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LIKE A ROCK

COUNTRYMUSIC

Winter 2000

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CM captures country music history on film in this one-of-a-kind portrait gallery featuring living legends with the artists who hope to carry on their tradition in the coming century.

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Country music has changed dramatically over the past 100 years, and a new century is bound to bring more change. But at its core, country will always speak to the heart.

By Edward Morris

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If Elvis were alive, he'd be 65...and ruling the country charts?

By Alanna Nash

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Released from an all-too-binding contract with his former label, Tracy Byrd spreads his wings.

By Michael McCall

56 Good Time Man

He may live on the other side of the world, but "Good Time" Charlie Nagatani has a real hillbilly heart.

By Peter Fredenburg

60 Hat Trick

He's a favorite target for music critics, but Clay Walker has quietly become one of country's most successful artists.

By Craig Havighurst



Scenes from the "millennium" sessions, top to bottom: Vince Gill gives Chet Atkins a sneak peek at a new tune; Dolly Parton and Lee Ann Womack see eye to eye; Marty Stuart and Earl Scruggs fill the autumn air with mountain music.

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Marty Stuart does a lot more than make music; also Joe Bonsall, *Austin City Limits*, Jerry Jeff Walker, bluegrass and a Super Bowl special.

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74 New music by Clint Black, Reba McEntire, Toby Keith, Trace Adkins, Bob Delevante, Bruce Robison, Buddy Miller, Chris Gaines, Dolly Parton, Gary Allan, John Berry, Jon Randall, Kris Kristofferson, Lee Roy Parnell, Marty Raybon, Paul McCartney and more.



Clay Walker's success leaves him plenty to smile about (top); Tracy Byrd comes through some tough times with a new outlook.

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HIT "LIST"

I JUST HAD TO WRITE to tell you that you were right on with your Holiday Wish List. The Mavericks should have dozens of platinum sales. They're the best group out there. Personally, I like Rodney Crowell's version of "Please Remember Me" much better than Tim McGraw's. You were right about James House, but you left out one of the most talented singer/songwriters in your list of artists who should have record deals: Jamie O'Hara. I've been waiting forever for new music from Jamie.

Carolyn Fertig
Wheatland, Wyoming

HATS OFF TO THE PERSONS responsible for the Holiday Wish List. I couldn't agree more. In fact, when I read the article I had to show some of my friends because they know how I feel about these issues. It's a good sign to see folks like you feeling this way. Now all we have to do is convince the rest of the industry. God bless Gary Allan, Dwight Yoakam and *Country Music* magazine. Always keep it real.

Howie Herula
Detroit, Michigan

YOUR HOLIDAY WISH LIST was awesome! I hope some decision-makers take note. If I have to hear one more girl group that's trying to be the Dixie Chicks I'm going to throw my

radio against the wall. The Chicks are real musicians and a tough act to follow. Also, when Tim McGraw came out with "Please Remember Me" and the radio station started playing it, I called to complain. About five years ago I was calling them to request Rodney Crowell's version and they wouldn't play it. Rodney's version is rich, soulful and so much better. Maybe now that you've pointed it out, more people will check out Rodney's version.

Tom McNamara
Atlanta, Georgia

LEE ROY JOY

AT LONG LAST, a long interview with Lee Roy Parnell! I received my Holiday issue today and I was going to browse through it, having given up on any music magazine devoting space to him—and then I saw it. It's not only informative, well-written and with great pictures, but it also shows us his special place in Texas. Thank you so much. I'm probably his greatest fan—or friend, as Lee Roy calls us. I've been on tour cruises with Delbert McClinton just because of Lee Roy. I call my radio station every day, three times, and they play him. Let's hope that more people get acquainted with this very special, talented and incredibly friendly artist.

Cathy Brown
Bethesda, Maryland

THANKS FOR THE STORY on Lee Roy Parnell. I've always been a fan of his music but rarely have read anything so interesting about him. Sometimes stories just focus on the music, which is great, but it is usually so one-dimensional it's hard to get a sense of who the artist is as a person. Your story gave some wonderful insights about Lee Roy as a man. Keep up the good work!

Julie Williams
Portsmouth, New Hampshire

HARRIS POLL

A JOYOUS THANK YOU from the bottom of my Emmy-loving heart for the piece on Emmylou. She hit the nail right on the head when she lambasted country radio and the Nashville mindset. It has done her fans' hearts good to see her back on the charts again after all the years of losing out to the fluff-peddlers in the awards shows and being basically ignored. It does our hearts even more good to see the press recognize the accomplishments of this fantastic lady and give her a forum to fire a few volleys across Nashville's bow.

Donald R. Soll
Holland, Pennsylvania

AS A LONGTIME ARDENT admirer of real country music and Emmylou Harris, I bought her new album of duets with her "Everly Sister" Linda Ronstadt. It is ironic that after her rightfully grouchy take on how current country radio is not "washed in the blood" she puts out an album of West Coast popglamfolk, which is less country than many an empty hat act—sorta more Marilyn Monroe than Bill. I know she's dissatisfied with her position and her fame, and I wish her the best as she reaches out creatively, but it appears our country goddess has been too long at the Lilith Fair. By the way,



thank you for having "meat" in your magazine. An example was Merle Haggard's "crap" remark—that was priceless.

Tom Stone
Germantown, Tennessee

ALL HAG, NO HYPE

I WOULD LIKE TO SAY

congratulations to Merle Haggard for telling it like it is in his Trailblazers interview, especially the last question about not being played on country radio these days. Merle's answer: "They say they won't play my records the same time they play Shania Twain's? I'm glad because I don't want anyone mixing me up with that crap." How many of the songs and artists of today will be remembered 50 years from now? As George Jones sang, "Who Will Fill Their Shoes?" Nobody!

Dick Hill
Hastings, Nebraska

BROOKS AND DONE?

WHY DON'T Kix Brooks and Ronnie Dunn just break up and put us all out of our misery? Then there'd be more slots on the radio for music with substance. Their *Tight Rope* album is a disgrace and Craig Havighurst's review was right on the money.

Michael Reilly
Chicago, Illinois

I'VE BEEN A Brooks and Dunn fan for a long time and didn't think twice before going out to buy their new CD *Tight Rope*. I guess I should have read Craig Havighurst's review first. The CD is pure schlock and to say I'm disappointed would be an understatement. Don't the artists care about the music they put out anymore? It seems like country radio gets worse every week. Guess I'll go back to classic rock.

Lee Ann Kowalski
Richmond, Virginia

AS A BROOKS AND DUNN FAN

and new subscriber to *Country Music* magazine, I was appalled at the horrible review of *Tight Rope*. I found it to be an incredibly artistic and creative CD. To refer to Ronnie Dunn's voice as "artless" is extremely cruel and an absolute crime. Brooks and Dunn have never let this fan down and I'm sure never will. They have more than paid their dues to the country music industry and should be treated with the utmost respect. In no way did they deserve such an awful review. Maybe this subscriber should stick to the other country magazine. They seem to treat the artists with a little more dignity.

Lani Milas
Chicago, Illinois

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RAEANNE RUBENSTEIN

Last spring, *CM*'s staff tossed around ideas for a special feature for the first issue of 2000, something to honor country music's past and celebrate its future. *Wouldn't it be great*, we thought, *if we could photograph today's top artists alongside the legends who inspired them?* In one photographic moment, we could capture a bit of country's past, present and future, honor the seminal artists who shaped the music of the 20th century and take a peek at where country is going in the 21st.

KNOWING THAT SCHEDULING A PHOTO SESSION WITH

even one busy celebrity is a major task, we nonetheless initiated what we came to call "the millennium project," attempting to coordinate the hectic schedules of numerous pairs of artists. (For those who haven't booked celebrities and cannot fully grasp what's involved, here's a brief overview of the past six months at *CM*: Phone requests, letter requests, promising responses, postponements, updates, rescheduling, disappointing responses, cancellations, cajoling, more rescheduling, more postponements, last-minute confirmations, last-second requests, split-second location setups...and hundreds more details, multiplied by dozens of artists.)

It was a teeth-gnashing but rewarding exercise. For one thing, we were privy to some wonderful moments once we landed the photo sessions: After posing with Dolly Parton, Lee Ann Womack gleefully exclaimed, "That was it—that right there was the highlight of my career!" George Jones took a moment to offer Alan Jackson some sage advice: "Alan, if you ever need to make a comeback, just get you a lawn mower!" And to our surprise and delight, six months and several bottles of Pepto later, we had beautiful photographs of 13 pairs of exceptional artists for our exclusive photo gallery, "Who's Gonna Fill Their Shoes?"

Our one-of-a-kind photo collection could not have become a reality without the talent and persistence of photographer Raeanne Rubenstein; the cooperation of some of Music Row's top publicists, execs and managers, who coordinated their artists' schedules with ours; and, of course, all the accommodating artists who took the time to pose for us. We'd be remiss if we didn't say thanks to all who became a part of the project.

Aside from the exclusive photos, this issue is also chock-full of stories that examine the state of country music. Edward Morris contemplates whether country as we know it will survive the future; Alanna Nash whimsically ponders whether Elvis, if he'd lived, would now be a country king; and Peter Fredenburg shows us that country music thrives far beyond America's borders with his profile of Japanese showman Charlie Nagatani.

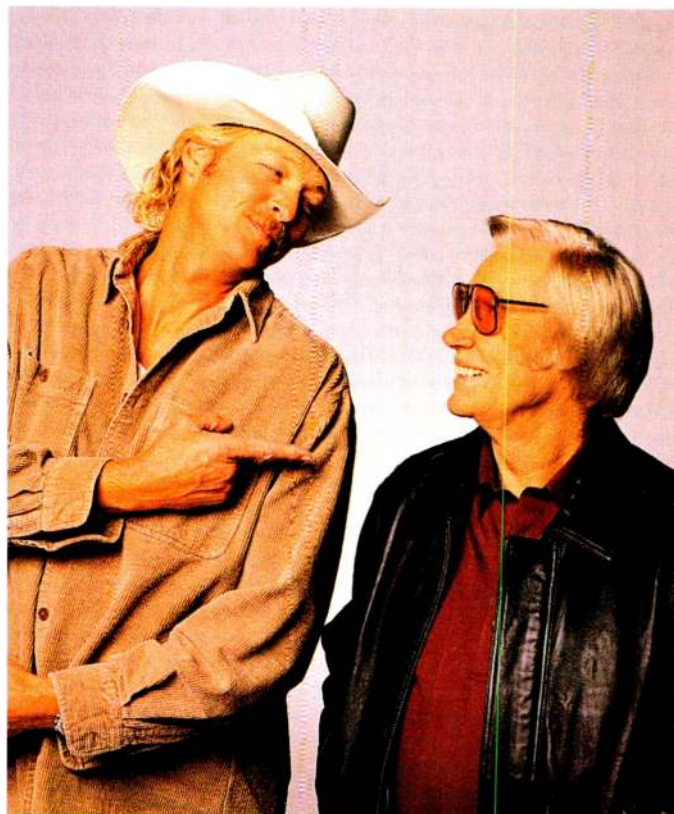
In addition, Tracy Byrd reveals details of his break with MCA and Clay Walker ponders the secret to his success. It all adds up to an issue with a little something for everyone. Not a bad way to kick off a new millennium!

DEBORAH BARNES
Editor-in-Chief



RAEANNE RUBENSTEIN

Top left: Pam Tillis and Kitty Wells graciously allowed me to horn in on their photo session. Above: Photographer Raeanne Rubenstein captures a moment with Billy Ray Cyrus and Tom T. Hall. Below: Posing is serious business for Alan Jackson and George Jones.



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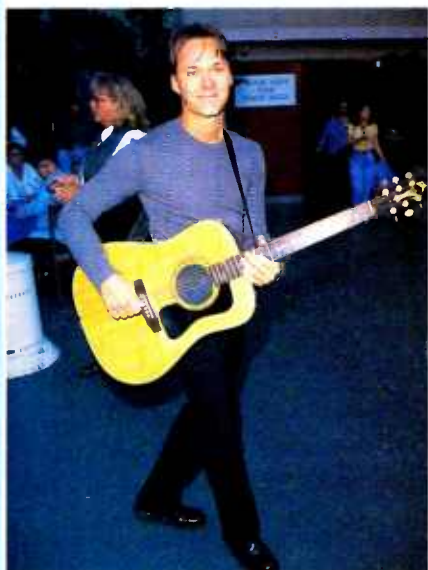
Country on the Town

By Robert K. Oermann



SCENE STEALERS

Top to bottom: **Terri Clark** gets the feel of concrete while placing her pinkies in Nashville's Walk of Fame. **Lee Roy Parnell**, **Hal Ketchum** and **Rodney Crowell** join voices to celebrate the publication of a book commemorating the 25th anniversary of *Austin City Limits*. **Bryan White** puts his best foot forward in L.A. at KZLA's country cookout.



OPRY HOUSE MEMORIES

Pam Tillis has been at the Opry all her life, thanks to papa Mel, and **Jo Dee Messina** honors the memory of Opry diva Dottie West with "A Lesson in Leavin'." The two chatted at the show's 74th anniversary.

LEFT, TOP TO BOTTOM: MORELLO/GHERGIA (2); KATHY HUTCHINS PHOTOGRAPHY; RIGHT: MORELLO/GHERGIA

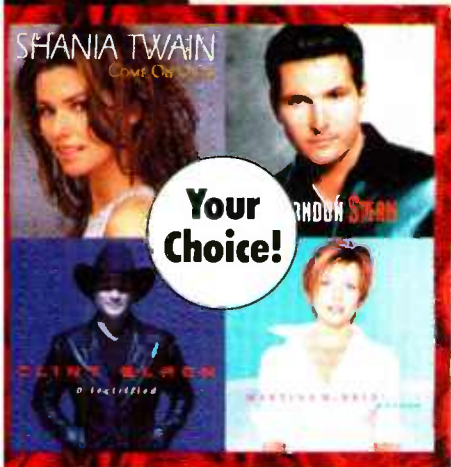
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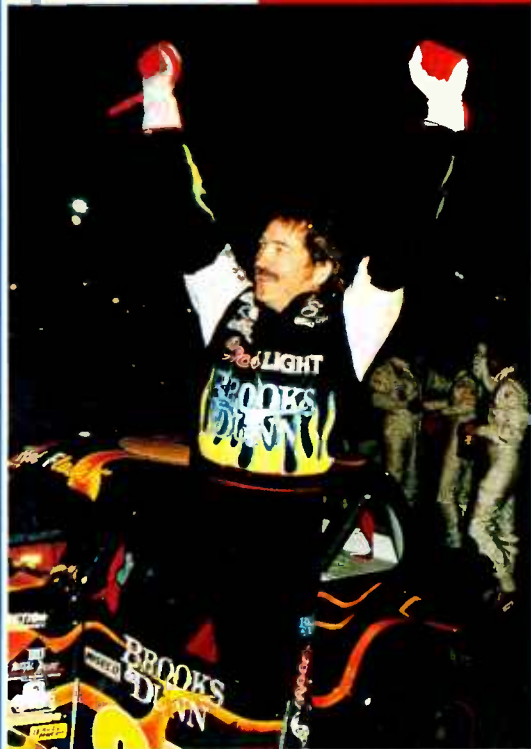
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WINNERS CIRCLE

A HALO FOR HAZEL

▼Our own **Hazel Smith** was honored with a CMA award at a Nashville surprise party. Fellow scribe **Robert K. Oermann** broke the news with a hug (bottom), then **Marty Stuart** made the crowd howl by telling tales about the beloved columnist.



▲**T. Graham Brown** takes the spot light at the Christian Country Music Awards with his powerful alcoholism song "Wine Into Water." ◀Team captain **Kix Brooks** gives a champ's salute at **Mark Collie's** celebrity race for diabetes (left). Below left, Mark and **Larry Stewart** flank **Matthew Nelson** with their trophies at the same star-studded event.

RADIO ROMANCE

▼American broadcasters' love affair with the Dixie Chicks bloomed brightly at the WB Radio Music Awards gala in Las Vegas. Fiddler **Martie Seidel** is all aglow with her trophy.



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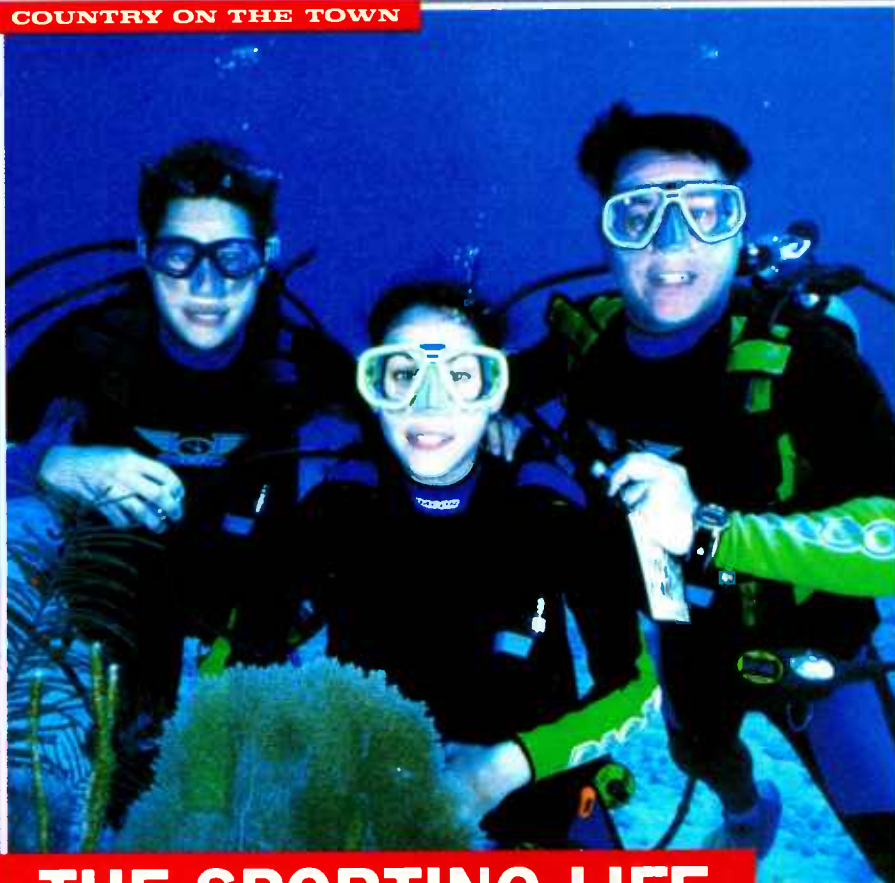
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**WHEREHOUSE
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THE SPORTING LIFE



Clockwise from top left: **Tyler, Amanda** and **Steve Wilkinson** get away from it all with a family scuba-diving expedition in the Caribbean. All three earned their advanced open-water certifications. **Vince Gill** dons his "numero uno" for his annual charity celebrity basketball game at Belmont University in Nashville. **Dean Sams** of Lonestar. **Mark Wills, Janie Fricke** and **Chad Brock** get set to hit the links at the Bill Boyd Golf Classic in Los Angeles, which is also a fundraiser for charities. **Billy Ray Cyrus** takes pointers from figure-skating queen **Nancy Kerrigan** at the taping of TNN's TV special *An Evening of Country on Ice*. The two-time Olympic medalist was also joined by **Sawyer Brown, Lorrie Morgan** and **Sherrié Austin**. Champion skaters glided to the music of **Brooks and Dunn, Reba McEntire** and **Shania Twain**.

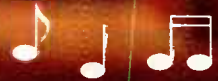
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: LOUIS HATCHER; SCHMIDT RELATIONS; MIPELLO; GRIEKE; KATY FUCHS; PHOTOGRAPHY; MIPELLO; GRIEKE

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THE BUZZ

BY HAZEL SMITH



C.J. SHELVER

Joan Osborne, Lee Roy Parnell and Randy Scruggs

Almost Hollywood

Nashville's star-studded premiere of the comedy *Happy, Texas* was not only fun, it was one of the funniest movies I've ever seen. I won't give away secrets but the story is about two prison escapees who end up in the middle of a beauty pageant for little girls in a small town. And the made-in-Music City soundtrack produced by my best friend, **Fletcher Foster**, is par excellent. Following movie and food we were royally entertained by **Lee Roy Parnell** and his band, with **Randy Scruggs** and **Joan Osborne** highlighting the evening performing "Passin' Thru" from the CD soundtrack, with **Delbert McClinton** blowing his Texas blues harmonica. In the crowd and on the soundtrack: **Brad Paisley**, **Pam Tillis**, **BR5-49** and **Alison Krauss**. Special guests: Hall-of-Fame member **Earl Scruggs** and his wife **Louise**, **John Prine** and former *Saturday Night Live* writer/comedian **Al Franken**.

Junk Mail

Nothing is more irritating than telemarketers calling at supper, unless it's junk mail addressed to *Current Resident*. About to trash the latter, the girl in the ad favored **Faith Hill** so I ripped it open, saw it was a Cover Girl ad with liquid makeup. 'Course it was Faith in the ad, looking lovely except for her hair. They obviously styled it with an egg beater! But seriously, one can assume all is well at the **Tim McGraw**/**Faith Hill** homestead, since the couple announced they will tour together in 2000.

P.J. Party Chely

Wright has learned not to go into Kroger to grocery shop alone in your pajamas. Seems Chely and entourage were heading out of town on her bus when they stopped for stuff. Wearing a blouse over her cotton pajama bottoms, the singer was moseying down the chips aisle when her cell phone rang. The voice on the other end reported that "Single White Female"

was No. 1. There was no one in sight save the Frito salesman who was stocking the shelves. Congratulations to a deserving gal singer on her first No. 1.

The Switch Is On

Ty England is now **Garth Brooks** became Chris

Gaines but became **Garth Brooks** again when he produced Ty's record when he became Tyler. Confused? It's clear as mud to me.

Wrestlemania

Went for a checkup and ran into **Daryle Singletary**, who needed X-rays. Seems he and the band were watching wrestling on the bus when Daryle and his bass player started wrestling. Next thing you know, Daryle can barely breathe, his chest hurt so bad. All the advice I could give Daryle and crew: "Grow up!"

A Hero Is Born

During the CMA awards, **Alan Jackson** performed his new single, "Pop a Top," and midway through he sang a verse and chorus of **George Jones'** hit "Choices." The producers of the CMA awards had requested that Jones and the other nominees for Single of the Year sing only a verse and chorus of their nominated song. The Possum said no thanks. Alan issued a

statement that said George crashed his car in March, and if he had died the CMA would have given him 15 minutes in tribute. But he lived, and they wouldn't let him sing his three-minute song. "George Jones isn't just anybody," said Jackson. "He's been doing this 50 years and he's almost 70 years old." That was the night Alan Jackson became a hero.

