

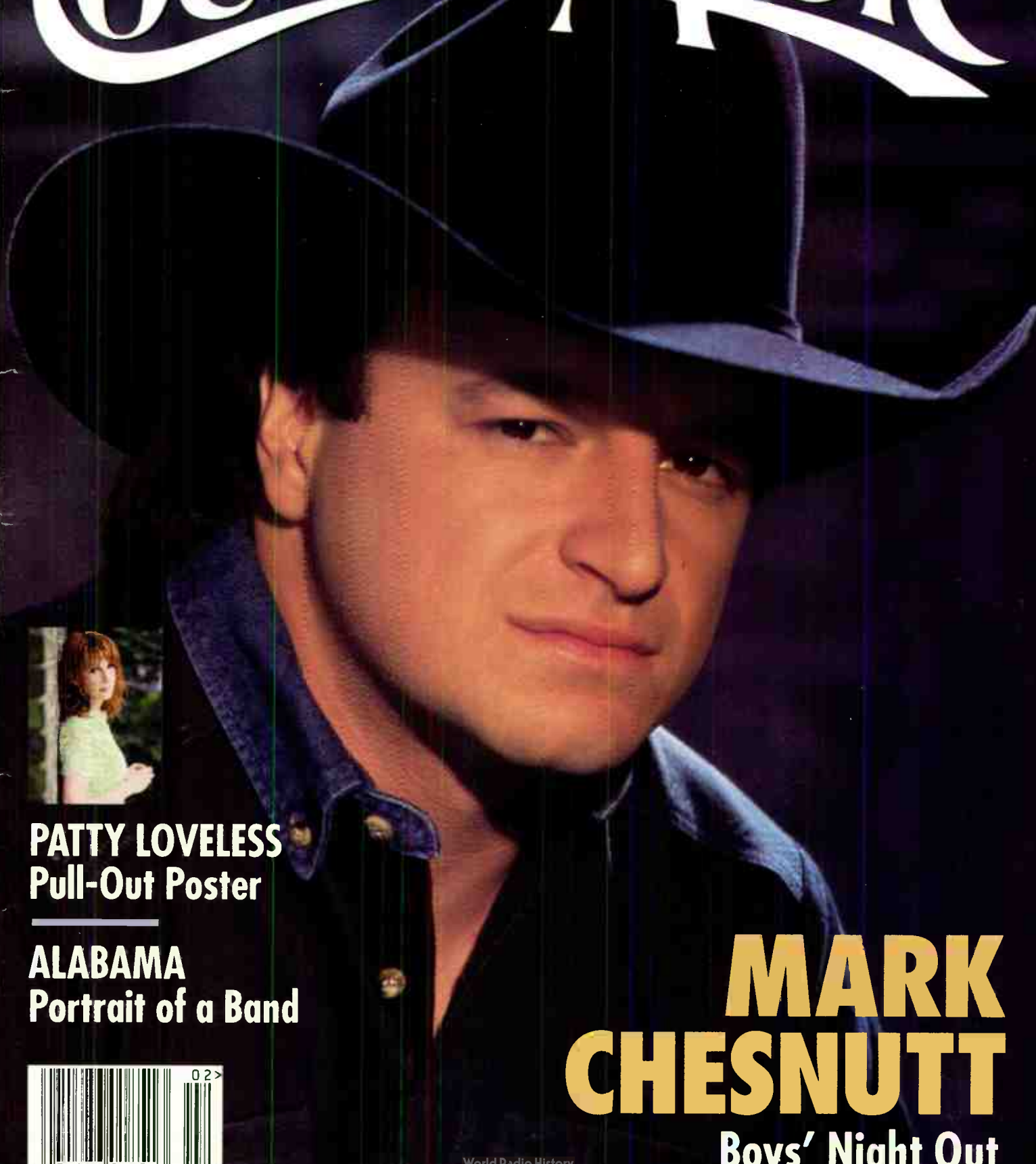
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<p>People 4 <i>by Hazel Smith</i> Cash's ups and downs, Hazel's heart, and news from the front. Trisha visits New York, and The Oaks sing with U.S. senators. Harlan gives to others, as do Vince Gill, Garth Brooks and Clint Black. Plus label changes on the horizon, sexy stars and more.</p>	<p>Top 25 35 Letters 55 For Members Only 64 Buried Treasures 68 <i>by Rich Kienzle</i> Elvis, George Jones and more.</p>
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People

A SPECIAL SIGNING



To honor his new autobiography, Johnny Cash signed books for friends and fans at Davis-Kidd Booksellers in Nashville. Fan Dennis Devine and tons of stars showed up. Later came news of Cash's illness. All other signings were cancelled.

HEARTS AND FLOWERS

Let me tell you about my heart attack! During my years on the Row of Music, I heard "Your Cheating Heart," "Cold, Cold Heart" and "Toy Heart." I also heard "Heart of Gold," "Heart of Stone," "Heart of Dixie" and "Heart Over Mind." Furthermore, "Heartbroke," "Heartache" and "Heartbreak." Alcoholism, broken marriages, lost love, stress and wasted fortunes are blamed on the heart. The heart or the Lord are either blessed or blamed for 90% of the hits that find their way out of this hillbilly town to the airwaves. But a heart attack, now that's another story.

I hurt midway in my back, just to the left of my spine and over to my left side. Thinking the pain was from coughing (from previously diagnosed bronchitis), I called **Kelly Kaye**, clinical masseuse. As Kelly massaged, I sweated profusely, was short of breath, felt pressure in my right jaw, throat and between my breasts and could not lay down flat. Kelly recognized the potential problem. I did not.

Nobody smiles in ICU. For the first time in my life, I was wired, but not for sound. Once when I finally went to sleep, the nurse woke me up to give me something to make me rest. Finally, I went to a room where good-hearted friends and beautiful flowers arrived by the van load. I received over 50 floral designs and twice that many guests. It spilled over to the house. Just think, Caswell County's token hillbilly got four dozen roses from **Garth** and **Sandy Brooks**, a plant big enough to half cover a coffin from **Alan Jackson** and his manager **Chip Peay**, a floral design almost as tall as me from **Pam Tillis**, roses from my precious **Sammy Kershaw**. **Tony (wow) Brown** visited, and he and **Bruce Hinton** sent flowers, as did my guardian angel **Joe Galante**, the great **Ralph Emery**, dear **Linda Edell** and **Doug Howard**, **Luke Lewis** and **Mercury**, **Atlantic**, **Scott Hendricks** and darling **Bryan Kennedy**. Hearts filled with love, arms filled with flowers, bath goodies and the entire **Jenny Craig** video, audio and cookbook line, were the wonderful **Robert K. Oermann** and **Mary Bufwack**. Flowers came

MAN IN BLACK STANDS TALL

Many milestones for **Johnny Cash** this fall, some good, some not. His second autobiography, *Cash: The Autobiography*, written with our own **Patrick Carr**, has been published by a division of Harper/Collins. (See this issue's Essential Collector for a review.) In Nashville for a taping of **Ralph Emery's On the Record** on TNN, Cash talked about the book and other things. Later that day, he signed books for a crowd of over a thousand, including many

stars, at Davis-Kerr Booksellers. Those on hand included **George Jones**, **Tom T. Hall**, **Billy Ray Cyrus**, **Carol Lee Cooper** and a host of Cashes. **June Carter Cash** accompanied her famous husband.

The world was saddened soon after by the news that Cash is suffering from a form of Parkinson's disease called Shy-Drager syndrome. As of this writing, Cash was recovering from double pneumonia. Fellow legend **Waylon Jennings** was also laid up with symptoms of a slight stroke. Our hearts go out to these two men, and their families.

Reporter: Hazel Smith

Editors: Rochelle Friedman/George Fletcher

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People

NYC'S FIRST LADY GREETES TRISHA



Donna Hanover Giuliani, wife of New York City's recently re-elected mayor Rudy Giuliani, was one of many fans who greeted Trisha Yearwood the night of her sold-out show in the Big Apple last fall. The First Lady of New York City was lucky enough to get an autographed tour jacket to commemorate the occasion.

from Donna Hilley and her staff, Connie Baer and Giant, Gina Dylan (who also visited), Ronna Rubin, the Foxalls, Dave Perry and Darrell Temple, Lisa Waara, Sharon and Clementyne Howard, Max D. and Patsy Barnes, Julie and Greg Kaczor, Brian Hughes and TNN, Billye and Buddy Cannon, Jerry Cupit and his partners, RCA's Renee Bell, also Tommy Daniel, Heather McBee and the PR staff, Jessi Colter and Waylon Jennings, Steve Wilson, Simitar, Bobby Heller and family, Bruce Shindler and Susan Turner, precious Fletcher Foster and his Arista staff (Fletcher came to see me several times), K-Tel, Tatsuya Imai, my wonderful compadres at WFMS Radio in Indianapolis, Kathy Knipple, Vernon and Celean Johnson, Donnie Gentry (and visited), *Music City News*, Vicki Lehning, Barry and Jewell Coburn and my Ten Ten friends and many others. ASCAP's Connie Bradley learned that I had a new gas heater—the gas line was run, but it wasn't hooked up. Connie got on the phone on my behalf. Do I have to tell you that she gave 'em some heat, and they turned my heat on. Cheryl White, Sharon White and Ricky Skaggs and their kids visited me. Betty Hofer, who does great PR, sent marvelous homemade soup and chicken salad with non-fat mayo

and no salt. My neighbors, Nancy Stribling and Marie Nethery, brought "stuff." Marty Stuart and Connie Smith called, Kenny Chesney called and sang for me. Dennis Johnson, Beth Gwinn, Toni Miller, Dean Thompson, Marie Hartford and Michael Campbell dropped by. My family came every day. After I got home, my sons, the Kaczors and Kelly Kaye were in and out until I could make it on my own. In the beginning, it must have been hard to walk with me the required half a mile, but my son Billy never complained. At first, Billy went into denial and would not admit I'd actually had a heart attack. His brother, Terry, had to tell him five times. The almost-tragedy put him in shock. I am very grateful for all my friends and my family, and for their prayers, gifts and visits.

And, if I live to be 100, I will never be able to find words of gratitude for *Country Music Magazine's* kindness during my time of need. At a time when I was flat on my backside, could not do radio or write, Russell Barnard came through like Prince Charming in a fairy tale. Russell also sent George Fletcher from Connecticut to Nashville to see how I was doing, laden down with goodies from the staff of *Country Music Magazine*. God does move in mysterious ways.

Maybe this piece might help someone else who may be having a heart attack and, like me, is diagnosed differently and believes something else is wrong. Females don't necessarily hurt in their arm or hand or chest during a heart attack like males usually do. The cardiologists told me of one woman hurting in her big toe who was suffering a heart attack. Heart attacks are a Number One killer for females. Heart attack is the silent killer. I am so lucky to get my flowers while I live. I want you to be so lucky too. Please read this carefully again.

GARTH NEWS

My name was first on the list for the press conference for Garth Brooks held at the brand new, unfinished Capitol Records digs on Music Row. It was a by-phone invitation. I arrived early so I wouldn't miss a thing. When the Capitol Records layoff in New York cut Terri Santisi, superstar Garth Brooks—the second time in his career—felt he had lost his "connection." From the get go, beginning with his Central Park performance, with his album, *Sevens*, set for release in conjunction with the concert, until his next record release, all were part of a big marketing plan between Garth and Santisi. With her gone, Garth refused to release the record. Six months later;

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Editor and Publisher
Russell D. Barnard

Vice President/Managing Editor
Rochelle Friedman

Editors-at-Large
Michael Bane, Patrick Carr,
Bob Allen

Art Director
Katheryn Gray

Senior Editor
Helen Barnard

Senior Editor
George Fletcher

Contributing Editors
Peter Guralnick, Leonard Kamsler,
Rich Kienzle, Bob Millard,
John Morthland, Hazel Smith

Associate Publisher/Advertising Director
Leonard Mendelson

Vice President/Consumer Marketing
Michele Jones

Accounting Director
Henry Bishop

Marketing Director
Warren Beardaw

Circulation Director
Wanda Augustyn

Administrative Assistant
Joyce Brown

Editorial, Executive and Advertising Offices

1 Turkey Hill Road South
Westport, Connecticut 06880
Telephone (203) 221-4950
FAX (203) 221-4948

Subscription Service

Telephone (203) 221-4950

Advertising Office, West Coast

Leonard Mendelson
P.O. Box 5489
Santa Monica, California 90409
Telephone (310) 207-4948 (Advertising Sales)

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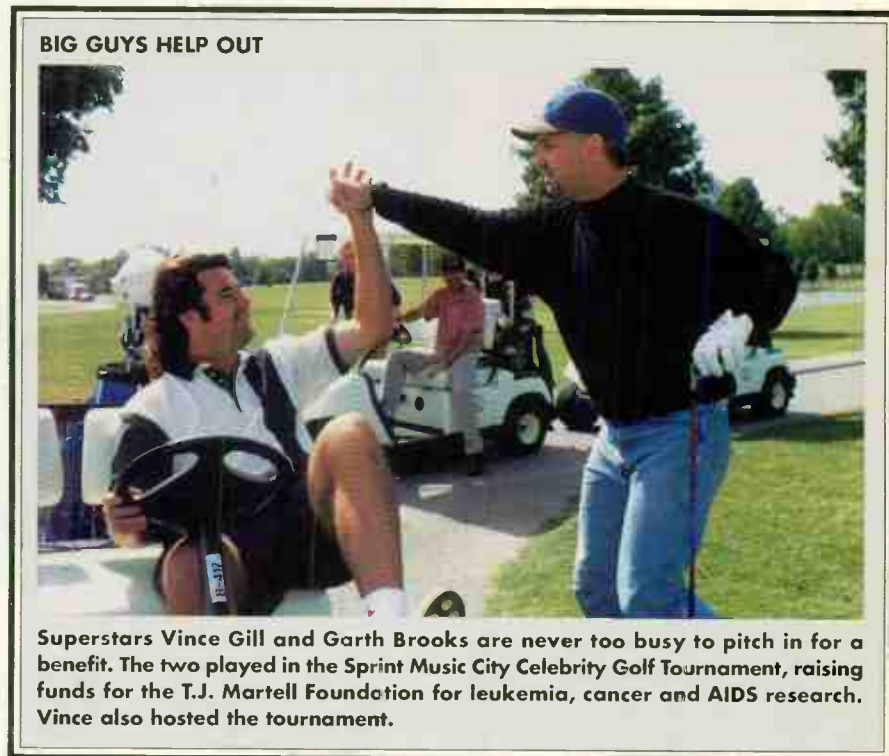
People

Garth released *Sevens*, but only after Santisi had worked out her severance through attorneys, and was in place as part of his marketing team. I believe this is called loyalty. It's a Garth thing. By the time you wonderful fans read this, there's no telling how many cash register bells have rung up the \$16.98 asking price for the 14-song album. A buck less than most...another Garth thing. By Christmas 1998, according to Garth, in addition to *Sevens*, fans can find two more G.B. records in the bins; the long awaited **Trisha Yearwood/Garth Brooks** album is on the horizon as is a "live" recording and his second Christmas album. Save your dollars, G.B. will have you lots of music.

Meanwhile, with Capitol/Nashville's reorganization, **Pat Quigley** takes over the reins as president and CEO. It isn't clear at this writing what former labelhead **Scott Hendrick's** plans are. He was a very successful producer/businessman prior to the Capitol gig. And he has a brand new baby daughter, his first child, named **Keely**. Scott may feel he is rid of a headache.

MOVIE IS GROOVY

Lorrie Morgan's book, *Forever Yours Faithfully*, about her marriage to the late, legendary **Keith Whitley**, who died in 1989 from alcohol poisoning, is on the best seller list. I hear negotiations are in the



BIG GUYS HELP OUT

Superstars **Vince Gill** and **Garth Brooks** are never too busy to pitch in for a benefit. The two played in the **Sprint Music City Celebrity Golf Tournament**, raising funds for the **T.J. Martell Foundation** for leukemia, cancer and AIDS research. Vince also hosted the tournament.

making for a TV movie. Lorrie, who has done a bit of acting, has made the decision not to be in the film. It must have been hard for her to relive the memories when she wrote book. Acting would be worse.

STORK FINDS BEAUMONT

Tracy Byrd and his wife **Michelle** are the proud parents of a new baby boy named **Logan Lynn Byrd**. Logan Lynn was born in Beaumont, Texas, on November 5. The couple's daughter, **Evee**, is three years old.

HARLAN GIVES BACK

His Hall of Fame statue is still warm, and **Harlan Howard** is out helping others. This time he hosted a benefit for the **W.O. Smith School of Music** to give music lessons to underprivileged children. Joining **Big Daddy Harlan** were **Emmylou Harris**, **Pam Tillis**, **Gary Chapman**, **The Mavericks'** **Raul Malo** and **Billy Dean**. Hillbilly wannabe/Hollywood star **Kevin Bacon** was in the audience. He and his brother, **Michael Bacon**, have a record deal on an indie label.

TRACY LAWRENCE CHARGED

Police in Las Vegas have filed a misdemeanor domestic violence/battery charge against singer **Tracy Lawrence**. Tracy's wife, **Stacie Lawrence**, called police after her husband reportedly struck her in the face and head repeatedly and pulled her hair after his show at **Buffalo Bill's Desert Star Arena**. Stacie told police that **Tracy** threatened to kill her after the couple argued about his gambling. Her lawyer is-

SINGING SENATORS



It was quite a line-up at an **Oak Ridge Boys** show at **Charley Pride's** theater in **Branson** recently. Joining **The Oaks** on stage were four **U.S. Senators**—who called themselves "**Oak Ridge Boy wannabees**"—and **Pride** himself. Left to right: **Oak Joe Bonsall**, **Vermont Senator Jim Jeffords**, **Oak Duane Allen**, **Idaho Senator Larry Craig**, **Pride**, **Missouri Senator John Ashcroft**, **Oak William Lee Golden**, **Mississippi Senator Trent Lott** and **Oak Richard Sterban**.



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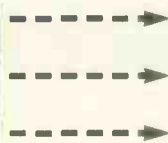
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People

LENDING A HAND



Clint Black was among the participants in the third annual benefit concert for tennis champ Andre Agassi's self-named charitable foundation, which helps troubled teens. Helping the cause are, left to right, Agassi, *Tonight Show* host Jay Leno, pop stars Elton John and Lionel Richie, and Clint.

sued a press release saying that Lawrence had beaten her before. Tracy filed for divorce. The couple were married March 15.

IS SHANIA COMING TO TOWN?

I hear that **Shania Twain** is threatening to do a concert this summer at the Nashville Arena. Miracles never cease, I say. My pals from K-105 in Minneapolis, where I spout off news each Thursday, told me that Shania signed autographs for four hours at the Mall of America. She says she used to chop wood in the forests of Canada, so autographing for four hours ain't gonna hurt her. Her new album's titled *Come On Over*.

NASCAR CAFE

Down on Lower Broadway, where rats used to play beside the winos, there's the Hard Rock Cafe, Planet Hollywood and now the NASCAR Cafe. Look for these cafes to spring up across the country. There's also major talk of Winston Cup racing in Music Town. Since the Nashville Speedway is the site of Fan Fair each June, there's a lot of talk of combining the two. Somebody said car racing and country music go together. Maybe so, but I never heard a race car that could carry a tune. Come to think of it, some of these tight-butted wonders (both guys and gals) have the same problem.

platinum in just five weeks of release, is now reaching double platinum status. I actually sat down, listened to and enjoyed her entire album. Seldom can I listen to a record without fast forwarding through something, cynic that I am. Trisha just sings so good, and all her past hits are there, plus her marvelous recent single, "How Do I Live," and the duet with **Garth Brooks**, "In Another's Eyes." *Songbook* is just really good listening. Lord, Trisha Time called for Trisha parties. Let's see. A platinum party. A Number One single party. A celebrating-10-million-sales party. Another Number One party for Trisha and Garth when the powers at her label (MCA Records), **Bruce Hinton** and **Tony Brown**, were out of town. 'Course I attended every Trisha party. The CMA Vocalist of the Year is definitely standing by her award. Ahoy! Ahoy! Trisha Time overseas. In Australia she's platinum. Her hit single chart-topped in Ireland, Taiwan, Thailand and Singapore.

PEOPLE MAG'S SEXIEST IN COUNTRY

Who do you think it is? It's that hat-wearing hillbilly, country to the bone, **George Strait**. They named **George Clooney** the overall Sexiest Man in America. Now, girls—all you wonderful country music fans, you know as good as I do that neither George Clooney nor any of them other Georges can hold a candle to George Strait.

TRISHA TIME

After much plowing and hoeing, it's Trisha Time in the fields of country music. **Trisha Yearwood's** latest album, *Songbook: A Collection of Hits*, which was certified

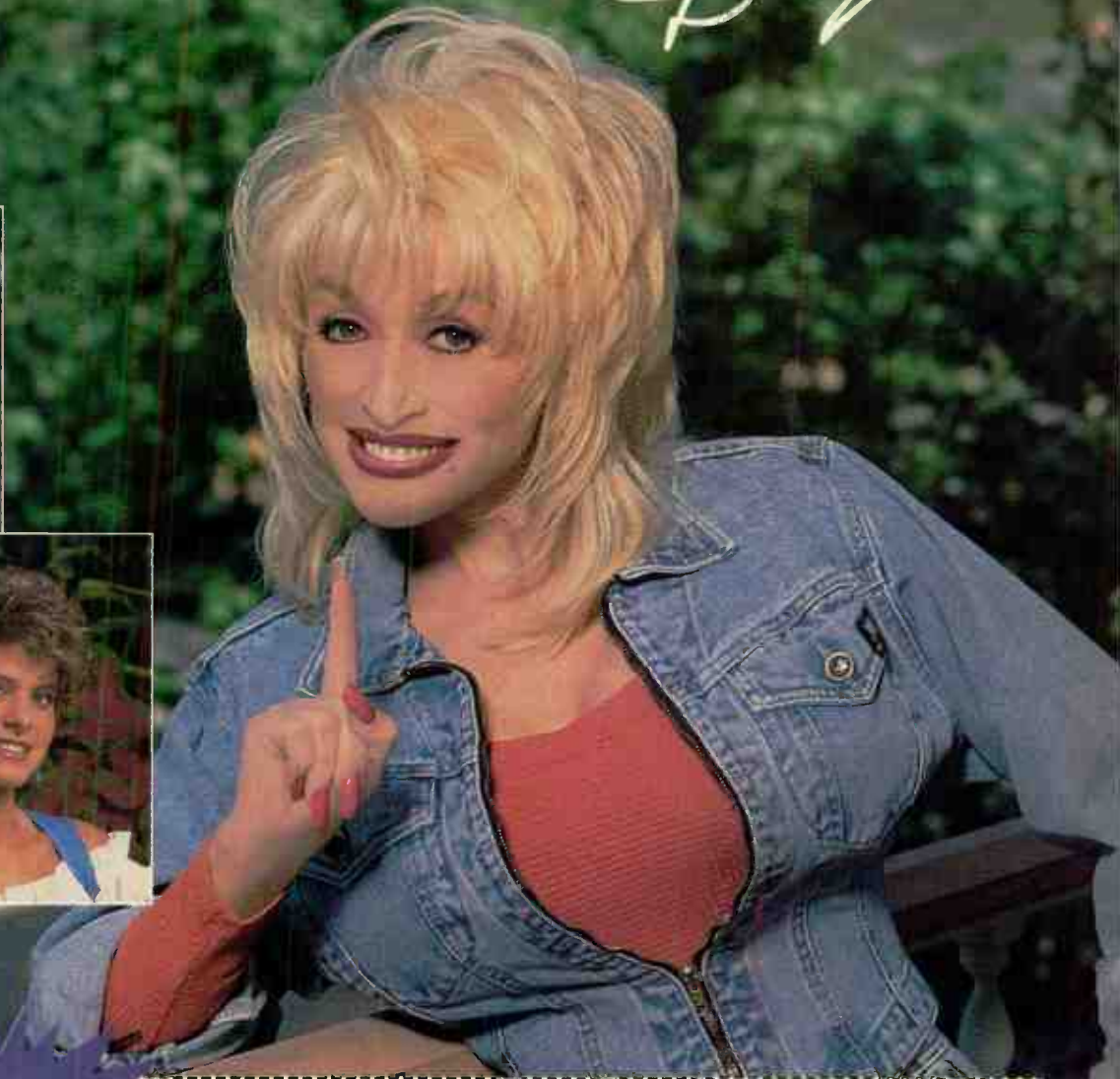
SIGNING ON



Randy Travis becomes the first artist signed to the new **Dreamworks** label as he puts pen to paper while label exec **James Stroud** and wife/manager **Lib Hatcher** look on. Stroud will co-produce Randy's first effort for the label, along with **Byron Gallimore** and Randy himself.

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People

CROWN ROYAL TOUR

The Princes of non-pop, **Mark Chesnutt**, **David Lee Murphy** and **Gary Allan**, debuted the Crown Royal tour in Macon and will end up in Music City in May, 44 cities later. This is the first time Seagram Americas, the maker of Crown Royal, has joined with MCA/Decca—which they own—to bring good 'n' country music to the fans. I will drink a toast to this tour and anything **Mark Chesnutt** is involved with. He is a honky tonk hero of the 90's and ain't afraid to sing from his heart. There's that word—heart—again!

PLAY BALL

The eighth annual **Vince Gill** Celebrity Basketball Game and Concert was every bit the professional event, raising a projected \$75,000 for scholarships and program enhancements for the Athletic Department and the Curb Music Business Program at Belmont University. **Asleep at the Wheel's** tall drink of water, **Ray Benson**, lost his pants. It was not a pretty sight. **Chely Wright** scored 16 points during the womens' game. Vince played on the girls' team because he sings high. Coaches **Cledus T. Judd** and **George "Goober" Lindsay** did a splendid job as umpires, or were they referees? **JoDee Messina**, **Terri Clark**, **Amy Grant**, **Deana Carter**, **Suzy Bogguss** and **Faith Hill** played like pros. **Billy Dean**, **Kix Brooks**, **Mark Miller**, **Lone Star**, **Bryan White**, **Larry Stewart** and others bounced the ball. Lots of fun. Lots of singing. Even **LeAnn Rimes** showed up and sang. LeAnn and Bryan White will co-star on tour next summer. No co-busing, kids.

RED, YELLOW, BLACK AND WHITE

We used to sing the little song about "Jesus loves the little children/All the children of the world." Our very own **Reba McEntire** can sing the song and mean it. Reba went into the studio—if you call that old mattress company in Franklin a studio, and she recorded the new single, "What If," with a choir of many colors. Some 220 amateur singers—Native American, Asian, African-American and white—joined their voices with Oklahoma's favorite redhead. Reba debuted the song on Thanksgiving Day at half-time during the Dallas Cowboys football game. The single is out now on cassette and CD, and its sales will benefit the Salvation Army's fundraising efforts. If that isn't love, God didn't make Indianapolis, Minneapolis and little green apples. Gives me chills, girl...Reba, you did.



Vince Gill and more than 30 friends and fellow performers entertained a sold-out crowd in the Belmont University gym at his annual Celebrity Basketball Game and Concert.

NUMBER ONE FUN AT ASCAP

Buddy Cannon has been a friend of mine since water. His wife, **Billye**, claims that I'm her husband's girlfriend. So I attended **Lee Ann Womack's** first Number One party for "The Fool" for two reasons: First, Lee Ann did a fine job, and second, **Buddy Cannon's** daughter, **Marla Cannon**, co-wrote the tune. Congratulations. Other Number One parties of late include: **Tim McGraw's** for "Everywhere." "Everywhere" was such a catchy tune. I like it as much as any song Tim has ever recorded. And big **Toby Keith** hit again with "We Were in Love." This is about eight Number Ones for the former football player turned hillbilly who plays golf like he's getting paid. "How Do I Get There" is the first Number One **Deana Carter** co-wrote in her exciting career. She wrote the song with her producer, **Chris Farren**. Watch that girl soar. And my pal, **Kenny Chesney**, scored his second Number One with "She's Got It All." I just had to go to Kenny's party. The doctors told me I could, so I drove to ASCAP to the party. This was my first trip after the heart attack, and, boy, was I tired afterward.

END OF AN ERA

When **Henry Cannon** died in his sleep on November 7, it was the end of an era. Henry was the husband of the late **Sarah Ophelia Cannon** a/k/a Cousin Minnie Pearl. Henry never went onstage with Minnie, but he went everywhere else with her.

He served as her pilot and manager. He invested wisely, and the couple were financially secure. Henry and Minnie lived next door to the Tennessee Governor's mansion. They had no children. Since Minnie's death a couple of years ago, Henry looked forward to joining her. Minnie Pearl loved to carry on about her "fellas" onstage, but her true love was Henry Cannon. God rest his soul.

OPRYLAND THEME PARK IS NO MORE

The decision was made, and the Opryland Theme Park is history. The post-Christmas closing of the amusement park came as no surprise. Attendance was down. In its place will be a retail shopping and entertainment park called Opry Mills. The project is designed to attract shoppers, tourism and retail workers. Since it's located seven minutes from the house, it is of interest to me—especially in view of the fact that "The Mill" will be open 365 days a year. The mall is skedded to open at the turn of the century, and the hope is to attract 17 million annually. I will miss Opryland, but thank goodness the Grand Ole Opry and the Opryland Hotel will still be there.

GO WEST, YOUNG MEN

Those darlings of Western music, **Riders in the Sky**, can still straddle the saddle singing those cowboy tunes and traveling the hillbilly highway. This year, **Ranger Doug**, **Woody Paul** and **Too Slim** are celebrating 20 years together. Congrats.

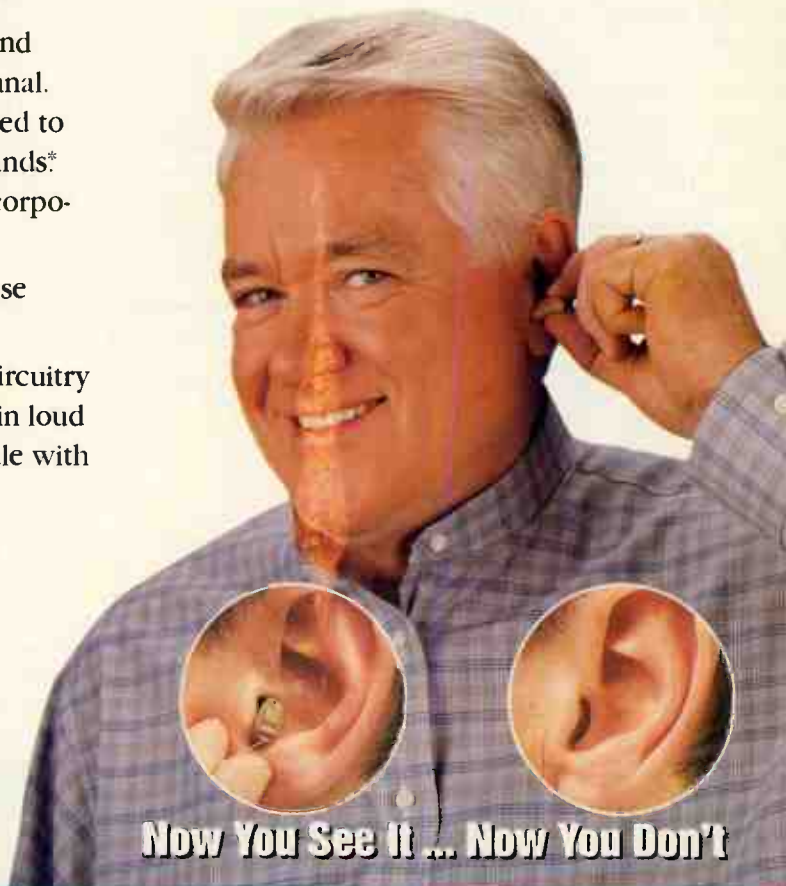
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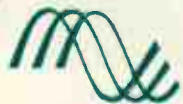
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People

DUETING WITH RALPH

Alison Krauss, Connie Smith, Dwight Yoakam, Ricky Skaggs, Patty Loveless, Joe Diffie, John Anderson, Kathy Mattea, Marty Stuart, Vern Gosdin, Diamond Rio and The Kentucky HeadHunters are confirmed to sing a couple of tunes with bluegrass legend **Ralph Stanley**. There's even talk of **Wynonna** reuniting with mama **Naomi Judd** for this special project. The two-CD set will also include one of Ralph's all-time biggest fans, **Bob Dylan**. What will Bob sing with Ralph? "Whatever he wants to," says producer **Bill VornDick**. I heard that.



ON A SUNDAY AFTERNOON

I drove all the way across Davidson County to Franklin to attend the 40th wedding anniversary of **Carl and Goldie Hill Smith**. The best-looking couple in show business, Carl and Goldie were honored by their children, **Carl Jr., Lori Lynn and Dean**, along with their grandchildren. One of the finest Sunday afternoons in the *Annals of Hazel*: I sat down and watched history walk around before my eyes in the form of **Grandpa Jones, Tom T. and Dixie Hall, Waylon Jennings and Jessi Colter, Little Jimmy and Mona Dickens, Joe and Rita Allison, Johnny Wright and Kitty Wells, Keith Bilbrey, Dianne Sherrill** and others. **Carlene Carter**, Carl's daughter by his first marriage to **June Carter**, was not there.

BARBIE AND KEN GO HOLLYWOOD

Barbara Mandrell did her swan song on the stage of the Grand Ole Opry to a filled house. Her two-hour, final concert was filmed by TNN for broadcast on January 27. The special is to be called *The Last Dance*. Mandrell and her husband, **Ken Dudley**, made the decision to hang up the hillbilly highway for the streets of gold in Hollywood. Barbara claims she just took a turn in the road, and it's still show biz. She's done quite a bit of acting and says she enjoys it. Daughter **Jamie**, also looking to act, is in Hollywood. Son **Matthew** has left the nest and is a chef. Little



Goldie Hill and Carl Smith celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary with friends and family, including me. The happy couple, above, and below with **Johnny Wright and Kitty Wells**. **Kitty and Johnny** celebrated their 60th recently, at the Opry.

Nathaniel is the only one at home. Their mansion is up for sale for something like \$7.2 million. Lord only knows who can afford to pay that kind of money for a house. Barbara's done well in country music, and I'm sure she'll do well in movies. I just hope Hollywood let's them be **Barbie and Ken**. Barbara's friend, **Reba McEntire**, along with Reba's hubby/manager, **Narvel Blackstock**, were in the audience for the Mandrell finale.

JEANNIE'S GOING JAPANESE

The Opry's **Jeannie Seely** will soon be touring Japan. She recorded a duet with Japanese performer **Kenji Nagatomi** on his latest album. Stay tuned for her touring times. In May, Jeannie will be joined by **Johnny Russell, Little Jimmy Dickens and John Conlee** for her second Caribbean cruise. You go, girl.

THE QUEEN OF COUNTRY MUSIC AND MR. RIGHT

The Queen of Country Music, **Miss Kitty Wells**, and her Mr. Right, **Mr. Johnny Wright**, celebrated 60 years of wedded bliss at the Grand Ole Opry House in November. A special program featuring their band, **The Tennessee Mountain Boys**, along with their son, **Bobby Wright**, and the **Carol Lee Singers**, sang a medley of hits recorded by Kitty and by Johnny & Jack. They were followed by **Mac Wiseman, The Whites, The Jordanaires, Little Jimmy Dickens, Ricky Skaggs and Tom T. Hall**, who each performed one of Kitty or Johnny's hits. **Johnny Russell, Carl Smith and Chet Atkins** entertained the crowd with road stories about the couple. Canadian star **Tommy Hunter** read letters of congratulations from **President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore**. The program ended with Johnny calling the entire Wright clan onstage for a finale. The closing song was "I Saw the Light." Johnny walks with a cane because of hip replacement surgery last year, and Kitty's had minor heart problems, but they both look wonderful.

MONUMENT CELEBRATES

Monument Records went to the historic Ryman to celebrate the re-launch of the label. First act signed is **The Dixie Chicks**. Surely you know they are girls.

OPENING EYES ON MUSIC ROW

CBS bought TNN and CMT. Don't know what kind of bedfellows they're gonna make, but they sure had one fancy party at BMI.

People

SWITCHBACK

That's a movie. *Switchback*. Why should you go see this movie with **Dennis Quaid** and **Danny Glover**? Because **Martina McBride**, **Waylon Jennings** and **Willie Nelson**, **Keith Gattis** and **Mindy McCready** are on the soundtrack. See what you learn by reading my column.

ENGAGED

Mindy McCready is engaged to her super boy, **Dean Cain**. Superboy, the former *Superman* on TV, Dean got down on his knees and proposed to Mindy, and she said yes. Then she got a sore throat and canceled everything. Someone from **Tim McGraw's** camp said Mindy was canned as opening act from his tour because she was acting like a prima donna, late for rehearsals and uppity. She has reportedly been cancelling stuff right and left lately. She was on Superboy's arm while he was directing a video for a new artist on MCA. Mindy said Dean would direct her next video. Mindy says she left the McGraw tour 'cause she didn't get enough time with her fans...only 15 minutes, like the contract said.

