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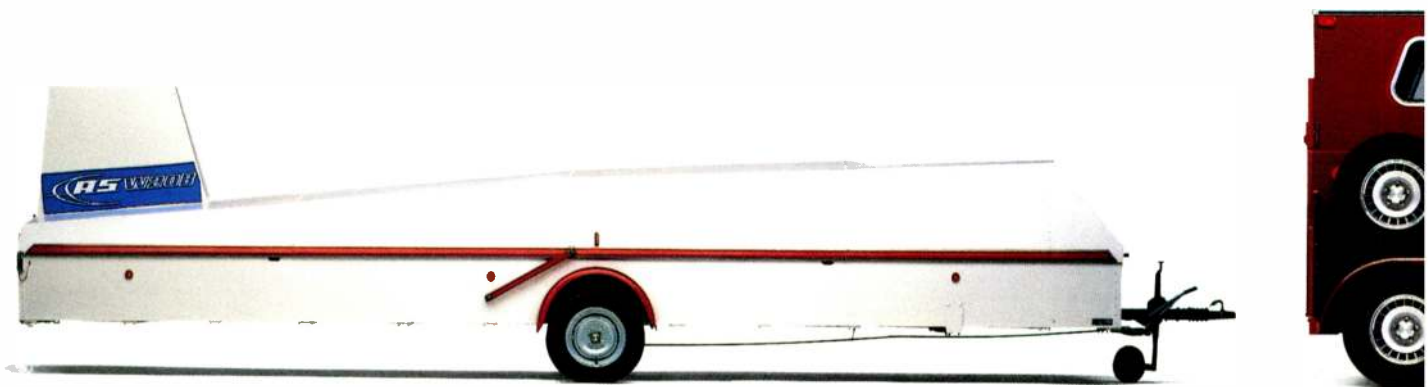
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4 Letters

Readers react to Travis' torso, Williams' soul, Wynette's honesty, Hillman's success and Price's pique. Plus more "Whatever Happened To," responses to reviews and questions about writing songs.

21 People

Cash is honored, so is Acuff. Dolly goes home and Raven finds one. Plus George Strait gets upstaged and Johnny Russell runs for President. Also an update on Grandpa Jones and much more.

by Hazel Smith

34 Rosanne Cash: A Reluctant Star Comes to Terms with Her Talents

by Bob Allen

It's taken time, but Rosanne Cash finally feels comfortable with her place in the music world. And with that, comes an awareness and calm she now takes with her on and off the road.

40 Keith Whitley: New Kid in Town Finally Makes Good

by Bob Allen

Keith Whitley discovered that sometimes having the talent, the record deal and the right songs isn't enough. He tells Bob Allen what it took for him to keep at it and land on top.

43 Jo-El Sonnier: Rockin' Cajun Country

by Bob Allen

His music may be as old as the bayou he comes from, but Jo-El Sonnier says it took many years to get new listeners.

46 Recharging the Oak Ridge Batteries

by Patrick Carr

You knew The Oaks when they were a gospel group and then country-pop superstars. Meet the current, re-vamped Oaks, with a new member and a new outlook on their music.

55 Record Reviews

Some super music from Rodney Crowell, Sweethearts of the Rodeo, Steve Wariner and even Patsy Cline. Eddie Rabbit, Jo-El Sonnier, Reba McEntire and George Strait have new releases. We also hear from newcomers Darden Smith and kd lang.

68 Our First 15 Years: 15th Anniversary Letters

This is it, folks! The last of the letters you wrote to founder, publisher and Editor-in-Chief Russ Barnard with your thoughts and suggestions on the occasion of *Country Music Magazine's* 15th anniversary.

72 Buried Treasures

by Rich Kienzle

If you're looking for early releases of Merle Haggard, Wanda Jackson, The Wilburn Brothers, Asleep At the Wheel and others, you're in luck. Rich Kienzle dug deep and found them.

74 20 Questions with Conway Twitty

by Michael Bane

Lucky Michael Bane got to go to the Cayman Islands to ask Conway Twitty 20 questions.



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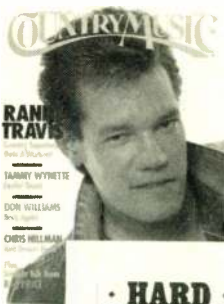
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FOR COWBOYS

Letters



Travis a Triumph

Michael Bane, you've done it again! Another great article. This time it was on my absolute favorite, Randy Travis. The pictures were fantastic (especially of him working out). Randy is so sexy! Keep up the good work.

Sissy Harris
Lithonia, Georgia

Youth Applauds

I got home from school and found the new *Country Music Magazine*. I was so happy to see Randy Travis on the cover! I've loved Randy every since I first heard him. I'm only 12 years old, but I still think he's the best! So thanks very much!

Lana Mae Johnson
Mason, Wisconsin

P.S. I sing country music, and I am always interested to hear what it is like to be a big star. So thanks again!

. . . And Is Inspired

I received my first *Country Music Magazine* in March 1988. At the time I was in a Federal Military Prison. And as I read your magazine, it seemed to give me a better outlook on life, especially when I was reading about Randy Travis. You said he has seen the inside of jail rooms also.

John W. Blair III
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Still Not Satisfied

Thank you, thank you, thank you for the article on Randy Travis. But can't you ask questions about: if he had to face any pressures or drugs or such, trying to make it to the top? And does he have a girlfriend, a family, and what's his idea of the "perfect" woman? Does he ever want to marry and have kids, retire, goals in life. That's the scoop I want, not a lot of chit chat!

Brenda Brooks
Anaheim, California

We had to save something for a future article. — Ed.

Travis Makes the Rounds

Thank you for the article on Randy Travis in the March/April issue. I always take my issues to work with me, and everyone wanted to read about Randy. He was passed around all night.

We love you, Randy, from Latricia, Irene, Lisa Lee, Maxine, Deb. E. and myself. Keep up the good work.

Rose Havel
Silverhill, Alabama

Travis Address, Please

I just wanted to thank Michael Bane for the March/April story on Randy Travis. I think he's the greatest singer to come along since George Jones. I would love to see him in concert. I would like to know if he has a fan club I could join.

I think it's wonderful that the traditional country music is coming back strong. Some of my true favorites are Reba McEntire, George Strait, Dwight Yoakam, Ricky Van Shelton and of course, Randy Travis.

Pam Hartlein
Weatherford, Oklahoma

We got a lot of mail for Randy in response to this feature. His fan club address is — Randy Travis Fan Club; Jill Youngblood; 1601 Allenbrook Dr.; Charlotte, North Carolina 28208. Thanks to all who wrote in. — Ed.

And a Closing Word

Randy is 28, not 26, or at least that's what I heard. Thank you for having the article. This is truly an issue I am gonna keep forever and ever (Amen!).

Angie Grizzle
Alpharetta, Georgia

TAMMY
WYNETTE



It Feels Good
To Feel



Touched by Tammy Wynette

I have just received the March/April issue of your fine magazine. As always I sat and read it from cover to cover. I enjoyed the articles on Randy Travis and Don Williams, The Carter Family and, of course, Hazel. I

must state, however, that the article on Tammy Wynette hit home, and it hit hard.

I was released from a Detox Unit in Grand Rapids, Michigan, the day I received this issue. I have been a songwriter/musician for the past 15 years. I am also an alcoholic and drug abuser at the ripe old age of 29. I wanted to go for the full rehabilitation program, but did not qualify for federal funding. I'm not giving up, however. I will go to Out-Patient Substance Abuse on a self-pay program. The price is little compared to life itself.

It has been a humbling experience for me as I'm sure it has been for all the entertainers I have read about.

Thank you, Tammy Wynette, for being yourself, as well as Waylon, Larry Gatlin and I'm sure scores of other country artists. Thank you, *Country Music Magazine*, for not hiding the fact that we are all just people. People with problems.

J.W. Snider
Scottville, Michigan

Feeling Good About Tammy

It feels good to know that Tammy feels good! Thanks to Patrick Carr and your magazine for presenting an excellent, honest, touching "exposure" of Tammy, the first Lady of Country Music forever. Her openness was both heart-warming and heart-rendering. What a terrific, strong woman she is!

I've seen her in pain on stage, but she always has given the most she can, and her fans continue to give it right back to her. Everyone who knows and respects Tammy should run out and buy her latest album, *Higher Ground*. It's a classic.

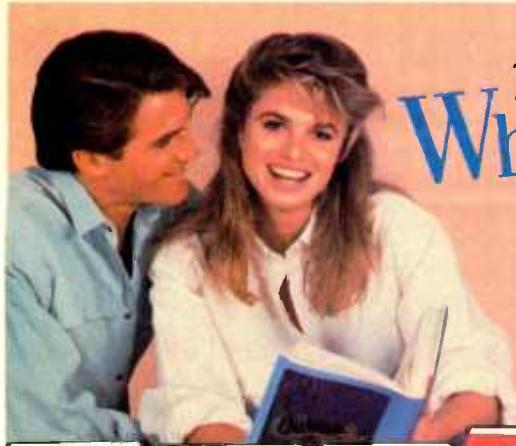
Gary Beck
San Francisco, California

Tammy on Higher Ground

I would like to applaud *Country Music Magazine* and Patrick Carr for the excellent article on Tammy Wynette. It was a pleasure to read such an honest story which gave insight into why so many of our superstars face so many problems in their hectic lives.

During the last few years I've had to be content listening to a few of Tammy's "golden oldies" being played on the radio. Now every day I hear cuts from her album, *Higher Ground*. I hope this is a sign of Tammy's return to the top.

Mark Stocksdale
New Albany, Indiana



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ACM AWARDS

J. Watson Garman of Santa Monica, California, had a grand old time at the recent ACM Awards, and he has the photos to prove it.



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HANK JR.

Starters not Stars For a Change

This is the first letter I have written to a magazine for fear of being stuck in "File 13." I work for Street Music during the day, and I'm an entertainer after normal working hours. I appreciate your magazine very much. I feel it gives me a lot of encouragement.

I feel a lot of people like myself would benefit from seeing an article on someone who is in the process of reaching that goal. Your "superstar" articles are great! But someone who is struggling right now is an average person they could relate to.

Sherry Carlisle
Nashville, Tennessee

Another good idea! Space is precious, so we try to do this in every star article - career turning points, etc. - and on a regular basis in the Newsletter. - Ed.

Hello, Hazel . . . and How About Reviewing Music Videos?

To Hazel Smith: I know I'm not the first to say it, but I'd love to meet you sometime for a nice long chat. Do you ever get to Indy? A late aunt of mine was also named Hazel Smith, and if your gift of gab is anywhere near hers, we'd have a high ole time. Bravo to you for your support of K.T. Oslin. Don't let the "feminist" label scare you, guys. Her lyrics touch nerves shared by all humans.

Does anyone ever review music videos?

In spite of the almost insufferable commercial breaks, chopped-up "spotlight" segments and an occasional clunker of a video, I find myself having CMTV on quite a lot. I have formed a lot of my own opinions about what gets accomplished in what is still a fairly new medium. I'd like to know what some others think.

John R. Reed
Indianapolis, Indiana

We're thinking about it. - Ed.

The Travis/Strait Team

My grandmother and I are writing to you regarding Randy Travis and George Strait. These two entertainers have filled the generation gap between a 16-year-old teenager and a grandmother in her 60's. If you were to enter either of our houses on any given afternoon, you would probably hear this conversation: "Did you see Randy Travis and/or George Strait on the television last night? Wasn't the song he sang wonderful? Didn't he look handsome?"

We would just like to thank both of these men for helping us discover the best friends we have ever had, each other.

Susan and Wilma Hales
Millington and Munford, Tennessee

Elder Class Fan

I get *Country Music Magazine*, and always enjoy it - even if I am in the "elder class." I

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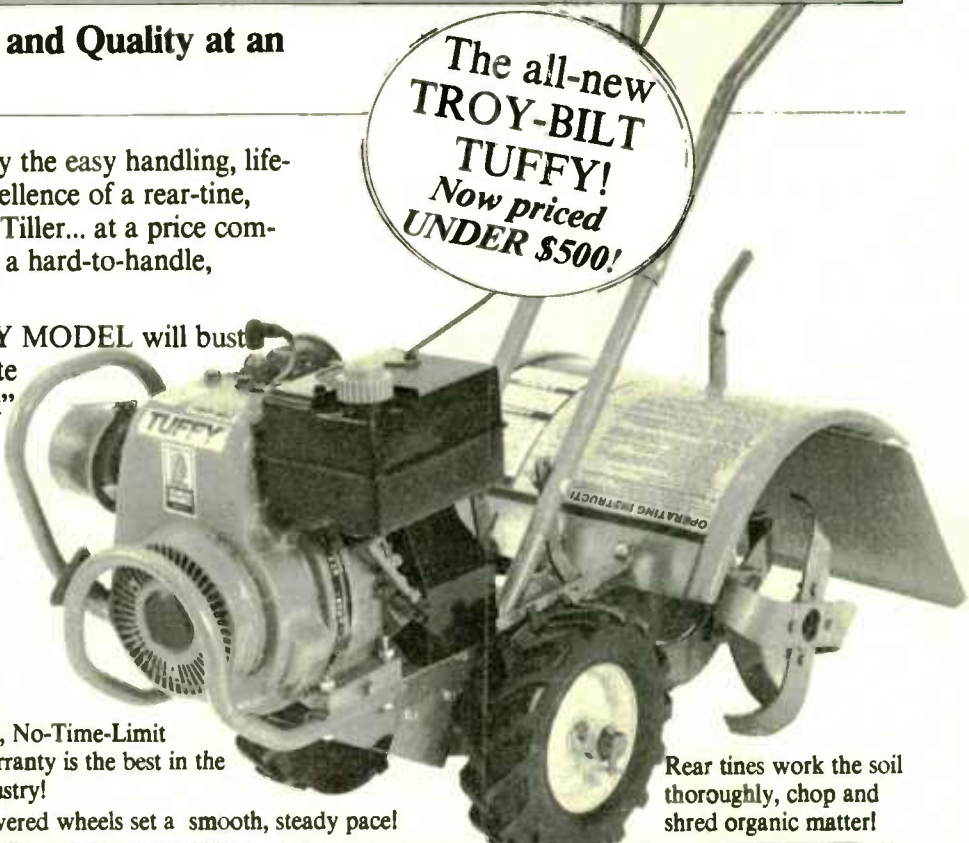
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am 83 but still enjoy my music. I like so many of the singers, too many to name.

I never see Charlie Rich anymore. I think he is great.

Mrs. Bertie A. Norman
Temple, Texas

Charlie Rich, give us an update. - Ed.

Alabama Fan Hangs On in Manitoba

My name is Raynard Monk, and I live on a farm located in the heart of the Interlake in Manitoba. Doesn't anyone know there are country music fans in this part of the country too? I must be one of the biggest country music fans in the area I live in. I attend school at Ashern, and I must say there are not many country music fans found here. Everyone here is hooked on hard rock. In this part of the country, people who listen to country music are rated as queer or strange. To heck with them! They don't know what they're missing. They are missing many of the finest artists of country.

My favorite country music group is Alabama. I like many more other groups, but the list is too numerous to write out.

As the saying goes, your magazine is worth every penny that was spent on it. The best of luck to all of you at *Country Music Magazine*, and keep up the great work!

Raynard Monk
Ashern, Manitoba



Dressed for success, Bo Duffey.

One More Hungry Songwriter Looks Up to Waylon Jennings

Young songwriters like myself need to hear legends like Waylon Jennings talk about the ups and downs of the music business, like Waylon did in the November/December 1987 issue in the article by Michael Bane. Thank you, Hoss!

One day I hope to meet this great man and hope someday to have him record a song of mine. After all, if Nashville needs another songwriter like Kristofferson, then they'd best listen to ol' Waylon and give

songwriters like myself the chance we so rightfully deserve.

I spent my last \$10 on Waylon's new album, *A Man Called Hoss*, written by Waylon and Roger Murrah. It was well worth the money. If he writes Part II, I hope Waylon and Roger look me up, 'cause I've got a few songs I wrote about Ol' Waylon, and I might be a little hungry right now, but it takes a hungry writer to make it in the music business. So thank God for artists like Waylon Jennings, 'cause if he were on Buddy Holly's plane, country music wouldn't be the same, Hoss!

Bo Duffey
Grafton, Virginia

Overwhelmed by Overstreet

Just finished my March/April issue of *Country Music* and had to sit down and write right away! I have wanted to write a response to some things in your magazine for some time now, but never did so until I read the article on Paul Overstreet by Hazel Smith. What an interview!!

A feeling of *love* came through so strongly that it brought tears to my eyes. It was a simple love of fellow man, and a Christian love of Jesus. So overwhelming, I felt I had to write, and I'm sure I'm not the only one.

For such a compact article, it had quite an impact. No doubt, the personal touch of Hazel adds a great deal. It must be wonderful to be able to associate with such people, and even more wonderful to have them as a friend.

Because of articles like this, your magazine has a special edge over the others. Thanks for this article and all to come.

Teresa J. Mathes
Littleton, Colorado

A Pearl of a Piece

I read Hazel Smith's article on Sarah Ophelia Colley Cannon (Minnie Pearl) in the March/April issue, and I want to thank Ms. Smith for a fine, glowing article.

Just looking at the picture where Hazel quips, "A Diamond Called Pearl," gives one a feeling of warmth and sincerity. I am sure that every Minnie Pearl fan is thankful for it.

Robin Blair
Bristol, Tennessee

Send a Song to Randy Travis

Can you inform me as to how to send written songs to the country artists?

I do lots of writing and I wrote a song to my husband. He wanted me to send it to Randy Travis. I write only the words, no music. Please help me if you can.

Also where do I send for info for a copyright?

Margie Waddell
Jackson, Mississippi

For copyright info, write the Library of Congress. Songs have a better chance of being used if they are words and music. Most stars get their songs from professional songwriters who are pitching all the time in Nashville. To reach Randy, you can try his fan club address listed above. - Ed.

An Open Letter to the Readers of *Country Music* from:

JOHNNY CASH

Lay off of Kris.

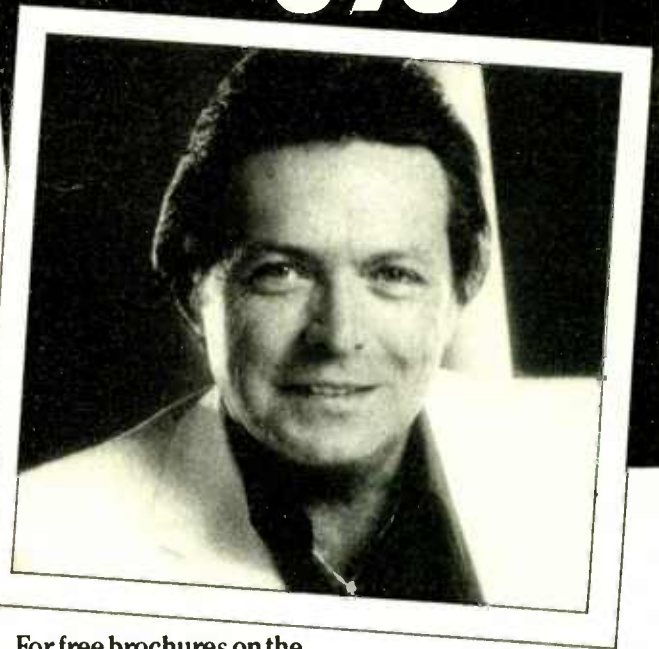
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Johnny Cash

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Williams in Arabia

I just finished the features on Randy Travis, Tammy Wynette, Don Williams and Chris Hillman & Desert Rose. They're great.

I especially enjoyed the one on Don Williams. He has to be my all-time favorite singer—any category. I guess he is going to let me die of old age before he records a Christmas album—or a gospel one. How about it, Don? I'm not the only one who would love to hear either.

I first heard Don Williams when he was living in Arabia. We only had non-Arabic radio for two hours in the morning—a news and music show. Our DJ, only had one Anne Murray, one Loretta Lynn and one Don Williams album, so we heard 'em a lot—enjoyed 'em too. (That was *The Very Best of Don Williams*.) That was so much more enjoyable to me than the rock 'n'roll he played most.

I've only heard Don Williams in person one time, when he appeared here in Tyler. Keep up the good work.

Helen Bassett
Tyler, Texas

Recognition for The Desert Rose Band—How About Skip Ewing?

A great big thank you (and hug) to Patrick Carr for his fantastic article on The Desert Rose Band. I am so happy these very talented guys are finally receiving the recognition they deserve in country music.

Radio station KQUS/FM in Hot Springs, Arkansas, has just started playing a great record, "Your Memory Wins Again," by Skip Ewing. When I heard the artist's name, I knew I had recently come across it—though I had not heard any of his music before—and sure enough, in the MCA ad in your March/April issue, there he is. See, I do read your magazine cover to cover.

Anyway, after listening to the record, I called the station trying to find information on him. All the DJ could tell me was that he's a songwriter, and that this is his debut as a singer. How about some information on him in a future issue? I believe Skip Ewing is going to "do good" as a singer. And he's good-looking to boot.

I was wondering if you've considered having a section in your magazine for new and upcoming artists? There is so much good music that most radio stations won't play because it's not on their Top 40 play lists. Sometimes I listen to one of the smaller (AM) stations which takes its play list from the top 100. This is so refreshing, rather than listening to the same 40 songs (with a few older cuts thrown in) over and over again.

I think if you did have a section for these artists, your readers would be interested in seeking their records out.

Emma Kaye Robuson
Malvern, Arizona

Magazine is getting thicker by the minute! We'll try.—Ed.

Hillman and Parsons

I really enjoyed your article on Chris Hillman and The Desert Rose Band in the March/April issue. Chris has worked very hard for a long period of time and I am delighted that he is finally getting the recognition that he deserves.

I was also so very pleased with your recognition of Gram Parsons's contribution to country music. I was co-producer of *Gram Parsons and the Fallen Angels—Live, 1973*. As a close friend of Gram's, I know that he would have been quite rewarded to have been called "the primary poet of the style . . ." country rock.

Marley Brant
Burbank, California

Starr and Carr, Again—This Time It's Fargo

Dear Patrick,
I just read the *Country Music* article you wrote on me in the May/June 1987 issue, and I want to thank you. What a wonderful writer you are! You read hearts and souls and feelings and meanings . . . not just words. I know I was not very articulate the day we talked. I even remember praying about the interview. I felt I had not given you much to write about, and I asked God to help you read between the lines. And my prayer was answered.

Thank you so much for the work you do. I remember being so impressed with your intellect, and now I know you also have those other rare qualities that I love so much . . . sensitivity, compassion, depth, skill, talent and love. You are so good. I feel blessed.

Donna Fargo
Nashville, Tennessee

Repairs for Ryman

On a recent, long-awaited trip to Nashville, we toured the World-Famous Ryman Auditorium, home of the Grand Ole Opry.

As you walk up the steps on the outside, you can see the stained glass windows replaced by plywood. Behind the "Barn Door" curtains is the sign: Welcome To The World Famous/GRAND OLE OPRY/Established . . . Saturday, November 28, 1925. I wondered why *behind* the curtains on the floor leaning against the wall! My stomach turned at all the writing on the walls. I always wanted my name in the Opry, but not by doing it myself with an ink pen. As I walked on the floors, they seemed in places to be giving way.

My heart is full of sadness to see such a shrine going so badly down hill.

Teresa Conway
Macks Creek, Missouri

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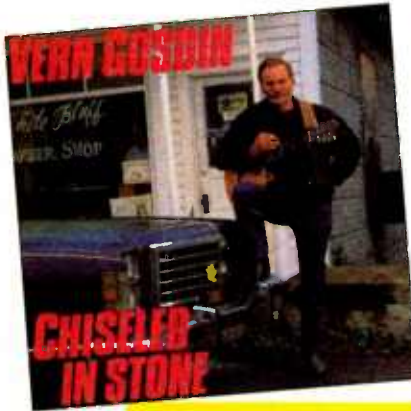
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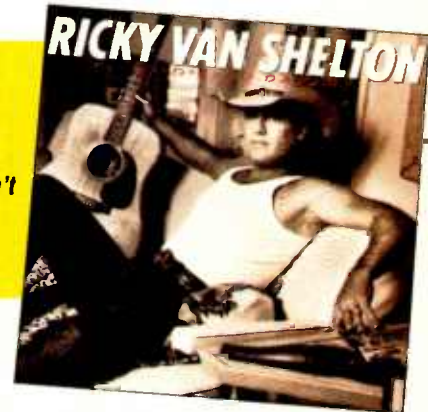


VERN GOSDIN - "CHISELED IN STONE".

Now he's "The Voice" of success with a solid Top 10 album and the biggest, best singles of his career, including "Do You Believe Me Now" and "Set 'Em Up Joe".

RICKY VAN SHELTON - "WILD-EYED DREAM".

The debut album with the #1 hits "Somebody Lied", "Life Turned Her That Way" and the new "Don't We All Have The Right". It's the stuff that Wild-Eyed Dreams are made of!



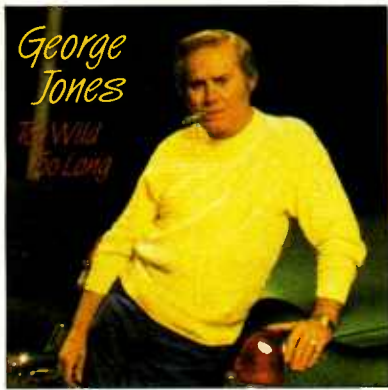
MERLE HAGGARD - "CHILL FACTOR".

Nobody's cooler than Merle, making it all seem easy on his latest big-selling album. Including the #1 single "Twinkle, Twinkle Lucky Star", the hit title track, "Chill Factor" and the moving new release "We Never Touch At All".

ROSANNE CASH - "KING'S RECORD SHOP".

Here's where to go for #1 hits! Three in a row, including the newest chart-topper "If You Change Your Mind", plus "Tennessee Flat Top Box" and "The Way We Make A Broken Heart".





George Jones

GEORGE JONES - "TOO WILD, TOO LONG"

First he gave you "The Bird". And soon he'll be flying high with "The Old Man No One Loves"...classic Georgetel



THE O'JANES - "TIRED OF THE RUNNIN'"

Last year's breakthrough male duo is right back with a Top 20 album, a Top 5 score with "One True Love", and the brilliant new single "Blue Love".



RICKY SKAGGS - "COMIN' HOME TO STAY"

He really started something. And he's still doing it better than anyone on this back-to-basics album, including his very welcome new single "Thanks Again".



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EXILE - "SHELTER FROM THE NIGHT"

"I Can't Get Close Enough" was their ninth #1 hit. And they could be "Just One Kiss" away from their 10th!

RODNEY CROWELL - "DIAMONDS & DIRT"

Albums come and albums go, but "Diamonds & Dirt"'s forever! It includes the #1 duet with Rosanne Cash, "It's Such A Small World"...the honky-tonkin' new hit, "I Couldn't Leave You If I Tried"...and a host of other Lone Star-inspired future classics.



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CMSA Members
VOTE
 Use Ballot Page 54

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Has-beens??

In the January/February issue, another reader's letter refers to a group of stars as old-timers and has-beens, then proceeds to list them by name! Quite a few of these stars are professional acquaintances of mine, and some I consider friends.

Maybe I'm spoiled living in Music City, where we get the WSM radio shows, TNN country cable shows, etc., where lots of these stars are still active. Some of the others have "new" chart releases as well. If people in Maine are that out of touch with the Nashville Scene, I'm sorry, and I apologize. Otherwise, seek and ye shall find.

Stevie Lee
 Nashville, Tennessee

You are spoiled! Rush your list of names to us, and we'll start spreading the news to readers like Sheila Richardson who are longing to hear. — Ed.

Subscription for Desperak

Howdy! I just received the March/April issue of *Country Music Magazine*, and of course I read the Letters section and came across the letter from Miroslaw Desperak.

Is it possible to extend a subscription to him and bill me for it? I feel that if he loves country music that much, he should be entitled to his own subscription. And I don't mind footing the bill, including the overseas postage.

Lou Claudio
 Los Angeles, California

Another reader wants to share the cost with you. Price of a European subscription is \$19.98, most of which goes to those trusty post office folks. — Ed.

Searching For Songbooks

My wife and I are trying to find out where we can order a good Country & Western songbook. We like the older songs sung by Ernest Tubb, George Jones, Porter Wagoner—anyway the oldies and the goodies. If you have any information on this, would you let us know?

Guy and Jessie Crabtree
 Weatherford, Texas

Who can recommend a good songbook? — Ed.

Travis, Take Out Your Pen

I'm a senior citizen. Have been a country music fan all my life. I just received my first copy of your magazine. I was very unhappy that on the cover of the first issue, my March/April issue, you had Randy Travis, and then I opened it up to a story by Michael Bane.

All you people seem to be under the impression that Randy signs autographs. I have quite a number of autographed pictures of myself and family members with the stars.

I was also very pleased, a few months back, when I heard he would be in this area. I reserved tickets far in advance so I would not miss the show.

As soon as the show was over, I tried to see him, and all I saw was he and his manager running onto the bus.

For the price of tickets I cannot see any acceptable excuse for a star not meeting his fans. This should be planned into his schedule. If he continues with this attitude, I'll have to disagree that he will stay on top. I, for one, would not go out of my way to see him again.

I don't think you will ever publish this.
 Wayne McDowell
 Mattoon, Illinois

These bad experiences, awful as they are, never seem to be the whole story. Please read on. — Ed.



Randy Travis made Judy McArdle and the rest of Mark Brewer's family feel as if he had known them forever.

Talkin' with Travis

On a recent trip to Nashville, after we visited the Ryman Auditorium, we decided to step into this little guitar pawn shop downtown. I can't even remember the name of it.

Over in the corner looking at some guitars was Randy Travis! We couldn't believe it. We didn't want to bother them. I imagine it gets to be monotonous for stars to have people bother them. But I introduced myself anyway, and Randy took care of the rest.

Randy, you made our trip to Nashville a dream come true.
 Mark Brewer
 Mitchell, Indiana

If You Can't Say Something Nice . . .

Michael Bane's review of Dolly Parton's album *Rainbow* in the March/April issue was awful and unkind. It should have read like this:

"If you like Dolly Parton, and who doesn't . . . if you like pop, if you like rock, if you like it country, or if you just like to be enchanted . . . you are sure to find that everything Dolly Parton gives you on her album *Rainbow* will satisfy your desires and more."

Are you listening, Michael?

Dave Bennett
 Farmington Hills, Michigan

Outraged

I agree, Dolly Parton is funny, articulate, very smart, extremely talented, and her new figure looks great!!!!

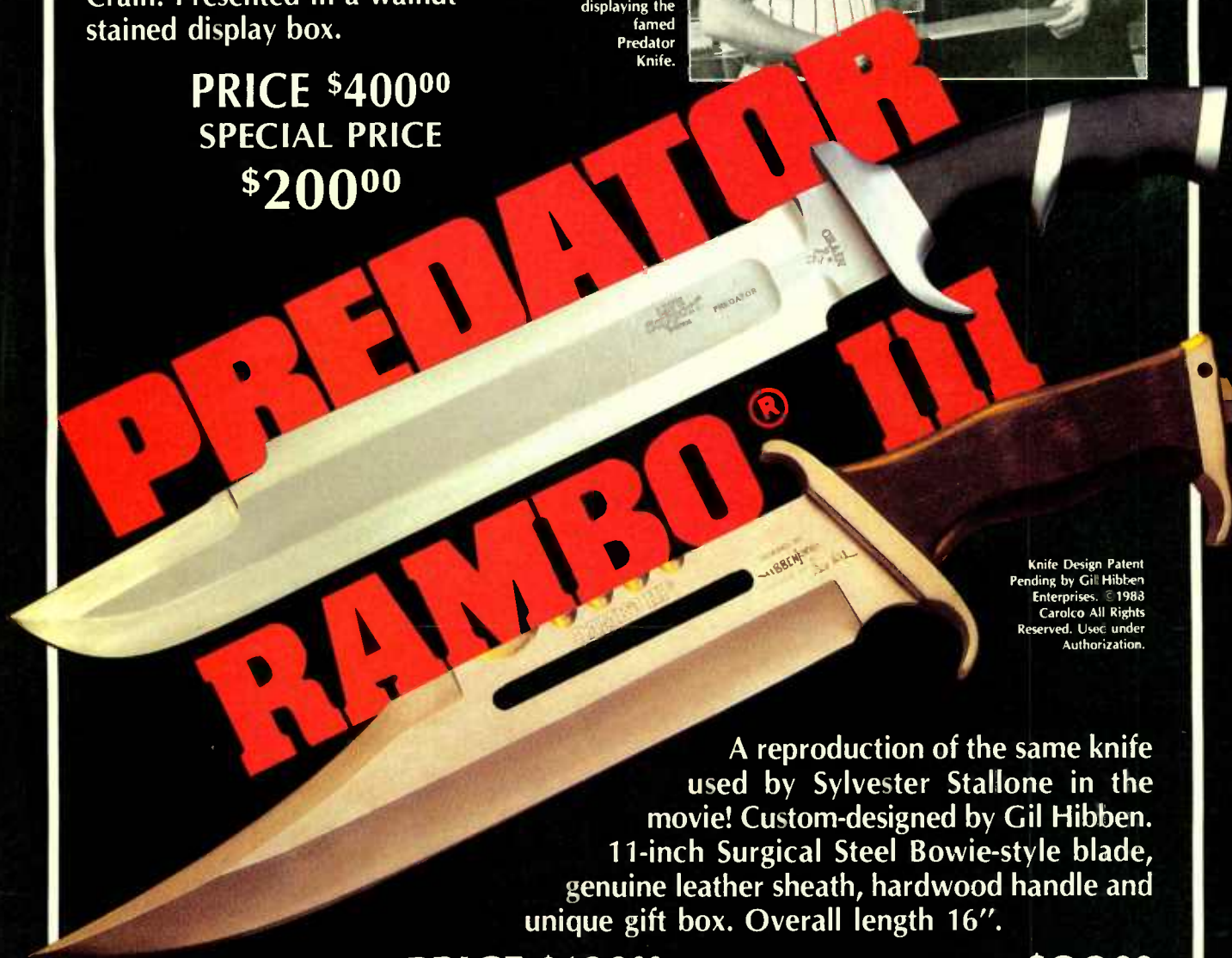
But I disagree! I'm outraged! How dare

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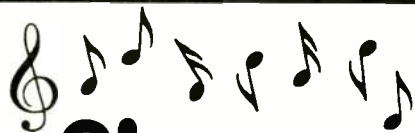
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Michael Bane even think of saying her newest album is awful, much less worse than awful! Anything done by Dolly has to be the best!

Michael Bane, if you were a woman, I would conclude you were jealous.

Tina Jackson
Rohnert Park, California
P.S. You should be happy to know that I've read Dolly is working on a bluegrass album with Ricky Skaggs.

Now that sounds more like it. — Ed.

Additions and Corrections on Kay Starr

I read Buried Treasures by Rich Kienzle in your January/February issue with interest. In it he mentions Kay Starr, but there are certain inaccuracies and omissions.

Miss Starr comes from Dougherty, Oklahoma, not far from here, not from Memphis. At a national F.O.E. convention a few years ago, I heard Miss Starr tell how she got her first big break after hearing "Bonaparte's Retreat" on the radio in the late 1940's. She called Roy Acuff in Nashville, persuaded him to add words to the tune and let her record the song on Capitol. Other hits were "Wheel of Fortune," "If You Love Me, Really Love Me," "Rock 'n' Roll Waltz," etc., on RCA.

Miss Starr told how poor her family was. She asked if any Okies—"Oklahomans"—were in the crowd. There were four, and we have the opportunity to visit with her after the concert—a charming lady.

The Buried Treasures articles are my favorite in your magazine.

Neil McElderry Jr.
Purcell, Oklahoma

Here's What Happened to Wanda Jackson

Where's Wanda Jackson? I'd like to answer not only the *where* but the *who*. She's not been nominated for Female Vocalist of the Year by the CMA recently, although she has been in the past and could be again, nor is she making the big bucks as a "super star." Wanda Jackson is working with people like me, a convicted murderer in the Oklahoma Prison System.

As Jaycee Chaplain at the Jess Dunn Correctional Center, I contacted Wanda and



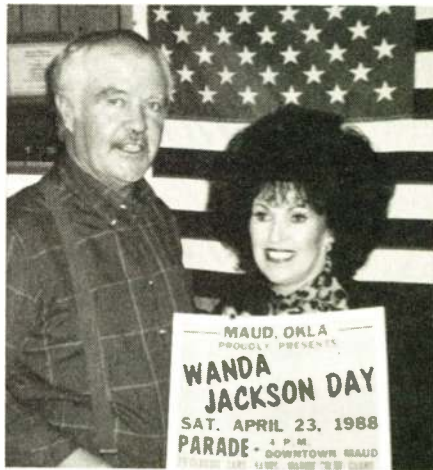
Jim Boland, Wanda Jackson and Wendell Goodman celebrate a successful show. Wendell is Wanda's husband.

her husband/manager, Wendell Goodman, in Del City, Oklahoma, to perform at our Christmas Party in 1984. Wanda and Wendell spoke about their rise and gradual fall due mostly to alcohol. Many of us in prison could relate to that. I called again this Christmas, and they accepted.

I never wrote or sang till I came to prison, never dreamed I'd be nominated for OCMA Male Vocalist of 1985 or write "Mama's Love," a song that went to the top 10% in Nashville's 1987 Music City Song Contest. Nor would I ever imagine that a world-famous lady (over 60 albums) and her faithful husband would come home from a European tour and travel halfway across Oklahoma at Christmas to fill the floor with tears of joy from a bunch of "Forget-Me-Nots" in prison.

