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COUNTRY MUSIC

Publisher:
John Killion

Executive Editor:
Russell D. Barnard

Associate Publisher &
Advertising Director:
Jim Chapman

Art Director &
Production Manager:
Cheh Nam Low

Nashville Editor:
Bob Allen

Assistant Editor:
Rochelle Friedman

Contributing Editor:
Pat Canole

Director: T.V. Marketing:
John D. Hall

Director: Special Projects:
Gloria Thomas

Circulation Director:
Michael R. McConnell

Director: Direct Marketing:
Anthony Bunting

Executive, Editorial and
Advertising Offices,
475 Park Avenue South, 16th Floor,
New York, New York, 10016
(212) 685-8200
John H. Killion, President
R. Barnard, Secretary
Doug Roeder, Assoc. Advertising Director

Advertising

Nashville Operations
50 Music Square West
Nashville, Tenn. 37203
Jim Chapman
Karen Johnson
(615) 329-0860

West Coast
The Leonard Company
6355 Topanga Canyon Blvd., #307
Woodland Hills, California 91364
Len Mendelson
Director of West Coast Advertising
(213) 340-1270

Midwest
Ron Mitchell Associates
1360 Lake Shore Drive
Chicago, Ill. 60610
(312) 944-0927

South/Southwest
Newt Collinson
Collinson & Company
4419 Cowan Road
Tucker, Georgia 30084
(404) 939-8391

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LETTERS

Dolly At The Top

I have been meaning to write for sometime to thank you for a good magazine. We enjoy it very much and save every copy for future reference. This (Nov/Dec) month's article on Dolly is fabulous. The pictures are beautiful, so much better than in *Playboy*. I was disappointed in it. Fans are looking for the truth about their stars but it can be kept clean and enjoyable for all ages. I'm waiting for a good article on Larry Gatlin and Marty Robbins—good long articles, like this one on Dolly.

FRANCIS TALLENT
EVENSVILLE, TENN.

I've never written to your magazine before this, and my subscription is paid up until Jan. 1982. I enjoy your magazine very much each month. The Nov/Dec issue of your magazine could not have been better. I am an avid Dolly Parton fan and you surely did give me a nice Christmas gift by featuring Dolly in the holiday issue. Dolly, in my opinion, is the most versitile performer in the business today and the most talented and most beautiful.

DONALD SWARTZ
LEWISTOWN, PA.

I just finished *Country Music* magazine's Nov/Dec issue and want to praise Alanna Nash for the excellent article on Dolly Parton.

This was, by far, the most informative article I have ever read on Dolly. I am a lover of Dolly and her music and was most pleased with this classy and personal interview.

My hat is off to Ms. Nash and to *Country Music* for paying this tribute to America's most beautiful and talented lady of song.

STEPHEN VERNARD PERDUE
ROANOKE, VA.

I am very pleased with the Nov/Dec issue of *Country Music*. Dolly Parton makes any magazine magnificent. I enjoyed the article and loved all the beautiful pictures.

JAMES TRACY GREGORY
CHESAPEAKE, VA.

Sons Of The Pioneers

I would like to take this opportunity to convey my thanks to your fine magazine for the article in the October issue on the sons of the Pioneers. The author, Douglas B. Green gave an excellent presentation both past and present of one of the finest, most enduring, never duplicated groups in the field of music today.

It was my good fortune to see and talk with some of the members of the group at the Nashville Music Festival this past July and they are gentlemen and professionals from the word go.

Thank you and keep up the good work on an excellent publication.

THURMAN JOHNSTON
HARRIMAN, TENN.

Thank you for the recent article about The Sons of The Pioneers. I have been a fan of theirs for many years and would like to read more about them. Your article was well done and informative. Thank you again.

DONNA ULLREY
BROOKLINE, MASS.

Queen of Country Rock Reigns Supreme

Many thanks for your feature on the Queen of Country Rock—Linda Ronstadt. A fascinating article about a fascinating woman. Just one mistake—Linda attended the University of Arizona and not Arizona State. There is a hundred mile difference between Tempe's ASU and Tucson's U of A. But when it comes to lovin' Linda, you couldn't find two closer towns.

BOB WILLHOIT, PRESIDENT
LINDA RONSTADT FAN CO-OP

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. I love your October 1978 issue with that beguiling cover photograph of Linda Ronstadt. You know, this one issue may just be worth my entire subscription price.

BARBARA MCFERRON
RICHMOND, KY.

I greatly admire and respect Linda Ronstadt. Linda has worked so hard for many years to become what she is today. It was surely a long road, but I'm so glad she made it. She's one person who worked hard and never gave up. She's definitely number one all the way. Mary Ellen Moore's article was truly terrific. Just keep on singing Linda. What a beautiful voice.

MAGGIE BARMAZIAN
CRANSTON, R.I.

Gospel and Connie Smith

In regard to the Nov/Dec *Country Music*, I find C.M. more interesting all the time. Of course like most C&W fans, I have my favorite. Connie Smith's comments regarding her future singing career —I certainly hope with a prayer also, that she will never give up singing and yes, entertaining. For me to watch her sing is pure joy. She has a great voice for singing gospel. Her shyness is very becoming to someone as great as she is. In singing and being beautiful as well. I send my love to Connie.

WALTER N. SHIELDS
TUTWILER, MISS.

I enjoyed reading your article on Connie Smith. I knew she was a strong person about God. But I didn't know she had been married twice before now. Connie is a very special singer. She is just one of my favorite country artists.

DIANNA LYNN ROWLEY
TOLEDO, OHIO

Thank you for the article on my favorite singer, Connie Smith in your Nov/Dec issue.

My file is filled with her many albums and I will be first in line for any new releases.

LESTER E. MORGAU
HENDERSONVILLE, N.C.

Willie In New Jersey

I take personal offense to your article "Willie Nelson and the New Jersey Punks." We in New Jersey are not savage beasts. In answer to your article I have these questions: First, why is a country music magazine writing about a group like the Grateful Dead and what went on at their concert, when Kenny Rogers and Dottie West did a fantastic performance out in the Meadowlands too? You should have had someone report on a truly great, classy and dignified show, instead of punk rock.

Also, what was Willie doing appearing with a group like that anyway? And last, the concert took place in New Jersey's Giant Stadium in the Meadowlands Complex named after the New York Giants football team, located about 7 miles out of New York City. Not all the kids there that day were New Jersey punks.

LARAINE LASPADA
NO. ARLINGTON, N.J.

On Elton Britt

Doug Green's all too brief article on Elton Britt has been long in coming. Elton was a truly fantastic singer with a voice that sent chills down one's spine. His yodels were as clear as bells and his voice as sweet as saccharin. Why Elton has not been voted into the Country Music Hall of Fame I do not know. But I agree with Doug Green—he was one of country music's greatest talents. I hope the article will spur and awaken new interest in this great man.

A. ALLAN GREEN, D.P.M.
HOWARD BEACH, N.Y.

AUDIO

By HANS FANTEL

Cartridges and Needles

If your stereo system is more than about four years old, replacing the phono cartridge may be a fairly cheap way to make it sound better than it ever did before. Total system performance can be upgraded by simply changing the cartridge—or pickup—as it is sometimes called, because cartridge design has recently been much improved.

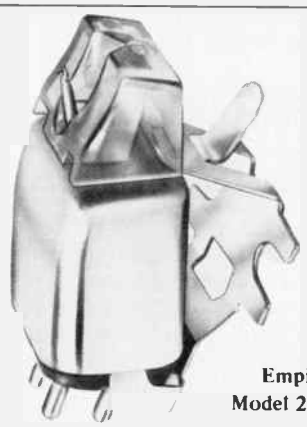
The best models today reach performance levels unheard of just a few years back. What's more, the performance gap between top and bottom of the price range is narrowing. A low-cost model selling for about $35 now sounds every bit as good as the far more expensive top models did only a short time ago.

The cartridge—the little device at the tip of the tone arm—is where the music really begins. It is the gateway by which the music passes from the record groove into your sound system. As the *source* of the sound, it occupies a strategic position: if the cartridge doesn't *read out* the sound correctly from the record groove, the music gets messed up at the start. No matter how good your amplifier and your speakers, they can't correct the faults introduced at the outset by an inferior cartridge.

Next to the speakers, the cartridge has the most noticeable effect on the kind of sound you hear. For each cartridge model has its special tonal coloration which cannot be fully expressed in its technical specifications. It can be described only in subjective terms, such as "bright and brilliant" as contrasted with "warm and velvety"—or, in some cases, "fuzzy and dull." But the differences between really good cartridges—such as **Empire**, **Ortofon**, **Shure**, **Pickering** and **Audio-Technica**—are slight and all of them will give excellent results with a good sound system.

The fidelity of a cartridge depends on how accurately its stylus (needle,) tracks the musical waveforms on the disk. Suppose Dolly Parton sails through a song. To your phono cartridge, Dolly's pearly voice is a bumpy road. To track those overtones that spell out the special character of Dolly's (or anybody elses) voice, the stylus must swing through some 40,000 hairpin turns each second. That's what it takes to reproduce a 20,000 Hz note, since each cycle of a recorded frequency consists of two turns—one in either direction. At the speed the stylus has to swing around these curves, it endures accelerations greater than those experienced by astronauts at blast-off. It staggers the imagination to think of such vast forces at play within the narrow confines of that wiggly groove. Yet throughout this harrowing journey, the stylus must never loose contact with the groove wall. If it overshoots the curve and doesn't follow the contour of the groove exactly, the result is distortion.

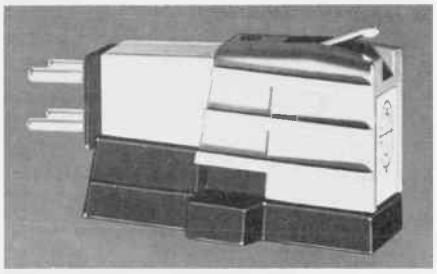
As a general rule, a cartridge capable of true fidelity will track at no more than two grams stylus pressure. Some top-rank cartridges will track with less than one-gram pressure. But to operate at such minimal pressure—virtually floating across the record—such cartridges depend on a very good tone arm with precision bearings, enabling it to move across the disk without frictional drag. If you have quality components, this poses no real problem, for nearly all of today's better turntables and changers come with tone arms that move very easily on their pivot. However, many older record changers have too much frictional drag on their tone arms, requiring cartridges built for a downward pressure as high as three-five grams. These are rarely capable of high-fidelity performance. Besides, the added weight makes your records wear out faster. So, if you happen to own one of those older kinds of record changers, it may be a good idea to replace it also and get a modern turntable so you can take advantage of the new light-tracking phono cartridges.



Empire's Model 2000

Today's cartridges come in two basic types: ceramic and magnetic. Ceramic types are widely used in cheap, non-fi equipment. In these models the stylus twists a slab of ceramic material which then produces an electric signal according to the stylus motion. Such cartridges are simple and inexpensive, but, unfortunately, not very good. The heavy mechanical task of twisting the ceramic slab makes it hard for the stylus to follow the rapid motions necessary to produce a wide range of frequencies. So, if your record player uses a ceramic cartridge, you can take it for granted that it's not true hi-fi.

All quality components use magnetic cartridges, in which the electrical signal is generated by the stylus wiggling a tiny magnet inside a wire coil, thus acting like a miniature dynamo. By making all the moving parts extremely light and small,



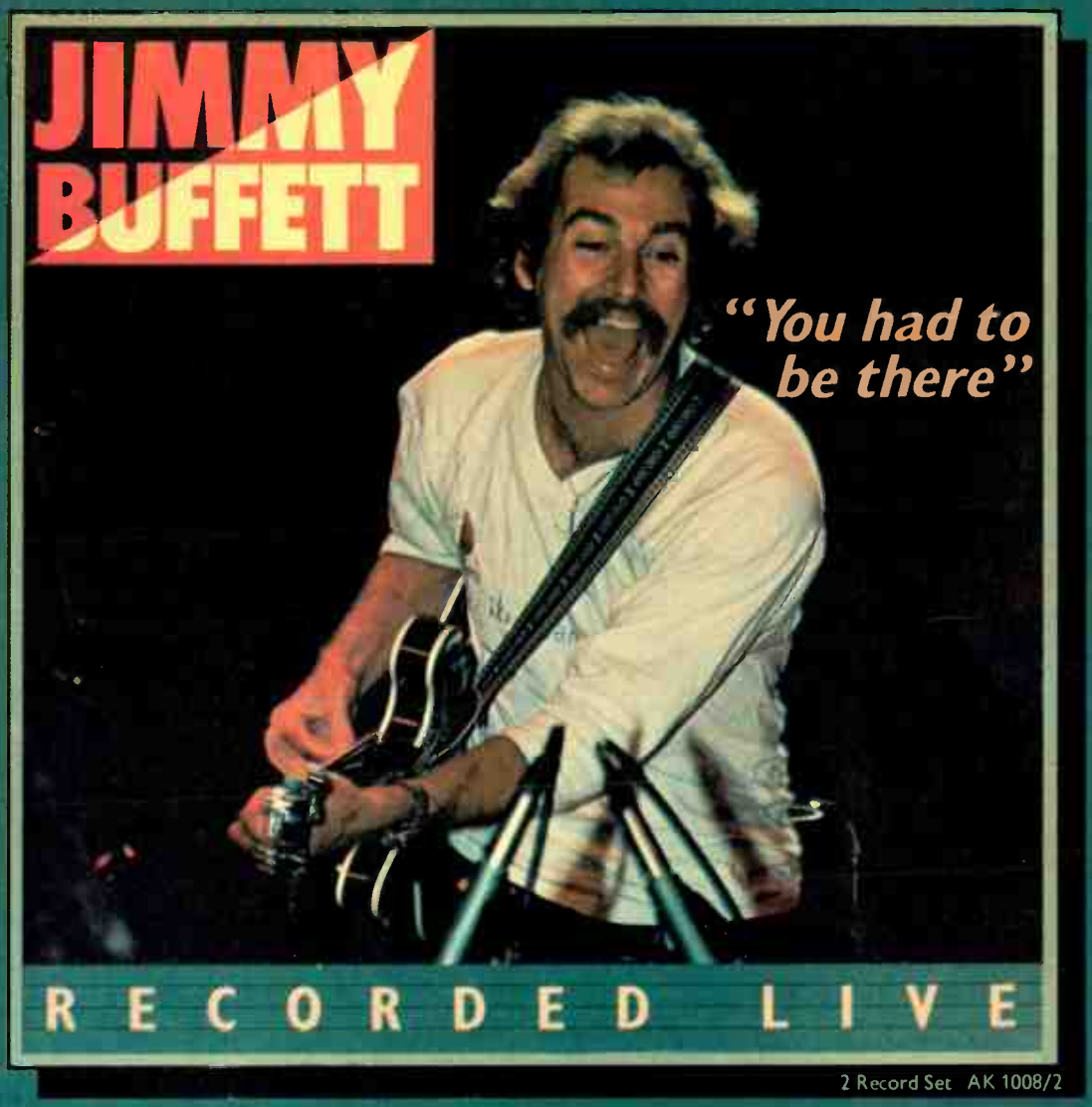
Audio Technica's Model ATX1

engineers enable such cartridges to follow the musical waveforms in the groove quite easily and reproduce the entire range of musical sound. Furthermore, nearly all magnetic cartridges now come equipped with a diamond stylus, which lasts for more than a thousand plays without developing wear or damaging your records.

In choosing a cartridge, it's a good idea to match the price range of your cartridge to that of the rest of your system. There's no sense in buying a top-model cartridge for a low-cost system because the system wouldn't really show off the performance of the cartridge. Likewise, there is no sense in handicapping a superior system with a cartridge that won't let the system do its best. So, to avoid confusion, let me offer a few practical suggestions:

For a low-cost component system, you might consider such fine, moderately priced models as the **Empire 2000E** ($30), the **Audio Technica AT-11** ($35), or the **Stanton 500E** ($35). A medium-priced stereo system will do very well with a **Shure M91E** ($60), a **Pickering XV-15/400E** ($55), or an **Ortofon FF-15E MkII** ($60). And if you're lucky enough to own a truly superb sound system, pick among such excellent as the **AKG P8E** ($100), the **Empire 2000T** ($90) or the **Shure V-15 Type III** ($90). The prices, by the way, are merely the official list prices and are often discounted by local dealers.

As I said, installing a new cartridge often does wonders for an aging system and all the mentioned models offer outstanding performance in their class. ■



2 Record Set AK 1008/2

THERE'S NOTHING to this show bidness gig. After twelve years and ten albums I enjoy remembering some of the moments in the history of Coral Reefer madness that still makes it fun. I could go on for hours telling stories but I guess...you had to be there.

Jimmy Buffett
Wasting away in London
August 30, 1978

Direction: IRVING AZOFF, Front Line Management

Produced by: NORBERT PUTNAM

Country Scene

RONNIE SESSIONS: I've Been An Entertainer Since I Was Seven...And Still Got A Long Ways To Go

When it comes to honky tonkin', the consensus of opinion in Nashville is that Ronnie Sessions can honk with the best of 'em. Rumor has it he's got an immense capacity for holding his liquor, a telescopic eye for the ladies, a winning touch on a pinball machine, and a couple of lightning quick fists if he needs them.

Sessions has a reputation for having a personality akin to that of a race car—flashy, flat-out, and screechin' on the curves. It is a reputation he claims to uphold no longer. Although he still spends an occasional night out on the town, he's slowed down his pace, and more often than not, he's accompanied by his wife. He says he doesn't drink as much anymore, now that he's married there are only three women in his life (his mother, wife and daughter), he puts his money in the bank instead of pinball machines, and he avoids trouble instead of seeking it out.

Ronnie Sessions (center) and his band, Ambush.

So what makes a crazy, devil-may-care cowboy from Bakersfield, California, mellow out? "Responsibility," Sessions deadpans, ordering a double scotch on the rocks from a mini-skirted barmaid in a Music Row lounge. He eyes up the girl and grins. "You sure are pretty, I'll bet you got lotsa boyfriends, doncha?" She smiles back and says, "No, just one. He's a karate instructor about 6'2" tall and a solid 210 pounds." There was a time when Sessions would've taken her reply as a "come on." Now he just let's it pass. Before she leaves, he reconsiders and changes his order. "On second thought, honey, why don't you just bring me a beer. I need to get home early tonight anyway."

Ronnie Sessions has always been somewhat of an anomaly, containing a more than ample share of the craziness associated with the entertainment world. Shortly after he moved to Nashville some eight years ago, he was the victim of quick success. He scored a big hit with Hoyt Axton's *Never Been To Spain* but never tasted that kind of success again until *Wiggle Wiggle* in 1977. His career nosedived in between those two records and thus he spent more time building his dubious reputation as the king of the honky tonk cowboys.

But now Sessions feels his career has been granted a new lease and this time he's mature enough to handle it. "I've got a lot of folks who are countin' on me to come through," he continues. "I've got a wife and baby at home to provide for. There are a lot of people involved in my career now who believe in my talent and I don't want to disappoint them, my family, or myself." Then he flips his hat in the air and adds with a boyish grin, "Don't get me wrong now, I still like to have a big ole country an' western good time. It's just that some things are more important now."

(Continued)

CHARLIE McCOY: "I Never Considered Myself A Great Singer, But Now I'm Gonna Go With The Flow"

Charlie McCoy, Grammy award winning instrumentalist and two-time winner of the Country Music Association's "Instrumentalist of the Year" Award, is finally singing. . . again.

His recording of *Fair and Tender Ladies* appeared on *Billboard*'s list of Top 100 Country Records for ten weeks this past fall. He is following it up with an album called **Appalachian Fever,** on which he sings all parts.

For a man who is as closely identified with the harmonica as Ford is with cars, it might seem strange for Charlie to embark on a career as a vocalist. Not so, however, as "Mr. Harmonica" started out his recording career as a Top 40-type singer.

"My first record was in 1961," Charlie recalled. "It went to #99 in *Billboard* for one week then it disappeared."

McCoy made nine records as a singer between 1961 and 1978. His budding singing career never got beyond the "budding" stage, though. In the meantime, McCoy continued to gain wide music industry respect as a musician who played nearly every instrument. He put his multi-instrumental talents to the test on *Fair and Tender Ladies* and played everything, including drums, for which he is not often called upon.

Not many people realized at first that it was Charlie playing all those banjos and guitars, as well as singing nine vocal tracks. Actually, not many people were supposed to know about it for another year or so. *Fair and Tender Ladies* was part of a personal project Charlie was working on, a concept album which he was recording largely in his spare time. The re-emergence of Charlie McCoy, singer, was an accident of timing.

"I had that song and several others in the can," Charlie candidly admitted one afternoon on the set of *Hee Haw Honeys,* "and when it came time to pick my next single, it was the best tune we had."

Still, Charlie has been known as one of the most requested studio musicians in Nashville for many years. He has recorded with such top artists as Elvis, Ringo Starr, Tom T. Hall, and Johnny Paycheck, just to name a few. So why go back to singing?

"Guess that's just the ham in me," Charlie confessed. "I never considered myself a great singer, but these new tunes are a 'sound.' I'm doing eight or nine vocal tracks (on the new album)."

How are people reacting to McCoy as a vocalist? He has had a lot of folks ask him, "Who's that singing on your record?" Another Monument Records artist, Larry Gatlin, has even kidded him about stealing the famous Gatlin Family sound.

"I was doing this years before I met him," Charlie said. "I've even had Larry pitch me a song now, so he's not really mad."

All in all, Charlie McCoy is very calm about his new-found success as a singer. He continues to serve as music director of the popular *Hee Haw* and *Hee Haw Honeys* TV shows and hardly a day goes by in Nashville when he isn't working in a recording studio for someone. Now that he's a singer again, will Charlie McCoy ever do another instrumental record?

"I'm gonna go with the flow," he quipped mysteriously, "which means I don't know."

BILL MILLARD

Ronnie Sessions

(Continued from page 9)

In the past year Sessions has assembled his own band, Ambush, found a booking agency that could keep him working, hired a fulltime business manager, and purchased a bus in which to travel. The catalyst for his assault on the proverbial mountain has been a string of successful recordings over the past year and a half, the most recent being an energetic ditty entitled, *Juliet And Romeo.*

"About a year ago I decided it was time to reach out and go for it," Sessions explains. "I mean it still ain't no room full o' roses yet. But at least things are better than they were last winter. That was one of the roughest times I've ever been through. I'd just put the band together, but we didn't have any money comin' in because most of the time we were rehearsin' and the few gigs we did have got cancelled because of the bad weather."

So Sessions found himself not only trying to support his family, but his band as well. In order to keep the band from falling apart due to a lack of funds, he had the "boys" (as he calls the bandmembers) move in to his home. They set up their equipment in the den and practiced day and night. "We had to practice," he emphasizes. "We didn't have the money to do anything else. You might say I was not only raisin' a baby, but a band too," he jokes.

Sessions says he doesn't know if the beans had anything to do with it or not, but somehow the band managed to stick together through those lean times. "Maybe that slack period was actually a blessing in disguise," he reasons. "All those months of practicin' really helped us get tight, not only musically but as friends too. Since then, his bookings have increased to the point where he is working consistently and beans are no longer the only item on the menu.

Two tourists from Des Moines, Iowa, who are sitting at a nearby table, recognize Sessions and bashfully ask for his autograph on a beer mat. They also get a napkin signed for their teenaged daughter whom they say idolizes Sessions. Always a charmer, he eases their apprehensions and treats them like old friends. They offer to buy him a drink but he declines. As they return to their table, he signals the waitress and asks her to give the couple a round on him.

He finishes his beer and chuckles as he recalls something someone once told him. "You know, some years ago my producer at the time told me I might oughtta consider giving up bein' a singer and take a day gig. I thought about it too. But I've been an entertainer since I was seven-years-old. I really don't know how to do anything else, so I decided to hang in there. I've still got a long ways to go, but I'm mighty glad I didn't take that advice."

KELLY DELANEY

Grandpa Jones Garners Country Music's Highest Honor

On October 9th, Grandpa Jones stepped to the stage at the Grand Ole Opry house to receive congratulations upon his induction into the Country Music Hall of Fame, the highest honor a country entertainer can attain.

He was seen by the 4,400 in attendance in the Opry house, and by an estimated 25 million on national television; and this slight, balding man with the dapper moustache accepted the honor with the shy dignity and wry humor which have characterized his fifty year-long career.

Grandpa—who got the nickname while appearing with country music legend Bradley Kincaid at the age of 22—was born in Niagra, Kentucky, on October 20, 1913, the youngest of ten children. Apparently he never thought of pursuing any other profession than that of music; he embarked on his career at eleven, and he has never stopped.

Grandpa has recorded for King, RCA, Decca, Monument, and most recently CMH Records and wrote a number of his most popular songs, including *It's Raining Here This Morning, Eight More Miles To Louisville,* and *Old Rattler.* A pioneer of television since its infancy, he has continued to maintain a career on that medium through his ten year association with *Hee Haw.* He has been a member of the Wheeling Jamboree, the Boone County Jamboree, the Old Dominion Barn Dance, and the Grand Ole Opry from 1946-1949, and 1959 to the present.

Other nominees in 1978 were the Sons of the Pioneers, Hank Snow, Johnny Cash, and Vernon Dalhart, but it was Grandpa Jones who became the 29th member of the Country Music Hall of Fame.

DOUGLAS B. GREEN

ELVIS: A Birthday Tribute

"Elvis was to love, to laugh at, to listen to with secret hearts, to imitate, to use as a comparison for the culture he created, but he wasn't supposed to die," Leon Russell mourned in August '77, summing up what millions of fans around the world felt but were too shocked and grieved to say. Russell, like so many other of Presley's contemporaries—Merle Haggard, Donna Fargo, Ronnie McDowell—eventually vent his sorrow in original song, Russell enlarging the scope of his tribute to include Marilyn Monroe, Presley's female sex symbol equivalent in the '50s, and an equally tragic hero, a hero, like Elvis, destroyed by the adoring culture whose fantasies she fulfilled.

Alas, the song itself, *Elvis and Marilyn*, off Russell's new album, falls short of what it could be (taking the ridiculous tack that had the two met and fallen in love, they might not have come to such unhappy ends). In some ways, it is as ghoulish as the merchandisers who will no doubt celebrate what would have been Elvis' 44th birthday this month by introducing an electric Elvis hairbrush, or some such banal memorial item designed to make Presley a bigger moneymaker in death than in life. But there is still something ghostly, something moving and haunting about Russell's song. Maybe it's because it comes at a time when Presley fanatics have almost succeeded in blurring what was really the essential magic of the man—and the fact that he *was* a man—in favor of making him a god.

"Elvis died a sad death," says Knox Phillips, whose father, Sam discovered Presley and recorded his first hits on the Sun label. "They made him larger than life, and he feared not being able to live up to that image. He lost contact with reality, and when you lose touch with what you are, you're unhappy and lost. Sam says Elvis died of a broken heart. And I guess that's true." Perhaps one reason so few want to acknowledge Presley's mortality—aside from the fact that it reminds them of their own—is because it is so hard for those who considered him The Last Hero, or more, part of themselves or their kin, to accept that this man who gave them so much joy could be so unhappy himself.

It was doubly hard for Southerners. Almost single-handedly, Presley, the son of a sharecropper, changed the attitudes of the world. Not only about sexuality and "race music," but about class barriers, taste and Southerners themselves. To those who never knew or who had forgotten, Presley proved that to be poor and Southern did not mean you didn't count. When he died on August 16, 1977, country music, once the voice of the Southern working class and the illiterate, was well on its way to mass acceptance all around the world, and a peanut farmer from Georgia was living in the White House. They owed Presley no small vote of thanks.

In generations to come, the fact that Presley changed the course of popular music forever will probably have lost much of its meaning, after those who lived through that change are dead and gone. What will remain—what will prove to be more important—is the spirit of all that Presley came to embody, whether or not it is indeed rooted in truth. "We have to keep his name alive," a 40-year-old woman told a reporter at the Elvis Presley Fans Reunion in Las Vegas recently.

Happy birthday, Elvis. We miss you.

ALANNA NASH

RODNEY CROWELL: Life Is A Musical Experience

Hundreds of miles from Nashville, in an outlaying area in Southern California called Calabasas, the margaritas flowed freely. The buffet table was heavy with Mexican food, caldrons of steamed clams and nearby, people were stacked up at the bar. Everything was in readiness to celebrate the debut of Rodney Crowell and his first album, **Ain't Livin' Long Like This**.

Crowell is no longer a member of the starving artist/writer echelon. The past five years in Los Angeles have established him as a much sought-after songwriter, but now, instead of Emmylou Harris, Mary Kay Place and Carlene Carter singing his credits, Crowell is recording his own material.

The Hot Band, who flew in that day to back Crowell, had just completed a tour playing with Emmylou Harris. Crowell, incidentally, used to play guitar with the band was the vocal forerunner of the group.

"I love being out in front. It's the rush I've always expected it to be, but I also love my friends' music as well and I'm glad everybody got a chance to be heard."

The stage was packed with well-wishers. Crowell sang lead to Emmylou Harris' harmonies on the opening song, *Elvira,* which is the lead cut on his album. With the tempo and the music of the evening soon established, Crowell took over as emcee, and introduced Albert Lee, who plays lead guitar for the Hot Band.

Harris re-appeared on stage and sang several songs, some of which Crowell had written especially for her, such as *Bluebird Wine, Amarillo* and *Tulsa Queen,* which was a co-writing effort.

Next up was Guy Clark, an inspired songwriter (*Desparados Waiting For A Train, L.A. Freeway,* etc.) and performer (a new album just released on Warner Bros.).

Three-part harmonies were provided by the Cash/Carter offspring (Carlene Carter, Rosie Nix and Rosanne Cash). Musicians rotated on and off stage—the sultry, soulful tones of Willie's harp player, Mickey Raphael, blended well with the driving bass rhythms of his co-worker Bee Spears.

But the night belonged to Rodney Crowell. "I stopped touring with Emmy last fall when I started work on my own album. Studio problems, financial difficulties and time-related setbacks kept placing the release date for **Ain't Livin' Long Like This,** further in the future until over a year had gone by from the albums inception to its reception.

"I've missed working on the road all this time and was particularly disappointed that I had to wait so long to get my own band together. I'm going to Europe this month to play several dates in England and Holland, and the first thing I want to do on my return is to get my own group. That way I can start touring immediately."

Crowell did not sit idle for the past twelve months. Instead, he stayed home writing songs and when calls came in requesting his presence in the studio, he traveled to England and Tennessee.

"I went to Europe with Carlene Carter and was in on the planning stages of her album. I wrote the single, *Never Together But Close Sometimes,* which is on it. As soon as I returned to the States I went to Nashville, where I spent a lot of time in the studio working with Guy Clark on his album."

Though Crowell was raised in Houston, where Clark spent many years, they did not meet until they had both settled in Nashville. He had heard of Clark, as well as Townes Van Zandt (another Houston compatriot), but was only slightly familiar with their music before leaving Texas. Today, he credits both of them as having been a strong influence on his songwriting style just as he acknowledges the help Emmylou Harris gave him as a performer.

Creative influences have surrounded Crowell all of his life. One grandfather played bluegrass banjo, one was a

Barbara Mandrell & Sonny Bono Star In A TV Movie

Barbara Mandrell, who has been for many years packing them in at concerts, halls will be wowing them, as well, in a made-for-TV movie, *Murder in Music City,* to be telecast this month. Ms. Mandrell, who portrays herself, co-stars along with Sonny Bono (pictured above) in this murder mystery.

church choir leader and one of his grandmothers played guitar. Crowell's father continued this musical heritage in the honky tonks of Texas, where he maintained a semi-professional status.

"My whole musical experience begins with my family. I was raised around country shuffles and honky tonk songs like Willie's playing now. But I discovered R&B on my own.

"I count my father as being the greatest influence on my musical life. At one point I felt it sounded trite to say it but it's the truth. When I talk about who's had an affect on my career, I like to mention people whose music can be heard. When I discuss my father I begin dealing with concepts and not something concrete like an album. And I've spent the last few years trying to get away from the abstract or at least turn it into something everybody can grasp," Crowell explains.

Ain't Livin' Long Like This, should go a long way towards serving this purpose. For it is a solid piece of music and musicianship that everybody can take home and listen to over and over again.

GAIL RAY

The Rolling Stones Catch "Cajun" Fever

Leave it to The Rolling Stones to know a hot country fiddler when they hear one and then put him to work for them. The night after the World's Greatest Rock & Roll Band played New Orleans during last summer's tour, Stones' bass guitarist Bill Wyman dropped in to catch Doug Kershaw, who was playing in a club there.

"We got to talking after the show," Kershaw said. "They were in Ft. Worth the following day and I was in Dallas so they asked me if I'd go open for them. And I said, 'Hell yeah!'"

Did Doug know that a Rolling Stone was in the audience? "I heard that somebody was going to be out but I didn't know which one of them. It turned out he was a fan—isn't that great?"

Very few rock acts get the golden opportunity to open for The Rolling Stones. But a country act? "I was amazed. I even cancelled a night of my own! By the time it all got figured out they already wanted me to play on stage with them on a song. Now that blew my mind!"

The Ragin' Cajun's opening set went so well that he was brought back for two encores. Then midway through the Stones' set, Doug came out and joined on *Faraway Eyes,* a country ballad off their latest album, **Some Girls,** which includes some fine pedal steel guitar playing by Stones' guitarist Ron Wood. "It's been years since I've been nervous but I was, I tell you. Makes you humble yourself real quick," he laughed. "We didn't move around too much because it was a slow song—nice and a lot of fun. And they're a great bunch of people. I was truly amazed, especially with Jagger. He's a very nice guy."

Does the Cajun Rolling Stone have future plans with his new band? "We're planning to do some stuff in Europe. Bill wants me to do some big festivals out there."

And can country music fans expect to see rock's finest band cross over into our territory? "I bet you they're going to hit some country things. Jagger's been writing a lot of country stuff. I think it's great!"

JAMES BESSMAN

HANK WILLIAMS: Still Country's Greatest Legend

There is cause to reflect that sometime during the early hours of New Year's Day, some 26 years ago, the life of a young man not yet thirty, who had already been up and back down again, ebbed away in the back seat of a 1953 Cadillac convertible somewhere on the highway headed toward Canton, Ohio.

Hank Williams remains, 26 years after his death, country music's greatest legend, a music which thrives on great legends. He was born September 17, 1923, in Mount Olive, nine miles from Georgiana, Alabama. His remarkable rise to popularity despite his youth—although, like all "overnight successes," he'd been hard at it, and not always successfully, since he was sixteen—has been related many times, as have his inability to cope with his own overwhelming success, his problems with marriage, with the bottle, and with the medication, and his subsequent fall from grace with everybody except the American people, who treasure legends.

Recently, more objective retrospectives have tended to tone down the legend, to put Hank Williams' career in proper perspective. He was not country music's greatest singer, nor even its greatest star, nor its best songwriter. But he was undeniably a genius, a performer of charisma rivaling Presley's, and was, musically speaking, in the right place at the right time, for he caught the shifting American music mood perfectly when he came to prominence in the late 1940's.

