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Volume I

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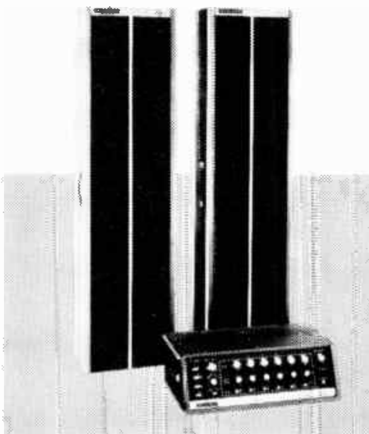

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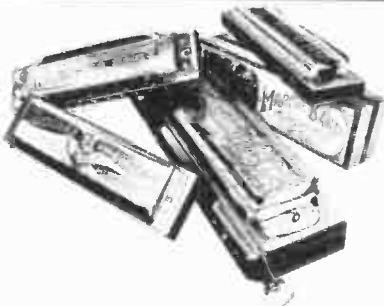

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Loretta Lynn: Heartland American Soul

By Steven Fuller

I "Doo"

"Since I was 13 years old the teacher kinda let me help her arrange the programs for the pie supper—a lotta people called them pie socials" Loretta began, "and so I lined up all the talent. I sang. I was in the beauty contest and I was in the cakewalk, I think. I was in just about everything. I had to be 'cause there wasn't that many kids in school. It was a big night for us. It was the tenth day of December.

"We didn't know who was goin' to bid off the pies. The teacher went to my husband's mother and asked if she knew someone that would bid the pies off, and help us, ya know, so my husband who had just come out of the army—I didn't know him at the time—came to bid the pies off. Whoever bought the girls' pies or cakes got to take them home. Well, I didn't think anybody'd buy mine; anyway I wasn't worried about it. At that age you don't think too much about stuff like that, boyfriends and everything. Just little silly things like grade school, ya know, like throwin' notes across the room, stuff like that.

"When it came to the beauty contest, I got in the beauty contest, me and about four other girls. I won because—there was another girl I thought was much prettier than me—but my husband was kinda stuck on me and when it come time to win the contest, he waited until everybody had spent almost all their money a biddin' and then he bid ahead of 'em and I won the beauty contest.

"When it came to biddin' the pies off, I sat by my pie. I had baked it myself. Everybody's supposed to bake their own pies and cakes. When it came time to start the biddin' there was another feller there. I thought they were all too old for me but I guess they didn't think so. So this feller was biddin' pretty heavy on my pie. He and my husband was biddin' against each other, and finally they got it up to about four dollars. My husband only had five dollars so when the other guy said '$4.50,' my husband said, 'Five dollars and sold!' He bought it and everybody was supposed to have a piece of the pie or cake that was baked and then take the girl home. Well I got the salt mixed up with the sugar when I was bakin' it 'cause they both came in these big cans. I didn't know it though, and I cut the pie and gave him a piece and I took a piece. My aunt was standin' there too, and she was goin' to try the pie, so I cut her a piece too. I took a bite of mine and said, 'Oh my Lord, what in the world's wrong?' So he took a bite and I saw it was just about to get him. My aunt says, 'Loretta you've used salt instead of sugar.' She kinda got me out of it. We pushed the pie back and that was all that was said.

"... Daddy made him promise not to take me very far away from home ... seven months later we moved three thousand miles ..."

"When it was time to take me back up to Butcher Hollow (Kentucky), he had a jeep that he'd just brought back from the army and I wouldn't get in it 'cause I'd never ridden in a car before. I wouldn't get in that jeep. I said, 'No, I ain't gittin' in that thing.' Everybody had these big pine torches, everybody that came out of the Holler had 'em. And I'd come out of the Holler with my aunt and her daughter and my kinfolk, ya know. So we walked back to the Holler and he left his jeep at the schoolhouse. He had to walk me home and then walk all the way back to the schoolhouse to get his jeep so he could go home.

"Well, I told my mother *who* had walked me home when I got in the house. She got all upset, and said, 'Oooh, he's too old for you, and not only that he's the meanest thing around. He's got a real bad reputation.' But I never thought too much about it.

"Well, the next night here he comes with that jeep. What with our house settin' up on a hill, Daddy always had to pull the horse and sled up the hill in the wintertime, ya know, but he came right up that hill with that jeep and scared me to death. About two or three days later though, he got me to ride in it. Every night after that he came to see me, and we went together one month and got married the tenth day of January.

"That was the funniest thing you ever heard in your life. I told my mother. I says, 'We're gonna git married,' and she says, 'No you're not.' I says, 'Well why not?' She says, 'You're too young.' Well Mooney, my husband—I call him 'Doo'—worked in a coal mine. It was a Friday night and he'd just got a real good check. He says, 'we better get married right away and not wait,' 'cause he had this big check. I told him he'd have to talk to Mommy and Daddy about it and

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". . . Daddy made him promise not to take me very far away from home . . . seven months later we moved three thousand miles . . ."

from the porch to the bedroom, and they wasn't gonna go for it. I told him that he's gonna have to catch 'em together. So Doo was settin' in the front room when Daddy walked in off the porch and went in the bedroom. Doo went in there and said he'd like to marry me. Daddy said that I was awful young to even be thinkin' about gettin' married. Doo said he knew that, but he'd take real good care of me. Daddy made him promise not to take me very far away from home. Mommy says, 'I don't want you bein' mean to her. I don't want you to whip her, ya know.' Doo says, 'Awww I'll never do that.' So we got married. Seven months later we moved three thousand miles away from home."

Broncs and Babies

Loretta and Doo went to Custer, Washington where they lived for the next eleven years. Loretta had her first child there shortly before she turned fifteen. The next one was born in Kentucky when they returned home for a short visit. Then numbers three and four were born in Washington all before Loretta turned eighteen. Eight years after that, Loretta gave birth to twins, and thus far that's the entire family.

In those eleven years, Mooney Lynn worked at a variety of jobs doing construction work and busting broncs, which he had done before he'd gone into the army. Loretta raised the kids and sang them to sleep every night. Mooney thought Loretta had a pretty good voice, so he urged her to write some songs and to try and learn the guitar. Which she did. She taught herself how to play and she wrote a song called "I'm a Honky-Tonk Girl." Mooney arranged for her to sing the song locally. At one of her performances, in a grange hall, a man from Vancouver heard Loretta and arranged for her to cut a single of the song. Loretta and Mooney *and* the man from Zero, the tiny Canadian label, were so poor that they did the distribution themselves.

"I sent the song off myself to I

PHOTOS: JOHN JEFFERSON

She could be a young but mature thirty, or a very sexy forty, but her exact age is "none of your business."

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don't know how many disc jockeys along with a little note explaining about myself. But it went over real big 'cause the record stores were callin' up the radio stations and tellin' them to get the record off the air 'cause people were buggin' them to death about the record. They wanted to buy it and nobody had it."

Loretta was a local success, but the Lynns were still poor. Mooney decided that they should go out on the road and try to promote Loretta themselves. "We went on tour drivin' from radio station to radio station in an old Mercury. We didn't have enough money to stay anywhere, so we slept in the back of the car and ate baloney and cheese sandwiches. I remember I had one good dress. When we were drivin' I'd just wear jeans or something, but when we were comin' to a radio station, I'd hop in the back seat and put on my dress. Then we'd go inside and do a radio interview. Afterwards I'd change back into blue jeans and we'd drive on to the next station."

". . . We slept in the back of the car and ate baloney and cheese sandwiches. I remember I had one good dress. When we were comin' to a radio station, I'd hop in the back seat and put on my dress . . ."

The touring continued, even though Loretta wrote one local hit after another. Eventually she appeared on the Buck Owens Show, and finally cut a single which made the Top Ten in Nashville. This got her a promotional trip to Nashville where she signed a contract with Decca Records. That was ten years and thirty albums ago.

Shades of Empire

Today, Loretta seems to be creating her own modern-day dynasty. She and Mooney have built their own little corporate conglomerate. Besides the seven-man, one-woman organization that travels with her, she owns three publishing companies for her songs, which number in the hundreds since she writes much of her own material. In addition, Mooney runs the LORETTA LYNN RODEO which travels all over the world and is one of the largest rodeos in existence.

"There's about two hundred cowboys and cowgirls," Loretta explained. "The top cowboys travel with the show just about all the time and there's all kinds of acts. The first time I ever went to a rodeo I didn't like it because there was so much time between every act. You'd sit like five minutes before anything else happened. But in our rodeo it all goes real fast; that's the only way I'd have it. It's got every act you could imagine, there's clowns and trick riders, then sometimes I do a show. Just about everything you'd want to see we got in the LORETTA LYNN RODEO."

Then there's a chain of LORETTA LYNN WESTERN STORES which sell all the usual Western apparel, but carry an entire line of mod clothing too. Loretta loves the clothes the kids wear today and confesses she takes a "heap of 'em" home with her every time she visits one.

The latest addition to the Lynn realm is United Talent, Inc., a

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Nashville-based talent agency which specializes, naturally, in country artists. Loretta started the agency a year ago, but only recently teamed up with Conway Twitty, her sometime singing partner, to make it a joint venture.

"I started my talent agency myself," Loretta says, "but in about two or three months Conway talked to Mooney and Conway wanted to go into it with us. I wasn't very enthused about it at first, but Conway's such a nice guy, and if there's anybody I'd like to be in business with, it would be Conway. I've had it a year. Conway's been with us about five months now."

Recently four new recording artists were signed up by United Talent. Songwriter and singer Ray Griff, who wrote "Patches," is one. Also Anthony Armstrong Jones, Stu Phillips, a regular member of the Opry, and L. E. White, who has written number one hits for both Loretta and Conway.

Loretta's success in country music has enabled her to help two of her younger sisters and a brother get into the business.

"Six or seven years ago I hired my brother, Jay Lee Webb, to go on the road with me. He played lead guitar for me and drove the car we had at the time. Since then I got him on Decca Records and he's doin' quite well for himself right now. My two sisters, Peggy Sue and Crystal Bell, used to sing with me too. We all were just called the Loretta Lynn Sisters and they never had a name of their own. Then I sent them out on their own. They didn't like it too good at the time but I did it for their sake, not mine. Crystal sings more pop than she does country. The first record she had, I wrote for her. It was called 'I Cried the Blue Right Out of My Eyes'. She sold 45,000 copies of that one. Peggy does real country. She sings a lot like me. Peggy sings with her husband and she has two albums out now. Since I let her go, she hasn't done as good but she's not worried. She works good when she goes out on stage, but she don't work with disc jockeys and write letters to them the way she should. Crystal likes to sing, but she doesn't like the travelin' and signin' autographs and meetin' people. But that's what helps. If I'm feelin' good, I'd rather sign autographs

She may be a superstar in her own right, but she's also Gregory Peck's biggest fan.

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than do about anything. I think that's what keeps me goin'. Sometimes I'm feelin' bad and somebody comes up to me and says, 'You've just made my night,' and I get to feelin' better and better."

Buses and Houses

Loretta's bus is brand spankin' hundred grand new. The interior is as plush as a millionaire's private railroad car with its purple velvet walls and gilt trim. Up front the driver, Jim, is surrounded by a multitude of instruments, switches, telephones and his own private stereo cartridge player and headset. Behind the driver's cockpit, which can be separated from the rest of the bus with a purple curtain, is the lounge. There's another tape player and radio with external speakers and a cabinet full of country favorites for the band members who spend their time here playing cards and talking when they're not sleeping. A small table takes up one corner, the rest of the space is occupied by soft, black leather couches surrounded by built-in pillars of indirect lighting. There's wall-to-wall carpeting on the floor, velvet curtains at the windows and soft white leather covering the ceiling. Not to mention a huge color TV set and a refrigerator.

". . . I'm about as good a shot as my husband. Sometimes I beat him. We'll set up a can and I'll knock it off and he'll miss it. It'll make him so mad . . ."

The mid-section of the bus is devoted to sleeping accomodations. There are eight bunk beds, a bathroom and storage space for the band's personal gear—the instruments and amplifiers are stowed underneath the bus.

The remaining third of the bus is Loretta's. She has a combination bedroom-dressing room at the rear. It is also equipped with a stereo and a color TV and has a heating and air-conditioning unit separate from the rest of the bus so Loretta can control it herself. She isolates herself back in her little cubbyhole so she can pick on her guitar and write songs for her upcoming album.

When she's not touring and living in her bus, Loretta has two, soon to be three, houses to live in. One of these is located on a small farm right outside Nashville, which she actually doesn't use much these days, since she and Mooney bought the entire town of Hurricane Mills, Tennessee. They have 1,500 acres and an old manor house.

"Everybody gets a bang out of our town. They come from hundreds of miles to see that old town and the mill. There ain't no red light in it either, I can guarantee," Loretta adds hastily.

"We've left the house just the way it was. We don't have a lot of modern improvements. We fixed it up and left all the high ceilings and furnished it with antiques and things, just like it was when it was built. The only difference is that we've got modern heating and air-conditioning."

The third house which is in the process of being built is an old-style adobe Spanish hacienda located in Mazatlan, Mexico overlooking the Gulf of Mexico. There are no neighbors for miles around, which suits Loretta fine since she plans to

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spend several months of the year there just taking it easy with Mooney and the family.

". . . When I went to California to do pictures, I found out Gregory Peck was on the same lot. The whole week I was up in the air just knowing I was gonna meet my favorite actor. It rained and he didn't come out to the set and I left that night. I was sick . . ."

A Star and Yet a Fan

A superstar in her own right, in many ways Loretta still retains a great deal of the little girl. She admits to her "crush" on Gregory Peck.

"I think Gregory Peck is the greatest actor that's ever been. I think I've seen him in everything he's been in. I really love *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Duel in the Sun*.

"When I went to California to do pictures on the MCA lot, I found out Gregory Peck was on the same lot doing a picture. The people at MCA said, 'Well, before you leave here, we'll make sure you get to meet him.' The whole week I was up in the air just knowing I was gonna meet my favorite actor, ya know. So on Thursday, I didn't know it, but they had it all fixed up that I was gonna meet him. What happened? It rained and he didn't come out to the set and I left that night. I was sick!

"He sent me a great big picture and autographed it to me when MCA told him what a big fan I was. I've got it hangin' right up above my bed. Anybody who sees it just falls out, 'cause I got him there in my bedroom, but I never thought anything about it. I don't see nothin' wrong with that. Besides my husband's got a picture of Dolly Parton on his nightstand beside his bed. I think we just do that mostly to kid each other."

Loretta, too, has her share of zealous fans. "If I get down off the stage people'll come up and grab my hair. They'll yank it out so they can curl it up and put it in their billfold. It gets pretty bad sometimes. By the time I holler, 'Owwww,' somebody else has got me from the other side."

PHOTO: YVONNE HANNEMANN

At one time Loretta was scared to ride in a jeep. Now she travels in a $100,000 bus.

It's almost impossible for her to go in a restaurant because so many people flock to her table that her food gets cold. She usually stays in the bus and has something brought out to her. Innumerable people have maintained that they are her mother, brother or sister, in order to get into a sold-out show or to get backstage. A policeman once helped a man change a flat tire because he said he was Loretta's brother and would be late to one of her shows if he didn't get his tire changed in a hurry.

The bus sometimes acts like a magnet. One lady borrowed a ladder from somewhere when she saw Loretta's bus getting gas about seven o'clock one morning. She climbed up to Loretta's bedroom window and commenced banging and yelling for Loretta to come out.

"There's so many people that want to see me before and after the show. They say just give them five or ten minutes, but I don't have that much time between shows for all of them. That's what hurts."

People Not Politics

Loretta retains the good humor and unbiased, honest charm of a child, while operating in a very tough, grown-up world. She totally broke up a meeting in Washington attended by Mrs. Nixon by referring to Mr. Nixon as "Richard."

Her genuine feeling for people permeates everything she does. Race bigotry distresses her very much because she doesn't "see any sense to it." People are people to Loretta. "I had a doctor, an educated man, tell me that if I ever had my picture taken with Charley Pride, he'd drop out of my fan club." She did and he did.

Her simple good sense keeps her out of any kind of politics. "I don't get involved in politics at all. George Wallace called me up and wanted me to do a fund-raising show for him, but I said I didn't want to get involved in politics. Not that I have anything against George Wallace, 'cause I don't.

"I just hope the best man wins, but I've always thought you had to be crooked to get in stuff like that. The good guys almost never make it. The reason why they don't is because they say what they think they can do. They're not gonna say they can do this when they know

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they can't. People say, 'Well, if he can't do this I don't want him.' People are silly."

Loretta also has firm views on women's lib and the relationship between men and women.

"I definitely think a man should be the head of the house. I think a woman should get the same pay if she's doin' a man's job, but I'm not sayin' I think it's good that she's in that factory. I think they should raise a man's pay and take the women out.

"Too many women have wanted to be on their own and it's broken up too many marriages. Nowadays a lot of the kids aren't gettin' married. They just go off and live together and sometimes with more than one man, one after the other that is. I think this is just a phase we're goin' through now and that it won't last. Men and women will always live together and stay together and that's the way it should be."

"... They say just give them five or ten minutes of my time, but I don't have that much time between shows for all of them. That's what hurts ..."

Mona Lisa of the Mountains

Loretta looks ageless. She could be a young-but-mature thirty or a very sexy forty, but actually she's somewhere in between ("It's none of your damn business," is the answer she gives to questions about her exact age). Long, lovely dresses, on occasion hemmed up fifteen minutes before the show, are what she prefers for the stage, but off-stage she dresses casually in belled trousers with a matching halter.

Her ten years of extremely hard work in the business have taken a certain toll however. She's been in the hospital four times this past year. The next year's schedule is a long, hard one too, but after that she plans to spend a great deal more time with her family in Tennessee and in Mexico.

"A lot of people have said that I'd really miss the business if I quit, but they don't know me very well. I didn't really realize it'd be like this when I started. I thought when I made it I could quit right then, but you got people waiting around for your next album. I am gonna start slowing way down though, and working less and doin' things I've been wanting to do for a long time. I want to hunt and fish which I love to do. I'm about as good a shot as my husband. Sometimes I beat him. We'll set up a can and I'll knock it off and he'll miss it, and it'll make him so mad. We go out target practicing a lot. That's about all we get to do these days.

"Actually I just want to be a housewife with a family. I love to sing, don't get me wrong, but I just don't like to travel that much especially since Mooney don't come with me much anymore, since he's got to take care of the business in Nashville.

"You want to hear one last thing that's real funny? Well, when Mooney and I went to get married he had to write his name on the paper. I looked down at what he wrote and said 'Who's that?' I called him 'Doo' but his real name is Oliver Vanetta Lynn, Jr.!"

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Waylon Jennings: "I Couldn't Go Pop With A Mouthful Of Firecrackers."

by Patrick Carr

Waylon Jennings is standing on a stage in New York City, looking a little tired and raunchy in the harsh lights. The brim of his Stetson throws a shadow down over his gaunt face with its piercing brown eyes and strong, outlaw-bearded jaw. He has just introduced the Waylors to New York, and met with unexpectedly enthusiastic applause—which in this part of the world means a round of clapping and a scattering of lonely whistles, the most these city folks can manage. From out in the dark beyond the stage, a young woman's voice cries, "And who the hell are *you*?"

He smiles a wry, crooked smile, leans into the mike, and replies very matter-of-factly, "Waylon—Goddamn—Jennings, lady."

Behind him, the Waylors launch into "T For Texas" with a punch that curls your toes. They look like they're about to hold up the audience at the point of a .45 and then hightail it back down to the badlands with the spoils, and indeed that is something like the truth of the matter: they've taken over the town for a few days, impressed the hell out of everybody with Waylon's knowledgeable, bittersweet songs of life and the sliding brilliance of the great Ralph Mooney's pedal steel, and soon they'll be off for Texas, leaving the Big Apple considerably quieter and not a little poorer in spirit for their absence . . .

"I'm no cowboy," says Waylon, pulling his long, lank hair back behind his ears and replacing the hat just *so*. "I'm a country boy; I'm a hillbilly. They talk about the Nashville Sound, y'know. My music ain't no Nashville sound. It's my kind of country. It's not Western, it's Waylon."

It's true. You can't hang a label on Waylon Jennings. He's one of those rare beings who can reach out and pick up any kind of song, treat it any kind of way with any kind of instrumentation and arrangement, and make it as country as a cabin in the hills just by the way he is, the way he feels and translates feelings into song. When he recorded "MacArthur Park," he had to deal with a barrage of accusations to the effect that he was travelling toward pop and away from his Texas roots. His reply was brief and to the point: "I couldn't go pop with a mouthful of firecrackers," he said. "Merle Haggard's drummer told me that once, and it's true. Did that set *sound* country? Instruments don't make country. We're entitled to a heavy rock beat if it complements our songs. Or if we want to use a kazoo played

PHOTOS: RAEANNE RUBENSTEIN

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through a sewer pipe, that's all right too. Why should we lock ourselves in?"

Maybe that's what has all these citified hippies so excited, the fact that here's a big, mean-looking man with a band that could easily be a group of rock and rollers with their long hair and electric guitars, and they're playing music that has as much rhythmic guts as you could wish for, but still really isn't anything like what they get on the radio around here. It's country music, no mistake, and *do they ever love it to death.* It's genuine, no frills, no slickness, no pretensions. Just hard-hitting, hard-living country soul.

"I was born in the suburbs of a cottonpatch down in Littlefield, Texas," says Waylon in a deep Texas drawl. "'Bout ever since I can remember, all I wanted to do was play and sing, y'know?" His parents both played guitar—his father played dance halls in Texas when he was young and no doubt felt pretty pleased about the fact that by the time his son was 12, the boy had landed himself a disc jockey spot at the local radio station. That kept Waylon in spare change for two years until he moved down the road apiece to another DJ job in Lubbock. It was there that he first met Buddy Holly.

"We both started out together, singing country music," he remembers. "We used to play on this radio station called KDAV every Sunday. They had a thing called 'The Sunday Party' where they had local acts. That's where we got to know one another. He had an act called 'Buddy, Bob, and Larry' then, and when I came to Lubbock he asked me to join the band. So I did. Buddy went out and bought me a bass and I learned to play it in two or three weeks.

"We never had a cross word, y'know? He was easy to get along with, easy-going, and he was a monkey in a lot of ways, a real cut-up. We sure did have a lot of fun. He was one of the best people I knew in my life, y'know? Really."

But it all ended on that tragic February 3rd, 1959, when the Crickets lost their leader and the world lost a great artist.

"We'd been on the road for days, man. Our clothes were all dirty and we were all dirty and tired and everything. Even the bus had frozen up one time, goin' right down the road. It was pretty hectic. So Buddy chartered a plane for him, myself, and Tommy Allsop. The three of us were going to fly from Mason City—we were playing in Clear Lakes, a little place out of Mason City, Iowa—to Fargo. We were going to play in Moorhead, Minnesota, and the airport was between Moorhead and Fargo.

"So we were backstage when the Big Bopper—J.P. Richardson—asked me if he could take my place on the plane 'cause he had the 'flu. I told him it was all right and he made it all right with Buddy. Then Richie Valens asked Tommy Allsop if he could take *his* place.

"A lot of people say it was Buddy who took my place, but that ain't the way it was at all. Y'know, it was real funny. That night after the crash we played some auditorium in Moorhead, and after we played they tried to dock us for the money Buddy and the Big Bopper and Richie Valens would have gotten—this after beggin' us to play. We just wanted to go home, y'know, but we played for them anyway. Real nice people, them . . .

"... We're entitled to a heavy rock beat if it complements our songs. Or if we want to use a kazoo played through a sewer pipe, that's all right, too..."

"Buddy was one of the first people who ever believed in me. He produced the first song I ever recorded, on Brunswick; he paid for it, he produced it, and he flew King Curtis, the sax player, from New York to New Mexico to play on the record with me. He was a real friend, all the way."

Buddy's death sent Waylon back to Lubbock, where he took another DJ job for $75 a week until he took off for Arizona to form his own band and play nightclubs in the area.

"What were we playing?" He laughs. "We were playing what they call 'contemporary country' now. We did some rock and roll, but basically country. Everything had that country flavor, y'know?"

The sweat ran freely during that period, but in 1965 Chet Atkins heard the Waylors in Pheonix and signed Waylon to RCA. Waylon moved to Nashville, where he set up bachelors' quarters with Johnny Cash. The following two years might well go down in history as the most spectacular era in the fine arts of door-smashing, house-wrecking, and general craziness. Looking back on those years, Waylon can afford to laugh a little, even feel a bit nostalgic; they both survived, but the changes, as they say, were heavy.

"... A lot of people say it was Buddy Holly who took my place (on the plane), but that ain't the way it was at all..."

"We *existed*," he says. "Yep, there's a lot of stories all right. We did some fishin' together, y'know." Quite a lot of fishing in fact, but the strange thing was, they never caught any fish. Waylon is at a loss to explain this fact in practical terms. "I dunno," he says, "I ain't *never* caught a fish. I've been fishin' with Bobby Bare, Harlan Howard, Cash, a lot of people, but I ain't never caught a fish. I dunno . . . there's somethin' about it. Maybe I don't *want* to; maybe *that's* it.

"Y'know, we'd stay out on that lake anywhere from twelve to fourteen to eighteen hours. One time we were out there for eighteen hours because John forgot where he parked his car. From the lake all those coves look the same, y'know. It rained, everything. That

"I ain't never caught a fish. I dunno . . . there's somethin' about it."

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almost did us in right there.

"That's the same day we almost killed everyone within a mile, tryin' to kill a snake. It was on the bank swallowin' a fish. You know one of those boat oars? There wasn't a piece left a foot long when we were through. Damn thing near scared us half to death."

It was on that day too that the pair first saw the house in Hendersonville, Tennessee where Cash now lives. "From the lake it looked like an old English castle type thing, y'know? It really was a great-lookin' house. That house could belong to nobody else. It's special.

"Me and him were both noted for kickin' in doors, y'know. I said 'John, there's a house where you can never kick down the door!' It was about six inches thick, y'see. But sure enough, he lost the key one time and he went and got an axe. He kicked the door in all right . . .

"...This friend of mine has a fish market. Bare went down there and bought a fish about three feet long, and had his picture taken with it..."

"You know Bobby Bare ain't never caught a fish either? I was over in Norway and this guy was tellin' me about Bare. He says, 'Did you see the fish Bare caught?' I says, 'Now tell me the truth, did Bare ever catch a fish?' He says, 'Well, I'll tell you the truth. He fished three days and he never caught a fish. So this friend of mine has a fish market, and Bare went down there and bought a fish about three feet long, and had his picture taken with it.' Ain't that somethin' else?"

"Ain't no way were gonna get that damn PA up them stairs," Waylon is mumbling as he sits back on a bench in a New York rehearsal studio, making faces at an

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attractive young lady photographer.

"This guy says Charlie's ready and waitin'" replies Ritchie Albright, Waylon's drummer and eleven-year companion who is talking on the phone to Max's, the chic and outrageous stronghold of New York hip where these Texas pickers are about to stun the local population.

"I hope you-all like what we do. If you don't—don't ever come to Nashville. We'll kick the hell out of you . . ."

"And who the hell is *Charlie*?" asks Waylon.

"He's the dishwasher."

"Ask 'em what kind of PA they got there." He turns back to the interview. "What kind of guitar do I use? Hey, Billy, what year is that Telecaster y'all gave me? '53? Yeah, a '53 Telecaster. A guy came by and sold it for $40 and it's the best guitar I've ever had. Must've been the way they pissed on the wood at the factory that year . . . but hell, I ain't no great guitar player. I just play my stuff. I'm very self-conscious about my guitar playin' for some reason. I'm a singer. I never practice on my guitar. They—the band—keep pushin' me to play more."

He's too modest. He plays that tooled leather Telecaster with a fine touch, very economical and precise with just the right feeling to set off Mooney's pedal steel and the two rhythm guitars. Late at night down at Max's, the band plays a long, tumbling instrumental break on "Me And Bobby McGee" which shows just how far they—and he—can take their talent on a good night. It's just plain beautiful, very complex, and you begin to realize where all those big rock bands who have "gone country" got their inspiration, and why they somehow don't quite manage to pull it off because the *real* stuff, the real innovation, isn't theirs at all. It's Waylon's.

"These are things from rhythms I've thought up, y'know," he says. "I don't play drums, but I *hear* drums and I hear new ideas and new beats in drums. Ritchie and I have come up with things that disguise waltz beats to where they're a *movin'* thing, y'know? Like in between a ¾ and a 6/8 thing."

Sure, things go wrong now and again. Somebody misses a cue and there are broad smiles all round, but what do you expect from the outlaws of country music? Just the fact that Ralph Mooney, the man who they say made Merle Haggard and Buck Owens and the West Coast sound all by himself, and Waylon Jennings, who *invented* chicken-pickin' (the stuttering guitar, he calls it) are up there on the same stage is enough to make magic more than likely.

"I hope you-all like what we do," said Waylon on opening night. "If you don't—don't ever come to Nashville. We'll kick the hell out of you."

Now, Waylon Jennings lives in Old Hickory, Tennessee, about twenty miles outside Nashville, right across the lake from where Cash and Bobby Bare live in Hendersonville. "I haven't gone out there on the lake again yet," he says with some humor. He lives with Jessi, his beautiful brunette wife, their daughter Jennifer, and three children from a previous marriage.

"I'd as soon the kids didn't follow in my path," he says. "I've been through a lot of changes in a lot of different ways, and I don't think most people should have to go through all that." Buddy, 12, wants to be a drummer. "I think he's gonna do it, too," says his father. Jessi's getting roped in, too, as another singer for the Waylors, who look upon the prospect with relish on account of how she's so *good*. "Make her pay her way," says Waylon, who likes to take Jessi with him on the road in their infamous "Black Maria" school bus. They're getting a spanking new Silver Eagle as soon as delivery can be arranged and the Waylors, accustomed to less exalted ways, are wondering what it will be like to travel in style for a change. A far cry from the day when Ritchie Albright woke up on top of an amplifier, bumping through Crab Orchard, Texas, in a beat-up pickup truck, and decided that things were getting just a little bit *too* crazy for his health to take. That's when he quit, leaving the Waylors the night before Waylon married Jessi.

"I figger that was a pretty good

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Waylors Don Brooks (harp), Billy Reynolds and Ralph Mooney (guitar and steel), and drummer Ritchie Albright.

PHOTO: YVONNE HANNEMANN

Jessi will be singing regularly soon, and her man Waylon couldn't be happier. She has what it takes.

swap," says Ralph Mooney who usually doesn't talk much, especially with a hangover. But Ritchie came back. There were still occasional dates where he'd have welcomed some chicken wire between him and the audiences on the man-eating chit-chat club circuit, and there are always *incidents* like the one when he got thrown out of Canada for getting in a fight, and Waylon didn't help any by saying rude things about Her Majesty The Queen at the border, but on the whole, things have worked out just fine.

Waylon's all right, too. He's still a little weak from the hepatitis he picked up down in New Mexico on a Navajo reservation, but he copes with New York pretty well and he seems to have plenty of energy. Despite the hepatitis, he remembers the reservation with great pride and good feeling. "I really enjoyed playin' for the Indians," he says. "They really enjoy what I do. That's just about the extent of it; we're friends. I'm part Indian myself, y'know. Comanche and Cherokee. They call me 'Waylon' now, and I like that. Basically, they're just good ole country boys and good old country girls, in their own way. I never met any one of them that was bitter. They're good people, man, real good people. I'll be playin' there again, no doubt about that."

He's even had movie offers, the latest being for the part of Pat Garrett in Peckinpah's "Pat Garrett And Billy The Kid" in which Kris Kristofferson, an old-time buddy from early Nashville days, plays Billy, and Bob Dylan has a small part. But Waylon couldn't bring himself to do it.

"They got the wrong story!" he exclaims. "Billy The Kid wasn't a misunderstood kid. He was an idiot! He was really a half-wit who got attention by killing people! I make a habit of studying and analyzing famous people. I started when I was about 24 when I realized that everybody is an individual. It's just a hobby of mine; I do it for my own benefit."

He volunteers an irreverent remark, then says, "Don't print that or I'll blow up your magazine," with a broad smile. I tell him that it might be difficult for a tall, bearded outlaw in a cowboy hat to get into the building in the first place, but like he says, "Look, if it was appearance and arrangement and instrumentation that made country music, Dean Martin would be the greatest country singer in the world today . . ."

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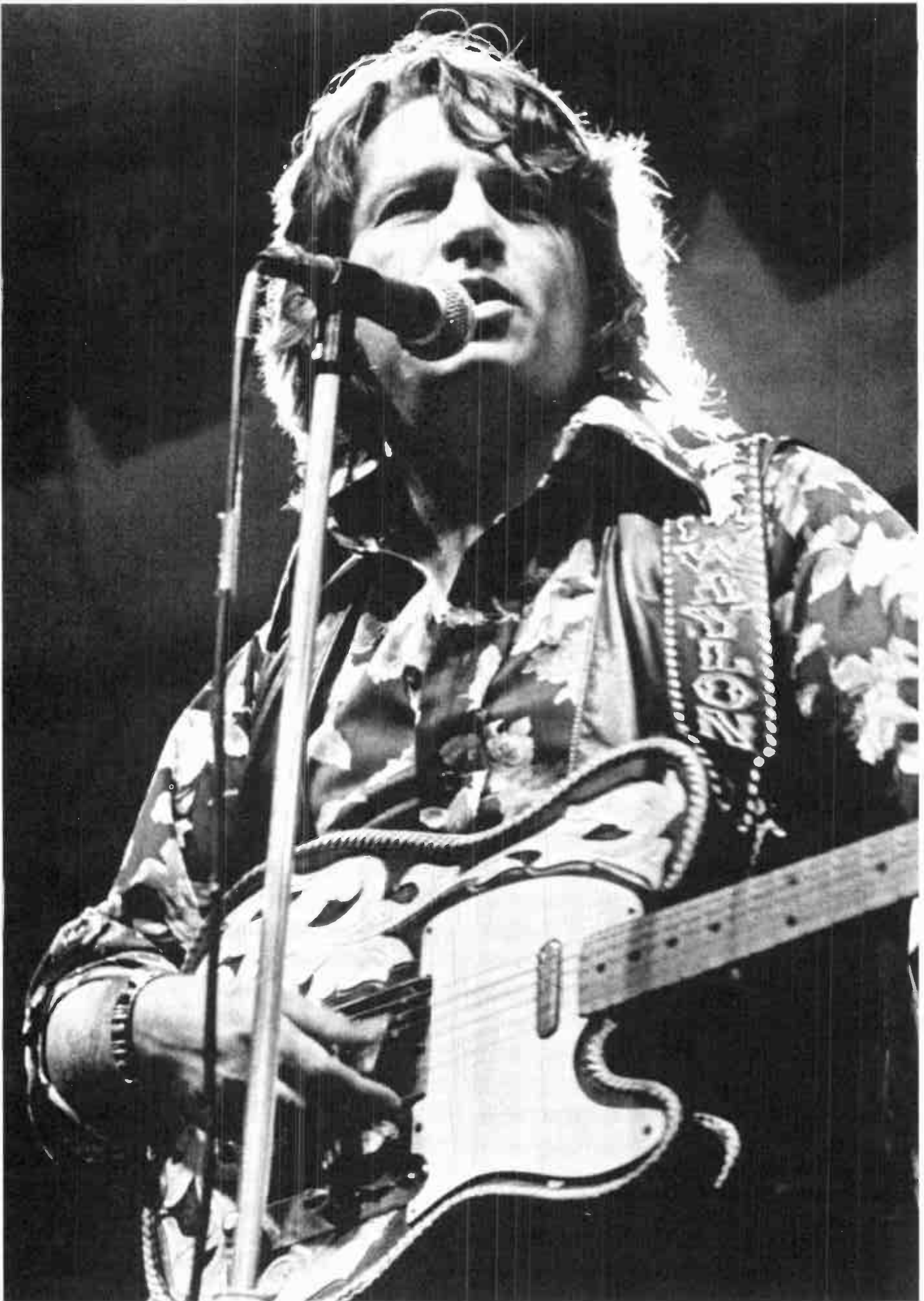

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Tammy Wynette: Songs Of Heartbreak, But A Happy Home

by John Gabree

PHOTOS: MARSHALL FALLWELL

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It's just part of the Nashville legend: The Day Billy Sherrill Discovered Tammy Wynette. By now probably nobody remembers it just as it happened. It's been told so many times.

Billy himself is modest enough about it. Something just told him to take a chance, so a chance is what he took. Not too much of a chance, though, when you think about it. If it hadn't worked out, he'd have been down maybe a couple of hours of studio time. Hindsight says that's an acceptable risk.

So Billy brought Tammy into the studio. Her first song, "Apartment Number 9," went to Number 43 on the national charts. "Your Good Girl's Gonna Go Bad," her second record, went to Number 1. Nowhere to Number 1. Rags to riches. An hour with Billy Sherrill and a star is born.

It was not, of course, quite that simple. It never is.

"I kept getting breaks that didn't quite happen," says Tammy Wynette. "In early 1965, I moved in with my grandparents in Birmingham. I had an uncle who was chief engineer at Channel 6, WBRC-TV. He got me an audition and I became a regular on the 'Country Boy Eddy Show.' I was getting up at 4 a.m., getting to the station by 6, then working 8 a.m. til 6 p.m. in the beauty parlor. Nothing happened. Then in October the next year I sang at the Disc Jockey Convention in Nashville. Porter Wagoner heard me and liked me enough to have me do several shows with him after Norma Jean left him and before he found Dolly. Nothing happened. Early in 1967, I moved to an efficiency apartment in East Nashville. By the time I met Billy in the lobby at Columbia, I had already been to five record companies. Nobody but Billy was willing to really listen."

"... By the time I met Billy in the lobby at Columbia, I had already been to five record companies. Nobody but Billy was willing to really listen ..."

The Wynette-Sherrill team followed "Your Good Girl's Gonna Go Bad" with 15 straight #1 singles, a streak that was broken only when an inspirational tune, "The Wonders You Perform," went to #2. That shouldn't really count. In all, Tammy and Billy have been together on 21 #1 songs.

Ironically, Tammy's most and least favorite songs respectively are "D-I-V-O-R-C-E" and "Stand By Your Man," the two hits by which she is best known. "D-I-V-O-R-C-E" probably graced the juke box in every honky tonk from Augusta to Amarillo. And "Stand By Your Man," which sold more than 2 million copies, is the biggest single by a woman in the history of country music. They are both classic Wynette.

"D-I-V-O-R-C-E" is sung by a young woman, presumably in her late twenties, the same age as much of Tammy's audience.

Our D-I-V-O-R-C-E
Becomes final today
And me and Little J-O-E
Will be going away
I know that this will be
pure H-E-double-L for me
I wish that we could stop this
D-I-V-O-R-C-E.

"D-I-V-O-R-C-E" © Tree Publishing Co., Inc.

Tammy and Billy pull out all the stops on this one. The singer holds nothing back, draining emotion from herself, the song and her listeners. "I think I've always liked it best," she says.

"... Billy is always right. He's a genius. If he came in and told me to record 'Yankee Doodle' I'd do it ..."

Tammy's "discoverer" and producer, Billy Sherrill. "He has an uncanny ear for good material," says Tammy.

"Stand By Your Man" is another matter. "I didn't like the song very much when Billy and I wrote it. I had been married about two weeks (on August 22, 1968 to be exact) and I took it home and showed it to George (Jones). When he didn't like it either, I guess I got prejudiced toward it. But Billy is always right. He's a genius. If he came in and told me to record 'Yankee Doodle,' I'd do it."

A lot of people in Nashville think Billy Sherrill is a genius. But then a lot of people think he's a lousy SOB. Watching him work in the studio you'll probably decide that his fans are right. You'll also probably find it harder and harder to agree with his critics.

As a producer, Billy Sherrill is without equal. As head of production for Columbia and Epic in Nashville, he oversees the album-making of more than 30 artists. Besides

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Tammy, he personally produces records for some of the best Country artists, performers like Charlie Rich, Jody Miller, Sandy Posey, Johnny Paycheck and Freddy Weller. By the industry's standards, he is the best there is: nobody has scored Number 1 more consistently than he has. And though he isn't extremely prolific as a writer, only 50 or so songs, nearly everything he writes turns to gold. "He has an uncanny ear for good material," says Tammy, "his own and other people's."

"... 'Stand By Your Man' was so big because country people aren't attracted to women's lib. They like to be able to stand by their man ..."

In other ways, however, Billy Sherrill is his own worst enemy. He has acquired, for example, an uncommon suspicion of the press. It's true that he has been bagged a couple of times by unscrupulous reporters. But it is equally true that he says most of those awful things they say he says. Billy seems to have no idea what his jokes will sound like in print. Most of the time he *is* kidding, and besides, what he says is often no worse than what other people in the music business might say. Only Billy gets quoted.

Studio B at Columbia's 16th Street headquarters is beginning to fill with musicians. Billy Sherrill is in the control booth with engineer Lou Bradley, heavy into a discussion. From the outside it looks like they're hard at work, and they are.

"... The hardest thing about making records is finding the songs. George and I listen to everything that's sent to us ..."

But what they're talking about is football. Billy is a football nut and a betting nut, and the previous weekend he had won a bundle on Miami over Washington in the Super Bowl. He is asking Lou Bradley, as he has asked everyone he's met all day, whether he'd won or lost on the game. Bradley, a lanky, soft-spoken man in his 30s, is noncommittal; mostly, he just lets Billy talk. Billy tells a visitor he'd like to bet on some hockey matches. "What do you know about hockey?" his friend wants to know. "What the hell do I know about basketball either?" says Billy, "I just like to bet."

The thing Billy liked best about the Dolphins-Redskins game, besides winning, was that most of the "experts" picked the other side. Billy likes beating the experts. His first hit was a smash even though the experts said it should have been impossible. Don't cut a waltz, they told him, keep it under 2½ minutes, get the punch line up front, and never feature a steel guitar. So Billy recorded David Houston singing "Almost Persuaded," a waltz over three minutes long with the punch line two minutes into the record and featuring a steel guitar. It sold a million. Billy really likes beating the experts.

In the studio, Tammy Wynette is tucked away in a corner, peering around a partition at George Jones, who is working out an arrangement with the musicians. Tammy is talking about two of her favorite topics, George and Billy.

"Billy is doing wonderful things for George. George never recorded on more than one track before he came to Epic. He knows how much Billy has done for me and he trusts him completely. George has been a star for 18 years, so it's not that Billy had anything to teach him about performing. It's just that Billy's way of producing is better than a lot of other people's."

Billy is snaking in and out among the musicians, offering a greeting here, a bit of advice or a joke there. Mostly he's talking about the barium treatment he's received the day before. He looks older than his 35 years, and tired and frail among the hearty, fleshy session men.

Earlier Tammy had been overdubbing part of her newest single, when Billy broke in from the control room: "Can you just talk that line there instead of singing it?"

"I don't know, Billy, you know I hate to talk." But she did it and of course the cut was much improved. "I really hate to talk," she is saying now, "I just am not very good at it. The only time I ever argued with Billy was once when he wanted me to do 'Cry,' the old Johnny Ray song, and sort of talk my way through it. I really disagreed. I didn't think it was my type of song and I got this mental block against it. I couldn't get the melody in my mind. But we finally got it down and it was such a good sound. Billy was right. In the studio he really is always right."

Tammy Wynette is an extraordinarily attractive woman. When she talks to you, she fixes you with two of the saddest and most beau-

Head of Columbia's Nashville operations, Ron Bledsoe, talks about a recording session Tammy has just completed.

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tiful eyes in Creation. Here, in street clothes instead of the costumes she wears on stage, she looks like any moderately prosperous young woman, albeit a very lovely one, like Eva Marie Saint playing Tuesday Weld. Her manner is direct, open and intelligent.

To a lot of people, Tammy Wynette *is* country music. She has had a greater impact on country and its image than any other woman performer. Genius or not, Billy Sherrill had a lot to work with in Tammy. She has a strong, clear voice, maybe the best female voice in Nashville, and she knows how to wield it with great dramatic and emotional effect. When they wanted to epitomize country music, the producers of "Five Easy Pieces"

"...I try to find songs that express down to earth feelings. That's why I like Tom T. Hall so much as a songwriter..."

used the record of Tammy Wynette singing "Stand By Your Man." Karen Black played a character who wanted to *be* Tammy Wynette as thousands of women around the country also must. Her records are made by a great producer, but they feature a great singer.

"The hardest thing about making records is finding the songs. George and I listen to everything that's sent to us. A while back we got a tape from California with no return address on it. We liked one of the songs and I wanted to do it. All we had was a name, J. Judy Kay, and the postmark, so we called agents and promoters on the Coast until we tracked her down. Then I recorded the song, 'Bridge of Love.' Billy's best at picking songs, though. And of course he's written most of our biggest ones. We had a survey that showed most of our listeners were women between 22 and 45 years old. In the past couple of years we have been getting more and more college kids and that makes me really happy. But most of the people who like our records are probably married, so we try to find material they'll like.

"'Stand By Your Man' was so big because country people aren't attracted to women's lib. They like to be able to stand by their man. And of course the men liked the

In the studio Tammy pulls out all the stops. She holds back nothing, draining emotion from herself, the song and her listeners.

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idea that their women would stand by them. I try to find songs that express down to earth, honest feelings.

"That's why I like Tom T. Hall so much as a songwriter. He's the story teller of all story tellers. When we're on the road George and I will stay in the bus or the dressing room until just before we go on. But if Tom's playing, we'll always go out and listen. Some of his songs are corny, but they always brighten your day a bit.

slow I'd be shaking so much I couldn't sing."

Billy is back in the control room and ready to roll. George is at the mike. There'll be no more talking for a while.

"Why don't you come out and see the farm in the morning?"

That's a date.

"The farm" is a 15-room mansion on 340 acres of prime land about 30 miles south of Nashville in Maury County. Tammy and George have

PHOTO: ALAN WHITMAN

"I love music and I love performing, but if I never had another hit it would be all right."

"We don't travel more because it's so nerve-wracking. I love to perform for live audiences, to get to see real people. But sometimes you'll feel bad and you'll still have to go on out and smile. You'll want to scream, pull hair and run and say you don't feel like it. But you owe it to people to come see them and you want to do it. I get very nervous just before a show. You wonder if you're going to do the job. You want to and people expect you to. That's why I always open with a fast song, to cover my nervousness. If I tried to open with something

only owned it a couple of months. They are still redecorating. The new carpets are so thick that the man answering the door can hardly get it open.

"I'm Foy Lee," he says, "Tammy's father. This is Mrs. Lee. Come on in."

As she pours a couple of cups of coffee, Mildred Lee, a short, plump, energetic woman, talks about her daughter. "Tammy was an only child and we tried to be real good to her. I was a school teacher and Mr. Lee worked the farm. There wasn't any town. It was all farm.

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There weren't but 800 people in all of Itawamba County. When she turned 18, she got married, moved to Tupelo and went to work for a beauty shop."

Mrs. Lee turns her attention to Tammy's maid's son, who has stayed home from school with a bad cold. She is trying to get him to eat something to keep up his strength. "His Ma and Pa haven't come up from Florida yet," she explains.