Where's Wanda Jackson? She and her family are out there beyond the bright lights making winners out of losers.

Jim "Bo" Boland
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma



Bob Miller, mayor of Maud, Oklahoma, and Wanda Jackson prepare for Wanda Jackson Day, held April 23, 1988, in Maud, Wanda's hometown.

A Word From Wanda's Manager

Wanda is very much alive and singing well. In the last eight years, she has recorded seven gospel albums and averaged about 120 gospel concerts per year. She is doing some country shows again, and is currently working on a new country album here in America. In Europe, she released a rockabilly album in 1985 and a country album in 1987. She was in Europe for two-and-a-half months last year.

We know there are many Wanda Jackson fans in America, and we are planning more country shows for the future.

Wendell Goodman
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Whatever Happened to Daisy Mae and Ole Brother Charley?

Does anyone know what happened to Daisy Mae and Ole Brother Charley? They used to be heard on a barn dance show that origi-

nated from radio station WDAE in Tampa, Florida, back in the late 1940's.

John Bell
Zeeland, Michigan

Whatever Happened to Doris Macon?

What has happened to Uncle Dave Macon's son Doris, who used to play with Uncle Dave on the radio? Is he still entertaining? If so, where? Was so sorry for Doris when his dad passed away.

Myrtle Heath
Mount Hope, Wisconsin
Who knows? - Ed.

. . . And Here's Charlie McCoy

In reference to what happened to Charlie McCoy - well, he is on *Hee Haw* and leads the *Hee Haw* Band. Someone asked about him in the March/April issue.

Marilyn Haag
Waterloo, Iowa
Been a snake, he would-a bit us! Thanks, Marilyn. - Ed.

Jerry Wallace Gets Around

Jerry Wallace stopped by my beauty salon last January. He had been in Las Vegas doing a show. It seems like he said something about going to Tahoe and Oregon.

I received his autographed tape of *Primrose Lane* dated that day. It is beautiful - "Primrose Lane," "Misty Moonlight," "Sweet Child of Sunshine," "Song Nobody Sings" and others. Hope this helps. The album is out on Starday Records.

Dorothy Clark
Quartz Hill, California
Thanks to all who wrote in about Jerry Wallace and Charlie McCoy. Two readers have offered to help Coral Palmer get old Wallace albums. Another has McCoy albums for Jenny Morris. Write to us, ladies. We'll forward the mail. We updated you on Jerry's latest single in our last issue. - Ed.

Waiting for a Train . . . No, a Truck . . . No, a Song . . . You Decide

Will someone take the young lady, who would be in the ad on page 61 of the March/April issue of *Country Music Magazine* on the cover of the *Road Music* album, put her in front of Buddy Emmons' swing band and have her record "Truck Driver's Blues"?

Give her a break! She's been posing patiently for so long! Or someone write "A Truck Driver's Dream" and let her record that. Waiting!

W.R. Jones
Wharton, Texas
Another reader has been trying to get in touch with this girl for years. Buddy Emmons, are you listening? You try! - Ed.

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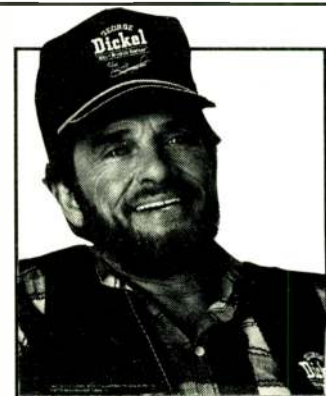
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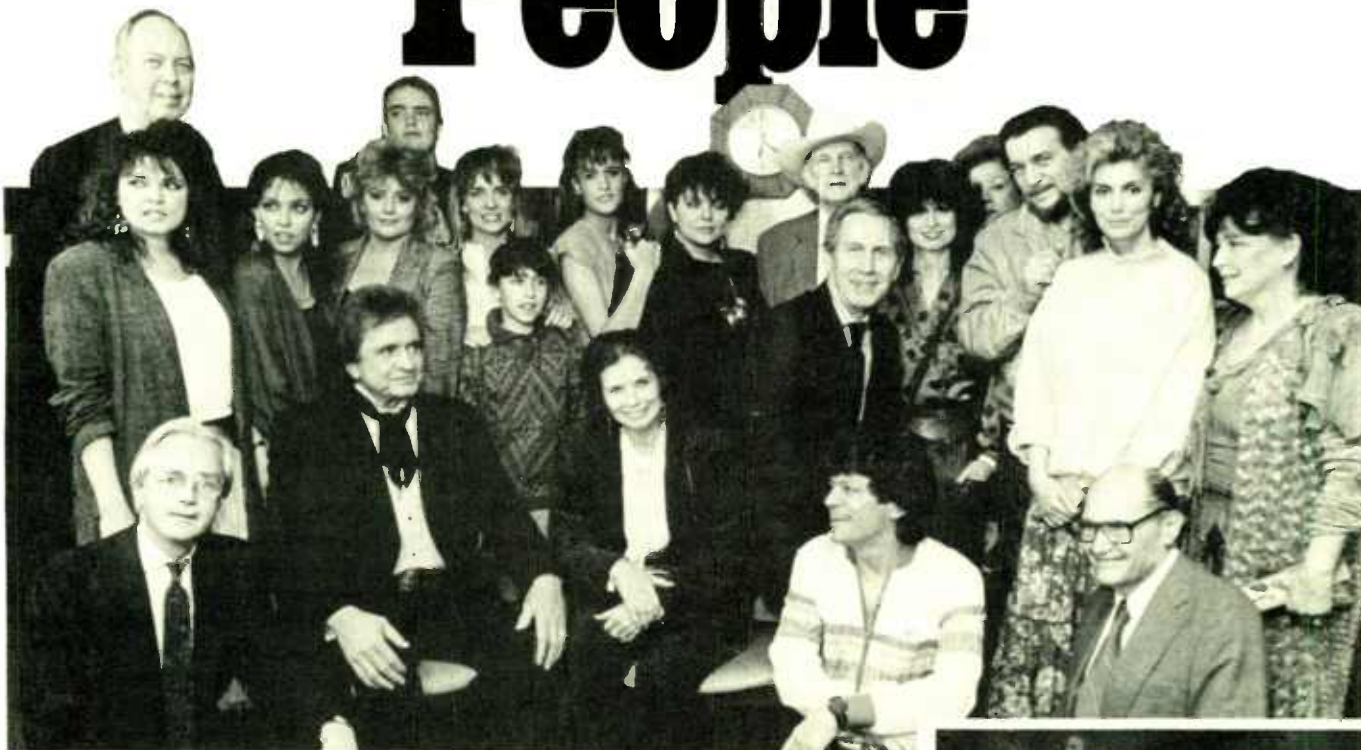
Produced By Paul Worley Ed Seay



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World Radio History

People



Friends and family turned out to help Johnny Cash celebrate the opening of "The Johnny Cash Exhibit." Standing, from left, are: Tara Cash, CMF's Joe Talbot, Cindy Cash, Rosie Cash, John Carter Cash, Carlene Carter, Cindy's daughter Jessica, Carlene's daughter Tiffany, Kathy Cash, Bill Monroe, Jessi Colter, Reba Hancock, Waylon Jennings, Emmylou Harris and Anita Carter. Seated are CMF's Bill Ivey, Johnny Cash, June Carter Cash, Chet Atkins, Johnny Rodriguez and Roy Horton.

JOHNNY CASH CAN

The Johnny Cash Exhibit at the Country Music Hall of Fame is a reality. Scheduled to run till 1990, this exhibit is billed as the "largest and most elaborate biographical salute in the CMF's 20-year history." Many of the artifacts and memorabilia were personally chosen by Mr. Cash and are being displayed publicly for the first time.

And, the opening of the exhibit and party afterwards were as extra-special as the exhibit itself. Who else but The Man in Black could bring out the Honorable Ned Ray McWherter, governor of the great state of Tennessee, world-renowned trial lawyer James Neal and former Nashville mayor Richard Fulton to the same place on the same night as the presidential primaries? Who, when honored, can have the great Sam Phillips, the rockabilly guru, leave his house and home in Memphis and come to Music City for a party? Johnny Cash

can. Hall of Famers Bill Monroe, Earl Scruggs, Chet Atkins and Roy Horton were present to honor Hall of Famer Cash, too. The great Waylon Jennings, who is probably John's closest and dearest friend but who hates parties, was there with his wife Jessi Colter, who is still the prettiest girl in any room. Johnny Cash can bring out Waylon.

Cash's wife, friend and companion June Carter Cash was lovely in a two-piece black suit with polka dots belted with silver and turquoise, with shoes to match. Emmylou Harris, beautiful as always, wore a pink springish sweater and flowered skirt. Me? I wore a smile and a blue dress. Johnny Cash still makes me shake inside. If you're in the room with greatness, you know it.

The rapport between John and his superstar daughter Rosanne Cash was something to behold. With their faces about an inch apart, it was obvious that the chit-chat was anything but show biz. It was a proud



Included in the exhibit are Cash's 1956 rockabilly jacket, instruments used by The Tennessee Two and a 1955 handbill advertising one of Cash's first shows.

daughter and an equally proud father simply trying to have a private conversation in a room full of faces. Watching this scene, I knew that moments like these are few and far between. And times like these are when father and daughter get to share a special smile or secret. Rosanne and her

Reporter: Hazel Smith

Editor: Rochelle Friedman

People



In their first public appearance together in more than 13 years, Dolly and Porter reunited to salute Roy Acuff on his 50th anniversary with the Grand Ole Opry.

DOLLY CAME HOME

Good golly, Miss Dolly—Parton, that is. All hundred pounds in low-cut, high-slit gowns, captured the hearts and minds of Music City for a whole week, taping her TV show. When Dolly left for the West Coast, the talking, mouthing and moaning caused one to wonder if she'd turned Yankee or worse, pop. She's neither and never was. She is Dolly spreading good will for country music and Tennessee across this great land. Rehearsing for one show, she took the time to be sure that Roy Acuff could sing his part correctly, and when he made a mistake, she took the blame. Dolly and Porter Wagoner, her former duo partner, made amends, and the couple duetted on the TV show and on the Grand Ole Opry the following weekend. She issued a personally-signed invitation to each and every member of the Grand Ole Opry to be there and sing on the closing song, and all those who were in town complied. It was one of the greatest television shows that I have ever seen. She took care to take care of friends like Jeanne Pruett, Johnny Russell, Jean Shepard, Del Wood, Jimmy C. Newman, Jan Howard, Kitty Wells, Faron Young, Bill Phillips (who recorded the first song Dolly wrote called "Put It Off Until Tomorrow"), Fred Foster, her sister, the very talented Stella Parton, and her uncle Lewis Owens.

Yep, like Lassie, "Dolly Came Home." And all the fretting and fussing of yesterday was a waste of time, money and beer. She hasn't changed except maybe she got richer, smarter and brassier. Mileage and Hollywood turn girls that way. If I told the truth, I'd have to say that the only person on this planet I am jealous of is Dolly Parton. She exemplifies what I stand for and believe in totally. From the brass to the cash, from the boobs to the tube, from the hair to the heart, from the sense of humor to the business sense, Dolly is my hero. If I wasn't me, I'd rather be her than anybody I know.

MONEY CHANGES EVERYTHING

Rumor has it that Randy Travis' manager Lib Hatcher has put the ever-present wig in either mothballs or the trash can and is wearing her own hair these days, with a little help here and there. Rumor also has it that the 'Mad Hatter,' her royal Hatcher, flew a couple (or was it three) hairdressers to the Big Apple to do her hair for the Grammys. Wonder if Randy had a hairdresser?

It's also rumored that Barbara Mandrell has her own personal makeup artist flown

sisters do not remember their lives being any way but this. They have always been a superstar's children. I would venture to guess this is the reason we don't see Rosanne on the road or on the stage or the tube every spare minute. She too is raising daughters and stays home a lot. And her daughters accompanied her to this opening.

Rosanne's three sisters—Cindy Cash, Kathy Cash and Tara Cash—were present, as was her half-brother, Johnny Cash's only son, John Carter Cash, who is a handsome lad, taller than his famed dad. Their grandma, John's mother Mrs. Ray Cash, also attended. June's two daughters, Carlene Carter and Rosie Nix, were present along with a couple of grandkids.

Other stars that I saw mingling in the crowd included Mel McDaniel, Anita Carter, Lynn Anderson and the great Steve Popovich, who isn't a star but a great man of music who heads up Polygram Records locally, where Cash hangs his recording hat these days. Tracey Ullman, who hails from England and hosts the late-night TV talk show on the Fox Network, made the do, too. She doesn't look, talk or sing like us, but she is a star, so she should be mentioned. Don't ask me what she wore. I saw it and I still don't believe it!

My dear readers, fans of country music, try and make it to Music City within the next two years just to see this exhibit. John Rumble, Chris Skinker, Bill Ivey (head of the CMF) and all of the other employees of the Country Music Foundation have done a job to be proud of.

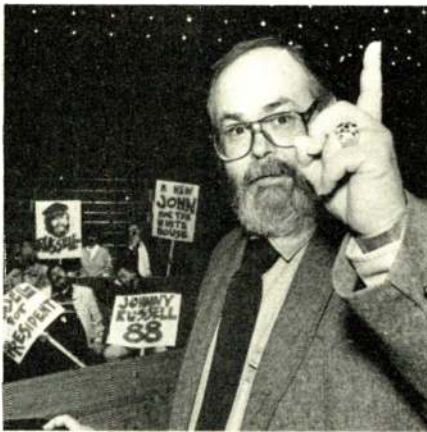
These hillbilly do's can conjure up some of the finest rations a body ever tasted, and this one was no exception. Matter of fact, this outdid most. My mouth, used to the taste of beans with beans, did salivate with the succulent seafood/spinach souffle and rare roast beef, cheeses, fruit, veggies, drinks for alchies and nons (just so mama

will know, I had diet cola). Really, it is real hip to stand around the table when the faces on the other side are 'Who's Who in Country Music.' Across from me at one time were Capitol Records head Jim Foglesong, CMA exec Jo Walker-Meador, CMA pres Joe Talbot, Welk Music's header-upper Bob Kirsch and Harold Shedd, who produces both K.T. Oslin and Alabama!

Closing the do, Cash allowed, "I'd like to thank God who is the source of all music. And ask His forgiveness for all the times we've screwed it up." And if anybody can make God smile, I bet Johnny Cash can, and did with this closing remark.

JOHNNY RUSSELL FOR PREZ

Big Johnny Russell is still campaigning for the presidency. Since he isn't married, his first plan is to have a new first lady every month. This makes about as much sense as any of the ideas of those who are seriously running.



A small but enthusiastic group of supporters turned out for Johnny Russell's press conference announcing his plans to run for President.

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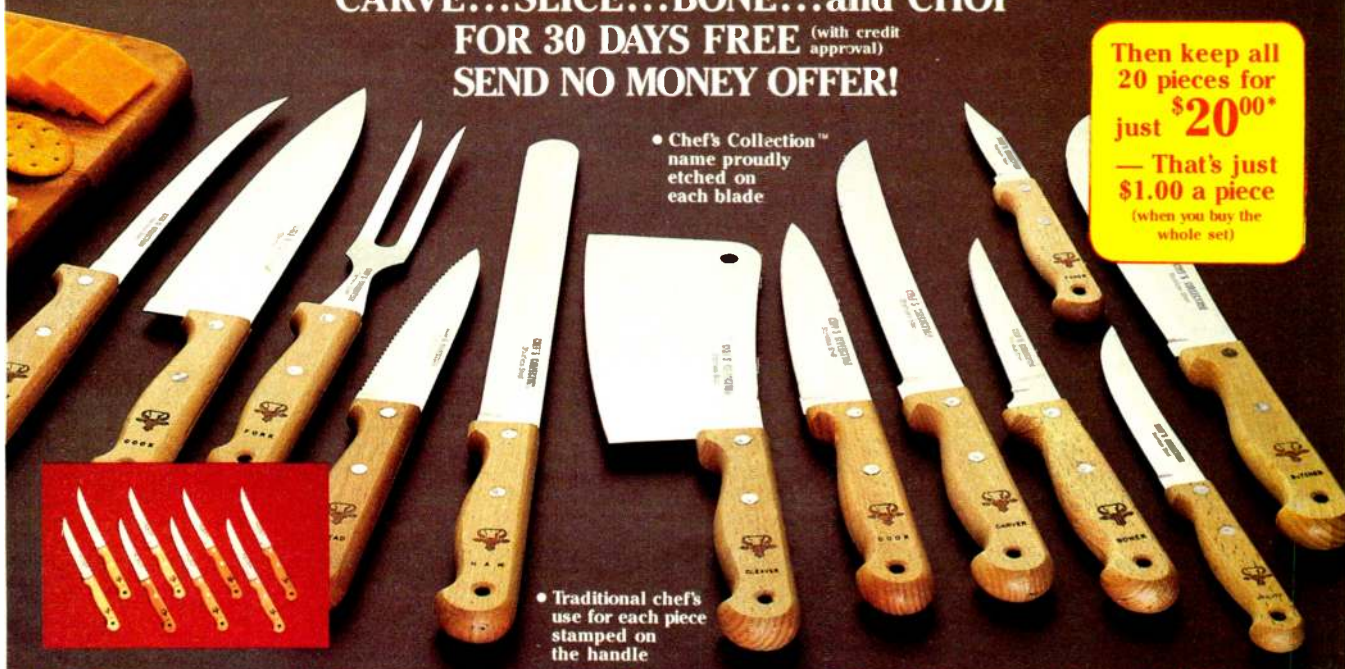
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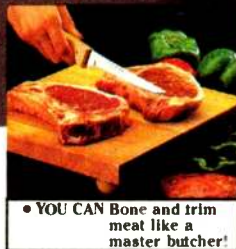
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Please Sign Your Name _____

Order TODAY! Satisfaction Assured!

People

in from Los Angeles whenever she has a photo session or does television. Barbara is a huge star, and she should have her makeup person flown in from Paris if she wants. If you're gonna have your picture taken, you need to put your best face forward!!

CONGRATULATIONS ARE IN ORDER

Congratulations to the following 1988 Million-Airs. According to BMI, these songs have been played three million times! They are: "All I Have to Do Is Dream," writer the late **Boudleaux Bryant**; "Angel of the Morning," writer **Chip Taylor**; "The Most Beautiful Girl," writers **Billy Sherrill, Norro Wilson** and

Rory Bourke; and "Traces," writers **Buddy Buie, J.R. Cobb** and **Emory Gordy Jr.** A lot of spins and a lot more money.

K.T. OSLIN IN A CLASS BY HERSELF

With two Grammys to her credit and Music Row at her feet, K.T. Oslin is ready, set, go and no looking back. Her background, rich with acting, jingles, Broadway, stage, Texas and hillbillies, has got a good wind blowing at her back, good songs flowing from her pen and great vocals flowing from her vocal chords. Her interviews excel a whole lot of stage shows. The chick is funny in that she laughs with you and laughs at herself. I swear, she just may be the smartest she-star in show biz. For all the above reasons,

plus the fact that I like K.T. as a human being, I predict K.T. as the girl most likely to be a superstar quickly... before 1990 approaches. She is in a class by herself.

ARE YOU BELIEVING 17.6 MILLION DOLLARS IN 127 DAYS

Randy Owens, Teddy Gentry, Jeff Cook, and Mark Herndon a/k/a Alabama pulled a hefty 17.6 million big ones in 127 days. Friends, this is a cool average of \$138,582 daily if you really want to get technical. And that ain't passing hats for tips at Myrtle Beach. But it ain't rock 'n' roll either! Solid country. Congratulations, guys. You done well for yourselves and done a great deal for country music. The music I love.

RAVIN' RAVEN,

The best thing about this gig of mine is getting to hobnob with nice folks who have a sense of humor, like Eddy Raven. Sitting in his publicist's office on the seventh floor high over Music Row, Eddy looked straight out the window, snickered and said, "Oh! It's one of us!" A lowly crow (raven) was flying by.

Right off, Eddy was excited. Excited because he had been selected to open all of Alabama's shows for the forthcoming season. No better way to get in front of the public, I'd say. And the *young* record-buying fans, at that. All during the interview, Eddy praised Alabama for their music and for what they have done for country music and the music business... for bringing youth into the country folk, so to speak.

Eddy Raven's career has been anything but an overnight success. He has been around for a while and has fluctuated and floated from label to label. In 1983 Eddy took a year off to regroup. As a result, he came up with the killer song, "Thank God For Kids," which turned out to be a huge recording for The Oak Ridge Boys. He's also written "Back To the Country" for Roy Acuff and "Good Morning, Country Rain" for Jeannie C. Riley. I asked if he favored writing or performing. This he did not answer, but he did allow that writing took much more out of him than performing. I could dig that... the laying of the heart on the line.

I asked Eddy about Roy Acuff, knowing that Eddy was an Acuff-Rose songwriter for years, and Roy having a



mini-hit with Eddy's "Back To the Country" when he was 75 or so. Eddy said, "I couldn't have been prouder of my own grandfather than I was when Roy Acuff recorded my song. What a lift! What a rush. And seeing him perform the song on stage of the Grand Ole Opry just topped anything that ever happened."

Eddy also remembered another great moment. "When I was six years old, my daddy took me to see Elvis Presley on the *Louisiana Hayride*. My daddy told me, 'Son, don't never do nothing like that,' but my mama, she loved it. At that moment, I knew where I'd end up." "Elvis was your hero?" I asked. "Yep. Sonny West, Elvis' former bodyguard, even worked for me a while"

Eddy is quite happy with his association with RCA Records. Since his

RAVE ON

producer and best friend for 17 years, Don Gant, died suddenly a couple of years back, Eddy is being produced by Barry Beckett, the master-mind keyboardist from Muscle Shoals. The Raven/Beckett combo felt good to Eddy, and they came up with a rollicking "I'm Gonna Get You" for Eddy's *Best Of* album.

Today recording and writing both have smoothed out and are going upward at a steady pace. Eddy is currently building a home (not house) in Hendersonville, Tennessee, and should be in it by now. Situated on Old Hickory Lake on 43 acres, the house has walls that are 10 feet high and 10 inches thick. The porch is 10 feet wide and 63 feet long. It's big but not fancy. Built to live in, not look at. Besides, Eddy boasts, "I will have a place to keep my guitars, records and junk!"

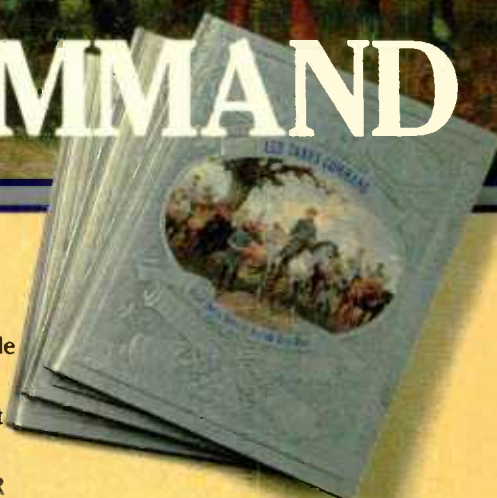
It isn't easy to keep Eddy on the Eddy subject. He is an appreciative soul. I read his press kit and song/single/album discography, and I do have enough sense to read and report these facts. But to me Eddy deserves more than reporting achievements. This talented Cajun deserves superstardom. He's a good son-of-a-gun who genuinely cares about country music and country music people. He has given a lot more than he's taken, and, by god, I for one think it is time he took some too. So lend an ear and let the Ravin' Raven rave on. And by 1990, who knows, Raven might outfly the eagle. Hope so.

-H.S.



LEE TAKES COMMAND

"Lee has arrived, and our hopes are high. He is silent, inscrutable, strong, like a God."
 Lieutenant John H. Chamberlayne, Virginia Artillery, C.S.A.



Not everyone cheered the selection of Robert E. Lee to command the army defending Richmond in 1862. Many thought him too cautious, too gentle. They called him "Granny Lee". But within three months the doubts were gone. Lee had driven the enemy from the doorstep of his capital to the doorstep of their own. The tide, it seemed, had turned. Spirits were high. And Lee had begun his rise as the great gentleman-hero of the Confederacy.

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All orders are subject to approval. Prices subject to change.

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People

CALIFORNIA CHICKS FLY KAMIKAZE ONSTAGE WITH STRAIT

The hottest singer west of the Mississippi is definitely **George Strait**. Playing to SRO crowds across the country, George reached **Buck Owens'** stomping grounds, Bakersfield. There, a half-dozen or more Strait-crazed chicks bolted onstage, surrounding the superstar and trying to tear off his clothes. They did manage to take his hat. About a half-dozen or better of California's biggest and finest men in blue came to Strait's rescue. Word I got is they had to surround George while he finished the show. The show's promoter, my buddy **Ben Farrell**, made the late-night news that night in Bakersfield as he wrestled two determined fans to the ground when they tried to get on the star's bus.

By the way, George has a new MCA album on the shelf these days titled *If You Ain't Lovin' (You Ain't Livin')*. Should be another platinum platter with Strait singing and the old Master Record Producer **Jimmy Bowen** giving great studio orders. Please, don't pay any attention to the rumor that "moi" was in the California mob. I was home in Tennessee wishing I was where that cowboy hangs his hat.

DOING IT THE COWBOY WAY

Ranger Doug, Woody Paul and Tbo Slim make up the group **Riders In the Sky**. These good guys who swear by 'doing it the cowboy way' came through, benefitting the Hospice Hospitality House. This institution provides food and shelter for individuals from out of town who have sick or injured relatives here. More charitable doing, one day Tbo Slim, being the true cowboy he is, was driving toward Nashville when he saw a house burning. He stopped and found an elderly couple distraught about the house and the fact that their cat was in the burning building. The fire department had not arrived at the scene, so Tbo Slim, in the cowboy way, raced into the burning building, rescued the old couple's cat and then hit that dangerous trail called Highway 100 that heads toward town.

D-I-V-O-R-C-E

Dottie West and hubby calling it quits.

TWO GALS AND TWO GUYS

Benefitting the American Cancer Society and calling their act 'April '88', the unlikely quartet of **Minnie Pearl, Amy Grant, Robin Williams** and **James Taylor** took to



The uproar was all in a day's work for George Strait.

the Opry stage. Just two gals and two guys who done good in the entertainment business.

MORE THAN JUST FRIENDS

Singing star **Billy Joe Royal** and local celeb **Cathy Martindale** are a truesome twosome, so they say, in the world of hill-billy songs. I understand from the Aristo publicity folks that Billy Joe's career moves are all forward and fast. With news like this, who would ever want to rock 'n' roll again? Not Billy Joe!

SON OF CAJUN CALLED SONNIER

Cajun is called a 'roots' music. Originating in the swamps of Louisiana, **Jo-El Sonnier** has brought his roots music to town, recorded an album, gotten a deal on RCA and named his album *Come On, Joe*. Down home, Jo-El started playing accordion when he was four. By the time he was six, he had a 15-minute radio show. He was gigging on the weekends, digging frogs to eat and dreaming of being famous. Thanks to **Joe Galante** at RCA, some of this may just happen. Looks like he's headed toward stardom in a big way.

IRLENE MANDRELL GOES TOPLESS!!

Hey! Don't get your dander up. Cutest thing you ever saw and on page one of the

brand new *Baby Photos of the Country Stars*, compiled by **Paul Randall**. My family got the biggest kick out of comparing the baby pix with the adult pix in the back of the book. And we all enjoyed seeing **Irlene Mandrell** topless at six months old. By the way, if the book isn't distributed in your area, you can get it by checking the ads for it right here in this magazine.

TRAILBLAZER PEARL BUTLER DIES

Pearl Butler, half of the duo team **Carl & Pearl Butler**, departed this life the first of March. She and her husband Carl, who survives, blazed the duet trail with hits like "Don't Let Me Cross Over" and "If Tear Drops Were Pennies." Pearl and Carl were close friends of young **Dolly Parton** when she first came to Nashville and knew her in Knoxville when the Butlers lived there and Dolly lived with her family in nearby Sevierville. Representing the music world at the funeral were **Buck White, Billy Walker, Tommy Collins, Ferlin Husky** and **Cal Smith**. We send our sympathy to Carl and the Butler daughters, **Carla** and **Robin**. Pearl was laid to rest in the Williamson Memorial Gardens not far from the couple's Franklin, Tennessee home.

BRENDA! BRENDA! BRENDA! MUSIC! MUSIC! MUSIC!

All you lucky fans who visit Opryland this year are in for a superstar trip. Little Miss Dynamite, **Brenda Lee**, will star in the musical production *Music! Music! Music!* at the Roy Acuff Theater on the Opryland grounds the entire forthcoming season. Separate from park admission, the tickets are \$9.95 and well worth the money. I will see you there, my friends.

TANYA TAKES THE CURE

Sultry **Tanya Tucker** reportedly has done her time at the Betty Ford Center. Plagued with "walking that dangerous line" for quite a spell now, I for one pray talented Tanya gets back on the road again. It's good to see her on the charts and on the ACM Show. With a little luck and help from good friends, she's gonna be okay.

TRUCKERS WITH TASTE

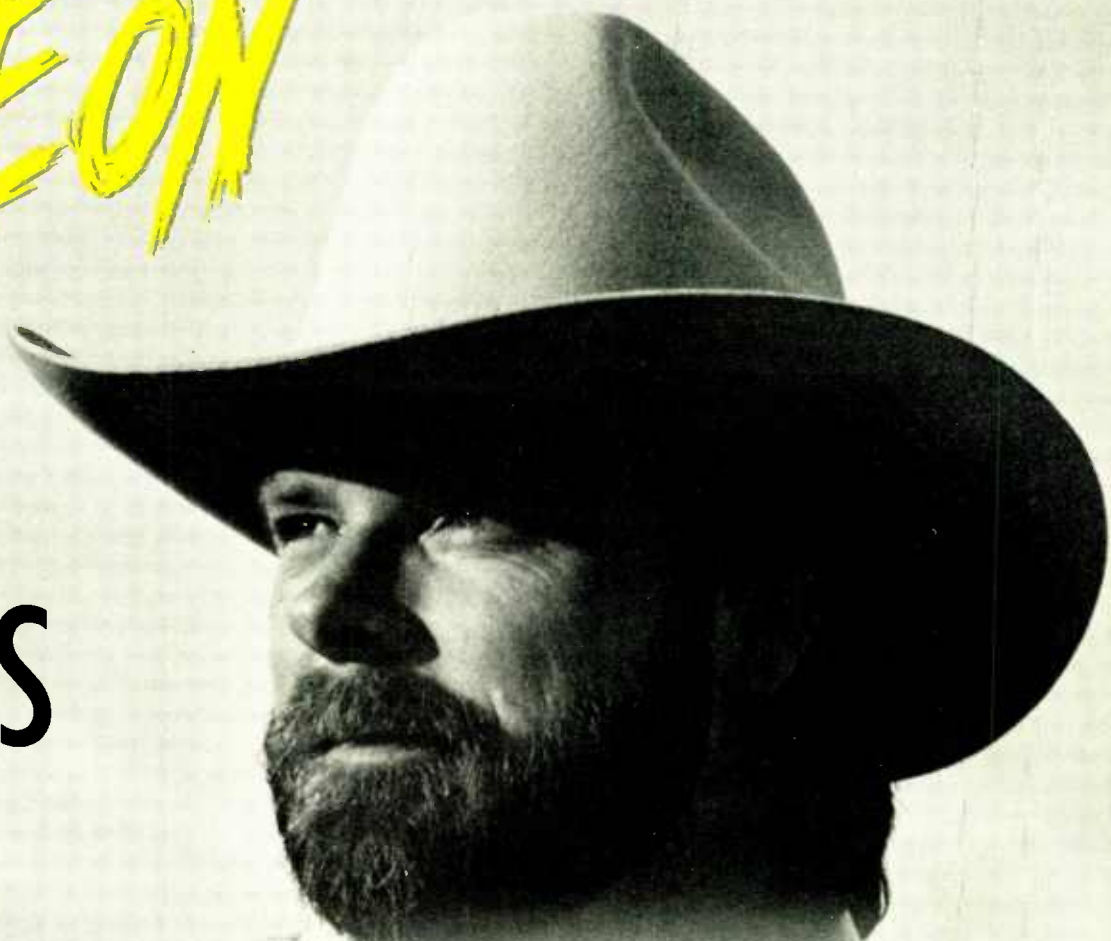
With twelve Number One singles to their credit, **The Bellamy Brothers** were recently notified that the **West German Truckers Magazine** debuted their current album, *Crazy From the Heart*, at the top of the chart. Congrats to The Bellamys for this rare Number One and congrats to the truckers for having Number One taste.

IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR SOMETHING GOOD TO GET "ADDICTED" TO, THIS IS IT.

RAGE ON

THE NEW ALBUM BY

DAN SEALS



FEATURING THE HIT SINGLE
ADDICTED

Produced by KYLE LEHNING

Management: TONY GOTTLIEB/Morningstar Management

Capitol
©1998 CAPITOL RECORDS, INC.

World Radio History

GMM UPDATE: *Grandpa Jones*

Grandpa Jones has got to be the "longest running Grandpa" on record. He was given the name Grandpa when he was 22 years old. And hasn't slowed down since.

The 75-year-old veteran entertainer has had two bypass operations. He appears on each and every *Hee Haw* show. He appears regularly on the *Grand Ole Opry* and *TNN*. He still does personal appearances and allows that he would like to work even more than he does. Grandpa and his bride Ramona have a home north of Nashville in the Goodlettsville area and also maintain a residence in Mt. View, Arkansas, where they run The Grandpa Jones Family Dinner Theatre from mid-June to mid-October. I visited the Joneses in their Goodlettsville home. What a treat.

Subtly situated at the end of a dirt road, the haven the Jones family calls home is a "long stones throw" from the hustle and bustle of Music City/Grand Ole Opry/*Hee Haw* business. So close, yet so far. Close enough to drive to in 30 minutes, but far enough that you cannot see nor do you hear any traffic. Trees and shrubs block out any view from neighbors. The 100-acre farm has been their home for 30 years. Grandpa can practice his banjo, shoot his gun, cut his firewood for the fireplace and split it up (which he does without help and enjoys it) and get outside and pick dandelion greens, cressy greens, poke sallet and sour dock to cook up his favorite dish... wild greens. Ramona can practice fiddle and mandolin and guitar, putter in her beautiful kitchen, walk around the property, which she and Grandpa do on a regular basis or just relax at home.

Grandpa and Ramona recently were inducted into the Arkansas Tourism Hall of Fame. The couple was honored at a surprise banquet/dinner and presented with a plaque which read "For unselfish dedication to the tourism industry, we, the Arkansas Academy for Tourism Achievement, do hereby induct Louis "Grandpa" and Ramona Jones into the Arkansas Tourism Hall of Fame 1988."

Ramona wanted to talk about the dinner theater, which is open Thursday through Saturday nights in season. Ramona and her band appear each night and perform for the guests, and whenever Grandpa is in town, he too joins in the fun. Two of the Jones children, Mark and Alisha, perform in the group and Ramona has added a couple more people to round out a great old-time string band. Before the music, however, there is entertainment of another kind. Food! The menu consists of Grandpa's yummy beef barbecue, old-time cracklin' cornbread that Ramona learned to cook by the time she learned to sing, white beans and baked potatoes, Grandpa's favorite greens, apple sauce, sorghum molasses, Ramona's delicious homemade cakes and coffee or tea. Everything included for \$15.00.

Some friends who will drop by to pick and sing for the friends and neighbors this sum-

mer are David Holt, John Hartford, George "Goober" Lindsay and Oswald "Pete" Kirby. Harold Morrison will be an extra added attraction this summer, which should be loads of fun. The theater is located just 70 miles south of Branson, Missouri, in the beautiful Ozarks, so mosey on down for the food and fun and mingling with the stars. Grandpa drives his Mercedes the eight-hour trip every week. Was I impressed with that!

Grandpa and me hunkered over the oak table over coffee and talked till the sun went down. What a fortunate person I am to have been in the company of such greatness. Their lovely home is constructed of logs hewn in the 1800's and consists of oak, chestnut and yellow poplar. The log that runs the entire length of the livingroom fireplace, Grandpa said was yellow poplar. Ramona added that the trees had to have been growing during the 1700's because of their enormous size.

I asked Grandpa his feelings on *Hee Haw*. "It's just one big happy family. When one gets cut, why we all bleed." Sam Luvolvo? (I already knew this answer... a prince of a fellow, Sam produces *Hee Haw*). "Happiest man you ever saw. Great man. You know, he just took right up with me. We hit it off right from the start."

Grandpa's skin does not have a wrinkle. His step is agile and sure. Why? "Well, maybe the skin is helped from all the makeup Elizabeth Linneman uses on me for *Hee Haw*. She's the best, you know. And, well... that last heart attack, after that, the doctor told me I needed to walk and I do, a mile or two every day. It just feels good. I get out doors. I love to hunt, but I don't hunt nothing we don't eat. We don't eat venison, so I won't hunt deer. I like quail, so I hunt it. I love to fish."

Biggest thrill, I asked? "Two. When I was elected into the Country Music Hall of Fame, and when me and Ramona entertained the troops in Korea during the war there. Why we sung to servicemen 500 yards from the front line. Now, that was something."

Other memories included his childhood. "Daddy was a sharecropper, and you just don't have nothing when it's that-a-way. I remember once we moved from Ohio back to Kentucky in this cold old house that you could see outdoors in the cracks by the chimney. We got to this place about midnight, and it was cold... what you talking 'bout. We built a fire and got it going and started to thaw out. Mother brought in some sandwiches. Boy, I never tasted nothing that good before or since. Anyhow, we had one old Jersey cow and some corn in the crib. Mother shucked and shelled the corn. Parched it and ground it in the coffee grinder and cooked it with water... three times a day for three weeks, and that's all we had with the milk from the cow. Thinking back, it sounds bad, but at the time it really didn't seem all that bad."

