

SPOTLIGHT: COUNTRY BANDS

YOUR ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO THE STARS, MUSIC & TRADITION

COUNTRYMUSIC

APRIL/MAY 2003



ALABAMA

The end of an era –
and what's ahead for the future

DEANA CARTER

She's rebuilding her career after a divorce, an arrest and a label shakeup. Now if she could only find her clothes . . .

TRACE ADKINS

In the Middle East

BLAKE SHELTON

Has a real blast

DAVID ALLAN COE

Wild & woolly

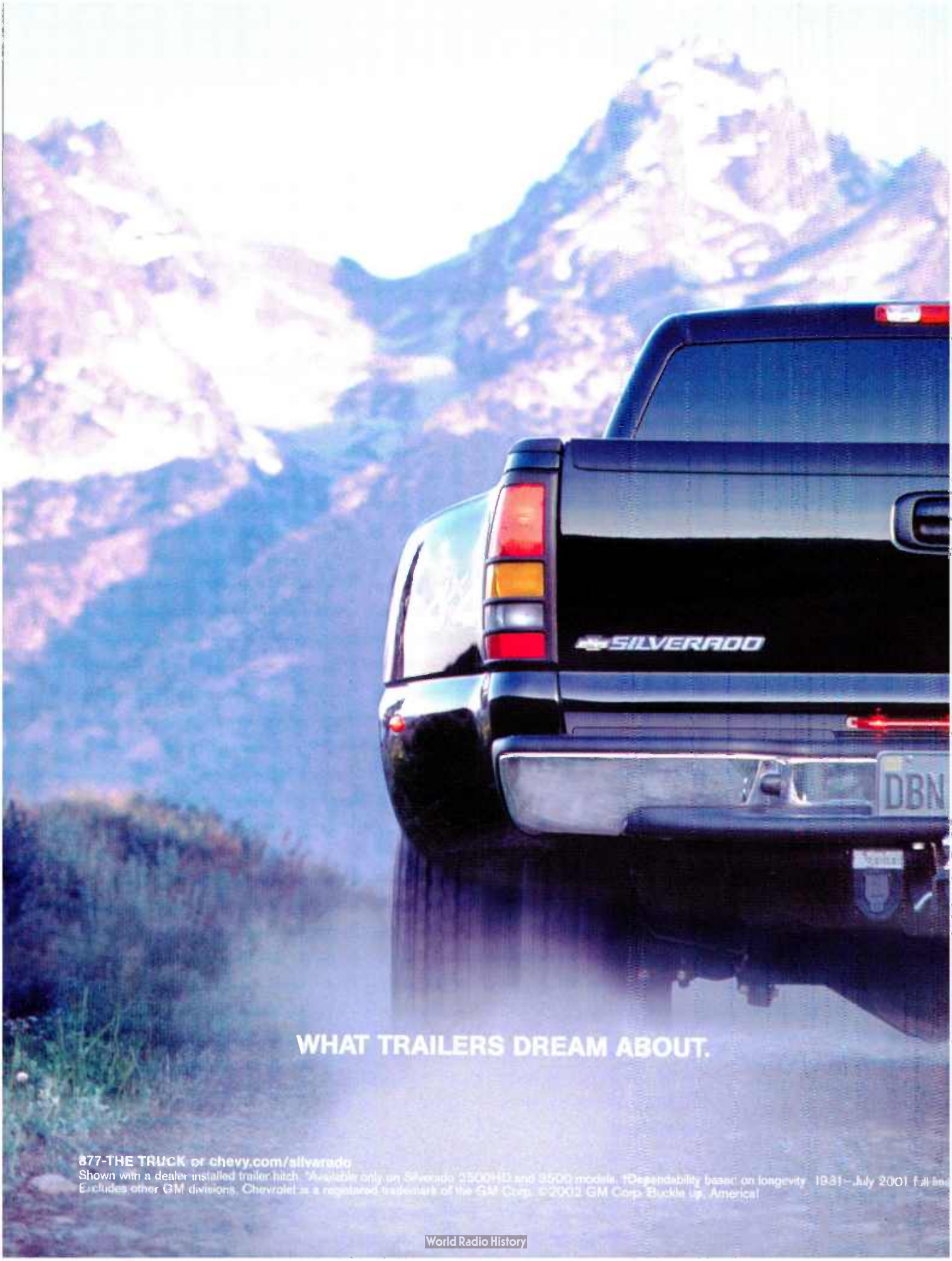
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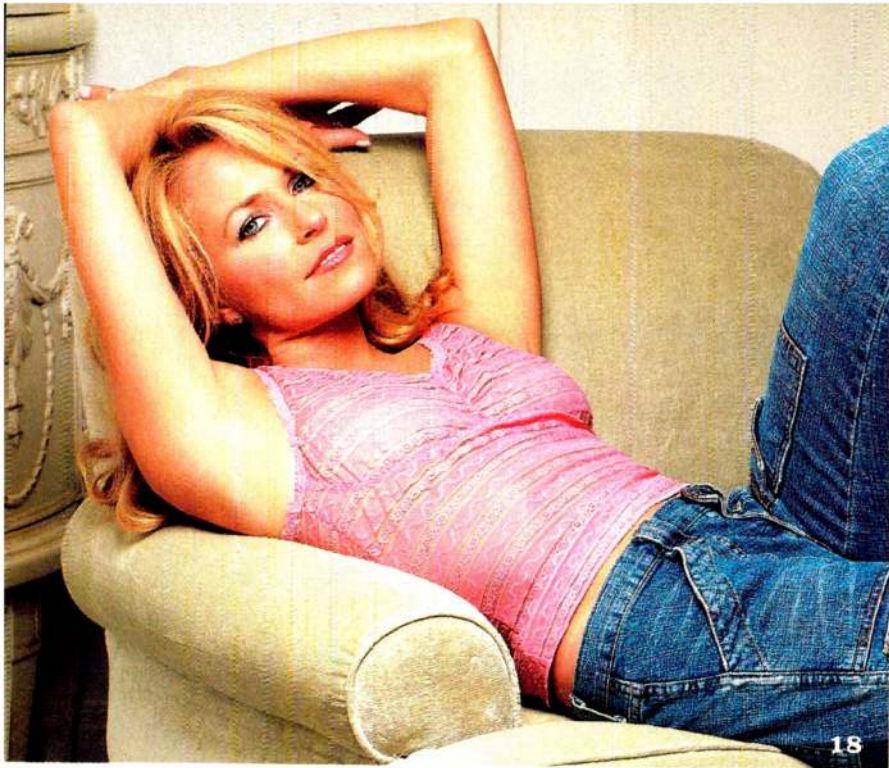


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APRIL/MAY 2003

22 COVER STORY:

Alabama

Has country's most enduring supergroup ever received the respect they deserve? As they hit the road one last time, they discuss their legacy. Plus, the skinny on today's country bands.

18 Deana Carter

After years of disappointments, the spirited blonde forecasts that happy days are here again.

34 Montgomery Gentry

Small-town, working-class values remain the driving force behind this duo.

38 Trace Adkins

The proudly patriotic artist writes about his visit to U.S. troops in the Persian Gulf.

42 Dwight Yoakam

His Bakersfield Biscuits may be frozen, but his career and music are as fresh as ever.

46 Blake Shelton

A-hunting he will go ... and we follow as this newcomer is hot on the trail of a prize buck.

65 Marty Raybon

The man whose voice propelled Shenandoah to country stardom gets back to his bluegrass roots.

66 David Allan Coe

You don't have to call him darling, but this old rebel remains outrageous and outspoken.

70 Mark Chesnutt

After years of trying to fit the mainstream country mold, Chesnutt breaks free.

72 Lari White

The former country singer realizes her heart is in soul music.

74 Radney Foster

Buck the system, count the bucks. Foster finds financial success beyond Nashville.



THE Journal
OF TRADITIONAL COUNTRY MUSIC

Porter Wagoner ... "The Dance"
... Gram Parsons' suit of sin ...
Producer/session player Jerry
Kennedy ... Reviews ... And More!
Beginning on page 51.



DEPARTMENTS

- 4 Letters**
- 8 Country On The Town**
- 12 The Insider**
- 16 Horizon – Joe Nichols**
- 49 Say What? – Sara Evans**
- 64 Food**
- 73 Message In The Music**
- 76 Reviews**
- 90 Off The Charts**
- 96 Great Moments**

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FAITHFUL

Prepare to be inundated with mail putting down your selection of Faith Hill as your cover girl (*February/March*). Why put her on your cover? She's not country anymore. How dare she try something new? Of course I'm being sarcastic. It seems like every issue people write in to state their dismay towards today's country music and those "disgraceful" crossover singers. Well, if it weren't for those singers, there are many people, myself included, who probably never would have come to country music. It is because of those artists that I have discovered greats like George Strait and Alan Jackson. How does that make singers like Shania and Faith anything less than a great attribute to country?

MICHAEL COYLE
SAYREVILLE, NEW JERSEY

Every month I get your magazine and every month the letters are the same. Someone is always putting Faith Hill and Tim McGraw down. Everyone says she is selling out to Cover Girl or Pepsi, but come on now – if Cover Girl offered you

Rebecca Lynn
Howard brought
tears to a
reader's eyes.



COURTESY: MCA

LETTERS



STEVE GRANITZ/WIREIMAGE

think twice next time they are putting someone down.

ASHLEY LOWMAN
HESPERIA, CALIFORNIA

I want to thank Chrissie Dickinson for pointing out that Faith is not the first or only artist exploring the pop world (*February/March*). If people would shut their mouths long enough to listen to her new album, they would realize what incredible talent she has. Just give her music a chance.

KAMA BENNETT
MONTOURSVILLE, PENNSYLVANIA

When a parent has a child and that child matures and goes out to make their own way, *in* their own way, does that parent kick him out of the house or ridicule the child in front of everyone? A good parent doesn't. Then why does country music and Nashville continue to kick and ridicule their precious child, Faith Hill? I know I'm not the only one of Faith's fans who is sick of seeing bitter diatribes against this amazing artist. Haven't you hurt her enough? Your latest review of her new album, *Cry*, is written by what seems to be an envious, rancorous rookie with a personal vendetta. The article by Holly George-Warren is at least kind, but instead of writing of Faith's astounding accomplishments, Ms. George-Warren, with bitter undertones and jealous accents, decided to depict her as too busy to talk to one of *Country Music's* own. Why should she have time for you and your magazine when you're not going to keep her in her best light? Faith shines brightly even after all the abuse. Her fans know she is a real queen of country, and of music in general. *Country Music* and Nashville need to embrace their child again, like a good parent should.

DEBRA J. STREIT
CHANDLER, ARIZONA

I am very disappointed in your article on Faith Hill, which took a negative tone from the beginning. The woman has a fabulous voice and is using it to make great music. Never mind that while she is maintaining a huge career, she is doing it with high moral standards and raising a beautiful family.

CAROL HERTEL
OAKLAND, NEW JERSEY

a spot on their campaign, wouldn't you take it? I would. That's a huge compliment. As for Tim singing about abortion, don't you think it's time we put something real into our songs? Some folks must be out of touch with reality because what he's singing about has happened to too many teenagers. Maybe people should

HEARTENED SOUL

After reading the article on Rebecca Lynn Howard (*February/March*), I had to write. When I first started reading, tears instantly came to my eyes because she sounded like she was talking to me. I too suffer severe panic attacks, and I am a songwriter as well. I went for a year and a half suffering with what I thought were mini heart attacks before I was diagnosed. I initially resisted medication, but realized it would do me some good. Reading about how Rebecca resisted medication at first, and about what she experienced while she *was* taking it, made me think that sometimes the first set of medications don't work the way they should. They can leave you feeling so numb that you can't do anything, and that's what blocked her creativity to make music. She gave her life into the hands of God and now she's been anxiety-free. I'm so glad that she can say that. There will be times when the anxiety will come back, but her faith will see her through. I'm so thankful that a country star like Rebecca could talk about her anxiety attacks and not be ashamed of them. Thank you, Rebecca.

ELLEN TECKMAN
POSEN, MICHIGAN

CONTRIBUTORS

Meet this issue's esteemed guest stars

★ **LISA ZHITO**, who penned our cover story on Alabama, says visiting the band in Ft. Payne was bittersweet. "In the late '80s I went there every year for June Jam, their all-star benefit that always followed Fan Fair. You'd think that would be the last place a music journalist would want to be after Fan Fair. But I loved it. It was always relaxed, no schmooze or industry b.s., just great music and a good time. Talking to them about their legacy made me miss those days." Zhito recently co-authored *The Insider's Guide To Nashville* and she is working on her first novel.



★ **DON MCLEESE** had never gone hunting before *Country Music* assigned him to bag a profile of Blake Shelton, but the journalist is always game for a good story. "Blake was so obviously in his element that it was impossible not to share his excitement," says McLeese

of his outdoor quest with the hot newcomer. Formerly the pop-music critic for the *Chicago Sun-Times* and the *Austin American-Statesman*, he is currently associate editor of *Midwest Living*, based in Iowa, where Shelton came to hunt.

★ **HENRY CABOT BECK** learned everything he needed to know about country music listening to his grandmother's 10-inch copy of Hank Williams' "I Saw The Light," which he still owns. Raised in Indiana, Beck divides his time between Arizona and New York City and writes regularly about entertainment for the *New York Daily News*, *Interview*, *Phoenix New Times* and other publications. He first interviewed Dwight Yoakam in 1985 when they were both still relatively wet behind the ears.



★ **JEFF WALL**, who got up close with David Allan Coe, is an excessively shaggy acoustic guitarist, freelance music and humor writer, web magazine publisher (www.twangzine.com) and confessed habitual bad speller. A former hard drinker, he was excited to

meet the man who wrote the soundtrack to the numerous ass-whippings Wall says he's received in juke joints and biker bars across the country. He has written for many publications, most of which seem to go out of business shortly after hiring him — which didn't deter us ... much. This is his first article for *Country Music*.

LETTERS

FAITHLESS

What a disappointment to see Faith Hill on your cover. It amazes me how some of the country industry overlook the fact that she does not want to be country. Have you listened to her music recently? It is unfortunate you have chosen to promote her career with this publicity when you could have given someone who is truly country – and proud of it – the opportunity.

DEE MORELAND
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

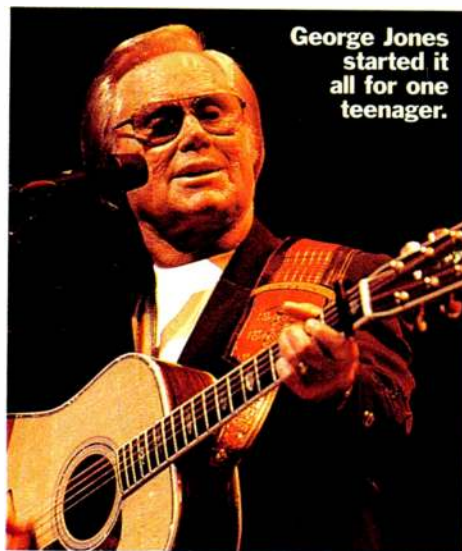
I found the article on Faith very interesting. She and others who have found the lure of pop too hard to resist – and are using the cover of wanting to stretch their musical talents – have gone too far. Yes, many country artists have done music that has crossed over to the pop charts, and musical instrumentation has undergone many changes in country, not all of which everyone has agreed with. On the other hand, artists like Faith and Shania readily admit they make music that is *not country*. I wonder why an artist who builds their career in country, but no longer makes that type of music, is still considered a country artist? If they want to be on the pop charts, why not just be honest about it?

CYNDIE MOORE
MIDVALE, UTAH

THE DEBATE GOES ON

Do you know what the smell of fresh-cut grass does to your nose? Well, that's what the sound of a pedal steel guitar and a fiddle do to my ears and what *traditional* country music does to my soul. Lately, however, the sound of country music doesn't do that – with the exception of George Strait, Alan Jackson, Darryl Worley and a very few others.

The last to defect was Lee Ann Womack, and her new album, I discovered, was something worth leaving behind. Shania calls herself a country artist, but any similarity to country music is purely accidental. Faith Hill is a crossover pop star. Martina McBride is the CMA's new Female Vocalist of the Year, but she doesn't sing country. Rascal Flatts won an award over Darryl Worley – I didn't realize that punk rock was also considered for country honors. I *have* to listen to the beautiful mess the radio plays so that I can get the occasional true country record that finds



George Jones started it all for one teenager.

TRADITIONAL TEEN

I disagree with J. McDaniel's letter on the future of country music and teens (*February/March*). I'm 13, and *old* country is still popular with kids. The first singer I ever heard and liked was George Jones. My favorites include Patsy Cline, Hank Williams Sr. and Loretta Lynn. I know what good country is and also listen to bluegrass, such as Bill Monroe and Flatt & Scruggs. I think the Dixie Chicks, Alan Jackson and George Strait are great candidates to carry on the future of country music, and Alison Krauss is a great candidate to carry on bluegrass. Not all teens have the same point of view, and I'm a prime example.

SAMANTHA RICHTER
ELIZABETH, PENNSYLVANIA

its way onto the charts. What counts today is no longer the play on words or the crying steel guitar of true country music, but the *ka-ching* of the cash registers as they rack up sales of records by people who are confused as to what it is they sing.

MARTIN G. QUELLER, DVM
MONTCLAIR, NEW JERSEY

After reading the letters that put down certain performers because they don't sing like someone from the old times, I have to wonder why these writers keep watching and listening. Sounds like they just like to criticize. I am 77 years young and have been listening to country music since I was old enough to remember. In each generation, the new ones coming into country music have their own style and each one is beautiful in their own way. I am old, but I still appreciate the beauty and talent of these young people, just as I did back in the '40s, '50s and '60s. Open your eyes, ears and hearts – and just enjoy!

FRANKIE SURFACE
BAKERSFIELD, CALIFORNIA

HEAR, HEAR KITTY

Thank you very much for the article on the Queen of Country Music, Kitty Wells (*February/March*). I'm proud to say I own more than 110 CDs, tapes and albums of Kitty Wells, and in case you're wondering, I'm not an old person. I'm a young person who simply loves, admires and respects Kitty Wells. She's a very gracious lady.

BILLY CREECH
VANCEBORO, NORTH CAROLINA

ROSE-COLORED MEMORIES

The article about Rose Maddox and her brothers (*February/March*) brings back great memories. We made a point to go to see them when they appeared at the Dessau Dance Hall here in Austin, Texas. They put on a four-hour show, and it was remarkable. What a beautiful voice Rose had. I also enjoyed reading about Kitty Wells and her husband Johnny. They are a great pair who have brought the country music world a lot of beautiful music.

ALICE HERZOG
AUSTIN, TEXAS

I really enjoyed the article on Rose Maddox. I grew up in the Modesto area and listened to the Maddox Brothers and Rose along when they performed on the local radio station. They also worked the Riverbank Club House back in the '50s, and we would all go to the dances there. Great music.

MARGE PRICE
ESCALON, CALIFORNIA

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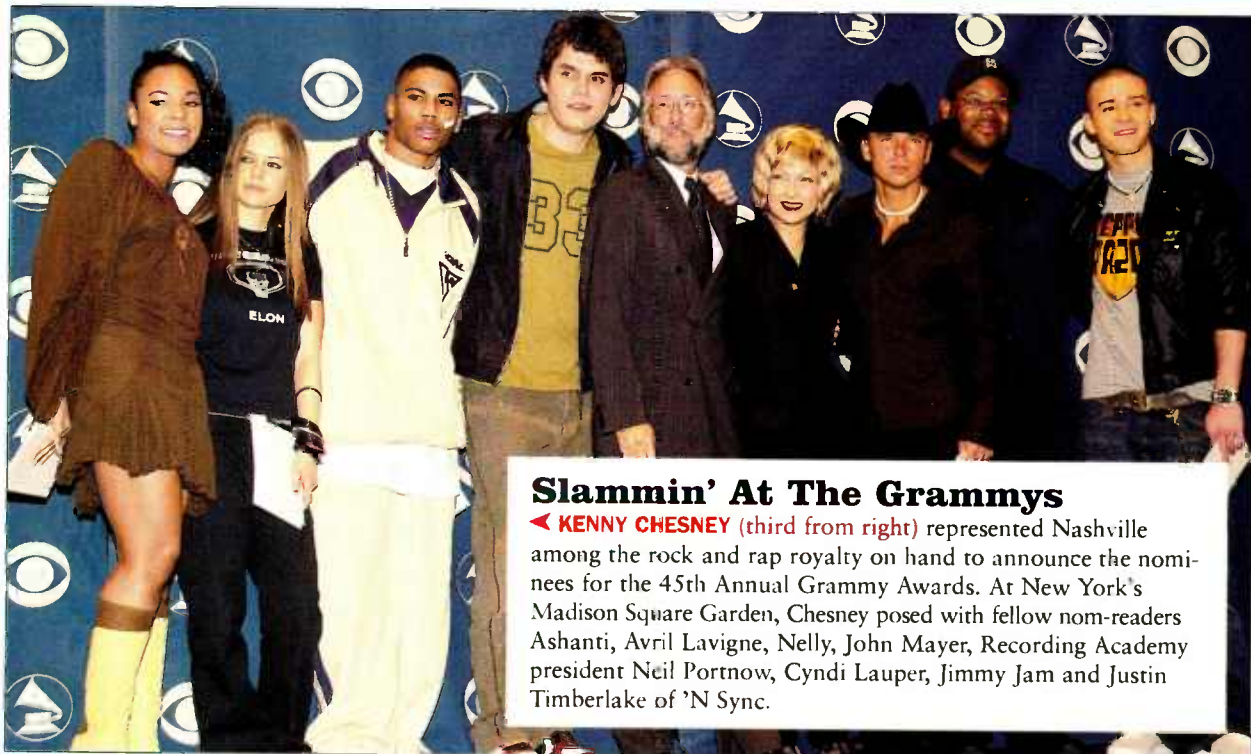
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COUNTRY ON THE TOWN

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Slammin' At The Grammys

◀ **KENNY CHESNEY** (third from right) represented Nashville among the rock and rap royalty on hand to announce the nominees for the 45th Annual Grammy Awards. At New York's Madison Square Garden, Chesney posed with fellow nom-readers Ashanti, Avril Lavigne, Nelly, John Mayer, Recording Academy president Neil Portnow, Cyndi Lauper, Jimmy Jam and Justin Timberlake of 'N Sync.

LARRY BUSACAN/REXUSA.COM



Up For The Cup

◀ **SHANIA TWAIN** pumped up the home folks in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, when she performed at the 90th Grey Cup, the championship game of the Canadian Football League. The Canadian star sang selections from her new album *Up!*, which definitely described the mood of the crowd.



MACDUGAL/PHOTODISCIRECT (2)



DAVID ATLAS/RETNA

He Loves New York

▲ **TIM MCGRAW** did the Big Apple up right on his recent visit to New York City, promoting his *Tim McGraw And The Dancehall Doctors* CD. Following his performance on the *Today* show, he signed autographs for shivering fans lined up along the Rockefeller Plaza stage. He then trekked to Barnes & Noble to sign copies of his new book about the making of the album.

NOW, YOU WON'T WANT TO CHEW ON ANYTHING ELSE.





Stars For Charity

▲ Country stars showed their support for cystic fibrosis research at the All Star Music Bash in Nashville. Among those on hand for the event were **KEITH URBAN**, **LISA HARTMAN BLACK** and husband **CLINT BLACK**, along with **CRYSTAL GAYLE** and the event's host, pop star **RICHARD MARX**. For the auction portion of the show, **TAMMY COCHRAN** offered up lyrics to her hit "Angels In Waiting" along with an autographed photo (*below right*), while **JO DEE MESSINA** signed a guitar and some CDs (*above right*).

LARRY HILL (3)



LARRY HILL (2)

Honoring Eddy

► The legendary **EDDY ARNOLD** received the Artist of the Century award at the Nashville Association Of Musicians' 100th Anniversary at Nashville's Grand Ole Opry House, in honor of his 55 years of recording achievement. **WILLIE NELSON**, **GEORGE JONES** and gospel great **VESTAL GOODMAN** were there to salute their pal.



Helping Out

► Bluegrass queen **RHONDA VINCENT** hit the right notes with patients at the Minnie Pearl Cancer Foundation in Nashville. Vincent not only visited the facility but also took time to read up on the subject.



LARRY HILL

Star Spangled Star Duty

► **ANDY GRIGGS** had the honor of performing the national anthem before the *Monday Night Football* game between the Oakland Raiders and Denver Broncos in Denver. The game provided a slice of history, as it marked the 500th *Monday Night Football* telecast.



KEVIN PEGG/CONAN

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THE INSIDER

WITH HAZEL SMITH



Her boyfriend's back: Brad Paisley will return to *According To Jim*, with star Jim Belushi and Brad's real-life fiancée, Kimberly Williams.

MAN IN GREEN

Many country singers may be hunters, but you don't often see them walking out on the *Grand Ole Opry* stage in camouflage. But that's exactly what **Darryl Worley** did recently – with good reason: He'd just come back from visiting the U.S. troops in Afghanistan.

While we were in warm houses with our families over the holidays, Darryl was sleeping in a tent with our soldiers. That's the kind of man he is. He prefers the front lines over the front page. On the show Darryl sang something he'd just written, "Have You Forgotten." To me, the song takes up where **Alan Jackson's** "Where Were You (When The World Stopped Turning)" left off and serves as a reminder of the Americans who lost their lives at the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and in Pennsylvania on 9/11.

TOOTSIE'S REVISITED

Terri Clark went back to where her country music career started, Tootsie's Orchid Lounge on Broadway, the legendary bar with a back door that opens across an alley to the stage door of the Ryman Auditorium. The famed watering hole served as a songwriter's desk for **Willie Nelson** and **Roger Miller**. It was where **Patsy Cline** could order a cold one and be one of the boys; and it was where **Charley Pride**, **Faron Young** and many others got stuck in the butt with a

★ BRAD TV

Brad Paisley must have done pretty well in his acting debut on TV's *According To Jim*, because they've invited him back. It was a perfect part for Brad since his fiancée, **Kimberly Williams**, is one of the actors on the sitcom, and he played the new boyfriend of her character, Dana. If you've watched the show then you know star **Jim Belushi** has a band, and music fit into the episode with Brad.

I'm glad our Brad did well, but I just don't want Hollywood to chew him up and keep him – like they did **Mac Davis**, **Kris Kristofferson**, **Roger Miller** and others. Even **Dolly Parton** for a time stayed in Hollywood and out of country, and it nearly happened to **Clint Black**. Brad is great as a singer, songwriter, musician and performer. Can he act? Who cares? That boy does not need to act.

hat pin by Tootsie herself for being too rowdy. It's also the place where **Terri Clark**, then a green Canadian newly arrived in Music City, went onstage and earned herself a gig. Have you heard the story of how Terri would tie her guitar to her arm at 2 a.m. when the bar closed, to keep it from getting stolen when she'd walk out onto a street populated by hookers, pimps and winos?

Terri was singing at Tootsie's when songwriter **Carl Jackson** heard her, liked her and decided to do a song demo on her, which led to her recording deal. So Terri recently went back to Tootsie's to celebrate the release of her new CD, *Pain To Kill*. Could be Terri had memories to kill and thought she could do it by going to Lower Broad one more time.

LEGACY REMEMBERED

Hank Williams often spoke of the enormous influence **Rufus Payne** had on his early musical development. Called "Tee Tot" by Hank and others, Rufus was a guitarist who sang and played the blues while shining shoes and selling peanuts on the streets of Montgomery, Ala. He befriended Hank when the future Country Music Hall of Famer was just a bone-thin 9-year-old. Tee Tot taught Hank to play blues chords on the guitar, and for the next five years, encouraged his growth as a musician while showing him how to entertain people. On the 50th anniversary of Williams' death, Hank Jr. brought the son of the man who taught his daddy to play to the stage of the *Grand Ole Opry*. Payne's son, **Henderson**, came onto the

Ryman stage in a wheelchair, obviously proud to be there. **Hank Williams III** was also a special guest. He sang two songs but refused to sing or walk onstage with **Hank Jr.**, **Little Jimmy Dickens**, **Vince Gill** and **The Whites** joined Hank Jr. to close the 50th anniversary tribute with his father's gospel standard "I Saw The Light." But the grandson of Hank Williams was nowhere to be seen. I suppose it's called "family tradition" – somebody has to be mad about something.

ROW ON THE ROW

Speaking of **Hank Williams Jr.**, he recently took his manager, **Merle Kilgore**, and his friends **Kenny Chesney**, **Kid Rock** and Kid's fiancée, **Pamela Anderson**, to dinner at Valentino's, a fancy Nashville restaurant with



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Blake Shelton

Darryl Worley

white linen tablecloths and napkins. Rumor has it that the Kid and Miss Pamela got into a “honey-do” snit. They stepped in an empty room to settle things – and the sound of breaking wine glasses soon filled the air.

ANGEL AMONG US

There is nothing worse on this earth than child abuse, and **Martina McBride** is an angel for partnering with Childhelp USA to help raise awareness about this tragedy. If you suspect child abuse, Martina’s video for “Concrete Angel” includes a phone number – 1-800-4-A-CHILD – that you can call.

FOREVER PATSY

As did the late **Patsy Cline**, I live in Madison, Tenn. Every time I go grocery shopping, I pass where Patsy had a horrible automobile accident, and I think of her and cringe. Scars remained on her forehead from that crash until she died. We recently passed the 40th anniversary of the plane crash that took the life of Patsy as well as her flight companions **Hawkshaw Hawkins**, **Cowboy Copas** and **Randy Hughes**. I don’t have to tell you what a terrible loss it was. Like **Loretta Lynn** has said many times, “There’ll never be nobody like Patsy Cline.” Nobody sang a song better than **Patsy Cline**. She’s the best that ever was. **Reba**, **Trisha**, **Patty** and **Martina** – every great vocalist who comes along continues to be measured against Patsy Cline. The voice that will reign forever.

GAGA FOR CAGLE

Chris Cagle is the act fans compare to **Garth Brooks**. He brought traffic to a standstill in downtown Nashville while making a video earlier

this year. Rumor has it that girls driving by had their car windows down and were screaming, “I love you, Chris Cagle.” Can’t blame me for that. I was out of town.

A GOOD BYRD

Tracy Byrd recently attended the dedication of the Tracy Byrd Hyperbaric Medicine and Wound Care Center at CHRISTUS Sr. Elizabeth Hospital, a children’s hospital in his hometown of Beaumont, Texas. This is where the money that Tracy generates annually at his hometown fishing/golf tourney goes.

MILKING A LAUGH

Cledus T. Judd’s video “How Do You Milk A Cow” is being used as a training video by the Michigan Milk Producers Association. Actually, it’s a “what *not* to do” video. Silly Cledus T. demonstrates by trying to draw milk by pumping the cow’s tail up and down. Cledus T. never did grab the udder and squeeze.

LOTTA BULL

Talking ’bout a lotta bull! **Montgomery Gentry** spent several days at Red Canyon Ranch in New Mexico to hunt elk and tape a segment for The Outdoor Channel. **Troy Gentry**, the more experienced outdoorsman of the two, missed the target, but his partner, nonhunter **Eddie Montgomery**, landed a prize bull elk that weighed 1,100 pounds. “An unbelievable experience” is how Eddie described bringing home the big bull elk.

The duo returned to Music Town to rehearse for their upcoming tour. With Eddie still bragging about his bull elk, his partner Troy, not to be outdone, turned the studio parking lot into a mess hall complete with open-air grills filled with elk steaks he’d

bagged on a previous hunting trip. Before long, the whole gang was chowing down and bragging on Troy’s bull. It took one good meal for Eddie’s lotta bull to become history.

CARLENE CARTER

I met **Carlene Carter** when she was 19-year-old Carlene Smith Simpkins Routh. Married to songwriter **Jack Routh**, Carlene was very pregnant with her son **Jackson**. She already had a 3-year-old daughter, **Tiffany**, by her first husband, **Joe Simpkins**.

