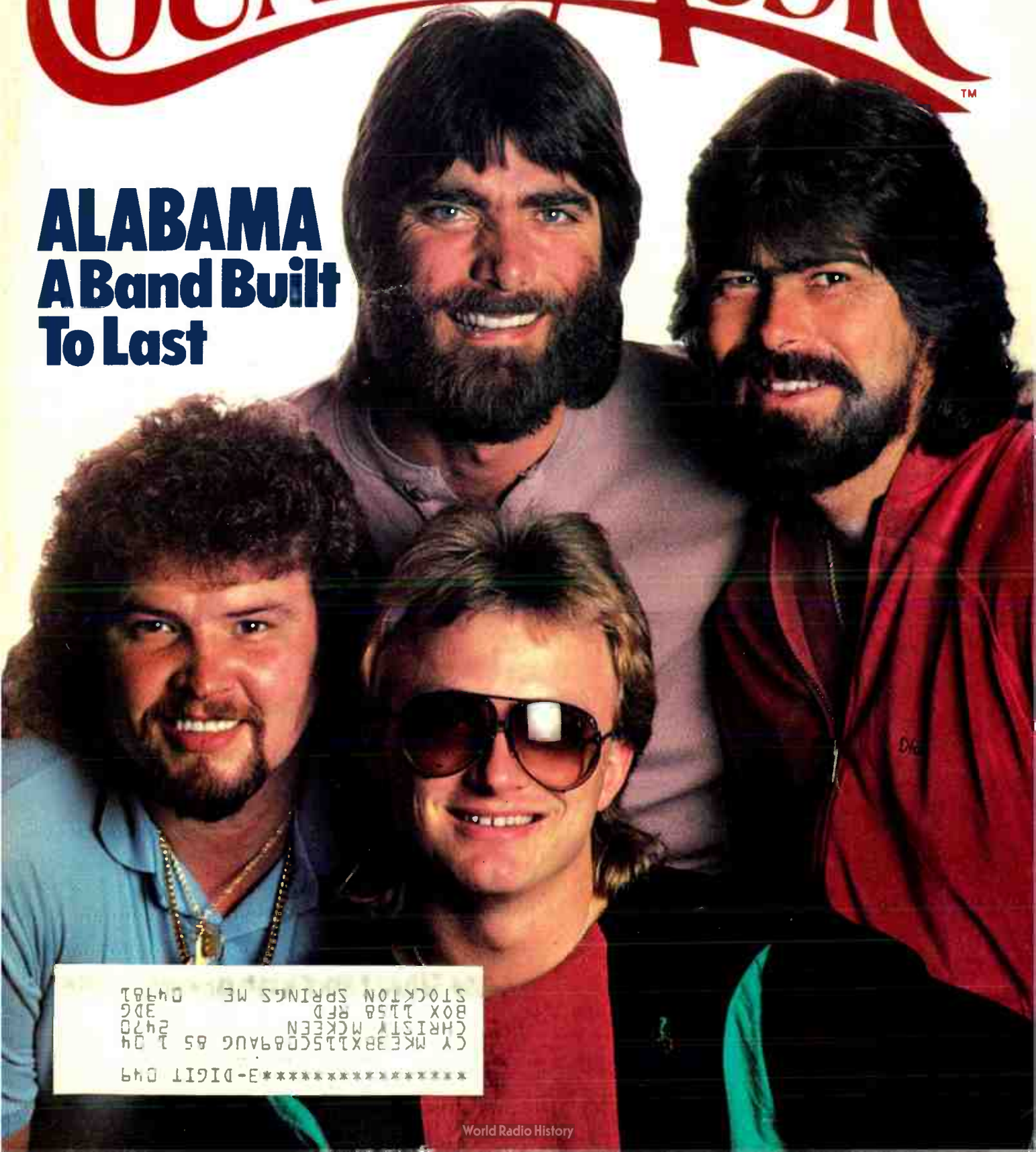


**Dottie West/Floyd Tillman/B.J. Thomas**  
**How to Be a Country Star by Lester "Roadhog" Moran**

MAY/JUNE 1984/\$2.25

# COUNTRY MUSIC™

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## An Open Letter from The Oak Ridge Boys:

Because of the overwhelming support of the general public for Stars For Children over the past six years, we wanted to personally let all of you know that there will not be an Oak Ridge Boys Stars For Children concert this year. The Oak Ridge Boys will however, continue to support a national child abuse prevention campaign.

Our concerts, held in the cities of Dallas/Ft. Worth, Texas, during the past six years (five actual concerts) have raised approximately \$1,000,000. In the beginning, the majority of the money raised came from ticket sales and small private contributions. However, Stars for Children has now achieved what it set out to do in the cities of Dallas/Ft. Worth. It has started the wheels turning on a major child abuse prevention effort. Last year we received nearly \$320,000 in donations from Texas-based corporations and private individuals who gave from \$250-\$10,000 each. People are committed to continue supporting the child abuse prevention effort in the Dallas/Ft. Worth community, through funding of the two Stars For Children Child Abuse Prevention Centers we set up there last year. What we have started in Dallas/Ft. Worth will go on forever, changing for better the lives of countless children.

There are many, many people responsible for the tremendous success of Stars For Children, too many to mention here. But you know who you are. Some donated pennies. Some hundreds of dollars. Others merely expressed their support. We appreciate all of you. It's your kind of support that has kept enthusiasm high.

There are a few people we would like to thank publicly. Those who gave of their time and talents on an extraordinary level. From business associates, to volunteer workers, to entertainers from almost every avenue of our industry.

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KPLX Radio  
George Jones  
George "Goober" Lindsey

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As well as funding Texas-based child abuse prevention programs, Stars For Children has financed a major national child abuse prevention media campaign. Public service announcements have aired across the U.S., from Philadelphia to California, from local television stations to cable. We have produced a ten-minute documentary film, available for civic organizations/schools/churches. The Oak Ridge Boys will continue to work nationally against our nation's worst problem—the senseless waste of our most important resource—our children.

Finally, I want you to know how proud I am of all that we have accomplished together. And we thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

Kindest personal regards,

Joe Bonsall, for The Oak Ridge Boys  
Chairman, The Oak Ridge Boys Stars For Children



# COUNTRY MUSIC™

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*by Rich Kienzle*

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*by Russ Barnard*

## Cover Photo

*by Leonard Kamsler*

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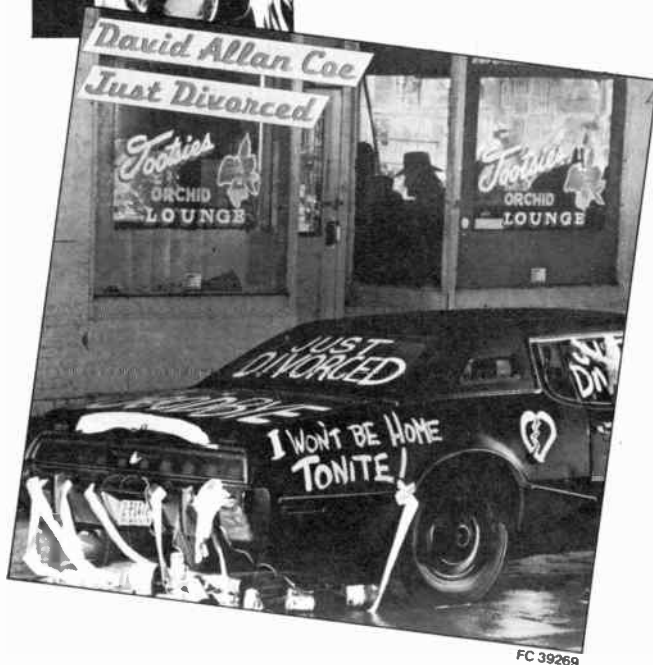
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# Letters

## Someone Else's Mistakes

After reading some of the letters to the editor, I decided to write one myself. It seems many people are blaming you for someone else's mistakes. I've been a subscriber for many years, and you have the best news of country and western singers. Also I think George Jones is my favorite. I really enjoyed the story and his picture being on the cover. Thanks for helping a great performer make a great comeback. I see you believe in these people, too.

Lucille B. Conner  
Starke, Florida

## George the Great

Just received my issue of *Country Music* for January/February, and when I saw George's picture on the cover, I never put it down until I had read every word. George Jones is my all-time favorite country singer. I have followed his career for many, many years, and when he was down so low, I prayed for him, as I am sure many others did, because I knew down deep there was a soul there worth saving, and I was right. Thank you, Bob Allen.

Ruby Fordyce  
Washington, Indiana

I just wanted to thank you for the return of *Country Music Magazine*. I have all of the magazines since the beginning, but this one with the cover photo of George Jones plus the article about him by Bob Allen is my favorite of all issues. I am so glad George is happier now and really hope his happiness continues. He is, in my opinion, the most talented, gifted country singer there is in the business. I have been a fan of his since back in the Fifties (used to dance till dawn to his "White Lightin'" and many others he had on records at the time).

Thanks for the article on Lefty Frizzell. Marty Robbins was one of my favorites also. We'll miss both Marty and Lefty for a long time.

Vee Kendrick  
Gardena, California

What a wonderful way to start the New Year, with a cover of George Jones, and indeed it is "a striking work of art." So is his *singing*. He is the greatest *singer* of all time. So, it made me sad to read

certain parts of the write-up suggesting that his fans feel "morbid fascination." I was fourteen years old when I first heard "Window Up Above" and had to find out who that great singer was. I've learned to love him a lot over the years. He's someone to be proud of and to brag about. I say to everyone, "Who is your favorite singer? Mine is George Jones!" He's the greatest. That doesn't make it morbid fascination. No one can touch him or even come close and probably never will!

Shirlee Young  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

*I agree about George—below is the pin-on button I keep on my desk. Bob Allen's point was that there seems to be a "morbid fascination" about George's personal life, perhaps because he is so widely revered as a singer. —R.D.B.*



Early last year I joined what I thought was a George Jones fan club, run by Mr. Gerald Murray, 2903 Woodward Avenue, Muscle Shoals, Alabama 35660. After receiving the initial membership pack, I only received one newsletter and that was last May. After many attempts to contact Mr. Murray by mail with no results, I wrote to several country music magazines and papers explaining my problem. I also wrote to George's new music park in Texas. That worked! I received a letter from the Secretary/Treasurer of the *real* fan club telling me that George has not been affiliated with the Muscle Shoals club for several years. I hope you will pass this information along to your readers so that they don't get ripped off any more. The correct

address for the fan club is: George Jones Fan Club, P.O. Box 730, Doucette, Texas 75942.

Patricia L. Strejc  
Atlanta, Georgia

*Thanks for helping to set the record straight.—Ed.*

## Let's Have Bill Monroe

I've just finished reading my January/February issue of *Country Music*, and it is greater than ever! The fabulous write-up about George Jones is one of the best I have ever read. He will always be one of my favorite singers.

How about an article on the *great* Bill Monroe with a good color photo? Also more about the old timers like Roy Acuff, Jimmie Dickens, Lester Flatt, Earl Scruggs, Texas Ruby, Curley Fox: I could go on for pages.

Wishing you all the success in the world, and if two old time country fans can be of assistance, my husband and I stand ready.

Mrs. Dial Mullins  
Robinson Creek, Kentucky

*Have you been reading our minds? Your letter sounds like one of our own editorial meetings. As for being of assistance, how about starting a chapter of the Country Music Society of America in Kentucky? There are 1,275 Society members in Kentucky at the moment, and no one to lead them.—Ed.*

## Strait Ahead

Thanks for the nice story on George Strait. He's the best singer to come along in a long time and with his voice he's definitely going to the top. I saw him for the first time at Aqua Fest in Austin. His shows are true honky tonk. I've been to ten shows in the last five months (driving 75-100 miles for most). Country music took a big swing away from honky tonk, but thanks to George Strait, it's coming back. Moe Bandy has always been my favorite, but now he has some competition. I hope you have more on George Strait and honky tonk music—I love them both.

Diana Hood  
Round Rock, Texas

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CT-1



I just received my January/February issue and have read it front to back. I really enjoyed John Morthland's article on George Strait. He was born only seven miles from where I was. Incidentally, "Poteat," as John spells it in his article, is actually spelled "Potet." My sister attended Southwest Texas State, and while there went to George's dances every weekend. We're very proud of him around here.

I would really like to see something on my favorite country artist, Michael Martin Murphey, soon.

Pam Youngblood  
Pleasanton, Texas

See Record Reviews and the People section for more on Michael Martin Murphey.—Ed.

### Lefty Remembered

Thanks for the article and record reviews on Lefty Frizzell. David's reminiscing that Lefty "never knew loyalty" may have applied to his back-up musicians, but certainly not to his fans. I know of several, myself included, who were turned on to country by Lefty in 1950-51, "adopted" the top country singers for a decade, and now listen to and collect only Lefty: we started and ended with him.

Rich Kienzle's critiques of Lefty's latest discs are, as usual, right to the heart of it. I appreciate the release of any Lefty material, but it isn't necessary to change a thing. "New" background music is an interesting gimmick of technology, but let's save it for those artists who need updating—Lefty never has needed it.

Finally, a request to both Columbia and Rounder Records: Let's make albums out of those Lefty singles that have never been on albums before, and let's release those 41 masters that are as yet unissued, especially "Blind Street Singer" and "The Old Gang's Gone."

Sitting here listening to 25 years of Lefty makes me wonder: Is all of country music history since his time merely a footnote to the life of this one man?

Ed La Neve  
Chester, West Virginia

Congratulations on David Frizzell's "Recollections of My Brother" in your January/February issue. David and I have been close friends for twenty years. I can hear David in my mind, talking, in this interview.

If someone asked me to try to tell Lefty's fans what he was like, I would have to say, "The only way to really know about him was to have known him." I consider myself one of the lucky ones, because I did know him. There is no way to describe him, his character, the way he thought, or the way he phrased his words. The man was unique, to say the least.

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Lefty in Nashville. While we were there, Lefty and I went into town one night to a small bar where a good friend of his named Abe Mulkey was playing. After a few pushes and shoves, Lefty decided to set and sing most every hit he had. I'll never forget that evening.

Lefty had a home in Hendersonville, and David and I stayed there while we were visiting. I took this picture of David and Lefty standing in the front yard.



One afternoon while we were there, Lefty said, "Let's take a ride up to Dallas Frazier's cabin." It was a one room cabin on top of a hill where Dallas, Whitey Shaffer and Lefty went to write songs. Whitey, David, Lefty and myself jumped in the car and headed out. We spent half a day singing and playing music. They had just finished writing, "That's the Way Love Goes," a great song.

When we were driving away from the cabin, Lefty asked me who my favorite female singer was, and I said Jeannie Seeley (Shelly West was too young then). Much to my surprise Whitey slammed on the brakes and started to back up, up and up!! Then he put it in forward, and we went up a long driveway to a two-story house that sat all by itself in the middle of the acreage.

When we stopped, we were within inches of the front door. I said, "What's going on and who lives here?" Lefty told me to open the door and go in and find out. When we were all inside, I was introduced to Jeannie Seeley and her husband Hank Cochran. They were great people and I was really impressed. I remember Jeannie had to give an award or something on one of the shows in town and was in a quandry over not being able to find her blond wig. She had only a short time left before she would be late. All of a sudden Lefty raised up off the couch and said, "Oh, is this what you're looking for?" He had been sitting on it all the time.

Jeannie made it to her commitment in time and all was well. The rest of us spent

the evening and well into the night listening to tapes that Hank had. I could easily write a book about the conversations we had that night.

I spent a month with David on that trip and left him in Spokane, Washington, where he was playing another gig. His life was too hard and fast for me. The life of an entertainer is as tough as any lifestyle I have ever seen. I was on my way home to go back to work and relax.

Thank God for that trip and the memories I now have of Lefty Frizzell. I think that all country music lovers can be thankful we still have David Frizzell and his brother Allen to carry on the family name, with two of the finest voices I have ever heard.

Gary Clawson  
Florence, Oregon

*We are very grateful to Gary for providing us this unique view of Lefty. We encourage those of you who have had similar experiences to let us know.—R.D.B.*

### Chameleon Coe

I enjoyed Michael Bane's review of David Allan Coe's *Hello in There*. If only more people felt as we do. I believe they would if they were exposed more to David's music. I honestly don't understand how he has been so overlooked.

David Allan Coe is the best singer/songwriter in country music. He is also a great entertainer. I've been to lots of concerts but have never enjoyed any as much as his. Do the disc jockeys dislike him? He gets very little air time.

I sometimes disagree with the choice of songs he releases off his albums for singles, but I own sixteen of his albums and can't pick a favorite, although some of his best include *Hello in There*, *DAC*, *Family Album*, *The Mysterious Rhinestone Cowboy* and *Human Emotions*. Each new album he releases lets us see a different David. Each album cover portrays a different David. That's one of the greatest things about him. I hope he never gives up.

Diane Gafford  
Electra, Texas

### Kick Kienzle Week

I realize this will probably never reach print, but I am so steamed about Rich Kienzle's review of John Anderson's new album *All the People Are Talking* that I would like to say a few words in rebuttal.

Kienzle's review was very unfair. Anytime an artist wants to add a little bounce and vitality to their music, they are automatically shunned and accused of selling out for rock and roll (Hank Jr. gets the same treatment). Kienzle called "An Occasional Eagle" a flat-out disaster! Please, this song is beautiful! The rockers on this album, he called "sameness." I

wouldn't say that. I'd say they dare you to sit still, and they all share bounce but with a different edge.

Then he turned around and called this album "uneven." Sameness but uneven? His critique is uneven. I enjoy all music and can't understand those who cannot accept change and have a closed mind. Maybe it's a personal vendetta: Anderson stole Kienzle's marble in the third grade or something.

Well, I've got my point across: this is one of the best albums sold anywhere. But, hey, why not hire me to do record reviews?

Dee Tatum England  
Lamont, California

P.S. I really enjoyed Michael Bane's review of David Allan Coe's latest album.

*Hey, Dee, how about writing for the CMSA Newsletter? Contact us if you're interested. We're looking for writers and photographers. Everyone works for free, but there are 60,000 readers.—Ed.*

Hi Rich,

I read the "blistering" review of our latest album on the Texas Playboys. That did not bother me. What did is your statement that most of our projects have been unsuccessful. We have managed to remain in business and prosper while most small independent labels have failed. We must be doing something right.

In fact, the Willie Nelson-Johnny Bush album you mention as being successful was the worst-selling album we have ever produced. I just wish you would have checked out the facts before degrading our label.

David Stallings  
Delta Records  
Nashville, Tennessee

Sorry David,

You obviously misunderstood my statement regarding the "success" of various Delta releases. I felt I'd made it clear I was referring to *aesthetic* success as opposed to commercial or financial success. Obviously, having set up shop in Nashville, you are surviving nicely. But commercial success doesn't necessarily mean a record is top quality or of enduring musical value.

Congratulations on your success; I just wish it gave you the freedom to concentrate on quality productions. Plenty of former Texas Playboys can still play that music well. I wish they had a chance to record. Best wishes for the future.

Rich Kienzle  
Greensburg, Pennsylvania

Dear Mr. Barnard,

We were considering advertising in your publication as we do in *Music City News*, *Country Song Roundup*, *Country Rhythms*, *Billboard*, *Cash Box* and others.

But I think that Mr. Kienzle's remarks about the general low standards of our label have probably damaged us with your readers so that any advertising would be in vain.

He failed to mention that we have had several albums which have sold over 250,000 units each, quite an accomplishment for any small independent label.

I do think you have a fine publication. It is just unfortunate that you have a writer who does not do his homework before writing stories which border on slander.

David Stallings  
Delta Records

*Rich Kienzle's job as a reviewer is to comment on the quality of what's on the record. The business success of any record company is a separate issue. We'll accept your ad any time and let the customers judge for themselves.—R.D.B.*

### Kicked Out

In New York there used to be two country radio stations: WKHK-KICK FM and WHN 1050 AM. My question to you is: If WKHK-KICK FM was the best FM country station in the United States, why did it change its format from country to classical?

The "Weekly Country Music Countdown" used to come on every Sunday night at 8 p.m. over WKHK-KICK FM hosted by Chris Charles. Now I have to listen to WWVA, Wheeling, West Virginia to get it. New York needs another country music station.

Arthur Ray Collins  
Brooklyn, New York

*You are not the only one of our readers to write in about the loss of WKHK. It's gone over to "lite FM," call letters WLTW. You can still catch Kenny Rogers on it if you want to. No explanations from the station are forthcoming.—Ed.*

More than upset over the loss of WKHK, pronounced as "KICK." The new sound came on for fifteen minutes and then the end came. People in our area have problems getting good reception on WHN (the best!). Generally it's fine during the day, but in the evening no way. My husband has now purchased a radio with extra strong reception.

Jo Clemens  
Colts Neck, New Jersey

### Stop Reading Now

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



Charlie Daniels jams at the 10th Annual Volunteer Jam in Nashville.

# People



DON PUTNAM

Not very silent partners: T.G. sings with Clint and pops with Reed.

## MUCH IMPACT

Did you ever notice that once a phrase hits, it's all over the place? It's happened again in connection with the new single by T. G. Sheppard and Clint Eastwood. They teamed up on "Make My Day," the catch-phrase from Clint's hit film *Sudden Impact*. The song marks T.G.'s second duet (he did "Faking Love" with Karen Brooks) and Clint's third. (Clint cut "Barroom Buddies" with Merle Haggard and "Beers to You" with Ray Charles.) Wonder who'll make a song out of "Where's the Beef."

The next logical step for T.G. would be to appear in films. But it seems that T.G. likes to keep behind the scenes. He and Jerry Reed purchased a movie theater in Williamson County, Tennessee. The first film screened at the theater was none other than *Sudden Impact*.

## KEEPING IT COUNTRY

You can take the boy out of the country, but you can't take the country out of the boy. Shelbyville, Tennessee, native Boyd Keele, who is stationed on board

the Navy's *U.S.S. Barnstable County* off the coast of Lebanon, wrote to Opryland requesting videotapes of Opryland's musical shows. Keele said in his letter that he had been telling the rest of the ship's crew about Middle Tennessee and Opryland, and he wanted some show tapes to help illustrate what he had been talking about.

Well, the folks from Opryland were more than happy to oblige their hometown boy. They sent him a package which included mementos from Opryland and the Grand Ole Opry, photos of Dolly Parton, and Nashville's favorite candy, Goo Goo Clusters. Opryland even decided to go a step beyond filling the sailor's request and sent him a complete Tennessee care package to share with the rest of the ship's crew. Included were ballcaps and pins from the Nashville Network, Opryland bandanas, and several posters and books autographed by numerous Opry members. Oh yes, he also got the video tapes.

Bill Monroe was approached about the project before an appearance on the Opry. The Father of Bluegrass said he would be more than happy to pen his famous signature in an Opry picture book. "Anything we can do for the boys away from

home, I'll do in a minute," declared Monroe.

Never let it be said that Porter Wagoner is old-fashioned. Yes, he may sing traditional country music and his experience in the field does go back 25 years, but he is also not afraid to mine new territories. Porter recently put together an all-female band. The group debuted on the Nashville Network's *Nashville Now* TV show on Valentine's Day. Porter says, "Despite the fact that each one of them is pretty, that's not the only reason they were chosen. It's the most exciting band I have ever worked with in my entire career. I consider myself lucky to have found such tremendously talented musicians. Three of the girls play several instruments between them." Porter says it took a long time to find the right combination because personality was also an important factor. Each of the women has a college degree in music. Porter called several colleges around the country to find out who had graduated recently, and if they were working and looking for a career in music. Then he held auditions. He admits that the girls "truly inspire me—they can play my old hits and sound just like the record. They can play today's music, and

by Rochelle Friedman

# People

it gives me such a thrill to see something new develop in the country music industry. I also believe that it's a great opportunity for women in this business."

A new single entitled "I'm Alive and Well" will be released soon, and a European tour is scheduled for August. Maybe Porter will find the next Dolly Parton in the bunch.

## TV NEWS

**Barbara Mandrell** has joined the ranks of Nashville stars who have taken on dramatic roles in films. Barbara's currently filming a TV movie, *Coal Fire*, in which she plays a geologist in Appalachia. Barbara told the *Tennessean* newspaper, "I sort of had a rude awakening. I was with the director, and we read the script together. Well, I'm such a novice at this, I knew the size of my part was tremendous, but when we started looking, I realized with a shock that I'm in all but three scenes of this movie. I never fantasized about being an actress. I didn't even fantasize about doing what I'm doing now in music." Of course, Babs is no stranger to TV, as she and her sisters starred in their own variety show not too long ago. As for future acting plans, she told the *Tennessean*, "We'll see how it goes. All I can do is the best I can. If it doesn't do well . . . well, I tried." Well, knowing Barbara, her best is usually excellent.

**David Frizzell** has been cast in a recurring role, playing himself in the popular WTBS-TV daytime soap, *The Catlins*. Frizzell will perform musically as well as have speaking lines with cast members in the thirty-minute program which airs twice daily on some 4750 cable stations. The producers said they selected David because of his traditional style. He'll be the featured performer at *The Lucky Seven*, a local honkytonk in the story line.

**M-I-C-K-E-Y-M-O-U-S-E!** Remember those eleven letters you sang when you came home from school along with the other Mouseketeers? Well, ex-Mouseketeer **Annette Funicello** has shed her ears and recorded her first country album in Nashville. Annette got the idea for a country album after the success of her single, "The Promised Land," which she wrote as a tribute to her parents. She says the musicians in Nashville are the finest and there's a family kind of feeling. Coming from *The Mickey Mouse Club*, Annette likes that. Even if her album takes off, though, Annette says she won't tour. She says *her* family is most important in her life, and she doesn't want to leave them for an extended period of time.

## EVERYBODY'S A FAN



DONNIE McLEMORE

Since we made a mistake a couple of issues back and said that Tony Geary starred on *One Life To Live* instead of *General Hospital*, we thought we'd give his fans a chance to see him in this magazine as sort of an apology. The fact that he is standing with Lee Greenwood didn't hurt either. Geary showed up at one of Lee's concerts recently and Lee invited him backstage for a visit.

## FAMILIAR FACES IN DIFFERENT PLACES

When **Lee Greenwood** arrived in Bloomington, Minnesota, the night before his engagement at the Carlton Theatre, he decided to stroll next door to the Met Center to see the North Stars battle the Maple Leafs in hockey. But, to ensure himself a good seat in the arena, Lee first had to sing the National Anthem, *a capella*, for the 15,000 spectators and the TV audience. One hand certainly washes the other. The solo provided Lee a ticket for one of the best seats in the house—the box of North Stars' general manager Lou Manne. The following night, the North Stars and their management returned the favor by catching Lee's show at the Carlton.

During Lee's five day headlining stint at the Registry in Dallas, he was pleased to find **Mel Tillis** in the audience one night, and **Merle Haggard** sitting ringside the

following night.

Lee hasn't got any problem nowadays finding work. According to his agency, he is booked for concert appearances through the last quarter of 1985.

**Hank Williams, Jr.** was in California recently and played to sellout crowds in five cities, including a debut appearance at the Universal Amphitheatre in Los Angeles. He also played to packed houses for three nights at Caesar's Palace in Lake Tahoe.

Look for **Tammy Wynette** in the June issue of *Redbook Magazine*. The editors said they chose Tammy because she is the epitome of the female country singer.

**Larry Gatlin** and the **Gatlin Brothers** joined **Wayne Newton** in concert at the Los Angeles Coliseum following the USFL season-opening game between the Los Angeles Express and the Denver Gold. One dollar from each game ticket was donated to the U.S. Olympic Games. The Brothers also headlined one in a series of three concerts for the U.S. Olym-

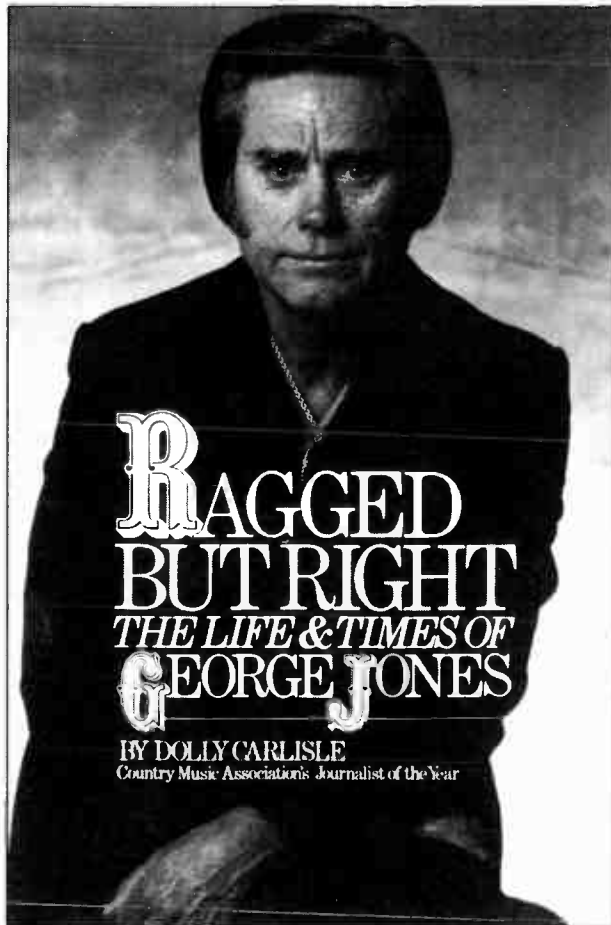


# JUST PUBLISHED

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EVERYONE IS  
ALREADY TALKING  
ABOUT

**“After reading  
RAGGED BUT RIGHT,  
I can think of only  
one word to describe  
the man and his music  
— incredible.”**

*Merle Haggard*



Dolly Carlisle, CMA's 1983 Journalist of the Year, first saw George Jones staggering down Nashville's Music Row one bleak wintry day in 1979. He was gaunt, unshaven, ragged—the ghost of a man barely able to stand. How, she asked herself, could Country Music's greatest singer sink to such a sorry state?