Happy 100

Governor **Jimmie Davis** of Louisiana celebrated his 100th birthday by singing four songs, including his self-penned smash "You Are My Sunshine." More than 900 people attended his party. Humbly, I send congratulations to Governor Davis, a great American and a great man of country music.



MORELO/GHERGIA

Amy and Vince

Hometown girl **Amy Grant** came out in the open by telling her side of her divorce from **Gary Chapman**, and gave an inkling of what may lie ahead. She and her three children have moved from their house in Williamson County to Belle Meade. Amy says her best friend, hands

down, is **Vince Gill**, but she denies there was anything more than friendship between them before her divorce. (Vince and ex-wife, **Janis Gill**, were divorced in 1997.) Now Amy and Vince attend church together, and they were seen at the Predators hockey game with her kids. A week later Vince was in Oklahoma for his golf tournament when reporters approached him with an Amy/Vince question. Answered Vince, "What's the big deal? She's single. I'm single. Yes, she's my girlfriend."

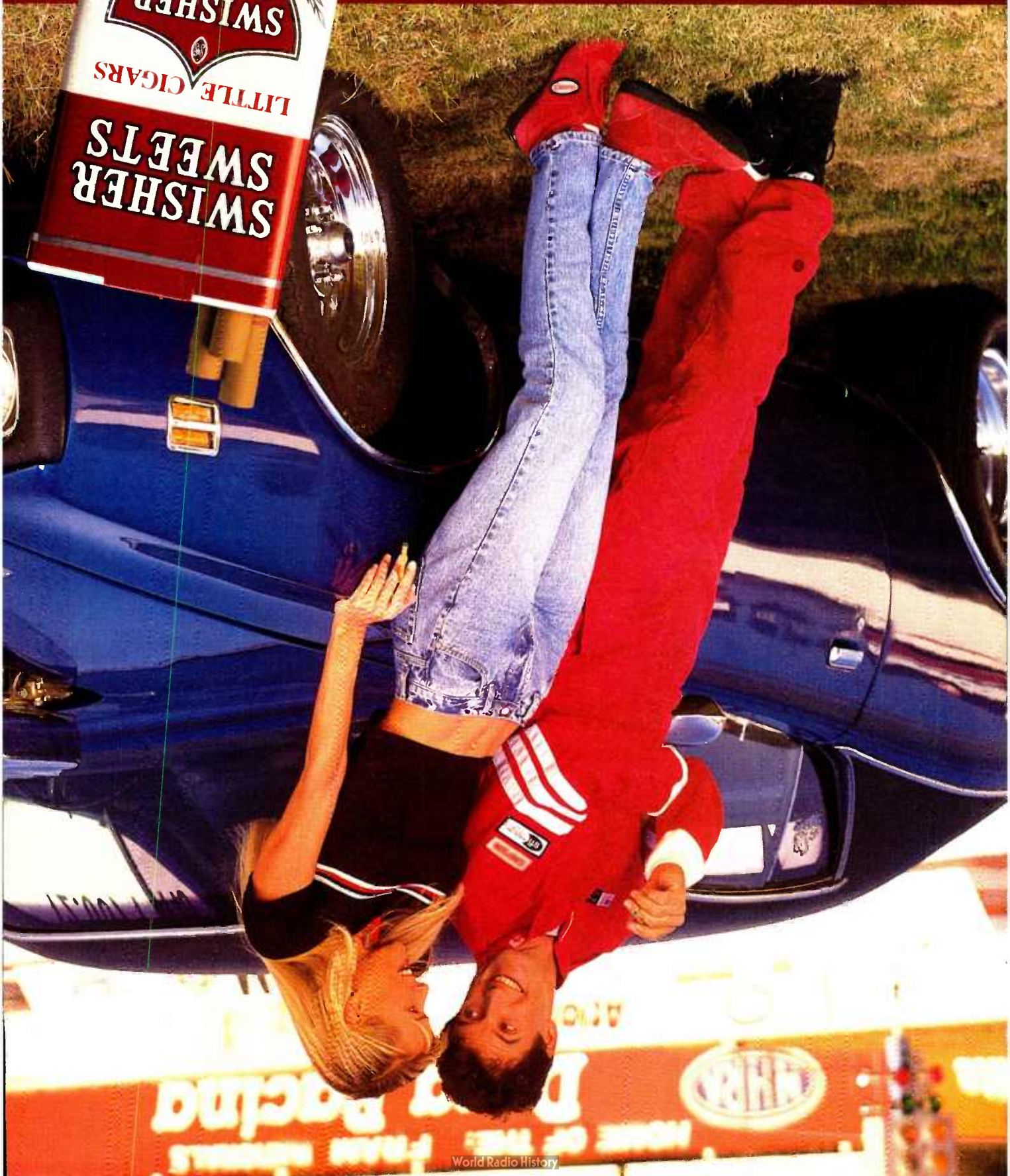
Under Cover

I had almost forgotten women can sing without showing body parts. It was truly almost a religious experience to watch **Emmylou Harris** and **Linda Ronstadt** in that hallowed place, the Ryman Auditorium, in a concert that brought standing "o" after standing "o." The two of them still out-sing just about all other females.

Tammy Pages

You didn't really think **Tammy Wynette's** death was laid to rest, did you? Daughter **Jackie Daly** is writing a book titled *My Mother's Story* with noted author **Tom Carter**. According to Daly, her book will be critical of her stepfather, **George Richey**. Richey, on the other hand, is reported to be keeping company with a former Dallas cheerleader, 33-year-old **Shelia Slaughter**, and plans to write his own book titled *You and Me: Tammy Wynette, A Love Story*. ★

IT JUST DOESN'T GET ANY SWEETER THAN THIS.



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HOME OF THE... Packin'
VINTAGE

KEITH URBAN'S SELF-TITLED DEBUT album for Capitol Nashville is all about the importance of relationships.

"Not every song reflects it, but there is absolutely a running theme about partnership," the Australian-born Urban explains. "Even if you're single, it's vital to have a good support team around you, including your friends and family."

The genesis of *Keith Urban* (with nine of the 12 songs cowritten by Urban) comes from his own personal struggle to overcome addiction, to strengthen his relationships and, finally, to heal.

"I was at a place in my life where I took everything and everybody for granted. I was struggling with some

powerful demons," Urban recalls. "It was only the support of my family that pulled me back out of the hole again. I also lost a relationship in the middle of it—hopefully I can get that back again sometime—but it made me realize you can't do anything alone, and the more you try, the more isolated you get."

Urban took a long look in the mirror and wasn't happy with what he saw. As he made positive changes in his life, Urban kept writing. And the songs on *Keith Urban* reflect those changes.

"Guys are strange creatures," Urban laughs. "We are so macho sometimes. We'll be out together and one guy will say, 'Oh, I've got to call my girlfriend' and act like it's a real hassle. Then, when he gets on the phone with her, you hear

him go, 'Hey babe!' and he's all excited. The truth is, we really *want* to be home with our wives or girlfriends. Every one of us is thinking the same thing, but no one will say it. Guys think it's a sign of weakness to say, 'I love being with my girl and quite frankly, I don't really care to hang with you guys.' Once you're willing to really open yourself up to that kind of intimacy with someone, I think it becomes more apparent how silly it is to play those kinds of games."

Urban grew up in a suburb of Brisbane, Australia, with parents who loved American country music. His first influences were Charley Pride, Dolly Parton and Jim Reeves. By the age of 8, Urban was winning country music talent shows and dreaming of Nashville. In his early 20s, Urban formed a band whose distinctive take on country music led to four No. 1 hits in Australia. Following this success, Urban decided to make the move to Nashville.

When he arrived in Music City, Urban formed another band called the Ranch. Their live shows caused a buzz throughout the music community, and the group was eventually signed to Capitol Nashville. Unfortunately, the Ranch disbanded shortly after the release of their critically acclaimed debut, but Urban decided to hang in there and work on his first solo album.

"The songs on this album are much more personal than the work I did with the Ranch," Urban says. "A lot of the Ranch songs told a nice, colorful story, but they weren't particularly personal to me. I'm a big Glen Campbell fan. I love 'Galveston' and 'Wichita Lineman' and those kinds of songs. I can't personally relate to any of them, but I love the story. The Ranch album was more along those lines. [But] this record is just so personal—it's really quite different from anything I've done before."

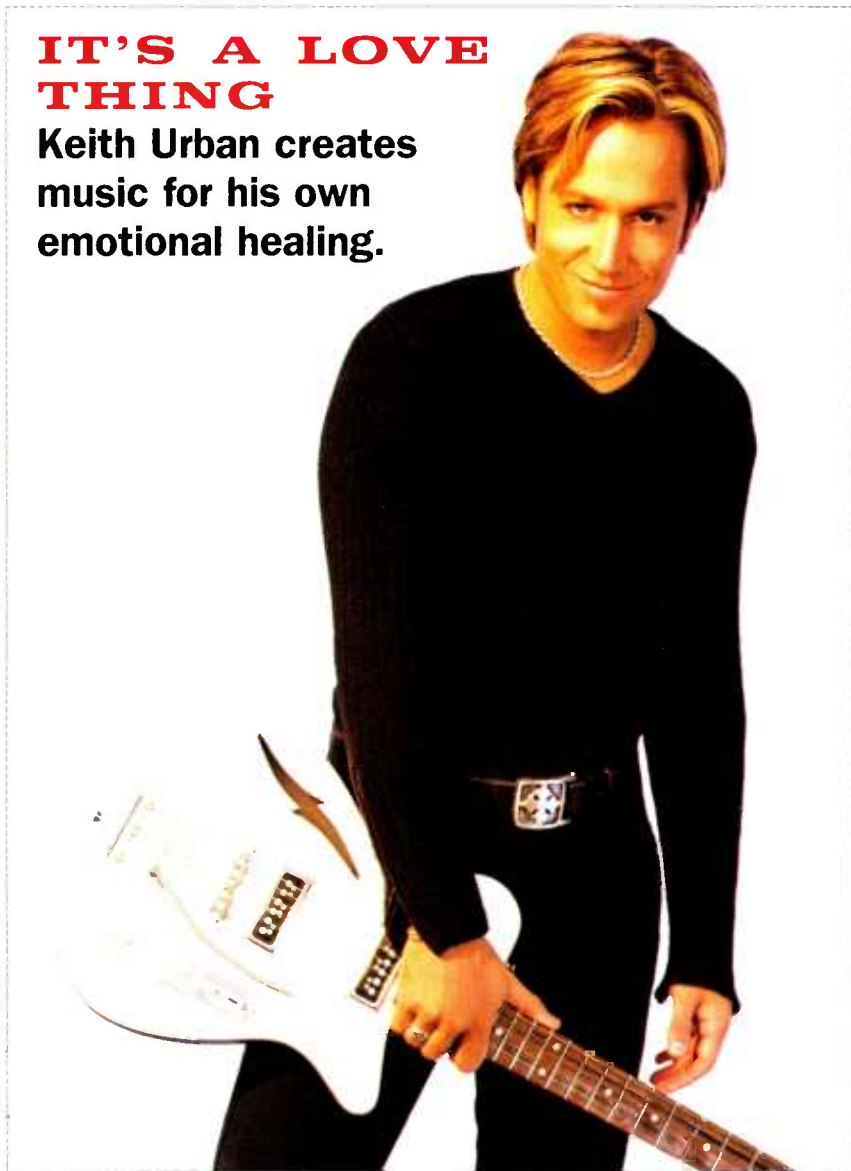
Urban plans to follow his passion for music and let things happen naturally.

"I don't feel like I'm chasing a dream as much as pursuing my destiny," Urban says with conviction. "I love playing, I love singing, I love writing and I love recording. My love for all those things propels me forward and takes me places I could never have dreamed I'd be."

—Tamara Saviano

IT'S A LOVE THING

Keith Urban creates music for his own emotional healing.





Left to right: Kevin Griffin, Jerry Hughes, Matthew Basford, Tim Hunt, David Buchanan, Joe Caverlee

RAISING THE DREGS

Yankee Grey taps a neglected vein of southern-fried rock.

MAKING THE LEAP FROM A regional bar band to major label act has its occupational hazards. Yankee Grey lead vocalist Tim Hunt recalls having the kind of problem recently he's wanted for years. The high-energy sextet was playing a circuit of opening dates for Hank Williams Jr., and they were elated when their punchy first single, "All Things Considered," brought the house down. But then something unnerving happened. The band began the delicate fiddle and acoustic guitar lead-in to the ballad "This Time Around," "and before we got out of the

their cover-heavy club act into the 10 songs—most written by Hunt—on their debut *Unchained*.

Recording, says Hunt, "was an adjustment, because we're so used to the live thing." But producers Robert Ellis Orrall and Josh Leo had the band cut loose on their uptempo tunes and set the right atmosphere for the ballads. Orrall, for example, turned out the lights and put hundreds of candles all over the studio to cut "This Time Around." "It was little things like that," says Hunt, that helped the band grow through the studio experience.

The resulting sound is strongly remi-

intro and into the verse, all 8,000 people were so quiet you could have heard a pin drop," says Hunt. "For us, that's nuts. It was so overwhelming to me that I had to fight to remember the first four words."

For a band that's been sweating out a living in clubs around the Cincinnati area for 13 years, that kind of attention feels well-earned. They were signed in the summer of 1997, and they spent much of the last two years distilling the energy and elaborate arrangements of

niscient of Williams' hard-rocking country, but also the big-guitar southern rock bands of the 1970s and '80s. And they add their own twists. What sounds like Marshall Tucker-style harmonized guitar leads actually pair Matt Basford's guitar with the fiddle of Joe Caverlee. They trade off rapid-fire guitar, fiddle and keyboard solos in a manner directly influenced by the instrumental wizards from the Dixie Dregs.

Maybe most striking, *Unchained* features elaborate three- and four-part vocal harmonies that Hunt says began with his love for the band Restless Heart and developed as Yankee Grey looked for ways to make their long nightly sets interesting. "We'd pick songs that were vocally challenging just to break the monotony. Doing that started shaping and changing the sound of the band."

It's an eclectic stew. Everyone but drummer Kevin Griffin is from Ohio (and he's from just over the river in Kentucky), but the band's musical heroes are all over the map. Caverlee says his chief influences are Bill Monroe and Stevie Ray Vaughan. Bass player Dave Buchanan cites Boston and KISS. Keyboardist Jerry Hughes is a Stones and Eagles man. But Hunt says nobody's closed-minded, so it gels into a cohesive, vibrant whole. "We don't try to squelch anything," he says. "Everybody's influences come out. We're a mutt band. It's a freak of nature, but it always comes together." —Craig Havighurst

SISTER, SISTER

Rootsy duo Sisters Wade keeps country's traditions alive.

Debbie and Julie Wade have been dreaming about making music since they were girls, poring over their parents' record collection in their tiny hometown near Cape Cod, Massachusetts. "We didn't have a lot of money when we were growing up, so we would just listen to what they had: Patsy Cline, Tammy Wynette, Marty Robbins, Merle Haggard, Loretta Lynn and the Everly Brothers," says Debbie. They began performing together when Julie was 10 and Debbie was 12, lending their sweet harmonies to all the country songs they knew.

Julie moved to Nashville first, and got a job singing in Opryland's "Country Music U.S.A." show. Debbie came down once

a month to write songs with her sister while she finished her master's degree at the New England Conservatory of Music. She studied singing and everything from jazz to classical music. Yet it was country that called to her heart, and as soon as she finished school, she moved to Nashville to join her sister. It wasn't long before they attracted the attention of Charlie Daniels' Blue Hat Records. They signed to the label and are currently opening shows for the country-rock veteran.

—Cyndi Hoelzle

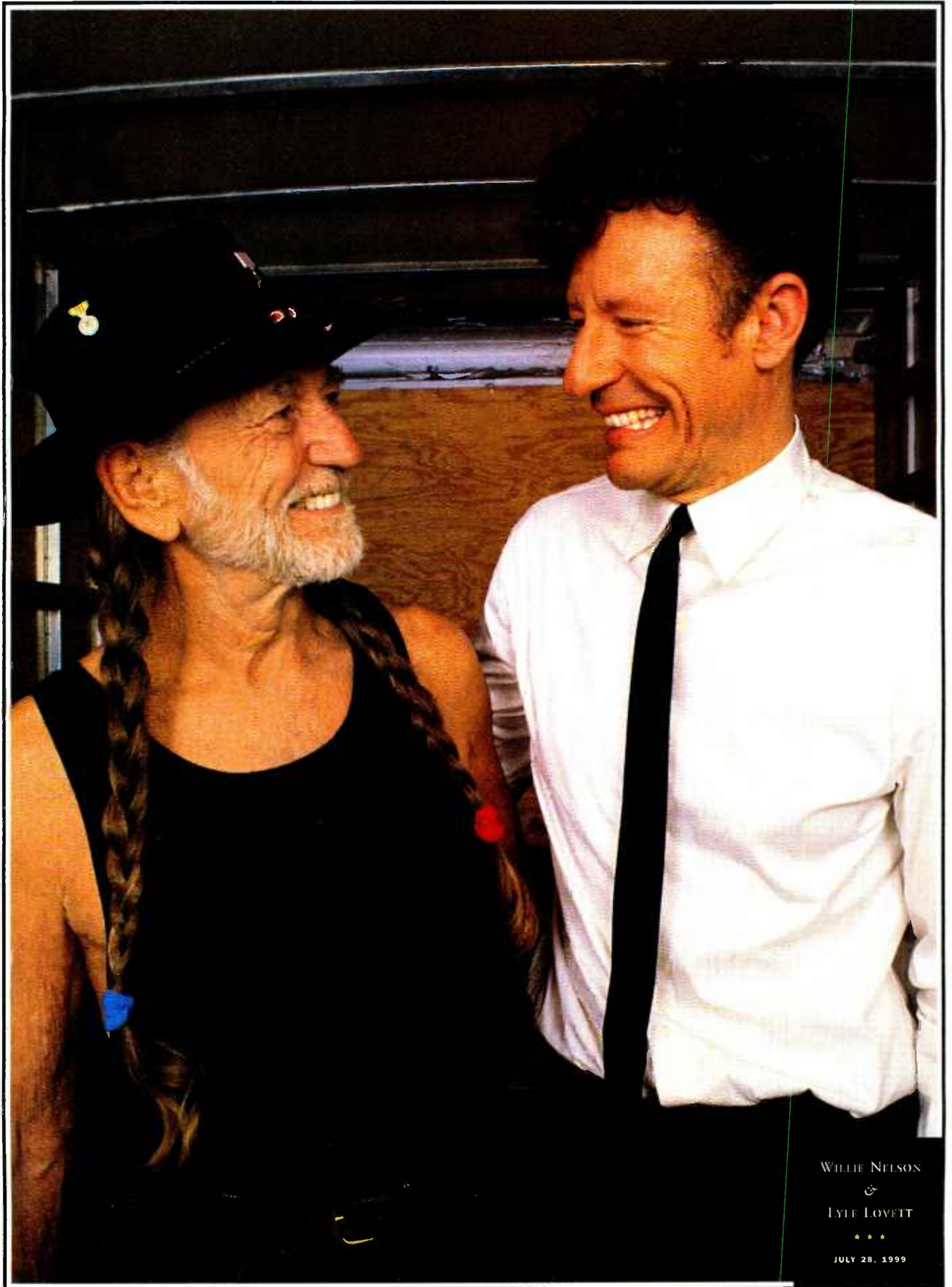


Debbie (left) and Julie Wade

Who's gonna fill their shoes?

George Jones asked that question in a 1985 song about country music's heroes. But today the question looms even larger, as we enter a new century and a new millennium and ponder where we've been and where we're going. It's a time to assess the many changes in country music over the past 100 years, and contemplate how it will change in the future and who will set the standard for the country music of tomorrow. ★ To celebrate a new century of country, *Country Music* takes a photographic look at the superstars who brought country music into the 21st century and who will be carrying on the country tradition in the years to come. In the following pages, our exclusive portrait gallery features some of country's greatest living legends and the renowned artists who were inspired by their work—the same artists who will in turn inspire the country legends of tomorrow. So the circle—or perhaps in this case, the chain—remains unbroken. And as we see it, the future of country music is in good hands. ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ **PHOTOGRAPHS BY RAEANNE RUBENSTEIN**

ADDITIONAL PHOTOS BY RUEDI HDFMANN, DONN JONES AND SEÑOR MCGUIRE



WILLIE NELSON

&

LYLE LOVETT

JULY 28, 1999



RICKY SKAGGS



RALPH STANLEY



OCTOBER 21, 1999

World Radio History

PHOTOGRAPHED AT THE PALACE THEATRE, LOUISVILLE, KY



DOLLY PARTON
&
LEE ANN WOMACK

SEPTEMBER 22, 1999



BRAD PAISLEY



BILL ANDERSON



NOVEMBER 2, 1999

World Radio History

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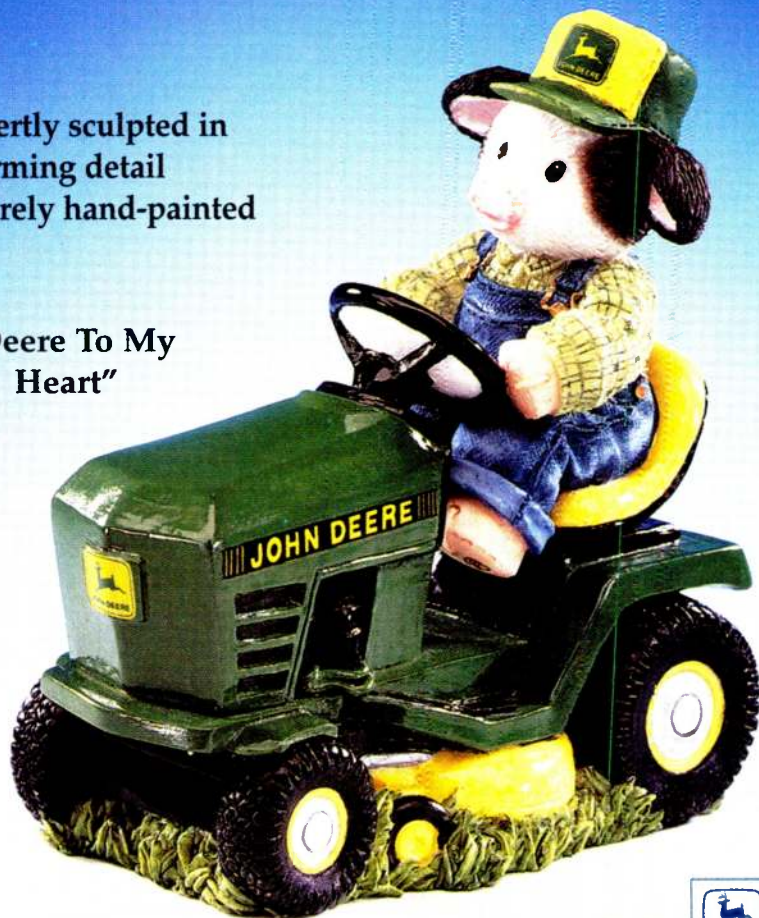
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CHET ATKINS



VINCE GILL



NOVEMBER 3, 1999

PHOTOGRAPH BY TANYA FISHER

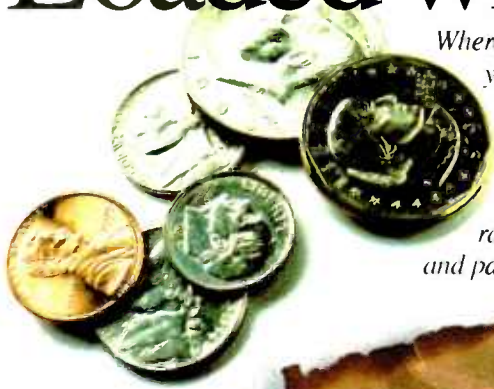
CLINT BLACK
&
MERLE HAGGARD

OCTOBER 28, 1999



PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDREW HARRIS FOR COUNTRY MUSIC PHOTOGRAPHY

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World Radio History

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World Radio History



TRISHA YEARWOOD
&
EMMYLOU HARRIS

OCTOBER 4, 1999

PHOTOGRAPHED AT THE HUMAN AUTOGRAPH, NASHVILLE, TN

PAM TILLIS
&
KITTY WELLS

OCTOBER 22, 1999



HAIR MAKEUP BY HOLLY BALLARD



ALAN JACKSON

&

GEORGE JONES

NOVEMBER 2, 1999

PHOTO BY SENIOR MCGUIRE HAIR MAKEUP NAOMIE PETTUS STYLING MELANIE SHELLEY FOR TRIM CLASSIC BARBER ALAN JACKSON

World Radio History

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Shown smaller than actual size. Clock measures 9½" wide x 14" high. Chain length up to 5¾ feet.

