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COUNTRY MUSIC



Cover Leonard Kamsler

Volume Six, Number Six
March, 1978

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Editor's Note

Some notes about this issue:

There's something decidedly eerie about going to a Don Williams concert these days. I've been to two of them in the past few months, and both times I've been struck with how, well, *churchy* the atmosphere is. No other country performer, with the exception of Willie Nelson, has been able to inspire the almost religious fervor that surrounds Don Williams.

It's downright eerie to hear Don stop singing and have the audience carry on without him, a vast choir for *You're My Best Friend* or *Amanda*. More than just knowing the words to the songs, I think, Williams' audience understands the emotions behind the songs.

Those emotions are the common thread that runs through the music of both Williams and Willie—the idea that, macho posturing aside, men and women share the same emotions; that the small victories and defeats that go into everyday life are not necessarily tied to a single gender. The music of Don Williams, like the music of Willie Nelson, looks at life through the wrong end of a telescope, shrinking seemingly overwhelming emotion storms into tiny, crystal-clear points of feeling. I'm constantly amazed at how a writer like Willie or Don or Bob McDill (who writes many of Don's songs) can capture such a fleeting moment and preserve it for us all.

It might seem surprising to some people that Don Williams is the caliber star that he is—another obvious case of the audience being far, far ahead of the industry "tastemakers." Of course, it's no surprise to anyone who's ever heard him sing...

* * *

On another story, we sent writer Ed Ward to Los Angeles to talk to the Bionic Cowboy, Larry Mahan, after we noticed Larry's name turning up just about everywhere. In this issue alone, Larry not only has a story of his own, but punches out Jerry Jeff Walker and calls in a request to WBAP's Bill Mack. If he isn't the king of the cowboys (which we don't doubt, mind you), he's certainly the most visible.

* * *

Finally, we were unprepared for the tremendous success of our Bullet Awards For New Talent—apparently the country music industry was more than ready for a new award to spotlight new talent. We're already in negotiations for a televised Bullet Awards show next year, and we're working out the details of having our readers participate in the next balloting. We even presented our Best New Male Vocalist and Best Album winner Alvin Crow with his Bullets on stage at Carnegie Hall, where Alvin was working a package show arranged by manager Jim Halsey. And speaking from painful experience, if anyone tells you that walking out on stage to present an award in front of a packed house is fun, they don't know what they're talking about.



Editor Bane and Alvin Crow

COUNTRY MUSIC

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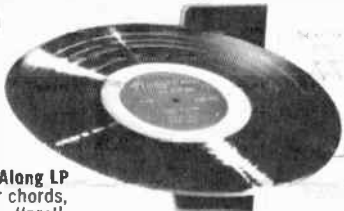


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Letters

DJ Talk

I don't know who Ed Ward is, but his story in the DJ Talk section in your January, 1978 issue conveniently ignored the #1 Country Station in the San Jose metro area and that's Radio KEEN.

As anyone at all familiar with Country Radio in the San Francisco bay area knows, Radio KEEN has been pumping out traditional and modern country music since the early 1950's.

KEEN can play *Moose Turd Pie* and use all the four letter words they want to, but the true country fan still tunes to good ol' Radio KEEN for the best country music.

STEVE SNELL,
 STATION MANAGER PROGRAM DIRECTOR
 KEEN RADIO
 SAN JOSE, CALIF.

#One With A Bullet

I would like to commend you on selecting Eddie Rabbitt as the Best New Entertainer of the Year. I don't think you could have made a better choice. I think he's fabulous. I have his albums and they're going to be worn out soon.

I hope he comes to my part of the country soon for a concert. I would certainly try my best to be one of the first in line for tickets.

I haven't felt this hard for a singer since Elvis Presley. I have all of Elvis' albums and you can be sure I'll get all of Eddie Rabbitt's.

C. TABOR
 ANDERSON, S.C.

I now realize that only a magazine as great as Country Music with a superb writer as Michael Bane, could come up with such an informative and fantastic article on Eddie Rabbitt.

A super talented man he is, as well as a fine contributor to the country music industry with his meaningful songs that have touched many lives. Someday I hope to meet this wonderful person and tell him myself how much I appreciate his music.

Thank you for Country Music Magazine.

DAVE CALHOUN
 ROCKFORD, MICH.

I just received my January 78 issue of Country Music Magazine. I like the cover

picture with Eddie Rabbitt. Thank you for picking Eddie as the Best New Entertainer of the Year. I think he deserves it. Keep up the good work on Country Music Magazine.

LINDA PEARSON
 ADDRESS UNKNOWN

I just wanted to say that you, your writers and everybody concerned made a wise choice in picking Eddie Rabbitt as the Best New Entertainer of The Year. He's really a great entertainer. I've loved his music, and singing since I first heard *Rocky Mountain Music*. I saw him in person for the first time in Lubbock, Texas and he's truly a fine entertainer and a very nice guy too.

Please keep writing about him, there's really a whole lot more I want to know about him.

GEORGE TREMINO
 SUNDOWN, TEXAS

On Brother Billy

I just got the January 78 issue and just loved it. The article on Billy Carter was just great . . .

STEVE KIRKMOB
 MOUNTAIN CITY, N.C. 27030

On Our Reviews

Thank you for reviewing Larry Gatlin's latest album *Love Is Just A Game*. I agree that it is an excellent album.

However, I totally disagree with your statement that Larry's last song on the album *Alleluia* is a clunker because it sounds like some of those "daringly and modern pieces that progressive churches featured 20 years ago." Why didn't Mr. Ward listen to the words that Larry wrote?

The first time I heard Larry sing *Alleluia* was on Christmas last year, when he was at the Grand Ole Opry. He introduced it by saying, "This is Christmas Day. We have a lot to be thankful for . . . I thought it'd be nice if I could write a song that would kinda express to our audience and our maker the way we feel about Him. And we wouldn't presume to preach to you, but we'd like to sing a song for you. And it's kinda the way me and my brothers feel about things and it's just for you for Christmas."

JERRY CLOWER

Jerry Clower On The Road



**A new album...
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I personally think it's a beautiful and touching song. Not only are Larry, his band and his brothers, Rudy and Steve, truly fantastic singers and entertainers, Larry is also an excellent songwriter.

Thanks again for your otherwise great review of Larry's new album.

A DEVOTED FAN OF LARRY GATLIN
L.A.SALLE III.

I just read your article in January Country Music Magazine about Larry Gatlin's new album. To each his own if you think Larry Gatlin is great.

But don't you think for one minute that anyone can cut Johnny Rodriguez to shreds on any song he sings. He is a great

singer. There is no way Larry Gatlin can sing *If Practice Makes Perfect* as good as Johnny.

There is nothing wrong with Larry's singing. But don't put Johnny down.

BETTY & JEANIE BROWN
EDDYVILLE, KY.

In just about every issue of Country Music, the letters section will have a letter from a reader who is quite unhappy with a record review. A few were so upset that they cancelled their subscription.

This letter is not one of those that I have mentioned. Why? Just because I have found a sure way to beat the record critics. I just do not read that section. The

critics know what they like and I know what I like. I let my own ears be the judge. If I bought records just because someone said it was a hit or tagged it with five stars, then I would have a house full of records that I wouldn't even like or play. There is no one who can tell me what I like to hear nor what I should dislike.

DEMPEY MERRITT
JACKSONVILLE, FLA.

A Thank You From An Old Friend

I was quite surprised when a friend of mine called and told me to get a copy of the Jan. 78 issue of Country Music—that there was an article about me in it—and when I saw it I was not only surprised but humbled as well. I thank you and all your writers for their interest in me and my work.

But the real treat was a story on page 52 about KFAT in Gilroy, Calif. I visited that little station in February last year, and it was so funky, but so great. I can't help feel that if there is to be a future for country music, it will be in stations like KFAT—they play music for people, not for chart numbers.

Thanks again, all the best.
JAMES TALLEY
NASHVILLE, TENN.

A Thank You From Some New Ones

I just started getting your magazine, the story on Kenny Rogers is what made me subscribe. I hope you do a lot more on him in the future.

I never liked country music until Kenny Rogers turned country. I really think he should have gotten more of the awards...

KIM LANG
ADDRESS UNKNOWN

Thanks! Love the magazine. Love the music and the people. Wish there was more around LA. Good luck with all you try to do in the future.

LORI HAMMOND
ONE OF A MILLION COUNTRY GIRLS
TRAPPED IN THE CITY

I'm just sitting here reading your magazine and wanted to let you know what a fantastic job you are doing. I'm 21 years old and just love your magazine and country music. To me, being without country music would be like being without a leg or arm.

Keep up the great work, and let's keep it country.
CHUCK MARVIN
BERLIN, WISC.

Due to our great volume of mail, we regret we can't answer all letters individually. We welcome your opinions, and will publish the most representative letters in this column. Let us hear from you.—Ed.

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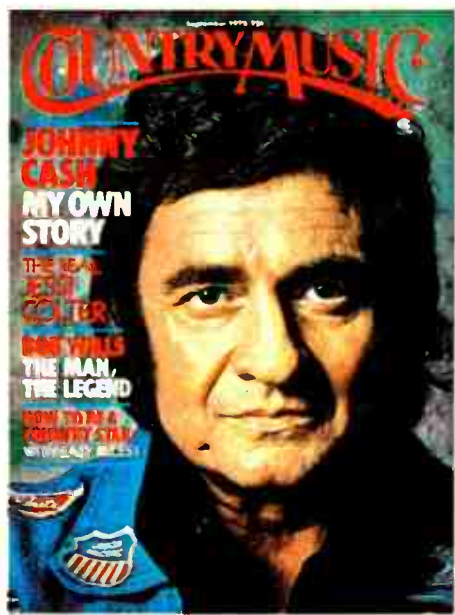
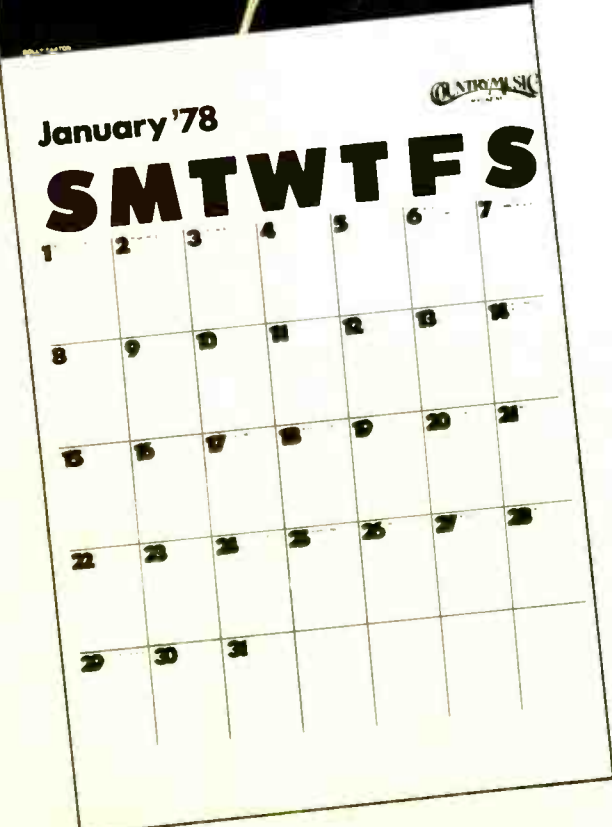
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Country Scene

SATURDAY NIGHT'S Alright For Spoofin'—Willie And Mary Kay Country-Up TV

Leave it to Willie Nelson to find some new turf to conquer. After capturing Austin, Nashville and most of the rest of the country, what could be more appropriate than late-night television? So Willie sneaked into New York last December for a spot on NBC's *Saturday Night* show. Guest hostess was none other than Mary Kay Place, a Willie fan from way back and his most recent duet partner. Willie sounded, doing *Whiskey River* and *Blue Eyes Crying In The Rain*, as well as joining Mary Kay for *Something To Brag About*. Afterwards, they retired to the Lone Star Cafe, where Willie played until it was time to close up the honky tonks. A good time was had by all.



Mary Kay Place as a "Saturday Night" cheerleader.



Willie Nelson at rehearsals—taking Texas music to the big city.

Country Scene

... Country Times In The Big City



Mary Kay and Willie rehearse "Something To Brag About" in the chilly NBC studio.



Willie on stage doing "Whiskey River" while the cameraman sets up another shot; Willie and Mary Kay together (inset).



One of the best smiles in country music.

