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COUNTRYMUSIC

JUNE / JULY 1999

SAWYER BROWN'S
Long, Rough
Road to Respect

LORRIE MORGAN & SAMMY KERSHAW
Old Friends,
New Music

TIM MCGRAW
Why He Doesn't
Have It All Yet

Neal McCoy,
Fan Magnet

A Spiffy New
Joe Diffie

Charlie Daniels
for President?

RICKY SKAGGS
How He's Found
His Way Home

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COUNTRYMUSIC

June/July 1999



COVER STORY

22 Dreaming Out Loud

From the way a song should sound to what's around life's next corner, Tim McGraw has a knack for picturing things in his head and then making them happen. So far, it's working.

By Neil Pond

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Ten years ago, they were all brand-spanking-new-comers. But in the decade that followed, Garth Brooks, Mary Chapin Carpenter, Clint Black, Travis Tritt and Alan Jackson would lead the way toward an unprecedented period of country-music growth and popularity.

By Robert K. Oermann

34 Less Fat, More Meat

After a career slump in which he was pigeonholed as a singer of novelty songs, Joe Diffie slimmed down, cleaned up and got serious.

By Michael McCall

46 Pair of Cards

Two old friends, Lorrie Morgan and Sammy Kershaw, share road-warrior stories, contemplate the current state of country music and discuss their new vocal collaboration.

By Bob Millard

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By Lisa Zbito

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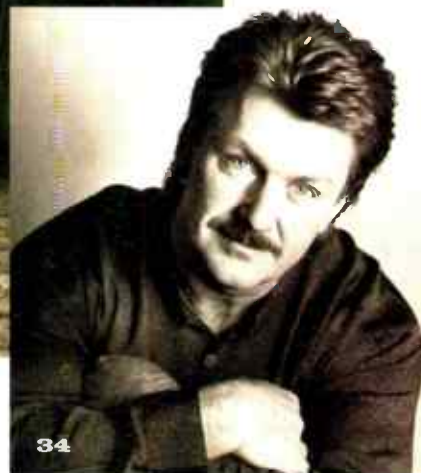
Ricky Skaggs found his true calling by returning to the fertile musical ground of his Kentucky youth: bluegrass.

By Geoffrey Himes

60 The Brown Derby

Other bands have come and gone, but after 16 albums, Sawyer Brown is still plugging along.

By Richard Quinn



ELIZABETH WHITE

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Tim McGraw, above, has it all—almost. Joe Diffie, right, didn't like the direction his career was headed, so he took a turn for the serious.

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GPC

BEST SMOKE OF THE DAY



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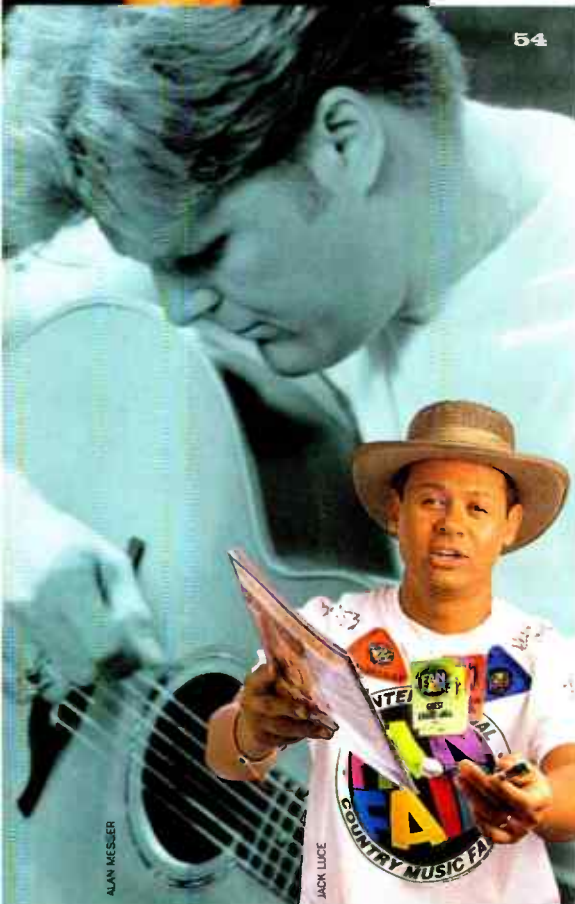
ED ROBE

Sawyer Brown huddles; Lorrie and Sammy cuddle; Ricky Skaggs returns to his roots; Neal McCoy gears up for Fan Fair '99.



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ED ROBE

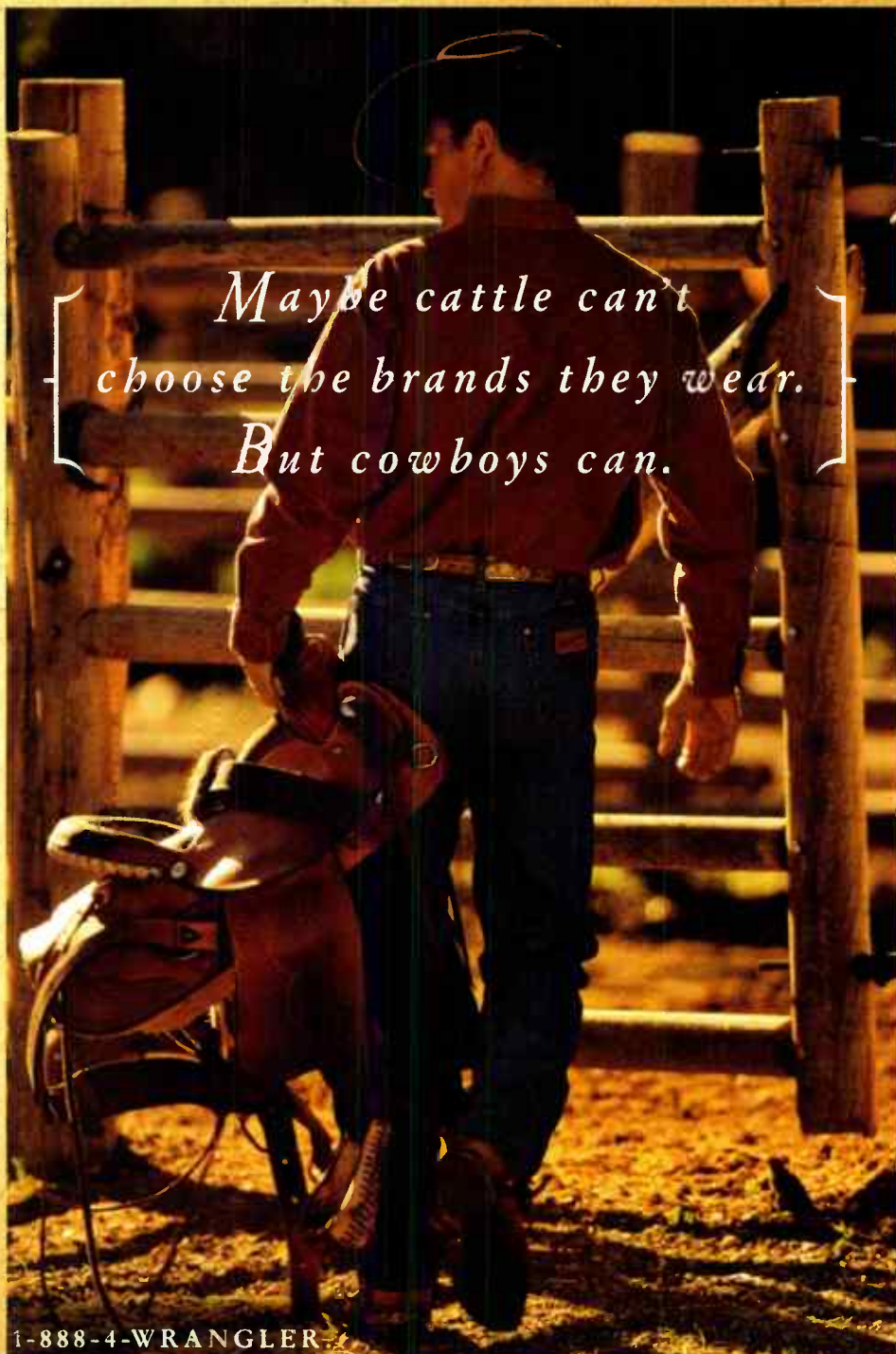


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Every so often, the wind blows through country music and rearranges things a bit. Some things fall flat and others remain standing tall. Others shift around and find a new spot to take root. All in all, it's the artists who hang on the tightest who stick around the longest.



IN THIS ISSUE, you'll get reacquainted with a slate of artists who've all hung in there. We take a look at a very select group of five stars, known in Nashville as the "Class of '89," who came onto the scene exactly 10 years ago and went on to make their marks throughout the decade to come. A decade ago they were all little green sprouts with their first recording contracts; today they're superstars. You know them all on a first-name basis: Garth, Alan, Mary-Chapin, Clint and Travis.

Early on, when Tim McGraw was just getting settled in Nashville, more than one Music Row honcho told him to pack up and go back home to Louisiana. He didn't, of course, and today he's got it all—well, almost. You'll want to find out the one thing he thinks his life is missing. (It'll surprise you.)

We visit with Ricky Skaggs, a perennial entertainer who followed his heart—if not Music Row's commercial instincts—and returned to his bluegrass roots. When he did, he tapped into something solid and timeless.

Sawyer Brown fought for years to overcome the bubble-gum-act stigma of winning TV's *Star Search* in 1984. Today, 16 albums later, they're recognized as one of the most successful, hardest-working and crowd-pleasing acts on the road.

Joe Diffie danced with novelty songs so many times that the ditties started to two-step his career down a dead-end street. He decided to change that, along with a few other things in his life, and now feels like he's in better physical and musical shape than ever.

For years, Neal McCoy endured the barbs of critics who branded him a musical lightweight. Radio's given him only one No. 1 hit. But even so, today he's the reigning TNN/*Music City News* Entertainer of the Year, an honor bestowed by the fans he's so carefully cultivated throughout the years.

And, finally, we go to one of Nashville's most historic watering holes, Tootsie's Orchid Lounge, to catch up with Lorrie Morgan and Sammy Kershaw, two old friends who've now hitched together musically. They compare battle scars, reminisce about the miles and even learn something new about each other.

All in all, it's an issue about weathering the winds of change—and growing stronger in the process.

There's a lesson there for all of us.

Enjoy!

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PROUD MOM

THANK YOU SO MUCH for the excellent story about my daughter, Lee Ann Womack, in the Jan/Feb issue. Her dad and I are very proud and we appreciate the support your magazine is giving her. Lee Ann set her goals a long time ago. She worked hard, overcame some obstacles and persevered to reach those goals. These are the characteristics that make parents proud. Thanks again.

Ann Womack
Jacksonville, Texas

GARTH AT BAT?

I AM AN 80-YEAR-OLD great-grandmother and I love country music. I remember listening to it since I was about 7 years old. I'm not a fan of Garth Brooks. If Michael Jordan couldn't make it in baseball, how does Garth think he can?

Lena Shannon
Orland, California



NEW LOOK

JUST GOT YOUR APRIL/MAY ISSUE and was drawn in by the striking, new-look cover, featuring my favorite band, the Dixie Chicks. Wow! I enjoyed Country on the Town with its fun photos and news tidbits, and I relished the coverage of two of my on-the-verge-of-stardom faves, Mandy Barnett and Karen Staley. Thanks. I devoured the Dixie Chicks

story. It's easily the best, most insightful, most hype-free feature I have read about these fascinating ladies! Michael McCall broke through the Chicks glib, flip defenses, and showed us the intelligent substantial women underneath. I ate up Russ Harrington's gorgeous, imaginative photos for your Fresh Faces/Fresh Fashion roundup. The exciting Shane Minor pic literally stopped me in my tracks. I know I've gone on way too long here, but I just had to tell you how impressed I am with your revamping of a great old magazine. Consider me renewed!

Tishia Agee
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

THE COUNTRY MUSIC MAGAZINE

I received in today's mail is not the magazine I subscribed to. It's slick and glossy and all the garbage that modern country radio is full of. I don't care about Martina's makeup. I buy CM to read honest reviews of music, not the superlative-filled pages I have here. The old CM helped me decide what music was worth buying, music not heard on the "poptry" radio of today. The new CM is everything that is wrong with Nashville: all glitz, no substance.

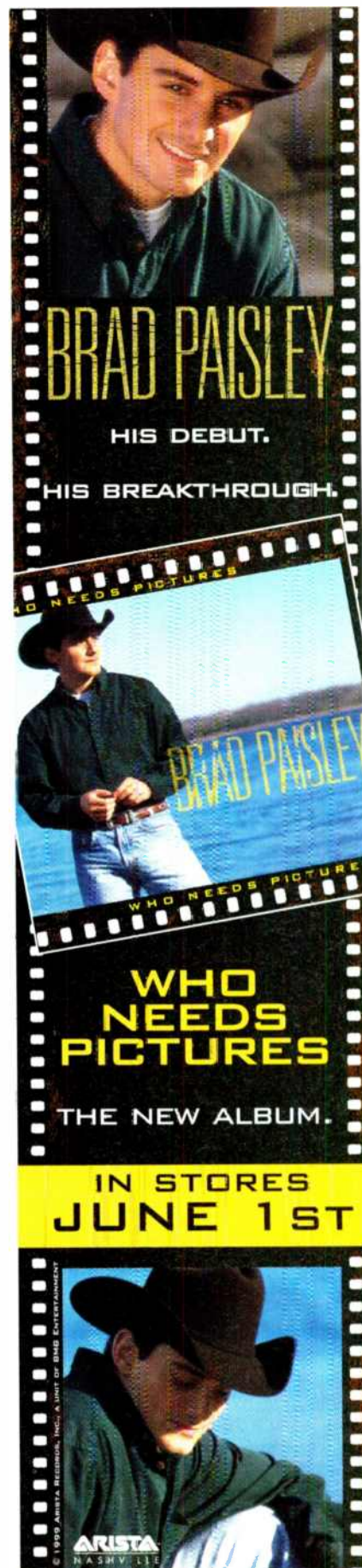
Charlina Adams
Elkview, West Virginia

CLOSE CROP

WE KNOW WHY YOU WOULD put Billy Ray in your centerfold and we really appreciate it. But, why on Earth did you cut off the top of his head? We were so excited to see him on the contents page and then groaned when we flipped over to the middle and saw the hatchet job done on him. We like his sexy legs, too, but please, next time keep all of this gorgeous man intact.

Barb and Brandi Payne
Cedar Hills, Missouri

Send letters to the editor to Country Music magazine, 7 Music Square West, Nashville, TN 37203. Mark envelope: Attention: Letters. Sign your full name. We reserve the right to edit for space and style. E-mail us at comments@countrymusicmag.com.



Country on the Town

By Robert K. Oermann



GLITTERING GRAMMYS

📍 Faith Hill and Celine Dion, above, are mutual admirers at the Shrine Auditorium in L.A. At right, from top to bottom, are Madonna getting chummy with Shania Twain; the Dixie Chicks backstage, matching the "hardware" of their outfits' studs, clasps and chains with the golden Grammys they won; Clint Black and Lisa Hartman Black arriving at the show; and Travis Tritt, Emmylou Harris and Marty Stuart sharing a Grammy for "Same Train Different Time."



JOHN MELLENCAMP, LEFT, PLAYED A COUNTRY BOY IN *FALLING FROM GRACE*. SMILIN' JAY MCDOWELL IS ONE IN *BR5-49*. THE BAND WAS ON STAGE WITH MELLENCAMP, JAMES TAYLOR, DON HENLEY AND OTHERS AT L.A.'S CITY OF HOPE BENEFIT.

A GIRL'S GOTTA DO...

“Happy Girl” **Martina McBride**, left, and “Fool I’m a Woman” **Sara Evans**, right, flank **Mindy McCready** and **Lorrie Morgan**, who could have had the theme songs from the quartet’s *Girls Night Out* CMT special—namely, “A Girl’s Gotta Do (What a Girl’s Gotta Do)” and, naturally, “Watch Me.” The special was this spring’s landmark live event on the channel and has a CD starring all four ladies as its tie-in.



ACHY BREAKY ARM

Billy Ray Cyrus submits to Sunset Tattoo’s **Lisa Bernabe** in L.A. He walked away with a tribal armband on his left bicep. The “Busy Man’s” new accessory is on view in his role in **David Lynch**’s TV pilot *Mulholland Drive* and in his TNN special *I Give My Heart to You*. **L L Cool J**, **Dennis Rodman** and **Motley Crue**’s **Vince Neil** also sport Bernabe’s tattoos.



VANITY STYLE

LeAnn Rimes glows with glamour in a feather boa and slinky top of lavender blue. **Dwight Yoakam** and **Bridget Fonda** look good, too, at *Vanity Fair*’s Oscar Awards bash.



CLEOPATRA FRONT (LEFT) ARTISTA RECORDS; BETH GRANN; JEL JOHNSON; MULTIMEDIA PHOTO AGENCY; © STEVE LEVENQUE; LUCK MEDIA & MARKETING, INC.

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COUNTRY ON THE TOWN



TYLER, AMANDA AND STEVE WILKINSON TAKE SEATS AT THE NASHVILLE MUSIC AWARDS. ALL SAID THEY HAD A BALL DESPITE LOSING TO THE MAVERICKS.

ONE TEEN TO ANOTHER

➤ **Jessica Andrews**, 15, does lunch in Music City with former teen queen **Brenda Lee**. Andrews' debut CD is *Heart Shaped World*. Lee burst on the scene at age 13 and is always happy to oblige with advice to other teen music makers.



POP'S SHERYL CROW IS IN A "SANDWICH SCHMOOZE" WITH COUNTRY'S WARREN BROTHERS AT THE SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL IN PARK CITY, UTAH.

COWBOYS IN SIN

➤ **Riders in the Sky** share some laughs at the taping of magicians **Penn and Teller's** *Sin City* variety show for the FX Network. The Opry trio shows its sartorial superiority in a group shot featuring, from left, **Joey the Cowpolka King** with embroidered sleeves and collar, **Woody Paul** in his white-hat gloy, **Too Slim** wearing his famous cact-tie, **Penn Gillette** in a three-piece suit, **Ranger Dog** in his flashy western garb to match, and the always-silent, suited **Teller**, gesturing in fashion surrender.



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THE BUZZ



BY HAZEL SMITH

Clay and **Lori Walker** expect their second child in June. Their daughter McClay is 3 years old... With baby number seven on the way, I reckon **Marie Osmond** takes the "be-fruitful-and-multiply" Scripture literally. So she multiplies, multiplies, multiplies. Kidding, I am kidding. Yes, I know Marie adopted some of her family...She's never been to the altar, but **Tanya Tucker** is expecting child number three in July. Tanya previously announced her engagement and set the wedding date to songwriter **Jerry Laseter**. Once she discovered she was in the family way, Tanya decided not to walk down the aisle pregnant. Go figure. Her daughter Presley is 8, son Beau Grayson is 6...**John Michael** and **Crystal Montgomery** got just what they ordered, a baby son named Walker Carl Montgomery. Their daughter Madison is a spunky 2 years old.

Who had the prize-winning bull at the stockholders convention in Oklahoma City? Our very own **Randy Owen**, lead singer with **Alabama**—I wouldn't shoot you no bull. **George Strait** raises and sells prize-winning quarterhorses, and he looks pretty good in the saddle, too. **Sawyer Brown's Mark Miller** has a herd of cows out near

Nashville—and you thought all he could do besides dance and sing was play basketball.

Deana Carter and her hubby were due a long-awaited vacation and decided to go skiing and snowshoeing in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. While they were in town shopping and piddling, several people told the star she favored Deana Carter. Finally someone asked if she *was* Deana Carter, and Deana admitted she was. "Nobody imposed on us. Everybody treated us so nice," Deana says. "And you know what? It's great to be recognized." There you go, Deana. Deana knows she's a star, and she also knows fans like to see and meet celebrities. Stars who don't recognize this, hear this from me: You work for the fans. They are the reason you are where you are. How dare you treat a fan any way except the way Deana did! Hey, if you don't want to be bothered by the fans, get yourself a job pumping gas or frying burgers.

BlackHawk member **Van Stephenson** underwent surgery at Vanderbilt Cancer Center in Nashville for what was diagnosed as malignant melanoma. Van was released from the hospital the same day. He and wife

Karen say thanks to you fans for everything. What I say is keep them prayers a-coming. Don't you know the Lord hears the prayers of country music fans.

These days there's awards for everything. I read in the paper



Clockwise from above left: Yearwood and Reynolds share some Opry cake; Wagoner gives an official welcoming hug; Vince Gill joins in the celebration.

that in Denton, Texas, the Sally Beauty Supply Best Tressed Celeb Survey had named **Shania Twain** as Female With the Best Hairstyle, while **Garth Brooks** and **Clint Black** tied for Male With the Best Hairstyle. Recently Shania's hair had the wet look. Garth's graying hair has a buzz cut. Clint's hair is usually under a hat. I am totally puzzled over the choices, especially in view of the fact that **Vince Gill** has better-looking hair than anyone and **Marty Stuart** has the most of it.

Be looking for those **Judd** women during K-Mart blue-light specials

for the next couple of years. **Wynonna** and **Naomi** took over where **Penny Marshall** and **Rosie O'Donnell** left off as spokespersons for K-Mart.

Barbara's is a nightclub in Printer's Alley where parties have been



known to throw back a few while enjoying country music. Seen at the renowned watering hole were the following members of the second generation: **Michael Twitty**, son of the late **Conway Twitty**; **Hawk Hawkins**, son of the late **Hawkshaw Hawkins** and the Grand Ole Opry's **Jean Shepard**; **Buddy Jennings**, son of **Waylon Jennings**; **Robin Young**, the son of the late **Faron Young**; and **Georgette Jones**, daughter of **George Jones** and the late **Tammy Wynette**. Chips off the old blocks, I reckon.

We'd had lots of rain but the skies cleared off that day, so **Trace Adkins** took a drive on his country property. His truck mired down and Trace thought he could push it out of the mud, but he stepped in a sinkhole, and *snap*—he

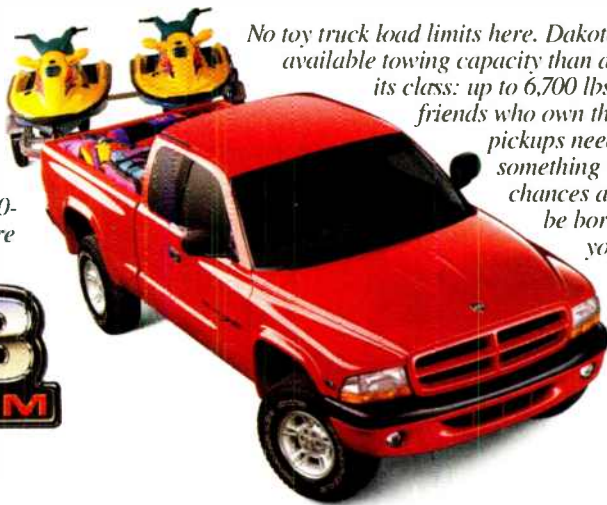
Trisha Yearwood became the 71st member of the Grand Ole Opry with her husband, **Robert Reynolds** of the **Mavericks**, relatives and other all-star peers looking on. **Porter Wagoner** called Trisha the best female singer he'd ever heard; **Steve Wariner** said he couldn't think of anyone he'd rather have at the Opry; and **Marty Stuart** said, "We've inherited one first-class singer and a wonderful person." **Charlie Dick**, husband of the late **Patsy Cline**, and daughter **Julie Dick** surprised Trisha with a silver necklace that used to belong to Cline, making the evening even more memorable than Trisha had imagined it could be.

broke and dislocated his ankle so badly he required surgery. The cast on the singer's foot for eight weeks did not stop his performing, however. But he did have to put his sexy dancing moves on hold. *

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World Radio History

Hung Up on Hollywood

Trisha Yearwood is such a film fan, she even loves books about movies.

Between touring with friends like Garth Brooks, filming her latest appearance on the hit TV series *Jag*, and recording her new album (due this fall), who has time to read or go to movies?

Well, if you're Trisha Yearwood, you make the time. Books? "I read whenever I can—airplanes, and at night before bed." Movies? "You name it—I'm a fan!" she says. As for music, Yearwood stays true to her folk-rock roots.

Here are some titles on her current hot list:



Yearwood with actor David James Elliott on TV's *Jag*.



BOOKS

In light of Trisha's forays into acting (in addition to her role on the CBS military drama *Jag*, she had a cameo in the 1993 Peter Bogdanovich film *The Thing Called Love*), it's telling that her current favorite read is the biography of Oscar-winning Hollywood screenwriter Frances Marion.

Without Lying Down: Frances Marion and the Powerful Women of Early Hollywood by Cari Beauchamp

(Scribner), takes a look at the high-powered females of Hollywood's Golden Age like Mary Pickford, Hedda Hopper and Marion herself.

"A friend recommended this book," Yearwood reports, adding, "I love to read biographies."

MOVIES

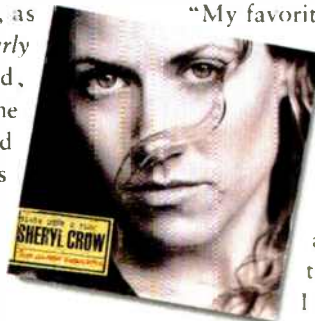
Yearwood carries the Hollywood theme over to her movie selections, as well. "I just went to see *Hurlyburly* in L.A. with my husband, Robert," she says, referencing the current flick about foul and self-absorbed Hollywood bullies and the women they abuse. "I liked it. It's pretty dark, but I love Sean Penn and Chazz Palminteri.