Florida is where the Jones and the Lees have been living for the last few years. Tammy and George bought an old plantation about 40 miles from Tampa in Lakeland. They put in a bandshell and every couple of weeks they'd put on a big Nashville show starring themselves and whichever of their friends—Porter and Dolly, Conway, ole Waylon—could make it. But they found it meant too much traveling. Besides being on the road, they had to be in Nashville to record, rehearse and find songs. So they've moved back home to Music City.

Foy Lee offers to conduct a tour of the new house, beginning in the cellar. "They kept the slaves down here," he says, pointing to the barred windows. The masonry walls and oak beams, almost 140 years

At the top of the country music ladder, both Tammy and husband George Jones are "really happy." According to Tammy: "I have no other goal than to keep doing what I'm doing."

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old, are in perfect shape. Pointing to rows of scratches over the fireplace, he adds: "See, here's where they kept count of the days by marking the wall. They used to work them like horses during the day, then ring that big old bell out there in the evening and herd them in down here." These are working-class people and they haven't forgotten how hard life can be. There is real sympathy in Foy Lee's voice, just as there will be later when Tammy says: "That cellar gives you a creepy feeling. It's a terrible thing to lock anybody up like that."

"...A lot of people love us and we'll just go on making records and singing for people who want to hear us..."

It is a relief to get your feet into the thick carpet upstairs. The carpet stretches wall to wall in every room, including the kitchen. It changes color every time you go through a doorway, pink here, blue there, but nowhere do your feet touch solid ground.

The front hall is two and a half stories high, with an enormous wooden door with the 140-year-old key still in the lock. Painters and carpenters are busy in several of the rooms. One painter is uncomfortably high up near the ceiling. A carpenter is putting extra closets into one of the guest rooms.

"The house has a lot of history in it," Mr. Lee is saying. "The State even put a historical marker about it out by the highway. It was General Hood's headquarters during the War between the States. One story is that five generals spent the night here and then all went out and were killed at the battle of Franklin the next day. I don't know if that's true or not."

Back downstairs in the kitchen, George and Tammy have arrived from Nashville. With them is baby Georgette and she gets a lot of grandmotherly attention from Mrs. Lee. George goes off to get one of the carpenters to plane the door so it won't be scraping the rug. Tammy runs up to her suite to get several framed photographs showing the house as it looked a hundred or so years ago. The big magnolias that dominate the front yard were just sprouts.

The suite that George and Tam-

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my share has been decorated in Spanish modern, like a lot of the rest of the house. "George is actually the decorator. He picks everything out. But I love Spanish. I think it is really beautiful." Over the fireplace in the den, above the gas-powered logs, George has hung a collection of mounted prize-winning fish, all stuffed so that they look like they are leaping in the air. Over the door is a beautiful hand-decorated Spanish sword.

Tammy goes outside for another session with the photographer. Dressed in yellow slacks and a yellow top under her blond hair, she is fabulous. George is talking management problems with one of the hands, discussing the herd of Black Angus cattle he has begun to assemble. "We have about 60 head now," he tells a visitor. "I'm not sure of the exact number because we keep having calves. We lost two calves during the snow in January because we didn't have the cattle indoors. The previous owners hadn't moved their's out yet, but everything is fine now. We'd like to get up to about 300 head. Originally we thought we'd just buy a herd, but we found out you get a lot of old cows that way. So now we're buying a few at a time when we find some good ones."

George is chewing on a little black cigar. "We gave up smoking this morning," says Tammy. "I've tried before, but this time I'm going to do it. George didn't have any trouble giving up drinking a couple of years ago, but this seems a lot harder. We won't start again. George has a little touch of emphysema and it just makes me feel bad to smoke. So we've stopped."

Georgette has followed her mother out into the yard and Tammy calls her over to have her picture taken. The Jones have six other children, three each by previous marriages. The oldest is a legal secretary in Nashville, the rest are in school. Georgette is a beautiful, serious-looking child. She has her mother's sad eyes, and today she has decided not to smile. "Georgette got her first s-p-a-n-k-i-n-g yesterday," says Tammy. "Mommy was washing her hair and Georgette wanted to do her hair the same way, so I gave her a shampoo and fixed her hair. She liked it so much that she gave herself three more shampoos in the commode. I finally lost my temper."

At 2, Georgette has already started to sing. The only song in her repertoire so far is "Funny Face."

Georgette is being followed around by a skinny mongrel who looks like he invented the hang-dog look. Mrs. Lee is following him: "This is Lucky. We found him abandoned when we moved in. He was so weak he couldn't walk, but I've been feeding him and taking care of him and he's starting to get better. I call him Lucky 'cause he's lucky we found him."

"Imagine leaving an animal to starve like that," adds Tammy, as Lucky lopes off after one of the fat squirrels that live in the yard.

Tammy Wynette has been on top for almost five years. Even though it looks like George might, she knows nobody can stay on top forever. "I'm completely happy," she says. "I have no other goal than to keep doing what I'm doing. I always wanted to be a singer, but I never dreamed I'd become rich and famous. I always expected to have a hard country life. George and I are really happy. We have a nice home for the kids. Now that we're back in Nashville we're going to join the Opry again. We can perform and we can get the insurance. We're on the road so much and we want to make sure the kids are taken care of if anything should ever happen to us. A lot of people love us and we'll just go on making records and singing for people who want to hear us. I love music and I love performing, but if I never had another hit it would be all right."

"The farm" Tammy calls it. A 15-room mansion on 340 acres of prime land about 30 miles south of Nashville.

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The Greatest Live Show on Earth

by John Pugh

He is called "the Killer" primarily because that is what he calls everyone else. Even so it would be an appropriate nickname—quite possibly the only appropriate nickname. Because Jerry Lee Lewis can leave you for dead at just about any game you want to play.

Back in the mid-fifties Jerry Lee's music was something the world had never heard before. Then he was billed as "Jerry Lee Lewis and His Pounding Piano," and at that time that was like saying Marilyn Monroe has a nice shape. When he sat down at a piano it was like watching a karate demonstration by a man afflicted with *delirium tremens.* Dementedly pounding away, exhorting the Cool Generation to "Shake it one time for me," he was a father to, and became an overnight legend in, a music whose repercussions continue to reverberate into its third generation. Today he has toned it down—as far as he can ever be said to have toned it down—crossed over into another genre, and now lays down some of the most "hillbilly" licks ever to grace the country music scene.

The pace of Jerry Lee's music may have slowed; his own pace hasn't. Following a recent show in Knoxville, Tennessee in which he "sent 'em on a rampage," Jerry Lee boarded his private plane around midnight and flew to his beloved Memphis (about 400 miles). There, jumping off his plane almost before it had stopped, he hopped into a waiting limousine and sped to an after-hours club. Unscheduled to appear, he was forced up on the stage (this is like forcing a drink on Dean Martin) where he "couldn't have knocked them any more dead if I'd used my fists." Returning home with a dozen or so friends, he threw a party at which he was still going strong long after the sun had come up the next morning. In some 15-16 hours he was never once without a drink, and never once stopped talking or singing. The fifth of whiskey he consumed had no effect on him whatsoever. He never even burped. The furious, non-stop pace only reinforced him.

And Jerry Lee certainly hasn't toned down his opinions. "*Elvis?*" he explodes increduously. "Follow *me*? I

". . . There's no way Elvis can follow me. There's no way anybody can follow me . . ."

guarantee you that if Elvis had his choice of being up in heaven right now, or coming on before me, he'd have to come on before me. There's no way Elvis can follow me. There's no way *anybody* can follow me. I've been The Greatest Live Show On Earth for the past 15 years, and I'll keep on being The Greatest Show On Earth until they put me six feet under. And even then I might still find a way to keep hanging it in."

Jerry Lee came out of Ferriday, Louisiana much the same way Elvis Presley came out of Tupelo, Mississippi, Johnny Cash came out of Dyess, Arkansas, and Carl Perkins came out of Jackson, Tennessee. His area was the richest mixture of music in America—the country, folk, and particularly indigenous Cajun of the white man, the blues and jazz of the black man. While growing up, he spent many long nights in places like Haney's Big House and Junior's Club, raptly absorbing it all. When he made his move at age 21, he was ready to take on the world. The world just wasn't ready to take on him.

In the mid-1950's music was undergoing—and, consequently, causing—an upheaval comparable to Vesuvius in all its glory. Country music and rhythm and blues had secretly married. Their offspring—which nearly devoured both parents—sprang forth not only fully grown, but demanding to head the family. By arousing, exciting or outraging everyone who viewed or heard it, rock and roll got its way. And no one aroused, excited or outraged more than the "Memphis Mauler" himself—Jerry Lee Lewis. He was denounced as a work of the devil by his elders, and regarded as a godsend by youngsters.

"I don't remember much about my early days, but I know I came out jumping and I've been running ever since," Jerry Lee recalls. "First time I ever sat down at a piano I played a tune on it, so my father mortgaged the house to buy me a used piano. In two weeks I taught myself how to play it. I started giving shows when I was just a kid. My father would load that old piano onto his truck, we'd drive somewhere, he'd unload it, I'd give a show, we'd pass the hat, he'd load it back on again, and we'd go home and see what we had got.

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PHOTO: EMERSON-LOEW

". . . I told them I was going to get an audition if I had to sit on the doorstep for three weeks . . ."

"Then in 1956 my father and I sold 33 dozen eggs, got in our old car and headed for Memphis to get an audition with Sun Records. We got there just in time to miss Sam Phillips (founder of Sun) who had gone to Nashville, and they wouldn't let me in. I told them I was going to get an audition if I had to sit on the doorstep for three weeks. Finally, Jack Clement took me in and we cut a tape. Then he told me to come back a month later to see what Sam Phillips thought.

"A month later I came walking in the door and Jack Clement looked up and said, 'Jerry Lee Lewis! I was just fixing to call you. Sam heard the tape and wants to cut a session on you.' So I cut 'Crazy Arms' and 'Whole Lotta Shakin' Going On.' Then when the record came out, they banned it because it was 'vulgar.' Every radio station in the country banned it.

"Then one night I was doing a show in Alabama. Judd (Sam Phillips' brother) came backstage, introduced himself, and told me he was going to take me to New York, get me on national television. 'Whole Lotta Shakin' would sell a million, and break me into one of the biggest ever.

"So we got up there and Judd took me around to the Steve Allen Show. We walked in and the man there said, 'Well, Judd, what can you let me have? Have you got any pictures or records?'

"Judd said, 'No.'

"The man said, 'What have you got?'

"Judd said, 'I got my boy here.'

" 'How many records has he had?'

" 'He's had one.'

" 'How long had it been out?'

" 'About seven months.'

" 'How many has it sold?'

" 'About 30,000.'

"The guy turned around to somebody else there and said, 'How do you like that? Here's a salesman without a damn thing to sell.' Then he said, 'You got your boy, huh? What does he do?'

" 'He plays piano and sings.'

"The man looked at Judd like he was crazy. He said, 'You mean you came all the way from Memphis to show me a kid who plays piano and sings?'

"I just sat there blowing bubble

gum, reading a funny book. I was still an innocent babe. I'd only been married twice. This guy looked at me and I looked at him. Finally he said, 'Okay kid, let's see you play piano and sing.'

"I said, 'Judd, what do you want me to do?'

"Judd said, 'Just cut loose on 'Whole Lotta Shakin'.'

"I walked over to the piano, and this guy sat down and put his feet up on his desk like he was going to get a big laugh. The minute I started in on 'Whole Lotta Shakin', this guy came up out of his chair, and came creeping up on me, and got down behind me, and just crouched down there looking over my shoulder the whole time I was playing. When I finished, he said to Judd, 'I'll give you $500 if you don't show him to anybody else! And bring him back first thing Monday morning. I want Steve to hear him!'

"We went back Monday morning, Allen heard me and said, 'I want him on the show this week!' We went on that week, signed for two more appearances and the only time Steve Allen ever beat Ed Sullivan in the ratings was when he had me on the second time.

"We got back to Memphis and Judd had the girl at Sun send the record to every DJ in the country, telling them that I had played it on the Steve Allen Show, and for them to start playing it on the radio. It started selling 50,000/60,000 copies a *day* on that little independent label. Then I cut 'Great Balls of Fire' and it sold a million the first ten days it was out. 'Breathless' and 'High School Confidential' sold well over a million. Everything I put out was selling a million. I was King of the Rockers. Then I married Myra."

Myra Gail Lewis was Jerry Lee's third wife. She was also his 13-year-old second cousin. Sooner or later that was bound to mean trouble. It came in England in 1958.

Jerry Lee: "I stepped off the plane in London and they (the press) pounced on me. They looked at Myra and said, 'Who's this, Mr. Lewis?'

"I said, 'That's my wife.'

"They said, 'Your wife?'

"I said, 'Yeah, and what's more, she's my cousin. And what's more, I've had two other wives and never got a divorce from any of them.' That's when they started coming on strong. One paper said I had married my 9-year-old cousin, another one said it was my 12-year-old sister . . . they had

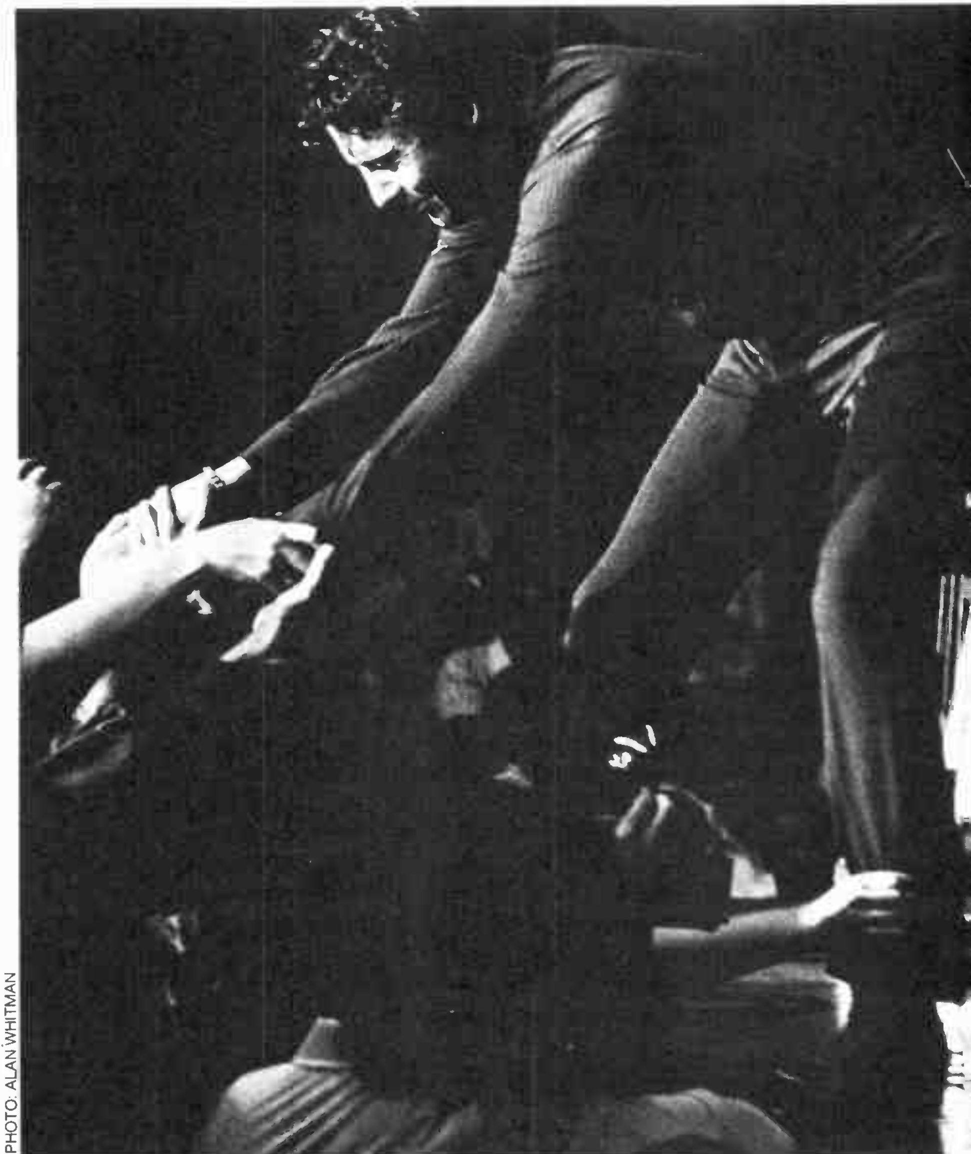
PHOTO: ALAN WHITMAN

Jerry Lee: Denounced as a work of The Devil by his elders, seen as A Godsend by kids.

PHOTO: EMERSON-LOEW

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". . . Jerry Lee lives his life on a much larger scale than the average person," says a former sideman . . .

me confused who I'd married for a while. It got so ridiculous there were 100,000 people outside my hotel waiting to look at me. I was eating in my room and went to open a window—this was about two or three stories up—and there was a man hanging on a rope with a camera. I raised the window, drug him in, and said, 'Here man, get your picture.' He took his picture and I slung him out. The publicity and the crowds got so much that my promoter said, 'There's no sense doing a tour after all this. Let's go home.' We came back to Idlewild (Kennedy) Airport and I had a bigger reception waiting for me than Clark Gable when he was king."

But despite his bravado, an unforeseen disaster awaited Jerry Lee upon his return. As he tells it, Sun Records had panicked over the matter and done the biggest cut and run since Rhett Butler told Scarlett O'Hara he didn't give a damn. Jerry Lee: "I got back home and asked Sam how 'High School Confidential' was doing. He said, 'It's not doing too well.' I came to find out he hadn't even sampled a DJ! The record still sold a million anyway. But they were trampling each other to death at Sun looking for a place to hide. Judd had it squashed here and nobody wrote it up, but they still wouldn't stand behind me. If I had had some backing from the label, the whole thing would have blown over in three months.

And so, as quickly as it had begun, it was over. Jerry Lee still had a contract with Sun and he says he made them live up to their recording obligations, but he got no air-play and little retail distribution. At 23 years of age, and after only two years on center stage, Jerry Lee Lewis became rock and roll's first has-been. In a rare reflective moment, Jerry Lee said, "It might have all been for the best. If I'd have kept going like I was back then, I'd be dead by now."

For all intents and purposes, however, he was dead. A change in labels—to Smash, a subsidiary of Mercury—in 1963, and Herculean efforts at a comeback produced little. His only real source of income was live shows—mostly in clubs that featured talent either on the way up or on the way down. Jerry Lee had been up.

PHOTO: ALAN WHITMAN

"I know I came out jumping and I've been running ever since."

Trouble is, it is impossible to convince *him* of all this. He insists that despite the radio blackout his records still sold well. And, to use his favorite reiteration, "The whole time I never quit working, never quit packing them in." There is some truth in both these claims, but both are still exaggerations. What really kept him going all those years was his love for performing and his unshakeable conviction that the Second Coming of Jerry Lee Lewis was imminent.

A sideman who was with him in the lean days said, "He always told me, 'Stick with me, Hawk. I'm going to get back up there. If I don't get another rock hit, I'll get one in country.' "

In 1967 he made good his boast. Country music, a former fortress of constancy, was at last undergoing changes—changes not so sudden and dynamic as those that produced rock and roll, but just as definite, nonetheless. Country fans were getting little hard country music, and hungrily snatched at any available morsel. Jerry Lee served them a banquet fit for a king in the form of "Another Place, Another Time," a classic lament about an ole boy who goes down to a honky-tonk looking for a woman, finds one, thinks he is going to score, then sees her slip away for reasons never made quite clear, and is left facing " . . . a sleepless night waiting for another place, another time." The country DJs picked up on the record. It shot up to number one, and in one fell swoop Jerry Lee had gone from rock and roll purgatory to Hillbilly Heaven.

It is ironic that Jerry Lee would stage his comeback in the music he played such a large part in almost destroying. It would seem even more ironic that he sees nothing ironic about it. But this characteristic style of reasoning greatly defines him, for he is a maze of complexities and contradictions.

A few at random. He is literally possessed by a gigantic ego concerning his ability and talents, yet he lavishly praises nearly all other entertainers. He says he lives only to please his audiences, yet he has had some of his most angry moments with audiences he felt did not show him the proper respect. He talks with great authority about women, citing his four marriages as ample justification, yet in private moments he wonders if he really knows anything about them. His compassion knows no limits, yet to anyone who upstages him—however temporarily—he can be unbelievably base. He operates on an even, if greatly accelerated, keel, yet he can become suddenly, inexplicably, totally, and often violently irrational. He is a deeply religious person who periodically expresses misgivings concerning his boozing, wenching, hell-for-leath-

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er way of life, yet he will not, or cannot, bring himself to modify a single aspect of his character.

"Jerry Lee lives his life on a much larger scale than the average person—even the average show business person," says a former sideman. "Consequently, everything he does—the good, the bad, the indifferent—is done on a much larger scale."

Jerry Lee makes it plain that he has never run for cover on seeing the storm clouds brewing. "I am what I am," he said. "I've always said what I wanted to say, done what I wanted to do, and been what I wanted to be. I've never tried to hide anything. Everything I've done has been out in the open. If people don't like that, then that's their problem." But, basically, he sees himself as merely an earnest person striving to make his peace with the world, who has been beset by evil forces at every turn—and has still managed to prevail. "I've been picked on, abused, sued, jailed, ridiculed, persecuted and prosecuted," he said. "But I never let it bother me. You know why? Because I beat every one of them. Besides, these people are not the real buying public. My public has always stood by me."

When Jerry Lee says he lives just to please his audiences he is at his sincerest. Put him in front of an appreciative audience and he is supremely happy. "Just point me to the piano and give me my money," he will tell promoters, "and in 15 minutes I'll have 'em shaking, shouting, shivering and shacking." It is that rare time when these are not forthcoming that all hell breaks loose. In Detroit, for example, he stopped his show, and to a couple of fans who expressed displeasure, shouted, "Listen, Killer, if you don't like it, that door back there swings both ways."

"It's been blown out of proportion," said a former sideman. "Out of a hundred shows, it would only happen maybe once or twice. Of course, when it did, we all wanted to fall right through the stage."

Jerry Lee: "If I'm up there doing my best to entertain people, they should show some consideration and shut up, and let me entertain them. Nobody made them come to the show, and nobody's making them stay. If they don't like it, there are exit signs all over the place. I demand respect from my audiences, and if I don't get it, I give 'em a good cussing. I'm not the only entertainer who does it, either. But I'll also sign autographs and talk to the fans, whereas a lot of performers won't. Heck, I love my audiences."

PHOTO: EMERSON-LOEW

Jerry Lee has never been known to run for cover when he sees the storm clouds brewing.

In what could probably qualify as a prime example of doublethink, he steadfastly maintains both positions—particularly the latter. He is amazingly accessible to his public, enduring—even welcoming—impositions that would have any other entertainer calling for the police. Wherever he performs, his dressing room is always filled with friends and neighbors whom he knows from somewhere or other, and there is much backslapping and handshaking, much talk of mutual friends, much inquiring about the health of respective relatives and much reminiscing about former good times. Barring the need for a fast getaway, he will stay until he has answered the last question, signed the last autograph, and posed for the last picture, displaying a patience, endurance and amiability that are utterly astounding.

". . . Just point me to the piano and give me my money," he will tell promoters. "In 15 minutes I'll have 'em shaking, shouting, shivering and shacking . . ."

Most—if not all—of his difficulties stem from his having two different audiences: country and rock. He does, indeed, love his country audiences. With his rock audiences he is not so sure. "His native Southern people are the ones who stayed with him when he was down," says a friend, "and they're the ones who rode him back up again. He's automatically accepted by them. The rock audiences always seem to have a 'show me' attitude, and I don't think he likes this much."

All observers agree that Jerry Lee's ego is uniquely exceptional. Though everyone has some comment on it, perhaps Jack Clement's statement best sums it up.

"Jerry Lee—and this is true of most outstanding performers—doesn't have an ego because he's a performer; he's a performer because he has an ego, and the applause and acclaim are his way of having it constantly gratified."

There are, of course, other reasons. Because of his overnight fall from grace, Jerry Lee has never felt his achievements in rock and roll were properly honored. Even worse, he saw a former Sun artist and fellow Memphis resident—Elvis Presley—be accorded the esteem he always perceived as being, for the most part, rightfully his. To this day it remains in his mind as a gross injustice.

Jerry Lee: "I told Conway Twitty one time that there have only been

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PHOTO: EMERSON-LOEW

Jerry Lee's fourth wife, Jeron.

". . . I demand respect from my audiences, and if I don't get it, I give 'em a good cussing . . ."

four stylists. The first was Al Jolson, the second was Jimmie Rodgers, the third was Hank Williams and the fourth was Jerry Lee Lewis. By stylist I mean somebody who created his own style and his own type of music that hundreds of entertainers have tried to copy and failed, simply because they weren't that person."

There is also another aspect of his certitude that has never been fully understood. His ego offers him veritable life sustenance, and, more than anything else, is responsible for his being Jerry Lee Lewis. It takes a hell of an ego for a kid from Ferriday, Louisiana to come to Memphis and *tell* them he is going to get an audition come hell or high water; it takes a hell of an ego to endure seven or eight years of oblivion and never give up; it takes a hell of an ego just to *do* some of the things he does on stage. Without this, despite everything else he has going for him, he *would* be just a guy who plays piano and sings.

Besides, some of it—particularly that which is often displayed on stage—is an outrageous put-on. Jerry Lee decided long ago that if he were going to be so miscast when all he was trying to do was set the record straight, then he might as well play the role, and—what the heck—have a little fun doing it. This decision shows in his regal countenance, in the way he whips out his silver-plated comb and ceremoniously flicks his sideburns, and in the way he often follows a boastful statement with a knowing look or a quick, sly smile.

What he does take seriously—to the almost total exclusion of everything else—is music. Jerry Lee is a very single-minded person, and his mind never strays far from music. If he isn't playing music, he's listening to it; if he isn't listening to it, he's talking about it. Approach him about something other than music, and he just isn't very interested.

His knowledge of music is all-encompassing. "He's got the most remarkable memory concerning music I ever saw," says a former sideman. "If he were put to the test, I think he could recall nearly every singer and every song that has ever been recorded." Literally obsessed by the musical past, he has acquired an inexhaustible record treasure trove, and will sit for hours totally transfixed by anything from Gene Austin to Jimmie Rodgers to Cole Porter. An original 78 by someone such as Jimmy Wakely or Margaret Whiting can render him speechless—something no other power on earth has yet been able to do. Blissfully mindless of the almost unbearable static and distortion, he regards his old records in much the same way an antique-lover regards that which most other people refer to as junk. "Considering what they had to work with, they made better records back then, just like they made more durable, longer-lasting cars in 1942 then they do in 1972," he says. "Besides, this is where I get a lot of my stuff."

This same preoccupation with music also carries over into his personal life, dominating his every decision and action. He always carries some of his 78's on the road with him. An unostentatious person offstage, he affects little of the trappings and glamour of a celebrity, partly because of his relatively simple tastes, but more so because he feels that it would somehow adversely affect his historical significance in the musical hierarchy. "When they look back on me," he says, "I want them to remember me not for all my wives, although I've had a few, and certainly not for any mansions, or high living or the money I made and spent. I want them to remember me simply for my music."

"People come to him all the time with business deals and propositions," says a friend, "and he very attentively hears them out, then very politely turns them down, and very graciously thanks them for their time and interest. Then, as soon as they leave, he pulls out another box of 78's." Seeking some kind of a nest egg, however, he does dabble in real estate ("It's the only thing that doesn't depreciate. Other than me."), and a pro football game—particularly one involving the Dallas Cowboys—can lure him away from his record lode. But that's about it. Anything else outside of music he has little comprehension of, less interest in, and no time for.

Excepting his family and friends. When his mother died a year ago, he plunged into a tailspin which he took many long, hard months to pull out of. No one is certain just how many various relations he helps over rough stretches, but it is a considerable number. He was raised in a time and place where a family was an all-embracing, cohesive, loving, guiding, helping, understanding *unit*. To this day it remains the single most important influence on him, accounting for his boundless compassion, fierce loyalty and overwhelming generosity.

His friends come in a close second. Actually he views and treats everyone as a friend, mostly due to his innate

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"I've been the Greatest Live Show On Earth for the past 15 years."

conviviality, but also because he perceives it as his Christian duty.

"I was raised in the Assembly of God Church and taught to believe in the church and, even more so, the Bible," he says, as if reciting the multiplication tables. "The Bible teaches us two things: that everyone is equal in the eyes of God, and that we're supposed to help our fellow man in every way possible. If you're going to be a Christian, this is where you should start. You can't turn anybody down or hurt anybody, and still call yourself a Christian. You're supposed to believe in the worth and dignity of every human being, and look for every person's good points. Now, I'm not perfect; I've made my mistakes. But at least I'm trying to do that much."

"I'd come back to the motel dead to the world," says a former sideman, "and pretty soon the phone would ring, and it'd be him, and it'd be the same thing every time. 'Hey, Killer, this is Jerry. What are you doing?'

" 'I was sleeping.'

" 'Well, hell, get out of bed and come on up and have a drink.' Pretty soon I learned that 'come on up and have a drink' meant 'you better get your ass up here, the party's starting.' "

And once one enters Jerry Lee's lair for a night of fun and games, there is absolutely no escaping until he is ready to call it quits, which is usually six to eight hours and a mind-boggling quantity of whiskey later. By then even his indefatigable energy has abated, and he is ready for a few hours sleep before getting up and starting the cycle over again. His private moments are rare, his introspective ones almost nil. He lives simply to live.

The one time he tried to change his modus operandi, it ended in a complete flop. In the latter part of 1970, Myra Gail filed and won a divorce suit. As is par for the course with anything involving Jerry Lee, there were all sorts of stories, rumors, charges and countercharges. The upshot of it all was the statement that Jerry Lee had seen the error of his ways and had turned to the church in an attempt to "get my life in order." He forsook cigars, whiskey, nightclubs, and young ladies not bearing his last name. This announcement came as a complete surprise, sent shock waves throughout the music world, and was the cause of endless speculation.

It lasted about two months.

Shortly thereafter he explained. "Yeah, Killer, I'm back to smoking, drinking, playing in clubs and running around with women. I sure ain't going to run around with no men. I meant it when I said it, and I was going good there for a while, but I just couldn't keep it up. I tried and failed. At least I'm man enough to admit it."

A new love and the passage of time, however, rapidly helped soothe his tribulations to the point where several months later he was able to announce: "In the last three or four months I've never been happier. It's the first time in 20 years that I've been really free and I'm really enjoying it."

Less than two months later he traded his short-lived freedom for his fourth wife. "Best thing that ever happened to me," he said. "In one week I went from rags to riches."

Right before his recent marriage he was asked why he had such a compulsion to be married when it appeared that he was not especially suited for the ties of matrimony. "Well, Killer, that's something I've wondered about myself, and it's one question I can't answer. I don't know if I'm a one-woman man or not.

Perhaps the following exchange best summarizes Jerry Lee. Recently, he was asked by an observer if there had ever been anyone like him before.

"Nope! Absolutely not! Never been another Jerry Lee Lewis!" came the staccato replies.

"Do you think there ever will be?"

"I certainly hope so," came the totally unexpected response.

"Why?"

"Well, Killer," he said, pausing to take a long puff on his cigar and ruefully contemplate his momentarily-empty glass, "just think what a dull world this would be without a Jerry Lee Lewis in it."

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'The World's Not Yet Lonesome For Me'

Once upon a time I spent six hours with the late, great Hank Williams. This is a kind of informal memoir in honor of the 20th anniversary of his death.

by Melvin Shestack

I received a letter recently from a 21-year-old Harvard student who claimed he'd "just read" an article of mine in "an old copy of *Esquire*"—an article in which I mentioned that as a teenager in the late 1940s, I'd listened to, met, and interviewed the late Hank Williams for my high school newspaper. My correspondent was in the midst of completing "a thesis on American folk-poets" and he considered Hank Williams on a par with "Bob Dylan, Phil Ochs and Buffy St. Marie." Would I "open up" about my "friendship" with Hank Williams?

I wish I *could* say I was his friend.

I was an admirer and still remain an ardent fan.

I think, in his time, no other performer, country, folk or pop, could come within a country mile of Hank Williams.

A number of musicians have asked me: "What kind of *vibes* did Hank give off?" I always reply: "Williams was special, different."

I only spent about six hours with him, saw him twice in person, once only as a member of the audience—and that was more than 20 years ago. I wrote him two letters and he answered both of them with scrawled post cards. One was from Beaumont, Texas and the other from Wheeling, West Virginia. When my parents moved to a new house while I was at college, the post cards disappeared.

. . . Musicians have asked me: "What kind of vibes did Hank give off?" I always reply: "Williams was special, different . . ."

And, during these past twenty years, give or take a couple for loafing and army service, I have been traveling with, writing about, interviewing and filming all kinds of newsmakers—from presidents of the United States to mass murderers, Hollywood sex symbols to Italian cardinals. If I were required, for example, to relate my minute-by-minute recollections of a two hour meeting I once had with an Arab king who exercised total life and death power over his not-always-loyal subjects, I'd have a lot of trouble. Yet, the memory of my afternoon with Hank Williams remains as vivid as if it were yesterday.

I was about 17 years old, and through a combination of John Steinbeck's novels, Burl Ives' radio program, and a Merle Travis album given to me as a birthday gift, country music was beginning to have a real influence on my life. Nonetheless, I kept it a secret. In Rochester, New York, in 1948, liking country music was a very radical gesture. ("That's what redneck Communists listen to," my friend Arnold warned when he discovered my hidden store of country records.)

My secret was also shared with Vern Young and Annie, a pair of aspiring country singers who were struggling to keep their small "folk/country/western" record shop from failing. They had come to Rochester from elsewhere (I don't remember exactly where. I think Annie, like Hank Snow, was born in Nova Scotia.) with the too-early notion that the Northeast was ready for a country music boom. Both Vern and Annie spoke with strong rural accents, which might have been Swahili as far as most Rochester folks were concerned. I hung around their shop, and whenever I had the money, I'd buy a record.

Vern Young and Annie occasionally promoted traveling "hillbilly music" shows, and it was from one of their posters that I first heard of Hank Williams. "If you never get to see another southern singer, boy," Vern Young insisted, "get over this weekend somehow and listen to Hank Williams. He's gonna be one of the big ones." He pointed to the bottom of the poster which listed a number of performers then touring the area. It read, in the smallest typeface, *"Extra Added Attraction: Hank Williams."*

I was an editor of my high school newspaper and one of my "innovations" was to interview visiting celebrities about their own teen-age. The

PHOTOS: COURTESY HEATHER ENTERPRISES

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results proved to be quite popular. I interviewed Vaughn Monroe, the Boswell Sisters and Frankie Laine.

"I have to interview Hank Williams," I told my mother.

"Who?" my mother asked, innocently.

"Hank Williams. He's appearing at Max Raney's in East Bloomfield on Saturday."

"East Bloomfield?" My mother was incredulous. "That's about 50 miles. Your father will never let you have the car all day on Saturday."

"I have enough money for gas and tickets."

"Ask your father," my mother said, but it didn't look very good.

My father, generous in all other respects, was the kind of man who walked to work if it was raining—so his car wouldn't get wet. I had managed to get a driver's license the year before, but only on rare occasions did my father let me have the car. He was, however, a great believer in career training and he figured that no matter what his feeling was, I would turn out to be a writer or artist of some kind, so he encouraged my ambitions.

"I *have* to interview Hank Williams for the paper at school," I insisted (lie). "Miss ________ (the paper's advisor) is really excited about the interview."

He let me have the car—a green Buick. I drove over country roads, past neat, red barns and through herds of grazing Brown Swiss and Holstein dairy cows. I crossed the Erie Canal at the West Henrietta locks and cut my speed through the picturesque main streets of little towns like Honeyoye Falls, following the hand-made signs: *Hillbilly Jamboree This Way.*

When the traffic grew heavier and the sound of electric guitars grew louder, I knew I'd arrived. Hundreds of cars, some bearing license plates from as far away as Pennsylvania and Canada, were already parked in an empty cornfield, plowed down to make it into a parking lot. In the distance was a miniature impromptu fairground and a huge tent, emblazoned with a badly painted sign: "THIS IS IT!"

Many of the cars had picnic blankets spread out next to them on the still-wet field; whole families squatting and talking and eating sandwiches from abundant picnic baskets and drinking out of huge thermos jugs. There were people of all ages, from toothless old grandfathers in faded engineer's caps to healthy kids in well-worn hand-me-downs and momma-scissored haircuts. Judging by their complexions, they spent a lot more time outdoors than I did. (To this day, visitors are surprised to find out how rural most of New York State really is.)

". . . If you never get to see another Southern singer," Vern Young insisted, "get over and listen to Hank Williams . . ."

"Here's a boy you might be hearin' a lot about," the MC announced.

I remember what I wore: a wide-shouldered, double-breasted, one-button roll blue serge suit and a bulky red knit tie. As was the city style in those days, the cuffs of my trousers were pegged to sixteen inches. The knee was about 20 inches. They called them "zoot suits," and they looked as if they were designed by Al Capp for Evil-Eye Fleagle. Among the farmers in overalls that day, I was unusually conspicuous and I felt ill at ease.

I paid my dollar to get into the "This Is It" tent and found a single seat—an uncomfortable wooden folding chair—in the third row. A local country band was already on the stage, playing "Pistol Packing Mama" and other popular western swing hits. They probably weren't so hot, but I thought they were nifty.

There were other performers on the bill that day, some of whom probably have gone on to fame and Nashville-style fortune, but I can't honestly remember much about them except they were lively, professional and entertaining. Whatever talents they had were obscured by the Hillbilly Jamboree's "added attraction." He climbed onto the stage, carrying his guitar, and gave some sheet music to the house band. He was lanky, hungry-looking and ill-at-ease. He wore a huge Roy Rogers style hat, white as snow. His suit, which made the padded shoulders on my own pale to insignificance, was also white and embroidered with butterflies. His face was slightly misshapen, pale as if it had been taken out of the oven too soon—but his expression was clear even to the least astute observer in the audience; it spoke of pain and sorrow and loneliness and sadness.

"Here's a boy you might be hearin' a lot about," the MC announced. "He was just signed on by the Louisiana Hayride and you can buy his recording of 'Move It On Over' on the MGM label. He's a boy who's gonna go far in our kind of music. Folks, let's give a great big upstate New York hand to that lonesome drifter from Alabama, Hank W-i-l-l-i-a-m-s!"

Upstate New Yorkers, Pennsylvanians and Canadians aren't given to outbursts of emotion. Throughout the

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earlier part of the show the audience had been attentive, courteous, and had applauded generously. When Hank Williams was introduced, a smattering of hand-clapping filled the tent. Then Williams adjusted the microphone. "My own boys couldn't make it this trip and we haven't had a chance to rehearse. I come here by bus and the roads ain't so good (trickle of laughter). But I'd like to play you a number to start that I've written and am going to record. It's called the 'Lovesick Blues.' "

". . . I don't know what you mean by country music," Hank said. "I just make music the way I know how . . . "

From the very first crack of "sweet d-a-a-a-a-ady," the audience exploded. They stood on their chairs. They howled at "Howling At The Moon" and they screamed at "Why Don't You Love Me Like You Used To Do?" And I was screaming with them. THE MAN WAS GREAT. Nobody has ever successfully explained the quality that deserves the term "great." But whatever it is, Hank Williams had it. He was supposed to have twenty minutes on the program. The audience wouldn't let him go for almost an hour. Though the "star" of the Jamboree was yet to come, I left my seat as soon as Williams left the stage. I followed him to the "dressing room," a screened-off area in the far corner of the tent. At first he thought I wanted an autograph and then I explained that I was an editor of my high school paper and I wanted to interview him.

He was supposed to have 20 minutes. The audience wouldn't let him leave for an hour.

"Well, well," he said, looking at me. "How old are you?"

I told him.

"Hell's bells," he said. "Writin' for a newspaper at that age. When I was your age I couldn't much write." He enjoyed his joke. He handed me his guitar while he opened his collar and took off his tie and jacket. He was wearing brown, clip-on suspenders and was sweating. His hair was already thinning.

"They sure are nice folks," he said, "that audience." He picked up a half-empty bottle of orange soda. "It's warm," he said. "Why don't you and me go get us a cold one."

We walked toward a stand selling hog dogs. "W-h-i-t-e Hots," he said deliberately, reading a sign. "What are white hots?"

"Pork hots," I said. "It's a specialty of the area." (They still are a specialty of Monroe County, New York where white hot dogs seem to outsell the red ones. I've never seen them anywhere else.)

"Instead of you writin' for the high school paper," he said, as we walked around the fair grounds, Williams eating his hot dog and drinking a bottle of Queen-O Orange, "you should go into business sellin' these things in other parts of the country. Maybe I should quit the music business and become a white hot performer instead of a red hot one." He looked to see if I was going to laugh.

I didn't. I was too intent on taking notes.

"Why don't you put that notebook away so we can talk." Williams looked around. "Mighty pretty country. It's all mighty pretty country." He pointed to a big tree. "Let's us sit under that 'un," he said, tossing the bottle into a waste bin. "I like to relax between shows."

I asked him if he thought country music would sweep America. "I don't know what you mean by country music," he said. "I just make music the way I know how. Singin' songs comes natural to me the way some folks can argue law or make cabinets. It's all I know. It's all I care about."

I gave him the inevitable press question to a number one singer: "Where do you get ideas for your songs?" He smiled (he kept smiling—not a nervous smile, but a natural one) and said, "I don't know how to answer that. Sometimes I make 'em up. Other times they just come to me. And other times I listen to people and try to understand how they feel

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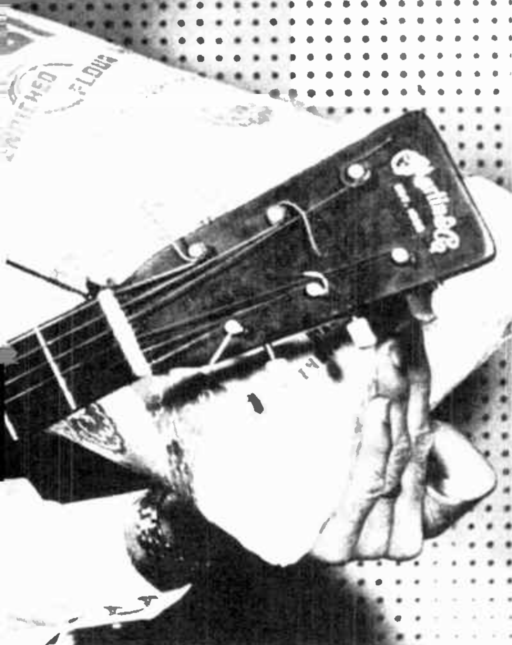

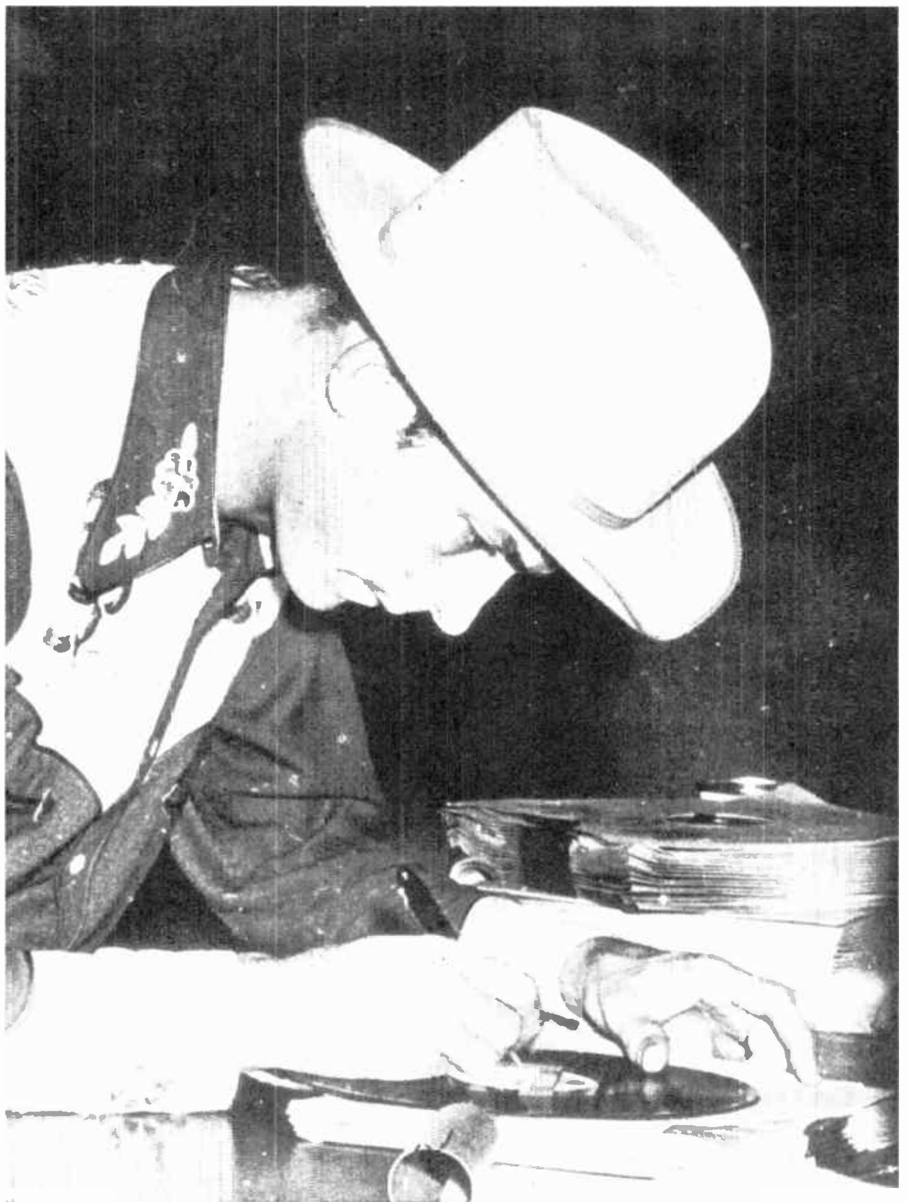

Whatever greatness is, Hank Williams had it.

about things. Feelings about things. That's what songs should be about." I was busy taking notes. "If I could write that fast," he said, "I'd have written 500 songs by now."

We talked about growing up. About parents and their desires for children and how parents didn't really understand kids and that he probably would be a parent himself someday and hoped his kids would turn out okay.

"What do you mean, okay?"

"Well, if I had a son," he said slowly, "I wouldn't mind if he growed up like you." I was embarrassed. "I'm not sure you know me well enough," I said, trying to be cool. But that was disconcerting, and I stopped taking notes and we just continued talking. (From time to time when I've been in the vicinity of a Hank Williams, Jr. concert, I've wanted to go backstage and tell him about my meeting with his father. I never have.) He told me a little about his growing up, his listening to black singing, ("that's real natural music") about starting his own band when he was only fourteen ("a man has to know what he wants to do, and then do it and keep your mind on it, and don't let nothing else get in the way to clutter up your life . . . "). We talked about cars, America and how the people were the same wherever he went, the funny way people dress, about girls (he was willing to talk about women, but I was prudish and uncomfortable) and whiskey ("Don't you start drinkin' now, just because your friends do it . . . ") and about religion.