After World War II the American public seemed to grow weary of smooth dance bands and dreamy songsters spinning vague, romantic ballads. They seemed, in retrospect, to have been looking for an earthiness, a no-nonsense straightforwardness, a raw, gritty honesty about the realities of life, painful as they might be. They were ready for it, and Hank Williams gave it to them. They wanted real life and Hank lived his songs; in doing so he accelerated a whole musical trend away from the big band sound of Bob Wills and Spade Cooley and from the romantic singing cowboys, toward a simpler, more direct, gut-wrenching, tear-jerking sound that was to dominate country music until the coming of rockabilly.

A musical prodigy capturing the mood of a nation: It is the kind of story from which legends are born.

Had he lived, Hank would have been 56. It is both fascinating and pointless to speculate what he would be doing: Would he be crooning mushy ballads in a tuxedo and a painfully obvious toupee? Or would he still be out there raising hell, wringing great songs out of his torment? Or would he have slowly, agonizingly squandered away his magnificent gift, as Lefty Frizzell did?

Maybe legends don't become legends unless they die young, with so much promise left unfulfilled. It's impossible to say. The only sure thing is that after more than a quarter of a century Hank Williams remains country music's most vivid legend.

DOUGLAS B. GREEN

SHERIFF FATE THOMAS: A Friend To Music Row

Could this possibly be Nashville's next hit entertainer? From the reaction of one who knows, Waylon Jennings, we think not.

Though he doesn't pick or sing himself, when Fate Thomas, the four-term sheriff of Nashville and surrounding Davidson County runs for re-election or needs to pay off campaign debts, he usually has a little help from his friends in the music business.

When one of Fate's supporters throws a benefit for him, it's not at all unusual for people like Johnny Cash, Waylon Jennings, George Jones, Marty Robbins, Webb Pierce, Charlie Daniels, Jack Greene, Jeannie Seely and Boots Randolph to show up and perform.

In fact, just about all these celebrities have been on hand for several "Music City Salutes Fate Thomas" dinners that have been held over the years. "Fate Thomas has done a lot for Music Row and the people who work there," said Wally Cochran who sponsored one of these dinners. "We just wanted to do something to show our appreciation."

Tall and portly, with silvery hair and a bald spot, and often dressed in a rumpled pin-strip suit, Fate Thomas fits his public role of county sheriff turned politician and dignitary, to a tee. With a drink in hand, he's often seen around town, shaking hands and enjoying the local night life: Whether it's at the formal opening of Webb Pierce's pool, at a benefit concert that Waylon Jennings is putting on for him at the local Munincipal Auditorium, or at a showcase for the most unknown of new country artists, you'll often find Fate on hand.

Over the years, Thomas has more or less established himself as a sort of one-man welcoming committee for Nashville: He's usually there to present an honorary "Key To The City Jail" to luminaries like Roy Clark, Hoyt Axton, Hugh Hefner, Frank Sinatra, Alice Cooper and George Wallace when they arrive in town.

"A lot of the music people are personal friends of mine," says poker-faced Fate, who in his own way, is sort of reminiscent of the countrified W.C. Fields. "Waylon Jennings and I go back a long ways...Tom T. Hall and I go huntin' together.

"They (the country artists) have been awful kind to me, so whenever they put somethin' on, I try to be there. Even if Cowboy Jones comes to town, why I'll ride out and see him!"

In Fate's large impressive office over the county jail, C&W music can often be heard playing loud and clear over the elaborate sound system. In the lobby, are pictures of him with everyone from Billy Carter and Chill Wills, to Muhammed Ali and the late Robert Kennedy. (Fate is usually in charge of handling security for major political figures when they visit Nashville.)

There are also several framed shots of him and his good friend, Waylon Jennings among the collection. One of them is inscribed, "To a great sheriff (and worst guitar player I ever knew), your buddy, Waylon Jennings." On one of the walls of his office is a gold record that was presented to him by the Southern rock group, The Atlanta Rhythm Section. "They was up here in Nashville one time and they had a little problem," he explains. "But it was nothin' serious. We straightened it out.

"Anytime the music people got a problem, they come to me," he adds. "They know they got a friend. A lot of Nashvillians don't want to accept the music business, and it's never really had a seat at the table in this town. But it literally keeps thousands of people in work, and brings millions of dollars into Nashville.

"But I'll do anything I can to help them. Like I said, they're friends of mine."

BOB ALLEN

MEL STREET: Dead At 45

On Saturday, October 21, in the midst of Nashville's annual DJ Convention, the music industry was shocked and saddened by the news that country singer, Mel Street had taken his own life on the morning of his 45th birthday.

Street had been eating breakfast with his wife Betty and his brother and sister-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Cleve Street, at his home in Hendersonville, Tennessee. Suddenly, Mel excused himself, went upstairs to his bedroom and closed the door.

Moments later, a shot rang out. His brother then went upstairs and found him lying on the floor with a handgun beside him.

Those close to Mel said he had apparently been depressed about a heavy work

(Continued from page 16)

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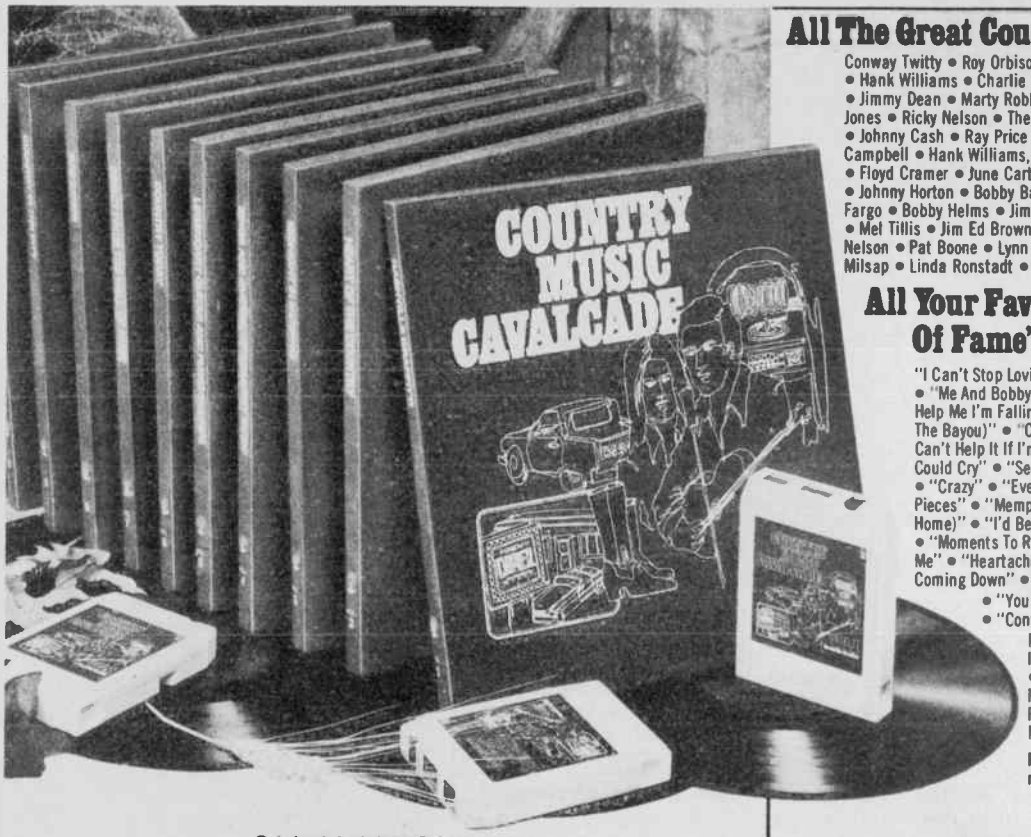

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142

They Call Themselves RIDERS IN THE SKY

"So yuh calls yerself a western band!" sneered the grizzled old sheriff. "That's what they all say. Why, every dad-blamed cayuse that comes to Nashville buys hisself a new pair o' boots and sets his hat fer two days t'git it authentical lookin' 'n calls hisself a cowboy singer. Why, we got cowboys, outlaws, western swingers comin' out our ears around here! How do I know yer what y'say y'are?"

"Well," said the slender string bass player, whose steely gaze was in no wise diminished by the horn rim spectacles he was wont to wear, "look at our equipment—the saddles, the cactus, the western movie, the prairie moon, the campfire..."

" 'N jest who might you be?"

"I'm Slim LaBour, Sheriff. I've written songs and played in a lot of bands, and I can tell you this here is *real* western music."

"Absolutely!" added the scholarly looking guitarist, whose quick hands had made the name Tumbleweed Tommy Goldsmith legendary across the West. "We play the great old songs, and those that we write—and all of us write—" he added with chilling emphasis, "are in the authentic style. Why I've played swing with Alvin Crow's bunch and did a stint with Marcia Ball; even done some southern rock with the Contenders. I've seen it all, Sheriff, and I promise you this is the real thing."

The sheriff's lower jaw, thinly populated with teeth, snapped up against his upper gums, devoid entirely of dentition, and he turned to the wild-looking one. "And you, young feller, what d'you have t'say fer yerself?" The bearded fiddler eyed him carefully with his baby-blue eyes and casually let fly a projectile toward the spitoon before answering in measured, languid tones. "I'm Woody Paul, from Triune, Tennessee. I've fiddled with Loggins and Messina, and with Wilma Lee Cooper, on the streets of Boston and the stage of the Grand Ole Opry. I've fiddled every style there is, from Cajun to bebop, and I can tell you that this here is real western music, Sheriff."

The grizzled old man, who sometimes answered to the name of Gabby, turned at last to the big fella leaning with casual insouciance against the adobe wall. "'N you? I hear this here was yer idea, big fella."

"Yep," said Doug Green, whose fingers were never more than inches from the big Colt .44 at his hip. "I've wanted to form a *real* western band for years, Sheriff. Me 'n ole Slim there put together this outfit not too awful long ago, and right away Tumbleweed and Woody signed on."

"Okay, boys," said the sheriff, with a malevolent gleam in his eyes," the proof is in the puddin.' Get out yer instruments. If yeh play good yer free t'go. If yeh don't...." He pointed with a jerk of his thumb to the crude gallows clearly visible through the jailhouse window.

In the wink of an eye the four cowpokes had tuned up, and the fearsome countenance of the crusty sheriff turned to surprise, then to contentment, then to delight as they reeled off *Tumbling Tumbleweeds*, *When Payday Rolls Around*, *One More Ride*, *Back In The Saddle Again*, *Cool Water*, *Timber Trail*, *Riding Down The Canyon*, and a few of their own tunes before winding up with *Happy Trails*.

"Why...why...I done you fellers a great disservice, yes siree! Gol durnit, that's the best western music I ever heard! You fellers are free t'go."

"Just in tine!" cried Slim, "We've got a show to make!" "Just sorry we couldn't stay to show the movie!" said Tumbleweed, as the four leapt into the saddles of their magnificent stallions...

Doug Green (center), a contributing writer for Country Music Magazine, ventures to achieve more success as a performer with his new band, Riders In The Sky.

Mel Street

(Continued from page 14)

and recording schedule. "I don't know if we'll ever know what was on his mind that day," says his manager, Jim Prater. "That'll always be a mystery. He just wasn't the kind of man you would expect something like this to happen with."

Though never a superstar, Mel had solidly established himself in the music business with a consistent string of hard country hits ever since he first reached the top of the country charts with the self-penned *Borrowed Angel* in 1972. (The song has since been recorded by George Jones, Ronnie Milsap, Mel Tillis and numerous other artists.)

Street's later hits included *Loving on The Back Streets, Forbidden Angel, Looking Out The Window Through The Pain, If I Had A Cheatin' Heart, I Met A Friend of Yours Today,* and *Lust Affair.*

"To me, Mel was *the* greatest country singer," says Prater, "but he would have argued with that. He idolized George Jones. He worshipped him like a fan. So you can't imagine how good it made me feel when George called and *asked* to sing at Mel's funeral. He came and sang *Amazing Grace.*

"I don't know how many times you can play a record in a row," adds Prater, "but the night after we buried Mel, I played *Borrowed Angel* over and over until five o'clock in the morning. Because to me, that song was him."

—BOB ALLEN

COUNTRY MUSIC MAGAZINE'S BULLET AWARDS

Last year, the editors of *Country Music* Magazine, recognizing the need to bring new talent to the attention of our 1,500,000 readers and the music industry, announced the presentation of the First Annual *Country Music* Bullet Awards.

We at *Country Music* realize that the future of country music lies in today's new artists. We've been helping bring them to your attention for years with our "Watch This Face" columns, and since October, 1976, with our "Rising Star Awards."

Among last year's Bullet Award winners, were two choices that turned out to be fortuitous indeed: Eddie Rabbitt and Crystal Gayle. These two have gone on to achieve a degree of success that was even beyond our wildest expectations.

This year's Bullet Award winners were chosen through a system of voting that involved the editors and the key writers of *Country Music* Magazine. No doubt, you'll be hearing a lot more from this select group of artists in the future.

Entertainer of the Year
Rex Allen, Jr.

Female Vocalist
Janie Fricke

Male Vocalist
Mel McDaniel

Song of the Year
The Gambler
Don Schlitz

Duet of the Year - The Kendalls

Album of the Year
All I Want To Do In Life
Jack Clement

Single of the Year
Rose Colored Glasses
John Conlee

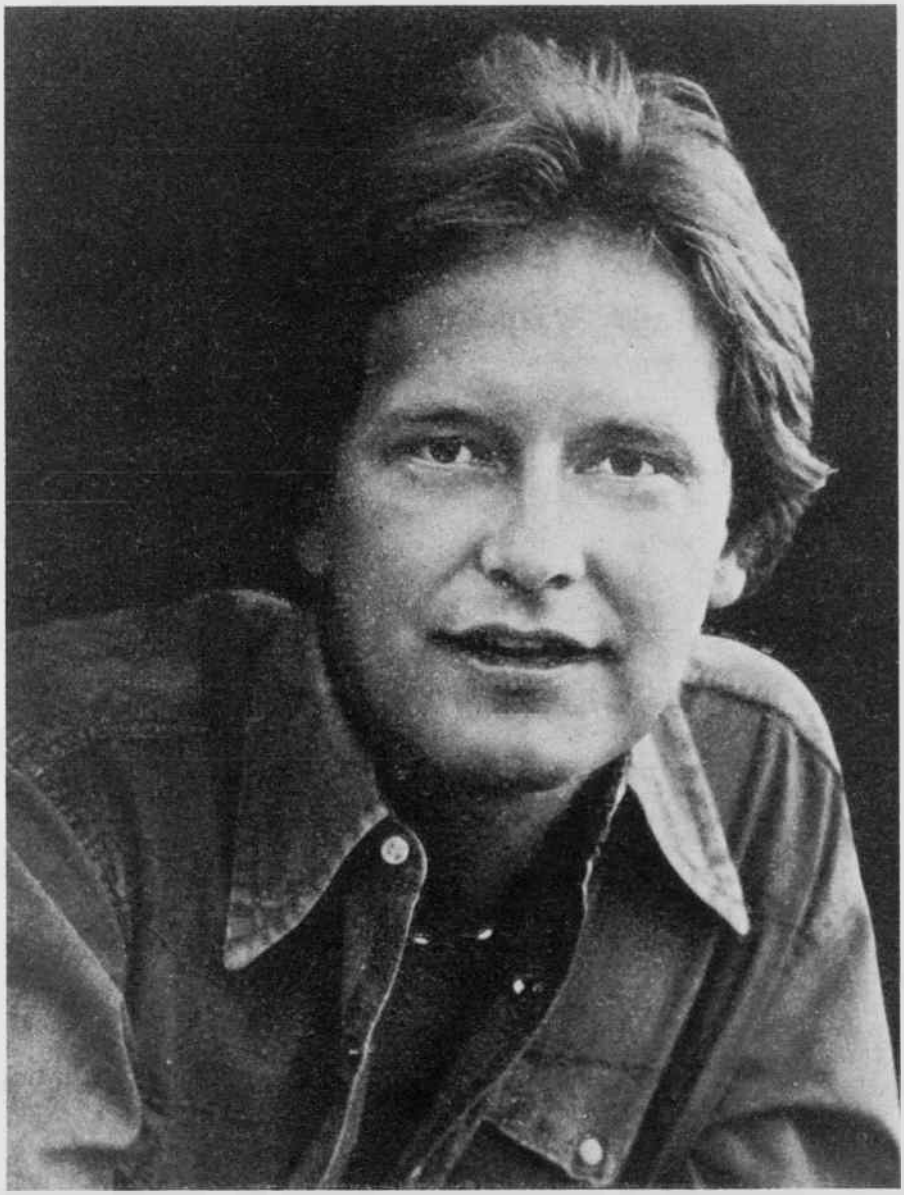
Vocalist Runner-Up
Randy Gurley

Vocalist Runner-Up
Charly McClain

Vocalist Runner-Up
Con Hunley

Vocalist Runner-Up
Lee Clayton

Rex Allen, Jr.



Funny thing about careers and stardom. Night after night Rex Allen Jr. proves what a showman he is, skillfully blending his hits, slapstick humor and the great songs from the Western heritage that is so inescapably part of him. The spotlight is home to him and the payoff almost always comes in a beautiful standing ovation.

"I'm one of the fortunate people who always knew what I wanted to be. I always wanted to be an entertainer," says Allen, one of the most outgoing men in the business. "The word has great meaning for me. The word does not mean *singer*. I'd rather be an entertainer first and a singer second. Isn't that funny?"

At 31, Allen has a habit of discussing himself and the music business and then hanging that question out there over everything: "Isn't that funny?"

The answer is a resounding "No" in his case. Country music renews itself with stars like him. He's been a comer for several years; and part of the magic spell of Show Biz is judging who the next giants will be when they're still on the horizon.

He's one of the best singers around and a class entertainer with the good taste and intelligence to combat what he accurately perceives as country music's lingering image as "the music of the dumb ass. Country music to a lot of people is a swear word."

In recognition of his growing stature, as an artist and entertainer, Rex Allen Jr. is the second recipient of *Country Music* Magazine's annual Bullet Award for New Entertainer of the Year, following in the large tracks laid down by last year's winner Eddie Rabbitt.

Like the oldtimers might have said in his father's Westerns: if there's a Bullet with your name on it...

"I think I've made tremendous progress the last three years—it's phenomenal," Allen readily agrees. "I can think about building a house. I've gone from traveling in a Ford Maverick to a 35-foot bus.

"As I get older and get a little hair on my shoulders I've become an introspective singer; I sing more from my heart than my head. But my head has changed and it's time for my music to change, again. I say again because if you listen to my albums over the last four years I never stayed in one place. I moved.

"If you consider me successful, then fifty per cent of my success is due to my wife Judy. What I'm proudest of in my career, what my wife is proudest of, what my family is proudest of, is the fact I've never sold out."

While some stars are dreaming only of "Crossover Heaven," Allen, who manages himself, has had something else in mind, all along. He is rooted in his respect and love for his Western heritage, since

the days when he used to open for Dottie West for $100 a night. This movie cowboy's son has earned his spurs.

"I couldn't go out and sing hit records I'd never had—I had to entertain people," he laughs. "I think that was lucky. You can't entertain by doing hit after hit, as far as I'm concerned.

Rex still hasn't found his masterpiece of a song yet, but he's been satisfyingly consistent and he hasn't inflicted any real clinkers on us. *Lonely Street* and *No, No, No* both reached number five on the charts and *Two Less Lonely People* was also a strong effort.

Rex's wife, Judy is a "picker," too—having picked every one of her husband's hit singles since *Can You Hear Those Pioneers,* for which she shares co-writing credit with him.

Pioneers marked a turning point when it was finally cut after a two-year wait. Larry Butler produced the song, but before it's release Allen moved on to work with Norro Wilson.

Now Rex and Judy are on the threshold of something they've always wanted: artistic control. They're producing five songs on the next album themselves and are shopping around for a producter for the rest.

As Allen's stature grows, there's an even stronger bond forged between son and father. Rex Allen Sr. Who's he? Why, he was one of the most famous Good Guys of all during Republic Studios' Western-a-week days of the 1950's. He'd ride into town on Koko, The Miracle Horse of the Movies, to give justice a helping hand and treat his leading lady to a song as beautiful as Western sunsets.

"I would describe him as Dad, because that's what he always was to me," says Rex Jr., still known to his family and old friends by the childhood nickname Chico. "Now that I've grown older I would describe him as the greatest Western singer that's ever lived, as well as the greatest entertainer I've ever seen."

When Rex Allen Sr. was home in North Hollywood he'd sing for his two sons (Curt is an engineer with the legendary Jack Clement) and some of his numbers were written by a young man named Willie Nelson. When Chico asked his father why he didn't record them, the prophetic answer was that Nelson was ten years ahead of his time.

Chico was belting 'em out himself when he was only nine or ten and traveling with his father. When he hit twelve, well, he knew what he wanted. He went to Valley College for two years to avoid the draft ("I found out college was only high school with beer and ashtrays"), but when the Army called, he went.

Allen turned his service hitch into a personal training ground, entertaining often and getting involved in everything. "It was like vaudeville to me," he points out. He was in 80 variety shows and 10 theater productions and even wrote a show.

But while he may have grown up with greatness at home, Allen has been trying to convince some skeptics about the worth of his own entertaining, singing and writing ever since he moved to Nashville in January, 1971.

"After eight top ten records in row I'm not a virgin anymore. I think it's time to have a No. one record," he says, slicing right to the heart of the matter. "I think there are three reasons why I haven't had one. It could be the material, it could be the production and, what I feel is the most important reason I haven't had a No. 1 record, my name is Rex Allen Jr."

Whether the feeling is valid or not, Rex has released enough good songs that he should have established himself in his own right now. There's no reason for him to be a casualty of the "Junior" hassle.

"*Junior* is thought to be inferior," Allen says, turning serious and tracing the rim of an ashtray with his Marlboro as he outlines his case. "The unfortunate part of being *Junior* in the business is the public and the media expected me to be the same caliber of entertainer at nineteen my father was at forty.

"I'm the only *Junior* whose father is still alive who's made it. I think it's hurting me more now than it ever has. I don't think people want you to be successful and be a *Junior.* Isn't that funny?

"I don't get that from the record company because they're a hundred per cent behind me. I get the feeling from some radio people and some bookers. Most people booking, booked my father 30 years ago.

"I'm proud I've maintained my integrity through all the *Junior* hassle," he adds, sweeping his left hand in front of him to symbolically remove the whole distasteful issue. "Winning the Bullet award is the first step, the primary step."

Gaining a great measure of artistic control, freedom, over the upcoming album is an even bigger step. Record companies just don't extend that privilege without a lot of thought about the results.

Yet multi-talented artists like Dolly Parton, Eddie Rabbitt, Larry Gatlin and Don Williams, the Country Music Association's male vocalist of the year, have already shown why the artist should have as much creative input as possible.

"I think a lot of artists doing production work are not getting credit for it," Allen says. "A lot of people think artist-production stuff can't be done. A lot of people think the artist is not critical enough, which is a farce. If anyone is super critical it's the artist.

"You're into a new era in country music. There's a group of artists today who are between the ages of 28 and 35 and their heritage is country music; yet not one of those people would say the most influential people in their career is anyone in country music. The most influential people have to be Lennon and McCartney and the Beatles."

Great music is where you find it, so why not learn from anyone who practices the craft so brilliantly? And country music simply should not ignore the enlightened approach to albums taken by the Beatles and Fleetwood Mac, either, not when those albums sell in the millions. Those groups didn't slap two hits together with so many throwaway cuts and ship it. Some major country artists are still guilty of that.

"Let me give you the master plan," Allen says, purposefully tugging up the sleeves of his white, V-necked ribbed shirt. "The tentative title of the new album is **New Directions**. Basically what that means is I want to appeal to a larger audience. Now, I'm not going out and cut **Hotel California**. Creatively, Warner Brothers has given me the freedom to experiment. *Slightly.*

"Warner Brothers had given me a big budget to find my "quote, unquote" *niche.* I think an artist needs a production change at least every three years or you wind up cutting the same material.

"If I did an entire Western album that would be the kiss of death for my career," he adds. "But I love the music and it's something I don't want people to forget. There's been at least one Western cut on every album. I hope to continue that, but it's hard; I don't want to do all old material. *Kin To The Wind* (written by Marty Robbins' son Ronny) is the first new Western song I've heard.

"The biggest difference is I'm not settling—I'm going on with it. Now, as far as I'm concerned, the song will be right. You can pull any cut off the album and I'll be proud of it."

Allen puts a big heart into his career and he's bolstered by qualities like love and pride. He's got the common sense he needs to get to the top, too. He's not married to his own writing and he's not trying to match his voice to that heavy Waylonized beat. At times he can get completely away to think by cruising in his Cessna 182, airplane, but he loves the studio as much as he does the stage and the time invested there—call it creative fooling around—will free some useful ideas.

"Look inside my little pea brain," Rex Allen Jr. says with a grin as he leans forward. "I don't want to change anyone's musical habits. I was always taught to set my goals high. If I was to say my goal is to get into the Country Music Hall of Fame I'd be shortsighted. Most of the people in the Hall of Fame are dead." ■

Janie Fricke

Janie Fricke

Perhaps no one woman has generated more excitement and interest within the music industry in the past year than Columbia recording artist, Janie Fricke. (See *Country Music* Magazine's "Rising Star Award," February, 1978.)

Before emerging earlier this year with hits of her own like *What Are You Doing Tonight, Playing Hard To Get,* and *On My Knees* (a duet with Charlie Rich), Janie enjoyed the secure anonymity of being one of Nashville's most successful studio back-up singers. Up until recently, Janie, the woman with a voice for every occasion, was the one you heard in the background, confidently supplying the subtle "doo-wahs" and "ooh-wahs" at all the right places on the number one records of such artists as Dolly Parton, Ronnie Milsap, Crystal Gayle and the late Elvis Presley.

While featured recording artists often beat their brains out, breaking even on the road night after night, Janie remained content to draw her six-figure income from studio and commercial work and enjoy the luxury of eating dinner at home.

But that's all changed now; since Janie did a series of stunning duets with Johnny Duncan—*The Stranger, It Couldn't Have Been Any Better,* and *Thinkin' Of A Rendevous*—the momentum has been building for her to step out on her own. Lately as her own hits have gained more and more momentum in the charts, she has taken to the road more and more, still carefully balancing her career in the studios with her solo career. Nowdays, touring with the likes of Charlie Rich and Charley Pride, Ms. Janie Fricke is truly on her way—up from the "doo-wahs." ■

Mel McDaniel

Mel McDaniel

Perhaps no one's route to success has been more circuitous than that of Capitol recording artist, Mel McDaniel. (See *Country Music's* "Rising Star Award," August, 1978.)

Born 36 years ago in Checotah, Oklahoma, smack in the middle of Indian country, Mel made his first venture to Nashville in 1970 and spent two years working at the airport and unsuccessfully trying to break into the music business.

When Mel's brother suggested that he join him in Alaska, he loaded up his wife and daughter and did just that. In Anchorage, he spent the next two years playing for $80 a night at the King's Lounge until he had saved enough money to come back to Nashville.

In Nashville once again, Mel got a job at the Holiday Inn and pumped gas at a Texaco Station. In between, when times were good, he would get work singing on demo records for Combine Music Company, one of Nashville's largest music publishers. Eventually, the people at Combine found a song called *Have A Dream On Me* that seemed to fit Mel's voice so perfectly that they took the finished demo record to Capitol and ended up getting him a recording contract.

In the meantime, Mel had begun enjoying a degree of success as a songwriter: Hoyt Axton and Commander Cody both recorded his *Roll Your Own,* and later Conway Twitty recorded *The Grandest Lady Of Them All.*

Since signing with Capitol, Mel has had continued success in the record charts. Hits like *God Made Love, The Farm,* and *Bordertown Women* promise that Mel is on his way to carving out the niche in country music that he rightfully deserves. ■

Runners Up

Lee Clayton

As one of Nashville's new wave writer/artists, Lee Clayton, (see *Country Music*, Nov./Dec., 1978) is seemingly always on the move. When we last talked to him, he had just returned from the west coast where he had begun work on his second Capitol album.

After quite a number of years spent in and around Nashville's music business (he recorded an ill-fated album for MCA Records in 1973), Clayton is perhaps on the verge of getting the sort of recognition he deserves.

As a writer, Clayton has already made some headway. His *Ladies Love Outlaws* was recorded by Waylon Jennings in 1972, and *If You Can Touch*

Her At All was a recent hit for Willie Nelson.

Lee's debut Capitol album, **Border Affair**, released early in 1978, was critically acclaimed, but unfortunately, hardly penetrated either the airwaves or the record racks.

So naturally, it's good news to hear that the ever-elusive Clayton has been back in the studio again, regrouping for his next LP. ■

Con Hunley

On up the road from Nashville, about 200 miles or so by interstate, lies Knoxville, Tennessee, the stomping grounds of newcomer, Con Hunley (see *Country Music*'s "Watch This Face", August, 1978) who

signed with Warner Brothers Records earlier this year.

Hunley, an ex-mechanic and service station attendant, got into the big-time music industry a little differently than most: Instead of going to Nashville, he sort of made Nashville come to him.

In Knoxville, Hunley had put together his own band, the Rhythm Masters, and began playing local venues. Eventually, he gained such prominence that he was packing them in at the 1500-seat Village Barn.

At this point, enter Bonnie Rasmussen, public relations director for Warner Brothers in Nashville, who heard Hunley play in Knoxville and went back to Nashville to spread the word.

Eventually, five major record labels were competing for his talents.

Much to Bonnie's delight, Hunley ended up on Warner Brothers Records where he is produced by Norro Wilson.

Each of Hunley's new single releases, *Cry Cry, Darlin*, *Weekend Friend*, and *You've Still Got A Place In My Heart*, has maintained the confident, upward momentum of the career of this versatile, richly talented young vocalist who promises to make a big impact on tomorrow's country music scene. ■

Charly McClain

Charly McClain (see *Country Music* "Watch This Face" May, 1977) has been dazzling music fans with her good looks and impressive vocal talents with songs like *Lay Down*, *Let Me Be Your Baby*, and *That's What You Do To Me*.

Originally from Memphis Charly, (real name: Charlotte Denise McClain) began singing seriously in school when she and her brother formed a band and wore out two cars driving back and forth to play small clubs in the Memphis area.

When she was 17, Charly auditioned and was chosen as a

regular singer for the Memphis country music showplace, the Mid-South Jamboree, where she played for two years.

Charly's reputation as a singer grew and,—with the help of Grand Ole Opry member, Ray Pillow, she came to the attention of Columbia producer, Billy Sherrill. Her two albums and her string of hit singles seem to be steadily paving her way to a reputation as one of country music's most gifted female vocalists. ■

Randy Gurley

Randy Gurley exemplifies one of those rare instances where an artist has gained widespread recognition within the music industry *before* she's had a hit record.

Randy, a diminutive, dark-haired young woman, was first "discovered" by David Van

Cronkhite, a young political public relations specialist from Dallas. Van Cronkhite took Randy to Nashville, got veteran producer, Owen Bradley interested in producing her; and then took her to Tulsa and got powerhouse manager/booker, Jim Halsey interested in handling her career.

Randy's first album on ABC Records, **Let Me Be The One** demonstrates her powerful and versatile talents as vocalist, just as her live performances demonstrate her energy as an entertainer. ■

BULLET AWARDS:

Duet of The Year – The Kendalls

It's hard to think of the Kendalls (see *Country Music,* May, 1978) as a *new* group: In the past year and a half, they've won a Grammy Award, a Country Music Association Award (for Single Of The Year: *Heaven's Just A Sin A way*) and they've had three number one records.

But having considered all this, there's the other side of the coin: A little over two years ago, the Kendalls were without a record label affiliation. In fact, after seven years of performing and recording unsuccessfully, they were going nowhere fast; that is, until they signed with Ovation Records, a relatively small, Chicago-based label, and stumbled across a song written by Jerry Gillespie called *Heaven's Just A Sin A way.*

Heaven's Just A Sin A way was a dark horse from the beginning. The song was first recorded by the Kendalls in early 1977 in their first sessions for Ovation. The song was casually accepted at that point as nothing more than an album cut—definitely not a potential hit single; nobody expected it to take on a life of its own. Nonetheless, it ended up on the B-side of the Kendall's second single. The people at Ovation first discovered they were on to something good when DJ's began turning the record over. In October, 1977, the song went to number one in all three of the trade magazine charts and stayed there for weeks.

With their latest single, *Sweet Desire,* the Kendalls have also fooled a lot of us on another count: Contrary to those who said it couldn't be done, the Kendalls have finally had a hit without the word, "sinnin' " in it. ■

Album of The Year JACK CLEMENT

It's sort of ironic that the winner of *Country Music* Magazine's 1978 Bullet Award for "Album of the Year" is a man who's been in the music business for nearly 30 years. But that's the way it worked out in our final voting, and we're glad of it.

Even though Jack Clement (see *Country Music*, September, 1978), in the course of his three decades in the music business, has *written* such masterpieces as *Ballad Of A Teen Age Queen*, and *Guess Things Happen That Way* and *produced* such giants as Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Charley Pride, it wasn't until this year that he finally got around to releasing an album of his own, a masterpiece called **All I Want To Do In Life.** ■

Single of The Year JOHN CONLEE

Before making his debut on the country scene this past summer and fall with *Rose Colored Glasses* (a song he also wrote), ABC recording artist, John Conlee had worked at various times, as a farmer, and a mortician; and for seven years, previous to his recording success, he was a rock disc jockey for Nashville's Radio—WKQB.

Conlee, who originally hails from Kentucky, had several regional hits with ABC Records before hitting the big time with *Rose Colored Glasses*.

Recently Conlee told esteemed country music writer, Jack Hurst that one of the most memorable moments of his life occurred late one night not long ago, when he was driving down an interstate in Kentucky and heard his record being played almost simultaneously on radio stations in Chicago and Dallas. ■

Song of The Year - Don Schlitz

After five years in Nashville, playing in small clubs and writing songs by night, and operating computers by day, Nashville songwriter, Don Schlitz has finally come into his own with his song, *The Gambler*.

Schlitz, who hails from North Carolina (see *Country Music's* special New Talent Supplement, October, 1978), tells us he wrote *The Gambler* about two years ago. One of the first releases of the song was Don's own version, his debut single on "Crazy Mama" Records, (later picked up by Capitol) which made a significant dent in the country charts.

Since then, *The Gambler* has been recorded by nearly a dozen artists, including Johnny Cash, Bobby Bare, J.J. Cale, and Mac Wiseman. The song was recently popularized by Kenny Rogers whose version is currently near the top of both the country and pop charts. The success of *The Gambler* is particularly gratifying to those of us who have been hearing Schlitz play the song in local listening rooms for the past couple of years.