"I'm a movie fan, *period*," she adds. "I love old movies, new movies, action movies, comedies—you name it!"

MUSIC

Trisha has long cited '70s folk-rockers like Linda Ronstadt, the Eagles and Bob Seger as influences. Her current fave on the CD player harkens back to those roots.

"My favorite non-country album right now is Sheryl Crow, *The Globe Sessions*," she says. "I think this music gets close to what I loved about Linda Ronstadt and Bonnie Raitt in the '70s—country rock, I guess." —Lisa Zbito



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Eddie Montgomery (left) Troy Gentry

REBEL ROUSERS

Montgomery Gentry is out to prove that rumors of country music's demise have been greatly exaggerated.

For some country music purists, it's hard to tell country radio from pop radio these days. But new duo Montgomery Gentry is waking up the airwaves with fuel-injected, southern rock-influenced country that's proud of its hillbilly heritage.

"Our definition of our music is 'hill-billy honky-tonk,'" says Troy Gentry, who provides the latter half of the group's name. "Take a little Waylon and Willie, mix it with some Charlie Daniels, Hank Jr., Gregg Allman and Marshall Tucker, and throw in a little Merle Haggard. That's pretty much it."

It's a recipe that appears to be whetting the appetites of country-starved radio listeners. Many of the aforementioned ingredients—especially early Charlie Daniels and Outlaws-era Waylon and Willie—are obvious in Montgomery Gentry's rowdy, irresistible first single, "Hillbilly Shoes." During a winter-long radio tour to promote the single and their Columbia Records debut album, *Tattoos and Scars*, Gentry and partner Eddie Montgomery discovered their music is just what some fans have been waiting for.

"Oh man, some of the comments we've heard," says Montgomery. "'Refreshing,'

'Great to have some music back that's in-your-face country'—we hear that a lot." One excitable radio programmer even referred to them as "the second freakin' coming."

"We've also heard, 'We're glad to hear country music going back to country music, and away from the pop-ish sound,'" adds Gentry. "We're really tickled with the response we're getting."

The record company was so tickled with reaction to the duo that it bumped up their album release date from late June to April—another encouraging sign for the Kentucky-based artists, whose "overnight" success comes after years of club work, including backing Eddie's brother John Michael (yes, *that* John Michael Montgomery). "We all started in a band about 12 years ago in Lexington," Eddie recalls. "Of course, John-boy went on, and Troy did a solo thing for a while. About three years ago [Troy and I] said, 'Why don't we go after a duo act?'"

After building a fan following in their home state, Montgomery Gentry signed with Columbia nearly two years ago and began searching for songs that fit their gritty style. "We wanted real raw stuff, and we wanted 10 songs that described us. So we had to do some digging," says Montgomery.

"A lot of the writers in Nashville were writing for radio—what was already out there—and we wanted stuff like we grew up listening to," adds Gentry. "So we had to go back into older catalogs."

The result, *Tattoos and Scars*, is an ear-opening combination of old-time country, southern rock and honky-tonk played with modern, cutting-edge energy and an almost-live urgency—shaken, not stirred.

"When we recorded the album," says Montgomery, "we had all the guys in one room—instead of one in a booth here and one there—and Troy and I were in a room beside 'em. We were live in the studio because we wanted a live sound."

Hardcore, outlaw-country recorded in an old-fashioned setting—is there a retro revolution afoot here? The duo maintains they have no designs on single-handedly renovating country, but they wouldn't mind being agents for change. "One act can't do it alone," says Gentry, "but we hope more artists will cut more in-your-face country like this. We hope we can help turn things back around." —Deborah Barnes



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Charlie Robison (left), Bruce Robison

SIBLING REVELRY

Bruce and Charlie Robison delight in their differences.

Both Bruce and Charlie Robison are critically acclaimed Texas singer/songwriters, with voices full of loneliness and mystery. Both are signed to Sony's Lucky Dog records, and both employed steel-guitar legend Lloyd Maines to produce their solo albums. Both have also seen unexpected com-

mercial success; Bruce with the heavy rotation of the videos for "Angry All the Time" and "Desperately," and Charlie with the song "Bar Light," which has broken into the commercial country charts and has become a top-seller in Dallas.

The brothers are both tall and handsome and to top it all off, both are married to other country performers (Bruce to Rykodisc artist Kelly Willis and, by the time you read this, Charlie to Emily Erwin, the banjo-wielding third of the Dixie Chicks). With all these similarities, how can you tell them apart?

Once you have heard their music and seen them perform, the answer is easy. To put it simply, this is really a story about an introvert and an extrovert—two Texas poets whose lives and music are intrinsically linked, yet clearly distinct.

"It gets down to our personalities," explains Bruce. "My brother is more outgoing and I'm more quiet. So Charlie tends to write songs about other people, and I tend to write more personal stories."

Charlie varies from brash and humorous honky-tonkers like "Bar Light" and "You're Not the Best" to the epic, tragic tales of "Indianola" and "Loving County."

"I love the bluegrass narrative style," says Charlie. "I like to write songs that have a little history lesson with the story."

Bruce's songs are quieter, but just as piercing, like the slow desperation of "Rayne, Louisiana," the startlingly honest "Angry All the Time," and the sly boasting of "My Brother and Me."

The brothers, who grew up in Bandera, Texas, a small hill country town south of Austin, started their first band when they were in junior high. Charlie never doubted he would be on the stage, but Bruce took a more roundabout way, attending college on a basketball scholarship and working odd jobs before he moved to Austin and began writing songs. "Songwriting was the first thing I ever felt good at," he says honestly. "Once I started writing songs, it really chose me."

They admit that the difference in their personalities is also reflected in their stage show. "Bruce hates it, but I call him the 'Alan Alda of country music,'" laughs Charlie. "I'm a little bit more energetic. I like to have fun as much as possible." Even the album titles are indicative of their styles: Bruce's CD is called *Wrapped* (as in around her finger), while Charlie's is *Life of the Party*.

"You don't want to confuse people so they say, 'What are they, the Bellamy Brothers?'" laughs Bruce. "We are both doing our own thing, and trying to establish our own identities." —Cyndi Hoelzle

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Dreamin' Out Loud

By Neil Pond

TIM MCGRAW SEES IT IN HIS HEAD, THEN MAKES IT HAPPEN. SO FAR, IT'S WORKING.

TIM MCGRAW SURE LOOKS LIKE a guy who's got it all. He's in the driver's seat of a red-hot career. He's got a beautiful, talented and supportive wife—who just



TIM MCGRAW "IS A VERY NORMAL, SIMPLE GUY WHO REALLY DESIRES STABILITY AT HOME," SAYS WIFE FAITH HILL.

happens to be Faith Hill. He's a proud papa to their pair of healthy kids.

Yes, he's got everything he could possibly want—doesn't he? Actually, he admits, there *is* one little piece of the happiness puzzle that he's yet to fit in.

"I would really like," says McGraw, sitting with one leg swung casually over the arm of a chair in his office, "to coach high-school football."

McGraw is a dreamer. He's constantly looking ahead to the future, creating images of what he wants and projecting them in his head. For years now, he's been visualizing himself out on the playing field, spurring younger, greener athletes on to glory.

"I've always enjoyed working with kids in sports," he says. "I've done it since I was a kid, coaching church basketball and stuff like that. I love basketball, football, Little League...I'd love to coach some youth sports."

"Tim is *such* a dreamer," says wife Hill. "One of my favorite things to do is to listen to him rattle off his dreams; it's better than having him read a book of poems to me. I'd rather listen to his dreams, 'cause I really believe them. I do believe they'll happen. And they're very simple dreams, some of them: 'One day

I'd like to have a tomato garden.' Those are the slice-of-life things that keep us all grounded. And when you've got someone to share that with, you really can do anything."

McGraw's going-on-three-years marriage to Hill, and his fatherhood role to their two daughters, Gracie and Maggie, really does seem to empower him, to focus his musical sights more keenly and more aggressively. Parenthood, he says, kicked his work ethic into even higher gear.

"When you have children, you want everything, especially when it comes to having the chance to give them everything they could ever need, or want, to make them the best people they can be," he says. "You want to make sure you extend that chance out to them for their whole life. And the only way to do that is to work hard."

"You have to think beyond your job sometimes," says his manager, Scott Siman. "Anyone who's a parent can appreciate that. You have to be a provider. I think that really helped focus him musically. The growth in his personal life really helped sharpen his musical ax."

That must certainly be true: The past couple of years, McGraw's been swinging

ng

that ax with undeniable muscle—and accuracy.

He's coming off the most successful album of his career, 1997's 3-million-selling *Everywhere*. That CD launched five No. 1 singles: "Just to See You Smile," "It's Your Love," "One of These Days," "Where the Green Grass Grows" and the title track. Its sixth release, "For a Little While," stalled in *Billboard's* No. 2 position, holding McGraw off from becoming the first artist in country music to spin six No. 1s from a single CD.

Singing success aside, he's also on a markedly upward growth curve as a producer. In addition to co-producing his own recent efforts (with Byron Gallimore and James Stroud), he's also been a studio wiz behind the curtain for Jo Dee Messina. After an 18-month dry spell, Messina re-emerged in 1998 with a trio of dynamite singles, "I'm Alright," "Bye, Bye" and "Stand Beside Me"—all of which were co-produced by McGraw. (In fact, it was Messina's "Stand Beside Me" that blocked McGraw's "For a Little While" from *Billboard's* No.1-single spot, an irony that delights rather than aggravates him.) In addition to his work with Messina, he's also been in the studio with the band Sons of the Desert, co-producing their recent hit "What About You," and with a brand-new, all-brother act called the Clark Family Experience, which will be unveiled later this year.

This summer finds McGraw once again sharing the stage with his hero, George Strait, on Strait's massive festival tour. And these days McGraw's



GLEN ROSE

also in promotional gear for his sixth album, *A Place in the Sun*. He says the title doesn't have any particular significance beyond sounding cool—and, not unexpectedly, echoing the name of one of its songs. But compared to the earlier stages of his Nashville career, he really *does* seem to have found his place in the sun.

"And then some," agrees the 31-year-old performer, who was put down, shut out and turned away by nearly every record label in town before finally landing a recording deal back in 1992. More than once he was told to go back home to Louisiana, that he didn't have what it took and probably couldn't ever get it. But he kept at it.

"He persevered and stuck with it," says Siman. "He's a survivor."

"I met him before his first album came out," says Messina. "All he needed was a chance. He didn't say it, but it was like, 'Bet on me and I'll do my best.'"

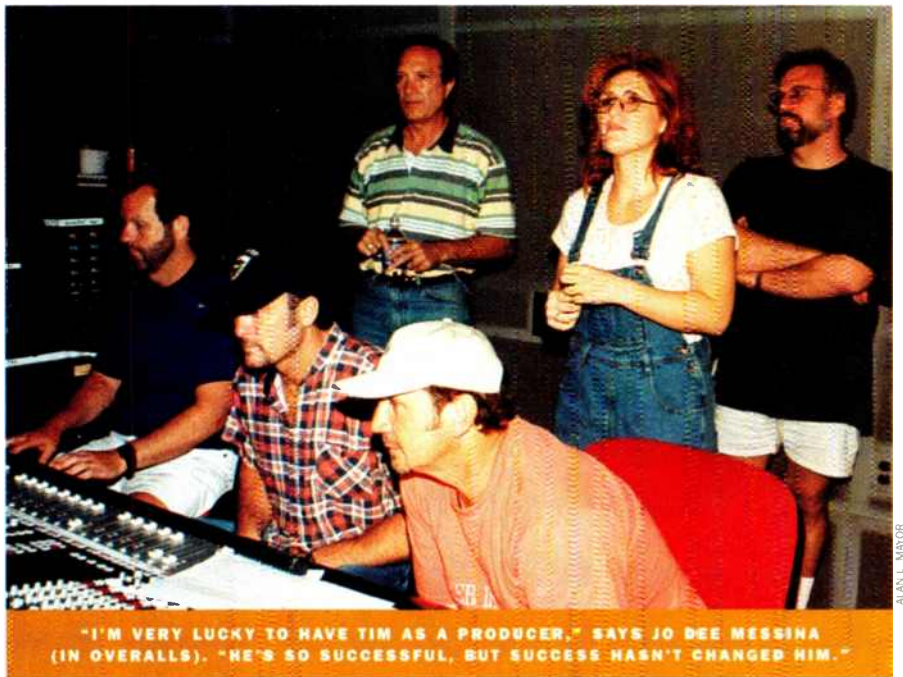
"Before Tim and I got together," adds Hill, "he was at a turning point, on the verge of people respecting him. Some of them knew he had a pocketful of gold, but others hadn't really accepted him yet. But he proved himself."

Radio turned a mostly deaf ear to his debut album, released in early 1993, but perked up for *Not a Moment Too Soon*,

"HE'S SO VISION-ORIENTED," SAYS MANAGER SIMAN. "HE REALLY DOES SEE THINGS IN HIS MIND THAT HE WANTS TO BRING TO TAPE."

his second. He weathered the zingers of critics, who carped on his singing style, and the controversy created by "Indian Outlaw," his "politically incorrect" first hit. But when all was said and done, *Not a Moment Too Soon* stayed at No. 1 on the *Billboard* chart for an incredible 26 weeks and went on to sell 4 million copies.

Today, McGraw dryly notes that *Not a Moment Too Soon* came, its title correctly suggested, not a moment too soon. "If I hadn't had hits off that



album," he says with a small smile, "I would have been history."

Bolstered by the explosion of success, he continued to put even more notches in his belt. His next two albums, *All I Want* and *Everywhere*, were both triple-platinum smashes. *Everywhere* even took Album of the Year honors at last year's Country Music Association Awards.

As his professional career zoomed upward, McGraw dropped his personal

records!" says Siman. "Those things are fleeting, but family is forever."

McGraw's family is only a few years into forever, but both he and Hill are adamant about keeping that aspect of their personal lives separate from their professional careers. They shun publicity that would link them as performers. They've never let their children appear officially on camera. And even though they've collaborated musically on two monster hit singles, "It's Your Love" and "Just to Hear You Say That You Love Me," they've very deliberately positioned themselves as solo artists, not a duo. McGraw doesn't rule out a possible duet album in the future, but it's clearly not something just around the next corner.

McGraw seems to have his hands full these days with his own solo career, anyway—at least in terms of getting it to where he thinks it should be. "I'm nowhere near comfortable with what I sound like," he says. "But I keep working on it, and I think I'm getting better. I'm probably about halfway to where I want to be. My best work is yet to come."

He hints that the future may find him writing a few songs of his own, something that he knows will certainly require some growth. "I sit down and start writing a song, get halfway through it and, God, it sucks," he says. "And then I just won't get back to it. I've got a lot of half-written songs lying around. Maybe I need to give them to somebody and let them finish them."

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Even though he doesn't write them, McGraw certainly seems to have an instinct for picking hits from the submissions that overrun his office. "Tim's always had a great knack for songs," says co-producer Gallimore, who's worked alongside him for the past five years. "And when he hooks with the right song and the right lyric, he can actually do a one-take performance"—a rarity in this day of nearly endless opportunities for a singer to record, re-record and then re-record some more until a song is finally refined to everyone's eventual satisfaction. (McGraw's

recent hit, "Please Remember Me," is, in fact, a one-take performance.)

In the studio, McGraw "sees" the different musical parts—guitar licks, piano riffs, drums beats—as actual, interacting visual layers whenever he starts thinking about making a recording.

"He's so vision-oriented," says Siman. "He really does see things in his mind that he wants to bring to tape."

"He'll come up and say, 'I want this really clean guitar right here,' or 'I want this really dirty guitar right here,'" laughs Messina. "When he gets those ideas, his enthusiasm rubs off on everybody in the room."

"I always visualized everything," McGraw says, drifting back to his days as a high-school athlete. "Like playing basketball, the night before a big game, I'd lay there and picture every play in my head, exactly how I was going to run the route, where the ball was going to be, the defenders, the crowd, everything. Absolutely, every time." A few years later, he'd watch country awards shows on television and put himself in the place of the winners, trooping onstage to pick up their—his—trophies.

Think it hard enough, and you can make it happen. It seems to have worked for him, anyway. So don't bet against

his coaching football—or growing tomatoes—one of these days, because the pictures of those things have already started running through his head.

On this particular morning, however, McGraw is visualizing something else entirely. "Maggie is probably taking her morning nap, Gracie is downstairs beating on her drums and Faith is getting hungry," he says, describing what's likely going on at his house a few miles away. And as much as he'd like to be there, he's still got a full day ahead. He reels off a slate of appointments and interviews. He's already been up since 5 a.m., when he hopped in his Dodge Ram pickup and came into town to drop in on the drive-time crew at a Nashville radio station.

All in a day's work. All necessary, he knows, to build a future for his kids.

"Tonight we're going to a big furniture show called 'Heart of America' or 'Heart of Country' or something," he says. "One of them big antique furniture shows."

Big conventions often book entertainers to perform. Is this an event at which McGraw will take the stage?

"No!" he says. "We're going *shopping!*"

And what's on the McGraw-Hill shopping list this evening? He smiles.

"Anything that we like," he says. *



GARY DENNER, COURTESY OF CLARK FAMILY

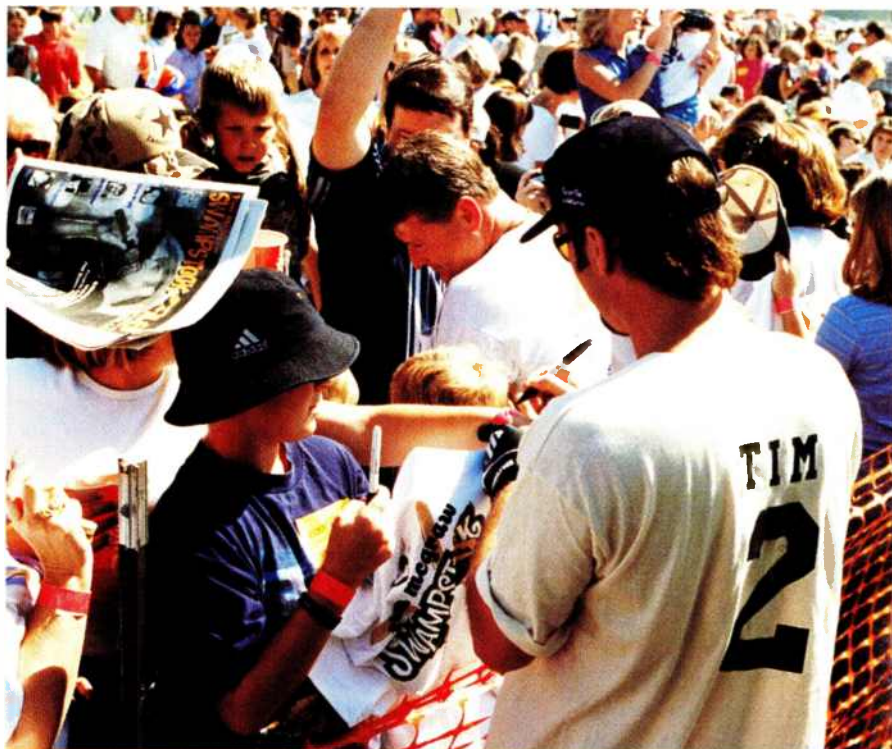
McGraw with three of the six Clarks (Aaron, left, Alan and Adam).

ON THE SIDE

You know him best as a performer, but Tim McGraw's also been steadily beefing up his resume as a producer. In addition to his recent work with Jo Dee Messina and Sons of the Desert, he's also been in the studio with the Clark Family Experience, a group of six young, harmonizing brothers who pick, pluck or strum just about anything with strings. Their debut album will arrive later this year.

McGraw describes watching the Clarks perform for the first time as a "jaw-dropping" experience. Later that same evening, McGraw joined them backstage. "They had this bus with nothing on it—like, a lounge chair over here, really nothing. They bring their upright bass in, and by the time the night's over, there's 10 or 15 instruments going, everybody's jamming and singing old Louvin Brothers songs, Merle Haggard songs, Beatles songs, Styx songs. I'd sing, Faith would get up there and sing. Really cool."

Is there any instrument the Clarks can't play? "If there's one they don't, ask them today," says McGraw, "and one of them will play it tomorrow!"



GLEN ROSE

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HIGH CLASS

IN 1989, FIVE MAJOR ARTISTS EMERGED WHO WOULD GO ON TO CHANGE AND REDEFINE COUNTRY MUSIC. IT WAS A LANDMARK YEAR, AND COLLECTIVELY THESE ARTISTS BECAME KNOWN AS THE "CLASS OF '89."

WHERE HAS THE TIME GONE?

It hardly seems possible, but it's been 10 years since country music graduated its "Class of '89." A decade has passed since Clint Black, Alan Jackson, Mary Chapin Carpenter, Travis Tritt and Garth Brooks all debuted on the charts. All were strikingly individual vocalists and powerfully distinctive songwriters. And all became multi-million selling leaders of the "new country" movement.

Then as now, musicians from all over America came to Nashville to pursue their dreams. Black, the high-school dropout, was from Texas. Carpenter, the Brown University graduate, was from Washington, D.C. Brooks, the college track star and nightclub bouncer, arrived from Oklahoma. Jackson, the mailroom clerk, and Tritt, who'd worked for a heating and air conditioning company, led a wave of migration from Georgia.

They were entering an entertainment world that was profoundly different from the one in which they work today. All of them made their debuts on vinyl LPs—the compact disc was still a year from revolutionizing the industry. There was no Internet, no SoundScan sales technology, no country line-dance craze, no *Rosie*, no *Springer*, no *Montel*.

Bill Monroe, Minnie Pearl, Roger Miller, Conway Twitty, Gene Autry, Webb Pierce and Tammy Wynette were still around to guide and influence young performers. Shania Twain, Tim McGraw, Brooks and Dunn, Billy Ray Cyrus, Faith Hill and Trisha Yearwood were unknowns.

You could almost feel the earth moving under your feet in Nashville in those days; the rumble of change was underway. In less than two years these Class of '89 grads would be part of a new order. Such stars as Ronnie Milsap, Eddie Rabbitt, the Oak Ridge Boys, Dolly Parton, Rodney Crowell, Rosanne Cash, Earl Thomas Conley and Willie Nelson were still forces on the charts back then. The Class of '89 quake would create a tidal wave that swept those established hitmakers from the popularity polls.

But the members of the Class of '89 had no way of knowing they were standing on a fault line. They were bright-eyed youngsters with brand-new record contracts as their "diplomas."

MOST LIKELY TO SUCCEED

Black had just turned 27 when "A Better Man" entered the charts in February. He bolted out of the gate early: His debut went directly to No. 1.



"It's wonderful when your dreams come true," he said at the time. "I've pretty much been living off nightclub gigs for the past eight or nine years. This is like stepping into a picture you've been looking at all your life. I just love singing to people, and I'd travel the world over to do it."

In June, *USA Today* wrote, "There may never have been a country performer who has created a bigger stir right out of the box. Or one placed...in such a perfect position to become the next superstar." Nashville's own *Tennessean* dubbed him "the Good Guy in the Black Hat" (even though he didn't wear one in his first publicity photo, above). *New York* magazine's headline was "That New Black Magic."

BEST STUDENT

Next up to the podium was Brooks, then 26. "Much Too Young (To Feel This Damn Old)" entered the charts in March; it made the Top 10. But it was "If Tomorrow Never Comes," released in September, that made him a star. In the interim, he'd learned everything he could about marketing his music, from radio promotion to record distribution. Then he went on to issue the recordings that would make him the biggest-selling recording artist of the '90s, gunning for the once-unthinkable 100-million-sales mark as the decade closed.

"Maybe when it's the last day of my life, I can look back and say, 'I made it through the door,'" said Brooks as 1990 dawned. "I've had very fortunate luck with the charts. But I'm still not 'in,' to me."



BY ROBERT K. OERMANN



World Radio History

TRAVIS TRITT CLINT BLACK MARY CHAPIN CARPENTER ALAN JACKSON GARTH BROOKS

People magazine called him "Country Music's Newest Nova." On the heels of "If Tomorrow Never Comes," the *Gavin Report* noted "His Time Has Come." *Billboard* named his *Garth Brooks* the breakthrough country album of 1989.

THE BOOKWORM

More reserved and less flashy than her classmates, Mary Chapin Carpenter was the senior member of the group at age 31 when she entered the charts in April with the sprightly "How Do," which climbed to No. 19 on *Billboard*. Like Brooks, she would do better on her second single, September's "Never Had It So Good," a Top-10 success.

"When I quit my day job, I didn't know what to do with myself," she said in the wake of her breakthrough hits. "It was frightening...Mainstream country music is not what I grew up with. I was incredibly surprised [to have country success]. Still am."

Carpenter had every reason to feel skittish. A 1988 LP called *Hometown Girl* had died on the vine, despite favorable reviews. And even with the 1989 hits, her future wasn't assured until after she created a sensation at the 1990 CMA Awards with "Opening Act," a good-natured jab at the music business that had the award-show crowd rolling with laughter, and then a subsequent smash with the jaunty "Down at the Twist and Shout."



THE REBEL

The youngest member of the group was Tritt. He was 25 when he got his recording contract and had just

turned 26 when "Country Club" first appeared on the charts in September. From the start, he battled convention with his long hair, shoot-from-the-hip style and biker image. His label already had Randy Travis as a bona fide star, but Tritt refused to change his name. Cowboy hats were in; he refused to wear one. When "Country Club" broke through, the company had so little faith in him that it hadn't yet committed to record an album.

"There were shouting matches," he reported back then. "They didn't want me to be as rock 'n' roll as I am. Charlie Daniels gave me probably the best advice: 'Screw what the record company thinks. Find your audience and see what they want.'"

