

YOUR ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO THE STARS, MUSIC & TRADITION

COUNTRYMUSIC

JUNE/JULY 2002

**SPECIAL
REPORT
CONCERTS
IN CRISIS**

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Straight talk

CYNDI THOMSON
More than skin deep

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Career moves

Kenny Chesney

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Thanks for joining us for this issue of *Country Music*, packed as usual with stories on your favorite stars, legends and newcomers. In the spirit of springtime, we've freshened up. We've tweaked our design for a brighter look and added a few new features that you'll be seeing in every issue:



Neil Pond

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

✦ The Message Behind the Music (see page 40) takes you on an inspirational journey between the lines of country songs.

✦ Sound Off! (page 86) lets you – the reader – voice your opinion about the music you're buying and hearing.

✦ Teen Country (page 92) gives you the frank perspectives of some younger fans.

Please let us know what you think about our new look, our new features – and anything else! And if you'd like to become one of our teen correspondents, or a contributor to Sound Off!, just send a letter to the address that you'll find at the bottom of each of those columns.

Thanks again for coming aboard this special issue. Enjoy!

Yours in country music,

Neil Pond
Editor in Chief

P.S. We're gearing up for a special 30th anniversary issue of *Country Music*, coming later this year. But our library of past issues is missing many copies, especially from the magazine's early years. If you are one of our faithful readers who has held on to your copies throughout the decades, please let us know if you'd be willing to help us out by letting us borrow them, photograph their covers and then return them to you. Please drop me a line at *Country Music*, 118 16th Ave. South, Suite 230, Nashville, TN 37203. (Be sure to include your phone number.)

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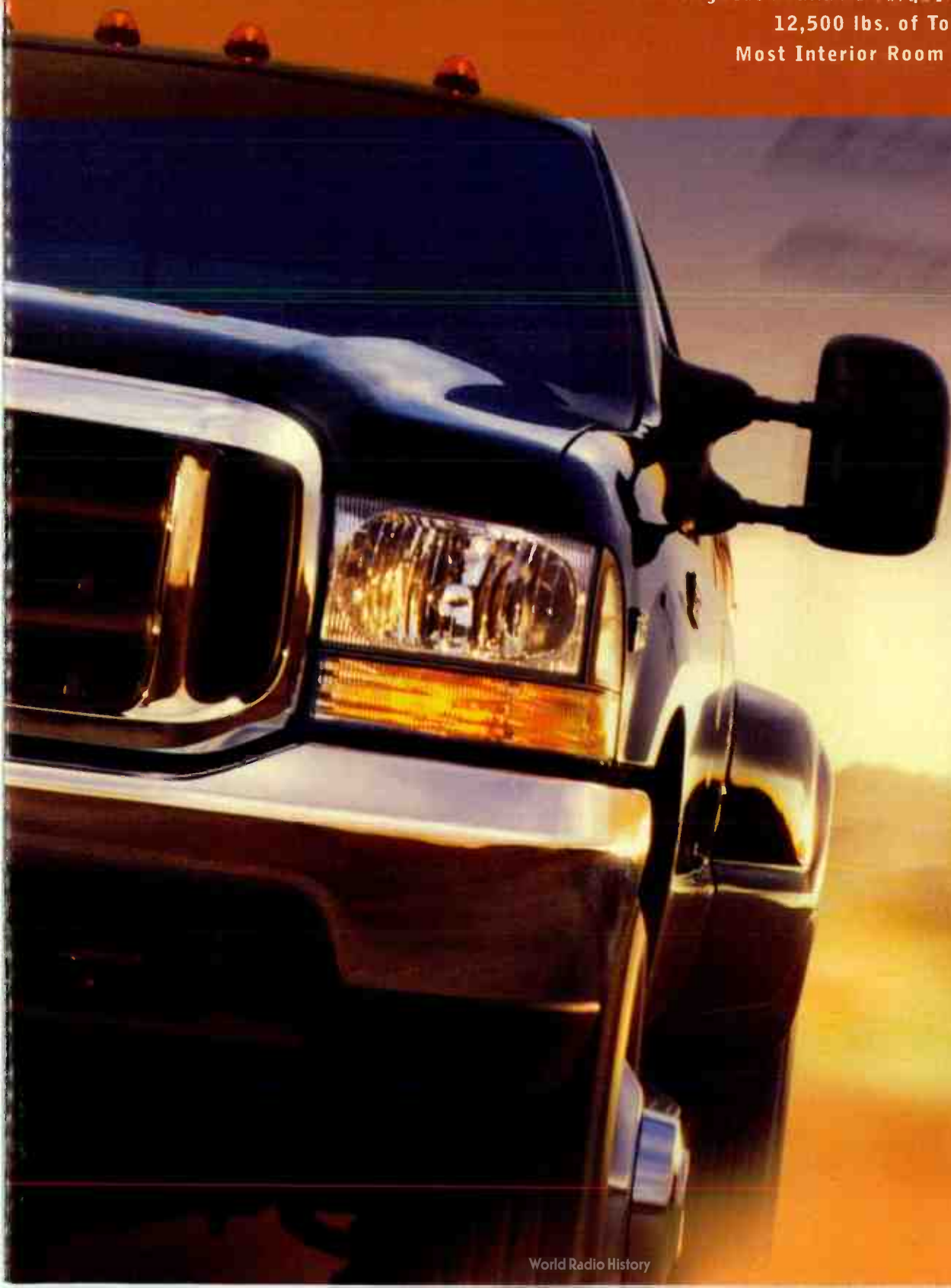
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NANCY LEE ANDREWS/CAPITOL RECORDS

COUNTRY MUSIC

JUNE/JULY 2002

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Kenny Chesney

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She rocks, and the Hall of Fame says so.

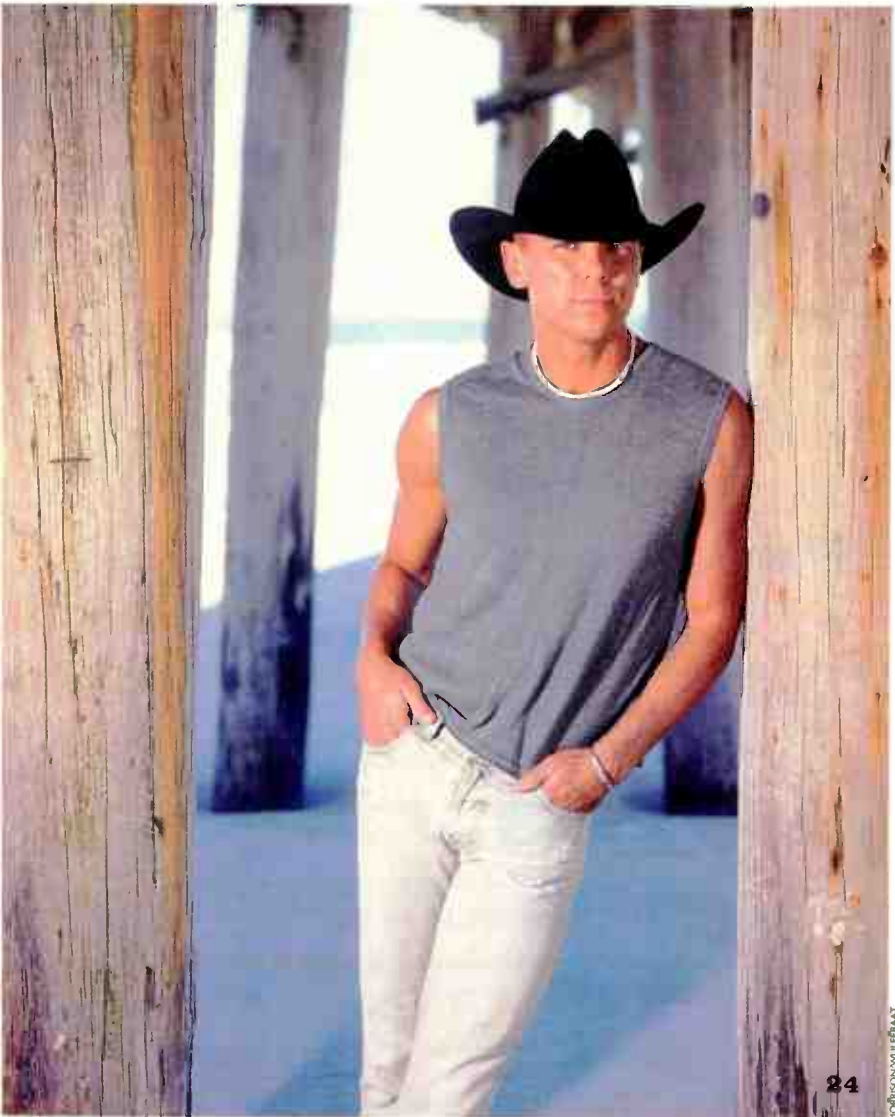
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A beauty who is more than skin deep.



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HORIZON/WOODFIN

THE Journal
OF TRADITIONAL COUNTRY MUSIC

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Reviews ... More! Beginning on page 51.

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LETTERS



Jo Dee Messina

LEA ROSE/PA

NO MESSIN' WITH MESSINA

I was none too happy with your comment about Jo Dee Messina (*The Insider*, April/May) when you said, "She needs a stylist to dress her." I got red with rage. She knows how to dress herself – and whatever she wears is stylish and beautiful. I'm a huge fan, and I'm going to defend her every chance I get.

ANNIE DAVISON
HARVARD, ILLINOIS

COUNTRY IN THE CITY

In response to Neil Harbison's letter (*February*), to say that country songs are being "citified" is a closed-minded statement. There are plenty of country music fans up north who like the classics and who also know that country as of late has been poppy. Before you go and tag the blame on city slickers, keep in mind that Nashville is *not* in New York. Just because I'm not from the backwoods does not mean I can't relate to or appreciate country music.

GEORGE ANTHONY HARRISON, NEW JERSEY

RICKY VAN FAN

I was more than happy to see the article about Ricky Van Shelton (*March*), however small it was. It hurts me that we never hear his beautiful voice on the radio or TV anymore. We saw him in concert in Laughlin, Nev., and he was so wonderful. A voice like that should not be kept from the folks that love him.



TRIP CAMPBELL

DONNA AMUNDSON
PARADISE, CALIFORNIA

HOORAY

I have such a problem trying to find your magazine in a newsstand, but I went into a bookstore in Covina, Calif., and there it was! Hooray! This magazine is the only way I can keep up on the news of all my favorite singers and songwriters, and it was especially gratifying to see a tribute to Waylon Jennings and stories on Hank Williams Jr. and Ricky Skaggs (*April/May*). Waylon was one of my very favorite singers, and I was so shocked to find out he had diabetes and had a foot amputated last year. The country station out here in L.A. does not play the good music I used to listen to, so unfortunately I don't listen to country much anymore – except for my CDs and the classic country music on my cable radio outlet. I just mailed for my new subscription. Now maybe I'll be able to keep in touch with who and where they are today. Thanks again for a great magazine.

DIANE WRIGHT DUARTE, CALIFORNIA

BOTH SIDES NOW

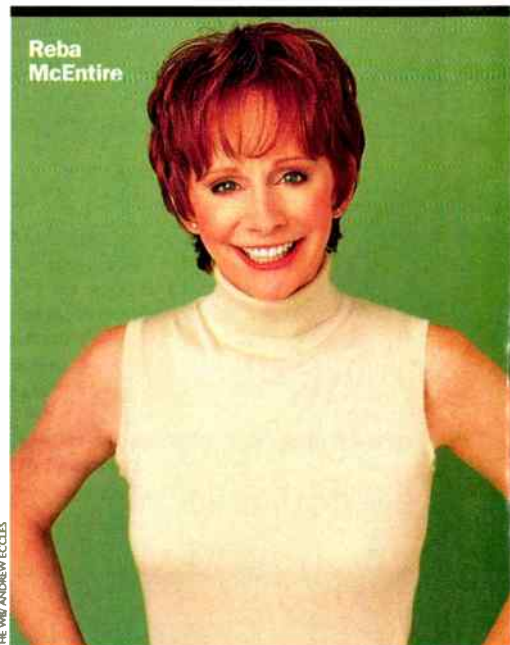
The March issue is the best one I've seen in months. Loved the Garth Brooks article, which tried to present a balanced view of this sensational entertainer. I was also amused by the reviews, which presented differing views on the song "Beer Run" by one reviewer critiquing George Jones' album *The Rock* and another one looking at Brooks' *Scarecrow*.

STEPHANIE SMITH
SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA

Kudos to Alanna Nash on a balanced article, and to Brad Walker on his illustrations in "Solving The Garth Puzzle" (*March*). We have been loyal Garth fans since 1992, when we saw his first special. Nash gave us some facts that we had never heard about Garth's boyhood and career, rather than retelling boring stories. She presented reasons why some are such Garth promoters and some are Garth detractors. Brad's "Garth cube" was really clever and his choice of photos refreshing.

DOTTIE AND ROBIN ENGLE
MIDDLETOWN, MARYLAND

By the time I finished "Garth Brooks: Inside The Mind Of Country's Most Perplexing Megastar" (*March*), I was livid. I thought the article would shed some light on his announcement of retiring, but no. It seems the article was just a chance to trash him. He is criticized for not taking part in the TV



Reba McEntire

THE WB/ANDREW ECCLES

LETTERS



Garth Brooks and George Jones

TM CAMPBELL

TV fund-raising concerts for the Sept. 11 tragedy. Who is to say he didn't donate privately? Maybe the Chris Gaines album didn't do well. So what? It was a good idea. It was supposed to be fun. As far as his personal life, in the history of the world, the only perfect person who ever lived is Jesus Christ. Critics can say what they want, but album and concert sales speak for themselves, and nobody's bad-mouthing can ever change Garth's numbers.

ELIZABETH SNYDER
HUDSON, MICHIGAN

THAT GIRL

I would like to compliment you on "A Star's Trek" (*March*). The article was very truthful about Reba McEntire's success. I immediately was interested in the information provided about her career. I hope you continue to publish articles like that.

STACEY EVANS (AGE 10)
LAKEWOOD, COLORADO

I don't think Tom Roland has good taste: The *Reba* show stinks. I watched a little of it once. All she does is say some witty remark – which isn't so witty – and smile. She also does not know how to act. Once was enough for me. I won't waste my time on it anymore.

DON ROBERTS
OLEAN, NEW YORK

NOT SO GRAND

I was impressed with the interview with Billy Walker (*March*). I wonder where country music will end. I rarely ever tune in to the *Grand Ole Opry* anymore. These new artists are so loud, and jump around and make such awful faces to get their music out. Why can't we go back to where the artists stood and sang in a voice that let us understand the words being sung?

PENNY BANNING
SHELBYVILLE, ILLINOIS

STRAIT TO THE HEART

It is always such a joy to see George Strait on the cover (*April/May*). The interview was terrific; George seemed to be enjoying himself, and it was most interesting to read his views on videos and recording sessions. Thanks for making this George Strait fan very happy.

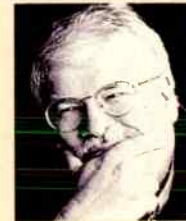
K. COLQUHOUN
DALLAS, TEXAS

Sometimes I get worried when I see an article on one of my favorite singers, because I am afraid to find out something that might change my view of them. I admire George Strait so much that my heart would sink if I found out anything I didn't like about him. However, over the years I have never had that problem with George. He is the same genuine, charismatic gentleman with or without the media. Your article has helped me realize that I never have

CONTRIBUTORS

Meet this issue's esteemed guest stars

★ **JOHN SWENSON** has been writing about country music since the early 1970s, when he befriended Townes Van Zandt, wrote about the remarkable rise of Willie Nelson, spent time with the late Doug Sahm and got the lowdown on a songwriter fresh from prison named David Allan Coe. His 1982 biography of Bill Haley traces the country roots of rock 'n' roll's first chart-topping star, and his story on Kenny Chesney in this issue traces the rock 'n' roll roots of country music's latest.



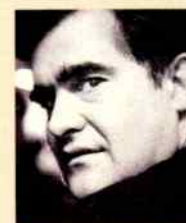
★ **PATRICK CARR** became addicted to Hank Williams in 1952 and Chuck Berry in 1956, but he didn't fully appreciate Elvis until 1974, when Col. Tom Parker let him shake the King's hand and sold him a 25-cent souvenir pen for \$5. By that time Carr was

editor of this magazine. His history at *Country Music* stretches from writing the lead record review in the first issue to his Final Note column in the '90s. It is with great pride that we welcome him back with this issue's piece on country's Top 10 essential live albums. Carr has also written several books, one of them *Cash*, with Johnny Cash, and hundreds of articles for publications like *Rolling Stone* and *The Village Voice*.

★ **ROBERT BAIRD'S** obsession with music began at age 4 when he spent hours hunched over a blue-and-white Close N' Play listening to just-released Beatles singles he'd badgered his father to buy. Music Editor of *Stereophile Magazine*, Baird



spent an afternoon with Willie Nelson at Manhattan's tony Hotel Carlyle and informs us that, yes, Willie Nelson actually is the salt-of-the-earth sweetheart he appears to be. Not surprisingly, Nelson did offer a couple of zingers about Faron Young that, alas, can't be printed in a family publication like *Country Music*.



★ **ROB PATTERSON** is a freelance writer who lives in Austin, Texas. Unlike Chris Cagle, the subject of his feature, Patterson wasn't raised in the Lone Star State, but is a transplanted Yankee from New York. His work has appeared in hundreds of

newspapers, and national magazines. He is a columnist for *Country Music People* in England and writes about country music for CD Now and *The Journal Of Country Music*. He also conceived and co-produced the album *Austin Country Nights*, a 1995 compilation that featured Don Walser, The Derailers, Bruce and Charlie Robison and others.

LETTERS

to worry about finding anything negative about him. He is who he is and that makes him an admirable individual.

LORI SOWADA
WRENSHALL, MINNESOTA

STRAIGHT TO THE BIRDS

The March issue is fit only to line my bird's cage floor with. I am referring to the review contributed by Don McLeese on George Strait's *The Road Less Traveled*. If Mr. McLeese would like to see a prime example of "narrow," let him look in the mirror. He will see the very essence of the word. He has the right not to appreciate good music, but his remarks were not so much a review as an attack. As a supposedly qualified critic, one would hope that he would not use his position to vent his personal antagonism toward any individual.

ADELE SHORTLIDGE
CAMERON PARK, CALIFORNIA

RIGHT ON ROBISON

I enjoyed reading the recent article on Bruce Robison (*March*), but I'd like to point out a couple of factual errors. The story incorrectly stated that Robison's albums *Wrapped* (1998) and *Long Way Home* (1999) contain the original versions of "Angry All The Time" and "Travelin' Soldier." Both songs originally appeared several years earlier on Bruce's 1995 self-titled debut on Vireo Records, an independent label



CRAZY ABOUT PATSY

Thank you for reprinting Ralph Emery's reflections on Patsy Cline (*March*). The Journal is my favorite section of your magazine. This was a nice way to remember Patsy on the 39th anniversary of her death. The pictures you used were wonderful.

There is still a fan club honoring Patsy, "Always Patsy Cline," P.O. Box 2236, Winchester, VA 22604. We are currently hard at work on producing a 2003 Patsy Cline Calendar and also presenting The Kentucky Music Museum with a plaque on Patsy. Fans can learn more about Patsy on the web at patsy.nu and the other countless websites. Thank you for helping to keep Patsy's memory alive.

JIMMY WALKER
LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY

out of Austin that also released brother Charlie's debut, *Bandera*, the same year.

MIKE TRYNOSKY
COLCHESTER, CONNECTICUT

TRACE IN BLUE

When I first heard Trace Adkins sing, I was hooked. I was a member of his fan club and enjoy his music and concerts very much. However, I am puzzled by a comment he made in the March issue. He states: "I've never really been in a

happy place anytime in my life, except maybe when I was in high school. I'm basically not a happy person." Trace has more to be grateful for than most people! He has a beautiful loving wife, four gorgeous daughters and many fans who adore him. How can he be so unhappy? Trace, you have a lot to be happy about and even more to be grateful for!

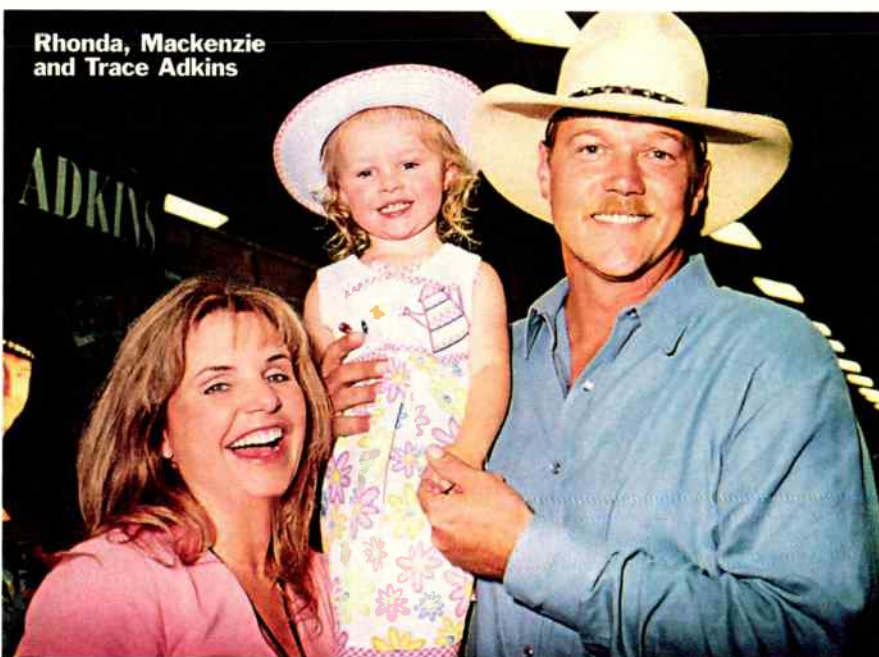
DUSTI PERDUE
CLEVELAND, TENNESSEE

O COUNTRY, WHERE ART THOU?

I would like to respond to your El Paso reader's flip suggestion that those of us who don't like what they're playing on country radio stations "should quit whining and just switch to something else." I don't know why I didn't think of that myself – what a great idea! So, OK, I'd like to listen to some *real* country music. Can you tell me where I can find some?

BETHANY BRALEY
PINE, ARIZONA

Have a comment? A complaint? A compliment? Send your letter by e-mail to letters@countrymusicmagazine.com or by regular mail to Country Music magazine, 118 16th Ave. S., Suite 230, Nashville, TN 37203. Mark envelope: Attention: Letters. We will not print any letters that do not contain a name and contact address. We reserve the right to edit.



PATRICIA PEEBLEY

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Read 'Em, Cowboy!

► Who's the cat in that black hat? None other than **GARTH BROOKS**, honorary chairman of the National Education Association's "Read Across America 2002," who took the program to R.H. Bearden Elementary School in Sumner, Miss. Garth read the Dr. Seuss kids' classic, *The Cat In The Hat*, to the second graders, who all sported black hats for the occasion. Garth also visited Coles Ferry Elementary School in Lebanon, Tenn., with friend and sometime collaborator **STEVE WARINER** (below right), who shared a grin with student John Lane.



AP PHOTO CLAUDEALE PRESS REGISTER/JOY CATCHINGS

Dwight's Night To Party

► **DWIGHT YOAKAM** traded in his hillbilly jeans for an uptown suit to attend a post-Academy Awards party sponsored by *Vanity Fair* magazine at Morton's in West Hollywood. Dwight continues to beef up his acting resume with a key role in the new Jodie Foster film, *Panic Room*.



KATY HUTCHINS/GETTY IMAGES PHOTO



AP PHOTO/CHRIS TENNESSEAN, USA NIPR

There They Are

▼ **TIM MCGRAW** revealed a new, longer hairstyle when he escorted wife **FAITH HILL** to the recent Academy Awards gala, where Faith performed the Oscar-nominated song from *Pearl Harbor*, "There You'll Be."



STEVE GRANITZ/WIREIMAGE.COM



COURTESY JIM HANEY PR

Rockin' The USO

▲ **NEAL MCGOY** worked every square inch of stage when he entertained American troops on a USO tour of Afghanistan. The frenetic singer led a contingent of stars, which included the Dallas Cowboy Cheerleaders (above), Wayne Newton and pop singer Jessica Simpson on the patriotic tour.

Kudos For Kenny

▼ **KENNY CHESNEY** celebrated the success of his platinum *Greatest Hits* album at a Music Row bash. Chesney's labelmate and tour partner **PHIL VASSAR** (right) dropped in to offer congratulations.



TONY PHIPPS/WORTHAN WORKS



SEBASTIAN MAYER/WIREIMAGE.COM (2)

Honors From Gibson

▲ The Orville H. Gibson Guitar Awards honored some of country's finest at this year's ceremony from the Knitting Factory in Los Angeles. **EARL SCRUGGS** and former Elvis sideman **SCOTTY MOORE** received gift instruments, while **BRAD PAISLEY** (inset) took home one of the night's top awards.



COUNTRY ON THE TOWN



Top Guns

◀ **BROOKS & DUNN** joined hands with that little ol' band from Texas, **ZZ TOP**, for an episode of *CMT Crossroads*, which puts together stars from different genres of music. Giving the trademark ZZ wave were Dusty Hill, Kix Brooks, Frank Beard, Ronnie Dunn and Billy Gibbons.

Riding In Style

▼ New duo **HOMETOWN NEWS** is on the charts with "Minivan," but they chose to pack up a limo to promote the song in Nashville. News-men Scott Whitehead (left) and Ron Kingery (right) picked up passengers around town, then treated them to an in-limo acoustic performance as they rode around in luxury.



Wright Stuff

▲ **CHELY WRIGHT** stood side-by-side with former U.S. astronaut and senator **JOHN GLENN** at the FAME Awards in Washington, D.C., where Chely was honored for her contributions to music education.

Nickel Dreams

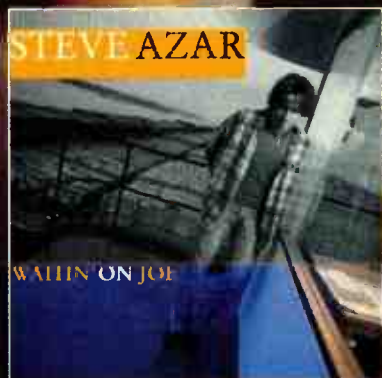
▲ The members of red-hot band **NICKEL CREEK** were taken completely by surprise on their visit to *CMT's Most Wanted Live*. During their interview, hosts Greg Martin (far left) and Katie Cook (far right) presented Sara Watkins, Sean Watkins and Chris Thile with gold plaques marking sales of 500,000 copies of the group's self-titled debut album.



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THE INSIDER

WITH HAZEL SMITH

AMAZING ALAN

A 12-year-old girl from Kentucky who was being treated for cancer at Vanderbilt Children's Hospital let it be known that she wanted to meet **Alan Jackson**. So not only did Alan visit her in the hospital, without informing the media, he also took the child for a drive in his car, and on a trip to the Opryland Hotel to view all of its incredible decor. He then flew her over Nashville in his private Lear jet, then kept flying north so that she could look down on her home in Kentucky.

Last year, in his fan club newsletter, Alan requested that fans make donations to Vanderbilt Children's Hospital instead of sending him Christmas gifts, as they often do. For this and all the right reasons, I believe "Where Were You (When The World Stopped Turning)" was dropped from heaven to Alan in the middle of the night.

Speaking of Alan, when the long-legged wonder appeared on NBC's *Today* show, a carload of females drove from Iowa to New York to hear their favorite star sing his incredible patriotic hit. It was worth every mile, too.

NO LAUGHING MATTER

Always ready to entertain and provide a good laugh, **Kix Brooks** and partner **Ronnie Dunn** stayed up nearly all night recently to write a spoken-word tribute to their boss, RCA Nashville president **Joe Galante**. Only they never got to read their speech.



Triple billed: Joe Diffie (left), Mark Chesnutt (center) and Tracy Lawrence.

ROCKIN' ROADHOUSE

The Rockin' Roadhouse Tour starring **Joe Diffie, Mark Chesnutt** and **Tracy Lawrence** begins on June 22 at the Red River Valley Fair in West Fargo, N.D. If you like get-down

country music, you will want to catch these three great artists when they stop in your neck of the woods. There will be no vocal lessons and no stylist needed this tour. Just shirts, jeans, boots and good down-home country music.

Galante and RCA fooled Brooks & Dunn into showing up at the early-morning gathering so the duo would be surprised when presented with the Humanitarian Award from the Country Radio Broadcasters organization. Kix and Ronnie were humbly moved. Both guys became tongue-tied, claiming they get far more than they give. Some charities supported by Brooks & Dunn include St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, Vanderbilt Children's Hospital, Red Cross, Second Harvest Food Bank, Ronald McDonald House and W.O. Smith Music School, just to name a few.

GOODBYE, WAYLON

The first time I saw **Waylon Jennings** perform was at a **Johnny Cash** TV show at Nashville's Ryman Auditorium in the early '70s. He wore a Nehru suit and his short hair was combed straight back. Boy, was he handsome, and could he sing! The last time I saw him

was at **Chet Atkins'** funeral, again at the Ryman, in 2001. He was in a wheelchair. He laughed when I told him he was the best-looking man there.

My Waylon highlights: Working alongside him for years at **Tompall Glaser's** "Hillbilly Central" office and watching him and Tompall do business while dropping rolls of quarters into a pinball machine hour after hour at Nashville's Burger Boy or J-J's Market. I'll never forget when Waylon came in one day and said he had something to play for me. He threaded up his reel-to-reel and turned on his brand-new cut of "Amanda." I just about flipped. "That song reminds me of Jessi," he shyly confessed. He was alluding to the lines, *Amanda, light of my life/Fate should have made you a gentleman's wife*. He laughed as I tried, and failed, to explain that he was a gentleman.

I once drove **Bill Monroe** to meet Waylon Jennings in the recording studio, and Waylon

was so nervous he couldn't get back in the groove. He explained to Bill that in a room in his parents' home in Littlefield, Texas, they had three exalted items: a Bible on a table, an American flag on the wall and, next to it, a framed photograph of Bill Monroe.

Waylon's music was a gift from someplace special. Like all who knew him, I shall always miss this great man of music. And I thank God for giving



Waylon Jennings' hat and leather-tooled guitar at the Nashville memorial tribute.

him Jessi to love, 'cause Lord knows, she loved him back.

The family requests that donations be sent to the song-writing fund Waylon founded during the '80s: Sue Brewer Fund/Guild Foundation, 1222 16th Ave. S., Nashville, TN, 37212. Be sure and mark your check in memory of Waylon Jennings.

MASTER CLASS

Unless **Harlan Howard** was fishing or on vacation, you could find him at his favorite bar at lunchtime, eyeballing the hands of the clock on the wall. Someone told Harlan that only alcoholics drink before noon. As soon as the second hand moved past 12, Harlan ordered his first drink of the day while holding court with other songwriters and friends. He affectionately called the young songwriters who hovered around him "juveniles." And they eagerly gathered around the master until he died in March at 74 – to listen, learn and worship the greatest tunesmith who ever walked the planet. They all knew that the highest compliment a young writer could get from another is, "That song sounds like a Harlan song."

Harlan also listened. In the bars, he paid attention to the stories of losers, boozers, bartenders and waitresses as they poured out their hearts. He also had the sly wit of an old fox. A friend once watched him pull into the handicapped parking space at his favorite bar. The pal said, "Harlan, you aren't handicapped." Harlan just grinned. "I will be," he said, "when I leave."

SIGN FOR MEL

Entering the Oklahoma hometown of singer **Mel McDaniel** a newly erected sign reads thusly: OKMULGEE, HOME OF MEL MCDANIEL, RECORDING ARTIST AND STAR OF THE GRAND OLE OPRY. Let's everybody stand up and congratulate Mel, just like the *Opry* fans stood for him when he added a verse

to his hit "Stand Up" that simply said: *Stand up for America/Stand up for the USA*. The entire audience was on their feet screaming and waving their arms for Mel and our great country.

BAKING BISCUITS

Dwight Yoakam's Bakersfield Biscuits is the sponsor of the Countryman Motorsports NASCAR racing team that includes **Trent Owens**, nephew of the legendary **Richard Petty**, and **Adam Andretti**, son of racer **Aldo Andretti**. Honest truth, I never heard of a biscuit being made in California. Dwight was born in Kentucky, I wonder why he didn't call his biscuits Dwight's Kentucky Biscuits. Dwight's been on the right track lately, though – he's been writing with the wonderful **Deana Carter**.

MUSIC AND COMMERCE

Good guy **Vince Gill** joins legends **Ray Price** and **Jimmy Dean** in **Bill Anderson's** adopted hometown of Commerce, Ga., for the sixth annual City Lights Festival in June. It was in tiny Commerce that *Whisperin' Bill*, then a 19-year-old deejay, wrote the classic country song "City Lights," which stood as a No. 1 song for Ray for 13 weeks in 1958. That hit brought Bill to Music City, where his ability as song-

writer, singer, actor, TV host and businessman would give him a long and exceptional career that just keeps going and going.

SENSIBLE SHOES

Designer **Stuart Weitzmann** asked **Faith Hill** to wear his million-dollar shoes during the Academy Awards when she sang her Oscar-nominated song, "There You'll Be," from the movie *Pearl Harbor*. She turned him down. Good for her. Like a good country girl, Faith knows she doesn't need a million-dollar pair. She just needs some decent heels that don't hurt her feet.

JESSICA'S GIFT

Now that **Jessica Andrews** has turned 18, her parents have returned to their small, Middle Tennessee hometown of Huntingdon. To reward them for their support and faith in her, Jessica bought her parents a grand new house, complete with swimming pool.

Meanwhile, Jessica has a boyfriend, **Marcel Chagnon**, a hockey player-turned-singer who has signed with Mercury



PAUL ELLIOTT/OUTLINE PHOTO

Faith Hill added color to the Academy Awards.

Records. The two-some, too, offered a gift acknowledging Jessica's roots, staging a music benefit in Huntingdon.

CLOTHING CATASTROPHE

Lee Ann Womack recently arrived at a big Texas concert to discover her stylist had sent the wrong size britches. Lord knows, we can't have that. The singer sent her road crew out bird-dogging for pants in her size. Her road manager returned an all-American hero. Lee Ann liked his choice from the ritzy Neiman Marcus

department store so much that she sent him back for a dozen pairs! Lord, child – you can only wear one pair at a time!

HEALING VOWS

A wedding has a way of bringing people together and healing old wounds. Not long ago, **LeAnn Rimes** was suing everybody: her daddy, her dad's business partner and her record label. But before she said her wedding vows in a ceremony at a Dallas church with dancer **Dean Sheremet**, she patched up her partnership with Curb Records and, more important, called her daddy and asked that all their money differences be forgotten and all their bad blood be forgiven.

A happy **Wilbur Rimes** proudly attended his daughter LeAnn's wedding. She was not given away by her father, though. When the preacher asked, "Who gives this woman away," both parents – who are divorced and married to others – stood and said, "We do." That is probably the first thing LeAnn heard her parents agree on in a long time. We wish her the best.