"Within the next few years, Don Schlitz will be the foremost songwriter in Nashville," says Bobby Bare, one of the first major artists to record *The Gambler*. And after all, who would know better than Bobby Bare! ■

JACK CLEMENT

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MOTHER MAYBELLE CARTER

(May 10, 1909-October 23, 1978)

A CORNERSTONE IN THE FOUNDATION OF COUNTRY MUSIC

by DOUGLAS B. GREEN

Throughout her life Maybelle Carter remained an enigmatic person and performer. Ever the shy, reserved, determined woman of the Virginia mountains, she gave us no daring or memorable interviews, no public flights of fancy or drama. Still, she was and is, one of the cornerstones in the foundation of American music.

Maybelle Addington was born May 10, 1909, in Nicklesville, Virginia, in a long Appalachian valley known for centuries as Poor Valley. She reflected the virtues of the inhabitants and character of that region: dignity, determination and a rich musical tradition.

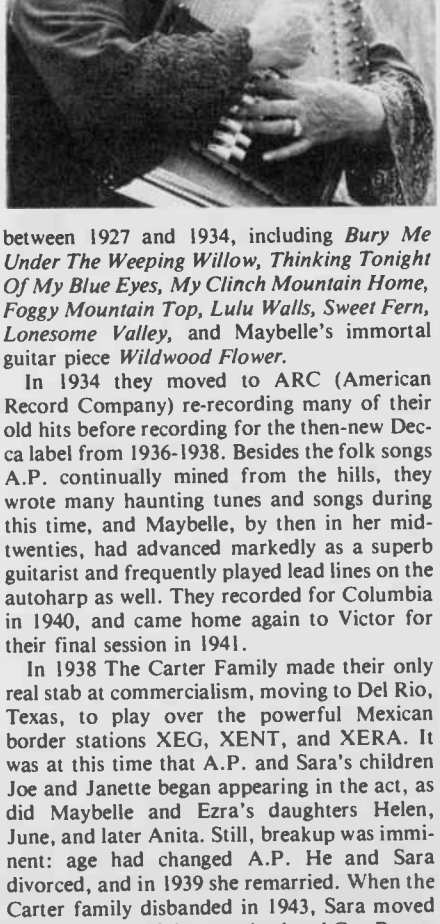
At age sixteen Maybelle married Ezra Carter. Ezra's older brother, A.P., a cheerful, strange man who sometimes fiddled and sometimes sang, was married to one of Maybelle's distant cousins, Sara, whose deep, clear singing was breathtaking. Though not yet adept, Maybelle was already a capable guitarist in the process of developing her famous style, and the two young women began harmonizing and playing, while A.P. contributed the on-again-off-again bass singing that became his trademark. They began to harbor aspirations of a professional career in 1927, when they drove 25 miles from their home in Maces Spring to Bristol, Tennessee, to audition and record for Ralph Peer and Victor Records.

The effect of the Carter Family (as they were now called) was not as immediately spectacular as was Jimmie Rodgers', who recorded his first record in the same week, but it was in its way as profound. They caught a perfect balance between the honest, rough-hewn folk music of their native highlands and the newly conceived professionalism of the country music industry. Their voices, their musicianship, their presentation were professional, while their music was as stark and uncompromising as the rocky hills from which they'd come. It was beautiful and meaningful and country. America took them to its heart.

And then there was Maybelle's guitar. There had been literally nothing like it before, and the sweet and endearing sounds produced by this eighteen year old girl with the striking ice-blue eyes were genuinely exciting in technique and in feel.

In their heyday the Carter Family was a peculiar act. They refused to travel much out of their native region, playing school houses and small scale shows in the southern highlands. In 1928, in fact, in the first bloom of their recording success, A.P. felt compelled by finances to pack up and move to Detroit for several months, and work as a carpenter.

But they continued to record, cutting a great many of their most famous pieces for Victor



between 1927 and 1934, including *Bury Me Under The Weeping Willow, Thinking Tonight Of My Blue Eyes, My Clinch Mountain Home, Foggy Mountain Top, Lulu Walls, Sweet Fern, Lonesome Valley,* and Maybelle's immortal guitar piece *Wildwood Flower.*

In 1934 they moved to ARC (American Record Company) re-recording many of their old hits before recording for the then-new Decca label from 1936-1938. Besides the folk songs A.P. continually mined from the hills, they wrote many haunting tunes and songs during this time, and Maybelle, by then in her mid-twenties, had advanced markedly as a superb guitarist and frequently played lead lines on the autoharp as well. They recorded for Columbia in 1940, and came home again to Victor for their final session in 1941.

In 1938 The Carter Family made their only real stab at commercialism, moving to Del Rio, Texas, to play over the powerful Mexican border stations XEG, XENT, and XERA. It was at this time that A.P. and Sara's children Joe and Janette began appearing in the act, as did Maybelle and Ezra's daughters Helen, June, and later Anita. Still, breakup was imminent: age had changed A.P. He and Sara divorced, and in 1939 she remarried. When the Carter family disbanded in 1943, Sara moved to California with her new husband Coy Bayes.

But Maybelle was a different matter. Quiet and dreamy though she seemed, she was also fiercely determined to remain in music. The woman who had said and expressed little was also the woman who had bought a green Harley and taught herself to ride it. She and her three daughters became the Carter Sisters and Mother Maybelle, joined first the Old Dominion Barn Dance in Richmond on WRVA in 1943, and then the Grand Ole Opry in 1950. Maybelle was, though she never showed it overtly, determined to succeed, and did.

Oddly enough, this determination for success did not strongly involve her own ego. As the Carter Sisters and Mother Maybelle, she receded markedly into the background as the three girls sang lovely, creamy harmony—worlds apart from the spine-tingling, haunting sounds their mother and aunt and uncle produced—Helen was featured on the accordion, June became a superb comedienne, and Anita became one of the great underrated country singers. But Maybelle simply sang a little here and played a bit of guitar and autoharp there. Eventually they hired none other than Chet Atkins to play guitar for them.

Three events in the past years brought Maybelle back into the limelight. The first was an appearance at the Newport Folk Festival in 1963, where a whole new generation was introduced to her and her music. The second was the induction of the Original Carter Family into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1970. And third was her powerful contribution to the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band's widely hailed *Will The Circle Be Unbroken*—the title song of a Carter Family classic.

In the late 1960's daughter June married Johnny Cash, and Mother Maybelle became an integral part of the Cash road show. Even as age took its toll she remained on stage, and when arthritis stilled the magic of her guitar playing, she continued on autoharp. She often looked somehow out of place, this elderly, serious, dreamy mountain woman dressed in glamorous flashy gowns like her daughters, but her dignity and sense of purpose carried her through.

Maybelle had been off the road for over a year, in declining health, although her sudden death on October 23, 1978 at age 69, was still a surprise. Her funeral was crowded with country music luminaries, some of whom prayed, some of whom mourned, and all of whom tearfully sang *Will The Circle Be Unbroken* over her grave.

We will now never know her motives, her aspirations, her influences, the depths of her determination. She simply never expressed them publicly. Still, in a very real sense, it is not the motivation but the effect which ultimately matters, and her effects on the course of country music have been as profound as any country singer, entertainer, or musician. Like her native Clinch Mountains she remained to the end imbued with dignity and an aura of mystery. ■

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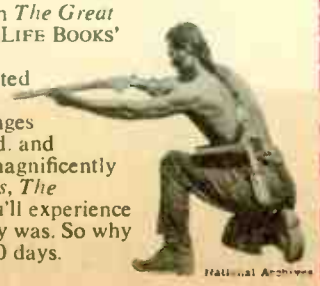

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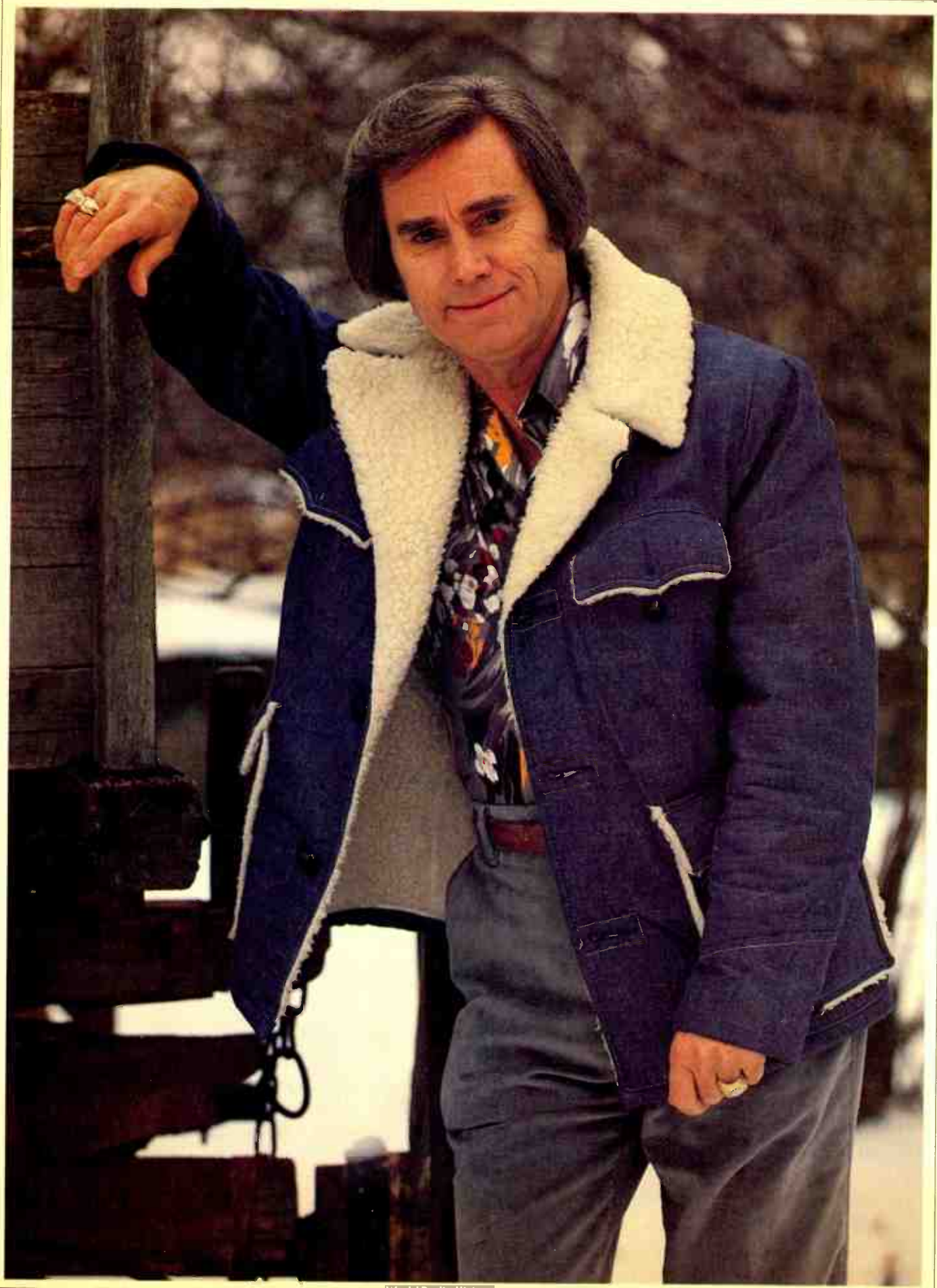


In the course of filing our story on George Jones, numerous attempts were made to interview him, both in Alabama and Nashville. Appointments made by his manager were repeatedly broken when George failed to show.

At any given time, nobody seemed to know where George was, or what kind of condition he was in—a state of affairs that has not been uncommon with him of late. Friends in Alabama said he was in Nashville; his representatives in Nashville said he was on his way to Florida.

Working through Jones's Nashville attorney, Mr. Ralph Gordon, an interview was finally scheduled for 10 a.m. on a Saturday, at George's Possum Holler Club in Nashville, only a few days away from our deadline, and some time after our correspondent, Bill Jarnigan had filed his report on George's last days in Alabama.

George appeared with his manager A.C. (Shug) Baggott, two hours late for our appointment. He looked slightly nervous and haggard, but otherwise appeared surprisingly healthy, considering what he's been through in recent months. He was profusely apologetic, but was unable to talk at length, since he was already late for a live radio broadcast on which he was scheduled to sing.

Our interview was rescheduled for the next afternoon at his manager's office/apartment near Music Row. This time, George was only an hour and a half late.

As he sat on the sofa, sipping a mixed drink and watching a football game on an Advent TV screen with the sound turned down, he seemed restless and exhausted. With rather disarming candor, he discussed his recent problems. He had only an hour's sleep the night before, and up close, he appeared somewhat ravaged from his recent bouts with depression and drinking; yet he expressed a fierce, and almost urgent determination to turn his career around.

During our two-hour interview, he barely touched his drink.

—Bob Allen

The Decline and Fall of GEORGE JONES

The man with the greatest voice in Country Music talks about his last ditch attempt to turn his life and career around.

By BOB ALLEN

ALLEN: George, you seem to be having more than your share of troubles lately. Just how have all these events in your career and your life managed to get so out of hand?

JONES: Well, it's kind of like Morton Salt: Everything kind of snowed down on me at once. I've sort of agitated a lot of my troubles on myself too, with too much drinkin' that I should not have done. But you know, I can handle three or four problems, but I think I must of had twenty or thirty that showered down on me at one time. And to add to it, the little gal I've been goin' with for a couple of years, that I really admired; really turned out to be another. . . . There just seemed to be all these things comin' down on me at once. Everybody's got their problems, but I'm one of those kinds of people who is, y'know, weak. I'm just a little weaker than some people are.

ALLEN: Lately, no one seems to ever be able to find you. Half the time, it seems your manager and your record label don't even know where you are. The last I heard, you had left Alabama, you were moving your furniture to Florida, and then you were going to come up here and get an apartment and try and get things back in order.

JONES: I have been living in Alabama for the last four or five years. I originally moved to Alabama because I only had one friend, Earl Montgomery, who wrote some songs for me and lived down there. I got to likin' the area down there, and I had gotten to the point where I didn't want to be in Nashville any more than I had to. Because every time I'd come to Nashville, I'd get depressed, because this is where I had things going at one time, I had a home. I had a family.

But along with everything else, things were goin' wrong in Alabama too, and I just decided to get away from it all, so I'm going to move back up here (Nashville) and try to get everything back together the way it should be.

ALLEN: You've been missing a lot of your shows lately. A lot of your fans are worried about you, and I suppose some of them are a little bit upset. Just why have you had so much trouble getting to your scheduled appearances lately?

JONES: I know I've let a lot of people down—not just fans, but promoters too. And I've got to do something now to win their confidence back and to prove myself. Of course, they don't understand why I didn't show up. I was promoted to be at these places, and I know a lot of 'em travelled a long way to come and see me. It seems like I'm ungrateful because I didn't show up, and this has bothered me quite a bit.

ALLEN: Where were you?

JONES: Well, it's not my problem to tell them (the fans) all my problems, and it's just too long a story. But there were reasons these things happened; far more reasons than somebody just sayin' "He was drunk and he didn't show up." That's their most favorite thing to say when I'm not there. And that was the case, maybe once or twice out of twenty times. But all you gotta do it is once, and then that's what they say every time. Drinkin' may have agitated my problems and added to them, but it was not the problem I was havin'. But that's not important if we can win these people back and prove to them that we love 'em, and we want to sing country songs to them. And I think country fans will forgive us, because they are some of the finest people in the world.

ALLEN: About a year and a half ago or so, CBS, your record label, put together a huge showcase for you in New York, at the Bottom Line. They spent thousands of dollars, flying in key radio people and members of the press. But then you didn't show up. You stood them up, not just one night, but two nights in a row, as I understand it.

JONES: That's one of the most sorrowful things that keeps hauntin' me. They worked their tails off and did a great

job and I was lookin' forward to it, but this was just about two thirds into all of these problems I had. And I was so whupped and my mind was beat and tormented and depressed that there was just no way I could even figure a way to get there and be right to do it. I just didn't want those people to see me in that kind of shape. They tried to explain that to the radio people, but naturally they were mad. And Columbia Records, I don't blame them. They spent fifty-sixty thousand dollars, maybe more. It was a great thing they tried to do for me, and like I say, it still bugs me; it bothers me all the time. But they're going to try and do it again and I won't charge them one penny for it, and I'll be out all the expense. I'm going to make it all up to them.

ALLEN: Several weeks ago, you were arrested for assault with intent to murder down in Florence, Alabama. Supposedly, you shot at your friend, Earl "Peanut" Montgomery's car, and nearly hit him. What is the story behind that incident?

JONES: Well, he (Peanut) is supposed to be a Christian, and I believe he's a good man. I had considered him my closest friend, and he knew what had been goin' on with me for the past few months. He knew the problems I was havin'. But the wrong night, he called me, knowing the shape I was in, drinkin' more, because I didn't know just what I was goin' to do and worried to death. He called me and said, "Get out of your apartment." Well, I don't know why I thought about it, but I always go down to the river bottom (Cypress Creek, a tributary of the Tennessee River) and sort of meditate. Just sit down there, you know. So I told him I'd meet him at the river bank.

So I took off, and I was there before he was. And I was just boilin' over. I was already messed up in my mind, drunk and agitated. And he pulled up beside me in his car and said the wrong thing to me.

I'm very sorry for what I done, because I'm not the sort of person to do that. I just had my finger on the trigger and had my thumb on the hammer to pull it back, so that's when the gun went off. I thought it went off to the right, in the back of his car, and up in the air, but it didn't do that. They showed me a picture where the bullet was just about an inch below the chrome at the top of the door, just about where he was sittin'.

I'm just thankful he's still alive and that it didn't hit him, because it's just not in me to do that. But when you get all these things in your mind, you really become a crazy person. He knew it, and all the people in town knew what was goin' on with me, and I was botherin' no one. I was stayin' in my apartment. He had no reason to do that, but I'm sorry for what happened.

ALLEN: It was also around that same stretch of time that Tammy Wynette got kidnapped and assaulted. Where were you when you first heard about that, and what was your reaction?

JONES: I happened to be at a friend's house that night. In fact, I'd been in Nashville that day, and I drove back and got into Florence about 5:30 in the evening. I went to see a friend, and then a little later, I went back to my apartment. My son lives with me down there. He's in college there at the University of Alabama. When I walked in, he said, "Hey daddy, did you hear about Tammy? She got kidnapped. It was on the news a little while ago."

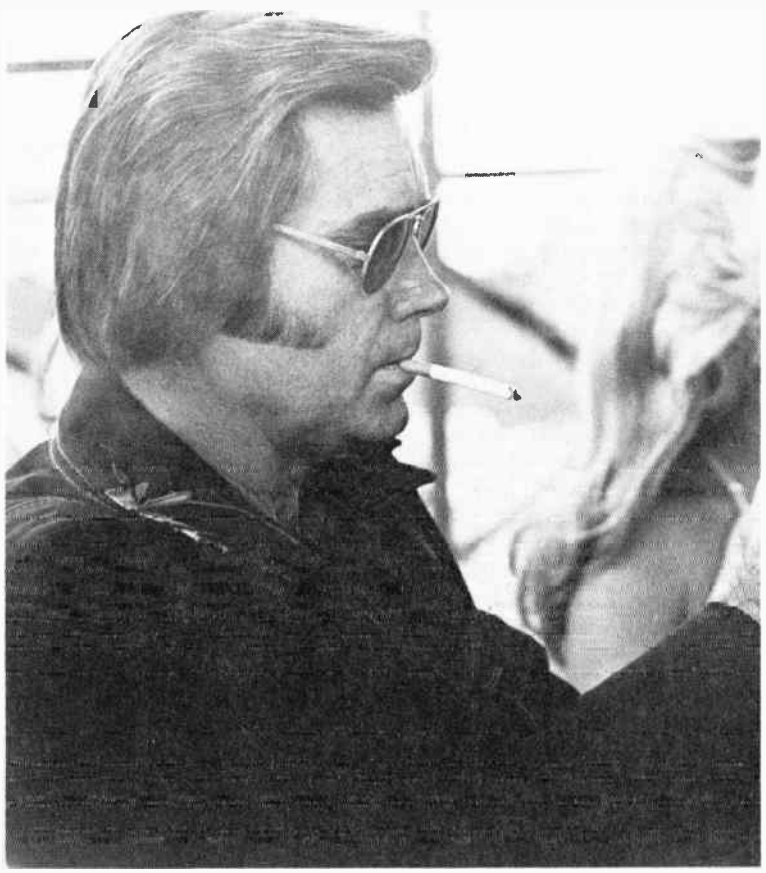
I was very disturbed because her new husband, George Richey told her that a week before, they had tried to kidnap my child, Georgette. Right away, I got on the phone and tried to get a hold of someone up there, but nobody answered.

Naturally, I wanted to get right up there, so 7:30 or 8:00 the next morning, I drove back up to Nashville and tried to get a hold of somebody, but I still couldn't.

Then I went on in and talked to my manager and he started to tell me somethin' and I said, "OK, I know what you're tryin' to say." He said that they had been trying to tie me in with it and they were sayin' I'd been disturbed and everything....I'd been driving back and forth between Nashville and Florence almost every day because I had time on my hands and I needed to think. And they turned her loose in Pulaski and that's almost all the way back down there, in the direction of where I live. So really, it was all over town that there was that possibility. I don't know. Maybe whoever did it, didn't like me (either). Maybe if they'd of brought her a little closer to Florence, they'd have made it look more real (laughs).

But anybody who would say anything like that about me, don't know George Jones the way they think they do. Because that's the woman who gave me quite a bit of happiness and was a good mother. She's a warm person. I don't know. It's a sad thing. And it don't make no sense to me. Anybody who'd do somethin' like that and take a chance of spendin' a lifetime in prison, I don't know, I'd think they'd at least try to get some money out of it or somethin'. *(Continued)*

"I'm very sorry for what I done. . . I just had my finger on the trigger and had my thumb on the hammer to pull it back, so that's when the gun went off."



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ALLEN: Do you still have much communication with Tammy? Do you talk to her regularly these days?

JONES: This is a very funny thing. Just before George Richey and she married, and the couple of years before that, we had a very good friendship and relationship. I could call and we'd talk. I'd stop by and she'd fix me a cup of coffee. A lot of times, if she felt like it, she'd come down and sing a couple of songs with me at Possum Holler. We had a very good relationship goin' right up to the time that she married this Mr. Tomlin, which I told her—I called her and told her, right before she married him, "You don't even know this guy. You've only known him a few weeks. You don't know that much about him." I told her it didn't mean that much to me, but I wanted her to be happy. I mean, that's crazy. You need to check a lifetime partnership out a little bit.

Well, she married him and it lasted three weeks. Well, I ain't one to tell you I told you so, but I had to tell her that. But we still got along and everything was fine. But then one day, I called the house, and this man was there. I don't know why he was there, but he was there. But I just wanted to check on Georgette.

Well, Mr. Richey has been a friend of mine for years. He wrote *Grand Tour* and a lot other of my songs. He's a fine person and I love him to death. He always helped me in any way he could. If my piano player got sick, he would go out on the road with me. But then he told me on the phone, "We don't want you callin' here no more and we don't want you around here no more." I said, "Well God, Richey, what's wrong with you? I'm not jealous because you're marryin' Tammy. I want her to be happy. If you can make her happy, I want you both happy. I mean, it's over for us. I know that. I'm just callin' to check on my child."

He said, "Yeh, that's another thing: We want you to stay away from her too." I said, "I'll die and go to hell!" And I hung up the phone. I ain't done nothin' to that man. He's been my friend for all these years, then just because he marries my ex-wife, he hates me. I can't understand people like that.

ALLEN: Do you still think back much to your marriage with Tammy? Do you regret that you went separate ways?

JONES: Well, lookin' back, I figured I done my part. I done everything I could. I even quit drinkin' for almost eighteen months to satisfy her. Not even a beer. Nothin. Then one night, she kept me awake all night, worryin' because she hadn't had a single out in eighteen months, and cryin' and keepin' me awake all night, and my goodness! I said, "You've still got your name, and you'll find a good song. I don't care if it takes three years."

Anyway, it got me so depressed and I got up the next morning and went down to check on the new office building we were building—which I lost in the divorce. I was so depressed, I said, "I've got to have a drink." and I kept tellin' myself, no. But I wound up havin' a couple of drinks and I wound up gettin' drunk that day. I went up to Franklin (Tennessee), checked into a Holiday Inn and slept it off because I didn't want to go home and be around the kids. I got up the next morning sober and called her (Tammy) and told her, "I'm very sorry and I'll be home in a little bit."

"I was very disturbed because her (Tammy Wynette's) new husband George Richey told her that a week before, they had tried to kidnap my child, Georgette."

Well, she come out with all these bad words and said, "You ain't never comin'home! Don't ever come around here!" I called her up a couple of times after that, and it was the same thing. I don't call that love. When a man tries to do the things a woman wants, even gives up drinkin', not even a beer, for eighteen months and then goes out and pulls *one* drunk, just one night, and then they wanta spend the rest of their lives without you, just because you went out and got drunk.

I think people need to know both sides of the story before they read something and condemn a man and say, "Well, my God! He must be the sorriest thing in the world! I ain't never gonna go out and buy any of his records again! Look how he treated that poor little girl!" But they don't know for a fact, what happened. It's just like that old Hank Williams song where he says, "Who am I to cast the first stone?" We just can't do that.

ALLEN: George, your drinking is said to be of monumental proportions. People have described you as a sort of Jekyll and Hyde character. People who know you say that when you're not drinking, you're one of the nicest people in the world. But then when you start drinking, you sometimes change completely and things get out of hand.

JONES: I wouldn't say that was true in general, but naturally, anyone who has had too much to drink and someone says the wrong thing to you, knowing that you're drunk, and naturally, if you're in that certain stage of drunkenness, you're gonna try and whip the butt off 'em.

I've been about as high as you can get on whiskey and I'll be sittin' around playin' the guitar, enjoyin' myself until someone smarts off and says the wrong thing to my wife or girlfriend....Well, what the heck, you'd get a little violent too. You can be sober and people say those things to you and it makes you mad.

ALLEN: When you drink, does it sometimes go on for long periods of time? For weeks and weeks?

JONES: It does when I have so many problems. I'm smart enough to know that it doesn't help. It adds to your problems, and you wake up tomorow and you've got a couple more there. I've got sense enough to know this, but I don't want to know it.

ALLEN: What do you usually drink?

JONES: Oh, maybe I drink Jack Daniels; Bourbon and Seven-Up.

ALLEN: Would you actually drink so much sometimes that you would stop eating for long periods of time?

JONES: Yeh, and that's my problem. If I would have eaten like a lot of people do, and then drank, I wouldn't have had this problem. It wouldn't be that bad. I went, uh, three, four, five weeks at a time and then my stomach would be so small and shrunk up, I'd be hungry and I'd get

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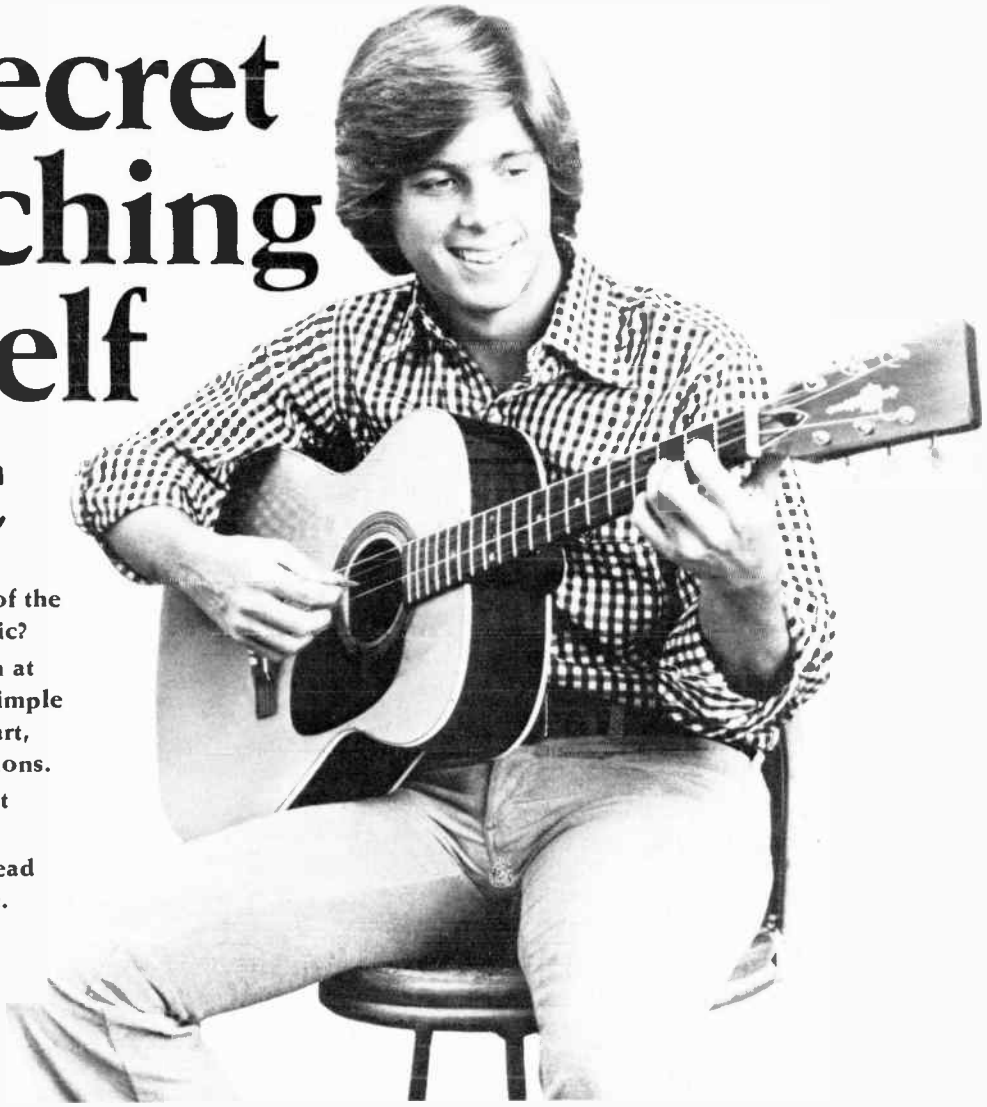

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me a hamburger and eat about half of it and that'd be all I could get down. Then I'd maybe go four or five days more and do the same thing.

But I wake up in the morning, knowin' I'm sick and I just got to have a drink y'know. Because that's the only way I can settle my stomach, unless I wanta fight it out. Well, that's the hardest thing to do, so you wind up sayin' maybe just one.... I don't know, you get so far down with all this and your mind gets so screwed up, you just don't care.

ALLEN: I notice you have a drink there now, but you've hardly touched it in the past hour. Have you slowed way down or what?

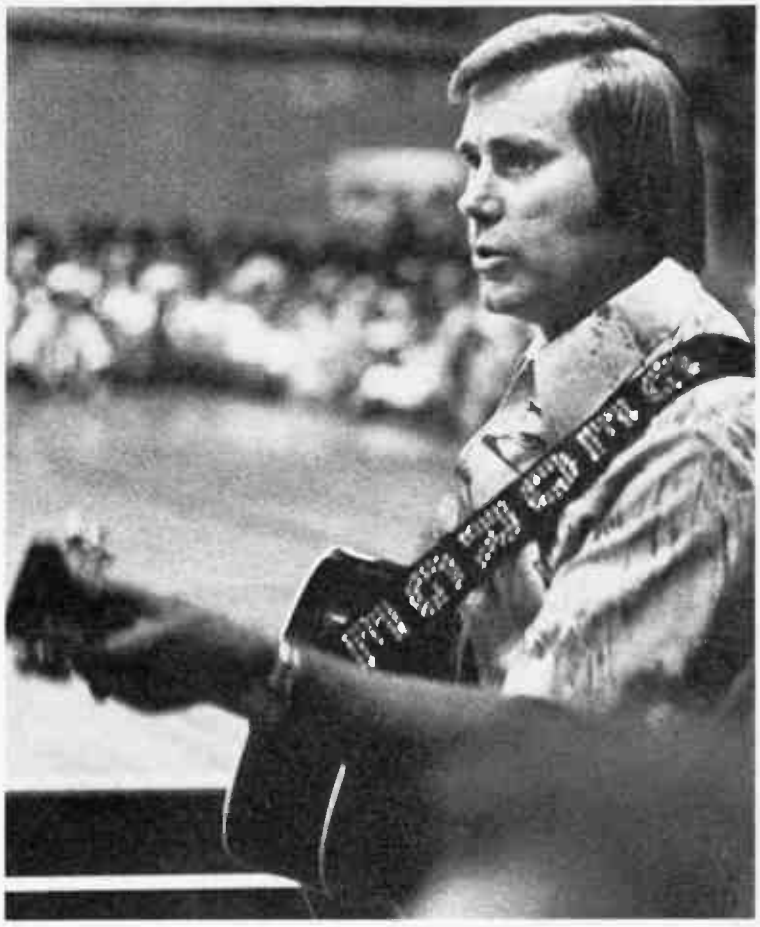
JONES: I'm tapering, y'know, because I'm still pretty sick at my stomach, and I'm trying to do this without having to go in the hospital and get shots and medicine and things like that. And I can do it, because from day to day, I feel almost a hundred percent better. I may have one or two, and then try and eat something and then I may have another an hour or two later. But my stomach still tends to get nauseous after puttin food in it. So maybe I'll have one drink to kind of settle it and then take a couple of alka seltzers. Then maybe before I go onstage, I'll have one to relax my nerves a little bit, because I've been uptight and everything. I'm still fatigued from drinking too much, and it takes quite awhile to get over something like that.

ALLEN: A lot of your problems lately have to do with money. Your manager made the statement in the local paper, in the midst of all these court judgements against you that, the only asset George Jones has right now, is his voice. A lot of people say you never have really managed your money well, because you've never really seemed to care about money.

JONES: I don't. Naturally I want a little to buy things and live on. I want enough to eat and to be comfortable and maybe have five or ten thousand dollars for a rainy day. I feel like this because I love country music. It's hard to explain, but you've heard of the man who just loved a woman so much, he just worshipped her. Well, that's the way I am about country music.

I went through all my first years, playing my guitar and singing. I didn't make no money. I didn't want no money. I didn't even think you could get money for it. Of course, a little later, I got to where I could make a living on it, and as I got a little older, I realized you had to make a living.

The day Tammy and I split for the last time, I had two thousand dollars in my pocket and a new Cadillac that I had to sell within a couple of weeks. She kept the bank account. She kept the home. She kept the things that we had invested in, the office, the bus, the band. I wanted peace of mind. I didn't want to hurt her. I wanted her to have it all. And it was the same way with my wife before her: We had a lot of money, property, rental houses and things like that. I think we had about $130,000 in our savings account, and I just left that to her too.



"I'm no spring chicken any more, and in the next few years, I'm going to have to give it everything I've got, because I just don't have that much time left."

People said I was crazy, and of course, that's why I'm in the shape I'm in now. But of course, peace of mind means more to me than anything. I figured that maybe by doin' these things out of the kindness of my heart and maybe helping them with something to go through life.... I can do it again, what the heck. And now, I'd like to call some of them and borrow some of the money that belongs to me (laughs)! But you can bet your boots, I wouldn't get a nickel!

