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COUNTRY MUSIC



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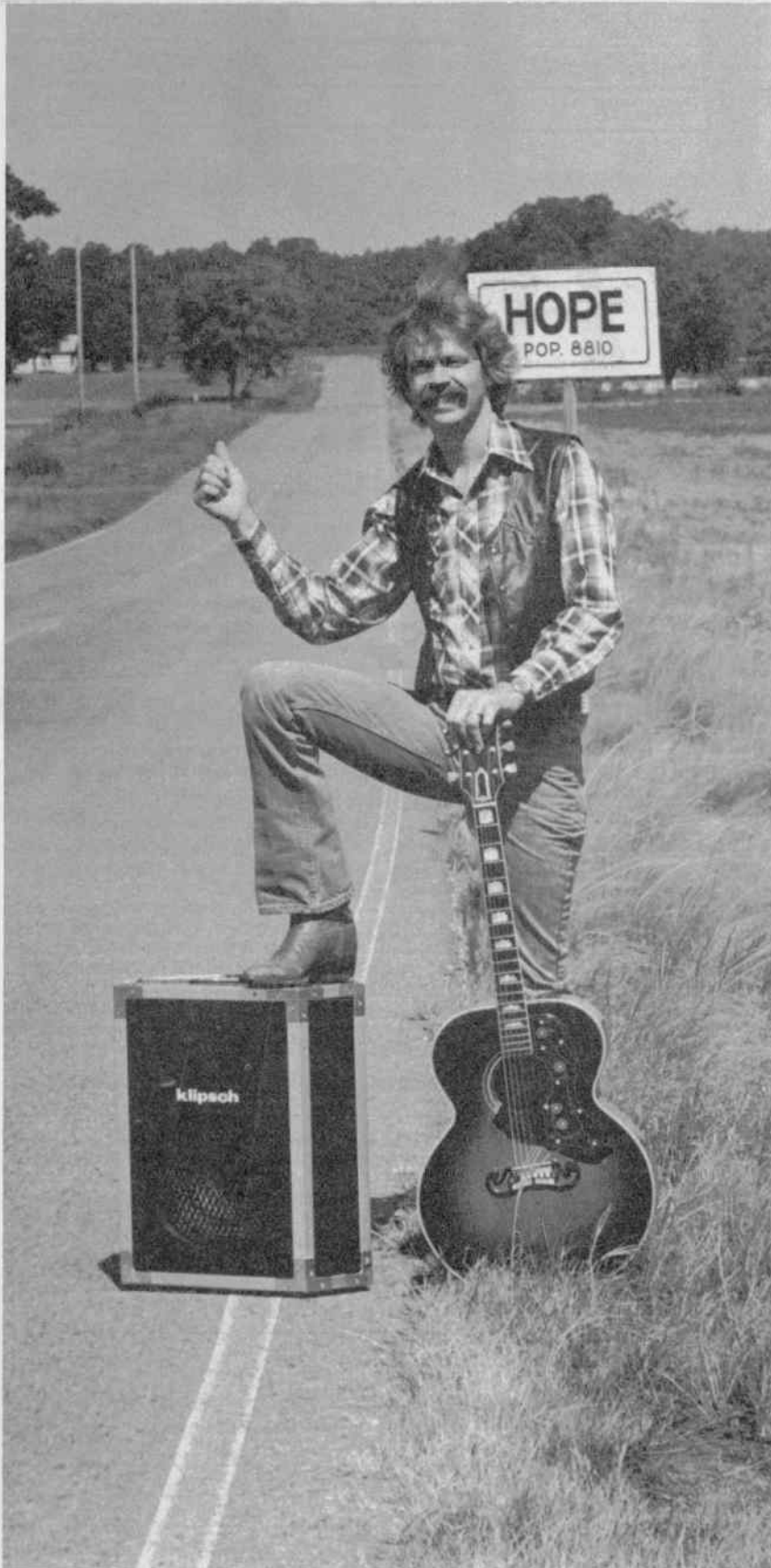
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LETTERS

Barbara's Moods

After reading Douglas B. Green's review of Barbara Mandrell's *Moods* album in the Nov/Dec 78 issue of *Country Music*, I am compelled to quote Linda Ronstadt: "Music to me, is music, and it's either good or bad and you judge it on that basis." (*Country Music*—Oct. 78).

I have been enthralled by *Moods* since the first time I put it on my turntable and heard such captivating cuts as *Pity Party* and *Don't Bother to Knock*. After hearing these songs (and most of the other cuts on the album) once or twice, Barbara already had me in the "mood"—foot tapping, singing along, etc.

I wish to congratulate Barbara Mandrell for a truly top-notch performance on *Moods*. In my opinion, the weak spot (if you can call a hit single a weak spot on this album is *Sleeping Single in a Double Bed*).

I think your reviewers need to place the aforementioned Linda Ronstadt quote prominently on their desks as they write their reviews. I shudder to think what would happen to multi-talented performers such as Dolly Parton, Emmylou Harris, Linda Ronstadt, Barbara Mandrell, Eddie Rabbitt, Willie Nelson etc., if they allowed themselves to stagnate within the narrow confines of what your reviewers think they should be singing. I, for one, would feel cheated if these talented people failed to continue to expand their horizons. They would be cheating themselves, as well as their listeners, if they didn't strive to develop their full potential (even if it does offend a few people who want to keep them in a narrow mold!)

STEVEN J. HASHEK
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

Statler Bros.

Holy Cow. What Next?

Finally after all the sarcastically written record reviews of past Statler Brothers albums, you have redeemed yourself with a favorable review. (Statler Brother's Christmas Card Album).

How about a few more articles about the boys or maybe a centerfold picture in an upcoming issue.

DEE FORBES
VIRGINIA BEACH, VA.

Hank Snow

Thank you for the article on the greatest picker and singer of them all, Hank Snow, in the Nov/Dec 78 issue of *Country Music*. It was an interesting item on a most fascinating individual, although I thought such phrases as "homely dough-like face" and "clothes-pin-on-the-nose

quality in the voice" were a bit tacky. Somewhere I'd like to see someone write more about Hank's music, such as his guitar style, his attitude toward electric instruments, drums, etc., and his intriguing method of tuning a fret lower than standard back in the 50's.

I would like your readers to be aware of the annual outrage that took place this year on October 9th. The Country Music Association once again failed to induct Hank Snow into the Hall of Fame. He's been nominated forever it seems, but someone else more or less deserving always beats him out. But this year they've gone too far. Think of it. Grandpa Jones is in the Hall of Fame but not Hank Snow. Mind-boggling. Now I'm not knocking Grandpa Jones. He's an enjoyable entertainer. But considering all that Hank has accomplished over the years, his artistry as guitarist, singer, and songwriter, as well as his contribution to the whole music scene indicates something's wrong somewhere. No wonder this mysterious clan of 200 who makes the selections remains secret. They should be ashamed to go out of the house. They've lost all credibility as an award-giving agency, and until Hank Snow is in that Hall of Fame the prestige of the honor itself is suspect.

Here's hoping that a public outcry of indignation to the Country Music Association will correct this unconscionable injustice long overdue. Hank Snow should be in the Hall of Fame.

DON ZELADE
OCEANSIDE, CA.

John Prine

I'd just like to thank you for the article on John Prine in your Nov/Dec 78 issue.

I first heard one of his albums about four years ago, and have been hooked ever since.

He is my all time favorite and it's nice to see him getting the recognition he deserves.

KIM BLACK
MONTICELLO, ILL.

Ralph Emery

It was refreshing to read the article on Ralph Emery Nov/Dec 78 especially since we (the listening audience) seem to acquire many interesting insights about country artists and associates through him, yet seldom read or hear of his personal or professional life.

He's commendable for his foresight in recognizing and promoting many country artists. Also, he is to be admired, for somehow, among all that glitter and glory,

he has not forgotten his humble origin and still possesses that rare essence.

I was fortunate to meet him, while in Nashville in 1976, during a taping of *Pop Goes The Country*. His photogenic mind instantly recalled as usual, the call letters of the local radio and TV stations that carry his programs in my area.

In conclusion, I must agree, "He does everything with class."

AGNES CORDREY
ROSSFORD, OHIO

Bartender's Blues

I just picked up my Nov/Dec 78 issue of *Country Music* and was shocked over Ed Ward's review of George Jones' album *Bartender's Blues*. Being a fan of George's all my life, I think the album is super. I feel myself that George has changed his style just a tiny bit on this album and that Mr. Ward should have taken this into consideration. If I may correct him, the album has ten real good songs on it, not two.

KIM SINCLAIR
BRANTFORD, ONTARIO
CANADA

Donna Fargo

I wish everyone could have a chance to meet Donna Fargo and see for themselves what a very special lady she is. I saw Donna's show (which was fantastic) last night in Leslie, Ga. After the show, she signed autographs and then sat and talked with several of us for thirty minutes or more. I believe there is no such thing as a "stranger" to Donna Fargo. She treated us as though we'd all been friends forever. I've never seen a star with so much affection for her fans.

I'm sure by now everyone knows that Donna has multiple sclerosis. You'd never know it by her fantastic performance and bubbly personality. I hope everyone will pray for this wonderful lady. She is a big asset to country music.

Keep up the good work on the magazine and keep it country.

KIM WYNNE
AMERICUS, GA.

Carl Perkins

This is, by far, a complete change from my usual routine after receiving my *Country Music Magazine*. I usually get back from the mailbox and read it from cover to cover. Today, your Nov/Dec issue has excited me so that I had to put it down and write.

First of all, I am a Carl Perkins fan who has been hanging in there for the past ten years trying to do my best to promote his career. He has so much to offer country fans from little kids on up. Your magazine comes as payment for all our discouraging moments in the past. The star is beginning to shine again even brighter than before. No one deserves it more than Carl. What a special person he is.

Thanks for the fine record review of *Ole Blue Suede's Back*. The album is one for the vault and has an element of magic about it. Unadulterated production and instrumental genius.

Country fans, please be sure Carl is back as the Rockabilly King like in '55. He still has his country boy's dreams and is truly one of the "good ole boys." He puts as much effort into a show for 50 people as for 5,000.

I'll be looking forward to future coverage of Carl's career. It has been very good in the past. Thanks also for the articles on Dolly, Connie, Eddie and Ralph. Now—back to my reading.

LYDIA SEIBERT
LITITZ, PA.

I've Always Been Crazy

I've been debating whether or not to write to *Country Music Magazine* concerning the review of the latest Waylon Jennings album, *I've Always Been Crazy*, Nov/Dec 78 reviewed by Douglas B. Green. After I read the review, I was to say the least, a little agitated.

I like the title song, and so do many other people, since the song won a *Bullet Award*. *Don't You Think This Outlaw Bit's Got A Little Out Of Hand*, is a total rebellious song, protesting the label that Waylon has been stuck with. This labeling system has been more destructive than constructive, because it seems to be limiting the audience in some concerts. Waylon's music is not rock, not country, not blues. Getting stuck in one category is hard to shake. Merchandising doesn't sell records, versatility does. The whole album is a fantastic one that will probably be and stay my favorite. The album was released Gold and may open a broader spectrum in *Country Music*.

I went to the Waylon Jennings concert at the Arizona State University Activity Center and all I can say is that Waylon put on One Helluva Concert. When he puts on a concert, he realizes that the audience came to hear him sing, not hear him talk.

Many people in the *Country Music* field, both professionals and fans alike feel the way I do. So as far as we're concerned, let Waylon play his music as he sees fit, and if you don't like it, you don't have to listen.

SUSAN L. TALAFOUS
PHOENIX, ARIZ.

EDITORIAL CORRECTION

Looking back at the January-February issue of *Country Music* we see that we owe a couple of our writers an apology. Though he is not credited in the issue, the excellent profile of Rex Allen Jr., our 1978 *Bullet Award* Winner for Best New Entertainer Of The Year (page 18) was written by Harry Morrow. Also, "Country Scene" piece on Charlie McCoy (page 10) was written by Bob Millard, not Bill Millard as we had it credited.

The South Texas songwriter one magazine tagged "a musical version of Clint Eastwood" has been preceded by a pretty strong reputation. Johnny Cash, David Allen Coc, Rita Coolidge and Jerry Jeff Walker have paved a wide welcome line to his door interpreting Clark classics like "L.A. Freeway," "The Last Gunfighter Ballad" and "Desperados Waiting For A Train."

But you don't really need interpreters to hear and feel music as clear and clean and direct as the kind Guy Clark makes on Guy Clark.



Guy Clark

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1) Dick Broderick, former chairman of the board of the Country Music Association (CMA), past vice president international division of RCA Records and managing director of Springboard International Records.

2) Federation of International Country Air Personalities (FICAP).

3) Lee Morgan, co-produced, wrote and published Ronnie McDowell's smash hit "The King Is Gone."

Music City Song Festival 1979 is limited to amateur participation only (see rules and regulations). **All entries will be limited to country music**. All rights to the entered songs and lyrics will remain those of the songwriters and lyricists.

It's easy to enter. For song competition, record your original song on a tape cassette (one song per cassette); for lyric competition, type or print your original lyric on a sheet of plain white paper (one lyric per sheet); for vocal performance competition, record any song you wish on a tape cassette (one song per cassette). Each song or lyric must be accompanied by a completed **Music City Song Festival 1979 entry form or reasonable facsimile**. Send entry, completed and signed entry form, and proper entry fee to:

 **Music City Song Festival**
P.O. Box 17999
Nashville, Tennessee 37217

This is your opportunity to get your songs and lyrics in front of the people who make the "Nashville Sound" They are waiting for your entry. so enter now, as often as you wish and **you could win \$10,000**.

1979 Rules and Regulations

1. Competition in this festival is open to any amateur writer or amateur vocalist (see definition of amateur stated below), with the exception of employees, their relatives or appointed agents of the Music City Song Festival (MCSF).
2. Each entrant indemnifies MCSF, and warrants same, that his or her entry is not an infringement of any existing copyright, or other rights of any third party. Furthermore, the entrant by virtue of his or her signature on the entry form specifies his or her right to enter this competition, and do so in accordance with its rules and regulations.
3. Musical compositions and lyrics which are entered and have been released or disseminated in the United States for commercial sale in any medium prior to November 1, 1979, or the public announcement of the "MCSF 1979 Winners", whichever occurs first, will be in violation of these rules and regulations and will be ruled invalid for this competition.
4. MCSF accepts no responsibility for damage or loss to any entry prior to its receipt by MCSF.
5. All decisions of Festival judges shall be final and binding upon MCSF and all entrants.
6. All entries must be postmarked no later than August 15, 1979. MCSF reserves the right to extend all dates inclusive of this competition, in the event of interruption of postal services, national emergencies, or acts of God.
7. For the purpose of the songwriting and lyric competitions, an amateur is anyone who is not or has not been a member or associate member of a performing rights organization, such as ASCAP, BMI, SESAC or their foreign contemporaries. In addition, an amateur is defined as anyone who has not had a song or lyric published or recorded in any commercial medium.
8. For the purpose of Festival eligibility, an amateur singer is anyone who has not had his or her voice recorded for commercial sale in any medium. All others may enter and compete.
9. Each entrant agrees that should he or she be chosen as a prize winner in this competition, MCSF will have the right to publicize that fact, his or her name and likeness, and all matters incidental to the same.
10. Each entrant shall permit (or shall cause the proprietor of copyright of the entry if different than the entrant to permit) MCSF to use said entry in and as part of any MCSF award program, to record the entry in its original version or in a new version for non-sale promotional purposes, and to use such recordings promotionally as MCSF shall deem fit.
11. All cassettes sent to MCSF will not be returned and shall become the property of the festival.
12. Each entrant agrees to be bound by all rules and regulations and entry procedures of the Music City Song Festival.

**MUSIC CITY SONG FESTIVAL
Official 1979 Entry Form**

1. Songwriter, Lyricist or Vocalist Name: _____
2. Address: _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Country _____
Phone: Home () _____ Office () _____
3. Title of song: _____
4. Title of lyric (lyric competition): _____
5. Entry categories: (check one)
 a. Song competition entry fee \$10.95
 b. Lyric competition entry fee \$ 7.95
 c. Vocal performance competition entry fee \$ 6.95
 d. Song & vocal performance competition entry fee \$15.95
 Note box "d" above combines the song and vocal performance competition. Use only one entry form for each entry.
6. Entry fee enclosed \$ _____
 Transfer fee: check box if entry is not on cassette (lyric competition not applicable)
 \$1.00
 Total fees enclosed \$ _____
7. Collaborators names (if applicable) _____
8. The 1979 MUSIC CITY SONG FESTIVAL is restricted to amateur competition only (see rules & regulations for definitions), and will be limited to country music.
9. I hereby certify that the information contained in this entry is factual and correct, and that I have read, understand, and agree to be bound by the rules and regulations of the Music City Song Festival, which are incorporated herein by reference.

Signature _____ date _____

Send entry to:
MUSIC CITY SONG FESTIVAL
 P.O. Box 17999
 Nashville, Tennessee 37217

CM-1

COLUMN

by MICHAEL BANE

Burn Down The Honky Tonks

I grew up with honky tonk stories, mostly centered around a local Leaning Tower of Degradation called Hernando's Hideaway. It was painted dead flat black, and if you believed even half the stories told about that place you'd be watching for half-clothed witches and satanic fire on Saturday night. "Don't you ever go in a place like that," my grandmother told me when I was too young to have any idea about what she was talking about. "That's nothin' but a no-good honky tonk, and that's no place for a good Christian to be."

Maybe so. Honky-tonks, I think, in some mystical way, belong to a rowdier, more freewheeling time, a time when the country was, well, *younger*, spiritually younger, less dispirited. They reached their peak in the years after World War II, riding on a wave partly composed of returning GIs looking for something more exciting than quiet evenings on the farm, and partly of hillbilly swing music pouring out of the mountains and plains at a staggering rate. It was (and in some rare cases, is) music you could drink to, dance to, fight to, and, when it was all over, cry to, and it found a ready home in the road-houses of the South and West. In their own way, the 'tonks became fortresses of a culture under fire. In the South, the dual shockwaves of industrialization (and the accompanying urbanization) and desegregation were challenging the very roots of Southern culture, while in the West the cowboy mythology was loosing ground to the planners, bureaucrats with slide rules replacing cowpokes with Winchesters. It was a time of change, and the 'tonks were little puddles of the past, a place to close the door to social upheaval.

What I was going to do was tell you about my favorite remaining honky tonks, where they are; what they're like. After thinking about it, I'd rather you didn't know. Not that I'm afraid you're going to plan your vacation around visiting a real honest-to-god honky tonk, but you *might*, and that's enough for me. There's one in Nashville, although you've never heard of the place. It's on the wrong side of the tracks, two steps removed from nowhere and masquerading as a barbecue joint by day. Once Freddy Fender showed up to play, and nobody would let him on stage, since everybody knew that Freddy Fender would never show up at a place like *that*. He came back later that night with his driver's license, then vowed that nothing in the world could *ever* make him get on that stage.

I was going to tell you about another place, but I hear from a traveling band

that, if not my life, at least a certain portion of my lower anatomy of which I'm rather fond, is forfeit if I ever go back. They tell me there was even a story in the local paper, circulation three or four, about my indiscretions, but that's okay, too. I believe every person should have at least one place they can never go back to, so the next time he (or she) is in a new honky tonk, he'll have something to talk about with the Saturday night regulars. It's served me in good stead.

Call them honky-tonks if you want, but for the Saturday night regulars, that raunchy, neon-lit bar with its cheap beer and even cheaper solace is called *home*. The honky tonk is as American as apple pie; as deeply engrained in our collective subconscious as the prostitute with a heart of gold. A working-class pit stop between today and tomorrow; a buffer zone between exhaustion and despair; soft lights and hard country music—a good honky tonk is all that and more.

A honky tonk is a magical place where all the rules are, however temporarily, suspended, where ten bucks is still big money and the barmaid isn't studying to be a Broadway actress. Sure, you can dance at a honky tonk, but it's more than a dance hall. You can hear live music at a honky tonk, but it's more than a listening room. And you can drink yourself blind at a honky tonk, but it's more—much more—than a bar. A good honky tonk is the American Dream shrunken to beer, broads, and a bunch of loud music, the place where you pass "Go," and, if you're lucky, you collect your \$200.

But don't go getting the idea that honky tonks are all sweetness and light. The fears and desires and greeds that created the 'tonks in the first place are always bubbling just below the surface, waiting for the right amount of fire, or the right amount of whiskey, or the right misunderstanding, to bring them explosively out in the open. Consider the perhaps apocryphal story from a once-famous Texas honky tonk: A bouncer at the door asked each patron if he was holding a weapon, and everyone who said "no" was issued one free of charge.

There's one more little fact about honky tonks you should know—they're a dying species. Like the passenger pigeon and the Great Auk, the grand ole honky-tonk has fallen victim to that ole Demon Progress. It's hard to run a 'tonk in a shopping mall, and harder still to cry in your beer to a disco beat. So the old-time honky tonk has retreated to a few treasured enclaves, jealously protected by the Saturday night regulars. ■

Consoles Versus Components

The very first choice you have to make when buying a stereo system is to decide between a console or components. A console is a single piece of furniture containing all the "works" with built-in speakers. A component system consists of separate building blocks—speakers, receiver, turntable, and tape deck—each of which may come from a different manufacturer. To make an intelligent decision, you have to consider the advantages and drawbacks of each of these two approaches.

The chief advantages of the console is that it is simple to buy and install. You buy just one big box, take it home, plug it in, and your room is filled with music as well as a piece of outside furniture.

Unfortunately, the advantages end right there. For the emphasis on furniture affects both the cost and quality of consoles. The fancy cabinetry may well account for more than half the console's price. Granted, there's nothing wrong with spending money on furniture, but

you should realize where your money is going. It goes mostly for the box, not for its contents.

There are other troubles with consoles. Speaker placement is the most obvious problem. For good stereo, speakers should be at least eight feet apart in average-size rooms and as much as twelve feet apart in large rooms. With both speakers built into a single console, the cabinet would have to be anywhere from nine to thirteen feet wide to provide an optimum stereo effect. Yet for practical reasons—because otherwise they'd just be too bulky—most consoles are only about six feet in width. This compromise robs you of a great deal of musical realism. Even if the console were wide enough, speaker placement would still remain a problem because the speakers do not always sound best wherever the console happens to fit into your room. The sheer bulk of the console limits the choice of its placement. By contrast, separate speakers can easily be placed where they sound best.

The most serious drawback of consoles is that their performance is rarely spelled out in the specs. Most console manufacturers provide only promotional blurb without specific data. With components, by contrast, the specifications are clearly stated. Even if you don't know a watt from a decibel and can't make any sense of all those numbers at least with components you have the assurance that the manufacturer is laying his cards on the table: He tells you exactly what you get for your money. Think of the difference this way: With a typical console, you're taking pot luck with whatever the manufacturer has hidden away in the furniture. With components, it's like ordering a la carte. You can choose every part of your system to meet your particular demands in performance, features, looks, and price.

An important question is how the stereo system will fit into your home. In this respect, too, components have the advantage over consoles. With their bulky cabinets, consoles usually waste a lot of floor space. Components, by contrast, need not take up any floor space at all. All the units—even the speakers—can be placed on shelves, room-dividers, side-boards, etc., and their neatly styled appearance blends well with almost any decorating scheme.

Back in the early days of audio, there used to be a prejudice against components because most of them were unsightly—a scraggly mess of wires and tubes. But today's components are designed to please the eye as well as the ear. And if you are at a loss about just where to put your com-

(Continued on page 66)



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Country Scene

Earl Owensby: Hollywood Movie Mogul With A Southern Flair

When most kids go to sleep and dream about the silver screen, what they've got in mind is Hollywood. Not Earl Owensby. When he dreamed about the silver screen, he saw a budding movie business in North Carolina. Shelby, North Carolina, to be exact.

Go ahead and have a good laugh—a lot of people did (and still do). But while everyone was chuckling, Earl Owensby became the new king of the “Bs,” those low-budget, high-profit movies that everyone loves but won't admit it. From his expanding outpost in tiny Shelby, Owensby controls the largest independent movie operation on the East Coast, and all of a sudden a lot of Hollywood-type mogul people are knocking on Earl's door to see just how he does it.

How he does it is simple: He knows his people, the people who pay good money to see movies such as *The Brass Ring* and *Death Driver* and *Buckstone County Prison*. “That's why I use a lot of country music people in my movies,” says Owensby from his office in the EO Carolina complex, which includes not only executive offices, a sound stage and a private airfield, but a motel to house his guests as well. “People who see my movies like country music.”