During the next four years Dolly spent hundreds of hours talking with Jones, his family, friends, and associates. The result is a fascinating profile of a superbly talented country boy searching for love, trust, and God in a frenzied world for which his humble beginnings had ill prepared him.

**RAGGED BUT RIGHT: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF GEORGE JONES** is published in a hardcover, 272-page book that also includes 16 pages of photographs. It is available in bookstores or you may order it using the coupon below.

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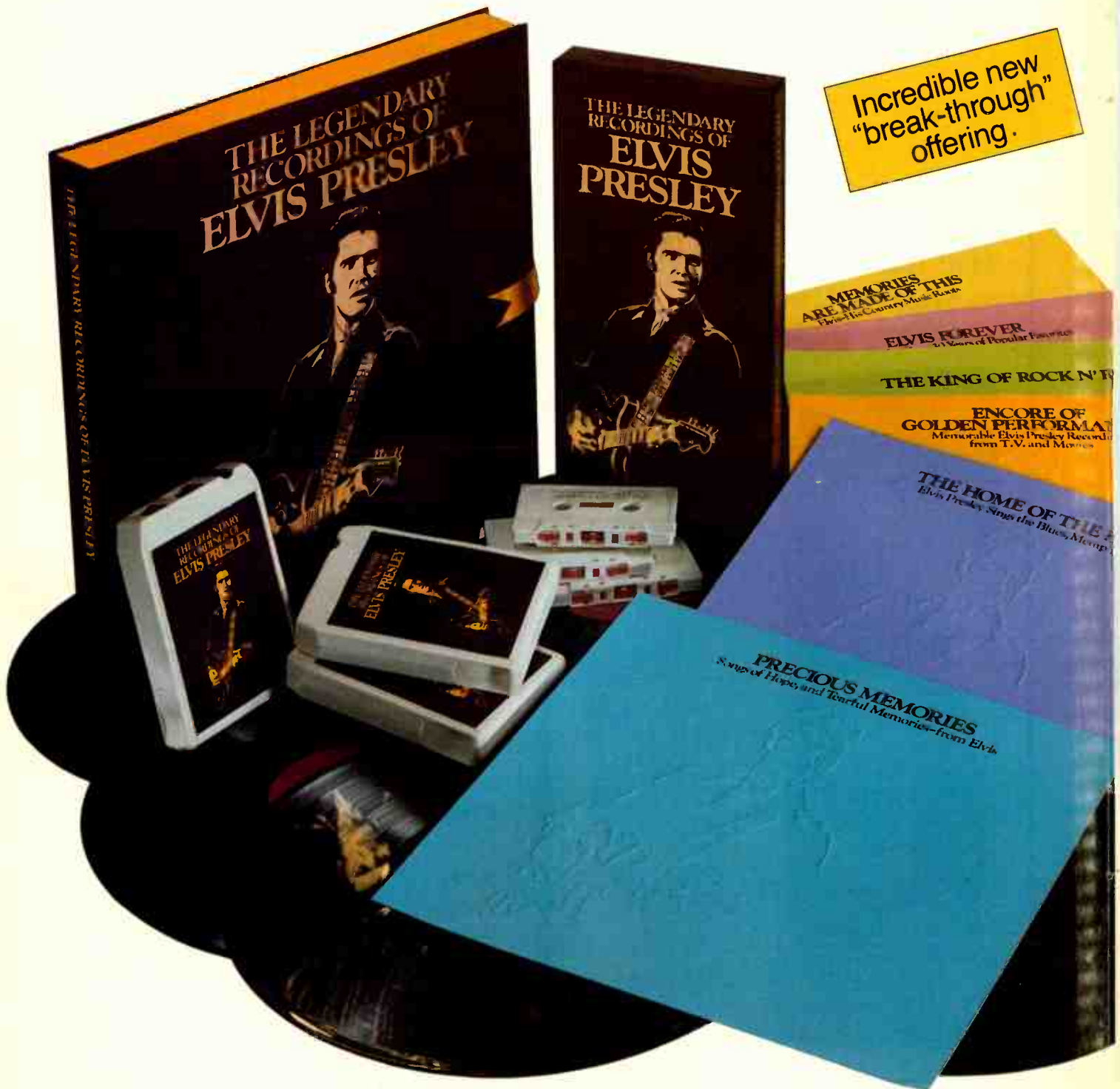
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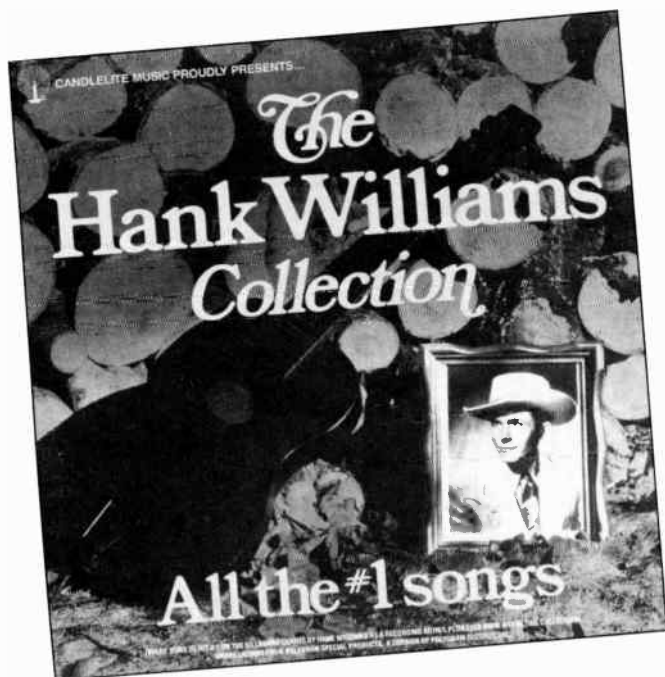
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564-2

# People

pic Team, which was aired on NBC/TV. In addition, the boys performed a benefit concert in Fort Worth to aid the Edna Gladney Home for Young Women.

If you stood in line for Cabbage Patch dolls last Christmas and didn't get one, there just might be a replacement. According to the manufacturer, 1984 will be the year of the King of Rock 'n' Roll Elvis Presley dolls. The Elvis dolls were introduced at a Manhattan news conference by the manufacturer, World Doll, a subsidiary of the Brooklyn-based Eugene Doll and Novelty Company. For \$2,500 collectors can purchase an all-porcelain, seventeen-inch tall Elvis, dressed in a multi-colored "Aloha Hawaii" outfit studded with rhinestones, with a diamond in his belt buckle and a silk scarf made from the late king's personal wardrobe. According to World Doll, the various colored scarves were discovered packed in a trunk in Graceland, Elvis' home. And you thought that owning a doll with its own birth certificate was a big deal.

## HONORS

**Michael Martin Murphey** has been honored by the Kit Carson Foundation in Taos, New Mexico, and has received a proclamation from Taos mayor **Phil Lovato**.

In addition to being a singer, Murphey is a recognized collector and history buff,

specializing in Southwestern history. He has participated in numerous projects with the Kit Carson Foundation and other museums in the Southwest.

In recent months, the Foundation has been able to restore important buildings and have them set aside as historical landmarks. Included are the Kit Carson Home and the Antonino Marinex Hacienda, as well as the Blumenschein Home and its archives. In his proclamation, Mayor Lovato referred to Murphey's continued and significant support, and noted the Foundation's appreciation for Murphey's long-time interest in the history and music of the Southwest and his exploration in these areas.

## TWO BANJO GREATS

We've mentioned sponsorship on these pages before. Now we hear of another musical pairing. Gibson has announced that **Earl Scruggs** has begun an exclusive association with their company. The most immediate product of the association will be a Gibson Earl Scruggs Model Banjo, designed to Scruggs' exact specifications in materials and craftsmanship. The new Gibson banjo is set to be introduced in the middle of this year. A Gibson spokesman said, "Of all the banjo masters from the early history of our country, no one has been more responsible for bringing banjo music out of the mountains and hollows



and into the musical mainstream than Earl Scruggs. We are extremely pleased to be working with a true banjo legend in designing and producing a new Gibson banjo."

Gibson is widely known for its successful design associations with premier musicians (**Les Paul**, **B. B. King**, and **Chet Atkins**), but the Earl Scruggs connection marks the first time they have worked exclusively with an artist on a

The original Honky Tonk Man is gone. **Al Dexter**, whose 1943 hit recording of his own "Pistol Packin' Mama" was one of the first crossover hits, died in Lewisville, Texas, of a heart attack January 29. He was 78.

Dexter defined honky tonk music's more exuberant side. Unlike the somber, desolate music of **Ted Daffan** or **Floyd Tillman**, Al's music celebrated good times and congeniality.

Born Clarence Albert Poindexter in Jacksonville, Texas, on May 4, 1905, he played music part-time until the mid-Thirties, when he began recording for ARC (later part of Columbia). At his first session in 1936 he recorded another song he wrote, "Honky Tonk Blues," the first country song to use that term. Though it was a hit, most of the other 63 songs he recorded over the next five years weren't. His producer, **Art Satherley**, was pressured to drop him, but insisted "someday that boy'll make a record that'll knock your socks off."

"Pistol Packin' Mama" proved

## AL DEXTER: 1905-1984



**Satherley** correct. It was based on an incident Dexter witnessed in a Longview, Texas, honky tonk which he owned. He recorded it with **Gene Autry's** backup band in Hollywood in March 1942. Released in March 1943, the song not only topped the country charts, but **Bing Crosby's** cover version with the **Andrews Sisters** dominated the pop charts, making it a World War II classic. That did not impress the *Hit Parade* radio show, however. Dismal of hillbilly songs, they ignored it for months before featuring it, grudgingly.

Dexter's music was outdated by the late Forties, yet he managed to record for **King**, **Decca**, his own **Aldex** label and **Capitol** over the next decade before leaving music to concentrate on business interests. Though little was heard from him in the last 25 years, it was **Al Dexter** who set the stage for **Moe and Joe**, **Gary Stewart**, and just about every other performer who celebrates the joys of the barstool.

—**Rich Kienzle**

# People

new banjo design. So . . . all you pickers . . . thumbs up!

## OLD FACES: NEW LABEL

Do the names **Buddy Killen**, **Chips Moman** and **Phil Walden** sound familiar? Well, they should: they are three of country music's best known executives. Walden was founder and president of Capricorn Records, Moman is a songwriter and producer who's worked with such superstars as **Elvis Presley**, **Willie Nelson** and **B. J. Thomas**, and Killen has produced dozens of major artists and has developed Tree Publishing Company into one of the giants of the industry. Now the three have gotten together to form **Triad Records**, a new, independent, national record label to be based in Nashville. The first artists signed to the label include **Jessi Colter**, **The Atlanta Rhythm Section** and **Tony Orlando** and **Toni Wine** (one of the original members of **Dawn**.) The first release on Triad will be **Jessi Colter's** "Rock 'n' Roll Lullaby."

The three function as co-presidents, with Walden serving as chief operating officer. Both Killen and Moman will continue to produce acts independently for other labels as well as for Triad.

When asked why they started the label at this time, Killen said, "Through the years, the number of record companies has diminished considerably, and they in turn have trimmed their rosters, leaving a lot of great talent unrecorded. With our track records, we feel we have a good strong group of people able to bring out some great music at a very opportune time." Maybe Triad will sign some of the older artists who currently don't have label affiliations.

## TOBACCO ROAD

It seems that country music is smoking this year. Three major tobacco companies have nabbed country entertainers as sponsors for their product. You've seen **Charlie Daniels** dipping Skoal as part of U.S. Tobacco's advertising campaign. Charlie is also heard on radio and seen in ads for their new **Bandit** (smokeless tobacco in a pouch.) Skoal Smokeless Tobacco also sponsored Charlie's **Volunteer Jam X** this year.

The other two companies are going about it with a series of concerts. This is the third year that R.J. Reynolds is sponsoring their "Salem Spirit Concert Series." They started out with 16 concerts in 1982 and have expanded the series to 120 this year. **Alabama** headlines all of

their shows with **Juice Newton** appearing at 30 of the dates. Why did they choose **Alabama**? According to **Greg Novak**, Marketing director at R.J. Reynolds, "Music represents a long-time commitment for Salem and, as such, we want to associate with the top talent around. **Alabama** represents the perfect choice for us due to their vast popularity and unique sound." Why did they choose country music? According to **Nat Walker**, another company spokesman at R.J. Reynolds, "This kind of music, contemporary country, fits the profile of a Salem smoker." The tours started in the beginning of January in Knoxville, Tennessee and end December 2, in Orlando, Florida.

**Philip Morris**, maker of **Marlboro**, also has a country music concert series. Called the **Marlboro Country Music Tour '84**, the concerts feature **Ronnie Milsap**, **Ricky Skaggs**, **Merle Haggard**, **T.G. Sheppard**, **Eddie Rabbitt**, and **Louise Mandrell** in various locations for the spring schedule.

The schedule reads as follows: May 18, **Omaha, Nebraska**; May 19, **Wichita, Kansas**; June 1, **Baltimore, Maryland**; June 2, **Norfolk, Virginia**; June 8, **Minneapolis, Minnesota**; June 9, **Milwaukee, Wisconsin**; June 15, **San Antonio, Texas**;

June 16, **Houston, Texas**; June 23, **Lakeland, Florida**; and June 24, **Jacksonville, Florida**.

Prior to each show, a talent competition called the **Marlboro Country Music Talent Roundup** is held in a popular nightclub in each city on the tour. The best act wins the opportunity to perform as the concert's opening act as well as a cash prize of \$5,000. Second and third place winners are awarded \$1,000 and \$500, respectively.

The actual concerts feature three giant video screens in each arena. Roving cameramen capture everything happening on stage throughout the concert, giving almost everyone a front row seat. As **Ricky Skaggs** put it, "With the screens, I feel as if I can reach every fan in the arena as easily as if I was performing in a night club, and yet there's all the excitement of a large scale, live entertainment as well."

According to **Tom Keim**, Director of Marketing Communications at **Philip Morris**, "Marlboro and country music is a good association for many reasons, two in particular. First, country music is more popular today than ever . . . even though it has always been big. And second, the western tradition in country music is

## YOUR FAVORITES' FAVORITES



This issue we take a look at two relative newcomers to the country scene and their favorite songs. Both **Lee Greenwood** and **Terri Gibbs** made great strides

in country music in a relatively short period of time. And since both of them have hit the pop and country charts, it would stand to reason that their favorite tunes would run the gamut from pop to country. Herewith are Lee's favorite songs and the artists who made them famous: "Please Come to Boston" by **Dave Loggins**, "Lady Lay Down" by **John Conlee**, "Georgia" by **Ray Charles**, "It Was Almost Like a Song" by **Ronnie Milsap**, "It's Too Late" by **Carole King**, "Lady Down on Love" by **Alabama**, "Three Times a Lady" by **The Commodores** (did you notice that that's the third song with "Lady" in the title?), "American Made" by **The Oak**

**Ridge Boys**, "An Affair to Remember" by **Nat King Cole**, and "It Turns Me Inside Out" by **Lee Greenwood**.



**Terri Gibbs** didn't give us the artists who recorded the following ten songs, probably because most of them have been recorded by so many people.

Here's Terri's list: "Ode to Billie Joe," "He Stopped Loving Her Today," "Somebody's Knockin'," "That's Alright Mama," "Dim All the Lights," "Georgia on My Mind," "Summertime," "Tell Me What I Say," "White Christmas" and "Amazing Grace." Most of the singers we have asked to name their favorite songs have picked at least one they have recorded. No wonder they became hits. Next issue we look at **David Frizzell's** and **The Oaks' Joe Bonsall's** favorites. Be here. Aloha.

strong, just like the western image of 'Marlboro Country' which has been in use for thirty years. So this makes a good tie-in for us in communicating Marlboro's message to the public." Keim adds that details for the fall season of the Marlboro Country Music Tour will be announced around the end of June.

## TIDBITS

- The **Oak Ridge Boys** really know how to please their fans. Their Fan Club members can now enjoy special VIP seating at most Oaks concerts. Fifty ground-floor tickets per show are reserved when available for purchase by fan club members on a first-come-first-served basis. Oak Ridge Boys fans can now also call a special number to hear a taped itinerary of upcoming personal appearances, pre-recorded by the Oaks. That number in their Hendersonville, Tennessee, office is (615) 824-4970. Good idea, boys!

- Members of the **Carter Family** recently lost treasured photographs and memorabilia in a fire that destroyed the home of **Helen Carter Jones**, the eldest daughter of **Mother Maybelle**. A family mandolin and a one hundred year old fiddle were also destroyed. Luckily, no one was injured.

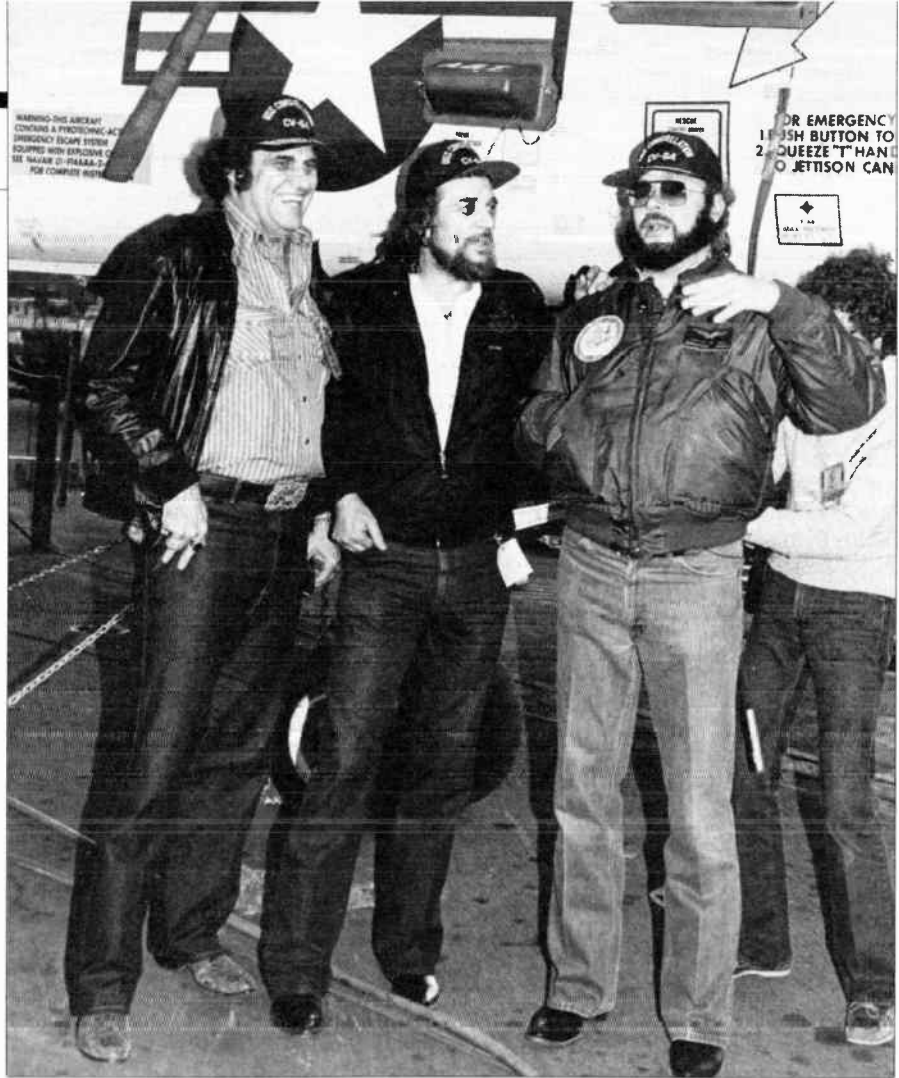
- A terminally ill girl had her wish come true, thanks to **Dolly Parton** and "A Child's Wish Come True," a nationwide organization which heard of **Vickie Perales'** illness and set out to introduce her to Dolly. **Jaco Energy**, an aviation firm, heard an appeal for **Vickie's** trip to Los Angeles and furnished the plane that took her to meet her favorite singer.

- **Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD)** have approached **John Anderson** about doing some public service announcements for their cause. The appeal came after they heard John's single "Let Somebody Else Drive."

- Some people say that talent contests are just a waste of time. But some believe in them whole-heartedly. Just ask twenty-three year old **Lang Scott**. Lang recently won The Nashville Network's *You Can Be A Star* national talent search, which led him to landing a recording contract with MCA records.

As you may well imagine, it wasn't all that easy. Lang began singing at local beauty pageants, weddings and churches when he was just a kid. He also joined various bands in South Carolina.

It wasn't until his third year of college that things really took off for him. Lang entered the **Wrangler Country Song Roundup**, a statewide talent contest, and won. There he met **Pete Ray**, a Nashville



GARY R. HAJEK

## ALL ABOARD

**Hank Williams, Jr.**, filmed a television special aboard the aircraft carrier *U.S.S. Constellation* in San Diego. Titled *A Star Spangled Country Party*, the show was taped for a ninety-minute cable special with guests **Waylon Jennings**, **Sylvia**, **Alabama**, **Gus Hardin**, **Merle Kilgore** and **Mel McDaniel**. **Dan Wojcik** the president of the booking agency that represents **Hank, Jr.**, said, "To my knowledge this is the first time that a country music special has been filmed entirely aboard an aircraft carrier." That's probably true, but we did see **Dottie West** on *The Love Boat* recently.

based singer/songwriter who offered to bring **Lang** to Nashville for a recording session. **Lang** came to Music City, and then landed a job singing in the lounge at the Nashville Sheraton Hotel.

Through his lounge work he met various singers who tapped him to record their songs on demonstration tapes. At this point he heard of the *You Can Be A Star* talent contest.

**Lang** called for an audition, but at the time didn't have any idea that events would lead to a recording contract. Eventually **Lang** was chosen from some 140 contestants who competed during twelve weeks of competition. Even if he hadn't been a winner, **Lang** says the exposure gained by being on a show that reaches more than 12 million homes would have been helpful.

After months of singing other people's songs, today **Lang** has his own releases.

"Run Your Sweet Love by Me One More Time" and "It's Been One of Those Days (When I Need One of Your Nights)", co-produced by **Bill Anderson** and **Mike Johnson**, just may prove that **Lang** could be a star.

- Videos are really coming on strong in country music. **The Oaks'** fifth, "I Guess It Never Hurts to Hurt Sometimes," was released recently. This time the group teamed with rock video producer **Dominic Orlando**. Orlando wrote the script based on a concept offered by the Oak Ridge Boys. The video was filmed in various locations around Nashville. Orlando said that he had wanted to do a country video for some time (he's produced and directed clips for **Kansas**, **Carly Simon**, **Stevie Nicks**, and others), and added, "It was a pleasure to work on a music project where I could understand the lyrics." Well, that's country music.

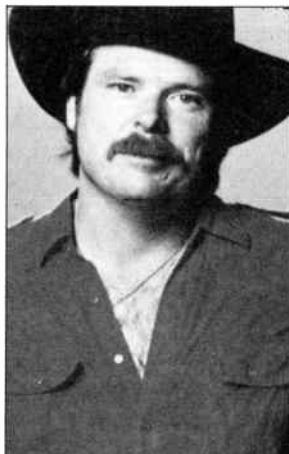
# People

## NEW FACES AT COUNTRY RADIO SEMINAR

How long do you think it would take ten acts to sing two songs each, with set changes included? Figuring that each song is about four minutes long, it comes out to about eighty minutes or an hour and a half for the actual singing. Then include introductions from hosts **Eddie Rabbitt**, **Janie Fricke**, and **T.G. Sheppard**, and add another eight minutes for each of their songs, and you get roughly another twenty minutes. Okay. So far, adding all of that together, you've got about two hours. Taking into consideration the on-stage patter and the band changes, we'll give it another fifteen minutes between acts. So, giving it the benefit of the doubt, we'll say two-and-a-half to three hours maximum.

So, how come the New Faces Show at the 15th Annual Country Radio Seminar took more than four hours? Well, sometimes technology gets in the way of entertainment. This year's New Faces Show fell victim to TV coverage in the worst way.

The New Faces Show was filmed by Multimedia Entertainment and the Jim Owens Entertainment Company, and will be syndicated sometime later this year. Usually, this show is billed as the "event of the year" for radio people. Broadcasters get a chance to see the newest up-and-coming talent perform, after attending two days of seminars about the country music industry. But this year, the talk was about bad timing, and a bad sound system which drove at least half of the audience out before the show was over. You would think that a show produced in



Despite the commotion, the new faces shined: (left to right) Dan Seals, Lane Brody and Jim Glaser, were just three of the "new" headliners who kept the show going.

Music City, U.S.A. for industry professionals would be fast paced and right on target. You'd also think that after fourteen years of experience, they'd have it down pat. But the TV coverage, including false starts, tape changes, and sound checks, not to mention cameramen whose massive equipment obstructed the audience's view, upstaged the entire event. Imagine being introduced to **Dan Seals** by **Charlie Monk**, the show's host, listening to a wonderful country/rock set (including a solo on the soprano sax), and then having to hear the entire introduction all over again because **Eddie Rabbitt** was supposed to do it, and they needed to get him on film. And what about those other New Faces—**Atlanta**, **Bandana**, **Lane Brody**, **Rick & Janis Carnes**, **Exile**, **Jim Glaser**, **Jan Gray**, **Gus Hardin** and **Kathy Mattea**—standing in the wings waiting to be introduced to the people who

could either make or break their careers? You've got to know that waiting three hours to sing two songs could be a little disheartening, as well as nerve-wracking. They all did a great job, though, despite the circumstances.

After the show, I spoke with some radio people to see if their reactions were the same as mine, since I was just a member of the press, and radio was their domain. They all agreed that the TV coverage detracted from the main event. One program director said, "This is a radio gig, man, what's TV doing here?" Unfortunately, instead of the conversation revolving around all the new talent, the talk centered on the invasion of the TV cameras. Hopefully, the talent won't get lost in the shuffle when these people get back to their radio stations and get a copy of one of those New Faces' latest singles.

On the other hand, the two days preceding the New Faces Show went off without a hitch. The daily seminars dealing with everything from sales, programming, and engineering to management and videos were interesting, fast-paced and sometimes enlightening. But I can't help but think that since music is the name of the game, as much thought should be put into planning the show featuring the performers of the future. Then the entire three days would be a tour-de-force.

When the show does air on TV, you won't get to see all the problems that occurred during the filming. The magic of tape editing and the drawing power of **Janie Fricke**, **Eddie Rabbitt** and **T.G. Sheppard** will make the whole thing look like a well-produced and well-executed program. Luckily, what *you* will see is the talent and dedication of some of the brightest New Faces in country music.

—Rochelle Friedman



The old faces, hosts **Eddie Rabbitt**, **Janie Fricke** and **T.G. Sheppard**, didn't do too badly either. Each performed one of their hit songs.



# "HOUSTON TO DENVER"

MILE HIGH MUSIC FROM  
**LARRY GATLIN & THE GATLIN BROTHERS**




America's favorite high fliers, Larry Gatlin & the Gatlin Brothers, recently touched down long enough to record a new album that's bound to touch you.

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# ALABAMA

## A BAND BUILT TO LAST

It's amazing to realize that it's been just a trifle more than four years since four shaggy, hairy young country-rockers—who at the time were busted and semi-disgusted after a decade's worth of bad breaks going-nowhere-fast on the Southern bar and nightclub circuit—were spotted by some observant RCA Records executives who happened to catch their act on a "New Faces" showcase at a Nashville country radio convention.