". . . Don't you start drinkin' now, just because your friends do it," he warned . . .

"Are you a God-fearin' boy?" he asked. It was a question I didn't expect. "I really don't know how to answer that," I said. "I don't think much about fearing God."

"Well, boy," he offered deliberately, "Don't let it trouble you none. I ain't afraid of God, either."

We were interrupted by a shout. "Where the hell are you hidin', Hank?" It was the MC. "I thought you'd run out on us. It's almost time for the next show."

"I been bein' interviewed," Williams replied.

"Interviewed?" the MC said. "What paper?"

"It's for a high school newspaper, his paper." He pointed to me.

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"You mean you disappear for hours just to give some high school kid an interview?"

"He ain't just some kid," Williams said. "We're buddies, aren't we buddy?" I nodded.

The MC tried to pull Williams away. "Hey, you'll send me a copy of the interview when it's published, won't you?" He quickly scratched his address and went off. "Next time *you* buy the white hots."

My father was angry and my mother worried sick when I got home, hours later than they expected. Undaunted I went to my room and typed out my interview—it was long and detailed and it totally praised Hank Williams and I believed every word.

On Monday morning I turned the story into Miss ________, and the next day she called me into her office. She was rejecting the story. "I don't know how an intelligent mind like yours can deal with such superfluous things as hillbilly singers."

She pronounced the word "hillbilly" in a way to make you crawl: filled with disgust and loathing. "Furthermore," she said sternly, "none of the other students at Monroe High School will find your story has any value at all." She tossed it back to me.

Poor Miss ________. I wonder if she knows now, as she teaches grammar to illiterate angels in some heavenly schoolroom, that in 1973, Harvard students are writing theses about that "hillbilly." Dear Miss ____ (May She Rest In Peace). What a shock she must have had, when she slipped a golden nickel into one of the celestial juke boxes, and the first sounds she heard were "a fiddle and a git-tar with a honky tonk sound . . ."

I wrote a long letter to Hank Williams explaining what an idiot Miss __________ was and that I was sorry I'd wasted his time and wasn't able to give him the publicity I'd promised. Two months later, in an almost unintelligible scrawl, Hank Williams wrote me: "Don't sweat, buddy. The world's not yet lonesome for me."

Hank Williams in 1949. His career was soon to reach its height.

. . . When I wrote Hank Williams that I tried to get backstage, his post card said, "Buddy, life gets tougher all the time . . ."

I've just read over what I've written. If all I did 25 years ago was sit under an elm tree near the Erie Canal with Hank Williams, talking about things I talk to everybody about every day, why do I almost totally recall the experience? The answer is simple. Hank Williams was one of those rare persons who projected: "I am special. I am different. I only do what I know how to do and something drives me to do it better than anybody else. Why do you want me to be just like you? Lord knows, I don't want you to be like me. Why do you not accept me as God made me?"

Through the years, as the Williams legend has grown, a lot of things, probably more profound than on these pages, have been written about the meaning of Hank Williams' music and the whys of his existence. There is always the under-current of ugliness: drugs, insanity, liquor, wild women, drugs, brutality, drugs, overdose.

He probably wasn't perfect. But from my personal experience that afternoon more than two decades ago, you couldn't find that out from me. I remember him as a man of undisputed genius who treated an excited teenage reporter as an equal (in a time when teen-agers didn't make the headlines very often). I tried to see him once more, backstage in Los Angeles in 1950. He was already a superstar by this time and I was reporting for my college newspaper. Only I couldn't get by the guards. ("Just give him this note," I pleaded. "He knows me." But they wouldn't believe me, and the girl I was with didn't believe me, either.) And when I wrote Hank Williams that I tried to get backstage, his post card, in an even wilder script said, "Buddy, life gets tougher all the time."

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The Best Of Records

Roy Clark . . . Charlie Rich . . . Loretta Lynn . . .

Roy Clark
Superpicker
Dot DOS 26008 (record)
8150-26008 (8-track tape)

Roy Clark still registers in most minds as a "funny guy who also picks and sings" rather than as a complete entertainer, and it's a shame he's been cast in that role.

Well, limitations are part of life, I reckon. Even this album, revealing as it is, doesn't explore several areas of instrumental expression in which Roy moves comfortably (another album later this year, exhibiting some brilliant flattop pickin', will rectify some of this), but it clearly backs up the proclamation of the title—Superpicker!

Cut one, Side One is a low register romping of "Riders In The Sky" and the final cut on Side Two exhibits a brilliant highneck passage where he literally runs out of fingerboard on "Never On Sunday." In between, he picks soft and sweet, wild and raunchy, clean and country, swingin' and sophisticated. In short, he *picks*, and that also goes for the other musicians (including background voices) involved—especially whoever does those nice piano things and the wildest organ chorus I've ever heard on "Never On Sunday." Producers Joe Allison and Jim Foglesong come through nicely, too.

The high point could be "Roy's Guitar Boogie" or "Riders In The Sky"—or perhaps "Today I Started Loving You Again," "Snowbird," or "Somewhere My Love," but my personal bet is "Never On Sunday." Roy Clark could be bigger than any half-dozen average superstars rolled into one, if only we could find a cure for cubbyhole-itis. *Superpicker* is an experience you owe yourself. BILL LITTLETON

Charlie Rich
Behind Closed Doors
Epic KE 32247 (record)
EA 31933 (8-track tape)

It's a pleasure to report that this is Charlie Rich's best album yet. He may be the most versatile performer in country music—Charlie can be as sweet as honeysuckle or as raunchy as a polecat—but before he came to Epic and Billy Sherrill, his records did not do him justice. They tended to reflect only one side of his talent at a time.

Billy has understood what a pair of beautiful instruments he had in Charlie's voice and piano, and he has tried to showcase them both. He's never succeeded better than on *Behind Closed Doors.*

Billy knows how to choose hits and Charlie has more taste than a trainload of Perdue chickens; between them they have picked out eleven terrific songs including two genuine classics—"The Most Beautiful Girl," which Billy helped write, and

"You Never Really Wanted Me," written by Charlie's son Allan. In fact, side one ends with a little Rich Family songwriting festival: Allan's song is followed by a beautiful tune, "A Sunday Kind Of Woman," by Margaret Ann Rich, Charlie's wife, and his own rollicking "Peace On You." Another good song by Margaret Ann ends side two.

Often when you buy a new record, you like it at first, but get tired of it after a few listenings. *Behind Closed Doors* is just the opposite. I have been listening to it several times a day for a couple of weeks and I like it better and better. My only complaints are that it doesn't include enough of Charlie's funky side, and that it offers only eleven songs. However, the first albums in the stores make up for that problem in a rather neat way: they include a 7-inch "bonus record" with excerpts from four of Charlie Rich's greatest hits ("Life Has Its Little Ups And Downs," "I Take It On Home," "Big Boss Man," and "Nice 'N' Easy").

JOHN GABREE

Loretta Lynn
Entertainer Of The Year
MCA-300

Loretta Lynn's latest album—and it's a beauty (including the smashing cover design)—is called "Entertainer of the Year." Few artists, whether in country, pop, or soul, have produced as many consistently first-rate records as Loretta Lynn. In any list of singers who most vividly personify what country music is supposed to be, Loretta would certainly be in the top five. And there's good reason.

Loretta Lynn doesn't need frills, trombones, or fancy arrangements to bolster her performance. Her voice rings with the gentle authority of one who *knows* what she's doing is right and pure.

Let me talk about Loretta on TV. I watched last February's network country music "spectacular," and being the hard core country music nut that I am, I could hardly wait. I was disappointed (ex-

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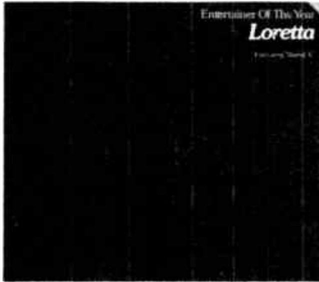


cept for Loretta, but that comes later).

What the audience got was a watered-down version of the Dean Martin Show—or at the very best, an almost-country version of the worst of Ed Sullivan, a procession of banal dancers, vapid sets, double exposures and bland performances from usually first-rate country performers.

It seems to me that they are *ashamed* of being country and would rather present what they wrongly think "sophisticated" audiences prefer. Well, Mark Twain was certainly sophisticated, and he never betrayed his country origins. Neither did Will Rogers—and he packed them in at Carnegie Hall. When Charles Portis wrote the best-selling *True Grit,* he didn't make the locale of the story the suburbs of Chicago. And one of the most beloved new TV shows, "The Waltons" is successful because it brings back a bit of rural America to us all.

Loretta Lynn was the one bright spot on the show, and when you watched her you knew *why* she's Entertainer of the Year. Her songs cut through the hour like bright rays of Kentucky sunshine. There was nothing pseudo "pop" or "easy listening" about her singing. She sang like Loretta Lynn always sings: country.

MELVIN SHESTACK

Waylon Jennings
Lonesome On'ry and Mean
RCA LSP-4854 (record)
P8S-2136 (8-track tape)

It's about time we stopped being amazed that Waylon Jennings can sing both pop and country songs. Listening to his new album, it's more obvious than ever that there is a special place between pop and country that is *called* Waylon Jennings. He doesn't interpret material; he possesses it.

Too many of Waylon's previous albums have the feeling of being collections of singles, some of them obviously recorded years apart, but listening to an album you need a little space to breathe, a more relaxed format which hopefully gives you some of the loose laid-back energy that characterizes Waylon's performances. This new album has just that, along with the usual unerring selection of material, made absolutely Waylon's.

If, for instance, you think you never want to hear "Me and Bobby McGee" again,

listen to the version on the album. It's another one of Waylon's definitive versions of Kristofferson—a loose arrangement with a long instrumental tag that really cooks. Somehow Jennings can take Kristofferson's material and purge all the self-pity other artists find there, leaving the bare, tough song. He does much the same with Danny O'Keefe's "Good Time Charlie's Got the Blues." The title song—"Lonesome, On'ry, and Mean,"—Billy Reynolds' "Sandy Sends Her Best," and especially Willie Nelson's "Pretend I Never Happened," are first rate Jennings' material but the real sleeper of the album is Gene Thomas' "Lay It Down," a beautiful song so well fitted to Jennings' style that it's hard to imagine anyone else singing it.

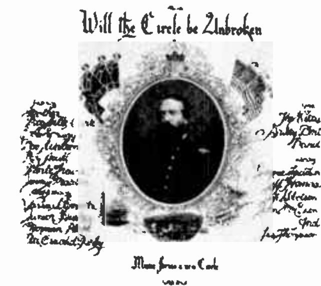
This is an album about leaving places, about going places, about being in between, being caught between the country and the city and not pretending to be one or the other. Go into any city honky tonk and you'll find the people Waylon Jennings music is for—those lonesome cowboys who have left the country, who will never go back and will never be anything but country. There are a lot of us around.

DAVE HICKEY

The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band and Distinguished Friends
Will The Circle Be Unbroken
United Artists UAS 9801

Since the beginning of country music recording, there have been some records that can be called truly historical. For example: Jimmie Rodgers' "Soldier's Sweetheart," Bob Wills' "San Antonio Rose," Hank Williams' "Your Cheatin' Heart," Roy Acuff's "Wabash Cannonball" and Johnny Cash's *Johnny Cash At Folsom Prison.* Now, a new 3-record masterpiece, *Will The Circle Be Unbroken,* may also prove to be some kind of milestone. Here, two eras of country music embrace to form a perfect and fixed moment.

The list of artists responsible for this landmark album is staggering: Mother



Maybelle Carter, Earl Scruggs, Doc Watson, Vassar Clements, Merle Travis, Norman Blake, the late Junior Huskey, Jimmy Martin, Pete 'Oswald' Kirby, Randy Scruggs, Gary Scruggs—the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band—and the King of Country Music himself, Roy Acuff.

Begun in the summer of 1971 at Woodland Studios in Nashville, the album was two weeks in recording.

Looking back, the first session was a somewhat nervous confrontation. Although they are professionals in their own right with a few hits tucked under their belts, the prospect of recording with living legends caused more than a few butterflies for the long-haired Dirt Band boys. The tense apprehension of that August day passed, however, as evidenced in COUNTRY MUSIC's interview with Roy Acuff (October, 1972). "I have never met a finer group of boys than the Nitty Gritty boys," Acuff said.

This album's 37 songs, many of them classics, are performed and offered as an experience, not just a collection to listen to. The title song, originally recorded by the original Carter Family as "Can The Circle Be Unbroken," captures the spirit of the entire work. Fittingly, Mother Maybelle opens with the entire group singing the chorus, highlighted by Doc Watson's excellent solo line. The strength of the album increases with each track: "Keep On The Sunnyside," the A.P. Carter classic; "Dark As A Dungeon," written by Merle Travis, Roy Acuff performing; "I Saw The Light," "Wreck On The Highway," and "The Precious Jewel," with the Nitty Gritties, Vassar Clements, and Earl Scruggs providing the backup; "Way Downtown," sung by Doc Watson; Hank Williams' "Honky Tonk Blues," performed by Jeff Hanna of the Dirt Band. Instrumentals include "Lonesome Fiddle Blues," "Flint Hill Special," "Wabash Cannonball," "You Are My Flower" and more.

The significance of *Will The Circle Be Unbroken* will be felt throughout the music business. This album is far ahead of its time.

RICHARD NOONAN

Tanya Tucker
What's Your Mama's Name
Columbia KC 32272 (record)
CA 32272 (8-track tape)

Tanya Tucker, as everyone

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knows by now, is Nashville's youngest superstar, a 14-year-old bundle of talent whose first records have gone right to the top of the charts, and whether you judge her as a new singer or as a child prodigy, *What's Your Ma-*

ma's Name makes an interesting and entertaining record.

The title tune is a pretty fair sample of Tanya's style: take a strong song, usually one that tells a story or describes an event rather than an emotion, and give it a rough, rhythmic going over. Listening, I was reminded of other singers: Janis Ian, with whom Tanya shares a quality of voice that may simply go with being in their teens; Bobby Gentry, who has the same "funky" sound; and Wanda Jackson, whose pacing has the same straightforwardness. Tanya also has a very pronounced vibrato, which contributes rather than distracts from her performance. It adds up to quite a combination.

What's Your Mama's Name is a nicely chosen collection, even if it is only eleven songs long (a baker's dozen is thirteen, a record company's is eleven). Some—"The Chokin' Kind," "California Cotton Fields," "Pass Me By"—are well-known, but it is the new or more rarely heard songs that are the most fun. "Teach Me The Words To Your Song" is a nice metaphor for building a relationship; "Horseshoe Bend" is about lost love; and "Teddy Bear Song" is about lost innocence. Billy Sherrill produced, backed by his team of flawless sidemen and the Jordanaires.

Tanya Tucker is at the start of what promises to be a very big career. At 14, she is already a polished entertainer, and this album, her second, proves that she is also an excellent recording artist. JOHN GABREE

Merle Haggard
The Best Of The Best
Capitol ST 11082

Modern country music was born in Bristol, Tennessee when Jimmie Rodgers and The Original Carter Family spent some time in front of Ralph Peer's recording machine. Floundering in its youthful awkwardness, country music lived through its adolescence in Nashville. Now in its maturity, maybe (and it's only my opinion) pure country music resides in Bakersfield, California with Merle Haggard. "Hag's" current album, *The Best Of The Best*, is the best explanation of why country music moved west.

This album not only shows off the best works of Merle, but the songs included also represent all the elements that define country music today: humor, "Okie From Muskogee"; hard times, "Got No Reason To Quit"; heartache, "Silver Wings" and the

best heartache song ever written as far as lyrics, instrumentation, and presentation, "Today I Started Lovin' You Again"; prison, "Mama Tried"; hope and optimism, "Every Fool Has A Rainbow"; pride, "Fightin' Side of Me."

Merle's wife, singer Bonnie Owens, and the Academy of Country and Western Music award winning band, The Strangers, help add the finishing touches to this portrait of the man who in my opinion is responsible for the genius of country music today. RICHARD HARBERT

Johnny Rodriguez
Introducing Johnny Rodriguez
Mercury SR-61378 (record)
MC8-61378 (8-track tape)

Johnny Rodriguez' debut album is without question the best LP from a new singer released this year, and it has to rank as one of the best LP's from anyone in a long, long time.

There are many reasons for this kind of enthusiasm. Firstly, there's his songwriting capabilities (he had a hand in the composition of six of the eleven tunes here, penning four of them with Tom T. Hall). Unlike many of the songs Tom has written for himself, these are not stories in the specific sense. They are old-line love and heartache numbers whose lyrical twists and immediate melodies impel you to learn them, so you can hum or sing any you choose for weeks on end.

Johnny's voice, both in English and Spanish, has both the plaintive qualities of a George Jones and the gruff-and-tumble impact of a Conway Twitty. He doesn't always sing bi-lingually, but when he does, the transition is so easy and natural, you could swear he switched gears in mid-sentence.

With all this going for him, we still must marvel at the way producers Jerry Kennedy and Roy Dea have put it all together. The sound is a full one, but in reality, there is a very select group of musicians doing all the work.

Most of the cuts are put across in the same spirit as Johnny's landmark first single, "Pass Me By." The mid-tempo ballad form is never allowed to sit still—if Rodriguez' voice isn't pulling or pushing from both ends, then the drums of Jerry Carrigan and Buddy Harman are.

The only vocals here are Johnny's. He, too, can fill any empty space you care to point at with a command of country music that's not often heard on a fifth, let alone a first LP. Nobody is going to be passing this man by. ROBERT MITCHELL

Tammy Wynette
Kids Say The Darndest Things
Epic KE 31937 (record)
KA 31937 (8-track tape)

In addition to being a spokesman for the common woman, Tammy Wynette has also made a name for herself singing songs through children's eyes. The title tune, her most recent #1 hit, serves as the focal point of a program of 11 heartsongs. Three of them —"Bedtime Story," "D-I-V-O-R-C-E" and "I Don't Wanna Play House"—are taken from previous albums and were also #1 winners. But in the context of this new concept album, they come off sounding fresher than ever.

Of course, there are happy families in Middle America. But Tammy isn't singing about them. Neither is she interested in placing blame for the broken home (though there *is* a slight slant toward male culpability). Tammy takes the child's basic

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reaction as her inspiration—it's all that a little soul can stand when Daddy leaves or Mom brings too many daddies home. The sadness is real, and it manifests itself in many ways. Thus, each song becomes its own little scenario within a larger dramatic scheme.

Simplistic? Yes, the song plots are often soap opera thin. But children aren't psychoanalysts, and Tammy is taking the role of a child in each song. What comes out of the mouths of these babes is often more meaningful, and certainly more moving, than professional counsel.

In "Too Many Daddies," the small daughter of a woman-about-town touches the listener when she speaks of the presents Mom's friends bring her: "dirty looks, and dollies, and dollars and dimes." And in "Don't Make Me Go To School," the strongest lyrical message on the album, "the fifth grade blues" really come to life. Broken homes are not places, they're states of mind.

This album probably won't save any marriages. But it does reach out in an entertaining manner while proving, once again, the almost hypnotic power of Tammy Wynette's sob side.

ROBERT ADELS

Jerry Lee Lewis
The Session
Mercury SRM-2-803

Is there any doubt that Jerry Lee Lewis is one of the greatest sources of natural energy in this solar system? Or that the soul-jarring pulse of his music has not once skipped a beat since he vaulted onto the scene in 1956 with a string of hits that shot him to the top of both the country *and* the pop charts? Or that he can work a piano harder, badder, faster, and finer than any other living human?

This new two-record set is more than just another Jerry Lee Lewis album (which, in itself, would've been, as always, more than enough),

The album also features some of Britain's finest rock artists: guitarists Alvin and Albert Lee, drummer Kenny Jones, bassist Klaus Voorman, and pianist Matthew Fisher.

Together the whole gang rips and sucker-punches its way through eighteen songs and a medley. Some of the high points include: a boisterous instrumental version of one of Jerry Lee's earliest Sun hits, "High School Confidential"; extended versions of Gordon Lightfoot's "Early Morning Rain" and Eddy Arnold's "Trouble In Mind"; Roy Hamilton's "Pledging My Love"; two Jimmy Reed standards, "Big Boss Man" and "Baby, What You Want Me To Do," Chuck Berry's "Memphis" and "Johnny B. Goode"; powerhouse takes of "Whole Lotta Shakin'" and Ray Charles' "What'd I Say," both among the Killer's first hits.

Two songs especially, "Drinkin' Wine Spo-Dee-O-Dee" and "No Headstone On My Grave," are alone worth the price of the album.

NICK TOSCHES

Dolly Parton
My Tennessee Mountain Home
RCA APL 1-0033 (record)
APS 1-0033 (8-track tape)

If I had to select five albums to give a foreigner who wanted to understand the best about modern country music, Dolly Parton's new album would be one of them. As a theme album, only Willie Nelson's *Yesterday's Wine* compares with it. And as a group of autobiographical songs, only Merle Haggard's are in the same league.

The intention of the album, like the songs themselves, is simple and straightforward: it is an evocation of Dolly Parton's Tennessee Mountain home and of the people she left there when she came to Nashville. Each song captures one attitude clearly and concisely, but the songs contradict themselves, the happiness and sadness, the good times and bad, the longing to leave and the longing to return, so that the total effect of the album is surprisingly rich and complex.

She not only has an ear and a voice, but a poet's eye for the concrete detail of everyday life, the way things look and smell and taste, the flowers that grew and the things around the house: her father's working boots, her

mother's black kettle, June bugs, possum grapes and muscadine, straight-back chairs.

The songs are up to and past Dolly Parton's usual standards. Her ability to fit complicated musical rhythms with complicated verbal lines without strain is really unnerving and somehow she has the ability to write what I call instant-classics which seem to have been around for a hundred years. The title song of the album is this kind of song, as is "The Wrong Direction Home."

We don't usually ask of our singers and songwriters the kind of things we expect from our poets and novelists, but when we get it we ought to be thankful. DAVE HICKEY

Charlie McCoy
Good Time Charlie
Monument KZ 32215 (record)
ZA 32215 (8-track tape)

With Charlie McCoy at the

controls, instrumental albums become a whole new experience. There are no brass and string sections to play popified versions of country songs. There *is* a fine country musician playing country songs the way they should be played—country.

Space prevents one from raving endlessly about the quality of each side on this, perhaps the best Country & Western instrumental album ever recorded. Suffice it to say that McCoy's harmonica, taking the lead solos normally filled in by a vocalist and backed up by a group of sidemen (Buddy Harman, Bob Moore, Pete Wade, "Uncle Josh" Graves, Weldon Myrick, Pete Drake, Russ Hicks, Hal Rugg, Dennis Linde, Doug Kershaw, Buddy Spicher and more) whose names read like a Nashville Who's Who, give the country connoisseur everything he or she could ask for.

Although every cut, without exception, is a jewel, "Shenandoah" deserves special recognition. With apologies to Francis Scott Key, McCoy's version should be proclaimed the national anthem. It's a gorgeous arrangement and a performance that makes your hair stand on end.

If you never buy another album, get this one. Then, the next time some city-slicker asks you, "What *is* the Nashville Sound?" just smile, walk to the record cabinet and put on *Good Time Charlie*. Unless he's deaf, stupid or both, he'll get the message as only the best sideman in the business can present it to him.

GARY FRIEDRICH

World Radio History

Opryland to Politics to Yo-yos... An Interview With Roy Acuff

By Steve Goldstein

At 2:55 one hot summer afternoon, the publisher and editor of COUNTRY MUSIC were still yelling from the car windows to the population of Gallatin, Tennessee: "Which way to Roy Acuff's house?"

"Keep goin' straight," everyone seemed to say, without saying how far. Our appointment time was 2:30. We'd been held up trying to get the right film for the cameras. My nails were disappearing fast.

Tired and sweaty, we finally pulled into Roy Acuff's driveway, to see Roy standing on his front porch glancing at his watch, but fortunately still smiling.

"Kinda late, ain't ya?" he grinned. "Another five minutes and I might have had to go to town," he teased in his drawled out way. Mrs. Acuff appeared carrying some badly needed Coca-Colas, and finally we all sat down in the best possible setting for the interview . . . Roy Acuff's back porch.
STEVE GOLDSTEIN

Q. Having been involved with the Grand Ole Opry for so many years, how do you feel about the Opry making its new home in the new park of Opryland?

I'm glad you started with that because I want you to know how *strongly* I feel about it. You see, so many people have been saying, 'Oh, this is where the Opry started. We don't want to destroy everything' . . . they don't know! They're just talkin'. Why, some people think it was under a tent once. It wasn't. It was never under a tent. It started in the studio at WSM and they moved it out to a little theater out on Eighth Avenue. Then they moved it back to Fatherland Street, where you walked down a sawdust trail and sat down on a board. That's when I joined 'em. 1938. You didn't pay no money to see it. Didn't cost a dime. You all knew where you

". . . When this park, Opryland, gets in full swing, country music's musicians will leave the highways and come and spend their whole time right here in Nashville . . ."

could get a ticket . . . at the National Life & Accident agent. Pretty soon we outgrew that and they moved us into the War Memorial. We were only there a couple of years and we outgrew that. And only then did we move to the Ryman Auditorium. But a lot of people think that the Ryman Auditorium was where it started, that this is the home of country music. Well, they just don't know. They don't see what I see. I go down there every Friday and Saturday, 'cause I have a place of business on Broadway. And I see people lined up around my place of business, and they stand there with babes in their arms and sometimes an ambulance has to come and get 'em off them hot streets . . . how proud I'll be to know that country music has really meant something. I don't want people to come to Nashville to suffer, to see or hear the "Great Speckled Bird." I want 'em to ride the Wabash Cannonball in here and go out on an airplane. I want to see people prosper and do well. And I'll predict this. In less than five years from today, when this park, Opryland, gets in full swing—get all them motels built, get the auditorium built—and country music's musicians will leave the highways and come and spend their whole time right here in Nashville playin' practically every night. Country music won't be just Friday and Saturday night. I predicted that last night to Mr. Bud Wendell, the manager of the Opry. I said, 'Bud, you're going to have to pull 'em all off the road and you're going to have to pay them enough money to stay here and put on shows one right after the other, every night.' I really believe that.

You won't feel any nostalgia?

Well now, I'm not as harsh as I seem, or as harsh as I speak. I'm a clear speaker. I speak loud and distinct. But this is something (Opryland) that I'm so proud of. You see, I've seen it. I saw it when it was nothing. And I like country people to have this place.

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You must feel that country music's come a long way since the Governor of Tennessee, back in the forties, felt that the Grand Ole Opry brought a disgraceful element into Nashville?

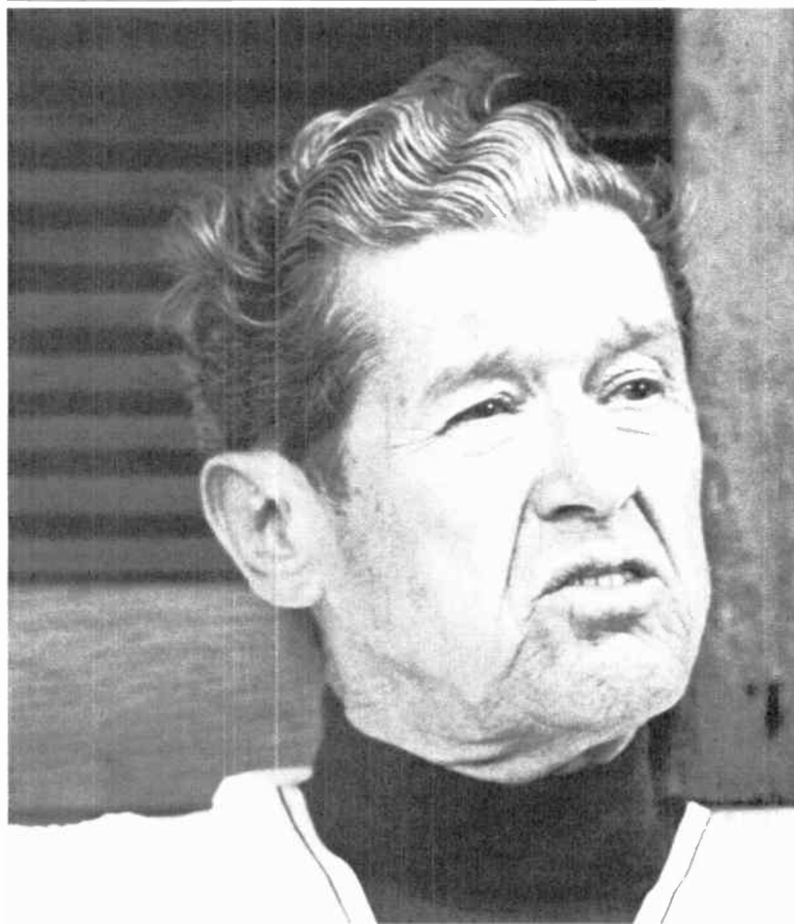
He ought to have been proud that country music was in Nashville, or this would have been just another dead city. You go to all the other major cities and see what's around? They're just other places where there's nothing to do. Country music has meant more to Nashville than any other thing. We have one business here that's been great. We have one insurance company that protected us, the National Life, of course. They stayed with us. They had some people among them that *disliked* country music, but they also had some that liked it and some that appreciated country people. And then they began to realize where they were selling their insurance, and very wisely they took advantage of it and I'm glad they did. Now they've invested upward of $30 million here on music, and not only country music. We're well aware of the fact that we want the people of the big city, who've never even heard a country song, to come into the Opryland Park. If they like symphony, well we should have symphony there, every kind of music in fact.

". . . I created a whistle in Wabash Cannonball that was like an engine in fast flight. I can't do it now on account of the dentist, who has pulled my whistle . . ."

(It may be no accident that from Roy Acuff's back porch, you can hear the sound of train whistles loud and clear. By the time the whistle had stopped, and the conversation could resume, the subject had already changed.)

. . . You know people used to go down to the depot just to watch the train run. Y' heard of that expression? 'We're goin' down to watch the train run.' Well people would go down to the depot just to see who got off and on the train. Trains have action . . . powerful action. I can tell you why the "Wabash Cannonball" became popular, at least I think I can. It had been recorded before I recorded it.

Balancing a fiddle bow is as natural for Roy Acuff as drinking Coca-Cola.



"I don't go out on stage to sing a song, I go out to entertain."

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I used to work for the L&N Railroad. I was a callboy and I learned to copy those train whistles. I came up with this whistle that I used for years, though I can't do it now on account of the dentist, who has pulled my whistle. But I created a whistle in there that was like an engine in fast flight, and when I'd come in with the whistle, it attracted attention. People wondered how I was doin' it. They would listen just to hear that whistle. It wasn't my singing, you know. It was the whistle.

Sort of like Johnny Cash's "Orange Blossom Special" when he puts in the "Whaaaaaooooo?"

I believe you will agree with me that Johnny has something besides a voice to sing. I'm not a singer either. I'm a *seller*. I think Johnny Cash is a seller. I think if you took a vote on whether people liked to hear Johnny Cash sing, as opposed to listening to his voice, I think you would find that on balance people would say that he can't particularly sing a good song. But he can *sell* you a damn good song, and he has something that people like to hear. Now George Morgan can sing a pretty song, but he can't sell. He can't sell it . . . But to get back to the train. I think that the whistle in "Wabash Cannonball" created something special about it. I've recorded a lot of train numbers—"Night Train To Memphis", "Sunshine Special"—they've all sold good, everyone of them. There is something about a train that's attractive and that attracts attention. But I think they lost a lot when they brought in the diesel and took the old steam engine off. It was nice to go down to the depot and watch 'em spin the wheels.

Which is the audience that you most prefer to play for, that you think reacts best to your music?

Oh, I'd rather play for our military than anyone else I've ever played for. They're the best audience in the world. I made my first trip to Europe in 1949. I've played on all of them hillsides. When I go over there, they don't bring the boys to see me, I go to see the boys. I get in a jeep or anything else they've got. I don't care what it is, I get with the boys. Any place we've got boys in military clothes, I've been there. It's satisfying to me to know that I'm doing something to

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help keep up the morale of the boys that are away from home. I doubt if I'll do much more because I think it's all coming to an end in a way, especially with our fighting boys. They're not goin' to be out in the boon docks anymore . . . Well . . . let's get off the war question. We're all war-torn anyway and that's why we've got that park here. It's something to do besides sitting here watching television, watching the news and seeing how many boys've been killed.

Okay, let's change the subject. Could you talk a little about your various balancing activities and how all that started?

Well, when I was living on the farm, like all farm boys and farm people, we entertained ourselves and our families. I used to take a corn stalk or something light, and I'd put it on my nose and try and balance it, if the wind would stop blowing long enough. I just learned to balance that way. I was pretty strong when I was young. I was real strong, played football, basketball, baseball . . . and I'd take a number 20 Oliver Chilled plough—you know what I mean when I talk about one of those? . . . a turning plough . . . big one. I'd take it by the beam and put a red bandana handkerchief in my mouth so it would protect my chin, and I'd take that thing and muscle it up there on my chin and walk around over the field with it. Now I can balance anything. I could take them chairs over there and balance them. I just do it to entertain myself. How it got into the act, I don't know, but it was just natural. I'd walk out and take my fiddle bow and put it up there. It's as natural for me to do that as it is for me to take a drink of this Coca-Cola. I don't think nothing about it. But I'll tell yer. When I walk on the stage I don't go out to sing a song, I go out there to *entertain*. I don't care anything about selling a record, I don't care anything about making fifty cents extra, I go out there to please them people sitting out there, and I'm not goin' to let it die. If somebody gets up and sings "The Wreck Of the Old 97," and the crowd is saddened, I'll sing "Tied Down" or something to bring 'em back out of it, or I'll call for a fiddle tune. I'll do anything to bring that audience back up. A lot of people go on stage and they're on for 30 min-

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He took up yo-yoing when sunstroke stopped him from playing baseball.

utes and they do nothing but sing. I never was on a program like that in my life. If I'm going out there for 30 minutes, I'll have some fiddlin' music, I'll have some banjo pickin', I'll have some harmonica playin', I'll have piano, I'll have guitars . . . I'll have every kind of music during that 30 minutes, 'cause nobody just wants to sit out there and listen to me sing "The Wreck On The Highway" and "The Great Speckled Bird" and go home crying. I'll make you cry if I can, but I'll also make you laugh.

I wanted to ask you about "Wreck On The Highway." One of our writers recently described it as, "a classic outcry against modern corruption." I wondered what you felt about that particular song now and how it relates to the world today.

Well, you know, I didn't write "Wreck On The Highway." No, I didn't. It belongs to me, though. If you want to know who wrote a song, just record it, and if it becomes a hit, you'll find out quick enough who wrote that song. So I recorded "Wreck On The Highway" not knowing who wrote it; I'd

". . . Hank would come up with fine ideas, but before they were made into a real song, Fred Rose would touch 'em . . ."

picked it up in the country. I'd collected $1300 in royalties on it when I got a letter from this feller in Greenville, North Carolina, who said he was the writer of the song. So I immediately put my partner, Fred Rose, one of the most honest, fine men that I could ever have gotten acquainted with to go into the publishing business, on the plane to go visit this man. And Fred called me back and said, 'Roy, it is not the same number exactly, but it's close to his number.' And he said, 'this man will sign all his rights over to us, and if I was you, I'd just write him a check for the $1300 that you have received from this song and he will then sign the song to Acuff-Rose Publications and you can have it from then on.' So I sat down and wrote him a check for the $1300 that I had received, and sent it to him. That was a good, honest way of doing it. I don't ever want to claim a song that is not mine. I'd never do that—steal anyone's song—'cause that's gifted to them.

Talking of Acuff-Rose, how did you meet Hank Williams and have him sign up with Acuff-Rose?

When I was . . . let's say in my prime . . . I'd go down into Alabama and wherever I'd play Hank would visit my shows. He tried to copy me for years 'cause he played fiddle like me and he sang all of my songs. He was a real country boy. He'd come into my dressing room and he wouldn't sit down in a chair, he'd always hunker down in the corner. I'd talk to him and I found out that he could write songs. He wrote "I Saw The Light" and I recorded it. That was before he ever got started. Then, when he came to Nashville and got acquainted, through me, with Fred Rose, that was the greatest thing that ever happened to Hank Williams, because he had then met a man that was a *polished* songwriter. You could give Fred Rose an idea, and he would produce a song in a very short while. He was the only real songwriter that I have ever met, even though I know there's some good ones writing today. But I was in the studios in Chicago once and I needed one number to finish up the quota of songs I'd recorded that day, and while I was in there singing a song, Fred Rose wrote a song and I recorded it.

Wasn't Hank Williams able to do that?

No, he couldn't do that, but Fred Rose could. Hank came up with ideas. He was a good man for the ideas, but Fred was the man who polished his songs. And that's not intended to take anything from Hank, please. Hank would come up with fine, fine ideas, but before they were made into a real song, Fred Rose would *touch* 'em and it made Hank's songs much more commercial. Now Hank's way of singing a song was another thing altogether. A lot of people tried to copy him, but they can't put in that actual *cry* that he had in his voice. There's never been anyone could do that. There's been a lot of copies, but never anybody who could touch that boy when it'd come to really singing. I've seen him stand in front of an audience and tear 'em all to pieces, just with his way of delivery . . . I don't know whether

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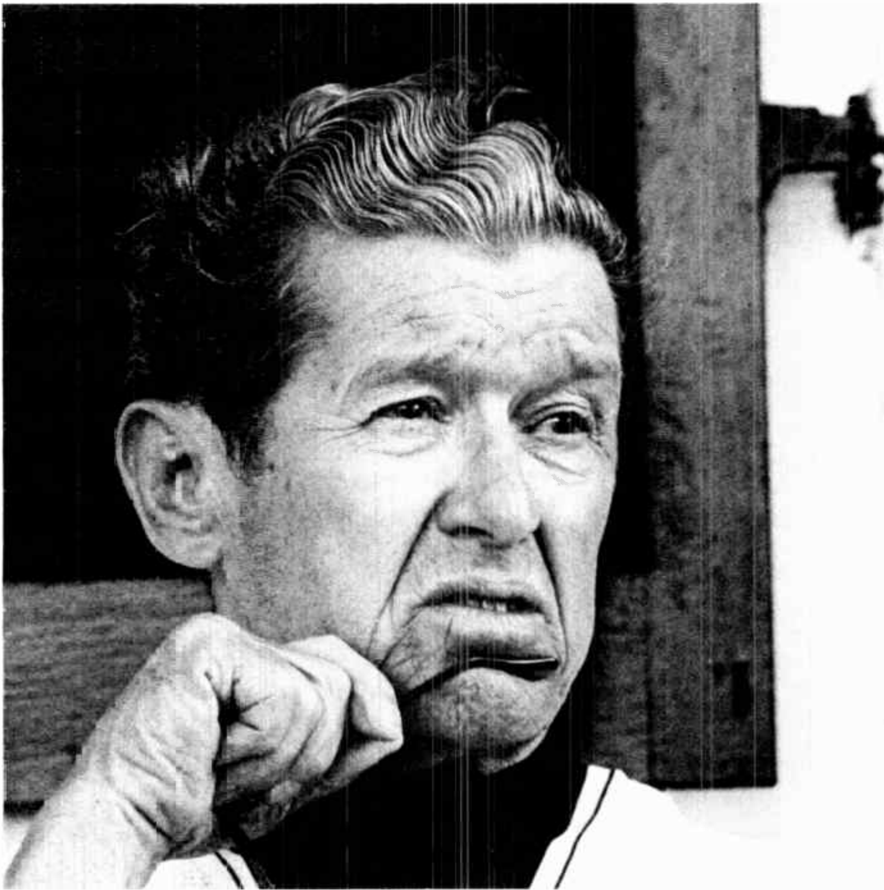

"I want people to ride the Wabash Cannonball into Nashville and go out on an airplane."

we stayed on your subject or not. I ramble a bit when I talk.

Maybe we should ramble a bit too. How did you feel going into the studio with the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band?

Well now, let me make myself clear to you. I have no respect for hippies. I'm clear about that. I have no respect for them because I don't think they have respect for anything. So that's the reason I dislike the hippie attitude. Wes Rose called me and asked me if I would consider going into the studio with the Nitty Gritty boys. And I said, 'Wes, I have no objections to doing anything, at any time with anybody, if they want to do it and in the right way.' Now, I have never met a finer group of boys than the Nitty Gritty boys. They're just as fine as they could be. I haven't seen them . . . their faces was covered! I didn't know if I was in the studio with boys eighteen, or thirty-eight or fifty-eight! I couldn't tell! I'm serious about it! I didn't know if they were boys, men, or maybe girls! You cover your face and you hide all your character. I dunno. When I went in the studio, they took me at my word. I said, 'fellers, they call me one-time Acuff, now let's get it over with.' And we did it . . . one take and that was it. But really, they really were a good group of boys. I would have liked to see them. I asked why they objected to bein' called country. An d'you know, the only thing they said was that the word country can hurt the sales of a song. And I agree with them to a certain extent.

But a whole lot of people are being attracted to country now.

Oh, that's true. I think that people, the general public, are beginning to realize that the people in country music are nice people, whereas at one time we was more or less looked at as dirt. At that time, the Nitty Gritty *Dirt* would have been alright, but the only one who was in that studio with the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band that ever saw any dirt was Roy Acuff. But I've heard the number we recorded, "I Saw The Light" and it sounds good, real good.

With so many people becoming more interested in country music, do you think this has brought about a change in the music itself?

No, I don't think there's been a great change in it. To me there hasn't. I still sing in the same style and I use the same instruments that I used when I first came here. I think what we have added into country music maybe is a beat, the beat of the drums, or at least the snare drum. They use that on the Opry now all the time, but that wasn't allowed when I first came here. Nor was there any electric. Now I have nothing against electrical instruments, in fact I use one, a lead guitar. Well, I don't now, but I have used one. But what I detest about electrical instruments is that they play them so hellaciously loud. They kill all the beauty of a song or a tone.

You mentioned a while back that your main purpose when you went onstage was to entertain. Do you think that entertainers ought to convey political messages in their songs?

I think it's an entertainer's privilege to do whatever he wants, if it's political or whatever it is. You know, of course, that I take a great interest in politics, though I'm more interested in government, because I see so much corrupt government, bad government, that I really like to see someone in office that I have confidence in; that I trust. I don't really care anymore what his politics are, if he's honest.

Will you be active this election year?

Oh yeah, I suppose I will.

I don't have much doubt who you'll be voting for this year, but could you elaborate a little more about what you base this trust on?

Well, I'll tell yer what I really think about Mr. Nixon. I've met the gentleman and I've been on stages where he was, and I truthfully think he's a good Christian man. I think his connection with Billy Graham and different things that he has done has put something into the White House besides . . . (long pause while Roy stared at his Coca Cola) . . . the bottle. I really think that Richard Nixon means well, let me say it that way. I think that he'll be reelected beyond any doubt because this country's not ready for any McGoverns yet. We've never run out of anything, and we ain't gonna run this time either. America wasn't built on runnin', but on startin' something and

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"America wasn't built on runnin'. It was built on startin' something and stayin' with it."

stayin' with it until it was finished. And I hope that Richard Nixon can finish it over there. Maybe he can't, but I hope he can. I tell you, you go over there and you see things like I've seen them and you wonder what in the world you're doing there, but there is *definitely* a purpose. It's costing us, and you and I are the ones that's paying for it. We know that. But if we was to walk out of there, them poor people, every one of 'em, they would do nothin' but die. And we just can't afford to let that happen. We're gonna have to stop it somewhere. I'm very much afraid that we're gonna have to go into it in a heavy way before long, maybe I won't be alive to see it. But it's like this; you see two dogs standing around growling at one another. One of these days them *dawgs* is gonna fight. And as long as Russia stays up there and does the kind of stuff they do, and as long as we live in the free world over here . . . one day we're gonna fight. I don't know when it will be, but I'd like to see it. I'm just that much of a red-blooded American. I'm serious. I don't think we've got any chance in the next twenty years of not havin' a showdown with them. There'll be a showdown somewhere, maybe not here. I hope not. We're very fortunate; we're very lucky people that all this has happened in Europe and Germany and Japan and Korea and in Vietnam, rather than here in the United States. Well . . . let's go back and talk about my yo-yoing.

Yeah, we should do that. Perhaps it's appropriate that we're going from politics straight into yo-yoing.

Well, now we're with a subject we know something about. I *know* about yo-yoing. When I was playin' baseball, I really had planned to make a career of it. But I got knocked down by sunstroke three times, and it took me two years to recuperate from the sunstroke. That was when the yo-yo came out, about that time. I would go down to the corner drugstore at nights . . . I couldn't go out in the sun because of the sunstroke . . . and I would stand on the corner and yo-yo to keep myself from throwing a baseball. I became pretty good, only I could never yo-yo with two hands, only one. I more or less got away from the yo-yo for a while because I was fiddlin' a lot. But when I got on the Grand Ole Opry, where commercials were being read, I got back into yo-yoing. You see the audience at the Grand Ole Opry couldn't care less about the commercials; the commercials are supposed to be for the benefit of the people out on the air. So I began to realize that the audience ought to be entertained in some other way during the commercials. And while they were reading the commercials, I began to do my yo-yoing. And I'd tell the sponsors that too; the audience has to be entertained, and I didn't want to just stand around.

After thirty years on the Opry, do you have any special moments or special evenings that you remember?

Well, I feel my entire career has been enjoyable. I've had a lot of hardships, yes. I've had wrecks and nearly died, but I've been prosperous and I've watched other people prosper too, and I'm proud of 'em. I have great respect for the entertainment world. There's a lot of evil in it, a lot of it, but I don't think that one good sermon would cure it either.

My father was a minister and I was raised in a Christian home. I was brought up as best my family could. All of 'em were musicians; my father was a fiddler, my mother and sisters played the organ and we all sang. In fact, we entertained ourselves back on the farm. We were brought up that way. I kinda turned out to be the black sheep, I guess, when I got into the entertainment world, but my father never made any remarks about it from the pulpit in his life.

What do you want to do now?

Just what I am doing now. There's nothing that I would change. I'm happy about being on the Grand Ole Opry, and I expect to remain there. I don't want to become a *fixture* on the Opry. I don't want to become someone that others might say, 'well, he's possibly too old to be there.' If that ever happens, then I'd want to quit. But as long as I can yo-yo and balance a fiddle bow and hit a few jigs and sing a song now and then, and so long as someone can appreciate it, well I want to stay on the Opry. I don't like the word retire. Hell, I can't retire, I ain't got time.

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COUNTRY MUSIC

A Restless Aries Loses his Devils

The very qualities which make Merle Haggard a beautiful man, could be the same qualities keeping him from being a super-superstar.

By Paul Hemphill

Among my friends is a fellow known as Streetcar, a name he was given when he was 14-years-old and commandeered a trolley one shadowy Halloween night on the streets of Knoxville. Thus began a life of mischief for Streetcar—nothing really serious, just enough to get him into a startling succession of juvenile homes and county jails—which has continued, relatively unabated, for nearly three decades. He has hustled pool all over America. He has dealt in high-stakes poker games. He has awakened in bus stations in Arkansas when he was supposed to be in Miami. He has knocked around with Hank Williams, claiming to have been present at the creation of several Williams' songs. Unable to resist his charm, a Knoxville newspaper once fired and rehired him as a sportswriter nine times. "Breathe deep, honey, and I'll pay the damages," he once said to a Playboy Bunny, just before setting her stockings ablaze with a Roi-Tan Blunt. It isn't that Streetcar is a bad man; he simply has his own private drummer.