The Danbury Mint
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NOVEMBER 22, 1999
* * *
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COUNTRY MUSIC LEGENDS GALLERY



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MARTY STUART



EARL SCRUGGS



NOVEMBER 7, 1999

Can Country

One look at the past 100 years proves that country music is in a constant state of evolution. So where does country go from here? **BY EDWARD MORRIS**

IN 1951, HANK WILLIAMS CROONED TO his cutie: "I got a hot-rod Ford and a two-dollar bill/And I know a spot right over the hill/There's soda pop and the dancin' is free/If you wanna have fun, come along with me."

In 1996, Mary Chapin Carpenter purred to her partner: "What if we went to Italy/A suitcase of books/And one bag apiece/For the summer?"

Within these two songs lies all we need to know about the trajectory of country music—where it has been and where it is headed.

The world Williams sings of is rural and culturally narrow. Impulses are raw, urgent and sharply focused. Aspirations are painfully modest. Money looms large because there's little of it. Not so with Carpenter. Her world is boundless, and she looks out upon it with serene nonchalance and self-assurance. Her emotions emerge as subdued, restrained and civilized. Money is assumed.

The milieu Hank Williams crystallized in song has all but faded into myth. But the one that inspires Mary Chapin Carpenter and her contemporaries is still bubbling and

forming before our eyes. And that poses the question: Where does country music go after the country elements that gave birth to it are gone? Will it congeal to the fly-in-amber perfection of bluegrass and cowboy music? Or can it continue to thrive and remain emotionally relevant without losing its essential character? History suggests it can.

For most of its existence, the "country" part of country music meant "rural." In turn, rural meant isolation, clannishness, hard work, a slow-paced existence and a sense of permanence in place, in one's "home." Country signified living in ways dictated more by nature—daylight and dark, shifts in weather, the growing seasons—than by the clock. Lacking the control over events that comes from wealth, education and the right connections, rural life tended to breed reticence, superstition and fatalism. Country people were victims when victimhood wasn't cool. At least that's how the music portrayed them, and, to a degree, still does. A happy side effect, however, was that these same crippling limitations also endowed country folk with a sense of

wonder, a capacity to be surprised and delighted by small things.

The city—country's polar opposite—symbolized confusion, complexity and a general sensory overload. In these hellish cauldrons, survival was predicated not so much on understanding nature as on out-smarting other people. Even so, many country bumpkins did leave the farm for the city and were able to adjust quite well to their new surroundings. Those who failed to fit in, however, returned home or wrote home with horror stories of crowds, noise, crime, rudeness, indifference, trickery, temptation and imprisonment.

Translated into song, these tales of woe became "Detroit City," "The Streets of Baltimore," "The Girl in the Blue Velvet Band," "In the Jailhouse Now," "The Wild Side of Life," "Luckenbach, Texas," "Big City," "Better Class of Losers," ad infinitum.

But the drama inherent in every Eden is the absolute certainty that its borders will be breached. Idyllic country living—if it ever existed—surely began to crumble with the arrival of the first mail-order catalog. In its alluring pages were so many pretty things not of the soil, things that whispered of leisure and glitter, of dark-defying electric power and distance-melting motor cars. Then came the cumbersome but magical battery-run radios to waft urban sounds and patter into the deepest hollows. By the time the Depression and the Dust Bowl had driven millions off the land and into the cities, the ideal-



1900-1910

Cowboys and trains are popular subjects of country songs. Including "Red River Valley," "Casey Jones" and "The Wreck of the Old 97."



1910-1920

Country pioneers Riley Puckett and Fiddlin' John Carson begin performing. Popular songs like "Home on the Range" and "On Top of Old Smoky" reminisce about home.



1920-1930

Country performers Jimmie Rodgers and the Carter Family rank among America's most popular stars. Songs like "In the Jailhouse Now" depict cities as fraught with peril for rural folk.



1930-1940

Country stars Gene Autry and the Sons of the Pioneers appear in films. Patsy Montana becomes first million-selling female artist.



1940-1950

Swing and honky-tonk emerge. Stars include national figures Roy Acuff, Bob Wills and Ernest Tubbs. Postwar country loses some of its rural innocence, and such songs as "Divorce Me C.O.D." and "Slippin' Around" become popular.

Survive?

ized “homestead on the farm” was already a museum piece.

World War II was the mother of all cultural exchange programs, thrusting country boys into far-flung places they would never have gone on their own. Those who returned from the war brought back many strange things—from impenetrable military jargon to exotic war brides—but never their innocence. Now they knew how small and sheltered a place “home” really was.

Throughout all these seismic changes, country music dutifully assimilated the invading influences. Over the decades you could hear the ice breaking in tunes like “The Royal Telephone,” “Mail Order Mama,” “Turn Your Radio On,” “Smoke on the Water,” “White Cross on Okinawa” and “Filipino Baby.” In the postwar years, country kept pace with new wonders and looming fears through such songs as “Plastic Heart,” “Atomic Power” and “We Need a Whole Lot More of Jesus (And a Lot Less Rock and Roll).”

Indeed, rock ‘n’ roll did turn out to be country music’s “bad seed,” almost killing its parent before it moved out to start a life of its own. But it left a few things behind that country soon embraced, including aggressive drums and electric guitars and a somewhat less reverent attitude toward love. Rock surfaced just when the television set was becoming America’s favorite home appliance. Consequently, looks became as much a part of this new musical phenomenon as sounds and attitude. It would be

awhile before country, too, assigned great value to looks, but—as virtually every music video now attests—it finally has.

The Statler Brothers were the Great Suburbanizers of country music. In their 25-year string of hits (1965-1990), they never made the slightest pretense of being dislocated farm boys. The Statlers sang of vibrant small towns in which kids attended (and even enjoyed) high school, went regularly to exciting movies and were as likely to grow up to wear a white collar as a blue one. Their humor was barbed and ironic, not corny and folksy. These guys didn’t sound at all like victims.

And so country has continued to evolve. It has acclimated itself to the interstate highway system (via a million trucker songs), sociopolitical trends (“The Pill,” “Just Across the Rio Grande,” “She Thinks His Name Was John”), fads (“The Streak”) and modern marvels of communication (“Fax Me a Beer,” “First Redneck on the Internet”).

In 1989, country music’s proto-redneck, Moe Bandy, released a single called “Many Mansions.” What set it apart from Bandy’s grittier fare was that the first line, “Hope is the thing with feathers,” was lifted directly from Emily Dickinson. Not surprisingly, one of the song’s writers, Alice Randall, was a Harvard humanities graduate. Such literary allusions have been “upgrading” country songs since at least as far back as 1980, when Bob McDill wrote, “And those Williams boys, they still mean a lot

to me/Hank and Tennessee” in “Good Ole Boys Like Me.” Songwriter Michael Anderson followed suit in “Maybe It Was Memphis,” confiding, “Read about you in a Faulkner novel/Met you once in a Williams play.” English majors abound on Music Row these days, and country music adjusts its elastic contours to every highbrow reference they care to toss in.

Venturing out into the world, once a daunting prospect to isolated folk, is a matter of impulse in today’s country. It’s “Hey, Baby, Let’s Go to Vegas” and “Heads Carolina, Tails California.” Far-reaching highways and cheap airfares make it easy. In “Who Needs Pictures,” Brad Paisley sings as casually of being “down in Cozumel” as he might of visiting Wal-Mart.

In the beginning, country music was what it was because it couldn’t be anything else. It reflected the life its creators were born into. Today, it is more of a choice, an outlook that can be cultivated anywhere.

In spite of its endless adaptations, country has values and conventions that have never changed. Nor do they have to. These conventions hold that a simple life is preferable to a lavish one; love is a big deal and not an evening’s recreation; poverty is morally superior to wealth; home is where you’re from rather than where you are; hard work is ennobling; experience is better than book-learning; family is more a comfort than a burden; and Mom and Dad were right all along. These notions will prevail in country music long after the once-serviceable images of remote farms, dirt roads, coal mines, log cabins and Mama-at-the-stove have been plowed under with hot-rod Fords and two-dollar bills. ★



1950-1960

Kitty Wells becomes first major female country star. Other stars include Hank Williams, Marty Robbins and Johnny Cash.



1960-1970

The Nashville Sound emerges. Country finds suburban appeal with such artists as the Statler Brothers and Roger Miller.



1970-1980

Country’s outlaw movement, led by Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings, results in the first million-selling country album, *The Outlaws*. Country goes topical with songs like “The Pill” and “The Streak.”



1980-1990

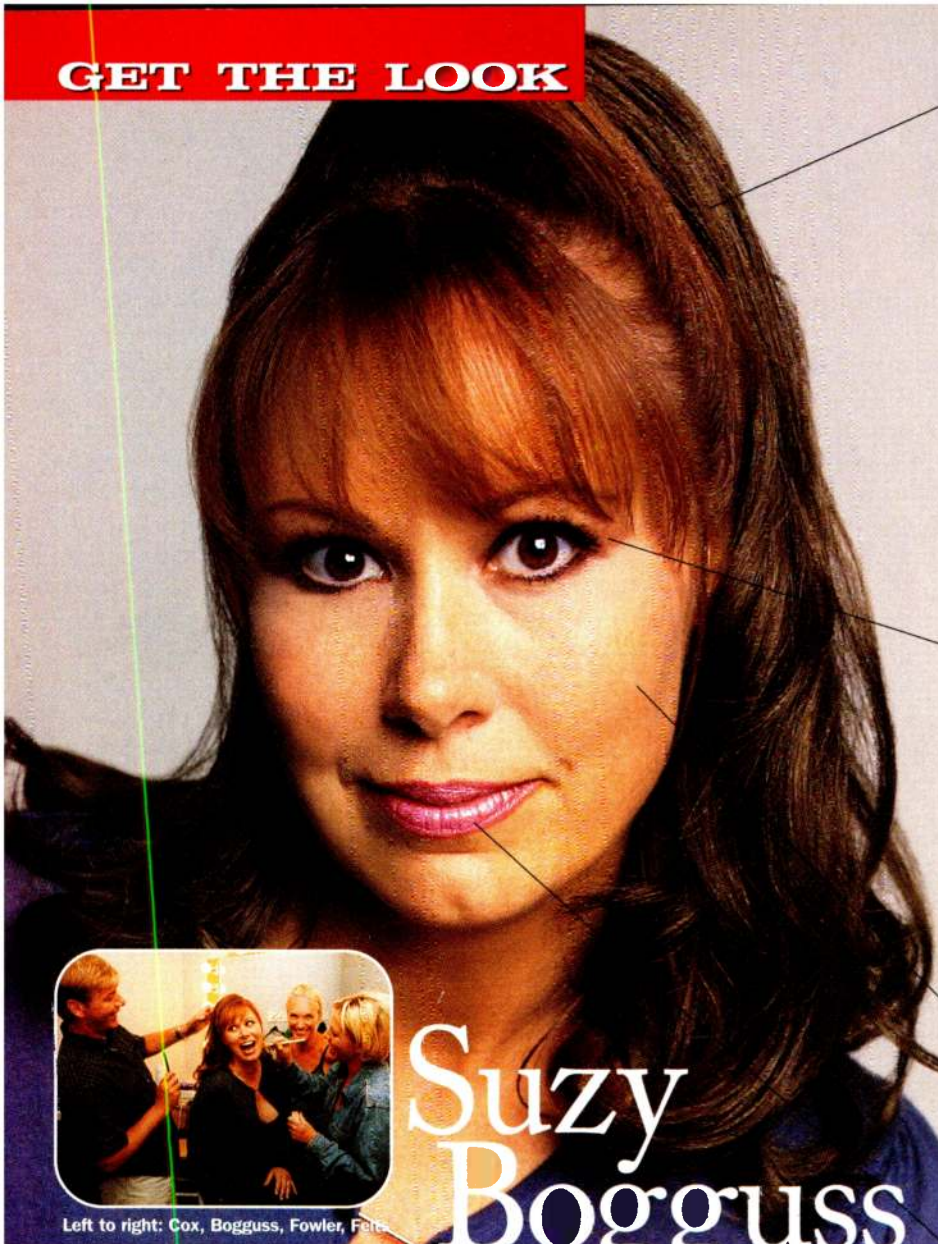
Country enjoys the *Urban Cowboy* boom and unprecedented national popularity. New traditionalists like Randy Travis and Dwight Yoakam make retro country cool.

1990-2000

Country achieves its greatest crossover success, blurring the lines between country, pop and rock and infiltrating mainstream culture, including movies, TV and fashion.



GET THE LOOK



Left to right: Cox, Bogguss, Fowler, Felts

Suzy Bogguss

Flirtatious Retro Fun

SUZY BOGGUSS FANS GOT A SURPRISE LAST FALL when the dimpled singer unveiled her latest video, "Goodnight": Gone were the prairie-punk dresses and bulky sweaters she normally sports, replaced by a cleavage-baring Gucci top and a skirt slit up to there.

The sexy look fit the song, which tells of a woman who finally quits looking for her ex and decides to get on with her life. Although the lyrics are very '90s, the music has a retro feel to it, thus the challenge was to find a look that mirrored the song's modern-but-retro approach.

To pull it off, Bogguss' sexy outfit was paired with a fun, '60s-style ponytail and clean, fresh makeup. "We wanted her to look fresh and clean but just a little sassy," says Nashville makeup artist Mary Beth Felts, who has worked with Bogguss for eight years. "On Suzy, a lot of times less is more. You can make a dramatic statement without going overboard."

Gucci: www.gucci.com; EMBE Cosmetics, toll-free: 877-FMBECOS or www.embecosmetics.com; Trumps Studio: 2225 Bandywood Drive, Nashville, Tennessee, 615-385-9898; AR Tec: 800-323-6817 or www.artecworldwide.com

HAIR Earl Cox of Nashville's Trumps Studio used a shoulder-length hairpiece to create Bogguss' contemporary version of a '60s updo. He prepped her hair with AR Tec Smoothing Serum on the ends to prevent frizzing, then used AR Tec Volume Gel at the roots for volume.

After blowing her hair dry he put it in jumbo hot rollers, then divided her hair in two sections. One was put in a ponytail with the hairpiece attached; the other section was swept over the top to hide where the hairpiece was fastened. Cox says the secret to using hairpieces is to make sure the color matches your natural hair. In Bogguss' case, the color match was "a fluke," he says. "I had bought it because I liked the way it was constructed, and when she was in the salon I put it up to her hair and it matched perfectly!"

EYES Felts uses her own makeup line, EMBE Cosmetics, on her all-star clientele. To highlight Bogguss' eyes she used powder shadows: First, Shroom was brushed on the brows to even out the color. Freeze was applied on the brow bone. On the lids, she first used Swing "to offer just a hint of shimmer" and topped it with Ony, for definition. The lids were then lined with coffee eye pencil and smudged with a small brush for a smoky look. Felts finished the eyes by curling the lashes and applying two coats of black mascara.

FACE "Suzy's skin is so flawless. I really didn't want to cover it," Felts says. "There's something nice about seeing somebody's skin." She prepped the skin with Kiehl's Ultra Face moisturizer, then applied a light dusting of Fawn powder foundation with a brush. Fifi powder blush was applied on the apples of the cheeks.

LIPS Bogguss is one of several stars for whom Felts has created a signature lip color, and she wears it here. Felts first lined the lips with Bouquet lip pencil, then colored her lips with Soozie.



CLOTHES The Gucci outfit was purchased in Atlanta, but the stacked-heel boots are Bogguss' own. "She didn't want it to be '70s-looking by any means, but Gucci is now doing really modern pieces with a retro attitude," says stylist Claudia Fowler. The overall

look was "retro-feeling in style but modern at the same time." The sweater's peekaboo keyhole opening was daring. "In the past she's usually put on jackets or something to be a little more covered up," Fowler notes. "but she just felt like being a little more free with this look." A perfect approach for the song's character—or for anyone who's starting over.

—Lisa Zbito

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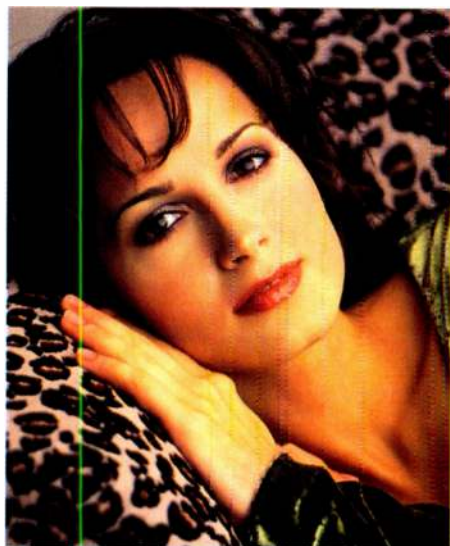




C H E L Y W R I G H T

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COUNTRYMUSIC



Chely Wright

Talk about ending the millennium on a high note: Last year at this time, Chely Wright was recording her second album for MCA, preparing to join the Crown Royal 1999 tour, and basically hoping for the best. Fast-forward 12 months and Wright is looking back on what is easily the best year of her career. By September, her hit “Single White Female” was the No. 1 country song in the nation—her first No. 1 in a career that encompasses six albums. “You know what, my feeling about where I am now is not very different from where I was last year,” she observes. “I think I have a default setting to celebrate the positives and repress the negatives. I like to celebrate the victories.”

PERSONAL INFORMATION

BORN

Oct. 25, 1970, in Kansas City, Missouri

CURRENT RESIDENCE

Nashville, Tennessee

FAMILY

This single white female does have a new addition to the family—puppy Minnie (after Minnie Pearl), a Yorkie, will be a year old in April.

MAJOR MUSICAL INFLUENCES

Loretta Lynn, Buck Owens, Conway Twitty, Connie Smith

NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION 2000

“This year I’m on a quest: When I see people littering, I’ve resigned myself to tell them [not to do it]. Usually, I obsess about it all day long, and then I think, *Gosh I wish I’d told them.* Now, when I see people throwing trash on the ground, I’m going to say, ‘Am I supposed to get that?’”

VALENTINE'S DAY PLANS

“I hope so!” she answers coyly. “I don’t put a lot of stock in it, but if I happen to be dating somebody, I like to get a gift. I’d really rather have a nice plant; flowers die too quickly.”

BEST VALENTINE'S DAY MEMORY

As a financially strapped college student, Wright was living in a trailer outside Nashville, and she pinched

pennies by not running the air conditioner. Her boyfriend drove up from Mississippi and presented her with a single flower, prompting an “oh-how-sweet” response. Recalls Wright, “Then he said, ‘I was going to get you a dozen roses but I decided to get you something you really need.’ He got me a box fan! I thought that was so nice. I still have it.”

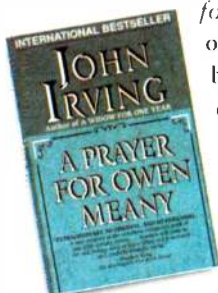
MOST ANNOYING HABIT

“Before I leave I go through the house three times, knowing I’ve turned all the lights off, but I do it again. I’m a double-checker and a triple-checker.”

RAVES

BOOK

A Widow for One Year, by John Irving (Random House). “[Irving’s] *A Prayer for Owen Meany* is one of my all-time favorite books. This one is quirky but there are none of the weird characters he’s known for. The rhythm of his writing is just wonderful.”



MOVIE

The Sixth Sense. “That was just so good.”

VIDEO

A Simple Plan. “Billy Bob Thornton is so cool. I got to meet him at the CMA awards. We were backstage and I walked up and said, ‘Billy Bob, I’m Chely.’ He said (to girlfriend Laura Dern), ‘Laura! Laura! Come here, it’s that girl who sings that song!’ It was so funny.”

TV SHOW

Law and Order

NON-COUNTRY MUSIC

“I love that Santana thing with Rob Thomas from Matchbox 20,” she says, referring to the No. 1 hit “Smooth.” “It’s really cool.”

VITAL STATISTICS

HEIGHT 5’9½”

HAIR Brown

EYES Brown

FUTURE PROJECTS

Wright is spending the winter working on her third album for MCA.