ASTRO-NOMICAL

★ Mighty **George Strait** bid goodbye to the old Houston Astrodome with a record sellout crowd of 68,266 that included former President **George Bush** and former First Lady **Barbara Bush**. During the concert, Strait accepted the Lone Star Legend Award from the former chief executive and dedicated "Love Without End, Amen" to the couple.

The Astrodome had always been a good friend to country music. Over the last 37 years, everybody from **Roy Rogers** to **Willie Nelson** to **Garth Brooks** to the **Dixie Chicks** sold out the famous venue. But guess who will be the first music star to perform in the new Reliant Stadium during RodeoHouston 2003? That's right, George Strait.



MORRISON/RETNA

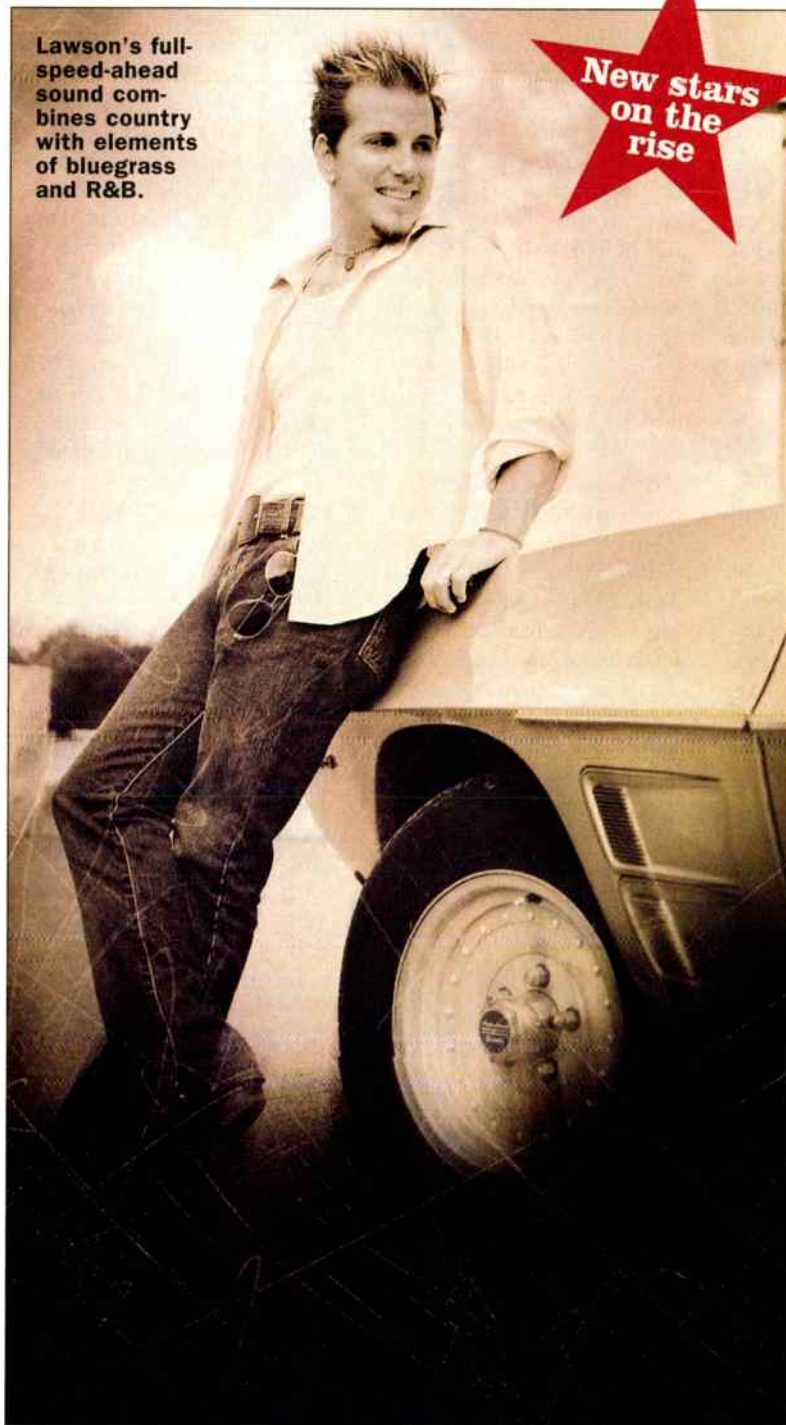
George Strait, a Texas favorite

Long Way Home

Kentucky's Shannon Lawson left his past – and found his future

Lawson's full-speed-ahead sound combines country with elements of bluegrass and R&B.

New stars on the rise



COURTESY/MCA

Country music artists have long sung the praises of home and family, but they also know that sometimes you have to leave them behind to find yourself. Just ask Shannon Lawson, whose *Chase The Sun* album promises to be one of the year's most exciting debuts.

Born into a generations-old musical tradition in Taylorsville, Ky., Lawson grew up playing bluegrass and country music before diving into the world of rhythm and blues at age 18. Within a few years, he had formed his own band, The Galoots, captivating crowds in nearby Louisville with tunes that drew as much from Marvin Gaye as bluegrass legend J.D. Crowe (for whom his uncle had worked in the late 1970s).

Still, he was after something more.

"I wanted to blend them – the bluegrass and the blues – but I had to move to Nashville to make it happen," says Lawson. "Back home, I was too close to what inspired me. I needed to get out and get somewhere else. When I did, it just clicked. It was wild, it was like another door opened."

Once the creative door opened, it wasn't long before the real ones were swinging wide along Music Row. A series of Nashville gigs with The Galoots brought him a half-dozen offers for production deals. Lawson turned them down in favor of a music publishing contract that let him concentrate on his songwriting. But his talent – especially a stunningly strong and expressive voice – was too bright to remain hidden for long. When an MCA Nashville executive heard his song demos, his big break arrived.

"I think timing is everything," he says. "If I'd have come here one year earlier, it wouldn't have worked. It just clicked at the right time, and luckily for me, the influences that I had in the background helped too. The bluegrass, and then the power of the R&B, all those weird little elements, they just kind of fit in like a jigsaw puzzle."

Chase The Sun, with 10 original songs and a bluegrass take on Gaye's classic "Let's Get It On," shows just how neatly those pieces fit together. Produced by Mark Wright (Lee Ann Womack, Brooks & Dunn), the CD serves up a distinctive blend of grit, polish and powerful emotion, from the desolate heartbreak of "Goodbye On A Bad Day" to the swaggering confidence of the horn-laced "Who's Your Daddy."

Though he had to move away from home to reach his goal, Lawson hasn't forgotten his roots – or his family. "Now my cousins and my niece and other parts of the family, they're picking up guitars and fiddles, so it's continuing the generational cycle, and I'm helping that," he says with a broad grin. "And that alone makes me feel great."

— Jon Weisberger



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Walking Tall

Trace Adkins on the hardships of clothes shopping, eating octopus and a really bad wedding reception

At 6 feet 6 inches, Trace Adkins literally stands head and shoulders above most stars. He also stands tall when it comes to his music, a soulful, gritty blend delivered in his intense baritone. He gained his self-proclaimed “tungsten vocal cords” from playing in smoky, rowdy beer joints for more than a decade before moving from Louisiana to Nashville. His personal life has been just as rowdy. He suffered several often-discussed bodily injuries, from a severed finger on an offshore oil rig to a gunshot wound at the hands of an ex-wife. Having released his fourth and most diverse album, *Chrome*, Adkins recently graced us with his droll wit and some tall tales.

What's the most exotic food you've ever eaten? Octopus. I was in Mexico at what was supposed to be the *mucho grande* seafood place, and they brought this big dish out and set it on the table. There were these tentacles hanging out on that plate. I had one bite and said, “I ain't eating that, that's just gross.” I tried it to be nice, but I never will eat octopus again.

What do you think when people refer to you as a “country hunk”? Hunk of what? No, I don't pay much attention to stuff like that. I'm flattered if someone out there thinks I'm attractive – but as long as my wife still thinks I'm a hunk, I'm happy.

What's the worst thing about being so tall? Not being able to walk into any store and buy clothes. I have to go to the big and tall men's store – and their stuff all sucks. None of it is any good, so I end up having to have stuff custom made. All of my stage clothes have to be tailor made.

As a frequent guest on TV's *Politically Incorrect*, do you consider yourself to be politically incorrect? I'm terribly

politically incorrect. I think that's why Bill Maher keeps having me on the show.

Talk about your visit to Ground Zero in New York.

I was there in October, about three weeks after the attack, and the fires were still burning strong. My reaction was pretty much the same as everybody else's. I was overwhelmed, and it was hard to absorb. And I was infuriated. Really, it was too much to take in, and I found myself standing there trying to take mental pictures of it to sear into my memory to relate to my grandchildren someday. But I realized it was impossible to do that, because it was so unbelievable and on such a large scale. And the longer I looked at it the madder I got.

What movies can you watch over and over? No Time For Sergeants, Shane, Sergeant York. Anything John Wayne is in I will watch over and over.

What's the fastest you've ever driven?

About 130. I was in a BMW on an Interstate, but I'm not gonna tell you where! It was a thrill, it really was. That car was meant for driving fast, because the faster you went, the closer it got to the road.

What was the most miserable gig you ever played? I remember many years ago we played at a wedding reception, and the family comes out to do their first dance after the wedding, and grandma falls over dead during the first song. So they made us stop, and we're like, “What the hell are we gonna do?” Poor grandma was dead on the dance floor, so we just packed up our stuff and left. We didn't even get to finish our one song.

Who's not making records as often as you'd like?
Bruce Hornsby.

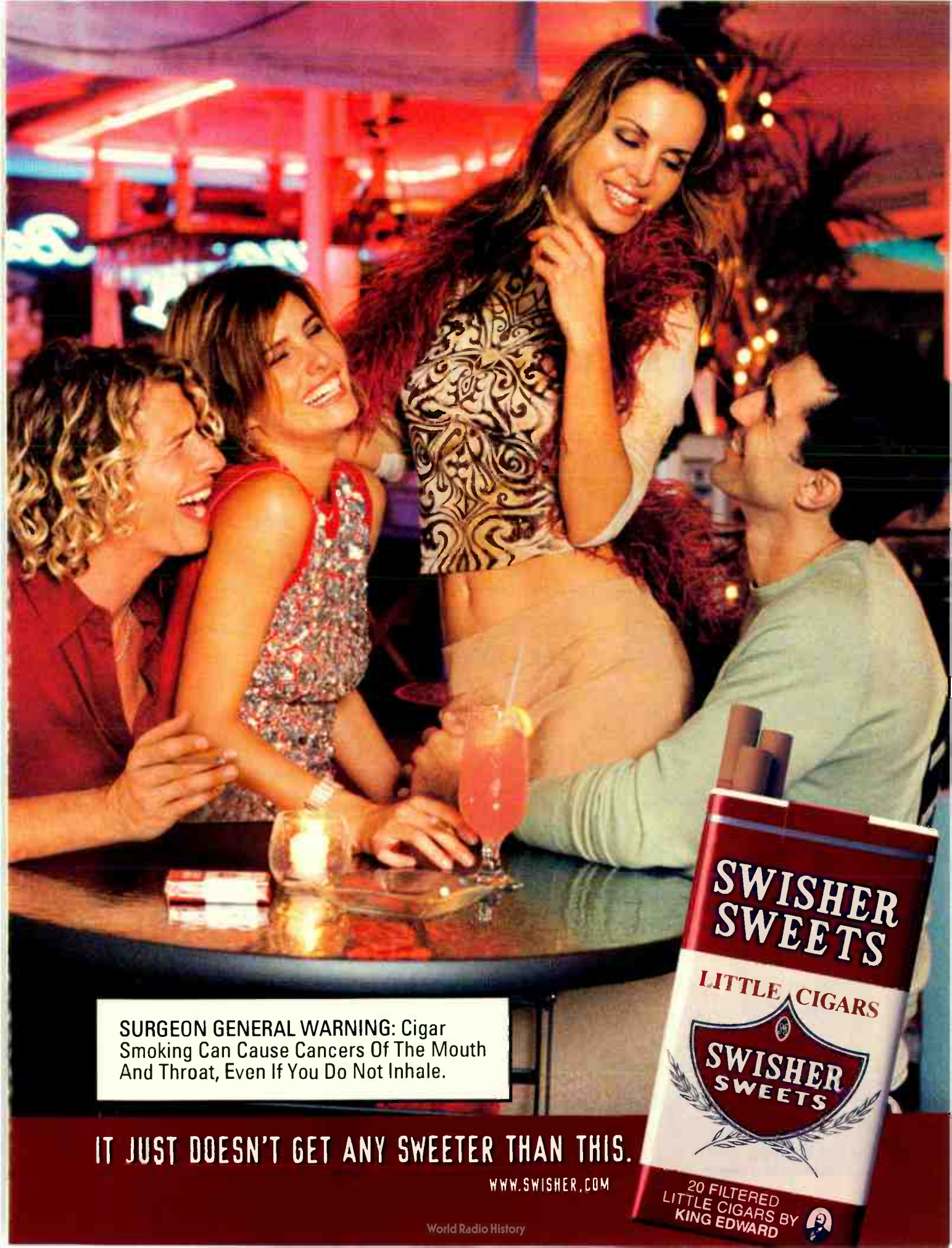
Do you think the success of the O Brother, Where Art Thou? album will have any effect on country radio? No. It was a soundtrack, and the movie acted as a springboard for that record, and that was a one-time deal. And it had to win

the Grammy, because the numbers were there. Plus, “Man Of Constant Sorrow” is such a great song, it's so earthy and eccentric. Personally, I didn't like the entire album as a whole, but I love that song.

What character from Star Wars do you best identify with?
Chewbacca. He's tall and hairy and lumbers around with that weird deep voice.

— Kath Hansen





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Caught in The Act

A provocative look at the best live country music albums

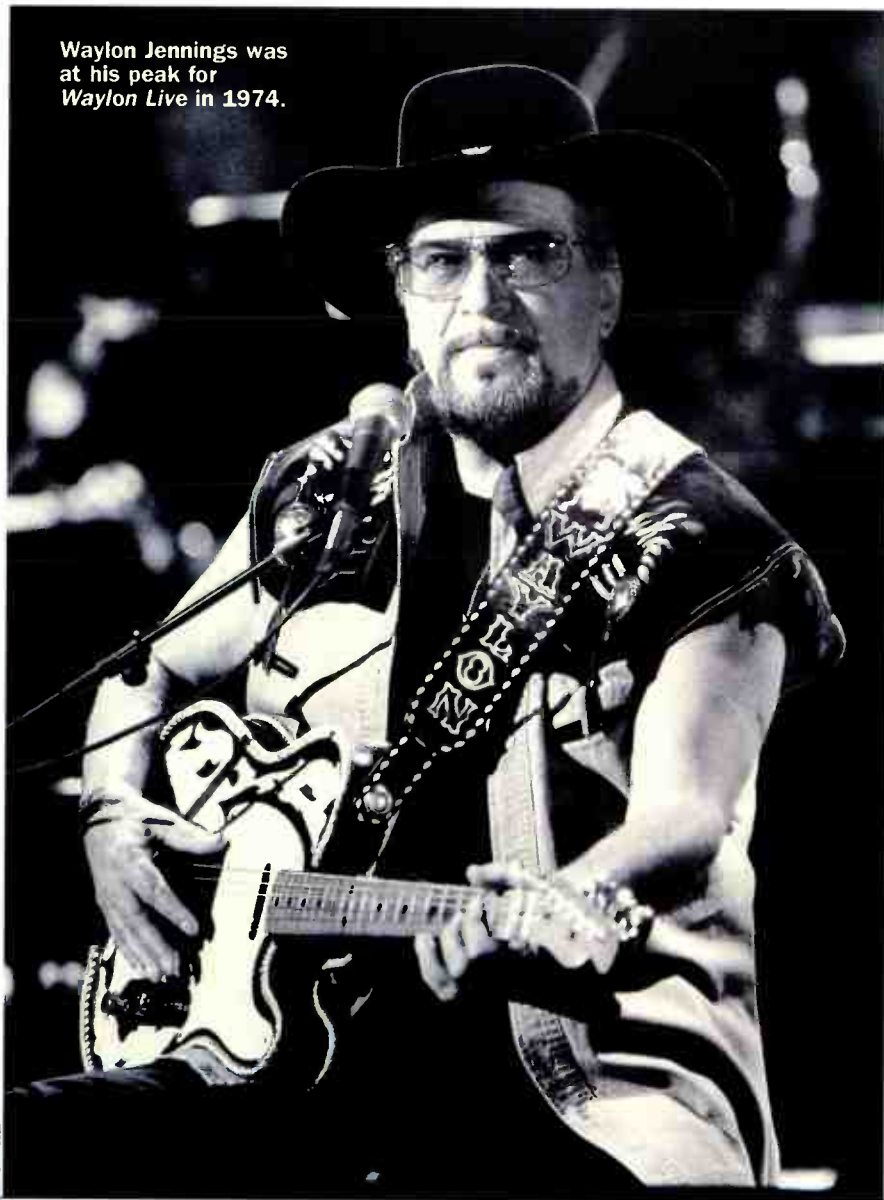
Waylon Jennings was at his peak for *Waylon Live* in 1974.

BY PATRICK CARR

Delve through recording history, and you'll notice that the overwhelming majority of country singers never recorded a live, in-concert album. You'll also see that Joe Ely has *three* of them (and he might not be done yet) – and deserves a prize straight off: Joe Ely, the live-est country recording artist of all time! His contenders are *Live Shots*, *Live At Liberty Lunch* and *Live At Antone's* – but only one makes the all-time list.

But let's not talk about contenders. When looking for the best live country albums of all time, the field is so small that a rank-order, Top 10 kind of approach would be a disservice. Though such a short list does have its bright side – should life ever feel meaningless unless you own all the live country albums truly worth having, affording *every* one of them could be a real possibility.

It's easy to understand why country hasn't produced more live records, great or otherwise. For one thing, the music's hard-core fans never possessed the free time, money and technology that so enriched the history of rock. The very idea of teenage techies dogging Conway and Loretta's tour bus through the golden age of country with tape recorders and spare batteries, or trekking after George Jones the way they followed the Grateful Dead and The Rolling Stones, is absurd. Therefore, no underground market, no



bootleg tapes, *nada*.

Neither has there been much action above the board. The usual business rationale for live albums – the record company gets to meet consumer demand while the act fulfills its contractual obligations without having to disappear indefinitely into the studio – never made much sense in the streamlined world of country record production.

The creative rationale was just as irrelevant. Country bands existed, and still exist, to reproduce their singers' records as faithfully as possible – not to embellish, expand or improvise on them. So it's not surprising that most of country's best live recordings come from places where the mainstream has run into something else – '50s rockabilly, '60s counterculture, the folk movement, alternative scenarios of one sort or another, even the mass-market juggernaut of pop.

1 Bill Monroe And The Bluegrass Boys Live Recordings 1956–1969

(Smithsonian Folkways)

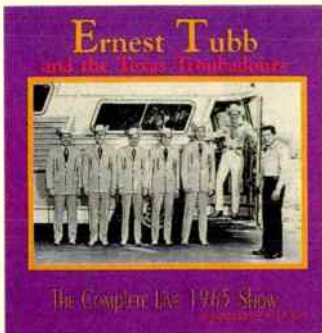
You could argue until you're blue in the gills about which of Mr. Monroe's live recordings best reflects his brilliance.



Bill Monroe's Live Recordings 1956–1969 offers some profound and beautiful moments.

MICHAEL OGBURN ARCHIVES

You can even take the position that none of them quite nail it the way his studio sessions so frequently did. I choose this collection partly for the relatively intimate settings of the performances (clubs and pickin' parties, as opposed to, say, Bean Blossom festivals) and partly for the expertise of the compiler, Ralph Rinzler, who was Monroe's manager and advocate for many years. There are some profound and beautiful moments here, the kind that make you wonder where the music really comes from.



2 Ernest Tubb Live 1965 (Rhino)

Basic, that's what this is: a thoroughly confident, road-worn singing star on an averagely good night in a big ol' honky-tonk someplace out West – the long-gone Magic Castle on Highway 99 between Seattle and Tacoma, Wash., to be precise. The band was discreetly fabulous (Jack Greene on drums, Cal Smith on rhythm, Leon Rhodes and Buddy Charlton weaving electric and steel), and E.T. was at his best – gravelly and gra-



4 Gram Parsons & The Fallen Angels Live 1973 (Rhino)

Speaking of

Waylon and Marley in the early '70s reminds us of Max's Kansas City, the New York club where both gentlemen made their first impressions on the media in-crowd, and where Gram Parsons spent the night before he drove to Long Island for the live radio show recorded here. The music is pretty good, which isn't surprising. Gram-fawning aside, GP was after all the most exciting musician in the world right before Waylon and Marley powered up.

5 Patsy Cline

Live At The Cimarron Ballroom (MCA)

People who think of Patsy Cline as the smooth-singing goddess of sophisticated country should not purchase this title. In reality she was a rough, rowdy old gal, and here she is being just that. The date, in Tulsa, Okla., in 1961, was her first since leaving the hospital after a head-on car crash (which she recounts in detail), so she's kind of weak, beat up and having trouble with her wind. So the show is a bit of a mess, but this is a great human document – and you are *definitely* there. Supposedly the tape came from a yard sale. I'd have given \$10 for it at least, maybe even \$20.

cious, funny and frank, just working through the hits and favorites for the friends and neighbors. It ain't hot, but it sure is cool.

3 Waylon Jennings

Waylon Live (Buddah)

Another great Texan at his peak. This was 1974, right after Waylon started winning the freedom, fame and money he deserved, and right before he began contending for the world cocaine-snorting title. Talk about electric atmospheres, talk about magic moments: At the time I thought Waylon and his Waylors were the most exciting musicians in the world, with the possible exception of Bob Marley and his Wailers, and listening again doesn't change that opinion. There was never a

sound quite like this, before or since. The original album, released in 1976, had 11 tracks; the CD has 20.

Live Albums

6 Shaver

Unshaven: Live At Smith's Olde Bar

(Praxis)

"God loves you when you dance," says Billy Joe Shaver during this ultra-funky, smoky little club set, and isn't that the truth? Billy Joe, the soul of his country-music generation, just knows stuff. At the point in his saga when this CD was recorded, in 1995, he had his son Eddy on lead guitar, plus three of Eddy's like-minded buds on rhythm, bass and drums, and what came from that combination (known collectively as Shaver) was a truly wild and wonderful psychedeli-crunchy-country sound – sort of like a liberated Tom T. Hall blended and baked with a Dixiefied Jimi Hendrix. Hearing Shaver so live is spooky, for Eddy wasn't long for this world. His dad is still with us, thank God.

7 Dwight Yoakam

Dwight Live (Reprise)

After the first few songs, you begin to wonder if *live* is quite the right word for Dwight, either. He sounds a tad mechanical, like maybe he's just hitting the musical cues fed him by Pete Anderson (lead guitar, record production, band leadership, zeitgeist). Then he slows it all down and envelops the mic for a rivetingly intimate "Two Doors Down," and you know he's all there and it's going to be OK. This is as close to a good arena country record as our world is likely to produce.

8 Johnny Cash

At Folsom Prison/ At San Quentin

(Columbia)

Sometimes we forget what a badass Johnny Cash still is, and other times we forget what a badass he used to pretend to be. In Folsom Prison he laid out that whole show for us, and



it's truly fascinating to hear it play, wondering how much the cons saw him as one of them and vice versa. He was certainly in touch with his feral side that day, and enjoying himself immensely. The San Quentin gig, years later, was much improved – bigger show, better musicianship, superior pacing, etc. – but nowhere near as exciting. Helluva comeback record, *Folsom* was; the modern equivalent would be gangsta rap sweeping the Grammys.

9 Jerry Lee Lewis

Live At The Star Club, Hamburg

(Rhino)

No comeback here. The opposite, in fact: Jerry Lee skidding around the basement floor both figuratively and literally. On this night in 1964 at the Star Club in Hamburg, Germany (where The Beatles had honed their act), The Killer's career was as cold as the hearts of the prostitutes on the street above. His music, though, was amazing. You could call it red-

hot and say the man was burning up, he was on fire, but that doesn't cut it; this one set (with the Nashville Teens, his temporary English backup band) far outclasses any of his other performances caught on tape at any point in his career, and most of his studio work to boot. Nobody outside Germany got to hear it until it was reissued on CD in 1992, nearly 30 years later. Thank you, Rhino.

10 Joe Ely

Live Shots (MCA)

How many is that, nine? OK, let's round it up to 10 with Joe Ely and *Live Shots* (MCA), the first and rowdiest of his three. Recorded in 1980 while Ely was touring England with The Clash, it's just a riot goin' on, such a smart, muscular piece of work that I have no trouble buying into its legend. This record, or

more accurately the meeting of minds and cultures around the Clash/Ely tour, is said to have been the flashpoint for all manner of twang-oriented fusions to follow, alt-country included.

We can't wrap this up without mentioning some also-rans and distinguished rejects. Chief among them are two very well regarded albums, 1962's *Flatt And Scruggs At Carnegie Hall* (Koch) and 1966's *Buck Owens & His Buckaroos, Carnegie Hall Concert* (Sundazed).



An astounding
Jerry Lee
Lewis in
Hamburg,
Germany

UNITED PRESS INTERNATIONAL

To my taste, both are too long on corn and short on music. Emmylou Harris' *At The Ryman* (Reprise) features her all-acoustic Nash Ramblers and some thrilling moments, but Harris' eternal search for her notes wears me out. Then there are two albums virtually impossible to find, a Johnny Cash/Carl Perkins/Jerry Lee Lewis concert in Stuttgart, Germany, released in the early '80s as *The Survivors*, and Hank Thompson's *Live At The Golden Nugget*. If you ever see either of those items, grab

BIRTH NAME:

GEORGE STRAIT

STAGE NAME:

GEORGE STRAIT



GEORGE STRAIT

ON THE WEEKENDS, YOU'LL FIND HIM PICKIN' THROUGH OUR AISLES

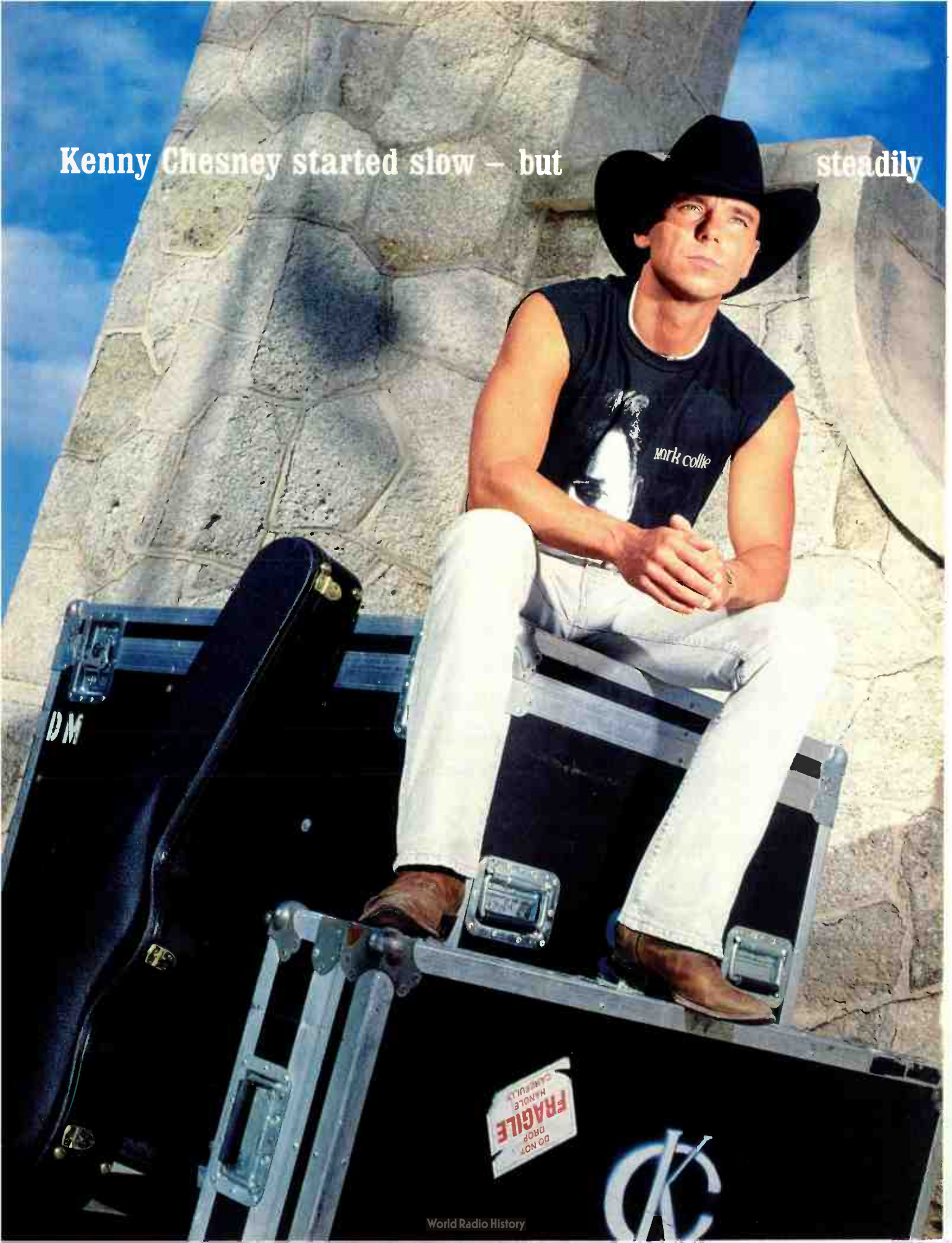


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Kenny Chesney started slow – but

steadily



worked his way to the top. Here's how he became the ...

STAR of the Show

BY JOHN SWENSON ✪ PHOTOS BY MORRISON/WULFFRAAT

Some stars are born. Many more are manufactured. A special few endure a challenging, often excruciating climb from the bottom, transforming themselves from the ordinary to the sublime along the way.

Kenny Chesney is a product of such a transformation.

The East Tennessee native came up the old-fashioned way. Starting out in the clanging din of rough bars, he's grown into one of country music's most popular arena performers – and one of its biggest record sellers. At a time when even the biggest names in country music struggle with shrinking sales, Chesney ranks among the few whose careers are on the rise.

He's got the fans, the radio play and the sales. But to complete his transformation, his new album needed to convince the critics that he's a credible artist while continuing to excite new fans. It just might succeed, too: *No Shoes, No Shirt, No Problems* is a powerful effort that crystallizes his identity as the blue-eyed boy next door.

Chesney's also matured into an unlikely sex symbol: In this age of physical perfection, he's challenged both vertically and follicly. But his regular-guy look is part of his appeal. Chesney's audience, strikingly young and strikingly female, is drawn to a mysterious charisma that's equal parts wholesomeness and vulnerability. He's the sensitive football player who girls hope will ask them to the prom, but who takes enough lumps on the field to prevent the guys from thinking he's a wimp.

On the day before Chesney kicks off the *No Shoes, No Shirt, No Problems* Tour in Florida, the singer stops hustling long enough to field a few ques-

tions. Wearing shades, a T-shirt from Duffy's Love Shack in the Virgin Islands that reads ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE, and a baseball cap with the slogan BE WHO YOU ARE, he looks more like an athlete than an entertainer – tanned and buffed with the muscle definition of a workout fanatic.

All day, he's been fast-forwarding around the backstage area of the Mars Music Amphitheatre, a beautiful, 10,000-plus, open-air arena ringed with stately palm trees.

In between inspecting the newly arrived tour T-shirts, running to the stage for rehearsals and conferring with the lighting and sound technicians, Chesney scuttles across the parking lot and buries a couple of three-pointers in a portable basketball net his crew has set up backstage.

"I'm very hands on with everything, sometimes to a fault," he says through a bashful smile. "I work on my show a whole lot. I really work on details. Whether it's how to move onstage, the stuff on the video screens, the intro that we're doin' before we come on – I'm always trying to make it better."

Chesney's work ethic is central to his identity – the mark of an overachiever who knows what it's like to be told he doesn't have what it takes. As a child growing up in the small town of Luttrell, his first love was sports. Music came later, but he pursued it with the same zeal he displayed on the field or the court.

"I was in sports ever since I was old enough to pick a ball up," he says. "I played baseball and basketball in high school. I only went out for the football team in college because somebody told me I couldn't make it. I was a mediocre football player; a pretty good athlete, but a mediocre football player."

Kenny Chesney

Without reservation, Chesney sizes up his gridiron problems – and provides a glimpse into what drives him. “I was a really small guy in high school,” he says. “I’m still a small guy. When people think you can’t do something, it gives you a desire to prove them wrong. That was what started me playing football. It taught me how to work hard, gave me a lot of discipline. I think that carried over out here.”

Chesney darts into one of the four gleaming silver-and-white tour buses that serve as his band’s rolling home. VH-1’s *Pop Up Video* blares from the huge TV screen that dominates the front section of the well-equipped cabin. On the table sits a CD of ’80s rock band Georgia Satellites and a home-burned country ballad compilation.

Departing the bus, he leads his seven-piece band to the stage to hammer out the show’s final details. The singer’s crack band can add country accents with fiddle

and steel guitar or transform into a three-guitar rock band at the drop of a Stetson.