His latest release, *Buckstone County Prison*, featured country music bad boy David Allan Coe in a substantial role (so far, Owensby has starred in his films—a formula for success that shows no sign of ebbing), with a soundtrack written by Coe. In case you didn't catch *Buckstone* when it passed through, consider this: Based on a total budget of less than a million dollars (“That's what I always say,” says Owensby. “Less than a million—sometimes a *lot* less than a million”), *Buckstone* has returned almost *six million*. And it's still doing just fine, thank you.

Owensby's latest project should prove even bigger. It's called *Living Legend*, and it's about just that, the world's greatest singer—a legend in his own time. The film stars Owensby in the legend role, with Elvis' last girlfriend, Ginger Alden, in the supporting role. As a bonus—and for any music fan, it's one hell of a bonus—the soundtrack includes 23 original songs by Roy Orbison. Per-

haps most interestingly, Owensby staged a huge rock concert for the film, and the effect on him was staggering.

“I just got a taste of what it must have been like,” he says. “And I'd have never believed it. It's like no other life in the world.”

It's like this: Hollywood is the biggest, toughest bureaucracy anywhere outside

the CIA, and Earl Owensby beat it at its own game. He beat it by simply ignoring all the conventional wisdom about what you could and could not do, by just going out and doing it. He doesn't need a multi-million dollar computer survey to tell him what people want—all he's got to do is turn the radio on. Check it out.

MICHAEL BANE

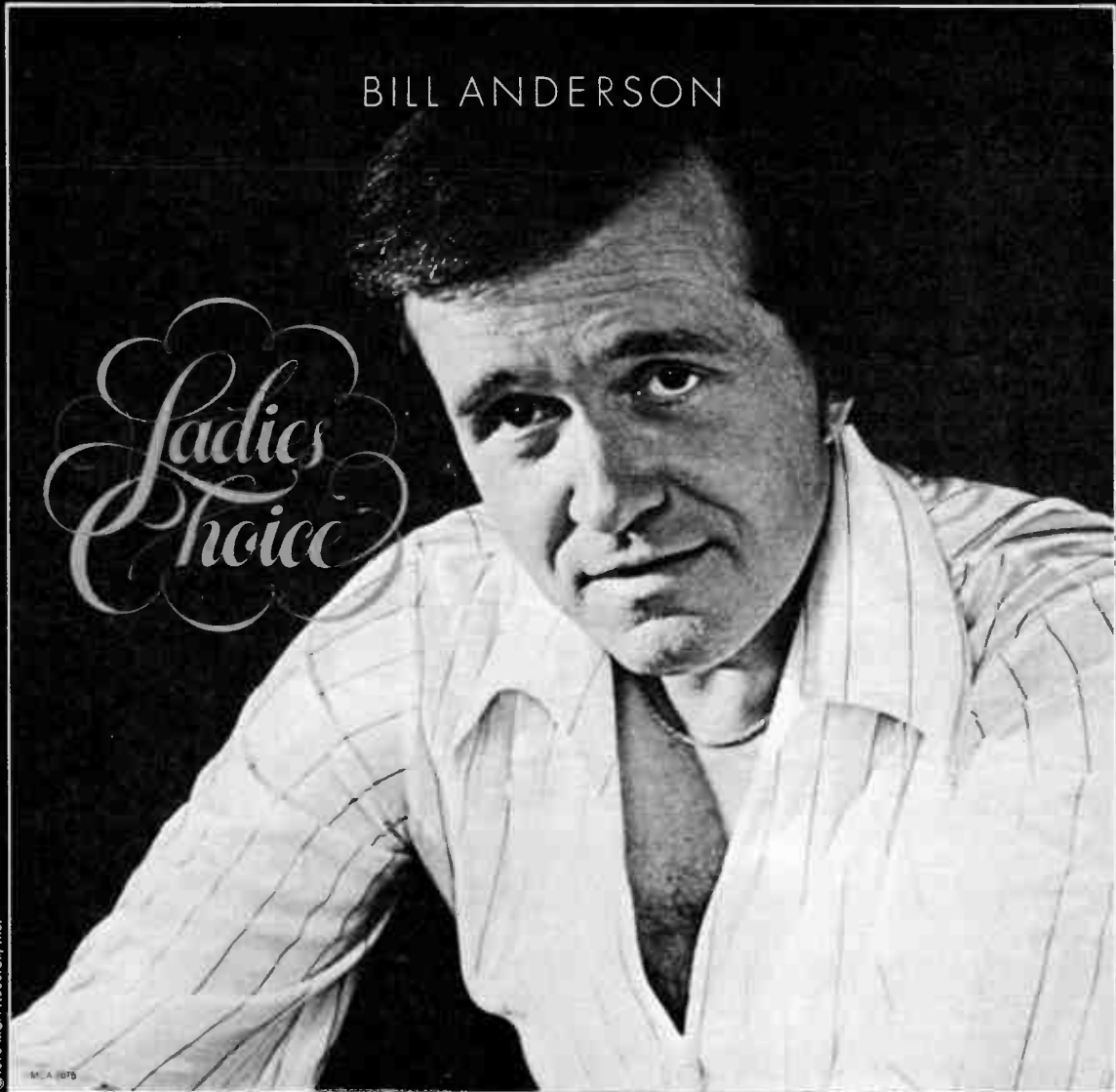


Movie mogul Owen pictured in top photo with costar Ginger Alden. Scenes from “Living Legend” (top right and above) depict the hectic life of a rock superstar.

*Ladies
Choice*

BILL
ANDERSON

BILL ANDERSON



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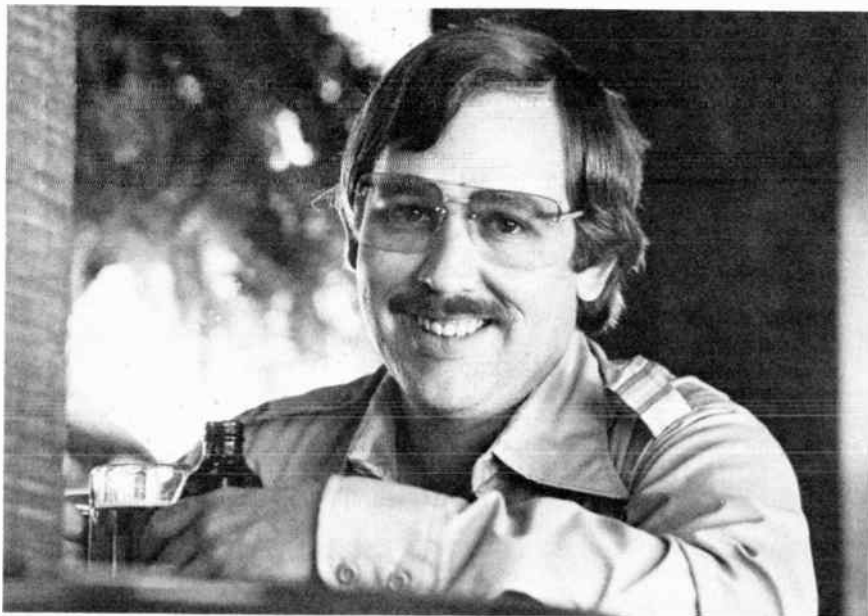
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Produced by Buddy Killen for Dial Productions

MCA RECORDS

John Conlee: "Basic And Simple Is What Works Best For Me"



No, it's not Merle Haggard. Funny, it sounds like him though, that rough-hewn tenor quaver. Funny though, the man behind the voice doesn't look like a hell-raiser but a quiet, bookish-type. Despite that, his strong, resonant tone marks him as one of the more interesting voices to emerge in latter seventies country music. His name: John Conlee.

You know John already from two top ten country hits—*Rose Colored Glasses* and *Lady Lay Down*. Both are plaintive, allegorical tunes which fit his voice like hand over glove. Yet, are you perhaps nagged by the inescapable feeling that there is still someplace else you've run across the name?

Of course. If you ever lived in or around the gold capital of the world,

Fort Knox, Kentucky, you might have heard him as disk jockey on radio station WSAC. His main radio job, however, was with one of the major radio stations—Nashville's famed WLAC.

Recounts John, "I did the morning drive. It's the most important slot in radio—that of getting people as they drive to work. But I did just about every format there; including news-talk, rock, you name it."

One thing initially hits; as one of the better-known DJ's on Nashville radio, and at the time a part-time closet songwriter, one would undeniably think that he would have a direct pipeline to the record contract-granting powers that be. Not so, says John, "because I was on a rock station and the business here is

ninety percent country."

Associations he formed, however, were helpful. WLAC program director Dick Kent, well known to many business execs in Nashville, "told Bud Logan about me. Bud is a fixture in the song publishing business and it happened that he and Dick were working together on a golf tournament when the subject of me came up."

Logan liked what he heard. ABC Records expressed interest, and a contract was signed, while John was still doing radio duty. Only when *Rose Colored Glasses* hit last spring did Conlee, a new recipient of artistic security, leave radio to concentrate fully on a recording career.

Roadwork looms ahead. The stage is not exactly new to John—he recalls singing *Love Me Tender* on a show while in the fourth grade, but as for the tour grind—250 or 300 dates a year—that is something Conlee is eagerly anticipating.

For a new artist to break so spectacularly is a rare feat in today's super-competitive country. Perhaps listeners appreciate the clean, uncluttered sound of his records—as John says, "basic and simple is what works best for me. I'm not one for slick production techniques." In addition, the editors of *Country Music* only recently voted John's hit song, *Rose Colored Glasses*, best new single of the year.

He may sound like the archetypal honky tonk cowboy on vinyl, but off-mike John is quiet, extremely intelligent, and very quick-witted. These indeed are positive qualities—not only to his business career but to any future Mrs. Conlee who might come along. "I'm a bachelor, and very eligible," he unhesitatingly informs.

Listening, ladies? RUSSELL SHAW

Cowboy Phil: Twenty Years Of Down Home Country Radio

It's been some time now since Philip J. Reed died at the age of 66 in a Westmoreland County, Pa. hospital. His death was not noted by many, for all the county's major newspaper gave him was a standard obituary without a photo or even a headline. To make matters worse, they buried the nickname "Cowboy Phil" in lowercase type. Philip J. Reed could have been anyone. But in this rural/urban/industrial area in the Appalachian foothills thirty miles east of Pittsburgh, Cowboy Phil was someone special, and country radio here just isn't the same without him.

For over twenty years, thousands of

farmers, housewives, students and plain working people were stirred awake by Phil [also known as "Pappy" and "Old Dad" in his later years] as he served up plenty of Roy Acuff, Kitty Wells and Little Jimmy Dickens records from 6 to 9 a.m. every weekday on radio station WHJB in Greensburg, the county seat. Long after strings and smooth arrangements became commonplace on country records, you could still hear *Wabash Cannonball* or *Old Shep* on Phil's show.

Once every American community had a Cowboy Phil, a man who hid behind undignified nicknames like "Cactus Jack" and "Cottonseed" while plying

his trade with a freewheeling independence unthinkable in these days of Arbitron ratings and arcane terms like "A.M. Drive Time." They and their listeners chose the day's musical fare, not the station's program director. Nor did they need carefully scripted continuity to read between records and commercials; they could ad lib for hours.

Over the years they transcended mere entertainment to become as essential to the areas they served as any preacher or doctor. Phil, for example, kept an entire generation of pre-agrobusiness farmers informed about crop blights and other

(Continued on page 16)

Cowboy *continued*

rural bogeymen through his daily farm reports. "He'd give you everything you needed: the farm report, the market report and road and weather conditions.

Actually, Phil came to Western Pennsylvania in 1934, when he joined the newly-opened WHJB as a young, guitar-strumming country singer. He and his Golden West Girls became popular local performers and worked briefly as regulars on Wheeling's WWVA Jamboree until World War II suddenly intervened to change Phil's—and American radio's—fortunes. Live music dominated radio before the war, but the draft drained off so many musicians that live programming became difficult. Stations turned to recordings, and soon so many new disc jockeys had been created that after the war live music never regained its popularity. Though Phil continued to play and sing live for a time, by the late forties he too had swapped his guitar for a turntable.

But under Phil's gentle, down-home facade was a highly individualistic, opinionated person. One morning in the early seventies he introduced a single by the rock band Country Joe And The Fish, played ten seconds of it, yanked it from the turntable and amid profuse apologies, broke the disc in front of the mike. There was a lot of showbiz in that, and it was probably planned. But it left no question that it was *his* show.

At the time he did that, he was already an endangered species. In fact, had he done that at the majority of the country stations in America, he would have been fired within the hour. Such shenanigans were considered uncouth as country radio refocused itself. By 1970, many small stations were part of huge conglomerates that researched audiences to determine programming. They discovered huge profits lay in attracting the young and affluent to country radio, but that these people emphatically did *not* want to hear *Wabash Cannonball*, played by older men with funny nicknames. Things began to change. New, college-trained program directors came in, bringing with them well-scrubbed young "personalities" who played what they were told when they were told. Soon many of the veteran deejays were "retiring."

In the midst of all this, Phil remained untouched. WHJB realized his popularity had barely diminished, and that he was a legend in an area notoriously resistant to change. They left him alone. In the end, only his injury in a fall, followed by deteriorating health, stopped him.

RICH KIENZLE

Eddie Rabbitt Scores A Hit With "Every Which Way But Loose"

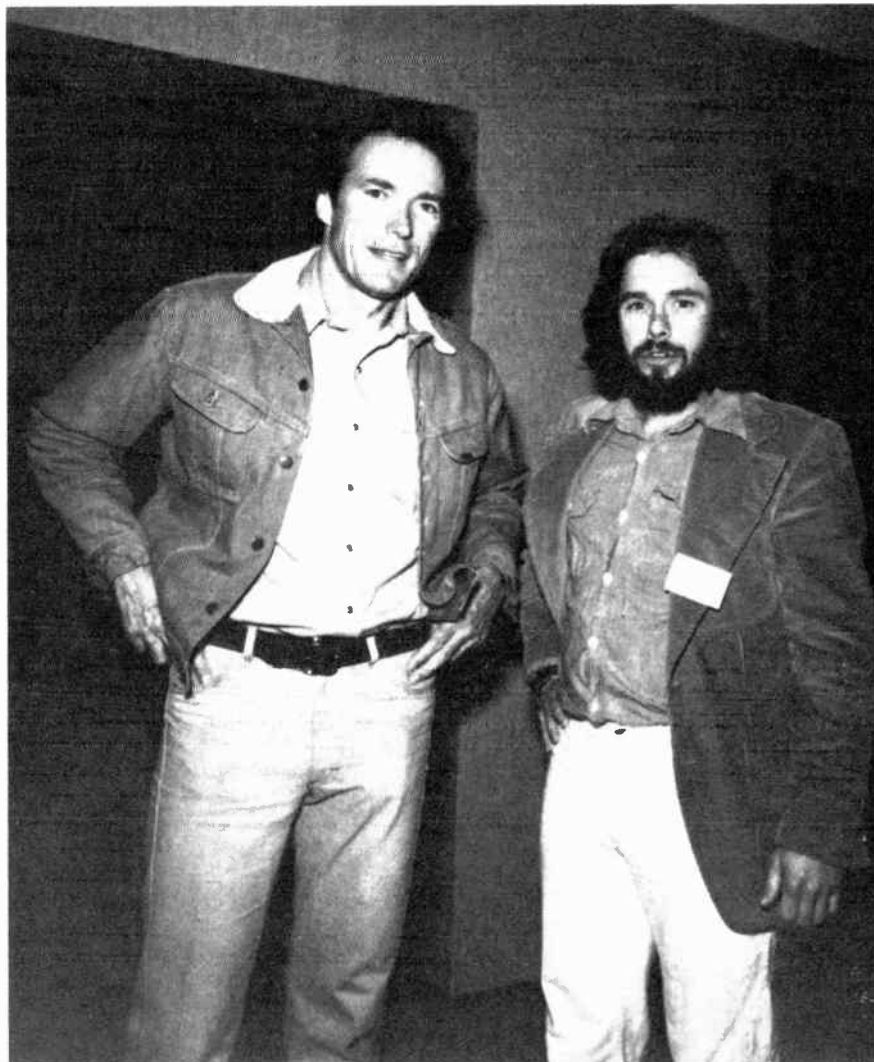
Recently, our Nashville editor, Bob Allen, journeyed to Dallas, Texas for the premiere of a new Clint Eastwood film, *Every Which Way But Loose*. Allen, an admitted Eastwood fanatic ("I've seen all his movies at least once, and *Dirty Harry* at least four times.") reports that the film should be of special interest to hardcore country music aficionados: it features cameo musical appearances by Mel Tillis, Charlie Rich and Phil Everly, as well as a title song (currently released as a single) by Eddie Rabbitt.

For Eastwood, who is best known to movie-goers as the man with a .44 Magnum, and "the man with no name," this starring role is something of a departure. In *Every Which Way But Loose*, he falls in love, he loses a fist

fight, and not *one* person gets shot!

"This guy's probably a little more naive than some of the characters I've played in the past," Eastwood explained at a press reception held during the festivities at the Dallas premiere. "He's kind of involved in the subculture of barroom fighting. The girl (Sondra Locke, who plays opposite Eastwood) is a country-western singer trying to make it on the club circuit. It's kind of a good atmosphere. It's an atmosphere I've never seen before."

Also appearing in a supporting role is Clint's sidekick, Clyde, an orangutan. Many critics insist that Clyde is a shoe-in for an Academy Award nomination. "Clyde's good" said one viewer. "In fact, he's *so* good, in some scenes, he even upstages Clint."



Country Music's own Bob Allen talks briefly with Clint Eastwood, star of "Every Which Way But Loose" at Dallas film premiere.

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CM 1

A presentation of Sterling Recreation Organization 1978 American Song Festival, Inc.

THE ORIGINAL TEXAS PLAYBOYS, THE WORLD'S OLDEST WESTERN SWING BAND: ALIVE AND KICKIN'

by DOUGLAS B. GREEN

Public taste in music is a funny thing; great music can be consigned to the musician's graveyard on a seeming whim. It can be revived just as capriciously.

That is exactly what has happened over the past few years with western swing, the dance music which charged out of the western dance halls in the 1930's to become country music's most inventive and innovative substyle, rode a crest of popularity for 10 or 15 years, then looked terminally ill before a swift and sudden revival in the past four or five years.

Where but a few years ago a scant few regional bands were struggling to make ends meet, suddenly western swing has become national again, with acts like Asleep at the Wheel and Alvin Crow and the Pleasant Valley Boys gracing major labels; Bob Wills reissue albums springing up all over the place; and, most fascinating of all, a group of former Texas Playboys touring and recording; the hands that helped create the music forty years ago still performing it with skill and feeling.

The germ of the idea actually began as early as the spring of 1970, when Merle Haggard, then at the front rank of country music's entertainers, took the commercially risky step of recording a tribute album to Bob Wills, which he entitled *A Tribute to The Best Damn Fiddle Player In The World*. It was, indeed, not a commercial success (although it was reissued when the swing boom got underway), but was highly acclaimed critically for not only the concept, but for the feeling of sheer reckless fun that people had forgotten existed in music. Assisting Merle's band, The Strangers, in the recording were several ex-Playboys, and their work was particularly outstanding with Eldon Shamblin on guitar, Johnnie Lee Wills on banjo, Johnny Gimble and Keith Coleman on fiddles, Tiny Moore on electric mandolin, Alex Brashear on trumpet, and others.

Wills had been highly lauded by this time in his career (he'd been elected to the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1968), but he was not a well man, debilitated by a

heart condition and a stroke. Still, late in 1973, producer Tommy Alsup gathered another set of legendary ex-Playboys for a recording session for United Artists. Brought in were legendary steel guitarist Leon McAuliffe, and country music's first drummer, Smokey Dacus. Johnny Gimble and Keith Coleman were there as a team, and Eldon Shamblin was there for his legendary guitar work. "Brother Al" Stricklin, the legendary "piano pounder" of western swing was there, as was one of Wills' latter—though one of his best—vocalists, Leon Rausch. The recording session was set for two days, and Wills himself was there the first day, enjoying the proceedings immensely, though unable to play. That night (December 3) he suffered a serious stroke (he was not to regain consciousness before his death some 18 months later), and did not make the second session.

The album, *For the Last Time*, like the Haggard album was not a best seller, but was highly regarded and the enthusiasm for western swing began to spread, especially with the growing popularity of *Asleep At The Wheel* with a younger audience.

By 1976 groups of reunited Texas Playboys began being invited to make appearances. One of their most memorable was on the *Austin City Limits* television show, and they officially formed under the aegis of western swing's prime mover and shaker, Tommy Alsup (also *Asleep At The Wheel*'s producer at the time), who produced their first album, *The Late Bob Wills' Original Texas Playboys Today*.

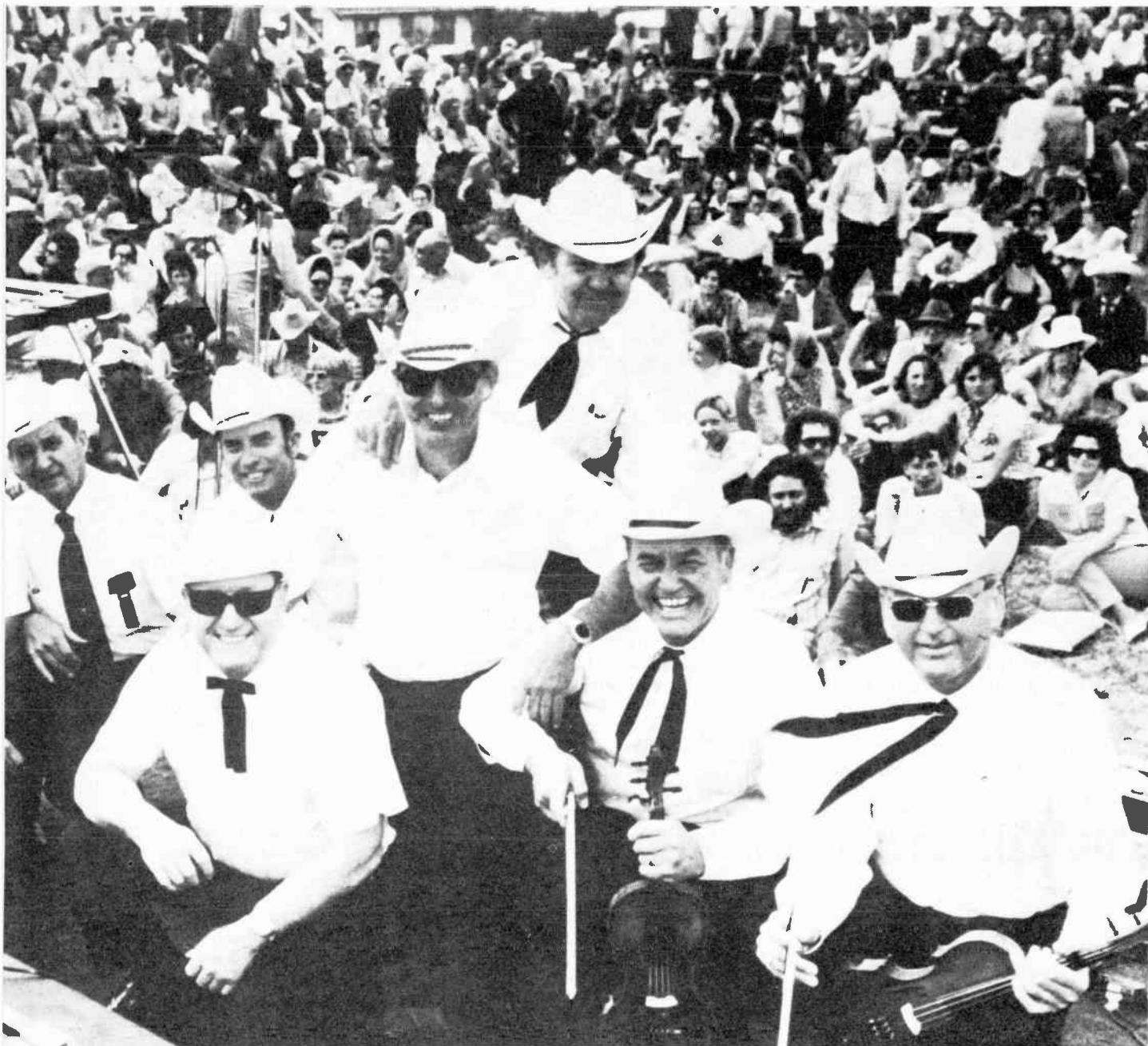
The reunited Texas Playboys were under the direction of Leon McAuliffe, who had joined Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys as a gangly youth of 18, in March of 1935, and in the ensuing years created the definitive western swing steel guitar sound, as well as writing many of the classic tunes for the instrument, including *Steel Guitar Rag* and *Blue Bonnet Rag*. Leon left the Playboys in 1942 to serve in the Air Force, and formed his own band, the Cimaron Boys, after the war. Based in Tulsa, he did quite well for himself for a number of years,



recording for Columbia, Capitol, and other labels, before becoming a radio station executive in Rogers, Arkansas.