The people spoke. *Country Club* was the biggest-selling album at the 1990 Fan Fair and earned Tritt the first of his many gold records. By this decade's end, his record sales will have exceeded 17 million.

MOST LAID-BACK

Jackson had the toughest time finding a post-graduation career. He was 30 when he recorded his debut single, "Blue Blooded Woman," and celebrated his 31st birthday the week it was released

in October. The party ended quickly—the record never even made the Top 40. He would not join his classmates in the Top 10 until 1990. The experience didn't seem to faze him, though. He just kept patiently plugging away.

Perhaps the least savvy about the ways of the music business, Jackson carried a sense of humility and gratitude with him as his star rose. "I had no earthly idea what a publisher was, or a producer, or anything," he said in 1989. "I just wanted to carry on the tradition of real country music. You know that song, 'Who's Gonna Fill Their Shoes?' I



don't know whether I can fill 'em, but I'd sure like to try 'em on." It turned out they fit fine. By 1999, Jackson's record sales exceeded 24 million.

TEN YEARS AFTER

Country's Class of '89 hasn't faded like memories of the prom and the homecoming game. Paced by marketing master Garth Brooks, all five members became media stars and icons of an entertainment phenomenon as country music's cultural presence rose to unprecedented levels.

Between 1989 and 1991, country's sales doubled (from \$460 million to \$1 billion), then doubled again between 1991 and 1994 (to \$1.97 billion). By 1997, more than 20 country stars were topping the \$1 million mark in annual concert revenues. Even performers who'd predated the Class of '89 were brought into the light in the wake of the magna cum laude successes: Lorrie Morgan, Pam Tillis, Patty Loveless and Vince Gill all became far bigger stars than they'd been before. And "underclassmen" like Collin Raye, Toby Keith, Martina McBride, John Michael Montgomery, Deana Carter and Sammy Kershaw graduated to No. 1 hit-making status.

This has been a tumultuous decade in country music, an era of commercial success that was unimaginable a generation ago. The Class of '89 has left an indelible mark on history. Will the "Class of '99" be able to say the same? *

Report Card

The Class of '89 is full of high achievers:

Clint Black

4 ACM awards, 2 CMA awards including 1990 Male Vocalist, 2 TNN/MCN awards

Garth Brooks

10 ACMs including 4 Entertainer of the Year, 10 CMAs including 4 Entertainer of the Year, 2 Grammys

Mary Chapin Carpenter

2 ACMs, 2 CMAs, 5 Grammys including 1994 Best Country Album (*Stones in the Road*)

Alan Jackson

7 ACMs, 6 CMAs including 1995 Entertainer of the Year, 24 TNN/MCN awards including 5 Entertainer of the Year

Travis Tritt

2 CMAs, 3 TNN/MCN awards, 1 Grammy

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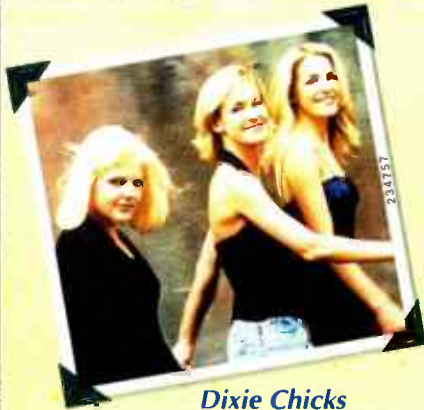
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- Cloy Walker—*If I Could Make A Living* (Giant) 103440
- Bryan White (Asylum) 110734
- **Alison Krauss**—*Now That I've Found You* (A Collection) (Rounder) 120345
- George Strait**—*Lead On* (MCA Nashville) 111583
- Wade Hayes—*Old Enough To Know Better* (DKC Music/Columbia) 117028
- Rhett Akins—*A Thousand Memories* (Decca Nashville) 118463
- Trisha Yearwood—*Thinkin' About You* (MCA Nashville) 118703
- **The Essential Waylon Jennings** (RCA Nashville) 159160
- Marty Stuart—*The Marty Party Hit Pack* (MCA Nashville) 121350
- John Michael Montgomery (Atlantic Nashville) 121467
- Alabama—*Greatest Hits* (RCA) 123471
- Alabama—*Greatest Hits, Vol. 2* (RCA) 123489
- The Essential Ronnie Milsap (RCA) 123729
- **George Strait**—*Blue Clear Sky* (MCA) 168583
- Martino McBride—*The Way That I Am* (RCA) 123760
- Ricky Van Shelton—*Super Hits* (Columbia) 127589
- George Jones & Tammy Wynette—*Super Hits* (Epic) 127605



Billy Ray Cyrus—*Shot Full Of Love* (Mercury/Nashville) 265058



Garth Brooks—*Sevens* (Capitol) 232207

- **Chris LeDoux**—*Live* (Capitol Nashville) 212647
- Dwight Yoakam—*Dwight Live* (Reprise) 128389
- Lorrie Morgan—*Greatest Hits* (BNA) 132480
- Jeff Foxworthy—*Games Rednecks Play* (Warner Bros.) 133322
- Collin Raye—*I Think About You* (Epic) 135814
- Terri Clark (Mercury/Nashville) 136291
- Best Of The Pure Prairie League (Mercury/Nashville) 136671
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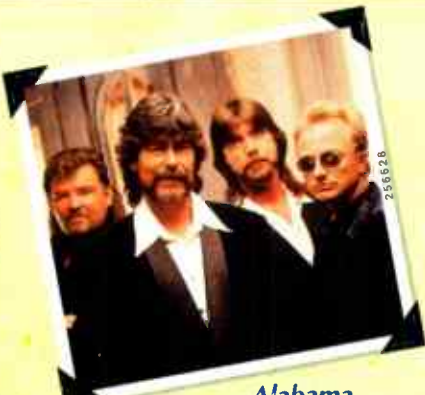


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JOE DIFFIE REALIZED SOMETHING needed to change. After enjoying more than half a decade of enormous success, his record sales had started to slip and country radio no longer jumped every time he released a single.

"When you go through something like that, you start to do a lot of self-examination," Diffie says. "I'd covered a lot of ground and done a lot of things, but I knew I needed to alter some things. In my mind, I feel like there are flash artists, and there are artists who last longer. I'd like to see myself in that latter vein, but it was up to me to prove it to people."

So the man who once billed himself as "a regular Joe" hiked up his sleeves and went to work. If he was going to battle to save his career, he needed to get into fighting shape. And boy, did he: He quit smoking in early 1998 and began a strict workout and diet regimen that resulted in a loss of 40 pounds and the disappearance of several inches of waistline. For a food-loving good ol' boy from Oklahoma, that's quite a feat. It's also one of which he's quite proud.

"Man, it feels so good," he exclaims. "I'm back to the same pants size I wore in high school. I'm working out every day—I got up this morning and got to it. I feel so strong and so much healthier."

The newly streamlined singer believes his outlook on his life and his career is stronger and healthier as well.

"It's been so good for me mentally," he says. "There's so much positive energy around me now. You know, you can fool yourself for a while into believing that it's OK and everything is fine. But then you look in the mirror and say, 'Who is that guy?' I'd see a picture of myself and get embarrassed. But it's up to you to

change, and that's what I did. And now I feel so much more confident."

Part of his health kick involved quitting smoking. Unlike most habitual puffers, Diffie didn't start as a teen. He took up cigarettes at age 28, after his first divorce. "I'd started hanging out more, and eventually I started buying cigarettes," he says. "It was one of the stupidest things I ever did."

LESS FAT, MORE MEAT

**JOE DIFFIE SLIMS DOWN,
PERKS UP AND PUTS OUT
A DITTY-FREE NEW ALBUM.**

BY MICHAEL McCALL PHOTOGRAPHY BY ELIZABETH WHITE

The combined effects of ridding his lungs of smoke and gaining stamina from exercise provided an unexpected benefit. Suddenly, one of the most respected country vocalists of his generation discovered he could sing stronger, clearer, longer and just plain better than ever.

"I tell you, talk about making a difference!" he beams. "I was amazed. I guess I was in denial about it; I kept

thinking that all that smoking wasn't affecting my voice. But boy, was I wrong. My voice feels a lot stronger. It just sounds younger and tighter."

Indeed, everything about Diffie seems more youthful. Typically reserved in person, he now speaks easily and enthusiastically about himself. Usually self-deprecating, he now refers to himself in positive terms that, though far from bragging, exude confidence and self-belief. He feels good, and it shows.

Part of that exuberance comes from the songs he's just recorded for his new CD, *A Night to Remember*. For Diffie, the sense of renewal he's feeling includes the creation of an album that digs deeper emotionally than the songs he's been recording in recent years.

"We made a very conscious effort to move away from the kind of stuff we'd become known for doing," he says. "I've had a lot of my friends say, 'Man, I wish we could hear you sing some really good songs that have a message to them.'"

Though Diffie originally came into country music as a traditional balladeer, he embraced good-time novelty songs in the early '90s. Much like George Jones before him, Diffie's masculine tone and wide vocal range allowed him to fully express the exaggerated dramatics that make witty romps so much fun to sing and hear.

So after establishing himself with emotional ballads like 1990's "Home" and 1992's "Ships That Don't Come In," Diffie switched directions and gained more attention for rollicking, big-beat novelty tunes that became dance-floor favorites in honky tonks everywhere.

And, for better and for worse, they also became his musical trademark. For a



few years, nearly every Diffie hit was packed with boot-scootin' energy and clever lyrical twists. Starting with "Honky Tonk Attitude" and continuing through "Prop Me Up Beside the Jukebox (If I Die)," "John Deere Green," "Third Rock From the Sun," "Pickup Man" and "Bigger Than the Beatles," Diffie presented a string of hits that posited him the court jester of amusing, pun-filled country rockers.

But Nashville tends to like too much of a good thing, and radio was soon overrun with lightweight, lighthearted songs. Fans eventually stopped chuckling and started groaning—and so did Diffie.

"I've had a lot of success with those kinds of songs," says Diffie, "but I've been raked over the coals for them, too."

As he began preparing for his new album, he issued a dictum: "No ditties." Instead, he wanted the album to feature a theme he hadn't explored much in the past: the possibilities and rewards of true love.

"I wanted to base the whole album on love," he says. "I got to looking at my

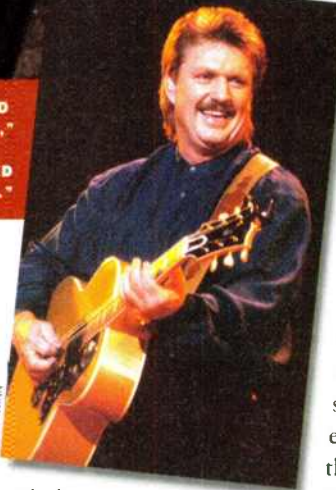
"I SORT OF GOT PIGEONHOLED AS A SINGER OF FUNNY SONGS," DIFFIE ADMITS. "BUT I'VE PLOWED THAT GROUND. I WANTED TO DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT."

past albums, and most of them were real heavy on 'leaving' kind of songs. I wanted this one to be about the positive side of love."

As the album evolved, Diffie felt another theme developing. He realized it was possible to feature songs with danceable tempos without slipping back into novelty-tune territory.

"I wanted songs that people can dance to, and that means the slow songs as well as faster ones," he says. "The album is real rhythmic. It's real country music, but it's got a lot of things going on that people can move to."

As Diffie's experience indicates, reflection and self-examination can be good for the soul. He suggests that, with record sales and radio listenership falling off, the industry itself should reflect, regroup and return to its basic strengths.



"Everything runs in fads," he says. "I think for a while the industry tried to expand so quickly that we started becoming caricatures of ourselves. We kind of watered ourselves down. I'm not being harsh on anybody; I've been in the middle of that stuff, too. But you've got to get back to what founded this business—good songs, unique artists and relationships with fans."

Diffie also contends that the country industry could do with a little belt-tightening, a theory that Music Row has already put into practice with recent staff cutbacks and roster trimmings.

"You can't flood the market with so much stuff that it overwhelms people," he says. "It's a basic law of supply and demand. If you have too much supply, the demand goes down and the quality goes down."

Diffie has certainly put his own actions where his mouth is. He's trimmed himself down, and he's returned to the basic values that originally attracted him to country music. "I feel like I've done a 180-degree turn,"

he says. "I feel real positive about things. I think we've been faced with a set of circumstances in our industry that we can't change immediately. So you've got to work within those boundaries and figure out what you can do to make it better. You can sit in a room and let everyone tell you why this or that won't work.

But I'd rather find the people who say, 'Let's do this and make it work.' That's a lot harder to do, but it's the only way that things will turn around."

Whatever happens, Diffie has the inner satisfaction of knowing he did his best. Rather than compromising or trying to second-guess the next trend, he buckled down and gave his best effort on the strongest songs he could find.

"On this album, I did not shortchange myself. I'm not sure I could say that about some of the things I've done in the past. But I'm as proud as I can be of what we've done here. And that feels real good to me." *



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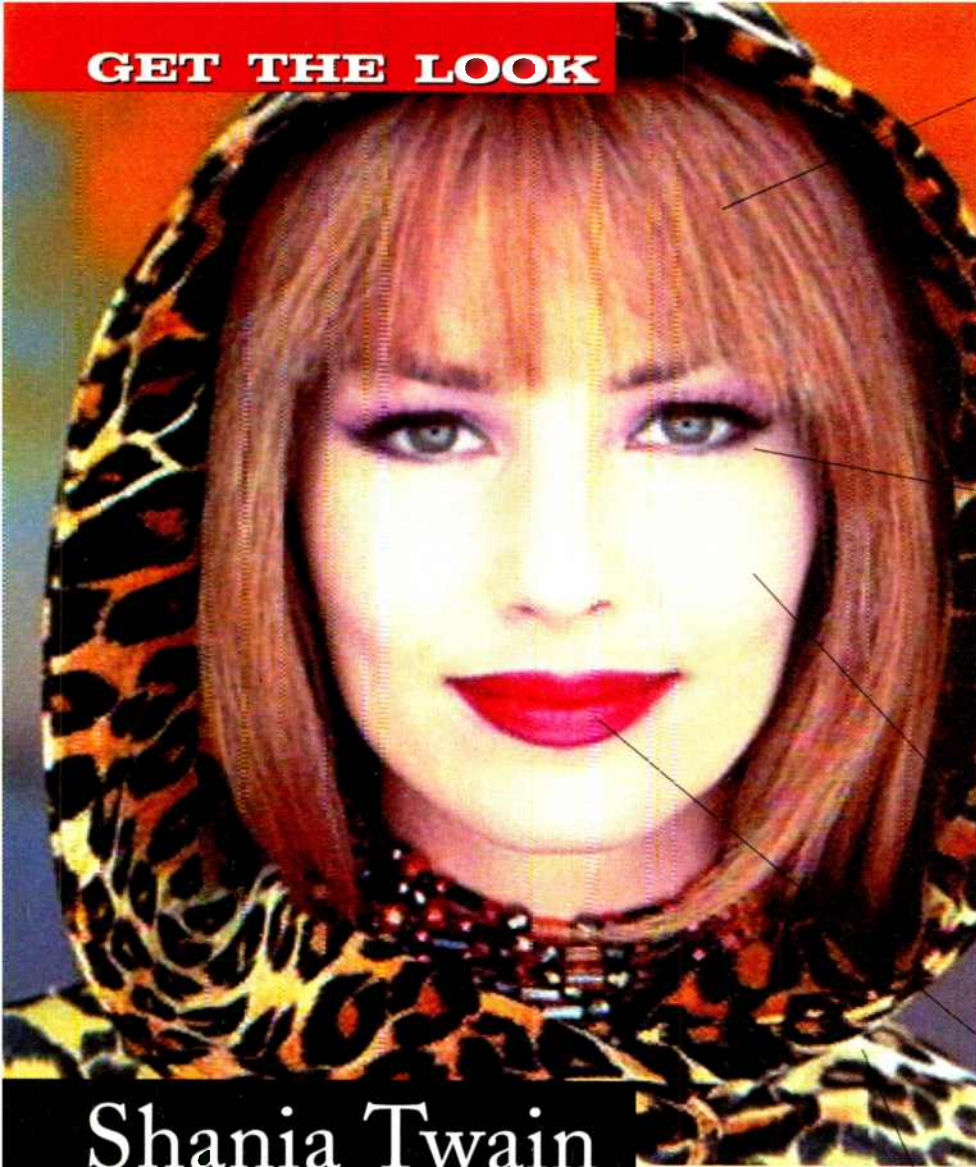
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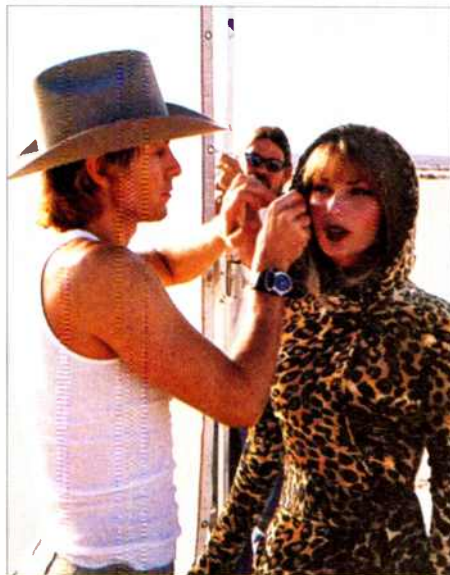


Shania Twain

Fierce, Flirty Hollywood Chic

Word leaked out early from the Nevada set of Shania Twain's "That Don't Impress Me Much" video: The Canadian beauty had outdone herself on this one. From her strawberry-blond wig to her leopard-print pants, Twain was, as one observer crowed, "beyond gorgeous."

The all-lips-and-eyes makeup was designed by star couturier Marc Bower, whose clientele includes Whitney Houston and Lisa Marie Presley. The look was executed by Cyril Lanoir of Judy Casey in New York City. Bower's concept was a look that's "old Hollywood, but modern, not too retro." Lanoir finished with a touch of whimsy: He glued a red ruby inside Twain's belly button. Watch the video and see if you can spot Lanoir's little surprise.



HAIR The blond wig was Twain's inspiration, says Bower. Originally, he wanted Twain's hair to be straight, and Twain herself was lobbying for curly. "I said, 'I have a straight wig here; let me just show you what straight hair will look like.'" Bower recalls. "She loved the wig! That's what's so nice about her; she doesn't mind playing around with her look. She's a real chameleon."

To make the wig look real, it was fitted to Twain's head, with the bangs cut to match the shape of her face. A key point was to thin the wig out, giving it a more natural look.

EYES Twain wears Moulin Rouge red eyeshadow from Nars, which Lanoir applied on the crease of the lid. He then applied Inkwell liquid black liner from Dramateyes.

"I applied it very thin, starting from the inside of the eye all the way to the end, and extended it all the way out. That gives the effect of darkness, a real fashion statement." He completed the eyes with "a lot of mascara and false eyelashes, to give her that sassy look."

FACE Lanoir likes to mix favorite products from different cosmetics lines. Twain's foundation is Cover Girl's Buff Beige, topped with a very light dusting of translucent powder from Christian Dior. Trish McEvoy No. 6 light pink blush was applied on the cheeks.

LIPS Twain's super-red lips were achieved using Chanel red burgundy lip liner, followed with burgundy lipstick from L'Oréal. "Red is very bright and hard to apply," Lanoir warns. "When you do red lips, make a stain with the liner, then apply one coat of lipstick. Then blot it with a tissue and then powder it. That will make it stay. Then apply another light coat of lipstick. That way it won't bleed into the lines around the mouth."

CLOTHES Bower designed Twain's fabulous leopard-print outfit after learning of the shoot's desert location.

The cold desert shoot created the need for a warm cloak, but Bower gave it a sexy twist. "I thought, *It reminds me of the Red Riding Hood story, let me put a hood on her,*" he explains.

Despite the cover-up, Bower kept the look sexy by balancing it with midriff-baring hip-hugger pants and tube top, taking advantage of Twain's natural assets. "It's unbelievable how tiny her waist is," Bower notes.

WHERE TO GET IT

★ **Marc Bower:** Designer salons at Saks Fifth Avenue and Neiman Marcus

★ **Judy Casey:** 212-228-7500

—Lisa Zbito

Shane Minor

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“Slave To The Habit”



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S A R A E V A N S

J U N E / J U L Y 1 9 9 9

COUNTRYMUSIC

Sara Evans

"I'm not a pack rat," says Sara Evans. "I love to throw things away." One thing she wants to hang onto for a while, however: the sweet memory of her recent breakthrough single, "No Place That Far," which went No. 1 earlier this year.

PERSONAL INFORMATION

BORN

February 5, 1971, in Columbia, Missouri. When she was 8, a debilitating accident left her with two shattered legs, cracked wrists, countless stitches



and the prognosis that she might walk with a life long limp. Hit by a speeding car coming over a hill just as she was crossing the highway, she spent a full year in therapy. (She healed completely—except,

she says, "my left leg looks a little odd. It's got this little bow in it that protrudes above the knee.")

CURRENT RESIDENCE

Springfield, Tennessee

FAMILY

Husband Craig Schelske; mother Pat Boggs; father Jack Evans; stepfather Melvin Boggs; brothers Jay and Matt; sisters Lesley, Ashley (who sings backup for Sara), Erin and Allyx (who's 9, but already in a band back in Missouri. "She's the next me!" says Sara proudly).

MAJOR MUSICAL INFLUENCES

Patsy Cline, Hank Snow, Tammy Wynette, George Jones, Dwight Yoakam and Patty Loveless

HOBBIES

Softball, reading, fixing up old houses

FAVORITE WAY TO SPEND AN AFTERNOON

Taking a walk with Craig, cooking out or playing catch

FAVORITE ACTOR

Nicolas Cage

FAVORITE ACTRESS

Jessica Lange or Susan Sarandon

BEST MOVIE SEEN LATELY

Saving Private Ryan, which Sara went to see the same day her single "Cryin' Game" died—lost its upward momentum—on the charts. "It brought everything into perspective for me. I thought, 'I am so lucky. My life is so great. Who cares about this song dying?'"

FAVORITE MOVIE OF ALL TIME

Gone With the Wind. "I really think of myself as being Scarlett O'Hara. She appeared to be so bitchy and prima donna-like, but really, she was very, very tough. She was like the only one in her family who was tough enough to survive. I sort of have the same attitude: 'I'll think about it tomorrow.' She never stays down for long. That's the way I live my life."

SOMETHING I KEPT FROM MY CHILDHOOD

"My baby quilt, which my great-grandmother actually made and gave to my mother when I was born."

BEST ADVICE ANYONE EVER GAVE ME

"To seek Jesus."



MOST UNUSUAL THING IN MY HOUSE

"Me and Craig!"

VITAL STATISTICS

HEIGHT: 5'8"

HAIR: Black

EYES: Brown

RECORDING CAREER

CURRENT ALBUM

No Place That Far

ALBUM DISCOGRAPHY

True Lies (1997)

SINGLES

"True Lies," "Three Chords and the Truth," "Shame About That," "Cryin' Game," "No Place That Far"

AWARDS AND OTHER RECOGNITION

1998 ACM nominee for New Female Vocalist

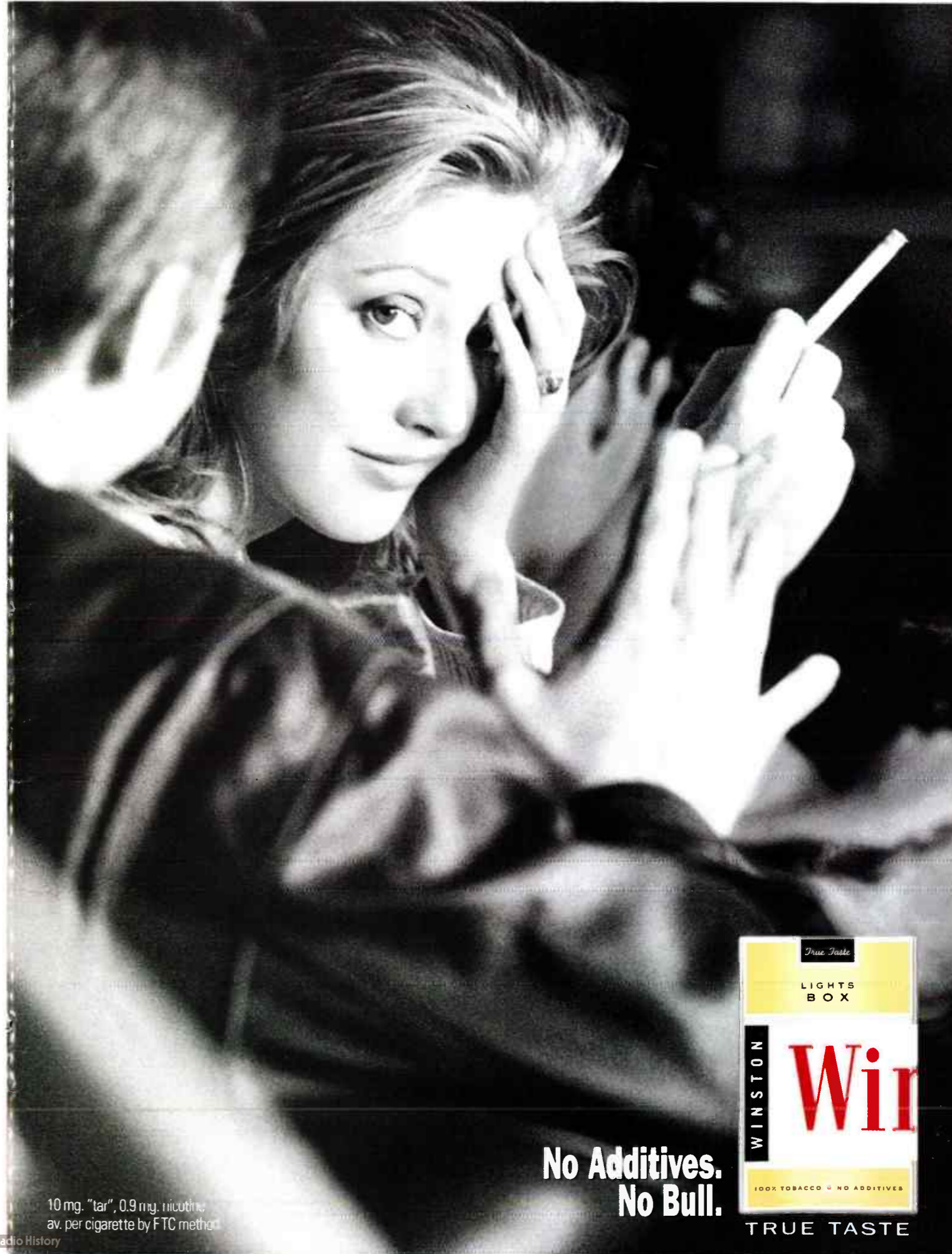
WHAT'S GOING ON

"I'm pregnant(!), on tour and very busy!"

