

and sniffle a little whenever you sang it—but otherwise the sadness stayed put. Right where you put it. In the song.

“Scared as hell” and “guilty as sin” just couldn’t be put out so easy—like the cat, or like a fire. I could only treat *them* with the booze and the pills I was afraid of and felt guilty about, and strangely enough, they always gave me the courage to seek what they made it impossible for me to get. It went on for 29 sleazy little years, fourteen of ‘em spent in skull orchards and blood buckets, singing myself hoarse and drinking myself crazy, breathing smoke and taking abuse off sweaty, stinking field hands.

Not exactly your TV dream vacation, but at times, in places, it was better than nothing—mostly after midnight in hotel rooms alone, when all of a sudden the words and the sound of the words and the thrust of music and the goddamn hurt in my heart all went *click!* and cinched in there so they’d never come apart again. Wow. That was worth it all. “You be daffy and I’ll be dilly,” and I never quite knew how it happened. It was my own gift and the damndest feeling I ever felt—of having things just *fit*.

The thing of it is, I never really got ahold of anything else

PAINTING: PAUL LAFFOLEY

by Dave Hickey

COUNTRY MUSIC NEWS

VOLUME I, NUMBER 1 The Newsletter for Members of the Country Music Society of America

MARCH/APRIL 1984

SOCIETY ACTIVITIES

CHAPTER BY CHAPTER

You Can Get Your Next Year's Dues Free

A new membership drive is underway in which we hope to get present members involved in getting new members so that local chapters can be bigger. The bigger the chapter, the more interesting activities it can sponsor and take part in.

We have initiated this drive by sending out a special offer with the new membership cards whereby present members can earn their next year's dues free by getting two friends to join the Society.

Fan Fair

We are looking into the idea of making special arrangements for Society members who would like to attend Fan Fair. The package would include discounts on motel room, meals and perhaps other activities in addition to Fan Fair that the group might like to participate in while in Nashville. Chapters would have to make their own travel arrangements. Some are considering chartering their own bus. Anyone interested in making such a trip or in organizing a group, write to us or contact the local Chapter President in your area.

Chapters in Progress

Inquiries are continuing to come in from those of you interested in heading up Chapters in your local areas. If you haven't heard from us yet, in response to your inquiry, you will. Meanwhile, if anyone would like to get in on the ground floor in helping establish a Chapter, contact these Chapter Presidents.

- **Alabama:** Rick Owens, Box 5051, Montgomery Alabama 36103.
- **California:** Ardis McCullough, Box 583, Lemon Grove, California 92045.
- **Connecticut:** Geraldine Harger, 233 Harland Road, West Granby, Connecticut 06090.
- **Illinois:** Jeanie Witherell, 117 Duever

Lane, East Peoria, Illinois 61611.

- **Kansas:** Marlene Ann Avery, 4504 Foothill Drive, Hutchinson, Kansas 67502.
- **Mississippi:** Kathy Morgan Johnson, Route 1 Box 31-B, Dundee, Mississippi 38626.
- **New York:** Nancy Van Putte and Linda Marsters, 70 English Road, Rochester, New York 14616; Dane Helt 506 Lakeview Drive, Endicott, New York 13760; Jim Hilbert, 399 Whittier Drive, Mastic Beach, New York 11951.
- **North Carolina:** Alma Todd, Route 12, Box 350, Winston-Salem, North Carolina 27107.
- **Ohio:** Marie Lewis, 230 East Nottingham Road, Dayton, Ohio 45405.
- **Pennsylvania:** Walt Peters, Route 2, Box 2440-A, Etters, Pennsylvania 17319.
- **Tennessee:** Irene Gibbs, 127 Star Boulevard, Madison, Tennessee 37115; Steve Heiss, 13321 Jones Gap Road, Soddy, Tennessee 37379.
- **Wisconsin:** Betty Weinaug, 1334 West Pine Street, Appleton, Wisconsin 54914.

If you think *you* are the one to start a Chapter in your area, or if you know a friend who would, write to: Chapter Director, Country Music Society of America, 450 Park Avenue South, New York, New York 10016.

Letters from Chapter Presidents

No one knows what it takes to make a good Chapter President. This whole undertaking is new — nothing like it has been done before. There is room for creativity. So if you are interested in country music and like to take a risk, you may be just the right one to do the job for your area.

Organizing a Chapter is not quite like organizing a business to make money — although there probably is some money to be made, directly or indirectly, to benefit the Chapters in their activities.

Attention: CMSA Members

Here is the first issue of your newsletter. You may remove it by unbending two staples, then bending them back. Your \$50.00 worth of coupons are included on page 7 and 8. Your permanent Charter Membership card and the CMSA *Answer Book* will be sent to you soon.

Helen Barnard, Editor

Instead, the point is to bring people together who have a common interest, who may like each other, and who may, by working together, be able to generate a lot of interest in country music and country music activities among their friends and people who live near them.

The letters below, from three Chapter Presidents, will give you a better idea than anything we can say as to what it takes to get a Chapter started. As the individual Presidents take over more and more, we plan to keep you posted through this Newsletter about interesting ideas and activities underway in Chapters throughout the country.

Dear CMSA,

It would be a privilege to organize a local chapter of the CMSA in the Chattanooga (southeast Tennessee) area. We have several major country radio stations, the UTC Roundhouse (12,000 capacity), the Memorial Auditorium (6,000 capacity), and several large clubs which feature country artists. I have seen almost every major artist in concert and met several personally.

Organization is an ability which comes naturally. I am involved in election committees and am chairman of my election precinct. That takes organization! I was also an organizer in college clubs. I also secure bookings and manage a seven-piece band and a few solo acts. I have always been and always will be a country music fan. Please contact me if I can be of assistance in any way. Good luck with the Society!

Stephen Heiss
Soddy, Tennessee

Dear CMSA,

I was surprised and elated to learn that *Country Music News* will soon be available again. I have made efforts. It has always been a magazine and I, like you, have wondered what happened. I have information regarding the current situation now I know.

Since my return to the country, I have expressed my interest in you and expressed my desire to be more involved. I wish you would be more responsive under-standable. I am a member who writes to

Country Music NEWS 34-A

ATTENTION COUNTRY MUSIC SUBSCRIBERS
You can get every issue of this Newsletter plus other Charter Member benefits in the Country Music Society of America. FREE for the balance of your current Subscription. See page 46 for details or use one of the order cards in front or in back of this newsletter.

FROM ONE TO FIFTY THOUSAND

There is a tie for first member of the CMSA between Lynn Oettinger of Paris, France and Fred Johnson of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Lynn joined in person when she was in New York City as the Society was starting up last spring. She paid cash for her membership and really got in on the ground floor. Fred Johnson joined over the telephone as soon as he heard about the Society. Their support meant so much.

To hear about the 50,000th member, watch this column of the Newsletter. It may turn out to be *you*.

Dear Russ,

Love the magazine, proud to be number one. Will start a Paris office whenever you feel the need.

Lynn Oettinger
Paris, France



everybody expressing my feelings on everything. In fact, I have never written to a publisher before, but your offer is so unusual that I would like to support your efforts in any way I can.

Allow me to tell you a bit about myself. I am mature (my kids think I'm over the hill!), have been in accounting all my life, am Controller at the world's largest manufacturer of wheelbarrows (Jackson) with a staff of 13 people working for me, have a knack for writing, love country music, and some years ago I was employed by a magazine publisher (*Civil War Times* and *American History Illustrated*) so the world of publishing is not totally alien to me. Not your average kook!

You sound like the kind of person I like to deal with and I would like to offer my services in whatever manner I can to assist you in this endeavor. Subscriptions, accounting, records, articles, etc. I am expecting no compensation for this and I am not looking for employment. I would just like to be part of *Country Music* and donate any talents I may have to the furtherance of country music.

If you could use any assistance, I am more than willing to help and I would be glad to meet you personally at your place and at your convenience. Again, I am not looking for rewards or a job. I feel that each of us was given some kind of talent in this world, and if you could use mine, it's yours for the asking.

If you are interested in contacting me, my address and telephone numbers are shown below. If not, I wish you the greatest success and thanks for reactivating *Country Music*—the world's greatest magazine!

Walt Peters
Etters, Pennsylvania

Dear CMSA,

I'm definitely READY to get our chapter ROLLIN'! Thanks for the mention in the January/February issue. But why 'temporary president'? I fully understand that I, along with others, will be on trial...if I don't do a good job, then I'll certainly feel that you should replace me. But, I really hate to start off being a 'temporary president' ...sounds as if I'll last a few days, then... Anyway, I deeply appreciate your confidence in asking me to serve. THANK YOU!!!

I'll be in Nashville on the 19, 20, and 21 of this month. I'll spread the word whenever I can, and possibly ask for support in some manner. I'll see Bob Pinson of the Country Music Hall of Fame, Joe Gibson of Nationwide Sound Distributors, and others. CMSA will be in my mouth

everywhere I go.

Meanwhile I have the following in mind for our Alabama Chapter!

1. Newsletter . . . reporting on: concerts, Alabama country music artists, night clubs, Chapter plans and news, spotlighting Alabamians involved in country music (there are many), etc.
2. An annual Chapter party with music/dance/special guests.
3. Press release.
4. Attending art/craft shows, fairs, concerts, etc and handing out literature on CMSA and the Alabama Chapter. Asking members to do the same.
5. Seeking radio support.
6. Getting involved with the Alabama Music Hall of Fame.
7. Getting involved with the Muscle Shoals Music Association.
8. Designing a bumper sticker.
9. Designing a t-shirt.
10. Planning special trips and events, if funds allow.
11. Approaching country music artists from Alabama concerning their fan clubs' support of our Chapter and CMSA.
12. Studying the possibility of a state-wide talent search with prizes. (May be part of a nationwide search by CMSA.)
13. Presenting awards to the members who sign up the largest number of new Chapter and CMSA members.

Plus much much more. Thanks for your time. Extremely excited about this entire thing!

Rick Owens
Montgomery, Alabama

We thought you all, future Chapter Presidents or just plain Society members, would enjoy Rick's enthusiastic spirit and his get-up-and-go. We look for great things from all of you, and hope to hear from even more of you in the days to come.

STATE BY STATE

All right, everyone, take a look! Here is where you are, state by state, including

all the overseas post offices and Canada. Each number represents one of you.

Alabama 955	Kentucky 1,275	North Dakota 245	Wyoming 136
Alaska 101	Louisiana 928	Ohio 3,405	Pacific Islands 2
Arizona 525	Maine 297	Oklahoma 1,020	Foreign 58
Arkansas 711	Maryland 1,038	Oregon 603	Newfoundland 4
California 3,351	Massachusetts 668	Pennsylvania 3,097	Nova Scotia 10
Colorado 609	Michigan 2,014	Puerto Rico 5	New Brunswick 11
Connecticut 492	Minnesota 1,502	Rhode Island 90	Prince Edward
Delaware 166	Mississippi 577	South Carolina 777	Island 3
District of	Missouri 1,972	South Dakota 291	Quebec 21
Columbia 19	Montana 250	Tennessee 1,181	Ontario 140
Florida 1,718	Nebraska 584	Texas 3,138	Manitoba 33
Georgia 1,363	Nevada 140	Utah 202	Saskatchewan 40
Hawaii 33	New Hampshire 228	Vermont 194	Alberta 70
Idaho 245	New Jersey 855	Virginia 2,003	British Columbia 43
Illinois 2,834	New Mexico 240	Virgin Islands 2	Northwest
Indiana 1,923	New York 2,192	Washington 951	Territories 1
Iowa 1,410	North	West Virginia 910	Yukon 0
Kansas 1,048	Carolina 2,009	Wisconsin 2,029	

All right, all those of you in the Yukon who are not joining...what's wrong? We'd like to hear from you.

FROM YOUR VIEWPOINT

YOU AND COUNTRY MUSIC

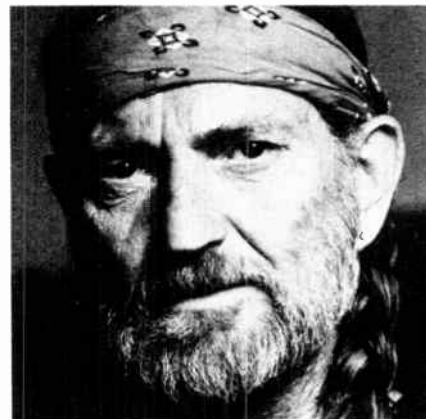
Everyone who is interested in country music makes contact with it in a different way. The story of how an individual became interested often makes good reading. Sometimes there are unusual connections between individuals and performers based upon family or other common interests. Sometimes there are stories to tell about performers that only you can tell. Another interesting angle is how country music is important to you, what it does for you as an individual. We know that some of you travel great distances to see performers. Your reasons for doing this and the details of your journeys may be important.

We have published a number of letters like these in *Country Music*. We would like to do even more here in the Newsletter. So send us what you have to say on these subjects, and send us snapshots if you have them. The letter below is an example of what we are looking for.

Dear CMSA,

The last four or five years I've become a real country music "junkie" and not because of "Urban Cowboy." Actually, it was Willie that turned me on to country music. We grew up listening to KVOO in Tulsa in the 50s but got away from it after high school and during the rockabilly era. I never was too much of an Elvis fan. I started listening to country music again after we moved to Houston and my favorite "easy listening" station was sold to a Spanish music station.

One day I heard Willie sing something I liked. I started listening more and bought some of his records — I think the first one was *Willie Nelson Sings Kristofferson*. The more closely I listened the better I liked his singing. I now own every record and tape I can find with him on it as well as records by Merle Haggard, Ray Price, and several others. My record collection is larger than my teenagers'. (They think it's hilarious that



Mother is such a record buyer.) I am also collecting books on country music. This is becoming an expensive hobby. Fortunately, I have an understanding husband who likes country music, too.

Virginia Caudle
Houston, Texas

YOU AND THE MOVIES

Tender Movie

Because we thought "Tender Mercies" was an interesting and important movie on a country music subject, we featured it in our "Round Up '83" in the January/February issue of *Country Music* and invited you to respond to our review. Several of you did.

Dear CMSA,

I watched a home video of "Tender Mercies" in December and felt that it was rather vague. I love to see anything to do with country music, but I was rather disappointed with this one. However, I think Robert Duvall did an interesting and honest job of acting and singing.

Kathy Morgan Johnson
Dundee, Mississippi

Dear CMSA,

I just heard Willie Nelson and Kris Kristofferson being interviewed on "Good Morning, America" about their upcoming movie, "The Songwriter." I'll be interested in your review of this movie when out. I love Willie's music — sad, glad, mad, sweet, soft, hard, hell-raising — and his voice and instrumentation. I can't say the same for Kris's singing. I like some of the songs he wrote that I know of — still, to me it's like, "How the heck did he get to be a super star?" I may have a lot to learn. After reading your review of "Tender Mercies," I think it's a



must for me to see, and I'm not really a movie goer.

Your opening is just *perfect* on Clint Eastwood and Snuff Garrett, but bless them for putting Shelly West and David Frizzell and "You're the Reason God Made Oklahoma" out for us. Shame, shame on what they did to Shelly and *Red Hot!* Yes, yes to Johnny Cash's efforts and "Living Proof". I never liked "Whorehouse." Nothing good or country about it. Tammy's "Stand By Your Man," O.K. "Coal Miner's Daughter" is great. The tears came for sad and for super good. Poor Kenny — he's good but needs acting lessons. Why don't we have "Seven Brides for Seven Brothers" and "Yellow Rose" included?

I'll be looking for "Tender Mercies" in Salina.

Alice Estes
Bridgeport, Kansas

Dear CMSA,

Saw "Tender Mercies" and *loved it*.

Definitely one of the best movies in years. However, I thought your review was a little overdone in the area of plot summary and explanation. In fact, I found the tone of the review to be a bit condescending, as if you were explaining the movie to us. The film speaks for itself.

I agree that it needs better distribution and promotion.

Ruth Tonachel
New York, New York

Coming Soon

We are delighted to report that "Tender Mercies" has been re-released by Universal Pictures. It is scheduled to play all over the country. A partial list of cities where it will appear is given below.

Raleigh-Durham	Reno
Columbus	Denver
Savannah	Colorado Springs
Orlando-Daytona	Omaha
Mobile-Pensacola	Wichita
Montgomery	Oklahoma City
Lafayette	Amarillo
Fairbanks	Wichita Falls
Spokane	Abilene
Boise	El Paso
Salt Lake City	Sweetwater
Portland	San Antonio
Sacramento	

After you have seen the movie, we would be interested in hearing what you think of it. Robert Duvall, the star of

"Tender Mercies," was particularly concerned to portray the people in the story accurately, as he saw them. Your impressions would be most interesting.

Central Casting

Not just country music, but the mid-section of the country generally, seems to be receiving more attention in the movies. Whatever one may think of "Terms of Endearment," and opinions vary, it certainly presented some delightfully realistic scenes of parts of America that don't usually show up on film. The clap-

board house that the newly-weds start out in in Houston, the white frame house in Des Moines, the college campus in Nebraska, the few shots of Lincoln other than inside the hospital — all are examples. Many of the values, to say nothing of much of the scenery of "The Right Stuff," derive straight from the Sun and Central belts of this country. No one who has ever been on the hot High Plains in the summer could fail to identify with those families cooking hot dogs outside and the father and sons playing catch in the back yards at Edwards Air Force Base in the high desert of Cali-

fornia, with that strong wind blowing the dusty grass and trees.

Cold and snowy winter in Iowa provides the background for a new film called "Country," with Sam Sheppard, who was featured in "The Right Stuff," working with Jessica Lange, playing a couple about to lose their farm.

And Nashville and Austin will appear in the new movie with Willie Nelson and Kris Kristofferson called, aptly enough, "The Songwriter." The outline of the story sounds a little bit like Willie's real-life journey.

Where will these films premiere?

FROM YOUR SEAT

True Country

One of the most common themes in your letters and in much that is written by professional writers in our and other magazines these days is the theme of "country": whether something is or isn't "country," be it a singer, a song, a show, or whatever. People on all sides of this question speak with a good deal of heat. Many are delighted with the new, younger performers whose music often includes sounds that are not real country. Others are distressed with this trend and wish that more was heard from and written about the older stars. Mel Tillis, in our "Twenty Questions" feature in the March/April issue of the magazine, gives one of the stars' point of view on this question.

Here are two reviews by Society members, one of a concert, one of a TV show. We would like to hear from more of you with reviews like these — regardless of which side of the question you are on. It's not even necessary to take up the issue of "country." Just tell us what you've seen and what you've liked or not liked about it.

Dear CMSA,

So glad you decided to publish *Country Music* again. I always enjoyed it. Like to tell you what I and a lot of people thought about Janie Fricke. She sang at our Fair. She was terrible. When she started her third song, we got up and walked out. Sure wish I could have gotten half of my ticket money back, which would have been \$10. Will never go to see her again. Don't know how she ever won an award. She isn't even country. So many of the singers that get an award nowadays aren't country. I don't even watch the award shows anymore for this reason.

Thanks for letting me tell it like it is.

Jeanette Mack
New Utm, New Mexico

Dear CMSA,

I watched a show that was billed as "Music City Top Country Hits." (This



was the "Music City News Top Country Hits of the Year" show broadcast in late January.) In my opinion it should have

been billed the "Music City Top Hippy Hits." There was more hair and less country music, real country. I think something like that is a detriment to country music.

I wanted to get me a cage and start preaching evolution.

Clarence I. Williams
Sacramento, California

The awards on the *Music City News* show were reportedly voted by fans. The fans contacted for that vote gave John Anderson's and Lionel Delmore's "Swingin'" the nod for Favorite Song of the Year. Anderson's hair is long and his music is controversial; Delmore's hair is short.

For how both Janie Fricke and John Anderson, and others of many different styles and sounds, fared in our own CMSA Ballot Box, read on. And don't forget to send us *your* opinion of TV shows and concerts you attend and records too.