BLACK GOES BACK

Clint Black headed back to Hollywood, where he busied himself playing the role of real-life rodeo champion **Cadillac Jack Favor**. Favor was wrongly accused of murder. The TV movie will also star Clint's wife, **Lisa Hartman Black**, as **Ponder**, Favor's real-life steadfast wife. The Clint/Martina McBride duet, "Still Holdin' On," was inspired by the love between Ponder and her Cadillac Jack. Clint said Lisa had no intentions of being in the movie, although they had wanted to do a flick together. According to Clint, they needed a female lead, and he said, "How about Lisa?" Ain't love grand. Hopefully the movie will be complete by February.

THE NUMBER BY HIS NAME MEANS OPRY MEMBER

"This is the highlight of my life," said **Johnny Paycheck**, as he removed his hat. Becoming the 72nd member of the Grand Ole Opry puts Paycheck a long way from wearing a number for a name in an Ohio prison. Two years ago, with rhinestones falling from his jacket, holes in his boots, shirt faded and frayed, pants shiny and thin and a hat that had seen better days, Paycheck stepped on stage at the Opry, thanks to Opry manager **Bob Whittaker**. Opry members spilled from

TATTOO YOU



Wearing his heart on his sleeve, of sorts, is **BR5-49's Chuck Mead**, who sports a tattoo of idol **Hank Williams** on his upper arm. I'm no tattoo fan, but I make an exception for this one.

their dressing rooms to watch as Paycheck sang his way to a standing ovation. Fans have been screaming for him ever since. Whittaker, along with Opry members **John Conlee**, **Porter Wagoner**, **Johnny Russell** and

Steve Wariner, were on hand to welcome the newest Opry member. Also on hand, **Blake Chancey**, Sony's Vice President of A&R, who signed Paycheck to a record deal.

72 YEARS OF OPRY

The Grand Ole Opry celebrated her 72nd birthday with performances by a batch of today's chart-toppers, including **Vince Gill**, **Joe Diffie**, **Steve Wariner** and newcomer **Anita Cochran**. In addition, many Opry legends were on hand as well. Serving as host, **Little Jimmy Dickens** joined fellow legends **Grandpa Jones**, **Porter Wagoner**, **Jean Shepard** and **The Melvin Sloan Square Dancers**. Long live the Grand Ole Opry, where there's a party every weekend.

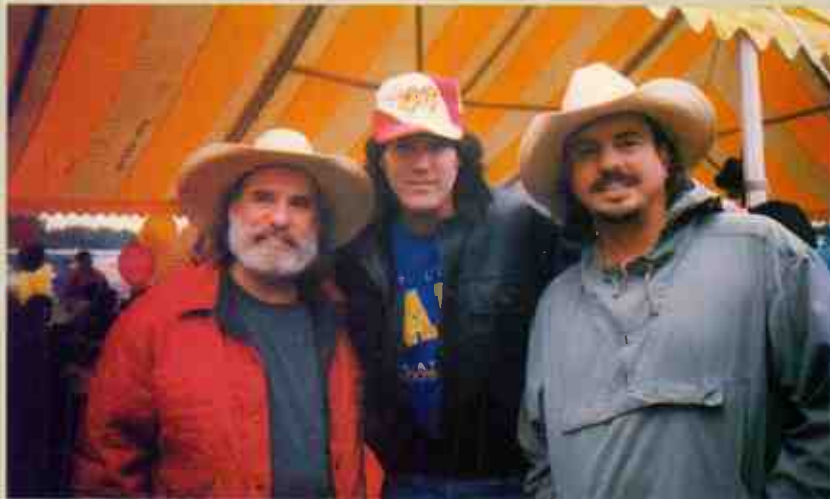
DIDJA KNOW

Didja know the Song of the Year at the International Bluegrass Music International Awards in Louisville was **Vince Gill's** "High Lonesome Sound" as written and recorded by Vince and **Alison Krauss**. **Del McCoury** took home the Entertainer of the Year award for the second consecutive year. His excellent son, **Ronnie McCoury**, won the mandolin award.

A WALK ON LYRIC STREET

The first star to walk on Lyric Street, the new Disney-owned record label, is **Lari White**. Lari, who is expecting her first child in January, will also have musical product out in early '98.

DAVID LEE AND THE BELLAMYS



David Lee Murphy was among those appearing at **The Bellamy Brothers' Snake Rattle & Roll** benefit concert this year. The event, in its ninth year, raises money for the **Tampa Children's Hospital**. Before the show, David Lee is flanked by **Howard** (left) and **David Bellamy**.

Record Reviews

Tom T. Hall

Home Grown

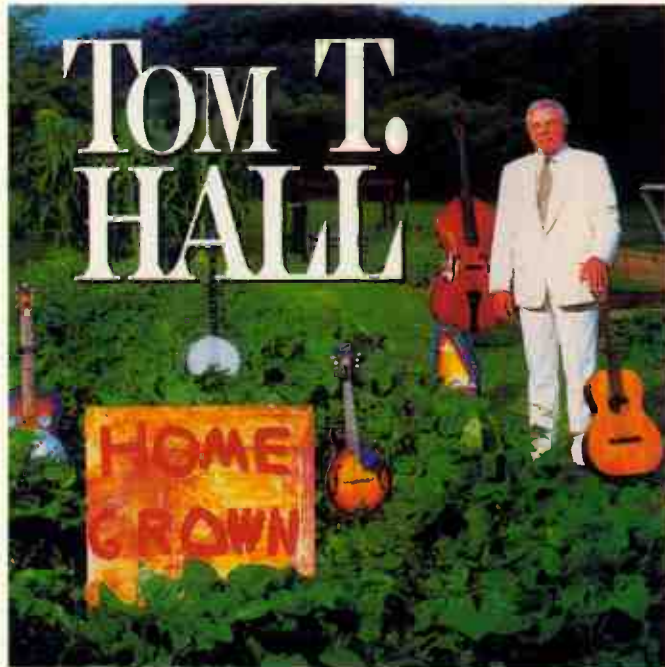
Mercury 314-536 316

In my estimation Tom T. Hall is one of the greatest country songwriters that ever lived.

Maybe Hank Williams or Harlan Howard have written more hits, but in his heyday Hall took country music someplace it had never been before and has seldom been since. His vivid powers of observation and uncanny gift for wringing incredible empathy and irony from mundane slices of everyday life—as in “Old Dogs, Children and Watermelon Wine,” “Ballad of Forty Dollars,” “Mama Bake a Pie” and “The Year That Clayton Delaney Died”—owe as much to American prose masters of yesteryear like Mark Twain and Edgar Lee Masters as they do to Jimmie Rodgers and Hank Williams.

After a rather lengthy break from recording, Hall re-emerged in 1996 with *Songs from Sopchoppy*, an album recorded at his winter home on a Gulf Coast island.

Hall's timing couldn't have been better, as his musical reputation (too long and too unjustifiably underplayed, in my opinion) is currently undergoing a renaissance. A little while back, Alan Jackson had a big hit with “Little Bitty,” a Hall original that appeared on *Songs from Sopchoppy*. Deryl Dodd recently took Hall's classic “That's How I Got to Memphis” back up the charts. Buddy Miller also did a dynamite version of the song on his new album, *Poison Love*. In 1995, Mercury, Hall's long-time label, released an ambitious, 50-song retrospective called *Tom T. Hall: Storyteller, Poet, Philosopher*. Meanwhile Iris DeMent and other notables



will soon release an album-length tribute to Hall.

Home Grown, Hall's timely follow-up to *Sopchoppy*, is an all-acoustic album recorded in Hall's Brentwood, Tennessee, studio in three days. It's as near as Hall has come in years to recapturing glimpses of the eloquence and brilliance that so consistently marked his music in the 60's and 70's.

Admittedly, by the late 70's and early 80's, Hall, for whatever reason, had begun working on a narrower canvas as a songwriter. The irony and stark pathos of early strokes of genius like “Homecoming” and “It Sure Gets Cold in Des Moines” gradually gave way to less ambitious exercises in complacency, nostalgia and sentimentality on songs like “I Like Beer,” “I Love” and “100 Children.”

On *Home Grown*, there's still quite a bit of this more slapshot approach of latter-day Tom T. Yet there are also more than enough re-stirrings of his early brilliance to make

for some great listening.

The “old” and “new” Tom T. merge beautifully on a heart-felt tribute like “Bill Monroe for Breakfast” and on the stirring bluegrass/gospel number, “The Beautiful River of Life” (which Hall co-wrote with his wife, Dixie). With its fine harmonies and great banjo and dobro licks, I wouldn't be surprised if “River” soon turns up on an album by IIIrd Tyme Out, Front Range or some other cutting-edge bluegrass band. Ditto for the delightfully bluegrass “Waiting On the Other Shoe to Fall.”

“Royal Annie,” a vivid portrait of a small-town arch-eccentric, is another tasty brew of early (vivid, ironic) and more recent (sentimental, whimsical) Tom T. Hall-marks. The gently lovelorn “The Way I've Always Been,” like quite a few early Hall originals, gently cradles personal loss in a comforting blanket of small-town familiarity in which life always goes on, despite all our little spiritual aches and pains.

“Watertown, Tennessee” is a pure slice of latter-day Hall whimsy about a small-town never-never land where people never die. “Life Don't Have to Mean Nothing at All” offers comfort from a totally different perspective, and even gives Hall a chance to subtly poke fun at all the searches for higher meaning that he himself has so often embarked on in song.

A particular favorite of mine, where early and latter-day Hall influences also merge powerfully, is “Local Flowers,” a disarmingly simple but poignant meditation on death.

If there is any justice, Tom T. Hall will eventually end up in the Country Music Hall of Fame. *Home Grown* is merely the latest in a long list of good reasons to put his name in the hat next time around.

—BOB ALLEN

Brent Mason

Hot Wired

Mercury 314-484 782

Over 30 years ago, Nashville A-Team studio musicians, the ones who played on all the hits, commonly had their own major label instrumental recording careers on the side. Hank Garland, Floyd Cramer, Charlie McCoy, Boots Randolph, Grady Martin, Pete Drake and Owen Bradley were among those who had success as solo artists. Where, you ask, is Chet Atkins on this list? Chet was already an established recording artist before he moved to Nashville. Once there, he became one of the early A-Team pickers as well, leading to his career as an RCA producer.

Solo careers by studio musicians dwindled by the 1980's, when albums by most pickers didn't sell enough to satisfy la-

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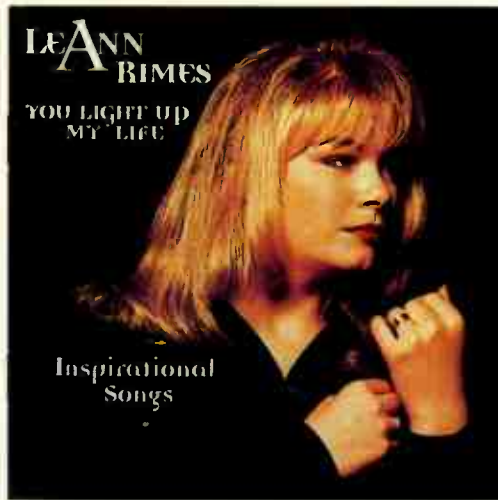
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Record Reviews



bel execs. Those who recorded at all on their own were largely relegated to small-label deals except for Mark O'Connor and, of course, Chet, who's perked along as always.

In recent years, interest in instrumental music has revived, and it was inevitable a major label would sign a current A-Team picker, and I must say, the right guy got there first. Guitarist Brent Mason, who's played on dozens of current hits, turns out to be much like his heroes of the past, a throwback to the consummate versatility of Atkins, Garland and Martin, who could invent literally any kind of accompaniment a producer or artist required.

As with any such album, Mason explores various styles and moods, some more effective than others. His accompanists are all first rate, including current Nashville A-Team members such as keyboardist Matt Rollings, pedal steel great Paul Franklin, harmonica player Terry McMillan, and bassists Glen Worf and Michael Rhodes. Mason wrote or co-wrote all but one track here. The first two, "Cayman Moon" and "Mellow Midnight," fall into the fusion jazz category, though skeptics might suggest they sound like the Muzak you get on cable TV. "Blowin' Smoke" is a slashing rocker with guitar licks inspired by Jerry Reed and some gutsy harmonica from

McMillan, while "First Rule of Thumb" revives the kind of sly, loping nylon string acoustic playing that captures, in Mason's own way, the spirit of the sound that was Reed's trademark.

"Hot Wired" is a furious, intense romp that fuses Mason's virtuosity as he interprets the styles of two dazzling guitar veterans: Albert Lee and Ray Flacke. "Blue Water Girl" lowers the intensity to a darker, more bittersweet level, followed by the raw and funky "Gator Bite." "My Little Ballerina" has a special significance as it pairs Mason with Chet Atkins. Chet's recent serious health problems add very real poignancy to a fine and sensitive performance from both.

The final two tracks move Mason deeper into country jazz. The supercharged arrangement of "Sugarfoot Rag," the Hank Garland favorite, rips out at a breakneck pace with dazzling single string lines, with fiddler Stuart Duncan joining in to play the lines in unison with Mason. "Swing with a Sting" further explores country jazz in the swinging, bebop-influenced styles of Jimmy Bryant and Garland, with solos from Rollings and Franklin as well.

Everything old, it's said, eventually becomes new again. We can only hope that *Hot Wired* is not Mason's first and last major label effort,

and that some of the other great studio players get the same major label chance. If they do, hopefully their efforts will come off nearly as well as Mason's did.

—RICH KIENZLE

LeAnn Rimes *You Light Up My Life* Curb D2-77885

From the time LeAnn Rimes came on the scene with "Blue," a single that triggered the Patsy nostalgia gene in millions, she crashed into the business with the force of a huge asteroid, a vindication of her talents and the perseverance of her dad, Wilbur Rimes. "Blue," a quality single from the get-go, deserved its success. In its wake, nearly everything released by Rimes, even old material of dubious quality, sold like crazy.

Unfortunately, one great single does not a career make, and any teenage star, regardless of talent, faces obstacles in avoiding one-hit obscurity. I think back 40 years to one who did just that: Brenda Lee. She began as an adolescent, recording country and novelty rockers, only to mature into a terrific teen pop vocalist and later, a world-class country singer with remarkable staying power. She had talent and handlers who left her to mature and grow naturally. In

the producer's chair was the great Owen Bradley, who also got the best from Patsy, Conway and Loretta. Tanya Tucker's enduring success, which began at age 13 and had its ups and downs, likewise speaks for itself.

Is Rimes heading the same direction? Well, *You Light Up My Life* is selling like crazy despite being a package with little reason to exist. While the national media heralds the cutting edge sophistication and consciousness of female singers like Patty, Lorrie and so on, Rimes not only avoids sophistication, she works here in a context that can only be called anachronistic if not outright corny. New, vital young artists rarely record albums of "inspirational songs." They do that (or remake their hits) years, even decades later, when stardom is history or they've run out of new things to say. Where today's best female singers create albums of complexity, like a fine portrait, Rimes' albums remind me of a painting on black velvet.

In fairness, could anyone expect her to be creative, faced with this bizarre mixture of largely overdone material, including the ever-pretentious "You Light Up My Life," "The Rose," "Bridge Over Troubled Waters" (sic) and the pompous "I Believe"? Add to that "Ten Thousand Angels Cried," "On the Side of Angels," "I Know Who Holds Tomorrow," "God Bless America," "How Do I Live," "Amazing Grace" and the National Anthem. Patriotic fare might have worked for Lee Greenwood, but in this case it underscores the album's total lack of cohesion.

Making matters worse are arid, uninspired performances, hog-tied by overblown arrangements and Rimes' powerful but emotionally empty vocals. Sure, she can belt out "Amazing Grace" and the National Anthem unaccompanied, but nowhere is there even a glimmer of the emotion and passion of "Blue." I'm sure in his role as producer Wilbur tried his best,

Record Reviews

but the fact remains, he's no Owen Bradley (or, to be more current, Tony Brown). As for Curb, I can only say that while I admire the fact they record many veteran artists, they've never claimed to place artistry above commerce. The unimaginative packaging speaks for itself.

Rimes' defenders will insist you can't argue with success. But my job is evaluating the quality of the project, not the bottom line, and it's no pleasure seeing a young, promising singer smothered in such vanilla blandness. With mature direction and creative inspiration, she could be the Brenda Lee or Tanya of the millennium—and more. Without it, a few more sappy excursions like this one may sell for awhile. But in the long haul, they could leave her facing the prospect, like other artists whose flames burned brightly and briefly, of becoming a trivia question. She deserves better than an album that for all the world, looks and sounds like the ones sold on TV via an 800 number.

Have your credit card ready.
—RICH KIENZLE

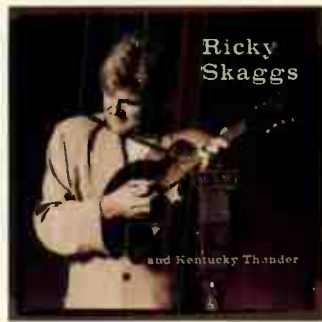
Ricky Skaggs

Life Is a Journey
Atlantic 83030

Bluegrass Rules!
Skaggs Family/Rounder
CD-0801

After a series of underwhelming albums and a growing reputation as a preachy conservative, it's easy to forget what a revolutionary Ricky Skaggs has been. But when the Kentucky singer and picker racked up 11 Number One country singles in the 80's, he not only single-handedly invented a whole new genre—bluegrass-pop—but also helped launch the neo-traditionalist movement that turned country music around in the mid-80's.

Now Skaggs is back with his two finest albums of the 90's,

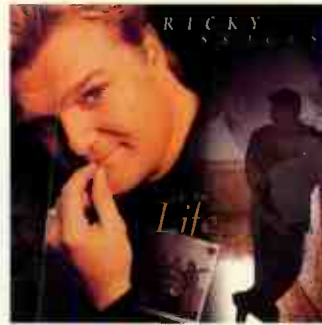


and the liberating effects of the hard-core-bluegrass album, *Bluegrass Rules*, made possible a return to form on the mainstream project, *Life Is a Journey*. You can't do a strong crossover record unless you're firmly rooted in the territory from which you're crossing over, and by reconnecting to his home turf on *Bluegrass Rules*, Skaggs is able to bring fresh juices to his bluegrass-pop on *Life Is a Journey*. (Ironically, *Journey* is Skaggs' final album for Atlantic, as he was dropped by the label soon after its release.)

"For 12 long years," Skaggs writes in the Rounder liner notes, "I wasn't allowed to record anything except country for contractual reasons. After signing with Atlantic Records, Rick Blackburn gave me his blessing to record this bluegrass album for my own label." *Bluegrass Rules* features a dozen all-acoustic, drummer-less songs, most of them mountain stringband standards by the likes of Bill Monroe and The Stanley Brothers. Singing and playing mandolin, fiddle and guitar, Skaggs is joined by his regular road band, Kentucky Thunder, plus guests Stuart Duncan and Jerry Douglas on fiddle and dobro.

The delightful results remind us what we've been missing for the past dozen years, for Skaggs is simply one of the greatest bluegrass vocalists and instrumentalists of his generation. And he seems to be having the time of his life as he leads his pals through fast, hard romps and through slow, high and lonesome ballads. Because Kentucky Thunder has

kept playing bluegrass live, even when they couldn't do so in the studio, they play with a focused rhythmic drive and sing with tight vocal harmonies matched only by The Del McCoury Band. When they get going on Monroe's "Get Up John," one is left panting with exhaustion just from listening to them. And when they join voices on the old hymn, "Rank Stranger," their aching drone captures the hurt caused by fickle friends.



The joy and energy generated by the pure-bluegrass album carries over to the bluegrass-pop project, much as it did when Skaggs first graduated from Rounder Records to Epic in 1981. Just as he did back then, the singer subtracts the banjo from his arrangements and adds drums, electric guitar, steel guitar and piano. Once again he maps out ingenious arrangements where the rhythm section stays within a tightly defined area and thus never gets in the way of the acoustic picking, which never gets in the way of the electric picking, which never gets in the way of the vocals. As a result, there's a clarity to the sound that allows the bluegrass flavors to come through even as a satisfying thump is added to the beat.

It also helps that Skaggs has pulled together an impressive bunch of songs. Much as he did in the early 80's, he has largely bypassed the usual Music Row suspects to draw from veteran bluegrass and honky-tonk writers as well as contemporaries who are pursuing a similar sort of crossover-roots fusion. From the veteran camp

comes "The Selfishness in Man," a 1965 hymn by Leon Payne (who wrote "Lost Highway" for Hank Williams) and Dallas Frazier's "Ain't Love a Good Thing," which was a Number One hit for Connie Smith in 1974.

From the contemporary camp come two wonderful songs about love lost and love found by well established bluegrass writer Larry Cordle. Jason Sellers, who spent four years in Skaggs' band before landing a solo deal, wrote "I Don't Remember Forgetting" with his then-wife Lee Ann Womack, and Skaggs stretches out his honky-tonk drawl on this classic tears-in-the-beer ballad. Best of all is Steve Earle's "Hillbilly Highway," a song about the economic forces that push native sons out of the Appalachian Mountains; it's Skaggs' life story, and he sings it as if every chapter in the tale happened yesterday.

Taken together, these two albums mark Skaggs' satisfying return to the top of his game.

It remains to be seen, however, if country radio will be as open to his bluegrass-pop in 1997 as it was in 1981.

—GEOFFREY HIMES

Steve Earle

El Corazón
Warner Bros. 9 46789

As much as I admire Steve Earle, I'm sure glad I don't live where he lives.

No doubt, he's one of our best and most honest songwriters, but he's sure had to pay a steep admission price in lost years and has stumbled down some mighty dark roads to get there.

Yet I think we're all better off for the fact that Earle often spares us the same perilous journey by periodically sending us musical postcards from the desolate spiritual outposts and treacherous terrain where he's spent so much time.


Admittedly, for a while

Trisha

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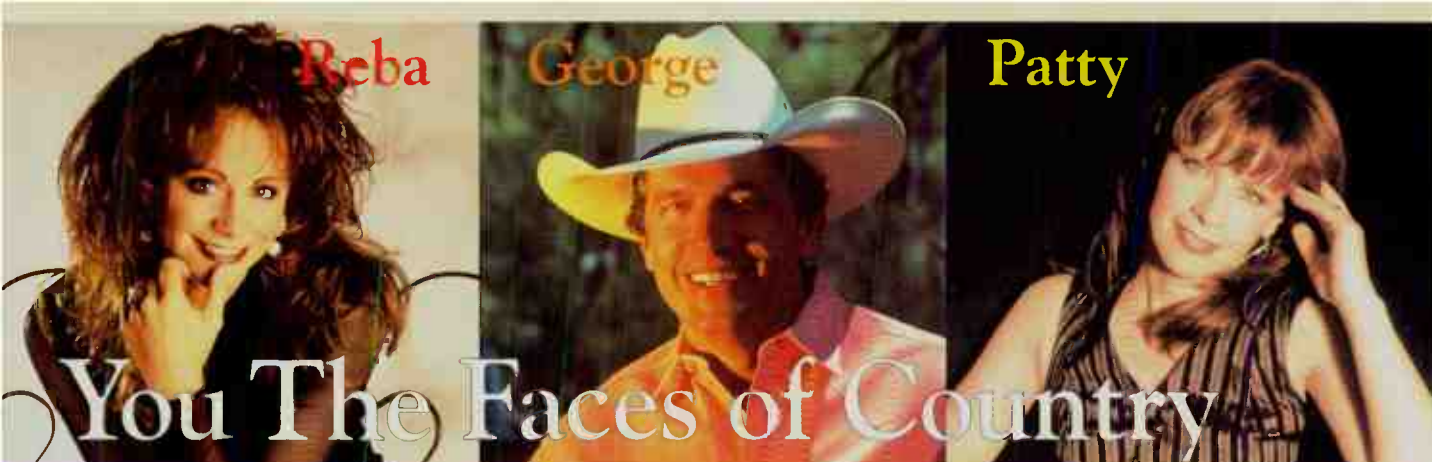
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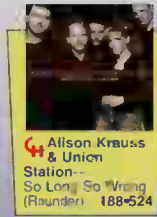


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* Selection is available on CD only.

Record Reviews

there, Earle got so far out in the darkness that he stopped sending postcards altogether, and it looked like he never would find his way back. But in 1995, he reestablished contact with *Train a Comin'*, a rousing, mostly acoustic album that was his best (hell, his only) work in a long, long time.

Since then, Earle's been back on the beam with a vengeance. His latest inspired "dispatch" from the spiritual trenches is a 12-song collection called *El Corazón*. In typical Earle fashion, it's pretty much what we might expect: gritty, world-weary, and by turns both tender and sinister, as Earle, with one foot in the realm of grunge hillbilly rock, tackles themes that tamer songwriters and artists wouldn't have the nerve, or the musical chops, to touch with a ten-foot pole.

The opening bell on *El Corazón* rings somberly with a heartfelt ode called "Christmas in Washington." It not only sets the tone for the rest of the album, but also introduces us to a somewhat different and definitely older Steve Earle. Gone is much of the swagger ("Guitar Town"), youthful optimism ("Somebody") and angry defiance ("Copperhead Road") of his early—and best—music.

Now we hear a more resigned acknowledgment of a world that often exacts a bitter toll of self-doubt, broken dreams and faded idealism in exchange for mere survival.

"Christmas in Washington," on which Earle sings in a hushed, somber growl with little accompaniment other than a softly picked flattop guitar and a droning synthesizer, is a yearning for an earlier time when our enemies were more easily identifiable and the causes were worth fighting for. "If you run into Jesus, maybe he can help you out," he laments to the ghost of America's most famous folk troubadour—"Come back, Woody Guthrie, to us now."

"Taneytown" is one of those



great, dark, historical narratives that Earle handles so well. It's also a bitter first-person account of murderous racism that's infused with knife-edged fatalism and embellished with some hauntingly melancholy harmonies from Emmylou Harris.

On "N.Y.C.," a particularly grungy collaboration with punk rock band The Supersuckers, we can almost hear the older but wiser Steve Earle having a dialogue with his more reckless and self-confident former self. Implicit in the song is the mature acknowledgment that, at least to some degree, every generation must suffer the lesson of learning from its own mistakes.

A Steve Earle album would be incomplete without a tortured love song or two. This time it comes with "Somewhere Out There" and "Poison Lovers," a superlative duet with Siobhan Kennedy.

"I Still Carry You Around" is (for Earle) an unusually mellow collaboration with bluegrass great Del McCoury and his superlative band. "The Other Side of Town" is a surreal slice of hillbillies-in-hell despair that, by comparison, makes some of Hank Williams' saddest songs sound downright uplifting. "Telephone Road" is a cleverly hokey celebration of a false honky-tonk mecca of neon lights and all-night taverns ("50 car lots and 100 honky-tonks") that makes the sparks dance in a young man's pants.

One thing you can bet on with Steve Earle: his musical postcards aren't intended to feed us false promises or amuse us with radio-friendly

ditties meant to momentarily cheer us up. The stuff he tends to write about isn't often pretty, and sometimes it's even a bit unsettling.

But, for sure, it's real, and it's often painfully honest.

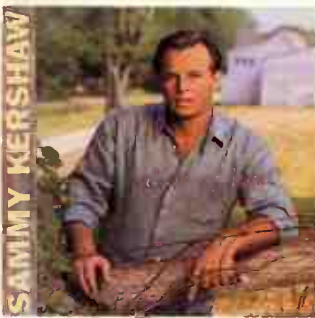
And you can hardly argue with that. —BOB ALLEN

Sammy Kershaw

Labor of Love

Mercury 314-536 318

On his new album, *Labor of Love*, Sammy Kershaw kicks things off with a Bob McDill song, "Honky Tonk America," a celebration of every dimly lit, beer-soaked nightclub in the nation—"a blue-collar place" with "a red-blooded crowd." And what kind of music, according to Kershaw and McDill, should one expect to hear in today's honky tonk? "Louie, Louie," "Proud Mary" and "Woolly Bully."



This is a surprising admission for a country singer to make, but it's probably accurate. As much as country purists may hate to hear it, today's Southern factory worker, the sort of person who's the backbone of the country audience, is more likely to dance to "Woolly Bully" on a Friday night than to "New San Antonio Rose." As a 39-year-old former WalMart employee, Kershaw is part of that core audience, and so it's only natural that his new album reflects as much rock influence as country roots.

As a country impurist, I have no problem with Kershaw adding cannon-shot snare drums and cranked-up

guitars to the fiddles and pedal-steel guitar on *Labor of Love*, especially when these backing tracks sound as good as they do under the direction of producer Keith Stegall and his crack studio band. I just wish Kershaw would use his George-Jones-alike baritone with the same wild abandon that Sam "The Sham" Samudio brought to "Woolly Bully."

Instead, *Labor of Love*, like Kershaw's previous albums, is unfailingly polite. His voice is a marvelous instrument, and it sounds thick and creamy whether it comes out slow and sad, as on "Matches," or fast and funny, as on "Shootin' the Bull (In an Old Cowtown)." The songs are all built around clever puns and catchy chorus jingles, but they never go any deeper than that.

Consider, for example, the album's hardest rocking song, "Cotton County Queen." It boasts a riveting Skynyrd-esque guitar riff and a wonderful, tongue-twisting chorus line, "Tupelo honey in a pair of blue jeans, the upper Mississippi Delta Cotton County Queen." Kershaw and guitarist Brent Mason make the most of these ingredients, but even they can't manage to turn this two-dimensional fantasy figure into a flesh-and-blood person.

On the album's most country-sounding track, "Thank God You're Gone," Kershaw and his co-writer, Mike Fornes, describe a romantic break-up with a captivating ballad melody and the usual lyric details. The singer captures the self-pity of the situation in a gorgeous vocal, but he never quite touches the depths of post-break-up despair where anger, regret and yearning are tangled in an undoable knot. Until Kershaw is willing to take the chances necessary to reach those raw emotions, it won't matter how he mixes the ingredients of country and rock. He will remain a highly skilled radio entertainer who leaves little lasting mark on the music.

—GEOFFREY HIMES

Record Reviews

Martina McBride

Evolution

RCA 67516

Martina McBride's new CD, *Evolution*, is a marvelous piece of work, starting with the taped performance by the seven-year-old Martina doing Little Jimmy Dickens' theme song, "I'm Little But I'm Loud." We hear her evolve right before our ears, from her earliest performances to her latest exemplary recordings. It's a fun segue into an album that shows growth into a more personal kind of record. Still too largely produced and dynamically sung to qualify as intimate, it drives at the one-to-one facets of love relationships. And, as we've come to expect from the woman with nerve enough to sing "Independence Day," what she reveals is often beyond the easy and pretty. Martina goes to the heart of situations no one would pick off the menu of love, but which many of us wind up in at some point in our lives.

There's plenty to get into here, as this is a 14-song record. "Be That Way" is McBride's way of saying that a hard-headed man and a hard-headed woman can be a good match if they give each other room and don't hold back. "Baby let's get emotional/What do you say we let it all go?" I think I've lived one thin apartment wall away from that couple more than once. And you've no doubt heard and loved the single, "A Broken Wing," about a woman finally fleeing an abusive relationship. It's beautiful, musically, and an uplifting story to boot. I dig this record.

In a bit of label synergy, McBride teamed with Clint Black (and Matraea Berg) in writing, and with Black in singing "Still Holding On." This is about one of those difficult, can't live with 'em, can't live without 'em relationships. He's gone, but she stays faithful to him in her loneliness. Man, the end of my first mar-



riage left me in such a state for months; it's weird, but a true phenomenon.

That's a lot of what I love about McBride in *Evolution*—she's dealing with strength in its many permutations, not dishing out man-bashing attitude or romantic pabulum. This is an album of real stuff. Whether it's standing up to a potential cheat in "Whatever You Say," or sticking with a guy who might or might not be running around in "I Won't Close My Eyes," McBride sings her hiney off, delivering nitty gritty stories of human needs, emotions and foibles from a vastly broader and deeper palette than your average love song. What would happen if the many facile, romantic, stud-muffin young blue-jeaned boys of country sang this deep and real? Nah, it'd never happen. This seems to be a woman's domain, and a rare and gutsy woman at that.

—BOB MILLARD

Robbie Fulks

South Mouth
Bloodshot BS 023

So far, the so-called "Alternative Country" scene has proved disappointing, at least insofar as becoming a real alternative to the worst of what pours out of Nashville studios, albums whose best moments come during the silences between songs. Too much "alt. country" sounds like sloppy garage band and regurgitated New Wave rock, fringe music for clueless Gen-Xers. Since a lot of it lacks ties to country, past or present, its future is

questionable.

Robbie Fulks, who isn't comfortable being categorized, may be the exception to the rule, a dynamic new voice able to appeal to mainstream and alt. fans (though certain material here might alienate the former). A songwriter of wit and individuality, with a feel for both tradition and contemporary, his voice is flexible, his songs glistening with life and crackling with immediacy, pushed ahead by no-bull arrangements. The spirits of many legends hover above Fulks, yet he doesn't go out of his way to conjure them up. They're just there. He's backed on most cuts by The Skeletons, a rock band whose bass player, Lou Whitney, co-produced the album.



"Goodbye, Good-Lookin'" is probably the most accessible song here, a pleasant, rocking, honky-tonk shuffle that shows both Fulks and band off to good advantage. "I Told Her Lies" updates the Tex Williams talking blues with wit and a wild, high-strung vocal. "Heart, I Wish You Were Here," a duet with Jim DeWan, brings The Louvin Brothers' sound into the late 90's. The dark, haunting murder saga, "Cold Statesville Ground," follows the tradition of countless centuries-old folk ballads. The equally somber ballad, "Forgotten But Not Gone," has the sort of intimacy rarely heard on most records today, though the Orbison overtones aren't far away. "South Richmond Girl," another Fulks-DeWan duet, ends the album with yet another somber, tragic ballad that could have been done by The

Blue Sky Boys.

Only George Jones could out-sing Fulks on the ballad, "I Was Just Leaving," and the shuffle, "What the Lord Hath Wrought (Any Fool Can Knock Down)," both songs that reveal the depth of his work. While his vocals stand on their own, they have a spontaneity making them even more compelling. On "What the Lord Hath Wrought," he tears off a gutsy, gnarly acoustic guitar solo. "Dirty-Mouthed Flo," with former Buck Owens Buckaroo Tom Brumley on pedal steel, is nothing radio would touch, but establishes Fulks' wiseass satirical side. At the same time, he can be mellow, even sweet, as on the plaintive, jazz-flavored Jim DeWan ballad, "You Wouldn't Do That to Me."

"F*** This Town" is quite another matter. No gentle jibe about the current scene, a la Alan Jackson's "Gone Country," Fulks' song angrily, satirically summarizes the frustration of artists who try to play Nashville's musical and political games, only to be short-sheeted for failing to meet Music Row consultants' visions of marketability. The sole quotable verse goes thusly: "Now it's three years later/And I'm a wonderin' where I went wrong/I shook a lotta hands, ate a lotta lunch and wrote a lotta dumbass songs/but I couldn't get a break in Nashville and I tried my whole life long." Other lines, like "I thought they struck bottom back in the days of Ronnie Milsap" will upset many. Suffice it to say, Fulks won't be covering "Butterfly Kisses" anytime soon, and that's fine with me.

If this seems like the kind of record no more than 50 people will buy, that critics embrace while the masses ignore it, don't be so sure. Fulks just signed a major-label deal with Geffen, one that hopefully will allow him to get his iconoclastic approach to a wider audience. *South Mouth* proves that Geffen did the right thing.

—RICH KIENZLE

Record Reviews

Jason Sellers *I'm Your Man* BNA 67517

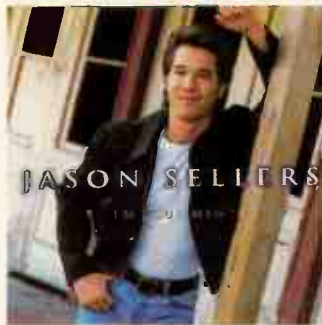
For the most part, Jason Sellers' *I'm Your Man* is a typical country-pop debut from a good-looking 26-year-old with a square jaw and a rugged baritone. You get the usual ingredients: the mainstream Music Row producer (Chris Farren of Deana Carter fame), the "look" (no hat but long sideburns), the bouncy country-rock anthem (the title track), the over-the-top ballad weeper ("Can't Help Calling Your Name") and the radio-friendly sound (country, but not too country; rocking, but not too rocking).

Two songs on the album, however, cut so deeply that they suggest Sellers may be much more than just another pretty face in the Nashville machine. Both of them are ballads co-written by Sellers himself, and both of them deal with his recent divorce from Lee Ann Womack with a bracing honesty. Both the writing and the singing on these two songs break through the usual clichés to capture the essential pain of losing the one relationship you told the whole world would last forever.