You can just picture how beautiful a young girl she was – attractive **June Carter Cash** was her mother and handsome **Carl Smith** was her dad. Carlene once told me she learned to play guitar and to gamble from her grandmother, Mother **Maybelle Carter**. She said she didn’t realize how famous her grandmother was until she was 17 and began performing onstage with **The Carter Family**.

Following her divorce from Routh, Carlene moved to England and married rocker **Nick Lowe**. When this marriage busted up, she returned to live in the Madison, Tenn., home of her grandmother and again toured with The Carter

Family. In 1990, she hit No 3 with “I Fell In Love,” produced by Carlene’s then-companion **Howie Epstein**, bass player with **Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers**. By the mid-’90s, Carlene quit the road and hid away with Epstein in California and New Mexico.

Then in the summer of 2001 she was arrested with Epstein in New Mexico for possession of drug paraphernalia and black tar heroin. Carlene told police the drugs were hers. But I wondered if Carlene took that rap.

More recently, she was arrested again for identify theft in Tennessee – using her dead boyfriend’s prescription to obtain drugs. The boyfriend had been killed a couple of weeks earlier in a traffic accident. The case was still pending at deadline time.

This is a sad story, and it’s not over. My prayers are with this beautiful and talented woman, born into country music royalty.

KID TALK

Young **Gracie McGraw** was listening to the kids at school talk about what their daddies did for a living. “My daddy doesn’t work,” piped up the daughter of **Faith Hill** and **Tim McGraw**. Gracie got that right. Her daddy is a star – he don’t have to work!



George, with rodeo champs Phil Lyne (left) and Roy Cooper

COWBOY HALL

No better-looking butt ever said good morning to a horse than **George Strait**’s. In January, my favorite cowboy was inducted into the Texas Cowboy Hall of Fame. Maybe it wasn’t God who made honky-tonk angels, as **Kitty Wells** sang in her song, but George Strait sure is the reason God invented Wranglers.

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Irregular Joe

Joe Nichols wraps traditional country in a modern package



New stars
on the
rise

"There's not a lot of vocal acrobatics in the way I sing," says Nichols.

COURTESY UNIVERSAL SOUTH

Joe Nichols couldn't have picked a more appropriate breakthrough record than "The Impossible." He understands what it means to pursue what seems like a lost cause.

His only previous album, self-titled and released in 1996, sunk without much notice – a disappointment that could have pulled his career dreams under with it. But six years later, the Top 5 success of "The Impossible" provided salvation, as did the follow-up, "Brokenheartsville."

Crowning his fast rise, Nichols garnered two Grammy nominations earlier this year, becoming the only newcomer to compete with such superstars as the Dixie Chicks, Johnny Cash, Willie Nelson – and Alan Jackson, who had given Nichols the cherished position of opening act for part of his 2002 tour.

"I remember when I first heard 'Here In The Real World' and another of his early songs, 'Blue Blooded Woman,'" Nichols enthuses, recalling the impression Jackson made upon him as a teenager in Rogers, Ark., nestled in the Boston mountains just north of Fayetteville. "He immediately became one of my favorites, and he's still one of my biggest influences."

Nichols, 26, is among the new artists young enough to have grown up on a steady diet of Jackson records. "The Impossible" was also influenced by George Jones, Merle Haggard and Randy Travis, and as a result, Nichols creates traditional-sounding music – the type that is nearly impossible to hear on radio today.

"I know there's not a whole lot of – well, how do I put it? – there's not a whole lot of vocal acrobatics in the way I sing," Nichols explains by way of distinguishing himself from many other contemporary singers. "I hope what I do comes off as sounding like traditional country but that it also still sounds modern. It sure doesn't blow your hair back when you listen to it."

But if Nichols doesn't sound like the country-pop competition, he certainly looks the part of a contemporary country star, sporting shiny shirts and eschewing the old-school cowboy hat and letting his long, wavy pop-star locks fall freely.

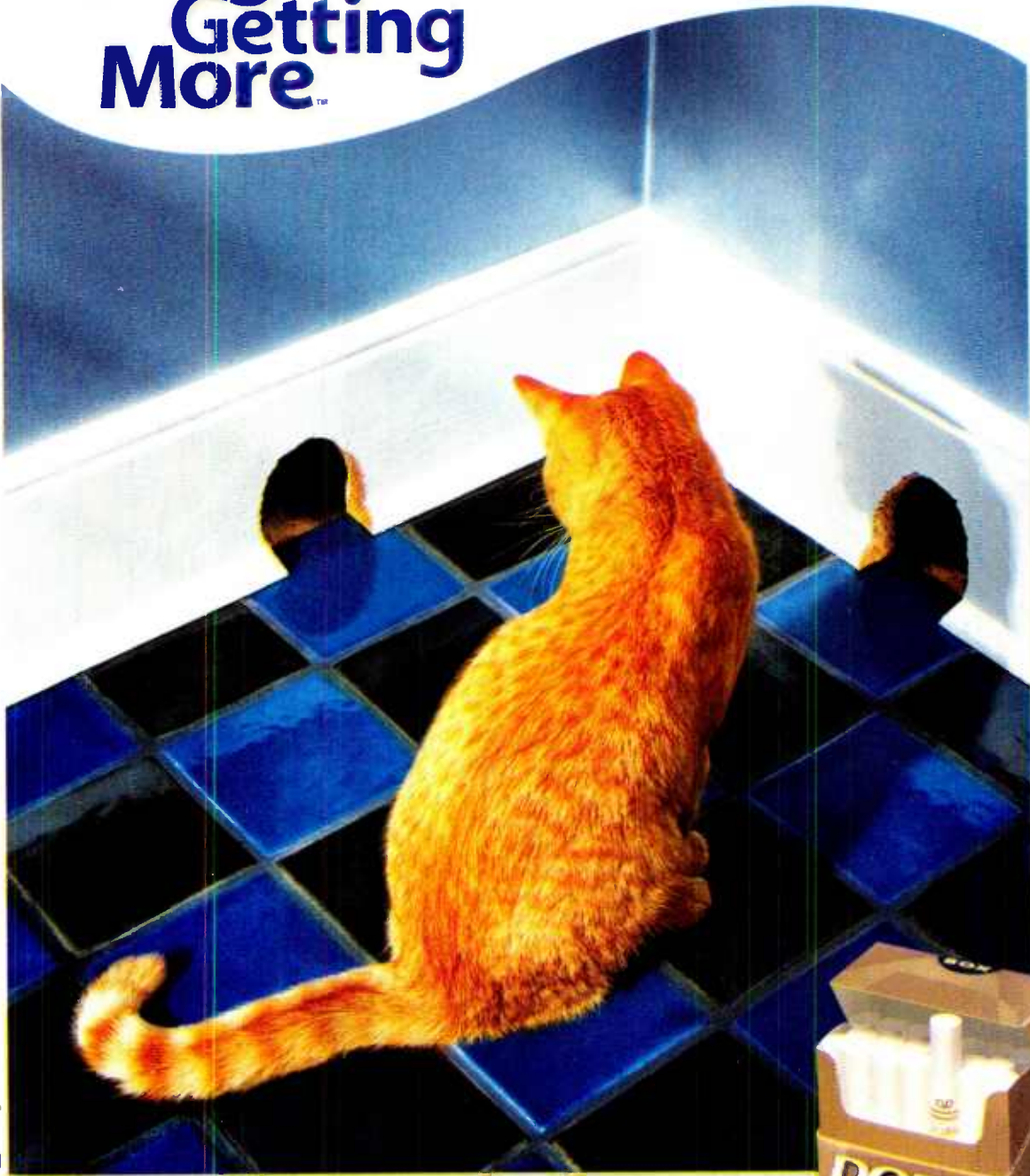
"I think sometimes, if you're a traditional country singer, people get caught up in your having to have a traditional look, too," Nichols explains. "But I don't think that has to be the case. Sometimes, you know, rock singers dress real country. I saw where Madonna wears a cowboy hat in some of her videos, for instance. So why can't country singers do it from the other direction?"

"The key thing for me is that country music is not just a lifestyle, it's a form of art," he says. "The clothes are extra."

— David Cantwell

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 Ginger had breakfast and lunch covered.



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You can't keep a good woman down. Deana Carter knows the truth of that adage better than most. She became an instant star in 1996 with her smash "Strawberry Wine" and a string of other hits. But after a second album failed to maintain her momentum, her star seemed to drop from sight just as quickly as it had risen.

And the news got worse before it got better. In 2001, the petite blonde left Capitol Records, divorced her husband of five years and was charged with DUI a few days before Christmas, which landed her in jail for a night.

Carter takes responsibility for her actions but feels the media attention was blown out of proportion.

"I was in front of bin Laden on the news for three days – it was ridiculous," says the 37-year-old Carter, who eventually got the charges lowered to "driving while impaired," which

She wrote or co-wrote all 12 songs. Starting the album originally in her home studio, she later brought in noted pop-country producer Dann Huff.

"There's No Limit," about the heady spell of early romance, has already raised the body temperature of some fans and the eyebrows of others, especially with its provocative video. In it, she gets playful under the covers with a sexy hunk and walks around her apartment talking to her guy on the phone while sporting a tight-fitting undershirt and men's underwear. "I used to wear my husband's boxers around the house," she explains.

Even though she's easily able to throw inhibitions to the wind – who could forget her leap into the arms of a surprised Ricky Skaggs at the 1997 CMA Awards show? – Carter admits the video is a bit risqué, though insisting it's "honest and relative to what's happening today." Her dad, noted guitarist Fred Carter Jr., agrees. "It's

about time the country girls did something a little adventuresome," he says.

Like *Did I Shave My Legs For This?*, the 1996 album that propelled Carter to stardom, *I'm Just A Girl* is seductive and winsome, blending Deana's undeniable country pedigree with strains of classic and contemporary pop and rock. "You And Tequila" recalls the steamy yet innocent vibe of "Strawberry Wine," while the affecting and melancholy "Twice As Worth It," about trying to save her marriage, hearkens to '70s pop. "Girls' Night" is as raucous as a female punk rocker, and it's hard to listen to the silky "Goodbye Train" without thinking of Sheryl Crow.

"Some people will hear it a little more country, but my references come from specific guitar solos that I remember as a kid," says the woman who grew up visiting her dad in the studio, watching him play behind such luminaries as Bob Dylan, Roy Orbison and

Back IN THE Game

After a divorce, an arrest and a label change, an irrepressible Deana Carter rebuilds her career

BY ALANNA NASH

resulted in a fine and 16 hours of community service. "You get ragged unfairly because of your celebrity, you know. But I was drinking red wine that night."

The cumulative toll of the three events left Carter feeling as though she'd hit rock bottom. "That's the lowest I've ever been," she recalls. "But I woke up, and I faced it, and I came out the other end with support from everybody."

Now Carter is justifiably excited. She recently signed with Arista Records and released a new album, *I'm Just A Girl*, which features "There's No Limit," her first hit single in nearly five years.

I'm Just A Girl is quintessential Deana, stamped with her sweet, vulnerable, fiercely independent personality.



Paul Simon. "When I play my album, I hear Eric Carmen and the Raspberries, The Beatles, Bob Seger, a little Bruce Springsteen and Tom Petty."

But, she hastens in her honeyed drawl, "You put my voice on anything and it pulls it right back into the country genre. And that's fine."

I'm Just A Girl is a strikingly mature showcase, and presents Carter as using today's trends as a jumping-off spot for her own imagination. Yet in 2001, when she took half of these same songs to Mike Dungan, who had just assumed management of Capitol Nashville, Carter had a rude awakening.

"I was playing him songs, and a bar

Carter strips down and plays around in her provocative video "There's No Limit."



into each one, he would shake his head no. I'd put in another one, and before I even got to the lyrics, he would do the same thing. Finally, he looked me in the eye and said, 'Deana, I just don't hear it.'

Carter bristles when remembering the meeting. "I was devastated. He had told me he was my biggest fan. But suddenly his eyes turned into big X's, and he became a robot. I don't know what happened."

Carter had long had her troubles at Capitol, where she was signed in 1991. Three years later, Jimmy Bowen produced an album's worth

Everything's Gonna Be Alright, an ambitious fusion of country, ZZ Top-ish grooves and hip-hop style percussion – got little support from Capitol, engendering no hits and lackluster sales.

After her fateful meeting with the head of Capitol, Carter left the label. "I'd kept hanging in there to be a team player," she says. "I wanted to stay at Capitol because Bowen signed me there, and I wanted to be part of the history of all those amazing artists – Dean Martin, The Beatles,

establish herself as an actress. She has moved to Los Angeles and has already scored a part in the TV movie *The Badge*, starring William Devane and Sela Ward, and appeared on the sitcom *Raising Dad*.

Her parents aren't surprised at her acting aspirations, remembering her role in a college play at the University of Tennessee. "I think Hollywood better look out," says her proud papa. "She can whip L.A."

While Carter hopes to write and produce shows of her own, she's making important contacts, meeting the likes of Sandra Bullock and

Deana Carter



The "Strawberry Wine" sensation looks to reestablish her singing career with a just-released album, *I'm Just A Girl*, and new record label, while testing the acting scene as well. "I think Hollywood better look out," says her dad, famed musician Fred Carter Jr. (left). Daughter Carter revealed her acting talents in an episode of TV's *Raising Dad*, playing the sister of star Bob Saget (middle) – and revealed much more in her new video (right).

of material for her, and it was released in Europe but not in the United States. When Scott Hendricks took over Capitol in 1995, the label considered dropping her, but eventually asked her to re-record her first album.

Carter insisted on bringing in L.A. producer Chris Farren, who shared her pop vision. She and Farren only kept two songs from her initial recordings – "Strawberry Wine" was among the tunes they added.

The album sold five million copies, and the award-winning Carter was poised to become one of country's biggest stars. But her sophomore effort – 1998's

Bonnie Raitt, you know. But they just had so many changes."

Carter believes the label found her voice too similar to that of Cyndi Thomson, the first new artist to come out on Capitol Nashville after Dungan took over. Other insiders speculate that the record company might not have liked Carter's former manager, or that she took too long making records and wanted too much control over her work and career.

With Arista, Carter figures she's landed at the right place. "I've never seen a label kick butt like this," she gushes. "It's pretty amazing."

As the singer revamps her recording career, she's also attempting to

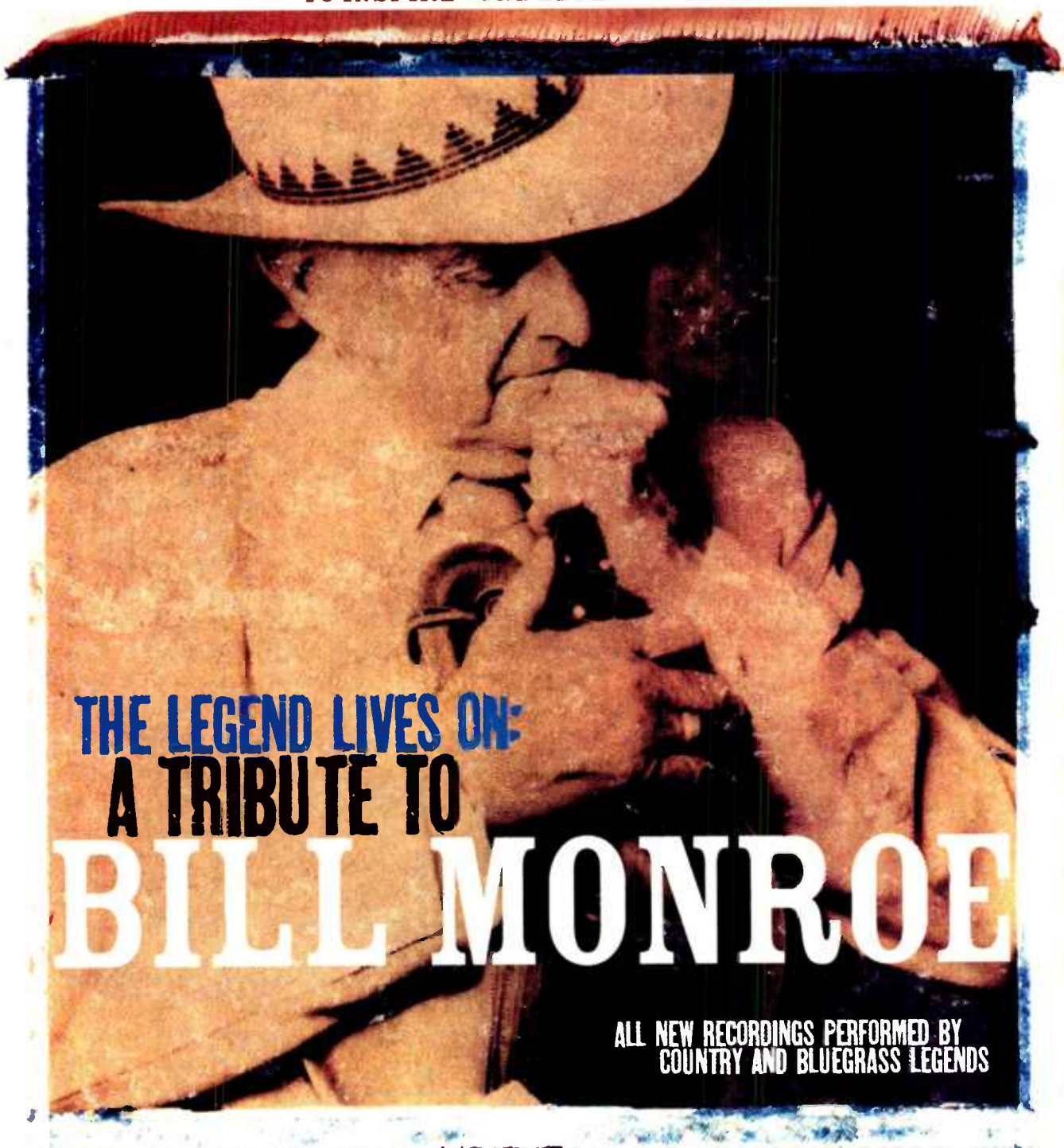
Hugh Grant at premieres, and the cast of *Friends* at TV tapings.

On the personal side, she's also testing the waters.

"I'm just starting to date a little bit, too," she says, then smiles. "I'm planning on having a great time, I know that."

But more important, Carter hungers to be validated again as a singer/songwriter. "I know I'm getting another chance – and a better chance, which is rare," she says. "I want everybody on the planet to know that I am proud for sticking it out and seeing my dreams through. Perhaps it will encourage them to do the same."*

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SWEET home

ALABAMA

As they embark on their final tour, this pioneering supergroup still hasn't received its proper due

The stretch of two-lane that winds through north Alabama into Fort Payne has changed over the years. A dilapidated sign still welcomes visitors – OFFICIAL SOCK CAPITAL OF THE WORLD – but elsewhere, scrubby hillsides once ripe with honeysuckle and hickory trees have been carved into neat strip malls. A Wal-Mart Supercenter, a car dealership and a Goody's Family Clothing store are evidence of the growth that has transformed this slice of small-town America into a piece of cookie-cutter consumerism.

A mile into town sits the warehouse-like complex that for years has housed the offices, fan club and memorabilia museum for supergroup Alabama. Still bustling with energy, locals have begun to wonder about the future of this colorful, proud city anchor. But since announcing plans for a 2003 farewell tour at last year's ACM Awards, Randy Owen, Teddy Gentry, Jeff Cook and Mark Herndon stirred up speculation that the most successful group in the history of country music is calling it quits.

It's a charge they all firmly deny. "The band's not breaking up," lead singer Randy Owen says flatly and firmly.

Jeff Cook, the group's chief wiseguy, explains: "You can say 'American Farewell Tour,' but people don't hear that. They hear words like 'quit,' 'break up' and 'retire.' But if you look closely, none of those words are in that sentence."

In other words, a farewell tour does not necessarily mean the end of the band. It just means that the band is planning its final major concert tour, which begins in mid-June and continues through November.

As swan songs go, this one is both innovative and understated. Each show will be different from city to city, keeping things interesting for the band as well as

BY LISA ZHITO
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ALABAMA

the fans. The production promises to be huge, with an enormous video production tracing Alabama's past 25 years. There will also be a museum's worth of collectibles and other commemorative items to be given away. There's even a high-tech element: An Internet ticket pre-sale was linked to the February release of Alabama's final RCA project, *In The Mood: The Love Songs*.

During the five months of the tour, Alabama will play about 40 concerts. It's certainly not the kind of parting we've come to expect from our superstars; after all, it took The Judds nearly a year and 116 cities to make their long goodbye. Garth Brooks took a more atomic approach, performing just three concerts but broadcasting them live on TV before an audience of some 15 million.

The reason, says Marc Oswald, the tour's executive producer, is that Alabama is gearing its final outing toward its fans.

"We're only playing on Friday and Saturday nights, which is very uncommon," he explains. "The band really wanted to limit it to that for two reasons: One, they're playing a very long show, too long to be able to do it more than twice a week in terms of the wear and tear on your voice.

"And two, we've spread the dates out pretty evenly across the country. If we're not playing in one city, we'll be close enough for those people to jump into the car and make the drive. So we didn't want people to have to wake up and go to work the next day. I guess at the end of the day it was quality versus quantity."

MOVING ON

The band remains reluctant to talk about why they're pulling off the road after this tour; as far as they're concerned, that's all yesterday's news. They made the announcement of the farewell tour at the Academy of Country Music Awards in May 2002.

Since then, they've refused to answer questions about their decision. "I just think it's time to move on," drummer Mark Herndon, Alabama's least chatty member, says flatly, "and that's been covered pretty well."

What should have been bombshell news was treated as a footnote by the music media. Those familiar with Alabama's legacy and contribution to the industry were puzzled; the cold shoulder Alabama has been given says as much about the changes on Music Row in the past 10 years.

Of the muted media response, RCA Records chairman Joe Galante admits, "We were surprised about that."



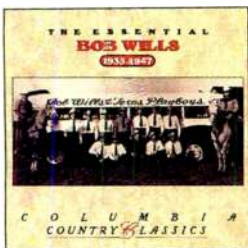
In the 1980s, Mark Herndon, Jeff Cook, Randy Owen and Teddy Gentry changed the course of country music.

COURTESY RCA

THE ESSENTIALS

As influential as Alabama was, the long line of country bands didn't start – or end – with them. Here are 10 CDs every band fan should own

1. Bob Wills & His Texas Playboys, *The Essential Bob Wills: 1935–1947*



Wills and his outstanding band blended Texas fiddle music with big-band swing, creating a jumping dance-floor sound that forever changed country music. This 20-song compilation concentrates on Wills' classic early lineup featuring vocalist Tommy Duncan.

2. Bill Monroe & His Blue Grass Boys, *The Essential Bill Monroe And His Blue Grass Boys: 1945–1949*



Focusing on Monroe's most famous band with Earl Scruggs on banjo and Lester Flatt on guitar

and vocals, this 40-song, two-CD compilation sets the standard for what would become a genre of its own, bluegrass.

3. Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, *Will The Circle Be Unbroken (30th Anniversary Edition)*
A landmark recording that bridged the generation gap of the early '70s, the original Circle stands up because of what it



accomplished – and because of how vibrant it still sounds. The young, longhaired Dirt Band paired themselves with an outstanding guest list of Nashville veterans, including Roy Acuff, Earl Scruggs, Doc Watson, Mother Maybelle Carter and others. The result is a one-of-a-kind recording packed with spirit and emotion.

4. Asleep At The Wheel, *Collision Course/The Wheel*
Though either of the swing band's tributes to



Bob Wills is worth owning, the Texas-based group's most distinctive work came in the '70s. This CD combines two of their best albums from that period, capturing the cheeky fun and ace expertise that have made the Wheel an institution.

5. Alabama, *For The Record: 41 Number One Hits*

The most successful band in country music history revolutionized the industry by injecting rock dynamics into a down-home sound that emphasized simple,



catchy melodies and sentimental lyrics focusing on home, work, family and love. Several greatest-hits collections exist, but this two-disc collection is the only one that encompasses the group's entire career.

6. Highway 101, *Highway 101*
Singer Paulette Carlson



and bandmates brought attitude and intelligence to snappy, country rock. The quartet's stunning debut stands as one of the best country albums of the '80s.

7. The Mavericks, *Trampoline*

This album found the most intriguing country band of the '90s experimenting with new sounds and textures



while maintaining their grasp of groove and melody. The results manage to be both innovative and accessible.

8. Diamond Rio, *Greatest Hits*
Superb musicianship focused to deliver melodic songs and sentimental lyrics, Diamond Rio's members stand as the most accomplished



musicians of the current crop of bands. This collection shows off their wide range and knack for finding solid songs.

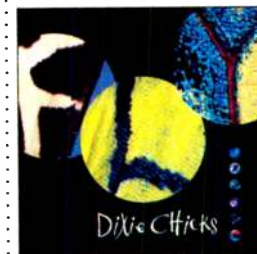
9. Lonestar, *Lonely Grill*

The band's third album propelled them to the front ranks thanks to the touching



power ballad "Amazed," which shows off Richie McDonald's strong, sensitive voice. Though they went on to establish a reputation as supreme balladeers, the album shows off the quartet's eclectic abilities.

10. Dixie Chicks, *Fly*
The gutsy Texas trio truly did let it fly on their second album, flashing wit and inventiveness with a style that made them stand out from



their peers. From the bold "Goodbye Earl!" and "Sin Wagon" to the classic songwriting strengths of "Ready To Run" and "Without You," *Fly* truly soared.

ALABAMA

Alabama's association with RCA reaches back to 1980 – no major current country music act has been with the same label longer. In that time, the quartet's achievements have been staggering: They've sold more than 70 million records, scored 42 No. 1 hits, taken home more than 150 awards and raised millions of dollars for charity.

"I think people look for the things that are the most sensational at the moment, not things that have substance," Galante muses. "At the same time, people in the industry have come and gone, and the people who did recognize Alabama are no longer here. New folks come in and look at them like, 'That was yesterday's news. This is 2003! Who cares?'"

Understandably, that attitude bothers Galante. "These

guys have done everything the industry has ever asked," he stresses. "Any award show, any organization, free concerts, they were always there, and I don't think it's been quid pro quo. I don't see people recognizing what they've accomplished in terms of opening the door for so many bands today, and the leverage they gave country music back in the '80s."

THE LEGACY

Most industry experts today cite Alabama as the barn-burner that made self-contained bands, as opposed to solo acts or vocal groups, acceptable in country music. "They broke the ground for self-contained bands in Nashville,"



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What's in a name

The distinction between a 'band' and a 'group' isn't always an easy one to make

In elementary math, we learn that a square is always a rectangle, but a rectangle is not always a square. Country music has a similar conundrum: A band is always a group, but a group is not always a band.

Say what? For an official explanation, we turn to the Country Music Association. For the CMA defines candidates for the Vocal Group of the Year award this way: "A group is defined as an act, composed of three or more people, all of whom normally perform together and none of whom

is known primarily as an individual performing artist." Simple enough, right?

But wait. From 1967 to 1986, the CMA also presented an Instrumental Group of the Year award. The award went to such self-contained musical bands as the Buckaroos, the Oak Ridge Boys Band, the Charlie Daniels Band, and the Ricky Skaggs Band.

In other words, the Oak Ridge Boys are a vocal group; but the fellows who performed behind them onstage were a band.

Alabama, Lonestar, Emerson Drive

and Pinmonkey deserve the description of band. SHeDAISY, The Statler Brothers and the Oaks are vocal groups, mainly because they typically require the backing of other musicians.

But what about the Dixie Chicks, Trick Pony or Rascal Flatts, all of whom play instruments, but still perform onstage with an assist from other musicians?

Final word goes to Jeff Hanna, a founding member of the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, which by its very name indicates on which side of the divide they prefer to fall.

"A band does it all," he opines. "A group is a bunch of singers in front of a band; a band is a bunch of musicians singing in a band. The individual talents in our band are each substantial, but it's within the framework of the band that we do our best work. I think of our band as a five-headed monster, but that is a good thing. We believe that the five of us can take on the world."

— Kay West



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When I saw what Royal Jelly did for me and my son, I started my own company!

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For everyone interested in feeling better and living a vibrant, healthy lifestyle, I am a living testimony that there is a way! With Royal Jelly helping both me and my son, I became so excited that I started my own company. Today, nearly two decades later, Bee-Alive, Inc. is a thriving, nationally-known company with hundreds of thousands of "bee-lievers." For those who knew me way back when, they are amazed at the hectic schedule I now keep. Traveling constantly throughout the United States and Europe for television and radio appearances, I always extol the benefits of good nutrition and the virtues of Bee-Alive Royal Jelly! I find it a joy to share my knowledge of this amazing food substance that enhances health and vitality! And at Bee-Alive, we truly care about you. That's why our products cannot be found in any stores. Our toll-free number connects you with your very own caring, personal consultant. And our customers... well... they soon become our friends!

What type of person is interested in Bee-Alive Royal Jelly?

We receive hundreds of calls each day from all different kinds of people: men who wish to acquire more physical and mental stamina; women who are overwhelmed with too much work, responsibility and stress; runners,

bodybuilders and athletes who like the competitive edge they get from Royal Jelly; and even the elderly who report being more active, thus enjoying life more!

What is Royal Jelly?

Royal Jelly is not honey or pollen. It is actually the food of the Queen Bee, and her longevity can definitely be traced to her exclusive Royal Jelly diet. She lives up to six years, while worker bees, who eat only honey and pollen, live up to six weeks! And this rare and remarkable substance cannot be duplicated in any lab, but can only be harvested in God's own pharmacy... nature.

Why Bee-Alive's Royal Jelly is unique.

To my knowledge, Bee-Alive is the only company in the U.S. that has pure, non-freeze dried Royal Jelly in capsule form. In the interest of purity and potency, none of our Royal Jelly products are freeze-dried. They are as close to nature as possible. And to assure you freshness, all of our products are stamped with a packaging and expiration date.

Royal Jelly is not only for the rich and famous!

While celebrities, athletes and royalty, have used Royal Jelly for decades, I've now made it available to everyone through Bee-Alive. Here's what a couple of our Bee-Alive friends have to say:

For years, Madeline Balletta felt so tired and drained, and on many occasions, so totally exhausted that she was unable to care for her family. Then, a friend came to the rescue! She told her about good nutrition and gave her a marvelous substance called Royal Jelly. Amazed by her improvement, Madeline gave Royal Jelly to her young son who was experiencing difficulties of his own. When his life began to turn around, she knew that she had to share the news of this wonderful God-given, natural substance. Thus, Bee-Alive was born!

"I was so tired that I'd given up hope. After improving my diet and taking Bee-Alive, people commented on my glowing smile and increased energy. Today, I'm a better nurse, wife, mom and grandma!"

SHARON GIGL, Nurse, TX

"I read your ad and wondered if Bee-Alive could help a tired and overwhelmed soul like me. As a businesswoman and a mom of three, my life was too busy to stay in bed. I needed all the energy and vitality I could get. Bee-Alive has truly been an answer to prayer for me!"

MARLEEN CANNANO, Working Mom, RI

Just as it's improved my life and the lives of thousands of others, I hope it will improve yours, too.

Call Bee-Alive today at **1-866-861-8181** and get a **FREE GIFT** valued at over **\$30.00** with your first order of Royal Jelly. We're waiting to help you change your life!

Madeline

MADELINE BALLETTA
Founder and President, Bee-Alive, Inc.


Bee-Alive

P.S. I promise you'll see a difference within 3 months, or I'll happily refund your full product cost if you are not 100% satisfied.

*These statements have not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration. This product is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any disease.

Individual results may vary.

World Radio History

ALABAMA

says Diamond Rio lead vocalist Marty Roe. “We have always watched how they do business and admired their career. Without their success it would have been much more difficult for us to break into the industry.”