ON THE TURNTABLE

Bought Any Records?

You certainly have! Your response to this question in the January/February issue of the magazine makes interesting reading. See if you don't agree. Nashville record executives, take note. The enthusiastic record buyer is not dead. We hope more of you will write in, and don't forget to try your hand at a record review — a longer, detailed discussion of an album you've liked, or didn't like — if you've a mind to.

Dear CMSA,

Thanks for the opportunity and encouragement to participate in the magazine and the Society. My husband and I are happy to be actively involved. Below is a list of records we obtained in the month of December.

• **Willie Nelson, Without a Song.** It was given as a gift. This makes #66 in our

collection of Willie records. We love it!!

• **Willie Nelson, A Song for You.** #67 in our collection of Willie records. It was recorded in London. As longstanding Willie fans, we tend to love all his music.

• **Charly McClain, Paradise.** Given as a gift. We enjoyed the selection "Paradise." The rest was O.K.

• **Riders in the Sky** (Doug Green, Too Slim and Woody Paul), **Prairie Serenade.** Purchased because we know a relative of Doug Green. We like the music, but could do without the extras (hoots and howls).

• **Jim Glaser, Man in the Mirror.** It's terrific!!! We have always enjoyed the Glasers' music and wish Jim well with this record.

Merry C. Bjorne

Dear CMSA,

In response to your asking members to tell you about albums we've bought, I now have the opportunity to do some-

COUNTRY MUSIC

A CONFIDENTIAL SURVEY

08440

Please indicate each of your answers by placing an "X" in the box or writing it on the line provided. "Your household" refers to all persons living with you regardless of whether or not they are relatives.

1. How many of the last four issues of COUNTRY MUSIC have you read or looked into?

- 4 out of the last four . . . 6-4 2 out of the last four . . . -2 None of the last four -0
 3 out of the last four . . . -3 1 out of the last four . . . -1 New reader (have not received four) . . . -x

2. Considering all the times you picked it up, about how much time in total, did you spend reading or looking into the last issue of COUNTRY MUSIC before you were finished with it?

- Less than 30 minutes . . . 7-1 1 to under 1½ hours . . . -3 2 hours or more -5
 30 - 59 minutes . . . -2 1½ to under 2 hours . . . -4 I am still reading my first issue -6

3. Not including yourself, how many other males and females in your household have read or looked into the last issue of COUNTRY MUSIC which you and other members of your household were finished reading? (If none, write "0")

	NUMBER OF OTHER MALE READERS	NUMBER OF OTHER FEMALE READERS
Under 18 years of age	_____ 8-	_____ 12-
18 to 34 years old	_____ 9-	_____ 13-
35 to 54 years old	_____ 10-	_____ 14-
55 years or older	_____ 11-	_____ 15-

4. What did you do with the last issue of COUNTRY MUSIC that you and the other members of your household were finished reading?

- Saved entire issue 16-1 It went into a waiting room -3
 Passed it along to friends/relatives . . . -2 I discarded it -4
 Other: _____ -5
(Please specify)

5. How many people do you know of outside of your household who read your copy of the last issue of COUNTRY MUSIC you received?

Number of people _____ 17-
 (Write in)

6a. How many passenger vehicles are currently owned by all members of your household?

Number of vehicles _____ 18- None -0

b. Which of the following types of vehicles does your household own? (Check as many as apply)

- Domestic Car 19-1 Van -4 Camper -7
 Imported Car -2 Trailer -5 Sport/Utility Vehicle -8
 Pick-Up Truck -3 Jeep -6 Motorcycle -9

7a. Which of the following Alcoholic Beverages do you yourself drink?

- Beer 20-1 Wine -2 Other Alcoholic Beverages -3

b. Which of the following Alcoholic Beverages have you served in your home in the last 3 months?

- Beer 21-1 Wine -2 Other Alcoholic Beverages -3

8. In the last 12 months, how many records and tapes have you purchased? (If none, write "0")

Records _____ 22- Blank tapes _____ 23- Pre-recorded tapes _____ 24-

9a. Do you currently own a stereo system for your home? Yes 25-1 No -2

b. If yes, does it have a tape/cassette deck? Yes -3 No -4

c. Do you currently own a stereo system for your auto? Yes -5 No -6

d. If yes, is it: A radio . -7 A tape/cassette deck -8 Both -9

10a. Do you yourself play any musical instruments? Yes 26-1 No -2

b. If yes, which instrument(s) do you play? _____ 27-
 28-

Cut here, Mail completed questionnaire to address on reverse side.

11. In the last 12 months, approximately how many pairs of jeans have you and the other members of your household purchased?

Number you purchased _____ 29- None 0 Number others purchased _____ 30- None 0

12. Do you or other members of your household smoke cigarettes, cigars or use chewing tobaccos?

You do 31-1 Others do -2

HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTICS

In this part of the questionnaire, we are interested in obtaining some information about you and your household which we need for statistical and analytical purposes only. The information will be held confidential and treated only in composite with information from other readers. It will be extremely useful to us in completing our picture of our readers.

13. Are you male or female? Male 32-1 Female -2

14. Including yourself, how many persons in each of the listed sex and age categories live in your household?

Males 18 years of age or older _____ 33- Females 18 years of age or older _____ 35-
Males under 18 years of age _____ 34- Females under 18 years of age _____ 36-

15. Please put an "X" in the box below which indicates your age:

Under 18 37-1 30 - 34 -4 45 - 49 -7 60 - 64 -0
18 - 24 -2 35 - 39 -5 50 - 54 -8 65 or over -x
25 - 29 -3 40 - 44 -6 55 - 59 -9

16. What is your marital status?

Single (never married) 38-1 Legally Separated -3 Widowed -4
Married -2 Divorced -5

17a. Which of the following best describes your present employment status?

Employed full-time -- that is, 30 or more hours per week 39-1
Employed part-time -- that is, less than 30 hours per week -2
Not employed (retired, etc.) -3

b. If not employed, are you:

Retired 40-1 Full-time student -3
Temporarily unemployed -2 Homemaker -4

18a. In what kind of business, industry, or profession do you work? _____

41-

b. What do they make or do where you work? _____

42-

c. What is your particular job called? _____

43-

19. Please indicate the highest level of schooling you have completed.

Some High School or Less 44-1 Attended College 1 - 3 Years -4
Graduated High School -2 Graduated 4-Year College -5
Attended College Less Than 1 Year -3 Professional or Graduate School after 4-Year College -6

20. Are you the head of your household (that is, the main income earner)? Yes 45-1 No -2

21. What is the total combined annual income before taxes of all members of your household, including yourself -- that is, income from jobs as well as any other sources?

Less than \$8,000 46-1 \$15,000 to \$19,999 -4 \$30,000 to \$34,999 -7
\$ 8,000 to \$ 9,999 -2 \$20,000 to \$24,999 -5 \$35,000 or more -8
\$10,000 to \$14,999 -3 \$25,000 to \$29,999 -6

22. What is the Zip Code of the area in which you live? _____

47- 48- 49- 50- 51-

Please cut out this page, fill in all the blanks and mail to:
Questionnaire, Country Music, 450 Park Avenue South, New York, New York 10016

thing that I have always wanted to do ... review records like a fan, rather than like your so-called experts! So here goes....

• **Kenny Rogers, Eyes That See in the Dark** is easily Kenny's best. It may be a little more "pop" than his others, but this album has proved to me that Ken is still moving up. I never thought that Elvis would have any real competition till Kenny Rogers came along. This album solidifies that opinion. On my scale of one to ten ... *Eyes* gets a 10!

• In comparison, **Deliver** by **The Oak Ridge Boys** is their most country album in quite awhile. They prove their versatility and move back to their gospel roots. This is an album you have to listen to ten times before you really appreciate or understand it. The Boys have *Delivered* a good country l.p., so give 'em a hand ... and a 7!

• **Hank Williams, Jr.** really is the **Man of Steel**, the superman of country music! This album captures the sound and excitement of Hank's concerts. Every selection is an excellent choice, and every one is superb. This is the Hank album I've been expecting. On my scale of one to ten ... *Hank's Man of Steel* gets a 12!

• **Waylon & Company** is a typical Waylon album with everybody and his dog singing along. There have been so maaaaannny duets this year, but I would trade this l.p. for all the others combined. Now if ol' Waylon will only do a solo album this good. *Company* gets a 9.

Well, there ya' have it. Thanks for your time and keep up the great work.

*Mike W. Sheets
Pulaski, Virginia*

Dear CMSA,

Here are the records I've bought lately.

• **Jerry Lee Lewis, My Fingers Do the Walking.** Lewis is good, background and chorus horrible. Wasted my money. Can't bear to hear it. Dug out all the old ones.

• **Sir Douglas Quintet, Together After Five.** Got this oldie in a bargain bin for \$1.00. I thought this was their best album ever. Wouldn't get rid of this even though my daughter-in-law begged on bended knees to buy it for full price. Told her I would leave it to her in my will.

• **Stuart Margolin, And the Angels Sing.** Another oldie I found. Loved it. Neighbor heard it and got the other copy. Guess our copies are the only ones sold.

• **Okeh Western Swing.** Liked this one so well I bought a second copy. Especially like "Lovesick Blues" by Emmett Miller. Wish I had everything he recorded.

• **Hank Williams, Jr., Strong Stuff.** Worth the price but can't hold a candle to *Habits Old & New*.

• **Carl Perkins, Sun Years** (box). Loved it.

I've got a list of twenty-five or thirty records I want, but so far haven't gotten them. I mainly collect older records and

1983 CMSA AWARDS

You have had your say, you have cast your votes, the results are in. Here is what you have decided:—

Entertainer of the Year
Alabama

Male Vocalist of the Year
Ricky Skaggs

Female Vocalist of the Year
Janie Fricke

Song of the Year
"You Were Always on My Mind"

Album of the Year
The Closer You Get, Alabama



Your votes were the same as the CMA's in these categories, with one exception. You went for Ricky Skaggs, by an overwhelming margin, for Male Vocalist of the Year. The CMA voters picked Lee Greenwood as the winner in that slot. Barbara Mandrell and Ricky Skaggs were tied for second in your vote for Entertainer of the Year, behind a large lead for Alabama. You put Lee Greenwood and Merle (need we say Merle who?) in a tie for second place in the Male Vocalist slot. Barbara Mandrell was a fairly close second to Janie in the Female Vocalist category. "You Were Always on My Mind" was your overwhelming favorite in the Song of the Year voting, but your second choice was "Swingin'," which the CMA voted Single of the Year (we did not include that category in our ballot). For Album of the Year, you went strongly for Alabama's *The Closer You Get*. In second place you had a dead heat between Ricky Skaggs' *Highways and Heartaches* and Merle's and Willie's *Pancho and Lefty*.

Your Vote Counts

So that's how you voted. Thanks to all those who participated. We were delighted with the response. Your nominations are still coming in for the All-Time Ten Best Songs and the All-Time Ten Best Singers. We may have to hire several of you to come in and help compile them! Keep watching the Newsletter for the final ballot.

always look in the cheap bins and at garage sales, etc. My best 45 is Willie Nelson's "Betty 5702." It's red.

I love your magazine, always have. Sure glad it's back. My favorite article is "Buried Treasures." If it weren't for this article, there would be so many albums I would not be aware of.

*Charlotte Brown
Conroe, Texas*

Dear CMSA,

I bought two new albums just recently. I like them, and I think I got my money's worth. The albums were: **Ricky Skaggs, Don't Cheat in Our Hometown**, and **Barbara Mandrell, Spun Gold**.

They were good albums. 'Course I love country music and have most of my life. I buy one album a week or sometimes two, and they all are country music.

*Linda Kamp
Rochester, Indiana*

Dear CMSA,

Here are some of the new albums I've bought. I've really enjoyed all of them.

• **Kenny Rogers, Eyes That See in the Dark.** I especially like "Buried Treasure" and "Evening Star." Both have help from the Gatlin Brothers.

• **The Oak Ridge Boys, Deliver.**

• **T.G. Sheppard, Slow Burn.** I also like *First Things First* real well.

• **Lee Greenwood, Somebody's Gonna Love You.**

• **Larry Gatlin and The Gatlin Brothers, Greatest Hits, Vol. II.**

• **Ronnie Milsap, Keyed Up.**

• **Earl Thomas Conley, Don't Make It Easy for Me.**

• **B.J. Thomas, The Great American Dream.**

• **George Strait, Right or Wrong.** I also like "80 Proof Bottle of Tear Stopper" and "Every Time It Rains."

• **Steve Wariner, Midnight Fire.**

• **Gary Morris, Why Lady Why.**

• **John Conlee, Greatest Hits.**

Also a few of the not so famous:—

• **Joe Waters, Harvest Moon.** I really like "Someday My Ship's Comin' In."

• **Danny White, Country Cowboy.** I'm a Dallas Cowboy fan.

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ONLY ONE COUPON GOOD TOWARD EACH PURCHASE

YOUR NAME _____ I.D.# _____ (Non-Transferable)

I got my money's worth on *all* of these.
Belinda Tompkins
Beckrille, Texas

Dear CMSA,

I only bought two record albums lately. They are:—

- **Reba McEntire, Behind the Scene.** I did like it, and I did get my money's worth as with all the albums I have by Reba. She is the only singer whose records I will buy just by the name of the artist. With 100% success on this so far, I will continue to do so. She's the best.
- The second album I bought was **Today** by **The Statler Brothers.** This is the only album I have by them. I have their single, "Flowers on the Wall." Yes, I did get my money's worth, and I like all of the songs on this album.

After this, I may add more to my collection.

Dave Krusz

Dear CMSA,

In response to your "For Members Only" question about records, here's what I've bought lately.

Guy Clark, Better Days, which I listen to constantly. Definitely worth the money.

Also **Hank Jr.'s Man of Steel,** which was *not* worth the money. A dull and somewhat pretentious record, I think.

Am still enjoying **Annie McGowan's Rattlesnakes and Rusty Water,** **Townes Van Zandt's None But the Rain,** and all Joe Ely's records.

Ruth Tonachel
New York, New York

(Ruth wrote to us about both movies and records, as did several others.)

Dear CMSA,

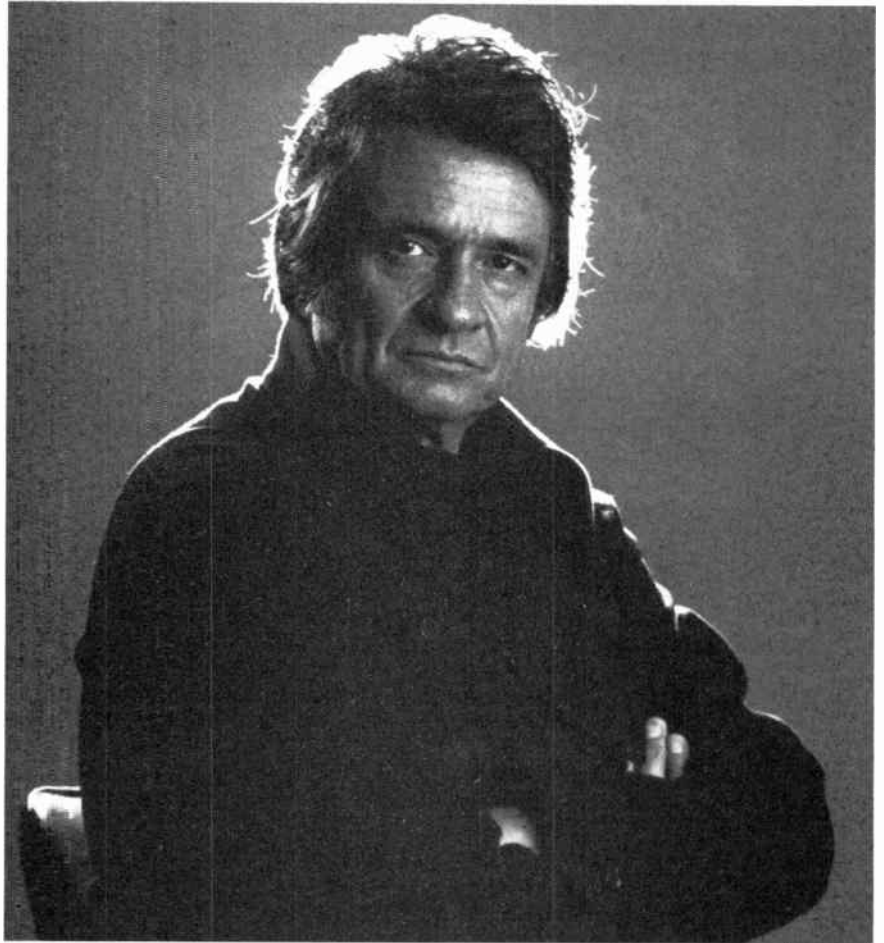
In the last issue of *Country Music* you asked for feedback on any new albums your readers had bought. Well, I recently purchased **Johnny Lee's** album **Sounds Like Love** and **Ed Bruce's** album **You're Not Leavin' Here Tonight.** Both are terrific! Normally I only purchase an album if I like a number of selections on it. However, with these two artists I am willing to take a chance with any album they record, and—as usual—I was not disappointed. The albums have a fantastic assortment of smooth ballads and up-beat songs. Both artists display their

GET IT OFF YOUR CHEST

What's bothering you? Seen a bad concert lately? Records aren't right? D.J.'s play the wrong music? Send us your gripes. We'll publish the most commonly mentioned gripes and pass them along to the people who can do something about it. And if *we're* bothering you, tell us that too!

WISH UPON A STAR

In each Newsletter, we will give you an opportunity to write to a country music star. Ask questions. Tell this man or woman whatever it is that's in your heart. Maybe you've seen or even met this person—many of you have met stars, but in the rush of people and autographs, there just wasn't time to make your presence felt or your question heard. Now's your chance.



Johnny Cash

Johnny Cash is our first offering in the "Wish Upon a Star" category. He's first on a lot of people's lists for a lot of reasons.

Send your questions for Johnny to us here at the Newsletter. If you have photos of yourself with Johnny Cash, send them too and tell us when and where you met him.

great talents. The combination makes for two delightful albums that are worth many replays.

Deborah Gonyon
Columbus, Ohio

Dear CMSA,

You wanted us to tell you about any albums we've bought in the last few months. Well, I got **The Oak Ridge Boys' Deliver.** I think all of the cuts are very well done. I do feel there's a little too much tenor on "Break My Mind." I'd like it better if it were sung a little deeper-pitched. But overall, the Oaks have done it again!

They are the best country group on the scene today. They deserve better coverage than they get. They have proven that

they can do any music. I have been a fan of theirs since I was eighteen—I'm gonna be thirty in April. I have seen them grow and progress, and they are the best!

Sudie Marie Benke
Omaha, Nebraska

Other Albums Mentioned

- **Marty Robbins, A Lifetime of Song 1951-1982**
- **Tom Jones, Don't Let Your Dreams Die Young**
- **Ray Price, Master of the Art**

These from Guy Dodge of Clear Lake, Wisconsin and Norma Kahler of Sedalia, Missouri.

FRONT AND CENTER

On Their Way Up

Originality was the key, according to spokesmen for the winners of two big amateur contests. **John Arnold**, lead vocalist for The John Arnold Band of Norman, Oklahoma, winners of the 1983 Wrangler Country Showdown, told CMM the band thought they had done what they had come out to do when they made it to the Top Ten in the Showdown finals in Nashville last November. "We were so glad to be representing Oklahoma when we went out there," he said, "The other acts were all so good. We didn't think we had a chance." Asked what made the difference for them in the final win, John laughed. "A lot of luck," he said, "and originality—originality in our song and in our performance. We didn't sound like anybody else." The band's song, "Take Another Chance," was co-written by all six members: John; fiddler and alto sax player **David Coe**; lead guitarist **Bob French**; bass guitarist **Steve Grunder**; **Janie Herbst** on keyboard; and **Jimmy Herbst** on drums.