ALLEN: Well, on the brighter side, you have a new album on the way that a lot of people are really excited about. Can you tell me something about that?

JONES: Yeh. It's got a lot of guest artists on it. It's gonna be called **George Jones and Friends** or something like that. I'm just very thrilled about it. We've got a song on it with Johnny Paycheck, one with Dr. Hook, one with Linda Ronstadt, Waylon Jennings, Willie Nelson, Emmylou Harris, Dan Fogleberg. Even Elvis Costello from England. I also did a gospel thing with the Staple Singers.

I feel so good that all these artists would do this for me and not charge me a nickel for royalties. I admire these people very much and I think it's one of the greatest things that's ever happened to me in my life. I'm looking forward to it. It gives me something to hope for.

ALLEN: Do you look at this new album as sort of a starting point, perhaps a point at which you can maybe turn your career around again before things go any farther?

JONES: Yeh, I sort of do. I think I owe it to the music people and the fans, because I know these people love country music as much as I do, and I'm going to do my best to try and make it up to them.

I'm no spring chicken anymore, and in the next few years, I'm going to have to give it everything I've got, because I just don't have that much time left. I'm lucky at 47, to even have another chance, and I may not do it. But I'm going to give it everything I've got. ■

"See if your God can save you now," George said as he pulled the trigger.

by BILL JARNIGAN

"Peanut" Montgomery shows how close the bullet came.

In Nashville, George Jones's attorneys and manager battled for him in court day after day, trying desperately to save his career. When he repeatedly failed to show for interviews and personal appearances, speculation mounted as to his whereabouts and his state of mind.

But many nights, when all this was going on, the country music great would while away his evenings alone, not far from his Alabama home, sitting on the bare bank of the fast-moving Cypress Creek at the point where it meets with the Tennessee River, just west of Florence, Alabama.

Sometimes the troubled singing star would just sit thinking, behind the wheel of his new 'Vette, often with his old friend, Jack Daniels for company, enjoying the quiet comfort of the water and ignoring the roar of trucks on the nearby Savannah Highway.

For someone who has seen, heard and done it all, George Jones, by his close friends' accounts, is a man who is still searching. For just what, he is not quite sure. As a recording artist and performer, the man is forever on a pedestal, larger than life—a social position that some say, he has never been comfortable with. According to friends in this Northwest Alabama city where he resides, Jones is in search of himself as a common man, quite apart from the myriad trappings and pressures of stardom.

Others say he is a man in search of himself in the eyes of God.

In fact, it was in his quest for a soothing of his soul that may have ended a strong friendship on an almost tragic basis: A .38 calibre slug from a pistol wielded by Jones on that Cypress Creek bank somehow seemed to punctuate all the troubles piling on the shoulders of the man considered by many to be the greatest country singer alive.

* * * *

For the past 15 years, Jones and Florence songwriter, Earl "Peanut" Montgomery have been the closest of friends. Of the 200 songs Montgomery has had recorded, more than 30 were sung by Jones, including *4-0-33*, *Lovin' You Could Never Be Better*, and *We're Gonna Hold On* (sung with Tammy Wynette).

"When he left Tammy...well, he sorta wanted to get out of Nashville," Montgomery recalls. "George began coming down here and finally bought a place in Florence while he was building his A-frame out on Wilson Lake."

But always a restless man, Jones tired easily of his houses. During his relatively brief stay in Alabama, he moved several times, first to Kendale Gardens, then to Glenbrook. Before leaving Florence in October, 1978, Jones had moved again, this time into Georgetown Apartments where the management had nothing but kind words to say about their famous tenant.

Jones has been much the same way with his cars as he is with his homes. According to who you listen to, he traded somewhere between five and 36 cars during one year while he was in Florence. Supposedly, he once bought a new one, one morning, and then sold it at a loss that same afternoon.

Linda Welborn, George's girlfriend and one-time fiancee, puts the exact figure at 27.

Jeweler, Johnny Tucker, a friend of George's, recalls the singer purchasing 15 cars in one year. "He spends money like it was water," comments Tucker.

* * * *

Linda Welborn speculates that mutual loneliness, after their respective broken marriages, brought her and George together. The younger sister of Peanut Montgomery's wife, Charlene, Linda recalls her first impression of George: "I don't think I've ever seen a lonelier person. He was jolly, but you can tell when someone is trying to appear happy, when they have a lot on their mind."

Some of George's friends believe that Tammy Wynette, even though she's been married twice since her 1975 divorce from George, remains one of those problems that weighs heavily on his mind. "I don't think he's ever forgotten Tammy," says his friend, Johnny Tucker. "He's always talking about her."

When things are going wrong for Jones, it seems he turns to his old, trusted friend, the bottle. In various news accounts, he has been quoted as calling himself an alcoholic.

The flow of alcohol was what reportedly led to the infamous September 14, 1978 shooting incident involving Jones and Montgomery.

As Peanut tells it, he had been converted to Christianity. And he wanted to give up the rebel-rousing he and George used to do. As a result, he and George got into some arguments over religion. Montgomery notes, "I've seen him cry while singing gospel songs. I don't know if he is crying or the devil in him is crying because he is losing ground. If George doesn't change, he won't be long on this earth."

Montgomery, the writer of *Let's All Go Down To The River*, recounts an incident when Jones, in a drunken mood, ripped apart an autographed copy of the Holy Bible given him by evangelist, Bob

Harrington, and threw it on the lawn. Montgomery says one of Jones's sons cried at the outrage. Peanut gathered the remnants of the Bible and has them today as a reminder to ward off temptation.

"When George gets to drinking, he asks why there are crippled people if there is a God," Montgomery says. "George is looking too deep. He should not question God, but he studies... dwells on it. I'm no saint, but I'm a Christian. I was half-drunk when The Lord called me. Maybe God called me to get George started on religion. God is the only one who can help George now. He could be the number one witness for The Lord, if he was saved now."

George's friends say he only argues about religion when he is drinking. When he is sober, they say, he would impress any man as a gentle soul: quiet, kind and courteous.

Colbert Park on the Natchez Trace was a favorite hangout for George's "gang" on Sunday afternoons. George loved walking through the woods, grilling out, playing volleyball and baseball and romping with his friends and their families.

The people of Huntsville, Alabama are not likely to forget the graciousness of George Jones. For the past two years, he has headlined the cerebral palsy telethon at WAAY-TV. Television personality Johnny Evans relates, "He (George) is doing for cerebral palsy what Jerry Lewis is doing for muscular dystrophy. He rounded up all the talent for us, paid for the band and came over at his own expense. He's got a heart of gold. Deep down, George is a very compassionate guy. We are thinking of naming the telethon for him."

In addition to his selfless involvement in charity work, Jones has often been equally quick to help out his friends when he saw that they were in need of it.

"I was having problems with real estate once. George paid my lawyer's bill," recalls Jimmy Hills, George's barber and travelling companion. "He tried to give me eight thousand dollars another time, but I refused it. I told him I wanted to be his friend because of him and not because of his money."

Hills was one of the last of George's friends to freely associate and drink with him before he left Alabama. Their relationship almost came to an end after a trip they took together to Los Angeles. The two of them returned together through Las Vegas, where George abandoned Hills, penniless and without a way home. Hills is reluctant to talk about the incident.

Linda Welborn thinks that people like to use George for his money and his status. "I hope I was never one," she says. "He gave me a 'Vette, but I didn't want that, because what I wanted from him I was losing—his love."

* * * *

Alabama is only one of several states in which George Jones has come in conflict with the courts in recent months. In August, 1978, a Davidson County circuit judge in Nashville ordered him to pay two women who claimed he assaulted them, nearly $12,000 in damages.

Jones was slapped with another default judgement of $29,654 when he failed to appear in court to answer a suit filed by two Virginia promoters who said Jones failed to honor a contract to do two shows in September, 1977.

Three other court judgements were made against Jones and also against George Jones Possum Holler Club, totalling over $50,000.

Jones's ex-wife, Tammy Wynette also had him before the judge for back payment of $36,000 in child support for their daughter, Tamala Georgette. At Tammy's request, Judge Hamilton Gayden charged Jones with contempt and ordered his arrest if he set foot in Tennessee.

LATE NEWS

On November 28 a warrant was issued for the arrest of George Jones in Alabama on an assault and battery charge. George had allegedly beat up his ex-girlfriend, Linda Welborn. At the time we went to press, the warrant had not been served because George's whereabouts were not known.

Gayden issued his order less than a week after Jones had been arrested in Florence, Alabama for assault with intent to murder his pal, Peanut Montgomery. Some of their friends say that the incident stemmed from a disagreement over money Peanut owed George. Peanut says it was over religion.

About the money, Montgomery says, "George made a down payment on a house he was to buy from me. Well, he never finalized the deal. I offered him the money back, but he insisted I keep it. That's where he got it, I owed him. I don't owe him anything.

"The reason he shot at me was strictly over religion," he adds. "He wants what I've got—peace with the Lord. But he don't know how to get it."

Jones and Montgomery met on the west bank of Cypress Creek to talk the night of the shooting. It was quiet in that area at 1 a.m., at which time, Montgomery says Jones pulled out a .38 Smith and Wesson and propped it on the door as they sat at arm's length in their cars.

"See if your God can save you now," Montgomery quotes Jones as saying.

The bullet sped between Montgomery's clasped hands and his chin, resting on the door. The lead lodged in the thick metal plate at the top of the door. Had the path of the bullet been two inches up or down, Montgomery would probably be dead today.

Peanut says George, who, he says, was drinking heavily, cocked the pistol again, but finally laid it on the seat. They talked a while longer, then Jones drove away.

Montgomery experienced some difficulty in getting the law to react. Several officials, such as Lauderdale County District Attorney Lavern Tate, a friend to both men, considered the incident a family affair. A warrant was finally issued on Friday, September 15; however, Jones, who was seen around Florence during the weekend, was not arrested until Sunday at his apartment. The gun was left behind as the singer calmly went with Deputy Milton Borden to the county jail, where he posted a $2500 bond.

"We dismissed the case on payment of thirty six dollars court costs at the request of the prosecuting witness," Tate says. "I did exactly what Peanut wanted me to do. I told him George would never be convicted."

Jones's manager, A.C. "Shug" Baggott, owner of Possum Holler in Nashville, says he is still trying to untangle a web of lawsuits Jones faces around the country because of his "no-shows" at scheduled concerts.

In October, Jones threw himself on the mercy of Judge Gayden concerning the money dispute with Tammy. George claimed she owed him over $20,000 in old income taxes, penalties and touring expenses. George admitted an addiction to alcohol and pledged to seek psychiatric care. He stressed the need to regroup his career in order to take care of his problems.

Reportedly, two old friends of George's, who have undergone similar crises, Johnny Cash and Waylon Jennings, have silently come to his aid.

So the fans and friends wait. What the future holds for George now, is in his own hands. As one friend reassures, "He didn't get his nickname of Possum by being dumb." If he can replace the problems of booze and women with the peace of mind his friends say he sorely needs, George Jones has the potential of being greater than ever.

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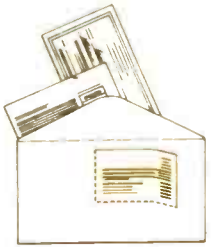

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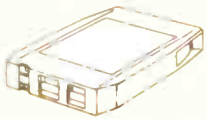

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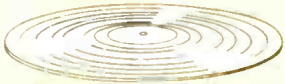

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MOE BANDY: Honky Tonk Hero, Hardcore Country Survivor

By BOB ALLEN

If the 1978 Country Music Association Awards Show was any indication of what's going on, then it's clear that mainstream country music is currently in the midst of some sort of major transition: Headliners like Dolly Parton, Kenny Rogers, Barbara Mandrell, and Crystal Gayle all seem to be straddling the narrow, stylistic fence between country and pop. Deadly phrases like *crossover* and *pop charts* which used to be whispered along Music Row, are now discussed loudly and openly. Nashville, it seems, has more or less come out of the closet with its intentions: The lure of bigger dollars and bigger record sales has helped to allay any misgivings there may have once been about taking country music even further "uptown."

But underneath all the controversy—underneath all the maudlin attempts to hide the rough edges of tradition and capture instead, the bland, MOR swishiness of songs like *Ramblin' Rose,* or the somewhat mindless repetition of disco—there are still those country artists like Moe Bandy who go quietly about the business of singing hardcore, undiluted, honky tonk music—music which, as one critic put it, "empties beer glasses, touches hearts, and sells records." It's doubtful that you'll see Moe hosting *The Tonight Show* anytime soon, and I doubt even more that he'll include a version of *Danny Boy* on his next LP. But you will find him out there, as much as 25 nights out of the month, doing what he does best: singing his brand of hard country music to sell-out crowds.

It's almost safe to say that Bandy is the *only* faithful successor to the hard-edged honky tonk tradition started by Ernest Tubb, carried forth by greats like Hank Williams, Lefty Frizzell, and more recently (in their gutsier moments), George Jones and Merle Haggard. Bandy's songs are almost relentlessly devoted to the sort of unembellished cheatin', drinkin', rodeo bull-ridin' themes and motifs that have hit home with listeners everywhere. Titles like *I Just Started Hatin' Cheatin' Songs Today, Honky Tonk Amnesia, Hank Williams You Wrote My Life,* and *It Was Always So Easy To Find An Unhappy Woman (Till I Started Looking For Mine),* get the message across loud and clear. As Ernest Tubb puts it, "He [Moe] is one of the newer country artists today who really *is* country."

Five or six years ago, when Bandy was dead broke and hocking his furniture to pay for recording sessions, he had no doubts that there was still a healthy audience for his kind of music, and now, 15 hit singles, ten albums, and numerous awards later, nobody else does either.

"All the changes in country music, if anything, have kind of helped me in a way," he says. "From my experience, travelling around the country, there's still a hunger, a demand for real country music. So far, I've been successful with that, and I'm sure that's what I'll stay with."

Bandy, who describes himself as "a cornbread country boy," ("I eat, sleep, and breathe country!"), is undoubtedly one of the most humble, understated and soft-spoken country music celebrities that you could hope to find. He's friendly, but he's a tough interview: It's obvious that he is much more at ease, onstage singing his songs than he is in front of a tape recorder, talking about them. His quiet, well-mannered demeanor is a far cry from the loud barroom scenes and wild night life that he so often sings about.

Bandy's success story is a sort of double-edged one: It was as much a fortuitous stroke of good luck for Moe as it was for the man who discovered him: Ray Baker, his long-time producer/manager. Before Bandy came to him some six years ago, and paid him a couple thousand dollars to produce his first recording session, Baker's production experience had been more or less confined to the demo sessions that he did for his publishing company, Blue Crest Music. But today, almost solely on the strength of Moe's enduring success, Baker has established a reputation for himself as one of Nashville's most consistently successful producers.

But it really all started years earlier, with Bandy's persistent, almost naive determination to make it in the world of

Moe enjoys honky tonkin' at Tootsie's Orchid Lounge in Nashville.

country music entertainment. Born in Meridian, Mississippi, some 34 years ago, his childhood was steeped in the traditions of modern country music: His grandfather worked on the railroad with Jimmie Rogers and had an extensive collection of his records. When Moe was still a boy, the family moved to San Antonio, Texas where his father, for a short time, organized a band called The Mission City Playboys and played in local honky tonks. As soon as Moe got a little older, he was following in his footsteps.

"I've played Texas honky tonks all my life," he recalls. "Those places can get rough. I used to play a place called the Hi Ho Corrall in San Antonio. We used to play right through the fights. The thing is, when a fight starts, you just go from one song to the next without stoppin', or they'll get on you.

"As I got a little older, I got to love George Jones," he recalls with a smile. "I'd sing like him. I even had my hair cut in a flattop like his and everything!"

Eventually, Moe went to work as a sheet metal worker for Judd's Plumbing Company where his father was a superintendant. By night, he continued to play the Texas honky tonk circuit, often working as much as 70 or 80 hours a week. Sometimes, he would come in from a long ride back from a club appearance somewhere in the far reaches of the state, and would just barely have time to change clothes and punch in at Judd's.

"Sometimes I wouldn't have a chance to sleep at all," he recalls. For 12 years, I worked day and night. It was rough; it just about ruined my health. I'd come in bleary-eyed and put in my eight hours, and then sometimes, I'd go back out again to play another show.

"I opened shows for just about every entertainer that ever came through San Antonio," he adds. "Willie Nelson, Charley Pride, Loretta Lynn, Stonewall Jackson....Every entertainer that ever came through San Antonio has one of my records," he laughs. "I made sure they all got one! They might have thrown them away, but they sure got one!"

When Moe heard that Ray Baker from Nashville, who at that time, headed Blue Crest Publishing Company, was in Texas on a hunting trip, he wasted no time tracking him down.

"I didn't really know what Ray did in Nashville," remembers the soft-spoken Bandy. "I didn't know anybody in Nashville. I went down to his motel room, knocked on the door, introduced myself and gave him a tape of my songs. I was very nervous at the time, but I was also really wantin' to get into the business, and I'd do just about anything.

After listening to the tape, Ray Baker agreed to bring Moe to Nashville and produce a session on him—if Moe would pay for it. "I didn't kid Moe," Baker recalls. "I tried to explain to him that his chances were slim."

Nothing much came of the Bandy/Baker alliance at first. Baker took the results of their first session around to every major record label in Nashville, and was routinely turned down by all of them.

Finally, they went back into the studio and recorded a song called *I Just Started Hatin' Cheatin' Songs Today*. They paid hard cash to have about 500 copies of the song pressed on a small private record label called Footprint, and mailed them out to radio stations. To their surprise, the record started getting some airplay.

"Even after it started getting airplay, the major labels still turned us down," recalls Ray Baker. "If we hadn't known somebody at GRC (a small, Atlanta-based record label that has since gone out of business), and they hadn't picked it up, the record would have died a natural death in two or three days' time."

Re-released on GRC, Bandy's version of *Cheatin' Songs* continued to gain momentum, and as Moe recalls, "the next thing I knew I was down there, still workin' in the sheet metal shop, with the number three song in the nation, wonderin' what to do!

"The odds against that happening again are unbelievable," he adds incredulously as he looks back at the series of coincidences and strokes of good fortune that led to the success of his first record. "The only thing I can say is, my number came up!"

But the hits continued, and Moe took to the road, where he has more or less been ever since (often working as many as 25 shows a month). After GRC Records went under, Baker had no trouble getting Moe signed to his current label, Columbia.

"It was an awfully sweet feeling," Baker recalls, "seeing those same exact companies that had turned Moe down before, all lined up, wanting to sign him."

Today, Moe is the undisputed king of contemporary honky tonk: The hardcore themes of sadness and estrangement that he so often sings about, ring home in the hearts of listeners across the country; and among some fans, he is practically looked upon with reverence.

"A lot of people come up to me and say they've gotten divorces over my songs," says Moe with a look of mild disbelief in his eyes. "I've got some babies that have been named after me. A girl just recently in Indianapolis, who obviously had one on the way, came up to me after a show and told me, 'It's going to be *Moe!* I don't care if it's a girl or a boy!'

"I really think my songs are about life," adds Moe with his characteristic soft-spokenness. "There's cheatin' and drinkin' and divorcin' goin' on everywhere. I believe that's what country music is all about.

"But a lot of people really think I live my songs," he laughs. "Everywhere I go, somebody's wantin' to get drunk with me. They say, 'You mean you're not *drinkin'!*'

"If I lived all the things in my songs, if I lived all that cheatin' and drinkin' and all those bad things, I'd be in bad shape!" he laughs again.

"I'd be dead!" ■

JESSI COLTER

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LARRY GATLIN:

Who Is This Man Who Scolds His Audience and Refuses to Sign Autographs?

by LAURA EIPPER

Larry Gatlin would like to set the record straight once and for all. He's not the prima donna he's cracked up to be.

Generally acknowledged as one of country music's up and coming superstars, a songwriter hailed by colleagues as diverse as Johnny Mathis and Johnny Cash, Gatlin has also earned a reputation as something of an *enfant terrible* with the public, who scolds his audiences, refuses to sign autographs and is elusive in interviews.

There's a story about the Bronx cheer he gave the audience at New York's Lone Star Cafe last winter.

There's another about his walking grumpily away from fans after his performance at the Nashville Music Festival last summer, refusing to pose for snapshots.

There's the one about his promise to a rowdy bunch of elevator company conventioneers to stop urinating in their elevators if they'd stop talking during his show.

And so on. Though he's won a Grammy (for *Broken Lady*) and earned the respect of the country music industry, it's not too unusual to hear wisecracks like "When Will Rogers said he never met a man he didn't like, he hadn't met Larry Gatlin."

A lot of people who know Gatlin will tell you that it's all a bad rap, and Gatlin himself is among them. He's had enough colorful anecdotes, enough of being the *Peck's Bad Boy* of the music industry. He doesn't deny all the stories, but he feels there's a lot more to be said on the other side.

"There's a vicious thing that's gotten around over the past couple of years that I don't appreciate fans," Gatlin said recently over a tuna sandwich and potato chip lunch at his home near Nashville. "People have said that I have a bad attitude toward my audiences. As a matter of fact *Country Music* printed one of those pieces back last winter I think. I'd like to go on record, because none of those things could be farther from the truth.

"I *do* care about my fans—very much. The simple reason that I do care so much means that when I walk out there every night I want to sing my ass off. That's what I'm supposed to do for them. If it means going backstage between shows and not talking to anybody so that I can sing my ass off for the second show like I did for the first, then that's what I'm going to do.

Gatlin's eyes, a remarkable, intelligent blue, flash when he gets on the subject of his relationship with his fans. If he's opinionated, and if his opinions rub some people the wrong way, he certainly can't be faulted for not caring about his audiences. It may be that he cares too much about their opinion, refusing to buy their approval of his music with "aw-shucks" good ole boy-isms. The *song,* for Gatlin, is the thing.

"I think a lot of stars need things like autographs to reinforce their own egos. I don't need that. All I came to do is sing for them, that's all. That's what they paid for and that's what I do. There are some artists who walk out there and laugh and giggle and smile and cut up and sign autographs and do all that show business thing. That's just not where I am and I don't enjoy it at all.

"I don't shake my pelvis. I'm not trying to excite them sexually or physically. I'm trying to get to their souls and their hearts a little bit with some music. When I get through singing I'm hot, I'm sweaty and I smell like an Arab with a goat under each arm. My breath smells like a microphone because I've been sucking it for 45 minutes. I don't want to talk to anybody. I don't want to sign autographs. I want to get some rest so the next night when I go out there again I can give again of my heart and soul."

In a business where traditionally, fans have nearly unlimited access to their

Larry Gatlin (at right) joins several record executives at recent industry function.

favorite stars (unlike other areas of entertainment) Gatlin's words are nearly heretical: You just don't say things like that and get away with it for long.

Oddly, all this apparently hasn't hurt Gatlin's rapport with his fans in the least. Last spring he and his band walked off with no less than three fan-voted awards at the *Music City News'* annual popularity awards show. Gatlin had tears in his eyes backstage after thanking the audience.

"I've won a Grammy, and that's a very special kind of thrill. But the fan awards —now that's even more gratifying," he says, looking back on the event. "It's the same thing I've tried to explain before. Fans have a place in my career which is just as important as my guitar, just as important as Rudy or Steve Gatlin (Larry's brothers who play in his band) or me. Their place is to open up their ears and their hearts and make a judgement: 'Do I like it or do I not like it?' Getting mad at me because I won't sign autographs after a show is a little misplaced I think."

Gatlin pauses in mid-gesture for a moment, searching for the right words. At times he seems genuinely confused as to what all the noise is about. He's not without an ego—he knows he's good and he'll tell you—but there's still enough of the boy from Odessa, Texas left that all the star-stuff disturbs him.

"I just hate it when someone runs up and says 'Oooh, I just want to touch you.' That makes me feel so weird. I ain't from Mars, and it's demeaning to them. There's not one human being in the universe I want to touch for the sake of touching except for that woman over there that I'm married to. Now she's fun to touch," he laughs. "But I know the roots I come from. I know that I'm basically a very simple person, not very complex at all. I have simple wants, simple needs, simple desires."

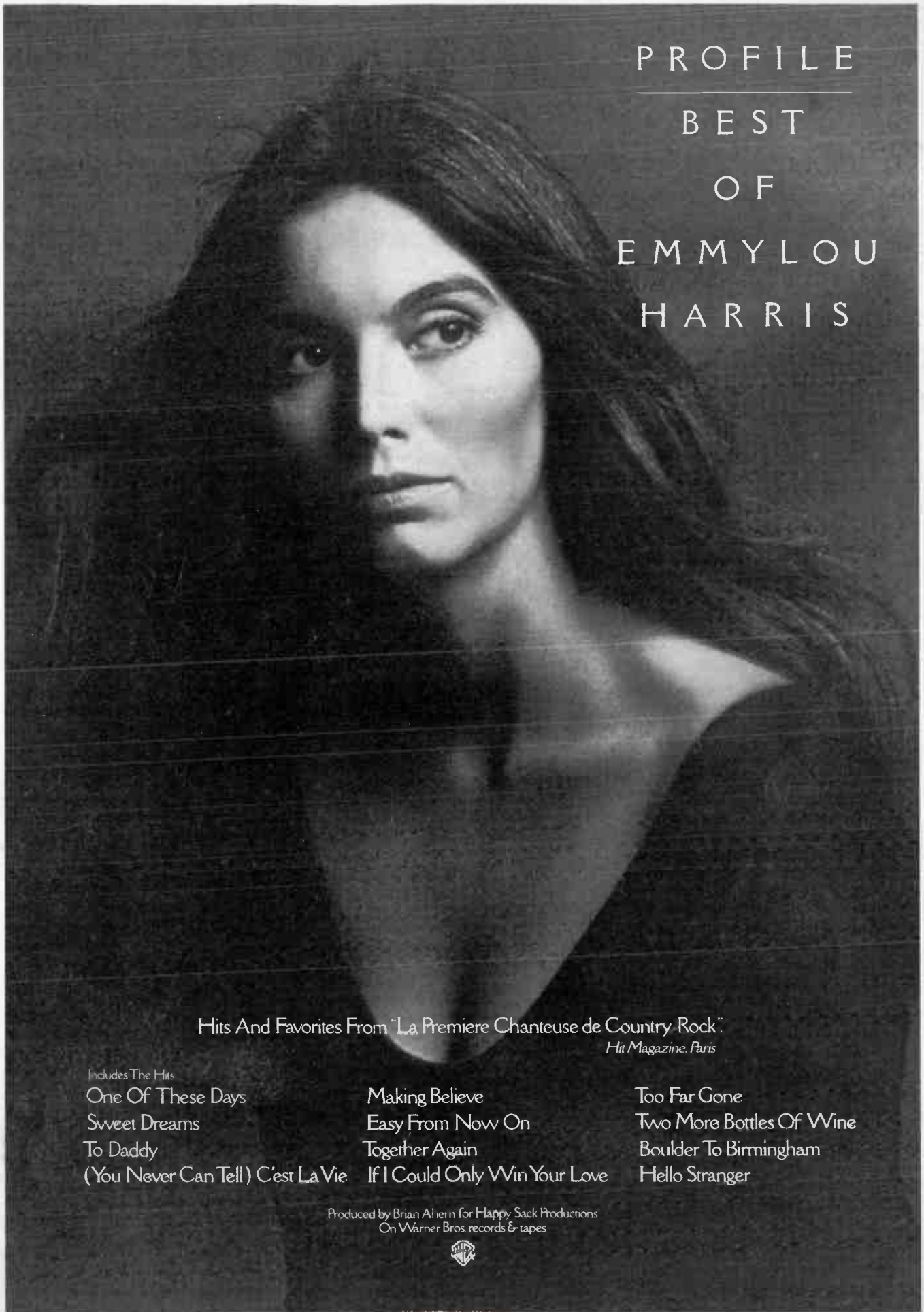
If you doubt that, spend an afternoon in the Gatlin household. Gatlin, his attractive brunette wife Janice and their two children, Kristin and Joshua Cash, live in the middle-middle class Nashville suburb of Antioch. They have a small Cape Cod style brick house, furnished in assorted comfortable antiques—the flea market, not the Louis XIV variety. The TV carries on in the kitchen and lunch is served as Gatlin washes his hair in the bathroom sink, running back and forth to watch Sara Vaughn on the *Mike Douglas Show* ("God, to be able to sing like that," he says).

Throughout the afternoon, members of the Gatlin's huge extended family, ranging from brothers to great aunts, wander in and out, planning a get-together of some 30 relatives for hamburgers that night. There's tremendous warmth, informality and a lot of good-natured kidding in the air, much of it with Gatlin at the center. His neighbors, he explains, include a policeman on one side and a trucker on the other—both good friends—and their lives are much the same as his.

"So far the tour busses aren't passing by here. I think it's because they don't know where I am," Gatlin laughs. "And if the fans did come by, they'd say 'You mean he lives here? My God, we voted for him for male vocalist of the year. He's got to live in a bigger place than that!'

"It's getting increasingly harder to hold on to the way we've tried to live though," he adds, growing more serious. "Traditionally that's what show business has been about. You get yourself a bigger house, a bigger car, fence everything in, including yourself. Don't let anybody close to you. I think entertainers have inflated their own egos, their own sense of

(Continued from page 95)



He is mysterious, an extremist, doggedly independent, paradoxical, intelligent and absolutely dedicated to his work. He lives by his own bent, and he happens to sell more records than anyone in Country Music—with two platinum and nine gold albums to his credit. His latest album, ***I've Always Been Crazy,*** *last fall achieved recognition as the first album in Country Music history ever to be certified as a gold record the week it shipped to record stores.* —— *Bob Campbell*

Waylon

by BOB CAMPBELL

I had wanted to talk to Waylon Jennings for a long time. Take away the music, and the man still remains one of the few interesting people on the loose these days.

There are easier things to do in life than nail down a Waylon interview. But I finally got the session set up after a few false starts, a few high-level phone calls and a little luck. After six weeks of negotiations, an RCA representative calls late one day and tells me to be over there the next morning at 10 sharp. Now I'm forever trying to figure out if stiff preparation or raw instinct best serves a writer in conducting interviews. But it so happens that by 10 o'clock the next morning, I have run head on into the unbending truth—I have only a vague notion of what to say to Waylon. The saviour of this day will have to be instinct.

I had already considered the wisdom of the scheduled 10 a.m. appointment time, so I'm not surprised when RCA Publicist Jerry Flowers greets me in his office on the second floor and informs me that Waylon will be late. Here we go again, I thought. But just as I'm settling down on Jerry's couch with a hot cup of coffee, the phone rings. Waylon wants to speak to me.

"Bob, this is Waylon. I'm gonna be a little late."

"That's all right, Waylon. I got here a little late myself. It's nice of you to call. I appreciate it."

"Hey hoss, it's your time. I'll be over there in about 10 minutes."

I'll admit this softened me up a bit. Even though I have always identified with Waylon's music, I didn't know what to expect of the man himself. Stories float around about the surliness of some of his hired hands...stories of organizational paranoia concerning outsiders...of drugs of Neil Reshen, Waylon's manager, a man with a sinister reputation. However, I've decided I can get along with Waylon.

Waylon arrives.

Introduced, we both pull up a chair in the deep mahogany, RCA second-floor conference room. Waylon is a good-sized man, and I do believe he can handle himself just fine. He looks a little worse for wear on this warm October morning, and he tells me he has been up all night.

Some weeks earlier, through a stroke of incredible luck, I had traveled to New Orleans for the third resurrection—namely, the World Heavyweight Championship Bout between Muhammad Ali and a kid named Spinks. I had noticed Waylon down there, and this seemed like as good a time as any to take a reading on Waylon's interest in boxing and in Muhammad Ali. Waylon informs me he loved the fight, has been to several championship fights and he LOVES Ali.

Waylon recalled visiting Ali in his dressing room before the fight. And he related a small gem of a story concerning the fabled wit of the Champ:

"Ali was just a super person. We were sitting on a bench a few minutes before the fight, and the television people kept trying to shove me out of the way so they could film Ali. After a little bit, Ali said in that joking way of his:

'Waylon! Don't let 'em talk to you like that! Slap 'em! Slap 'em Waylon!"

Continuing the story, Waylon said the TV folks appealed to Ali to help them keep the area cleared, saying they were under severe pressure.

"YA'LL are under pressure!" *mocked Ali.*

A few days later, Richie Albright, Waylon's co-producer and drummer, would tell of Ali stopping Waylon as he was leaving the dressing room and complimenting him on his music. Richie added that Waylon apparently was deeply moved by his meeting with Ali and said little for the next two days.

Seeing how I had struck the right lode, I used the subject of heroes to fire up a conversation with the man who has altered the face of country music.

* * *

CAMPBELL: Do you have any heroes?

JENNINGS: Muhammad Ali is my hero. He really is. I think he is the greatest

thing to happen in twenty years. My dad is my hero, and he comes first. And old Johnny Cash is one of my heroes. He is a great man. And Richie Albright. He is my drummer. Without him I couldn't have made it.

CAMPBELL: Hasn't he been with you a long time?

JENNINGS: Fifteen years. He had to go back and get his health one time. He took almost a year off. I was planning on quitting.

CAMPBELL: You were planning on quitting music?

JENNINGS: It was about six years ago. I was sick.

CAMPBELL: Didn't you have hepatitis?

JENNINGS: Yeh. I was broke and about $600,000 in debt, and it just looked like it was all over, you know. That's when Richie came to me and said, 'I know you are fixing to quit. Don't do it. Let's give one more run at it, and if it don't work, we'll go somewhere and get us a sit-down job. I've got someone you need to meet.' That's when he brought in Neil Reshen. Neil is a genius. Me and Willie... We were through, you know. We were just up against a brick wall. Neil took us in and fed us and loaned us money, and he didn't know if he was ever gonna get it back. But he had faith in us, and it was hard to find any place to put faith.

CAMPBELL: Was that when Willie was on Atlantic?

JENNINGS: No. That was before that. But that same day that Richie brought Neil to me...On the way to the airport, we saw Willie. I told Neil about Willie, and I had already made a deal with Neil. He saw Willie, and Willie made a deal with him the very same day. You know Neil is from New York, and there was that Yankee thing and the South thing.... Where did you grow up at?

CAMPBELL: I'm from East Texas. I grew up in a little place called Kilgore.

JENNINGS: Ain't nobody from Kilgore.

CAMPBELL: Bob Luman's from Kilgore.

JENNINGS: There you are! I'm from Littlefield, Tex.—in the suburbs of a cotton patch.

CAMPBELL: That's in West Texas, right?