The last time I saw him was a couple of years ago. I was riding through Ohio on a magazine assignment with Merle Haggard. At the time Streetcar was under the protective custody of his married sister in Columbus, a durable woman who played the organ in church and found ingenious places to hide her whiskey. Knowing he was terribly lonely, probably wasting away by eating Oreo cookies and watching daytime soap operas on television, I called him from Dayton and invited him to meet me at the Columbus auditorium when the Haggard entourage pulled in. The next day he bounded out of his sister's car at the appointed hour, sloshed through the puddled parking lot and—looking like a drowned rat— proceeded to recapitulate old times and made up for two years away from good Scotch.

". . . Well, I tell you," Haggard was telling Streetcar, "nobody knows unless they've been there . . ."

While we were talking, Merle Haggard awakened from a nap in the rear of the bus and came up the aisle to the front. Waiting for him was a television producer in the midst of filming a documentary, an executive from the country radio station sponsoring that night's show, a *Life* photographer, and a local newspaper reporter. Through the windshield, Haggard could see about a dozen fans already waiting in the rain to see him or touch him. Streetcar whispered to me that maybe he ought to get off the bus, with all these important people Haggard had to meet, but I told him to wait.

"Merle," I said, "I want you to meet Streetcar."

"What?" said Haggard, rubbing sleep from his eyes.

"I'd like you to meet an old buddy of mine."

"No, the name."

"Streetcar."

Suddenly Haggard's eyes lit up as they do when he hears a good lyric or finds an old fiddle. "How the hell did you ever get a name like that?"

And they were off and running for the next half-hour, the new King of Country Music and this itinerant character from that American outback of pool halls and jails and bus stations. The TV man, the radio executive, the reporter, the photographer and the adoring fans could wait. "Well, I tell you," Haggard was telling Streetcar at one point, "nobody knows unless they've been there." They talked about places they had done time, freights they had hopped, fights they had lost, and women they had known. Much later that night, standing backstage as the show came to a close, Streetcar was uncommonly quiet. He listened intently to every word Haggard sang—*Things I learned in a hobo jungle/were things they never taught me in a classroom/Like where to find a handout/while thumbin' through Chicago in the afternoon*—and when it was over, the two of us standing outside in the cold drizzle, Streetcar looked up for the moon and said, "Hank Williams."

Success can be a hazardous business, no matter what your line of work, but it can be especially critical for someone involved in the arts. Money and fame have turned more heads of artists—writers, painters, poets, lyricists, performers—than any other outside forces. "Man was a good writer until he made some money," Ernest

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PHOTO PAUL LEVIN

Merle Haggard: a man who prefers fishing and writing songs to anything else.

. . . Money and fame have worked for him, not against him, giving him a self-confidence and a freedom he has never known . . .

Hemingway once said of another novelist, failing to recognize that once *he* became rich and famous he spent the rest of his career parodying himself. Many a songwriter was at his peak when he was begging people to listen to his songs. Material success gets in the way of art, bleeding the juices and distracting the soul from whence great art comes. It is a sad old story, and can be witnessed almost daily in Hollywood and New York and Nashville: yesterday's starving prophet, today's well-fed hack.

Outwardly, Merle Haggard has changed considerably over the past two or three years since "Okie From Muskogee" won most of the big Country Music Association awards for him and made him a true superstar of American music. Now he demands upward of $10,000 per show, lives in a $250,000 home on a lake outside Bakersfield, California, fishes from a fully-stocked yacht and travels with two $100,000 buses (one for his band, The Strangers, the other for him, his wife and his manager). He is playing all of the big places now like Harrah's at Lake Tahoe, rather than the dinky nightclub circuit, and they want him for television and the movies. He can buy anything he wants, do whatever he wants to do, go wherever he wants to go. He has found the brass ring he was looking for during all those years of working the "fightin' and dancin'" clubs and playing county fairs and begging disc jockeys to play his records.

And, from what I see, an amazing thing has happened. Rather than success spoiling the man, it has strengthened him. Five years ago he would come blowing into Nashville "to do some howling" and be seen stumbling around Music Row like a lost soul, but today he has all but quit drinking. In the past he was a moody man who seemed terribly complex and haunted by all sorts of devils, but now he is as self-composed as any man I have ever known in show business. The money and fame have worked for him, not against him, giving him a self-confidence and a freedom he had never known. Not having to worry about paying the bills or becoming a success or otherwise proving himself, he now has the peace of mind to go on and become what my friend Streetcar and a lot of other people think he can be: an artist whose work should be every bit as lasting as that of a very few, such as Hank Williams and Jimmie Rodgers. "I tell you what," says Kristofferson, "that man has already written some of the best folk songs that's ever been done. I think that now, when we speak of Merle Haggard, we aren't talking about how he's going to come out on the CMA awards this year; we're talking about posterity."

It is really quite simple, to me, why Haggard did not have his head turned—did not sell his soul and his art—when success finally came. It is because he has remained true to his roots. He plans to die in Bakersfield, right there where his Okie parents migrated during the Thirties. He would much rather be out fishing with some longtime crony than kowtowing around a network television executive on a golf course. His mother, who suffered during his boyhood days of wandering, still lives with Merle's family and is titular head of his fan club. His personal manager is an old boy named Fuzzy Owen—there is no telling how much money Haggard might be earning if he had a high-powered agent—but it was Fuzzy who virtually picked Merle up off the streets when he got out of prison and Merle respects that obligation. It is not in his system to forget where he had been, and it is when he writes around those experiences—and in "Mama Tried" and "Branded Man"—that he is at his best.

". . . We aren't talking about how Merle's going to come out at the CMA awards this year," said Kristofferson. "We're talking about posterity . . ."

Those experiences are something else. Merle was born in 1937, when the family was living among the sagebrush in a boxcar that had been converted by Mr. Haggard. The Haggards had bailed out of East Oklahoma along with many other burned-out farmers, and rumbled up and over the Rockies to the promised land in California. Mr. Haggard was a hard-working, honest man who had given up the fiddle when his wife, a stern member of the Church of Christ, objected to such carrying-on. At the

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age of nine, Merle had just begun to pay some attention to music when his father suddenly died. Mrs. Haggard felt perhaps too strongly her responsibility to raise her youngest son properly, and by the time Merle was fourteen he began skipping school and investigating the world on his own.

"It was the wrong thing to do," Mrs. Haggard says now of her decision to put Merle into a juvenile home for a few days to frighten him into straightening up. He promptly escaped, getting himself a record, and for the next ten years he was into everything: bogus checks, escape, burglary, petty theft, pitching hay, stolen checks, riding the rails. "Wild hair is all it was," he says. "You'd be surprised what a kid's thinking at that age. I mean, like the first time I got locked up I felt like I'd finally become a man. That's what it was all about. I was just trying to grow up."

If so, he did it the hard way. Late in 1957, Bakersfield authorities, tired of dealing with him, charged him with attempted burglary and escape and sent him off to San Quentin for six months to fifteen years. He spent three years there (and was in the audience the day Johnny Cash came by to perform), straightened up when he spent a week in solitary confinement next to the doomed Caryl Chessman, and drifted back home to Bakersfield.

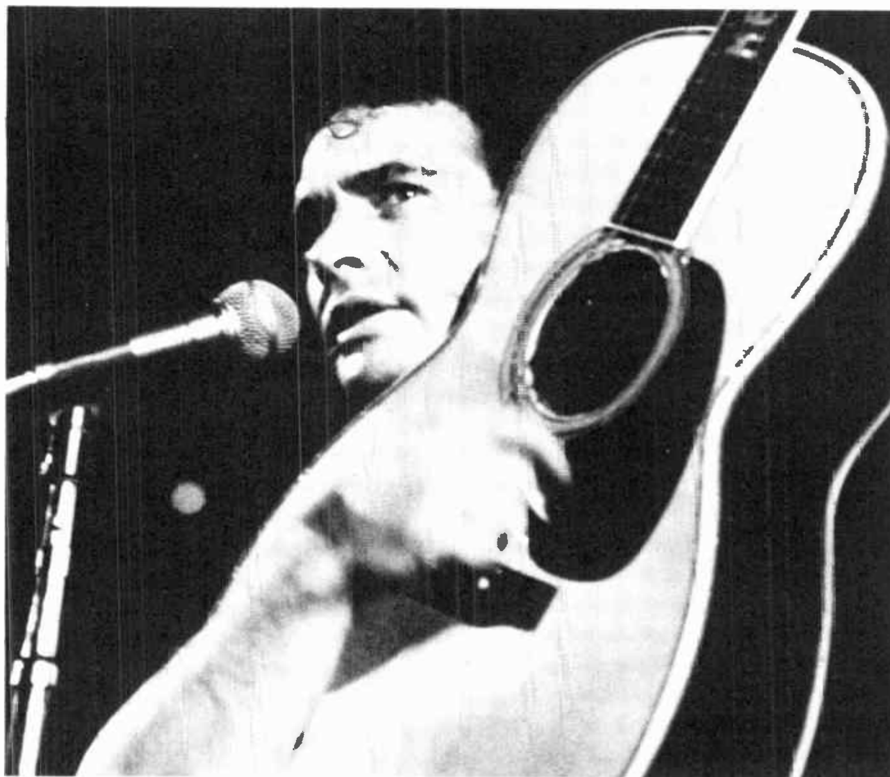

PHOTO: PAUL LEVIN

He wanted to quit the road for a while, but he owed "Sam" a cool half million.

". . . The first time I got locked up I felt like I'd finally become a man. That's what it was all about. I was just trying to grow up . . ."

Off and on, between stretches in jail, Merle had gotten into music by writing an occasional song and picking guitar in roadhouses. When he returned from prison, Bakersfield was beginning to sprout a modest music industry—Buck Owens and others had built studios, and plenty of clubs featured live country music. Soon Merle was quitting his job as a laborer and going into the clubs fulltime. And he met Fuzzy Owen, who eventually recorded Merle in a garage "studio" he had built. The first release sold two hundred copies, but not much later, in 1965, Merle did "All My Friends Are Gonna Be Strangers" and it made the country Top Ten. He signed with Capitol Records, rounded up a band, bought a station wagon and hit the road. Within six years he had become a star—mainly on the strength of such autobiographical songs as "I'm A Lonesome Fugitive" and "Swinging Doors," which strongly identified him with working people and the downtrodden. Then, of course, came "Okie From Muskogee."

The story surrounding "Okie" oozes with irony. In the beginning the song was written on a lark. "We were riding through East Oklahoma and saw this sign that said 'Muskogee' and somebody said, 'I bet they don't smoke marijuana in Muskogee,' and somebody else threw in another line," Haggard recalls. "We must have pretty much written the song in twenty minutes." During the session when it was recorded, everybody kept breaking up over the lyrics ("I didn't think we would ever get it down," says one studio musician).

Before the record came out, Haggard sprang the song on a beery crowd of Green Berets at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. He was astounded when they tore the place up. Then came the release of the record, and Haggard found himself in the middle of a controversy. In some quarters he was being hailed as a "proletarian poet" (President Nixon wrote to congratulate him on the song), but elsewhere he was being castigated for capitalizing on Middle America's distaste for the hippie lifestyle. Just as liberals had begun to worship and respect Haggard as a folk singer in the vein of Woody Guthrie, he had taken what they felt to be a cheap commercial shot.

It is my feeling that Haggard seems mildly embarrassed about having written "Okie" and "Fightin' Side of Me." A man who has no taste for politics (he seldom reads, doesn't vote, and turns down invitations to appear on behalf of candidates), he simply wrote a couple of songs that in one way backfired on him. No doubt about it, they made him a superstar, "Okie" becoming his first gold album. They thrust him into a prominence transcending the world of country music, and brought him untold riches, but they also taught him a lesson. The charges that he had gone commercial got in his craw. Cash was just beginning to be accused of getting away from *his* roots, allowing non-country acts on his television show, and Haggard didn't want that to happen to him. Many performers would have gone

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". . . He's an Aries, very restless, and I have to remember that," says his wife, singer Bonnie Owens . . .

on to make a career of being a professional "patriot," but instead Merle next tried to do a song about an interracial love affair (which Capitol refused to record on the grounds it would be "bad for my image").

The uproar over those two songs was really only another progression in the slow but steady growth of Merle Haggard over the past decade. Only a man who retains his roots and keeps an inner calm can mature as he has.

"I remember when he first came back to Bakersfield and began singing," says Bettie Azevedo, Merle's secretary, "Fuzzy had to show him how to stop twisting his mouth up so funny." Back then, everything he sang came out sounding like Lefty Frizzell, who is still a hero to him. He went through a long period then when he was terribly shaky in front of crowds, perhaps the most difficult problem he has had to overcome. Then he was leaning too heavily toward songs about boozing and unrequited love, which he began to break away from when he started going to his own background for material with such numbers as "Hungry Eyes" and "Mama

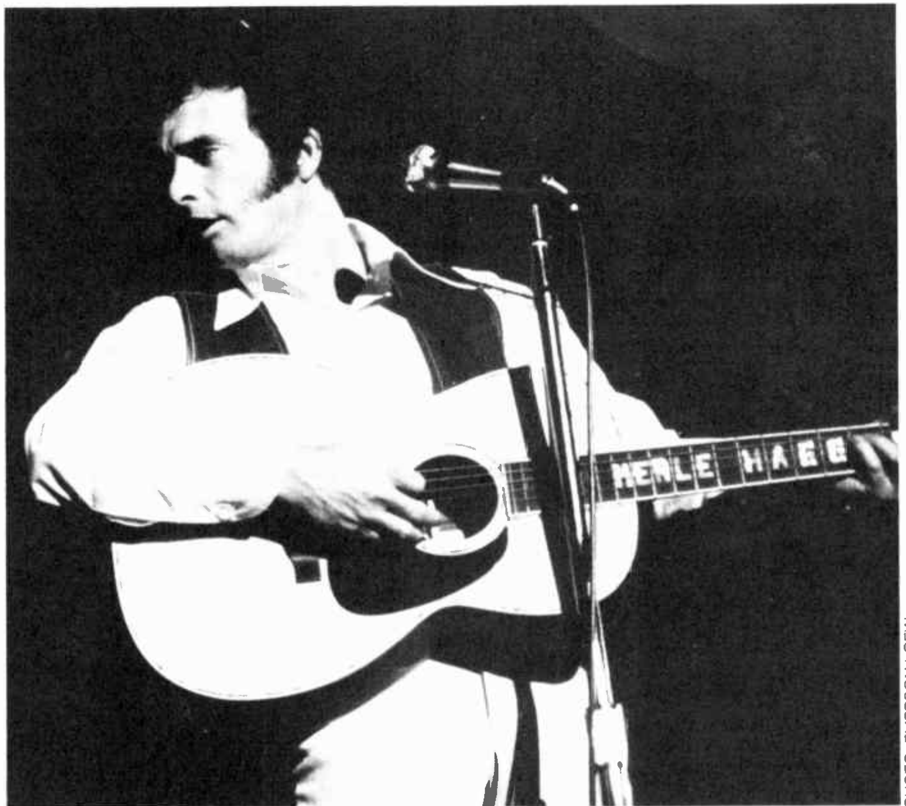

PHOTO: EMERSON LOEW

Haggard could have made a career as a professional "patriot," but he wanted to do a song about an interracial love affair.

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PHOTO PAUL LEVIN

At one time everything Haggard sang sounded like his hero, Lefty Frizzell.

Tried." His marriage to singer Bonnie Owens was a stabilizer ("He's an Aries, very restless, and I have to remember that"), and his acceptance by longhairs in spite of their dislike for "Fightin' Side" and "Okie" gave him the confidence he needed to branch out. His recreations of the sounds of Bob Wills and of Jimmie Rodgers represent some of the purest country music I have ever heard (to be authentic, he taught himself to play the fiddle in six months for the Wills album).

What we have now is a man on the verge of becoming a complete musician, able to do it all—and in almost any medium. The catalogue of songs he has built up and continues to build runs the gamut—recreations of greats like Rodgers, gospel songs, hard beer-drinking classics, sweet love songs, even impersonations—and he may have already reached the point of being the most flexible country singer on the scene. "Let's face it, most of us aren't singers," Bill Anderson once told me, "we're stylists." Dave Dudley does truck-driving songs, Marty Robbins does gunfighter ballads, Cash does prisons and hard times. But Merle Haggard has run through them all and was last seen working on a Dixieland album. His one weakness, as I see it, is an inability to make his personality come across on television; he simply doesn't have the flair for showbiz and hopping around that the screen calls for. There is a feeling around Nashville that Haggard will never achieve the spectacular success—financially, in particular—that Cash enjoys. A major reason for that, they say, is because he isn't good enough for TV and doesn't have the distinctive physical presence of Cash. Almost unspoken, though, is a deeper reasoning: that Haggard, unlike Cash,

". . . I really think," says Merle's secretary, "that Merle dreams of the day he can stay home to fish and write songs . . ."

lacks the drive to go all the way. "I really think," admits Bettie Azevedo, "that Merle dreams of the day he can stay home to fish and write songs." It is frustrating to anyone, up to and including executives who want to make a lot of money for Merle, to locate him when he is back home in Bakersfield. Capitol is forever having to reschedule recording sessions in Los Angeles when Merle doesn't show up. Merle even walked out on an Ed Sullivan Show, back when he really needed it, because they wouldn't let him sing what he wanted to sing, the way he wanted to sing it. He doesn't like to hang around with important people in show business, preferring to be alone, or with members of his band or with his family. He is, in short, his own man. Those very qualities which make him a beautiful man could be the same qualities keeping him from being a super-superstar.

The last time I saw Merle was during the past summer, when he was making a short swing through the South. He had played at George Jones' and Tammy Wynette's outdoor place in Lakeland, Florida, rushed to Nashville for some recording, and had a date in Columbus, Georgia before driving all night to Huntington, West Virginia for another. At four o'clock in the afternoon Merle and Mel Tillis, who was also working the show, sat in Merle's bus outside the Columbus Coliseum, talking about songs and other writers and whatever.

"I thought you was gonna quit the road, Merle," Tillis was saying.

"I *was* getting pretty tired there," said Haggard.

"She's a booger, all right."

"Kinda got my second wind now, though. Got stale for a while, but then my tax bill came in."

"How's that?"

"Had to pay half a million to Sam for last year."

A girl reporter from the local paper came by to interview Haggard ("I understand you write some of your own songs, Mr. Haggard"), followed by a couple of disc jockeys and then a pair of good old boys who wanted to audition a song for Merle right on the spot ("Tell you what, send me a tape so I can give it a fair shake"). He talked about the movie he may star in ("Sort of a 'Grapes of Wrath' character"), played his latest record on the stereo, then reached for his fiddle and played a few strains from Bob Wills' "Faded Love." It occurred to me to ask him what he is shooting for, what he would like to be remembered as.

"I never thought about that," he said, squinting and looking absentmindedly out the window of the bus. The Coliseum was filling up very early, and it looked like a sellout. "A writer, I guess. Somebody who did some living and wrote songs about what he knew. Just like Jimmie and Hank did. That's all."

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Dolly Parton Wants to Glitter As A Musician

by Jerry Bailey

Rooms have a way of growing smaller when Dolly Parton walks in. It has nothing to do with physical dimensions but with psychological comparison. She could wear pajamas to a banquet, and many formally attired persons there would feel improperly dressed. In her presence, women tend to fidget with their hair and adjust their clothes; men stiffen uneasily and stare noticeably at the object of their admiration. She has a way of destroying one's composure, though it seems entirely unintentional.

When she walked into the dressing room of a Nashville TV station one recent evening, I thought my chances for survival would have been better had she instantly been transformed into a man-eating grapevine. It is somehow impossible for this reporter to get mentally prepared for her. With her four-inch heels and mounds of blonde hair, her height came to threatening dimensions though she would stand only five feet with plowed earth beneath her toes. She was wearing tight-fitting blue pants, revealing curves reminiscent of Marilyn Monroe, and moved with the carefree innocence of a country school girl. Her perfect face, highlighted with skillfully applied makeup, reminded me of a seasoned, passionate woman and, at the same time, a tender childhood sweetheart. On this particular evening, she wore seven rings on her fingers.

She extended her hand in the friendly, frank manner of Tennessee hill folks.

"Hi, I'm proud to meet you," she said, like a magician breaking a hypnotic trance. She pulled up a folding chair uncomfortably close, and smiled eagerly. After a meaningless greeting, I found myself fighting with paranoia, in spite of hours of preparation for the interview. After some fumbling with my tape recorder, I ventured a half-question.

"Uh, I suppose you get tired of telling your life story."

"Sometimes, but not tonight," she replied, still smiling eagerly. I had almost hoped she would say she was too busy to talk to me. Just in the nick of time, Porter Wagoner walked in and began putting the final touches to his sparkling clothes before the wall of mirrors. It was a welcome distraction.

". . . What are you going to give me for Christmas?" Dolly asked. "Another chance," Porter replied . . .

Dolly watched him for a moment and then asked, "What are you going to give me for Christmas?"

"Another chance," Porter replied.

"Another chance! That's what you gave me last year."

"Last year I gave you a Cadillac, a diamond necklace and another chance," Porter said. He had earlier estimated that he had given Dolly five rings, two Cadillacs and two necklaces during the years she had been with his show. He turned to

PHOTO: YVONNE HANNEMANN

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"I'm like any woman. I'm just a human being. I try to look as good as I can and it's a great compliment when somebody thinks I'm pretty or says something nice. But I never look at myself that way; what I look like on the outside is not what I feel like on the inside.

"A lot of people take me wrong, because I look like the type of person that might be trying to show off, because I wear gaudy clothes—I reckon it's because when I was little I never really had anything at all, and when I would see somebody dressed up real fancy, that would just impress me no end. I just thought that one of these days I was going to wear fancy clothes and hairdos and makeup and shiny jewelry. It's just part of my personality."

Dolly Parton

me and grinned mischievously: "Dolly was born in Frog Alley until she put Sevierville on the map."

Porter's joke held a lot of truth. Dolly Parton, who at her present age of 27 is the pride and joy of the Porter Wagoner Show, was the fourth of a dozen children born to a farmer-turned-construction-worker in Sevier County, Tennessee. Her mother and father married while still in their mid-teens, but, as Dolly once said, "they done pretty well." Her earliest memories are of a place back in the Smokies called Webb Mountain. The family had moved there when she was three and stayed, scratching out a living by raising just enough food for their own survival for five years.

Later, they moved around the country for a while and then settled in the Caton's Chapel community "on a little farm, well, not too little, about 40 or 50 acres," where they lived until she graduated from high school.

"I started writing songs before I could even write songs—before I ever went to school, when I couldn't write or read or spell. I used to make up songs and my momma would write them down for me. She said I was making up songs before I was five, but at that age I used to beg her to write them down so she could read them back to me. When I was about seven years old I started playing the guitar. It's all I've ever known."

Dolly made her first guitar from an old mandolin and two bass guitar strings. She had the strings

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keyed up in some way so she could play a melody and form chords, and she wrote a lot of songs with that guitar.

. . . To play down the importance of music to Dolly Parton, would be to not understand Dolly Parton . . .

"I got a real one when I was eight years old. My uncle gave me a little Martin. It's really the one I learned to play on. Of course, it had full strings where I could learn full chords. When I was 12 years old, I was away from home in Knoxville one weekend and didn't have my guitar. While I was gone, my guitar got loaned out and it broke. That hurt me real bad. It had the side busted out and the neck broke off. I guess some kids had jumped up and down on it—I never did know what happened. I put it away and said when I got enough money, the first thing I'd do was have my guitar fixed so I could play it again."

It is perhaps entirely understandable that many of Dolly Parton's most ardent fans have tended to exercise their eyes at the expense of their ears. It is as if the fact that she is a genuine country singer with a unique style and repertoire is only a secondary feature. But to play down the importance of music to Dolly Parton would be to not understand Dolly Parton. She may not have worked especially hard to quash the myth that beautiful blondes and brains do not run together, but a few minutes conversation with her would be enough to convince any skeptic that she has a good head on her shoulders, a vivid imagination and a great dedication to succeed as a musician.

And apart from her music, there is another very important influence in her life which dates back to her childhood.

To the people in the communities where Dolly grew up, religion was both recreation and duty. In words that one of his granddaughters would use in a song someday, the Rev. Mr. Owens "preached hell so hot that you could feel the heat." Two years ago a song about this subject became one of the top ten country songs in the nation and in it, Dolly Parton tried to convey the spirit of the way it was in her grandfather's fundamentalist church in the hills.

Before she ever left for Nashville, she was singing in church with her granddaddy, and it did not take Dolly long to start singing something besides hymns. She sang well enough that one of her uncles, Bill Owens, managed to get her on the radio in Knoxville before her eleventh birthday.

"Dolly was singing around home all the time," Owens said. "She'd sing while she washed dishes; she'd sing when she put her younger brothers and sisters to bed. And even then she sang good! All of a sudden the thought came to me that I should take her to the Cass Walker (a renowned Knoxville disc jockey) broadcasts.

"This particular show was originating downstairs. When Dolly started to sing, announcers and other people from all over the building came in, announcers from upstairs and everywhere, just to hear this new talent. She was an instant hit, and Cass hired Dolly on the spot."

It was shortly after this that she cut her first record. It was on the Gold Band label, a small company in Lake Charles, Louisiana. The song was called "Puppy Love," written by Dolly and her uncle. The record went nowhere.

She began high school in Sevier County in 1959, and one of her school activities was playing the snare drum in the band. But her main interest was still country music, and it touched all aspects of her life. By the time graduation rolled around in 1964, definite steps had been taken to launch her in the music business. Bill Owens, his wife and young son moved to Nashville about two weeks before school was

PHOTO: BILL PRESTON

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out and found an apartment. Dolly was to live with them until she could establish herself. She graduated on Friday night and, the next day, boarded a bus for Nashville.

"When I moved to Nashville I lived with them (the Owenses) for about five months. He was working some on the road with Carl and Pearl Butler. After a while, I got a contract with Monument Records and Combine Music. They gave me an advance and paid me so much a week, so I moved out and got my own apartment. I lived by myself until I got married. There were some hungry days back then, I tell you. I had hot dog relish and mustard in my refrigerator, but that's all I had to eat for about three weeks at one time. The only time I ever got a really good meal was when I was on a date, and I didn't date anybody in the music business that much, because I didn't want to get a reputation. Not that I would have done anything to get one, but you don't have to, really.

. . . Porter saw his chance and interrupted. "You come down here in a Rolls Royce. Quit lying...."

"I say it in a joking way, but that's really the only time I ate—if somebody would take me to his momma's for Sunday dinner, or if we would go to a show. I mean, I was taught well and was a big girl, but I didn't want somebody to say 'Yeah, so and so went out with her,' when I went somewhere to get something done. I just felt like that was the thing to do, so that's why I ate mustard and hot dog relish.

"I met my husband the same day I got to Nashville. When I left Sevierville, I had taken a bunch of dirty clothes with me, because I was in a hurry to go and didn't have all my things ready. That particular day I was at the laundromat and I got me a cola and I was walking down the sidewalk, just looking around, you know, because I'd never been to the city. I was fascinated. I'd been to Knoxville, but I'd never lived in a city."

Porter saw his chance and interrupted. "You come down here in a Rolls Royce. Quit lying." When the laughter settled, Dolly continued.

"Being from the country, I was real friendly, because everybody in

Dolly Parton's Songs Have Real Soul

It's no secret that beautiful, talented women put us West Texas boys on the defensive. Even when we praise their achievements, we tend to come down awfully hard on the talent part and real light on the intelligence and commitment—on the principle that, if you *must* admit a woman is just flat better than you are, it's some comfort to attribute it to an act of God. That's the tradition, anyway. But when I started writing about Dolly Parton's songs, I soon discovered I was going to have to abandon that particular part of my heritage. When you begin to realize just how much Miss Parton has done, and how well she has done it, it doesn't take long to decide she has the right to take a two-by-four to the next cowboy who pats her on the head and says, "My, my, Puddin', you sure write good. It's a *real* gift!"

By any standards the range of subject, language and musical form in Dolly Parton's songs is incredible. Within the canon of country music she has tried literally everything and has usually succeeded gracefully enough to hide the difficulty of what she has attempted. When the resources of country music seemed too narrow she has borrowed from other sources. Taking, for instance, a country lyric, a modal Appalachian melody, and a rock bass line with a syncopated bridge, and combining them into songs like "Early Morning Breeze" and "Greatest Days Of All."

Of course, country music is like good grammar. You know it when you hear it, and you know what it's *not*—but it's hard to say just what it *is*. When you start talking about Dolly Parton's songs, however, they are at once so various and so rooted in the country idiom, that you can't help making distinctions between country songs and the other kinds you hear. Country music shares qualities with folk, rock, pop, jazz and musical comedy, and like any good songwriter, Miss Parton takes what she wants where she finds it. So the things her songs have in common with other types of songs make it easier to see how they are special.

Musically, for instance, country songs have the same tight musical format of *statement, restatement, release* and *return,* and the same limited set of harmonic options that pop songs do, but lyrically pop songs present the world as it *ought* to be, as it exists in the dreams of various record executives and adolescents. Country lyrics, on the other hand, are about the world as it is; they are made by adults and for adults—not rich and famous ones, just grown-up people making it from day to day. Even when country songs do their special kind of dreaming about life "In The Good Old Days," there is always, stated or implied, that realistic parenthesis in the title—"(When Times Were Bad)":

No amount of money could buy from me,
The memories that I have of then.
No amount of money could pay me to
Go back and live through it again.

Although jazz and musical comedy songs use much more complicated musical forms and harmonic structures, sophisticated country lyrics by artists like Miss Parton, Roger Miller or Willie Nelson are easily as complex and as subtle as their jazz and musical comedy counterparts. Jazz and musical comedy lyrics, however, are made from literary, written English while country lyrics are made from the language as it is spoken. So, what a country lyricist gives up in vocabulary, he gains by being more sensitive to the interplay between the sound and meaning of the language. Miss Parton, for instance, within eight lines of text plays off six shades of meaning from the verb "will," in the song "Will He Be Waiting For Me."

It is this sensitivity to the spoken language which allows Miss Parton to do what she does best: to capture the complexities of life as it is lived in the ambiguities of language as it is spoken. People who say that country songs are made of cliches don't realize that cliches are dead language which a writer like Dolly Parton takes, slaps on the bottom and brings back to life. In "I'm Doing This For Your Sake," Miss Parton tells the story of an unwed mother placing her child in an orphanage, and into four lines of lyric, she fits three cliches and breathes new life into each of them:

In this home so far away from home,
I leave my heart today,
'Cause home is where the heart is,
And with you my heart will stay,
Because I love you so much,
Why, I can't make you pay,

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So I'm doing this for your sake
I'm giving you away.

If you are going to write about life as it is, in the language as it is spoken, you are going to come up with some fairly unsavory examples of both. Miss Parton's ability to deal with this kind of material goes back to the basic distinction between pop songs and country songs, simply: pop songs are aggressive; they are made to be sung *to* an audience, while country songs are made to be sung *for* an audience. The difference is real, even though it is often one of tone. I can remember hearing a fairly good pop singer singing Dolly Parton's "Just The Way I Am," and she sang it all right, hit all the notes, etc., but she used the song to dramatize herself, and she sang it *to* the men in the audience:

Even though you may not understand me,
I hope that you'll accept me as I am,
There are many sides of me,
My mind and spirit must be free.
I might smile when you think I should frown,
I don't know why, it's just the way I am.

When Miss Parton sings the song the difference is enormous. However much the song may express the way she feels, ultimately she is singing it *for* the other women in the audience. You get the impression that she has made the song out of her feelings, but that she has made it *because* she thinks other women might feel the same way.

If pop music is about that distance between the stars above and the audience below, then country music, at least for me, is about the community they share. And it is this sense of community, I believe, which allows Miss Parton to write sympathetically about subject matter which is considered taboo in the world of pop music. Just off the top of my head I can think of songs she has written about suicide, adultery, madness, drugs, betrayal, illegitimacy, incestuous desire, and worst of all (in the pop music land of plenty) poverty. Down on the page those words look pretty wicked—more like the synopsis of a Faulkner novel than part of the repertoire of a young lady who sings. But if you are going to look straight at the world, you are going to see those things; and if through your talent and skill you can make them into music, you might give someone a song who only had words before.

Dave Hickey, a Texan currently in exile in New York, is Executive Editor of Art In America *magazine.*

© 1969 "Just The Way I Am" Owepar Publishing Co.

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the country knows everybody else. Everybody's your neighbor. Well, I just went out walking and I saw this boy go down the street in a white Chevrolet, a '65 Chevrolet. No, it was a '63; we had a '65 later. I spoke to him and he spoke back. I wasn't doing it to flirt, although I might have been in a way. He was real friendly too, and he turned around and stopped, and we got to talking and he asked me out.

"I told him I couldn't go out with him because I didn't know him. I was babysitting for my little cousin, and I told him he was welcome to come by the house the next evening, if he wanted to. Actually, it was afternoon; any time after 12 is evening to me.

"He came over about 2 or 3 o'clock the next day, and we sat on the steps. Actually, it was the fire escape. The next day he came back, and the next day he came back, until I got to know him pretty well. When my aunt, who was working at Shoney's, got her first day off, we had our first date. We talked for about five days before I went out with him."

Uncle Sam was soon to declare an intermission in the courtship, but almost exactly two years later, Dolly Parton married the driver of that white Chevrolet. His name is Carl Dean. He is now 30 years old and a partner in his father's asphalt paving business.

Those two years while Carl was in the military were probably the roughest and most decisive of Dolly's career. Not only did she go hungry often, but her music was equally unfulfilling. The first records she made after coming to Nashville were based on rock music, which is about as foreign to the Smokies as a lobster dinner.

"Monument Records was doing what it thought was best at the time. My voice was so strange, and still is. They didn't think I could possibly sell any country because they thought I sound like a little girl. They didn't think I could sell any hard message song or sad story, because nobody would believe it. But I always wanted to do it, so I told them after a while that I was either going to do what I felt that I could do in my heart, or I was going

PHOTO: YVONNE HANNEMANN

Although she credits her relatives with the success of her publishing company, she too has done a great deal to boost her business.

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". . . I would love to have a song that would go pop, but I would want it to be country oriented...."

to have to leave. I got to do country. I would love to have a song that would go pop, but I would want it to be country oriented. I wouldn't want to aim it right at the pop field. I think I've got some songs that could go pop. You never can tell nowadays."

Dolly proved her point about the acceptability of her singing country songs. Monument gave her the go-ahead to record more country records. She came up with a hit song called "Dumb Blonde," selected for her by Fred Foster. She followed it with one of her own songs, "Something Fishy."

Then one afternoon, at home in her apartment, Dolly received an unexpected phone call from Porter Wagoner.

"I had never seen Porter Wagoner in person. We were big fans of his back home and watched his show on television. I never had met any real big stars; I had met a lot of people, but no stars. He called me one day and told me who he was, and I just couldn't believe it."

She thought Porter wanted to see her about one of her songs and took her guitar along for the appointment. She had a lot of songs out around town at the time and was trying to get someone to record them. Porter and Norma Jean, the girl he had on his show, had several. She had heard that Norma Jean liked one of the songs especially well. But Porter wanted to tell Dolly that Norma Jean was getting married and moving to Oklahoma. He was considering replacing her with Dolly Parton.

PHOTO: YVONNE HANNEMANN

Fancy clothes, hairdos, makeup and jewelry. "It's just part of my personality," she says.

Porter has told the story of that first meeting many times.

"Dolly came to my office, but she didn't really know what we were going to talk about. She brought her guitar. And she sang a song for me, a song about everything being beautiful. She had written it. And this song told me so much about her. I knew if a person could sit down and write a song like that, they'd have to have a real soul inside 'em."

"If I seem to ignore you, it's because Porter doesn't like to see me talking while he's singing," Dolly said as we watched Porter during the taping, and I began to understand just how seriously Porter and Dolly regard each other's music. It's important to Porter to know that Dolly takes his artistry seriously, and while one is singing, the other reacts as if a sacrament is being performed.

In the summer of 1967 Dolly began appearing on the Porter Wagoner television and road shows. Those first few months were torture for her, because at each appearance, she felt people wanted to see someone else, namely Norma Jean. Porter sensed her anxiety and began singing with her on the bus before their shows, trying to help her relax. He liked her interpretation of songs and decided to cut a record with her. From those efforts came a success bigger than either anticipated, and from that success came a work load for Dolly that only a person with a lifetime of determination could handle.

"We don't spend as much time on the road as most people think, or as much as many other artists. But we do spend about 80 days a year traveling and we do an awful lot of work in town. We have the publishing company, and the television show. We record as a duet and as solo artists, plus we do a gospel and a hymn album a year. Most of our work is done in town. When Owepar started, it was my publishing company, and I presented Porter with half of it one Christmas. He really devotes a lot of time to it and is partly responsible for it being as big as it is.

"It was kinda slow getting started. I didn't do it all myself. Bill (Owens) helped a lot with it and my Uncle Louis came and worked for me—he's put the brains into it really. It's a combination type deal, and everybody working together is what made it successful. It's one of the bigger companies in Nashville now, so we're real proud of that."

Although she gives credit to her relatives for the success of her publishing company, she, too, has done a great deal to boost her business. She writes hundreds of songs every year, more than she or Porter could ever use, and she reportedly often stays up very late writing songs,

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and even dictates lyrics. She doesn't work closely with the writers affiliated with her publishing company, preferring to keep her distance in case she should incorporate their work in *her* own tunes and lyrics. She feels she owes it to her writers to make the best of their material.

Her business inevitably takes up a great deal of her time. She plays down her abilities in the kitchen ("I'm not much of a cook," she says), but at the same time she shows no indication of discounting her role as a wife.

"My husband and I have a real good understanding, and he knew when he met me why I came to Nashville. That's why he met me to begin with, because I'd moved to Nashville to be near the music business. Otherwise, I'd still be in Sevierville.

"He understands that music is so much a part of me and he understands I couldn't be happy without my music—as much as I love him. There would be so much of me missing, I wouldn't be myself. Even as much as I'm on the road, we make up for it when I'm home. I really think it's good, or it has been in our marriage, to be away from each other a lot, because it keeps you closer to be apart, if that makes any sense. You can enjoy more things and you don't have time to pick every little fault with each other, because you're just happy when you are together."

. . . Dolly admits she would like to have children someday. Recently, however, she has been taking care of twins—piglets in fact . . .

So far, Dolly and Carl have no children, though she said she would like to have some someday. Recently, however, she has been taking care of twins—piglets in fact.

"We fixed 'em a house with this big ole iron kettle, you know, like they used to wash clothes in outside on a fire. It had a piece busted out of it. We turned it upside down on the ground and dug down under it, and it made just a perfect little place for them to live with straw in it.

"And I've got some cattle, some calves. We're going to raise white face cattle when we get our own farm. We've just got about 10 acres now, but we're waiting until we can get out in our new house which will be in early spring. It's out in the Brentwood area, in the farm section. Out there, there's about 70 acres, and we have another farm out near Franklin. That's where we have our cattle and pigs and everything.

"When we get our house, we're going to move the animals we want around us out there. We've got half our house done; it's a Southern plantation house. In fact, we're going to call it Willow Lake Plantation. We have a lake with a lot of willow trees planted around it.

"It's a real big house—one I always dreamed about. I don't have many rooms, but the rooms I have are real big and I have a real big living room and dining room and a long kitchen. In fact I'm going to have two kitchens in one. One end will have the modern conveniences I really need and the other will have an old wooden stove that really works. In the winter time, sometimes, I'm going to use it."

It was time to begin taping the Porter Wagoner show. As she walked down the hall, I found I was quite a bit less awe struck by Dolly Parton. After all, she was just a grown-up country girl, dressed up real fancy. Like she said, it's just part of her personality.

PHOTO: YVONNE HANNEMANN

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Charley Pride: 'What We're Really Talking About Is Change'

The story of the man who sees himself *not* as a phenomenon, but as a true country artist.

By Peter McCabe

The Hollywood Roosevelt hotel strikes the same chords of nostalgia as the roar of the MGM lion. Both are legacies of a bygone era, a time when magnates of the world's former film capital used to think big—because they could afford to. Today the magnificent lobby of the Roosevelt with its worn, red leather armchairs stands as mute witness to this era, and there's a common look of sadness in the faces of the cast-offs from Central Casting, who sit for hours at the bar watching middle-aged couples on the dance floor fox-trot and tango to the uninspired rhythms of the house band.

Into this extraordinary setting walks the Charley Pride party. All the more modern hotels in Los Angeles are fully booked. Charley's party has to *make do* with the Roosevelt, while Charley spends a week here taping the Dean Martin show. Jack D. Johnson, Charley's manager, is striding out in front of the group. The flight in from Nashville has topped an exhausting day for him, and he's now anxious to register and cool his throat in the bar.

A few feet away, Charley is playing a cassette tape recorder for an RCA PR man. The music is blaring across the lobby, frustrating Johnson's attempts to sort out the room situation with the desk clerk.

"Turn it off Charley, c'm'on, don't play it here."

"You don't like it?"

"Well, play it over there," Johnson pleads.

Charley turns the volume down, grins widely, hands the recorder to the RCA man, and begins a conversation with the other desk clerk who has recognized him and has been holding pen and paper at the ready should Charley look his way. As soon as Johnson has registered, the banter between he and Charley begins again.

PHOTO: QUESADA-BURKE & BURKE

"... Charley loves to talk on the phone," says his manager. "When he's got nobody to talk to, he'll call up the operator..."

"Just think of all the rest you'll get here Charley," Johnson teases, surveying the row of old-timers at the bar. "Oh, and by the way, I've got a surprise for you. There ain't no air conditioning in this hotel."

"No what?"

"No air conditioning."

"When that sun comes up tomorrow, I'm gonna cook."

Charley picks up the phone as soon as he reaches his room, dials the Continental Hyatt House, a hotel Johnson and he have stayed at on previous occasions, and tries to win over the Continental's desk clerk.

"Hi there. This is Charley Pride over at the Hollywood Roosevelt. We've got no air conditioning here and I'm gonna cook. You have any rooms available ...? You're full, huh ... Yeah, the country music singer, that's right. You liked the album. Well, good. ..."

By this time Johnson and his assistant Tom Collins are ready to hit the bar. Johnson evidently realizes Charley is just being Charley and can be safely ignored.

"We're goin' for a few beers," he tells him. "See ya downstairs.

"Charley'll be on the phone for hours," he chuckles. "He just loves to talk on the phone. When he's got nobody to talk to, he'll call up the operator."

Charley Pride loves to socialize. He never passes up an opportunity to make conversation. It comes naturally to him, as the saying goes. His smile is ready, open and infectious, a full-blooded grin which instantly softens his strong profile. It doesn't matter who stops him in public or how busy he is. Charley just isn't the kind of entertainer who constantly feels the need to be on his guard, who protects his privacy jealously.

And yet watching him in Los Angeles, I was surprised. Country mu-

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sic has many firm friends in Southern California, but Charley could walk around virtually unrecognized. The man who recently sold out the Las Vegas Hilton for a whole week, who outsells Elvis Presley and Eddy Arnold in tape sales, who might just be the greatest country singer since Hank Williams, could come and go as he pleased.

"It's amazing really," Tom Collins confided, gesturing around the lobby of the Roosevelt. "Charley can walk through a place like this and nobody will bother him."

Part of the reason for this may be Charley Pride's manager's attitude toward publicity. Jack Johnson has not forgotten the expressions on the faces of most of country music's disc jockeys some seven years ago when he played Charley Pride's demo record for them, and then showed them a picture of the singer. He knew only too well that Charley wasn't going to need too many press releases. "I really don't go after this type of thing," he declared. "Why, sometimes I'm of the opinion that *no* publicity is *good* publicity," he added with a sly grin.

Jack D. Johnson is a major part of the Charley Pride story. He is recognized in Nashville's music circles as a character, a very likeable one, but also a very shrewd one. At first meeting his manner is gruff, but he quickly lapses into a dialogue which is as informal as the casual jacket and Tony Lama boots which he wears for all manner of business. He gives the initial impression that he is only interested in making light conversation, though after a few beers he is ready to debate the entire issue of gun control, carefully putting forward both sides of the argument, and explaining the issue in the context of basic American regard for individual freedoms. A very savvy individual, not to be taken lightly.

PHOTO: Grant Sexton

Jack Johnson, Charley's manager. A very savvy individual.

. . . Jack Johnson has not forgotten the disc jockeys' expressions seven years ago. He played them Charley's record, and then showed them a picture of the singer . . .

Johnson entered the music business after graduating in journalism from Tennessee State University. He worked for Cedarwood Publishing Company as a public relations man, which is perhaps where he acquired his easygoing attitude, a genuine affinity for people equalled only by Charley's. He likes nothing better than a good joke, as he demonstrated the following morning at breakfast.

The middle-aged waitress had quickly decided that the only way to cope with Jack Johnson was to assume a stiff matronly attitude. She was obviously highly amused by him, but wasn't quite sure how far she ought to let things go. Johnson had already taken five minutes to order his breakfast and was now ready to order for "his friend" (Charley) who was still upstairs in his room, quite possibly talking on the phone.

"When my friend here comes down," Johnson drawled, "he would like two eggs, sunny-side, a large glass of orange juice with ice, toast and jelly, a large glass of milk . . . but no coffee."

"No coffee," the waitress repeated automatically.

"No coffee," Johnson confirmed. "Why he drank coffee once and he started turning black!"

The waitress lowered her note

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"He *is* country. He *loves* country music. He *feels* it. He's *sincere.*"

"... I used to ask shoe shine boys if they knew any Negroes who liked country music. I got some pretty weird looks ..."

pad, looked at Johnson slightly uneasily, as if to imply that this last line might have been in bad taste. She shuttled off to get the breakfast. By the time she returned, Charley was seated at the table.

"Do you know what he said about you?" she began, "Oh, my Lord . . . it's Charley Pride!"

Johnson was chortling uncontrollably.

Jack Johnson relates to Charley Pride in that special way that so many successful managers have with successful artists. It is a combination of man-to-man dialogue with many elements of father and son. Johnson has managed Charley since the latter first arrived at the door of Cedarwood Publishing Company in 1964, and the story of how this association came about is well worth a little more elaboration. Johnson is candid about what he had planned way back in 1964.

"I had been looking for a Negro singer to bring into country music for some time," he says. "I thought the industry was ready for it and I guess, in retrospect, I was right. I used to ask shoe shine boys if they knew any Negroes who liked country music. I got some pretty weird looks.

"I was very fortunate running across Charley because, and I can't overemphasize this, Charley *is* special. You gotta realize that. He *is* country. He *loves* country music. He *feels* it. He's *sincere.* He understands what he's singing about, and you know as well as I know that a country audience can spot a phoney a mile away.