Grandpa gave me his book titled *Everybody's Grandpa* and his newest album with



Grandpa and Ramona

"There's a million Grandpa Jones stories, and I was fortunate to have met the man in person."

songs on one side and those wonderful recitations on the other. The book is \$15.00 and the album \$9.00. Both can be ordered by sending a check or money order to Grandpa at Box 853, Goodlettsville, TN 37075.

Grandpa's favorite song is "Green, Green Grass of Home," his favorite singers are George Jones and Merle Haggard. He has plans to go with Porter Wagoner to Center Hill and fish as often as he can.

There's a million Grandpa Jones stories, and I was fortunate to have met the man in person.

I'd like to thank my friend, Mr. Jim Wilkins, for driving me out to the Jones estate and thank Ramona and Grandpa for inviting me. From the first hello to the last goodbye, I felt perfectly at home. Nothing formal, nothing stuffy. Just good down-to-earthers who pick music instead of beans for a living.

As I was leaving, the sun was down behind the trees. Grandpa picked up Ramona's D-18 Martin 1939 Vintage and picked out "When Jesus Beckons Me Home." What the great old man didn't know is I felt like I was leaving heaven.

—HAZEL SMITH



This drill solved our water shortage problem.

"They Didn't Think The Children And I Could Drill A Water Well."

— Mary Hickman

But, seeing is believing. Thank you, DeepRock.

MY FRIENDS THOUGHT I had lost my mind. The idea that the children and I could drill a water well by ourselves sounded like an impossible dream. However, we had to have more water for our large garden and lawn.

AN EASY WAY

Then I saw an advertisement that claims that you can drill your own well with a Hydra-Drill and save a lot of money. I had never even watched a well being drilled, much less drilled one myself, so I assumed it would be difficult. But they offered a free brochure, so I sent for it.

When the information came, I was delighted to find it contained a wealth of material. In addition to pictures and descriptions of the equipment, there is a very informative booklet about drilling your own water well.

I was impressed with the information package, but I wondered what we would do if we ran into a problem while we were drilling. Then I thought—well, they have a free consulting service with a toll-free telephone. Any company that is willing to go out on a limb like that, knowing they'll get calls from all over must have a lot of confidence in their product. So I took a deep breath, crossed my fingers, and ordered a Hydra-Drill.

TWO SURPRISES

Much to my amazement, the Hydra-Drill arrived from the factory in Alabama in just 7 days. That was my first surprise.

My second surprise was the simplicity and ease of operating the Hydra-Drill. The kids wanted to operate it, but there really wasn't much for them to do. There isn't any big mess and it's more like play than work. Best of all, we were drilling exactly where I wanted the well.

SPARKLING, CLEAR WATER

The biggest thrill came when we hit water. It was such an exhilarating experience, I can hardly describe it. We

had drilled down into the earth and found sparkling, clear, delicious water! It was such fun, the kids are eager to drill some more wells.

It must be contagious; my friends are getting caught up in it, too. When we started, they thought it was a pie-in-the-sky idea. Now they've got the well-drilling bug and I could sell my Hydra-Drill in a minute.

IF YOU ASK ME

To anyone considering drilling a Hydra-Drill well, my advice is this: Sure it's a challenge, but don't be afraid. It's an exciting and satisfying experience. If you ask me if I think it's worth doing, I'll say, "Yes, I do. I really do!"

For a FREE Information Package, call today TOLL-FREE or mail coupon below. Learn how over 100,000 water wells have been drilled this easy, low-cost way since 1962.

Now! Watch a Hydra-Drill well being drilled -- on videotape! Send \$5 (refundable) with coupon.



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People



NASHVILLE'S HOTTEST SEAT
It's not a shrink's office. Does not belong to a hypnotherapist. The chair does belong to TV host Ralph Emery and the *Nashville Now* set. Decorating the sofa from left to right are K.T. Oslin, Lyle Lovett and Randy Travis.

SKAGGS/SCAGGS

Plagued with incorrect spelling of his name, superstar **Ricky Skaggs** met the reason why lots of folks spell his last name with a 'c' instead of a 'k' at the last NARM (National Association of Record Merchandisers) Convention. Yep, Ricky met **Boz Scaggs** and said they had a good talk. It seems Boz has the same problem with the misspelling of his name and all because of the 'k' in Ricky's name.

WUNSCH GETS HIS WELL-DESERVED CHANCE

I'm betting on **Roy Wunsch** not to come in second place, ever. He is a first-class man and a gentle soul. During the course of his 17-year tenure with CBS, I was afraid the powers-that-be might overlook Roy's talent. Sometimes we can't see what is right at our own back door. But they looked and they saw, and they named Mr. Roy Wunsch Senior Vice President, Nashville Operations, CBS and its affiliated labels. He's got a big job and he will do it with class and common sense. Before 1990, I predict CBS will again be the Number One label in this town. I am a name dropper, and I'm ready to brag about having lunch with Roy Wunsch. He's the best. But then all my friends are the best, aren't they?

By the way, the date that the announcement came that Wunsch had in fact been named to head up the label, my family and I were dinner guests of **Rattlesnake Annie** and her husband and mother at Ben Kay, a lovely Japanese restaurant. Over sushi we lifted glasses filled with plum

wine and chokos filled with sake to toast Roy Wunsch. It just seemed to be the right thing to do.

JERRY LEE LEWIS FLICK

Who could play the part of **Jerry Lee**? Hmm. Well, about the best actor I know is Jerry Lee's own dear first cousin **Jimmy Swaggart** who has acted for years. And I vote for Jerry Lee to play Swaggart when they do *his* life story. Could not help but write it: *Three little boys from down in Louisiana/Three little boys all learned to play the piano.* (The third is cousin **Mickey Gilley**, of course.) There is more, but it might embarrass mama and the boys, and I wouldn't want that. All kidding aside, rumor has it that **Dennis Quaid** is set to play Jerry Lee. Does Quaid have the stamina? The Killer has been known to live two lifetimes in one month and brag about it.

GREAT JOB, HANK & REBA

Our own **Hank Williams Jr.** and **Reba McEntire** did a bang-up job hosting the Academy of Country Music Awards Show from California. To both you pros, may I congratulate you and say you made Nashville country music look great.

MY LOVE AND SYMPATHY, ROY

Among other tributes being offered to the great songwriter **Vaughn Horton**, I give thanks for having known him. The writer of "Mockingbird Hill" and co-writer of "Mule Skinner Blues" died at his home in Florida. He was buried in the family

cemetery in Pennsylvania. A memorial service held in Nashville was attended by Vaughn's brother, Country Music Hall of Fame Member **Roy Horton**, now a New Yorker. My love and sympathy go up to New York to dear Roy and his family. Vaughn was a great man whose music will live forever.

VERN GOSDIN—PLATINUM PERFORMANCE

From the chilling "Do You Believe Me Now" to the chip-kicker "Set 'Em Up, Joe," to the spine tingler "There Ain't Nothing Wrong (Just Ain't Nothing Right)," to the show-stopper/tear-starter "Chiseled in Stone," there ain't a bad groove on Vern Gosdin's new album, *Chiseled in Stone*. First we thank God for this excellent recording and for giving Vern Gosdin a voice that borders on being the best; second we thank Vern for not giving up after all those bad years filled with bad breaks; and last we thank songwriter **Hank Cochran**, who helped write seven of the songs and who brought Vern to the attention of Nashville great, **Bob Montgomery**. I will laud Montgomery later; for now, just let me say, Montgomery has forgot three quarters more than Music Row will ever learn or know about music. On the strength of the songs, Montgomery went to CBS with an idea—some great songs and a 50-year-old hillbilly who had never been on a major label! CBS went for it, on one condition. Montgomery had to cut the record with a budget of peanuts. He spent about as much on the entire album as most producers spend on a single record.

JUST MENTION THE MARLBORO COUNTRY MUSIC TOUR

You fans who are fortunate enough to attend the Marlboro concerts this summer and fall are indeed lucky. With stars like **Alabama**, **Randy Travis**, **Merle Haggard**, **The Judds**, and the Texas hearthrob **George Strait** headlining the star-studded package, which also features up-and-comers **Ricky Van Shelton** (who better run fast or I'll catch him), **K.T. Oslin**, **Restless Heart**, **Kathy Mattea** and **The O'Kanes**, you'd be hard-pressed to find a better concert.

Please make note that \$1.00 from each ticket sold will be contributed to Second Harvest, a national food bank. Also, Marlboro will sponsor a talent contest boasting a winning pot of \$30,000. The Marlboro folks continue to present great entertainment with both old standbys and newer talent for the fans. Personally, I'd like to thank them for their generosity.

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Just imagine what it would be like to look through glasses that make the world seem sharper, more vibrant, more alive and more cheerful. Slip on a pair of these sleek designer sunglass "look alikes" and you'll notice a marked improvement in your vision. The world will seem so crisp, so clear, that you'll feel as if someone had just given you a new set of eyes. This vision enhancement experience is so incredibly phenomenal that you literally "won't believe your eyes!" Thousands of professional golfers, hunters, and skiers have already discovered and reaped the benefits of these indispensable Super-Glasses — now you too can experience the excitement of ENHANCED EYESIGHT!

What About Sunglasses

The unbelievable truth is that ORDINARY sunglasses may be dangerous to your eyes. Everybody knows that

your eyes automatically adjust to light. When you wear plain darkened lenses, your pupils open wider to adjust for darkness - but this becomes harmful because your eyes are now letting MORE dangerous UV rays in.

Ambervision™ lenses are graduated to help shield against overhead light. These glasses are made with one of the finest lens materials available for sunglasses - cast in CR 39™ with UV400 protection, even an optometrist would be impressed! The lightweight frames are designed for ultra comfortable wear and tear and the molded nose rest is designed to rest comfortably on your nose. The hinge design of these frames allows them to be the perfect "one size fits all" eyeglasses. Your "Super-Glasses" even come complete with a luxurious black suede-like protective pouch. No wonder these are the most popular and fastest selling sunglasses ever sold by this giant new home shopping club!

These Ambervision™ Super-Glasses will not be sold to any wholesalers, dealers, or retailers at this price. They are only available through this special publicity campaign for a limited time. There is a limit of two (2) pairs per address at this price, but requests that are mailed early enough (before July 30) may request up to five. Each pair of Super-Glasses is covered by a full one year money back guarantee.

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READ THIS

All amber colored glasses are NOT alike. Since the introduction of Ambervision last year, many imitators have come out with their own amber colored glasses, for lower prices (as low as \$5), making the same claims as Ambervision. The fact is that these imitations are manufactured of inferior material that does not compare to the quality in Ambervision. Some imitators even use the name "Amber" in the name of their product to deliberately confuse the consumer (ie.-Amber Optics, Ambersun, etc.) Ambervisions are the only glasses of their type that have been tested SUPERIOR to \$70 Blue Blocking glasses by an independent lab. Nobody else can make this claim. Please do not trust your valuable eyesight to anything less than the best!

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ROSANNE CASH

A Reluctant Star Comes to Terms With Her Talents

Never one to be easy on herself, Rosanne Cash was once full of self-doubt. Now that she's come into her own, she's found that life is a little easier and a lot more fun. And, her music has benefitted too.

■ by Bob Allen

In the course of a major-label recording career that now spans nine years and five albums, Rosanne Cash has earned a reputation as the reluctant star.

She has often greeted the considerable acclaim and public visibility that have come her way with hesitation, even trepidation. By her own admission, she has also, at least until recently, harbored grave—sometimes crippling—doubts about her own talents.

Yet in a business where second-generation artists with famous last names but insufficient talent to back them up are weeded out of the pack early, Rosanne Cash, age 32, has dug in for the duration. And she has prevailed. Her career is now adorned with all the requisite milestones of legitimate success, above and beyond her celebrated surname: A Grammy Award (1985 “Best Country

Vocal Performance”), a half-dozen or so Number One singles, some gold records...

Yet Cash has, from the start, sustained her career in a most unusual—and, frequently, ambivalent—manner. While your average, run-of-the-mill, best-selling, name-brand country artist spends 360 or so days a year fast-peddling on an exhausting go-around of nonstop touring, twice a year album releases and endless blitzes of media exposure, Cash has stubbornly stuck to her own considerably more casual inner agenda. Throughout her career, she has toured only sporadically. Her recent tour in support of her new *King's Record Shop* album was her first in three years. She has been known to take lengthy leaves of absence from the record business, and has even gone as long as three years between album releases.

“I do want to be a successful recording artist,” Rosanne, who has, in the past, often expressed a crippling phobia about the recording process itself, told me recently. “But I really don't give a s_____ if I go five years between albums.”

She has, judiciously, let the demands of the record business take a back seat to more pressing personal matters such as: raising her three daughters, Chelsea, 6, Caitlin, 8, and Hannah, 11, maintaining her occasionally troubled but deeply committed nine-year marriage to the celebrated artist/producer/songwriter Rodney Crowell, staying faithful to her weekly regimen of racquetball and pursuing a part time literary career as a budding short story writer.

“I just wish there were some way to be successful making records without being famous,” Cash lamented not long ago. “Fame, to me, just means living up to somebody else's expectations at any given moment...”

Yet, the considerable critical and commercial success that has come her way in the wake of *King's Record Shop*, her fifth and most recent CBS album, produced by Crowell, seems to have rejuvenated both her confidence and her enthusiasm for her music on several different levels.

Thus far, in fact, the record-buying public's reception of *King's Record Shop* has been strong enough to stifle even Cash's harshest and most outspoken critic: herself. The album as a whole has received a Grammy nomination, and the first two singles released off of it—John Hiatt's “The Way We Make a Broken Heart” and her own sassy rendition of “Tennessee Flat Top Box,” a song her father wrote and popularized nearly thirty years ago—have already hit Number One.

She was also recently awarded BMI's prestigious annual Robert J. Burton songwriting award for “Hold On,” which was a hit single from her 1985 *Rhythm & Romance* album. In addition, this same woman who confessed just a few years ago that, “I really have had to struggle to accept myself as a singer over the years,” was recently hailed by *Rolling Stone* magazine which, in a glowing review of one of her live performances, offhandedly allowed that Rosanne just “might well be the finest female singer in pop music today.”

And, today, in the face of such praise, even the ever self-critical singer herself begrudgingly admits: “It's been very gratifying—because I feel like I've worked a long time to get comfortable. I feel like I've finally earned my right to play in the garden, ya know?” The *Rolling Stone* review was “enormously gratifying” to her. “But,” she continues, “I don't think I could have gotten that review until I'd gotten to a place where



Rosanne and Rodney's video, "It's Such a Small World," was also the first single from Rodney's *Diamonds & Dirt* album.

"I don't much care about being a celebrity, but I do care about being an artist."

I had accepted myself as a singer, and come to terms with my strong points and my limitations—which took years of internal work. But I think if I had gotten that review before I'd worked out that process, it would have been difficult; I would have put a lot of pressure on myself."

If her philosophy and her way of doing things do, at times, seem different, let's just keep in mind that Rosanne Cash's background is a far cry from that of your run-of-the-mill country singer. She was born in Memphis in 1955, around the same time her father was making his first records for the Sun label. Her parents were divorced when she was quite young, and she grew up in Southern California, where she was raised on a steady musical diet of The Beatles, The Doors, and Buffalo Springfield. In her formative years, she briefly studied acting at the Lee Strasberg Institute in New York. She took courses in creative writing at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, worked for CBS Records in England, recorded one rather forgettable album for the German-based Ariola label, and even sang for a while as a back-up vocalist in her father's road show.

It was in Nashville in 1978 that she signed with CBS Records; her debut album *Right or Wrong*, was released the following year.

Today, when you scratch the surface with Rosanne Cash you encounter a bluntly honest, intensely introspective, yet surprisingly soft-spoken human being who seems infinitely less preoccupied with the external milestones and status symbols of success than she is with those even more elusive inner guide posts which lead down a sometimes painful road of growth and self-discovery. In its rougher and more

uncharted stretches, this road has included, for her, periods of serious strife in her marriage and a drug dependency, not to mention several crises of creative and spiritual self-confidence.

On a cold, gray Nashville afternoon, Cash is sitting in her comfortable Music Row office, keeping a watchful maternal eye on the young daughter of one of her business associates while she goes over details relating to Acme Pictures, a thriving video and film enterprise which she recently co-founded. Dressed casually in boots and dungarees, she chats in a disarmingly unpretentious, almost gentle, tone of voice. As she speaks, she seems blissfully detached from the storm's eye of a recording career that has gone rather abruptly from a back-burner simmer to a red-hot boil on the front of the stove. In a measured and occasionally hesitant manner that wavers between tentative confidence and begrudging self-acceptance, she discusses the complex and all-too-often unfathomable internal and external demands of walking a lifetime's worth of miles in Rosanne Cash's shoes. **So you really didn't have any particular expectations as to how *King's Record Shop* would be received?**

Shakes her head emphatically. No. I really didn't.... But I *did* know that "The Way We Make a Broken Heart" was a Number One record! *Laughs.* And I just said, if that's not a Number One, I'm going to quit! Because I just felt that strongly about it.

I understand that making the new album was a lot more enjoyable than working on the last one, *Rhythm & Romance*.

The new one only took three months to do. It had its own flow and spontaneity to it. It really just fell together; all the songs were *right* there. But *Rhythm*

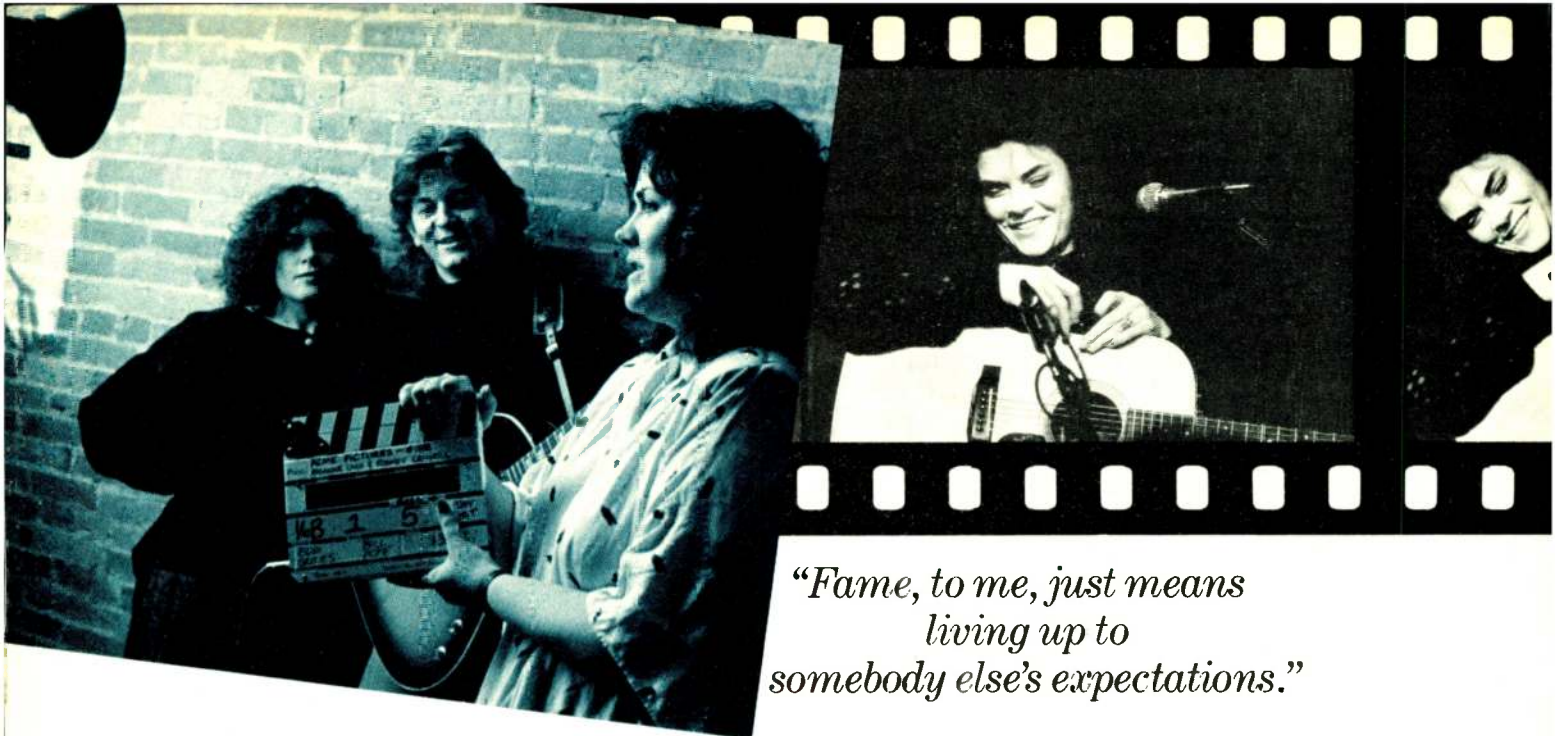
& *Romance* was another story entirely. It took a whole year to finish that album, and by the time it was finally finished, I felt burnt and drained, and unsure if I ever wanted to make another one.

That was also during a very difficult time out of my life. I had just finished up a month-long drug treatment program two months before I started the sessions, and I was still on a sort of unsure footing in the world. Rodney and I were also having difficulties, and we were trying to figure out how to be in love and stay married. We didn't like the way we were making each other feel, and there was a time there when it felt like we just didn't want to keep on.

Also, I'd written all these songs for the album, but I had no idea in my head of how I wanted them to sound—basically because, at the time, I didn't *know* what was going on in my own head! I'd become so neurotic and paranoid that my adrenals were pumping twenty-four hours a day. If you go back and listen to *Rhythm & Romance*, there's kind of an *angst* that comes through that's a pretty accurate reflection of what was going on in my life then. I was paranoid in my life, so naturally I was paranoid in the control booth, as well.

Was there much difference with *King's Record Shop* as far as the overall artistic approach?

I was real adamant this time about keeping the music stripped down and basic. I didn't want any layering. I wanted it all very simplified. I wanted a guitar-framed album. I didn't want any synthesizers, and I didn't even want any keyboards on the basic tracks, though I did end up compromising with Rodney about that on a couple of songs. I just wanted to peel back all the layers of distance that can develop between the



"Fame, to me, just means living up to somebody else's expectations."

singer and the listener.

So it was a lot easier this time around?

Yeah. *She smiles.* There's an old saying: 'As within, as without.' And that's sort of how it was this time. I love recording now. I think that once I got all my *fear* out of the way, I've been able to enjoy a lot more about my work. I've come to look forward to recording, and even touring, which I dreaded before.

Even so, Rodney had to sort of twist your arm about doing this new album at first, didn't he? Wasn't King's Record Shop the album that almost didn't happen? (Ed. note: Rodney Crowell, singer and songwriter in his own right, is Rosanne Cash's husband and has produced all of her albums.)

Right. At the time, I was not at all anxious to go back in the studio, particularly after the arduous experience of doing *Rhythm & Romance*. CBS wanted me to do a Greatest Hits package, and at first I liked the idea. It seemed the easy way to go: I was tired and didn't want to go back in the studio. Hell, I was just having fun writing my short stories, hanging out at my house with my kids and playing racquetball. So I figured I'd just go in the studio for a couple of weeks and cut two or three new songs to round out a "best hits" collection. But Rodney got after me about that. He said, "You *know* this isn't the *artistic* thing for you to do: the people who buy your records aren't going to appreciate an album that's basically a bunch of rehashed material, with a couple of new things thrown in." And he was right: I knew in my gut that it wasn't, and that I was taking the easy way out.

It's ironic somehow that Rodney has been such a wizard at writing and producing hit records for you, while over the years he's had considerable diffi-

culty getting his own records in the charts. It seems like even though he's tried with all his heart, it has taken him almost forever to get his own recording career off the ground. At the same time, however, success in that regard has often seemed to come to you even when you were only halfway trying. So...the inevitable question is, what about jealousy, or rivalry? What happens when you have two separate and individual, yet slightly overlapping music careers within a marriage? Do things like competition, or even resentment, ever become a problem?

Yes. It can make things very complex. It's done a lot for both of us now that Rodney is getting his own records out again. I think his self-esteem was injured, you know, by the flux and uncertainty (over his final album for the Warner Brothers label which the label chose not to release), and also by the fact that country radio didn't play *Street Language*, his last album. I could feel his frustration. It was particularly bad when Warners decided to can the album he did for them after he'd worked on it for nearly a year. And with his frustration came a certain amount of guilt on my part. Even though it wasn't my fault and I couldn't do anything about it, I still *wanted* to fix it, even though I couldn't. But now that he's got his new album, and he's getting ready to tour behind it, he's really happy, and it makes life easier for both of us. (Ed. note: Warners cancelled the last album Crowell recorded for them. His first CBS album was *Street Language*, followed now by *Diamonds & Dirt*.)

But if issues like jealousy or resentment do come up, we talk about them. We never bury them and let them fester until they ruin the relationship. We learned early on that if there is conflict,

you need to get it out in the open. I think the best thing about our relationship is our ability to communicate. But we've had to work on that long and hard. We've worked on everything. And I think we've finally learned what we didn't know in the beginning and what often made things so painful for us: we've learned how to just pare it down to two people who really love and care about each other, without feeling a lot of competition or anxiety, or whatever. All the rest...you have to learn to let go, like letting go of the string of a balloon. **And things work as well for you two in the studio?**

They do now. *Laughs.* Recording used to be a painful and anxiety-ridden process for me. And Rodney and I would get into our share of scraps, which made for some excitement! But this time around I had so much more clarity and focus than ever before. Rodney's such a good producer for me because he *understands* me better than anyone else in the world. We also have similar artistic criteria, so there's not much ground that we battle over anymore. *She laughs again.* It does seem awful, though, that Rodney's best qualities come out in the studio. His infinite patience and infinite concentration, all of these things rise to the surface—things I get so frustrated with him for not having at home sometimes!

There were actually times in the past when you and Rodney were close to calling it quits?

Sighs. Oh, yeah. There were a couple of times when we felt like we were ready to break up. But you know, every time it would get to that point, I just knew I didn't want to leave him. I knew that no matter how hard it was right then, I knew it was something that could be worked out.



"It's like you really want to be with the person you love, and you really want to show your real self to them, and it's just so frightening...."

Did getting off of drugs prove to be a help in that regard?

To some extent it did make it easier when they were no longer in the picture. But it also made things rise to the surface that the drugs had been keeping repressed. All the issues that had been covered over by the drugs now presented themselves, and I began to find out what my *natural* compulsions were. They say that all addictions—whether it's drugs, or alcohol, or food—are covering up some deeper spiritual unease.

So you actually checked into an inpatient sort of place.

Yeah. I went through a month-long program.

Was it difficult?

Laughs heartily. Very difficult!

Your music, at least some of it, has been described as "confessional." There is a song on the new album called "The Real Me," which, if you're in a raw mood, can be almost painful to listen to. It sounds terribly cathartic—it's full of that very painful and desperate aspect of intimacy: the risk of opening yourself up completely to another person, trying to find out what you really feel about them, what they feel about you....

A specific situation sparked that song.

Can I ask what it was?

Oohhhh... *Laughs nervously.* No, you can't ask!

What about the writing of it?

Frowns. Even that's hard to talk about. Let's just say I had gone through a shattering experience... And in that *breaking down* there was that feeling that you're talking about—like: "Oh my God, I've just got no pretenses left..." And there was the song. I was feeling so vulnerable, I really wanted to be with Rodney, you know? It's like you really

want to be with the person you love, and you really want to show your real self to them, and it's just so frightening....

I hate to use the word 'confessional,' but taking those kinds of risks with your unconscious, with your feelings, generally proves to be the best work, whether it's in music or in any other art. And sure—it's cathartic. But then, I couldn't listen to "The Real Me" every day. I couldn't go back to that every day. *Laughs uneasily.* I can face up to myself—but only when I'm prepared!

You've talked about how one of the hardest aspects of becoming "famous" for you is letting go of an attempt to control other people's expectations of you....

Thank God, I finally have. But that's something I really had to struggle with. At first I thought, "Well, of course people would know who I am and understand what I'm really about. But it's not that way. You find out instead that you can't control other people's perceptions of you, and everybody's got a different one. You can never anticipate on what level what you are doing will be understood or misunderstood. It's sort of disappointing, actually, to find out again and again that you've been misunderstood or trivialized.

Can you think of specific examples where that's happened?

Like people who actually walk up to you and say things like "We made you," or "You owe us." Or people who would write me letters and tell me I was disgusting, that I was ruining country music, or what I was doing was a sacrilege or whatever. At first it hurt me. But then I just let it go. The reason I do what I do has nothing to do with that sort of thing: I do it because it helps me, and because I love it.

With the Number One records, and

particularly with the songwriting award from BMI for writing "Hold On," do you feel like, to some extent, you've been vindicated?

Well, I must be pretty perverse, because in a way it always causes me to re-evaluate what I'm doing, rather than just taking it and automatically inserting it in my ego. When I got that award, the very next day I was going through "Hold On," line by line, thinking to myself: "This isn't that great a song, I've written better, why did this one get an award?" But that becomes abusive after a certain point. It's a character defect I've learned to recognize in myself. After a while I finally said, "God, why not just accept it, enjoy it? So...*laughs*... I did!

I heard an interesting story about "Tennessee Flat Top Box," your dad's old song, which you just recorded. I understand that when you first decided to record it, you didn't even know he'd written it.

That's right. It was Rodney's idea for me to do the song at first. I had heard it since I was three years old, and I just thought it was public domain. But Rodney kept saying, "I really think your dad wrote this." But when I found out that he had, I really wasn't surprised. I thought, "Of course he did! Who else could have written that!"

Have you heard from your father since you recorded it?

Oh sure! *Smiles.* The week it became Number One, he took out this full-page ad in *Billboard* to write me this letter thanking me and congratulating me. It was so sweet!

Do the two of you talk pretty often?

I guess about as much anybody my age talks with their parents. I talk to my mom, and my dad, I guess about once a week.



*"I said, if that's not
a Number One,
I'm going to quit!"*

Did you see much of your father during those years after your parents divorced and you were living in Southern California?

Well, yeah... I mean, after he *cleaned up*, I started going back and seeing him in the summers. But when you're young, you don't want anything to do with fame. When you're a kid, you just want your parents to be just like everybody else's. So it was awkward. I mean, I was real proud of who he was, but it was a real paradox: I didn't want the attention that went with it. And I think that's why I've always had reservations about my own success.

I understand you weren't terribly impressed with Nashville back in those years.

Laughs. No. To me, it was a bunch of people wearing plaid pants who'd never heard of The Beatles. I mean that's just how it was: I was coming from Southern California where you wouldn't be caught *dead* without Levis on! Nashville just seemed so behind.

During your couple of years off from recording you've also turned to short story writing, I understand.

That's right. I'm really enjoying it. I've finished several stories, and I've got more in the works. I just love not having to write melodies! I've been writing since I was nine, and I wrote fiction in college, but I set it aside to write songs. I've even bought a copy of *The Writer's Market*, and I'm going to start sending my stories out to every little literary magazine I can find.

Laughs. I sent one out to *The New Yorker*. I just thought, "Okay, I'm going to start at the top." But when I got my rejection notice from them, it was a big relief: Like, "Okay, now I can get *serious* about this."

You send them out under your own

name?

I use my own name, but nothing about what I do, or that I'm a singer. I just send a little letter that says, "Please consider this story."

I know it's always a hard question for a writer to answer just what his or her stories are "about." But what are they about?

A lot of them are pretty experimental. I have one that is about dreams—dream sequences connected with waking sequences. I'm really interested in experimental writing. Another one of them is a little bit more structured: it's about a relationship and the unconscious things that are going on in the woman which the man has no knowledge of. Another is a story of two women; one of them very outgoing and confident, and the other the exact opposite, and it's the interior monologue of the withdrawn woman. All those sorts of unconscious dynamics are just limitless to write about, so I'm real excited about it.

Are you back to songwriting, as well?

Uh-hum! I've already got ten new songs, some of which will hopefully go on the next album. I've been writing a lot on piano lately, which I haven't done since my early twenties. The melodies I come up with on piano are just so different than they are on guitar, which is what I usually write on.

Do you do most of your writing at home?

Most all of it. Usually when the kids are at school or in bed. I usually don't write when they're in the house unless I've made it clear to them that, "Look, I'm working, so don't come in the bedroom and don't take my pen!" *Laughs.* Children, though, are great for the creative process. They're a real *leveler* in a way that's helped a lot with my music. For one thing, they don't respond to

ego. I mean, if I came around them with an attitude, they'd just look at me like I was nuts. You've gotta be real with kids... I think anything where you have to be *real*, emotionally, and work from your gut instead of from your ego, helps your art, your music.

You've made the statement before that woman does not have to be victim, either in life or in music. And you made a particularly strong musical statement in that regard with "Rosie, Strike Back," a song on the new album, in which a woman with a physically abusive husband is urged to stand up and not take it any more.

Oh, yes. But how far does one go in speaking out against abuse? Not just physical abuse. Does it mean for a woman, not hiding your intellectual abilities, or not playing the weak part just to make some guy feel better? I mean, there are so many subtle levels that that sort of thing works on. And a lot of them are a kind of self-imposed victimization. I've been unraveling that for myself, too. And those things are definitely rampant in the culture—all the way back to when women were considered property.

On a lighter subject, I sense a lot more excitement and enthusiasm, a lot less ambivalence, about your career. So it definitely won't be three years between albums this time, huh?

No way. I think that this past year, I've made a lot of commitments to my career that I'd been unwilling to make before. And I think I finally figured out, not so much by thought but by work and feel, what being an *artist* really means. I don't much care about being a celebrity, but I do care about being an artist. And for a change, I've really been having a good time, as well. *Smiles.* I've really been having *fun!* ■



KEITH WHITLEY

New Kid in Town Finally Makes Good

Keith Whitley came to town expecting to make good. Instead, life had a few surprises in store.

Two albums flopped, and personal problems didn't help either. Then Keith took charge. Musically and at home, he's cooking now.

by Bob Allen

I went through some pretty hard times after coming to Nashville," says Keith Whitley. The former bluegrass star turned country recording artist scratches his beard uneasily and searches for the right words.

"I was, uhm, into the bottle pretty bad, ya know. I didn't even realize it. Hell, it's just a way of life. I thought, well, Hank and George and Lefty and Carter Stanley all drank, and I thought I had to. It's something you just start doing without realizing what it's doing to you.

"I was never that bad as long as I was working the road," Keith continued, looking back at his years as lead singer for Ralph Stanley's Clinch Mountain Boys and the J.D. Crowe Band. "But taking off the two years that it took me to get my record deal together in Nashville, and sitting home listening for the phone, things can creep up on you. I found I ended up getting a little further into booze and pills than I realized. I was beginning to think there for a while that I would never have a hit record, that it just maybe wasn't in the cards for me. I saw everything I'd always wanted slipping away..."

It is late afternoon, and Keith Whitley, looking tanned, healthy and prosperous, appears to be a world away from those all-too-recent, good-old-bad-old days when he was Nashville's new kid on the block. As he speaks, he sprawls comfortably in his air-conditioned Silver Eagle touring bus, dressed in white tennis shoes, blue jeans and a pin-striped sports shirt with the sleeves rolled up to the elbows and the shirttail dangling out. The bus has just brought him and his band back from a 24-day swing through Texas, Arizona, California and other points west. After one day in town, he will leave again this very same evening for more shows in Ohio and Indiana.

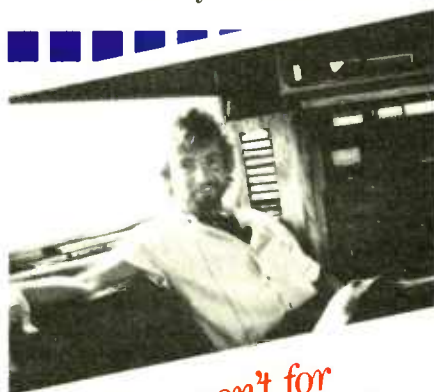
Whitley's bus is parked behind *The Nashville Network's* TV studios, just across the lot from the Grand Ole Opry House. He is spending a big chunk of his one day home taping an upcoming segment of *Nashville Now*.

"There just ain't no rest for the weary, I guess!" Whitley laughs. A wide smile of pleasure spreads across his face until he looks like a 14-year-old who's just found the ten-speed racing bike he's always wanted under the Christmas tree. "But hey: I *sure* ain't complaining!"

Indeed, Whitley, 32, has a lot to smile about these days. Just a few years ago, he was mired in a swamp of self-doubt and disillusionment, aggravated by a painful divorce, a stalled recording career and a drinking problem that ultimately required professional intervention. Major changes in his personal life since then include his marriage of two years to recording artist and Opry star Lorrie Morgan and the birth a year or so ago of their son, Jesse Keith. Last but not least is his new album, *Don't*

Close Your Eyes. The title song, recently released as a single, is tearing up the charts in a way none of his records ever has before. The word-of-mouth around Nashville is that *Don't Close Your Eyes* is going to do the trick his first two RCA albums were unable to do: put Whitley where many feel he's belonged all along, right up there with the Randy Traveses, the George Straits and the Dwight Yoakams of the world.

"It's a well-known fact that there was something coming across live with Keith Whitley that had never been captured on record," Whitley readily admits. "I have a lot of life-long fans who haven't liked any of my recent albums until this one. I'd have all these people come out and see me in concert, and they'd say, 'Man, I can't believe how much better you are live!'"