It's even more amazing to realize that that event now stands some eleven million records and tapes ago in the past, that in such a short time, these four young "ole boys" from Fort Payne, Alabama have racked up both the Country Music Association's and the Academy of Country Music's "Entertainer of the Year" awards two years running—not to mention the fact that they have also scored two Grammys, a wheelbarrow-load of American Music Awards, and enough other music biz trinkets, trophies, plaques and citations to fill up the back end of that big old eighteen-wheeler they've been singing about lately.

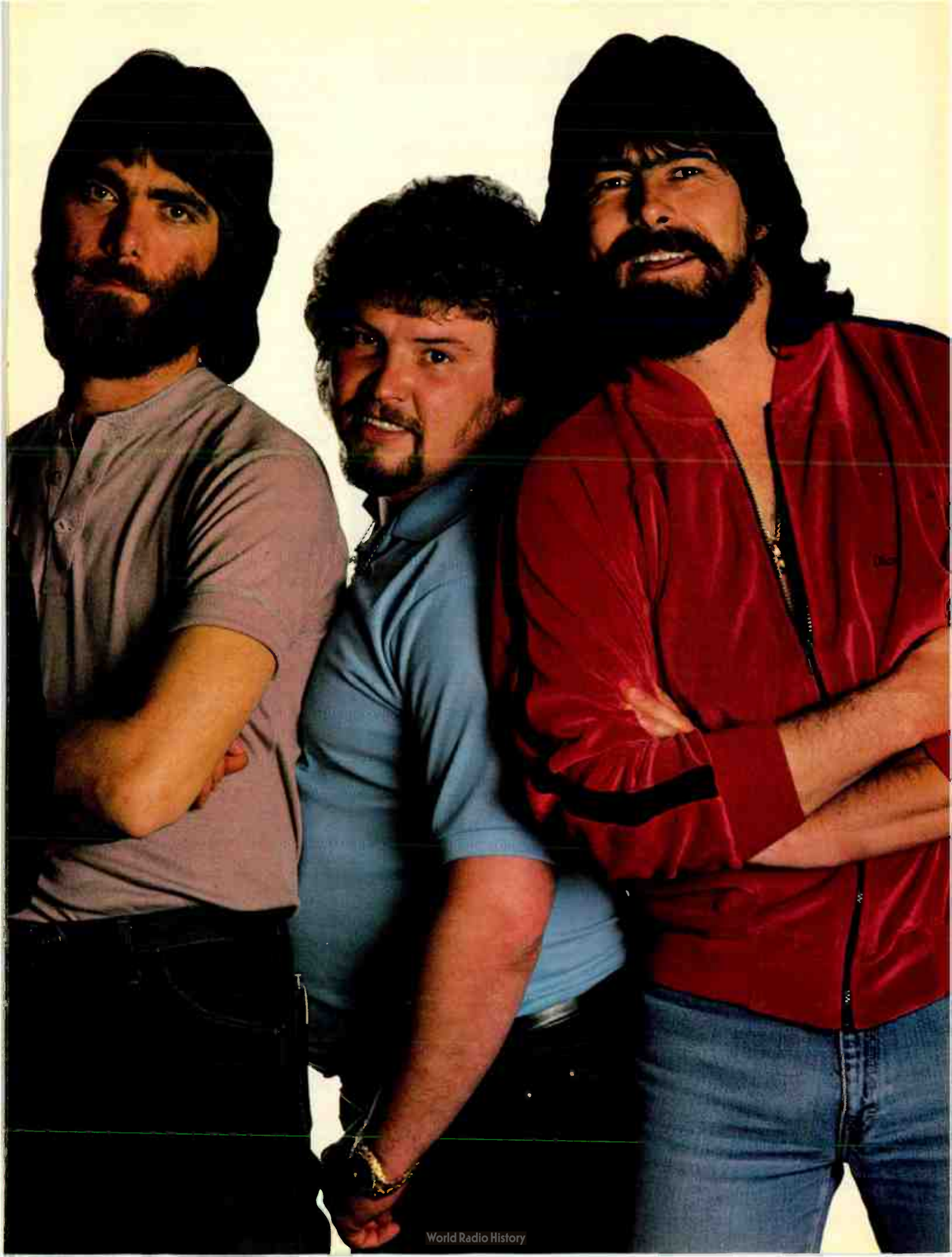
And please, let's not overlook the facts that twelve consecutive singles by the group—starting with "Tennessee River," their first RCA release, and running right on up to "Roll On Eighteen Wheeler," their latest—have all hit the Number One spot, and all their albums have gone platinum at *least*.

All these facts are pretty impressive. So much so, in fact, that when I read an official record company biography of the band stating

PHOTOGRAPHS BY LEONARD KAMSLER



## BY BOB ALLEN



that a person would "have to live in a cave" to be ignorant of their glories, at first it almost gagged me as yet another example of puffed-up record company hype—but then I started thinking about it, and I had to concede that they might be right.

With multi-million-selling albums and sold-out concerts hither and yon, Alabama must be doing something right. Nonetheless, their massive success has in some ways up-ended the traditional principles of the country music industry, much as the surprising success of Willie Nelson's austere, self-produced *Red Headed Stranger* album did back in 1976. Consider the fact that when they first signed the band in 1980, RCA officials told them that they would be satisfied with the deal if their first album sold more than 60,000 copies. It sold more than a million.

Alabama's astounding success has also stirred up a little controversy here and there. For instance, after the band cleaned everybody else's lunch at the CMA Awards show last year, one of the Oak Ridge Boys went on Nashville TV to complain, in effect, that the Oaks should have won more awards and that the awards were rigged (an untenable argument, in my opinion—the CMA's annual choices are often so far out in left field that they *defy* rigging).

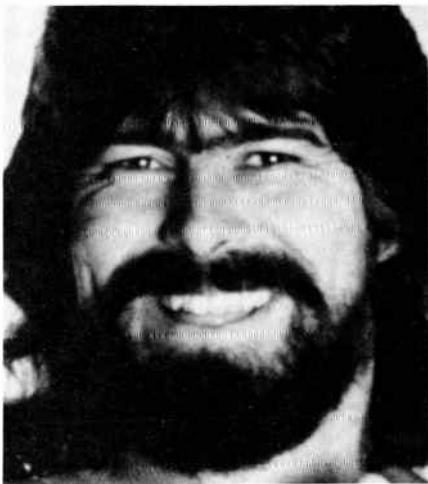
There has also been a running debate among the self-appointed critical intelligentsia as to the actual degree of musical talent which may or may not lie behind Alabama's rise to fame. While some have applauded the band as the saviors of Dixie-fried country-rock and the heirs-apparent to the throne vacated by legendary Southern rockers like the Allman Brothers and Lynyrd Skynyrd, others have dismissed them as bubble-gummers with Southern accents. To some, they are the quintessential country stars of the Eighties; to others, they are merely a flash-in-the-pan novelty, a shallow contrivance of Nashville's relentless mediablitzy machinery: country music's answer to the Monkees.

At times, even the four members of Alabama themselves seem at a loss to pinpoint the source of the disarming breadth and scope of their popular acceptance. As guitarist-vocalist Randy Owen once admitted: "I couldn't count how many people are better guitar players or better singers or better songwriters than I am. Other groups can play our songs probably as good as we can. But *we've* stuck together."

In a recent quiet evening, the four members of Alabama were relaxing, in various states of repose, at the brand-new, handsomely furnished, two-story brick house that their management team maintains for their convenience near Nashville's Music Row. This particular evening, fatigue was the constant thread

## RANDY OWEN

*"Other groups can play our songs probably as good as we can. But we've stuck together."*



running through the conversation and mannerisms of the four musicians. Just the night before, they'd pulled into Nashville after a string of concert appearances ending in Raleigh, North Carolina. They were facing a hectic two days' worth of last-minute promotional duties for their freshly released *Roll On* album. Only then could they head back home to Fort Payne, just a two-and-a-half hour drive to the southeast, for two days of rest and relaxation with their families before hitting the road again.

The house, of course, is furnished with all the amenities suitable for such country-rock gentry: a weight room, a sauna, a state-of-the-art sound system, a large dining room and kitchen area, and four separate upstairs bedrooms, each equipped with cable TV and sophisticated movie-watching paraphernalia.

Upstairs, guitarist/vocalists Randy Owen and Jeff Cook were catching forty winks. Downstairs, members of Alabama's extended family—wives, children, and employees—were going quietly about their business. In a corner of the living room, guitarist/vocalist Teddy Gentry and drummer Mark Herndon (who was coming down with the flu, and seemed particularly edgy and exhausted) were, on the eve of *Roll On's* release, already listening to demo tapes, already screening songs for the band's *next* album.

Later, everyone would gather for a quiet home-style supper of pork chops, beans, potatoes and apple pie. Then, they would all—even Herndon, for a change—retire early, without venturing out in search of whatever night life Nashville might have to offer its newest superstars.

Eventually, Cook and Owen roused themselves and came straggling down the stairs into the living room. Smiling and yawning, they were, just like Herndon and Gentry, dressed in what could easily have been the same bluejeans and off-the-rack shirts and sweaters they wore on the "New Faces" show four years earlier.

Rising wearily to the task of what was perhaps the thousandth interview of their careers, they once again discussed the implications and rewards of their immense success, as well as the decade of frustration, hard times, bad breaks, false starts and uncertainty that preceded it. With considerably more reluctance, they cautiously touched upon some of the more unpleasant side effects that high profile of fame has brought their way—critical, legal and otherwise.

**W**hen you begin at the beginning with Alabama's history, it is clear that these boys—particularly cousins Owen, Gentry and Cook, the true nucleus of the group—have roots. Their musical celebrations of Southern life—stuffed with tried-and-true images about riding down lazy rivers and parking in a mountain holler under a Dixie moon with your sweetheart from the next pasture over—may occasionally sound a little bit too contrived, but it's obvious from the details of their past that these boys have lived every bit of what they sing about. They are nothing if not rural and authentic.

The extreme northeastern tip of Alabama, almost within spitting distance of both the Georgia and Tennessee state lines, is where the band's story begins. It was there, in the general vicinity of the small town of Fort Payne (pop. 11,485), that the three founding members of Alabama were, in the words of their own song, "Southern born and Southern bred."

Occasionally referred to as "The Sock Capital of the World" in honor of its many textile mills, rural Dekalb County suffers today from chronic double-digit unemployment. Nothing changes, it seems: Owens and Gentry grew up on adjacent farms in the shadow of scenic Lookout Mountain, but they also grew up in the shadow of rural poverty.

Randy Owen's father was a hard-working, God-fearing, guitar-picking man named Gladstone Owen; the only time his son ever saw him cry was one year when a hard rain came and washed away the freshly planted corn fields in which he'd

invested every cent he had. Owen's mother (who later took a swing shift job in one of the sock factories) was also musical; she sang and played piano at local gospel revivals. Eventually, she bought Randy an old beat-up third or fourth-hand Gretsch guitar which a previous owner had painted green. Often, Randy would go along with his mama and daddy to the revivals, but he was far too bashful to get up and sing in front of the congregation himself.

By the time they were five or six, Owen and Gentry had become constant companions, more like brothers than cousins. They would spend hours together chopping cotton, shucking peas, raising hogs and hoeing the family watermelon patch. Neither of their households could afford a TV or a radio, so much of their recreation centered around singing together, with their families, at the nearby Lookout Mountain Holiness Church.

Worship at the Holiness Church was an intense experience which often rolled on from the languid late afternoon hours until well past midnight. Often, the revivals were wrenching communal experiences accompanied by the clapping of hands, stomping of feet and beating of tambourines as worshippers wailed out tears of repentance and fell to speaking in strange tongues. Often, Owen's and Gentry's music would be the backdrop; caught up in the frenzy of the moment, the two cousins would pound on their guitars as the Right Reverend E.H. Eller reached into a box and pulled out a writhing, seven-foot rattlesnake named Oscar who was renowned for his ill temper. Mesmerized, and almost overcome with the fervor themselves, the two small boys would sing and play mightily as various members of the congregation came forward to test their faith by taking that snake in their hands; their belief was that if their faith was strong and unflinching, old Oscar would not bite them.

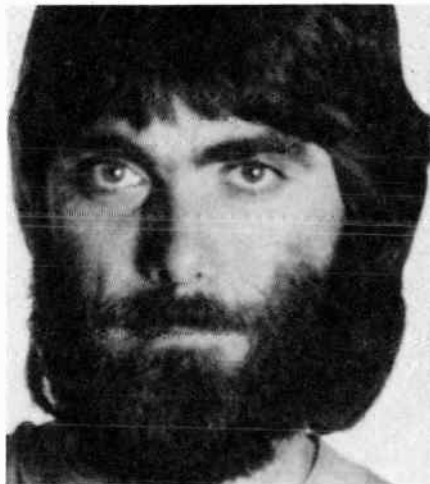
Owen recalls that he was nearly twelve when his family finally got their first radio and the clear, clean harmonies of the Beatles and other British Invasion groups began to mesmerize him just like that old snake did.

In the mid-1960s Owen and Gentry trundled off to high school in the teeming metropolis of Fort Payne. In that unusual city—said to be three blocks wide and six miles long, the local terrain being what it is—they met a city mouse called Jeff Cook. They didn't know it at the time, but later, after some arcane calculations of the Chinese arithmetic of extended kinship, they found that he was in fact their cousin.

Cook, the son of an auto parts salesman, had also been raised on old-time religion. He and his mother both played gospel music ("I been around gospel and listenin' to that Holy Roller-type stuff as long as I can remember," he recalls), but

## TEDDY GENTRY

*"Except for bits and pieces on the earlier albums, this new one (Roll On) is the first one I've gotten to play on."*



by the time he hooked up with his two country mice cousins, he already had a seven-piece rock band called the Viscounts. They had even ventured as far afield as Chattanooga to make a record.

Lured by the fact that unlike them, Cook had his own guitar amplifiers, Gentry and Owen (who had already begun writing songs) threw in their lot with him in 1969. Their first paying date, at the American Legion hall, earned them \$5.37 apiece. They went on to win a local talent contest, which got them two tickets to the Grand Ole Opry and a chance to shake Lester Flatt's hand backstage (the closest, they figured, they'd ever come to those Music City footlights), and eventually they graduated to the big time, playing nightclubs in the "wet" counties just a hop, skip, and a jump away across the Georgia state line.

**T**he years passed and the three cousins stuck together. Owen landed a college degree from Jackson State University in his spare time; Cook landed a government job in nearby Anniston, Alabama; and, in order to keep the band intact, Owen and Gentry followed him there and landed piecemeal jobs hanging drywall and laying carpet. All three of them moved into a \$56-a-month apartment, where they

practiced their ever-tighter three-part harmonies, night after night, until the wee hours. On weekends, they'd play at Canyonland Amusement Park, a tourist-style recreational complex deep in the hollow of DeSoto Canyon, a picturesque natural gorge near Fort Payne.

In March, 1973, against the strenuous advice of their families, the three of them decided to leave their day jobs behind and plunge headlong into their music. "My dad wouldn't talk to me for about three months," Cook recalls with ironic laughter. "But of course now, it's just like that Jerry Reed song: 'Keep the check's comin', son!'"

The band, which had begun calling itself "Wild Country," made its next stop at Myrtle Beach, North Carolina, a coastal city with a rockin'-stompin' reputation as one of the East Coast's wildest and wooliest college resorts. There, they joined the several hundred other bar bands which find gainful employment each summer in the countless clubs along the Grand Strand, the 40-mile stretch of commercial beachfront that encompasses Myrtle Beach.

The joint where they landed a job was a hell-raisin', sawdust-on-the-floor place called The Bowery. They played six days a week for tips, and although the pay was low, the experience was invaluable. "We'd play some nights till we got blisters, then we'd play till the blisters popped," Teddy Gentry recalled. "But it sure beat workin' the swing shift in a sock factory."

Owen, Gentry and Cook (along with six different drummers who joined and quit the group in the coming years) put in seven long, hot summers at The Bowery. But it was time well spent. They learned to work a crowd, and they learned to cover hundreds of country, rock, and bluegrass tunes—everything from Creedence Clearwater Revival's "Bad Moon Rising" and Lynyrd Skynyrd's "Sweet Home Alabama" (the boys are long-time Skynyrd and Creedence fans) to Charlie Rich's "Behind Closed Doors" and John Denver's immortal "Country Roads." They polished up their own distinctive gospel-country-British sound on those songs, but more important, they got the chance to showcase the songs they were writing. That's where subsequent Number One country hits like "Tennessee River" and "My Home's in Alabama" (now the state's official anthem) came from.

The boys still look back on those days with fondness and a touch of nostalgia. "The Bowery was great. It was more like a concert atmosphere than a club," Gentry remembers. "There was no dancing. People just came to sit and drink beer. Sometimes, on a busy night, they'd squeeze five hundred people in there—just stand 'em up against the walls. On the 4th of July and the big weekends, we'd play almost around the clock, from

**FOR COUNTRY COLLECTORS ONLY**

# Classic Country COLLECTIBLES

**COLLECTOR 78 R.P.M.s**

<b>Eddy Arnold</b>	
RCA 20-2332	Don't Bother to Cry
	I'll Hold In My Heart
RCA 20-2806	Bouquet Of Roses
	Texican Baby
RCA 21-0002	Don't Rob Another
	Man's Castle
	There's Not A Thing
<b>Pee Wee King</b>	
RCA 21-0489	Slow Poke
	Whisper Waltz
<b>Sons Of Pioneers</b>	
Decca 46027	Cool Water
	Tumbling Tumbleweeds
<b>Gene Autry</b>	
Col. 20027	Old Missouri Moon
	Tumbling Tumbleweeds
Col. 20377	Here Comes Santa
	Claus
	Old Fashioned Tree
Col. 37183	Back In The Saddle
	Again
	Tumbling Tumbleweeds
<b>George Morgan</b>	
Col. 20594	Room Full Of Roses
	Put All Your Love

<b>Carl Smith</b>	
Col. 21129	Hey Joe
	Darling Am I The One
<b>Tex Williams</b>	
Cap. 40001	Smoke Smoke Smoke
	That Cigarette
	Roundup Polka
Cap. 40276	With Men Who Know
	Tobacco Best
	Three Old Girls In Blue
<b>Ted Daffan</b>	
Ok. 6706	No Letter Today
	Born To Lose
<b>Vaughan Monroe</b>	
RCA 203411	Ghost Riders In The Sky
	Single Saddle
<b>Patty Page</b>	
Merc. 5534	Tennessee Waltz
	Boogie Woogie Santa
	Claus
<b>Frankie Lane</b>	
Mec. 5345	Mule Train
	Carry Me Back To Old
	Virginia
Col. 39998	Your Cheatin' Heart
	I Believe

<b>Red Foley</b>	
Decca 46136	Tennessee Saturday
	Night
	Blues In My Heart
Decca 46143	Just A Man And
	His Dog
<b>Webb Pierce</b>	
Decca 29480	I Don't Care
	Good For Nothing Heart

**COLLECTOR ALBUMS**

<b>Gene Autry</b>	
RCA 2623	Golden Hits
<b>Jim Reeves</b>	
RCA 2284	Tall Tales Short
	Tempers
<b>The Browns</b>	
RCA 2345	Songs From The Little
	Brown Church
<b>Hank Snow</b>	
RCA 2285	Silhouettes
<b>Chet Atkins</b>	
RCA 2717	Teen Scene
<b>Johnny &amp; Jack</b>	
RCA 2017	Hits By
<b>Davis Sisters</b>	
RCA 2851	Southern Gospel Style

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# COUNTRY MUSIC Newsletter

MAY/JUNE 1984

Newsletter of the Country Music Society of America

EDITOR, HELEN BARNARD

## SOCIETY ACTIVITIES

### A Letter to Members

#### This is Your Newsletter

This *Newsletter* is published *only* for members of the Country Music Society of America. Subscribers to *Country Music* who are not members do not receive it. It is bound inside the magazine at this point to simplify postage and mailing. You and you alone receive these special copies. It is your *Newsletter*, so the more you write to us about your activities, interests, gripes and questions, the more other members will benefit from your ideas by hearing what you have to say, and the better the *Newsletter* will be.

#### Get Free Dues for One Year

You have recently received your permanent Charter Membership Card (or you will shortly). With it came a special application form offering an extra year's free membership to any Charter Member who enrolls two friends, neighbors or relatives as Charter Members. This is important for two reasons: first, it saves you money, an extra year on your membership at no extra cost, and, even more important, the more members there are in your area, the more active and influential the CMSA can be in your area, especially if you and others want to form a local Chapter. Your membership will be more valuable and useful to you. So, help yourself by helping CMSA find new members.

#### Improve Your Answer Book

The *CMSA Answer Book* has been finished after much delay. (If yours hasn't arrived, it will soon.) We are sorry about the delay, but the result is a much better book. However, next year's edition of the *Answer Book* will be even better if you will look yours over carefully, then send us your suggestions for changes.

#### 10,000 New Members

In January and February, CMSA received 10,000 new membership applications, bringing total membership to 60,000. If you are a new member, you will receive your permanent Charter Membership Card, Discount Coupons and *Answer Book* shortly. Your copies of *Country Music* and the *Newsletter* are your first benefits to arrive.

#### Growing Pains

The CMSA is growing like wildfire. From nothing last September to 60,000 members now, CMSA is ten times bigger than any other music organization in the world. So, we have a real chore trying to keep everything moving, and we've been behind schedule on several items. We really appreciate the friendly, understanding, patient support we are receiving from you Charter Members.

#### New Benefits

Shortly, we will be able to give you details on how members can get special privileges on certain fan club memberships, and discounts at nationwide motel and car rental chains and on stereo equipment and special record and tape collections available for members only. Many members have helped us in determining what members want by sending us their suggestions. Send us *your* ideas, too. Thanks.

Russ Barnard

#### Letters from Members

Joy Slocum, a long-time country fan in Grove City, Pennsylvania, has sent in some excellent ideas for Chapter activities. Joy and Walt Peters, the Chapter President in Pennsylvania, have been in touch. Will Pennsylvania be the first state to get a Chapter off the ground?

Dear CMSA,

I have a few ideas as to what a CMSA Chapter could do: work to preserve some of the written and recorded material of recognized, legendary stars in the business and strive to pay respect late in coming to other deserving artists; compile information as to where some of the best music can be heard in the area; offer support to new artists in the business; work on ways to reduce the stress of traveling for popular artists so that they may be made more comfortable at their engagements: offer discounts for Society members on ticket sales, albums, etc.; offer support for important legislation that may be necessary so that artists' rights/royalties can be protected.

These are just a few ideas I have at the moment. I'm sure I could come up with more.

Joy Slocum  
Grove City, Pennsylvania

#### New Chapters Forming

Since our first issue, more members have told us they are interested in starting local Chapters or assisting Chapter Presidents. Add these names to the list of presidents in that issue.

Thadd Turner and Cyndi Van Sickle,  
P.O. Box 824, Tehachapi, California  
93561

Robert Huffines, P.O. Box 76825, Atlanta, Georgia 30358

Duree Tomberlin, Rt. 2 Box 8, Ocilla, Georgia 31774

Gordon Wallace, 39 Marconi St., Tenafly, New Jersey 07670

Edith Moyle, 1213 G. Green Oaks La., Charlotte, North Carolina 28205

Carl Drake, Box 1227, Anadarko, Oklahoma 73005

Anna Wideman, 8326 Avon Lake Rd., Lodi, Ohio 44254

Joy Slocum, R.D. #2, Grove City, Pennsylvania 16127

Sheri Reznicek, 1401 N. Logan #10, Texas City, Texas 77590

Patricia Katz, 513 N. Adams St., St. Croix Falls, Wisconsin 54024

We have received new inquiries from those listed below and will be in touch with them as soon as possible.

Gary Johnson of Huntsville, Alabama  
H.E. Harvey of Clarksville, Alabama (for a friend)

Dave Anthony of Orange, California  
Jim Seymour of Milledgeville, Georgia  
Carla Sherman of Fairhaven, Massachusetts

Betty Parsons of Hannibal, Missouri  
Loranda Daniels of Ainsworth, Nebraska

Rachel Ellen of Bristol, Tennessee  
Gayla Nimtz of Crosby, Texas  
Kathy Nichols of Rupert, West Virginia  
Pamela Wilks of Barboursville, West Virginia

#### From the Editor

To respond to a feature in the *Newsletter*, please indicate the *Newsletter* department, such as Record Reviews, on your envelope and include your name and address on the letter. To submit articles, like Kathy Morgan Johnson's or Jerry Barney's, please type if possible and double-space. And of course, we are interested in photos.

Helen Barnard

## MEMBERS' OPINIONS

### Members' Own Stories

#### Members Stay in Touch Through Music and the Magazine

Several letters you have sent in lately suggest that you get a sense of being in touch with others and with life in general through listening to music, tuning in the radio, or receiving *Country Music Magazine*. Two or three of these are published in Letters to the Editor in the magazine. Here are two more.

Companionship is important. For **Bertha Marx of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania** receiving *Country Music Magazine* again was like refinding an old friend. So was finding a first album by one of her favorite singers.

Dear CMSA,

I want to thank you sincerely for returning a very good friend to us. I sure did miss it when it wasn't being published, and when I received your most generous offer, how could I refuse? I have loved your magazine for so long.

I would also like to say I have received a wonderful album by Don Winters and the Winters Brothers which I feel is an old friend or maybe old memories. It's Don Winters' first recording, but he has been around for many years, and believe me, it's great. So you see, I have two old friends to keep me company.

**Bertha Marx  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**

Togetherness is companionship, too. **Becky Minjarez**, a Barbara Mandrell fan from **Anthony, New Mexico** has written to us about togetherness in country music.

Dear CMSA,

Country music artists are really a big family. Everyone knows and loves each other. They are always recording together. I really love that. Barbara Mandrell has recorded with Steve Wariner, and Shelly West and David Frizzell came with her this past year to do a concert in my area. You never see that in other kinds of music, like pop or rock. Togetherness is what country music is all about.

**Becky Minjarez  
Anthony, New Mexico**

David Frizzell and Shelly West may not always sing together. Duets and duos come and go, and yet there does seem to be a strong tendency to bring people together in country music. Partly this may be native to the music: it evolves out of family or neighborly singing and it often leans on strong vocal harmony. Think of The Whites, The Judds, the re-born Everlys. In addition, the subject matter of the music itself is often relationships.

The consideration shown by the singers for their fans seems part of this togetherness, too. Singers and fans alike: companions in life.

#### Interested in Meeting a Star

One of the newer country artists, Sylvia, has had a big hit with "I Never Quite Got Back (From Loving You)." That is a poignant song. In "20 Questions with Sylvia" in a recent *Country Music Magazine*, Sylvia struck another poignant note: her involvement with an organization called The Dream Makers who brought her into contact with an ill child who longed to meet her.

**Linda Sanford of Harrodsburg, Kentucky** wrote to us after she read that article. Her stepson **David Sanford** would like to meet Ricky Skaggs. We are working with Phyllis Reid in Sylvia's office to help make this meeting happen. Phyllis is a member of The Dream Makers Board of Directors.

One of David's grandfathers once played fiddle with Ricky in a bluegrass jam. Linda Sanford met Ricky after a concert in Lexington a year ago. She got an autographed picture from him and mentioned David to him.

David has cerebral palsy. He wrote this letter with the help of his special teacher. Linda says that David is very intelligent and that he has wanted to meet Ricky for a long time. "David hardly ever gets out of the house," she wrote, "but he loves to sit and listen to country music. He knows who sings most all of the newer songs."



Dear CMSA,

My name is David, and I'm sixteen years old. I live with my grandparents in a small apartment in Harrodsburg, Kentucky. I have had cerebral palsy since birth and have lived in a wheel chair all my life.

I really enjoy listening to country music. My favorite star is Ricky Skaggs. "Highway 40 Blues" is my favorite of all his songs. I also have the album *Don't Cheat in Our Hometown*. I really enjoy it.

Last summer Sylvia was in my hometown, but I didn't get to see her. My stepmother

stood in line at a concert to get me a picture of Ricky. I didn't get to see that concert either.

I would really enjoy meeting and talking with Ricky. He seems to be a "good ole Kentucky boy." I'd love to have a gospel album of his if he has made one.

I am enclosing a picture of myself with my stepmother and my grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Taylor Sanford.

**David Sanford  
Harrodsburg, Kentucky**

### Concert Reviews

#### More on Janie

One of Janie's concert performances was reviewed by **Jeanette Mack of New Ulm, New Mexico** in the first issue of the *Newsletter*. Here is **Peg Johnson of Stillwater, Minnesota** responding to Jeanette Mack's review and offering her own.