As CMM went to press, the group had its feet up back in Norman after opening for **Johnny Rodriguez** at Billy Bob's in Ft. Worth and appearing on the Wrangler Float at the Cotton Bowl Parade in Dallas. They were getting set to watch themselves win all over again on the Nashville Network's broadcast of the Showdown finals, hosted by **Louise Mandrell** and **Ed Bruce**. The band was scheduled to tape a *Nashville Now* show in late January or early February and they all were looking forward to recording their first single in February.



They are taking turns with the van they won, signing up for non-band outings in it on a calendar.

Things are pretty much back to normal for **Desert Star**, the San Jose, California band which won the Seagram's Battle of the Bands. "We are on a gradual roll," said **Charley Wayne**, the band's spokesman. "We are trying harder, but things are getting harder too." The band, all of whom have day jobs, would like to quit them and be fully professional as soon as they can. According to Charley, originality was the key to **Desert Star's** win, as it was for the John Arnold Band. "A lot of the other bands really sounded like other artists," Charley commented. "Some groups were really heavily influenced by **Alabama**. One sounded exactly like the **Oak Ridge Boys**. We did not, not at all." Charley calls the band's sound "strictly country."

The group—**Caryn Sinkler**, vocals; **Donna Preston**, vocals; **Dave Preston**, bass and vocals; **Richard Sinkler**, steel guitar; **Charley Wayne**, guitar and vocals; **Rick Broccini**, drums and vocals—played two of their own songs and two songs written by friends. Favorites of theirs by other artists are **Linda Ronstadt's** songs and some of **John Anderson's** new songs. The John Arnold Band also likes Linda Ronstadt's songs, but they don't have a female singer who can sing them. They like to play **Michael Murphey's** songs and songs by **Larry Gatlin** and **Ronnie Milsap** in addition to their own material.

For **Desert Star**, playing in Las Vegas in the semi-finals was one of the high points—if not *the* high point—of the Seagram's contest. With their name, who could be surprised at that?

When the contest was all over, **Desert Star**, like The John Arnold Band, was surprised that they had won.

A New Star

Denise Price, last year's Wrangler winner, is hard at work in orange grove country. In mid-January she rode the Missing Children's Float sponsored by J.C. Penney in the Super Bowl Parade in Tampa, Florida the night before the Super Bowl. Denise has recorded a song called "Jennifer" for the Missing Children's Fund. She first heard the song when Jennifer's grandmother brought a tape of it to the Salt and Pepper TV production company where Denise has been taping shows for *Church Street Station*, one of the new Nashville Network shows. Denise hopes that the song will help in the search for Jennifer, a



real-life missing child. Her husband, **Larry Price**, told CMM that the song captured the audience's attention when Denise sang it at the Cheyenne Opera House, where *Church Street Station* is in performance. "It was the only time I have ever heard the Cheyenne Opera House quiet," Larry said. "It was quite an experience for everyone." The song has been released nationwide on the Golden Swan label.

Denise will be a regular on the *Church Street Station* series, appearing on almost half of the 52 weekly shows, now slotted to be broadcast in prime time on Saturday nights. Denise and Larry are focusing their energies on getting out another record, to follow Denise's first single, "Two Hearts Can't Be Wrong," which crept onto the country charts for a short time last year. They are thrilled with the exposure Denise is getting on *Church Street*, but records are the key in country music today, they feel. "There are not a lot of women in country music who are really successful," Larry commented. Both he and Denise would like to change that! Denise's idol is **Barbara Mandrell**, who has worked so hard for what she has accomplished.

In the Limelight

Are you in a country music band? Write and tell us about it.

TEX RITTER

Tried and True

Another common theme in your letters, in addition to the issue of what is country, is the continuing interest many of you have in older artists—men and women who have expressed for you the heart of the matter in words and song. Some of these singers are still alive, some are not. You ask about them and remember them fondly. Sometimes you say you miss them or wish we would tell you more about them.

In each issue of the newsletter, we plan to feature an older artist. This month we present Tex Ritter.

Ride, Cowboy, Ride

In song and words, Tex Ritter celebrated a life he was born into in 1905: 400 acres of ranch and farm land in Nederland, Panola County, East Texas, land claimed by his great-grandfather in 1830 when it was still part of Mexico. Real name Woodward Maurice Ritter, he was youngest of six children. As a boy, he sang in church, at home and at an occasional "singing school." "My family sang a lot. Out of three boys, I was the youngest. My two older brothers were very good singers. ... Usually they wouldn't let me sing with them, because I couldn't sing well enough. ... Once we got up in front of the fireplace and sang about a half a song, and then the others stopped and said, 'Mama, would you make him sit down?'"

While studying to be a lawyer at the University of Texas, Tex Ritter became interested in lecturing and singing about Texas. He called his show "The Texas Cowboy and His Songs." His success with the show led him to Chicago, where for awhile he continued his law studies at Northwestern University and sang on local radio. He left Chicago for New York and a career in show business in 1930.

These were the Depression years, in New York City as everywhere. "It was pretty grim to see people jumping out of windows — well, I didn't actually see it; but I know I was pretty hungry, real hungry." He joined the New York Theater Guild and in 1931 appeared in *Green Grow the Lilacs*, the play by Lynn Riggs about ranch life in Oklahoma that be-



came the basis of Rodgers and Hammerstein's musical *Oklahoma!* "It was a folk play of Oklahoma at the turn of the century, while it was still a territory. It was beautifully written. *Oklahoma* still kept the dialogue, and the prose had a rhythm to it, kinda like poetry. They followed the book rather closely, except they extended the ending a little. ... Instead of the square dancing, they put in the ballet; and the cowboy songs were scored by Richard Rodgers. ... That was a nice era."

In those same years, Tex Ritter broke into local and national radio. He was involved in several important shows, sometimes as both writer and performer: *The Lone Ranger*, *Death Valley Days*, *Tex Ritter's Campfire*, *Cowboy Tom's Round-Up*, and the WHN *Barn Dance* which he hosted with Ray Whitley.

In 1933 he signed with Columbia Records and began making singles and albums, and in 1936 he completed his first Hollywood movie for Grand National Films, called *Song of the Gringo*.

He appeared in many, many films during the late 1930s and early 1940s. He, Gene Autry and Roy Rogers were the three great "singing cowboys." As fewer westerns were made, following the advent of TV, Ritter became a touring artist and a performer on the Grand Ole Opry, which he joined in 1965. He also hosted a late night radio show on WSM in Nashville. He was instrumental in setting up both the Country Music Foundation and the Country Music Hall of Fame, becoming the Hall of Fame's second living member in 1964.

Tex Ritter was one of country music's hottest artists on records during the 1940s. His string of hits began after he signed with Capitol Records in 1942. It included "Jingle, Jangle, Jingle" (1942), "Jealous Heart" and "There's a New Moon Over My Shoulder" (1944), "I'm Wasting My Tears on You," "You Two-Timed Me One Time Too Often," "Rye Whiskey" and "Green Grow the Lilacs" (1945), "The Wayward Wind" (1956), and "Hillbilly Heaven" (1961). His biggest hit was "High Noon," the theme song for the film *High Noon*, starring Gary Cooper. It remained in the top ten on the pop charts for months in 1952.

In 1970, Tex Ritter ran unsuccessfully for the United States Senate in Tennessee. His campaign left him in debt, but he said, "It was a great experience and I don't regret it at all." He died following a heart attack in Nashville in January 1974.

He and his wife, Dorothy Fay Southworth, had two sons, Thomas Matthews and Jonathan Southworth. Jon followed his father into a career in show business as star of the TV series *Three's Company*.

Near the end of a life filled with accomplishments, Tex Ritter said, "I don't think anyone is ever satisfied with his accomplishments. Some of the greatest accomplishments in the world have been performed by old men, so you're never washed up. You can always accomplish something. But you'll never do it if you retire and just sit. Certainly not. When you do that, you die." The heart attack that led to Tex Ritter's death occurred while he was arranging bail for one of his band members at the Metro Jail in Nashville.





The "cowboy" music that Tex Ritter sang was heavily flavored with pop and rural Southern, "hillbilly," sounds, but all across America, it rang true.

—HELEN BARNARD

You Tell Us

John Morrow of Poplar Bluff, Missouri is an active Tex Ritter fan. He has written to us several times and has brought a good deal of interesting information about Tex Ritter to our attention. Here is some of what he has had to say.

Dear CMSA,

The Greatest Singing Cowboy Movie Star of All Times, Tex Ritter, was a phenomenon who excelled in every field of entertainment and was the first Texan, first singing cowboy movie star, second living and fifth member to be elected to the Country Music Hall of Fame. He helped several others to get recording contracts as he was one of the early pioneers of country music.

Tex Ritter started in country music and stayed with it until he made it big. He was the only big singing cowboy movie star to be a regular member of the Grand Ole Opry, and was the first major singing cowboy on radio. Such stars as Elvis Presley, Conway Twitty and Jerry Lee Lewis had to make it big in rock 'n roll before they were accepted by the country music fans, and Elvis, in spite of his fame, was turned down by the Opry. Yet he and others get cover story tributes with colored pictures showing them as young stars, when Tex Ritter deserves as much or more.

There is a painting of Tex Ritter in the Windmill Museum in Tex Ritter Park in Nederland, Texas along with mementos of his career and a marker to him at his

grave site in Port Neches, Texas. He is in the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben Western Hall of Fame in Omaha, Nebraska, the National Cowboy Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame, the Wax Museums in Nashville and in Grand Prairie, Texas, the Hollywood Walk of Stars and the Newhall, California Walk of Fame. Tex and his son John Ritter were the first father and son to be honored together in the Hollywood Walk of Stars.

Tex Ritter is the only singing cowboy

movie star to belong to both the Country Music Hall of Fame and the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben Western Hall of Fame simultaneously, and only singing cowboy to have held the number one, two and three spots simultaneously on the Country Music Billboard charts. This happened in 1945.

Two Tex Ritter Awards are given annually, one at the Country Music Fan Fair in Nashville each June to a person who has contributed a lot to country music, and one at the Academy of Country Music Awards Show in Los Angeles to someone who has accomplished something in movies related to country music.

The Tex Ritter Fan Club is still active ten years after his passing away. The address of the fan club is: *Tex Ritter Fan Club, Sharon Clarke, President, 12014 Alexander Road, Everett, Washington, 98204.*

I am very proud to be one of the many faithful fans of Tex Ritter. We fans work on projects to get him honored as he well deserves to be.

I am interested in collecting colored pictures of Tex Ritter, anything from reasonably priced lobby cards to comic books and 8 X 10-inch or larger stills.

*John Morrow
Poplar Bluff, Missouri*

Mr. Morrow's address is 608 Victor Street, Poplar Bluff, Missouri 63901, if you would like to write to him about pictures.

Tex Ritter on Records

Several Tex Ritter albums can still be found, mostly through collector's outlets and rare record dealers. The best of these, by far, for the average person to collect is *Tex Ritter: An American Legend*, a three-album boxed set which was released shortly after Ritter's death in 1974.

This set is a compilation of more than 30 of Tex Ritter's most famous recordings such as "Jingle, Jangle, Jingle," "Green Grow the Lilacs," "Boll Weevil," "Big Rock Candy Mountain" and one of George Jones' favorites, "Teneha, Timpson, Bobo and Blair."

Also included is "Do Not Forsake Me," the theme from the 1952 Gary Cooper classic, *High Noon*.

Beyond the music, this album is unique because most of the songs are preceded by commentary by Tex, and it is richly illustrated with 21 photos. At \$15.98 this unusual package is a bargain (add \$1.95 for postage and handling).

There are other albums available including a new import titled *High Noon* from the German Bear Family



Records. It, however, is a single album with only 15 songs for \$9.98 (add \$1.95 for postage and handling). Several of the songs have never been released before, so this album is a good choice if you want more than one.

CMSA has made a special arrangement for members to order this rare album set through the Society. If you would like one or both of these albums for your collection, send your check to: Country Music Society of America, 450 Park Avenue, South, New York, New York 10016.

TRAVEL TIME

MUSIC CITY, U.S.A.

Many of you have visited Nashville. From time to time we receive a letter that says that your trip to Music City was the thrill of a lifetime. This year you may decide to follow up on the Society's possible special package to Fan Fair, or you may decide to go on your own at a time that is convenient for you. We hope you will write and tell us about your trip when you do go — and it doesn't have to be to Nashville to be worth a story. The Grand Canyon, Vegas, Lake Tahoe, Glacier National Park, Cape Kennedy, or even New York City can make an impression on an individual or a family that lasts a long time and is worth telling. But if you do decide on Nashville, here are a few hints on places to write for further information.

Fan Fair—June 4-10

Fan Fair may be the best entertainment buy of the year. The \$55 per person registration includes daily admittance to the exhibits and concerts at the Tennessee State Fair Grounds in Nashville, a visit to the historic Ryman Auditorium, the Country Music Foundation, and Opryland Park, and admission to the All American Country Games in which country stars compete to benefit the Special Olympics. Entertainment events at the Fairgrounds include a bluegrass show on opening day, concerts throughout the week by a wide variety of country artists, and the Grand Masters Fiddling Championship on Sunday. There are special shows at the Grand Ole Opry Friday and Saturday nights. Tickets for these performances cost \$9 each and are available only to visitors to Fan Fair. For additional information, write to Fan Fair, 2804 Opryland Drive, Nashville, Tennessee 37214.

Opryland Park

Opryland Park opens for weekends March 31. Starting Memorial Day it is open all week long. A one-day ticket for \$13.25 for anyone age four and older entitles the visitor to all rides and shows in the Park that day.

The Nashville Network

Many people are aware that a great many TV shows are now produced and taped in Nashville. Some of you might like to visit specific shows that are open to the public. Here's how to do it.

- *Nashville Now*

This 90-minute show is in performance live five nights a week all year long.



There is no admission fee. When Opryland Park is open all the time, a visit to "Nashville Now" is available to all visitors to the Park. During the winter, early spring and fall, call 615-367-1851 for reservations.

- *Dancin' USA*

This live dance-and-music show, modeled after a Western dance hall or an "American Bandstand" type of show is open to the public to come, look, and dance when it is in production. Call 615-367-1851 for details.

- *Fandango*

This game show hosted by Bill Anderson is open to the public when it is in production. Contestants are chosen in advance, but visitors to Nashville are welcome to come, sit in the audience and cheer. Call the number listed above to see if it's in production.

- *You Can Be a Star*

When this talent-search show is in production, an audience is not only welcome—five members of the audience are chosen each time to join the panel of professional judges. Call 615-367-1851 or 889-6611 for details of the schedule.

- *New Country*

This new show features a single artist performing new material from a soon-to-be-released album. When it is in production, an audience is welcome. Call the two numbers above for details. This show is taped at the Opryland Hotel, unlike the others, which are all produced in studios at the Park.

The Country Music Foundation and Hall of Fame

This spot is a must for most visitors to Nashville. A new exhibit on the history of recording has been installed in the lobby of the famed RCA Studio B which the CMF owns and operates as a historic site just a short distance away from its main building. The exhibit follows the development of the art and science of recording through Edison's cylinders, the first 78 rpm records, 45s, 33s, and the new compact disc records. It also takes a look at the development of stereo and hi-fi. For more information about Foundation exhibits, write to The Country Music Foundation, 4 Music Square East, Nashville, Tennessee 37203.

FARTHER AFIELD

Here are two more special events worth thinking about. One revolves around a great singer of the past, the other around a newer star.

Jimmie Rodgers Festival—May 19-26

A fun-filled week in Meridian, Mississippi with music, dances, talent show, barbecue, chili cook-off, workshops, and a wreath-laying ceremony. Also features a railroad ride. Concert seats for evening entertainment, \$9 for reserved seats, \$5 for all other seats. For information write to Jean Dollar, Director, The Jimmie Rodgers Museum, P.O. Box 4555, Meridian Mississippi, 39301. Membership cards available from the Museum entitle you to tickets in advance and attendance at the Hospitality Dance on Tuesday night.

Hank Williams, Jr. Day—April 14

All you Hank Jr. fans might like to take part in the Hank Williams, Jr. Day and Second Annual Hank Jr. Look-Alike Contest in Cullman, Alabama. The events of the day are under the direction of Annette Harris, assistant manager of Hank's store, Hank's Montana Exchange, in Cullman. There will be prizes and T-shirts available. Hank Jr.'s touring schedule does not permit him to be there. For information write Annette Harris, P.O. Box 1088, 109 Second Avenue, NW, Cullman, Alabama 35055.

Enjoy your trip, and don't forget to write and tell us all about it.

COLLECTIBLES

GET IT ALL TOGETHER

Complete Set

We are so delighted to hear from those of you who have written in to tell us that you have a complete set of the magazines. There are fourteen names on the list so far. We would like to apologize for a typographical error in our statement about complete sets in the January/February issue. The first *Country Music* was published in September 1972, not September 1982 as printed. So you can see how large a complete set is! If there are any others who have not written us

about having a complete set, we hope you will.

Point to Point

It has occurred to us that some of you might like to fill out sets that are almost complete. One or two of you have spoken to us about this already. We are going to run an "Issues Wanted/Issues Available" box in each edition of the Newsletter so that you may correspond with each other. So, if you don't mind having your name and address printed, let us know here at

the Newsletter which issues you need and your name and address. Those of you with issues to sell, do the same. We will publish that information, and you may get in touch with each other.

In the meantime, we like what John Hendricks of Hardwick, Georgia had to say when he wrote to us: "I have a complete set of *Country Music* magazines and if anyone is interested, it is not for sale." Ours is not for sale, either, Mr. Hendricks! We like your spirit.

Recent Issues

Because of the many different ways in which various ones of you started up your subscriptions to the new *Country Music*, some of you may have missed one or two issues since we began again in September 1983. If you would like to order any of the three issues to date, send us \$2.25 and we will mail you the issues you need while the supplies last.

Attention:

CMSA Members

Here is the first issue of your newsletter. You may remove it by unbending two staples, then bending them back. Your \$50.00 worth of coupons are included on pages 7 and 8. Your permanent Charter Membership card and the CMSA *Answer Book* will be sent to you soon.

FREE ADS

Would you like to have a chance to run a free ad in the Newsletter? Here's how to do it.

Send us your ad for some item of information you would like to acquire. We will keep your letters, and just before printing each issue of the Newsletter, we will draw three ads out of the hat and print them. These are items or information you would like to acquire, not goods or services for sale.

The first ad comes to us from Paul Koskubar of Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin who gave us the idea for this feature in the Newsletter.

Information Please

Anyone have information on the De Zurik Sisters who were on WLS in the late 30s?

Anyone know who the Oklahoma Sweethearts were?

Contact Paul Koskubar, 823 S. Ithaca, Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin 54325.

25 OFF THE TOP TWENTY-FIVE

Members get 25% discounts on the Top 25 albums. List price for records or cassettes is \$8.98, your price \$6.73 plus postage and handling.