CONTACT INFORMATION

WRITE TO SARA

Sara Evans Fan Club
P.O. Box 509
Knoxville, TN 37901



No Additives.
No Bull.

10 mg. "tar", 0.9 mg. nicotine av. per cigarette by FTC method

TRUE TASTE

TOP

25

ALBUMS



The hottest hits on the country charts.

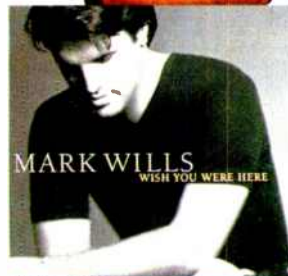


FAITH

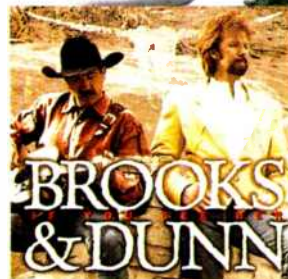
Vince Gill



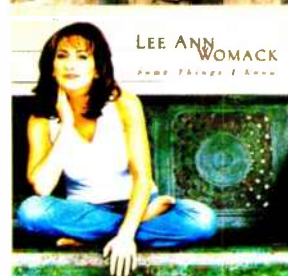
The Key



MARK WILLS
WISH YOU WERE HERE



BROOKS & DUNN

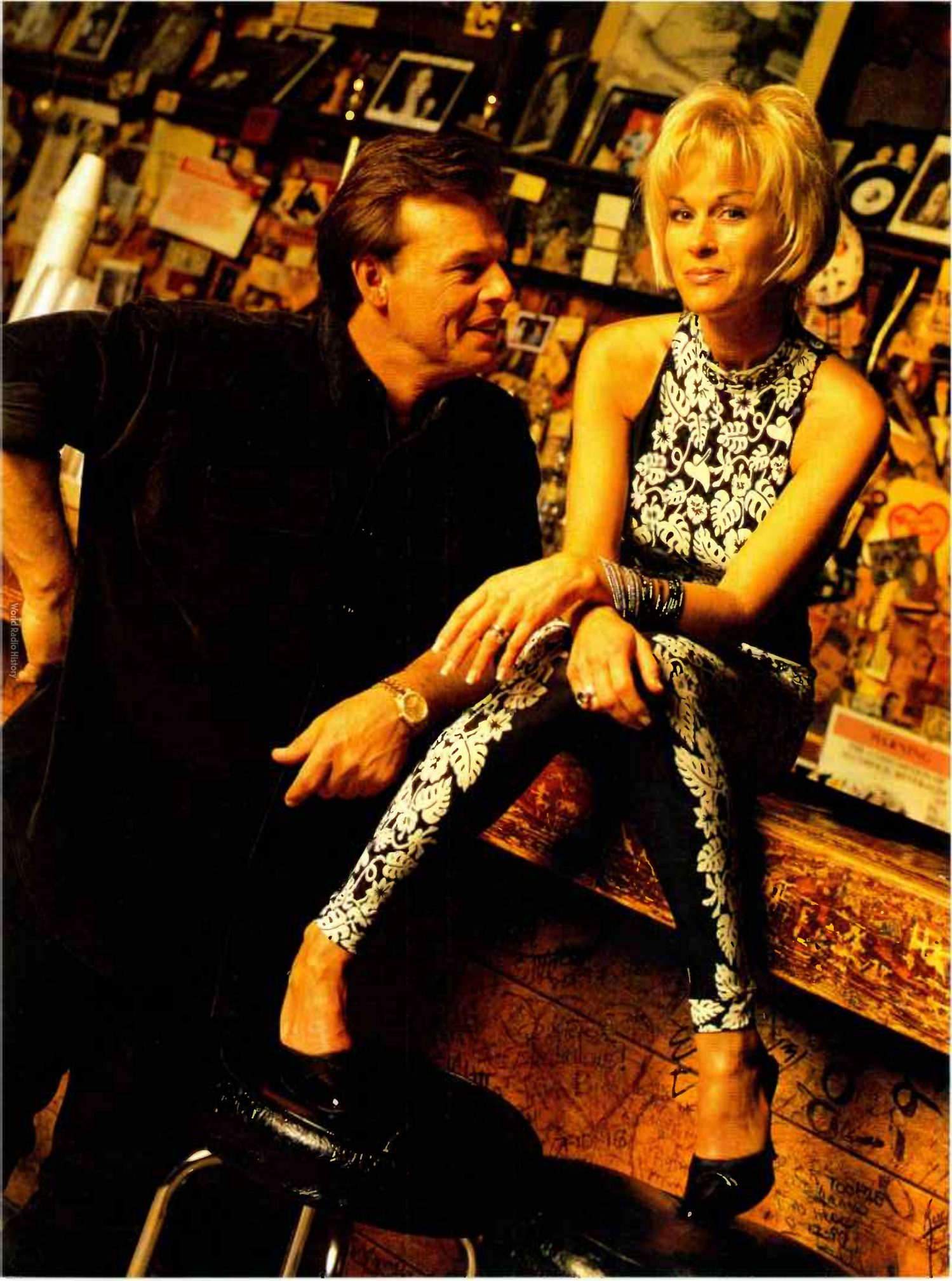


LEE ANN WOMACK
Some Things I Know

- 1 **DIXIE CHICKS**
- 2 **SHANIA TWAIN**
- 3 **GEORGE STRAIT**
- 4 **GARTH BROOKS**
- 5 **EMMYLOU HARRIS, LINDA RONSTADT, DOLLY PARTON**
- 6 **FAITH HILL**
- 7 **VINCE GILL**
- 8 **SOUNDTRACK**
- 9 **KENNY CHESNEY**
- 10 **TRACY BYRD**
- 11 **SAWYER BROWN**
- 12 **JO DEE MESSINA**
- 13 **MARK CHESNUTT**
- 14 **MARK WILLS**
- 15 **SARA EVANS**
- 16 **SOUNDTRACK**
- 17 **STEVE EARLE AND THE DEL McCOURY BAND**
- 18 **TIM MCGRAW**
- 19 **DIAMOND RIO**
- 20 **MARTINA McBRIDE**
- 21 **BROOKS & DUNN**
- 22 **ALAN JACKSON**
- 23 **LEE ANN WOMACK**
- 24 **TRISHA YEARWOOD**
- 25 **ALABAMA**

- Wide Open Spaces** (Monument)
- Come On Over** (Mercury)
- Always Never the Same** (MCA)
- Double Live** (Capitol)
- Trio** (Asylum)
- Faith** (Warner Bros.)
- The Key** (MCA)
- Touched By an Angel** (550 Music/Pic)
- Everywhere We Go** (BNA)
- Keepers** (MCA)
- Drive Me Wild** (Curb)
- I'm Alright** (Curb)
- I Don't Want to Miss a Thing** (MCA)
- Wish You Were Here** (Mercury)
- No Place That Far** (RCA)
- Hope Floats** (Capitol)
- The Mountain** (E-Squared)
- Everywhere** (Curb)
- Unbelievable** (Arista)
- Evolution** (RCA)
- If You See Her** (Arista)
- High Mileage** (Vista)
- Some Things I Know** (MCA)
- (Songbook) A Collection of Hits** (MCA)
- For the Record: 41 Number One Hits** (RCA)

Based on a combined tabulation of sales and airplay data.



World Radio History

PAIR^{of} CARDS

By Bob Millard

Old friends Lorrie Morgan and Sammy Kershaw team for a new duet, compare battle scars, cut up and even learn something new about each other.

EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE country music produces a noteworthy duet. Not a duo—an act—like Brooks and Dunn or the Judds, but something unexpected, an “event,” as the Country Music Association calls its annual award category.

Memorable vocal blendings through the years have included Conway and Loretta, Kenny and Dottie, George and Tammy, Tim and Faith and Garth and Trisha. Now add Lorrie Morgan and Sammy Kershaw on a tune called “Maybe Not Tonight,” released on both Kershaw’s *Maybe Not Tonight* and Morgan’s *My Heart* CDs.

With Kershaw and Morgan, “Maybe Not Tonight” appears to be both a personal statement and a synergistic cherry on top of solid journeyman honky-tonk careers that stretch back many years. The singers are friends of long standing, and they have both been in and around the country music business nearly their whole lives; Morgan at the Opry with her father, the late George Morgan, and Kershaw in Louisiana honky tonks, earning a living for his family since age 11, when his own father died. Both have lost in love more times than they care to count. In this duet, their shared, mature view is

that hurt may not be the end of a relationship as long as there is some reason to keep hoping. “Maybe Not Tonight” reflects the complexities of life and established connections. It’s a statement of maturity when younger lovers might have said, “I’m outta here.”

So what better place to photograph Morgan and Kershaw than historic Tootsie’s Orchid Lounge, the famous watering hole on Nashville’s Lower Broadway? Like both the artists, Tootsie’s—which sits just across the alley from the Ryman Auditorium, the Opry’s former home—has roots that go back much deeper than this week’s Top 40.

“Man, this is the first time I’ve been in here,” says Kershaw as he studies the hundreds of framed photos of country stars, semi-stars and ’60s-vintage wanna-bes that line the wall from the top of the wainscot to the ceiling. “This is neat.”

“This is only the third time I’ve been in here myself,” Morgan responds. “The first time, my daddy brought me in when the Opry was still across the alley. There’s a picture of me back there on the back wall, see?”

Kershaw studies the photos, faded with time and coated with the brown stain of more than 30 years of cigarette

smoke. He notes how small the room actually is to hold so much history. The window alcove on the other side of the door is crowded with a drum kit, guitar cases, P.A. speakers and a mike stand, the tools of the trade by which today’s hopefuls pay their dues nightly.

“Man,” he says, “I was playing joints smaller than this just weeks before I got my record deal. I ain’t kidding.”

“Okay, we’re ready,” calls the photographer. The shoot begins.

Kershaw and Morgan are time-tested professionals. She can turn on her full 200 watts of charm for the camera and playfully needle Kershaw at the same time. He has a ventriloquist’s gift of being able to smile wide enough to trigger dimples, but still mutter “*Bitch!*” back at her in mock ire. More than once, they dissolve in laughter at their own banter.

They seem at ease with each other, cutting up or trading the kind of business war stories only two artists of their stature can exchange. In fact, their friendship began when both were teenagers caught in the middle of a potential road-horror story.

“We’ve been friends since we were about 18 or 19 years old,” Morgan begins. “That was a long, long time ago,” adds Kershaw, picking up the tale. “Lorrie was working with George Jones as a backup singer at the time. I was in a house band further down the road, but when George was coming to town, I would always find a way to get off and go hear him. But [that night] George didn’t show up.”

“And it wasn’t the first time,” Morgan says. “Every time, we panicked when George didn’t show up. People had started gettin’ to where they would throw bottles and stuff at us on stage like it was our fault.”

New to Louisiana country nightclubs, Morgan had never heard of Kershaw, the Cajun country firebrand.

“We met him backstage and they said, ‘Man, this guy sings his butt off,’” she recalls. “We were like, ‘Yeah, sure, everybody sings their butt off.’ But, man, he did.”

Photographs by Ed Rode

"We didn't have a choice but to call somebody up on stage," she continues. "Sammy knew every one of George's songs, so we were able to do practically the whole show with Sammy. He did George's hits, then he did George's parts and I did Tammy's parts and we did a lot of those great duets together. Thank God Sammy was there; we pulled it off."

With professional memories going back that far, the current state of country music as just another youth-focused pop format is a sore point with both Kershaw and Morgan. They came up in the business within the shadow of the Opry and its colorful, collegial backstage. Today, they both complain, just about everything in Nashville is owned by absentee foreigners focused on the ever-important bottom line. With the marginalization of the Opry as a central, vital institution to the industry, there's no family support system for artists, and consequently the respect new artists show each other—and their somewhat older contemporaries—is hit-or-miss.

"It's not like the old days," says Kershaw, lighting another cigarette. "[Then] they had these big package deals where three or four artists would be on the same show night after night, and then after the shows they'd all hang out together, maybe drink and play cards, stuff like that. It's not like that anymore; you might have a show with Lorrie tonight and, hell, you might be with Terri Clark or Aaron Tippin tomorrow night. And you have to leave right after every show to get to the next one."

"Friendship, respect—you know, that's kind of the 'old country,'" Morgan explains. "And it's hard to find these days. It's too goddamn egotistical right now. That's not what country music is all about. Everybody's so me-me-me-me that it's really hard to find true-grit people who really just give a damn about you. It's rare. You've got some really true good friends, and that's the relationship that Loretta and Conway had, and Kenny and Dottie had, and Kenny and Dolly have, and I think that's what Sammy and I have."



MORELLO GHERGIA

THE IDEA OF A MORGAN/KERSHAW DUET CAME NATURALLY TO THESE VETERANS, WHO LITERALLY SANG TOGETHER THE DAY THEY MET.

As the photo session shifts to the two artists standing before one of those famed walls of stars at Tootsie's, Kershaw and Morgan—who have so much history between them and also all around them—discover something about each other that they didn't know before.

"Go away, you're a liar!" Morgan suddenly says loudly, her hands on her narrow hips as she laughs right out loud. "You? You're a Catholic? So am I!"

"I was born and raised in Louisiana—of course I'm Catholic," says Kershaw.

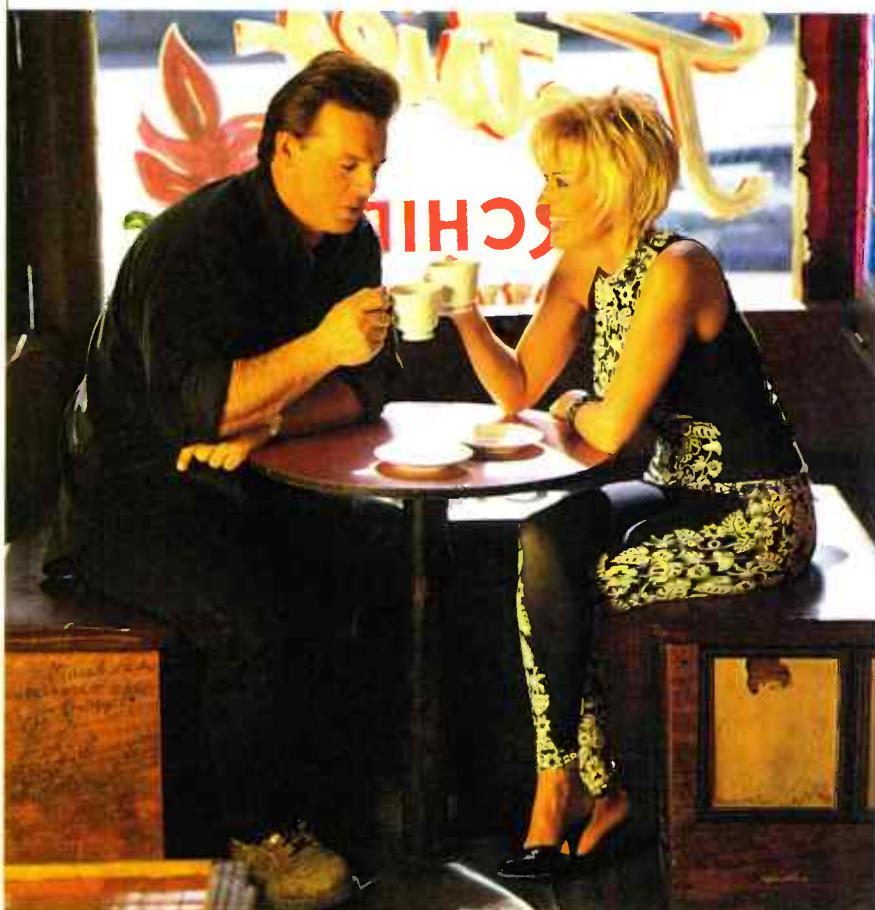
"Can you say the Rosary?" she challenges. He rapid-fires it off and then launches into a Hail Mary.

"Go on! You know the Hail Mary, too?!" Morgan is clearly as pleased with this discovery as she is amazed she never knew it before.

"You betcha I know that one," says Kershaw. "Man, when I was coming up, I was in trouble all the time."

These are things friends would care about. And here at Tootsie's, where you can still get a beer for breakfast if you need one, the smokes and jokes and connections continue to flow as I step back out onto the bright noontime sidewalk of Lower Broadway, 1999. Looking back at Kershaw and Morgan posing and cutting up between takes, I feel like a man who has traversed 20 years in time by just crossing a threshold.

Twenty years ago, when I wrote my first story for *Country Music* magazine, it was a lot like this. Times change and tastes change, but instances of genuine, rough-edged country, filial loyalty and got-here-the-hard-way-and-hell-if-I-care honesty among fellow artists still dot the musical landscape, like proud oak trees tall in a forest of hackberry saplings. ★



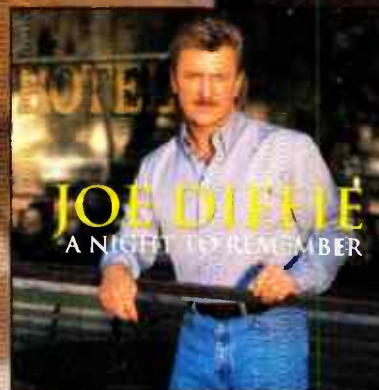
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World Radio History



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With Fan Fair approaching, the country music spotlight shifts to the people who turn artists into stars—the fans. And no one has more fan-atical followers than Neal McCoy.

FANMAN

By Lisa Zhito
Photographs by Jack Luce

He doesn't rack up titanic record sales like Garth Brooks, and he doesn't fill stadiums like George Strait. He's not a hunk of beefcake like Billy Ray Cyrus or a celebrated song man like Alan Jackson. Yet buoyed by a small army of devoted fans, Neal McCoy leapfrogged past those illustrious names last year to become 1998's Entertainer of the Year in the fan-voted TNN/*Music City News* awards. And during this year's awards show—appropriately scheduled during Fan Fair week in Nashville on June 14—he just might do it again.

All country acts have their faithful followers, to be sure. But there's something about being a Neal McCoy fan that transcends the backstage meet-and-greet. McCoy's fans seem to have developed relationships with the singer, his family, the band and other McCoy fans.

"I don't know why I feel closer to my fans than a lot of artists do, but I really do," admits McCoy, who knows a substantial number of his followers by name. "So many of these fans who come see us over and over again, they meet other people and become friends through our concerts. A lot of times when these people travel

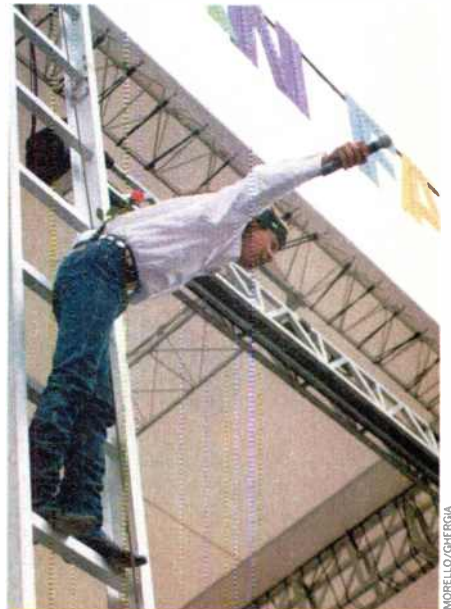
around and go to our shows, it's like a big family reunion."

And McCoy's 8,000-member fan-club family goes out of its way to keep him happy. They drive thousands of miles to see as many as 100 of his concerts a year. They arrange vacation schedules around his tour itinerary. And they're *very* giving. Of course, all country artists receive gifts from their fans—generally clothing, food or homemade bric-a-brac. McCoy gets his share of caps (especially bearing the logos of the Utah Jazz or the Dallas Cowboys, his favorite teams), shoes, cookies and the like, but some of his faithful go much further.

He's even been named the beneficiary of one fan's estate (he says he'll give the money to charity). One woman hand-sewed a two-foot-tall Neal McCoy doll wearing replicas of his black jeans, shirt and Stetson. Born in the sign of Leo, he now has several stars in the constellation named for him—birthday gifts from fans.

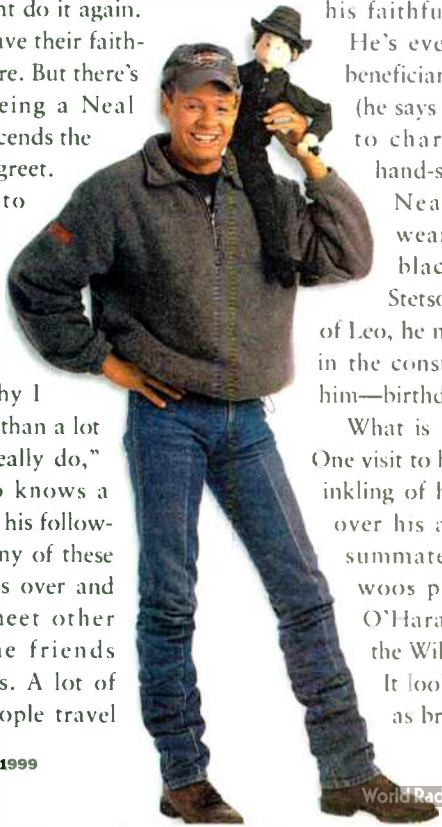
What is the McCoy appeal? One visit to his show provides an inkling of how he casts a spell over his audience. The consummate charmer, McCoy woos people like Scarlett O'Hara courting beaus at the Wilkes family barbecue.

It looks as natural to him as breathing.



FAN FAIR IS ONE MORE OPPORTUNITY FOR MCCOY TO WIN OVER CRITICS WITH HIS ENERGETIC LIVE PERFORMANCE.

"There's not a show out there like Neal McCoy's. He's one of the best entertainers on the road today," offers friend Daryle Singletary. "A lot of us—I'm guilty of it—we'll put a set list up on the stage. Neal never puts up a set list; he calls every song. He works with the crowd. That's what's so





The many gifts McCoy's fans bestow include a handmade "Neal" doll (previous page) and lots of hats. Says Kevin Sharp, "Neal is able to bring out the nut in everyone."

Neal McCoy's Guide to Fan Etiquette


They send him food and flowers, shirts and shoes, baby clothes, hand-painted portraits and other paraphernalia. And surprisingly, he wears all the clothes (on any given day, he says, most of his outfit will be composed of "gift-wear")—and yes, he eats all the food.


"Artists can't believe it," he laughs. "I went to a radio station the other day, and some lady met me in the lobby and gave me cookies. I started eating them in the elevator. I walked in the studio control room, and they said, 'Where'd you get those?' I said, 'Some lady outside gave them to me.' They said, 'A fan gave them to you? And you're eating them?!' I got that response from about four people in the studio. Hello! They made 'em; I'm eatin' 'em!"


Such accessibility might cause some artists concern, but McCoy claims he has no stalkers or crazies among his bunch. But as a service to artists and their followers everywhere, he offers these ground rules for fan behavior.


Handshakes


Hugs


 Kisses "That depends on the fan," he laughs. "For the most part kisses on the cheek are OK."

 Autographs "I'll sign them anytime." (But in general, it's only polite to leave artists in peace when they're trying to eat at a restaurant.)

 Food Except for "bad cookies! Some people just can't cook. God bless 'em for attempting, but next time, stop by the bakery!"

 Gifts But "people really don't have to give me gifts and stuff. I appreciate it, but it's not necessary. I'm just glad they enjoy the show."

 Live Gifts "Don't send me any live animal! Don't send me a live *nothing!*"

 Calls to radio stations But be gracious when calling, he advises. "Stay after them and be persistent, but don't be a pain, because I'm afraid if fans go too far, the station will take it out on the artist!" —L.Z.



appealing—he doesn't mind making jokes with them."

"Neal has a humongous fan base, and it's because they are in *love* with the man," offers pal Jo Dee Messina. "He's so funny, he's so genuine, he's so real, he's so sincere. He jokes around; he loves life. I love to be around him—he's infectious."

His fans agree. "He can make you cry, he can make you laugh, he can make you happy. It's just the joy that he gives you," explained fan Patricia Crawley of Murfreesboro, Tennessee. "When you leave the show, you can't wait for the next show, because you feel a part of him."

McCoy explains, "When I first started, a lot of people weren't sure who I was, so I felt it was a challenge to entertain them—to win them over in some way. If it took doing a George Strait song, if it took doing an AC/DC song—whatever it took, I wanted to win them over, because I wanted them to like Neal McCoy as an entertainer."