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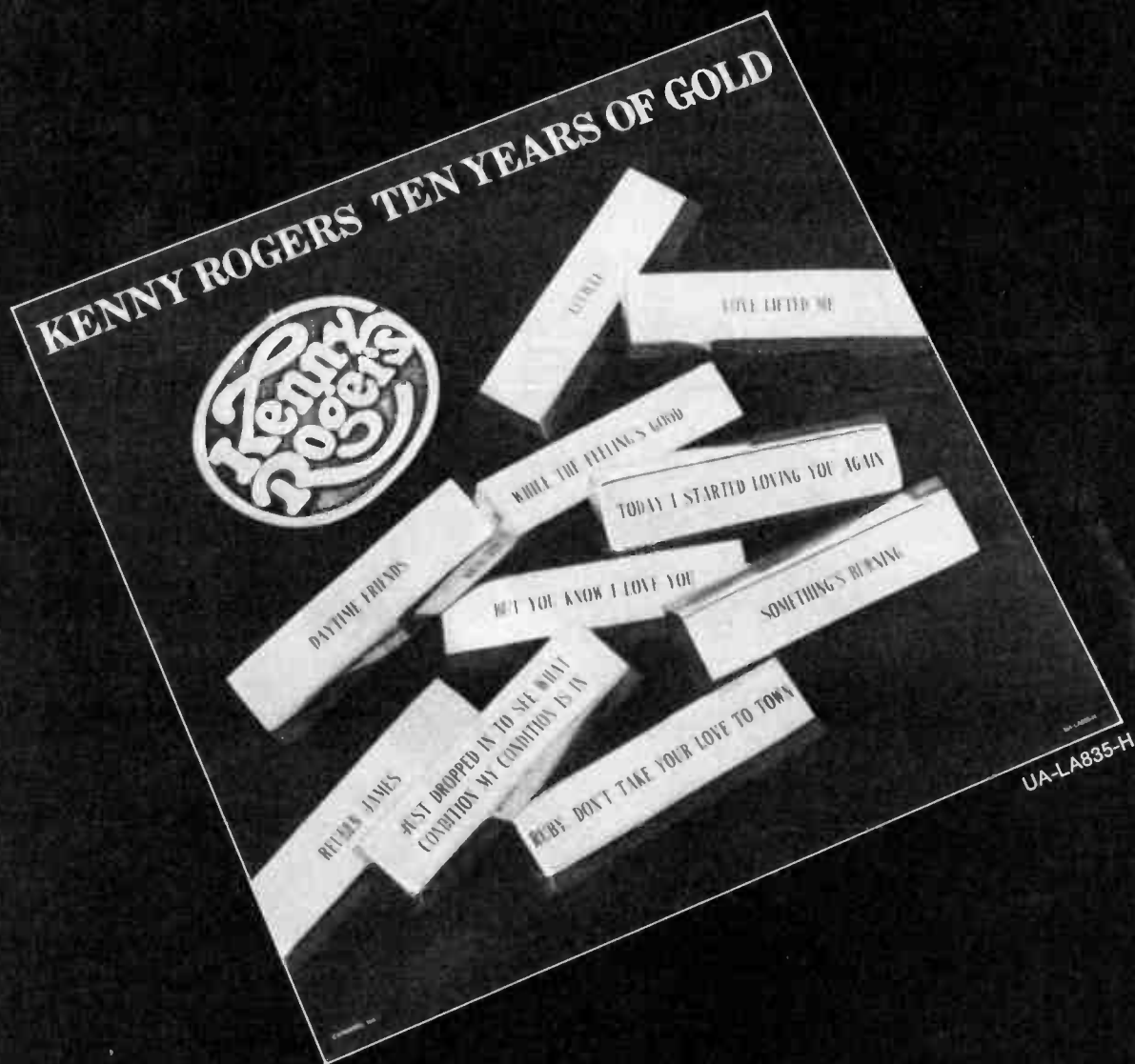
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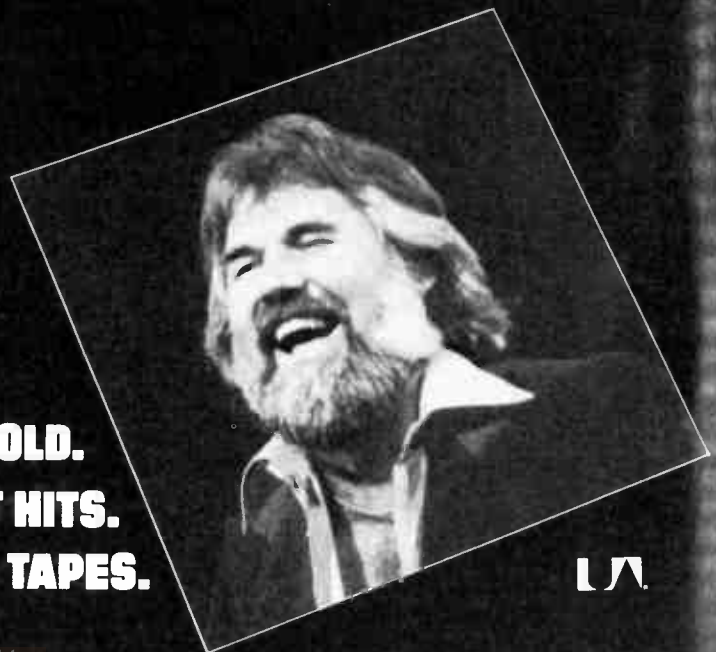
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Country Scene

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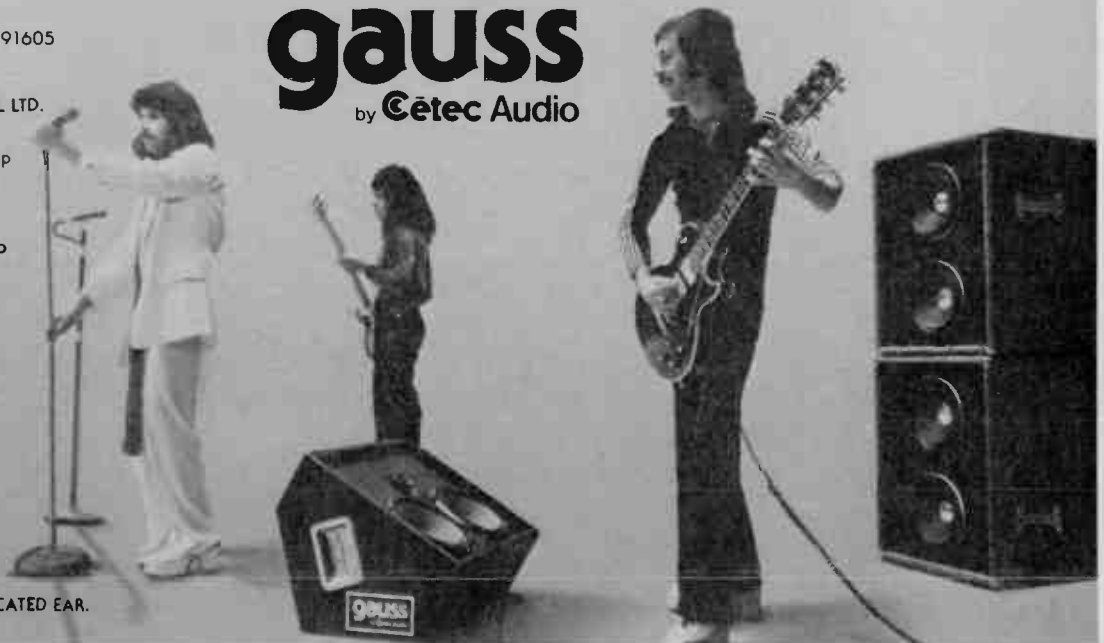
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Country Scene

Elvis Memorabilia Auction Attracts Fans; Cash

Memphis auctioneer, Colonel Don B. Smith held the first Elvis Memorabilia Auction in Nashville since the singer's death. Items were from the Colonel's

personal collection as well as from Elvis' Graceland mansion and his home in Beverly Hills. Highest price of \$40,000 was paid by Glenn Webb of Tenn. for

an oil painting of Graceland. "There's a lot of stealing going on tonight" remarked Col. Smith, who was both surprised and disappointed at the turnout.



Record albums were brought in by individual owners. Each item came with a guarantee of authenticity.



Collectors and dealers showed up, where items from carpets to albums were sold.



A 78 rpm Sun Recording was sold for \$600.

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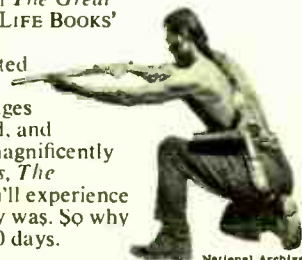


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The Don Williams who roared. Excursions with the king of country mellow.

Whispering Thunder

by **HARRY MORROW**

Nashville never forgets a crossover, and that's why Don Williams—the quiet man who's worn his jeans from his farm to Carnegie Hall and back home again—got a new green jacket a while back.

There really wasn't much fuss about it; it wasn't, after all, like the jacket was glen-plaid or something gauche that would clash with the battered hat Williams seems to need as much as his guitar. This particular splash of color was strictly a business decision.

ABC/Dot, Williams' record company, was so pleased with his string of number-one records, that they up and decided it was time Williams reached a wider audience, so instead of mailing out his records in the red jacket reserved for country artists, the records were sent to radio stations in the green jacket cover ABC uses for its pop artists.

A lot of hunches get played in the record business, and when one of them hits, the payoff is spectacular. The fact is that Don Williams is already an international star with a style so smooth and mellow it's almost conversational, and the company's soft sell might be just the tactic to cross a record like the hit *Country Boy* over into the lucrative pop market.

Artists who do have pop crossovers can say "thanks a million" and literally mean it. But the catch is that no one really knows how to get that crossover or where the next one's coming from. What does Kenny Rogers' crossover hit *Lucille* have that Don Williams' *Amanda* doesn't? Ask in Nashville, and you'll get a dozen sure-fire formulas, but keep in mind that when corporate giant MCA tried to cross over newly signed Tanya Tucker, the record sank without a trace. Crossovers are only slightly easier to predict than, say, earthquakes.

There's one fellow in Nashville, though, who

watches all these efforts to help Don Williams crossover with a healthy detachment—and that person is Don Williams.

"I don't think a whole lot about where I should be career-wise," he says with the calm that brands everything he does. "I think I've fairly clearly defined my direction. I'm not really up for any drastic changes.

"It seems like a lot of people are trying to take a success and make a crossover. If you're going to have that attitude, why try to be a country artist?"

"There's a whole lot about this business I try not to think about. A record label, like so many other things, is just a money-making machine. One of the most pleasant things I've had is that people here have felt from the beginning that the music I make has an appeal broader than country. I don't know if that's true. I don't try to figure that out."

Don Williams, 38, the mechanic's son from Portland, Texas, concentrates on creating something meaningful to the average listener. He sings personal, intimate songs enhanced by fine harmonies and spare, subtle arrangements. That's what he wants to do and Don Williams, laid back as he is, does not seem like a man who can be pushed. He has his own ideas and any crossover that turns up will come on his own terms.

In the past year Williams was a finalist for the Country Music Association male vocalist of the year for the second time (with Waylon Jennings, Ronnie Milsap, Larry Gatlin and Kenny Rogers). He was a big favorite at London's annual Wembley Festival and stole the show from Roy Clark and Freddy Fender at Carnegie Hall. He also sang with the Tulsa Symphony and toured Germany, England and Canada.

“The main thing I’ve been interested in is just feelings, songs that relate honest emotion.”

But the most important shows he did were probably ones with Waylon Jennings, Emmylou Harris and Jerry Jeff Walker, designed to get Williams before a new audience. ABC-Dot believed so strongly in the effort the company subsidized his appearance.

There are some rowdy, flamboyant—and charismatic—artists in country music—and some phonies—and then there is Don Williams, who’s already quit the music business twice in the past. The most noticeable quality about him is how quiet and serious he is—he never seems excited. If Williams isn’t working in the recording studio, he’d rather stay home on his 85-acre farm at Ashland City, northwest of Nashville, than sit around on a plush leather couch in a small conference room and contemplate acceptance.



Don Williams on stage at New York's Bottom Line—
“His standards are very high.”

But he will devote a day to interviews, both in person and on the phone, to strifetorn Belfast, North Ireland, where he appeared last fall, and he’ll talk about subjects ranging from his music to the television show *Roots*, which he enjoyed. He leaves his hat, which he got when he appeared in the Burt Reynolds movie *W.W. and the Dixie Dancekings*, on and drinks coffee the whole time.

“I don’t think it’s easier to be a country artist,” the 6-foot-1 Williams emphasizes in his resonant voice. “With country, if it’s good country, 90 percent is creating a feel, something that’s interesting enough and valid enough that somebody wants to listen.

“The main thing I’ve really been interested in is just feelings, songs that relate honest emotion. I feel that’s the strongest thing any of us have going for us.”

You see, in a fast-moving world where slickness and shoddiness are a way of life

to some people, Don Williams is hung up on honesty.

“Beyond that, I don’t know a whole lot to say about what I’m doing.”

Some critics think Williams hasn’t been doing enough growing as an artist. They were disappointed by the album *Visions* last year and complained that too many of his songs sounded alike. Music that’s meant to be caring, gentle and important isn’t supposed to become merely tranquilizing. No successful artist can allow himself or his music to be taken for granted.

“On all my albums I’ve tried to grow some, to stretch a little bit,” Williams answers mildly. “With writing it’s a projection—you’re trying to come up with something new. Sometimes I enjoy writing so much that when it’s done I feel let down.”

He wrote *The Shelter of Your Eyes* himself and co-wrote *Til The Rivers All Run Dry* with Wayland Holyfield. Most of his hits have been written by Holyfield and the amazing Bob McDill. Williams admits he went after some fresher songs for his latest album, *Country Boy*, and McDill contributed *Louisiana Saturday Night* and *Rake and Rambling Man*. In the past he gave Williams *Amanda*, *Come Early Mornin’* and *Love Me Tonight*. Holyfield has supplied *You’re My Best Friend* and *Some Broken Hearts Never Mend*.

“I really feel the song has to dictate what happens in the studio,” Williams says. It’s a simple truth to him. He’s said it before and he will say it again. “I take a song I think is a good one and try, instrumentally, to frame a song where it can mean its maximum.

“I like music. It’s never been a situation with me of pledging allegiance to a par-

ticular form. I like to hear people do things.

“One of the things I feel strongly about is the fact that the average country listener is far more intelligent, and can understand or reject a lot more, than a lot of people give them credit for.

“I don’t feel, just because I have the freedom, that I should throw a lot of things at them that don’t make sense. I hate to wonder why somebody did something. I try not to play games with anyone who’s associated with me in any way.”

Don Williams, who breaks his serious pattern occasionally with a warm, enjoyable laugh, is a man who’s always tried to decide the right thing to do and then do it. He and his wife, Joy, dated only six weeks before they got married. That was 17 years ago.

“His standards were very high,” recalls Joy, who usually stays in the background but had joined her husband for this trip to Nashville. “If I had to remake him I’d make him just the way he is. I really can’t complain at all. Sometimes when I go to a concert, I cry because I’m so proud.”

