

February 1976, One Dollar

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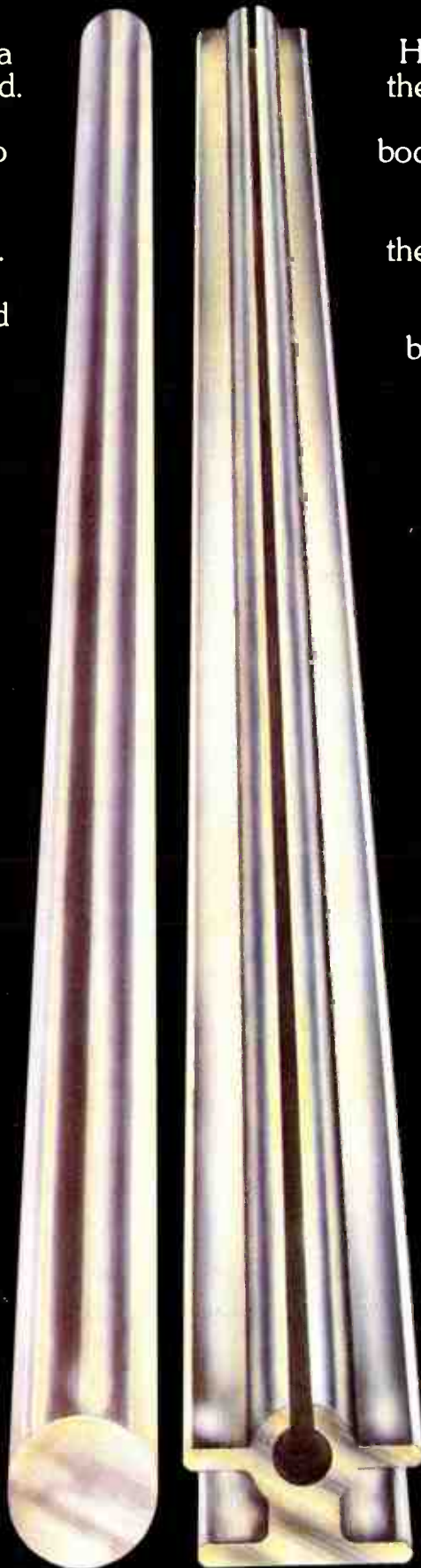
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John Killion

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**Editor:**  
Patrick Carr

**Art Director:**  
Cheh Nam Low

**Managing Editor:**  
Martha Hume

**Associate Editor:**  
Madine Singer

**Reviews Editor:**  
Nick Tosches

**Designer:**  
Gail Einert

**Contributors:**  
Audrey Winters  
J.R. Young  
Dave Hickey

**Advertising Sales Director:**  
Steve Goldstein

**Circulation Director:**  
John D. Hall

**Circulation Assistant:**  
Lynn Russoillo

**Director: Direct Marketing:**  
Anthony Bunting

**Direct Marketing Assistant:**  
Eileen Bell

**Administrative Manager:**  
Gloria Thomas

**Administrative Assistants:**  
Frieda Dazet, Rochelle Freidman

**Executive, Editorial and Advertising Offices,**  
475 Park Avenue South, 16th Floor, New York, New York 10016  
(212) 685-8200  
John K. Killion, President  
W. Beattie, Treasurer  
S. Gross, Secretary

**West Coast (Advertising)**  
The Leonard Company  
6355 Topanga Canyon Blvd., #307  
Woodland Hills, California 91364  
213-340-1270

**Chicago (Advertising)**  
National Advertising Sales  
400 North Michigan Avenue  
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COVER PHOTO: JAY GOOD

# Letters

We were more or less raised on country music. Now, as adults in our late twenties, country still remains our favorite music and always will.

Last night we watched the CMA Awards and were sorely disappointed in some of the winners. Naming John Denver Entertainer of the Year, for instance. We know that times change and music has to change too, but country stays country. To us, John Denver does not embody country music.

If that were not enough, one of our favorites, Charlie Rich, had to come on stage giving all appearances of being stoned. If he was not, it was in poor taste to act that way, and if he was, that was even poorer taste.

However, it is Waylon we're really concerned with. Just because he chooses to keep some privacy in his life, be a nonconformist, and have a rough-looking appearance, plus a rough-looking band, it seems that Nashville has a tendency to turn its back on him. We were really irritated with Tanya's remark about Waylon's "song from the underground." We think Waylon is great, and is long past due an award. Hurray for last night—he deserves it. We'd like to know who told him to "be nice," and why?

It looks like Nashville would be better off "seeing to" those who call themselves country but are really only pop and rock people and don't know what country is all about.

MR. & MRS. BILL HANNAH  
PINEBLUFF, ARK.

After watching the CMA Awards I've decided I don't want to be a country music fan anymore. Most of the awards were a joke! Freddy Fender—single of the year—sings like his undershorts are too tight! Waylon Jennings, male vocalist of the year, they should have given him a bath instead of an award. Willie Nelson looked like a real screwball. "What a talent." If anything ever happens to his nose his singing career is over. The selection of John Denver as Entertainer of the Year was ridiculous. He's not even a country singer. If he is how about Peter, Paul &

Mary or The Kingston Trio for Vocal Group?

What has happened to country music? It's a shame. I used to really enjoy it.

BOB WALLACE  
GAMBRIOLLO, MD.

The Country Music Association is sick. Last year it was Olivia Newton John, who sounds like a sophisticated rest room. During the awards show she left the country, and they felt it was necessary to cram her down our throats.

This year it's John Denver, who sounds like a club sandwich served in the rest room. How in good conscience can he be the Entertainer of the Year? We get to see Denver in front of the T.V. cameras, grinning like a skunk chasing a bumble bee across a plowed field on a frosty morning. The guilt of his pilferage must have caused him to leave the country.

If they can't put on a country show, with country artists, then cancel the show. Perhaps they could learn from the *Music City News Awards*, which are chosen by the fans. Remember them, they are the people who have been forgotten.

STEVE KAVAJECZ  
MADISON, WIS.

I love all types of music. I think that John Denver writes and sings some fantastic songs. However, I just don't understand what is going on in Nashville. I do not recognize John Denver as the Country Music Entertainer of the Year.

ROBERT B. WHITE  
BOULDER, COL.

It's about time! We Waylon fans have waited too long.

You've won, Waylon. Keep going.

M.L. CANGIANO  
HAWTHORNE, N.J.

I believe the time has arisen that the CMA should set some personal guidelines for artists appearing on the Country Music Associations Awards night.

It should be stated in simple terms

to all appearing on the show, that there will be no drinking or drugs before the show, or they will not be allowed to appear.

The conduct of Charlie Rich was deplorable. He gave the impression of being drunk.

Now it has come out in newsprint that Mr. Rich was suffering from a poisonous spider bite and was under the influence of medication. If this is true then why wasn't he prevented from appearing? Those backstage surely were aware of his condition.

Another thing that was distasteful was the expletive that Glen Campbell used after Waylon Jennings won his award.

It is my opinion this was one of the worst CMA awards presentations to date. Country music is something to be proud of. However, this type of conduct will certainly cast dark shadows. Country music's foundation is bible-principled fans.

MARILYN DARNALL  
BURKBURNETT, TEX.

You're sticking your neck out too much. In July a Roy Rogers drag; November, Elvis Presley, and about every third copy, Johnny Cash. Better get back to the real thing (like the boys in Austin and maybe ole Tom T. now and again.)

BOB HILBURN  
TYLERTOWN, MASS.

As a long-time, totally devoted Tom T. Hall fan, I've become a firm believer in the man's intelligence and integrity . . . as well as his professional proficiency as a songwriter/recording artist/performer.

I'm writing to express much gratitude for the unbiased interview published in December's issue. Hopefully, this article will serve to inform the country music community of the wrong-doing which was perpetrated on the man; to dispel any controversial speculation which arose; also, to assure folks Tom will continue to express his views as he sees 'em!

BERNA A. LASHLEY  
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# People on the Scene

Blackwoods Lost in Missouri  
Elvis's Dog Hospitalized  
Thieves Take Kinky's Oysters

by AUDREY WINTERS



Photo: Alanna Nash



Photo: Charlyn Zlotnik

Dolly Parton and Emmylou Harris greet friends backstage at the taping of the Grand Ole Opry's 50th show. As for Freddy, he just wants to go home, drink a beer, and watch his dog chase cars.

The 1975 Country Music Association Awards show, televised on CBS, seems to have been a huge success. Playing against NBC's World Series broadcast, the CMA show was rated 10 for the week ending Oct. 19 by the A.C. Nielsen organization . . . Meanwhile, Cajun producer **Huey Meaux**, who was voted "Producer of the Single of the Year," got to meet **Ernest Tubb**, one of his idols, at the CMA Banquet and Show. His comment: "I could die happy if I could know that Ernest Tubb and Fats Domino would be my pallbearers."

The 50th Anniversary of the Grand Ole Opry was equally successful. ABC television filmed the show for a special . . . **Mrs. Billy Grammer**, an expert seamstress, made a king-sized "Golden Anniversary Quilt" in honor of the birthday. The center of the quilt contains the Opry's logo, and autographs from Opry members are interwoven in the

pattern. The quilt will be on display at the Opry house. . . . Also hung in the Opry house will be a wooden poster mat of the type used in the forties to promote road shows. The poster, of Daddy Bluegrass himself, **Bill Monroe**, was discovered a few weeks ago between two partitions at the Ryman . . . .

The ladies are beginning to notice **Freddy Fender**. **Barbi Benton's** first question to Freddy when she met him at a Playboy Records show was "How does it feel to be a Mexican?" Freddy's answer: "Well, I can go into a restaurant now and order a hamburger." Then, **Dolly Parton**, remarking on the way Freddy shakes his head when he sings, said "If I shook my head like Freddy, my hair would be hanging on one of those rafters up there." Meanwhile, Freddy himself has announced that he and his wife are expecting a new baby about April of this year. After

winning his award for "Single of the Year," Freddy told his producer, "Don't put me through that again. I was so nervous. I just want to go home and sit on my front porch, drink a beer and watch my dog chase cars." We're with you on that one Freddy.

**Dick Curless**, in the midst of making a comeback from his home base in Bangor, Maine, recently underwent extensive emergency surgery in Portland. Dick has suffered from three ulcers for a while and when he went into the hospital for tests, doctors decided to operate immediately. They removed half of his stomach, his gall bladder, a benign cyst, and his appendix. A spokeswoman for Dick reports that he is now recuperating at home and plans to be back on the road soon . . . . **Barbara Cash**, ex-wife of **Tommy Cash**, (the two are dating again) was admitted to a Nashville hospital in serious condition suffering from an overdose of sleeping



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El Paso; Don't Worry; Ballad Of The Alamo; Like All The Other Times; Is There Any Chance; Ride, Cowboy, Ride; A Time And A Place For Everything; Streets Of Laredo; Saddle Tramp; I Told My Heart; Red River Valley; Big Iron.

**MARTY ROBBINS HITS - CS-8639 - SPECIAL \$2.98**  
A White Sport Coat; The Story Of My Life; Ain't I The Lucky One; The Last Time I Saw My Heart; Long Tall Sally; The Blues Country Style; The Hanging Tree; Sittin' In A Tree House; She Was Only Seventeen; Singing The Blues; Knee Deep In The Blues; Aloha'70.

**JIMMIE RODGERS - ANLI-1209 - SPECIAL \$2.98**  
Jimmie Rodgers' Last Blue Yodel; Mississippi Moon; My Rough And Rowdy Ways; Blue Yodel No. 9; My Blue Eyed Jane; The One Rose; Southern Cannonball; Long Tall Mama Blues; In The Jailhouse Now No. 2; Peach Pickin' Time Down In Georgia; Blue Yodel No. 1; Travelin' Blues; Mule Skinner Blues; My Carolina Sunshine Girl; The Brakeman's Blues; Away Out On The Mountain.

**ROY ROGERS AND DALE EVANS - SM-1745 \$2.98**  
The Bible Tells Me So; Whispering Hoops; Just A Closer Walk With Thee; In The Sweet By And By; There'll Be Peace In The Valley; Pass Me Not; It Is No Secret; Amazing Grace; Take My Hand Precious Lord; The Love Of God; I'd Rather Have Jesus; How Great Thou Art.

**SONS OF THE PIONEERS - ANLI-1092 - \$2.98**  
Cool Water; Wind; Cowboy's Dream; The Last Round-Up; Ridin' Home; Twilight On The Trail; Red River Valley; Wagon Wheels; Riders In The Sky; Blue Prairie; Way Out There; Empty Saddles; Tears Drop In My Heart; Blue Shadows On The Trail; Ridin' Down The Canyon; Timber Trail; Tumbling Tumbleweeds; Whoopie-Ti-Yi-You.

**CONNIE SMITH - ANLI-1206 - SPECIAL \$2.98**  
Just One Time; The Hurtin' All Over; Just For What I Am; Once A Day; Cincinnati, Ohio; Ribbon Of Darkness; White Is My Castle; Baby's Back Again; Run Away Little Tears.

**CARL SMITH - CS 8737 - SPECIAL \$2.98**  
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**KAY STAR - SM 11323 - SPECIAL \$2.98**  
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Oklahoma Hills; Wake Up, Irene; Shot-Gun Boogie; Humpty Dumpty; Deep In The Heart Of Texas; Wabash Cannon Ball; Squaws Along The Yukon; Whoa Sailor; Total Strangers; Rub-A-Dub-Dub; Rockin' In The Congo; No Help Wanted.

**MERLE TRAVIS - SM 2662 - SPECIAL \$2.98**  
Sweet Temptation; Sixteen Tons; Follow Thru; John Henry; Three Times Seven; Fat Girl; I'm A Natural Born Gambler; Man; Dark As A Dungeon; I'm Sick And Tired Of You Little Da.Lin'; Nine Pound Hammer; Steel Guitar Rag; I Am A Pilgrim.

**MAC WISEMAN - ANLI-1208 - SPECIAL \$2.98**  
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**PORTER WAGONER - ANLI-1213 SPECIAL \$2.98**  
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pill. A spokeswoman for Buddy Lee, Tommy's manager, says Barbara is recovering satisfactorily . . . . Meanwhile, Tommy's famous brother **Johnny Cash** had to cancel a performance for Egyptian President **Anwar Sadat** at the White House because he was suffering from muscle spasms in the back and neck. The doctor told Johnny to cancel all engagements for two weeks . . . . Also on the sick list is **Byron Metcalf**, husband of **Dottie West**, who underwent major abdominal surgery recently. He is home now and receiving some visitors . . . . On a lighter note (sort of), Colleen Mills, **Waylon Jennings'** secretary, remarking on a fall which resulted in two broken arms for a visitor to Glaser Productions, where Waylon has his offices, said, "That's the first time I've heard of two big breaks in the music business in one day!" . . . . **Elvis Presley's** 10-month-old dog, **Getlo**, is home from the hospital too. Getlo was suffering from kidney problems.



Webb Pierce beat City Hall and kept his tourist attraction, but he's still battling Ray Stevens.

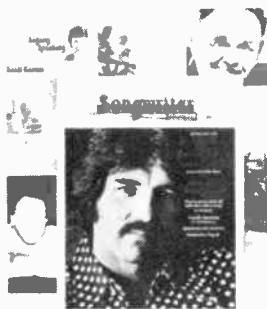
**Webb Pierce** came out the winner in a suit filed against him by the citizens of the City of Oak Hill, who had sought to prevent Pierce from letting tourists



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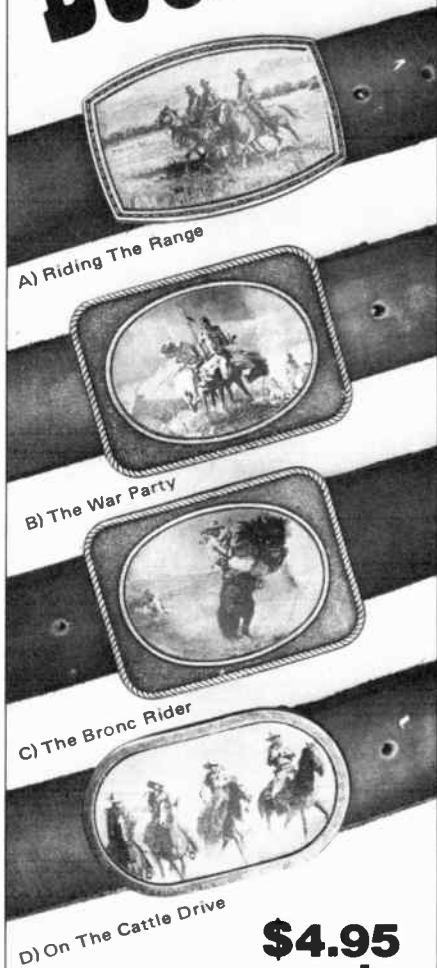
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visit his home on Curtiswood Lane. Webb's still not entirely out of the legal soup, however, because neighbor **Ray Stevens** (Harold Ragsdale) is pursuing his suit to prevent Pierce from building a concrete ramp to his house. That one's now in the hands of the Court of Appeals . . . . Meanwhile, **Willie Nelson** and Crackerjack Productions (which staged Willie's Fourth of July Picnic) have been charged with violating the Texas Mass Gathering Act. No trial date has been set.

**R.W. Blackwood**, of the **Blackwood Singers**, who was recently injured when he tried to shake hands with fans through an electrified fence, is still having problems. The Blackwoods showed up for a date in Ironton, Mo., and while sitting in a cafe, encountered the promoter of the show who asked where they were playing. "I thought I was playing here," said R.W. "No," said the promoter, "You're playing here next year." Sure enough, when R.W. checked his contract, he found that the Blackwoods were supposed to be in Ironton, Ohio, that night. Since the Ohio date was 625 miles east of Ironton, Mo., local groups filled in on the show. Anyone willing to donate a roadmap to the Blackwoods?

In last month's "People on the Scene" column we reported that **Dolly Parton** was writing the soundtrack for **Roy Rogers'** new movie. We were wrong. **Waylon Jennings** is working on the soundtrack. Apologies to Waylon, Dolly and Roy.

"Mom" **Stoneman**, wife of country music pioneer **Ernest V. "Pop" Stoneman** and mother of 23 children, celebrated her 75th birthday recently. Mrs. Stoneman accompanied her husband to New York in 1927 for their first electrical Edison session. She sang on the session and this means she is one of the first women in country music to ever record . . . . Another veteran entertainer, **Kirk McGee**, has decided to continue his career as a single act following the death of his brother **Sam**. Kirk is working on material for an album to be out later this year . . . . And **Don Gibson** has re-joined the Grand Ole Opry. Don was a member in the late fifties and early sixties. The new Don is sporting a beard and wearing a cape now.