They run through “Young,” the anthemic first single off *No Shoes*. Chesney listens intently to the band and examines the nostalgic images flashing on the screen behind him. He then sings a couple of lines to test the vocal mike: *We were wannabe rebels who didn’t have a clue/In our rock and roll T-shirts and our typically bad attitudes ...*

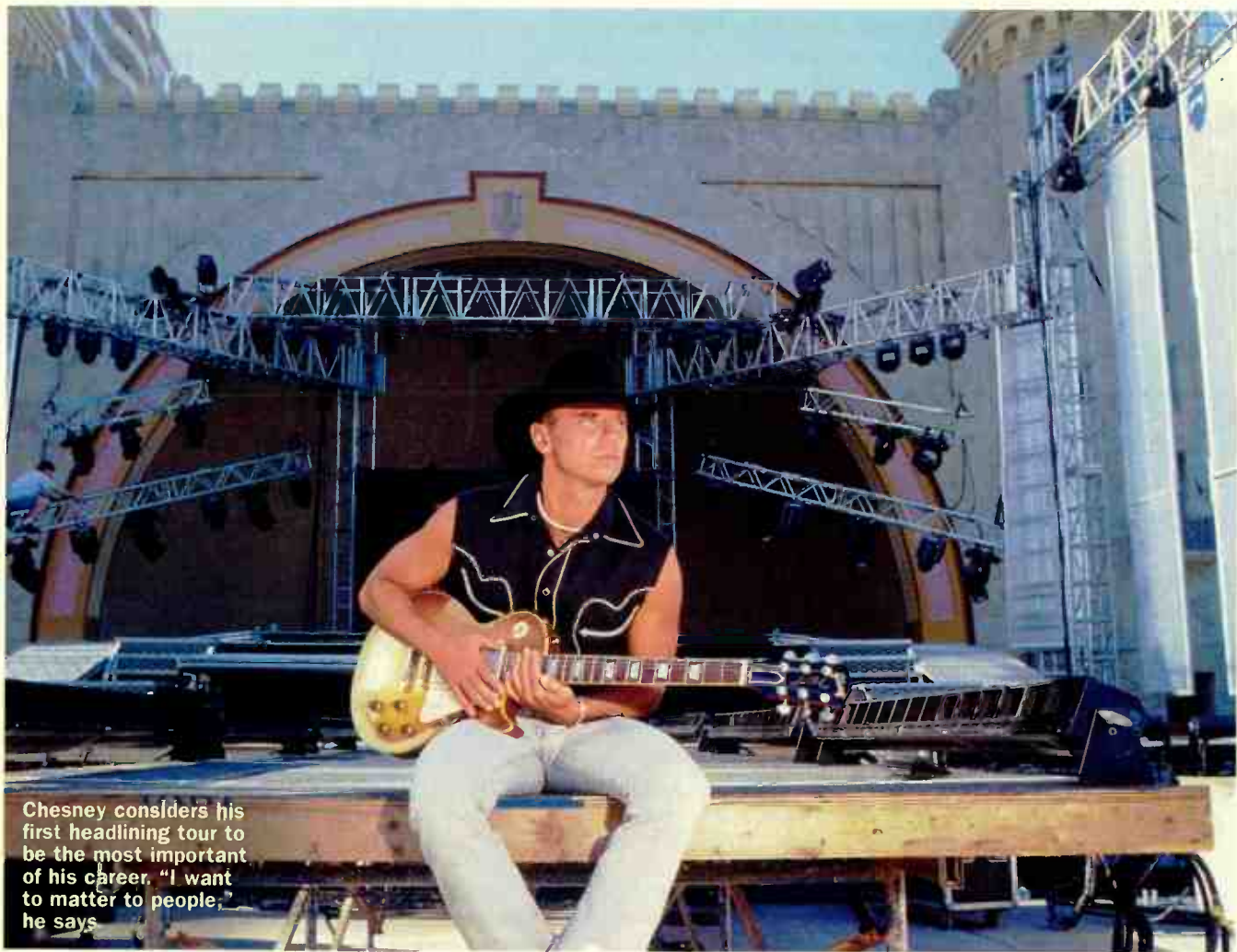
He stops the band to speak to the sound engineer. “When we’re rocking like that, which will be about 80 percent of the show, my voice is getting lost,” the singer says. Adjustments are made, and the focused bandleader expresses his satisfaction.

He then directs the band through several covers. They try out the Georgia Satellites’ raucous “Keep Your Hands To Yourself,” with

Chesney instructing drummer Sean Paddock on the beat he wants. They slide into John Cougar Mellencamp’s “Hurts So Good,” but abandon the tune midway. Guitarist Clayton Mitchell teases the riff from Lynyrd Skynyrd’s “Gimme Three Steps” but stops as Chesney directs the band into Mellencamp’s “Jack And Diane” instead. A stanza or so into it, the singer slices his arm through the air to stop the band – again.

“Let’s break it down dynamically,” Chesney says, walking up to the drum kit and physically showing Paddock how to set the rhythm. As the drummer finds the groove, a smile breaks across Chesney’s face. “That’s it,” he says elatedly, and the band joins in. “That works!”

The band jams through the Mellencamp tune, with Chesney pointing to different musicians to take their leads. With a wave of his arm, they jolt



Chesney considers his first headlining tour to be the most important of his career. “I want to matter to people,” he says

back into "Keep Your Hands To Yourself," clearly having fun and rocking away madly. Chesney signals for them to stop, but the band is having so much fun they just keep going until Mitchell finishes with a flourish, capping his guitar coda with a few lines of Skynyrd's "Call Me The Breeze."

During a break, Chesney pauses to reflect. He's about to begin his first extended tour as a headliner, a major step in the development of any career. As he considers what's ahead, he recognizes that this tour marks the realization of everything he's worked for until now.

"This is it – it really is," he says. "This is my ninth year on the road. Sometimes it seems like it's been nine years, and sometimes it seems like it's been nine months. I've had the luxury of not happening early. I got to experience every level, and I got to learn something at every level. We built our

rush to headlining status. Instead, over the last three years, he chose to accept opening slots for two of country music's biggest-drawing stars, George Strait and Tim McGraw.

Now, he believes, he's ready to put his name at the top of the marquee.

"I'm very excited about it," he continues. "I used to play in a bar called the Turf down on Broadway in Nashville. When I moved to Nashville, it was the roughest part of town. They've really cleaned it up now, but back then it was a rough place. I sat on a stool with a tip jar and my guitar and sang for four hours a night. That's where it started. To look at where we are and remember where we've been, it is emotional."

Chesney values his success accordingly, as if each of his incremental victories were shared with the everyday

me, I think. When they see me up there singing songs – a lot of girls come to our shows, so we're able to turn the girls on a little bit, but I think the guys out there think they could hang out with me on a Friday or Saturday night."

His production crew on the road includes several friends from back home, and their presence keeps Chesney grounded.

"I've got a lot of guys on the bus that have known me a long time," he says. "If I started to get too big for my pants they have a way of pulling me down. That's a big reason why I don't have the ego some people have. To be honest, I can't stand hanging around with people who have an ego. I just won't associate with them. I'm friendly to everybody, but there's not a lot of people who I'll let sit around my table. The guys with me are all real people."

Chesney has been particularly astute in choosing material that celebrates the life of

Chesney's audience, strikingly young and strikingly female, is drawn to a mysterious charisma that's equal parts wholesome-ness and vulnerability.

fan base every year, we built our radio presence every year, we built our record sales every year and we built this" – he gestures to his stage production – "every year. We added another bus every year."

Indeed, in an era when stars are expected to hit fast or get pushed aside, Chesney's is that rare career that started poorly, but slowly – and steadily – climbed the mountain. His first album in 1993 didn't spin out a single hit. His first No. 1, "She's Got It All," didn't come until four years later.

So, as he's about to launch his first headlining tour, forgive him if he experiences a roller coaster of emotion.

"I'm very anxious," he admits. "Somebody asked me the other day if I was scared. I'm not scared. The past three years have been a wonderful educational process. I'm not scared about putting the show together. I'm anxious to go out and see how our fan base has grown, because I believe our fan base has almost doubled in the past couple of years. This year they're going to come to see me only."

Even as his hits started to pile up in the late '90s, Chesney didn't try to

country people who grew up sharing the same experiences. Listening to Merle Haggard, Hank Williams Jr. and ZZ Top, driving to a secluded spot to drink a case of beer or make out with a date, playing school sports on a team that lost more than it won – and, most of all, finding ways to cut through the routine of life to tap more fun out of a day.

"My audience wears baseball caps and cutoff blue jeans," he says with pride in his voice. "My audience drives pickup trucks. My audience goes out Friday and Saturday nights. They're proud of where they came from. My audience is probably very deep in family. My audience likes to have a good time, and that's how I am."

That connection – the identification Chesney feels with his fans – is something he believes is crucial to his success.

"I really believe that me and my audience have a lot in common," he continues. "We grew up the same way and went through the same problems, the same transitions, the same things growing up. I don't think my audience is stupid, and they can sense that in

small-town America. One of his signature songs, "Back Where I Come From," evokes nostalgia for a time that existed before most of his audience was born, while another, the moving "Don't Happen Twice," talks about life's epiphanies. His new album references this same theme brilliantly on the hit single "Young."

"A song like 'Young' is very much me," Chesney agrees. "'Don't Happen Twice' is very much me. And 'Back Where I Come From,' we get as big a response to that song as we do to any song. It's because they can see that I mean it – that I lived with it, grew up with it, and it's who I've become. They see me in them, my song in them. I honestly believe that."

He can provide evidence, too. Driving to visit his family in Knoxville recently, he stopped for gas and ran into some fans. "Two teenage boys were in there and they said, 'You're Kenny Chesney!' They had every album I ever made in their truck, and I signed all of 'em. One of them goes, 'I tell you what, my favorite song that you done is this-un right here,' and he cranked up 'Back Where I Come From.' And as they pulled off



REGRETS?

They've Had a Few

BY EDWARD MORRIS ✱ ILLUSTRATION BY SCOTT T. WRIGHT

For country artists, potential pitfalls are everywhere: Stars routinely derail their careers because of bad marriages, bad song choices, bad habits, inept managers, overreaching producers or self-interested label executives. Add to these natural hazards the volatility of an artist's own ego and impulsiveness – and some toxic career karma is sure to brew.

So let's stroll along country music's lost highway and mark the slick spots where some of ours skidded into the ditch.

**Remembering
some unwise
career decisions**

Regrets

JOHNNY PAYCHECK

On a chilly December evening in 1985, Paycheck brought a spirited barroom discussion to conclusion by shooting his fellow disputant in the head. While this was not the first courthouse stop in the grizzled singer's career, it was surely the one that affected him most (even though his victim survived). After spending two years behind bars, Paycheck enjoyed one more modest hit, 1986's "Old Violin," but never fully regained his star stature.

RANDY TRAVIS

In 1990, Randy Travis was among country music's biggest, brightest young stars. But in March of that year, a tabloid publication printed a story claiming he was gay. On the verge of scoring his 11th No. 1 hit, Travis was furious. Instead of taking the high ground and ignoring the rumor, he strongly denounced the story and denied the accusation in front of a roomful of broadcasters at the annual Country Radio Seminar. But instead of putting out the rumor fire, Travis' outburst only stoked the flames higher, bringing even more attention to the story and swinging the spotlight of public interest away from his magnificent voice – and toward a sexual-orientation issue he more prudently might have chosen not to dignify with a response.

HOLLY DUNN

In an earlier time, Holly Dunn's "Maybe I Mean Yes" would have sounded coy and flirtatious with its refrain: *When I say no, I mean maybe, or maybe I mean yes*. But in 1991, when "date rape" was a frequent subject of TV talk shows and the prevailing feminist mantra was *no means no*, Dunn made a tactical error in recording the song (which she also co-wrote). Her label compounded the problem by releasing it as a single and video. The politically correct took issue, as did several radio stations. Rather than argue, Dunn gracefully asked her label to withdraw the single, which it did. "Maybe I Mean Yes" peaked at No. 48 on the charts – and Dunn has not had a single that has risen any higher since.

CHARLEY PRIDE

RCA took a chance when it signed Charley Pride in 1965, and the singer

richly compensated the label by selling millions of albums and scoring at least one No. 1 hit a year between 1969 and 1983. But by the mid-'80s, Pride was growing resentful, believing RCA ignored him in favor of younger acts. In 1986, he quit the label. The break may have felt good, but it effectively killed his recording career. He was never signed by another major label and has had only one Top 5 single in the last 16 years.

OAK RIDGE BOYS

They didn't call the Oak Ridge Boys "The Mighty Oaks" for nothing. From the late '70s through the mid-'80s, they were the most exciting stage performers in country music. Trained as a gospel quartet, they had perfected the art of driving audiences into a frenzy. A major element of the Oaks' appeal was their baritone singer, William Lee Golden. He didn't move much, but his waist-length gray beard and mountain-man buckskins commanded attention. It came as a shock, then, when the group expelled Golden in 1987, claiming he had become impossible to work with. But fans never quite warmed up to Steve Sanders, his replacement promoted from within the ranks of the Oaks' backup band. Within a couple of years the quartet's long run as radio stars ended and their stature declined. By 1996, the personality rift ended and the group brought Golden back into the quartet.

HIGHWAY 101

Highway 101 ranked among the freshest country acts of the late '80s. Paulette Carlson, the group's distinctive lead voice, led the group to the No. 1 perch with such hits as "Somewhere Tonight," "Cry, Cry, Cry" and "(Do You Love Me) Just Say Yes." However, disputes within the band led Carlson to go it alone. Her best solo effort topped out at No. 21; the band replaced Carlson and stayed active, but fared no better and lost its niche at radio.

GARY MORRIS

Gary Morris' rich, burnished tenor scored a resounding breakthrough in 1983 with two Top 5 singles, "The Love She Found In Me" and "The Wind Beneath My Wings." The following year, as he scored his first No. 1 hit with "Baby Bye Bye," Morris left Nashville to play Rodolfo in a Broadway production of *La Boheme*. He later scored other hits, including "I'll Never Stop Loving You" and "Makin' Up For Lost Time," but in 1988 returned to New York to play the lead in *Les Miserables* on Broadway and took other acting roles, including regular appearances on *Dynasty II* and *The Colbys*. While Morris' theatrical triumphs were a feather in the cap of country music, they didn't help his gig at country radio. His last few singles on Warner Bros. earned only minimal airplay, and the ones he released next on Universal Records never took off at all.

RICKY VAN SHELTON

Ten years ago, Shelton ranked among the most popular and successful of country music stars. Then, during rehearsals for a big CMA anniversary special in 1993, he argued with the program's producer. Only hours before showtime, the star canceled his high-profile appearance and the CMA had to scramble to rewrite the program's script. The singer had a perfectly reasonable explanation – the backing music was in the wrong key – but he was marked as a troublemaker and gets ignored by radio programmers and TV bookers to this day.

* * *

The list goes on and on. For instance, John Rich left Lonestar right before the band became a top-drawer act – and so far Rich's solo career has run into nothing but dead ends. But that's the nature of the unpredictable music business: It's a business of risks. As with any gamble, some pay off, some don't. And it's never fun to be left holding an empty bag. *



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Full Nelson

Willie Nelson's done it all – and at 69, there's still no slowing him down

Midway through a New York concert, Willie Nelson stops performing and snatches a stars-and-stripes bandanna from a hip pocket, deftly tying it in a knot around the neck of his guitar. Then, in a move the 69-year-old icon has mastered over the years, he flicks his wrist and yanks the knotted cloth from the instrument and, in one fluid motion, secures it snugly around the top his head. Then he turns to guitarist Jody Payne, shines his beatific grin and re-joins the band – never missing a beat.

BY ROBERT BAIRD



Willie Nelson

It's a small gesture, one that he executes in less time than it takes to say, "Mammas don't let your babies grow up to be cowboys." But it says a lot about Nelson's well-practiced skills and unflappable nature. Here he is, playing to a rowdy-yet-reverent crowd on the first of three sold-out shows at New York's Irving Plaza; but to him it's just another night, just another show, just another chance to show how dazzling he can be as a guitarist, a singer, a songwriter and bandleader. And all without breaking a sweat.

No one else in the world could have, with one hand, tied and fitted a bandanna so quickly and so smoothly under such circumstances.

But there's no one else like Willie Nelson.

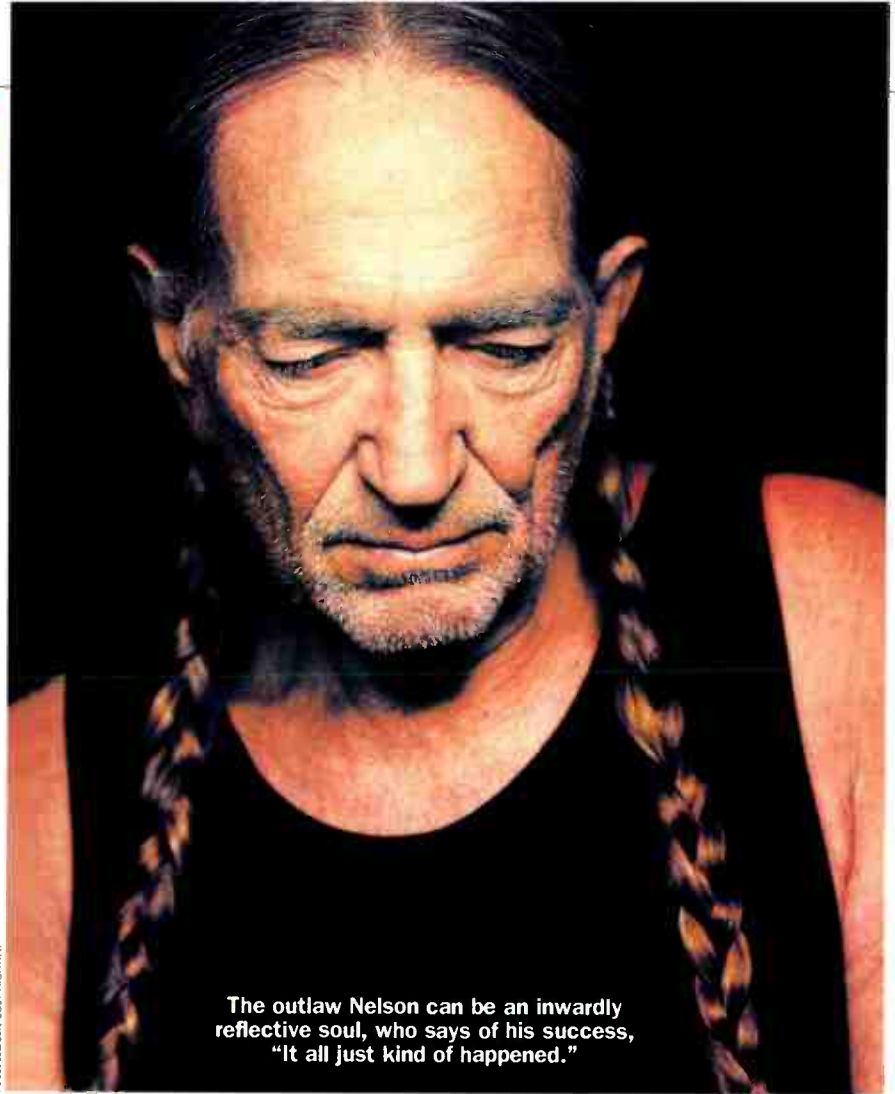
Who else could be labeled an "outlaw" yet get invited to sing "America The Beautiful" to close out a Sept. 11 fundraising telethon? Who else could be known as the Red-Headed Stranger yet own one of the world's most recognizable faces? Who else could flaunt his daily use of marijuana and lose nearly everything to the IRS, yet receive invitations from presidents and pardons from Texas judges? Who else could sponsor a new brand of whiskey and author a book filled with dirty jokes, yet earn a Grammy nomination for an album of children's songs?

Nelson's contradictions are as big and as enigmatic as America itself. Maybe it's because, like America, Nelson doesn't hide his paradoxes – he embraces them. Or maybe it's just that he's a superbly talented musician and a passionate, warmhearted human being who doesn't try to be anything but who he is.

Fifty years into his singular career, Nelson is actively involved in as many diverse projects as ever. He's got a new book, *The Facts Of Life And Other Dirty Jokes*; a new album, his fourth in less than two years – and a new brand of top-shelf bourbon, Old Whiskey River.

Meanwhile, he finds time to perform 100 concerts a year, spend time in Texas with his family, take an annual monthlong sabbatical in Hawaii, play lots of golf, jog a few miles every morning – and, oh yeah, write more songs, such as the title track to his latest album, *The Great Divide*.

A person this busy would almost certainly have to be as well-organized as the



The outlaw Nelson can be an inwardly reflective soul, who says of his success, "It all just kind of happened."

MARK SELIGER/LOST HIGHWAY

chief executive of a major corporation. Is Nelson's multi-tentacled life part of a grand design that's carefully plotted?

"It all just kind of happened," he says, smiling mischievously at the question. "Nothing was planned – it's just good happenstance."

The words are spoken like the true Zen master he's become. Nelson doesn't sit back and devise new avenues of income or new means of promoting himself. Opportunities arise, and he steps into their flow and moves on.

His ability to remain creatively relevant and his knack for handling life with such relaxed aplomb were recently toasted in a song, "What Would Willie Do," written and recorded by Texas songwriter Bruce Robison and covered by country star Gary Allan. But it's not the first song to feature the Texan's name in a title: Late jazz great Miles Davis recorded his composition "Willie Nelson" on a 1970 album, *Black Beauty*. And Nelson's been mentioned

in songs written by outlaw buddies Waylon Jennings, Billy Joe Shaver and David Allan Coe, among others.

Amid all this, there's one constant: his live show. Even though every Willie Nelson & Family concert is different – everything he does involves some improvisation – they're also much the same now as they were 10, 15, even 20 years ago. A few songs come in, a few songs go out. But the foundation of the show remains the same as it's always been.

In New York, the Irving Plaza stage has been transformed into a new-age honky-tonk, a mixture of downhome bric-a-brac and commercial pitches, including banners for Old Whiskey River and willienelson.com. Nelson steps out dressed in black boots, black jeans, a black cowboy hat and a black T-shirt emblazoned with his bourbon logo. He slings on his battered guitar with its trademark red, white and blue strap and, as he has for more than two decades, launches into his 1979 hit "Whiskey River."

Wasting little time on between-songs

patter, Nelson rolls without strain through a three-hour, 50-song set. Cellular phones regularly pop up throughout the crowd, held aloft by fans turning others on to their favorite Willie moments. The singer glides through his usual set, combining self-written classics like "On The Road Again," "Night Life," "Funny How Time Slips Away," "Crazy" and "Angel Flying Too Close To The Ground," with well-chosen covers - "Pancho And Lefty," "Jambalaya," "If You've Got The Money I've Got The Time," "Blue Skies" and "Will The Circle Be Unbroken."

Two hours pass before he features a song from his new album, likely choosing to perform "Maria" because he relishes the chorus punch line: *Shut up and kiss me.*

While the new album may not affect Nelson's live show, it certainly arrives with an air of anticipation for the singer and for Lost Highway Records, Nelson's current home and the label that released the film soundtrack *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*

That soundtrack brings a satisfied smile to the man who's been a part of his own share of left-field successes, including his albums *Wanted: The Outlaws*, *Red Headed Stranger* and *Stardust*. Not surprisingly, Nelson has a few thoughts on the *O Brother* phenomenon.

"Demand," he answers when asked why he thinks *O Brother* was such a smash. "The supply was low and the demand was high. And once you feed 'em something they like, they say, 'Wait a minute, this is what I've been wanting



Often aligned with charitable causes such as Farm Aid, Nelson pitched in last year for the *America: A Tribute To Heroes* telethon, where he appeared with Reba McEntire.

"I'd met Rob Thomas of the rock band Matchbox 20, and we got to be pretty good buddies, so we'd talked about doing something together," Nelson says, relaxing inside a luxury suite at New York's Carlyle Hotel with a half-burned, hand-rolled joint resting openly in an ashtray on a table next to him.

Serletic has produced Matchbox 20's million-selling albums, as well as Carlos Santana's *Supernatural*, the rock guitarist's smash, duet-filled comeback album. Thomas suggested to Nelson that Serletic would be a "perfect producer for us to do something together," Nelson recalls.

Though he was in control of the project, Serletic, clearly a fan, found working with Willie to be a shock to his system.

Brian McKnight, Sheryl Crow and Bonnie Raitt - to introduce Nelson to new fans.

Nelson acknowledges that the duets and much of the music were recorded without his presence. "If I heard something I didn't like, I could have said no. But I didn't," he shrugs. "Matt suggested Kid Rock for 'Last Stand In Open Country,' and I had no objections to that. I wasn't in the studio when he did his part. He came in after I'd cut the track. I called him at the studio to see how he was doin' with it, if he was having any fun or not."

The lush, ornate production of *The Great Divide* could be likened, ironically, to the polished Nashville studio work that Nelson rebelled against 30 years

Who else could flaunt his daily use of marijuana and lose nearly everything to the IRS, yet receive invitations from presidents and pardons from Texas judges?

to hear and can't hear on the radio.' It didn't get a lot of play, but it sold a lot."

While *O Brother* is a return to country roots, Nelson, ever the unpredictable iconoclast, chose a markedly different path for his new *The Great Divide*. A mishmash of old and new material from sources as diverse as Cyndi Lauper and Mickey Newbury, the album has met with mixed reviews. It was produced by hot rock producer Matt Serletic (who, according to Nelson, chose all of the tunes and crafted the sound).

"I take my time making records," the young producer says. "Willie did his parts in two and a half days - bare-bones, live band right off the floor and let's go. It was unbelievable."

He's referring to the portion of the recording featuring Nelson and some members of his band. Serletic took that work and expanded upon on it, adding layers of guitars, keyboards, rhythm and all-star duets. The aim was to use the promotional power of the singing partners - Thomas, Lee Ann Womack, Kid Rock,

ago. Escaping the confines of Nashville's late-'60s overproduction habit was the major reason behind such a stripped-down, out-of-the-ordinary album as *Red Headed Stranger*.

But Nelson doesn't see that as a problem. "I had a lot of faith in Matt because I'd heard some of the other stuff he'd done, which had a lot of production but it was all tasteful," he says. "You could distinguish everything in there: the voices, the horns, the strings, the bass, the piano. The biggest problem I've had with over-

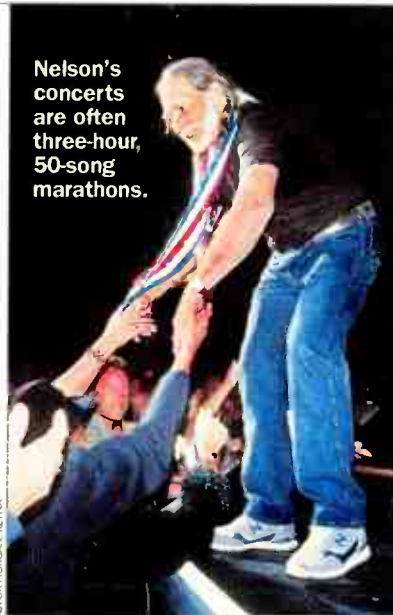
Willie Nelson

production is that one thing cluttered the other. I really don't like that. I don't think anybody really does."

Serletic didn't let *The Great Divide* fall into that trap, Nelson says. "He started out with a nucleus, which was the voice and the rhythm, and then he added everything else a layer at a time. I was there for step one, then I went away. I was satisfied. I said, 'You can [release] these if you want to.' But then he started sending me new versions, where he'd produced some voices here, some horns over here, some little sound effects in different places. It didn't offend me, so I said 'Yeah, keep going, do what you want to do with it.'"

Serletic affirms that his involvement was heavy on *The Great Divide*. "The songs kind of dictated where they were supposed to go," he says. "Willie is very much like a Miles Davis or some other legendary performer; every moment is a new musical experience. The idea here was to build a world around his voice."

For Nelson, though, it's just a short stop in a long career – and one that's as full as it's ever been. Since 2000, he's released four new albums of original material, all of them



Nelson's concerts are often three-hour, 50-song marathons.

completely different. There's the raw Texas honky-tonk of *Me And The Drummer*, the blues duets of *Milk Cow Blues*, the children's album *Rainbow Connection* and now the modern pop-influenced *The Great Divide*. He's also expected to release a duets record with Ray Price this year, and he has a reggae-influenced CD and a jazz album already done.

As if that's not enough, he also has his new book and his new bourbon. The autobiographical *The Facts Of Life And Other Dirty Jokes* is a mix of

song lyrics, on-the-road observations and lecherous gags that's nothing if not a quick read. Like nearly everything else in Nelson's universe, the project grew organically.

"A friend of mine, Kinky Friedman, had some friends at Random House and evidently my name had come up for a book," Nelson says. "I met with his agent, and he convinced me it was the thing to do. It was going to be one-third pictures, one-third lyrics and one-third bullshit. I figured I could handle one third of it."

As for the bourbon, it might be seen as odd or opportunistic, it's pointed out, that a man who years ago won his battle with the bottle would venture into the liquor business. Nelson sits up straight and blinks.

"I didn't really give it up," he says about drinking. "I cut down a lot. I'll have a drink with you anytime."

He then reaches for the bottle, tips it up and takes a drink. "I've given up trying to kill myself," he says. "I figure that's gonna happen soon enough."

Then he twists the cork back in, moves the bottle in reach of his interviewer, looks up and flashes a wise, knowing grin.

Sharp-eyed yet fully relaxed, he's ready for the next move. ★

HE'S GOT A MILLION OF 'EM

Willie Nelson peppers his new book, *The Facts Of Life And Other Dirty Jokes*, with his own brand of humor – part off-the-cuff Willie-isms and part tried-and-true barroom stories.

The humor shows up early, in the opening sentence: "They say writing the first line of a book is the hardest part. Thank God that's over." He also draws on the quips of friends, such as Roger Miller or songwriter Harlan Howard, who once told Nelson, "If I ever think about getting married again, I'm just gonna find some gal that I don't like too

much and buy her a house."

There are plenty more (some of which we could actually print!):

- "Did you hear the one about the duck that went into the bar, jumped up and asked the bartender, 'You got any grapes?' "The bartender said, 'No,' and the duck left. The next day, the duck returned and asked the bartender once again, 'You got any grapes?'"

"The bartender said, 'No grapes!'"

"The duck left. The next day, the duck came into the

bar and asked the bartender, 'You got any grapes?'"

"No, I don't have any grapes! I didn't have any grapes yesterday, I don't have any grapes today and I won't have any grapes tomorrow! If you ask me again, I'll nail your feet to the bar!"

"The duck left. He came into the bar again the next day, jumped up on the bar, and asked, 'You got any nails?' The bartender said 'No.' The duck said, 'You got any grapes?'"

- "Perfect pitch: When you toss an accordion into a trash

can and it hits a banjo."

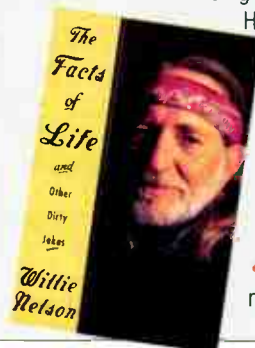
- "Remember, the early bird gets the worm, but the second mouse gets the cheese."

- "Ma said, 'Pa, your foot is in the fire.' Pa said, 'Which one, Ma?'"

- "Did you hear about the drunk who leaned a little too close to a two-story apartment building window and fell out?"

He was lying on the sidewalk when someone ran up and asked what happened. The drunk looked up and said, 'I don't know. I just got here.'

- "They say Viagra can make a lawyer taller."

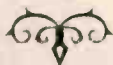


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Driving Down Memory Lane

Alan Jackson's song "Drive" isn't just about family. It's also about the power of memory.

We don't create memories; they create us. The powerful events of our lives – the triumphs as well as the tragedies – help mold us into who we are. Sometimes memories come weighted in meaning, reminding us of what we've gained and what we've lost, of when we've grown and when we've fallen.

But memories just as likely can recall seemingly inconsequential moments, of laughter around a candlelit dinner with friends, of playing in the yard with the dogs, of listening to family stories when relatives are all together.

As "Drive" reminds us, memories can provide strong subject matter for a country song, too. In the tune, the star from Newnan, Ga., reminisces about special moments he shared with his father while growing up.

His memories aren't necessarily what others might think of as grand, defining moments. Instead, they draw upon fundamental times that represent the love conveyed to a child through time, attention and understanding.

When Jackson sings, *It was just an old, hand-me-down Ford/With a three-speed on the column and a dent in the floor/A young boy, two hands on the wheel/I can't replace the way it made me feel*, the lines subtly yet clearly communicate just how important a moment spent with his father was.

There wasn't anything remarkable about that beat-up truck: It wasn't new or flashy, it didn't have a powerful engine or a premium sound system. What made it special for Jackson was how his father believed him and trusted him to take control of a vehicle. He was given the authority of an adult. It was a moment of empowerment.

Such themes – of memory, of parents "passing down" to children – run throughout country music. Dolly Parton addressed the lessons her mother quietly taught her



For Alan Jackson, old cars evoke fresh memories.

Alan Jackson's "Drive" embraces the power of the past

in "Coat Of Many Colors," where a poor woman, unable to buy her daughter a warm winter jacket, stitches one together from rags. The love and the time put into the coat wasn't lost on the child, who proudly endured the taunts of fellow schoolkids because she knew of the dignity and the love the coat represented. She had been empowered.

Similarly, Loretta Lynn spoke of the values of love and hard work that she was given while growing up a "Coal Miner's Daughter." She may have grown up poor, but as Lynn sings, *We had love – that was one thing daddy made sure of*. That love gave Lynn the strength to overcome the difficulties of her childhood and to endure the rough aspects of her early adult life.

She, too, had been empowered – and she held on to those memories with great pride.

Trisha Yearwood's "The Song Remembers When" even implies that music itself has the ability to embed certain long-forgotten memories – so that even if people do not

recall a certain time, place and circumstance, "the song remembers when."

As these songs show, and as Jackson reminds us in "Drive," there is enormous significance in remembering an empowering moment. It is a pattern that's integral to us as humans: We remember births, graduations, weddings and those who have passed on, just as we remember mankind's catastrophes, such as the Holocaust or Sept. 11, and our achievements, like landing a man on the moon or finding a cure for a disease.

But it is not enough to just remember important events of our lives or our history; we must work to extend the lessons from our memories into our present lives. Jackson doesn't just sing of beloved moments spent with his father; he shows how he took those lessons and passed them to his own children.

The song's final stanza shares how he let his three daughters drive his old Jeep around his farm, hoping it would bring them the same feelings it gave him as a youngster. By giving his children a chance to feel the same thrill of authority and responsibility he had experienced, and by empowering his children to use their imagination just as he once did, the memory of his father lives on.

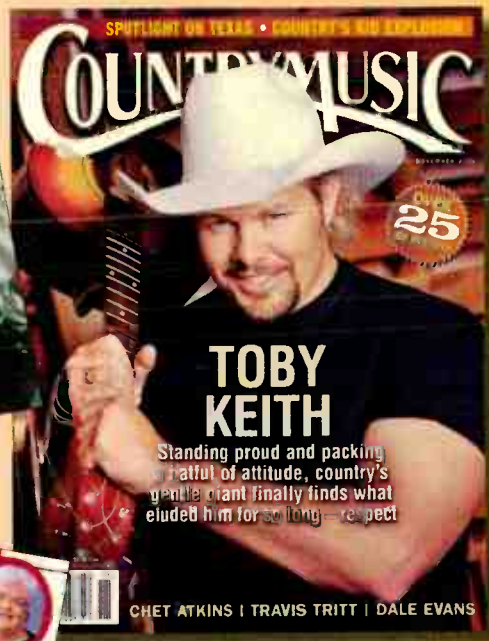
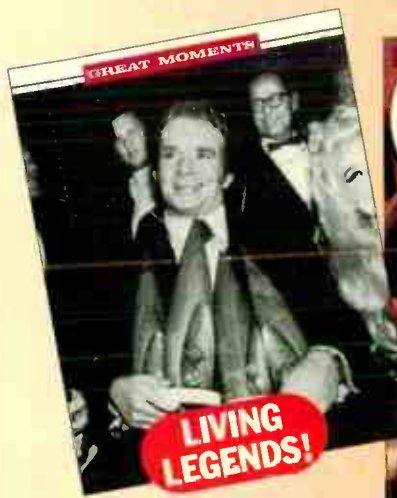
— Hollie Woodruff

Hollie Woodruff is a former music industry employee who is currently in the Master of Divinity program at Vanderbilt University.

A closer look between the lines of country songs



Eugene Jackson and his son, Alan



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REPORT:
IN CRISIS
 COSTS AND FALLING
 ARE LEADING TO
 CHANGES IN THE
 LIVE COUNTRY MUSIC

BY LISA ZHITO

Not long ago, country artists ruled the road. Each spring scores of tour buses would hit the highways, headed for county fairs, urban amphitheaters and sawdust-covered honky-tonks from coast to coast. Anyone with a record deal toured nonstop from spring through fall; if an artist had a song on the radio, chances are they'd be playing a venue near you sometime soon.

But a funny thing happened to country's top entertainers on their way to stardom: Many of them stopped touring.