Sitting in the audience while Don Williams sings is so pleasant it’s almost like being at a friend’s house. The performance, backed only by Danny Flowers on guitar and harmonica and David Williamson on bass, is usually that intimate, and Williams’ fans routinely sing along. Williams was slightly awed last spring at Wembley when the London crowd sang *You’re My Best Friend*—and reaching English fans is one kind of crossover, isn’t it? And Carnegie Hall, of course, is a magic name to any performer.

“That was quite a trip,” Williams says as his smile drifts from one dark, triangular sideburn to the other. “There was plenty of anxiety that night. We were hitting a lot of rocks with one bat. Carnegie Hall was enough, but we had a full house, we were being recorded for a live album and radio coverage was world-wide.”

How did all that strike a man as laid back as Don Williams?

“We tried awful hard . . .”

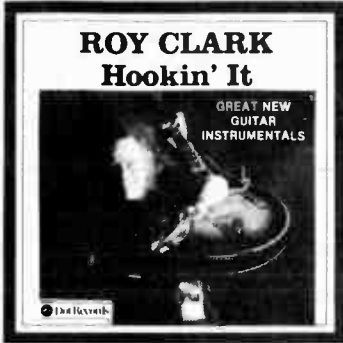
That’s when he really laughed heartily, and one gets the impression that everything at Carnegie Hall was just fine.

The Carnegie Hall show was promoted by Williams’ manager, the influential Jim Halsey of Tulsa. One thing Halsey has done for such acts as Roy Clark and Mel Tillis is to gain access to the notoriously closed West Coast television circuit, especially the *Tonight Show* with Johnny Carson. With a little push from Halsey and a substantial tug from matinee idol Burt Reynolds, who subbed for ol’ Johnny one week, Don Williams gained even that vaulted stage.

The basis for that success is Don Williams’ sound, that mellow, subdued,

(Continued on page 63)

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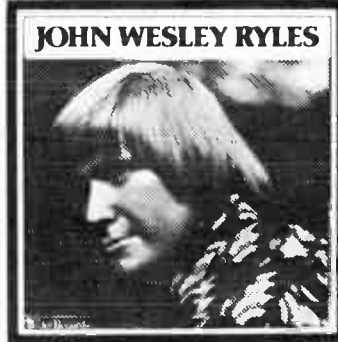
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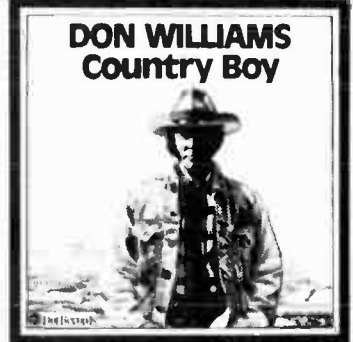
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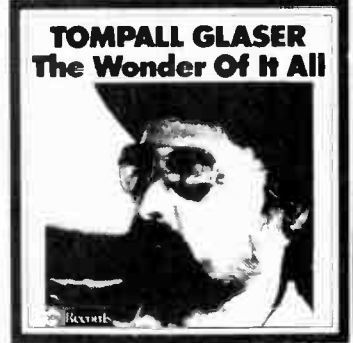
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JERRY JEFF

Rides Again...

...Again

Heard all them stories about ol' Jerry Jeff? Well folks, they're all true—sort of.

by **JOHN MORTHLAND**

They say around Austin that Jerry Jeff Walker can do no wrong, but *whoo boy*, does he ever give it his best shot.

There was, for example, the night he showed up to play at Castle Creek, a local club, in wet swim trunks, and spent most of the evening falling down and picking himself back up. Or the evening there that he swung around the room from the rafters instead of playing. Or the evening he threw up on the first row of tables. Then there was the time he drunkenly challenged rodeo champ Larry Mahan to a fight, and got himself punched out but good. In fits of anti-materialism, he's chucked a few TV sets into his backyard swimming pool and smashed some stereo systems to smithereens. Or how about the time he came to a Princeton faculty party hosted by a friend, drank like he'd just come off a month in the desert, and then delivered up his best impersonations of some stuffy faculty wives. That one supposedly ended when Jerry Jeff borrowed his host's rented car and disappeared. The car, sans some parts but covered with a fresh batch of tickets, was found the next week in Manhattan, and Jerry Jeff explained it away by saying he couldn't recollect having been in a car that particular night.

You bet. Such stories are about as hard to find in Austin as an empty longneck. In a city with its fair share of, shall we say, *eccentrics*, Jerry Jeff is considered something like the pet nut, sort of a Hill Country Jerry Lee Lewis. Some of these stories—*some* of them—are even true. The point is that Jerry Jeff's exploits have taken on mythological status, and people will believe and perpetuate anything they hear about him. Yet his reputation has worked to his advantage (people always come to see him) as often as it has to his disadvantage (they often come for the wrong reasons). It is a lot of baggage to carry, but Jerry Jeff is the first to point out he picked it up by choice and carries it by choice; he



Jerry Jeff Walker and pals at a recent engagement in Austin, where all the folks turn out to see Ol' Jacky

does so with an endearing enough style and spirit.

Asked if he thought his rep was deserved or if it was blown out of proportion, he quickly responds, "Both. I've broken in too many journalists. Meaning, they've exaggerated the point. Being loose when I'm performing is something I've always

tried for. I think music should be performed and played as if we were not too uptight about it.

"The other side of the coin is that I *did* do a lot of carryin' on, yeah. I haven't calmed down much either and it does haunt me sometimes, yes. The big joke that always gets around is that people will say,



Jack, as he's known in those parts, get up and howl. Joe Ely, the West Texas rockabilly flash, mans the tamourine at the right.

'We all came and we didn't expect you to show.' I don't know why they would not expect me to show. I've usually walked off more shows because of the people puttin' them on, almost never because I was too messed up to play—I will usually overcome most anything in that department. The final thing, I dunno, is that my name's

up there on the marquee and if everybody else screws up—the sound people, the people selling tickets, whatever—it finally gets down to my name is the one that's blamed.

"I just think that some people have a tendency to get carried away over something they've heard before. I've talked to

people who've never seen me who have their opinion before they even see the show. There were enough times that I was messed up that young journalists got a 'good story' out of it. But don't you think they could also put down some of the magic we did while we were doing all that other stuff? That would be nice to relate to people.

“... Being loose when I’m performing is something I’ve always tried for...”

Sure we hung out, we drank, we took the girls home. But the carryin’ on part seems to be the only part anyone wants to put down. They didn’t chronicle the event. The thing is to have your fun, but also get some truth as to what went down.”

We are sitting in the basement of a Greenwich Village folk club run by a friend of Jerry Jeff’s. It is in the middle of a debilitating heat wave, and if there is a comfortable spot in all of Manhattan, it’s the best kept secret in town. The interview had begun upstairs, right after Jerry Jeff’s show at the Bottom Line, a couple blocks away. Jerry Jeff, who has trouble sitting still for very long, had wandered away for about a half hour at one point. When he returned, he apologized and allowed as to how he’d found this cooler spot downstairs, so why didn’t we go there to finish talking? But before we go any further with that, let us return to the show momentarily and get some truth as to what went down.

The Bottom Line is a rock showcase not exactly noted for downhome ambience. But this particular night the place was jam packed with big city buckaroos decked out in cowboy hats, tee shirts and red bandanas. They whooped and hollered and stomped their boots and ran the waitresses down to a frazzle with their steady, no-

nonsense demands for “MORE BEER!” It was definitely Jerry Jeff’s kind of crowd, and this cannot be attributed solely to the fact that there are enough expatriate Texans in New York that they almost qualify as just another ethnic group in the city’s bottomless melting pot. Jerry Jeff is quite popular also with many New Yorkers—he once lived in the Village himself, in his folkie days—and he hadn’t been to town in quite a while.

So out he lopes wearing his tee shirt and red bandana, grey cowboy hat pulled down almost to his eyebrows, and lunges right into that tongue in cheek song about Scamp Walker trying to slide it past you one more time, all the while maintaining a good-bad-but-not-evil smile as he looks out over the crowds dancing in the aisle. His voice is deep and raggy, ravaged by too many four a.m. tokes and shots. It’s not a “good” voice, any music teacher would hasten to tell you, but it’s a very effective one for putting across Jerry Jeff’s type of song. With no shilly-shallying around between songs, he and his band proceeded to deliver a set of hard, fast and lean music that made a diehard fan out of at least one previous non-believer (me) and drove most of the house to delirium.

This Jerry Jeff music has not yet been fully captured on record—not even on the live albums—and that is a shame. He likes to use that word “magic” often when he talks about music, and he also likes to emphasize the “pure joy of just playing.” If that isn’t revealing enough about his attitude, the live show provides a reasonably accurate representation of the man himself; this music is tough but sensitive, serious but self-mocking, ragged but right. Sometimes it can be downright erratic, but it makes no apologies, and it likes to stay on the move.

As does Jerry Jeff, who was born and raised in upstate New York. It was a musical family; his grandparents were square dance people, his mother sang in a trio, and as he recalls it, “I was never not around music, and it never dawned on me not to sing, or to sing either. They’d just hit me upside the head and say ‘You sing,’ and so I did. After that I just sang, didn’t get my head slapped. So pretty soon you stop thinking about singing or not singing and you just sing.”

He spent his time ice skating, chasing skirts and singing doo-wop on the street corner; at one time, he wanted to be an astronaut. The starting forward on a high school basketball team that won the state

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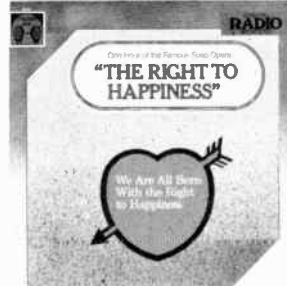
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championship, he got pretty good grades until he quit trying. Eventually, he dropped out of high school to bum around the country. (Though he later went back and finished.)

Mr. Bojangles, still his best known song, was written in a drunk tank in New Orleans, but Jerry Jeff was living in New York City when it became one of the big hits of the Sixties. He was playing the Village folk circuit, having only middlin' success despite the song's popularity with everybody from Richard Nixon ("I wasn't surprised to hear that was his favorite song; it was a lot of people's favorite song. He liked *Home on the Range* too.") to the average Joe down at the end of the bar. But he wasn't very fond of New York, and he was further miffed by much of the folk crowd. Years later, when he saw a film clip of Uncle Dave Macon and Jimmie Rodgers on a Johnny Cash TV show, his feelings about that period clicked into focus.

"In this film clip, Uncle Dave puts his banjo on the floor, tuned to some open chord, and then he just dances around it, whacking away at it with his hat," Jerry Jeff marvels. "He was just having fun with his instrument, but he was making music. I watched too many people in that folk scene shush a crowd and tune to some weird Oriental tuning so they could show off how much technique they had. It turned a lot of people off from music; it wasn't fun, and music has to be fun and entertaining."

That's another recurring theme with Jerry Jeff, the importance of feeling over technique. He respects Nashville pickers for their ability to play anything right, but he also believes strongly that they lose the spirit that way and start turning out carbon copy records with no soul. The records he's cut in Nashville were an attempt to get the best of both worlds—technique and feeling—and he's not entirely happy with the results in most cases.

For a while after leaving New York, Jerry Jeff was constantly on the move, as he had been earlier. To the extent that he lived anywhere, he lived temporarily in Key West, Fla. But early this decade, he moved to Austin, a town he had passed through and liked several times already.

"Austin was my ace in the hole," Jerry Jeff points a finger and advises, "Always keep an ace in the hole for yourself. Besides, I knew I could always work there. I had an album sell 50,000 there that only sold 70,000 total in the whole country. And whenever I played, I knew I'd get a good crowd. Don't ask me why; I still don't understand it myself."

What it appears to come down to is that Austin seemed like the kind of place where a picker could put his guitar on the floor and whack away at it with his hat. These were the days before Austin music was much in the public eye, but Jerry Jeff wasn't the only musician to discover this audience.

"People came *back* to Austin, and it was all a coincidence. Michael Murphey'd been out in L.A. Willie was living in Nashville,

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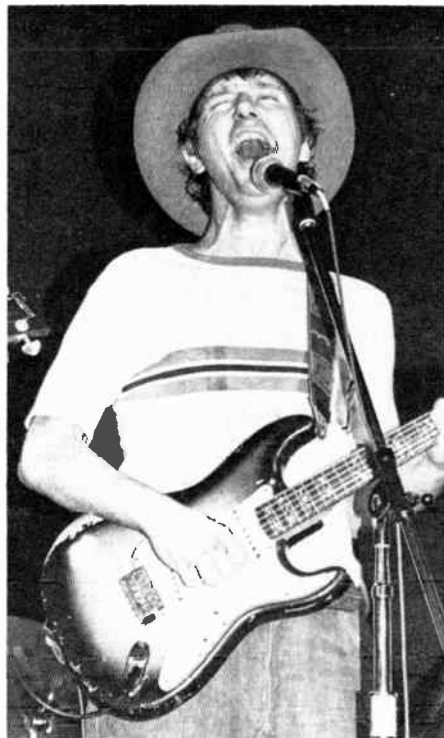
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“ . . . I did do a lot of carryin’ on, yeah. I haven’t calmed down much either and it does haunt me sometimes. . . ”



They were in sorta the same position as me; they’d had to go somewhere else to do anything, but they remembered Austin as a good place to live and work. And once they accomplished something elsewhere, they wanted to come back to Austin to enjoy it.

“I think Willie just let the air out of the balloon now,” he adds rather cryptically. But a few minutes later he comes back to that point. “Willie just bought himself a house in Malibu. He wants peace and quiet.”