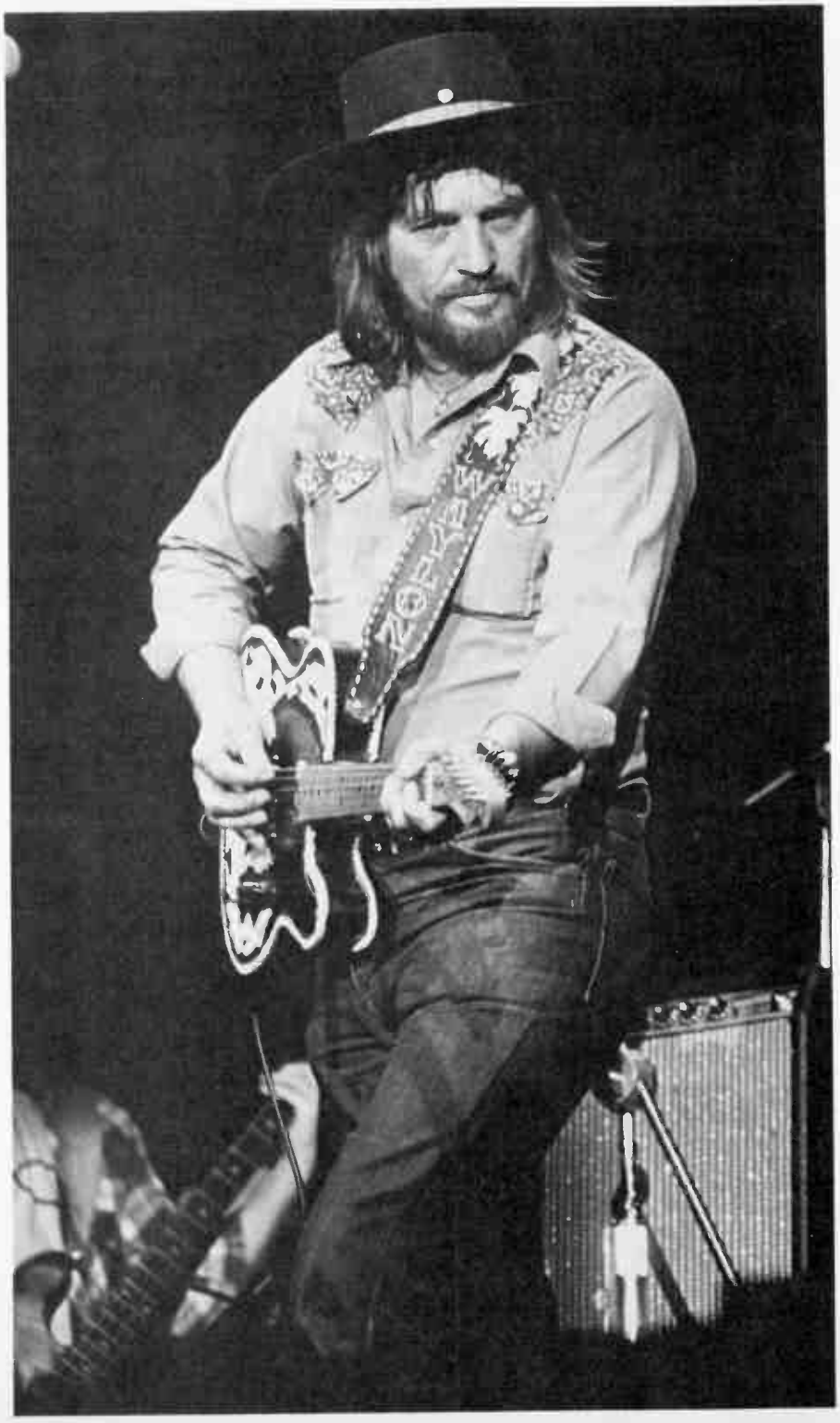
JENNINGS: Yeh. Anyway, there was that thing at first about somebody from New York. Fast-talking New York manager. But that fast-talking New York manager is one of the best people I've ever known. And between him and Richie and Jessi (Colter), I have somehow stayed together.

CAMPBELL: I have admired your music for a long time, and I used to go see you at Panther Hall in Fort Worth in the late sixties. I knew you had encountered problems with record autonomy, but I had no idea you had gotten to the point where you were thinking about quitting.

JENNINGS: I had already made up my mind. I never could conform, you see. I think there was a big misunderstanding. We didn't understand each other. I think Chet Atkins is a genius. Some of the best records I have ever cut have been with Chet. And I had my other problems. But I had to go through all that stuff because of *me*. I wasn't trying to prove anything. I think some people thought I would destroy things if I had the freedom and control I had to have in order to do the music right. And now they understand, and I think I understand them a little better.

CAMPBELL: What do you think was the turning point in your career?

JENNINGS: I think it was after Neil took over as my manager and renegotiated my contract. I asked for artistic control and freedom. And that was one of the things everybody was dead against giving me. But I wouldn't go without it. I had to have it. And yet, you know when I came into the studio it was pressure. Because if I could get that kind of control, then everybody is watching. The first thing we worked on was on the **Lonesome, On'ry and Mean** Album. But the



Ronnie Milsap & Waylon Jennings: Two of country music's gold record winners.

first entire album I had control over was **Honky Tonk Heroes.**

CAMPBELL: This is kind of off-the-wall, but what makes you mad about the music business?

JENNINGS: People who think you owe them the world. I think the statement that makes me madder than anything is "I made you what you are." Now I'm not talking about people who sincerely come to hear you sing. See, I'm an introvert in an extroverted business. And I'm not the great conversationalist. I make people nervous when they first come around me because of all the things they have heard about me. Then I react to that reaction. And another thing that makes me mad is when I hear somebody say, "You can't do this because that ain't country." Now who the hell cares!?: I have heard more of them say this too: "I think that could be a pop hit." Now where is that coming from!? Why don't they just get in there and not worry about charts and an award at the end of the year. Just take a good song and do the best that you can do with it and play music. Music is supposed to be a happy thing. It's creative. And when you get it all balled up in red tape, it's ridiculous.

CAMPBELL: By the way, you don't make me nervous.

JENNINGS: That's your first mistake. Now I'm gonna hit you (laughs).

CAMPBELL: I've listened to your new album pretty close, and my favorite song on it is Billy. *How close does that song parallel your relationship with Willie Nelson?*

JENNINGS: Willie is my brother. There is no rift between Willie and me at all. But you know that place in the song where I say, "Tell all the people down in Texas I said Hi?" Well, me and Willie have been through the briar patches together. And we will go again if we have to. I hope we don't have to. Willie is a great writer, a great singer and a great ole boy. But I got to where I didn't like to do those outdoor things (Willie's annual picnics). For one thing, four of them in a row got rained out. And I felt like someone was going to get hurt at one of them. Not me or my people, but someone in the crowd. You know, the law enforcement people there get a little over anxious, and the people get a little nervous and over anxious. I'm not blaming anybody. But maybe those things have been run into the ground.

CAMPBELL: I have heard you aren't doing much with Willie now, but are you planning on working with him now or in the future on any projects?

JENNINGS: Willie who? I don't care where he is or what. If he wants to pick and grin, we will work together, sure. He can't do without me! (laughs).

CAMPBELL: I read somewhere that you and Johnny Cash roomed together and were friends back in the 60's when you first came to town. Why have both of you waited this long to work together?

JENNINGS: It wasn't intentional. Listen, I had rather be around Johnny Cash than anybody I know. He just knocks me out. We have more fun together. We get nervous when we get up and sing together because we have never done that before. I tell you, John and I are closer than brothers. We went through the wild years—the drug scene. We hid them from each other and lied to each other. We had to get away from each other in order to pull it back together. But that is not the reason we have never worked together. It just happened. We decided to record a thing together. We went into a studio one night and had a great time—picking and singing. I thought we sounded pretty good together and he did too. So we did it again not too long ago. I'm the kind of person who would rather wait and let things happen naturally. It wasn't nobody's idea. I found a song.

CAMPBELL: Chain Gang?

JENNINGS: No, the other one. *I Wish I Was Crazy Again.* He was in Hamburg, Germany, and we were talking on the phone. I played it for him on the phone and that is how it got started. I said that would be a great duet, so we did it. And then we did the other one.

CAMPBELL: How did the death of Elvis affect you?

JENNINGS: I was really sad. I was

down in Alabama in Muscle Shoals, and me and Richie were working on a Hank Williams Jr. album. We were producing it together. Richie waited a long time before he told me. Finally, he said, "I've got to tell you something." I just drove on back up to Nashville. I knew Elvis. He was really something. I had met him four times. I had a lot of fun with him. There was a great thing about him aside from the music. He was just special, period. I think we all needed him.

CAMPBELL: You know, I think a lot of people felt like, if Elvis can die, I can sure die. He represented more than just music.

JENNINGS: It still don't seem real to me. But I don't worry about death. I figure on living forever. I'm going to figure it out before it's all over.

CAMPBELL: It seems to me your new album is more reflective than anything you have done in the past. Does this mean you have reached a point in life where you feel you need to examine the past few years and get a fix on where you have been and where you are going?

JENNINGS: This album is a little bit of

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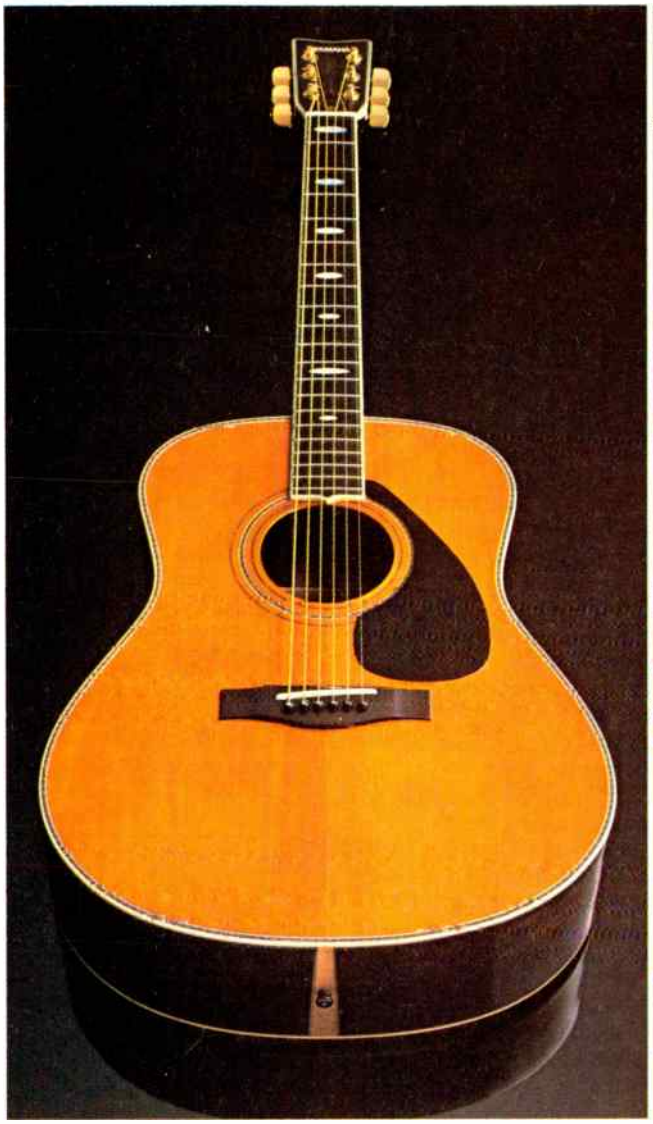

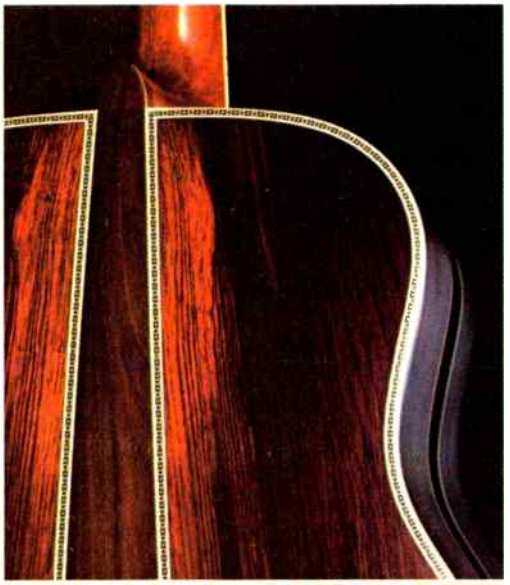

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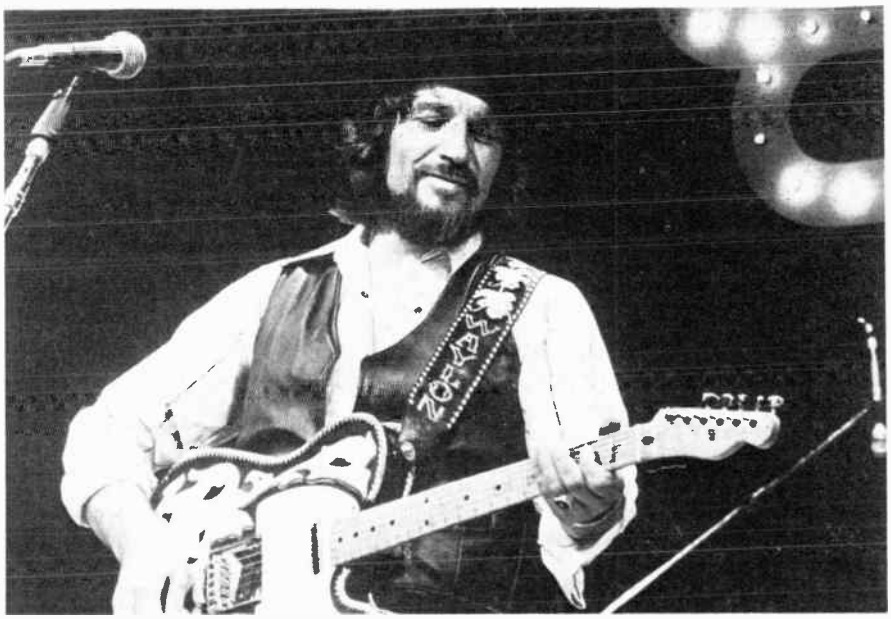
everything I have ever done. I like it. If you listen to it, it seems like it touches on just about everything. I think when a guy gets about 40, everybody looks back then. And I have come to the conclusion the business can run you to death if you try to keep up with it. Let it keep up with you. If you worry about energies and worry about how big you are going to be, where is that at? That puts you right back into the thing I was talking about earlier when I said music is something to be enjoyed. I love recording and I love playing music. Richie and I and the band have talked about this, and I have started playing clubs every once in a while now. I don't care how many people they hold. We played Cain's Ballroom (Tulsa, Okla.) not too long ago. You lose touch with people in Coliseums, and you should keep that. Coliseums can become very sterile. After a while, faces look like chairs. And you get to walking through things. You need that personal contact right on you, and there is nothing like a nightclub—like that club over in Tulsa. Them people are crazy, but they are great.

CAMPBELL: I know you don't like doing interviews, and I appreciate you talking to me. But why don't you like to do them? Are you uncomfortable here talking with me?

JENNINGS: No, I'm comfortable with you. But I had a lot of problems with me saying one thing and somebody printing another. It's things like *People* Magazine. This guy chased us halfway across the country trying to get us to do that interview. So we did it. Then here he comes along saying Jessi wanted me to get a vasectomy. And he said Waylon answered him no in his male chauvanistic way saying my next wife might want children. Now that was a lie. That was never even discussed, and it wouldn't have been in front of that snaggle-toothed SOB anyway. I had to have somebody tell me what a vasectomy was. And when I found out what it was, I didn't ever want it mentioned to me again. It's things like this. If people would just tell the truth—what was really said. Another thing is where I'm at. This outlaw stuff and macho stuff. That's not what it's all about. They come in and talk to you and don't want to hear a damn thing you are saying about the music. All they want to put in is where you come in, sit down, kick a waitress, sit with your back to the wall, face the door and you knock out a bartender—humming all the while.

CAMPBELL: But you were an outlaw in the sense that you did rebel.

JENNINGS: More than a sense. I did rebel and backed up and said I wasn't going to do things a certain way anymore. But the other way didn't work for me. The outlaw thing has probably caused me a problem or two. I'm not going to back up if I think I am right, and that has caused problems. I've never been in the habit of backing up, and I don't think I want to start now. But I'm a good ole boy, and I have a good ole time.



CAMPBELL: Well, I really believe Texans are different from most people. Most of them are independent as hell.

JENNINGS: Stop and think about the way we were raised. We were raised to believe that we were about a notch or two better than the rest of the world, and that the rest of the world was overseas. It's that pride of being a Texan. It's taught from childhood.

I think there are very few people anymore who will really stand up for what they believe no matter what the cost. No matter if they lose their job or whatever—someone who will say, "This is what I believe. This is it."

Well, you can see their side too. Here comes this ole boy from Texas who looks kind of crazy and acts kind of crazy too. And things have been going smooth, and he starts rocking the boat. One thing I just always loved though. This guy is no longer with the company so I can say it. There used to be a guy with RCA that would come in and say, "You just be quiet, and we will take care of this. We know what we are doing about these records." Now where is that coming from—he knows what he is doing about *my* music?—telling me what to release, and then he sits there and pats his foot to the wrong beat. And he tells me that's got a good, snappy beat. And he whistled with a yankee accent. Nobody is going to make me change anything about my music. I ain't saying that is the easiest way to go. But I had to do it that way. And I am glad I did.

CAMPBELL: How about two more questions?

JENNINGS: Go on. Ask what you want.

CAMPBELL: Let me see how to put this. You've been in the business about 20 years, haven't you?

JENNINGS: Yeh, right around that.

CAMPBELL: Uh... do you?... let me see how to put this.

JENNINGS: Don't be nervous kid, you can get another job.

CAMPBELL: Naw, I'm just trying to work out a phrase. I write better than I talk.

JENNINGS (laughs): Hoss, now you see what I've been talking about: If we could sing 'em to you like Merle Haggard, we'd be all right!

CAMPBELL: If, in fact, this business has changed you over the years, how have you changed? And what is your key to survival in the music industry?

JENNINGS: Sure you change. Everything has an effect on everyone and everything around you. It's had kind of a rough effect on me. I got to where I wouldn't go out anywhere. I can't really put a handle on that kind of thing. Maybe people might not believe this, but I am actually surprised by all of it each and every day. I don't really think in that direction. I didn't want to compete with anybody. That's what I told the Country Music Association. I'm not into competing with any of the other singers. I am a fan of this business. Let's put it this way: Willie and I were up for the same award. Now there is no way I am going to sit there beside him if had won—and I didn't. I just don't want that type of stuff. It affects your music. It puts you in competition. The best thing to do would be to give it to new artists to help them along.

Sure, everybody likes to be appreciated, but I just didn't like the way they went about it; adding up the votes and how they were come by and where they came from. You asked me what I though was the best thing to do in this business? Honesty.

Honesty is something you can't wear out. And you don't have to spend a whole lot of time remembering. Being yourself. That's what you got to do. Look that fellow in the mirror in the eye. And keep honesty in your music. ■

CARL PERKINS:
The Legend Of Rockabilly Keeps Rollin' On
by RUSSELL SHAW

Once upon a time, there was a world without synthesizers, noise reduction, digital delay, equalizers, and all the technical stuff which has supposedly advanced the state of recorded music from "primitive" to "contemporary."

There are those in all fields of music who swear by all these scientific devices, stating that the overall sound quality of modern day records is unsurpassed. And yes, whether it be a country session full of overtracked, sweet strings, or a rock number rich in electronic feedback, there is no denying the wizardry of modern electronics.

On the horizon though, a rebellion brews. Some of the so-called "new wave" rock stars—Elvis Costello, Talking Heads, Devo, and others with even more bizarre names—are leaning more towards simplicity in recording technique, chord structure, and overall packaging. Old rockabilly chords, though admittedly several decibels louder, are merged with persistent, uncomplex rhythms to produce a music that while frequently trendy, often sparkles with the immediacy of directness.

Social pundits would like you to believe that "new wave" emerged from a poetic-artistic brainstorm inspired by the Muse, yet in truth, the folks in their young twenties who form the backbone of this clientele are largely unaware of the true genesis of the musical structures employed. Fact of the matter is, if it weren't for the early rock stars of Memphis—Elvis, Jerry Lee, Carl Perkins, as well as Lubbock's Buddy Holly, the original spark of gutbucket rock might not ever had been lit.

When punk rock's Dead Boys jammed with Carl Perkins recently at a Los Angeles watering hole, it was less of a contrast than one would think. As the "bizarre" dress and surface social rebellion of ensembles like the Dead Boys currently draw scorn from the music establishment, Perkins' mid-fifties hip swinging and rather (for the time) ruffian look did not endear him to the powers that were. So therefore, the link in the chain is a firm one.

Carl Perkins, in his mid-forties, is enjoying a healthy renaissance. Indeed, his following makes a fascinating social study: According to Carl, "it seems like the young today are finding a new kind of music in the simple rockabilly style. It's new to them, but it is the same thing I did back in the fifties.

"That basic beat has always been in rock. It has been dressed up by fancy sounds, but there's only so far you can go to make a circle before you go back around. I think it's good if not but for one thing; these kids out there are going to have to replace old dudes like me. I like to think there is a kid out there I'm inspiring. It seems unfair that if he don't have ten thousand dollars to buy the amps and all the fancy equipment, he gives up on music cause he can't duplicate the sound he hears on a lot of these records—whereas if he gets back to more of the basic thing, he would have more of a chance. He wouldn't have to be the son of a rich man. He would just have to buy a cheap guitar and amp and do what I do."

"It seems like the young today are finding a new kind of music in the simple rockabilly style. It's new to them, but it is the same thing I did back in the fifties."

Doing what he does, of course, is play songs which have etched their way into immortality on the honky-tonk mantlepiece—*Blue Suede Shoes*, *Dixie Fried*, and *Boppin' The Blues* are but a few Perkins immortals. Yet it is to be emphasized that Carl is simply not one of those old rock and roll revival stars, living on, and in, the past, musically bereft, subsisting on the creativity of a long-gone youth.

Early this fall, Carl came out with a new album, **Ol' Blue Suede's Back**. And not only is he sounding, but he's looking as good as ever: playing top nationwide clubs with a hot band, dancing and strutting across the stage with just as much aplomb as in the fifties, still writing tunes; winning raves as a currently vibrant force, not as a yeoman-like memory.

The memories should be and are no albatross. However, the many years of close association with the early country-rock fusion, the friendships with Elvis, Johnny Cash (whom he toured with for ten years beginning in 1966), Jerry Lee, and others, inevitably directs any conversation with this amiable man towards background, war stories, and juicy anecdotes. But first, the genesis of a legend....

"I grew up the son of a sharecropper in West Tennessee. My dad loved nothing but country music. I loved it too, and was inspired by Bill Monroe on the Opry. A lot of country music though, I thought was just too slow, and lonesome, about wrecks and deaths and mamas dyin.' But growing up where I did, I worked in the cotton fields with maybe fifty or seventy-five black people.

"Every day, when the evening sun went down, there was nothing to do but sing. I grew up listening to old spirituals, and I loved the rhythm that they sang it with. When I was about nine, I had learned me a few chords on the guitar, but I liked songs like *Gonna Lay Down My Burden* so I took songs like *I'm Walkin' The Floor Over You* and gave it that beat. My daddy would say many times, 'Carl, you not singin that song right, you singin' it too fast.' So I said I'm sorry Dad, I like it fast.

"That's where my kind of music came from. I was not, and neither was Elvis, or any of the first guys, the inventor of what we did. That kind of music was very popular in the cotton belt—a lot of dudes played it but for some reason never made it. We were just lucky enough to be the first ones to record it."

"Back then," according to Carl, "you had your country stations and gospel, and black stations, as well as pop. Rhythm and blues played nothing but blacks, and pop would play Dean Martin."

How was the ice broken? Carl remembers that "whenever we put out a record, one of the things we did was visit these country stations, cause we were country boys. It was country disk jockeys who first played our records, even though they took risks. It was grabbed up quickly by the young teenagers in the south. They liked the way Elvis looked and moved.

"Seventy-five percent of the credit has to go to Elvis. It wasn't just musical. Sex played a role in it; the way he moved on stage. He was a complete entertainer, the looks, the moves; and he opened up the doors to the rest of us."

"I heard *Blue Moon Of Kentucky* in a housing project where I lived in Jackson, Tennessee. I was making my living playing music in the clubs at night, and working in the Colonial Baking Company by day. Then I got laid off at the factory, and I had more time to do what I wanted to do—making a career out of music. So I decided to approach record companies.

"I was turned down when I walked into the Sun Studios. The secretary said that "Mr. Phillips (Sam Phillips, owner of Sun) is not listening to anybody because

we have this new boy Elvis Presley and he's red-hot.' I said 'Ye's ma'am, I know he is, but me and my brother can play the same kind of music.' She said 'we don't have time.'

"We walked back to the old car and were fixin' to pull away when this '54 Cadillac Coupe De Ville pulled up. I got back out of my car and asked him if we could come and pick a little for him. I said that we sound kind of like Elvis.

"He told me afterward that he was all prepared to tell me no, that he didn't have time to listen. But he said that, 'You was the most pitiful looking boy I had ever seen. You looked like you'd have cried, or your whole world would have ended.' I told him that it could have happened that way, because I had sent tapes to companies and they didn't know what to do with them. I was at the end of my rope.

"That's the way we got started. I tell the kids today it is persistence. It isn't easy now, either. I think the competition is even stiffer now, but it's always going to be that handful of people who have that desire to succeed."

Once signed to Sun Records, the hits started to come. "*Blue Suede Shoes*?..." recollects a chuckling Carl, "Well, I heard a boy say that to a girl dancing right in front of the bandstand one night in Jackson, Tennessee. He said 'don't step on mah suedes!' Those shoes were popular then, and what he said to her bothered me and I couldn't get it out of my mind, that boy thinking that much about a pair of shoes. At night, I lay awake, got up out of bed, and wrote the words on the outside of an empty potato sack.

Boppin The Blues'.... Well, there was

a boy who lived in the housing project in Jackson where I was. He was practically blind. He had a tape recorder, and was good with lyrics. He had a little poem called *Boppin' The Blues*. The title will always be his but I wrote the song. I love the blues, people like B.B. King and John Lee Hooker."

With the hits came the associations, the friendships, the tales. How then, did Carl get along with his stablemates?

"First," confesses Carl, "there was no jealousy, cause we was all poor boys. None of us had anything. Everybody wanted everybody else to succeed. Roy Orbison would be recording, and Cash and I would be there. We were all fans of each other. I look back on that now, and that was a very unusual situation. I had been on stage and Elvis would be on the side, saying 'You got 'em! Go!' It's called love."

What of the people, the larger than life figures?

"Jerry Lee was exactly like he is today: just as unpredictable as a guy can be. It's just his way. You gotta be around him to know it's not a show with him.

"This is one of the most talented people I've ever known. He can sing any kind of song as well as he wants to sing. He cuts up a bit, but he really can play piano. But he also is a little bit against the grain. You can't predict today what he'll be like tomorrow. He's liable to come out and give you the greatest show you've ever seen, or he might not feel like singing rock at all but gospel.

"Wavin' that gun around Presley's gate—that stuff is a little too far out. I think he will get himself in trouble if he doesn't watch it. I'd like to see the man get this out of his system before he hurts somebody."

Johnny Cash?

"John was a very shy, quiet, reserved fella. I guess out of all the people at Sun Records, we were the closest. He grew up picking cotton and working in the fields like me.

"Elvis was so full of fun, moving around in a room, but Cash would sit down with you and smoke a cigarette. He was confident back then, too. He didn't stray from the type of music he believed in—that chunk-chunk of the Tennessee Three. I have a lot of respect for John's talent, and now, he seems to be going back to the old sound. He will have some hit records now, because that's what people want to hear."

Our next name is brought up not out of eagerness, but an imposing, curiosity.

Elvis.

For the first time in our amiable conversation, Carl falls silent.

"Well, Elvis had it together for a long time, as well or better than I or anybody else I know of would have taken it. The life he was forced to live, not being able to get out in the daytime and enjoy life anywhere in the world—I wondered about

it for many years—'when will the boy break?'

"It's abnormal, it's not human, it's too much pressure. I could not have survived for a third as long as Elvis did if I couldn't go get my fishing pole once in a while. He couldn't walk down the street of his home town and say hello to people. All those things were taken away. Plus he lost his mother.

"When we played the circuit in the early fifties, Miss Gladys and Mister Vernon were always with him. When he lost his mama, I do know for a fact it started the shattering of Elvis. That love was gone. I think that split from Priscilla—which he didn't want—added to it. He really loved her. That hurt. It seemed that Elvis couldn't buy what we all gotta have. He needed that leaning post, and that, I've found out in 46 years of living, is just a simple four letter word.

"I always felt sorry for Presley.

"People ask me over the years," muses Carl about all the other Sun Records artists being big over the years and me stalling out. I say to them 'Son, I haven't stalled out. I've never left the number one position at 320 Cresent Street in Jackson, Tennessee. I AM LOVED. If a guy is trying to compare success, I say that I've been loved when I was down, as well as up."

Down for Carl has included a series of automobile and mechanical mishaps that but for fortune would have left him crippled, if not dead. In 1964, he had his left hand caught in a window fan. "It took a lot of prayin', cause the doctor said I might not have use of my hand. Then in 1965, I nearly blew my left foot off in a shotgun accident.

"I knew then that I had to straighten my act up. I was drinkin' back then. The good Lord was after me. I started to straighten out my life.

"I got a book which came out in October of 1978 called *Disciple In Blue Suede Shoes* in which I tell about God. He had his arms around me, and I started realizing that when I joined the Johnny Cash show in 1966. I was around people who didn't drink. John quit pills back then and was cleaning up, too."

Financially, the mid-sixties were by no means cruel to Carl; the Beatles invasion had hit and the then mop-top quartet from Liverpool cut three Perkins originals: *Matchbox*, *Honey Don't*, and *Everybody's Tryin' To Be My Baby*. "I've always felt honored about that. If someone wants to pattern something after me, that speaks good. It's that silent thing you know, when you are trying to come out with a sound, and later it rubs off on other people."

To date Carl has written over four hundred songs. In fact, a forthcoming album, already completed and due out in late winter or early spring, comprises much of his recent tunesmithing. Meanwhile, Carl is being seen by people who weren't even born when the old tunes hit.

Sounds initially suspicious that he would keep matters in the family, but two of Carl's band members are literally chips off the old block. Drummer Stan Perkins, according to a proud pop, "has been pounding on buckets ever since he was this high." Carl's hand is held in very close proximity to the floor. Bassist Greg Perkins is super-proficient, rhythmic, funky, yet quite loyal to the old and new Perkins tunes, as well as the Chuck Berry, Elvis, and Bill Haley tunes that comprise his current live repertoire. Three other pieces add up to a smokin' band.

Once again, Carl's recording situation is healthy. He currently waxes for Jet Records, beneficiary of CBS distribution, Carl has the promotion forces of one of the two biggest record company giants on his side.

And somewhere, as in Carl's wish, there's a kid with an inexpensive guitar learning old Perkins licks just as the originator not only lives those timeless chestnuts, but creates new ones. ■

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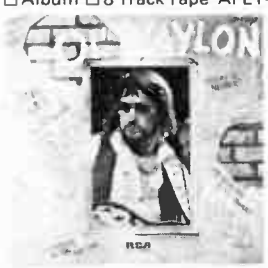

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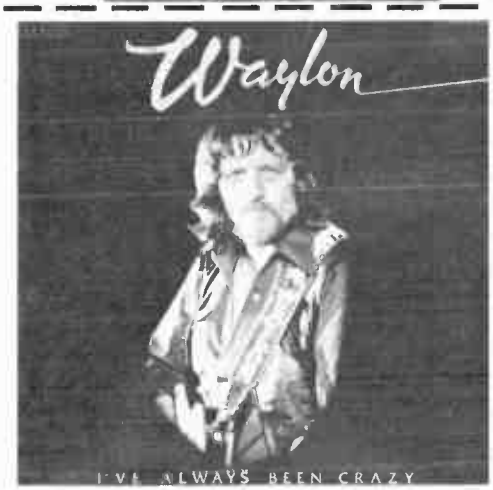

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CM

RCA Records

Linda Hargrove

by LAURA EIPPER

For many years, she has been one of Nashville's

For years, Linda Hargrove has been known as one of the hottest young songwriters in Nashville, a perennial "new face" to watch.

Her songs, *I've Never Loved Anyone More* and *Just Get Up and Close the Door* have grown to the status of country classics, and others of her tunes have been recorded by everyone from Leon Russell and Johnny Rodriquez to Olivia Newton-John and B.J. Thomas.

She's had respectable chart success herself with *Blue Jean Country Queen* and *Once Around the Dance Floor,* though that "one big record" has so far eluded her.

But now she says she's READY, and it looks like this may well be Linda Hargrove's year.

There have been some changes made lately—a new contract with RCA Records, for starters, and what seems to be a newly-confident, more mature approach to her career on Linda's part.

The blue jean country queen is now wearing soft, stylish clothes, has polished up her stage act, tightened up her band and is making a concerted effort to go for the brass ring.

"I don't sing like anyone else out there, I guess," she explains. "It takes the public ear a long time to get accustomed to the sound, and the large, record-buying public hasn't had much chance to hear me. So, I've made a commitment for the next three to five years to just burn the highway up. I want to play for as many people in this country and elsewhere as I possibly can." With her *Go Fer Broke* band and a customized van, she's been doing just that for several months and loving it.

Part of her enthusiasm, she says, comes from her new record deal, her third, after disappointing go-rounds with other labels.

"I don't think you can take your disappointments out on other people, even corporate structures," she says. "But I felt like I was drowning before. With RCA, I feel really good—they seem to have a lot of faith in me."

If things haven't always looked this rosey, Linda isn't bitter about it. As she recounts some of the highlights of the past seven years, her eyes light up with laughter and the friendly, open face with its sprinkle of freckles often breaks into a wide grin.

Born and raised in Tallahassee, Florida, her musical training began early with French horn lessons designed, she chuckles, to give her culture. After two semesters on a music scholarship at Troy State University, the subculture won out over the culture, however, and Linda dropped out and began playing guitar and singing in honky tonks in Florida. Her interest in songwriting became confirmed when a local band recorded a half dozen of her songs.

"It was great," she laughs. "I figured if it was that easy I'd just go on to Nashville and do it. Besides, I could starve there just as easily as in Tallahassee."

She hit Nashville with a handful of songs, little money and few friends. One of her earliest acquaintances, songwriter Lee Clayton, had to show her where to find Music Row.

As the near-classic story goes, she pounded on doors everywhere and found them all closed to her. She began to take on odd jobs while singing in local small clubs.

"I was working as a waitress in one and they let me graduate to singing. My salary was three sandwiches a day and all the beer I could drink." she says.

Her first lucky break came when Billy Robinson, Sandy Posey's husband, discovered Linda and took her home to meet Sandy, who decided to record one of her tunes.

"They took me over to her session where Billy Sherrill was producing and cut one of my tunes. Believe it or not, I didn't even know then who he was."

At the same session she met steel player Pete Drake, who approached her afterwards and suggested she bring some of her material by for him to listen to.

"I just thought, 'Oh, sure' and let it go for a month. But then one day I was getting hungry again, so I called Pete up and said 'Mr. Drake, you still interested in hearing some of my tunes?"

He was, and a long-term, fruitful relationship with Drake, who subsequently became her producer, began. Drake started to work Linda into sessions at his studio as a rhythm guitar player, a means of support while she worked on developing what he saw as a substantial songwriting talent.