CONTACT INFORMATION

FAN CLUB

Chely Wright International Fan Club
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718-698-7873
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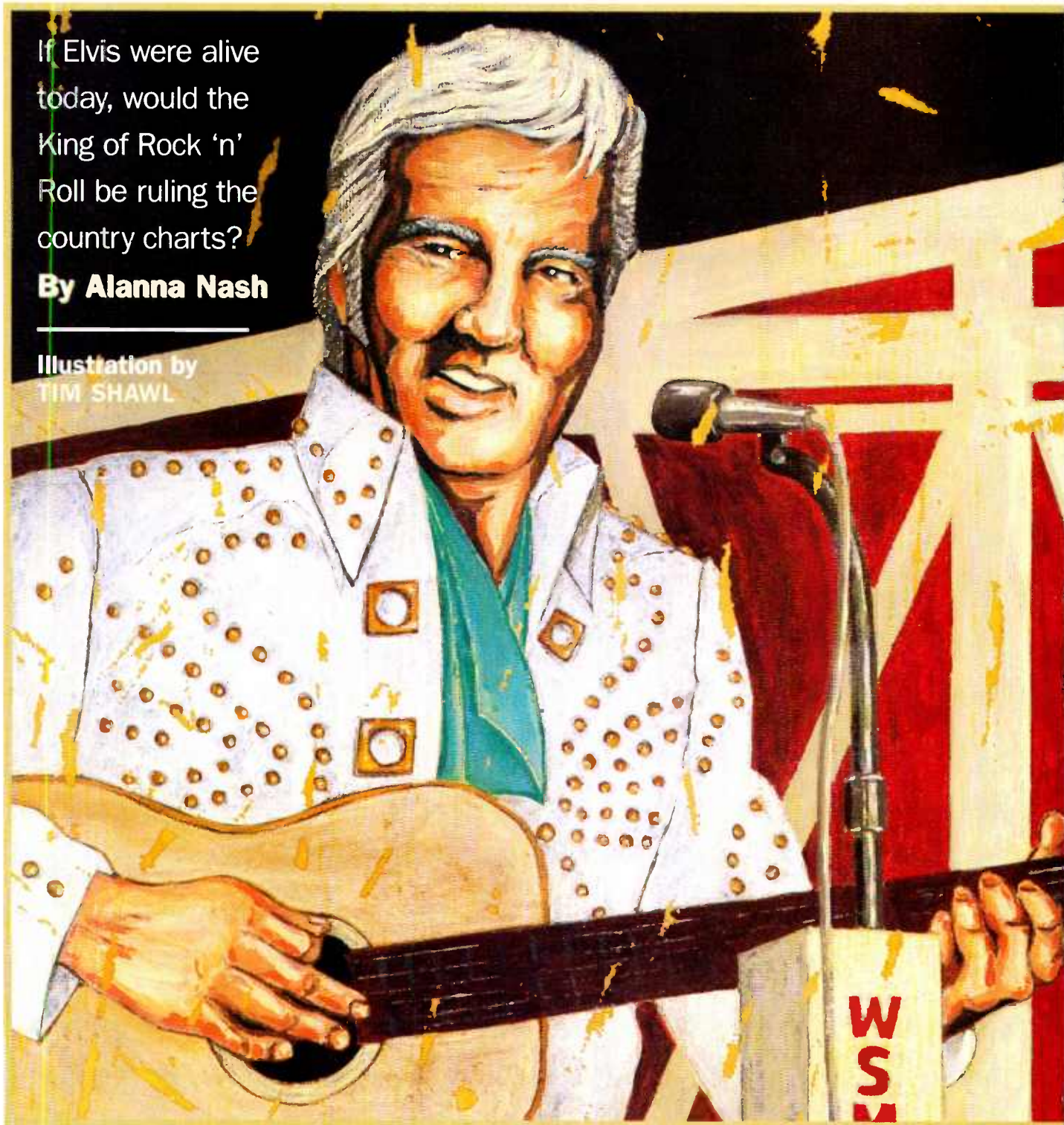
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World Radio History

If Elvis were alive today, would the King of Rock 'n' Roll be ruling the country charts?

By Alanna Nash

Illustration by
TIM SHAWL



ON JANUARY 8, 2000, ELVIS PRESLEY, the entertainer who best symbolized the youth culture of the 1950s, would have turned 65 years old. He would be eligible for Social Security, and 15 years past enrollment in AARP. But had he lived and straightened out his myriad health problems, chances are Elvis wouldn't have truly "retired" at

all—he would still be making music.

But what kind of music, once he got too old to compete in the rock arenas with the likes of U2 and R.E.M. in the 1980s?

The probability is that Presley would have still played Las Vegas, but not with the grueling treadmill of a schedule that marked his '70s tenure, and perhaps would have staged a major tour every so many

years, an event that would have been launched and received with all the fanfare of Frank Sinatra's last performances.

And it's also a good bet that Presley, who was posthumously inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1998, would have returned to his country roots. It's hard to imagine the King hanging up his crown in Branson, but country, which

Y'all Hail the King

Presley only in the burgeoning years of his youth and recording career, the reality was something different.

Aside from the early '60s, when the bulk of his recorded material came from the songs that were custom-written for the soundtracks of his films, Elvis frequently recorded country tunes. Indeed, "He'll Have to Go," a song made famous by Jim Reeves, was the last song of Presley's final

studio recording session, at Graceland in the fall of 1976. And the very last music that ever coursed through his lungs, seated at the piano in the lounge of Graceland's racquetball building on the morning of August 16, 1977, was "Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain," the Fred Rose song that Willie Nelson included on his *Red Headed Stranger* album two years earlier.

Just as Presley drew inspiration from country, he also influenced it. As country began

has evolved to encompass much of roots rock, would have been his milieu if he had continued making records, much the same as it was for '50s rockers Conway Twitty and Jerry Lee Lewis. For even though the perception among many serious students of his music is that country was something that concerned

shifting to a country-politan sound to compete with rock 'n' roll, it was his pop songs that routinely showed up on the country charts, where he eventually racked up 11 No. 1 hits.

As his film years wound to a close, Presley turned often to country. In 1968, he made his first appearance on the country

charts in eight years, and stayed there with singles like "In the Ghetto" and "Kentucky Rain," songs that were essentially progressive country for the time. Then in June 1970, he did a marathon, five-day session in Nashville in which he recorded a number of country love ballads of the '60s, like "Make the World Go Away," a hit for both Ray Price and Eddy Arnold. By then, he was already fond of doing his own versions of classic country songs made famous

by traditional country singers like Hank Snow and Bob Wills. In 1975, he recorded "The Green, Green Grass of Home" and the Statler Brothers' "Susan When She Tried."

In his last years, Presley frequently played country music on his stereo at home. And although he never really understood the counter-culture of the '60s, he embraced the work of late-'60s Nashville songwriters like Waylon Jennings, Billy Joe Shaver and Kris Kristofferson, whose "Help Me Make It Through the Night" he recorded.

Presley's influence on country continues after his death, in part because today's mainstream stars were not

raised entirely on traditional country. His early rockabilly style invigorated the genre in the 1980s, particularly with Dwight Yoakam and Steve Earle. Travis Tritt and Charlie Daniels say that it was Elvis who made it possible for a country boy to rock. And, for that matter, a Cuban. Just ask Raul Malo of the Mavericks.

In the end, of course, Elvis transcends Nashville, as does Garth Brooks, whose "The Dance" might have been just the perfect song for Presley's warm baritone and sentimental personality. How easy it is, in the fantasy of the mind, to hear him sing it, his voice soaring on the chorus, yet sad with heartache and regret. Elvis Presley missed far too much of life's dance, but oh, what a whirl he gave us. ★



COUNTRY COUSINS Top: Presley jams with Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins and Johnny Cash. Above: Backstage at the Opry in 1957 with (from left) talent booker Hubert Long, Col. Tom Parker and Faren Young.

CERKOTT TOP; COURTESY COUNTRY MUSIC HALL OF FAME



Depressed after years of disappointing career struggles, Tracy Byrd now feels upbeat about his future. "I'm enjoying myself for the first time in a long, long time," he says.

FREE BYRD

Released from the stress of conflicts with his former record label, Tracy Byrd revels in spreading his wings.

Photographs by
TAMARA REYNOLDS

MICHELLE BYRD WAS THE ONE WHO finally said enough was enough. She had just watched her husband, Tracy, break down in tears in the couple's Texas home. She could no longer sit back and watch him suffer.

Michelle knew her husband had been bickering with MCA Records for several years. During that time, his once-promising country music career had tumbled downward. When she saw his tears, she realized how miserable he felt. She had to do something to help. So she called Byrd's manager, Joe Carter.

"She told him, 'Joe, you've got to do something,'" Tracy Byrd recalls, his voice somber as he recounts one of the darkest periods of his life. "She told him, 'I know you've been trying to work things out, but he's losing it. He's really, really upset. I've never seen him like this.'"

Thanks to Michelle Byrd's goading, Carter set up a meeting with MCA Records. This time, Carter made it clear that Byrd wanted out of his contract.

"Joe went in with a different attitude," the singer remembers, admitting that he and his manager no longer tried to find common

ground with the record company. "He said, 'Y'all don't need us here. You show us daily that we're no priority to you. We fight all the time. We argue. We cuss each other.'"

The relationship between the artist and the record company had been strained for some time. It hadn't started this way, of course. Byrd's first single, "Holdin' Heaven," had been a No. 1 hit in 1993. "The Keeper of the Stars" reached the top of the charts two years later. In between, he scored several prominent Top 5 hits, including "Watermelon Crawl," "Lifestyles of the Not So Rich and Famous" and "The First Step."

At the time, the gentle baritone appeared perched to follow singers like Alan Jackson and Mark Chesnut into a long career that straddled traditional country music and the slicker sound of '90s Nashville. He certainly seemed custom-fit for the part: a lanky, laid-back Texan who earned his break by becoming a popular performer in the honky tonks of Beaumont and other east Texas outposts. He had a friendly, down-home demeanor that worked well onstage and that led to him assuming a prominent role in fishing and



SHINING STAR Byrd and songwriter Karen Staley, one of the writers on "Keeper of the Stars," accept the ACM Song of the Year award in 1995.

COURTESY ACADEMY OF COUNTRY MUSIC

hunting programs on TNN. Everything seemed to be falling in line for the young Texan, who was 26 years old when his debut album marched up the charts.

However, with the release of Byrd's third album, *Love Lessons*, momentum stalled. He had changed producers, working for the first time with MCA president Tony Brown. Usually such a move suggests that a record company plans to put more promotional punch behind an artist's career. For Byrd, it didn't work out that way.

"Coming into that third album, our second album was still at No. 3 on the charts, and we were selling 40,000 records



a week," the singer says. "We never got back there." Byrd and Brown clashed on song selection and on musical choices. For the first time, tension existed between the singer and his record label. When *Love Lessons* was finally released in 1995, both radio and critics reacted with a lack of enthusiasm. The No. 1 songs quit coming.

"We had a lot of great ideas, and I was tired of not getting any support for 'em, tired of having to fight for 'em, tired of my records not getting the support I knew they should be getting."

Fewer of his radio singles climbed into the Top 10. His record sales dwindled.

In Byrd's mind, MCA had pushed songs on him that he recorded only because the company assured him they would be hits; they weren't the songs he would have chosen, he says. As many of those songs failed to become hits, the normally soft-spoken singer grew increasingly frustrated with his record company.

"He and the label were always going at it," a former high-ranking MCA employee

says. "Tracy wasn't happy. That was real clear."

Byrd concurs. "I had just really gotten down on the whole business," he says. "I was sick of making records the way I was making them. I was tired of having to fight for everything. We had a lot of great ideas, and I was tired of not getting any support for 'em, tired of having to fight for 'em, tired of my records not getting the support I knew they should be getting. I was tired of hearing from radio people that I wasn't getting any promotion from my label. I was fed up, I was disgusted, I wanted out."

So Carter asked MCA to let Byrd go. Carter was passionate in stressing that they saw no other options, and that his artist was ready to stay home rather than continue working under the current conditions. "Why don't y'all just let us go?" Carter appealed.

That night, as he prepared for a performance in Reno, Byrd received a call from Carter. "Joe called and said, 'Man, you sitting down?'" he remembers. "I knew he'd had that meeting that day. I said, 'So, how'd it go?' He said, 'You're

gonna love it. They let us out. We're free to go do what we want to do.'"

Byrd let out a whoop of relief. "Man, I remember this feeling," he says. "It was like salvation. I leaned back and said, 'Thank you, Lord!' Everything got brighter right then. It was a glorious day."

As soon as the word got out, RCA Records contacted the newly free Byrd and signed him to a recording contract. The resulting album, *It's About Time*, reveals a Byrd of a different color. The

songs contain more maturity and depth than most of the lighthearted, dance-floor novelties and simplistic love ballads that signified his previous work.

"These are the best songs I've cut in my career," he says. "Everyone knows that you're not going to get the best songs if you're getting lackluster support from your record company. Well, RCA went to bat for me. They called up the publishers and said, 'Tracy Byrd is a priority. Send us



ALL FOR ONE | Byrd smiles along with manager Joe Carter (far left) and RCA executives Renee Bell and Butch Waugh.

COURTESY RCA LABEL GROUP

the best stuff you've got because this train is fixing to take off.'"

The singer feels the new songs also give him a chance to better show off his vocal ability. "I've got a great range that we never did capitalize on, except maybe on 'Keeper of the Stars,'" he says. "We went into this record looking for songs that would showcase what I can do."

Byrd now credits his new label for providing the difference in how he looks at the future. "The feeling RCA gives me is such a feeling of support and confidence," he explains. "Now I have somebody telling me how much they love the album, and telling me how good the album is and what all it's got, as opposed to telling me what the album doesn't have. That positive energy is so nice to have around you, as opposed to skepticism."

Byrd recognizes the turnabout that's occurred. He realizes how down he felt a year ago, and how optimistic and energized he feels now. As he sees it, creating hit records is still a gamble. But he's willing to accept the consequences, as long as he knows that he's doing his best and getting the support of those working on his behalf.

"You know, it seems like it all happened for a reason," he muses. "I'm a whole lot more seasoned and a whole lot more ready to move to another level now than I was even a year ago. So I think it's all happened as it was supposed to for me." *

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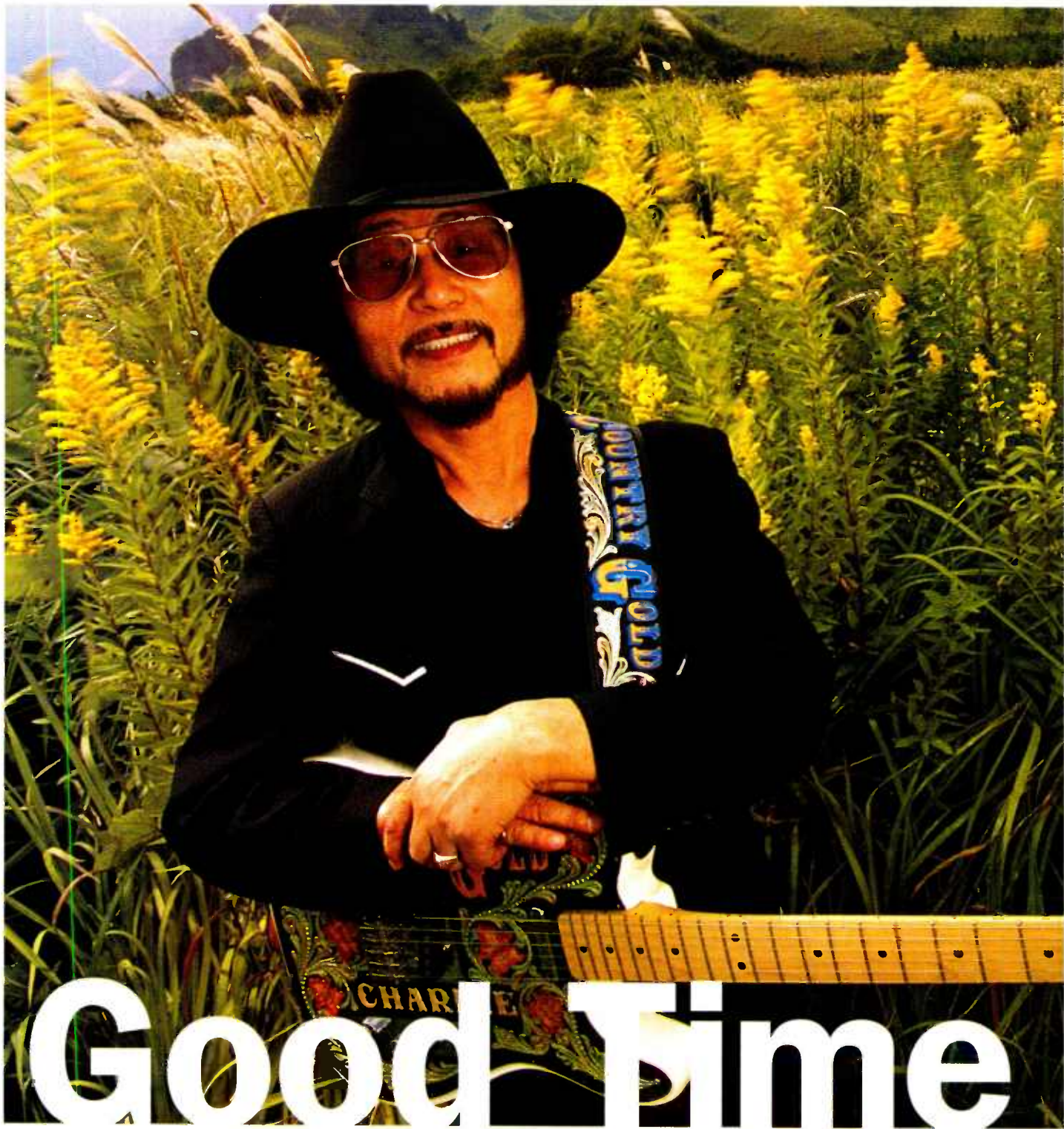
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World Radio History



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Good Time

Country music is alive and well in the Far East, thanks in part to the Country Gold festival and the hillbilly heart of its founder, Charlie Nagatani.

BY PETER FREDENBURG

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID PAUL MORRIS

CHARLIE NAGATANI HAS MANY friends and fans. Most would be surprised to learn that the big-hearted but headstrong Japanese doyen of American honky-tonk once let someone change his mind. But in the early 1960s, Speedy Kido, Nagatani's steel guitar player, convinced the leader of the struggling band to dump the group's jinxed



Man

"Good Time" Charlie Nagatani's dream of bringing America's country artists to his home town has become Japan's big-ticket Country Gold Festival. Scenes from the 1999 event, from top: Connie Smith vows the crowd; more than 20,000 fans show their appreciation; Nagatani joins the headliners to close the show.

name "Charlie and Hilltop Hands." Within days, the newly minted "Western Cannon Balls" started landing desperately needed dates at Japan's American military bases like Itazuki, Iwakuni and Sasebo. This sudden change of fortune was probably a coincidence, as Nagatani has built his career by following his heart and disregarding advice from others. After a

rocky start, the man who is arguably Japan's biggest country music fan went on to open a successful honky-tonk bar, Good Time Charlie's, and to found Asia's grandest annual country music festival, Country Gold. Charlie Nagatani discovered his love of country music early on. The seminal event was his 20th birthday in 1956—the

day, by Japanese reckoning. Charlie came of age. "A neighbor who worked at an American base nearby brought a Japanese country band to play at my party," Nagatani relates. "They were called the Hillbilly Jamboree. I fell in love with the music, quit college and joined the band."

Soon made the group's lead vocalist, young Charlie moved from provincial Kumamoto to Tokyo. "When Elvis' music came out, people said I could get more work if I switched to rockabilly, like all the other bands in Tokyo," he continues. "But I loved doing straight country. So, in 1961, I made up my mind to form my own band, back home in Kumamoto. People said this was a bad idea, that I should stay in a big city like Tokyo or Osaka. But I wanted to do it at home. I had a hard time for two or three years. I couldn't get work. To pay the band, I had to borrow money from friends and family. They told me to quit."

But Nagatani held on. Playing military bases in Japan led to gigs overseas, first in 1967 in Okinawa (an American possession until reversion to Japan in 1972), then in other Vietnam War-era bases and liberty ports in Taiwan, the Philippines, Guam and Thailand. As the American presence in Vietnam wound down in the mid-1970s, Nagatani stopped touring and returned to Kumamoto.

"Very few people understood my work at that time," he laments. "They said that if I [wouldn't] quit, then I should sing in Japanese. But I didn't want to, because you can't express the same feeling. I've never sung Japanese versions."

In 1976 he opened Good Time Charlie's, and plowed his long, lonely furrow for a dozen years. Country wasn't cool, but Nagatani earned the affection of a small but loyal cadre of fans who had acquired a taste for the music, initially



from the radio programs of the U.S. armed forces' Far East Network.

In 1988, Nagatani wrote a letter to the director of the Country Music Association, Jo Walker Meador, telling her of his dream to bring American country artists to his hometown.

A copy of the letter reached Nashville promoter Judy Seale, who happened to be in Japan shepherding a Pat Boone supper-show tour. The two met in Kyoto.

"We talked about his dream," recalls Seale, now executive vice president of Refugee Management International. "I'd never met anyone with such a passion for country music. Charlie had no sponsors or financial support, only his dream and love of the music."

Nagatani wrangled a grant from Kumamoto Prefecture, Seale bent ears in Nashville, and the first of what was to become the annual Country

Gold festival took place the following year, with such headliners as Roger Miller, Bill Monroe and Hank Thompson. Some 8,000 fans assembled at Aspecta, an outdoor venue overlooking scenic Mount Aso, an active volcano near Kumamoto in the heart of the southern island of Kyushu.

From top: Nagatani two-steps with a fan at Good Time Charlie's; Michael Peterson enjoys his Country Gold performance; country music fans of all ages make the trek to Kumamoto for the festival; Jo Dee Messina tours Kumamoto before her 1998 Country Gold appearance; Bryan White learns to make sushi while in Japan for the '98 show.

"I was surprised," Nagatani confesses. "I asked all my friends to come down, and they did. They came from all over Japan, from Hokkaido to Okinawa."

One friend who didn't make the trek for the first festival, but has rarely missed one since, was Noaki Hirose, now a senior research scientist in Tokyo at the Computational Sciences Division of the National Aerospace Laboratory. "I couldn't believe that Charlie could get Bill Monroe to Kumamoto," explains the rocket scientist. "Maybe to Tokyo, but not Kumamoto. When I heard it was true, it was too late to go."

Among the artists Nagatani has attracted to his hometown since the first Country Gold are Bryan White, Jo Dee Messina, Diamond Rio, Dwight Yoakam, Steve Wariner, the Bellamy Brothers, Ricky Skaggs, the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, Asleep at the Wheel, Marty Stuart, the Charlie Daniels Band and Emmylou Harris. Attendance at the Sunday-afternoon event has grown steadily over the past 11 years. Last October, more than 20,000 fans gathered to hear high-energy singer/songwriter Michael Peterson, heart-tugging vocalist Connie Smith, western serenaders Wylie and the Wild West, award-winning bluegrass ensemble the Lynn Morris Band and east Texas all-rounders Perfect Stranger.