With McAuliffe came Smokey Dacus, a longtime employee of his who had become country music's first drummer when he joined the Texas Playboys also in the spring of 1935. He set the definitive rhythm feel for western swing until his departure from the band in 1940, and though long out of practice he quickly regained his chops.

Another truly original Texas Playboy to sign on was the jovial newspaperman from Cleburn, Texas, Al Stricklin, who like McAuliffe and Dacus had set the definitive style for western swing with the piano. Stricklin's enthusiasm gave a lift to the band's morale as well as it's music. He also displayed a hitherto unknown talent at the same time, authoring a book (with the aid of Ft. Worth newsman Jon



McConal) called *My Years With Bob Wills* in 1976.

These three were joined by latter day Playboys with impeccable credentials: Johnny Gimble, Keith Coleman, Joe Ferguson, and Leon Rausch. Ferguson came closest to the original era: he first joined the Playboys as bass player, sax player, and vocalist in 1936, stayed until 1940, returned in 1950 and 1951, and has made a living as a professional musician in the Ft. Worth area ever since. His strong pop-influenced tenor is an effective vocal counterpoint to the deeper, huskier vocal work of both Leons, especially on Joe Frank's specialties, *Marie, You're O.K.*, and *Blue Prelude*.

Gimble and Coleman first worked as a team with the 1949-1951 Playboys. Gimble, who has since moved back to Austin, was the dean of Nashville's fiddle sessionmen for nearly a decade, and the

master of many instruments. Coleman had gone to work for a horse trailer manufacturer, in Chickasha, Oklahoma, but had not lost his fiddling touch: had turned out two fine albums with his boss, Jack Stidham, also an excellent fiddler. In addition to their joy at working together again, Gimble had just won the CMA's Instrumentalist of the Year award.

Three months after the release of the album, Keith Coleman died of cancer. Gimble said at the time that "all the rest of us fiddlers can move up a notch, 'cause we've lost the best."

Leon Rausch was a latecomer in Texas Playboy annals, first joining Wills in 1958, but his mellow, sun-warmed vocals were firmly in the tradition established by the legendary Tommy Duncan, and has assured a continuity of sound bridging the pioneer era with the modern.

Added to the band were two non-Play-

The Texas Playboys: Endeavoring to perpetuate the music they helped create.

boys who nonetheless had solid western swing credentials: Bob Kiser, a former member of Leon's Cimaron Boys, who played strong Shamblin style rhythm guitar and some very tasty lead as well; and Jack Stidham, Coleman's old boss, who made up a front line of three fiddles when Coleman was alive.

The album came out in the spring of 1977, and a live album was planned for the fall, recorded at Knott's Berry Farm. "We wanted to accomplish two things with '*Live and Kickin*'," said McAuliffe. "In all the years of recording we'd never done a live album. We've always felt that the band's live feel and beat were never accurately caught in the studio. The interaction between the band and the audience is what motivates the feel that we get.



Secondly, we wanted to do some new material to show that we could adapt any good tune to the Bob Wills style. We changed tempo, lyrics, and arrangements to fit us instead of rearranging the band to fit the tunes. On both these points I feel we've done what we set out to do."

The feel of the live band was indeed propelling and exciting, capturing much

Playboys, Sleppy Johnson, Keith Coleman and Jesse Ashlock. (above)

of the feel and the drive of the original Bob Wills sound. In fact, Al Stricklin ventures to compare this band with his original band: "We hear a lot of people who knew us back when, and the comments that we get say the same thing: better than ever!

The excellence of all the musicians helps, of course, as does their commitment to their particular sound. One significant difference Stricklin feels is in the rhythm section. "Leon McAuliffe and I have talked about this, and I really think the rhythm section's better than it ever was. Smokey on those drums, and Joe Ferguson just plays the heck out of that standup bass, and Bob Kizer is as fine a rhythm man as I've ever heard. It's solid! Really, it's as good as we've ever had, if not better."

Two new men made their appearance as members of the Original Texas Playboys though neither are on 'Live and Kickin'. One was sax player Rudy Martin an ex-Cimaron Boy, who added much of the feel of the Bob Wills sound of the 1930's with his energetic playing. Wills, though a firm lover of his basic fiddle band sound, was also a relentless experimenter, and had added horns to his band in the mid-1930's, at one time touring with a huge eighteen-piece orchestra. The other was the addition of Bob Boatright, a high school physics teacher from outside Fort Worth. The classic twin fiddle sound was provided by Stidham and Boatright, who also had been a member of Leon's Cimaron Boys, and had recorded, though not toured, with Bob Wills himself in the 1960's.

They were joined on the live show and the album by Marcia Ball, the highly regarded Louisiana singer who is now coming into her own at last. She sang *Texas Blues* as her contribution to the proceedings.

Just weeks after the album was recorded, the Original Texas Playboys surprised and delighted the country music world by winning the CMA award for Instrumental Group of the Year, an award which Danny Davis and the Nashville Brass had seemed to monopolize for quite a few years. Other than the election of Wills himself to the Hall of Fame, it was the first real honor from the country music establishment that the pioneers of western swing had ever received, and they were understandably jubilant.

The year 1978 has brought more of the same: more adulation, more work, and a third Capitol album recently recorded at the Capitol Towers in L.A., where they also appeared to two packed houses at the Palomino.

Today, most of them continue to hold day jobs: Al Stricklin still works for the Cleburn weekly newspaper; Bob Boatright still teaches physics; Leon McAuliffe still has his radio station in Rogers, Arkansas; Leon Rausch records on his own; Jack Stidham continues to manufacture and sell horse and livestock trailers. But they do all meet frequently to perform all over the country. After all, they are not a band that needs a lot of rehearsal; they had that 30 or 40 years ago, night after night on the bandstand with Bob Wills as they helped him create the music they now endeavor to perpetuate. ■

Bob Wills Is Still The King



Western swing is a polyglot mixture of square dance fiddle, big band swing, blues, Mexican mariachi, and country hot jazz. While he did not invent it, Bob Wills is certainly the central figure in the music, the figure around whom the legend and the folk-lore have grown.

The son and grandson of fiddlers, Bob was born in Kosse, Texas, March 6, 1905. He grew up around dances and music, and left his West Texas farm in 1929 to join a medicine show. He and a guitarist, Herman Arnsperger, met on the show and recorded as

early as 1929 (the record was never released) as the Wills Fiddle Band.

Wills along with Arnsperger, and vocalist Milton Brown formed the Light Crust Doughboys, which became immediately successful in Fort Worth, but he broke away in August of 1933 to form a group he called his Playboys, consisting of himself, his banjo playing brother Johnnie Lee, vocalist Tommy Duncan (Milton Brown went on to form his own band, the Brownies, also pioneers of western swing), and Kermit and June Whalen. They became the Texas Playboys when they moved to KVOO in Tulsa in 1934.

There they had their greatest success, becoming instant hits with the fans, and extremely popular on record, recording first for Brunswick in September of 1936, and had innumerable hits throughout those years, most of them the classic tunes of western swing. The Texas Playboys broke up during the war, and although they enjoyed their biggest success immediately after World War II, dance bands both pop and country were on their way out. The final blow was rock and roll. Wills himself kept going with increasingly smaller bands largely on the strength of his personality. Most of the other musicians in the style found work at other professions.

Wills lived long enough to see the start of the revival, however, lapsing into a coma on December 3, 1973, and dying of complications May 13, 1975. ■



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LATEST NOTES ON DAVID ALLAN COE: WHO IS THE MAN BEHIND THE 'MYSTERIOUS RHINESTONE COWBOY' PERSONA?

... "There are people who figure David Allan Coe's life is a series of escalating misadventures, one mistake after another, with a busted career at the end of the line.
... There are people who don't credit David with sense enough to tie his own shoes."

by **MICHAEL BANE**

*"I've seen my name a few times in your phone book
(Hello, hello)
And I've seen it on signs where I've played
But the only time I know
I'll hear David Allan Coe
Is when Jesus calls his final Judgement Day..."*

—You Never Even Called Me
By My Name, as sung by David Allan Coe

The Bearded Lady has died—Lola was her name—only it turned out that Lola was the Bearded Man, and some SOB on some Mickey Mouse newspaper printed it like it was news or something, but no matter, 'cause David Allan Coe and Entourage have come to pay their final respects. David Allan Coe leans against the wooden, garishly painted stand of Fred the Sailor, the tattooist and titular head of this family that travels under the name of "Freak Show," and stares at the flowers piled on the stage where Lola plied her trade.

"It was all slight of hand," says Fred. "I mean, she was a fine lady, whether she was a woman or not."

He proceeds to explain in graphic detail the departed Lola's anatomical gifts, and David Allan Coe shakes his head sagely and wanders off to look at 8×10 photographs of the Snake Lady caressing a python with her tongue. David is dressed in black, wearing his Mysterious Rhinestone Hat—the last vestiges of his Mysterious Rhinestone persona—having changed out of his black Mormon cassock after an early afternoon interview ("Tell me,

David, what are you doing these days... Oh? That reminds me of the time that me and Slim here"—gestures to a strange man wearing the world's largest turquoise belt buckle, styled hair and a shirt with no buttons—"went to Nashville and met all these stars, like Conway Twitty and Tammy Wynette... ad nauseum)." Incongruously, David is carrying a large green alligator won at the dart-throw booth. He looks pained.

"Whatdaya think, Michael?" he asks me.

I don't know what to think.

*"I can sing all them songs about Texas
And I still do all the sad ones I know
I can't help it, I look like Merle Haggard
And sound a lot like David Allan Coe..."*

—Long-Haired Redneck, as written
and sung by David Allan Coe

We are in Shelby, North Carolina, David Allan Coe and I, and for various and sundry reasons we both wish we were elsewhere. Anywhere else, in fact. For the first show, scheduled for a ridiculously early five p.m., before the rodeo that highlights this particular country fair, there are three—count 'em—three people in the cavernous stands. The sound equipment is ready, the band is ready, David Allan Coe is ready, everybody is ready but the audience, who didn't show.

"Postpone it," David says to the beleaguered promoter, who runs off to reschedule the show for *after* the rodeo. "This is the dumbest thing I've ever done in my life," David says to no one in particular.

There are people who would take issue with that last statement, because there are people who figure David Allan Coe's life is a series of escalating misadventures, one mistake after another with a busted career at the end of the line and an audience of three people to applaud when it's all over. There are people who don't credit David Allan Coe with sense enough to tie his shoes, much less to write a song, people who sniff at his music and downgrade his voice and laugh at his image and would probably kick his dog if he had one.

And David Allan Coe carries those detractors with the stoic equanimity of a monk, shrugging off the emotional baggage of his enemies like a convict shrugs off the days of his sentence. It will pass.

*"You better not try to stand in my way
When I'm walking out that door
Take this job and shove it
I ain't working here no more..."*

—Take This Job And Shove It, as
written by David Allan Coe and
sung by Johnny Paycheck

David Allan Coe's life reads like a country song. It's a song about prisons, about a mother who didn't care and father who went away, about an over-riding ambition and a whole bunch of demons who wouldn't let that ambition come to fruit. In its own way, the story of David Allan Coe is a modern-day parable, and like all good parables, it's just about half myth. And like all good parables, you can read in whatever message you'd like and take that home for yourself.

It begins in Ohio some 40-odd years

ago, where a nine-year-old David Allan Coe is being taken to a boy's "school," a reformatory, for, as his parents said, "his own good." David doesn't really understand why he's being sent away, only that his parents have separated, and they have other priorities. But David is a scrapper—or he learns to become a scrapper real fast. He learns that the first lesson is survival, and the second is escape. One of those escapes is in a car with a bunch of older boys, and when you escape in someone else's car, it's called Grand Theft Auto. And when you're an ex-con with a record going back to your ninth birthday, having a screwdriver on your person is Possession of Burglary Tools; having a "dirty" comic book is Possession of Obscene Materials. You go directly to jail. You do not past "Go." You do not collect \$200.

This is the old news: That David Allan Coe has spent a lot of time behind bars in



the Ohio State Penitentiary; that the raps were, for the most part, bum raps, a life of crime hardly worthy of the front pages; that he may or may not have killed a man who solicited sexual favors in prison, and that outside of David and the other gentleman involved, we're not likely to ever know one way or the other. And there is no evidence that crimes of violence make you a better (or worse) country singer.

When David Allan Coe came to Nashville in 1967, fresh from the Ohio State Pen, one of the first things he did was buy a hearse. Then, every weekend, as the friends and neighbors would pour into Nashville for the Grand Ole Opry, he'd drive that hearse down to the crumbling Ryman Auditorium and park it in front, so you couldn't get in or out without coming face to face with David Allan Coe. The Mysterious Rhinestone Cowboy, he called himself, and he dressed

all in black with rhinestones, wore a tall black hat that would make Tom Mix wince with envy and performed on-stage in a black mask.

When the Opry was over, he'd head over to Tootsie's Orchid Lounge (or, if Tootsie's looked dead, Linebaugh's just across the street from the Ryman), haul out his black-and-white Mysterious Rhinestone Cowboy guitar and invite himself to play. And when some six-foot-plus cowboy covered with 300 prison tattoos and with his name spelled out in rhinestones on the back of his shirt, wearing a black mask and patent leather black boots, driving a hearse and sporting a black hat the size of an Apollo spacecraft asks you to listen, you'd best believe that you *listen*. Listen, in fact, as if your life depended on it.

"Lately I've been thinking too much lately

*Lately I've been staying kinda stoned
Maybe I need someone who can make me
Feel like I'm not making it alone..."*

—Lately I've Been Thinking Too Much
Lately, as written and sung by
David Allan Coe

Melanie Broussard "Meme" Coe is sitting on the side of her bed in the motel room in Shelby, North Carolina, slowly working herself into rare form. She is as small as David is huge, an attractively tiny blond woman, and she single-handedly keeps the David Allan Coe road show from crashing into an iceberg and going under for the third time. She deals with the bookers and the bill collectors and the record companies and the well wishers and curiosity seekers, and she's damn sick and tired of hearing David moan about his *other* wife, Debby, leaving him to run off with the road manager, David's daughter Shelly and the dog, Nicky.

"Sometimes I just don't want to hear it any more," she says, pausing momentarily from his list of people who have to be called and letters that have to be written. It's hard. It's damn hard. We've been on the road for weeks, and I think we've managed to lose money. Now we've got to stay on the road to get enough money to get back home."

This is the first major road trip in quite a while, in support of an album David calls *HUMAN EMOTIONS* (released by CBS Records). Side one is the "happy" side of the album, done before Debby left. Side two is the "sui-cide." Figure it out yourself.

The two years since Meme joined David have been nothing else than hectic. Oh, by the way, David has always had more than one "old lady," as he likes to call them. For a long time it was just Debby and Meme. There's been as many as seven women at one time or another. On this trip, there's Meme, Nancy and Cherin, although Nancy's just along for the ride.

"I think they're more my old ladies

than David's," Meme says, slamming down the telephone and crossing off another number on the yellow legal pad that enumerates the day's chores. "We couldn't run it without 'em. Cherin takes care of David—makes sure his clothes are ready, that he gets places on time, stuff like that. Nancy runs errands, does the laundry, all the other stuff. I run the business."

David's professional landscape has changed as much as his personal one in those two years. For a start, and perhaps most importantly, the Mysterious Rhinestone Cowboy is dead. He died in a hail of cross-hype, gunned down by friend and foe alike who couldn't see the inherent *humor* in the ex-con turned guitar slinger, who saw only some hulking figure threatening the lily-white virginity of Music City, U.S.A. The funeral was held at a Nashville flea market last year, where surprised patrons were offered the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity of purchasing the Mysterious Rhinestone Car or the Mysterious Rhinestone Suit or all manner of Mysterious Rhinestone Memorabilia, sold by none other than the late Mysterious Rhinestone Cowboy himself.

The Mysterious Rhinestone Cowboy wasn't blameless in his own death—make no mistake about that. Even he understood that when you set yourself up as a target, you gotta expect to get shot.

Contrary to popular belief, the Rhinestone Cowboy has absolutely nothing to do with either Glen Campbell or the song by the same name. The Mysterious Rhinestone Cowboy was David Allan Coe's alter-ego: the baddest of them all, meaner than two junkyard dogs and able to leap tall studios in a single bound, third hand in the holy outlaw trinity of Willie and Waylon and The Next Big Thing. So he thought.

*"Twenty years I was in prison
More than that I was alone
Them some lily-white reporter
Thinks it's time that I was stoned..."*

And you wonder why I lost my sense of humor..."

—A Sense Of Humor, as written and sung by David Allan Coe.

Give a reporter an inch, and he'll try to make it a mile, and as a reporter, I'm speaking from experience. Our strength and our weakness is that, given any event we try to metamorphose that event into one of cosmic significance. Music is more than music, we music writers claim. It's a way of life. No, make that *life* itself. We don't want to review concerts, we want to cover *trends*; we are all, in this business, looking for The Next Big Thing, and when someone so totally outrageous presents himself and informs you that he is indeed The Next Big Thing, well, what's a writer to think?

And at first, everybody thought that



David Allan Coe, a.k.a. The Mysterious Rhinestone Cowboy, was just about the bees' knees. But there was a very basic problem, and that problem was that David Allan Coe was the person that he was. If he had been just *faking* all that Mysterious Rhinestone malarky, that would have been just fine, and everybody could have gone out and had a drink together. But, for better or for worse, there was an awful lot of The Mysterious Rhinestone Cowboy in David Allan Coe, and try as he could, there was just no way that David could make himself totally acceptable to either the Sunday afternoon social club or the established Nashville Sound or the budding scruffy-but-loveable Outlaw mythology. Somewhere deep inside there was a little demon in David Allan Coe, and that little demon pushed and shoved and goaded its host to test the outer limits, to push and probe at the fabric of country music and the Nashville establishment until something yelled "Ouch!"

"I've sang about things that no other country and western singer has ever sang about," David told me once, and that's the gospel truth. No matter who wrote them or who sings them now, songs like *Would You Lay With Me (In A Field of Stone)* and *Greener Than The Grass We*

Lay On are quite simply, as good as country music ever gets. *Take This Job And Shove It* is a masterpiece, the perfect song for the times. Like him or not, David Allan Coe is one of the finest songwriters around, and if you don't like his face, buddy, you better listen to his music.

But it's a question of limits—what do you make of an entertainer who spends 30 minutes of his opening show in a prestigious club in Manhattan doing magic tricks while dressed in a Mormon cassock? Who shifts from playing heart-rending ballads solo on a guitar to thundering



Coe (and friend) with Willie Nelson and CBS Records executives.



In a quiet moment during a break, Coe serenades a couple of admirers backstage.

rock-and-roll renditions of Allman Brothers Band music on the conga drums? Who can go from the sublime to the ridiculous in the space of a song?

What do you make of an artist who's spent 20 years of his life behind bars; who rides with a motorcycle club called the Outlaws and routinely travels with five Outlaw bodyguards who aren't kidding even a little? How many stars of the Grand Ole Opry have more than one wife at the same time? Make and lose a fortune with sobering regularity?

Who is David Allan Coe?

I don't think even David knows.

His record company says he could be a superstar. Earl Owensby, owner of the largest independent movie operation on the East Coast, says David could be a great character actor, "another Warren Oates," and cast David for a part in his film, *Buckstone County Prison*. As usual, David was great. His live shows are outstanding, and he's a standing-room-only act in the east and a good draw even in Texas, where most of his detractors seem to be holed up.

If there is any clue as to the identity of David Allan Coe, though, it is in his music. There's a song he wrote called *Another Pretty Country Song*, and it says more about David Allan Coe than any dozen interviews could ever say. It is, in fact, one of those rare cracks in the shiny facade of Nashville, when the curtain is pulled aside for a brief moment and a world of heartbreak peaks through from the backstage. It goes like this:

*"I bought this rhinestone suit in
California
These boots came all the way from
Mexico*

*The Cadillac ain't nothin, boy
You oughta see the Greyhound
I bought to take my band from show
to show*

*You've seen my face a thousand times
on teevee
and heard me on your local radio
And in your eyes I see
The adoration there for me
But son, there's something that you
ought to know*

*Well, I gotta take a drink to keep from
shakin'
Motel rooms ain't nothing like a home
Money can't make love grow any fonder
When you leave your woman home
alone
She can't raise the children with no
daddy
And they can't love a man who's always
gone
It takes a whole lot more than pride
To keep your feelings locked inside
While you sing another pretty country
song...*

The show is over now, and it's almost midnight in Shelby, North Carolina. The audience, this time swelled to almost 300 people, is yelling for an encore. For a moment now, they're all together—the cowboys and cowgirls who came for the rodeo, the bikers, the elderly couples who came for an evening of country music—all screaming for more.

But David Allan Coe doesn't hear them screaming, not anymore. We're sitting in his motor home, David and I, and his bodyguards have stationed themselves in front of the door to keep out the well wishers and autograph seekers and

groupies and assorted dignitaries and functionaries. It is dark and quiet in the motor home, and there is nothing to say, really. It's been a couple of years since David Allan Coe and I sat in the quiet after the storm of a performance, and the road has taken a toll from us both. For David, it's been 11 years since he came to Nashville to become the Mysterious Rhinestone Cowboy: 11 albums, three record companies, the cover of the *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, one book, one "greatest hits" package, five or six wives and one child later, The Next Big Thing is still waiting.

"I don't know, Michael," David says into the dark and quiet. "Damn it—sometimes it seems like I'm just running around in circles."

There is nothing to say, and he is quiet again. Outside, the crowd roars for another pretty country song. ■

So I get this call from Meme Coe, just after I turned the story in. Both buses broke down, so they had to buy a semi to get the band from show to show. Somebody rear-ended the semi the day they got it and wrecked the lift mechanism, so they went on to Houston without it and unloaded by hand. But then this karate teacher who alleges that David punched him out one night (David says the guy pitched a beer bottle at him) had the semi impounded, so David borrowed some equipment and went on stage anyway. After the show, he complained of stomach pains, which, of course, turned out to be acute appendicitis, and David was rushed to the hospital for emergency surgery. Meme called to tell me he was resting comfortably. Twang twang.

—MICHAEL BANE

WE'VE COME A LONG WAY, BABY

Loretta Lynn



HER NEW ALBUM



Produced by Owen Bradley

MCA RECORDS

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LARRIE LONDIN: Bringing The Drum Sound To Country Music



Drums and drummers—up until recent years—have had less than an uneasy truce with country music: On many early sessions, a drummer—if he were used at all—would often be relegated to beating out a rhythm on a cardboard box or a guitar case (as was used on some of Elvis Presley's early recordings).

Around the early 1950's, a drummer was first allowed on the Grand Ole Opry; the one catch was they let him play only a snare drum, and hid him behind a curtain where he couldn't be seen.

But today, that's changed to some extent. The drummer is playing an increasingly important role in country music; but as top Nashville session drummer, Larrie Londin notes, it has been an uphill fight most of the way.

There is perhaps no one who has been more aware of, or been more a part of the changing role of drums in country music than Londin. He is one of Nashville's busiest and most respected session drummers. His list of credits seems endless: Just a few of the people he has played with are: Chet Atkins, Elvis Presley (both in the studio and on concert tour), Perry Como, Linda Ronstadt, Dolly Parton, the Carpenters, Dan Hill, Minnie Pearl, Grandpa Jones, Olivia Newton-John, Merle Haggard, Emmylou Harris, Ronnie

Milsap, Mel Tillis, Ray Stevens, Jerry Reed, Glen Campbell, and Lester Flatt.

Londin's drumming can be heard on more than a dozen number one records, and he toured on the very last series of live shows that the late Elvis Presley did. . . . In other words, the boy has some credentials. As Chet Atkins puts it, "He's the best drummer around. He's my favorite. He was *born* to play drums."