Thieves have struck two entertainers on the road recently. **Ray Pillow's** guitar, credit cards, and billfold were

stolen from his Tampa, Florida, motel room. The thief left Ray's clothes, but took the clothes of the lodger next door . . . . In Houston, **Kinky Friedman**, who's cutting his third album with **Huey Meaux** producing, was cornered by two armed men in his motel room. The assailants took Kinky's diamond horseshoe pinkie ring, some cash, the lyrics to a new Kinky song called "Asshole From El Paso," and an unopened jar of oysters. "It was scary," Kinky told *Rolling Stone*. "It almost made a Christian out of me." At last report, however, Kinky's band was still called "the Jewboys."

Death has struck two more country music entertainers. **Doug Renauld**, 28, former drummer for **Bill Anderson's** Po' Boys, and more recently a member of the Possum Hollow Band, was killed instantly when his car crashed off a bridge as he was returning home from a show. Bill was so broken up over the death that he couldn't sing a song for Doug at the Opry and had to ask the Po' Boys to play without him . . . . **Ike Everly**, country entertainer and father of **Don** and **Phil Everly**, died in Nashville in October. The Everly family moved to Nashville from Muhlenburg County, Kentucky, when Don and Phil formed the Everly Brothers act.

**Glen Campbell's** San Diego house is up for sale—for a reported \$3 million. Glen and his wife split up recently . . . .



Splitville for Glen: Want to buy a house?

And, there are reports that all is not well with **Mac Davis** and his wife **Sarah**.

**Roy Acuff** and his wife went to see *Jaws* the other day. When asked how he enjoyed the movie, Roy replied, "It's the first movie I've understood completely in a long time." Eat you heart out Robert Altman. ■

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# COUNTRY NEWS

## 'MISS AUDREY' DEAD AT 52



"Miss Audrey" by Hank's gravesite a year ago. A younger Audrey smiles right.

While flowers wilted in the steaming, unseasonable November heat, old friends gathered in Montgomery, Alabama, to pay their last respects to the widow of a country music giant, and lay one more portion of the Hank Williams legend to rest.

"One of these days all you entertainers are going to play your last gigs," eulogized the Rev. Bob Harrington, the flashy "Chaplain of Bourbon Street," and close friend of the late Audrey Williams. "Audrey Williams tried to do her thing as only Audrey Williams could do her thing."

Audrey Mae Sheppard Williams, 52, ex-wife of Hank Williams and one of the legend's chief perpetrators, died Tuesday, Nov. 7, in Nashville.

Her death came during a time of trouble. Her son, Hank Jr. had recently suffered a fall in a hunting accident which left him with several broken bones and almost no face. The Internal

Revenue Service was moving in on her holdings and reportedly was preparing to seize her home. And, only a week before her death, a Nashville judge had ruled that Billie Jean Berlin Horton was in fact the common law wife of Hank Sr., and thus would own half of the copyright renewal rights to Hank's songs, along with Hill and Range Songs. (This ruling is being appealed, according to Wesley H. Rose, president of Fred Rose Music, Inc.)

Williams—"Miss Audrey" to friend and foe alike—had been increasingly despondent and depressed in the weeks before her death, according to friends, and had told Harrington in a recent phone conversation, "I've got the faith I need now, not only to live with, but to die with." Her death was ruled to be a result of natural causes.

"I think she's better off now," a sobbing Lucretia Morris, Miss Audrey's daughter from a previous marriage, told friends at the burial site

in Montgomery's Oakwood Cemetery Annex. "She was so upset these last weeks," added Lucretia, who, earlier had collapsed weeping on her stepfather's towering memorial.

Miss Audrey met Hank at a medicine show and divorced him eight years later, a year before his death. Hank took up with Billie Jean, who faded into relative obscurity with another ill-fated singer, Johnny Horton, and Miss Audrey became the grieving widow of Hank Williams, the legend. She converted her Nashville home into a veritable museum, displaying his guitars, boots, and guns. Just over a year ago, she ran a garage sale of Hank Williams memorabilia.

"I was married to a legend," she said. "I'm letting people come now because I owe it to Hank Sr."

Services at White Chapel Funeral Home and the burial were subdued affairs. Approximately 300 people attended the ceremony, including Alabama Governor and Presidential hopeful George Wallace, who was surrounded by a bevy of Secret Service agents. Long-time family friend and head of the Acuff-Rose publishing empire, Wesley Rose, served as a pall bearer and joined the family behind a curtained partition as Harrington eulogized both Hank and Miss Audrey.

"We, especially this preacher, tend to say 'Live, drink, and be merry.' That's the Bourbon Street philosophy of the people I love," said Harrington. "We tend to forget," he added, "that the rest of the saying is 'for tomorrow, we may die.'"

Harrington finished reciting an old gospel number and, after a short prayer, turned to the yellow rose-covered casket. Doffing an imaginary hat, with an almost Vaudeville step, he extended his arm and sang: "Hey good-lookin', what you got cookin'."

*(Continued on page 20)*

# Hank Williams: the story isn't over

When 30-year-old Nashvillian Chuck Bullard, one of the city's many aspiring songwriters, moved into his Englewood residence, early last year he had little idea of the precious treasure that awaited him in the basement.

"I was cleaning out the bottom of the house," says Bullard with pop-eyes reminiscent of Peter Lorre. "I had to crawl up in a corner and got filthy dirty. There was just a bunch of trash in there—what I thought was trash. What I found was a 1932 grocery sack and stashed in it were a bunch of paper and magazines and this and that."

The moldy grocery sack, bearing the logo of Kroger's Grocery and Baking Co., was apparently stuffed with a

with his guitar sticking out of a replica of his famed grocery bag, I suspected that everything was not as it seemed.

For one thing, what were magazines dated from 1944 to 1947 doing in a 1932 grocery sack, and why would someone who obviously craves publicity wait so many months before telling anyone about his treasure trove?

But here he was, somewhat of a local celebrity now, whetting my appetite for legends with a September, 1947, issue of *Barn Dance* magazine with the words "Mansion on the Hilltop" scribbled across Roy Acuff's familiar smile. Another relic, a March, 1944, edition of *Hillbilly Hit Parade*, is literally covered with lyrics to "Move It on Over," and "I'm a Long Gone Daddy." Hank Williams' signature catches one's eye at the bottom of the page. Every song is signed. Meanwhile, I'm thinking, this guy's entire story wouldn't make sense if it weren't for the fact that the handwriting has been verified by representatives of Acuff-Rose, and Bullard is waving various forms of legal verification in front of me. Remarkably, the songs were probably written before Hank had ever signed a publishing contract. Truth is indeed stranger than fiction.

Bullard says he immediately put the magazines in a bank vault, keeping his secret until he had compiled a song about his hero, Hank Williams. One, entitled, "Memories of the Past," makes its point with lyrics composed from 11 titles of Hank's songs, while another, "A Part of Hank," uses just a couple.

Bullard claims he turned down an offer of \$150,000 for his find because "When you come across a part of Hank Williams who is a legend, it can make a legend out of you."

His main ambition at this point is to give up his construction business and become a full-time songwriter/performer. "There's a key to every door, and whoever signs me might want a part of the books. I've been approached by three different companies about a writer's contract. I have about 400 songs, but I haven't gotten together with the one I want to be with which is Acuff-Rose. I'm a big Hank Williams fan. I write in his style. I sing in his

style. But I'm a self-styled person."

There are still many unanswered questions. Bullard won't say where his house is located, so it is impossible to find out who owned the place at the time when the magazines were stashed. One Nashville theory is that the house served as a boarding house, that Hank might have stayed there, left the songbooks when he moved out and the landlady merely stored them in the basement. After all, the name Hank Williams wasn't exactly a household word at the time. On the other hand, why were the books so well hidden that they weren't discovered for 28 years?

The biggest question, of course, is whether Bullard's collection contains any unpublished Hank Williams songs. Bullard hints that "there's a reason for them being in a vault," but then admits that there are a dozen or so unknown Hank Williams songs and expresses legal concern over the ownership of them.

Dean May, speaking for Fred Rose Music, Inc., the firm that signed Hank in 1948, says Fred Rose music owns the publishing rights on all Hank Williams songs no matter when they were written. Hank, Jr., says Ms. May, has several of his father's unpublished songs which he is thinking of setting to music. If all of this is correct, then it's of no use to Bullard to try to sell the songs themselves because Fred Rose Music would already own them. The books, however, probably are the legal property of Bullard.

"The books have really changed my life," he concluded. "A lot of people just want to see the person who found the books, and it gives me a chance to show people in the music business my songs too. But I value them more than anything else because they've made me a part of Hank Williams. The music business is tough and like I said before you gotta have a key and these books may be mine."

ALVIN COOLEY

*In the October issue of COUNTRY MUSIC the color photo on page 40 was taken by Kit Luce. On page 13 of the November issue photographer Chris Fort's name was misspelled. Our apologies.*



Photo: Frank Empson

Bullard shows off songs signed by his hero.

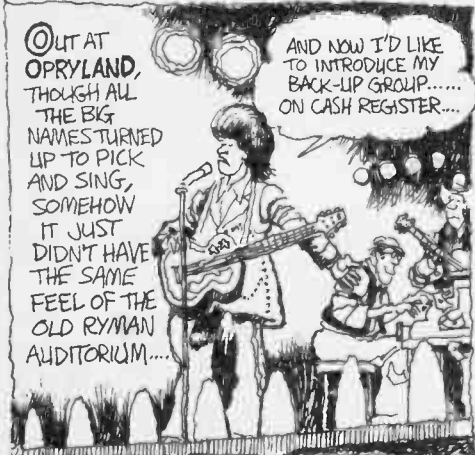
veritable fortune in Hank Williams memorabilia—for scrawled along the borders of many of the yellowed pages were lyrics to songs written in Hank Williams's own handwriting. Bullard explained that "being a songwriter myself I knew what I had found and it just knocked me out."

It wasn't until eight months later Bullard broke news of his discovery to the press. It received widespread local coverage and before I ever met the man, before he ever stood next to me



# COUNTRY NEWS

THE GRAND OLE OPRY IS CELEBRATING ITS FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY THIS YEAR AND THE COUNTRY MUSIC INDUSTRY IS THRIVING, BUT THE FESTIVITIES IN NASHVILLE LOOK LESS LIKE A HOEDOWN AND MORE LIKE A HYPED-UP HOLLYWOOD EXTRAVAGANZA....



OUT AT OPRYLAND, THOUGH ALL THE BIG NAMES TURNED UP TO PICK AND SING, SOMEHOW IT JUST DIDN'T HAVE THE SAME FEEL OF THE OLD RYMAN AUDITORIUM....

AND NOW I'D LIKE TO INTRODUCE MY BACK-UP GROUP.... ON CASH REGISTER....

...MEANWHILE, THE DEEJAY CONVENTION WAS IN TOWN FOR A WEEK OF WHATEVER IT IS DEEJAYS DO WHEN THEY GET TOGETHER.....



HONEY, I WANKHA T'MEET 'COUNTRY' FLOYD OVERDRIVE OF STATION K-O-K-O, 1530 ON YOUR DIAL, COMIN' ATCHA HERE AT (BONG) SEVEN MINUTES PAST THE BIG HOUR OF TEN O'CLOCK. FLOYD'S ANOTHER BLAST FROM THE PAST AND I GUARAN-DOGGONE-TEE YA HE'S SOLID GOLD....



EVEN HUGH HEFNER WAS ON HAND TO THROW A PLAYBOY PARTY FEATURING ENTERTAINMENT BY HIS CENTERFOLD GIRL FRIEND BARBI BENTON.... UH.... SHE SANG....

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YESSIR, THINGS HAVE CHANGED IN THE LAST FIFTY YEARS ON THE MUSIC SCENE IN NASHVILLE.....



1925

AIN'T THE PICKIN' PURTY, MAW?

REAL PURTY, PAW.



1975

THE SINGLE'S AT FORTY-TWO WITH A BULLET ITS SECOND WEEK ON THE CHARTS, AND IF IT'LL ONLY CROSS OVER I'M SURE IT'LL BE A MONSTER!

FAR OUT!



HELLO-CRISIS LINE? I JUST GOT LAID OFF MY JOB, MY WIFE RAN OFF WITH MY BEST FRIEND, MY HOUSE CAUGHT ON FIRE, MY MOTHER'S A JUNKIE, AND AN EARTHQUAKE SWALLOWED UP MY DOG! WHAT AM I GOING TO DO?

COPYRIGHT IT! SOUNDS LIKE YOU'VE GOT A HIT IN THERE SOMEWHERE.

MARLETTE NASHVILLE THE CHAIR, I OBEYED

SOMEBODY OUGHT TO DO A MOVIE!

## SPEARS SCORE IN GOSPEL MUSIC AWARDS

The Spear Family's *I Just Feel Like Something Is About to Happen* was honored as best record album of the year at the Gospel Music Association's sixth annual Dove Awards held at the Grand Ole Opry House, September 29.

It was also a big night for the Gaither family—Bill Gaither was voted best songwriter of the year, and the Gaither Trio won as best mixed group. Best song of the year was Neil Enloe's "One Day at a Time." Jeanne Johnson came out tops in the best female vocalist category. Best male vocalist award went to James Blackwood who also won the First Annual Fan Award voted on by GMA's associate members. In addition, two names were added to the Gospel Music Hall of Fame: Brock Spear and the late Fanny ("In Ascen-

tion") Crosby.

Other winners were the Imperials (best male group); Henry Slaughter (best instrumentalist); Jim Black (best DJ); Gospel Singing Jubilee (best TV show); Wendy Bagwell (best backliner notes of a gospel record album—for her

recording, *Bust Out Laffin*); Bob McConell (best graphic layout and design of an album—for *Downings Praise Him Live*); and Spears Photo (best record album cover photo—for their photo on the Blackwood Brothers' *There He Goes*).



Marijohn Wilkin and Imperials' Don Murray get Doves from Jerry and Jeannie.

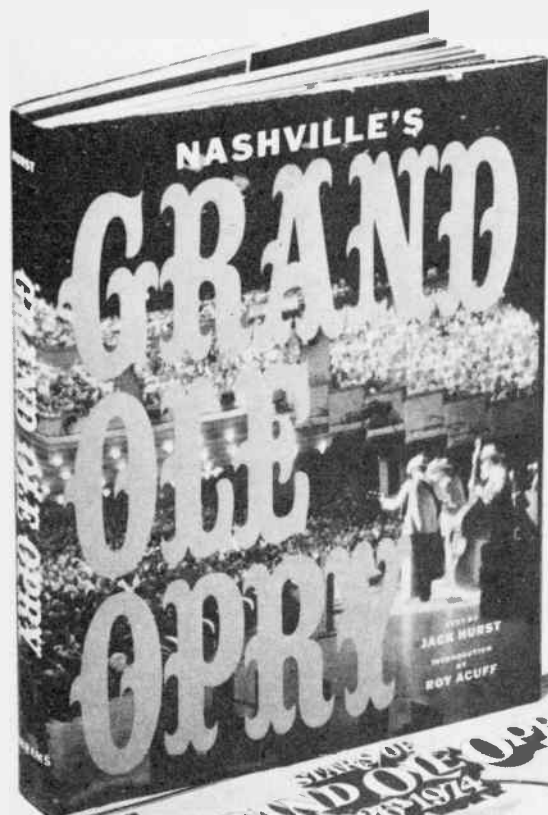


Photo courtesy GMA

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Country Girl  
by Dottie West

Four Walls  
by Jim Reeves

Ribbon Of Darkness  
by Connie Smith

I'm Thinking of My Blue Eyes  
by The Carter Family

Railroadin' and Gamblin'  
by Uncle Dave Macon

Just A Little After Heartaches  
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# Watch This Face:



## ASLEEP AT THE WHEEL

Backstage at the Longhorn Ballroom in Dallas, a place Bob Wills once owned, Jesse Ashlock is rosining up his bow. "Now, I hope you don't expect much," he cautions. "I'm not near as good as I once was, you know." He picks out an old fiddle tune, and rapidly starts improvising in the classic Wills style. If that's not as good as he once was, I don't think I could have taken him at his prime. Suddenly a tall, red-headed and bearded figure walks into the room.

"Hey, Jesse!" a voice booms, "how's it goin'?"

Ashlock brightens. "Hiya Ray!"

Ray's got some union papers under his arm for all the musicians to sign, and they gather around him. "You make sure and sign yourself Mister Al Stricklin now," he tells a stout, sprightly man who turns out to be Bob Wills' legendary pianist.

What's going on here? Asleep At The Wheel's playing Dallas again, that's what.

Wherever this nine-piece swing band plays in Texas, they seem to draw the most diversified crowd this side of Willie Nelson. The hippies come for the country music and instrumental swing

numbers, the oldsters for the Bob Wills tunes, and everybody contra-dances when they play the "Cotton Eye Joe."

"People try and force us into the 'successors of Bob Wills' bag, and we're not really," says Ray Benson, the six-foot-ten (including hat and boots) leader of the band. "I mean, nobody loves Bob's music as much as we do, but when you come right down to it, on an average gig, we only play a couple of Wills numbers, and we do all that straight C&W, and the jazz, and Chris does a spiritual number . . ."

While this diversity may bother the three record companies the group has been with since 1973, it surely doesn't bother their audiences. What other act can rip right from a Loretta Lynn classic to Wynonie Harris' jump-blues "Bloodshot Eyes" to Jesse Ashlock's "The Kind Of Love I Can't Forget" to "Bartender," an original that sounds like something Moe Bandy would record, to a red-hot version of Count Basie's instrumental "Jumpin' At The Woodside"?

Asleep At The Wheel was born on a farm in Paw Paw, West Virginia, where Ray and his boyhood pal Lucky Oceans had moved with songwriter Leroy Pres-

ton and some other folks to get a band together. Since Ray is something of a perfectionist, a number of people came and went during that period, but one who stayed was Chris O'Connell, who played rhythm guitar and sang backup vocals because she didn't think she was good enough to sing lead.

Ray began writing Commander Cody's manager about how good the band was, and the next time Cody played Washington they were invited to play on the bill. Joe Kerr, the manager, was impressed and invited the band to come to California.

The group eventually picked up a steady Tuesday night gig at the Longbranch Saloon in Berkeley. The first Tuesday hardly anybody came, but it wasn't long until they were wowing the owner with capacity crowds.

Packing a club on Tuesday nights is the stuff of legends, and pretty soon the record companies started coming around to take a look. For the most part, they were confused by the band's music, since they'd expected to find



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# COUNTRY NEWS

another country-rock band. But United Artists' Dan Bourgeoise got the message, and in 1973 the Wheel's first (and only) UA album, *Comin' Right At Ya*, was released. It missed.

But the band toured regularly, and found that no matter if the audience was straight country or young urban they went over smashingly well, especially in Texas. They found that they were spending more and more time there, and less and less in Oakland. Saying good-bye to all their old friends with one last bash at the Longbranch, they moved off to Austin. Shortly thereafter, they signed with Epic Records, and a second album, *Asleep At The Wheel*, followed. Once again, bad luck with the record company kept things from really busting loose.