In addition to being a Kentucky colonel and honorary citizen of 25 American states, Nagatani was named the 1998 Country Music Association International Talent Buyer/Promoter of

"When Elvis' music came out, people said I could get more work if I switched to rockabilly...But I loved doing straight country."

the Year. He's the 1999 Japanese recipient of the Mansfield Award, in recognition of his "outstanding contributions to the promotion of understanding between Japan and the United States"—the first-ever recipient in the field of arts and culture. In May, he dined at the White House, along with Toshiko, his wife since 1961. ("Don't write that, because she doesn't want people knowing we've been married that long!" he says.)

Considering how far Nagatani has come, it's amazing how little he's left behind. More than 80 musicians have played in the Cannon Balls over the past 38 years, but Nagatani has never disbanded (though he did drop "Western" from the name). And he and the boys still play at Good Time Charlie's seven nights a week, as well as serving as the perennial opening act of Country Gold.

Perhaps most important, Nagatani still runs things his way, from the heart. Although fans can buy Country Gold tickets through an agent, some 70 percent prefer the collectors' version available directly from Nagatani, which he and Toshiko send out in batches of two to 10, addressing the envelopes by hand and enclosing a signed souvenir flyer along with instructions on how to pay. Such trust and personal attention build strong fan loyalty, immunizing the



COURTESY CHARLIE NAGATANI (L)

admittedly niche Japanese country market from the flu now afflicting its American counterpart.

"Last year we calculated that about 800 people had been to all 10 Country Golds," Nagatani asserts. "One 10-year-old boy at this year's festival claimed to have been to all 11, because he was in the womb when his

"Charlie's not in it for the money," observes Connie Smith. "He's in it for the passion he has....He truly loves what he's doing."

mother attended the first Country Gold."

Meanwhile, Nagatani strives to keep the ticket price low, at least for Japan—6,000 yen (\$55) in advance or 7,000 yen at the gate—to attract people who don't yet know country but are willing to give it a chance. The festival achieved modest profitability in 1994, only to be pushed back into the red by a sagging yen in 1996 and 1997 and a typhoon threat last year. No one will know if 1999's

October event made money until the bills are all paid and the ticket payments stop trickling in, sometime early in 2000.

"Charlie's not in it for the money," observes Connie Smith. "He's in it for the passion he has. He's a giver rather than a taker, and he truly loves what he's doing."

"He's a visionary, a pioneer," agrees

Michael Peterson. "This was just a dream 12 years ago, and look what it's become. Everything is first-class."

Not everyone is as sanguine. "People say I'm crazy," Nagatani acknowledges. "They say I should use computerized ticketing. They say I should do more locations. But I've seen a lot of festivals come and go because they tried to do too much. Most festivals last three or four years. If they lose money, they quit.

"I want to keep this going here," he stresses. "And I intend to do it until I die, even if I live to be a hundred." *



Inset: Young Charlie with his first guitar and cowboy boots. As the opening act for Country Gold (below in 1998), Nagatani has come a long way since he began playing professionally in 1956. "I intend to do it until I die," he says, "even if I live to be a hundred!"



"It doesn't bother me to be called a hat act, because I wear a hat," Walker declares. "But...This hat ain't no act. It's the real thing."

HAT TRICK

Stuck with the “hat act” stigma, Clay Walker has never been a hit with critics. But he gets the last laugh, having quietly become one of country’s biggest-selling artists.

By Craig Havighurst

CLAY WALKER DOESN'T WANT TO leave the stage, and the screams of the teenage girls who make up a majority of his crowd let him know that he's welcome to push their curfew as far as he wants. It's now nearly 11 p.m. at the ballpark adjacent to the Kentucky State Fair, and Walker's kept the crowd cheering and swooning for more than two hours.

At this point, Walker and his band have exhausted the list of songs they set out for the night's show. The singer has already coaxed the band through several encore romps, including an impromptu version of Jerry Lee Lewis' "Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On," a raucous cover of George Strait's "I'm a Fireman" and a theatrically romantic take on the syrupy prom favorite "Three Times a Lady."

After a bit of onstage consultation with band members, and with young female fans waving illuminated fabric roses to catch his eye, Walker lets loose with "Sweet Home Alabama." The Louisville locale notwithstanding, Walker dives into the song for all it's worth. The fans react by once again stomping the bleachers and shouting their approval.

The adoration is mutual. All night, Walker has paced, gestured, smiled, winked, vamped and crooned for the audience, and his boyish, natural exuberance keeps him from coming across as arrogant

or unappreciative. When he tells the crowd this is the best show he's played this year, he could just be a handsome cowboy spouting a well-practiced line. But those eyes, that smile....No wonder the audience buys what he's selling.

That Walker wins over fans with his personal charm is no secret, but it often rankles critics who can't square his pop-driven brand of mellow, modern country with his spectacular commercial success, including 7 million albums sold and a dozen gold records in six years. *Billboard Monitor* lists the Texan as No. 10 in country radio airplay for 1998 and the No. 17 artist among all radio formats. For three consecutive years (1996, 1997 and 1998) Walker was one of the top 10 grossing touring acts in country music.

So much of what Walker presents can seem superficial: There's his country-hunk attire; his less-than-challenging, pop-saturated music; even his strobe-lit, fog-machine entrance, which seems lifted straight out of the movie *Pure Country*. Walker's quiet ride to country stardom has left a lot of music fans and writers wondering if he has a core or if it's all about moving merchandise.

In a 1997 *Washington Post* review of Walker's *Rumor Has It*, critic Mike Joyce wrote: "After opening with the title track, already a hit single, Walker's album

follows a downward spiral into nonsense and sentimentality. It's a quick trip—the album clocks in at a little more than 30 minutes—and an utterly uneventful one. Unless, that is, you have a passion for documenting the new lows in country music." One critic even went as far as to say, "Dolly, the cloned sheep, looks more original than Walker."

Walker occasionally has shrugged off such criticism. He once told journalist Brian Mansfield, "I don't really care what critics say about me. I care what the fans think and what the people who work around me think."

Like a number of other artists signed in the wake of Garth Brooks' monumental success in the early 1990s, Walker has taken flak for being a "hat act." Although you need a hat to be a hat act, the derision often stems from a dependence on the country singer uniform: boots, starched shirt, starched Wrangler jeans and a big belt buckle.

"It doesn't bother me to be called a hat act, because I wear a hat," Walker declares. "But there's only one thing: This hat ain't no act. It's the real thing." If you come of age in Texas dance halls, he says, then the look is just an indigenous part of the culture. "In every college football game, the ball has stripes. It's not what ball you play with, it's what you do with

POWER CLAY Clockwise from top: Walker woos the crowd at Fan Fair in 1994; the hardest-working hat in show biz; at the *Rumor Has It* platinum party in 1998 with (from left) Denny Mosesman, Debbie Zavitsan, Connie Baer, John Burns and Doug Johnson.



him to make a career in music. You'll hear about Walker being on his own at age 17, with music as his chief livelihood, and about grueling tours of honky tonks in Canada, the South, the

Midwest and, of course, Texas, where he says his musical roots tap straight into George Jones, Bob Wills and neighbor Mississippian Jimmie Rodgers.

It was during seven years of almost nightly gigs that Walker honed what he says is the secret of his success: his rapport with all kinds of crowds. Walker remembers strolling the room between sets introducing himself to as many members of the audience as he could.

"It made a difference the next time we came back, and the club owners recognized that," he says. "I still enjoy talking to people. I think that's one of the reasons people like coming to our shows—because I'm not unapproachable. I'm just as interested in them as they are in me."

That Clay Walker charm has fueled spectacular success. Ask the fans, and they'll tell you their affection is personal more than musical.

"The reason Clay Walker is so popular with his fans is because he's just a hometown kind of guy," says fan Tracy Vaughn of Bryan, Texas, reached through a Walker Internet site. "He hasn't let fame

go to his head. He puts on an awesome show and makes you feel like you are the only one he is singing to."

That's music to Walker's ears. Although he says he doesn't want to make "ear candy," he's less interested in impressing critics than in constantly exceeding the expectations of his family oriented fan base.

And unlike many artists, Walker sees radio as a force for good in country music. "I'll tell you what matters: What matters is radio and Wal-Mart," Walker says. "That's what matters. It ain't what people in Nashville think. If you want radio to play you, you have to have a good hook. The hook factor is the most important thing in a song—be it melody or lyrics. Radio is the greatest thing that ever happened to country music. It's heard everywhere, and to be part of that is an awesome feeling."

You can hear those hooks in the hits Walker has amassed since his explosive 1994 debut: the jaunty "If I Could Make a Living," the pop-influenced "What's It to You" and the silky smooth "This Woman and This Man." These songs aren't meant to be musically challenging or complicated. They're sentimental and personable, optimistic and inviting. Walker has an ear for timeless-sounding melodies and a keen sense of what will massage the hearts of clean-cut heartland youth. The large number of young parents with their kids at Walker shows testifies that in his universe, romance will always triumph over raunch or cynicism.

So Walker will let his critics stew, if they must. He's setting his sights on new audiences and an even higher profile than he's achieved thus far. He's learning Spanish and has aspirations of recording a bilingual album to reach Latin markets in the U.S. and abroad. He recently did a guest spot on *Asleep at the Wheel's* tribute album to Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys, citing a deep love for western swing.

Who knows? If some of these rootsier influences begin to penetrate his radio-friendly sound, perhaps Walker will produce some serious music after all. But for now, he's measuring success with numbers. "I feel a certain urgency in my career," he says. "Am I satisfied with where we are? No. I hope we haven't scratched the surface of what we could do." *

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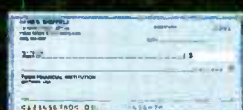
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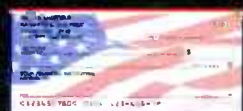
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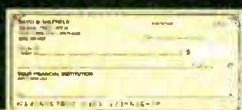
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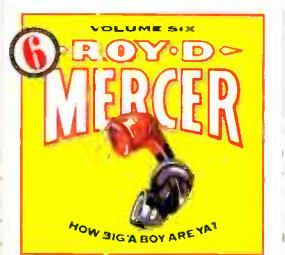
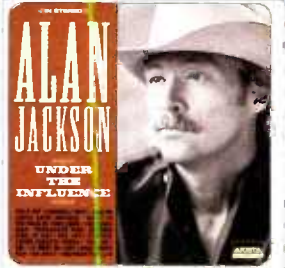
25

ALBUMS

The hottest hits on the country charts.



Lonestar's Michael Britt, Dean Sams, Richie McDonald and Michael Britt pose with their platinum award for *Lonely Grill*.



- | | | |
|-----|------------------------|---|
| 1. | FAITH HILL | Breathe (Warner Bros.) ♦ |
| 2. | DIXIE CHICKS | Fly (Monument) ◎ |
| 3. | LEANN RIMES | LeAnn Rimes (Curb) |
| 4. | ALAN JACKSON | Under the Influence (Arista) |
| 5. | SHANIA TWAIN | Come On Over (Mercury) ♦ |
| 6. | TIM MCGRAW | A Place in the Sun (Curb) ◎ |
| 7. | LONESTAR | Lonely Grill (BNA) ◎ |
| 8. | DIXIE CHICKS | Wide Open Spaces (Monument) ◎ |
| 9. | MARTINA McBRIDE | Emotion (RCA) ♦ |
| 10. | KENNY CHESNEY | Everywhere We Go (BNA) ◎ |
| 11. | CLINT BLACK | D'lectrified (RCA) |
| 12. | SHEDAISSY | The Whole Shebang (Lone Star) ♦ |
| 13. | TRACE ADKINS | More... (Capitol) |
| 14. | JO DEE MESSINA | I'm Alright (Curb) ◎ |
| 15. | GARY ALLAN | Smoke Rings in the Dark (MCA) |
| 16. | FAITH HILL | Faith (Warner Bros.) ◎ |
| 17. | BROOKS AND DUNN | Tight Rope (Arista) ♦ |
| 18. | BRAD PAISLEY | Who Needs Pictures (Arista) |
| 19. | GEORGE STRAIT | Merry Christmas Wherever You Are (Arista) |
| 20. | GEORGE JONES | Cold Hard Truth (Asylum) |
| 21. | GEORGE STRAIT | Always Never the Same (MCA) ◎ |
| 22. | ROY D. MERCER | How Big'a Boy Are Ya? Volume 6 (Virgin) |
| 23. | REBA McENTIRE | Secret of Giving: A Christmas Collection (MCA) |
| 24. | DOLLY PARTON | The Grass Is Blue (Sugar Hill) |
| 25. | TRACY BYRD | It's About Time (RCA) |

Compiled by *Country Music* magazine. Based on a combined tabulation of sales and airplay data for the four weeks prior to publication.
 ♦ Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) certification for net shipment of 500,000 album units (Gold); ● RIAA certification for net shipment of 1 million units (Platinum); ♦ RIAA certification for net shipment of 10 million units (Diamond).

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musical, *Heavens to Betsy*, and keeps a guiding hand over her Dollywood theme park, one of the biggest tourist attractions in the United States.

And, as always, she greets each interview with fresh quips and a ready wit.

Country Music: There is a line in "Blue Valley Songbird" that goes, "She's a little bit crazy." Are you?

DP: I think that all creative people are a little bit nuts. There's a great line that Waylon Jennings sings: "I've always been crazy, but it's kept me from going insane." That is one of the greatest lines, and so true. I'm totally nuts, but in a good way, because I have fun.

And I think I'm a strange person in that I enjoy my own company. I'm so crazy I'm entertained by it, if that makes any sense. I think, *Oh my Lord, I can't believe you did that*. Sometimes I'll walk away from an interview and go, "I didn't say that, did I?"



Kenny Rogers inducts Parton into the Country Music Hall of Fame.

PATRICIA PRESLEY

CM: Tell me about going into the Country Music Hall of Fame.

DP: When I got the call, it was June. Two of my sisters, Cassie and Rachel, and two of their kids, Hannah and Rebecca, who are like 11 and 13, had come out to L.A. They were in the kitchen and I was in my office, which is off the kitchen, when I got this call. I started screaming. They thought somebody was dead or something. They all came running in. So I got to share the moment with my family. My heart was just overjoyed and overwhelmed.

My first joke was, "I thought I'd have to be as ugly as Porter and as old as Willie Nelson before I'd be put in." I did think, *I'm not old enough to be in the Country Music Hall of Fame*, but I guess I am. It's like being inducted into sainthood or something. I am in the Hall of Fame with the saints. Me, little Dolly Parton from the Smoky Mountains in there with Hank Williams and all those people who

Hurricane Dolly

Thirty-five years after moving to Nashville, Dolly Parton remains as refreshing and innovative as most acts half her age.

AS USUAL, DOLLY PARTON IS A WHIRLWIND OF CREATIVE ACTIVITY. At the age of 54, Parton is reinventing herself again with a sparkling new bluegrass album. *The Grass Is Blue* finds Parton drawing on her Appalachian heritage in a fresh, yet staunchly traditional, manner. This move follows 1998's *Hungry Again*, a similarly gutsy gamble she recorded with young alternative-country musicians.

Parton's lovely *Trio II* album with Emmylou Harris and Linda Ronstadt became a surprise sales success of 1999, even without radio airplay. She starred in *Blue Valley Songbird*, a Lifetime network movie based on a song she recorded for

the *Hungry Again* album. And, as Parton became a 1999 inductee into the Country Music Hall of Fame, she continued to push beyond artistic borders by joining outrageous pop star Boy George on a disco recording. She's also developing a gospel

have done so much. It's chilling. It's humbling. And I'm glad to go in while I'm still young enough, active enough and alive enough that I can enjoy it. I get to see it happen, feel it happen, be part of it while it's happening.

CM: Your bluegrass performance was one of the best moments of the telecast.

DP: It's cool to be going into the Hall of Fame and at the same time doing new music. If you think this means I'm done and that this is putting me in a rocking chair, you can forget it. If it does, you can just put wheels on my rockin' chair, 'cause I am gonna rock 'n' roll. With the bluegrass album, I feel like I'm just starting my career.

CM: How did *The Grass Is Blue* come about?

DP: All of my people played fiddles, mandolins, banjos and guitars. We defined our music as "mountain music." The emotion is the same for mountain music and bluegrass. That "high lonesome sound" is just the mourning of the soul, like being part of a high lonesome wind, going deep into the soul and expressing it. Steve Buckingham, who has produced so

many of my records, invited me to dinner. He said, "They ran a survey of some sort asking people who they would most like to do a bluegrass album. Do you know what the results were? Dolly Parton, 10 to one." I said, "Well, why don't we just do one then?" Six weeks later we were done with it.

CM: Are you in a good place in your life?

DP: They say wisdom comes with age, and I think peace does as well. I don't have to do anything, so I will not do anything if it doesn't feel right to me. I am willing to work until I fall over, but I don't have to.

I have freedom now. I'm not tied up to a record label. I am managing myself, so I don't have to ask managers. Since I have gotten older and not been played on the radio, I don't have to write to please a disc jockey. I'm not writing to please anybody but



TENNESSEE MOUNTAIN GIRL | Dolly at 3 years old (left), and with her family a few years later (center, in striped shirt).

myself. If I want to do a bluegrass album, I have the freedom. I've lived long enough to earn it, and I guess I deserve it. I'm gonna claim it whether I deserve it or not!

I feel good and I don't look bad for my age. I look like a cartoon anyway, so what difference does it make? I'm always gonna look like Dolly, like a freak. But I'm the best freak I've ever been. At this time in my life, I'm happy.

CM: Whose plastic surgery is better, yours or Cher's?

DP: What is this for, the *National Enquirer*?

—Robert K. Oermann

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hear our
cities.*

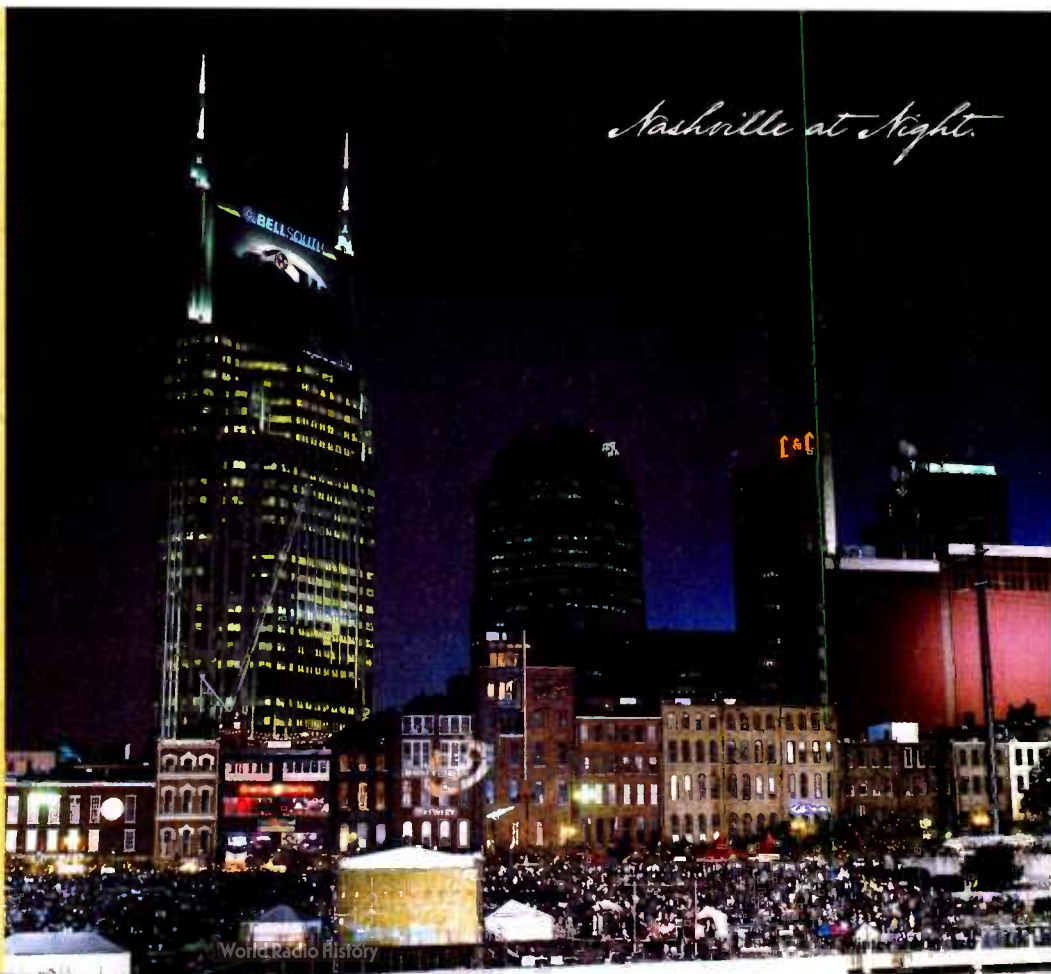
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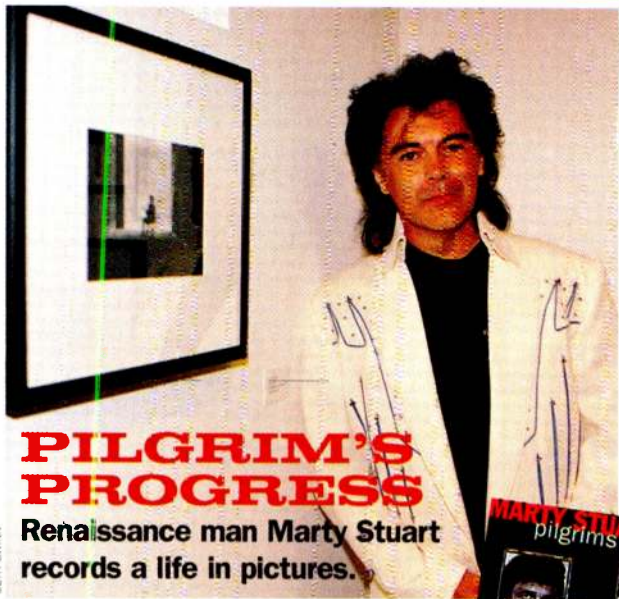
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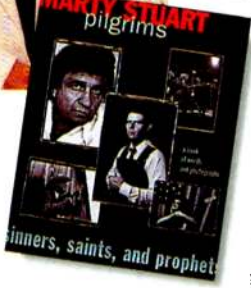
BETH GWINN

much less turned into a book," Stuart says. "I can't believe they turned my hobby into work."

Pilgrims proves that Stuart's photography deserves such a showcase. Revealing his skilled eye and knack for catching off-the-cuff moments that reveal something about the subjects, the photo book presents a personal reflection on country music. Not only do readers learn something

about Stuart's subjects, they also learn something about the star, his passions and his tastes.

The 192 pages contain more than photos. The book



also features an extensive memoir by Stuart as he offers vivid and often poignant memories about Johnny Cash, Lester Flatt, Merle Haggard, Dolly Parton, Bob

Dylan, Keith Richards and many others.