*"If it wasn't for
'Miami, My Amy,'
Keith Whitley wouldn't
be here today."*

"So when we started sessions for *Don't Close Your Eyes*, Garth Fundis and I figured out that one thing we needed to do was come up with a band sound in the studio." Fundis is Whitley's new co-producer, who's made a name for himself working with Don Williams, and more recently, the New Grass Revival. Keith continues, "We got all new people I'd never used in the studio before. We never intended it when we started out, but seven of the ten vocals on the album were done live. I did 'em at the same time the band was laying down its instrumental tracks.

"I saw this album as crucial," he emphasizes. "I knew it had to be my very best shot."

To the casual observer, Whitley has never come across as a man in a state of crisis. With his easy smile and his gentle, deferential manner, he's always had a natural way of putting people around him at ease, and seemed to know exactly where he was going and how he was going to get there.

Arriving in Nashville in 1984, he had ev-

ery reason to be confident. His reputation as one of the most talented singers to emerge from the bluegrass field since Ricky Skaggs preceded him. He'd just completed a couple of amazing albums with newgrass banjo-player/band leader J.D. Crowe, *Somewhere Between* in 1982 and *My Home Ain't In the Hall of Fame* in 1981. Both of these showcased his striking vocal talents in the Lefty Frizzell/Merle Haggard tradition. Whitley also had to his credit a couple of impressive duet albums he'd recorded with Ricky Skaggs back in the long-gone days when they played together in Ralph Stanley's Clinch Mountain Boys and in their own little bluegrass/gospel ensemble. So, all of Nashville rolled out the red carpet—something which, in retrospect, Whitley feels may have done him as much harm as good.

"I rode into town in a blaze of glory, so to speak," he recalls with irony. "The day I cut my first session at RCA, everybody who is anybody in the industry was there. I mean, it was like a major star coming in to record.

"But then my first album came out, and radio more or less said it was too country for them." This was *A Hard Act to Follow*, released in 1984. A frown clouds across his otherwise bright countenance. "They would not play it," he recalls. "We didn't have a hit record, so everybody kind of backed off and said, 'What happened?'"

"So the next time around, when I went in the studio with Blake Meavis to do the *L.A. to Miami* album, the first thing Blake says to the pickers is, 'Radio thinks Keith Whitley's too country, so don't be afraid to experiment or whatever.'"

L.A. to Miami proved to be a double-edged sword. It did get Keith on country radio, but it also alienated many of his long-time supporters. Somewhere in the course of making the album, Whitley's vocal gifts got lost amidst the contemporary keyboards, the refined schmaltz of the production and the blow-dried cover photo of the country boy gone uptown. He came across sounding like one more sexy but faceless countripolitan crooner with a nice hairdo and no discernible style of his own.

There were other cruel little ironies connected with that album, too. Whitley and Meavis had recorded some great songs, but it looked as if everybody *but* Keith was going to have blockbuster hits with them. "On the Other Hand," also recorded by Randy Travis, went to Number One. "Nobody in His Right Mind" turned into a chart-topper by George Strait. Meanwhile, Whitley was still sitting on the bench with a couple of modest Top Tens, waiting for his turn.

"People ask me about that all the time," he laughs. "Like: 'My God, I bet you could just kill them!'" Quite frankly, there were other things that bothered me, but that never did. We did cut those songs first, but I never considered either of them as a sin-



Lorrie and Keith with daughter Morgan and baby Jesse. The family is what kept Keith together through the hard times.

gle. That's just the way this business works: you've got the same publishing companies pitching the same songs to the same artists.

"But then," he laughs a little more uneasily this time, "it was like once that started happening, it seemed to just keep right on. I remember just before we re-released *L.A. to Miami*, and added some new songs to it: 'Homecoming '63,' 'I Wish Hard Living Didn't Come So Easy to Me' and 'Quit-tin' Time.' I remember right after the new version of the album was completed, I turned on the TV one day, and there's Jerry Jeff Walker on CMTV doing 'Hard Living.' Then I hear that Con Hunley's got 'Quit-tin' Time' out as a single on Capitol!..." He shakes his head and looks chagrined: "At least that let us know that we were choosing good songs!"

Whitley ultimately did get the one big hit from *L.A. to Miami* that he needed: "Miami, My Amy," which went Top Five. Maybe the song was still too slick to be quintessential Keith Whitley, or to really let the world know what he was all about. But it was a solid radio hit that came right when he desperately needed one.

"That record was not a Number One, but it did a whole lot more for me than I've ever seen Number Ones do for other artists. It was what I call an 'impact' record. That one record took me from being a songwriter on a \$250-a-week draw to being an artist with his own bus and his own band, neither of which I'd ever had before. It gave me something in my life important enough to make me change the way I was living. It took me from a God-awful point in my life where I was drinking too much, was having stage fright, and had lost every bit of self-confidence I'd ever had. It took me from that to having more self-confidence than I'd ever had before.

"I think it's safe to say that if it wasn't for 'Miami, My Amy,'" he adds with what sounds like genuine relief, "Keith Whitley wouldn't be here today. That record really saved my life."

Riding the momentum generated by

"Miami," Whitley worked the road hard. He also completed another album with Blake Meavis. "He's like a brother to me, one of the best friends I've ever had," Whitley says about Meavis. The album was good, too, he recalls. But, he finally decided, it was not the album he needed.

"One day after it was finished and the cover art was all done and everything, I just sat back and listened to it, and it just didn't hit me like it should. Ya know, this was my one big shot: the record label was ready to get behind me in a big way, and I just felt like this wasn't the kind of album I really needed. Plus, I'd already had the last single from *L.A. to Miami* die prematurely in the charts. And when you're out there facing \$45,000 a month in bills for bus, band and travel expenses, that can be real scary. I wanted to make sure it didn't happen again."

So Whitley summoned his courage and went in and had a conference with RCA/Nashville chief Joe Gallante. "I told him I wanted to shelve the album and co-produce the next one myself. Much to my surprise, he said that's just exactly what he'd like to see happen, too."

The end result, of course, is *Don't Close Your Eyes*. In many ways, the new album marks the much-delayed re-emergence of Keith Whitley. For the first time since his early 1980's albums with J.D. Crowe, his subtle and unmistakable powers as a singer come through on vinyl. "I don't think this new album would have been possible if I hadn't gone out on the road with my own band for two years," he says. "During that time, I really learned who I was as a person and as a singer. I think the way I sing on this new album is different from anything else I've ever done."

Suddenly, Keith's road manager appears at the bus door, and it's time for make-up and rehearsals. Whitley springs from his seat, tucks in his shirttail and puts on his blue-tinted sunglasses. His wife Lorrie and her beautiful six-year-old daughter Morgan also arrive on the scene. "I've adopted her, she's mine now," Keith says proudly of the

little girl. One-year-old Jesse Keith is back home with his nanny, but Lorrie and Morgan will travel with Keith for a couple of days to make up for his prolonged absence from home.

Inside the dimly-lit studio, Keith and his band take their places before the cameras and make a practice run on "I Wish Hard Living Didn't Come So Easy to Me." Morgan stands beside her mother in a dark corner, seemingly entranced by the larger-than-life close-up of her stepfather's face on a nearby video monitor. When Whitley finishes the song, there is a short break and he ambles over to join them. He and Lorrie stand there in the shadows, kissing, holding hands and making much over each other like newlyweds, until it's time for him to strap on his guitar and get back up on the sound stage again.

Whitley has, no doubt, told the story of this romance made in country music heaven a million times. But when asked, he flashes another one of those big, unrestrained smiles of his and says reassuringly: "I have. But it's a story I love to tell."

"I met Lorrie when I first came to town. I was in the studio doing some demos with Don Gant, and she came by with Gant's brother Ronnie who, at the time, was producing her for MCA. She's very pretty, and I never quite got her out of my mind after that first time. I found out later that she lived in these apartments right across the street from the apartment I was living in then, though I had no way of knowing at the time... There were just all these incredible coincidences..."

"So she'd made a big impression on me, and I evidently made a big impression on her without even knowing it."

"It just seemed like for the next two years, we just kept running into each other here and there. I found out later she was a big fan of mine. She had tapes of all my stuff with J.D. Crowe, and everything. I also found out she'd sung on the very first demo of 'Miami, My Amy,' and that the first time she heard my version on the radio, it really knocked her out."

"Then one night after I was divorced, I ran into her when I was out doing the Opry, where she's a regular. She came over and re-introduced herself to me," he smiles again, "even though she sure didn't need to do that! I sure knew who she was! It seems like in the next fifteen minutes I told her my life story: that I was divorced, and let's go to dinner... Something like that!" He giggles. "I think that kind of scared her, but we made a date for the next day, and we've more or less been together ever since. She's really been the best thing that ever happened to me, in a lot of different ways."

"Between her and the new record, I've got a whole new life," he flashes that warm, million-dollar smile once again. "I don't think things have ever been going better for me than they are right now." ■

CMSA

NEWSLETTER OF THE COUNTRY MUSIC SOCIETY OF AMERICA
JULY/AUGUST—EDITOR, HELEN BARNARD

Newsletter

REVIEWS & FEATURES

Lifetimes of Music

You readers are great writers. In response to Editor Russ Barnard's call for thoughts and suggestions on *Country Music Magazine's* 15th Anniversary in last year's July/August issue, you sent us not only congratulations and suggestions, which we have been publishing in our 15th Anniversary letters sections in various issues since September, but also long letters about what country music in general has meant to you and how it has been involved in your lives over long periods of time.

These letters have made fascinating reading. They have given us glimpses of life lived in this country 30 to 40 to 50 years ago, when radio was the important source of entertainment for families and neighbors

and when rubbing elbows with entertainers was easier than now.

We have published excerpts of these letters in the current 15th Anniversary letters section in this issue, and here in this *Newsletter* you will find some of them that relate to items asked for or found through Information, Please. We believe that our opening our hearts to you in the 15th Anniversary Issue is being reflected in your opening your hearts to us in these letters.

In addition, we have received more mail about radio stations in response to our March/April and May/June Radio Specials. We will continue to feature stations you recommend to us.

Thanks and Many Memories

A member from Ohio writes to Russ Barnard.

Just a note to say "thank you" for advertising my *Country Music Magazine* collection in your January/February *Newsletter*, and thanks to the lady in Wichita, Kansas, who bought it. I had requests from nine states, also one from England. How about that? That goes to show you just how "big" country music really is.

I grew up with country music in our family, as my four brothers had a country band and I did their vocals for several years. We listened to the Grand Ole Opry on an old battery-operated radio my mother had, and I always had a fantasy that someday I would get to see it.

Well, "lo and behold," in 1984 I finally realized that dream, and what a show they had. I saw

Loretta Lynn, Hank Snow, Porter Wagoner, Skeeter Davis, Jimmy C. Newman. What a thrill to be finally sitting there seeing the Opry live.

I go to every concert that I can make it to, and I promote country music daily. My kitchen radio plays on our local station WHXZ all of my waking hours. I had the pleasure of meeting Pee Wee King way back in 1937-38. He was

playing vaudeville at the old Savoy Theater on W. Jefferson in Louisville, Kentucky. Now that "was a while back." Louisville is across the bridge from my home town of Jeffersonville, Indiana. By the way, the Jeffersonville Boat & Machine Company built the "General Jackson," and I hope to get to take a cruise on it. During World War II, we built LST's there and launched them. "Wow," that was also a while back too.

However, Russ, thanks for the greatest magazine ever published and keep up the good work.

Mr. & Mrs. Charles Eary
Mt. Orab, Ohio

P.S. Also spent last 4th of July in Branson, Missouri. That's a country music fan's dream. Visited The Roy Clark Celebrity Theater, saw Ray

In This Issue

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- Outstanding Stations
- The Legend of Bill Monroe
- Collections



HISTORIC PHOTOS

Thanks to Pee Wee King for some of these: l. to r., Pee Wee and Minnie Pearl, in a 1938 Gene Autry film, in 1945 with Judge Hay and Ernest Tubb, and in 1938, the year Mrs. Eary met him in Louisville.



Stevens. He is the "greatest"—got a picture, also a "hug." Also visited Bob O'Links, saw The Texans. They had that crowd rolling in the aisles. What a treat!

Hello to "Hazel." I like her. I believe she is a sweet "ole" down home girl. Pee Wee King's brother Gene operates King's Record Shop in Louisville. See our September/October issue. As for Branson, we're always looking for reports on visits there. Hope more fans will write us.—Ed.

HISTORIC PHOTO



Keepsake photo of Paul Roberts.

Whatever Happened to Paul Roberts?

A request for info plus a historic photo. Does anyone know where Paul Roberts is, the writer of "There's a Star Spangled Banner Waving Somewhere"? I am enclosing a photo of him, taken back in the 1940's when he appeared in person in Maine. I know Elton Britt recorded the song—it was popular during World War II.

Dorothy Greene
Brook Rd. Box 141
W. Lebanon, New Hampshire 03784

MAY 1988 POLL

Album and Single of the Month

| | |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Randy Travis | <i>Always & Forever</i> |
| Ricky Van Shelton | <i>"Life Turned Her That Way"</i> |

Third win in a row for Mr. Randy Travis and *Always & Forever*—nationally Number One or Two and flat-out Number One with the CMSA. Ricky Van Shelton and George Strait are two and three respectively with *Wild-Eyed Dream* and *Greatest Hits, Vol. 2*.

In singles, Ricky Van captures first—the CMSA listens to Hazel, right? George Strait is second with "Famous Last Words of a Fool." The also-rans are so far back, they don't even count. Names are Hank Jr. and Moe Bandy, with songs "Young Country" and "Americana," respectively.

Looking Back on T. Tommy Cutrer and Don Holt

Sometimes words can paint a picture as graphically as a photograph. Here's member Linda Holt Moorehead reminiscing about her brother and T. Tommy Cutrer. The call for info about T. Tommy in the January/February Letters section got Linda started. She's also looking for two of her brother's records.

I've put off writing this letter for years because I dread not getting any information and being very disappointed. We have been living "temporarily" outside the United States for almost eight years. We keep up with country music only through your magazine and a one-month vacation in the States each year. Thank you for a terrific magazine.

My husband and I are two of the multitudes of Ray Price fans that would love to hear from/about him. I'd also like to hear about T. Tommy Cutrer and Ginny Wright (Josey) of "I Love You," "Are You Mine," etc., fame in the early 1950's. She was a regular on *The Louisiana Hayride*. What happened to Jimmie Rodgers of the 1950's—"Kisses Sweeter Than Wine," "Uh, Oh! I'm Falling in Love Again," etc.? Last I heard of him was about an unfortunate accident in California many years ago. He was a great talent. Is he well? Still singing somewhere? What about the Rowley Trio (Evelyn, Dido and ? Rowley), Betty Foley, Shep Wooley, Hoot (Raines) and Curley (Herndon)? Maybe Slim Whitman, my idol of the 1950's, would know about the latter two or maybe any of the above. As for T. Tommy Cutrer, I only hear his beautiful voice speaking on commercials now.

My husband and I (youngsters then) knew T. Tommy Cutrer when he was a singing D.J. on KCIJ in Shreveport, Louisiana. He emceed a stage show in Marshall, Texas, that my

brother, Don Holt, and I were on. I think it was called *The Marshall Jamboree*. Don, at the time, had a live music show and a D.J. show on KALT in Atlanta, Texas. Any old fans out there? Don also appeared as a guest on the Grand Ole Opry at least once or twice, and several times on *The Louisiana Hayride*.

I'd like to find copies of two of Don's records, "Let Me Love You" b/w "My Baby Still Loves Me" on Buddy label (78 only) and "My Heart" by The Tunes, featuring Don Holt, on Swade label (45). The family would very much like to buy at least one copy of each. We have none ourselves, but I do have "My Heart" on tape.

T. Tommy used to have a habit of calling the performers (male ones, that is) "brushhog." One night on stage he said something like, "Why doesn't somebody write a song about a brushhog?" Don started writing frantically backstage and minutes later came out and sang, "Don't You Call Me a Brushhog" for T. Tommy. The crowd went wild. I still have it on tape.

T. Tommy had a great bass voice. My mother, Clara Holt (retired now from the music business), and I always thought T. Tommy sang the bass on Olivia Newton-John's "Let Me Be There." Sounded just like him! He was a fine fellow and we all enjoyed him very much.

Would also love to find "I Love You" by Ginny Wright and "Are You Mine?" by Ginny with either Tom T. Hall or Jim Reeves.

Linda Holt Moorehead
P.O. Box 61780-ODECO
New Orleans, Louisiana
70161-1780

T. Tommy or any of these other fine people mentioned, come in, please . . . also any members who can help Linda with these records. Don't think you'll be disappointed, Linda! — Ed.

Response to Elvis Photo

In the May/June 1987 *Newsletter*, you printed a photo of Elvis and Johnny Cash reported to have been taken in March of 1956 at *The Louisiana Hayride*. Dennis Devine was said to have bought the 'original' photo in September 1986.

I bought this identical photo in August of 1978 in front of Graceland from a man named Elmer Williams. He told me that he had taken the photo of Elvis and Johnny backstage at the Grand Ole Opry on December 22, 1957. This information is printed on the front of the photo that I have, as well as the photographer's name. A notice is printed on the back of the photo which states that it is unlawful to resell, reprint or reproduce the picture for any purpose without the permission of the photographer.

In the photo that I have, there are three other people in the picture. Two of them are members of The Jordanaires. There is also a light bulb directly over Elvis' head.

I have a picture of Elvis, a snapshot of him in his bathing suit taken in his backyard at Graceland in 1957 standing by a friend. This friend is the person who gave me the photo and has asked that it not be reproduced for any purpose, so I can't share it with your readers. I also have a personally inscribed and autographed picture of Elvis he gave me when I met him in 1955, but I have seen this picture published many times.

Mr. Williams' address was 116 Donald St., Nashville, Tennessee. I hope this will be information Mr. Devine will be interested in.

Virginia Henry
Welty, Oklahoma

Unfortunately, people often sell copies of historic photos, with or without permission. The price Dennis paid for his, \$5, would indicate it was a low-grade copy itself. As for the occasion, the Cashes thought it was the Ryman, not the Hayride. We're drooling about your swim suit photo of Elvis.—Ed.

Meet Our Intern

The latest in our series of outstanding interns, Anne Barnard, high-school senior from the Brearley School in New York City, joined *Country Music Magazine* this spring as part of her senior project. "Country Music is giving me a lot of experience about how to interview, how to get a story and the practical aspects of putting a magazine together," says Anne. She especially likes working on the *Newsletter*, "because it puts me in touch with people all over the country, especially people in the Midwest, in small towns or on farms, like the place where my grandparents lived."



Diane Bossotti, Emily Di Censo and Jeanine Morley, last year's interns, all went on to other jobs or school. So did Margaret Kehoe, an art intern here last summer.

Words to a Favorite Childhood Song

We've all had the experience of not being sure we remember things right. Can anyone help?

I am 68 years old. When I was a child, my mother sang a song, "The Blind Child," to my sister and me.

She kept an old notebook into which she glued poems, songs, recipes, etc. Even then, the newspaper clipping was yellow with age. I don't remember what paper it was from, but undoubtedly one in Kentucky.

My mother died recently, and we can't find her notebook. My sister and I each assumed it had been left with the other one. Perhaps some other readers know the words. We'd appreciate any help. I am enclosing the words we remember. They might not be in the right order.

Bernieta E. Brown

720 E. Minnesota

Torlock, California 95380

The Blind Child

They tell me, Father, that tonight
You wed another bride,
That you will clasp her in your arms,
Where my dear mother died.
They say her voice is soft and low,
Her manner sweet and mild.
But, Father, will she love me too,
Your blind and helpless child.

As he turned to leave the room,
One joyful cry was given.
He turned and caught the last bright smile,
His blind child was in heaven.
They laid her by her mother's side,
And raised a marble fair,
And on it were these simple words,
"There'll be no blind eyes there."

CMSA Q&A

Following our article about finding collectible records in the September/October 1987 CMSA *Newsletter*, many of the dealers we mentioned received dozens of inquiries about rare, out-of-print records as well as auctions. Fort Worth record dealer Keith Kolby (6604 Chapel Lane, Fort Worth, Texas 76135) has some suggestions:

- **SEND A STAMPED, SELF-ADDRESSED ENVELOPE WITH YOUR INQUIRY** and "Limit the requests to a few things at first."
- **TYPE YOUR INQUIRIES IF POSSIBLE, OR IF WRITING BY HAND, PRINT OR WRITE LEGIBLY.** Some requests can't be answered due to illegible handwriting. "It's best to print your name and address in at least two places," Kolby advises. "If it's illegible in one place, we can get it in the other."
- **DON'T ASK BROAD, GENERAL QUESTIONS** like "List all the old albums you have by Waylon Jennings." That covers dozens of albums. "Some people," Kolby complains, "send whole pages of stuff, names of every artist that made a record and want a list of every record they made." Keep requests reasonable.
- **ALLOW TIME FOR DEALERS TO ANSWER.** "One old boy keeps writin' and writin' and askin' the same stuff over and over," Kolby says. "I really don't mind the questions unless they ask 'em twice." Be patient.
- **KNOW WHAT SPECIFIC RECORDS YOU WANT.** If you know the title of a single or album, you've got a big advantage. "If you don't know the title, you gotta know at

least several words of it," explains Kolby. "It's a common mistake for people to give the wrong title." If you're not sure, determine the title through Information, Please.

• **BE REALISTIC ABOUT PRICES.** Older records are like antiques. You won't pay less than you would for a new record. You'll often pay more. "These records are not a dollar apiece," Kolby declares. "We go to a lot of trouble to get 'em and drive many miles. These records are hard to find and long out of print. It's nearly reached the point where you don't pick up any old records cheap." Kolby continues, "I see in some customers' comments they'll pay a 'reasonable price.' What is a reasonable price? Obviously I've gotta make something out of it. A lot of people seem to think it's a freebie deal. Anybody in this business has to love it."

Speaking of things of interest to collectors, a book well worth owning for lovers of early steel guitar is Richard R. Smith's *Rickenbacker Guitars*, a beautifully detailed, lavishly illustrated history of the first company to commercially produce electric steel guitars and later electric guitars and basses played by various acts. The early section is particularly interesting, with photos of Rickenbacker-users such as steel legend Jerry Byrd and The Miller Brothers Western swing band. — RICH KIENZLE
Add this address to September/October's list of independent record stores: Corky's Record Shop, 5732 Johnson Drive, Shawnee Mission, Kansas 66202.

Attention: Luzon Valley Boys

Here's a call for a reunion, plus memories of days gone by. Members, take note.

During the time period 1955-1957, I was stationed at Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines and played steel guitar with the Luzon Valley Boys Band. We performed on Armed Forces radio and TV.

I would like to have a reunion of all former and later Luzon Valley Boys. The members while I was there were: Dick Flood, who was on Jimmy Dean's TV show in the late 1950s; Dave Triplett, Marvin Goss, Clint Heacock, Tex Dudley, "Gator" Lewis, Jasper Hedgepatch (comedian stage name).

I wrote to M. Triplette from Branchland, West Virginia, who has been in the *Newsletter* twice, to ask if related to Dave Triplett, and they were kind enough to respond to say no.

I enjoy reading *Country Music Magazine*, and I know I am speaking for countless read-

ers when I say, it is wonderful to have a source of information available to keep you informed about country music when you truly love it and have since you were a small child as I have.

My father had a Hawaiian, country-flavored show on WBNS radio in Columbus, Ohio, in the mid-1930's, and it is evident the Hawaiian guitar sound led me to play steel guitar. Also, Jerry Byrd, The Grand Daddy of the Steel Guitar, played for years on radio station WLW in Cincinnati, and he was my greatest influence (and was for most steel guitar players during the 1950's, 1960's and 1970's).

Thanks for keeping it country. I'll be a subscriber for life. If you have space, please caption my letter, Attention: Luzon Valley Boys.

Richard G. (Dick) Sudlow
RR 2, Box 103
Hanover, Indiana 47243

This should do it! For more on WLW today, see the featured stations in this Newsletter. — Ed.

Formula for Radio Success: Loyal Listeners, Faithful Sponsors, Community Involvement and a Clear Purpose

Here are three radio stations who receive high praise from their listeners: WKCW of Warrenton, Virginia, WLW of Cincinnati and WWL of New Orleans. The last two are rivals, serving truckers across the U.S.A. WKCW is a well-established traditional station.

WKCW—TRADITIONAL ALL THE WAY
WKCW, or "Big K," as its listeners affectionately call it, of Warrenton, Virginia, is the first radio station to have two fans recommend it to us. WKCW broadcasts on AM 1420 to areas of Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland and the District of Columbia. Its commitment to traditional country music and to the community have helped "Big K" build an unusually loyal following. Here are excerpts from the two listener letters we received.

... If you're talking traditional then there is no way this station should be overlooked. WKCW is a jewel in traditional country music, and one of only a few stations in the country that have not swayed from it. From the early morning show, to the daily gospel half-hour, to bluegrass, the afternoon show and the request lines, they keep Hank Sr., Lefty Frizzell, Flatt and Scruggs, Ernest Tubb, Hank Snow and all the other legends in country music everyday household words.

I'm sure it is not easy in 1988 for a radio station to stick to the format that it has had for years, but everyone in WKCW's listening area is glad the "Big K Cares," and we take our hats off to everyone at the station for not letting us forget what country music is all about.

Rosemary Callaway
Nokesville, Virginia

... WKCW's DJ's and station manager, Bobby Jo Watson, are like "home folk" and their formats are set up to please everyone listening in. They have a spot called "Hymn Time For the Homefolks," and no matter what your request concerning country music and bluegrass, they fill it!!

I am a Webb Pierce fan from way back, and WKCW is the only station where I can call and request his songs and know I will hear what I want. They have close associations with such greats as George Jones and Loretta Lynn, and with the changes in country music today it is truly a pleasure to know that "Big K" will play the music as I knew it growing up with such great people as Eddy Arnold, Jim Reeves, Patsy Cline, Kitty Wells, Faron Young, Hank Snow—the list is endless but you can be sure you will hear it on "Big K."

I just felt as one of its devoted listeners, that your magazine should know about the good feeling that comes over the air ways from this station and the people involved in running it—they definitely reach out to satisfy the country music fan!

Pat Kennedy
Dumfries, Virginia

We called up Bobby Jo Watson at the studio one day, and we could hear in his voice his love and enthusiasm for "Big K" and his profession. "We're the oldest existing traditional country and bluegrass station in the U.S. and Canada. We're kinda proud of the place," he said. WKCW has been commended by the CMA and the CMF, and there is talk of declaring the 28-year-old station a historical landmark.

We asked Bobby Jo if WKCW had had any trouble staying alive all those years while sticking to its unusual format. Not at all, he said—in fact the station hit its all-time sales high in 1987. How did they manage it? Bobby Jo mentioned that the owner, Joyce Crescente of Ridgewood, New Jersey, has allowed him to do what he likes with the station, with her blessing, for the last six years. "She's the sweetest woman on the face of the earth," he said. "A religious woman—she wouldn't take advantage of anyone. And we've done right by her."

Bobby Jo had no doubt about the mainstay of Big K's success: "Our sponsors. Ben and Mary's Steakhouse has been on the air every day since we've been in operation." The advertisers "love what we do, because they get results."

Those results come from the remarkable loyalty of WKCW listeners. They go out and buy things they hear advertised on Big K, because "people love this radio station. It's like a cult, or a religious following. Like a big family," Bobby Jo said. He told us one story of a fan who spent three weeks making a glass etching of all the stars for the studio. When the station asked for the price, the fan was insulted. "It's an honor to do it for Big K," he said.

One reason for that loyalty may be the station's involvement in community service. Bobby Jo hosts a yearly radiothon to aid low-income kidney patients at the Warrenton Dialysis Center. Last year WKCW listeners raised \$15,000. The station also sponsors an annual Miss Big K contest. In addition to attending events in the show van, this year's winner, Tamara Edge, will visit local hospital patients and help with other public service work.

And finally, says Bobby Jo, "It's popular. Peo-



Bobby Jo Watson, Station Manager of WKCW, keeps up with the stars. Here he is with Loretta Lynn. The WKCW studio may be declared a historical landmark someday. The Big K van travels around Warrenton. Miss Big K 1988, Tamara Edge of Ruckersville, won a trip for two to Jamaica, but she also does public service work for Big K.



ple used to laugh at us for playing traditional country music, but they don't laugh anymore. There's a kind of respect." —A.B.

WLW AND WWL—HEAD TO HEAD

Paul Ed Chamblin and Mary Slayback put us onto WLW in Cincinnati and WWL in New Orleans. Mary's favorite WWL D.J., John Parker, takes the Sunday night slot, from midnight to 6 A.M., including Mary's favorite segment, "Country Music As It Used to Was." We're still waiting to hear from John. The weeknight D.J. on WWL is Dave Nemo.

Together WLW's Dale Sommers and WWL's Dave Nemo have America's truckers covered in the wee small hours. Here's how the two huge stations compare.

On Their Stations

Neither WWL's *Road Gang Show* or WLW's *Interstate 700* operates out of a country station. Dale Sommers, the "Truckin' Bozo" of the *Interstate 700* show, describes his station as "mostly talk, sports, and a little adult contemporary." Dave Nemo of *The Road Gang Show* says WWL broadcasts news and information during the day. Both stations have a strong signal and can be heard across most of the U.S.

On Their Playlists

Both D.J.'s described most of the music they play as "traditional, up-tempo." "I refuse to change the playlists just because Nashville wants to put out artists that wouldn't know country if it bit 'em in the butt," says Dale Sommers. "I've been a rebel in the business for 25 years, so there's no reason to stop now." Also, he says, "Truck drivers are staunch loyalists when it comes to country music, and I play what they want to hear." Dave Nemo doesn't actually have a playlist; his show is all requests. Only truckers get the 800 number of the request line. "There's no stereotypical truck driver any more," says Dave. "They come from all sorts of educational and societal backgrounds. I just find that *most* of 'em like traditional country music." But Dave adds that many truckers also enjoy classical music shows like PBS's *One For the Road*, or hard rock stations like WLS in Chicago. Merle Haggard and Hank Williams Sr. are staples on *Road Gang*, and some new artists such as Skaggs, Strait and Travis are popular as well. The station received 4000 get-well cards for Skaggs' son from truckers and their families, which it forwarded to the hospital. "We don't play a lot of music that other people play," says Nemo. "You can't please everybody, so you just got to find your niche and stay there."

On the Purpose of Their Shows

Dale Sommers loves to get on the phone with truckers, and to send out messages to them on the air. "People call and say hi to a trucker on the road—it gets a trucker up at 3 in the morning, to hear his wife say, 'Hi, honey!'" Sometimes Dale will get two truckers on the phone together and "let them agitate each other, just like they do on the CB." Dave Nemo often



**SONGS PLAYED ON WWL 2-28-88
12AM-6AM**

| | |
|--|------------------------|
| Little Green Apples | Roger Miller |
| That's Truck Driving | Slim Jacobs |
| Home Grown Tomatoes | Guy Clark |
| I Had to Hold Her Hands | Homer/Jethro |
| Born to Lose | Ted Daffan |
| Tweedle-o-Twill | Gene Autry |
| Dim Light, Thick Smoke and Loud, Loud Music | Vern Gosdin |
| Bet You My Heart I Love You | Bob Wills |
| Red River Valley | The Vagabonds |
| Willie Roy, The Crippled Boy | Roy Acuff |
| Old Shorty (recitation) | Tex Ritter |
| Talk to the Man | Lorne Greene |
| A Tombstone Every Mile | Dick Curless |
| Miner's Silver Ghost Train | Merle Haggard |
| Goodbye, Sweet | Charlie Poole/Ramblers |
| Liza Jane | |
| Precious Memories | Wells/Wright |
| Jole Blon | Moon Mullican |
| I'll Hold You in My Heart | Eddy Arnold |
| In the Garden | Tennessee Ernie Ford |

Dave Nemo of *The Road Gang Show*, left, on WWL 870 AM turns the late-night microphone over to John Parker on weekends. Right, part of listener Mary Slayback's list of what Parker played one night.

broadcasts *The Road Gang Show* from truckstops all around the country. He likes to frequent trade shows where he can meet drivers and their families in person. And drivers have gone 300 miles out of their way to go to Nemo's road shows. "We usually go for the opening of

a truckstop," he says, "and then it turns into an annual thing." Both D.J.'s want to get to know the drivers and make them feel they're not alone out on the road.

On Politics

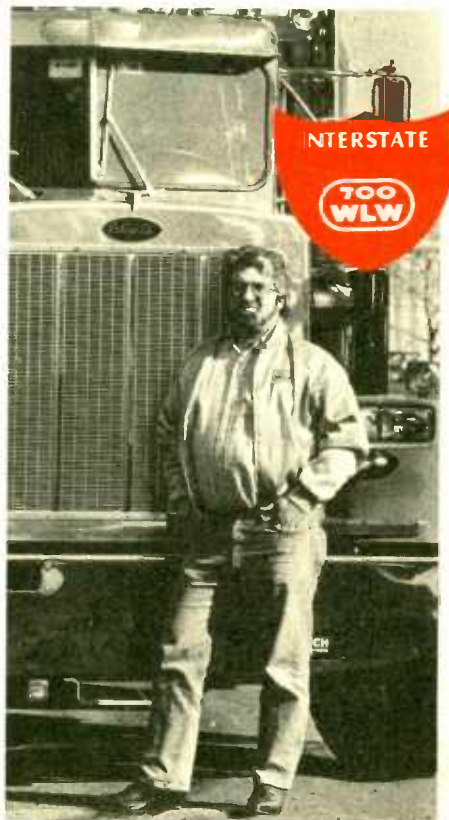
Nemo emphasizes the importance of America's truckers. "They are so important to our way of life, our economy," he says. "Everything in your office, even the phone you're holding in your hand, was brought there by truck And some states don't even want trucks on their highways—that's like saying, 'We want good health care, but we don't want any doctors,' or 'We want to be religious, but we don't want any Bibles.'"

Dale Sommers likes to get involved in truckers' political issues. Recently he has been promoting the economic boycott against Indiana, which "raised taxes against truckers and lowered the speed limit from 65 to 55." Dave Nemo often brings in representatives of each side of a trucking legislation issue—for example, people from the Federal Trucking Administration or the ATA—and mediates the debate. He doesn't see it as his place to take sides, but says, "I think the truckers know where we stand."

On Sponsors

Like WKCW, WLW and WWL enjoy commercial success with their traditional offerings. Sommers' and Nemo's shows both have strong followings—WLW is actually Number Two at night in Atlanta, far from its base in Cincinnati. WWL gives Nemo and weekend D.J. John Parker "a great deal of autonomy at night—we don't even broadcast out of the main studio."

Both shows are supported solely by trucking-related advertisers. Sommers and Nemo count Escort radar detectors, Cobra CB's, Texaco, Good Year and United Van Lines among their sponsors. —A.B.



Dale Sommers, "Truckin' Bozo" of *Interstate 700* on WLW 700 AM, poses with one of his best friends.

One of the stories they *don't* tell about the time Elvis tried out for the Grand Ole Opry was what happened when he ran into bluegrass great Bill Monroe backstage. Monroe recalls: "He come around and apologized for the way he'd changed 'Blue Moon of Kentucky.' I told him that if it would help him get his start and give him a different style, I was for him a hundred percent." Elvis was sincere; a few years later, during the so-called "million dollar quartet" jam session at Sun, where Elvis was joined by Jerry Lee Lewis and Carl Perkins, Elvis and Lewis sang no less than four of Monroe's old songs. Another Sun alumnus, rockabilly singer Charlie Feathers, made the connection even more explicit: "Bill Monroe's music and colored artists' music is what caused rock 'n' roll."

For a singer whose music, bluegrass, is supposed to have a cult following, Bill Monroe has had an amazing influence over the last fifty years. His 1985 album *Bill Monroe and Friends* had some of Nashville's biggest names actually fighting to get on it; the winners included obvious choices like Ricky Skaggs and Emmylou Harris, but also mainstream figures like Johnny Cash, Willie Nelson, Barbara Mandrell, Waylon Jennings, Mel Tillis, Larry Gatlin and The Oak Ridge Boys. In a city full of "legends in their time," Monroe still stands out as a *unique* legend, in all kinds of ways. He's actually had only a handful of certified chart hits, preferring to work through a long series of steadily-selling albums. Unlike many of his age and tenure, he refuses to rest on his laurels by remaking old favorites for TV packages and restricting his touring to a few big shows. His albums continue to show new work, new songs, new performing ideas and new sidemen. *Bluegrass '87*, released when Monroe was 76, contains as rich a selection of Monroe music as any released: hot fiddle tunes, blues, waltzes, gospel and older country songs. And in 1986, to celebrate his fiftieth year in the music business, Monroe took off on a grueling fifty-state tour—travelling, as he always has, by bus and car. Next to Roy Acuff, Monroe has been on the Opry longer than any other singer, but his career shows no signs of slowing down. He is still making his legend.

And legend it is; there's no doubt about that. Monroe doesn't just attract fans; he creates disciples. People name their children after him; amateur mandolin players bring their instruments to him to bless; families build their vacations around his annual gathering at Bean Blossom. And Monroe is refreshingly free of false modesty about all this. When asked how he feels when he is called "The Father of Bluegrass Music," he answers, "Well, I don't mind that. That's really the truth, you know. I accept that, I guess, as well as any man could. I think it's a great honor to originate a music—something to be proud of." In other conversations, he talks fondly of "his" music,

and reviews with pride the various other "students" who have graduated from his school—everyone from Flatt and Scruggs to Ricky Skaggs.