"This Small Divide," co-written with Gary Burr, takes its title from the often small differences that drive a wedge between a couple. "It's not an ocean," Sellers sings in a voice that can barely contain its bewilderment, "it's not a canyon, but it's enough to make us cry." To Sellers' credit, he never pretends that this divide can easily be bridged just because it's small; instead he reluctantly accepts the paradox that little things can cause such large hurts. Producer Farren reinforces this puzzled despair by framing the verses in an understated setting of acoustic guitar, bass and drums; the song builds to a big chorus before sinking back into the

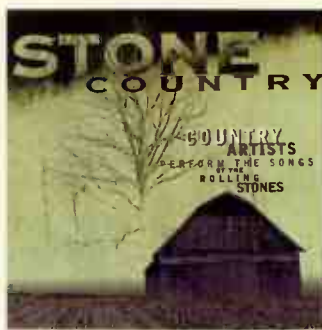
spare verses as if in defeat.

Just as powerful is "Divorce My Heart," co-written with Austin Cunningham. The song contains some striking images ("I can put some sheets on that old sofa sleeper...I can force my hand to sign these final papers/With both of our attorneys in this room") and raises the unanswerable question, "When I stand and walk away from this table...how do I divorce my heart from you?" There's a refreshing honesty in the suggestion that no break is ever final, that the past can never be left completely behind. Sellers' vocal never whines or pleads; it simply asks that the ex-wife acknowledge the fact that they're forever linked whether they like it or not.



The weightiness of these two songs provides a contrast that makes the album's lighter material work better than it would otherwise. The title track marries a contagious, uptempo guitar riff to a common-sense outline of what the singer will and won't do in a relationship. Even catchier are the two songs co-written by Al Anderson—the bluesy, funky "Hole in My Heart" and the flat-out rocker, "It's a Man's Job." Sellers and Cunningham wrote a positive love song, "That Does It," which benefits from a lovely melody and the vocal's reluctance in giving in to love. If Sellers can build on his strengths, the young Texan may escape the assembly-line disposability of modern country and actually build a career worth remembering.

—GEOFFREY HIMES



Various Artists *Stone Country* Beyond CD3055

Stone Country, the latest in the seemingly interminable string of "tribute" albums to come out of Nashville in recent years, is a tepid but perfectly enjoyable record which, with a little more imagination and courage, could have been a hell of a lot better.

Certainly *Stone Country* is based on a solid premise. There's nothing far-fetched or illogical about a country tribute to Britain's archetypal outlaw rock 'n' roll band.

The Rolling Stones had early hits with tunes by Buddy Holly ("Not Fade Away") and Hank Snow ("I'm Movin' On"). On top of that, Mick Jagger and Keith Richards are fabulous songwriters. Over the years, country and bluegrass masters like Johnny Cash, Waylon Jennings, Tom T. Hall, J.D. Crowe and Earl Scruggs have all covered The Stones' compositions on their own albums.

But a number of things hamstring this record from the outset. To begin with, *Stone Country* is marred by the sort of typically slapdash, musically conservative and politically correct decision-making that mars too many Music Row releases these days. (Ever since seeing The Rolling Stones perform many of these same songs on their current American tour, I find myself referring to this record as "Whole Wheat Stone-Ground Country"—but

maybe that's just because I missed breakfast this morning.)

For one thing, as good as some of these tracks are, they make you wonder why some of the artists who could have worked wonders with a Rolling Stones song aren't included here, while a number of others who can barely sing their way out of a paper bag with a Stones tune are. And, considering how extensive the Stones' song catalogue is (39 albums and counting), did the producers have to serve up 11 tunes here that have already damn near been played to death?

On the plus side, Travis Tritt does a spirited though somewhat rote-learned version of "Honky Tonk Women," while Rodney Crowell serves up a galvanizing take on "Jumpin' Jack Flash." Tracy Lawrence reveals his rock 'n' roll roots with a very competent, if unremarkable, reprise of "Paint It Black."

The Tractors bring an interesting arrangement but, alas, very little get-up-and-go, to "The Last Time." And Deana Carter's rendition of "Ruby Tuesday" is just a little bit too mannered for its own good.

For a change of pace, BlackHawk turns "Wild Horses" into an intriguing, bluegrass-flavored ditty, while Nanci Griffith brings a deliciously drawling bluesy-folksy reading to "No Expectations." George Jones imbues "Time Is on My Side" with a benevolent, almost avuncular growl that's fun to listen to, even if it does seem to miss the point of the song.

Some of the other artists (whom I will kindly not mention by name) have either made dubious song choices, or are simply too anemic to do justice to the quintessential decadence and sinister undercurrent that inform most of The Stones' best music.

Indeed, this feeling of anemia is so creeping that it makes you wonder how they did choose the 11 artists rep-



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Record Reviews

resented on *Stone Country*. If I had to guess, I'd say they must have just grabbed the first 11 warm bodies that could carry a tune who happened to walk through the studio door.

I mean, where is Steve Earle, who could have done wonders with a country-flavored Stones gem like "Dead Flowers? Where's Dwight Yoakam, who could have worked magic with "Factory Girl" or "Spider and the Fly"? Or Patty Loveless, who could really rip into "Gimmee Shelter"? Or Lee Roy Parnell, who could breathe fire into "Under My Thumb"? Or Lucinda Williams, who could have really nailed "Sister Morphine"?

But alas, these artists, and these sorts of Stones songs, are not represented on this unadventurous mainstream effort. Thus there's a missing edge that keeps this fairly enjoyable album from being a lot more than it actually turned out to be.

—BOB ALLEN

Bryan White *The Right Place* Asylum 62047

Bryan White brings youth, romance and handsome vulnerability to the country scene and has been amply rewarded with popularity. He has hit a vital nerve—the James Taylor nerve, I think. His many fans will find this latest effort a must-have, if not immediately, then certainly in the old Christmas stocking.

That said, I have to admit I think White has more in common with contemporary Christian pop music than with anything I've ever identified as country, but there's no arguing that today's young and urban female audience tuning into country radio has wider tastes and less cultural investment in the rural and blue collar roots of country. For them, this is country music.



So be it. It's also really well done.

Let's examine the tunes found and interpreted here. Marcus Hummon, co-writer of the title track, has long been one of Nashville's hidden treasures as a singer and songwriter. He delivers a terrific upbeat look at love as something between geography of the soul and quasi-religious vocation. Skip Ewing and Bob DiPiero—certified song-writin' hitmakers, both—pitch a hit down the middle of the plate, and White has the stuff to knock "Leave My Heart Out of This" right out of the park. The urge to emotional rescue is barely resisted: "I'd love to be the way your heartache ends/But 'til it does we can't be more than friends."

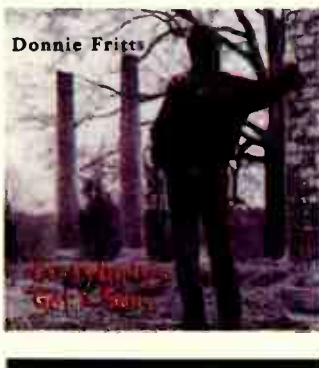
"The Natural Thing" borrows key elements from a noteworthy Bonnie Raitt hit single and delivers them up to a generation that probably never heard the original, recent as it is. I'm afraid that anyone living on an adult's hormone level will find this tepid, bubble gum rock 'n' roll, but my guess is it strikes where it means to and will satisfy White's fans. Turn another corner and find legend Bill Anderson teaming with Steve Wariner to write "One Small Miracle." It has all the markings of classic Wariner melody and country-politan lyrics of ol' Whisperin' Bill. Now this is more like the country music I love.

Skip Ewing pairs with Don Sampson to fill in the pleasing ballad niche on this offering. "Tree of Hearts" is a sweet story song of a lifetime

lived and finished, recorded by the annual carving of a heart in a tree trunk. I really like this song a lot, and White is a fine, breathy singer for it. "We Could Have Been" is another great ballad, this one with a sentimental wistfulness for missed opportunities.

Well, give the devil his due, Bryan White deserves his success and his following, and this record should write a new chapter in his growing career. Without meaning to criticize what he delivers here, I confess it's not my meat. The only track here I would personally want to hear again is the first-rate finisher, "Call Me Crazy." But I know my five-and-a-half-year-old daughter will love it when she pulls it out of her Christmas stocking this year, along with the pencils with her name on them and the new Pez candy dispenser.

—BOB MILLARD



Donnie Fritts *Everybody's Got a Song* Oh Boy! Records OBR-017

For those of you who don't already know this soft-spoken Muscle Shoals songwriter and picker, Donnie Fritts has a writing and performing pedigree running through some of the most unique and talented camps of the last 25 years of country music, including Waylon Jennings, Kris Kristofferson, Willie Nelson, John Prine, Steve Goodman, Billy Swan, Tony Joe White and Dan Penn. He is espe-

cially renowned for doing 22 years on the road with Kristofferson, and appearing in several of Kris' movies to boot. But he is, first and foremost, a songwriter—shoot, it says so right there on the back of his jacket.

Now Fritts, as a singer, is a damn good songwriter, which is to say he's ragged, earthy and not likely to give Alan Jackson a run for his slot on the *Billboard* Top 10 Country Singles chart. But for those among us who appreciate the Muscle Shoals influence and that now-rare, quirky, perceptive wit, reprobate honesty and tales arising from a no-excuses life of beer-for-breakfast hillbilly independence, this here is the gen-u-wine article.

Interestingly, Fritts covers some of his songs previously recorded by Jerry Lee Lewis ("A Damn Good Country Song"), Dusty Springfield ("Breakfast in Bed"), John Prine ("The Oldest Baby in the World"), and Ray Charles ("We Had It All"). He is joined with vocals or instrumental contributions on these sparse and soulful tracks by John Prine, Willie Nelson, Kris Kristofferson, Waylon Jennings, Lucinda Williams, Tony Joe White, Lee Roy Parnell, Delbert McClinton, Billy Swan and Dan Penn. It's good ol' greasy Alabama country/R&B.

This whole album is loose and appropriate to the subjects, ranging from a woman with a too-cold heart ("Ten Foot Pole") to lost love (both "We Had It All" and "Better Him Than Me") to a sideshow geek ("Star of the Show"). Tempos are relaxing, even when they rock out, suggesting an afternoon spent on a Dripping Springs, Texas, shaded porch with your feet propped up on a half-empty case of beer. This is the good stuff; Fritts' collaborative friends and admirers here tell a mighty story. This is a guy whose music you owe it to yourself to discover.

—BOB MILLARD

John Denver Revisited

by Michael Bane

The first time I'd really thought about John Denver in ages happened a couple of years ago, and it didn't have anything at all to do with the music business.

I'd been climbing Alaska's Mt. McKinley, the highest point in North America, for weeks, and I was sick. Driven by the high altitude and bitter cold, a minor respiratory infection had turned deadly. At those altitudes, the body no longer has the resources to heal itself. I could barely force myself to eat; sleep had become a memory. Even breathing the thin air seemed like agony. I remember lying in my sleeping bag, wracked with uncontrolled shivering and coughing fits, wondering whether I could find the strength to climb one more day.

But I did climb one more day, up the magnificent 1,300-foot wall of stone and ice that is the last major climb, to within sight of a summit I knew was out of my reach.

As we reached the top of the great headwall, the storms abated, and the sun—so close!—broke through. My body reeling from the exertion, I stepped out onto a high balcony and looked across the roof of the world. Strangely, here is what I thought:

*He climbed cathedral mountains
He saw silver clouds below
He saw everything as far as you can see
And they say that he was crazy once
And that he tried to touch the sun
And he lost a friend
But kept the memory*

The last time I'd thought about John Denver before that one perfect moment was back in 1975, when I was working for *Country Music Magazine* and John Denver was named CMA Entertainer of the Year. I know it's hard to remember back that far. Before Garth; before Randy; before George. Before Alabama, The Judds, Hank Jr. Before Willie & Waylon and the Outlaw era. Before country music changed the world, and the world changed country music.

We used to sit around *Country Music's* New York City office—myself, John Morthland, Patrick Carr, Rochelle Friedman, Nick Tosches—and argue about whether John Denver was actually the Anti-Christ or just a misguided pop singer looking to make a few extra bucks. Hey, not only was this guy a pop singer, but he was a successful pop singer, and Nashville



was doing everything short of giving him a key to the city. We were shocked and appalled.

Amazing the difference a few years can make. I heard "Back Home Again" on the radio yesterday, on a country station, and it occurred to me that "Back Home Again" and a bunch of other John Denver songs are probably "too country" for many of America's top country stations. Heck, "Country Roads" couldn't get airplay on a country station today on a bet! Was John Denver guilty of gross pop excesses? You bet. Will his music stand as great country songs? That's not my call. But if I was going to guess, I'd say yes, it will.

All these thoughts were knocking around in my head when I heard that John Denver had been killed in the crash of his experimental plane. If you strip away those pop excesses, John Denver's strength as a singer and songwriter was his ability to

capture small truths and weave them into larger cloth. His genius, though, was to capture a sense of place; through rhythm and metaphor to anchor that place in the amber of music. He always seemed to be either just arriving, or just leaving, these places of the mind. Although those places might be "almost heaven" or "feel like a long lost friend," Denver—and, by extension, we—accepted that they were only transitory, places where we might stop and replenish our souls before, once again, moving on. The highway, the jet plane, are the enduring icons of our lives.

It's also worth noting here that John Denver died while practicing a very dangerous, highly skilled activity—flying experimental aircraft. Those of us who, for whatever reason, have found our way to the fringes of the Known Universe, do so with the knowledge—and, ultimately, the acceptance—that sometimes our reach will exceed our grasp. Yet it is exactly that reach, that willingness to leave the comfort zone far behind, which leads us to great art, to enduring music, to words that may live long after we're gone. Great risks, someone once wrote, taken joyously.

One of the things the mountains teach you is how to mourn the loss of an individual while simultaneously celebrating that individual's choices in life. I have made it a habit to lift a glass for friends who have gone on where I can't yet follow. So a week or so ago, I lifted a glass to John Denver, who knew the mountains better than I ever imagined.

Talk to God and listen to the casual reply. ■

MARK CHESNUTT'S *Boys' Night Out*

For Mark Chesnutt, a night off from the rigors of the new-album publicity grind means hanging out and shooting the breeze. The players include a songwriting legend, a rockabilly off-shoot and our hero, a honky tonk original. It's just good old boys sharing a good old time.

By Bob Millard

I've done a lot of stories in my time, from bone-rattling road trips ending in triumph or disaster, to the ever-popular 30-minute chat in the record label's conference room where I'm one of a dozen journalists in a stifling production line being shuffled in and out to be dished the same canned chatter about the artist's new album.

This, on the other hand, is about the most uncategorizable one of all. This is the story of dinner missed on the Monday night when Mark Chesnutt and I did not see Glen Campbell.

The set-up was simple: Chesnutt was in Nashville promoting his new CD, *Thank God for Believers*. It's more classic Chesnutt honky tonk, with Chesnutt himself stepping forward with writing credits on more songs here than he's had in his entire career to date. To avoid the same-ol'-same-ol' interview in the conference room, I suggest that we try something off the cuff, something with "color," as we say in the magazine biz.

"Well, Mark likes to go hear music and hang out with musicians and writers when he's in town," the publicist offers. "He loves to eat at The Longhorn, too. Glen Campbell is going to be doing a show at Caffe Milano downtown Monday night—why don't we get you two together for an evening of that?"

Well, I can go to dinner on the company card with the best of them, and I love Glen Campbell. Sure, I said. And the deal was struck.

At the last minute, I got a call explaining that Chesnutt had gotten an invitation from legendary country songwriter Harlan Howard to meet him for drinks at a Music Row watering hole called The Nashville Country Club. To an authentic country boy like Chesnutt, sitting down with Harlan Howard is like an audience with the Pope, albeit in a bar. I was to meet Chesnutt there, then we were off to choice, medium-rare steaks at The Longhorn and a night of Glen Campbell in sumptuous surroundings. No sacrifice is too great when it comes to bringing *Country Music* readers a fresh angle. Ah, yes, "the best laid plans of mice and men..."

The bar side of The Nashville Country Club is a scene worthy of any of the great country music industry hang-outs of the past 45 years. Nary a "civilian" wanders over that way from the expansive dining room, other than the odd wanna-be songwriter determined to "gherm" his way into the circle for a while. This evening found a heady group bellied up to the bar, writers who've had many major hit songs flow from their pens, producers, Memphis legends such as "Haunted House" hitsman Gene Simmons, second generation international rock and rockabilly legends like Billy Burnette, and Decca Records' newest signee, happy-go-lucky tomboy Danni Leigh. I chat with Chesnutt's producer, Decca executive Mark Wright, as Chesnutt and Howard order

IMESTOCK






drinks and bend to talk into each other's ears across a narrow, two-top table by a potted plant behind the bar. This is going to be an interesting evening.

Soon I join Chesnutt and Howard at their table. They are talking about families and the touring end of the record business. Harlan Howard made several albums during his younger years, though he still refers to them as "the times I got major labels to pay for my demos. I never deluded myself. I did a few dates out there, but what you do is hard."

"It was one thing when I was single," says Chesnutt, nursing a beer whose label he slowly peeled away. "But I got two kids now that I love spending time with. It makes it really hard to leave home when I have to. I mean, I miss my wife, too, but I really miss those kids."

That's why you will find Chesnutt at his Jasper, Texas, renovated ranch-style home when work doesn't take him on the Silver Eagle concert trail or to Nashville to record and promote records. There is genuine regret in this fine honky tonk singer's eye as he shakes his head, tips his brown bottle and takes a slow sip.

Harlan Howard is in a generous and expansive mood. He encourages Chesnutt to keep on expanding his control of his music by writing more


*"I got two kids
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those kids."*

and standing up for songs he believes in. Their give and take on this topic produces a rare glimpse inside the politics of label-artist relations in Nashville.

"I found this song, 'Just Wanted You to Know,' but two or three albums went by and they wouldn't let me cut it," Chesnutt tips back his ball cap and explains to Howard. "They kept telling me it was no good, but I knew that song was a hit. After a few years I realized that it was my career, and my record, and I was going to cut it if I wanted to."

"Yeah," opines Howard, "you gotta stick with what you believe in; and it damned well better be something you want to still be singing 50 years from now."

"Of course, they got the last word," Chesnutt says, readjusting his baseball cap and shaking his head. "When they put out my *Greatest Hits* record, they left that song off."

Laughter flows around the adjoining tables. Everybody knows a similar story. I look at my watch for the first time since I had sat down and realize we've spent too much time talking to catch any kind of dinner, much less at a different restaurant, and still get to the Glen Campbell show, which I believe Chesnutt really wants to see. So, we sit tight, order another round, and the chat flows on like water down the Green River.

"Man, I've known Harlan for seven years, the whole time I've been in this business, and getting a call from him to come over and have a drink with him is better recognition to me than a whole mantel full of awards," said Chesnutt later. "Every time I see him, he tells me the same things, but I love hearing it. He tells me to keep it country, to keep it real, to stay true to myself and my sound and to hell with the rest of it. He says all the rest of it will come in time if I don't get frustrated and walk away from it. You know, he doesn't have to say that. He has nothing to gain blowing smoke at me, or anybody in this town."

It's a good thing for Chesnutt that Harlan Howard's company is worth more than a wall full of awards, because for an artist of his longevity and consistently successful track record, his awards wall is noticeably blank. He's not good at industry politicking, Lord knows. While he has sold six and a half million records in seven years, he's only won one industry award. "You'll get 'em," assures Howard, back at the bar, "and when it happens, you won't be expecting it, and that'll make it all the sweeter for you."

"Well," he concludes, struggling to rise, "I have a prodigious bladder, but it's full."

Billy Burnette, with his litting quasi-brogue, offers to help Harlan to the bathroom. Howard waves him off and refuses the walker he has parked behind a large potted plant.

"See, he wouldn't let me help him," says Burnette, his dark eyes sparkling. "You know why?" he says meaningfully.

"Because he doesn't want help from anyone?" someone hazards a guess.

"Nah, it's because you're even drunker than he is," says Chesnutt, breaking up the whole group, Burnette included.

"Yes, it's true," agrees Burnette with charming humor. "How kind of you to point that out."

Burnette reaches over and takes Chesnutt's

hand, kissing it with theatrical mock deference. "Hey, Billy's the only guy that ever kissed my hand that didn't get hit," laughs Chesnutt.

At this point, Chesnutt grimaces, realizing he's just getting comfortable with this setting and these companions and we are supposed to be miles away, checking in on Glen Campbell in a few moments. We have already missed prime rib at The Longhorn.

"Ah, I'm not hungry," says Chesnutt, ordering Cajun chicken strips from the bar's appetizer menu.

Billy Burnette wants to go downtown to see Campbell, but explains the event is not a Glen Campbell performance, but a showcase for Glen Campbell Music songwriters. These include teen country idol Bryan White. Chesnutt screws his face up in a "don't make me go sit through the competition" look and pulls his hat brim over his eyes.

"Hey, whadda ya say we just hang out with Harlan then," I suggest.

The ball cap comes off, smiles bloom and another round of what's-your-poison shows up at the table. Chesnutt, Harlan Howard, Danni Leigh, Billy Burnette and I settle in for a long evening of hanging out. If trying new tunes in the studio is where the rubber hits the road in country music, hanging out like this is where the tires get rotated, where the overheated radiators cool down, where everything and everyone gets... well, as they say in Paris (Tennessee), "lubricated."

Burnette waxes on about a movie script he has written and hopes to direct. It is a film about the early days of rock 'n' roll. Son of Dorsey Burnette, of the legendary Johnny and Dorsey Burnette rockabilly pioneers, he knows something about the subject.

"I want you to be in it, Mark," he says, his enthusiasm infectious. "I want you to be the big country star I open for when I'm just getting started."

"Will it take long?" asks Chesnutt.

"No."

"Do I get killed in the end?"

"No, you get arrested for fooling around with drugs and under-age girls and go to prison for five years, and I wind up schtupping your wife," says Burnette, grinning.

"Hmmm," says Chesnutt, playing along straight-faced. "Oh, well, I guess that'd be alright then."

"I usually get four or five days, maybe a week at home. I spend it mostly outside. I have some ponds there at the house, and I do some fishin'."



Home is where the heart is. When time permits, it's the outdoors and family that really keep Chesnutt going. Hanging out with legends in his spare time is a plus, too.

PHOTOS: LIVESTOCK



Chesnutt revels in this. This is the real stuff. This is history in living memory. Chesnutt is completely unaware that he is also history a-happening, a star and a stalwart of country's real roots—one of the few remaining in Nashville.

The longer we stayed, the less we thought about steaks and the Wichita Lineman. It was a wonderfully human night of camaraderie. No agenda, no tape recorders, no publicists steering talk back to the agenda; nothing but good company, drinks, cigarettes, and more drinks and cigarettes. And the sort of free-flowing talk, stories and laughter that frame the off-hours world of genuine good ol' boys like Harlan Howard and Mark Chesnutt. It was not to be missed, though the later hours of it were also not to be remembered too clearly, or repeated word for word in a family magazine.

The next night I catch up with Chesnutt again, this time at a radio production studio being interviewed by Lon Helton. After two long days of interviews, Chesnutt is worn out and brain-dead. We ride back to his swank hotel a few blocks from Music Row to put finishing touches on our own interview-cum-ecumenical-bar-crawl of the night before.

The suite is on the 11th floor, with a view of the

main street leading out of downtown Nashville towards the places where all the genteel, monied people live. He has been ensconced there for three days, but it looks untouched, like it just came out of one of those little cellophane wrappers for drinking glasses at Motel 6, where I usually stay. Chesnutt is not a hotel hound. He goes to his rooms-with-a-view to rest and make a few phone calls, but he prefers to cruise the town with friends such as long-time songwriting collaborator, Roger Springer.

Now, he puts his feet up on the coffee table and wants to talk about anything but the business. Home is sorely on his mind.

"I usually get four or five days, maybe a week at home," says the man in the high-priced motel room. "I spend it mostly outside. I have some ponds there at the house, and I do some fishin'. Or I'll go down to the coast and do some bank fishin' or do some bass fishin' there at Rayburn Lake. Or I'll just run around the woods on my four-wheeler, taking my boy out for rides."

He thinks back to the night before.

"I've always admired Harlan's writin' and have a lot of respect for that guy. He's one of the legends. For him to call me friend and to get to hang out with him and have a drink and cuttin' up—it makes you feel like you're doin' something right.

"You know, I've been around people that was really nice guys before they got in the business, then they really changed overnight. I just don't see any cause for that at all. I've had some new artists...I've read interviews with 'em where they've said that they grew up listening to my songs and singing my songs in clubs. Gary Allan tells me all the time that he was playing in clubs there in California that he played all my songs. That's a big compliment. That makes me feel like I've done something important, you know."

And, as important as that is, Chesnutt doesn't act like a big shot. He doesn't even whine about his lack of industry recognition.

"It does bug me at times," he admits. "I'm always pretty excited about nominations bein' announced, just to see if I made it. But it's a little bit of a disappointment sometimes, but I've learned to laugh and I'm used to it now.

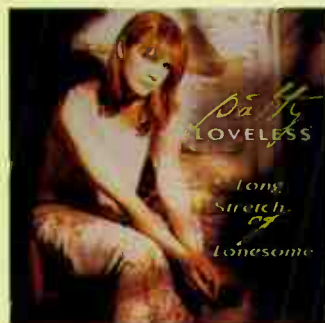
"I'd like to get a little more attention from the award shows. I'd love to be asked to perform on one. I've never really performed on an awards show, except for the little bit of a song you do when you're nominated. But it's always been a dream of mine to actually perform a whole song during the CMA's or the ACM's. But they haven't invited me to do that yet, so, like I said, I'm just waitin' for my turn."

Truth told, Mark Chesnutt would rather miss a fine dinner to share buffalo wings with Harlan Howard and the gang. He's okay with a largely bare awards cabinet for now, because he's making the best music of his life, which is what it's really all about for him. He's also socking away memories of times spent with the legends and pals who really make the music go 'round.

"It's a great feelin' when you fit in at a place like that, full of guys of that caliber," he says, breaking a tired smile. "That's award enough for me, just to be accepted by these people who actually create the music. That's better than being on TV anyway." ■

— — — — —
*"It's always
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 perform a whole
 song during the
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 I'm just waitin'
 for my turn."*

TOP 25

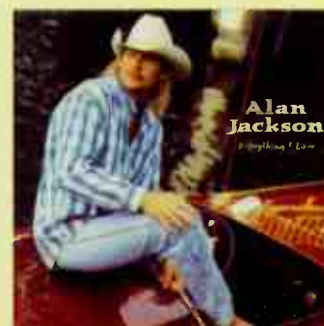
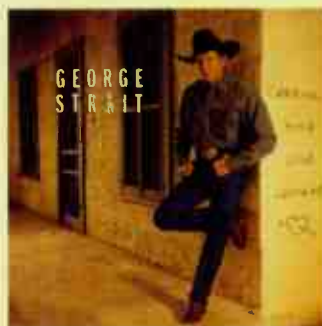


Albums

1. Shania Twain *Come On Over*
2. LeAnn Rimes *You Light Up My Life—
Inspirational Songs*
3. Trisha Yearwood *(Songbook) A Collection of Hits*
4. Brooks & Dunn *The Greatest Hits Collection*
5. Tim McGraw *Everywhere*
6. John Michael Montgomery . *Greatest Hits*
7. LeAnn Rimes *Blue*
8. George Strait *Carrying Your Love with Me*
9. Deana Carter *Did I Shave My Legs for This?*
10. Wynonna *The Other Side*
11. Trace Adkins *Big Time*
12. Martina McBride *Evolution*
13. Sammy Kershaw *Labor of Love*
14. Mindy McCready *If I Don't Stay the Night*
15. Collin Raye *The Best of Collin Raye—
Direct Hits*
16. Alan Jackson *Everything I Love*
17. Clint Black *Nothin' But the Taillights*
18. Patsy Loveless *Long Stretch of Lonesome*
19. Michael Peterson *Michael Peterson*
20. LeAnn Rimes *Unchained Melody/
The Early Years*
21. Various Artists *A Country Superstar Christmas*
22. John Denver *The Best of John Denver Live*
23. Bryan White *The Right Place*
24. Neal McCoy *Greatest Hits*
25. Neal McCoy *Be Good at It*

Singles

1. Shania Twain *Love Gets Me Every Time*
2. Clint Black *Something That We Do*
3. Michael Peterson *From Here to Eternity*
4. Garth Brooks *Long Neck Bottle*
5. George Strait *Today My World
Slipped Away*
6. Clay Walker *Watch This*
7. Alan Jackson *Between the Devil and Me*
8. Pam Tillis *Land of the Living*
9. Trace Adkins *The Rest of Mine*
10. The Kinleys *Please*
11. Martina McBride *A Broken Wing*
12. Toby Keith with Sting *I'm So Happy I Can't
Stop Crying*
13. Wynonna *When Love Starts Talkin'*
14. Lonestar *You Walked In*
15. John Michael Montgomery . *Angel in My Eyes*
16. Patsy Loveless *You Don't Seem to Miss Me*
17. Mark Chesnutt *Thank God for Believers*
18. Ty Herndon *I Have to Surrender*
19. Brooks & Dunn *He's Got You*
20. Tim McGraw *Everywhere*
21. LeAnn Rimes *On the Side of Angels*
22. Diamond Rio *Imagine That*
23. Alabama *Of Course I'm Alright*
24. Sammy Kershaw *Love of My Life*
25. Lila McCann *I Wanna Fall in Love*



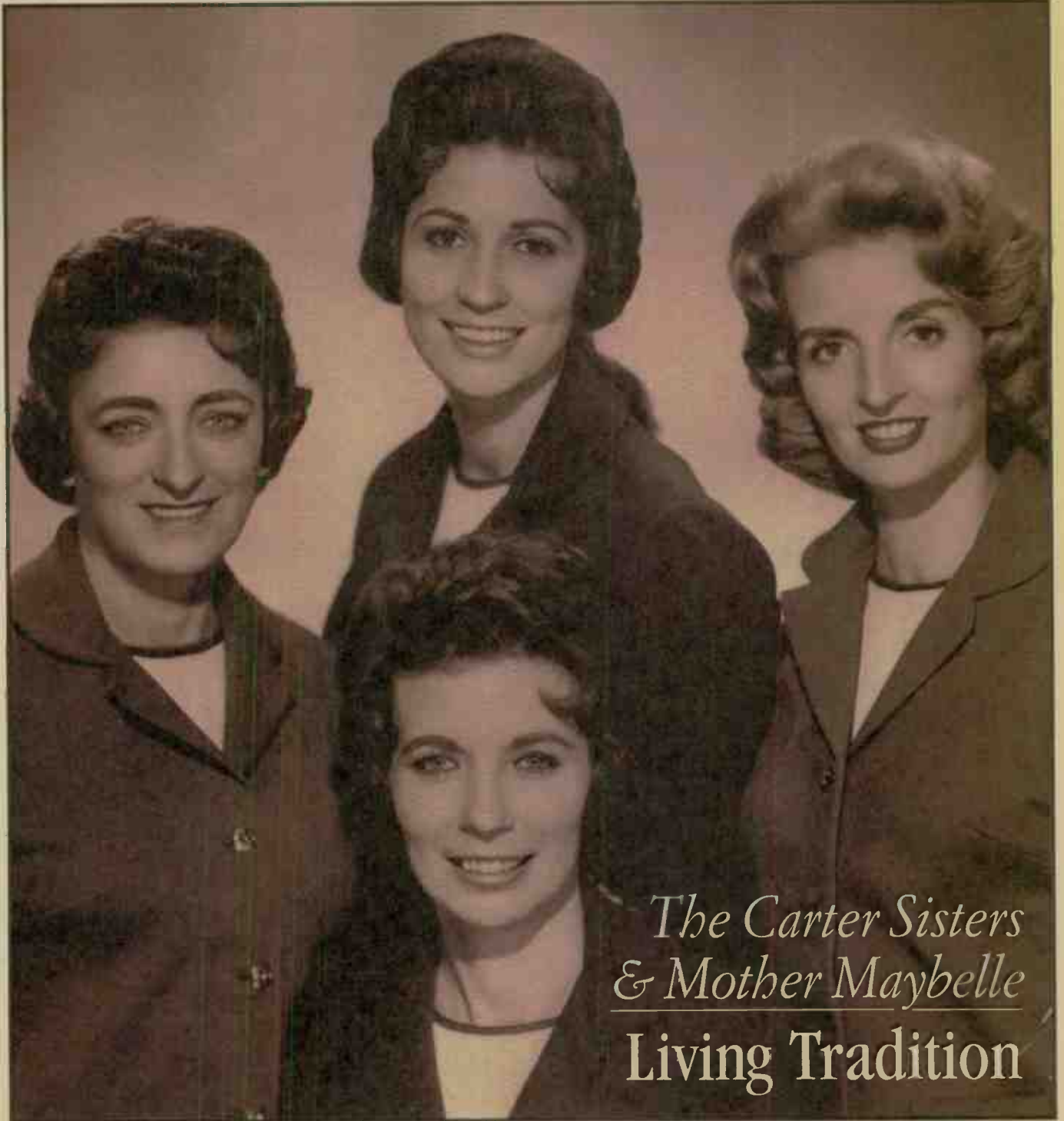
COUNTRYMUSIC



Issue Number 41
February 1998

THE JOURNAL

OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY FOR THE PRESERVATION OF OLD-TIME COUNTRY MUSIC



*The Carter Sisters
& Mother Maybelle*
Living Tradition

REVIEWS AND FEATURES



Cash and Emery taping the show, and Dennis with George Jones and Tom T. Hall



A Cash Trip

Longtime CMSA member and Cash fan Dennis Devine went to Nashville in October to see Johnny Cash tape a TV show with Ralph Emery. Then he heard about the Cash book signing.... Herewith his report

on what took place.

It all started when Ralph Emery Productions in Nashville called to ask if they could use my copy of the photo of Johnny Cash and Elvis taken in 1957 that was featured in the first combined issue of *The*

Journal and the CMSA Newsletter, October 1997, in Photo Album, as part of an upcoming Ralph Emery *On the Record* show with Johnny Cash on TNN. I said, "Sure they could." They were to interview John Wednesday, October 22nd at 10 A.M. about his new book, *Cash: An Autobiography* and his life. I called Cindy Sinclair, a producer with Ralph Emery Productions. She said she would hold me front row seats. That is all it took. I called my friend Loren Ganoce, in Des Moines, Iowa, and he got off work, and we got tickets to go to Nashville October 21st.

We arrived at 7 A.M. Wednesday morning, and went to the guard shack. We were let in around 8 A.M. and after a time, met Cindy Sinclair and went into Studio "B" and found our seats. Cindy talked to the 150 people who were there, and before long Ralph Emery came in and talked to us. Johnny Cash was in a doorway with his back to us and turned around and said his famous line, "Hello, I'm Johnny Cash." The crowd responded to it in a big way! We were a few feet from where he was, and for 90 minutes plus it was something special! I got to talk to Ralph Emery after the show. He asked me, "How was it?" I told him great!

Then we found out there was a book signing at Davis-Kidd Booksellers on Hillsboro Road at 7 P.M. Two Johnny Cash events in one day! How could you better that? We found the store like we knew where we were going. Loren is a good navigator. At 7 P.M. John started signing, and before you knew it, in walked George Jones, Tom T. Hall, Carol Lee of the Grand Ole Opry singers and Billy Ray Cyrus.

THE JOURNAL

and The Newsletter of the Country Music Society of America

Issue Number 41
February 1998

2 REVIEWS AND FEATURES

Cash tapes a show with Ralph Emery and signs books in Nashville. Members share facts about stars old and new, plus nitty gritty, plus latest Poli. Our series on special gravesites continues as well.

6 THE CARTER SISTERS & MOTHER MAYBELLE • LIVING TRADITION

Picking up where The Original Carter Family left off in the mid-1940's, Mother Maybelle and her three daughters continued the tradition of old-time picking and singing into the modern era. From the brand-new *Old Dominion Barn Dance* to WNOX to the Opry, The Carters maintained their distinctive sound. June's comedy lent its note, too.

By Charles Wolfe

8 PHOTO ALBUM

Family members and collectors share photos of Clayton McMichen, Roy Acuff and more. Skeets Yaney shows up for more, so does Asher Sizemore.

10 HANK LOCKLIN • BIG HITS WITH THE EARLY NASHVILLE SOUND

Hank Locklin had his first success in Texas, where he worked with Four Star Records. Then came Nashville, Chet Atkins and a whole new sound. His "Send Me the Pillow You Dream On" belonged to both eras. By Kevin Coffey

16 COLLECTIONS

Members help members find things they need: music, magazines, photos, memorabilia and more. Send your entry in today!