"Yet sometimes I wonder. I dunno, it's amazin' really. It still amazes me. I've seen big, burly redneck truck drivers . . . if you told 'em they were gonna have a black guy as a co-driver, they'd go nuts. But I've seen 'em at shows right before Charley comes on stage. There's this something in the atmosphere, this electricity in the air. You can feel it. When he walks on stage they go crazy. He could be purple, and they'd still love him. It makes me wonder about everything. Ya know, sometimes I think white people in the south don't really dislike colored people. It's just this incredible competition thing."

"How come you don't sound like you're supposed to?" Charley Pride gets hit with that question often, and he's always slightly stumped for an answer. The explanation can safely be left for musicologists to puzzle over, but it is interesting to note this one particular anecdote. A reporter I know once heard an upstate New York farmer ask Hank Williams, "Where'd you learn to sing the blues?"

"I learned everthin' about singin' from a fine old Mississippi nigra I used to foller aroun' when I was a kid," Hank replied.

A few years ago the reporter was backstage at a Charley Pride concert in New Jersey.

"Hey Charley?" someone asked. "Where did you learn to sing the 'Lovesick Blues' like that?"

"From listening to Hank Williams," Charley answered. "Where else?"

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Charley Pride grew up in Sledge, Mississippi. "I was as typical as any other Mississippi kid, but a bit of an individual," he recalls. "They used to kid me a lot, say that I was sort of an oddball. I think what they meant was that I was not just going to be a product of my environment."

The music that appealed to his ears even as a youngster was the music he heard on WSM radio. It was its earthiness that attracted him, he says, the feeling that he could relate to it, the joys and sorrows contained in the music. There was no one person who steered him toward country music; nobody in his family was particularly musical. At 14 years old he simply went out and bought his first Sears & Roebuck Silvertone guitar and sang along to the songs he heard on the radio.

". . . I wasn't goin' to deny myself the enjoyment of that music because people might ask, 'Why are you singing their songs?' . . ."

"I was blessed with five senses same as anybody else, and I heard music on the radio, broadcast from the Grand Ole Opry, that appealed to my ears," he began in answer to the inevitable question about what attracted him to country. "I wasn't goin' to deny myself the enjoyment of that music just because of my environment, because people might ask, 'Why are you singing *their* songs?' After all, I didn't make society, I was born into it.

"Music has been sliced up over the years into jazz, blues, rhythm & blues, country, rockabilly—all these terms are just connotations—to my way of thinking, it's *all* American music. A good example of this is 'When My Blue Moon Turns To Gold.' It used to be a country song. It was done straight country. But it became rock 'n' roll when another gentleman from my home state, Mr. Elvis Presley, did it. Like I say, it's all been sliced up, so now people say it's your music 'cause you're pink, or it's my music 'cause I'm purple, if there was any such thing as purple people.

"I've been told that I could sing anything. Well, I'm *not* of that opinion. Maybe I could do rock, or pop, if I worked on it. I don't know. You see country music is the music that I chose to sing and I feel that I'm a *true* country artist.

"I've also been told that I sound like 20 different country artists. Basically, I think the reason for that is because I learned country music from the old school, back in the forties. But someone once told me that when people tell you that you sound like more than any one given artist, you have your *own* style, so I would say that I'm in pretty good shape from the standpoint of being original.

"All the same, I don't feel that I'm a phenomenon. I know that if it's a Negro talking to me, he might say, 'Well you look like *us,* but you sound like *them,'* and if it's a white person he'll say, 'Well you sound like us, and you look like them,' but I'm no different from any other country artist, other than the pigmentation of my skin."

"How come you don't sound like you're supposed to?" people ask him.

PHOTO: QUESADA-BURKE & BURKE

". . . I'm no different from any other country artist, other than the pigmentation of my skin . . ."

Those were exactly the feelings of a small group of people in Helena, Montana at the club where Charley Pride first began singing. Charley had left Mississippi at seventeen, his single aim in life being to make it as a baseball player. He played for a while with the Memphis Red Sox before he went into the Army. Afterwards, he wound up in Montana working as a smelter for the Anaconda Mining Company, and playing semipro ball. Occasionally, he'd sing between innings. One baseball fan took note of his voice, and Charley began singing in a night club.

One night he went to a show where Red Sovine was playing along with the late Red Foley. Charley went on in the second half of the show, did two songs, "Heartaches By The Number" and "Lovesick Blues" and came off stage to find Sovine and Foley waiting in the wings, encouraging him to go to Nashville. That was the turning point in his life.

"People had been telling me they thought I was pretty good. 'Why didn't I try to do something for myself?' they would say. When I mentioned that this was *country* music I was singing, they didn't quite understand what I meant. They said, 'What about Nat King Cole and Sammy Davis, Jr.?' and I'd say, 'Well no, this is *country* music and I never heard of anyone being recorded in country music who had a tan this deep.' They said they didn't figure that would make any difference. Funny thing is it turned

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". . . Lot of people said, 'Well, who's he gonna sell records to?' Jack used to say, 'Same people as all the rest of the country artists' . . ."

out it didn't. Same thing happened when I first came to Nashville to audition for Jack Johnson. Lot of people said, 'Well, who's he gonna sell records to?' Jack used to say, 'Same people as all the rest of the country artists.' "

It was Red Sovine's and Red Foley's encouragement that finally persuaded Charley. These people were in the music business. They ought to know. But Charley had one other thing on his mind. That early childhood ambition, to be a major league baseball player, just would not die. He decided to go to New York, to the Mets, for just one last crack at it. It was to no avail.

"They wouldn't even look at me," he recalls, and even now there's no escaping the sadness in his voice at the memory of it. "I feel I could have done the job, too. I *still* feel I could do the job. 'Course their way of looking at it was at the age of 25, you should be starting to establish records in the majors instead of trying to get in there. But I've been going back spring training with the Brewers for the last two years, and back a while ago, I hit one into the seats in Milwaukee during batting practice.

"I really threw hard that day. They were surprised to see how hard I was throwing. I'd been away from it for awhile. I'm not a vain or a boastful person, but I am a *good* hitter. I always have been. I've got good eyes and good coordination. I can read the copy of a paper from one side of the plane to the other."

It was a disappointed Charley Pride who headed for Nashville. He'd taken a plane to New York, but by now funds were low. He made his trip to Nashville by bus. At one in the morning, he woke up Red Sovine. Red sent him over to Cedarwood Publishing the next morning where Jack Johnson was working as public relations director. Charley remembers that first meeting vividly.

Johnson was coming downstairs when he spotted Charley. He had put the word out recently that he was looking for a Negro singer, and one of the people he'd spoken to was a black "soul" singer named Obrey Wilson. "Did Obrey send you?" Johnson inquired of Charley. The answer was negative, but Johnson decided to audition him anyway.

Charley had come to Nashville intending to let anyone with any influence hear him. He was surprised and a bit annoyed after the audition when Johnson told him, "Go back to Montana. You'll hear from me in two to four weeks." He immediately called Red Sovine and told him "this feller doesn't want anyone else to hear me."

"Well, Charley, they're reputable people down there. I book out of there," Sovine told him. "All the same I wouldn't let 'em keep you hanging on for six months with promises."

Charley decided to go back to Montana. A few days later he got a manager's contract in the mail from Johnson. He called Red again.

"Red said, 'You don't need a

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manager,'—and then he said, 'Wait a minute you will need a manager, too. But you don't have to sign this contract right now; just keep it and let your lawyer look at it.' "

A month later Charley signed the contract and sent it back. He and Johnson have been going strong ever since.

"I like the voice . . . it's a nice country voice," a record executive told Jack Johnson.

"Well, what do you think about recording it?" Johnson asked.

"Dunno, who is it?"

"Charley Pride."

"Who is he?"

Johnson would produce a picture.

"Oh my goodness, you're kidding! You're kidding!! He don't sound like no. . . ."

This went on for nearly a year. Charley was fed up. He was ready to come back to Nashville again and carry out his original intention—let everyone in town with any influence hear him. "I didn't know what Jack was going through," he admits now. When Charley told Johnson what he planned to do, he got a letter back immediately, telling him that an independent session had been arranged with producer Jack Clement. In the meantime Charley was supposed to work up some new material.

"They gave me seven songs, including what was to be my first single, 'The Atlantic Coast Line.' I worked 'em up, recorded 'em on a little Webcor tape recorder, and I was to mail 'em back from Mississippi where I was staying. But I said to myself, 'I think I'll take 'em back.' I drove back to Nashville, 270 miles, met Jack and we went over to Jack Clement's office. I played 'em for him, and he took up his guitar and picked right there in person, letting me sing them. Finally, he looked up at Jack and said, 'I think he's ready.'

"He asked me if I thought I could do two sides in three hours. I said, 'I can do 'em in an hour,' 'cause I was so enthusiastic about getting in there. When we got through, I went back to Mississippi. Chet Atkins was supposed to have been at the session, but he couldn't make it. So he didn't get to hear me record, but they played him the tape afterwards."

Then the delays began again. Chet Atkins had now found himself in Johnson's unenviable situation. The record was fine, but was it possible to launch a black singer in country music? Charley kept calling Johnson from Mississippi.

"What's happening?"

"Well, Chet Atkins still has the tape."

"Well, if they don't want it, why don't we go somewhere else?" ("I wasn't really aware of the advantages of being on a big label," Charley admits now.)

Atkins finally brought the tape to a meeting of top RCA A&R men. Everybody liked the tape. Then Atkins broke the news. He told them the singer was a Negro. There was a deathly silence. Finally, someone suggested taking a chance, and they did.

On September 28, 1965, Charley got a call from Jack Johnson.

"They told me I was going to be on RCA Records. I said, 'Is that good?' They kid me a lot about that now."

". . . They told me I was going to be on RCA Records. I said, 'Is that good?' They kid me a lot about that now . . ."

That was seven years and seventeen albums ago. A lot has happened for Charley Pride since. Country music accepted him, just as easily as Charley Pride had accepted country music. Not only did it accept him, it made him number one in its ranks in terms of record sales and voted him "Entertainer Of The Year." The electricity which Jack Johnson spoke of is still quite apparent to anybody in an audience whenever and wherever Charley Pride is about to walk onstage. And 17 albums later, Charley Pride's records are every bit as good and as rich in quality and material as his first album.

Where does he go from here? As the latest in a line of country music stars—Jimmy Dean, Glen Campbell, Johnny Cash—to bring country music beyond its traditional environs to an even wider audience, the next logical step seems to be a TV show. And maybe that's what Jack Johnson has in mind, though if he has, he ain't sayin'.

PHOTO: QUESADA-BURKE & BURKE

The music that appealed to his ears was the music he heard on WSM.

Charley has a simple explanation for all his success.

"I feel music is just like buying and selling groceries, or insurance, or anything else," he says. "The better the product you've got, the better people like it and the better you can sell it. If it's got good lyrics and a good melody, I can do a much better job of selling it. But I have

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to really like a song; I have to feel that I can put my heart into it because I sing from feelings, I mean from the heart.

"Why do I do mostly love songs? Well, I believe in love for one thing. And some of the songs that I've recorded remind me not only of situations that other people have been in, but of situations that I've been in. And I just *love* ballads. I don't believe music should be used to promote politics, or religion or whatever, but that's only my own individual feelings on it. I want to make that clear. And I am a staunch individualist.

"I think that explains a lot about why I'm in country music. I said to myself, 'Why can't I sing the kind of music I love?' I believe you should be your own individual self and not be molded into what somebody thinks you should be. I love to talk and visit with people, all people, but it was a long time before I would even venture to talk because I was afraid of saying 'they does' instead of 'they do,' until I learned how to listen and observe, and even now I'm still learning. People say, 'Where did you go to school?' I say, 'Sledge Junior High'. They say, 'No, I mean college. Where did you learn to speak this well?' I'd say, 'Self-taught. Observing. Listening.' Because I make people my business.

"I'm a very curious person. I'm a Pisces. We're curious people. I believe in astrology. I've always started with the basis, 'Well, we're both Americans.' I've done that since I was old enough to learn a lyric."

". . . I believe that if you put the right hand in space, you've got to put the left hand in there, too . . ."

In Sledge, Mississippi, a little boy named Charley Pride would sometimes have a dime to spend. He would head on down to an old country store to buy some "well, we called it liver cheese and Pepsi Cola." It was one of those old, typical country stores, where the guys sat around outside in rocking chairs, chewing tobacco and just swapping yarns. One day as Charley went into the store he overheard a conversation about a guy from up North. "I don't like him, he's a Yankee," said one man in his rockin' chair.

"Something clicked in that kid's mind of mine," Charley recalls. "It would click in the mind of any little kid who was just goin' into a store to buy some liverwurst. At the time this man said that about the Yankee, Hitler was raisin' cane all through Poland and Austria. It all seemed so irrelevant to be worried about a Yankee.

"I don't think I grew up with any chip on my shoulder. I'd go to school and I'd pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, and those are beautiful words. I would look out of my broken windows and see the white school, and I knew things weren't quite what they was supposed to be, but I wouldn't feel any animosity or militancy because my mother had told me it was her belief that things were gonna get better. She was a great help, and I talked and listened a lot to her. She used to tell me, 'Don't go around with no chip on your shoulder.'

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That was a great help to me, and it all fits in with my philosophy as an individual. Now you might go and talk to my own brother, with the same mother and father, (I have seven brothers and three sisters) and you might find that all of them don't have quite the attitude that I have, in relation to me sittin' here talkin' to you."

Charley Pride refuses to speak for any minority group or any particular group. He doesn't feel he's an authority on anything, nor does he see himself as a phenomenon. He thinks of himself as a plain, average guy, who grew up in Mississippi, picked cotton, was blessed with a voice, wanted to be a baseball player but happened to make it as a singer after he didn't make it in baseball. He plays down the uniqueness of his situation in country music, preferring to talk more about the changes he sees taking place in people's attitudes in this country.

"I have three kids," he says. "My youngest is seven, and I guarantee you she knows where babies come from. I haven't told her. But you see it's a combination of TV, and everything else that's starting to loosen up people's minds. Like sex and anything else that for a long time was thought to be dirty and so forth. I mean that's a part of life, too. It needs to be explained. I think the best example to use is space. On the one hand, some people will say, 'Well, okay, I want to put my right hand in space, but I want to keep my left hand in the 17th century on other matters.' Well, I don't believe that will work. I believe that if you put the right hand in space, you've got to put the left hand in there too, and accept that what we're really talking about is *change*. If something hasn't worked for years and years, why keep holding on to it?

Charley still goes back to spring training with the Brewers.

"You see, I think a lot of the problems in this country are caused because people get frustrated. Everybody wants all those beautiful words we were talking about just before to come true. But a lot of people have different ways to get there. Some have militant ways, others form groups and others think it's gonna be done politically and educationally. I feel it has to be a blend of minds with the right attitudes, trying to avoid frustrating one another and trying to come to a sensible solution. 'Cause that's what we're really dealing with—minds and attitudes. Instead of gettin' angry and mad, let's help one another, instead of hating.

". . . You know . . . if I'd still been pickin' cotton, you wouldn't have been here interviewin' me . . ."

"I consider myself a youngster, I'm worried about pollution and I'm worried about my country, and yet I'm not worried. It's just a matter of being an optimist. Like in England, they used to have people dropping in the streets from pollution; they finally did somethin' about it. Well, that will be done here. But let's not wait 'til finally we see our fellow Americans fallin' in the street from pollution. Let's look for it now. In other words, I'm not for forgetting outer space. I'm just for cuttin' back there a point. Why if we don't start with pollution, we ain't gonna have nobody to go to space anyway. So first things first. What is the priority?

"I've been appointed to the

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self—intensely interested in people, curious to the nth degree. Even today, after seven years of success, the idea of being interviewed still seems strange to Charley.

"You know . . . like if I had still been pickin' cotton, you wouldn't have been here interviewin' me. I got the same hands, same feet, same head, same eyes. Now if I'd still been pickin' cotton, what would you say? 'Well, I wouldn't go interview no cotton picker.' But I'm no different other than that I've been exposed, just happened to have a voice and wanted to pursue something and achieve something. So now you are sittin' here interviewin' a former cotton picker. People say, 'Oh yes, you are different, though. You *are* phenomenal.' But I'm not.

". . . I'm sure that Jackie Robinson would have loved to have been just another baseball player . . . I'm in the same position . . ."

"I'd like to give you a completely clear example. I was livin' in Montana, and a kid walked up to me and said, 'my name's'—well, I won't say his name—but he gave me his name and he says, 'I'm a half-breed, the lowest thing on the face of the earth.' I said, 'What'd you say?' He said, 'I'm a half-breed, the lowest thing on the face of the earth.' He had been told this, and he had accepted this within him. I think this is where a person should use his brains, to the point of not gettin' angry at the persons that were persecuting him that way, callin' him these names, but to try to stand up and think about it for a minute and say, 'Why are they callin' me this? Are they jealous? What reason? I mean, what have I done?'

"You know, Negroes, a lot of 'em love country music, but all of what we've talked about previously still relates to this business of your music and my music, because of what I said earlier. In other words, the best way I can explain it is this way. I'm sure that Jackie Robinson would have loved to have been just another baseball player. But society put him in a position of being the first known Negro in the major leagues. I come along years later. I'm in the same position and it's slowly breaking down."

PHOTO: QUESADA-BURKE & BURKE

"Why do I do mostly love songs? Well, I believe in love, for one thing."

American Revolution Bi-Centennial Commission by the President. I explained to him earlier that I would try and make as many meetings as I can—it's the Commission on celebrating the 200 years of America. Now I'm not a politician—I don't care to be. I don't endorse anybody. I don't reject or condemn or condone. I just try to contribute the best I can as one little mortal on this planet and one little mortal within America and our society."

Charley got up and searched around for his cigarettes. He stared out of the Hotel Roosevelt window at the Los Angeles smog which had started to spread out of the city up toward the canyons. "Horrible, ain't it?" he grumbled. Charley by now had gotten well into his stride. Dean Martin would have to wait. A few knocks on the hotel door had already been ignored. Charley had started to interview me, not just the sort of elementary questions one sometimes gets from an entertainer who's been through *so many* interviews, because Charley doesn't give many interviews. He is everything that Johnson said about him, and that he said about him-

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Good mornin', mornin',
Good mornin', sunshine . . .

Oh, my yes! Donna Fargo. "The Happiest Girl In The Whole U.S.A." Grammy winner first time out. Only in the business less than a year, can you imagine? Every day has become the skippety-doo-dah day of her songs. She's a S-T-A-R. Her first album has been on the country charts for 45 weeks and her second is climbing the charts at olympic speed. The executives at Dot Records are swelling with pride over their acumen in signing up the singing schoolmarm.

Yet, when *Country Music* suggested I write about Donna, I almost refused. First of all she was on a Canadian tour. I'd have trouble finding an airline to take me to Oshawa, Ontario; or Brantford; or Owen Springs. Secondly, I am an acknowledged advocate of *traditional* country singing. I would hire a dog sled to listen to Dolly Parton, whose voice is filled with rural nuance, or to hear the strong Appalachian sound of the Wilburn Brothers. I relax by playing Wilma Lee and Stoney Cooper records. Tammy Wynette is too citified for my taste.

"You will love Donna Fargo," editor Peter McCabe insisted. "I saw her in Nashville. She was wonderful." He handed me an envelope of money and a bright red ticket marked *Air Canada*, and several planes and a rented car later, I found myself listening to a country station, speeding toward Lake Huron to the Trail Winds Motel in Hyde Park, Ontario where I had to ask for Harry Joyce.

Harry Joyce is the proprietor. He was also the promoter of the Donna Fargo/Hank Williams, Jr. tour of mid-eastern Canada.

I drove up to the motel's front office, only to be greeted by the cold noses of a couple of old dogs. I thought: "Tom T. Hall probably invented this place. Next thing you know, I'll be offered some watermelon wine."

No such luck. It was coffee, hot and welcome, and poured by Mrs. Harry Joyce who showed me to a large room. "Harry's not in yet, and Donna and Stan should be here any minute. It's a four-hour drive from where they performed last night—Kingston, Ontario—and they said they were leavin' about noon."

Donna Fargo: A Singing Schoolmarm In A Class By Herself

How thousands of Canadians discovered why Grammy award winner Donna Fargo is the Happiest Girl in the Whole U.S.A.

by Melvin Shestack

An hour later in walked Donna Fargo, petite and a little tired, carrying some clothes over her arm. She was wearing a brown jacket, brown pants and tinted glasses.

"I'm glad you came," she said, a smile in her voice. "I have to freshen up a little, get unpacked. And then I'll be glad to talk to you. I'm really glad you came." She smiled again, not forced—but naturally, turned and said, "See you soon." She walked down the hall toward her room.

A few minutes later Stan Silver came in carrying some bags. I introduced myself. Stan and I have one thing in common. We both have ample beards. I complimented his. He complimented mine. "Donna's got to rest a little. Why don't you drive to the concert with us? That'll give you plenty of time to talk to Donna." Stan Silver smiled, too. "I'm glad you came," he said. "We like your magazine."

Stan Silver, for the uninitiated, is Donna Fargo's manager. He is also her advisor, professional worrier, arrangement maker, friend and partner. He is constantly at her side. He even shares the same bedroom with Donna. Don't be shocked. Donna Fargo is Mrs. Stanley Silver.

I'd been warned on a couple of occasions that Mr. Stanley Silver was a "hard case" who didn't take too kindly to nosey types like myself, and guarded Donna with the perseverance and ferocity of a Doberman pinscher. However, the psychic defenses I'd armored myself with melted with Donna's smile.

I had a second cup of coffee with Harry Joyce. "We love country music in Canada," Harry told me, "but the audiences are tough. They don't come out for everybody and I don't know why." He mentioned the name of a country superstar who bombed locally a few weeks ago. "But Donna is different. I think it would be pretty

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"... People have to tell me I'm a celebrity," Donna said. "I'm really still amazed when people stop me on the street..."

hard not to like Donna Fargo's singing.

"I plan to book Donna all over Canada this summer," Harry said. "She should be a sell-out, especially on a bill with Hank, Jr. Everybody loves Hank Williams, Jr., you know. And Jan Howard is on this bill, too. She's great. Really great. I love country music and I like to bring it to Canadians and I always try to book local talent, too. There's always Canadians on my bills."

"Like Anne Murray?"

Harry Joyce laughed. "She's so booked up in the States, I can't even get a date in 1975."

Stan Silver walked into the parlor and asked Harry how long it would take to get to Treasure Island Gardens. A few minutes later, I piled into the front of Stan's rented car. "We'll have a bus, soon, which I'll tell you about. But right now, we fly and rent cars. It's a drag." Stan drove, Donna sat in the middle, and I took the window seat. Donna had a map giving directions to the auditorium, drawn up by Harry Joyce. "Donna has a great sense of direction," Stan said, admiringly. "She'll direct us there."

Donna laughed. "We're always looking at directions to some place. We've been on the road so much, I'm used to it. We live in Nashville, but we're almost never there."

"We have a house there, though," Stan interrupted. "We found it almost two-thirds built and we're finishing it. But we're on the road all the time. It's hard. We've been going since last June."

Donna continued: "I stopped teaching last June. They let me quit three days early, so I could tour with Roy Clark. It was really exciting."

I asked Donna about her teaching. "I'd always been interested in singing," she told me, "but I was trained as a teacher and I got a job teaching. A friend of mine introduced me to Stan, who has been in the music business for a long time. I sang for him and he said, 'You're a country singer.' Did you know, Stan taught me to play the guitar? I told him I wanted to write songs and he said, 'then write songs,' and I started writing."

Stan interrupted: "Donna was head of the English department in her school and she helped accredit the school for the state. She was a fine teacher. They weren't happy when she left. They wanted her to teach teachers, too. That's how good she was." Donna squeezed Stan's hand and blushed. "I'm really shy," she confessed.

"Donna never told anybody about wanting to be a singer," Stan said. "But she's really a worker."

"I guess you'd say I'm a very determined person. I learn by doing. When I wrote my first song

PHOTOS: EMERSON-LOEW

"Donna never told anybody about wanting to be a singer," Stan Silver said. "But she's really a worker."

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about five years ago, I put down what I heard in my head. It didn't work exactly, but I wrote it over and over and it finally came out nearly like I wanted it." Stan explained how Donna's first record, for a company called Ramco, got a lot of Southern California airplay, but it was a small company and didn't have wide distribution. "Are we on the right road?" Stan asked, as we came into London, Ontario.

"We're going right, honey," Donna insisted.

She pointed straight ahead and we saw a poster announcing the Donna Fargo show. "There it is, Stan, The Treasure Island Gardens."

"It's an ice arena," I said.

"Most of our shows in Canada are in ice arenas," Stan said. "I hope they have a dressing room instead of a locker room."

It was a locker room. There was at least a two-hour wait until Donna went on. "I don't wear fancy costumes, usually," Donna explained. "Mostly one-color pants outfits. They're simple and dignified. But I do wear dresses occasionally. It depends on my mood. I jump all

Donna's band, The Pony Express: Silver says they're one of the best groups in country music, good enough to record on their own.

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over the stage, you know. I have to move around. I can't just sit there and sing. And it's hard to do that in a dress. Besides, women seem to accept another woman in pants instead of dresses."

The chairs in the locker room were a shade less than comfortable.

"We talk about that all the time," Donna answered. "Sometimes we want a family and sometimes we don't. I wonder how it will turn out. But right now we're busy working and for the present that's what's on our minds. Getting better and better at what we're doing."

"... Then you really are the happiest girl in the U.S.A.?" I asked Donna. "In the world, I think. That's how I happened to write the song ..."

Hockey players, after all, have bottoms a bit more calloused than most country singers. Stan went out for some soft drinks. He gave Donna a quick kiss on the head before he left.

"We're a real team. We work really well together," Donna said, proudly. She stopped for a moment. "You know, we're together all the time—and I mean all the time. In most families, the husband and wife work at different jobs. But lately our life has been so busy that we haven't had time to think about anything. Even about finishing our house, or building one next door for the band to rehearse in. We're always on the go."

"Do you ever think of quitting to raise a family?"

I asked her how it felt to be a celebrity.

"People have to *tell* me I'm a celebrity. I'm really still amazed when people stop me on the street, or ask me to autograph their napkins in restaurants."

I brought up the subject of acting.

"I haven't thought about it. Not at all. But I think about writing a lot. I love the challenge of writing. I have eight of my own songs on the first album and eight, I think, on the second. I just want to grow as an individual and as an artist.

"What bothers me most about this life," Donna admitted, "is that it's hard to wind down. We don't eat well on the road. It's trash eating. We grab hot dogs and sandwiches at awful places. Stan is almost a vegetarian, but he has to eat meat on the road. The peas and carrots we order in restaurants are all canned and tasteless. Stan is very conscientious about his health. We've gone three years now without smoking and drinking."

"For religious reasons?"

"Not exactly, but people tell me they find religious overtones in my songs. I went to a Methodist college. High Point, in North Carolina. Did you know that I was scared to death to be baptized? Thought I would drown. I'm still a little guilty about having fun. And my life *is* fun. Especially since I met Stan."

"Then you really are the happiest girl in the U.S.A.?" I asked, almost joshingly—but she answered in a serious vein: "In the world, I think. That's how I happened to write the song. I wanted to make a statement about happiness. The idea sat up there, kind of ready to explode for about two months. Then, one Saturday night, in front of the fireplace, I didn't have any specific intention of any particular words but they just came out of me —'good mornin', mornin'—good mornin', sunshine. And the second verse just happened. Maybe it's because I'm a Scorpio. Things just happen to me. Things happen to Scorpios. What sign are you?"

"I'm a Leo."

"Oh, I thought you might be a Virgo, like Stan."

"If I was born three days later, I'd have been a Virgo."

"If Stan was born three days earlier, he would have been a Leo."

Donna told me that the day after she graduated from college, she went to California. "My brother lived there, too, and I managed to get a job as a teacher. Stan was right. I tried hard to be a good teacher. I'm all business in class. My students didn't know until my record was number one on the charts that Mrs. Silver was Donna Fargo. They were so wonderful and so excited. I thought they'd turn their noses up at me because they were mostly into rock and roll, but they were wonderful."

Donna fidgeted and looked at the clock. "I wish I had some tea," she said. "I carry my own tea bags wherever I go. Coffee makes me nervous. I'm a water sign."

Jan Howard came in. "I'll change back there," she said. "Keep on

PHOTO: EMERSON-LOEW

"My students didn't know until my record was number one that Mrs. Silver was Donna Fargo."

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talking." She went into another room and came out a few minutes later in a stunning two-piece long white dress, accented with one piece of gold jewelry. Jan Howard is a tall, beautiful woman with striking red hair and an aura of aristocratic intelligence. I was struck by the sadness of her eyes, obviously reflecting the much-publicized family tragedies which have plagued her during the last few years.

Jan Howard has left the Bill Anderson show to strike out as a solo act, and according to all reports, is doing quite well. When she sat down with us, we were talking about Donna's trip to Europe. "I just got back from Tasmania," Jan Howard said. "I was with John and June Cash. I was just along for the ride. I wasn't an official member of the cast, but they made me sing a couple of times."

" . . . Did you know that when Tom T. Hall won the award for best songwriter, he put an ad in the paper which read, 'I voted for Donna Fargo' . . . "

"Do they know who Johnny Cash is in Tasmania?" Donna asked.

"Do they? Well, we went to what they call the outback to film some footage for a TV special on the aboriginal natives. Those aborigines knew who Johnny was and they sang along with him and knew the words to his songs. I'll never forget that as long as I live." Jan stood up: "Well, it's time for me," she said. "See you soon."

"Jan is a wonderful woman," Donna said. "I have really liked meeting all the great country stars. They all turn out to be fine people, too. Did you know that when Tom T. Hall won the award for the best songwriter, he put an ad in the paper which read, 'I voted for Donna Fargo.' We framed the ad. That's what I mean about fine people. I've been fortunate to have done shows with great people. There's a real camaraderie among country stars. Did I tell you I did a series of shows with Merle Haggard? And I was on the Grand Ole Opry. Talk about excitement."

PHOTO: MARSHALL FALLWELL

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PHOTO: EMERSON-LOEW

"I jump all over the stage, you know. I have to move around. I can't just sit there and sing."

Harry Joyce, all dressed up in a white shirt and snazzy jacket stuck his head in the door. "Better get ready, Donna," he said. I left to find the band—Donna's new band, "The Pony Express."

I stormed into the band's locker room, announcing who I was. "Well, we ain't the Pony Express, yet," one of them chuckled. "Our yoo-nee-forms ain't back from the tailor yet, so we wear these blue shirts so you'll know we all belong to the same team." They all seemed young. In their early twenties.

As we talked and joked I put these statistics in my notebook.

O'Dell Martin: Leader. From Todd County, Kentucky. Lead guitar. Played with both Kitty Wells and Faron Young. Considered one of the best pickers in Nashville.

Les Sneed: Electric guitar. Sings. From Amigo, West Virginia. Formerly with Barbara Mandrell. Has played with Dave Dudley and Stonewall Jackson.

Don Clark: Bass. Sings. From Binghamton, New York. Played with Sneed, previously with Mandrell unit.

Don Marrs: Drummer. From Portland, Oregon. First job with a star.

Glen Andrews: Steel player. From Dublin, Alabama. Has played for Roy Drusky, Peggy Sue and Little Jimmy Dickens.

David Byrd: Piano. From Oneida, Texas. Has played with Johnny Cash and Jeannie C. Riley. His wife is Mary Lou Turner of the Bill Anderson show.

(Stan Silver later claimed that the "Pony Express" was one of the best groups in country music, even though they hadn't played together long. "They're good enough to record on their own," he said.)

It was time for Donna's performance. I wanted to see it from the audience instead of from the side of the stage, and as I walked to an arena gate, Hank Williams, Jr., (whom I recently interviewed) spotted me and yelled: "What the hell you doin' here?"

"Tell you later," I shouted. And I entered the gate.

The ice portion of the arena was filled to capacity. The arena was about 90 per cent packed as well. At each gate, a number of people stood, so they could get a better view. I looked around at the group at my gate. There was the Barnes Security Guard with folds of skin over the starched blue collar of his uniform; there was a hippie-ish kid in yellow bell bottoms and a red-and-white hockey jacket which advertised a team called the "Snorks"; next to me stood a real live Canadian mountie, in his brown and yellow uniform with dark jodphur pants and thick mountie boots with spurs attached. A holstered Webley-Vickers .357 Magnum was attached to his Sam Browne belt. Instead of the Smokey Bear hat most movie mounties wear, Constable Heinekie (that was his name) wore a stiff garrison cap. "Are you from the West?" he asked me, looking at my Tony Lama boots.

"I'm in the country music business," I said.

"I'm from the country myself," he said. "Thunder Bay. And I'm a Donna Fargo fan. I hope she's the happiest girl in Canada." Behind the mountie stood two young men, both with yellow inverted corporal stripes on their blue uniforms. London, Ontario is the home of the Royal Canadian Regiment (Fusi-

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liers). The audience had more than a sprinkling of the blue uniforms. There were a few men in kilts, too. And behind me, nervous and happy all at once, was Harry Joyce.

The house lights dimmed and the Pony Express—all six of them, pounced on the stage. After an instrumental warm-up, Les and Don sang two numbers. They sang well, and the audience clapped in appreciation. As the group did another number, I heard a high-pitched voice behind me—at waist level. I turned to see a midget family trying to find an opening among us. "We have seats," they said, anxiously, "let us through." The little man waved his camera at me. "I drove all the way from Guelph to see Donna Fargo." We opened a path and the little couple went up to their section in the grandstand.

Merle Kilgore appeared on stage, a tall man with a deep, resonant voice: "The Pony Express, ladies and gentlemen. Ain't they great? Just great. And now, ladies and gentlemen, it's star time." He stretched out his arm. "Miss Superstar, ladies and gentlemen. Donna Fargo!" Out Donna came, almost doing a somersault. She was in pink and made a fine contrast to her dark blue band members. Her shoes were silver and they glistened. She sang "A Little Somethin' (To Hang On To)" and then "Funny Face," all the while dancing across the stage—a strange combination of primness and letting it all go at the same time, and the audience loved every minute. They fairly sizzled in their seats.

. . . The audience moved as Donna moved, stopped as Donna stopped. "Everybody join in," she shouted . . ."

The audience moved as Donna moved, stopped as Donna stopped. "Everybody join in," she shouted, as she began "Joy To The World." And then she sang a gospel tune. She clapped her hands, and trotted across the stage, beckoning all the time for the audience to join in. She danced as she sang. I noticed the feet around me. The two fusilier corporals were dancing. The Barnes guard was dancing. The Snork hippie was dancing. Even the midgets were dancing, their stubby little hands waving in the air to the music.

Tap. Tap. Tap.

I can't believe it.

It's my own feet.

Impossible, I think. I stand still all the time. I *never* dance. All the Chubby Checkers and all the Arthur Murray Studios have never been able to get my fabled concrete feet to move. But there I was. Jumping as Donna jumped. Slapping as Donna slapped. And when she opened up with Tom Hall's "Me and Jesus," I dropped my notebook and started clapping. Me and everybody in the arena. The constable, the fusiliers, the guard, the midgets. All of us. And I knew that Me and Donna had our own thing going.

Peter McCabe was right.

All those millions who bought her albums were right.

Stan Silver was right.

Dot Records was right.

I was sold. Out of sight! I hadn't felt as light and good in years. And after *only* a year in the business. At that moment, I wondered why it took her *that* long.

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An Interview With Johnny Cash

by Peter McCabe and Jack Killion

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When did you first get the idea to make the film "Gospel Road?"

It began about six years ago with a dream June had. We were in Israel for the first time and she said, 'I dreamed I saw you on a mountain with a book in your hand talking about Jesus.' At that time I didn't want to hear anything like that. It sounded too much like preaching.

We went on up into Galilee and we saw this mountain up at the north end of the Sea of Galilee. We didn't know what mountain it was, but we found out later it was Mount Arabel. And all around this area is the land that Jesus lived and walked—Magdala where Mary Magdalene lived, the place of the Sermon on the Mount, the mountain where He fed the multitude. June said that was the mountain she dreamed about. So we came back two years later and I brought a recorder, and the result of that trip was the *Johnny Cash And The Holy Land* album. We decided then that some day we'd come back and do a film.

You see, for somebody like me, who grew up singing Jesus songs all his life and who was raised up in a Baptist Church, going to Israel is like going home. You see the things you've been singing about all your life. You sing about the old oak tree at home all your life and you go home and there it is. You want to hug it.

Was that your only motivation?

Another thing happened about three years ago; I met Billy Graham for the first time. He called and said he wanted to come to Nashville to see me. I never had met him. He came down, we had a big meal and we sat around and talked a long time. I kept waiting for him to say what he came to see me about. Finally I asked him. He said he just wanted to meet me and talk to me about music, but another thing he wanted was to talk to me about gospel songs, Christian songs and songs about Jesus. This was just before the big Jesus song thing came along. He said the kids were not going to church, that they were losing interest in religion, and he said he thought that the music had a lot to do with it, because there was nothing in the church house that they heard that they liked. The latest thing that the kids can hear in church is "Bringing In The Sheaves" and "How Great Thou Art," and those are not the kind of things going on in religion that makes the kids say, 'Hey, I like that. Let's go hear some more.' There's nothing that they can relate to.

So he talked to me about myself and other song writers like Kris (Kristofferson), who think along that line, and he kinda challenged me to challenge others, to try to use what talent we have to write something inspiring, that would inspire people to sit up and take notice of religion and Jesus.

Well, first thing that happened, the night after he left, I wrote "What Is Truth." Just him coming to the house inspired me to write that, if you want to call it inspiration. But June and I also got to talking about the thing we'd talked about doing in Israel. We'd thought about making a kind of travelog, walking the steps that Jesus walked and telling His story, and then we talked about taking some contemporary, country-style Jesus songs, having songwriters write them and telling His story with them. As it turned out, that was a rough concept of what the film was actually going to be. We didn't know it at the time. When we went to Israel we had two songs that we thought would probably be in the film. We had gone through all the church hymns, discarded them, not because they weren't any good, but because they didn't say anything to people today. We had "Jesus Was A Carpenter" and another Christopher Wren song called "Gospel Road."

We hired an Israeli film crew to supplement our crew that we took over there, and we decided since we'd gone to all the expense to take a bunch of people to Israel that we were gonna shoot the moon, and we were gonna make as good a film and spend whatever it took for the month that we had to spend over there. And that's what we did. We hired extras. We didn't try to make a little big movie. We didn't try to make a Cecil B. DeMille film. We used as few extras as we could, and at the times when there should have been a multitude of people, we didn't use anybody. We used sound effects, to try to make it seem like there was a multitude of people. Well, when we came back and started editing the film and putting it together, we saw the need of a song to help tell the story here and there. So a boy named Larry Gatlin came along, who wrote a song called "Help Me." Kris has recorded it now—Kris and Rita Coolidge. And it fit so well in the scene about Nicodemus that we used Kris' recording of it in that scene. We had Gatlin write two more songs, I wrote two or three for the film, and we got Joe South's "Children" for the sequence where Jesus is playing with the little children on the beach. We spent a year picking songs and fittin' them in the film, and that's what we've got now, a musical drama with a bunch of good, new songs that I think people will enjoy hearing if they can stand my voice. One prerequisite for seeing this film is you've got to be able to stand Johnny Cash for 90 minutes. If you can't, then you don't need to go. But if you can stand me for 90 minutes, then you're gonna enjoy it because it's an excellent film as movies go. If it wasn't, 20th Century Fox wouldn't be spending a half a million dollars to promote it and make prints like they are.

PHOTO: ALAN WHITMAN

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Let me ask you about the financial side of it. Tucked away in a Newsweek *report was a suggestion that you consciously went out and raised a lot of money to make this film.*

No, I didn't go out and raise it. I had it. I guess it cost half to three quarters of a million dollars, somewhere in that area. I don't know what the cost is gonna be when they tally it up. But it was the first time anybody was ever stupid enough, if you want to call it that, to put up all their own money to make a movie. But that's what we did, and we did it for a very good reason. If we hadn't put up our own money, we couldn't have done it exactly the way we felt like we wanted to do it. We would have had to do it the way the financier wanted it done. And we could have taken somebody's money. We could've had it financed. We could've had our bank put up the entire amount, because we have a good reputation with our bank, and we had no doubt that we could've got the money. But we wouldn't have had the say and it wouldn't have been our personal film. And this is. This film has our personal feelings in it, and it's got our believability because we believe in what we're saying and what we're doing.

I think I understand the effect that you hope this film will have on other people— but what effects has the actual making of the movie had on you, your circle of friends and your family?

Well, it's had a great effect on a lot of people that have been associated with it, like the little crew that Robert Elfstrom (director) brought over. He referred to them as a bunch of blackguards, as a bunch of profane outlaws. The first day on the set, when they realized we were serious about the subject that we were making the film about, all the profanities stopped, and I think most of the drugs stopped—I'm not sure about that—and if there was any wenching going on, it was on the sly.

I had about a 30-minute meeting with this crew the evening that we got to Tiberius, Israel. We sat around on the floor, and I told them that whatever they'd done before, it didn't make any difference to me. Some of them had some pretty tough reputations; they'd been in the riots in Mississippi; some of these people that worked on this film had been in South American revolutions. I said, 'We're beginning a film about a man that is my Lord, and you're working for me, and that's all I want you to remember, that we're making a film about my Lord. There's not gonna be any preaching; there's not gonna be any orders given; there's not gonna be any rules laid down.' And I said after the first day of filming, 'I think you're all gonna get into the spirit of the thing and believe in what we're doing.' And the second day of filming, everybody was up at 3:30 a.m. cleaning equipment. We drove 20 miles and were on location when the sun came up ready to start shooting. It was that way every morning. This was the most devoted bunch of people that anybody could ever hope to have.

PHOTOS: ALAN WHITMAN

"This film has our personal feelings in it. We believe in what we're saying and what we're doing."

Will you make other movies after this one?

This is probably the first and the last film I'll ever want to produce because I don't want to be a film producer, if you want to call it producer, 'cause that's what I was on this. This is my life's proudest work that I wanted to produce, to lay down a story and put it on the screen, have people go and sit and enjoy it, and when they walk out of the theater, feel good about it. Not walk out of the theater saying,

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'Oh me, I'm a sinner. I've got to run and do something quick, to get right.' It's the kind of thing that will make you think about your religion, but it's a beautiful film.

When Jack Hurst spoke to you last Fall for a story in COUNTRY MUSIC, *he asked you when religion became important in your life. You said you didn't know, but you felt it had something to do with when John Carter came along and you and June "realized that you weren't children any more." Could you talk a little more about that now?*

Well, for seven years I tried about every dirty rotten thing there is. I took all the drugs there are to take, and I drank, and then when I married June, I decided all that was no good, that I'd run through every evil, dirty thing there is, and I didn't like it. I wanted to live, I saw a chance to find a little peace within myself. Everybody had written me off. Everybody said that Johnny Cash was through, 'cause I was walkin' around town, 150 pounds. I looked like walking death and they were turning and laughing at me. I saw it myself, many times, people saying, 'Oh man, he's gone.'

Well, it didn't take too much of that for me to say, I'll show you, that ain't all of me. I had June to hold onto, and my religion helped. My religion now is no different than it was when I was a kid, it's just that after a few years of adult life, I went down the wayward path.

Do you feel any sense of accomplishment from those years? I'm thinking particularly about the songs that you wrote.

Yes, there's a lot of things I wrote that I'm proud of through those years. And I feel that everytime I went on stage, I tried to do a good job. There were some shows I missed, and some bad shows I probably did, but I'm not ashamed of it. Right now I'm not ashamed of a thing I did because when God forgave me, then I forgave myself, see. That's one thing that people like me have to learn to do, that after you've straightened up and stopped all that, and you know that God forgave you, then the big sin would be not to forgive yourself. So I'm not ashamed of all that rot that I did. I don't like to think about it. Some of it I've erased from my mind, so I don't think about it, and some of it I refuse to admit that I remember.

Do you think your audience has changed since you've moved more toward gospel music? I know many people found it easy to identify with what you were singing, and your songs appealed to anybody who had even the slightest troubled frame of mind.

You know, the accent is not all that much on gospel music. It's just that when I sing gospel music or record gospel music, I'm serious about it, whereas a lot of artists I know, every three or four years, or at one point in their career they say, 'Well I think I'll record a gospel album now because it would be the thing to do and it would show the people that deep down I'm a religious person.' That's the way I used to think about it, too. Now my last record was *Any Old Wind That Blows,* and the one before that was "*Oney.*" You know I'm still the same person that I always was. It's just that I'm serious about the gospel songs when I do sing them. I'm serious about this film, but there's a good chance that I might star in a film called "Old Fishhawk," a story about an Indian. 20th Century is now trying to buy the rights for me to do that film, and it's got nothing to do with religion.

I guess there are two things that have really influenced your life and career in the last few years. One, the fact that you stopped taking drugs, and two, the arrival of your son, John Carter.

Yes, John Carter's had a lot to do with it. You know, I used to go rabbit hunting and squirrel hunting, and killing all kinds of animals. But John

Johnny Cash and June Carter at the Atlanta premier of "Gospel Road."

Carter's almost three years old now. He's got all these animal books, and I tell him stories about animals, and I can't go killing any animals now. John Carter has had a lot to do with the change in me. I'm 40 years old, and all of a sudden this little, redheaded boy comes along. Everybody thought it was going to be a black-haired boy, but this little redheaded boy comes along who looks like June Carter and follows me everywhere I go. I can't go anywhere in this house without him being right at my heels, and I enjoy all the quiet, nice, little things that three year old boys do. There's something strengthening about that. He's had a lot to do with it all right.

Did giving up drugs make you feel that this was the first time you'd stood up to something and really come through it?

There's been a lot of us that was on drugs and quit. There's been a lot of us who had the problem with alcohol and quit it. It takes a real man to be able to do it. It really does. But the toughest thing I ever did was to quit smoking. I can say that, and maybe I don't really mean that, because I made myself forget all those nightmares I had when I was trying to come off barbiturates. Before I married June and lived out here in this house on the lake, I used to get those pills by the hundreds or thousands, and I used to put a hundred of them in a sock and hide them between boards in the floor, or in the ceiling in the bathroom, or behind the light or something. Last week I found a box full of pills! They were not in a sock, but in a matchbox. Merle Haggard incidentally knows where I used to hide my pills sometimes. I told Haggard where I hid 'em and I'm not

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going to tell you, but Haggard knows where I used to hide my pills when I wanted to carry 'em on me. But I found a box full of pills under the washbasin and I almost broke my arm to get to 'em. I knew that I had hidden some pills five years ago under that washbasin. I got down on the floor and I stuck my arm under there and the tips of my fingers touched a little box. It slid around a little bit, and I kept straining and skinned my arm to get to 'em, pulled them out and there was that box of yellow pills. Half yellow pills and half tranquilizers because I'd hide both kinds, so I could go up and come back down, too. I pulled this box of pills out and looked at 'em. Smelled 'em, that weird sticky smell they have, and I thought of a bunch of things I'd done while I was on 'em. I took them up to the bedroom and June and John Carter was laying on the bed. And I opened up that box of pills and said, 'June, look what I found.' I emptied them on the bed, and she said, 'Oh, my God, no,' 'cause she remembered a bunch of bad things, too. And I said, 'Don't worry, let's go in here and flush 'em,' and June and John Carter and I went into the bathroom and John Carter said, 'What are you doing that for daddy?' And I said, 'Because it's the thing to do, son.' I said, 'That was bad stuff daddy flushed—bad stuff.' So we got rid of the pills. There may be some more pills at the house, but if I ever find 'em, I'll flush them too.