Shania Twain, Dixie Chicks, Garth Brooks, Faith Hill and Reba McEntire are just a few of the big names who are off the road for one reason or another this year. When a big-name artist does tour, they're usually fronting a multi-act extravaganza presented with plenty of hoopla – and commanding a hefty ticket price.

The concert industry in general has undergone some massive changes in the past five years. But especially in country music, it's a completely different world out there.

Some of the change is financially based. Last year, a sliding economy compounded by the Sept. 11 tragedy put several high-profile tours in the red; a few artists opted to cut their losses and come home early. Others hitched up as part of multi-act packages, which offered a way for artists to work the road while minimizing the risks normally associated with solo touring. And some stars chose to stay home altogether until the economy recovers.

For others, a new career strategy entirely has taken hold.

"There's a pretty good technique in the pop-music world where artists don't constantly tour," explains veteran agent Ron Baird of Creative Artists Agency, which handles LeAnn Rimes, Shania Twain and Martina McBride. "They'll tour on a hit record for about two years, then go into the studio to record a new album for a year, year and a half. You only see them on the road every few



"Event tours," major roadshow productions like Brooks & Dunn's Neon Circus, have become more and more prominent.

years. It's not the same style of pacing that the country industry has traditionally employed."

Shania Twain used the pop model to great success. Her decision to delay touring until her second album was a mega-smash prompted much head-scratching. But when her 1999 tour outdistanced that of every other country act out there, Music Row took notice. With plans for her next tour tentatively set for 2003, nobody's questioning the strategy.



Once a road-burner, Billy Ray Cyrus is keeping close these days to the set of his hit TV show, *Doc*.

"Now when Shania Twain comes out," says Baird, "it's going to be a big event."

Other major artists don't tour because they are focused on different commitments. Reba McEntire and Billy Ray Cyrus, for instance, have growing acting careers; Garth Brooks has said his priority right now is being a dad.

Only a handful of new headliners have risen to replace those names. Part of the blame, say insiders, goes back to country radio. By playing fewer songs for a longer period of time, it can take months to get a hit single established,

making the current climate particularly restrictive for new artists.

"We're not creating stars like we once were," says Clarence Spalding, vice president of TBA Entertainment, which manages Brooks & Dunn, Chely Wright and other country artists. "We see more artists who have a big hit record and then are never heard from again. Now, if a single dies, that artist is over with, he's history."

That makes it nearly impossible to build a career, Spalding says, and the lack of recognizable stars affects every level of the industry, including touring.

But there are exceptions. Two acts who have broken into the headliner club this year are Kenny Chesney and Toby Keith. Both are helming big tours and doing gangbuster business. "Knock on wood, the economy hasn't seemed to hurt us much," Chesney says. "People want to come out and have a good time, and thank God they're coming out to buy tickets."

Veteran concert promoter Louis Messina, who is producing Chesney's *No Shoes, No Shirt, No Problems Tour*, praises how the singer has handled his concert appearances. "Kenny did it right," Messina says. "He's focused, like any artist should be, on the future. It's not about today, it's about a three-year plan or a five-year plan."

In other words, Chesney and Keith paid their dues, opening tours for George Strait, Tim McGraw, Brooks & Dunn and others. Chesney likes to joke that he's "played every club twice."

Additionally, Chesney and Keith's long lists of radio hits and platinum

albums mean both stars have well-established careers that can now support headliner status. Ironically, their success points to an even more pressing void in the touring industry: the lack of midrange acts to fill the slots Chesney and Keith vacated.

"You elevate Kenny and Toby to headliner status, and there's two great support acts out of the picture," says Spalding. "Who's going to take their place? Five years ago, there were seven

early '90s, there were a lot of acts like us building a good head of steam – like Toby and Kenny *last* year. There's not a lot at that level right now."

Five years ago it was common to have a headliner and one opening act. These days touring with anything less than three acts on a bill is rare. It all goes back to that logjam in the artist-development pipeline. Newer artists don't have hits because radio doesn't play them often enough, and if they do, their singles take

just a package on steroids. A package maximizes the potential of each artist, which is the ultimate responsibility of each one of us in this industry."

Indeed, tour packages are nothing new – back in the '40s and '50s, the Grand Ole Opry packaged such stars as Kitty Wells, Pee Wee King, Eddy Arnold and Minnie Pearl on its famous Camel Caravan tours. But until recently, star-studded concert packages were the exception, not the rule. But economic

Concerts in crisis

Five years ago it was common to have

a headliner and one opening act. These days touring with anything less than three acts on a bill is rare.

to 10 acts we thought were about to break into headliners, but in the meantime there were great support acts that helped you build a strong package."

Kix Brooks of Brooks & Dunn is among the artists who recognize the problem. "Support is a bit of a problem right now," he says. "There's acts doing the club thing, making some noise with one or two hits. But in the

months to make an impression. Audiences won't pay high ticket prices to see someone they hardly know. Factor in the shaky economic picture, and increasingly the answer is to package multiple artists together.

"Packages have been going on for 40 years or more," William Morris Agency Vice President Greg Oswald says. "An event like the George Strait Festival is

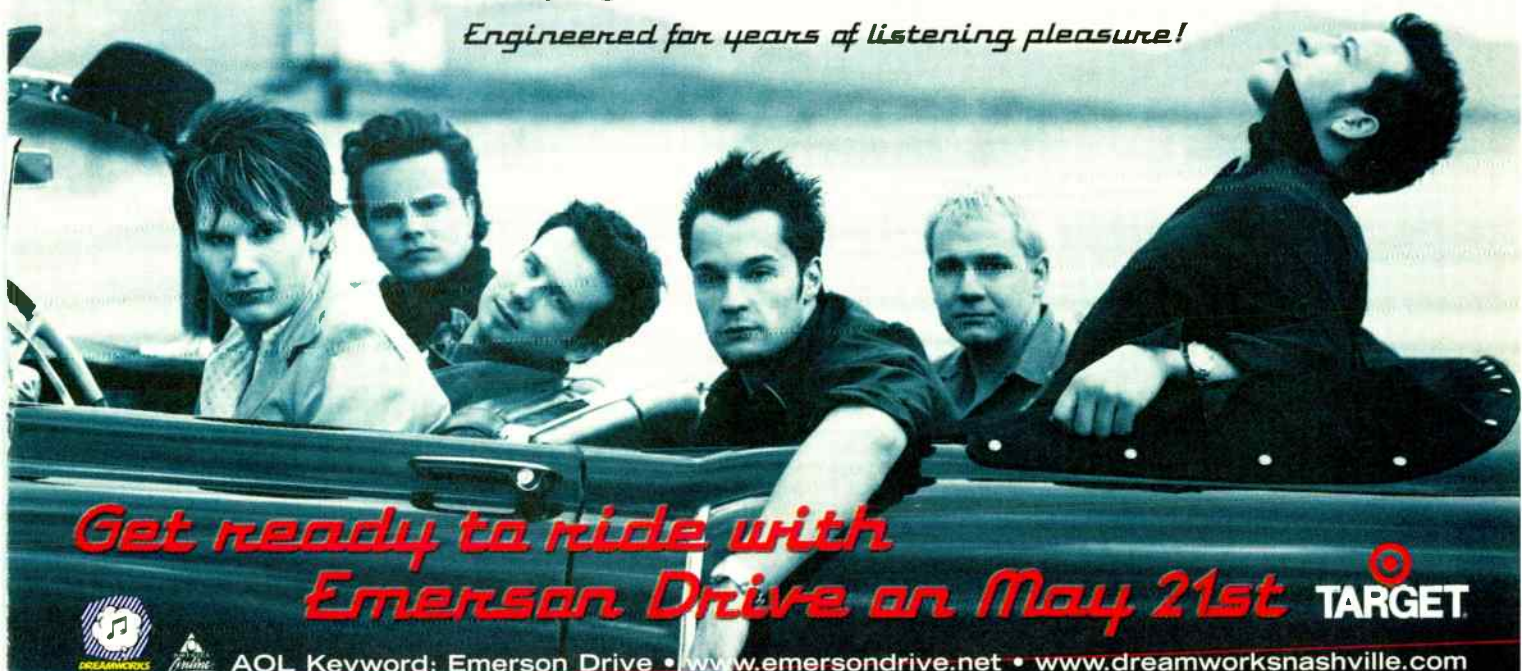
conditions have persuaded country stars to concentrate on staging tours that are multi-act extravaganzas.

Artists feel that the audience benefits from the trend. "I just feel that like as a headliner, I want to give people their money's worth," says Chesney of his own tour, which includes Sara Evans, Carolyn Dawn Johnson and Phil Vassar. "I think there's a little more excitement if

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World Radio History

Concerts in crisis

you bring people with you. There's 31 flavors, you know? When I cut a record, I try to have something for everybody, and it's the same way with touring."

Brooks & Dunn follow the same philosophy. "It's our foremost ambition to make sure people get their bang for their buck," says Brooks, who's currently out for the second summer with the Neon Circus & Wild West Show tour, which this year features Dwight Yoakam, Gary Allan, Trick Pony, Chris Cagle and comic Cledus T. Judd serving as emcee. "I think at the end of the show people go, 'Wow! We were here all day, and it didn't feel like it!'"

For a non-headliner, joining a package is critical for developing a broad fan base. Performers like Sara Evans and Carolyn Dawn Johnson got their names established in major markets from coast to coast, first as part of last year's Girls'

Night Out tour with Reba McEntire, Martina McBride and Jamie O'Neal, and now with Chesney.

"You have to be a fan-based artist, not a record-based artist," says Messina. "You can't just be as good as your last hit on the radio. An artist has to check their attitude at the door. It's not, 'I'm not going to play in front of him!' It's, 'Oh, I have a chance to play in front of x amount of people, I'm going to have a chance to win those people over.'"

That's where paying your dues comes in. Artists usually hone their skills by playing clubs, fairs and honky-tonks. "I started on a stool with a tip jar in college," Chesney recalls. "That's how I learned to entertain. It was great playing those clubs, you make eye contact with a couple thousand people every night and you learn how to entertain those people. I'm

glad I had that experience - I'd hate to be shoved into doing what I'm doing now without that background."

Usually, the next step for an emerging star were the top-tier clubs that couldn't pay enough to present the superstars, but would feature artists with enough name recognition to draw customers in.

Today, that type of club scene in the country music world is "nonexistent," according to Messina. "I think the artists have out-priced themselves to play clubs," he says. "A club owner has to make money, and he can't just depend on the beer sales. The artist has to take it on the chin if they want to do clubs."

State and county fairs, which do pay well, were once country music mainstays - but not anymore. Today, fair buyers are as likely to book oldies rock, pop, contemporary Christian and Latin.

"Fairs want families," explains CAA's Baird. "If you look at the age of

An interesting thing happened to the concert industry in 2001: In a year of flagging attendance, total ticket income hit all-time highs. The reason? Record-high prices.

In 1995, the average ticket price for a top music tour was around \$26; last year, that figure had jumped to \$44. While rock acts charging \$75 to \$100 per admission skew the numbers somewhat, the price of a country ticket has nonetheless risen dramatically.

Not surprisingly, any discussion about the cause of the higher prices results in lots of finger pointing.

Louis Messina, former chairman of PACE Entertainment,

IS THE PRICE RIGHT?

out with a healthy ticket price and nothing stopped that show from succeeding," he observes. "If you really want to see an artist and the ticket is \$75, you're going to pay whatever it costs. I'm not justifying high ticket prices; that's just reality. It's a supply and demand world."

Or maybe it's something else. Soaring prices arrived in tandem with another dramatic change in the industry: consolidation.

The world's largest live entertainment promoter today is Clear Channel Entertainment. Ten years ago, such central, consolidated control of the industry didn't exist. But, in 2000, Clear Channel

What's behind the huge hike in the cost of tickets

a veteran concert production firm bought by SFX and then Clear Channel, says. "Everybody is to blame. It's a shell game. Promoters, managers, artists - it's all about greed."

In other words, everyone wants to make more money on a tour. And the money, of course, comes from the fans buying the tickets.

"The reality is, the higher the guarantee [what a promoter pays an artist], the higher the ticket price. Who generates the guarantees? Who knows? The promoters? The artists saying, 'Gimme gimme?' It's all of the above. Who suffers? The consumers."

Greg Oswald, vice president at the William Morris Agency, counters. "Artists still have the majority of the leverage when it comes to ticket price," he says. "Even then, it depends on how big they are. If someone says, 'I want this price,' and the promoter says, 'It's this, take it or leave it' - a less established act may say, 'Well, OK.' A bigger artist can stand their ground. It all depends on who's got the bigger stick."

Ron Baird of Creative Artists Agency points out that ticket prices wouldn't be so high if people didn't pay them. "U2 came

bought SFX Entertainment, a company that itself rose to prominence by gobbling up concert rivals.

Today, this entertainment Goliath owns more than 100 concert venues, 19 television stations, 770,000 outdoor billboards - and 1,200 radio stations, more than any other company. Last year Clear Channel's live entertainment division produced seven of the top 10 grossing tours.

Joining Clear Channel are a handful of smaller concert conglomerates. Logic alone would indicate that this lack of competition affects ticket costs.

As for that law of supply and demand? Clear Channel's fourth-quarter revenues tumbled nearly \$40 million; company officials cited lower concert attendance in the wake of Sept. 11 and a decrease in international touring.

But ticket prices, on the other hand, have not been lowered in response.

"It's like real estate," Baird says. "The price may be plateauing, but it's not going to get any cheaper."

— L. Z.

COUNTRY'S BIG GAMBLE

High-rolling casinos are placing their bets on country stars

Once relegated to Atlantic City and Las Vegas, casinos have exploded around the country, thanks to riverboat gambling and Indian reservations. And they book a lot of country stars.

"There are lots of them and more all the time; new ones are opening up pretty fast," says William Morris Agency Vice President Greg Oswald. "Every year they get more sophisticated in the quality of the production and the venues – five years ago, some were having concerts in tents."

A quick look at their concert schedules is an eye-opener. Veteran country acts have long played the casino circuit, so it's not a surprise to see the Oak Ridge Boys, Loretta Lynn and Ricky Van Shelton on the calendars. But, more and more, current radio stars – including Toby Keith, Martina McBride and Clint Black – are accepting invitations to perform on the plush stages of the gambling halls.

The reason artists perform in casinos is simple: money.

"Casinos are pretty aggressive spenders because they obviously have more than just the box office for income," Oswald explains. "They can break even on an artist at the door with just \$50,000 [in ticket sales], whereas if you're a promoter, you've lost money. If you're a casino, you've made a couple hundred grand off the people who gambled."

That doesn't sit well with a concert veteran like Louis Messina. "It's big money, and it's hard for an artist to pass up," Messina acknowledges. "but it doesn't help their career, in my opinion."

In a traditional concert setting, an artist establishes a one-on-one relationship that can make a listener a fan for life, Messina explains.

At casinos, it's part of a package that includes gambling, food, drinks and other entertainment options. The show won't have the same long-lasting effect on the listener.

There's another downside, too, according to some music executives. "Casinos have helped keep mid-level acts alive, but it also gives an almost false impression of what your act is worth," says manager Clarence Spalding. "If you're a \$10,000 act, a casino might pay you \$20,000." That hurts, insiders say, if an artist turns down better career-building opportunities – say, a strong opening slot on a tour – in favor of a bigger casino paycheck.

"There's nothing really wrong with playing casinos if the artist is using that to subsidize other [career-building] dates," Messina believes. "But if the artist is building a whole career playing casinos, well then, go put on a leisure suit and knock yourself out."

— L. Z.

parents today, they're in their 40s and 50s. If you can see a classic rock act that the kids like because it's rock 'n' roll and the parents like because they remember it, it's a family affair, and you've got a family audience."

So where country artists once ruled the road, now they face a multitude of roadblocks. There are fewer places to play. Fewer chances to rack up hit singles. Fewer dollars available for concert tickets.

But the future is not quite hopeless. Brooks looks beyond the current business climate and explains the basics from an artist standpoint.

"There might not be much money in it, but music is a thing you do because you love it," he says. "A painter isn't working because he wants to get into a particular gallery – he gets up every morning and draws and paints because he's driven to do that. Acts will play Holiday Inns, beer joints, whatever they can find."

Change in the music business is constant, but one thing remains the same: Fans love live music, and performers love to play. Chances are, they will always manage to find each other.

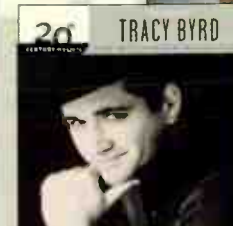
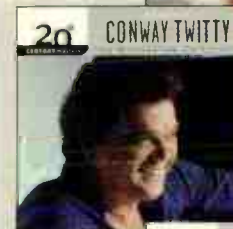
But the questions remain: When? Where? How often? And for how much? *



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On a chilly but sunny Austin day, Chris Cagle arrives at the Star of Texas Rodeo in an SUV surrounded by an entourage. The car is full – but it's not the usual gang of managers and assistants that typically attach themselves to a hot, up-and-coming country star. Instead, a tanned, smiling Cagle opens the door and piles out with his wife and kids, looking like all the other families who have been coming onto the rodeo grounds all day to catch some events and walk the carnival midway.

Despite his casual entrance, this is a big day for Cagle. For the first time, he's headlining a concert in the capital of his home state.

He rolls into Texas just as his dreams are beginning to crest: So far, each of the three singles from his first album have climbed successively higher in the charts: His first, "My Love Goes On

Chris Cagle's hard work turned good

FUEL for the FIRE

BY ROB PATTERSON

And On," made the Top 15; his next hit, "Laredo," reached the Top 10; and his latest, "I Breathe In, I Breathe Out," topped the charts.

"Man, we've been incredibly lucky," Cagle announces right off the bat. It's a line that could have come straight out of Music City Media Training 101, right down to using the plural "we" instead of the singular "I" – the ubiquitous personal reference that's become a staple of the country star lexicon.

Yet, over the course of a 45-minute interview, Cagle will show that he's hardly the latest prefab singer off the Nashville assembly line. He talks with genuine openness about growing up in a family torn by divorce, the shortcomings he struggled to overcome and even the couple of pounds of paunch he's gained while touring. All the while he chews tobacco and spits into a plastic cup like a roper just out of the nearby ring.

Besides, the bit about being lucky is gospel truth. Nashville tends to micro-manage new artists, fine-toothed comb in hand. Yet Cagle not only achieved the rare feat of co-producing his debut album, he also pulled off a minor miracle by getting to record nine songs he wrote – and all three of his hits so far are from his own pen.

Beyond that, he rode out the closing of his original label, Virgin Records, a hurdle that often takes down a newcomer, who gets lost in the resultant reshuffling of artist rosters. Still, the new buyer, Capitol Records re-packaged Cagle's debut, *Play It Loud*, and put it back out with full promotional force.

However, another stroke of fortune comes with an incredible burden. Cagle has been tagged more than once with the "G word" – he's been touted by critics as the next Garth Brooks.

"In the beginning I let it get to me," he confesses, "because I was new, and I didn't know the logistics and parameters of this whole business. I still don't. And as far as that goes, there is only one Garth Brooks, and there will always only be one Garth Brooks. And I just want to make my mark, and I want to make it count."

As Cagle starts to explain, he stops himself. Despite his best intentions, here he is referencing the G-man again when discussing his own career.

"I even hate saying the word Garth in talking about myself, because I'm not trying to compare us at all," he stresses. "But as men, as people who love and enjoy playing and creating music, we both have a high-energy show, and we both have a lot of passion about what we do."

NANCY LEE ANDREWS/CAPITOL RECORDS

A man with a goatee and a wide smile is wearing a black cowboy hat and a green button-down shirt. He is sitting on a white and black cow. The background is a textured, warm-toned wall. The text "fortune" is on the left and "into gold" is on the right.

fortune

into gold

Chris Cagle

"When I put one step forward" – and Cagle accentuates the point by rapping his tobacco tin on the table in front of him – "it's a passionate step. And maybe that's what one comparison could be. But I don't want Garth's job. Man, that's a tough, tough gig."

He may not have much choice in the matter.

In addition to possessing an in-concert presence that matches the wild brones bucking the cowboys inside the nearby arena, Cagle has made an album as vibrant and as polarizing as the music that launched Brooks. The aptly titled *Play It Loud* could be termed "heavy country" for its hard-charging, rocked-up sound. It's the sort of music that sends traditionalists heading to the hills; yet it hits dead center at the core of today's country audience – a generation raised a

tagging himself as a good old boy from Texas. Nor is he overstating the luck it takes to get where he is. But he is, perhaps, overly modest about the hard work and determination it's taken to get himself situated to take advantage of that luck.

Growing up in the Houston ship channel, Cagle was, as a child of divorce, faced with struggle from an early age. He doesn't flinch when he talks about living with the conflict between his mother and stepfather and how it instilled in him a desire to please others in order to soothe ruffled feathers.

A key incident in his high school years helped forge his character, after he went to live with his father. Chris wanted guitar lessons; his dad insisted he join the football team. "The first year I rode the bench," he confesses. But the following summer, "while all the guys were at the beach in Galveston, I was in the gym."

wanted to see how tenacious I was and how badly I wanted what I wanted."

He worked menial jobs, and instead of going out on Friday nights, stayed home with his guitar. "People made a lot of fun of me for that," he says with a sly grin.

Then luck came into play. As a songwriter, he scored his first cut on a David Kersh album in 1998 with "I Breathe In, I Breathe Out." (His own version was added to *Play It Loud* as a bonus track after he moved to Capitol Records.) While plugging away in search of another break, he met a woman in a restaurant where he bartended who offered to listen to his demos. Though she hadn't told him so, the woman, Donna Duarte, worked as the executive assistant to Scott Hendricks, president of Virgin Records Nashville. When Duarte played Hendricks the tapes, the president immediately signed the upstart to a contract and gave him a small recording budget to test out a few songs.

Cagle and his co-producer Robert Wright made the best of it, delivering four radio-ready tunes for the cost-cutting price of \$4,000 – and all four songs ended up on the album without one altered note. Hendricks let Cagle make his own music – an atypical decision for an untested artist. "He told me, 'If it isn't broken, why should I fix it?'" Cagle recalls.

In his personal life, the last couple of years also proved lucky for the Texan. He re-connected with a long-lost girlfriend who is now his wife, Elizabeth – the two said their vows on Sept. 10, and Cagle became a stepfather of her two children from a previous marriage.

"It was like instant Dad, instant everything," he says. "She was actually my first love, and we didn't speak for 12 years, didn't see each other, nothing. She was the first woman who really got under my skin. Then we haphazardly ran into each other."

Yes, Cagle is indeed a lucky man. But he has also learned that while fortune may be the flame that lights the fire, dedication and labor are the fuel that keeps it burning. When asked to look 10 years into the future, he answers, "I hope we're right back here talking about the last 10 years. I don't care how big I get, as long as I get to stay. That's all I want." *



"I don't care how big I get," says Cagle, "as long as I get to stay."

good bit country, but still a little bit rock and pop, too. It also has the breadth to reach far beyond – just as Brooks did.

And, like Brooks at the start of his career, Cagle does not at first glance seem a model of future stardom. He's of average height, with the slight stockiness of the ex-football player he is. At 33, he's a bit older than the current crop of country acts being groomed for success. Pulling off his hat, he reveals a balding pate.

"I'm no different than anyone else out there," Cagle insists, and it's a valid point. "My kids are up front, my wife and friends are up there. I'm just a guy from Baytown who got lucky and got a shot."

Cagle isn't being disingenuous in

By his senior year, Cagle made the all-district team. He'd also acquired his first guitar.

Following high school, Cagle admits, he was a less than stellar college student, first at the University of Texas in Arlington, then back at junior college in Baytown. He dropped out and headed to the Dallas-Fort Worth area, where he paid his dues playing in bands on a circuit that included Ty Herndon and Ricky Lynn Gregg. "Then they all turned up missing," he recalls, "and I was like, where'd they go?"

Nashville, that's where.

So in August of 1994, he sold everything and moved to Music City. "There were nights I slept on the street," he confesses. "I think, looking back, that God

THE Journal

OF TRADITIONAL COUNTRY MUSIC

“He Stopped
Loving Her
Today”

Charlie
Louvin

Keith
Whitley

From hillbilly
to big city

Eddy
Arnold

MICHAEL OOS ARCHIVES

Editor: Robert K. Oermann

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The Tennessee Plowboy initially scored as a rural balladeer. But each time his career faltered, his willingness to evolve and try new ideas set the stage for even more success.

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Louvin is a survivor — and a feisty one at that. Recently inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame as one-half of the Louvin Brothers with his late brother Ira, the veteran star talks about his past and present, including the severe injuries he received in a recent car accident.

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PRECIOUS MEMORIES FROM THE COUNTRY MUSIC HALL OF FAME AND MUSEUM



COURTESY OF COUNTRY MUSIC HALL OF FAME AND MUSEUM

Born To Be Wild

Born in the mountains of Kentucky in 1955, Keith Whitley was a thrill seeker throughout his life. As a teen he loved fast cars, and as an adult he loved this Harley-Davidson motorcycle.

After apprenticing in the band of bluegrass great Ralph Stanley with fellow Kentucky teenager Ricky Skaggs, Whitley joined J.D. Crowe's band, The New South. Crowe knew how enamored the singer was of the hard-country styles of Lefty Frizzell and Merle Haggard. So in 1982 The New South switched from bluegrass to honky-tonk music to feature Whitley as a vocalist on the album *Somewhere Between*.

That experiment led Keith Whitley to attempt a solo recording career in Nashville. Initially rejected by the major labels for being "too country," Whitley eventually found a home at RCA in 1984.

Whitley used this motorcycle in the video for his 1988 chart-topping single "When You Say Nothing At All." Though he died the following year, he continues to be cited by up-and-coming singers as a profound influence.

Keith Whitley's Harley recalls his life in the fast lane



ALAN HAYCOX

Lorrie Morgan, Whitley's widow, presented the motorcycle to the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum in 1989.

— Mark Medley

THIS DATE IN COUNTRY MUSIC

JUNE

June 1

1915 Johnny Bond born

1953 Ronnie Dunn born

June 2

1896 Guglielmo Marconi receives the first radio patent

June 3

1989 Reba McEntire marries manager Narvel Blackstock



Chet Atkins

June 4

1937 Freddy Fender born

June 5

1993 Conway Twitty dies

June 6

1885 Fiddler Gid Tanner born

1943 Joe Stampley born

June 7

1934 Wynn Stewart born

June 8

1951 Tony Rice, bluegrass star, born

1964 Alton Delmore of The Delmore Brothers dies

June 9

1941 Wilma Lee & Stony Cooper wed

June 10

1988 Ricky Van Shelton joins the Opry

June 11

1949 Hank Williams debuts on the *Grand Ole Opry*

June 12

1965 Tex Ritter joins the Opry cast

June 13

1972 Country Music Foundation Library dedicated

June 14

1923 Ralph Peer records Fiddlin' John Carson, country's first "star"

1968 Pop Stoneman dies

June 15

1937 Waylon Jennings born

1969 *Hee Haw* debuts on CBS TV

June 16

1980 Bob Nolan Of The Sons Of The Pioneers dies

June 17

1910 Red Foley born

1916 David "Stringbean" Akeman born

June 18

1915 A.P. Carter and Sara Dougherty wed

June 19

1914 Lester Flatt born

1926 Deford Bailey debuts on *Opry*

1956 Doug Stone born

June 20

1924 Chet Atkins born

1945 Anne Murray born

1965 Ira Louvin killed in a car crash

June 21

1938 Bluegrass star Eddie Adcock born

1959 Kathy Mattea born

June 22

1930 Roy Drusky born

1936 Kris Kristofferson born

June 23

1929 June Carter born

1972 Elton Britt dies

June 24

1918 Johnny Bailes of The Bailes Brothers born

1978 Oak Ridge Boys' "I'll Be True To You" becomes their first No. 1 hit

June 26

1914 West Virginia country king Doc Williams born

1926 Bluegrass fiddler Kenny Baker born

June 27

1913 Yodeling king

Elton Britt born

1924 Yodeling queen

Rosalie Allen born

1959 Lorrie Morgan born

June 28

1924 George Morgan born



George Morgan

1940 *Grand Ole Opry* movie premieres in Nashville

June 29

1968 Tammy Wynette's "D-I-V-O-R-C-E" hits No. 1

1980 George Jones' "He Stopped Loving Her Today" hits No. 1

June 30

1922 Fiddler Eck

Robertson records the first country-music single

1970 Groundbreaking for the musical theme park Opryland in Nashville



Anne Murray

July 1

1955 Keith Whitley born

July 2

1964 Last recording session for Jim Reeves

July 3

1946 Johnny Lee born

1958 Aaron Tippin born

July 4

1903 Charlie Monroe born

1942 Peter Rowan born

1973 First Willie Nelson 4th of July Picnic staged

July 5

1954 Elvis' first recordings for Sun Records

July 6

1925 Bill Haley born

1940 Joannie Seely born

1998 Roy Rogers dies

July 7

1917 John Sullivan, "Lonzo" of comic duo

Lonzo & Oscar, born

1927 Charlie Louvin born

July 8

1961 Toby Keith born

1997 Marty Stuart and Connie Smith wed

July 9

1907 Singing cowboy Eddie Dean born

1923 Mountain singer

Molly O'Day born

1929 Mandolinist Jesse McReynolds, of Jim & Jesse, born

1952 June Carter and Carl Smith wed

1953 David Ball born

July 10

1908 Opry star Paul Howard born

1958 Banjo great Béla Fleck born

1970 Johnny Cash records Kris Kristofferson's "Sunday Morning Coming Down," which becomes the CMA Song of the Year.

July 11

1984 Ezra Cline, of The Lonesome Pine Fiddlers, dies

July 12

1943 Roy Rogers & Trigger on the cover of *Life* magazine

July 13

1995 Folk singer Bradley Kincaid born

July 14

1912 Woody Guthrie born

1933 Del Reeves born

1961 Bill Anderson joins the *Opry* cast

1973 The Everly Brothers announce their breakup

July 15

1913 Cowboy Copas born

1946 Linda Ronstadt born

July 16

1949 Ronny Robbins born

1954 Nanci Griffith born

July 17

1918 Red Sovine born

1951 "Jole Blon" singer Harry Choates dies

July 18

1954 Ricky Skaggs born

July 19

1937 George Hamilton IV born



Roy Rogers

1947 Tex Williams hits No. 1 with "Smoke, Smoke, Smoke (That Cigarette)"

1952 Kitty Wells' "It Wasn't God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels" debuts on charts

1975 Lefty Frizzell dies

July 20

1944 T.G. Sheppard born

1959 Radney Foster born

July 21

1895 Singing cowboy Ken Maynard born

1899 Sara Carter, lead singer of The Carter Family, born

1972 Paul Brandt born

July 22

1874 Old-time singer Obed "Dad" Pickard born

1995 Shania Twain's *The Woman In Me* CD hits No. 1

July 23

1943 Tony Joe White born

1971 Alison Krauss born

1977 Alabama debuts on the charts with "I Wanna Be With You Tonight"

July 24

1948 Roy Acuff announces he's running for governor of Tennessee

1957 Pam Tillis born



Pam Tillis

July 25

1967 Tommy Duncan, lead singer of The Texas Playboys, dies

1970 Anne Murray's "Snowbird" marks her U.S. chart debut

1995 Charlie Rich dies

July 26

1986 Randy Travis gets his first No. 1 hit, "On The Other Hand"

July 27

1920 Homer Haynes of Homer & Jethro born

1944 Bobbie Gentry born

1957 Bill Engvall born

July 28

1984 "Angel In Disguise" hits No. 1 for Earl Thomas Conley, making his LP *Don't Make It Easy For Me* the first to yield four chart-topping country hits

July 29

1966 Martina McBride born

July 30

1958 Neal McCoy born

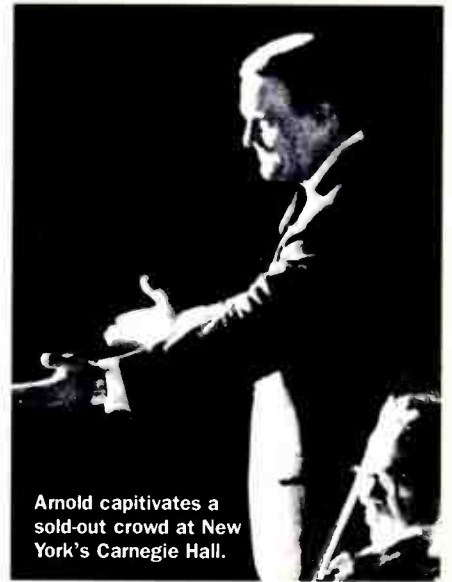
July 31

1963 Chad Brock born

1964 Jim Reeves dies in a plane crash

Country Crooner

Eddy Arnold thought his career was over – then he was saved by the strings



Arnold captivates a sold-out crowd at New York's Carnegie Hall.

On a sunny, easygoing day in Nashville, the most easygoing of country legends is reminiscing about the moment when, six decades ago, he forged a new path for the future of country music.

"I do a lot of thinking when I'm riding in the car, alone," Eddy Arnold says in his gentle Tennessee accent. "One day, the thought struck me, 'Why don't I do practically the same kind of song that I've been doing, and just add strings?' I called [RCA Records producer] Steve Sholes and asked him what he thought. He said, 'Why don't we try it?' Then I did it."

Arnold's front-seat ruminations proved to be a key step in the evolution of what would be called "The Nashville Sound." By becoming the first Nashville superstar to record with a string orchestra, Arnold made the transition from rural balladeer to supper-club crooner, ratcheting up his popularity to a level that even the biggest pop stars envied.

Arnold had already enjoyed a long streak as a country star by time he made his pop move. In the 1940s and early 1950s, he ranked as RCA's biggest-selling star, outpacing Perry Como, Vaughn Monroe and the label's other pop vocalists. His hits of the era – "Cattle

BY ROBERT K. OERMANN

Call," "It's A Sin," "I'll Hold You In My Heart," "Anytime," "Bouquet Of Roses" and "There's Been A Change In Me" – now rate as country standards. During 1948 alone, only seven country songs occupied the No. 1 position – and six of them belonged to Eddy Arnold.

Though Arnold recorded his 1944 hit "Cattle Call" in Nashville, the singer primarily cut his songs at RCA's headquarters in New York. It was at a 1955 session in the Big Apple that Arnold exper-

imented by adding strings to his songs. RCA's Sholes contracted Eddie Fisher's arranger, Hugo Winterhalter, and brought in a full orchestra to back the star. They recorded a second, more pop-pish version of "Cattle Call," as well as the would-be Top 10 hits "The Richest Man (In The World)," "I Walked Alone Last Night" and "The Kentuckian Song," the theme of the Burt Lancaster movie *The Kentuckian*.

Arnold and Sholes were thrilled with the new sound. But radio deejays complained about this turn away from traditional country instrumentation.