Obviously McCoy isn't one to get hung up on artistic purity. He peppers his show with everything from "Banana Boat (Day-O)" to "Play That Funky Music." Lofty artistic ambitions take a back seat to just being liked. And that, McCoy guesses, is what has forged the bond between him and his fans. Nothing proves that more than his fan club breakfast during Fan Fair.

"A lot of entertainers sing and put on a show [at their fan club events]," says McCoy. "We don't do any of that. I get up there and I talk to them, and I open up. They don't want to hear me sing—they've heard me sing all year! They want to *talk* to me! They want to know what I'm like! They want to ask us questions about our kids. I think it's more important that they know me, and not just come and hear more music.

"Of course there are other artists who are more into their music and have done very well; a lot of them are big stars. I think that's great, and I would love for people to love my music. But I want them to like *me*," he laughs.

His attitude is not particularly PC—most artists declare the purity of their art at the tip of a cowboy hat, whether they actually believe it or not. McCoy feels he may have paid a price for such honesty.

"I think we've suffered at radio," he concedes. "We've only had one real radio hit in two years, and that's 'The Shake.'" Although this obviously irritates him, McCoy's resolve remains firm. Given the

choice between pleasing fans and pleasing radio, it seems, fans win every time.

"It's rewarding when you leave that stage to know that those people really enjoyed you," he explains. "They didn't just *like* you. They really—

we hope thought, *That's one of the best shows I've ever seen!*"

Kevin Sharp, who last year became McCoy's brother-in-law (the two are married to sisters), has seen the long-legged performer in action and finds an honesty amid the onstage goofiness. "He's just himself," he explains of McCoy's appeal. "So many people

are afraid to do that in today's world, whether you're a performer or not—we're always putting on an act for the people around us. So many artists...I know them, and I watch their shows, and I don't see that person I know when they're onstage. When someone is not afraid to be who they are, that can be appealing."

Sharp could be on to something. With McCoy, it appears that what you see is what you get. He's the first to admit that his albums aren't the greatest, that he's not the purest singer, nor is his band the finest group of pickers on the road. "I'm sure we have people who say, 'Well, you're right—they're not good players, and you're not a good singer,'" he laughs. "But we don't care about them. Did you have fun for 90 minutes? That's what we want to know about. Did you not worry about anything—your bills, your health problems? Did you just, for an hour and a half, sit back and go, 'Hot dog, this is fun'? If you did, that's what I wanted you to do."

Spoken like a true Entertainer of the Year. *



McCoy Predicts the Fans' Picks

Last year's Entertainer of the Year goes out on the limb with his picks for winners of the TNN/*Music City News* Awards June 14.

Male Artist: "Garth Brooks. I think he's very hot, he's always hot. Tim McGraw could give him a run, and George Strait—not anything against Vince and Alan—but I'll go with Garth."

Female Artist: "You know, Shania is going to be hard to beat. There's some great singers here; Trisha's a great singer. The best singer in this category I think is Martina McBride—she's wonderful! She sings from her toes!"

Male Star of Tomorrow: "I definitely think Amanda Wilkinson should win that! I can't believe they're in there. I'll say Michael Peterson. The Wilkinsons are very good, but do they belong in the category?"

Female Star of Tomorrow: "The Dixie Chicks."

Vocal Duo or Group: "Brooks and Dunn."

Vocal Band: "I'll tell you who I want to win, who I think is the best out there: Diamond Rio. Those are talented guys. There's a lot of other talent in this group, but for picking and singing, Diamond Rio is the best. Great players and great singers."

Album: "Goll-eeee! Who knows? I'll say the Chicks. They're hot. *Wide Open Spaces*."

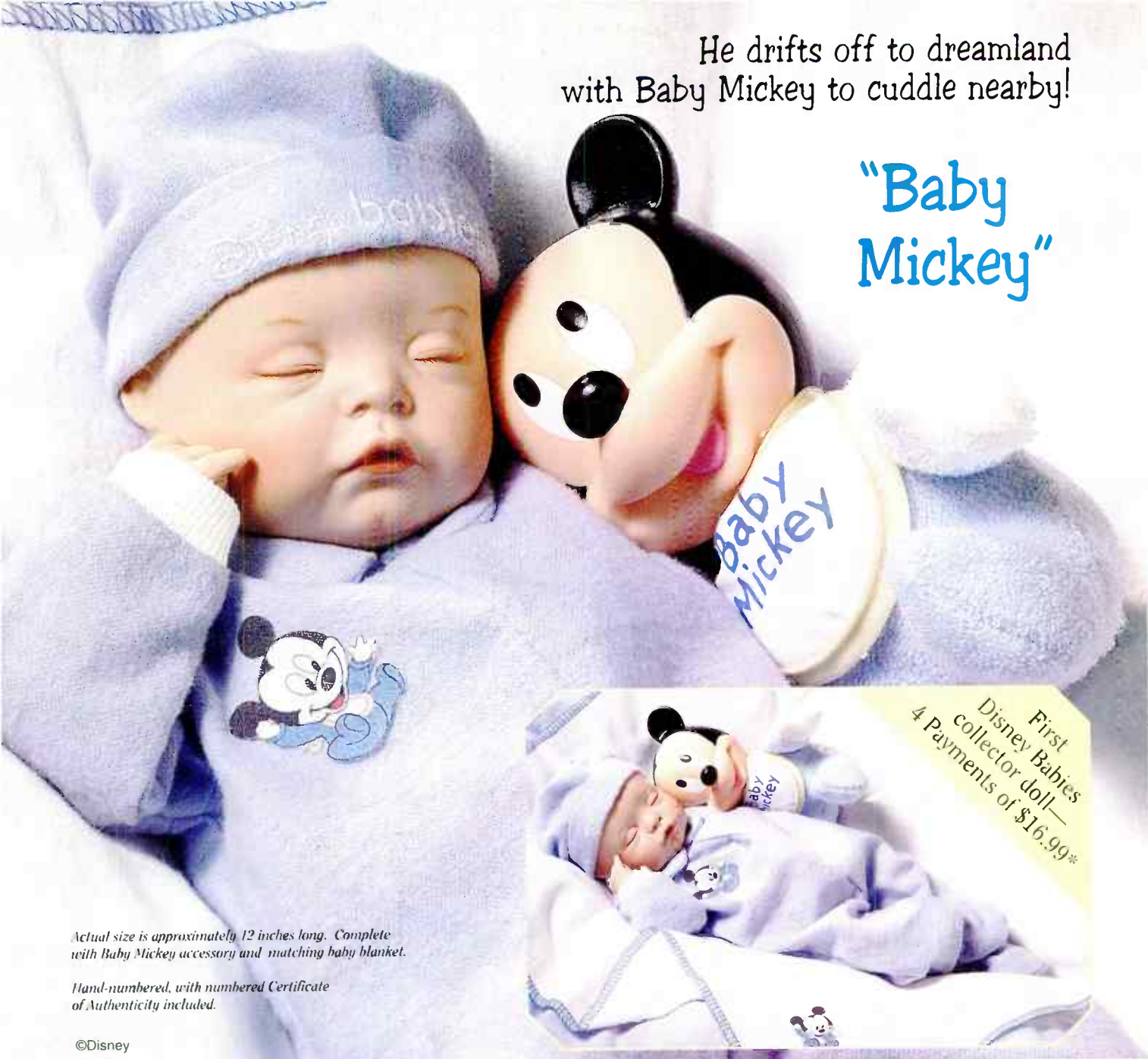
Entertainer of the Year: "OK, *me!* That's more of a wish than a prediction!" —L.Z.

And Fan Fair is...what, exactly?

Each June, more than 20,000 country fans descend upon Nashville to meet their favorite stars during Fan Fair. The festival is a country music tradition, a week full of concerts, autograph sessions and more country-related fun. Also scheduled during Fan Fair week: a celebrity softball game and the TNN/*Music City News* Awards.

He drifts off to dreamland with Baby Mickey to cuddle nearby!

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Roots

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Mixings

Ricky Skaggs finds new life by tapping into music's ancient, eternal flow.

By Geoffrey Himes

THE LITTLE TOWN OF CORDELL IN the East Kentucky mountains is a long way from anywhere, and once upon a time it was isolated from most outside influences. But by 1964, television had brought the outside world and a certain English band to Cordell. Most of the local youngsters were bowled over, but 9-year-old Ricky Skaggs wasn't impressed.

"When I saw the Beatles on *The Ed Sullivan Show*," he recalls, "I said, 'They're pretty good, but they're not as good as the Stanley Brothers.'

"That's what people forget," he adds. "Classic bluegrass can be as exciting as the Beatles or Garth Brooks or anything. If you listen to tapes of Bill Monroe and the Blue Grass Boys at the Ryman in the '40s, back when Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs were still in the band, it sounded like the Beatles on *Ed Sullivan*. Earl would start playing that banjo and people just went crazy."

There's still a lot of 9-year-old boy in the 44-year-old Skaggs. It's not just that

his baby cheeks and sandy hair give him an improbably boyish look. It's the way he jabbars excitedly whenever he starts talking about his bluegrass heroes. If you ask him a question about Monroe, the Stanleys or Flatt and Scruggs, prepare to sit back for a while as a torrent of anecdotes, analysis and proselytizing come gushing your way in the same chipper tenor you hear skipping through his tunes.

"I like country music," Skaggs admits, "and some rock 'n'roll, too. But right now I want bluegrass to reach a wider audience, a younger audience. A lot of people still think of bluegrass as *The Beverly Hillbillies* and *Deliverance*, as yesterday's news. I want people to know that bluegrass is cool and it's happening right now. Bluegrass is hip not because folks like Steve Earle and Vince Gill are coming to bluegrass; those people are coming to bluegrass because it was already hip and cool."

To bolster this evangelical crusade on behalf of bluegrass, Skaggs has formed

his own company, Ricky Skaggs Entertainment, to record, book, publish and promote bluegrass acts. The company includes two different record labels—Skaggs Family Records and Ceili Music—which have already released two albums from Skaggs and one from Del McCoury.

Skaggs titled his own new album *Ancient Tones* because he believes the oldest sounds in American music can become the most modern. In this era of evasion and euphemism, he feels, songs that talk directly and forcefully about death, home, true love and lost love can strike listeners as refreshingly daring. And when those lyrics are backed by voices and instruments with a crisp mountain edge, the songs can slice through the modern media's wishy-washy sentiments like a machete.

"What I'm finding out," Skaggs says, "is those ancient tones are modern sounds if you really listen to them. But you have to bypass your mind and either listen with



SENIOR MCGUIRE

IN 1970, TEENAGERS SKAGGS, LEFT, AND KEITH WHITLEY, RIGHT, WENT ON THE ROAD WITH BLUEGRASS TITAN RALPH STANLEY.

Dumbo-sized ears or listen with your heart. Those sounds are out there in the Appalachian Mountains; they never go away and they never lose their power.”

The cynical might suggest that Skaggs only rededicated himself to hardcore, acoustic bluegrass when his mainstream-

By the late '80s, though, his sales were tapering off, and by the mid-'90s he could barely get arrested at country radio. Skaggs had balanced his natural bluegrass inclinations with more commercial country ingredients during his stints at two different Music Row labels,

the other half. If radio had played my country music, I'd probably be just playing bluegrass part-time today. But I was no longer Young Country, and radio was ready to ship me off to Branson or Myrtle Beach. So I decided what I wanted to do was play the music I learned as a kid, whether I made a good living or not.”

“I was no longer Young Country, and radio was ready to ship me off to Branson or Myrtle Beach. So I decided what I wanted to do was play the music I learned as a kid, whether I made a good living or not.”

Then a funny thing happened. Atlantic Records, with whom Skaggs was still affiliated in 1997, opted not to release his *Bluegrass Rules!* CD, which leaned decidedly more toward bluegrass than commercial country. So Skaggs formed his own company and licensed the record to the bluegrass-friendly Rounder label. And guess what? It became a bluegrass smash, selling a surprising 150,000 copies (in a genre where 25,000 is considered a runaway hit).

country career fell off a cliff. Between 1981 and '89, no one was hotter on the country charts. Skaggs scored 20 Top-20 singles, 11 of which went to No. 1. His profile was never higher than in 1985, when he won the CMA Entertainer of the Year Award plus his second Grammy for Best Country Instrumental Performance.

Epic and Atlantic, but neither company proved very supportive when he leaned too far away from what Top 40 radio had indicated it would play.

“A few years ago,” Skaggs admits, “I was hoping I could have two careers at once. I thought I could do traditional country music half the time and bluegrass

So the die was cast. Skaggs stopped accepting country gigs and devoted himself entirely to bluegrass. He also decided to turn his record company into a real label by building a healthy roster.

(Later this year, Skaggs' two labels will release product on the band Blue Highway, the Gibson Brothers, the Whites, and Jerry and Tammy Sullivan.) And he decreed that there would be no compromise on the follow-up to *Bluegrass Rules!*: His *Ancient Tones* would be another hardcore-bluegrass project with lots of songs originally issued by Bill Monroe and the Stanley Brothers.

Fellow bluegrass musician Peter Rowan once told Skaggs a story of traveling as a sideman with Bill Monroe in the '60s, and waiting with Monroe on the side of the road one evening for their bus to be repaired.

"Peter said he heard him singing this real mournful melody, like his antenna were up and he was picking it up out of the air," relates Skaggs. "'Do you hear that, Peter?' Bill said. 'Those are the ancient tones; don't ever forget them.'"

"Bill could hear music from the rustling of the leaves or the wind blowing through the trees," Skaggs continues. "I know that feeling because I had it when I'd go coon hunting with my daddy. We'd be up on a ridge and the hounds would be down in the valley barking, but when the trail got cold there wouldn't be any sound. The wind would go through the trees; the fibers would start stretching and the twigs would bump up against each other, and I thought I heard the sound of fiddles playing. It was pretty scary and if I hadn't been with my dad, I would have left. Bill could hear music in things like that."

In the Monroe composition, "Walls of Time," which kicks off *Ancient Tones*, Skaggs sings, "The wind is blowin' cross the mountain and down on the valley way below," as if his tenor voice were actually that wind. "It sweeps the grave of my darlin'; when I die that's where I want to go."

Another Monroe song on the album describes how the road of life is "Mighty Dark to Travel" once your sweetheart has died. In both numbers, death is confronted in an honest, unflinching manner, as if it were the everyday occurrence that it is. Country music used to be filled with songs about death and dying, but today bluegrass is just about the only sub-genre

in country where death is described without an overcoat of melodrama.

"Not just bluegrass, but gospel and country music once had so many songs about death," Skaggs maintains. "Kids today think death isn't real; they think it's just something on TV, in the movies or on the news. They don't know that it happens to everyone, that it's just as real as life—and more permanent."

"The old-timers in the mountains—and I experienced this so many times as a kid—would set the casket in the house for two or three nights before they buried it. The men would be outside drinking and telling stories and the women would be inside cooking and consoling the family. It's an old-fashioned lifestyle that we've gotten away from, so death has lost its sting."

"When I sing about death, I try to bring some hope into it. We don't have to

interviews. When Skaggs blamed his declining fortunes on anti-Christian prejudice, it sounded like sour grapes. These days he's no less firm in his opinions, only a little more circumspect about when to share them.

"Being outspoken about my beliefs has put me at odds with my record labels at Epic and Atlantic," he concedes. "The only regret I have is I didn't have the wisdom to know when to speak out and when to shut up. The Scripture says faith builds the house and wisdom fills it. I've built a big house but it hasn't always been full."

"I realize when people pay \$25 to hear me sing and play music, they haven't come out to hear a sermon. If I went to Jack's Barbecue by the Ryman Auditorium and ordered ribs and they brought me chicken instead, I'd be disappointed. I like chicken, don't get me wrong, but if I had my heart set on brisket and ribs, I'd be



Skaggs and his band, Kentucky Thunder, at the 1999 Nashville Music Awards.

fear death if we're prepared to die. In my faith, I don't fear death because I know my last breath on this earth will be my first breath in heaven. Some people don't have that assurance, don't have that faith. [Rolling Stone] Keith Richards said to me one time, 'When I see God, he's going to give me a big spanking.' I said, 'Do you really think so, Keith?' He said, 'Oh, yeah.'"

When Skaggs' popularity began to wane in the early '90s, some observers blamed it on his increasing tendency to push his fundamentalist Christian beliefs and conservative politics at shows and in

disappointed. If they did it once, maybe I could accept it, but if they did it again, I might not go back there again.

"At times, I might have been too strong and I might have offended someone. It's a prayer in my heart, 'Lord, if you want me to speak out, I will, but I don't want to offend anyone.' I can't save anyone; only God can save someone. God's the one who saved me. I have to be humble enough to do my work and let God do His work. I try to let the spirit work through the music." *



Alan Jackson



Wynonna



Shania Twain



Reba

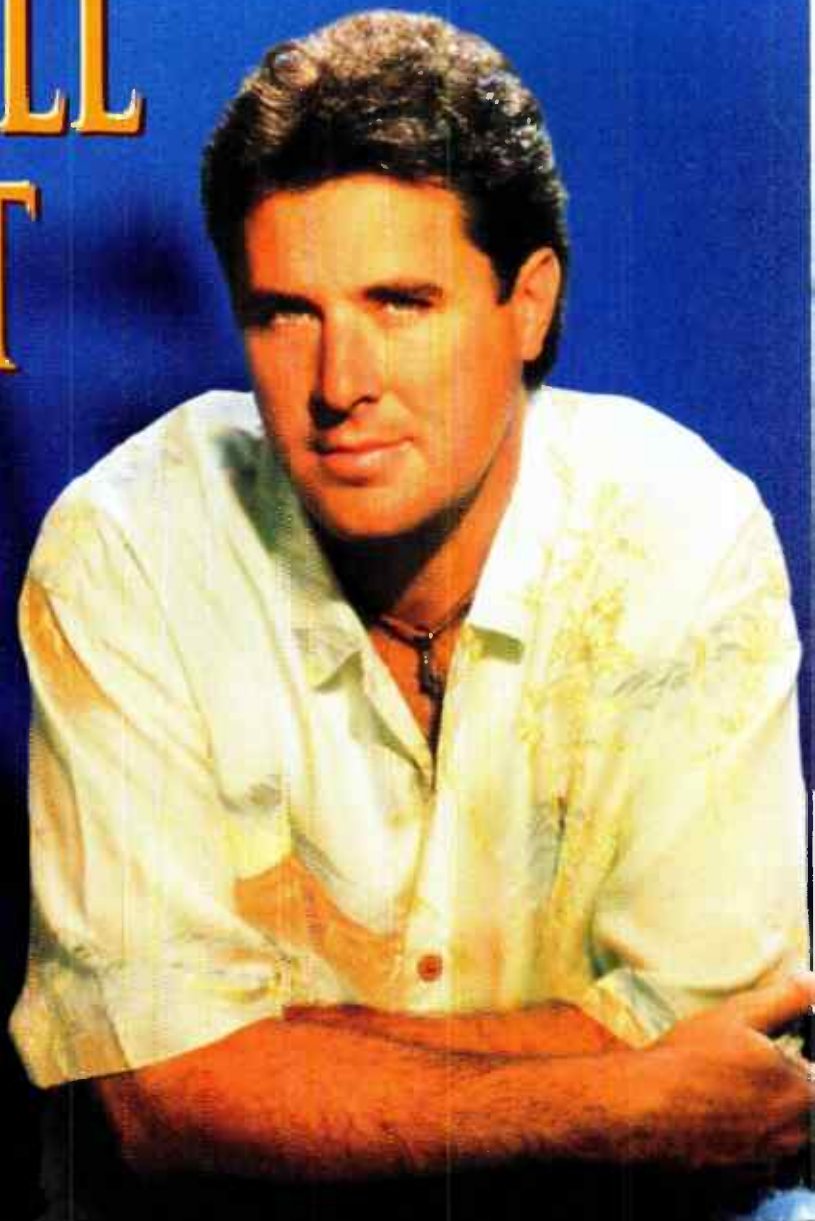
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The Brown Derby

It's been a long and bumpy ride,
but Sawyer Brown has finally found
the road to respectability.

By Richard Quinn

Photographs by Ed Rode

"EVERY FEW YEARS WE GO THROUGH a reinventing period," says Sawyer Brown frontman Mark Miller. Longtime fans needn't worry; the band's lineup remains the same. What Miller refers to is their latest album, *Drive Me Wild*, which features waves of multilayered vocal harmonies—sort of a Nashville version of the Beach Boys.

"'We're Everything to Me' was the first song that we did that kind of thing on," says Miller, "and we liked the sound. So we started thinking more in that direction."

"Early in the process, we realized we probably would be doing more with the vocals," says keyboardist Gregg "Hobie"

Hubbard. "But I think the songs themselves kinda pushed in that direction anyway."

"Duncan and Hobie are really good singers," offers Miller, "and I think some of the background vocals are as important to the song as the lead vocals are."

"You know, it's always been that way," pipes up guitarist Duncan Cameron, one of the aforementioned background vocalists.

The group explodes in laughter. After nearly two decades together, they're used to each other's ribbing. "There's a kind of second sense that develops over 18 years," explains bassist Jim Scholten. "You don't study it, it just happens. For instance,



Copping a decidedly kicked-back career attitude are Sawyer Brown members (from left) Joe Smyth, Gregg "Hoble" Hubbard, Duncan Cameron, Mark Miller and Jim Scholten.

if Mark goes to the edge of the stage, somebody else goes right with him. I went to four years of college and the best advice one of my music professors ever gave me was, "When all else goes to hell, just follow the singer."

For certain, Miller's husky baritone and kinetic stage moves have made him the band's focal point. But on *Drive Me Wild*, their 16th album, the rest of the group assumes a higher profile. It's a more mature Sawyer Brown, one that's far removed from early hits like "Betty's Bein' Bad" and "Step That Step."

One reason is that the group took their time recording. "When we first started making records we had no time to do

it in the middle of 300 days on the road," explains Hubbard. "You didn't experiment as much, because you were working literally right up to the deadline. But with this we took however much time it took to get it to sound like we wanted it. If that meant spending a week on one song, that's what we did. That was more freedom than we've ever had."

The results are impressive. The opening track, "Break My Heart Again," features a liquid, George Harrison-style slide guitar by Cameron. "Moon Over Miami" boasts a Caribbean lilt and a generous helping of those creamy vocals. "Playin' a Love Song" includes a dreamy a cappella section. Producer

Mac McAnally's "All Wound Up" resembles a great Stones tune that got away. Then there's the gospel-ish "Soul Searchin'" and the band's cover of Paul Thorn's "800-Pound Jesus," which is as energetic as it is quirky.

The album's most intimate moment is Chuck Cannon and Allen Shamblin's "I'm in Love With Her," a Mark Miller vocal showcase. "I had to stretch and do some exploring to see what I was capable of," says Miller. "After we cut the track, I said to these guys, 'See ya!'—because I didn't want anybody in there. I even made Al Schulman, the first engineer, leave. I had Chris Stone, the second engineer, there, and I told him, 'Don't even look at me when I'm singing, because there's gonna be some squeals coming out of me that I don't want anybody to have to hear.'"

Even with the squeals and hot harmonies, *Drive Me Wild* is unmistakably Sawyer Brown, which means don't expect any soundalike groups anytime soon. "We've never been a formula Music Row band, ever," insists Miller. "And there's no one in the band that you would call a stock Nashville studio musician. But we would be proud to be Nashville studio musicians, because they're the best in the world."

Miller gives Nashville its due easily—a professional courtesy that in some ways Music Row has yet to return. Early Sawyer Brown reviews were

less than kind. "'Weak' is hardly the word for some of the songs...we're talking 'She'll Be Coming Around the Mountain' types of tunes," said one reviewer of their self-titled debut in 1985. Another sniffed, "Compared to such one-dimensional fare...even an Exile album seems deeply philosophical."



STILL IN-DEMAND AND A HIT WITH FANS AFTER 18 YEARS, SAWYER BROWN IS A MODEL OF PERSEVERANCE.

When Sawyer Brown hooked up with songwriter/producer Mac McAnally in 1992, the group began inching out from under Ed McMahon's shadow. "I think the

turnaround came with 'The Walk,'" says Miller. "For the first time [the press] said good things. Because in the earlier stages, we could sell a bunch of records like 'Shakin',' 'Betty's Bein' Bad' and 'Heart Don't Fall Now,' so the label at that point offered those kinds of songs, because they knew they could sell some product."

"We finally went in and said, 'You know, on every album there's been serious ballads or serious songs. At some point we've got to mix it up a little bit.' And that's when we really got behind 'The Walk,' and thought, *This is our ticket*. Then we followed it up with 'All These Years,' and I think it made people say, 'Maybe there's some thought that goes into these guys.'"

"Mac came up with this philosophy a few years ago," Miller continues. "This was before the [1992] *Cafe on the Corner* album, and he said, 'You guys should just figure out what it is you want to say, and we'll make records about it.' And that's been the philosophy."

Sounds simple, and it has worked. In the years that followed, Sawyer Brown racked up a list of chart successes that showed an impressive range of styles.

"We've always pushed the edges," says Miller. "It depends on what kind of

It's hard to get respect when your big break came in 1984 for winning the Ed McMahon-hosted shockfest, *Star Search*.

"The way people put that whole *Star Search* thing down really kinda bothers us," says Scholten. "When *Star Search* came along, we were an aspiring band playing clubs and beating our heads against the wall. When somebody says, 'You have a chance to go do a TV show and play in front of millions of people,' what kind of idiots would be too cool to do it?"

"Our other option," seconds Miller, "was to stay home and watch it from the couch. It was a free trip to L.A.! They paid for our flights, they paid for our hotel, and they were going to give us actors' scale—whatever that was—about \$1600 apiece."

"Where's the downside?" asks Hubbard.