Today, they're signed to Capitol, and their third album, *Texas Gold*, is out. The current line-up of the band consists of Ray (vocals, lead guitar), Chris (vocals, rhythm guitar), Lucky (pedal steel), Leroy Preston (vocals,



Asleep at the Wheel's Leroy Preston rises from coffin to sing "Hello—I'm a Dead Man."

guitar), Floyd Domino (piano), Tony Garnier (bass), Danny Levin (fiddle), Scott Hennige (drums) and Ed "Tejas" Vizard (sax).

A funny thing happened at the Longhorn the night that the Wills alumni sat in. Jesse Ashlock, stunning in a turquoise suit, was fiddling up a storm while Al Stricklin and Floyd played the piano together holding their hands up in the air like boxing champs. I was sitting at a table with Stricklin's son David and a young relative of Bob Wills who had brought a friend along to the show, a young guy with long hair. The friend was upset.

"Listen," he said to me, "you're a music critic and all that. I think I like this music, but I never listened to anything but rock and roll. Is that okay?"

"I thought you had to have some sort of special education to like this stuff," he explained, "but right now, all I want to do is get up and dance."

And the diversity of *Asleep At The Wheel* wins another fan.

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# Freddy pays a visit to jail

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The "arrest" of the Tex-Mex baladeer started a day of activities that focused attention on the plight of Raul Morales, a 78-year-old Mexican national who has served 48 years in the Texas penitentiary without receiving so much as one visitor. A newspaper account of Morales' situation came to the attention of Fender's producer and sidekick, Huey P. Meaux, himself a graduate of the Big House (14 months for violation of the Mann Act), and Fender subsequently volunteered to headline an all-chicano benefit dance that would be held later that evening. But first there was this trip downtown.

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by Bert Rivera, one time pedal steel guitarist for Hank Thompson's Brazos Valley Boys, Fender serenaded close to 225 inmates in five different tanks, or holding areas. His appearance, which inaugurated a local program designed to bring a little outside culture to county prisoners, sparked some uncharacteristic criminal behavior. One man scheduled to give himself up to authorities turned himself in a day early and another delayed his release a few hours in order to hear Fender. During one set, an inmate recognized Freddy from a certain party years ago down in the Rio Grande Valley when the star passed out.

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*(Continued on page 20)*



Photo: Charlyn Zlotnik

Freddy Fender, feeling right at home, at Travis County Jail performance.

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M026

# AUDREY

(Continued from page 13)

At the gravesite, the curious, the sightseers, and the family gathered, and the funeral seemed to be almost as much for Hank Sr. as it was for Miss Audrey. The Chaplain of Bourbon Street prayed at Hank's grave while photographers clicked away. Television cameramen set up their equipment while reporters tried to button-hole anyone who walked by. Hank Williams Jr. himself, only recently out of the hospital, spoke to no one. He arrived looking like death itself, unable to move very well, his mouth wired almost shut, and unable to turn his head fully.

The eulogy continued. "Just a few feet in front of me," said Harrington, "there's enough words for me to preach the rest of my life." Gesturing at Hank's grave, he said, "I'm sure that she was with him when he wrote those songs we remember." With that, he

picked roses from the coffin, presented them to Hank Jr. and Lucretia, and it was over.

The legend once again served, people began to leave. The cemetery is quiet, with only the clanking of trains to disturb the legend at rest. But the quiet is deceptive. Hank Williams—and perhaps Miss Audrey as well—has not really been laid to rest.

The local Montgomery country station still plays one Hank Williams song each afternoon—sometimes one which includes Miss Audrey's painfully poor vocals. And, on the third floor of the Alabama state archives, a glass case of Hank memorabilia shares the floor with pre-Civil War dresses, mastodon bones from God know when, and the wooden leg of one Senator Charlie Tate.

And then, there is Hank's tomb itself, with Audrey's poem carved on the back. It's called "Thank You Darling": *And now I say there are no words in the dictionary that can express my love for you/Someday beyond the blue . . .*

Meanwhile, plans are moving along for a new memorial—a giant cowboy boot overlooking a guitar-shaped pool with the central attraction being Hank himself, dug from beneath his present resting place and transferred to a gaudy new home.

"We've got a couple of hopes of raising the funds in this Bicentennial year," said Judge Richard T. Emmets, the supervisor of Hank's estate and head of the Hank Williams Memorial Commission. The commission needs some \$750,000 to get the 60-foot tall boot off the ground. After six years of work, they're still far from their goal.

The top of the boot, says Judge Emmets, will contain a glass observation tower, overlooking the new tomb and the Alabama countryside. Visitors will also be able to see the Cadillac in which Hank died.

In the meantime, Hank and Audrey Williams will rest together, separated by only a few feet of earth with only a couple of sightseers and a few clanking trains to disturb the quiet.

For a while, at least.

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# FREDDY

(Continued from page 19)

and Wasted Nights" four times.

The man who introduces himself as Baldemar Huerta in addition to his stage name, hadn't forgotten his old cause or his old friends. The benefit in the evening drew a disappointingly small crowd, but the chicanos that did show heaped star status on their native son. The town's most visible country music fan, UT football coach Darrell Royal, came backstage to visit, families lined up for pictures for their photo albums, there was an endless stream of babies for Freddy to kiss, and a sudden population explosion of cousins. "All of a sudden I'm finding these cousins I never knew I had," Fender said.

Despite the fiesta atmosphere Freddy took time to look at the issue from a serious side: "Prison is mostly mental punishment. It's anguish to be locked up and know damn well the next day you're still going to be in there. It ain't no place for anybody to be, I don't care if they put a king size bed in there."

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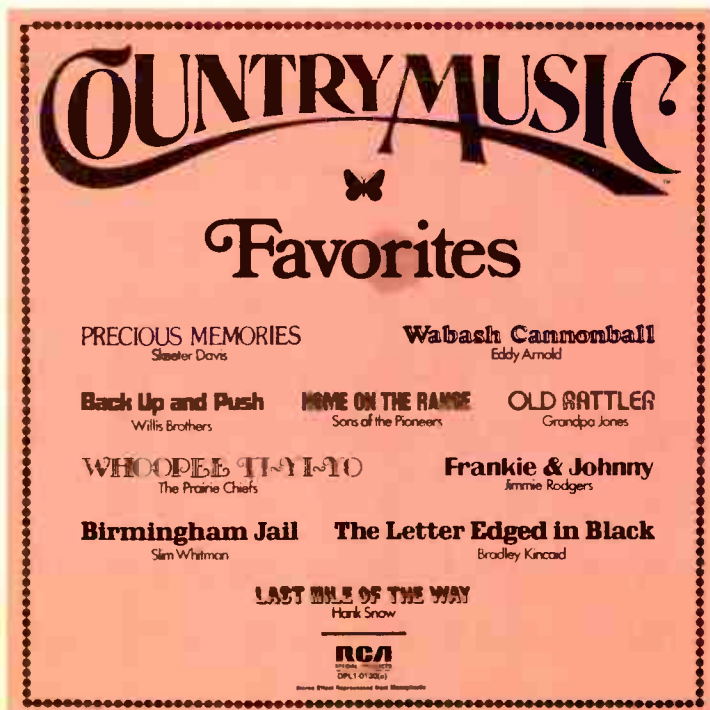
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# THE MAN WHO BEAT THE SYSTEM

by PATRICK CARR

We begin with an ending of sorts. We are in Nashville on a drizzly night, packed into the Municipal Auditorium like so many high-rent sardines approaching the strung-out finale of the Disk Jockey Convention, 1975. Taken together tonight, we are perhaps the most professional audience any of these Columbia/Epic acts are likely to play for at least another year: all of us are Somebodies in the country music business, and we're all hip to the score. The Columbia/Epic acts bounce onstage and do whatever thing they do, three numbers each, one after the other. Tammy Wynette, Mac Davis, Barbara Fairchild, David Houston . . . it's very democratic but pretty soon it becomes obvious which artists are getting the corporate nod right now because all you really have to do is watch the company personnel pay or not pay attention. Nevertheless, it's a subtle affair.

But when Willie Nelson and his band of gypsies make their entrance backstage, looking for all the world like some flying wedge of curiously benign Hells Angels, subtlety goes by the board and it's plain that this year's Most Likely To Succeed slot has just been taken with a vengeance: a great shaking of hands begins. The impression is confirmed when Willie proceeds to get up onstage with his full band (all the other acts were backed by the Columbia band) and play a 40-minute set that, except for a quite seemingly absence of illegal drugs and teenage nudity among the audience, might just as well be happening in

Texas on the 4th of July. This is the ending of sorts, and what it means is that after telling the Nashville powers-that-be to get lost and leaving town just three short years ago, Willie Nelson has become the country music wave of the future and is now accepting Nashville's praise and promotional efforts on his own terms.

There is a postscript, though. Three or four hours later—after another couple of hundred handshakes, after attending a *very* high-rent Columbia party to which his band was not invited, and after behaving like a perfect gentleman through it all—Willie gets himself down to Ernest Tubb's Record Store and plays for two hours while most every other star in town is out at Opryland, all gussied up to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Grand Ole Opry amid great pomp and ceremony of the By Invitation Only kind. It isn't that Willie couldn't have shown up at the Opry—with his current Columbia-backed status, that's a silly notion—and it isn't that he's trying a reverse-*chic* move like one of Nashville's several dozen I'm-so-hip-and-isn't-this-earthly types might attempt. It's just that his old friend and musical hero Ernest was gracious enough to invite him, and that Ernest Tubb's Record Store is still the best place in town to get down and play straight honky tonk music for the friends and neighbors.

Apart from being a rebel against Nashville's creative restrictions, a culture hero, a real sweetheart, a person blessed with a highly sophisticated sense of humor, and the man who first made it possible for hippies and red-necks to co-exist under the protection of his music—all of which he is—Willie Nelson has always been one other thing. He has always been a writer and singer of the *classic* country honky tonk song, which is to say that he has always had a very precise, lonely, realistic understanding of the hard ways of this vale of tears in which we all live and suffer from time to time. This is the juke box Willie. Historically, this music came out of, more or less, his whole career up to today (which seems somewhat more optimistic when you consider the conclusions of the *Red Headed Stranger* album). It's the kind of stuff—like "Hello Walls," "Ain't It Funny (How Time Drifts Away)," "Pretty Papers," "Touch Me" and all those other perfectly morbid songs—that really say it to you when you're down and getting

kicked. Willie wrote most of it in Nashville when he was a highly-reputed songwriter trying to be a singing star, simultaneously going through the usual business of divorce, marriage, divorce, marriage and consequent craziness (or is that vice versa?) and running with the likes of Faron Young, Roger Miller, Mel Tillis and other distinguished crazy people.

A segment of my Willie Nelson interview:

Willie (laughing): "I think a lot of people got to thinking that everybody had to do the same thing Hank Williams did, even die that way if necessary. And that got out of hand. I always used to think George Jones got drunk because Hank Williams did, like he really thought that was what he was supposed to do."

Me: "You ever do that?"

Willie: "'Course I did. That's the reason I know it's done."

Me: "You still do it?"

Willie: "I still get drunk, but I'm not really mimicking anybody now. I have my own drunken style."

These days, see, Willie won't talk about the personal agonies of those Nashville years without humor, but it's all there in the songs which made him one of Nashville's most sought-after songwriters, and it came to a head during the year—his last year in Nashville—that gave rise to his *Phases And Stages* album. That year was a turning point, and it is chronicled in *Phases And Stages*. The album is an excruciatingly universal account of the way one man and one woman deal with their divorce ("That was the year I had four or five cars totalled out and the house burned down," says Willie), but it ends with a *very* significant song called "Pick Up The Tempo." It goes like so:

*People are sayin' that time will take  
care of people like me*

*And that I'm livin' too fast, and  
they say I can't last for much  
longer.*

*But little they see that their  
thoughts of me is my savior  
And little they know that the beat  
ought to go just a little faster.*

*So pick up the tempo just a little,  
and take it on home . . . \**

For a man hitting the crucial age of forty, those are important lines. They speak of an affirmation of life and a determination to triumph over its

\* [Used by permission of the author.]

emotional problems, and they represent Willie's decision to leave Nashville, move back home to Texas, and finally realize his potential—which is, in fact, exactly what he did. "I knew I only had a few years left to do what I was going to do, and I had to make a move," says Willie. "I wasn't going down there to quit. I was going down there with a purpose." The purpose, quite simply, was first to make himself a national recording star, and then to use that power base to make damn sure that people like him could be free to make their own music their own way without having to starve in the process.

Remember, Willie has a history in this department. It was he who first chaperoned Charley Pride into the country music concert scene, bringing him on stage in Louisiana—actually kissing him right there in the spotlights—and risking God only knows what kind of backlash in the process. The risk, once taken, paid off: Charley was accepted because Willie was behind him. Similarly, Willie used his high prestige and general likeability in country music artist circles to ease Leon Russell into the Nashville scene by surrounding him with Ernest Tubb, Roy Acuff, Jeanne Pruett and a whole galaxy of main-line performers when he was cutting the sequel to his "Hank Wilson" album. Willie can get away with heresy because more than any other artist occupying the often-queasy ground between country and something else, his country credentials are in order and—more to the point—he has never betrayed his roots.

So Willie arrived in Austin (where he was already a star), formed his present band around himself and his old compadre drummer Paul English (of "Me And Paul" fame), began booking his own dates and managing himself, set up that first media-shocking Picnic at Dripping Springs, connected with the local power elite in the person of Darrell Royal (coach of The University of Texas football team and a very influential citizen), and quickly assumed the role of main Godfather in the Austin scheme of things. That, incidentally, is some gig: you don't know what a loyal crowd is until you've been to Austin and watched a whole clubful of liberated young things worship the ground good ol' Willie walks on to quite embarrassing excess.

Along the way—just before that first Picnic, in fact—Ritchie Albright of the Waylors suggested that he get in

touch with one Neil Reshen, a New York manager and fixit person who at the time was looking to consolidate his country music holdings. Reshen already had Waylon as a client, and Willie followed suit. This action signified the arrival of the necessary teeth for the outlaw alliance Willie had been pondering for years, and it began a classic Beauty and the Beast operation that continues to this day.

An example of the dynamics of that Beauty and the Beast relationship:

*Willie on Neil Reshen:* "He's probably the most hated and the most effective manager that I know of. He enjoys going up to those big corporations and going over their figures. He's so sadistic, he loves to do it."

And once again, Willie: "At least you know where you're at with Neil. Nowhere."

And again: Anyone who can learn to like Neil can like *anyone*. It's a challenge to like Neil."

"Willie, how're you doing on that?"

"I'm coming along, I'm coming along. I can stay around him a little while now."

Although the mere mention of Neil Reshen's name has been known to send secretaries to the bathroom and turn grown executives into violent monsters ("He's another of those guys I don't understand how he's lived so long without somebody really hurting him," says Willie), you have to admit that while Willie and Waylon ("It's like having a mad dog on a leash," says Waylon) may have been able to get out of Nashville's grasp without him, it's only through this man's unspeakably vicious yet effective manner of doing business, that the outlaw bid for independent power in country music has avoided bankruptcy and actually shown a profit.

So, with the active assistance of New York Neil, Willie has established the power base he was after. It is now possible for Willie to record with Waylon or Kris or Leon (he's planning a whole Willie/Waylon joint album), and what's more, with the formation of Lone Star Records, he can get people like Jimmy Day, Johnny Darrell, Floyd Tillman, Billy C, Bucky Meadows, his sister Bobbi and other Texas worthies into the recording studio and, since Columbia Records pays for promotion and distribution under a joint Columbia/Lone Star deal, actually get the finished product before the public. Like Willie says, "We're all together, and we have the

same idea about what we want to do—which is to do our thing our own way. I'm trying to get these guys to do for themselves what they've been bitching about people not doing for them."

Willie's long affair with the business of honky tonk music represents one considerable side of his character which may be traceable to the fact that he and his sister Bobbi ("It's always been me and her") were raised without parents. Mr. and Mrs. Nelson divorced when Willie was a baby and Bobbi was three, and so for the first six years of his life Willie was with his grandparents. For the next ten years, he was raised by his grandmother alone, grandfather having passed away. That of course is a vast oversimplification, but the roots of his two divorces and highly creative loneliness must lie buried somewhere in there, just as the roots of his present, almost uncanny serenity must be located in the emotional steps he took to overcome his personal problems. Whatever, it is an absolute fact that the present-day Willie Nelson is most definitely *not* an individual still in conflict with himself.

In a sense, Willie Nelson now is in some sort of still-perceptive, still-creative cruise-gear, moving through a world of incredibly high pressure with almost perfect equilibrium. You can hear this feeling on the *Red Headed Stranger* album (a concept suggested and assisted by his wife Connie, with whom he does in fact seem quite happy) and you can see it when, dead center in the eye of one of this nation's strangest cultural hurricanes, he drifts through the absolute mayhem of his Picnic and somehow manages to be a rock-like source of calm and competence for (literally) thousands of the most outrageously uncalm, incompetent hustlers, freaks and assorted weirdos ever assembled under one patch of Texas sky. It also shows when, in the middle of yet another night of pushing his ragged band through a set of half-tragic, half-boogie music and watching with a smile as his audience stumbles and whoops its way towards unconsciousness, it comes down to just him and his Spanish-style, gut-string amplified Martin, and for a while the most carefully emotional, beautifully balanced little collection of mood notes in the world go soaring through the rancid air. This is the musical legacy of Django Reinhardt, Grady Martin and



The man who beat the system in action. Above, he poses in Atlanta with Linda Ronstadt and Tracy Nelson after yet another of those endless Willie Nelson jam sessions. Below, ever cooperative, he tags along behind a Columbia Records promotion man for an afternoon's business in Atlanta. At right, though, it's just Willie and his old beat-up Martin, picking out another all-too-real honky tonk soap opera for the happy young folks of Austin, Texas.



Photo: Charlyn Zlotnik





Photos: Jay Good

Willie's band of gypsies. There's sister Bobbi (top left, piano), old friend Paul English (bottom left, drums), bassist Bee Spears, harpist Mickey Raphael and extra drummer Rex Ludwig (center photos), and lead guitarist Jody Payne (right).



the other psychological gypsy guitar pickers from whom Willie developed his style; it is also the mark of a man who has *really* seen it all and can still look it straight in the eye.

*Atlanta, Georgia:* Willie is on a First Class trip. Laid out in the back of the limousine behind his big spade shades, he is relaxing into the ways of being a star with records on the charts. There'll be no more no-money dives to play, and for a while there won't even be any songwriting unless the fancy takes him. Willie explains that he's not one of those people who get headaches when they're not writing, and since his next two albums—a Gospel album and an album of Lefty Frizzell

songs—are already in the can, all he really *has* to do is keep on showing up for Willie Nelson concerts.

There are also some interesting projects in wind, and they might even get done. There's the issue of a *Red Headed Stranger* movie, for instance ("If I had the money and any idea about how to do it, I'd be somewhere doin' it right now"), and the almost equally interesting notion of Willie, Ray Price, Roger Miller, Johnny Paycheck and Johnny Bush getting together to do a couple of original Cherokee Cowboy dates.