It was on an early trip through Austin (“1962-3-4, somewhere in there”) that Jerry Jeff first met the late Hondo Crouch, to whom *A Man Must Carry On*, Walker’s latest album, is dedicated. Jerry Jeff played a gig then with Hondo’s son-in-law. Later, while in Colorado, he heard that Hondo had bought the Texas town of Luckenbach, and he went there to visit. Since then, Luckenbach has always been a refuge to him, “a place to go when I wanted to get away,” and his friendship with Hondo became one of the few constants in his life.

Jerry Jeff was in Austin mixing the double album early this year when he received word Hondo had died. He knew he was losing his *Lost Gonzo Band*, who were unwilling to go one more round with their unpredictable leader. So he had his mind on putting together the new group (which turns out to be as superlative as the *Gonzos*) as well as the album, which he wanted to represent “as many different moods and attitudes and things, and new songs, too, as possible.” On hearing the news about Hondo, Jerry Jeff quickly worked it

into a tribute album. His original plans, once he finished mixing, had called for Hondo to come up to Austin so the pair could “do some things together.” What was it Hondo did that could be put on an album?

“I dunno, I never knew. You’ll have to figger that part out for yourself.” Jerry Jeff’s voice trails off. “He just made magic. I never been anyplace he was where there wasn’t magic.”

From all reports, the two men were birds of a feather despite their age differences (Jerry Jeff is 35). Hondo was also known to enjoy a few nips and then conduct himself by rules other than those written by Emily Post. He liked playing the court jester at Luckenbach (pop, three, just a couple buildings, really), he liked putting people on, he was a master storyteller, and he did not rise in the morning by alarm clock. Even beyond their similarities, Austin observed say, Hondo had a benign influence on Jerry Jeff, particularly in improving his self-esteem.

“I don’t talk about it much,” Jerry Jeff mumbles when asked just what influence Hondo did have on him. He is staring down at the table, the only time during the interview he seemed ill at ease. Prompted, he toys with his hat and then answers.

“I would say Hondo taught me to lighten up. I could get a little nasty and surly then, and he taught me not to take myself quite so seriously. He showed me the importance of staying a little innocent and naive, so that it was always possible for some other new thing to happen.”

Perhaps this explains that child-like look, half quizzical and half gleeful, that Jerry Jeff usually has on his well-worn face. Perhaps it also explains some of the contradiction and impulsiveness that seems to swirl around the man. Perhaps that’s what fuels his keen sense of the absurd.

Which is how this interview ended. Jerry Jeff was insisting that the most appropriate way to write about him would be to just leave a big blank space in the middle of the article, and readers could draw their own conclusions. I argued that while I saw what he was driving at, it wouldn’t in this case make much more sense than were he to leave ten minutes of silence in the middle of an album or concert. (We were both sober during this, I swear.) With a derisive harumph, Jerry Jeff got up and left.

Leo LeBlanc, his ace steel player, who’d been contributing to most of the discussion, stayed downstairs a few minutes longer, and we dug ourselves into rhetorical holes debating the relative virtues of Nashville music and Austin music, or Bakersfield’s initial threat to Nashville in the early Sixties. We were both primarily amused by the turn of events—there are less classy ways, after all, to terminate an interview than with a philosophical debate on the aesthetic merits of blank space on a page. When we trooped upstairs ourselves, the man cleaning up at the bar said Jerry Jeff had just departed for Chinatown, where he hoped to hunt up a *Samurai film*. So what if it was 5:30 in the morning? I wouldn’t be at all surprised to hear he actually found one. ■

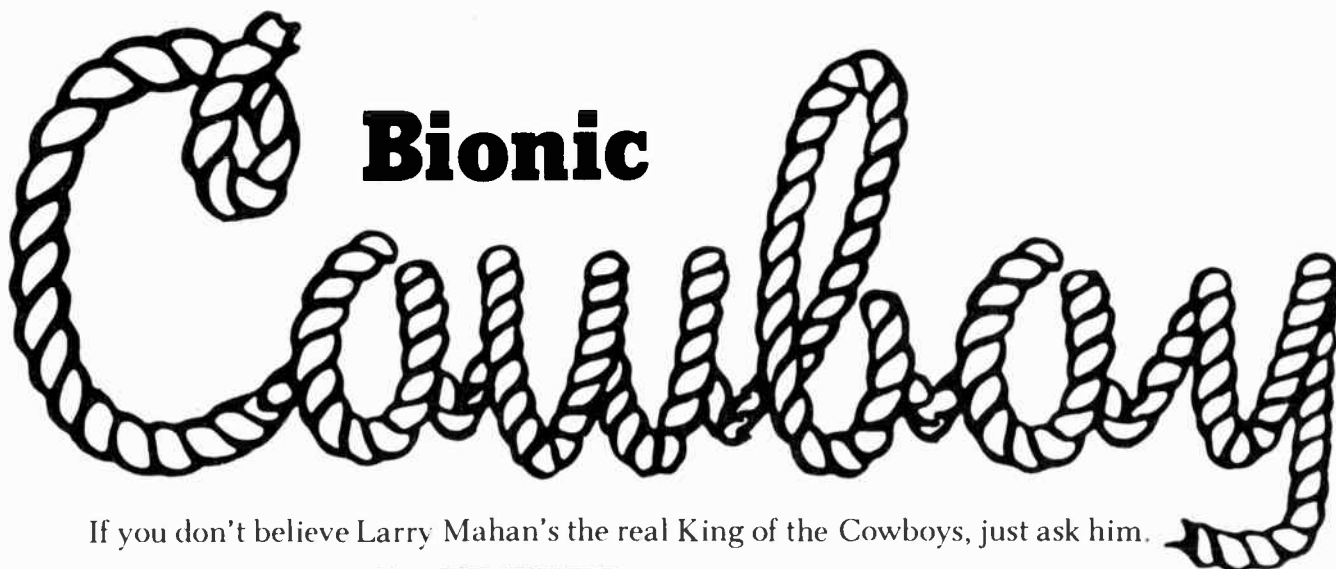
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If you don't believe Larry Mahan's the real King of the Cowboys, just ask him.

by **ED WARD**

Cowboy. Now there is one confusing word. These days, there are cowboys everywhere, all kinds of 'em. You've got your cosmic cowboys, your Dallas Cowboys, your Clonakilty cowboys over in Eire, your cowboy boots, your cowboy hats, your cowboy shirts and cowboy belts and cowboy stringties, and you've even got your Frye-booted female followers of novelist Tom Robbins who walk around with a book called *Even Cowgirls Get The Blues*. Imagine—cowgirls! There are other usages, too/ my father calls reckless drivers "cowboys," and there are some cities in this nation where, if you ask for a "cowboy bar," you'll be directed to a place where male homosexuals strut around wearing denim and looking weathered. I tell you, cowboy is sure a mixed-up word these days.

Not for Larry Mahan, though. Larry Mahan is a cowboy, pure and simple. He's been one since he was twelve years old, and since then, he's gone through several different aspects of cowboyhood, done cowboy movies, written about cowboying, sung about cowboys, but mostly just cowboied. Of course, Larry Mahan isn't your average gar-

den-variety cowboy. No, he's a champion cowboy, subdivision rodeo. In fact, Larry Mahan is the *world* champion rodeo cowboy, and he's lived to tell the tale. At 33, he's retired from rodeoing, but he's still a cowboy. Oh, yes.

When you think of a cowboy, you don't tend to think of acting lessons, though, and you sort of assume that any cowboy worth his salt already knows how to play a guitar—if only to his horse. But the cowboy stereotype we all know and love was formed in Hollywood, not on the range, and Larry Mahan, 1970s cowboy, was actually bidding his acting teacher adieu and heading up the Sunset Strip to suburban Sherman Oaks in a beautiful snow-white Jaguar sedan of some antiquity when I caught up with him. He's got the hat, he's got the boots, and he's even got the saddlebags thrown over his shoulder, but the people who make the *Bionic Woman* TV series want a rodeo cowboy on the show, so Larry's engaged Vincent Chase, one of the finest coaches in the business, to help him. And we're in a Jaguar, because, podner, you do *not* attempt the Hollywood Freeway on a horse. Ever.

If Larry Mahan is driving a

Jag up the Hollywood Freeway, though, does that mean there just aren't any more "real" cowboys left? Well, yes and no. The old-time ropin-and-ridin' sort are dying out, and the craft is in the hands of a few cowboys these days, mostly Mexicans, and only on a few of the big ranches. A lot of the old cowboy tasks have become automated or unnecessary; it's easier to survey your livestock or ride the fences inspecting for breaks in a helicopter. And as for the rodeo, today rodeo cowboys are professional athletes just like any Dallas Cowboy or Montreal Canadian or Boston Red Sock.

Of course, as Larry explains as we hit the Ventura Freeway, there are some important differences. To begin with, rodeo cowboys are only incidentally competing with other rodeo cowboys. What they're really competing against is a random animal they're drawn at "the luck of the draw," as it's called. That animal has to be just right, neither too violent to handle at all nor too docile to give a good ride. Two judges watch the ride, and they each have fifty points to award, 25 for the animal and 25 for the rider, for a grand total of 100. You can draw a bad horse and ride it well and still do pretty

good in the scoring, or draw a good one and blow it yourself. Another factor is time: eight seconds, that's all, from the time you come out of the chute to the time you hopefully get off your animal with as much grace as you can safely muster. And, depending on which events you enter, you can be doing this up to six times a day.

Another difference is that when, say, the Yankees go to play an out-of-town game, they each pack a suitcase, get on a plane the team's paid for and go. Up until the end of the year when the finals are held, no rodeo cowboy *has* to go to any single event, nor does he have to follow anybody anywhere, but when he does go, he has to take his equipment (saddle, gloves, cinches, chaps and so on) and pay his own way there. If he's a calf-roper or steer-wrestler, he's got to have his own horse, too, and faces a choice of transporting it or borrowing someone else's and giving him 25 percent of the winnings. Not that the winnings are much. I don't know how many basketball and football players make over \$100,000 a year, but Larry Mahan won about \$80,000 in his best year, and that was before expenses.

“It sure wasn’t the money that attracted me to rodeo,” Larry grins. “As ol’ Waylon would say, I grew up a-dreamin’ of bein’ a cowboy. It was the whole *thing* of cowboy, you know, probably from going out and seeing Roy Rogers on the screen and then getting a horse and then getting involved in rodeo. Some kids want to be ball players and some want to be firemen, and so I’m still livin’ out my childhood fantasies. I grew up on a two-acre place just north of Salem, Oregon. I got a horse when I was seven, did some ridin’ and when I was twelve, I went to a kids’ rodeo, entered the calf-ridin’ and won it, six dollars and a buckle. Well, that started it all—I’ve still got the buckle, but I spent the money. I moved to Phoenix in 1962, when I was 18, to go to Arizona State, but I lacked the \$300-some-odd to pay the out-of-state tuition, so I rode in a couple of rodeos to get it and decided the hell with school, I’ll become a “Roads” Scholar. I joined the Professional Rodeo Cowboys’ Association the next year, won the bull-riding championship in 1965, won the all-round 1966 through 70 and again in ’73, and...” He shrugs. Sure, that sounds easy enough.

“I compete in three events, bareback and saddle broncs and bull ridin’. The all-around award means the most money won in a given year as long as you win money in at least two events, any combination. You don’t have to be the big money winner in each event, as long as you’re the big money winner all over. To win the individual championships, you just win the big money in the individual event. They’ve just changed the rules, though. I’d go into the national finals in Oklahoma City with such a lead that nobody could catch me, so it was a cinched deal; I was just goin’ there to be there and to win some money.”

Larry’s modesty, his off-handedness, is disconcerting. Nobody else has ever won the All-Around championship as many times as he has. He beat the previous all-time champion, Jim Sholders, who had an unprecedented five wins. That’s a lot of dust eaten, a lot of riding, a lot of bones jolted, a lot of cans of beans grabbed between one tiny town and its annual rodeo and the next arena down the pike, and, for Larry’s kind of cowboy, a lot of mental preparation. “You know, I think any game, be it rodeo, football, music, acting—anything—involves sheer guts and determination. If you have your goals set and you’re the type of person that says you have to achieve the goals, you’re gonna make it. People who don’t believe they can really achieve their goals don’t make it. Like when I was rodeoin’, it wasn’t that I rode any better than anybody else, it was just that I had the desire to go on out there and keep winning.” It’s a doctrine that infuses every page of



The Bionic Cowboy meets his fans.

Larry’s book, *Fundamentals of Rodeo Riding. The Mental & Physical Approach To Success*, and it’s obviously Larry’s credo.

But just as important as knowing your goals is knowing when you’re achieved them, when you’ve actually fulfilled the dream and—in simple language—when it’s time to stop. “The time comes, especially in a game like rodeo, where it’s so physically demanding that you can’t do it forever, so you got to lace reality and say man, I’m gonna have to do something else.” Was there no one moment when you looked up from the dust and said this is it? “No, I think the time had just come to find something else to do. I still win when I go out, you know, and physically it’s still there, but mentally it’s not. I won the all-around six times and Jim Sholders had won it five, so from then on out, I’d be competing against myself. And hell, I did it, so what the hell.” The difference between six and eight isn’t nearly as big as the difference between five and six, right? “Yeah. This buckle here, the first All-Around championship, that’s the only buckle I’ll wear, because none of ’em will ever mean more to me than the first one I won. After a while, you just stop growing, and that’s what I like about singing and acting. It’s not like, okay, all of a sudden you’ve ridden the toughest bull, so where do you go from there? You can keep growing.”