Most Monroe fans can recite the basic facts of the Monroe legend. He was a flatlander, from the rich farmland in western Kentucky, near a little town called Rosine. In one direction was Muhlenberg County, where Merle Travis would develop his influential guitar style; in another was Louisville, home of a thriving black music culture that merged rags, blues, jazz and string band music. The radio station of choice was WLS in Chicago, where the Monroe family listened to singers like Bradley Kincaid and bands like the Prairie Ramblers and the Hoosier Hot Shots. There were two churches in Rosine, a Baptist Church and a Methodist Church, and regular rural "singing conventions," where young Bill learned to sing the tenor parts to songs like "Beautiful Life" and "He Will Set Your Fields on Fire." And there was Bill's uncle on his mother's side, Pen Vandiver, an old-time square dance fiddler; after the older boys had left home, young Bill would ride horseback to dances with "Uncle Pen" to back him on mandolin or guitar. "We'd go out in the country maybe four or five miles and play for a square dance at somebody's home; they'd clear a room out and me and him would play the dance. We'd make three or four dollars apiece." Years later, in 1950, Bill would write "Uncle Pen," one of his best known songs, in tribute to these times.

As the Depression hit western Kentucky, many local farm boys fled north into the industrial centers looking for work; Bill's older brothers, Birch and Charlie, had already left, and soon Bill joined them. For five years he worked at a Sinclair Oil refinery in East Chicago and played dances with his two brothers in his spare time. Then, in 1932, the three Monroes got their first professional jobs in music—not as musicians, but as buck dancers in the WLS Barn Dance touring troupe. It was good work, and in 1934 Bill and brother Charlie decided to strike out on their own, doing full-time music as The Monroe Brothers. Bill played mandolin, Charlie guitar, and they specialized in sentimental songs like "Little Red Shoes" and "What Is a Home Without Love" and up-tempo gospel songs like "Drifting Too Far From the Shore." In some ways, they were like many other brother duets of the time, such as The Delmore Brothers or The Blue Sky Boys, but they liked to play songs faster and dazzled people with their intricate mandolin and guitar runs. For a time, they were sponsored by a curious product called Crazy Water Crystals (which apparently promoted "regularity") at stations in the Midwest, but in 1935 they moved down south to the Carolinas, where their radio career really took off.

In fact, the brothers were doing so well on radio that when the first letters came offering

them a recording contract with RCA Victor, they threw them away. Finally, on February 17, 1936, in a warehouse in Charlotte, RCA's Eli Oberstein corralled the Monroes for their first session. It yielded five records on the company's budget-line Bluebird label, including hits like "What Would You Give in Exchange for Your Soul?," "Nine Pound Hammer," "Foggy Mountain Top" and "New River Train." Over the next two years, the Brothers would record some 60 songs for Bluebird—about half of them gospel, many of them from older generations like The Carter Family, and most of them arranged by Charlie. They had success, but each brother wanted more, and in 1938 they decided to split.

Charlie kept the RCA contract, and for a



Bill Monroe

Bill Monroe's innovative career influenced both country and rock 'n' roll musicians, but he's best known for creating a style of music all his own — bluegrass.

by Charles Wolfe



The ages of Monroe. Middle photo, Bill, Scruggs, Birch Monroe, Flatt.



band of all time—Earl Scruggs on banjo; Lester Flatt on guitar and vocals; Chubby Wise on fiddle; and Howard Watts (Cedric Rainwater) on bass. It was this band that really defined bluegrass music, in 28 sides recorded for Columbia between September 1946 and October 1947. This was Elvis' source for "Blue Moon of Kentucky" as well as "Molly and Tenbrooks," "Will You Be Lovin' Another Man" and "I'm Going Back to Old Kentucky." The Blue Grass Boys were the hottest thing on the Opry, and when Monroe and Scruggs took their driving instrumental solos, the Ryman Auditorium went wild. By the early 1950's, as band after band sought to copy the Monroe style, the term "bluegrass" was being used to describe a type of music, not just a band.

In the early 1950's, as former Blue Grass Boys Flatt and Scruggs saw their own careers take off, Monroe's career seemed to falter. His new label, Decca, tried to push him toward mainstream country, and even saddled him with sessions using electric guitars and Nashville studio sidemen like Grady Martin. Monroe shook this off, though, and was soon producing new masterworks: "Footprints in the Snow" (1952), "I'm Working on a Building" (1954), "Gold Rush" (1967), "Linda Lou" (1961), and "Lonesome Moonlight Waltz" (1970). His instrumentation grew more and more complex—and at one point he was using three fiddlers—and through the 1950's and 1960's the Blue Grass Band became what Monroe calls "his school." His graduates were sent out to carry on the tradition, and they included Jimmy Martin, Sonny Osborne (of The Osborne Brothers), Hubert Davis, Bill Keith, Del McCoury, Roland White, Vassar Clements and dozens of others. In the 1960's, with help from his new manager Ralph Rinzler, Monroe began to expand his music into the "folk revival" circuit of the North and West, and onto college campuses. He found a national audience, and even today has fans in places where even the most sophisticated mainstream country acts have trouble.

In the early 1980's there were rumors that Monroe was about to retire. In his *Master of Bluegrass* album appeared the haunting, melancholy hit with the cryptic title "My Last Days on Earth." He underwent major surgery. He even made his peace with the Gibson company over a long-running dispute about his mandolin. But then came a new surge of creativity, and soon Monroe was back, as strong as ever, appearing in a video with Ricky Skaggs and doing a wild buck dance on the CMA awards show. In a recent interview, he summed up his work by saying, "I just wanted a style of music of my own." Such a pronouncement was, and continues to be, one of country music's great understatements.

Albums Available
See For Members Only page.

time was doing better than Bill. "I didn't sing a solo until I was 27 years old," Bill recalls. "I'd always sung tenor to Charlie. But with that training, to get up and hit those high notes, there wasn't any trouble for me to sing high, so I did." Finding the proper back-up combination was a different problem. The first group he actually called The Blue Grass Boys—in Atlanta—consisted of a fiddle, a guitar and a jug. He soon substituted the string bass for the jug, but still did not add a banjo. By 1939 he felt he was ready. "I went into Nashville on a Monday morning, and went up to the Opry office. Judge Hay and Harry Stone and David Stone were all going out to get coffee. After they came back, I played 'Mule Skinner Blues' for them, and 'Bile Them Cabbage Down,' and

'John Henry.' And they said I had the kind of music National Life needed, and they said, 'If you ever leave the station, you'll have to fire yourself.'" Monroe joined the Opry that fall, and during the next two years made his first solo recordings for RCA Victor—including such classics as "Orange Blossom Special," "Dog House Blues," "In the Pines" and "Tennessee Blues."

During the 1940's Monroe carefully built his band and crafted his sound—in between grueling tent shows he took out for the Opry and a series of exhibition baseball games that his boys played. By 1942 he had added David "Stringbean" Akeman on banjo, completing the basic bluegrass band line-up. By 1946 he had created what many call the greatest bluegrass

COLLECTIONS

Collecting the Magazine

Buying or selling extra issues of Country Music Magazine? Please write each other directly. If you need more info, enclose SASE.

• Extra collection of *Country Music Magazine* for sale, all in excellent condition: Aug.-Dec. 1978; Jan.-Apr., June 1979; Jan.-Dec. 1980 (2 copies May); Jan.-Oct. 1981 (includes 10th Anniversary Issue); Sept.-Dec. 1983; Jan.-Dec. 1984; Jan.-Dec. 1985; Jan.-Dec. 1986; Jan.-Dec. 1987. **Betty Heddens, 234 Marx Dr., New Buffalo, MI 49117.**

• For Sale: entire collection of *Country Music Magazine* dated from 1973 to the present. Write indicating which ones you need and what you want to pay. **John Wise, 9626 N. Memorial, Owasso, OK 74055.**

Information, Please

Write to each other directly. If you need more info, enclose SASE.

• For sale: several 8-track country/western tapes, all at least 15 years old. Also have the *Country Music Cavalcade*, a 20-tape set, in its original boxes. Write **Mrs. Clifford L. Hamilton, 6509 Baltimore Ave., Baltimore, MD 21222.**

• Looking for the song "Bride With the Faded Bouquet," recorded on Capitol or Columbia by Hank Williams. Jacket cover is a dark color and shows three men on horses in the sunset or sunrise. **H. G. Rinkel, P.O. Box 1049, Montague, NJ 07827.**

• Wanted: records or cassettes of The VanDells. Also photos of VanDells former vocalists Steve "Moose" Ritcks, Tony Bertke and Greg Schaffer and/or address where I can write them. **Janet Mae Spurling, Box 446 Macedonia Rd., Rt. 2, Blanchester, OH 45107.**

• Looking for 45 rpm record or tape of The Cathedral Organ, "The Wedding March—Processional" and "The Wedding March—Recessional" on Heart-beat II label. Thanks to all *Newsletter* readers who helped me with my earlier request to find Hank Williams Sr. songs. **Frank J. Dotterman, 222 Orange St., Mansfield, OH 44902.**

• Anyone have a video cassette tape of a TV special, *Roy Acuff: 50 Years The King of Country Music*? Please let me know. **Shirley Stephan, 1402 19th Ave. SW, Austin, MN 55912.**

• Rare old 78 albums available, including Jack Guthrie, Bill Carlisle, Cowboy Copas, Bill Monroe, Jenks Carmen, Ginny Wright, Harry James, Ella Fitzgerald, Tommy Dorsey, Erskine Butterfield, The Carter Family, The Carlisles and more. Send SASE for list. **Shirley Jordan, 4500 NW 34th Ct., Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33319.**

• I have several old *WLS Weekly* magazines dated 1935, and about 100 issues of *Standby* starting from 1936, all in fairly good condition. Can anyone help me find out their value? **Mrs. Eldore Lillo, 1212 River Rd., Grand Rapids, MN 55744.**

• In Rich Kienzle's CMSA Q & A in the July/August 1987 *Newsletter*, Jason Ralleck of Waco, TX, asked about Buck Owens records. I have the following: "I've Got You On My Mind Again" and "Anywhere, USA," Buck Owens and the Buckaroos, and "We're Gonna Get Together," Buck Owens and Susan Raye. If Mr. Ralleck is interested, my address is: **Reita Walker, Rt. 3 Box 1592, Keystone Hgts., FL 32656.**

• For sale: Vernon Dalhart recording, like new. Wanted to buy: Lynn Anderson recording, "Paradise." Contact **George Wendt, 3633 Arlington, St. Charles, MO 63303.**

• Looking for a June 1975 copy of *Country Music Magazine* with Mac Davis on the cover, also any photos, posters, etc., on him. Does he still have a fan club? **Joseph Butata, 525 Pewabic St., Laurium, MI 49913.**

• Have some very old records, Thomas Edison, *The Record*: very heavy, about 1/4-inch thick. Any antique dealer interested? **Grace Barnett, 2009 Kentucky Ave., Jackson, KY 41339.**

• Looking for the following songs: "Ode to Cowboy Jack" from *Stonewall Jackson Sings the Great Old Ones*, or by anyone; "The Heart" by Larry Gatlin; "Because I Care" by Leon Ashley; "I'm So Much in Love With You," by David Rogers; "Same Sweet Girl" by Hank Locklin; and a song by Carl Smith which goes, "I'm not wearing my heart pinned on my sleeve/I'll keep it wrapped up until it's over"; and "Dog-gone It, Baby, I'm in Love," also by Carl Smith. **Mildred Holden, Rt. 2, Jonesboro, TX 76538.**

• 2 songbooks for sale, both in very good condition: *Asher Sizemore and Little Jimmie's Songs of Home and Heaven* (original 1939 edition—mountain ballads, old hymns, children's songs and cowboy songs), and *The Kentucky Mountain Boy, Book II*, copyright 1940, a book of mountain ballads and old-time songs by Bradley Kincaid, autographed by Kincaid. **Josephine Nauben, 952 London St., Menasha, WI 54952.**

• Seeking Dolly Parton memorabilia. Will buy records in mint or excellent condition, magazines or magazine articles, tapes or pictures. Also interested in Porter and Dolly material. Will pay any reasonable price. Also, any avid fans of Dolly, as I am, I will be glad to write you. I love Dolly! **Jennifer Malcom, 4356 Covington Dr., N. Charleston, SC 29418.**

• Trying to find the words and music

of a gospel song recorded by Annie Smith—something like "You'll see Jesus" or "I see Jesus everywhere." Any help will be appreciated. **Barbara Fetters, Box 42 Rt. 1, Seymour, IA 52590.**

• In search of the album *Love Is No Excuse*, recorded in the late 1950's or early 1960's by Jim Reeves and Dottie West. **Clarence W. Poindexter, 1211 E. 222nd St., Carson, CA 90745.**

• Looking for a new album or video by Mark Balin, whose most famous single is "Love Attack." I've seen him on *Video Country* on *The Nashville Network*. Would appreciate help from anyone who has information about him. **Ron Mashintonio, 452 Ross Rd., King of Prussia, PA 19406.**

• Looking for 8 x 10 pictures of Gene Watson, T.G. Sheppard, Ronnie McDowell, Mel Tillis, Randy Travis, Dwight Yoakam. Please let me know how much you want for them. Have one bottle of Elvis Presley Wine, seal unbroken. Will take best offer. **Rita Ringo, 4003 Vivian, Houston, TX 77093.**

• Would like to correspond with someone who has audio tapes of Grand Ole Opry broadcasts, preferably with commercials, from the 1960's and 1970's. I have some from the late 1970's and 1980's. **Jim Herzog, 21750 Lincoln, Rockwood, MI 48173.**

• Looking for Kenny Rogers' recording of "The Rest of Last Night." It was originally on the flip side of "What About Me?" Help! Thanks! **Gayle Abbott, 5120 Bridle Place, Colorado Springs, CO 80918.**

• In search of nine 45's to complete David Frizzell collection: "L.A. International Airport," "Just Passing Through," "Love Baby," "Bartender's Best Friend," "I'll Give Her Mine," "In the Arms of Love," "Jesse," "A Case of You," "I Got a Dream (Wish You Were Here Tonight)" and "Mona Lisa's Smile." Also interested in VHS tapes of David or of Shelly West from any TV shows or specials. **Cindy Yale, Bldg. A Apt. 20, Beverly Drive, Edwardsville, PA 18704.**

• Looking for the *Johnny Cash Greatest Hits* cassette tape, and any other Johnny Cash tapes. Please write and send price. I love Johnny Cash's singing! **Margaret Angler, 6705 Old River Rd., Philo, OH 43771.**

• Trying to replace an album titled *The Johnny Cash Show*, which was recorded from Cash's network program of several years ago. Is there a Johnny Cash fan who could make me a cassette or has a copy for sale? **B. Gene Earnest, Rte. 4, Box 247, Greenville, AL 36037.**

• Looking for a record with words that go "... it's in the Book." May be a comedy recording. This is for our minister's 50th birthday. For myself, I am looking

for any C&W album I can buy cheaply and don't have in my 3200-record collection. I have for sale: an old soundtrack of Shirley Temple movies and one old Beatles album. **Mary E. Barber, 31891 Chicago Trail, Bldg. 3, Apt. 18, New Carlisle, IN 46552.**

• Looking for a tape of John Schneider's "A Quiet Man," also recent or old articles on Schneider. **Angelena Grizzle, 130 Bettis Rd., Alpharetta, GA 30201.**

• Wanted: Louise Mandrell memorabilia. Clippings, photos, VHS tapes of her with her sisters, 45's. Thanks to all for help finding her *Inseparable* album. **Mrs. Dennis Robinson, 18 Arlington St., Meriden, CT 06450.**

• Would like to purchase record or tape with the song "The Face on the Bar-room Floor" by Bill Anderson or Marvin Rainwater. **Joe Markee, 405 Meadowview La., Mont Clare, PA 19453.**

• Wanted: VHS tape of the TV show *Christmas Comes to Willow Creek* broadcast Christmas 1987. **Jennifer Mullen, Rt. 1 Box 49, McCarley, MS 38943.**

Thank You's

Cindy Cummings, Iva Hoffman and Wanda Owen thank all those who responded to their requests in the last two Newsletters, especially those who wrote anonymously. The help received meant a lot.

Pen Pals

Make new friends by mail.

• Thank you for using my pictures and letter on Rose Maddox in the Jan.-Feb. issue. It's too bad some of the other magazines don't ever mention Rose. They don't know what they're missing. She is a fantastic lady and a country music legend. I am looking for other Rose Maddox fans as pen pals. **Johnny Bond, 3774 E. Martin Ave., Cudahy, WI 53110.**

• 27-year-old male would like to write to single females from the South who are fans of Roy Acuff, Sylvia, Barbara Mandrell and Marie Osmond. Send address and photo with first letter. **Benton Kennedy, Rt. 3 Box 424, Angie, LA 70426.**

• I'm 24 years old and would love to correspond with males and females, preferably in their 20's, who like country music. I like The Judds, Reba McEntire, Patsy Cline, Dolly Parton and Rosanne Cash. **Denise Romano, 1502 Carmel Dr., San Jose, CA 96125.**

Send material for Newsletter to Country Music Magazine, 342 Madison Ave., Suite 2118, New York, New York 10173. Include membership number. Mark your envelope, Attention: Newsletter.

It is late afternoon in RCA Nashville's third-floor conference room, a spacious wood-panelled chamber complete with bathroom and kitchenette that was once Chet Atkins' executive office.

Not that time is all that noticeable in this windowless, hermetically-sealed domain inhabited by the record industry's upper strata. The central air conditioning hums sleepily. The muted fluorescent lights cast a soft glow that is always the same, night or day. The ionized air, untouched by sunlight, has the sweet fragrance of air freshener and carpet cleaner. If you didn't know, you would never guess that outside it is a beautiful spring day, all awash with

the blooms of azaleas and dogwood.

Jo-El Sonnier (pronounced *Sawn-yay*) fidgets in a chair near one end of the long conference table. The Louisiana-born French-Acadian looks out of place in this sterile corporate domain. Listening to him talk in his thick French patois, I'm sure that two decades spent butting heads with the music business in Nashville and Los Angeles have left him still very much a part of the swampy, sharecropping region of southern Louisiana Cajun country where he was born 42 years ago.

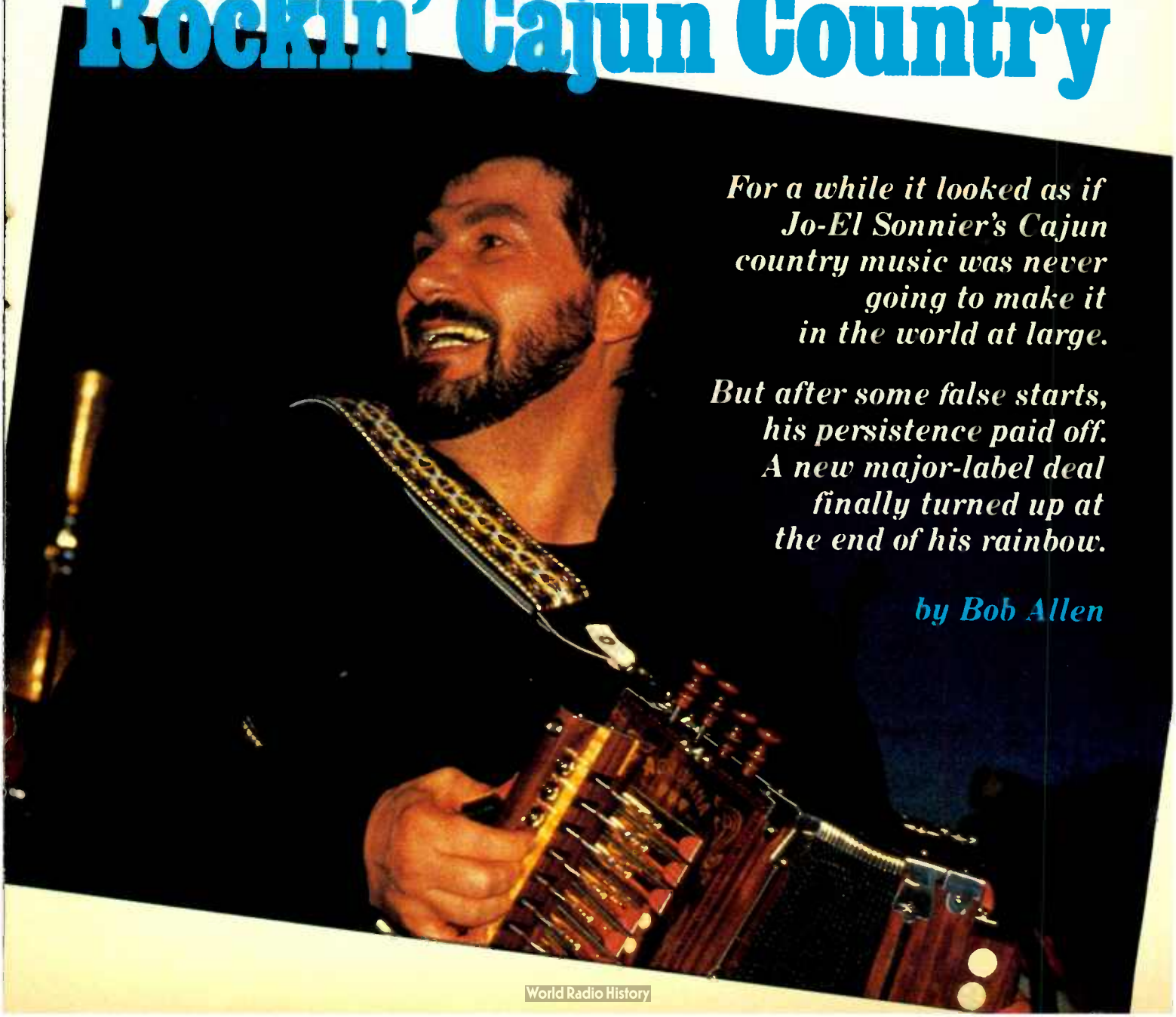
As Sonnier goes back over all the long years of hardships, bad breaks and false starts that preceded his current associa-

tion with RCA Records, his wife Jami—the love of his life and, to all intents and purposes, his manager, spiritual advisor and chauffeur as well—listens attentively and nods her head in mute agreement. His voice occasionally falters as he recalls how his repeated efforts to get the major record labels interested in his brand of “rockin’ Cajun country” came to naught. He remembers blaming those failures on himself, yet being unable to understand just what he was doing wrong.

“It was devastating, man.” He shakes his headful of gray-streaked jet black hair mournfully. “Nothin’ was going right for me. They had Rodriguez and Freddy

◆ JO-EL SONNIER ◆

Rockin’ Cajun Country



For a while it looked as if Jo-El Sonnier's Cajun country music was never going to make it in the world at large.

But after some false starts, his persistence paid off. A new major-label deal finally turned up at the end of his rainbow.

by Bob Allen

Joel Sonnier: Champion of Country Music

Joel Sonnier will be the first to tell you it's tough to make a living performing a heart-felt ethnic music in an increasingly monochrome musical world. But his voluble, positive Cajun nature sees the outlook with optimism.

"It is music which is hard to be accepted, because it is unique. It is something very valuable to society, because it is music of the heart. It is based on the soulful, tearful, crying sound, the Cajun fiddle, and blues and jazz and country, and the French accordion. You have to feel it to sing it."

Sonnier has been on the bandstand for twenty-five of his thirty-odd years, singing and playing the accordion, blending the music of his native southwest Louisiana with his self-penned songs. He left the local club circuit ("I was playing thirteen dances a week at one point!") and headed for California in 1972, playing country and a bit of Cajun and endlessly performing and writing. He came to Nashville in the mid 1970s, and recorded for Mercury for three and a half years with moderate success, while playing on recording sessions and getting songs cut by Merle Haggard, Conway Loretta, and Johnny Cash among others.

He now records for Rounder Records, and is delighted with the independent label's approach to and respect of his music: "Many of the songs are songs I was raised with, and some I have written, like *Louisiana Blues* and *Cajun Born*

This is an introductory album, and that's why I feel so positive about it. They believe in Joel Sonnier and his music, in its honesty and in its beauty. In this way they introduce me, this is him, what he does. This is the music of his roots.

"I'll tell you—I think the 1980s and 1990s will have a different style of music: many styles. I think ethnic music, roots music, will come back in, music that has love and inspiration, that has some blues. Music that is real and not camouflaged.

"Cajun music is that kind of music, and it is growing. We've got Frenchie Burke and Doug Kershaw and Jimmy Newman and his band; they are all building an audience for when this movement comes.

"I am from Louisiana, proud country. No Cajun will say he ain't proud! I am proud of my roots, and proud to be recording what I believe in. I believe people will accept honest music, heritage music, in the 1980s, and I fully believe Joel Sonnier will be a part of that."

DOUGLAS B. GREEN



Back in November, 1980, when *Jo-E! Sonnier* was spelled *Joel Sonnier*, *Country Music Magazine* ran this article. The Cajun country singer was introducing his music with wide-eyed optimism.

Fender, and they were both big. And there I was: the only French artist... but..."

Sonnier's voice breaks again as his recollections turn to his bleak early days in Nashville in the mid-to-late 1970's, when nobody much seemed to care, and the late Ernest Tubb gave him a job playing at his record shop: "Ernest was so good, he was so nice to me..."

Suddenly he bursts into tears, as if overcome by the memories. Jami fetches him a tissue, and he bows his head and waves his hand, as if pleading for a moment of silence. Gradually he wipes his eyes, regains his composure and continues.

"I come in to Mr. Ernest's record shop one day, and just asked him if I could be on his show. He was just so nice to me—he liked Cajun people. I can't remember just exactly what he said, but he was always givin' me encouragement.

"If I'd never been in Nashville then, I never would have met Ernest Tubb, or Johnny Cash, or Haggard, and all those wonderful people who did so much for me. Cash recorded a song of mine called 'Cajun Boy,' and he called me in to play accordion on it." Sonnier's mood lightens and he laughs nostalgically. "I remember, in the studio, I was the only one dressed in black. I think Cash was in his pajamas! Then I did 'Skybo' with Hag, and 'Norwegian Wood' with Hank Jr." He pauses thoughtfully and shakes his head again. "I couldn't get no support for using my accordion on my own records that I was makin' for Mercury. Yet

here was Cash and all these people calling me to play accordion on theirs. I just couldn't understand it.

"But lookin' back now," Jo-E!'s eyes brighten and he speaks with a quiet, self-absorbed intensity, "I can see that it was fate. I couldn't have done it no other way."

As Sonnier speaks, it is clear that his recent triumph, the release of his first RCA album, has been both exhilarating and emotionally trying. *Come On, Joe* is an impressive musical exploration of his Cajun roots overlaid with contemporary country, rock and pop influences. It comes in the wake of nearly twenty years of dead end streets and missed opportunities faced by Sonnier as he pursued his dream, "to take accordion music out into the world," from Louisiana to Los Angeles to Nashville and back again several times.

"I was just tryin' to be accepted, just tryin' to find love, for me and my music. Just tryin' to find a record label that would take me not just as a Cajun artist, not just as an ethnic artist, but as a total artist. Everybody was tellin' me I should do this, or do this, or do this. I didn't know which way to go. I was dyin' inside."

Since the beginning, Sonnier seems to have been possessed by the power of his music, even when most of the rest of the world remained politely indifferent.

He was born in 1946, in the small South Louisiana bayou community of Rayne, between Lafayette and Lake Charles. His parents were French-speaking dirt farm-

ers who eked out a living from corn and cotton. Sonnier was never even introduced to English until he was in the fourth grade, and he never really mastered the language until he wound up on his own in Los Angeles nearly two decades later. But by age four, he'd gotten his first accordion and was learning to play it. Two years later, he had his own radio show on a local station, and not long after that was making his first records on a little two-track reel-to-reel.

"I grew up with the roots of the South," he remembers. "I listened to French music: Shorty LeBlanc, Iry LeJeune, Sidney Brown—the man who made my first accordion. I was always a big fan of Ray Charles. I used to make my own little records and go around on my bicycle, peddling them to all the old ladies in my neighborhood. Most of 'em didn't even have a phonograph!"

In the years following, Sonnier recorded songs like "Tes Yeaux Blues" ("Your Blue Eyes") for a number of regional labels. As a teenager he was billed as "The Cajun Valentino" and toured extensively throughout the musically rich region of southwest Louisiana and the "Golden Triangle" of southeast Texas. By the time he'd turned twenty-six, he'd already recorded four albums and 12 singles and seemed to be well on his way.

In spite of this promising start, a move to the West Coast shortly thereafter brought nothing more than a few honky tonk gigs, considerable culture shock and a bad case of homesickness. His English was so rudimentary and his accent so thick that he found himself facing a virtual language barrier.

Sonnier's next stop was a six-year stint in Nashville, where he did occasional session work, whenever an accordion was in demand. He wrote songs for Johnny Cash and a few others. (One of his songs has since been recorded by George Strait.) He also recorded "I've Been Around Enough To Know" and several other solid singles for Mercury that did not sell.

"The way I hear my music in my heart I never could get on to vinyl until now," he laments. "Y'see, it's not just Cajun. It's country, rock, blues, jazz... all those things. And if you take the accordion away from me when I'm making music, it's just like taking out my heart and leaving it on the floor. Nothin' worked out for me in Nashville the first time around. I don't blame nobody. I just couldn't find nowhere to fit in."

Discouraged, he moved back to Louisiana in 1980. In the meantime, something strange was happening: Cajun music, obscure ethnic curiosity that it was, was slowly coming into vogue. And as down on his luck as Sonnier sometimes perceived himself to be, his phone never quite stopped ringing. That same year, he put together a fine, little-known album, *Cajun Life*, for the Rounder label. Merle Haggard called and asked him to appear with him at the annual Jimmy Rodgers Festival in Merid-

ian, Mississippi. Film director Peter Bogdanovich hired him to help provide the musical score for his film *They All Laughed* and later cast him in a small role as a singing, accordion-playing biker in the film *Mask*, starring Cher.

In the mid-1980's, Jami, whom he'd met and married when he returned to Louisiana from Nashville, encouraged him to try his hand once again in Southern California. "I felt like I was through with music at that point," he explains. "I had no plans of ever getting back up on the stage for a long, long time. I'd made some connections in the film industry; some people thought I might make a good actor. So me and Jami headed for *Lost Angeles!*"

Again—as Sonnier recalls it—fate intervened. Hauling most of their possessions behind them in a small trailer, he and Jami were just pulling into the greater Los Angeles metropolitan area when they heard an ad for the Palomino Club on the car radio.

"Jami said, 'Listen to that band!' I nodded my head, but I didn't even wanta hear it." He shakes his head ruefully. "I'd been there, I'd gotten that pain so bad, like it's pullin' your guts out. But Jami knew I was dyin' inside without my music. And she did everything she could to pull me back."

That very evening they ended up at the Palomino. Unbeknownst to Sonnier, Jami had entered him in a talent contest taking place there that night. Astonished to hear his name called, he ran out to the trailer and rummaged through the clothes and other items until he uncovered his accordion. He played "Jambalaya" in French—"in the wrong key, and in the wrong tempo"—and ended up winning first place over 30 or 40 other contestants. The \$100 prize money became the seed money for their new venture in Southern California.

Over the next three-and-a-half years, Sonnier's reputation on the Los Angeles club scene slowly grew. Much to his own surprise, he was befriended by some of the most respected session musicians in the community, most of them "star" instrumental recording artists in their own right—people like guitar and stringed instrument geniuses David Lindley and Albert Lee, and Garth Hudson, esteemed keyboard player, formerly with The Band. At their own suggestion, these three began backing Sonnier in concert, under the delightfully modest title "Jo-El Sonnier and Friends."

"I didn't even know who these guys were until several months after I met them," he insists. "They were just intrigued by my music. Some of them had heard of me through the country scene, and some through the Cajun scene. They were intrigued that I'd taken my music as far as I did. David Lindley sat and talked to me for eight hours one day, about my musical roots, his musical roots and the history of the accordion. Finally they all more or less

said to me, 'You've gotta come out of the closet, Jo-El. We're gonna get your music out there, we're gonna get you out there.'"

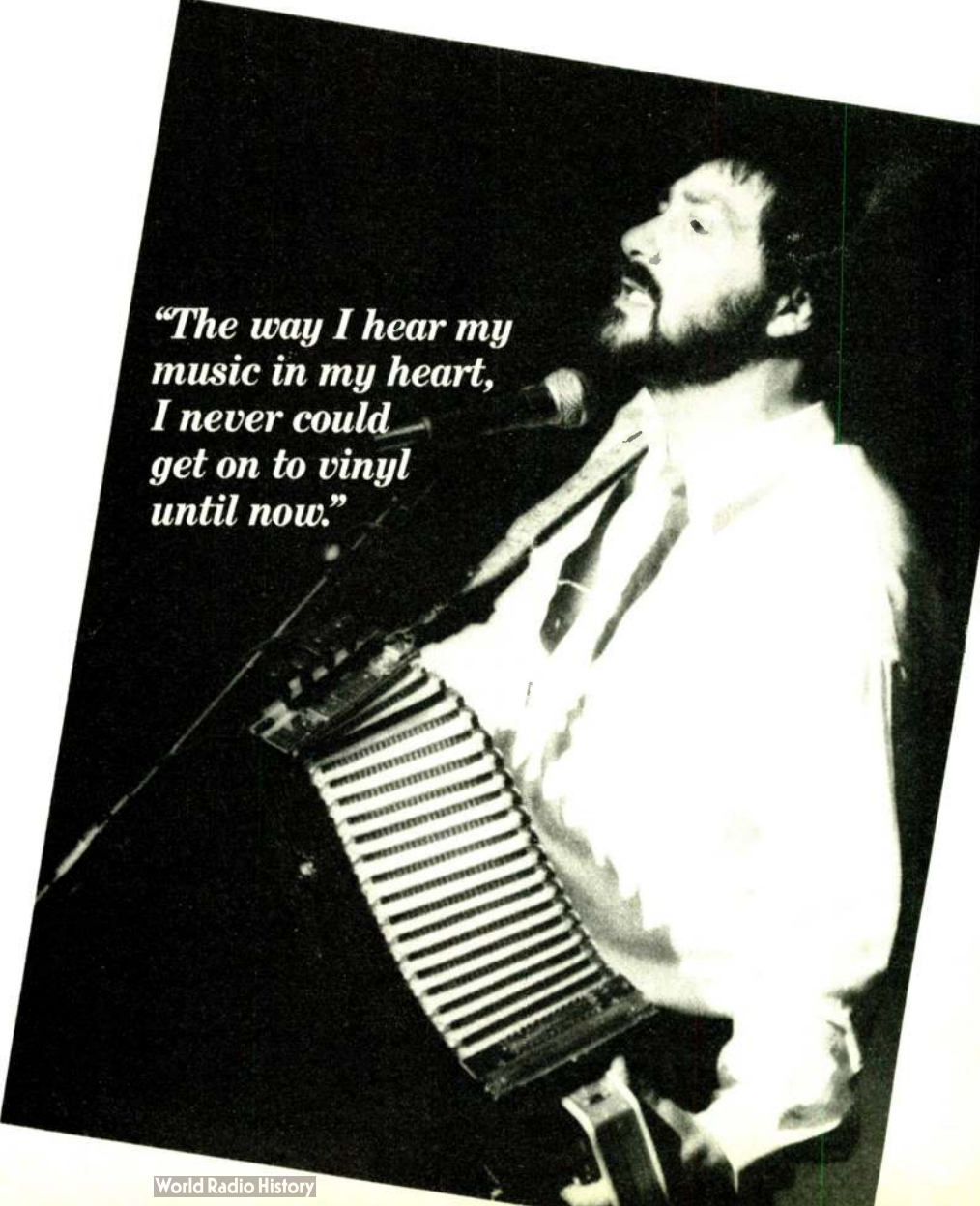
Buoyed up by his celebrated back-up band, Sonnier's standing within the West Coast music scene rose, and the grassroots appeal of his "Rockin' Cajun Country" spread far and wide. British rocker Elvis Costello featured him on his critically acclaimed *King of America* album. He opened shows for prestigious rock and country-rock bands like Los Lobos, Lone Justice and The Blasters. Still, the long-sought major-label record deal eluded him. Eventually, he and Jami moved back to her hometown of Bogalusa, Louisiana, and only made occasional commutes back to Los Angeles to continue playing music.