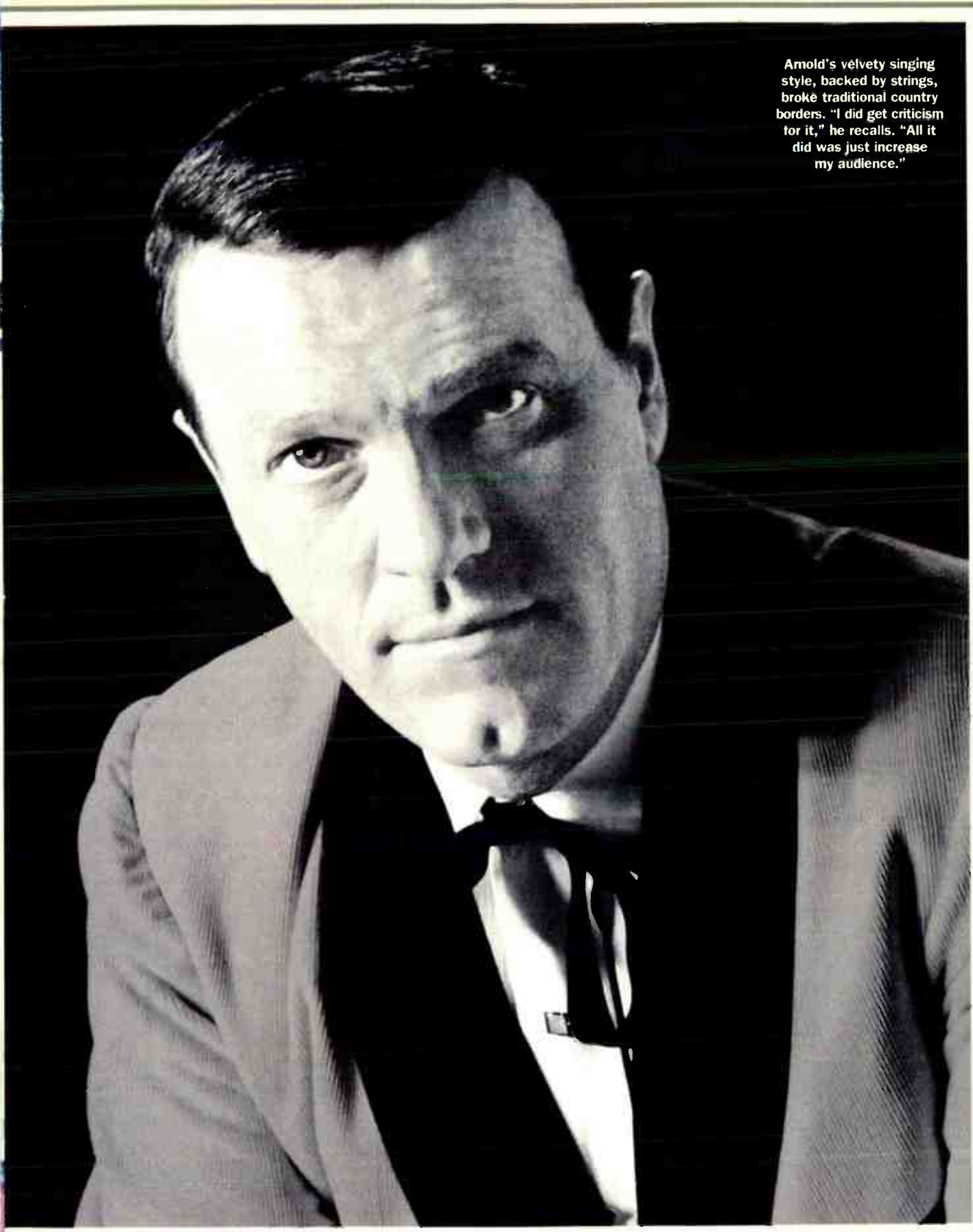
"I never thought about it at that moment, but I noticed later that I did get criticism for it," Arnold recalls. "But I also noticed that about a year went by, and all the country singers were doing it. All it did was just increase my audience."

Still, when rock 'n' roll took over the airwaves, Arnold no longer enjoyed the radio attention he once had. After scoring an astonishing 57 consecutive songs in the Top 10 between 1945 and 1954, the singer started to struggle. He didn't land a single chart-topper between 1956 and 1964. In 1958, the year he turned 40, he didn't place one tune on the charts.

"I thought slightly of



In 1993, Arnold presented the Country Music Hall of Fame with a plaque depicting his gold records. Joining Arnold (second from left) in the gala event were RCA label execs Tom Schuyler (left) and Jack Weston, along with Hall of Fame director Bill Ivey (right).

A black and white, high-contrast portrait of a man with dark hair, wearing a suit jacket, white shirt, and dark tie. He is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. The lighting is dramatic, with deep shadows on the right side of his face and neck. The background is dark and indistinct.

Arnold's velvety singing style, backed by strings, broke traditional country borders. "I did get criticism for it," he recalls. "All it did was just increase my audience."

Eddy Arnold

retiring," Arnold recalls. "I thought, 'Well, it's probably over for me.'"

Instead, Arnold conspired with fellow Tennessean Chet Atkins to launch the next stage of his career. Working with Atkins, Arnold enlisted conductor Bill Walker and vocal arranger Anita Kerr to give his sound an even lusher, more sophisticated veneer. His comeback started in 1962 with four Top 10 hits, but the new uptown sound really took off in 1965 with the No. 1 "What's He Doing In My World."

To match his elegant new musical style, Arnold's manager Gerard Purcell pushed for an overhaul of the singer's image. Early in his career, Arnold had been billed as "The Tennessee Plowboy," a true reflection of his rural upbringing in Chester County, Tenn. But Purcell thought the older Arnold needed a more cosmopolitan image, so he talked the singer into buying two tuxedos and easing into a new role as a concert performer, rather than a state-fair, side-stage attraction.

The always-frugal Arnold complained about the cost of the formal

wear, griping, "I could buy several good suits for this money." But the new image fit the new musical direction, and once again Arnold ruled the country charts.

Another key decision came when Arnold insisted on recording a Hank Cochran song, "Make The World Go Away," a choice Atkins resisted because it had already been a hit for Ray Price, Jim Reeves and Timi Yuro. But Arnold had a hunch, and vocal arranger Anita Kerr agreed.

"I think she's always been underrated," Arnold says of Kerr. "People don't recognize how important she was to the Nashville Sound. She was great, fantastic. She could write arrangements, play great piano and lead the Anita Kerr Singers. They had a great blend."

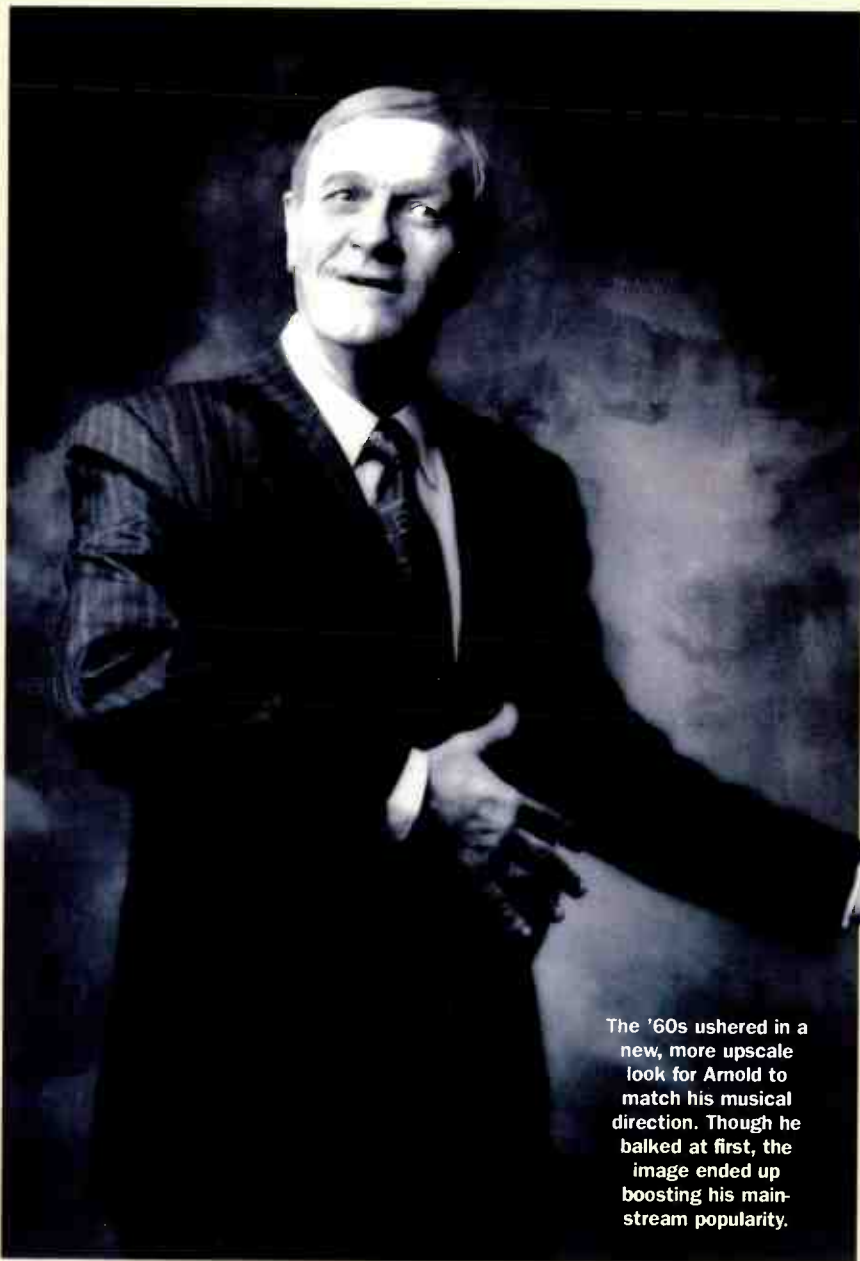
On record, Kerr's creamy vocal blend and a simple string section buoyed Arnold's delivery, and the results appealed to both country and pop listeners. Their version of "Make The World Go Away" topped the country charts - and went to No. 6 on the pop charts alongside hits by The Byrds, The Supremes, James Brown and Simon & Garfunkel.

Meanwhile, Purcell turned Arnold into a regular performer on several network TV variety shows, and in 1966 he negotiated a booking with a concert symphony - another first for a country singer.

"I thought [my manager was] crazy," Arnold recalls of first hearing about the symphony booking. "I got a call from my manager saying, 'They want you in Dallas.' I said, 'OK, what am I going to do in Dallas?' He said, 'The symphony wants you.' I said, 'What will I do with a symphony?' I thought about it for a few days. My manager and Bill Walker got together and began talking about it. I think it was Bill's suggestion to do just the same thing I'd been doing, only with this increased size of an orchestra."

Arnold agreed to do it, and it turned out beautifully. "Suddenly we started getting booking solicitations from other metropolitan symphonies," the singer recalls. "I appeared with I don't know how many."

Arnold's smooth vocal style, finely honed sense of humor and natural grace made him popular all over again. He sold



The '60s ushered in a new, more upscale look for Arnold to match his musical direction. Though he balked at first, the image ended up boosting his mainstream popularity.

out Carnegie Hall and played everywhere from Constitution Hall in Washington to Symphony Hall in Boston. During the mid-'60s, he introduced a whole new crop of standards, including "The Last Word In Lonesome Is Me," "The Tip of My Fingers," "Lonely Again," "Misty Blue" and "Then You Can Tell Me Goodbye."

Arnold's extraordinary endurance as a hitmaker was illustrated when, the year after being inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1966, he was named the CMA's Entertainer of the Year. No one else has ever won the Entertainer honor after becoming a Hall of Fame inductee.

Then a family tragedy put a temporary halt to everything. In 1971, Arnold's son Dickey was critically injured in an auto accident in Alabama. Dickey spent two months in a coma, and the singer canceled all plans in order to stay at his son's bedside. After Dickey

regained consciousness, Arnold scaled back his work to help his son learn to walk and talk again.

Still, Arnold's career was far from finished. In 1980, at age 62, he returned



Arnold hand-picked past recordings for his latest album, *Looking Back*, a collection of favorites recorded with strings. *Seven Decades Of Hits* is no misnomer – he's been putting out records since the 1940s.

to the Top 10 with "Let's Get It While The Gettin's Good" and "That's What I Get For Loving You." He made the charts for the 143rd time in 1983.

Arnold continued to occasionally record, earning notable success as the duet partner of young LeAnn Rimes on her 1996 remake of "Cattle Call." He announced his retirement from the road in 1999. But in 2000

he was presented with a National Medal of Arts award; he also released an album of new material in 2000 and, recently, hand-selected some of his favorite past recordings for the single CD release *Looking Back*.

At age 84, he remains active. "I still go to the office every day," he says. "I own some property, and I take care of that." His property holdings are reportedly worth more than \$12 million.

To this day, Eddy Arnold is most proud of how, late in his career, he helped country music adopt a more sophisticated sound. "That brought the music out of the hills," he says, "and brought it uptown." ☼



Strike up the band! Arnold, longtime producer and friend Chet Atkins (left), and Vince Gill cut up on the set of TNN's special, *A Celebration Of Eddy Arnold*.

No Leavin' For Louvin

After more than 50 years, Charlie Louvin is still

They say you can't keep a good man down — and any doubters just need to talk to 74-year-old Charlie Louvin. The guy who helped elevate two-part harmony to an art form as one-half of the legendary duo The Louvin Brothers has experienced more than his share of calamity recently. But, amazingly, he's none the worse for wear today.

In 1999, Louvin was helping a friend remove an awning from an RV when the metal slammed down on his hand, badly injuring several fingers. Then on December 31, 2001, Louvin was driving his car near his home in Manchester, Tenn., when he inexplicably blacked out, crossed several lanes and hit a tree going 50 miles per hour. Incredibly, he escaped with only minor injuries.

"I'm a thousand percent improved, though still not completely out of the woods," says the resilient country legend, who made it to last fall's Louvin Brothers' Country Music Hall of Fame induction without incident. "I still don't know what happened — I just went out like a light while behind the wheel. Drinking wasn't the issue, since I don't drink."

Louvin's offhand remark instantly conjures another time and another auto mishap — the one 37 years ago this June — that claimed the life of his mandolin-playing brother, Ira Louvin. Two years earlier, the Louvins had broken up their legendary duo, a split necessitated by Ira's alcoholism and increasingly erratic behavior.

However, in 20 years together as a duo, the Louvins set a new standard for vocal harmonies.

THE LOUVIN BROTHERS, Ira (left) and Charlie, enjoyed a close bond for several years. But the bond went bust after the duo split up because of Ira's drinking problems and irritable nature.



BY DAVID SIMONS

Add to that their impeccable songwriting, and it's fair to say that the pair laid the groundwork for generations of country-based acts who would follow, from the brothers Everly and Osborne to future country-popsters like The Byrds and The Eagles.

"It was just a natural thing," the surviving Louvin says about their inventive vocal style. "Ira had a tremendous range, from as low as Ernest Tubb to as high as Minnie Pearl. The thing is, we didn't get locked into our individual parts — we could interchange at will. If

we'd be doing a melody that would move into an area that was too high for me, Ira would just automatically take the lead, and I'd just slide right under him with the low harmony. It was second nature to us. Of course now, when I'm performing those songs and I ask someone who's singing harmony to switch to lead for a loop! But my brother and I didn't even think about it — we just knew."

Signing with Capitol in the mid-'50s on the cusp of a changing music market, the traditionalist Louvins found themselves torn between the demands of the industry and the faith-based gospel that was their musical birthright. On the country side, it was a successful balancing act: the brothers immediately reached the Top 10 with 1955's "When I Stop Dreaming," then spent the next several years charting such oft-covered classics as "You're Running Wild" and "Cash On The Barrel Head." At one point, they even displaced Elvis Presley's classic "Heartbreak Hotel" with their own chart-topper, "I Don't Believe You've Met My Baby."

But unlike The Everly Brothers, the Louvins were already well into



The brothers had a natural flair for innovation. "We didn't get locked in to our individual parts," recalls Charlie. "We could interchange at will ... My brother and I didn't even think about it — we just knew."

their 30s by the time the singles began to hit – far too mature for a youth-obsessed pop market. “If you were ‘B.T.’, before television, or ‘B.P.’, before Presley, it was a much different game,” observes Louvin. “And we were both.”

Charlie accepted the challenge of the new era, going solo and scoring a major hit his first time out with 1964’s “I Don’t Love You Anymore.”

And even though Charlie went on to land a dozen hits in the ‘60s, it was the

making music

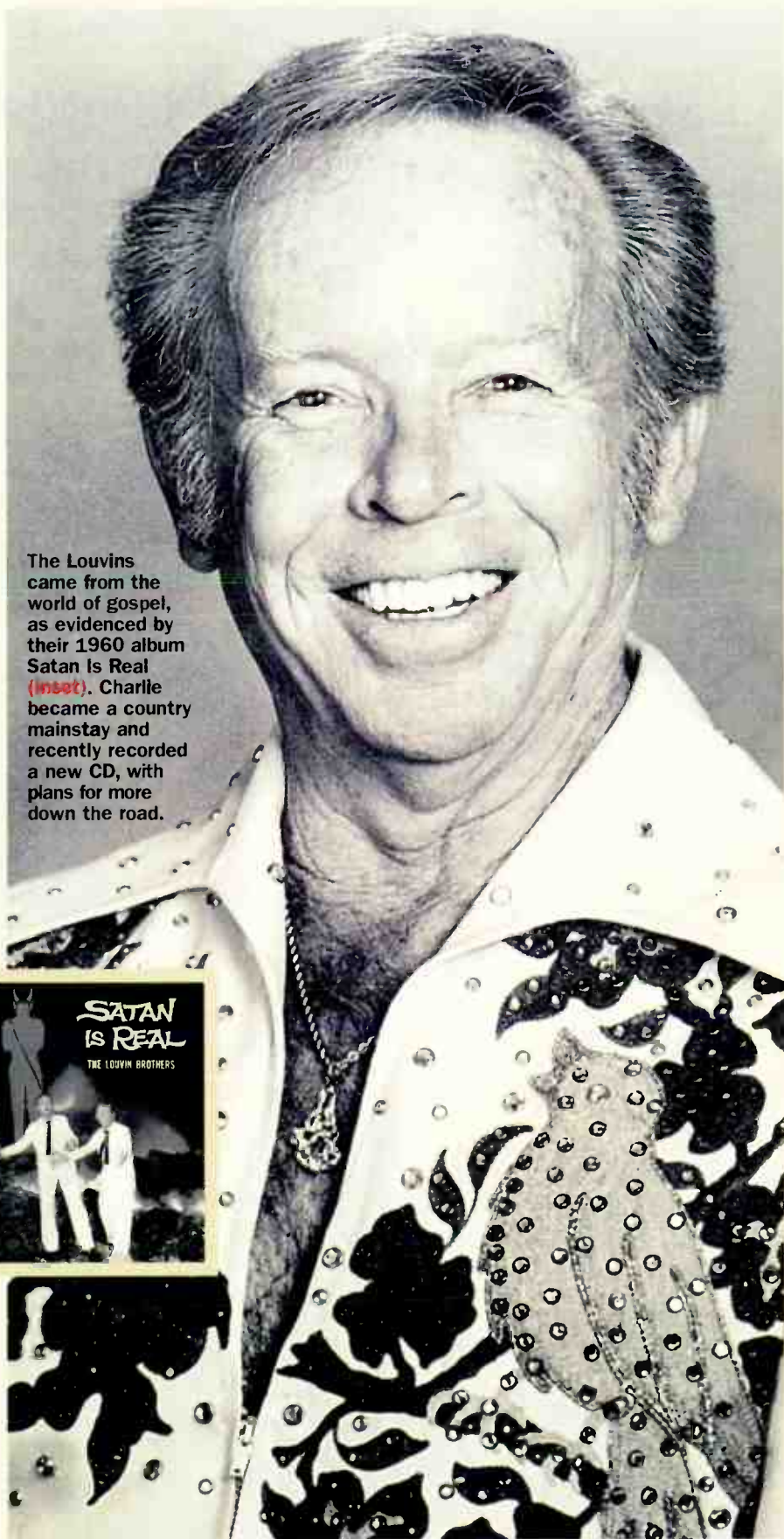
influence of the brothers’ repertoire that has had a lasting impact. Their songs attracted an assortment of interpretations, from The Byrds’ heartfelt “The Christian Life” and Emmylou Harris’ “If I Could Only Win Your Love,” to the many covers of the classic “When I Stop Dreaming” by the likes of Roy Orbison, Don Gibson and George Jones. You can add Dolly Parton (“Cash On The Barrel Head”) and Lucy Kaplansky (“The Angels Rejoiced Last Night”) to the recent list of Louvin lovers.

“What Emmylou did with ‘If I Could Only Win Your Love’ – which was to take Ira’s tenor harmony part and make it the melody lead – was really inventive. I enjoyed that one a lot,” says Louvin. “There have been so many great bluegrass versions of the songs that I’ve loved as well. To me, it’s a great compliment when someone takes the time to work up a totally different interpretation of a song, rather than just doing a straight copy.”

Louvin himself has continued to maintain a healthy recording regimen that includes recent standouts like the star-studded Charlie Louvin: 50 Years Of Makin’ Music, featuring duets with Willie Nelson, George Jones, Tanya Tucker and the late Waylon Jennings. He has no intention of slowing down.

“I’ve managed to find a bunch of new songs that I’m real happy with,” he remarks on the eve of yet another round of recording sessions. “I’m just hoping that they come off in the studio as good as the sound in my mind. If they do, it could be some powerful stuff.”

The Louvins came from the world of gospel, as evidenced by their 1960 album *Satan Is Real* (inset). Charlie became a country mainstay and recently recorded a new CD, with plans for more down the road.



THE STORY BEHIND THE SONG

“He Stopped Loving Her Today”



*“He
Stopped
Loving
Her
Today”*

BY CURLY PUTMAN
AND BOBBY BRADDOCK

He said, “I’ll love you till I die”
She told him, “You’ll forget in time”

As the years went slowly by
She still preyed upon his mind
He kept her picture on his wall
Went half-crazy now and then
He still loved her through it all
Hoping she’d come back again

Kept some letters by his bed
Dated nineteen sixty-two
He had underlined in red
Every single “I love you”

I went to see him just today
Oh, but I didn’t see no tears
All dressed up to go away
First time I’d seen him smile in years

He stopped loving her today
They placed a wreath upon his door
Soon they’ll carry him away
He stopped loving her today

You know, she came to see him
one last time
We all wondered if she would
And it kept running through my mind
This time he’s over her for good

He stopped loving her today
They placed a wreath upon his door
Soon they’ll carry him away
He stopped loving her today

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Written by Curly Putman and Bobby Braddock

George Jones had reservations about recording “He Stopped Loving Her Today” from the start. He thought the lyrics were morbid, and he thought the melody too closely resembled Kris Kristofferson’s “Help Me Make It Through The Night.”

But producer Billy Sherrill convinced Jones to give it a try.

The first time he sang the song in the studio, no one was happy with the results. But just as Jones prepared for a second take, complete with a live band in the studio, his ex-wife Tammy Wynette walked into the studio with her new husband, George Richey. Wynette took the seat next to Sherrill as Jones stepped up to the microphone.

“The light in the control room illuminated her face as he sang,” says the song’s co-writer, Bobby Braddock, who heard the story from another tunesmith, L.E. White, who was in the studio at the time. “So the performance that you hear was done with George looking at Tammy.”

After Jones recorded it, Sherrill invited Braddock and Putman to his office. The two writers hadn’t thought their composition was all that special — until they heard the emotion that Jones put into their words. “I knew then that it was something very, very special,” Braddock says. “We were all just blown away,” Putman adds.

“He Stopped Loving Her Today” has repeatedly topped polls as the best country song of all time.

By the time Braddock and Putman wrote the tune in 1978, the two friends were among country’s most successful songwriters. Putman, an Alabama native, had just been inducted into the Nashville

Songwriters Hall of Fame, thanks to his classics “Green Green Grass Of Home,” “My Elusive Dreams” and “D-I-V-O-R-C-E” (co-written with Braddock). Braddock, from Florida, was on a roll with Jones’ “Her Name Is ...” and the Jones/Wynette duet “Golden Ring,” songs that helped earn him his Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame induction in 1981.

As for the song’s inspiration, Putman recalls Braddock having the oddball idea on “kind of a morbid subject — a man lying there dead and having a little smile on his face because he was happy after all these years.”

After writing the song, Braddock pitched it to Sherrill, Jones’ longtime producer, who loved it but thought it wasn’t finished yet. “Billy wanted us to include a verse that had the former lover or wife coming to the guy’s funeral,” Braddock recalls. The two songwriters went through a few new verses before hitting on one that Sherrill liked. He immediately thought of Jones as its singer.

The rest is country music history. “He Stopped Loving Her Today” won Song of the Year honors from the Academy of Country Music, the Music City News Awards,

the Nashville Songwriters Association and the Country Music Association — who bestowed the award in both 1980 and 1981.

Putman points out that one of his other hits, “Green Green Grass Of Home” has been cut by over 700 different artists, while hardly anyone has covered “He Stopped Loving Her Today.” That fact is testament to a perfect, impossible-to-repeat convergence of songwriters, producer and artist.

— Walter Carteree



Bobby Braddock



Curly Putman

NEW AGAIN

NOTEWORTHY DISCOVERIES



JIM REEVES
RCA Country Legends
(BMG Heritage/RCA)

Both sides of this extraordinary vocalist are presented on this 16-track CD. Reeves was a jaunty tenor on such lighthearted fare as 1953's "Mexican Joe" or 1955's "Yonder Comes A Sucker." But it was his velvet intimacy on ballads like 1957's "Four Walls" and 1959's "He'll Have To Go" that made him legendary. Reeves worked close to the microphone, carressing every phrase of "Am I Losing You," "Distant Drums" and the like. Unfortunately, the collection doesn't include such marvelous performances as "I'm Gettin' Better," "Welcome To My World," "Is This Me," "When Two Worlds Collide," "Missing You" and "The Blue Side Of Lonesome." The accompanying booklet includes historical photos, an essay and full recording-session details.



THE BAILEY BROTHERS
Take Me Back To Happy Valley
(Rounder)

Charles and Danny Bailey combined the old-timey brother duet tradition

with bluegrass instrumentation. So their sound is both gently nostalgic and even sort of rocking. Their Happy Valley Boys band drives just hard enough to give the sound an edge, but never overwhelms the sweet sentimentality of the brothers' repertoire. Originally recorded in 1974, these sides are making their CD debut. The overall effect is like listening to a live rustic radio show in the mountains.



GENE WATSON
Ultimate Collection
(Hip-O)

When the conversation turns to the greatest country singers of all, this is a name that inevitably comes up. Gene Watson's voice is a thing of sublime wonder, an instrument that can drip with tears, whisper sexual intimacy, moan in pain and shout defiance. It's not only that he has such power and range, it's that he's such a brilliantly emotional interpreter of lyrics. The 23 tracks here cover the span of his major-label career, from awesome, early Capitol hits "Love In The Hot Afternoon" and "Where Love Begins" to MCA era tunes "Fourteen Carat Mind," "Speak Softly (You're Talking To My Heart)" to mid-'80s Epic smash "Memories To Burn," "The Jukebox Played Along" to his stint at Warner Bros. Records. Still, not every hit is here:



PORTER WAGONER
RCA Country Legends
(BMG Heritage/RCA)

This one's a winner all around. The 16 tracks (1954-1971) include not only Wagoner's hits, but several superb, lesser-known songs. The set

"Farewell Party," "Should I Come Home (Or Should I Go Crazy)," "Bedroom Ballad" and "One Sided Conversation" are notably absent.

THE O'KANES
The Only Years

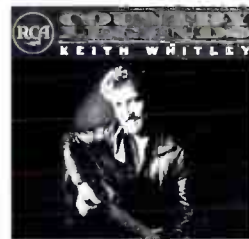
(Lucky Dog)
Kieran Kane and Jamie O'Hara created splendid music during their years together in the mid-to-late '80s. They had a fine, close-harmony vocal blend



and a well-developed sense of how to inject a rhythmic groove into the sound. This stinky, 10-track set isn't a greatest-hits collection. In fact, only two radio favorites are included, "Oh Darlin'" and "One True Love." It is, however, an enjoyable reminiscence of their distinctive sound.

explores the darker aspects of his repertoire in performances such as "The Cold Hard Facts Of Life" (infidelity and murder), "Green, Green Grass Of Home" (execution), "The Carroll County Accident" (highway death) and "Cold Dark Waters" (suicide) — all of which were hit singles. The set also includes such memorable non-hits as "Confessions Of A Broken Man" (alcoholism and gambling), "The First Mrs. Jones" (stalking, domestic

violence) and the fabulously weird "The Rubber Room" (insanity). On the sunnier side are "Company's Comin'," the bluegrass "A Good Time Was Had By All" and his TV show's theme song, "Howdy Neighbor Howdy." The classic "A Satisfied Mind" is here as well. The remastered sound is rather bass-heavy, but can be adjusted. Included are liner notes, vintage photos and complete discographical information.



KEITH WHITLEY
RCA Country Legends
(BMG Heritage/RCA)

If he had recorded nothing but "I'm No Stranger To The Rain," "Don't Close Your Eyes" and "When You Say Nothing At All," Whitley would have earned his place in history. As this set reminds us, those three performances were merely the most prominent in a career that was full of splendid singing. Whitley conjured up the ghost of the immortal Lefty Frizzell better than anyone, so his 1988 cover of "I Never Go Around Mirrors" was especially thrilling. And when he bent notes and created vocal curlicues on "Homecoming '63," "Ten Feet Away" and "A Day In The Life Of A Fool," he leaves the stamp of an all-time great.

CHET ATKINS
Chet Picks On The Grammys
(Columbia)

Prior to Vince Gill's win this year, and his tying win in 1999, Chet Atkins held more Grammys than anyone in Nashville history. Now, on the occasion of his induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, comes this survey of his



13 sterling performances. The recordings are presented in chronological order, and it's a revelation how diverse they are. For instance, 1967's "Tears" is blues, 1976's "Caravan" is jazz, 1985's "Cosmic Square Dance" is country, 1990's "Poor Boy Blues" is rockabilly. Put this on during your next dinner party and watch the smiles.

Collections

ATTENTION, READERS! The Collections page is your source for buying, selling or trading country music-related merchandise and memorabilia. Entries are printed at the discretion of the editors. Please keep in mind the following guidelines when submitting your entry: 1) Entries must be kept to 40 words or less. 2) Only one entry per member per issue. 3) We reserve the right to edit for space and style. Please write each other directly about information or items.

WANTED

I am looking for Shania Twain's full-size cardboard cut-out figure.
Tim Gerber
314 O St. NE
Auburn, WA 98002-4644

I am a huge fan of Patsy Cline. I would like to buy any photos, books or videos that feature her, or join a fan club.
Annette Renfro
424 Renfro-Ray Rd.
Smith Grove, KY 42171

I want to buy the CD *God Will* by Connie Smith and Nat Stuckey.
Alice Anderson
P.O. Box 164
Redding, IA 50860-0164

EDITOR'S NOTE: *This album is being marketed by Nat's widow, Ann Stuckey. She can be reached at P.O. Box 18770, Shreveport, LA 71118 (lakesong@shreve.net).*

Wanted: the album *Leon Payne – A Living Legend Of Country Music*, Starday 236. A good cassette or CD-R copy is welcome, too.
Miro Desperak
P.O. Box 713, PL-42200
Czestochowa, Poland

I'm looking for Carl Belew LPs, also *Bashful Brother Oswald* singing.
Norma J. Chandler
20 NE 8th St.
Linton, IN 47441

I'd like the words to "A Deck Of Cards."
Joseph Reese, #03703-087
Federal Correctional Institution
Box 1000
Morgantown, WV 26507

I would like to get the song "A Deck Of Cards." I think it was sung by Tex Ritter.
Annette McGuire
1315 Ashley Dr.
Hardy, VA 24101

EDITOR'S NOTE: *In addition to Ritter, "A Deck Of Cards" has been recorded by T. Texas Tyler (who had the first hit with it, in 1948), Bill Anderson, Red Sovine, Dick Curless, Pee Wee King and Wink Martindale. Tyler's version is on an album called 16 Country Hits Of The 1940s. The Ritter, Anderson and Curless versions are on collections of these artists' works. Contact the*

Ernest Tubb Record shop at 1-800-229-4288 to order.

Can you please tell me where I can order CDs or tapes of the Dillardards, who played the role of "The Darlin' Family" on *The Andy Griffith Show*?

EDITOR'S NOTE: *The Dillardards have made many albums. Contact the Ernest Tubb Record Shop at 1-800-229-4288 for information about which ones are available.*

I am desperately seeking the video *Holiday In Your Heart*, starring LeAnn Rimes. Also the first Dwight Yoakam LP on Oak Records. Do you have any information on a guy named Cotton Carrier, a country singer in the '50s?

Alice VanCamp
8100 Riverland Ave. SW
Navarre, OH 44662-9248

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Joseph A. "Cotton" Carrier was born near Arthur, Ky. He came to WSB in Atlanta in 1941 after a broadcast stint in Paducah, Ky., and became the emcee of WSB's Barn Dance. He also could play guitar, mandolin and fiddle. Among his most popular tunes were "Why Should I Worry Now" and "I Have But One Goal." He was also a pioneering country disc jockey, an Atlanta TV star and an early mentor of Brenda Lee. He later became a longtime employee at the Lowery Music publishing company, also in Atlanta. He was inducted into the Georgia Music Hall of Fame in 1991 and died in 1994 at age 75.*

I am looking for an album, *The Best Of Connie Smith*, with the song "I Saw A Man" on it.
Betty Luttrell
P.O. Box 509
Orleans, NE 68966

I have been trying to locate a song Loretta Lynn sang called "The Third Man."
Diane Griffin
525 Henderson Lake Lane
Sylacauga, AL 35151

EDITOR'S NOTE: *This song is on Loretta's 1965 album Hymns, which is available on CD.*

Wanted: TNN videos of the Highwaymen in concert at the Mirage Hotel and in Central Park. Also want complete tape

of Don Williams' 2001 ABC Radio Christmas broadcast.
Ruben Jones
105 Cedar St.
Gallipolis, OH 45631-1224

I am looking for a CD by Willie Nelson entitled *A Horse Named Music*.
Kelly S. Segars Sr., M.D.
52 County Road 150
Luka, MS 38852

Where can I buy "Black Land Farmer" by Frankie Miller or anyone else? I have already tried the Ernest Tubb Record Shop.
Pat Steinke
24530 Helium St. NW
St. Francis, MN 55070

I am looking for anything by Alabama from when they were "Young Country" or "Wild Country."
Stephen Wilburn
133 Elberton St.
Toccoa, GA 30577

QUESTIONS

About four years ago Patty Loveless had a Christmas TV special in which she sang a song, "Beautiful Star Of Bethlehem." Did she ever record it? The same night, the Bill Gaither Choir had a special and played the same song. This was the most beautiful Christmas carol I have heard. Hope it is available and you can tell me where.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *"Beautiful Star Of Bethlehem" has been recorded by such country stars as Emmylou Harris, Ralph Stanley, The Judds and John Starling. I do not believe Loveless' version has ever been recorded commercially.*

A male-female duet hit, I think it was called "The Coming Of The Roads," got a lot of airplay in the late 1960s. Can you solve a mystery and tell me who sang it?
Barry H. Beydoun
P.O. Box 842
Bowling Green Station
New York, NY 10274

EDITOR'S NOTE: *You've got the title precisely. This beautiful, sad Billy Edd Wheeler song was released by Johnny Darrell and Anita Carter in 1969. There is an Australian album called Johnny Darrell: Singin' It Lonesome, Best Of 1965-1970 that con-*

tains it. It's listed for sale at the CDNOW website.