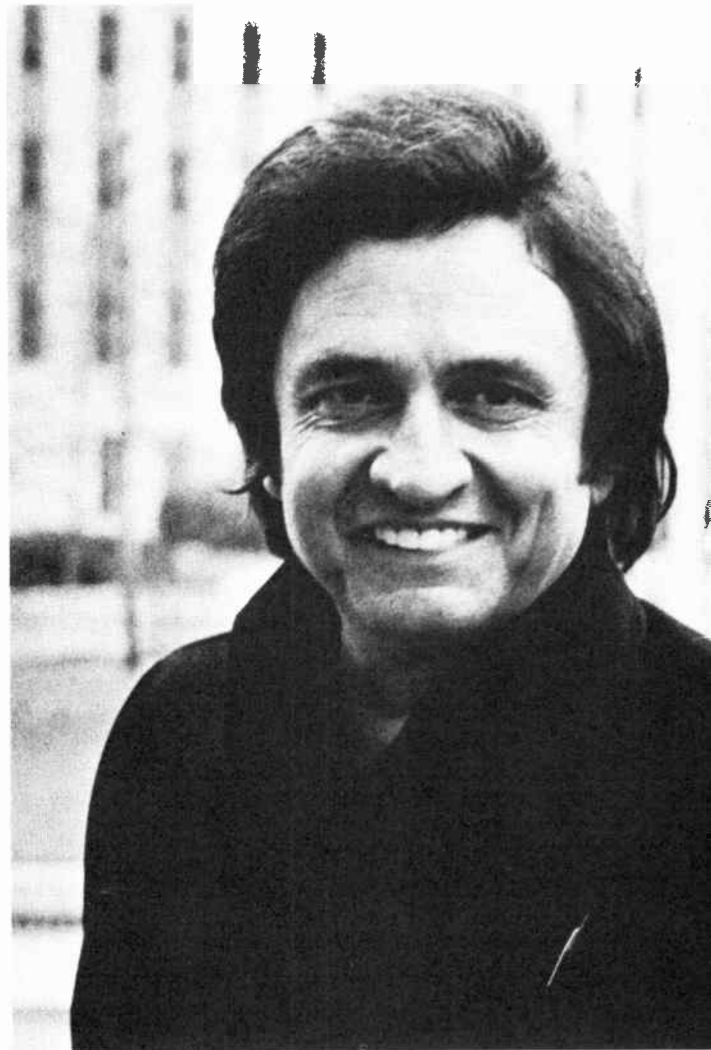
To change the subject a little, what do you think is happening in country music now? Probably you, more than anybody, in the last ten years have broadened the scope of country music, popularized it for a much wider audience.

That's happening, and will probably continue to happen, but when it's broadened, it can spread pretty thin. But I think better songs are being written than ever before. Tom T. Hall's "Watermelon Wine" is one of the greatest things ever written in country music. This is the kind of thing I love. It's philosophy, it's life, it's real—and those are the kind of songs that are going to stay, no matter how wide the spectrum spreads. Songs like that are gonna make it. So I think that so long as people come along like Tom T. Hall writing great stuff like that, then country music is here to stay. Well, it's here to stay anyway, but I mean in a big way, 'cause there's some really good talents around. There's a young writer that we've got here named Dick Feller, who has just recorded for United Artists. He's going to be a big artist. I recorded a song of his, one called "Orphan Of The Road." I think as long as people like him keep coming along, country music's got a great future.

Do you see yourself moving more toward producing?

No, not at all. We've got the best studio at House of Cash, the finest one in Nashville. The feeling here is great. People love to record here, but I don't want to produce. I don't want to produce records. I want to do my own records, and that's it. I don't want to get involved in a bunch of business ends of the business. That's one reason why I'm still around and going, because I haven't stuck myself behind a desk. Although I've got a nice desk here, you won't find me behind it once a month. I don't like the business end of the business.

PHOTO: ALAN WHITMAN



Cash with Robert Elfstrom, who played the part of Jesus and also direc

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There was some talk recently that you were going to play more small halls. Is there anything to that?

Well, I'm not only playing small halls. I'm still playing the big halls, but I enjoy going to a town that I've never been in before, like a 100,000 population town. I just looked at the map and made up a list of towns that I gave to my manager last week, for him to check out. I like to play a smaller hall because the audience response is better in an auditorium of 3000 or 4000 people.

What effect, if any, has working with companies like American Oil and Lionel had on your career and your audience?

It hasn't had any effect on me. Those commercials I do for American Oil about every six months take three days of work and then I forget about it. Of course then my fans see me on TV. I don't really know what effect it has on them, except I get a few letters. I haven't had a half a dozen letters in two years offering any harsh criticism on those commercials. I really do use American Oil, up here at the station in Hendersonville, and I try to be realistic about things. I like to sing about trains and the old times and the good old days and all that business, but if my boy gets sick and I need a doctor, I don't want him to walk 15 miles. I want him to burn some gasoline to get out here.

spel Road."

I think there's always two or three ways to look at everything. The commercials I did for American Oil helped pay for things like the film, or part of it. So I use the money that I make to do a little good now and then. We're very active in a lot of charities, in mental health and boys' homes, so I don't have any apologies to make for anything that I do to earn income. I employ a lot of people here and feed a lot of children and I'm very proud of all the work that I do because there's a lot of thought and careful consideration that goes into all of it. It doesn't mean I don't make mistakes because I know I do. I've seen them. I do just about as many things wrong as I do right, but at least I'm doing what I feel is right at the time.

You pledged to support President Nixon and his policies in Indochina toward ending the Vietnam war. Do you feel you were right now that the war has ended?

The only thing I know about that is what I've read. One thing, COUNTRY MUSIC Magazine said something about me refusing to endorse the President. What was that headline?

"Cash Is Cool To The Republicans?"

Well I guess you *could* say that, but all I said was that I didn't feel that an entertainer had any business going to political conventions. I still feel that way. It had nothing to do with the Republicans or Democrats, or the President. I think the dignity of the office of President of the United States should be maintained and respected no matter who is our President. He is our President, and we the people have elected him whether you or I voted for him or not. As far as the war in Vietnam is concerned, that war just made me sick. I'm not supporting that war or any other war and whether or not Nixon did his best, I don't know, because I don't know that much about his job. I have to assume that he did because we believed in him enough to re-elect him.

Do you think there's been a big change in the American way of life since the sixties? Do you think we're going back to the fifties way of thinking?

No, I don't think so. Change is the whole process of life. Change is for the most part healthy, of course. We made a lot of mistakes in the sixties. We'd like to just erase that whole war from our history books. That would really be nice, except you can't forget the ones that died and every time the war is brought up, you think of something that brings it home.

Maybe Vietnam has taught us a hard lesson to not be involved in foreign wars. Maybe that's the lesson we've learned. I hope we have. Then all those things that happened in the sixties were solidifying and strengthening for this country. The riots, the campus riots—I was just reading a copy of *The New York Times* I have at the house from 1873, and in Washington, D.C. in 1873 there was a student riot, and there were burnings in effigy and bonfires out in front of the Capitol and students singing and dancing and drinking all night. Kids want to get out roaring, and get organized in their roaring and march while they're roaring. I don't think that's gonna stop. They're gonna let off steam however they want to. And sometimes they get serious about it and some-

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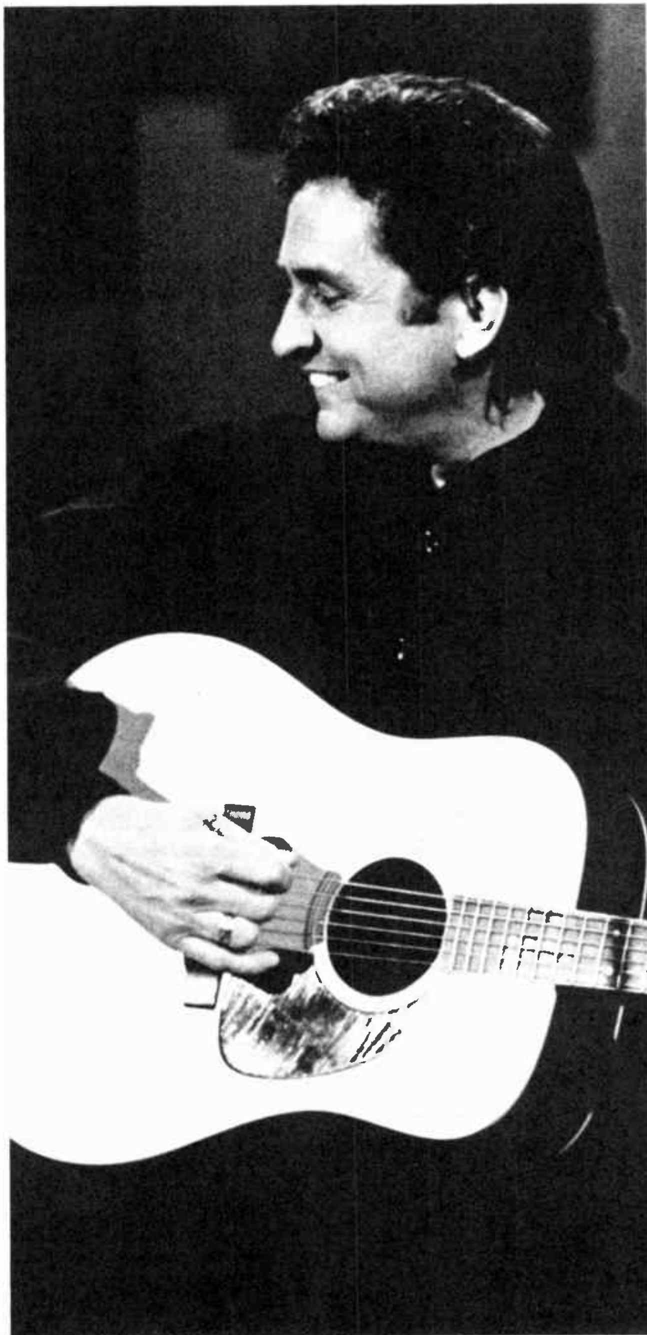
body gets hurt. I think we've learned a lot of lessons from the sixties.

What happened at your testimony on prison reform last Fall?

I guess because I got a lot of attention from prison shows and albums, I get a lot of requests from people who want me to be involved in this and that program. One thing I did, I went with Senator Brock to Washington to testify before the Senate Sub-Committee On Prison Reform for some bills he was trying to get through. I told how I felt about prison reform and such, and about some things I had seen or knew about that go on in prisons. People say, 'well what about the victims, the people that suffer—you're always talking about the prisoners; what about the victims?' Well, the point I want to make is that's what I've always been concerned about—the victims. If we make better men out of the men in prison, then we've got less crime on the streets, and my family and yours is safer when they come out. If the prison system is reformed, if the men are reformed, if they are rehabilitated, then there's less crime and there's less victims.



Ever since I've been in the entertainment business, from the very first prison I played in 1957—Huntsville Texas State Prison—I found that a concert is a tension reliever. A prison is always full of tension, but sometimes it gets to the breaking point and there's trouble. I'm not saying that our concerts have prevented trouble, but who knows? They may have, because I've been called on by a warden here or there to do a concert when they've had trouble, and we've done it, and there's not been trouble. Here at Tennessee State Prison, I had a man come up to me and say, 'I believe I can make it another five years. I know somebody out there cares, cares enough to come in here and sing for us.' A concert does relieve a lot of tension because it makes them forget, it makes them happy, it makes them applaud, it makes them laugh, they tap their feet to the music. That's our purpose, to give them a little relief.

You seem to have acquired a great deal of tolerance and you seem to have mellowed a great deal. How do you see your life moving now?

I think I feel better on stage now than I ever did in my life. I worked a concert in Fargo, North Dakota recently, and I never felt so good on stage as I did that night. I see myself on stage, if God lets me live, 20 or 30 more years. It's what I feed on, the performance and the audience reaction. It's what I love and that's all I want to do. I want to try to write and record better country songs. I've got my own studio here and just because it's the biggest and prettiest in town doesn't mean I'm going to fill it full of fiddles every time I record. I spend a lot of time in there with just my flat top guitar. And another thing, talking about the future, I want to try to become a musician. I started taking piano lessons at the age of 40. I just had my first piano lesson about two months ago and I already know C, F and G7. That's one of the proudest accomplishments of my life is to learn those three chords on the piano, and I've got another lesson tomorrow afternoon, my third lesson. I'm trying to learn to finger pick on the guitar. Red Lane will laugh at this, but I'm trying to learn some finger picking. I learned my guitar lick from Norman Blake and Red Lane. I've been working on it. They don't know how good I'm gettin'. I'm gonna show 'em some day. Then I took my first piano lesson, I learned three chords and I practice them. And then Walt Cunningham, a young man that's been playing piano for us on some of our concerts, taught me how to vamp in 4/4 rhythm and everyday I practice on that. That's something I've never done in my life, sit down and play something. Strumming is all I ever did before.

Is John Carter interested in music?

Yes, he is very much interested in it. June and I did a show at a handicapped children's school last week. We took him with us because there's little kids there. I was right in the middle of a song when he bounded onto the stage and said, 'I want to sing.' I stopped the song and said, 'What do you want to sing?' and he said, 'I wanna sing 'The Cowboys And

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The Indians And The Sheep'.' So he started singing, and when he got through that I said, 'okay son, let's hear another,' and he said, 'Oh, The Wind Blows On The Cows.' That's the name of another one that he made up. And the kids loved it.

But last week in Fargo, I brought him out on stage because he told me—now I know the people won't realize that John Carter is old enough to think like this, but he's 3 years old now—he said, 'daddy, I'm going to sing tonight.' I said, 'What are you gonna sing, son?' And he said, 'Peace In The Valley.' So in the show when I got ready to do "Peace In The Valley," I called him out on stage and he sang the chorus with me. At the end of the song, he took a bow and went off, and they kept applauding, and he came back and took another bow.

When someone interviews you and you talk about your personal life, do you think that serves a purpose to cut through the stage image which I guess all performers have?

Well, when I'm on stage I feel like I'm really a complete person because that's what I feel like I do best and that's what I'm most alive and happy doing, performing. Any other part of me might be interesting to the people that like that image on the stage. Yes, I think it's realistic; it's justifiable, the interviews, the pictures of the life of the man that lives off stage. And I think in most cases it's an honest picture, like right here, because it's really the way I feel about things; when I sit down and talk to you and tell you about these things, it's the way I feel.

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Stories About The Storyteller – Tom T. Hall

compiled by Patrick Carr

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Tom T. Hall—the Storyteller—is a puzzling figure. He seems quiet, reserved, distant almost, and yet he is one of the most popular members of the country music community. He doesn't talk much about himself, preferring to concern himself with the stories and the problems of the people around him, but almost without exception his songs are drawn from his own experience, with names changed and situations altered to convey more than a simple story.

Tom has jumped a lot of fences in his time. He has been a disc jockey, a songwriter, and is now a full-fledged performing artist writing and singing his own material. But if a label must be pinned upon him, it should be that of a writer, for his mastery of technique and his eye for subject matter are unsurpassed.

We have turned the tables on the Storyteller. We have talked to people who know him well, and asked *them* to tell stories about *him*. We gave them the chance to say whatever they wanted about Tom T. Hall—and not one of them had anything bad to say. Their tributes are often not included in these stories—there would not have been room for anything else if they had been—but the impression of a well-loved and *very* highly respected man remains.

Mae Curtis

Mrs. Mae Curtis lives in Olive Hill, Kentucky, where Tom T. Hall was born, raised, and schooled. Tom joined the late Mr. Curtis' band as a 14-year-old high school student—an association which lasted until Tom left Olive Hill to serve in the Army. For Mr. and Mrs. Curtis Tom was more than just one of the boys who liked to be around the band. Tom's mother had died, after a long illness, when he was eleven, and Tom found family security in the Curtis household. Now he calls Mae Curtis his adopted Aunt, and he has just written a song called "This Song Is For You, Uncle Curt," dedicated to the memory of her late husband.

"It was some twenty years ago that Uncle Curt from the hills of Eastern Kentucky formed a hillbilly band, 'The Kentucky Travelers.' They made many appearances and Tom, being the leader, was made Master of Ceremonies. He didn't like that. He just wanted to pick and sing and write his own songs.

Disc jockey Tom sorts through entries in a pig give-away contest.

"His first TV appearance was when Flatt & Scruggs invited the band to do a couple of numbers on a Saturday night show. Tom, being the M.C., was asked to introduce the other boys. The poor little guy was so nervous and scared that he forgot the boys' names and the instruments they played. He would always return from a show saying, 'Aunt Mae I can't do it.' I'd always answer with 'Yes you can.' Tom finally whipped his stage fright after locking himself in the bathroom to practice while watching himself in the mirror. We would occasionally hear him pound the wall with his fists, screaming 'I just can't do it!'

"As we all know he *has* done it. His audience doesn't scare him anymore; he wants the crowds and draws them. Tom is loved by all because he tells it like it is today. His home town has designated July 4th as Tom T. Hall Day, and on that day he likes to come back home for a day with his friends.

"Yes, Tom's come a long way. We are proud of him."

Jack Robinson

Jack Robinson now owns a television service center in Connersville, Indiana, but back when Tom T. Hall was in town after his Army service, Jack was the drummer in Tom's band. They were paid ten or twenty dollars a night each in the local clubs, and now and again they would raise a little hell, as young men do. Mr. Herbert Mitchell, in whose house Tom lived while he was in Connersville, and who first directed him to the Bar and Grill (the scene of "Connersville"), remembers that Tom and the boys never had to be brought *home, but that may have been because Mr. Robinson—a non-drinker at first—used to do all the driving. Tom recalls that his drummer would sit in the car while the rest of the band spent time in the local bars.*

"Tom used to get the hiccups. Often he'd get them on stage in the middle of our act. There was one night at the 520 Club when he got them real bad. The only way he could get rid of them was to get a sudden shock that would scare them out of him. So this particular night, he left the stage and ran out back of the club. There was a policeman there outside the door,

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Tom (second from left) with his Army band in Darmstadt, Germany, 1959.

and to cure his hiccups, Tom hit that policeman right in the face and took off flying.

"He came back into the club and said, 'You seen any policemen?' I said, 'What are you talkin' about?'

"'I just hit one,' he said, 'and he's lookin' for me!'

"I asked him why he'd done it, and he said, 'I was just tryin' to get a little excited to cure these hiccups—and it worked.'

"They used to drink, you see. I didn't drink. I drove the car. The police used to stop us and ask us questions, and we'd say we played music. Then the next night we'd be in another car and they'd stop us again. Finally they got tired of it and they didn't stop us anymore. They'd just say, 'There go them musicians again.'"

Margaret Patterson

One day in Connersville, Tom suddenly asked Mr. Mitchell to take him home to Kentucky. They hadn't had a falling-out or anything like that: it was just that Tom knew there were bigger things waiting for him elsewhere. He wanted to be a disc jockey, and he became one. One of the stations at which he worked was WBLU in Salem, Virginia. It was there he met Margaret Patterson, a divorced lady living with her teenage children in the nearby town of Roanoke. Tom found family companionship there.

Margaret Patterson is now the president of his fan club, just like he promised her she would be back in the days when she took him around and introduced him to the country music community, both in Virginia and Nashville. WBLU was Tom's last stop on the road to Music City.

"Tom and I didn't especially hit it off at first—we're both kind of abrupt—but after he came to Salem, we began to get along just fine. He was one of the best disc jockeys I ever heard. They used to have to stop him once in a while because of his ad libbing that the manager didn't approve of, but he was so interesting that though I only like country music, I'd listen to his pop show too.

"He used to come out to my house all the time. He'd drink coffee and eat green beans—he loved them with a passion, and he said I cooked them old-fashioned—and we'd go to all the country music shows together. He said that I kind of filled a void when he was away from his family. He would call me at maybe three o'clock in the morning and say, 'Margaret, I've just finished a song. You want to hear it?' Then he'd play his guitar and sing the song over the telephone.

"We'd go to these little old shows like they have for mobile home sales and things like that. Nobody realized that Tom could sing like he does, so I'd say, 'Let Tom sing,' and he'd get up on stage and steal the show.

"When he was here, he got an interview for a job in Nashville, but he had to take a test on the last writing course he was taking at Roanoke College the same day.

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They said that if he didn't take the test, he'd fail the course. So he went to Nashville and got an 'F' on his course. He said it didn't matter—he still had all the knowledge from the course anyway.

"I just missed him so much when he left. I cried and cried like crazy. He didn't know it of course, because I'm kind of proud. Then a year ago last April he called me up one Tuesday night and said, 'Can you be down here in two weeks at Fan Fair to start my fan club?' Just like that. I had kind of faded out of the picture, so I was real surprised. But I went, and he made a little speech at the booth. He said I cooked the best green beans he ever saw, that I loved him, and that I might resent it, but he would like to say that I mothered him. I didn't resent it: I thought it was a great honor."

Ralph Emery

Ralph Emery has known Tom T. Hall since the mid-Sixties, when Tom first came to Nashville. "Tom had trouble finishing his songs in those days," says Ralph. "There was the germ of a great songwriter, but he just couldn't write good conclusions. But he could listen to any song on a jukebox and say who wrote it, and he was particularly interested in the songs of Willie Nelson, Hank Cochrane and Harlan Howard, the top songwriters of the day."

Like a few of Tom's other close friends, Ralph Emery has been told the real stories behind the Storyteller's songs.

"You know, some of the best Tom T. Hall stories are the ones he tells about himself, like the one he calls 'You Can't Cheat An Honest Man.'

"Dave Dudley—he's a good friend of Tom's—was playing a club in Louisville one night when Tom just happened to be passing through. Tom decided to go see Dave. There was a man at the club who was a big Dave Dudley fan, and there was a bowling machine there—one of those things you put money in and slide the little thing that looks like a hockey puck down it.

"Tom got into a discussion with this guy about the bowling machine, and the guy said, 'I'll bet you $50 that Dave Dudley can beat you.' Tom said, 'I'll take that bet. Dave can't beat me.'

"Then he went into another room with Dave, and told him, 'Dave, we're going to bowl. No matter what you do, don't beat me.' They started the game, and Tom would roll that thing down there and he might get a spare. Dave would roll it, and *he* would get a strike. Tom rolled again, and he got eight. Dave rolled it down the side—right into the gutter—and he still got a strike. Naturally, Dave won the game and Tom lost his $50.

"So later on Tom came through the club—he didn't know what had happened—and he saw this guy sitting there. The guy pulled this little thing out of his pocket: it was an electronic device with which he could make the machine strike whenever he wanted just by pressing the button. Tom had tried to cheat that guy by doing a deal with Dave Dudley, and the guy turned right around and cheated *him* out of his $50. And that's the story Tom calls 'You Can't Cheat An Honest Man.'"

Jimmy Newman

Jimmy Newman was the first performer to record one of Tom T. Hall's songs, "D.J. For A Day." One day a stranger came into his office in Nashville and presented one of Tom's songs, and when he found that the writer was not signed to a publishing house, Jimmy signed him up as a songwriter and persuaded him to move to Nashville.

"Many times on the road before Tom became an artist he'd travel with me. We'd share a motel room, and in the morning while I went down to get breakfast, he'd stay up in the room, have coffee sent up—lots of coffee—and he'd have one or two really good songs written by the time I got back. He tells me that early morning's the best time for him to write, when it's a new day and everything is fresh.

"I've seen him write a song while I was entertaining. He'd be off to the side of the stage watching us work, and he'd be writing at the same time. And not only would he write the song, but I'd call him up on stage as a guest, he'd introduce himself and tell the audience that he'd just written this song—and then he'd sing it. He's got a photostatic mind. He'd sing that song he'd just written word for word and note perfect, as often as not without even writing it down on a piece of paper."

Bill Anderson

Before Margaret Patterson met Tom T. Hall, her favorite country artist and friend was Bill Anderson. Now she places them both on the same pedestal. She told Bill about Tom before Tom's first trip to Music City, and said that he was going to be a big star. "You know how you hear these things every day and then file them in the back of your head or forget about them?" says Bill. "Well, that's what happened." He admits now that he should have listened harder.

"I have a very dear friend in Miami who called me recently and said he would give anything in the

PHOTO: WENDI LOMBARDI

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world to meet Tom T. Hall when he came down there. So I told him, 'You go to his bus,' and I gave him the whole routine about how to meet him. Then I called Tom and told him about this friend of mine, and gave him his address. Tom said, 'Does he have a telephone? Give me the number and I'll call him up.' And he did.

"Now this was nothing but a friend of mine: he wasn't in the business and Tom didn't stand to gain anything from being nice. But he called anyway and said he was a friend of Bill Anderson and he was looking forward to meeting him. He gained a fan for life, and he did *me* a favor. That's the kind of guy I've always found him to be.

"Another thing. I recently had a Number One country hit called 'The Lord Knows I'm Drinkin',' which was a very different kind of song for me to write. One of the first people who came up to me about that song said, 'Boy, have you heard that new song Tom T. wrote?'

"'Yeah, boy, it's *fantastic*,' I said. 'Tom T. wrote that song?'

PHOTOS: WENDI LOMBARDI

Performing as a major artist has not, as Tom feared, impaired his songwriting abilities one whit.

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"'Well, I guess he did,' said the guy. 'It sure does sound like one of his!' So I waited a minute, and then I said, 'Well, I hate to tell you, but you're talkin' to the man that wrote that song!'

"Now, I didn't intend for the song to sound like one of Tom's, but the thing is, when a writer like Tom T. Hall comes into town, it inspires us *all* to write better, try a little harder, and apply ourselves a little more. It fires you up, you know?"

Jerry Kennedy

Tom T. Hall's first recording as an artist was "I Washed My Face In The Early Morning Dew," a song about tolerance like many of his others. Jerry Kennedy has been his producer from the start (in fact, he cut a number of Tom's songs with other artists before he even realized that they were Tom's songs), and the two have a close working relationship. In the studio Tom contributes a great deal apart from his songs and his voice, but Jerry Kennedy remembers a time when a different arrangement was the order of the day.

"When Tom was just a songwriter, he'd come in, say this was his song, and leave. Never a hello or goodbye. He was a walking demo. Even after I had signed him as an artist, he still had that quiet shy manner. I'd say, 'What do you think of this?' and he'd reply, 'Fine, anything you say.' There was never any conversation at all.

"Then one night we had a ten p.m. session—the third or fourth I'd done with him—and we did the song 'Weekend In A Country Jail.' One of the musicians asked him about that incident—it was a real thing, it actually happened to him—and we sent out and got him a beer. While the tape was rolling, he just stopped, opened up and told the whole story. It was fantastic. I'd never heard him talk so much, and he talked for a full fifteen minutes. We couldn't believe it.

"I guess another weird thing was when he came into the studio recently, straight off an airplane. He had 'Old Dogs, Children, and Watermelon Wine' written on the back of a sickbag from the airplane.

"Tom's very knowledgeable—about politics, anything. He has views and he expresses them. Most people in this business, they tiptoe around issues like that, but Tom's a free thinker and he lets you know. He doesn't talk much about himself or about his past, and I never dig into where a song has come from. Sometimes, though, I'll throw a question and catch him off guard, and he'll say, 'No, it was really like *this*, but I had to write it that way.'

"Like he has this song on his new album about sitting in a motel room writing songs while everyone else is out doing something else. In the song he says, 'I don't know what I'm doing here, I should be someplace else.' I said, 'What's so horrible about Seattle?' (That's where he wrote the song.) He said, 'Man, it was cold—it was so cold I didn't even want to go down to the restaurant.' And that's why he wrote that song.

"He has six songs written for his next album already—and we just shipped the new one. That's professionalism. Most of the time you see writers who become artists, and gradually their writing ceases.

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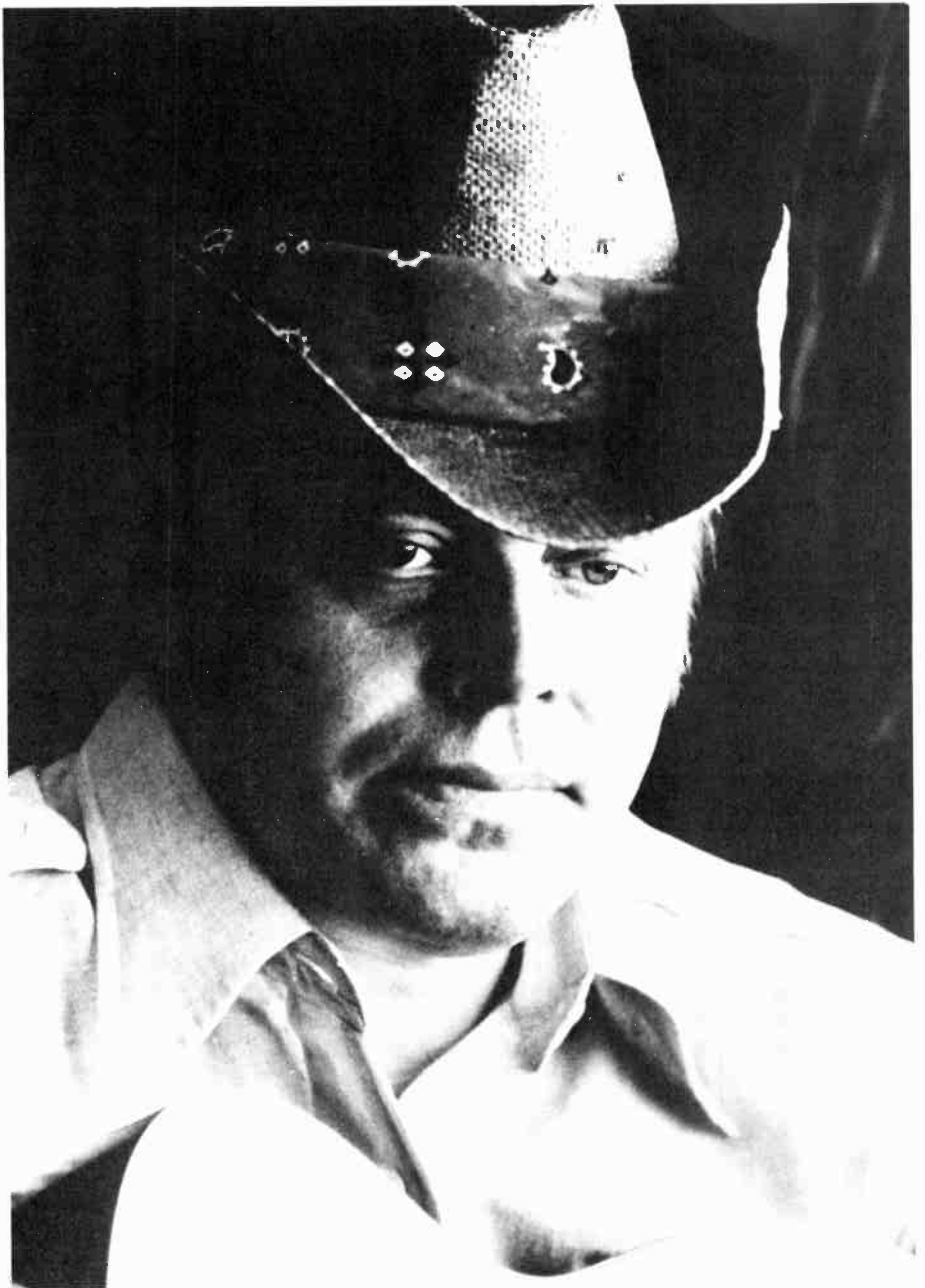

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But it looks like becoming an artist has been an inspiration for Tom: the more he entertains, the more songs he comes up with."

Harlan Howard

Tom spends a good portion of his time before the public these days, applauded and respected wherever he goes. That kind of constant boost to the ego can do strange things to a man, warp his character in unexpected ways, and often drive him on a path towards false self-glorification or its companion, self-destruction. But Tom T. Hall is obviously a strong individual who can see the traps that might catch him out. Harlan Howard—one of country's most successful songwriters whose style Tom studied when he was edging into the Nashville songwriting scene—tells a story that illustrates the extent of the Storyteller's self-awareness.

"Being fellow songwriters, Tom and I can talk about ways to keep writing, ways to break out of slumps, and ways to keep mentally in shape to write songs that people can relate to. Tom told me that all songwriters, and especially country songwriters, should always keep their humility and not get above the people they're writing to, no matter how successful they are.

"He has little tricks he'll use to keep his feet on the ground, even with all those hits of his going all over the place. Like out on the road, he'll get into a motel room, put a tennis shoe on his head, and stand in front of a mirror.

"He says, 'Any sumbitch that can look at himself in a mirror with a tennis shoe on his head, and not be *himself,* is out of it!'

"That destroyed me because it's true, you know. Just imagine doing that yourself. Tom's a very intelligent person, and he uses all kinds of psychology on himself to keep himself right where he wants to be—he wants to stay that country boy and working man that he was all those years."

Dixie Hall

And who else should have the last word on the Storyteller but the Storyteller's wife?

"I met Tom at a BMI song awards dinner. I was getting an award for a song I had written with Ray King—'Truck Drivin' Son Of A Gun' which Dave Dudley recorded. My chaperone that evening was Maybelle Carter. Tom had written the B side of the record, a song called 'I Got Lost,' but we had never met. Somebody there—I forget who it was—introduced us during dinner.

"Tom looked at me and said, 'Do you like potatoes?'

"I said, 'Yes, I do. Why?'

"'I guess that accounts for you being so fat,' he replied. Maybelle nearly choked on her soup.

"Later that evening I asked him why he'd been so rude with that first remark.

"'Oh,' he said, 'Don't worry about that. I was just trying to get your attention.'"

PHOTO: WENDI LOMBARDI

The Storyteller broke a lot of ground when he played the historic Carnegie Hall: New York loved him.

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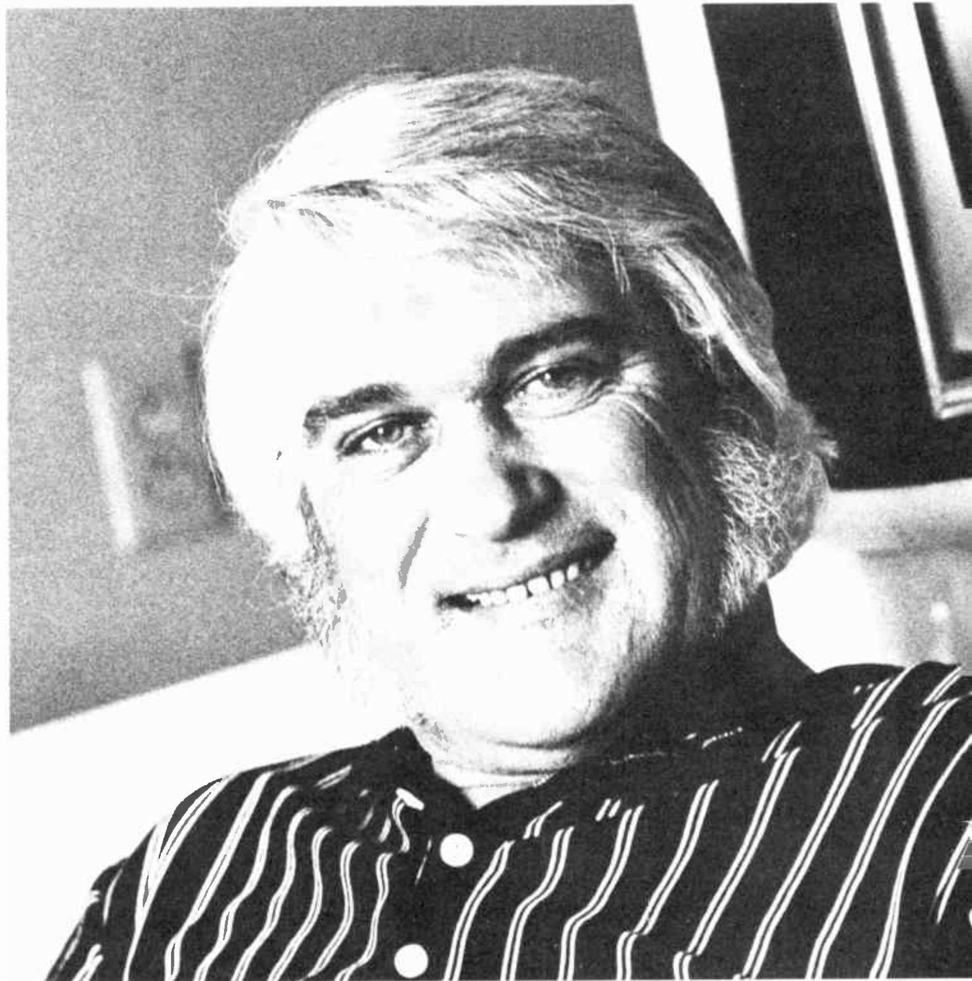
The Ups and Downs Of A Sun Records Legend:

Charlie Rich

by Charlie Burton

Harold Murcheson is sitting in the lounge of the King of the Road Motor Inn in Nashville, amidst a herd of farm implement conventioneers, talking about Charlie Rich. Harold is both drummer and personal manager to Charlie, and he's in town while his boss tapes a couple of syndicated country music television shows, and goes into the studio to cut what Charlie calls (from force of habit), "a couple of misses." Harold's a young guy with a full beard, and he says the other musicians keep kidding him because he "don't look country enough."

I ask Harold if he saw Charlie's performance of "I Take It On Home" at the last disc jockey convention. "Yeah, man," he says. "Did you *see* that? Man, he had his *back* to the audience 'cause they didn't move the piano, but he *still* brought the house down. Man, it was incredible! Just think what would have happened if the audience could have seen his face! Like, once we were playing this gig down in Memphis—Jerry Lee was on the same bill. It was this big auditorium. So we get there and there's no mike; no amplification on the piano. So Charlie says, 'It's okay, it's a grand piano,' and we go ahead with the gig. Well, you just couldn't hear the thing, and Charlie's voice was echoing all over the auditorium. We couldn't hear each other—it was terrible. So I went over to the guys at the hall, and I said, 'Look, man, I'm warning you that if things aren't right when Jerry Lee gets to that piano, he's gonna tear the thing apart.' And he would have, too. He's done things like that. But Charlie, well, he loves Jerry Lee like a brother, but he could just never quite assert himself in that way. No, he never went in much for slapping people he don't know on the back. But, you know, that's the funny thing—that's what he says he likes so much in Jerry Lee—his arrogance. Charlie says if you aren't arrogant like that, well, people will walk all over you. But with Charlie, the only way—the ONLY way he can express himself is when he's up there playing his music."



Harold hands me a few sheets of paper containing reprints of clippings on Charlie to help me do my story, as well as a nice 8" x 10" glossy photo of Charlie, looking mighty distinguished. "Great," I said. "Now I can get me an autograph." Harold looks at me as though I've said the wrong thing. "Look, man," he says. "I don't exactly know if Charlie'd be into that sort of thing. But, look, I'll tell you what. We had this little rubber stamp made with his signature on it. . . ."

Charlie Rich rose to fame as one of the class "rockabilly" artists to

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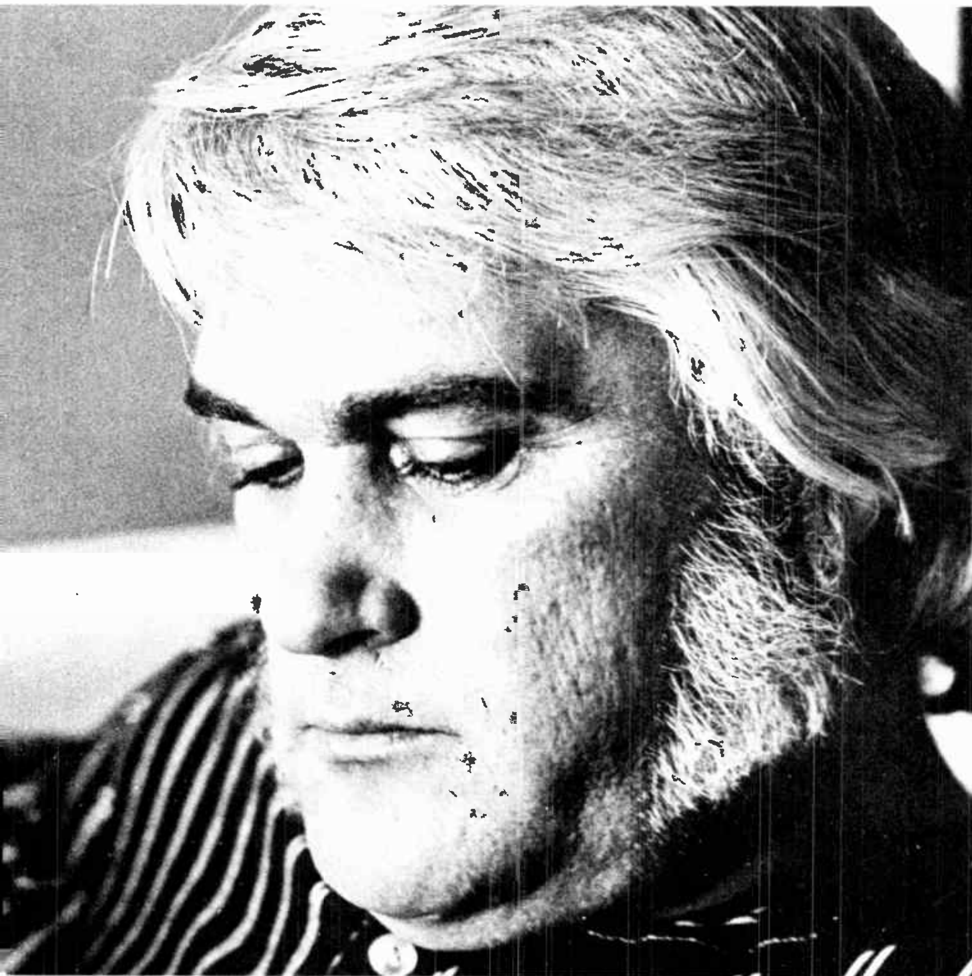
record for Sam Phillips' SUN label in Memphis. Sam has become a legend for being with his microphones in the right place at the right time, and his important "discoveries" included, in the blues field, B. B. King, Howlin' Wolf and Junior Parker, and in the country/rockabilly field, Elvis Presley, Roy Orbison, Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins, and Johnny Cash. But of all the exceptional artists that Sam Phillips recorded, it is an oft-quoted observation of his that it was Charlie Rich alone who had the kind of talent it would take to equal the success of his most fabulous discovery, Elvis Presley.

major commercial success is that Charlie just seems to lack the kind of determination and drive it takes to become a star in the music business.

Charlie's wife, Margaret Ann Rich, Charlie's biggest fan for the past 20 years, says, "I know that's been a problem with Charlie. I try to tell him, get yourself with a big booking agency. Go on the road for one year. JUST ONE YEAR. I know he'd hate it but it would be good for him. But he just says no. He'd rather stay home and spend time with his family—he's real proud of the kids. And besides, that's the way he was brought up.



One reason for the failure of this prediction—on a commercial level, anyway—was Phillips himself. By the time Charlie hit big with "Lonely Weekends," Sam had lost two of his biggest artists—Elvis to a deal with RCA, and Jerry Lee Lewis to a public scandal. Johnny Cash was about to leave for Columbia, and when Charlie was sorely in need of promotion, Sam was devoting his time to projects he felt demanded more of his time. The other major reason for Charlie's lack of

That's the way he's always been. His family was a strict religious family—Missionary Baptist—and he's just never been able to resolve the difference between *that* life—the church life—and *this* life."

Margaret Ann waves her arm in the direction of the picture window overlooking one of the seamier sides of Nashville town. Charlie, who has been slouching in a chair drinking a scotch and water while Margaret Ann has been talking, says nothing, but the volcanic expression on his

. . . Margaret Ann says that in high school and college Charlie was good at music and lousy in just about everything else . . .

face confirms what Margaret Ann has just said.

Charlie Rich was born December 12 ("Or was it 14?"), 1932, ("Or was it 1934?"), in the little village of Colt, Arkansas, population 312. "It's just a little big for my size," says Charlie. He picked up his money picking cotton until he found he could do the same by picking up a horn—his was a musical family anyway—and he began playing tenor sax in the high school band. Charlie says that he got a lot of the "bluesiness" in his music from playing the saxophone. He developed a strong liking for jazz—Stan Kenton and Oscar Peterson were his favorites—and also for Margaret Ann, another jazz fan whose favorites included Stan Kenton's girl vocalist, June Christie, and Billie Holiday. Margaret Ann says that in high school, and later in college, Charlie was good in music and lousy in just about everything else. He entered the Air Force, where he was stationed in Enid, Oklahoma, and on the base, Charlie started playing in a jazz group—piano and a little scat singing. After hours, when he was off-duty, Charlie would go into town to "moonlight" with another little band that had a featured vocalist named Margaret Ann.

"Charlie often says that those three years he spent in the Air Force were the most valuable years of his life, musically speaking; there were so many good jazz musicians there," says Margaret Ann.

When Charlie left the Air Force in 1955, he went back to picking cotton for a while, to support his wife and new little kid, and tried his hand at a little farming. But Margaret had an idea that Charlie would be happier making music, and she suggested that he make a tape for her to take around to different recording studios. Margaret took the tape they made—songs like "River, Stay Away From My Door"—across the river to SUN Records. Sam Phillips wasn't in, but his musical arranger Bill Justis was, and he listened to the tapes.

PHOTOS: ALAN WHITMAN

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Margaret Ann says it was probably best that Bill Justis heard Charlie first—he had a better background in jazz than Sam, and could probably dig what he heard more. Justis did like the sound, and Charlie was hired as a session man and part-time arranger, playing on tunes by Ray Smith, Johnny Cash, even providing the piano part for his own composition, "I'll Make It All Up To You" for Jerry Lee Lewis, when Lewis' own technique made it hard for him to learn the strange progressions in the key of E-flat. An early Rich recording, "Whirlwind," failed to click, despite a small promotional tour up North, but it was one of Charlie's own tunes that hit, and "Lonely Weekends" is to date his biggest song, recorded by artists from Jerry Lee to Bill Anderson, to the English rockers, "Them," featuring Van Morrison on vocals.