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4. **Willie Nelson:** *Without A Song* (Columbia FC-39110)
5. **Ricky Skaggs:** *Don't Cheat In Our Hometown* (Sugar Hill/Epic FE-38954)
6. **Lee Greenwood:** *Somebody's Gonna Love You* (MCA 5403)
7. **Earl Thomas Conley:** *Don't Make It Easy For Me* (RCA AHL1-4713)
8. **Crystal Gayle:** *Cage The Songbird* (Warner Bros. 23958)
9. **Eddie Rabbitt:** *Greatest Hits Volume II* (Warner Bros. 23925)
10. **Merle Haggard:** *That's The Way Love Goes* (Epic FE-38815)
11. **Gary Morris:** *Why Lady Why* (Warner Bros. 23738)
12. **The Oak Ridge Boys:** *Deliver* (MCA 5455)
13. **Hank Williams, Jr.:** *Man of Steel* (Warner/Curb 23924)
14. **Deborah Allen:** *Cheat The Night* (RCA MHL1-8514)
15. **John Anderson:** *All The People Are Talkin'* (Warner Bros. 23912)
16. **John Conlee:** *In My Eyes* (MCA 5434)
17. **T.G. Sheppard:** *Slow Burn* (Warner/Curb 23911)
18. **Merle Haggard and Willie Nelson:** *Pancho and Lefty* (Epic FE 37958)
19. **Tom Jones:** *Don't Let Our Dreams Die Young* (Mercury 814-448-1)
20. **Janie Fricke:** *Love Lies* (Columbia FC-38730)
21. **Kenny Rogers:** *Twenty Greatest Hits* (Liberty LV-51152)
22. **Larry Gatlin & The Gatlin Brothers Band:** *Greatest Hits Volume II* (Columbia FC-38923)
23. **Exile:** *Exile* (Epic B6E-39154)
24. **Hank Williams, Jr.:** *Hank Williams, Jr.'s Greatest Hits* (Elektra/Curb 60193)
25. **Shelly West:** *Red Hot* (Viva 23983)

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that clear—never got anything under control, even. I kept expecting to, but hell, in the end I never even got to step back and look at things straight on. Started looking up from under, ended up looking down from above. I never even saw the ever-day world most folks live in. Not the way *they* see it, anyway. But what do you do?

I was eleven, I think, when I found out that whiskey killed “shy”—that was about the time Lilly was aiming my ass at the stage with no questions asked—so I took to the stuff as a private resort, knowing even then that I lacked both the constitution and the stamina to be a drunk. I damn sure had the inclination. In total, I reckon, I was drunk or doped two days out of every three that I was alive, and that’s counting the time when I was a little baby and don’t recollect—which is just as well, since the first thing I could remember was being sick with the croup. So to tell you the truth, I missed a good deal of my own adventures.

As it turned out, I spent 25 out of my 29 years scuffling around on the bottom, maybe six months sitting pretty on top, and the last three years in dreamy slow motion, just falling—off the wagon, off the stages, off that damned horse (which either hurt my back or helped my morphine supply, depending on how you looked at it).

For a while there, I immediately fell off everything I got up on—except the booze and pills, of course. I got up on *them* and stayed up, getting higher and higher and tired and tired until I was so light, so frail, til there was so little of this world, of this earth left in me, that I just began to fade like Gene Tierney at the end of that movie with the sea-captain.

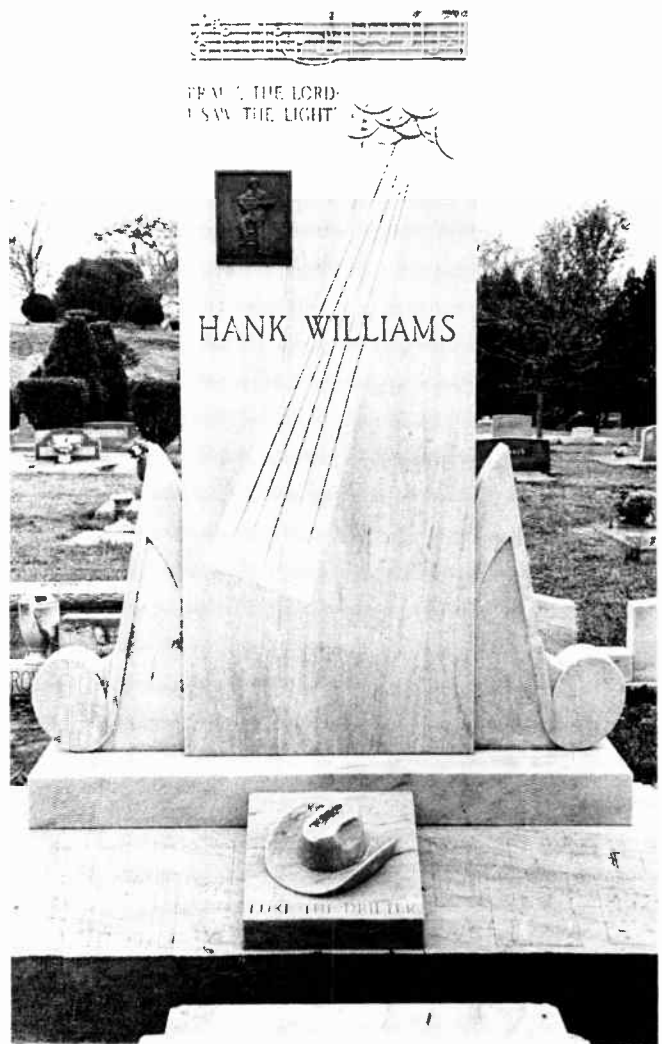
I figured that I’d already been found out, anyway, you know. I really thought that everybody could see the decision I had to make: If I gave up the drugs and booze, I’d lose my confidence and my fame along with it, but if I didn’t give ‘em up, I’d probably lose my life. So everybody, I figured, would know that I didn’t really want to die—I just didn’t want to stop shining, to lose my stardom. They’d know that it came down to the fact that I’d rather be a nothing than a nobody.

From that point of view, knowing what-all I would have done not to be a nobody, I guess the luckiest thing in my life was that I got to be a somebody by being honest about my feelings. ‘Cause I was *gonna* be a somebody, honest or not. That’s why I have to laugh at that durned Acuff saying that my songs would have stayed country no matter what, that I would never have gone “rock and roll.”

Folks, I’ll tell you true—and you can go to the bank with this: To me, being country was just one of them accidents of birth. If I thought it would have helped me to get a hit single record, I would not only have gone “rock and roll”; I would have gone nekkid with a flower behind my ear.

If it’s any consolation, the end, after all the shouting and guilt and greed and fear that preceded it, wasn’t that bad—cruising along over the snow-white New Year’s breast of West Virginia with the scrawl of black bare trees undulating as they slid across the steamed side windows and disappeared into the past, and the ol’ Drifting Cowboy snuggled up on the good-smelling leather of the back seat, in the warm embrace of Sister Morphine.

It was so damned improbable, you know, for little Hiram Williams from south Alabama to be moving so warm and effortless towards the welcoming arms of people who loved him. It was slightly wonderful, as it always was, to be nestled in the bosom of a powder-blue Cadillac in the Heart of America, floating without effort along that shiny black ribbon of highway (it might have been glass, black glass, a thousand feet deep), with that clean-cut and thoughtful stranger at the wheel.



He was just a kid, really, with a collegiate crew-cut, wearing a pullover vee-neck sweater—an article of apparel I’d never once thought to buy, which as far as I could remember even Audrey had never thought to buy, and which *was* something. He was just another chauffeur-nursemaid, a quiet one this time without a lot of fool questions. Just a guy hauling a load, gauging his speed so as to make delivery right on time for the gig—*Dead or Alive*, I thought vaguely—as a hot number or as cold meat, it didn’t really matter which. Not to me, probably not to the fans. Six of one, half a dozen of the other, really. Either way, I figured it would be a big thrill for the folks in Canton. I mean, wasn’t I the Drifting Cowboy? And wasn’t he always wanted, dead or alive? You bet your bustle he was.

But who the hell cares? Really? Come on. I decided I’d just close my eyes and listen to them big oversize balloon whitewalls whirr and swish on the ice-cold pavement rushing under the chassis about eight inches below. Then I could actually “see” the pavement rushing beneath me, as if it were a glass-bottomed Cadillac. *And wouldn’t THAT be something!* I was thinking, *a glass-bottomed Cadillac! And why the hell not? I’ll call down to the dealership the very second my next single hits the charts. I could afford it. Hell, if I could afford Audrey, I could damn sure afford a glass-bottomed Cadillac. I might even NAME it...*

But I let go of the thought and watched it drift away from

me as if it were a balloon, and I was drifting, too, and gaining altitude. Pretty soon I was just beneath the wooly gray blanket of cloud, looking at the jumble of snow-covered fields, faint rectangles spreading away over the rolling country like a scattered manuscript, defined by feathered snow along the fence-lines. Seen from above, the black bare trees looked like calligraphy, like Fred Rose's angular lead-sheet notation which I never could read, and couldn't read now on the snowy pages before me.

And oh, yes, I was really the "Drifting Cowboy" now, no doubt about it anymore.

Do I start planning my entrance?

It was always my favorite thing about being a star, that moment when I stepped out of the wings. Just getting hit with all that heat and light and noise. It always felt so good. I wanted to go back and do it again. The whole idea of getting something before you've done anything... It was almost like real love, I guess.

"HEEELOO, O-HI-O!" I'll say tonight, stepping into the magic crackling light. "Didja know that this old country boy has seen your snowy heart?"

Then, at the very damn last second, right before there wasn't any Hank Williams anymore, I realized that I'd done the same damn thing to Bocephus and Audrey that Lon had done to me and Lilly, and I tried to crawl back down, but my hands kept slipping til I disappeared.

That was just another one of those things I figured out too late (the boy weren't dumb, just slow). Hell, it wasn't til very shortly before that that I realized what Lon *had* done to me without really having a choice.

I was writing this song about him being the engineer on the log train, and when I came to the line about hearing his whistle off in the distance, I suddenly remembered an evening when I was about five, running on my cold bare feet across that no-man's-land of frozen red mud behind the house to the "facilities," hop-skipping over the rusty-gray puddles with ice around the edges, and all of a sudden hearing that log train whistle.

The minute I got into that outhouse I just started bawling. I just sat there and cried 'cause my daddy was always off someplace, running the log train or just somewhere off in his head. And I knew then that the sadness in every whistle I ever heard, every whistle I ever wrote up in a song, was that log train whistle telling me that my dad was somewhere else.

And I remember, way back before he moved to the V.A. hospital, how he'd sit there in the kitchen with his elbows on the table, just staring at me with them big, blank, rabbit eyes of his—like I was a freak of Mars, or something that was just hatched and not born his son at all.

Sometimes, when I was feeling frisky and just "cutting up" as kids will do, he'd all-of-a-sudden start crying, not making any noise, but really bawling with these big tears rolling down his cheeks. Later I was given to understand that Lon was wound kinda tight on account of getting gassed in the Great War, but by that time I couldn't stop being resentful of him.

He didn't tell me "nothing" about "nothing"—how to act or what to do, or how to dress or even play a damn sport. He'd been over the Atlantic clear to Europe; I know that he knew stuff, but he didn't "show" me "nothing," not even how to bait a hook. (I had to learn that, like everything else, by looking out of the corner of my eye as my buddies baited theirs. And naturally they noticed that Lon hadn't ever showed me how, and had a real big time at my expense. Naturally.)

And remember—back then, south Alabama was a whole hell of a lot further back in the sticks than it is now. There wasn't that much law, nor that many differences between whites and blacks on a day-to-day basis (though nobody ever thought to question Jim Crow on the general issue of who was

superior); even stuff like electric lights and pavement was unusual. And Lon, damn it, didn't even tell me nothing about south Alabama, even.

So around other guys I always had to pretend to be joking, "cutting up," you know, and doing things in silly ways like I really knew how to do them but was just goofing around for fun. Which was hard on the nerves. I'll tell you—but I did have a gift for words, so it wasn't too hard to make everything into a joke. If they figured out how really stone ignorant I was about things, they very rarely let on.

Still, I always felt a little bit outside, a little bit below the crowd I run with, always showing off and trying to please, like every day they needed a new reason not to look down on me.

With guys, I guess, I always expected to be "caught red-handed" at something, found guilty of breaking some rule I'd never heard of. Partly on account of Lon, and partly, as Vic McAlpin used to say, 'cause like him I was a "backwoods cat" born and bred, slinking among the gloomy pine and cypress with a solitary heart, shy and distrustful by my very nature.

I cut up and showed off, of course—I wanted to have buddies and be accepted like everybody else—but I never really trusted another man except maybe Fred Rose and Rufe Payne. They, being a New York Hebrew and a black African respectively, were not tore up with the idea of "Southern Manhood" like me and my buddies were.

I used to think it might have been different if my back



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COUNTRY & WESTERN CLASSICS

hadn't got banged up, I'da been able to enlist in the Army like Lon had. If I'da got some medals and all... but I don't know.

I *do* know that somehow, between the two of them, Fred Rose and Rufe Payne got it through my thick skull that—unlike the old “story ballads” Lilly used to sing, which were about “things” and “things that happened”—real *songs* that you sang from the heart were about *feelings* about things and things that happened; that the actual “facts” about what happened didn't mean doo-doo as long as you were clear about the feelings. And my songs were. Not simple, but *clear*.

“She's my eskimo, baby/She's my eskimo pie”—*That's* simple! *That's* factual!

“Today I passed you on the street/And my heart fell at your feet”—*That's not* so simple. Sure ain't factual. But it is *clear*—about the feelings.

Unfortunately, according to the ideal of “Southern Manhood,” menfolk down here in the South (unlike your Hebrews and Africans) ain't supposed to have 'em—feelings, that is—and certainly ain't supposed to show 'em if they should crop up, which of course they do. Which of course makes the menfolk crazy, since when it comes to feelings, if you don't show 'em you don't know 'em. But that still don't make it okay to show 'em.

So, as thankful as fellers were to me for putting what they felt into words, they still couldn't really *respect* me for it, no more than they could respect a Hebrew or a black African or *anyone* who let his feelings show. Especially his “romantic” feelings. Romantic feelings are a source of considerable embarrassment to male Southerners now that only babies and New Yorkers believe the old myth about how they are as cold and bold as Southern women are flighty and sentimental.

Nowadays, it's just the reverse, and no Southern woman has believed a single word out of the mouth of a Southern man since 1860, when the men went riding off on their chargers shouting, “Not to worry, sugarplum! We'll be home early from the war!” As a result, your average Southern woman of today is about as sentimental as a chainsaw, and though she might twitter on about “good manners” and “religion” and such, when it all comes down she don't believe in nothin' but hard currency, land in clear title, and rigged elections. (Audrey and Lilly didn't even believe in the last two.)

On the other hand, your average Southern gent (of which I was a touching example) believes in his heart of hearts, and despite his rough-and-tumble ways, in “fair play”—and remains a fool for any kind of romantic adventure which requires charging the cannon to demonstrate a “pure” and “constant” allegiance to some “lost cause.” Unfortunately, the “lost cause” of a lot of us Southern boys turned out to be one of those beautiful Southern girls without an ounce of mercy or a trace of “fair.”

I don't know why I wanted to trust them or wanted them to trust me; I'd never have expected that of a man. 'Cause it isn't that they wouldn't love me—it was that they wouldn't keep *on* loving me irregardless.

I wanted to be loved the way I loved them—right or wrong, good or bad, the way Stonewall Jackson loved the South, lost cause or not.

I wasn't ever going to be all good, I know, not with whiskey as my co-pilot, so I always tried to be *extremely* good to balance out the extremely bad in the end. And anyway, I didn't intend to *perform* for love. I wanted it fair, open, non-judgmental, and in advance. The women couldn't see that the religious “Luke the Drifter” and the worldly Hank Williams were two sides of the same soul. Their love was always practical, profitable, and opportunistic. I was thinking of something more along the lines of “constant.”

And Lilly! Hell, Lilly didn't know nothing except how to pinch a penny til it screamed, and complain and bust my ass and let me grow up ignorant of almost everything but woman-

talk about all the good things these good little Southern boys did for the Mamas who got them out of south Alabama.

And she did do that, Lilly did, and I was grateful for that. It was too bad, though, that I got out of there with such a clear picture of how painful it was for “pore” Lilly, being so clean and thrifty, that after I achieved the Louisiana border I never felt the least inclination to try it myself. *Why be an “upright Christian citizen,”* I thought to myself, *if it kept you in such a foul humor all the dern time?*

Of course, the poor woman was just trying to make herself irreplaceable, so I wouldn't run off from her like Lon did—but by the time I got that all figured out, it was too late again. (Really, nobody ever told me nothing, except “Don't trust anybody.” I didn't.) See, I'd already replaced Lilly with someone who drove me just as crazy. *Was* just as crazy. *Crazier*, really.

I mean, Lilly drove me towards the stage like I was a draught ox, but she at least had the sense not to follow me up there into my “safe place”. The stage was my “hideout,” you know. Right up there in front of God and everybody, I was my own man, I could find warmth up there with nobody standing in my light. Until Audrey, that is.

God knows, I loved her better than free whiskey, but she chased me clean out onto the STAGE! And I swear, she drove me right to the edge and over the falls. I near throttled her a hundred times for the few times I really tried it, and the damn woman was so thick, she could not understand. She thought I was stifling her career. I couldn't explain it to her, no ways.

The stage was like my “club.” You know how them railroad barons and Tammany politicians had these private clubs just for them and their buddies—no women allowed, not wives nor mothers, no how? Well, when I was up on the stage with the Drifting Cowboys, that was my “club,” you know, and the damn crazy female just wouldn't let it be!

Still, I don't want you to think that my life was just fightin' and cheatin' and winnin' and losin' and whiskey and pills and cryin' and dyin'. A lot of it was laughin' and lovin' and just living.

I remember I wrote this song for Audrey which nobody much recorded, called “Why Do We Try Anymore?” It sounded a good deal like a Merle Haggard song before there *were* any Merle Haggard songs. The song was about the feeling of not wanting to try anymore, so the answer to the question wasn't part of the song—but the answer is that you try because you're alive, 'cause when you quit trying, you're dead, and life is better than death.

I remember this one time right after we moved into the big house in Nashville, I'd come in from the road and crashed out for about two days, and when I woke up it was about five in the morning, and I didn't know where I was. I was in this big, cool room with light-colored walls, full of gray pre-dawn light, stretched out on this big soft bed with crispy-clean white sheets. Wherever I was, I'd never felt so good in my life. Then I saw Audrey sleeping beside me, and I knew it was my house, and I felt even better.

Without waking Audrey up, I got up and tip-toed downstairs in my stocking feet, loving the feel of the plush carpet through my old white socks. Downstairs I got me a Coca Cola from the Frigidaire and carried it to my den, which had a picture window looking out over the lawn. Just as I walked into the room, the sun broke over the hillside, and the whole yard of St. Augustine grass covered with dew just burst into Technicolor, just like in *The Wizard of Oz*. And I stood there in my dark den, smelling the leather and sipping my Coke and looking at that bright green yard, and I figured that just this one sunrise, this one morning, was worth the whole damn trip. ■

The Energy of Hank Williams

Paul Laffoley, the artist who painted the portrait of George Jones for our January/February issue, is deeply interested in astrology and numerology. His portrait of Hank, like his portrait of George, is an astrological/numerological work of some complexity. We asked him to explain some of its elements:

When I was given the opportunity to paint a portrait of Hank Williams, my goal became to convey the tremendous energy which possessed him in life, and to be directly affected by that energy myself. I decided that I would use three methods to reach Hank's energy: the painting style of Van Gogh, and the disciplines of numerology and horary astrology.

I chose the painting style of Van Gogh because he and Hank Williams had much in common: Both were prolific artists who endured hardships and met early deaths; both rose to unique positions of fame and cultural influence after death; both were terribly lonely; both were highly energized. The specific Van Gogh paintings which I used as models for my work were "Pere Tanguy" and "Patience Escalier." In both these portraits,

the eyes are the points of concentration; the eyes fix the gaze of the viewer while the rest of the painting swirls and radiates like a hurricane. In my painting, the hat, the eyes, the pose and the gold radiations from Hank's head are attempts to reproduce the visual energy-structure of Van Gogh (and therefore Hank).

My next step was a numerological analysis of his name. In the numerological system, "Hank Williams" signifies change, upheaval, and power; a dreamer who awakes only when surrounded by danger; an eccentric who rebels against regulations but makes secret enemies; and a person who is an instrument of fate, misunderstood in life and intensely lonely at heart.

My third method of reaching Hank's energy was to cast an astrological chart through which I could ask questions: What is the nature of the energy of Hank Williams now? What happened to his goals, ambitions,

and talents? What would his energy look like if it were reincarnated? Where is this energy now located?