FOR SALE

Vintage Les Paul guitar, made in 1952-53.

Marian McMillioan
451 Peckham St.
Blackwell, OK 74631

I have two lap steels. Who would like to buy them? One is a Fender K and L lap steel, introduced in 1945-46. Only about 1,000 were made. The other is a Supro Comet, introduced in 1947, possibly 1952. It's customized because of metal replacing the plastic parts.
Madeline White
P.O. Box 897
Dublin, VA 24084

I have a 1987 Franklin Heirloom Loretta Lynn doll for sale. She's 19 inches tall and is dressed in a suede, beaded "Squaw on the Warpath" dress. Great likeness.
Roxanne Johnson
3196 Newton Rd.
Hibbing, MN 55746

Record albums from the '50s, '60s and '70s, all country, from Elvis to Webb Pierce. I am the original owner and will sell them for the best offer.
John Heflin
4050 Ridge Trail
Robstown, TX 78380
(heflinji@webtv.net)

Selling my collection of Conway Twitty and Loretta Lynn albums. All in mint condition.
Ruth Bradford
3010 18th Ave.
Sheffield, AL 35660

I have a large collection of classic country and gospel LPs, all in excellent condition. Can provide list.
Larry Dick
2904 Traverse Creek Dr.
Milford, OH 45150

Send requests to Country Music magazine, 118 16th Ave. South, Suite 230, Nashville, TN 37203. Mark envelope, Attention: Collections. Collections is printed as a service to readers, and Country Music magazine assumes no liability for any losses or damages resulting from any Collections page correspondence. Parents, be aware of children's correspondence.

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STILL

With an explosive new

WOMAN ENOUGH

memoir, Loretta Lynn still tells it like it is

Loretta Lynn's blue eyes, set off by a snow-white blouse, shimmer with the vitality of youth. Her face is round and delicate, bringing to mind her Cherokee ancestry and the high cheekbones of so many who share her Appalachian heritage. Despite the slow encroachment of age, her beauty – which once inspired Faron Young to say he'd like to take her to a desert isle – lingers still.

BY MICHAEL STREISSGUTH

But age hasn't dimmed her commitment to live life on her own terms. Stricken last year by bacterial pneumonia, she brings up her doctor's command that she quit meeting with fans after shows. He simply wants to protect her from picking up anything while greeting throngs of fans after each show, but Lynn has long gone out of her way to ensure that she welcomed those who wanted to meet her, and she doesn't take kindly to her new directive.

"I miss getting out and mingling with the people," she explains in an accent still seasoned by her mountain roots. "That's how you write hit songs, seeing how they're living today. Everybody changes. I think everybody's changed but me. So I would like to get down and mingle with the people again. Then you know exactly how they're feeling about life today."

She's touching upon what sets her music – and the music of those allied with her – apart from much modern country music. Drawing from the experiences of others and from her own life, has given her the raw material for the songs she has written and recorded over the years.

Her experiences also fill her new autobiography, *Still Woman Enough*, published this spring by Hyperion. As would be expected, her book relates many of her career highlights, such as her induction into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1988 and the night she won the CMA's Entertainer of the Year award in 1972.

"I never won the Entertainer of the Year

award again," she writes, "but I'll remember that night forever."

But *Still Woman Enough* only touches fleetingly on her industry highlights. Most of the text is colored by the drama of her personal world – serious drama and hardship. Lynn chronicled a lifetime's worth in her famed 1976 autobiography *Coal Miner's Daughter*, which became a *New York Times* bestseller and inspired an Academy Award-winning movie starring Sissy Spacek.

But what she didn't tell in *Coal Miner's Daughter* – and what she's endured since – has filled another book. "I betcha I had enough stuff for three books," she declares, perched on a plush leather couch at her home in Hurricane Mills, Tenn.

Written with Nashville author Patsi Bale Cox, *Still Woman Enough* is awash in desperate scenes, the most wrenching of which feature her husband, Mooney "Doolittle" Lynn, who, she writes, during their nearly 50 years of marriage drank incessantly and cheated on her – going as far as bedding down with their son's girlfriend.

The most dreadful experience with Doo (Loretta's nickname for Mooney) occurred during her pre-fame years in the '50s when they lived in Washington state. One evening Loretta had drunk a beer and thrown up, which enraged her husband, who – apparently had a double standard regarding women and drink.

"He dragged me into the kitchen," writes Lynn, "run the sink full of water,



A young Loretta Lynn changed country music with her frank songs.

grabbed me by the hair and shoved my face in the sink. He knew how scared I was of water and held my head under until I began to choke, then he yanked me out by the hair until I caught my breath. As soon as I did, he pushed my head back under the water."

Considering the number of such scenes recounted in *Still Woman Enough*, the singer would be forgiven if she felt relieved when Mooney died six years ago. But she didn't, which underscores a stubborn question about the legendary singer: How could she love a man who treated her so, this woman who took nothing from men in her hits like "Don't Come Home A'Drinkin' (With Lovin' On Your Mind)," "What Kind Of A Girl (Do You Think I Am?)" and "Your Squaw Is On The Warpath."

She refuses, however, to let her late husband's dark side dim her fond memories of him, and she warmly recounts his steadfast

Loretta Lynn

encouragement and their quiet times together. Her eyes still fill with tears when his name comes up – as it frequently does whenever she begins reminiscing.

“The other day I dreamed he said, ‘Loretta, take a ball of string and tie it around this stake and go to the head of this garden, so you can get these rows straight.’ Well, before, when I started getting out a garden with him, I just took my hoe down through [the ground], and it grew just as well. Who cares if [the rows] are crooked, as long as it grows? Me and him used to fight about that. So every now and then I will dream about him, but he’s never dead. He’s telling me what I should do and what I shouldn’t do. Or we’re on vacation, in the camper, and we’re having a good time. But I never dream about him being gone.”

The late Tammy Wynette, one of Lynn’s musical peers who was married five times, merely sang of perseverance in love. If ever there was a stand-by-your-man kind of woman, it’s always been Loretta Lynn. Her anthem “You Ain’t Woman Enough,” which threatens a scheming woman who would take her man, if given the chance, seems to reflect Lynn’s notions of dealing with Mooney’s unfaithfulness: My man may cheat, goes this creed, but it’s the back-door woman who’d better watch out.

“I was working Vegas one night, and I was singing ‘You Ain’t Woman Enough,’” Lynn says, brushing back her deep chestnut locks. “This is the maddest I think I’ve ever been onstage. This woman raised up – and everyone was quiet during the show – and said, ‘Let me tell you something. I’ve been to Hurricane Mills, and I had your old man.’ I had a big-tailed gown on, and I swished down and pulled up my gown and I hit the table. I was goin’ right at her. They took her out before I got to her. I think I messed up a lot of people’s drinks and stuff. She didn’t have no business sayin’ it. I’d-a used that microphone over her head.”

So Lynn tolerated her imperfect husband, absorbing the most pain from other events in her life, such as the passing of her beloved father in 1959 and the drowning death of her son Jack in 1984.

The life that Lynn wrote so convincingly about in her books and her songs began 67 years ago in harsh, isolated conditions. As most everybody knows, she was *born a coal miner’s daughter in a cabin on a hill in Butcher Holler*, as the song goes. In the



Sharing a laugh with good friend Tammy Wynette in 1994

backwoods of Kentucky, she learned to trust in family and live with tragedy. A cousin close to her was shot dead after stealing moonshine; she saw women stealing men, men stealing women; and she accepted that sometimes her parents had to steal whatever to make ends meet.

At the age of 13 she married Mooney Lynn, newly discharged from the Army, and soon discovered she was pregnant – at the time, she says she wasn’t aware of how women became pregnant. When her husband heard the news, she writes in *Still Woman Enough*, he sent his new wife packing.

“I was four months pregnant when Doo run me off,” she writes. “I wasn’t sure why at the time. He seemed to have lost interest in me, and everything I did made him mad It happened late one night, about 10. Doo up and told his brother Johnny to take me home in his Jeep. He was sick of being married to me.”

If Lynn reeled from her unplanned pregnancy and from being sent home to her parents, she hit the ceiling when Mooney swooped back into her life and swept them off to Custer, Wash. The move distanced her from her only refuge, her parents, and forced her to grow up – to keep house, raise children (they would have six together) and work for extra money.

Life took its sharpest turn in the late ’50s when Mooney, who long admired her voice and songwriting, urged her to

play local honky-tonks and write more songs. One performance on a Buck Owens show in Tacoma, Wash., caught the ear of a Canadian, Norm Burley, who decided the aspiring singer belonged on his Zero Records.

Burley sent Lynn to Los Angeles to record her composition, “I’m A Honky Tonk Girl.” “I had all my kids sittin’ in the front row where I was recordin’ in that studio,” she recalls. “It was the only way I could sing ‘cause when I’d write a song I’d sing it to the kids. So Doo put all the kids in there so I could sing, and I played my own rhythm [guitar]. It sounds like a dag-gone jam session, but I done it anyway.”

Incredibly, that first, rudimentary recording made it onto the national country charts in the late spring of 1960 and quickly led to a spot on the *Grand Ole Opry*. Her husband had taken her to the brink of fame, a place she would never have known otherwise. For that, she would always be grateful. Past that, Mooney kept pushing, urging her to capitalize on fame and forcing her to realize her capabilities.

“Doo shoved me out [on the road] and said, ‘You’re a big girl. Take care of yourself,’” she says. “A lot of times when I’d go to work, I’d have to go to Colorado and places like that.” On those trips, she used public transportation – Greyhound. “I would get behind the bus driver and tell him that I didn’t read too good and for him to tell me how to get on the next bus. And every bus driver would take me and show what bus I should get on.”

As she came into her own and brought her name to the country buying market, her career blossomed. She joined the roster of Decca Records, one of Nashville’s most prestigious labels, and she became one of the *Grand Ole Opry*’s main attractions. She also became a member of the Wilburn Brothers troupe, whose syndicated television show delivered her to dozens of markets across the nation.

More hits followed: “Success,” “Blue Kentucky Girl,” “The Home You’re Tearin’ Down,” “Fist City” and “The Pill.”

Lynn the hit-maker, though, was becoming something bigger than most country music stars. She was speaking for women in her songs, bringing to the spotlight topics ranging from birth control to gender equality. Because she sold so many records, millions around the nation were listening. She was making it in a man’s world with music that often challenged male dominance.



WRAP PARTY

Coal Miner's Daughter remains the high-water mark for many of the movie's actors. What happened to the cast – and the people they played – after the film's release in 1980?

Sissy Spacek (as Loretta Lynn)

- With a well-deserved Oscar for *Coal Miner's Daughter*, she finally shed the troubled-teen typecast of *Carrie*.
- Oscar nominations for Best Actress for *Missing* (1982), *The River* (1984), *Crimes Of The Heart* (1986) and *In The Bedroom* (2001), and Best Supporting Actress for *JFK* (1991)



Tommy Lee Jones (as Mooney "Doobille" Lynn)

- *Coal Miner's Daughter* helped him break into meatier movie roles.
- Won an Emmy for portrayal of killer Gary Gilmore in *The Executioner's Song* (1982)
- Oscar nomination for Best Supporting Actor for *JFK* (1991)
- Won Best Supporting Actor Oscar for *The Fugitive* (1993)



Loretta Lynn

- Inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame (1988)
- Co-authored *Still Woman Enough* (2002)
- Awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Kentucky (2002)



Mooney Lynn

- Entered the Betty Ford clinic in an unsuccessful attempt to whip alcoholism in the early 1980s
- Ran Loretta Lynn's Family Campground until his death on August 22, 1996

Patsy Cline

- Though she had been dead for 17 years, *Coal Miner's Daughter* revived interest in her life and music.
- Her greatest-hits collection continues to be one of country's best-selling albums.
- *Sweet Dreams*, a biopic starring Jessica Lange (1985)
- Posthumously awarded the Lifetime Achievement Grammy (1995)



Beverly D'Angelo (as Patsy Cline)

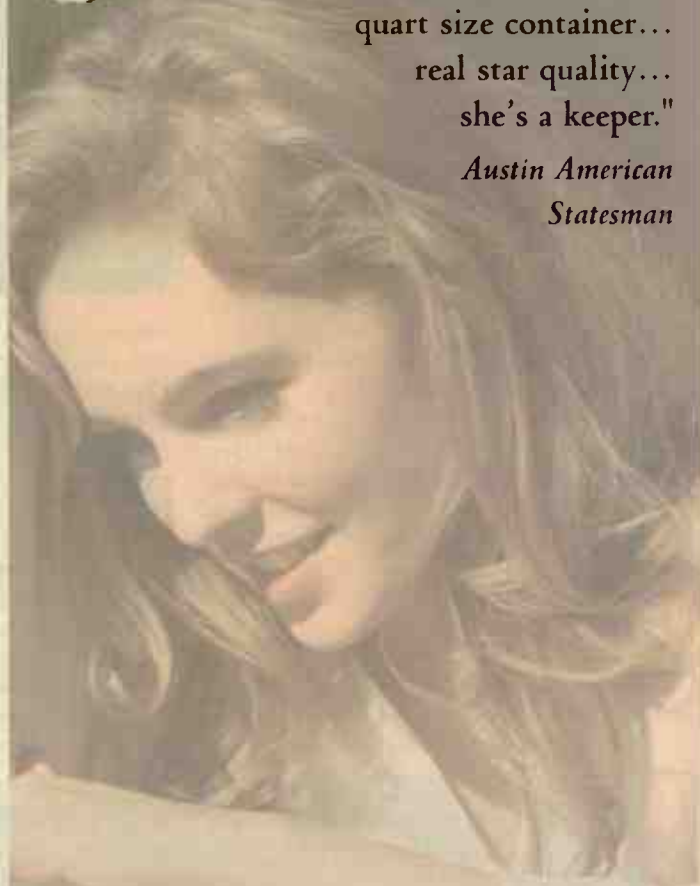
- A former rock singer and cartoonist, her critically acclaimed role as the doomed country-pop diva gave her Hollywood cachet.
- Played Stella Kowalski in the TV movie *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1984)
- Starred with Chevy Chase in a string of low-brow comedies: *National Lampoon's Vacation* (1983), *European Vacation* (1985), *Christmas Vacation* (1989) and *Vegas Vacation* (1997)



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LOST HIGHWAY

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Loretta Lynn

She was even cutting through the bitter jealousy that many female entertainers harbored against her – with a little help from Patsy Cline. Her competitors, she says, resented that she played her own guitar and grabbed so much of the *Opry* applause.

“The girls that was on the *Grand Ole Opry* was fighting to keep me off,” she says, relishing the memory of the battle. “Patsy Cline, when she was here, she fought to keep me around. They were having a party at one of the girls’ homes and she heard about it. So, she called me up and said, ‘Loretta, you and I are going to a party tonight.’ I said, ‘What for?’ She said, ‘You might need to go.’”

“Later, I found out that they were meeting to have me kicked off the *Opry*. It wasn’t mentioned that night because when Patsy walked through the door, she said, ‘If anybody in here has got anything to say, say it now.’”

The catty women sat silently, thanks to Cline.

Cline helped pave the way for Lynn, as did the prodding of her husband, the support of pioneering record producer Owen Bradley and management



Lynn's new autobiography reveals a dark, abusive side of husband Mooney (who died in 1996).

ADAM SCULLIGLORE PHOTOS

who booked her on national television and arranged for the publication of *Coal Miner's Daughter*.

By the '70s, Lynn had become a full-fledged star and commanded all of its benefits: invitations to the White House, industry awards, a stately home and farm west of Nashville. Because her songs said something concrete about life and because she reached the highest levels of the industry, she stands among the most monumental figures in country music.

Bring up modern country music, though, and she takes issue. “They don’t

have country music now,” she complains, a dash of red rushing to those Kentucky cheeks. “What it is is fantasy land. If they didn’t have the videos for them to show their bellies or their boobies, they wouldn’t have nothin’. If they come out on video and just sit there and sing, you couldn’t sell that song ‘cause the song don’t say nothin’.”

Though she expresses her disappointment at how country music has moved away from the truth as she sees it – “country music is not telling it,” she protests – she nonetheless points to one new artist, Trick Pony’s Heidi Newfield, whom she particularly likes.

“*Pour me, pour me, pour me ... another shot of whiskey*,” Lynn sings, mimicking Newfield’s voice on the band’s hit song. “I said, ‘Come on girl, get it.’ I kind of like her. Whoever’s writing for her knows she’s goin’ to do it. So she’s not afraid to do it. So I say, ‘Come on.’ She was woman enough to get out there and sing it.”

Like Newfield, Lynn’s still woman enough, too. Still woman enough to protest the country music industry, to record an upcoming album, to stand up for her late husband. Still woman enough to delve into and share the drama that has been her life. *

Prior to Loretta Lynn’s *Coal Miner’s Daughter* in 1976, country music autobiographies were hardly known as tell-alls. Too many suffered from too little candor, and the language hardly resembled the voices of the stars whose names were on the jacket. But Lynn’s frank tale – spun in her unvarnished, mountain manner – enlivened the genre, coaxing many stars to plow deeper into their pasts. Plenty of dirt and desperation produced books by leading stars from Tammy Wynette to Merle Haggard and George Jones. Some flew off the shelves. Others died quick deaths, sold only to adoring fans at intermissions and autograph sessions.

SOME OF THE BEST

Coal Miner’s Daughter by Loretta Lynn with George Vecsey (1976). The mother of no-holds-barred country autobiographies.

Man In Black by Johnny Cash (1975). One of the few good pre-*Coal Miner’s Daughter* reads, Cash’s first book unflinchingly relates two crucial chapters in his past: the tragic passing of his brother Jack and his pitiful decade-long drug trip. Cash published a second revealing memoir in 1997.

Love Can Build A Bridge by Naomi Judd with Bud Schaetzle (1993). One of the best reads to ever roll out of Nashville. Judd weaves an incredible story of motherhood and dogged pursuit of fame.

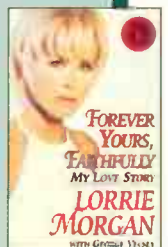
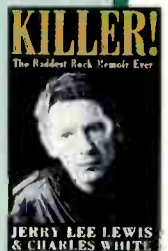
Truth Is Stranger Than Publicity by Alton Delmore, edited by Charles Wolfe (1995). A delightful ramble through the early days of country music by one half of the influential Delmore Brothers.

SOME OF THE WORST

Killer: The Baddest Rock Memoir Ever by Jerry Lee Lewis and Charles White (1995). The title says it all. This legendary rocker with a penchant for country music pasted together a series of vague recollections.

It’s A Long Way from Chester County by Eddy Arnold (1969). Arnold will tell you that he didn’t have much to say when he penned his life story – and this book proves him right.

Forever Yours, Faithfully. My Love Story by Lorie Morgan with George Vecsey (1997). Noted writer Vecsey’s involvement doesn’t redeem this bound monument to Morgan’s late husband Keith Whitley. She wears readers down with endless detail – such as lurid description of the one-piece outfit she wore on an early date with Whitley. “I have to admit,” she continued, “I was looking good.”



a music club is only as good as the selection it offers

Ni'kel Creek—Sugar (Epic) 304768
Kenny Rogers—20 Great Years (Reprise) 444805
 ③ **Martina McBride**—Greatest Hits (RCA Nashville) 324693
Charlie Daniels Band—Super Hits (Epic) 456608
Blake Shelton—(Giant) 444869
Madonna—The Immaculate Collection (RCA/Warner Bros.) 414557
Jamie O'Neal—Shiver (Mercury Nashville) 409086

Alan Jackson—Men Somebody Loves You (Arista Nashville) 197533
Deryl Dodd—Pearl Shirts Lucky Dog (Columbia) 345397
Barry Manilow—Ultimate Manilow (Arista) 345280
 ⑧ **O'Dotter**—Where art Thou?—Dun Tyntinnaw, Emynys Harris, Alcon Krudd, more (Columbia) (Mercury Nashville) 206375
Trace Adkins—Chrome (Capitol Nashville) 335299
Inoubus—Morning View (Epic) 335273

Pico—Back in the Saddle (Roadrunner) 327015
Chad Brock—III (WB Nashville) 330175
Keith Urban—Capitol Nashville 320192
Brooks & Dunn—Tight Rope (Arista Nashville) 315960
Slings—Brand New Day (A&M) 315846
Martina McBride—Emotion (RCA Nashville) 315689
Eric Clapton—Clapton Chronicles: Best Of (Reprise) 315416

Lonesta—I'm Already There (BNA Records) 302752
Brad Paisley—Part II (Arista) 291567
Destiny's Child—Survivor (Columbia) 291310
 ① **Brooks & Dunn**—Sticks and Stones (Arista Nashville) 268508
Lorrie Morgan & **Sammy Kershaw**—I Finally Found Someone (RCA Nashville) 284612
Chris LeDoux—20 Greatest Hits (Capitol Nashville) 283812

Allcia Keys—Songs In A Minor (J Records) 316463
Montgomery Gentry—Tattoos & Scars (Columbia) 278770
Johnny Cash—16 Biggest Hits (Columbia/Legacy) 272583
Toby Keith—Greatest Hits Vol. 1 (Mercury Nashville) 263731
Randy Travis—Greatest #1 Hits (Warner Bros. Nashville) 256665
Kid Rock—Devil Without A Cause (Lava/Atlantic) 254227

Dixie Chicks—Fly (Monument) 14278
Trick Pony (WB Nashville) 234609
John Michael Montgomery—Greatest Hits (Atlantic Nashville) 225862
Diamond Rio—Greatest Hits 214627
Clivii Black—U Leftriched (RCA Nashville) 206326
Madonna—Music (Warner Bros.) 196451
Whitney Houston—The Greatest Hits, Incl. "The Star-Spangled Banner" (Arista) 395210

O Sister! The Women's Bluegrass Collection—Alison Krauss, The Cox Family, Ronny Vincent, more. (Rounder) 352013
Travis Tritt—Greatest Hits—From The Beginning (Warner Bros.) 136812
 ⑦ **Itain**—Dance On (Columbia) 249227
John Michael Montgomery—Brand New Me (Atlantic Nashville) 195131
Dave Matthews Band—Crash (RCA) 156703
Diamond Rio—One More Day (Enhanced) (Arista Nashville) 204313



Uncle Kracker—Double Wide (Lava/Atlantic) 397802
Matchbox Twenty—Mad Season (Mercury Nashville) 394742
Pink—Can't Take Me Home (LaFace) 392241
Prime Country Cuts—Lonestar, Dixie Chicks, more. (Foundation) 391946
 ⑤ **Willie Nelson**—The Last Dance (Mercury Nashville) 345728
Fleetwood Mac—Greatest Hits (Warner Bros.) 375782
Journey—Greatest Hits (Columbia) 375279
Alison Krauss—Forget About It (Rounder) 350934
Chris Isaak—Always Got Tonight (Reprise/Gire) 345595

John Michael Montgomery—Love Songs (WB Nashville) 347724
Collin Raye—Can't Back Down (Epic) 342840
Chris Cagle—Play It Loud (Enhanced) (Capitol Nashville) 340729
Billy Joel—The Essential (Columbia) 331850
George Jones—The Rock Show—Cold Country 2001 (BNA Nashville) 324707
Jeff Foxworthy—Greatest Hits (WB Nashville) 320218
Carolyn Dawn Johnson—Room With A View (Arista Nashville) 319210
Cyndi Lauper—My World (Capitol Nashville) 318782

Tracy Byrd—Ten Rounds (RCA Nashville) 314542
Christina Aguilera (RCA) 311282
Creedence Clearwater Revival—Chronicle: 20 Greatest Hits (Fantasy) 308049
 ④ **Kasey Chambers**—Barracuda—Arista Nashville
Ari Brown—Arista Nashville
O-Town (J Records) 304121
Mary Chapin Carpenter—Time 'Sex' Love (Columbia) 298372
Jessica Simpson—Muzik Soul (Columbia) 298364
Patty Loveless—Mountain Soul (Epic Nashville) 295766

Billy Gilman—Dare To Dream (Epic) 290866
Montgomery Gentry—Carrying On (Columbia) 290700
Steve Miller Band—Greatest Hits 1974-78 (Capitol) 290171
Deslins's Child—The Writing's On The Wall (Columbia) 288613
Santana—Supernatural (Arista) 287854
Eagles—Greatest Hits, 1971-75 (Asylum) 287003
Brad Paisley—Who Needs Pictures (Enhanced) (Arista Nashville) 281535
Lonestar—Lonely Grill (BNA Records) 281527
Garth Brooks—Double Live (Capitol) 266734

Willie Nelson—16 Biggest Hits (Columbia/Legacy) 253682
Merle Haggard—16 Biggest Hits (Epic/Legacy) 253666
 ⑥ **Jennifer Lopez**—J (Epic) 340208
John Anderson—Nobody's Got It All (Columbia) 249250
Brooks & Dunn—If You See Her (Arista) 247759
Kenny Rogers—There You Go Again (Dreamcatcher) 247122
Faith Hill—Faith (Warner Bros.) 241356
Alan Jackson—Everything I Love (Arista Nashville) 235002
Dixie Chicks—Wide Open Spaces (Monument) 234757
Total Hits, Vol. 3—Brienne Spears, Marc Anthony, Jennifer Lopez, more. (Real Gone Music) 343467

Alabama—When It All Goes South (RCA Nashville) 199703
Erykah Badu—A Day Without Rain (Warner Bros.) 198382
Garth Brooks—No Fences (Special Edition) (Capitol Nashville) 196824
Dwight Yoakam—Tomorrow's Sounds Today (Reprise Nashville) 196428
Linkin Park—Hybrid Theory (Warner Bros.) 196394
Sara Evans—Born To Fly (RCA Nashville) 196220
Travis Tritt—Down The Road I Go (Columbia) 196204
 ② **Faith Hill**—Breathe (WB Nashville) 326507
Terri Clark—Fearless (Mercury Nashville) 194878
Patty Loveless—Strong Heart (Epic Nashville) 192609
Phil Collins—Hits (Atlantic) 260836

Aerosmith—Big Ones (Geffen) 111468
Shania Twain—The Woman In Me (Mercury Nashville) 119760
Shania Twain—Come On Over (Mercury) 229021
 ⑨ **Kenny Chesney**—Greatest Hits (Mercury Nashville) 195198
Billy Gilman—One Voice (Epic Nashville) 398065
The Black Crowes—Greatest Hits 1990-1999 (Columbia) 398024
Bon Jovi—Crush (Island/Def Jam) 397778
James Taylor—Greatest Hits (Warner Bros.) 291302
Jennifer Lopez—On The 6 (Work) 282996
John Mellencamp—The Best That I Could Do (Mercury) 242958
Martina McBride—Evolution (RCA Nashville) 220236

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 - **A rock-solid guarantee:** You'll always have at least 10 days to make your decision. If you ever have less than 10 days and receive a selection you don't want, return it at our expense and we will credit your account.
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3.	6.	9.	12.

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<input type="checkbox"/> Faith Hill	<input type="checkbox"/> Janis Taylor	<input type="checkbox"/> Jennifer Lopez	<input type="checkbox"/> Radiohead	<input type="checkbox"/> Fuel
<input type="checkbox"/> Lonesta	<input type="checkbox"/> Slings	<input type="checkbox"/> O-Town	<input type="checkbox"/> Tori Amos	<input type="checkbox"/> Aerosmith
<input type="checkbox"/> Emily Listening	<input type="checkbox"/> Light Sounds	<input type="checkbox"/> Contemporary Christian (Christian members will be serviced by Power & Glory.)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Frank Sinatra	<input type="checkbox"/> Enya	<input type="checkbox"/> Plus One		
<input type="checkbox"/> Barbra Streisand	<input type="checkbox"/> Jim Brockman	<input type="checkbox"/> Point Of Grace		

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Print First Name Initial Last Name Age (09)

Address Apt.

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Horse

Travis Tritt settles down – and saddles up

BY M.B. ROBERTS

Travis Tritt is all about horse power. Whether he's rousting fans out of their seats during his rollicking stage show or revving up his Harley-Davidson for a sunup-to-sundown ride, he's a man in high gear.

Most fans of the Georgia-born country-rocker know he's a dedicated Harley rider. He's even been known to pull on his motorcycle boots and fingerless gloves and ride his Harley FX across the stage to open a concert, or to crank up the energy midway into a show.

Power



Country-rockin'
Travis Tritt is
always ready to
rev it up.



RONALD C. POODRA

When Tritt rides, a gentle canter turns into a full-on gallop.

Travis Tritt

“I love Harley-Davidsons, but I don’t want to be on them every day. I love horseback riding, but don’t want to do that every day either. I like to do a little bit of a lot of different things. That’s the way my music has always been.”

The image of Tritt on a motorcycle is an easy fit. But how many fans would envision the longhaired, leather-tooled Southern rebel on a horse?

As part of Tritt’s recent transition from hard-driving, hard-living, hard-partying wild man to responsible husband and father, the Georgia singer has fulfilled a longtime dream by purchasing his own quarterhorse.

“This is the first horse I’ve ever owned,” Tritt says, stroking a hand along the thick, shiny mane of Dandy, a beautiful, dappled buckskin. “I always wanted one. But the music and everything else I was involved with pretty much consumed my time when I was a kid. We had about 40 acres where I grew up – Marietta, Georgia, was rural back then. So we had plenty

of room. But I think Dad thought, ‘Well, that would be a little more responsibility than I want you to get involved in – more than a dog!’ ”

In 1992, Tritt bought a 75-acre hay farm in Hiram, just outside of Atlanta. He knew right away the sprawling acreage was perfect for a horse. But it took several more years for him to settle down, build a home there and take the cowboy plunge.

“Everybody either wants a paint, or James Arness’ horse from *Gunsmoke*,” the singer says of his steed of choice. “I went with James Arness.”

Soon after Dandy arrived, Tritt bought another quarterhorse, Nicky, for his wife, Theresa. When the singer is off the road, the couple often rides together, sometimes hoisting their son, Tristan, 2, and daughter, Tyler, 4, up into the saddles with them.

“It reminds me of riding a Harley,” says Tritt. “You lean way back. If I could just mount handlebars on it, I’d be all set!”

But even when he’s taking it easy, guiding Dandy gently across his expansive farm, he sometimes finds himself kicking it up a notch. More often than not, a gentle canter winds up as a full-on gallop.

So when Tritt is riding his horse, is he thinking about riding his hog?

“I love Harley-Davidsons,” says Tritt. “But I don’t want to be on them every day. I love horseback riding, but don’t want to do that every day either. I like to do a little bit of a lot of different things. That’s the way my music has always been. There’s certain days when I feel like doing nothing but rock. Some days, it’s straight-ahead

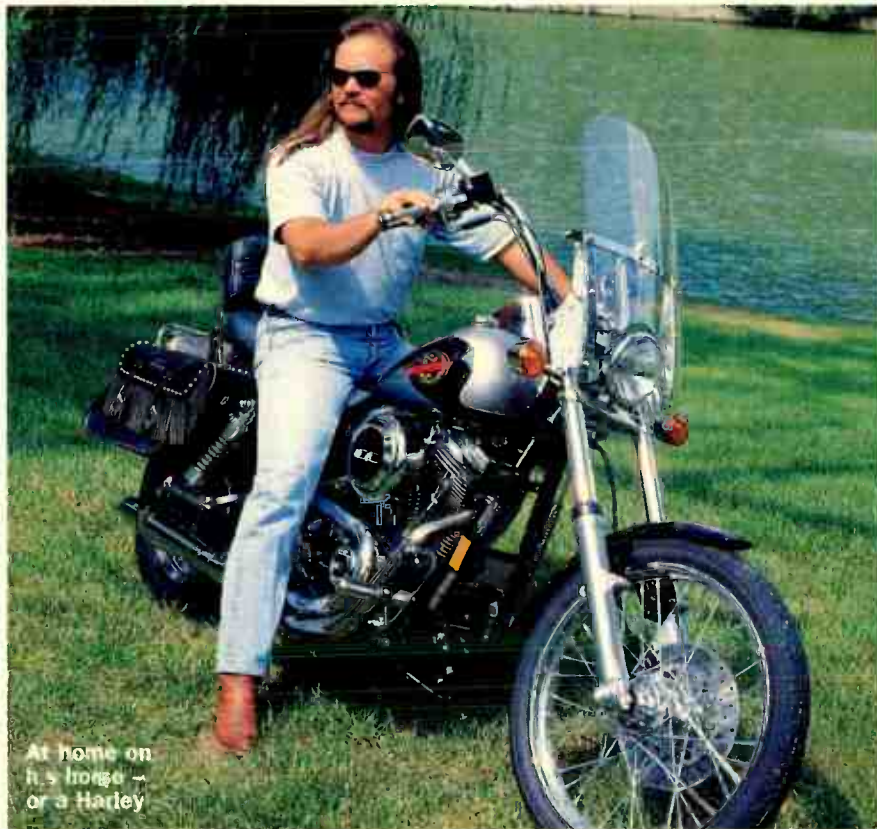
country. Some days, bluegrass or the blues. I like being able to do all those different things."

Variety is what it's all about for Tritt. On and off the stage.

"I love the idea of the cowboy way of life and having horses," he says. "But I wouldn't want to do that 24/7. It's a full-time job."

There are many responsibilities of a cowboy lifestyle, he realizes – and he knows he's not quite ready to make the full commitment. "You've gotta be available," he says. "You never know when those cows are giving birth or when those new colts are coming in. And something's always breaking on the farm or the fencing is down and the cows are getting out. And you've got to get up at four in the morning."

While he's not quite ready for pre-dawn chores, he is happy being a gentleman rancher. "I like the idea of dabbling in it," he says. "With horses, there's such a mystique. Everybody wants to be a cowboy." *



CHUCK JONES

Earnhardt North Carolina State Quarter Introduced

"Man in Black" Joins Presidents on Genuine U.S. Coinage



Collectors race to acquire newest Earnhardt tribute.

Kannapolis, NC – Fans of auto racing legend Dale Earnhardt are going wild over the announcement that racing's "Man in Black" is the first driver ever honored on a genuine U.S. Statehood Quarter. Release of the Limited Edition confirms what many fans have known for years: that Dale Earnhardt was perhaps the most popular driver of all time. Legions of Earnhardt's loyal fans are racing to obtain the unique coins before they're sold out.

The North Carolina Statehood quarters used in this unique commemorative are all obtained from the U.S. Mint in brilliant uncirculated condition. The coins

are then colorized by a revolutionary new process that actually fuses a brilliant color portrait of Dale Earnhardt into the face of the coin. Each coin is then sealed inside a crystal-clear capsule to assure the dazzling luster will never tarnish.

"Almost a year after his tragic passing at Daytona, the legend of Dale Earnhardt continues to grow in the eyes of millions of fans," stated George Hubbard of the International Collectors Society, exclusive distributors of the coins. "This uniquely American tribute combines the popularity of Dale Earnhardt with the collectibility of the U.S. Statehood Quarters.