And that’s what happened. For a while, Larry was in the sort of daze you’d expect from somebody who Gave It All Up, “just sort of wandering around,” as he put it,

trying to figure out a good way to exploit being the world champion rodeo cowboy. There was a tie-in with Jantzen sportswear that got him to Europe, and a souvenir of that journey hangs on his wall, a picture of a cowboy—Larry—peacefully dozing on his bedroll in a field, but at the other end of the field is... the Eiffel Tower? He also hit Spain, where he said the sportswriters were fascinated with a guy who rode bulls instead of fighting them. “But the thing that was bothering me, like a lot of guys in sports, was: what was I going to do? What was I going to do that creates the same feeling that you get from rodeo competition but maybe without all the physical danger? That’s when I hit on acting.”

It took a bit of courage, as well as a few sessions with the drama coach, but as things turned out Larry had acting talent. So far, his roles have been limited to portraying rodeo cowboys, in *Mackintosh and T.J.*, *The Great American Cowboy* and—if Linsey Wagner ever decides to allow the script to be filmed, the *Bionic Woman*. Yeah, acting took Larry’s mind off rodeo, but there was still something itching back there, and it needed to get scratched, something that movie acting didn’t do for him, something that combined the immediate response of the rodeo arena with the personal satisfaction of acting. Of course. Music. And so, with the blithe assurance of a total outsider, he signed a contract with veteran producer Snuff Garrett, obtained a deal with Warner Brothers and recorded an album, just like that. Had he ever performed as a singer? No. Did he write songs? No. Did he even know how to play the guitar? No. All he had was that famous Larry Mahan mental attitude.

“I actually find music more gratifying than acting,” he says. “I like what acting does for me, but with music, it’s like riding a bull, man, the instant gratification. In music, you have a hell of a lot more control over your own destiny than you do with acting, and when you’re through, the applause, the reaction, is right there. Another thing I like is the attitude changes you send yourself and the audience through in two and a half or three minutes if you’re really communicating with them. That’s the challenge right there, the communication. And if you believe what you’re doing, chances are you’ll be able to do it.”

But the album showed Larry’s unpreparedness and inexperience. He didn’t have much idea how to do an album, and thus never really was able to give Snuff Garrett any feedback about the way *he* wanted it to sound. Larry, who’d never done any singing, sounded like somebody who’d never done any singing, and the strings and elaborate arrangements only

(Continued on page 62)



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Mickey Gilley's Piano Roll Blues

Part of becoming a success is discovering who you are—and aren't. . .

By PETER GURALNICK

The first time I heard Mickey Gilley on the radio, I was sure, like just about everyone else I knew, that it was Jerry Lee Lewis. He's back, I thought exultantly to myself, hearing the familiar piano arpeggios, the flat-out confidence in the voice. This was mid-1974, and I was really excited, because Jerry Lee, who was in the midst of an artistic doldrums at the time, was singing and playing better than he had in years. Then the announcer's voice came on and corrected my error. The song was Roomful of Roses.

Ferriday, Louisiana, on a Saturday afternoon. The War is over. It's market day in the small farming community, and there's an assortment of old Fords and pick-ups in front of Gilley's grocery store

on Mississippi Avenue. There's a line of kids at the Arcade Theater on Fourth Avenue. In the line are three cousins, all within a couple of years of each other, all of whom play the piano occasionally in the little Assembly of God church on Texas Street. The movie is a cowboy picture—Gene Autry or Roy Rogers or Johnny Mack Brown. One week Lash LaRue appears in person to do tricks with his whip. "If it was a double feature, oh man, the place was packed with kids. It was 15 cents for the movie, a nickel for popcorn. Of course we weren't allowed to go to the shows, because our parents didn't hold with that, but we went just the same. I wasn't quite as wild as Jimmy and Jerry Lee. Jimmy had hopes of being a professional fighter. Next think I knew he had

went into the church."

Jerry Lee Lewis, Mickey Gilley, Evangelist Jimmy Swaggart—"the three piano pickers from Ferriday," which also gave Howard K. Smith to the world. Jerry's and Jimmy's mothers were sisters; Mickey's mother Irene and Jerry's father Elmo were brother and sister, and their older sister Ada was Jimmy's grandmother. The three boys grew up like brothers. Jerry Lee started playing piano when he was eight or nine years old. He was living in Indian Village outside of Clayton up on the Black River, and his parents mortgaged their home to buy an old Stark upright piano, which Jerry Lee still has today. "Jerry's family was even poorer than mine, and that was bad. My father didn't even have an automobile. My mom worked in a cafe for \$18 a week and bought me a piano—I must have been 10 or 11. Boogie woogie—that was the thing. We used to play in church a little bit, but the only one to even think about playing professionally was Jerry. The first time he ever played in public was when the Ford dealership came in to town.

Mickey Gilley grew up very much in the shadow of his older cousins. If you ask him today where he got his style from—the same classic mixture of boogie woogie, country gospel and blues which electrified the world from the moment that Jerry Lee



Gilley at work and Gilley at home: getting comfortable with the music.

Lewis first stepped into the Sun recording studio—he'll credit it unabashedly to Jerry Lee. It was Jerry and Jimmy Lee Swaggart—now one of the leading radio and television ministers in the country—who sneaked into Haney's Big House, an all black roadhouse in the colored section of town where B.B. King and Memphis Slim and a host of nameless but equally well-remembered bluesmen and boogie woogie piano players held court.

It was only when Jerry Lee's first record came out in 1956 that Mickey Gilley even thought about becoming a professional musician. He was living in Houston at the time (he had moved there two years earlier after running off at 17 to get married), working in the parts department of an engineering company when *Crazy Arms* came on the radio. "I ran around telling everyone, 'Hey, that's my cousin!'" He went around to all the radio stations, too, unofficially promoting the record and even helped publicize Jerry Lee's first

Houston appearance at Dement Field in Galena Park. "It was the same exact thing, same style we had always played when we were kids, just changed around a little bit. So I said, 'I can play that.' It was very easy for me to pick up. Next thing I knew, I had decided to cut me a record. After all, Jerry had made it, why not me? The only thing was, I was terrible. The first record I ever recorded is just plain embarrassing. I thought it was going to be a smash. I enjoyed doing it, though. And I've never liked to admit defeat. You know, if you stay with something long enough, I guess you have to either improve or get out."

Mickey Gilley stayed with music long enough—for almost 20 years in fact—before he ever saw anything even resembling a national hit. At first every record that came out was going to be a big breakthrough, every single on Minor, Potomac, Lynn, Sabra, Princess was going to put him on the national charts. He cut his first

record at Bill Quinn's Gold Star studio in Houston; he did sides for Huey Meaux and played back-up with Johnny Bush and Kenny Rogers. Once he came close to a hit with *Call Me Shorty*, a good rocking number in the Jerry Lee vein that came out on the Memphis-based Dot label. Once he went to Nashville to cut the slickly produced *Three's A Crowd* and bought a whole new wardrobe because "I knew when this record came out we were going to be a hot act." He went to New Orleans and Biloxi and Mobile's Azalea Grille and ended up in a little club called Ray's Lounge in Lake Charles, where he got paid \$150 a week as a single at first, then—when he continued to pack the 85-seat club—added a drummer as well. Towards the end of 1959 he moved back to Houston, where he had a local hit with Warner Mack's *Is It Wrong?* He got a job playing at the Ranch House and spent the next 14 years out on the Spencer Highway, across the channel in Pasadena moving next door to the Nesadel from 1960-70, going out briefly on his own at the Bel Air cross-town, then finally settling in at Gilley's with his new partner, Sherwood Cryer, just down the road from where he had started out. He was by this time very well established in Houston; his name was on a bright new eye-catching sign; he had a television show which aired on two channels, plus his own label, Astro, on which he had his biggest hit, *Lonely Wine*; he had resigned himself at this point to never being anything more than a strong local club act.

What seems to have held him back more than anything else was the same thing that had dogged him throughout his career: his stylistic resemblance to Jerry Lee. What little success he achieved in the first place he probably owed to this very resemblance. It was Jerry Lee and His Pumping Piano, Jimmy Lee Swaggart and His Golden Gospel Piano and Mickey



Gilley and His Rocking Piano. A great deal of his later career, however, seems to have centered around his attempts to escape being labeled just another imitator. It got to the point where he went to Nashville and recorded an album for GRT on which he didn't play piano at all (the results are on *Welcome to Gilley's*, released on Astro after Mickey bought back the masters) simply in order to establish some kind of fresh territory of his own. "I let it bug me to the point where it just about drove me nuts, man. I didn't want to sound anything like Jerry Lee at all, even though I knew that the type of music that he played was the type of music that I feel." By 1974 "I had given up, I mean, I was successful. My personal appearances were good. The club and TV show were going great. But I couldn't sell records. I think I had the attitude, why should I care? No one else does."

The story of Mickey Gilley's "overnight success" is so well-known it wouldn't bear repeating if it were not for the insight it affords both into Mickey's character and the vagaries of fate. Minnie Ehlerick, the ticket-taker at Gilley's, also has title to the vending concession, both at Gilley's and at several other clubs around the city in which Mickey's partner, Sherwood Cryer, has an interest. As a favor she asked Mickey to record *She Calls Me Baby*, one of her favorite songs, for local jukebox play. Just

by chance Mickey put *Roomful of Roses*, an old George Morgan hit which he and Jerry Lee had fooled around with back in Ferriday, on the "B" side. Really, he didn't want to do the record at all—for one thing "because I had no confidence in the song, since Jerry had overlooked it" and, also, "because it sounded too much like Jerry." The engineer on the session convinced him that it was going to be the back side of a record that would never get played, so Mickey went ahead and cut it, overdubbed steel and then forgot all about it for a few months. When he finally heard the engineer's mix-down, *She Called Me Baby* sounded fine. "I thought to myself, well, I finally got something. Then I flipped the record over. All I could hear was that damn steel guitar, the echo was just bounding off the walls. I called up the engineer, I said, 'Why's it so loud?' He said, 'Man, I just mixed it the way I felt it.' 'Well,' I said, 'I'm just going to have to remix it. This is terrible.' I went and got the tape, I actually cued the tape up, then I said, 'Hey, I don't want to take the time to mess with this. It's just a local record; it's only going to be played on the local jukeboxes.'"

When the record finally came out, it was a runaway hit in Houston, the pressing plant couldn't keep up as orders kept pouring in, but it was the "B" side, *Roomful of Roses*, that was getting the play.

Finally it reached the point that Mickey could almost smell national success. He flew to Nashville, presented the song to all the national labels, and was turned down by every one. As a last resort he turned to Playboy Records, which didn't even have a Nashville office, flew out to the Coast, and leased the record. The rest is history.

"You can imagine how excited I was. Here I had been pushing, I'd been trying all those years, and it was only when I got to the point where I just didn't care that I could really do something. I guess sometimes you want something so bad, you strive so hard for a certain goal, that you don't even realize it's within your grasp. I just had to get the idea of getting away from the style of Jerry Lee out of the back of my mind and start thinking about Mickey Gilley. You know, when I sang those two songs, I *knew* there wasn't nothing that was going to happen. I almost wasn't even trying, and they came out better than anything else I ever recorded."

Mickey Gilley today is a far cry from the insecure, self-doubting entertainer who struggled for so long in his older cousin's shadow. Although he retains a strong element of self-deprecating good humor, at 40 he has finally gained confidence in himself and his music. Easy-going, unpretentious, still boyish-looking in a pudgy, slightly buck-toothed, old-fashioned sort of way (he looks as if his newly styled hair should still be neatly parted on the side), Mickey Gilley gives the impression in everything he does of a sober kind of competence, the same affable good-natured sort of enthusiasm that you find in his music. At Gilley's Club, where he is only an infrequent attraction nowadays, he is in his element, meeting friends, greeting old acquaintances, showing off his new 24-track studio next door, winking at the pretty girls. At one time he used to hustle pool in the clubs; in fact at the Nesadel, he says, that was his principal living. Although he hasn't got much time for pool today (after every set there are autographs to sign, pictures to be taken with fans [who line up at \$5 a throw], reminiscences to be exchanged), he isn't above playing a friendly game either, and he ascribes at least part of his success to his continued ability to relate to the people who pay to hear him play. "These people love someone who don't give 'em a big star attitude. I mean, you got to understand, you're something special to them, especially when they see you on TV, shooting the breeze with Dinah or Betty White or Ken Norton. And then when they see me at the club, 'Man, I can't believe I know him. He's just like us. He's a hometown boy. Hey, Gilley, you still play pool?'"

Gilley's Club itself sometimes seems more like an extended family than a business enterprise and is certainly one of the most unusual places I've ever been. Not so much for its atmosphere, though this is

(Continued on page 63)

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Lucky Lady

Don't tell Jeannie Seely about
the costs of freedom—she already knows.
by MARY ELLEN MOORE

"Basically," says Jeannie Seely, "I've gotten rid of kids, cows, dogs, horses and everything, and I said, 'I came here to be an artist, and a writer,' and I looked around one day and figured out that I had done everything except what I came here to do. Now that I do have the freedom, I'm going to get back to concentrating on those two things."

Freedom's occupying a lot of Jeannie Seely's time these days. Freedom from a recording contract she found stifling. Freedom within an unorthodox marriage. Freedom from a commitment to a career goal which also stifled her. Freedom from more full-time projects than most people start in a lifetime.

Jeannie's also written a song about freedom. And while she talks about it in terms of what she'll be able to do with her life, she writes about it in an entirely different light.

"Freedom . . . boredom . . . lonesome," she picks out on her piano.

"I feel more lost than I feel free," she sings to an audience of two. It's a personal song, perhaps seeming more so because of the intimacy of the setting in Jeannie's own house, a house which itself reflects the eccentricity that sets Jeannie Seely apart from the rest of Nashville and—perhaps—has kept her from the stardom she seeks.

In a city where more often than not success and money buy poor taste, Jeannie Seely's home stands as a tribute to the fact that money can also be used in good taste. Jeannie and husband Hank Cochran purchased a farm outside of Nashville as a homestead. They also bought the land across the road as an investment. Then, at Jeannie's suggestion, they moved the farmhouse which stood on the second piece of land across the street to the first where it now nestles in the surrounding hills, one of those picture-pretty farms that you wonder about while driving through the country.