I cast the chart, and found that its shape was what in astrology is called a "bucket." That is, a concentration of planets on one side of the chart is opposed by a single planet on the other; this shape denotes a high but restricted energy with but one place to go. In the death state, it indicates a ghost attempting to break through to the physical realm (I could feel Hank's energy helping me work on the portrait). Also, the north and south nodes of the chart, always highly significant, were in Sagittarius (which rules Alabama, Hank's birthplace) and Gemini (which rules Hank's death

place, West Virginia). Other elements of the chart answered other questions: If he were reincarnated, he would look the same, thin and bony, but now he is in a limbo state: It is confirmed that he died of heart problems, but according to the chart his drinking was actually an aid to his composure and did not diminish his creative output: His energy is now back near his home. Finally, the containment of his energy was caused by fate, not his life-will; therefore it is compelled to re-generate, and will manifest it-

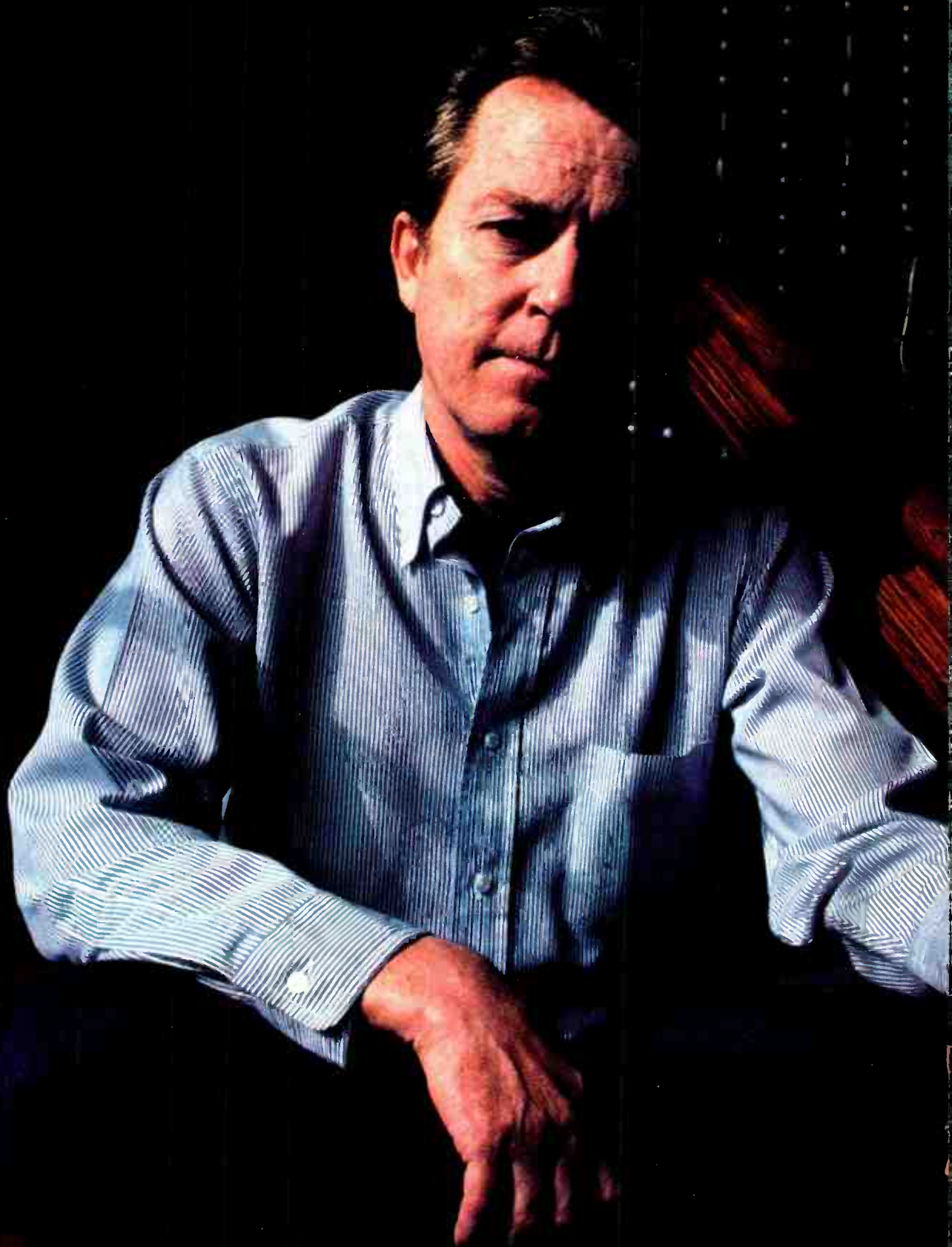
self again in some manner of material form.

The energy of Hank Williams, although at present confined by death, is waiting to get out and participate in the expression of the American aesthetic he helped begin. I believe that this energy will find a way out. As Hank himself said, "My bucket's got a hole in it."

-PAUL LAFFOLEY



Editor's Note: For a full-size color poster of this painting, send \$5.95 plus \$1.00 postage and handling to: Hank Poster, Country Music Magazine, 450 Park Avenue, South, New York, New York 10016. You'll also get the detailed numerological and astrological analysis of the painting written by the artist.



LOUIE FAVORITE

BILLY SHERRILL

Steward Of His Talent

"For unto every one who hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

—Matthew 25:29-30

The mid-afternoon silence in the small lounge of Nashville's Sound Emporium Studio is suddenly shattered by a loud report of gunfire. When the smoke clears and tranquility again enfolds the room, Billy Sherrill, Nashville's most successful producer/songwriter/publisher, can be seen standing quietly. Dressed in a black pullover shirt, black dress pants and matching black loafers, he is poring intently through the pages of a phone book. In one of his hands is a plastic cup of J&B and water. In the other is a palm-sized .25 Browning automatic.

All the while, a honky tonk ballad called "Crazy Old Soldier" plays over and over through the huge studio speakers in the room. The song was recorded a week or so earlier by George Jones, whose records Sherrill has been producing for the last decade. This afternoon, Sherrill is supervising additional instrumental overdubbing and the remixing of "Crazy Old Soldier" in preparation for its release. But at the moment, he seems preoccupied with the phone book that served as the target for the impromptu ballistics test that he's been conducting.

"Not bad," he mutters as he raises his eyebrows, sips his drink and traces the bullet's trajectory through the white pages. "Made it all the way to the M's."

Despite the gunplay, Sherrill has actually been listening closely to the music. Abruptly, he picks up a phone in the lounge and dials the number of the control room, which is just beyond the closed door and across the hall, where Ron "Snake" Reynolds, his longtime sound engineer, is manning the control board.

"Hey, Snake!" Sherrill yells into the phone as he puffs impatiently on a cigarette and fondles the pistol. "We need to double the rhythm guitar track and overdub a tambourine...No, on second thought, make that two tambourines—tape them together. They don't make tambourines like they used to."

by Bob Allen

"I don't know," he sneers facetiously as he slams down the phone and again listens intently to "Crazy Old Soldier," which is still blasting through the speakers. "Maybe I better overdub a couple of violins on there. I don't care if it is George Jones. I don't want it to sound *too* country."

It is with just such a combination of unerring instinct and offhanded whim, of trenchant irreverence and intuition, that Sherrill has, for the last two decades, controlled the master switch of modern country music, establishing himself as Nashville's most innovative and most widely imitated producer.

As a producer for CBS Records, Sherrill has launched or revitalized the careers of dozens of country music's leading artists, including Jones, Tammy Wynette, Barbara Mandrell, David Allen Coe, Janie Fricke, Charlie Rich, Johnny Rodriguez, Johnny Paycheck and Tanya Tucker.

Along the way, he has also produced more than fifty number-one singles and dozens of platinum and gold albums, and earned himself a wheelbarrow full of awards, including three Grammys.

He has also amassed a huge catalog of original songs, which run the gamut from deep-country chart toppers like "I Don't Wanna Play House" and "Your Good Girl's Gonna Go Bad," to more enduring crossover classics like "The Most Beautiful Girl in the World" and "Stand By Your Man." With a record 82 annual awards (for the most radio airplay in a given year) from the Broadcast Music Industry (BMI), he is one of country music's most oft-recorded and frequently performed songwriters.

If Sherrill's musical efforts have not always been labors of pure love, they have almost always been inspired by the lure of profits. Through the years, by way of his producing and songwriting royalties, his music publishing interests and his lucrative performance royalties contract with BMI ("It's got two commas in it," he reveals slyly), Sherrill has made himself a wealthy man.

Yet in his public pronouncements, he has always been less than a cheerleader for the industry in which he's enriched himself. He has dismissed most country albums (including some he's produced himself) as boring. "Most country radio stations," he says, "will put you to sleep." Even in the midst of producing a George Jones recording session, he commits what must, to the hard-core country fan, be the ultimate sacrilege, boasting, "When I go home, I listen to Johann Strauss, not this crap."

Such trenchant denunciations have inevitably been used against Sherrill by those who resent his pervasive influence on the country music scene. Critics delight in writing him off as a ruthless Svengali who demands total allegiance

from his artists and specializes in molding their individual talents into his somewhat predictable assembly line approach to hit making. "I'm not looking for social commentary or aesthetics in a song," he admits. "I'm after sales. I go after a hit every time I turn the tape on."

Sherrill has also borne the wrath of critics for what has come to be called the "Sherrillization" of country music. This refers to his tendency to bury the fiery heart and soul of the traditional country sound beneath lush background vocals and syrupy Mantovani strings—at times more reminiscent of Perry Como than of Roy Acuff.

"Sherrillization—I kind of like that. Maybe it'll end up in Webster's Dictionary," Sherrill says, smiling with perverse pleasure. "Hell," he adds in a slightly more serious tone, "I think strings are *pretty* on a country song. God knows I've stolen a lot of licks from Strauss and Stravinsky."

Later in the week, Sherrill is sitting in his windowless office at CBS, slouched behind his desk. Wearing a loose-fitting blue oxford-cloth shirt, tan permanent-press pants and moccasin-style leisure shoes with no socks, he looks more like a modish executive than a country music magnate. He is on the phone with a producer friend who is trying to persuade him to go back into the studio with one of his former artists. As he listens, Sherrill toys absently with a snub-nosed .38 he's pulled from the desk drawer.

"Listen," he replies coolly, "the first record I cut with the cat went to number two, and it was all downhill from there. It finally got to where every time I'd book studio time, he'd show up after partying for three days and three nights, and he'd sound like Aldo Ray. . . But you tell him if he can keep his head straight for one solid week, I'll get him back into the business."

Hanging up the phone, Sherrill returns to the morning's task: searching for material for upcoming sessions with Lacy J. Dalton. The huge pile of cassettes on his desk is just one day's worth of musical product cranked out by Nashville's various publishing houses. He randomly chooses a cassette, pops it into the machine and listens to about eight bars of what sounds like a rather convincing ballad. Suddenly, he yanks it out and hook-shots it in the general direction of the trash can.

"If I played that for Lacy J., she'd vomit," Sherrill moans disgustedly. "There's not one line in that song that hasn't already been written nine million times."

"The only advantage to having to wade through all this junk," he continues, exhaling a stream of cigarette smoke in

the direction of the tape boxes, "is that when you finally do find a diamond, it just jumps out at you so hard that it almost hits the ceiling."

At times, however, the sheer drudgery of the task seems too overwhelming even for Sherrill. As the cassettes play, he takes frequent time-outs to sip more cups of J&B and water, phone in bets on an upcoming college football game and run down the hall to test out a high-frequency sound-wave "stun gun" someone has lent him for shooting at stray cats in an alley behind the building.

Near the end of the day, Sherrill sits down at the Yamaha grand piano in his office and plays a few flourishes from the introduction to George Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue." Then he breaks into a dirge-like rendition of the old pop standard, "That's Where My Money Goes."

"What do you think," he asks with a soft laugh, "about a kid who played this song while his father was passing the collection plate around at a tent revival meeting?"

The son of an evangelical preacher, Sherrill was born in Phil Campbell, Alabama, in 1937. He spent his youth touring throughout the South, playing piano at his father's tent revivals. By the time he was in his late teens, however, both parents had died. As "a matter of survival," Sherrill turned to a determinedly more secular life of sleeping under bridges and sidestepping beer bottles and knife-wielding drunks on the Alabama-Mississippi dance band circuit. "Back then, I was into R&B and B.B. King," recalls Sherrill, whose speech is still peppered with the down-home hipster patois of a former rock and roll saxophone player. "I hated country music."

Nonetheless, in 1962, Sherrill ended up in Nashville, lured there by a \$4,000 royalty check that he received when a song he wrote was recorded by Bob Beckham. He soon landed a job as a \$100-a-week engineer in a studio owned by Sam Phillips, the legendary producer who founded Sun Records in Memphis and discovered Elvis Presley. On his own time, Sherrill spent hours alone in the studio, making one-man records by overdubbing tracks on the half dozen different instruments on which he'd become proficient. "He never missed an opportunity to learn something," Phillips later recalled.

In 1963, on the strength of those one-man-band efforts, Sherrill landed a job with Epic Records, a division of CBS. He eventually began producing the handful of country artists who were then on the label's small roster. ("I still knew about as much about country as the Shah of Iran," he concedes.) Almost from the start, he refused to follow anyone else's

As a boy, Sherrill played piano at revival meetings conducted by his father, an evangelical minister. When the collection plate was passed around, he played "That's Where My Money Goes."

rules. By expanding the use of strings, adding occasional horns and putting increased emphasis on background vocals, he began creating a fuller, more embellished studio sound that was all his own. All the while, he continued to enlarge upon the traditional role of the country producer, which at the time often consisted of little more than keeping an eye on the clock and sending out for fried chicken. "I just decided I was going to do it the way I wanted," he recalls.

It was his 1966 production of "Almost Persuaded" by David Houston that thrust Sherrill into the front ranks of Nashville producers. Measured by the standards of Nashville record production of that era, the song was considered something of a joke: It was a waltz; it was too long; the punch line didn't come until halfway through the song; and it featured a steel guitar. It was a record that some felt should never have been recorded, much less released, and it was first issued as the B side of a single. The song seemed destined for oblivion until a D.J. in Atlanta flipped the record over and began playing the B side. It went on to sell 900,000 copies (more than ten times the sales of the average country hit of the day). When it won Sherrill his first Grammy award, he finally felt that he had arrived.

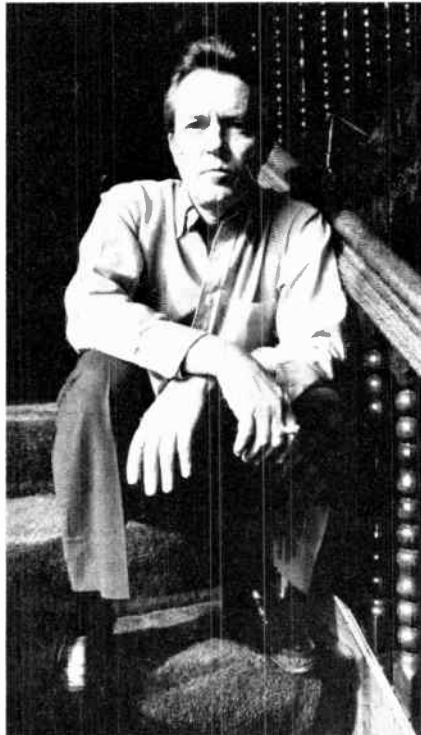
As night falls, Sherrill, with a few friends in tow, steers his silver Mercedes 450 SL through the tree-lined south Nashville suburbs to his home, a sprawling brick affair with wrought-iron gates and a thirteen-foot TV satellite dish in the backyard. With his wife Charlene away on vacation and his daughter Cathy at college, he has the run of the house. Soon the J&B and Budweiser are flowing.

After acing one guest at a game of pool, Sherrill flips among the 480 TV channels available on his multi-screen console. He pauses to view a Mexican skin flick and an old Doris Day movie before settling on highlights from the 1969 Jets-versus-Colts Superbowl game, on which he won a \$10,000 wager.

When a latecomer knocks on the door, Sherrill puts down what must be his seventh or eighth drink and picks up a .38 Smith & Wesson pistol that he's been toying with. Jumping up and pointing it toward the door, he yells menacingly, "It better be you!" Then he grins wickedly as a friend walks in to find himself staring down the barrel of the loaded gun.

The party continues until around midnight. When one of the last visitors finally leaves, Sherrill is still moving restlessly around the house, sipping a drink, listening to "Tales from the Vienna Woods" on his stereo and watching a videotape of *The Triumph of the Will*.

Beneath the good-ole-boy facade and



LOUIE FAVORITE

Sherrill: an uncertain future?

the hard-nosed veneer of the hit maker, there is about Sherrill a certain inscrutability. It is reflected by the prize possessions on display in his house—bound transcripts of testimony from the Nuremberg trials on the bookshelves next to a Grand Ole Opry picture book; framed, faded documents, one bearing the signature of Abraham Lincoln, the other, Adolf Hitler; an eerie old photograph of Sherrill's father, waist-deep in an Alabama river, leading a large congregation in the baptismal rites. It is also reflected in his daily preoccupations. While Sherrill often spends slow afternoons in the studio regaling co-workers with rabid racist jokes, he also passes long evenings at home alone reading up in his encyclopedia on such unlikely subjects as the Asian sub-continent.

Sherrill clings tenaciously to the same literal interpretation of the Bible that his father preached so many years ago. "My

father had higher goals than money, and I do hope some of that rubbed off on me," he says. Yet in his professional dealings, he can be brutally pragmatic. "Of everyone I know in this business, including myself, everything is done with a view toward increasing their net worth," he says. "And they will do anything in order to do that."

Despite his professed relentlessness, there are indications that after nearly two decades, Sherrill's sharp focus as a producer is growing diffuse, and that he is being left behind in an era of changing musical tastes. Many of the artists with whom he set the tone of country music in the 1960s and 1970s have gradually slid off the record charts and dropped out of sight.

At age 45, Sherrill admits that, in this new era of the independent producer, he is already on the endangered species list. "I'm almost a dying breed—the staff producer," he says. He also makes no bones about the fact that when his contract with CBS expires this year, he will most likely be joining the ranks of the independents.

Sherrill's power has been further eroded by the recession that has swept across the entire music industry. The famed CBS Studios A and B, just down the hall from his office, where he cut practically all his hits, have been closed, as part of the record company's nationwide cost-cutting efforts. And many of his most trusted staff members have received their walking papers.

On a cloudy afternoon, Sherrill stands thoughtfully amidst the ruins of what was once Studio A. Workmen are busy ripping out the studio components. "I guess they know what they're doing," he muses softly. "But the way I feel now I wouldn't mind if they turned it into a *greenhouse*. I needed something like this to get in gear. Apathy had set in. I probably stayed here too long, as it was."

Still, a visitor suggests, there is a distinct end-of-an-era sadness about it all—like the final scene in *Citizen Kane*, when they're chucking everything into the fire.

Sherrill lingers for a moment, then turns and walks quickly back to his office. "Yeah," he mutters softly, that odd mixture of sincerity and irreverence rising to the surface once again. "Maybe we ought to get a can of spray paint and write 'Rosebud' on the wall." ■

COUNTRY MUSIC SOCIETY OF AMERICA

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Letter from the Publisher

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Little Jimmy Dickens

Welcome to the Hall of Fame

"I really was not expectin' to go into the Hall of Fame that soon. I knew that once you're nominated and in the top five for the fourth year, your chances are good. But I wasn't expectin' to go in this year. So I just wasn't prepared for it, and you know you always think of somethin' to say and... once I knew I was going to be inducted, I couldn't find any words for it."

Little Jimmy Dickens became the Country Music Hall of Fame's fortieth inductee at the 1983 Country Music Association Awards presentation. Though the applause was strong, there were undoubtedly many in the audience who had no idea who the diminutive, sixtyish guy in the cowboy hat and Western tux really was. You don't see his name on *Billboard's* Country Top Ten, or hear his records on the average country radio station.