Her reputation as a session player grew and her songwriting began to attract attention. Jan Howard and Tommy James recorded her songs. Tanya Tucker and others followed.

By 1976, her reputation as a top-ranking songwriter had been firmly established with such major hits as *Just Get Up And Close The Door,* and *I've Never Loved Anyone More,* recorded by Johnny Rodriquez, and Olivia Newton-John's version of *Let It Shine.*

In 1972 Linda decided to give recording a try, and encountered the same obstacles as in her first days in Nashville.

"Pete and I went up to New York that year and had every major label turn us down," she remembers. "It looked like it was back to beans again."

Help arrived in the form of ex-Monkee Mike Nesbitt, who met Linda in Nashville and invited her to come to Los Angeles to play on some sessions he was producing. In the studio she met Elektra Records' a&r director Russ Miller, who asked her what she was interested in.

"I just told him I wanted to make records and he said 'fine,' " she says. "He and Pete shook hands on the deal within a month. It seems like much of my career has been being in the right place at the right time."

Two years and two albums later, Linda parted company with Elektra and went on to do three albums with Capitol Records, all critically well received but less than whopping commerical successes. It was a difficult period of time, she recalls, marked with frustration but also a sense of steady, if slow, progression.

She says now that everything she went through, all the ups and downs, were preparation for what she's doing now.

"They tell you when you come to Nashville that it takes three to five years to get anywhere. I didn't believe that at first, but it's true. I've had dark nights like everyone else, but knowing the business, I've been prepared for them. It takes time. I'm looking for longevity in my career. I don't want to be a flash in the pan."

It's her audiences, she says, that have sustained her the most during the difficult times and are the main reason behind her "burning up the highways" approach to her career these days.

"Even when I haven't been selling a lot of records, there will be two or three hundred people almost any place I play that always come to see me. They'll come up and say they've got every record I ever made, that kind of thing. Or I'll look out while I'm working and see them singing along. That's a big part of what's kept me going all these years."

One suspects that another large part of what has kept Linda Hargrove going, besides an enormous talent, is a commonsensical wisdom and maturity much older than her 27 years. A soft-spoken, reflective young woman off stage, she is also a clear-headed pro in a business that requires an enormous amount of rolling with the punches. When she says she doesn't plan to be a flash in the pan, you believe her.

"You know I came to Nashville with nothing and I've had the chance to do a lot, and grow and consistently raise my standard of living. That's not too bad."

"I've learned something from every disappointment I've ever had. You just can't let failure go to your head, as Pete says, and besides it's fun trying to make your dreams become reality. I always had too many dreams to turn back—and I still do." ■

hottest songwriters. Now, she says she's "READY."

by MARY ELLEN MOORE

An Interview with guitar legends, Ches Paul and Lester Atkins, er uh... wait a minute...

Chet Atkins and Les Paul. Who hasn't heard of these two music greats? And at the same time, who would have expected them to get together on an album, as they did with **Chester and Lester**, and win a Grammy to boot? It worked so well the first time, they tried it again with **Guitar Monsters**, and produced another terrific album.

There's talk of a third...but with Chet and Les, the talk is endless. Sitting in on a conversation between the two geniuses is like partaking of an *Alice in Wonderland* adventure.

It's hard to imagine that two such established stars would worry about such mundane things as album covers and titles, or their standing in the trade magazine charts. Chet and Les do, among other things:

CHET: I've never played in New York City, mainly because anytime you play any of those places, like Carnegie Hall, it costs so much to promote the show, you wind up not making any money. I play anywhere, Europe and all over, but up here the tv ads are so expensive and newspapers, that we just stay away. It's mostly my manager, not me. He likes to make money, he doesn't want me playing free anywhere.

MEM: You seem to be getting more involved with your music?

CHET: Yeah, I am. I made about 50 or 60 albums just half-assed while I was recording 30 or 40 other artists, and I'm amazed I did as well as I did. Because I'd work all day at the office and come home and fall asleep practicing the guitar, which I still do a lot (practice, not sleep). And I thought, 'Well, why do that? Let somebody else record those people, I've proven I could do that. I've paid my dues to them...I love all of them, but after awhile...So seven or eight years ago, I just started turning all the artists over to somebody else and now I just record two young people—Steve Warner and Paul Craft.

(Enter Les Paul.)

CHET: Hey, Les, how are you?

LES: Terrible, and you?

CHET: Sleepy. Hell, I slept 11 hours.

LES: Doesn't make a damn bit of difference, when you feel bad, you feel bad. I just ate some melons, and for what they charge you here, you can go out on the George Washington Bridge and the turnpike and eat there.

Chet and Les performing at their very first concert together at New York's Bottom Line.

CHET: I know it, I had some cereal, a little piece of cantaloupe and a Danish pastry and some sanka and it was nine dollars.Well, that's all right, they've got to make a living too.

MEM: They figured you were too sleepy to notice.

CHET: Oh, I *always* notice that bottom line.

MEM: How did you two get together?

CHET: I was walking down the street one day and I just bumped into the damn guy. You see him everywhere. He's like horse manure, he's everywhere.

LES: Aw, c'mon. I rapped on his window. I needed help. No, I was driving through Springfield, Missouri. And I used to work with his brother, Jimmy. He worked in my trio, years and years ago, way back before you were born. And he used to tell me about Chet. He'd say, 'I got a younger brother down there that's pickin'. And you better believe it, he's gonna be a winner some day.' And I'd say 'Yeah, yeah.' I figure it was his brother. And finally Mary [Ford, Paul's wife], and I were driving to the coast and I said, 'Mary, this is the station that I opened, KWGO in Springfield...I did the first broadcast in the late 20s.' So I turned it on, and there was this bunch of peapickers on there, picking all these hoedowns and everything, with an accent. They all sounded like their guitars. And right out of the clear sky, they said, 'Here's Chet Atkins.' And I drove over to the station, and I was staring in the window. And ole Chet, he's seen pictures of me and everything, so ole Chet, he says, 'Holy Christ...''

CHET: And I didn't recognize him. I saw this nice-looking guy...

LES: Nice-looking guy! You're totally blind!

(That was in the mid '40s. Thirty years later they got together and recorded **Chester and Lester.**)

LES: Little did we know, Chet, right? Little did we know that the darn thing would get a Grammy. We kept saying, 'We ain't gonna make it, we ain't gonna make it,' them *Boom!* it happened. Did you wet your pants? [Chet shakes a No.] I was nervous. I never got a Grammy. I was really excited.

MEM: Where do you see country music going?

CHET: I don't know. I think...it will merge more and more with pop music. And then I think somebody will come along that's pure hillbilly and sell a helluva lot of records, and then it will go back like it was. It goes in cycles—and pop music's the same way. They get more and more intricate and involved over there and then Eric Clapton comes out with *Lay Down Sally* which is a 1950-type rock record and everybody buys the hell out of it. I think it's just

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gonna be a duke's mixture from here on. But I think there will always be a market for pure country music, people like Porter Wagoner and John Cash...

LES: Chet, don't you think that our putting jazz and country together, playing pop tunes, kind of bridges the gap, too?

CHET: Sure. I think that helps the album sell a lot because I'm a country artist and he's known as a jazz artist, so we appeal to a lot more people that way.

LES: Otherwise you won't get a jazz player to buy a country album. This is sort of a no-no, for a jazz artist to be caught with a country cowboy album in his collection. That's terrible. And the truck driver would say drop dead to jazz, because he doesn't understand it. So this is kind of a wedding between the two of them.

CHET: Y'know, Steve Sholes, the guy who signed me up originally, the guy who signed up Elvis, he always told me that the musics would merge, that they would get closer and closer together 'til finally it would be one music. And he's right, so far. Because back in those days you had gospel and rhythm and blues and country and pop. And they were all very different and they didn't infringe on each other. Now that's not true at all. When Elvis came around, he changed all that. That's what made him so terribly different.

LES: And don't you think the magazines and all that, draw that line down the piece of paper and say this is country and this is pop. And a lot of times a guy is misplaced. Like you take Ray Charles —all of a sudden he's done one thing

and here he is a country name in the country world and this guy was anything but country when he started...And right now, with Chet Atkins and I, the biggest problem we have is that some of the stubborn stations will say that's not country, because of the song, because it's *Stardust* or *Over the Rainbow* or the *Limehouse Blues.* Who cares? The country guy don't care.

MEM: How do you feel about the merging, Chet? You obviously don't object, Les.

LES: Not when it goes to number one, I don't (laughs).

CHET: I kind of hate to see country music lose its identity because that's kind of my insurance. Country fans stick with you forever. You have a guy who had a hit in 1955 and he's still out working and making a living. So I guess from a protective standpoint, I hate to see it merge; I hate to see it lose its identity.

MEM: Aren't you largely responsible for the sophistication of country music?

CHET: I get accused of that, but I just think I made it a little more palatable to the urban audiences, which we needed at that time. And I used groups like Anita Kerr, who is a beautiful musician and singer. And I'd been taking classic guitar and jazz and all kinds of stuff, so I could take ideas and put 'em in country records and nobody knew the difference—and it made a different record. That's what you do when you get in the studio, you try to come up with something different every time. If you don't, you don't sell records.

You have people out on the road all the time who say, 'Why don't you make records like you used to?' It's almost always the older people. And the fact is, you wouldn't do that. You've got to keep changing...you've got to surprise your friends and neighbors with every record you put out. So to do that, you try new things. And you try violin, you try horns once in awhile. And maybe it's a big smash, well, everybody else jumps on the bandwagon and does the same damn thing. Then you get accused of moving country music uptown.

But the thing to remember is that you're trying to sell records, that's it. If you don't sell records, you're out of a job. And that's the only reason—it's not out of dislike—I love country music. But you've got to do something different.

MEM: Do you plan a third album together?

CHET: We might, if this one does well. We can make two dozen if we want to, we know that many songs and that many jokes.

CHET: Did you like the title, **Guitar Monsters**, Les?

LES: I really didn't pay much attention to it...I'll tell you what I am a believer of, Chet, is if I had to put an album out, the first thing I would do is get that guy's face out there because that's what you're selling and the instrument he's playing. And I wouldn't have any two monsters on there a'tall. If you're selling a monster, you're not selling yourself.

CHET: But everybody puts a picture. So you come up with something different. You put not a picture, but a guitar and monsters, and you say, 'What the hell is *that?*'

CHET: They had pictures in the Nashville paper, and yours was real close-up and mine was in a tux way back and I looked as if it were nineteen aught-six or something.

LES: When that camera gets near me, I get nervous.

CHET: Well, it shows up that silicone in your nose. He had silicone implanted in his nose, y'know.

MEM: Did you really?

LES: Aw, c'mon. (He explains the routine on the album in which he throws in a line about silicone being implanted in his nose.) And the band laughs and we go into the number. And what happens, is a lot of people don't come to see us, they come to see my nose. (They both laugh).

CHET: We talk about Dolly Parton, and of course, when you say Dolly Parton, everybody wonders, did she or didn't she? And, of course, she didn't.

MEM: How do you know?

CHET: Oh, I know. She's too pure, and if she did do it, she wouldn't have that much put in, right? She's pure as the driven snow. She's a great woman, and she has great, two great...

LES: Chet, Chet. You've got silicone, where are you gonna put it? I put mine in my nose, and you know where she put hers. What are you gonna do with yours?

CHET: (Stammer, stammer.)

LES: What are you blushing for, Chet?

CHET: My lips, I guess. I'll be a black star.

LES: Chet, don't play too good tonight.

CHET: Don't worry.

LES: Are you gonna be there?

MEM: Of course.

LES: Are you gonna applaud?

MEM: Well, I have to hear you first.

CHET: And if you like it, you'll applaud?

LES: What!!??!! You're a faithful fan!

MEM: Well, I don't want to applaud at just anything.

LES: Oh, you don't want to be like that. In other words, if we're dead, moldy figs, then, we'll remain so, right? Okay. Two moldy figs. That's our next album. That's a great title.

Postscript: Needless to say, MEM applauded—wildly, in fact. ■

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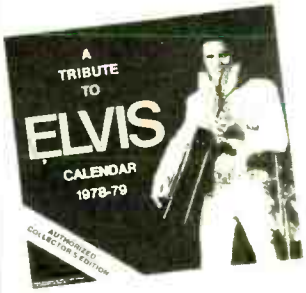

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THE MUSICAL WANDERLUST OF JOE ELY

by PETER GURALNICK

"With the coming of Dean Moriarty began the part of my life you could call my life on the road. Before that I'd often dreamed of going West to see the country, always vaguely planning and never taking off. Dean is the perfect guy for the road, because he actually was born on the road, when his parents were passing through Salt Lake City in 1926, in a jalopy, on their way to Los Angeles."

—Jack Kerouac,
On the Road (1957)

The first ride I got was on a dynamite truck
The driver kept tellin me his bad luck
As we swerved around the curves I began to shout
I said, 'Hey, hey, mister would you let me out.'

—Joe Ely,
I Had My Hopes Up High (1977)

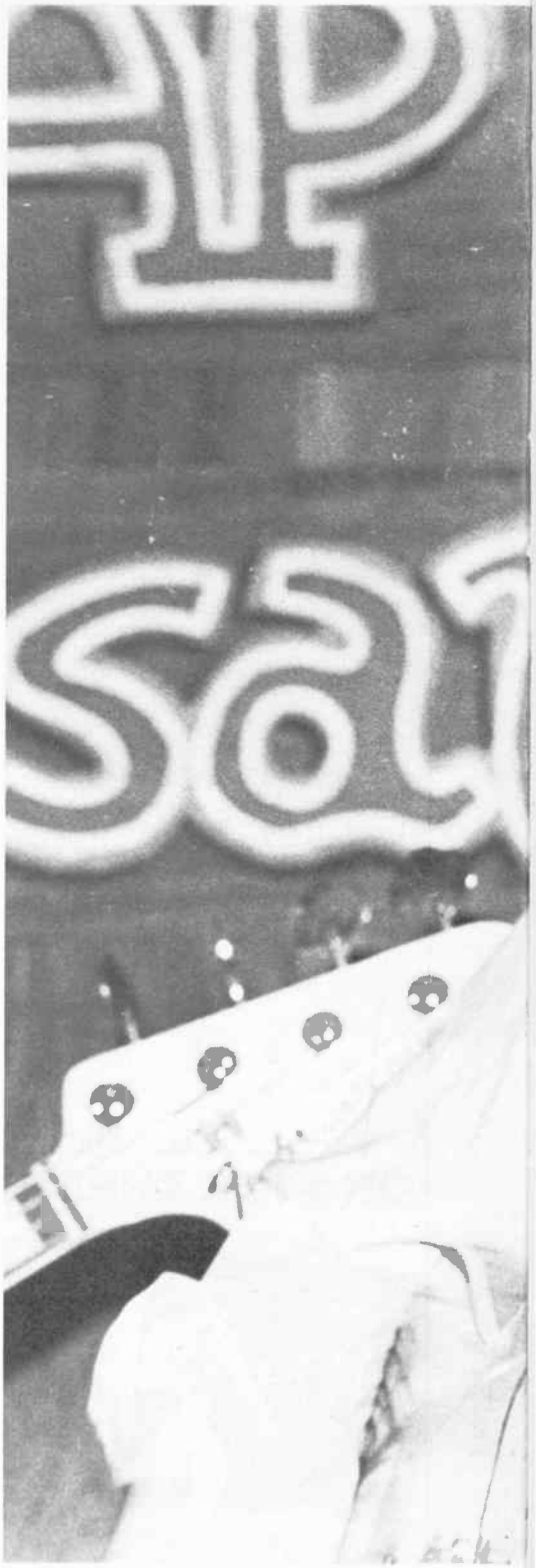
The acoustic guitar sets up an ominous express train pattern, with just the bass thumping underneath. The steel kicks in, then the drums, and all at once you get the full powerhouse effect of the ensemble—steel and electric, bass, drums, acoustic guitar, and accordian—creating a big band wall of sound. "River's on the rise/ Crows are in the sky/Look at that big yellow Cornbread Moon..." If it were 1956 and the radio was still playing music that people could dance to, you have the feeling that Joe Ely could hit with all the force of Chuck Berry, Jerry Lee Lewis, or fellow Lubbock native, Buddy Holly. If it were 1956, all the isolated cowboys everywhere, from New York to San Antonio, would be tuning in to the same Pan American radio station to get the message.

"I remember the first time I heard *Roll Over Beethoven,*" says Ely's accordionist, Ponty Bone, "I was sitting in my Dad's pick-up truck, and I'd never heard anything like it before. I thought it was the beginning of a whole new movement."

Cross Chuck Berry with Hank Williams, Bob Wills, Bob Dylan, and Jimmy Reed, and you've got a little bit of an idea of what Joe Ely's music sounds like—its impact, too. It has all the intensity, the single-minded drive, conviction, and explosive originality of first-generation rock 'n roll; and the two albums that he has released in the last couple of years (**Joe Ely** and **Honky Tonk Masquerade,** with a third in preparation from MCA) contain some of the hardest-hitting music of the decade.

The fact that Joe Ely is not a household name can only be put down to the unclassifiable nature of that music. Like Bob Wills and other pioneers of western and country music, his work does not fit easily into any one category, and in an age when packaging is as much a concern as substance, when radio stations stick to market-tested and proven playlists, Joe Ely's very diversity has frightened off country and Top 40 stations alike. You wonder if Elvis Presley came along again ("Sings hillbilly in r&b time," said a DJ of the time. "Can you figure that out?") if he would get airplay nowadays.

Joe Ely himself is an intense unsmiling figure, short and scrubby, deliberately unprepossessing in frayed dungarees, fringed vest, workingman's shirts and beat-up leather jacket—the picture of a punk or a thousand drugstore cowboys. Like many musicians, much of his life has been spent on the road; in his case, though, it seems as if he has almost glorified the bad boy image, preferring the seediest of circumstances, the grimiest of hotels, the fightingest of honkytonks, to any of the blandishments that civilization has to offer. His story has a familiar enough ring to it—hardshell Baptist upbringing, left school at 16, wandered, couldn't really find himself but stuck tenaciously to his music. The only element that is really unfamiliar is the fierceness with which he clings to these roots, his unwillingness to charm interviewers or turn his life into a Horatio Alger struggle for romantic respectability. His refusal to do this is in a way admirable, his bleak straightforward presence a healthy corrective to all the smiling superstars who haven't got one tenth of his talent. Whether it will help Joe Ely to sell records remains to be seen.



He was born in Amarillo in 1947, 100 miles north of Lubbock ("might as well be the same"). "When I was real young we jumped around a lot, Fort Worth, San Antonio, Houston. My father worked for the railroad at that time, which is what my grandfather did, worked for the Rock Island Railroad for 40 years. When I was growing up in Amarillo, the Rock Island tracks were practically in the back yard." When he was nine or 10, his family settled in Lubbock, and he grew up with stories

of Elvis and Hank Williams playing the Cotton Club, Buddy Holly's meteoric rise to fame, and the flat desolate horizons of the west Texas plains. "My mother put me on the fiddle when I was 11, but it wasn't for me. By then I'd found me a flat-top guitar. A guy down the street played guitar, and I'd listen to him for hours, he did solo stuff, Ventures mostly and Freddy King. His name was Bob Blasingame and he was a plumber who sold snap-on tools." School never seemed to mean much. "I guess I decided there wasn't anything in it for me. Two or three different times I would go off and come back again, until I finally really realized that was it. By then I was playing a bunch of little clubs, not thinking about it as a career or anything; it was just something to do to keep my mind off school. I think my parents had kind of given up on me by then. They knew I wasn't ever going to be a doctor or an architect or a lawyer."

He left home and played around Dallas and Houston and Fort Worth, finally leaving Texas altogether after a nasty experience at Houston's Cellar, where the clubowner pulled a gun on him. "I met a friend in Fort Worth, we wanted to get out of there as quick as we could, so we packed everything we had, put all our scratch together, and flew out to California, with my amp riding in the seat next to me. We walked from the airport to Venice, California, I don't think I even had a suitcase, all I can remember is switching

hands to carry the amp, and when we couldn't find the people that we were going to stay with that night, we slept on the beach, I used my amp as a pillow. I was 18."

With that began what sounds like 10 years in the wilderness, as Ely swung from coast to coast, janitoring in New York, washing dishes in California, hopping a ride to Europe with a theatrical troupe from Texas, settling temporarily in Austin, just riding the rails, and finally running off with the circus for a few weeks, where he took care of the spittin' llama and a couple of Arabian stallions, the world's smallest horse. "I have a lot of great memories from those times, little four-year-old kids juggling balls and practicing tightrope things, sleeping on the circus train, eating in the pie car with the world's smallest man, a little guy named Mishu. He could speak a little English, even though he's from Romania somewhere, and we were standing on the platform one time rolling into Amarillo, and he asked me to help him up, he couldn't see over the rail. I lifted him up so he could see, and over in the distance was the hospital where I was born. He took one look and said, 'Aw, this is such a sad town,' and then we pulled into the Rock Island station, where my grandfather worked for 40 years. It was the first time I'd been in Amarillo in a long time."

Ely quit the circus soon afterwards when he was kicked in the ribs by a jealous mare, picked fruit in New Mexico, and was heading back to Austin in 1974 when he stopped off in Lubbock "just to say hello. There was a club owner who needed a band for a couple of nights and I got together with Lloyd [Lloyd Maines, his current steel player] and Gregg [Gregg Wright, still the bass player in the band] and another guitar player, and all of a sudden everything started making sense. We were doing songs nobody ever heard before—*and they worked!*"

Within six months he had put together the rest of the core of his present band, guitarist Jesse Taylor and drummer Steve Keeton, with only accordionist Ponty Bone ("I talked to Ponty for a long time about playing with us, but he was having troubles with his old lady and trying to keep a day gig going") to follow shortly after the first album was completed. When he landed a recording contract with MCA in 1977 on the basis of a demo version of *Big Hotel* which Jerry Jeff Walker picked up, it seemed as if his belief in the accidental nature of selection was being borne out. "I guess I had to do a lot of insane little things to keep myself sane. For a long time I really didn't have any idea where I was going, it seemed like I was just the only one fool enough to keep on. Sometimes I might decide to be a painter or a poet or a sweeper—hell, I liked to sweep a whole lot—or anything else besides a picker, but always something would come along to catch my ear, I'd find bits and pieces and say, 'Oh, yeah.' Most of the time it would seem to be purely accidental that I'd find something to keep me going, but I never got discouraged, I just kept looking around, even if I had to look under rocks sometimes, just putting pieces of the puzzle together."

I count my blessings
I don't count my faults
And I like to dance like the dickens
To the West Texas Waltz

Obviously one of the key pieces of the puzzle was finding a band which shared his musical vision ("The trouble with other bands I was with was that they wanted to play what the other kids were hearing on the radio."). Not only do Joe Ely and this band go back a long way together ("I'd known Lloyd through the Caldwell Studio, and Gregg had always played bass in different bands when we were kids growing up"); they complement

each other both in terms of music and personality to a degree that the tightest musical units—Merle Haggard's Strangers, Bob Wills' Texas Playboys—achieve only after many years. They can pull changes with the best of the big bands, take off on adventurous solo flights, and swing right back into intricate, carefully arranged unison passages.

The songs, too, stem from a shared pool of experience, with every song but one on the first two albums written by either Ely, Butch Hancock, or Jimmie Dale Gilmore, at one time (1972-73) members of the loosely based Flatlanders, an acoustic country band that cut a few sides for Shelby Singleton. You'll find every kind of song in the Joe Ely band's repertoire; on stage they can range from their raucously aggressive version of Hank Williams' *Honky Tonkin'* to the autobiographical *I Had My Hopes Up High*, and back again to Bob Wills, Waylon Jennings, and the *Hesitation Blues*. In person, like a lot of bands on the honky tonk circuit that can play all night long, they have a repertoire of hundreds, maybe thousands of songs. What is really remarkable is that on two albums of the original material they have actually managed to suggest the sound and feel of a great live band, with most of the playing live in the studio and the production (by Nashville's resident rockabilly, Chip Young, who has also produced Delbert McClinton and Billy Swan) "more of a catching than a layering process." On the two albums I would say there are at least a dozen certifiable masterpieces, from the Jerry Lee Lewis-styled *Fingernails* ("I keep my fingernails long, so they click when I play the pi-anner") to lyrical love songs like *Because of the Wind* to the angry social commentary of *Boxcars* ("Well, I gave all my money to the banker this month/Now I got no more money to spend"). It's all there, as it so seldom is on record, all anchored by Joe Ely's bedrock sense of reality, the grit in his voice, the unforced assurance of his style.

What has it all added up to so far? Not much commercially, that's for sure. MCA has tried to break Ely as a straight country act, in the FM and progressive country markets, with limited success at best to date. He has traveled to England, gone out on a national promotion tour behind the second album ("MCA wasted their money"), amassed a complimentary series of clippings, and proved that audiences will respond to his music, even if they have encountered nothing like it before. When he played New York he and Delbert McClinton were the focus of a minor happening (Jimmy Buffett and John Belushi and Lee Clayton all showed up, and he and Delbert traded songs afterwards until the sun was coming up"), and when he played St. Louis, Chuck Berry himself sat in. Berry had been listening most of the night, saying he might get up on stage if he got the feeling. When told that it was after midnight and this was the last set, "he jumped right up and said, 'I just got the feeling right now,'" joining in on *Jambalaya* and *Mountain Dew*. If you're looking to see Joe Ely excited, this account might be as close as you'll get.

Outside of the music. "I never have played the same set twice. Some songs I want people to hear, so I play them. I try to get 'em out there as good as I can, whatever way feels right. I never have set an amp on fire yet—not to say I wouldn't. Some nights can be kind of rough—you have a big empty dance floor in front of you, but then you just have to say, 'The hell with it, I'm gonna play what I want to play.' I don't think I'd be up there if I didn't get *something* out of it... Yeah, really, it moves me a lot."

It's when he's talking about his music, his band, or his family ("I always did keep them in heart, it wasn't that I was trying to get away from anything, I just had some wandering to do") that his manner

(Continued on page 102)

WHEN THIS GAMBLER PLAYS, EVERYBODY WINS.

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Produced by Larry Butler

Hey Diddle-diddle, Who's That Playin' The Fiddle?!...

It's JANA JAE

"I will always credit Buck (Owens) for giving me a start. He took a pretty innovative step by bringing a woman fiddler into his group and he got a lot of criticism for doing it."

by JOHN G. WHITE

Blue flashes echoed and bounced from smiling shout-strained faces to the ceiling as fiddler Jana Jae moved intensely with the pace of *Orange Blossom Special.* People, crowded snugly, moved with her energy and music, tapped unheard time onto the tiles of the nightclub floor while their palms smashed a more voluminous rhythm into the smokey air. Anchored to the blurred blue fiddle, behind the whipsaw figments of the nearly invisible bow, Jana's ever present smile pulled deep on heartstrings to strengthen a special and growing relationship with new fans.

Appreciative and animated crowds are more commonplace for Jana Jae nowadays as she strives toward her dream of being the top of her profession.

The winner of the 1973 and 1974 National Oldtime Fiddler's Contest in Weiser, Idaho, Jana Jae jams with the top fiddlers in her profession.

Watching her on stage, smiling and bending with her sweet fiddle music, makes it difficult to believe she was once the concert mistress for the Boise [Idaho] Symphony, or that she was a serious student of classical violin. Jana, in fact, graduated with a degree in music from Colorado Women's College in Denver after a year of study at the Vienna Academy of Music. Before that she had won scholarships to Interlochen and to the International String Congress in Puerto Rico.

Classical violin wasn't her main love, nor was fiddling. It was more of a dual love affair of a child whose destiny was to play the small instrument in one art form or another. Jana was given her first violin when she was two-and-a-half years old by her parents, then students at the Julliard School of Music in New York. A later divorce and move with her mother to her grandparents home in Western Idaho brought Jana to the other side of her musical destiny.

There in the home of Frank Sprague, "a barn dance fiddler from Missouri," Jana found an empty knee and willing grandfather to teach her the rudiments of oldtime fiddling. "They had this grand old farm house with a large kitchen. After supper my grandmother would play the piano and we would play along with our fiddles," she remembers.

She was encouraged by her family to learn and to appreciate both classical and country music. "My mother wanted me to play both kinds of music and is the one really responsible for keeping me going. She insisted on the music camps and the fiddling competitions. She had no problems playing the two diverse styles of music and couldn't see why I should have any."

A few years after the Idaho move, her mother met and married farmer-country musician Joe Hopper who would further Jana's education in country fiddling. "Joe was so great. He taught me how to do show time fiddling and songs like *Black Mountain Rag* and *Orange Blossom Special,* Jana said.

Her family annually crowded into the audience to encourage Jana at the nearby National Oldtime Fiddler's Contest in Weiser, Idaho. Many of the top fiddlers in the nation made the Weiser event and Jana jammed and learned from them. "It was a male domain then. It was really tough to be a female fiddler. All the men would tell us to do it this way, or that. Gradually the attitudes changed as I jammed with Benny Thomasson, Junior Daugherty and some of the others. As the barriers broke down I wasn't a female fiddler to them anymore, I was just another fiddler."

After college Jana married and moved to Redding, California, to raise a family and teach private lessons. Homebound boredom and the desire to "reach out" led to a divorce and she began to teach in the Redding school system and to play her fiddle with a local bluegrass band. She continued to return to Weiser and won the Ladies division in 1973 and 1974.

It was 1974 when Jana was in the audience in Redding at a show that featured Buck Owens and his Buckeroos. Between sets she ushered her picture and a note backstage to Owens. Instead of ignoring her ploy, he invited her backstage and placed a fiddle in her hands. When he returned to the stage he brought Jana along to play *Orange Blossom Special.* Within two months he called her to his Bakersfield headquarters and she became, in Buck's words, "The world's first Buckarette."

This most important break was beneficial to her career, although it would bring eventual embarrassment.

"After I joined Buck's band everything

else stopped. From that point everything was full time. We went to a club in Denver where I was worked into the group. From there it was to Las Vegas for three weeks at the Frontier. Wayne Newton, who was signed to play the Sands, suddenly got sick and we were booked there for three weeks as his replacement. I loved it right from the first show. Buck has a real knack for using talent and for working everything down to perfection," Jana said.

Hee Haw was Jana's first national TV exposure. She was a regular for three years and toured with Owens in the off season. In 1977, the two exchanged wedding vows and entered a short, three-day marriage that brought Jana new and embarrassing national attention. Gossip columns and magazines chewed diligently into the full-page newspaper ads that Owens planted to convince his wife to return home.

"I gave things two or three tries," she said of the marriage. "That wasn't printed in the papers, but after all the publicity there were two or three good, hard tries—so I pretty well felt inside that I had done as much as I could and that I was ready to go on with my own thing. I have two children and had to make some sort of stable life for them.

"But, things always seem to work out for the best. I knew I just couldn't sit around and mope. I moved to Burbank. Then Jim Halsey invited me to Tulsa for a television appearance," Jana said.

That "audition" eventually led to her signing a contract with Halsey's firm and placed her with a stable of performers that included Roy Clark, Tammy Wynette, Mel Tillis, and the Oak Ridge Boys and many other top country music stars.

"After that I moved my home to Tulsa. It was more centrally located, and I wanted Jim and everyone else to know I was serious about my career," she said.

Halsey has high praise for Jana. "I have great expectations for her career.

You hear of women fiddle players, but for many it is mainly a gimmick. They will play a little bit of a hoedown or something, but Jana can play and play well. She can play anything from a classical sonata to country. Everyone she has performed with likes her, her music and the balance her act gives a show. I haven't yet booked her in a place where the people haven't wanted her to return."

The former concert mistress has made grand strides since joining the Halsey stable, including several national television appearances on *The Tonight Show, The Merv Griffin Show, Dinah!* and specials with Tony Orlando and Charley Pride. A second album is forthcoming and she is booked for a series of international music festivals in Europe and England. Back home it is nearly constant travel and nightclub dates, and her continuing *Hee Haw* appearances.

"This is a new thing for me," Jana said. "I feel like I'm learning a tremendous amount about this business. I will always credit Buck for giving me a start. He took a pretty innovative step by bringing a woman fiddler into his group and he got a lot of criticism for doing it."

Admittedly there aren't a wealth of known women fiddlers, but Jana's success has opened doors that have been traditionally closed. She said, "It has been something of a benefit and a disadvantage. I have had a lot of publicity because of the fact I am a woman. But, when it comes down to the nitty-gritty, people listen and if you're good they will appreciate what you are doing, and if you're bad it doesn't matter whether you are male or female."

Jana Jae's life has been full of music and diverse circumstances. "Now it is time for me to see where I can take it from here," she said. "Music is something in my life which I would never want to give up...not now, not ever."

For this small, effervescent woman who can so easily switch from the semi-classic *Flight of the Bumblebee* to *Sally Goddin,* these changes have brought her to new destinies and destinations. ■

WILL THE REAL BRENDA LEE PLEASE STAND UP: A Child Star's 20-year Search For Musical Identity

by ALANNA NASH

The late afternoon TV movie crawls to a close, and the screen fades to black for a commercial. Suddenly, the hot, lusty sounds of rockabilly explode the air: *My baby whispers in my ear, ummm, sweet nothin's...* Then the singer herself, nearly 20 years older than the day she recorded the song, smiles into the camera, holding *The Best of Brenda Lee*, 20 of her greatest hits, selected, she confides to the viewers, "especially for you." In eight weeks, the two-record album sold 200,000 copies. Brenda, now sitting before me in the flesh, cannot contain her delight as she tells me that. "So I'm selling the old, if I'm not selling the new," says this woman, who in the past years has earned eight gold records and six Grammy nominations. "At least I'm selling somewhere."

If the public is fonder of Brenda's old music than of her new, one reason could be they have no clear conception of what today's Brenda Lee is like. To start with, a lot of people cannot accept the fact that Brenda, named the world's top female vocalist year after year in the early '60s, recently celebrated her 34th birthday. To give you an example, "A woman came back after a show not long ago," Brenda remembers. "And she said, 'It's so great seeing you again. Do you remember where we met?' I said, 'Well, no.' She said, 'At the premiere of *Gone With the Wind*.'

"Well, I couldn't dispute her and say I couldn't have attended a premiere in 1939 since I wasn't even born until 1944, because people like that will stand there and argue with you all day, so I said, 'Wasn't it a wonderful movie? Clark Gable looked great, didn't he, and how terrible that Margaret Mitchell got killed crossing the street.' I have no idea who she confused me with."

Such things shocked Brenda when they first began occurring. But that's what happens when you've been around for 28 years, having started singing professionally at age 6 and recording at 10, and getting your first hit at 14. So by now the anachronistic faux pas and the misidentification still occasionally surprise her, but at least Brenda understands the reasons for them. Sometimes she even finds them humorous. "Another woman asked me, didn't I use to go under the name of Molly Bee," she says. "I *loved* that one!"

Brenda Lee is, you might say, currently between stages of her career.