Meanwhile, the West Coast buzz over Sonnier's music reached Joe Gallante, head of RCA Nashville. Gallante flew to Sunset, Louisiana, to catch Sonnier's act in a small club. Not long afterwards, Gallante inked him to his first record contract in quite a few years. *Come On, Jo-El*, the album that resulted, is a delightfully raw, instrumen-

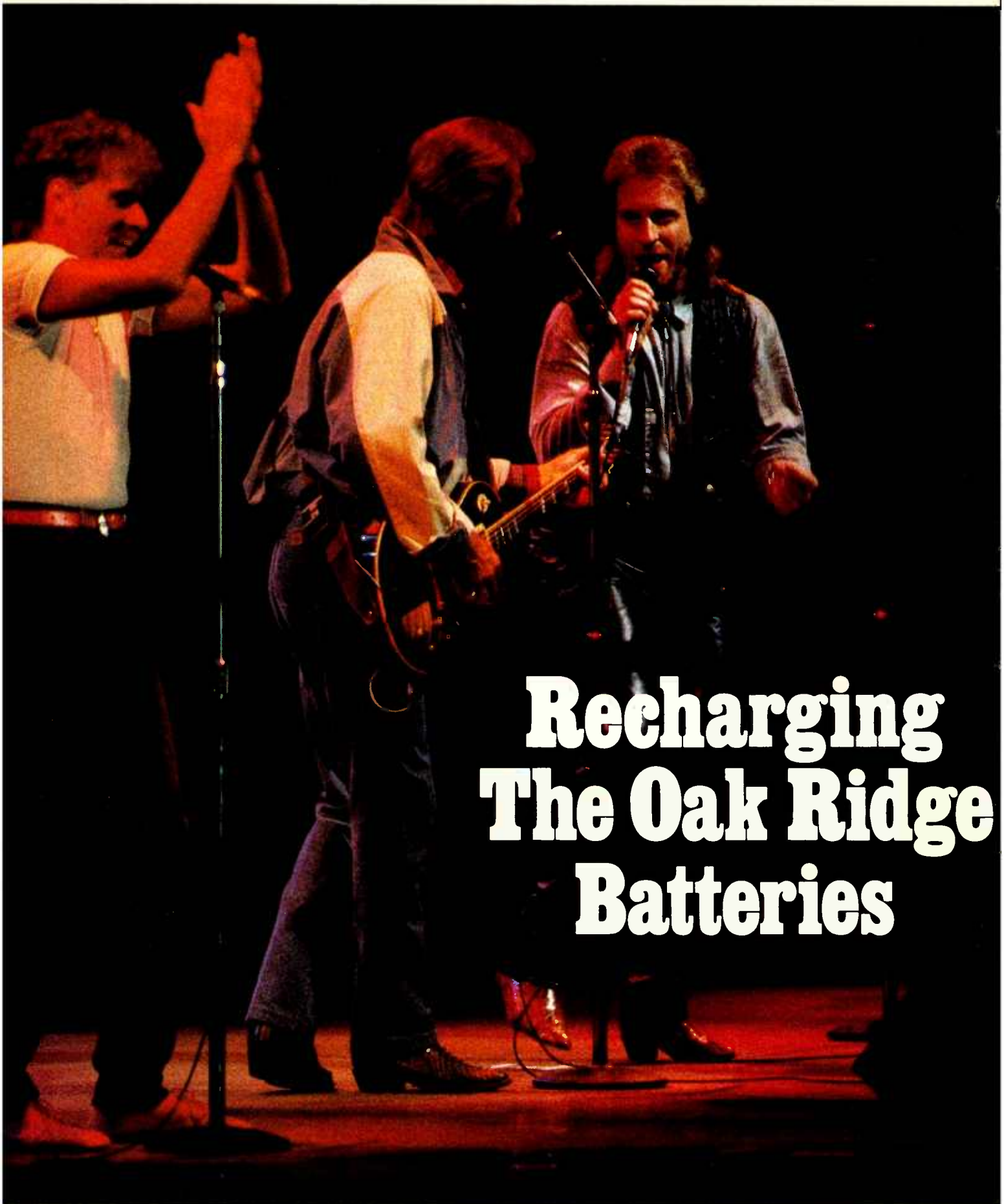
tally adventurous showcase of Sonnier's music. It echoes with deep, palpable connections to his Cajun heritage and the bold tones of contemporary pop, rock and country. The material ranges from compositions by country masters like Troy Seals and David Kirby to others by cutting-edge rock and pop composers Richard Thompson, Randy Newman and Dave Alvin.

"There's thirty-eight years of my life on that vinyl," Sonnier notes. He takes quiet but intense pride in the new album. "What I've done is take my music, the roots of my music, and take it into the 1990's, and on into the twenty-first century. I really think that what I'm comin' up with here is the first generation of a new style. It has a spirit all its own. I really think if you put this on the turntable five years from now, or even ten years from now, it will still sound fresh and new.

"I sure know one thing, though," he smiles with relief and fumbles with the Kleenex that he is still clutching in his hand. "It's sure given me a new lease on life." ■



"The way I hear my music in my heart, I never could get on to vinyl until now."



Recharging The Oak Ridge Batteries



Once heralded as the best businessmen in country music, The Oak Ridge Boys had a well-oiled organization. But a few clogs in their system, including an uninterested singer and some costly business decisions, forced them to make some changes. Patrick Carr visited them at Sea World this summer and got the lowdown on their new member and their renewed optimism about their music ◇ by Patrick Carr



In the heart of Florida's tourist belt, marching through the crowds at Sea World on a wham-bam VIP guided tour, the four Oak Ridge Boys seem happy and peppy and oh, so full of fun.

That's not unusual—ever since the group “went secular,” The Oaks have always behaved in public like college cheerleaders majoring in Clown Technique with a minor in Public Relations—but there's something unfamiliar about the cheerfulness today: it doesn't seem forced. All four Boys are doing the O.R.B. thing, grinning and capering and striking silly poses for the cameras of both press and public, with what feels like genuine enthusiasm.

In semi-private, too, each of them seems relaxed, natural. Here's good old dependable Duane Allen enchanted with Sea World's cute little Shamu/Baby Shamu cuddly-toy combos, buying a bunch for his kids and then strolling on again, chatting happily about the latest stars of his antique car collection and the pleasure he gets from helping folks around Tennessee in his volunteer Deputy Sheriff work. Here's Richard Serban, Mr. Serious, as ultrafashionably sharp and dark and heart-throb handsome as usual, articulating a clear, sober analysis of his Nashville baseball team's 1988 prospects in that steady *basso* boom of his. Here's the hard-wired instant-response Joe Bonsall zipping around at Warp Speed, scattershooting quip grenades across whatever local universe he encounters, then jamming down suddenly to aim precisely and rake a hard question from stem to stern, leaving it more thoroughly answered than it ever bargained for.

Then also, last but by no means least,

there's Steve Sanders, the new guy, most of whose attention is being taken up by his visiting mother. Not all of it, though, because whenever he follows the bouncing Bonsall into, say, some particularly cute photo opportunity—or for that matter whenever his own radar locks on to such a possibility—the new guy's right there on the spot, roping in Duane and Richard and falling instantly into place in the resultant happy, peppy, oh-so-full-of-fun O.R.B. pose of the moment. He slides in there with the other three like he's been doing it all his life.

And that right there, that's the key to The Oaks' new mood. Thinking back to things like spontaneous O.R.B. photo opportunities a year or more ago, to when William Lee Golden was still an Oak Ridge Boy, you just can't see things happening the way they're happening today. Back then, there wouldn't be four men slipping instinctively and effortlessly into happy-peppy gear. If Golden could be persuaded to enter into the picture at all, the camera would record a psychological moment of a very different color: three men posing their butts off but obviously having a real hard time looking *genuinely* happy-peppy, and one man, aloof from it all, doing an extremely convincing impersonation of a wooden Indian.



As every country music fan and Enquiring Mind must surely be aware, the four “modern” Oak Ridge Boys, the ones who made the trip from straight gospel in the 1960's through a 1970's whirlwind of bitter words and rock-hippie weirdness to big-time 1980's pop-country prominence, did not dissolve their union with great grace. When Golden went, he went hard and



nasty, and he was *gone*: asked-to-leave-and-please-don't-stay-in-touch, never-coming-back, 40-million-dollar-lawsuit-threats, no-longer-associated-with-the-company *split*. Which of course caused a headline or three and still, a year-plus later, demands more than passing comment.

For this we go to Joe Bonsall, broaching the matter directly: *How bad was it before you gave Golden the boot, Joe, and why did you-all do it?*

Joe jams hard, gives this question a quick once-over, and punches up the heavy weapons. His ammunition is the frank, accurate, rapid-fire language of the tough Philly neighborhood he left behind to join the Oak Ridge gospel train; his face and hands dance a street-kid carnival of emphasis and punctuation.

"Well, for a long time there we were pushing and pulling against each other," he says, "and we were just sliding. That's a horrible thing if you're as proud as we are



and you have the track record we do, to *feel* that slide and feel like there's nothing you can do about it—or you're afraid to do something about it, which is what we faced for a couple of years."

So how long did you guys push and pull against each other? How many years? I ask. Really—to me, Golden *always* seemed like a square peg in a round hole, some sort of alien presence; the talking tree from Terra Tangentia.

"Golden's always been kinda strange, you're right," says Joe, "but that's okay. A lot of Golden's uniqueness, if I can put it that way, is quite appealing, and Golden added a different element to the group. Here were four guys who were completely unique, as different as night from day, but it worked; the chemistry worked even though Golden *was* kinda out there. But that gap got worse, oh, I guess around 1982. It had nothing to do with him growing his hair and his beard. Just all of a sud-

den, goofy things started happening. I could name a million incidents, but the thing was that if three of us went *this* way, he went *that* way.

"I mean... we'd be doing a real good interview, and all of a sudden Golden would jump in and say something completely off the wall that'd make everyone go 'What? What is that?'... We'd come stompin' off the stage onto the bus, goin' 'Man, that was a great show! That felt *great!*' and Golden would go 'Well—maybe,' and it would be like a dark cloud, the rain would start falling, and 'Well, okay. I guess we're not allowed to have fun tonight! I'd feel like crap the rest of the night..."

"We didn't even know why he did that stuff. If you sat down and tried to talk to the guy—Hey, Golden, what's goin' on?"

"I like good solid singing and good vibes and good feelings to be what carries The Oak Ridge Boys."

Back in sync again, The Oaks give their all, on stage and off. Clockwise Joe, Duane, Steve and Richard enjoy the spotlight. Middle right and below, Steve Sanders, Joe Bonsall and Duane Allen have an impromptu autograph session.

What are you wantin'? We're in there tryin' to take a picture with the Mayor of Cincinnati, and you turned your back! Why do you do those things?—he'd just smile, say nothing.

"I don't know, man. I just never understood. Like with this Sea World gig. It would be like, 'Hey, Golden, Sea World's offering us \$30,000 plus production, we can hit it right before Cocoa Beach, maybe fit Tampa in there too, whaddya think?' And he'd go, 'Hm... Wellllll... (Joe does a perfect imitation of Golden staring off into space, drawing his left index finger slowly down his face into the monumental cascade of his three-foot beard)... That's one of those *places*... Ma and Pa and the kids... I don't know... And I'd be like, 'Tell me! We gotta know! This is how we make our living, man!'"

"Really, we did try. We'd *all* try to talk to him. Like, 'Hey, Golden, obviously you're not real happy, man, so what do you want

to do? There's a lot of people out there got a lot of faith in our group. We're *very lucky men*; all we have to do is sing good, shake hands and be nice guys, and we can make a real good living. This is America, man; we've paid our dues, they're comin' to see us now, all we gotta do is keep it right... So what is the *problem?*"

"Golden never answered that question. To this day, we *still* don't know what was bothering him, or if anything really was. It was like he wore a sign over his head: *No Funnel Out*.

"I don't know. He just liked to stir it up. You know, *if things are going too good, let's stir it up a bit*. Golden liked that.

"Well, the rest of us don't function that way. That old bit about *As long as they're saying your name*—I don't believe that. I don't like controversy. I know it sells papers, but I like 'em talking good about The Oak Ridge Boys. I still like good solid singing and good vibes and good feelings to that what carries The Oak Ridge Boys. That's how I feel, and Richard feels, and Duane feels—but Golden didn't."

For the better part of a decade, then, The Oaks were under constant internal pressure. Bonsall knows that it cost them. "It hurt us creatively. It hurt our shows, and it hurt us in the studio, for sure. To me, it was still fun to go out and sing, so I didn't let it bother me too much, and I know we still pulled off a lot of what we did—but I also know there were things we *didn't* pull off. It was just that constant turmoil."

The last straw for Joe and Richard and Duane was Golden's solo album, the first by an Oak Ridge Boy. "It wasn't like one of the guys said, 'Hey, I want to do a solo project: what do *you* guys think about that?'" says Joe. "It was like, 'Well, I'm going to by God do a solo project, and I don't care *what* you think! That's the way it was put to us."

"So y'know, that was it. The point had come where either a change was inevitable, or the end of the group was inevitable. So we decided to make the change. Give Golden the opportunity to go do whatever it is that's going to make him happy. I'm sure he has something to contribute somewhere, but he just wasn't contributing anything here."

So much for the problem. Now for the solution.

Theoretically, the task of replacing William Lee Golden was mind-boggling. The new guy would have to be a) a baritone, b) a great harmony singer, c) a showman, d) a personable individual compatible with the existing Oaks, e) a thoroughgoing professional who was also a relative unknown, f) between the ages of 30 and 45, and g) available. Imagining the number of prospects the Boys would have to evaluate in order to find all seven of these characteristics in a single male human, one finds oneself craving a very long nap, immediately.

In practice, though, the job was dead

easy. The three remaining front men just asked Steve, who was already working in the Oaks Band but getting tired of it, if he wanted to step forward with them. Which he did.

"We knew Steve could handle it," says Joe. "We knew we had a guy who could make it vocally, and personality-wise, and was professional enough. We knew we could put him on the stage of the Universal Amphitheater, or into the studio with a producer like Jimmy Bowen and the top session guys in the world, and his knees wouldn't be knocking. All Steve had to do was move his stuff onto the bus."

And there, on the bus, is where we find out who this man is. The Sea World show (a genuinely exciting event in which Steve did indeed distinguish himself as a professional, a showman, a sex symbol, a fine harmony singer and one hell of a lead vocalist) is over; the other Oaks have gone about their private business, and the new guy is now available for individual interrogation.

First, though, a basic impression: the new guy is a *nice* guy. Relaxed, cheerful, open, real pleasant, no airs about him, no burrs or sharp edges, nothing in the least egotistical, insecure, or obnoxious. You can see immediately why the other Oaks just can't stop telling you what a pleasure it is to have him around. And there's something else, too. The other guys will tell you that he adds soul to their concerts and records, that in addition to everything else, his voice is a rich, deep-flowing new stream in their sound; I'm telling you that the soul isn't just in his vocal chords.

Second, there's Steve's history, which is just plain wild. I mean, talk about stage experience. I'd venture a guess that this guy has more of it than just about any other 35-year-old on the planet.

Here it goes, chronologically. It began at the age of five in Macon, Georgia, when Steve's bookkeeper dad realized that his son could carry a wonderful tune. He quit his job and took Steve out on the professional gospel circuit for the next eight years, which proved to be real smart: the kid was a *very* hot ticket, shooting straight to the top in that bizarre, cutthroat, and often extremely sleazy world. Then, when Steve was 12 going on 13, the track switched to Broadway, where the kid spent two years singing 28 songs a night, plus matinees, in the original, lavish, super-successful production of *The Yearling*. Stopping off in the TV world on occasion (*The Ed Sullivan Show*, for instance), the path then led to Hollywood, where Steve acted with Michael Caine and Jane Fonda in Otto Preminger's movie, *Hurry, Sundown*.

So far, so good; stardom all the way. But now there was a problem. Steve had hit the wrong age—there just weren't any good parts for 16-year-old actors at that particular point in time—and so his father took him back onto the gospel circuit. Which en-



The Oaks try to make their fans feel important. Here, Duane and Richard take time to meet with as many as they can.

vironment, to an almost-man who'd seen another world and was moreover acquiring philosophies and opinions of his own, had all the charm of a garbage can full of rabid wolverines.

All the same, he did it for a while, until he just couldn't stand the whole business—that scene, his father's control, everything—and he lit out, unannounced, to Atlanta. There he joined forces with Mylon LeFevre, another child prodigy, and those two and their friends in the band Holy Smoke sallied forth into the rock 'n' roll scene with their original, unique brand of swamp/folk/rock/blues/gospel music. They went to England and lived there for a year or so, they hung out with rockers like Alvin Lee (then of Ten Years After) and Steve Winwood, they opened shows for Winwood's Traffic, The Who, all sorts of big acts.

By this time, thanks mostly to the inspiration of Mylon Lefevre and Troy Seals, Steve was writing songs. So more or less logically, his next port of call was Nashville.

He didn't do very well there. As he puts it, "Mostly I was just running up and down the street, not getting anywhere. And that didn't set well with me. I've got to be able to look myself in the mirror and say, 'All right. I ain't got anything, but I'm after it, whatever. And it got to the point where I couldn't do that in Nashville. I was a very empty person.'"

So he escaped—escaped Nashville, the music business, his whole showbiz life. He went to Florida to visit his sister, "got drunk, met some ole gal, and ended up staying for a year. In my mind, I got out of the music business. I was so frustrated with it all. It was like, 'Man, I'm not in the music business, or the banking business, or the car selling business; I'm in the business of *life*, and I want to live it.' I mean, I'd been working ever since I was five years old. I'd never really had a vacation."

In Florida he told nobody who he was or what he'd done. He made new friends who knew him just as himself. He ran a dive shop, went diving, hung out, renewed himself. "Florida probably saved my life," he says now. "It wasn't that I was going to blow my head off or something; I was more in line for the likes of a nervous breakdown, like 'Arrrrrrgh! Rip my face off!' But I guess what was happening was that the seeds of what I was going to do were already planted, and they were growing; I just couldn't see them. I just had to wait, and Florida helped me do that. It helped me get healthy so I could do the music again."

Ironically, it was the prospect of a truly big-time escape, a three- or four-year cruise around the world on some friends' sailboat, which put him back into the music business. He went to Nashville to say goodbye to people he cared about, and while he was there the guys in the Oaks Band asked him to be their singer. Steve, who had known William Lee Golden for 25 years and the other Oaks since the days when they were all on the gospel circuit together, "thought about it for about a second and a half, then said 'Yes.'"

The final piece of the story is that after a confusing, not very satisfying period in which he was just the Oaks Band's featured singer in their portion of the show, then the singer and an extra rhythm guitarist who was on stage for the entire show but not plugged in, and finally a singer and a rhythm guitarist who *was* plugged in, he was about ready to call it quits again when Golden departed and his current job became available.

Looking back on his truly erratic history, Steve laughs an easy laugh and says that "I don't know, man. It's like I'm *led*. I've never been smart enough to figure out what it all means, what I want to do in 20 years. So I've just moved from situation to situation. Now I thank God that the situa-

tions last a little longer than they used to. I guess if you can live through it, you live and learn."

We keep talking on the bus for quite a while—stories of the gospel world, stuff about kids (Steve has two from a broken marriage) and about trying to be grownups ourselves, the kind of things you can talk about when you meet genuinely open people in this job—until it's time to go home. At which point, Steve notes that, "As I got older, I started questioning whether or not I really wanted to be in this business. Now I still do that every five or six years. But y'know, it's getting to be that the answer's always 'Yes.'"

Which, I conclude, is The Oak Ridge Boys' very good fortune.



Replacing William Lee Golden was not all The Oak Ridge Boys as an organization had to do a little over a year ago. And most of the other things had a great deal to do with that word: *organization*.

The O-word arises on the bus after the concert when Joe and Richard and Steve are taking care of whatever subjects we haven't covered already. We've dealt with the question of Steve's contractual status (currently he's on salary, but he'll be a full partner once the settlement with Golden is concluded). Now we're talking about the decision-making process within the new group (it's democratic, not very highly structured, and a whole hell of a lot easier than it used to be), when Joe notes that "not being that *conglomerate* we used to be, it's not necessary for us to sit around a boardroom table and talk about all the publishing company figures and the radio stations and the tax consequences of this and how much money we're losing from that. Now we don't have to do that stuff. We're not an *organization* any more; we're a singing group again."

This, perhaps, is a change just as signifi-

Fact:

"The Cardinal," 1985 issue in the Birds of Your Garden wildlife series from Knowles China, recently jumped in value *again* during heavy trading—to 159% of issue price.*

Fact:

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by Lynn Kaatz

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Actual diameter: 8½ inches

(such recent plates as the 1986 "The Landing" from the Wings Upon the Wind and the 1984 "Tender Moment" from the Children and Pets collection are both over 195% of issue price), so it's a good bet that "Dog Tired—The Springer Spaniel" may quickly rise above its \$24.90 issue price.

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cant as the departure of Golden, for thinking back again to the years before that spectacular event dominated Oaks-related headlines, one remembers two very possibly related items.

First is the fact that gradually, The Oaks' image in the music business, if not among the fans, had evolved from its original shape—a supercharged, sensual, unholy-rolling, brilliantly professional group of rabble-rousers with a wild and wonderful past—into something made of computer chips and diversification scenarios and stock options and other very admirable but essentially very boring elements.

Really. It got to where you'd be talking business with an ordinary hillbilly singer, a man who could break your heart forever with five words or less but thought a condo complex option meant a wide range of choice at the drugstore, and sooner or later, he'd get this wistful, awestruck look on his face. "The Oak Ridge Boys," he'd say. "Now, them fellas are *smart*. They understand all that business stuff. Man, I wish I was that smart..." Then he'd start fantasizing about himself in an Oak Ridge world: tour buses with computerized maintenance schedules which somehow managed to take you to Nova Scotia only in August; clean new offices staffed by crisp, efficient college graduates totally loyal to his self; bankers able only to refine and polish his own devastating investment strategems; the thieving egg-sucker who managed him in his present life limping barefoot down a country road somewhere, too sick and sorry to mug a blind 80-pound bluehair...

The Oaks, in short, had come to stand for virtues in no way connected to the actual making of music. And that, the making of music, is the second item of interest about the pre-Steve Sanders quartet. Their record sales were off. Their winning streak was waning. Musically, they just weren't that hot any more.

In hindsight, that was all very predictable. "It's an interesting thing that happens to a lot of people in this business," says Joe Bonsall today. "You get so caught up in all that conglomerate stuff that you suffer creatively, then wonder why."

Richard fills in some of what "caught up" means in these situations. "We're singing now because we want to," he says, "but not long ago we were singing because we had to, just to keep all those other companies going. I mean, we had 90 employees to pay!"

That remark shoots a few holes in the sunny vision of diversification-driven Oak Ridge prosperity which used to be such an article of faith in Nashville, and Joe widens those holes.

"Well, for a start, if I had to do it all over again, I'd never buy two radio stations in Terre Haute, Indiana," he says. "That was something our business manager talked us into at the time, and it was like, 'Hey, have I got some land for you!' But Terre Haute,

Indiana, was at that time one of the most depressed areas in the country. Those radio stations were in a bad market, and besides, we weren't there to have our hands on things, so we had them in the hands of other people, which isn't always a great idea. So no, that wasn't a good investment. We lost money. We were taking money from our concerts and putting it into our broadcast venture. That's one of the stupidest things we ever did, and it got old real fast. The end of the year would come around, and it would be time for us to take a little money home, and it was like 'This much has to go to the radio stations, that much has to go to the publishing companies. Sorry, boys!'"

It wasn't *all* foolishness—the song publishing companies, for instance, weren't quite the drain the radio stations were, and it was inspiring to discover new talents like Steve Earle and Paulette Carlson (now of Highway 101)—but really, the bottom line was simple: The Oaks had a rather large problem.

Joe represents the action they took—getting rid of all that baggage, including the business manager who talked them into picking it up in the first place—as the result of the boys coming to their senses, learning from experience. Steve Sanders, on the other hand, mentions in passing that the divestment was necessary in order to achieve a workable settlement with William Lee Golden. So perhaps the leaning-and-meaning of The Oaks had multiple causes, and Joe's concentration on the most positive of them is an example of his public relations savvy. Which isn't to say that, being the frank fast fellow he is, he wouldn't have responded in full had the

hard question been asked.

Whatever. The important thing is the boys really are lean and mean these days. It's obvious; you can feel it in everything they do.

Most crucially, it's there in the music. The group's last album, *Heartbeat*, made with a new producer, Jimmy Bowen, at a point where all Steve had time to contribute was his singing, showed the beginnings of a new energy—Joe characterizes it as "Point A" in the revitalization process—but from all the available evidence, their second album, *Monongahela*, with Steve—"Point B"—is a killer.

The evidence is in The Oaks' Sea World show, in four of the songs from that album. All of them are tight and smart, really cherry-picked gems off the Nashville production line, but one, "Bridges and Walls," is just outstanding. Sung by Steve Sanders with great control and feeling, it's one of those songs that's not at all cute or easy. It doesn't depend on gimmicks or hooks or rhythm. Quite the contrary, in fact; it's slow and deep and stately, powered by old, conservative, graceful principles, starting with a spell, a kind of hush, and building into a sweet deep storm. To my ear, it's the most moving song The Oaks have ever recorded.

Basically, "Bridges and Walls" sounds like a hymn; though secular in content, it feels like a moment of worship, music for a higher power. And so for The Oaks I think it's a real achievement, a real reclaiming of the passion they owned twenty years ago but have muted and at times perhaps lost entirely in their country/pop career. The song has soul, in short, and that's the most encouraging news of all. ■



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FOR CMSA MEMBERS ONLY



Bill Monroe Album Specials

The legendary Bill Monroe is featured in this issue's CMSA *Newsletter*. Read all about the birth of bluegrass and Monroe's long career on pages 42F-42G, including photos.

The best Bill Monroe albums available from a historical viewpoint are County Records' *The Classic Bluegrass Recordings, Vol. 1* (CCS 104) and *Vol. 2* (CCS 105) and Rounder's *The Original Bluegrass Band* (Rounder Special Series 06.) These cover Bill Monroe's band during the period when Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs were members. These three albums present all the Bill Monroe classics. For a detailed review, see our March/April 1986 issue, page 75.

Another important album is *In the Pines* (REB 853), which presents samples of Monroe's Decca records from the 1950's. For details, see March/April 1988, page 74.

All four Monroe albums have \$9.98 list prices but are available to you at a \$7.98 members price. Add \$.95 postage and handling for each item ordered.

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Albums available in Buried Treasures are also offered to members at a special members' price—\$2.00 off each album plus \$.95 postage and handling for each item ordered.

Buried Treasures this time features Merle Haggard, The Wilburn Brothers, Wanda Jackson, Bob Wills, various honky tonkers and others. Wanda Jackson is also fea-

tured in the Letters section, for those eager for news.

How To Order These Items

To order any Monroe album or any Buried Treasures album, send check or money order to *Country Music Magazine*, 342 Madison Avenue, Suite 2118, New York, New York 10173. Mark your envelope, Attention: Dept. 7888. Include your membership number.

Join Now and Save

Non-members who would like to enjoy these savings today can do so by sending an additional check for \$12 with their record order. See the box titled If You Are Not a Member on this page for details.

Opry Talk

The Member Polls for March and May 1988 have been running some questions about the Grand Ole Opry. The questions were sparked by reader concerns and ideas expressed in letters to us. Here are tentative results based on returns so far:

Of those who have responded, about twice as many have attended the Opry at Opryland as at the old Ryman Auditorium. A relatively small number of poll-takers responding, 16% of the total, have been to performances at both Opryland and the Ryman. Of these, 60% were split equally as to which performance was best, 40% rated the performances "about the same."

Agree? Disagree? Vote in this month's Poll. If you'd like, write in the reason for your opinion somewhere on the Poll.

MEMBER POLL / JULY 1988

VOTE

Your opinions can help influence record companies, radio stations, record stores, concert promoters, managers and performers. As a CMSA member, you have an organized way of making your opinion known, by filling out the Members Poll. We forward the results of the Polls to those involved in the business of country music who are interested in what fans are thinking and doing, and we publish the results.

Bought Any Good Records Lately?

1. Did you buy any albums (records or tapes) in the last month?

Yes No

How many records? _____ How many cassettes? _____

2. Which ones did you like best? List performer and album title.

- a. _____
 b. _____
 c. _____
 d. _____
 e. _____

Your Choice for Album and Single of the Month

3. To vote, list the numbers of your top 5 favorites from the Top 25, page 68.

Singles (list 5 numbers)

Albums (list 5 numbers)

Been to the Grand Ole Opry?

4. Did you ever attend the Grand Ole Opry when it was at the Ryman Auditorium? Yes (How many times? _____) No

5. Did you ever attend the Grand Ole Opry at Opryland? Yes (How many times? _____) No

6. If you attended the Opry at both the Ryman Auditorium and Opryland, how do you rate the performance?

Opryland better Ryman Auditorium better About the same

7. Do you plan to go to the Opry in the future?

Yes No

Who Can Vote

Only CMSA members are eligible to vote. If you are a member, fill in your Membership Number _____.

If you are not a member, but want to join and vote immediately, fill out the poll, enclose your check for \$12 for one-year CMSA Membership (you get an extra year of *Country Music Magazine*, too.)

Fill out and mail to: July Poll, *Country Music Magazine*, 342 Madison Avenue, Suite 2118, New York, New York 10173.

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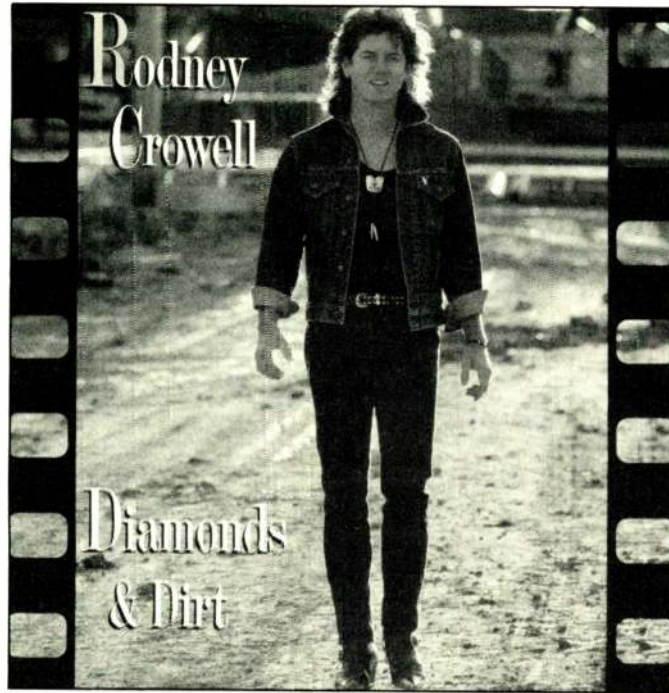
Record Reviews

Rodney Crowell
Diamonds & Dirt
Columbia FC 44076

It's Such a Small World," Rodney Crowell's duet with wife Rosanne Cash, has been making my day every time it's come on the car radio the last few weeks. The song is, to paraphrase its own title, such a small world of big emotions, of wonder and incredulity and wistfulness, loss and hope and resignation, and as complex as it is, it also rings as true as anything I can remember hearing in ages. Best of all, most of the album's like that, too.

Rodney has covered a lot of ground musically over his previous four albums, but I think it is fair to say that no matter what he was doing over that period of time, he was helping to keep Nashville on its toes, helping to keep the town open enough to allow the next wave of bright new country artists to emerge. What a pleasure to find out, then, that when he decided to cut a straightforward country album of his own, he had one like this in him.

It's still primarily rocking country, of course, because that's just Rodney. What it reminds me of more than anything else, oddly enough, is the records of Dallas Frazier, few as they were. Frazier is a largely unsung 1960's figure with whom Crowell has demonstrated empathy in the past. "Crazy Baby" opens this set with pounding rockabilly, while "I Couldn't Leave You If I Tried" and "Above and Beyond" represent the kind of rhythmic, Ray Price shuffles that once ruled in Rodney's native Texas. But this doesn't mean he doesn't know his way around a ballad just as well. "It's Such a Small



World" offers ample proof that he does, but I'm moved just as much by the way a song and performance like "I Didn't Know I Could Lose" illuminates those awful moments when one realizes not only that a good thing has gone bad but also that the person you thought you had known so well is still, in many respects, a total stranger.

What's most impressive is how fluid, relaxed and easy Rodney's vocals remain no matter what kind of material he's negotiating—the natural swing of "Crazy Baby," for example, or the deep sorrow and longing of "The Last Waltz." Crowell sings with winning conviction even when he hits the occasional duff note, and the echo he and co-producer Tony Brown use to fatten his voice adds drama.

Which this album has plenty of to begin with. It does what the best country has always done—aims straight for the heart and lets the rest take care

of itself. *Diamonds & Dirt* is indeed a gem.

—JOHN MORTHLAND

Sweethearts of the Rodeo
One Time, One Night
Columbia FC 40614

It's time for another of 1987's most pleasant surprises to reveal whether they can make it work again. Janis Gill and Kristine Arnold, The Sweethearts of the Rodeo, had a banner year last year, even though their debut album contained only eight songs, not really a full-fledged production. Their talent overcame that, helped along by the fact that the market for female vocal duos and groups has finally escaped the "novelty" stereotype in the wake of The Judds' success.

The answer's now in. *One Time, One Night* is a fine album

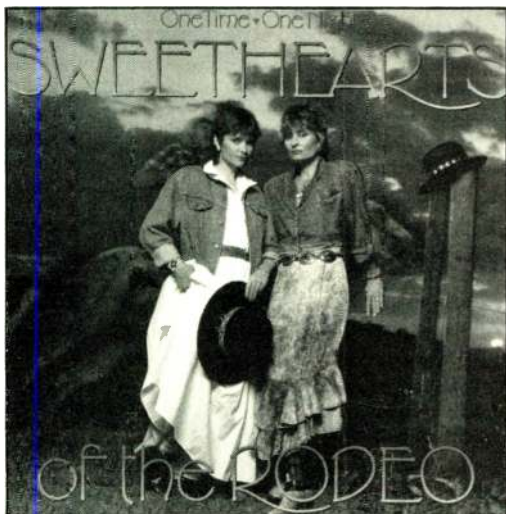
and is stronger than their first for several reasons: the quality of the material, the production and the arrangements, which stood them in such good stead before, remains high, plus they continue to rely on others' material, wisely, since they generally select the right songs, with only a couple of mistakes.

Both "Satisfy You" and "Don't Look Down" have a bouncy feel similar to "Midnight Girl—Sunset Town." And considering early comparisons made between them and The Everlys, it's not surprising they pay tribute to The Everly Brothers by recording Don and Phil's "So Sad (To Watch Good Love Go Bad)," closely following the original. They carry the Everly spirit over to "Blue to the Bone," which has the same feel as The Delmore Brothers' "Blues Stay Away From Me." The Everly spirit shows up once more in the excellent "Gone Again."

Another high point is their vibrant rendering of The Beatles' 1965 hit "I Feel Fine," which proves the durability of the British group's music. This one sounded country when it came out 23 years ago. Nashville's Penny DeHaven first cut it in 1970. But in contrast to the shallowness of her version, The Sweethearts' is charged with real affection. If this seems weird, remember: *this* was the music of The Sweethearts' (and my) generation. We all caught Hank and Lefty a few years down the road.

The mistakes on here are the title song, a superficial, almost cutesy reading of the brilliant Los Lobos (of "La Bamba" fame) composition. The vocals on the original were dry, contrasting with the spritely arrangement. Janis and Kris don't recapture that edge. And "You Never Talk Sweet" is a flawed number, fragmented and incomplete.

Record Reviews



Fine as most of their uptempo songs are, I'm most impressed by their ballads. "If I Never See Midnight Again" is a majestic, classy love song celebrating the act of settling down. It's easily the strongest number of the set and possibly their finest vocal performance of all. Its sophistication becomes them. The delicate Latin arrangement of "When I Stop Dancing" is only one element of a magnificent and compelling number, featuring beautifully phrased, intense vocals and an intimate mood that remind me of "I Can't Resist" from the first album.

The strengths of *One Time, One Night* make it clear that The Sweethearts were not just a flash in the pan. We can be grateful that they chose not to rest on their laurels.

— RICH KIENZLE

Patsy Cline

Live at the Opry
MCA 42142

Patsy Cline's fame and the period when she achieved it (over a quarter century ago) bring us back to a time of Owen Bradley's Nashville Sound production and lavish orchestrations, surrounding a superbly expressive voice. So far as on-stage appearances go though, Patsy, the live artist, has been a mystery.

Up until now. *Live at the Opry*

covers six years of her appearances on network segments of the show from 1956-62, recorded on transcription discs. Perhaps its greatest value is that it covers her appearances before and during her greatest triumphs. At the time of her initial success, she was only a modestly successful artist on Coral Records (a subsidiary of MCA/Decca), yet her self-confidence and charisma shine through on every performance. If she was ever shaky appearing on the Opry, she sure didn't show it.

The Country Music Foundation, who produced this set with MCA, wisely assembled the numbers in chronological order. We hear her in 1956, still an unknown, being introduced by Little Jimmy Dickens before singing "A Church, a Courtroom and Then Goodbye," her first unsuccessful Coral single. With "Walkin' After Midnight" in 1957 she proved her potential, and the added verve, which was lacking before, shows in her performance.

Five of the most fascinating performances took place in 1960. "How Can I Face Tomorrow?" was one of her most underrated recordings. The song was loaded with 1950's country music clichés, but she managed to break free of them. Three other 1960 numbers, performed just before she established herself, are covers of others' hits, with occasional liberties taken with lyrics and arrangements,

most notably on "Lovesick Blues." But in the process she makes them her own.

She does likewise with a rip-roaring, full-throated version of Carl Smith's "Loose Talk" that reveals a side of her consistent with her gutsy offstage personality. With a Hank Snow-style rhumba rhythm chugging behind her, she turns the song into a rave-up unlike anything she ever recorded. "There He Goes," another Carl Smith hit, is nearly as good, hinting that Smith, himself known for raring back and letting fly, may have been an early influence on her vocals. Even "Crazy Dreams," one of her weaker singles, is far better live than it was on vinyl.

"I Fall to Pieces" was heading for the top of the charts when she prerecorded it at an earlier live show. It was then plugged into a July 7, 1961, Opry broadcast. It is a slower, stately and more muted reading than the single, complete with vocal quartet backing and low-key backup from the Opry staff pickers.

"She's Got You" and "Crazy," both recorded at the same time in 1962, get low-key treatments live. Minus Bradley's studio genius, both numbers achieve a totally different kind of intimacy than the singles, the kind gifted vocalists can create onstage, the kind imitators like k.d. lang never will.

Jay Orr's beautifully written notes are a virtual education on Patsy's Opry stint, laden with

small details that tell us much about both the artist and her music. They stand with Charles Wolfe's superb *Bristol Sessions* notes as an example of the right way to do historical liner notes (European country writers, take heed).

Like all great music, Patsy's recordings will always be available. But even if you have all the greatest hits sets, you've heard only one side of her until you hear this.

— RICH KIENZLE

Steve Wariner

I Should Be With You
MCA 42130

It's funny how an artist sometimes makes the long, hard transition from "promising newcomer" to "certified star" so quietly, so slowly and smoothly, that those of us who should have been paying attention but weren't hardly even notice until the journey is complete. It's almost like waking up one day and discovering that the kid you bought the first bicycle for is about to leave for college.