There was a time, however, when the name Little Jimmy Dickens commanded the same respect that the names Haggard, Nelson and Skaggs command today. From the late Forties to the late Sixties, Dickens was everywhere: on the Opry, on the road, overseas, on the charts and on the tube.

Today, the only missing element is the charts, for Dickens and his band, the Country Boys—a unit which throughout its life has boasted some of country's most stellar instrumentalists—continue to work at, and revel in, their rural music. When many country artists took their music "uptown," reaping the consequent rewards of fame and money, Little Jimmy Dickens chose to keep it country and stayed in the hinterlands.

Dickens is a native of Appalachia, and like so many other performers who grew up there, he was influenced by mountain music and the high, lonesome singing of Roy Acuff and the Monroe Brothers. Yet



COURTESY CHARLES K. WOLFE

and unvarnished, like his roots. He was born in Bolt, West Virginia, in the southern part of the state, amid coal mines and mountains. The nearest large town was Beckley, to the east.

"One biography on me read 1925 for my birthdate, but that isn't correct. My birthdate is December the 19th, nineteen-and-twenty. I was the oldest of thirteen children. All my people were coal miners down through the years, and still are—my brothers and my uncles are still in the coal mines."

"No one actually inspired me to play music, because my people played music, and they all sang and played different instruments, but none of them did it professionally. As a kid I wanted to be a country music entertainer, because I was raised up on the Grand Ole Opry and gospel singin' music, and I just decided I wanted to be a professional entertainer and someday maybe accomplish something. And I set out to do that. I listened to Mr. Acuff, and Ernest Tubb, and of course Bill Monroe and his brother Charlie at the time."

unlike those artists, who used acoustic backing almost exclusively, Dickens took the style solidly into the mainstream by using a raucous, driving, amplified sound and sporting clothing equally loud. The eyeball-blasting sequin-spangled outfits he wore were among the first ever seen on the Grand Ole Opry.

Where many of his peers took a low-key stance on stage, Jimmy was all flash and energy. There was nothing subtle about him; he was *up* from the minute he hit the stage. And though he was an excellent ballad singer, he built his career not on sentimental favorites of the hills, but on slightly rude, flippant novelties like "Cold Feet," "I'm Little but I'm Loud" and "May the Bird of Paradise Fly Up Your Nose." His songs were snappy

by Rich Kienzle

Jimmy Dickens does not refer to Roy Acuff as "Roy," but as "Mr. Acuff," a measure of the deep sense of gratitude and respect he feels toward him. At the age of seventeen he began singing country and gospel songs at WJLS radio in Beckley, then moved two years later to WMMN in Fairmont, West Virginia, then to WIVC in Indianapolis through World War II, to WLW in Cincinnati after that, and finally by 1947 to WKNX in Saginaw, Michigan. He had met "Mr. Acuff" at WLW. They met again in Saginaw around 1948, and by this time, Acuff was impressed. He secured Dickens a place on the Grand Ole Opry.

Shortly after reaching Nashville, Dickens's career began taking off. Uncle Art Satherly signed him to Columbia in the fall of 1948, and his first recording session, in January of 1949, yielded a two-sided hit: "Take an Old Cold Tater and Wait" and "Pennies for Papa." Acuff's Smokey Mountain Boys, augmented by electric lead guitarist Billy Byrd from Ernest Tubb's Texas Troubadors, backed him; their presence on the records, and the plaintive quality of Jimmy's vocals, underscored his musical debt to Acuff. "Tater" became Jimmy's first Number One single, and established him as a star. It also earned him his nickname, "Tater," first used by his pal Hank Williams.

Jimmy, however, was clearly looking for his own niche, something different from the music of his past.

"All down through the years before I came to Nashville, before I recorded, I had always done just ballads and gospel material. Then the record came of 'Old Cold Tater' and 'Plain Old Country Boy,' and my sound just kinda fell in line."

By the time he made "Country Boy," one of many Boudleaux Bryant numbers he would record, Jimmy had established himself as an unabashedly rural singer,

singing of subjects he knew firsthand and peppering his songs with affectionate humor. He still searched for a new sound, however, and to that end he decided to form his own band, the Country Boys (named after his hit). He was fortunate in finding some truly outstanding musicians, most notably the legendary guitarist, Grady Martin, and the equally brilliant but sadly unheralded Jabbo Arrington. They defined Jimmy's music from then on.

"That first group was the old Paul Howard band from Shreveport—Jabbo and (bassist) Bobby Moore and (steel guitarist) Walter Haynes and (fiddler) Red Taylor. They for some reason or another had split from the Howard band. Grady Martin told me about Jabbo when he knew I was gonna get a band together, and so I got ahold of Jabbo, and I asked him if he'd put the band together for me, and he did. He and Grady were my first twin guitars."

Twin lead guitars were being used in the mid-Forties by Bob Wills, but Jimmy made them an integral part of his sound. Arrington and Martin began playing sophisticated ensemble work that gave the Country Boys a fire and color few other bands could equal. The lineup changed over the years. Red Taylor was replaced by fiddler Louie Dunn; veteran bassist Joel Price, who while with Dickens played the first Fender electric bass used by a country musician, replaced Bobby Moore. Distinguished guitarists Spider Wilson, Howard Rhoten, Johnny Johnson and Thumbs Carlille filled Grady's and Jabbo's shoes (Arrington died tragically young in the mid-Fifties). Buddy Emmons took Haynes's place on steel. Dickens maintained the hottest stage and recording group in Nashville. It gave him a trademark, and drove his vocals, giving him a loud, sassy musical identity.

"I wasn't even aware that I had one of the best bands in the nation. I still depend on that sound, on my groups to have that punch and that drive. Without it, you almost don't work. When you got a group like that, doin' that, and they know exactly what they're doin', you actually work that much harder."

The Country Boys backed Jimmy on many outstanding records, among them hits like "A-Sleepin' at the Foot of the Bed" and "Hillbilly Fever," and less successful but equally vibrant numbers like "Out of Business," "Walk, Chieken, Walk," "Out Behind the Barn," "Closing Time," "Wabash Cannonball," "Night Train to Memphis," and "When that



COURTESY CHARLES K. WOLFE

Love Bug Bites You." Several exciting country boogie records, including "Rockin' with Red," "Salty Boogie," "I Got a Hole in my Pocket" and "Hey Worm!" were later seized upon by rockabilly collectors, although Dickens says that he never considered them significant when he cut them.

Jimmy had no more Top Ten records until 1962, when "Violet and the Rose" reached number ten. The next hit would not come until three years later, in 1965.

"We were doing an album for Columbia in the studio, and my friend walked in, and this guy come in with the song 'Bird of Paradise' under his arm. I never stopped in the middle of a session to listen to a tune, but I did for him. He took it downstairs and played it for me, and a half-hour later we were upstairs recording it. I didn't have any idea it could be the hit that it was. I just thought it would be a good piece of material to include in the set."

"May the Bird of Paradise Fly Up Your Nose," a classic smart-aleck novelty song, gave Jimmy his first Number One record in sixteen years. He was on a world tour of military bases when the record was released; when he returned he found that much to his surprise, it was a bona fide hit on the pop as well as the country charts. Suddenly, he was on national TV: *The Tonight Show*, *Hulla-*

ROY ACUFF

Smokey Mountain Boys
and Opryland U.S.A.



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balloo, and even a Dick Clark "beach party" where he made a bizarre appearance dressed in Hawaiian duds.

Jimmy tried to repeat his success, but his follow-up singles, among them several "Bird of Paradise" sound-alikes, failed to make the charts, and his recording career faltered. In 1968 he ended his nineteen-year association with Columbia; from there he went to Decca, then United Artists. There were no hits on any of the labels, but Jimmy continued to travel across the country and around the world (twice to Vietnam, where on one occasion his hotel was bombed the day before he arrived). Today, with an album on Nashville's Gusto label, he still works the road, playing mostly to middle-aged and older crowds who remember "Tater" and his other early hits. He would like to record with a major label again, and talks about the possibility that his Hall of Fame election might open a door in that direction. Negotiations, he says, are in progress.

"I just want to be produced properly. That's one thing I've always had problems with, listening to everybody else and doing exactly what they said. I feel like I've been doing this long enough to know what my audience will buy, including how the record is done and the material is done, and that's just the way I'm gonna keep it. Just down-to-earth, plain country. You can't tell me it don't work, as long as there's a George Jones and a Merle Haggard, or Moe Bandy or Ricky Skaggs and these folks..."

If you look hard, you will see that Little Jimmy Dickens is actually in a minority. He is one of little more than a half-dozen living Hall of Famers who maintain a vigorous, active touring schedule. Many of the others either limit their appearances or have retired. A few, Ernest Tubb among them, have had health problems serious enough to keep them off the road. But Dickens, in good health, perseveres. When he's not on the road, he's usually at home in Brentwood, a Nashville suburb, with his wife Mona and their daughter (he has another daughter from an earlier marriage). And just as his music has remained simple, his hobbies—hunting and fishing—reaffirm his Appalachian roots.

You get the impression the Hall of Fame election may have re-energized Jimmy. Having his name and face on a plaque next to those of his heroes Acuff and Tubb is clearly a point of pride, and the attention it's brought him has renewed him to the point where he's ready to record again. Perhaps his election will give people, especially the millions who have been converted to country music in recent years, a chance to find out who Little Jimmy Dickens really is. ■

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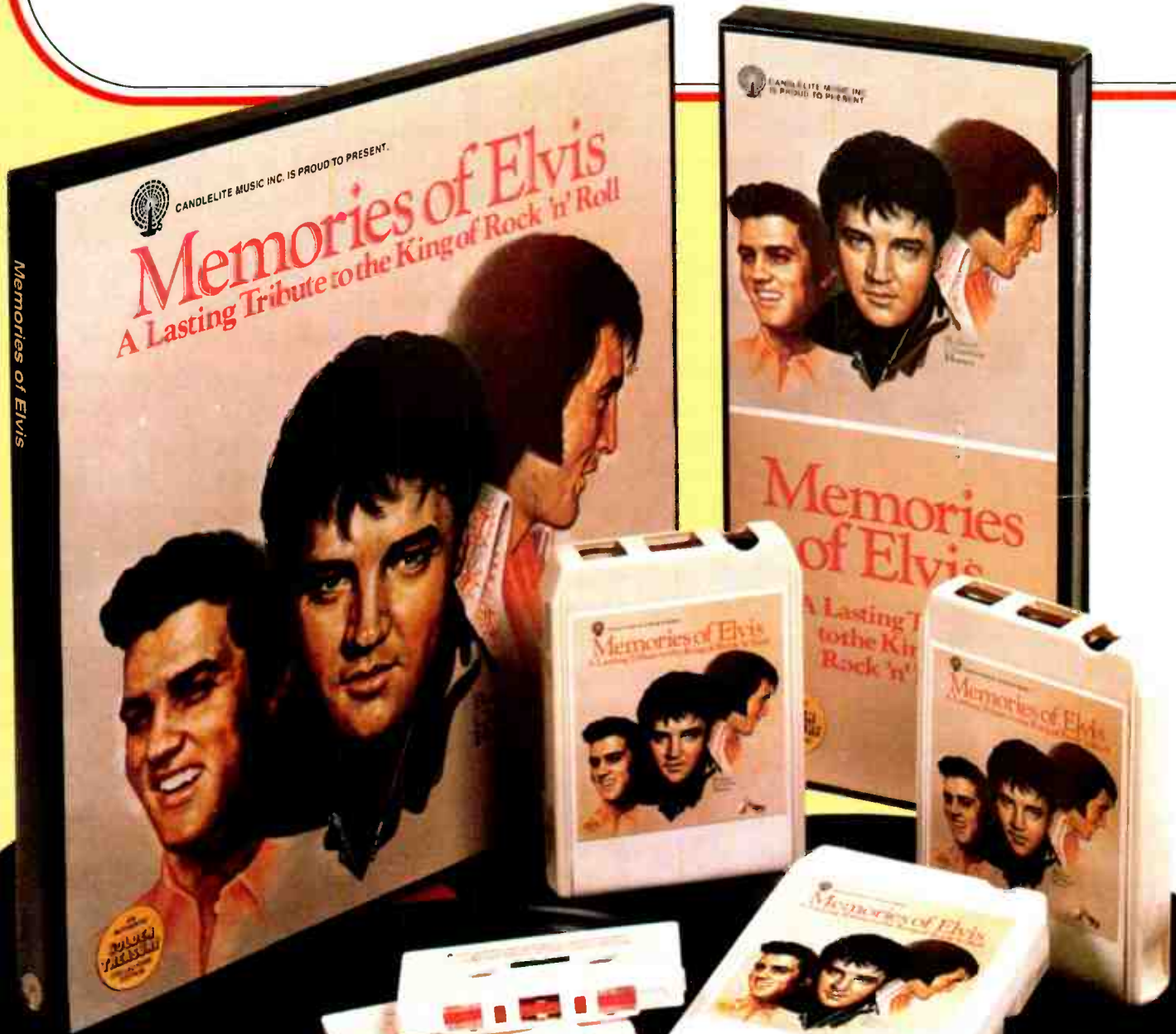
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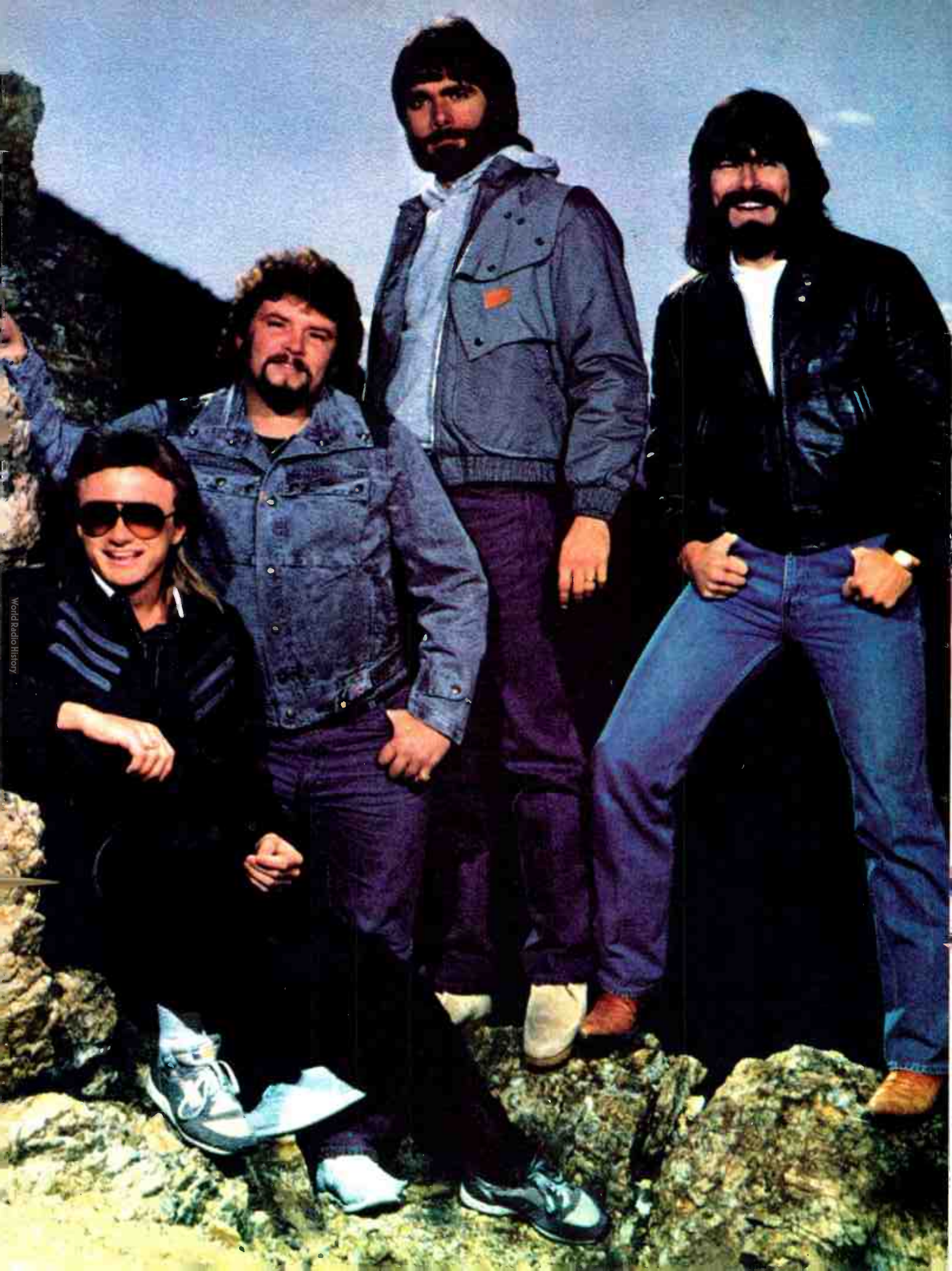
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Record Reviews

Alabama

Roll On

RCA AHL 1-4039

In their brief but blazing existence on the country music front, Alabama have become a certified phenomenon. No act in Nashville's history has ever sold records like



the Ft. Payne Foursome. No country act has ever scaled Platinum Mountain so consistently, nor walked the precarious tightrope between country and rock so deftly.

Their latest album is a salute to their roots, evidence that from the dizzying heights of success, they have not forgotten their modest beginnings. Technically, *Roll On* is one of Alabama's best albums—its fidelity is crystal-clear—but there is also a free, unfettered feeling running through its core. Although only four of the cuts were written by members of the band, the outside songs have a certain well-worn familiarity which makes them sound autobiographical.

The title track, "Roll On," is one of the album's best moments. It's the band's first foray into the classic country theme of trucking, and they throw themselves into the number with full abandon, finely-honed harmonies and barely-contained exuberance—and who conveys exuberance better than Alabama?

Another highlight is a distinctly Eagles-flavored song,

"The End of the Lyin'," which gives Randy, Teddy and Jeff a great opportunity to show off their layered harmony vocals against powerful percussion and juiced-up electric guitar leads. Then there's "I'm Not That Way Anymore," a curious song written by the band and their road manager, Greg Fowler. This is a tale of reminiscence, about changes in their lives, about growing up. The lyrics would have us believe that Father Time has taken his toll of even this high-flying supergroup, touching them with homebodied mellowness: "We used to get crazy every Saturday night/We'd drive into town and get feelin' right/A child of the 60s in '74/But I'm not that way anymore..."

Alabama's strongest trick is coming up with brilliant arrangements to surround average material; not all of their songs are as distinctive as "Love in the First Degree" or "Tennessee River" or "Feels so Right." They can, for instance, take an unimpressive number like this album's "(There's a) Fire in the Night" and convert it into a sizzling production full of superb harmonies. And on *Roll On*, their vocals are even more potent, clean, and decisive than usual.

It's evident through autobiographical songs like "The Boy" and "Food on the Table"—both written by band members and both about growing up poor and country—that Alabama share a special identification with their audience. It's also evident through the entire album that this is a band which can experiment without excess.

Maybe that's why *Roll On* is such a striking album: It's a clear indication of how far, instrumentally and vocally, Alabama have come in the past few years—and how little they have changed in spirit.

—KIP KIRBY

Ricky Skaggs

Don't Cheat in Our Hometown

Sugar Hill/Epic FE-38954

Aside from his keen musical instinct and intuition, a key factor in the broad appeal of Ricky Skaggs's music is that it reminds many of us of a time and place where we once lived but to which we can no longer return; a time and place where there is a gentle and benign order to the shape of things.

On *Don't Cheat in Our Hometown*, Skaggs has reached back into his own past in more ways than one. Firstly, he has included a formidable collection of tried-and-true bluegrass originals and traditional country standards: Bill Monroe's "Uncle Pen," Lester Flatt's "I'm Head Over Heels in Love," the traditional gospel song "Children, Go Where I Send Thee," Carter Stanley's "Keep a Memory," and "A Vision of Mother" by the Stanley Brothers, to whom the album is dedicated.