Still, the group learned how rigid the opinions of country music establishment can be. Hubbard recites the criticism like a shopping list: "Too energetic. stand still, wear cowboy boots, somebody needs to have a cowboy hat, you're not country, you don't sound like everyone else in Nashville..."

"Bubblegum..." Miller interjects.

"Or," Hubbard says finally, "'They're using this to go pop.'"



The band's 1985 debut (before Duncan Cameron replaced Bobby Randall, far left) was a hot target for critics.



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mood we're in. 'The Dirt Road,' 'Cafe on the Corner' and 'The Walk' were a bit more traditional. Then we had 'Some Girls Do' and 'The Boys and Me,' things that pushed us in the other direction. It's been kind of nice to have a career that's enabled us to do that."

Sawyer Brown's recent success has naturally brought the band plenty of attention and—finally—a little hard-won respect. *USA Today* noted that *Drive Me Wild* has "enough strong stuff to win over the skeptics who haven't realized how good this band has become."

But they're still not comfortable with the praise. "We've never been ones to believe our own press either way, good or bad," says Scholten.

"We're still not widely accepted by the industry," acknowledges Miller, "and I think that keeps an edge on us. That keeps us hungry. We're not, never have been and are never going to be the darlings of the month. So that keeps us fighting. There's an open sore there that we just keep picking at."

"Boy, that's gonna look good in print!" shouts Hubbard. "They Are Like an Open Sore That Never Healed!"

"How about 'Sawyer Brown Heals—Thanks for the Memories?'" offers drummer Joe Smyth.

Miller tries to get serious. "Well, I know it fuels us, and that's cool. We've used that as a positive."

Recently, they needed that positivity when CMT refused to air the video for "Drive Me Wild," which led off with a spoken intro by pro wrestler "Stone Cold" Steve Austin. The network claimed it was against policy to feature non-musical segments, and offered to run it with the Austin portion excised. Standing their creative ground, the band refused. The clip later received an ACM nomination for Video of the Year.

"It doesn't tick us off so much as it just doesn't make sense," says Hubbard.

"We've got to realize that it's their TV station, and they can do what they want to do," says Scholten. "It's kind of mystifying, because we've had such a good relationship with them over the years. They seem to have no problem

with NASCAR drivers or Hooters girls, but for some reason wrestling is out."

"Roller derby's in this year," suggests Smyth. "They have headlocks and hair-pulling!"

"You should make a flip book of the video in the magazine—that's the only way [fans will] see it!" laughs Cameron.

"At this stage of our career, how could we get upset about anything?" Miller asks with a shrug. "We're still here!"

"Who was it said, 'Living well is the best revenge?'" notes Hubbard with a grin.

"I mean, quite honestly," continues Miller, "if we never have another record, what could we have to complain about? We're just thankful that we still hear our latest songs on the radio. That's all you can hope for."

Especially, it seems, in a business that's even tougher on bands than on solo artists. A parade of talented groupings—from Shenandoah to Little

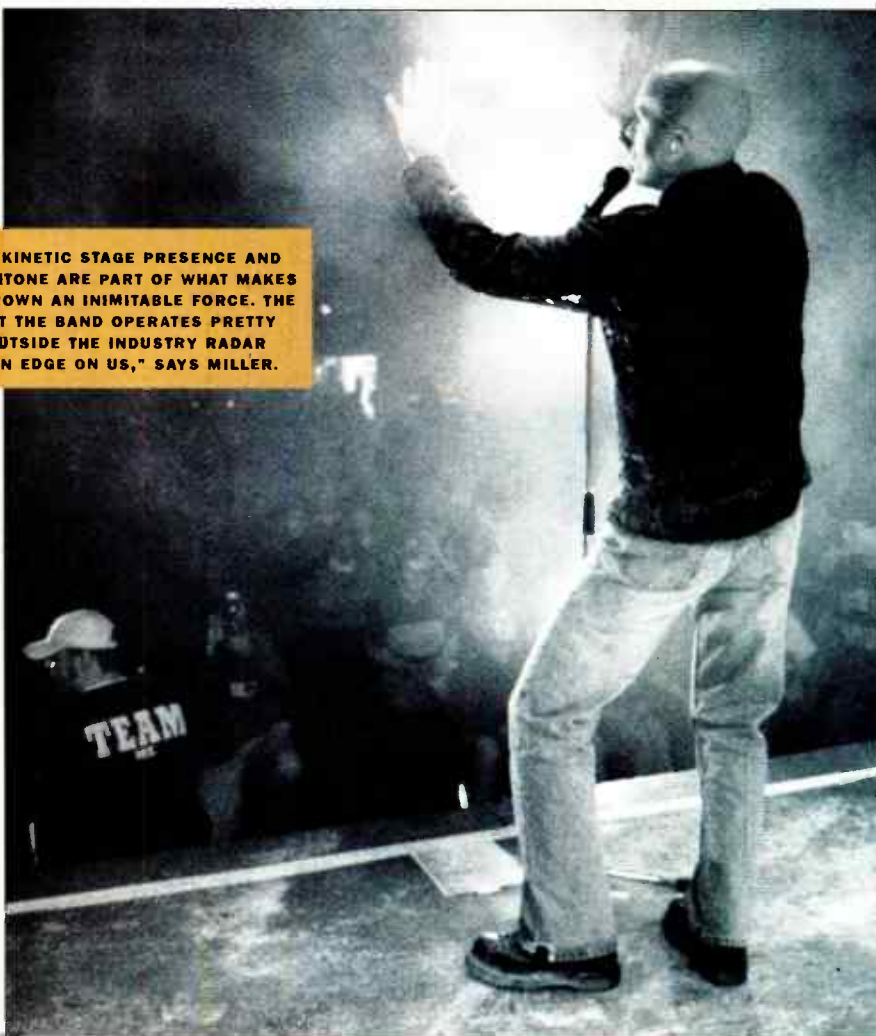
Texas and everywhere in between—have come and gone since Sawyer Brown's first recording.

"If you were to start [in the music business] now, I'd be surprised if you squeezed five years out," says Hubbard. "I don't think labels have the commitment to stick with you or to let you do something different."

So how has Sawyer Brown survived for nearly a generation? "Focus," insists Miller. "Focus is the main thing. From day one, we haven't gone outside of what this band wanted to do. That was to make records, write and tour. We don't want to be actors; we haven't wanted to go off and write books and be celebrities. We've wanted to be musicians."

"Ultimately God has his hand in everything. There's a reason why we're still here. I don't think any of us could pinpoint it and tell you why. It's just one of those meant-to-be kind of things." ★

MILLER'S KINETIC STAGE PRESENCE AND HUSKY BARITONE ARE PART OF WHAT MAKES SAWYER BROWN AN INIMITABLE FORCE. THE FACT THAT THE BAND OPERATES PRETTY MUCH OUTSIDE THE INDUSTRY RADAR "KEEPS AN EDGE ON US," SAYS MILLER.



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Off the Charts

The country buzz outside the music biz

PROGRAMMA-BULL Computer-savvy rodeo fans will soon find out exactly what it's like to straddle a thousand pounds of raging, twisting, bucking bull—minus the pesky concussions and broken bones. Working with Professional Bull Riders Inc. (PBR) and top bull-riding champs Ty Murray and Tuff Hedeman, Sierra Sports is developing *Professional Bull Rider*, a CD-ROM simulation that purports to “capture the challenge of bull-riding on the PBR circuit.” Available in September, *Professional Bull Rider* is the first of what is expected to be a series of rodeo-related interactive titles.

NO PLACE THAT FAIR The newest addition to Lilith Fair, the blockbuster traveling rock-concert festival, is pure-country powerhouse Sara Evans. She'll join Fair founder Sarah McLachlan and other female rockers on at least one date in July.

SECRETS OF THE DEEP

Country's fishing am-bass-ador Tracy Byrd hooks you up with tips for the big catch.



Finding a country artist who loves to fish is not hard. Finding one who's a bigger fishing nut than Tracy Byrd is a lost cause.

Byrd hosts his own bass tournament near his hometown of Beaumont, Texas, and even titled his current road show the Outdoor Obsession Tour. The avid angler recently appeared on a segment of *Bill Dance Outdoors* on TNN. “[Bill and I] have fished together probably 10 times, but that was the first time we filmed the show,” he says. “In two days we caught about 300 bass.”

That's a lot of bass. But Byrd says a monster catch is not the real lure of fishing. “I've gotten hundreds of wonderful memories,” he declares. “Whether it was fishing with my grandmother when I was about 5, or with my dad all through school, or the first time I took my daughter fishing. I've had as much fun when I didn't catch anything as I have when I've caught a hundred fish. That's the cool thing about fishing.”

Here the lanky lure-master offers a few tips for bass-happy anglers:

1 In early spring, I suggest throwing a big-blade spinner bait—probably a number 7. I usually throw a white or chartreuse color. Use a white or chartreuse grub, depending on which skirt you use, as a trailer on your hook, so that it extends about two inches. Make sure the tail of the grub curls the same direction as your hook. Slow roll that in shallow water or off the edges of grass beds. Speed is the critical thing: Pre-spawn bass are lethargic, so go as slow as you can and still feel the blade turning.

2 A lot of people like to throw bug bait, but I've found something I think works better. It works in shallow water, or in open water if you find a hump or ridge six or eight feet under. In summer and fall, try a chartreuse tandem-blade spinner bait. Use a high-speed reel, and

reel it so that it makes a wake on the surface. Occasionally let it break the surface so that the blades cling together—that's real enticing to the fish when their metabolism is running real high. They'll hear that noise and want to chase it. You're reeling really fast, and that's what they want—something to chase.

3 For people who like to fish with a classic worm, there's a thing called the wacky worm. It's called that because it looks silly. About a third of the way from the top of the worm, there's a digit that fishermen call the egg sac. Hook the worm through that sac, so the head hangs on one side and the tail hangs on the other. It causes the worm to fall real slow. Throw it without a weight so it will fall slow. It's a great lure—you can catch a hundred bass with it.

WHEELS

RICOCHET ROADSTER Although there's a “car” in his name, Ricochet's Teddy Carr has two-wheelers in his blood. Carr got his first Honda mini-bike when he was in the fifth grade. A couple of years later he moved up to a bigger Honda, which he kept until his freshman year in high school. That's when his father bribed him to give up his motorcycle. “He said, ‘I'll get you a car if you'll give me the keys to the bike,’” Carr once recalled.

Carr stayed exclusively on four wheels until a couple of years ago, when a cycle dealer asked Ricochet to take part in some charity rides. Carr, Heath Wright, and brothers Jeff and Junior Bryant took lessons, got licenses and started riding. The band's two-wheeling

pastime paid off: Last spring a dealer offered them brand-new, custom-made motorcycles for their “Seven Bridges Road” video.

Carr has owned his 1994 Harley for a year. “Instead of going to the office or running errands in my truck, I do it on my bike,” he says. Sometimes I like to just ride and clear my head. The guys laugh at me and call it my therapy. Everybody's got to have something, and riding my Harley's my thing.” —Douglas Fisher



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Off the Charts

BIG IN THE CITY

The Great White Way fell in love with country sweetheart Pam Tillis during her stint as a cast member of the Broadway musical *Smokey Joe's Café* last spring. In spite of her stature as an award-winning recording artist, she requested that she not be singled out in any of the shows, saying, "What I really want to do is be part of the cast." And how did Tillis like performing on Broadway? She described the experience as a dream come true, the "ice cream of the pie of life."

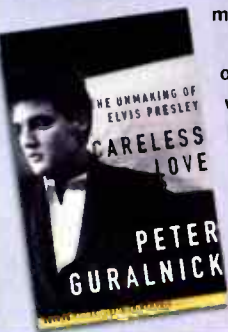


CHIC CHICKS The Dixie Chicks are known for their out-there fashion sense, so it's no surprise they've made the pages of *In Style* magazine. Part of a feature in the July issue called "Women Who Rock," the Chicks join such red-hot rockers as Sarah McLachlan, TLC and Gwen Stefani of No Doubt.



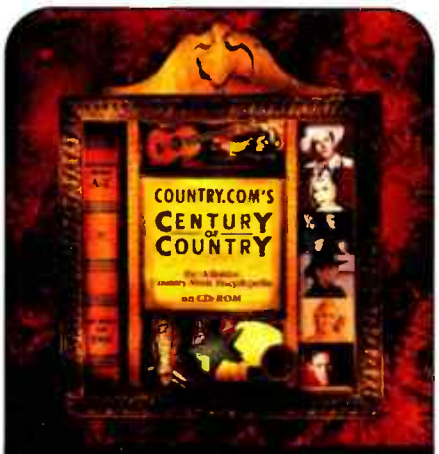
KING TOME Peter Guralnick's follow-up to his impressive Elvis Presley biography *Last Train to Memphis* opens with 25-year-old Presley's return to the United States after his Army tour of duty.

Careless Love: The Unmaking of Elvis Presley doubles back to describe the rock 'n' roll king's military life in Germany, where he discovered the two things that would become major forces in his life: Priscilla Beaulieu and prescription drugs.



The carefully documented biography is a sympathetic portrait of the singer's last 20 years, and portrays Presley as his own worst enemy, closely seconded by his manager, Colonel Tom Parker. According to *Careless Love*, the fearful Parker, along with Presley's entourage of hangers-on, maintained a stranglehold on the singer, a lock so tight it quelled Presley's tentative efforts to grow as an artist and a spiritual being.

Guralnick makes his points throughout the narrative with integrity and detail. *Careless Love*, along with its predecessor, is a must-read for Elvis fans. —Tamara Savlano



NEEDY CD

In spite of its title the new CD-ROM *Country.com's Century of Country: Definitive Country Music Encyclopedia* is not exactly encyclopedic. It does feature photos, biographies, discographies, video clips, interview snippets and other factoids about some 1,300 different acts. It's a formidable assemblage of material, but something's missing—a lot, in fact. You can read about Bjørn Håland ("Norway's most successful country star") and Dave McCarn (a North Carolina mill-worker-turned protest-singer)—but nary a whit about such '90s stars as Gary Allan, Lisa Brokop, Danni Leigh, Kevin Welch, Deryl Dodd, Jamie O'Hara, Bobbie Cryner, Kelly Willis or Marty Raybon. There's quarterback Terry Bradshaw (who sneaked onto the charts in the '70s) but not George Burns (who received an Academy of Country Music award in 1980). There's an entry for the city of Austin, but not Branson—or even Nashville. And what's the deal with an audio-track section featuring only seven songs, from only three artists? Well, those artists happen to be Randy Travis, Linda Davis and newcomer Jessica Andrews, all of whom record for DreamWorks Records, one of the project's underwriters. For a grade, this CD—incomplete and compromised, but still somewhat functional—gets what those letters imply: something between a C and a D. —Neil Pond



WORKING GIRL In addition to auditioning for roles, going to premieres and in general doing the Hollywood thing, LeAnn Rimes has been working on several music projects. Due sometime this year: a pop album and an album full of country classics like "Crazy," "Your Cheatin' Heart" and "Me and Bobby McGee."

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Charlie In Charge

What becomes a legend most? How about the White House?

On a musical landscape woven with sound-alike pretty-boys in Stetsons and pressed Wranglers, 62-year-old Charlie Daniels is easy to spot. At a time in his life in which his contemporaries are checking the balances of their 401(k) plans, Daniels is recording new music for his own record label, Blue Hat Records, and taking his famous Volunteer Jam on the road with the Marshall Tucker Band and Molly Hatchet. The outspoken icon talked with *Country Music* about everything from CDs to crime.

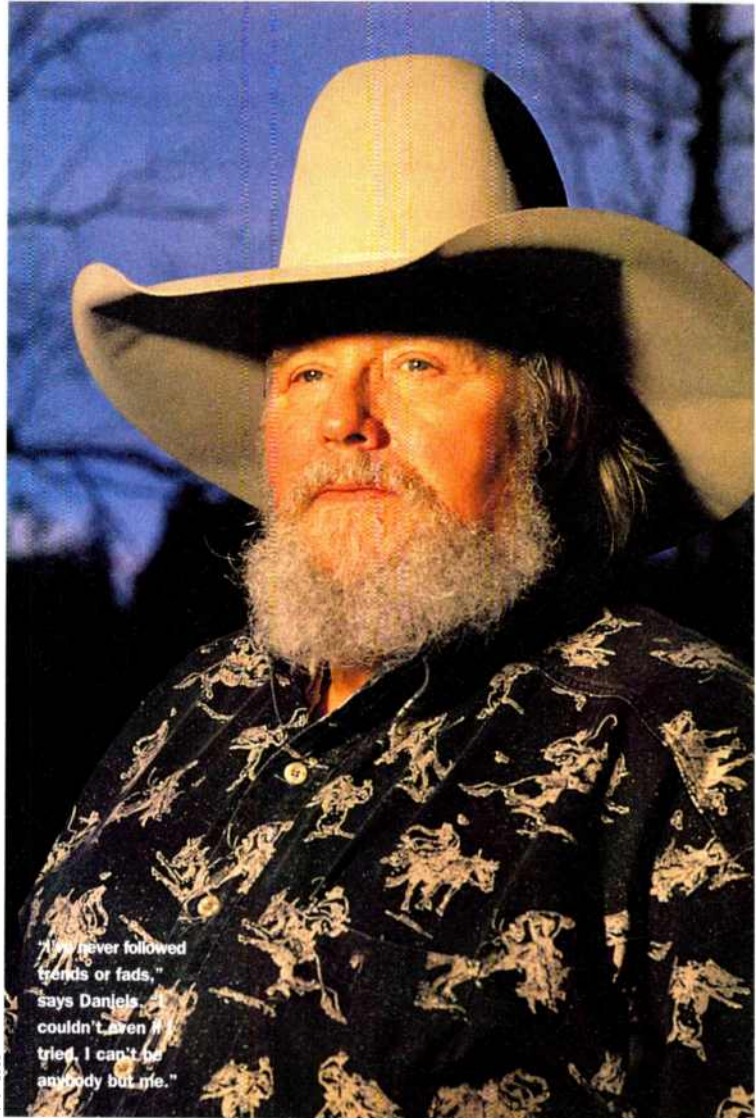
CMM: Why did you want to record an album like *Tailgate Party*?

CD: I've actually wanted to do an album like this for several years, and part of the purpose of starting Blue Hat Records was to have the freedom to do records like this. I wanted to pay tribute to bands of the South like Marshall Tucker, the Allman Brothers and Lynyrd Skynyrd, but I also wanted to recognize some of the newer southern bands like the Georgia Satellites and Hootie and the Blowfish. We had an afternoon concert rained out in a small town in Georgia one day. Hootie and the Blowfish were playing in Savannah that night. We decided to go see them. Well, I've never been treated nicer at a concert in my life. They asked me to sit in with them. We played "Mustang

Sally" together and I had a wonderful time. The thought came to me that they were part of a new generation of southern bands. It seemed appropriate to include them in this album. We also cut songs like Stevie Ray Vaughn's "Pride and Joy." Blues is the original music of the South, and nobody played the blues like Stevie Ray.

CMM: You've always been a proponent for the South. What do you think other regions of America can learn from the South?

CD: One thing the South can certainly be admired for is our ability to rise from adversity. The South is the happening part of the country now—it has been for the last 15 to 20 years—and it shows no end in sight. I think it's probably the most progressive part of



"I've never followed trends or fads," says Daniels. "I couldn't. Even if I tried, I can't be anybody but me."

JACK LUCE

the country. People pay lip service to being progressive but I think it's actually happening in the South. Racial attitudes in the South—although there are still people, and always will be people, who will never see equality as a way of life—have changed in the South a lot more than attitudes in other parts of the country. The South literally rose from the ashes with very little help. We've been stereotyped as inbred, incestuous hillbillies. It wasn't an easy reputation to overcome, but once television became a part of the American life, along with travel, people started to find out that people in the South are proud people, and we won't give up our heritage. We may live slower, but nobody has anything on us. We're just as smart and just as proud as any other culture.

And we're growing and prospering faster than any other region.

CMM: What made you decide to take *Volunteer Jam* on the road?

CD: We've been doing the Volunteer Jam in Tennessee since 1974. Last year we did a couple of dates in Hartford and New Jersey and they worked out extremely well, so we decided to take it on the road this year. Of course, it won't be the full Volunteer Jam because we've run as many as 25 acts over eight hours in the Jam before. But we'll have three acts, and in some markets we'll probably have some surprise guests. We'll also show Volunteer Jam footage before the show, and during the set changes, to try and bring along some of the ambiance of past Jams. We just want everyone to

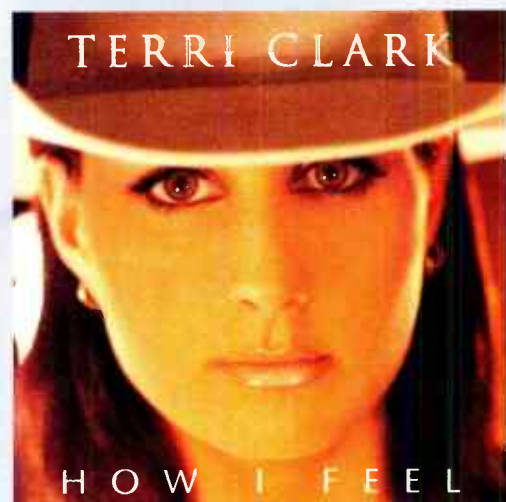
*"Everytime I think you might have changed
I put aside the anger and the blame
Make myself believe that there's a way to work it out
Everytime you say let's try again
Beggin' me to let you back in
Everytime I do, everytime you lie
Everytime I cry"*

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come out and have some fun. At the same time, we're going to partner with Habitat for Humanity to raise awareness and money for their worthwhile organization.

CMM: Do you think President Clinton should have been removed from office?

CD: Is perjury a crime? Are we going to have two sets of laws, one for the common man and one for the President? To me, the entire situation goes back to the days of the old South when there was one set of laws for plantation owners and another set of laws for the slaves. If perjury is a crime, and people are jailed for perjury, then Bill Clinton should be removed from office. Otherwise, we may as well be saying, "Hail King William Jefferson Clinton, the first ruler of the formerly democratic nation of the United States of America." I cannot articulate the contempt I have for Congress for not doing their job. The morals of this country have been lowered so far it's unbelievable. It's not about sex; it's about lying. How can we trust this man? If he were honorable, he'd resign. He's torn this country apart. The only thing Bill Clinton cares about is Bill Clinton. And I believe the Clinton legacy is a debt this country will be paying for a long time. He'll be long gone before all of the ramifications of his behavior are realized.

CMM: If you were President, what is the first issue you'd deal with?

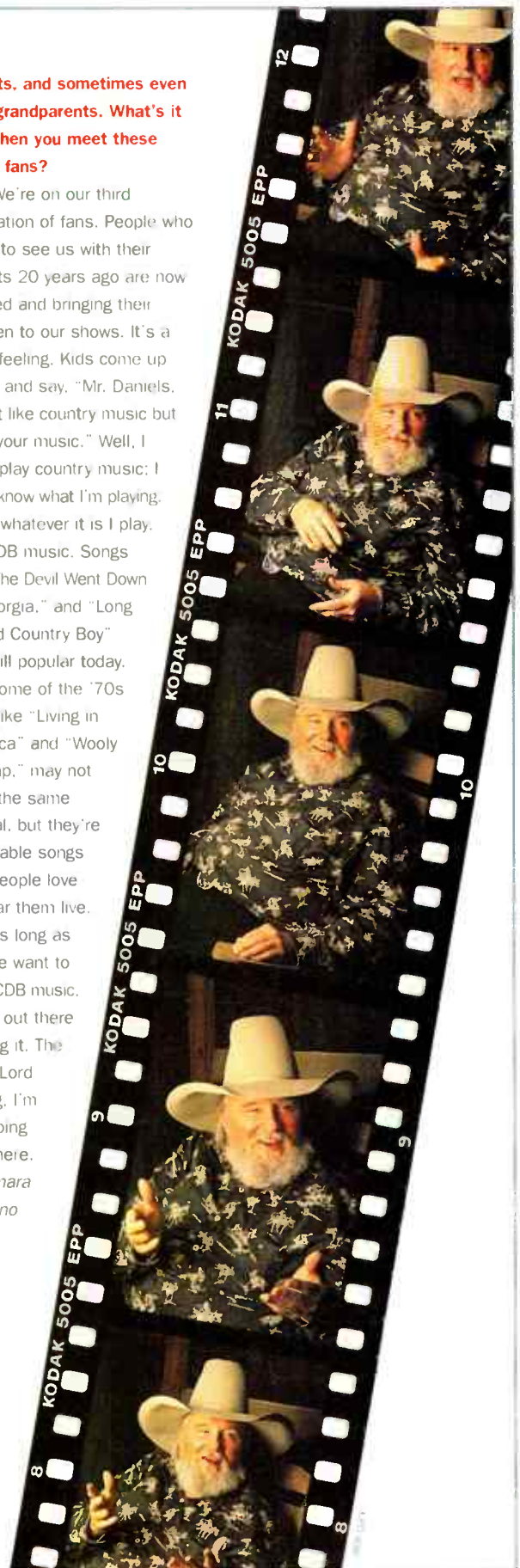
CD: I think the biggest problem we have in this country is crime. And I believe it's the same small handful of people causing all the trouble. They're in jail,

then they're out of jail and we refuse to deal with the problem. The crime generated from drugs causes 70 percent of our problems. We should use 70 percent of our law enforcement to fight drugs and eradicate the problem. The will of the people is the most powerful force in this country and if everyone said, "Damn it, we're sick and tired of the drug problem and we want something done about it," it would get done. If I were President, part of my Inaugural speech would speak directly to the drug dealers. I would say, "The day I become President, you better be out of the drug business, be prepared to go to jail, or be prepared to meet whatever amount of force it takes to remove you from society. If you're from a foreign country, we will deport you. If you shoot at one of our policemen, he will shoot back at you. If you're dealing drugs on the street corner, we don't care if you came from a broken home, you know you're doing wrong and you're going to be held accountable for your crime. We'll give you the programs to help you but you will quit dealing drugs. We're not only going to prosecute people dealing drugs; we're going to prosecute the people using drugs. We'll have zero tolerance for heavy-duty drugs like crack, heroin and cocaine. If you get picked up you will be taken to jail, period. If you do it, you do it at your own risk. I am ready to take all the flack. I don't give a damn what you say because this is what I stand for and this is why I was elected."