It's a collectible treasure that will be cherished for generations to come."

Arriving in a handsome black felt presentation case, each Limited Edition coin comes with a Certificate of Authenticity and the International Collectors Society 100% Buy Back Guarantee. "It's a sensational way for fans young and old to establish a link with the most dominant driver racing has ever seen," added Hubbard.

The Dale Earnhardt North Carolina Quarter is available for just \$9.95 +\$3 postage & handling, limit 3 per household. Send a check or money order to ICS, 10045 Red Run Boulevard, Suite

350CMMQD1. Owings Mills, MD 21117.

Credit card holders may call toll free

1-800-787-7527

Free collector's display case with each coin.

Actual Size of Coin: 24 mm in diameter



The Lee Way

BY BEVERLY KEEL

Two days after her 57th birthday, Brenda Lee learned she had been selected to join the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. The timing couldn't have been better: Her induction took place in March, coinciding with the release of her long-awaited autobiography, *Little Miss Dynamite: The Life And Times Of Brenda Lee*.

The book chronicles the 4-foot-9-inch singer's amazing rags-to-riches story. Born in an Atlanta hospital's charity ward and raised in a tar-paper shack, Lee rose to gain early recognition for her precocious talent – even though her carpenter father died when she was 9 years old.

By the time she was 10, Lee's performances supported her family. By 11, she was starring on the weekly ABC-TV show *Ozark Jubilee* and singing on the top-rated network programs hosted by Ed Sullivan, Perry Como and Steve Allen.

In the mid-'50s she signed with Decca Records and within five years scored two smash pop hits, 1960's "Sweet Nothin's" and "I'm Sorry." Ten more Top 10s followed, including the holiday standard "Rockin' Around The Christmas Tree" and the powerful torch ballads "I Want To Be Wanted" and "Break It To Me Gently."

Pushed off the charts by the British Invasion of the mid-'60s, Lee eventually turned to country music. Starting with 1973's "Nobody Wins," she landed a series of Top 10 country hits, including "Big Four Poster Bed" and "He's My Rock."

Despite her success, Lee remains as down-to-earth as the Georgia red clay on which she was raised. She recently celebrated her 39th wedding anniversary with husband Ronnie Shacklett, with whom she's raised two daughters to adulthood. From the modest Nashville home they purchased three decades ago, Lee discussed her current accolades and past achievements with *Country Music*.

You're now officially a rock 'n' roll legend. How did you react when you heard about your induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame?

To say that I was overwhelmed or shocked is an understatement. This was my third nomination. After I didn't get it last year, I just figured I wouldn't have any chance at all.

Did it feel different than your 1997 induction into the Country Music Hall of Fame?

Yes, in a way. Even though my roots are in country, the better part of my career was in rock 'n' roll

How does it feel to be a role model for female singers?

It's nice to think you were an innovator who opened doors for other women. It's also nice for other girl singers to say I inspired them in some small way to get into this business.

What advice do you have for aspiring young singers?

I have talked to LeAnn Rimes, Tanya Tucker, Jessica Andrews and Billy Gilman, several of the younger folks. My advice is to get their education first. You can do both – I did. I think a public education is so important. Public schools are a great source of getting to know yourself and being with other people and having those life experiences that you don't have when you have a tutor or are home-schooled.

Are there more pressures on young stars today than when you started?

I think the pressures are the same because you've got to give up a lot to do this. When you are a child, you can't make your own decisions, so decisions are made for you and sometimes they're not the best things. So you have to be careful of the people around you. You need to have good people around you who care about you as a person and not a product. I was blessed that I had a mother who stayed with me and had a hand in choosing the people around me. She wanted what was best for me, not what was best for her.

With a new book and another Hall of Fame honor, Brenda Lee looks back at her amazing life

and pop. So that was the hall I thought I would get in first. I never dreamed I would get into the Country Music Hall of Fame first.

You are the only woman inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame this year – and one of few female members of that exclusive "club."

There aren't many women, that's true. It's a male-dominated business – it's been that way since day one. It's always hard for a woman to break those barriers, although they do. Women right now are at their creative peak and calling their own shots.



Brenda Lee

You've been as successful in Europe as in America. Do you approach the continents differently?

All audiences are basically the same: They love a good show, they love good music and they loved to be entertained. I had released a couple of records that were big hits in England, so I started going there. But I haven't been to Europe in the past six or seven years. I don't know if I'll ever go again because I don't fly anymore. That's not because of Sept. 11. I've been leery of flying for several years. I don't know where that comes from because I've flown the world over and over again. If I have to, I would. But if I have a choice, I won't. Steven Spielberg and Whoopi Goldberg don't fly, so I'm not as silly as I may sound.

What was the hardest part, emotionally, about writing your book?

Reliving the sad times, like the death of my father, the poverty I grew up in, the workload I carried from the time I was a little girl, being away from my children. When you are pulled in so many directions, some

things you don't remember – or you repress them. When I had my first child, three weeks after she was born I went out on the road and hardly came back until she was walking. Those things are painful to relive. But I loved it. I got to meet with people who were a big part of my career who I hadn't seen in years. I got to mend fences with family, fences I thought were broken, and they were not; it was all in my mind. It was a real healing process. It was very emotional, but it was a lot of fun, too.

Any surprises?

You'll read about the lows that people don't know happened, the times when I didn't think I would have a career, when no one was interested in me. You will read about a stalker I had – that was serious. You'll read about my relationship with my manager, which was not strange, because he was like a father, but it was tough. You'll read about the competition in the business, which I hate. You have to look your best, be your best, do your best. You'll read about how hard my family struggled to get to where we are.

What do you think of today's country music?

I certainly like what the women are doing. There are a lot of young girls who are really doing good. I like to see youth coming out because it brings a lifeblood into our business.

Describe a typical week in your life.

It's just like it is for any woman my age who is married and has children and grandchildren and a home to take care of. I'm always doing something.

What are the questions you are asked the most?

The question I'm asked the most is, "How did you get started?" You would think that as many times as it's been printed that it wouldn't need to be asked.

I'm also asked, "Do I mind being as short as I am?" I've never minded being little. This is my body, and this is what I have to make the most of. The only time it bothers me is when I buy clothes or shoes. I have a real little foot and I can't buy clothes off the rack, which bugs me. It has to be made or bought and remade. Other than that, I don't mind being little at all. ★

Double Hall-ers

Brenda Lee is the first woman with a plaque in both the Rock and Country Halls of Fame. But the list of those who belong to both hallowed institutions may be longer than you think. These legends' impact spanned genres and generations.

Jimmie Rodgers (Country 1961; Rock 1986) – The Father of Country Music's blues-based sound, rambling-man persona and autobiographical songwriting influenced early rockers as well as scores of country singers.

Hank Williams (Country 1961; Rock 1987) – As the most towering figure in country music history, Williams' wild-eyed, honky-tonk blues and never-get-out-of-this-world-alive themes foreshadowed the live-fast, die-young ethos of rock 'n' roll.

Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys (Country 1968; Rock 1999) – The jazz-inspired Western swing of Wills and his crack musicians showed that bands could be both progressive and fun-loving – and most everyone at their shows came to dance.

Bill Monroe (Country 1970; Rock 1997) – Elvis Presley covered Monroe's "Blue Moon Of Kentucky" for a reason. The intensity with which the Blue Grass Boys attacked a song crackled with the passion and energy of rock stars.

Chet Atkins (Country 1973; Rock 2002) – Atkins' innovations on the electric guitar, and his sophisticated yet pristine style, has influenced nearly anyone who picked up a guitar in his wake – not to mention the production work he did with

such seminal performers as Elvis Presley and The Everly Brothers.

Johnny Cash (Country 1980; Rock 1992) – No one walks the line between country and rock with more swagger and substance than the Man In Black.

Brenda Lee (Country 1997; Rock 2002) – A rockabilly princess before she became a pop queen, Lee eventually showed her range by scoring country hits as well.

Elvis Presley (Country 1998; Rock 1986) – From his first recording session to his last, the King of Rock 'n' Roll openly displayed his love of country songs – and eventually scores of country stars re-paid him by showing how much influence he had on them.

The Everly Brothers (Country 2001; Rock 1986) – Wedding country harmonies to a rock beat, The Everly Brothers came up with a youthful sound steeped in tradition, and the appeal hit high notes that resonated around the world.

Sam Phillips (Country 2001; Rock 1986) – He discovered Johnny Cash, Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, Charlie Rich, Carl Perkins and Roy Orbison – all rock pioneers who scored country hits in their careers – and molded their raw talent with loving hands.



ADILE STARR

The former teen pop idol was inducted first into country's hall of fame (in 1997).



Lovingly encased
in a luminous
silver-accented
crystalline guitar

Shown smaller than
approx. height of 9½
inches with stand



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MISS CONGENI

Sitting in a Starbucks sipping a double cappuccino, Cyndi Thomson displays every bit of the sweet, self-possessed graciousness that comes with being a charm school graduate and one-time beauty-pageant competitor from Tifton, Ga.

But call her a beauty queen, and she bristles.

"I wanted to be in pageants only because it was an audience, another place to stand and walk and learn poise, another place to sing," she explains firmly. "That's really why I did them – it wasn't to win the crown."

Indeed – except for being named Miss Congeniality in the Junior Miss Tifton pageant one year – Thomson was never a big winner.

Until now.

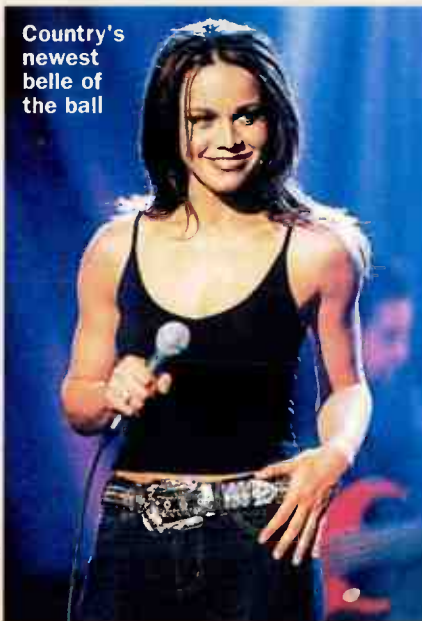
Three years after writing her first song, Cyndi Thomson is country's newest belle of the ball. Her first hit, "What I Really Meant To Say" – a pleading, urgently emotional song about running into an old love after the breakup – catapulted to No. 1.

With success comes questions about her beauty contestant past – a point underscored by the peach-fresh Southern sexiness exhibited in videos and in photos in her CD and promotional calendar. But Thomson brushes off such questions easily, because, as she puts it, "I know who I am."

Dressed in denim jeans and matching jacket and wearing only enough make-up to cover up the tanning-bed sunburn from the previous day, Thomson chats up the Starbucks servers while ordering her morning wake-up brew. As recently as only two years ago, she herself

worked as a waitress, and her affinity with the employees is genuine.

But for Thomson, conversing with the coffee-shop employees goes beyond the connection to her former job; she's naturally outgoing and makes it clear that she's never met a stranger. She may not care about being a beauty queen, but the Miss Congeniality title remains hers.



Country's newest belle of the ball

PATRICIA PRESLEY

Sitting at a corner table, she insists she's not a sex kitten, but instead a self-assured woman who feels connected to her femininity just as she feels connected to her roots and her traditional upbringing. She's still very much a product of rural Georgia and a family that taught her to believe in herself.

"It's about being grounded," says the 25-year-old Thomson. "It's about going

home every once in a while – finding your foundation, being with your family, coming back, talking about what's going on in your life with other people, paying attention to things around you and learning as much as you can. Being a sponge. And then when you go into a room and write, you've got all this stuff. You've got resources."

Thomson's parents supported her dream from the start. They sold a car to pay her tuition to Nashville's Belmont University, but she dropped out after three semesters to pursue a music career. A friend introduced her to successful songwriter Tommy Lee James, and although stepping into the songwriting room with a seasoned professional was daunting, Thomson knew what she had to do to make the best of the opportunity.

"I had a lot of training in selling," she explains. "I sold perfume. I can convince you to buy anything. So, I said to myself, 'I've done it, and I think I will sell myself on just my plain passion.' I was honest. I told him I had never written a song, but I can do it if given a chance."

Thomson proved she was right. Not only that, she proved she could articulate a young woman's viewpoint with freshness, grace and straightforward honesty. Instead of simply writing hits, she wanted to say something substantial, something that had perspective. She wanted her songs to be catchy, but challenging.

"I didn't want anybody to be able to sing along with it the first time they heard it," she says. "I wanted to grab someone's attention, but then have them listen to a story or to the song, so they're like 'wow.'"

What she wants people to hear is the

Cyndi Thomson may look like a beauty queen – but her artistry earns the crown

ALITY

vision, experience and unabashedly personal thoughts of a young woman who knows who she is, what she wants and what it's worth to her.

"I was fortunate enough to have a mom who encouraged that, too, to find out who we are, to be strong women who can fall in love and can share it and can be honest about how it's not always roses," she continues, getting to the core of her songwriting aesthetic.

"One thing I won't ever do, I won't ever bash a man. I won't ever tell him off. That's not my style. 'I'm Gone' has a little of that, but it's more of, 'Hey, here's some advice, and listen to it.' And I always say that before I sing it: 'Guys, I want you to listen to me right now. This is for you.' Because I've dated jerks before that I wish knew how to treat me, but I will never write songs like that because it's not who I am."

Again, those words – knowing who she is. Thomson says it's a good thing people seem to like what she's doing, because she was determined not to let any record executive or producer change her.

"I've never been moldable," she says. "I've always been an individual since I was a little girl."

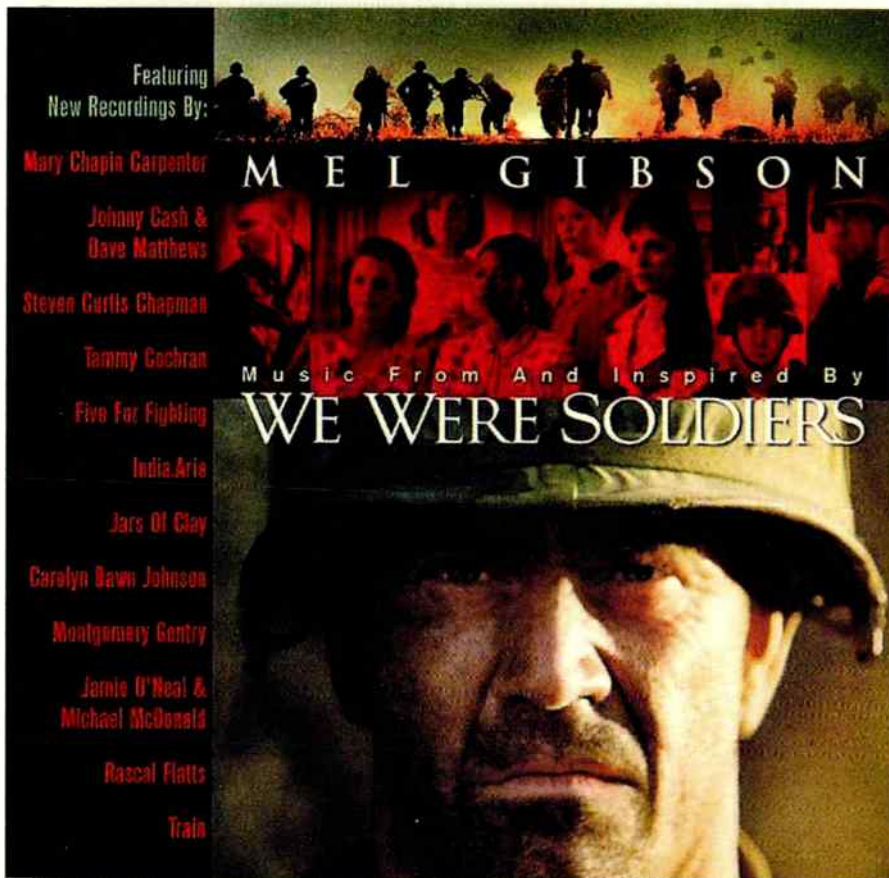
And that individuality comes through – loud and clear, or soft and sensual – in her music.

"I had to fight for that stuff, though," she says. "There were times that different people didn't believe in my songs. But I did and I wrote these songs – me and my co-writers – and it's me. I believe that's part of the reason it's done so well. The label said, 'Let's let her be who she is.' And it worked."

— Bob Millard



REVIEWS



VARIOUS ARTISTS Music From And Inspired By We Were Soldiers

COLUMBIA

★★

The purpose of a soundtrack is to advance a story. Pair that mission with the events of Sept. 11 and you get a challenge: How can music tap into the emotions of war and sadness without disintegrating into banal sentimentality?

On this Vietnam biopic soundtrack, unfortunately, it doesn't.

Of the 14 tracks here, eight are from Nashville-based artists. The feel, however, is not so much country as careful calculation – a storyboard approach to war songs using bagpipes, snare drums, army drill calls and gospel tabernacle organs to manipulate feelings with the subtlety of an M-16 rifle.

The most maudlin tunes come from the rock and contemporary Christian world. Train's "Fall Out" sounds like someone mated the brooding rock of Pink Floyd with Billy Ray Cyrus' "Some Gave All." Jars Of Clay's "The

Widowing Field," with hyperbolic lyrics like *fires in the sky illuminate the demons closing in*, could have been written and performed by earnest high schoolers at a Young Life retreat. By the time you get to the military glee club version of "The Mansions Of The Lord," it's as if you're on an Arlington National Cemetery tour.

The country artists occasionally rise above such contrivances. The opening duet, "For You" – a beautifully hypnotic love song from Johnny Cash and rocker Dave Matthews – is worth the price of the CD. Cash sings in the burning-bush style he has established so well on his recent American Recordings albums.

Another standout is Carolyn Dawn Johnson's "Some Mother's Son." Though the lyrics are as subtle as a greeting card, Johnson's strong, childlike voice charges ahead over a meandering banjo to make the tune a nice souvenir. Scratch-and-spit duo Montgomery Gentry offers an overdue tribute to Vietnam vets on "Didn't I," though the

dirgelike quality takes away from Eddie Montgomery's cocky vocal style.

Mary Chapin Carpenter pops up with her warm-brandy voice on a sparse tune called "My Dear Old Friend," and Tammy Cochran's "I Believe" is a rare moment of joy on the soundtrack, hinting at her potential as an anthem singer.

Disappointingly, the duet between Jamie O'Neal and soulful ex-Doobie Brother Michael McDonald misfires, mainly because their distinctive voices sound like sandpaper rubbing together. "Glory Of Life" from Rascal Flatts is a soaring tabernacle hymn not all that distinguishable from any other Hallelujah moment.

Essentially, that's the flaw running throughout this album: It's little more than patriotic background music.

— Miriam Pace Longino

TOMMY SHANE STEINER Then Came The Night

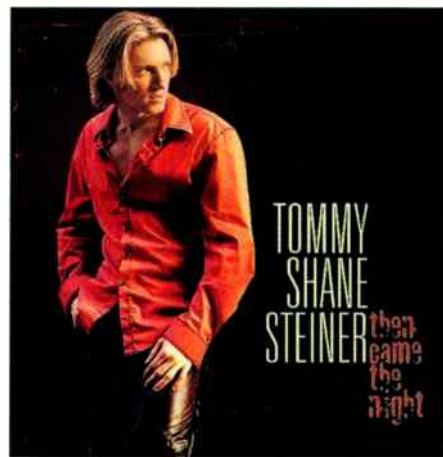
RCA

★★

If there's a recipe these days for producing radio-friendly, pop-country music, Tommy Shane Steiner's debut sticks to it with blind persistence. All the ingredients are here: the slightly distorted electric guitars, the conspicuous drums, the tinkling piano and the anonymous background vocals. Throw in Steiner's pleasant-but-bland voice, add some schmaltzy songs and you just might get a hit record.

But is it any good? Not particularly.

Then Came The Night suffers from an abundance of overwrought, mid-tempo power ballads calculatingly aimed at the heartstrings. The maudlin "What If She's An Angel" wonders if that homeless beggar on the corner is really a heavenly creature testing our convictions. "The



Mind Of John J. Blanchard” tells of an elderly stroke victim confined to a nursing home. “And Yet” finds Steiner bumping into a ex-fiancee and wondering if she ever dreams of him at night.

As if that weren't cute enough, the 28-year-old Texan gets *way* too cute on “What We're Gonna Do About It,” a boy-meets-girl story set in an Atlanta Starbucks. Actress Bridgette Wilson plays the part of the girl, but she doesn't sing a lick; she talks on the phone with her girlfriend, gushing about the “strange guy” she's just met. Meanwhile, Steiner sings his cloying pickup lines such as, *Did you know there's 35 Starbucks and three million people in Atlanta? The odds of you and me being in the very same line are staggering.*

Randy Travis is another guest, lending his voice to “I Don't Need Another Reason.” The duet does serve a good purpose: It reminds us of what a great singer Travis is – and how far Steiner has to go before he's in the same league.

— David Hill

HANK WILLIAMS III Lovesick, Broke & Driftin'

CURB
★★★★

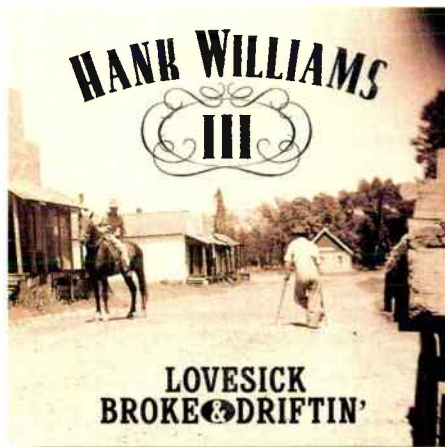
If being born with the name “Shelton” seems like a heavy load for a young boy, imagine the weight you'd tote around as Hank Williams III, especially if you happen to be 29 years old – the very age your legendary grandfather rode to glory in the back seat of a Caddy.

That's precisely where Hank Sr.'s grandson stands with the release of his second solo album, *Lovesick, Broke & Driftin'*, a guided tour to debauchery, misery and keeping the family tradition.

Hank III denounced his debut album, *Risin' Outlaw*, claiming that it suffered undue influence from his record company. So he produced *Lovesick* with friend Joe Funderburk, keeping things spare and in the tradition of his famous granddad, and even bringing in Hank Snow's old pedal steel player, Kayton Roberts, for that lone-some “train whistle” sound.

While Williams' punk persona pokes through on his rootsy cover of Bruce Springsteen's “Atlantic City,” on “Trashville,” his diatribe on contemporary Music City, he sticks close to updating both his father Hank Jr.'s rowdy boogie and his grandpappy's traditional sound, sometimes with a Texas influence.

“Nighttime Ramblin' Man,” an up-tempo play on one of Hank Sr.'s songs,



includes lyrics about drinking and “tokin' ” – and carries the inherent knowledge that his road will come to a bad end. Other tunes, especially

“Whiskey, Weed, And Women,” and “Walkin' With Sorrow,” sound like outtakes from one of Senior's sessions from the early '50s, and they reprise mournful themes – mostly heartbreak, living on the road, and trying to “kill my pain.” The yodeling on the latter, in conjunction with III's spooky, catch-and-moan delivery, is enough to give you goosebumps of otherworldly recognition.

That said, not everything works – a couple of the songs have an unfinished feel, and at times this third-generation rebel tries too hard to convey the image of a messed-up messiah. But when he launches into the gutbucket rhythm of “7 Months And 39 Days” or the syncopated gush of “Lovin' And Huggin',” there's no denying the real magic of country's most exalted hillbilly grandson.

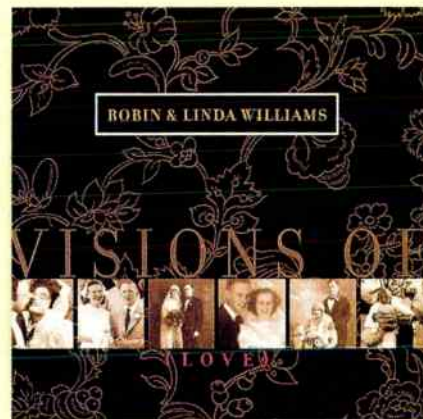
— Alanna Nash

ROBIN & LINDA WILLIAMS Visions Of Love

SUGAR HILL
★★★★

There's something reassuring about Robin and Linda Williams. On paper, their early life together resembles that of the prototypical free-living couple – traveling from gig to gig across Nixon's America in a Volkswagen Beetle. But their marriage and musical partnership endured the Me Decade and beyond. Now, after recording nearly 20 albums comprised mostly of their own compositions, the Williamses gather their gracefully entwined talents for *Visions Of Love*, a collection of covers ranging from the Conway Twitty/Loretta Lynn classic “After The Fire Is Gone” to Jimmie Rodgers' “Mississippi Delta Blues” to the World War I-era “Keep The Home Fires Burning.”

The set is imbued with the comfortable ambience of a Sunday morning radio show. And, wouldn't you know, *Prairie Home Companion* host Garrison Keillor produces. A longtime supporter, Keillor spotlights the couple's strengths as interpreters: up front is the authoritative country-blues keen that often invigorates Robin's singing (especially on Hank Williams' “Ramblin' Man”), and Linda's



pliant, sandy voice burnishes these songs with a great deal of warmth.

There are no blistering revelations here, but also no misfires, and the album's high points make for fine listening. On Bruce Springsteen's “If I Should Fall Behind,” Linda delivers an especially sensitive, knowing lead, sung from the perspective of one familiar with the give-and-take required to make a long journey by another's side.

They may have traded in their old VW Beetle years ago, but the Williamses are still on the road, sharing the simple joys of their music.

— John Vasile

Country Music rates all recordings as follows:

- ★★★★ EXCELLENT A classic from start to finish.
- ★★★★ VERY GOOD An important addition to your collection.
- ★★★ RESPECTABLE Recommended with minor reservations.
- ★★ FAIR For loyal and forgiving fans.
- ★ POOR Seriously flawed.

Ratings are supervised by Country Music editors.

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Cool, Blue And Lonesome

SUGAR HILL

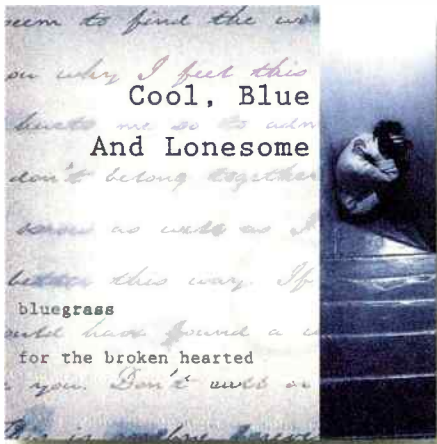
★★★★

As bluegrass labels scramble to get music to newly receptive listeners, the advantage belongs to those with deep catalogs. Compilations of previously released material are easy to assemble, and they offer a big bang for the buck; and listeners are more likely to find an artist or two whose albums they'll buy.

Though Sugar Hill is the youngest of bluegrass' three biggest labels, it still had two decades' worth of material to choose from for *Cool, Blue And Lonesome*, the latest in its "Cool, Blue ..." series.

As the title suggests, there's a theme of sorts – an exploration of the music's blues-influenced side. But it's honored less in musical structure than in the lonesome spirit that pervades the 18 tracks.

Instead, what's offered is a panoramic introduction to several of bluegrass' most



talented performers. Ricky Skaggs appears with Boone Creek and in a haunting duet with guitarist Tony Rice on two cuts from Sugar Hill's early years. Tim O'Brien sings his "Walk The Way The Wind Blows" with his old band, Hot Rize, and a Bill Monroe classic with his sister Mollie. Seldom Scene offers two favorites. *Grand Ole Opry* stars Bob and Sonny Osborne reprise their classic "Listening To The Rain," while Soggy Bottom Boy Dan Tyminski joins mandolin sensation Alan Bibey for Monroe's "Close By." And Dobro wizard Jerry Douglas seems to turn up everywhere.

In short, these are Sugar Hill's heavy hitters, captured in some of their signature performances. Anyone not already

deeply involved in the music is sure to make some new and happy discoveries.

— Jon Weisberger

JOHNNY BUSH

Green Snakes

LONE STAR/TMG

★★★★

Houston-born Johnny Bush, an alumnus of Ray Price's Cherokee Cowboys and a former Willie Nelson bandmate, is less than a chapter but more than a footnote in the history of Texas honky-tonk.

Bush's presence would loom larger if he had not been waylaid from 1972 until

the early '90s by a condition called spastic dysphonia – a disorder that causes spasms of the vocal chords – which, in Bush's case, seriously hampered his ability to sing or talk for many years. His biggest contribution to the classic country canon came as the writer of "Whiskey River," which his pal Nelson turned into a classic booze-drenched, neo-Texas, honky-tonk anthem. As a singer, Bush scored several hits on the country charts, his biggest success coming with his Top 10 rendition of Marty Robbins' "You Gave Me A Mountain" in 1969. Bush's *Green Snakes* – recorded with stalwart

TRAVIS TRITT

The Rockin' Side

RHINO

★★★★

The Lovin' Side

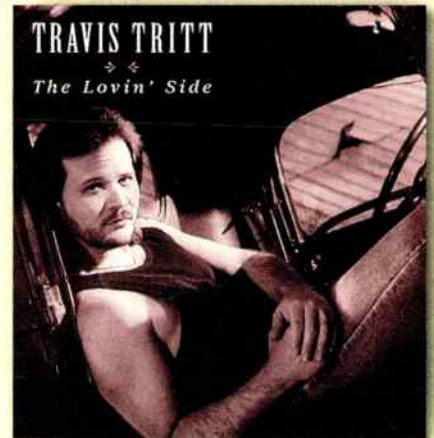
RHINO

★★★

A longhaired rebel in a crowd of hat-act traditionalists, Travis Tritt made a striking entrance in 1990. With a rip-saw baritone and a gift for rockin' honky-tonk, Southern blues and boogie, Tritt unleashed a debut hit, "Country Club," that established him as a full-blown artist, a cross between Bob Seger and Hank Williams Jr.

Blue collar to the bone, he had grits 'n' gravel in his throat, working-class pride in his soul and plenty of attitude on his sleeve. To top it off, he either wrote or co-wrote half of his first album. With *It's All About To Change*, his second, Tritt refined his art with edgy melodies and pointed lyrics. By 1995, he had produced 14 Top 10 hits, establishing himself as a star with some staying power.

However, over time, Tritt's music grew predictable and he seemed bored with it all, lapsing into a formula that alternated tender love songs with rockers that kicked



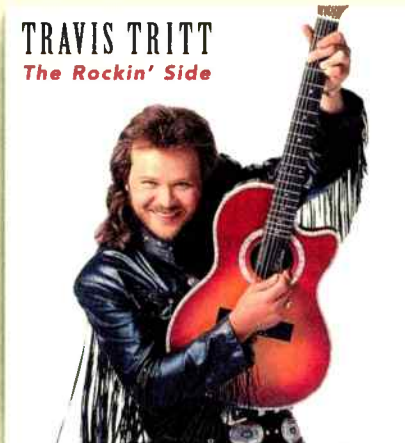
like mules on moonshine.

In repackaging his early material, Rhino erred in marketing his more male-oriented barnburners on one disc (*The Rockin' Side*) and his female-directed romantic songs on another (*The Lovin' Side*). They overlooked the fact that Tritt's music always worked best when alternating his sensitivity with his swagger.

The ballads collection features several memorable cuts, including the affecting country heartache "Between An Old Memory And Me" and the goosebump-good duet with Patti LaBelle on the Sam & Dave remake "When Something Is Wrong With My Baby." But even the best of Tritt's sensitive stuff pales in comparison to rockers like the hayseed-meets-hellion "Ten Feet Tall And Bulletproof."

Two years ago, Tritt made a fine comeback with the million-selling *Down The Road I Go*. Anyone curious about the journey that brought him there will want to pick up the Rhino compilations. But chances are most buyers will wish the label had simply put out a double-disc box set with Tritt's songs sequenced the way he originally intended them to be heard.

— A. N.





musicians Dave Kirby, Buddy Emmons, Tommy Allsup and Floyd Domino – reaches across the honky-tonk decades with renditions of gems by Harlan Howard, Buck Owens, Sanger D. Shafer, Hank Locklin and Cindy Walker. With his broad, lilting baritone back in working condition, Bush also throws in a few delightful curve balls, such as the lighthearted (but creepy) title tune, which he originally recorded in 1972, and a hilarious Tex-Mex comedy of errors called “Dos Tacos.” He particularly shines on the wonderful Moon Mullican chestnut “The Pipeliner Blues” and on the contemporary “When Did You Stop Lovin’ Me.” *Green Snakes* includes a bonus disc featuring nine demos that Bush recorded in 1965 with pals Willie Nelson and steel guitarist Tommy Morrell. All in all, this CD marks another rousing and inspired round in Bush’s long, fascinating career.

— Bob Allen

HOT RIZE

So Long Of A Journey

SUGAR HILL

★★★★

Ultimately, bluegrass is meant to be played live rather than in a sterile recording studio. From 1978 to 1990, Hot Rize was one of the best bands on the circuit, in part because the quartet had played together longer than most bluegrass line-ups, which tend to rotate in and out with seasonal regularity.

These 1996 concert tapes, once thought to be lost, draw on two spring dates during a reunion-tour stop at the Boulder Theater in Colorado. Before a homestate crowd, Hot Rize played as if they were the next big bluegrass thing and just a group of friends making music on a backyard deck.

GARY STEWART

Best Of The HighTone Years

HIGHTONE

★★★★

It’s a little sad, this album. On one level it’s a voice from an almost-vanished world, a reckless meeting of honky-tonk and Southern rock that sure was fun while it lasted but that didn’t last half long enough – and that’s a shame. More profoundly, though, it presents, right there in the blood on the tracks, that world’s cost, the wild man’s burden. Ultimately it raises the hard, old question of what we’re really willing to pay, or have others pay, for our passions.

The earliest tracks in this 13-song collection, culled from three albums, were cut and released in 1988, when Stewart was a decade past his commercial prime, and in those 10 years a lot of bills had come due. Some of his personal trials had been terrible and some of



That intangible bonding and understanding pervades these performances. Tim O’Brien, Nick Forster, Pete Wernick and the late Charles Sawtelle united in the late ’70s, and they came of age together as young musicians finding a single vision in friendship and collaboration.

As modern as they were traditional, Hot Rize combined original compositions, public-domain gospel, Scruggs instrumentals and the best of young and old songwriters; for example, Hazel Dickens’ “Won’t You Come And Sing For Me” finds an ideal treatment here as a set closer. But they weren’t purists. Forster plays electric bass, a taboo for many bluegrassers, and Wernick goes even farther, freely punching in a phase-shifting pedal to give his banjo an eerie, atmospheric tone.

However, it’s the joyful, energetic and deeply felt singing – especially on songs

the damage to his body severe – something made clear by his ravaged vocal chords.

Once his singing was thrilling, immensely powerful and beautifully controlled all the way up to its far peaks and scary edges. In his RCA years in the ’70s, he really was *the* honky-tonk singer, equal even to Jerry Lee Lewis in his prime. Here he sometimes struggles to do justice to his songs.