The old one ended about mid '77, when Brenda asked to be released from her contract with MCA Records, the company she'd been with for 21 years. "I left because I felt there wasn't a place for me there anymore," she explains with a wistful sigh. "When Owen (Owen Bradley, her longtime producer) retired, I got it in the back of my mind to leave. I missed that one-on-one, family situation. It was kind of like divorcing, really," she says of the parting. "They've been good to me, and it was very friendly. No one asked me to leave. But at this point in my career, I felt this was the thing for me to do."

Before even inquiring, one knows the catalyst for Brenda's leaving was **L.A. Sessions**, her last American album for MCA, released late '76. True to its title, the LP was recorded in California, with Snuff Garrett producing, the man who brought you Cher and Tanya Tucker, among others. To say **L.A. Sessions** was a departure from previous Brenda Lee albums, or that it was disappointing, is a gross understatement. Aside from *Ruby's Lounge* and *Oklahoma Superstar*, the material dealt with such cheery topics as insanity, cheating, shacking up and gangbangs in lumberjack camps. The songs were done up, for the most part, in pop, easy-listening and supper-club arrangements. One critic closed his scathing review of the album with, "Somebody really ought to Snuff Garrett."

The idea behind it, supposedly, was "to do a new crossover image with Brenda Lee," she says. What that essentially meant was that MCA thought the time

Child star Brenda Lee and her singing idol Elvis Presley.

was right to reintroduce Brenda to the pop audience, especially to the age group that watches *Midnight Special* and *Rock Concert* and might be too young to remember Brenda's early rock successes. Enter Snuff Garrett, whom Brenda had known as a disc jockey in Texas when she was a little girl, to try to alleviate Brenda's big image problem—which is, of course, that she's not 45 years old; but a mere 34. (She is aware that her rather "establishment" mode of dress and hairstyle could be obstacles with the 13 to 18 age group, but says, "It's not me to go out in a pair of blue jeans and a blouse cut down to my navel and beads around my neck, and I wouldn't do that even if they told me it would make me the number one singer in the world.") But **L.A. Sessions** did little to dispell the myth that Brenda is ready for Medicare. Nor, really, did it build her a new audience. In fact, it came close to alienating her long-time fans. Although Brenda Lee is a superior song stylist and interpreter, and possesses one of the best and most expressive voices in the history of popular music, she cannot sell a song she doesn't believe in. And there was precious little to believe in on **L.A. Sessions.**

A year later, Brenda had seen the error of her ways, and she was no longer pleased. "We had two weeks to look for material," she remembers. "Most of the songs turned out to be in-house (written by people connected with the session). I felt the material was foreign to Brenda Lee. It didn't fit me, and I wasn't comfortable with it."

Then, early in '78, she thought her career was finally going to receive the direction it needed, when David Skepner, Loretta Lynn's manager, took Brenda on as his only other client, and began negotiations for her with Elektra Records. The first months of the year found Brenda in Wishbone Studios in Muscle Shoals, Alabama, where producer Terry Woodford had her trying on every musical coat from cheating songs (again) to disco, leading her in three grueling sessions through intricate vocal phrasing that threw Brenda time and time again. Sitting in the control room and watching the small figure in the studio go through the phrases again and again as Woodford punched them in, it was clear to me that although Brenda was desperate to rejuvenate her career with a hit single, her difficulty with the phrasing was no more than subconscious rebellion against Woodford's obvious disregard for the real Brenda Lee.

"My gut feeling was that what they were doing with me was not Brenda Lee," she says. "It was a creation of other people's ideas of what *they* thought Brenda Lee should be. The sessions we did in Muscle Shoals had good musicians and it was good material, but it was terribly overproduced. They tried to make me something I was not. If you turned on the radio and heard that single, it would have sounded like any other girl singer. You wouldn't have said, 'Hey, that's Brenda Lee's new record.' I've always been proud of having a very identifiable sound and style, and I don't think it was there on those records."

When Elektra finally released a single in the spring, and then did nothing to promote it, Brenda knew it was time again to move on. At the end of '78, she was negotiating with another record company, but this time without Skepner's help. "We didn't close the door with getting back with David, but at this point in my career, there's really nothing to manage," she says. "And we just felt until we could get the recording thing straightened out, we were spinning our wheels. It was a very friendly, amicable thing, and I'm sure later on David will fit back into the picture."

Despite all that, Brenda says her attitude is better now than it's been in three years. "I don't think I was ever frustrated about not having a hit record, but I was certainly depressed about my career. Not depressed that I wasn't doing anything, because I was." (Brenda, Nashville's first international star, is a huge success in Japan, where she does an annual, record-breaking sell-out tour, and where she has a "jazzier" image than in the United States. Recently, she became the first American artist to cut an album there, using Japanese arrangements and musicians.) "But," she continues, "I wasn't really happy with what I was doing because I wasn't being directed correctly. Managers and record companies and publicists do all that, and not being with a record company for the last two years has been a little frustrating, although I've done a lot of TV—an hour special in Canada with the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra that'll be syndicated here, *Merv Griffin*, *Dinah*, *Mike Douglas*, and the Glen Campbell special, to name a few. What I'm concentrating on now is finding good material, and when I find it, I'll go in the studio and cut it and be ready when the deal does come through. The next 18 months will tell the story, and then if it doesn't happen, I think I can just lay back and rest on what I've done. Which," she says with a little laugh, "you're not really supposed to do, but why not? There are other avenues—I want to write a book—but mainly, I just wanna sing. I think

there's a Brenda Lee market out there—an old Brenda Lee market and a new one. Because there's a lot of youth out there that has no preconceived ideas of what and who Brenda Lee is. That's exciting to me."

Although Brenda forged her initial reputation in the late '50s and '60s with ballads and rock 'n' roll, or rockabilly, she has since recorded and sung everything except gospel since, with pop, country, rhythm and blues, standards, Christmas songs and foreign language hits to her credit—85 million records sold in all. But to anyone who has followed her only since the early '70s, when the success of her rendition of Kris Kristofferson's *Nobody Wins* caused her to be played only on the country stations (and pushed country by her record company), her last American product might possibly be interpreted as an abandonment of the music and people who boosted Brenda's career in a period when she admits she "wasn't exactly setting the woods on fire."

Brenda says nothing could be farther from the truth. But it takes a bit of explaining.

"In 1969, after I had my last baby," she begins in the Georgia accent she went to speech school to try to soften, "music had changed again since the Beatles. It had gone in another radical direction, and I didn't feel there was a place for me. There was no demand for female vocalists. And I felt like I could not do the material that was being done, and, in fact, I wasn't submitted any good material. So I just decided to take a sort of hiatus and decide where I wanted to go and if I even really wanted to do it. When I started back recording with Owen in 1971, we put out *Nobody Wins*, and it went top ten country. But it was the same Brenda Lee formula that we'd used for years and years with pop, with *As Usual* and *Too Many Rivers* and lots of others. Then *Sunday Sunrise* and *Big Four Poster Bed* went top ten, too. There wasn't any concerted move to make them country. I just sang the way I'd always sung. But I'm certainly glad that happened." (Brenda's association with country music goes back to 1956, when Red Foley put her on his *Junior Jubilee* TV show. "I was on TV before I even *had* a TV," Brenda says. That same year, Brenda landed the Decca (MCA) contract after "just about every other label turned me down. It was hard to sell a child in those days.")

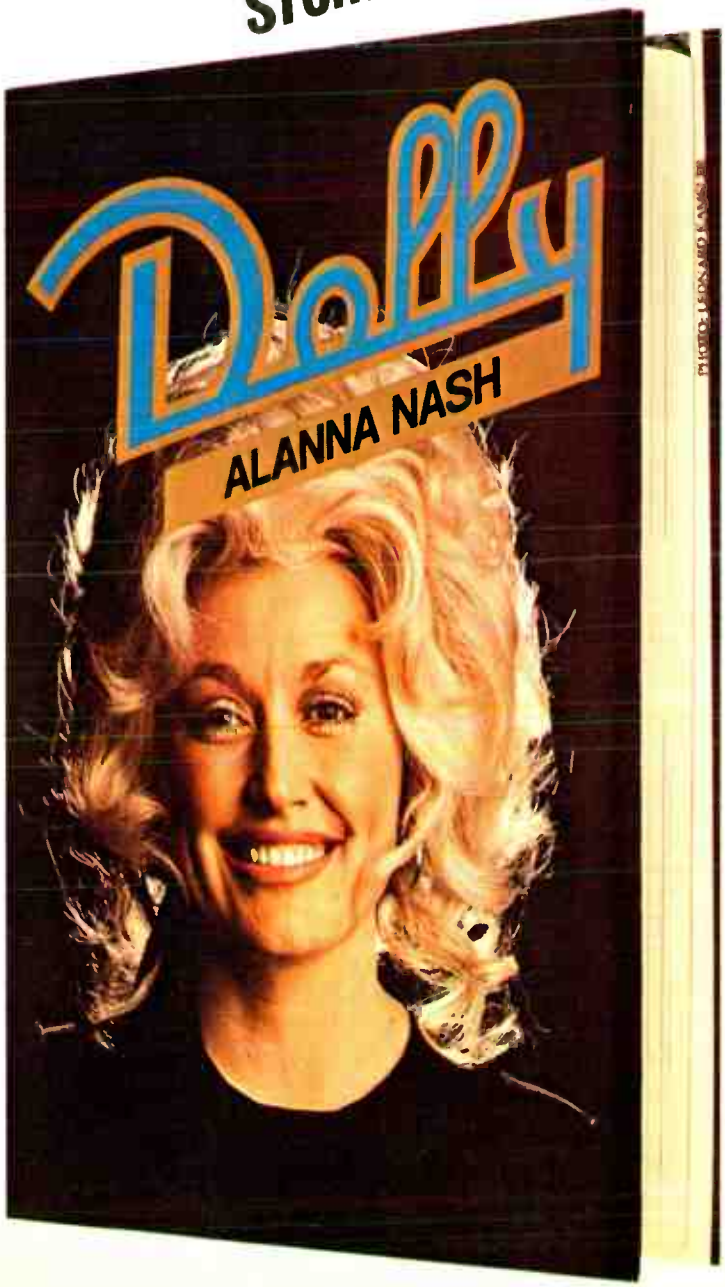
Even though she's always sung everything and hates to be categorized, Brenda says she has retained a country base—and hopes to continue doing so. "I'm very proud to have that stable, steady country base, 'cause when you have that, you don't worry about gettin' a pop record too much," she explains. "If it comes, it comes, but you can count on the country disc jockeys to play your record whether it's a durn monster or not. And you can count on the country people. They're more loyal. My main objective is to play for those people, 'cause that's who gave me everything I have. And that's why I like to play the little fairs and small towns that a lot of people won't play. Those are the people who buy the records. The people who come to Las Vegas to see the shows don't necessarily support you and go buy every record you bring out. That's why the country fans are so great."

Ironically, while the country fans have stayed behind Brenda, she feels that her country peers in Nashville never really accepted her—not even in the days she thought she was categorized. "I wasn't asked to be on any of the awards shows, I wasn't included in anything," she says, a look of genuine disappointment showing on her face. "I talked to a few female vocalists in the country field who are good friends of mine, and I said, 'I don't understand this.' And they said, 'Why you're not country! We all want to be what you are. It's not meant as a slam, but we just feel that you're not limited to the field.' That was so frustrating to me, because darn, after all, country's my heritage! I *am* country. I'm from the country, born and raised there." (Brenda,

(Continued on page 101)

DOLLY

THE NEW ILLUSTRATED STORY OF Dolly Parton



Skeptics disclaim her, fans adore her, but whatever she is, none can ignore her. Dolly Parton's star is on the rise, and now author Alanna Nash makes us part of Dolly's dazzling success story in this intimate new biography that fans have long awaited.

Based on interviews with Dolly herself, and with others who have known her all her life, DOLLY reads like a true Cinderella story – one of twelve children growing up in the Smokey Mountains of Tennessee, the first album for Monument Records, her big break with the Porter Wagoner Show, one of the first platinum albums by a female country music singer. But above all, Ms. Nash takes us beyond the flashy exterior to reveal the true Dolly – a bright, articulate woman who knows exactly what she wants and where she is going.

Dolly is currently music's most visible songstress, but she still wants to write, produce, direct and star in her own movie. Will Dolly's staying power with her new found pop audience be as strong as it has proved to be in Nashville? Once you've read DOLLY, you know she'll do it all.

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Records

Johnny Cash
Gone Girl
KC-35646

Ever since his ill-fated venture with **The Rambler** a couple of records back, Johnny Cash has obviously been rethinking his music, and the results have been especially gratifying. It's very, very rare that an artist of Cash's stature can look back at his music, sift the wheat from the chaff and put the old train back on the track.

Gone Girl is so back on the track that it's scary—this is a great album, low-key, unpretentious and right on target. It's Cash, I think, at his best, working with material that he genuinely likes and working with a group of people who know how to embroider on that Voice From On High. There's the regulars—the Carters, Jan Howard, Marshall Grant on bass, W.S. Holland on drums, Bob Wooton and Jerry Hensley on guitars of various sorts, and Earl Ball on piano—but there's also Jack Clement knocking around in there, doing his off-beat harmonies and keeping things from getting too serious.

The centerpieces of the album are Cash's renditions of Clement's *Gone Girl* and Billy Ray Reynold's *It'll Be Her*. Both songs have an almost bemused quality, a lilt, if you can believe it, and Cash captures that quality perfectly—as he did in last album's **I'd Really Like To See You Again**.

There's also a country version of Mick Jagger and Keith Richard's *No Expectations*, and it's *good*: I had to listen to it twice just to let it sink in. Somehow, the rhythms and phrasing remind me of *Big River*, a sort of the Rolling Stones meets Sam Phillips.

Couple of other interesting points: *I Will Rock And Roll With You*, a sort of ode to the Sun days, with some *bad* guitar playing that'd do Memphis 1955 proud—"A world of wierdos waiting in the wings," indeed, *Cajun Born*, proving that even a Cajun beat can't deter that Cash juggernaut for long. *You And Me*, a duet with June Carter (no surprises there).

There's a lyric in *A Song For The Life*, written by Rodney Crowell, that goes something like "I've finally found a song for the life I live," and I think that Cash has done that. Sometimes he tries and fails, but with each record he grows as an artist. And I can't help but contrast that to Sun-mate Elvis Presley, who tried to keep it all frozen forever and succeeded only in dying. Elvis isn't the only boy who dared to rock.

—MICHAEL BANE

Gail Davies
Lifesong
KZ 35504

If Gails Davies looks a bit smug on the cover of her debut LP, it's all right, because this is an impressive, double-barrelled bow. Not only is Davies a gifted songwriter, she's an exceptional, *anoelic* singer, and with one LP she could easily establish herself as a top contender for Linda Ronstadt's pop/country crown. Comparisons with Ronstadt are especially valid; their material is virtually interchangeable—Ronstadt in fact would be right at home with a Davies composition—and on occasion they sound quite alike. Davies, however, is the superior vocalist. Her voice is deeply steeped in country tradition, and marvelously rich and emotive—if any singer could be said to "tug at your heartstrings", it's Davies.

Davies' best songs are her most personal, the ones that she's closest to, but she bridges any gap that might create through her sincerity and compassion, and a knack for a lingering, infectious melody

coupled with an easy, precise lyric. "The feelin' is gone/ We're draggin' it on/What can I say, it's over..." she sings in *What Can I Say*, while *Grandma's Song*, *Bucket to the South*, and *Soft Spoken Man* all abound with splendid, almost archetypal childhood/ nostalgic images that she tenderly brings to life.

On the other hand, while Davies can be tender or sentimental without being mawkish or corny, her sweetness can also work against her. Every song here is a love song of sorts, which tends to overbalance the album. A bit more variety would be welcome—and there's every indication that Davies can deliver it next time around. Gail Davies is a major talent, with a bright future ahead of her.

BRUCE PALEY

Tanya Tucker
TNT
MCA 3066

Don't be mislead by the sexy promo campaign. Apparently hoping to follow Dolly Parton's crossover lead, MCA is trying to spice up Tanya's image for a larger audience, while giving her the Big Push. Thankfully, however, it isn't "Push push in the bush," or a graduate discourse from the Donna Summers' School of Multi-Orgasmic Disco. It is, in essence, the same Tanya we've come to love, and while she's grown up a bit, the pipes are as powerful and passionate, and she's as gutsy and confident, as ever.

What mars this LP, in fact, besides some weak material, is Jerry Goldstein's slick and erratic overproduction, which quells any real excitement or spontaneity the album might have had. Tanya has to constantly fight his sterile arrangements. Furthermore, in aiming at the pop charts, Goldstein and MCA have for the most part ignored the country side of Tanya, while taking a "Something for everyone" approach. Consequently, the album lacks any cohesive musical identity.

Heartbreak Hotel typifies this. Tanya always wanted to be the female Elvis, and when she gets a chance to strut her stuff, she matches the King shot for shot, but Goldstein's quirky, gimmicky, arrangement (and a plodding, aimless quitar solo), literally interrupt

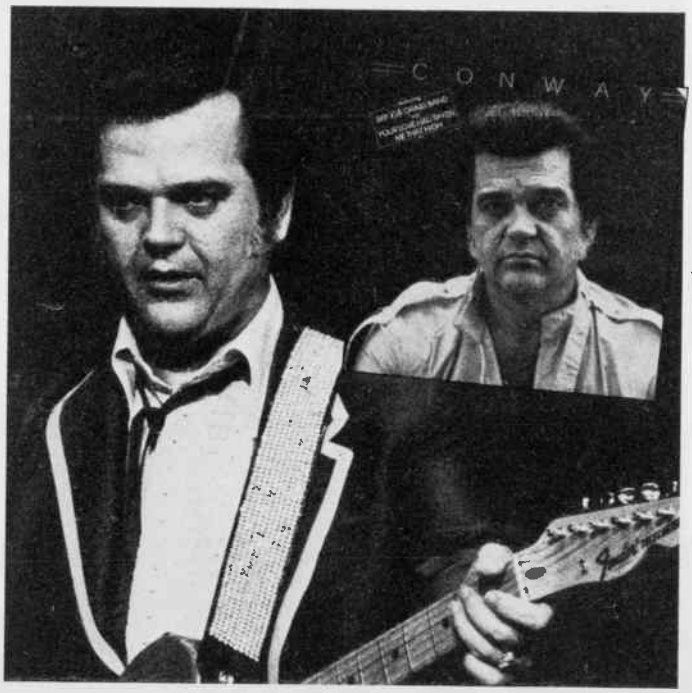
the flow of the song, and it never takes off the way it should. Things are a bit looser, and Tanya fares better, on the other uptempo tunes, especially Chuck Berry's *Brown Eyed Handsome Man* and Phil Everly and Joey Paige's *Lover Goodbye*, either of which would make a better single than the umpteenth remake of Buddy Holly's *Not Fade Away*. On the aforementioned tunes, Goldstein takes a back seat, and left alone, Tanya's as hot, gritty, enthusiastic, and untamed a rock'n'roll singer as any in the business—male or female.

On the other side of the coin, Tanya scores heavily with a few moody ballads. *I'm the Singer, You're the Song* is a powerful, moving piece she cowrote with Goldstein, and, *Angel From Montgomery* achieves a disturbing, haunting intensity that is barely hinted at in John Prine's original. On Goldstein's *Nice to be With You*, Tanya has to overcome a lush, string-laden arrangement to bring the song home.

Essentially, Tanya herself can seemingly do no wrong, handling, even transcending anything thrown at her with the skill and apparent ease of the truly gifted professional she is. No doubt this LP will make it's mark on the pop charts, but in the hands of a more sympathetic producer and with the right musicians, Tanya might very well one day set those same charts afire, much like a certain Hillbilly Cat did some 20-odd years ago.

BRUCE PALEY

Conway Twitty
Conway
MCA-3063



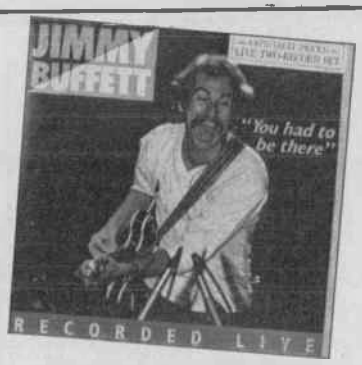
About two years ago, while reviewing **Conway Twitty's Greatest Hits, Vol. II**, I praised Conway for his consistency. That sort of effusive praise can be a dangerous move for a critic, since an artist can begin churning out mediocre material for one reason or another, making the critic seem an idiot. But after listening to **Conway**, I'm positive I was right, for it is easily one of the best albums of the year, if not *the* best.

Every instrument, every arrangement, every song is literally perfect. The instrumentation is traditional Twitty, heavy on steel guitar and fiddle. Yet it's used in creative ways beyond the standard progressions and beats, such as a churning, semi-disco arrangement of Troy Seals' pungent *One Night Honeymoon* that dovetails perfectly with the back street affair lyrics. Ronnie Reno's *Boogie Grass Band*, which manages to spell out the connection between Bill Monroe and the Allman Brothers so that it makes perfect sense, is equally well-arranged. *Julie* is more than another lost-love lament. It's actually a three-and-a-half-minute drama. The rockabilly *That's All She Wrote* was inspired by the old Tex Ritter tune *Dear John*, but hearkens back to Twitty's days in the shadow of Presley. His tongue-in-cheek rendition of Sonny Throckmorton's *You Were Named Correspondent (In A Divorce Suit Today)* has all the raffish humor of Little Jimmy Dickens' old records.

As all too many country singers take the plunge into the pop market or onto the Outlaw bandwagon at the expense of their roots, it's comforting to know that a precious few can continue doing what they do best and grow with the times as well. Conway is one of them, as this ablum so admirably shows.

RICH KIENZLE

Jimmy Buffett
You Had To Be There
ABC AK-1008/2



One of Jimmy Buffett's best qualities has always been his sardonic perception, his ability to view such potentially mundane things as trailers and drinking with a wickedly subtle sense of humor, then translate them into songs like *Grapefruit-Juicy Fruit* and *Why Don't We Get Drunk (And Screw)*.

At the same time, he is able to write such touchingly beautiful songs as *The Captain and The Kid* and *Come Monday*.

The problem has always been that his audiences have always seemed to appreciate *only* the trash, putting up with the sensitive just so their cult-hero will do the raunchy. And Buffett seems to have finally given in to their demands.

You Had to Be There is a double album, recorded live at Atlanta's Fox Theater and Miami's Maurice Gusman Cultural Center.

Instead of showing us the best of Buffett, it seems only to reflect his weariness with the whole show-biz shebang, as he caters to his audience's demand for the adolescent. His on-stage patter is embarrassing and often too-lengthy. As with most performers who sing the same songs over and over again, he often offers relief with a change of lyrics. Unfortunately, most of the changes are just plain dumb; and although they may come across at a one-time live performance, forever imbedded in vinyl as they have been, they will remain, forever dumb.

Nobody does raunchy songs better than Buffett. And there's nothing wrong with raunch. But Buffett seems to be rubbing his audiences' nose in it, as if to say, "That's what you want, that's *all* you're gonna get!"

Judging from the audience cheers on the album (very distracting, by the way), this is all the audience wants, so Buffett obviously has a good sense of his listeners. It's too bad, though, because he once had a much better sense of what *he* liked, and if it wasn't commercial, to hell with it.

Anyway, enough philosophizing about where he went wrong. Some of Buffett's best is on this album, including the four previously mentioned as well as *A Pirate Looks At Forty*, *Pencil Thin Mustache*, *Changes in Attitudes, Changes in Latitudes* and one of his favorites, *He Went to Paris*. There are also a few previously unrecorded selections, including his ever-popular (and hilarious) *Why Don't We Get Drunk (And Screw)* and *Perrier Blues*, a sort of dumb ode to the bubbly water.

Possibly, the title is indicative that Buffett's sardonic sense of humor is still at work. Maybe after he listened to it he realized that—as an album—it just doesn't work. **You Had to Be There**—get it?

This is one time, however, where he should've forgotten his sense of humor, forgotten this album, in fact, and released a **Best of Jimmy Buffett.**

MARY ELLEN MOORE

David Allan Coe
Human Emotions
KC35535

It's really a shame that David Allan Coe's image so overwhelms his songs. If anybody else had put out an album of this caliber, it would be instantly hailed as purely great country music.

But because it's Coe, and because he's written terribly self-conscious, self-pitying liner notes which explain the album's relation to the recent departure of one his wives well, it's a little hard to take.

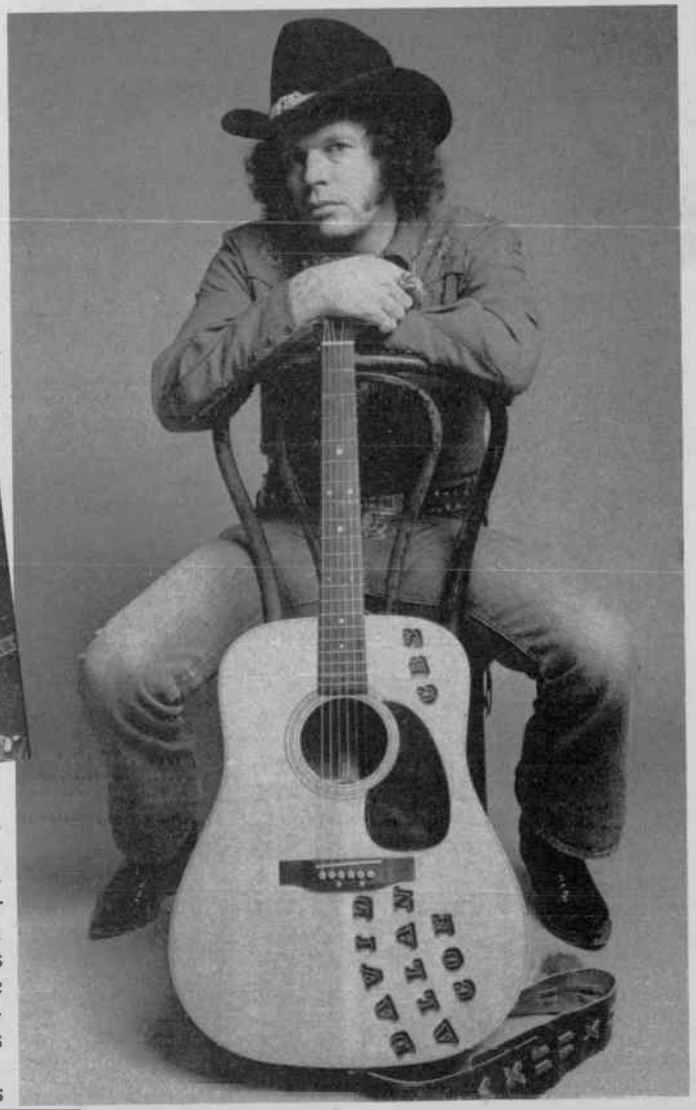
So just for a moment, let's forget Coe, the man, and concentrate on the album.

The "Happy Side" contains the latest version of his *Would You Lay With Me (In A Field of Stone)* and a few others that would do a hillbilly proud, particularly *If This is Just A Game*. The Steve Goodman-esque *Tomorrow is Another Day* is a lighthearted look at things that go wrong, and it's hard to believe that it's the same man singing this mariachi-type tune who then sings his plaintive second side.

The "Sui-I-Side" contains some of the best cry-in-your Jack Daniels stuff this side of George Jones. Dismissing *Human Emotions* as too self-conscious and *Suicide* as too vulgarly punk, it still leaves *(She Finally Crossed Over) Love's Cheatin' Line*, *Whiskey & Women* and *Jack Daniels®* , *If You Please*. All three could become classics, if...

If it were anyone else but Coe singing them. So forget for a few more minutes it's Coe, sit back and listen to the album. Maybe, you'll find yourself liking the man a bit more

MARY ELLEN MOORE



Freddy Weller
Love Got In The Way
Columbia KC35658

If you're one of those doubting Thomases who can't believe that a former rocker can change into a sincere country singer, swallow your prejudices and listen to Freddy Weller prove you wrong.

Weller's *Bar Wars* is a wonderfully blatant Star Wars

rip-off. It's hilarious, and it's pure country twang all the way.

Both the good-naturedness and the twang appear throughout the album, usually together. Weller can out-twang the best of them, yet for some reason he seems to hold back, cutting loose only on the more tongue-in-cheek cuts, such as *Bar Wars*, *Rock-A-Bye-Baby* (which could become a country standard in the George Jones vein) and his countrified version of one of his all-time greatest of the bubblegum era, *Dizzy*. (Who says Brooklynites have a monopoly on bubblegum?)

Weller sounds like a junior George Jones in his duet with Lorrie Morgan, *Love Got In The Way*, a good solid country-jerker. Lorrie, on the other hand, sounds like a junior Janie Fricke, and the duet is one of the best cuts on the album.

Weller was country before he was a rocker, yet too many people apparently think his return to country was a move to capitalize on country music's rising popularity. And they won't let the poor guy forget his digression into rock 'n roll. But Weller outcountries even his best rock, and should be forgiven his sins.

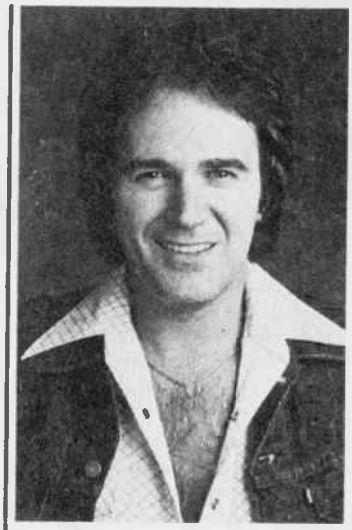
And just to set the record straight, he's included what has to be one of the most personal songs recorded—and in country music, you *know* that's saying a lot. The plaintive *Legend of Paul Revere and The Raiders* (good-natured plaintive, not self-pitying by any means) says it all, concluding with an up-date on the rest of the Raiders:

*Now Paul's big in land deals
And Mark is a company exec
Y'know the world keeps on turning
And the cards came unstacked in the deck.
And I sing country music
And old guitar Keith's still the best
So long live the Legend of Paul Revere and the Raiders...

Rave on, Freddy!

MARY ELLEN MOORE

*Young World Music (BMI)



T. G. Sheppard
Daylight
Warner BSK-3259

The high point of this second T.G. album on Warner Brothers is a honky-tonk version of the Turtles' old standard, *Happy Together*, which oughta keep jukeboxes humming across the South for a while.

The low point is yet another version of *I'd Like To See Jesus On The Midnight Special*, and even T.G.'s incredible country voice can't save that tuna fish. I'd rather see Moses on *The Gong Show*, myself.

But seriously, folks, the great thing about T.G. Sheppard is his voice, a honey-and-molasses vehicle for describing third-rate romances and low-rent rendezvous. If there is such a thing as a bedroom voice, T.G. Sheppard could be said to have a *motel* bedroom voice. Whether he's explaining why he won't *do it*, as in *Let's Keep It That Way*, how much he wants to *do it* again, such as *When Can We Do This Again*, or even what happens when you *do it* too much in *Daylight*, he is totally, swooningly convincing.

With the advent of country disco and crossover rabies, the grand ole cheatin' song is an endangered species, and for no other reason than that we need to cherish our honest, gutsy country singers like T.G. Sheppard. Bring that man another whiskey!

MICHAEL BANE

Tom T. Hall
"Places I've Done Time"
RCA APL1 3018

It is difficult to say exactly why this record is so affecting. Tom T. Hall does not possess one of the great voices of all time. His tunes have been accused, with some justification, of tending to a certain similarity, and there is nothing sparkling or innovative about the production or arrangement here.

Still, it is a record that is a pleasure to play again and again, and in many ways the deficiencies are part of its charm: Hall's voice conveys authenticity and lack of pretension. The simple melodies are the right vehicles for the weight of the words, and the vanilla production does not clutter or spoil the thrust of the material.

The strength, of course, is in his songs—eight of the ten are Hall originals—and while they are as inconsistent in quality as much of his recent work is, the high points are high indeed. They include *The Man Who Shot Himself*, the cheerful *Son of Clayton Delaney* and *The Three Sofa Story*. All, as with his best work, are songs that draw meaning from small, localized, specific instances, and are detailed with skill and understated feeling.

Less successful are his current chart record *What Have You Got To Lose*, another beery saga, *I Couldn't Live In Southern California*, a slightly soggy love song with some high points, and *The Great East Broadway Onion Championship of 1978* which strives to be cheery and blustery, but ends up forced.

Still, despite its unevenness, **Places I've Done Time** is a compelling album, largely for the reasons which have made Tom T. Hall a major country writer and entertainer for a decade now: his ability to tell a great story in song. Not every one of his stories is a great one, but at his best the Storyteller has lost none of his magic.

DOUGLAS B. GREEN

Bobby Bare
Sleeper Wherever I Fall
KC 35465

One facet of Bobby Bare I've always admired tremendously is that he doesn't take a "hit" single, throw it together with nine or ten fillers and have the audacity to call that an album, like far too many country artists do, far too often. Thus, it's always a treat to see what Bare has come up with each time: a *Rosalie's Good Eats Cafe* here, a *That's How I Got To Memphis* there; almost like the office Santa Claus dipping into his bag and handing out everyone his or her own special little gift.

But a funny thing happened to Bobby on the way to his latest album, **Sleeper Wherever I Fall**. Somebody switched bags. And when Bare got to the studio this time he reached in and found the bag...well, not entirely empty. There *are* a few good cuts on this one; after all, Bare is too talented to come up *completely* empty. But as a whole, **Sleeper** just doesn't have the songs (or the production) to be the top quality album I was hoping for.

A couple of counts not only disappoint, but downright irritate. One, Tracy Nelson, who can shatter speakers with her clarion-like pipes, is far less prominently featured than billed. Not only is there no *After The Fire Is Gone* type duets, al la Tracy and Willie, but on some cuts she is barely distinguishable at all. Two, Bare includes the early Rolling Stones classic, *The Last Time*, and naturally has to make the obligatory endorsement, "It's the most country song on the album." I guess that all started back when Buck Owens did *Bridge Over Troubled Water* because he realized it was "country in disguise." But just once I'd like to see an artist say, "This song doesn't have a thing to do with country music, but I wanted to do it anyway, because I've always been a closet Top 40 artist." That way, if we didn't necessarily get a good song (and Bare's doing Mick Jagger is less than successful), at least we'd get some honesty.

Bobby Bare, the artist who once cut the landmark album, **A Bird Called Yesterday** is certainly capable of providing more next time.

JOHN PUGH

BURIED TREASURES

by RICH KIENZLE

It's doubtful that even Bill Monroe ever expected bluegrass to become the industry that it has, with scores of festivals, concerts and a veritable legion of small bluegrass labels. Though many such labels release only one or two titles annually, their combined output each year is considerable. Rounder, the Boston-based specialty label, has become one of the most prestigious bluegrass labels in the space of a few years, issuing repackages of classic material as well as new recordings. Their repackages are some of the finest anywhere, such as **Bill Monroe with Flatt and Scruggs: The Original Bluegrass Band,** (Special Series 06) which reissues (in conjunction with CBS) some of the definitive Monroe recordings from 1946 and 1947, when Flatt and Scruggs were revolutionizing the art as members of the Bluegrass Boys. The program, made up of such classic Columbia sides as *Heavy Traffic Ahead*, *Molly And Tenbrooks* and *My Rose of Old Kentucky* is characterized by superb sound, and is an essential bluegrass record.