Additionally, Londin's wife, Debbie—with the help of Larrie's technical expertise and guidance, of course—owns and operates a small drum shop located on Nashville's 18th Avenue South, called D.O.G. Percussions. ("The dream of every drummer is having a drum shop," he explains. "It's like walking into a candy store!") D.O.G. is one of the few, if not the only, stores in town that caters especially to the needs of the professional drummer.

Londin emphasizes that drums have only recently found a role in country music, and that it really wasn't that long ago that they were considered taboo.

"Back in the early '50s, they [Nashville producers] were used to just using a guitar or a piano or a banjo to do the rhythm," he explains. "But then Buddy Harmon, who is one of the greatest drummers to ever hit this town, came along and

changed all that.

"Harmon was working in a strip joint in Printers Alley, and they decided to use him on a couple of country records, which was unheard of at the time.

"Then," adds Londin, "some of these artists whose sessions he played on were appearing on the Opry, so they thought maybe Buddy could work the Opry with them. He did. But they put him behind a curtain where he and his drums couldn't be seen. So he got no recognition for it."

Slowly, as Londin explains, Buddy Harmon's reputation began to grow. He played on some of Presley's early Nashville sessions; he drummed for the Everly Brothers, Roy Orbison and Chet Atkins.

"Buddy Harmon is the man who originated country drumming," says Londin. "Even today, if I go in and do a George Jones session, they'll tell me to play a 'Buddy Harmon beat.'"

In these early days, a drummer was fortunate if he got to use three pieces on a country session—a snare, a high hat, and a bass drum. (A full set of drums was unheard of.) A lot of times, they would only let him use a snare. Sometimes they would only let him pound the beat on a cardboard box. "On some of Elvis's really big records, the only drums was Buddy beatin' on a guitar case," says Londin. "They'd make him muffle down his snare drum to the point where it didn't even sound like a snare, so he figured, if they want a box sound, why not just go ahead and give 'em a box!"

Once Buddy Harmon did manage to get drums into country music, he had to pioneer the concept of a full set, one piece at a time: "He added a high hat, and then maybe he'd sneak in a bass drum, and by the time they [the producers] noticed it and said, 'What's that!', they realized it was helping the music."

Before Larrie Londin made his own debut as a Nashville session drummer, he had been drumming professionally since he was 15 years old. For eight years, he was a staff drummer for MoTown Records in Detroit, and worked with a very successful touring band called The Headliners.

In 1969, Chet Atkins and Boots Randolph, two musicians whom Larrie had met earlier in his career, let it be known that they could put Larrie to work. So he moved to Nashville.

But in Nashville, Larrie was in for a slight cultural shock: He soon found out

that along Music Row, in the early '70s, drums were still looked upon as something of an ugly stepchild. Session work was hard to come by; to support himself, Larrie went on the road with Glen Campbell and Jerry Reed, and then took a full-time drumming gig at the Carousel Club in Printers Alley. It took him about two years to really break into the business as a session drummer, and often when he did manage to get studio work, he found that it could be compromising for a former rock drummer.

"Chet Atkins helped me more than anybody," he recalls. "If it weren't for him, I probably couldn't have stayed in town. He used me on sessions where he really didn't need me, just to give me the work.

"But often, I'd go to a session, and all they'd let me play on was my practice pad. Drums, then, were just thought of as a sound effect; something just to keep the musicians in time. I remember once, Chet used me on an album with Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs, and it was a big thing for me; I came up with all kinds of patterns and rhythms and stuff. But when the album came out, the drums had been erased. I asked Chet, 'What did I do wrong?' He told me the only reason they had wanted drums in the first place was to keep the band together in the studio."

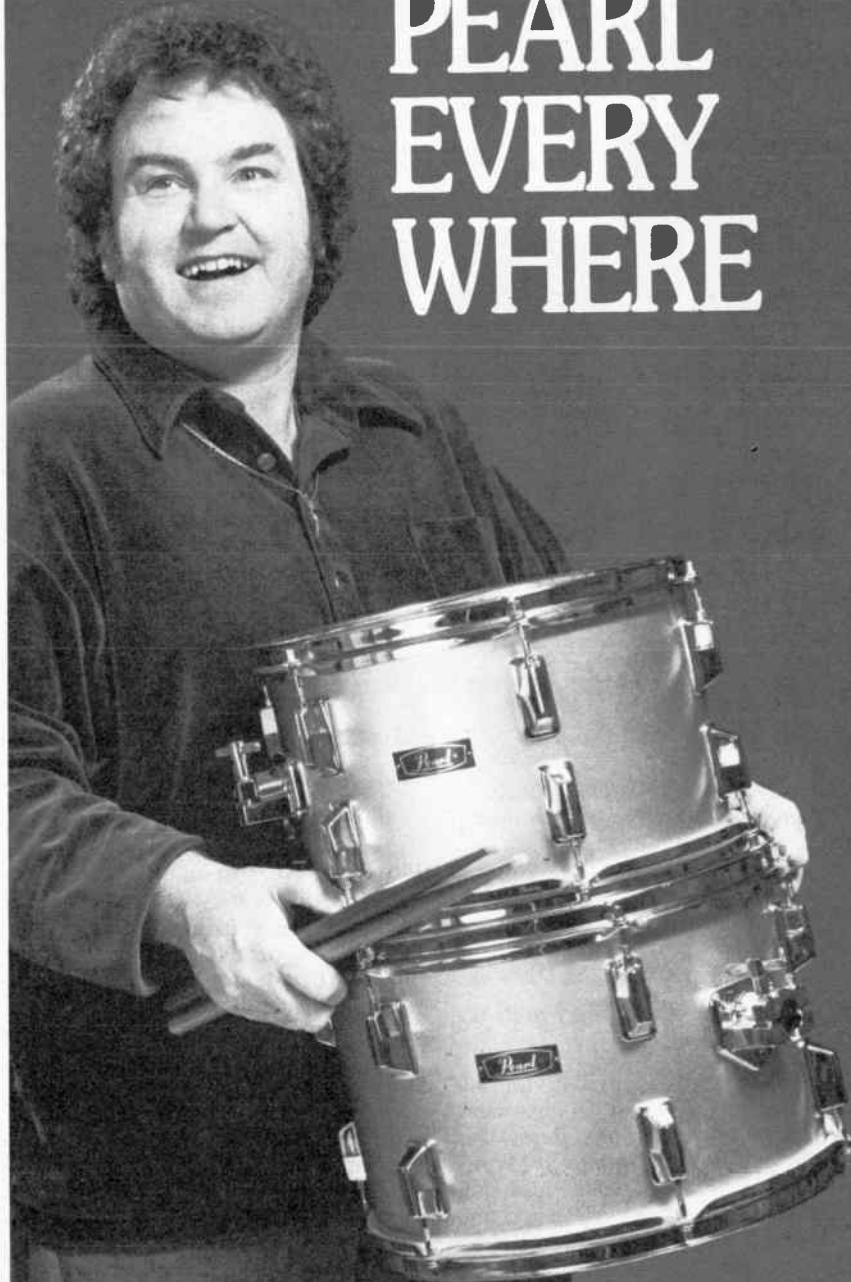
Slowly, things for Larrie Londin began to pick up. By standing in as a "sub" for other drummers who failed to show, he got to play on some Elvis Presley sessions. As time passed, he began getting more and more calls to do studio work.

"I did sessions with people like Jerry Reed and Waylon Jennings," he recalls, "and out of that, I developed a certain style. Reed influenced me a great deal. He really helped me understand country music. He would literally sit at the drums and show me how to play a certain 'feel,' or a certain pattern. One of the things he showed me was a 'blue beat.' That's when you get a double-time feel on the high hat, and half-time feel on the snare drum, and then you play quarter notes on your bass drum; you're playing a country feel and a rock feel at the same time. That came out of the fifties, though I'd never heard it until then. It was the kind of feel that's on *Amos Moses*, and a lot of Jerry's records."

According to Londin, around this time, the basic sound of country music was starting to go through some obvious changes. "The fiddle, the banjo, the steel, and all that stuff was still there, but the bass and the drums were more rock. Kenny Malone [another prominent Nashville session drummer] was doing rock type things with Don Williams, and a lot of other people he played with. Artists like Eddie Rabbitt, Mickey Gilley, Waylon, Joe Tex, Jerry and Chet became more aware of drums as well; and when I worked with them, they gave me the fre-

(Continued on page 67)

LARRIE LONDIN TAKES HIS PEARL EVERY WHERE



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Determined, hard-working, ambitious, Tammy Wynette possesses a tough inner core, and yet, she remains emotionally vulnerable and fragile. We have watched her through ten years at the top of her profession, five marriages, the trauma of her recent kidnapping, and still, we know little of what lies behind the public veneer. In this revealing article, writer Peter Guralnick takes us behind the veneer for a rare look at Tammy's own views of her childhood, her early musical development, her unique relationship with producer Billy Sherrill, her children and herself.

Tammy

The Only Time I'm Really Me

*To my husband I'm an ordinary wife
To my children I'm the mother in their
life...*

*To the party people I don't fit their world
To my Daddy I'm still just his little girl
But when I lie down and close my eyes and
sleep*

This must be the only time I'm really me.

From the song, *The Only Time I'm Really Me* by Tammy Wynette

Once when she was waiting for her mother to get off work in 1954, they came clattering by with their long greasy hair and their loud hep-cat clothing. "My my my," said Ozella Moore, whose husband, Carney, owned the dry cleaner's and whose brother-in-law, Scotty, was a hatter and played guitar in the band. "Look at the stars. They all just laughed and chuckled and walked off," the now grown-up woman recalls. "They rehearsed every day in the hat department upstairs, they had just started, actually, and were very nice—but I never saw him after that, well, I never got to talk to him again, and I really wanted to." The group, of course, was the Blue Moon Boys, soon to be known as Elvis, Scotty and Bill; the

by **PETER GURALNICK**

19-year-old vocalist and rhythm guitar player was Elvis Presley. That was when Tammy Wynette (then Virginia Wynette Pugh) was 12 years old, living for a brief time with her mother in Memphis until her grandfather wrote to her "and told me Shirley Anderson was fixing to get my basketball uniform. I went back home in a hurry."

Home was the 600-acre farm (cotton, corn, and Black Angus cattle), where she grew up with her mother's parents after her father died. "I had a *great* childhood. It was a hard life but very fulfilling," says Tammy today unselfconsciously, thinking not of picking cotton ("I did everything that could be done on a farm; if they really wanted to punish me they'd set me to churning—that was one thing I really hated."), but of the warmth and security she got from a family that may have had its share of divisions but still appears to be very close-knit. Her music she got from her father, Hollis Pugh, though he died of a brain tumor when she was 8 months old. "He left me his guitar, his mandolin and

accordion and big bass fiddle—he could play them all. He went blind before he died, but he'd hold me at the piano and put my fingers on the keys and say to my mother, 'If you do one thing, give her piano lessons if she shows any talent at all.' My father and his people were all very musically inclined—my uncles played with my father, but they never picked up a guitar after he died other than just to teach me a few chords. He died at 26, and I just put up a new headstone a couple of months ago after my aunt died that says: *An Inspiration Even After Death.*

She did get piano lessons, though it was not always her mother who drove her to Luka, 50 miles away, because "when my father died she moved to Birmingham and went to work in an airplane factory where they made B-29 bombers, and that's the reason for me living with my grandparents. Well, there was no future for her on the farm, there was nothing for her to do there, except just live with Mama and Daddy, so I understand, you know, why she had to leave me. But I grew up feeling towards my mother like a sister, because my grandparents, I called them Mama and Daddy, and I called her Mother, she still,



she's like my sister—we argue, if it's over the color of a dress. She remarried when I was four, and I would live with her for two or three weeks, and then back to my grandparents. I'd get mad at her for something she did and go back to my Mama; then Mama would do something I didn't like, and I'd roll my Army cot across the road to my mother's house—she was right across the road from us—until my granddaddy told me one day to park it—one place or the other. So I parked it at his house until I was 13. And I slept with Daddy every night until I was 13. Then he moved me out of the bed and put me in the bed with my aunt Carolyn, and that lasted for about a year, and then I moved home with Mother and stayed with her for about two and a half years—until I got married at 17.”

Though life in the Russell household may not have been luxurious, certainly Wynette Pugh grew up comfortably enough; her family was well-respected in Itawamba County, and her grandfather Chester was a 40-year member of the local college board. Still, she worked in the fields like everyone else. “It's very strange. We didn't get paid very much, maybe two dollars per hundred pounds of cotton we would pick. But we did get paid, and the only thing we would save it for was the County Fair in Tupelo every September. That was our big thing, it was

the only place we had to go to spend our money.

The only live entertainment that she saw was Lash LaRue (“I'll never forget it, we thought he was the most fabulous thing in the world, popping that whip”), Flatt and Scruggs once in Tupelo, and the Chuckwagon Gang or some other gospel group that the whole family would drive to see once a week in Memphis or Birmingham 120 miles away. She listened to records, of course, country records, to begin with, that her mother would bring home by Kitty Wells and Hank Williams. “I can remember one record by Hank Williams so well—*No One Will Ever Know* was on the album, which is my favorite Hank Williams song—and I had a little tiny record player, just a little bitty thing—the record itself actually stuck way out over the little player—and I'd put it on a chair by the side of my bed at night, and I can just see my room. I'd go to bed at night, and I'd put that record on, and I'd sleep on my stomach with my hand out, and when it started to go off of *No One Will Ever Know* and the next song that followed it, I think it was *Cold Cold Heart*, I'd take my finger and slide it back over, scratch that record to pieces.”

She herself can't ever remember buying a record, but “I loved the Coasters, the Platters, Buddy Holly, Patsy Cline (I just idolized her), and Ray Charles.” As she

got older, she started driving over to Hamilton, Alabama with a girlfriend named Linda Loden (“She was Sonny James' third cousin”). They would sing on their pastor, Brother Verrell Collier's radio show. (“It was a thrill for us. We didn't know you could get paid for anything like that.”) and then go over to the Skatetorium where “we'd go skating on Saturday afternoons that we didn't go to the movies. That's where I first met Carmol Taylor, when I was about 16, and he's written so much for me since I've been in the business. He used to play there, and Rick Hall, who's over in Muscle Shoals, he used to play the fiddle for Carmel, Carmel Taylor and the Rhythm Swingers. We'd sing with whoever'd let us sing. We had one guy, oh we thought he was Elvis, he had the long hair and all the movements—oh, what was his name, I saw him in Chicago about two years ago, he wasn't playing any more, in fact he was teaching school—but we thought he hung the moon. Everything was played there, from country to Elvis to R&B.” And Billy Sherrill was there, too, playing saxophone in an R&B band in the Hamilton, Alabama Skatetorium.

Neither Billy nor Wynette Byrd (Tammy's first married name) remembered their association right off when they met again in 1966. She had married just one month short of high school graduation in



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1959 because "I was really, I'll have to say, running away from the farm. I was just so tired of farm life, I thought anything was better than this. My stepfather signed the marriage license; my mother refused to sign. I was 17 years old, and I just had to get away."

She didn't get very far. She enrolled in Mrs. McGuire's School of Beauty in Tupelo, had a couple of kids, moved to Memphis briefly, and then "moved in an old house of Daddy's. Daddy paid our light bill, we had no water bill, we had no inside plumbing, I didn't even have a stove, I cooked in a fireplace in the kitchen. And that's only been 16 years ago; it's been a drastic change for me." She still harbored dreams of stardom, but her husband only said, "Dream on, dream on!" When they separated in 1964, she moved to Birmingham to live with her Grandmother Pugh and aunt and uncle. She was three months pregnant and discovered that her beauty operator's license wasn't valid for the state of Alabama. "So here I was with two kids, no job, no money, no nothing, moved in with my grandmother, and I had to start all over again at the American Beauty College in Birmingham. I went for three months, worked 14 or 16 hours a day, and Tina was born at a little less than six months, and she was born weighing a pound and a half." It was at this point for the first time

that she really began to move towards a musical career. "My mother thought I was crazy, she was totally against what I was doing. Not that she didn't believe in me, but she said, 'You're 23 years old, have three kids, you're divorced—' Well, I can understand it now. If one of my girls just up and said, 'Mama, I'm going to Hollywood to be a star,' I'd say, 'You've got to be kidding.' Because I know what it's like now, how difficult it really is."

She started going up to Nashville on weekends, leaving the children with her grandmother at first ("She is the most fascinating woman, one of my biggest inspirations, really. She's 88, and she goes on the road with us every year for a certain length of time. She loves to play rook with the boys."), looking for any kind of a break. She was writing songs with a Birmingham DJ named Fred Lehner, appearing on the Country Boy Eddie Show on TV station WBRC at 6 a.m. and then working a full day (8:00-6:00) at the beauty parlor. For one very brief period she went on the road with Porter Wagoner, just after Norma Jean left and before Dolly joined him. "I did 10 shows with him in Alabama and Georgia. That really, I think, set me on fire for traveling. I drove my little Volkswagon behind that big bus, I followed that big bus and my aunt went with me every night." Shortly afterwards came the move to Nashville, no connec-

tions, no prospects, three kids in tow. It was 1966, and Loretta Lynn's *You Ain't Woman Enough* was at the top of the charts.

* * *

Billy Sherrill, for anyone who is unaware of the name, has several different reputations in Nashville. He has been described as a genius, a racist, a deliberate provocateur, and a man with the surest commercial instinct in town. To Tammy he may be all of these things, but more than any of them "Billy's a very old-fashioned person, basically shy and hard to get to know, unless you really get to know him very very well. Our backgrounds are just exactly the same, and I feel like I know him like the palm of my hand." It was Sherrill into whose office Tammy walked ("his secretary had just moved to the Coast, which was a good thing for me") with her guitar one day in the summer of 1966. "I knocked on the door, and he was in there completely alone, and he said, 'Yeah? Come on in. Who is it?' And I went in and told him my name, and that I wanted to sing for him. He listened to me do a couple of songs, and he had his legs crossed on his desk and he was leaning back in his chair and never said a word till I finished, and he said, 'You know something else?'"

Almost the very next day Sherrill heard a song on the radio, *Apartment Number*



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Nine, which he unsuccessfully tried to lease from the small label which had put it out, and then offered it to Tammy to record. When she came into his office a couple of weeks later, he had obviously made the connection in their backgrounds. "He was standing just inside the door, I almost hit him when I opened the door to go in his office, and he was standing throwing darts at a huge map almost the size of that wall, and he said, 'What're you doing?' And I said, 'Nothing. What're you doing?' And he took a dart, and he said, 'We're gonna put Red Bay, Alabama,' and he threw a dart at Red Bay and then he threw one at Haleyville and said, 'We're gonna put Red Bay and Haleyville on the map.'"

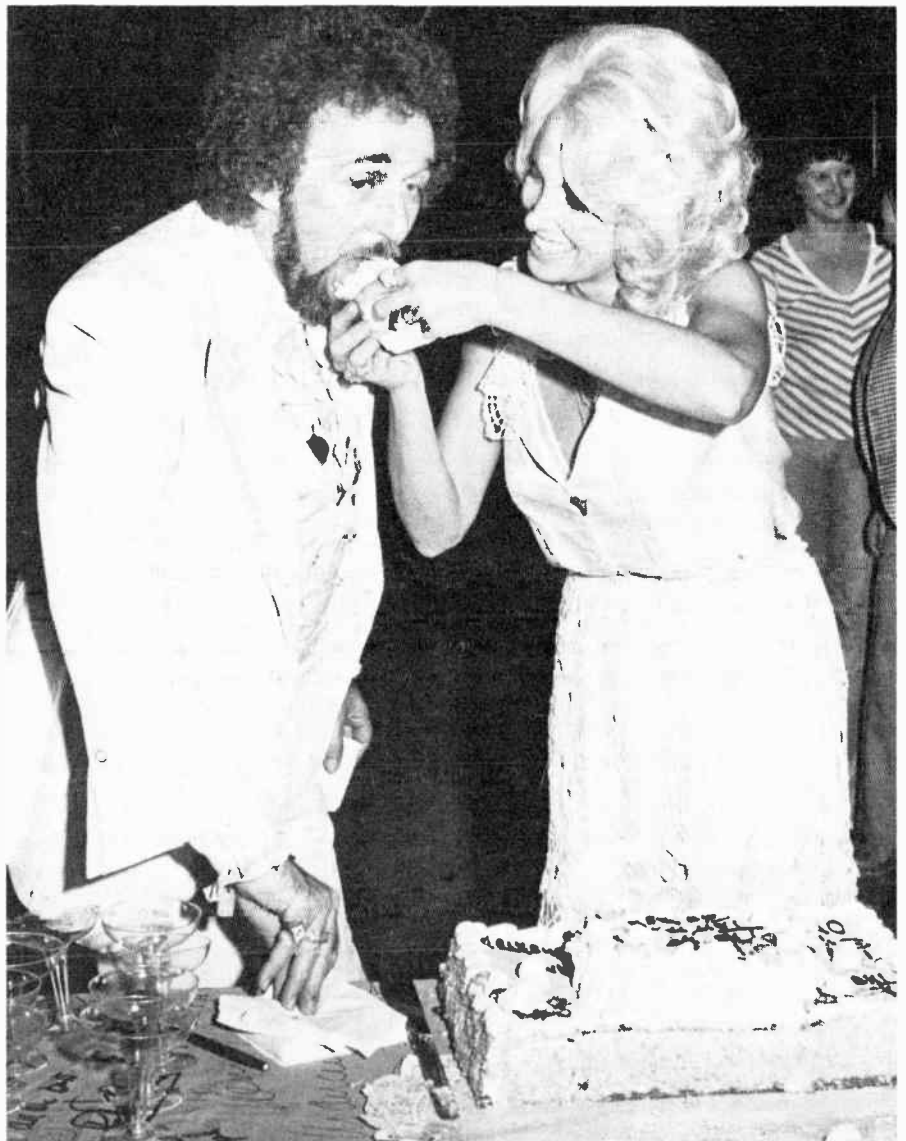
That is exactly what they did. *Apartment Number Nine, Your Good Girl's Gonna Go Bad, I Don't Wanna Play House, D-I-V-O-R-C-E* were all carefully chosen, constructed, orchestrated and tailored to an image which both Billy and Tammy (Billy has selected the name because "You look like a Tammy to me.") agreed was suited to her, all designed to bring out what Sherrill calls "that little tear in every word" which is the special quality of her voice. Then came *Stand By Your Man*.

"It was the first thing Billy and I had written together," Tammy recalls. "Just a fast thing, 25 minutes during a session. We had two songs for the session, and Billy wasn't satisfied with either one of them for a single, so he told the musicians to take a break and we had about 30 or 40 minutes to play with. So we went upstairs and he said, 'Do you like the idea of 'stand by your man?'' And I said, 'Yeah, I do. With the old-fashioned Southern Baptist upbringing that I've got I like that idea.' So he said, 'We'll, let's write it.' So we just sat down, and he asked me how I felt about what I would do, and I said, 'Well, if I was back home in Mississippi, being a Mississippi farmer's wife, you'd stand by a man regardless of what happened because you wouldn't have any reason or hope to do anything better. Because you have no education, you work in a shirt factory or something, and there's just no way that you could better yourself if you wanted to.' So we just put our ideas down and wrote *Stand By Your Man*. Well, I hated that high note worse than anything in the world, and I had been so used to doing the kids' things, too, that I really didn't like, just the whole song. And, two, Jones and I had been married two weeks, and I took the song home to George and I played it for him and he said, 'That one's different from what you've been doing. I don't like that one.' And I said, 'What don't you like about it? (I didn't tell him Billy and I had written it.)' I said, 'My singing?' He said, 'No. You're singing okay.' I said, 'The arrangement?' He said, 'No. Billy did a good job on the arrangement.' I said, 'Well what don't you like about it

then?' He said, 'Well I just don't particularly like the story.' And I started crying, I said, 'Well, I wrote that.' He said, 'Well, let me play it again. I might like it better after awhile.' So I just started off wrong with *Stand By Your Man*. From the very beginning it was just wrong for me. We wrote it so fast, and I didn't have any faith in our writing, and I didn't like the high notes in it, I just thought I sounded like a rhythm & blues singer in the country field. But I have really learned to like it since then."