"It goes though my entire musical career and traces the journey from the start to here," he says. "They all evoke special memories. I really didn't think it was time for an autobiography because I haven't done anything worth writing a book about yet."

The book also features family photographs taken by Stuart's mother while he was growing up in Mississippi. The earliest photograph of his own comes from July 1970, when a 12-year-old Stuart took a snapshot of country star Connie Smith as she sat in a car following a performance. Smith and Stuart would become husband and wife 27 years later.

"Connie says she remembers me taking it," Stuart says with a laugh. "I was trying to get her to remember me! On the way home that night I announced that I was going to marry her someday."

Marty promises that *Pilgrim* isn't a one-off project. But he also emphasizes that he's not giving up writing and singing.

"There are so many other things to do besides sing three-minute songs, and this is one of them," Stuart says. "I hope this is the first of many books. I've always felt like I have a few books in me, but that will have to wait for a bit. It's time to write some songs."
—Douglas Fulmer

COUNTRY FANS KNOW MARTY STUART as a talented singer and songwriter, but they may not know he's a talented shutterbug as well. Nonetheless, Stuart has been taking pictures for more than a quarter-century. The best are collected in his new book, *Pilgrims: Sinners, Saints and Prophets*.

"In my wildest dreams I never thought I'd see a photograph I took published,

REBA REVIEW

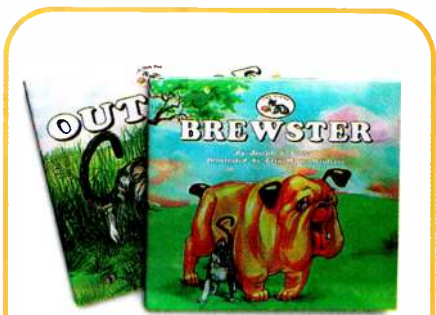
For years now, Reba McEntire has peppered her concerts with dancing, acting and multiple changes in costumes and sets. But with *A Singer's Diary*, she makes the leap to presenting her music within a Broadway-style production.

Using professional actors and dancers, McEntire sets her hit songs within the context of her life story. The show opens with McEntire re-enacting a teenage performance of the National Anthem during the National Rodeo Finals. It then follows her through her initial struggles in Nashville and her breakthrough early-'80s hits, then balances the triumphs of winning the Country Music Association's Entertainer of the Year award with the difficulty of her divorce from her first husband and the tragedy of a private plane crash that took the lives of most of her band.

For McEntire, whose multimedia stage shows have included a disappearing act and high-wire flights, the theatrical setting allows her to be more intimate with a crowd while still giving them something new and unexpected.

Initial reviews have been favorable. A newspaper critic in St. Petersburg, Florida, cited McEntire's "comic timing" and said the well-paced program was interrupted several times by spontaneous standing ovations.

—Michael McCall



COOL CAT These days, Joe Bonsall of the Oak Ridge Boys signs autographs for cat lovers and doting mothers as well as for music fans. As Joseph S. Bonsall, he's become the successful author of a series of children's books based on a feline character he created, Molly the Cat. Nashville-based Ideal Books recently released the fourth volume, *Brewster*, about a friendly bulldog that Molly encounters. Bonsall bases the book on personal experience; he and his cat-loving wife Mary recently added a fifth kitten to their home.

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BOOKBEAT

A Century of Country: An Illustrated History of Country Music

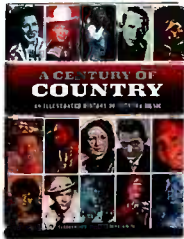
Robert K. Oermann (TV Books, \$39.95)

A Century of Country brings a historian's insight to the photo-saturated format of the coffee-table book. With more than 300 photographs—many of them rare publicity stills, posters and sheet-music covers—it has the lavish look expected of a flashy holiday gift book. But author Robert K. Oermann, an editor for this magazine, draws on a lifetime of studying country music, and he fleshes out the past 100 years with a flood of dates, anecdotes and firsthand quotes.

The book is based on the similarly titled TNN documentary series for which Oermann was a writer. It begins with the puzzled accounts of East Coast publications straining to describe turn-of-the-century southern rural music that no one knew what to call. The book ends with Emily Robison of the Dixie Chicks admitting that modern country artists "not only have to put out a great album, but they have to appeal to people's eyes as well."

A Century of Country attempts to bridge visuals and substance. Mirroring television's emphasis on visuals over music, the book gives a full chapter to both "Country and the Movies" and "Country on TV." Meanwhile, western swing, California country and alternative country get squeezed into other sections.

The book's format doesn't allow room for



overarching analysis. But Oermann knows his stuff, and the rich mix of facts, stories and pictures makes this a good introduction to country music history. —Geoffrey Himes

Austin City Limits: 25 Years of American Music

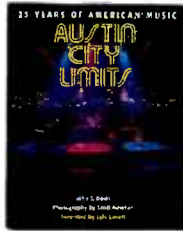
John T. Davis and Scott Newton (photographs) (Watson-Guptill, \$35)

Linda Ronstadt recently compared playing music live on television to dipping a gardenia in kerosene. The artificial setting of a TV studio can have a corrosive effect on music-making, she said, because it flattens the sound and eliminates the pulse-beating rapport between performer and audience.

But not every musical experience on TV is created equal. For more than a quarter-century, *Austin City Limits* has provided a vase of nourishing water to artists wanting to reach the enormous national audience television allows. Tammy Wynette, the most mainstream of Nashville stars, said she loved doing the show "because I don't notice the cameras and can really play to the audience."

The new *Austin City Limits: 25 Years of American Music* provides a compelling summary of what makes the show so special. Pairing startlingly good photography with anecdotal recollections by the show's staff and its performers, the book charts the show's growth and its impact on American music.

Veteran journalist John T. Davis captures the Austin spirit in the ambling, informed way he strings together colorful stories. But the most stunning aspect of the book comes through the photographs. Scott Newton the



show's photographer from the start, possesses a knack for catching the personality of his subjects. Filled with pages of live shots rather than backstage poses, the book depicts a catalog of American music greats doing what they love. —Michael McCall

Gypsy Songman

Jerry Jeff Walker (Woodford Press/Andrews McMeel Universal)

We love our favorite artists because of the distinctive way they sing and write. However, too often that distinctive voice is missing from the autobiographies of singers and songwriters.

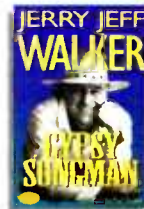
Jerry Jeff Walker's new autobiography, *Gypsy Songman*, has some weaknesses, but it also has one major strength: Walker's one-of-a-kind voice comes through loud and clear.

The same personality that inhabits such songs as "Railroad Lady," "Driftin' Way of Life" and "Mr. Bojangles" comes through in this story of how Ron Crosby of Oneonta, New York, became Jerry Jeff Walker of Austin, Texas. Sometimes that personality is amusingly irreverent; sometimes it's rosily romantic; sometimes it's smugly self-congratulatory; sometimes it's bracingly honest, but there's never any doubt that it's Walker's voice.

Walker has known lots of great characters, including Jimmy Buffett, Guy Clark, Willie Nelson and the original Mr. Bojangles, as well as an outrageous parade of street singers and wild women. He tells of them, and of some terrific barroom stories, especially from his legendary younger years.

In all, he makes it clear that he's a gypsy with a story worth reading.

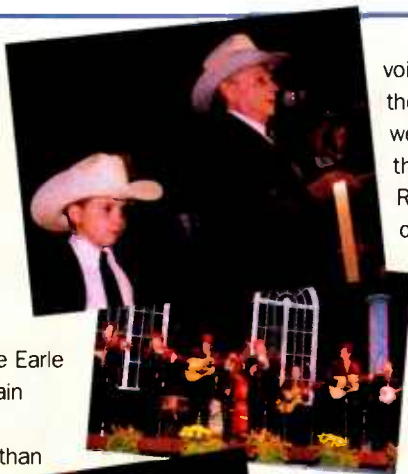
—Geoffrey Himes



GRASS IS GROWING

These days, scores of country artists are finding inspiration by planting their feet in the rich tradition of bluegrass. Recent albums by Dixie Chicks, Vince Gill, Dwight Yoakam and Marty Stuart display an occasional but unmistakable bluegrass flavor. Several artists have taken a deeper plunge: Recent collections by Dolly Parton and Steve Earle focused wholeheartedly on the fiery, mountain string-band sound, and Ricky Skaggs now considers himself a bluegrass artist rather than a country music performer.

This connection was underscored at the International Bluegrass Music Association convention in Louisville, Kentucky, last fall. Joe Diffie showed up at the IBMA Awards to flex his



voice on "Georgia Mail," with support from the Lonesome River Band. Gill and Stuart were among those phoning in greetings to the show. Album of the Year honors went to Ralph Stanley's *Clinch Mountain Country*, a classic two-CD set from Rebel Records that teamed the legend with a score of vocalists from country, folk and bluegrass.

Meanwhile, the new century already has found singer Rhonda Vincent forgoing her attempts at becoming a country star to return to the bluegrass fold. At a time when so many Nashville artists are striving to create music that sounds more pop

than country, it's encouraging to know that so many established artists are willing to maintain ties to such a traditional American sound. —Craig Havighurst

Top to bottom: Ralph Stanley accepts the IBMA award for Album of the Year while his grandson watches; Ricky Skaggs and his Kentucky Thunder band; Joe Diffie tears it up with the Lonesome River Band.

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TIM MCGRAW

My favorite team is the Green Bay Packers. One of my best buddies is Brett Favre.



MARK WILLIS

Atlanta Falcons because they're my home team! [But I think] Miami will win the Super Bowl because Dan Marino won't have too many more chances. I believe the proper urgency is there.



SAMMY KERSHAW

New Orleans Saints. I'm a Louisiana boy and have been with them since they began in 1967. I'm a big Saints fan!



MARK MILLER

(Saxxy Brown)
Denver Broncos. I've followed John Elway's career since college. I was a Bronco fan through the bad years—and it looks like we're there again!



DEBBIE WADE

(Sisters Wade)
Naturally the Titans are my favorite team because I'm a loyal Nashville fan. Also it doesn't hurt that they have great uniforms and a very hip new stadium.



MARTY RAYBON

I've always liked the Cowboys and am a big fan of Troy Aikman. I think Jacksonville and Minnesota will go to the Super Bowl and Jacksonville will win.



DAVID BELLAMY

(Bellamy Brothers)
Dallas Cowboys, because my wife's a Texan and she wouldn't let me in the house if I mention another team.



PAUL BRANDT

Tennessee Titans, because they're the home team and they're doing great. I have high hopes for the Titans to be Super Bowl bound.

SUPER SHOW Country Music Television will present its own halftime extravaganza during this year's Super Bowl. At the mid-game break, CMT will present a series of exclusive acoustic music performances by such acclaimed country acts as Dixie Chicks, Martina McBride, Jo Dee Messina, John Michael Montgomery, Kenny Chesney and Lila McCann. Meanwhile, to lure those not interested in the sports extravaganza, CMT has dubbed January 30 as Super Showcase Sunday. As an alternative to the game, the cable channel will televise a 10-hour marathon of its popular *CMT Showcase* program.



Toy Story 2 soundtrack producer Randy Newman (front) with Riders in the Sky and movie director John Lasseter.

BIG-SCREEN RIDERS

Cowboy trio Riders in the Sky are riding high in the saddle these days, thanks to their prominent participation in the soundtrack to the hit animated movie *Toy Story 2*. Group members Ranger Doug, Too Slim and Woody Paul—as well as accordion-playing sidekick Joey the Cowpolka King—contribute the theme song for *Woody's Roundup*, a mock '50s cartoon series that assumes a major role in the movie's plot.

Meanwhile, the group will release a follow-up album of songs inspired by the movie. Slated for release on Disney Records in March, the album will be titled *Woody's Roundup* and will feature such original Rider tunes as "Jesse, the Yodeling Cowgirl," "The Prospector Polka," "To Infinity and Beyond" and "My Favorite Toys."

ILLUSTRATION BY LAUREN SANDERS. LEFT, TOP TO BOTTOM: MORELLO/GHERGIA; RANDY; SPRINGSTEEN/MERCURY; PAMELA; VAN WINKLE; MORELLO/GHERGIA; RIGHT, TOP TO BOTTOM: RUSS HARRINGTON/MORTMAN WORKS; PATRICIA PRESLEY; MORELLO/GHERGIA

FAN FAIR UPDATE Despite threats by the Country Music Association to move or even shut down the International Country Music Fan Fair, the annual event will take place in Nashville from June 12 to 16 at its longtime home, the Tennessee State Fairgrounds. But officials expect the location will change in 2001.

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CLINT BLACK
D'lectrified

RCA

★★★★

Unplugged Country! As the tongue-in-cheek "warning" on this CD says,



LEE ROY PARNELL
Hits and Highways Ahead

ARISTA

★★★★

Thank goodness for Lee Roy Parnell. Since releasing his self-

no electric instruments were used in this recording.

Black cuts loose with his own new tunes and songs written by or with his own favorites (including Leon Russell, Steve Wariner, Kenny Loggins and Monty Python founder Eric Idle), with brilliant dis-

titled first album in 1990, he's made a career of bucking the mainstream in favor of his own saucy Texas-tinged country-soul music. Although that formula usually leads to one-hit wonders and artists without recording contracts, Parnell has thrived, not only as a scorching live performer but as one with a knack for writing and finding songs that happily balance those rootsy inclinations with a cool catchiness that radio can embrace. And having one of the sweetest, most intimate baritones in the

regard for original arrangements or commercial country conventions. Edgar Winter, Waylon Jennings, Wariner, Loggins and Idle make duet appearances here, as well. For hip arrangements and the all-acoustic mix, he gets an A+.

First, the old hits: This new version of "No Time to Kill" opens as funky as anything Little Feat ever did when Lowell George was living. It enjoys the influence and input of pianist Bruce Hornsby, becoming a cool, slinky, syncopated groove. He uses a relaxed rock, rhythm and blues approach with "Burn One Down for Me."

The sax solos and trumpet section blasts make this chestnut a wholly different song.

It was a natural for Black to write a special song for the love of his life—wife Lisa Hartman Black. She turns in a sweet and credible job singing with Clint on the peaan

business doesn't hurt.

But early on, a successful recording career looked like a long shot. Parnell's sterling first album, a confident mix of rocking country and roadhouse r&b, complete with a horn section and sax solos, never even charted, and its singles didn't

to marital fidelity. "When I Said I Do." All his new songs here are great, as a matter of fact.

The brilliance of this musical rethinking and homage to eclectic influences is the stripping away of certain set-in-cement commercial country clichés. The drummer is generally freed from the straight-jacket of plodding straight-time. Horns, harmonicas and glorious piano from such players as Matt Rollins to Hornsby himself stretch lead breaks far beyond the strict commercial country four-bar formula. And the three-minute track confines? *Fuhgetaboutit!* "No Time to Kill" runs more than five minutes here, full of extended jazzy solos and cool harmonies.

To cap off this 14-song set, Black adds something that disappeared from mainstream country records around the late 1960s: an instrumental. Black, his bassist and drummer present a surpassing gift here as Black tracks all guitar parts himself on "Something That We Do," cowritten with Skip Ewing. It establishes Black as a much more accomplished and creative guitarist than you may ever have imagined.

D'lectrified is a breath of fresh air and showcases the eclectic and wide-reaching tastes and talents of a guy who genuinely loves music.

—Bob Millard

fare much better. The big break came when "What Kind of Fool Do You Think I Am," the second single from his second album, *Love Without Mercy*, hit in the summer of 1992. "What Kind of Fool," filled with the kind of tasty slide guitar licks that would soon become a Par-

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.

nell trademark (both on his own recordings and on hits like "Shut Up and Kiss Me"), opened the floodgates.

Hits and Highways Ahead collects all seven of Parnell's Top 10 hits as well as his incendiary concert favorite "If the House Is Rockin'" and "John the Revelator," a traditional gospel track (from 1997's *Peace in the Valley* compilation) that features the Fairfield Four and does Parnell particularly proud. There are also two new songs recorded at Jackson Browne's studio in

Santa Monica, California: "She Won't Be Lonely Long" is one of Parnell's brawniest singles ever, and "Long Way to Fall," which he penned with Nashville songwriting dynamo Gary Nicholson, is a handsome ballad that ponders the wonder and mystery of new love. Both showcase Parnell at his most assured and deserve to be big hits.

The hits themselves touch many bases, from the guarded optimism of the anthemic "I'm Holding My Own" to the Springsteenesque "Tender

Moment" to the Memphis blues base of "Heart's Desire." The latter was written "strictly for fun," as Parnell confides in this album's notes, and the singer was flabbergasted when the song went on to top the charts.

I guess we all get lucky sometimes, to quote the name of Parnell's most popular album, but luck has had little to do with his success: That comes from having a big heart and a great desire to play straight from it.

—David Sokol



PAUL MCCARTNEY

Run Devil Run

CAPITOL

What made the Beatles so refreshing was not only their impeccably melodic songwriting, but also their knack for resurrecting various rock 'n' roll, rockabilly and country classics and giving them twists that were original, yet didn't stray too far from their idols' vision and intent.

McCartney keeps that spirit alive with the release of *Run Devil Run*—a raw and raucous 15-track collection consisting of the B-sides of hit singles made famous by his roots music heroes, including Elvis Presley, Carl Perkins, Ricky Nelson and Chuck Berry. To capture the energizing feel of his earliest days in the music business, McCartney pulled out all the stops when he selected David Gilmour of Pink Floyd, Mick Green of Johnny Kidd and the Pirates, Everly Brothers touring band stalwart Pete

Wingfield and Deep Purple's Ian Paice as his backup band. What's more, McCartney insisted on recording the tunes as quickly as possible. The entire album was cut in only five days—just like the Beatles recorded—at Abbey Road Studio Two. And, man, it worked. *Run Devil Run* rips with off-the-cuff, electrifying swagger, verve and soul.

Chuck Berry's "Brown-Eyed Handsome Man" is given a toe-tappin', Cajun treatment that's brilliantly augmented by Wingfield's lively accordion playing and Paice and McCartney's solid rhythm work. Carl Perkins' obscure gem "Movie Magg" has a country-western feel, from Gilmour's muted bass string-picking on the Fender Stratocaster to McCartney's plaintive, matter-of-fact vocal performance. Speaking of which, when it comes to singing, McCartney—at age 57—still has one of the most expressive and versatile voices in pop and rock history. He can shift gears from tender and longing balladry, as evidenced by his standout cover of Ricky Nelson's "Lonesome Town," to flat-out, wailing, in-your-face rock 'n' roll abandon on Elvis Presley's "Let's Have a Party."

All told, *Run Devil Run* is no mere retrospective, nostalgic throwback to the golden days of rock 'n' roll, rockabilly and country yore. It's an aural chronicle of a man who has always had an enormous amount of respect and fondness for those who influenced him and gave him the vision and tools to revolutionize the music of the 20th century and take it to the next level of cultural sophistication.

—Rick Petreyck



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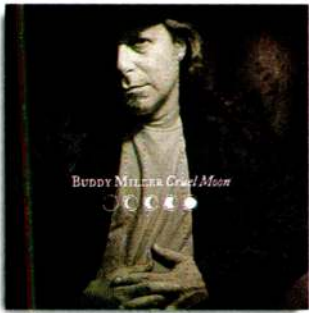
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BUDDY MILLER
Cruel Moon

HIGHTONE

★★★★

Buddy Miller's sound may be too edgy and idiosyncratic for today's country radio, but this ferociously independent singer/songwriter and guitarist shouldn't be overlooked by country music fans. His albums are full of tight songs, virile twang and bracing melodies. *Cruel Moon*, his third offering on Hightone Records, may not be his best, but it still has more energy and more whiskey-soaked country pathos than most anything you'll hear from the male artists on Music Row.

Miller's guitar work, which lit up Emmylou Harris' triumphant *Spyboy* recording and tour, is technically masterful and sonically unique. Furthermore, the 45-year-old Miller has one of the richest, snarliest voices in the business, one characterized by just the right mix of silk and gravel. When he sings with his wife, Julie—a noteworthy recording artist herself—the air buzzes with the same feverish longing conjured up by Ernest Tubb and Loretta Lynn or George Jones and Tammy Wynette.

"Does My Ring Burn Your Finger" opens the album with a typically dark groove and home-studio ambience on Miller's anguished vocals. The witty "Love Match" was penned by friend Paul Kennerly, and fea-

tures Steve Earle on surly background vocals. Miller shows his best stuff on "Looking for a Heartache Like You," a raw shuffle cowritten with frequent collaborator Jim Lauderdale and recorded in a stripped-down, no-nonsense way that lets us hear a small, talented band play in the raw. The title cut, a duet with Harris, haunts the memory, and two tracks, "Somewhere Trouble Don't Go" and Roebuck Staples' "It's Been a Change," feature hungry, fabulous southern grooves.

One does wish Miller the writer would more often explore subject matter beyond the realm of love and relationships and broaden his imagination a little in his packaging. He risks making the same excellent record over and over.

—Craig Havighurst

JOHN BERRY
Wildest Dreams

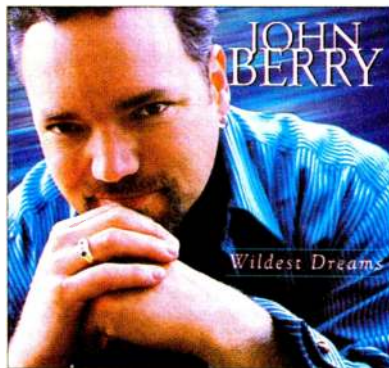
LYRIC STREET

★★★

John Berry arrived on the scene in 1993 looking like the latest in a long line of Georgia's musical geniuses. Blessed with an extraordinarily pure

and elastic tenor, he also had the quintessential gift necessary for any serious singer—the ability to convey great emotional depth. On his self-titled platinum debut album, which garnered the No. 1 hit "Your Love Amazes Me," his delivery was so startlingly intense that he often sounded like a man down on his knees, awash in desperation.

Yet mainstream country—and even his label, Capitol Records—didn't really know what to do with him. Was he country just because he came from Georgia? Was he a soul singer in disguise? A misguided purveyor of middle-of-the-road pop? His follow-up, 1995's well-named *Standing on the Edge*, did little to answer the question, but yielded two Top 5 singles, the title tune and "I Think About It All the Time." And then, after another No. 1, "She's Taken a Shine" in 1996, John Berry—brain tumor survivor, possessor of a voice that



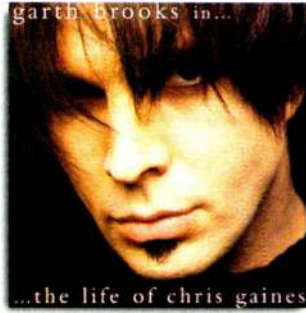
could bring a lump to a listener's throat in just four measures—lost his record deal.