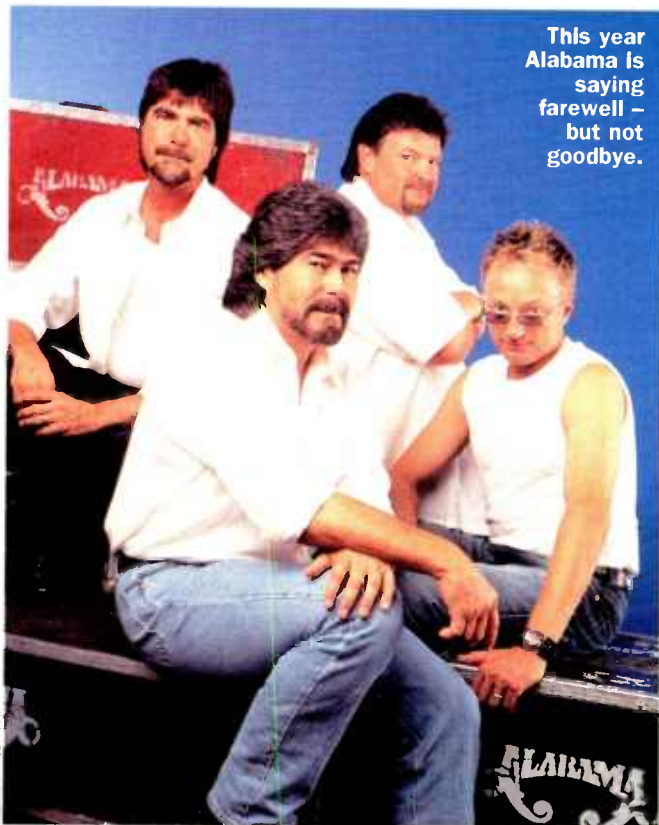
Veteran music journalist Ed Morris, who wrote a 1985 biography of the band, says Alabama’s impact on country music has been enormous. “They came in during the Urban Cowboy time when country music had a little flare-up in popularity but still wasn’t making a lot of money. And suddenly they were filling arenas like rock stars.”

Indeed, arena tours by country bands were unheard of in the early ’80s. So was selling merchandise like T-shirts and logo-sporting baseball caps, another innovation Alabama introduced to Music Row.

Alabama has plenty of other firsts to their credit, too. And *how* they did business is as much a part of their legacy as *what* they did. The group’s members approached their career with a shrewd business acumen, early on shoring up exclusive management, in-house booking and promotion and even starting their own publishing company.

“It certainly wasn’t the norm in those days,” Morris notes. “Almost everything was farmed out. In fact, in the early ’80s, not a lot of artists were writing their own songs, either. It’s so commonplace now it’s hardly remarkable, but I would think one of their biggest legacies is showing how to sensibly handle a career for longevity.”

Owen asserts that Alabama continues to work their business much as they always have. “The industry has changed a lot,” he says, “but we haven’t changed the way we do business, except in areas where we have no control.”



This year
Alabama is
saying
farewell –
but not
goodbye.

In the early days, the perception of country bands in Nashville was disparaging at best. “At our first performance in Nashville, Mark didn’t even get to perform – he had to sit in the audience and watch me and Jeff and Teddy sing,” recalls Owen. “And we couldn’t even play our instruments. They had the studio band play, and those guys had an attitude of, ‘Hey guys, you may have written the song. But we don’t care – we’re going to play it the way we want to play it.’”

“The song was ‘My Home’s In Alabama,’ and of course we had worked on that arrangement for days and days and days, that’s why it sounds different. So we started listening to these guys play our song and it was like, ‘Holy hell! This is not even the same song that me and Teddy wrote!’”

Before long, though, Alabama gained the leverage to do things their own way. There’s nothing like a string of No. 1s to change attitudes. Once Alabama hit it big, record companies quickly searched for similar acts. Bands were suddenly in; groups like Restless Heart, Shenandoah, Sawyer Brown and Southern Pacific were quickly signed. Even the once-rocking Exile and the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, both already established in California, found themselves welcome in Nashville after Alabama laid the groundwork.

“You can’t overlook it when somebody gives a shot in the arm to a form of music, because it allows labels to finance other acts,” Morris says. “I think that’s a big part of their legacy, too.”

GETTING THEIR DUE

Recently there have been some noteworthy attempts to recognize Alabama’s contributions. At January’s American Music Awards, Alabama received the Award of Merit, which recognizes career achievement.

But there have been slights, too. In 1999, the RIAA named Alabama the Country Group of the Century, but little resulted from it. “I don’t know what the other guys got,” cracked Jeff Cook, “but I got a fruit basket. I think there should have been a little more festivities going on than a fruit basket.”

There have been other slurs as well, such as the nifty journalist who recently asked Mark Herndon if he was copying Alan Jackson because his jeans had holes in the knees.

Owen, ever diplomatic, takes a philosophical view. “In the early days, just the thought of having one song on the radio or an album that was on a real label was such a big deal,” he says. “And we’ve been able to accomplish that. So I think we’re at peace with ourselves. If you worry or think about what people think about you, then you’re already defeated.”

“It’s like anything else,” explains Herndon. “I don’t think people like you any less, they just take you for granted a little bit. It’s like a romance, it’s hotter than fire when you start out, and then you get used to someone and that tapers off. You don’t cherish that person any less, it’s just that things are a little different.”

Though they don’t say so, such factors surely must have played into Alabama’s decision to quit touring. Asked whether they are emotionally ready for the big farewell, Owen answers in the affirmative, noting he’s been thinking of calling it quits for years.

“Like anything else, you reach a point where you feel like you’re just worn out,” he explains. “Being part of a group is

BANDS ON THE RUN

Today's groups continue to follow the road that Alabama paved with country and rock



BAND: Dixie Chicks

MEMBERS: Natalie Maines, Martie Maguire, Emily Robison

KEY TUNES: "Ready To Run," "Goodbye Earl," "Long Time Gone"

DEFINING TRAIT: Defiantly independent

ROCK/POP EQUIVALENT: Destiny's Child



BAND: Sawyer Brown

MEMBERS: Mark Miller, Gregg Hubbard, Jim Scholten, Joe Smyth, Duncan Cameron

KEY TUNES: "Some Girls Do," "Thank God For You," "The Dirt Road"

DEFINING TRAIT: Miller's spastically inspired dance moves

ROCK/POP EQUIVALENT: Sugar Ray



BAND: Lonestar

MEMBERS: Richie McDonald, Keech Rainwater, Dean Sams, Michael Britt

KEY TUNES: "Amazed," "I'm Already There," "What About Now"

DEFINING TRAIT: Masters of the arena-ready power ballad

ROCK/POP EQUIVALENT: Chicago



BAND: Diamond Rio

MEMBERS: Marty Roe, Dan Truman, Dana Williams, Brian Prout, Gene Johnson, Jimmy Olander

KEY TUNES: "Meet In The Middle," "One More Day," "Beautiful Mess"

DEFINING TRAIT: Graceful, solid musicianship

ROCK/POP EQUIVALENT: Toto



BAND: Trick Pony

MEMBERS: Heidi Newfield, Ira Dean, Keith Burns

KEY TUNES: "Pour Me," "On A Night Like This," "On A Mission"

DEFINING TRAIT: Rowdy and ready for a good time

ROCK/POP EQUIVALENT: No Doubt



BAND: Emerson Drive

MEMBERS: Brad Mates, Danick Dupelle, Chris Hartman, Pat Allingham, Pat Bourque, Mike Melancon

KEY TUNES: "I Should Be Sleeping," "Fall Into Me"

DEFINING TRAIT: Hooky tunes, spiky hair

ROCK/POP EQUIVALENT: matchbox twenty





OFF THE RECORD

Even bona fide country bands often don't play on their own albums

At some point in every concert, the lead singer will direct the spotlight toward the band. Each instrumentalist will be introduced by name before the audience will be asked to give "the greatest band in country music a big hand!"

So why is it that when it comes time for the singer to go into the studio, the members of "the greatest band in country music" are replaced by session musicians?

Even more surprising is that bona fide, self-contained country bands – Alabama, Lonestar, Sawyer Brown and Sons Of The Desert, to name just a few – hire Nashville studio pros to play the music on their albums.

The reason, simply, is time and money.

"It is largely an economic issue," explains Bob Titley, a top executive at TBA Entertainment, which manages Brooks & Dunn, Clay Walker, Terri Clark, Aaron Lines, Kathy Mattea and The Ragsdales. "Historically, we haven't had the same dollars in country music as in other genres to allow for a singer and their band to noodle around in a studio.

"The producer has to deliver a record on time and on budget, and that means he wants to use studio musicians he knows can get it done right – and get it done quickly."

Tony Brown, a head honcho at Universal South Records, offers a unique

perspective because he's been a touring musician (Elvis Presley, Emmylou Harris) and a producer (George Strait, Reba McEntire). "Certainly a road band can do it," he says, "but they take a lot more time than studio musicians. Springsteen can spend five months in the studio with the E Street Band, but most country artists don't have that kind of time.

"For most country albums, you need to get the tracks down in five days, and studio musicians can do that. I never enjoyed playing in the studio as much as I did on the road. There's too much pressure. Every player on the road wishes they could play on the album until they get in the studio. Then they say, 'Whoa! Call [studio drummer] Eddie Bayers!'"

Some bands – including Diamond Rio, Alison Krauss & Union Station and Trick Pony – have been fortunate enough to cross the divide.

"Before we were signed, we used to talk about how if we ever got to make a record, we wanted to play on it ourselves," says Ira Dean, bass player and one-third of Trick Pony. "We were really lucky that our producer, Chuck Howard, felt the same way. People wonder why records all sound alike in Nashville. If you ask me, it's because you have the same five guys playing on all the records."

— Kay West

ALABAMA

a different deal, because you don't make all the decisions. If I had made all of the decisions at the time, we would have taken a year or two off, giving us time to write a little bit."

But that didn't happen. Now, he says, he's ready. "For me, I've looked at every show as possibly my last show. That's the way I've approached it. You want to look at everything, you want to look at the people, you want to say goodbye. It is an emotional thing, but it's a good emotion: Hey, it was a good show, I had a lot of fun, I hope they did too."

Herndon's been so busy working on the production of the tour that he really hasn't thought about how it will feel when the band's final tour ends. "I compartmentalize things, so I'm not to that point yet," he says. "Maybe when I'm in some arena in some city somewhere it will hit me, and it will mean something. But right now, I'm keeping busy."

Cook notes that the band still "has a lot of doors and directions left to go. There's no law that says we can't record."

WHAT NEXT?

The other big question looms for Alabama: After the tour, what then? The band is tight-lipped about their post-tour plans – Herndon jokes that, like Shania, they plan to move to Switzerland – but there are undeniable signs that something big is coming down the pike. Even longtime supporter Frances Preston – president of the songwriting organization BMI – hints, "They have plans for the future, but I'm not at liberty to say what."

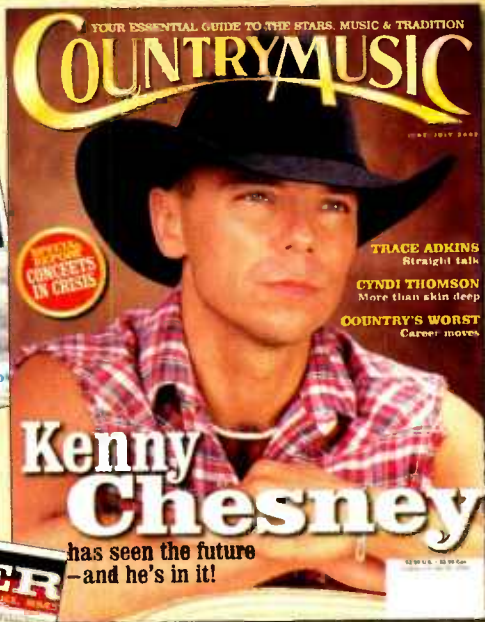
While Galante confirms that *In The Mood* is Alabama's final record for RCA, he also says the label is open to talks about future recordings. "I don't think anyone knows what the next move will be," he says. "Based on the fact that this is a farewell tour, none of us has had any conversations about what is next in terms of recording. But we're happy to sit down with the guys to talk about that."

Galante believes Alabama is still viable in today's marketplace. "What it all comes down to is, is the music compelling in today's marketplace? They're still competitive in today's marketplace in terms of singing and playing. You just don't know until they try.

"You know," he adds, "we've had this conversation many times where people are saying they think Alabama is about done, and then the band sells a couple million more records. People said the same thing about Kenny Rogers. He was gone, what five years? And then he came back with some major hits, had an album nominated and everything."

As to those post-tour plans, Herndon hints, "The more speculation out there, the better it is for us. The more people talk, the more it builds up. Sometimes it's better if we talk less."

Savvy to the end, it seems Alabama is orchestrating chapter two of their career with the same finesse that made the first chapter such a blockbuster. After 25 years of record-setting, why should anyone be surprised? *



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A COLLECTORS' MAGAZINE ON YESTERDAY'S COUNTRY IN EVERY ISSUE!

Eddie Montgomery leans back in an upholstered chair on his tour bus. "We're country boys," he states emphatically, "and we ain't gonna ever outgrow that."

While the luxury conditions inside the custom-made bus might belie the contention, all Montgomery has to do is step outside into the parking lot behind Billy Bob's Texas and catch a whiff of the cow patties and road apples from the pens and stalls for the club's rodeo ring to remind him of where he really is.

Obviously, Montgomery Gentry's rural roots are never more than a sniff away.

Those roots remain a big part of the duo's appeal. Their recent CD, *My Town*, takes listeners on a guided tour of the Kentucky farmland and honky-tonks that these two good ol' boys still call home.

"I think it's the best thing we've done," declares Montgomery between bites of french fries from a take-out box. Partner Troy Gentry and his wife are spending time with his in-laws, who live nearby in the Fort Worth area. The Gentrys recently enjoyed the birth of their first child, so family is the one thing that takes precedence

The major catalyst for that growth was a new producer, Blake Chancey, best known for his work with the Dixie Chicks. "Blake is the most creative person I've seen in my life," Montgomery says. "He's unbelievable. He'll let you have the reins, and without you knowing it, he'll be directing you this way and that way. You just feel so damn comfortable with him."

As a result, Eddie and Troy found themselves eagerly showing up for work for a process that in the past has occasionally felt laborious and tense. "For the first time, we were showing up at the studio early," Montgomery recalls with a laugh. "Me and Troy were beating everybody to the studio, and we were ready to sing. We were like" – he smacks his hands together to punctuate the thought – "*come on man, let's go*. We just absolutely had a blast. We hated to see it end."

Chancey feels just as stoked about the experience. "It's just about the most fun I've had in years making a record," the producer says. "It wasn't like work. It was like you got up every day and you wanted to go make more music."

So what was it that made recording this album as much fun as tearing it up on a Saturday night in a packed road-

Chuck Leavell, a former Allman Brother who now tours with the Rolling Stones, and hotshot guitarists David Grissom (whose credits include John Mellencamp and Joe Ely), Al Anderson and Pat Buchanan. "We went into the studio and put the drums here, and everybody just kind of gathered around the drums," Montgomery recalls. "Me and T-Roy" – as Montgomery often refers to his partner – "were the only ones in a booth. It took off, man – just unbelievable! Some of them songs were actually 18 minutes long. They would just keep jamming. They were having a ball, we were having a ball."

The other important component of *My Town* is the songs, every one of them chosen during countless hours of searching and listening.

"When it comes to the song selection process, the guys love listening to music," notes Chancey. "Most artists look at it more like work. But Eddie and Troy enjoy that process. Those guys will sit up all night listening to music. And maybe drinking a little bit, too."

That's because offering value for the dollar is paramount for Montgomery Gentry.

"You want to make an album where

Montgomery Gentry takes its Kentucky roots to the world

Town and COUNTRY

BY ROB PATTERSON

over this duo's musical ambitions.

Talking by phone a few days later, it's clear Gentry is equally enthusiastic about *My Town*. "Our first two albums made a statement of who Montgomery Gentry was, creating a sound and an image," he explains. "Now after two records, we're able to step up and start growing musically as well as professionally."

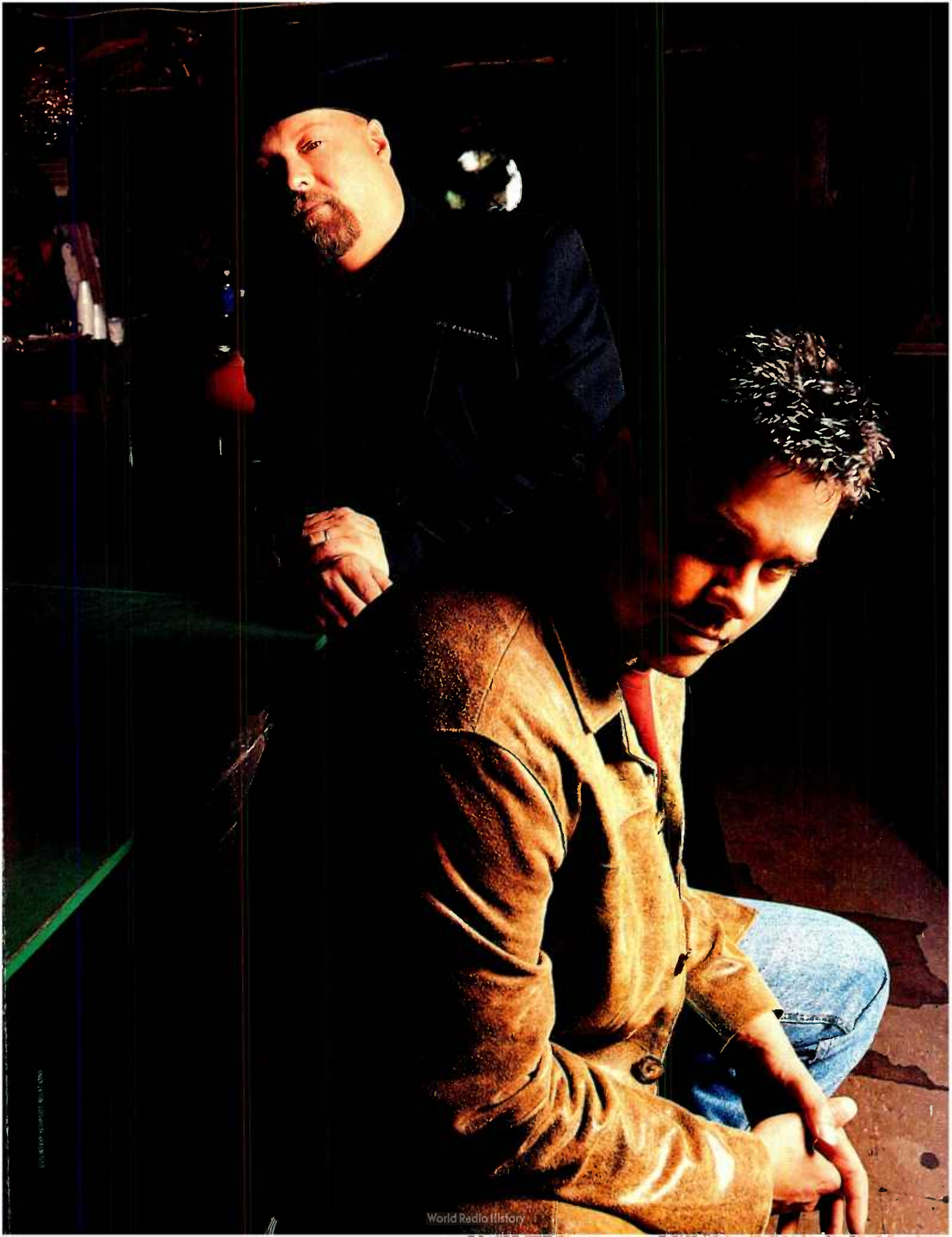
house? Cutting the songs live in the studio, say the duo.

Chancey wanted to capture on record the energy of a Montgomery Gentry live performance, so he made this suggestion: "I think we should hire the baddest band we can find, and rehearse it like you're going to play a gig."

The crew for the sessions included

people don't skip over songs," says Montgomery. "Or make it one where they want one for the house and one for the car. Or where someone says something like, 'Man, I had mine in the car and somebody took it.' That's the kind of album you want to make."

Gentry also looks at it from the fan's point of view. "We grew up in the honky-tonks; we grew up around



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working-class people," he explains. "We're all about the working people, man, who work hard for their money and are gonna go out and buy our CD. So we want to make sure we give 'em something, and we're always gonna try to never let them down."

At a time when country music has elsewhere seemingly verged into an idealized suburbia where love and fidelity reign supreme, Montgomery Gentry is determined to sing about life as it really is. "Every song or every other song these days is about somebody getting married and somebody falling in love with some-

one and staying in love all their lives," notes Gentry of the recent trends on country radio. "That's great when that happens to people, but that's not what life is about. Life has its ups and downs. It has its moments of glory, but it also has tragedy, and Eddie and I want to be able to sing about all of it."

Such devotion to the everyday realities follows the line of Montgomery Gentry heroes like Merle Haggard, Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson, as well as the Southern rockers the duo grew up on and whose songs they performed

back in their barroom days in Kentucky.

"I think one of the best country songs in the whole world was 'Simple Man' by Lynyrd Skynyrd," Montgomery says. "I was definitely influenced by Ronnie Van Zant. A lot of the stuff I do on the front of the stage comes from watching Ronnie."

And it's not just the sound and style of its heroes that Montgomery Gentry follows, but the content as well. "Charlie Daniels and Waylon Jennings were definitely singing about the ups and downs and the hard knocks of life," Gentry points out. "We're just being us. We grew up on a particular sound and style of music that we embraced, and we're just trying to take what we learned from the guys we looked up to and carry it on to another generation."

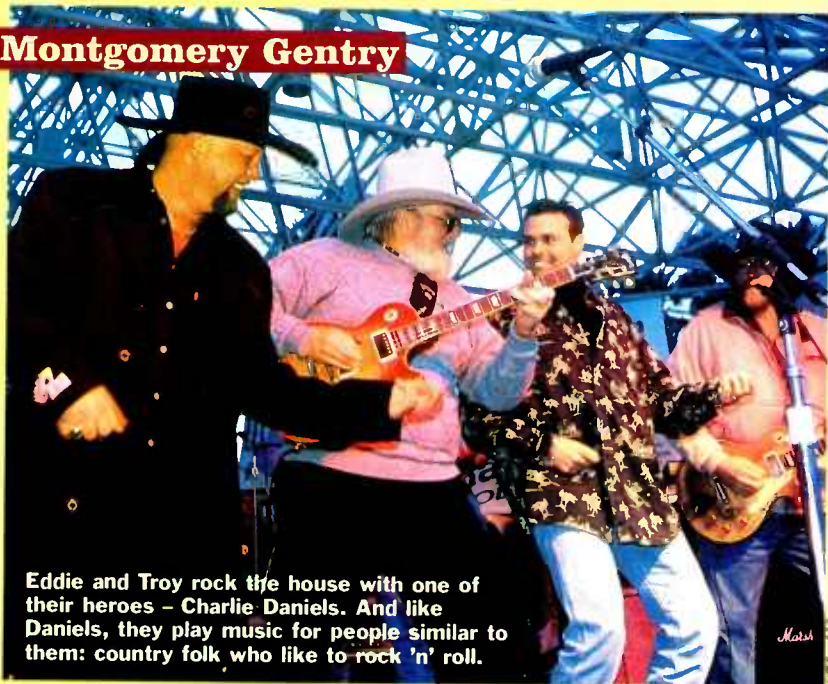
Montgomery agrees that what songs say is as vital as how they are played. "We always want to make music that touches people, whether it's partying music or music that helps someone get through something. That's what music is about. It's the greatest tool in the world for people's emotions."

So while the country industry aims at a demographic of suburban housewives, Montgomery Gentry is staking its claim on a considerable audience that is much like them – country folk who like to rock 'n' roll.

"Me and Troy, we listen to all types of music," explains Montgomery. "One minute we'll be listening to Merle Haggard, Charlie Daniels and Waylon. The next minute we might have some Ozzy in there."

No matter what's on the CD player as the bus rolls down the road, and no matter how far the duo travel from their native Kentucky, Montgomery and his partner promise to keep their feet on the same ground their audience walks on. "Somebody tries to tell us, 'Y'all are celebrities,'" Montgomery says with a raucous guffaw. "No, no, no, man! We're country boys, and we're going to keep it that way.*"

Montgomery Gentry



Eddie and Troy rock the house with one of their heroes – Charlie Daniels. And like Daniels, they play music for people similar to them: country folk who like to rock 'n' roll.



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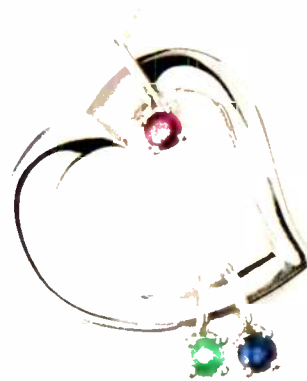
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Over

Trace Adkins offers a firsthand account of his life-changing trip to the Persian Gulf

There



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY TRACE ADKINS



Adkins packs some heat with our soldiers (left) and performs for the troops (below). "Haggard's 'Fightin' Side Of Me' got them all fired up," he recalls.



Adkins (fourth from left) and band join soldiers for a dramatic view from the wing of a military jet.



In the fall of 2002 Trace Adkins accepted an invitation from the USO to perform for U.S. troops stationed in the Persian Gulf. Drawing from a journal he kept through the course of the trip, he shares his thoughts and observations with Country Music.

I've found it really difficult to talk about the trip and the impact it had on me in a concise, intelligent way. Every time I try, I stumble around. Anything I say comes up short. If you're a Christian, it would be like trying to explain what you felt when you were saved. You can't put that stuff into words.

In November, four members of my band and I boarded a flight in Los Angeles, touching down in Amsterdam and Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates. From there we traveled by air to Manama, Bahrain, where we stayed in a hotel that served as our home base during the trip.

The hotel may have been a fancy, four-star joint, but to me it felt like a prison. Anytime we left the hotel, the people of Bahrain did not make us feel welcome. People would look at you as if they wanted to cut your throat. I only went out one time, that was enough for me. I didn't feel comfortable there.

After an initial day of rest, we underwent a briefing about what to expect and then were flown to the aircraft carrier, the USS Abraham Lincoln, accompanied by the Vice Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral William J. Fallon. He was a real regular guy, real friendly to us. I didn't know he was such a high-ranking officer until we got there and I saw how he was greeted.

I had really been looking forward to landing on the flight deck of an aircraft carrier. Well, it was just as thrilling and amazing as

you would think. Our plane was jerked to a stop less than 300 feet after we landed – from 130 miles per hour to zero in no time flat.

When we got off the plane, the impression that most struck me was how young the soldiers were. They looked like kids to me; the average age was 19. I wrote in my journal that we were "welcomed aboard by children in Navy uniforms." It made you realize how brave they must be to be there.

So many images come to mind from that first day: sitting in the captain's chair, seeing the



COURTESY TWBK

A Rebel GROWS UP



"The record business is changing dramatically," says Dwight, who founded his own Electrodisc label after 16 years and 16 albums with Reprise.



ROCK ON! PHOTOGRAPHY

On the outskirts of Phoenix, a gruff waitress pours coffee in a modest roadside cafe. When she discovers Dwight Yoakam is appearing at an arena down the road, she admits she'd enjoy seeing him perform.

"He's been around so long," she says as she fills a cup, "and I mostly like the older stuff."

The *older* stuff? Since when is Yoakam, the outspoken torchbearer of twang, considered part of country music's old guard? When did the Hollywood-based hellion of honky-tonk become one of those he set out to save? When exactly did the curator become the *curatee*?

On reflection, it seems clear: Yoakam has been around since the mid-1980s, and 17 years is a career in anybody's book, particularly in the country music business where stars often pass through the public consciousness as quickly as last year's SUV. The times they were a-changin' in 1986, when Yoakam released his first full album, *Guitars, Cadillacs, Etc., Etc.* on the Reprise label. Pop-country had suffered a front-end collision in the earlier part of the decade, and Ricky Skaggs, George Strait, Reba McEntire, The

As a springboard to success, he sidestepped Nashville altogether, which he openly despised, and instead launched his career out of the Los Angeles musical community, which included a thriving live scene that blended punk and Americana.

But that was then. Now Yoakam stands in the middle of a number of career changes, with one foot in the future and one in the past. "I'm in the eye of the storm," he says with a sly grin that says he likes it there. In part, Yoakam is referring to his transition from Reprise Records, which has been his home for 16 years and 16 albums (including Christmas and greatest-hits collections), to independent artist and owner of his own record label, the all-new Electrodisc label.

"The way I see it, the record business is changing dramatically," he says. "We started taking a good look at everything, and going independent just made the most sense. From this point on, I'll be in a position to create my own masters and ultimately own them, and my Electrodisc albums will be released through another independent company – a truly independent alignment – that I'll join with as a partner. It's real positive stuff to me."

Western Studios in Hollywood – I think I was 24 at the time – in 1981," he explains. "I was really exploring these songs for the first time. This was before I met and began my collaboration with Pete [Anderson, Dwight's longtime guitarist, co-producer and all-around right-hand man]. It was interesting to go back and listen to the songwriter's clarity of purpose I had at the time, but it's obvious I still hadn't arrived at or defined my sound – that came when Pete and I started working together."

Meanwhile, Yoakam has been cast in the new Harrison Ford film with director Ron Shelton, known for sports-oriented pictures *Tin Cup*, *Bull Durham* and *White Men Can't Jump*. "I get to play a bad cop – yet another villain in a long line of bad guys," he says, referring to the characters he played in *Sling Blade*, *Panic Room*, *The Minus Man* and other films.

And then there's Dwight Yoakam's Bakersfield Biscuits, the singer's pre-packaged frozen entrees that involve a variety of stews, chilis and gravies with a half dozen or so pre-cooked biscuits. He's also added a new line called Lanky Links sausage products. They're now beginning to make their way into the freezers at Albertson's, Safeway, Wal-Mart and other national grocery chains.

"Heat 'em 'n' eat 'em!" Yoakam blares with considerable goofy delight. While making no secret of his vegetarianism, he claims that the sausage gravy and chili varieties of the sausages smell so good he was tempted to try them himself.

Meanwhile, at his show Yoakam meets and greets visitors and fans, a routine event at his concerts. Among those standing outside his bus in a hot desert wind is a representative from a grocery chain that will be carrying the Yoakam product line, a young female Air Force pilot who once took Dwight in a jet over the Middle East and a woman from Arkansas who asks if it's true that Johnny Horton was really Dwight's father.

The crowd reflects Yoakam's varied interests as well as his broad appeal. But, veteran that he is, where does he go from here? As a newly independent artist, does he see himself ever wielding the impact he held as a head-turning newcomer in the '80s and a consistently challenging artist of the '90s?