She and Billy have stayed together, in a marriage more stable than any of the well-publicized alliances which have made newspaper headlines. Just how close they are can be illustrated by the way in which she broke the news to Sherrill of her recent marriage to George Richey, a longtime associate of Billy's ("they're like brothers"), as well as producer and writer for George and Tammy. "When we first decided we were going to get married, I said to Richey, 'We better go in and talk to Sherrill,' because Sherrill knew nothing at all about it. And he said, 'Yeah, you're right. We'd better tell Billy first of all.' So we walked in, and it was the funniest thing

in the world, I'll have to tell you this regardless of what it sounds like in print. We walked into Billy's office, and I had been sick and lost a lot of weight, which I keep losing—but Sherrill has always been like a brother to me, and he said, 'What have you two been doing, writing?' And we said, 'No.' He said, 'What have you been doing?' And I said, 'Nothing. Just walking around—you know—just riding around.' And he said, 'Well, sit down.' He said, 'Your boobs are bigger.' I said, 'They are not. I've lost a lot of weight.' He said, 'Well, they look bigger.' I said, 'Well, they are not bigger.' And he said, 'Well, I guess they're not, it's just probably what you've got on.' Well, we sat there for a few minutes, and Richey and I started laughing, and I said, 'Billy, I've got to tell you something,' I said, 'Richey and I are going to get married.' And he said, 'Oh my God, I just told you your boobs was bigger!' We laughed till we just about cracked up. We started out the door that day, and he says, 'Go home. Just go on. I guess now there'll never be any more sad ballads written. Every-Tammy and new husband, George Richey at their wedding reception.



thing'll be happy, uptempo, and *gay*, and *fun*.' He said, 'Who's gonna write the slow sad tearjerkers anymore?' "

There has been no problem with material, needless to say. Sherrill's familiar stable—"our little group," Tammy says, which has been made up of writers like Carmol Taylor, Glen Sutton, Bobby Braddock, and Curly Putnam from the first—has continued to supply Tammy with suitable material. In addition, as she has herself grown more confident in her writing, she has contributed as many as two or three songs to each album. Most of her writing centers around longing and loss, the sad aftermath to fairy tale romance, the very discrepancy she seemed to note in her description of how *Stand By Your Man* was composed. "I write exactly what I feel," she says, and indeed compositions like *Singing My Song*, *Another Lonely Song*, *The Woman I Am*—even though they may have been co-written with Sherrill or Sutton or George Richey—express very precisely the sense of deep personal hurt, give life to the proud but bedraggled persona which the world knows as Tammy Wynette. She feels no embarrassment at writing about "anything that's happened to me, anything I've gone through or experienced or just been mad about. I'll write about it and pretend it happened to someone else. I won't talk about it, but I'll write about it—and I guess that's just my little fairy tale world. But I always figured the public knew everything about me anyway." She gets her inspiration from real-life situations and the passing remarks of strangers; one recent song (*Love Doesn't Always Come on the Night It's Needed*) came from a book of thoughts which her biographer, Joan Dew, gave her; several songs, *That's the Way It Could Have Been* among them, stemmed from a brief affair she had with a married man ("It's not a very easy thing to talk about; it was something I had sworn would never happen to me, we knew it was ridiculous from the first. But a lot of times I'm around the person I was involved with when I do the song—*That's the Way It Could Have Been*. And it's a very strange feeling to know that somebody's in the room that inspired to me a very pretty song.") A song like *Till I Can Make It On My Own* (whose refrain—"Till I get used to losing you/Let me keep on using you"—she frequently quotes as an example of lines she is proudest of—comes like so much of her recent work from the public debacle of her marriage to George Jones.

"Jones and I had just separated and were in the process of getting a divorce and Richey had brought up the idea of the song: *till I can make it on my own*, till I can do something by myself. What would you do? And we tried to write it that day before a session, but Billy said, 'My mind is just too befuddled. I'm thinking about the session. Let's wait and write it tomorrow.' So I went home that night and



"Billy's a very old-fashioned person...I feel like I know him like the back of my hand."

Richey called and said, 'Can you drive over? We're fixing some popcorn (Richey was still married to his wife Sheila), and let's finish writing that song.' So I said okay, and it was snowing, and he said, 'You know that idea we've been talking about today? Now how would you feel if you'd been married to a guy and everything and dependent on him for so many years and all of a sudden he just up and left?' And I said, 'You fool, that just *happened* to me! How do you *think* I feel?' And he laughed, and he was an absolute Jones idol—he wrote *The Grand Tour*, *The Battle*, *Picture Me Without You*, and so many things that George did—and he said, 'Well, write it down.' So I did, and it was very easy to write, once we got those two lines, and we wrote every bit of the song until we got to four lines from the end, and it was 2:30 in the morning, and we were just beat—we had eaten popcorn and Cokes, and Richey had just played the piano, he hadn't even left the piano stool all night, it was just one of the easiest songs to flow together. But we didn't know how to end it.

"We talked about it and talked about it, and then he said, 'I'm calling Sherrill. This is ridiculous. He started this song with us, and I'm calling him.' So he got up at 2:30 in the morning from the piano stool and called Sherrill, and Sherrill said, 'I'm too sleepy, and it's snowing outside. I'll come over tomorrow.' So I went home, Richey called me the next day and said, 'Sherrill's over here. Can you come over and we'll finish the song?' So I went over, and Richey and I played for Billy what we had, and Billy said, 'Oh, I like it. I really like it. You've really used the idea well.' But he said, 'I'm interested in the football game right now. When that goes off we'll finish it.' So Richey and I just looked at each other and laughed, and Sherrill was running from room to room with two different television sets, and he'd say, 'Oh, lost that game. Well, I won that one.' Well, finally I got up and said, I'm

going for a ride. You two can finish the song. I've had it.' And I got back about 30 minutes later, and they'd finished it!"

* * *

Tammy Wynette as just one of the boys? It's an unlikely image, and yet in the rough fraternity of Nashville songwriters she can more than hold her own. Even the songs she does not write, a song like *Sweet Music Man*, for example ("You touched my soul with your beautiful songs / You even had me singing along"), extend the sense of personal intimacy, bear out the unique persona she has created for herself, almost as if each new release brings with it the latest installment in the running diary of her life. And yet for all the care she invests in her writing, her singing, her art, and her career, she still does not get to see the material she will actually record until a couple of hours before a session. "Well, I'm very fortunate in that I learn a melody very quickly. I meet Billy in his office usually between ten and 11, when we have a 2:00 session, and we gather together all the material in that time, and I learn all the melodies to everything before the session between 11 and two. Well, probably it sounds better the way I do it now, but I can't knock it, it must have sounded okay or they wouldn't have bought it the way it was."

Just as the method has become ritualized by success she seems to feel trapped too, by the obvious appeal of her established image. "Well, Billy won't let me cut very many cheating-type songs or the running-around-type songs, because he says, that isn't what the public expects of me. And it really isn't. Sometimes I hear songs that are different, that are totally away from what I'm used to doing that I would very much like to do. And then again I think of the different reviews and all the things people write about the top songs I do, and I'm almost *forced* to stay where I am."

Don't feel sorry for Tammy Wynette, though. As she herself says, "If I never

had another hit record in my career, for the past 12 years I've been so lucky, the average wouldn't be so bad." Plucky, determined, hard-working, ambitious, above all emotionally, vulnerably open, she has carved out a place for herself that no one else can usurp. Being a woman, she says, has never worked against her except at the very beginning of her career when she had trouble finding someone to book her because "they said that they didn't have good luck with female artists, that female artists didn't like to play the clubs, they didn't like the drinking or the dirty jokes and things like that. Well, it aggravated me, because I knew I was willing to work any place, within reason, where I could earn a living. I didn't care to work the clubs, it didn't bother me at all—they weren't my favorite place to work, but I didn't complain about it, because I earned money there." Though she certainly shows a kind of fragility, she also possesses the tough inner core that has made it possible for her not only to survive but to thrive in the business. Again and again throughout her career she has been forced to assess unromantic reality and make hard business-like decisions. Just recently, for example, she broke off her booking with Shorty Lendar, who, in fact, was her business partner, to go with the much bigger-time Halsey Organization. "I struggled with myself for weeks wondering if I was doing the right thing, but I just felt like I had to do something. We'd been playing the same places over and over, it was getting



really stale, and I felt like it was time to do something different." Halsey meant Las Vegas, Johnny Carson, movie tie-ins. She sees the need "to compete with all the other shows that are on the road, to do a show that's equal to theirs," and this year plans to add another touring bus that will allow her both to carry more sound and put together the kind of slide show to illustrate her songs which she first saw Ann-Margret use in Vegas. Her own Vegas act is so carefully worked out it would be slick if it were not for the undeniable feeling in her voice; even the jokes ("It all is around



One of her major hits, *Till I Can Make It On My Own*, was written while Tammy & George were in the process of their divorce.

traveling on the bus and things like that; it's about the only thing a woman can get by with. You've just got to do something cute or something funny or make fun of your own self. You can't get out and tell jokes like a guy can and hold 'em in the palm of your hand.") are retailed with the timing of a professional comedian.

She seems comfortable with her newfound celebrity, with hobnobbing with the superstars with accepting a gift of Wild Turkey and a bale of hay which arrives backstage at the Frontier courtesy of Evel Knievel. And yet there are the disquieting events, the bad luck that continues to dog her—the fires, the marriages, the deaths of those close to her, the kidnapping, the hospitalizations. And there is the disquieting physical fragility which is all too apparent ("Don't tell George," she says, as she pours a glass of milk down the sink. "You know, I haven't eaten anything in two days."). What she really likes to talk about most are her children—Gwen ("a very independent child"), Jackie ("she's my fashion girl"), eight-year-old Georgette (so anxious to record that last summer she tried to "solicit a record contract" from a disbelieving Billy Sherrill), and Tina ("she's always being grounded"). "I'm so mad at Tina," she says, "because she's got the same break in her voice that I have, but she can put it where she wants it. She'll sing a line, and she'll sing it straight, and then she'll turn around and she'll break her voice at least three or four times. She doesn't realize what she's doing—she's only 13—but I told Richey, 'That makes me so mad, I could just wring her neck, because she can control it and I can't.'" Of her own voice she says, "I was never aware of having any particular style;" she says nothing of the subtle dynamics which allow her to capture a full range of emotion from the delicate breathiness of a little girl to the full-throated wail of a Billy Sherrill crescendo, while all the time holding on to

that deep well of sadness which Sherrill first spied in the "beat-looking chick" who wandered into his office 12 years ago. "When she says I love you," Billy has said, "you believe it."

So Tammy is riding the crest. With the recent appearance in Vegas (she opened for Roy Clark, another of Halsey's clients), her autobiography coming out, increasing movie and TV work, she would appear to be scaling new career plateaus. About the kidnapping, from which she still carries a pronounced facial bruise which make-up can't hide, she is almost resigned. "I'll have to say that I've lost a lot of respect—maybe I shouldn't say it, but I have—for the police department. Because it just seems they've dragged their feet and haven't really done the things they promised they would do. I told Richey last night that I think they must have needed a body, and he said, 'Well, they had one, yours, for six weeks.' I still have problems sleeping because I wake up at night sometimes thinking, Where is he? Will they ever find him? Will he do it again? To anybody else?"

It is her forthcoming autobiography about which she is most excited. "I turned it down the first time when Simon and Schuster called, because I laughed and told them I didn't think my life was over yet. But then they called back and said: 'Have you ever really stopped to think that 15 years from now nobody might care?' And, gosh, that like to drove me crazy. And so I did it, and I don't regret it, it was just a lot harder work than I ever thought it would be. But I have a great memory. When I'm asked a question, I can really, I can just see it as if it were yesterday. So we really did have fun doing the book. And if it comes out and is ever made into a movie—which hopefully some day it will be—I'd love for Faye Dunaway to get my part, and I'd like Jack Nicholson to play Jones' part." It would be inspired casting. ■

FREDDY FENDER & HUEY MEAUX:

How a down-on-his-luck cajun producer and a pudgy south Texas Chicano teamed up and hit the Big Time / by JOE NICK PATOSKI

For better or for worse, the '70s have been a pretty interesting decade for country music. At one time or another, an act has come along to suit practically every taste ranging from Waylon and Willie's band of pirates to those who take their C&W in small doses, the sugar 'n' spice sweetness of John Denver, Anne Murray, and Olivia Newton-John.

Of all the artists to materialize on the country scene in the last nine years, though, none—not even David Allan Coe—better represents the modern country sensibility of the '70s than a pudgy Chicano from South Texas with the unlikely name of Freddy Fender. Only in the present country music climate could the ex-mechanic and former El BeBop Kid from the Rio Grande Valley collaborate with a down-on-his-luck Cajun producer named Huey Meaux from Houston by way of South Louisiana and come up with two consecutive number one hits, as they did in 1975. More than any other new talent to appear this decade, the Meskin and the Coonass proved beyond a doubt that anything is possible in country music.

Take their approach for instance: As unlikely as it seemed at the time, Freddy Fender made his records in Houston, not in Nashville or LA, at his producer's studio. Meaux's previous experience in the recording field were racked up in the blues and rock idioms. But when *Before the Next Teardrop Falls* and *Wasted Days and Wasted Nights* hit the airwaves and jukeboxes of the nation, there was no questioning their methodology or background. Fender's pleading, pitiful voice was full of the kind of soul that has defined country music since the days of Jimmie Rodgers and Hank Williams, no matter what his skin color is.

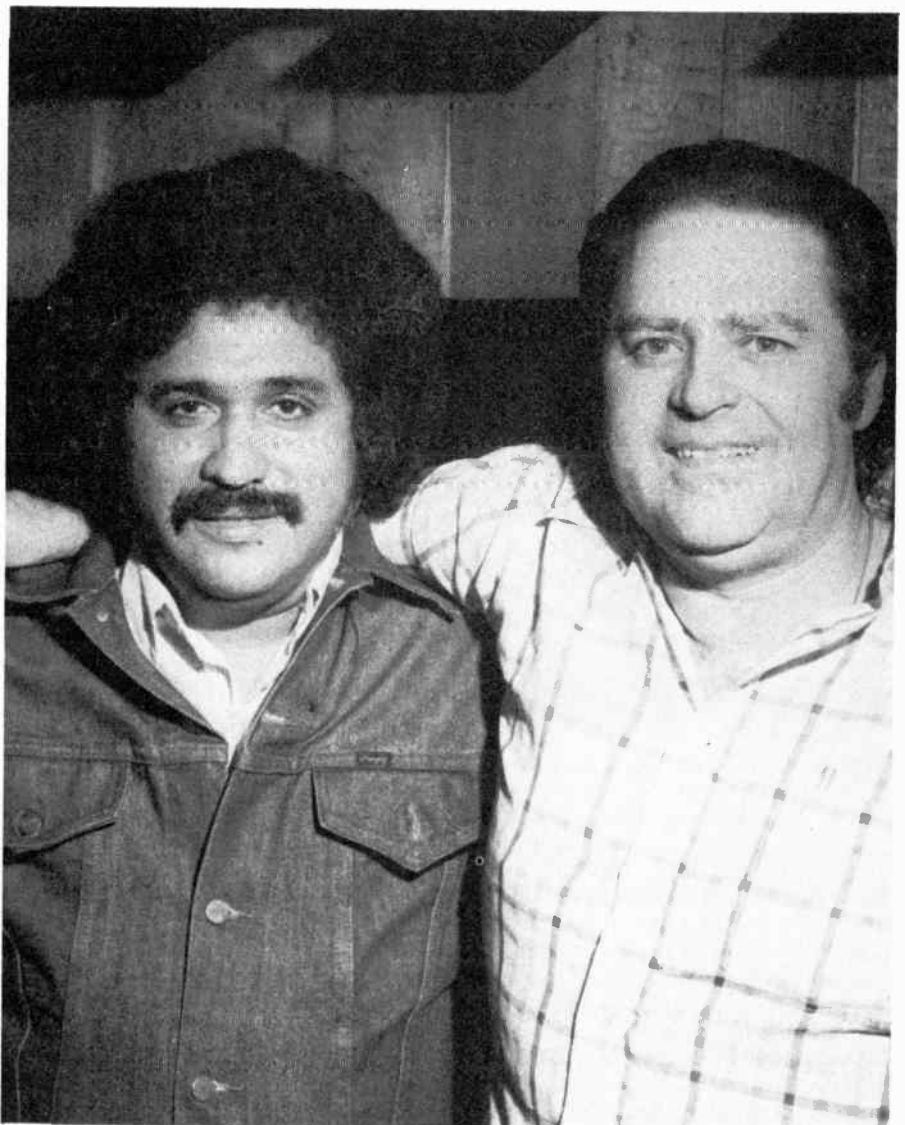
Even more unlikely is the fact that Fender continues to sustain his popularity (though his other records haven't eclipsed the success of his first two country hits) and maintain his professional relationship with Meaux. At the same time (even weirder still) the overweight Mexican-American in his forties has effectively replaced Tom Jones as a sex symbol.

Which is why Freddy Fender, Huey

Meaux, and I were scrunched in a borrowed Lincoln one crisp autumn Sunday headed for the state pen in Huntsville, Texas, an hour's drive from Houston. No, they weren't in trouble again. Freddy had a gig at the Texas Prison Rodeo inside the notorious Walls Unit. It's the toughest rodeo in the world, they claim, and Freddy was going to sing for the 20,000 folks who turned out to watch a bunch of cowboy convicts with nothing to lose, attempt to break some broncos, rope

some calves, and do funny stunts like the hard money contest where they chase a wild bull in order to grab a bag stuffed with fifty dollars that's tied between the bull's horns.

I hadn't had a chance to speak with Freddy much since his rapid ascension to the big time and there was no place better to catch up on old times than in the joint, especially with Huey at his side. Both Fender and Meaux had seen the other side of the bars before. They are probably the



Right: Ex-cons, Freddy and Huey.

only active artist/management team in show business comprised of convicted felons. Besides having been in the can more times than he'd care to count in his wilder teenage days, Fender did two years in Louisiana's Angola and DeQuincy penitentiaries for possession of a marijuana cigarette, earning his release in 1963 (an album he recorded with the prison band is still available in budget racks nationwide). Meaux pulled his time in 1970 and 1971 for another rock 'n' roll crime—conspiracy to the Mann Act; he reputedly transported an underage female to a Nashville disc jockey convention for record promotion purposes that were commonplace in those days. Meaux still contends he was set up and record promotion has never been the same since.

So in a sense, the trip to Huntsville was almost like old home week. In the car Freddy and Huey swapped stories about their first impressions of life behind bars; none of the recollections were fond.

But before we hit Huntsville, Huey wanted to check on an old roadhouse beer tavern he owned back in the Piney Woods several miles off the highway. Steering the car through dense forests, down dirt roads, and into hidden, dark-shadowed hollows in the middle of nowhere, Huey



Above: Freddy as Pancho Villa.

silently drove until he slowed down and looked into the rear view mirror with a straight face, telling Freddy, "Well, son, it's been good to know you."

Freddy jerked up from a daze, acting shaken, then busted out laughing. The jiving had begun.

Both Fender and Meaux would have you believe their artist/manager arrangement is a marriage of convenience. Freddy would get a divorce if he could get out of his legal contracts. Huey would split if only he could find new meat to promote. But for all their bickering and Three Stooges clowning, the Fender/Meaux



Freddy and Dinah try out a Mexican recipe on the Dinah Shore Show.

partnership is a marriage of two soul survivors from a different, less sophisticated era of music. Without each other, the two Texas wildcats would be lost in a strange, over-civilized music world.

"Damn you Freddy, always talking about your chicana lawyers. Dey just gonna get you in trouble," Meaux moaned at one point in the conversation.

We finally arrived inside a mobile trailer parked twenty feet from the red brick border of the Walls Unit of the Texas Department of Corrections after an official motorcycle escort caravan through the town of Huntsville. Had I not noticed the mounted guards with shotguns milling on the edge of the crowds pouring into the rodeo arena, or not overheard Huey's remembrance of one Huntsville guard who claimed all people who drove Cadillacs were either "pimps or dope dealers," or seen the twenty-foot fence surrounded by guards that separated the inmate spectators from the free world spectators, the rodeo would have seemed almost circus-like.

Instead, I remained in the trailer with Freddy and Huey, listening to Meaux complain about the shivers running up his neck every time he gets around places like this. But if it was the price to pay for success, it came cheap. For the scene in the mobile trailer certainly confirmed Fender's star status. A crowd of people that included several area sheriffs taking advantage of their freebies, numerous cousins of Fender, and plain old fans mingled outside his dressing room while Freddy slipped into his purple, metal-studded western suit. One svelte lady in an iridescent Freddy Fender t-shirt and black knee-high Go-Go boots had come all the way from West Virginia for the rodeo.

She kept trying to tell a nearby listener, "I'm not a coal miner's daughter, I'm a coal miner."

So how did Freddy Fender, country star, react to the whole hoo-haw?

"You and I know better, don't we?" he winked. "My roots are in Chicano music, mariachi music, black music, and a lot of that old rock 'n' roll. But I had the good fortune of recording a country song and all of a sudden I'm a country entertainer. If that's what puts the beans on the table, that's what I'm gonna stick with. I'd be an idiot if I didn't."

"I'd always thought I was real groovy Pachuco dude with all this jive—long hair, sideburns, chain hanging from my pocket," he said, snapping his fingers with a trace of cool. "I was a San Benito city slicker and here I come to find out I'm Freddy Fender, country-western singer. And I guess I am or otherwise I wouldn't be known as Freddy Fender."

While he might have sounded opportunistic, Fender was actually affirming a fact of life of growing up brown in Texas. Like the cockroaches, this Chicano viewed himself as surviving at any cost. The bottom line is that five years ago, Freddy Fender was in storage while Baldemar Huerta (his real name) quit the music business and returned to night school to learn a trade. His only involvement in music at the time was recording a few sides for Huey P. Meaux and his Spanish audience along the Texas-Mexico border.

Life was no better for Meaux, still on the rebound from his prison stretch. Upon release, he found that although he'd produced and promoted more than 25 gold records, he was suddenly an untouchable in the music business. Except for his

studio, a contract with Freddy Fender and several other Texas and South Louisiana balladeers, he didn't have much going. At least he could keep his mind sharp with his weekly Houston area radio program, *The Crazy Cajun Show*, a maniacal Friday night happening where Meaux recreated the screaming, shouting, jiving deejay delivery of his old friend, the Big Bopper. The show also provided an outlet to test potential hits of his small roster of Crazy Cajun artists and at the same time, repay a few prison debts: His most faithful listeners, according to the mail, were the men and women in white of the Texas Department of Corrections, some of whom dressed up in their cells each week preparing for Meaux's show, so an inmate told me. Not surprisingly, the most requested record was *Release Me*.

Back then, Meaux still harbored a ray of hope that he could get another hit like he did with Doug Sahm's *She's About A Mover*, B.J. Thomas's *I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry*, or Roy Head's *Treat Her Right*. He'd tried Freddy Fender singing Spanish reggae and that didn't work. He'd tried Freddy Fender shouting Tex-Mex rock and that didn't work. But there was a new song and a new groove for Fender that Huey claimed (as he always did) would destroy him. "You ain't never heard nuttin' like it, bruddah," he told me then. "Dis one's *country*. Two months later, ABC Records had released *Before the Next Teardrop Falls* from Crazy Cajun records and Freddy Fender dropped out of night school.

The singer had a hit and the producer had an act he could run with. Fender attributed the rest to the bond formed between himself and Meaux more than ten years before the record clicked. "It goes all the way back to 1963 when I got out of the can in Louisiana," he recalls. "I was on parole in San Benito and Huey had this big show of stars in Harlingen and I had to meet him because he was the only well-known freelancer in the record business. I got to talk to him backstage of the Municipal Auditorium. I think he'd heard of me before and he said he'd record me. But I was so uptight about my parole I couldn't get together with him. I couldn't even get out of the county with my parole. It ended up that I had to finish my parole in Louisiana because they found out I was singing in beer joints in Texas during my parole."

"I didn't get together again with Huey until 1971 during the winter. My wife told me to get the hell out of the house in San Benito so I left and came to live with my brothers and sisters in Houston. Things were so bad I had one front tooth missing—I would sing like that. Huey had just come out of the penitentiary and his office was very lonely except for him and Beth Thornton, his very loyal secretary. I went in and asked for fifty dollars and a contract.

"He said, 'How come you want a con-



This picture of a young Freddy Fender was the first taken for his record company publicity.

tract with me? Nobody wants to do anything with me since I got out of the pen.' I said, 'I don't know about your history but I know you've been in the pen and you know what we're talking about.'