Cover photo: Southern Folklife Collection

George Jones was with Johnny Cash in 1960 in Omaha when I first met Johnny. I did not get a picture then, and have tried for 39 years, but it took a night when he was with Johnny Cash again. I got a picture with John too, the 37th year picture, and he signed three *Cash* books. You can't get enough of a good thing!

I am reading *USA Today*, October 30th, a big story about John revealing that he has Parkinson's. I am sad about it, but John says, "I refuse to give it some ground in my life." That sounds like the Johnny Cash I have been blessed to know since 1960. With the help of June, her prayers to the man up above, we will hear from "The Man in Black" for a long time. God Bless you, Johnny. Thanks for everything you have given us for so many years.

—Dennis Devine

For more of Dennis' photos, see the *People* section in *Country Music Magazine* this time.

Response to New Format

Let's look at what you are about to do. Take two great publications, bind them together, extend my subscription, and also keep the cost down. Sounds good. Now the question is, how do you keep *The Journal* from losing its own identity and mission? Since you are making changes, just a couple of thoughts. I would like to see one re-published story in each new issue of *The Journal*. I also would like to see expanded information on future releases from our old-time favorites. Keep up the good work, and please keep it country.

Steve Olen
Palm Bay, Florida

Down Homer Details

Received the April 1997 *Journal* last week. Another great issue as usual. I think the merger of the two publications will be great! Responding to the query about the "fourth performer" in the picture of The Down Homers (Photo Album, page 33, April issue)....you knew I would!

That photograph is one of about 30 that we have on The Down Homers, both group and individual shots of the 19 or so performers who were in this group during its lifetime, 1935-62. The fourth performer in the shot is a pasted-in Shorty Cook, in comic attire. A close examination of this portion of the picture shows that the background is hand-drawn (note that piano legs don't match, etc.).

According to our records, Ginger Shannon was in the group from 1935 until 1942, but that's not to say she never appeared with them at other times. The Down Homers appeared at the Lone Star Ranch in Reeds Ferry, New Hampshire, in 1941. They may have done this photograph as a publicity shot for the local radio station, promoting their appearance at the Ranch.



Brother Wayne, Bill Haley, Bob Mason and Lloyd Cornell in 1947 or '48.

Some interesting yodelers were in the group over the years, including world champion yodeler Kenny Roberts. He was with them while at WOWO in Fort Wayne, Indiana, and made their first records with them, Vogue Picture Discs, in 1946. He did not make the move to New England with them in 1947 as he had his own solo radio/TV career going in the Midwest. Also, Yodelin' Bill Haley, who would later have his own Western groups before inventing rock 'n' roll with his band, The Comets, was a member of

The Down Homers. He came with them to WTIC in Hartford.

The enclosed photo from our collection shows Bill Haley with his first band, The Range Drifters, at WKNE, Keene New Hampshire, in 1947 or early 1948. Bob Mason and Lloyd Cornell were former Down Homers with Haley. Does anyone know Brother Wayne's first name?

Gordy Brown
New England Country Music
Historical Society
Watertown, Massachusetts

A Word to the Wise

When I signed as a charter member of the Academy, the reason was to get *The Journal* magazine, *The Journal* being devoted to the type of entertainers that interest me! I am not at all interested in the newer generation of country music. In my view it closely resembles warmed over rock, and not good rock at that!

If it is my only choice to have to take *Country Music Magazine* and look at pictures of Garth Brooks' surly face to get *The Journal*, then I will allow my subscription to *The Journal* to run out. I have enjoyed *The Journal* very much, and would like to see stories about people like String Bean and others continue.

My only way of showing my dislike for the turn country music has taken is to boycott music and magazines like *Country Music Magazine*. *The Journal* was right down my track.

Tom Frost
Middleville, Michigan
(Continued on page 14)



Harold Clark's gravesite, and a clipping from 1977 showing him with a duet partner named Rosie Schweighauser.

Remembering Harold Clark

Thank you for publishing the pictures and articles on Skeets Yaney and Austin Wood in previous issues of *The Journal*. I'm enclosing some information on the late Harold Clark, who wrote the big band hit, "Give Me Five Minutes More." Although fame escaped him, he was successful in many ways. His old records are scattered around. I knew him all of my life, and



have seen many of his paintings, which he was well known for. I took the picture of his headstone last summer at the Sherrill Cemetery near Licking, Missouri.

Lee Roy Maxey
St. Louis, Missouri



THE CARTER SISTERS & MOTHER MAYBELLE

By Charles Wolfe

The Carter Sisters and Mother Maybelle carried on a tradition that first flourished with The Original Carter Family.

It was the winter of 1942-43, and The Original Carter Family was making its last stand over radio station WBT in Charlotte, North Carolina. Since 1927, when they made their first recordings at the famous Bristol sessions, A.P. and Sara Carter, along with their younger cousin Maybelle, had dominated the new field of country harmony singing. They had recorded their classic hits like "Wildwood Flower," "I'm Thinking Tonight of My Blue Eyes," "Keep on the Sunny Side" and "Gold Watch and Chain" for every major record label, and since 1938 had spread their music all around the nation over the powerful "border radio" stations along the Rio Grande. But times were changing; Sara Carter had divorced A.P., remarried, and moved to California. Maybelle had married at 16 to A.P.'s brother, Ezra (Eck) Carter, and had started her family: three daughters named Helen, Anita and June. The big border stations had closed down, and the record business, beset by shellac shortages from the war, was a shadow of its former self. Small wonder that when a company called Drug Trade Products offered A.P. a 20-week contract to work the winter at WBT, he accepted. WBT was a 50,000-watt station with a huge coverage and a good cast of other musicians, and the money was too good to pass up. For the last time, the original Carters gathered together again, moving into the Roosevelt Hotel on South Tryon Street in Charlotte because of the housing shortage.

Maybelle Carter was 45 that year; she had blossomed from the shy, small, dark-eyed guitar player into a seasoned and confident musician and songwriter, and had even contributed several original songs to the last Carter Family Victor ses-

sion the year before. Her husband Ezra had recently taken early retirement from his job on the railroad (due to low blood pressure) and was interested in seeing Maybelle form her own group with her girls. By now the two oldest, Helen and June, were in high school, and Anita, the baby, was barely 11. All three had gained entertainment experience when their mother had brought them onto the border radio shows in 1939. Helen sang and played the guitar, June the autoharp, and even little Anita would sing and play guitar. The old radio transcriptions from XET showed the kids doing their own specialties on the show—June strumming the autoharp and singing "Engine 143," all of them together doing "Give Me the Roses While I Live" and "Somewhere a-Working for My Lord." The Carter Sisters, as they were starting to be called, had decided they wanted to try for a career as they finished school, and Maybelle was agreeable. All this took on a new excitement when *Life Magazine* sent down a photographer to document the family's music at Charlotte; for a time, it looked like a cover story and a chance for The Original Carter Family to get the national publicity it had been needing. But after doing a long series of photos, both in Charlotte and back home in Poor Valley, the magazine decided war news was more pressing, and the project was scrapped. The last hope of keeping the original group together had vanished. Thus when the contract at Charlotte expired, A.P. decided to return to Virginia, while Sara went back to the West Coast with her new husband. "It really wasn't all Dad's decision," recalls A.P. and Sara's son, Joe. "Maybelle had been wanting to strike out with the girls for some

time. When she got that offer to go up to Richmond and be on the radio, they thought it was a good deal."

Maybelle's group returned to Maces Spring that spring for some R&R, and then in June 1943 headed for Richmond. At first, they did a commercially sponsored program for the Nolde Brothers Bakery over WRNL as "The Carter Sisters." Then, in September 1946, the group was asked by WRVA's leading star, Sunshine Sue, to become members of a new show that was starting up, to be called *The Old Dominion Barn Dance*. Sunshine Sue Workman was a native of Iowa, and had won a solid reputation appearing on various Midwest programs through the 1930's. She had arrived at WRVA in January 1940, and was a natural choice to be host of the new barn dance program; in doing so, she became the first woman emcee of any major barn dance show. Her music featured her own accordion and warm, soft voice doing songs like "You Are My Sunshine." Like Maybelle, she was juggling being a wife and mother with being a radio star; she also, by the late 1940's, was planning the *Barn Dance* shows and organizing touring groups.

By March 1947 the new barn dance was doing daily shows from a local theater from 3 P.M. to 4 P.M.; soon, though, it moved to Saturday nights, where WRVA's 50,000 watts of power sent it up and down the East Coast. In addition to The Carter Sisters, who were now getting headline billing, the early cast included Sunshine Sue's husband, John Workman, who with his brother headed up the staff band, The Rangers; Joe and Rose Lee Maphis (with the fine guitarist being billed as "Crazy Joe"); the veteran North Carolina band, The Tobacco Tags; and local favorites like



Early 1940's: Jane, Sara, Anita, Maybelle and Helen. Life Magazine's 1940 photos of The Carter Family were tabled till 1993.

last of the vaudeville days, and the yearning to keep on singing or travelling just a little further never left." And in spite of their growing popularity, the sisters continued to hear the border radio transcriptions of the original family over many of the stations—proof, it seemed, the old Carter sound was not yet as passe as some thought it was. By now Helen had learned to play the accordion (a la Sunshine Sue), and Anita was standing on a box and play-

singer Benny Kissinger, champion fiddler Curley Collins, and the remarkable steel guitar innovator, Slim Idaho.

By 1950, the cast had grown to 100, and was including major national figures like Chick Stripling, Grandpa and Ramona Jones, Toby Stroud and Jackie Phelps. The station's general manager John Tansy, worked closely with Sunshine Sue to make the *Old Dominion Barn Dance* a major player in country radio. At the end of its first year, it was filling its 1,400-seat theater two times every Saturday night, and by December 1947 it could brag it had played to 100,000 "paid admissions." The Carters realized they were riding a winner.

As always, success on radio also meant a bruising round of weeknight concerts in schoolhouses and small theaters. Eck Carter did a lot of driving in his Frazier, and on the way there was time to rehearse new songs. June Carter recalls: "The back seat became a place where we learned to sing our parts. Helen always on key. Anita on key, and a good steady glare to remind me that I was a little sharp or flat... Travelling in the early days became a world of cheap gas stations, hamburgers, tourist homes, and old hotels with stairs to climb. We worked the Kemp Time circuit, the

ing the bass fiddle.

The early days at Richmond were especially hard on June. Helen had already graduated from the high school back in Holtons, but June was just coming up on her senior year, and she would be spending it in a large Richmond school called John Marshall High School. She was self-conscious about her accent (in which a touch of Texas drawl had been added to her Poor Valley dialect), her looks, and the way in which she would be hoofing across some theater stage at night instead of doing homework. She remembers: "I took a good look at myself. My hair went just where it wanted to go, and I was singing those hillbilly songs on that radio station every day and somewhere on a stage every night. I just didn't have the east Virginia 'couth' those girls had." In response to her problems of singing on pitch, and her natural volubility, she began to turn to comedy. "I had created a crazy country character named Aunt Polly Carter, who would do anything for a laugh. She wore a flat hat and pointed shoes and did all kinds of old vaudeville bits." She also sometimes wore elaborate bloomers, since in her dance steps her feet were often above her head. And for a time, part of the act had her swinging by a rope out over the audience. But she managed to have a great senior year at her new school—she learned to read "round notes" and to sing in the girls' choir, and to make new and



Low Everett Collection



In 1950, they joined the Grand Ole Opry with Chet Atkins. On stage a year later, with June cutting up as usual. Inset: Martba White Flour souvenir card features the group.



Southern Folklife Collection

lasting friends. But in 1946, when it was all over, she cried because there was no way she could follow her friends off to college.

The Carter Sisters spent five good years in Richmond, and by the time they left, the girls had all become seasoned professionals, and the group was no longer being confused with The Original Carter Family: it had an identity, and a sound, of its own. In 1948, they took a new job over WNOX in Knoxville, Tennessee, where they played on the evening show, *The Tennessee Barn Dance*, and the daily show, *The Mid-Day Merry-Go-Round*.

Though the former dated from 1941, and the latter from the 1930's, the station was hitting its stride in the late 40's, and was being thought of as a AAA farm club for the national shows like the Opry. Regulars included Archie Campbell, Homer and Jethro, The Bailey Brothers, Wally Fowler and The Oak Ridge Quartet, Carl Smith, Pappy "Gube" Beaver, The Carlisles, The Louvin Brothers, Cowboy Copas and such strange novelty acts as Little Moses, the Human Lodestone. One of those who was amazed at the popularity of The Carters was a young guitar player named Chet Atkins: "They were an instant success. Crowds flocked to the auditorium every day to see them; the crowds were so heavy at the 'Barn Dance' on Saturday night that you had to come early even to get in." He was thus surprised and pleased when Eck came to him one day and offered him a job travelling with the group. "We'll cut you in for one-sixth of what we make," he said. "That's equal shares for each of us."

Soon Atkins was crowding into the back seat of Eck's Frazier as they headed out after the Saturday Knoxville show to play in one of the big music parks in Pennsylvania. During all of this time, The Carter Sisters and Mother Maybelle, for all of their success in radio, had not recorded on their own. This was finally remedied on February 2, 1949, when the entire ensemble travelled to Atlanta to record a double session for RCA Victor. They produced eight sides; the first two issued were "The Kneeling Drunkard's Plea," which was credited to them, and "My Darling's Home Again," which they had gotten from Johnnie and Jack. More popular were "Why Do You Weep, Dear Willow," from Lynn Davis and Molly O'Day, and "Someone's Last Day." June added a couple of novelties, "Root Hog or Die" and "The Baldheaded End of the Broom." The sales were above average—some of them were among the very first RCA sides to be issued on the new 45 rpm "doughnut" records—and the band was quickly scheduled for another session later that year. In the meantime, on May 17, 1949, June lent her comedy talents to the first RCA session by Homer and Jethro. In New York City, they did a take-off on the pop song, "Baby, It's Cold Outside." It got onto the charts, established Homer and Jethro as comic "song butchers," and established 19-year-old June as a comedienne in her own right.



Photos: Country Music Foundation Collection



Charles Wolfe Collection

Maybelle, Anita, June and Helen in the 60's, once again The Carter Family. Maybelle, June, Anita and Helen in mid-60's. Their last album, 1976.

June 1949 saw the troupe once again uprooted, this time headed for KWTO in Springfield, Missouri. The small towns around southern Missouri and northern Arkansas offered new audiences for personal appearances, and the Radiozark company was making the station into a center for transcribed shows. Helen recalls: "We did two or three radio shows a

day, worked every night, and got up in the morning and started all over again."

Chet Atkins was still with them, though the girls were increasingly concerned about his debilitating asthma attacks. June remembers: "Chester and I set up the public address system, and he'd have those asthma attacks and I'd have to lug the stuff in." But two things of lasting interest happened in the year they stayed in Springfield: they cut a series of 39 15-minute transcriptions which featured a good cross-section of their repertoire, as well as some fine Atkins solos. (Copies of these have survived, and deserve reissue.) And Helen, the oldest of the girls, got married, in March 1950, to a young man named Glenn Jones.

In June 1950 the group, with Atkins, got an offer to join the Opry and moved to Nashville. Things got complicated in the next few years, as the other two girls got married as well. Anita chose a young, hot fiddle player named Dale Potter, while June said yes to a young singer she had met in Knoxville who had just joined the Opry, Carl Smith. While the three sisters still got together with their mother for record sessions and radio shows, each began to be interested in a solo career. June created a band called The Bashful Rascals and made her first solo try on RCA

(Continued on page 15)



Len Lavender

TV stars in 1970: taping a Cash show for ABC-TV at the Ryman Auditorium.



To my good old time
Papa Mr. McMichen
Love
J. Lynn

Clayton McMichen
about 1925, from his
daughter, Juanita
McMichen Lynch's
collection. McMichen
played all these
instruments.

PHOTO ALBUM

Family members and one collector share photos from the 1930's and 1940's. Academy members and Society members have asked about these stars.



Also from Juanita McMichen Lynch, Asber and Little Jimmy Sizemore at WCKY, Covington, Kentucky. Juanita also sent in a Sizemore songbook.



From Bertie Lee Woods: her uncle Skeets Yaney (on right) and his longtime partner Frankie Taylor at KMOX in the 30's. Bertie sent in her whole collection to share. Below, Skeets with Roy Acuff at Acuff's Dunbar Cafe in the 40's.



Hugh Cross at Indianapolis station WIBC in the 30's, from Juanita Lynch. Cross and Clayton McMichen worked together at times.



From Murfreesboro, Tennessee collector Fred Goodwin comes this movie still from the 1940 film, Grand Ole Opry. Performers are: Harty and Abner Weaver, Jess Easterday, possibly Joe Zinkan, Roy Acuff, Rachel Veach, Bashful Brother Oswald (Pete Kirby), Dorris Macon (Uncle Dave's son) and the Solemn Old Judge, George D. Hay, with his steamboat whistle.



To Hank
The Best
Guitar man
ever played

LY'S

DA

DAILY'S

DAILY'S

Hank

THE TEXAS TENOR

ALBUM OF
HYMNS

RODEO TIME

ALBUM OF
HYMNS

ALBUM OF
HYMNS

HILLTOP

CROSHY

XSZT

HANK LOCKLIN

By Kevin Coffey



From a strong regional base and regional hits on the Four Star independent label, Locklin moved to mainstream success with one of the first giant hits of the Nashville Sound.

A longtime member of the Grand Ole Opry and a man almost as well known for his penchant for songs associated with Ireland and the Irish as he is for his major crossover hits, "Send Me the Pillow You Dream On" and "Please Help Me I'm Falling," Hank Locklin has been playing professionally for almost six decades.

For most of his first decade as a performer, Locklin viewed music merely as a sideline, and for several years after he entered music full time, he worked primarily as a lead guitarist. But from the moment he began singing in earnest, his distinctive, appealing voice and sincere delivery ensured his wide and enduring popularity.

Locklin's career has been marked by bad luck—the untimely deaths of key backers, for example—and a few decisions that proved unfortunate in retrospect. "I'd've had a real good career if I could have just gotten paid for a lot of stuff," he told researcher Otto Kitsinger in 1995, adding, "I lost people that were going to help [me]. I've thought a lot about it over the years. Why would my luck run like that?"

Regardless, Locklin enjoyed a period of major stardom with "Send Me the Pillow You Dream On" in 1957 and "Please Help Me I'm Falling" in 1960 and remained very popular long after; he was also a significant regional star for almost a decade before his big hits, working out of Houston and recording for Four Star, one of the largest of the independent labels of the period. Today, he views his early association with Four Star with much ambivalence; his tenure there established him as a viable recording star, but the notoriously creative bookkeeping of the label's head, Bill McCall, saw Locklin apparently receiv-

ing only a fraction of the money his sales dictated. In addition, the label lacked the solid national distribution of a major label, limiting Locklin's potential audience for a number of years.

Frustration at "what might have been" aside, Hank Locklin has had a good career and then some. He was born Lawrence Hankins Locklin in McLellan, Florida, on February 15, 1918. His father Lawrence was a railroad worker, his mother Hattie played some piano, and Locklin learned some guitar by age nine, his interest piqued during his convalescence following an accident that saw his leg crushed under the tire of a school bus. He had made tentative appearances on WCOA in Pensacola and WLW in New Orleans by the time he married Willa Jean Murphy in 1938, but had not pursued music in earnest. Locklin held jobs in a creosote plant and as a ribbon mill worker, moving to Brewton, Alabama, and starting a family. He served briefly during World War II (he was discharged due to lingering effects of the old school bus accident), but spent much of the duration of the war in the shipyards at Mobile, where he began working with local bands. Primarily a guitarist, Locklin sang occasionally in a style inspired chiefly by Ernest Tubb, and it was an important moment when he heeded the advice of accordionist Pee Wee Moultrie, who told Locklin that he had "a unique voice. I told him he ought to do something in his own style."

With the war's end, Locklin began to pursue music as a full-time career. He joined the band of singer Jimmy Swan as a lead guitarist, working a Gulf Coast circuit out of WDLP in Panama City during 1945-46. From there he followed his

friend, steel guitarist Jack Featherstone, to Hot Springs, Arkansas, where they joined Joe Avants and The Four Leaf Clover Boys at KTHT, a band that also included the Holmes twins, Clent and Clyde. The band moved shortly to Shreveport, where all but Locklin and Clent Holmes eventually dropped out. Locklin and Holmes, joined by two Shreveport high schoolers, steel guitarist Felton Pruett and fiddler Dobber Johnson, began backing local singer Harmie Smith on his KWKH radio show and on show dates. Adding bassist Tiny Smith, the group, dubbed The Rocky Mountain Playboys, began playing dances on off-nights, with Locklin increasingly featured as vocalist and frontman. Sometime during 1947, at the instigation of Tillman Franks, the Shreveport bassist-promoter who was working at the time with Claude King and Buddy Attaway at KLEE in Houston, the group relocated to Houston, Texas. As Hank Locklin and The Rocky Mountain Playboys (or sometimes just Rocky Mountain Boys), the group began broadcasting regularly on KLEE and playing shows and dances.

Locklin fell under the wing of a local car dealer-cum-songwriter Elmer Laird. A promising partnership was cut short by Laird's murder by an irate customer in May 1948. Although previous accounts have indicated that Locklin's first recordings were made shortly after Laird's death, there is some evidence that his single on Houston's Gold Star label, Laird's "Rio Grande Waltz" b/w Locklin's own "You've Been Talking in Your Sleep," was actually recorded as early as September of 1947. Regardless, it was a strong debut and the only recording to feature the original Rocky Mountain Playboys (Locklin, Clent

Holmes, Dobber Johnson, Felton Pruett and Tiny Smith), as well as the only to feature Locklin's electric take-off guitar work. (Elmer Laird enjoyed a post-humous songwriting hit with "Poison Love" a few years later.)

Following Elmer Laird's death, The Rocky Mountain Playboys did not fare very well in highly competitive Houston, despite the sponsorship of Laird's brother, Elmo. By the end of 1948, the group had disbanded, and Locklin, now with three children to support, headed to Fort Worth-Dallas.

In Dallas, Locklin fell in with comedian-musician Bill Callahan, of Callahan Brothers fame. Augmented by a few other musicians, he and Callahan worked the area as The Blue Ridge Mountain Folks for a few months before Locklin returned to Houston, where he began regular radio broadcasts under the sponsorship of car dealer Charlie English, a former associate of Elmer Laird's. (Two singles from his Dallas days were issued illegally by the Paris, Texas-based Royalty label following Locklin's initial success on Four Star a few months later; Four Star sued and the singles were withdrawn.) His new radio show was immediately popular, and Locklin began frequenting area clubs, sitting in with local groups. Under the advice of singer Jerry Jericho, he also went to see local record distributor and retail shop owner, Harold Daily, about possibly getting on record. Daily, whom Locklin would dub "Pappy" and who became Locklin's manager for a time, had a new arrangement with Bill McCall of the California-based Four Star label to record area talent for Four Star. The arrangement would prove far more beneficial to McCall



Gladys Lassiter Collection

Hank in his "Knocking at Your Door" days at California-based Four Star Records.

than it would to Daily or any of the acts he brought to Four Star, but, to an essentially local singer like Locklin, getting on a large independent like Four Star was exciting in itself, and, at least at first, the naive Locklin was concerned less with record and song royalties than he was with just having records out. He signed to the label in the spring of 1949 on the strength of his first release, "The Same Sweet Girl," which became a sizeable regional hit.

Locklin followed with other hits, one his cover of Harmie Smith's "Knocking at Your Door," which became his theme song, and, more important, the original version of his own "Send Me the Pillow You Dream On," another big regional hit during 1949-1950. His earliest releases on

the Four Star label were Southeastern-flavored country tunes, but subsequent titles began to reflect the more dance-oriented environment of the Southwest—not Western swing, but certainly influenced by it and by local honky tonk sounds. In the late summer of 1949, Locklin formed a new version of The Rocky Mountain Playboys for dances and personal appearances. The group included Doug Myers, fiddle; Bill Freeman, steel guitar; Hamp Stephens, lead guitar; Jimmy Snow, rhythm guitar; and Leon Crawford, bass. Snow put together the group and fronted it when Locklin was off-stage. The band worked and recorded with Locklin through mid-1950 and would be his last permanent band. The group disbanded following Locklin's ill-advised decision to travel as a campaign band for a Texas gubernatorial candidate named Wellington Abbey. Afterwards Locklin began appearing as a single, working with various house bands. The arrangement allowed him to travel more easily and less expensively behind hit records and was a growing trend among singers at the time.

In the meantime, regional hits continued: "You Burned a Hole in My Heart," followed by "Pinball Millionaire." "Paper Face," cut at the same 1950 session that produced "Pinball Millionaire," was the first of many songs from the pen of Fort Worth-based songwriter Lawton Williams that Locklin would record over the years, and the association would result in some of Locklin's most important sides. As Locklin's popularity grew, he attracted the interest of larger labels, but a complicated Four Star contract kept the admittedly still somewhat naive Locklin tied down.

From the early 50's, Locklin began appearing in package shows with other artists like Moon Mullican and Jerry Jericho; many of these were booked by the Beau-

Bill Freeman Collection



Gladys Lassiter Collection

Rocky Mountain Playboys in 1949-50 included Hamp Stephens, Hank Locklin, Jimmy Snow, Bill Freeman, Doug Myers and Leon Crawford. Inset: Locklin, Ken Lasater and Cecil Brower at Rosa's Club in Dallas in the mid-1950's.

mont-based singer-disc jockey-club owner, Boyd Whitney; as Lefty Frizzell had been a couple of years earlier, Locklin was introduced through Whitney to Beaumont club owner-talent manager Jack Starnes, who was soon to start Starday Records with Pappy Daily with the money he got from Frizzell's contract buyout. Starnes became Locklin's manager for a short time, as well, around 1953—the same year Locklin recorded the song that would finally lift him out of regional-star status and would eventually propel him not only onto a major label, but also to the Grand Ole Opry. Joining forces with Starnes was unusual; for most of his career, Locklin went without managerial guidance, for better or worse.

The song he recorded was "Let Me Be the One," a Four Star tune brought to Locklin by Bill McCall. The record was released on Four Star, though by this time McCall had entered into a deal with major label Decca to record and release some of his more popular Four Star acts, like Locklin and T. Texas Tyler, on the larger label. McCall kept "Let Me Be the One" for Four Star, something Locklin feels kept it from being an even bigger hit than it was. "If McCall would've let Decca have the record, it would have been a giant," he says, adding, however, that with Four Star, "I couldn't get any money out of it no way."

Still, the song had impact and sent Locklin touring far wider and far more successfully than he had previously—opening his eyes to how little money he had really been making on the Texas dance hall circuit compared to what nationally touring single acts were making (when he told tourmate Porter Wagoner how much money he had made the previous year, Wagoner was incredulous: "I made that the first month!" he told Locklin). Beginning in 1952, Locklin also began recording in Nashville rather than Houston, during 1953-54 using the late Hank Williams' Drifting Cowboys augmented by Chet Atkins on guitar and his new producer, Owen Bradley, on piano. His sound became more polished, though not more distinct—the key to Hank Locklin's sound was always Hank Locklin's voice and delivery, anyway.

No further hits came Locklin's way through the end of his Four Star-Decca tenure, but "Let Me Be the One" proved a big enough song to land him a contract with RCA-Victor in 1955. He initially fell under the wing of RCA A&R head Steve Sholes, who remained an important force in Locklin's career until his death in 1968. But it was under the astute production of Chet Atkins that Locklin finally reached major star-



Locklin, Chet Atkins and Floyd Cramer in the RCA studio in 1963. Atkins had helped Locklin style his sound. "Please Help Me I'm Falling" was one result.



Courtesy Bear Family Records

dom in the late 1950's. His first two years with RCA yielded only minor chart action, but in 1957, Locklin followed Bobby Helms' huge success with Lawton Williams' "Fraulein" by recording Williams' "Geisha Girl," which lingered high and long on the country charts and made the pop chart as well. At the same recording session, Locklin rewaxed his old hit, "Send Me the Pillow You Dream On," which became a far bigger hit the second time around. The recording reflected, as others have pointed out, the stylistic changes in country music since Locklin recorded the original in 1949. The 1957 version exemplified the burgeoning Nashville Sound, with no fiddle or steel guitar anywhere to be heard: "Send Me the Pillow You Dream On" of 1957 was essentially a pop recording.

Locklin left Texas for good that same year, relocating to Florida and ending a semi-regular status with KRLD's *Big D Jamboree* which had begun in 1954. The momentum built by "Geisha Girl" and "Send Me the Pillow" waned, however. He recorded an interesting concept album, *Foreign Love*, but had no further hits until his massive, Grammy-nominated crossover success, "Please Help Me I'm Falling," in 1960. The song pushed Locklin into a new realm, including overseas touring. Riding the tide, he joined the Opry as well, but, perhaps surprisingly, failed to follow with anything that remotely approached the success of "Please Help Me."

His career hardly went into eclipse, however; Locklin remained a very popular performer and prolific recording artist. His 1964 tribute album to Hank Williams earned him a second Grammy nomination, and his album of Irish songs, recorded in 1963, proved very popular ("Hank was blessed," Otto Kitzinger has written, "with the genetic background and the fine tenor voice required to do a great job on Irish songs.").

Locklin's first marriage ended in divorce in 1969, but a subsequent marriage to Anita Crooks brought a final child, Hank Adam, in 1972. Locklin has continued to tour and record and remains a popular Opry performer at this writing. He has also long since become affectionately known as "The Mayor of McLellan," a sobriquet reportedly hung on him by Ralph Emery, referring to Hank's old home town. Today, he and Anita live in Brewton, Alabama. As of 1996, Locklin often called on old cohorts like Clent Holmes and Pee Wee Moultrie—the man who had first suggested Locklin find his own style—for musical support for Alabama-Florida area gigs, bringing his career, to a certain extent, full circle. ◀



Backstage at the Opry in 1963 with Walter Cronkite of CBS and Donna Douglas of Beverly Hillbillies fame.



Ronnie Williams with Mother Maybelle's guitar in front of the old Ryman in 1993. Helen Carter with Ronnie Williams at a Fredericksburg concert in 1996.



REVIEWS AND FEATURES

(Continued from page 3)

Charles Wolfe and The Carters

Contributing Editor Charles Wolfe's research into the history of The Carter Family led him to spend several days at the old Carter Fold in Maces Spring, Virginia, on two occasions recently. Charles is working on a book on The Original Carter Family to be published in a year or so. All three original Carters lived in Maces Spring, in houses still occupied by their relatives today, and it was there that A.P. built a country store to run after he retired from music. Today the store is a Carter Family Museum, and next door is "the fold" itself—a wonderful old-time music barn where Joe and Janette, the children of A.P. and Sara, hold concerts every Saturday night. (For information on who's playing, call 540-386-9480.) The Nashville division of The Carters—June, Anita, Helen—still maintain their vital interest in the music, though health problems have prevented Helen and Anita from performing as much as they would like.

The photo of the Eck and Maybelle Carter homeplace in Charles' article on The Carter Sisters & Mother Maybelle was taken by Charles on one of these recent visits.

Carter Fan Keeps Up

Old-time music fan Ronnie Williams of Spotsylvania, Virginia, has kept up with The Carter Sisters and Mother Maybelle over the years, including visiting with them in Nashville in recent months. He reports that the family members and spouses are staying close, visiting one another and keeping vigil.

Ronnie has an extensive collection of photos of The Carter Sisters and Mother Maybelle. Watch for gems from his collection in next issue's Photo Album.

Ronnie owns a guitar similar to Mother Maybelle's Gibson L-5. He bought his from Gruhn Guitars in Nashville in 1984. Helen spotted it for him, and he purchased it right away. A Gibson L-5, made in 1929, it differs from Mother Maybelle's (now in the

Country Music Hall of Fame) in that the inlay in the neck is in block shapes. On Mother Maybelle's, the inlays are diamond-shaped and smaller. Ronnie reports that June loves to play his guitar when she comes to Virginia. It appears in the photo of Helen, June and Anita on page 15.

More About Slim Clark

Just finished reading *The Journal* Issue Number 37, February 1997, and, as usual, first rate. I especially enjoyed the letter and information about Olivio Santoro. I remember him well. There was also a girl

group called The Moylen Sisters that was also featured on that Philadelphia radio program.

The other reason for this letter is to answer a question concerning Yodeling Slim Clark (Ted Fiskevold's letter, page 5). He states that he doesn't have any Slim Clark records, but then mentions a 10-inch LP, *Western Songs* (Pontiac 508), featuring an unbilled singer. Well, that singer is none other than Slim Clark. He was usually billed as either "Cowboy Slim" or "Yodeling Tex Carter" on those budget labels, which were taken from Continental masters. Slim's style was not Jimmie Rodgers, but that of his idol, Wilf "Montana Slim" Carter.

**Martin R. Mettce
Lutherville, Maryland**

Imagining The Journal

The Legends Calendar is no more. But this story about trying to get last year's version was too good to let go by.

I received my 1997 *Journal* calendar early in April of 1997. It is a fine calendar, with pictures of performers not seen before.

Promptness is not one of *The Journal's* selling points. I can wait for orders, calendar, etc., but it's wondering if it got lost or not during these two-three month intervals. As I've mentioned before, I think *The Journal* is the greatest of mags. I'm still waiting for my April issue of *The Journal*, by the way. I've gotten my May/June issue of *Country Music Magazine*—a week or two ago.

A couple of suggestions: Why don't you have a card or form in *The Journal* to enroll friends with? And how about an index in some issue listing all the performers covered previously?

I can almost picture *The Journal's* office in my mind based on my experiences with you. Since *The Journal* is about old-time stars from the 1900's through the 20's and 30's etc., your office has one large wooden desk with a 60-watt bulb hanging from the ceiling with (one) person handling all correspondence and orders. Down in the basement is a 1920's manual printing press operated by my 75-year-old Jake, turning out *The Journal* and calendars.

I do hope *The Journal* survives for a long time to come, although these late lapses concern me of its stability.

**Art Johnson
Bremerton, Washington**

OCTOBER 1997 POLL

George Strait	"Carrying Your Love With Me"
George Strait	<i>Carrying Your Love With Me</i>

An even more unprecedented eight in a row for George Strait, as he tops your album and single picks yet again. This man can do no wrong with CMSA/Academy members (and with lots of other fans as well). First time at Number One for the single, "Carrying Your Love With Me," and the second time for his latest album of the same title. Lee Ann Womack's "The Fool" is in second place, Pam Tillis' "All the Good Ones Are Gone" in third, McGraw/Hill fourth with "It's Your Love," and Alan Jackson fifth with "There Goes."

Rounding out album picks, second place goes to Alan Jackson's *Everything I Love*. Ole Alan's in third as well with his *Greatest Hits Collection*. LeAnn Rimes returns to the Poll in fourth with *Blue*, and that other Lee Ann (spelled differently), Ms. Womack, comes back in fifth with her self-titled debut.

The Nitty Gritty

A few housekeeping details about *The Journal* CMSA Newsletter's most recent combined issues.

*Kevin Coffey writes to add about Tune Wranglers (December 1997): The band was originally formed by Buster Coward and Tom Dickey, rather than Coward alone.

*The photo of Red Ingle and Jo Stafford in *Off the Record* (December 1997) is from Don Ingle's collection, not Dave Samuelson's as noted.



Hope Williams

autoharp after moving to Nashville.) June, for her part, took her solo career in a different direction: she moved to New York to studying acting with Elia Kazan, and eventually landed acting roles in TV shows like *Gunsmoke* and *Jim Bowie*. By 1963, after a second marriage to Rip Nix, she joined Johnny Cash's show.

Throughout the 1950's, labels like Columbia and RCA kept cutting singles on The Carter Sisters and Mother Maybelle as a group, and as individuals. When A.P. Carter died in 1960, Maybelle felt comfortable in taking the name "The Carter Family" for her organization, and in 1962 used it on the cover of their first real LP, *The Carter Family Album* on Mercury. Many of these early LP's were filled with versions of old Carter songs from the 20's and 30's, though a superb 1963 solo album by Anita contained a bevy of new songs done by modern Nashville tunesmiths—including the first recording of "Ring of Fire." In 1963, The Carter Family as a group joined Johnny Cash's successful road show, and celebrated the event by cutting their first Columbia record, "Keep on the Sunny Side" (with Johnny Cash). June and Johnny married in 1968.

Albums of all sorts now began to flow during the late 60's and 70's, many with the full family, some featuring Maybelle, some featuring one of the girls, some featuring other groups like Flatt and Scruggs and The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band. By 1974, yet a third generations of Carters was making its mark, with the Columbia LP, *Three Generations*. June's daughter, Carlene, started a solo career in 1978, achieving great success in recent years. Maybelle herself began struggling with arthritis and a type of Parkinson's disease, and by the mid-1970's her legendary energy was beginning to run down. There was time for one last album, *Country's First Family*, cut at the House of Cash studio in February 1976; it was an engaging mix of old Carter songs and new Nashville ones. Maybelle died October 28, 1978, knowing that there were new generations of Carters to carry on the work. ■

The sisters—Anita, June and Helen—at a concert in 1992. The guitar, a 1929 Gibson L-5, similar to Mother Maybelle's, belongs to a fan. June plays it when she can.