"Let me just say this: Things are cyclical," he says. "The more things change, the more they just get the same."*

— Henry Cabot Beck

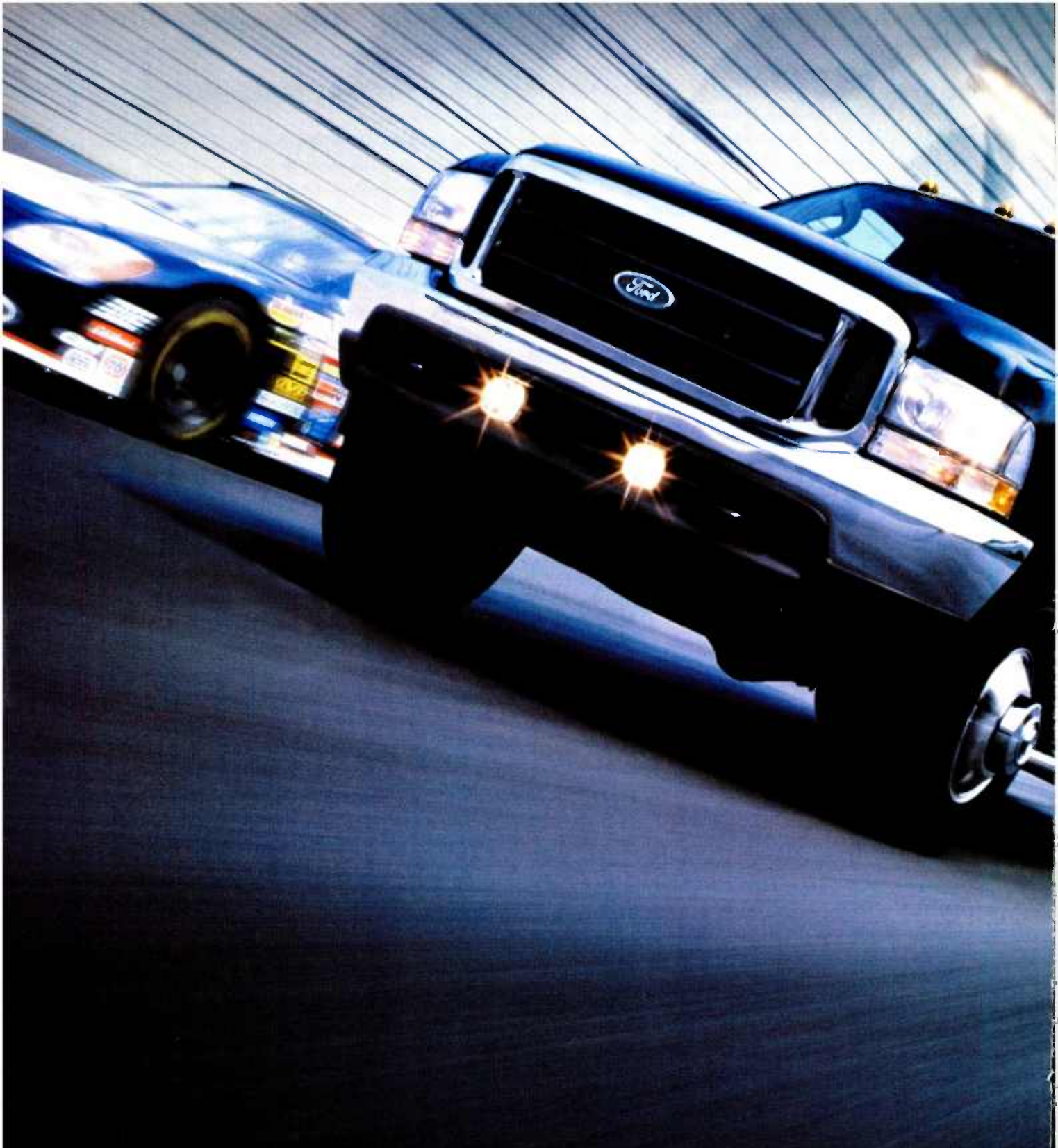
Dwight Yoakam boxes up his past and moves into the future

Judds and Randy Travis began staking their claims amid the wreckage.

But the Kentucky-born, Ohio-raised Yoakam was unique among the upstarts in his singular devotion to preserving the post-World War II hillbilly music he grew up on. Doses of Johnny Horton, Johnny Cash and Lefty Frizzell were poured straight on Yoakam's earliest tracks, along with a liberal quantity of Appalachia long before mountain music became cool.

As a way of putting his history behind him, Yoakam hooked up with Rhino Records to release a four-CD set, *Reprise Please Baby*, a greatest-hits package that will comprise his career to date. He will follow this with a more ambitious multi-disc box set, *The Complete Works*, that will feature all of his Reprise-recorded songs as well as a number of unheard demos.

"These were some of the first professional demos I ever did at United



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On the HUNT

Whether tracking deer or making hit records, Blake Shelton's aim is true

In front of a camera or a microphone, it's easy for a singer to pretend to be someone he isn't. But there's no faking it when hunting for deer deep in the Iowa backwoods – you're either the real deal, or you're not.

The Wal-Mart Great Outdoors program on ESPN2 has presented plenty of celebrity hunters over its 13 seasons, but none have displayed more over-the-top enthusiasm than Blake Shelton.

"Oh man, he's just loving it," says producer Rich Larson, shaking his head and chuckling as he recalls how eager the rangy Oklahoman was to shoot the first deer he saw that morning – until the crew advised that patience likely would lead to a bigger one.

"He's just like a kid at Christmas," Larson continues, relaxing at the lodge of Timberghost Ranch, a white-tail preserve for trophy hunting in southeast Iowa.

Just then, series co-host Jack Youngblood bursts through the door, a huge smile on his face. The football hall-of-famer – a former defensive lineman for the Los Angeles Rams – invites everyone outside to admire the prize he calls "Deer-zilla."

Now the question is whether Shelton will be so lucky. It's past dark, and dinner's almost ready. Had the singer bagged a trophy buck, he'd be back by now. He and Youngblood have bonded with a bet – \$100 for the biggest deer, another \$100 for the prettiest.

"He loves the outdoors, and he's one

fun guy," Youngblood says. "It's like taking your son hunting."

When the 6-foot-5-inch Shelton returns to the lodge, his smile is even bigger than Youngblood's. His buck is bigger as well, an 11-point beauty. Everyone again rushes outside to eye the treasure.



"Hunting and fishing were always my first love, music second," says Shelton, showing off his prize 11-point buck. He also aims to bag more big hits like "Austin" and "The Baby."

"My goodness!" exclaims Youngblood. "You're going to have to build a new house with 14-foot ceilings to display that one. Guess I'm down \$200."

"This is the greatest day of my life," gushes the dimpled, curly-haired Shelton, and there's no one among the TV crew or

the hunting-lodge staff who doesn't share his happiness. Shelton's the sort of playful jokester who puts people at ease, making even new acquaintances feel like old friends. Without a trace of the prima donna, he's a man's man among the guys and a ladies' man around the women, yet everyone agrees that there's no b.s. in Blake Shelton.

"Hunting and fishing were always my first love, music second," he reveals inside the lodge. "I saw more bucks today than I have in my life, and I know I'll never shoot a bigger one than this."

By now, the 26-year-old Shelton should know never to say never. Just a year or so earlier, "Austin" gave him the biggest chart-topping breakthrough by a new male artist since Billy Ray Cyrus' "Achy Breaky Heart." The singer feared he'd never enjoy another hit like that again, but his recent hit "The Baby" looks to be another career milestone.

Instead of succumbing to the dreaded sophomore jinx, he and producer Bobby Braddock (best known as the co-writer of "He Stopped Loving Her Today" and "D-I-V-O-R-C-E") have raised the bar. Where "Austin" provided a calling card, Shelton's new *The Dreamer* is the sort of album that makes an up-and-comer a star.

"I was really proud of that first record, but this is a way better album," agrees Shelton. "My voice has gotten stronger just from singing every night on tour for a year and a half, and we've reached a completely different level with song quality.

BY DON MCLEESE



COURTESY WARNER BROS.

Instead of publishers reaching down into that drawer where there are songs that have been laying around for years, they're reaching into the top drawer for new material by their best writers."

While "The Baby" finds the singer justifying the faith publishers put in him, the most revelatory cut on *The Dreamer* is the Shelton-written title track. Addressed to his fiancée, Kaynette Williams, it describes how it feels to become an overnight success after eight years of scuffling – and shows how the dream that came true left Shelton rattled in its wake.

"She and I went through some really hard times when 'Austin' came out," admits Shelton. "To be honest with you, I went off the deep end in a lot of ways and pushed a lot of people out of my life. I had people depending on me for the first time to make their living, where I was the guy three months earlier who didn't even know how I was going to pay my rent. There's no other way to describe it than temporary insanity – and no way to know how it feels until you go through it. I'm glad I came to my senses."

If success was different than Shelton had anticipated, it was still better than the dead-end lives he saw so many friends living back home in Ada, a town of 15,000 in south-central Oklahoma. Around there, he says, teenagers tend to find



KEVIN FERGUSON

thinking about what had happened every morning for about three years, trying to figure out the meaning," says Shelton. "What I took from it is that you only get one chance at this, and you have to give it your best."

Further impetus for Shelton to leave Ada came during a homecoming celebration for Mae Boren Axton, writer of "Heartbreak Hotel" and mother of singer/songwriter Hoyt Axton. At 16 years old, Shelton had been singing around town and was part of the entertainment when Ada gave Axton the key

Blake Shelton "I guess the odds were even more against me making a living in music than in hunting."

trouble just to have something to do.

A profound influence on his early days was his big brother, Richie, to whom he addressed this dedication on his 2001 debut album: "He was my hero, and I still miss him every day."

Eight years older, Richie Shelton was everything his kid brother wanted to be – a good-looking guy who was popular with the girls and loved racing motorcycles and listening to music. He never backed away from a fight. If a singer was cool enough for Richie – from Waylon Jennings to Bob Seger – he was cool enough for Blake.

After returning to Ada from a stint in the Army, Richie died in a 1990 car crash. "After he died, I woke up

to the city. She told him she thought he had a future in Nashville.

"Man, that was all the encouragement I needed," remembers Shelton, who left Oklahoma for Tennessee as soon as he graduated from high school.

Ready to conquer the world at 17, he called Axton when he arrived in Nashville and asked what he should do now. She told him he could start by painting her house.

Being able to drop Axton's name around Music Row opened doors for Shelton as a songwriter. One of his first collaborators was Michael Kossler, who played one of their songs for his friend Bobby Braddock.

Though Braddock wasn't knocked out by the song, he heard something in the singer.

"I thought this guy could be a modern-day Hank Jr.," remembers Braddock. "And after seeing him live and getting to know him, no disrespect to Hank Jr., but I thought he was the next Garth Brooks. He had that charisma, that electricity that appeals to both male and female audiences."

Though part of Shelton's strength is that he's as country as they come, neither the artist nor his producer see him as any kind of neo-traditionalist throwback. On *The Dreamer*, he sings about Mama ("The Baby"), driving a truck ("Asphalt Cowboy") and drinking ("Georgia In A Jug"), but he also echoes Aerosmith on "Underneath The Same Moon" and Van Morrison on "Playboys Of The Southwestern World."

"To me, country music has been changing since it's been invented," says Shelton, who considers '80s hitmaker Earl Thomas Conley his favorite vocalist. "I can use the latest technology and make music that competes with everything else on the radio – from Top 40 to Adult Contemporary – and still sounds real country."

Braddock agrees. "Whatever Blake sings, he's gonna sound like a country boy," the producer/songwriter says. "And country boys his age grew up listening to AC/DC and the Black Crowes as well as Hank Jr. and Travis Tritt."

Though music has taken him far from Oklahoma, Shelton never sounds like a guy who has lost his way home. And if this country thing doesn't work out, he's got a standing offer back in Iowa at the Timberghost Ranch. During the peak of deer season, they can always use a guide who loves hunting as much as Shelton does.

But don't look for him to be switching jobs any time soon.

"I guess the odds were even more against me making a living in music than in hunting," he says with a laugh. "It sounds really stupid to tell yourself you're going to go to Nashville and become a famous country singer. But as Bobby Braddock told me a couple of years ago, if you want something bad enough, you can make it happen."*

RED HOT MAMA

Sara Evans on spilling coffee, peeling peaches and getting to third base

By the time you read this, Sara Evans will have a new baby. She and her husband chose not to know the sex in advance, but she has detected signs of a female baby. "This pregnancy is so much different from my first," says the mother of a 3-year-old son, Avery. "I was much more sick with this one, and I'm not nearly as big. Though the doctor says that has nothing to do with it being a girl or boy." Her follow-up to her hit album, *Born To Fly*, will be released this summer, and Evans expects to be back on the road after her delivery. During this phone interview, she was rummaging through the bathroom for cold medicine for Avery, who woke up with a nasty cough. And she never missed a beat.

What's the strangest thing Avery has ever put in his mouth? We have a dog named Percy the Road Dog, and the other day Avery had Percy's favorite chew toy in his mouth. But he's not really the type of baby to chew on strange things, so I've been really lucky.

After Avery, did you have difficulty losing the baby weight? No, actually it came off pretty easily. I really cracked down on myself, though. I did the "Weigh Down" diet, which has two principles: Never eat until your stomach growls, and stop when you are full. I had gained 55 pounds with the baby, and then I lost 75 after. I won't gain anywhere near 55 pounds with this baby! With my first, I just thought I could eat whatever I wanted, and I really pampered myself by hardly doing any exercise. I hear a lot of women pack it on with the first baby!

What is the most challenging song you sing? "Show Me The Way To Your Heart" from my current album is really a workout for my vocal cords. "I Could Not Ask For More" is also a tough one because it's so low, and then goes so high. I have to really concentrate, and I don't move around too much when I sing it. I'm really big into sounding in tune; I hate the thought of the audience hearing me sing off-key.

Would you rather be a cat or a dog? I'm more like a dog, because I like companionship and like lots of people around me. I need lots of approval, like a dog does. Maybe I'd be a black lab.

What TV show would you like to guest star on? *Law And Order* is my all-time favorite. I watch all the different versions of *Law And Order* and I love watching the reruns, too. It's an incredible show and I love Jack McCoy. He's so sexy!

Have you learned any new skills in the past year? I just learned how to peel a peach. There's a trick to it. I love peaches, but getting the skin off them is a way to really bring out that peach flavor.

I hear you have a second career in mind as a softball player. I just love playing third base. Is there a professional softball league I could join someday?

Do you eat at the Waffle House? I would eat there anytime, but my husband thinks it's disgusting. He's really into health food and is very picky. He will only eat out at certain places – and they are usually expensive. I haven't eaten at the Waffle House in ... gosh, probably as long as we've been married, which is nine years.

Have you ever considered becoming a vegetarian? No. I grew up on a farm, so it just would not have been possible. I don't believe in cruelty to animals, but I also think it's OK to eat animals. Fried chicken is too good to pass up!

What was your worst experience working as a waitress? Gosh, it's like I've blocked that whole section of my life out! Back when I was waiting tables in Missouri, I had a pot of regular and a pot of decaf – and I dropped the entire tray of hot coffee and scalded a woman's leg. She had on pants, luckily, but she was just furious. I was also scalded, by the way! But it was an accident. Waiting tables is so hard, God bless anyone who does it.

— Kath Hansen



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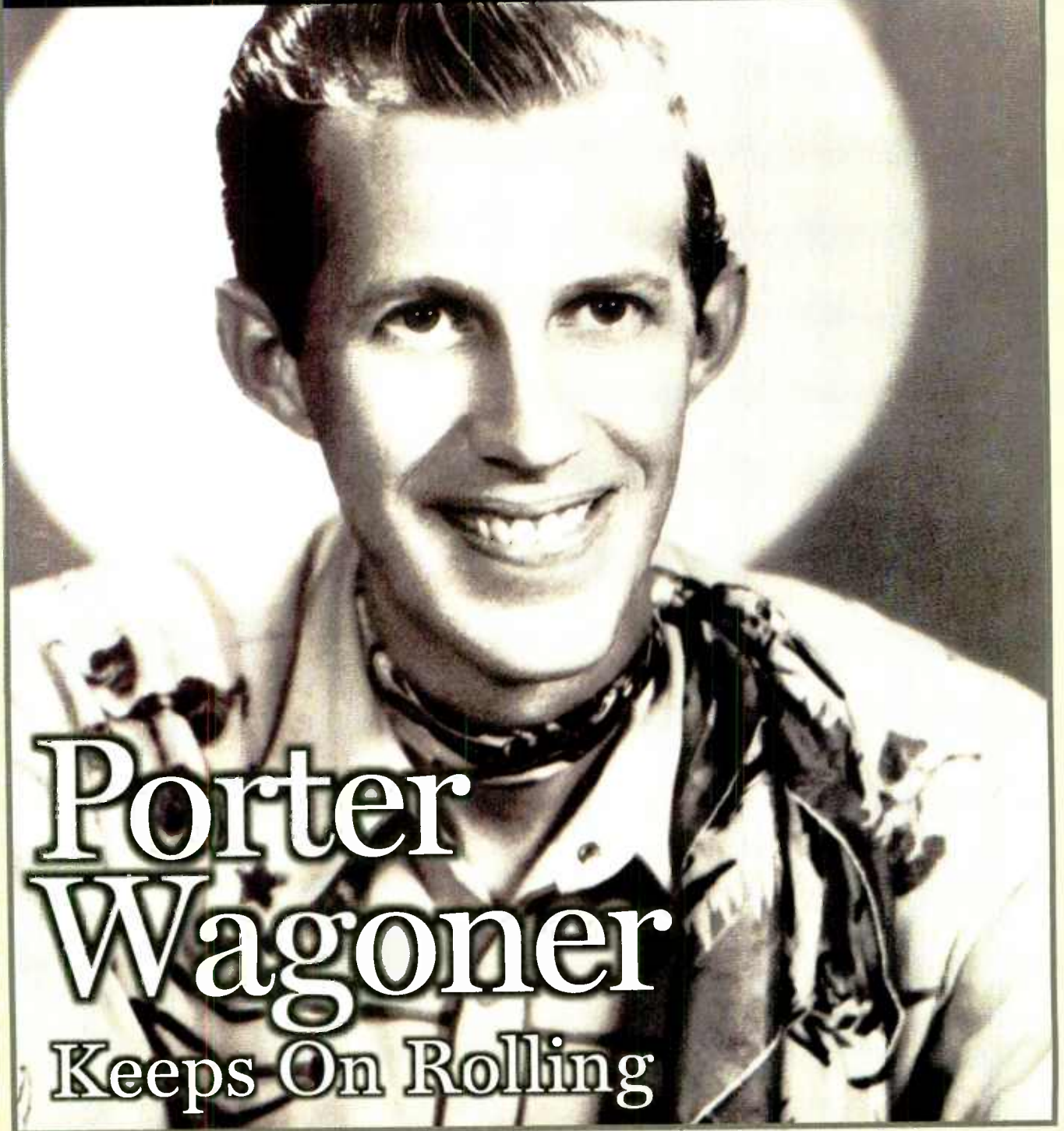
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THE Journal

OF TRADITIONAL COUNTRY MUSIC



Porter
Wagoner
Keeps On Rolling

PRECIOUS MEMORIES FROM THE COUNTRY MUSIC HALL OF FAME AND MUSEUM



Dressed For Excess

A suit custom-designed for Gram Parsons reflects 1960s drug culture

In the late 1960s, a young Gram Parsons appeared at Nudie's Rodeo Tailors shop in North Hollywood. Over the years, sharp-dressed country stars like Webb Pierce and Hank Williams had been snapping up flashy stage costumes made by custom tailor Nudie Cohen, so much so that his rhinestone-embedded, Western-cut suits came to be associated with country music itself.

Drawn by this reputation, Parsons

wanted Nudie to create outfits for his entire band, The Flying Burrito Brothers. Longhaired and gaunt, Parsons looked like a rock 'n' roller, but he was passionate about country music. He and Nudie immediately hit it off.

"I took a special liking to him," the late tailor said of Parsons. "Not only was he one hell of a good songwriter and musician, he was also real smart and a nice boy too. He was a real down-home kind of a guy and he liked to hang around my store and pick the guitar."

The tailor often incorporated an artist's personal symbols into his clothes: Birds of Paradise decorated a Little Jimmy Dickens outfit, and Webb Pierce's had spiderwebs.

Parsons wanted something different. Inspired by his group's song "Sin City," he asked Nudie to make a suit that reflected the culture of the time. Nudie turned the outfit's actual tailoring over to his assistant Manuel, who eventually kept the costuming business alive in Nashville after his mentor's death.

The front of the motorcycle-styled gabardine jacket featured pills, syringes, LSD cubes, nude girls and marijuana leaves. The back glowed with the light of a cross. The flared pants were emblazoned with lips, poppies, flames and silver conches.

The suit mirrored Parsons' music – the form was country, while the message it projected came straight out of rock 'n' roll. Parsons wore the decadent duds on the cover of The Flying



COURTESY OF COUNTRY MUSIC HALL OF FAME AND MUSEUM (3)



Sex, drugs, rock 'n' country: Gram Parsons displayed it all in his Nudie-designed "Sin City" suit, now on display at the Country Music Hall of Fame.

Burrito Brothers' 1969 LP *The Gilded Palace Of Sin*.

The free-spirited Parsons soon left the Burrito Brothers to embark on a solo career, a move cut short after two albums when he died in 1973 from substance abuse.

Protégée Emmylou Harris carried on his musical vision, as did such artists as Southern Pacific, The Desert Rose Band and Dwight Yoakam. As a result, Gram Parsons is now revered as one of the most influential innovators of the country-rock style.

Following his untimely death, the one-of-a-kind suit passed through a number of hands, eventually surfacing in a Los Angeles thrift store. Today the "Sin City" suit is displayed for visitors at the

Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, along with the original Nudie's Rodeo Tailors sign.

— Mark Medley

THE Journal

OF TRADITIONAL COUNTRY MUSIC

Editor Robert K. Oermann

In this issue...

- J2 Country's Hall of Fame**
Country-rock pioneer Gram Parsons wore his vices on his sleeve in an audacious custom-made Nudie suit.
- J3 This Date In Country Music**
- J4 Cover Story: Porter Wagoner**
With a career based on honest – and often gritty – songs, this *Grand Ole Opry* vet has plenty of substance to back up his flashy style.
- J8 Jerry Kennedy**
Though successful as both a producer and label executive, the Nashville veteran always made time to play as a session guitarist.
- J10 The Story Behind The Song**
A powerful movie scene inspired the timeless message of "The Dance."
- J11 Disc-overies**
- J12 Collections**

THIS DATE IN COUNTRY MUSIC

APRIL

April 1
1934 - Jim Ed Brown born
1967 - Country Music Hall of Fame opens

April 2
1947 - Emmylou Harris born

April 3
1928 - Don Gibson born
1948 - First performance of the *Louisiana Hayride* in Shreveport
1961 - Chart debut of Patsy Cline's "I Fall To Pieces"

April 4
1980 - Red Sovine dies
1981 - Chart debut of Oak Ridge Boys' "Elvira"

April 5
1931 - Producer/songwriter Jack Clement born
1967 - Troy Gentry (Montgomery Gentry) born

April 6
1983 - Vernon Dalhart born
1937 - Merle Haggard born
1998 - Tammy Wynette dies

April 7
1935 - Bobby Bare born
2001 - Jessica Andrews gets her first No. 1, "Who I Am"

April 8
1942 - Capitol Records founded
1960 - John Schneider born
2001 - BlackHawk's Van Stephenson dies of cancer



Con Hunley

April 9
1945 - Con Hunley born
1953 - Hal Ketchum born
1994 - Tim McGraw gets his first No. 1 album, *Not A Moment Too Soon*

April 10
1921 - Sheb Wooley born

April 11
1957 - Jim Lauderdale born
1964 - Steve Azar born
1980 - Cousin Emmy dies

April 12
1925 - Ned Miller born
1957 - Vince Gill born
1961 - Marty Robbins wins a Grammy for "El Paso"

April 13
1952 - Mandolinist Sam Bush born
1963 - Bill Anderson's "Still" ascends to No. 1

April 14
1935 - Loretta Lynn born

April 15
1937 - Bob Luman born



Mary Chapin Carpenter

1989 - Mary Chapin Carpenter debuts on the charts with "How Do"

1998 - Rose Maddox dies

April 16
1977 - Waylon Jennings' "Luckenbach, Texas" enters charts.

April 17
1960 - Taxi crash in England kills rockabilly star Eddie Cochran and badly injures Gene Vincent

April 18
1936 - Gene Autry records theme song "Back In The Saddle Again"

April 19
1924 - *National Barn Dance* goes on the air on WLS/Chicago, as prototype radio "barn dance" series
1980 - Ricky Skaggs debuts on the charts with "I'll Take The Blame"

April 20
1969 - Wade Hayes born
1985 - *Grand Ole Opry* debuts as TNN TV show

April 21
1924 - Ira Louvin (Louvin Brothers) born

April 22
1936 - Glen Campbell born
1978 - Kellie Coffey born

April 23
1936 - Roy Orbison born

April 24
1979 - Rebecca Lynn Howard born

April 25
1986 - Ronnie Milsap's *Greatest Hits* gets double-platinum award
1987 - K.T. Oslin's "80's Ladies" enters charts

April 26
1941 - Ernest Tubb records "Walking The Floor Over You"

1971 - Rascal Flatts singer Jay DeMarcus born

April 27
1974 - Charlie Rich rules country album charts with *Very Special Love Songs* at No. 1 and *There Won't Be Anymore* right behind it

April 28
1963 - "Dad" Carter, founder of The Chuck Wagon Gang, dies
1984 - The Judds enter charts with "Mama He's Crazy"

April 29
1925 - Danny Davis born
1992 - Doug Stone undergoes quadruple bypass heart operation

April 30
1925 - Johnny Horton born
1933 - Willie Nelson born
1971 - Carolyn Dawn Johnson born

MAY

May 1
1894 - Old-time *Opry* star Sam McGee born
1967 - Elvis Presley marries Priscilla Beaulieu



Tim McGraw

1967 - Tim McGraw born

May 2
1962 - Ty Herndon born

May 3
1928 - Dave Dudley born
1986 - Dollywood opens
1996 - Patsy Montana dies

May 4
1905 - Honky-tonk star Al Dexter born
1959 - Randy Travis born
1993 - *No Fences* by Garth Brooks is certified for sales of 10 million

May 5
1938 - *Hee Haw* star Roni Stoneman born
1942 - Tammy Wynette born

May 6
1945 - Jimmie Dale Gilmore born
1949 - Delmore Brothers record "Blues Stay Away From Me"

May 7
1894 - Blind old-time star Riley Puckett born

1994 - Martina McBride's "Independence Day" debuts on charts

May 8
1953 - Billy Burnette born
1982 - Willie Nelson's "Always On My Mind" is No. 1 as year's biggest country hit

May 9
1914 - Hank Snow born
1989 - Keith Whitley dies
1999 - Shel Silverstein dies

May 10
1909 - Maybelle Carter born

May 11
1959 - Buck Owens debuts on charts with "Second Fiddle"
1979 - Lester Flatt dies
1996 - Steve Wariner joins *Grand Ole Opry* cast

May 12
1921 - Joe Maphis born
1955 - Kix Brooks (Brooks & Dunn) born
1990 - Travis Tritt gets first No. 1, "Heip Me Hold On"

May 13
1914 - Johnny Wright of Johnny & Jack born
1916 - Jack Anglin of Johnny & Jack born
2000 - "Buy Me A Rose," the comeback single by Kenny Rogers, hits No. 1

May 14
1994 - Shenandoah hits No. 1 with "If Bubba Can Dance"

May 15
1918 - Eddy Arnold born
1941 - K.T. Oslin born

May 16
1981 - George Strait releases his first single, "Unwound"

May 17
1952 - Ray Price debuts on chart with "Talk To Your Heart"

May 18
1942 - Rodney Dillard (The Dillards) born
1952 - George Strait born
1959 - Johnny Horton goes to No. 1 with "The Battle Of New Orleans"

May 19
1940 - Mickey Newbury born
1973 - Tanya Tucker gets her first No. 1, "What's Your Mama's Name"



Tanya Tucker

May 20
1989 - *Killin' Time*, the star-making album by Clint Black, is released

May 21
1988 - Kathy Mattea's "Eighteen Wheels And A Dozen Roses," ascends to No. 1 and later is named CMA Single of the Year

May 22
1998 - Royce Kendall (The Kendalls) dies

May 23
1925 - Mac Wiseman born
1951 - Judy Rodman born
1953 - Jim Reeves debuts on *Grand Ole Opry*

May 24
1947 - Mike Reid born
1980 - Chart debut of *Urban Cowboy* soundtrack



Billy Gilman

1988 - Billy Gilman born

May 25
1936 - Tom T. Hall born
1974 - Melba Montgomery's "No Charge" rises to No. 1
1996 - LeAnn Rimes debuts on chart with "Blue"

May 26
1933 - Jimmie Rodgers, 35, dies of tuberculosis
1949 - Hank Williams Jr. born
1990 - Vince Gill's breakthrough "When I Call Your Name" enters charts

May 27
1939 - Don Williams born

May 28
1945 - Gary Stewart born
1965 - Phil Vassar born

May 29
1916 - Bluegrass star Carl Story born
1952 - Hank and Audrey Williams divorce

May 30
1926 - Johnny Gimble born
1964 - Wynonna Judd born
1966 - Dolly Parton marries Carl Dean

May 31
1938 - Johnny Paycheck born
1986 - Reba goes No. 1 with "Whoever's In New England"
1991 - Randy Travis marries Lib Hatcher

This Wagon Keeps Rolling

At long last, Porter Wagoner is in the Hall of Fame – but he's not done yet

BY HOLLY GEORGE-WARREN

When Porter Wagoner started his career more than a half-century ago, he already owned a distinctive voice, a devotion to hard-country music and an engaging, entertaining way with a crowd.

But he didn't yet have the flashy, \$10,000 suits – the final element in the package that would make Wagoner one of the most instantly recognizable stars of his time.

Wagoner, who joined the Country Music Hall of Fame in October, started out in off-the-rack cowboy shirts and fringe jackets. But while he was starring on *The Ozark Jubilee*, a *Grand Ole*

Opry-style TV program broadcast on ABC in the mid-'50s, he received a visit from "Hollywood tailor to the stars" Nudie Cohen.

"Mr. Nudie showed up there one day at the rehearsal," Wagoner remembers. "He came backstage and introduced himself and said, 'I wanna talk to you a few minutes about your wardrobe.'"

Wagoner wasn't familiar with the colorful, diminutive tailor. But he agreed to talk to him. "He told me, 'I make clothes for movie stars in California. What you've got on looks great, but anything would look great on you

because you're like a mannequin – you're 6 feet 2 inches, slender built' and so forth. 'I wanna make you a suit that when you walk out on the stage, people will just go *ahhhh*.'"

Wagoner was intrigued, but had one concern. "I probably wouldn't be able to afford something like that," he recalls telling Nudie. "And he said, 'I'll make the first one for you for free. Because then if it works, I know I'll be making a lot of them for you throughout your career.'"

Wagoner had just about forgotten the conversation when a box arrived six weeks later. "In it was the most beautiful, peach-colored suit I'd ever seen in my life, and a pair of boots that matched it, and a shirt. The jacket had rhinestones all over it and a covered wagon on the back outlined in rhinestones. It was just unbelievable – you can imagine a country boy seeing something like that! Hell, I just went nuts! My sister said I tried it on *11 times* that day. I'd put it on, go and look at it in the mirror, then take it off, and an hour later I'd do it again."

The suit had a similar impact on audiences. "The first time I wore it on *The Ozark Jubilee*," Wagoner says, "I walked on the stage and people just went 'Wow!' It was that powerful!"

At age 75, Wagoner still possesses that *wow* factor. And it's on display nearly every weekend at the *Grand Ole Opry*, where the singer dazzles crowds as one of the *Opry*'s patriarchal figures and primary ties to its 1950s heyday.

An *Opry* member since 1957, Wagoner holds court Friday and Saturday nights in dressing room No. 14 backstage at the *Opry*. Lean, lanky and sporting a modified version of his signature pompadour, he likes to chat and joke with visitors and musicians during breaks. His spacious dressing room



Wagoner sparkled not only in song but in choice of wardrobe. He was one of the first to sport Nudie suits and rhinestones as a fashion statement. "The suits were a big part of my success," he admits.

His Hall of Fame induction has made Wagoner a satisfied man. "As you get older, you appreciate a lot of things more than when you were rushing by, trying to make a career."



Porter Wagoner

boasts a large walk-in closet, necessitated by Wagoner's wardrobe of sumptuous, bespangled suits now custom-tailored by Manuel, who was trained by the late Nudie Cohen. Wagoner still owns many of his original Nudie suits, too, and he can still fit into them nearly 50 years after they were created.

Wagoner's Hall of Fame induction coincided with the release of a new album of classic country, *Unplugged*, which follows his inspired 2000 effort, *The Best I've Ever Been*. Though most of his original 80 or so albums are out of print, RCA recently released a superb 16-track Wagoner retrospective, *RCA Country Legends*. Its songs range from his first big hit, 1955's "A Satisfied Mind," to his TV show theme song, "Howdy Neighbor Howdy," to one of his spookiest story songs, "The First Mrs. Jones," plus his over-the-top cult classic, "Rubber Room."