CMM: You've got fans now who were introduced to the Charlie Daniels Band by their

parents, and sometimes even their grandparents. What's it like when you meet these young fans?

CD: We're on our third generation of fans. People who came to see us with their parents 20 years ago are now married and bringing their children to our shows. It's a great feeling. Kids come up to me and say, "Mr. Daniels, I don't like country music but I like your music." Well, I don't play country music; I don't know what I'm playing. I play whatever it is I play. It's CDB music. Songs like "The Devil Went Down to Georgia," and "Long Haired Country Boy" are still popular today. And some of the '70s stuff like "Living in America" and "Wooly Swamp," may not have the same appeal, but they're still viable songs and people love to hear them live. And as long as people want to hear CDB music, I'll be out there playing it. The good Lord willing, I'm not going anywhere.
—Tamara Saviano



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As usual, Strait generally satisfies, but rarely surprises.

ALWAYS NEVER THE SAME
George Strait

MCA

The grammatically incorrect title just about sums up Strait's latest effort. Certainly, George is not going to mess around with the formula that's carried him for nearly two decades: solid songs, tastefully produced, and delivered in "Strait-speak," his unique style that allows him to practically talk the verses and get away with it. On the other hand, some elements have actually improved, mainly his control and ability to sustain notes with greater power.

If you insist on evidence, try "That's the Truth," "Meanwhile,"

already an out-of-the-box hit, and especially the title track, sung against a demanding triple backbeat. Listen in particular to how he stretches out the word "lie" in "That's the Truth," making up for the lower-register notes that don't quite suit him. Strait, of course, is hardly the rangiest vocalist who ever attacked a lyric, and he doesn't fill in the spaces with dips and curlicues and other enhancements.

Whatever he sings, you always come away feeling as though you've experienced a brief segment of real life. He can take a carefree theme like "Peace of Mind," a paean to the joys of no attachments, follow it up with the extreme opposite, "That's

Where I Want to Take Our Love," and make them both believable. As for the songs themselves, there are a couple of genuine hits besides "Meanwhile." Strait musters up some personality on "Write This Down," which would sound positively cornball from someone else, and the stone-country "4 Minus 3 Equals Zero," featuring a nice bit of wordplay. "One of You," however, really overdoes the "one" theme (enough already), and "I Look at You" seems too similar to past Strait material.

You won't be able to make a full meal out of *Always Never the Same*, but diehard George Strait fans will find it satisfying.

—James Alan



GROOVEGRASS 101
The Groovegrass Boyz

REPRISE

First impressions can kill ya if you're not careful. Mine came when I read the CD liner notes and credits for *Groovegrass 101*. The name Bootsie Collins, bass-master for '70s funk groups Parliament and Funkadelic, immediately gave me tingles of anticipated funkiness. Doc Watson, Mac Wiseman and Jerry Douglas—all well-known musicians for their work in country and bluegrass—are also listed in the credits.

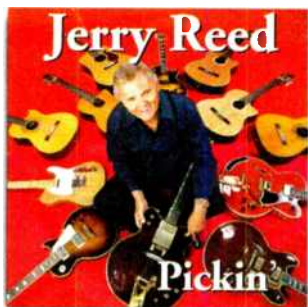
Great, I thought. *Once again someone's making fun of hill-billy music.* Well, like I said, if first impressions could kill, then this review is compliments of the undertaker.

The playlist on this long overdue (recorded in 1993, but only recently released) album includes such standards as "Salty Dog Blues," "Blue Moon of Kentucky" and "Wabash Cannonball." Though all the songs (some original) are great in their own right, Scott Rouse has produced an infectious, groove-laden, hip-hoppin' 11 tracks of fine music. I suppose the purist snobs will be rolling their eyes because all the tunes "ain't bein' played properly," but truthfully, these are cool and slammin' tributes with a '90s twist. The traditional instruments (banjo, mandolin, fiddle, Dobro) are

here, but the application—complete with drums, electric bass and samples—makes for terrific, unique interpretations. The medium/slow groove on “Little Cabin on the Hill” slayed me! Now I know why Boorsy Collins is a part of this.

Groovegrass 101 is just plain fun, great hip-pocket music. But I forewarn you: Approach with an open mind and appreciate it for what it is. And, if you aren't moved to move—even a little bit—then you better call the undertaker... 'cause you be dead from the neck down!

—Tim Smith



PICKIN'
Jerry Reed

SOUTHERN TRACKS

Who says an Old Dog can't teach new tricks?

The pluckin' Atlanta native has been enjoying a resurgence of late, what with the Shel Silverstein tribute *Old Dogs* that he recorded with Mel Tillis, Bobby Bare and Waylon Jennings last year, and now *Pickin'*, his first solo album in cons.

And even though Reed has just celebrated his 62nd birthday, he's lost none of the nimble facility that made him a country guitar god just this side of Chet Atkins, nor the personal taste that found his best material divvied up between songs like the jamming “Guitar Man” and humorous novelty anthems like “When You're Hot, You're Hot.”



BANG BANG BANG
Nitty Gritty Dirt Band

DREAMWORKS

By 1997, the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band had been down for the count so long, the old Colorado hippies seemed just about out. Then they recorded a surprisingly strong and joyful album that promised to jump-start their career. About the time it was set to be released in early '98, their label, Rising Tide, folded. In the months ahead, rumors swirled that another Nashville-based record company

Not all of *Pickin'* is worth writing home about. The lame swamp flavored “Does Anybody Want to Boogie” may have been okay circa 1978, but it does Reed no favors, its out-of-sync timeline highlighting the singer's rusty pipes. But the next number, a gorgeous, molasses-flavored acoustic ballad titled after Reed's wife, “My Priscilla,” is certainly one reason to buy this record. A sweet melody bolstered by shimmering, full-bodied jazz chords, it's extraordinarily exquisite. The pseudo-classical “Gypsy Heart” also offers Reed's strong melodic flavor as it casually passes 3:10 of the CD's time.

Of course, Reed can still perform at breakneck speed, and “Reed's Rag” finds him barreling along with a dexterous precision that should be the envy of every guitar and banjo student out there. *Pickin'* proves

would pick it up. But when that didn't happen, the venerable acoustic-based band looked as if they might never find a home for their most charming and cohesive record in perhaps a decade.

Now DreamWorks has ridden to the rescue, banking that the Dirt Band will still appeal to their original rock fans as well as to mainstream country listeners. And, indeed, those who come to this album remembering the band's heyday of the late '60s and early '70s (“Mr. Bojangles”) will find that they sound both rejuvenated and updated, sacrificing nothing from their winning, homemade style and trademark layered vocals. On the other hand, there's nothing groundbreaking here—they scored that coup with “Will the Circle Be Unbroken,” their 1972 three-record set that bridged both country and rock, and the Mother Maybelle and long-hair generations. But there's plenty to like, beginning with the easygoing

Jerry Reed still has some magic in those learned fingers.

—Nick Krewen



HEART SHAPED WORLD
Jessica Andrews

DREAMWORKS

Like her (*ahem*) “elder” LeAnn Rimes, Jessica Andrews has a voice as big as a Montana sky and as smooth as Tennessee whisky—if only she were old enough to drink.

But do we *really* need another teenage prodigy who gets to cut study hall in order to make sound

songs from Jim Lauderdale, Gillian Welch and Mac McAnally that supplement their own.

“Forget the Job” reprises the Johnny Paycheck sentiment of “Take This Job and Shove It” in a more gentrified fashion for the '90s (the suggestion is to get a life instead), but the Dirt Band takes more nods from its rocking half than its country. From the can't-wait date with the girl in the leopard-skin bodysuit of “Bang, Bang, Bang,” an infectious dance number in which they declare “Felt so good I liked to hurt myself,” to the winsome love ballad “It's About Time,” a duet between real-life partners Jeff Hanna and Matraca Berg, this band gives credence to two popular adages: Today's country is often indistinguishable from '70s L.A. singer/songwriter pop, and good music is simply good music, no matter how old it is—or how hard a struggle it had getting heard.

—Alanna Nash

check? After a few listens to Andrews' debut *Heart Shaped World*, the answer is a resounding “Yes!”

In an industry almost devoid of new artists with any dirt under their collective fingernails, one is predisposed to dislike another sugary-sweet starlet in a Stetson. Still, you can't help but feel warm and fuzzy listening to Andrews' music. Obviously James Stroud caught that fuzzy vibe, too, signing the 15-year-old after one listen.

Perhaps the secret to *Heart's* success is the stellar production of Byron Gallimore (Tim McGraw, Faith Hill, Jo Dee Messina). The arrangements are lush and slick, yet have an “alternative” looseness about them. More important, Gallimore deftly sidesteps Rimes' biggest pitfall of choosing profoundly meaningless tunes. The songs on *Heart Shaped World* are emotionally charged, but not

beyond the realm of the typical 15-year-old girl.

For example, Andrews could easily relate to "You Go First," depicting the universal situation in which two people work up the nerve to initiate the inaugural kiss. Musically, the tune is more a nod to Shania Twain than Rimes, especially with the repeated use of the word "kiss" in the chorus. "James Dean in Tennessee" is eighth-grade poetry at its endearing best—where the romantic, but short-sighted, imagination of the protagonist takes flight on Andrews' soaring vibrato. "He tried to smoke them cigarettes/And he always made me laugh/He said I'd be his pickup truck queen/And someday I'd be his better half." Conversely, "Down By the Riverside" showcases the immense potential of Andrews as a grown-up artist.

Demonstrating a tinge of grit and teenage nerves beginning to feel the fray of adulthood, if *Heart Shaped World* doesn't break Jessica Andrews big, surely her future efforts will.

—Brett Ratner



I BELONG TO YOU

John Jennings

VANGUARD

One of the most difficult hurdles for a musician to overcome on the heels of a critically acclaimed debut record is the dreaded follow-up. In music-biz circles it's known as the "sophomore

THE OLD DOMINION MASTERS

Jim and Jesse

PINECASTLE

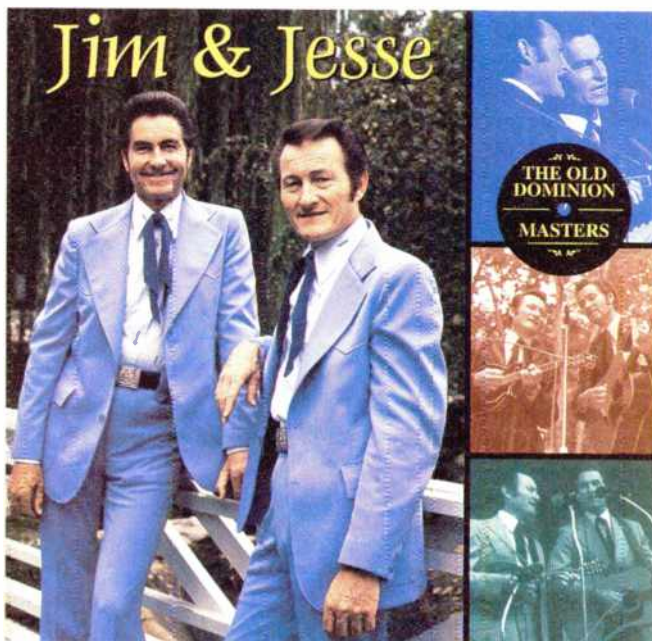
While it's impossible to have anything but admiration for their lush voices, their work ethic and their unfailing graciousness, Jim and Jesse McReynolds have long made music that struck many hardcore bluegrass fans as just a bit square.

Where other giants of the music—including McReynolds contemporaries like the Osborne Brothers—played with fanatical drive and aching blue voices, Jim and Jesse tended to dress their music up with pop-country flourishes and to exhibit a stiffer approach to rhythm and harmony.

That said, Jim and Jesse have endeared themselves to huge audiences over a 50-year career, and for those with a taste for their music, this new Pinecastle release is an affordable treasure trove.

In the early 1970s, after nearly 25 years of performing, the brothers were ready to pull back from the most commercialized period of their career, an association with Columbia/Epic that had produced some modest hits but not a lot in the way of timeless music. As part of reestablishing their own musical voice, they launched their own record label and named it after their home state of Virginia. *The Old Dominion Masters*, a four-CD, 101-song collection, kicks off with a disc full of stage favorites named after television's syndicated *Jim and Jesse Show* and a 1974 LP called *Superior Sounds of Bluegrass*. The singing throughout is top-flight, even if the arrangements tend to be somewhat plodding and sing-songy.

slump," and very few manage to elude it. One who has—and in a huge way—is singer/songwriter/multi-instrumentalist John Jennings, who also functions as Mary Chapin Carpenter's



Disc two jumps time sequence to put the collection's two gospel albums together on one CD. This mostly slow to mid-tempo material showcases Jim and Jesse's evident affection for classic sacred music, but it isn't until discs three and four that the collection gets the jolt of energy it needs. *Songs About Our Country* from 1976 brings banjo player Allen Shelton back into the Virginia Boys after a hiatus, and at last the music is propelled forward. The patriotic songs are a bit maudlin, but the 1977 *Palace of Songs* album features some killer cuts, especially a new version of "Air Mail Special on the Fly," an early McReynolds hit. "Stormy Horizons," like the many other songs here from the Louvin Brothers song bag, shows the incalculable influence the Louvins had on the McReynolds' vocal union. The 1983 *Homeland Harmony* album is heavily truncated here; the elegantly sung "Valley of Peace" by Charlie Monroe made me wish there were more. Disc four is dominated by a live

double LP recorded in Tokyo in May of 1975 to an exuberant audience. It's a good way to fill the McReynolds hit quota. "El Cumbanchero," "Paradise" and "I Wish You Knew" all cook. At the end is a grab bag of singles and radio broadcasts that originated between 1962 and 1983.

The Old Dominion Masters is Pinecastle's first foray into boxset territory, and it's a smashing job that borrows heavily from the Bear Family model: potent remastering, an LP-sized box, detailed notes by Gary B. Reid, and nearly 30 black-and-white photos. Producer Tom Riggs zeroed in on an important and largely lost period of the McReynolds' career and captured it on CD, ensuring the set's historic value. And despite the distractions of electric bass and occasionally sappy arrangements, you get Jesse's utterly distinctive cross-picked mandolin and Jim's keening high harmonies on virtually every song. That alone is enough to make it a keeper.

—Craig Havighurst

producer and guitarist. His *I Belong to You* is an eclectic gem that blends heartfelt, expressive lyrics with cleverly crafted elements of folk, country, r&b and Brit-pop power chording.

Jennings delivers a one-two punch with the CD's opening track, "Movieland," a rhythmically charged romp that examines the dream-versus-reality scenarios that, unfortunately,

accompany many relationships. As the tune builds in emotional intensity, Jennings segues into an instrumental bridge that features a cool, Beatlesque, single-note blending of guitar and piano, played by session stalwart Jon Carroll.

Longstanding musical partner Carpenter lends strong vocal support to the title track—a brilliantly delivered, stark look at the emotional shackles and denial that imprison the victim of an abusive relationship.

In the opening verse of the sparsely textured “Who Am I Tonight,” Jennings cuts right to the chase in addressing a relationship whose passionate flame has been extinguished, as he plaintively laments to his lover, “Now you close your eyes and turn away/To drift off to some much better place/If I should disturb you in your sleep/Think of me with someone else’s face.” Ouch!

Failed love pops up again in “The Simplest Thing.” Lack of communication coupled with foolish pride are the culprits this time, and Jennings drives home the point with an impassioned Warren Zevon-like vocal delivery propelled by a thumping backbeat and chiming electric 12-string guitar.

Jennings is a gifted storyteller whose knack for poignant narrative detail invites obvious comparisons to songwriters Lyle Lovett, John Hiatt and Hal Ketchum. Not only that, he’s also a helluva musician. In addition to providing all of the killer guitar parts heard on *I Belong to You*, he functions as a one-man backup band on many of the tracks, playing bass, mandolin, Dobro and drums. From that perspective alone, *I Belong to You* is a truly remarkable recording.

—Rick Petreycik



IT'S ABOUT TIME
Julie Reeves

VIRGIN

If only one new act is allowed to break through this year, then let it be Julie Reeves. Virgin's first new signee doesn't sound like your run-of-the-mill novice content to take the safe and easy route. This lady is confident enough to turn loose and show you her power, combining the vocal brass of a Martina McBride with a country soulfulness that might strike up images of Dolly. She gets down to business quickly on the lead cut, “Trouble Is a Woman,” a rapid-fire workout that requires breathless, scattershot phrasing and a bit of attitude—suffice to say that this is one woman you would not want to cross. Two additional numbers, “Party Down” and “Whatever,” prove she’s equally adept at the playful putdown. In “Party Down,” Reeves even promises to help pack your bags on the way out the door.

About the time you’re thinking she has all the sensitivity of a special prosecutor, along come “What I Need” and, the album’s prettiest song, “You Were a Mountain,” where Reeves gets to demonstrate her high vocal range. More important, they mark her versatility. She obviously knows when to cut back and take things down a notch. What’s truly remarkable is her willingness to tackle difficult territory, like the talking blues of “It’s About Time” or

the folksy narrative of “If Heartaches Had Wings.” Most artists would wait until they’ve got a few notches in their belts before making the attempt, because these styles dictate the singer adopt a conversational tone that must hold the listeners’ interest. They’re risky, but Reeves makes them work. Evidently the label was impressed enough to give her 12 tracks, though it’s probably one too many, as “He Keeps Me in One Piece” merely rates an “ordinary” verdict. The rest are catchy, compelling and produced with more instrumental edge than normally found on debut efforts. If Reeves bears even a hint of her talent in the live setting, we could be looking at a future award-winner.

—James Alan



DANCE HALL DREAMS
Rosie Flores

ROUNDER

Rosie Flores is such a natural on stage that her studio albums have always seemed a bit studied by contrast. With a live band behind her, and a dancing crowd in front, this Rose of San Antonio lights up a room with her firecracker guitar-picking and her swaggering rockabilly vocals. When she has to overdub leads in a studio isolation booth, however, that voltage seems to get turned down a few notches. So it’s good news that her new album, *Dance Hall Dreams*, was recorded live before her friends and family at San Antonio’s Cibolo Creek Country Club last year. It’s



NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH
Stephen Bruton

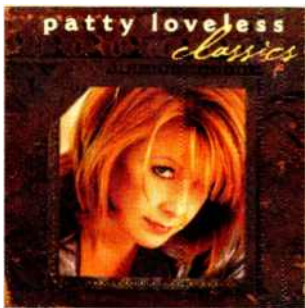
NEW WEST RECORDS

As a one-time road guitarist for blues goddess Bonnie Raitt, it’s no surprise that Stephen Bruton’s new album bubbles along like a river full of rocks. To understand why the current keeps changing, you need to swim upstream to discover what’s standing in its way.

even better news that the disc doesn’t merely recycle well-worn favorites but introduces 11 previously unrecorded originals, plus a rousing remake of “Funnel of Love” by Flores’ rockabilly hero, Wanda Jackson.

Flores co-wrote many of the new numbers with top Nashville craftsmen, who bring a narrative and melodic focus to her irrepressible energy. For example, frequent Kathy Mattea contributor Don Henry helped Flores write “Who’s Gonna Fix It Now,” a marvelously detailed memoir of her late father. Radney Foster helped her with “Bring It On,” a slinky, Dwight-like challenge to a tentative lover. And Terry McBride helped Flores pen “Little Bit More,” a rollicking rockabilly boast about her unquenchable appetites. As much as these collaborators have helped Flores, she has more than repaid them that rarest of qualities—a simmering sexuality blended with a girl-next-door friendliness. She’s one of the overlooked gems in country music, and this album is the best possible introduction.

—Geoffrey Himes



CLASSICS
Patty Loveless

EPIC

Patty Loveless is often held up as the standard-bearer for modern country music, and with good reason. After more than a decade of making records, Loveless still is a queen among princesses, sort of the female

Like Raitt, Bruton has had plenty of boulders to paddle around, to be sure, and both artists offer hidden pools with waterfalls and shade, and many shades of blue.

The main difference between the two performers? Today, nobody has to ask, "Bonnie who?" Bruton lives in Austin, Texas, a city with a live scene strong enough to support its best musicians, but rarely capable of launching them to a national level. At 50, though, the Fort Worth native is not really searching for his name in lights, but for enlightenment. "Grow up too fast/Get smart too late," he sings in the title track, "Grow old too soon/Hurry up and wait."

You may know Bruton's other songs, by the way. He wrote "What It Is" for the Highwaymen and "Too Many Memories" for Patty Loveless' acclaimed *Long Stretch of Lonesome*; Willie Nelson, Lee Roy Parnell and Hal Ketchum have cut his tunes, too.

My favorite new song is "When Love Finds You," which reminds me of Alan Jackson's

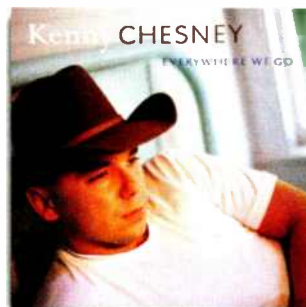
George Strait: Someone who has consistently scored hit songs and platinum records while never abandoning her integrity and love of the art form.

Any collection of her greatest hits is bound to be worth the price of admission, but this set ups the ante. After disappointing radio response to her last album, *Long Stretch of Lonesome*, Loveless and her husband, producer Emory Gordy Jr., have turned it up a notch with two new radio-friendly cuts, the current single "Can't Get Enough," and "I Just Wanna Be Loved by You." She sounds sexy and on top of her game on both, and Gordy proves he can compete with anyone behind the controls. But it is on the third new cut, the stone-cold country duet with Vince Gill, "My

"I'll Go On Loving You"—not just because of the part-spoken, part-sung melody, but also due to the sensuality and the slow groove of love tumbling through the lyrics and melody.

There's a lot of motion on *Nothing But the Truth*: Bruton mentions ships, caravans and a trip around the sun; the bluesy music always keeps him moving right along. I'm not sure where he's traveling, but it's mighty fine to sit in the passenger seat.

—Craig Shelburne



EVERYWHERE WE GO
Kenny Chesney

BNA

Like any good cloning experiment, it took a long time, and was orchestrated so secretly, so

Kind of Woman/My Kind of Man" (which also appears on Gill's latest, *The Key*) where Loveless really soars.

There is a reason this is titled *Classics*: everything on it is timeless, from the heart-wrenching "You Don't Even Know Who I Am," "You Don't Seem to Miss Me," (with vocals by George Jones), "How Can I Help You Say Goodbye" and "Here I Am," to fun songs like "Blame It on Your Heart" and "I Try to Think About Elvis." These 12 songs are just a taste, but if you've never owned a Patty Loveless album, this is an excellent place to start. It's a trip through some of the best of what modern country music has to offer.

—Cyndi Hoelzle

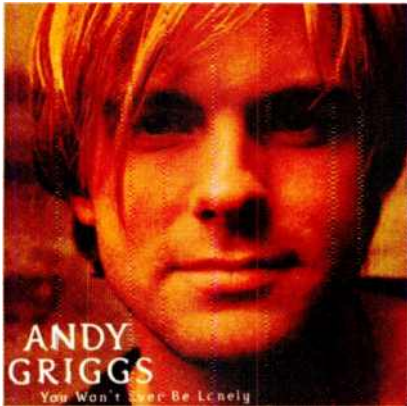
subversive-subliminally, that few even noticed it happening. But one pointy-booted amble through Kenny Chesney's new populist collection and it becomes as clearly defined as the vampire in an old Hammer horror film: Thanks to scrambling, scraping-the-barrel-bottom publishing houses, country music—as we all knew and loved it—has turned into a novelty-hit shell game. It's not "true-blue," as it would have you believe, nor even the slightest bit "blue-collar." And it's about as heartfelt and deep as "They're Coming to Take Me Away" or "Poisoning Pigeons in the Park" from the old Dr. Demento shows we used to chuckle along with as kids. It's just not funny anymore, though.

And you can't technically blame poor Chesney. He was given a set of Nashville rules the minute he tried on his first Garth-goofy Stetson: Play along, they suggested, and you too, can pacify the masses with your own brand of carefully concocted snake oil. The kid's

got a good set of pipes, he hits all the right throat-catching notes, even holds his own alongside the game's ultimate rollerball survivor, Randy Travis. (Their duet, "Baptism," penned by Mickey Cates, is the only moment here that rings true and echoes some smidgen of real emotion.) Fans can defend such a voice all they want; it's what that voice is singing that matters, that perhaps forges a career-defining legacy. Ergo, will anyone, 10 years from now, be whistling along to pandering perambulators like "She Thinks My Tractor's Sexy"? Or "How Forever Feels," which name-checks Jimmy Buffet and Richard Petty? Or conjure-up-that-old-Route-66-bit "California" ("You can wish on four-leaf clovers/But all the fields have been plowed over/And there's nothin' left to do but fly away")?