"Huey said, 'OK' and he drew me up a contract and gave me a fifty dollar check. He told me to go to some bank and when I got there I thought they were gonna arrest me. They took the check to the office, studied it, and finally gave me fifty dollars."

With his first big advance, Fender bought a freezer full of *menudo*. (A south Texas dish, hotter and runnier than chili, usually eaten for breakfast and reported to be a cure for hangovers.)

Since his entry into country music through the back door, Fender has become all too aware of purists accusing him of carpetbagging. But Fender answers his accusers in a manner more articulate than any more ballyhooed crossover act could muster. "What I sing isn't the country that they used to hear. But how old are these people? The young people of today ten years from now are going to be saying, 'That's not country, not the country I was hearing back in '70.' It's a never-ending cycle which has to change. Music is changing and it's getting closer to rhythm 'n' blues and rock 'n' roll. The teenagers who used to rock back in the '50s are, like myself, approaching 40 or over 40. And we have gotten to fall in love with the music nowadays because it's got the taste from the '50s. Musicians soak it in and let's face it—it's not the people that make country music. It's the musicians."

"Hopefully, though, country music will always remain close to the soul of these people, which is really what country music

is all about."

"There's a lot of soulful people in country music."

That last statement alone explains Freddy Fender's appeal as a country act. But in addition to having a surplus of soul, he is also a throwback to the days when country entertainers maintained direct contact with their public. Earlier in the morning, Fender's food in a restaurant turned cold because he was so busy signing autographs. Again, Fender was exercising his beans-on-the-table philosophy.

"Unless you're Elvis Presley or some tremendous multimillionaire superstar, it's like a gardener who doesn't look after his garden. You gotta keep on digging up the dirt in and out all the time so you're on top of things. That way I know I've been good to the people. There's a lot of entertainers—I'm not going to name names—but there's this gentleman who's just finally made it after quite awhile and he says he doesn't like to sign autographs, he works hard enough onstage. Now everybody's entitled to their own beliefs. I happen to like the way he sings. I just hope he succeeds to be on top. But I think that's wrong because he's not gonna have number ones all the time. I know from experience."

Since his first two number one singles, Fender leveled off to the point of breaking into the top ten of the country charts once or twice a year. Of course, he'd like another *Teardrop* but he remains realistic. "If I don't," he says, "I know I'll still have some of the people I've been good to. They'll still buy my records. If you're gonna depend on nothing but number ones, when those leave you, you're gonna be up the creek."

Huey opened the dressing room door and brought in the Prison Rodeo Queen. Freddy obliged her with a kiss, smiled for a photograph, and signed a few autographs for her. He handled it with the deftness of a seasoned veteran. Manners like that can only prepare him for the next big crossover from music personality to screen star. Already Freddy's made approximately 20 appearances each on Merv Griffin's and Dinah Shore's talk shows ("Dinah is much better to look at," reports Freddy) and he's so at ease under the klieg lights that now a movie career is in the works. He's already costarred in two movies—*Short Eyes* (he plays a Chicano prisoner, natch) and *She Came to the Valley* in which Freddy Fender plays Pancho Villa (natch). He is also slated for a major role in a bazaar flick titled *Tijuana Donkey* (natch again).

It can be expected that Huey Meaux will be by Freddy's side all the way. Having been a musician himself—at one time back home in the Beaumont/Port Arthur area of Southeast Texas, he once played in a band that included his father on accordion and area talents like the Big Bopper, Poppa Link Davis, pianist Moon Mullican, and a young kid named George Jones. They played for free beer, Meaux said. "For pleasure;" Meaux enjoys the limelight as much as the people he manages. He also maintains strict control of their artistic development as with Freddy. Even though Fender carries a band, has a touring bus, his own road manager (The "Phantom"), and booking support from the Jim Halsey organization, it is Meaux who calls the shots, which doesn't always go down well with Fender.

"Yeah, I don't always like the things he does, but I'm legally tied up," Fender says with a tone of lament. "But as far as our relationship, it's up to him and me to keep it together. As long as he keeps his s--- together with Freddy Fender, Freddy's gonna stick with him."

The Crazy Cajun walked back into the room as Freddy continued.

"If not, we're gonna take him out the back alley and make him into 250 pounds of *salsa picante*" (hot sauce).

Huey winked and the sparring was on. "We're makin' a lot of money but Freddy ain't savin' none. He spent dis year's and last year's at one time."

Freddy grimaced, then tried to explain straight-faced, "I actually had a very bad incident with the government on taxes."

"He made a couple of bad investments," Meaux grinned.

"Yeah, The Phantom and Huey Meaux," Freddy shot back. "Let's just say that at the end of every year we have a tremendous argument where we all want to kill each other, then we go on to the next case," Freddy said, turning serious. "But we got to be like that because we all work as a team and if we don't work as a team, then we don't have the mules pulling the cart. I can't take care of every-

thing."

Strangely enough, the cautious relationship works. Meaux has a new custom label deal with Columbia Records and Freddy Fender will be its featured artist. Meaux has also swung a deal for Freddy to sing the title song for the movie, *When You Comin' Back Red Ryder?* in duet with Tammy Wynette. As Huey is wont to do, he says the song is "a stone bitch."

But more than anything, Huey's relationship with Freddy gives both an opportunity to stay in Texas while dealing with the big boys in New York and California. Meaux remembered once when he was offered a major label job with a fat cat's income if only he'd move to New York. "Dey gave me dis apartment and it was country boy's dream," he said. "'Cept



when I pulled back the drapes dere was dis wall staring me in the face. I didn't have a penny in my pocket, but I left for home right then."

Fender, too, likes his location. "I love Texas," he said. "I love to see my Texas palm trees. Matter of fact, I've been writing some of my own movie scripts and in one of them this character keeps saying, 'Man, look at them palm trees under the moonlight. Ain't that beautiful?' The Rio Grande Valley is palm after palm after palm. I just love it. I've got about six palms in my backyard in Corpus Christi. One of them I named Willie. It's so high that I can't cut up the dried palm leaves. It's got a beard like Willie's."

Huey Meaux had left the dressing room and returned again, this time smiling skittishly, as he escorted a tall gentleman wearing western boots. "Hey, Freddy, I want you to meet a very, very nice man," said Meaux. "Dis is W.J. Estelle, da head of the Texas Department of Corrections."

Freddy stood up and greeted the warden graciously. When asked how he'd been, Fender replied he was all right. "I've been staying out of here haven't I?"

But as soon as Meaux led the warden out, still talking about how nice he was, Fender's smile tightened into a grimace. Some memories can't be forgotten.

Finally it was show time. Fender entered the arena in the back of a pickup truck, standing and waving to the crowd as Huey and I steadied his butt so he wouldn't fall. It was a credible 30-minute set, considering Fender and his band played in the middle of a sea of dirt on a revolving stage. All during the performance, the inmates who were watching sat rigid in their section, politely clapping on cue. But when Freddy finished and the pickup truck pulled in front of the inmates in their white uniforms for a moment, they all stood for a split second and cheered wildly before the guards motioned them to stop. They were merely acknowledging their colleague from the School of Hard Knocks.

On their way out, Meaux told Freddy he added an extra hundred dollars to the Hard Money contest to make it a little more worth it for a convict to go chasing a wild bull. Fender nodded happily.

Then, for once, Huey Meaux and Freddy Fender agreed on something. "Dem shivers down my back are gettin' to be too much," Meaux told his associate. "Let's get back to Houston."

"Get it on, *cacheton*" (a person with chubby or fat cheeks which Freddy and Huey both have), Freddy replied without hesitation, though several females outside his mobilehome were literally crying to see him. Before the rodeo was over, they were back on the highway, putting the rib on each other once again. "You damn Meskin," Huey said. To which Freddy replied, "You Cajun crook."

Life was back to normal for the two Texas hustlers. ■

Buck Trent:

The “Banjo Bandit” Sidekick Steps Out From Roy Clark’s Shadow

by LOLA SCOBEY

Buck Trent is the type of guy a girl might wind up having to propose to. Slow and easy moving, he draws forth slightly earnest conversation that tends to drop off into empty silence. He’s unfailingly polite and nice to ladies—in other words, he’s the kind of man who has to be drawn out.

Careerwise, drawing Buck out fell to his longtime buddy and performing partner Roy Clark. “One night when we were in Las Vegas,” Buck explains, “Roy introduced me, then just turned around and said, ‘Talk to ‘em, Buck,’ and walked right off the stage.

“Roy,” he continues in a soft voice, “was always wanting me to tell this and that around friends. Cause he thinks I’m funny. Well, this was the greatest thing that could ever have happened to me,” he says with genuine appreciation, “him saying, ‘Tell ‘em something, Buck,’ and leaving the stage.”

Clark’s do-or-die tactic kicked off Buck’s real career as a featured performer and banjo player instead of just a sideman or straight man. These days Buck’s solo career as a picker and humorist has developed to the point where this past December he began occasionally fronting his own show, without Clark.

When headlining, he uses the band he and Clark hire for one nighters to play fairs and package shows. “There’s a lot of fairs that can’t afford a \$30,000 act,” (Clark’s going price) he explains, “and this way they’ll get a good show, and it’ll be good for me, too.”

On top of this new touring development, his first single, *Is It Hot in Here or Is It Me*, a duet with Clark on ABC Records was recently released. “It’s a big step for me,” he says with obvious pride, “to have a record—a single record, going.”

For these and other advances in his career, Buck gives unbounded and sincere credit to Clark, whom he teamed up with in 1973 at a peak in Clark’s career. Immediately after winning Entertainer of the Year in October of 1973, Clark went ahead and did what he had wanted to do for several years—invited Buck to join his show. (“Well, actually everybody thought



about me playing with Roy except me,” Buck says with typical modesty, “Cause when I said I was going with Roy, they said, ‘Well, naturally.’”

Despite the credit he gives Clark, however, a bit more prompting reveals Buck Trent to be a man who has generally made his own opportunities by being very good and very innovative at what he does. Doubtless the best illustration of how tenacious and creative the outward easy-going Trent has pursued his career is his invention of the electric banjo.

Buck began playing banjo in grade school. “I just loved the ring of the banjo,” enthuses the picker, who still has the fresh-faced, clean-cut school kid look about him. “A neighbor let me try his, and I just went crazy. Within a week his family couldn’t tell if it was him or me playing in the next room.”

However, in 1969, when he moved from playing back-up with the comedy team of Cousin Wilbur and Blondie to form a trio with Bill Carlisle on the Grand Ole Opry, “banjo music wasn’t going at all,” he says. “I mean, if you played the bluegrass banjo, Bill Monroe was the only one you could work with—or maybe, if Earl Scruggs died, you might go to work with Lester Flatt. So, it was really tough.”

Consequently, his gig with Carlisle consisted of playing Chet Atkins style, finger

picking guitar, with a couple of tunes on his first love, the banjo, thrown in for novelty.

Despite the limited exposure, he was snappy enough on banjo to be spotted at the Opry by Porter Wagoner, who asked him to join the Wagon Masters, singing and playing banjo. He quickly accepted Porter’s offer, but based on past experience, was a little leery of a banjo gig. “I knew banjo players had it rough. There weren’t that many places we could go, and I wanted to plant a little insurance, you might say.”

At this time Buck was living in east Nashville at Mom Upchurch’s seven-dollar-a-week boarding house. Among his fellow boarders were Pee Wee King, Carl Smith, Faron Young, and Hank Snow’s steel guitar player, Howard White.

Buck noticed that White used a bar to play his steel guitar that was different from normal. After appropriating one of White’s bars and studying it awhile, Trent filed notches in it and replaced the wooden bridge on his banjo with the notched steel bar. “Well, it rang and sounded real pretty, but you couldn’t hear it too good,” Buck explains, “so I went to Shot Jackson at the Sho-Bud Guitar Company, and they electrified it.”

Today, Trent has put his invention through several changes so that it is constructed somewhat like a steel guitar with strings that he can pull with his wrist when he plays. This makes it a “cross between a banjo and electric guitar and a steel guitar,” he explains, “so I’ve got three different styles of playing I can do with this banjo.”

At the time, however, the main pay-off was one certain lick that got Buck jobs when other guys weren’t playing. “I got a lick from Ray Charles called dun-da-dalun-ta, da-dun-da-ta-lun-ta, and when I played it on electric banjo, people just said, ‘wow.’ Every time a record producer wanted that lick on a record, he’d call me up. I finally got to where I couldn’t hardly hit it,” he laughs. “I got a complex, cause I used it so much.”

(Continued on page 64)

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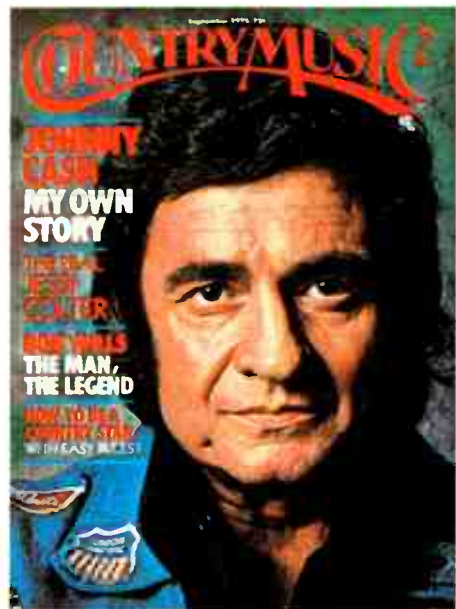
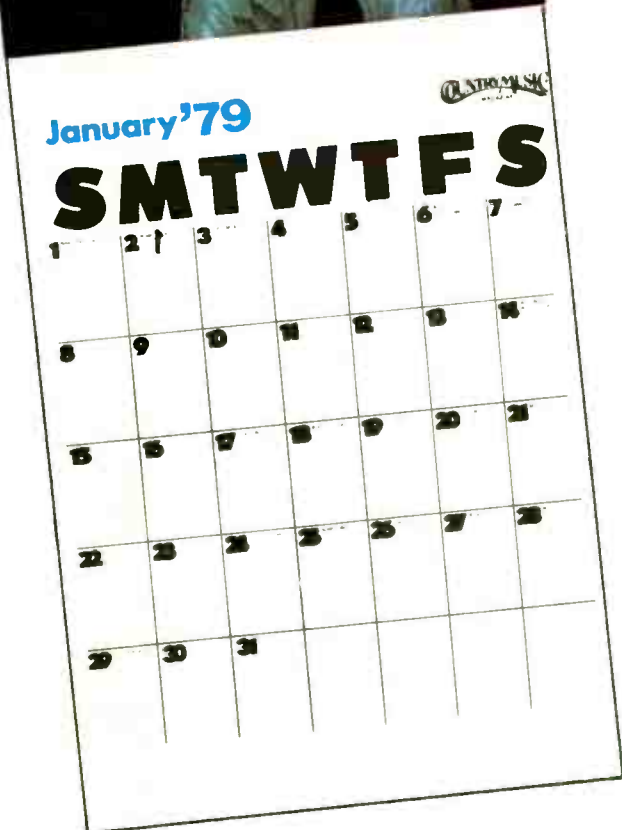
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On The Road With GARY STEWART

The "country-boogiein'" Florida boy finds a home in Texas honky tonks.

by **BOB ALLEN**

Late on a slow, rainy Friday afternoon, the phone rings in my Nashville office.

"Hey, man," a youthful voice tells me across the long-distance wires from Fort Pierce, Florida, "this is Gary Stewart. I've got a message for ya:

"And God said, 'Go down, Death, go down. Go down to Savannah, Georgia in Yamakraw and find Sister Caroline. She's borne the burden in the heat of the day, she's labored long in the vineyard. She's tired, she's weary. . . ."

Earlier, I had been scheduled to hook up with Gary and his band, Train Robbery, at a show they were going to do the following weekend in Corpus Christi, Texas. Mainly, Gary is calling me now to tell me he prefers that I *not* come to that particular show.

"I wanta show you *me*," Gary explains after he's finished reciting his cryptic "message." "I want you to tell it in your own words. If you think, 'Hey, the dude's losin' it,' then *say* it. . . .

"But I don't think Corpus is the place," he adds. "It's a negative place for me. The people there are good people, but they're kind of *shy* or somethin', y'know. I don't tell jokes or anything; I *feed* off an audience, and I'm only as good as they are. If they come out to have a good time, then I have a good time; if they hold back, then I hold back."

Gary—communicating with me the next week through his Nashville management firm—is adamant that I not go to Corpus

Christi. Instead arrangements are made for me to hook up with him the next night at Dancetown, U.S.A. a lively, contemporary Texas honky tonk just outside of Houston where, Gary feels, he will be more in his element. At this point, I am having nagging doubts about whether an interview with Gary is going to materialize at all, since talking with the press seems not to be one of his favorite pastimes. "There was a time there," says Gary's Nashville publicist, Charlene Bray, "when Gary told us, 'I'll pay you to keep reporters away from me!'"

* * * * *

It's been about five years since Gary Stewart, the gaunt, diminutive, wild-haired boy from Fort Pierce, Florida first took the country music world by storm, shaking the pillars of concert halls and the Nashville establishment with the frenzied tremolo and wildly quavering, spine-tingling sensuality of his voice; a voice as powerful and distinctive as any that had ever wrapped itself around a 2½-minute country song. Somehow, when Stewart first hit the scene, he seemed to be doing something that no one else had quite done before. Somehow, he seemed to be revitalizing the frenzy and hard cutting edge of the honky tonk and rockabilly traditions of such greats as Jerry Lee Lewis and Lefty Frizzell. Not that others weren't doing the same, but when Gary Stewart did it, he brought to it, a contemporary youthfulness of heavily electrified "country boogie" (as Gary calls it) that seemed to have a lot in common with his more rock-oriented southern peers like the Allman Brothers. "I got turned on to the Allman Brothers when I was living up in Tennessee," Gary recalls, reflecting on the impact this early Southern rock group had on his music. "They changed my life."

Stewart first came to Nashville in 1969 as a songwriter, and he was eminently successful almost from the beginning. During one period in 1971, he had four songs simultaneously in the nation's top ten; and Billy Walker's version of his *When A Man Loves A Woman (The Way I Love You)* went to the number one spot.

But in the midst of this, Stewart grew disenchanted with the rarified atmosphere of commerciality in Nashville and moved back home to Florida. "After awhile (in Nashville), we lost what we had," he recalled. "I wasn't living what I was writing. I felt like I was selling out. Writing songs for me, wasn't art anymore. It was just for the money."

In Florida, Gary continued with his writing during the week, and on weekends, he could be found at local clubs, playing countrified rock music with his group. But eventually, Gary decided to try Nashville again, this time as a recording artist.

In Nashville, a demonstration tape that Stewart had made, found its way to RCA producer, Roy Dea, who soon signed Gary to the label. After several aborted single releases, Stewart finally hit the number

one spot in early 1974 with *Drinkin' Thing*. His next two releases, *Out Of Hand*, and *She's Actin' Single (I'm Drinkin' Doubles)* also went to the very top of the charts.

Soon, as Gary started gaining national exposure on tours with Charley Pride (for whom he doubled as piano player), Ronnie Milsap, and Waylon Jennings, he became the darling of the avant-guard print media as magazines like *New York*, and *Rolling Stone* found room to give him full-page write-ups; *Time Magazine* dubbed him, "The current king of honky tonk"; Bob Dylan, in an interview with *Playboy Magazine*, named Gary as one of the five or six artists whose records he most often listened to at home.

But then, somehow, as several more years passed, the fire seemed to go out; Gary's records that had first caused a flash fire, seemed to settle into a sort of stylized predictability. His single releases instead of going to the top of the charts, began dwindling off long before they got there. Somehow, it seemed, the fame that had been predicted for Gary Stewart had not been forthcoming. Now, instead of appearing on label-supported tours with major artists, Gary was once again back to working the seemingly endless grind of the honky tonk circuit. "I don't know," mused one executive who has followed the 34-year-old singer's career closely, "he may never get out of those honky tonks."

* * * * *

Dancetown U.S.A. is about a 20-minute taxi ride from the Houston airport. It is situated about 10 miles north of the downtown area where the amorphous stretches of Houston suburbs have begun pushing out into the flat, Southeast Texas expanses of scrub pine and cottonwood.

As it has been planned, Gary Stewart is scheduled to arrive at the 1600-capacity, hangar-like club at 1:00 p.m., but when I get there at 1:30, the place is locked up tight and there is no sign of life. I kill about an hour, sitting on the sidewalk in the December chill, reading a magazine, then pass another hour eating lunch at a nearby Mexican style fast-food joint.

Eventually, after another hour, the club manager arrives and lets me inside. There is still no sign of Gary Stewart, so I lay down on the ragged sofa in the club's deserted lobby and take an hour's snooze. I wake up cold and cramped, and somewhat disenchanted. Time is running out; Gary Stewart is now five hours late, and I'm beginning to wonder if this entire trip—including a treacherous taxi ride across ice-covered roads to the Nashville airport earlier in the day—has been in vain. Is Gary Stewart avoiding me?

Finally, around 7:00 p.m., Gary's Holiday Rambler, camper-style truck pulls into the parking lot. By now, it's dark and the stars are shining over southeast Texas. I walk out to the bus, knock on the door and introduce myself to Gary who is sprawled out in the passenger's seat with

his feet propped comfortably up on the dashboard. He is short and skinnier than a rail; he's dressed in a fairly new pair of levis, and is wearing a black Willie Nelson T-shirt under a brown leather jacket. His dark, curly hair is nearly to his shoulders. He greets me like a long-lost friend, and as I take a seat in the warmth and comfort of his motorized "home-away-from-home," all the weariness, irritability and spiritual discomfort of my cold, six-hour wait seem to vanish. Here, the atmosphere is relaxed and familiar: a tape cassette of Buddy Holly plays through the sound system; members of Gary's band, Train Robbery, are smoking, sipping Coors Beer or Dr. Peppers, restringing their guitars, reading magazines, and playing with the puppets that Gary has bought to take home to his kids for Christmas.

"Are there many people inside yet?" Gary asks me. I tell him the place is just starting to fill up. "Whew, that's a huge place, isn't it!" he says in amazement. "The first time I played here, I didn't see it 'till right when I went on, and, man, there was just...young people, cowboys, drunks...dancin' and standin' around! I felt like I was in a movie or somethin'," he adds in awe. "All these people just standin' around, doin' their thing, and then they introduced me, and I felt just like a... (he stands up and strikes an Elvis Presley type pose and chords an imaginary guitar)... I felt just like a star!"

As I look around the bus, I notice it is filled with books and magazines: a special anniversary issue of *Playboy* ("Here's a poem by Shel Silverstein, about Nashville!" he tells me excitedly, "and an interview with Brando! It's heavy."); a new picture book on the history of Hollywood called *Flesh And Fantasy (I'm goin' out there this month to visit; I wanta look at some antique car lots and get me a 'rock 'n roll' jacket. I'm still a kid when it comes to Hollywood.)*; and another huge picture book of the history of the U.S. ("Here's what I was readin' to you on the phone the other day," he explains as he leafs reverentially through the glossy pages. "It's a poem by James Weldon Johnson called *God's Tombstone.*")

Gary's bus is now parked in the alley back behind Dancetown U.S.A. and his bandmembers have gone on in to set up equipment and open the show for him. The atmosphere is quiet and relaxed as he puts the soundtrack to *Dr. Zhivago* in the van's cassette player and sits down to restringing his electric guitar.

"I'm glad there's a Texas," Gary explains quietly when I ask him about his current road trip. "It keeps me alive. I'd say that's where eighty percent of my bookings are.

"I don't work that much," he adds, "maybe seven to ten shows a month. That way, it's fun. Any free days I have, I fly home to Florida. I love my family!" He reaches up on a shelf and pulls down a framed picture of his eight-year-old



Stewart: "I feed off an audience....I'm only as good as they are."

daughter, Shannon. "Isn't she beautiful!" he laughs delightedly. "What a character! She's a natural-born actor. She can do impersonations of *anybody!*"

Gary disappears momentarily into the back of the van and emerges a few minutes later in his "stage costume." He's changed into a somewhat more faded pair of dungarees, and is now wearing a loose-fitting gray sportscoat and has put on a narrow-brimmed hat.

"I like playin' these honky-tonks more than I like auditoriums," Gary explains when I ask him how he compares a show like this with the ones he used to do on tours with stars like Milsap, Waylon Jennings and Charley Pride. "I'm glad to be off those tours," he laughs, shaking his head. "They didn't work out; I was just too *loud* for them.

"In honky tonks, it's more like goin' out on the town, man," he adds, "like goin' out and partyin'." Whenever we go on the road, we're makin' a living, of course; but we're makin' a livin' *partyin'*."