Dear CMSA,

I must disagree with the lady from New Mexico who didn't like Janie Fricke. I feel really involved in Janie's concerts. She gives her all in her performances, has a beautiful voice and a good band, and after the exhaustion of performing, gives autographs and meets her public. She's the greatest.

**Peg Johnson  
Stillwater, Minnesota**

### Backstage at the Opry

**Jerry Barney of Fergus Falls, Minnesota** has written a "Special to Country Music," about a very special weekend he spent several years ago at the Grand Ole Opry with some real old-timers. In his own words, "This story was written because it needed to be, to salute some of the great but under-publicized old-timers."

One last note: Jerry describes himself as "a music bum and a parking lot picker. To make a living, he edits a publication that goes to members of Communicating for Agriculture, a rural advocacy organization." Now to his story.

#### Member Salutes Old-Timers

As a long-time country music freak, I was literally in hog heaven on this particular weekend in the summer of 1976, when I had the opportunity to spend nearly a full weekend in that legendary Mecca for hillbillies: the backstage area of the Grand Ole Opry.

Imagine!!—sitting on bleachers only several feet away from performances by folks like Stonewall Jackson and Lester Flatt and the Nashville Grass, walking within arm's length of Hank Snow and Larry Gatlin, and even talking to folks like Jerry Clower, Guy and Vic Willis, Bill Monroe and Roy Acuff. Visiting with Mr. Acuff alone was like standing in the presence of the Almighty.



## MEMBERS' OPINIONS

But, in retrospect, the most memorable part of the whole experience was visiting with the Opry's *real* old-timers. Older than Roy Acuff or Bill Monroe, you say? Yes, Kirk McGee, Alcoyne Bate Beasley and Herman Crook were Grand Ole Opry stars even before Acuff and Monroe made their professional debuts, and long before Larry Gatlin was even born.

Talking to McGee, Ms. Beasley and Crook was a gratifying experience, not only because they were so willing to share observations about their careers, but because it was a link with the earliest history of commercial country music. (They were part of the show before it even received the name, "Grand Ole Opry.")

They were from another era, when live radio was the main medium of country music (they got their starts even earlier than that), and records were just a sideline. They were from an era before country music became star-oriented, when it was something you just picked and sang on weekends, to pick up a few extra dollars (unless you traveled with a medicine show). It's sad, but it seemed they were regarded as token antiques.

Ms. Beasley told about being a young girl in the band led by her father, Dr. Humphrey Bate, when it was the first country music band to play on WSM radio, Nashville. This was in 1925, even before the station had debuted the Saturday night show that was later to become the Grand Ole Opry.

She told about all the country music stars she had seen come and go. She recalled Hank Williams' multi-encore first performance on the show, but acknowledged that Marty Robbins had since outdone Hank in enthusiastic, audience-generated encores.

McGee, whose older brother and long-time musical partner, Sam, had been killed a short time earlier in a tractor accident, noted that he had only recently been given solo singing slots on the Opry. (The management had just dusted him off, as a new token old-timer, to replace Sam.)

Kirk talked about reviving a lot of his old numbers, and his plans to record some of them. (I got the impression at the time that these plans would never materialize, but fortunately, they did.)

Crook, who played (and still plays) harmonica in the Crook Brothers band (used exclusively on the Opry to accompany square dancers), explained that his group hadn't been a real "brothers" act for almost half a century. He continued that he actually did play in a group with his brother in the nineteen-teens, but retained the family-oriented band name after his sibling quit the music business.

Crook also said he missed the days when the Grand Ole Opry was primarily a fiddle band show, rather than a showcase of stars.

Well, I'm really glad I got to talk with that trio of old timers in '76, because I'll never

get quite that same opportunity again. Alcoyne Bate Beasley and Kirk McGee went to Hillbilly Heaven in 1982 and 1983, respectively.

Herman Crook is still blowing his harp in harmony with a fiddle, and I notice the folks at the Opry are making a somewhat bigger fuss over his senior status these days. (His token status has been elevated, in absence of his peers.)

Heaven knows I'm not knocking the Grand Ole Opry! If it hadn't become a star-oriented show and gone over to electric country music with all the trappings, it probably wouldn't have survived 59 years in such style. And, it's done a pretty decent job of mixing the older styles of country music with the newer.

All the same, it's a shame that its *real* pioneers receive so little limelight.

But at least I got to meet them.

**Jerry Barney**  
Fergus Falls, Minnesota

### Artists in Performance

In each issue, we plan to feature photos you have taken of artists in performance. Here is one by **Terry Stephenson of Hamilton, Texas**. Terry has had a photo of himself and Merle Travis published in *Country Music*. We like this one of Merle Haggard even better.



### Thumbnail Reviews

Several members have sent in brief reviews of concerts they have seen. **Gloria McGill of Hughson, California** says: "During the summer, I was fortunate to see David and Shelly perform twice. Both times, once at Lake Tahoe (where Dottie made her appearance) and once at the California State Fair, the two gave super performances. They have a different show for different settings and interact well with the audience."

This visit by Dottie West to David and Shelly's show may be the same one mentioned in the People section of the November/December issue of *Country Music*.

**Marie and Chuck Bonnstetter of Greensboro, North Carolina** saw the Oak Ridge Boys show, with Louise Mandrell and Atlanta, and the Barbara Mandrell show with

Ronnie Milsap and Ricky Skaggs. Both, they note, were "great entertainment." For more of the Bonnstetters' letter, see the Travel section.

**Leonard Staley of Brush Prairie, Washington** tells us: "I had the opportunity to see the Statler Brothers and Reba McEntire at the Civic Auditorium in Portland recently. A great show—need I say more?"

## Record Reviews

### Members Continue to Stock Up on Records

Here's **Ed La Neve of Chester, West Virginia** telling us where his record dollar has been going lately. Ed is quite a Lefty Frizzell fan. A letter from Ed about Lefty appears in the May/June issue of the magazine.

Dear CMSA,

Here is a list of albums I've purchased recently.

*Treasures Untold*, Lefty Frizzell, Rounder Records. A magnificent collection of vintage Lefty, but still touching only a fraction of Lefty cuts unissued on albums. More needed like this.

*Rogue's Gallery*, Gordon Bok, Folk-Legacy Records. What a voice, what excellent material. Bok never disappoints.

*Lefty's 20 Golden Hits*, Lefty Frizzell, Gusto/CSP. All Lefty's *biggest* hits. Nice to have them on one disc. Now let's get on with some of the great Lefty stuff the DJs forgot to play. There's a lot of hit potential in some of those great Columbia cuts of the 60s—even today!

*Little Innocents*, Vin Garbutt, Topic. Unusual voice, but great sounds (folk), with courage and conviction about some of today's "liberated" options.

*Honky-Tonkin' with Lefty Frizzell*, Flyright Label. Any more of this "rehearsal" material of Lefty? Let's get it out in the open.

**Ed La Neve**  
Chester, West Virginia

**Mrs. B. Gay Hoefler of Lewiston, Idaho** must have a big record cabinet. Look what she has to say about recent gifts and purchases since just before Christmas. She got started on this subject while filling out the Questionnaire in the first issue of the *Newsletter*. By the way, Larry Gatlin sang back-up with the BeeGees on *Eyes That See in the Dark*.

Dear CMSA,

When I stopped and figured how many tapes and albums I had either bought or been given since Christmas, it seemed to me I'd better revise my figures!

*Culture Club*. What can I say? I like to hear them just as long as I don't have to watch them.

## MEMBERS' OPINIONS

*Greatest Hits*, David Allan Coe. I had another one but one of my kids ripped it off.  
*The Outlaws*. Same thing happened.  
*Roll On*, Alabama. I really like it. I have all of theirs and hope they keep on keeping on!  
*Cloud 9 Music*, Steven Halpern. This is the "Anti-frantic alternative." Wonderful!  
*Pancho & Lefty*, Willie Nelson and Merle Haggard. Disappointment!! The only one I really liked was the title cut. They really don't sing together very well, although I enjoyed them on *Austin City Limits*.  
*Cow Jazz*, Jerry Jeff Walker. Save your money. Half was okay and half was rotten.  
*George Benson Collection* (two tapes) and "In Your Eyes." Really great!!  
*Eyes That See in the Dark*, Kenny Rogers. At first I really only liked the duet with Dolly, but the more I play it, the better I like it all. Although how anyone could think the Gatlins sang back-up when it has to be the BeeGees is more than I can figure out.  
*Urban Cowboy Sound Track*. I lost the other one I had or one of my kids got it. I love it!  
*Without a Song*, Willie Nelson. Present. I have a lot of Willie Nelson, but this one is my very favorite. I play it at least once a day!!  
*Walk On*, Karen Brooks. This lady is really great. I saw her on *Bobby Bare and Friends* on the Nashville Network (which incidentally I try never to miss!! It is wonderful) . . . and I ran right out and had to special order her tape, but it was worth it. I hope it isn't too long before she comes out with another one.  
*Passionfruit*, Michael Franks. It is good but not as good as a lot of his.  
*Somebody's Gonna Love You*, Lee Greenwood. Thanks for the wonderful write-up on Lee in *Country Music*. More records, Lee, please!!

Mrs. B. Gay Hoefer  
Lewiston, Idaho

## Gripes

Jim Kregel, whose address was separated from his name, has several gripes related to concerts. We are sending this letter to the managers of all the major country stars.

Dear CMSA,

At most country concerts, there seems to be a tendency for the band to play much louder than on the records and even overshadow the artist himself. Often it is difficult to understand the words of the songs because the instruments are so loud. I like to sit close at concerts to be nearer the total feeling that is a part of a live concert. Lately it seems that if I sit close at all, it becomes a painful experience. I remember a Willie Nelson concert several years ago at the Metropolitan Sports Center in Minneapolis where people were literally standing out in the lobby listening because it was too loud inside.

While on the subject of concerts, I think it would be safe to say that most of us go to them to see the artist that is billed, and normally he or she will not play much longer than one hour. At most concerts, it seems to be standard procedure for the singer's front man to sing two or three songs, killing fifteen minutes; then the artist comes on, and then, during his or her part of the performance, has the band do an instrumental number. I can understand how proud an artist can be of his band. If he had more time to perform, I would love to see his front man and band featured—but that is usually not the case. Time is so short. I'd like to see the artist.

Now to a more positive note: I can't remember seeing a country concert that I didn't enjoy overall. Just turn the volume down, please!

Jim Kregel

Another gripe about country music comes from E. Eleanor Lukens of La Jolla, California. The theme of "keep it country" first emerged here in the *Newsletter* in Jeanette Mack's letter about Janie Fricke. Here it is again. Copies of this letter are going to all the major record companies in Nashville. However, many of our members like the "new" country music.

Dear CMSA,

I am very interested in keeping country music "country." Too many of the singers are willing to sing any song as long as they can make a buck off of it. There are quite a number of good country songs being written today, but what is being recorded is way overloaded on the side of junky pop or commercial music. It is sad that so many will sell their musical integrity for junk and money while good writers are left behind. I am hoping for more honesty and integrity in the country music business.

E. Eleanor Lukens  
La Jolla, California

Last but not least, we said that if you had a gripe about us we'd print that too. D. Pfaff wrote this one while filling out the Questionnaire from our last issue. Sorry this address also got separated from the letter. Bill Watson of Anaheim, California is also interested in this problem. He is a friend and associate of Rick Owens, the Society Chapter President in Montgomery, Alabama.

We know you do not like having to cut coupons out of anything important and did the best we could to design the first issue of the *Newsletter* so that the things you would have to cut were not the most memorable. In the magazine, as we wrote Bill Watson, we are trying to lay out the pages so that coupons do fall against ads. It's not always possible, but we appreciate your concern, and we're trying.

Dear CMSA,

My gripe is that you print the discount coupons on the back of reading material, so that I have to cut up an article or story if I want to use any of the forms or the like. Why not put forms or coupons on the reverse side of a blank page or an ad? I'm sure many others will agree. I like to keep my books intact.

D. Pfaff

## Wish Upon A Star



### Any Questions for Barbara?

Would you like to ask Barbara Mandrell a question? Send it to us and we will print the answer here. Send us photos of yourself with Barbara, too.

### Response to Johnny Cash

Heartwarming is the word for the response to the Johnny Cash "Wish Upon a Star" feature in the first *Newsletter*. Letters, questions and photographs have come in. These will be featured in our next issue. It would not be right to let that much time go by, though, without printing this letter which came in just as John was recovering from his latest illness. It is from Patricia Katz of St. Croix Falls, Wisconsin. Patricia is one of those interested in starting a Society Chapter in Wisconsin.

Dear CMSA,

I wish people would not judge another when they have never met them! Other magazines are so quick to say "Johnny Cash is back on drugs," when the truth is, the poor guy is trying so hard not to have problems again. I for one say "Good for you, John! Keep up the terrific work you do!" It had to be a big decision for him to go to the treatment center knowing that people (not all, thankfully) would jump to the wrong conclusions. But we who know and love John are very proud of him!

Patricia Katz  
St. Croix Falls, Wisconsin

## From Dream to Reality

"Watch Out on Friday Night," by Kathy Morgan Johnson, one of our Society presidents, of Dundee, Mississippi, as been published by Country Boy Publishing Company of Memphis, Tennessee. Kathy has been writing songs for about eight years. She works during the day when she can catch a spare minute from her duties as a mother and a wife. Actually she devotes more than a minute—sometimes as much as six hours, but that's mostly at night. For a short time she sang with a local band in order to get some experience working under pressure and performing. Her husband supports her efforts and is proud of her, she says.

Realizing that many are interested in writing songs and that frustrations abound, Kathy has written some thoughts and suggestions for aspiring writers.

### Member Has Song Published; Tells How You Can Too

Any of you who are serious about songwriting and still feel as if you are drowning in the struggle will know exactly what I am trying to get across in this article. This is by no means a grand success story, but an article by one of your peers. Even though I have had one song published, I am still fighting all the red tape and facing the everlasting battle to get someone to approve of my material. I know in my heart that my songs would be welcomed by the public, but try telling that to the publishers, etc., right?

Do *not* get discouraged though! It can be so very frustrating to "hurry up and wait" and end up with an impersonal form letter of rejection. Don't worry, there are still other publishers to send your material to. Remember, it's up to you to keep the ball rolling. You have to push yourself to the right people at the right time. Let me tell you exactly what steps I have taken and maybe you will gain some ideas for yourself.

First, enter every contest you hear about, near or far, as long as you meet the qualifications. If the guidelines are a bit confusing, call or write and ask for explanations. Sec-

### Members Mourn Two Musicians

Al Dexter of Denton, Texas  
Stephen Douglass, known as "Tebes," of the McGuffey Lane Band

Mildred Chism of Tyler, Texas has written to us about her brother Al's death. "His 'Pistol Packin' Mama' will go on and on," she says. "Any cards to Frankie Dexter would be nice. P.O. Box 71, Denton, Texas 76201." Russ and Cheryl Hall of Williamstown, West Virginia are saddened by the loss of Tebes. "Tebes," they say, "was a great musician and we believe one of the best harmonica players we have ever heard. He will remain in the hearts of the Ohio Valley forever."

ond, be sure your songs are protected, either by an official copyright or through various other reputable "song banks." It costs \$10.00 per song for an official copyright from the Library of Congress in Washington D.C. and may take up to four months to complete. "Song banks" are a bit easier. Personally, I use SRS; Songwriters Resources and Services at 6772 Hollywood Blvd., Hollywood, California 90028. It costs \$5.00 to protect the first song on your tape and \$1.00 for each song thereafter. The protection lasts for ten years or until your song is placed with a publisher.

Third, it is very important to surround yourself with people who are positive about what you are trying to accomplish. Some of you may have already experienced the "dragged down" feeling from being exposed to constant negative reactions. One way to "lift" your spirits is through joining one or more of the many foundations organized specifically for the songwriter. I am a member of the Nashville Songwriters Association International (NSAI) and the Memphis Songwriters Association (MSA). You have no idea how much enthusiasm, energy, and positive feelings you get from other people who are in the same boat as yourself! Some of the members in MSA have had more success than others but they don't look down on you; they offer *lots* of encouragement and positive feedback. If you do not know of any associations near you, call your local Chamber of Commerce or check at the nearest larger town or city. You may also write to NSAI, 803 18th Ave. So., Nashville, Tennessee 37203 and ask for the name of the group closest to you. Believe me, it will be more than worth the effort!

Next, be like a sponge! Read, study and soak up every little tidbit of information you can get about the art of songwriting, making demos, styles, etc. I subscribe to *Songwriter Connection Magazine*, *Music City News* and, of course, *Country Music Magazine*. Each of these publications is an education itself. I'm sure there are some I don't know about yet, but I am always open to new ideas and suggestions.

Since I started doing all these things, numerous doors have begun to open for me in the field of writing. And we all know the old cliché "getting your foot in the door"! You absolutely cannot sit back and think things will start happening if *you* don't make the effort and be determined and have faith in yourself. It is important to bolster yourself psychologically. Family and friends can help. Also, have you heard of the Dot System? It stands for *desire*, *opportunity*, and *talent*. I feel that if you have a strong desire you will be able to find the opportunities. Your talent is a very special gift from God given to you to share with others, so *go for it!!!*

One final thing you may want to give some thought to is finding yourself a co-writer. If you are great at writing lyrics but a bit weak

in the music department, find a co-writer who is a talented musician. Maybe a guitar player or piano player, for example. You may be like I was at first; a little too shy to open up with another person, or maybe not quite confident enough. You must get over those inferior feelings. I had to do it myself! There is a very special bond between writers and musicians, and I'm sure if you look hard enough there's a great collaborator out there right now looking for someone exactly like you!

Kathy Morgan Johnson  
Dundee, Mississippi

### Interested in Publishing Their Songs

Here is a list of members we have heard from who, like Kathy, are interested in publishing their songs.

Phyllis M. Painter of Baltimore, Maryland

A.L. Vicks of Long Beach, California  
Pauline Pinkney of Bentleyville, Pennsylvania

Lloyd G. Belver of Congress, Arizona

### Members Recommend New Artists

In Legends of Country Music we look at artists of the past who are still loved and remembered. In Newsworthy we look at newer artists, especially those that you suggest.



Marlene Avery of Hutchinson, Kansas would like to introduce Johnny Gatewood to Society members. Johnny's career seems to be going places. Have any of you seen him or bought his records? Let us know. Marlene is a Chapter President in Kansas.

### Also Recommended

The Wright Brothers of French Lick, Indiana  
Toni Jolene of Houston, Texas  
The Thrasher Brothers

These recommendations come to us from Susan Criner of Rockford, Minnesota; Patsy Swayze of Simi Valley, California (Patsy is a professional country choreographer and dancer); and Susan Knack of Jeffersonville, New York. Susan Criner says the Wright Brothers are a "fantastic group, with great voices, class and charm."

### *The Singing Brakeman*

# JIMMIE RODGERS

*Passing you  
Jimmie Rodgers*

#### **The Music of Jimmie Rodgers**

James Charles Rodgers: He had almost no formal education. He was in acutely poor health most of his adult life. He was almost done out of a chance for a recording career by his own band. He died in a hotel in New York City after making his last recordings, alone except for a hired nurse. His body was carried home on a train.

Jimmie Rodgers' music was successful beyond anyone's dreams. In a time when radio was not as developed as it is today, and when money was scarce because of the Depression, he sold millions of records. He established the yodel as a wonderfully emotional embellishment on the end of a song—or a line. He relied on the form of blues most commonly used today, the twelve-bar, three-phrase form, and helped to establish it as standard. He established the guitar as a bright, leading instrument, using special tuning and a capo on the neck of the guitar and special strums on the neck of the guitar and around the acoustic hole. He established country music as a way of remembering and romanticizing the everyday experience of people in the countryside and the small towns.

He did work at various jobs on the railroad, for fourteen years, on and off, part of the fluid, drifting world of the rails. He did hear and sing the music of both black and white Americans. He did tour the South and Southwest, first in blackface, then in whiteface, then in his own face, visiting town after town. With the Carter Family, who recorded for Ralph Peer of RCA Victor the same week

he did in Bristol, Tennessee, he was one of the first to plunge into the technological world of recording and disseminating his voice on records to countless listeners.

Like Hank Williams, there was something magical about him, and he was truly influential.  
—Helen Barnard

#### **Jimmie Rodgers Chronology**

1897	Born in Meridian on September 8
1901	Mother died
1911	Left school; went to work in the railroad yards in Meridian
1917	Married Stella Kelly; they separated after six months
1919	Divorced Stella Kelly
1920	Married Carrie Williamson on April 7
1921	Daughter Carrie Anita born on January 30
1923	Daughter June Rebecca died on December 22
1925	Diagnosed as having tuberculosis; tuberculosis is the leading cause of death in America, 90,000 die of it in 1925
1927	Left railroad work; moved to Asheville, North Carolina in January

Recorded for Ralph Peer in Bristol, Tennessee in August; received a recording contract

Recorded "T for Texas" for Peer in Camden, New Jersey in

JIMMIE RODGERS  
MUSEUM  
MERIDIAN  
MISSISSIPPI  
50th  
ANNIVERSARY  
FATHER OF  
COUNTRY  
MUSIC  
1983

#### **Jimmie Rodgers Festival**

For more about the Festival, May 19-26, see the first issue of the *Newsletter*. For information, write to JRMF, P.O. Box 1928, Meridian, Mississippi 39302.



**Jimmie Rodgers wrote to his daughter Anita from the Hotel Taft two days before he began his final recording sessions.**



**Jimmie Rodgers was the first performer featured in the Performing Arts series of stamps.**



### Jimmie Rodgers' Songs

In addition to the twelve "Blue Yodels" and "Jimmie Rodgers' Last Blue Yodel," here are some of his songs. Gambling, tuberculosis, the South and the Southwest, family and the mood and form of the blues occur

- November under the title "Blue Yodel Number 1"
- 1928 Recorded "Blue Yodel Number 2," "Blue Yodel Number 3," and three other songs; several were million-sellers
- 1929-33 Recorded close to one hundred songs
- 1933 Traveled by ship to New York to begin last recordings  
Began recording on May 17; completed twelve of planned twenty-four recordings on May 24  
Died in the Hotel Taft on May 26  
Buried in Oak Grove Cemetery in Bonita, Mississippi next to grave of baby June
- 1961 First member elected to the Country Music Hall of Fame
- 1978 Jimmie Rodgers "Singing Brakeman" stamp issued on May 24; celebration in Meridian attended by Jimmie Rodgers' daughter, Anita Rodgers Court and Ralph Peer's son, Ralph Peer II

and recur in these titles:

"T.B. Blues," "The Brakeman's Blues," "Travelin' Blues," "Daddy and Home," "My Time Ain't Long," "Prairie Lullaby," "Mississippi Delta Blues," "Cowhand's Last Ride," "Roll Along Kentucky Moon," "Down the Road to Home," "Waitin' for a Train," "When the Cactus is in Bloom," "Somewhere Down Below the Dixon Line," "Hobo Bill's Last Ride," "Yodeling Cowboy Blues," "Mississippi River Blues," "Those Gambler's Blues," "Land of My Boyhood Dreams," "No Hard Times."

### Jimmie Rodgers' Fans

There is no greater compliment to a musician than playing his music. Among those who have loved and played his music, first and foremost among the professionals were and are these stars: Ernest Tubb, Hank Snow and Merle Haggard. Ernest Tubb was one of the founders of the Jimmie Rodgers Memorial Festival, held each year in Meridian.

### Jimmie Rodgers Book and Records

Anyone interested in Jimmie Rodgers should have these two things: *Jimmie Rodgers: The Life and Times of America's Blue Yodeler* by Nolan Porterfield (University of Illinois Press), an excellent book, one of the most entertaining biographies currently available on any country music star; and *This is Jimmy Rodgers* (RCA, VPS-6091), a set of two record albums, including many of Jimmie's biggies, such as "T for Texas,"

### Jimmie Rodgers' Trademark

**Brakemen use the thumbs-up signal to tell the engineer to start the train. It means, "Go ahead, everything's okay." It also means, "My work's all done."**

"Muleskinner Blues," "Waitin' for a Train," "In the Jailhouse Now" and "My Rough and Rowdy Ways."

If you would like to order either the book (\$14.95) or the double record album (\$12.98), send your check to: Nashville Warehouse, Box 236, Hendersonville, Tennessee 37075. Add \$1.95 for postage and handling for one item, \$2.95 if you order both.

### Acknowledgment

We thank Jean Dollar, the Director of the Jimmie Rodgers Museum in Meridian, Mississippi, for providing many of the items used to illustrate this feature on Jimmie Rodgers and welcome her to the Country Music Society of America.

### Members Suggest Other Legends

- Ernest Tubb
- Rose Maddox
- "Little" Roy Wiggins
- Red Foley

These names were sent to us by Johnny Bond of Cudahy, Wisconsin, Marie Sturkie of Laurel, Maryland, and Alvin Egner of Endeavor, Wisconsin.

# TRAVEL & COLLECTIONS

## Memorable Visits to Nashville; Members Recall Happy Times and Are Planning New Visits

Meeting the stars, buying special items, celebrating important personal events: these are some of the reasons that bring lovers of country music to Nashville. **Mary Banczak** of Antigo, Wisconsin met Conway Twitty in Nashville. That's Mary with him in the photograph. **Marie and Chuck Bonnstetter** of Greensboro, North Carolina are planning their latest visit; and a member in **Bracebridge, Ontario** named **Johanna Vanderveen** is looking forward to shopping in Marty Robbins' store.



Dear CMSA,

Last year my sister and I were lucky enough to go to Nashville for Fan Fair Week. It was an experience we'll never forget. The stars go all out that week for the fans—for example, Conway performed at the Fairgrounds, at the IFCO show, an autograph party at his record shop and a great fan club party at Twitty City. The enclosed picture was taken at the fan club party at Twitty City. Conway autographed it just last week after his concert in Milwaukee. It is really something special to me now. Every country music fan should certainly try to get to Nashville during Fan Fair Week. Wish I could go every year!

**Mary Banczak**  
Antigo, Wisconsin

Dear CMSA,

When we were in Nashville in June 1983, we attended the Grand Ole Opry and Opryland. The young talent in Opryland is really something to see and hear. On our 24th wedding anniversary we stayed at Opryland Hotel: that was in September 1983. We once again enjoyed the sights and sounds of country music. We will be attending our first Fan Fair this year and can hardly wait for June to get here.

**Mary and Chuck Bonnstetter**  
Greensboro, North Carolina

Dear CMSA,

We will be heading for Nashville for the fifth time with friends and enjoying the events

that Nashville has to offer. One place I want to go is the Marty Robbins Store and see which records I haven't got. Even though Marty has passed away, he'll always be my favorite. I met him several times. The first time was in Lucan, Ontario in 1960, when I presented him with a birthday cake on stage. Wow, a long time ago.

**Johanna Vanderveen**  
Bracebridge, Ontario

## Upcoming Events

- May 19-26** Jimmie Rodgers Festival  
Meridian, Mississippi (601-485-1808)
- June 4-10** Fan Fair Week  
Nashville, Tennessee (615-889-4393)
- June 9** Alabama's June Jam III  
Fort Payne, Alabama (205-845-1646)
- June 13-17** Bill Monroe's 18th  
Annual Bluegrass Festival  
Bean Blossom, Indiana (615-868-3333)
- June 16** Spirit of the Woods Music Association 7th Annual Folk Festival  
Onekama, Michigan (616-723-4783)
- June 22-24** Ohio Country-Bluegrass  
Forever Fest  
Berea, Ohio (216-831-7310)
- June 29-July 15** National Mountain  
Music Festival  
Pigeon Forge, Tennessee (615-453-4616)
- July 14-15** Jamboree in the Hills  
Usually held at St. Clairsville, Ohio  
Phone contact available after April 4  
through WWVA, Wheeling, West Virginia  
(304-232-1170)

## Members Collect Country Music Magazine

There are now sixteen names on the list of those who have every issue of *Country Music Magazine* since September 1972. The magazine was out of print from January/February 1982 until September/October 1983, so even the most complete set will have a gap there. **Kathie Scott** of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania has most of the covers of her set autographed.

For information about issues for sale and issues wanted to borrow, see the questions listed below.

## Members Ask Questions on a Variety of Topics

If you have answers to any of these questions, write to the members listed below.