Now comes Berry's first album in three years, and what a joy it is to hear him again! But all too soon, this collection of easygoing country-pop begins to seem airless—too perfect and too pretty to arouse much passion or even connection in its audience.

Yet in a subtle way, the album reveals Berry's true calling. With his penchant for concisely expressed songs of humanistic faith ("Rivers in the Clouds"), spiritual awareness ("Salvation") and moral absolution ("Love Is for Giving," with the line "you wrapped me in your angel wings"), Berry would do well to make a new career in contemporary Christian music. His beatific tenor—surely male seraphim sound like this—is perfectly suited for the material, and the arrangements on *Wildest Dreams* already lend themselves to the format.

Once you have that idea in your head, nearly every one of the 11 tracks on *Wildest Dreams* lends itself to that interpretation, devotion to the Lord easily substituting for romantic love. But there's no gray area on "Salvation," in which a man drives with a plastic statue of Christ on the dashboard, facing not the passengers, but the highway. "I'd rather have Jesus watch where I'm going," Berry sings, "'cause He already knows where I've been." Amen, brother.

—Alanna Nash



GARTH BROOKS
In the Life of Chris Gaines

CAPITOL NASHVILLE

★★

Well, the news is in: Garth Brooks' NBC-TV special on his pop-music alter-ego, Chris Gaines, rated fourth place among major broadcast networks. It was even beat out by that poor excuse for a sitcom *Norm*. And I believe there is a Chris Gaines movie yet to come.

But how does the music on Garth Brooks' new CD, *In the Life of Chris Gaines*, stand up by itself?

Well...

It would be so easy to dismiss this whole silly idea. I mean, who else but the ultra-intense, self-serious Garth Brooks would tackle the fictional Chris Gaines, an even more inward, intense, tragic survivor? I can't think of anyone else besides Michael Jackson—pop, rock or country—who could afford the risk of failing so largely.

Brooks turns to Nashville-based writers for nearly all these tunes, ostensibly (according to fictional liner notes) written by Gaines about a variety of deeply personal occasions. Everything seems to be deeply personal with Chris Gaines, by

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the way. Perhaps that is the reason this record becomes a mish-mash of lyrics with contemporary country sensibilities—read: tepid, romantic pop—and musical themes ripped off from the likes of the Rolling Stones, Stevie Wonder, Bob Dylan, Bob Seger, the Band, Bad Company, Kenny Loggins and, of course, the Beatles.

Then there's Brooks hiding his own vocal style behind various other artists' styles he practiced during his happy hour bar-singing days. Actually, if you

are as tired of the actual over-the-top Billy Joel-meets-Chris LeDoux Garthosity as some of us, this can be a plus. It's pretty cool to hear a different Garth on the James Tayloresque "Right Now," actually a medley of Cheryl Wheeler's "If It Were Up to Me" and Chet Powers' "Let's Get Together." And though somehow forgetting to credit songwriter Dino Valenti, in "Maybe" Brooks wraps an ethereal and unexpectedly effective rhythmic narration around the chorus of Valenti's memo-

rable "Get Together," which was the signature hit for the Youngbloods in the late '60s. I like this track a lot. More often, Chris Gaines' music is merely derivative and characterless.

The problem is not all with Garth Brooks pretending to be somebody else in his vocal performance, or the watered-down tracks, supposed to represent several eras of rock music. It's just a fatally flawed concept.

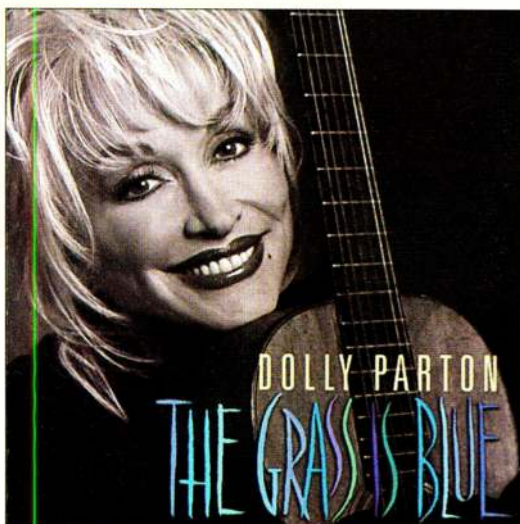
Think back to the few successful records by make-believe acts you ever heard of. (The

Monkees don't count.) You may recall *Break Like the Wind* by director Rob Reiner's hilarious muttonheaded heavy metal-movie rockers, Spinal Tap. Then there was the Rutles, a brilliant parody from Monty Python's Eric Idle, in a truly clever television special film named *All You Need Is Cash*, a send-up of the Beatles' career and music. There aren't any others.

By making Chris Gaines look like "the Prince of his generation"—a hideous thought—and sound vaguely like a dozen others, Gaines/Brooks is frustratingly nobody. This record lacks either the power of Brooks being himself, or the appeal of a good parody. "It Don't Matter to the Sun" is limp-noodle blues. Why didn't they release "Unsigned Letter," which at least has a strong contemporary rock-grooved chorus and a reasonably interesting performance, if unnecessarily marred by signature licks stolen from Mark Knopfler's "Sultans of Swing"?

In the end, this isn't a truly bad record, but neither is it original or even good. It is merely a make-believe artist making make-believe music. It just doesn't work.

—Bob Millard



DOLLY PARTON

The Grass Is Blue

SUGAR HILL

★★★★★

Dolly Parton's latest CD arrived the same week she was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame, stealing the show at the CMA awards in the process with her lightning-bolt personality, gratitude and a powerful version of "Train, Train" off the new record. It was difficult not to suspect that the promising project would be undermined by some force of show business, some dumb production decision, or some stab at cuteness. But fortunately, not only is this a Dolly Parton classic, it's one of the best bluegrass albums of the 1990s, a beacon for younger artists and fans and a keepsake for anyone who loves American music.

Not strictly traditional, it lets today's best instrumentalists explore wide-ranging musical territory on songs old and new. Fiddler Stuart Duncan, Dobroist Jerry Douglas, mandolinist Sam Bush, bass player Barry Bales, and banjo man Jim Mills play it clean and modern, but

they never leave tradition behind, and they never overwhelm Dolly's robust, nuanced and joyful voice.

The young Bryan Sutton, recently of Ricky Skaggs' Kentucky Thunder band, turns in a spectacular performance on guitar, and a host of golden voices (Patty Loveless, Dan Tyminski, Alison Krauss and others) take turns on harmony vocals.

Parton's own singing, steeped in her Tennessee mountain girlhood and refined by three decades in Nashville, is ultimately responsible for the magnitude of this project. Her rigorous attention to craft and articulation, deep blues sensibility and emotional range have few matches anywhere in country or popular music. And as if to prove how versatile bluegrass can be as a showcase for great singing, she chooses a gutsy mix of standards, originals and covers.

Parton has been singing fellow Hall inductee Johnny Bond's "I Wonder Where You Are Tonight" since her youth, and it couldn't sound more lush or comfortable. But who'd have thought Billy Joel's "Travelin' Prayer" would work so well as a hardcore bluegrass tune? The old folk tune "Silver Dagger" is given an impressionistic treatment with a spooky, lovely melody that hangs over a fascinating and original banjo line. And Parton has obvious fun with the Flatt and Scruggs classic "I'm Gonna Sleep With One Eye Open" and the Louvin Brothers' "Cash on the Barrelhead."

Finally, Parton, who wishes to be remembered in the end as a songwriter, turns in four beauties here. Two, including the heartbreaking title track, are new for this album. But the stunner is the remake "Will He Be Waiting for Me," a song that poses its plaintive question through a breathtakingly original bluegrass melody and song form. It would have been enough of a treat for Parton to record a standard bluegrass throwback album. By pushing the form so sympathetically, she further solidifies her greatness.

—Craig Havighurst



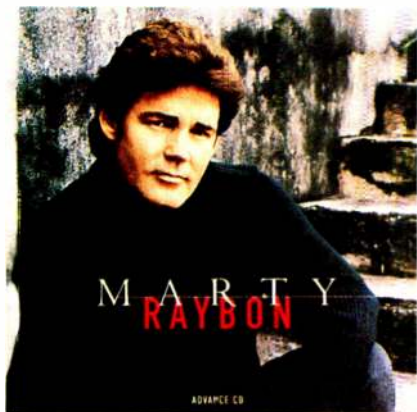
KRIS KRISTOFFERSON

The Austin Sessions

ATLANTIC

★★★

Kris Kristofferson's *The Austin Sessions* is both bigger and smaller than the promising title



MARTY RAYBON

Marty Raybon

TRI CHORD RECORDS

The best thing about Shenandoah was always Marty Raybon, the soulful lead singer who turned routine songs about the small-town, rural South into affecting three-minute soliloquies, finding, especially in Mac McAnally's sweet/sad celebrations of true love, prideful meditations on old-fashioned values that stand the test of time. Something in Raybon's charismatic, bluegrass tenor understood how to be sentimental without being sappy, while honoring what matters in life. If there's a man alive who can pack more respect into the word "mama," I haven't heard him.

After Raybon left Shenandoah in 1997, the Alabamian recorded a solo gospel project and a well-received duo album with his brother. But neither offering got to the core of what makes him special the way his first solo record manages to do.

Marty Raybon, which, like the songs of

Shenandoah, keeps things country with a contemporary beat, doesn't explore a wide-ranging world, but it doesn't have to—Raybon isn't concerned with anything other than relationship songs, those that teach little lessons about character, conscience and kindness. On the most memorable cut, "Summertown Road," he finds himself torn between doing the right thing and satisfying personal desires and ends up putting loyalty and friendship above all else, even as his own world empties by half. On the ballad "She Doesn't Need Me Anymore," he goes half crazy trying to figure out why a woman's love grew cold, but he never tries to change her or stand in her way.

Over and over, Raybon sounds like the kind of singer who knows what he's talking about, who isn't afraid to turn his life inside out and put it on display. His success comes from knowing the secrets the rest of us whisper in the dark, from drawing on the sort of pain that runs far too deep to hide and leaves too many scars to ever smooth away. On "Searching for the Missing Peace," he presents himself as a man who spends his whole existence cherishing the memory of a woman's long-ago smile, and dealing with "a hole in my life...an emptiness...that knows no boundaries."

An underdog who finds—and loses—a fleeting happiness, Raybon walks the same emotional landscape as Tim McGraw, but emerges the better singer. Low-key and self-effacing, he's nonetheless a star-in-waiting. More than that, his significance lies in his history. He remembers when country music had a heart.

—Alanna Nash

would suggest. How could this once-stellar Texas songwriter, surrounded by friends and guests Jackson Browne, Vince Gill, Alison Krauss, Steve Earle, Matraca Berg, Mark Knopfler, Marc Cohn and Catie Curtis fail to turn out a record that was as much an "event" as a collection of remarkable music?

Well, *The Austin Sessions* is a worthy album, but not quite what it could be.

In rerecording his best-loved songs, Kristofferson

cements his reputation as one of the most influential and important Nashville songwriters of the early '70s, one who helped lay the foundation for country's outlaw movement. While his swaggering, tough-guy attitude grates a bit nearly 30 years later, the songs themselves never seem dated, thanks to arrangements that bypass their '70s framework for a mostly acoustic, low-key presentation. And there's no denying his poetry, or the emotional effect of such

songs as "Sunday Morning Coming Down" or "To Beat the Devil."

In that context, his work looms larger on re-examination, especially in comparison to the fluff that passes for contemporary country songwriting. But although Kristofferson is singing better now than ever before (unless producer Fred Mollin exacted a fair amount of studio wizardry on Kris' weathered baritone), the record seems "smaller" than it should.



Top 20
Most Downloaded
Country Songs

1. **I Saw Mama Kissing Santa (So Did Dad)**
(Dysfunctional Family band)
2. **Amazing Grace**
(Cree Ative Harmony)
3. **I Got the Blues Again**
(Erin Hay)
4. **Grace**
(William Brooks "Four Stars" Music Papers)
5. **Brand New Day**
(Lisa Dodd)
6. **Wildwood Flower**
(homemade)
7. **The Water Is Cold**
(homemade)
8. **She Spends the Mornings With Me**
(Scott Hall & the Panther City Band)
9. **One More Dance**
(Doug Wayne)
10. **Amazing Grace**
(homemade)
11. **The Wild Ride**
(Billy Sahrer)
12. **I'll Fly Away**
(Angel Band)
13. **Hard Rockabilly Cafe**
(Brent McAthey)
14. **Country Songs**
(Gracie & the Slipcovers)
15. **Black Mtn. Rag**
(homemade)
16. **Cotton Eyed Moon**
(Ken Spooner)
17. **Baby, It's So True—Jon Cassandra**
(The Freedom Exchange)
18. **Jukebox Jenny**
(Lory Lynn)
19. **Do What You've Got to Do**
(Kiley)
20. **Old Country Saturday**
(Roy Howard)

Check out the rest of the country list at:
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*Compiled by MP3.com. Based on number of downloads, plays and CD sales on the date of publication deadline.



JON RANDALL

Willin'

EMINENT

★★★★

Jon Randall had quite a year in 1999—both his second major-label record deal and his marriage to country chanteuse Lorrie Morgan went up in flames. Such a double trauma would likely send the sturdiest of us far away from the invasive lights of Music City. Instead, this 30-year-old Texan cowboyed up, found himself a new label, assembled a group of world-class musicians and made the record that, finally, shows us

Ironically, the fault lies in the use of the singer's star-studded lineup of guests, who have so little vocal presence on the record that they might as well have been you or me. Who would know that's Jackson Browne on "Me and Bobby McGee"? Not only can't you hear him, but never does he get a chance to shine. Gill and Krauss fare somewhat better on "Why Me?" as does Matraca Berg on "For the Good Times." But it doesn't help that the harmony line is a wee bit out of her comfort zone.

The Austin Sessions is an essential update to the Kristofferson library. But if you're looking to find that one obscure Steve Earle performance, save your money.

—Alanna Nash

his musical heart. Titled *Willin'* after his cover of the Lowell George classic, this set might more appropriately have been named *Phoenix*, because out of Randall's painful ashes have come triumph.

With titles like "Can't Hurt Anymore," "Lonely Street" and "Mountain of Regret" (the latter sure to become a bluegrass standard), one might think this collection merely a travelogue of a breakup. But his bluegrass upbringing and eclectic roots education as a former member of Emmylou Harris' heralded Nash Ramblers round out the emotional themes with evidence of a boundless, genre-defying melodic sense. He gives us a wider berth here, with a funky pop-inflected "Baby Make the Sun Go Down" and the bluesy, defiant "Walk the Line." Gorgeously produced with

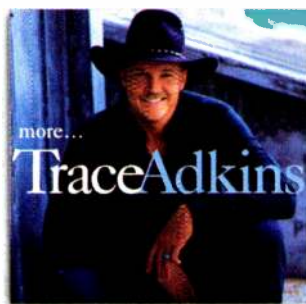
touches of mandolin, Dobro, B-3 and banjo in all the right places, Randall shows us a musical ingenuity that is food for the soul.

And *Willin'* is a bittersweet dessert with layer upon layer of heartache and loss, of honest vulnerability sprinkled with distrust, topped by moments of personal resolve. Possessed of a sweet and fluid tenor given to a delicate vibrato that can be as plaintive or as sultry as the song demands, Jon Randall bares it all here, and musical authenticity is the result. Not only is Jon Randall willin', he's able.

—Charlene Blevins

"Someday" is a sophisticated song about confronting the challenges of adulthood from the always astute mind and pen of Darrell Scott. And the self-deprecating "All Hat, No Cattle" is a western swing romp recorded with Ray Benson and Asleep at the Wheel in Austin. It has a warmth and separation between the instruments not clear on many of the other tracks. Otherwise, the title of the album is unfortunately apt. Some singers need lots of production to prop them up. Adkins is not one of them. Next time, he should remember the old saw about art: Less is more.

—Craig Havighurst



TRACE ADKINS

More...

CAPITOL

★★

The physically imposing Trace Adkins has survived accidents that would have killed about six other people, and the same could be said for his music. No matter how much electronic claptrap his producers throw over him, his vast voice punches through and impresses. His new record has a number of fine,

even excellent, songs, but nearly all are undone by something overdone. The Disney-ish swell in the middle of "She's Still There" stunts an otherwise moving song about someone dying young. And the emotional climax of the record, "Every Other Friday at Five," about a good father in a bad paternity arrangement, gets the full Reba treatment. The descent into forced sentimentality just doesn't fit with Adkins' rough-neck past and persona. It's easy to believe he feels what he's singing, for he's quite an emotive vocalist, but it's hard to hear him through the cluttered midrange.

There are two exceptional cuts here, though, that suggest what a more stripped-down Adkins record might sound like.

MUSIC FROM THE MIRAMAX MOTION PICTURE

Happy, Texas

ARISTA

★★★★

Arista/Nashville has been riding high throughout most of the 1990s with hits by such artists as Alan Jackson, Brooks and Dunn and Pam Tillis, but *Happy, Texas* marks the label's first foray into the soundtrack business. And, as you might expect from a company with such a sterling track record, the album of music from the goofy, critically acclaimed film is both a lot of fun and a dandy sampler of contemporary country music. Like that big box of chocolates at grandma's, containing everything from creamy-raspberry to chewy nut-filled surprises, this 16-cut collection

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of both new and recently released material covers plenty of tasty territory.

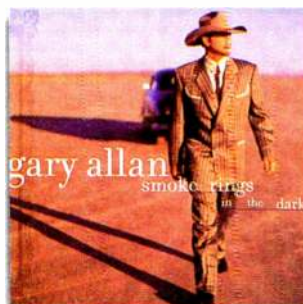
"Passin' Thru," the Dylanesque opener by reigning CMA Musician of the Year Randy Scruggs and Joan Osborne from Scruggs' *Crown of Jewels* album, is a hit-the-road-running scene-setter written by guitarist Scruggs and Johnny Cash, and features high-octane harmonica by journeyman blues-rocker Delbert McClinton. Native Texan Lee Roy Parnell chips in with his carefree "Are You Happy Baby," a previously unreleased western-swing duet with soul man Keb' Mo'. Then there's the album's first single, Pam Tillis' "After a Kiss," wherein the ever-reliable singer wisely doles out her advice for defusing

domestic tension: "Talk about it after a kiss." Comic relief comes in the form of Yma Sumac's "Gopher Mambo," two-odd minutes of wacky, futuristic lounge music with some of the highest-pitched vocals on record.

More straightforward is "Stay," the gorgeous Alison Krauss ballad that also kicks off her recent *Forget About It* album, and the upbeat "Me Neither," a hoot of a song wherein up-and-comer Brad Paisley reels off a litany of things he'd rather not do on a first date. The song, a highlight of Paisley's debut album, ends way too soon. Add Emmylou Harris' delicate "Ordinary Heart," the saucy Shania-like "Half a Man" by Shannon Brown, BR5-49's smoky version of Mel Tillis' "Honky Tonk

Song," and Robert Earl Keen's "That Backin' Song" (rate this one PG for some not-so-subtle wordplay), and we have nearly 50 minutes of music that nicely complements the movie and, better still, stands happily on its own.

—David Sokol



GARY ALLAN
Smoke Rings in the Dark

MCA

★★★

There's good news and, well, some not-so-good news regarding Gary Allan's new *Smoke Rings in the Dark*, his third album since debuting back in 1996.

The good news is that, contrary to what it may seem, the neo-honky-tonker isn't just another ambitious hat act whose new home address reads Nashville, Tennessee. Rather, Allan hails from Orange County, California, where he counts himself, alongside many of the punks and modern rockers, one of the many surfers who calls the region home. Because of that countercultural exposure, Allan brings freshness and excitement to Nashville's mainstream homogeneity, and he refuses to bow to Music

REBA McENTIRE
So Good Together

MCA

★★★

What becomes a diva most? Ballads, of course. But not mere weepy ballads. No, in the current climate of frantic, in-your-face millennial madness, you've got to have showstopping, hanky-soaking, worthy-of-TV-movie ballads. Just as Victorian novelists



wrote of heartbroken heroines dashing themselves on the rocks of the shore, contemporary Nashville balladeers want to belt out tales of romantic misery that will make listeners teary and radio programmers quite cheery.

Such material suits Reba McEntire perfectly on her new album, *So Good Together*. Although still strikingly beautiful at age 45, McEntire can't compete with the telegenic kids who are taking over the ageist video airwaves. But on radio, the former rodeo champ from Chockie, Oklahoma, can still sing circles around all the youngsters. Live performance has always been important to her, and in order to maintain her deserved superstar status, McEntire knows she can't continue to strut around

awards like a hungry party guest hogging the pretzels—but in terms of artistry, she's in her prime today. The new disc reveals a gifted vocalist in full command of her instrument. A noteworthy restraint empowers tracks like "When You're Not Trying To" and "Where You End and I Begin." Gone are the unnecessary vocal flourishes and whoop-de-do's of an immature soprano. These days, McEntire can emote convincingly without resorting to cheap theatrics.

The standout cut is the ballad "Roses," which dramatically traces a couple's courtship from the first date to the grave. The complex vocal arrangement requires a triple-axe in the chorus: Reba slows the tempo, elongates notes

like the flaming-mane firecracker of 15 years ago. Thus, she has gracefully eased into divadom with shorn locks, sweeping ballads and a ceremonial dropping of her surname, a la Cher.

Reba's popularity has waned since her mid-'80s peak—when she snatched up CMA

and gently stair-steps down the scale while singing, "And the roooooo-ses hearrrr-rd it all." It's simply one of the best performances of her 23-year recording career.

The album is predictably ballad-heavy, and Reba shines on most of them. On "Back Before the War," she even overcomes a lyric that rhymes "bold print" with "document." The pop tunes, however, are moldy duds just two steps away from Chris Gaines' cheese stand. The uptempo "We're So Good Together" belongs on a Melissa Manchester disc, and "Nobody Dies From a Broken Heart" is as flat as yesterday's glass of soda.

The disc also has some pedestrian filler, such as "She Wasn't Good Enough for Him" and "Til I Said It to You," that is neither offensive nor engaging. The most surprising moment is a completely over-the-top rendition of Rita Coolidge's 1977 hit "We're All Alone" that pairs Reba with Brazilian duo Chitaozinho and Xororo. This English/Spanish duet is a bold move that could win Reba new fans.

In our age of information overload, it takes grand gestures to get the public's attention, and *So Good Together* pulls out all the stops. The lyrics refer to adulterous confessions, bitter divorce battles, adult bookstores, drunken teenagers, sexual negligence and dying lovers. Instead of asking you to listen, Reba dares you not to.