At this point in life, Wagoner is riding high and enjoying himself. He learned as a boy, though, that there's a lot of hard work before the fun comes along. Born the youngest of five in rural Missouri to a struggling farmer crippled with arthritis, the youngster quit school at age 15 to toil in the fields.

After the family farm was lost, the Wagoners relocated to nearby West Plains, Mo., where young Porter worked as a grocery store clerk and a meat-cutter. In his spare time, he played guitar and sang gospel and bluegrass songs. His talent didn't go unnoticed, and his boss at Vaughan's Grocery Store sponsored a 15-minute radio show starring his young clerk pitching the store's goods between songs.

Eventually, Wagoner moved to a bigger station in Springfield, Mo., got signed to RCA Records, penned a hit song for Carl Smith (1953's "Trademark") and began appearing on Red Foley's *Ozark Jubilee* television program.

Wagoner's emotive baritone and intriguing story songs – many of them similar to old-time murder ballads updated to honky-tonk settings – earned him numerous hits, including "Misery Loves Company" and "Cold Dark Waters" in 1962. His 1965 smash, "Green Green



Wagoner's tales of the down-and-out on albums like *Skid Row Joe* and *Soul Of A Convict* struck a real-life chord with fans, and he also hit the right notes with Dolly Parton (above), who became his most famous duet partner. Together, Wagoner and Parton won three CMA Awards and scored 13 Top 10 hits.



Grass Of Home" was later turned into a pop hit by Tom Jones.

Wagoner mixed singing and narration to deliver morbidly fascinating lyrics detailing the downfall of gamblers, cuckolds, cheaters, murderers and winos in such hits as "Skid Row Joe," "The Cold Hard Facts Of

Life," "The Carroll County Accident" and "Confessions Of A Broken Man."

His compassionate portrayals of life's losers struck a personal chord with many listeners. "I've had some wonderful compliments from fans who've written me letters that said they were about to commit suicide and they heard some song I'd done that saved their life," he says. "That's pretty touching when you get down to it."

Wagoner is perhaps best known for his syndicated TV program, *The Porter*

Wagoner Show, which ran for an astonishing 21 years, from 1960 to 1981. He considers it his greatest contribution to country music. "I think my television show alone was enough to put me in the Hall of Fame," he says. "I had almost everybody who is anyone in country music during those years on that show with me. It got country music to people who never would've gotten to see it. It was an honest show. It wasn't a bunch of hype, it wasn't slick. There were mistakes made, but it was fun."

From the beginning, he shared the spotlight with his band, The Wagonmasters,

Wagoner made a huge contribution to country's popularity with his syndicated TV program, *The Porter Wagoner Show*, which ran for 21 years and showcased the format's biggest stars. "It got country music to people who never would've gotten to see it," he proudly declares.

and a female singing partner, starting with Oklahoma's Norma Jean, followed by Dolly Parton in 1967. In those days, women struggled as second-class citizens in country music, and Wagoner had to put his own royalties on the line

to convince RCA to sign Parton.

"I just thought [the female artists] should be equal to the men," he says. "Back at that time, the girls hadn't sold records like the guys had because [the labels] didn't promote 'em as much. When Dolly became part of my show and was really great, I tried to get them to have her host the [CMA] awards show. They thought that was completely out of the question. Later on, they were beginnin' to have her."

Wagoner's TV empire expanded from an initial 18 stations to more than 100 syndicated outlets. Besides giving country music a national forum, the show also hipped fans to the flamboyant suits favored by the show's host. Marty Stuart, for one, recalls that when he joined Lester Flatt's band at

age 13, his goal was "to buy me a Porter Wagoner suit."

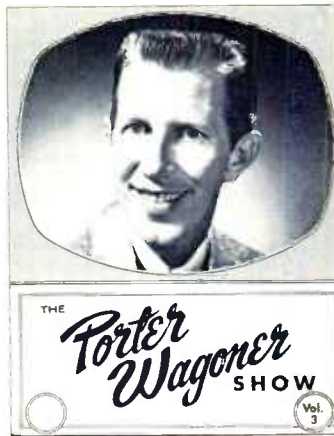
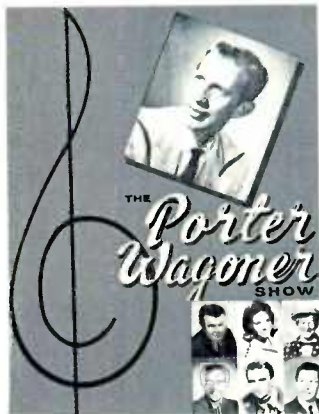
Fans deserve a star who dresses up for them, Wagoner believes. "I wouldn't pay \$12,000 for a suit if I didn't feel like it was worth it to the fans. The suits were a big part of my success."

While Wagoner remains a devoted member of the Opry, he stopped recording for most of the '80s and '90s. He came back after a 17-year absence to record *The Best I've Ever Been* in 2000 because an old friend, Damon Black, wrote an entire album of songs for him, and Wagoner liked the songs so much that he felt compelled to record them.

After that experience, Wagoner was eager to return to the studio for 2002's *Unplugged*. He called Willie Nelson to see if he'd join in on a couple of tracks. The two legends recorded Nelson's gospel-tinged "Family Bible" plus "Silver Eagle Meets The Great Speckled Bird."

For Wagoner, the chance to make music with an old buddy was part of the joy of making the record.

"Willie pulled up in his bus and parked," Wagoner recalls. "I went out and visited with him for about 15 minutes, and he said, 'Let's quit talkin' about it and go do it!' That was a wonderful time for me with him. As you get older, you appreciate friends more. You appreciate a lot of things more than when you were rushing by, trying to make a career and trying to make a living." 🌟



Both Sides Of The Glass

Jerry Kennedy became a top record executive, but with (guitar) strings attached



Meeting a fan in the '50s

Jerry Kennedy wouldn't give up his day job. True, he was a successful executive for Mercury Records, recruiting such illustrious stars as Tom T. Hall and The Statler Brothers. At the same time he thrived as a record producer, helping shape hits by Roger Miller, Ray Stevens, Faron Young and Jerry Lee Lewis, among others.

Yet he regularly moonlighted as a studio guitarist, picking out flawless chord progressions on sessions for Elvis Presley, Bob Dylan, Ringo Starr and hundreds of others. Even as he became one of Nashville's most respected record producers, Kennedy couldn't quite put down his Gibson guitar.

"I never really left the musician's side of the glass," chuckles Kennedy. "Maybe it's because I didn't ever want to think of myself as 'the producer.' I'd always just walk in as one of the guys."

Born in 1940 and raised in Shreveport, La., Kennedy acquired an interest in music early. By age 11, he was on his way to becoming an ace guitarist. While attending Byrd High School, Kennedy met country-music impresario Tillman Franks, who got him a slot on the *Louisiana Hayride* backing rising honky-tonk star Johnny Horton, among others.

Through Franks, he met Shelby Singleton, a promotion executive for Mercury who offered Kennedy a job as a talent scout for the record company. But Kennedy

didn't exactly jump at the opportunity.

"At the time, the Nashville explosion was still about a year off," he notes. "Naturally, I had some misgivings about leaving Shreveport, which I absolutely loved."

As added incentive, Mercury agreed to let Kennedy work on the side as a session musician while maintaining the A&R job. He moved to Music City in 1961.

Working out of Owen Bradley's Quonset Hut studio and RCA's Studio B, Kennedy joined the ranks of great session guitarists like Ray Edenton, Harold Bradley and Grady Martin. "I was 20, walking into a room with all these big guns," says Kennedy of his A-team peers. "It was incredible - pretty intimidating, too. If



Bringing a rocker's sensibility to country's Music Row, Kennedy evolved from session guitarist to producer.

you blew your part, it blew the whole take. It was real pressure - but I actually enjoyed that aspect of those sessions."

A disciple of Chuck Berry and Scotty Moore, Kennedy brought a rocker's sensibility to Music Row, becoming one of the first guitarists in Nashville to experiment with amp distortion.

"Guys like Grady and Hank Garland were these great, clean players," Kennedy says. "Then there I was with my Gibson, sounding like I was beating on barbed wire! But it worked - particularly when somebody wanted something that was a little different sounding."

The distinctive descending Dobro notes in Jeannie C. Riley's 1968 smash "Harper Valley P.T.A." are Kennedy's. He's also on Bob Dylan's famed *Blonde On Blonde* album of 1966.

Among the hundreds of sessions he worked on, a few stand out, including one from the summer of 1964 when Roy Orbison recorded the milestone "Oh, Pretty Woman," with its timelessly distinctive guitar hook.

"I remember Roy coming in and playing us that lick while we were tuning up," says Kennedy. "[But] in the process of rehearsing the song, we accidentally altered a few of the notes. But evidently Roy didn't mind, because we ended up doing it like that. I suggested that we play the part together - me, Billy Sanford and Roy, in unison. Boy, was that a fun record to make!"

Kennedy evolved from session guitarist

to producer by assisting Singleton in the studio. "I was really uncomfortable with the whole idea at first. But eventually it got me thinking about working on the other side of the glass, just from watching Shelby. And the more I did it, the more I fell in love with it."

Scoring a Top 5 single on his first production effort with Rex Allen's 1962 smash "Don't Go Near The Indians" didn't hurt. "I thought, 'Hey man, this is easy,'" Kennedy says, then breaks into a grin. "Shows you how ignorant I was."

In 1969, Mercury promoted him to head the Nashville office. It took another few years before Kennedy finally began limiting his session work to his own productions.

"It's funny, but I just didn't want to let it go," says Kennedy, who frequently cranked out five four-hour sessions a day. "And that 1 a.m. session wasn't exactly a favorite under any circumstances! Guys like Elvis and Bob Dylan were really into recording at that hour, but it's tough to shine at three in the morning after you've been at it all day long!"

During his 20-plus years at Mercury, Kennedy discovered and produced such stars as Reba McEntire and Johnny Rodriguez. His production touch is also on discs by such diverse artists as George Burns, Brook Benton, Patti Page and Charlie Rich. Kennedy left Mercury in 1984 and launched his own label, JK Productions.

All three of his sons followed Kennedy into music. Bryan, a singer/songwriter, has opened for Garth Brooks. Shelby is a record producer. Gordon, also a songwriter, co-wrote Eric Clapton's Grammy-winning 1996 hit, "Change The World."

Kennedy, though proud of their accomplishments, believes the world his boys toil in could use a little changing.

"I really miss hearing those productions that had a 'personality' - where each musician had an identifiable sound," he muses. "Used to be that you could tell a Chet record from an Owen record, and you could distinguish Hank Garland's playing from Grady Martin's."

"Nowadays, these guys don't even have the luxury of all working together in the studio at the same time. That's too bad, because you can't begin to describe the importance of sitting there and feeding off each other during a session, when just the slightest bit of eye contact can make you do something really great. I just wish my kids could experience some of that today." ♦



"I really miss productions that had a personality," says Kennedy (here in the '60s), "where each musician had an identifiable sound."

THE STORY
BEHIND
THE SONG

“The Dance”

Written by Tony Arata



“The
Dance”

BY TONY ARATA

Looking back on the memory of
The dance we shared
'neath the stars above
For a moment
all the world was right
How could I have known that
you'd ever say goodbye

And now I'm glad I didn't know
The way it all would end
The way it all would go
Our lives are better
left to chance
I could have missed the pain
But I'd have had
to miss the dance

Holding you I held everything
For a moment wasn't I a king
But if I'd only known how the
king would fall
Hey, who's to say, you know I
might have changed it all

And now I'm glad I didn't know
The way it all would end
The way it all would go
Our lives are better
left to chance
I could have missed the pain
But I'd have had
to miss the dance

Yes my life is better
left to chance
I could have missed the pain
But I'd have had
to miss the dance

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Morganactive Songs Inc.

Tony Arata got the idea for “The Dance” from the '80s movie *Peggy Sue Got Married*, but it wasn't a dance scene that inspired him. It was an emotional moment between Kathleen Turner, as a grown woman who has traveled back in time to her teenage years, and Nicolas Cage, as the high school sweetheart who became her husband.

“She's being asked to marry him again,” Arata recalls. “This time she's sitting there from the perspective of knowing how dreadful it all turned out. She says ‘No.’ There's a locket around her neck and her kids' picture is starting to fade.”

The scene stuck with Arata. “It's the realization that you don't get to pick and choose your memories, and it's a good thing that you don't.”

The next day Arata pulled out an old song with a melody he liked and a lyric he didn't, revising it into “The Dance.”

He made a recording in his basement on a boom box, and then went back to his daily routine, loading boxes for UPS by day and playing all the open-mike nights in Nashville's songwriter clubs by night.

At the time, Arata was between careers in the music business. The Savannah, Ga., native had a promising start as a songwriter in 1983, when Jim Glaser scored a Top 20 hit with his “The Man In The Mirror” on the independent Noble Vision label. That led to a solo album for Arata on Noble Vision in 1984, but neither of his two single releases made it as far as the Top 50.

“I felt as awkward making that record as anything I've ever done,” he says. “I was in a studio filled with incredible players who were probably wondering the same thing I was: ‘What is this guy doing here?’”

Looking back on that disappointment, he applies the same philosophy that he expressed in “The Dance.” “In all honesty, I'm very grateful nothing ever came of it. Had it done anything, it may have altered the course of me moving here as a songwriter, which is really all I ever wanted to be.”

By 1986, when Arata and his wife Jaymi moved to Nashville from Thunderbolt, Ga., he was an unknown again. He worked his way up from the open-mike nights to scheduled spots on writers' showcases. After he sang “The Dance” at the Bluebird Cafe one night, another songwriter playing on the same show told Arata if he ever got a record deal he wanted to do that song.

“He was selling boots and I was loading trucks,” Arata recalls. “I appreciated the vote of confidence, but I didn't think much would come of it.”

Arata's songwriter friend, an Oklahoman named Garth Brooks, eventually did get a record deal, of course, and called Arata's publishing company for a demo recording of “The Dance.” Arata still had only his homemade boom-box version, so that's what he delivered.

“There were people who had heard me play that song,”

he says. “Some were a bit disappointed that a new artist was going to do it, because they didn't expect much to come of a new artist.”

By the time “The Dance” was released in 1990, no one was questioning Arata's decision. Brooks already had a No. 1 and a No. 2 single, and his poignant video of “The Dance” helped push the song to No. 1, where it stayed for three weeks. It garnered a Grammy nomination and Song of the Year honors from the Academy of Country Music.

Arata went on to write the No. 1 hits “Dreaming With My Eyes Open” by Clay Walker, and the Top 5 hits “I'm Holding My Own” by Lee Roy Parnell and “Here I Am” by Patty Loveless, plus songs on 11 Garth Brooks albums.

Still, that first one is a special memory.

“I've seen Garth fly through the Astrodome, but I still think of him as a songwriter,” Arata says. “That's the biggest compliment I could be paid, that another songwriter gave up a spot on his record for one of my songs.”

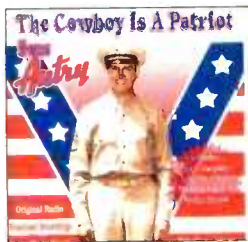
— Walter Carter



Tony
Arata

NEW AGAIN

NOTEWORTHY DISCOVERIES



GENE AUTRY

The Cowboy Is A Patriot

(Varese Sarabande)

The sound quality isn't flawless, but then again, these are vintage radio broadcasts. And for my money, it's worth the sonic sacrifice to have this wonderful window into the mood of the nation during World War II.

Autry was among the country stars who enlisted during the conflict. He also did his part by coloring his *Melody Ranch* radio show with patriotic material. Included are his performances of "Private Buckaroo," "Any Bonds Today," "There's A Star Spangled Banner Waving Somewhere," "Praise The Lord And Pass The Ammunition," "This Is The Army Mr. Jones," "Comin' In On A Wing And A Prayer" and the like.

That's not all – you get the commercials, too. His sponsor, Doublemint Gum, tailored its ads to make it sound as if it was our duty as Americans to chew gum on the job. Other spots are about recruitment, voluntary induction and such.

As an added bonus, the CD contains a mini-drama explaining "Why Gene Enlisted" and his actual swearing in to the U.S. Air Force by Col. Herbert F. Shaffer. Great stuff.

HARRY CHOATES

Devil In The Bayou

(Bear Family, 2 CDs)

The man who popularized the Cajun country standard "Jole Blon" is somewhat of a cult figure among country historians. Choates (1922–1951) was a brilliant fiddler and guitarist who blended blues, Western swing, Cajun and country elements into a unique hillbilly-jazz style. He was also a raging alcoholic who died grie-



somely at age 28 in a Texas jail, hallucinating and banging his head against the bars in the throes of withdrawal.

These two CDs document the bulk of his recording career – 47 sides recorded for the Gold Star label of Houston between 1946 and 1950. The company's technological capabilities were crude, but Choates' energy and fire shine through nonetheless.

Both his English and French versions of "Jole Blon" are here, but so are some wonderful, obscure cuts. "Harry Choates Special" is a dazzling jam session. "Devil In The Bayou" features furious fiddling punctuated by shrieks and maniacal laughter. Choates was one of the first white musicians to cover "Good Rockin' Tonight" (which he titled "Have You Heard The



VARIOUS ARTISTS

Time-Life's Treasury Of Bluegrass

(Time Life Music/Universal, 2 CDs)

You say you want all your bluegrass favorites together in one package? Well, step right up, because this is probably

News"). Also noteworthy are his bluesy renditions of "I'm Gonna Move To The Outskirts Of Town" and "Milk Cow Blues" (retitled "Old Cow Blues"), not to mention "The Right Key (But The Wrong Keyhole)" (retitled "Wrong Keyhole"). Also included are the 10 sides Choates recorded for Bluebird in 1940 as a member of Happy Fats and his Rayne-Bo Ramblers.

This reissue is also important for its outstanding booklet, a 100-page essay and discography by Andrew Brown. His research strips away many of the mysteries surrounding Harry Choates, bringing one of country's most fascinating characters to light at last. Highly recommended.

JIMMY WAKELY

The Singing Cowboy

(Varese Sarabande)

Wakely (1914–1982) was among the most pop-oriented of all the singing cowboys. His smooth baritone bore no

as close as you're going to get. The Osborne Brothers are present with both "Rocky Top" and "Ruby, Are You Mad." Bill Monroe's "Footprints In The Snow," "Blue Moon Of Kentucky," "New Mule Skinner Blues" and "Kentucky Waltz" are included, as is the Ricky Skaggs revival of Monroe's "Uncle Pen."

Ralph Stanley and Jim & Jesse are rather shortchanged, though. Each gets only one track while Mac Wiseman gets

two. Flatt & Scruggs are scantily represented as well, with only "Foggy Mountain Breakdown" and "Ballad Of Jed Clampett." Jimmy Martin's signature "Sunny Side Of The Mountain" is here, though.

All in all, it's a decent overview of the genre – Alison Krauss, Del McCoury, Larry Sparks, The Country Gentlemen, The Seldom Scene, J.D. Crowe and The Johnson Mountain Boys are among those touched upon.



Wakely's occasional whistling during the songs is also a plus.

MERLE TRAVIS

The Very Best: The Shasta Masters

(Varese Sarabande)

Country Music Hall of Famer Travis (1917–1983) recorded the original versions of many of these songs for Capitol. A decade later, he sang

trace of his Oklahoma upbringing, and most of his big hits were duets with pop chanteuse Margaret Whiting.

After his silver screen stardom of the 1940s faded, he starred in his own radio show, the source of most of these performances, in the mid-1950s. His uptown accompaniment included muted horns, accordion, organ, female harmonies and tasteful guitar.

He makes his way through familiar cowboy material ("Tumbling Tumbleweeds," "The Yellow Rose Of Texas" and the like) with rather dull results. But every now and then he enlivens a lesser-known gem such as "It's A Lonely Trail," "The Trail To Mexico" or "Lonely Is The Hunter."



them again on Jimmy Wakely's radio show of the mid-1950s, which is what you hear here. The performances are engaging, informal and relaxed. Travis' three guitar instrumentals are super. For the famous versions, though, buy his hits reissue on Capitol Records. Turn to this one to learn what he sounded like live.

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.

COMMENTS

I am looking for an LP by Ernest Ray Lynn and would be happy to trade for it.

Nora Stanley
600 Willis Ave.
Fairbank, PA 15435

WANTED

I am looking for any video tapes or films of Bob Wills performing on any TV shows.

Carlton Miller
P.O. Box 324
Tate, GA 30177

I am looking for music by Ray Pillow, especially the song "One Too Many Memories On My Mind." Also looking for Rodney Crowell's "Please Remember Me" from his 1995 CD *Jewel Of The South*. Also looking for music by Rhonda Vincent, especially the song "I'm Not Over You."

Wanda Owen
P.O. Box 254
Paris, AR 72855

EDITOR'S NOTE: *The Ray Pillow and Rodney Crowell discs are out of print. Vincent's song, however, can be found on her 2001 CD The Storm Still Rages.*

I lost my complete collection of Cal Smith tapes. I also lost three George Jones tapes - *Bartender's Blues*, *The Battle* and *Memories Of Us*. I'll be glad to pay someone to tape them for me.

Marlene Bidwell
4183 Autumn Trail
Nekoosa, WI 54457-8304

I'm trying to find some music by Red Garrett. He had three or four albums in the 1950s-1960s. He sounded a lot like Hank Williams.

Al Baisley
P.O. Box 82
Highland Mills, NY 10930

I'm looking for the new book on Jim Reeves.

Dale Reed
135 Oak Grove Rd.
Loudon, TN 37774-7533

EDITOR'S NOTE: Like *A Moth To A Flame: The Jim Reeves Story* by Michael Streissguth was published in 1998 by Rutledge Hill Press. The book is no longer listed on the company's website, but you can write Rutledge Hill at 501 Nelson

Pl., Nashville, TN 37214. In early 2002, songwriter Mitchell Torok evidently self-published Jim Reeves, Me And Mexican Joe. Details can be found at johnreves.com, the website of the singer's nephew.

I am hoping someone has a copy or a cassette of Red Foley's "Beyond The Sunset." A lot of artists sang it, but I would sure love to have it by him.
Verna Hoffman
Rt. 8, Box 15044
Donna, TX 78537

I have been looking for a record or the lyrics of a song by Tennessee Ernie Ford called "Hick Town."
Jo Ann B. Cordova
8405 7th Avenue
Hersperia, CA 92345

All my mother wanted for her 80th birthday was the song "Saving Up Coupons." She doesn't know who sang it.

Rita Gardner
377 E. Dyke St.
Weillsville, NY 14895.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Old-time string band leader J.E. Mainer had a song by this title, but it does not appear to have been reissued on either LP or CD by Mainer's Mountaineers. Readers?*

I am looking for Faron Young movies or interviews, as well as his last three singles on MCA Records. Also any old magazine articles on Faron.

John Morris
651 Orpington Rd.
Peterborough, Ontario
CANADA K9J 4A5

I'm looking for the song "Until I Met You" by Judy Rodman.

Charles H. Lynch
336 Broadway Ave.
Montreal, Quebec
CANADA H1B 5A8

I am looking for "Kentucky" by Johnny & Jack.

Robert Colwell
Box 785
Lomita Ranch
Hebbronville, TX 78361

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Although just about every other duo recorded Karl & Harty's "Kentucky," I can't find any evidence that Johnny & Jack ever did. The Blue Sky Boys, The Louvin Brothers, Osborne*

Brothers and Everly Brothers all have it available on CD.

Dottie West and/or Mark Gray sang a song called "When I Look Beyond The River" on a TNN TV show that aired shortly after her death. I want a record, cassette, CD or VHS with this song. I have searched everywhere.

Delores Brown
137 N. Cedar Dr.
Greenwood, SC 29649

I am looking for "Wrong" by Waylon Jennings.

Willene Wheeler
5460 Brooks Lane
Loganville, GA 30052

EDITOR'S NOTE: *This song appeared on the out-of-print Jennings' 1990 CD The Eagle. Check used-record shops and online sites.*

Looking for Buddy Holly memorabilia (pictures, fan magazines, etc.).
Ms. Robin Coffman
103 Whitelaw
East Alton, IL 62024

Greetings from Belize. Will someone find me good country singers who will be interested in buying poems/songs to sing?

Ann Requena
No. 1 Fabers Rd., Apt. 15
Belize City, Belize
Central America

QUESTIONS

Does anyone know of any film or video of the late country singers The Delmore Brothers?

T.L. "Red" Rowland
455 Rowland Ct.
Shumate Park
Bartow, FL 33830-6412.

"Rose Of My Heart" was recorded by Johnny Rodriguez and by Nicolette Larson. On what albums would I find it?

Alice A. Laing
205 Third Ave. E.
Havana, FL 32333-1423.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *The song can be found on the Rodriguez LP Foolin' With Fire (Epic Records, 1984), on the Larson LP Rose Of My Heart (MCA Records, 1986). It's not in print, so you'd have to find it in a used record store or online. Or you can find it by the bluegrass band Illrd Tyme Out on a 1999 CD*

titled John & Mary or by the song's composer, Hugh Moffatt, on his 1989 album Troubadour.

FOR SALE

I have Gentleman Jim Reeves' picture in good condition. Also Hank Williams and a lot of Elvis pictures, all in good condition. I had them for many years in a scrapbook with clear covers on them.

Glennie Moree
1920 Bowater Dr. #D-10
Kingsport, TN 37600

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Jack Camburn
498 Hull St.
Boyne City, MI 49712

Lots of magazine articles and clippings on many actors, country music stars, sports stars and others. Selling cheap. Send a list of your fave people for a price list.

R. G. Sturgill
755 Stewart Brand Rd., Box 5
Pineville, KY 40977-1806

Many *Country Music* magazines and *Journals*. Also earlier country LPs from Acuff to Hank Williams Jr. Send your want list.

Robert Johnson
914 Larson St.
Knoxville, IA 50138

Large Dwight Yoakam memorabilia collection for sale. Write for a list of contents.

C. Staal
9202-101 Ave.
Grand Prairie, Alberta
CANADA T8V-0W3.

Elvis Presley record and album cover that pictures Elvis at age 5 and his parents.

Phyllis Ciannilli
566 Forest St.
Kearny, NJ 07032

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Slice of Heaven

Is there anything more divine than pie for dessert?

Southerners love their pie. And people from the world over love the many creative ways Southerners bake them.

"We have eaten key lime pies in Florida, wild blackberry pies in Oregon, blueberry pies in Maine and sour cream raisin pies in Iowa," write authors Jane and Michael Stern, noted experts on classic American cuisine, in their book *Goodfood*. "But the place we like eating pies best is the South."

John Egerton, author of *Southern Food*, agrees. "The South certainly doesn't have a monopoly on outstanding pies," he writes, "but it does generate a major share of the pie-making energy."

Indeed, a panoply of classic pies are closely identified with Southern cuisine – including pecan, buttermilk, chocolate, lemon, key lime, sweet potato and, of course, the inherently Southern chess pie.

The origin of the latter's name has long been open to speculation, but some believe it can be traced to Civil War times. Southern ladies, forced to feed the Union troops, would use their dwindling rations to create a pie simply from eggs, butter, cream and sugar. "What kind of pie is this?" the obliged soldiers would ask. The answer "just pie," delivered in a self-effacing Southern drawl that turned the word *just* into something more like *jess*, was heard by the Yankees as – you guessed it – "chess pie."

At The Belle Meade Buffet Cafeteria, a Nashville institution that has served classic Southern food for 40 years, dessert is first *and* last. Customers who line up for fried chicken, catfish, turnip greens, cornbread and other Southern fare are first dazzled by a colorful arrangement of sweets proudly showing off their undeniably tempting virtues. Foremost amid the cakes and puddings stands an astounding assortment of pies.

If calorie counters resist the desserts at the start, they are tempted with an



encore performance at the end of the serving line, where another seductive display of creamy, nutty, puffy, gooey, sugary treats awaits.

Jim Yates has been baking pies at the Belle Meade Cafeteria for 20 years. For his lemon-icebox pie – a truly beautiful creation – Yates starts with a crust that combines crushed graham crackers, melted margarine and his secret

A panoply of classic pies are closely associated with Southern cuisine

ingredient, crushed pecans. With his fingers, he spreads the mixture across the bottom and up the sides of a pie tin. For the filling, he whisks together three egg yolks, a 14-ounce can of sweetened condensed milk and a half cup of fresh lemon juice.

The tricky part is the topping, and he's a tad more circumspect with his methods. "I use three egg whites and stabilizer," Yates explains. "I whip up the egg whites, until the volume comes up by about three quarters. Then I pour in just enough sugar syrup in a steady stream, while beating. If it's just right, you throw it on top – one handful per pie – and it just spreads out into place. If it's too thin, it will run. If it's too thick, you'll

have to pat it down too much. Use your hands to make sure it covers all the lemon filling, then put it in the oven for about 12 minutes. Keep it in the icebox till you're ready to eat it."

Fruit pies are more common in the North than the South, where peaches and berries are more likely to show up in cobblers. But sweet potatoes are another story. DreamWorks artist Chalee Tennison

loves sweet potato pie. "Is there anything more Southern than sweet potato pie?" she asks.

About five years ago, the dark-haired singer and mother of three decided that making her own sweet potato pie would be part of her Christmas holiday tradition.

"I experimented a lot until I came up with what *we* think is the perfect sweet potato pie," Tennison says. "I bake the sweet potatoes, then mix 'em up with egg, cream, nutmeg and cinnamon. I serve it at home warm with whipped cream, and I take it to people's houses when we visit. I only make them during the holidays. That's what makes them so special!"

— Kay West

Back and Blue

With his Shenandoah hits behind him, Marty Raybon returns to his bluegrass roots

Ask Marty Raybon how bluegrass has influenced him, and the answer you get may not be what you're expecting. "The drive to keep going," the singer says. "Bill Monroe was never willing to quit, and that drive – the feeling that 'I love this, and it's going to be part of my life' – became part of me."

Raybon first acquired that drive as a teen, singing with his father and brothers in the American Bluegrass Express, one of Florida's most popular bluegrass groups in the late '70s. It sustained him through the late '80s and early '90s, when his mainstream country band, Shenandoah, piled up chart-topping hits like "Church On Cumberland Road" and "Next To You, Next To Me."

He's relying on it again today as he hits the road in support of his new CD, aptly titled *Full Circle*. It's a hard-core bluegrass project that mixes his own compositions with classics from Bill Monroe, Flatt & Scruggs and a favorite from his youthful days, the irrepressible Jimmy Martin.

Full Circle shows Raybon's comfort with the bluegrass tradition as well as the sophistication of more contemporary material. When he needed a duet partner for the tender "Everything," Raybon turned to a singer with the same vocal range.

"I always said, if I ever do a duet, I'm going to see if Sonya Isaacs will do it," Raybon says. "When some wonderful friends and I wrote this song, I knew it was the right one to sing with her, especially since she sings so much gospel music with her family. It sounds like a love song, but it's about the Lord."

Raybon, who recorded a gospel album in 1995, sees his new effort as following in the same spirit of performing music close to his heart.

"A bluegrass album is something that was burning in my spirit to do," he says.

Musicians on the album include two who worked with Jimmy Martin – banjo player Dave Talbot and bassist Terry Smith – as well as award-winning guitarist Bryan Sutton, fresh from his work on the Dixie Chicks' *Home*.