- Where can I obtain either the single record or an album containing Charley Pride singing "All God's Children"? **Ruth Watts**, P.O. Box 1, Georgetown, Indiana 47122
- I'm looking for articles/info/memorabilia about Lefty Frizzell, especially older things that appeared in fanzines. Any help? **E. B. LaNeve**, 1012 Neptune, Chester, West Virginia 26034
- Where can I find *Country Symphonies in E-Major* by the Statler Brothers? It is on the

Mercury label. I have twenty-six of their twenty-seven albums and haven't been able to find this one. **Denessa Hamilton**, P.O. Box 405, Kingsford Heights, Indiana 46346

• Is the song "Elvira" by the Oak Ridge Boys original with them or did Webb Pierce record it in the 50s? I seem to remember hearing him sing it. **Eunice Griffen**, 3704 Coronet Pit Road, Plant City, Florida 33566

• Does anyone have an album or tapes with the songs of Old Bill (My Voice Keeps Changing On Me) Stafford on it? Also is there a song that goes like this: "Why do you weep, dear willow? Why do your branches hang low? Could it be you know a secret that other trees don't know?" **Mrs. John W. Shreve**, 2084 Lee St., East Liverpool, Ohio 43920

• Can anyone help me find more facts on the recording sessions of Elvis Presley and the people who worked with him? **Vic Wright**, 7010 Holdrege, Lincoln, Nebraska 68505

• Does anyone know the whereabouts of Browning Bryant who appeared on the *Wayne Newton Show* in the 60s and 70s? He also appeared on the old *Kraft Music Hall* when Eddy Arnold was one of the hosts of the show. I would also like to find more Browning Bryant records. **Janet May Spurling**, Box 446 Macedonia Rd., Rt. 2, Blanchester, Ohio 45107

• Who was the youngster who recorded "Wooden Heart" in about 1954 or 1955 before Elvis recorded it? Was it Roddy McDowell? **Sammie Mostrom**, 13019 N.E. 4th Plain, Vancouver, Washington 98661

• I have been reading some disturbing news about Johnny Lee. Please tell me it isn't true. Are he and Charlene having problems or is it just gossip? Also, I have issues of *Country Music Magazine* for sale from the following years (not every year has every issue): 1972-1975, 1980-1983. **May King**, 319 Cameron, Brush, Colorado 80723

## Member Has the Last Word

The following letter from **Sue Parker** of Waterbury, Connecticut is too good not to print in its entirety. This will be our, or rather your, last word for this issue. Note Sue Parker's closing.

Dear CMSA,

You want a letter! You got it! When I first subscribed to *Country Music Magazine*, sometime around August 1974, I sent in two or three letters *none of which got printed*. I am glad you want to hear from us fans.

The August 1974 issue was the first one I received. I would like very much to have a complete set. Since I can't afford to spend too much, it would be appreciated if I could pay half-price or perhaps borrow them from any of your readers. They will be returned.

Keep up the good work and "Kindly Keep it Country."

**Sue Parker**, 990 West Main St., Apt. 206, Waterbury, Connecticut 06708

# COUNTRY MUSIC SOCIETY OF AMERICA

## 11 GREAT REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD JOIN NOW

### Letter from the Publisher

Attention Country Music subscribers! In looking over your magazine you no doubt have been noticing references to something called *The Country Music Society of America*. And, you've probably wondered just what it's all about. That's why I'm taking a minute now to fill you in on the details.

For a long time, I have felt that you and I and other fans, whose knowledge and love for country music is above average, should have an organization to serve our interests. Not something for just everyone, but something special for serious country music loyalists. We buy the records. We listen to the radio stations. We spend the money to go to the concerts. So how do we make our voice heard?

The answer is the *Country Music Society of America*. With 60,000 members already and another 200,000 expected by the end of the year, we are the largest most influential organization of music fans in the country.

Already, response to this novel idea has been overwhelming. So overwhelming in fact that I have decided to give you regular *Country Music* subscribers a once only opportunity to get a free *Charter Membership* when you extend your current subscription for an additional year. This is the time you should sign up. And here are 11 great reasons why...

### Eleven Reasons to Join!

1. You get *Country Music Magazine*... America's number one country publication... for one full year, plus the time you have left to go on your current subscription.

2. You get *Country Music News*... a unique bi-monthly newsletter for *Society* members only.

3. You get the *Country Music Answer Book*... a pocket digest crammed full of award winners, fan club information, country night-spots, birthdates and horoscopes of the stars, important addresses and phone numbers, and more.

4. You get \$50.00 in discount coupons... for records, tapes, books, T-shirts and more.

5. You get 25% off on the top 25 albums (see page 57 of this issue).



6. You get special discounts... up to 50% off... on collector's records and tapes, special historical re-issues and out-of-print classics.

7. You get special discounts on stereo equipment, travel packages, home video equipment, musical instruments... anything we can buy for our group so we can pass along the savings to you.

8. You get your Member's Identification Card showing your personal account number, which you use to obtain members privileges.

9. You pay only \$10 for all this... our lowest price. That's \$3.50 less than the

cover price for one year of *Country Music* by itself. And \$5.00 less than regular *Society* members have to pay. And when your membership again comes up for renewal, you are guaranteed the lowest rate in effect at the time.

10. Your *Charter Membership*... with all its added benefits... automatically begins just as soon as we hear from you. You don't have to wait til your current subscription expires. You will receive all your added benefits for the rest of your current subscription... plus a whole extra year.

But there's more...

11. In addition to everything else, you will also get to vote on awards... attend special concerts in your area... go to conventions... meet and talk with other members as well as some of your favorite stars.

You get it all... *Country Music Magazine*, the newsletter and discounts... the an-

swer book, the numbered identification card and voting privileges... for the time left on your current subscription plus a whole extra year.

And remember, you get it all for only \$10... just three cents more than you originally paid for one year of magazines alone.

Now, doesn't it make good sense to renew that subscription of yours now while you can get all these extra benefits? I'm sure you will agree the answer is yes. But you better hurry.

### THIS OFFER EXPIRES IN 60 DAYS!

This is a limited time offer only... good for the next 60 days. After that you will have to pay the regular membership dues when your subscription expires. And you will have missed out on all the added *Society* benefits for the time you still have to go on your current subscription. So take a minute now to fill out and return the coupon below.

—Russ Barnard  
Publisher

MAIL TO: Country Music Society of America  
Membership Dept.  
P.O. Box 2000  
Marion, OH 43305

YES, I want a FREE Charter Membership in the Country Music Society Of America, so extend my subscription one more year for just \$10. I get *Country Music Magazine* and all *Society* Charter Member benefits and an extra year. Also, when my membership comes up for renewal, you guarantee to bill me at the lowest available rate.

Bill me later  Payment enclosed E5643

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_  
State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

I'm not presently a subscriber. Send me *Country Music*, one year for the regular \$12 rate and also give me free Charter Membership for the one year.

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*Having sold millions of records by the time he was thirty, he was washed up just a few years later.*

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*By Bob Allen*

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**I**n many ways, B.J. Thomas is country music's equivalent of the dangling man. He is a man who first achieved fame in the late 1960s and early 1970s with a string of pop hits like "Raindrops Keep Falling on my Head," "Hooked on a Feeling," "Rock N' Roll Lullaby" and "I Just Can't Stop Believing." But then, by the mid-1970s he had practically faded from sight after taking a nose-dive into a dark pit of drugs, illness, bankruptcy and personal despair. Having sold millions of records by the time he was thirty, he was washed up just a few years later: hung out to dry and left dangling on the line.

When B.J. finally re-emerged in the late 1970s, it was as a "born-again" gospel singer. Then, more recently, he began establishing a new commercial base for himself in country music. All in all, that's a lot of personal and professional change for one man to go through in less than a decade. And in the wake of it, many of his fans were left mildly confused, and a few of them were angered.

Today, B.J. Thomas still dangles uneasily under the misconceptions of the record-buying public. There are those among his hard-core gospel followers who feel that he turned his back on them when he began singing "that other music" again. Then there are some more secular-minded fans who still shy away from his concerts, afraid that they might pay ten or fifteen bucks and end up hearing a sermon. Finally, there are the more indifferent members of the public who have followed his well-publicized ups and downs with relative detachment, and simply don't know what to make of it all.

It is doubtful if there is anyone on earth who has tried harder to set the record straight than B.J. Thomas himself. And judging from the present shape of his career, it's safe to say that he's come a long way in bridging that confusing credibility gap. The past year or so, in fact, he's really been on a roll. He's racked up two Number One country singles (his first trips to the top of the charts in more than eight years): "Whatever Happened to Old Fashioned Love"



CBS/PRIORITY RECORDS

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# B.J. Thomas' HARD ROAD

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and "New Looks from an Old Lover." And he's had almost more work out there on the touring circuit than he can keep up with. It is Thomas, in fact, who recently garnered rave reviews as the opening act on the Kenny Rogers road show. While Rogers was busy trying to crack chandeliers with his cloying vibrato and pumping out sincerity as he showed home movies of his family and his multi-million-dollar possessions, B.J., with his unassuming stage presence and his lilting singing style, was winning over the crowds and quietly stealing the show.

As the saying goes, when you're hot, you're hot, and right now, B.J. is *hot*. The people at his record label are fully aware of this, and they too are concerned about the public misconceptions that may linger from the many twists and turns his life and career have taken. So they have come up with their own ideas about just *how* B.J. should be presented to the public, about how they might smooth out all the rough edges and sanitize the more gory details of his well-publicized past. Therefore, prior to my interview with B.J., I am presented with a virtual shopping-list of no-no's, items which are to be off-limits in my interview—items which, it is fervently hoped, I will not belabor in my article. These include:

B.J.'s eight years as a self-admitted drug addict.

The 1968 stabbing incident in a New York hotel which put him out of commission for five months.

His 1976 bankruptcy.

His arrest in Texas last June on a minor marijuana possession charge after a small amount of the drug was found in his home (an arrest which, in all fairness, had the taint of a set-up to it; the fact that he was sentenced to one *day's* probation is a pretty good indication of just how seriously the court took it).

Now that I know what I should and should not write about, the record company people let me know how glad they are that I'm doing this story. Maybe, it is hoped, I can succeed in cutting through all the misperceptions and confusion, and portray the *real* B.J. Thomas.

**H**e comes ambling into the tiny, windowless record company office where the interview is to take place. Although he is right on schedule, it is obvious that he is dreadfully weary; he has spent all but six days of the last eight months out on the road, and last night he was up into the wee hours taping a video at his home near Franklin, Tennessee.

"I didn't really plan to spend all but six days away from home," he yawns, "but I figured that if I was going to start

making records again and get serious about my career, then I needed to make a full commitment to it. So I've been out there a lot this past year. I've done shows in the rain and in the snow. I've done shows sick and everything else. And it's given me a really good feeling about it all. I think I've proved something to myself. I feel like I can do anything with my music now."

As B.J. relaxes and begins to reflect calmly on his career resurgence, it soon becomes apparent that, in flesh and in spirit, he is far too vivid and perceptive an individual to ever be obscured for

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*"I remember  
my daddy  
used to tell me,  
'Son, you ain't  
supposed to make it  
in this world.'  
And that's what I  
came to believe.  
That's why I later  
got into drugs."*

---

long behind a screen of high-gloss publicity hype. He is tall and bone thin, almost gangly. His dark hair flows down around the contours of his gnarled face in a manner that makes him look wary and street-wise, and at the same time frail and introspective. His large dark eyes with their opaque irises reveal a painful sense of vulnerability, as well as a sense of hard-won spirituality. Even in the sterile surroundings of this modern office, it is easy to picture him as a wandering pilgrim who has spent long years in the desert. He comes across as a man who is given to pondering the imponderables, and who is not apt to take anything—not even life or existence itself—for granted.

Talk soon turns to this business of the dangling man. B.J. seems slightly surprised that long after he has managed to come to terms with his own troubled past and re-establish himself as a recording artist, he must still struggle with the after-effects of going public with his religious beliefs.

"It caused some conflicts," he admits quietly. "I've gone through some odd times with the public. But now I think that even some of the people who originally disagreed with me can see that it is

possible to be an entertainer who has Christian beliefs, without just being strictly a gospel or a Christian entertainer. It's not my job to take anybody to heaven or straighten anybody out. I just think that I have an obligation to leave a good feeling behind and be part of the overall *positiveness* that is going on."

B.J. was a great success in the gospel field, to which he committed himself exclusively from 1976 to 1980. During that time, he won no fewer than five Dove awards, the gospel equivalent of Grammys—but even so, it was not all smooth sailing. Some of the gospelites complained that his hair was too long, and that he wore his pants too tight. Then, when he himself saw a survey which said that only about three per cent of all Christians actually listen to gospel radio, it seemed to validate his nagging feelings of artistic confinement. He began to wonder just how much good he was doing for anybody by getting up on stage and singing "Amazing Grace" to the same old hard-core gospel fans for the thousandth time.

"There'd always been a conflict there on my part," he admits. "It was because I'd never wanted to do *just* gospel music. When I made my first gospel album, it was a sincere expression of spiritual awareness. But then, after I'd made my third, and my fourth, I thought to myself, 'What are you doing?' I realized that it, too, had become a *business*. I then realized that I wanted to be involved in the entire music scene, and that I had just been a secular singer for far too long to completely forsake it."

The transition from gospel music to the secular field was not easy. Many gospel fans, for instance, felt betrayed when he started mixing his old pop hits in with his "praise Jesus" material. Occasionally, they booed and heckled him off the stage.

For their part, the secular audiences greeted his re-emergence with some skepticism. There is among such audiences a common perception that the gospel world, for all its "holier-than-thou" attitude, is actually as rife with greed, bigotry and corruption as is the secular music business. Not only that, but the general public has watched far too many "born again" entertainers conveniently get religion and lose it again almost as often as their fans change their shoes.

"I think the public just gets a certain perception of who you are if you get involved with organized religion," B.J. theorizes. "I think the 'pop-art' masses are just not involved in that sort of thing. If they are, then it's a private thing, and they don't want to hear it on the radio or see it on the cover of *Hustler* Magazine. For instance, when Bob Dylan released his *Slow Train Comin'* album a few

## Some of the gospelites complained that his hair was too long, and that he wore his pants too tight.

years back, it shot up the charts. But then when it became common knowledge that it was a Christian album, or a kind of 'born-again' thing, man, it just hit the bottom of the charts like a brick! If Debby Boone released 'Light up My Life' today, it would bomb, too, because people know now that it also was a spiritual statement. That's just one thing on which the public really draws the line. They just don't allow religious music to take a part in what they do for pleasure. But I'm not sure the public is wrong about that. In fact, they're surely right."

Thomas' own solution to this dilemma has been to temper his music, to avoid direct spiritual statements, and instead to emphasize the positive and the inspirational aspects of life in a more subtle manner. Thus, you will find no songs about knife fights, flying bottles, or honky tonk hangovers on his albums—not even so much as a song about a guy getting drunk and running over his pet dog.

"It's way too easy to leave a negative feeling in the air," he explains. "I don't want to spend all my time recording songs that will pull me down or give someone else a negative feeling. I love positive songs, songs that make people feel good. And I usually make a conscious effort to record them.

"It's not that I don't like songs that are true-to-life," he adds. "For instance, I recorded 'Gypsy Woman,' which is a true-to-life situation that I can relate to. I still sing 'I'm so Lonesome I Could Cry,' and I don't think there is hardly any Hank Williams song that I wouldn't record. There are even a couple of songs on my new album that are what I would call blue songs."

"I think the most important thing," he continues, "is that you've got a good feeling in your heart for other people. I really don't think it's that important *what* kind of song you sing as long as the attitude that comes through is good. I like to let it show in my music how I feel about myself now, and how my wife Gloria and I feel about our lives. And I think my music feels good. I think it has a better feeling to it now than it has ever had."

Such good feelings, however, have not always been easy for B.J. Thomas to come by. His life story is filled with the kind of pain, sadness, and hard times from which so many great popular singers have shaped their talents. As he sits in this office and recalls his dark years, he lapses into deep reflection. Even now, he seems to be going through a life-long

process of getting rid of the pain, putting together the fragmented pieces of his own past and coming to terms with it all.

**B**illy Joe Thomas was born in Hugo, Oklahoma, in 1942. He was the grandson of a bootlegger and the son of a man who, early on, developed an acute fondness for his own daddy's home-made corn liquor, as well as a love for the hard country sounds of Ernest Tubb and Hank Williams which he passed along to his son. "We were always poor," B.J. recalls. "The times when Daddy drank heavily, we would have nothing to eat."

While B.J. was still a small child, his older brother came down with polio. Trying to stay one step ahead of the hard times, the family moved often. The fact that young Billy Joe and his mother frequently became the objects of his father's drunken abuse did little to ease the grimness of the family's lot in life. Neither did the fact that his father seemed totally incapable of expressing any emotion other than despair to his children.

"I remember my daddy used to tell me, 'Son, you just ain't supposed to make it in this world,'" B.J. recalls sardonically. "And that's what I came to believe. That's why I later got into drugs, because of the relationship I had with my dad. I was motivated to be destructive to myself just like he was to himself. I figured that if I was gonna be his son, then I had to live hard and raise hell and hurt myself just like he did. That was the way he showed me you were supposed to have a good time, you know. I think that he and Hank Williams and a million other men of that generation really believed that in order to have a good time and be a man, you had to get drunk and go out and ram your hand through a wall.

"My dad eventually drank himself to death," he adds regretfully. "I never was really able to get close to him. Even now, I have certain bittersweet thoughts about him. To this day, I've never been to his grave, except for the day that we buried him. One day I guess I will go back there and maybe get down and let him be gone, but right now, I feel like I still have him with me, because I was never able to resolve my feelings about him. I was never able to see that, through his eyes, I was a man. And I think those unresolved feelings still influence my singing and the way I treat my own children. I suppose those feelings will probably al-

ways be with me."

As he grew older, B.J. gravitated to the music scene around Houston, Texas. In the mid-1960s, he joined a local band called The Triumphs which eventually began recording under the auspices of ubiquitous Houston producer Huey Meaux. During one lengthy recording session, Thomas—almost as an afterthought—decided to lay down a version of Hank Williams' "I'm so Lonesome I Could Cry." He later recalled that his decision to record the song was actually a back-handed tribute to his father, who had jokingly told him not to come back home until he had recorded something country.

In 1966, Huey Meaux succeeded in leasing the master tape of B.J.'s hurriedly recorded version of "I'm so Lonesome I Could Cry" to the New York-based Scepter record label. When it was finally released as a single, it surprised everyone by going to the Number Four spot in the national pop charts and eventually selling a million copies. Today, the record still stands as one of the definitive pop versions of a Hank Williams classic.

Soon, B.J., singing solo now, began touring with the *Dick Clark Caravan of Stars*. The hits continued: "Eyes of a New York Woman," "I Just Can't Help Believing," "Raindrops Keep Fallin' on my Head" (the theme song to the film *Butch Cassidy And The Sundance Kid* and a million-seller in 1970), "Rock N'Roll Lullaby," and "Hooked on a Feeling" (1969). Before this first wave of success was over, B.J. had scored nearly a dozen gold records.

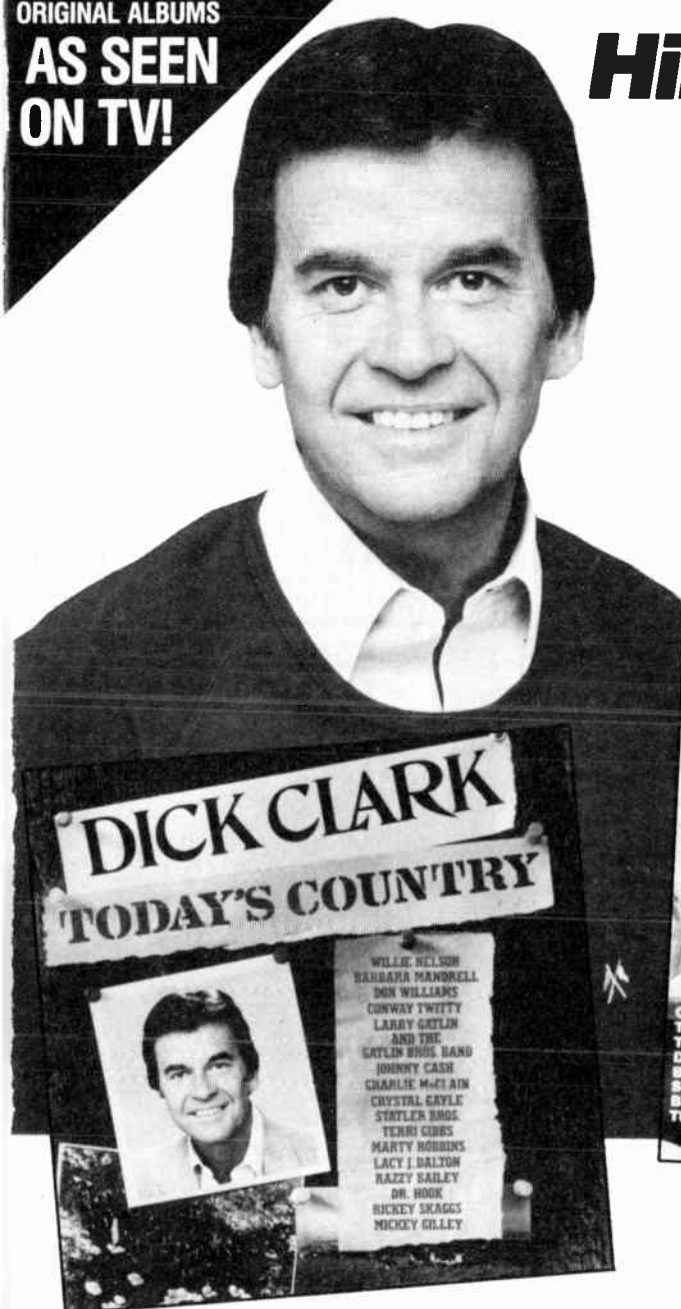
**B**ut the fact was that by then B.J. Thomas was hooked on much more than just a feeling. He was touring constantly, earning several thousand dollars a week and, he says, spending thousands more on cocaine, amphetamines, valium and assorted other uppers and downers. He used the luxury of his new-found affluence to live out his father's legacy of self-destruction to the fullest. There was the stabbing incident in New York; and then there was another widely publicized mishap in Nashville.

"I had taken a lot of pills and was drinking brandy," he recalled in an interview with *The Tennessean*, Nashville's daily paper, several years ago. "I was having seizures from a valium addiction. I was in this guy's taxi cab. I don't remember anything, but I hit him with

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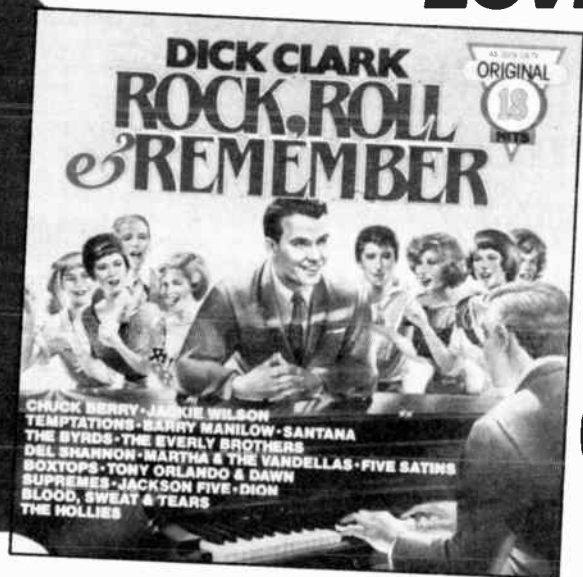
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an empty brandy bottle. He radioed in that he had a crazy man in the car. After the police came, they took me to the hospital and sewed me up where I'd been cut, and I had another seizure. For some reason, they taped my mouth shut. I almost died that night. I almost choked to death."

Even though the hits continued sporadically ("Another Somebody Done Somebody Wrong Song" in 1975, and a revival of the old Beach Boys song, "Don't Worry, Baby" in 1977), his life continued to come apart at the seams. He became estranged from his wife Gloria, whom he'd married when he was little more than a teenager.

"By 1975, I was spending three thousand dollars a week on cocaine. I was O.D.-ing once or twice a month and spending a lot of time in hospitals," he recalls with quiet candor. "It didn't matter how many million-sellers I had or how much money I made. I was having terrible psychological problems about who I was. I was basically just living out on the West Coast, destroying myself."

The turning point in his life came in what could be described—depending upon your point of view—as either a spiritual re-awakening or a flash of profound psychological insight. Whatever it was, it happened at a time when he'd sunk so deeply into fatalism that there appeared to be no way out. It came to him on a visit to Texas when he was at the home of some friends of his wife Gloria, who had already undergone a spiritual conversion of her own. Since then, his life

has been on an up-turn.

"I think it was more of a psychological revelation," he recalled in an interview some years later. "I suddenly realized that I was a good man and that there was happiness to be found if I locked into certain spiritual things. But really, I had to learn to love myself before I could ever get to Christian principles.

"From that point on, I did seek a lot of professional help, just from being a drug addict for so many years. And I had to investigate all kinds of things....I can't really state that I was 'born-again,' because I am the same person I was even when I was on drugs. You might say I have searched out and corrected a lot of psychological patterns.

"Way too often," B.J. adds with exasperation as he sighs and leans back in his chair. "I'll go and do an interview, and it doesn't matter what we talk about, it always comes out like... (he makes a grandiose, sweeping gesture with his hand, as if writing huge letters across the sky)... *God Saves Singer!* or *Born Again B.J.!* But 'born-again' is really too mysterious a way to put it. I just had a serious change of direction in terms of the way I thought about myself.

"I'm just a guy who is trying to find God in my own way," he adds. "God didn't do no miracle for me. Why would God save me and let millions of other people die of drug overdoses? To have that perspective of God is to lock God up in your own ego...I don't believe that God reached down and took the drugs

out of my soul. It came from *me*. I just didn't want to kill myself anymore."

**W**hatever the source of his about-face, B.J.'s new sense of well-being has endured thus far. It has given him the strength and stability to slowly rebuild his career, but even more importantly it has enabled him to find within his own family a source of love and support which was missing from his formative years. He and Gloria now have three children: Paige, a thirteen-year-old daughter; Erin, a four-year-old son; and Nora, a five-year-old Korean orphan whom they adopted when she was a baby.

A very important issue in B.J.'s mind is his determination not to pass his inherited sense of dire fatalism on to his own children, but rather to allow a more positive sense of life to flow down through future generations. He and Gloria, who also functions as his manager, have, in fact, written two rather candid and insightful books, *In Tune* and *Home Where I Belong*, about their personal and spiritual struggles, in the hope that they might succeed in lighting the way out of the darkness for someone else.

But once again, B.J. emphasizes that he is *not* preaching, not really carrying the torch or pulling a "holier-than-thou" trip on anybody.

"I don't believe that I have to say that I'm going to heaven and that somebody else is going to hell, in order to be a good person," he insists. "I think that kind of thinking is what separates too much of the religious community from everything else, and I don't want to be part of it. My personal feeling is that if there is a God like we're talkin' about, then surely he'll take us all home; none of his creation deserves to be burnt up.

"I'm just like the common guy down at the ice house right now who is having a beer or putting a six-pack in his car, fixin' to drive home and watch the football game or whatever," he adds. "Life is still a rough trip for me at times. I have three kids and I'm trying to pay my bills and have hit records. The difference is that now, I'm not trying to just survive another day and get another fix. I'm trying to grow old gracefully. I really believe that just being a regular guy and trying to do the best you can is the essence of having peace of mind in this life.

"The bottom line for me," he concludes, "is *not* going to church every day of the year. The real answer for me lies in trying to be a good husband to my wife and a good father to my kids and to live up to my responsibilities. That's the bottom line right there. That's almost as Christian as you can get." ■

# Twenty Questions with

by Michael Bane

1

Rumor has it that the Dottie West road show has wound down recently.

Right now, we're just doing weekends. For the last two years, I have taken a little more time off the road.

2

We never thought we'd hear Dottie West talk about taking time off the road . . .

Well, I have. I wanted to be with my babies—I have two grandbabies. Tess Marie (Shelly's daughter), of course, you've probably heard of her. I think she's better known than I am, and I've worked for years spreading the word. But anyway, the other is my oldest son's. He was married about two years ago and they have a little girl three months old. She's Dorothy May West. We finally got a May West in the family.

3

Just a couple of years ago weren't you knocking down something like 300 nights a year on the road?

Yeah, so I took the whole month of December off, but it didn't work out that way anyway. I ended up busier. I've been out of town so much, and a lot of friends of mine are in Nashville. And I feel that I've been out of Nashville and away from my close friends for all these years, you know? Plus there are so many good television shows in Nashville now.

4

So you decided to stay off the road and go on television?



Yep—go on television and talk to some good friends. In fact, I got to go fishing on television for Bobby Lord's *Country Sportsman* show on The Nashville Network. I was the first female they'd asked to do the show. They've had Mel Tillis and Jerry Reed and all those guys, but I was the first girl.

5

No fish stories here—did you catch anything?

They took me down to St. Thomas, down in the Virgin Islands, and I caught the record fish—reeled it in myself.