Tonight Willie's nose will be back on the grindstone as once again he takes the stage with his gypsies and plays for the sticky young drunks and dopers of Atlanta. Tonight, once again, he'll be up there doing "Will The Circle Be Unbroken?" and "Eileen Goodnight" with whoever wants to join in (this time it's Tracy Nelson and Linda Ronstadt and Mylon LeFevre), and tonight there'll be another endless hillbilly amnesia session up in the hotel room. Tomorrow there'll be another bloody mary morning when Paul, bless him, has paid the bills and checked us all out and onto the road again. But now, just for a while, Willie is thinking about

his Gospel album and remembering that he was asked to quit teaching in Sunday school when they found out that Little Willie played the local Texas beer joints at night.

"Were you a good preacher, Willie?" I ask.

"Yes," he says, "I really was." For a moment, a kind of cold feeling has come into his voice. The only time I've heard it before was when I asked him to change his Razorback Chilli Team t-shirt for the magazine's cover photograph session, and, while doing it for me, he *did* let me know that he wasn't very pleased at what he figured was an attempt to soften his image for public consumption. He didn't really say anything about it, but he was angry, and for the first time I got a measure of how much he must have hated those Nashville executives who used to control his career and keep him where they thought he belonged.

This time, however, the anger is only a memory, and it passes quickly. But I'm wondering just how far he's had to come to cancel the past, and so I ask a serious question.

"Willie, are you a religious man?" I ask.

"Yes," he says. "Probably more than I ever was. Y'know?"

Somehow, when you really get serious about Willie Nelson, the answer is not at all surprising. ■



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# COUNTRY '76

WHAT THE HELL IS HAPPENING TO OUR MUSIC?

by MARTHA HUME



Freddy Fender



Charlie Rich



Waylon Jennings



Roy Acuff



Ronnie Milsap

## The Mysterious Case of Billy Swan

Billy Swan has lived in and around Nashville for a long time. People there know him as a skinny boy who swept out the studios at Columbia, as the sixteen-year-old author of "Lover Please," as a longtime sideman who many times was literally starving, as a member of the original Kinky Freidman and the Texas Jewboys, as a buddy of Kris Kristofferson's, as author and performer of the national hit single, "I Can Help." He has a new album out. It's called *Rock and Roll Moon*, which is an apt title for the rockabilly material which the album contains. But mostly, people know Billy Swan as a country entertainer.

## John Denver, c/o General Delivery, Rocky Mountains

John Denver is an army brat who more or less comes from Fort Worth, Texas. He got his start when he replaced Chad Mitchell in the Chad Mitchell Trio, a sixties folkie group.

Then he went on his own, moved to the Rocky Mountains, saw the fire in the sky and started putting out hit singles: "Country Roads," "Back Home Again," "Thank God I'm a Country Boy." John Denver is a very nice boy and he's also the 1975 Country Entertainer of the Year.

## Waylon Jennings couldn't go pop with a mouth full of firecrackers

That's one of Waylon's nicer quotes. Waylon is from Littlefield, Texas, and he played for a little while with Buddy Holly and the Crickets. But, being from Texas, he naturally went country and stayed there. On the way, however, he grew his hair long, started fighting with his record company and got labeled an outlaw. He began to get a lot of press and ended up on the *Billboard* pop charts. A recent RCA ad in *Billboard* had a blurb under Waylon's quote. It said, "Eat your words Waylon Jennings."

What's happening to country music anyway? Where's Ernest Tubb? Where's Roy Acuff? Why is everyone saying all those horrible things about Faron Young? Waylon's on the pop charts and so is Willie Nelson. For that matter, so are the Statler Brothers. Meanwhile, John Denver, Olivia Newton-John and Linda Ronstadt are on the country charts. And, at the same time, folks like Porter Wagoner and Wilma Lee and Stoney Cooper, who are out there "keeping it country" aren't selling enough records to make record companies think they're worth pushing.

The music business trade words for what's happening are "crossover" (meaning a record crosses from the country to the pop charts) and "reverse crossover" (meaning the record crosses from the pop to the country charts). The charts, you see, are very important. They are listings of singles and albums which are selling well and they are published weekly in music trade papers like *Billboard*, *Record World* and *Cashbox*. A look at *Billboard*'s "Hot Country Singles" chart for the week of

November 8, for example, shows John Denver's "I'm Sorry" at number one; "Are You Sure Hank Done It this Way" by Waylon Jennings at two; and "What's Happened to Blue Eyes," by Jessi Colter at five. On the "Hot 100" (pop singles chart) for that week, "I'm Sorry" was at number three; "Are You Sure Hank Done it This Way" at 63; and "What's Happened to Blue Eyes" at 75. These are crossovers, and crossovers make money.

Since records which make the pop charts make more money than records which never leave the country charts, it is naturally to a record company's advantage to sign artists who can hit as many listener markets as possible.

The second element of what's happened to country music is radio. Radio is the Catch-22 of the business. Unless fans hear a record on the radio they won't buy it, and unless fans buy the records, the radio stations won't play it. And, radio stations, like record companies, are in the business of making money. Therefore, it's a whole lot safer to stick with music which has the widest possible appeal to listeners—

John Denver sells more records than Roy Acuff, and therefore John Denver gets more airplay and therefore he sells more records and therefore. . . .

So, in one way, what is "country" is defined as what country radio stations play and what record companies push as "country." It's that simple and that complicated. The reason that it's complicated is because country music, if there is any such thing, has been changing ever since it was invented. Crossover is not a new thing.

Cowboy movie music, like that performed by Gene Autry and Roy Rogers, was a form of crossover in that it reached an audience much larger than the traditional "country" audience. Reverse crossover was happening in the forties when Bing Crosby recorded "San Antonio Rose." Patti Page crossed over with "Tennessee Waltz," and Hank Williams, the man who is most identified with what we now call country music, crossed over with "Your Cheatin' Heart" and "Jambalaya."

So, another way to define "country music" is to say that it is a sales





Dolly Parton



Billy Swan



John Denver



Earl & Randy Scruggs



Hank Williams



Mac Davis



Tammy Wynette

device—if a record company wants to hit a specialized audience, it can put a new album into the hands of its country promotion people, who, in turn, will push the album to country radio stations and country record stores, and thus does an album become “country.” But, there are other ways to define “country music.” Look into the past.

In the beginning, what we now call country music was called hillbilly music or fiddle music or string band music. In essence, these terms were applied to music made by the people of rural white America, specifically those who lived in the Appalachians, the South, and the Southwest. Their music was descended from ballads brought over from England, Scotland and Ireland; from the “blues” of black slaves; and from music played in churches—what we now call “gospel.” The people who listened to the music, however, didn’t call it much of anything; it was just music to them, and outside the South, no one cared too much anyway. In fact, no one really remembers exactly when the term came into use. Roy Horton of Peer International says he vaguely recalls hearing that the term, “country music” was used in a magazine called *Pennsylvania Grit* (now *Grit*) around the turn of the century. Smoky Dacus, the man who put the beat into Bob Wills’s fiddle band, says he heard a member of Herman Wolman’s dance band use the term when he came to see Wills and the Playboys at a Lafayette, Texas, show in 1937. Leon McAuliffe, Wills’s steel player, doesn’t think he heard the phrase until after World War Two. Doug Green, oral historian for the Country Music Foundation, thinks that the trade papers were responsible for coining the term when they started including country charts in their papers in the

late forties or early fifties. The problem, then, is that no one is sure. The consensus seems to be that “country music” wasn’t introduced as a universal label until the forties at the earliest.

If this is indeed the case, an argument could be made that after the label “country music” came into being, country music, at least in the old sense of the term, ceased to be. When one asks what country music is today, most people will answer with sentences like, “It was the music that Hank Williams played,” or “Jimmie Rodgers was the first country singer.” People who answer in this way, however, forget that the music of Hank Williams and Jimmie Rodgers didn’t just spring out of thin air. Rather, it was derived from the music they had heard: black blues, religious music, fiddle music, mountain singers. What Rodgers and Williams did was to take these styles and synthesize them into a new sound, a sound which emphasized the solo singer, the simple arrangement, the emotional lyrics. It was this style that came to be known as country music. Jimmie Rodgers, however, the “father of country music,” was the figurative son of the black bluesman.

Nevertheless, for a while—mostly during the forties and early fifties—there was something which could be identified as “country music.” There was Patsy Cline, Hank Williams, Roy Acuff, Cowboy Copas, Ernest Tubb, Hank Snow, and in the southwest, Bob Wills. However, country music was still a regionalized form of music that was looked down upon by many “popular” stars of the time.

Take, for example, the case of Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys. The Playboys came from all over and they played all sorts of styles. Playboy Smoky Dacus was a concert musician

who moved from a hotel dance band to Bob Wills. Leon McAuliffe was similarly sophisticated.

“It seemed like I was fightin’ a lot when I was young,” says McAuliffe. “The pattern was always the same. People would come up and say, ‘What lousy music.’ I’ve crawled off the bandstand a few times.”

Even then, bands, musicians, were troubled by that old bugaboo, the label. “Country music” was a label that came to mean a whole lot more than just a musical style. It became synonymous with words like “hick,” “hillbilly,” and “briarjumper.” Moreover, it came to mean Nashville (because of WSM’s origination of the Grand Ole Opry from there); southern, white, and lower-middle-class—the music of the working man. The label was so effective that many southern working-class people who made the white collar ranks refused to listen to country music because they identified it with a past from which they were trying to escape.

In the fifties, the crossover movement began in earnest. Sonny James recorded “Young Love,”; Marty Robbins did “White Sportcoat”; Conway Twitty did “Is a Bluebird Blue?” Then came the Elvis Presley revolution, and country music ran into hard times. The young people were listening to rock.

The sixties brought better times, however. New singers, the proliferation of country radio stations and the growing interest in folk music brought new life and new sources of influence to country music and that momentum seems to have continued until today when country is experiencing its biggest resurgence since the forties. Today’s country music, however, has little to do with the country music that we remember from the forties and fifties. In the past 20 years, the music

has assimilated some rock, the influences of Western Swing and bluegrass, and, of course, folk and popular music, as well as the original black, gospel, and traditional folk music.

There was also something else going on in the late sixties and early seventies, and that is what might be called a return to basics in our culture. The early sixties had been years of revolution, excitement, wild music, heavy rock psychedelics—they had been years of breaking away. But the tide turned, the wave rolled over and away, and the musical emphasis shifted. What was called for in the late sixties and early seventies was *soft* music, easy-to-listen-to music. And there, waiting for its big chance, was Nashville. Nashville became one of the nation's chief producers of the new soft music. For want of a better title, everybody started calling the new soft music "country"—"country" James Taylor, "country" *anyone* with a sweet voice, a simple melody, and an acoustic sound.

So, the style of country music has become less rigid and perhaps more palatable to the general public. Record companies and radio stations—not to mention many country stars—are encouraging this trend because a wider audience naturally means more sales. Unfortunately for country fans, this has meant a watering down of what they traditionally define as country music. The admission of the Olivia Newton-Johns and the John Denvers into the ranks of country has created the "keep it country" backlash from the fans, and organizations like ACE from country entertainers. But country music is an amalgamation of so many styles of American music that the term "keep it country" is practically meaningless. Do we mean, "Keep it Hank Williams?" Do we mean, "Keep a full set of drums off the Opry stage?" Do we mean, "Let's go back to the Carter Family?"

In fact, country music, like all American popular music, moves with the times and with the changing value systems of the people. Unfortunately, the only way we have to gauge the musical wishes of the people is by looking at what sells, and it seems that what's selling is Denver, and Charlie Rich and Linda Ronstadt and the "new" Waylon Jennings (who, incidentally, seems to be selling a whole new value system as much as a new form of music). Country entertainers are no longer required to be from the south, to have been raised in the country, to be white, or even to be

familiar with the music's history. All that's required is that they sell records.

Freddy Fender is a case in point. Freddy is essentially a Tex-Mex rhythm and blues singer. He cut "Wasted Days and Wasted Nights" in 1959. It was a regional hit and Freddy moved on to New Orleans, playing blues, Dixieland, whatever. A dope bust landed him in Angola prison, and after he was released, Freddy went home to South Texas, playing here and there in small, mainly chicano clubs, until his friend Doug Sahm encouraged him to do some traveling.

Enter maverick producer Huey Meaux with a song he picked up called "Before the Next Teardrop Falls." It was a country song, and Huey produced it that way. The single broke regionally (meaning it began to get local airplay), a New York writer brought it to the attention of ABC. They leased the single and presto!—Freddy Fender, country singer.

The story of Charlie Rich, well known to country fans by now, is similar. Charlie started out with Sam Phillips' Sun label—the same one that made the term "rockabilly" (another label, by the way) a household word. Charlie played in the style of Elvis and Carl Perkins and Johnny Cash and Jerry Lee Lewis, but his early singles: "Mohair Sam", "Lonely Weekends," were a whole lot closer to blues than to country and Charlie himself still likes to think of himself as a blues singer.

Again, as in Freddy's case, a clever producer entered the scene. That was Billy Sherrill. He had Charlie record "Behind Closed Doors," "The Most Beautiful Girl" and "Every Time You Touch Me I Get High," and another country pop star was created. Oddly enough, if Charlie Rich had been black, he might have been able to stay in his blues groove and achieve success along the lines of Al Green.

Finally, there's the case of Billy Swan. Billy plays what used to be called rockabilly—a term which is gaining acceptance once again—but he is still classified as a country entertainer. This can be attributed to the fact that Billy records for Monument out of Nashville and it seems that record companies and trade papers automatically assume that all product from Nashville is "country."

There is evidence that many of the younger Nashville producers, publishers, writers and musicians are beginning to become concerned about this problem.

"We're a music town, not a country

music town," says one Nashville publisher. "We even have trouble drawing new talent because they're afraid that if they record in Nashville, they won't be able to shake the label."

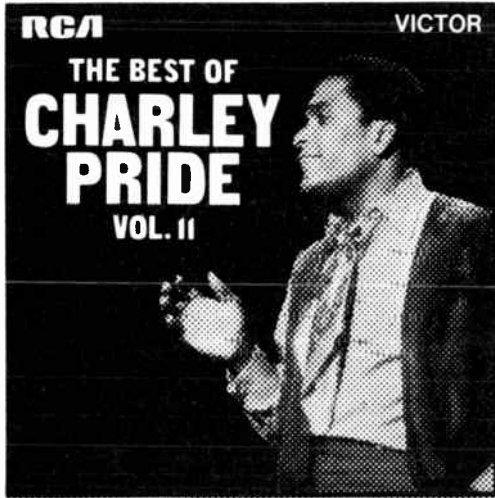
It all goes back to the word "label." Oftentimes a label is meaningless and sets limits which shouldn't exist. Should Linda Ronstadt, who grew up listening to Patsy Cline, and who has what we might have called a true "country" voice, be excluded from the country charts because she likes to call herself "rock" and because she records out of LA? Should Emmylou Harris, who is planning to cut a single with George Jones, be excluded because she has a lifestyle different from that of the traditional "country" fan? Should Loretta Lynn be limited by the country label when she can sing the blues well enough to knock your socks off? On the other hand, should we ignore Gary Stewart because he's too country?

In short, what's happening in country music is total confusion. To the traditional country fan, the music is being watered down so much that it has become no more than what record companies call MOR (which means "middle of the road"—i.e., no style at all). To the country artist, a crossover hit can produce a substantial increase in income, and to the pop star who wants to reverse crossover, some extra sales to the country fans certainly can't hurt. In addition, there is a minor vogue among young people for music that "goes back to the roots," that is honest—and honest is something that country music has always been. It is a music of very personal, very emotional feelings—the truth.

But Hank Williams is dead, and television, with its overriding desire not to offend anyone, is gaining more influence (This is not to say that radio stations aren't guilty too). Country music, or the music that is labeled country, will survive as long as it sells, but it looks very much like the country music which is selling now and will sell in the future may not bear much resemblance to what country fans have known in the past. Perhaps country will mutate into some modified form, just as country blues evolved into rhythm and blues and rock.

What's happening in country music is change, but no matter how much the music may change the old elements—the Hank Williams', the Jimmie Rodgers', and Uncle Eck Robertsons—will be part of it, and they will be revered for a form of music that is American, pure and simple. ■

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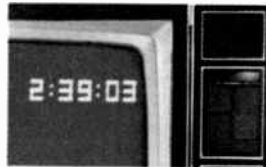
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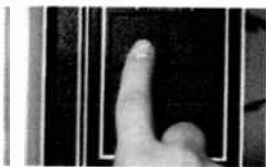
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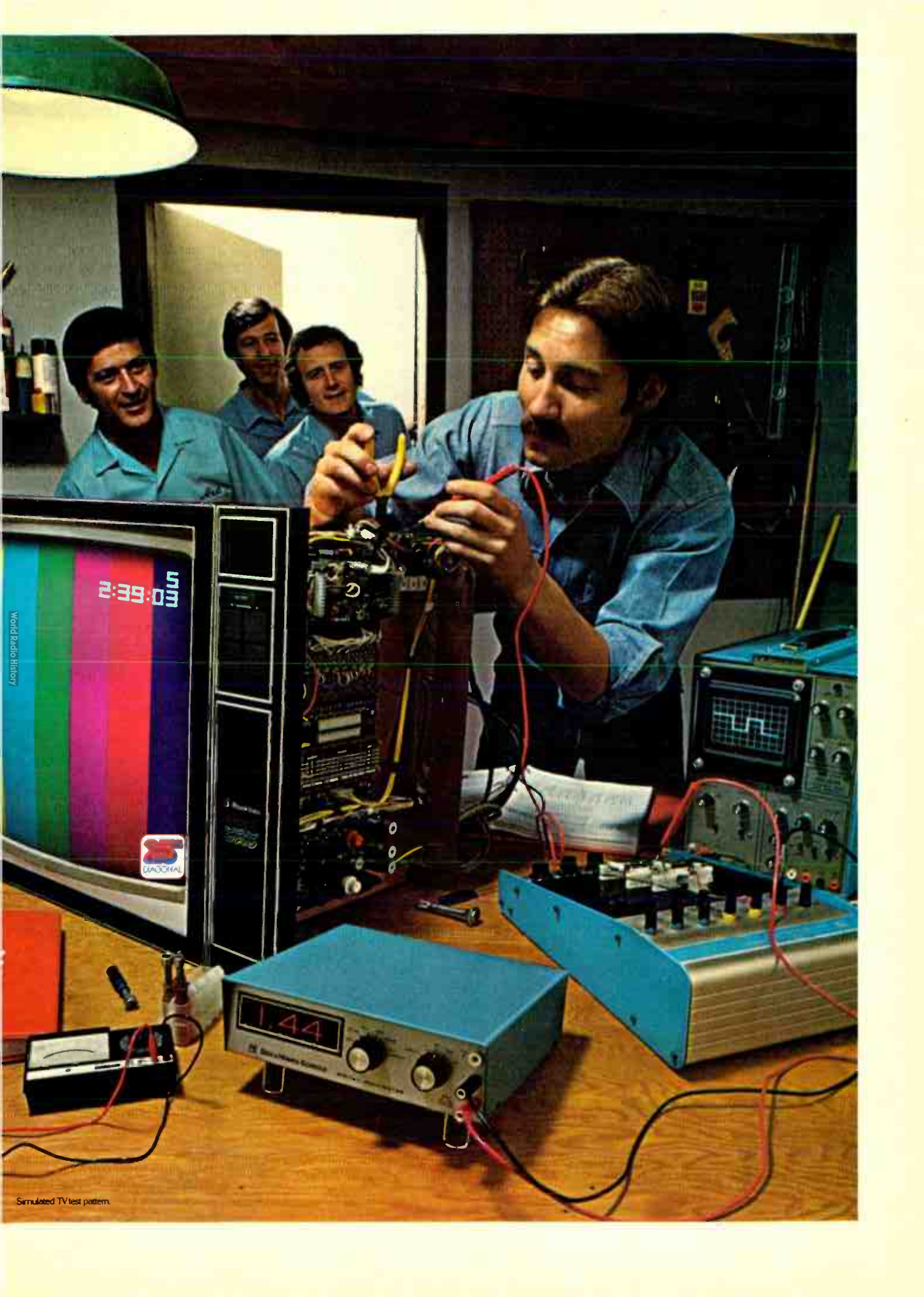