THE CARTER SISTERS

(Continued from page 9)

in August 1950 with a single called "Bashful Rascal." At the same session, Anita tried her first solo with a song called "Somebody's Crying." Helen tried her hand with the new independent label, Tennessee, cutting a duet with Opry announcer Grant Turner ("Heaven's Decision"), another one with Don Davis ("Sparrow in the Treetop"), and a couple of solo efforts (including "Fiddling Around"). In February 1952, all of them signed with Columbia, where they would largely remain for the next two decades.

In 1951 Anita also began working as a duet partner to RCA's hottest current star, Hank Snow; their version of "Bluebird Island" reached Number Four on the Top Ten charts. A little later Anita would become duet partners with singers like Johnny Darrell and Waylon Jennings. In

1955 RCA producer Steve Sholes paired her with Rita Robbins and Kitty Wells' daughter, Ruby, to form a rockabilly trio called "Nita, Rita, and Ruby." No big hits resulted from the experiment, but they did some of the earliest female rockabilly, and recorded songs that ranged from pieces by The Everly Brothers to Cindy Walker ("Give Me Love").

Mother Maybelle continued to work on the package shows, including several of Snow's, where she met and took a shine to a young Elvis Presley. June recalls: "She'd drive all night getting us in from somewhere and we would be exhausted, but she was wanting to go bowling at some all-night lane." By the early 1960's, Maybelle had been discovered by the young college audiences of the "folk revival," and she began to make some solo appearances at places like the Newport Folk Festival, performing the older songs and conducting guitar and autoharp workshops. (She had begun to play the

Charles Wolfe



Hope Williams

A.P. and Sara Carter homeplace in Maces Spring, still occupied by family. Maybelle's grave in Hendersonville, Tennessee.

COLLECTIONS

Attention, Members!

The Collections page is your source for buying, selling or trading country music-related merchandise and memorabilia. Its is operated as a benefit to CMSA Academy members, and entries are printed at the discretion of the editors. Please keep in mind the following guidelines when submitting your entry: 1) Membership number must accompany entry. 2) Entries must be kept to 40 words or less. 3) Only one entry per member per issue. 5) We reserve the right to edit for space and style. 6) Entries that do not follow these guidelines will be discarded.

Collecting the Magazine

Members help each other complete their magazine collections.

•For sale: 120 back issues of *Country Music Magazine*. Also have several copies of *The Journal*, plus some early records, CD's, and some videos. Send SASE and \$1.00 for complete list. **Robert D. Johnson, 914 Larson St., Knoxville, IA 50138.**

•For sale: Back issues of *Country Music Magazine* from the following years: 1980 and 1984 through 1991. Also have a few issues from 1975 through 1983. Send SASE for complete list. Sale only. I do not want to trade for anything. **Anna Mae Eckert, 655A Colony Dr., York, PA 17404.**

•For sale: back issues of *Country Music Magazine*, *Country Weekly*, *Country America* and *Music City News*. All have been grouped by artist featured: Alan Jackson, Garth, Reba, Vince Gill, Judds, Alabama, Mandrells, George Strait, Shania Twain, Travis and more. Send SASE with one stamp for list. **William J. Erickson, 1502 Bunting Ln., Janesville, WI 53546.**

Information, Please

Please write each other directly about information or items listed. When corresponding, include

SASE. Entries are printed at the discretion of the editors.

•Lots of material on both new artists and country greats: books, cassettes, clippings, magazines, pin-ups...Also have TV, film and sports items. Send self-addressed envelope and \$2.00 for nine-page listing (includes postage). Please don't send U.S. stamps, as they can't be used from Canada. **R. Smith, 128 Henry St., Barrie, Ontario L4N 1E1, Canada.**

•For sale: six-hour VHS tape, \$25.00 includes shipping and handling. Tape includes: CMA, ACM, TNN/MCN awards, No Hats Tour, Alan Reba, Garth, Ricky Van Shelton, Trace Adkins, Travis, Dolly and many more. **June Miner, 517 Edward Rd., W. Melbourne, FL 32904.**

•I can't find either of the following two albums at any record store near me: Highway 101's *Paint the Town* and Mark Collie's *Born and Raised in Black and White*. If you have either one of these on CD and want to sell them, please write me with prices. If I'm going to buy from you, I'll send half payment plus postage up front, and the remaining half upon receipt of package. **Tim Moule, 10022 Catalpa Ln., Grass Valley, CA 95945-5253.**

•For sale: concert and offstage photos of your favorite country music stars. Also have videos, LP's, magazines, T-shirts, buttons, trading cards and posters. Name favorites. Wanted: anything on Crystal Gayle, Martina McBride and George Strait. **Galen Duncan, 3517 Grier Nursery Rd., Street, MD 21154.**

•Help! Looking for the following items: copies of *Country Music Magazine* with Kenny Rogers on the cover, especially 1970's-80's; also looking for Lynn Anderson's Christmas albums, tapes or CD's, particularly Volume 3. Will pay reasonable price. **Annette Good, 1414 12th Ave. North #6, Fargo, ND 58102.**

•For sale: up-close concert photos of LeAnn Rimes, Tracy Byrd, Trace Adkins, Bryan White, Ray Price and many more. Send SASE for photocopies of your favorite artist. **Richard D. Moore, 20 Maple St.,**

Hopedale, MA 01747-1116.

•For sale: cassette tape of country DJ telling jokes on a tour bus. Not a professional tape. Recorded by a passenger, but laughter and comments are hilarious. Good, clean fun. Cost: \$5.00. **D. Mullins, P.O. Box 2035, Portsmouth, OH 45662.**

•For sale: country and western records—LP's and 45's. Also country and western magazines, plus *Country America*. Album list includes such artists as: Carl Smith, Walter Brennan, Tanya Tucker, Loretta Lynn, Dolly Parton and many other fine performers. Send three stamps for list. **M. Barker, 17876 Sequoia Ave., Hesperia, CA 92345-4939.**

•For sale: private collection of photos (new and old artists), magazines, VHS tapes, photo buttons, key chains, 8x10's and lots of miscellaneous stuff. Send a SASE and a list of who you're looking for. Will trade for stuff on Ricky Lynn Gregg. **Robin Garfoot, 808 East Vine, Sullivan, MO 63080.**

•Wanting to buy or trade for items on Bryan White...want anything on him—posters, press kits, T-shirts, radio shows, articles, hats, singles, photos and newsletters. Have lots of promotional items for sale or possible trade on TV shows, artists, actors—promo photos of *90210*, *Melrose Place*, *Party of Five*. For complete list, send \$2.00 and SASE for a computer print-out, or send \$5.00 for a complete list on computer disc. Let me know what you have on Bryan. **W. Myers, P.O. Box 474, Glenville, WV 26351.**

•I would like to thank all the people who wrote to me about the CD's I was looking for. Here are three more I'm looking for, all by Prairie Oyster: *Different Kind of Fire*, *Everybody Knows*, and *Oyster Tracks*. Prefer CD's, but will take cassettes. Please let me know if you have any of these. **Carolyn Fertig, 1703 9th St., Wheatland, WY 82201.**

•Wanted: Items on Lee Roy Parnell, including magazine articles, photos, posters, videos, T-shirts, etc. **K.P., 1026 Linwood Ln., Palm Bay, FL 32905.**

•For sale: large Hank Williams Sr. collection (collecting since 1949). Includes 50 original LP's, 78 r.p.m.'s, etc., all songs. Plus, portrait by Gil Veda (one of seven done, none alike). Also, magazines, newspapers, songbooks, pictures, and much more. Asking \$10,000.00. Send SASE for complete details.

JoAnn Connelly, 2506 Pond Branch Rd., Lusville, SC 29070.

•I'm looking for information on Jett Williams, daughter of Hank Williams Sr. Want genealogy info, and news of any music she has available. Would love to have copies of her recordings. Have material on Reba and lots of other stars. **Lois Harbin, Rt. 2, Box 353, Pottsboro, TX 75076-9123.**

•Wanted: looking for a VHS tape of *Prime Time Country* from September 2, 1997. Clay Walker was on that evening. Anyone who has a tape of that episode, please contact me. **Karl L. Edwards, 4117 Lee Cir., Waterford, WI 53185.**

•Wanted: various 45's. Have a large list of 45 r.p.m. records I'm looking for. Any record dealers out there who have 45's for sale, please send me your information, and I'll send you my list. **Jean Keso, 20912 Seven Mile Rd., Reed City, MI 49677-8346.**

•For sale: Large selection of country and bluegrass albums, priced at \$5.00 and under. **Bob Rowland, 537 N. Syracuse Ave., N. Massapequa, NY 11758-2002.**

•I am looking for Merle Haggard's autobiography, *Sing Me Back Home*. Will pay up to \$20 for a copy. Also want photos of Wade Hayes. **Ms. Billy Chapman, 19499 N. 1400th St., Chrisman, IL 61924.**

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CMSA

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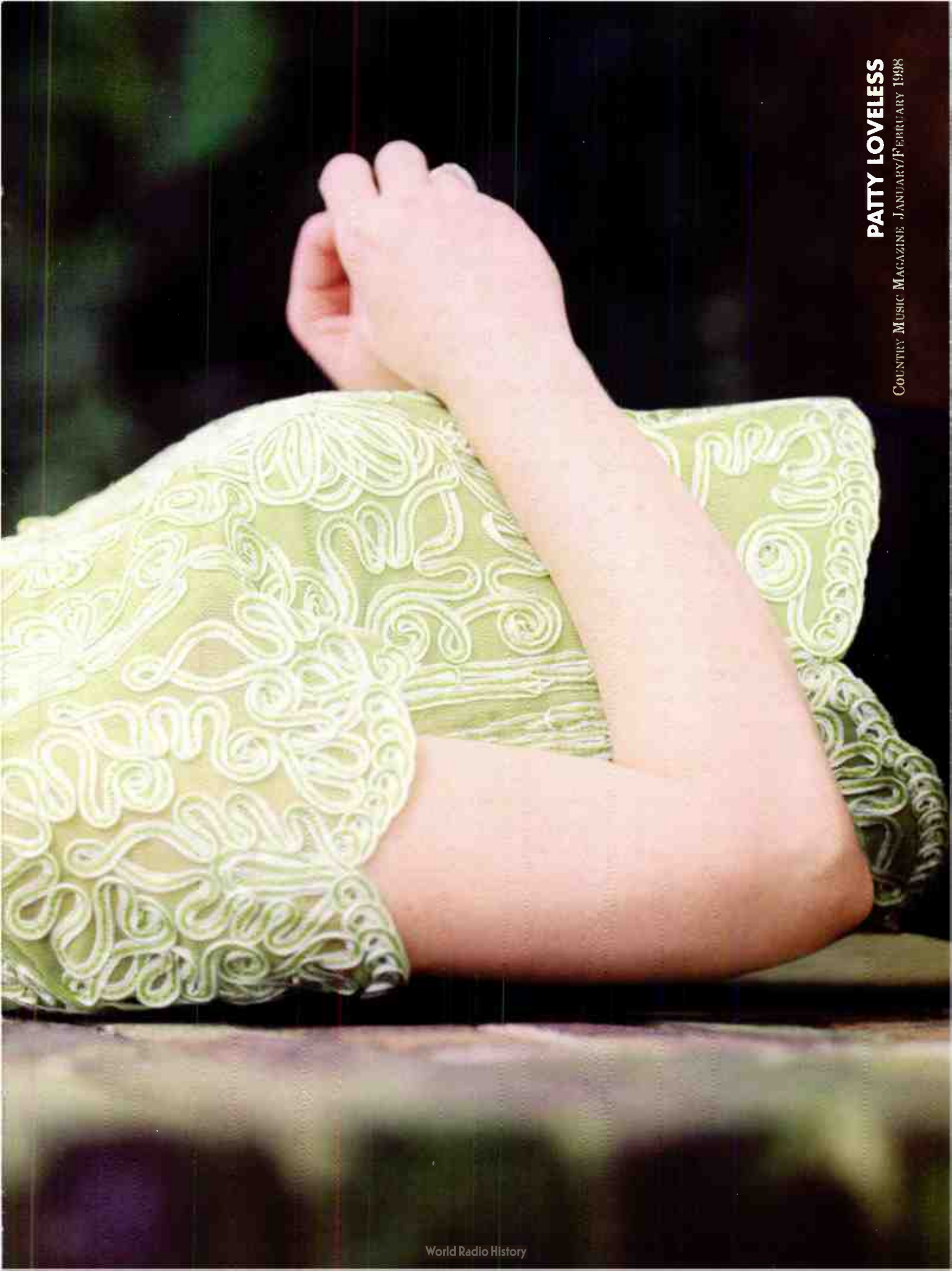
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CONTRIBUTING EDITORS *Charles Wolfe, Les Leverett*

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PATTY LOVELESS
COUNTRY MUSIC MAGAZINE JANUARY/FEBRUARY 1998

PULL-OUT
CENTERFOLD
OF THE MONTH

PATTY LOVELESS

Facts of Life

Personal Data

Family Name: Patricia Ramey
Birthdate: January 4, 1957
Birthplace: Pikeville, Kentucky
Residence: Nashville, Tennessee
Family: Husband, Emory Gordy Jr.
Musical Influences: Loretta Lynn, Porter Wagoner, Dolly Parton, George Jones, Ralph Stanley, Emmylou Harris, Flatt & Scruggs, Linda Ronstadt, Vince Gill
Musical Instruments: Guitar
Hobbies: Indian cooking, shopping for vintage clothing and antiques

Vital Statistics

Height: 5' 7"
Weight: 118
Hair Color: Auburn
Eye Color: Green

Recording Career

Current Record Label: Epic Records, 34 Music Square East, Nashville, Tennessee 37203.

Albums	Release Date
<i>Patty Loveless</i> (MCA)	1987
<i>If My Heart Had Windows</i> (MCA)	1988
<i>Honky Tonk Angel</i> (MCA)	1989**
<i>On Down the Line</i> (MCA)	1990*
<i>Up Against My Heart</i> (MCA)	1991
<i>Greatest Hits</i> (MCA)	1993*
<i>Only What I Feel</i>	1993**
<i>When Fallen Angels Fly</i>	1994**
<i>The Trouble with the Truth</i>	1996**
<i>Long Stretch of Lonesome</i>	1997

*Gold album
**Platinum album

Singles

"Lonely Days, Lonely Nights"
"Wicked Ways"
"I Did"
"After All"
"You Saved Me"
"If My Heart Had Windows"
"A Little Bit in Love"
"Blue Side of Town"



"Don't Toss Us Away"
"Timber I'm Falling in Love"*
"The Lonely Side of Love"
"Chains"*
"On Down the Line"
"The Night's Too Long"
"I'm That Kind of Girl"
"Blue Memories"
"Hurt Me Bad (In a Real Good Way)"
"Jealous Bone"
"Can't Stop Myself from Loving You"
"Send a Message to My Heart" (with Dwight Yoakam)
"Blame It on Your Heart"*
"Nothin' But the Wheel"
"You Will"
"How Can I Help You to Say Goodbye"*
"Halfway Down"*
"You Don't Even Know Who I Am"*
"Here I Am"*
"I Try to Think About Elvis"
"You Can Feel Bad"*
"A Thousand Times a Day"
"Lonely Too Long"*
"She Drew a Broken Heart"
"You Don't Seem to Miss Me"
*Number: One single

Awards

1990: *Music City News* Awards Female Artist of the Year
1993: Country Music Association (CMA) Vocal Event of the Year, George Jones and Special Guests, "I Don't Need Your Rockin' Chair"
1995: CMA Album of the Year, *When Fallen Angels Fly*; Nashville Music Awards Best Country Album. *When Fallen Angels Fly*; Academy of Country Music (ACM) Top Female Vocalist
1996: CMA Female Vocalist of the Year; ACM Top Female Vocalist
1997: *Radio & Records* Readers' Poll Female Vocalist of the Year; Nashville Music Awards Female Vocalist of the Year

Television Appearances

The Late Show with David Letterman
The Tonight Show
CBS This Morning
Late Night with Conan O'Brien
Live with Regis & Kathie Lee
48 Hours
Austin City Limits

Trivia

- On her first trip to Nashville at age 14, Patty auditioned for Porter Wagoner, who was so taken with the teenager he introduced her to Dolly Parton, beginning a long-lasting friendship.
- At age 17, Patty began travelling and performing with The Wilburn Brothers.
- Loretta Lynn and Crystal Gayle are Patty's distant cousins.
- Patty has been a member of the Grand Ole Opry since 1988.
- Patty was featured on the *Red, Hot & Country* benefit album, performing "When I Reach the Place I'm Going."

Fan Club

Patty Loveless Fan Club, P.O. Box 1423, White House, TN 37188.



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Alabama

Portrait of a Band in Mid-Life

It's hard to believe that the members of this band are all over 40—some close to 50. It may be even harder to believe that they've been at it for more than 20 years. But the road has taken its toll, and though they're still in demand, the Fort Payne foursome says it's time to reassess what Alabama wants to be.

by Bob Allen

For maybe the 16th or 17th June in a row, the four members of Alabama—Randy Owen, Teddy Gentry, Jeff Cook and Mark Herndon—have braved that sweaty, frenzied, good-natured annual madhouse of non-stop music, over-priced souvenirs, three-dollar ice cream bars and sticky Middle Tennessee humidity, popularly known as Fan Fair.

Alabama is no longer the big tent attraction at Fan Fair that it was back in the early 1980's when the band won the Country Music Association's Entertainer of the Year award three times in a row. Alabama didn't even perform at Fan Fair '97. Younger stars like Faith Hill, Alan Jackson and Brooks & Dunn rule the roost these days. Others, like Garth and Reba, manage to be more conspicuous by their mere absence.

That said, Alabama has drawn enough of a mob to the RCA signing booth in one of the Tennessee State Fair's hangar-like exhibit buildings to overwhelm the tepid air conditioning. Even before the bandmembers arrive ten minutes late from a TV taping across town, the line of autograph seekers already snakes across the building and stretches all the way out the door into the sunny mid-June heat. When Owen & Co. finally do file in, they're greeted by a burst of flashbulbs and a hearty round of cheers.

These days the affable Jeff Cook has put on a few...well, gosh, more than a few...pounds. It seems to take him several tries to get himself perched on his little stool as he limbers up for an hour's worth of signing photos, CD's, posters, T-shirts, teddy bears, hankies, guitars, articles of clothing or whatever else folks shove in his face.

"You from *Country Weekly*?" the guitarist gen-

tly chides me when he sees me lurking in a corner with notepad and tape recorder. "Cause if you are, you got us down as havin' 25 Number Ones. We've had 40 of 'em!"

Randy Owen, Alabama's lead singer, front man and perennial in-house optimist, is the center of attention, as usual. He smiles, laughs softly, poses for photos, dispenses autographs and swaps casual reminiscences with fans about some concert in Indiana a decade ago, some Fan Fair of yesteryear, or visits to the band's new restaurant in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee.

Yet beneath his surface pleasantness, Owen seems a bit frazzled and far away this afternoon. The lines under his eyes suggest he's a man very much in need of a long summer vacation—preferably kicked back in his cabin in the woods near northeastern Alabama's Tennessee River Canyon.

The tightly scheduled hour of autograph signing quickly comes and goes. Yet the crowd seems even bigger than before. The barrages of flash bulb bursts are undiminished, and there's apparently still no end to the autograph line. At one point Owen wearily turns away from the sea of grinning, adoring faces that gawk at him from in front of the booth. Catching the eye of the band's long-time road manager, Greg Fowler, he shrugs with good-natured impatience and touches the face of his watch with his finger tip, as if to say, "Are we done yet?"

* * *

Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. A month or two later.

After Fan Fair, Alabama's summer rolls relentlessly onward. The band is in the midst of a very demanding touring schedule in support of *Dancin' on the Boulevard*, their 20th and most recent RCA album. It's another long afternoon a long, long way





Still Alabama, after all these years: Jeff Cook, Mark Herndon, Randy Owen and Teddy Gentry.

from Fort Payne, Alabama, and Randy Owen once again has that weary, faraway look in his eyes.

The band has just driven across Wisconsin through fierce thunderstorms, only to be greeted in Lake Geneva by tornado warnings. A ferocious windstorm has just whipped through the area, wrecking the outdoor stage where the band is scheduled to play and destroying some of their equipment. The show has already been canceled. Meanwhile, sirens are blaring everywhere, and as soon as the band bus pulls up in front of their hotel, the Alabama guys are herded, Chinese fire drill style, into the basement. There they spend the next half an hour or so sitting on their luggage, signing autographs and waiting out the storm.

"It's wild up here. I'm just hopin' to live another day," Owen notes with a sigh. He and the other hotel guests have finally been allowed to go to their rooms. But even before they can crack their suitcases, the sirens outside start up again, and it looks like another Chinese fire drill is in the offing.

For sure, it's a tough way to get a night off, but at this point Alabama will take it—especially with an 800-mile travel day to North Dakota looming in the A.M. The guys figure it might be time for a long-delayed band meeting to try and map out a somewhat more leisurely road schedule for 1998. If that can't be arranged, Owen concedes with a weary shrug, "It might just be a good time to kick back and watch the Braves play."

Needless to say, Alabama's never been a band to shy away from the all-American work ethic they've glorified in songs like "40 Hour Week," "T.L.C.A.S.A.P." and "One More Time Around" (on their new album). Not even 41 Number Ones and 58 million in album sales seemed to have quelled the self-induced pressure and sense of near-urgency they bring to their calling.

Yet even measured against their own exacting standards, the Alabama boys insist that 1997 has been a particularly exhausting line-up of concerts and WalMart, K-Mart and Target in-store appearances throughout the eastern U.S. to promote the new album.

Then again, let's face it: the guys aren't quite as young as they were when they first hopped on the nonstop merry-go-round of national touring about 17 years ago. To put it in perspective, Randy Owen's son is now a 16-year-old, six-foot-four, 245-pound high school football and baseball star who towers over his old man. His oldest daughter now plays college basketball at his alma mater, Alabama's Jacksonville State University.

Bass player/singer Teddy Gentry, 45, Owen's first cousin and boyhood friend, even has that beat. He's now a grandfather twice over.

Time flies when you're having fun. And even in those rough days when you're not.

"This year has been great, but it's been the toughest touring I've ever done," insists 47-year-old Owen, who, as always, is the master of turning lemons into lemonade. "The shows we did last summer didn't have a lot of pressure to 'em. They were great shows, and we had a great summer, but we didn't have a new album last year, so it wasn't quite as hectic and pressure-packed as this summer's been.

"Obviously, you miss your family and things when you're out here," he adds, staring restlessly out the hotel window at storm-tossed Lake Geneva, where a lone jet skier has recklessly ignored the prevailing storm warnings. "Wisconsin is sure a long way from Alabama."

Teddy Gentry nods in agreement. "I really love playing, but the travelin' beats you up sometimes," he notes matter-of-factly. "I'm personally hoping we don't work as much next year. Ideally, we'll do 50 or 60 dates and spend more time at home."

Though Owen and Gentry don't come right out and say it, it's easy to read between the lines here. It's easy to see that—despite Robert Earl Keen Jr.'s musical statement to the contrary—the road doesn't always go on forever. Though it's far from the end of the road for Alabama, 1997 has nonetheless shaped up as a year of sea change and redirection for this veteran band. It's already official that their '97 June Jam was their last, and that the summer of '97 was maybe the final one they'll devote so thoroughly to touring.

Yet even as they begin to scale down one phase of their career, Alabama has jump-started another. In 1997 they also managed to release an album, *Dancin' on the Boulevard*, which, though retrospective in tone, is one of their most adventurous and creative efforts in a while—mostly because of a renewed outburst of songwriting from within the group.

"I saw an article recently about us that was called 'Alabama Rediscovered,' and I just thought, *Yeah!*" says Owen, suddenly grinning and perking to life when the subject of *Dancin' on the Boulevard* pops up. "In my opinion it's the greatest creative project we've ever done. This record is Alabama.

I don't know how it will end up selling, but as far as being right from the gut and from the heart and soul and everything, this is our best. This is it."

Once again Teddy Gentry nods in polite assent. "It's my favorite album of anything we've done in the last ten or 12 years," says the tall, low-key, bass player who co-wrote stand-out songs on *Boulevard* like the title tune, "Sad Lookin' Moon." "Anytime (I'm Your Man)" and "One More Time Around," along with Owen and a host of other co-writers.

"It's just the feel of it," Gentry adds. "To me, in terms of putting it on and playin' it all the way through without wanting to jump some tracks that you've got bored with or burnt out on, this record still stands up, even long after we've come out of the studio."

Yet, in the midst of this creative second wind, the bandmembers also found themselves yearning to reclaim a bigger piece of their lives for themselves.

Which has a lot to do with why there'll be no more June Jams. "The Jam had become more and more difficult," Owen explains. "When we started it back in the 80's, there was no competition. Now there's a so-called jam or something everywhere around where we are."

But the big reason was a whole lot simpler. After about a quarter-century of playing music all through June and July (seven years as a Myrtle Beach bar band and roughly 17 years on the national circuit), Grandpaw Gentry wanted a summer vacation. "A long time ago we played a couple of shows up in Alaska, and we got a couple days off up there to kick back and do some salmon fishing," says Gentry, who readily confesses that the bulk of his time back in Fort Payne these days is spent with his "two grandbaby girls"—Alexis, at the time 21 months old, and Jessi, just 10 weeks. "I fell in love with the beauty of Alaska," he adds, "and I kept telling my wife I wanted to take her back up there one day. But it just seems like in life we never get the time to do some of the things we wanta do."

So earlier this year, Gentry went to the other bandmembers and told them enough was enough: In 1998, he wanted a break. "The June Jam's been great, but everything has to come to an end," he says. "Next summer my wife and I are gonna drive on up to Alaska in our GMC Yukon, along with Ronnie Rogers and his wife. We'll take the scenic route and camp and cook out and maybe write some songs."

It's pretty clear what Owen will be doing with his free time: sticking closer to his big farm (big enough to be called a ranch most anywhere but Alabama) and working with his 600 head of

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"This record is Alabama. I don't know how it will end up selling, but as far as being right from the gut and from the heart and soul and everything, this is our best. This is it."
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prize beef cattle. "I was a cowboy before I ever got in the music business, and I still am," he laughs. "I don't ride a horse and I don't wear a cowboy hat, but I'm a cowboy!"

A few years back Owen also bought a 23-acre hideaway in the woods near Fort Payne. Besides being a deal he just couldn't refuse, his cabin ("we call it a cabin, but it's a real nice place") also seems to have become the centerpiece of his life at mid-life. "It's right on Tennessee River Canyon, the place that inspired 'Mountain Music' and 'Pass It On Down' and 'Tennessee River,'" he explains. "I love it, not just because it's where we go to write songs, but because it's a place where I can go and get my spirits back together.

"It's just kinda the way everything works out in my life," he adds with a satisfied smile and a tone of mild astonishment. "This guy told me he'd sell this cabin and 23 acres of land for just exactly what he gave for it. I told my wife, 'The last thing I need is another piece of property!' But it was like I got a check for the publishing royalties for the songs I'd written, and it was for just exactly what he'd asked for the place. So I just said, 'Here! I never saw this check!'

"It's a lot of fun. We have Thanksgiving dinner there and spend Christmas there. My mother—oh, Lord!" he cackles. "One Christmas it snowed, which is rare around Fort Payne. My mom was 64 at the time, and she was like a little eight-year-old! We had a big fire going in the fireplace, and my dear mother was just out there havin' a big time in the snow! It's amazing how that cabin has done so many wonderful things for my life."

Among other things, it's also helped spur the surge of fresh songwriting that resulted in most of the songs heard on *Dancin' on the Boulevard*. "Me and Greg Fowler and Ronnie Rogers and Teddy go down there and just have a good time," says Owen. "Teddy cooks a lot for us, we have a few drinks and enjoy life and often end up writing songs. We call it 'The Pals Club'—Ronnie's got this sayin', 'Hey, pal!'—it sorta grew out of that."

Oddly enough, another thing that got the group's creative juices flowing again was selling the private jet that they'd toured in for about ten years.

Owen rolls his eyes. "We went through just about every kind of emergency you can have with that thing without it gettin' on fire. One time the batteries did get on fire over Washington, D.C. We made an emergency landing, and man! All the big fire trucks came out, and they made us exit as quickly as we could open the door.

"Then a few years back we spent the summer performing at Opryland—they made us a deal that only people that weren't interested in taking care of their families would have said no to. So we figured it was time to ditch the airplane.

"Me and Teddy had decided we wanted to get back on the bus anyway. We could have our guitars with us, and if we wanted to, we could pull off the side of the road and take a walk, or get somethin' to eat in a truck stop, or look at some trees or look at some cows.

"And I think that really got us back to writing so seriously again," he adds. "We got to see America again. It wasn't an airport every time we got out. We got to stop at these dirty truckstops and these convenience stores where you can tell the people are makin' minimum wage and will tell you straight out



what they like or don't like about your music. If those folks know who we are, I count it an honor. And sometimes I'm envious of them," Owen confesses. "Sometimes I think their lives are so simple, and why couldn't mine be like that?"

Somewhat to Alabama's surprise, when they did get back to knocking out original songs in Randy's cabin or on the bus between shows, the thematic drift took them to an unexpected place: back to their formative years in the resort capital of Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. For seven summers in the 1970's, before fame finally came knocking, they cranked out the hits and requests of the day as the six-night-a-week house band in a tourist club called The Bowery.

"Dancin', Shaggin' on the Boulevard," the title tune of their new disk, is chock-full of vivid images and references to those times. The album also includes covers of a pair of old-

ies—Smoky Robinson's "My Girl" and Bruce Channel's "Hey Baby"—that personify the so-called "Beach Music" that was all the rage back then.

When asked why, after all these years, Alabama's Beach Music roots suddenly popped up as a major musical theme, Owen, for once, doesn't have a quick answer: "I don't know just what it was that got our songwriting headed down that road," he concedes. "It was just something that was in the air, I guess. I'm just thankful, whatever it was, because I felt reborn or something.

"Before that, we'd kind of been through a period where the songs that we were writing, whoever we were working with in the studio at the time didn't seem to be interested in them. And our label, RCA, wasn't interested in them. So we just figured they wouldn't be interested in these songs either. So we just sort of starting writing like back in the old days when we wrote 'My Home's in Alabama' and 'Tennessee River.' We just kinda let the creative juices be real free and unrestrained, tried not to put a pattern to anything. We never stopped ourselves and said, 'This doesn't sound like something we'd do.' We just started writing."

Turns out they're still on a roll. Owen, Gentry and their tight circle of co-writers already have another batch of songs, even though recording sessions for their 21st album are still months away.

Still, there's that bigger question: Will Alabama be coming back through *your* town again?

"We've already had a lot of interesting offers coming in for next year," Owen points out, sounding only vaguely interested. "Somebody wants us to play a bowl game, if we were interested." He shrugs noncommittally. "I don't know if I am or not. Then somebody wants us for a big incredible New Year's Eve deal where they're wantin' to pay us more money than we're worth—than anybody's worth! Which is wonderful.

"Most of all," he adds, a touch of amazement creeping back into his voice, "it's just kinda neat that we've been able to touch so many people over the years with the music. I'm just real proud that the public hasn't forgotten about us.

"But it's just like with the June Jam: We wanta leave things on our own terms, as opposed to waiting and seeing the writing on the wall. And when that exit time does come for us, I hope that we can make that choice and go out with dignity." ■

It's day two of the Rustbelt Rockabilly Weekend at the Emerald Room along the main drag of McKees Rocks, Pennsylvania, a blue-collar Pittsburgh suburb high above the Ohio River. The club, complete with upstairs balcony, tables on the main level and a stage with fancy 50's-style draped curtains, is a good place to revive the Sun Sound for a crowd including aging hippies, punk and new wave rock fans (indeed, certain bands sound more punk than Presley). Hovering close to the stage are a few young retro guys and gals whose 50's outfits appeared heisted from the wardrobes of *Happy Days* or *Laverne & Shirley*.

Around 10 P.M., Ray Condo and His Ricochets, the headliners, filter through the backdoor. Lead singer-guitarist-saxophonist Condo, is tall and spindly, looking uncannily Hankish in a dark Western suit and Stetson. Gaunt, Lincolnesque steel guitarist Jimmy Roy follows him, with diminutive, mustachioed bass player Clive Jackson, bespectacled guitarist-arranger Steven Nikleva, and new drummer John Cody bringing up the rear. Greetings are exchanged, and we seek a place for an interview. The downstairs lounge is full of flashing lights and rap music, so we wind up in the dressing room, which is loaded with musicians who are attracted by the cold cuts, hot food casseroles, beer, Pepsi and bags of chips. Condo lights a cigar.

In some ways, this Canadian quintet was a weird choice to headline a rockabilly festival, since their wildly eclectic repertoire is pieced together by rummaging through dusty musical attics in styles beyond rock. By mixing little-known Western swing, 1930's jazz, Big Band, vintage hillbilly music, R&B and, yes, rockabilly obscurities filtered through their distinct intense sound, they created a radically different approach to interpreting older music. This mix was reflected on their 1996 debut CD, *Swing, Brother, Swing*, which gained substantial airplay on the Americana charts and garnered critical acclaim in both rock and country press. Their second album, the just-released *Door to Door Maniac*, continues in that direction.

In an era where any retro band seems an improvement over Music Row's bland, hack 'er-out mindset, Condo and company, mostly fortysomethings, avoid categories like the plague. Condo himself makes that clear when asked where he thinks they fit: mainstream, or alternative country. "I don't know," he says thoughtfully. "The corporate agenda seems to be one huge omelet that doesn't work if there's any individuality in it." Band member Jimmy Roy agrees, "When you hear a country band, they're actually a rock band." Remarks Condo: "That mentality is on TNN."

Though they got an enthusiastic reception at a Nashville club a few months back, their experience at Cain's ballroom in Tulsa meant even more. "What was really special was the crowd at Cain's," said Condo, speaking of the legendary, still-vibrant home of Bob and Johnnie Lee Wills. "You had your rock crowd, black fingernails, Prince Valiant haircuts, and they just loved it, this young contingent of geek-chic up to older, middle-age types. They've got their heritage intact. They wanted Western swing."

Their approach to swing—and everything else—has a full-bodied, driving intensity that's become The Ricochets' trade-

mark. Steven Nikleva, who along with Jimmy handles arranging, explains it as "trying to think like a larger group or big band, trying to make use of all the instruments, rather than all playing at once."

Unlike some other retro bands who write original material, The Ricochets, who admit no genius for lyrics, have recorded only one original: "Strathcona," an instrumental named for Ray's home neighborhood in Vancouver. Condo doesn't expect that to change. "We've never been purists," he says. "We're not afraid of mixing different things in. But I think the archival approach to our music is really important." Nikleva, who formerly accompanied singer-songwriters before gravitating to jazz, agrees, declaring, "Look at all the material we get to choose from." And John Cody, who replaced original drummer Steve Taylor in February, quotes his fellow Ricochet, "It's as Jimmy Roy said, 'Anything we do becomes us. If we're gonna redo someone else's tune, make it Condo and The Ricochets'." Condo jumps in, "We usually try [a song] on like a jacket or a pair of pants, then you wear 'em for awhile. This band's worn a few brief tunes and chucked them out quick."

Currently based in Vancouver, on Canada's West Coast, Ray Condo was born far to the east, near Montreal. He heard country at home and started playing rock in the 1960's, later moving to punk-rock. In 1984 he and Clive Jackson, a rockabilly collector who'd just bought a bass fiddle, founded The Hardrock Goners with several other musicians and toured Canada and Europe for over a decade. They recorded three albums. Condo and Jackson both moved to Vancouver in 1993. Jimmy Roy was already there. British born, he arrived in Canada at age six, grew up working with bands around Alberta, and focused on non-pedal steel guitar before moving to Vancouver. He and Condo met in the 1980's and discussed joining forces, but nothing happened. Jimmy and Nikleva met in a Western swing band and in 1990 founded the honky tonk revival band, Jimmy Roy's Five Star Hillbillies.

When both The Hardrock Goners and The Hillbillies dissolved in 1995, Jimmy and Condo finally hooked up, blending the best of both by merging Jackson, Nikleva and Taylor into The Ricochets. "We became The Ricochets right before we discovered there were two other bands with that name," Jimmy explains. They recorded *Swing, Brother, Swing* for Vancouver's East Side label that year. Meanwhile San Francisco-based Jeff Richardson, who'd produced Western swing LP reissues in the 80's for the defunct Rambler and Western labels (discs Condo and friends devoured), had founded a new reissue label: Joaquin Records. He never considered taking on a live act until he heard Condo's album. After licensing it from East Side, repackaging and switching some tracks, he reissued the Joaquin version in mid-1996 to rave reviews and respectable sales.