It's all on camera, on film and it's all true. I caught a blue marlin, and he is eleven feet long and weighs 306 pounds!

6

We see that you're getting back to some serious recording. Hasn't your recording

# DOTTIE WEST

career taken something of a backseat these last few years?

Yes, that's true. And I've been taking a lot of acting lessons and dancing lessons, but that doesn't mean that Dottie's changing. In fact, if anything, I've gotten back home and gotten myself into Nashville more and more. I feel more back in my country roots, and it feels good, too.

7

What made you decide to spend more time in Nashville after the bright lights of Las Vegas and Los Angeles?

I got lonely for it. I really was just lonely. I mean, I love working the road, working with people like Mac Davis in Vegas or the Gatlins and Kenny Rogers. But, you know, I missed all these people I used to work with a lot. I did the *Archie Campbell Show* this week and it was fun! I guess I told him everything I know—we talked a lot about my music . . . I mean, my first music.

8

That's right, sometimes people forget that you were a songwriter first. You were part of that famous Tootsie's Orchid Lounge group of songwriters—Willie Nelson, Roger Miller . . .

Willie Nelson, Roger Miller—they taught me how to write songs . . . Hank Cochran, all those people. All the Opry artists I've worked with—well, I've been travelling for 22 years, so I have a lot of stories I can tell. Some I can't.

9

Do you remember any specific advice from those guys—Roger, Willie, Hank—on how to write a country song?

One thing I specifically remember Roger Miller saying was, "Dottie, look for inside rhymes. Not just at the end of the line, but inside the line as well." Willie always talked about melody quite a bit. He said the melody needed to be a hook, too; a simple, hook melody. Mickey Newbury told me to make songs like conversations. He'd read my songs back to me, then say, "See, you left something out; there's something in there that doesn't connect." So he'd show me how to put it conversationally.

10

So they basically all agreed that the secret to writing great country songs is to be simple and direct.

And always try to use the hook line as much as possible.

11

Were you just about the only woman in that group?

It doesn't sound very nice, does it? I had all these guys over at my house—sometimes their wives would come, too. I loved to cook and they loved to eat, and I just, pretty much, watched them write songs. For a long time, I wouldn't write in front of them. But it got to be a competitive thing with all of us. Every day we would try to write a song, then get together at night and sing them. We met at other houses, too, but I had four kids and the guys could leave their houses easier than I could. Each of us would say, "Look what I wrote." I think that we really generated a lot of energy when we wrote songs.

12

Kris Kristofferson was a member of that group, wasn't he?

He wrote "Help Me Make It Through The Night" and "For The Good Times" at the house that I sold just before I moved here. I lived there for a long time.

13

Didn't you once refuse to sing "Help Me Make It Through The Night" because you thought it was too dirty?

I'm sorry. Boy, am I *sorry!*

14

You've been one of the few country artists to move smoothly between pop and country, so you ought to be able to answer this one. What is the difference between a pop singer and a country singer?

I think the biggest difference is the music, the rhythm section. You can take a country song and produce it pop. I think it's up to the stylist—the style of the singer and the rhythm section. A song can be produced any way.

15

Do you think there's been an over-emphasis on crossover in the last few years?

I hate the word. I *hate* that word. I think that's what they're writing now. But there are still some good country songs around—George Strait, people like him. I love those good ol' country songs.

16

On another, uh, topic, do you think it's important for a woman to stay sexy?

Oh, absolutely! If she cares for herself even, I think she should. There's nothing wrong with saying that. Now, don't

you try to back me into into a corner, though. I don't try to look sexy . . .

17

You do pretty well for somebody who's not trying . . .

Well, thank you. I try to be healthy. You try to feel good and have a lot of energy, and a lot of exercise will do that. Just lying around sloppy makes you lazier. Exercise gives you energy.

18

What's your definition of a perfect relationship . . .

I never saw one. I don't know. The perfect relationship is . . . okay . . . two words will cover it. Try to be a good lover and a good friend.

19

Isn't that pretty tough for a travelling entertainer?

Yes, of course it is. And it's harder for a man to be in a position like my husband Allen, with me travelling. I'm not sure I could deal with it. I'm not sure I could have a husband who was a singer and travelled if I wasn't part of the stage show. I think it's difficult for a man to go along with his wife as the breadwinner.

20

One last question—who do you think is the biggest *hunk* in country music?

That's a heavy question. It has to be country, huh, so I can't pick "The Fall Guy," Lee Majors. It could be Larry Gatlin . . . I mean, they love him. T.G. Sheppard is close to it. I tell you . . . George Strait, I think. He ain't far from it, hon. He looks *great*. ■

**W**hen the Country Music Association handed out its 1983 awards last October in Nashville, Hall of Fame nominee Floyd Tillman, the Texas songwriter, was in Houston doing radio interviews to promote an upcoming charity show he was headlining. Floyd Tillman had been nominated for the Hall of Fame each of the previous four years, and had dutifully trooped off to Nashville each time. Floyd Tillman had gotten kind of down on the whole awards syndrome, and he was not about to go to Nashville again.

Maybe that was because he was pretty sure he wouldn't win anyway. His first inkling came when he received the CMA bulletin announcing nominees. The entry on Opry star Little Jimmy Dickens (who was indeed the eventual winner) was lengthy. The entry on Floyd Tillman was brief; one line credited him with forming the Blue Ridge Playboys (which he didn't, though he was a charter member), and another cited him as the writer of "It Makes No Difference Now" (which he did write, though it's not his biggest song). The entry also said that he was from Oklahoma, when, as he puts it, "I was born in Oklahoma, but when I woke up, I was in Texas." That's about how long he lived in Oklahoma; Tillman is a Texan through and through.

Perhaps you can see why Floyd and his wife Frances decided to watch the 1983 awards show on TV.

"We thought we'd just lay out for a change and try to make it next year," Tillman told me over the phone a couple of days after the ceremonies. "It's kinda nerve-wracking sitting there at the show year after year not knowing, so I figured it's easier to stay home—and it *was* a lot more relaxing that way. But it was very interesting to watch it on TV, and it turned out just about like I figured it would. Little Jimmy Dickens deserved to win; all the nominees did.

"But it don't look so good for me right now," he continued, "because I been in this business 53 or 54 years, been playing 60 years, and there's so many newcomers. They only gotta be in business 35 years to be eligible to be nominated, so that's gonna make it a little harder."

Another factor, he feels, also holds him back from the Hall of Fame. "See, fifty per cent of the voters live in Nashville," he says. "That is a fact. The only musicians that lived outside of Nashville when they got the award were Bob Wills and Gene Autry.

"That award does have special meaning, but I can live without it, too. Nashville isn't the end of the world—I've made more of my money in the pop field than I have in the country field, I'd say five to one. And I'd say that if there was a Hall of Fame in Texas, they'd vote me in."

Indeed. Cold print makes his words seem harsher than they sound when he says them. Floyd Tillman is as happy

without awards as he is with them, and he doesn't mind saying so; there really isn't a drop of bitterness in him. He enjoyed great success without any help from Nashville, and he's used to being overlooked by those who equate Music City with country music in general.

Consider the notion, repeated so often that it's dictum, that Hank Williams was the first country crossover writer. Wrong. Hank Williams was the first *Nashville* crossover writer; in addition to his own abundant talents, he had behind him Nashville's biggest publisher, as well as a Nashville agent, a Nashville label, and (such as it was in those days) the Nashville publicity apparatus. Since his death, all those elements have worked even harder to spread his legend.

But facts are facts, and here are two that tell the story. In

early 1939, Bing Crosby had a pop hit with Tillman's "It Makes No Difference Now" (the other side of the single was Crosby's version of Bob Wills' "San Antonio Rose"). Later that year, Connie Boswell scored in the pop field with her version of Floyd's "I'll Keep on Loving You." Floyd Tillman was a country crossover writer a decade before Hank Williams.

I first spoke with Floyd about three years ago, when he was living with Frances, his wife of 23 years, in a mobile home at Granite Shoals, a town of marble and granite quarries about thirty miles outside Austin. In his green sport shirt, black Levis, brown cardigan sweater and cowboy boots and hat, Floyd looked good; in fact, he was a dead ringer for the late character actor Slim Pickens.

That fact alone made Floyd A-1 in my book, but there are other facts: This was the man who wrote such pop and country standards as "It Makes No Difference Now," "I Love You so Much It Hurts," "They Took the Stars out of Heaven," "Each Night at Nine," "I Gotta Have My Baby Back," "This Cold War with You," "Slipping Around," and "I'll Keep on

Loving You." His songs had been recorded over a period of 45 years by artists as diverse as Crosby, Boswell, Perry Como, Vic Damone, Margaret Whiting and Jimmy Wakely, Ella Fitzgerald, the Mills Brothers, Rusty Draper, Ray Charles, Ray Price, Merle Haggard, Willie Nelson, Marie Osmond, Diana Ross and the Supremes, Dean Martin, Pete Fountain, Glen Campbell, George Jones, and John Prine, among others.

That made me wonder. Floyd should have made millions in royalties: What was he doing living in a trailer by a rockpile in the middle of nowhere? Was this another music biz hard-luck story, in which the creative artist had been sucked dry by a monolithic industry, then abandoned to obscurity and poverty?

No, it most certainly was not. As I learned, Floyd's is a success story of the best kind, the story of a man who has had it

# FLOYD TILLMAN

*Floyd should have  
made millions in royalties:  
What was he doing  
living in a trailer in  
the middle of nowhere?*

*by John Morthland*

## His Own Man





*“People would gather around me to hear somebody play lead guitar, because that was unheard of.”*

all several times and thrown it away as gleefully as he made it, a man who voluntarily retired at the peak of his powers because he didn't like the road, a man who to this day is doing exactly what he wants and is damn happy about it.

Floyd Tillman did everything ass-backwards. He played lead guitar when the guitar was strictly a background instrument, and he was one of the first to play electric. He wrote pop songs when he was supposed to be writing country songs, and he wrote country songs when he was supposed to be writing pop songs. He tried to sing like Bing Crosby but sounded more like Ernest Tubb.

But he did it ass-backwards with style, and he got away with every bit of it. No less an authority than Willie Nelson, back when the Outlaw movement was peaking, once snorted to an interviewer, “Hell, I'm no outlaw! You wanna talk about outlaws, look at someone like Floyd Tillman—now *there's* an outlaw for you.”

Floyd and Frances still live in a mobile home. The current one is on the edge of Austin. They use it for an office, a residence, and a studio for about three weeks of the month. The rest of the time, they retire to their home about 35 miles away in Spicewood, right near Willie Nelson's recording studio-cum-golf-course-cum-playground. Floyd has dropped out of the record business several times and returned once retirement got boring, but he's never stopped writing. “Once you get started, it's fun. It's like working a crossword puzzle; you just stay with it,” he chuckles.

Frances is his worst critic, and she warns you that she talks way too much. “Sometimes I just have to leave the room before I get going too far,” she laughs. More voluble than Floyd but every bit as unaffected, she has a self-mocking way of undercutting much of what she says. The two of them together make quite a pair.

**F**loyd Tillman was born on December 8th, 1914, in Ryan, Oklahoma, just across the Red River from Texas. He was the youngest of eleven kids in a sharecropping family. When he was an infant, the family bundled into two wagons and made the move to Post, Texas, a town named for its founder, the cereal magnate, who established a cotton mill there in 1900. Floyd's initial interest in music was sparked by Vernon Dalhart's recording of “Prisoner's Song” and “The Wreck of the Old 97,” which his parents used to play constantly on their wind-up phonograph.

“Later on, Jimmie Rodgers came along, and he was the rage with his songs, because by then everybody had a little five-dollar wind-up phonograph,” he recalls. “I could ride my bicycle down the street and hear Jimmie Rodgers just like I had a radio on my bike, because *everybody* was playing those Jimmie Rodgers records.”

Several of Floyd's brothers played guitars and fiddles, and when he was still a child he learned mandolin. He didn't play with his brothers, however, until 1929, when the Depression wiped out his dollar-a-day job as a Western Union messenger boy. A couple of brothers whose guitar-and-fiddle duet was netting them five dollars most Saturday nights proposed to Floyd that he learn guitar. One brother could then switch to banjo and they'd have a hot trio. His brothers taught him two chords, and Floyd picked up the rest of it on his own.

“It was one of those metal guitars, and it was loud, loud enough to be heard in the crowd. It didn't have no amplification, but there was one of them resonators inside. I liked to play lead on guitar, didn't like to play seconds at all, so I started playing lead guitar and melody.” He grins. “My brothers said I



STEPHANIE CHERNIKOWSKI

was playing all wrong, but I didn't care. Later, about 1932, there was this trumpet player who played with us, and he played these jazz choruses, so I got on a jazz kick. People would gather round me to hear somebody play lead guitar, because that was unheard of. Later on I heard of guitar pickers, but as far as I know, I was the first one I ever heard. I didn't have anyone to copy off of back then.”

Aside from the clubs in town, a musician could work the country dances. People would take the furniture out of their houses, set up an oil lamp, and invite the neighbors over. A fiddle-and-guitar team could make “about a buck each, but if they wanted you to play late, and they got drunk enough, they'd pitch in a few nickels and dimes and you'd make a little extra.”

Still, it didn't seem like enough. Floyd hopped a freight train for Houston, where he came up empty-handed. Returning to Post, he got a National Recovery Act job at the cotton mill and also polished up his guitar playing. By 1935, he was on his way to San Antonio; there, his luck changed.

“I had my guitar and was walking down the street, past a place called Dusty's Palm Garden. There was a three-piece band in there and I walked in to listen. They saw me and asked if I played and invited me to sit in. I couldn't sing or write songs then, but they fell in love with my guitar pickin' because they'd never heard lead guitar before. They wanted the guy to hire me, but he couldn't afford four musicians because he was already paying them a dollar a night each. So they split their dollars with me, and we all got 75 cents a night. That was my first job away from home. It was Adolph Hofner's group.”

Hofner was a seminal Western Swing bandleader who is still working around San Antonio today. This was one of his first groups, and since few musicians back then cared whether they were considered pop or country, they played a little of everything, depending on the nature of the venue.

*Floyd's is a story of a man who has had it all several times and thrown it away as gleefully as he made it. "I just never was ambitious enough to pursue Nashville. I was always pretty happy with what I was doing."*

Once, on their KABC radio show, Hofner had Tillman sing a song he'd just written called "Put a Little Rhythm in the Air." "It got good response and, against my better judgment, I started singing," Floyd says. "I only wanted to be a writer, and the first records I heard myself sing on, I didn't sound at all like you're supposed to sound. I sang mainly to get my songs recorded. Probably still do."

As the Depression worsened, Tillman left Hofner's group and drove to Houston, using kerosene instead of gasoline in his Ford to save money. In Houston, he met Leon "Pappy" Selph, another Western Swing pioneer. Selph was as intrigued as everyone else with Floyd's style of take-off guitar; the group he built around it laid the groundwork for modern honky tonk and produced most of the music's first stars. Floyd recalls the story in detail:

"We started as a trio, and we'd get to work at noon and work till we fell out about two or three in the morning. Next day we'd go back and play all day, and enjoy it, too! We played mainly for tips, but then we got a little radio program. This was all happening right after Prohibition. A big ole jug of beer cost a nickel, enough to get drunk on almost, really. The ones that were kids, man, they drank beer too; they had no law against it!

"Eventually we got on KXYZ in Houston—that was the third station where we got a daily program—and we called ourselves the Blue Ridge Playboys. Ted Daffan came along about that time and he was playing steel guitar, Hawaiian guitar. He had a car and a sound system, and we didn't have a sound system." He grins. "So we hired him because of that, and then we let him play a couple Hawaiian songs to make him happy." Daffan went on to write country's first trucker song, "Truck Driver's Blues" (1939), and such standards as "Born to Lose," "Headin' Down the Wrong Highway," "Blue Steel Blues," "No Letter Today," and "Worried Mind." Today, he lives in Houston, where he deals in electronics and builds synthesizers as a hobby.

"Moon Mullican worked a while with us, too," Floyd says. "He played a pretty good piano then, but not *too* good. Even then he was quite a comedian, he liked to keep 'em laughing. He'd always hitch his legs up on the bandstand and do something like stick a mop on top of his head and act like he was a girl; he'd change his voice so his vocals were real high. He'd just do stuff like that on the spur of the moment, anything for a show or a laugh. At first he just played rhythm and a few little leads, then pretty soon he'd get cracking and *play* that piano. People'd like it and get to clapping, and the more they clapped the harder he hit those keys. It got to where you had to re-tune the piano every time he played on it. So we had several pretty big people that came out of that band..."

The group also included, at various times, singer-guitarist Chuck Keeshan, guitarist Dickie McBride, and bassist Lew Fisby. A few years later, McBride, as the lead singer in Cliff Bruner's Texas Wanderers, cut Floyd's "It Makes No Difference Now." Singing also with Bruner's group after a brief stint as a solo artist, Mullican cut Floyd's "I'll Keep on Loving You." The Bing Crosby and Connie Boswell covers of the songs soon followed.

Tillman jumped from the Playboys to Mack Clark's eleven-piece pop band, where he played guitar and sang lead on songs the two girl singers refused to learn. That lasted two years, ending when he wrote "It Makes No Difference Now," which Clark considered "too country." Floyd played it for his old partners in the Playboys, who had him sing it on the air. Response was good, and Floyd re-joined the Playboys to keep performing it. Singer Jimmie Davis, who wrote "You Are My Sunshine" and who would later become governor of Louisiana,

wanted to buy the song. "He offered me \$200 for it and I held out for \$300," Floyd laughs. "Finally got the thing back 28 years later, in 1966. Made more money the year I got it back than it did for the whole time I'd sold it, too."

The hits others were having with his songs brought Floyd to the attention of Dave Kapp of Decca Records, who liked his other original material and signed him as a solo act. Floyd didn't get to cut his own version of "It Makes No Difference Now"—Decca wanted uptempo songs from him for the jukeboxes, and that one was a weeper—but he did cut such sides as "They Took the Stars out of Heaven" (which went to Number One late in 1942) and "Each Night at Nine" (ditto for 1943). The latter song, recorded while Floyd was on furlough from Ellington Air Force Base during World War II, became a favorite record of Axis Sally and Tokyo Rose. Both played it nightly while urging American soldiers to quit fighting.

After the war, Houston became a hotbed of country music, and Floyd Tillman was one of the stars most responsible. Upon his discharge in 1945, he signed with Columbia and began working such clubs as the Autotel Blue Room, Cook's Hoedown, Epon Downs Nightclub, and the notorious 105½ Main, which was "so rough that once they even threw me out—and I was on the bandstand."

Floyd first met Frances in 1945 at this club, though it was fifteen years before he saw her again. His group at the time, Floyd Tillman and All the Gang, included his then-wife Margaret Hardis, who sang under the name Little Marge. The band could work as often as it wished, but there were no big tours because Floyd didn't want to travel more than a day's drive away from Houston.

During that era, he also wrote "I Love You So Much It Hurts," which caused problems. "Uncle" Art Satherly, the Englishman who headed Columbia's A&R department, told him, "Floyd, it's a pretty song, but it's pop. Everybody's trying to make pop music, and we want country. Keep it country, lad." It wasn't until three years later, at the end of a session, that Floyd finally got to cut it. It quickly became his bread-and-butter song; with subsequent cover versions by pop and country stars like Vic Damone, Red Foley, Ernest Tubbs, Perry Como, Ray Price and Ray Charles, "I Love You So Much It Hurts" eventually became one of 365 songs to qualify for the Million-Airs award in honor of at least one million radio and TV airplays. That, Floyd says, is the equivalent of "more or less six years of constant play." He knows this because he once sat down with his pocket calculator and figured it out.

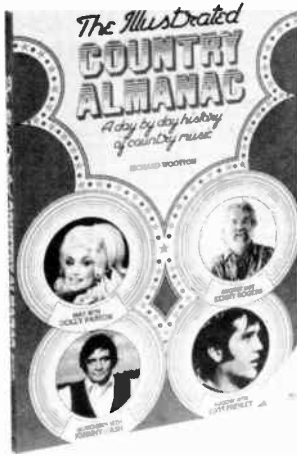
Then one night returning from San Antonio to Houston, Floyd was sitting in a 24-hour diner when he overheard a woman talking on a pay phone. "Honey, you call me tomorrow," she said, "and if a man answers, hang up."

"I thought, 'Oh, she's slipping around.' I had never heard the expression at the time, so I guess I made it up. I thought it might not be a bad idea for a song, so I wrote it down on a napkin and stuck it in my pocket. Dug it out the next day and finished the whole song.

"This guy in Houston had just started a studio and he said he'd let me make some records for free, just to try the place out. We recorded 'Slipping Around' and mailed it to Columbia; by then I was producing myself. Columbia came out with it on just one press. I wrote 'em and said we were getting a lot of requests, so they'd better put it on more than one press. They never did. Margaret Whiting and Jimmy Wakely knew it was a great song, and they covered us on it. After that, Columbia went to work, but of course then it was too late. I did sell half a million on it, but Whiting and Wakely got the million-seller."

"Slipping Around," the first big cheatin' song, broke a lot

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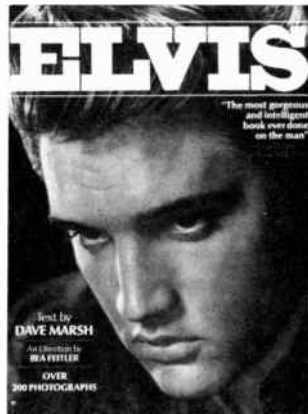
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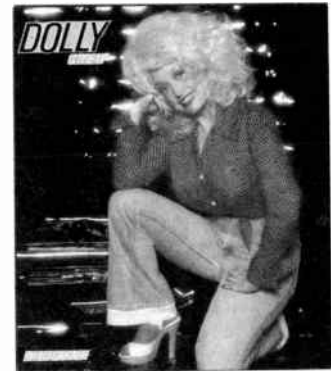
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of ground. "I thought at first that the words weren't clean enough to get on the radio," says Floyd. "I found out later it was censored on the *Lucky Strike Hit Parade*. It was because of the line 'You're tied up with someone else, and I'm all tied up too.' Gordon Baxter over in Port Arthur wouldn't play that part, but he'd play it up to the bridge, until that line, then he'd have a bunch of fire engine soundtracks comin' in and that kind of noise. The more he'd do that, the more people would wanna hear the whole thing. In those days, people didn't buy records much anyhow; the jukebox operators were buying all the records. You could get away with a lot more on the jukeboxes than on the radio, so I'd always figured that song for a jukebox hit."

**I**n 1950, Floyd Tillman was making pretty decent money. He'd done his share of roaring and though his life on the road hadn't been as debilitating as many others' had, he was still tired. After paying what he considered to be an outrageous amount of taxes that year, he sat down and wrote "I Don't Care Anymore." He recorded the song, watched it start climbing the charts, and promptly quit his own band. Since then he's played for charity more often than for a fee, though if a promoter goes to the trouble of tracking him down, he'll take the booking.

"I remember having dinner with Hank Williams in Houston one night not too long before he died," Floyd says. "He was feeling pretty bad. I said, 'Hank, why don't you be like me and retire? Then you can just play when you want to and write songs. You shouldn't work every night, because the pace will kill you. It's fun for a while, but it wears you out, makes an old man out of you quick.' And Hank said, 'Floyd, I just can't turn down \$600 a night.'" He shakes his head ruefully and snorts. "\$600 a night..."

After his retirement, Floyd made a few trips to Nashville to play the Opry. He even lived there briefly, and cut an album for Chet Atkins. "But I guess I just never was ambitious enough to pursue Nashville. I was always pretty happy with what I was doing," he says. "If I was more ambitious, I would have gotten an agent and manager, but I got to thinking that if I did that, I wouldn't own myself. They'd own me. And I always managed to live, never was hungry. Never made a million dollars, but never did think too much about it. I just enjoyed life too well the way it already was."

In 1960, he bumped into Frances again in Houston. She'd been single about ten years, having previously married and divorced the same man twice. Floyd, after three wives, had also been single about ten years. On this meeting, they discovered mutual interests in meta-

physics, reincarnation and the teachings of Edgar Cayce. Before long, they were married.

"He had always fascinated me," Frances explains happily. "I just thought he was a little bit different, and he *has* been different. I learned a lot from Floyd. I used to be very materialistic; in fact, sometimes I have to fight it now, because that's a basic character trait. But he is a true-blue man and not materialistic at all. I think he sets a good example for people that way. I also used to be a fanatic about something like housecleaning, really too fanatic for him. All this because of my strict middle-class background. But seriously, Floyd could be happy living in a tent."

Actually, early in the marriage, they used to travel most of the time, living

nowhere in particular. For a few years, they practically lived in boats up and down the East Texas coastline. But when they got tired of boats, they just got rid of them. The same thing happened to the airplane Floyd once owned: Who needs that kind of stuff?

For the last twelve years, they've lived in the Austin area. Floyd retains close ties with Houston. He plays Gilley's regularly, cut an album with Mickey that's on sale at the club, and publishes his new songs through the Gilley organization. When he's not writing, he does some fishing, while Frances tends to her gardening. It is one version of the good life.

Floyd Tillman remains his own man, and that's why, much as he'd like the recognition, the CMA Hall of Fame award would still be just gravy. ■



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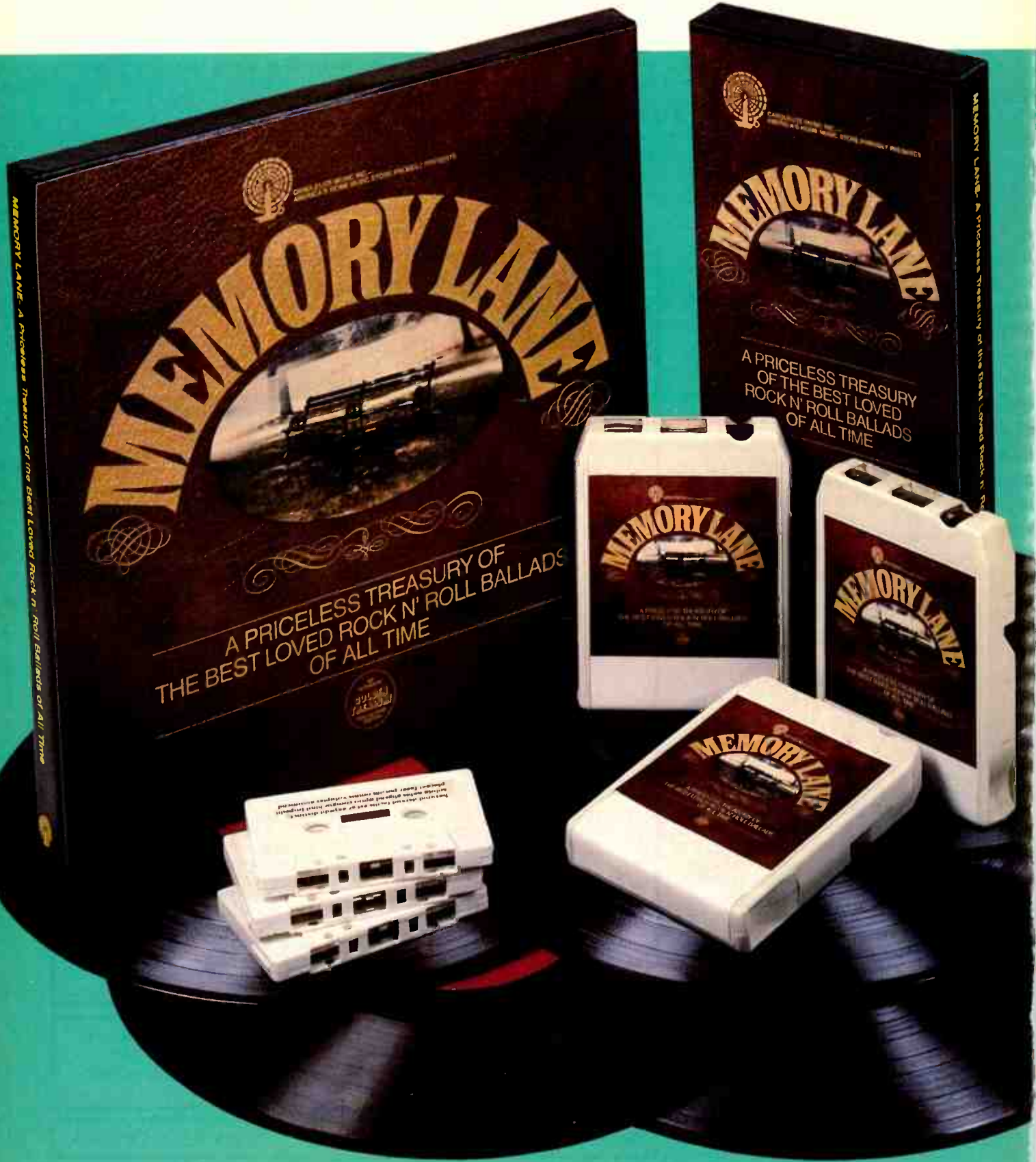
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# Be A Country Star!!