Gary slips a cassette of English rock

star, David Bowie into the van's sound system. "Listen to this!" he says gleefully. As we listen, I tell Gary about an article I read some months ago about how David Bowie, in order to escape the unbearable pressures of stardom, had moved to West Berlin, taken a small apartment and worked a nine-to-five job in order to maintain anonymity and try out a newer, more simpler identity and lifestyle.

"ARE YOU KIDDING!?" he jumps up out of his seat and comes over and sits next to me. "REALLY!?!...Y'know I was thinkin' about doin' that *exact* same thing!"

It's time for Gary to take the stage for his first show, so we leave the warmth and quiet of the van behind, and walk through the cold night air to the club's rear fire exit. As soon as Gary is inside, a small crowd swarms around him: a man with whiskey breath wants his autograph; a young girl wants to take a picture of Gary standing with her sister; a heavy-set, middle-aged lady rushes up to him and hugs him so hard she almost picks him up off

the ground. "You skinny little rascal," she tells him, "we was wonderin' when you were gonna get here!" Another young girl presents Gary with a T-shirt with his name embroidered on it that she's made especially for him.

Gary just seems to come alive in this crowd situation; he loves the attention. He laughs, shakes hands and hugs these people, not with the calculated friendliness of a politician but with a childlike enthusiasm that is both warm and sincere. "Hey, Bob!" he grabs my arm, "see this T-shirt she made me!" he laughs with delight. "things like this mean more to me than money, man! *This* is my pay-off!"

Once he's onstage, Train Robbery, working out some heavy chord patterns on electric guitars, leads Gary into a spirited version of *Out Of Hand*. As Gary works his way from one end of the small stage to the other, he slides his slender frame around agilely like a countrified Chuck Berry. As he centers himself behind the microphone, he executes a quick, 360-degree turn, wrapping his guitar cord around himself like a snake. He cocks his hat back on his head with mock arrogance, and as he bends to the microphone, he strokes his 1959 Gibson electric guitar, tightens his face into a grimace and belts out the lyrics with ear-splitting urgency. When he gets to the chorus, he affects a sort of comic Elvis Presley stance and intentionally knocks his hat off his head onto the floor.

Ten minutes into the show, Gary is perspiring heavily and clearly enjoying himself. The electricity that he generates has spread through the crowd and two-thirds of them seem to be up on their feet, either dancing or standing around the bandstand. A man in a huge cowboy hat comes forward and hands Gary a half-empty bottle of whiskey. Gary takes a healthy swig and hands it back.

Between shows, instead of returning to the bus, Gary kneels on the edge of the bandstand and one by one, greets the line of fans who are waiting to visit with him: one girl wants a kiss, one wants an autographed picture. Another wants Gary to sign his name on her britches bottom, and an elderly lady wants Gary to help her find her long-lost brother who now lives in Nashville. He obliges them all as best he can.

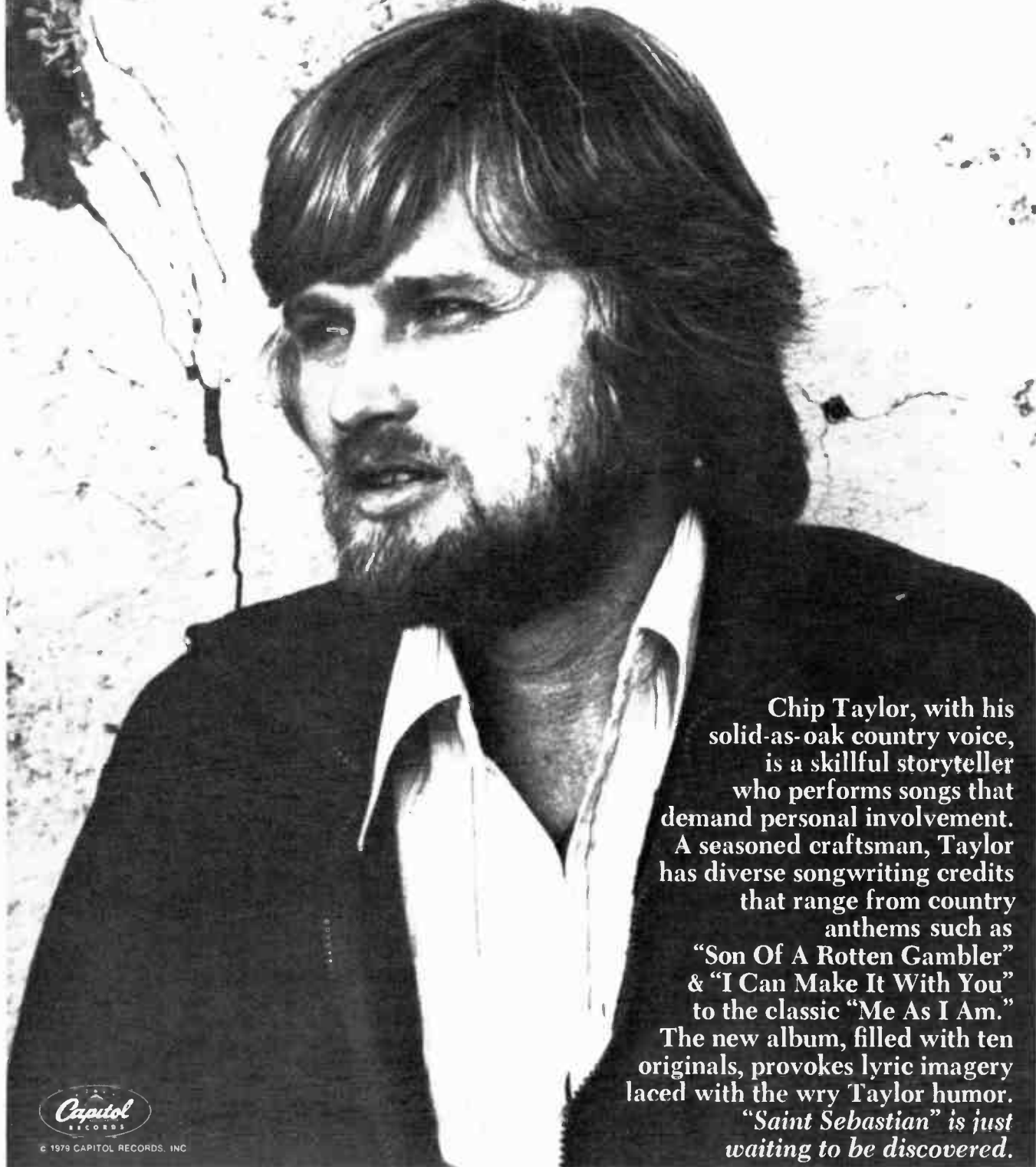
"I feed off these people," Gary tells me as he literally jumps up and down with excitement. "I come out to have a good time too, and *this* is the pay-off!"

A little later, back in the van, Gary is sitting quietly again, eating honey from a jar to ease a mild sore throat. I ask him about the excitement of his performance, and the heavy elements of rock 'n roll that are clearly in his music.

"I was raised on rock," he tells me. "Played it since I was a kid. That's where the energy comes from. I was born in Letcher County, Kentucky (the son of a

(Continued on page 64)

Discover
Saint Sebastian
CHIP TAYLOR



Chip Taylor, with his solid-as-oak country voice, is a skillful storyteller who performs songs that demand personal involvement. A seasoned craftsman, Taylor has diverse songwriting credits that range from country anthems such as "Son Of A Rotten Gambler" & "I Can Make It With You" to the classic "Me As I Am." The new album, filled with ten originals, provokes lyric imagery laced with the wry Taylor humor. *"Saint Sebastian" is just waiting to be discovered.*



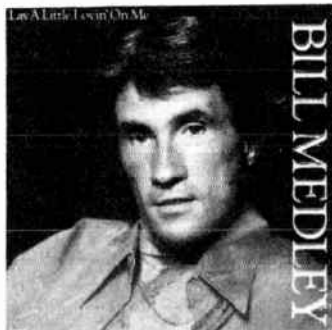
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Records

Bill Medley Lay A Little Lovin' On Me

United Artists UA-LA929H

In the early 60's the airwaves were dominated by a series of gut-wrenching ballads from the Righteous Brothers. They used to say back then that the Righteous Brothers were so soulful, black people assumed they were black. Bill Medley was half of the Righteous Brothers and neither one of them was black. Since those days he's been popping up here



and there—most recently with this LP in Nashville. Going from Phil Spector to the Nashville sound may not be that far a distance after all.

Lay A Little Lovin' On Me was produced by veteran Nashville producer, Larry Butler, with the strings being arranged by Bill (I don't care what anybody says, *Raunchy* was his finest hour) Justice. Lately there's been a drift toward rhythm & blues in Nashville and for the most part this turn of events hasn't been doing rhythm and blues any favors. This album pretty much falls into that category. It's over-produced (naturally) in spots and a lot of it sounds like something you'd expect to hear in one of the smaller rooms in the Adirondacks or maybe on the Johnny Carson show. Nevertheless, Bill Medley can still sing the bejesus out of a song when given the chance as he does with *Statue Of A Fool*

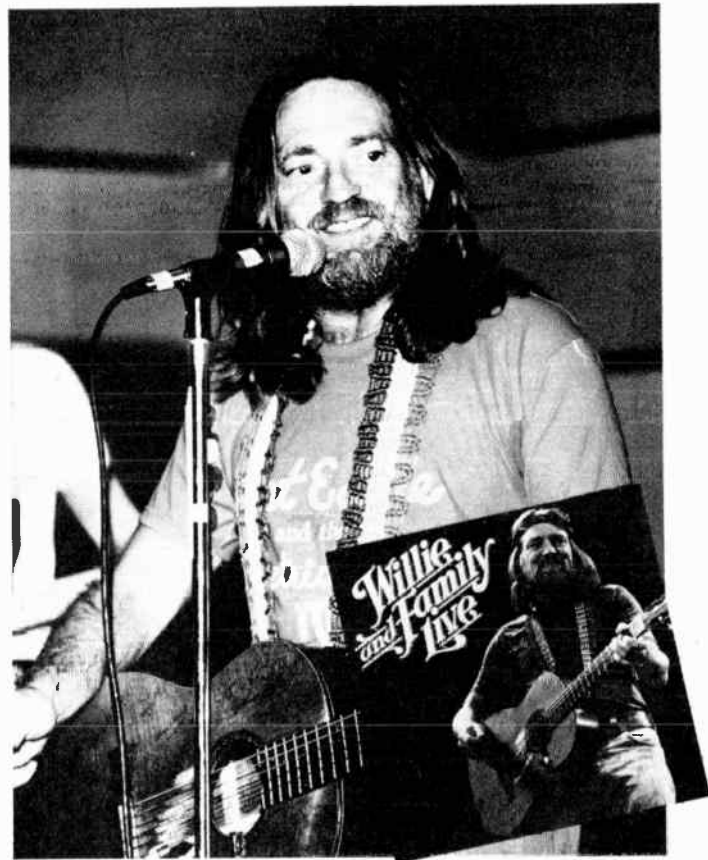
Willie Nelson Willie And Family Live

Columbia KC 2 35642

A lot of people have been waiting for Willie Nelson to release another collection of new songs. They've waited through a gospel album, the *Stardust* album of standards from the 1940's, and a re-release of some of Nelson's earlier tunes on, *Face of a Fighter*. With this, his newest release, they're still waiting because *Willie and Family Live* is just what the title indicates and is not another *Red Headed Stranger* or *Yesterday's Wine*. This is not to say, however, that *Willie and Family Live* is not a worthy addition to anyone's record collection.

There often isn't much point to live albums, they're usually done to complete contractual agreements, but this one is probably an exception. When Willie Nelson does a concert he comes to play and this album, a two-record set, contains almost an hour and a half of music. Willie rips through most of his earlier classics: *Funny How Time Slips Away*, *Crazy*, *Night Life*, *Bloody Mary Morning*, *Mr. Record Man*, *Hello Walls*. He does a Bob Wills tune and one by Lefty Frizzell along with A.P. Carter's *Will The Circle Be Unbroken* and the gospel song he likes to end up with, *Amazing Grace*. He does a lot of stuff from *Red Headed Stranger* including *Blue Eyes Crying In The Rain*. *Whiskey River* crops up twice. There are several guest appearances: Johnny Paycheck contributes

proving once again why that song will always be around. Medley wrote six of the songs, two of which, *Wasn't That You Last Night* and *Nothin' Left To Lose* are among the highlights in a mostly lackluster album. These guys are all



Take This Job And Shove It and Emmylou can be heard singing along on several songs. There aren't any new songs penned by Nelson but there are a few that can't be found on any other LP. Lee Clayton's *If You Could Touch Her At All*, a song by Rodney Crowell 'Til I Gain Control Again, Willie's version of *Mamas Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up To Be Cowboys* and a song he wrote with Waylon Jennings *I Can Get Off On You*. There's some outstanding instrumental work particularly from Willie's guitar on his arrangements of *Just*

As I Am which cuts into *Under The Double Eagle*.

Basically this is a greatest hits LP but *Willie and Family* shine throughout, having an infectious good time and taking interesting liberties with the material. This is the way Willie does these songs now—backed up by his band, one of the best in country music these days. The best thing about *Willie And Family Live*, simply but importantly, is that it's a lot of music for your money and it's fun to listen to.

NELSON ALLEN

slicked-up in search of country-soul and you'd expect them to wear brush denim tuxedos down into the pool hall, where they probably don't go anymore but where you could probably still hear the Righteous Brothers instead of

Lay A Little Lovin' On Me. Still, Bill Medley is a proven talent and with the right production or the right material or a little luck he could find himself back up on the charts again. He might do it anyway.

NELSON ALLEN

Johnny Paycheck Armed and Crazy

Epic KE 35444

It's a wild-eyed Johnny Paycheck staring out at us from under the brim of his now characteristic Witch Hilda-cowboy hat on **Armed and Crazy**. Paycheck's been riding high ever since his monster hit with David Allan Coe's *Take This Job And Shove It* and his follow-up single, *Me And The I.R.S.* which is included on this LP. Aside from *I.R.S.* much of the album is marked by Paycheck's and producer Billy



Sherrill's ideas about musical outlawry. On the title cut Paycheck proves that he obviously doesn't think this outlaw bit's gotten out of hand with lines like, "wanted for the robbery of a grocery store, disguised as a little old lady...son, you're armed and crazy." *The Outlaw's Prayer*, co-written by Sherrill, features the thoughts of a country singer dressed in a black hat and jeans, long-haired and bearded who's been banned from a large, fancy church, "Lord, didn't I see a picture of you with long hair and a beard?"

Paycheck goes through a variety of musical styles on this album, naturally and successfully making them his own. *Friend, Lover, Wife* is a coun-

try song with a disco beat. *Armed and Crazy* owes a lot to southern rock & roll. *Mainline* is a bluesy number complete with harp, written by Paycheck and R.C. Bannon after both had been out on the road for months while *Thanks to the Cathouse (I'm in the Doghouse With You)* is about as country as you can get. *Leave It To Me* and *Just Makin' Love Don't Make It Love* are two more songs penned by Paycheck.

As the publicity release which accompanied my copy of this album points out, Paycheck has a penchant for some "of your more explicit adulterous tunes." He also sings about prison, hellraisin', and the

working man—all subjects which qualify him as a country singer—which he certainly is. What he lacks in depth he makes up for with muscle. And despite his somewhat overly enthusiastic bid for outlaw status, Paycheck does stand in direct opposition to all those guys a few years back who, seemingly embarrassed by the fact they were country musicians, tried putting on tuxedos and sitting on stools like Perry Como. Johnny Paycheck sings through his nose and is proud of it. He's always a little rough at the edges and **Armed and Crazy** is no exception, but, then, that's the way it's supposed to be. NELSON ALLEN

last week he canceled a gig at Possum Holler and several publicity appearances. This album is all that remains.

Among the standout cuts are a couple of songs by Wayland Holyfield including *Just Hangin' On* which contains some lines seen in eerie retrospect, "Just hangin' on, can't call it living, feels like dying, I'm just hangin' on." There's a knock-out version of the country classic *Don't Let Me Cross Over* and a definitive motel-lovin' song written by Bob McDill, *Shady Rest*: "There beside the highway underneath the trees, there were 15 cozy



rooms and a coke machine, the summer nights were warm and we found a home away from home at Shady Rest." Beautiful and pure country, Mel Street's own *The Easy Lovin' Kind* is the last song on the album.

Ironically what this album displays is an artist prepared and willing to grow. Had Mel Street elected to stay among us he undoubtedly would have given us some great music in the coming years. Sadly, he did not. NELSON ALLEN

Mel Street Mel Street

Mercury SRM-1-5014

Simply entitled **Mel Street** this album is that singer's final contribution to country music. A contrast between a pensive expression and the high-styled gaudiness of an

entertainer's suit all covered with stars and thunderbirds, studs and rhinestones is revealed in the cover photograph. Discreetly in small print are the words: "Mel Street planned and recorded this album during the summer of 1978. The album was scheduled to be released in

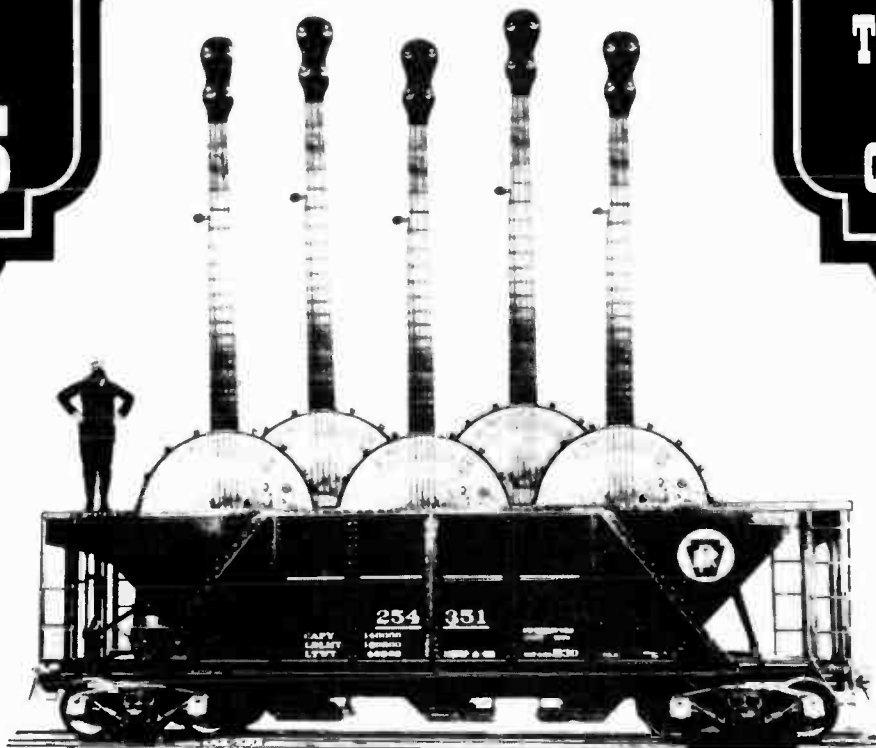
November 1978. Mel Street died October 21, 1978."

For reasons most of us will never know Mel Street took his own life just when he was at the brink of a new upswing in his career. Something of a recluse by Nashville standards he stuck to himself and was seldom seen about town. That

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Jessi Colter That's The Way A Cowboy Rocks and Rolls

Capitol ST11863

One of the genuine and enduring legacies of the "outlaw" movement in country music, however defined, has been the move to sparser, simpler production, resulting in records which concentrate on the singer and the song rather than a (frequently cumbersome) total sound.

Jessi Colter's latest, produced by her husband Waylon Jennings and his drummer Richie Albright, has all the hallmarks of the "outlaw" sound, which involved some risk, as Ms. Colter's voice is not one of the most supple, containing little of the power of Waylon Jennings nor the subtlety of Willie Nelson's.

It was a risk, but it paid off.



That's The Way A Cowboy Rocks and Rolls is a success.

The co-producers have been for the most part careful and thoughtful in the handling of Ms. Colter's winning but limited vocal abilities; strikingly so. She has literally never

sounded better. Only on *My Cowboy's Last Ride*—the weakest song on the album—does she strive for more than she can accomplish, and she makes up for it many times over in her surprisingly powerful performance of *My Good-*

ness, the final song.

If there is any major weakness, it is that they (Jessi and the producers) found too comfortable a groove for her voice; with the exception of *My Goodness* and *Roll On*, the songs do tend to sound somewhat alike. Still if it is a weakness it's also a strength, for it gives the album a fine unified feel, and is remarkably effective in creating the illusion of closeness to the singer.

Another remarkable item of note is that none of the ten songs are Jessi's. Her unique touch is missed here.

All in all, **That's The Way A Cowboy Rocks And Rolls** does an excellent (if not perfect) job of displaying Jessi Colter's winning and winsome voice, enhanced by the discrete and subtle production. It is a tribute to the best things the "outlaw" movement has brought to country music.

DOUGLAS B. GREEN

BURIED TREASURES

by RICH KIENZLE

Older country LPs are becoming an endangered species today. Worse yet, certain ones are becoming increasingly valuable as the art of C & W record collecting advances. So it's always heartening to see a label get into reissues and even more encouraging when those reissues are budget-priced in the \$2.99-\$3.99 range. But the nicest touch is to see these albums reissued in their original covers. Two major companies involved in such reissues are Capitol and Columbia, and for fans of older artists, these easily-available LPs are true windfalls.

Capitol's *Midline* series recently reissued four memorable LPs from the past: two by Merle Haggard and two by Hank Thompson. Hag's *Swinging Doors* (SM-2565) and *I'm A Lonesome Fugitive* (SM-2702) were his third and fourth albums, respectively, and show him deeply immersed in the classic "Bakersfield Sound" he, Buck Owens and Wynn Stewart pioneered. *Swinging Doors* features the ti-

tle tune and *The Bottle Let Me Down*, originally released around 1966 along with the slyly humorous *The Girl Turned Ripe* and nine others. *Lonesome Fugitive* contains the title tune Hag's first number one country hit, from 1966, a gutsy rendition of *My Rough And Rowdy Ways* (the first Jimmie Rodgers tune he ever recorded), the hilarious *Skid Row* and the stark *Life In Prison*. The Hank Thompson sets reprise his late '40s and early '50s period, where the smooth, western band he led (often abetted by Merle Travis) has been overlooked, but *The Best of Hank Thompson* (SM-1878) has all his original hits like *Six Pack To Go*, *Whoa Sailor* and *Wild Side of Life*. *Golden Country Hits* (SM-2089) features the same band playing such country classics as *San Antonio Rose*, *Detour* and *Wabash Cannonball*.

Columbia's *Limited Edition Series* recently released an album that originally came out in the fifties. *Greatest Western*

Hits is an anthology featuring the biggest original hits of Ray Price (*Crazy Arms*, *I'll Be There* and others), Carl Smith (*Hey Joe!* and others) and Lefty Frizzell (*Mom And Dad's Waltz*, *Always Late* etc.) The original cover shows all three in their glitter days. Anyone who enjoys Moe Bandy should enjoy this, for as Moe himself would tell you, these three were his inspirations.

One of the most glowing reviews ever given an album in these pages was given to an LP of Bob Wills Tiffany radio transcriptions back in 1976. Legal problems forced the record's withdrawal, but reissues of Tiffany material have resumed with *San Antonio Rose* (Lariat 1). Despite some duplication of songs from the first album the 16 tracks here shimmer with superb musicianship, particularly *Cherokee Maiden*, *Basin Street Blues* and the hilarious version of *El Rancho Grande*. Hopefully Lariat will continue what could become an important reissue series for Western swing fans.