Still, its 'success' is a microscopic fraction of major label sales, meaning it's not likely Condo, The Ricochets or Richardson will have Gold or platinum albums gracing their walls soon. Given the band members' age and Nashville's youth-conscious fanaticism, where megabucks and marketing hooks can too often crush an act's integrity, they realize that's not for them. The al-

RAY CONDO AND HIS Ricochets

A retro band who cull
from the past and
make it their own.
Could these guys finally
be the *real thing*?

By Rich Kienzle



Cody, Jackson, Ray Condo, Nikleva and Roy: no illusions about big-time success and a clear sense of mission. Plus fun.

ways-acerbic Condo quips, "Every couple of years they gotta have a new name for [the music]. They'd have a new marketing term for us. They'd call it 'Hick Hop'."

Witty? Sure, but upholding principles carries a price. On their 1996 U.S. tour, all five musicians, clothes and instruments were crammed into a tiny car, Clive's bass tied on top, the way 1940's hillbilly acts traveled B.B. (before buses). They have no hype machine driving them, only limited publicity and word of mouth. Their low-tech values, like Jackson's rhythmic bass slapping, have left soundmen in small clubs clueless. "A lot don't realize it's not an electric bass, doesn't have the bottom end rumble. [When I slap the strings], I've had guys say, 'Do you want that clicking noise?'" he says with some amusement.

No one, however, is looking to change things. "We wouldn't trade Jeff Richardson for all the major labels in the world," Jimmy insists. Discussing their next project, an instrumental set, Condo removes the cigar clenched between his teeth and

leaps into one of his free-form monologues. "Maybe after the instrumental album, we'll do 'Condo Sings,' in front of a fireplace. I'll get the Perry Como sweater on and do the late night thing. Then we'll do a Hawaiian album."

Turning serious, he says, "It's really nice to know you've helped people retain some culture, to get into some of their heritage. If you know where you're comin' from, you might know where you're goin'. It's a nice sense of community, having a North American heritage. As we're getting our neighborhoods knocked down left and right and our old buildings and the inner cities are being abandoned, we're losing anything that reeks of memory.

"We could be like America's granddaddy for a little while. Help them be more cozy, be more at home with themselves."

As the interview comes to an end, I have one more question: Is the cigar a Bob Wills inspiration?

"No, man." Condo laughs. "Clint Eastwood!" ■

VIDEO BONANZA

HANK WILLIAMS

Hank Williams Tradition—60 mins.
In the *Hank Williams Tradition* traces Hank's life story through rare film clips, music and revealing interviews with friends and fellow performers such as Roy Acuff, Minnie Pearl and Chet Atkins. Included are performances of many of Hank's greatest songs by today's top country artists, who also tell how Hank inspired their careers. There are also five hit songs performed by Hank himself. Item No. V2M - \$19.95

PATSY CLINE

Remembering Patsy - 60 mins.
This heartfelt celebration features 17 Patsy Cline songs and 10 rare television appearances. You'll meet Patsy through intimate home movies, personal letters and fond reminiscences from her loved ones, both family and friends. Item No. V1E - \$19.95

RANDY TRAVIS

This Is Me—40 mins.
This is Randy Travis' newest home video featuring such great hits as "Heroes and Friends," "Better Class of Losers," "If I Didn't Have You," "Look Heart, No Hands," "An Old Pair of Shoes," "Cowboy Boogie," "Wind in the Wire" **AND MORE!** Item No. V9T - \$19.95



ALAN JACKSON

Greatest Video Hits Collection—75 mins.
This new collection features 18 songs from throughout Alan's red-hot career, including "Blue Blooded Woman," "Here in the Real World," "Wanted," "Chasin' That Neon Rainbow," "Don't Rock the Jukebox," "Somebody," "Midnight in Montgomery," "Chattahoochee," "Mercury Blues," "(Who Says) You Can't Have It All," "Tall, Tall Trees," "Summertime Blues," "Livin' on Love," "Gone Country," "Song for the Life" **AND MORE!** Item No. V10J - \$29.95

ALAN JACKSON

Livin', Lovin', and Rockin' That Jukebox—28 mins.
Here are seven Number One videos from two double platinum albums by one of the most popular country entertainers around. Included here are "Don't Rock the Jukebox," "Somebody," "Midnight in Montgomery," "She's Got the Rhythm (And I Got the Blues)," "Chattahoochee," "Mercury Blues" and "Tonight I Climbed the Wall." Item No. V6K - \$19.95

CHARLEY PRIDE

An Evening With—45 mins.
Listen to the rich baritone sounds of Charley Pride, the Country Music Association's 1971 Entertainer of the Year—and one of the top country record sellers of all-time. This noteworthy performance includes many of his highly acclaimed, best-loved hits, including "Kiss an Angel Good Morning," "Is Anybody Goin' to San Antonio," "All I Have to Offer You Is Me," "Just Between You and Me," "A Whole Lot of Lovin'" **AND 9 MORE!** Item No. V1C - \$19.95

LOUISIANA HAYRIDE—62 MINS.

During its heyday the *Louisiana Hayride* rivaled the *Grand Ole Opry* in the number of careers that it spawned. Hank Williams Jr. narrates this documentary, which explores the Shreveport, Louisiana, musical roots of such venerable stars as Hank Williams Sr., Johnny Cash and George Jones. This unique program uses old photographs, film clips and live transcriptions of radio show recordings to tell its story. Item No. V8W - \$14.95

BILL MONROE

Father of Bluegrass—90 mins.
With the cooperation of Bill Monroe, ex-Blue Grass Boys and other performers he influenced, this documentary clearly defines Bill Monroe's unique role in American music. It covers his early years in Kentucky with great footage. The era of The Monroe Brothers, his early years on the Opry, the Flatt-Scruggs-Wise version of The Bluegrass Boys—all are here in full. This video is a must for any Bill Monroe fan. Item No. V2K - \$19.95

MERLE HAGGARD

The Best of—60 mins.
"I have selected some of my favorite songs for this video...and I hope they will be your favorites too."—Merle Haggard. You be the judge: "My Favorite Memory," "Mama's Hungry Eyes," "Today I Started Loving You Again," "When Times Were Good," "Okie from Muskegee," "Stay Here and Drink" **AND 11 MORE!** Item No. G3F - \$19.95

THE NASHVILLE STORY—71 mins.

Grant Turner takes you on tour as he narrates how Nashville became "Music City USA," the Country Music Capitol of the World. You'll visit all the famous landmarks while Ernest Tubb, Roy Acuff and Minnie Pearl tell you how they got started. You'll see all of these stars perform on the stage of the old Ryman Auditorium, as they sing some of their most famous songs. Also appearing are Porter Wagoner, Dolly Parton and others. Item No. V20E - \$39.95

COUNTRY ON BROADWAY

Filmed in New York—96 mins.
See Hank Williams in his only filmed appearance, uncut. Enjoy 30 full songs by Hank and other top country headliners like George Jones, Hank Snow and Porter Wagoner. Includes such great performances as: Hank Sr., "Hey Good Looking"/George Jones, "White Lightning"/Hank Snow, "Moving On"/Porter Wagoner, "Satisfied Mind" **AND MORE!** Item No. G8F - \$39.95

TIM MCGRAW

An Hour With Tim—60 mins.
Here are interviews, behind the scenes footage and background information, plus all five videos from his best-selling album, *Not a Moment Too Soon*, including "Refried Dreams." Item No. V7R - \$19.95

GARTH BROOKS

Live TV Special—85 mins.
Here is Garth's first NBC-TV special, complete with additional interview and backstage footage. There are 15 hit songs, including "Not Counting You," "Two of a Kind, Workin' on a Full House," "Much Too Young (To Feel This Damn Old)," "The Dance," "Rodeo," "We Bury the Hatchet," "The Thunder Rolls," "The River," "Friends in Low Places" **AND MORE!** Item No. V3H - \$29.95

GARTH BROOKS

Video Collection Vol. 2—34 mins.
Included on this most recent Garth Brooks video are such chartbusters as "We Shall Be Free," "Standing Outside the Fire," "The Red

Strokes" and "The Change" from Garth's *Fresh Horses* album. There's also behind-the-scenes footage and exclusive interview footage. If you're a Garth fan, don't miss it. Item No. V21B - \$16.95

ROY ROGERS & DALE EVANS SHOW—40 mins.

From ABC-TV (1962), featuring The Sons of Pioneers and others, this video includes classic Western hits like "High Noon," "Cool Water" and "Old Paint Needs a Paint Job." Item No. V6U - \$19.95

ERNEST TUBB

Thanks Troubadour Thanks—62 mins.
Here's the story of "America's Troubadour," from his birth in Depression-era Texas, his friendship with Mrs. Jimmie Rodgers, first recording sessions and early radio shows, to the Grand Ole Opry. This unique video features classic performances and his top hits. It's narrated by Skeeter Davis and others whose lives he touched. Item No. V2N - \$19.95

WOMEN OF COUNTRY MUSIC VOLUMES 1 & 2—45 mins. each

Volume 1 (Item No. V1Y) includes "He Thinks He'll Keep Her"/Mary Chapin Carpenter, "Something in Red"/Lorrie Morgan, "It's a Little Too Late"/Tanya Tucker, plus hits by Emmylou Harris, Loretta Lynn, Patsy Cline, Kitty Wells and others. **Volume 2** (Item No. V2Y) includes "Cryin' in the Rain"/Tanny Wynette, "It's Never Easy to Say Goodbye"/Wynonna Judd, "Hurt Me Bad"/Patty Loveless, plus hits by Reba McEntire, Dolly Parton, Barbara Mandrell, Rose Maddox and others. Each volume is a wonderful celebration of the contributions female singers and songwriters have made to country music. Only \$14.95 each, or both for \$27.90. **YOU SAVE \$2.00!**

JIM REEVES

The Story of a Legend—50 mins.
This is the Jim Reeves story from his deep rural roots and his years as an aspiring baseball player to his years as one of the most universally popular singers of the late 50's and early 60's. This program also features Jim singing hit songs like "Four Walls," "Am I Losing You," "He'll Have to Go" and "Welcome to My World." Item No. V2P - \$19.95

TOOTSIE'S ORCHID LOUNGE—60 MINS.

Kris Kristofferson, Faron Young and others join host Willie Nelson for this all-star program celebrating Tootsie's famous Orchid Lounge, where a group of songwriters hung out together 30 years ago and penned some of America's most popular songs. Included is footage of Jim Reeves, Patsy Cline, Ray Price and others. Item No. V1N - \$19.95



JIM REEVES

Golden Memories—50 mins.
This Jim Reeves video features some of Jim's biggest hits in a never before released collection of his most memorable television performances. Each song is performed in its entirety. This video is the most requested item by Jim Reeves fans and collectors. Item No. V4G - \$29.95

RICKY VAN SHELTON

To Be Continued...—35 mins.
Here are some of Ricky's early videos plus two live performances and an interview. Included are "Crime of Passion" and "Living Proof." Item No. G5W - \$24.95



VINCE GILL

I Still Believe in You—24 mins.
Vince Gill has joined the esteemed ranks of country's premier entertainers. Now you can enjoy this popular star on his only home video performing many of his top hits. Among the favorites included here are "When I Call Your Name," "Never Knew Lonely," "Pocket Full of Gold," "Liza Jane," "Look at Us" and "I Still Believe in You." Item No. V1M - \$19.95

GIANTS OF COUNTRY MUSIC VOLUMES 1 & 2—53 mins. each

Here are some of today's new stars and old favorites singing and playing their most popular songs. **Volume 1** (Item No. V10S) includes "We Both Walk"/Lorrie Morgan, "Something in Red"/Lorrie Morgan, "Achy Breaky Heart"/Billy Ray Cyrus, plus hits by George Strait, Reba McEntire, Dwight Yoakam, Dolly Parton with Ricky Van Shelton and others. **Volume 2** (Item No. V10T) includes "Drift Off to Dream"/Travis Tritt, "Same Old Me"/Ricky Skaggs, "We Tell Ourselves"/Clint Black, plus hits by Alabama, Kathy Mattea, The Oak Ridge Boys and nine others. \$19.95 each, or both for only \$34.90. **YOU SAVE \$2.00!**

TRAVIS TRITT

Greatest Hits From the Beginning—50 mins.
Along with exclusive, never-before-seen footage on this video are hits like "Country Club," "Here's a Quarter (Call Someone Who Cares)," "Can I Trust You with My Heart," "The Whiskey Ain't Workin'," "Help Me Hold On," "I-r-o-u-b-l-e," "Tell Me I Was Dreaming." Item No. V10P - \$19.95

HIGHWAYMEN LIVE

On the Road Again—60 mins.
Cash, Nelson, Kristofferson and Jennings are together on this European Tour. You'll meet them backstage, talking candidly about their lives and their music. Then you'll see them on stage from the opening bars of their theme song, "Highwayman," until the final chord of "On the Road Again." Item No. V2S - \$14.95

WAYLON JENNINGS

Lost Outlaw Performances—60 mins.
The master recording of this memorable con-

VIDEO BONANZA

cert was never released and lay forgotten in the vaults of RCA since 1978. Now we bring it to you in its entirety, as it was recorded on August 12, 1978, at the Grand Ole Opry. Here is the "Outlaw" period in all its glory, with eight Number One singles, including "Luckenbach, Texas" and "Good Hearted Woman." Item No. V4D - \$19.95

MARTY STUART

Hillbilly Rock—25 mins.

Marty's most recent home video features six songs including "Cry, Cry, Cry," "Hillbilly Rock," "Little Things," "Tempted," "Now That's Country," "Hey Baby" and "Kiss Me, I'm Gone." Item No. V6M - \$14.95

COUNTRY BOY—84 mins.

The best of Hollywood meets the best of Nashville in this touching, yet humorous motion picture. When Randy Boone (*The Virginian*), Paul "Wishbone" Brenninger and actor/singer Sheb Wooley get together with such country music stars as Grandpa Jones, Skeeter Davis and The Glaser Brothers, they tell the story of how Randy Boone comes to Nashville seeking stardom as a country music singer. This entertaining movie features 12 original songs. Item No. V20F - \$29.95

DON WILLIAMS

Video Collection Vol. 1: Echoes—55 mins.

Here are 14 of Don's personal favorites, including "Good Ole Boys Like Me," "The Ties That Bind," "That's the Thing About Love," "Till the Rivers All Run Dry," "It Must Be Love," "I'm Just a Country Boy" AND MORE! Item No. V10E - \$19.95

SECOND FIDDLE TO A STEEL GUITAR—107 mins.

Second Fiddle to a Steel Guitar is a rare production featuring 17 old-time artists and 30 great songs including "Born to Lose," "Jambalaya," "Hello Walls," "Don't Let Me Cross Over" and "Two Worlds Collide." You'll see stars like Lefty Frizzell, Dottie West, Bill Monroe, Webb Pierce, Faron Young, Minnie Pearl and others, both on-stage and backstage. Item No. V7E - \$29.95

LORETTA LYNN

Honky Tonk Girl—60 mins.

This personal portrait follows Loretta from rural Kentucky to the clubs of the Northwest, from her first appearance on the Grand Ole Opry to the 1970's Country Music Entertainer of the Decade. This video features never-seen home movies and photos and over 20 songs and performances. Item No. V8A - \$24.95

GEORGE JONES

Same Ole Me—60 mins.

They call him "Possum." They also call him "Country Music's Living Legend." *Same Ole Me* is the story of George Jones, finally told his way, with the help of a few of his friends—such great stars as Roy Acuff, Loretta Lynn and Johnny Cash. In addition to the "up close and personal" look you'll get at this country legend, the video also includes great performances of hits like "He Stopped Loving Her Today," "Bartender's Blues," "The Race Is On," "She Thinks I Still Care," "White Lightning," "Why Baby Why" and "Some Day My Day Will Come." Item No. G4Z - \$19.95

GEORGE JONES

Live in Tennessee—54 mins.

Taped live at the Knoxville Civic Coliseum, this video features George thrilling the audience with 15 of his biggest hits including "I Don't Need Your Rockin' Chair" and the Number One country song of all time, "He Stopped Loving Her Today." There's also "The Race Is On," "Who's Gonna Fill Their Shoes," "Bartender's Blues," "One Woman Man" AND MORE! Item No. V1X - \$24.95

GEORGE JONES

Golden Hits—50 mins.

This most recent video presents George Jones talking about his greatest hit songs and performing these songs at the time each one was released. We're taken into a time capsule that allows us to experience the career of this "living legend" as it unfolds. Some of the 14 songs are "White Lightning" (2/9/59), "Near You" (12/11/76) and "He Stopped Loving Her Today" (4/12/80). Item No. V3T - \$19.95

MARTY ROBBINS & ERNEST TUBB—60 mins.

Catch these two legends in the early days of their careers—rare footage of the pair performing some of their classic hits. There are 26 songs here, including such favorites as "Walkin' the Floor Over You," "Singin' the Blues," "So Many Times," "Time Goes By," "So Doggone Lonesome," "Tomorrow Never Comes," "I Can't Quit," "Pretty Words," "They'll Do It Every Time" AND MORE! Item No. V2G - \$29.9

WEBB PIERCE

Greatest Hits—52 mins.

Before his death, Webb personally created a compilation of his greatest hits from rare filmed performances, narrating and providing background on the songs, their writers and their origins. This unique video contains 17 of Webb's favorite hits including "There Stands the Glass," "I Ain't Never," "Rocky Top," "Someday," "Tupelo County Jail," "Wondering," "More and More," "Slowly," "Take the Time It Takes," "It's Been So Long" and "In the Jailhouse Now." Item No. V2R - \$19.95



DWIGHT YOAKAM

Just Lookin' for a Hit—30 mins.

Dwight's first video features hits like "Honky Tonk Man," "Guitars, Cadillacs," "Streets of Bakersfield" and "Long White Cadillac," plus an interview and performance footage from the I.R.S. label production, *The Cutting Edge*. Item No. G1E - \$19.95

REBA MCENTIRE

Live—60 mins.

This new video includes "Respect," "Is There Life Out There," "The Greatest Man I Never Knew," "Walk On," "For My Broken Heart," "Why Haven't I Heard From You," "Does He Love You" (with Linda Davis), "Take It Back," "Till You Love Me" and "Fancy." Item No. V10X - \$24.95

TAMMY WYNETTE

In Concert—60 mins.

This popular re-release features 24 classic hits from "The First Lady of Country Music" including such standards as "Stand By Your Man," "D-I-V-O-R-C-E," "Take Me to Your World," "I Don't Want to Play House" and "Your Good Girl's Gonna Go Bad." Item No. G1F - \$19.95

COUNTRY MUSIC HALL OF FAME 25TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION—90 mins.

Yesterday's legends, today's brightest superstars. For one magical night, they share the spotlight of country music's greatest spectacular—the Country Music Hall of Fame 25th Anniversary Celebration. There are classic Hank Williams favorites performed by Alan Jackson, Randy Travis and Tanya Tucker...Clint Black sings and plays the guitar of Jimmie Rodgers...Emmylou Harris, Patty Loveless and Pam Tillis pay tribute to Patsy Cline, Loretta Lynn and Kitty Wells...and so much more. Item No. V10Y - \$19.95

SHANIA TWAIN

The Woman in Me—25 mins.

This video includes the top hits from her breakthrough album, plus two earlier hits: "The Woman in Me (Needs the Man in You)," "Any Man of Mine," "Whose Bed Have Your Boots Been Under," "You Lay a Whole Lot of Love on Me," "Dance with the One That Brought You" and "What Made You Say That." Item No. V10M - \$14.95

DWIGHT YOAKAM

Pieces of Time—40 mins.

Dwight's latest video features 11 songs, including "Suspicious Minds," "The Heart That You Own," "Turn It On, Turn It Up, Turn Me Loose," "Takes a Lot to Rock You," "You're the One," "Ain't That Lonely Yet" AND MORE! Item No. V9P - \$19.95

THE STATLER BROS.

What We Love to Do—40 mins.

As a celebration of their 31st anniversary in country music, The Statler Brothers recently released this fine video, their first in over a decade! Featuring such Statler classics as "Elizabeth," "My Only Love," "What We

Love to Do," "Atlanta Blue," "Maple Street Memories," "Sweeter and Sweeter," "You've Been Like a Mother to Me" and "Let's Get Started," this is one that fans won't want to miss. Item No. V6A - \$19.95

ROGER MILLER

King of the Road—60 mins.

Here is the story of the life and career of one of country music's most notable talents. A brilliant songwriter and fine entertainer, Roger Miller was loved the world over. Here you'll see Roger perform some of his top hits, including "England Swings," "Dang Me," "Chug-A-Lug" and, of course, "King of the Road," narrated by Waylon Jennings, and featuring comments from family and friends. Reviewer Rich Kienzle called this video "an engrossing and definitive portrait of a true Nashville original." Item No. V20G - \$19.95

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WAYLON JENNINGS

My Heroes Have Always Been Cowboys—60 mins.

Filled with good humor and great music, *My Heroes Have Always Been Cowboys* presents the rugged world of cowboys against a background of Jennings' classic songs, including "Mamas Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up to Be Cowboys," "Sweet Mother Texas," "A Long Time Ago," "I've Always Been Crazy," the title track, AND MANY MORE FAVORITES! Item No. V10W - \$24.95

MARY CHAPIN CARPENTER

My Record Company Made Me Do This—25 mins.

Featuring seven of her most popular songs, this video nicely chronicles Mary Chapin's extraordinary career. Among the highlights are such top hits as "Shut Up and Kiss Me," "He Thinks He'll Keep Her," "Passionate Kisses," "I Feel Lucky," "You Win Again" and "This Shirt." Item No. V10L - \$16.95

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*Johnny Paycheck was, truly, the only hell his mama ever raised. Coming out of the 1960's as a solid country artist, Paycheck embraced the excesses of the 1970's with a vengeance. Liquor, drugs and the hard, hard road yielded a classic country album, *11 Months & 29 Days*, a virtual anthem ("Take This Job and Shove It") and an unlimited amount of trouble. That trouble culminated in a 1986 barroom shooting, and Johnny Paycheck began two years in the slammer. Amazingly, he survived it all. Instead of fading away, he came back and discovered the artistic vision that had slipped away in some honky tonk. 20 Questions surprised the legendary honky tonker at his home in north Georgia, and here's what he had to say.*

1 *Hell, more than anything else, I'm amazed you're still alive! I'll bet sometimes you are, too.*

Man, you ain't kidding! But I'm doing great, though.

2 *Even a new record deal... Tell me about that.*

Yep, got a new record deal with the Sony people. And was just inducted into the Grand Ole Opry last Saturday night.

3 *I can't believe you weren't already a member.*

Well, you remember I worked it quite a bit, but there's a lot of people who work the Opry and aren't inducted members. You know, I didn't really realize that either, until they asked me. So I was very honored that they wanted me.

4 *It must have been a pretty intense moment for you.*

It was, Michael, and they did it up real nice. They really made me feel good. Several of them came on stage and told little stories about me...good ones, you know. So it was nice, really nice.

5 *So tell me about the new record.*

I'm probably going to go in the studio in January. A



20 Questions with **JOHNNY PAYCHECK**

—By Michael Bane—

young man by the name of Blake Chancey is producing me, and it's going to be really, really great. We've been putting everything back together for the last two years, and it's really caught on fire. Once again, I'm a very, very lucky man.

6 *Have you written any songs for the new album?*

Yep, I'm writing again. I'm just writing the Paycheck style of songs, you know. I'm on a little more of a ballad kick, though, pretty strong. That seems to be what they want from me now. Especially

on the Opry and in my concerts. I'm leaning more to the ballads and staying away from the novelties as I've gotten older. I've had plenty of them, boy!

7 *So, how old are you now, anyway?*

I'm 59.

8 *And after everything, you're still ticking...*

Yeah! Because I've been very fortunate, I've got my health back the last ten years. I'm really ticking again—doing great.

9 *How about the last ten years?*

Oh, those have been the best. It was the years before that were rough! I quit drinking, quit smoking, quit drugs 10 years ago, and I've been working really hard to rebuild what I tore down, and I've finally got it back. I knew this was gonna have to happen—it didn't bother me at all to go rebuild them bridges. I was only hoping that I could. Consequently, I did. People came around to me.

10 *It's fair to say that, back in the 70's, a lot of people sang about the life, but you lived it.*

Yeah, that was one of my stupid moves. I don't know—I went the way life drug me. I did it all, I guess. Whatever.

11 *Of course, every one of us has 20/20 hindsight...*

Ain't that the truth! One of my sayings is, "From what I can remember, I think we had a good time."

12 *It's interesting that you're moving toward ballads and away from those hardcore Paycheck signature songs like "Take This Job and Shove It" or "The Only Hell..."*

If one of those hard songs comes along, I'm gonna do it. That's the fact. But I'm not going to be looking for those kinds of songs. When I do the Opry and my concerts, I'm getting standing ovations for these new kinds of ballads, new to me, that is. So I've started

Paycheck comes full circle. In the mid-70's his anthem, "Take This Job and Shove It," was everywhere. In 1975 he was caught reading the February issue of *CMM*. At right, joining the Grand Ole Opry recently with Steve Wariner and Opry General Manager Bill Whittaker.



MARIA A. MORELLO



MARIA A. MORELLO

following that and seeing where it led me. And it's led me, actually, to where I really wanted to be. I always wanted to sing ballads, but they were hard to sell. In my early career, what people wanted was "Only Hell..." and so forth. But it's been a long time now. I want to take advantage of the ballads, but you never know.

13 *Has it gotten easier, being out on the road?*
You know, I've never been off the road, except for the two years that I was in prison. I was totally shut down there. But the minute I came out, I went right back to concerts. Within seven days.

14 *It must have been an incredibly hard part of your life...*

It was, Michael. It was. The most...devastating...part of my life. But it also saved my life....

15 *Really? That was the point you were able to finally turn yourself, and your life, around?*
Oh, yeah. I finally saw that it wasn't just talk; I was way out of control. That turned me around.

16 *So before you went to prison, there was denial on your part? You really didn't believe you were out of control?*

Oh, absolutely. I was saying people didn't know what they were talking about! But everybody out of control says that! Unfortunately. Some of us never learn the truth. I've always felt lucky that I came

out on the other side, because a lot of people I know—my friends—didn't. So life's good to me, and getting better every day.

17 *How many dates are you playing these days?*
This year, I'll be working about 220. (Laughter.)

18 *It's lucky you're not slacking off...*
No, I'm staying right on top of it. You gotta make hay while the sun shines, and all of a sudden, it's cleared off.

19 *Why do you think your career has taken off again?*
People love to see somebody down get back up. I think that's one of the big things, and that's what we've done.

By the bootstraps, and people want to see that.

20 *Let me throw this out to you... You're the real item, the real deal. You didn't study American Popular Music in college like some of today's country stars...*

And people are looking for that now, I agree. Real country music. I like Mark Chesnutt. I like Tim McGraw. Tracy Byrd did a couple of my things, and he and I became pretty good friends. He's doing some good country things. I love Alan Jackson—he's country, sure is.

It looks like I'm going to be working some next year with Merle Haggard, starting the Workin' Man Concert Series. It's gonna be the year I've been looking for, I think.

Kim Richey

Live at the Bongo Java

With the emphasis on melody and harmony, Kim Richey strives for the unexpected in her music.

by Geoffrey Himes

It isn't easy to interview Kim Richey at Bongo Java, her favorite Nashville hangout. Even after she leads us into the remotest corner of the coffeehouse behind Belmont College, a steady parade of friends drop by to say hello. Every time someone waves, a wide, wide grin spreads beneath Richey's blonde, sheep-dog bangs. When the cafe owner comes by, she jokingly offers to buy the ugly, second-hand armchair she's sitting in. When her producer, Angelo, comes by, she unlimbers her long, long frame from the chair and rises to give him a hug. Even the busboy gets a warm welcome.

This same generosity of spirit informs Richey's current album, *Bitter Sweet*. The songs' juicy melodies and thick harmonies should warm listeners in much the same way Richey's smile lights up Bongo Java. There's a sunniness to the sound that reminds one of Southern California and its singers—Emmylou Harris, Linda Ronstadt, Rosie Flores and Christine McVie. Last year, Richey received a Grammy nomination for co-writing Trisha Yearwood's Number One hit, "Believe Me Baby (I Lied)," and as much as her own recordings resemble Yearwood's pop-country confessions, Richey places an even stronger emphasis on melody and harmony.

This presents another problem for the interviewer, who is accustomed to asking country performers just about their lyrics, which are, after all, words—a writer's stock and trade. But with Richey, you get deeper into the songwriting process, and how does one talk about melody and har-



mony? How does one discuss the feeling of vertigo produced by the melody on her song, "Fallin'"? How does one describe the way the herky-jerky first melody in the chorus of "I Know," her recent single, turns into a cascade of soothing "ah's"? How does one distinguish a good melody from a bad one without lapsing into the eye-glazing jargon of an academic musicologist? You ask the artist.

"I like melodies that you think are going one way," Richey explains, "but end up going another way. When you listen to music, there are certain things you ex-

pect to happen, but sometimes someone does something different—they might put a different chord than the one you expect or they might take the melody up where you expect it to go down—and it catches your attention. If it's done right, it sparks an emotion.

"More and more people in country music are doing that," she adds. "Dwight Yoakam does that; Jim Lauderdale does that; Radney Foster does that—and they do it beautifully. Like on the bridge from Dwight's 'Ain't That Lonely Yet,' where it takes you away from the melody but then winds up right back at the normal place. You hear something like that and you say, 'How did he do that?' Or when I wrote 'Nobody Wins' with Radney; he

thought of that weird key change coming out of the bridge into the last chorus; it doesn't jump out at you, but it gets you in the gut.

"There are only so many notes, so when someone does something different with them, it really impresses you—like anyone who can write a love song that sounds fresh at this stage in the game. The Beatles did that, but it doesn't happen very often."

Melody is making a comeback in Nashville, and Richey is at the forefront of the movement. It's as if country music were reclaiming the legacy of Roy Orbison and his big, dramatic choruses. Singers such as Yoakam, James House, Ray Vega, Rodney Crowell and The Mavericks' Raul Malo are all doing their best to imitate the man in shades. Richey herself had an obvious Orbison tribute, "Those Words We Said," on her debut album and an even more obvious one with "My Whole World" from the current one.

"Well, if you have a voice like Dwight's or Raul's,"

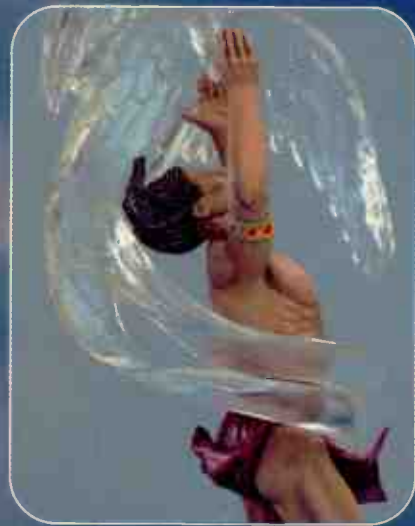
Richey points out, "you're naturally drawn to Orbison, because those bigger-than-life melodies give you a chance to really use that voice. When we wrote 'My Whole World,' both the chords and the lyric seemed to call for an Orbison treatment. It was more dramatic than anything I'd say in real life; I don't think anyone should be your whole life, but when I sang it, the music made it seem real.

"When we were thinking of titles for the new album," Richey recalls, "I asked myself, 'What do all these lyrics have in common?' We went over to the home of

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Luke Lewis, the president of Mercury, to hear the final mixes, and I turned to Luke and said, 'I've got the title. *Bitter Sweet*. Two words. I was adamant that it had to be two words; 'bittersweet' sounded too girly and whiny; it was two things, bitter *and* sweet. It's ambiguous, because that's the way life is.

"When bad stuff is happening to you, you can't let it just sink you down, but you have to give your sadness respect. You can't just pretend everything is fine. Sad songs can be very comforting, but there's a difference between a sad song and a whiny song. 'I Can't Make You Love Me' is a great sad song, because there's such realism, such strength in the lyric. She doesn't say, 'I'll do anything, please love me.' She doesn't whine."

Another new song, "Straight As the Crow Flies," faces up to separation from a loved one not with whining but with the promise, "You can always count on me." If it sounds like a combination of the lyric from Joni Mitchell's "Black Crow" and the music from Joni Mitchell's "Chelsea Morning," that's no coincidence.

"I'm a huge Joni Mitchell fan," Richey readily confesses. "When I was in a band in high school, this guy taught me 'The Circle Game,' and I loved it so much that I went out and bought *Miles of Aisles* and then worked my way backward through her whole catalogue and then through all the Joni Mitchell songbooks. I spent my college years playing Joni Mitchell songs on an acoustic guitar in bars."

High school was in southwestern Ohio, not far from where Dwight Yoakam grew up, yet Richey, who just turned 41, had an entirely different experience. Her dad died when she was two, and she lost that close contact with his family, which was full of coal miners and farmers. Instead her mom remarried and moved to the Dayton area, where Richey had the typical suburban childhood.

"I didn't grow up listening to country music," she admits. "We had this little plastic record player, and we'd stack up as many 45's as it would hold, and I'd sing along to Monkees songs over and over till it sounded just like the record. I drove my sister crazy. I sang solos in church; I sang choir in school. I was very shy as a kid except when I sang."

When she was a senior in high school, she heard that the local Steak & Ale Restaurant was looking for a band. She and two male friends auditioned on a whim as the Blue Monday Trio and were surprised to get hired. There was only one problem. They only knew three songs, and they had to have four sets of material in two weeks. "We learned any song we could find," she says. "We were going for quantity, not quality." They played at the

restaurant every week until they all went away to college.

Richey went away to Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green. One day in the college coffeehouse, a tall, curly-headed guy stopped by her table, trying to pick up her girlfriend. The guy invited them both back to his room to hear him play some songs, but once they were there Richey couldn't resist pointing out that he was strumming a wrong chord. The guy handed Richey the guitar to see if she

"I was adamant that it had to be two words; 'bittersweet' sounded too girly and whiny; it was two things, bitter and sweet. It's ambiguous, because that's the way life is."

could do any better, and he was so impressed with her singing and playing that he invited her to join his band.

The guy's name was Bill Lloyd, who many years later landed in the Top 10 country charts as half of Foster & Lloyd. The drummer in the band was Randy Goodman, until very recently an executive with RCA Records in Nashville. It was a taste of things to come, but it would be a long time before they would arrive. First, Richey transferred to Ohio University in Athens, where she graduated with a degree in environmental education. She worked as a drug counselor in Ohio, as a camp counselor in Sweden, as a bartender in Colorado, as a cook in Washington State.

Foster & Lloyd had just gotten their deal when Lloyd sent a tape of Steve Earle's *Guitar Town* to Richey in Bellingham, Washington. "I went cuckoo over it," she recalls. "It was one of those records that changes your life. He could paint a scene in so few words with such plain language. So often the language in songs is flowery, but Steve wrote the way people talked. It got me excited about music in general and about Nashville in particular. I had been working while my boyfriend was in school, but he finished, so now it was my turn to pick where we lived and I picked Nashville. We drove down in this really old, over-stuffed truck, looking like The Beverly Hillbillies."

The boyfriend soon disappeared, but Richey was in Nashville to stay. Lloyd introduced her to people and got her a publishing deal at Blue Water, where she still is today. The second song she wrote with Foster was "Nobody Wins," which became a Number One hit for him. She ran into George Ducas at an antique mall and ended up co-writing his hit, "In No Time at All." Ducas introduced her to Angelo. Then finally, after several near misses, she landed

a recording contract of her own with Mercury, and Richard Bennett, Earle's former producer, agreed to produce it.

"I was so excited by my first record," she confesses. "That was as far as my goals went—to make a record I could be proud of. We decorated the studio with folk art and lawn chairs and turned it into our own zone for a few weeks. I loved working with Richard, because he has no ego problems. If the demo works, he says, why mess with it? On the other hand, if the song needs something else, he has plenty of great ideas. 'Can't Find the Words,' for example, went way off into Richard World."

So Richey was crushed when she learned Bennett wouldn't be available to produce her follow-up album because he was going on tour with Mark Knopfler. She had been making demos of all the songs for the new album with Angelo, however, and she really

loved the results. She asked Mercury if she could use Angelo to produce the actual album, and she was surprised when they said yes, because it's rare for a major Nashville label to give so much responsibility to such a relative unknown. Angelo insisted on using his own players rather than the usual session players, and again Mercury surprised them by agreeing.

"So often you have this demo you love," Richey notes, "and then you go into the studio and lose that magic. Because you have to work so quickly in the studio, you can't work on each part like you can in a demo session; you have to settle for whatever a session player tries the first time. By using Angelo and his guys on the album, we didn't have that problem, because they had made the demos, and I loved the demos, so why change things? Plus, Angelo; Billy Beard, the drummer; and Andrew Mazzone, the bassist, are all from Boston and have been playing together since college, so they sound like a real band, not just some guys we hired and taught the songs. It makes a difference."