Inside is a comfortable, lived-in home, warmed now by several roaring fires, cluttered with the things of Jeannie's life: telephones everywhere, her crochet, an old *American Home Crafts* magazine, a few empty beer cans and full ash trays, a

stuffed owl and, upstairs, tapes of her new album and awards for her and Hank's old songs.

It's not a star's house, but then—and Jeannie would be the first to admit it—she's not a star. For the first time in years, though, she's seriously working on it.

She and singing partner (for about eight years) Jack Greene left MCA Records over a year ago.

"I couldn't get MCA to seriously consider *my* songs," Jeannie explains. "Everytime we'd get ready to do something, they'd want Hank Cochran or Dallas Fraser . . . they weren't taking me seriously as a songwriter."

"When you're not hot, the best songs are going to go to whoever's got the hit records right now, so I knew also I was being pitched secondary material. Also, I had some different ideas on different things I wanted to try. A lot of times when you're locked in with a company, they feel like you've got this image and they want you to stick right with this image. Well, they had in their minds what Jeannie Seely was, but I've never been quite sure—I'm still looking."

Jeannie's a firm believer in change, that you can't stick one person with one image because that person is constantly growing, outgrowing the image.

Her own changes, often public, have been the cause of some raised eyebrows. While other country girl singers sported gingham and bows, Jeannie (herself prettier than her pictures would have you believe) wore hot pants and halters to perform, when hot pants and halters were being worn by half the women in the country. She's worn mini-skirts instead of granny gowns. She drinks beer with the boys and utters a more-than-occasional four-letter word. This, as everyone knows, is something that a country girl singer just doesn't do. And since Jeannie had already been typed as a country girl singer, Jeannie's doings were frowned upon and talked about. It most likely had much to do with Jeannie's less-than-meteoritic career, although she did have a tremendous hit with *Don't Touch Me* and won a Grammy in 1966 for Best Female Performance on a country record.

Her unorthodox marriage to songwriter Hank Cochran hasn't helped either. In a city where a singer's divorce becomes the latest top single, where another's affair hits the charts faster than the proverbial bullet, Jeannie's marriage is merely whispered about, although she herself makes it no secret.

About a year ago, when she married Cochran, she had a talk with one of his three sons.

"He asked me if I'd ever been married before, and I said, 'No,' and he asked why and I told him because I didn't want to get married. So then he asked why I'd married his daddy, and I told him, 'Well, I didn't want to marry your daddy either, but if we didn't get married, they wouldn't have let you kids live with us.' And he said, 'Golllllly, Jeannie.'"

It all comes back to freedom.

"At this point now," she says, "I'm through with the house and pool, so that project's gone. The kids are gone, so I don't have to be concerned about them anymore. And Hank is pretty much going to stay in the Bahamas, write some songs, come back and cut a couple of demo sessions and go back to the Bahamas, so I don't have to be concerned about that."

And the rumors about her and Jack Greene just don't conform to Nashville's mores, although all three—Hank, Jack and Jeannie—are good friends and neighbors.

This neighborliness, incidentally, almost cost Jeannie her life last summer.

"I went to sleep driving," she relates. "It was right at the part I was doing a lot of dealing with Columbia, and we were dealing on a record deal for Jack, and Jack and I were dealing on our live album that we recorded at the Grand Ole Opry between labels, and Hank was in and all this hassle that always happens when Hank is around."

The morning before the accident, Jeannie had come in off the road from Ohio with things on her mind that kept her from sleeping. Jack went to meetings all day and when she hadn't heard from him, she was worried that things hadn't gone well for him. So at about 2:30 or 3 in the morning, still unable to sleep, she jumped into the car, drove to Jack's nearby home and talked things over with him for a couple of hours.

"And the only reason I came home was because I had Marty—Jack's youngest son—over here. Exactly one mile and one-tenth from Jack's carport, I went to sleep." The car went off the road, plowed down a fence and a couple of small trees before hitting a sycamore. Fortunately, the initial impact knocked Jeannie out and over, because the sycamore proceeded to demolish the car and, had Jeannie still been upright, would have demolished her.

The next thing she knew, she was awake in intensive care with five broken ribs, a punctured lung, a fractured face, a broken jaw. Her recovery has been fairly

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rapid, but she still had enough time to think things over and she made a decision.

"I'm not going like I used to. I can't for one thing, and I've made up my mind I'm not going to for the second thing."

Her voice itself is a little more tired-sounding than when I first met her more than a year ago. At that time, she was trying to teach herself to relax by learning new things like baking bread and planting trees. Now she simply relaxes by taking it slow.

However, slowing down doesn't mean the same thing for Jeannie as it might to most people. She's still on the road about 220 days of the year. She still entertains frequently. And she's a regular on the Opry when she's in town.

And, most important to her right now, she's deeply involved in establishing her own publishing company, Great Legend Music. Initially a planned partnership with Hank and Jack, Jeannie went into it on her own when Hank re-signed with Tree Publishing and Jack decided to keep his own two small companies as future investments for his sons.

"Then everybody decided I really kind of needed this project myself," Jeannie says, again remarking that she'd just about wrapped up all her other projects. So, with herself as Great Legend's main commodity, Jeannie got into the publishing business. And almost got out of it.

"After the accident, when you don't feel well, then you start feeling uncertain about a new thing. I had kind of a tough time trying to adjust to everything after I got well enough to think about things. Then I had an offer to go back with Tree. But like I told Hank and everybody, I need something to build for my future, too, because I know there's going to come a day when age is going to be a factor in my career. I want something to help make that transition. Like I told Francis Preston at BMI, the reason I want the publishing company is so that some day I can be a lady executive like her instead of a has-been girl singer."

That's another thing that sets Jeannie apart from most of Nashville: She's a realist, and she's smart.

So, while on one hand getting a renewed start on pushing her singing career to the hilt, she's planning ahead, just in case. Still, the two are not unconnected. Since establishing the publishing company, she's been concentrating on her own writing again, and it's paying off.

While still between labels, she met Chuck Glaser, late of the Glaser Brothers, and he became convinced that she had something worth listening to. She began recording with him as producer and eventually sold her new song, *We're Still Hangin' In There, Ain't We Jessi?* to Columbia Records, who, also eventually signed her to a contract. She retained Glaser as her producer and at his insistence looked at other writers' material

again to record. After the search, Glaser and Jeannie sat down together and went over the material they'd come up with. Even Glaser agreed that Jeannie's own was the best, so—except for two songs—her album will have been entirely written by Jeannie Seely.

Ironically, her single was written by Hank Cochran and Glenn Martin. It was only by accident that it became her single.

It's called *Take Me to Bed, And I'll Be Good* (Jeannie is hesitant when she tells me the title). She turned the song down because she figured she'd had enough trouble with one of her earlier hits, *Can I Sleep in Your Arms Tonight, Mister?*

"But I cut the demo for Hank. Then Tree took my demo of *Take Me to Bed* to Billy Sherrill (Columbia's own starmaker) to pitch it for Tammy. And Sherrill said, 'Isn't that Jeannie?' and they said 'yeah,' and he said, 'Well, I like that better than what we're releasing on her,' and he picked up the phone, called New York and cancelled my release. He told them to take me back to the studio and do this song when I got to where I could.

"It's kind of hard to argue with his track record," she admits.

But she's determined to release her own *Forever Gone* as a follow-up. Even Hank, she says proudly, told her that she'd given him a run for it when she wrote that song.

Jeannie takes us upstairs to play the two

songs for us. The difference from her earlier recordings is remarkable. Glaser, she says, has used a new microphone that picks up the deep-throated huskiness of her speaking voice, instead of toning it down. The voice that comes out over those tapes is a different Jeannie Seely and, I think, a better one.

Despite her tiredness, the excitement of having another potential hit after so many years comes through. The excitement of recording her own songs is apparent. She's no longer taking a back seat to her own career, even hiring her own promotional people to push the new single instead of relying only on Columbia's publicity.

Another reason she'd left MCA was because they wouldn't let her and Jack cut duets, although they had parlayed their duo into the top five for five straight years. Why, she wouldn't say, although she has her own ideas. (Conway and Loretta are also MCA acts.)

But right now it's Jeannie for Jeannie. And if she can get by Nashville's whispers and disapprovals, maybe this time she'll make it. She's got everything going for her now: self-assurance, a definite goal, good material, an understanding and good producer and, of course, freedom.

If things go alright for her, maybe she can change those words to that simple but revealing song to a more positive phrase:

"I feel more free than I feel lost." ■



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The Open Road Songs Of The Midnight Cowboy

WBAP recently celebrated its 50th anniversary. Sitting high on "radio hill" overlooking Fort Worth, Texas, it beams its 50,000 watt clear channel signal all across the United States and is one of the most listened to country stations in the world. It's also a station with a rich history, at one time broadcast the Lightcrust Doughboys live, and maintains a healthy and respectful attitude toward the music it plays and the audience it serves. And for the past seven years WBAP has been playing country music 24-hours a day.

No one knows just how many thousands are listening to WBAP at any one time, but the station's success is phenomenal. Listener response via phone calls and mail is voluminous. And Wee Marie, a young lady who has been with Bill Mack and the Open Road Show for five years, takes phone messages and requests for five solid hours. There is a map in the program director's office showing the phone calls that have come in week by week from all over the United States. They've received calls from as far away as Ireland and once from a German ship at sea. One ad campaign which the station decided not to run but which mistakenly got on the air ten times brought in responses from 31 states and Mexico, besides 69 letters from Texas. Two outstanding examples of listener response are related to promotional campaigns—one an accident which snow-balled. Don Day, the jock who is on the air just prior to the legendary Bill Mack, told his audience one afternoon that since they were already listening to the best station in the country they might just as well rip off their radio dials right where they were and send them in to WBAP. Dials started pouring in, the other jocks picked up on it and soon the station was inundated with thousands of radio knobs. They had boxes and boxes of them before they finally had to call a halt to it. Then WBAP held a "Follow the Spotted Asses Contest"—the winner won an all expenses paid trip to nearby Wichita Falls. WBAP provided two spotted donkeys and a covered wagon and a chance to drive the wagon to Wichita Falls where it would meet up with a parade celebrating the bi-centennial and headed for Valley Forge. It turned out that a number of people were not only willing but wanted to drive the spotted asses to Valley Forge.

I find myself sitting in the large office which belongs to Warren Potash the gen-

eral manager of WBAP. With him are program director Don Thomson and music director Art Davis. We're discussing the success of WBAP and I ask them why they think it's so popular. The general feeling is that WBAP is attune to its audience and continues to be, particularly to the west Texas-Oklahoma area. "Do you think there is a difference in Texas music and country music from other parts of the country?", I ask. They all look at one another and laugh. "That's just what we were talking about this morning", Warren says. "If you listen to the records that sell in Texas you'll find that they all have one thing in common—they all have a dance beat. It might be a slow type song, but it'll still have a dance beat."

There is a singular lack of personnel turn-over at WBAP, which is very unusual for a radio station. Art Davis has been there for 23 years; Don Thomson for nine. Bill Mack has been staying up all night for seven years and most of the other jocks have been there at least several years.

Talk turns to the Bill Mack show, perhaps the most listened to of all the all-night country radio shows. Aside from the truckers who make the all-night trans-continental hauls, Bill Mack has discovered new listeners—airline pilots. WBAP's transmitting tower lies at the end of the Dallas/Ft. Worth airport and pilots have actually followed its signal into Ft. Worth. Requests from airline pilots have come from as far away as Hawaii.

There is, despite good-natured kidding, a great deal of respect for Mack, who is WBAP's star—in fact, maybe the last real radio star in America. I come away with a lot of respect for Potash, a businessman with savvy. He refused to be photographed, reserving the camera for the people who are the radio station.

Don Thomson gives me a lift to the Ramada Inn where we find the bar and talk more about WBAP. They still play records, no tapes, about 70 singles on the playlist, and they also maintain a large selection of record albums—a reassuring policy in this age of increasing automation. I learn from Don that most of the people concerned with the production side of the station are also musicians. Don has released several recordings on various local labels, the most recent being *Friendly California* which intimates that California ain't really so friendly after all, a view of California that's been popular in Texas and Oklahoma

ever since the dust bowl days.

We arrive a few minutes early and someone puts on Bill Mack's theme song just as he pulls up to the door being chauffeured by his good-looking wife. We're introduced and after complimenting *Country Music Magazine*, he says there'll be plenty of time to talk after he gets rolling. I sit at a long wooden table in front of turntables with literally every country music star's name I ever heard of carved on its top. I carve my name between Moe Bandy and Tanya Tucker. Bill Mack starts off, and, watching, I sense the energy he brings into the room and across America. He's a man doing a job, doing it well, and loving it.

Among other things, Bill Mack is a walking, talking encyclopedia of country music. He knows it all. He was at one time the emcee for Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys. He's written several songs himself, most notably, Connie Smith's *Clingin' To a Savin' Hand* and Cal Smith's *Drinkin' Champagne*. But he's best known as the "Midnight Cowboy" host of the "Open Road" show picked up religiously by most truckers and country entertainers on the road and everyone in between. Wee Marie begins taking phone requests, the first one comes from rodeo star Larry Mahan. After awhile Bill and I start swapping stories about Bob Wills, Lefty Frizzell and other greats and near-greats.

Bill tells me about his super-eight movies. He just finished shooting "The Clodfather" and is now working on "Hot Chaps" a take-off on "Blazing Saddles". He gleefully reports that "The Clodfather" was reviewed in the Fort Worth paper and was panned. He invites me back to drink a few beers and help out with "Hot Chaps". But for the moment I have to drive back to Austin and Bill is preparing to leave for a vacation in Hawaii.