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## CRYSTAL GAYLE

There is a knock on my door at the Rodeway Inn in Nashville, and I open it to greet Crystal Gayle, a small young woman with large navy eyes and auburn hair so long and straight she sits on it when she comes in and rests a moment before we begin our interview. She is breathless from hurrying and worried that she is 10 minutes late. Sitting on the edge of the bed and chatting with the photographer, she is prettier and more fragile-looking than she appears on television and on her album covers. She's dressed simply in a pair of white slacks and a brightly colored top, and she looks more like a college student than a country singer. But then Crystal is full of surprises. When she begins to talk, it is hard to believe she is the sister of Loretta Lynn. (Continued on page 57)



# THREE SISTERS

KEEPING STARDOM IN THE FAMILY

by ALANA NASH

## STELLA PARTON

When Stella Parton was nine and growing up in Sevierville Tenn., one of her favorite games was playing Grand Ole Opry with her 12-year-old sister Dolly. "Part of the time I'd be Grant Turner," she remembers. "We lived in a house that had stairs in it and we'd go up and close the door to the stairway. Then I'd come down and I'd have a stick with a shoe stuck on it for a microphone, and I'd announce Dolly. She'd come out and sing and all the kids would applaud. Then Dolly would announce, and I'd be Minnie Pearl. She's always been my favorite person, so I'd get mad if I couldn't play her and dress up in a big hat." Today, the  
(Continued on page 60)

## LA COSTA

aden down with enough pants outfits to choke a Kentucky thoroughbred, La Costa disappears behind the swinging wooden door of a dressing room in a women's specialty shop in suburban Louisville. The manager tells her high school-age salesgirls that La Costa is a big country and western star who had her stage clothes stolen somewhere on the road. The words "on the road" sound very bigtime indeed, and the manager raises her eyebrows to punctuate the phrase. One underling drops her jaw, revealing braces on her teeth.

Suddenly the store is a flurry of activity. Salesgirls abandon their customers mid-sale and rush upstairs to the dressing area to see if The Star needs any help. One brings pillows for  
(Continued on page 62)



Black & white photo: John Miller





# Can BILLY SWAN Help Himself?

by MICHAEL BANE

The record store clerk is obviously distraught, alternating between flashing sympathetic smiles and pacing up and down the cavernous *Male Vocalists-Rock and Roll* aisle of Atlanta's Peaches record store, where Billy Swan is patiently thumbing through a stack of Elvis oldies. If only, the clerk says, Billy could have come in a little earlier, the place would have been packed. Or even if Billy could have stopped by just a tiny bit later—when the after-supper crowd trickles in—people would be dying to get his autograph or buy his records or just stop and chat for a spell.

But right now—the clerk shrugs and resumes his sympathetic smile—there's just nobody around.

Billy Swan adds his own smile and shrugs his shoulders, not the least bit perturbed. After all, it wasn't as if an empty record store was the only thing to go wrong on this particular week. After four days of non-existent crowds, advertising that never seemed to materialize, plugs that steadfastly refused to remain plugged, piano stools with a genius for falling off stage, abysmally boring parties, equipment failures and a bad case of the ain't-got-no-audience blues, the surprise would have been something going right.

It was, a more cynical observer observed, one hell of a way to launch a career.

But Billy Swan's chosen career has never slid along well-greased rails. His favorite on-stage story relates how easy the first hit record—"Love Please," recorded by Clyde McPhatter—was and how he spent the next 13 years looking for a follow-up. And then when the follow-up finally came, in the form of the phenomenally successful "I Can Help," Billy was caught completely off guard—no album, no band, no act.

"I really couldn't believe it was happening," Billy says, just before leaving for Georgia. "Every week I'd go out and look at the charts, and I'd see 10,000, then 100,000, then 300,000 people had bought the record. It's absolutely unbelievable that that many

people are buying your record. I kept saying 'this is as high as it's going to go.'"

But "I Can Help" kept climbing, and Billy and Monument Records, his new label, scrambled. First came the *I Can Help* album—"What's the word? Oh yeah, a potpourri of musical styles," he says—followed by a couple of more singles that refused to budge.

"I regret that in a way," Billy says. "I didn't want to do it (release the singles), but you have to compromise. If you're John Lennon or Waylon Jennings, you might not have to. But when you're up and coming, you do."

A second album followed, the more musically sophisticated *Rock And Roll Moon*, including the successful single, "Everything's The Same."

"*Rock And Roll Moon* is beginning to show more of a direction; more of where I want my music to go," he says.

Finally came the thing Billy had been avoiding, a band and a tour—stepping from the sidelights as Kris Kristofferson's guitar player to the front of the stage as the leader of the Billy Swan Band.

The Kristofferson motif is so solidly interwoven throughout the career of Billy Swan that at times it's hard to tell where one leaves off and the other begins. The role as one of Kristofferson's pilgrims—along with Donnie Fritts, Chris Gantry and others—had been a comfortable one, providing an immediate and recognizable identity in a city where talented singer/songwriters are something less than a dime a dozen.

"Why did I wait so long to break away from Kris?" asked Billy, who last year flatly refused to leave Kristofferson. "I guess I didn't feel I was ready to get a group together. Besides, it was steady work, a regular paycheck, and I enjoyed it."

As far as Billy is concerned, the steady paycheck is not to be discounted. Billy Swan has been a starving musician more than once, and on two occasions it was Kristofferson who plucked him from the edge of disaster, installed him in the band and put a

steady paycheck back in his pocket.

"If it wasn't for Kris, I don't know what I'd have done," he says defensively. "As far as I'm concerned, he can do no wrong."

But Kristofferson was in England pursuing a career as an actor, and rising young actors have little need for a full time band. With the second album heading up the charts, everyone from promoters to record company people to the mercurial Kristofferson himself was anxious to see Billy cut the electric guitar umbilical cord and head out on his own.

The net result was, for lack of a better word, the Billy Swan Band, a collection of old friends and new faces whipped into shape by three weeks of rehearsals at the Music Row studios of Combine Publishing. The group reunited Billy with old friend Jimmy Boyer, who'd helped sell "Love Please" years ago. Boyer's brother Rick joined on bass, with Jimmy handling percussion and harmonies. David Kielhofner, fresh from an engagement as the owner of a clothing store, became the saxophone player, with former cruise ship pianist Bill Donahue on keyboards and Tim Krekle on guitar.

So far, so good.

The shakedown tour through Georgia should have been a cream puff—opening night in Allman Brothers' country, Uncle Sam's nightclub in Macon, followed by four days in Atlanta's Great Southeast Music Hall, a euphemistically named cubbyhole sandwiched into a K-Mart shopping center. By the time the Billy Swan Band got to Atlanta, though, a management turnover and various hassles at the Music Hall had axed virtually all the advance advertising—a tune that was repeatedly heard all week—and the group opened the next phase of their fledgling career to an empty house.

Billy surveyed the opening night audience at the Music Hall and chuckled.

"Did you all come in one car?" he asked, trying unsuccessfully to keep his guitar plugged in. The night before at



A year after "I Can Help" hit, Billy was still in Kris and Rita's protective circle.

Uncle Sam's he'd played a series of guitar riffs ("I was really going"), only to discover the plug lying on the floor. "Waitress, would you please bring everybody a beer? No, I'm really serious."

Billy on stage is still very much the sideman, constantly glancing over his shoulder as if expecting Kristofferson to appear and take over the reins. He looks, in a word, lost.

"He embarrasses the shit out of me on stage," one band member laughs and says.

On stage the band launched into the only thing that went right all week—the music.

If the act wasn't tight, the music was, and the diminutive audience ate it up. By the end of the night they were on their feet, cheering for more, and Billy Swan was elated.

"It's going to work out," he said, heading offstage. "I think you can tell that everybody in the band is friends, and I like that. It's going to work out."

What Billy Swan may lack in initial audience, he makes up for in optimism. He is the prototypic nice guy, the struggling artist just around the corner from making it big. Mention his name in Nashville and more likely than not, you're going to get a big grin and a string of well-wishes—everyone is convinced that his time is now.

At the center of Billy Swan is his music, what he laughingly refers to as "adult bubblegum" or "progressive rockabilly." Listening to Billy Swan is like hanging around a jukebox in 1957.

Eventually you're going to hear something you like, and that something is going to be rock and roll. While so much contemporary music is sinking under the weight of its own self-inflicted importance, Billy's music rings as true as those original Sun Records from the dawn of rock and roll, a foot-stompin' fusion of hillbilly country and the Delta blues.

"You could call my music getting back to the roots," he says, laughing around the CBS Nashville offices before the start of the tour. "Maybe call it roots with something extra. Yeah, I'd say roots was where I'm at."

If his success on both country and rock charts has surprised him, it doesn't show. The idea of Billy Swan the country rocker has never been that farfetched.

"A lot of it—and I'm not saying this is good, mind you—is how a group looks, their image. Like if Billy Swan had longer hair, he might be strictly a Top-40 artist," Billy says, patting his not-very-long locks. "Some of your basic rock and roll these days is on the country music stations."

When the conversation turns to music, Billy becomes increasingly enthused. He talks about growing up in Cape Girardeau, Missouri, listening to Jerry Lee and Elvis, Hank Williams and Buddy Holly. He tells, probably for the thousandth time, about writing "I Can Help" in 45 minutes, just playing around on a new organ—a wedding gift from Kris and Rita, by the way. He tells of being on the road with Kinky Fried-

man, as one of the original Texas Jewboys, and of producing Tony Joe White's first and only hit, "Polk Salad Annie" in 1969.

He's not so expansive when the talk moves to the lean years; to living out of the backs of cars and scraping whatever meager living Nashville allows the unsuccessful. If it weren't for Kristofferson, he says, who knows?

But it isn't very likely that Billy Swan will be a starving musician again. "I Can Help" was an international hit and the album *Rock and Roll Moon* looks good. The off-again on-again European tour is on again. In fact, Billy says, the European tour has split into two tours—one with, one without the band. Billy shakes his head and glosses over the strange double tour. The first tour, he explains, is just for interviews and television shows. The second tour, in the spring, is for music.

The band members aren't so kind. Privately they say Billy needs to firmly grasp his career before booking agents, record executives and the ghost of Kristofferson-past get together and derail the whole affair.

In short, Billy Swan is just too nice for his own good.

The action shifts to the plush Hyatt Regency Hotel in downtown Atlanta, miles and miles from the cheapie plastic motel where Billy and the band are staying. CBS Records has flown in representatives from various trade publications ("Actually, I'm the secretary," says the woman from *Cashbox*. "My boss couldn't make it.") to see the show and party afterwards. The CBS group made up almost the entire audience for the second show.

It's almost dawn in Atlanta, and most of the record writers have gone off to some disco, leaving Billy Swan to lick his wounds and do battle with the fast talking, obnoxious disk jockey.

The talk has centered on Kristofferson, eventually working around to Billy's latest single.

"I'm not saying this to embarrass you Billy, you know that," the jock drones. "But I'm putting my career on the line by playing your record. I mean that—my career on the line."

The jock pauses and smiles, waiting for a comment.

For one second, a week of cheap motels, thoughtless bookings and empty concert halls rush to the surface, and a look of cold fury pours over Billy Swan's face. In a moment it's gone, and the disk jockey doesn't seem to notice.

"Thanks," says Billy Swan, the nice guy. "I appreciate it." ■

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# THE STANLEY SOUND

by MARTHA HUME & HENRY HORENSTEIN



The road to Coeburn, Virginia, is long and narrow. It winds up and down and around the Clinch Mountains like a snake with no apparent direction. This is mining country and huge chunks of the mountains are stripped bare all along the Robert Porterfield Highway. The aged, bumpy roads seem to exist so that people can travel to town and back, but not much further, and it takes the uninitiated driver about three hours to cover the 50 miles from Interstate 81, through the town of Coeburn, and up the mountains to Ralph Stanley's home, a sprawling modern brick ranch house that sits on the side of a hill.

The house, surrounded by a clutter of late-model vehicles—a Thunderbird, a Buick station wagon, a Chevy pickup and two Winnebago campers—is typical of the wealth that exists side by side with the poverty in the mountains today. But unlike most of the new houses—which were built with coal money—Ralph Stanley's house was built with money from Appalachia's other most valuable asset, music. And Ralph and his late brother Carter—the Stanley Brothers—already have gone down in American musical history for a sound which brought the spirit and the presence of the Clinch Mountains to the world outside the hollows of Appalachia. Carter is dead now, but Ralph and his Clinch Mountain Boys are carrying on the tradition, with music that is perhaps more old-timey now than it ever was.

But, despite the modern house, many of the old ways of the mountains still live in Ralph. The day I visited, he and lead guitarist Rickey Lee were building a dog house for one of the several coon dogs Ralph keeps on his place. (Carter Stanley, too, was a coon dog breeder and trainer of no little note.) Ralph is physically unimposing, but there is something about him that seems special. As he listens to Rickey's suggestions, and quietly directs a cut here, a nail there, Ralph Stanley shows the same kind of command that he shows on stage—quiet confidence with a whole lot of punch behind it. The same qualities have gone into the making of what many people are beginning to call “Stanley music.”

Stanley music is usually categorized as bluegrass, but Ralph himself is adamant about the difference between the two: “Only Bill Monroe plays bluegrass, because that's the name of his band—the Bluegrass Boys.”

And in fact, the term “bluegrass” was adopted from the name of Bill

Monroe's band. Bill became a member of the Grand Ole Opry in October, 1939, playing a style of “mountain music” that no one had ever heard before, but it does not appear that the term “bluegrass” actually came into popular use until the late forties or early fifties, after the Stanley Brothers had been playing for several years.

On the other hand, the Stanley style is not “old time” music either. It evolved from old time music, it owes much to the bluegrass sound of Bill Monroe, but ultimately, the Stanley Brothers' music is in a class by itself. It is safe to say that no one has ever duplicated the tight tenor harmony and high lonesome sound of the Stanley Brothers.

Ralph and Carter Stanley were born two years apart in a home beside a creek called Big Sproddle near Stratton, Virginia. The family was large—there were six boys and four girls—and all were musical. Mr. and Mrs. Stanley were both singers and Mrs. Stanley played the banjo in the old mountain clawhammer style. Carter got his first mail order guitar when he was 13 and Ralph his first five-string soon afterward. They played and sang in the McClure Primitive Baptist Church and for gatherings around their neighborhood until both were called to serve with the armed forces in World War Two. Carter was discharged in February, 1946, and began playing with a band called Roy Sykes and the Blue Ridge Mountain Boys on radio station WNVA in Norton, Virginia. Ralph was discharged the following October, and by November, The Stanley Brothers and the Clinch Mountain Boys had hit the road.

They joined WCYB's “Farm and Fun Time” show in Bristol, Virginia, becoming one of the first of a long line of early bluegrass type acts which were to launch their careers from the show. Only a year later, the Rich-R-Tone record company in Johnson City, Tennessee, contacted the brothers and signed them to record “Little Glass of Wine,” a song which was to become one of their most famous. From there, the Stanleys moved to Columbia, then to Mercury (where they recorded what many consider to be their best sides), and, as the fifties ushered in soft country and rockabilly, moved back to the small Starday label in Nashville and finally to King in Cincinnati. With each label change the Stanley style matured, moving from pure old-time music through imitations of Bill Monroe's bluegrass style (Carter had played

with Monroe briefly in the fifties) and finally into the style which became uniquely their own.

“We never did try to commercialize our music,” Ralph says. “Naturally, we wanted to sell records, play personal appearances, have big crowds. We wanted to make money. But we never did try to change our style to do that.”

While the Stanleys may not have *consciously* tried to change their style, change it did, and occasionally, in the troubled fifties, even veered near commercialism—once they recorded “Finger Poppin' Time” for King, and an electric pedal steel was used on a song called “If That's The Way You Feel” for Mercury. In the end, however, they were recognized for their own accomplishments and the terms “Stanley-style band” and “Stanley-type singer” became bluegrass trademarks.

The folk revival of the early sixties proved to be a minor bonanza for the brothers, who were much in demand on college campuses, and they began touring all over America and Europe as well. But the tours were rough. Alcohol became a problem, according to some, especially for Carter, the creative front man. His decline was evident, and on December 1, 1966, Carter Stanley died. Many thought that the Stanley Brothers, as an act, would die with him. Bill Monroe, choked with emotion, sang at his funeral, and the brother was buried on the family farm near McClure.

There is no doubt that Carter's death was, and still is, a tremendous source of grief for Ralph. Carter had started the band and kept it going. He had written many of his songs; his voice was unique. Carter had been the “genius.”

No one knew whether Ralph would have the will to go on. But, at a memorial concert held for Carter in 1967, Ralph showed up with his new Clinch Mountain Boys: Melvin Goins on guitar and Curly Ray Cline on fiddle (both were veterans of the old Lonesome Pine Fiddlers); Ralph himself, and nineteen-year-old Larry Sparks of Lebanon, Ohio, an excellent performer who could almost duplicate Carter's sound. Sparks helped fill the gap left in the group and stayed with Ralph until the group was on its feet again, leaving to form his own Lonesome Ramblers.

Ralph cast about for a replacement for Sparks—by now, there were many “Stanley-style” singers around—and found it in a young Kentuckian named Roy Lee Centers. Roy Lee's voice was very close to Carter's, and with the addition of two sixteen-year-olds—Keith Whitley on guitar and Rick



Photo: John Lee

Ralph Stanley and the Clinch Mountain Boys today. Ralph, center, sings with Keith Whitley, the man who replaced Roy Lee Centers, who was brutally murdered in 1974.