That's kind of how I feel when I listen to Steve Wariner's *I Should Be With You*. It seems like the lion's share of media attention in the past few years has gone to the hard-country revivalists like Dwight Yoakam on one end of the spectrum and the neo-punkabilies like Steve Earle on the other. But in the meantime, Wariner, in his own modest way, has been diligently covering country music's more urbane and predictable middle ground with no less style and artistry.

And he's been getting better and better at it all the while. At this point I am astounded to see how far he's come—how dramatically he's matured as a singer and songwriter.

When he first came to Nashville a decade or so ago, Wariner's essential talents were already in place; yet he was still wet behind the ears, still lacking in the necessary stylistic definition. Consequently, his early albums for RCA were charming, but plagued by a

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touch of sweet-toothed anemia.

But Wariner has hung in there. He made the switch to the MCA label some years back, a move which seems to have accelerated his musical growth. With the help of his coproducer, MCA regular Jimmy Bowen, his strengths as singer, songwriter and lead guitarist have grown more impressive with each successive album. *I Should Be With You* leaves the distinct impression that Wariner—with his thrillingly clear and youthfully emotional voice, and his songs about the complexities of life and love in the late 1980's—could emerge as the next Christopher Cross (listen, for instance, to “Somewhere Between Old and New York”), or maybe even the new Glen Campbell.

Wariner himself wrote six of the ten songs on *I Should Be With You*; two of them on his own, the rest in conjunction with songwriting aces such as Wendy Waldman, Don Schlitz, Guy Clark and Randy Hart. These original selections more than hold their own with the others written by masters like Dave Loggins, Jimmy Webb, Randy Goodrum and Mac McAnally. McAnally, a brilliant vocalist in his own right, is af-

forded a brief appearance here, as well as on Nanci Griffith's last album.

The arrangements by coproducers Wariner and Bowen are equally tasteful and intelligent. They are, for the most part, bright, clean and basic, yet energetic and inventive: lots of electric and acoustic guitars and keyboards; no strings and only a smattering of synthesizers. On his own “All That Matters,” a love song full of compelling urgency, and on “Baby, I'm Yours,” co-written with Guy Clark, Wariner also breaks out with a couple of great guitar solos, reminding us why Chet Atkins brought him to Nashville in the first place.

Wariner, as *I Should Be With You* so amply demonstrates, is one of the few present-day artists capable of making music that honestly and effortlessly straddles the demands of both contemporary pop and contemporary country; and which (rarer still) manages to do service to both forms.

I Should Be With You just as emphatically marks Wariner's undisputed emergence as a full-fledged major leaguer, who can hold his own with the best of them.

—BOB ALLEN

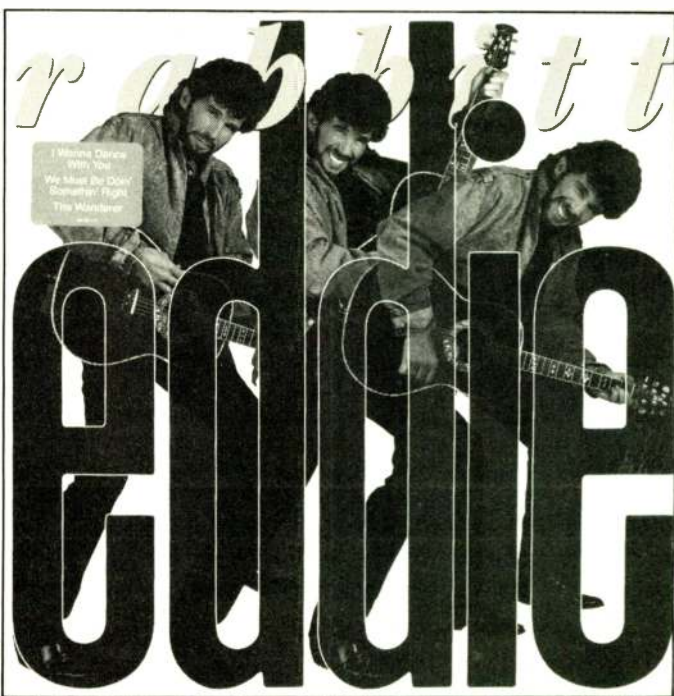
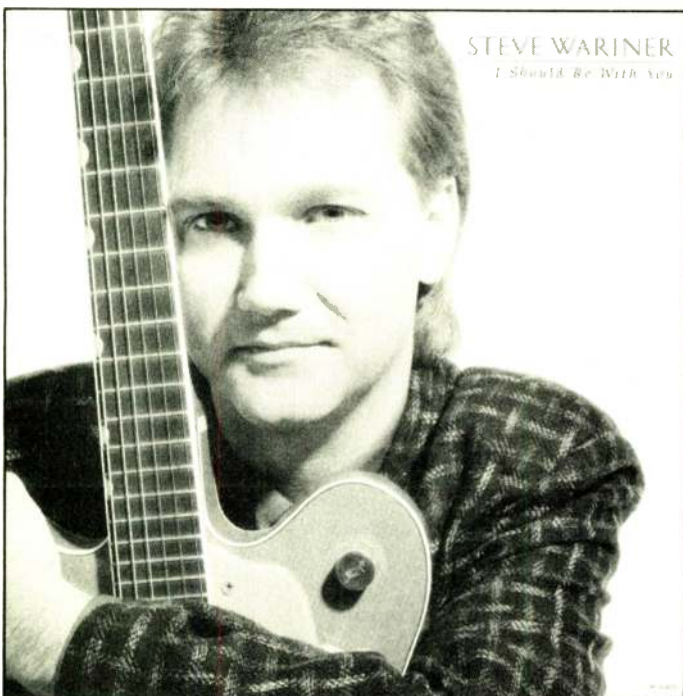
Eddie Rabbitt
I Wanna Dance With You
RCA 6373-1-R

Methinks Eddie Rabbitt is feeling a twinge of nostalgia these days, not for the 1950's, but for the early 1960's. It's not just his swaggering remake of “The Wanderer” that's making me think so, either. There's also “We Must Be Doin' Something Right.” It has the progression and build of one of those early 1960's ballads—the kind normally associated with Phil Spector and/or girl groups, though of course they'd do the song much differently. “I Don't Worry 'Bout You” could also adapt to the lilting, swelling treatment as easily as to this country-folk reading. You can even throw into the early-1960's scenario Eddie's droll take on “Workin' Out,” which is reminiscent of novelty songs of that era even if the subject matter is more contemporary.

I should now hasten to add that this nostalgia is not a bad thing in Eddie's case. Usually, such projects come off wooden and precious, but this album

shows more ingenuity and energy than anything he's done in quite some time. It is true to his original country-pop leanings while at the same time something of a departure. Let me put it this way: If you are an Eddie Rabbitt fan, you're sure to like it; if Eddie is someone you just sorta lost interest in a while back, you might want to give him a second chance.

For one thing, there's his artful blend of acoustic and electric instruments, and some mighty fine close harmonies, all parts sung by Eddie himself, who I suspect has lately taken more than a passing interest in new voices like The O'Kanes or Foster and Lloyd. Plus so many of these songs have such sturdy, catchy riffs, from “He's a Cheater” to “She's an Old Cadillac,” which is further blessed with a ringing acoustic-guitar rockabilly intro and some fleet-fingered electric guitar breaks in the middle. It's also hard not to like the former for lyrics along the lines of “You look at him like he's some kind of hero/But in the morning you'll wake up with a zero.” Given words like that, you're reminded that you're listening to the work of a songwriter as well as a singer/picker. Ditto for “We



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Must Be Doin' Something Right," which refocuses Eddie's nostalgia in the present and is that rarest of species, the devotional love song that doesn't go all mawkish. This album may not be for everybody, but it definitely puts Rabbitt back in contention.

—JOHN MORTHLAND

Jo-El Sonnier

Come On, Joe
RCA 6374-1-R

Not since both Jimmy C. Newman and the team of Rusty & Doug Kershaw had hits in 1961 and Doug alone in the early 1970's, has any authentic Cajun artist broken through to the mainstream in a lasting way. And those two acts were helped by sympathetic producers, Owen Bradley and Wesley Rose, respectively, who skillfully merged bayou consciousness with mainstream Nashville.

Things haven't changed much in 27 years. Jo-El Sonnier's been trying to cross over for years with only limited success in Nashville. A star in Cajun country, he briefly flirted with pop along the way, without success. His talent's never been questioned; it's all a matter of luck.

This time things are different. With RCA's vast resources, he's linked up with producer/guitarist Richard Bennett, who also works with Steve Earle, and ex-Crosby, Stills & Nash producer Bill Halverson. The material comes from a variety of writers including modern blues songwriter Dennis Walker, pop composers Randy Newman, Richard Thompson, Moon Martin and Dave Alvin and the country team of Troy Seals and Dave Kirby.

Sonnier's version of The Martians' rocker "Baby, Hold On" demonstrates his Cajun/country-rock fusion at its best. He's clearly reaching for the mainstream with this crashing number, but his French accordion, which shows up throughout the album, serves as the musical glue holding the song together.



It supports both his vocal and Bennett's slashing guitar solo. His version of Moon Martin's "Paid the Price" has a clearly contemporary feel, but the flavor of classic swamp ballads lingers in the background and in the twangy Bennett solo break.

The churning rockabilly of Dave Alvin's "So Long, Baby, Goodbye," originally recorded by Alvin's old band The Blasters, roars forward with shouted vocal and burning solos from both Sonnier and Bennett. The song does have one unfortunate problem that also mars several other numbers on the album: Sonnier's voice is overwhelmed or buried at times by the arrangements. Troy Seals and Dave Kirby's "No More One More Time" is excellent, and shows off Jo-El's unique vocal phrasing, but again, his voice isn't up front where it should be. Apparently the powers at RCA have noticed this, too. As we go to press, RCA says it's remixed four or five of the cuts to emphasize Jo-El's voice.

The title track, however, is nearly perfect. Catchy and commercial, I don't know if it'll be a hit, but it certainly deserves to be. Richard Thompson's "Tear-Stained Letter" is nothing short

of brilliant, with its ferocious arrangement and soaring vocals. It is perfect for him, though many country audiences may not understand references to the punk rock band The Clash (I barely do).

The album includes a few mistakes. Sonnier's oversung, hysterical stab at 1960's Louisiana bluesman Slim Harpo's beautiful ballad "Rainin' in My Heart" (a 1970 hit for Hank Jr.) pales next to his affecting performance of the contemporary blues ballad "I've Slipped Her Mind"—it's everything "Rainin'" should have been. Another disappointment is Randy Newman's "Louisiana 1927." It might have seemed a good idea to have Sonnier tackle this one, but nothing can make it his type of song.

I don't doubt Sonnier's talent for a second; *Come On, Joe* proves he has the mainstream potential he's long believed in himself. But I hope next time there's more consistency in selecting material (even a bit more bayou material might help) and a lot more concern about bringing his voice up where it belongs, so he can make the *real* album I know he has in him.

—RICH KIENZLE

Reba McEntire

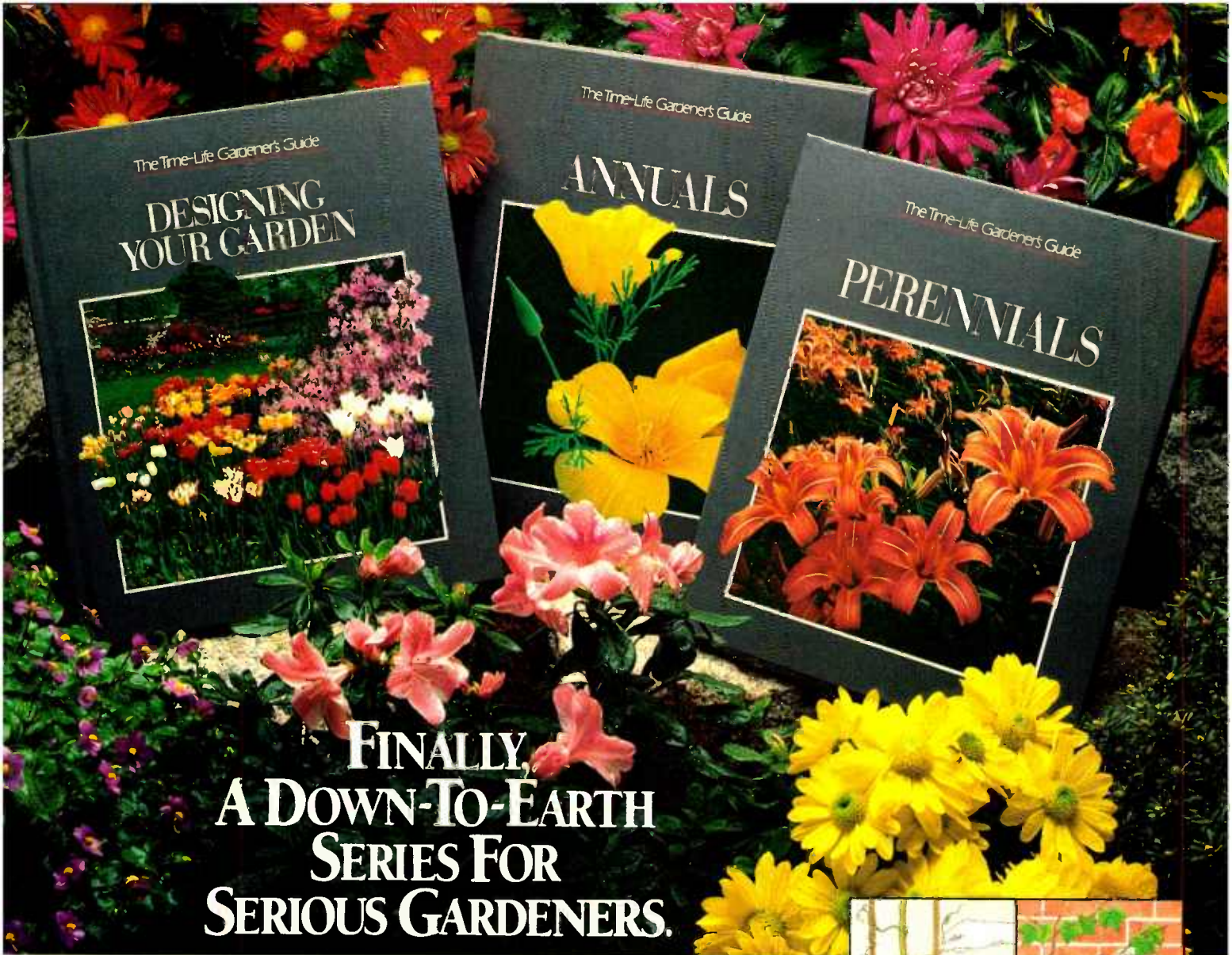
Reba
MCA 42134

I know this is largely an extension of what she's always done, and that a lot of her fans will welcome and cherish it as such, but I'm afraid that with this album Reba crosses the line from country to schlock as well as to pop. It is so studied, so calculated that most of it seems to go in one ear and out the other.

"So, So Long," the very first cut, helps define the problem. It has the kind of show-stopper intro that's supposed to make you sit up and go "ahhh," but in this case all the emphasis is on showing off technique rather than on conveying emotion. The song then shifts into a verse that's pleasingly loose, but just when you think this is gonna be okay after all, back it goes into another section like the intro. Like this song, the album as a whole jerks a listener back and forth, for no apparent artistic reason. It's all show and it has none of the warmth of earlier Reba albums. This is not soul as a living, vital thing to be felt and shared, but soul preserved under glass, to be admired from afar.

Much of this coldness, I suspect, comes from trying too hard—ironically enough, from working so hard to make sure everything is just perfect that the human element gets lost even though the proper notes are hit, the appropriate phrases torn and bent. As the album moves from late-night Yuppie ballad to late-night Yuppie ballad, I find myself remembering nothing except one precious little piano cliché that in my memory runs through every song. It doesn't really, of course, but because all the material is approached by producers Reba and Jimmy Bowen in such identical ways, it does melt together. Even when it's different, it seems the same. Background music.

Which is not what was intended here, clearly. This mishap has befallen many another



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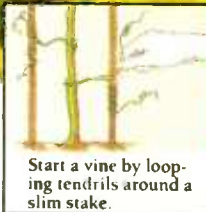
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country singer, but rarely one whose voice has as much character as Reba's. I suspect I'll be in a minority here, but I'll be interested to see how many other fans agree, and in the meantime, rather than belaboring a point, I'll just look forward to her next effort, hoping that this isn't indicative of her permanent future direction.

—JOHN MORTHLAND

Darden Smith *Darden Smith* Epic BFE 40938

In the 1970's, the Texas folk-country club scene gave mainstream country music a whole slew of fresh new singer/songwriters—Joe Ely, Guy Clark and Townes Van Zandt being not the least among them. Now, in the latter half of the 1980's, history seems to be repeating itself as an entire new generation of stunningly original Lone Star composer/balladeers, such as Nanci Griffith, Lyle Lovett, and Steve Earle, has emerged.

Another name to add to the list is Darden Smith, just recently sprung forth from the

clubs of Austin, Texas. As Smith amply demonstrates on this, his major-label album debut, produced by none other than Ray Benson of *Asleep At the Wheel*, he is a talent who can hold his own alongside the best of them. And as if Benson's presence weren't enough, the album also bears the supreme stamp of approval, guest vocals by both Nanci Griffith and Lyle Lovett.

Smith composed all ten songs here. The range and versatility of their down-home, slice-of-life vignettes prove how talented he is.

"Two-Dollar Novel," for instance, is a lyrical, detailed recollection of a visit to one's small home town, where the people of yesteryear are still immersed in the familiar small-town rituals, still "living their lives like two-dollar novels/And wondering why the world is so insane." Smith gives the song a low-key, gentle, yet gravel-edged reading on which he almost sounds like a young Guy Clark.

On other originals, like "Coldest Winter," a song which reminds me of some of Kristofferson's early love-gone-wrong hits, Smith delves into a

straight country vein with equal artistry and feeling.

At the other extreme is an exquisite track like "Talk to Me." Here, Smith's voice has all the silky-sensual, white-soul shades of romantic intensity of a latter-day Boz Scaggs. On this cut, producer Benson, who has done a wonderfully understated job throughout, deserves special credit. The arrangement is framed around the compelling acoustic interplay of The Big Guns, the trio which includes Roland Denny on five-string acoustic bass, Paul Pearcy on drums and Smith himself on acoustic guitar. Further fueling the fire are Sonny Landreth on electric lead, C.J. Chenier on accordion, Cleveland Chenier on rub board and Tim Alexander on piano. The song's extended vocal and instrumental riffs bristle with sensual intrigue and possess the excitement of a "live" studio performance—which I would guess it is. "Talk to Me," like any number of other selections on here, has "radio hit" written all over it.

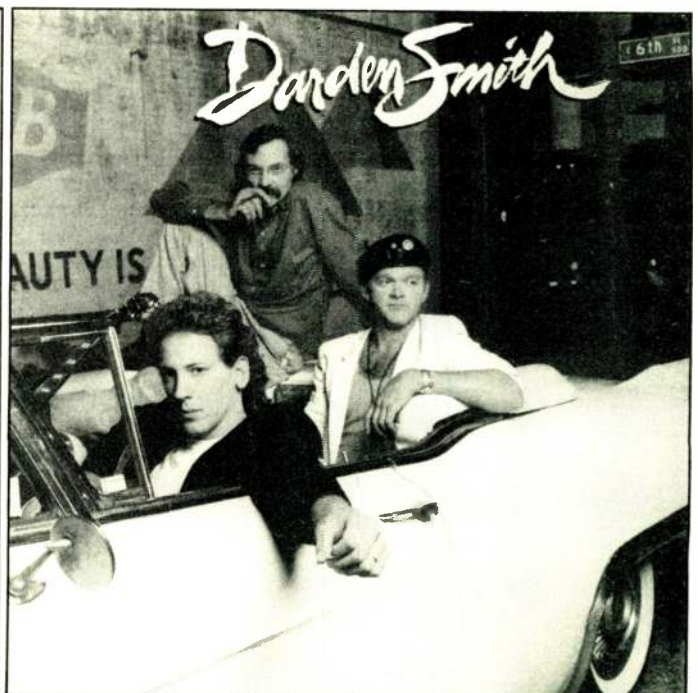
There are still other sides of Darden Smith to be heard, as well—all of them unified by the lyric precision of his writing, his ability to create and sustain a

mood or emotional attitude in just a few short stanzas. On a song like "Little Maggie," he comes off like a Texas-bred Jackson Browne. On "Day After Tomorrow" he slices into a compelling Fats Domino/"Kansas City" style riff, aided by the assembled musicians, this time including Floyd Domino.

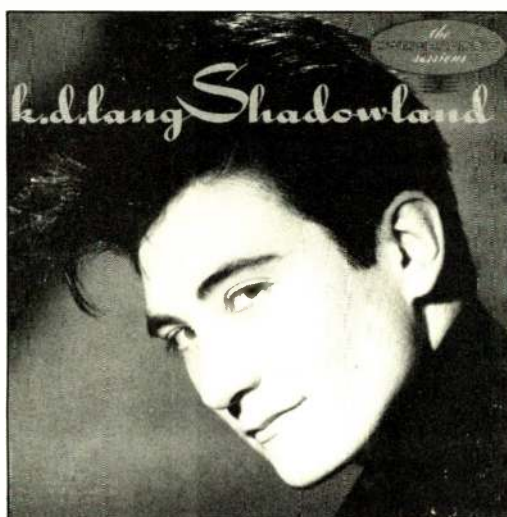
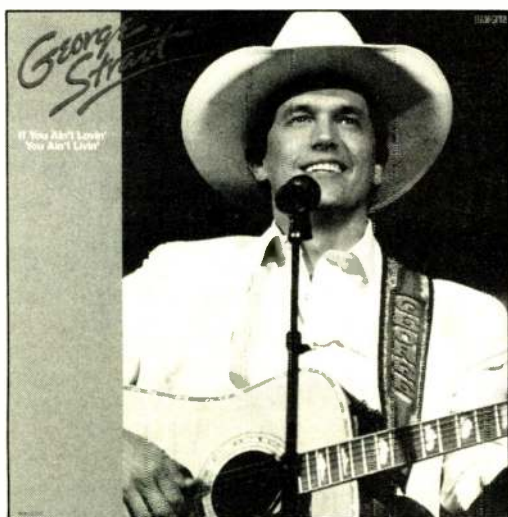
On "Love Me Like a Soldier" Smith once again turns the tables. This is the first song I've ever heard that seriously explores the drama, pathos and heartache of the life of a nine-to-five white-collar executive. In that regard, it evokes the same feelings of hopelessness as Arthur Miller's *Death Of a Salesman*.

The ability to use words and music to shape something extraordinary out of the ordinary: that's what sets the great songwriters apart from the merely good ones; and that's what Darden Smith shows he can do on "Love Me Like a Soldier" and on most of the rest of the songs on this impressive debut. These are qualities which, I think, ultimately ensure that this is one Johnny-Come-Lately who has the goods to hang in for the duration.

—BOB ALLEN



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George Strait *If You Ain't Lovin', You Ain't Livin'* MCA 42114

I'm not completely sure, but I think what we're dealing with here is nothing short of the Merle Haggardization of George Strait. You remember Merle Haggard, don't you? One of the toughest country singers to come down the pike; he knew how to wail and he knew how to swing; knew the backroads and the sidetracks and the places in between. Nowadays, though, Merle Haggard (since *A Friend in California*, I think) sounds like a guy who owns a smoking jacket and an overstuffed chair, doing songs that fade into an endless string of paint-by-number albums. They're all good and all dull.

You remember George Strait, don't you? Breath of fresh air in country music; the Great White Hope from Texas; a tangible connection with country music's disreputable past, who could sing of the dusty dancehalls and the even dustier plains, flat as a pool table. A man who still knew how to tip his ten-gallon hat to the ladies, say "Thank you, ma'am," and sing a country song with feeling and humor.

All that's still true with *If You Ain't Lovin', You Ain't Livin'*. It's got swing, it's got ballads, it's got country songs impeccably sung

and produced; it's got good fiddle playin' and songs with clever hook lines. It's got songs that sound as if George Strait was getting ready to tip his hat to the ladies.

What it doesn't have, though, bothers me a little.

If You Ain't Lovin', You Ain't Livin' doesn't have soul, doesn't have the spark that takes what is basically a rather so-so song like "The Chair" and turns it into something that stays with you for years and years.

If You Ain't Lovin', You Ain't Livin' feels like paint-by-number, just going through the motions. When an artist with George Strait's talent goes through the motions, it's not like the house band at the Holiday Inn in Jackson, Tennessee, cut an album. Everything is there—production quality, voice, songs (although the songs are a little weak), instrumentation. You could put this record on for background noise at a cocktail party and nobody would start throwing shrimp at the speakers. But this is not an album you're going to come back to again and again. It's not an album that has the power to touch you much deeper than potato chips and dip.

Strait fares best with the up-tempo material, things like the light-hearted title cut, "Let's Get Down To It" and "Back To Bein' Me." A couple of the ballads—"Baby Blue" and "Is It That Time Again?"—just fall flat. These are the kind of country songs that

George Strait blew off the charts not long ago.

Granted, it's tough throwing all sevens, and an artist of Strait's stature tends to get judged by pretty tough standards. George has already proved that he is the genuine article, and I'm rootin' for his next album to be his best.

—MICHAEL BANE

k.d. lang *Shadowland* SIRE 1-25724

Okay, here's the revealed, unvarnished truth. Every once in a rare while someone turns up who's really as good as people say he or she is. Now k.d. lang is here, folks, and she's every bit as good as people say she is. Which is refreshing, since her first album, *Angel with a Lariat*, was, for lack of a better word, a stiff.

Shadowland is a stunning second album, a vocal roller coaster ride that *Angel with a Lariat* only hinted at. In case you haven't been hanging out around video lately, k.d. lang (and, yes, it is lower case, and no, I don't have the vaguest idea why), is a Canadian singer in her mid-twenties, a fan of Patsy Cline and a thoroughly original singer in a vein she's dubbed "torch and twang."

Not a minute too soon, I'd say. The whole country music field has been almost overrun with sin-

cere folkies, singers who look like they got their cowgirl duds from Ralph Lauren (or, heaven forbid, Laura Ashley). Torch singers are as much a part of country music as those interminable bluegrass pickers. Actually, there's probably some strange middle ground there between pop and country, a field mined by everybody from Patsy Cline (who did it best) to Connie Francis and whoever it was who did "Wayward Wind." (Okay—just so I don't get letters, it was Gogi Grant in 1956, the same year Elvis did "Heartbreak Hotel," Johnny Cash did "I Walk the Line" and James Brown rocked out with "Please, Please, Please.")

The best torch singers remind me of nights I'd rather forget, bars that have closed and friendships that have gone sour. Listening to k.d. do "Black Coffee" is a memory lane tour through some bad-time lonely nights. All of a sudden, I'm back where it's last call at some dive in New York or Montana. She's got a voice that kind of sloshes around you, the last beer on top Beam's finest. That voice on Roger Miller's old "Lock, Stock and Teardrops" will damn near rip your heart out.

It musta ripped Owen Bradley's heart out, too, since he came out of retirement to produce this record. This is the stuff Owen Bradley does best, and he's done it with some of the best female vocalists ever—Patsy Cline and Brenda Lee come to mind. It's good to hear Owen Bradley at his best again, highlighting the singer rather than swamping her with a too-heavy arrangement. Working with a voice like k.d.'s must have been a blast.

I can't say enough about this woman's voice. Saying it's good is sort of like saying nuclear bombs blow up big. The comparisons to Patsy Cline are inevitable and, on the whole, pretty accurate.

When I first heard k.d. lang on demo tapes, being the fan of female vocalists that I am, I was blown away. That's why *Angel with a Lariat* was such a disappointment. *Shadowland*, though, does the trick and does it well. This is another "go out and buy quick" record.

—MICHAEL BANE



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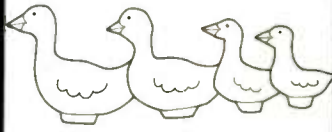
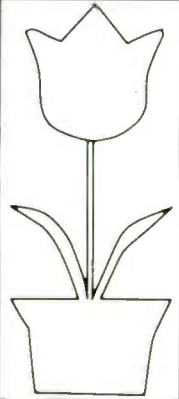
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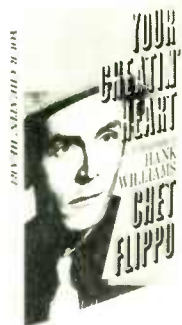


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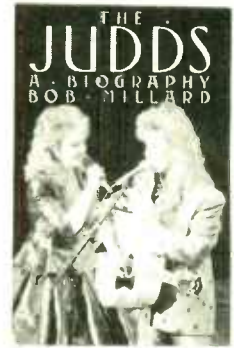
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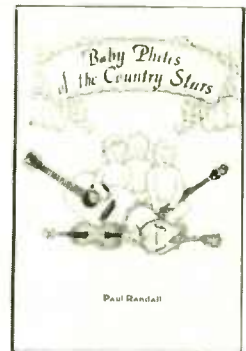
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OUR FIRST 15 YEARS

15th Anniversary Letters

In response to Russ Barnard's call for comments and suggestions back in July 1987 and to our Anniversary Issue in September 1987, as we promised, here is more of what you readers are thinking about us and country music in general. This is the third installment. The first two appeared in the January/February and March/April issues this year.

Thanks to all who took the time to write. We read them all.

Lee Rodgers Says Hello

Congratulations on your 15th Anniversary. Am a frequent visitor to Nashville, being a country music fan for 43 years. Sang over the radio in Massachusetts over stations WSAR/Fall River and WBET/Brockton, back in 1956-58 under the name of Lee Rodgers—Rodgers was my maiden name. At that time, country music was called hill-billy music.

My husband and I are proud to be "honorary citizens of Nashville."

Natalie Makepeace
Brockton, Massachusetts

Itineraries and Fan Clubs

Maybe you could list some of the fan clubs' addresses or the location and date of various stars' next concert. I'm having no luck on getting this for Lee Greenwood, Randy Travis or Hank Williams Jr.

Linda Scheffer
Chase, Michigan

For fan clubs, we may print a book. In the meantime, the CMA in Nashville maintains quite a list. Or look on the back of your favorite star's record jacket. Past Letters columns in this magazine also contain many of your favorites. Itineraries go out of date too quickly for us to publish them. Besides, how could we do everyone's? Some fan clubs have them!—R.D.B.

Music Makers of the Past

My suggestion for your 15th Anniversary is that you devote the entire issue to the music makers of the past. I am speaking of people like Marty Robbins, Hank Williams, Johnny Horton, Patsy Cline, Red Sovine and Ernest Tubb.

It is great the way you get the people who subscribe into the working of the magazine, as with this request for suggestions.

Larry Burks
Shepard AFB, Texas

We got in the three Hanks, Patsy, Red, Ernest, The Carter Family, Lefty and Jim Reeves, one way or another. So many have asked us for more on these and others like them, we may do a book.—R.D.B.

Country News



Remember Me?

Congratulations on *Country Music Magazine's* 15th Anniversary. You asked for thoughts and suggestions. I hope you like mine.

Country Music Magazine did a story about me in Volume One, Number Five, January 1973, which was terrific. I was wondering if you would like to do a follow-up? A lot of interesting things have happened to me since January 1973.

Big Bill Johnson
Greenville, Texas

Send us your info.—R.D.B.

Proposals from Propp

I especially like the way you let the members vote for the albums and singles of the month. I also like the way you have the Top 25, complete with an order blank, and the 20 Questions articles, except that you should let the CMSA members ask the questions to the stars.

I would also like to see a page or two of autographs at least once a year. And why not sell singles as well?

Douglas Propp
Richland Center, Wisconsin

Fun ideas! We can't sell singles, though... we'd have to charge too much. On letting the fans ask questions... we did twice, once with Johnny Cash in the July/August 1984 Newsletter, once with Alabama in 20 Questions in March/April 1986. We may again.—R.D.B.

Fifty Years Ago on Radio

When I was growing up on a Montana ranch fifty years ago, the big time for me came on Saturday night when Prince Al-

bert smoking tobacco sponsored one half-hour of the Grand Ole Opry. I remember Roy Acuff and Minnie Pearl. Minnie talked about her feller Hezzie and her home in Grinder's Switch. There was also a comic named the Duke of Paducah. He always ended up with the line, "I have to head for the wagon 'cause these shoes are killing me."

I also listened to the *National Barn Dance* with emcee Uncle Ezra and two young singers, LuluBelle and Scotty. It also had a band called "Spike Jones and his City Slickers."

Then there was a program about a young folk singer who was wandering through the mountain country collecting folk songs. He always sang a song to start his program: "I'm just a poor wayfaring stranger/Wandering through this world of woe./ There is no sickness nor toil nor trouble/ In that fair land to which I go." His name was Burl Ives.

James H. Smith
Miles City, Montana

Wonderful memories.—R.D.B.

Inside Country Music Journalism

As one of *Country Music Magazine's* earliest contributors, I want to congratulate you on the 15th Anniversary Issue.

Having written for most of the nationally-known country music publications over the past 15 years, I was especially interested in the articles by Bob Allen and Patrick Carr. If, however, most country music "journalists" are cheerleaders in not-too-hidden disguise, let's be about the business of naming names and routing them out. (Assuming it is they, and not the editorial policies of the publications for which they write, which are to blame.)

The cream of the crop among us, notably Bob Allen, Katy Bee, Edward Morris, Andrew Roblin, Alanna Nash and yours truly, none of whom is the darling of the industry, can then be about our true mission as country music historians who, despite—or perhaps as a consequence of—our independence, will finally rise above the ranks of the underrated.

Stacy Harris
Nashville, Tennessee

Cream rises to the top, no matter what kind of pitcher you pour it in. By the way, I could have sworn that Bob Allen told me he was the darling of something.—R.D.B.

Who's in the Top 15—No Robbins? No Tillis?

I was overjoyed to see the pictures of The Carter Family in the September/October 1987 Anniversary Issue of *Country Music*.

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I have been a fan of theirs ever since I first heard them sing on KWTO radio in Springfield, Missouri, when June and I were not much more than kids. They are the greatest, and June was, and is, a better comedienne than the famous so-called best performers on past and current TV. I suspect if she hadn't married Johnny, she would now be an award-winning comedienne herself.

I think you *Country Music* people made very good choices on the Top 15 Album Artists. However, I think you committed a crime when you left out Marty Robbins and Mel Tillis. Didn't they ever make an album?

Bernice DeWeese
Joplin, Missouri

Other people's favorites were missing, too. — R.D.B.

They Don't Make 'Em Like They Used To

I have been a subscriber to *Country Music Magazine* since the early 1970's. Have enjoyed it very much through the years.

They don't make singers like they used to. I can remember back in the 1930's listening to some of the oldtimers from the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville on the Saturday night show, and to WLS/Chicago. I used to get ready to go to school listening to The Carter Family from Del Rio, Texas, at five o'clock in the morning.

After WWII, I moved to Shreveport, Louisiana, where I got to know Jim Reeves and Hank Williams Sr. Hank used to come out to have Doug Lafitte make him molds for fish bait. Johnny Horton had Doug make him molds for a big ash tray with a mosquito standing on it. I still have one of the first ash trays that came from the mold.

I worked for T.L. James in 1954 while Elvis Presley drove a truck for them. His dad was a foreman. Slim Whitman delivered mail in Bossier City, and the Wilburn family lived around the corner from us. Teddy was a carpenter on the job for James.

Ricky Skaggs is about the best that has come along in recent years.

Thomas Kidwell
Stonewall, Louisiana

Black and White Make Music

I love your great magazine and I love *real* country music.

I'm over 71 years young, and my first ten years of life were spent gloriously and happily in lumber company logging camps—miles from the nearest village or farm. My first recollection of country and black music is the company dances held nearly every Saturday night in the company boarding house dining room. Only white people were allowed to attend—but the music was provided by three gifted musicians, a piano player, fiddler and guitarist. All of them were black. Most of their music was country or barrelhouse, honky tonk and jazz with irresistible rhythms.

PHOTO ESSAY: Fan and Star

Continuing the long tradition of gracious relations between fan and star, Judy Stull of Tippecanoe, Ohio, has had her picture taken with a lot of current greats. Her comments illuminate each photo.



"Tommy Cash is so friendly and such a showman. I've also had pictures taken with his brother Johnny. The Cash family are down-to-earth people. This picture was taken in Steubenville, Ohio."



"Little Jimmy Dickens stands tall in my book. He still gets the audience's attention with his powerful voice."

"Jim Ed Brown sings his heart out for his fans."



Ray Price is my favorite country music singer. He makes any song sound good. I even like Hank Williams Jr. when he sings his father's songs and a few of his own.

Fifteen years ago, along came your great magazine and I became hooked on it. Keep up the good work!

Ernest B. Ford
Houston, Texas

Serious Scrap Book and Discographer

I am a longtime collector of records and memorabilia related to *real* country music, and I write country music-related articles focusing primarily on the roots music of the commercial era of 1922-1950. I offer repros of the articles for sale. A catalogue of available articles may be obtained by writing me at 5108 Frenchwood, Arlington, Texas 76016.

Keep up the good work on the best magazine ever produced on our music, and especially the pre-1960's stuff.

Robert W. Phillips
Arlington, Texas

Good Old Trips to Nashville

Although I listened to the Opry back in the late 1940's, it wasn't until 1945 that I met my first live country music artist, Rex Allen, at a local fair. Then when the Opry stars started coming to Michigan, I finally got to talk to Ernest Tubb and the Texas Troubadours, plus the Short Brothers.