That much is obvious two weeks later when Richey, the three Bostonians and guitarist Kenny Vaughan show up for a live show in northern Virginia. The band is harder and looser on stage than in the studio, and when Vaughan plays a long guitar solo on "My Wildest Dreams," Richey does her best imitation of a *Shindig* dancer.

Wearing a brown leather jacket and shiny black pants, the tall blonde singer towers over three of her four bandmates. When she promises a lover that she'll be there for him until "Every River Runs Dry," the transporting rise and fall of her melody and the heartfelt intensity of her vocal make every stranger in the hall feel like Kim Richey's friend—as if they were all back at Bongo Java. ■

Letters

Come On Over

In regards to the November/December issue (Shania Twain): What a beautiful cover! What a wonderful article, "Shania Twain," by Michael Bane. But it left me wondering if Shania is getting too loonie (just kidding). She's as sane as ever the *twain* shall meet. Just *betwain* you and me, the "woman in me" can "come on over" any time! Love your magazine.

Jude L. Raymond
Falconer, New York

Assets Noted

I just saw the new "Gol Darn Gone and Done It" video. It revealed a part of Shania Twain that had been hidden before—her true set of values. It was a "first." It was the first Shania Twain video I hated. I had always looked forward to her videos, but I will no longer be doing that. I am a new subscriber to CMM. I thoroughly enjoy it. The articles are very informative, and since country music artists seem to respect your magazine, I feel I can trust the articles to tell the "real story," unlike some gossip type articles in some publications. The photographs in CMM are great.

Barbara J. Pendleton
McColl, South Carolina

That's "Love Gets Me Every Time" from Shania's new album.—Ed.

Body Parts

I usually don't write to your magazine, but I just read the story on Shania Twain in the November/December issue. The story says "her navel has gotten so much exposure it probably has an agent of its own." Why don't Shania just cover up? I mean, do millions and millions of people really want to see her navel? I doubt it, after all, everybody else has a navel, so she's no more special than anyone else.

Personally, I would rather listen to Trisha Yearwood or Patty Loveless. Both of them are beautiful, and neither has to show their navel to get attention. Their music speaks for itself!

Kay Thrower
South Boston, Virginia

See Patty Loveless in centerfold.—Ed.

Happy 25th Issue

I was very happy when I got my 25th Anniversary issue (September/October 1997) to see Garth on the cover. I wasn't sure if I'd see a major article on him in



your magazine. I was pleasantly surprised. I love Garth! He's the best! I thought Michael Bane and Hazel Smith did a good job with the questions they asked him. Garth was his usual candid self. I thought what he had to say was very interesting, touching, funny and revealing. It confirmed some of the reasons why I'm such a big fan and will always be despite what some people say/write like your Editor-at-Large Patrick Carr (Final Note, September/October).

Tell Mr. Carr that one of the persons he mentioned that he likes professionally and personally (Trisha Yearwood) would certainly disagree with his assessment of Garth. Trisha and Garth have been close friends for ten years. She thinks the world of him. She credits and appreciates how he helped her career and his friendship. Their duet, "In Another's Eyes," is just wonderful.

Country music is lucky to have Garth, and Garth is lucky to be a part of the country music family. Why can't some people (guess who?) appreciate what he has accomplished and what he stands for.

Seira Ogihara
Los Angeles, California

From the Front Row

After reading the CMM Interview with Garth Brooks in the September/October issue, I just had to write. We were some of the fans "going nuts" in the front row of the Garth Brooks concert in Pittsburgh on October 17, 1997, after one of his stage

crew members gave us the tickets. There were six of us—ages 12-64—and what a delight when Garth gave my niece a kiss (it just happened to be her 12th birthday and her first-ever concert). The rest of us were giddy for days, and I thank Garth for making it such a memorable, awesome night! We love you, Garth!

Amy Infanti
Wellsville, Ohio

Honoring Ferlin Husky

Having been subscribers off and on for years, we were shocked to see that your magazine had not honored Ferlin Husky on any magazine cover the last 25 years (25th Anniversary Celebration, September/October 1997). Yes, he's old now but still providing entertainment in Branson, Missouri. Just ask any musician and you will find only admiration for his many talents. My husband and I are in our 70's and would like to see him recognized again. Please do some research and honor him before he passes on. He is a legend in the music world.

Margaret Kroll
Murphy, North Carolina

Ferlin due up soon in *The Journal*, now combined with the CMSA Newsletter in members' subscriptions.—Ed.

Anniversary Inspires Critique

I have been a reader of your magazine for three years, and a subscriber for the last two. I have thoroughly enjoyed your photos and articles on the numerous country music entertainers, both past and present, featured in every issue. Your critiques of new albums are outstanding in their wonderful honesty. They say what they really think, instead of just what people would like to hear.

After reading my 25th anniversary edition, which I eagerly read from cover to cover, I was amazed to realize that in a brilliant 16-year career, George Strait has only graced the cover of your magazine four times. Please give his many fans a new cover and story on this true Texas gentleman, who is so quietly awesome, that he is, perhaps, sometimes overlooked.

Deborah Goings
Houston, Texas

Pulling Out All the Stops for Strait

I just received my November/December magazine. The first thing I saw was "George Strait pull-out." Thank you,

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thank you. It's been a long time coming. I have all of his pull-outs. He is the greatest, by far.

Thank you too for not having Garth Brooks splashed all over your magazine this month. I can not understand why the CMA gave him the Entertainer of the Year award for "giving a free Rock Concert" in New York City. He may put on a good Hard Rock show, but he isn't "Country." He never has been. If he was as good as some of the "Country Music" people want to make him out to be, he wouldn't have to break up his instruments and go "Flying over the crowd" and the other silly things he does. I think people go to see what he is going to do next. Why can't he just stand up there and sing his songs and be Country if he wants to be counted as a Country singer: George Strait packs them in by the thousands. He doesn't have to put on some kind of an acrobatic show to get people to come. He just stands up there and sings his heart out and flashes that million-dollar smile, and the crowd goes wild.

Thanks again for your wonderful magazine. It's the best.

Reatha Spence
Bartow, Florida

25 Years Inspires Subscribing

Loved your September/October 1997 Fall issue! Especially the articles on Garth Brooks (the CMM Interview) and Johnny Cash (25 Questions with Johnny Cash). Can't do without your magazine—so I'm ordering a subscription and decided to become a CMSA member.

Sandy Petra Guerra
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

CMSA now merged with Academy/Journal. No longer appears in newsstand copies. To subscribe, call 203-221-4950.—Ed.

L&N Rolls On

With regard to 25 Questions with Johnny Cash in your September/October 1997 issue: Brian Ahern's done his share, but Jean Ritchie wrote "The L&N Don't Stop Here Anymore" in 1963.

Bear Rowell
Falls of Rough, Kentucky

Yes, and Cash knows it. It's just the context that makes it appear that he is saying that. For more on Cash, see People and Essential Collector this time.—Ed.

Strait Father and Son

First off, I would like to say a big thank you for the excellent work on the magazine, *Country Music*. I am a new subscriber this year, and I am enjoying your magazine. Most of all, in the People section in your September/October issue, I loved your comment on George Strait about his son. It was about how George made time to go spend time with Bubba. George Strait is my favorite singer, and I appreciate the positive things you are

saying about him. I would really like it if you put him on the cover, 'cause he hasn't been on the front for a while. Meanwhile, keep up the good work.

Nicky Marx
Lenora, Kansas

"What'll You Do About Me"

Dear *Country Music Magazine*:

I read your record review of Toby Keith's *Dream Walkin'* CD in the November/December issue. I agree it is a great CD, but Toby did not sing "What'll You Do About Me," and with the personal problems, I think you got him mixed up with Doug Supernaw.

I just love Toby and think he is the best singer in the world today.

Cindy Wolfe
Fountain City, Wisconsin

We received many letters concerning the errors in the Toby Keith review. To set the record straight, the song "What'll You Do About Me" (originally cut by Randy Travis) was not covered by Keith at all, it was done by Doug Supernaw. In that vein, Millard says, "I apologize for the Toby Keith snafu. I combined his musical history with the personal history of Doug Supernaw in my tiny rat brain. Sorry, Toby. Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa." Additionally, in The Amazing Rhythm Aces review, the song "Third Rate Romance" was covered by Sammy Kershaw, not by Toby Keith. The song appeared on Kershaw's 1994 album, Feelin' Good Train. We regret the errors. Hopefully when we interview Toby in the near future (we have one scheduled soon), Toby can get back at us by saying anything he wants to about Millard. Seriously though, we regret these mistakes.

—The Editors

Revved Up About RVS

I am a new "re-subscriber" to your magazine and recently received my first issue. I enjoyed your record review of Ricky Van Shelton's new album, *Making Plans*, in your November/December issue. It is one great album, and he is singing better than ever. I wish radio stations weren't so set on playing mostly major label artists, as the first single, "She Needs Me," deserved to be high on the charts. I hope you will have an article on him soon.

Loraine Keehn
Kearney, Nebraska

That Leslie Cabinet Sound

A little comment on Bob Millard's review of *Shakin' Things Up* by Lorrie Morgan in your November/December issue.

Does anyone remember the Leslie cabinet sound? Anyone who has listened to rock music for the last eight years or so definitely does. The Leslie, and all those other trippy effects on Lorrie's record, have been a big part of the "alternative"

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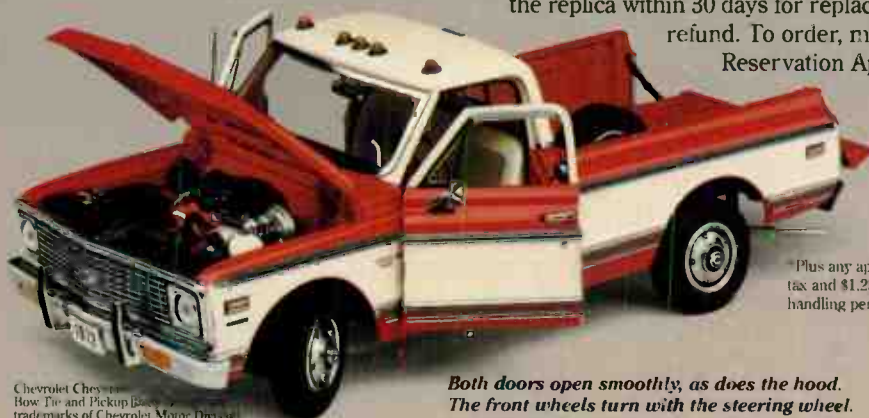
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Answers to these questions can be found by reading this issue of *Country Music Magazine*. Answers will be published in the March/April 1998 issue.

1. What country songwriting legend socialized with Mark Chesnutt recently?
2. How many Number One singles has Alabama had?
3. What is the name of Kim Richey's most recent problem?
4. Who co-wrote Johnny Cash's new autobiography, *Cash*?
5. How many albums has Patty Loveless released?
6. The Vortec engine in the Full-Size Chevy Truck is designed to go how many miles before its first scheduled tune-up?

ANSWERS TO LAST ISSUE'S QUIZ:

1. *The Woman in Me* 2. Matraca Berg
3. Make-A-Wish Foundation 4. *Murder, Country Style* 5. Kim Richey 6. Chevy S-10.

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sound; give Soundgarden a listen some time. Morgan and company have just picked up on what's going on (or went on a couple years ago) in the pop world—certainly nothing new for a country artist. Point being, it's not so much a nod to the 60's as a stab at a sort of "alternative country" sound. I've heard young bands around doing much the same mix of psychedelic and country, so she may have caught on to the right trend!

I do believe critics could be a little more aware of what's going on in other genres, especially when influences can spread so quickly in this age. Like it or not, we may be listening to the future of country music here; at least, it's better than the pop-country that's been putting us to sleep for the last few years.

Steve Brook
Steinhatchee, Florida

One Woman's Opinion

This is for the *critic* who reviewed *Everywhere* by Tim McGraw in the September/October issue. First, I have to say I do not agree with your point of view at all. Second, I have to say I'd hate for you to review anything for me. Third, I'd have to say I don't think you are worthy of your job.

Now that I have made my point, I can say although I don't care for your opinion, I love the magazine you work for. I (*in my opinion*) think Tim's latest record is fabulous. His duet with his wife is absolutely wonderful. I think it has done well for itself. Also I think many people would not say it's "bland" or "a loser."

Well, thank you for your time and patience, but I must go now. I want to play my "bland" single of "It's Your Love."

Denise Futrell
Marion, South Carolina

Inside Sherrie Austin

I am writing in response to Bob Millard's record review in the September/October issue. I purchased Sherrie Austin's *Words* because of "Lucky in Love"; after I listened to the CD, I sure didn't feel like I wasted my money. I felt like maybe she let everyone have a peek at the inside of Sherrie Austin, and that's not something that everyone is willing to do, not to mention that she traveled thousands of miles to do it.

I am a music lover, everything from Reba to The Rolling Stones. I would like to say that Trisha Yearwood and Alan Jackson rule country music and Fleetwood Mac rules everything else (The Mac is back).

Mandy Bennett
Jacksonville, Florida

Looking Back on CMM and E.T.

Just wanted to let you know how much *Country Music Magazine* has meant to me throughout my 60 years. I've bought

it off the newsstands or been a subscriber since its conception. It's always been my favorite magazine. I've enjoyed the articles and found great treasures through its pages. One treasure that I've found in recent months has been the book, *Ernest Tubb, The Texas Troubadour*, written by Ronnie Pugh. Had it not been for *Country Music Magazine*, I may not have discovered this fabulous, well-written, and informative biography on one whom I considered the greatest Country Music personality of all time. Although I knew E.T. very well personally, I learned a great many things from Ronnie's book. I'd like to urge all E.T. fans who haven't yet read this book to do so—if you loved E.T. you'll love this book! And even if one isn't an E.T. fan, the book will hold your interest. It belongs in every true Country Music fan's library. My thanks to Ronnie Pugh for his in-depth picture of Ernest Tubb, and my thanks to *Country Music Magazine* for the tip (Essential Collector, January/February 1997).

Doris Jacobs
Albuquerque, New Mexico

Looking for Cindy Walker

I have been trying to find information on a country singer from the 1940's, Cindy Lou Walker, and getting nowhere.

I just read *Country Music Magazine* September/October 1997 on page 11 under "Everyday Songs"; it's about induction to the Country Music Hall of Fame, Cindy Walker. Is this the same Cindy Lou Walker?

Cindy Lou Strickler
Rancho Cucamonga, California
Yes. A songbook of her songs is in work, hopefully to be published soon. For more info, try the Hall of Fame.—Ed.

John Denver's Passing

I think it's terribly sad that so little was said in the media about the death of John Denver. I know there were mixed feelings from fans about the fact that the media said he was flying illegally. Was he? or had he been told he could continue to fly until his hearing date.

No matter, either way. I think he deserves to be remembered for his music and his special contributions to many worthy causes such as The National Arbor Day Foundation, The National Wildlife Federation, The Windstar Land Conservancy, The Hunger Project and The Cousteau Society. Interested readers can plant a tree in the John Denver Memorial Grove in John's honor by contacting The National Arbor Day Foundation.

Alice R. Evans
Montrose, Pennsylvania
For a farewell to John Denver, see this issue. For the John Denver Memorial Grove: for each \$10, ten trees will be planted, National Arbor Day Foundation, Nebraska City, NE 68410.—Ed.

Remembrance of John Denver

Enclosed is a copy of a poem I wrote about John Denver. I felt compelled to write this poem about the late entertainer. I believe he wrote and sang songs about things of importance, and had a warmth within his music that touched so many.

Ron Dailey
Kingsford Heights, Indiana

A TROUBADOUR'S LAMENT (A Tribute to John Denver)

He sang of rocky mountains high,
Of craggy peaks where eagles fly.
Inspired by things he vowed to save,
A pristine lake, an ocean's wave.
His final trek in solitude,
A fate no mortal can elude.
Down country roads no more to roam,
God's gentle hand will take him home.
With mournful hearts and misty eyes,
The sunshine truly made us cry.
His mortal voice will sing no more,
This Rocky Mountain troubadour.
If the Rockies wailed in human voice,
His would be their solemn choice.
If you listen closely to the wind,
A familiar voice the mountains send.
Like the eagles high, his spirit soars,
This Rocky Mountain troubadour.

—R.D.



As detailed in her letter below, Pam Davis and her daughter Tricia are big Reba fans.

25 Years and Reba's Good Work

I would like to tell you all how much I enjoy your *Country Music Magazine*, and I hope it will be around another 25 years plus. I do not have many opportunities to go to country concerts. The last one I went to was in 1994, a Reba concert at Deer Creek, in Noblesville, Indiana. I took my daughter, Tricia, who is now 13 years old. She has cerebral palsy and is confined to a wheelchair. We had handicap seating, but the security people allowed me to take Tricia to the front to hear Reba sing a song, and to my surprise they brought

me a chair and let us sit in the aisle throughout the whole show. Tricia is a big country music fan, it is country or nothing with her. Although she cannot talk, sing, or walk, if she could, she would know every word to every song by Reba. When she hears Reba, it's almost like she is a country star herself. She will get so excited it nearly brings tears to my eyes. Tricia has Reba tapes that go to school with her. I was surprised when the teacher told me so many students know Reba songs from listening to them with Tricia. When it seems Tricia is not feeling well, I will put a Reba tape in, and if she does not respond with excitement, it is time to call the doctor. (This is no kidding.)

So please tell Reba to keep up the good work. Her music has touched the heart of my daughter and many others like her.

Pam and Tricia Davis
Kokomo, Indiana

Letters From Fans Abroad

Overseas fans took the trouble to write in a language that is not their own. Thank you, Juris, Nur and Jack, and we will keep it country.

Latvian Fan Likes 25

Happy 25th Anniversary, CMM. I really enjoy all articles in your magazine. I enjoy it until the "last dug." What a wonderful compilation, going back in history through the last 25 years as seen on your covers. The Times of our lives. That special September/October issue was a very special for me too. I am a "new" subscriber. I've received just six copies. The day when I receive every next issue is a happy day for me. Country music is my life, that is my soul and heart. I have a great possibility to listen country music Radio from U.K. via Astra satellite. CMM helps me to know country music more and—you guys do it your best!

I will subscribe CMM every next year. I collect every issue. All the best to CMM.

Juris Smiltnieks
Riga, Latvia

Indonesian Fan

First of all, allow me to introduce myself to you. My name is Nur Cholis Saiful. I'm 20 years old, and I'm a student in The Indonesian University, Jakarta. Now I live in Semarang.

This is my first time letter. I really do like country music. As you to know, the country music is not very popular in my country as much as other music. Cause of that it's so difficult to find CM collections. But this is not make me give up on it. I always keep loving CM forever. I wish I could have information about address of country stars, if you didn't mind of course. I always hope that all of your/CMM dreams come true.

Nur Cholis Saiful
Semarang, Indonesia



Envelope brought the mail all the way from Indonesia.

French Fan Salutes CMM

Hello, from France. I'm 61 years old, I love America very much since I saw the "G.I.'s Joe" came from USA in 1943 to liberate us from the German Nazi; I can't forget them and their music too.

I'm a subscriber of *Country Music Magazine* since three years. It help me for working out my show each Wednesday to talk about country artists "new-comers and the others one" on the air in the Southern French Radio Station.

I make a Country Music show since 12 years and my only regret it's I had liked to enjoy your magazine some years before. I'm a DJ and a membership of the Southern French "American Line Dance Association."

Thanks for all, God bless America. Keep your Country on.

Jack Salvaigo
Miramas, France

Sweeps Winner Shops

I would like to thank you again for picking me to win your 1997 June/July Sweepstakes. I am very happy about winning your sweepstakes, and I cannot be-



Happy sweeps winner Martin Kempf.

lieve it. I have not won anything in my life before. I enjoy reading *Country Music Magazine*. It is my favorite magazine. I am happy about winning your sweepstakes—you can tell by looking at my smiling face. I am going to buy Christmas gifts and pay off my bills. I would tell everyone to subscribe to *Country Music Magazine*.

Martin Kempf
Louisville, Kentucky

New Sweeps Winner Announced

The winner of our August/September 1997 \$1000.00 Renewal Sweepstakes is Terry D. Frye Sr. of Minneapolis, Minnesota. Congratulations, Terry.

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Thought for the Day

I have a suggestion I've been toying with for a while: Why not have the person that's pictured on the monthly calendar submit their favorite recipe for that month. I think this would be great.

Albia Huston
Mount Vernon, Illinois

25 Years and No Bogguss

I have received my 25th Anniversary September/October issue of your *Country Music Magazine* and cannot resist commenting on your negligence. With all the covers you have used in the 25th Anniversary, you did not see fit to use the photo of one of the most photogenic, talented, nice, award-winning females in country music. I am speaking of Suzy Bogguss. Granted you have written several nice pieces about her in your magazine but have never let her grace your front cover. Let us hope that in the coming year you will find a place for her in your cover history.

Janet L. Faber
Davenport, Iowa

Seek and Scan

When travelling from state to state, I have a problem finding country stations. Where can I get a list of local stations that carry country music? Maybe you could print a list once a year in *Country Music*.

Daniel Demcsik
Martinsville, New Jersey

Check with the *CMA* in Nashville or hit your search button and hope.—Ed.

Fourteen-Year-Old for Faith Hill

Hello, CMM. I am writing this to express my feelings. I feel that you do not give Faith Hill enough credit or controversy. I believe that she is the best country music singer ever; no ifs, ands, or buts. Period. I recall reading a letter (yes, I do read the letters) from a woman asking that you do another in-depth interview with her. Well, it's over a year since "Contradictions and Affirmations" was written, and I'm still waiting. By the way, do you know where I could get a copy of the July/August 1996 issue? I would also like to have a poster of her in an upcoming issue, if you don't mind. And, incidentally, don't get the wrong idea, Tim. Oh, and another thing. While I'm at it, I noticed that Tim McGraw and Faith Hill are married, right? Well, I noticed that there is a school publishing company called "McGraw-Hill" a.k.a. McMillan/McGraw-Hill. Neat, huh?

Is she going to do any more albums? I hope she does, because it would be a shame to see great talent like hers wasted. Could you see to it that she reads this? I would really appreciate that.

Zach O'Neal
Winston-Salem, North Carolina

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Dwight's Oldest

Surprise! I just found out I am the oldest member of Dwight Yoakam's Fan Club. Eighty this November. I have been a member for about eight years, and he is my all-time favorite. I buy two of every CD and video he has made in case one wears out. I have had a very sad life for the last ten years, with my husband ending up in a nursing home. Dwight's music really lifts my spirits to a higher level and has been my source of many happy hours of listening to some great music. I will never be able to thank him and his band enough. They surely deserve more glory than they receive. Keep the Dwight news coming, as I'm reading the *Country Music Magazine* and listening to Dwight.

Billie Pulliam
Milton, Washington

Fan Meets Rimes

I am enclosing a photo of my granddaughter Jackie Lemman with LeAnn Rimes. We all flew down to Reno from Oregon so Jackie could see LeAnn. She belongs to her fan club.

We have subscribed to your magazine for many years. We really like it.

Jackie and Richard Gettis
Salem, Oregon



Jackie Lemman meets LeAnn Rimes.

A Special Fan

As an Afro-American living in a predominantly black community, I stand out. What makes me stand out is my love for country music. I don't invite many people over. But when I do, I think they believe I'm crazy or being funny when they hear country music on my stereo. Then I hand them a copy of *Country Music Magazine* as a loaner and tell them to read up on it, man, you just might grow to like it. Weeks later, some will show up and flash me a Vince Gill or a Garth Brooks and smile. My wife Antoinette tells me I'm on a soul-winning mission for country music.

I have a daughter 13 years of age and four grandkids by my three older children who're raising families of their own, and all the grandchildren are hooked on country, including my daughter Juanita White. So country has a definite future.

Glenn White
Portland, Oregon



Ashley Adelmund meets Richie McDonald of Lonestar at a mall concert. Now she's hooked on their music.

Fan's First Concert

I just wanted to send you this picture! This was my daughter's first concert. It was a free concert at Lindale Mall, Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Lonestar was fantastic! She had a blast, singing and dancing with Lonestar; they made it fun for the whole family. She got to meet them afterwards, and they all said, "Hello, Ashley." She was tickled. She really liked Richie McDonald. She now listens to Lonestar all the time.

Kathy Adelmund
Waterloo, Iowa

Publisher to Publisher on 25

Russ: Congrats on 25 years. I've been subscribing since the start, at home and in California. The latest (September/October 1997) is simply great! You're a guiding light for all us small publishers.

Jim Sharp
American Songwriter Magazine
Nashville, Tennessee

A Voice From the Trenches

A little late, but I just picked up the last two issues of CMM, happy 25th birthday! Hope I'll see you in 25 years, if country music is not Resting In Peace at that time... I guess I'll always remember my impassioned conversation with Waylon Jennings at the Ritz in Paris, a raw-to-the-bone radio interview with the greatest unnoticed American songwriter back from Hell's Kitchen, I mean Steve Earle, Willie Nelson and a Pedernales Picnic, my first Johnny Cash show, a dream trip from John Lee Hooker's home in San Francisco to Bakersfield, and very recently criss-crossing the U. S. from New York to Hollywood via Nashville, Memphis, Gallup in the big radio desert.

Reading CMM looks like the first time I find in print some real-asked questions and feel a little fervor towards the music itself. I'll also keep in mind the near frantic look of Garth Brooks and the publicity crew when the French, young-and-skinny cow-punk that I am asked for a "nothing but the truth-on-the-grill" interview back in '94. There was a time when the music born in the South was like world radio,

and I'm afraid there are less and less words, tension and raw & sexy music to dream about now. Sometimes, the chills are there, though. And thank god—if the country radios are such a no-song nightmare, if the problem is not the hat but what you find right under, they didn't make you turn the stereo off, you're still on display, and we'll always find someone to play a good song. There still are a few hopes to share.

Franck Roy
Hollywood, California

One Last Concert

Just wanted to share a special memory with others. My mother and I are both big BRC fans. In May, we attended a concert in Owensboro, Kentucky. It was my Mother's Day gift to her. She enjoyed the show very much, but didn't quite seem herself. I didn't know why, but she had been sick for a few weeks and she didn't feel very well that night. The drive wore her out. But she had a great time. That night I had a backstage pass for this show. I tried to sneak her back with me, but everyone without a pass was asked to leave and she waited in the lobby.

Four days later, she was taken to the hospital. We found she had cancer—she passed away three weeks later. But that show was the last thing we did together,



Bessie Rhinehimer with Billy Ray Cyrus.

and she enjoyed herself as much as was possible. BRC fan 4-ever and have a good memory from this show. I loved my mother very much, and miss her dearly. Am trying to go on, and good memories like this one help.

Love your magazine. Don't miss it.

Bessie Rhinehimer
Lexington, Kentucky

Happy 25th Anniversary

"That Magazine is a Success who brings out the best in Others and gives the best of themselves." From your Number One subscriber,

Gregory E. Zotos
Livonia, Michigan

Send Letters to the Editor to *Country Music Magazine*, One Turkey Hill Road South, Westport, CT 06880. Mark your envelope, Attention: Letters. We reserve the right to edit for space and style.

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Payment: All classified advertising must be prepaid with order. Make check or money order payable to *Country Music Magazine*. For credit card orders (Visa or MasterCard only), please include account number, expiration date, signature and the amount you authorize *Country Music Magazine* to charge your account.

Closing Date: *Country Music Magazine* is published 6 times per year. The next available issue is March/April, which closes January 15th; the May/June issue closes March 15th.

Mail advertising copy, payments and production materials for display ads to: *Country Music Magazine*, Classified Department, P.O. Box 570, Clearwater, Florida 33757-0570. For overnight courier service send to: 1510 Barry Street, Suite D, Clearwater, Florida 33756. Telephones: 1-(800) 762-3555 • International (813) 449-1775 • Fax (813) 442-2567 • E-Mail rpiads@aol.com

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MEMBERS POLL/FEBRUARY 1998

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CMSA and Academy members, get your vote in now for the Album and Single of the Month. And, if you don't mind, please tell us about your album purchases this month. We'll publish the results in the next issue—your opinion counts!

Bought Any Good Records Lately?

1. Did you buy any albums (records, cassettes or compact discs) in the last month? Yes No
How many records? _____ cassettes? _____ CD's? _____

2. In the boxes below, write the numbers of any of the albums on the Top 25 list in this issue which you bought in the last month.

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3. For any albums you bought in the last month not on the Top 25 list, write performer's name and album titles in the space below. (Attach a separate sheet if you need more room.)

Your Choice for Album of the Month

4. List numbers of your five favorites from Top 25 in this issue.

Singles (list 5 numbers)

Albums (list 5 numbers)

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RECOMMENDED RECORDINGS



Notable reissues on artists covered in this issue of *The Journal*.

Hank Locklin: The recordings made during the 1948-1954 period of Hank Locklin's career (his early, pre-RCA era)—covered in Kevin Coffey's article in this issue of *The Journal*—are available in their entirety on the three-CD, 66-song boxed set, *Send Me the Pillow That You Dream On* (BCD 15953). It starts with Locklin's first recording for the tiny Gold Star Records of Houston, and also includes two 1948-49 singles for the equally small Royalty and DJ labels. His commercially unsuccessful Four Star recordings encompassed all types of material, and feature the original "Send Me the Pillow," recorded nine years before his hit version for RCA. His Decca recordings were no more successful, and even recording with Chet Atkins and members of Hank Williams' Drifting Cowboys didn't help him land a major hit. Coffey wrote the 31-page booklet, based on his interviews with Locklin and others involved in his career. Among the dazzling rare photographs is one showing Locklin with a relatively young "Pappy" Daily (Locklin gave him his enduring nickname), long before the days when Daily discovered George Jones. A three-CD boxed set. Available on CD only. **Regular price \$110.00. Members' price \$82.50. (Members save \$27.50!)**

Sara and Maybelle Carter:

Though the specific Carter family line-up focused on in the cover story of this issue of *The Journal* is not represented by any reissues at the moment, there is one that comes close: Koch's recent reissue of the 1966 Sara and Maybelle Carter album, *An Historic Reunion* (KOC-CD-7925). In 1966, Maybelle Carter and her daugh-



ters June, Anita and Helen, were working as part of Johnny Cash's show. Of the original Carter Family, Maybelle was the only one still working in music (A.P. Carter was dead, and Sara Carter, his wife, was retired from music and involved in raising peacocks). Then in 1965, as Johnny Cash became closer to the Carters through his relationship with June (whom he'd marry three years later), he found that Sara's second husband had bought her a tape recorder. When Sara sent Maybelle and the family a Christmas tape, June took the tape to Columbia A&R man Don Law. He agreed to record Sara and Maybelle for the label, and the result was the Columbia LP *An Historic Reunion: Sara and Maybelle, The Original Carters*. The 11 songs on the album are in the vein of the original Carter recordings, with both Sara and Maybelle singing, Maybelle playing drop-thumb style on her Gibson L-5 guitar and Sara playing autoharp. The songs all were traditional favorites, including "Higher Ground," "While the Band Is Playin' Dixie," "Lonesome Pine Special," "The Hand That Rocks the Cradle," "Three Little Strangers," "The Ship That Never Returned," "Weary Prodigal Son," "Goin' Home," "Sun of the Soul," "Farther On" and "Happiest Days of All." Available on CD only. **Regular price \$14.98. Members' price \$12.98.**

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EDITOR'S CHOICE

Spotlight Product



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George Strait is one of the most popular country music entertainers of all time. His concerts always sell out, he's won countless awards and racked up dozens of hits. Now here's *your* chance to see a George Strait concert, any time you want to—in your own living room. What country fan could resist that? *George Strait Live!* is a VHS tape, Item #V5K, and costs just \$19.95.

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In honor of the 25th Anniversary of *Country Music Magazine*, we've brought back these high-quality, solid brass belt buckles, one featuring the well-known *Country Music Magazine* logo, the other sporting the phrase "I Love Country Music." Each buckle is finely crafted and fits any 1 1/2-inch width belt. They're the perfect complement to any outfit.

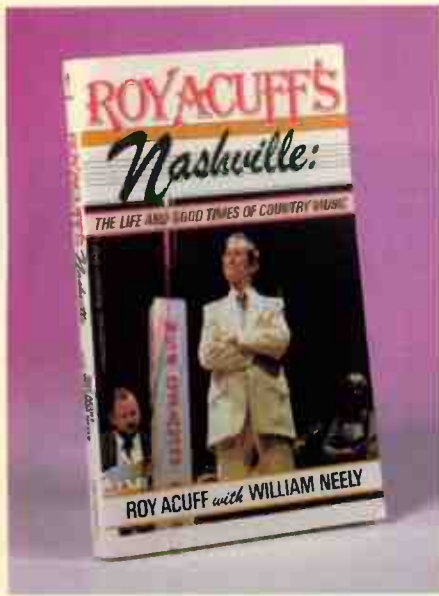
Both of these items were big sellers the last time around, and likely will be again. Don't miss your chance to get one—or both—of these fine belt buckles before they disappear again! The *Country Music Logo Belt Buckle* is Item #G6C, Price \$9.95. The "I Love Country Music" Belt Buckle is Item #G7S, Price \$9.95.



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THE LEGEND AND THE MAN: ROY ACUFF'S NASHVILLE

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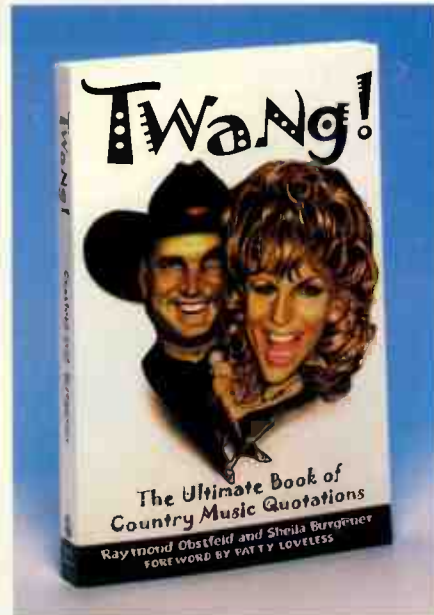
Roy and his co-author, William Neely, also provide revealing, behind-the-scenes looks at Roy's friends and fellow artists like Ernest Tubb, Hank Williams, Minnie Pearl, Patsy Cline, Merle Haggard, Tammy Wynette, Elvis Presley and many, many more. Roy's career had already spanned nearly 50 years when he wrote this book in 1983. He saw it all, and there was—and still is—no one better prepared

to tell the complete story of country music, from a witty, personal perspective. *Roy Acuff's Nashville* is also chock-full of beautiful photographs of many country music legends—onstage and off, candid and portrait, many from the camera of noted Opry photographer Les Leverett. It's a wonderful story made even more poignant by the beloved Acuff's death in 1992. *Roy Acuff's Nashville* is Item #B9P. Cost is \$8.95

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If you like these, there's plenty more you'll love in this fun book, compiled by



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Twang! The Ultimate Book of Country Music Quotations is Item #B5U. Cost is \$12.95.



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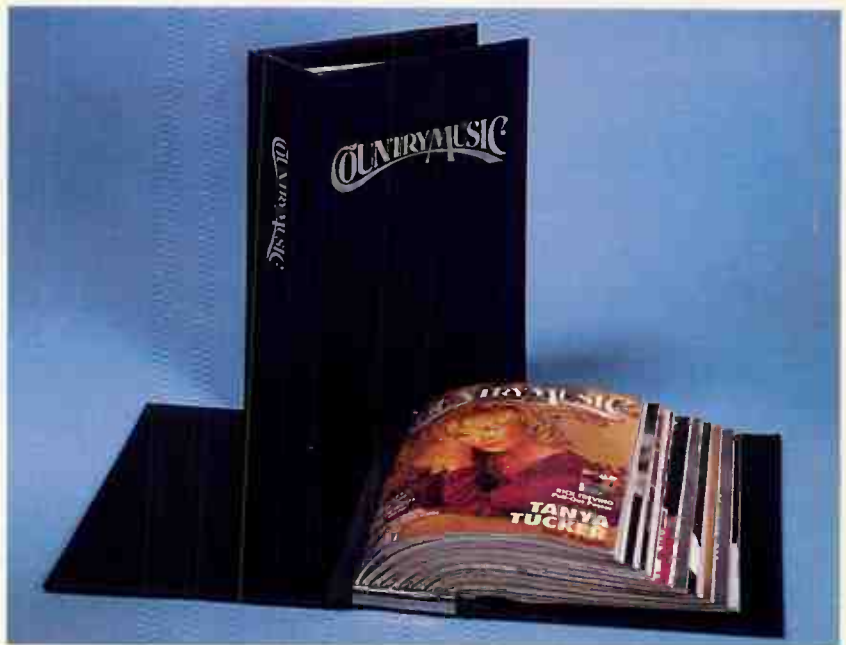




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COUNTRY MUSIC MAGAZINE BINDERS

If you're like many *Country Music Magazine* readers, you save your magazines for future reference, to enjoy again and again. But how best to store and protect them? Since they're not hard-cover, magazines don't stand up well on their own. Laying them down flat in a pile makes it hard to get to the ones on the bottom. Plus, if you just leave them on a shelf or in some other storage area, your collection can become dog-eared or torn. Here then, is the perfect solution to your magazine storage problem: Sturdy, hard-cover *Country Music Magazine* binders! The deluxe *Country Music Magazine* binders come in an attractive deep-blue, and are tastefully embossed on the front and the spine with our well-known logo in silver. Each binder holds 12 issues—two years worth!—of *Country Music Magazine* issues. The magazines are held in place by durable, rust-proof steel rods that don't require you to hole-punch or otherwise damage your collection. These heavy-duty binders will provide a lifetime of safe, attractive storage for your magazines, while still making it easy to enjoy your favorite photographs and articles over and over. They make a great gift for any *Country Music Magazine* subscriber! Binders are \$10.95 each. Ask for Item #M2B.