Dear County Music Magazine

You have asked me to right on how to git in good ole country music to help young people who aint stars yet. It aint easy but then it aint all that hard either. Here are some points that you gotta do to make yourself like Johnny Cash, Hank Snow, Del Reeves and of course yours truly the ole Roadhog.

No. 1 Dress Good. You have noticed that ole Johnny and me wear black suits and so does Sunny James. Besides they dont show dirt as bad.

No. 2 Sing Good Songs. People dont like songs they cant dance too. Our most best song is Mama Dont Allow No Giitar Pickin in here. On this won Wichita plays 2 instrumants. He starts out on the electric, lays her down and then plays the flattop. This always ceases to stop the show. Red and Wesley likes the ballards but people aint all that crazy about slow songs. And then Ed Jim Brown is a slow singer.

No. 3 Keep Yourself Up and be Clean. No body can play and sing country music with long hair. Waylen Jenkins has got long hair and you cant hear all of his words sometimes and his band is beatnicks and rock and roll. Kris Krisjefferson has longer hair and you cant hear any of his words at all. Eddie Arnnull aint got long hair.

No. 4 Be Funny. Everybody likes a good joke. Hears a good joke you can use. There was a chicken when you waved a red flag at her she layed a red egg. When you waved a white flag at her she layed a white egg. When you waved a blue flag at her she layed a blue egg. But Wichita ruint her. He wave a United Staes Americun flag at her and she stripped her gears. Git it?

No. 5 Be Showmanship. Always take your hat off when you bow!

No. 6 Be Courteous. Dont never tune when somebody else is singing. Dont never blow your nose on stage or in front of a woman. Dont drink and smoke to much in front of your fans. Always pay your band right after the dance. Dont rift in the micaphone.

No. 7 Play Country Music Instrumants. Pianos and drums and bugles aint country music instrumants. Pianos is alright in Church but Charlie Ritts, the white Fox if he wants to sit down ought to be playing a steel guitar. He is so fisticated sometimes he sounds like rock and roll and I wished Johnny Cash hadn't have used bugles on Ball of Fire.

No. 8 Dont Get the Big Head. The Stafford Brothers have got the big head. After they got me started now they wont give me there home phone numbers. I got the home phone numbers of some country music stars. They aint got the big head and I dont think they would mind if I gave out there numbers. Just to show you hears some I got,

Bill Andrews - Zip code 615 788-1792

Conroy Titty - Zip code 405 647-3069

Glen Camel - zip code 223-766-3851

Tom T. Hill - zip code 615 947 0909 - If you dont find him here call Tooties Orchard Longe 478-1846.

Mel Tillus - zip code 615-784-3896 - If you dont find him either call Tooties Orchard Longe again.

Roger Miller - I aint got his home numer but I guess you can find him at King on the Road Hotel in Nashville Tennessee, Music City USA Home of the Grand ole Opra

My phone numer is 728-4739 if you want Lester Roahog Moran and his Cadillac Cowboys for your dance, civil affairs, or country music shows you kin call me. Dont call me during the day on the thrid week of each month cause I work swingshift down at the plant and thats my week to work grave yard.

your Truly  
Lester Moran  
The ole Roadhog

Mity Fine, mity fine!!! Ole Roadhog back hear agin.  
 Aint it hot at the Top?? Hears somethin yall will  
 appreehiate, what them Mercury Music Record people  
 rit about Yors Truely an the Boys.

#### HENRY "RED" VINES



Henry "Red" Vines is the ladies man of the group. He was born 37 years ago to foster parents and spent his early years learning the music trade. He plays rhythm guitar and a little banjo. Red has played with humorous bands. Among some of the more famous ones, Bo Bradley and the All Star Wildcats, Ramblin' Ray and the Ranch House Boys, and Woody Burns and the Gospel Flames. Woody once said of Red, "If Red was the last guitar player on earth, I'd hire him."

Red is not married and has two children, Teddy and Doyle Vines. Pitching horseshoes and do-it-yourself projects are Red's hobbies. His favorite color is white and his favorite pastime is listening to records. His favorite singer is the Wilburn Brothers. Red's greatest ambition is to buy a new car.

#### "WESLEY" W. REXRODE



Wesley was born to normal parents when he was very young. Wesley was educated at the Union State Detention Home for boys and received two full years and one black Sunday of high school at the Frank Mull Reformatory for Men. (He also received two years once for women.) Wesley learned his musical prowess from a "roommate" during one of those lengthy stays.

Wesley is married to the former "Queenie Ramsey" (sister of Wichita), who was Wesley's connection to his current position as a Cadillac Cow-

boy. Wesley has often said of Queenie, "If it hadn't been for Queenie, I wonder where I'd be today?"

Wesley's pet peeve is unmarked police cars. His favorite color is chrome. His favorite singer is Robert Mitchum. His favorite food and comedian is Jimmy Dean and sausage. His favorite song is "The Girl Who Invented Kissing," the old Hank Snow classic. His hobbies include making billfolds and license plates.

Wesley and Queenie reside in a temporary residence in Rainbow Valley. When asked his one ambition in life, Wesley confided, he's always wanted one of those 19" color tvs.

#### LESTER "ROADHOG" MORAN



Lester Moran was born 49½ years ago in a farm house in the United States. When Lester was only 23 years old his father left home, along with his moth-

er. Lester was taken in by a wino uncle who taught Lester all he knew about the fiddle. To this day, Lester has never had a lesson, or learned one. When Lester was only 33 his uncle left home, along with his aunt, and Lester knew this could only mean one thing; he was being called into Country Music. Lester found work at the Hogan County shoe factory. By day, he was a mild mannered foreman, by night an ambassador of Country Music.

Lester's hobbies are watching wrestling and roller derby on tv, and sucker fishing. He lists his favorite food as sardines and crackers and mashed potatoes with gravy. His favorite color is green and his favorite singer, of course, Lee Moore, of

course. Lester is married to the former Ruby Lee Armstrong, whom he met while they were in service. They have one child, Ethel Renee. They reside in a semi-modest prefab cottage bungalow just outside of Rainbow Valley close to Lester's work. Lester's greatest ambition in life is to meet and shake hands with Doug Kershaw because as Lester says, "It takes one to know one."

#### RAYMOND "WICHITA" RAMSEY, JR.



Wichita grew up in a musical family. His fondest memories are of playing in the family band at church socials, parties, and square dances. Wichita boasts that his father played four instruments, upright bass, electric bass, electric guitar and flat top guitar. His mother played accordion and his sister played around.

When his family retired from the business due to public demand, Wichita joined up with Lester and formed one of the most sought after duets in the history of Rainbow Valley. Wichita, the original member of the Cadillac Cowboys, passes his many leisure hours playing pinball machines and Kilroy pool. His favorite color is black, because of his favorite actor "Lash La Rue." His favorite food is hot dogs with mustard and plenty of onions.

Wichita's greatest ambition is to learn to play all the chords in "Whispering." Wichita lives at home with his mother and enjoys wearing western clothes. Wichita's favorite all around entertainer is Buck Owens of whom Wichita says, "Nobody writes a song like old Buck." ■

1A TITLE OF PUBLICATION COUNTRY MUSIC 1B PUBLICATION NO 441-890 2 DATE OF FILING 3/6/84 3 FREQUENCY OF ISSUE BIMONTHLY 3A NO. OF ISSUES PUBLISHED ANNUALLY 6 3B ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION PRICE \$11.97 4 COMPLETE MAILING ADDRESS OF KNOWN OFFICE OF PUBLICATION 450 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10016 5 COMPLETE MAILING ADDRESS OF THE HEADQUARTERS OF GENERAL BUSINESS OFFICES OF THE PUBLISHER SAME 6 FULL NAMES AND COMPLETE MAILING ADDRESS OF PUBLISHER, EDITOR, AND MANAGING EDITOR PUBLISHER Russell D. Barnard, 450 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10016 EDITOR Same MANAGING EDITOR Same 7 OWNER (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a partnership or other unincorporated firm, its name and address, as well as that of each individual must be given. If the publication is published by a nonprofit organization, its name and address must be stated. FULL NAME Silver Eagle Publishers COMPLETE MAILING ADDRESS 450 Park Avenue South, N.Y., N.Y. 10016

Mr. William H. Peck, Jr. Prentiss Non Martial Trust c/o Peck, Sprague & Poor P.O. Box 239 Oyster Bay, NY 11771 Mr. Adrian Keller 145 Central Park West Apt #11CC New York, NY 10023 Mr. Werner Sonn Henri Stern Watch Agency 10 Rockefeller Plaza New York, NY 10020 Mr. Alexander McFarren 1130 Park Avenue New York, NY 10028 Mr. Ralph J. Weiger Sand Spring Road Mt. Vernon, N.J. 07976 Mr. David Rosow Moore & Mungler, Inc. 140 Sherman Street Fairfield, Conn. 06430 Mr. Leonard Boehner Morris & McVeigh 767 Third Avenue New York, New York 10017 The Emjack Holding Co. 116 East 68th Street New York, New York Mr. Barry Traub The Boulder Company 243 Vallejo Street San Francisco, CA 94111 Mr. Russell D. Barnard 145 E. 74th St., New York, N.Y. 10021 Mr. Bahman Khosrovani 1619 Third Avenue New York, New York Mr. Paul Glen 1216 Black Rock Trail Scottsdale, Ariz. 85253 Mr. Henry C. B. Lindh North Rock Ridge Greenwich, Conn. 06830 Mr. John Bucher Stires & Co. 130 East 40th Street New York, NY 10016 Mr. Malcolm G. Chace III Wanskuck Company 304 Pearl Street Providence, Rhode Is. 02907 Mr. Martin McNeil 345 79th Street Brooklyn, New York 11209 Mr. Robert Wilkis Lazard Freres & Co. One Rockefeller Plaza New York, New York 10020 Mr. John D. Archbold Foxlease Farm Upperville, VA 22176 Ms. Bertha Younkins 508 Woodlands Avenue Grove City, PA 16127 Mr. Milton J. Block, Jr. 235 East 22nd Street New York, New York 10010 Mr. John H. French II 71 East 71st Street New York, New York 10021 Mr. Peter E. Bronstein Bronstein, Vanveen & Bronstein 400 Madison Ave. New York, NY 10017 Mr. Seth B. French P.O. Box 314 Locust Valley Long Island, NY 11560 Ms. Ellen Mercer French 116 East 68th Street New York, NY 10021 Mr. Richard Metz 580 Park Avenue New York, New York 10021 Mr. Michael Weatherly 1036 Harbor Road Southport, CT 06490 Mr. Byam Stevens, Jr. Stillman, Maynard & Co. 61 Broadway New York, New York 10006 Ms. Lydia Foote c/o Leonard Boehner Morris & McVeigh 767 Third Avenue New York, New York 10017 Mr. John R. Winterbotham 1 East Schiller Street Chicago, Ill. 60610 Mercer Investment Co. 230 Park Avenue New York, New York 10169 Mike Michaelson 135 East 71st St. New York, N.Y. 10021

8 KNOWN BONDHOLDERS, MORTGAGEES, AND OTHER SECURITY HOLDERS OWNING OR HOLDING 1 PERCENT OR MORE OF TOTAL AMOUNT OF BONDS, MORTGAGES OR OTHER SECURITIES None

10 EXTENT AND NATURE OF CIRCULATION	AVERAGE NO COPIES EACH ISSUE DURING PRECEDING 12 MONTHS	ACTUAL NO COPIES OF SINGLE ISSUE PUBLISHED NEAREST TO FILING DATE
A TOTAL NO COPIES (Net Press Run)	306 165	324 861
B PAID CIRCULATION		
1 Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors and counter sales	None	None
2 Mail Subscription	304 023	322 168
C TOTAL PAID CIRCULATION (Sum of 10B1 and 10B2)	304 023	322 168
D FREE DISTRIBUTION BY MAIL, CARRIER OR OTHER MEANS SAMPLES, COMPLIMENTARY, AND OTHER FREE COPIES	594	687
E TOTAL DISTRIBUTION (Sum of C and D)	304 617	322 855
F COPIES NOT DISTRIBUTED		
1 Office use, left over unaccounted spoiled after printing	1 548	2 006
2 Return from News Agents	None	None
G TOTAL (Sum of E, F1 and 2—should equal net press run shown in A)	306 165	324 861

11 I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete. Russell D. Barnard, Publisher

# TOP 25

1. **Alabama:** *Roll On*
2. **George Strait:** *Right Or Wrong*
3. **Willie Nelson:** *Without a Song*
4. **Ricky Skaggs:** *Don't Cheat in Our Hometown*
5. **Lee Greenwood:** *Somebody's Gonna Love You*
6. **The Oak Ridge Boys:** *Deliver*
7. **Charly McClain:** *The Woman in Me*
8. **Kenny Rogers:** *Eyes That See in the Dark*
9. **Tom Jones:** *Don't Let Our Dreams Die Young*
10. **Merle Haggard:** *That's the Way Love Goes*
11. **Deborah Allen:** *Cheat the Night*
12. **The Statler Brothers:** *Today*
13. **Earl Thomas Conley:** *Don't Make It Easy for Me*
14. **Janie Fricke:** *Love Lies*
15. **Exile:** *Exile*
16. **Gary Morris:** *Why Lady Why*
17. **Hank Williams, Jr.:** *Man of Steel*
18. **John Conlee:** *In My Eyes*
19. **Dolly Parton:** *The Great Pretender*
20. **Crystal Gayle:** *Cage the Songbird*
21. **T.G. Sheppard:** *Slow Burn*
22. **Eddie Rabbitt:** *Greatest Hits, Volume II*
23. **Merle Haggard and Willie Nelson:** *Pancho and Lefty*
24. **Alabama:** *The Closer You Get*
25. **Mickey Gilley:** *You're Really Got a Hold on Me*

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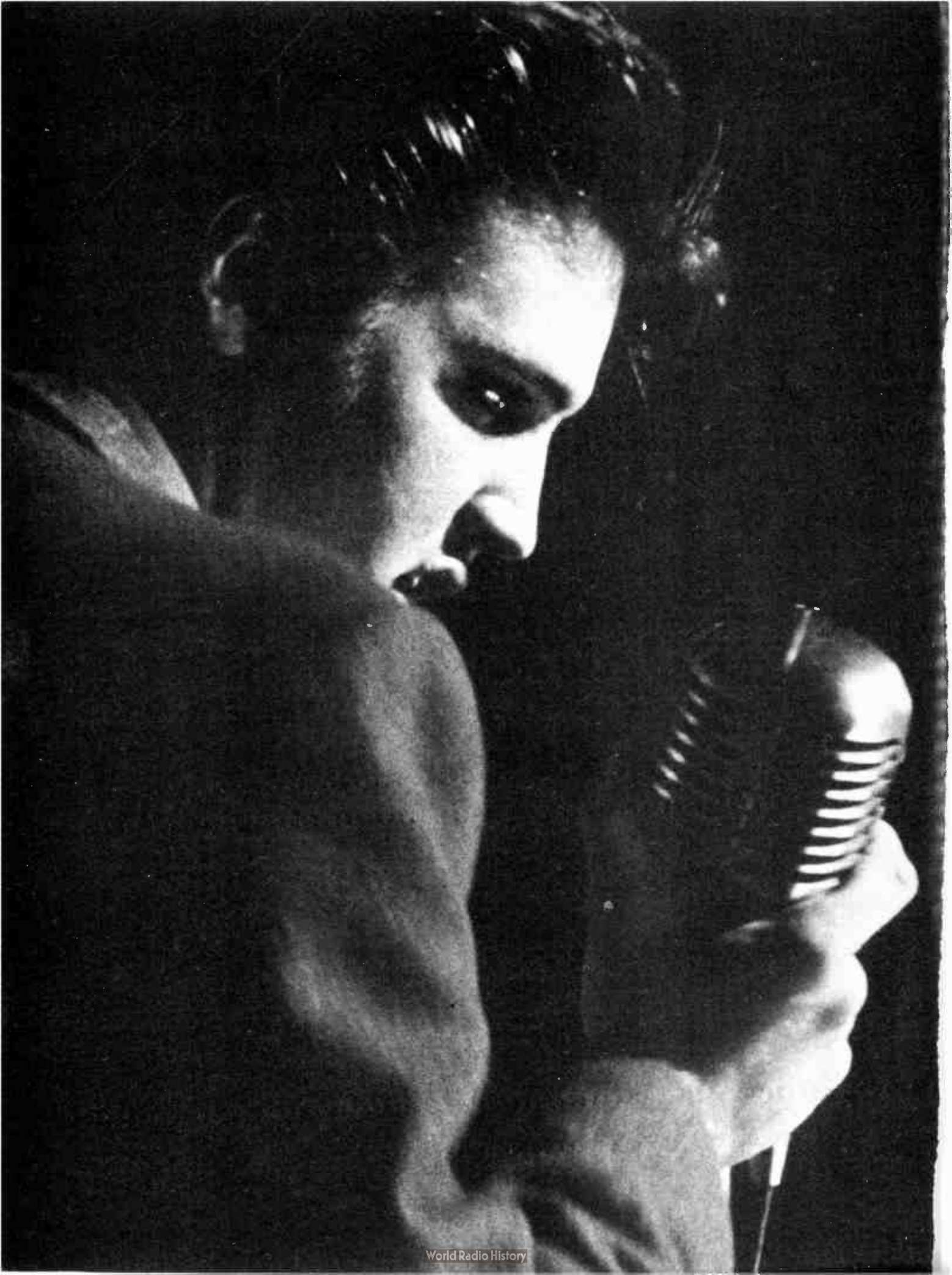
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# Record Reviews

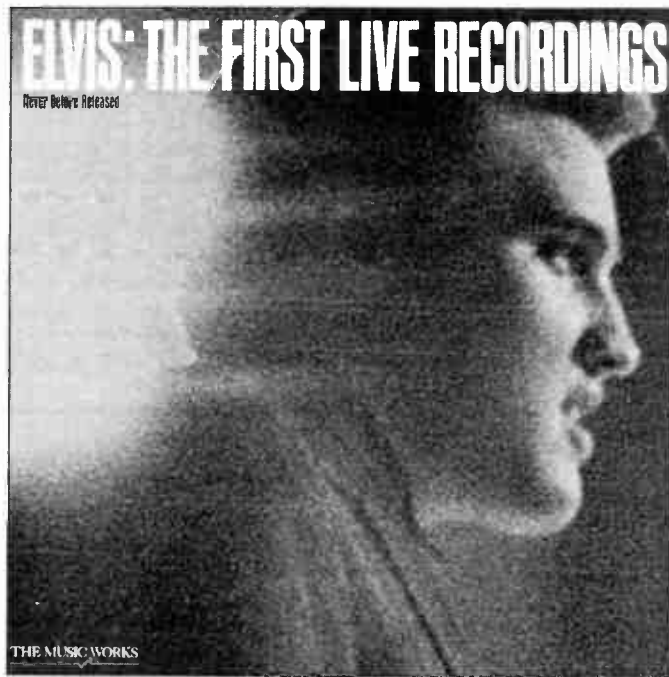
## Elvis: The First Live Recordings

The Music Works Label  
Jem Records, PB 3601

This mini-album contains five previously unreleased Elvis tracks recorded live in 1955-56 at the *Louisiana Hayride*, in Shreveport, Louisiana. I knew it would happen. I just knew it. One of these days, if I kept on writin' about pop music, it was almost inevitable. There are just too many of them and too few of us, so, eventually, somebody was gonna hand me one of 'em: "A Posthumous Relic of the King!" Another one! They would do it formally, you know, like it was a splinter of the True Cross, expecting me to go "AAAAAH," like when the Roman Candles go off on the Fourth of July.

And, of course, just to delay the moment of truth, I'd agree to review the darned thing, and there I'd be. Trapped. Out in the open. Exposed to ridicule. Because, after all the years of narrow escapes, all that "hillbilly reality," and "rock-and-roll-time," I was gonna have to admit it straight out, or be a damned hypocrite and pretend to be transported into a state of Graceland at the prospect of one more audience with "Da Kaing," or just beat around the bush . . . like I'm doin' now. Aw, what the hell...

The fact is, I was one of the original fools for rock and roll, and I never *did* like Elvis Presley all that much, and I saw him two or three times in Fort Worth and Dallas around the time these recordings were made during the mid-fifties. I also saw Chuck Berry and Buddy Holly around this time and they are still in my head



like it was last Saturday night, but to tell the truth I remember Johnny Trash (nee Cash) a lot better than I remember Elvis—or remember him fondly, I guess. I *do* remember the hair, especially, which was impressive, and the clothes (Pink! Black! Drape! Flare!) which, need I say, were stud beyond compare, and listening to these cuts I remember Elvis' and Scotty Moore's guitars being so out of tune that "Hound Dog" sounded like the Chinese National Anthem until "E" started singing.

But beyond that, I never got touched with the magic. I did get a little flash of it, however, years later, seeing the "Jailhouse Rock" movie sequence on TV, but at the time, neither me nor my compadres felt like he'd do to ride the river with. First off, he had this weird brand of narcissistic macho which didn't betray much sense of humor. It was like he'd just discovered what he had between his legs, and it

never occurred to him that he wasn't the only one who did. So, in general, if you were at an Elvis concert it was exactly like you weren't there. He sang all the songs to the girls like he was making an obscene phone-call, and restricted his onstage patter to "in-group" jokes for the benefit of his redneck entourage offstage.

It was clear: you wouldn't steal any horses with this guy, or depend on him to take it to the hoop in a pick-up game—which, of course, ain't no criteria for rock and roll, but it does bring up the point that there is macho and there is macho. And there are performers like Elvis or Tom Jones or Gregg Allman or Lee Clayton and any number of other singer/songwriters who play straight for the women, who come on with a combination of sexual threat and "bruised" sensitivity, as if they're actually competing with the guys in the audience, putting them down, using their position on

stage to take revenge for some imagined schoolyard injustice. The girls go ga-ga and never seem to realize that most of the energy comes from Mr. Macho trying to obliterate the other guys in the audience and become "Momma's perfect little favorite boy." And this was a part of Elvis' appeal from the very first. As a result it was no surprise to me he ended up in Vegas playing for thrill seekers and groupies. Because you can't take that attitude on stage in a rock and roll environment (or a country venue either, for that matter) where the audience expects some kind of rapport with the performer.

In these contexts even the most *my macho* can take a joke, and can take the men in the audience in on it. Buddy Holly, Waylon Jennings, Rod Stewart, B.B. King. . . Burt Reynolds, even. Even Mick Jagger, for Christ's sake, all have an air of self-conscious, self-deprecating irony which humanizes their macho posturing, and moderates it to a degree.

I would be the last person to deny, however, the power of that mixture of sexual threat and little-boy appeal when it is focused, unmoderated, on a female audience by a performer as gifted and charismatic as Elvis was. You can hear it on the last side of this album. The first four tracks were cut before Elvis' appearance on the *Ed Sullivan Show*. The last cut, "Hound Dog," was made after that watermark, to fulfill his contractual obligation to the *Louisiana Hayride* before an audience of ten thousand, not country fans but teenage girls who scream steadily and hysterically throughout the song, almost drowning out the band—which, as luck would have it, is finally in

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tune.

Compared to the desultory "country showcase" pace and audience response on the previous cuts it is a little scary, and it's probably worth the price of the album just for this historic moment, because the screams signal more than a new brand of sexual hysteria—they really mark the end of the Depression, the Second World War, and the post-war readjustment, the liberation of an entire generation of young people who up until that moment have been in effect "under obligation" to their elders, who have "suffered," "sacrificed everything" so their kids can have a brave new world they don't necessarily want. And is there a simpler or more straight-forward way of saying "Excuse me" from the guilt of being born too late for war and depression than rock and roll?

—DAVE HICKEY

## Moe Bandy *Motel Matches*

Columbia FC-39275

Call it age, experience, hard-won wisdom. Much as I can admire young new honky tonk heroes like George Strait or John Anderson, they still don't cut as deeply as an old pro like Moe Bandy. Now if only Bandy were given the material these upstarts usually get.

Really, too many of these songs—swelling ballads like "Your Memory Always Finds Its Way Back Home," the fake-flamenco of "In Mexico," the belabored simile of "That Horse That You Can't Ride"—are simply too slight. Bandy does the best that can be expected with such fare, and occasionally he even redeems it, as when he puts just enough swing in his delivery to kick life into "Beauty Lies in the Eyes of the Beholder." But it shouldn't be *that* hard to find ten songs up to his own talents in the first place.

Because when he gets such

material, he goes to town. The title song provides a model for all that is good on this album, with the piano providing momentum, the steel and guitar playing fills that sting and then quickly disappear, the crashing cymbals adding drama, and, over it all, the knowing, well-seasoned vocals of Bandy himself. The song (co-written by producer Blake Mevis and probably inspired by new waver Elvis Costello's tune of the same name) is full of clever wordplays that Bandy puts across effectively, and the way his voice modulates to rhyme "gone" and "dawn" offers a perfect example of perfect country singing. As "Motel Matches" and "It Took a Lot of Drinkin' (To Get That Woman Over Me)" both demonstrate, Bandy still knows how to stretch a word out in the middle of a line, or snap one off at the end.

The latter is the kind of nothing-fancy song he does best, a morose, this-is-how-I-lost-her tale of woe built around the simple declaration "She never turned a bottle up/And I never turned one down." Or how about "Don't Start Me Cheatin' Again," which gets right down to the emotional

dynamics of lust, infidelity and guilt when a mournful fiddle echoes the lines, "I want to be good/But bein' good to you is a sin."

That's the Moe Bandy there should be more of, because that's him at his most masterful. This happens often enough to make the album largely satisfying, even if it does sometimes lack the hard edge of his earlier work. When Bandy first surfaced a decade ago with his then-unfashionable honky tonk, he sounded like a stubborn Texas boy with the right idea. In retrospect—in light of the rise of Strait, Anderson, *et al*, and the rejuvenation of George Jones—he sounds more like a prophet. —JOHN MORTHLAND

## The Everly Brothers *Reunion Concert*

Passport 11001

It's been almost eleven years since the Everly Brothers burned out. Problems between them had built up to the point where, it seemed, they were brothers in name only. Something had to give, and it did: In the middle of a concert in

California, Phil banged his guitar onto the stage and walked off, leaving Don to fake his way through the rest of the show. After that, the brothers worked separately. Don was the more active, headquartering in Nashville and making some critically acclaimed albums, but even so he seemed determined to keep a low profile.

Wait a minute; I'm getting ahead of myself here. A lot of you readers may not be familiar with the Everly Brothers and their contribution to American music.

The sons of Ike Everly, one of the Kentucky guitarists whose fingerpicking inspired the late Merle Travis, Don and Phil started singing together in grade school. They sang on local radio shows, developing a close-harmony vocal style based on traditional country duet technique, and in 1955 they recorded some country sides for Columbia. The records were not successful—perhaps because by that time rock and roll had come to stay—but by 1957, when they started recording for the Cadence label, the brothers understood the new music as well as they knew close-harmony country singing.

The results were stunning. "Bye, Bye Love" and "Wake Up, Little Susie," recorded in 1957, began a string of hits which continued for three years. "All I Have to Do Is Dream," "Claudette," and "Bird Dog" topped both the rock and country charts in 1958, and in 1960, having moved to the Warner Brothers label, they hit again with "Cathy's Clown." The Everlys' harmonizing was one of the few overt "hillbilly" elements to succeed within the rock context; they were the only vocal duo to work comfortably in both styles, unafraid of rock but unashamed of their roots. Today, you can hear the gospel sound in the music of the Oaks and the Gatlins, but you can also hear Don and Phil Everly.

Don and Phil have made it up, and once again the results are stunning. This reunion album, recorded live on digital



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equipment at London's Royal Albert Hall last September (and also filmed for a cable TV special) is a real life achievement celebration. They summarize all their hits—"Bye, Bye Love," "Wake Up, Little Susie," "Bird Dog," "Claudette," "When Will I Be Loved," "Take a Message to Mary," "Cathy's Clown," "Be Bop a Lula" and many more—and they also pay tribute to their country roots with three of their childhood favorites ("Lightning Express," and "Put My Little Shoes Away" and "Step It Up and Go") sung with only acoustic guitar accompaniment.

The Everlys have lost not a bit of the vocal power which inspired so many rockers (including neophytes like Carlene Carter's English husband, Nick Lowe, and his Welsh buddy Dave Edmunds), and the maturity and confidence which always characterized their stage presence remains intact. The new performances are true to the originals, but a sharp contemporary edge is added by a tight band led by Don's long-time friend, country/rock guitar virtuoso Albert Lee.