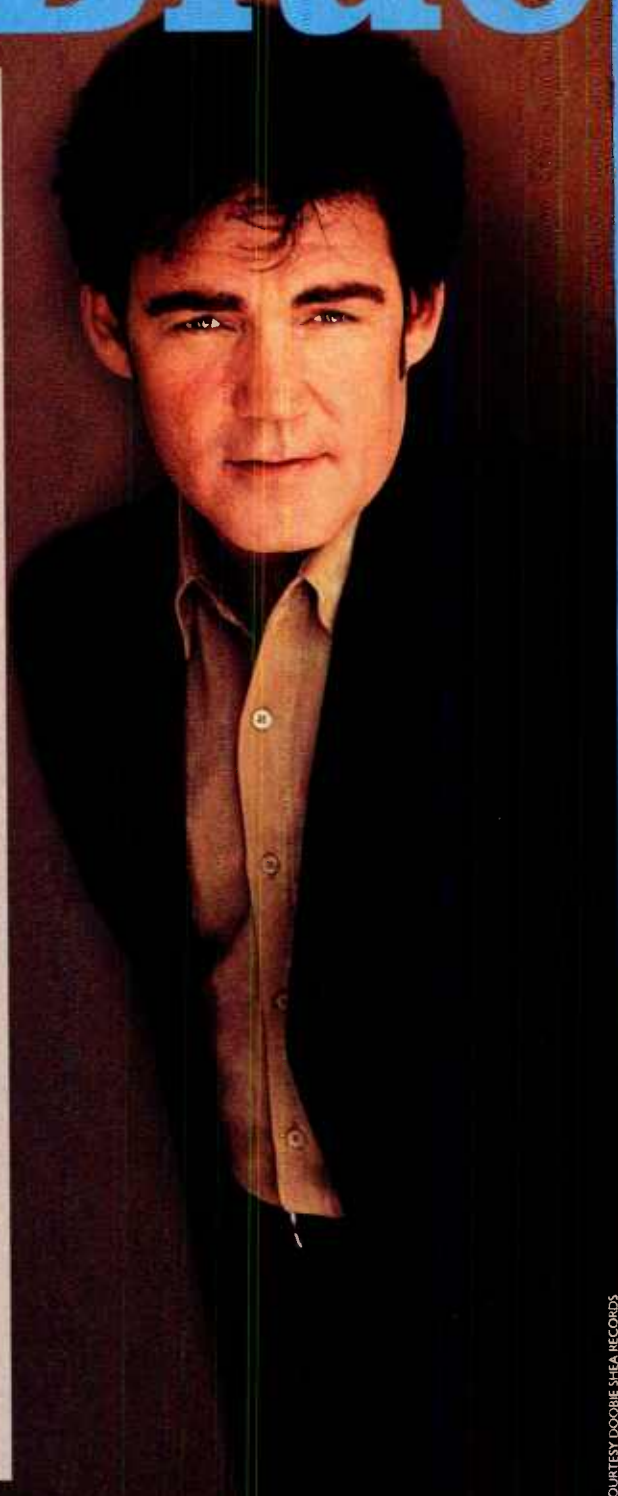
With an equally talented lineup backing him on tour, Raybon explains what continues to drive him. "I don't want to just play great bluegrass music – although one of the great things about bluegrass is that's all you need to do for people to love you. I want to entertain people."

— Jon Weisberger



With Shenandoah in the mid-'90s

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Tat & S

Still a rebel at 63,
the outrageous **David Allan Coe**
finds continued
success outside
the mainstream

toos cars

BY JEFF WALL



ANDREW BRUCE / NORTHWEST VISUAL MEDIA LTD.

When David Allan Coe returned briefly to Columbia Records in the late '90s, he noticed at least one change from the dozen odd years he spent with the company more than a decade earlier.

"There's a sign there now that says **MOTORCYCLE PARKING**," Coe recalls, his mood as serious as ever but his eyes flashing irony and humor. "It used to be that they would have a fit when I would ride my motorcycle over there. All the things I did 20 years ago have become cool to do now."

Well, not necessarily.

Country music still doesn't herald many biker-affiliated ex-jailbirds who claim to have killed another man. Nor does it tend to favor singers who sport one tattoo for every day of the year (that's right, 365 – somewhere or another), over-the-shoulder hair and a beaded, braided gray beard.

Nor will you find many who once lived in a cave, recorded X-rated albums or joined the Mormon faith simply to practice polygamy with as many as seven wives at a time.

Motorcycle-parking signs on Music Row or not, there's still only one David Allan Coe.

"How do you describe David to people who have never met him?" asks singer/songwriter Billy Joe Shaver, who has known Coe for more than 30 years. "A carnival with every ride running."

At age 63 – and 35 years after he released his first recording – Coe may be more popular than ever. He performs more than 200 shows a year and sells out most of them. His greatest-hits CDs have sold more than a million copies and continue to be among the most popular older country albums in the Columbia catalog. And recent albums like 2002's *Live From The Iron Horse Saloon: Bikttoberfest '01* have done brisk business.

He may have just reached retirement age, but there's no slowing down now. "I don't see any reason to quit," Coe says wryly. "I haven't quit being productive. I still sing good. I still write good. I still draw big crowds – big as ever."

Besides, he adds, "I pay child support of \$8,000 a month. I don't know anything else I could do where I'd make enough money to meet my obligations."

Coe got a boost in recent years from the support of an unlikely cast of famous fans, including rock star Kid Rock, his partner Uncle Kracker and the heavy metal band Pantera, all of whom have written songs and recorded with Coe. Kid Rock also took Coe out as his opening act for an extended tour of arena and outdoor concerts.

"During Kid Rock's show, about halfway through he would ask his audience, 'What do you think of this outlaw country music stuff?'" Coe recalls. "Then he would sing my song, 'You Never Even Call Me By My Name,' and midway into it I would walk out and finish the song with him."

The audience always responded ecstatically – even shouting out a climactic lyric that proved they knew Coe's song as well as his image. "We'd get near the end of the song, and I would ask the audience what happened, and they would all scream, '*She got runned over by a damned old train!*'"

Kid Rock loved the moment as much as his crowd, partly because it proved how wrong the people were who said he shouldn't put Coe on his concert bill. "Kid Rock's management and all of his people said, 'Man, you're crazy taking that old country-and-western singer on tour with you. Nobody's gonna know who he is.'"

David Allan Coe

But they do, even if Coe is never heard on the radio or seen on TV. "I don't think radio has ever really been a deciding factor with David Allan Coe," he says. "I've had some success on radio, but it's never been the backbone of my existence. Personal appearances and songwriting have been. Touring is pretty much how I've made my living all these years."

When Coe mentions songwriting as a source of income, he's referring only to those he's written in the last decade or so. The copyrights to all the early hits he wrote for other singers, including "Take This Job And Shove It" for Johnny Paycheck and "Would You Lay With Me (In A Field Of Stone)" for Tanya Tucker, were sold as part of a bankruptcy he went through in the '80s.

"I didn't know they could take my

songs and sell them," Coe says. "I knew they could take the royalties from my songs to pay into the bankruptcy court. But I didn't know they could actually sell the rights to my songs."

He also remains popular despite a *New York Times* article a couple of years ago that once again raised the specter that Coe has recorded not only X-rated material, especially on 1978's *Nothing Sacred* album, but also released songs that can be construed as racist, such as the ones on 1982's infamous *Underground* album.

"I think those albums were necessary," says an unrepentant Coe. "I think they served a purpose. Obviously a lot of people liked them. We've sold millions of them. I just don't understand that kind of censorship. I'm a songwriter, and the only tools I have at my disposal

are my words. If I was a painter, I'd have a paintbrush, paint and different colors. But all I have is words. It's my job as a songwriter to paint a picture in a person's head."

In Coe's mind, that includes the abilities to use racist and sexist slurs in his songs. "We've heard those words all our lives," he says. "It doesn't mean that I don't like black people or that I don't like Polish people. It doesn't mean I'm racist."

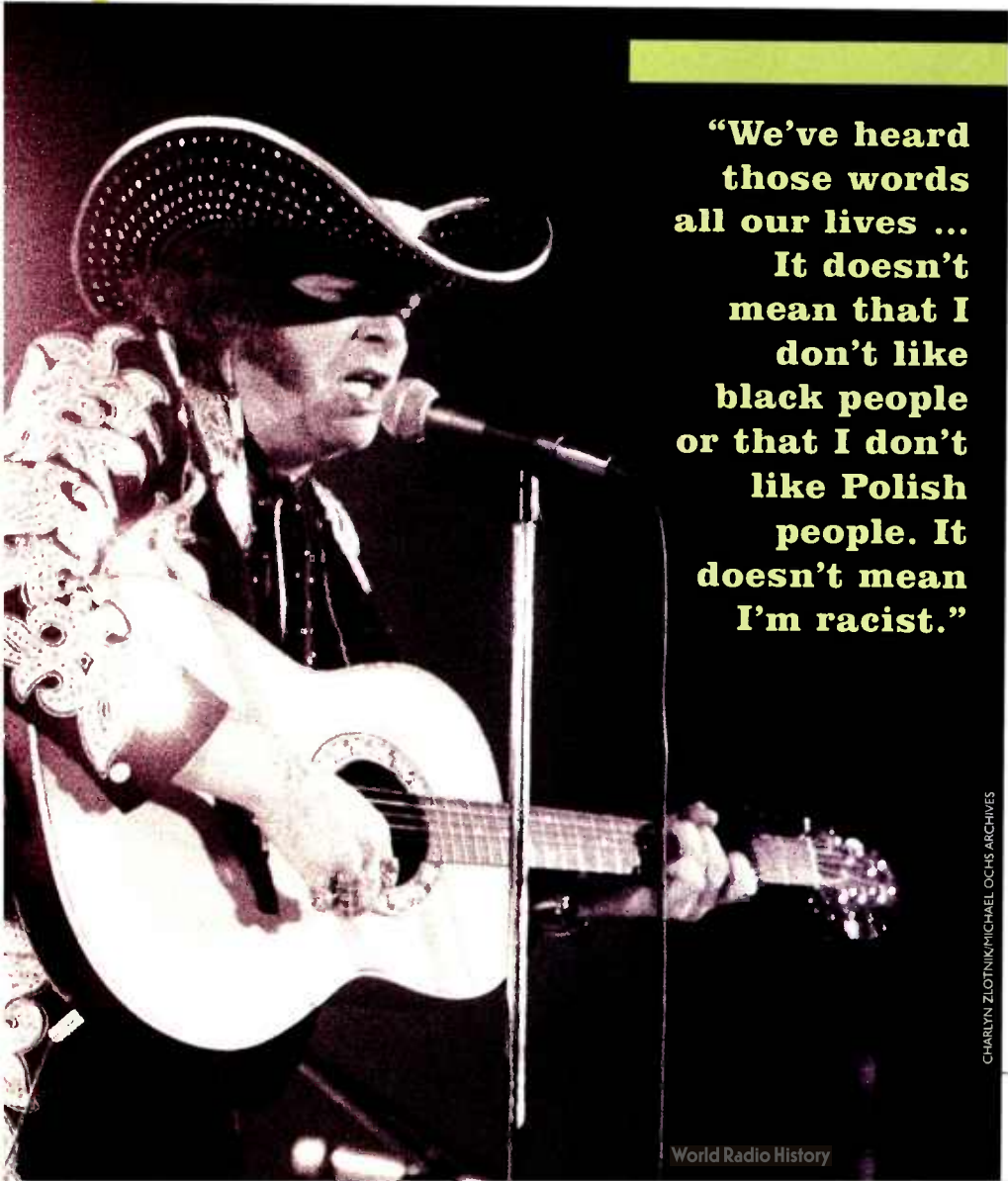
As a defense against charges of racism, he points to choices he's made in his own life. "At the time they were accusing me of being racist, my drummer was black and married to a white woman," he says. "Before that, my keyboard player was a gay, black kid. When I first came to Nashville, I had an all-black band."

Coe has never shied away from controversy or outrageous behavior. After all, this is the singer who posed for a photo of himself, his band and his road crew all lined up and dropping their trousers on Music Row for the surprisingly uncensored cover of a 1977 album called *Texas Moon* – and the one who rode around in a hearse to get noticed in Nashville after he made the move to Music City in 1967.

For added attention, he painted both his real name and his self-created nickname – the Mysterious Rhinestone Cowboy – all over the funeral wagon. On Saturday afternoons he'd park it in front of the Ryman Auditorium, then the home of the *Grand Ole Opry*. He would linger inside the Ryman until a crowd formed along the front of the venerable hall, lining up for that evening's show. The fans naturally gawked at the outlandish automobile docked next to them in front of the building.

When the crowd got thick, Coe would don a flashy rhinestone suit and a leather, sequined mask and sprint outside carrying his guitar. The crowd, thinking he was a star, would mob him and ask for autographs. And so a legend was born – even before he recorded his first Nashville song.

But even before Coe bought the hearse, he found favor in the legendary Nashville songwriting community of the early '70s, joining groundbreakers like Kris Kristofferson, Mickey Newbury, Townes Van Zandt and Billy Joe Shaver in forging a new type of country tune.



"We've heard those words all our lives ... It doesn't mean that I don't like black people or that I don't like Polish people. It doesn't mean I'm racist."

CHARLYN ZLOTNIK/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES

COUNTRY MUSIC HALL OF FAME & MUSEUM



George Jones and Johnny Paycheck both recorded Coe's songs. Paycheck's biggest hit, "Take This Job And Shove It," was a DAC original.

Shaver remembers how the two ragged, longhaired songwriters initiated a lifelong bond in those early days of struggle and glory. "Neither one of us had a car," Shaver recalls. "We walked everywhere. We would go to these parties because they had food, alcohol and women. If a guitar got passed around, it was all over. David and I wound up with all the women. Our songs were just so much better than everyone else's. And David had this voice as good as anybody's in country music."

Coe eventually signed with Plantation Records, then moved to the more powerful Columbia label in 1973. "You Never Even Called Me By My Name," a jukebox staple for 30 years now, became his only Top 10 hit of the '70s, though several other signature songs – "Longhaired Redneck," "Willie, Waylon And Me," "Jack Daniels, If You Please" – were popular on FM radio stations during the era.

Ironically, Coe enjoyed his greatest radio success during the conservative mid-'80s, when his songs "The Ride" and the beautiful "Mona Lisa Lost Her Smile" became Top 10 hits.

Coe left Columbia Records in 1987, and since then he's put out records on independent labels and through his website, officialdavidallancoe.com. In 2001, the singer formed a new record partnership, Coe Pop Records, with Steve Popovich Jr., whose father is a veteran music industry executive and owner of

Cleveland International Records. Besides the recent *Biktoberfest* live album, the new label put out Coe's 2001 album, *Songwriter Of The Tear*, and a new spoken-word release, *Whoopsy Daisy*.

Coe Pop also has begun issuing a series devoted to older country recordings. Billed under the promotional banner *David Allan Coe Presents*, the series will feature CDs by Merle Haggard, Patsy Cline, Conway Twitty, Roger Miller, Joe Tex and The Kendalls.

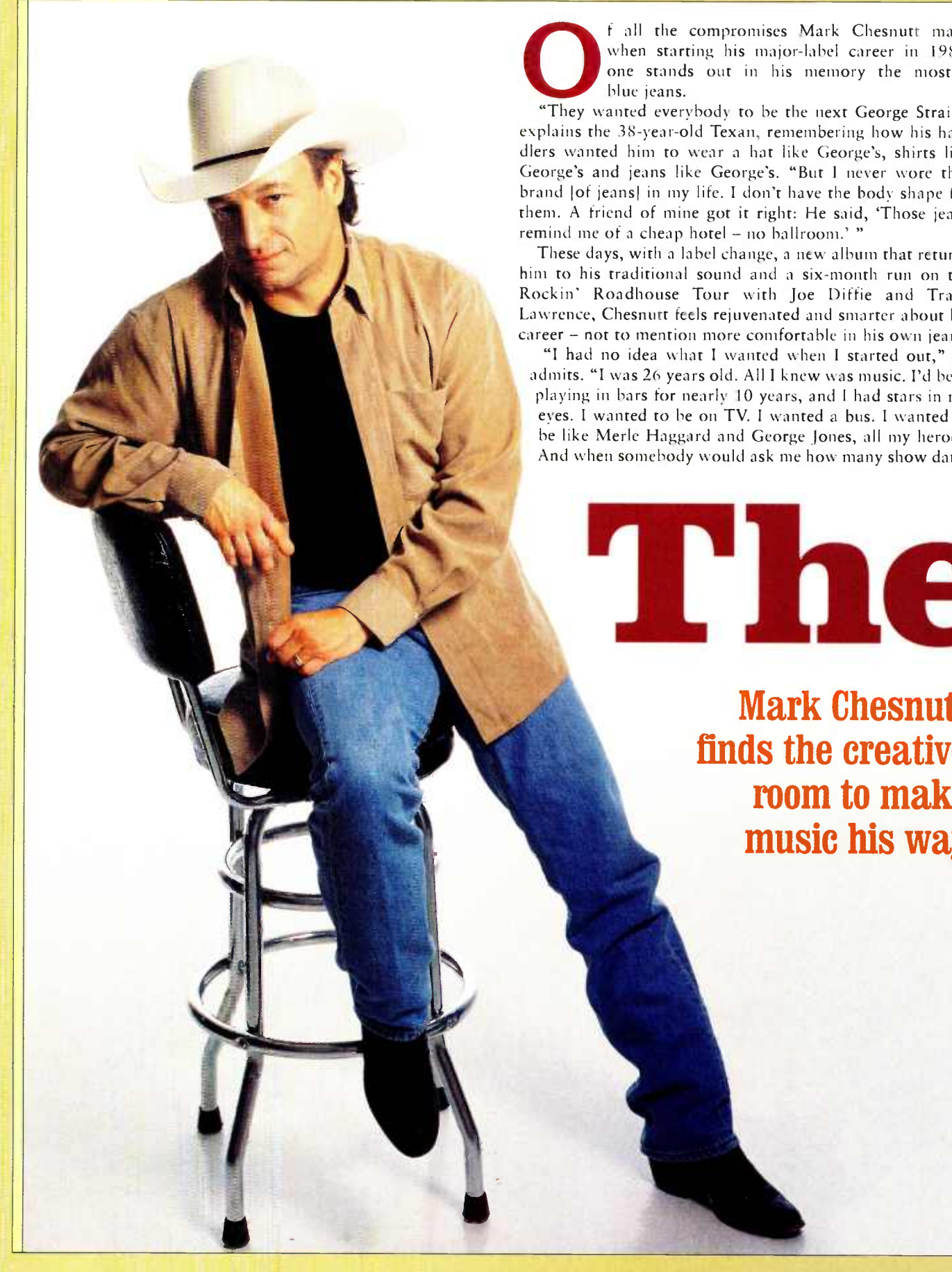
Meanwhile, Coe – single now after countless marriages, part of the flotsam of his once-polygamous lifestyle – will continue to stay on the road, playing his unpredictable shows to audiences of college students, bikers, rockers and dedicated, true-blue country fans.

"I just play to the audience in front of me," he says. "Sometimes it's a stoned-out rock 'n' roll show. Sometimes it's a hard-core country show. Sometimes it's a mixture of both. It depends on how I feel and what my audience looks like as to what I do."

But one thing's for certain: No two shows are ever the same. Just like David Allan Coe, they're a one-of-a-kind experience. *



Coe signs an autograph at Fan Fair, 1975. "All the things I did 20 years ago," he notes today, "have become cool to do now."



Of all the compromises Mark Chesnutt made when starting his major-label career in 1989, one stands out in his memory the most – blue jeans.

“They wanted everybody to be the next George Strait,” explains the 38-year-old Texan, remembering how his handlers wanted him to wear a hat like George’s, shirts like George’s and jeans like George’s. “But I never wore that brand [of jeans] in my life. I don’t have the body shape for them. A friend of mine got it right: He said, ‘Those jeans remind me of a cheap hotel – no ballroom.’”

These days, with a label change, a new album that returns him to his traditional sound and a six-month run on the Rockin’ Roadhouse Tour with Joe Diffie and Tracy Lawrence, Chesnutt feels rejuvenated and smarter about his career – not to mention more comfortable in his own jeans.

“I had no idea what I wanted when I started out,” he admits. “I was 26 years old. All I knew was music. I’d been playing in bars for nearly 10 years, and I had stars in my eyes. I wanted to be on TV. I wanted a bus. I wanted to be like Merle Haggard and George Jones, all my heroes. And when somebody would ask me how many show dates

The

**Mark Chesnutt
finds the creative
room to make
music his way**

SANDY CAMPBELL

I wanted to do, I'd say, 'As many as you can book.' I wore my butt out. Because at 26 years old, you think you know everything, but you really don't know a whole helluva lot."

Today, Chesnutt is the father of three boys – Waylon, Cameron and Casey – who, along with wife Tracie, sometimes travel with him. A doting parent, Chesnutt had a fine role model in his own dad, a singer, record collector and rabid country music fan who died in 1990. Bob Chesnutt was his son's best adviser, convincing him to switch from drums to guitar as a child and to hone his vocals in the Texas clubs instead of moving to Nashville to be discovered.

"He said, 'When things start rolling and you meet the right people, Nashville will come looking for you.' And that's exactly the way it happened."

Yet the younger Chesnutt hadn't anticipated a Music City makeover. Aside from the discomfort of tight-fitting jeans, the budding honky-tonker chafed against the confines of image, especially those dictated by MCA, his label at the time.

"It was always, 'You've got to do this. You've got to look like that. Can't go anywhere without your hat. Cut your hair and shave your whiskers off completely,' even though I've always been kind of a stubble guy."

like to think, 'If I'm driving down the road, will I turn this up, or will I change the station?'"

It was a difference of opinion on songs that led to Chesnutt changing producers and leaving MCA, where he had 20 Top 10 hits, including eight No. 1s. After starting off as a successful traditionalist with "Too Cold At Home" and "Brother Jukebox," the label prodded him to lean more toward mainstream pop.

They met in the middle – Chesnutt recorded some songs he didn't like, and producers Mark Wright and Tony Brown allowed him to cut some material they didn't believe in – but by 1999 the hits stopped coming. The singer asked to be released from his contract in 2001.

"There were never any hard feelings," he says. "We parted as friends and still see each other and cut up and talk like we always did, except we're not making records together."

Friends have always been important to Chesnutt. He's always had the support of George Jones – Chesnutt early in his career performed at Jones Country, the legend's short-lived Texas theme park, and later Jones endorsed him after he came to Nashville. Then there's Waylon Jennings, for whom Chesnutt named his eldest child. Jennings, who died in early

Right Fit

Chesnutt sighs as he remembers the routine. "It has nothing to do with the music," he continues. "But I wanted to be the biggest star I could be, and I didn't want to make anybody mad, so I did exactly what everybody said to do."

Then along came Garth Brooks, and Chesnutt interpreted the superstar's no-holds-barred success to mean he could do anything he pleased. "I didn't figure it mattered one way or another in the end," he says. "What keeps you going is the music."

Chesnutt's recent Columbia album, the self-titled *Mark Chesnutt*, is a case in point. As with his best work at MCA, it offers memorable ballads, meaty honky-tonk and danceable rhythm numbers. But his new label has allowed a measure of freedom to record the kind of sly, edgy tunes that Chesnutt always likes to slip in.

Like the late Conway Twitty, Chesnutt knows the key to longevity is finding exceptional songs. "I've heard some great singers – heroes of mine – who recorded some stuff that just wasn't commercial, mainly because they did songs that only appealed to them personally. But I've always tried to listen to songs as a fan. I

2002, slipped away before Chesnutt could say goodbye.

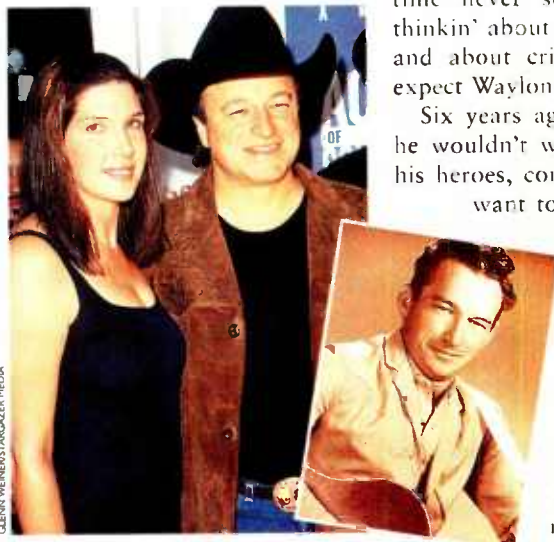
"Waylon was always saying, 'You all come on and bring the kids up to Arizona.' We always said, 'We will,' but the time never seemed right. I woke up thinkin' about that today, and I laid there and about cried because we just didn't expect Waylon to die."

Six years ago, Chesnutt remarked that he wouldn't want the superstar status of his heroes, confessing, "I don't know if I want to work hard enough to be a superstar!" Now, however, he says, "My goals have changed a lot. I'd be doing it for financial stability for myself and my family."

In the meantime, he'll keep working hard and recording the best songs he can find. "I figure I'll hit it hard for a few more years, as long as the fans and radio will accept me."

Chances are he'll be welcome, whether clean-shaven or stubbled ... and wearing any kind of jeans he darn well chooses.

— Alanna Nash



GLENN WEINER/STARGAZER MEDIA

The parents of three boys, Mark and wife Tracie strive to be role models, as was Mark's dad, Bob (inset), a singer and fervid country music fan who died in 1990.

'90s hitmaker
Lari White finds a new
groove by delving into
rhythm & blues

SOUL Survivor

No one would blame Lari White if she felt frustrated. After achieving a half-dozen Top 20 hits (including "Now I Know," "That's My Baby" and "Stepping Stone") in the '90s, she abruptly failed to score another nationwide hit. But on the heels of her new self-released independent album, White confesses that she's now driven more by freedom than frustration.

Setting out on her own has allowed her to expand her scope and create what she describes as "an amalgam of soul, pop, jazz, rhythm & blues and dance music."

The resulting album, *Green Eyed Soul*, completes a personal journey the 37-year-old Florida native undertook to figure out what kind of singer she wanted to be. Here's what she discovered: "One, I am and always will be a music artist; and two, I ain't that country."

Anyone who has heard her sing or act in movies such as *Cast Away* can attest that White's talent doesn't easily fit into a preconceived box. *Green Eyed Soul* pushes her deeper into hard-to-define territory, though one thing's for sure: The emphasis is on an old-fashioned soul groove reminiscent of Al Green and Aretha Franklin.

The project began when White still recorded for Lyric Street Records, which had released her 1998 album, *Stepping Stone*. But as she was writing, White came to the realization that "these songs don't have to have steel guitar on them!"

White knew her new sound no longer fit with the Lyric Street's country roster, and the label supported her desire to pursue a different direction. "Her talent is limitless," affirms Lyric Street vice president Doug Howard.

Pop labels showed interest in her, but White decided to put the record out through the self-created company Skinny White Girl Records. Along with her husband, award-winning country songwriter Chuck Cannon, she had already started

an independent label for songwriters called Nashville Underground, so she knew what she was getting into.

"I felt I had been accomplishing something on my own without a major label's involvement," White says. "Going independent, you just have to hang on and pray you can make a living."

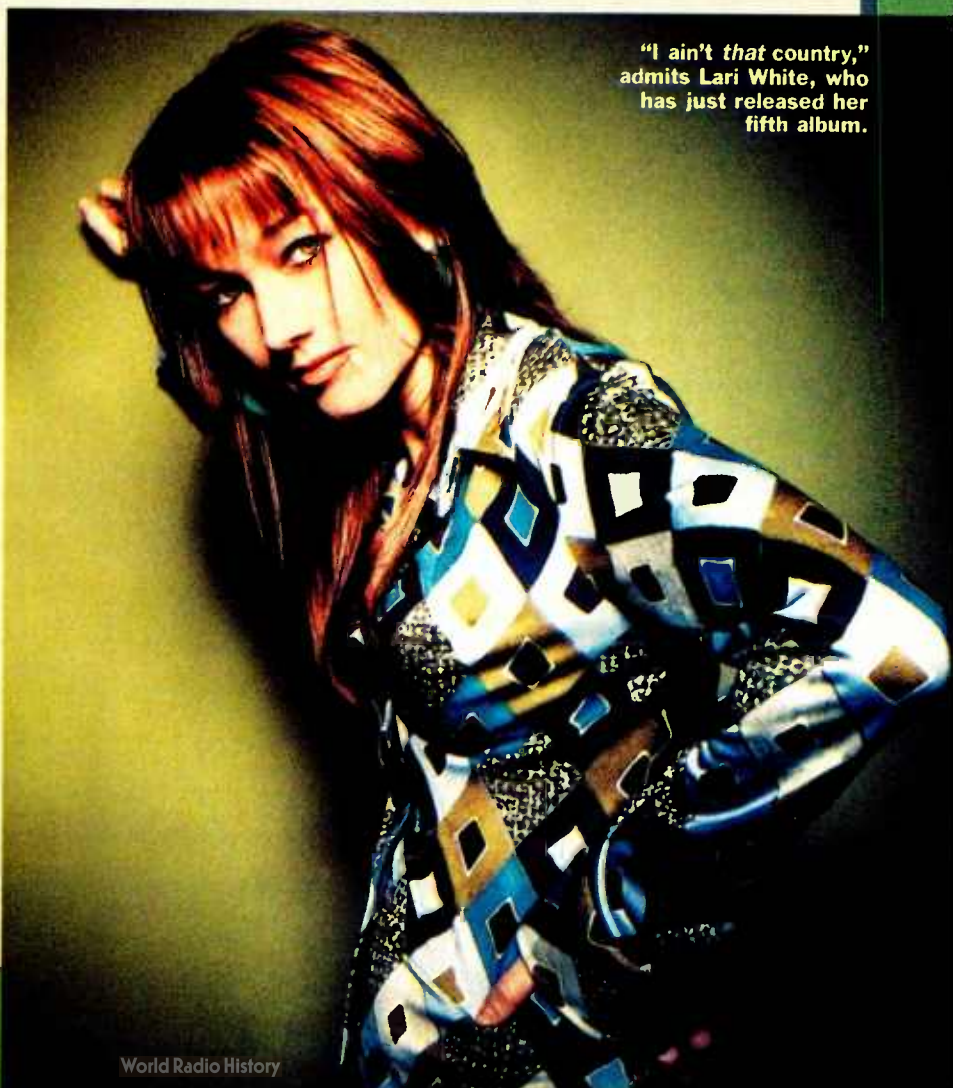
Along with the challenges, White believes the rewards can be greater when relying on your own ingenuity. "In the label situations I was in before, I was more in touch with myself as a product rather than an artist," she explains. "I just reached a point where I wasn't satisfied

with the level of commercial success I had. But I also wasn't satisfied with the level of artistry. So I made a choice."

While she realizes the scale is smaller than when she recorded Top 10 hits, White nonetheless hopes her new work finds an audience. "I want *Green Eyed Soul* to sell," she says firmly. "I really want to make my living like this. But boy, nothing can take away the absolute satisfaction and peace that I feel just having made this record. Anything beyond this is gravy."

— Heather Johnson

"I ain't that country," admits Lari White, who has just released her fifth album.



COURTESY: NASHVILLE UNDERGROUND

Truth And Consequences

Everyone agrees that country music deals with real-life issues. However, some issues – no matter how real or relevant to our lives – foster awkward or uncomfortable emotions. Often those are the very topics we need to be encouraged to consider and discuss.

Few issues facing our society are as divisive as abortion. So it's understandable why Tim McGraw's "Red Ragtop" stirred a lot of debate when the singer released it as the first single from his latest album.

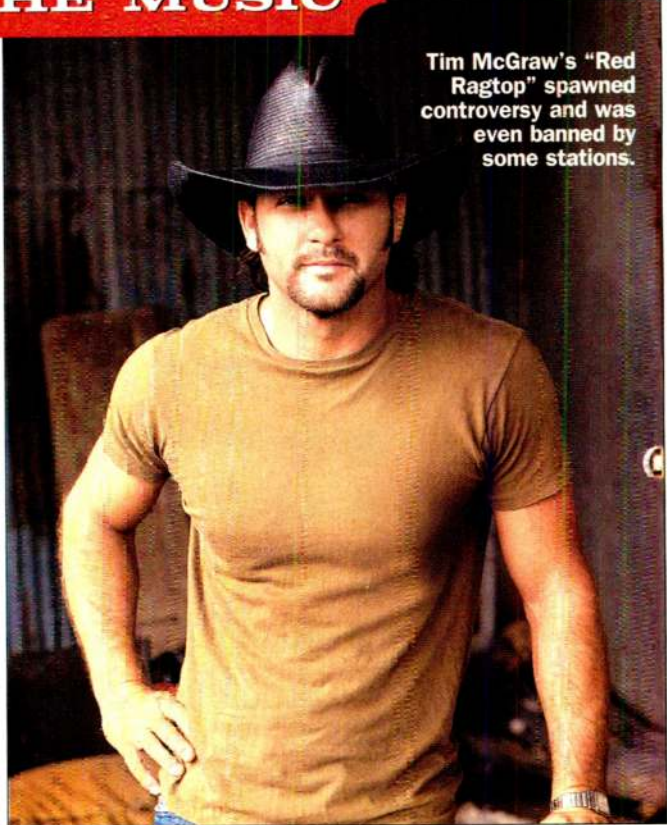
Written by Jason White, "Red Ragtop" is told from the point of view of an adult man remembering the life-altering discovery that his girlfriend had become pregnant – and their decision that she have an abortion.