Scaggs on mandolin—many observers felt that Ralph had formed a group that would survive even his own retirement, that the Stanley sound, even without the Stanleys, would go on.

Then, in the Spring of 1974, Roy Lee Centers was murdered near his home in Jackson, Kentucky. It was almost as if Carter had been lost all over again—and again, speculation was that Ralph Stanley and the Clinch Mountain Boys would go down.

Ralph Stanley, however, proved to be a stayer. Keith Whitley took Roy Lee's place. The show went on.

While the sound of Ralph Stanley and the Clinch Mountain Boys no longer shows the development it did while Carter was alive, Ralph has preserved what the two created—music which can literally grab the guts of the listener with its emotion and purity. Ralph's eerily high tenor sounds almost like the voice of the hills themselves. His rendering of the classic "Rank Stranger" is a veritable wail of grief for the mountain people's lost homes and families. But Ralph makes it sound easy.

Of his present style, he says, "It's so simple, I don't know if I can describe it.

I play just as plain as I can play. If I sing a note or slur it or something, I like to play it the exact same way on that instrument."

Curly Ray Cline echoes Ralph's description: "It's so simple it's hard. It's got to be perfect timing and straight. You can add a little something to Bill Monroe's style, but it seems that if you add to Ralph's it throws you off."

Curly, who had had experience with electric instruments as far back as 1950, had difficulty with the Stanley style when he first joined the group. "I didn't think about it much until I started cutting my own albums and people got to telling me about it. It put me to thinking. I figured the music was too far back—too old—but now I think the further back, the more they'll buy. It's funny. It's completely switched around. Ralph told me the further back I could go the better my records would sell and everything he's told me so far has paid off exactly like he said."

It pays off for Ralph too. Since 1968, he has been very successful—more so perhaps, than the Stanley Brothers ever were. The young, new bluegrass audience, together with the start of summer bluegrass festivals, has guar-

anteed more bookings at a higher rate. In 1971, Ralph, who had a head for business, started promoting his own festivals, and in 1973, he built his brick house a few miles down the hill from his house trailer.

There is a new breed of bluegrass fan too, young long-haired, enthusiastic. Curly Ray loves them. "The teenagers, the hippies, has really helped bluegrass music," he says, "even though a lot of people may not agree with me. But when you got a hippie on your side, they're very noisy and there ain't no question that they're with you. I tell you, they'll really tear the house down."

Both Curly Ray and Ralph now record for the small Rebel label in Maryland. Summer brings the road, the bluegrass festivals, the hustling. Winters are spent mostly at home, with a few bookings here and there. Ralph can work on his house, coon hunt, or, as he is doing now, run for Circuit Court Clerk in Dickenson County, Virginia. Of course that might mean that Ralph, at 48, is ready to slow down a bit. But his and Carter's places in history are established. Ralph Stanley and his music have come a long, long way without ever leaving home. ■

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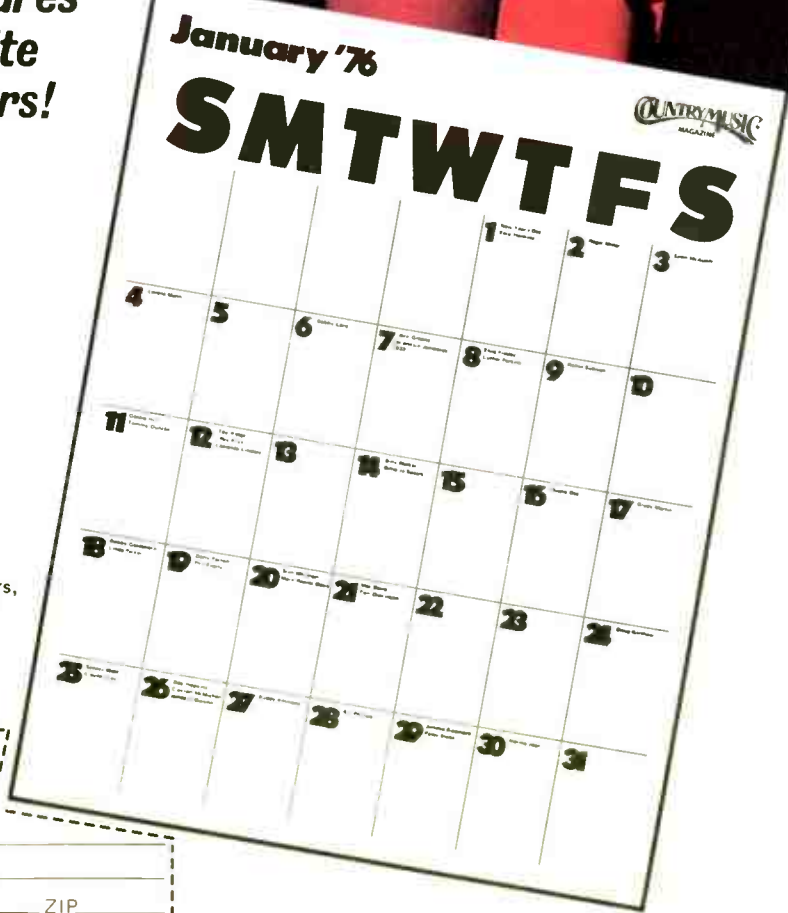
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# Records

## READER'S DISCOUNT

**\$1.00 discount on all records and tapes reviewed this month. See Page 63 for details.**

**George Jones**  
Memories of Us  
Epic KE-33547 \$5.98  
EA-33547 (tape) \$6.98

**Tammy Wynette**  
I Still Believe in Fairy Tales  
Epic KE-33582 \$5.98  
EA-33582 (tape) \$6.98

Probably no single event since the death of Hank Williams has put country fans' tongues to wagging like the marital schism of George Jones and Tammy Wynette. None the less, neither of them has done much to squelch the interest.



And that's why I tried not to listen *too* carefully to these albums. I listened to them carefully enough to hear that they were, as usual, collections of excellent songs, produced in the inimitable Billy Sherrill style, featuring two of country

music's best voices. I did *not* study them for clues and hints as to what was happening to the former Mr. and Mrs. Jones.

I mean, how much should I read into all those songs on Tammy's album ("I Still Believe in Fairy Tales," "Brown Paper Bag," and "The Bottle") about drinking ruining people's relationships? If Connie Smith



or LaCosta sang them, wouldn't I just think, "Wow, what good, depressing songs"? Of course, Tammy *did* write "The Bottle" and another of the depressing songs, "Your Memory's Gone to Rest," and this album *does* have more than the usual quota of gloom found on a Wynette record.

And what about George singing songs about being numb after getting dumped? Well, depression is certainly home turf for George—it's what made him famous. But I don't know how much I want to read into the fact that he sounds a bit distant on this record, as if he were somewhere else. As a matter of fact, songs like the title tune and "Touch of Wilderness" sound downright strange coming from him.

Well, like I said, I'm not

going to waste any time speculating about what it all means. Tammy's album is unusually good, even if it is depressing, and George seems a bit off this time. As they say, it's all in the grooves.

ED WARD

**Freddy Fender**  
Are You Ready for Freddy?  
ABC-Dot DOSD-2044 \$6.98  
DOSD-8-2044 (tape) \$7.95

**A**tune from a 1953 Doris Day musical, a coonass swamp ditty, some Ray Charles, a Mexican ranchero, bluesy ballads backed by marimba, and "How Much Is That Doggie in the Window." All in one album. No, Freddy Fender isn't your traditional whine-and-cry country singer.

This album contains strains of different Southern, Texan, Mexican, and Tin Pan Alley influences, all held together by Fender's supple



tenor. That voice, full of sincerity, gets him through a schmaltzy "How Much Is that Doggie in the Window," an off-the-wall song I doubt most artists would even attempt. Fender not only ap-

proaches it with a straight face, but also makes it sound plain romantic. Likewise, he appears to have found a groove for hit singles with bilingual lyrics; thus his version of "Secret Love." This and other bilingual ballads comprise more than half of the album.

Two cuts, "What'd I Say" and "Loving Cajun Style," both powered by Frenchie Burke's sawing fiddle, flirt with rock beats. The former showcases the urgency of the old Freddy; the latter, an old Jimmy Donley tune, jumps with producer Huey Meaux's *eeee-hey* bayou shouts and a mood of general festivity. The chicano presence announces itself grandly on the northern Mexico ranchero "Cielito Lindo Is My Lady."

The smooth arrangements of Uncle Mickey Moody and Bruce Ewen coupled with Meaux's grab-bag selection of material cement a strong place for Fender in country music's middle of the road. But unlike other crossovers, Freddy avoids mere corniness and blandness by bringing in rhythm-and-blues funk, Tex-Mex soul, his own mighty lungs, and by not popping any of these ingredients to the point of boredom.

JOE NICK PATOSKI

**Johnny Cash**  
Look at Them Beans  
Columbia KC-33814 \$5.98  
CA-33814 (tape) \$6.98

If there's one thing Johnny Cash does better than just about anyone else, it's interpreting other writers' mater-

ial. Cash has made Kris Kristofferson's "Sunday Mornin' Coming Down," Peter LaFarge's "Ballad of Ira Hayes," and Shel Silverstein's "A Boy Named Sue" as instantly identifiable with himself as "Hey Porter" and "Folsom Prison Blues." Re-



cently he's depended heavily on outside material, and results have ranged from the excellence of his last effort, *John R. Cash*, to the mixed success of *Look at Them Beans*.

What's good here will stand with Cash's best recordings. There's a solid reading of Harlan Howard's "No Change," the Melba Montgomery hit, explored here from a father's viewpoint. Don Williams' "Down the Road I Go" could have been written for Cash, since it evokes the sparse, simple sound of his Sun recordings. "I Never Sing Beer Drinking Songs" takes a light-hearted jab at honky-tonk: *I never, ever sing the blues/ I've forgotten 'Born To Lose' / And I hardly ever sing beer drinkin' songs.*

The album has its share of weaknesses. The title song, a Joe Tex composition, is marred by a sloppy, disjointed arrangement and an overly frantic vocal. "What Have You Got Planned Tonight, Diana," a mawkish tune in the mold of Bobby Goldsboro's "Honey," is too dull to be effective. "Down at Drippin' Springs" boasts a snappy tune but shallow lyrics that attempt to recall the

1973 Texas music festival simply by rattling off trite, fragmented descriptions.

It would be dishonest to say that this is Johnny Cash's best or worst album. *Look at Them Beans* has its moments, but with better production and material it could have had more of them.

RICH KIENZLE

**Mickey Gilley**  
Mickey Gilley  
*Crazy Cajun CCLP-1006*  
\$5.98 (no tape available)

**T**oo often, reissues are nothing but inferior products hitching a ride on the current success of a performer. Only on rare occasions do reissues reveal a past that merits close attention.

With Mickey Gilley's increased national recognition, Huey P. Meaux, the Houston independent producer who seems to have at one time or another recorded every natural born musician between New Orleans and Brownsville, has unearthed from his vaults a set of Gilley sides from the sixties.

The collection reveals a much rawer Gilley, naturally tinted by rockabilly and interestingly pocked with side



excursions into various pop trends of yesteryear. The 88 Attack piano and wandering croon, often attended by a lazy fiddle, show evidence of the Jerry Lee Lewis kinship. However, he reaches his true groove on Western walking bass dance tunes such as

"Caught in the Middle," a Charlie Rich song. Gilley's nasality sparkles, borrowing as much from Fats Domino as from Ernest Tubb.

"Shake It for Mickey Gilley" is a throwback to the not-so-good old days when it was common to barely alter a song's lyrics to avoid copyright problems. "Shake It" is really "Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On" with references to the Twist thrown in. But Gilley's pounding paces an amusing boogie-beat.

"Drive-In Movie," a Gilley original, is two minutes of high school car 'n' surf absurdity. Wilder than the Beach Boys, silly as Annette Funicello, the song concerns a real gone guy meeting a pony-tailed chick at a drive-in's snack bar then going to the car with her to watch "a horror movie with a monster named Moe."

Despite the one-take nature of the sessions (as a studio conversation between Gilley and Meaux on the record implies) and a playing time of under thirty minutes, the weird content and crude vitality help early Gilley compare favorably with the present one.

JOE NICK PATOSKI

**The Atkins String Company**  
*The Night Atlanta Burned*  
RCA APL1-1233 \$6.98  
APS1-1233 (tape) \$7.98

**T**he great fire set by General Sherman that charred and razed Atlanta in 1864 obliterated the Atlanta Conservatory of Music. Lead sheets were scattered in the wind, some destroyed by flame, others finding their way to safer ground. Decades later, a man named Clayton came to possess a mandocello that had survived the burning of the Conservatory. Eventually, he lost the instrument and its case in a hobo camp. In 1949, Clayton met a teenager named

John D. Loudermilk and the two formed a friendship of sorts. Clayton carried that music in his head, and played it for Loudermilk, who recalls it being "a soft, country music—sophisticated and elegant, almost feminine in places, never rude, never brusque, and never loud." Now an older, more famous John D. Loudermilk has brought the con-

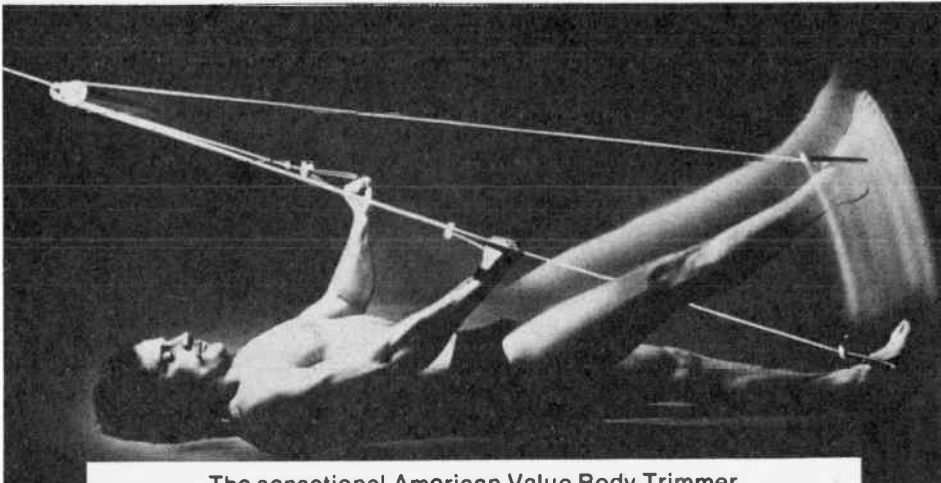


cept of that antebellum conservatory music to Chet Atkins. In turn, Atkins gives us *The Night Atlanta Burned*, his most interesting collection of material in quite a while.

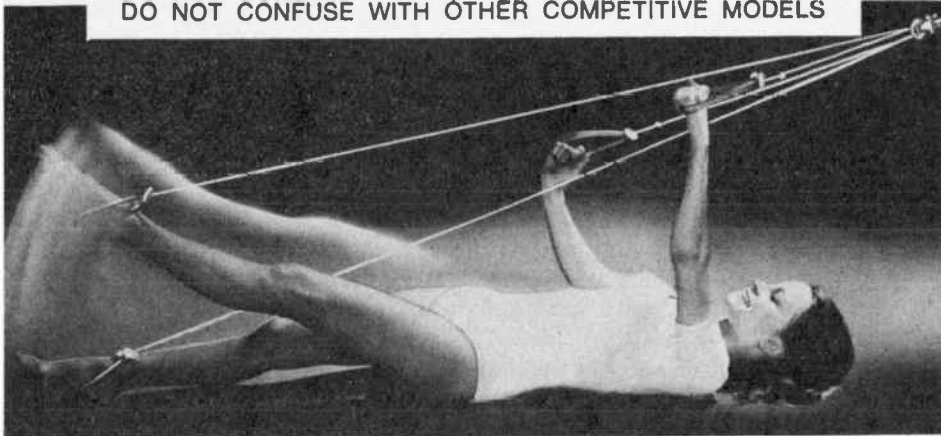
Chet's guitar here is dignified, a long way from the rhinestone charm of *Chet Atkins Goes to the Movies* or the loose raunch of his several *Superpicker* jams. Although most of the material is recent in origin, the Victorian formality is as graceful as parasols and white columns. Chet, rhythm guitarist Paul Yandell, violinist (not fiddler, please) Lisa Silver, and mandolinist Johnny Gimble produce a music that is more than mere archaeology.

This classic country string quartet (as Loudermilk describes it in his liner notes) may or may not be faithfully recreating the music of the Atlanta Conservatory of Music. The message here is clear, however, and *The Night Atlanta Burned* is a virtuoso dirge for an era gone up in flames.

RUSSELL SHAW



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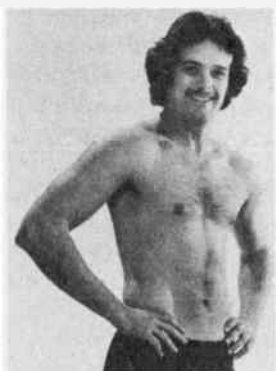
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## Fiddlin' Frenchie Burke

Fiddlin' Frenchie Burke  
20th Century T-479 \$6.98  
(No tape available)

I'm no Cajun, but I whooped anyway when Fiddlin' Frenchie Burke and the Outlaws' stompin' version of Link Davis' "Big Mamou" hit the big-time. The reason I got so excited is that every time I start to think country radio is too conservative, something like this comes along to kick me between the ears.

So you can imagine my delight at being the proud owner of an entire long-playing record of this stuff. Frenchie's Texas-Cajun mix is both refreshing and exciting—his approach to a Texas classic like "Cotton Eyed Joe" completely transforms the tune without making it unrecognizable — and he even handles straight country material like a master, as you can hear on "You Gave Me a Mountain" and his eerie original, "Mama's Picture."



Even warhorses like "Jole Blon" and (gasp!) "Orange Blossom Special" spring to life in the hands of this band. Which brings me to a sore point: Why oh why aren't the rest of the pickers on this album identified? The guitar player and the steel player in particular deserve to be congratulated, but I don't know their names (although I understand that Donnie King, who scored with "Mathilda" last summer, is the bass player).

But whoever these Out-

laws are, they're lucky to be working with such a talented boss. I can only wish him hit after hit, and suggest that you pick up on this album today.

ED WARD

## David Wills

Everybody's Country  
Epic KE-33548 \$5.98  
EA-33548 (tape) \$6.98

David Wills came to us in 1974 with a hit single ("There's a Song on the Jukebox") that was so good one couldn't help but anticipate his first album. Some mistake that turned out to be. The album showed Wills to be a mostly indifferent singer, and the production was an amateurish imitation of Billy Sherrill. Moreover, nearly every song was a slow barroom weeper. It was downright gloomy stuff, and was greeted accordingly.

One of Wills' problems has been corrected in his second album. The material is more varied in theme and tempo. "Queen of the Starlight Ballroom" sports some scintillating swing licks,



"Long Tall Sally" is a rousing closer. "Let's Get Naked," on the other hand, is insufferably cute. There's also a version of "Son of Hickory Holler's Tramp," an ode to a hooker in "Lady of the Evening."