Here's the scariest part: On his own, composing in tandem with the fairly talented Skip Ewing, all Chesney can muster is a cheap *Jerry McGuire* rip-off called—you guessed it—"You Had Me From Hello." But the reward system is already in place—this is the Soylent Green the sheep are programmed to receive, and the track will probably become some *Patch Adams*-huge hit. You know, all the right nerves are cunningly struck, all the right tear ducts—and purses and wallets—pop open. Is there an end in sight to this type of pabulum? Or even a solution for gifted crooners like Chesney? Probably not. If sheep don't recognize themselves as such, how will they ever break out of the pen?

—Tom LANHAM



YOU WON'T EVER BE LONELY

Andy Griggs

RCA

Some artists have it, some don't. And the "it" in question is, in fact, rather hard to describe—call it a casual, conversational singing style that never feels fey or forced, an almost intangible spark that separates the wheat from the parrot-toned chaff. It's all too easy to shamble through the vocal emotions; a difficult task, indeed, to elevate your material to apotheosis. And Louisiana-bred Andy Griggs, it's safe to say, is no shambler. He warbles through this debut with back-porch ease, like he's relating a particularly curious folk tale to a gaggle of wide-eyed young 'uns. You might've heard the shtick before, but he makes you feel as if you haven't.

A cruise through the credits on *You Won't Ever Be Lonely* tells you Griggs' heart is in the right place—he fuel-injects Rodney Crowell's already souped-up standard "Ain't Livin' Long Like This" and gets down 'n' roadhouse-dirty with Waylon Jennings in a clucking "Shine on Me" duet. Not bad for a newcomer. But he's got more than a batch of swell tunes—Griggs has *personality*. He can take a regulation, fiddle-punched hoedown like "You Made Me That Way" and give it an extra ear-catching oomph that suddenly makes the number a little bit more special, a little bit more idiosyncratic. Even the unpleasant domestic-violence scenario sketched in Russell Smith and Gary Nicholson's "Waitin' on Sundown" takes on urban-legend dimensions when Griggs wades bravely into it. You end up liking the downtrodden characters, because you like the guy singing about them.

Griggs co-wrote half the record himself, and it's on these originals that he really shines. The title track, which might've fit in well on an

old Eagles album, lets his loping drawl drip down over the swear-I-love-her sentiment like stove-warmed maple syrup—warm, sweet and altogether palate-pleasing. It's the same technique Kevin Welch, Bob Woodruff and even Travis Tritt perfected over the years—sing it like you'd say it, sing it like your blue-collar life depended on it. That these tracks are polished enough to woo radio is beside the point. In one fell swoop, Griggs has proved he's got it, the right stuff that long—and ultimately rewarding—country careers are made of.

—Tom Lanham



"When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect."

—Aldo Leopold



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- *Certificate Programs
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 - 12 Interior Decorator
 - 22 Wildlife/Forestry Conservation
 - 09 Legal Secretary
 - 381 Medical Insurance Clerk
 - 51 Fashion Merchandising
 - 25 Gunsmith
 - 52 Surveying & Mapping
 - 40 Photographer
 - 76 Freelance Writer
 - 42 Dressmaking & Design
 - 30 Florist
 - 26 Teacher Aide
 - 15 Home Inspector
 - 39 Medical Transcriptionist
 - 31 Locksmith
 - 58 Private Investigator
 - 102 Professional Landscaper
 - 149 Jewelry Repair Technician
 - 89 Small Engine Repair
 - 96 Tax Preparer
 - 151 Plumber
 - 152 Mason
 - 158 Auto Body Repair Tech.
 - 148 Drywall Installer & Finisher
 - 105 Computer Graphic Artist
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 - 145 Home Remodeling & Repair
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On the Road Again...

Tour Dates for Some of Your Favorite Artists

TRACE ADKINS

- June
6/19 Marinette, WI
 Country Music Fest.
6/21 Macon, GA
 Macon Cvl.
6/25 Richland Ctr., WI
 Kros Koup Pk.
6/26 Norway, MI
 Marion Park Summerfest

- 6/30** Edmonton, AB
 Skyreach Centre
 July
7/1 Saskatoon, Sask.
 Canada
 306-975-3155
 Saskatchewan Place
7/3 Dauphin, Man. Canada
 Manitoba Countryfest
7/10 Ft. Laramie, OH



Terri Clark

MURIEL LEE/REX USA

- June
7/7 Chippewa Falls, WI
 N. Wisconsin State Fair
7/16 Craven, Sask. Canada
 306-721-6060
 Big Valley Jamboree

ALABAMA

- June
6/3 Newark, DE
 Bob Carpenter Ctr.
6/4 Richmond, VA
 804-780-4970
 Richmond Col.
6/5 State College, PA
 Bryce Jordan Ctr.
6/12 Milwaukee, WI
 Expo Ctr.
6/13 Cleveland, OH
6/18 Marion, MI
 Marion Fair
6/24 Cadott, WI
 715-289-4401
 Chippewa Valley Country
 Fest.
6/25 Fargo, ND
 701-282-7029
 Red River Valley Fair
6/26 Richland Ctr., WI
 Kros Koup Pk.
6/27 Oshkosh, WI
 Country USA
6/29 Lethbridge, Alb.
 Canada
 403-329-4737
 Canada Sportsplex

GARY ALLAN

- June
6/26 Grand Junction, CO
 800-530-3020
 Country Jam USA
 July
7/3 Greeley, CO
 303-356-7787
 Greeley Stampede
7/10 Nazareth, TX
 Community Ballpark
7/17 Clovis, NM
 Clovis Music Fest.

BLACKHAWK

- June
6/12 Winstead, MN
 Country Music Fest.
6/20 Marinette, WI
 Country Music Fest.
6/24 Oshkosh, WI
 Country USA
6/26 Cadott, WI
 715-289-4401
 Chippewa Valley Country
 Fest.

BROOKS & DUNN

- June
6/25 Oshkosh, WI
 Sunny View Expo Ctr.

BOB

- 7/15** St. Clairsville, OH
 800-624-5456
 Jamboree in the Hills
7/16 Twin Lakes, WI
 Country Thunder USA
7/17 Eau Claire, WI
 715-839-7500
 Country Jam USA

T. GRAHAM BROWN

- June
6/12 Grenada, MS
 Thunder on the Water
 July
7/16 Proctorville, OH
 Lawrence Cty. Fair
7/19 Ctr.ville, IA
 Appanoose Cty. Fair

TRACY BYRD

- June
6/11 Winstead, MN
 Country Music Fest.
6/27 Oshkosh, WI
 Sunny View Expo Ctr.
 July
7/3 Rogersville, TN
 Rogersville 4th of July
 Celebration
7/16 Clovis, NM
 Clovis Music Fest.
7/17 Helotes, TX
 607-276-6870
 Flores Country Store
7/23 Angelica, NY
 607-276-6870
 Allegany Cty. Fair

MARK CHESNUTT

- June
6/18 Atkinson, NE
 Community Ctr.
6/25 Bay City, MI
 Powerboat Race
 July
7/4 Dauphin, Man. Canada
 Manitoba Countryfest
7/16 Eau Claire, WI
 715-839-7500
 Country Jam USA

TERRI CLARK

- June
6/17 Springfield, MO
 Route 66 Country Music
 Fest.
6/24-25 Red Wing, MN
 Treasure Island Casino
6/26 Oshkosh, WI
 Sunny View Expo Ctr.
 July
7/2 Dauphin, Man. Canada
 Dauphin Countryfest

BILLY RAY CYRUS

- June
7/2 Pigeon Forge, TN
 Governor's Palace
7/3 Myrtle Beach, SC
 803-272-5758
 Alabama Theatre

DIAMOND RIO

- June
6/3 Clio, MI
 810-687-7611
 Clio Amph.
6/5 Farmington, MO
 Wilson Rozier Stadium
6/25 Manhattan, KS
 800-795-8091
 Country Stampede

BOB

- 7/15** Merritt, BC Canada
 604-860-1470
 604-280-4444
 Merritt Mountain Music
7/16 Calgary, Alb. Canada
 403-261-0101
 Calgary Stampede
7/17 Craven, Sask. Canada
 306-721-6060
 Big Valley Jamboree
7/22 Roseau, MN
 218-463-1555
 Roseau Cty. Fair

JOE DUFFIE

- June
6/12 Hartford, MI
 Y Country Summer Jam
6/19 Monroe, NC
 Old Monroe Fairgrounds
6/25 Cadott, WI
 715-289-4401
 Chippewa Country Fest
6/26 Oshkosh, WI
 Sunny View Expo Ctr.
6/27 Manhattan, KS
 800-795-8091
 Country Stampede

- July
7/10 Rhinelander, WI
 715-369-1300
 Hodag Country Fest

SARA EVANS

- June
6/4 Reading, PA
 Municipal Stadium
6/18 Marinette, WI
 Country Music Fest.
6/19 Lockbourne, OH
 Hoover Y Park

MERLE HAGGARD

- June
6/10 Mt. Pleasant, MI
 Soaring Eagle Casino
6/11-12 Red Wing, MN
 Treasure Island Casino
6/13 Mahanomen, MN
 218-935-2701
 Shooting Star Casino
6/16-17 Sault Sainte Marie, MI
 906-632-0530
 Kewadin Casino
6/18 Bayfield, WI
 Big Top Chautauqua
6/19 Wisconsin Dells, WI
 800-696-7999
 608-254-4545
 Crystal Grand Theatre
6/20 Marinette, WI
 Country Music Fest.

WADE HAYES

- June
6/13 Rossville, GA
 706-866-5681
 Lake Winnepesaukee
6/26 Grand Junction, CO
 800-530-3020
 Country Jam USA

- July
7/10 Strausstown, PA
 610-488-1782
 Pat Garrett Music Park
7/11 Webster, MA
 508-943-3871
 Indian Ranch

- 7/15** Sevierville, TN
 Governor's Palace
7/16 St. Clairsville, OH
 800-624-5456
 Jamboree in the Hills

FAITH HILL

- June
6/27 Cadott, WI
 715-289-4401
 Chippewa Valley Country
 Fest.
 July
7/10 Saratoga Springs, NY
 518-782-1474
 Saratoga Harness Track
7/18 Twin Lakes, WI
 Country Thunder USA

GEORGE JONES

- June
6/10 Prior Lake, MN
 612-445-9000
 Mystic Lake Celebrity
 Palace
6/12 Sharp's Chapel, TN
 Sharp's Chapel Park
6/17 Houston, TX
 713-988-1020
 Houston Arena Theatre
6/18 Helotes, TX
 210-695-8827
 John T. Floore Country
6/19 Marksville, LA
 Grand Casino Avoyelles

- July
7/3 Hurricane Mills, TN
 Loretta Lynn Ranch
7/16 Sault Sainte Marie, MI
 906-632-0530
 Kewadin Casino

TOBY KEITH

- June
6/4 Double Springs, AL
 Looney's Amph.
6/5 Conyers, GA
 404-249-8300
 404-785-6900
 Georgia Int'l. Horse Park



Vince Gill

VINCE GILL

- July
7/24 Stateline, NV
 702-588-3515
 Caesars Tahoe
7/9 Universal City, CA
 818-622-4444
 Universal Amph.
7/10 Temecula, CA
 Pechanga Ent. Ctr.
7/11 Santa Barbara, CA
 805-568-2665
 Santa Barbara Bowl

On the Road Again...

- 6/19 Saginaw, MI
Ojibway Island St. Park
800-530-3020
- 6/25 Grand Junction, CO
Country Jam USA
- 6/26 Manhattan, KS
800-795-8091
Country Stampede
- 6/27 Petaluma, CA
707-763-0931
Sonoma-Marin Fair

- July
- 7/3 Prescott, AZ
Prescott Frontier Days
Rodeo
- 7/4 Lawton, OK
Polo Field
- 7/10 Saratoga Springs, NY
WGHA Country Fest
- 7/16 Peoria, IL
309-691-6362
Heart of Illinois Fair

- 7/17 Merritt, BC Canada
604-860-1470
604-280-4444
Merritt Mountain Music
- 7/18 Eau Claire, WI
715-839-7500
Country Jam USA

SAMMY KERSHAW

- June
- 6/18 Springfield, MO
Route 66 Country Music
Fest.
- 6/25 Richland Ctr., WI
Kros Koup Park
- 6/27 Oshkosh, WI
Country USA
- July
- 7/4 Greeley, CO
303-356-7787
Greeley Stampede
- 7/8 Ft. Laramie, OH
513-295-3820
Hickory Hill

MARTINA MCBRIDE

- June
- 6/12 Bosqueville, TX
Brentwood Farms
- 6/18 Myrtle Beach, SC
803-272-5758
Alabama Theatre
- 6/19 Pigeon Forge, TN
Governor's Palace
- 6/25 Bay City, MI
Bay City River Roor
- 6/26 Suttons Bay, MI
Leelanau Sands Casino
- 6/27 Oshkosh, WI
Country USA

- July
- 7/3 Albertville, AL
Albertville Recreation Ctr.
- 7/9 Warren, MO
314-456-4364
Warren Cty. Fair
- 7/10 Ft. Laramie, OH
513-295-3820
Hickory Hill
- 7/16 Uncasville, CT
Mohegan Sun Casino

NEAL MCCOY

- June
- 6/5 Birmingham, AL
Civic Ctr.
- 6/12 Deerfield, OH
Midwest Country Fest
- 6/19 Lockbourne, OH
Hoover Y Park
- 6/23 West Fargo, ND
701-282-7029
Red River Valley Fair
- 6/25 Oshkosh, WI
Sunny View Expo Ctr.
- 6/26 Cadott, WI
715-289-4401
Chippewa Valley Country
Fest.
- 6/27 Centreville, VA
Bull Run Jamboree
- July
- 7/4 Dauphin, Man. Canada
Dauphin Countryfest
- 7/9 Ft. Laramie, OH
513-295-3820
Hickory Hill
- 7/11 Rhinelander, WI
715-369-1300
Hodag Country Fest.

TIM MCGRAW

- June
- 6/5 Pontiac, MI
313-858-7358
Pontiac Silverdome
- 6/6 Pittsburgh, PA
Three Rivers Stadium
- 6/19 Springfield, MO
Route 66 Country Music
Fest.
- 6/27 Cadott, WI
715-289-4401
Chippewa Valley Country
Fest.
- July
- 7/16 Seymour, WI
414-833-2941
Outagamie Cty. Fair
- 7/18 Twin Lakes, WI
Country Thunder USA

JOHN MICHAEL MONTGOMERY

- June
- 6/12 Winstead, MN
Country Music Fest
- 6/19 Eldon, IA
515-652-7521
Wapello Cty. Fair
- 6/20 Springfield, MO
Route 66 Country Music
Fest.
- 6/25 Manhattan, KS
800-795-8091
Country Stampede
- July
- 7/2 Greeley, CO
303-356-7787
Greeley Stampede
- 7/9 Ft. Laramie, OH
513-295-3820
Hickory Hill



Toby Keith

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STRAIGHT TALK FROM THE STARS

On the Road Again...

LORRIE MORGAN

June

- 6/18** Cohasset, MA
617-383-1400
South Shore Music Circus
- 6/19** Warwick, RI
401-821-7300
Warwick Musical Theatre

July

- 7/4** Garland, TX
Star Spangled 4th

WILLIE NELSON

June

- 6/17** Telluride, CO
Music Fest
- 6/18-19** Laughlin, NV
702-298-2535
Riverside Resort Hotel
- 6/20** Saratoga, CA
Historic Mountain Winery
- 6/21** Stockton, CA
209-466-5041
San Joaquin Cty. Fair
- 6/23-27** Las Vegas, NV
Orleans Casino

July

- 7/1** Greenville, SC
Peace Ctr.
- 7/2** Antioch, TN
615-641-5888
First American Music Ctr.

SAWYER BROWN

June

- 6/5** Conyers, GA
404-249-8300
785-6900
Georgia Int'l. Horse Park
- 6/24** Oshkosh, WI
Country USA
- 6/25** Cadott, WI
715-289-4401
Chippewa Valley Country Fest
- 6/26** Manhattan, KS
800-795-8091
Country Stampede

July

- 7/4** Phoenix, AZ
Wesley Bolin Plaza
- 7/9** Rhinelander, WI
715-369-1300
Hodag Country Fest.
- 7/10** Tomah, WI
608-372-2861
Monroe Cty. Fair

DARYLE SINGLETARY

June

- 6/10-12** Laughlin, NV
702-298-4600
Harrah's Laughlin
- 6/27** Cadott, WI
715-289-4401
Chippewa Valley Country Fest

July

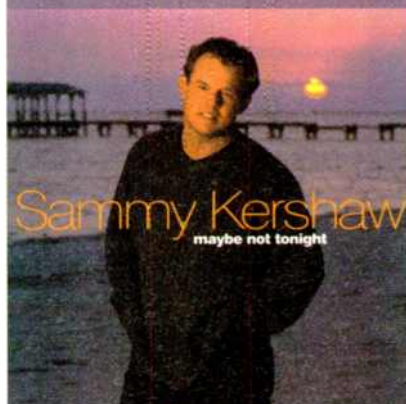
- 7/12** Mineral Wells, WV
304-489-2940
WV Interstate Fair

RICKY SKAGGS

June

- 6/5** Preston, CT
Strawberry Park
- 6/12** Winder, GA
Gospel Fest
- 6/15** Santa Rosa, CA
707-527-7006
Luther Burbank Ctr.
- 6/16** Saratoga, CA
408-741-3421
Villa Montalva Ctr.
- 6/19** Telluride, CO
Bluegrass Fest
- 6/26** Summersville, WV
Music In The Mountains
- 6/27** Pigeon Forge, TN
423-428-9433
423-428-9492
Dollywood Celebrity Theatre

Sammy Kershaw



Featuring the single, "Maybe Not Tonight"

(a duet with Lorrie Morgan)

"Keith found a way to bring out something on this album that I hadn't brought out yet. I think a lot of people are going to like this album when they hear it, and see that it is a little different."

- Sammy Kershaw

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Produced by Keith Stegall
Go Tell Management

www.mercurynashville.com



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ALLISON MOORER

"I grew up listening to classic country artists like Merle Haggard and Tammy Wynette, as well as renegades like Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings and Emmylou Harris. When we set about making my debut album, Alabama Song, we tried to embrace all the qualities of the music which has influenced and inspired me so much, while making it totally my own. The result is... well, I'll let you decide."

MCA NASHVILLE

On the Road Again...

AARON TIPPIN

- June
- 6/4 Newport, AR
Jackson Port State Park
 - 6/12 Grenada, MS
Thunder On The Water
 - 6/19 Allegan, MI
616-673-6501
Allegan Cty. Fair
 - 6/26 Jackson, NJ
908-928-2000
Six Flags Great Adventure
 - 6/27 Centreville, VA
Bull Run Jamboree

RICKY VAN SHELTON

- June
- 6/25-26 Jackpot, NV
702-458-7798
Cactus Pete's
- July
- 7/3 Meeker, CO
Meeker Range Call
 - 7/10 Hamilton, ND
Pembina Cty. Fair

STEVE WARINER

- June
- 6/4 San Antonio, TX
Far West Rodeo
 - 6/5 Fort Worth, TX
817-624-7117
Billy Bob's
 - 6/20 Syracuse, NY
315-487-7711
New York State Fair
 - 6/26 Nashville, IN
513-738-1241
812-988-2235
Little Nashville Opry



Bryan White

- 6/27 Cadott, WI
715-289-4401
Chippewa Valley Country Fest.

- July
- 7/3 Greeley, CO
303-356-7787
Greeley Stampede

BRYAN WHITE

- June
- 6/5 Myrtle Beach, SC
803-272-5758
Alabama Theatre
 - 6/12 Cumming, GA
770-887-7464
Lanierland Music Park
 - 6/18 Elizabethtown, KY
Freeman Lake Park

- 8/19 Renfro Valley, KY
800-765-7464
Renfro Ent. Ctr.
- 6/26 Sullivan, MO
Meramec Comm. Fair

- July
- 7/4 Grande Prairie, Alb.
Canada
Evergreen

MARK WILLS

- June
- 6/5 Pontiac, MI
313-858-7358
Pontiac Silverdome
 - 6/6 Pittsburgh, PA
Three Rivers Stadium

- 6/11 Crosby, TX
Crosby Fair
- 6/12 Fort Worth, TX
817-624-7117
Billy Bob's
- 6/19 Monroe, NC
Old Monroe Fairgrounds
- 6/24 Cadott, WI
715-289-4401
Chippewa Valley Country Fest.
- 6/26 Denver, CO
303-295-2353
Grizzly Rose
- 6/27 Grand Junction, CO
800-530-3020
Country Jam USA

- July
- 7/3 Campbeltown, PA
Fireman's Grounds

LEE ANN WOMACK

- June
- 6/5 Renfro Valley, KY
800-765-7464
Renfro Ent. Ctr.
 - 6/6 Pigeon Forge, TN
423-428-9433
423-428-9492
Oollywood Celebrity Theatre
 - 6/11 Kennesaw, GA
Cowboys
 - 6/12 Nashville, IN
513-738-1241
812-988-2235
Little Nashville Opry
 - 6/19 Saginaw, MI
Ojibway Island St. Park

- 6/26 Cadott, WI
715-289-4401
Chippewa Valley Country Fest
- 7/10 Rhinelander, WI
715-369-1300
Hodag Country Fest.

NOTE: This concert listing contains the most up-to-date tour itineraries at the time of publication. *Country Music* is not in control of where and/or when an artist performs in a specific area or venue. Dates are subject to change without notice, so please check with the venue before traveling. If no telephone number is listed, we recommend contacting your local TicketMaster office listed in your telephone directory. If you come across an area code change and wish to share it with other readers, please send the complete venue name and location with the new telephone number by e-mail to: updates@thecrusader.net or mail to: Venue Updates, P.O. Box 120872, Nashville, TN 37212-0872. Tour dates are provided by Sheri Rettew.

STRAIGHT TALK FROM THE STARS

MARK WILLS

Featuring
 "I Do (Cherish You)"
 "Don't Laugh At Me"
 and
 "Wish You Were Here"

Available wherever music is sold
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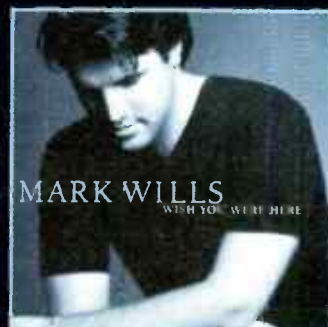
Produced by Keith Stegall and Carson Chamberlain

Star Ray Managonis



"I want each song to sound the best it possibly can and I want each album to be better than the last. It's a ladder that you have to climb. I think this album achieves that. The success of "I Do Cherish You", "Don't Laugh At Me" and "Wish You Were Here" mean a lot to me on a personal level. I get emotionally involved in the song and I want to share that with the listener. Music is all about emotion; heart-break, love, fun and sadness. What I want to share with the listener is the emotion."

Mark Wills



NASHVILLE

Ripley, Believe It or Not

TRACTORS' FRONTMAN STEVE RIPLEY DIGS DOGS, SWING MUSIC AND MUNCHIES.

With the mammoth success of their 1994 single "Baby Likes to Rock It," as well as their self-titled multi-platinum debut album, the Tractors furrowed the country landscape with a refreshing, roots-bound sound. Members of the group had been in demand as veteran sidemen for such artists as Bob Dylan, Linda Ronstadt and Eric Clapton. The Oklahoma band's left-field hit status surprised even lead singer Steve Ripley. "We got together to do this thing...then our album is released and it's a big hit," says Ripley. "Suddenly we're scratching our heads saying, 'What the heck is going on?'"

Last fall the Tractors released their eclectic second album, *Farmers in a Changing World*. Real-life former tractor operator and sometime philosopher Ripley recently plowed through some questions with us.

Which song do you wish you had written?

Well, all of them. My favorite is a Hank Williams song, "Why Don't You Love Me (Like You Used to Do)." That song is everything to me, really. It's funny, it's a love song, it's twisted. Everything from the music to the chord structure and melody to the lyrics—which I consider the right kind of clever—is just dead on.

Why do dogs chase cars?

Well, truthfully, it's because they can. It's a skill that comes naturally, and they're really good at it. If we all just did what came naturally and what we're good at, life would be perfect.

What's the best cure for boredom?

I simultaneously play the guitar and watch TV. In my house, there's never a guitar far away. It's really an adult pac fier.

Which movie have you watched the most times?

Dr. Zhivago. I also love *Groundhog Day*, when I'm in a bit lighter mood.

Why do you think the big-band swing sound is coming back again?

It really is a great musical form. When

our first record came out, people would ask "What's all that 'do-de-bop-de-bop' stuff going on?" And I'd say, "Louis Prima." And they'd say, "Who's that?"

This generation has not heard big-band before, and to them, it's as if it had just been invented. I tend to draw on this analogy: If you could find someone who's never eaten a chocolate chip cookie, and you give them one, chances are they're gonna like it. Same thing with this kind of music.

Also, inescapably, this resurgence of popularity is a fad—something old coming back again. People will move on to the next thing. People who

don't normally wear cowboy boots won't wear them for long, and people who don't normally wear zoot suits probably won't wear those for long, either.

Makes you wonder what the next fad might be.

Well, if I knew that, I'd change over to the stock market business!

Do you eat to live or live to eat?

Too often, I live to eat. When you're on the road, other than playing your one hour on stage, there's really not much else to do. With the Tractors, it's the "Let's-Get-Something-to-Eat Tour." I'd like to think it's partly the social gathering aspect, as well. I mean, if we all had to catch, clean and cook a fish each time we wanted to eat, we'd eat a lot less!

If you could travel back in a time machine, where would you stop off?

I'd go back to meet Jesus. I'd wanna go to the source, I think.

Who was the best James Bond?

Sean Connery. Is there really any debate on this? This is my kind of interview—Jesus and James Bond! *



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