Rounder also has repackages of classic material by the Osborne Brothers. In some ways the Osbornes were the first "new-grass" band through their use of electric instruments and drums. **The Osborne Brothers and Red Allen** (Special Series 03) features their earliest MGM recordings from 1956 to 1958, including the original version of *Ruby*. **The Osborne Brothers** (Special Series 04) summarizes their 1959-1963 output when they first began experimenting with electric instruments. Newer Rounder recordings include **Tasty Licks** (Rounder 0106) a pleasant young group with both traditional and progressive overtones. **John Hickman** (Rounder 0101) features an excellent banjoist through 12 instrumentals backed by the virtuoso fiddle of Byron Berline.

Gusto Records, the Nashville-based concern that owns the King and Starday catalogs has also released new recordings of prominent bluegrassers, including the legendary Jimmy Martin, represented with **Me 'n Ole Pete** (Gusto GD-5024X). Two songs, an original and one by Tom T. Hall, are tributes to Martin's coonhunting dog, who even chimes in on the first song (did he get union scale?), along with ten other fairly standard bluegrass numbers.

One of the strangest geniuses in American music was an elusive individual named Harmonica Frank Floyd, who combined the classic talking blues style, black blues and a radically individualistic harmonica style into a sound that managed to sound both black and white simultaneously. He also pioneered the "eef-ing" Jimmy Riddle and Jackie Phelps engage in on *Hee-Haw*. All this can be heard through his classic recordings from 1951 to 1958 on the reissue **The Great Original Recordings of Harmonica Frank** (Puritan 3003), which includes a fascinating pamphlet about Floyd's life.

The rockabilly reissues continue to trickle in from Europe. **MCA Rockabilly Classics, Vol. 3** (MCA MCFM 2833) is a British set with classic rock performances by Buddy Covelle, boogie pianists Roy Hall and Moon Mullican (both of whom influenced Jerry Lee Lewis) and Red Sovine's 1956 *Juke Joint Johnny*, easily his best single recording. An unusual set released domestically is **Ohio Rockabilly** (Hamilton 5877), featuring such bonafide obscurities as Bobby Martin and Hoyt Webb playing primitive, sloppy and utterly delightful rocking country. *The Rock And Roll Carpenter* by Emery Blades (!) is unbelievable, as is Bobby Martin's *Dood It*.

A fine Western Swing set I missed last month is **The Light Crust Doughboys** (Aolt 101), made up of some of their best performances from the thirties and forties on Okeh and Vocalion (available from Keith Kolby, 6604 Chapel Lane Fort Worth, Texas 76135). ■

Charley Pride
Burgers And Fries/ When I Stop Leaving I'll Be Gone
RCA APL 1-2893

Charley Pride's last few records have been missing something. None have really been bad, but they've shown him frequently slipping into an easy-listening rut in spite of himself. The immediacy of *Snakes Crawl At Night*, *Just Between You And Me* and *Is Anybody Goin' To San Antone* simply hasn't been in evidence. Much of this album shows him still struggling with shallow material and cliched arrangements, but a few songs do give cause for optimism.

Burgers And Fries, for example, has strong lyrics, but is dragged down by a pedestrian rhythm and dull arrangements as well as too much restraint on Charley's vocal. Most of side one follows that pattern. *The Best In The World*, *Whose Arms Are You In Tonight*, *Nothing's Prettier Than Rose Is* and *Mem'ries* are all fair, if unexciting songs saddled with mediocre formula arrangements that border on being mere filler.

Side two fares somewhat better. *When I Stop Leaving (I'll Be Gone)*, with its crisp, Memphis-styled horn arrangements owes more to Otis Redding and Memphis than it does to Nashville, but it works. The sound is not alien to today's more varied country sounds, and the infusion of R & B is a revelation. *I Can See The Lovin' In Your Eyes* also has a bit more of the Pride spirit, as does *Where Do I Put Her Memory* and *Just Snap Your Fingers*, an excellent John Schweers composition.

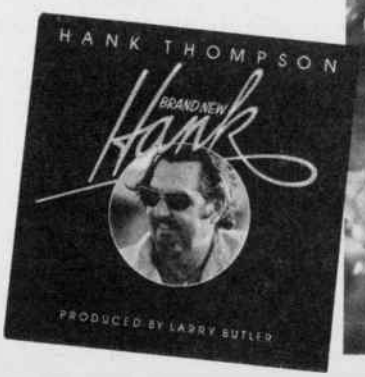
Even at his most uninspiring, Charley is above average, but if **When I Stop Leaving** is any indication, he's getting his second wind. Hopefully his next album will reflect it the whole way through.

RICH KIENZLE

Hank Thompson
"Brand New Hank"
ABC AY-1095

Occasionally the arrangements wash out good lyrics or the insistent let's-dance-or-else rhythms beat too stridently against the ear, but this is still—Praise the Lord!—more "Grand Old Hank" than the **Brand New Hank** the cover threatens.

For good-time, old-time, head-swaying music, you can't ask for better than *I Hear the South Callin' Me*, R. C. Bannon and John Bettis's joyously hokey testimonial to a land that never existed outside of MGM musicals. (Phil Harris would love it.) Almost as jumping—and just as graphically engaging—is Glen Sutton's cataloging tribute to the American roadhouse, *Tony's Tank-Up Drive-In Cafe*. Thompson tour-guides us through these delightful locales like a proud native.



Ever a stylist, Thompson touchingly illuminates the darker, wilder side of life through Jerry Foster and Bill Rice's canonical weeper, *I'm Just Gettin' By* and *Dance With Me Molly*, a lament for a loser, penned by Roger Bowling and Steve Tutsie. Ben Peters' *World's Greatest Feelin'* offers little lyrical substance for interpretation, but the vocal harmonies and steel guitar filigrees make it linger after the stylus has moved on.

In a day when "album filler" is a term used more matter-of-factly than apologetically, it's too much to expect that every cut will be a winner. Not surprisingly, then, this Larry Butler production has its quota of also-rans—most of them made that way by inappropriate arrangements. *Have a Good Time*, by Felice and Boudleaux Bryant, winds up sounding like the on-hold music you might hear when phoning a psychiatrist. *Signs of Love* (Ben Peters) suffers from an arrangement that tries to make domestic virtues seem cosmic by having them recited against the cathedral swell of background vocals. *Point of No Return* (Roger Bowling, Larry Butler, Steve Tutsie) starts off like a romping Jerry Lee Lewis confessional and then gets dragged down by ill-timed background vocals on the refrain.

Album credits go to Bob Moore, string bass; Buddy Harman, drums; Hargus "Pig" Robbins, piano; Bill Sanford, Jimmy Caps, and Ray Edenton, guitars; Tommy Alsup, bass guitar; Pete Drake, steel guitar; and the Jordanaires, background.

In spite of its soft spots, this collection demonstrates that Thompson's voice just keeps getting better. He may have gotten famous because of his beer-drinking balladry, but here he's as mellow & smooth as a casual sip of sherry.

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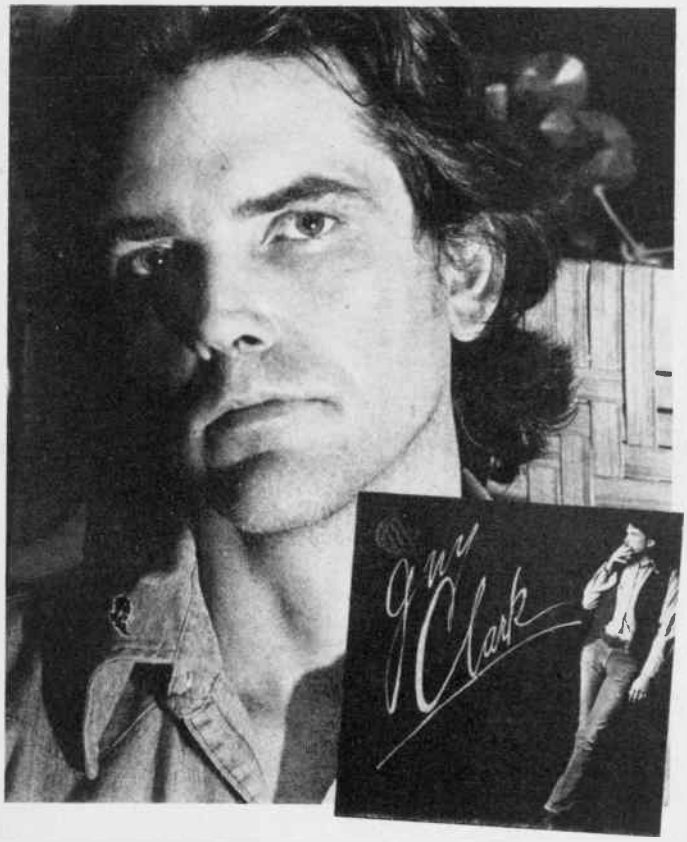
Guy Clark
Guy Clark
Warner BSK-3241

There's this *real* basic problem with songwriters, which is that, for one reason or another, they all think they can sing. The problem got serious with Kristofferson, who, with his twisted, stuffed-sock voice and convoluted phrasing brought a certain religious intensity to his songs, and flocks of sublimated songsters sought to follow in his successful path.

Guy Clark is a pretty good songwriter, but the guy can't sing a lick, not even on a bet. Nothing can save that voice—not even some great Nashville pickers like Albert Lee on electric guitar, B. Spears on bass, Buddy Emmons on steel, Micky Raphael on harp or Don Everly and Rodney Crowell humming along. The Mormon Tabernacle Choir couldn't help, I don't think.

But you don't have to be a great singer to make great record. People like Kristofferson, Dylan and Cash have all proved over and over that you don't need a voice like Sinatra, Mathis or Andy Williams. Guy Clark himself proved it with his first album, **Old Number One**, an absolute classic in its understated lyricism.



What it boils down to is this: if you don't have a great voice, you'd better figure out just how to use it to your best advantage, a la Tompall Glaser, before you stroll into the studio. And if you've got the potential to be a great songwriter, which Clark has, don't dilute your efforts with less than your best songs.

And that is the worst problem with Clark's third album called **Guy Clark.** Songs. It's hard to believe that the Guy Clark songs on this record were written by the same person who wrote *Texas—1947,* or *LA Freeway* or *Desperados Waiting For A Train.* Popular wisdom for songwriters is that the first album is the easiest, since they've got a decade or so worth of material stored up to pick from. Maybe that's the trouble here. There are some good songs on this album, but Clark didn't write them (top writers like Rodney Crowell, Walter Martin Cowart, Townes Van Zandt and Jimmie Rogers —without his knowledge, of course—all contributed songs for this album. When Clark goes back to the studio for his fourth album, I hope he'll pretend it's his first again.

MICHAEL BANE

Steve Fromholz
Jus' Playin' Along
L-4601 Lone Star Records

Steve Fromholz's last album was called **A Rumor In My Own Time**. According to Fromholz, "at that time I was one of the most well-known obscure musicians around." **Jus' Playin' Along** is his debut album for Lone Star and it's bound to make the composer of *Texas Trilogy* and the number one song recorded by Willie Nelson, *I'd Have To Be Crazy*, a little less obscure.

Fromholz picks through our memories, searching for diamonds in the dust. He succeeds more often than not.

Backed up by a few of Nashville's best (Johnny Gimble, Lloyd Green, Buddy Emmons, etc.) Fromholz has probably produced the best LP thus far in his checkered career. Included here is *Texas Trilogy* which appeared on Fromholz's first LP, **Frummux**. *Trilogy* established a cult following and is one of the reasons a copy of **Frummux**, long out of print, now sells for $35. *Yellow Cat* is another old tune first recorded by John Denver ten years ago. Steve does a better job than Denver, but then he wrote it as he did all the songs on this album. There are new songs as well—good country fare like *She's Everybody's Baby But Mine, No Regrets*, and *Fool's Gold*...("she glitters like fool's gold in a poor man's hand").

Willie Nelson and friends—the people behind Lone Star Records—are putting a lot of hope into this one. So is Steve Fromholz; but in the meantime he's **jus' playin' along.**

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Johnny Horton

Remembering The King Of The Saga-Songs

by RICH KIENZLE

November of 1960 was a good time for Johnny Horton. He was playing to turnaway crowds wherever he traveled riding a wave of popularity that had yet to crest. In barely a year he'd had three number one country hits including one on the pop charts. He'd almost single-handedly revived the saga song, an all but forgotten area of folk music. Yet he was also one of the earliest country performers able to perform raw, unvarnished rockabilly without alienating the hardcore country audience.

They headed through Texas on November 5, driving through the small towns toward their home base of Shreveport, then on to Nashville for a triumphant appearance at the annual deejay convention, to bask in the glories of the past year. Then along the road near the small town of Milano in Milam County, Northeast of Austin, a drunk driver heading in the opposite direction veered into the wrong lane. Seconds later there was a violent, jarring crash as the drunk slammed into the car carrying Horton, his bass-player/manager Tillman Franks, guitarist Tom Tomlinson and another person. Franks, Tomlinson and the other passenger walked away from the wreckage, injured but alive; Johnny Horton was killed instantly.

Johnny Cash, his close friend, travelled from Nashville to claim the body and later delivered the eulogy at his funeral. And for several years afterward Horton was surrounded by the same legend that surrounds Buddy Holly, Hank Williams and other great musicians who died while at their peak. But Horton's faded as the sixties ended. Columbia Records, for whom he recorded his definitive work, had all but exhausted its inventory of unissued Horton material, and his memory became obscured with the cathartic changes in country music. What information exists on his life is often ludicrous in its inconsistency. The liner notes of his Columbia albums are a good example. One album reveals (correctly) that he was born in Texas; another states his birthplace was Los Angeles. Other sources state he got his start as a musician in Texas; still others insist it happened in Southern California. In any case, an entire generation of country fans know little or nothing about Johnny Horton, a man who made many musical contributions in only a few years, a man who would have undoubtedly been a powerful force had he lived.

But even if he hadn't gotten into music, it was clear at an early age that Johnny Horton was one of those rare individuals who excelled at everything he did. Born in a rural area near Tyler, Texas on April 3, 1929 to sharecropper parents, his early life was dominated by the hot, grueling work that went with that life. All sources agree that his first serious interest in music came when he was eleven, when his mother taught him some chords on her guitar. Throughout his adolescence it remained a hobby secondary to sports, for he was a top athlete in his high school years. After graduating he continued as such while attending two East Texas junior colleges.

A good athlete, of course, does not go unnoticed for long in Texas; soon several four-year institutions, impressed with his prowess on the basketball courts, offered him scholarships. He accepted one from Baylor University in Waco, then transferred to the University of Seattle in Washington State sometime in the late

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forties. He apparently succumbed to a deeply rooted interest in fishing while there, for he left without graduating to work in Alaska's fishing industry for a time. When he returned he connected with several fishing tackle manufacturers who were impressed with his abilities as a fly fisherman. He was retained to demonstrate and field test new pieces of fishing equipment, working out of Los Angeles.

It may never be clear just exactly how Johnny Horton became involved in the music business; for a number of stories exist. One widely quoted account has him winning a 1950 talent contest at the Harmony Park Corral in Anaheim, California. In the process, he supposedly attracted the attention of two contest judges. One was Tennessee Ernie Ford, who was just enjoying his first successes with *Shotgun Boogie.* The other was the legendary West Coast C&W entrepreneur Cliffie Stone, proprietor of the popular *Hometown Jamboree* radio and TV shows and discoverer of Ford, Molly Bee, Merle Travis and Tommy Sands. Today, as Stone prepares to revive the Jamboree, he doesn't recall such a contest, but admits it might have happened. He does though remember plenty about Johnny Horton.

"Fabor Robinson (Horton's first manager and owner of Abbott Records) first brought Johnny to sing for me," he says. "And I thought 'Well, not bad, but not great.' And I had the *Hometown Jamboree* every Saturday from 7 to 8 P.M. on Channel 5, KTLA-TV. But I wouldn't put everyone on who wanted to be on. I didn't put Johnny on the TV portion of the show. I put him on the dance portion. And he sang some song—can't remember which—and he went over pretty doggone good, so I had him come back the next week. People liked what they saw. And he became a regular on the show for a year or two. In my opinion he wasn't a great singer. He was a song stylist. He knew how to *sell* a lyric."

Horton recorded a number of songs for Abbott which varied in style. Some, like *Plaid and Calico* anticipated his later work for Columbia while others were either straightforward country, airy pop or western swing flavored. West, who played on some early Horton sessions and produced one recalls him as "A very down to earth, warm person, very even tempered. He was liked by everybody. I never heard anybody downgrade him. Onstage, he had a warmth about him that projected to the audience."

Around 1952 he signed a recording contract with Mercury and continued building a reputation in the Southwest. Only a handful of his records had any national impact at all, such as *All For The Love of A Girl* and *No True Love,* but they gave him enough of a reputation that he was invited to join the cast of the Louisiana Hayride in Shreveport in 1955. The Hayride had garnered a reputation as a sort of

Johnny Horton, who believed in reincarnation and visions, predicted his own death just a month before it happened.

farm club for budding country stars, through its early exposure of Hank Williams and Webb Pierce. Horton arrived there at an exciting time. Elvis was preparing to leave, having built a massive reputation on the show, and Johnny Cash was just arriving after his early successes on Sun. Horton was married by then, to Hank Williams' widow Billie Jean, and the Hayride was perhaps the first major step in his career.

He connected with a number of people there including Cash, who became a close friend and musical influence. He also met a Hayride staff musician named Tillman Franks, who subsequently became his bassplayer and personal manager, and a young Shreveport football player-guitarist named Jerry Kennedy, who joined his band along with guitarist Tom Tomlinson, also from the area.

Late in 1955 he signed with Columbia. His earliest session, in January of 1956 featured the echoey, sparse feel of the Presley and Cash Sun discs, especially *I'm a One Woman Man* and *Honky Tonk Man.* Released that spring, the latter reached number 14 on the national charts. *One Woman Man* broke into the Top Ten shortly afterward, and suddenly Johnny Horton was getting national attention.

There was an irony in his success with these songs. At the time, Elvis was being damned by much of the hardcore country audience as a wild, loose-hipped pariah with a suggestive beat. Yet the Horton records weren't terribly different, with their boogie beat and twanging guitar. What differed was the approach, for it could be said that had Elvis stood still onstage, he would have been Johnny Horton. As Jerry Kennedy, now Mercury Records' major country producer told writer John Grissim in the late sixties, "(Johnny) was a great person, one of the nicest, cleanest cats in the business. Back then everybody had some sort of gimmick, or gyration or something that they'd go through onstage. He didn't. He could walk out there and he stood very still in front of the mike, and it'd amaze the hell out of me how he'd get the people in the palm of his hand, especially in West Texas and New Mexico. The Indians loved him. We'd play Gallop (sic) New Mexico once a week and turn 'em away. I don't know why... they just dug him."

He continued to work the South and Southwest throughout 1957 and 1958, scoring on the country charts with the rocking trucker song *I'm Coming Home.* Then in late 1958 Columbia released a radically different Johnny Horton record. *When It's Springtime In Alaska,* written by Tillman Franks, was an understated, almost delicate story of an Alaskan prospector murdered in a Klondike bar. The twanging guitar and thumping bass were replaced with acoustic guitar and banjo backing. It took several months to catch on, and moved slowly upward on the *Billboard* country charts.

But while it rose, Horton was in the studio working on a follow-up release. He had gotten hold of a Jimmy Driftwood composition that added colorful War of 1812 lyrics to the old fiddle tune *The Eighth of January.* It was a saga song, much like *Alaska.* Ironically the record was released the very day *Alaska* reached #1 on the *Billboard* charts. But it was the song *New Orleans* that reached the top of both country *and* pop charts, giving Horton a true crossover hit that cut through age and class boundries. While the country audience loved it, one could also watch the blasé Philadelphia teenagers on *American Bandstand* adapting their dance steps to fit the song's martial rhythm.

Everyone was on the Horton bandwagon. In August, Columbia released his first LP, **The Spectacular Johnny Horton.** Dot re-packaged some old, unreleased Horton material into an album, followed by a similar set on Mercury to capitalize on his sudden stardom. Other artists like Eddy Arnold, Hawkshaw Hawkins and Carl Smith rushed to record their own historical saga songs, but none even approached the success of *New Orleans.* Horton even returned to the studio to record a special version of the song for British release, and also received a Grammy award certifying *New Orleans* the best Country single of 1959.

Obviously he and his producers Don Law and Frank Jones had stumbled on the elusive commercial "hook" with their

saga numbers. Yet these songs were totally fictional in nature, relying on actual historical events only as a backdrop. They resembled the traditional "broadsides," balladeers once sang to relay current events. Horton's followups remained in this mold. Both *Sal's Got A Sugar Lip* and *Johnny Reb* were military-based numbers, as was *Sink The Bismarck,* a World War II saga song that reached number six on the country charts (and number three on the pop charts!) in early 1960. He recorded a group of saga songs for his second LP, **Johnny Horton Makes History** and that summer was invited to record the theme song for the John Wayne movie *North To Alaska.* Released in September, it became his third #1 country hit in nearly a year. It was also the last song he would ever record.

There are apparently no such things as "Johnny Horton stories" as there are "Hank Williams stories" or "Waylon stories," replete with intoxicants and carrying on. He was, as far as anyone can tell, the straight arrow who lived the good life in Shreveport with Billie Jean and their daughters. During his time off, he often fished with Johnny Cash. But Horton apparently had interests that give him an air of mystery. He was fascinated with reincarnation and visions. Nearly three years ago in this magazine, an article by the legendary Roger "Captain Midnite" Schutt, friend to Outlaws, recalled a day in the fall of 1960 when songsmith Merle Kilgore received a visit from Horton, his Shreveport neighbor.

"(Horton) put his arm on Merle's shoulder, looked him dead in the eye and drawled 'Old buddy, I gotta tell you that old John ain't gonna be around much longer. I don't know how or why, but I'll be gone before another month rolls around...Old John is just goin' on... I'm serious, Merle. I know it's almost my time."

A month or so later, Horton was dead.

It's inevitable when a promising performer dies prematurely that speculation runs rampant regarding what they would have done had they lived. Would Johnny Horton have been a superstar a la Cash or Roy Clark? A lesser-known, but beloved traditionalist like Stonewall Jackson or a Countrypolitan crooner? In the midst of the unissued Horton material Columbia released after his death was an album that makes such speculation risky. **I Can't Forget You** was recorded between his rockabilly and saga song period in 1958. It featured him singing calypso, fifties doo-wop and two bizarre ballads that reeked of Tony Bennett, along with hard country.

In the end, it's probably best not to fool with mystery, for the musical Horton was obviously as complex as the clairvoyant who predicted his own demise. It is fair to say that country music might have been radically different had he lived. But no one will know for sure. ■

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(Continued from page 48)

importance. They live in homes that are ten times bigger than what they need. When you have to start secluding yourself, that's when you can't stop. That's when it's all over."

Gatlin's attitude toward privacy, like his attitude toward fans, is maverick. So is his appraoch to his career in many respects, and it may have occasionally cost him professionally.

"At one point in time I didn't have as much control maybe, as I do now," he says a bit guardedly. "I had some people last year that I was paying to do certain things and their attitudes were different from mine. It was a management situation and we're still good friends—I love the guy to death. But it didn't work out because I guess I'm not like everyone else who does these things.

"Like Las Vegas: I hate it. Everybody thinks Las Vegas is the ultimate thing in this business. I hate to think what it stands for, that I might be drawing someone out there to lose his ranch or his farm. The only reason I'm going back this time is because the folks at the Aladdin Hotel are so nice to us. They're letting us do it our way, without eighty dancing girls."

On the whole, he says, he's got his career well in hand. He's writing, recording, working on a movie based on *Penny Annie* (one of his biggest hits) in which he'll play the male lead; he's doing more television and working toward his goal of playing to medium-sized concert halls—no clubs.

He's content with his growing stardom in country music, grateful for it he says, but there are still things that have eluded him and keep him working toward the future.

"There are some things about my career I'm concerned about. I basically have country music roots, for example, but I think our (the Gatlin family's) music is broader than just country. For some reason, though, we've been having a hard time getting MOR and pop airplay. I don't know if it's the fact that I'm living in Nashville and there's a negative association or what. Crossover and this country-pop situation is kind of crazy. What's country and what's pop? I just want to sing Gatlin music and get a little bigger and better known so we can play the kinds of concerts we want. I don't care about getting as big as Kiss—how could I move an audience of 70,000 people?

"There may not be enough people in the country who want to listen to the songs the way I want to sing them to make me a superstar," he adds. If there's not, I'll figure it's not God's will for me to be one. Because I feel that I'm supposed to do what I can with what ability He's given me. That's all I can do, all I want to do. I don't want to do one bit more." ■

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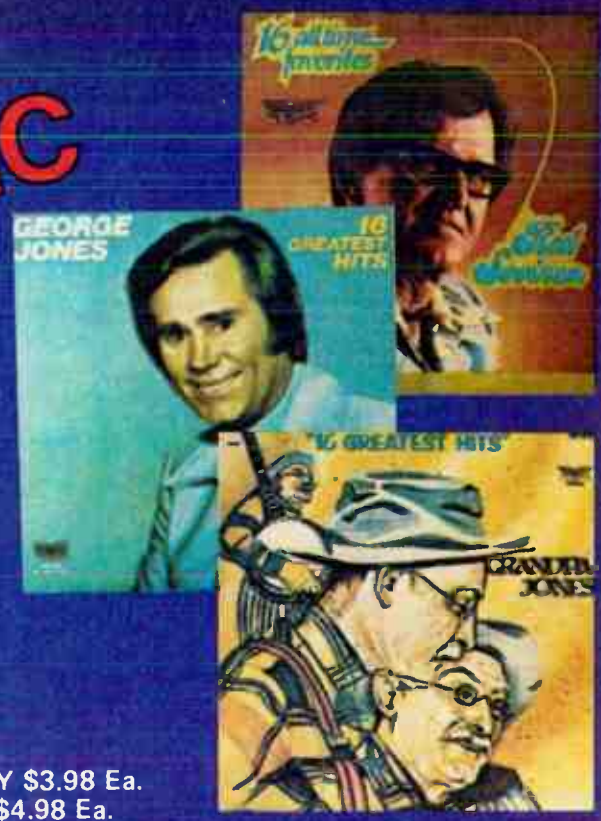

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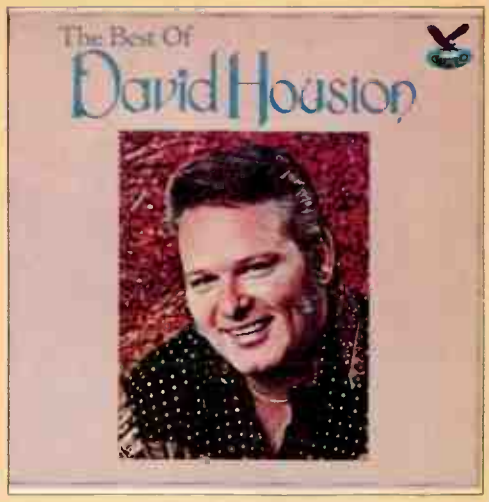

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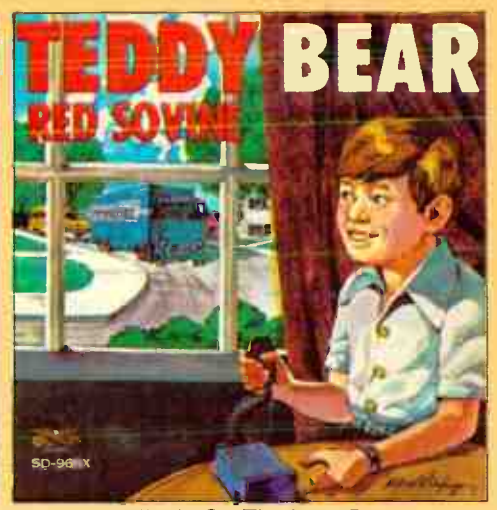

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BRENDA

(Continued from page 76)

from the small town of Conyers, Georgia, takes pride in telling she's the recent recipient of the Golden Peach Award for Country Female Vocalist of the Year from the state of Georgia, and that President Carter's last official act as governor of the state was declaring Brenda Lee Day in Georgia.)

Upon re-evaluation, Brenda decides she hasn't earned the right to be called mainstream country. Why? "Because I don't feel that I've contributed that much to country music," she answers. "Country music contributed a whole lot to me. I would like to contribute as much as I could, but I mean, I don't feel that I should be recognized, and the forerunners of country music not be. Loretta or Tammy or Dolly should certainly be recognized before me, because they've contributed a whole lot more than I have. One day, I hope I can be in those ranks, but I don't think people put me there. I think you could compare me--and this may sound out of left field—to Willie Nelson. That's the kind of country I'll be doing, like *Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain*. My old records were like that, if you listen to *As Usual*, *Too Many Rivers*, *Fool Number One*. In fact, I covered Willie on *Johnny One Time*. That was his record to start with. Those records are now considered middle-of-the-road country. So I think what I'll be doing is a gospel/country sound. Those are my roots. And I'm proud of 'em."

Admittedly, through the earlier years of her career, stardom at too young an age brought on something of an identity crisis for Brenda.

"My career has never been first, especially since I married (at 18 to her husband of 16 years, Ronnie Shacklett, a mill and lumber company owner). But it's never meshed into one person before, and finally, I think it's there.

What made this possible was a blessing in disguise of bad throat problems, brought on by abuse of the vocal cords and Brenda's not knowing how to correctly use them. (Phlebitis, kidney, abdominal problems and arthritis have plagued her relentlessly in the last six years, necessitating seven major surgeries.) "I hemorrhaged my cords twice, and there was a time when they thought I wouldn't sing again. I had to stop singing for six months and stop talking for three. Eventually, I had to go to a vocal coach and learn how to breathe correctly, but when I thought I might never be able to sing again, that's when I got really serious about distinguishing Brenda from Brenda Lee." . . .Sometimes I used to ask myself, 'Is that me?' 'Who am I?' It's finally coming together, and I feel that I know myself and understand myself and am satisfied with myself as well as I probably ever will be. It's a terrific feeling. ■

JOE ELY

(Continued from page 70)

will occasionally soften and he can appear hesitant, earnest, almost shy. He may be talking about the time his father brought home a recording machine which had been left unclaimed at the van line for which he then worked ("I just found some of them old records we made one Christmas when I was nine or 10. I say, 'Hi, I'm Joe Ely,' in this little kid's voice, and I sang *The Happy Wanderer*, I think it was."). Or he may be expounding fervently on the honorable history and funky atmosphere of Lubbock's renowned Cotton Club, where he plays regularly whenever he's at home. This is a different Joe Ely than the hard-nosed hustler who "learned to live on nothing a long time ago" and sometimes seems at permanent war with record companies and middle class respectability. I think it's a realer Joe Ely, too, the soft-focus version, who has clung stubbornly to a true musical vision, served as organizer and inspiration to a fiercely dedicated and eclectic "family band", and created a body of work which is as entertaining (it's good-time music in the best sense) as it is original. There's no false bravado to Joe Ely on stage, there's no reliance on excess to define a musical style—Joe Ely just gets the job done. And somehow you get the feeling that in his own way he's quietly confident of the future. Like his friend, Delbert McClinton, he doesn't need to be a superstar; he just wants to play music, and he *knows* his music is going to be heard. "It all feels like it's there," says Joe Ely. "I'm open to anything." ■

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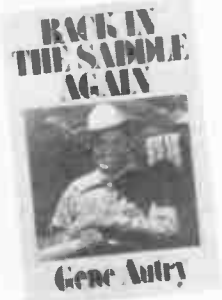

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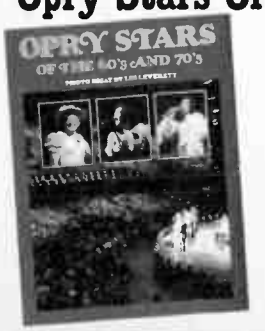

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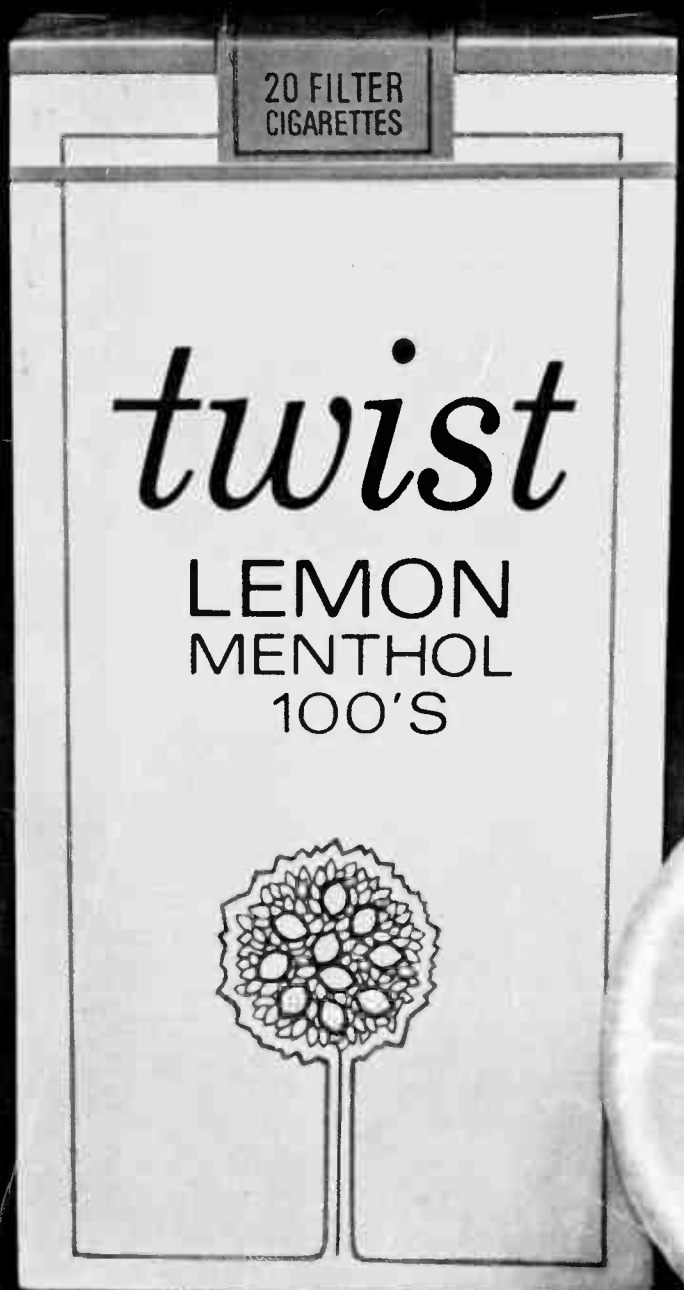

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