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Buried Treasures

by Rich Kienzle

Wanda Jackson: Bear Family has already issued Wanda Jackson's complete 1954-1962 Decca and early Capitol output on a previous boxed set. This new, eight-CD set, *Tears Will Be a Chaser for the Wine* (BCD 16114), covers all 219 songs she recorded for Capitol from 1963 through 1972. Disc eight consists of her foreign language recordings (among them her German hit, "Santo Domingo").

By 1963, her rockabilly days were winding down, though she laid down a few rockers like Roy Orbison's "Candy Man" and Carl Perkins' "Honey Don't" for her *Two Sides of Wanda Jackson* LP, a half-rock, half-country collection. Thereafter she largely stuck to standard Nashville Sound fare, produced by Ken Nelson. There were good moments, like her *Blues in My Heart* and *Wanda Jackson Salutes the Country Music Hall of Fame* LP's and a live set recorded in Vegas. Still, most of her singles were only modest successes, except for "Tears Will Be the Chaser" (Number 11 in 1966) and a couple more that made it to the Top 20. Colin Escott's notes, based on interviews with Jackson and husband Wendell Goodman, shed light on the hows and whys of this music. The packaging is outstanding, though for all but hardcore fans, this will be a lot to digest.

Elvis: RCA's ongoing Elvis reissue series has, so far at least, succeeded in placing his recordings into organized and dignified packages for the first time ever (though some could argue that most of his movie soundtrack music doesn't merit such classy treatment). *Platinum: A Life in Music* (RCA 67469) wasn't conceived as part of the earlier collections, but is more of an adjunct. These 100 songs include alternate takes, home recordings and other rarities on four CD's. No doubt, the biggest deal is another song from the two amateur recordings he



paid to make at Sun Records in 1953-1954 that brought him to Sam Phillips' attention. This plaintive performance of Fred Rose's ballad, "I'll Never Stand in Your Way," a minor hit for pop singer Joni James, is amateur in every way, yet reflects Elvis' early desire to sing sweet ballads. It was that style he pursued before falling into "That's All Right (Mama)" with Scotty Moore and Bill Black at that July 1954 session. Personally, I wish RCA would just issue these pre-Sun sides together, not one at a time. An alternate take of "That's All Right" follows, along with his "Blue Moon," Slim Whitmanized with some falsetto humming.

Two of the four other Sun recordings are alternate takes, but more interesting are the alternates from his early RCA material. Among these are rough versions of "I Got a Woman" and "Heartbreak Hotel" as well as "Lawdy Miss Clawdy" (which, despite the rough spots, surpasses the original) and "I'm Counting on You." The subtle differences reveal much about how the final versions we all know were built, bit by bit. On the alternate "Heartbreak," you can hear Floyd Cramer perfecting the song's famous piano break.

Another demo recording features Elvis aping Fats Domino on a slow, blues-drenched 1957 "Blueberry Hill." A five-song home recording made during his Army days in Germany shows him singing, with his own piano accompaniment, songs from

Ernest Tubb and Ivory Joe Hunter and even a boogie woogie version of "I'll Take You Home Again Kathleen," which was whatever came into his head at the moment. The two-song performance from the 1960 post-Army *Welcome Home Elvis* TV special hosted by Frank Sinatra hasn't been heard much, though it's hardly Elvis' best moment.

The rest of the album alternates between interesting and marginal. Another set of recently-discovered home recordings features Elvis crooning everything from gospel to "Tennessee Waltz" to Bob Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind." On Hank Williams' "I Can't Help It (If I'm Still in Love With You)," singing and playing guitar, he recaptures some of the sweetness of those early songs he paid to record at Sun. Equally tasty are two rip-roaring and intense dressing room recordings of "Tiger Man" and "I Got a Woman," with Scotty Moore on guitar, made while he was working on his 1968 "comeback" special. The 1970's material is less interesting, and I'm not sure why the producers closed the collection with his 1971 Jaycees Award speech. So far as Elvis collections go, this one isn't essential except for those who treasure rare and off-the-wall material. **Sam McGee:** One of the first great guitar virtuosos was the Opry's Sam McGee, the hot Tennessee fingerpicker who, along with banjoist brother Kirk, worked with Uncle Dave Macon on the show in its early days. A good dose of just how

powerful a player Sam was in his later years can be heard on the 17 tracks that make up *Grand Dad of the Country Guitar Pickers* (Arhoolie CD 9009). The title may be awkward, but the music, recorded in 1969 and 1970 and originally issued on LP, is anything but. The brothers were still regulars on the show in 1975, Sam still working his farm at age 81 when a tractor accident killed him.

Accompanied by a second guitar and bass, Sam ripped through originals like "Sam McGee Stomp" and "Fuller Blues." "Railroad Blues" (which he sang on the Opry), "Burglar Bold" and "When the Wagon Was New" feature his rough-hewn vocals. He plays five string banjo on the colorfully-titled "Pig Ankle Rag" and "Jesse James." He uses his original banjo-guitar (yes, there was such an instrument) on "Ching Chong." "Franklin Blues" came from a melody Sam got from an older man he knew in Franklin, Tennessee. It's not surprising that McGee has been forgotten given the vast changes in the music since his heyday, but among fans of acoustic picking and old-timey country, his legend remains. But legend has nothing to do with the music here. It's simply sublime, totally beyond criticism.

Rockabilly: Over 20 years ago, when few in the U.S. cared, European labels pioneered the serious reissue of rare rockabilly material, first on LP and then on CD. Charly Records got the ball rolling with Sun Records reissues. From there, anthologies of rockers from various U.S. labels followed, including multiple-volume sets from Decca, Columbia, MGM Capitol and RCA. Bear Family's *That'll Flat Get It* series revamps and revises some of these early anthologies, bringing the material onto CD, with sound generally superior to that of any of the LP's. *Volume 7* (BCD 15789) contains songs from

MGM Records; *Volume 8* (BCD 15936) covers selections from the vaults of the Fabor/Abbott and Radio labels. The 30-song MGM collection is a real crazy quilt of artists who recorded rockabilly and rocking country material in the mid to late 1950's, some, like Andy Starr, well known to collectors.

Billy Jack Wills, Bob's youngest brother, was inserting R&B vocal styles into Western swing in the early 50's. Here, he covers two R&B favorites: "All She Wants to Do Is Rock" and "There's Good Rockin' Tonight." Steel guitarist Cecil Campbell's "Rock and Roll Fever" is all right, but nowhere near as hot as "The Rocking Guitar" and the swinging "Dixieland Rock." The two Marvin Rainwater tracks, "Hot and Cold" and "Mr. Blues," are among his best, featuring a very young Roy Clark playing lead guitar. Clark also backed Wanda Jackson associate Thelma Blackmon on "I Wanta Waltz." Conway Twitty's MGM recording of "Long Black Train" was his version of "Mystery Train." Particularly interesting is 65-year-old country composer Carson Robison's "Rockin' and Rollin' with Grandmaw," recorded in 1956, one year before he died.

Naturally, the 32-song Fabor/Abbott/Radio collection focuses on obscure artists, as the label itself wasn't that huge. The biggest names include Dorsey Burnette, who recorded "Let's Fall in Love" just after leaving his brother Johnny's legendary rockabilly band, The Rock and Roll Trio. Johnny Horton is heard on his previously unreleased 1951 cover of Tennessee Ernie's "Shotgun Boogie" and sings a duet with Billy Barton on the 1952 country rocker, "Bawlin' Baby." Guitarist Roy Lanham, known for his work with The Sons of the Pioneers, can be heard on the hard-driving 1958 instrumental, "Klondike." Most other artists are little known, the quality ranging from good to mediocre.

Tennessee Ernie: I annotated and compiled this and the next release, so facts only. Razor and Tie's *The Ultimate Tennessee Ernie Ford Collection*

(RE 2134) probably wasn't the best title choice, since it's actually a "lite" version of the more extensive Liberty-Capitol boxed set that appeared late in 1994. The difference between this, the boxed set and other recent Ernie collections is the inclusion of six gospel songs, making this the first time any commercially available Ernie collection has mixed sacred and secular.

This two-CD, 40-song collection features all the big hits, from "Tennessee Border" and "Smoky Mountain Boogie" through "Shotgun Boogie." "I'll Never Be Free" with Kay Starr, "Blackberry Boogie" and, of course, "Sixteen Tons." Much of the other material has been available elsewhere, though not his last Top Ten record, the rather weak "Hick Town." Five of the six gospel tracks come from his classic *Hymns* LP, with the final track, "Just a Little Talk with Jesus," from his 1964 album with The Jordanaires.

George Jones: The 40-song *She Thinks I Still Care: The George Jones Collection* (RE 2136), another Razor & Tie reissue, focuses on his three years (1962-1965) with United Artists Records, mixing singles with album cuts. With UA, he recorded the immortal "She Thinks I Still Care," "The Race Is On," "A Girl I Used to Know" and "Where Does a Little Tear Come From." There, producer Pappy Daily teamed him with Melba Mont-

gomery to record some excellent LP's and the hit singles, "We Must Have Been Out of Our Minds" and "Let's Invite Them Over." Razor has reissued a number of Jones' UA albums over the past couple of years. A few tracks come from those, including his version of "Peace in the Valley" from his *Homecoming in Heaven* gospel album, and Roy Acuff's "The Precious Jewel," which originally appeared on his 1962 *George Jones Sings the Hits of His Country Cousins*.

Sheb Wooley: Those in the U.S. who follow Bear Family releases may wonder why the label chooses to produce encyclopedic reissues of artists who have strong fan support here, but hardly the cult following of, say, Lefty Frizzell or Merle Haggard. The answer? These artists are even more revered in Europe. Many likewise wonder why Bear Family chooses to cover certain periods of an artist's career. Again, overseas perspectives often differ from ours. And since Bear Family is concerned with completeness, that means taking the good with the bad (or worse).

This may make it easier to understand two compilations of Sheb Wooley's late 1950's pop material for MGM: *The Purple People Eater* (BCD 16149) and *Wild and Wooley, Big Unruly Me* (BCD 16150). Wooley's recording career was only modestly successful (his comic alter ego, Ben Colder, did about as well with his re-

corded song parodies); his biggest success came with his Number One novelty pop hit, "Purple People Eater," in 1958. Both albums are mish-mashes of MGM material from 1955 through 1970, much of it ill-organized and uninspired. The 31-song *Purple People Eater* includes the title song as well as an earlier, minor hit, "Are You Satisfied," from 1955. Though some topflight Hollywood pickers (including Jimmy Bryant and Speedy West) are heard on some of the 1955-56 titles, the bulk of the songs were undistinguished, Wooley-penned pop ditties. The singer, quoted in Kevin Coffey's diplomatically written liner notes, makes it clear he enjoyed his versatility. But the results don't hold up. The same goes for the 29 songs on *Wild and Wooley*. Oddly enough, the title song, one of Sheb's better later tunes, is here in unissued alternate take form. The better-known single is on the *Purple People Eater* collection. Go figure. For Wooley completists, this will be welcome. As for myself...

Narvel Felts: For those who define Narvel only by his 1970's country hits, covered on a previous Bear Family release, his early rockabilly period will be a revelation. The 34 tracks on *Did You Tell Me* (BCD 16220) cover his beginnings at Sun (with Jack Clement producing) in 1957. None of the material went far, and by mid-year Felts was on Mercury, where he and his band recorded 14 more songs (including Gene Autry's "Lonely River"). Again, the material was good but success was elusive. The same thing happened on tiny Pink Records, where he recorded the terrific "Three Thousand Miles" in 1959 with his band. But even with Jack Clement co-producing his last session for the label, nothing happened. Things also remained quiet at his 1960 country session, produced in Nashville, with its covers of Hank Williams and Stuart Hamblen songs. Interestingly enough, the notes aren't by a rockabilly expert, but by one who knows the music here better than anyone: Narvel Felts.

How to Get These Treasures

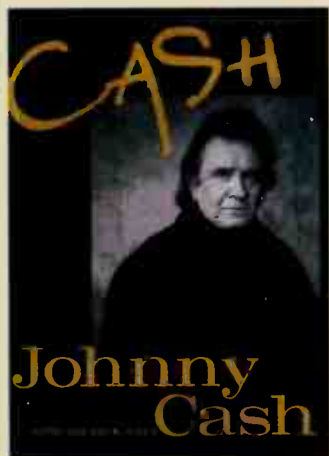
Available in formats shown at prices shown: Wanda Jackson, *Tears Will Be a Chaser for the Wine* (BCD 16114), an eight-CD boxed set, \$247.50/Elvis Presley, *Platinum: A Life in Music* (RCA-67469), a four-CD or four-cassette boxed set, \$59.98 cassette, \$69.98 CD/Sam McGee, *Grand Dad of the Country Guitar Pickers* (Arhoolie CD 9009), CD only, \$19.95/Various artists, *That'll Flat Get It, Volume 7* (BCD 15789) and *Volume 8* (BCD 15936), \$27.50 each CD/Tennessee Ernie Ford, *The Ultimate Tennessee Ernie Ford Collection* (RE-2134), \$24.98 cassette, \$29.98 CD/George Jones, *She Thinks I Still Care: The George Jones Collection* (RE-2136), \$24.98 cassette, \$29.98 CD/Sheb Wooley, *The Purple People Eater* (BCD 16149) and *Wild and Wooley, Big Unruly Me* (BCD 16150), \$27.50 each CD/Narvel Felts, *Did You Tell Me* (BCD 16220), \$27.50 CD. Send check or money order payable to Nashville Warehouse, Dept. 010298, P.O. Box 290216, Nashville, Tennessee 37229. Add \$3.95 postage and handling. Canadian orders, add an additional \$3.00 postage. **CMSA Members, see For Members Only page for discounts.**

Offer expires April 30, 1998

Essential Collector by Rich Kienzle

▪ Books ▪

Johnny Cash: It's a little hard to write about *Cash: The Autobiography*, given recent bad news about Cash's Parkinson's disease and his mid-November hospitalization just at the start of a book promotion tour. Written with our own Patrick Carr, the book is, as most hardcore Cash fans know, not his first such effort, coming years after he wrote *Man in Black*. *Cash* is Cash after over 40 years in the business, reflecting that "Inside, my boyhood feels so close, but when I look around me, it seems to belong to a vanished world." He ruminates about what "country" means at century's end, as opposed to what he's always known it to mean. He tells us again, more



compellingly than ever, about that early life in rural, Depression-era Arkansas and the accidental death of older brother Jack Cash. Newer reflections on his dad, Ray Cash, reveal him as a difficult father at times, far less supportive of his son's musical aspirations than many realized.

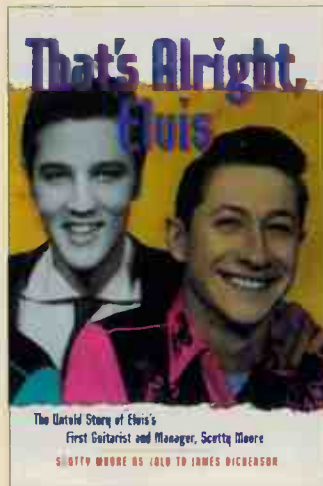
His account of his ups and downs doesn't avoid the invasion of his Jamaican home in 1982 by armed robbers or a bad experience with a crooked accountant. While he rhapsodizes over his and June's various homes and retreats, he also confronts more recent ups and downs with drugs.

Along with affectionate portraits of family members are appreciations of Mother Maybelle Carter, Carl Perkins, the original Tennessee Three, Roy Orbison, Johnny Horton, Sam Phillips, ex-son-in-law Marty Stuart and The Statler Brothers. He retains justifiable pride in his ABC-TV variety show, one of the best musical variety shows in TV history. Discussing his recording career, Cash finally places blame for Columbia's controversial 1986 decision not to re-sign him. He blames himself, alluding to his self-mocking *Chicken in Black* album (and video) as justification for the label's decision to pass. It makes his 1990's revitalization with American Recordings seem sweeter still.

In all, Cash has matured, yet he's still the "walking contradiction" Kris called him over a quarter-century ago. He's survived longer as a viable and vital recording artist than any of his Sun labelmates. At the same time, he realizes the world of his greatest years is fleeting. Cash and Carr have created a book that's surely the best country autobiography since *Coal Miner's Daughter*. Yet despite the wonderful reflections and reminiscences within, when it comes to Cash, one thing will always have more impact than Cash's printed word: the music.

Scotty Moore: Much as Scotty Moore wanted to be a guitar soloist, he made a greater impact on a generation of players through his 1954-1958 recordings with Elvis Presley. He was there—literally—at the dawn of Elvis' career, he and bassist Bill Black playing on "That's All Right (Mama)" in 1954 and remaining with him until Elvis left for the Army in 1958. *That's Alright, Elvis*, co-written with James Dickerson, tells the complete story of both Scotty's years with Presley and his pre-and post-Elvis life. Rather than go first person,

Dickerson treats the narrative as a biography, including Scotty's recollections and interviews with others. A Tennessee native, in 1954 Scotty was working days for a Memphis dry cleaner, playing with a

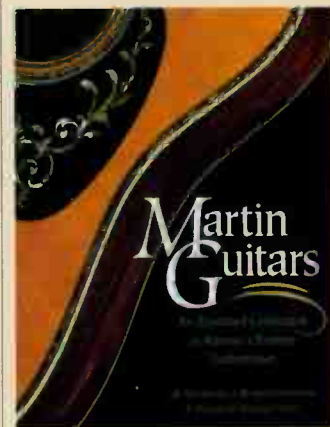


local honky tonk band at night until he informally connected with Elvis at Sam Phillips' behest in July 1954, leading to the sessions that produced the first Sun single. Though not a lot of his information is new, memories of Elvis' early days onstage are good reading. Recalling details of various sessions, he explains his primal, violent guitar break on "Hound Dog" as a product of frustration with the amount of takes (31) required to satisfy Elvis.

His later career is more interesting than you'd expect. He engineered Ringo Starr's 1970 Nashville session and worked with Tracy Nelson in her earliest days in town. Yet despite the many amusing stories, an undercurrent of sadness permeates the book. Scotty's refusal to kowtow to the arrogant Colonel Parker fueled Parker's desire to oust both Scotty and Bill from Elvis' organization. The split, which finally occurred over money, was one Elvis could have prevented had he cared enough. Though they returned to Elvis as per diem musicians, they never got the

money they deserved from a star they helped launch. Nonetheless, Scotty's admiration for Elvis leads him to avoid blaming him. He played on Presley record dates through 1968. After he produced a 1959 hit single, Thomas Wayne's "Tragedy," Scotty worked as an engineer for Sam Phillips in the 60's, all the while urging Sam to let him record a guitar LP, to no avail. When he did one for Epic in 1964, Phillips, who also owed Scotty much, fired him. Given the fact that Scotty's never done that well financially despite his achievements, it'd be nice to see those ultra-rich rock stars who recorded with Scotty earlier this year set up a decent annuity for a man who gave them (and us all) so much.

Martin Guitars: 200 years ago, Christian Frederick Martin was born in Germany. By 1833, he was setting up shop in New York as a guitar builder. Eventually, he relocated the busi-



ness to Nazareth, Pennsylvania, where Martin guitars, the legendary acoustic instruments played by everyone from Jimmie Rodgers to Gene Autry, Johnny Cash, Merle Travis, Marty Stuart and Willie are still produced today.

In the 1970's, Martin company in-house historian Mike Longworth put together the first book-length company history, still a worthy reference work. Now, *Martin Guitars:*

An Illustrated Celebration of America's Premier Guitar-maker, by Jim Washburn and Richard Johnston, proves a worthy successor. Working in a lavishly illustrated color format, the authors provide a meticulously detailed history of the company from its European roots to today, illustrated with photos of rare instruments and early production facilities; along the way they cover the various Martins who've owned the company and the artists who've made the company the institution it is. To the book's credit, no punches are pulled about Martin's woes, including fading sales and a bitter 1977 strike that placed its future in doubt before it emerged as it now is: stronger and more vital than ever. Profiles of Marty (Stuart) and Willie (Nelson) and their Martins also make for interesting reading.

Marketing Country Music:

For those who think that the image-making of late 1990's Nashville is new, that the emphasis on hype and manufactured images is recent, Vanderbilt University sociology professor Richard "Pete" Peterson's *Creating Country Music* will set the record straight. Peterson revisits the music's early history with an eye to how images of each era from the days of the first commercial old-timey country recordings in the early 1920's on were invented and embellished to market the music. Many scholars of old-time music have alluded to this, but Peterson tackles it head-on, starting with the music activities of savvy businessman Polk Brockman, the Atlanta OKeh Records dealer who recorded local musician Fiddlin' John Carson. Peterson explores the images and realities of early performers who affected hillbilly personalities but in truth were relatively sophisticated Southerners reluctantly clad in overalls and straw hats. Examining Henry Ford's sponsorship of old-time musicians, Peterson discusses the automaker's true agenda: a reactionary philosophy espousing rural values as a

counter to the jazz era, declining morals and rebellious youth of the 1920's, which Ford loathed.

Peterson's look at early "barn dance" radio shows reveals the WLS *Barn Dance* and Grand Ole Opry were far less pure than many assume. Early on, both shows presented pop music and performers alongside the fiddles and banjos. He analyzes the images



of Jimmie Rodgers, Roy Acuff and the singing cowboys; how Western duds replaced the overalls and straw hats; the role of advertisers, and the eventual adoption of the term "country." Casual fans will learn much, though I wonder if many will take to the required sociological protocols such as his "Hard-Core" and "Soft Shell" musical classifications. I was surprised at such misstatements as stating Bob Wills and Milton Brown sold "Light Crust Dough" as the Light Crust Doughboys when what they sold was flour. Amazingly, Peterson passed

by a quintessential image story: how Ohio farm kid Lloyd Copas reinvented himself as Oklahoma's "Cowboy Copas." Also, for a University of Chicago Press book, the number of typos is surprising. Nonetheless, Dr. Peterson has admirably tackled a subject long needing analysis, and could do another book on just the past 20 years of image-making.

Recordings

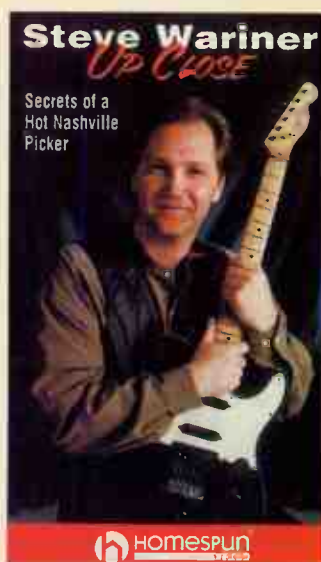
The Offenders: Willie Nelson's superstardom was less than a decade away when, as an RCA recording artist, he hit the road again with singer-drummer Johnny Bush, steel guitar virtuoso Jimmy Day and bassist David Zettner. Bush suggested calling the band "The Offenders," an idea Willie loved—until antsy promoters convinced him to rename the group, which then toured as The Record Men, named after Willie's song, "Mr. Record Man." In 1995 they reunited in Austin to record an album, half-instrumental, half-vocal.

Released for the first time on Germany's Bear Family, *Can't Get the Hell out of Texas* (BCD 16124) is a fairly mellow reunion. Half the 12 songs are instrumentals featuring Day's peerless pedal steel, which graced Ray Price's honky tonk recordings (Day still tours with Price today) and some of Willie's. His instrumental versions of "Linda on My Mind," "Hey, Good Lookin'," "There She Goes," "She's Not for You," the steel standard "Sleepwalk," and his own "Daybreak" show him playing with the same masterful emo-

tion he had 40 years ago. The remaining songs feature Willie on his own "I'm So Ashamed" and "Rainy Day Blues," while Bush handles other songs, including the title tune, Conway Twitty's "Walk Me to the Door," "Are You Sure This Is Where You Want to Be" and "I Know I Love You."

Videos

Steve Wariner: As a vocalist, Steve Wariner has never been one of my favorites, in part because he seems far more distinctive as a picker. *Steve Wariner Up Close* (Homespun Video VD-WAR-GT01) examines his dazzling fingerstyle



guitar technique, inspired by Chet Atkins but clearly his own. Beginning on electric guitar, he demonstrates several numbers, among them "Prelude/Practice Your Scales Somewhere Else," "For Chester B." (an Atkins tribute), "Sails" and various riffs and licks. He switches to acoustic to demonstrate "Back Home Again in Indiana" (played much as Atkins recorded it over 40 years ago), "Copper Kettle" and "I Should Be With You." Explaining his style to Homespun owner Happy Traum, Wariner is relaxed and informal, his manner in sharp contrast to the blazing hot licks that pour from his instruments. The 60-minute tape comes complete with a book featuring all solos in standard notation and diagrams.

How to Get These Collectibles

Books: Johnny Cash with Patrick Carr, *Cash: The Autobiography* (B5Y), \$25.00/Scotty Moore with James Dickerson, *That's Alright, Elvis* (B9N), \$25.00/Jim Washburn and Richard Johnston, *Martin Guitars: An Illustrated Celebration of America's Premier Guitar-maker* (B6N), \$40.00/Richard "Pete" Peterson, *Creating Country Music* (B8Q), \$24.95. **Recordings:** The Offenders (Willie Nelson and others), *Can't Get the Hell out of Texas* (BCD 16124), CD only, \$27.50. **Videos:** Steve Wariner, *Steve Wariner Up Close* (V8B), \$29.95. To order, send check or money order to Nashville Warehouse, Dept. 010298EC, P.O. Box 290216, Nashville, TN 37229. Add \$3.95 postage and handling per order; Canadian orders, add \$3.00 extra for postage. **CMSA members, see For Members Only page for discounts. Offer expires April 30, 1998**



A '97 Wrap Up and the Ones That Got Away

It was kind of grim, listening to the Nashville system try to accommodate its antithesis in '97.

Themes could be discerned. There was, on the one hand, the innovative "Let's make this boring guy *edgy!*" tack (add haircut, primal graphics, duet with Steve Earle), and on the other hand the more traditional "Dumb down the smart ones" approach. The former process showed promise—I wouldn't want any of Nashville's new outlaws along on *my* next bank heist, but they sure wear some mean-looking clothes—and so we can expect more of that kind of thing in '98, hopefully the crest year for Perpetrator Chic in general. The dumbing-down approach will of course continue forever, or at least for as long as record executives roam the earth. Significantly dumbed in '97 were Bob Woodruff (bye for now, Bob!), The Thompson Brothers Band, The Backsliders and Jim Lauderdale (see ya later, Jim!).

Then there were the ones who got away: artists who never entered the system in the first place, who got rejected prior to final packaging, or who somehow emerged from the process, or at least the music-making part of it, without excessive executive alteration. That last route gives us some of the very best records available anywhere, albums by artists coming from nowhere, commercially speaking, onto the country scene. The irony (it's not quite a tragedy) is that such creative lights tend to blink out almost immediately. Either the newcomers don't sell enough records and are gone, or they get hits and then get cautious; the guys at the big desks make damn sure of *that*. So good luck to Lee Ann Womack, whose very successful eponymous debut (*Lee Ann Womack*, Decca) was one of the joys of '97, and happy trails, most likely, to Sara Evans, whose *Three Chords and the Truth* gave RCA their best woman's country album since the glory days of Dolly Parton. By no means coincidentally, a non-Nashvillian producer, Dwight Yoakam's/Little Dog's Pete Anderson, helped Ms. Evans through the recording process. Long may they collaborate.

Another fine combination was the teaming of Bekka Bramlett and Billy Burnette with producer Garth Fundis for *Bekka & Billy* (Almo). From a distance a potentially cheesy concept (daughter of Bonnie Bramlett pairs with son of Dorsey

Burnette), up close it was a wonderful, natural dose of spirit, smarts, funk and fun.

The Anderson/Yoakam team, meanwhile, gave us *Under the Covers* (Reprise), an eccentric but inventive take on some great old (mostly) 1960's AM radio hits—Dwight, for instance, doing Tony Bennett doing The Kinks' "Tired of Waiting for You." An acquired taste, perhaps, but fun.

Pete Anderson, by the way, also produced an album which should have made the Final Note Best of '96 list, but didn't: Scott Joss' *Souvenirs* (Little Dog). Joss is what Jack Ingram, Neal Coty and a few other officially Edgy new singer/songwriters might be one day if they keep trying, and the same goes for Robbie Fulks. His *South Mouth* (Bloodshot) was so stuffed with near-perfect modern country songs that you wonder how on earth Nashville's droves of vigilant talent hunter/killers managed to miss him—until, that is, it dawns on you that maybe songs as good as his aren't moneymakers in the country marketplace. If you doubt that, go listen to the second-rate fluff with which both Lauderdale and Woodruff, two of the most original country/roots writers of their generation, filled their Nashville albums. Lucky for Fulks, then, that he got away in time. Lucky for us that he sings about it all in "F*** This Town," surely the funniest, saddest song yet about the state of the country biz.

Joy Lynn White got away, too, landing with Pete Anderson for *The Lucky Few* (Little Dog). She could sing the phone book; fortunately (for now, anyway) she doesn't have to. Kris Tyler might, since her *What a Woman Knows* (Rising Tide) didn't make the numbers. Maybe Nashville will cut her loose, and she can go someplace else and get great. On that note, it's nice to see Mercury hanging onto Kim Richey, who just keeps getting closer and closer to being the female singer/songwriter to beat in the country/pop/roots arena. *Bitter Sweet*, released early in '97, was clearly her best album yet. I like a label where she and producers Angelo and John Leventhal can co-exist with Shania Twain and Mutt Lange.

I'm running out of room here. Better start compressing information—which reflects well, I guess, on 1997's output of quality country. Maybe even the mainstream improved. I sure hope so, because I'd really like to tune in a "country" sta-

tion again without having to worry about shooting the radio. Smokey frowns on that kind of thing, so I really don't know what Vince and the gang are up to. Don't even know what Mindy sounds like. "Shania Lite," someone told me.

I found a lot of good, soulful stuff around the fringes. There were very nice collections from Tish Hinojosa (*The Best of the Sandia: Watermelon 1991-1992*), Delia Bell and Bill Grant (*Dreaming*, on Rounder), and Laurie Lewis (*Earth & Sky: Songs of Laurie Lewis*, also on Rounder). In the realm of tributes and anthologies, *The Songs of Jimmie Rodgers: A Tribute* (Egyptian/Columbia) was a real gem of appropriate pairings—Dickey Betts doing "Waiting for a Train," David Ball singing "Miss the Mississippi and You," Iris DeMent on "Hobo Bill's Last Ride"—and Bloodshot Records' *Straight Outta Boone County*, in which insurgent country types remade "hits and obscurities by artists who played on WLW's *Boone County Jamboree* radio program out of Cincinnati in the 1940's," was 20 tracks of hard-core fun. Dale Watson, meanwhile, continued straight on down his bullshit-free, hard-country road with *I Hate These Songs*. So did his HighTone Records labelmate Buddy Miller (*Poison Love*), his Austin compadre Wayne "The Train" Hancock (*That's What Daddy Wants*, on the ARK-21 label), and their fellow stars of the Continental Club, The Derailers (*Reverb Deluxe*, on Watermelon). All these boys are good. Cranking up The Derailers is like having The Buckaroos back.

Space really tight now. Steve Earle's *El Corazón* (Warner Bros.) just excellent, though not country. Paul Burlison's rockabluesabilly *Train Kept A-Rollin'* (Sweetfish Records) likewise. Darrell Scott's *Aloha From Nashville* (Sugar Hill) just about as hot as Robbie Fulks' record, which is saying something. *Chris Knight* (Decca) pretty damn good, too. Albums from three bands—the eponymous *Seconds Flat* on the Green Linnet label and *The Cicadas* (featuring Rodney Crowell) on Warner Bros., plus The Lonesome Strangers' *Land of Opportunity* on Little Dog—were all very close to the mark.

Twenty-one surefire good 'uns, three probables. Not a bad year. Peace, love, twang, thump.

Editor-at-Large Patrick Carr has been with CMM since September 1972.

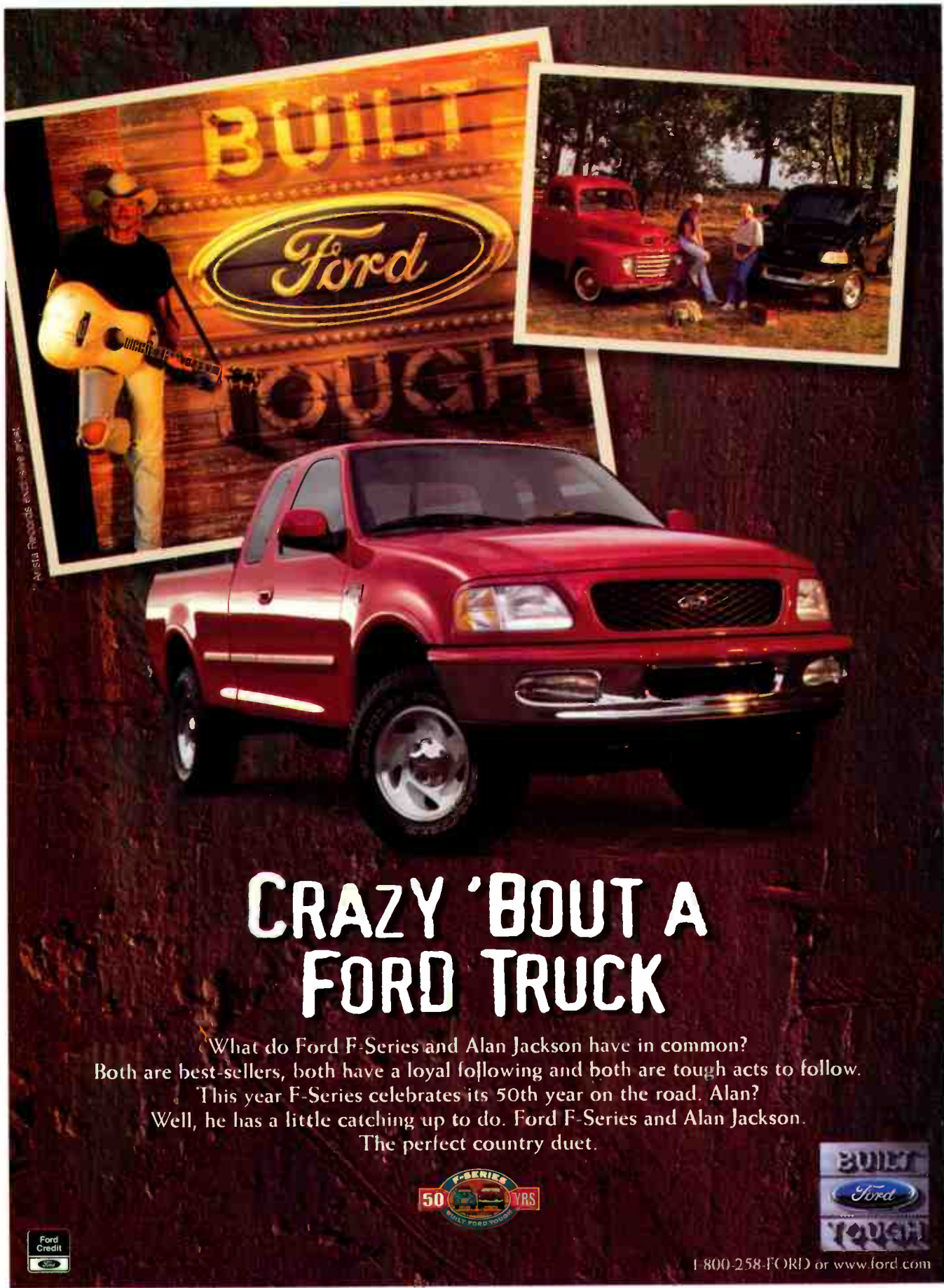


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