Such variety is most welcome, but it still serves to highlight shortcomings held over from the first album. Wills has a grainy voice

that's a natural for country, but his singing is still shaky and his phrasing cliched. The production, by Charlie Rich and manager Sy Rosenberg, remains a sore spot, what with those soupy strings popping up in the unlikely places. So *Everybody's Country* may represent one step forward for David Wills, but he's still got quite a way to go.

JOHN MORTHLAND

## Jerry Jeff Walker

Ridin' High  
MCA MCA-2156 \$6.98  
MCAT-2156 (tape) \$7.98

Once, during a concert in Nashville, I asked a rather conservatively dressed college student to explain the continued popularity of Jerry Jeff Walker, the man on stage at the time. "Just look at him," the student replied. "He's the man. He just keeps at it. He's singing the truth and he don't stop. He's crazy." I looked up at Jerry Jeff. He was half-drunk; a sweet, sad smile hung on his face. He was singing a song called "Pissin' in the Wind."

*Ridin' High* (which includes "Pissin' in the Wind") bears witness to the reasons young people like Walker. It's a beautiful album, full of sweet, sad songs, with impeccable traditional country arrangements and simple, crazy lyrics that linger in the mind long after the record's stopped spinning. In its way, the album is full of extraordinary despair, the same sort that characterizes old-line country laments. Son, you can't listen to these songs and tell me these boys ain't country!

"Night Rider's Lament" is a song of a cowboy whose response to a letter from back East asking if he's gone crazy out there is to raise the same question about the letter writer. "They've never seen the Northern Lights/

Never seen the hawk on the wing/They never seen spring hit the Great Divide." An absolutely perfect cowboy song, with a strong, distinct, and original melody, written by Mike Burton, one of the



many new writers Walker introduces on this album.

*Ridin' High* displays the talents of Nashville's finest session men and Walker's own Gonzo Band. The intention, Walker says in his liner notes, was to "get our cosmic gangbang with a little more quality." He succeeded.

RICHARD NUSSER

## Various Artists

Western Swing, Vols. 1-3  
Old Timey 105, 116, 117  
\$6.98 each (no tapes available)

Almost ten years ago, Chris Strachwitz, the mad genius behind Arhoolie and Old Timey Records, and record collector Bob Pinson put out the first landmark volume of *Western Swing*. A few isolated fanatics like me had heard of Bob Wills through the Columbia and Harmony albums, but nobody really knew anything else about this musical melting pot. *Western Swing* helped. It was loaded with information about players, recording sessions, and the cross-fertilization of the three most important groups. Bob Wills and Milton Brown had started off in the original Light Crust Doughboys group, headed by W. Lee O'Daniel (later governor of Texas).

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The group never recorded in its original form, and soon Wills had grabbed guitarist Sleepy Johnson for his own band, the Texas Playboys, and Brown was heading the Musical Brownies. The



Doughboys continued under O'Daniel. And they were all on this album, along with Bill Boyd and some Cajun stuff that wasn't too much like regular western swing.

Now that everybody who bought Volume 1 has worn it

to dust, Strachwitz has blessed us with not one, but two subsequent volumes. Not concentrating too heavily on Wills, who's much better known now, he focuses on Brown, the Doughboys, and lesser but excellent groups like Adolph Hofner and His Texans (where young Doug Sahm played steel guitar in the band's later days), Cliff Bruner's various groups, and one-shots like the Nite Owls. And with all this, Spade Cooley and Hank Penny get token recognition with one cut apiece.

If these albums do anything (besides entertain with some of the hottest music ever, that is), they point out the need for a Milton Brown album, a couple of Light Crust Doughboys albums, and an Adolph Hofner album. The five Milton Brown

cuts on these three albums show that the Brownies swung and soloed as hard as the best of the Wills bands, and Hofner's sides show that J.R. Chatwell could offer super Wills fiddlers such as Jesse Ashlock a run for their money any old time. And, on the latest volumes, even the Wills cuts are, with the exception of "Beaumont Rag," unknown and great.



Picking favorites on these albums is an absurd task.

The Modern Mountaineers demonstrate that Commander Cody wasn't the first to use That Word when they recorded "Everybody's Doin' It," and Cliff Bruner's "Milk Cow Blues" is one of the best versions of that standard yet. Milton Brown did a bang-up job on "Corrine"; his "Garbage Man Blues" is hilarious, and "Hesitation Blues" jumps like crazy. With the exception of the Hackberry Ramblers and Harry Choates cuts on Volume 1 (which aren't bad, just not swing), these three albums are worth their weight in gold.

It looks as if interest is re-  
viving in western swing, and considering how many of America's musics it mixes, it would be most appropriate to have it burst forward for the Bicentennial. But even if



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it doesn't, anybody who likes his country music with a little Tabasco will get hooked incurably after listening to these records. Thank you, Chris Strachwitz, and if you need any help with Volumes 4 to 28, just give me a call.

ED WARD

## Ronee Blakley

*Welcome*  
Warner Bros. BS-2890 \$6.98  
B8-2890 (tape) \$7.97

Ronee Blakley was a fairly unknown singer-songwriter when she was picked by director Robert Altman to portray Barbara Jean, the ill-fated country star, in the movie *Nashville*. Although her acting debut leaned heavily on the obvious source of her character, "Loretta Wynette", Miss Blakley showed a lot of promise,

got a lot of critical acclaim, and found herself thrown into overnight stardom. All this hoopla led her to a new recording contract (her first album was released a few years ago on Elektra). But *Welcome*, the first outcome of that contract, is a careless and sloppy record, which isn't surprising since it was apparently churned out as quickly as possible last July, right after the film came out, and rush-released by September.

Much of the blame must go to veteran producer Jerry Wexler, who throws in layer upon layer of meaningless instrumentation on most of the tracks. The arrangements are strictly hack jobs; the best songs are those in which Blakley is pretty much on her own, as in the title track, with just a piano be-

hind her, and "Locked Behind My True Love's Door," which features some nicely understated acoustic guitar by Blakley, Pete Carr, and Eddie Hinton.

A few other songs work fairly well, notably "If I Saw You in the Morning" and "I Was Born To Love You,"



both written before the *Nashville* affair. But Ronee's strength is the simplicity, both lyrical and melodic,

of her songwriting, and most of these new songs veer away from that strength with rambling melodies and bad, obscure lyrics.

Ronee Blakley has said that her music career is more important to her than acting. If that's the case, I hope she won't allow herself to be hustled through the recording studio the next time out.

BILLY ALTMAN

## Commander Cody and His Lost Planet Airmen

*Tales from the Ozone*  
Warner Bros. BS-2883 \$6.98  
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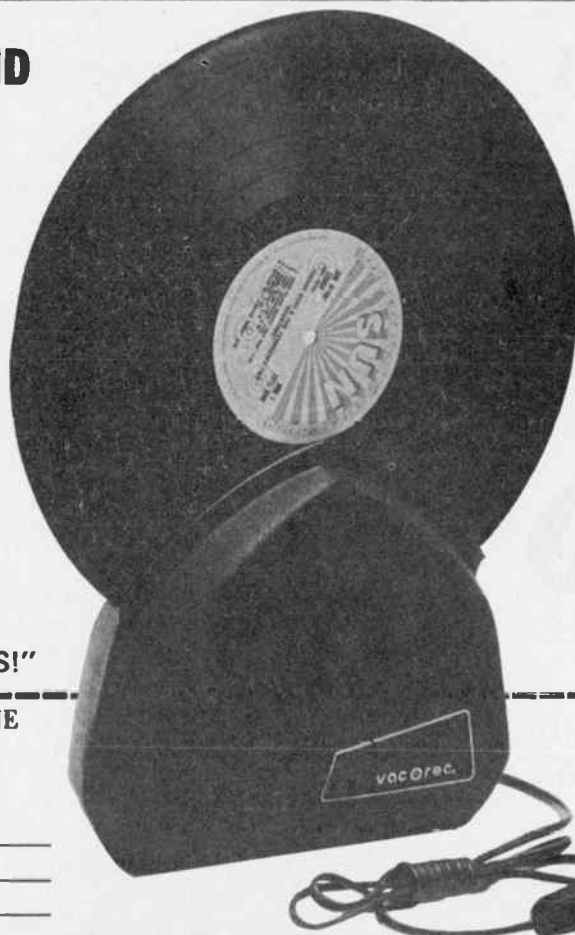
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the Byrds and the Flying Burrito Brothers, guys that have been doing it for a long time, have a Los Angeles type approach. It's a little too slick."

—Commander Cody, 1970

That attitude attracted a lot of people, myself included, to Commander Cody and His Lost Planet Airmen. That same attitude also spawned four magnificent albums for Paramount. Along with Gram Parsons, Cody and his boys were among the first long-haired country rockers whose music—in Cody's case a mixture of rockabilly, swing, and bizarre honky-tonk—owed more to Southern roadhouses than to Marin County folk clubs. Yet *Tales from the Ozone*, Cody's second album for Warners, finds the band mired in the same soft-country swamp they once sought to avoid.

The good-timey, boozy Ozone consciousness has given way to the vapid, simplistic folk-country sound favored by the New Riders of the Purple Sage and *Tales* producer Hoyt Axton. Lead

singer and rockabilly prince Billy C. Farlow accounts for the record's best moment, a supercharged version of Billy Joe Shaver's "I Been to Georgia on a Fast Train." From there it's all downhill: "Connie," "Honky-Tonk



Music." and "Paid in Advance" are flaccid ditties in the Axton-New Riders style; even the Commander's talker, the Coasters hit "The Shadow Knows," lacks the wry humor of his earlier versions of "Hot Rod Lincoln" and "Smoke! Smoke! Smoke! (That Cigarette)." Andy Stein's "Gypsy Fiddle" might sound great in a European bistro, but sounds ridiculous in this context.

Cody and the Airmen have given me some enjoyable mo-

ments in the past, which makes this a painful review to write. Buried among all the superfluous musicians and mediocre material here is one hell of a band. But the best description of *Tales from the Ozone* is in Cody's 1970 quote: it's a "slick Los Angeles" type approach, and a poor one at that.

RICH KIENZLE

### Merle Travis

The Merle Travis Guitar  
Capitol SM 650  
(No tape information available)

It took me two years of broken strings and cracked fingerpicks just to figure out the rudiments of Merle Travis's guitar style, and my task wasn't made any easier by the fact that his nine superb Capitol albums were out of print for years. So I contented myself with learning the basics from recordings of Merle's many musical disciples like Chet Atkins, Doc Watson, Jackie Phelps and Jerry Reed until the day I knew would come when Capitol would reissue some or all of his records for them.

Well, that day's finally here. *The Merle Travis Guitar*, a collection of unaccompanied electric guitar instrumentals originally released over ten years ago, proves what a lot of people already knew: that Travis is one of America's great guitar stylists, country music's equivalent of B.B. King or Charlie Christian. His technique, adapted from his boyhood Kentucky neighbors, involves playing lead, rhythm and bass simultaneously using only the thumb and index finger of the right hand for picking.

Techniques aside, there are twelve virtuoso performances here, including a hot version of "The Sheik of

Araby," the positively dirty "Black Diamond Blues," an adaptation of the old jazz tune "Bugle Call Rag" and the subtle, sensitive "Waltz You Saved for Me." "Walk-in' the Strings" is more a run than a walk while "Blue Smoke" is well, unbelievable. The notes just flow from Merle's guitar, every one clean and sparkling.

It's sure good to have even



a little of Merle Travis's music available again, and there's still a lot in Capitol's vaults just waiting to be reissued (hint!), including many of his great coal mining and honky-tonk songs from the forties and fifties. But *The Merle Travis Guitar* will do just fine for now.

RICH KIENZLE

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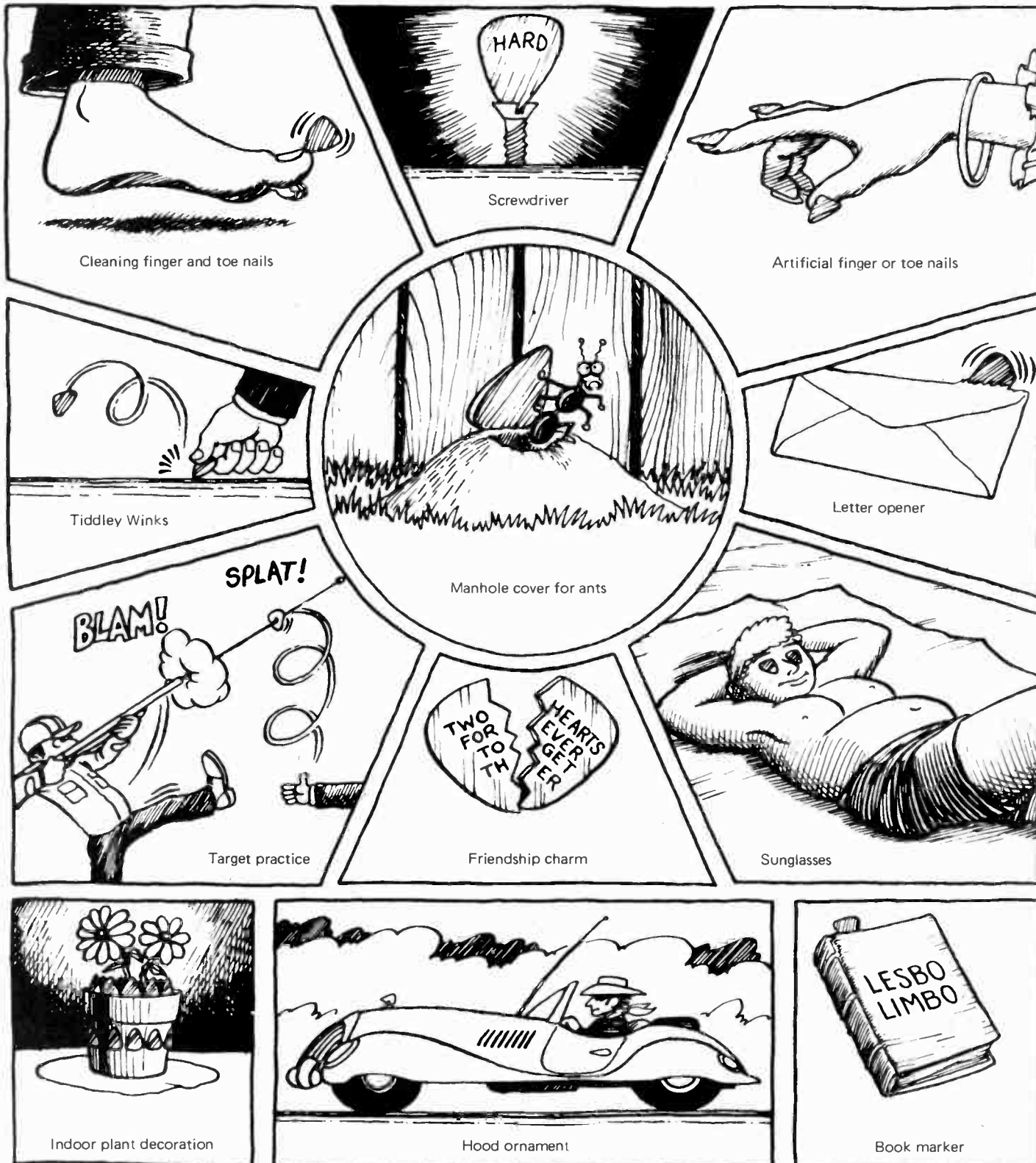
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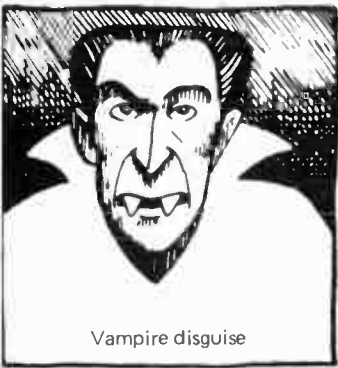
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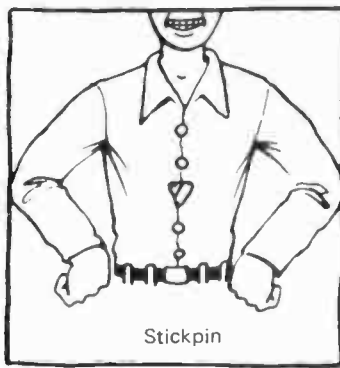
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# PITY THE POOR GUITAR PICK