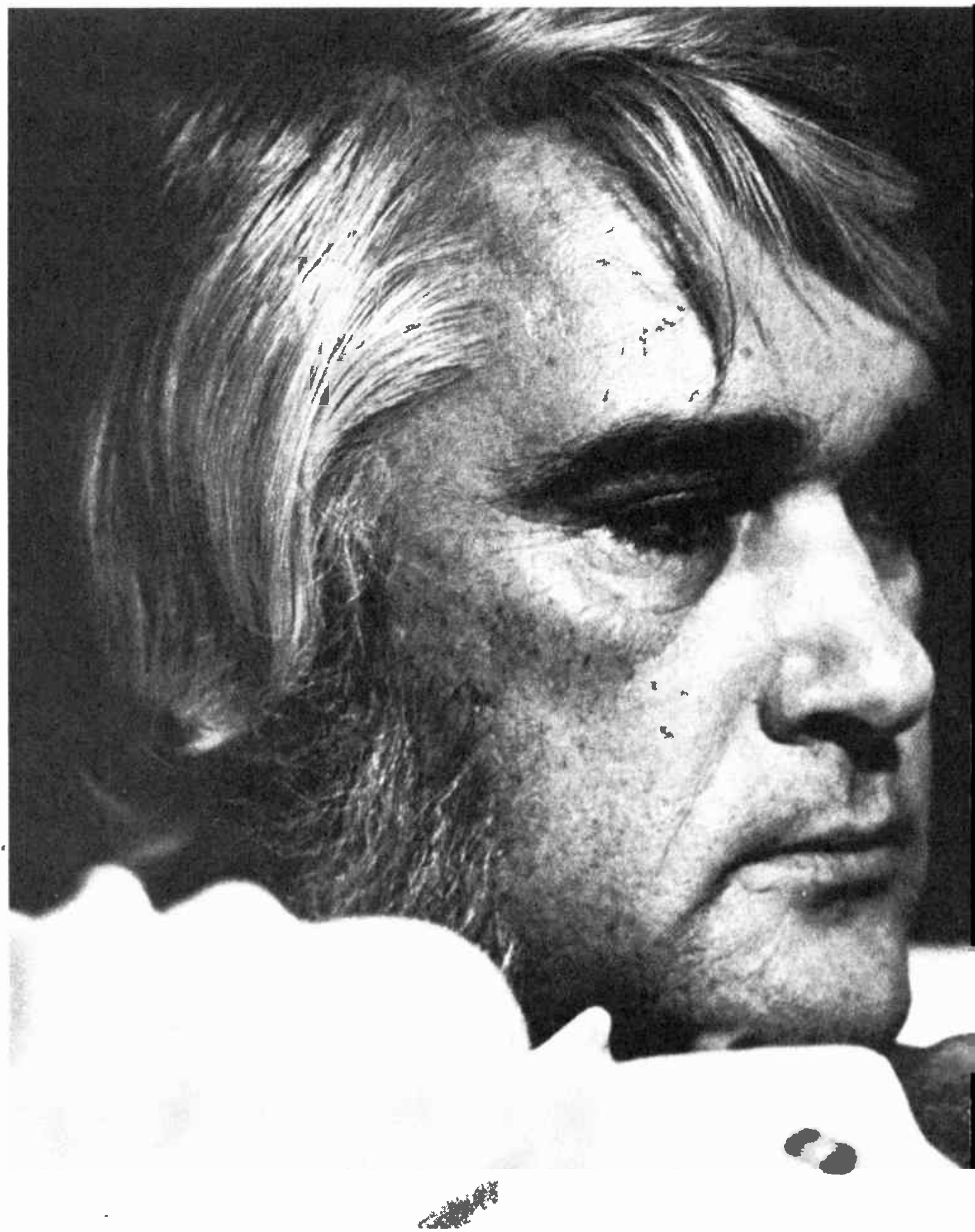
Charlie Rich followed "Lonely Weekends" with a song called "You're Gonna Be Waitin,' " but it was too much like "Lonely Weekends" and it flopped. He did score with one more tune while at SUN, the drinking song, "Sitting and Thinking," but after SUN had set, around 1963 he was spending most of his time playing in various small lounges and down-and-out clubs. In fact, that's what Charlie has been doing for most of his 20 years in the music business.

. . . By the time SUN set in 1963, he was spending most of his time playing in various small lounges . . .

Much of Charlie's work for SUN has been reissued on two records: *Lonely Weekends* and *A Time For Tears*. *Lonely Weekends* contains Charlie's best-known, early work and all his early hits: the magnificent R&B tune, "Who Will The Next Fool Be?" which has since been recorded by black R&B singers like "Little" Esther Phillips and Bobby "Blue" Bland, and also by James Taylor's blues-singing brother, Alex Taylor. "Break-up" is on that album, too—a big hit for Jerry Lee, though I'll take the desperate drive of Charlie's version any day, and also "Stay." *A Time For Tears* has more obscure, but nonetheless interesting, sides cut for SUN, including the great Rich composition, "Midnight Blues," and an engaging little piece of rockabilly fluff, "Goodbye, Mary Ann."

When SUN folded, Charlie signed with RCA's rhythm and blues affiliate, Groove, for a couple of years, and then switched over to RCA itself for one year. He had two hits while he was with RCA, "Mountain Dew" and a version of the old Jimmy Reed blues, "Big Boss Man." Charlie got along great with his producer at RCA, Chet Atkins, but despite Chet's expertise at production, and the talents of Bill Justis and Anita Kerr on the arrangements, he never reproduced a cohesive sound while with RCA. Oh, there were some fine moments—perhaps the most inspired performance ever of Lonnie Johnson's old R&B hit, "Tomorrow Night," was made by Charlie while at RCA. But in 1965, RCA and Charlie came to an amicable parting of ways.

In 1965 Charlie produced some of the finest recordings he has made to date. Even Margaret Ann got to sing in the sessions on Charlie's new label, Smash. Jerry Kennedy, Charlie's Smash producer, showed up one day with a rhythm and blues novelty song written by a then-fairly obscure songwriter named Dallas Frazier. The song, of course, was "Mohair Sam," and it became Charlie's second BIG hit. Those early sessions for Smash also produced an excellent album, *The Many New Sides of Charlie Rich*, and included Charlie's "Dance of Love," which has since been recorded by Tom Jones—twice ("We're very grateful," says Margaret Ann with a wan smile), some



Charlie Rich can play any style—pop, country, blues, jazz, gospel, or R&B.

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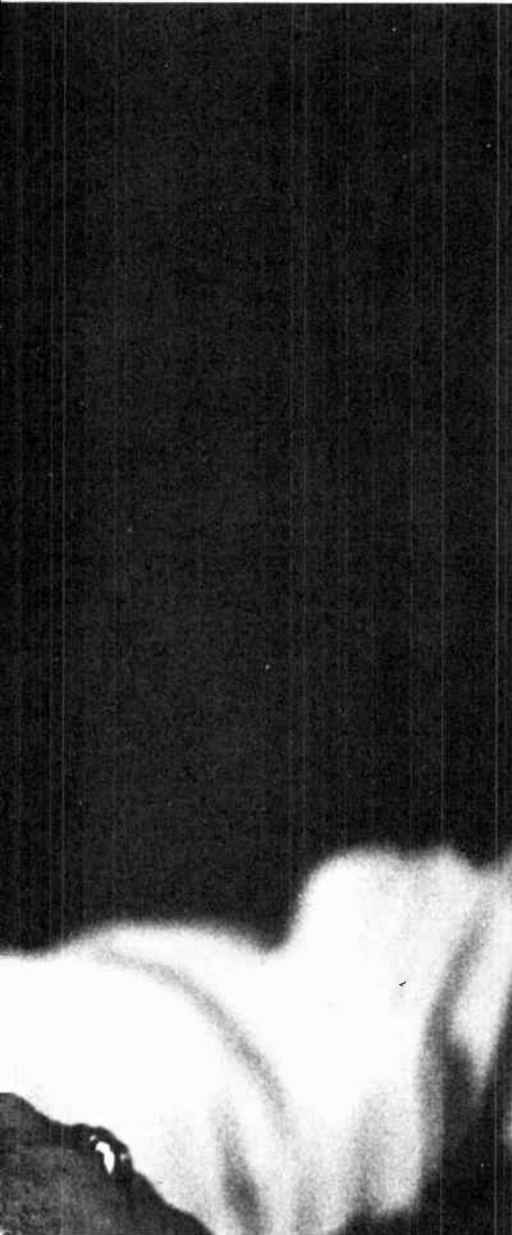
more of those early, goofy Dallas Frazier songs like "Moonshine Minnie" and "She's A Yum Yum," and one of the most brilliant songs of the Rich career, written by Margaret Ann, "Down And Out."

There were more records for Smash—an album called *The Best Years*, but, with tunes like "Tears A Go Go," it was nowhere near the quality of *Many New Sides*. Record sales fell off at Smash, and once again Charlie found himself switching labels—this time to Hi Records, a subsidiary of London, set up to record various Memphis acts like Bill Black and his Combo, and saxophonist Ace Cannon. The association was a brief one, but it produced another album, *Charlie Rich Sings Country And Western*.

From Hi, Charlie moved to Epic Records, where he remains to this day. His first Epic single was a classic, a Curly Putman song with narration written by Joe Tex, "Set Me Free." The album of the same name was mighty dismal, but things have been looking steadily up since then. Charlie's hits are getting progressively bigger: "July 12, 1939," "Life's Little Ups And Downs," "Nice 'N' Easy," "A Woman Left Lonely," "A Part of Your Life," and "I Take It On Home," and his albums keep rising in consistency and quality, probably as Charlie's producer Billy Sherrill begins to understand more the varied and complex talents of Charlie Rich, and seems to apply his special commercial touch extra-carefully and tastefully to each new Charlie Rich record. With the increasing success of his electrifying "live" shows at the Roof of the King of the Road and at various college and country concerts, his magnificent *Best Of* album and the release of "Behind Closed Doors," it looks like we are in the midst of the Third Golden Age of Charlie Rich, and one that will, hopefully, last this time. With the rise of the "new" breed of country star, perhaps after 20 years Charlie Rich's time has finally come.

Margaret Ann Rich is Charlie's pretty and friendly wife, and the mother of his three kids. She is also the most important single figure in Charlie's career; more important than Bill Justis or Dallas Frazier or Billy Sherrill. For besides being the author of Charlie's best tune, "Life's Little Ups and Downs,"



Margaret Ann Rich, Charlie's wife and a songwriter in her own right.

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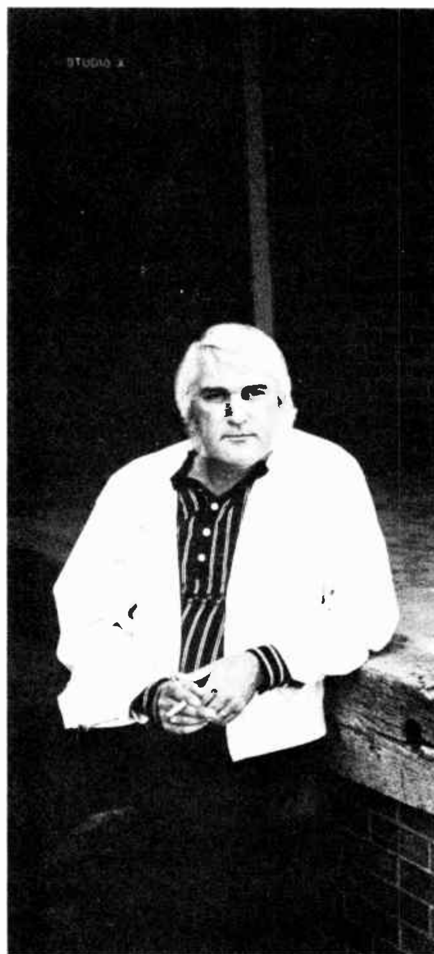
which has been recorded by artists ranging from Jerry Lee to Wayne Cochran and his C. C. Riders to Gary Puckett, and "Field of Yellow Daisies," which has been cut by Tom Jones, she is the one who stood by Charlie when the going got rough and the records wouldn't sell, which was sometimes for five years at a time. And she's long been on the receiving end of Charlie's frustrations when he gets too drunk or too uptight before a gig. "But that's the way it's been for twenty years," she says, "and, God willing, I'll have twenty more."

Sometimes country music gets to bothering her, though it's not that she dislikes the music—it's just that she realizes that Charlie could play any style, whether pop or jazz or R&B or gospel or rock and roll. It's the commercial reality of having to fit into some type of *mold* that bothers her. What she would like to see most is a situation where Charlie could do what he does best—introspective rhythm and blues songs. But she's also realistic about their state of affairs: "It's just impossible," she says, "for any singer that's white and over 40 to make a living in any field *but* coun-



. . . Both Charlie and Margaret Ann Rich have a great deal of admiration for the success of Kris Kristofferson . . .

try music. Think about it." Assuming that Charlie Rich isn't going to switch his image and start racing onstage, his white hair setting off a magnificent purple cape, to belt out a swinging version of "I Can't Turn You Loose," that would seem to be a fairly accurate appraisal.

Margaret Ann Rich was explaining to me the different kinds of music she and Charlie used to listen to when they were in high school. She and Charlie were particularly fond of the music of Jimmy Reed—and there is a great deal of the Jimmy Reed influence to be found in Charlie Rich's music. Anyway, she says, they used to listen real carefully to those Jimmy Reed records, and if you paid close attention to those records, you could hear the sounds of Jimmy Reed's wife whispering the words of the song to her husband, who couldn't read.

Charlie and Margaret Ann Rich make their home in Benton, Arkansas these days, along with three of their kids. Benton is a mining town, and the Riches aren't regarded as particular celebrities by the townsfolk. They don't even have all that many friends in Benton—just a psychiatrist who lives down the road a ways, who likes to go fishing with Charlie. Margaret Ann likes to cook a lot for her family, and when they sit down to listen to music, they'll listen to just about anything, just so it's good. Both Charlie and Margaret Ann have a great deal of admiration for the success of Kris Kristofferson, and the way he has been able to carve a place for himself in the ultra-commerical world of Nashville music, with a minimum of artistic compromise. Charlie says his favorite songs are Kristofferson's "Loving Her Was Easier," Margaret Ann's "Life's Little Ups and Downs," and the Peggy Lee hit of a few years back, "Is That All There Is?".

Their oldest son, Alan Rich, who with his mother co-wrote Charlie's moving hit, "A Part Of Your Life," is seriously considering a musical career of his own, and this makes his parents particularly proud, since they have made no effort to encourage Alan, who is now 18, in that direction. His mother says his sound is similar to another of James Taylor's brothers, Livingston Taylor, and the piano he uses to accompany his voice has acquired a classical flavor, "though I don't know where he picked *that* up." Charlie and Margaret Ann are hopeful, and more than a little apprehensive for their son and what he'll probably find in the music business. Margaret Ann has even written a song for Charlie to record; something like "He's following in my footsteps, so I'm bound to walk the line." "It's a HIT!" yells Charlie.

Charlie Rich has just finished taping the Wilburn Brothers' television show. It's been a long day for him, hanging around a room loaded with vending machines and Doyle Wilburn's dressing room, drinking brandy. And in the course of that afternoon, I've heard him say three times that he would just as soon be picking cotton as be hanging around that television station, and two times, that he would rather have a steady job playing piano in some cocktail bar than be hanging around that television station. Someone mentions that he can do the Dick Cavett show in a few days, when Roger Miller, his ole buddy, takes over to host an all-country music show. Charlie says he might do it if he doesn't have to sit down and talk, too.

Driving back from the television studio with Charlie and Margaret Ann, with Harold at the wheel, we get stuck in an incredible traffic jam caused by the overturning of a dump truck a few miles up the road. "Hey, Charlie," says Harold. "Didn't you say in that song that we're supposed to be having a couple of drinks before the five o'clock rush to go back?" As we wait for things to get rolling, I mention that I once found an old RCA 45 that had Christmas greetings from various artists on the label, and sure enough, there's one few-seconds-long cut that has tinkling bells, and a husky voice that comes on saying, "Hello, this is Charlie Rich, wishing you a very Merry Christmas, and a Happy New Year." There is an awkward silence in the car, and then Charlie taps me on the shoulder and says, "Hey, man, that's not so funny. You know, I believe in Christmas."

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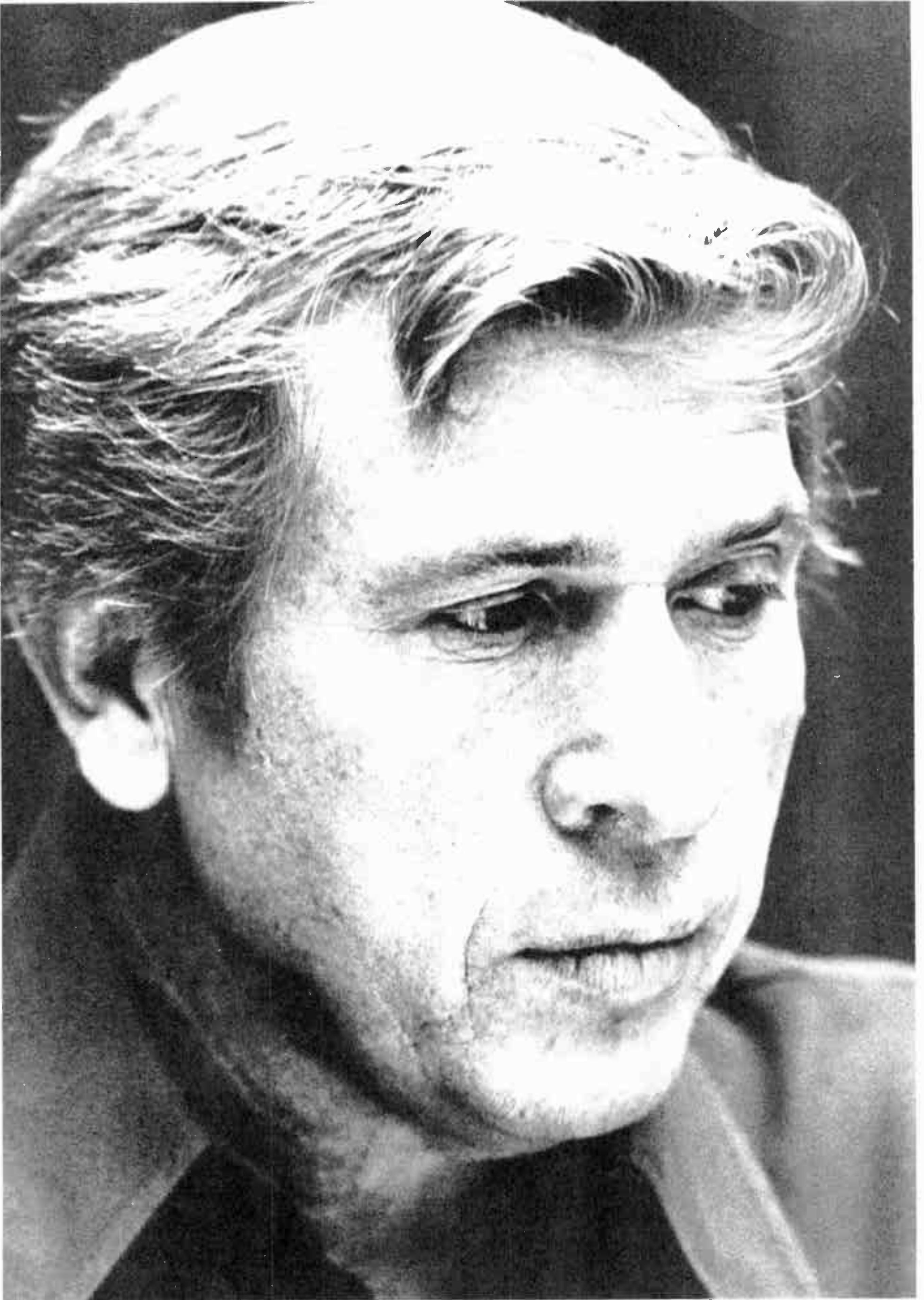

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Buck, Bakersfield, And The Talent Boom:

A Music Empire In The West

by Jeff Young

In Oildale things were cooking at 1215 North Chester Avenue all week long. Oildale, the growing north bank suburb across the Kern River from Bakersfield proper, is the site of the once elegant 1930's movie house which used to feature Ken Maynard and Hoot Gibson thrillers on Saturday afternoons, but now, remodeled and modernized, is the home of Buck Owens Enterprises. Inside it looked like any Credit Bureau office.

It was pressure cooking in those inner offices to be more exact. The 2nd Annual Buck Owens Pro-Celebrity Invitational Golf Tournament was coming up *that* weekend, and everyone was madly attending to the last minute details, from Buck, himself, to the glamour girls in the outer office. Everybody was up to their smiling teeth in details. Nothing was slipping by anybody, because this tournament is dear to Buck's heart. Two years ago, he lost his younger brother, Mel, to cancer, and it was out of a personal sense of futility that he put together the Buck Owens Health and Research Organization. The Buck Owens Golf Tournament was to aid in the funding of the project. Everyone in the Buck Owens business family was working overtime and on their own time.

Bob Beam, young and modishly inclined publicity director, leaned back in his spring chair inside his crowded walnut paneled cubicle and thumbed through the growing celebrity list, making additions and cancellations each time the phone rang.

"Clint Eastwood was here last year," he said, looking quickly up and grinning, "but he's in Mexico on location and can't make it. Mickey Mantle is back this year. He drives the ball a mile. Efrem Zimbalist, Jr. Peter Marshall from the 'Hollywood Squares.' The Dodger pitcher, Don Sutton. Evel Knievel. Johnny Bench. Archie Campbell. Charley Pride. Lots more. We had some professional golfers last year, but Bakersfield isn't a big golf town. So this year it's just celebrities. That's who the people want to see. People they really know. And, of course, Buck will be there."

> **. . . Buck is the man who nearly singlehandedly changed the name Nashville to Bakersfield East . . .**

What sort of a tournament would it be without ol' Buck? Or what would Bakersfield itself be without Buck? As the press releases say, Buck is "the man who put Bakersfield on the map; the man who wrote and sang songs for the people, all the people; who redefined the country music sound; who nearly singlehandedly changed the name Nashville to Bakersfield East; the man who built an empire for himself, an empire carved from cool, clean country music."

Before Buck, Bakersfield was known to its Los Angeles neighbors as a scorching hot town full of air-conditioned adobe motels where the Los Angeles Rams games could be seen on TV when they were blacked out at home. To this day, some of Los Angeles' finest fans can be found on certain Sundays holed up in the stuccoed opulence of the Bakersfield Inn, glued wide-eyed to the bolted down TVs. To all others, "pre-Buck Bakersfield" meant only a stop at a shady Orange Julius stand on a boring trip north or south. That, however, isn't the whole Bakersfield story, Buck not withstanding.

The flat semi-arid Central Valley town is the symbolic center of Kern County, whose riches are extracted from an almost perfect rectangle, 67 miles north to south and 120 miles east to west. The 1970 agricultural crop topped $345 million, third largest in the nation, and its 20,000 oil and gas wells, its mines and its mineral products brought in $462 million, one quarter of California's entire mineral production. Bak-

PHOTOS EMERSON-LOEW
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ersfield, itself, contains almost half of the county's population of 400,000, and with all the wealth the

. . . To many people, pre-Buck Bakersfield meant only a stop at a shady Orange Julius stand . . .

land has supplied, the town is slowly moving into the 20th century, while still retaining the small valley town sense about it.

There is a drug problem in the high schools as in all growing cities. Downtown is said to be dying. But the people have a basic faith in themselves, a Protestant self-reliance. They've come too far for a little brow-lining bafflement and certain troubling visitations from modern suburban spectres to keep them down. They have spirit and dedication.

And they've got their music, and *their* music is *country* music. There are "good" and "refined" citizens of Bakersfield who consider country music an embarrassment, but for the tough oil workers and field workers and sassy blonde bubble-headed secretaries and truck drivers—and especially for those who dance nightly at Tex's Barrel House, or the Blackboard, or Trout's or the other country music bars—it's the music of their lifeblood.

For more than 25 years, Bakersfield's own brand of country music had been growing in the Bakersfield soil since the Okies and other busted and homeless citizens from the dust bowls of Oklahoma, Texas and Arkansas arrived in California to seek their fortunes or mere employment. Along with the blankets, pots, pans, chairs and tables strapped to their broken down trucks, the hardworking people also brought banjos, fiddles, guitars and songs . . . and their love for music. Bob Wills with his Texas Playboys was the biggest thing around in Bakersfield in the late thirties, and Bakersfield soon became one of his regular West Coast stops. He'd play at Beardsley Garden out on the Edison Highway, southeast of town and the toughest place around. In the early days of the big dance halls, whole families would truck on in from the surrounding agricultural communities such as Arvin, Lamont, Weedpatch, Pumpkin Center, and make a night of it doing the western swing. The Rhythm Rancho was another ballroom on South Union that attracted big name bands.

With the ballrooms came the early music clubs, the Clover Spot and the Lucky Spot also out on the Edison Highway, and, in town, the Blackboard. Not only did the Hank Williamses, Spade Cooleys, and Pee Wee Kings all begin to stop by regularly, but Bakersfield's own musicians found steady work, and hair. It's difficult to tell just how old he is. "They were both naturals." Today, Bill works with Merle's band, the Strangers. He recently reinjured his back and was in traction at St. Mercy Hospital in downtown Bakersfield, but he was more than willing to delve into his past and that of the town. He was originally a boilermaker before he seriously got into the club and music scene in the forties, and put his first band together. He also had the first

Evel Knievel: a regular at many invitational golf tournaments.

local bands began to pop up. The Tex Marshall Band; the Tex Butler Band; Odel Johnson's Band; and the most memorable of the local bands, the Billy Woods Band.

Billy Woods is a musical landmark in Bakersfield. He's been there since the early days and it is Bill Woods who discovered not only Buck, but Merle Haggard, among others. "Discovered," however, isn't his word.

"Let's just say they both started with my band," Bill said. He's a big, soft, kindly man with slicked, black local country music show on the radio.

"The first country music radio in Bakersfield was in 1946 on KGEE. It was a 15-minute Bob Wills Show. They just played his records. Then a little after that I got my own live noontime show on the same station, 'Bill Woods and the Orange Blossom Show.' That just about made my band the most popular around because more people heard it."

Soon after, KBIS went all country and Bill Woods became one of the first disc jockeys, along with Lewis

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Talley, and Terry Preston, (now known as Ferlin Husky) another Bakersfield immigrant. When TV first hit Bakersfield in the early 50's, country music was right in there on the local channels. The most influential of all the local television personalities was the Bakersfield country daddy, Cousin Herb Hensen. It was Cousin Herb, a folksy oldtimer, who gathered the town's finest musicians around him and called them the Trading Post Gang. Many were from Bill's band, including Bill himself, Fuzzy Owen (now Merle Haggard's manager), Roy Nichols, Bonnie Owens, Johnny Cuviello, and the Farmer Boys. The Trading Post Gang became Bakersfield's favorite group, and whenever they would play in places such as Oakwood Park just south of Fresno, 10 to 15 thousand foot-stomping people would come out of the woodwork with fried chicken and potato salad and beer and make a Sunday picnic out of it. The most popular of all the Trading Post Gang was a young guitar player newly arrived from Arizona by the name of Buck Owens.

". . . You could tell even back then that Buck was going to be big. He just had it . . ."

"The folks really knew how to have fun then. Swimming, eating, dancing," Bill remembers. "Most of all they loved the music. And Buck Owens. You could tell even back then that Buck was going to be big. He just had it."

It is out of this tradition that Buck emerged. Like so many others, Alvis Edgar Owens, Jr. ("Buck" from quite early) was an immigrant from America's heartland. Sherman, Texas in the early 30's, was a hot dusty town up near the Oklahoma border, and Buck's father was a hard-working sharecropper when Buck was born in 1929. The family's small framed house had only dirt floors and no electricity. It was not an easy life, but not an untypical one for workers in the area.

Buck was an early worker, and through the eighth grade, he tramped into the fields of cotton and maize, both before the school bell rang in the morning and after it rang in the late afternoon, to help out with the grocery bills at home. He grew up big and strong early, and the summer following the eighth

PHOTO: ALAN WHITMAN

Susan Raye with her husband, Buckaroo drummer, Jerry Wiggins.

Susan Raye was discovered by Buck and Jack McFadden in Portland, Oregon when she was a teenager singing on a local TV show, "Hoedown." She is now an installed resident of Bakersfield, a permanent member of the All American Show, and a star of growing stature in her own right.

"I went to the club I often sing at," Susan recalls with her radiant and now famous Susan Raye smile, "to see Buck play when he was in Portland. I was introduced to somebody called Jack McFadden. I didn't know who he was, but apparently someone had told him about me. We sat and talked for awhile, and then, when Buck went on stage, Jack asked if I wanted to go up and do a couple of duets with Buck. *That's* when I found out who Jack was. Well, I was nervous to say the least but I went up on that stage and sang some songs with Buck, and both Jack and Buck liked the way I sounded. That was the beginning."

It was almost two years later before Susan signed and actually got into the Buck Owens act. Buck and Jack bided their time until they felt she was ready for the big time.

"I was young and inexperienced when I first met them, and I honestly think that they both felt I wasn't ready to make a real serious go of it. Buck told me later he didn't want to ruin my life by getting me into the pressure of travel and all the things that go with the hard work of trying to make it before I was ready. So I worked around Portland, a few dates in Las Vegas, and grew up both professionally and personally. Jack kept in constant touch with me the whole time, but didn't put me under any pressure. Then one day, they asked me to come visit them in Bakersfield."

When Susan arrived, she sat and talked with Jack and Buck and the two men decided that she was ready to join the Owens gang officially and begin touring and recording. They also suggested she move to Bakersfield.

"I talked it over with my mother for about ten minutes," Susan laughs, "and we both figured *why not?* If I was going to be singing, I might as well be with the best. So I went home to Portland, packed up my belongings, and drove back to Bakersfield."

Susan's first single "Maybe If I Close My Eyes" was released in September, 1969 under the management and guidance of Buck.

"I probably could have started out by doing a duet with Buck, but he decided he wanted me to make it alone. Still, he picks all my material, does all the producing, makes all the decisions. And I'm grateful, because he knows a whole lot more about the business than I do."

Her trust has been well-founded because she has had hit after hit, including "L.A. International Airport," "Pitty Pitty Patter," "Wheel of Fortune," and, of course, the duets that she now does with Buck that have made them one of the newest and hottest duos in country music today.

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grade, he worked fulltime "doing a man's work for a man's pay," as he is fond of saying.

It was also that year that the Owens family picked up what was left of its windblown stake and drove an old car to Tempe, Arizona, looking for a better life in more fruitful fields. Buck started Mesa Union High that fall, but quit after six weeks and went back to work as a truckdriver, a ditch digger, a hay baler, a fruit swamper, anything that had to be done and that he could do. The war was on, and for a strapping towheaded young man too young for the Army and World War II, jobs were plentiful. He lived with his folks until he was seventeen, the year he married his first wife, Bonnie Owens.

"I don't know why I got married," Buck recalled. "I just wanted to I guess. Why does anybody get married?" He was married just long enough to have two sons, Buddy and Mike.

Music had entered his life quite early. His mother played piano in church for as long as he can remember, and he was hauled off to sing each Sunday. Soon after the family moved to Tempe, his father went out one afternoon and purchased a rickety old piano that he set up in the family parlor. That's when Buck learned to play. They also got an old radio, and Buck, for the first time, heard country music on the airwaves early in the morning and late at night after the work was done, music pulled in from the powerful Mexican stations and the one in Coolidge. Buck's early favorite was Bob Wills, along with Red Foley and Roy Acuff. The radio in the house also filled another function. Buck had purchased a battered old electric guitar when he was fifteen, and his father soldered a jack into the back so that Buck could practice with amplification. It wasn't much but it was enough, and Buck practiced. By the age of sixteen, he was performing in the honky-tonks.

His first booking was in Eloy, Arizona, the toughest town he had ever seen. He stood on a stubby wooden platform barely six inches off the beer and blood stained floor and witnessed his first really hairy barroom brawl, a roaring fight that saw beer bottles by the dozen bouncing off heads and walls. Buck's eyes opened to the size of bright silver dollars and he continued to play for more than a minute. But things kept getting worse and as the bottles flew closer to his own head, he put down his guitar and tried to sneak off. The owner spotted him and ran after him hollering, "Keep playing. Keep playing. You can't quit."

". . . I first hired Buck as a guitar player," Bill Woods said. "That's what he was selling himself as . . ."

Even the joints, however, were few and far between in Arizona, so in 1951 at age 21, Buck packed up his family in another old car and headed out on Route 66 for Bakersfield. He had kin there, and he had heard there were places to play his music. In Bakersfield he found a home and neighbors that were his kind.

"I first hired Buck as a guitar player," Bill Woods said. "That was around '53. That's what he was selling himself as. A guitar player. He played a few casual nights with my band when I was at the Blackboard on Chester. It was a rough and tumble place back then. Drinkin' & Fightin' clubs had taken the action away from the ballrooms by then. Hell, there were no admission prices at the clubs, and you could get drunk and dance and whoop it up until you were crazy. It got pretty mean sometimes. A fight-and-lick-your-wounds type club. But the music was damn good.

"By then the trend was toward small bands. That's pretty much how it was when Buck was with me. I had a small band and a singer by the name of Billy Mize. Now, Billy left me one night on short notice, went to Los Angeles to make it *big* on his own, and I told Buck that he was going to have to sing, and he threw a fit. He hated to sing because people *stared* at him, and all he wanted to do was play guitar. But I made him sing. And he did, but *only until Billy gets back* he always said. But Billy never came back, and Buck would walk off madder than a wet hen each night. But the crowd loved him. *More Buck.* Always *more Buck.* That's when I knew he was going to be a big star. He had the talent, the drive, everything."

While Buck was working Bakersfield by night, he was also traveling to Hollywood by day to play sessions at the famed Capitol Towers for a multitude of Capitol recording

Buddy Alan: Stepping Out of His Father's Footsteps

The spitting image of his old man? Well, not quite, but there's no mistaking that Buddy Alan Owens is Buck's son. He's as tall (taller in fact), as rangy, and has that easy smile that lights up his eyes. Buck and Buddy both smile with their eyes.

Buddy was born in Tempe, Arizona in 1947 and moved to Bakersfield when he was three. As a youngster he was indifferent, if not turned off, by the country twang. Like most kids his age, he grew up listening to rock 'n' roll, and even at that, music was "no big deal" with him, although he put together a rock band in high school and played local dances.

"I liked the Beach Boys and the Beatles, but the whole band thing was really loose. I liked music, sure, but I had no ambitions in it. It was mostly just fun, an ego thing. Girls liked guys that played in bands, you know?"

After high school, the band broke up. Some were drafted. Others went to college. Buddy went to the local Junior College for three years, and during that time worked at Owens Enterprises-owned KUZZ as a disc jockey. It was that maximum exposure to country music that first turned his head, especially the music of Waylon Jennings. Buddy was coming around.

The following year, Buddy went to Phoenix to continue his education. He also continued his disc jockey work and picked up a job on a 50,000 watt station. He came home from school for a Christmas vacation and arrived just in time for the Toys For Tots Benefit Show that Buck puts on every year before a jam-packed audience in Bakersfield (admission is one new toy). Buddy asked his father if he could sing a couple of songs in the show.

"It was weird," Buddy laughed thinking back, "because I'd never sung before so many people before, much less real country music, *or* in front of my Mom and my Dad. I was scared to death, but once I got out

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there, it was okay. I sang my two songs, but they kept on applauding, and I had to sing another. Except I didn't know another. The Buckaroos were playing behind me and Don Rich had to whisper the words to me as we went."

Buck asked Buddy to go on tour with him the following summer.

"Twenty five dollars a day plus expenses. I did that for two years. It was great experience."

And since that time, things have continued to roll. He signed with Capitol in '69 and his first release, a duet with Buck called "Let The World Keep On Turning," hit number one on the charts. He records with the Buckaroos, and plays guitar on almost all the sessions that they play in Hollywood or Bakersfield. He's also doing lots of writing these days, and has written songs for Tony Booth and Susan Raye, among others.

When asked the most obvious question, *What's it like trying to make a name for yourself when you're the son of Buck Owens?*, Buddy just smiles.

"It's got its good points and its bad points. I'll admit that it's made my acceptance a whole lot easier, but with the acceptance goes a certain attitude by lots of people. They expect a certain something from you, and when I get up on stage, some people are disappointed when I'm not an exact duplicate of my father, musically or otherwise. That's why I use the name Buddy Alan, obviously. Someday, though, when I get it all together, I may change my name back to Buddy Owens. If I'm lucky."

stars, including Tennessee Ernie Ford, Tommy Sands, Stan Freberg, Kay Starr, Sonny James, Gene Vincent, and Tommy Collins. He got his session break when he toured with Tommy as a lead guitarist. It was an easy step into session work after that. By this time, he knew he wanted to get into the country music business as more than a session man, and it looked as if the best way was as a songwriter. He had knocked on doors to try to make records himself, but people always asked, "Got any songs?" They said they had plenty of singers, but they needed material. Buck began writing, and people began to take an interest in him.

After a minor contract with Pep Records ("The guy sold over a thousand of my records out of the back of his car."), Buck finally hooked up with the people that knew him best in the business. Ken Nelson, the famed country producer at Capitol Records, signed Buck in 1956.

His career didn't exactly break immediately. In fact, it was three years before Buck scored his first hit, "Under Your Spell Again," but from there, Buck Owens reached the top of the country music field with his recording of "Act Natually," a record that turned country music's musical head.

"I'd always been criticized," Buck says, "because I used too many drums on my records, but when this one broke, it changed a lot of people's minds. I think I always felt more beat than the country music people who grew up in the East. I mean, I was influenced by all the greats, but I never played the schools and the churches and those type of affairs where people sit down. From Arizona to Bakersfield, I played dances in VFW halls and ballrooms and clubs, and those people wanted rhythm. They wanted to dance. I was also influenced by a lot of early rock and rollers: Chuck Berry, Carl Perkins, Fats Domino, Elvis, Eddie Cochran. Eddie Cochran, in fact, used to come into the Blackboard when he came through town, and I even played a couple of dates with Gene Vincent. I used to do a lot of rock at the Blackboard, anyway, so the rhythm

". . . I think I always felt more beat than the country music people who grew up in the East . . ."

The Bakersfield studio, elegant by any standards, including a full-sized Moog synthesizer.

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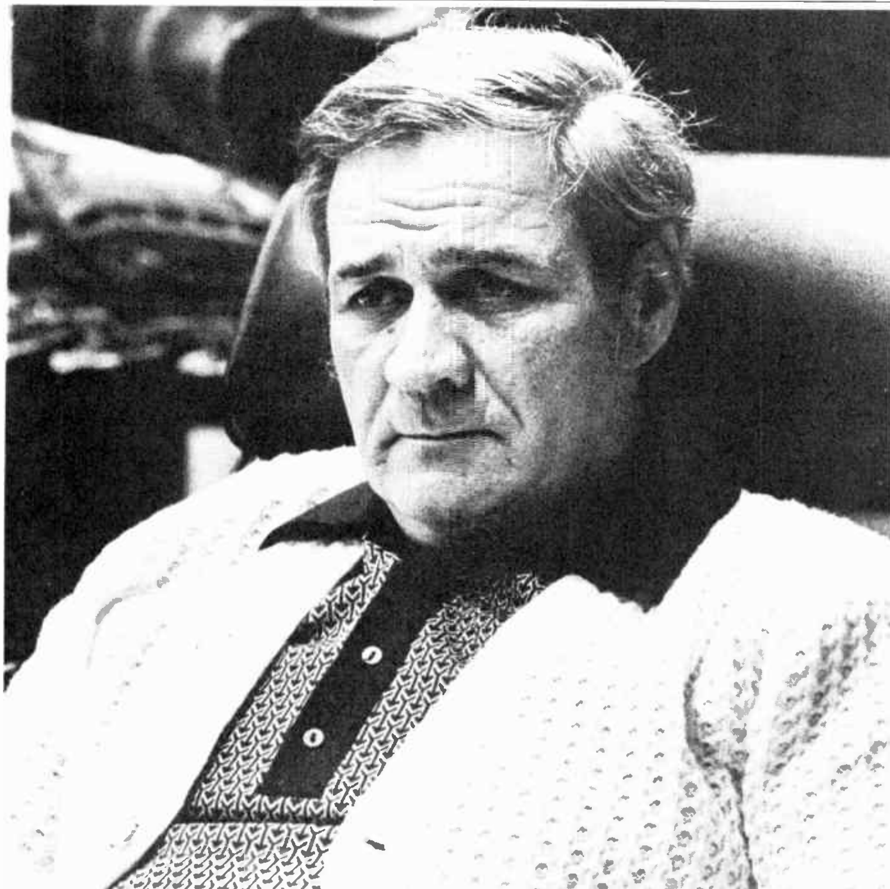
Jack McFadden: not only Buck's manager, but also one of his biggest fans.



came natural to me. I felt it."

Just as "Act Naturally" was beginning to climb the national charts, Buck received a phone call in Bakersfield one day that was to change not only his life, but the life of the caller.

Jack McFadden in 1963 was a longtime-aspiring West Coast promoter who lived on the periphery of the big time. Today he is a distinguished down home and greying man who commands attention. He smiles easily, can talk business a mile a minute, and is always ready. His career in the entertainment industry began as an eager ticket taker at a small theater in Sikeston, Missouri when he was only twelve. The owner had several theaters throughout Missouri, Tennessee and Arkansas, and he would periodically visit the theater where Jack worked. The owner took a liking to the boy and on one occasion took him to a corner grill near the theater, bought him a hot dog and Coke and asked him what he wanted to be. It took Jack fewer than five seconds to answer. He wanted to be in show business. Not as an actor or performer, but still in show business.

". . . I knew Buck was like I was," said Jack McFadden. "He was hungry, not only for money, but to get things done . . ."

By the time Jack McFadden was twenty, he was managing movie theaters and radio stations in San Francisco. Later in Stockton, California, he managed an appliance store, an auto dealership, and more radio stations. It was in 1954 that Jack first met Buck Owens.

"I'd been around Buck, and had seen what he had done in the years since I had first met him at the Blackboard. He was an aggressive and hardworking man. I called him that afternoon in '63 just to say 'hello', but as we talked that afternoon, the subject of me handling Buck exclusively came up. We agreed to meet that afternoon to talk about it in more detail. That's how it all began. I knew a manager can only do what an artist will let him do, and after talking with Buck, I knew he was like I was. He was hungry. Not only for money, but to get things done. This is what I had looked for all my life. He had both

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feet on the ground. Realistic and positive.

"In 1964, I predicted Buck would have eleven number one records in a row, but I was wrong. We had *twenty seven*." Jack leaned back behind his massive walnut desk and lit up a cigarette. "You know, Buck and I were driving to Las Vegas one day, and Buck asked me, 'What's your main ambition in life?' 'To make you a millionaire!' I answered." Jack looked cooly around the spacious mahogany elegance of his thick carpeted office, and then leaned forward with a handsome smile, "It don't take much to figure out why either."

Jack McFadden is not only Buck's manager, he is also one of Buck's biggest fans, even after all these years. He believes that Buck's next big move is into the movies.

"Almost everything that we planned," he confides, "we wrote down on paper a long time ago. A list of things that we wanted to do. And do you know it has all happened, and in almost the exact order that we planned it. During the original negotiations, we decided that all my time would go to Buck. But there was so much activity going on around him after he broke that we knew it all had to grow. We had to help other people."

Thus it was that Buck Owens Enterprises was formed, a foundation upon which Buck's growing empire could grow even more. In 1965, Buck and Jack took their first big step in diversification. Both saw a need for a central West Coast country booking agency to handle country acts exclusively. They formed OMAC, a booking agency to develop a stable of known stars and an agency that would give the artists the best results. OMAC immediately signed Joe and Rose Maphis, Wynn Stewart, Merle Haggard and Bonnie Owens, Freddie Hart, Rose Maddox and other West Coast based country acts.

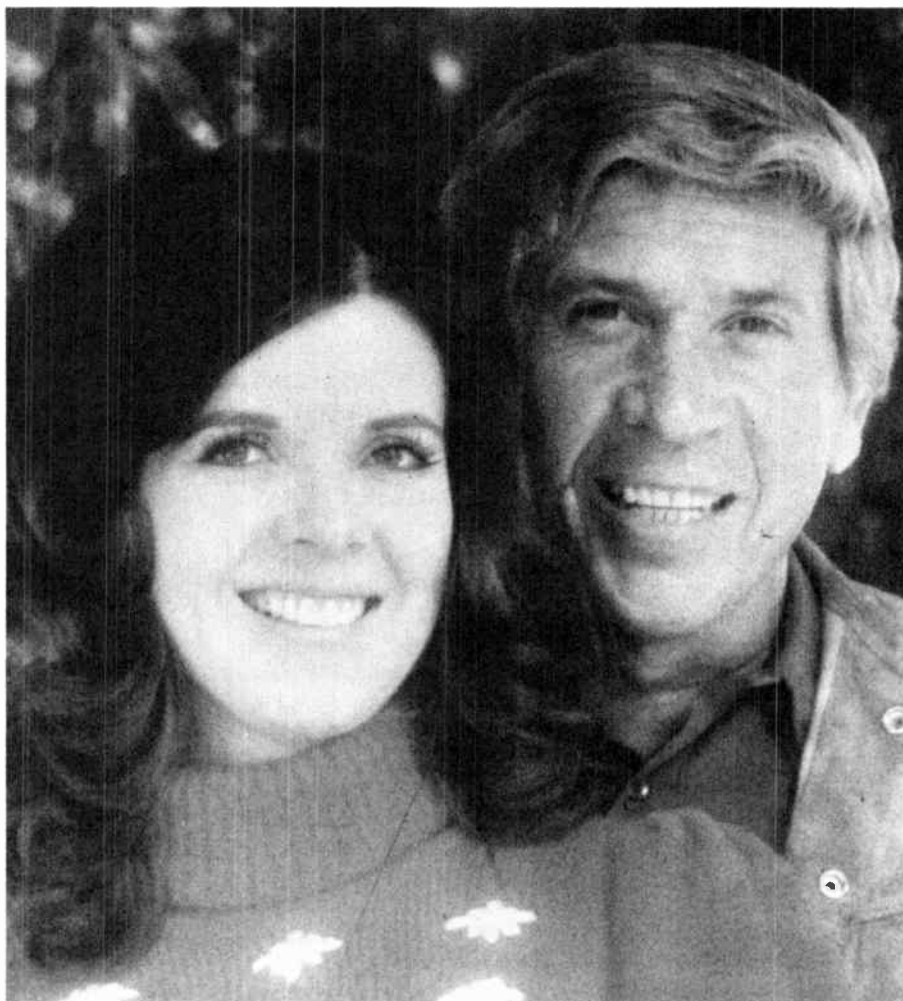
Jack's son, Joe McFadden has taken over the controls of OMAC. Although Jack still handles Buck exclusively, and the Buck Owens All American Show, OMAC handles the individual bookings of each of the Owens entourage, including Sheb Wooley and Red Simpson. Joe McFadden's office is right next to his dad's, but it is smaller, with less-tuft-per-inch carpeting, a smaller desk—less a place to live than to work.

"When an artist comes to Buck Owens Enterprises," Joe explained, "and wants to be represented, he usually comes for the whole ball of wax. OMAC handles his or her individual bookings, but when he or she goes out with Buck on the road, that's my dad's territory. Freddie Hart, on the other hand, has no business dealings with Jack. He's separate from the Buck Owens Show altogether. I handle all his bookings. For the most part, however, like I said, it's usually the whole ball of wax, like Susan Raye or Buddy Alan or the Buckaroos, or Kenni Huskey or the Brass. Most of them even live in Bakersfield, like a family unit. It just makes things easier, and it gives us a base. People aren't spread out all over and out of touch."