It's far from the first time a country star touched a tender nerve by singing about a highly charged social issue. Indeed, it seems that lately country stars have been taking bolder chances with material, whether it's Toby Keith giving America's enemies the boot or the Dixie Chicks exacting violent revenge on an abusive husband in "Goodbye Earl."

It's not a new trend, either. Tammy Wynette initially drew some criticism for illustrating how children are affected by failed marriages in "D-I-V-O-R-C-E," and Loretta Lynn's "The Pill," about a woman exercising her right to birth control, was banned by some radio stations and criticized by some preachers.

Then there's Reba McEntire's "Fancy," about a daughter whose mother pushed her into prostitution; Garth Brooks' "The Thunder Rolls," about a cheating, abusive husband; and Martina McBride's "Independence Day," about a young girl remembering how her mother burned the family home to the ground – with her abusive husband in it.

We remember these songs not because of the controversy they stirred, but because of the true-to-life power of their stories and performances. Like it or not, these things happen, and



Tim McGraw's "Red Ragtop" spawned controversy and was even banned by some stations.

PAUL DRUNKWATER/NSC

these songs encourage us to consider the hearts and emotions behind the problematic issues.

McGraw's song starts with a grown man remembering the first major love of his life. He recalls how carefree and passionate they were together, but then his mind turns to the circumstance – her unplanned pregnancy – that forever changed both of them.

As McGraw sings, *So we did what we did, and we tried to forget, and we swore up and down there would be no regrets in the morning light.* But, despite their words, the regrets and pain were there, evidenced in how their relationship changed and how they grew apart – no doubt haunted by their shared, if not spoken about, decision.

The song slyly and intelligently reflects on a complex decision made by an inexperienced young couple who did not yet understand or recognize the consequences of certain actions. In the light of being young and in love, they had not yet come to grasp the depth of responsibility that comes with a committed relationship.

From the feeling conveyed in his words, it's apparent that the man experienced a level of loss that led to personal growth and a better understanding of himself and of the choices he makes. Yes, life is full of regrets and consequences; it's also full of grace, forgiveness and second chances.

The song doesn't imply an endorsement for what's happened. Instead, it describes a life-changing moment in a way that encourages us all to reflect upon the decisions we make and to deeply consider the consequences of our actions. It also recognizes the very human need to overcome and learn from our mistakes.

That a song can lead us to debate and reflect upon such issues is one of the strengths of country music.

— Hollie Woodruff



PHOTOGRAPH BY FRANK

Tammy Wynette (left) was one of the first to take on real-life topics like divorce. But Martina McBride, Toby Keith and others have also embraced serious issues with songs like "Independence Day" and "Courtesy Of The Red, White & Blue (The Angry American)."



TN/PHOTOGRAPH BY



PHOTOGRAPH BY



ANOTHER WAY

Recording artist Radney Foster never made money from his records until *after* he left the big time.

In nearly a decade and a half of major-label stardom, Foster never saw a dime in artist royalties. Not when he enjoyed several Top 10 hits in the late '80s as a member of Foster & Lloyd. Not when he scored two more Top 10 hits as a solo artist in the early '90s.

That's not to say the amiable Texan has lived in poverty all these years. That might have been the case, however, if it hadn't been for *songwriter* Radney Foster. Unlike strictly recording artists, who don't receive royalties until after a record company has recouped all of its investments, songwriters get paid every time a song is played on the radio and every time an album is sold.

Thank God, Foster says, he always considered himself a songwriter first.

He's not only written his own hits over the years, he's also gotten several prominent cuts by other artists, including Top 10s by Collin Raye, T. Graham Brown, Holly Dunn, The Forester Sisters and Sweethearts Of The Rodeo.

In fact, a Foster composition is on the radio now, thanks to Keith Urban's hit version of "Raining On Sunday," and the Dixie Chicks have recorded several of his songs, including "Godspeed (Sweet Dreams)" from their new album, *Home*.

"When you are dealing with somebody the size of the grand behemoth of the Dixie Chicks, the royalties can be a really significant contribution to your bottom line," Foster says with a grateful smile.

"At the end of the day, if all I do is

break even on my records – which I'm not, I'm actually *making* money – I'm still going to own a catalog," Foster says. "And that's a significant thing. That's an asset that you can turn and sell."

Although sales for his recent albums *Are You Ready For The Big Show?* and his new *Another Way To Go* are only a fraction of those for albums he recorded for major labels, he's already earned a significant income from their sales. Thanks to a creative deal he's cut with the independent record label Dualtone, he now focuses promotional money where it has the most impact – mostly in Texas, which accounts for 75 percent of Foster's album sales and radio play. That way, he spends less and, in the end, makes more.

Of course, Foster is not entirely off the national radar. "Everyday Angel," the first single from his *Another Way To Go* album, rose to No. 43 on the *Billboard* charts. For a major-label release, peaking at 43 is considered a failure; for an inde-



COURTESY RADNEY FOSTER

Sons Jule and Jack, along with infant daughter Maureen (not pictured), are a priority. Jule lives with Foster's ex-wife in France, but spends summers with Dad.

HER TO GO

Radney Foster proves you don't need a major record label to hit pay dirt

pendent label with lower overhead, it's a good showing.

"If we don't have a major hit at country radio, we can still sell 40,000 records," Foster says. "If we do have a major hit at country radio, or even half a hit at country radio, all bets are off."

Another Way To Go also features "Scary Old World," which Foster wrote with Harlan Howard — one of the last songs the songwriting legend wrote before his death in March 2002.

"I didn't start writing songs with Harlan until I was 40, but it was like going to songwriting school," Foster says. "He was such a Brill-Building, make-it-work, write-a-song-in-a-day guy. And I come from such an emotional side of writing. It was really a great collaboration, because it was really good for me. He would hold my feet to the fire. He believed that if you used more than two or three chords, you were showing off. It had to have the elements of that Tin Pan Alley thing, but it had to have the working-man's simplicity of a Merle Haggard or a Buck Owens or a Ray Price. That's a magical combination."

The day after Howard's death, Foster



Foster says he never saw a dime of artist royalties despite several Top 10 hits with partner Bill Lloyd in the '80s duo Foster & Lloyd.

attended the visitation at a Nashville funeral home. Howard's widow, Melanie, told Foster that the last song she played for her husband had been his demo version of "Scary Old World."

Whether he scores another hit from the album or not, *Another Way To Go* has already been a success for Foster because its sales have put money in the bank for his family. Besides, as a songwriter, his best promotion comes from the songs he puts on his own albums.

"It's far and away easier for me to get a song to somebody like the Dixie Chicks because I make my own recordings," Foster says. "They knew 'Godspeed' from hearing me live, and they remembered the song. But they also listened to my *See What You Want To See* record on their bus. You can't get people to listen to demos on the bus, but if they're fans of your art and you actually go make a good record, it's amazing how they'll come back around."

— Brian Mansfield

REVIEWS



VINCE GILL Next Big Thing

MCA

★★★★★

Vince Gill has rarely sounded like he's having as much fun on record as he does when playfully satirizing our culture's emphasis on youth and shooting stars on the title cut of *Next Big Thing*. Goosed by an all-star band, he thoroughly enjoys crowing about such transitory delights as tight jeans and bellybutton rings in a romp built on age-old rhythms and boisterous ensemble play that only veterans can pull off.

The energy that pulses through several of these songs – most notably on the striking Merle Haggard tribute “Real Mean Bottle” – presents a refreshing change of direction for Gill. But that's not all this generous 17-song album offers. From the intimate revelations of “This Old Guitar And Me” and “Someday” to the philosophical reflections of “Whippoorwill River” and “In These Last Few Days,” his new songs span his strengths while turning personal experience into universal truth.

They're the kinds of truths no newcomer

could endow with the same emotional weight. In “These Broken Hearts,” he bids goodbye to a lover with a prayer, *We need all the sweet forgiveness we can find*. And in “Young Man's Town” – a serious turn on the message of “Next Big Thing” – he accepts that tomorrow does belong to the young, quietly acknowledging that *Sometimes you got to stand back and watch them burn it to the ground/Even though you built it, it's a young man's town*.

In all, *Next Big Thing* celebrates all that's special about Gill, that rare modern star who stays dedicated to personal artistry rather than scheming ways to expand his celebrity. Confidently in touch with his heart and his talents, Gill extends a promise that his future can be as musically enriching as his past.

— Michael McCall

GEORGE STRAIT For The Last Time - Live From The Astrodome

MCA

★★★★

It's hard to believe that George Strait has never released a live album before, but his

first proves to be mostly worth the wait.

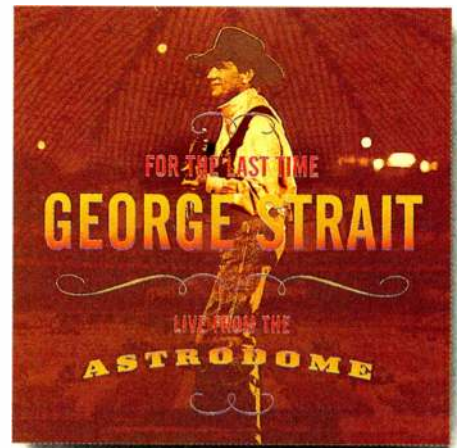
This 16-song package stitches together the understated elements that have made Strait one of country's premier artists – a sprinkling of sentimental tunes about everyday life, an aw-shucks stage delivery and the happy buzz of fans who connect to the no-frills, focused-on-music show.

Technically, the album is cleanly produced, which was probably a challenge in an echo chamber like the old Houston Astrodome. Strait's strong voice is front and center, with each instrument given a clear presence, from tinkling barroom piano to sweet Texas fiddle.

The crowd of 68,000 is kept at a clutter-free distance while Strait offers up a sampler of jukebox hits, including “Write This Down,” “I Can Still Make Cheyenne,” “Love Without End, Amen,” “Check Yes Or No,” “Blue Clear Sky” and what is probably his greatest goose-bump moment, “Amarillo By Morning.”

Don't start thinking about the vault of tunes that are missing (“Fool Hearted Memory,” “Ocean Front Property,” All My Ex's Live In Texas” and on and on) or the CD will seem incomplete. Maybe MCA should have considered a two-disc set.

However, two moments should have



been left out of the mix – the somewhat obsequious exchange between Strait and President George W. Bush sounding like roastmasters at a political fundraiser, and “Murder On Music Row.” Packaged in between Strait's muscle hits, this 2000 single sounds awkwardly just like what it was in the first place – a novelty tune.

But if you want a bit of dance-hall atmosphere thrown into the Strait sound, this is a satisfying supplement to

the comprehensive box set released a few years back.

— Miriam Pace Longino

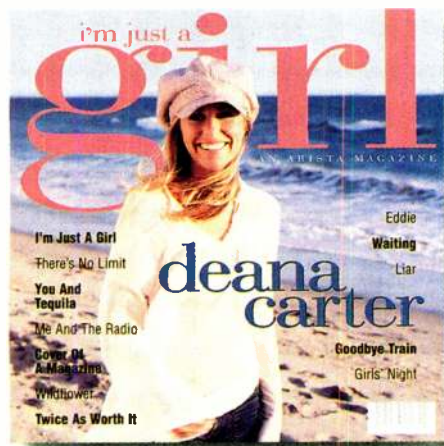
DEANA CARTER

I'm Just A Girl

ARISTA NASHVILLE

★★★★

Much to her credit and occasionally to her detriment, Deana Carter has always been a self-made artist. Her one-of-a-kind determination and vision filled her debut album *Did I Shave My Legs For This?* And "Strawberry Wine," her first single, was a watershed moment for the



genre, propelling the album to become a multiplatinum smash. Her next release, however, 1998's *Everything's Gonna Be Alright*, did not enjoy similar success.

I'm Just A Girl, her comeback effort, contains more Deana Carter ounce-for-ounce than anything she's done to date. She has writing credits on all 12 songs and has co-produced it with Dann Huff, and her airy vocals and wry perspective come right to the fore on the title track, a multifaceted self-portrait of a Southern girl who has "tried exotic foods and smoked some fine cigars" that serves as an inspired opener.

On "You And Tequila," we see a more vulnerable shade as Carter laments her weaknesses, while "Me And The Radio" finds her heading West to escape painful memories, and "Liar" savages a former lover in the form of a '60s pop anthem complete with a Beatles bridge.

The album has its shortcomings, bogging down midway through with the forgettable "Wildflower" and "Twice As Worth It." Carter also inexplicably drops a lot of brand names in her songs. Maybe she's eyeing endorsement deals.

Despite these dips, *I'm Just A Girl* presents a subtle cohesiveness, giving the

listener a feel for Carter's recent journey through divorce and career upheaval. And this time, she's baited her album with enough hooks that with any luck it will get radio play and record buyers back on the line.

— Chuck Aly

ROSANNE CASH

Rules Of Travel

CAPITOL

★★★★

In the mid-1980s, country radio briefly cracked open a window to the sort of emotionally prickly yet disarmingly tender music that Rosanne Cash was determined to make. But both the format and the artist

have experienced a series of upheavals since then, and in this age of Faith and Shania, it's hard to imagine Cash recapturing the commercial attention she once enjoyed with such hits as "Seven Year Ache" and "The Way We Make A Broken Heart."

Regardless of radio formats, however, Cash's first album in almost seven years ranks with her richest music ever. A redemptive spirit of uplifting renewal pervades this project, which marks her recovery from a mysterious voice ailment that was partly responsible for the extended hiatus.

The opening "Beautiful Pain" sets the tone, matching Cash's warm voice to a Beatlesque arrangement by producer (and

BERING STRAIT

Bering Strait

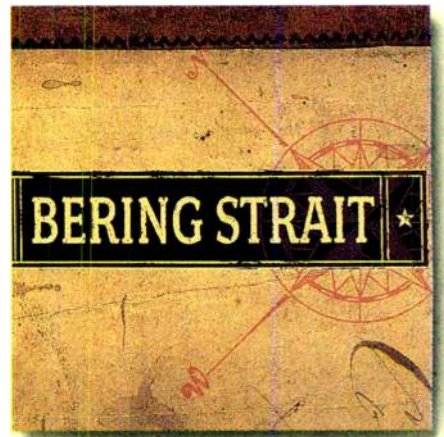
UNIVERSAL SOUTH

★★★

The oft-lobbed criticism that Nashville has a tendency to homogenize country music of its exotic characteristics isn't an unjustified one, and here's the latest glaring example. Aside from the lively "Porushka-Paranya," a traditional folk tune that sounds like an Eastern European adaptation of "The Devil Went Down To Georgia," nothing on this talented sextet's debut CD remotely suggests Bering Strait hails from one of the unlikelyst places – Russia.

The songs, written by the usual Music Row pros, offer no uniquely cultural voice, no hint that these young musicians left behind lives that few Americans can even imagine. As if to further disavow their old-country connections, singers Natasha Borzilova and Lydia Salnikova remove any hint of their Euro accents. Borzilova has a compelling voice with a husky timbre comparable to Fleetwood Mac's Christine McVie. Why not play up her uniqueness rather than her similarities to other stars?

The Bering Strait story is certainly a cinematic one: An American art dealer in Moscow discovers a band of classically trained musicians who are all obsessed with American bluegrass



music. He offers them a ticket to the Big Time. The band jumps continents – and eventually hoops – while enduring four label deals before finally releasing an album.

All in all, the polished, contemporary sound of the debut is pleasant enough, and the musicianship – especially that of guitarist Ilya Toshinsky, who's the second coming of Mark Knopfler – is outstanding.

In the end, though, the songs don't really stick in your head, and a listener is left with the sense of a missed opportunity. Bering Strait, in its ambition to be accepted in North America, feels like a square peg hammered into the same ol' round Music Row hole.

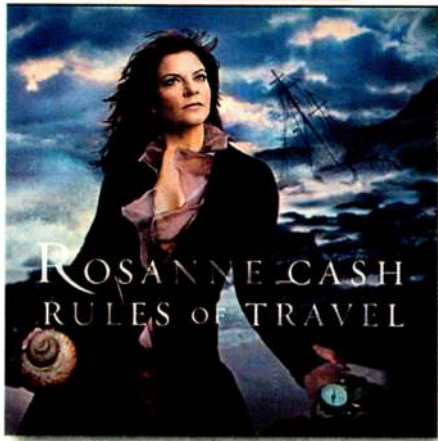
— Nick Krewen

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.

REVIEWS



Cash's husband) John Levanthal, whose sweetly singing slide guitar offers homage to the late George Harrison. Elsewhere, the opening strains of "I'll Change With You" evoke The Band's "The Weight," in a dialogue of romantic obsession teaming Cash with Steve Earle (making this the first duet ever by two country artists with short-story collections to their credit).

Other highlights range from the father-daughter reunion with Johnny Cash on the autumnal "September When It Comes" to the interpretive grace of "Hope

Against Hope," written by Jakob Dylan and Joe Henry.

It's fitting that *Do you want to be honest?* are the first words Cash sings in this return to form, for her artistry has never been anything but.

— Don McLeese

BLAKE SHELTON

The Dreamer

WARNER BROS.

★★★

Newcomer Shelton made a splash with his self-titled 2001 debut album, fueled by the hits "Austin" and "Ol' Red." The two songs couldn't have been more different – "Austin" is a sappy, feel-good contemporary love song, and "Ol' Red" is the saga of a prison breakout and a canine conspirator, harkening to country's novelty tunes of the '50s and '60s.

With his imposing height, head full of comely curls and a baritone voice straight out of Drawlville, Shelton is the kind of artist who appeals to both men and women. But as with his first album, his second poses an image problem: Who is he?

Other than guaranteeing radio success through smart song choices and convincing

renderings, *The Dreamer* offers little insight into Shelton the artist. It's as if producer Bobby Braddock threw every kind of style – old-time honky-tonk, south-of-the-border hell-raising, poetic love ballads and spirituals – against the



wall to see what would stick.

A lot of it does. "The Baby," in which a son arrives home too late to say goodbye to his dying mother, is affecting enough to melt the strongest man into a puddle. And both "The Dreamer" and "Underneath

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COUNTRYMUSIC

The Same Moon” beautifully explore two kinds of love lost and won.

But too much of the album sounds like other artists. “Heavy Liftin’,” a testosterone-driven song about taking care of business without moaning about it, seems like something Aaron Tippin would do. And “My Neck Of The Woods,” a workingman’s anthem laced with attitudinal fiddle and piney pride – *We come from back in the hollers/We got sweat on our blue collars* – brings Charlie Daniels to mind.

Until Shelton figures out a real stance and point of view, this deserving contender will likely be little more than a singles act – albeit a hot one, at least for the time being.
— *Alanna Nash*

DIAMOND RIO
Completely

ARISTA NASHVILLE
★ ★ ★

Since its 1991 debut, Diamond Rio has built a stellar reputation by wedding



superlative picking with impeccably layered vocals and lyrics of time-honored rural values. And as country music moves steadily toward middle-of-the road pop, Diamond Rio has followed suit.

But on *Completely*, they seem intent on redefining themselves as a band capable of everything from unvarnished honky-tonk to symphonic forays, with jazz and

LONESOME RIVER BAND
Window Of Time

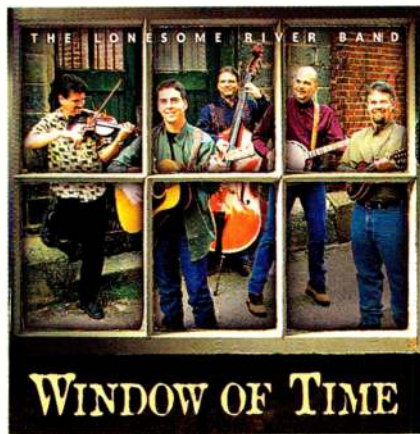
DOOBIE SHEA
★ ★ ★ ★

One of the most popular bluegrass acts of the past decade, the Lonesome River Band experienced a major shakeup in late 2001 when four of its five members left the group. With the 20-year-old group’s survival in question, award-winning banjoist Sammy Shelor gathered new recruits and tweaked the band’s “traditional grass with rock ‘n’ roll energy” sound.

The result is vintage Lonesome River Band – proving once again that in bluegrass, at least, a great band is more than the sum of its individual members.

From the first notes of the opening “Down The Line,” a crisp ode to life on the move, the distinctive elements of the LRB’s music are in place, right down to the deft, traditional-with-a-twist song itself.

Indeed, one of the LRB’s strengths has been an eye for just such material, and there’s plenty of it on *Window Of Time*, including lead singer Brandon Rickman’s compelling portrait of a gambling man on “Rounder’s Spirit,” bass player Irl Hees’ “How I Long To Be In The Mountains” and the hauntingly regretful “Missed It By A



Mile.” Bluegrass roots are explored in a pair of Delmore Brothers songs, while contributions from Nashville writers Harley Allen, Shawn Camp, Billy Smith and Guy Clark add a sparkling contemporary feel.

The new lineup is rounded out by mandolin player and tenor singer Jeff Parker, who brings a fine mountain voice reminiscent of LRB alumnus Dan Tyminski, and fiddler Mike Hartgrove, best known for his years with Illrd Tyme Out.

For most fans, all but Shelor’s and Hartgrove’s will be new faces, but there’s no mistaking the Lonesome River Band’s signature sound and energy in this spirited collection.

— *Jon Weisberger*

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pop bubbling in between.

Perhaps the crossover pop success of Lonestar has pushed this long-standing country band to reexamine itself. For whatever reason, *Completely* has an almost too-studied air about it, as if the songs were chosen by an earnest marketing group. The performances are so tightly constructed that they often seem airless and mechanical.

"I Believe," for example, opens with an overblown, cinematic string section. And the title song, written by L.A. drama queen Diane Warren, plods along without passion.

On the other hand, there's much to like here, beginning with the hit "Beautiful Mess," a sexy, melancholy tune that perfectly captures the head-spinning addiction of love. The group also shines on "A Better Idea," a loving tune extolling woman as the highlight of creation.

Still, the best songs on *Completely* are those that return country to its roots. "If You'd Like Some Lovin'" is an irresistible honky-tonk shuffle, and "Make Sure You've Got It All" is a quintessential country weeper written by Bill Anderson and Steve Wariner. Both feature the kind of honest emotion that other songs simply don't deliver.

Diamond Rio's main inspiration has always been bluegrass, drawing on their genesis as the Tennessee River Boys. In a time when bluegrass is all the rage, the band might think about incorporating more of their original sound next time out.

— A. N.



TERRI CLARK Pain To Kill

MERCURY
★★★★

With her boot-cut blue jeans, ribbed tank tops and raw-boned good looks, the Terri Clark who scowls from her publicity photos looks like a heartbreakin' honky-

RANDY HOWARD

I Rest My Case

SUGAR HILL
★★★★

It's not always easy to figure out who the best country musicians are. To find them, you have to carefully read album credits and interviews, looking for the name behind a hot mandolin solo or a superstar's comment about a guitarist whose name you've never heard.

But this sort of detective work pays off, for it will lead you to some terrific music that you otherwise would have missed. For example, it led a small number of grateful listeners to Randy Howard, the fiddler whose name appeared on albums by Garth Brooks, George Jones and Shelby Lynne, and who has been described as "the greatest as far as I'm concerned" by Bobby Hicks, a former Bill Monroe fiddler who now tours in Ricky Skaggs' Kentucky Thunder band.

Howard died of cancer in 1999, but now we're getting another chance to discover his genius. *I Rest My Case*, which he finished just before his death, is his third solo album, but the first with national distribution.

The album features well-known pickers Jerry Douglas, David Grisman, Sam Bush

and Bryan Sutton and gifted singers Don Rigsby and Carl Jackson, but Howard truly is the dominant figure. It's not just that he could play fast, though he has a slew of fiddle championships attesting to his speed. His talent also comes from how lyrically he played.



and Bryan Sutton and gifted singers Don Rigsby and Carl Jackson, but Howard truly is the dominant figure. It's not just that he could play fast, though he has a slew of fiddle championships attesting to his speed. His talent also comes from how lyrically he played.

Whether tackling his own impressive compositions or someone else's, Howard's fiddle solos had the melodic shape of good songwriting. On the title track, for example, his solo begins with some fancy double stops but builds to an aching cry, as if he were making one last bid for the recognition he so richly deserved.

— Geoffrey Himes

JENNIFER HANSON

Jennifer Hanson

CAPITOL NASHVILLE
★★★★

The buzz on Jennifer Hanson is she's a "country Sheryl Crow," a description that praises the talented newcomer but also sells her short. True, Hanson drinks from the same pop-rock-country-blues well that Crow does. And with pithy couplets like *It's so ironic, it's so confusing/To do the right thing and be losing*, Hanson, like Crow, boasts an uncommon ability to fuse poetry and conversation.

But Hanson is much more than anyone's wannabe. As a vocalist, she can be yearning (on the R&B flavored single "Beautiful Goodbye"), soothing (on the world-weary "All Those Yesterdays") or burning (on the female-bonding tale "Get Yourself Back") without sounding like she's merely plugging in the required emotion. Rather, she sounds like she's lived these songs, especially the galloping "Half A Heart Tattoo," in which she inquires about a stranger's unusual skin art, only to reveal an identical one courtesy

tonk rodeo refugee who'd rather arm wrestle a guy than jump his bones. As far as image goes, Clark seems to have little of the warm, cozy approachability of Faith Hill or Trisha Yearwood.

On her fifth album, Clark certainly shows her tough streak with edgy, honky-tonk-flavored tracks like the title tune and the pouty "I Just Wanna Be Mad." Yet, as on previous albums, Alberta-born Clark cuts deepest with the earnest, heartfelt delivery she brings to fine mid-tempo soul-searchers like "Almost Gone" and powerful inward-looking ballads like "Not A Bad Thing."

Clark occasionally gets bogged down on overly predictable anthems like "Working Girl" and "I Wanna Do It All." Yet her superb clarity and conviction on the tender "The First To Fall" and on introspective spiritual sojourns like "You Can't Help The One You Love" and "God And Me" (two of five songs that she co-wrote for this collection) make you wonder why Clark has never quite risen to the front ranks.

— Bob Allen

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of the same ramblin' man.

Hanson's debut packs a muscular punch, with the healthy Stones-like guitar crunch of "Beautiful Goodbye" giving way to the infectious funky groove of "Just One Of Those Days," and on to silky pedal steel on the lush "This Far Gone." Finally, the string-laden "Simply Yours" sounds like a great Gershwin tune discovered in a trunk in Owen Bradley's attic.

In the end, *Jennifer Hanson* crackles with attitude and polish. Co-producing the album as well as co-writing nine of 11 cuts, Hanson has created a formidable debut that's worthy of the freedom Capitol Records gave her to do so. Let her continue to run, and she'll likely dazzle us for years to come.

— Bob Cannon

STEVE WARINER
Steal Another Day

SELECTONE

★★★★

For 25 years, Wariner has been one of country's most consistent performers, turning out album after album of pleasant, satisfying country pop, often with a light-jazz veneer. Two years ago he left another record label, and without the pressure to capitalize on trends or sell vast numbers of records, he quietly began making a record in his home studio. The result, *Steal Another Day*, offers an opportunity for fans to hear what he's been doing.

Of the 16 cuts, several reprise his biggest hits, including "You Can Dream Of Me" and "Where Did I Go Wrong." The album also revives one of his most poignant songs, "The Weekend," in which a woman goes away for a fling with a man who not only falls in love, but defines his life by the memory he'll cling to forever. In his understated reading of the line *I finally found something worth keeping*, Wariner speaks volumes about

VARIOUS ARTISTS
Happy Birthday, Buck!
A Texas Salute
To Buck Owens

TEXAS ROUND-UP RECORDS

★★★★

Since 1992, pickers have gathered on August 12 at the Continental Club in Austin to celebrate the birthday and music of Country Music Hall of Fame member Buck Owens. Over the years, so many people showed up wanting to participate that the celebration was expanded to two days.

With *Happy Birthday, Buck!* the event now goes on record. This album follows the same formula as the club shows, with a guest list of Texas music luminaries performing with a core group of instrumentalists. A few guests arrive as self-contained bands, such as The Derailers, The Cornell Hurd Band and The LeRoi Brothers. Nearly everyone else makes good use of the expert house band, which includes event organizer Casper Rawls on guitar, Kevin Owens on steel guitar, Tom Lewis on drums and David Carroll on bass.

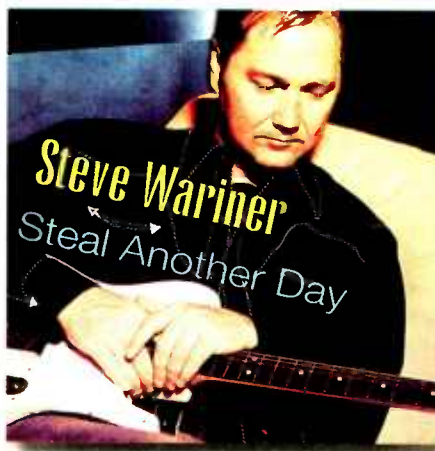
All of the arrangements stick pretty close to The Buckaroos' trademark sound and feel, which is not a bad thing at all. Rawls in particular does an excellent job of emulating the late Don Rich, whose phenomenal guitar work was such a major ingredient of Owens' success.



The disc's high-water mark is an acoustic rendition of the classic instrumental "Buckaroo." Other highlights include David Ball's "Made In Japan," Rodney Crowell's "Second Fiddle," The Derailers' "Under Your Spell Again," Jim Lauderdale's "Sweet Rosie Jones" and the Geezinslaws' "We Split The Blanket." As a bonus, the organizers also recruit former Buckaroo Doyle Holly, who contributes a not-to-be-missed "Before You Go," as well as the birthday Buck himself, who joins his own party by singing "Loves Gonna Live Here."

Sporting a generous 22 songs of prime Owens, this disc is a must-have for any fan of Bakersfield-style country.

— Jeff Wall



male vulnerability and longing and loss.

Of the newer songs – most of which stress the importance of familial love and the thrill of romance – Wariner scores highest on those he wrote with Billy Kirsch, who also collaborated with him on his memorable hit "Holes In The

Floor Of Heaven." The best, "Kiss Me Anyway," is a tale of psychic bondage that uses a sensuous Latin groove to capture the head-swirling confusion of a damaging love. Other songs celebrate his affection for friends and family, including his stepdaughter Holly and his mentor, the late Chet Atkins.

As solid as the album is, just once it would be great to hear something wild or fiery out of Wariner. Some may find *Steal Another Day* too safe and polite, but it's also a warm, thoroughly enjoyable visit with a gentle soul.

— A. N.

AARON LINES
Living Out Loud

RCA

★★

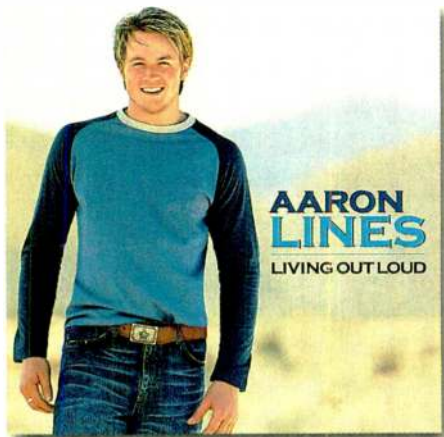
For Aaron Lines, love means saying the sweetest thing possible – over and over and over again.