I come away impressed having seen firsthand the heart of a country music radio station that seems to do everything right. But that isn't the real story of WBAP. I discovered the real story, the same way countless others have, one rainy night while driving home from southern Louisiana. I was alone and tired and I had a long way to go. I switched around on the radio dial until I heard a familiar voice, "This is Bill Mack, the old Midnight Cowboy and the Open Road show." All of a sudden I felt better—I had a good road to travel and I was listening to an old friend.

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Records

Hank Williams, Jr.
The New South
Warner Brothers BS 3127
\$4.98 (List \$6.98)
(No tape available)
Star Rating: ★★ ★

Of all Hank, Jr.'s recent battles, none has been rougher than overcoming the Living Proof image he's carried since day one. He's hammered at it through each post-accident al-



bum and though I'm not sure he realizes it, he's closer to breaking through it than ever.

But two obstacles stand in his way here, one being Waylon's production. His penchant for dominating all he touches flavors the music to the point that one number, *Tennessee*, sounds like an Ol' Waylon out-



take. The second is Hank's own doing. He might steadfastly assert he's playing *his* music and that he "don't feel *Lovesick*

Blues," yet he still invokes the name of Hank, Sr., if not by mentioning him, then by cutting *You're Gonna Change (Or I'm Gonna Leave)* which is still his song, even under the dixie-rock arrangement. It might be force of habit, but it undercuts Hank, Jr.'s credibility.

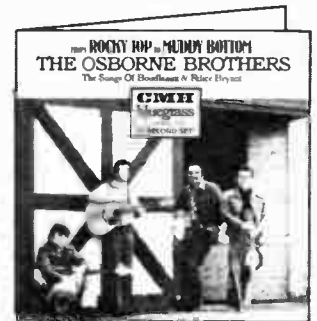
Still, the signs of optimism are clear in three moving originals: the autobiographical *Feel-in' Better*, *Once And For All* and *New South* show him in command of a hard-hitting, blunt songwriting style clearly his own. Two songs by Steve Young (an obvious inspiration), *Montgomery In The Rain* and *Long Way From Hollywood*, complement them beautifully. He's not abandoned tradition, however. His remake of Jerry Lee Lewis' 1962 waxing of *How's My Ex Treating You*, *Uncle Pen* and Jessi Colter's *Storms Never Last* are hauntingly archaic and masterful.

I doubt he expected to erase 29 years in a few albums, but *The New South* hints at the Bocephus of the future. No more help from his friends is needed; the next move's strictly up to him.

RICH KIENZLE

The Osborne Brothers
From Rocky Top to Muddy Bottom: The Songs of Boudleaux & Felice Bryant
CMH-9008 \$8.98 (List \$9.98)
CMH-8-9008 (Tape) \$9.98
Star Rating: ★★ ★ 1/2

Tribute albums to songwriters are always risky business, unless the writer is particularly fertile. Otherwise, things end up sounding a little bit the



same by the end of the second side, or else familiar tunes are mangled with bizarre arrangements (in the hopes of making them "different") which suit them not at all.

However, the choice of Felice & Boudleaux Bryant was a superb one, for not only have

Hank Thompson
Doin' My Thing
ABC-DOT DO-2091 \$4.98
(List \$6.98)
(No tape available)
Star Rating: ★★ ★ 1/2

Hank Thompson plays his own brand of hard-core country music. Though he incorporates heavy elements of western swing—lots of fiddle and fluid electric and steel guitar interplay—and even some weird vestiges of fifties-style pop music, his gruff, crooning vocals, combined with the repetitious 2/4 back-beat, translate most of it into straight-ahead, good-time, gut-bucket dance hall music—which, in this case, is probably far more exciting live than it is on record.

There are couple of interesting songs on *Doin' My Thing*. *We Don't Love Here Anymore*, for example, is a sad evocative love lament with an imaginative and unusual arrangement. It's *Five O'Clock Somewhere* is an exciting, up-beat drinking song.

Hank wrote or co-wrote just about all the songs on *Doin' My Thing*. Unfortunately, he has a tendency toward droll lyrics: bad puns, awkward word-plays, strained metaphors and clumsy rhyme schemes. In country music, there is a fine line between wit and solecism, and songs like *Window In My Heart*, *If I Only Had An Ounce Of Sense (I'd Come In Out Of The Pain)* and *Time Wounds All Heels* show what happens

when you cross it too often. Lyrically speaking, songs like *Johnny On The Spot* and *She Loves The One She's With* are utter throw-aways.

I'm sure this is great drinking music, but there's really not much here to take seriously while sober.

BOB ALLEN



How We Rate The Albums: 5 Stars...Album of the Month
 4 Stars...Excellent 3 Stars...Very Good 2 Stars...Fair
 0 Stars...Poor

their songs—*Rocky Top*, *Tennessee Hound Dog* and *Georgia Piney Woods* in particular—been very good to the Osborne Brothers, but their career, now approaching thirty years, has been one of the most fertile and diverse in country music history. So although a couple of the problems inherent in songwriter tributes exist here—a few too many “cute” and/or nostalgia pieces, for example—the 20 songs on this double album provide surprising variety.

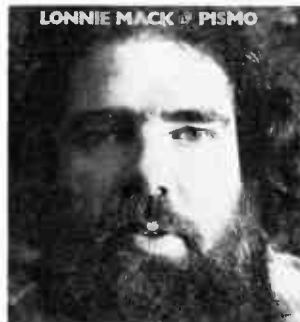
And the Osborne Brothers are ideal interpreters. They are not only capable of breakneck bluegrass like *Rocky Top* and the romping *Tennessee Hound Dog*, but for 20 years they have been country music’s premier harmony singers. Their intricate trios, topped by Bob Osborne’s sky-high tenor, are flawless. In fact, this album suffers from not having more heartrending weepers like *We Could*, which is probably the best cut here.

If there is one outstanding fault, it is that the whole thing sounds as though it was recorded in too little time. The Osbornes have a well-deserved reputation for perfectionism on record; to hear so many notes that could have, and should have, been hit better bespeaks of careless and rushed production. Still, it is a warm tribute from superb musicians and singers to superb songwriters.

DOUGLAS B. GREEN

Lonnie Mack

Lonnie Mack and Pismo
 Capitol ST-11703 \$4.98 (List \$6.98)
 (No tape available)
 Star Rating: ★★★★★



Lonnie Mack’s previous efforts on the Fraternity, Elektra and Capitol labels all merited their substantial share of critical praise, but none has come as close to kicking up the spiritual fires of Mack’s old signature piece, *Memphis*, as this debut outing with his new piledriving band, Pismo. Without trying to fit into any particular mold, Mack has hammered out a convincing synthesis of Southern soul by serving up country, rock and blues.

If “country” was typical of his style, then Mack could simply be filed away as the latest standard bearer of Dixie boogie, his bearish growl comparing favorably to that of Charlie Daniels’. But Mack is just as comfortable with the kind of Nashville rhythm ‘n’ blues associated



ALBUM OF THE MONTH

with Delbert McClinton, Billy Swan and Troy Seals. *Mexico*, a reworking of Seals’ *San Antonee-oo*, transforms from a smooth shuffle into a crashing, almost angry invitation; *Hug Me Till It Hurts*, written by Seals and Mack, is just the greasiest tribute to big fat woman since Joe Tex. However, it is the straight ahead mover *Rock and Roll Like We Used To* that most succinctly sums up Mack’s brilliance. Co-written with Pismo bassist Tim Drummund, the song is powered by Chuck Berry-styled guitar aggression in praise of a forgotten musical era “when you didn’t have to listen to the words for it to move.”

While songs like these accurately pinpoint the joys of hot nights and hell raising, the album may be destined for the deep recesses of your record store. This would mean most listeners might never hear it. The problem for country-rock is radio’s refusal to acknowledge its popular appeal. Mack is too wild for your basic AM C&W station and too upfront a hill-billy for progressive FMers, so he winds up in limbo because he ostensibly lacks “commercial appeal.” And in this instance, where for once violins are non-existent and the guitar again reigns as king, it’s a crying shame.

JOE NICK PATOSKI

Kenny Rogers

Ten Years Of Gold
 United Artists UA-LA835-H
 \$5.98 (List \$7.98)
 (No tape available)
 Star Rating: ★★

Several years ago, after Kenny Rogers had covered his version of *Ruby, Don’t Take Your Love To Town*, now-obscure singer Johnny Darrell told me, “I don’t get it. I can sing just as good as Kenny

Rogers.” What he should have added was that just about *anybody* can sing as well as Rogers, a man who, after more than a decade of consistently making the charts, nevertheless still mystifies most observers as to exactly what he offers. It would seem to boil down to two things: 1) a reasonably unique voice, and 2) an uncanny knack for picking material.

United Artists has now re-

leased the highlights of Roger’s last decade in *Ten Years Of Gold*. Maybe all the songs didn’t sell a million, but they are, figuratively speaking, golden hits. *Ruby, Don’t Take Your Love To Town* is already a classic, *Lucille* is destined to be one, *Rueben James* should have been. In fact, with one or two exceptions, every song is head, shoulders, chest, and waist above the normal bill of

fare found on most albums. But they have been hits in spite of Rogers, not because of him.

Therefore, if you listen to music primarily for the lyric content of the song, Rogers’ choices won’t disappoint you. If you listen to music mainly for the vocal and musical purity, Rogers’ “singing” will cause you to run up a white flag.

JOHN PUGH

Jim Owen and the Drifting Cowboys

A Song For Us All
Epic PE6-34852 \$4.98
(\$6.98 List)
No tape available)

Star Rating: ★★☆☆

Jim Owen is a young songwriter whose dedication to Hank Williams led him to create a one man show based on Hank's career. The show won an award when presented on public television. So it was natural that Owen should record a Hank Williams tribute, and it was also natural that he should use the original Drifting Cowboys—Jerry Rivers, Don Helms, Hillous Butrum, and Bob McNett—who have been quite active of late.

It's a bit more surprising—and, for that reason, more pleasing—to find it produced by Charlie Daniels, who with this album proudly displays affection for his country roots.

For all that good news, however, this set is not without problems. The whole of side one is taken up with interviews with the participants, and only snatches of music. A little conversation adds dimension to the album; and entire side makes Epic seem desperate to

prove the legitimacy of the project. Then, too, the presence of Daniels as a guest singer on *Settin' the Woods On Fire* is meant, I presume, to convey the feeling of good cheer on the project, as well as to sell albums. But that does not offset its obtrusive quality. And while the Drifting Cowboys provide their expected authenticity and solid instrumental work, they are not gifted singers. They shine on their version of Johnnie Lee Wills' *Rag Mop*, but usually the ensemble choruses sound like a bunch of tavern patrons belting out a bunch of good ol' Hank's tunes.

Nevertheless, Jim Owen seems to be a performer of innate good taste, and his contribution to the album stands out for its dignity and restraint. His husky voice is not like Hank's, but his inflections are, and that works to his advantage. He is a devoted interpreter, not a slavish imitator. While this album has several serious flaws, Owen's dignified, tasteful, loving performance transcends those flaws. That makes for some highly recommended listening.

DOUGLAS B. GREEN



Faron Young

That Young Feeling
Mercury SRM-1-5005 \$4.98
(List \$6.98)
(No tape available)

Star Rating: ★★☆☆

I used to like Faron Young back in the late Fifties when he wore Nudie suits and cut songs like *Live Fast, Love Hard*, *Die Young*, and *Leave A Beautiful Memory*. Well, Faron may have lived fast and loved



hard but he didn't die young and, therefore, has had to make some adjustments. For one thing, if you've seen him on tv lately, he looks more like a mafia gangster than a country & western singer. Still, as this new album attests, the Singing Sheriff hasn't changed his style that much.

The best cuts are *I'm Storing Up Memories In My Mind*,

This Will Be Her Last Goodbye, Please Take Her Home (and Love Her) and particularly *Loving Here & Living There & Lying In Between* and *The Unhappy Hour*, which contains the lines "bartender... pour me a tall pair of crutches, and maybe then I can make it home." The LP also contains a couple of country standards: *City Lights* (I can't believe Bill Anderson wrote this in Commerce, Georgia, I can't believe that he wrote it at all) and Conway Twitty's not-too-recent *Lying Here With Linda On My Mind*. There's also a couple of tunes that aren't so hot. Lately it seems that a lot of less inspired Nashville songwriters have been taking some obscure and not so obscure Kristofferson lines and turning them into complete songs. This affirms Kris's stature as a songwriter but it doesn't often make for good songs. *The Worst You Ever Gave Me Was The Best I Ever Had* is a case in point, but there's also *(You May Be Little) But You're The Biggest Part Of Me*. All in all, it's a good record; there are fiddles and steel and Faron's vocals are more than up to par. It's good stuff for honky-tonking or crying in your beer.

NELSON ALLEN



Flatt and Scruggs

The Golden Era
Rounder Special Series 05
(P-13826) \$4.98 (List \$5.98)
(No tape available)

Star Rating: ★★☆☆

What we have here is an essential bluegrass album. In 1948, Lester Flatt and Earl

Scruggs left bluegrass founding father Bill Monroe's band and set out on their own with the Foggy Mountain Boys. For two years they recorded for Mercury, where they saw considerable success. But in 1950, they switched to Columbia, and here they really hit their stride,

becoming the most popular bluegrass band since Monroe's, spawning many imitators along the way. Here they developed that legendary sound, based on Scruggs' lightning-fast banjo and Flatt's rhythm guitar and pinched vocals, that was somehow crisp and easy-going at the same time.

This album documents the first five years of the group's long association with Columbia, a period before they were well-known outside those states where bluegrass reigned supreme, perhaps, but also a period before they began making concessions to the urban folk crowd that diluted, and



eventually dissolved entirely, their sound. Golden Era makes available twelve sides out of print for years (only five of which were ever available on LP in the first place).