With his developing stable of artists under one business umbrella, Buck then set out to get all his publishing rights under the same roof. He formed Blue Book Publishing in 1967. Prior to Blue Book, Buck was signed with Central Songs, but when so many artists, ranging from Dean Martin to Peter and Gordon to Ray Charles to the Beatles started doing Buck's songs, it only made good business sense for Buck to channel all that money being made into his own business.

Buck Owens Productions was the next arm of the empire to be established. It handles "The Buck Owens Ranch Show," and the two radio stations that Buck owns, one in Bakersfield, KUZZ-KZIN, housed in the Owens building, and KTUF-KNIX in Phoenix. Mike Owens, Buck's youngest son, manages Buck Owens Productions, but at one time, like his brother, Buddy, he was the janitor and then a DJ for the radio station in Bakersfield.

"The Ranch Show" these days is seen in seventy plus markets across the country, and is shot at WKY-TV in Oklahoma City. Several times a year, the Owens entourage flies to Oklahoma City and in one madcap week puts together months and months worth of shows by working virtually around the clock. The shows are edited in Oklahoma, but the musical tracks are pre-recorded in the Buck Owens Studios in Bakersfield. It's all handled like clockwork. As Buck says, between



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"Hee Haw" and "The Ranch Show," and the way TV overlaps, he can be seen on TV sometimes six times a week.

Virtually all of Buck Owens' needs are now taken care of by Bakersfield. (Except for the audiences and the few sojourns to Oklahoma.) Sitting in his thoroughly masculine, interior decorated office with dark walnut furniture, thick gold carpet, black leather chairs, a couch, a fully outfitted bar and a grand piano, it's hard to think of Buck as a country boy. The crew cut he sported for so long is gone, but the eagerness is still there in his eyes as he leans back in his chair and smokes his pipe. This is "the man who put Bakersfield on the map." He is looking through a one-way glass window looking out on North Chester Avenue.

"No, I can't really see Bakersfield becoming a music capitol," he says thoughtfully, and narrowing his eyes. "For that we're gonna need to see more growth, and the growth will have to be more people producing things, pressing records here, that sort of stuff. The big labels will have to come in. Otherwise, it's just my organization and me. We're gonna have to have more competition, more quality product. A lot of people believe that Bakersfield will develop into that, but I haven't seen it as yet. It's like spread a rumor and watch it grow. But then I kinda like it as it is. It's a quiet little town with few hassles. You can concentrate here on what you're doing. I can never concentrate in Nashville."

When Buck says he'll stay *here,* he may mean it in a more literal sense than just living in Bakersfield. Buck knows that with all his record successes, and more recently with the success of "Hee Haw" and his own "Ranch Show," that so much exposure sometimes hurts an artist. He seems more than prepared to take himself away from the center spotlight that he has held for so many years. His records aren't automatically number ones anymore, and last year he ranked #16 in *Billboard's* Top Country Artists. In the last few years, Buck Owens the stage figure has by choice taken a less prominent place in the life of Buck Owens the person.

"There's a certain mystery that must remain about an artist, if you're going to continue," Buck said. "When you become a household word and everybody can see you as much as people have seen me over the past few years, it takes away the mystery. I know that Glen Campbell's record sales are down. His TV show has hurt him in that respect. Same with Roger Miller and Jimmy Dean. TV almost killed them as far as record sales, and even personal appearances." He leaned forward, cocking his head with a Buck Owens smile. "The biggest record buyers are women, right? If they're listening to somebody sing on the radio, who knows what's going on in their head. But if they see that person a lot, well, it changes them. It removes that essential mystery." He pauses a moment, his eyes twinkling as he looks you square in the eye. "Image is a very strange and touchy thing. Especially in country. The audience out there wants to know if you're fish or fowl. But if you as an artist don't know, then you're in trouble. If you have a record that breaks over into the pop category, that's okay, but if the country people think you've gone over into the pop area totally, then they'll think you deserted them, and then you do have a problem.

"When I released 'Bridge Over Troubled Waters,' *whew,* did I get letters about that. One minister from Missouri got all over me for

A few of the Bakersfield country stable.

singing a *dope song,* of all things. He was really uptight about that. But at the same time, I get requests to do that song every show. People love it. I will admit that I went after a much broader audience with 'Bridge,' but my belief is that you always have to be yourself. I would like to enlarge my audience. I would like to just sing and not really be labeled as pop, country, or whatever. But it's not easy. I can do gut bucket country and some people will say I'm regressing, while others will say, 'now you're cooking.' But I don't lose any sleep over it. I do things with sincerity and honesty. If they like it, great. If they don't, I'm sorry, but I'm not going to go jump in a lake or anything."

Producing now takes up most of Buck's time. He's always out looking

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". . . When I released 'Bridge Over Troubled Waters,' whew, did I get letters about that . . ."

for new talent, checking on an act that someone told him about, checking new presentations that he may be able to incorporate into the Owens Enterprises, making plans that will enable him to stick closer to Bakersfield.

"I've planned for a changeover from being known as Buck Owens, the guy who plays the clubs, who makes the records, who goes out and beats the road, to Buck Owens who is known as a producer, a coordinator. That's what I'm working on now. The most satisfying part of everything I'm into now is producing and watching the acts that are signed to me grow. Susan Raye. Freddie Hart. Buddy. The Brass. I watch their record sales, and if they move, I get five times as much satisfaction out of watching their records than I do mine."

Buck says that country music needs a czar, like baseball or football.

"You've got to have organization and planning. I don't think any Joe Blow should be able to call up and book anybody but maybe the top five country acts. Promoters should be licensed and should belong to an organization. Country music is a business, and it should be recognized as such."

"Centered in Bakersfield?"

Buck laughed and shifted in his chair. "You know, when I identified with Bakersfield, I was trying to tell all those people who believed you had to go to Nashville to cut a hit country record that I didn't believe that. I don't believe that anymore than I believe you have to go to Memphis to cut a blues record. I believe if you've got the right material, the right people to perform, that you can have a hit record." He winked. "And I thought it might be popular to be an underdog to Nashville. America loves underdogs, and God knows if you're in country and don't do *it* in Nashville, you're an underdog. You sure are."

Buck is quick to add that there is no animosity between him and Nashville. In the early 60's, in fact, he was going to move there at the request of the late Hubert Long, "the only man who could have gotten me there." But Ken Nelson talked him out of it, and Jack McFadden swears that keeping Buck in his home environment was an "instinctively shrewd move." Bakersfield, at first, wasn't that sure, especially the people who court Buck for his attention today.

"At first the city looked upon me with some disdain. I was, in their eyes, a hillbilly with manure on my boots who had gained some sort of national recognition. They came around very slowly at first. Today, of course, it's a different story. Today, the people, the politicians, seek to have your home phone number, but I suppose it's a normal thing. The city is full of typical American people. They take a wait-and-see attitude about anything that's new, or that they don't understand.

"The golf tournament is a good example. It's recent. Last year it was tough. We didn't get city cooperation from certain areas which might have made it easier. But I think we showed them something. This year we received much more help. In fact, the city fathers can't do enough. Now they're happy to have the movie stars. It's something they've never seen before. I only hope it doesn't rain for the damn thing."

It did rain that Saturday morning, and the wet drove everybody into the clubhouse for a mad celeb-filled party before the golfers could tee off again at noon. Back on the course, Mickey Mantle hit the pill a mile, Charley Pride cracked jokes every third step he took, and Buck played with a bad sore on his back that just about killed him everytime he swung. But you never would have known it. It all went off like clockwork. And Joe McFadden won the tournament in some of the ugliest golf shoes ever worn at the Bakersfield Country Club.

From the left—Buddy Alan, Stormy Winters, Tony Booth and Buck.

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Tanya Tucker: Country's Youngest Superstar

Henderson, Nevada is the home of a 14-year-old, blonde-haired beauty with the voice and poise of a mature woman. This is the story of Tanya's—and the Tucker household's—long road to success.

by J.R. Young

The flat, arid roadside of Route 66 leading into Las Vegas is as bright and loud as the Great Neon Strip itself—a continuous series of gaudy and beguiling signs proclaiming this week's Greatest Great. The furious Day-glo brain grabbers ranging from "New York Pastrami!" to "Campers Welcome!" crowd up against the four-lane black top like so many lithesome and long-legged lady hitchhikers, each with its own private and promising smile. Five miles south of the high rise Vegas Strip however, an obscure, and almost forgotten, exit veers right and heads east. A simple roadsign reads "Henderson-Boulder Dam," and the back road gradually eases up into the low hills skirting the Vegas sideshow below. After a calm, ten mile stretch it runs dead into Henderson.

This town is a small dot on the map. It is as far removed from the fever of the Vegas nightlife as is any town in North Dakota, except for the everpresent slot machines in every bar, every restaurant, and even every supermarket in the state, so it seems. Henderson's main features are a long, black, smoke-belching chemical plant and as many mobile homes as land-locked houses.

In one of the larger mobile home tracts on the edge of Henderson is a modest, double-width mobile home, complete with a green, metal canopy for a garage and a small plot of desert grass out front. Here, country songstress Tanya Tucker lives with her mother and father and a growing collection of stray dogs. Right here in Henderson. It isn't exactly where you'd expect to find a lovely nominee for two Grammy Awards (one nomination for her Number One best seller, "Delta Dawn," and one for Female Country Singer of the Year). After all, her competition includes Loretta Lynn, who *owns* a whole town, and Tammy Wynette who had staked out a huge chunk of Florida real estate until she and George Jones moved back to Nashville.

The slender, ash-blonde, 14-year-old beauty who opened the aluminum screen door late one afternoon seemed a far cry from all the glitter and trappings of stardom that one expects these days. Tanya Tucker's wide-eyed innocence and quick friendly smile as we headed

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into the comfortable family room was like any other 14 year-old's. But then, Tanya Tucker is still an impish, and always disarming, teenager. She just *happens* to also be one of the newest and brightest stars in country music.

Tanya is a most ordinary and most extraordinary young lady at the same time. One minute she is giggling and blushing behind her flashing blue eyes, and the next minute—by just the tilt of her head or the hint of a smile—she is calm and serious in the manner of a woman twice her age. The story of Tanya Tucker isn't so much the story of Tanya herself, as it is the story of the entire Tucker family, again a most ordinary and extraordinary household that deserves the collective credit for the success of its youngest daughter. Music has always been a part of the Tucker clan; Tanya's older sister, LaCosta, started singing before Tanya did.

"We all thought LaCosta was great. And she is," Bo Tucker, Tanya's father drawled as he leaned back in his easy chair in the panelled room of the trailer.

"I guess Tanya got tired of listening to LaCosta all the time," Bo Tucker continued. "She came up to me one day and said, 'Daddy, you want to hear me sing a song.' I said, 'Sweetheart, you couldn't sing your way out of a paper sack.'" Tanya giggled as her father smiled. "Well, she backed up a couple of steps and sang a song. And I said, 'Boy, that sounds pretty good. Sing another one.' So she did, and I seen real soon that she was going to be a singer."

"... 'Daddy, you want to hear me sing a song?' Tanya asked. 'Sweetheart, you couldn't sing your way out of a paper sack,' I said ..."

Tanya was eight at the time, but Bo claims to know a country voice when he hears one. And that's what he heard—a real good country voice as anyone who has heard Tanya singing "Delta Dawn," "Jamestown Ferry" or "What's Your Mama's Name?" will testify.

"She said to me, 'Daddy, I want you to hear me sing "Your Cheatin' Heart," ' and I said, 'Now don't start that. There never has been a girl who could sing Hank Williams numbers.' I've heard them try, but never any who could really do it. But Tanya proved me wrong again." And by the time Bo asked his "Your Cheatin' Heart" girl what she wanted to be, he figured he knew the answer. "A country singer," little Tanya answered, with all the gusto only an eight year-old could muster. And with all the confidence that perhaps only a father could muster, Bo Tucker decided to help Tanya become just that.

He became at once Tanya's singing coach, chauffeur, promoter, and whatever else he had to be to get his daughter's career going. He didn't know anything about the country music business, but he was willing to learn.

Jesse "Bo" Tucker was born in Colgate, Oklahoma, "a long time ago," he says, and Juanita Tucker ("the Mrs.") was born in Abilene, Texas. They both grew up in Denver City, Texas, and, as Mrs. Tucker admits with a shy smile, "I didn't like him much until he got out of the army." Soon after she got to liking him, they got married and began moving around the Southwest. Tanya's *official* biography reads, "... Bo is a heavy equipment operator in the construction industry. There have been good times, financially, and bad times for the Tuckers, and the elder Tucker's work forced them to move frequently." But it was really much more complicated than that.

Tanya, the youngest of the three Tucker children, was born in 1958 in the small, dusty west Texas town of Seminole. She did most of her growing up in Wilcox, Arizona, where her family moved shortly after she was born. Bo Tucker was always a great country music fan.

"The closest I ever got to singing myself, though," Bo recalls, "was in the car as me and my buddies would drive around. You know how that is. I did a pretty good imitation of Ernest Tubb, but that was about it. But I always had a good ear for music."

The only radio station in Wilcox at that time was a country music station, and between her Daddy's records and the one radio station, Tanya fell easily into that good ol' country sound. "Me and my sister would sing around the house for as far back as I can remember, and it was always country music. The first song I remember is "Sad Movies" by the Lennon Sisters. Country music was all there was, and that's the only thing I've known.

"... I don't like rock and roll ... there are some things I like, but nothing like country ..."

"I don't like rock and roll," Tanya says rather bluntly and matter of factly, but catching herself sounding a little severe, she cocks her head a bit and tempers the answer. "Oh, there are some things I like, but nothing like country. Rock may be good to dance to for the kids, but I still like the country dances."

When Tanya was ten, she began entering talent shows soon after the family moved to Phoenix in 1969. She never won any. But Bo Tucker still knew he heard "something in her voice that sounded right," and he set out to get people

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to hear it. On a trip to Nashville, Bo got producer Danny Davis to listen to some homemade tapes. Danny said, "Well, I think she'll be a whiz," but that's as far as it got. The next time Bo saw Danny Davis was when Tanya walked on stage at the Grand Ole Opry to sing "Delta Dawn."

Bo took Tanya to Nashville another time to try and get someone with the right connections to listen to her, but the musical doors of Nashville seemed steadfastly closed. He finally took some of the homemade tapes to a prominent Nashville record store owner for any kind of an opinion. The owner listened a few minutes and then looked over at his secretary and said, "If you just got $50,000 in the mail today, would you put one penny in this girl's singing career?"

"Nope," the secretary announced coolly.

"Does that answer your question?"

"Yessir," said Bo.

The Tuckers have sacrificed a lot for the sake of their daughter, Tanya. Now they're beginning to see some rewards.

"I'd try and get people to listen to her, but they'd say 'Who is she?' 'Well,' I'd say, 'my daughter.' And that ruined it." Bo smiled with the confidence of three plus years distance from those trying days. "'Yeh, I've got a daughter, too!' they'd say."

In the meantime, Tanya had sung a couple of songs on a local variety show in Phoenix, and as a result of that appearance, she became a regular on the "Lew King Show," a kids' talent show. In August, 1970 the Tuckers again had to move, this time following the construction crew to St. George, Utah, a small town in the southwest corner of the state. The job was a good one, almost $9 an hour. St. George wasn't exactly the place for Tanya to break into show business, but it was at this time that she received her first real break.

Judy Lynn was going to play the Arizona State Fair. Incredible as it may seem, the day before the fair opened Bo and Tanya jumped in the family car and drove almost 300 miles to Phoenix on the chance that they might be able to get Tanya on that show. There, they met Tanya's brother who just walked backstage to Miss Lynn's trailer and said his little sister was out front and wanted to be on the show.

"He must have been persuasive or something," Tanya laughed, "because they said they'd listen to me. I came backstage and sang something and then they talked it over. Finally they said *yes*. I heard later that Judy herself didn't think it was such a hot idea because then a lot of other kids would want to be on the show. And sure enough, the next day eight other kids came in and auditioned after I was on the show." When the show ended, however, Bo and Tanya got right back in the car and drove back to St. George and, as Tanya puts it, "goofed off for more than a year before really trying to get started again."

". . . I've quit some awful good jobs to go help her," Bo Tucker drawled . . .

If that singular drive to Phoenix seems rather incredible, then the permanent move to Henderson in the fall of 1971 was even more mind-boggling. "My family didn't move to Henderson because we wanted to move here," Tanya says with a characteristic frankness. "We moved here because of me. My life's goal was still to be a country singer. Las Vegas was a good place to get started."

"I've quit some awful good jobs to go help her," Bo Tucker drawled. "I automatically quit them to try and take her future on to where I knew it should be."

Bo had met some music agents from Las Vegas who talked a good game, and who said they could help Tanya get the break she needed if she moved to Las Vegas. That initial contact fell through, but since the mobile home was already purchased and installed up on the hill in Henderson, they stayed on and began looking elsewhere in the neon city. Bo chanced upon the name of Dolores Fuller, one-time agent for Johnny Rivers, a songwriter and a woman who just might have the contacts they needed.

"When we heard about her," Bo said, "we just looked her up in the phone book one day." At that time, Tanya had six demo tapes that she had made one afternoon at United Recordings in Las Vegas with the help of musicians recruited off the street. They were rather ragged musically, and the songs rather standard ("For The Good Times," "Put Your Hand In The Hand," etc.), but Dolores Fuller liked the tapes; she wanted the famed executive A&R producer of Epic Records' Nashville office, Billy Sherrill, to hear them. In Nashville, Billy Sherrill listened to the tapes and liked what he heard. That in itself is compliment enough. Sherrill has one of the best track records in the

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business, and is the guiding hand behind Tammy Wynette's career.

Sherrill flew to Las Vegas to talk personally with Bo and Tanya. After hearing Tanya sing in person, he signed her on the spot. A month later, Tanya found herself standing in Studio C at the Columbia studios in Nashville with the city's finest pickers playing behind her.

Billy felt he had found exactly the right record for Tanya's first single, and presented it to her when she arrived in Nashville. The song, of course, was Alex Harvey's "Delta Dawn."

"He could tell I could sing it right away," Tanya says delightedly. "But when Billy heard my demo tapes, he heard *my sound.* Everybody says I sound older and look older than I really am, but I think being only 14 was really an advantage. People hear my records and then see me. It's hard for them to believe."

In the eight months that Tanya has been making personal appearances, she's been as far from home as Florida, Illinois, the Grand Ole Opry, most of the western states, and has made a major tour of Texas with Johnny Rodriguez. Most of the time, however, she's at home in Henderson, where she is a ninth grader in basic high school. Her ambition, no longer a dream but a reality, has brought certain changes in her life.

"The biggest change is that I'm a lot more busy than I used to be. I've always thought of my music as a serious thing," she says quite matter of factly, "even when I was nine. Right now I'm taking 'Careers' in high school, and the class is kind of boring to me because it is to encourage kids to get a job, to do the job they want to do, and to enjoy it. It's boring to me because I already know what I want to do, and what I'm going to do."

Most of Tanya's friends at school are "real excited" about her career, and always want to know what she's doing next, where she's going and who she has met. It isn't often that high school kids have the opportunity to sit in the same English classroom and study "A Tale Of Two Cities" with an outright star and see that she has the same problems with Charles Dickens that they do.

As for boyfriends, Tanya laughs and looks over at her Mom and Dad. Tanya admits she has boy *friends* but, "no, not a steady."

The obvious question is whether Tanya thinks she is growing up faster than kids her own age, and she has given that question some serious consideration. "Yes, I imagine so." She paused a moment and pushed her long blonde hair over her shoulder. "Because the entertainment world is an adult world. I'm around adults all the time, and the only time I'm with kids is in school or at a show. I imagine I'm growing up faster, and seeing things from a more adult point of view before most kids do." She laughed a second, her eyes twinkling. "I'm aging."

When Tanya isn't on the road or in school, she can usually be found in Morgan Hill, just south of San Jose, on a ranch owned by some close friends. "They're a cowboy family with this beautiful ranch, and they have cutting horses." Suddenly it isn't the poised and reflective Tanya speaking, but Tanya the teenager, bubbling over as she talks a mile a minute in a high voice, and talking almost as much with her eyes and arms.

"The second time I went down there to play a date, Daddy and I stayed at the ranch, and one of the fellas said, 'let's go out and get some of those cows and see if you can ride a cuttin' horse.' I said I didn't think I could do that, but he convinced me to try. The cowboy told me what to do, and I did it. They were really surprised, and so was I. Everybody said, 'Hey, you ride pretty good. Let's go to a *cuttin'* Sunday!' So I did—and won third prize. Boy, was I excited, and right then, it was in my blood. I just had to have a cuttin' horse after that, and now I have two, both in Morgan Hill."

One of the horses wouldn't by any chance be called?

"You guessed it," Tanya grinned. "Delta Dawn. My first horse."

PHOTO: JOAN GUERTIN

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PHOTO MARSHALL FALLWELL

Mother Maybelle Carter: Her Career Spans A Half-Century

She's like the bass in a good band: you never know she's there 'til she stops pickin'.

by Billy Edd Wheeler

She is short, but she casts a long shadow—long and a half-century wide. Her voice is shy and unassuming, but it has boomed over the loudest air waves of her time and made her a household sound. She is so modest that digging facts out of her is like digging clams on a rocky, clammed-out Maine shore at high tide, because many of these facts would sound like compliments to herself and she is not, and never has been, on an ego trip. She is like the bass in a good band: you never know she is there 'til she stops pickin'. Yet thousands imitate her guitar licks and a handful of Nashville's elite acknowledge her as a master, a creator, an originator and an influence on their own style. She is Maybelle Addington Carter, Queen of Country Music.

She gave Chet Atkins one of his first steady jobs back when people said "Chet Who?" This was when Mother Maybelle and the Carter Sisters were playing the Tennessee

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Barn Dance in Knoxville, after the Original Carter Family had split up, and the girls and Mama had gone on to Richmond to begin anew, to see how hard show biz can be (they had two radio shows a day and did personal appearances just about every night).

It was 1949 and Mother Maybelle and the Carter Sisters got an offer to come to Springfield, Missouri. "We asked Chet if he wanted to come along and work with us."

... In 1949 "we asked Chet (Atkins) if he wanted to come along and work with us." 'I sure would,' he said. 'I'm starving to death.'

"I sure would," Chet said quickly. "I'm starving to death."

"Chester had his trailer hooked to his car. He unhooked that trailer and we took off. He was with us for three and a half years. He went with us to the Ozark Jubilee in Springfield, played with us 'til after he went with RCA here in Nashville. We brought him here with us and we had a time getting him in here. The guitar players tried to keep him out. They was afraid he'd take their work away from 'em, and he did eventually, but he couldn't play with nobody else but us for about six months."

Floyd Cramer is another Nashville picker who admits (or brags, for Floyd is big enough to) that some of his unique piano style came from Mother Maybelle and the way she slurred the bass notes playing her guitar.

"There's a little lick I get on the autoharp when I jump the key, you know, that Floyd says influenced his piano playing too," she added shyly, with a little embarrassed laughter.

Sitting in her son-in-law's home, Johnny-come-lately-Cash, and listening to him play tapes made from transcriptions of the original Carter Family broadcasts over XERA, XEG and XENT in Texas from 1938-42, the influences keep popping up.

"Hear that?" Johnny Cash says, rewinding the portable Wolensak. "Those patterns, repeats, coming in on certain phrases of that hymn —the Carter Family was doing that in the thirties. Gospel groups were making it popular in the forties and even the fifties."

A.P. Carter, Maybelle's cousin and the man of the group, had a way of coming in when he felt like it, when the spirit moved him or when the song needed a lift, singing bass harmony (though many of the notes were too low and his voice just naturally trailed off to nothing), repeating a key word, while Maybelle echoed him with her higher harmony.

"I'm thinking of doing an album using some of these old Carter Family transcriptions," Johnny Cash continued. "I'll do the narrating and pick out the best things from their different periods. Listen, here's June singing when she was ten."

In 17 years, the Original Carter Family recorded more than 250 songs.

"Honey!" June protests, blushing. "You don't have to play that!"

But he does, knowing she'd have clobbered him if he hadn't, for the tapes are fascinating documents of American musical history. The announcer, Brother Bill, barks out business-like: "And now here's one of the Carter girls, pretty little ten-year-old June Carter, to sing for you. What are you going to sing, honey?"

... The announcer barks out: "Here's one of the Carter girls, pretty little ten-year-old June Carter, to sing for you ... "

"I thought I'd sing Engine 143."

Johnny Cash almost breaks up when June starts in,

"Along came the FFE,
The swiftest on the line ... "
and for the rest of the evening he was like a child on Christmas morning, each new song a delightful revelation. There were 190 of them and we sampled a good many.

It was a treat for me too, for frankly I didn't know that much about Mother Maybelle—though I knew she was a member of the Country Music Hall of Fame, and I knew there was a style of playing named after her, the famous "Carter Lick," and I knew that they had erected a monument at Bristol, Virginia-Tennessee to the Original Carter Family and Jimmie Rodgers, and I knew that she had a famous son-in-law and was mother of three of country music's most talented and beautiful girls, Helen, June and Anita.

But that is not knowing someone. That's the way the public knows many of its legends, only superficially. What I was learning now was about the warmth of the woman, the fabric of her personality and the love that everyone has for her, not just her family, but everyone who has been associated with her. The one thing everyone agreed on, the key to her greatness is her deep humility. She is completely oblivious to how great she is.

There is one other thing that came out about Mother Maybelle and that is her physical strength. When they say "She is a trouper," they mean that today, in her sixties, she will sit up all night and pick and sing, if there is anyone who'll sit with her.

But with all her touring and trouping, she has always been a mother first and an entertainer second.

"When mother invited you for supper, *she* cooked it, not a servant or a cook," Helen says proudly. "The wheat thrashers loved to eat at our house. And when a play was given at school, a Carter girl got the lead, 'cause Mama was the best seamstress around.

She still raises a garden and she still cooks. She's a legend but she is still paying her dues. Billy Wilheit of the Hubert Long Talent Agency says they booked her 28 times between January and June of this year, but to hear her tell it, she ain't doing much.

"Mother would be happy if she could just die on stage," Helen said.

Maybelle Addington was born in Copper Creek in southwestern Virginia on May 10, 1909, in a land of small creeks, limestone rocks, rolling hills, rail fences and cellars full of cabbages and potatoes. She was one of ten children born to Margaret and Hugh Jack Addington.

On the other side of Clinch Moun-

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Mother Maybelle in front of her home, just outside of Nashville. She does her own cooking and still raises a garden.

PHOTOS: MARSHALL FALLWELL

tain were the Carters. Bob and Mollie Carter had eight children, eldest being Alvin Pleasant or A.P., who became known as a collector of English and Irish songs, grew up to be jug-eared and tall and handsome and, in 1915, raided the Copper Creek side of the mountain of a buxom, dark-eyed, beautiful girl named Sara Dougherty who sang in a low, almost male voice. She was Maybelle's first cousin.

In 1926 A.P.'s brother, Ezra J., crossed the mountain too, on a hunting trip—not for deer or bear or turkey, which were plentiful, but for blue-eyed gentle Maybelle, who could play the banjo and the autoharp and the guitar and, because there weren't many other pickers

. . . The key to her greatness is her great humility. She is completely oblivious to how great she is . . .

around, developed a style of finger playing wherein she worked rhythm and lead at the same time. They were married and came back to settle in Maces Springs, neighbors to A.P. and Sara.

So they were ready when in 1927 A.P. came home and said he had run into Ralph S. Peer in Bristol and that word was going out to all mountain communities for musicians and singers to come in and audition to make records for the Victor label.

Out of those who came and were lucky enough to be paid $50 per song recorded, two names were standout hits—the Carter Family and a young boy named Jimmie Rodgers. The Carter Family records must have sold well, for in 1928 Peer called them to Camden, New Jersey for additional recording, paying them now $75 per song. In May they recorded "Wildwood Flower," a song A.P. "worked up" for them, "John Hardy," "Forsaken Love" and others. In February they returned to New Jersey again for the recording of "Little Moses," "Lulu Walls," "Diamonds In The Rough" and "Foggy Mountain Top."

In 1938 they made the long trip to Del Rio, Texas where they did the transcriptions described earlier, over the Mexican border radio stations, with 500,000 watts, the most powerful in the world. They had crept quietly from the hills and now were blazing across international skies. Hillbilly music was evolving.

"The second year I went out to Texas," Mother Maybelle told me, "I took Anita. This was '39 and she was four. She'd sing duets with me and sometimes solo. We worked for Consolidated Drugs (Peruna and Kolorbak) out of Chicago—they paid for the broadcast time—and when I came home Christmas, 1940, I was asked if I had any other kids that could sing. I said I've got one, Helen, but I won't promise you about the other one, June.

"I went home and I started to work on them kids. I put June on autoharp and Helen on guitar and in two weeks they'd memorized 15 songs. He put them on the show and give 'em $15 apiece a week, and that was big money back then. They was still in school, too."

A.P. and Sara separated in 1933 and Sara married Coy Bayes in 1938 in Brackettsville, Texas, moving with him to California, though she continued to sing and record

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some with them. In 1942 the Carters moved to Charlotte to work for WBT and the following year they broke up. They had recorded some 300 songs for different labels, but no albums, though they were to see many albums put together in various packages later on.

"... We recorded with Jimmie (Rodgers) in Louisville in 1932. He wasn't able to play his guitar much, he was that sick, so I played for him and he sang ..."

"We recorded with Jimmie Rodgers in Louisville in 1932, not more than a year before he died," Maybelle says. "In fact, he wasn't able to play his guitar very much, he was that sick, so I played for him and he sang. I had to play like him, you know, so everybody would think it was him. But it was me." Again that embarrassed laughter.

The Carter Family moved to Richmond, then on to Knoxville, where they picked up Chet Atkins, and on to Springfield where they did their network show and another radio show every day and the hard work continued and finally to Nashville and tours of Germany (where Helen said Mother Maybelle once went to sleep while standing picking on stage!) and tours with Johnny Cash, the man she had blind faith in even before he made it big.

"Me and my husband, we just figured there was a lot of good in Johnny. He used to come out to the house when we was living at Two Mile Pike—he'd come in and out—June was beginning to work some with him then. After we moved over on Summerfield I just fixed him a room and let him come and go when he got ready. He stayed off and on two or three years.

"I knew he was having a little problem with some things, you know, and me and my husband talked about it. We figured we had to stick by him, and that's what we done. There were some things he did that we wouldn't o' put up with with a lot of people, I guess. I said sometimes I'd go off and come back and I wouldn't know if the house would be burned down or my doors broke down, or what. (That laugh again.)

"But if he ever tore up anything, he always fixed it. Once he broke the foot off my bed. I come in one day and he had him a bunch of books and rope and ... I don't know what all, some glue, and he fixed that bed. I thought, now that thing won't hold. But it never has come loose.

"I know he was taking a pretty good bunch of pills. I'd try to keep him from going out. I'd just sit and talk with him. He'd just get up or go back to bed, or just ramble around. But I knew if he ever got hisself straightened out, he'd be one of the biggest artists going."

She loves Johnny Cash and is proud of him, and it is obvious he loves her and is deeply proud of her. He has hung around her doorstep, like many others, for a long time, drinking at the free-flowing tap of one of the deepest springs in American folk and mountain music. She loves her girls, too, and her husband, Ezra, and that love is returned in full measure. It is not a gushy kind of affection, not the backslapping variety but strong and silent and reticent and sure. It's like mon-

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ey in the bank, you know it is there, but you don't overdraw on it. They give each other a lot of slack.

Mother Maybelle played an important part in "working up" the songs A.P. discovered or brought in, especially in arranging them, though only the man's name was put on the label in those days. Their harmonies were church influenced and because they used autoharp and guitar, most of the old ballads had to be taken out of their modal keys to lend themselves to instrumental band accompaniment.

Mother Maybelle has survived several eras, from the beginnings of country and western music, through ragtime, jazz, big bands, rock and roll, all the way through to today's middle-of-the-road or country-metropolitan sounds.

Mother Maybelle is still paying her dues. She is booking on her own again, with the girls, Helen and Anita, and with Helen's son David, sometimes, and beautiful 14-year-old Lorrie, Anita and Don's girl.

If, in the past, they'd had one of today's super managers the Carters would probably be rich several times over. But A.P. used to book them and he never bothered to read the fine print of a contract. Also Ezra, or "Pop Carter" as he has become known affectionately by those around him, helped out with some of the booking. But they were never interested in money. They loved what they were doing. The songs were important. It was a natural way of life. Nor have they reaped the mass adulation of super stars or been publicized for the legends they are.

Not that Mother Maybelle has gone unnoticed or is not loved by the country music community. She is. Deeply. It's just that the praise has been as quiet as she has. People like Joan Baez have stirred interest by recording some Carter material, like "Little Moses," and the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band used Mother Maybelle on a recent double album called *Will The Circle Be Unbroken.* She was written up recently in *Newsweek* and is beginning to be booked in more and more colleges.

And she is not trying to make a comeback. She is a trouper. She is just acting natural, the way she always has. She is there, she always has been and she always will be. And age *is* taking its toll, though she doesn't show it. She has to tell you about it. "I can't play the way I used to because of arthritis in my fingers. So I don't use the guitar as much. I play the autoharp." And she is not complaining. She is just being natural, as always.

"Can you imagine the stages she has played on?" Nat Winston asked me. Yes I can. I can see them, everywhere from London's Palladium to Carnegie Hall, from Newport's Folk Festival to those little school stages lighted on each side by kerosene lamps. And I can see Ezra, her husband, though I never met him during my interviews. And I know he has stuck by her and sacrificed just as she has all these years, with never a cross word between them.

I can see Ezra crossing Clinch Mountain and bringing back a talented, beautiful woman with music in her fingers that everyone who meets says is "truly a lady." And I can see him sharing quietly in her glory and being proud, content to stay out of the limelight with his books and his classical music, waiting until she gets home from her last booking, waiting to talk and ask how it went. Waiting to hear her "tongue rattle like a bell clapper, for there never was a Carter that couldn't talk," she says, in one of her few overstatements.

Who wouldn't sit up and wait for the First Lady of Country Music!

PHOTO: DICK HOLLAERT

The Carter Family, left to right: Helen, Anita, June and Mother Maybelle. "I put June on autoharp and Helen on guitar and in two weeks they'd memorized 15 songs." Mother Maybelle said.

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Country music is about love, life, death, drunkenness and dedication. Its subjects are average and extraordinary, virtuous and fallen, human, inhuman and superhuman, but . . .

Who Are We Singing To?

by Susan Witty
and Bill Littleton

The past 40 years have seen many Americans on the move—from the Okie migrations of the thirties to the more recent movements that have taken many Americans from the country to the cities. These migrations have not hampered the popularity of country music but have actually helped it spread.

Today country music fans are as diverse as the population of America; from the thousands of long-hairs who turn up at Bill Monroe's Bean Blossom bluegrass festival to the hundreds of truck drivers and their families who flocked to the Capitol Music Hall in Wheeling, West Virginia last Fall to hear their favorites; from President Nixon who brought Johnny Cash into the White House, to the couple who brought their piano to a concert for Tom T. Hall to autograph. Sports celebrities like championship golfer Lee Trevino and Cincinnati Reds' star catcher Johnny Bench have allied themselves with it. Entertainment personalities like Broadway star Carol Channing and political figures such as Governor John H. Love of Colorado have made their enthusiasm for the music known.

PHOTO: MARVIN CARTWRIGHT

National Life President Bill Weaver.

Writing about the fans of country music—the famous and the obscure—is somewhat like trying to sing all of Hank Williams' songs on a 30 minute show—you can count on leaving something out. All that is offered here is a sampling.

Bill Weaver

Bill Weaver remembers how his family wound up with seven or eight sets of earphones that plugged into a radio set that cost the princely sum of $75. They listened to the Grand Ole Opry together, "ever since it started over on the fiftieth floor of the Old National Life Building in Nashville."

Today Bill Weaver is chairman of the board of National Life and Accident Insurance Company and its holding company, NLT Corporation, and is thereby at the helm of the corporate entity that includes WSM, the Grand Ole Opry, and Opryland. A personal friend of many performers and behind-the-scenes people, he has retained his ties with the Opry despite the heavy demands upon his time from the other areas of business encompassed by NLT. "Oh, I run down there, I guess, every four or five weeks and see everybody," he estimates, "but I keep in touch with all the boys. I'm out of town a great deal, you know, and I don't get to go down as often as I would like to. But I never go down there and go back-stage and shake hands with everybody and visit with everybody that I don't get a real thrill out of it.

"This country music that we have here is a very basic music—that's the way I would describe it. It gets right down to the nitty gritty of life. If you'll analyze the songs, you know, you find that they're about life. And they're about sorrow and they're about happiness and people you know.

"I only wish I were twenty years younger," he confided, "so I could take part in more of the things that are gonna happen around Nashville in the future."

It is understandable that his pride and joy among the Nashville developments are Opryland USA and the new Grand Ole Opry House. "We told the architectural firm that we hired for the Opry House that their Number One assignment was to retain the relationship between the audience and the performers—the intimacy—and I think they've done that.

Bud Harrelson, the Mets' All-Star shortstop, with Johnny Cash in 1967.

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PHOTO: RICKERT STUDIO

ABC TV's Chris Shenkel with younger brother Phil as The Harmony Cowboys.

PHOTO: ELLIS NASSOUR

PHOTO: JIM McGUIRE

The Johnson sisters (above) with Loretta Lynn, their favorite artist. Tex Logan (hatted, center) with Bill Monroe.

That's what makes it the Grand Ole Opry."

Bud Harrelson

"Charley Pride and I have a lot in common," says Bud Harrelson, the Mets' all-star shortstop. "He's an old baseball player and I'm an old country and western singer." What Bud means is that when he isn't playing baseball or helping run a small computer business, he's playing guitar and singing in country music bars in and around New York—places like Henry's in Brooklyn, The Rainbow's End in New Jersey, and The Wagon Wheel Lounge in Binghamton.

Several years ago, Bud, who is an ardent Merle Haggard fan, went with catcher Jerry Grote to hear Merle at the Mosque Theatre in New Jersey where WJRZ used to do its broadcasts. "I was dying to meet Haggard and get his autograph. After the show we went back and met his group. It's funny, they think you're crazy if you're in sports and you want *their* autograph. My manager was with me and he saw how excited I was. 'Hey,' he said, 'you really like this stuff, don't you?'"

Of his guitar playing which he picked up from books, and with some help from pitcher Gary Gentry recently traded to the Atlanta Braves, Bud, who tends towards modesty says, "I'm not accomplished at it. I have enough trouble playing baseball."

In addition to Merle Haggard, Bud likes George Jones, Tammy Wynette, Charley Pride—"soft country. I used to listen to WJRZ all the way to the ball park and all the way home. I rigged out my car with a tape unit and speakers. When WJRZ went off the air, I was really mad. It was sort of like how mad the Dodgers fans must have been when the Dodgers went to Los Angeles. But WHN is going all country now, and they're a Mets station, so I'll be able to listen to it."

Chris Schenkel

Raised on a farm in the village of Bippus, Indiana, ABC's Chris Shenkel became a country music fan at an early age.

"I grew up way before TV," says Chris, whose eager face is more than familiar to today's TV audience. "Radio was a very important form of entertainment on a farm, and country and western was broadcast in the Midwest more than any other kind of music."

Every Saturday night Chris listened to the Grand Ole Opry with his family, and his exposure inspired him to learn how to play the guitar. By the time he was 12, he and his brother Phil—who at 5 played a mean mandolin—were appearing regularly at amateur contests in and around Indiana.

"Phil was really talented," says Chris. "Out of about 100 amateur contests we were only defeated once." After winning the Morris B. Sachs Amateur Hour contest, a major program broadcast over WLS in Chicago, Chris and Phil, now 14 and 7, received advice from stars like Red Foley and Homer and Jethro.

"They showed me arrangements, lead-in chords, and stuff like that. They were very unselfish people. Country music artists seem to have a freer exchange of knowledge. They're willing to impart their knowledge because that's how *they* got it."

When performing all over the country started becoming a way of life for the two boys, Chris and Phil's parents stepped in. "They felt it was a lot of commuting," says Chris, "so we cut back."

Ironically Chris, who covers so many of the major sports events, is now one of the world's number one commuters. Always off to somewhere, he flies his own plane which contains a stereo well-stocked with country tapes.

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"When I get people in the plane, they're sort of a captive audience and I play country music. I build it up and let everybody know that I love it."

The Johnson Sisters

When Loudilla Johnson, the oldest of the three Johnson sisters, says "the music is our life," it's not just for print. Unofficially referred to in country music circles as "The Queen Of The Fan Clubs," Loudilla, along with her sisters Loretta (an aspiring country singer) and Kay, does an enormous amount of work to promote country music.

Some of the tasks the energetic Johnsons have undertaken are: running the Loretta Lynn Fan Club, heading the International Fan Club Organization comprised of 75 country music fan club presidents, managing an artist's promotion agency called Tri-Son ("for the three Johnson girls") and writing columns for several country music publications. Loudilla also writes songs, two of which have been recorded by Loretta Lynn and Buck Owens.

How did three farmer's daughters from Wild Horse, Colorado get so involved? "My dad had always encouraged us to be interested in country music," says Loudilla. "When he worked for the WPA in the thirties for only a dollar a day, he spent part of that dollar on Jimmie Rodgers records."

At station KPIK where they used to have live shows, the girls met George Jones, and through him, Loretta Lynn. "We had heard Loretta's records and George suggested we write to her," Loudilla remembers. "My little sister, Loretta, wanted to write to Loretta because they had the same name, and that's how it started."

About 10 years and 3,000 fans later, Loudilla explains the Johnson's success with Loretta's fan club this way: "We just started and worked ourselves sick. If you give people their money's worth, the word gets around. Loretta's unusual. She works hard at it."

Loretta is very precious to them and has often included them in her life. "Loretta took us to England last year for the Wembley Festival," Loudilla says. "She took dad, too. She's crazy about our dad. Her real father's dead, and she calls our dad her daddy. Once at a concert she introduced *her* stepfather as her step daddy and *our* father as her daddy. After the concert, we got plenty of questions about that."

Tex Logan

Benjamin Logan—known as Tex to his friends—is a familiar figure at bluegrass concerts all over the Eastern United States. Aside from his ability on the fiddle, he is known as "official bean cooker" at Bill Monroe's Bean Blossom festival. "It's a great outlet," says Tex of his fiddling which occasionally takes him from his vocation—mathematics research at the Bell Lab in Murray Hill, New Jersey. "If you've got music in you, you've got to let it out once in a while. I'm just a country boy, really, and the work I'm in is a little alien to my upbringing."

Tex is from West Texas, and when he was growing up they were listening to Bob Wills and Bill Monroe. For many years, Tex shuttled back and forth between his academic career and his love of country music. In 1951, he left MIT Graduate School where he was studying electrical engineering to go on the road with Wilma Lee and Stoney Cooper. The rigors of that life were very sobering, and Tex returned to MIT and then went on to Columbia University to get his doctorate, but not without having made some cherished friends. One of these is Bill Monroe.

Every summer for about ten years now, Tex has been giving what he calls "a Bill Monroe Party" at his house in New Jersey. For the party Tex prepares a spread of beans, cornbread and salad. A couple of years ago Bill decided he wanted to duplicate this dinner at Bean Blossom and put Tex in charge. He's been handling the bean side of things ever since.

Darrell Royal

Darrell Royal, University of Texas football coach, can't remember when he started listening to country music, he was so young. "I have just recently learned what the works of Jimmie Rodgers are, and and *this* is what I was listening to then," he says.

Darrell became interested in country in a really serious way when he was in the service during World War II. Stationed at Will Rogers Field in Oklahoma, he and his wife, Edith, attended the live Saturday Night shows at the Municipal Auditorium pretty regularly. "I converted my wife to country music," he boasts.

"I've been going to shows so much," he says, "that I've become identified with the music. When I go to a public gathering folks seem to notice that I'm there." Being in the sports field, sometimes he gets introduced at a concert. Sometimes promoters want him to take pictures with the stars. That's how he met Willie Nelson, who has become a particular friend.

"I had my picture taken with Willie. We were staying at the same motel. He gave me a free album, and now I get invited to his all-night pickin' sessions."

When Charley Pride was honored in Dallas, Texas this year, Darrell went along. "I like Charley's song 'She Never Gave Up On Me' because I know it reminds Charley of his wife Roxanne and how she stuck by him that time he was trying to play baseball. When you know something about an artist, their songs mean something different to you."

PHOTO: JOHN JEFFERSON

Coach Darrell Royal (right) and his friend Willie Nelson.

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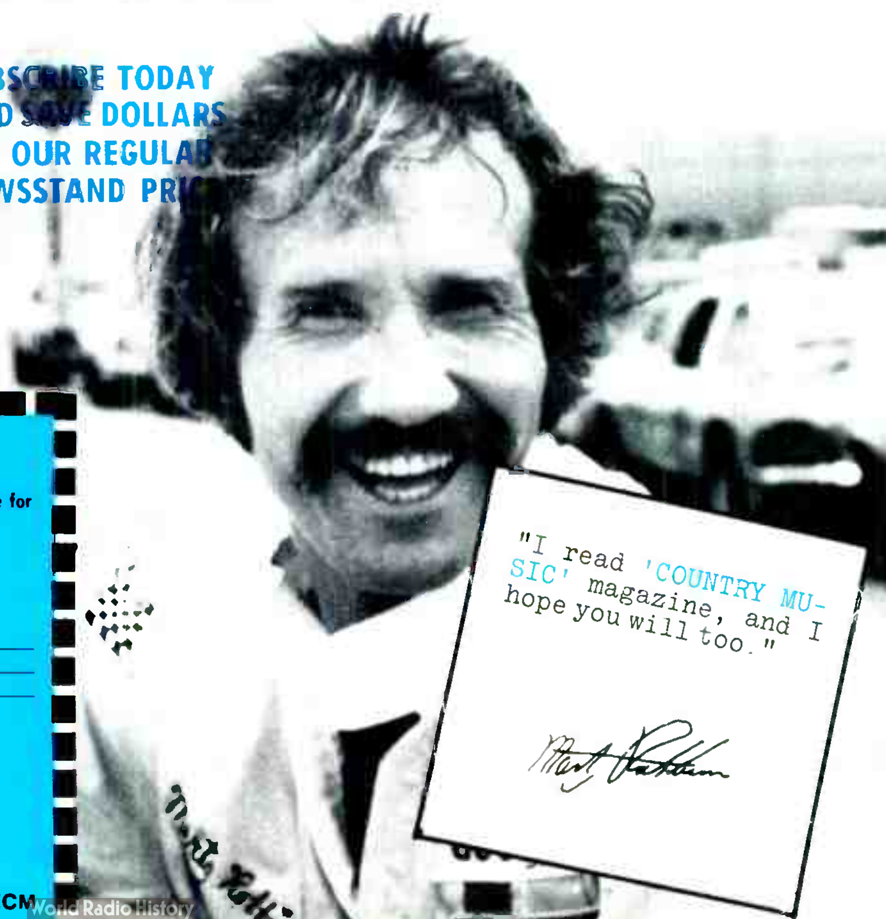

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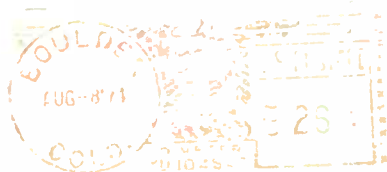

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