The 24-year-old Canadian entered the radio charts earlier this year with the romantic ballad "You Can't Hide Beautiful," in which he reassures the woman he loves that she looks special no matter the circumstances.

Like a guy who learns how effective a compliment and a kind word can be, Lines spends the rest of his debut album emphasizing positive aspects of relationships and aspiring to an optimistic, living-out-loud attitude. But as with many overactive Romeos, he pours it on so thick that what at first seems like tender sensitivity later becomes suspicious, even overbearing.

Lines and his co-writers aim for simplicity but come across as simple-minded. In the song "Love Changes Everything," for instance, stating that love can change the world is fine, if predictable; but saying that love can change your *tire* is where the rubber leaves the road.

To be fair, the melodramatic love letters that Lines and producer Chris Farren conjure aren't meant to be examined deeply. Mixing prom ballads and hood-



down breezy bouncers, these songs reflect the the storylines of hits by pop acts like 'N Sync, the Backstreet Boys and Boyz II Men, emphasizing elementary emotions and simplistic catchphrases that encourage singing along rather than self-examination.

Lines has an expressive voice and an upbeat, easy-to-like personality. His sweet talk likely will win over those hearts who yearn to believe that love is about unflagging devotion and flowery emotion. But if he wants to hold his audience past the first blush of attraction, he will need to dig deeper and give them something more honest and substantial to embrace.

— M. M.

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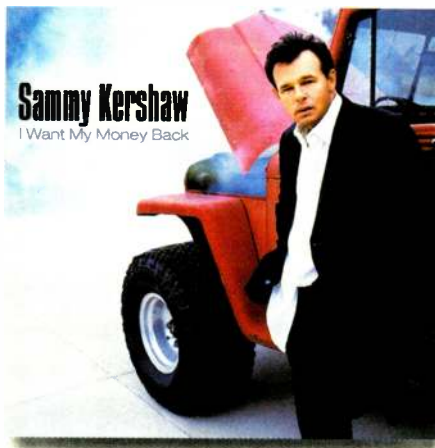
REVIEWS

SAMMY KERSHAW I Want My Money Back

AUDIUM

★★★★

Since he roared onto the radio with “Cadillac Style” in 1991, Kershaw has often been chastised by critics for sounding too much like his hero George Jones and recording too many generic tunes



that don't play to the strength of his Cajun-fried drawl.

Surprisingly, on his 12th album – his first for indie label Audium – Kershaw seems to have finally found his artistic identity, and the result is the best album of his career.

As a former Wal-Mart employee, Kershaw knows more than a little about a workingman's blues and breakthroughs, and it shows. Most of the new songs share an appealing blue-collar point of view, whether sassy and humorous (the title track) or quietly introspective (the exquisitely sad “Gone For Good Goodbye”).

Meanwhile, Kershaw's voice has aged like top-shelf bourbon, with a warm roughness around the edges. He uses it masterfully, as when he scrapes the bottom of his register for emotional effect on two standout Anthony Smith ballads, “Metropolis” and “Stitches.” And when Kershaw does indulge in some classic Jones vocal licks on the cheerfully redneck “Beer, Bait And Ammo,” he makes it clear he's doing it with a wink and smile.

Richard Landis' production nicely complements Kershaw's style. It's thoroughly modern but also thoroughly country, even when the tracks are sprinkled with occasional tasteful synthesizer touches or Stax-style horns on the groove-laden “Sunday Morning

On Bourbon Street.”

This is a very good record. If country radio doesn't put one of these tracks into Top 10 rotation, then it's true: It takes a major label's promotional money to buy a top chart position. For any country fan's hard-earned dollar, though, Kershaw's latest would be money well spent.

— Paul Kingsbury

JOHN ANDERSON Anthology

AUDIUM

★★★★

Warning: Stumble unaware upon this CD and you'd reasonably conclude that it's a swell new two-disc collection of John Anderson's greatest hits: The thing is called *Anthology*, after all, and the back of the jewel box lists the titles of Anderson's biggest recordings – “Wild And Blue,” “She Just Started Liking Cheating Songs” and “Seminole Wind” among them.

But that conclusion would be wrong.

Squint at the fine print on the back of the CD package, and you'll find this important information: These are new digital recordings. So you'll need to go elsewhere if you want Anderson's



original versions.

That caveat aside, these recordings are predictably first rate. For two decades now, Anderson has been among the primary inheritors of hard-core country vocalizing. If anything, his immediately identifiable voice – a synthesis of the slip-sliding sounds of Lefty Frizzell, George Jones and the world's twangiest trombone – has acquired additional texture and country soul over the decades.

The arrangements of the 30 tracks generally stick to the originals, but

Anderson's tone and phrasing is almost always different enough to reward close listening. Granted, the newer I-can't-believe-she-loves-me classic "Swingin'" suffers from horns that, whether real or not, sound too much like synthesizers. More typical is his fresh run at "Long Black Veil," an even more haunting rendition of that standard than Anderson's previous version from 1982.

In other words, even if these aren't the originals, *Anthology* reminds us of John Anderson's place in the country pantheon. With the likely exception of George Strait, Alan Jackson and Patty Loveless, no one in all of contemporary country has a stronger body of work.

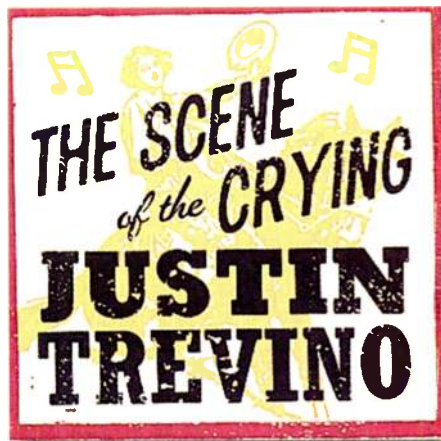
— David Cantwell

JUSTIN TREVINO
The Scene Of The Crying

LONE STAR RECORDS

★★★★

The musical style that continues to flourish in Texas honky-tonks might elsewhere be considered "retro" or



"traditional" country. But for fans of Lone Star stalwarts Don Walser, Johnny "Whiskey River" Bush, Dale Watson and Cornell Hurd, this is country music, pure and simple – the kind that requires no qualification.

The fourth album by 29-year-old Justin Trevino sounds as if it could've been recorded a decade before the blind-from-birth singer was born, but the

TAMMY COCHRAN
Life Happened

EPIC

★★★★

There's always been a place for outpourings of emotion in music, particularly when it's hard-earned – as was the case with "Angels In Waiting," Tammy Cochran's ode to the two brothers she lost to cystic fibrosis. That song became a hit from her first album. Cochran's new album doesn't contain anything as personal or wrenching as "Angels," but the pathos on the record is every bit as felt.

As with such recent touchstones as Trisha Yearwood's "Real Live Woman" and Lee Ann Womack's "I Hope You Dance," Cochran here plumbs the meaning of intimacy and commitment, including the trade-offs they demand, from the perspective of a woman who's had to make them.

Best of all, the Ohio native's sultry alto yearns and aches in all the right places, investing her material with more feeling than many of her peers can summon. Maybe more than those of any woman in country music today, Cochran's vocals hark back to the husky, heart-in-throat phrasing of the great Connie Smith, another belter with roots in Ohio.



Apart from an overripe chorus or two, Billy Joe Walker Jr.'s contemporary-yet-history-conscious production on *Life Happened* could hardly be more sympathetic. This is especially true of "What Kind Of Woman" and "White Lies And Picket Fences," both of which update the soulful, country-politan dynamics that producer Billy Sherrill achieved with Tanya Tucker and Tammy Wynette. Indeed, the title track is just the sort of bittersweet, slice-of-life ballad that *another* Tammy would have nailed back in 1972.

— Bill Friskics-Warren

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Austin-based artist never seems to be straining to revive something. This music comes naturally to him because he can hear it every night in the bars back home.

A disciple of Johnny Bush, Trevino lacks the operatic range of his mentor. His lower-key approach nonetheless conveys plenty of emotional conviction on a collection that mixes chestnuts from George Jones ("Three's A Crowd"), Connie Smith ("Then And Only Then") and Mel Tillis ("Old Faithful") with original material in a similar vein from members of Trevino's band.

The signature instruments are fiddle and steel guitar, the predominant rhythms are swing and shuffle and the typical themes are drinking, heartbreak or a combination of the two. Throughout, Trevino transforms the melancholy, morose themes into a celebration of country verities; even a voice on the verge of a sob in the title track carries a tinge of triumph. Among the highlights are harmonies with '50s rockabilly firecracker Wanda Jackson on her "What Have We Done" and a Cajun-accented duet with Jimmy C. Newman on "Daydreaming."

Any country fan with a long enough memory will have heard these styles and themes before, but Trevino refutes the contention that "they just don't make country music like they used to." In Texas, they do.

— D. M.



MOUNTAIN HEART No Other Way

SKAGGS FAMILY RECORDS

★★★★

Though they're not playing quite to the level yet of Flatt & Scruggs or even the

RAY PRICE

Time

AUDIUM

★★★★

Ray Price fans have been dreaming about this one for a while. On *Time*, Price resurrects the honky-tonk shuffle he perfected on indelible 1960s hits like "The Other Woman," "Burning Memories" and "A Way To Survive." What's more, the project features Price working once again with the very musicians who played on those beloved records.

It's been decades since this sound crystallized on Price's classic *Night Life* album. Yet bassist Bob Moore, drummer Buddy Harman and guitarist Harold Bradley – surviving members of the famed studio rhythm section, the A-team – fall into a smoky sawdust groove like it was still the early '60s. Joining them is pedal-steel player Buddy Emmons, a longtime member of Price's Cherokee Cowboys.

Still, 1963 it ain't. So it isn't surprising that *Time* is a tad disappointing when measured against the records it means to emulate. For one thing, some A-teamers – including pianist Floyd Cramer and guitarist Grady Martin – have died. (They're replaced here by David Briggs and Jimmy Capps, respectively, a pair of session legends in their own right.) For another, the songs Price selects



aren't always as strong as they might be.

Still, what's best about *Time* is how consistently Price and his old studio pals prove they can match their own high standards.

On the album-opening "You Just Don't Love Me Anymore," the A-team takes a lament about a departing lover's "cold indifference" and makes it ideal for gliding boots around a dancehall floor. Meanwhile, Price's voice is as elegant as ever – if anything, it's become more richly textured with the years. When, on "Both Sides Of Good Bye," he moans patiently that *I've loved and I've been loved, but not at the same time*, his bitter-sweet croon remains incomparable.

— D. C.

Del McCoury Band, Mountain Heart offers one answer to the bluegrass version of the question: Who's gonna fill their shoes?

No Other Way is the group's third and finest album. Partly this is thanks to producer Ricky Skaggs, who has become a master at capturing in the studio the energy and drive of the genre's best live performances. Mainly, though, it's just that this young, musically inventive quintet features timing that drives and swings alongside harmonies as tight and emotive as any in the business.

Not to say that some of the material couldn't be improved upon. Mountain Heart chooses mostly new songs that underscore its hill-country moniker, but on occasion the characters seem like types rather than individuals. And while the baritone voice of mandolinist Adam Steffey is agreeably ragged, it isn't distinctive or soulful enough to carry an

a cappella version of the traditional church ballad "Tedious And Tasteless." Then again, this side of Ralph Stanley's voice, whose is?

At any rate, all this quibbling melts away during the album's high points: tenor singer Steve Gulley soaring through a chorus, the group nailing its poignant harmonies on the born-again chorus of "The Spirit Moved," or the rousing call-and-response of "Gambler's Blues." And there are no quibbles at all when the band lays into instrumentals "Real Time" and the traditional "Lee Highway Blues."

To begin the latter, a band member goads the others to "Mash it!" – as in all the way to floor. Last we see Mountain Heart, they're streaking down the highway atop a fierce mandolin chop, hot on the heels of bluegrass' future.

— D. C.

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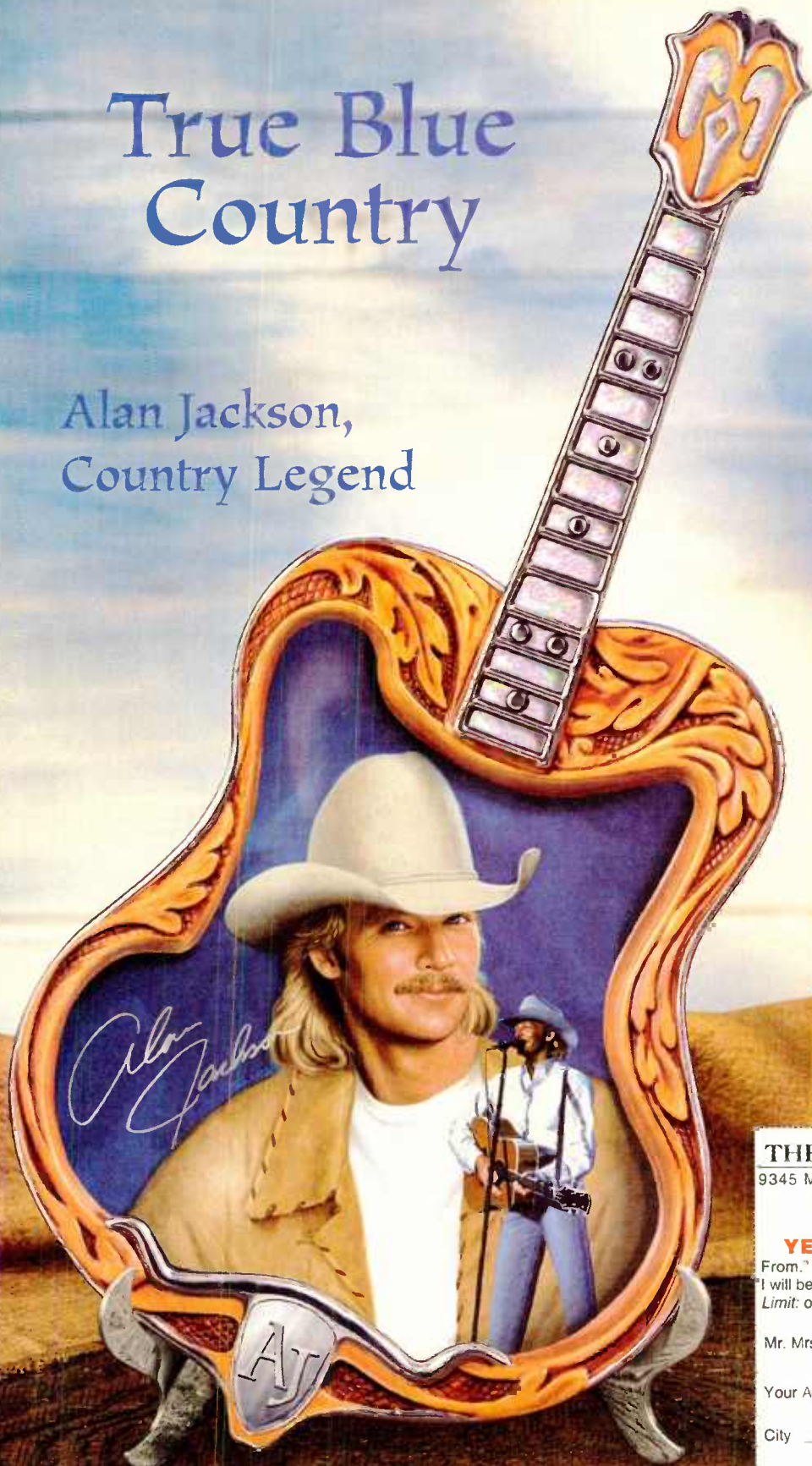
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Illrd Tyme Out

Singing On Streets of Gold

Illrd Tyme Out
Singing On Streets Of Gold
(Chateau) ★★★★★

Nothing challenges a vocal group – or provides a better test of its mettle – like the four-part harmony of classic Southern gospel. On *Singing On Streets Of Gold*, Illrd Tyme Out clarifies why it has won so many International Bluegrass Music Association Vocal Group of the Year Awards. The 12-year-old group has never sounded more assured and more aware of its strengths. The five singer/musicians also manage to find newer songs by songwriters like Jim Mills and Carl Jackson that are every bit as powerful as standards by Albert Brumley and Mosie Lister. All in all, an album sure to stir listeners beyond the bluegrass and Christian faithful.



The Be Good Tanyas
Chinatown
(Nettwerk) ★★★★★

Part rustic mountain cabin and part arty urban coffee-house, The Tanyas play acoustic music with an old

soul and a modern point of view. On its second album, the Canadian trio shows immense growth – the arrangements and harmonies are more focused and skillfully executed, making an already good thing all the more haunting and powerful. Their primary influences are old-time mountain songs and the darker side of contemporary folk, as heard on their fine cover of Townes Van Zandt's "Waiting Around To Die."

They understand the value of intimacy and the power of sparse musical backing, and like early Cowboy Junkies or recent Gillian Welch, they're the kind of band that will make obsessive fans of some while leaving others scratching their heads. But those who get it will embrace the Tanyas like a prayer book.



Open Road
Cold Wind
(Rounder) ★★★★★

Most Colorado-based acoustic bands go for extended jams and wild-eyed ruminations, but the buttoned-down pickers of Open Road bring a fierce Appalachian traditionalism to their bluegrass sound. What makes the quintet distinct, besides its aggressive talents, is singer/guitarist's Bradford Lee Folk's determination to bring a Rocky Mountain perspective to the lyrics and arrangements.

Folk's voice has a high, impassioned chill reminiscent of Del McCoury, and the band plays with focused fire

and harmonizes with sweet sentiment. The songs gain distinction by occasionally drawing on cowboy melodies and by referencing such regional wonders as the harsh winds of Buckhorn Canyon. Whether covering Bill Monroe or veteran Western performer Vern Williams, Open Road has both the power and the individuality of the best contemporary bluegrass bands.



Jill King
Jillbilly

(Blue Diamond) ★★★
Her cutesy album title and chirpy good looks might lead one to pigeonhole Jill King as another Barbie-doll entertainer driven less by artistry than by a craving for fame and attention. But that would be dead wrong. The Alabama singer's debut reveals a true talent with real range and style. King infuses fiddle-driven two-steppers "98.6" and "Down 'n' Out" with the personality of a ribald honky-tonk queen, then invests subtle emotion into the aching ballad "Not Knowing Anymore" and Garth-like melodrama into "It's Me Again."

As undeniably country as Loretta or Tammy, yet as modern as Shania or Faith, Jill King is a vibrant force that Nashville should welcome.

The Mammals
Evolver
(Humble Abode) ★★★

The Mammals aren't just interested in rekindling traditional string-band music;

they want to set it on fire and show how warmly and wildly it can crackle. The New England-based acoustic trio features guitarist and banjoist Tao Rodriguez-Seeger, grandson of Pete Seeger, and fiddler



Ruth Ungar, daughter of Grammy Award-winning traditionalist Jay Ungar. With Michael Merenda on various stringed and rhythm instruments, The Mammals celebrate a variety of folk music – from mountain and Celtic to English balladry and country hoedowns – by blending gleeful abandon with quieter, dark-toned stories. They put their mark on everything from the traditional "Way Down The Old Plank Road" and "John Brown's Dream" to Richard Thompson's "1952 Vincent Black Lightning," sharing both their dexterity and their delight in what they've discovered.



Teresa
Brave New Girls
(BNM) ★★★

It's easy to hear why Linda Ronstadt wanted to work with the pop-country performer Teresa. The single-

named singer shares a lot of the qualities of Ronstadt's pioneering early work, most notably its blend of country's lyrical strengths, catchy pop melodies and cutting-edge rock energy.

Well known within the Nashville music community – she was briefly signed to Sony Music in the mid-'90s – Teresa also has been steadily building a name for herself on a grass-roots level. Talent agents at national universities recently named her College Country Entertainer of the Year for an unprecedented sixth time.

A songwriter with a knack for emotional storylines that accentuate the strengths and vulnerabilities of women of all ages, Teresa has an expressive voice that, if not as potent as Ronstadt's, nonetheless gets her points across with clarity and personality. New? For most listeners, yes. Brave? Her new album certainly makes that case.



High Noon

What Are You Waiting For?
(Goofin') ★★

Let's see: References to Daddy-O, bad habits, railroad tracks, that crazy beat and baby, baby, baby. Must be a rockabilly record, right? Therein lies the problem. This veteran Texas trio certainly has the '50s rockabilly sound and lingo down. But, unfortunately, they don't go beyond the clichés, winding up with little more than a nostalgic novelty act for the go-cat-go set.



Winnifred B. Cutler, Ph.D.

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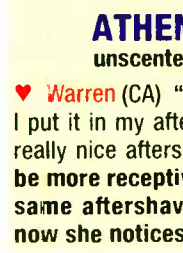
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Hat Acts

COUNTRY BOOKSHELF

How Hollywood created the cowboy mythos

Singing In The Saddle:

The History Of The Singing Cowboy

By Douglas B. Green

(Country Music Foundation/Vanderbilt, \$34.95)

Whenever Roy Rogers arrived at recording sessions in the 1940s, a gaggle of kids – usually the children of studio employees – crowded around to greet him and watch him sing. Rogers never seemed to mind.

But one day producer Charles Green heard the King of the Cowboys ask that the young fans be shown out, and he thought it uncharacteristic of Rogers. “Are they bothering you?” he asked. “No,” Roy replied, “but I like to smoke, and I don’t smoke in front of kids.”

The scene was indicative of how seriously Rogers took his role as a cowboy hero – and how carefully he groomed that facade.

In his expansive new book, historian Douglas B. Green – who doubles as Ranger Doug in the cowboy trio Riders In The Sky – traces the growth of the cowboy myth and how it became ingrained in American culture through the action movies of the '40s and '50s.



As Green asserts, real-life ranch hands and pioneers of the West had little time for singing. Still, their lonely, rugged life spawned romantic images. Where there’s romance, there’s song – and where there’s song, there’s money. So Hollywood, Tin Pan Alley, radio and television seized the mythic Western figure, hurled him into the commercial mainstream and inflated him beyond any semblance of reality.

Turning to the men and women who traded on those romantic notions, Green sketches rich profiles of leading stars Rogers, Gene Autry and Tex Ritter, and he dishes out mini-biographies of their lesser-known counterparts. Unfortunately, he leaves out Sheb Wooley, who recorded a herd of Western songs and played a cowboy in television’s *Rawhide*, and in such films as *High Noon*.

Despite that omission and the absence of any serious discussion about the impact of the singing cowboy on shaping American society, *Singing In The Saddle* is a valuable addition to the popular music library.

— Michael Streissguth

The Light Crust Doughboys Are On The Air: Celebrating Seventy Years Of Texas Music

By John Mark Dempsey

(University of North Texas Press,

\$29.95)

In the history of country music, flour is like gold dust. Manufacturers of the white stuff sponsored country and Western acts from Nacogdoches to Nashville. As



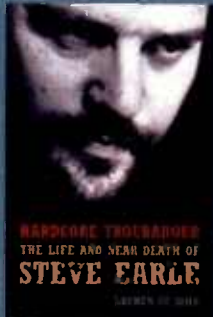
author Dempsey notes in this flattering biography, nobody benefited more than Texas’ Light Crust Doughboys, whose powder-caked beginnings led to a 70-year musical run and launched the careers of Western swing kings Milton Brown and Bob Wills.

Hardcore Troubadour: The Life And Near Death Of Steve Earle

By Lauren St John

(Fourth Estate, \$26.95)

In this clear-eyed bio, St John examines the trajectory of a life and career that rocked Nashville in the 1980s, descended into self-absorbed turbulence and nightmarish drug addiction shortly after, and ultimately



emerged, seeking redemption, in the mid-1990s. It’s a compelling midlife update that leads one to believe Steve Earle’s next 40 years will surely warrant another book.

Mel Street: A Country Legend Gone – But Not Forgotten

By Dennis Schuler Sr.

and Larry J. Delp

(Mountain State Press, \$16.95)

Another self-destructive personality to pass through country music, Mel



Street committed suicide on Oct. 21, 1978, his 45th birthday and the day his latest hit “Just Hangin’ On” debuted on the country charts. The authors trace the life

of this enigmatic hitmaker and come up with an adoring, though unpolished, tribute.

America's First Heroine Pocahontas

by Linda Mason

She was a legend in her own time, the 12-year-old Indian princess who created peace between the Algonquin people and the English settlers who became her family, too. Today, four hundred years later, we celebrate Pocahontas as America's first heroine.

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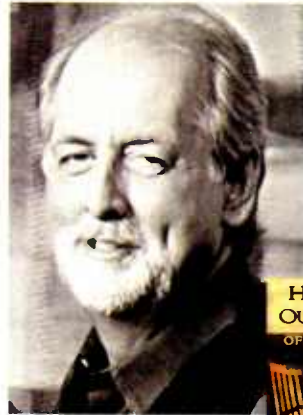
Reiding The Bible

Statler Brother Don Reid pens a tell-all book about some familiar characters

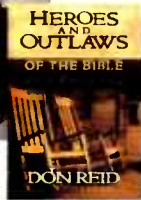
In his four decades with the recently retired Statler Brothers, Don Reid no doubt met his share of characters and told his share of stories.

But in *Heroes And Outlaws Of The Bible*, his first foray into books, Reid turns his attention to his spiritual life. Combining his considerable storytelling skills with 20-plus years of teaching Sunday school, Reid sheds light on the primary characters he believes are important to a basic understanding of the Bible.

"We all say we know all



COURTESY THE STATLER BROTHERS



about Samson or Joseph, but every time you read those stories, you pick up something new," Reid says. "You have a whole different angle on who these people are and what their stories mean and just how normal and human they are. That's what I really wanted to say with the book – that these aren't dusty old saints, these are real human beings that God used the same way He may be using us."

The book's title might be a tad misleading to casual readers, as the characters

Reid addresses aren't divided into "heroes" or "outlaws"; instead, they're both. His chosen subjects are Abraham, Joseph, Gideon, Samson, Ruth, Elijah, Esther and John the Baptist. Reid does his level best not to shy away from their faults, nor does he overhype their virtues.

"None of these people were perfect without God," Reid notes. "They all had their faults, and God tends to use imperfect people, because that's all He's got to deal with."

Each individual's story has a Scripture reference on the first page of the chapter. After that, Reid doesn't reference specific Bible chapters or verses.

"When you put down each verse as a footnote, it loses that novel feel," Reid says. "I wanted something that most kids could read, and that would be a good read for adults, too. I didn't want something that people would have to wade through."

— Lucas Hendrickson



LARRY HELL

Our own Oermann (left) holds court with Gershon and Robison.

Watch for *Country Music's* editor-at-large, Robert K. Oermann, as one of the judges for the USA Network's talent-search reality show *Nashville Star*. Oermann joins singer/songwriter Charlie Robison and Nashville music executive Tracy Gershon to rate aspiring country artists vying for the winner's spotlight and an album to be produced by Clint Black.



Flame Forward

CMT moves Flameworthy Awards to April

We're barely into spring thaw, school is still in session and most of us still have our summer clothes in storage. So what's this about the CMT Flameworthy

Awards airing in April – two months before Fan Fair?

For years, a fan-voted CMT awards event – from which the Flameworthy evolved – kicked off the famed weeklong fanfest in June. Last year's debut of the Flameworthy carried on that tradition and brought CMT its highest ratings ever, with Brooks & Dunn performing with ZZ Top and the Dixie Chicks debuting their first video from *Home*.

So why is the show now taking place two months earlier, on April 7?

"It's based on choosing a date that is most advantageous for the TV audience," explains CMT general manager Brian Phillips. "With a competitive environment on TV, and a show that was seen by six million people last year, we obviously have to go where the audience will see us."

The top ratings and the resulting increase in record sales for the stars who participated last year attracted such high-profile country artists as Shania Twain, Tim McGraw, Faith Hill and Kenny Chesney for this year's event.

"Last year was the most ambitious thing CMT ever tried," Phillips says of the show that honors the year's top videos. "We found out, almost by accident, that this night is meant to be a big, wild, over-the-top party. It's not staid or



COURTESY CMT ©

rigid like a lot of other awards shows. We want everyone involved to walk away saying, 'That was the most fun I've ever had at an awards show!'"

In other words, the Flameworthy Awards show is to the CMA Awards as the MTV Movie Awards are to the Oscars – they're looser, a bit more outrageous, and designed to surprise you.

— Nancy Henderson

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Blue Note

Jim McReynolds of famed bluegrass duo Jim & Jesse dies

Jim McReynolds dressed the part of the consummate bluegrass gentleman. Carefully groomed, and sporting a tailored suit that matched his brother Jesse's, the guitarist and tenor vocalist of the bluegrass duo Jim & Jesse was always the picture of professionalism.

But it would be a mistake to interpret his courtly demeanor as that of a musical conservative, for Jim & Jesse pushed the boundaries of bluegrass by embracing contemporary country and even rock 'n' roll, as they did by famously recording a string-band tribute to rock pioneer Chuck Berry.

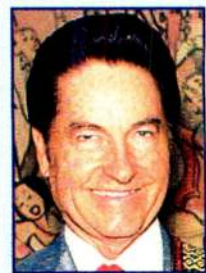
Jim, the elder of the two, passed away on Dec. 31, 2002, after a long battle with cancer.

Born in 1927 in Carfax, Va., McReynolds and his brother Jesse began performing on radio in 1947.

They signed a recording contract with Capitol Records in 1952, and Jim's soaring tenor and Jesse's distinctive mandolin style established them as one of bluegrass music's most exciting and skilled acts.

Jim & Jesse joined the Grand Ole Opry in 1964 and a year later began hosting their own syndicated TV program, *The Jim & Jesse Show*, which aired throughout the South until 1972. Their songs gained some country radio play, most notably the Top 20 hit “Diesel On My Tail” in 1964. But, as with many bluegrass acts, their reputation was based primarily on live performances and albums.

The duo was inducted into the International Bluegrass Music Association Hall of Honor in 1993, and they were given a National Heritage Endowment For The Arts National Fellowship Award in 1997.



TEEN COUNTRY

Every few years, fans ponder the question, “Who’s gonna fill their shoes?” It’s a query that never grows old – who will be the stars of tomorrow, the legends of the future? We asked those who will ultimately make that decision – the next generation of fans – which new artists they think will break through to enduring stardom.



Desiree M., 16
Gold Bar, Wash.

Carolyn Dawn Johnson. I wish that CMT would play more of her videos and the radio would play more of her songs. I love her music. My friend has her CD, and we play it every morning from beginning to end and sing along with it. Her songs are so real. She talks about relationships and love in her music, and she’s a beautiful singer.



Jayson G., 16
Tyrone, Pa.

In a string of new male artists like Blake Shelton, Steve Azar, Shannon Lawson and Aaron Lines, Joe Nichols is the one that sticks out the most to me. He seems like

a down-to-earth guy, and “The Impossible” touched millions who heard it. I first heard him on CMT – his video was one where I just had to sit down and watch it the whole way through. That video led me to get an earring and grow my hair long like his. His second single “Brokenheartsville,” is as creative and catchy as the last one.

If all goes right, I see him becoming a member of the Grand Ole Opry, having a string of Top 10 hits and eventually having a headlining tour.



Sarah T., 17
LaVergne, Tenn.

Rascal Flatts. They have a fresh, more upbeat sound but they still have a country feel to their music. I like the subjects of their songs, like “Prayin’ For Daylight,” and the sound of them singing in harmony. The lead singer has a great voice. And they’re cute.

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 e-mail to nhenderson@countrymusicmagazine.com.



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Dear Buck: You've Got Mail

A popular revolutionary, Buck Owens changed country music while ranking as one of its most successful acts. Forty years ago, Owens scored his first No. 1 hit with "Act Naturally," a song that typified his torque-and-twang sound,

which put rock 'n' roll muscle into honky-tonk rhythms. By acting as natural as can be, Owens became a fan favorite both as a singer and as long-running host of TV's *Hee Haw*, as illustrated by the mountain of fan mail he peruses in this 1974 photo.



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