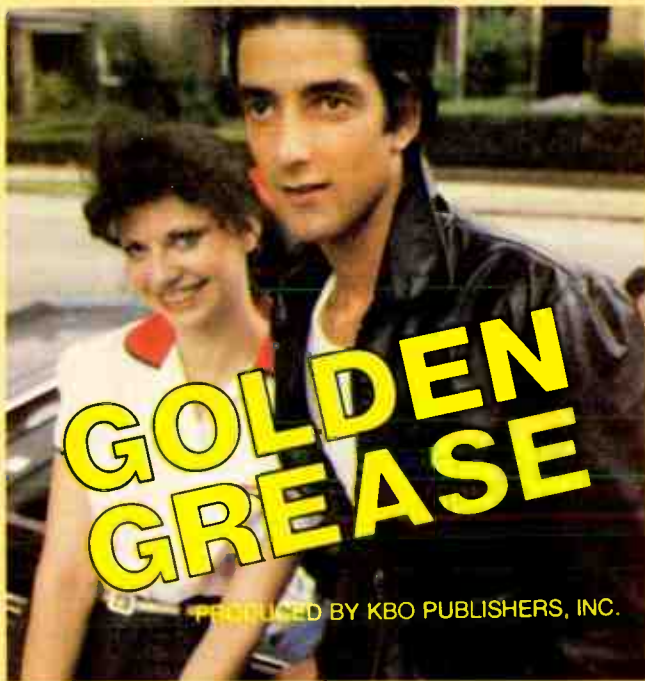
Male-female duets are common, but most of the traditional teams, like Lulu Belle and Scotty are either long gone or inactive. Few have elected to keep that tradition alive, but one notable exception is **Cathy Fink and Duck Donald** (Flying Fish 053), an American-Canadian duo who draw on other famous duos for material. Among their sources are Homer & Jethro, the Louvin Brothers and the Delmore Brothers. The instrumentation here is delightfully rural; Fink's and Donald's voices blend with just enough rough edges to sound credible. Their versions of the Delmores' *Tennessee Choo Choo*, Reno & Smiley's *Love Call Waltz* and *Meet Me Tonight In The Cowshed* are outstanding.

Every month in this column I'll be looking at new country releases on small labels, budget labels and reissue series.

The Bob Wills LP is available for \$5.99 from Southern Record Sales, 5101 Tasman Drive, Huntingdon Beach, California 92648.

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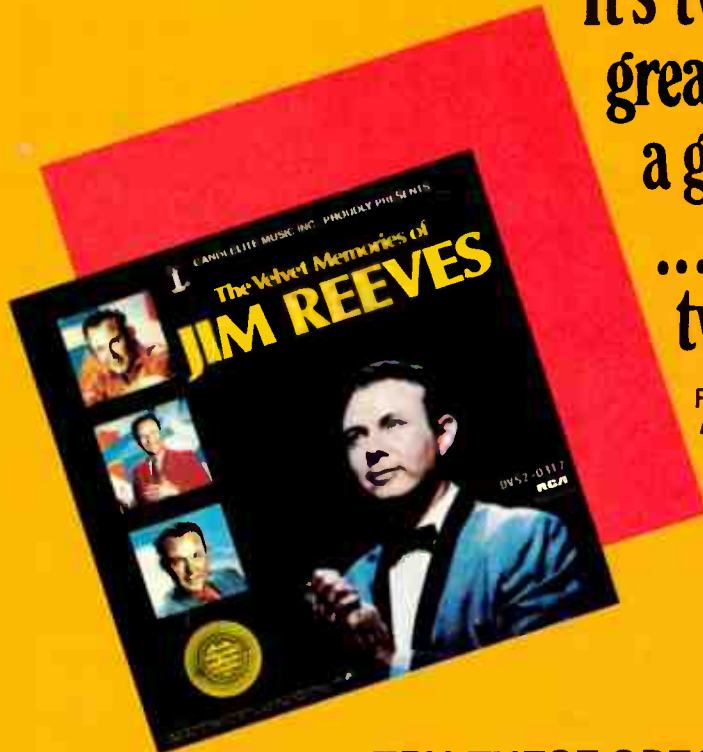
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Jerry Jeff Walker

Jerry Jeff

Elektra 6E-163

He sings "I'm not strange/I'm just like you," but you don't for a minute believe it, any more than you believe Waylon when he says he's always been crazy (for these outlaws, "crazy" is a code word for having the canniness to be obstinate, rather than



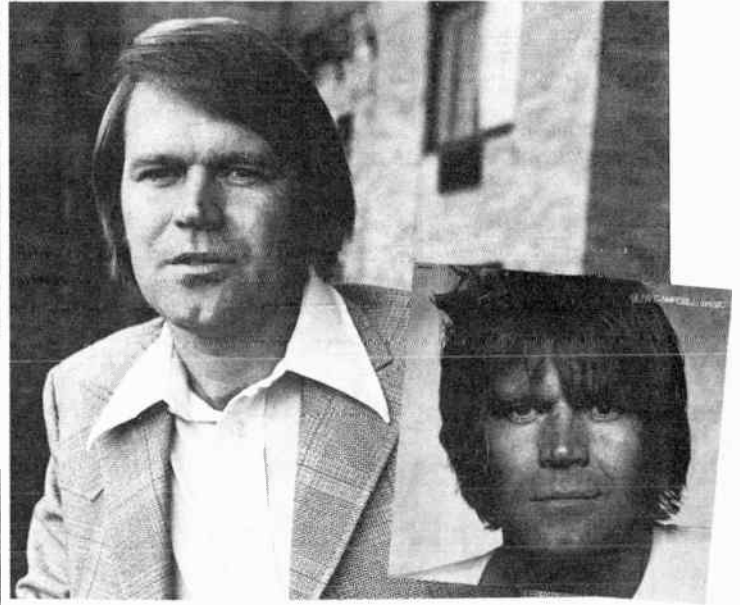
commercially, creative). The difference is that Jerry Jeff Walker doesn't expect you to believe. In a field of pretenders, he's a genuine story-telling loon, his voice an alcohol-drenched crackle, his anecdotes ramblingly sentimental. You gotta like him, really; I mean, if Larry Gatlin can become a quasi-star, then Jerry Jeff Walker should be a prince, at least.

Jerry Jeff, his first album under a new label affiliation—he's a Warner communicator now, God bless him—isn't perfect, to be sure, but it's a convincing, sometimes even com-

elling collection that spotlights Walker the interpreter rather than Walker the composer: he's written no new songs for the set, and the only one to bear his name was penned a half-dozen years ago. He has fine taste, though—Guy Clark and Rodney Crowell are just maybe the two best upstarts out there in the territory; Mike Reid, an unfamiliar name; Keith Sykes and Lee Clayton each has his moments (not many here, I'm afraid)—and Walker's voice and Bandito Band (with boozy horns that give the arrangements some frito friskiness) are amiably lazy without being too laid back.

So if all this is true, if Crowell's *Banks of the Old Bandera* is something of a mod masterpiece, and *Comfort and Crazy* is rich in Clarkian imagery ("Feelin' like some shot-up old tin can" type stuff) and *Eastern Avenue River Railway Blues* strings a bunch of cliches together evocatively, how come Jerry Jeff is only part wonderful? Because Walker, on side one, rehashes too many neo-country stereotypes (the woman-stalking lone wolf, the I-don't-everywhere "outlaw," the lusty honky-tonk boogie woman), and because almost seven minutes of *Follow* (best known from Richie Havens' first LP) slows things down between Clark and the Crowell. That's why.

MITCH COHEN



Glen Campbell Basic

Capitol SW-11722

Glen Campbell's albums followed a formula so long that it seemed unlikely he'd ever abandon it. Songs like *Galveston* and *Rhinestone Cowboy* were engineered to cross over into MOR airplay, and they did. So it is quite surprising to see Campbell drop the smooth orchestrations in favor of a small, guitar-dominated rhythm section, a smattering of background singers and a mere string quintet at a time when many others are doing the opposite. And the result, aptly titled *Basic*, is one of the more dramatic revitali-

zations in recent history.

Anyone who preferred Campbell's past recordings will be jolted by this new sound, which focuses around hard-driving country rock. No Waylon/Willie rehash, but a combination of searing guitar and gospel-flavored piano that pushes his voice to the front, giving those trademark falsetto peaks of his far more credibility than they previously had.

The abrupt musical turnarounds here make the material itself almost secondary. All songs were written by one Michael Smotherman, who also plays electric piano on the album. Smotherman takes his cues from many other contemporary songsmiths and has yet to find a style of his own, but tunes like *Can You Fool*, *You've Got To Sing It Nice* and *Loud For Me Sonny* and *Love Takes You Higher* work well. Campbell's bittersweet vocals on *California*, an anthem to West Coast life, gives it an unexpected touch of irony. Even less expected is *Grafhaidh me' thu*, a haunting instrumental featuring Campbell on bagpipes. It sounds like a traditional ballad—until the band kicks in behind.

I honestly never expected Campbell to break out of the rut he was in, but *Basic* shows him free of the past and more importantly, interested in his records again. RICH KIENZLE

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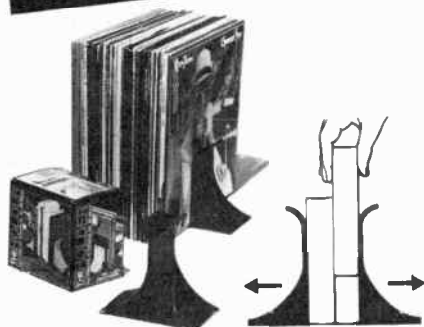
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THE HOLDER

This is a simple yet revolutionary item that impressed me the minute someone put it on my desk last year. Simply put, they are bookends that automatically open when you put something between them, and automatically close when you take something out. They are great for records, as I use them, as well as books, magazines, and just about anything else. They are made of high-impact plastic and priced really reasonably at \$4.95. The Holder is a product of METRA CORPORATION.



PLASTIC WALL RECORD FRAMES

I am starting this listing off with the Plastic Record Frames because they could well be one of the most practical items to appear in this year's marketplace. They offer an inexpensive way to use your favorite record jackets to brighten up the bedrooms and fun rooms of your house. They are made of high-impact plastic with two brown and two yellow frames to a set. This particular set, by OPUS, is an exceptional model because it uses a nail hanger as opposed to the tape employed by competitors. At \$9.95 for four frames, I consider this an exceptional bargain.

ONE POUND OF BUTTONS

(Not Shown On This Page)

Here is a package that I saw in the catalog of a company called STEWART JAMES LTD., and had to order it just to see if it was for real. It was, over 600 mixed and matched buttons, dozens of different styles, colors and sizes. There are many matched sets of 6 or more. The bargain here is the price, \$3.95. It could cost as much as \$50 if you bought these buttons individually.



THE WORKBOX

Here is an item I saw advertised on television, ordered it, and was impressed. You get a plastic cabinet with nine drawers and dividers to make up to 27 compartments. To fill these compartments you get a wide assortment of nuts, bolts, nails, screws, washers and cotter pins. Plus you get pre-printed, pressure sensitive identification labels for the different drawers, and a guide book to common repairs around the home. In all there are over 1001 pieces. At \$12.95, I consider it a real bargain.

CASSETTE CHEF FOOD PROCESSOR

(Not Shown On This Page)

So much is being said about electric food processors that sell for as much as \$100 today that it is a real pleasure to talk a little about the Cassette Chef by REDMAN BROTHERS. Unlike La Machine this model is manual. Also unlike La Machine, this model sells for \$8.99. Having used it myself, I can tell you ladies that it pares, slices, shreds and grates exceptionally well. Also, it does not seem to dull, and it is easy to clean. No doubt there are a thousand different food items it can be used on. So far I have found about a hundred and fifty. I heartily recommend it for the kitchen.



THE SUPER STRIPPER

Nothing has to be said about the quality of this item in stripping a surface down. The fact that it has sold millions and millions over the past two years is a testimonial to its performance. The reason we feature it here is because now the price is right to buy. Sold nationally last year for \$12.95, it can be purchased this year for \$7.95. At this price it is truly a great bargain.

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GROOVE TUBE RECORD CLEANER

You may already be familiar with other record cleaning devices around such as the Vac-O-Rec, which was offered some time ago through our magazine. It was a very efficient model. However, at a price range of \$29 to \$34 it was a rather high ticket item. The new Groove Tube by ARTIE LEWIS ENTERPRISES on the other hand does the same effective cleaning job but at a cost of just \$5. Additionally, unlike other cleaners, it is compact. If you are looking for an easy, inexpensive way to keep your albums free of dust and static electricity, we suggest you try this new product.



THE CUT-ALL SUPER SAW

When it comes to a sharp cutting edge, I do not think you will find any better than this one. The Cut-All Super Saw carries a tungsten carbide blade that is tough enough to cut through concrete, copper, brass, wood, even steel. Yet it can be used for precision cutting of marble, tile and glass. Its only flaw to my thinking is its high-impact plastic handle. I would have preferred wood. All in all however, at \$9.99 this is a tremendous working tool for the man of the house.

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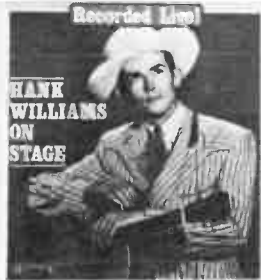
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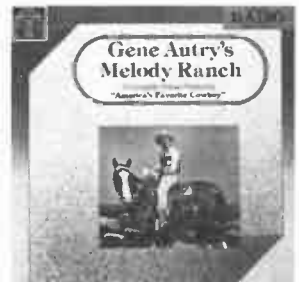


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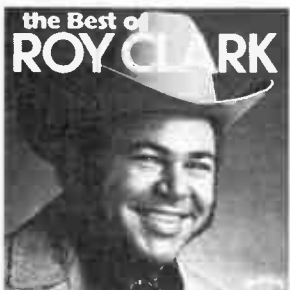


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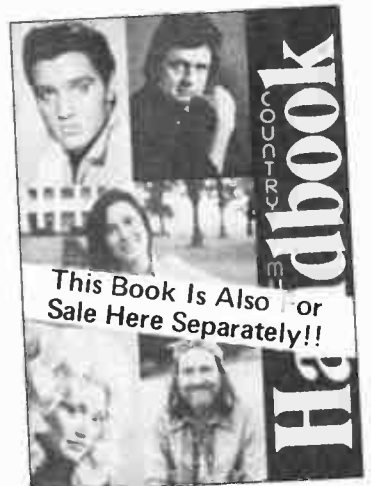
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MISCELLANEOUS SECTION
Continued From Page 68.

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GARY

(Continued from page 51)

coalminer), and I was raised in Florida. That's the *South*, man! I was raised on Elvis and Jerry Lee and Chuck Berry. *That* was southern rock! Then, when the Allman Brothers came on the scene, the first time I heard them, I said, 'YEH, THAT'S WHAT I BEEN FEELIN'! I BEEN FEELIN' IT THAT WAY! SOMEBODY TURNED ON THE LIGHT!' It changed my whole life. It really did."

But despite the immediacy and excitement of his live shows, it's painfully obvious to anyone who follows the record charts, that Gary's records have just not been selling as well as they used to.

"I don't follow 'em (his record's progress on the charts) the way I used to," he admits. "I don't know, I really don't like it too much when they do a lot of heavy promotion on them. I just want people to buy them because they *like* them. I don't want to try and shove 'em down their throats. I don't want to have, you know, TV advertisements like, (he affects the artificial phrasings of a pompous television announcer) 'THIS IS GARY STEWART'S LATEST RECORD!' "

Tonight's show, Gary tells me, is his last until after Christmas. Before he goes out to do his final set of the evening, he and the band are already laying plans to begin the long drive back to Florida as soon as the show is over. They even invite me along. ("Come see how I live," says Gary.) Stowed in the back, are five cases of Coors Beer they are taking back as "souvenirs."

After the show is over the equipment is quickly loaded into the U-Haul trailer hooked to the back of the van, and the night's "haul," several thousand dollars in small bills, is stashed away in an envelope.

At 3:00 a.m., Gary and I are standing in front of a Shell Station somewhere in suburban Houston, waiting while the van is being gassed up for the long haul back to Fort Pierce, Florida. "You know," he says thoughtfully, reflecting on his career, "if a genie came around and gave me a wish and said I could be a star... a *big-time* star, I would have to say no, because it takes so much of you. I feel sorry for a lot of people who do that. They lose their private lives completely. I mean, if that's your goal and that's what you want, then do that.

"But like they say," he adds, looking at the bus then up at the stars, and then to the point where the unfamiliar street fades off into the cold Texas night, "the road is a tunnel. It can be a dead-end street.

"I want to keep on doin' what I'm doin'. If it (stardom) happens, then I guess I'll deal with it as it comes," he adds with a trace of resigned sadness. "But really, I'm very pleased and happy with my career the way it is now," he smiles.

"I'm a happy man."

BUCK

(Continued from page 44)

Meanwhile, back at Mom's Boarding House, reaction to the electric banjo was mixed. "Real die-hard bluegrass people really turned me down," he remembers. "Bill Monroe liked my banjo playing, but he didn't care much about that electric stuff. But," he says, "hitting the heart of the matter, "it sort of set me aside from the rest of the banjo players that were going hungry."

One man who jumped at the new invention was Porter Wagoner. First Porter used it on his duet records with Norma Jean, then when Dolly Parton joined the show, he combined Buck's new banjo with one of Buck's new ideas. "Dolly," he says, "was singing *My Tennessee Mountain Home*, *Coat of Many Colors*, everything down. So, I said, do something fast, something exciting, cause she has an exciting voice. I said, record *Mule Skinner Blues*." Buck kicked that record off on the electric five-string, gut-string banjo, and *Mule Skinner Blues* went on to become Dolly Parton's first number one song.

(Shortly thereafter, Buck recorded an album of electric five-string, gut-string banjo music called *Sounds of Now and Beyond* which he describes as "way beyond its time.")

Buck met Roy Clark in 1967 while he was still with the Wagon Masters. Five years later, in 1973, Roy asked Buck to join his show. At that time, Buck had been with Porter for 11 years, including the days when being a sideman for Porter Wagoner meant having the hottest band gig in town. "I didn't want to walk off and leave what I had built," Buck says, "however, I seen things was happening with Dolly and I seen things were fixing to blow up a little bit with Porter and Dolly," he admits guardedly.

He may also have thought back to his first encounter with Clark. He, Porter, and Norma Jean were backstage waiting to close a show, and "I heard the crowd going to pieces," he recalls. "I ran out front and seen this guy tearing them up, talking about the jams and jellies and fruit jars and all that in the trunk of his car. So, I run back and told Porter, I said, 'Hoss, you won't believe this, there's a fat boy out there picking guitar and killing 'em.' Now, we got to follow him, right? So, we go out and do *Satisfied Mind*, and I'll tell you, we wasn't too satisfied at that time."

By the time Roy extended his invitation, he and Buck were fast and firm partying buddies and had developed such a rapport they could each sense what the other was thinking without even speaking. So Buck made the move.

"It was the best thing that ever happened to me," he states with simple and absolute conviction.

The direction Buck Trent's career has
(Continued)



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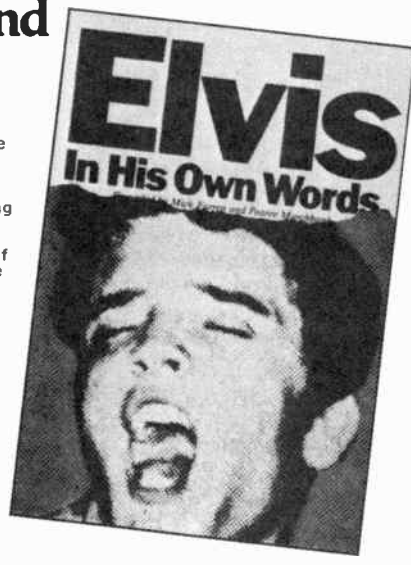
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BUCK

(Continued from page 64)

taken since he joined up with Roy Clark certainly proves this out. Drawing on natural comedic talent, he has skillfully capitalized on his drawl and fluid movements to make a career out of being what Clark playfully dubs "South Carolina slow." He made a precedent-setting tour of the Soviet Union with Clark (and discovered the unexpected aptitude for the Russian language). *Music City News* fans voted him Number One Instrumentalist in 1975 and 1976, and the Country Music Association has awarded him the Instrumental Duo honor, along with Clark, twice.

Right now he's learning a popular Soviet song called, *Kalinka* which he wants to record. "You've just got to be different," he declares earnestly, "and I've always wanted to be different for some reason. I never liked to copy anybody."

But these are all things you won't learn from Buck Trent right off...you'll just have to draw the man out a little. ■

AUDIO

(Continued from page 10)

ponents, most audio dealers nowadays offer special component shelves in attractive wood finish to solve that problem.

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PICKERS

(Continued from page 31)

dom to play as I felt. Slowly, the whole sound of the music started changing. It just started getting a little more fuller and a little more rock n' roll."

Though he has worked and lived in Nashville for the last decade, Londin is still not exclusively a country drummer. He is often called out of town for assignments: One week will find him in Los Angeles, working on a Ronstadt or Carpenters session. The next, he may be in Toronto, working on an album with Dan Hill, or in Europe, touring with Tompall Glaser.

"When I go out of town, to L.A. or New York, I really have to adjust: The more drums I play there, and the more I play physically, the more they like it. That's a big change from Nashville, and often I forget that I'm supposed to open up more and be a little more flashier: more Tom-Tom licks and a few more rolls on the snare—that sort of thing. That's not a cut on Nashville; it's just that people there have their own idea of how it should be done. It's more subdued, and it's quite different."

Part of what keeps Londin in the forefront of contemporary country drumming is the fact that he is flexible enough to change with the times, and that he is constantly searching for a new sound: "I use approximately seven different snare drums in the course of a day," he explains. "I've more or less found out which one works best in which studio, but I'm always hunting for a snare sound that nobody has. Right now, I'm working on an electric snare drum with pick-ups in it. About a year ago, I came up with a new snare sound which I used on quite a few sessions. Everybody loved it, and of course, everybody started copying it."

"The hardest part for any of us," he adds, "is that once you've played on a big hit record, for at least a year afterwards, they will make you play that record over and over again, because producers hire you to recreate that sound. You'll play that sucker over and over again until you're dead!"

Despite the prejudices that may still linger, Londin feels that more and more country artists and producers are becoming aware of the potentialities that drums have for enhancing their recordings. He is certain that in years to come, drums will play an increasingly more important role in the Nashville sound.

"Producers in Nashville are leaning more and more all the time toward pop music for their basic tracks. I'm getting more and more calls for my electric snares and my syndromes, which are already a big thing in pop music.

"I think drums are going to get bigger and bigger in country music." ■

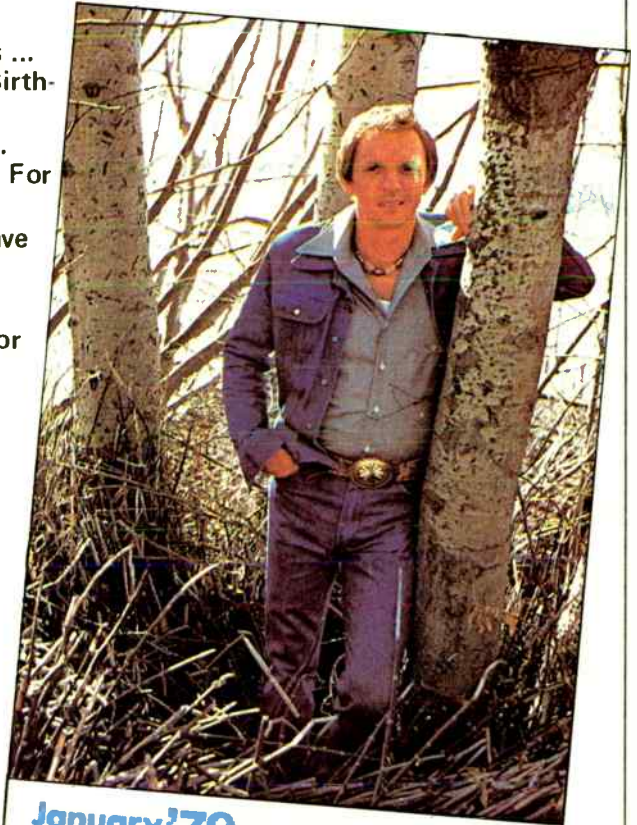
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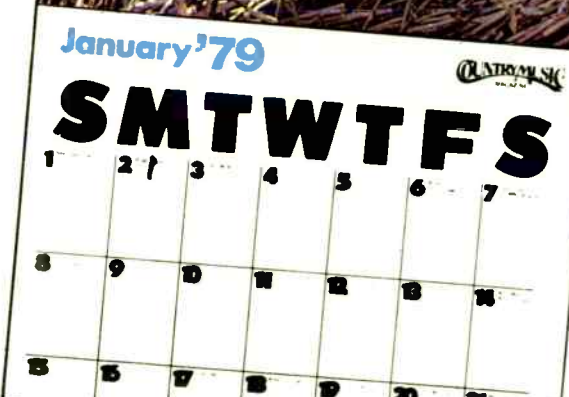
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