It doesn’t help that some of the songs – for instance “Rainin’, Rainin’, Rainin’,” “I Get Drunk,” and “Nothin’ Cheap About A Cheap Affair” – are perfect. That is, they’re first-rate, all-time all-stars of their genre, as true and as clever as any a poet of heartbreak and trouble ever wrote.

They’re played by the masters, too, some of them the same musicians recruited all those years ago by Roy Dea, producing here again, for those mid-’70s sessions when they got the Nashville Sound so deliriously dirty with the Southern rock swamp thang.

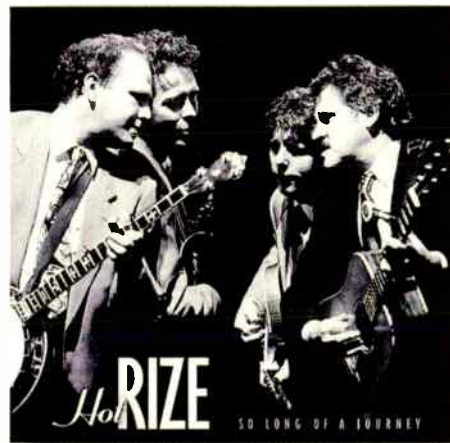
Yes, it’s regrettable that Stewart didn’t go further upward from his peak, perhaps with songs that searched deeper into the turmoil of his real-life soul than the generic boundaries of the cheatin’-and-drinkin’ genre he perfected. And yes, this collection really is sad. But given what he went through to get to it, and how he arrived still fighting, still wailing, still willing, you could also call it beautiful. Even triumphant.

And you want to know something else? Two-thirds of Gary Stewart is still worth twice as much as 99 percent of the other singers out there.

— Patrick Carr

they had shared for decades like “Working On A Building” and “High On A Mountain” – that makes this album a genuine treasure from one of the best bluegrass bands to ever take the stage.

— Roy Kasten



REVIEWS

PINE VALLEY COSMONAUTS The Executioner's Last Songs (BLOODSHOT)

★★★★

Death has historically been a recurring topic for country songs, but in these politically correct times it's not quite as fashionable as it used to be. With *The Executioner's Last Song*, some Chicago musical activists tackle a hot topic of today – the death penalty – and illustrate that capital punishment is an issue ripe for debate.

Jon Langford, who fronts the rowdy roots-music project Pine Valley Cosmonauts, has assembled an impressive array of Americana pals for this collection of songs about murder and death. A fundraiser for the Illinois Death Penalty Moratorium Project, *The Executioner's Last Songs* is an enjoyable 18-song collection that should prove interesting regardless of your stand on the issue.

Providing the musical anchor is the loosely knit Cosmonauts: Langford on guitar and vocals, Steve Goulding on drums, Tom Ray on double bass, Drew Carson on mandolin, the single-named Celine on baritone and acoustic guitars, fiddle, Dobro and steel. Despite the central theme, several songs feature an unexpected twist. Chris Ligon's polite waltz, "Great State Of Texas," finds the resigned singer apologizing to his wife for his Death Row predicament. Ex-Tsunami singer and music industry activist Jenny Toomey paints a tender yet shaken picture on her subdued version of Cole Porter's "Miss Otis Regrets."

For capturing forlorn desperation, no one succeeds better than Rosie Flores on her swing version of Hank Williams' "I'll Never Get Out Of This World Alive." And Steve Earle offers an insightful take on the traditional "Tom Dooley." But you



could point to anyone else on this collection – including Neko Case, Paul Burch, Johnny Dowd and a host of others – and find equally distinctive charms.

— Nick Krewen

JAMES KING Thirty Years Of Farming ROUNDER

★★★★

Heavily steeped in the influence of pioneering bluegrass bands like The Stanley Brothers and The Osborne Brothers, James King is often rightfully called "bluegrass's youngest old-timer." (See the review of his band Longview's new release on page 87.) The Virginia-born "mountain soul" singer, with his gruff, emotional baritone, tends to hew closely to the arrangements and stylings of vintage '50s and '60s bluegrass.

So it is on this comfortable yet inspired collection. *Thirty Years Of Farming* combines familiar material, such as George Jones' "Color Of The Blues" and "Flame In My Heart" and Carl Story's "I Overlooked An Orchid," with lesser-known songs like the beautiful "Here Today And Gone Tomorrow" and "Days Of Grey And Black."

King tends to wear his musical heart on his sleeve far more than stoic, high-lonesome masters like Ralph Stanley



and the late Bill Monroe. He pours particular sorrow into the Fred Eaglesmith-penned title tune, a Tom T. Hall lament called "I Don't See What I Once Saw" and "Roy Lee," a sad eulogy to the troubled and ill-starred Clinch Mountain Boys singer Roy Lee Centers. King's subtle yet forceful bluegrass soulfulness is in special abundance on a singularly grim tune called "Play Us A Waltz," about a decidedly unglamorous subject: the bleak loneliness and isolation of an old-age home.

But there's great feeling and power in these dark-toned songs. And, as well as anyone singing today, James King gets inside those emotions.

— B. A.

EDDY ARNOLD Looking Back

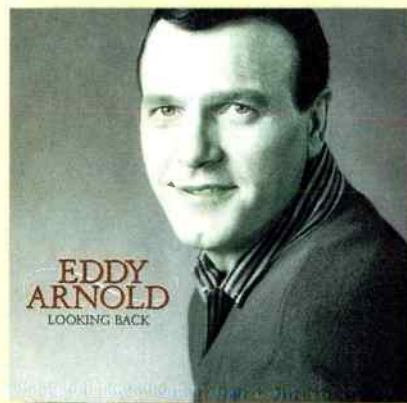
RCA

★★★★

Last year, while listening to his old recordings, Eddy Arnold got the idea to urge RCA Records to release a collection of old, non-hit album cuts from the 1960s. RCA agreed, even though the label has virtually ignored the Arnold catalog in recent times.

True to Arnold's vision, *Looking Back* resurrects long-out-of-print-songs while providing a potent reminder of the formula that brought the singer a second career: a voice as smooth as worn leather, Chet Atkins' warm production and the crackling arrangements of orchestrator Bill Walker. Tracks such as "Nothing But Time," "Gentle On My Mind" and "Honey" are pleasing examples of the Nashville Sound machine that Arnold helped define.

That sound, of course, pushed country to the outskirts of pop. In the late '60s, Arnold delved into adult-pop territory while still enjoying country radio airplay and sales. His performances of "It's Such



A Pretty World Today" and the classic "What A Wonderful World" represent Arnold, Atkins and Walker's flaunting of virtually anything country.

Looking Back documents what made Eddy Arnold one of the top country recording stars of the '60s and the foremost voice among country music's uptown balladeers. Perhaps it also marks the beginning of RCA's more serious mining of Arnold's catalog.

— Michael Streissguth

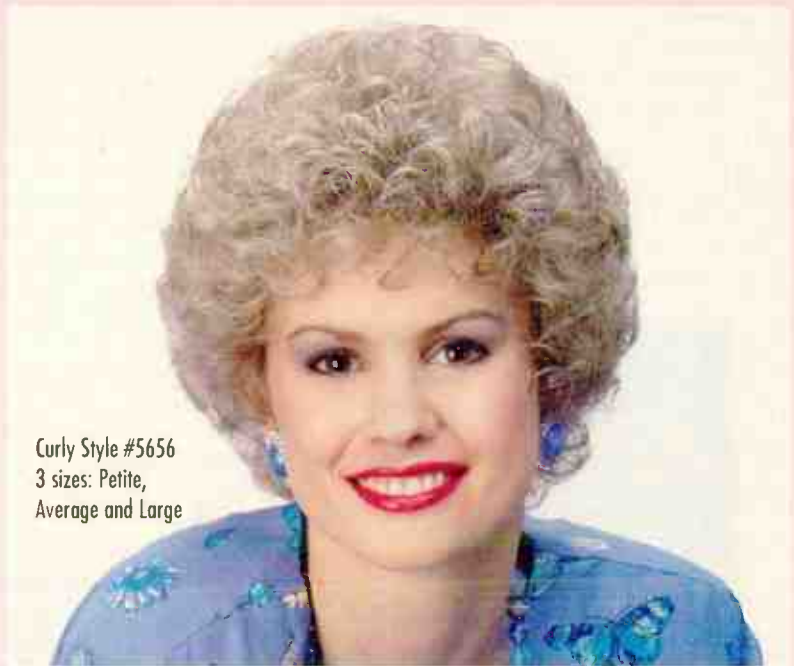
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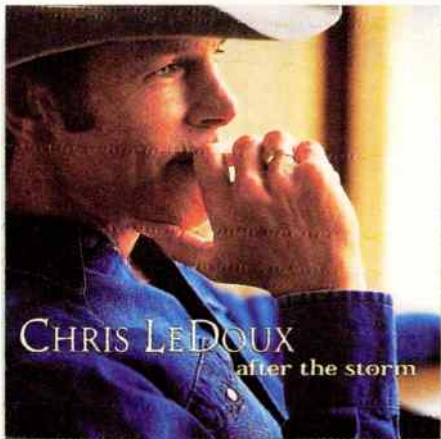
CHRIS LEDOUX

After The Storm

CAPITOL

★★★★

Given Chris LeDoux's habit of interweaving his life with his music, *After The Storm*, coming after a harrowing bout with a life-threatening disease, is an apt title. Back on his feet after a liver transplant, LeDoux is a quieter man on this album than the full-rockin' rodeo-country cowboy image for which he is rightly famous.



After The Storm isn't all ballads or sad songs, by any stretch. The LeDoux-penned "Bareback Jack" kicks chips clear to the back fence of the livestock show, goosed along by Jack Pearson's hot, Dickie Betts'-style electric slide guitar. But fans will also enjoy the reflective side this ol' cowboy reveals in such songs as "Daily Bread" and "What I'm Up Against."

LeDoux usually writes most of the songs he records, but here he contributes only one. Not surprisingly, for the rest of the 11 cuts, he draws from a tasty collection of writers from outside of the contemporary Nashville-formula song factory, including Kevin Welch, Joni Harms, Wood Newton and Larry Cordle.

Garth Brooks is the writer behind the lead-off tune, "Some Things Never Change," and he sings it as a duet with LeDoux. There's also a reprise of one of the great modern Texas dance-hall classics, Rusty Weir's "Don't It Make You Want To Dance."

LeDoux's albums nearly always maintain a certain consistency, and he keeps his standard especially high throughout *After The Storm*. If you like what he's done in the past, you'll enjoy this album, too.

— Bob Millard

MINDY McCREADY

Mindy McCready

CAPITOL

★

Mindy McCready, after leaving RCA Records, complained that she had been shackled with singing what she described as "young, fun, meaningless songs about lighthearted subjects." For her fourth album, she steadfastly sets out to address grown-up subjects.

And that she does – in a young, fun, meaningless and lighthearted way.

The opening tune, "Maybe, Maybe Not," is lyrically interesting, but where the story means to be ironically humorous, the 25-year-old McCready turns it into a ditsy tease. Her weightiest number, "Lovin' Your Man," is a cerebral cheatin' song, but McCready simply lacks the passion needed to deliver the nuances in this and other songs. For example, her breathy, faux-



yodel delivery of emotional lines like *I scream your name to the rain falling down on me ...* is pure helium.

Sure, her debut, *Ten Thousand Angels*, sold two million copies. But she's evolved in a cotton-candy manner

SOUND OFF!

Readers share their musical views

MERLE HAGGARD

Roots Volume 1

To say Merle Haggard is getting better with age is quite a statement. But after listening to his latest, *Roots Volume 1*, I'm prepared to say exactly that. With this album, he pays homage to his biggest influence, Lefty Frizzell. The album really shines. Unlike most put out by today's newcomers, every song is a jewel. That we don't hear cuts from this album on country radio is a disgrace.

— Rick Franks, St. George, Utah

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Caught In The Webb: A Tribute To The Legendary Webb Pierce

If you recently spotted a woman two-stepping along Interstate 40, it was me. The cause of my roadside exhibition was this fantastic collection of Webb Pierce songs newly produced by the talented Gail Davies. *Caught In The Webb* is great news for fans of the traditional country music sound. For those of you who are tired of the current paint-by-numbers music, you are going to love this collection. This collection makes me feel like I've been sitting in front of a picture of a gas log through a long gray winter and suddenly I've got a live cracklin' fire on a bright snowy day. Lord how I miss country music with this kind of honest substance.

— Bethany Braley, Pine, Ariz.

RAY STEVENS

Osama-Yo' Mama

Ray Stevens has been making America laugh for 40 years. On his latest album, he tackles the infamous Osama bin Laden in the title song, a future classic that ranks with past hits "The Blue Cyclone" and "It's Me Again, Margaret" for laughs. Cell phones are the subject of "Hang Up And Drive," while "Bon Temps Roulette" is a zany romp. The album closer, "United We Stand," written in 1970, gives the public a glimpse of the serious side of Ray Stevens, which many don't know. It's the perfect song to end a comedy CD spurred by an international tragedy in New York.

— Jerry McDaniel, Leesburg, Ohio.

STEVE HOLY

Blue Moon

Steve Holy's "Good Morning Beautiful" is his first No. 1 hit, and his new album is excellent – I highly recommend it. Most notable is Steve's incredibly beautiful voice. The album is a blend of traditional and contemporary country with a good mix of ballads and up-tempo songs.

— Nancy Alberino, Elmont, N.Y.

Heard something good – or even something bad – that you'd like to share with us? Send a review of 75 words or less to Sound Off!, c/o Country Music, 118 16th Ave. South, Suite 230, Nashville, TN 37203.

that does nothing to punch up a voice that started out bubblegum silly.

— B. M.

LONGVIEW

Lessons In Stone

REBEL

★★★★

Longview's six members have played alongside what amounts to a bluegrass hall of fame – everyone from Bill Monroe and Ralph Stanley to Jimmy Martin, Jim & Jesse, The Osborne Brothers and J.D. Crowe. Indeed the musicians – guitarists James King and Dudley Connell, mandolin ace Don Rigsby, fiddler Glen Duncan, banjo picker Joe Mullins and bassist Marshall Wilborn – are themselves masters of stellar three-part harmonies and hustling bluegrass rhythms.

With bluegrass hotter than ever, the zeitgeist feels ripe for a new Longview album, and *Lessons In Stone*, the group's third, doesn't disappoint. The album features bluesy, hustling threats like "You Can Mark It Down" and



ballads that are either melancholy or joyous – "A Few More Years" is a bit of both. The result is state-of-the-art, old-school bluegrass.

James King's graceful, dusty leads are especially memorable. His vocals join the relaxed and slightly ragged tone of the late Carter Stanley with the bluesy phrasing of Larry Sparks. The group offers straightforward wisdom throughout: Don't get above your raising, don't fritter away your life in pursuit of wealth and don't forget that no one gets out of this world alive. Longview's performances, and the lessons they reveal, are as enduring and unadorned as the names carved into the gravestones of the poignant title track.

— David Cantwell

JOHN MICHAEL MONTGOMERY

Love Songs

WARNER BROS.

★★★★

It's been a rough year for John Michael Montgomery. A badly broken leg and the shutdown of his longtime record label, Atlantic Nashville, put him on the sidelines for most of 2001. But apparently his new corporate affiliation is a good one, for Montgomery is the beneficiary of a prudent Warner Bros. marketing move: the reminder.

Lest we forget, folks, the Kentucky singer is still breathing, counting down the seconds until his next studio album – and hopefully a sequel to his monster hit "The Little Girl." Until then, this 10-song collection of love songs will have to suffice.

Of course, Montgomery has always had a knack for picking career ballads – he's up to four now – and his smooth tenor evokes sensitivity beyond tenderness. Witness the 1994 CMA Single of the Year "I Swear" as well as "I Love The Way You Love Me" and "I Can Love You Like That," three chart-toppers included here that pledge eternal devotion.

There are other hits, too, including



"Home To You" and "Long As I Live," both of which find Montgomery hopelessly dedicated to his love muffin. There are also non-hit album cuts, including moving paeans such as "Holding An Amazing Love" and "Heaven Sent Me You."

If you own all of Montgomery's pre-2000 CDs, you have all of these songs. But as a collection of previous material, *Love Songs* stands on its merits. Still, for fans, a new song or two would have justified joining in on the celebration.

— N. K.

ANDY GRIGGS

Freedom

RCA

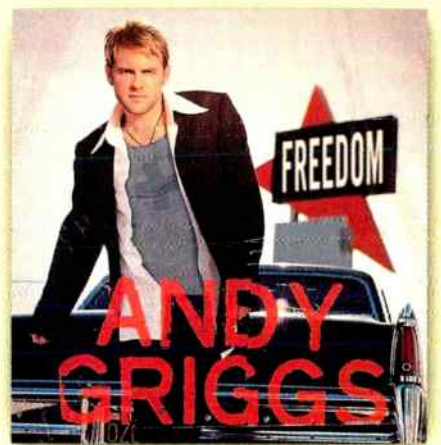
★★★

Despite the runaway success of *O Brother*, it's obvious that not every Nashville act is rushing to jump on the roots-music bandwagon.

This latest CD from young maverick Andy Griggs shows that there are still plenty of Nashville artists aiming to connect with the contemporary, suburban fan – the ones who still have their radio pre-sets on country and not NPR. On Griggs' sophomore album, that means pop melodies and rock-influenced production supporting a voice dripping with steamy Southern flavor. It's the kind of music designed for younger fans who are as likely to have a Britney Spears CD in the SUV as anything by anyone named Hank.

Sometimes, it works. The title track, "Freedom," is dead-on, chart-making country-roots-influenced pedal steel, lyrics about sitting in a cheap motel and a twist to the title: *Freedom's just a prison*, Griggs sings, *for a fool like me*. "Practice Life," a duet with belt-it-out queen Martina McBride, delivers a nice message about living in the *now*, set to an electric guitar straight out of a Tim McGraw anthem.

Too often, though, Griggs' vocals



valiantly try to sell mediocre material culled from the Eagles/Southern rock school. With a smoky, recognizable voice, he can sing just about anything with sass and hand-clapping vigor. But too often his material just doesn't stick to the bones.

We get a peek at Griggs' potential in the hidden track "Someone Like Me," a sweet acoustic ballad written by and dedicated to his late brother. This is where the young Louisiana artist's extraordinary voice shines. The tune is certainly not a radio hit, but it provides insight into his promise as a genuine country artist – if only he would go there.

— M. P. L.



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REVIEWS

DALE WATSON

Best Of The HighTone Years

HIGHTONE

★★★

Dale Watson may be a throwback, but his music wouldn't be possible in any age but our own. His sound and songs pose an aggressive, no frills, hard-country dissent — as much a vehicle for celebrating the country music of the '50s and '60s as for educating his audience in honky-tonkology.

Though its tempting to play classic-country Trivial Pursuit with his musical influences, Watson's rich baritone and sly musicianship distinguish him as more than an upstart true believer with more attitude than goods. He doesn't play at country music, he just plays it.

Watson's first album, 1995's *Cheatin' Heart Attack*, had the economy and power of a newly restored carburetor. The arrangements mixed Texas honky-tonk with fleet Bakersfield, and his delivery sounded like a cross between an old Paycheck and a young Waylon. His next two albums — 1996's *Blessed Or Damned* and 1997's *I Hate These Songs* — were just



as strong and just as inflexibly traditional.

This collection pulls equally from those three albums. At 13 cuts, the collection is briefer than some of the original albums; as a result, his strengths as a writer and balladeer are given short shrift compared to his more up-tempo, driving honky-tonk style.

But as a quick introduction to Watson's music, this set will suffice.

— Roy Kasten

RIDERS IN THE SKY

A Pair Of Kings

OH BOY

★★★★

Are the Riders in the Sky (a) a campy anachronism, (b) a comedy act or (c) a valuable repository of Western musical styles? On their latest album, *A Pair Of Kings*, they're all three.

They'd be the first to cop to the first charge; they obviously know their cowboy/swing tunes are a long way from today's mainstream, so they're willing to poke fun at themselves. After all, Ranger Doug Green is one of the country's foremost Western music scholars, so he can afford to be magnanimous.

As for comedy, it's always been a major part of their appeal. On "You Stole My Wife You Horsethief," various horsey effects keep it light, almost to a ridiculous degree. Fiddler Woody Paul's lighthearted "Never Go To Church On Sunday" has a raw Appalachian feel, but it's played strictly for laughs, as is a Satchmo impersonation on the cowboy standard "Don't Sweetheart Me."

Finally, there's their value as Western music performers, and these guys once again prove their worth as folklorists. Woody Paul's "Celtic Medley" combines "Annie Laurie," "Scotland The Brave," and "Haste To The Wedding" to neatly draw the line between tra-



ditional fiddle tunes and Bob Wills.

In fact, the Riders' grinning persona almost blots out some fine musicianship. Joey The Cowpolka King, the group's accordionist and producer, smokes on the swinging opener, "We're Burnin' Moonlight," and the fiddle-and-accordion duet on "Clarinet Polka" is tight and exuberant.

In the end, the Riders are a lot like that high-school history teacher who was loopy and hip enough to keep you from nodding off during that lecture about the Taft-Hartley Act. While you're digging the Riders' gags, some great music might accidentally sneak into your head. If only all education could be so much fun.

— Bob Cannon



Michael Cleveland

Flame Keeper (Rounder) ★★★★★ – Recently voted Fiddle Player of the Year by the International Bluegrass Music Association, Cleveland is a modest young man with a brashly spirited bow. Sticking closer to traditional styles than most up-and-coming virtuosos, this member of Rhonda Vincent's band plays it sweet and exuberant, enlivening classic tunes from the repertoire of Bill Monroe, Jimmy Martin and Red Allen. Where many ballyhooed newcomers bring in scores of big-name guests, Cleveland smartly sticks to a tight, expert band built around former road-band colleagues, including brilliant banjoist Tom Adams and guitarist Audie Blaylock, who adds vocals to several cuts.

Various Artists

Brewed In Texas (Compadre) ★★ – A flurry of young, rough-hewn singer/songwriters have recently built a groundswell of support in Texas, continuing a long-standing Lone Star tradition of providing a gritty alternative to Nashville polish. The latest batch of performers has been criticized for a lowest-common-denominator focus on songs about drinking and seducing

without accounting for the damage and pain that can follow. *Brewed In Texas* does nothing to counteract that claim. Filled with rowdy, booze-filled ditties by Roger Creager, Cory Morrow, Beaver Nelson, Cooder Graw and others, the compilation is about as much fun as hanging out with drunken frat boys in a beach-front hotel during spring break.

Various Artists

From Hell To Breakfast: A Taste Of Sugar Hill's Texas Singer-Songwriters (Sugar Hill) ★★★★★ – The young upstarts on *Brewed In Texas* would do well to spend time with *From*



Hell To Breakfast, which compiles highlights from a previous generation of singer/songwriters, including Townes Van Zandt, Guy Clark, Rodney Crowell, Robert Earl Keen and the great Terry Allen. Just as reckless, but much more complex and insightful, these songs recognize that life is more than how much one can consume.

Tanya Savory

Where We Live (Philo) ★★★★★ – At a time when female singer/songwriters often try to differentiate themselves by becoming rawer and ruder, Tanya Savory establishes her individuality with sharply detailed songs, tasteful



acoustic support and a gentle, humane way of looking at the world around her. But don't mistake tenderness for weakness; these are strong-hearted songs with a willful backbone by someone who strives to stay connected to her past, her surroundings and the people who have meant something to her.

Dugg Collins

Sounds Like Texas (Startex) ★★★★★ – A veteran Texas club singer with a manly, velvety voice reminiscent of Hank Thompson, Collins sings old-time honky-tonk and bar-room with dignity and style. Here he concentrates on hits from the '40s through '60s, blending Lone Star standards like "Bubbles In My Beer" and "It Makes No Difference Now" (a duet with Johnny Bush) with Nashville Sound classics like Conway Twitty's "Walk Me To The Door" and Bill Anderson's "You Lied To Me." Backed by a small steel-and-fiddle combo that includes bassist Bob Moore and pianist Floyd Domino, Collins presents classic country without apol-



ogy. Those who feel Nashville has abandoned real country will find *Sounds Like Texas* as nourishing as a Ray Price shuffle. (Startex Records, 2000 Magnolia Dr., Round Rock, Texas, 78664, startexrecords@aol.com)

Jim Rooney & Rooney's Irregulars

My Own Ignorant Way (JRP) ★★★★★ – As producer for several seminal acoustic artists – including John Prine, Townes Van Zandt, Nanci Griffith, Iris DeMent and Hal Ketchum – Rooney's talent is for collecting the right people and



giving them space to create organic, sweetly flowing music. He's a rough, limited vocalist, but those who care more about mood and expressiveness than perfection will find his solo album a welcome treat. Rooney's irregulars – a Nashville-meets-Ireland cast that includes fiddler Stuart Duncan, pedal steel player Dan Dugmore and guitarists Pat McLaughlin, Pat Alger and Shawn Camp – celebrate great old songs by Hank Williams, Waylon Jennings, Jack Clement, Billy Joe Shaver and several Rooney originals. The songs are spare, melodic and as honest as they are earthy. (JRP Records, P.O. Box 128167, Nashville, Tenn., 37205)

— Michael McCall

Country's Big Bang

Marking the 75th anniversary of the famed Bristol sessions

This summer, country music celebrates the 75th anniversary of one of the most important recording sessions in American history. In July of 1927, New York record executive Ralph Peer set up a temporary recording studio in Bristol, a Tennessee Appalachian mountain town on the Virginia border. During two weeks of recordings – which comprised 76 songs by 20 artists – Peer discovered country's first two superstar acts, The Carter Family and Jimmie Rodgers, whose songs gave birth to the country music industry. Music historians often refer to Peer's Bristol sessions as country's "big bang," the precise moment when it came to commercial life.

Besides selling millions of records, Rodgers influenced generations of country stars, including Bill Monroe, Hank Williams, Merle Haggard and Dwight Yoakam. The equally famous and influential Carter Family – a trio consisting of A.P., Sara and Maybelle Carter – provided the template for country harmonizing, and Maybelle's unique guitar style has influenced generations of musicians.

Beginning July 25, Bristol will sponsor a massive 10-day festival toasting those historic sessions with performances featuring veteran



The Carter Family and Jimmie Rodgers (right) were among the musicians recorded at the famed "Bristol sessions," which historians say is the moment hillbilly music came to commercial life.

artists Ralph Stanley, Doc Watson, Mac Wiseman, Jim & Jesse, Patsy Stoneman and several contemporary artists. Visitors also can participate in workshops with local musicians and hear tales of Bristol from historians. The revelry concludes on August 2 and 3 with the annual Carter Family Memorial Festival in Hiltons, Va.

"We're going to have a diverse mixture of contemporary country, gospel, bluegrass, old-time, classic coun-

try and maybe even some Celtic music," says Bill Hartley, executive director of the Birthplace of Country Music Alliance. "We want to get a good cross-section of music – just as Ralph Peer did 75 years ago."

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— Bobby Reed



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Book Beat

Ring Of Fire: The Johnny Cash Reader

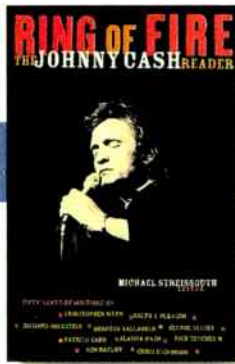
Edited by Michael Streissguth
(Da Capo Press, \$26)

Johnny Cash is capable of making the simple look profound and the profound seem simple. As a musician, songwriter and singer, he's as much minimalist mural painter as pop star, telling our history – and revealing our hearts – through musical narratives about trains, killers, Native Americans, the rural South, religion and love.

In this terrific collection, Cash is analyzed, interviewed and interpreted by various writers. His story is told time and again – his

Arkansas-Depression childhood, the gruesome death of his brother, his struggles with drugs, violence and personal tragedies, the unflinching undertone of religious faith that kept him alive and his rescue at the hands of his wife, June Carter.

There are articles in the collection that see Cash just as he is emerging in the mid-'50s, and others that deconstruct the sound of those early Sun records. One inter-



viewer gets a demonstration of the paper-under-the-guitar-strings technique that formed Cash's signature sound. Journalists describe Cash's move from Sun to Columbia, the record company with whom he is

most closely associated. They follow his ascendance through the '60s and chronicle his successes with the "jailhouse" recordings that made him a household name and put him on prime-time television.

And there's the story of how being a brand name sometimes forced Cash into a purgatory of mediocrity in the years that followed, when

Cash the man often became Cash the product.

Ring Of Fire is part biography and part critique. Not everybody has always loved Johnny Cash. In the wake of his recent acceptance among the post-punk Americana crowd it's easy to forget his missteps. For example, the book also contains Chris Dickinson's critical overview of Cash's return to grace at the hands of producer Rick Rubin in the '90s.

The best way to learn about Cash remains sitting down with his music. But this book creates a kind of three-dimensional, multi-perspective companion piece with its image of a dirt-poor farm boy who emerged a half century later as an architect of American culture.

— Henry Cabot Beck

TEEN COUNTRY

Fad Or Fashion?

Cyndi Thomson caused a buzz when she came onstage in a revealing outfit in front of an audience of deejays and radio execs at Nashville's annual Country Radio Seminar. CM asked several teen readers to share their thoughts about what she wore.



Ethan Brown, 12, Pinedale, Wyo.: After seeing this photo of Cyndi Thomson, I was not in the least bit impressed. Country music is traditional; it shouldn't be abused with fashion. The clothing she wore was immodest and somewhat trumpy. I only hope it does not continue.

Julia Bennett, 14, Stonybrook, N.Y.: Cyndi has crossed the line – her outfit seemed more suited to Britney Spears. Though I don't believe her outfit was all that bad, I don't think that country is ready for that more pop-



ish style. Let's hope older fans will not shun her for her personal taste in fashion. A change in style from traditional to trendy may bring an audience of younger people, which country music desperately needs.

Sara Helms, 16, Nashport, Ohio: I often wonder why there is such a great difference between male and female country artists. Males typically look stylish in a dress shirt, tight jeans, buckle, and cowboy hat, while females are all too often showing an excess of skin, such as low-cut shirts, see-through material, miniskirts, etc. While male artists are portrayed as good old boys, laid-back yet maintaining a sense of style that distinguishes them as country artists, some females who dress inappropriately cast a negative outlook on country music. It's not about who can show the most skin and make the cover of *Cosmopolitan*, it's about the music! So let's stress what is really important, not on appearing sexy in the media.

Shanley Wright, 15, Stephenville, Texas: It seems like everything in country nowadays is being sold on

sex appeal. They are showing more sex appeal in music videos and the way artists dress. I would much rather hear a good voice than see an artist or model with a half-naked body. I am a high school student, and we are always hearing lectures on abstinence and good morals. I think it's hard enough being a teen nowadays and having the peer pressure of sex. I watch country music videos for enjoyment, and I am upset when I see an artist pushing bad morals. I feel that country music artists need to be more aware of their teen audience and to be more sensitive about how they promote their music.



Interested in becoming a contributor to *Teen Country*? Drop us a line, enclose a recent photo, tell us a little bit about yourself, and include a phone number where you can be reached. Write to *Teen Country*, c/o Country Music, 118 16th Ave. South, Suite 230, Nashville, TN 37203 or email to nhenderson@countrymusicmagazine.com.



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'Bird Is The Word

Nashville songwriters' mecca celebrates its 20th anniversary

The Bluebird Cafe can be summed up in an expression printed prominently on brochures throughout the small club: SHHH! In other words, shut up and listen.

The Bluebird doesn't just present music; it honors it. Famous or obscure, anyone who calls themselves a songwriter in Nashville makes their way to the Bluebird Cafe.

They may deliver a song written that afternoon, or they may sing one of their well-known hits. Open seven days a week, the Bluebird offers live performances by more than 2,500 singer/songwriters each year.

In honor of its 20th anniversary, founder and owner Amy Kurland has written *The Bluebird Cafe Scrapbook: Music And Memories From Nashville's Legendary Singer-Songwriter Showcase* (Harper Entertainment, \$22.95). It includes memories from Kurland and from the countless writers who have graced the club's stage, including stars Garth Brooks, Pam Tillis, Faith Hill and Kathy Mattea as well as top songwriters Gary Burr, Bob DiPiero, Don Schlitz and Beth Nielsen Chapman.

Located in an unpretentious strip mall, the club opened its doors in 1982.



COURTESY THE BLUEBIRD CAFE

"That first night was a party," recalls Kurland. "It meant that there was another bar to go to in Nashville."

For the songwriting community, it grew into much more than just another bar. The Bluebird nurtured them, gave them a serious place to test their wings. "It's an outlet for songwriters to play their music, a mecca," Kurland says of the unique status of her club. "And it's also a place where you can

walk in the door and meet someone with power. It could only happen in Nashville."

The club's personality is evident on its crowded walls, where hundreds of signed black-and-white 8x10s of the famous and not-so-famous vie for attention. Nearly all the notes on the photos begin with, "Thanks, Amy," in appreciation of the quiet blond woman who serves as the club's lady and driving force.

— Phil Sweetland

The Last Refrain

The king of country songwriters, Harlan Howard, dies at age 74



ALAN HAYAKAWA

To Do," Howard was responsible for the smart, straightforward message and the impossible-to-forget melody.

"I don't write long songs," Howard once said. "I just get in trouble and make it rhyme."

Howard died on March 3 at age 74 after

a long illness. An icon of the Nashville music industry for 40 years, his passing removes a vital connection to an era when publishers and record companies forged a formidable song factory that drew on the writers, singers and musicians drawn to Music City USA.

"Harlan was the personification of country music," said songwriter Max D. Barnes.

Born in Detroit and raised in difficult circumstances – he spent time as a ward of the state and in reform school – Howard began writing songs while training as an Army paratrooper in Georgia. After leaving the armed forces in 1955, he moved to Los Angeles and began pitching songs. His first major hit came in 1958 with Charlie Walker's "Pick Me

Up On Your Way Down."

He moved to Nashville in 1960. With Willie Nelson, Bill Anderson, Roger Miller, Hank Cochran, Mel Tillis and Wayne Walker, he formed a core group of young songwriters who proved integral to the Nashville record industry.

A constant presence in the bars around Music Row, Howard usually wrote songs in the morning, then spent his afternoons holding court from a corner stool.

"Nashville's a tough-ass town," he once told a gathering of "juveniles," as he called young writers. "But come on in, the water's fine. And write some hit songs. God knows we need 'em." If a young writer complained about the music industry, Howard would offer his familiar admonishment, "Kid, nobody sent for ya."

He once described his methods this way: "What I do is collect emotions. I've loved and won, and loved and lost. Been married and divorced. I've drunk too much. I've done things I'm not proud of, and had them done to me. And all I know how to do is write what I've lived."

— Michael McCall

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Janet G., May 1999



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COURTESY COUNTRY MUSIC HALL OF FAME AND MUSEUM

Eddy Arnold Still Rolling Along

The Rolling Stones may be the grand old men of rock 'n' roll, but when it comes to career longevity, they've got *nothing* on country's Eddy Arnold. When Nashville's smoothest balladeer engaged Stones drummer Charlie Watts (seated) and guitarist

Keith Richards during a break in a television taping in the mid-'60s, he'd already spent more than two decades as a professional performer. This year, the 84-year-old Arnold celebrates the 55th anniversary of his first No. 1, "What Is Life Without Love."



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