In 1948 some country fans and I started a fan club for Jerry Byrd as we got interested in what the steel guitar did for singers like George Morgan, Ray Price and so on. It lasted for over 30 years! I joined many other fan clubs, collected records,

saw all the shows that came to Michigan and made trips to Nashville attending the DJ conventions annually. Minnie Pearl was under the impression I lived in Nashville! It was so much fun!

I would suggest you carry an article on the older artists to keep abreast of what they are doing now. I'm sure others would be interested in Buddy Starcher, Bradley Kindaid, Eddie Dean, Bob Atcher, Patsy Montana and so on.

Minnie Annis
Traverse City, Michigan
We keep lists of all the names you readers send us and chip away at them in various departments of the magazine and in the Newsletter. — R.D.B.

A New-Mexico-Eye View of Country Music

I have been a country music fan for 35 of my 42-year existence. I was introduced to country/western music by the AM radio in an old Chevy on our way from Santa Fe, New Mexico, to work the sugar beet fields in Brush, Colorado, back in the 1950's.

My biggest dream is to someday hear one of my own songs on radio performed by a professional singer. At the moment my only fans are my wife Betty and my nine-year-old son Nathan. Betty is a convert from rock to country due to my interest.

The country stars that I am familiar with are all anglos. There are only a few blacks and Hispanics who have been recognized and accepted as true country/western singers. There are probably fewer songwriters who fall in this category.

I understand that the origins and roots of country music are in the South, but



"Porter Wagoner has still got what it takes. He is a super entertainer and such a great guy. He put on a wonderful show at New Philadelphia, Ohio."



"Jeannie C. Riley puts on a great show. It is great the way country music entertainers take time for the people who made them what they are."
—Judy Stull

there are many fans and many singers and writers of country music even here in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Somehow I get the impression that folks down in Nashville could care less.

If stars are running out of fresh song material, tell them to contact their fans such as myself. I might have that million-seller they've been searching for.

Pete Sanchez
Albuquerque, New Mexico

OK, Pete, here's your chance. To reach Pete, write 430 Jefferson S.E., Apt. 4, Albuquerque, New Mexico 87108.—R.D.B.

Born to the Sound

I think I was born to the sound of country music, because I have loved it all of my 58 years.

We listened to a battery-powered radio when I was a little girl, because we had no electricity, and when the battery would get weak, my brothers and sisters and I took turns putting a finger on a weak tube so we could hear it, until Dad could afford a tube or battery.

For your anniversary, why not have a special magazine like *50 Years of the Grand Ole Opry* and put in pictures and stories of all the deceased, has-beens and all-time greats from the start of the Opry through the 1960's or early 1970's, so that the young fans now can read what real country music was all about?

Mary Glammeyer
Centralia, Illinois

Sounds like something the Opry should do, but we may do a book on oldtimers in general. Or a calendar. How do you like that idea?—R.D.B.

A-B-C's of Cajun

Thank you for allowing the fans and subscribers of *Country Music Magazine* to help with the 15th Anniversary Issue. Here are my suggestions:

Jimmy Buffet: cover story. Atachafalaya feature: they are Louisiana's hottest Cajun band. It's time for some Cajun flavor in *Country Music Magazine*.

Also, how about a "Where Are They Now?" type of article on the stars of past cover stories? You could pick one cover story each year for the past 15.

Keep up the great work and congrats.

Kathleen Thomas
Lafayette, Louisiana

How about Jo-El Sonnier right in this issue? Also like your "Where Are They Now" idea. Stay tuned.—R.D.B.

Country and Western Scrapbook

I've been a country and western fan for almost as long as I can remember. As a teenager, I made and still have a scrapbook of country and western stars. I don't remember which magazine or which tobacco company it was, but each month along with the tobacco ad would be a picture of a star. These would all end up in my scrapbook along with a prized color photo of a very young Hank Thompson in a starbedecked suit and a fancy guitar.

Aleta Gray
Dove Creek, Colorado

Sweet Memories, Sweet Sounds

Sometimes, as we grow older, things become more important to us. Country music is one of those things.

Not that it wasn't important as far back as I can remember. I cut my teeth on fiddles and guitars. All my uncles and aunts played and sang. Friends and neighbors dropped by just to play and sing, and Saturday nights our house was a meeting place for pickin' and grinning. During the war, on Saturday nights, the Grand Ole Opry was our neighborhood entertainment. We had to cover the windows with black cloths so the lights from the radio didn't show, but we all sat in the dark and heard every joke by Minnie and every sweet tune from Nashville.

A local girl has now recorded two of my songs, and I've sent some to a record company in Nashville and four to Boxcar Willie on tapes. Some of us get the breaks and some don't. Thank God for those who do, because they bring all those wonderful hours of country music to us. When I hear someone like my son and some of the other local people around me sing one of my songs, then I am a country music songwriter, even if you and all the others never know it.

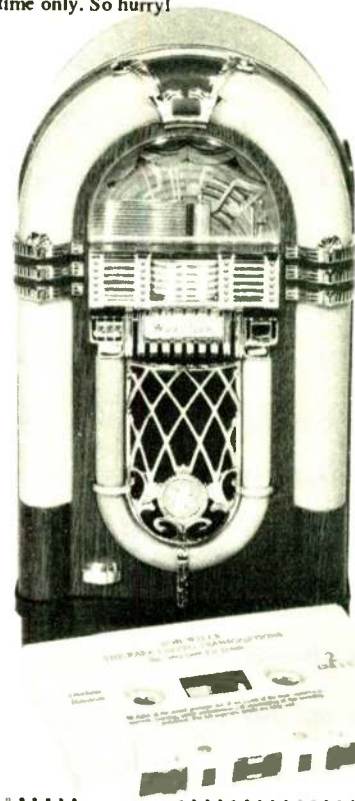
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Billie Morris
Whitney, Texas

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Merle Haggard: Want some of Merle Haggard's early Capitol albums? Well, they're scarce, so be prepared to pay—except for the 1966 *Swinging Doors* (See for Miles 68), available again in the original cover. Built around the title song, "Swinging Doors," and its answer song, "The Bottle Let Me Down," both Hag standards, the album is pure Bakersfield any Dwight Yoakam fan needs to hear (at least until Buck Owens lets his stuff be reissued).

The two hits stand on their own, of course, and ten of the 12 songs are Hag originals. Other performances are as brilliant as the first two, among them "If I Could Be Him," the rocking "I Can't Stand Me" and the Buck-flavored novelty "The Girl Turned Ripe." The strongest non-original is Tommy Collins' brilliant ballad, "High on a Hilltop." Not only is Bonnie Owens singing high harmony, James Burton fans can hear plenty of his legendary Telecaster chicken pickin'.

Hag's career's gone through many stages in 22 years. To hear

this stuff today is to hear an artist so incredibly *alive* (he was only 33) that you realize he was already well on the way to the enduring career many were predicting for him even then.

Wilburn Brothers: Doyle and Teddy Wilburn had been on the Opry as part of the Wilburn Family in the 1940's, but it wasn't until after the Korean War ended that they began working as a duo. Stetson recently reissued their first Decca album, from 1957, *The Wilburn Brothers* (HAT 3035). It contains none of their hits (those came later), but some impressive performances nonetheless, backed by a small honky tonk-styled band. Using slicker, less traditional harmonies than The Louvin Brothers, Doyle and Teddy tackled several of their own compositions, including the excellent "That's When I Miss You" and "Much Too Often."

Most numbers, however, are covers of others' hits, as is typical of country albums of the period. Among them are solo performances of Hank Sr.'s "You Win Again" (Teddy) and Moon

Mullican's "I'll Sail My Ship Alone" (Doyle)-and duet versions of "Time Changes Everything," Eddie Dean's "One Has My Name, the Other Has My Heart" and a lesser-known Ted Daffan masterpiece, "Always Alone."

Their hit period was still a couple of years away, yet the potential is obvious. The original 1957 cover is a real period piece, Doyle and Teddy replete with white jackets, trimmed with sequins and piping, and perfect patent-leather hair.

Wanda Jackson: Various advertisements for Wanda Jackson's *Lovin' Country Style* (HAT 3021), a reissue of her 1962 Decca album, refer to it as material done *after* her legendary rockabilly period with Capitol. In fact, these were her first records, done in Oklahoma, Los Angeles and Nashville in 1954-55, while Wanda was a 17-year-old high school senior. She recorded seven singles all told, including duets with western bandleader Billy Gray, who was Hank Thompson's musical director and had a Decca

contract.

None of her singles sold, however, and Decca only released the album after Wanda had built a solid country following when she moved from rock to country with Capitol. The duets with Gray aren't included, but the solo sides show her clear promise, particularly the delightful "Lovin' Country Style" and an over-dubbed duet, "If You Knew What I Know," plus "You'd Be The First One to Know" and "The Heart You Could Have Had." Her voice, like Brenda Lee's on her early discs, hadn't yet matured, but within two years her growl would become of her most distinctive features as she sang some of the greatest rock any woman ever recorded.

Incidentally, if you want *all* Wanda's Decca recordings, everything here including those with Billy Gray, they're available on the Bear Family compilation *Early Wanda Jackson* (BFX 15109).

Asleep At the Wheel: A few issues ago some readers took exception to my unfavorable

review of *Asleep At the Wheels* 10 album, in which I insisted that the band's Capitol periods were far better. You can hear for yourself on *The Very Best of Asleep At the Wheel* (See for Miles SEE 81), an anthology of their best Capitol and early United Artists sides. The original band, built around leader-guitarist Ray Benson, steel player Lucky Oceans, vocalist Chris O'Connell, guitarist-vocalist Leroy Preston and pianist Floyd Domino (now with George Strait), formed an unbeatable blend of songwriting, vocal and instrumental skills.

The first three songs from their 1973 UA debut album are stiff despite the band's enthusiasm. But by 1975 they had found themselves, as shown on their masterpiece album *Texas Gold*, which included "The Letter That Johnny Walker Read," Preston's rhythm-and-blues/country original "Runnin' After Fools" and the band's cover of Amos Milburn's rhythm-and-blues classic, "Let Me Go Home, Whiskey."

The original 1977 version of Preston's "My Baby Thinks She's a Train," later Rosanne Cash's first hit, is here in all its echoey rockabilly glory. Just as good are their 1976 cover of the old Nat King Cole classic "Route 66" and their 1978 Grammy-winning version of Count Basie's big band classic, "One O'Clock Jump," done Western swing style. AATW was never better than here.

Chris Bouchillon: The name Chris Bouchillon is no household word, which is not surprising since he made his last records in the late 1920's. But if you've ever heard early Opry star Robert Lunn or Tex Williams' "Smoke! Smoke! Smoke!" or Woody Guthrie's talking numbers or Jerry Reed's "Amos Moses" or Buck Trent's "Oh, Yeah!" routine, you've heard the "talking blues" style Bouchillon created sixty years ago. Old Homestead Records recently issued some of Bouchillon's earliest and best work on *The Original Talking Blues Man* (OHCS-181).

A South Carolina native, Bouchillon never took making music seriously and hence never realized what he'd start-

ed, as Charles Wolfe points out in his excellent notes. Bouchillon's "Talking Blues" (transcribed on the back cover) kicked off this entire style, and many of the other numbers, including "New Talking Blues" and "Born in Hard Luck," are good illustrations of it. As with all talking blues, a little goes a long way, but it's enormously entertaining in limited doses, especially if *Hee-Haw*-style humor is your preference.

Ballroom Kings: Detour Records has only done a few country reissues, but they've been excellent, particularly in terms of sound. No wonder, since the label's owner is legendary British sound engineer Bob Jones, the man responsible for the fantastic audio on many Bear Family albums. The idea behind Detour's latest, *Ballroom Kings* (Detour 33-005), is a good one: an anthology of 1940's and 1950's RCA Victor country and honky tonk performances.

But on this particular album itself, you have to take the bad with the good. It's a mixed bag of songs and styles. Pee Wee King's versions of "Rag Mop" and the Benny Goodman standard "Seven Come Eleven" both feature Bobby Koefler's outstanding steel guitar. Wade Ray's "Idaho Red" is a hot truck-driving boogie. Different sides of two legendary yodelers are revealed on Rosalie Allen's "It'd Surprise You" and Elton Britt's "I Feel the Blues Coming On." Jerry Byrd's hot steel guitar enhances Homer & Jethro's cornball novelty, "Child Psychology."

But duds like "Jaw-Jaw, Yap-Yap" by Texas Jim Robertson, Jim Boyd's "Waxahachie Boogie

Woogie Dishwasher Boy" and Eddie Hill's "You Ain't Gonna Like It" have no business here. With so many great RCA sides needing reissue, why these? The packaging is excellent, marred only by "Big Al's" ill-written, occasionally inaccurate liner notes. More details should and could have been included, as RCA keeps complete recording data.

Bob Wills: Kaleidoscope Records' series of Bob Wills material from the legendary Tiffany Transcriptions Series, recorded in San Francisco in 1946-47 with some of his hottest postwar musicians, continues with *Sally Goodin'* (F-27). Featuring the talents of Tommy Duncan and a host of master instrumentalists—Tiny Moore, Millard Kelso, Herb Remington, Alex Brashear, Noel Boggs, Joe Holley, Eldon Shamblin and Junior Barnard among them—this version of the band ushered in the group's musical golden era. Their instrumental lineup and use of electric instruments had an influence on country and pop music which is still felt today.

Consisting mainly of Western swing favorites, as opposed to the many jazz and pop numbers the Playboys cut for Tiffany, the album includes many outstanding performances, such as the band's jazzed-up version of "I Had a Little Mule," a version of Remington's steel guitar anthem "Playboy Chimes" that is better than the MGM recording, a blazing "Oh, Monah" and a riproaring rendition of "Sally Goodin'." The Tiffany Transcriptions convey a sense of joy and fun that does not come across even on the Playboys' best com-

mercial recordings. Listen closely and you can hear Bob's remarks nearly break Tommy up in places.

Like the *Detour* album, this one would have benefited from more comprehensive liner notes. Wills covered a lot of musical ground in the Tiffany series, but the details do not appear here. Alas, the California folkies who run Kaleidoscope are more enthusiastic than knowledgeable about Western swing and Wills' music. Don't let this put you off the record; the music's well worth having. Just don't expect to learn much about what it was and how it was made.

Another Wills re-issue available today is based on his Kapp sessions. In 1965, soon after Wills disbanded the Texas Playboys to work as a solo performer, he signed with Kapp Records. I've always felt (as did Bob) that the Kapp era accounted for some of his worst records. Produced in Nashville using A-Team pickers, the arrangements were so rigid and the overproduction so gross that the results sounded at best like a military band playing arranged versions of Wills music. Feeling and spontaneity made Bob's music, not dull precision.

His first three Kapp sessions in October 1965 and July 1966 were exceptions to that rule. Dominated by Texas players, including ex-Playboy singer Leon Rausch, fiddlers Jimmy Belken (later with Merle Haggard) and Keith Coleman, guitarist Jerry Case and a few extra Nashville pickers, the numbers turned up on *Deep in the Heart of Texas*, Bob's last good album as an active performer, now reissued on Stetson (HAT 3058).

The material here is a mix of the title song, Western swing oldies, pop oldies such as "My Adobe Hacienda" and even the rock classic "Kansas City"—this song and others like it have a lot in common with Western swing. The familiar Playboy feel is still present, even with Nashville drummer Buddy Harman. This group's versions of both the title track and Bob's fellow bandleader Hoyle Nix's "Big Balls in Cowtown" are nearly as hot as Nix's own.

—RICH KIENZLE

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It's harder to find Conway Twitty than one might think. He could be anywhere, from Twitty City to somewhere on the road or in a recording studio or running any one of his numerous businesses. Unlike many other artists, who might dabble in this field or that field, Conway Twitty is a dynamo—a very successful dynamo at that. We had to leave the country to run Conway down—we caught up with him by the pool of the Treasure Island Resort in the Cayman Islands, a resort that Twitty, along with several other country acts, owns. While Conway and new wife Dee Henry slathered on suntan oil, he agreed to answer a sunbaked *Twenty Questions*.

1

When did you start coming down to the Caymans?

A friend of mine, Randy Davidson, came to my office about, I don't know, three, three-and-a-half years ago, and said, "Have you ever heard of the Cayman Islands?" And I said, yeah, I've heard of them, but I don't know where they are. And we got the map out and he showed me, and he said, "We've got a really good deal down there, I think," and he started telling me about this hotel situation here on Seven Mile Beach on Grand Cayman Island. And he said, "I'm interested in putting together a group of country music entertainers. The people on that island love country music, and I think it would be beneficial for the hotel to have some of the owners be country music entertainers. I've heard that if I come and talk to you first, then the rest of them might go for it."

2

They do seem to like country music a lot down here.

They love country music. I couldn't believe it. We went shopping—oh, that's another thing. There's no income tax here. There's no kind of tax here. And that's great, that interested me a lot. It's hard for us to understand back home, isn't it? Anyway, I went shopping, and all the native people were jumping up and down and yelling, "Conway Twitty! Conway Twitty!" It amazed me, how much they like country music

20 Questions with CONWAY TWITTY

by Michael Bane



JIM HIGGINS

here. And this island is very accessible. It's just fifty-five minutes from Miami. And I call it the Hillbilly Hawaii, you know. All I did was mention it to Ralph Emery and said, "Would you like to come down and cut the ribbon at our grand opening?" He said, "I'd love to, it sounds great," and he's been very helpful since then.

3

Do they really have a Ralph Emery Suite here?

Yes, sir, Ralph's got his own suite here at the hotel, and we're proud to have him. He's a nice fellow.

4

Who are some of the other country music people involved down here?

There's Earl Thomas Conley,

The Gatlin Brothers, Jerry Reed, Ronnie Milsap, Helen Cornelius. Did we miss anybody? Of course, Conway Twitty. Within another couple of years, this hotel will be worth \$500,000 a room, and there's 292 rooms here.

5

I talked to some tourists who came down here just on the off chance of meeting some country music people in an informal setting.

Summer time is the slowest time in the music business, right? And I wanted to do down here what we did with Twitty City—we took the month of December, which is, historically, a very slow month in Nashville, and made it a great month with Christmas at Twitty City. All you gotta do is give country

music fans a good reason to do something with you and they'll do it. They'll support it. I believe that, and so I put my money where my mouth was. Now Christmas at Twitty City is very successful. We're thinking about doing the same thing here. The summertime is a sort of slow time for country entertainers. You don't go out and tour as big. My own shows are good, but I wouldn't dare go out and lease a building in June, a big building in some town somewhere and try to do a concert. People want to be outside, doing things like this. So we're thinking about doing some concerts down here where we've been doing the *Nashville Now* show for TNN.

6

So, we take it that things are going really good for you right now.

Oh, yeah. Well, you know I've had my problems in the last few years, family, private things, those kinds of things. But yeah, all in all, everything's going great. And I've been fortunate, I guess, down through the years, but I'm not going to say lucky. Because the harder I work, the luckier I get. I'm a workaholic, I guess. But I don't know any other way, not only to make it, but to sustain yourself.

7

You've got so many different things going. It's not like you're just in singing, or just in real estate, or getting involved in a hotel in the islands. Conway Twitty has all these balls up in the air...

The baseball team and a lot of other things. But years ago, when I first got into this business, I gave it five years. I would give five years to any business. And at the end of five years, I'm going to take a good look at myself, and see where I am and if I think I can make it. Then I'll reassess it at that time and give it another year or two or whatever. I've been very careful and I've diversified myself in ways that if one thing falls, another thing's going to keep you from going under. So it's that simple.

8

It takes a lot of entertainers a

long time to learn that lesson, doesn't it?

Yeah, well, that's the problem with most of my friends in this business. I've seen it, in 31 years, so many times. Once they get one hand on that brass ring, boy, one hit record, and they say, boy, that's all I need, everybody loves me and I'm going to be here forever, and that's so *wrong*. What they fail to realize is, it's that *song*. It's that great script for the movie people, you know, it's that great piece of material that you get ahold of. You've got to keep getting ahold of that. If there's any so-called secret for my longevity in this business, it's that fact right there. I know that. I've been aware of that fact ever since I've been in this business. . . I'll go through 2500 songs trying to find 10 to go on my next album.

9

What did you think about Ronnie McDowell's recutting "It's Only Make Believe"?

I thought that was fantastic. Ronnie McDowell, my wife and I went to the studio for my last album, and Ronnie ran in and said, "Oh, Conway, you gotta hear this!" So we stopped and put his tape on. He had recorded "It's Only Make Believe" the way you heard it. Of course, that was my first hit record back in 1958. I wrote it and published it, and all that stuff so, Ronnie's a friend of mine—I think he's super talented—so I said, "Boy that's great, I really do like it." Our producer, Jimmy Bowen, happened to be there, and he liked it, too. And Ronnie said, "Well, I want you to sing a couple of lines on it." I said, "No, you don't need that; you don't want Conway Twitty on there. You want Ronnie McDowell on there." He insisted. It was such a big record, he said, people might be offended if Ronnie McDowell tries to do it. If Conway Twitty is on there a couple of lines, people will know the song has your blessings. So, I did those two lines with him. But it's really been a good record for him. He did an excellent job on it, and I like it.

10

It's still a really good radio song. . .

I always wanted Elvis to record

that song. "It's Only Make Believe" was one of his favorite songs, his father told me, and some of the other people that were around him a lot told me the same thing. But he never did get around to it, so. . .

11

You still are really obsessed with songs, aren't you?

Oh, yeah, I love songs. That's a little vein of gold, that's the magic, that's what it is. It's not me; it's not any of us. We can all do all the dances we want to do, but if you don't tap into that little vein of great songs, forget it. That's why I got a lot of friends in the business who are sort of laying along side of the road now, because they can't get ahold of that little song. Little Jimmy Dickens, way late in his recording career—of course he still has a career, he's still talented, and I don't mean to say that he's not—but he got a hold of a great little song, what was the name of that? ("*May the Bird of Paradise Fly Up Your Nose*," wife Dee Henry adds.) . . . and had a giant record. He was on the pop charts.



In the islands with duet partner Loretta Lynn.

12

That's true, but it's hard to find those songs, isn't it?

Yeah. So it's just the song. Yeah, I'm a lover of songs, and friends of mine in the business say, "How do you sit there and listen to all of those songs?" They don't know that I love doing it. The hardest thing for me is to turn one down because there's something good about each one of them, kind of like kids, you know, there's something good about each one of them. We have a hard time, especially when it gets down to 100, then

90 and then 80 and down to 60 and 50 and 20 and so on. It gets hard.

13

A lot of artists look at it as more of a chore, you know, something they can shunt off on managers or producers. . .

Oh, nobody listens to my songs but me and my wife. We're the only two. Nobody else.

14

Do you ever argue about songs?

Sure. She didn't like "Tight Fitting Jeans."

(Dee: "I hate 'Tight Fitting Jeans.' If it comes on the radio today in the car, I turn the station.")

15

But who was right?

(Dee: "I didn't say it wasn't a good record. I just don't like it. You know I'm a fan too.")

She knew it was a good song. But she didn't think it was really a good record for me. But I've been in this business so long, you can't do "Hello, Darling" every time you turn around, you've got to diversify a little bit with your music. And you've got to push the edges out a little bit, which is what I did quite a bit when I left Owen Bradley in 1979. I could feel a real change coming on in the music business, and although I had a very successful run with Owen, there were limits there. . .

16

Well, you could get away with anything as an artist, and you're one of the few.

Well, sure. But not many people have ever noticed that. But all the different kinds of things I've recorded down through the years, it's pushed that image thing way out there, the boundaries way out there. And I firmly believe, as long as you stay within the boundaries of that image that has grown over the years, and that image is the way country fans see you, and they only know you through your music. . . as long as you don't violate that trust that you've managed to generate between them and you, they'll stay with you. I did it gently and carefully and I never made a big deal out of it.

17

What sort of stuff are you writing now? You were talking to Randy Travis about some of the stuff you were writing. What kind are they?

The songs I was talking about were the songs I've written down through the years that haven't been recorded yet. Some really good things.

18

Have you got a bunch of those?

I got a lot of them, yeah. I think every song has its day. "Hello Darling" was written in 1960, and it didn't come out until 1970, so every time I reach down in that bag of songs and refresh my memory on it, I say, well, no, it wouldn't be good for now, because this business is constantly changing and evolving, and different things float to the surface at different times, and you catch it just right. But I've got some really unique songs that I know are really good. And I'm just waiting for the right time and the right artist. And of course, Randy Travis, nobody's ever been as hot as Randy.

19

How many songs have you got stashed away there?

Oh, I've still got a bunch of them. I've even got some from the old rock days. There's a bunch of good rock things I wrote back then that never were recorded. The old 1950's stuff is getting stronger and stronger. You know, it'll never go away. So I might even slip one or two of those in somewhere for somebody. But I got off into so many other things. And when you do that, the first thing that suffers is your songwriting. That's the most fun part and that's the part that goes first and that's sad.

20

Do you miss it?

Yeah, I really miss that. I don't know, when you sit down and you start with nothing, and a few minutes or a few days or a few months later you wind up with something that touches a lot of people, there's something special about that. And I do miss that. ■

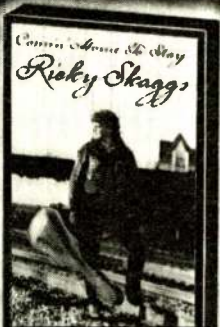
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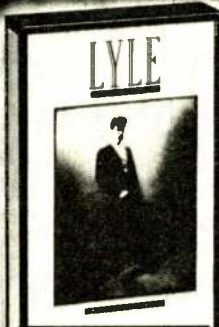
356329. Randy Travis—Always And Forever. Forever And Ever, Amen. (Warner Bros.)



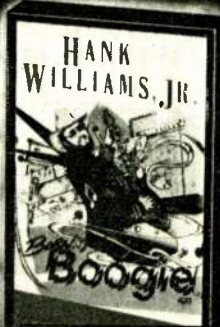
364042. Dan Seals—The Best. Three Time Loser; One Friend; I Will Be There, etc. (Capitol)



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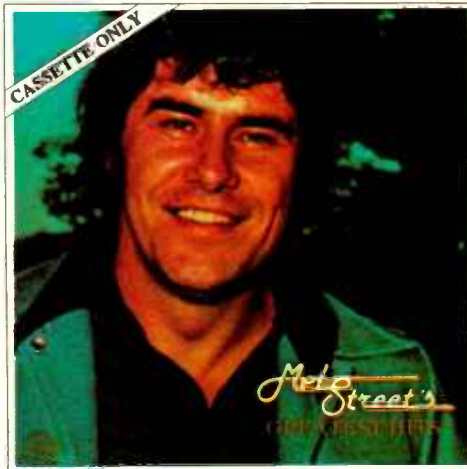
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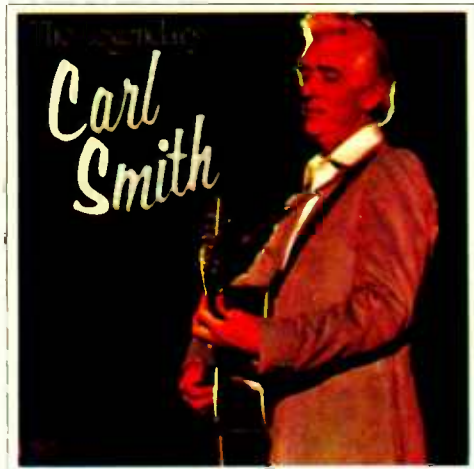
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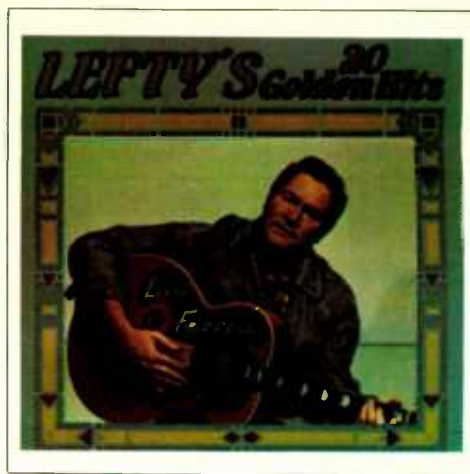
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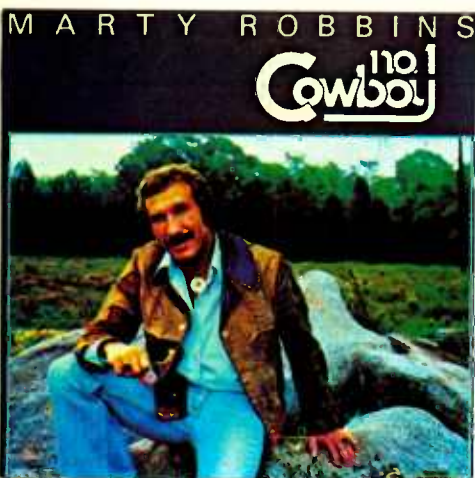
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HAWKSHAW HAWKINS: 16 GREATEST HITS Featuring: I Suppose/Lonesome 7-7203/Sunny Side Of The Mountain/Little White Washed Chimney/I Love You A Thousand Ways/I'm Waiting Just For You/Teardrops On Your Letter/Dog House Boogie/Slow Poke/I Wasted A Nickel/Pan American/Barbara Allen/Be My Life's Companion/Silver Threads And Golden Needles/I'm Slowly Dying Of A Broken Heart/Rattlesnakin' Daddy.



COWBOY COPAS: 16 GREATEST HITS Featuring: Alabam/Signed, Sealed And Delivered/Beyond The Sunset/Flat Top Guitar/Cowboy's Deck Of Cards/Louisian/Goodby Kisses/From The Manger To The Cross/Tragic Romance/Satisfied Mind/Cope's Wild Flower/There'll Come A Time/Sunny Tennessee/Waltzing With Sin/Filipino Baby/I Dreamed Of A Hillbilly Heaven. A classic collection of old time country.



WILMA LEE & STONEY COOPER: THE CARTER FAMILY'S GREATEST HITS The combination of old Carter Family songs and the artistry of the Coopers assures that this album is country music at its purest. Included are: Sweet Fern/You Are My Flower/Keep On The Firing Line/Hello, Central, Give Me Heaven/Worried Man Blues/Wildwood Flower/Picture On The Wall/Little Darling/Pal Of Mine/Lulla Wall, more!



"LITTLE" JIMMY DICKENS: THE BEST OF THE BEST OF Every major hit recorded by this country music mainstay is included on this special album. Such as: May The Bird Of Paradise Fly Up Your Nose/Take An Old Cold Tater And Wait/Country Boy A-Sleeping At The Foot Of The Bed/Hillbilly Fever/My Heart's Bouquet/I'm Little But I'm Loud/Out Behind The Barn/Another Bridge To Burn, more!

Rated ★★★★★ In Country Music, Sept./Oct. '85

Hawkshaw began with King covering whatever Ernest Tubbs was doing. But "Sunny Side of the Mountain" and "Slow Poke" in 1948 and 1951 were enough to establish him as a force in his own right. Like Copas, Hawkins fell by the wayside, with no hit records, though he was a member of the Grand Ole Opry and had contracts with RCA, Starday and Columbia. Then in March 1963, just days before he died, his King recording of "Lonesome 7-7203" hit Number One. Hawkins, like Copas, made other fine records, "Rattlesnakin' Daddy" and "Dog House Boogie" among them, that hinted at rockabilly. *16 Greatest Hits of Hawkshaw Hawkins* (Gusto to SD-3013) covers all these and more.

Copas first made his mark as a vocalist with Pee Wee King's Golden West Cowboys... "Filipino Baby," his first hit, came in 1944. Throughout the 1940's he had still more hits—with "Tennessee Waltz," "Tragic Romance" and others. In the early 1960's, Copas was successful with Starday, with the hits "Alabam," and "Signed, Sealed and Delivered" in 1961. Some of his best-known songs are available on *16 Greatest Hits of Cowboy Copas* (Gusto SD-3012). Most of the material is from his Starday period, though "Filipino Baby" and "Tragic Romance" are also included. Copas never got the credit he should have, considering his rich, supple voice and laconic, offhand delivery.

Wilma Lee and Stoney Cooper worked together nearly 40 years... *Early Recordings* (County CCS 103) compiles 12 Columbia songs, leased from CBS, that helped establish their reputation. A second Wilma Lee/Stoney album from the 1970's is *Wilma Lee and Stoney Cooper Sing The Carter Family's Greatest Hits* (Starday SD 980), an outstanding salute to the Carters cut in the early 1970's. Wilma Lee and Stoney tackle such Carter classics as "Keep on the Firing Line," produce a delicate version of "You Are My Flower" and are back on Wilma Lee's stops-out treatment of "Lulla Walls." The Carter style and the Coopers' sound blend easily here.

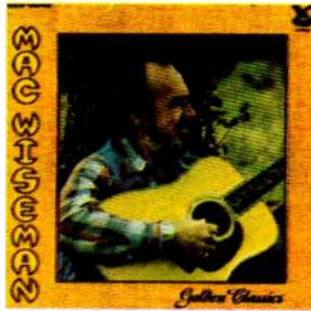


THE BLUEGRASS HALL OF FAME Stringbean: String's Mountain Dew/Grandpa Jones: Old Rattler/Stanley Bros.: Rank Stranger/Flatt & Scruggs: Foggy Mountain Breakdown/Carl Story: Tramp On The Street/Lonesome Pine Fiddlers: Windy Mountain/Hylo Brown: Hills Of Georgia/Country Gentlemen: Sunrise (Instrumental)/Reno & Smiley: Home Sweet Home/J.E. Mainers Mountaineers: Run Mountain/Jimmie Skinner: Fallen Leaves/Rex Allen & Kentuckians: Beautiful Blue Eyes/Jim & Jesse & The Virginia Boys/Let Me Whisper, and more!

RICH KIENZLE, SEPT./OCT. 85
PAGE 67, Country Music Magazine



CARL SMITH: GREATEST HITS
In this album Carl sings better than ever, giving a warm new glow to these classic hits he created. Included are: Mr. Moon/Are You Teasing Me/Hey Joe/Deep Water/I Just Loved Her For The Last Time Again/You Are The One/Don't Just Stand There/If Teardrops Were Pennies/Take My Ring Off Your Finger/Kisses Don't Lie



MAC WISEMAN: GOLDEN CLASSICS
This album is a compilation of some new recordings of the very best traditional bluegrass songs, plus some newer releases. Included: Jimmie Brown, The Newsboy/Goin' Like Wildfire/I Saw Your Face In The Moon/Barbara Allen/The Prisoner's Song/Johnny Cash & Charlie's Pride/Sweeter Than The Flowers/18 Wheels A Humming/Don't Make Me Go To Bed, more!



LULU BELLE & SCOTTY: SWEET-HEARTS OF COUNTRY MUSIC
Their style and songs made America think of them as close personal friends. Here's a sample: Homecoming Time In Happy Valley/Each Time You Leave/Have I Told You Lately That I Love You/Remember Me/The Brown Mountain Light/When The Blue Moon Turns To Gold Again/In The Doghouse Now/Sunday School/Sweet Lips/Mountain Dew, more!



LULU BELLE & SCOTTY: SWEET-HEARTS STILL
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PATSY CLINE/COWBOY COPAS/HAWKSHAW HAWKINS: GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN
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2. Steve Wariner *Baby, I'm Yours*
3. Ronnie Milsap & Mike Reid *Old Folks*
4. Hank Williams Jr. *Young Country*
5. Earl Thomas Conley *What She Is (Is a Woman in Love)*
6. The Oak Ridge Boys *True Heart*
7. Randy Travis *I Told You So*
8. The O'Kanes *One True Love*
9. Jo-El Sonnier *No More One More Time*
10. Desert Rose Band *He's Back and I'm Blue*
11. Don Williams *Another Place, Another Time*
12. Tanya Tucker *If It Don't Come Easy*
13. Merle Haggard *Chill Factor*
14. Eddy Raven *I'm Gonna Get You*
15. Dolly Parton, Linda Ronstadt, Emmylou Harris *Wildflowers*
16. Billy Joe Royal *Out of Sight and On My Mind*
17. Skip Ewing *Your Memory Wins Again*
18. The Gatlin Brothers *Love of a Lifetime*
19. Kenny Rogers *The Factory*
20. Sweethearts of the Rodeo *Satisfy You*
21. Rosanne Cash *If You Change Your Mind*
22. Alabama *Fallin' Again*
23. Dwight Yoakam *Always Late with Your Kisses*
24. Vern Gosdin *Set 'Em Up, Joe*
25. Nitty Gritty Dirt Band *Workin' Man (Nowhere to Go)*

Albums

1. Randy Travis *Always & Forever*
2. George Strait *If You Ain't Lovin', You Ain't Livin'*
3. Ricky Van Shelton *Wild-Eyed Dream*
4. Hank Williams Jr. *Born to Boogie*
5. K.T. Oslin *80's Ladies*
6. Rosanne Cash *King's Record Shop*
7. Billy Joe Royal *The Royal Treatment*
8. Merle Haggard *Chill Factor*
9. Highway 101 *Highway 101*
10. George Strait *Greatest Hits, Vol. 2*
11. Kathy Mattea *Untasted Honey*
12. Tanya Tucker *Love Me Like You Used To*
13. Vern Gosdin *Chiseled in Stone*
14. Dwight Yoakam *Hillbilly Deluxe*
15. Ricky Skaggs *Comin' Home to Stay*
16. Reba McEntire *The Last One to Know*
17. Randy Travis *Storms of Life*
18. Lyle Lovett *Pontiac*
19. Dolly Parton, Linda Ronstadt, Emmylou Harris *Trio*
20. Reba McEntire *Reba*
21. The O'Kanes *Tired of the Runnin'*
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23. The Judds *Heart Land*
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