In an era when duet singing is largely unfashionable and fake rockabilly bands are all the rage, it's reassuring to know that Don and Phil have finally put it together again—even if it *did* take eleven years.

—RICH KIENZLE

## The Judds

*The Judds*

RCA Mini-LP MHL1-8515

Every time I'm about to write off the Nashville music industry as a lost cause hopelessly buried beneath layers of polyester, pretense, and pop music pandering, someone like The Judds comes along and blows my well-formulated theory right out of the water. That a new group this fresh and novel, and seemingly so far from the current mainstream, can find their way through the ropes and ladders of the contempo-



rary country music business with their own artistic vision still intact is of course a credit to The Judds themselves, but it also says a lot for the entire industry.

Granted, The Judds—Naomi and Wynonna, a mother-and-daughter team—are a novelty act, and one of those has not come down the musical pike in quite some time, but their music functions on levels much deeper than mere novelty or contrivance. The two of them sing together with strong, flowing harmonies that bristle with energy yet are so tight and precise that they are almost seamless. And while their original vocal style resonates with the gospel, bluegrass, and old-timey country of their ultra-rural Kentucky heritage, the rich, textured maturity and soulfulness of nineteen-year-old Wynonna's voice gives contemporary currency to whatever she sings. Wynonna, the lead singer, includes among those who have influenced her, artists as diverse as contemporary white-blues singer Bonnie Raitt and the Boswell Sisters, a 1930s duet team.

Whether it's a rock-flavored number like Dennis Linde's "Had a Dream for the Heart," or a soulful ballad like Naomi's original "Change of Heart," or a brisk, jazzy piece of work like "Isn't He a Strange One," Wynonna injects each song with her own sultry and deliciously quirky sense of inflection and phrasing. And always, mother Naomi is right there on the mark, backing her up with her own slightly higher-range shadow vocals and harmonies.

Producer Brent Maher's largely acoustic arrangements (which actually evolved from

long hours of informal pre-studio, around-the-kitchen-table practice sessions) are both sympathetic and imaginative. There is an abundance of ringing rhythm and lead guitars, and the cuts are embellished with tasteful, understated Dobro and steel guitar fills with occasional spicings of harpsichord here and there for good measure. Anchored around the fluid drums and bass of Jack Williams and Bobby Ogden, these traditional instruments often combine on songs like "Blue Nun Cafe" and "Had a Dream" to create an effect that is almost swinglike.

All in all, The Judds have come up with some fine music that is as resoundingly fresh and original as it is satisfying. It's the kind of music I thought they'd forgotten how to make in Nashville.

There is, however, one warning that needs to be issued. Although *The Judds* appears to be a traditional full-length album, it is not. Instead it is (and is marketed as such) a new invention of the music biz euphemistically referred to as a "mini-LP." The price is considerably lower than that of an average country album, but so is the number of cuts; there are only six songs here, as opposed to the usual ten. As well as the mere annoyance of having to get up off the sofa twice as often to turn the record over, there is another problem: In The Judds' case six songs are not enough. This mini-LP is sure to leave you hungry for more.

—BOB ALLEN

## Michael Martin Murphey

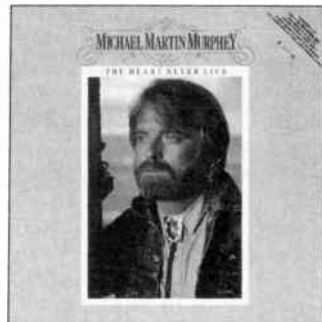
*The Heart Never Lies*

Liberty LT-51150

Sometimes, it's downright embarrassing to watch so many Nashville artists and producers floundering around self-consciously as they strive for that ever-elusive middle-of-the-road sound which will straddle the chasm between

contemporary country and pop playlists. That's why it's such a breath of fresh air to hear someone like Michael Martin Murphey. With his mellow, youthful, rural-urbane vocal style and finely-honed musical instincts, Murphey seems able to bridge the gap without even trying.

Murphey, best known for blockbusters like "Wild Fire" and "What's Forever For," has hit his stride again on *The Heart Never Lies*. His singing is inspired and fully on target, and so is his songwriting; his own new songs and the ones he co-wrote (mostly with producer Jim Ed Norman) display both his gentle, haunting philosophical bent ("Sacred Heart" and "Goodbye Money Mountain") and his flair for a strong story line. His choice of material from other songwriters is also on the money; two of this album's three "outside" songs, Randy



Goodrum's and Dave Loggins' "Maybe This Time" and W. Holyfield's and J. Careaga's "Don't Count the Rainy Days," are particularly outstanding.

The combination of Murphey and Jim Ed Norman, a recent Hollywood-to-Nashville transplant, is also effective. Working in studios in both Nashville and Los Angeles, Norman has come up with intelligent, urbane arrangements which fit Murphey's unpretentious style amazingly well. Things get a little thin when they try to mine the hard-country vein—Murphey sounds like a college boy trying to sound like Lefty Frizzell when he stretches his falsetto too far on "Goodbye Money Mountain," and the canned-and-countrified nostalgia of "Radio Land" sounds like

# Record Reviews

so many other half-baked musical reminiscences that you have to wonder why they bothered—but that's a fine point.

The main point is that *The Heart Never Lies* has a comfortable blend of commerciality and sincerity which is right on target. It's one fine album.

—BOB ALLEN

## Marcia Ball

*Soulful Dress*

Rounder 3078

**W**ell, looky here! Damned if Marcia Ball, Austin-tacous' perennial best-kept-secret in the female vocalist category, hasn't gotten herself a brand new wardrobe. She's gone and traded her calicos and gingham in on a tight skirt with a slit up the side. And as you would figure, she wears it well.

For those of you familiar with her earlier Capitol release, the now-unavailable but unforgettable *Circuit Queen* you may be expecting more of the frilly strings, quiet melancholy and standard-issue Nashville flounce which marked that earlier effort. On *Circuit Queen*, only the soulful and sadly-ignored "Never Been Hurt" really hinted at the fire, a deep rhythm-and-blues-tinged flame, that this woman possesses and delivers regularly on the Austin-to-New Orleans, tacos-to-boudin circuit she calls home.

But as I said, that's all different now. The production on *Soulful Dress* is stripped down to nightclub scale, and the band, her regular touring unit, is all fired up. The material really tells the tale, though, leaning heavily on the Southern bar blues and New Orleans second-line shuffles that make Marcia so tasty live. (Delbert McClinton, step aside for a lady!)

From the outset, the difference in Marcia's style is obvious. On the title track, "Soulful Dress," her husky growl is accented mightily by Austin's Mighty Big Horns

and a cameo appearance by Great-White-Guitar-Hope Stevie Ray Vaughan. Then comes an up-tempo shouter, Bobby Bland's "Made Your Move Too Soon," and then it's time for the real show-stopper, a torchy version of Etta James' classic "I'd Rather Go Blind." On second thought, Marcia's version of Laverne



Baker's "Soul On Fire" might be the show-stopper; both cuts are great. There's also a Dave Bartholomew/James Booker funk number and a Slim Harpo tune, and if that's not enough for you, there are also some fine originals: a lucky-in-love shouter called "My Mind's Made Up," the uproarious "Eugene," and "A Thousand Times," one of those aforementioned New Orleans shuffles which shows just how well Marcia has learned her lessons.

*Soulful Dress* is a marked improvement over her first album in terms of production and material, but I'm still not convinced that Marcia's main asset—a voice that can shake the rafters—has been exposed as fully as it could be. Even so, *Soulful Dress* should remind you just why you go out on a Friday night.

—JOE DIZNEY

## The Maines Brothers Band

*High Rollin'*

Mercury 422-814-985-1M1

**T**he Maines Brothers Band is a Lubbock, Texas institution, with membership passed down through the genera-

tions. Four of the seven members of the band's current edition are from the Maines clan, and several of them once played in Joe Ely's crack band. So it should come as no surprise that a good deal of their first major-label album (they released a few albums independently prior to this) is flat-out West Texas barroom music, full of the kind of guitar/steel interplay that once characterized the Ely band, and cohesive in a way that seems to come naturally to family bands.

Bar-band music *does* have its drawbacks. Lead singer Kenny Maines, for example, has no real style or personality of his own; he adapts himself to the song, rather than vice-versa. On Terry Allen's "Amarillo Highway," Kenny's phrasing is a ringer for that of fellow West Texan Waylon Jennings (which is easy to forgive when you hear his voice pitted against his own lead guitar and Lloyd Maines' steel, with Richard Bowden complementing them both on fiddle), and on the ballads, of which there are a couple too many for my taste, he can sound too much like a Don Williams. And of course, this being 1984, producers Jerry Kennedy and Rick Peoples must have been awfully tempted, working with a band in which everybody sings a little, to make their own version of an Alabama record. A tad too much of that notion seeps through, especially on ballads like "Baby Hold On," but it could have been much worse.

But the criticisms stop right there. It's hard *not* to approve of a band which kicks off its album with a slinky, hilarious blues like "Little Broken Pieces." This slice of woozy morning-after philosophizing on the idiocies of excessive drinking—and we're talking about *serious* drinking here, folks, as well as serious idiocy, conjures up more than a hint of the spirit, if not the precise sound, of Bob Wills. Then there's "Louisiana Anna" with a snakey, Tony Joe White-style swamp beat and some prickly guitar work from Kenny, and there's a likable

enough Elvis rip, "Dixieland Rock," with a quasi-New Orleans rhythm and a jazzy horn arrangement, and there's "Gonna Get Well Tonite." This song, which was written by the same J. Hadley who wrote "Little Broken Pieces" and is about repeating the idiocy all over again, bumps and grinds along to a countrified version of a Bo Diddley beat. All this adds up to a band which appreciates rhythm, a quality so rare in country music today that I give them the thumbs-up on the basis of that and that alone.

It's not encouraging, however, that the only original song on the album—"You Are a Miracle," written by bassist Jerry Brownlow and keyboard man Cary Banks—is also the schlockiest song on the album. I hope that's not a sign of the band's future direction, because *High Rollin'* features enough of the jumping West Texas country which is their heritage to prove that *that's* what they do best.

—JOHN MORTHLAND

## Kathy Mattea

*Kathy Mattea*

Mercury/Polygram 422-818

**K**athy Mattea's debut album for Mercury/Polygram Records is a mixed bag of tunes, obviously recorded to show the artist's wide range. And she shines on all of it. There's everything from "pure country" ("God Ain't No Stained Glass Window," beautifully sung with just one guitar as accompaniment), to "pure pop" ("Somewhere Down the Road," a cover of a Barry Manilow hit.)

The other songs fall into the easy-listening-it-could-go-anywhere category. Two of these were both released as singles recently. "Street Talk," her first single to make the charts, is a country-pop-rock song that catches you from the start. It opens the album, and for a moment I thought I was listening to Lacy J. Dalton. The



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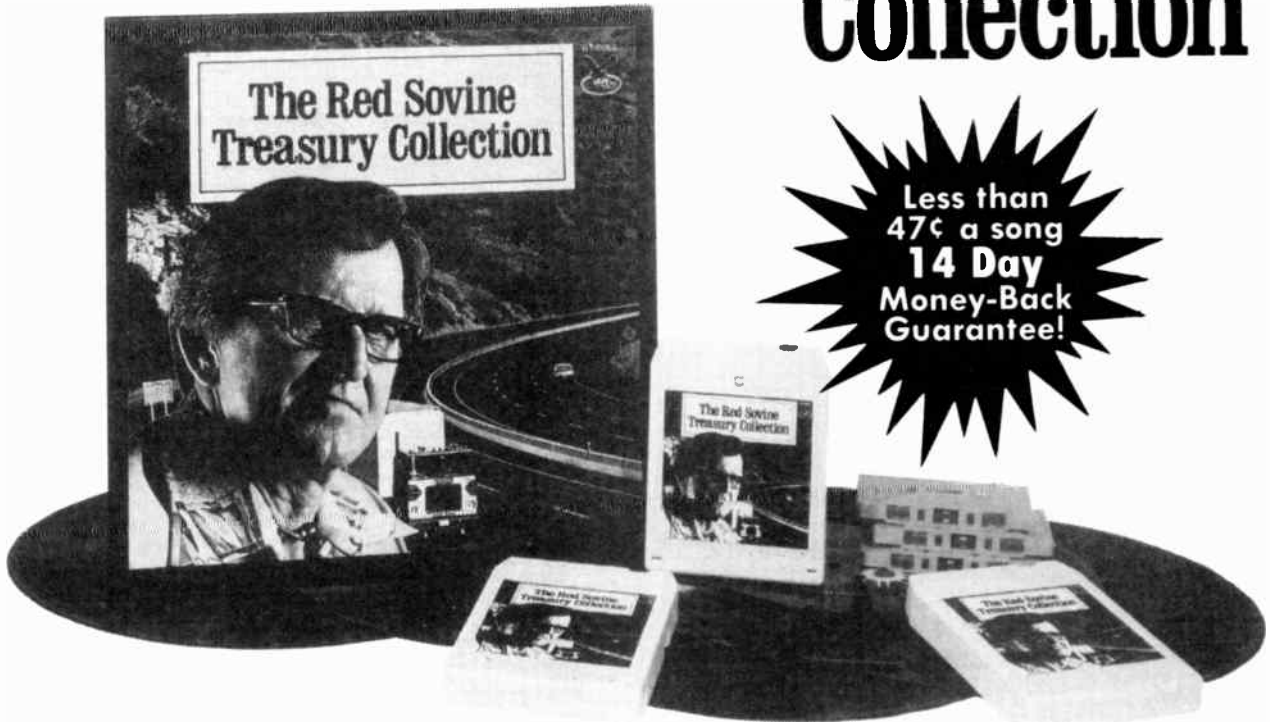
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# Record Reviews

catchy lyrics and Kathy's raspy voice are very reminiscent of Lacy J. But, it is Kathy's own. She grabs the song and throws it back at you.

She's a dead-ringer for Anne Murray on "Someone Is Falling In Love," her second single. At first that bothered me, and I thought, "Oh, she doesn't know who she is, so she's sounding like everyone else." But then I realized that Kathy Mattea sounds believable on all the cuts, whether singing sweet harmonies *a capella* on "Full Time Love," or belting it out on the fully produced "Somewhere Down the Road." On "Back to the Heartbreak Kid" she shows she can tackle everything from low alto to high soprano in just one song. Her background as a demo singer for various publishing houses must have helped there.

But, there is a problem. If this was another place and another time, "God Ain't No Stained Glass Window" would have been released as the single from the album. But, in these days of top 40 radio, singers have to resort to recording tunes that are pleasing to the middle of the road ears. Also, Kathy is billed as a country/pop singer, so her music is going to follow that route.

Who knows, maybe she'll be the next Crystal Gayle or Anne Murray, and if that's what she's aiming for, so be it. The unfortunate part is that we need more singers with Kathy's ability to record more country music. Female pop singers come and go, but female country artists are hard to find.

—ROCHELLE FRIEDMAN

## Gus Hardin *Fallen Angel* RCA CPL1-4937

**F**allen angels? If we're talking fallen angels, let's cut the platitudes. Gus Hardin has the kind of voice true fallen angels should have: rough, torn, ragged and right, the

kind of voice you'd hear in jukebox joints where women sit alone on bar stools and stay there until closing time. She sounds like a female version of Otis Redding Muscle Shoals-bound with a stopover in Nashville.

And therein lies the problem. Gus Hardin has the kind of voice that could sing you the Brooklyn phone directory and



make it sound convincing, but she requires material as powerful and honest as her voice. With it, she's formidable; without it...

On Gus Hardin's mini-album debut last year, she was given six great songs and she delivered six great vocal performances, including a spine-chilling cover of Otis Redding's "I've Been Loving You too Long" (a song her Muscle Shoals-based producer Rick Hall, knows as if it were yesterday all over again).

But something went wrong. While her first single had no trouble deftly cracking the country Top Ten, the next releases showed less momentum. Somehow, despite her wonderful freight-train voice, despite a fine selection of wrenching country-blues-rock material, Hardin's debut didn't quite live up to expectations. On the charts, at least.

There's always that danger, of course, with a genuine talent such as this. We aren't talking about some "silver-throated songbird" here; we're talking about a gutsy, slightly abrasive, often intimidating vocal presence. In any other kind of music, Gus Hardin would be right at home; in country, she's different, and thank God for it.

But in an industry where

success is measured by your last three-minute Top Ten hit, and where too much individuality can be alarming, loss of momentum so early in the game can provoke revisions in the game plan.

This time around, therefore, the singer has been given more commercial songs and arrangements. There's more uptempo stuff, more identifiable hooks on which to peg catchy choruses, more material that sounds as if it might have been aimed squarely toward radio. Hardin's overall performance is once again superb; she belts, swaggers, and defies with a cutting edge when tears are only a breath away, coming closest to the emotional depth of her first album with the fine ballad, "Still Hold On" (there's just no touching her on those ballads). And of course Rick Hall's production is, as always, fiesty, funky and fluid. His gritty Muscle Shoals instrumentation keeps things from getting *too* orchestrated and polished.

For listeners to whom Gus Hardin is an acquired taste, *Fallen Angel* will indeed be more palatable than her previous record. But for those who find themselves fascinated by her uncanny ability to combine all sorts of musical forms into one let-me-tear-your-soul-out style, it may prove just a little tame.

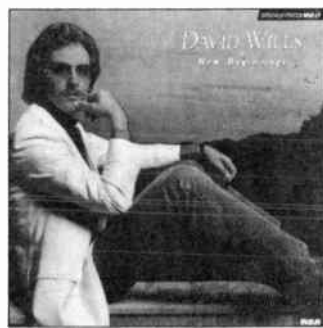
—KIP KIRBY

## David Wills *New Beginnings* RCA Mini-LP MHL1-8516

**I**n 1974, David Wills accomplished a near-impossible feat when his first single, "There's a Song on the Jukebox," streaked up into the Top Ten. Some months later, he duplicated this feat with another single, "From Barrooms to Bedrooms." After that, his Epic records began to fall farther down the charts; he

switched to United Artists but fared no better, though he continued releasing records almost every year.

All this is merely to emphasize that this excellent performer is no unknown, no overnight arrival to country music. He's been writing it and singing it for years. Now, finally, with the entrance of RCA and producer Blake Me-



vis, Wills' general anonymity should be replaced by proper recognition.

Wills looks good, sounds good, and wears well with repeated listenings. There's a sensitivity and integrity about his performances, and he gives honest readings to his lyrics (including the three songs he co-wrote for *New Beginnings*, "Miss Understanding," "Too Good to Be Blue," and "Lady in Waiting"). That's fortunate, since one of Blake Mevis' main strengths as a producer is his ability to keep arrangements clean, simple, and sparkling. Often, there is an acoustic feeling to his productions despite the customary contingent of electric fills, and this album is no exception.

"New Beginnings" is an apt title for an album by an artist with such a long track record but so little public recognition, and *New Beginnings* is a great way to get acquainted with him. It's one of RCA's much-touted six-cut "Mini-LPs" designed to give fans a chance to sample a "new artist" without risking the price of a full album. This technique may or may not work for David Wills, but I hope it does. He's good, and he deserves the break.

—KIP KIRBY

# Buried Treasures

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

by Rich Kienzle

**M**ost Mickey Gilley fans are aware that he began his career as a rockabilly in the style of his cousin, Jerry Lee Lewis. Many may not have heard Gilley in this incarnation, however, so *Down the Line* (Charly CR 30192) is a welcome sampling of his mid-Sixties stints on Paula and Astro records. The mix of rock and country material is much like Jerry Lee's late Sixties repertoire, and though the connection is obvious, most of this material stands on its own. His version of the Killer's "Down the Line" is well-focused and explosive, as are his covers of Dale Hawkins' "Suze Q," Charlie Rich's "Mohair Sam" and Jerry Lee's "Breathless." The material on the flip side is more country oriented, but it too is excellent.



**L**ike so many of the great country artists of the Forties and Fifties, Hank Snow does not have a recording contract today. A hassle with RCA prevented him from making it to a phenomenal fifty years with the same label. And to make things worse, much of the classic material he recorded between 1950 and 1954 (when eighteen of his records hit the Top Ten and four of them went to Number One) is no longer available.

Britain's Detour Records, which issued the Pee Wee King set we reviewed a couple of issues back, has partially filled that void with *Just Keep A Movin' with Hank Snow* (33-004), a beautiful compilation of sixteen tracks recorded between 1950 and 1955. Most of the numbers are B-sides, and only a few, like "Music Makin' Mama from Memphis" and "Cryin', Waitin', Hopin'" charted. Nonetheless, they are an engaging cross-section of Snow at his peak. The sparkling innocence of his music is cap-

tured in the effervescent "Just Keep A' Movin'." "Chattin' With a Chick in Chattanooga" and "Can't Have You Blues."

Snow's exquisite, graceful Jimmie Rodgers-based vocal style comes across beautifully on "The Bill Is Falling Due," "I Can't Control My Heart" and several other ballads, and the sparse accompaniment of the Rainbow Ranch Boys and Hank's own shimmering acoustic guitar leads are the perfect frame for his voice. The Latin aspects of his music aren't ignored, either. "Cuba Rumba" and "Caribbean" represent that unique facet of the Snow sound. Hank Taylor's liner notes aren't terribly revealing, but the album includes complete discographical data.

**T**he Lefty Frizzell revival continues. Although the promised Bear Family boxed set is not yet available, Britain's Flyright Records, which has compiled 35 albums' worth of blues, Cajun, country and rockabilly material from the

vaults of Crowley, Louisiana recording magnate J.D. Miller, has found still more Lefty tracks on the shelves. In early July of 1952, Lefty was staying at J.D.'s home during a tour, and decided to work on some songs he planned to record in Fort Worth later in the month. Hence the three demos, recorded with his road band, which show up on Flyright's *Honky-Tonkin' With Lefty Frizzell* (Fly 596), an anthology of various artists.

The three tracks are rough and tentative (Lefty blows the intro to "Send Her Here to Be Mine"), but his voice comes across well on "Lost Love Blues" and "That's Me Without You," the latter one of his better early ballads. Bruce Bastin's liner notes give the complete low-down on his wild stay in Crowley.

The rest of the album runs the gamut in both style and quality. The rare original 1949 recording of "It Wasn't God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels" (a Miller composition)

by an obscure female singer named Al Montgomery is included. Though incredibly rare, her performance is inferior to Kitty Wells' classic 1952 version. The other major name on the album is Tommy Hill, a Gusto records executive and onetime sideman who recorded some mildly interesting sides for Miller in the Fifties. The Frizzell material alone makes this album worthwhile.

**I** still wish that Columbia was doing more with their Bob Wills material, but perhaps there's hope. Columbia Special Products just re-issued *The Best of Bob Wills, Vol. II* (CSP P16803). The album was originally issued in the Fifties on the budget-priced Harmony label and has commanded huge prices at collectors' auctions for years. One of the most attractive things about the collection is its emphasis on the wartime and post-war Playboys, some of the best bands Wills ever led. Literally every song on this set is a treasure (some haven't been available for years, except on the Time-Life Wills collection), including the original "Home in San Antonio," "Goodbye, Liza Jane," "My Confession," "Texas Playboy Rag," "New Spanish Two Step," and the incredible blues instrumental "Let's Ride with Bob," done with his superb 1942 big band. No question about it: These are some of his finest moments on record.

**B**ear Family Records is performing a service in making much of the vast Columbia legacy of Marty Robbins available to the public. In addition to their *Marty Robbins Files* series, they have issued *Rockin' Rollin' Robbins Vol. 1* (BFX 15045) and *Just Me and My Guitar* (BFX 15119). *Rock-*

in' *Rollin' Robbins* covers a variety of up-beat country and flat-out rockabilly material he recorded between 1954 and 1958, and underscores the wide range of his talent. Although he was best known for his ballads, Marty's voice had enough of a bluesy edge to pull off everything on this album, from a stomping version of Bill Monroe's "Footprints in the Snow" to Chuck Berry's "Maybelline." Also included

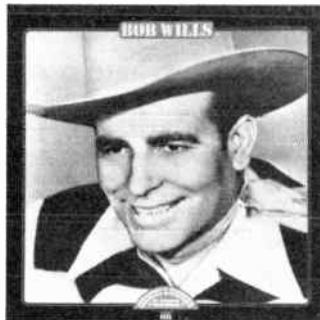
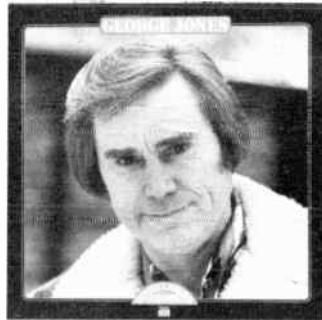
are four unissued tracks, among them the down-home blues "Pain and Misery," featuring bassist Junior Husky and rhythm guitar master Ray Edenton assisting Marty on vocal harmony. His 1954 cover of Elvis' 1954 "That's All Right (Mama)" differs from Presley's version in that while Elvis projected an aura of wild revelation, Marty's version is more polished and calculated, not quite so exciting. On the other hand, he acquits himself superb-

ly on "Long Tall Sally," "Tennessee Toddy," and his wonderful hit recording of "Singin' the Blues."

*Just Me and My Guitar* presents a very different side of Marty. Here he is alone with his acoustic guitar, singing fifteen traditional ballads. Most of these tracks were recorded in 1956, and only four of them were ever released, so we're hearing the bulk of the material for the first time. Marty truly made the most of the

intimate setting; without those hot guitar and fiddle licks, his voice took on an extra richness. His version of "Beautiful Dreamer" is magnificent, and he gave songs like "The Letter Edged in Black" and "The Wreck of the Number Nine" spare, pure treatments in tune with their timeless nature. This is country music as it was originally sung, and it's great that such excellent material is finally seeing the light of day. ■

## The Essential Collector *Bob Wills, Hank Williams, Roy Acuff, George Jones, Tammy Wynette, Willie Nelson, Marty Robbins, Barbara Mandrell, The Carter Family, Flatt and Scruggs, Johnny Cash, Patsy Cline, Loretta Lynn, Dolly Parton and more*



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*Country & Western Classics* consists of fourteen volumes. Each contains forty songs on three record albums (also available on cassettes) and a book. The books alone are worth a good piece of the price. Well-written and nicely illustrated, often with rare or unpublished photographs, the books provide valuable profiles of the lives, music and historical importance of the performers involved.

Rich Kienzle has reviewed individual volumes of the series in *Buried Treasures*, such as the *Hank Williams*, *Marty Robbins*, and *Honky-Tonkin'* sets, indicating that they are outstanding collections, containing not only the major hits of each performer but also many previously unreleased recordings not available anywhere else.

The *Bob Wills* set is also outstanding, especially considering how few of Wills' recordings are available elsewhere, and the book included is quite good.

Also especially good are *George Jones*, *The Carter Family*, *Flatt and Scruggs*, *Roy Acuff* and *Johnny Cash*.

Other sets in the series are *Willie Nelson*, *The Statler Brothers*, *Tammy Wynette*, *The Women* (including Patsy Cline, Kitty Wells, Loretta Lynn, Barbara Mandrell, Dolly Parton, Patsy Montana, Wanda Jackson, Rose Maddox, Wilma Lee Cooper and many more) and *Duets* (including Bill and Charlie Monroe, Lulu Belle and Scotty, the Delmore Bros., Wilma Lee and Stoney Cooper, Carl Butler and Pearl, Jenny Wright and Jim Reeves, the Louvin Bros., Johnny and Jack, Conway and Loretta, the Wilburn Bros., and, of course, George and Tammy)

The quality of the sound on all these volumes is excellent, particularly on the older re-

cordings such as those of the Carter Family. And, considering that the average \$8.98 album has only ten songs these

days, these Time-Life sets containing 40 songs and a book for \$19.95 are something of a bargain. —RUSS BARNARD

### • How To Get These Treasures

If you would like to buy any of the albums mentioned in *Buried Treasures* or *The Essential Collector*, make your check payable to Nashville Warehouse, P.O. Box 236, Hendersonville, Tennessee 37075. (Country Music Society of America members, deduct 10% and include your membership number.)

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### • Buried Treasures

Items from *Buried Treasures* in this issue are available on records only, no cassettes: *Bob Wills, The Best of Bob Wills, Vol. II* (CSP P16803), \$9.98; *Mickey Gilley, Down the Line* (Charly CR 30192), \$9.98; *Marty Robbins, Rockin' Rollin' Robbins, Vol. I* (BFX 15045), \$9.98 and *Just Me and My Guitar* (BFX 15119), \$9.98. (Add \$1.95 postage and handling for one album and \$.95 for each additional album.)

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