—Bobby Reed



BRUCE ROBISON
Long Way Home From Anywhere

LUCKY DOG

★★★★

Like Kris Kristofferson and Waylon Jennings before him, Bruce Robison was not blessed with a pretty voice or great vocal range. What he has instead is the same rare ability to convey emotion, transporting the listener into the very heart of the song. From the album's opener, "Driving All Night Long," in which he sings with the loneliness of a man watching the desperate miles unfold before him, to the determination of skipping town in the closer, "Long Way Home From:

Anywhere," Robison uses the haunting timbre in his voice to move his stories along.

Though he specializes in three-minute tales of the heart, he also spins a compelling yarn, as he proves in "Travelin' Soldier," sung from the point of view of a school girl yearning for a boy fighting in Vietnam. Though he is too young to remember that conflict, Robison creates a mini-movie, offering a tender glimpse into her fragile world.

With his second Lucky Dog release, Robison also matches the arrangements and production to the mood of each song. Whether it's the somber, understated strings on "Emotionally Gone," the honky-tonk twin fiddles of "The Good Life," the moaning background vocals of "Trouble" or the guitar-driven "Red Letter Day,"

Robison does a brilliant job of setting the scene for each story, yet never allows the arrangements to overtake the lyrics.

Robison's brother Charlie (who also records for Lucky Dog) contributes background vocals, as does Bruce's wife, singer/songwriter Kelly Willis. But neither presence is as strong as it was on *Wrapped*, his previous album. Robison's songs stand on their own, and on *Long Way Home From Anywhere*, so does he.

For all his grit and honky-tonk swagger, Robison is a subtle songwriter. His ideas don't hit you over the head, they get under your skin and beat inside your heart.

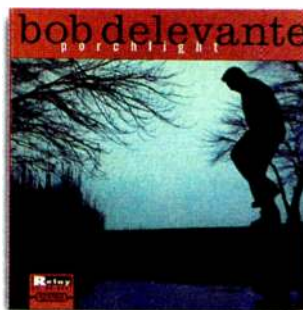
—Cyndi Hoelzle

City's considerable commercial restraints. On *Smoke Rings*, Allan covers a wide swath of stylistic turf, from rockabilly ("Sorry"), and Tom Petty-pop ("Right Where I Need to Be"), to Buck Owens' Bakersfield country ("I'm the One") and George Jones' classic honky-tonk ("Don't Tell Mama"). Electric guitarists Brent Rowan, Jake Kelly and Steve Gibson share the spotlight with Allan, adding dimension, depth and emotional shades to some classy material.

Despite its diversity and good intentions, though, *Smoke Rings* threatens to lose the battle of substance over style. Allan's husky baritone hits all the right notes, but the lines he sings don't resonate with relat-

able truths, bordering occasionally on noirish melodrama: "The night is like a dagger/Long and cold and sharp/As I sit here on the front steps/Blowing smoke rings in the dark"—a passage from the title track. To further confuse matters, the record features arrangements that often overwhelm Allan's center-stage presence. There is, for example, an affecting song somewhere underneath "Lovin' You Against My Will"; it's simply buried under too many layers of good musical intentions. Allan fans shouldn't dismay, though; there's much to get excited about here. It's just obscured by a little too much... um, smoke.

—Bob Gulla



BOB DELEVANTE
Porchlight

RELAY RECORDS

★★★★

Bob Delevante has a lot to live up to. As one-half of the Delevantes, he and his brother Mike made two great albums full of jangly gems. They began as Who's Your Daddy in their native Hoboken, New Jersey, before moving to Nashville,

where their cool harmonies and rootsy sound won over critics instantly. The Delevantes' debut album, *Long About That Time*, was full of little pop masterpieces and won them a deal with Capitol Records. Alas, the major-label deal wasn't all it was cracked up to be, and they got lost in label restructuring.

When that deal fell through, the brothers took some time off to regroup. While waiting for the next Delevantes project, Bob decided to record some of the songs he had amassed. He invited some friends to his home studio and came up with *Porchlight*. Guests include Emmylou Harris, Garry Tallent, Southside Johnny, Greg Trooper, Jeff Black, Kevin Gordon, Buddy Miller, Duane Jarvis and lots of other friends and neighbors.

Bob is immensely talented (aside from songwriting, Delevante is also an artist who designed Julie Miller's latest release, along with the packaging for this project), and his voice has a quirky appeal. The songs are packed with clever lyric twists and delightful little moments. Yet, while they have a simple, sweet charm (especially "Why Don't You Love Me," "Penny Black," "Porchlight," "You Worry Too Much" and "Count Your Blessings"), the project never really seems to come together, sounding more like a mismatched collection of songs than a complete album. And though Bob's Humphrey Bogart-meets-Elmer Fudd voice is engaging, without his brother's counterpoint something seems missing. That being said, if you are a big fan, this will tide you over until the next Delevantes album.

—Cyndi Hoelzle

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World Radio History

On the Road Again...

Tour Dates for Some of Your Favorite Artists

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DALE WOLFF/MAN

GARY ALLAN

- JANUARY**
1/14-15 UNCASVILLE, CT
 Mohegan Sun Casino
- 1/25** TAMWORTH, AUSTRALIA
 West Lyric Theatre
- 1/26** TAMWORTH, AUSTRALIA
 Leagues Club
- 1/27** TAMWORTH, AUSTRALIA
 Blazes
- 1/28** TAMWORTH, AUSTRALIA
 West Lyric Theatre
- 1/29** TAMWORTH, AUSTRALIA
 Blazes
- FEBRUARY**
2/25 CORINTH, MS
 Crossroads Arena

BILL ANDERSON

- FEBRUARY**
2/11 DICKSON, TN
 Renaissance Ctr.

JOHN ANDERSON

- JANUARY**
1/20 AUBURNDALE, FL
 Citrus Fest.
- 1/22** FELLSMERE, FL
 Mesa Park
- FEBRUARY**
2/18 DAYTONA BEACH, FL
 New Plaza Resort
- 2/19** SILVER SPRINGS, FL
 Silver Springs Park

ASLEEP AT THE WHEEL

JANUARY



TAMMY WELSH/WIKILE

- 1/21** AMARILLO, TX
 Amarillo Civic Ctr.
- FEBRUARY**
2/5 PARIS, TX
 Love Civic Ctr.

- MARCH**
3/11 SUTTONS BAY, MI
 Leelanau Sands Casino

SUZIE BOGGOSS

- JANUARY**
1/28 PHOENIX, AZ
 Phoenix Civic Plaza
- 1/29** VICTORIA, TX
 Victoria Symphony
- FEBRUARY**
2/4 FREDERICK, MD
 Weinburg Ctr.

T. GRAHAM BROWN

- JANUARY**
1/19 CAPE GIRARDEAU, MO
 Show Me Ctr.

TRACY BYRD

- 1/15-22** MIAMI, FL
 SS Norway
- FEBRUARY**
2/4 CHARLOTTE, NC
 Coyote Joe's
- 2/5** GREENVILLE, SC
 Blind Horse
- 2/17** DENVER, CO
 Convention Complex
- 2/19** LITTLE ROCK, AR
 Barton Coliseum
- MARCH**
3/11 WISCONSIN DELLS, WI
 Crystal Grand Theatre

JEFF CARSON

- JANUARY**
1/7 HICKORY, NC
 Country Music Bar
- 1/8** HICKORY, NC
 Country Music Bar
- FEBRUARY**
2/24 N. CHARLESTON, SC
 Desperado
- 2/28** TAMPA, FL
 Round-Up

KENNY CHESNEY

- FEBRUARY**
2/4 KANSAS CITY, MO
 Station Casino
- 2/5** FORT WORTH, TX
 Billy Bob's
- 2/6** SAN ANTONIO, TX
 Freeman Coliseum

TERRI CLARK

- MARCH**
3/8 PLANT CITY, FL
 Strawberry Fest.
- 3/11** SILVER SPRINGS, FL
 Silver Springs Park

CONFEDERATE RAILROAD

- JANUARY**
1/20 COLUMBIA, SC
 Main Event
- 1/28** WHEELING, WV
 Crossroad

- FEBRUARY**
2/12 STAUNTON, VA
 Ingleside Resort
- 2/26** DADEVILLE, AL
 Alibi's

BILLY DEAN

- JANUARY**
1/14-15 RED WING, MN
 Treasure Island Casino

DIAMOND RIO

- JANUARY**
1/22 ARNOLD, MO
 Rickman Aud.
- FEBRUARY**
2/5 PEMBROKE PINES, FL
 C. B. Smith Park
- MARCH**
3/18 AUSTIN, TX
 Travis Cty. Expo.
- 3/25** PORT CLINTON, OH
 City High School

JOE DIFFIE

- JANUARY**
1/1 JACKPOT, NV
 Cactus Pete's
- 1/22** MILWAUKEE, WI
 Bradley Ctr.

- 2/15** BOISE, ID
 Morrison Ctr.
- 2/16** PORTLAND, OR
 Ariene Schnitzer Hall
- 2/18** SAN FRANCISCO, CA
 Nob Hill Masonic Ctr.
- 2/19** SAN JACINTO, CA
 Soboba Casino
- 2/21** CERRITOS, CA
 Cerritos Ctr.
- 2/22** EL CAJON, CA
 E Cty. Performing Arts Ctr.
- 2/25** PHOENIX, AZ
 Celebrity Theatre
- 2/26** LAS VEGAS, NV
 House Of Blues
- 2/28** BAKERSFIELD, CA
 Fox Theatre
- 2/29** SANTA ROSA, CA
 Luther Burbank Ctr.



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Diamond Rio™

- FEBRUARY**
2/18 LANCASTER, CA
 Performing Arts Ctr.
- 2/19** HIGHLAND, CA
 San Manuel Indian
 Bingo/Casino

- MARCH**
3/25 SUTTONS BAY, MI
 Leelanau Sands Casino

EXILE

- MARCH**
3/4 MOBILE, AL
 Mystics Of Time
- 3/18** WEST PLAINS, MO
 West Plains Civic Ctr.

RICKY LYNN GREGG

- JANUARY**
1/14-15 SODDY DAISY, TN
 Charlie's Lounge

- 1/21-22** MANNASAS, VA
 Sharpshooters

TY HERNDON

- FEBRUARY**
2/28 N. FORT MYERS, FL
 Southwest Florida & Lee
 Cty. Fair

GEORGE JONES

- JANUARY**
1/28-29 ROBINSONVILLE, MS
 Sam's Town
- FEBRUARY**
2/12 SEATTLE, WA
 Paramount Theatre

- MARCH**
3/3-4 RENO, NV
 Silver Legacy Casino

TOBY KEITH

- JANUARY**
1/14 RALEIGH, NC
 Longbranch
- FEBRUARY**
2/12 KANSAS CITY, MO
 Station Casino
- MARCH**
3/25 MAHANOMEN, MN
 Shooting Star Casino

BRENDA LEE

- JANUARY**
1/3-6 ATLANTIC CITY, NJ
 Trump Taj Mahal
- FEBRUARY**
2/14 PORT ARANSAS, TX
 Port Aransas Civic Ctr.

LONESTAR

- JANUARY**
1/14 NORTH LITTLE ROCK, AR
 Alltel Arena
- 1/20** EASTON, PA
 State Theatre
- 1/21** STATE COLLEGE, PA
 Bryce Jordan Ctr.
- FEBRUARY**
2/4 MADISON, WI
 Dane Cty. Expo Ctr. Col.
- 2/5** AUBURN HILLS, MI
 Palace Of Auburn Hills
- 2/11** CHARLESTON, WV
 Municipal Aud.
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On the Road Again...



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Lloyd Noble Ctr.
- 2/20 SAN ANTONIO, TX
Freeman Coliseum

LORETTA LYNN

- FEBRUARY
- 2/10 TAMPA, FL
Entertainment Hall
- 2/12 FELLSMERE, FL
Mesa Park
- 2/24-26 RISING SUN, IN
Grand Victoria Casino

- MARCH
- 3/17-18 DOVER, DE
Dover Down Sblts

KATHY MATTEA

- FEBRUARY
- 2/10 OGDEN, UT
Browning Fine Arts Ctr.
- 2/11-12 SALT LAKE CITY, UT
Atravanel Hall

- MARCH
- 3/17 WACO, TX
Hippodrome Theatre

NEAL McCOY

- JANUARY
- 1/13 MT. PLEASANT, MI
Soaring Eagle Casino

- 1/14-15 HARRIS, MI
Chip-In Casino
- 1/21 LAC OUFLAMBEAU, WI
Lake Of Torches Casino

- FEBRUARY
- 2/12 SAN ANTONIO, TX
Freeman Coliseum
- 2/24 SUTTONS BAY, MI
Leelanau Sands Casino
- 2/26 MAHNOMEN, MN
Shooting Star Casino

WILLIE NELSON

- JANUARY
- 1/1 SPARKS, NV
John Ascuaga's Nugget

OAK RIDGE BOYS

- JANUARY
- 1/1 ORANGE BEACH, AL
Gulf State Park
- 1/28 CARUTHERSVILLE, MO
Casino Aztar

- FEBRUARY
- 2/4-5 RED WING, MN
Treasure Island Casino
- 2/12 FORT LAUDERDALE, FL
Coral Ridge Church

- 2/26 PONCA CITY, OK
Poncan Theatre
- MARCH
- 3/4 WARSAW, IN
Wagon Wheel Theatre

- 3/11 MYRTLE BEACH, SC
Alabama Theatre

EDDY RAVEN

- JANUARY
- 1/13 PASADENA, TX
Bayou City Nites
- 1/14 MCALLEN, TX
Villa Real Conv. Ctr.

- FEBRUARY
- 2/11 SAN ANTONIO, TX
Farmers Daughter
- 2/12 COUPLAND, TX
Coupland Dance Hall

- MARCH
- 3/1 SCOTTSDALE, AZ
Rockin Horse
- 3/2 ALBUQUERQUE, NM
Caravan East
- 3/4 NORWOOD, CO
Hitchin' Post
- 3/18 SAN ANGELO, TX
Blaine's Pub

RICOCHET

- JANUARY
- 1/8 SEBRING, FL
Central Florida Barbeque Fest.

JOHNNY RODRIGUEZ

- JANUARY
- 1/22 COLDSRING, TX
Sundance

BILLY JOE ROYAL

- JANUARY
- 1/28-29 NATCHEZ, MS
Lady Luck Casino

- MARCH
- 3/9 AUGUSTA, GA
Bell Aud. Civic Ctr.
- 3/10 COLUMBIA, SC
Township Aud.
- 3/12 ASHEVILLE, NC
Asheville Civic Ctr.

SAWYER BROWN

- JANUARY
- 1/1 BETTENDORF, IA
Lady Luck Casino
- 1/26 MT. PLEASANT, MI
Soaring Eagle Casino

- MARCH
- 3/9 ROBINSONVILLE, MS
Horseshoe Casino

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- FEBRUARY
- 2/5 TECUMSEH, MI
Tecumseh Civic Ctr.
- 2/12 BOWLING GREEN, KY
Capitol Arts Ctr.

DARYLE SINGLETARY

- FEBRUARY
- 2/19 MILTON, IN
Old Milton School

RICKY SKAGGS

- FEBRUARY
- 2/24 TACOMA, WA
Broadway Ctr.

- MARCH
- 3/11 PLANT CITY, FL
Strawberry Fest.

STATLER BROTHERS

- MARCH
- 3/4 SILVER SPRINGS, FL
Silver Springs Park

DOUG STONE

- MARCH
- 3/20 WICHITA, KS
Century II Conv. Ctr.
- 3/21 TULSA, OK
Mabee Ctr. Arena

MARTY STUART

- MARCH
- 3/25 ARNOLD, MO
Rickman Aud.

PAM TILLIS

- JANUARY
- 1/15-22 MIAMI, FL
SS Norway

- MARCH
- 3/10 PLANT CITY, FL
Strawberry Fest.

AARON TIPPIN

- FEBRUARY
- 2/5 KELSEYVILLE, CA
Knocntl Harbor Resort

RICK TREVINO

- FEBRUARY
- 2/20 INDIR, CA
Riverside Cty. Fair

TANYA TUCKER

- FEBRUARY
- 2/5 FORT WORTH, TX
Billy Bob's

STEVE WARINER

- JANUARY
- 1/1 NASHVILLE, TN
Opryland Hotel

- FEBRUARY
- 2/28 HOUSTON, TX
Livestock Show & Rodeo

GENE WATSON

- MARCH
- 3/12 GALESBURG, IL
Orpheum Theatre

BRYAN WHITE

- FEBRUARY
- 2/11 DALLAS, TX
Country 2000

- 2/23-24 VERONA, NY
Turning Stone Casino
- 2/26 TAYLORVILLE, IL
Nashville North

- 2/27 CONNERSVILLE, IN
Wise Aud.

MARK WILLS

- JANUARY
- 1/15-22 MIAMI, FL
SS Norway

LEE ANN WOMACK

- FEBRUARY
- 2/4 SUTTONS BAY, MI
Leelanau Sands Casino
- 2/5 WABASH, IN
Honeywell Ctr.
- 2/6 MADISON, WI
Mitty Theatre

- MARCH
- 3/4 PLANT CITY, FL
Strawberry Fest.

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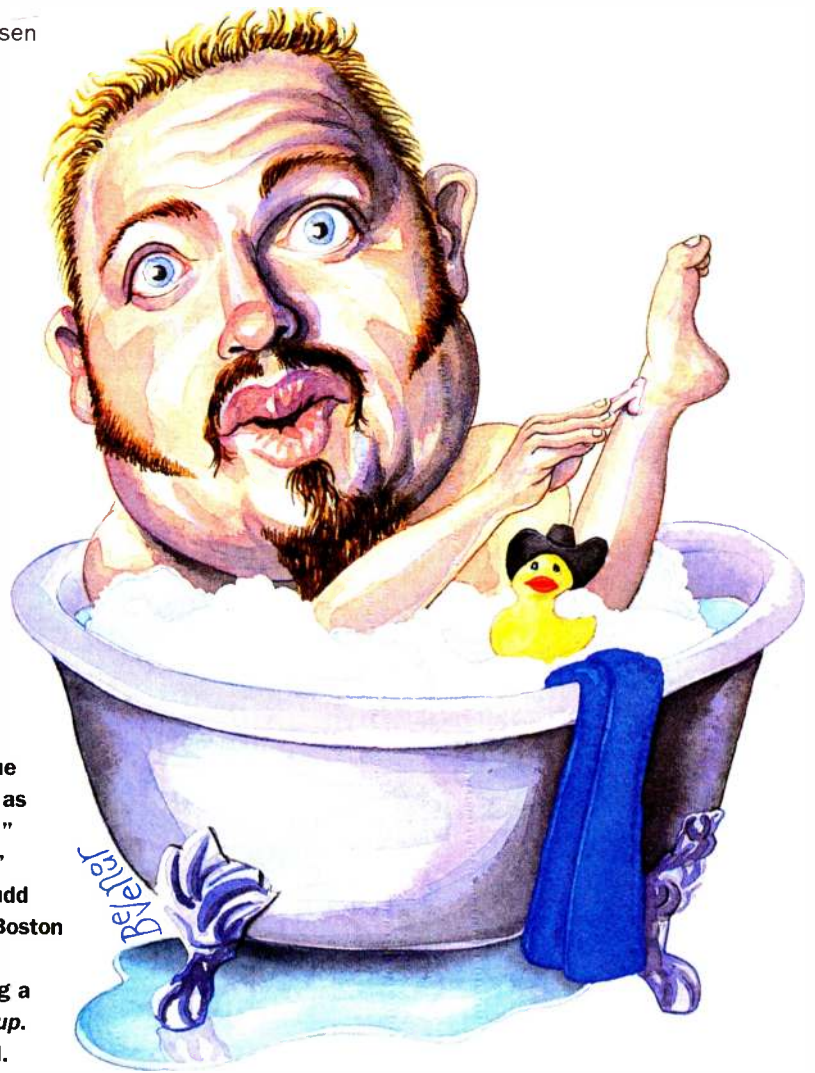
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This Judd's For You

Comedian Cledus T. Judd jests his way through some of our off-balance questions.

Cledus T. Judd gets big laughs from the artists whose songs he's lampooned, but unfortunately, he had to give up international acclaim as a hairdresser in Crowe Springs, Georgia, in order to pursue his comedy career. Crowe Springs' loss is our gain, as we giggle at such parodies as "If Shania Was Mine," "Did I Shave My Back for This" and "Coronary Life," the first single from his latest album *Juddmental*. Judd recently called us after sustaining a head injury at a Boston Celtics game, in which a cheerleader dressed as a leprechaun accidentally landed on Judd's head during a pre-game trampoline stunt. *We are not making this up.* "I've got a leprechaun-induced migraine," says Judd.



When was the last time you wore a tuxedo?

Three weeks ago. I got the lead role in an Alan Jackson video, "Pop a Top." In the video, I'm all tuxed out. Alan's just wearing his usual clothes, but I am in the tux.

Have you ever flown first-class?

I don't fly, period. I was almost in a crash, and I haven't been on a plane in almost three years. Now I just take the bus and ease on down the road. I'll probably be killed in a car wreck!

Who has the best belly button in country music?

Gotta be Mindy.

Not Shania?

Gosh, you shouldn't have said that. You know, I just knew this call would lead to phone sex, I just knew it! You just wanted to get two or three questions in,

and then go straight to the phone sex. No, seriously, about the belly button, I'm sticking with Mindy. But after Mindy, it's gotta be Clay Walker.

What's your favorite song on the Waffle House jukebox?

"Waffle House Rap," probably. You know, I think I may have to do a Waffle House song myself one of these days. It's either that, or I'll probably just end up working at a Waffle House one of these days... which I'd probably enjoy quite a bit!

Boxers or briefs?

Boxers. Silk boxers. But in the country, where I'm from, it's neither boxers nor briefs. It's bathing suits. Then you put your clothes on over your bathing suit.

Let's do some word association now.

What's the first thing you think of when I say bouffant?

Hairdo.

Cappuccino? Clay Walker.

Luau? Yee-haw!

Millennium? A big ol' mess!

Which is more dangerous, a possum or an armadillo?

Probably an armadillo, right? They look meaner, anyway. They're probably a lot more dangerous to your car when you hit one.

OK, Cledus, we all know you shave your back. But have you ever shaved your legs?

Oh sure. I did it in the "Wives Do It All the Time" video. I actually shaved my legs, for real. I cut my legs up real bad, felt like I did it with a butcher knife. Now I'll also tell you a little Cledus secret here: I do get a bikini wax now and then.

Fill in the blank: Garth Brooks' alter ego is Chris Gaines; Cledus' alter ego is...

Weight Gains! I think that says it all! *

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