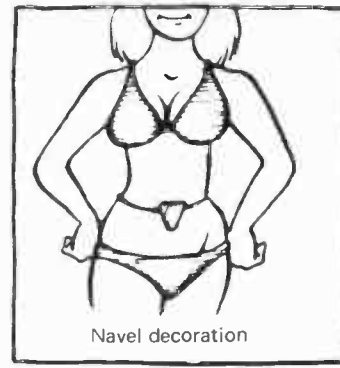




Vampire disguise



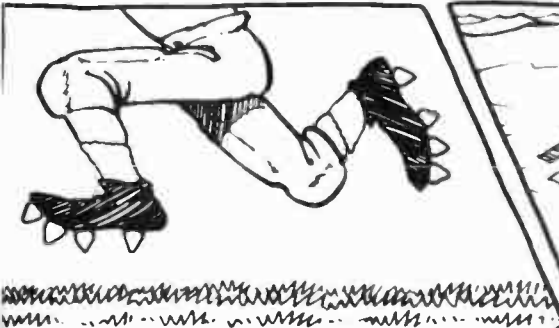
Stickpin



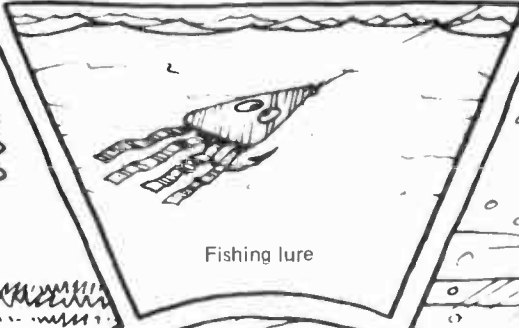
Navel decoration



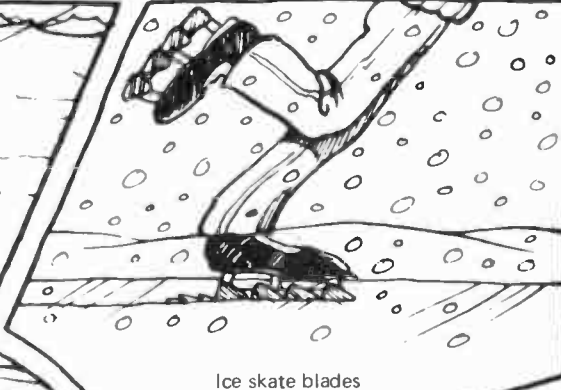
Third eye



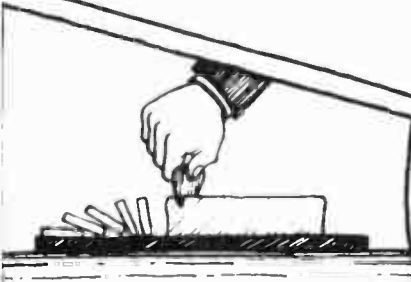
Cleats



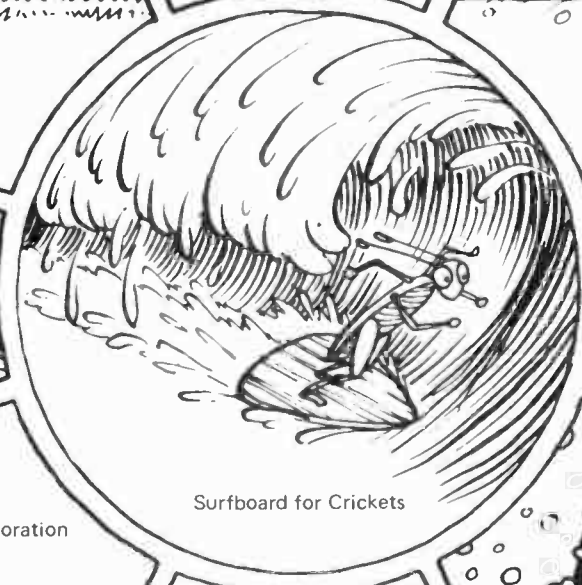
Fishing lure



Ice skate blades



Cheese slicer



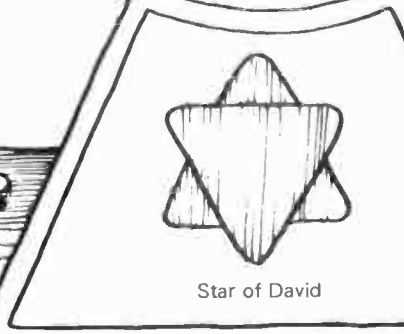
Surfboard for Crickets



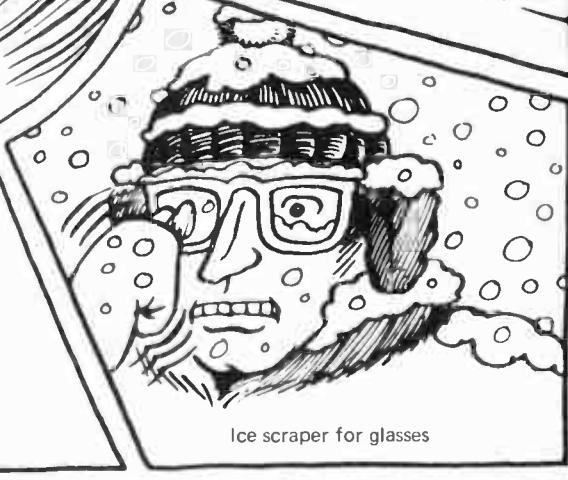
Puck for desk-top hockey



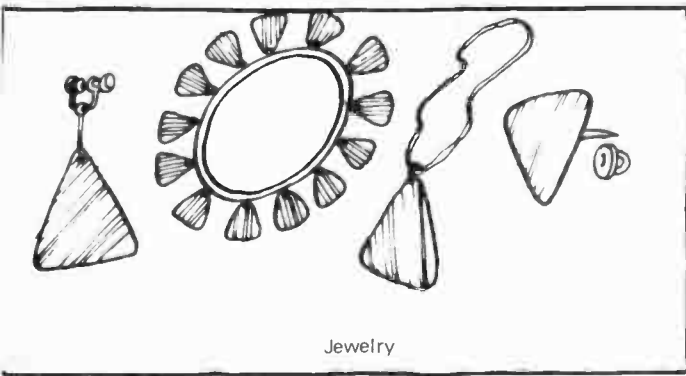
Hip hors d'oeuvre or cocktail decoration



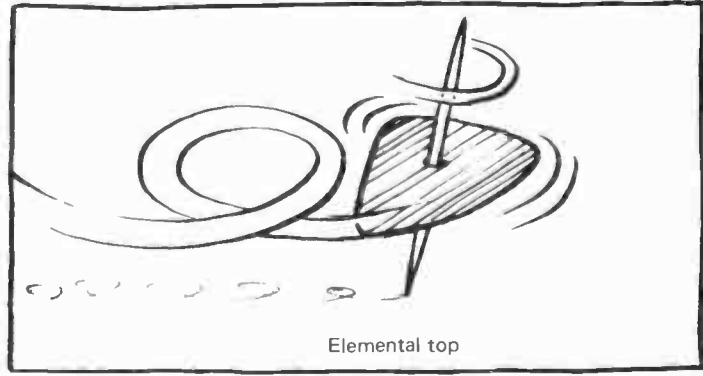
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# CRYSTAL GAYLE

*(Continued from page 35)*

Only occasionally is there a faint trace of the rural Kentucky accent that so characterizes her sister. "That's because my parents moved to Wabash, Indiana, when I was four," she explains. It was there she grew up as Brenda Gail Webb, "getting away with a lot of things I probably shouldn't have" as the last of eight children, who include Peggy Sue and Jay Lee Webb. After the Webbs settled in Indiana, the poverty Loretta knew as a child had subsided to the point where Crystal enjoyed a normal upbringing, listening and singing along with her Lesley Gore and Brenda Lee records in the backyard. Soon she was singing at school and for community organizations.

With music so important a part of her early years, Crystal well remembers the day Loretta—who was already married and out of the house by the time Crystal was born—came by to sing her family the songs she was about to put on a demo tape. It wasn't long before Crystal, still in junior high, spent her summers traveling as a singer with Loretta's show. She continued touring with her sister through high school, and signed her own recording contract with Decca her senior year.

Crystal readily admits the help and influence Loretta had on her career. It was Loretta who wrote Crystal's first hit, "I Cried the Blue Right Out of My Eyes," and who suggested her sister change her name to avoid being confused with Brenda Lee, who also recorded for Decca.

Unfortunately, Crystal says, she and Loretta see each other rarely now because of their busy schedules, and when they do, "There are so many people always hanging around her that we have to run into the restroom to talk. That's the only place you can have any privacy." She breaks into one of her frequent smiles. "I'm really, really proud that Loretta's my sister," Crystal says in a tone only a cynic could doubt, "and despite what people always ask me, there's never been any jealousy between us, because as far as I'm concerned, she's up there, and nobody is ever going to take her place. Even though I know she's a legend, a superstar, I can't think of her as anything but family. She's been a great leader in her field, and I think she could still be a great leader if she became a cross-over act and had the right material.

Crystal's music (as exemplified by

her two albums for United Artists) could be called country-pop, but Crystal herself has no particular name for the music she sings in her strong, wide-ranging voice, which is deeper and richer than her famous sister's. "I just sing, and I like that type of music, whatever it is," she says of such songs as "This is My Year for Mexico" and "Somebody Loves You," two of the songs she wrote with her husband, Vassilios (Bill) Gatzimos, for whom she says she loves cooking Greek dishes when they're not on the road.

Patently ambitious, Crystal hopes one day to have her own show, band and bus. "I could enjoy being a superstar," she admits. "It's really good to get out in front of people and have them enjoy you." By the time "The Crystal Gayle Show" is a reality, however, she may have changed her style. "I don't know if I'd be singing country if it weren't for Loretta," she says. "I wouldn't mind doing rock and roll, or anything, really, that my voice can sing. I like using my voice, and I'm just now really learning how. ■

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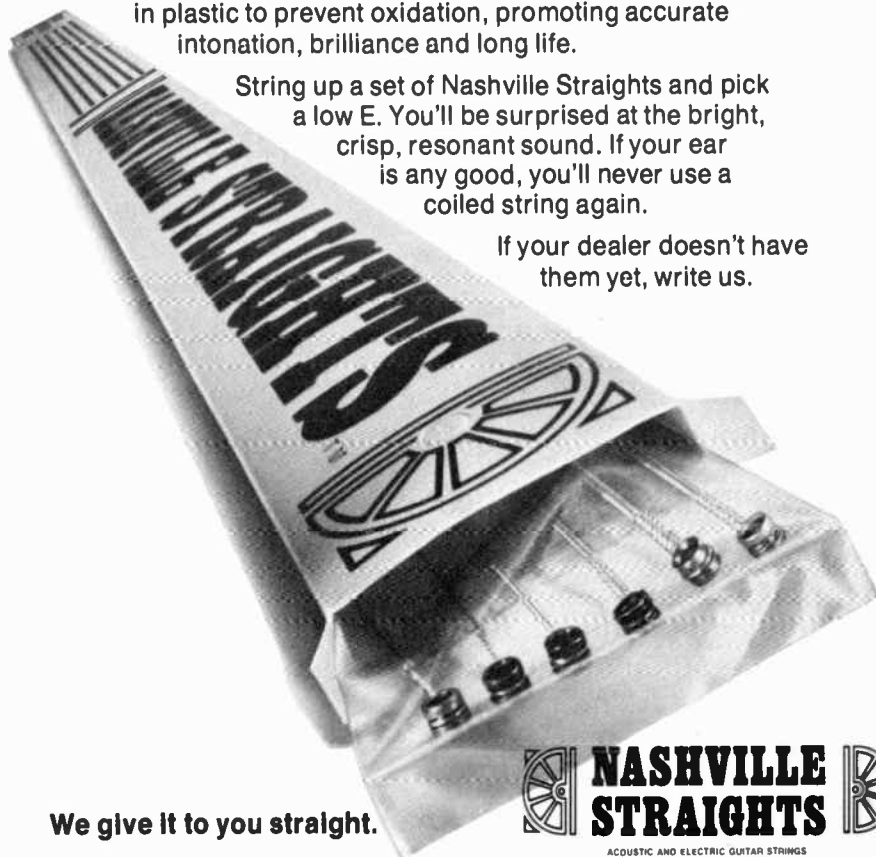
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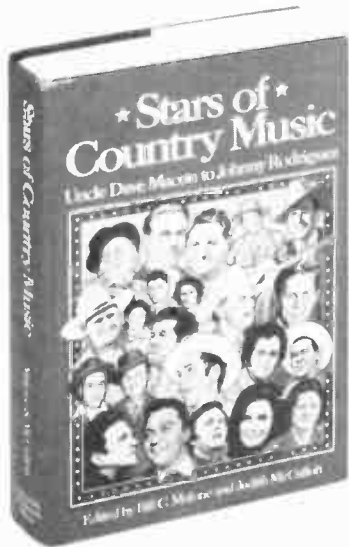
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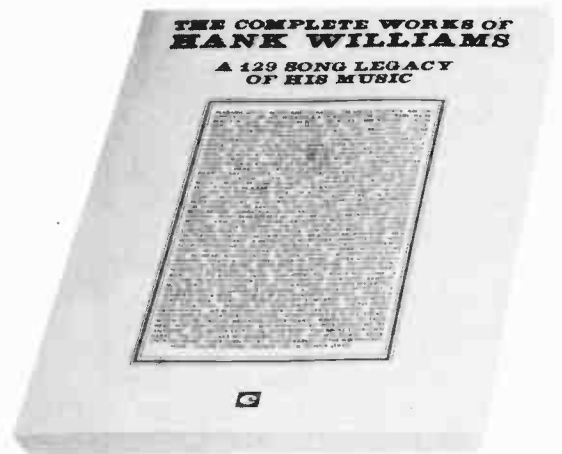
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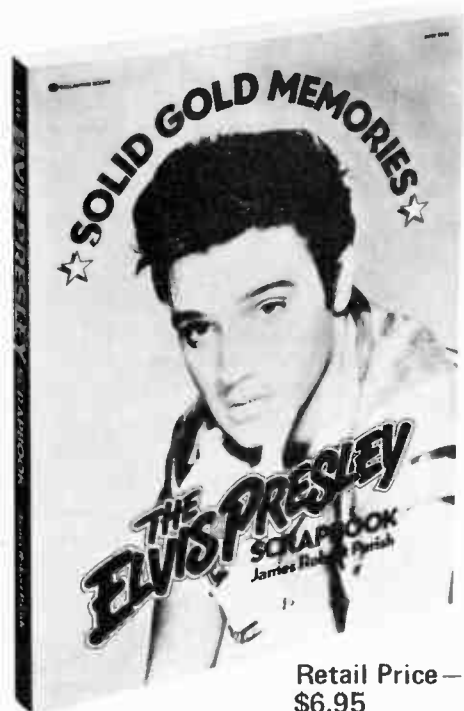


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Photo: John Miller

Stella Parton is a hat-lover. "I've got almost as many hats as Dolly has wigs."

**STELLA PARTON**

(Continued from page 35)

26-year-old singer with one album to her credit is still wearing hats. "I love to wear them," she says.

Stella has been recording for Country Soul and Blues Records for slightly more than a year, but she's been performing for audiences since the age of 9, when she and Dolly sang "You Are My Sunshine" on the radio. The Parton house was always filled with music, since nearly all of the 12 children sang or played an instrument (Stella plays guitar and autoharp), and their mother sang and wrote songs. Stella was 19 and in beauty school when she formed her first band, and when it broke up, she started a gospel group which lasted two years. Somewhere in between came marriage, a son, and divorce. "The opportunity was there for Stella to ride Dolly's coattails, but she didn't take it," says Ron Woolman, Stella's manager.

Although Dolly comes up often in Stella's conversation, one senses that she's something of a sore subject, perhaps because "people relate to me as Dolly's little sister, rather than as an individual." While she says she doesn't mind talking about Dolly, she dislikes being asked how it feels to be her sister. It's a question she says she doesn't know how to answer. "She's still not a star to me, she's my sister," Stella says. "I'm proud that she's successful, but I'm not any prouder of her than I am of my other brothers and sisters." As far as their being alike, Stella says, "We're alike only in that we have the same mother and daddy. She was always outwardly emotional as a kid and I

never have been. Really, we're nothing at all alike."

Certainly that is true of their music. Stella admits "I can't sing like Loretta/ Dolly or Tammy Wynette" in her song, "Long-Legged Truck Drivers," but the comparison is one of apples and oranges. The two have entirely different styles and approaches to their music, with Dolly's perhaps more defined than Stella's at this point.

She writes a good deal of her own material, songs that tell of love and passion and truck-driving men and women. The most distinctive of her songs is "Ode to Olivia," as much a reprimand to the country music industry as it is an apology to Miss Newton-John. "She didn't tell 'em to give her the award," Stella says. "It was just like a city dude comin' to the country and ridin' a pony better'n the country boys. They got mad about it, that's all." Both her comment and song are clues to Stella's strong personality.

"I've always said what I feel," she says. "If I don't like something, I don't like it, and you'll know it." The people who wanted to make her a star found that out. "They told me, 'Wear a dress,' and 'Fix your hair different.' I told 'em, 'As long as I'm clean and neat, it's my business.' They wanted me to change my name, too. I tried that for a while. No more, ever since they introduced me as Stella Stevens one night." This stubbornness apparently comes not from contrariness, but from a firmly molded sense of self. Stella is not about to have shaken. "When I decided to like myself, I decided I had to be me," she explains. "If they like me, fine. If they don't, well, I'm still gonna be me. Because I don't want to be a star. I just want to sing."



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## LA COSTA

(Continued from page 35)

the reporter and photographer squatting patiently outside La Costa's dressing room. A scrawny, dark-haired girl goes out and gets a Pineapple Julius in case the celebrity is thirsty. By the time she returns, salesgirls are lining the railing of the steps that lead up to the dressing rooms, waiting for a vision to waft from behind the wooden door.

Then it happens. The vision appears in a blue number with a star studded on the back. The salesgirls ooh and ah. Two pubescent customers stare a few moments, and then turn to each other. One finally works up the courage. "Who is it?" she asks. "I don't know," her friend returns. They turn and stare a second time. "Must be somebody, though," they conclude.

Despite two Capitol albums and a single, "Western Man," occupying a respectable position on the charts at press time, La Costa is not an immediately recognizable name, face, or voice, not even to country fans. The 25-year-old singer plans to change all that.

Unlike many other people with such lofty ambitions, La Costa did not spend her childhood dreaming of the day she'd become famous. As the middle child and elder daughter of an itinerant water-well driller and a beautician, La Costa (named for one of her daddy's old girl friends) had other things to do. Although her memories of growing up in Texas and Arizona include singing on the radio at the age of four, they're mostly made up of "washing dishes from sunup to sundown—we always had a lot of company" and walking barefoot down to the grocery with her sister Tanya on her hip. While her parents Beau and Juanita Tucker called upon both girls to entertain neighbors who dropped in, "Bein' a star or recordin' artist was so far-fetched, I guess I never really gave it any thought," La Costa remembers. "I was just so countryfied, doin' what my folks said all the time, that I didn't have enough initiative to think about what I wanted to be," she adds in her west Texas drawl. "Growin' up," she says, "I thought the thing to do was to get an education."

That she did, on a scholarship to Cochise College, where she majored in medical records and won a Miss Country Music Phoenix contest. Upon graduation she married Darrell Sorensen, a handsome, 31-year-old ex-pilot who

looks as if he just stepped off an Arizona ranch and who wishes reporters would forget his relationship to La Costa and omit the fact that he travels with her as her road manager.

In 1971, about the time La Costa tired of her medical records job and began working for a trailer sales company, Beau ("My daddy, he's a sly dude. He can talk his way") called from Las Vegas to say that Tanya had recorded a tune called "Delta Dawn," and that if La Costa wanted to get into the business, he believed he was in a position to help her. "Although it was always in the back of my mind that I could sing, I didn't really want to, I'll be truthful," she says, unconsciously working the zipper on one of her new specialty shop suits. "When it came down to it, Darrell talked me plumb into it."

For a girl who spent years not knowing what she wanted, La Costa is making up for lost time. She's currently trying to shirk her "only country" image so that she might also appeal to pop audiences. "I want them to come expecting to hear all types of songs," she says. It shows in her choice of concert material—"Me and Bobby McGee," "The Best of My Love" and "She Don't Love You," underscored with a rock beat by her own Stone Bridge Band. And while she once spent her spare time spelunking and raising falcons, she now contemplates the way to get a number one record. "I don't have to have the number one spot every time," she says, "but I don't want my aim to be any less than that, 'cause if you settle for less, that's what you're gonna get. I want nothin' less than the best."

There are self-imposed guidelines, however. "If I make it," she says, "I want to make it on my own, not because I'm Tanya Tucker's sister. I'm not ashamed of bein' her sister. I'm not jealous of her and we're not rivals, but I get p.o.'d when a j.d. introduces me as La Costa Tucker. It's not on the record. We've got very different singin' styles. I'm the smooth type of singer, mellow, laid back, and she's more boisterous. We record different songs, even, so I don't know why people have to do that, why they have to compare. It's ridiculous." She pauses and stares down into her glass of tea. When she finally raises her head, her usually happy-go-lucky look has turned to one of unexpected seriousness. "If I can't make it on my own," she continues, "then I want to get out of the business. It's as simple as that." ■



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