The material has an innocent



but very persuasive charm which is hard to ignore. For instance, "A Vision of Mother" is so full of Appalachian Christian mysticism and fervor (augmented beautifully by the restrained, ethereal harmonies of Dolly Parton) that it makes your spine tingle. That happens again when you hear the powerful, on-the-money *a cappella* harmonies of Skaggs and the

Whites (including Ricky's wife Sharon) on "Children, Go Where I Send Thee."

Secondly, Skaggs has taken his homage to his own past an unprecedented step further. All but two of the songs on *Don't Cheat in Our Hometown* were recorded four years ago, when he was still on the small Sugar Hill record label. He took those basic tracks, remixed them on state-of-the-art digital equipment, and released them.

Skaggs, however, is not merely a fine traditionalist. He is also, as his previous Epic albums attest, a superb synthesizer and innovator. He has often spiced his music with strikingly contemporary electric guitars, pianos, and heavy drum backbeats—evidence of his three years in Emmylou Harris's Hot Band. This "new" album, as he explained in a recent interview, was recorded "during that transition period when I was slowly coming out of the total acoustic stuff and into the electric, marrying the two." A good example of this approach is "I'm Head Over Heels in Love"; with the help of Albert Lee's sharp electric guitar leads, John Ware's tasteful, fluid drumming, and the lively piano work contributed by Glen D. Martin, Mickey Meritt and father-in-law Buck White, Skaggs brings an electric vitality to the song which both amplifies and preserves its original emotional integrity.

It is sad that this kind of musical innovation and stylistic synthesis is seldom heard around Nashville these days. The unwritten rule of Nashville production seems to be that if you don't hook it in the studio, you don't have to sweat it—just let the wardrobe consultants, hair stylists, and radio promotion people take up the slack. The entire industry, in fact, seems to be suffering from a terminal case of hair spray on the soul.

Record Reviews

Ricky Skaggs has gone against this grain, and maybe he has even helped to save the day for better things in the process. Ricky may care quite a lot about hair spray (check that 'do on the record jacket!), but that's not *all* he cares about. In the final analysis, *Don't Cheat in Our Hometown* is not only one of the finest albums to be released south of the Mason/Dixon line in a long time, but also one of the most daring. —BOB ALLEN

Jim Glaser

The Man in the Mirror
Noble Vision NV-2001

If you liked Jim Glaser's hit single, the title song from this album, then you're bound to like the album, too: it's cut very much from the same cloth. That by itself is hardly surprising on a country album, but it *is* surprising that in this case the cloth is middle-of-the-road country, a type of music not previously associated with people whose last name is Glaser. I mean, when he sang with his brothers, Jim Glaser made music that approached the center of the mainstream, but together the brothers never went as far across that cross-over line as he does alone here, and no previous solo album from any of the Glasers has been this close to pop. But now we know for sure where that softly grainy lead voice, somehow urgent and vulnerable at the same time, came from on so many of the brothers' records.

I know, I know, I sound ambivalent, evasive—but I *am* ambivalent about this music. My personal tastes lean more towards country that's less ashamed of the steel guitar and more wary of synthesizers. But so far as Glaser goes on this collection of brooding, uneasy songs—the man sure does worry a lot—I can't complain. He does it better than most.

He still knows a thing or

two about harmonies, as the delicately arranged backup voices on songs like "When You're Not a Lady" or "If I Could Dance With You" reveal. And when there's real snap to his phrasing, as there is on the latter song or on his remake of his 1975 solo hit, "Woman, Woman," Glaser comes off like a male Anne Murray, tough and tender too, with a totally distinctive voice. But the rest of the arrangement on "Woman, Woman" is dangerously schmaltzy, and on other songs like "I'd Love to See You Again" or "Close Friends," those strumming acoustic guitars and thin vocals make me think more of someone like John Denver. That's not the right idea at *all*.

Still, at his best, Glaser remains as subversive as ever—it's just that now he's subverting the Vegas-aimed form which radio programmers call



"happy housewife music." He's injecting a little soul into the ooze. So let's give him the benefit of the doubt, and hope that he doesn't get carried too far away down the middle of the road.

—JOHN MORTILAND

Emmylou Harris

White Shoes

Warner Bros. 23961-1

Is there any other female artist—with the twin exceptions of Kitty Wells and Loretta Lynn—who has ever been more esteemed in country music than Emmylou Harris? With her crystalline voice, her rhapsodic beauty,

her plaintive emoting, her winsome on-stage shyness, her delicate wholesomeness combined with a sort of freewheeling rambunctiousness, Emmylou has inspired something



almost like worship among her followers.

There is just one problem: her bewildering tendency every now and then to come out with an album so far below her usual standards that it almost causes a listener to become embarrassed for her. *White Shoes* is such an album.

For all her achievements, Emmylou still seems, musically speaking, unsure of who she is. On only one cut, "Like an Old Fashioned Waltz," does she sound like the Emmylou Harris who can evoke reverence. Otherwise, she runs the gamut of styles and deliveries—none of them remotely convincing. On one cut she tries to come across as Laverne Baker; on another, Connie Francis; on another, Lacy J. Dalton. She even takes a shot at the old show tune, "Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend." It's a semi-recitation, an almost pathetic attempt to sound like a nightclub torch singer, made even more ludicrous when she yells, "Let's rock!" As long as she's doing the Greatest Hits of Marilyn Monroe, I always kind of liked "River of No Return" done in the old Bessie Mae Thornton style.

Even the title cut, from the standpoint of content, is arguably her most baffling ever. It concerns a recently-jilted woman who's going to cure her blues with a new pair of white shoes. Look, I've listened to plenty of songs where the downcast female was going to

throw out all his old love letters, find a new man, have a good cry, whatever it took to get over her departed lover. But this is the first time I've ever heard a song about one who's going to strap on a new pair of high heels. Does she hope to meet a foot fetishist, or something?

Oh well, now that this year's bomb is out of the way, we can expect Emmylou to return to her sterling vocals and harmonies, her beautiful word pictures, her mesmerizing brilliance. And the dud that is *White Shoes* will be quickly forgotten. But why does she keep on with this dismaying practice to begin with?

—JOHN PUGH

Dolly Parton

The Great Pretender

RCA AHL1-4940

It's easy to speculate about how an album like *The Great Pretender* may have come about. There was poor Dolly Parton, up to her ears in acting and composing original songs for her upcoming feature film with Sylvester Stallone, *Rhinestone*. And there were the people at her record company, poring over their quarterly sales figures and fretting about how much they'd like to have a new studio album to release on their favorite resident female superstar.

So enter producer Val Garay with a well-chosen list of perennially favorite pop/rock/country/folk hits of yesteryear, which, when you read it real fast, sounds just like one of those late-night TV advertisements for: *Ten, that's right TEN of your favorite all-time hits from the Fifties and Sixties for only ONE-NINETY-FIVE!* Order now while operators are waiting for your call!

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Record Reviews

there, Dolly does manage to dig in and capture the same compelling emotions that made songs like Bob Lind's "Elusive Butterfly" or Tony Hatch's "Downtown" (originally recorded by Petula Clark) so memorable the first time around. But for the most part, there is in her performances a sense of hollowness. One gets the feeling that instead of taking the time to actually live with these songs and get inside of them emotionally, Dolly opted to merely attack them from without with what seems at times to be an overbearing onslaught of vocal acrobatics.



This is not helped by the fact that subtlety was not in producer Garay's vocabulary on this outing. The brash, electrified and synthesized pop/rock arrangements he brings to these familiar songs seem like mere exterior drapings—gothic flourishes, if you will—which serve to smother and de-personalize many of the songs' original charm. Under the combined attack of Dolly's high-decibel, high-octave vocal assault and Garay's equally overwrought production style, even a song as potentially laid-back as Johnny Cash's "I Walk the Line" comes out sounding like a high school band laying waste to a John Phillip Sousa march.

This disturbing tendency toward overkill is heard again and again on *The Great Pretender*. You can't help but suspect that at some point, both artist and producer realized, if only subconsciously, that things weren't cooking in the studio like they should. So, on far too many songs (even a number as subtle as the tra-

ditional "Turn, Turn, Turn, (To Everything There Is a Season)" they react like long-distance runners trying to make up for a lackluster showing with a headlong last-minute sprint. The result is a series of overblown finales with Dolly belting out her vocal gymnastics over a barrage of stilted guitar riffs and drum rolls.

Having dumped all over *The Great Pretender*, I will back down far enough to concede that at the very least, it is still a solid collection of moldie-oldies sung with a passable sense of surface authority and finesse. Here and there, as on Troy Seals's and Donnie Fritz's "We Had It All," there are even fleeting indications of true conviction in Dolly's voice. But all told, there are few moments when the music actually breaks through the calculated veneer of West Coast slickness and erupts with anything even vaguely resembling true inspiration and vitality. Dolly sounds like she is trying her damndest to convince us that her heart is in this project. But alas, she thinks she is just pretending.

—BOB ALLEN

Johnny Lee *'Til the Bars Burn Down* Warner Bros. 1-25056

Well, well. Who'd have suspected that Johnny Lee harbored so much fire and spunk underneath that mellow Lookin'-for-Love exterior?

Or is it that producer Jimmy Bowen just has a knack for taking laid-back artists who've grooved themselves into ruts and making them smoke?

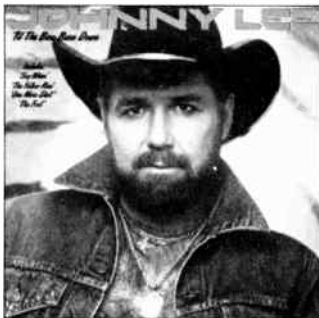
Either way, Johnny Lee has taken on a new measure of electrification here. And frankly, it's happened just in the nick of time. Despite hits like "Lookin' for Love," "One in a Million" and "Pickin' Up Strangers," Lee's image hasn't exactly stayed at the Mr. Excitement level. His albums tended toward the ho-hum. Suspicions about Lee's direc-

tion arose. Perhaps, it was thought, his true strength lay in carbon copies of earlier successes. Often his tunes were lightweight. Even when he tried to turn the tide with numbers like "Cherokee Fiddle" and "Hey Bartender," something seemed to be missing.

The missing something, it now seems, might have been Jimmy Bowen, Senior Vice President of Warner Bros. Records and one of Nashville's savviest producers. Shrewdly recognizing that Lee is an affable vocalist of limited skills, Bowen figured out a way around his problem. Basically, he concentrated on Lee's strength: immense likeability on vinyl. People like Johnny Lee, and more importantly, they relate to him. Men listen to his records and identify with him; women listen and fantasize, thinking that they are sharing insight into the viewpoint of the macho male.

Bowen has kept Lee in his favorite artistic setting here—bars—but classed him up, sassed him up, and dressed up his tracks with dazzling instrumentation. The effect is fast-paced and intriguing, rather like honky tonk-vaudeville. The tracks steal the show.

Lee lends credibility to his lyrics. Alternately, he's the Good Guy Done Wrong, the Cad Doing the Wrong, the Wronged Lover Bestowing Understanding, the Errant Lover Realizing the Folly of His Ways. The songs Bowen



has put into the lineup are cannily chosen: nothing taxing, but hard to resist in their finished versions. Besides some great new originals like

"Say When" and "I Won't Give Up," there's a cover of Mary Johnson's impossible-to-beat 1960 smash, "You Got What It Takes," Fats Domino's "What a Price," and a duet adaptation of "The Yellow Rose of Texas" sung with Lane Brody (and featured on the *Yellow Rose* TV series).

There's nothing very complicated about the Philosophy of Life According to Johnny Lee, and Bowen has parlayed this basic good ol' boy approach into a very successful album. It may not be monumental on its own, but it could be a turning point for Lee. Now it's up to him to keep the momentum going.

—KIP KIRBY

Gene Watson with the Farewell Party Band *Little by Little* MCA 5440

Some "critics" can't quit pressacing their reviews of Gene Watson albums with comments about how he has traded his slicked-back look for a beard and semi-Afro. Maybe the fact that his music seldom changes leaves them grasping for words. His conservatism might seem a liability on the surface (being static can, after all, become boring), yet Watson has never let it hurt him. He knows full well that the best honky tonkers could remain in the same groove for decades without letting it become a rut by keeping the quality of their material high and experimenting within their field.

Realistically, Watson *could* wimp out and become a Nashville schlockmeister if he wanted to. His voice is more than capable of handling the freeze-dried fluff masquerading as "crossover." That he has no apparent interest in doing so is a tribute to his (and producer Russ Reeder's) integrity.

Little By Little is an album so overwhelmingly sorrowful

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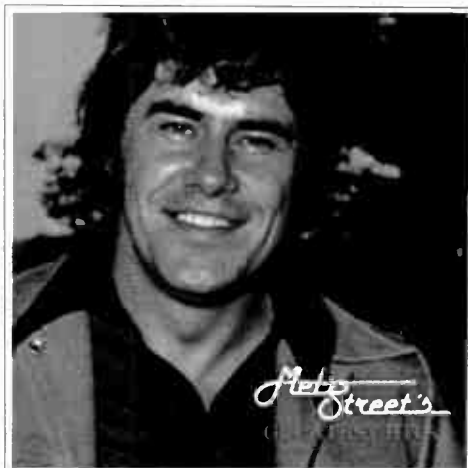
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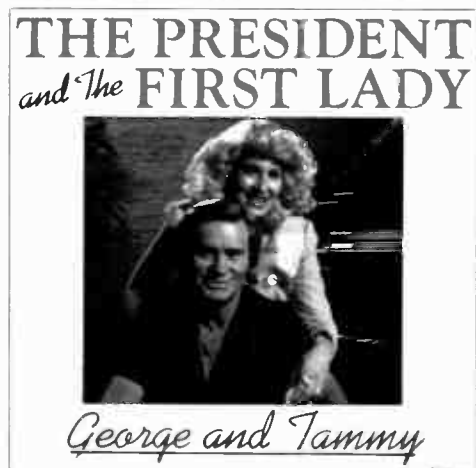
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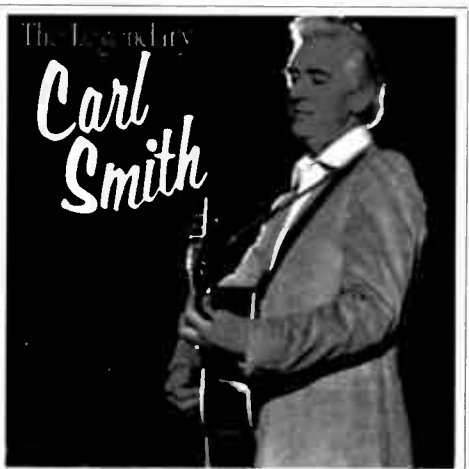
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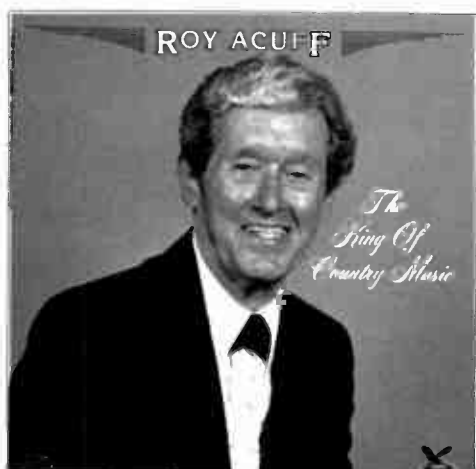
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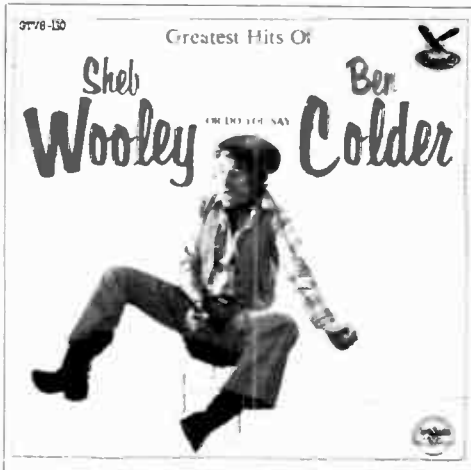
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Record Reviews

it threatens to self-destruct. The title song is a piercing, self-reprimanding ballad of eroded love; equally powerful is "My Memories of You," a tale of a person buried in reminiscence to the point of losing touch with reality. "Leaving's Been Coming for a Long, Long Time" continues this theme, and the haunting "Ballad of Richard Lindsey," the story of an emotional cripple burning with the urge for revenge against his lost love, has just the right aura of mystery. "Forever Again" continues the bad times; "With Any Luck at All" anesthetizes them. "Growin' Apart" is self-explanatory, as is "She Has No Memory of Me." "Drinkin' My Way Home" breaks the mood, though I suppose the album had to end on an up-beat note. Likewise, "The Chesapeake Bay," a trite calypso-flavored tune, is as appropriate to the album's overall mood as coconut on a burrito. But neither song deflects Watson's focus too badly.

Little By Little is yet another reminder that the honky tonkin' life is not just longnecks, barstools, and jukeboxes—it's also bone-jarring sadness and depression.

—RICH KIENZLE

B.J. Thomas *The Great American Dream*

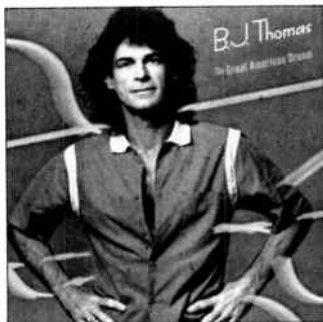
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Kenny Rogers (who has been accurately described as Perry Como with a beard) was one of the first artists to fully realize the potential of Nashville and the country music industry as a convenient stepping stone to dominance of the much greater pop market. And since Rogers opened the floodgates, a whole host of singers and entertainers have followed suit—Lee Greenwood, Eddie Rabbitt and Crystal Gayle, to name but a few.

Now, we have B.J. Thomas—who, in all fairness, is prob-

ably a better singer than any of the above—following the same formula.

Despite all the severe personal ups and downs and musical identity crises he has endured over the past decade, B.J. Thomas has come full circle with *The Great American Dream*. After several years as a gospel singer and occasional forays into the pop world with oddities like re-



makes of old Beach Boys tunes, he has once again emerged with a sound distinctly reminiscent of songs like "Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head" and "Hooked on a Feeling," his greatest hits of yesteryear. It is a style that is up-beat and lilting with introspective and bittersweet overtones—a style that is engaging yet seldom demanding.

The Great American Dream was produced by veteran Nashville steel guitarist Pete Drake, who has been playing on B.J.'s records for years. Drake has arranged practically all of the tracks with bright, easy-listening, often piano-dominated pop settings. It is a sound that seems perfect for the Nashville of the Eighties: rather low-energy, but poignant nonetheless.

The songs themselves are, for the most part, up-beat celebrations of the mundane, odes to the joys of everyday living and the spiritual rewards of middle-class ordinariness. The title song, far from being the indictment of small-time materialism that some listeners might imagine it to be, is in fact a gentle homily reminding us that true happiness often comes when one achieves a sense of place and a sense of

belonging—no matter how ordinary the setting in which one may find it. "Grow Young", written by famed pop composer Jimmy Webb, expresses a sense of perennial optimism in the face of all obstacles. "Pass It On," another Jimmy Webb song, evocatively voices the Christian values so often promoted by B.J., the former gospel singer, but it does so in an understated manner that is determinedly secular and humanistic.

All of this brightness and optimism-against-all-odds might tend to get cloying if it weren't for the fact that B.J. tempers it with occasional slices of melancholy realism like "Some Hearts Get All the Breaks" and "Deep in the Heart of Me."

Ultimately, even the dullest moments on *The Great American Dream* are also redeemed by the fact that as one of modern music's warmest and most consistent song stylists, B.J. Thomas would be hard pressed to find *any* song he couldn't embellish and enliven and make his own.

—BOB ALLEN

The Original River Road Boys *The Texas Touch*

Loughhorn LH 2002

Although the Western swing revival has been fading out over the last two or three years, there are now more hard-core swing fans spread further and wider around the world than there were when the music thrived in the Thirties and Forties. The new fans will sustain their interest, too—as the number of fine (and wretched) recent Western swing re-issues indicates.

Active, performing bands are another matter. The Original Texas Playboys rarely do Bob Wills's memory justice, and Asleep at the Wheel are anything but robust these days—but the Houston-based River Road Boys are a welcome ex-

ception to the general rule. Led by veteran Texas fiddlers Bob White (an ex-Texas Playboy) and Clyde Brewer (who played on countless Houston recording sessions in the Fifties and Sixties), they are one of the finest honky tonk/Western swing units operating today.

What distinguishes them is their originality and spirit. These guys really *enjoy* playing, and their approach to the music functions solidly in the Eighties while successfully paying homage to the past. The point is made particularly clear by numbers like "Down Here in Texas," a satire on the current influx of out-of-state immigrants, and "Low Down, Laid Off Blues," which brings Jimmie Rodgers-style black humor to a decidedly un-funny topical subject. Other standouts are "Sorry," a pleasant jazz-flavored honky tonker, and "Alice in Wonderland," which revives the classic Ray Price shuffle form.

The instrumental work is equally impressive. Brewer and White function as a real unit; Dusty Stewart's excellent approach to the steel guitar is influenced by, but not imitative of, Curly Chalker; Buford Estes's lead guitar is clean and well-focused. Several instrumentals, among them "Fiddle Breakdown," the driving "River Road Drive," and "Carroll County Blues" (which quotes from a number of old swing tunes, including Wills's "Fat Boy Rag") are tight, precise, and obviously well-rehearsed.

Nonetheless, there are a few weak spots—the fiddles are amplified to the point of sounding ponderous, the Humpty Dumpty analogy in "Shattered Love" wears thin quickly, and I doubt whether the world really *needs* another version of Bob Wills's "Maiden's Prayer"—but the River Road Boys are one of the few functioning Texas swing and honky tonk units who don't view this music as museum material. For that we can be grateful.

—RICH KIENZLE

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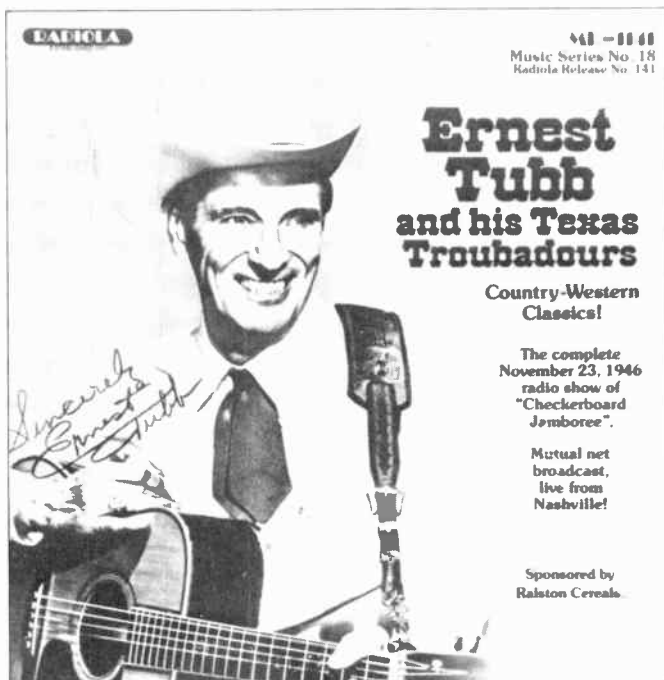
Re-issues, Rarities, and the Hard-to-Find

by Rich Kienzle

Capitol Records, founded on the home turf of the Hollywood movie industry 42 years ago, was one of the most important country music labels of the post-war era. Particularly in the Forties, the label combined West Coast sophistication, impeccable musicianship, and an excellent roster of artists—including Tex Ritter, Merle Travis, Leon Payne, Tex Williams, Jack Guthrie, Eddie Kirk, Tennessee Ernie Ford, Jimmy Wakely and Hank Thompson—to create music which was long on creativity, short on slickness, and enormously influential.

These days, the American Capitol label seems blissfully ignorant of its heritage; very little of its vintage product is now available. Its Australian cousin, however, is more aware of the label's past glories, as its recent release of *Country Music Is Here to Stay: 20 Golden Hits from the 1940's, Vols. 1 and 2* (SCA 045 and 046) indicates. Generously programmed with twenty songs per album, these two records provide a lucid, entertaining overview of Capitol's most successful recordings in flawless mono sound.

Fans of Merle Travis will delight in the inclusion of his original versions of honky tonk hits like "No Vacaney," "Information Please," "So Round, So Firm, So Fully Packed," "Divorce me C.O.D.," "Cincinnati Lou," and "Fat Girl." Three of Merle's 1946 solo acoustic recordings for the original *Folk Songs of the Hills* album are also included, as is Tex Williams's "Smoke, Smoke, Smoke (that Cigarette)," long unavailable in this country. Other Williams tracks are "Suspicion," "Who, Me?" and "That's What I Like about the West," all featuring Tex's driving, sophisticated Western Caravan band. Hank Thomp-



son's original "Green Light" and "Humpty Dumpty Heart" are set off by earlier Capitol hits like Jack Guthrie's 1945 recording of "Oklahoma Hills" and later numbers like Leon Payne's 1949 "I Love You Because." Several Western classics, including Margaret Whiting's and Jimmy Wakely's 1949 million-selling "Slippin' Around" and Tex Ritter's "Rock 'n Rye," complete the collection. These records represent a value that is rare indeed.

Australian Capitol is also the source of a fine Tennessee Ernie Ford retrospective, *20 Golden Greats* (SCA 074), featuring some of the best material from Ernie's strongest years in the Forties and Fifties. Ford, one of the first real "crossover" artists, recorded music that was pretentious and schmaltzy in the later stages of his career, but in the late Forties his boiling, full-blooded approach to country boogie was unparalleled. This collection offers hits like "Shot-

gun Boogie," "Smokey Mountain Boogie," "Blackberry Boogie," "Mule Train," the million-selling "16 Tons," and a disarmingly intimate version of Ted Daffan's "Worried Mind." A few numbers, like the bloated version of "Dixie," are out of place, and the otherwise vibrant version of "Stack-O-Lee" suffers from crude editing, but barring these minor flaws, *20 Golden Greats* is Tennessee Ernie Ford at his peak.

No matter how you slice it, Smokey Wood was nuts. A confirmed pot-head in 1930s Texas, he was a loose-jointed, bluesy singer and piano player in the Fats Waller style who worked with a number of Houston-based Western swing bands. *Smokey Wood: The Houston Hipster* (Rambler 107) combines all of his 1930s recordings—some with the hard-swinging Modern Mountaineers, a unit which also featured the fluent saxophone and clarinet of Hal Hebert and J.R. Chatwell's driving,

lyrical swing fiddle, and some with a studio band known as the Wood Chips. All the material is from 1937. Don't expect that Bob Wills "ah-ha" sound here; in the Thirties, Houston bands were far smaller and jazzier than Wills's outfits.

Wood's left-field approach is evident in "Everybody's Truckin'," a song which makes liberal use of *that word* (which may explain why it didn't sell very well in '37); Commander Cody and his Lost Planet Airmen appropriated it and re-titled it "Everybody's Doin' It" more than thirty years down the road. All the other tracks here, from both the Mountaineers and the Wood Chips sessions, are of uniformly high quality, including the Mountaineers' "Loud Mouth" and "Gettin' that Lowdown Swing" and the Wood Chips' "Keep on Truckin'" and "Carry Me Back to Old Virginny," the latter an outright steal of Jimmie Rodgers's "Traveling Blues."

Wood was a certified crazy, and the craziness did not stop with his death in 1975; even his funeral was bizarre. Read Marty Pahls's and Jeff Richardson's hilarious liner notes for details.

Despite the fact that lots of material exists, the country radio shows of the Forties and Fifties are rarely re-packaged. A notable exception is Radioola's *Ernest Tubb, T. Texas Tyler* (MR-1141). The first side is a Ralston *Checkerboard Jamboree* from November 23rd, 1946, complete with commercials. Backed by one of his earliest Texas Troubador bands and framed by Cousin Louie Buck hawking cereal and mail-order silverware, E.T. was in superb form that night. This is the kind of Americana that deserves to be heard, especially in an age of

sound-alike, pre-packaged country radio.

Side Two, which spotlights a January 11th, 1950 Los Angeles club date by T. Texas Tyler and his exciting (and underrated) Western Dance Band, is no less worthy. Tyler mixes country hits of the day—"I Love You Because," etc.—with hot instrumentals like the old big band staple, "Johnson Rag." The album ends with a brief, unintentionally funny 1954 Ralston Purina radio show hosted by Eddy Arnold and aimed at farmers. Eddy, his voice dripping sincerity, plugs a new Purina promotional movie: "... a film that shows *digestion* taking place in a *cow's stomach*..." Not the kind of thing you'd want to hear at the dinner table (let alone watch), but a wonderful relic of rural radio gone forever.

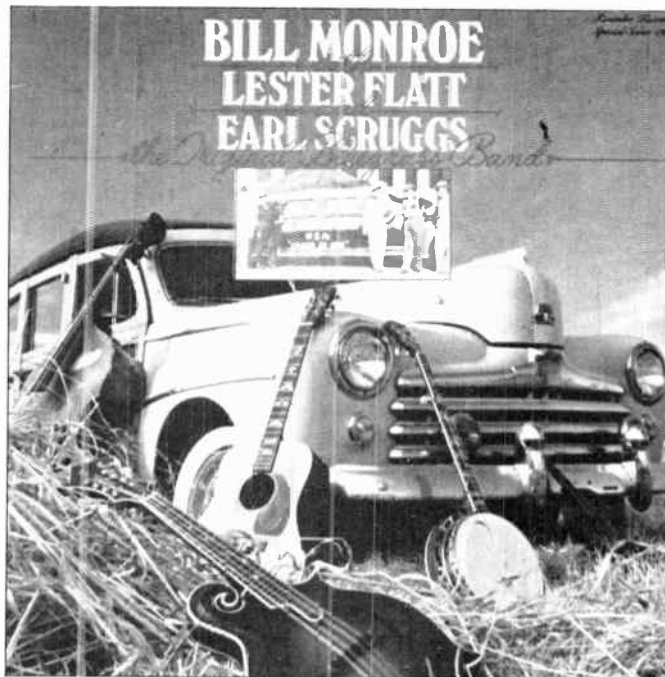
Kentucky Country, the recent and excellent book by Charles Wolfe, has been followed by an album of the same name (Rounder 1037). The album, produced by Wolfe, is somewhat narrower in scope than the book, dealing only with the more obscure Kentucky acts of the years between 1927 and 1937. Highlights are Buell Kazee's marvelously expressive 1928 recording of "Lady Gay," which begins the album; banjoist Hayes Shepard's 1930 "Hard for to Love," which has a hard rural intensity and driving banjo unusual for the time; the Prairie Ramblers' 1931 recording of "Shady Grove," which has a clear and prophetic hint of bluegrass to it; Karl Harty's muted 1936 "Going Home This Evening," which has an aching, sorrowful beauty; and the most recent track, fiddler Cliff Gross's 1937 "Run Them Coons into the Ground," which, driven along by Zeke Campbell's guitar, is beautifully tight.

This album may seem esoteric, but Ricky Skaggs fans who are curious about their hero's musical roots should definitely get it (and one by Bill Monroe, and one by the Stanley Brothers): Ricky's sources will quickly become obvious. Hard-core bluegrass fans will realize the album's importance from the first track on. ■

The Essential Collector

Basic Bluegrass

by Charles K. Wolfe



Three years ago, everybody backstage at the Opry was telling a lightbulb joke. *Question:* How many bluegrass musicians does it take to screw in a lightbulb? *Answer:* Seven. One to screw in the lightbulb, and six to bitch about the electricity.

The joke was pretty typical of the way the Nashville establishment used to react to the down-home simplicity and dogmatic purity which characterized much of bluegrass—but that was before the back-to-basics groundswell hit mainstream country music, before Ricky Skaggs, Emmylou Harris, John Anderson, Delia Bell, and the Whites brought their bluegrass sound to a whole new generation of hit records.

Still, to many listeners, "bluegrass" is a code word for any kind of unamplified string band music, whether folk, old-timey, Cajun, or cowboy. Not plugged in? Must be bluegrass. This kind of attitude irritates bluegrass purists. Cajuns, fiddle contest winners, cowboys,

and all sorts of other folks, for bluegrass today is nothing if not tightly defined. Listening to a handful of key albums will illustrate this definition better than a dozen magazine articles. And unlike the situation in mainstream country, most of the classic, essential bluegrass albums which defined the form are currently in print; most are easily accessible to any country fan who likes fine singing (especially harmony singing), instrumental virtuosity, and vintage songs.

The basic bluegrass sound was formed in 1946 when Bill Monroe hired singer-guitarist Lester Flatt and banjoist Earl Scruggs to join his Blue Grass (two words, at first) Boys on the Grand Ole Opry stage. The new band could play tunes twice as fast as any other group on the show. Scruggs almost started riots with his revolutionary three-finger banjo picking, and Lester and Bill electrified listeners with their high harmony singing. The 28

records this band made for Columbia are all now in print again, but the best of them are featured on *The Original Bluegrass Band* (Rounder Special Series 06). Recorded in 1946 and 1947, and suffering from a distant, muddy sound, these twelve sides are still exciting today even though the songs and arrangements have been copied hundreds of times by later bluegrass bands. Here are the first recordings of classics like "I'm Going Back to Old Kentucky," "Toy Heart" (a Ricky Skaggs favorite), "Will You Be Loving Another Man," and "Molly and Tenbrooks (The Race Horse Song)," more commonly known as "Run, Molly, Run."

In 1948 Flatt and Scruggs broke away from Monroe and started their own band, the Foggy Mountain Boys, which would become the second great bluegrass fountainhead. While their initial 1948-49 Mercury recordings (occasionally available in cut-out bins) contained favorites like "Salty Dog Blues" and "Foggy Mountain Breakdown," they really hit their stride in a series of brilliant Columbia pieces between 1950 and 1955. In recent years independent bluegrass companies like County and Rounder have issued no less than four albums of this material through leasing arrangements with Columbia. Probably the best single volume is County's *The Golden Years* (CCS-101). Here are fourteen masterworks, including two of Scruggs's finest banjo showcases, "Dear Old Dixie" and "Earl's Breakdown." Flatt's singing is complemented by Curly Sechler's amazing tenor harmonies on "I'll Stay Around" and "That Old Book of Mine," and by a variety of fiddlers, including Paul Warren and Benny Martin and Big Howdy Forrester.

While Flatt and Scruggs

went their own way, Bill Monroe continued to develop his music in a less flashy but equally enduring style through the 1950s and 1960s. Using his band as a school for dozens of younger musicians, he made over twenty albums, many of which are still in print, for Decca/MCA. A fine sampler of his work is, appropriately enough, *The Best of Bill Monroe* (MCA-4090), a bargain-priced two-record set which chronicles the best of those years, from 1950's "Uncle Pen" to 1973 cuts; in between are original versions of "Gold Rush," "Footprints in the Snow," and "Highway of Sorrow."

By the mid-1950s a second generation of bluegrass was emerging, including Reno and Smiley, Jimmy Martin, the Stanley Brothers, and Jim and Jesse; none, though, had quite the impact or caused quite the controversy as two brothers from Kentucky, Bobby and Sonny Osborne. In 1956 the boys hit the Wheeling *Jamboree* with "Ruby," an old Kentucky shout song delivered in a high, piercing, freight-train tenor that was the loudest thing the Wheeling fans had ever heard. By the time the boys got to Nashville, they had devised a new three-part harmony style and experimented with drums, electric instruments, and even a six-string banjo. Their recordings of "Rocky Top," "This Heart of Mine," "Making Plans," and "Up This Hill and Down" became chart hits as well as bluegrass classics; these (plus "Ruby"

and more of their original Decca releases) are available on *The Best of the Osborne Brothers* (MCA-4086).

While the Osbornes were experimenting in Nashville, a different sort of experiment was taking place in Washington, D.C., the real center for bluegrass in the 1960s and 1970s. This third generation was built around two related groups, The Country Gentlemen and The Seldom Scene. Focusing on the mandolin and banjo (to the exclusion of the fiddle), and emphasizing clean vocal harmonies, the Washington groups mixed older bluegrass songs with material from the folk revival ("House of the Rising Sun," "Two Little Boys"), songs drawn from rock ("Fox on the Run," a standard of the Country Gentlemen) and long, jazz-like instrumentals ("Old Train," "Train 45," "Fireball"). Though originally spread out over dozens of albums on minor labels, the key songs by these groups can be heard on *Bluegrass: The Greatest Show on Earth* (Sugar Hill SH-2201). The two-album set, recorded at a 1982 concert, was a homecoming for past and present members of the Gentlemen and the Scene, and was a Who's Who of Washington—read "contemporary"—bluegrass. Mandolin player John Duffey, dobroist Mike Auldridge, banjoist Eddie Adcock, and singer Charlie Waller showed up, as well as even more musically diverse modernists like J.D. Crowe, Tony Rice (the leading young guitar soloist), and

Jerry Douglas. Even Ricky Skaggs joined in, recreating his role as singer and mandolin player for Crowe's controversial band, The New South.

The Young Turks of bluegrass who didn't make it to that Washington concert can be heard on a milestone 1976 album issued under Bill Keith's name, *Something Bluegrass* (Rouder 0084). Keith, an ex-Monroe sideman, is credited with inventing a post-Scruggs banjo style generally called "chromatic," and he demonstrates it well here on tunes ranging from hornpipes to Dizzy Gillespie's "Jordu" to Hank Garland's "Sugarfoot Rag." Backing him on the album is a core group of bright young pickers who have all gone on to form the cutting edge of contemporary bluegrass: David Grisman, Tony Rice, Vassar Clements.

Traditional, however, remains the grass of choice for most of the younger bands today, such as the Bluegrass Cardinals and the Johnson Mountain Boys. Singing is more important than ever before, and songs by Lefty Frizzell, Ray Price, George Jones and Merle Haggard show up routinely in bluegrass sets.

Many feel that the best voice in bluegrass today belongs to Larry Sparks, a soulful singer who sounds like George Jones or Hank Williams (he once cut an entire album of Williams songs). Buried for years on a series of small-label, \$400-a-session albums, Sparks is finally getting some of the production he deserves, and is finding his audience. *The Best of Larry Sparks* (Rebel 1609) may in fact be the best single starting point for a country fan wanting to get into bluegrass. Backed by powerful harmony singers—among them Ricky Skaggs and Dave Evans—Sparks delivers songs like "Smokey Mountain Memories" and "A Face in the Crowd" in a way that reminds everyone that you can't take the country out of bluegrass. ■

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- Bigger standard payload (1,460 lbs.) than Toyota, Chevy S-10 or Ford Ranger.

• Wide-Clearance independent front suspension steps over bumps instead of bouncing like solid axles.

- Over seven feet of cargo bed wrapped in double walls of steel.
- Overdrive 5-speed; ventilated power front disc brakes.
- 4X2: alloy wheels; 4X4: white spoker wheels, plus on-command 4-wheel drive.
- Special sport bucket seats.

• Power steering with tilt column.

- AM/FM multiplex stereo and full instrumentation.
- Leather-wrapped sport steering wheel; plus a truckload of extras at no extra cost.

The new S/T Long Bed. Nissan takes "tough" to new lengths: all the way to Major Motion.

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MAJOR MOTION
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