The tone is set on the first cut, when Scruggs and fiddle great Benny Martin swap choruses on the instrumental *Flint Hill Special*, a Scruggs calling card. Martin shines again on *Your Love Is Like a Flower*, but several other ace fiddlers also get showcased here—particularly Benny Sims on *Head Over Heels In Love With You* and Paul Warren on *Randy Lynn Rag*, the latter an undeniably propulsive tune with hot picking all around. There's also a pair of fine gospel numbers in *I'm Working On a Road* and *Brother I'm Getting Ready To Go*, both written by Flatt. Finally, don't overlook that honky tonk classic *Dim Lights, Thick Smoke (And Loud, Loud Music)* or the sprightly, controversial *I'm Gonna Sleep With One Eye Open*.

JOHN MORTILAND

Oak Ridge Boys
Y'All Come Back Saloon
ABC DOT DO-2093 \$4.98
(List \$6.98)
(No Tape Available)
Star Rating: ★★ ★

In name, The Oak Ridge Boys date back to pre-World War II days, although the most long-standing of its current members has only been part of the group for 13 years. Within the music industry, The Oaks have been perennially recognized (three Grammys and 15 Dove Awards), but only with their recent signing with ABC-Dot have they had their first genuine hit single, *Y'All Come Back Saloon*, and begun getting radio airplay. Naturally they are being treated like a brand-new group.

With their history as a gospel quartet, The Oaks' strongest point, needless to say, is their vocals. And the songs here have been arranged and mixed accordingly, always emphasizing the fine tapestry of their rough-hewn, yet clear and confident, harmonies.

A minor weakness with the Oaks is that at their best, they often have a tendency to sound too much like someone else.



Songs like *Easy*, *Emmylou* and *Didn't She Really Thrill Them Back In 1924* are built around their superb vocal talents, but the way the tenor and baritone are piled over the brassy, booming bass voice is highly reminiscent of the Statlers.

This is really a nit-picking point, though. Overall, this LP contains a whole lot of good reasons why this highly talented vocal group is finally enjoying some of the broad-based commercial success it deserves.

BOB ALLEN

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MO38



Buck Owens

Our Old Mansion
Warner Bros. BS 3087 \$4.98
(List \$6.98)
(No Tape Available)
Star Rating: ★★★

In all fairness, it's been a while since I listened to a Buck Owens LP with any amount of deliberation. One of his albums used to be among my father's favorites, and he played it day and night. He



played it until I not only knew all the songs by heart, but knew where all the scratches were as well. He played it until songs like *A Bad Year For The Roses* and *Made In Japan* ingratiated themselves indelibly in my memory. He played them until I came to dearly love them.

As a writer, Buck has given us, over the years, a handful of country standards like *Together Again* and a string of novelty tunes like *Tiger By The Tail*. And new originals like *How Come My Dog Don't Bark*, *Texas Tornado* and *He Don't Deserve You Anymore* show that his commercial touch has not faded one iota. (I've always felt that if Buck hadn't made it as a singer, he could have made a fortune writing commercial jingles. He is a master at mixing devastatingly serious messages with cute word-plays and tongue-in-cheek humor: You never quite know whether he's putting you on or not.)

There are no new Buck Owens standards here. (*Let The Good Times Roll* is an obvious sequel to *Together Again*, but it lacks the punch and subtlety of its progenitor.) And there's nothing really startling. *Our Old Mansion* is just solid, dependable old Buck.

BOB ALLEN

Linda Hargrove

Impressions
Capitol ST-11685 \$4.98 (List \$6.98)
(No Tape Available)
Star Rating: ★★★

Though better known for her considerable songwriting talents, Linda Hargrove is also a seasoned recording artist, having already chalked up four solo albums prior to this one. While none were exactly monumental, they did provide the necessary experience to make the fifth time around her most polished effort yet. If every song was *Mexican Love Songs*, Hargrove could concentrate on showcasing all her previous material by herself. The song delves deeper into the languid soul of Tex-Mex than anything done by a country artist since Marty Robbins. Of course, the fact she hung around downtown San Antone on a hot and dusty night with a bellyful of Dos Equis a couple of years ago helps the tune's credibility.

But alas, every song is not *Mexican Love Songs*. *Star Crossed Lovers* only teases here. Given a livelier treatment by somebody else—Lynn Anderson, for instance—it is

top ten material. *Nashville You Ain't Hollywood* may be my most favorite C&W protest song since *Welfare Cadillac*. It is certainly as valid a social commentary as anything Mrs. Carter's favorite workingman, James Talley, has written. Regrettably, it holds about as much commercial promise as Talley's eclectic material.

Taken as a demo, there are some mighty fine pickings waiting to be recorded by someone more famous. *Impressions*, *I'd Rather Keep My Distance* and *Mem'ries* all have strong potential. As a female vocalist's album, *Impressions* lacks the passion to convey the deep emotions of the songs themselves. Perhaps



given her own band, with a more distinct identity than a Nashville studio session can give, Hargrove will have the best of both worlds next time. For now, she has to settle for something slightly less.

JOE NICK PATOSKI

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AUDIO

Unwinding The Facts On Cassettes

It was a distress call. "Something's wrong with my tape deck. Can you come over and take a listen?"

I had other things planned, but knowing how much that new tape deck meant to my friend, I dropped what I was doing and drove over. He had been taping Diana Ross off the air and was unhappy. On playback, Diana sounded as if singing through a wool muffler—all tubby and no highs—and every once in a while she had hiccupps.

I knew what was wrong as soon as I saw the cassette. Seems my friend had picked up one of those off-brand bargain cassettes that often turn out no bargain at all. More often than not such cassettes use reject tape that sounds dull and has frequent drop-outs during which the music breaks off entirely for a moment. I put in one of my own blank cassettes I had brought along—a reliable quality brand—and put the recorder through its paces. As I expected, it sounded just fine.

The moral of the story—well, never mind. Just remember that no tape recorder can be any better than the tape running in it. As the actual carrier of the recorded sound, the tape largely determines what you hear. No matter what the merits of your machine, the tape itself affects such important factors as frequency response, the levels of background hiss, and dynamic range—that is, the spread between the softest and loudest sounds your tape can carry.

All of which leads to the question of picking the right tape for your recorder. With the many kinds of different blank cassettes now on the market, each claiming to be better than the next, this can be pretty confusing. So let's get down to basics.

The "working" part of any tape is the magnetic layer coated on the plastic backing. This layer magnetically "holds" the musical signal and consists of tiny metal oxide grains mixed into a so-called binder substance. Most manufacturers guard their formula for this layer as jealously as a Mexican restaurant cook guards the recipe for his chili sauce. It's these secret formulas that are responsible for the slightly different sound of each cassette

brand.

Until recently, there were just two basic types of cassette: those using iron oxide (also called ferric oxide) and those using chromium dioxide as magnetic materials. Both kinds have specific advantages and drawbacks. Chromium tape (often designated by the formula CrO_2) has brighter highs but tends to be a little weak in the low end. The result is brilliant, clear sound, but lacking a little in warmth and bottom bass. Ferric Oxide cassettes (FeO_2) may lack those super-glossy highs, but many listeners prefer the smooth overall balance and the richer bass. Besides, ferric cassettes are cheaper.

To get the best possible results from either kind of cassette, you must adjust the circuits of your tape recorder to match the requirements of the tape. That's why the better tape decks have a selector switch by which the recorder can be optimized for either ferric or chrome tape. If your machine has no such switch, you can take it for granted that it is factory-adjusted for ferric tapes, and you had better stick with them. In fact, you may want to stick with ferric tapes in any case because many of the better brands have recently been upgraded, using smaller and more evenly distributed iron particles to improve response at the high end. (Small-grain tapes permit more sonic detail to be recorded just as fine-grain photo film yields sharper detail in pictures). I checked out a whole batch of those new, improved ferric tapes—using test tones and output meters—and found several outstanding performers in this group: the **Scotch Master I**, the **TDK AD**, the **Fuji, FC**, and **BASF Professional I**. They all cost about \$3 for a 1 hour (C-60) cassette and are often available at discount. I also obtained very good results from **Radio Shack's Concert-Tape**, which sells for \$2.59 for a C-60.

Recently, two additional tape types have come on the market, known as "ferrichrome" and "ferricobalt" cassettes. In ferrichrome tapes (such as the **Scotch Master III**) a thin chrome layer is placed on top of the ferric layer so that the highs register in the chrome while the lows are retained in the iron. In short, each part of

the musical range goes to its most congenial recording medium. The idea is to combine the relative advantages of chrome and ferrite in a single tape. Aside from being more expensive than other tape types, these cassettes require a special setting on the selector switch, usually marked **FeCr**. Trouble is that only the most recent tape decks have it. Unless your recorder has this special setting for **FeCr** tapes, there is little point in paying a premium for them.

The ferricobalt tapes, by contrast, don't have multiple layers. Instead, each iron oxide grain is bonded to tiny bits of cobalt. This greatly improves frequency response at the high end and enlarges the possible spread between loud and soft. With such cassettes you can record very loud passages without distortion and very soft passages without background hiss—providing you have the kind of high-quality sound equipment that really shows up the difference. If so, it may be worth your while to explore such premium ferricobalt tapes as the **Maxell UDXL-II**, the **3M Scotch Master III**, **BASF's Professional II**, or **TDK's SA (Super Avilyn)**. On average, they cost about \$1 per cassette more than the plain ferrics. By comparing them with other tapes on your own equipment you can decide for yourself if the difference in sound is worth the added cost.

Aside from the tape itself, the performance of a cassette also depends on its plastic shell. When you pop a cassette into your recorder, the shell becomes part of the mechanism that controls tape motion. Unless the shell is molded to close tolerances, it does not maintain a constant rolling friction. The result is uneven tape motion, making the pitch of the music wobble. At worst, it causes binding, twisting, and tearing of the tape.

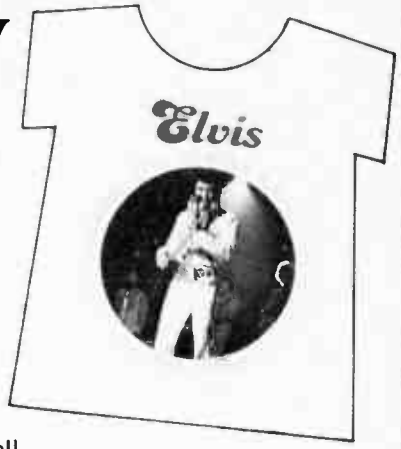
This sort of trouble happens far more often with off-brand cassettes where quality control in manufacturing is usually skimpy to save production costs. So, if your tape recorder doesn't work right, it's often the fault of the cassette—as happened the other evening to my friend. When I am counting on a recording to come out right, I don't mind paying a little extra for a known and reliable tape brand. I just think of it as insurance. ■

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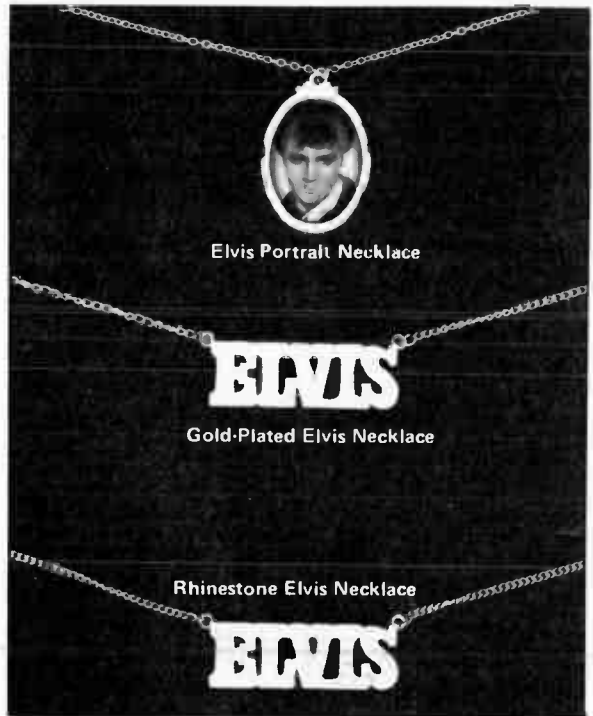
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MO38



From Staten Island, New York, comes the last word on instruments. . .

PICKERS

By STAN JAY and HAP KUFFNER

A.K.A. *The Mandolin Brothers*

We are very enthused at the bags of mail that came in in response to our vintage instrument article in the July issue. Many people ask the same questions: namely "How old is it" or "what's it worth." We could dedicate 10 pages to answering those questions but we'd much rather hear about unusual fretted instruments, repair and restoration or questions about history and development of specific models and brands of acoustic and electric instruments owned by readers, or used in country and bluegrass music. We will be happy to answer all the "how old is it and what's it worth" letters privately, but are especially delighted when you give us a question that makes us do our homework.

Keep 'em comin'.

About four years ago I heard of a man out west who was buried with a Stradivarius violin, a very selfish man to be sure. The instrument, in it's case, was placed in a casket with the deceased. A vault was placed over the casket. The instrument's case was not the original, but rather a high quality one the owner purchased himself—hard shell, but probably not air-tight.

If the instrument could be recovered do you think it would still be playable after four years? Also, could the smell of death be removed?

D.G., Madison, Wisconsin.

People sometimes ask where we "dig up" questions like this, but it's no deep, dark secret—we actually get them sent by readers and instrument owners. We have good news and bad news for D.G. The good news is that having been buried out west is quite favorable for the violin—the soil is dry and the vault would act as additional protection. Having a new case is good also since cases today are of higher quality than those made in the past. Our local mortician advised us that if the body has been properly embalmed there will be no smell of death, and after only four years the instrument should be quite playable.

The bad news is that while exhuming the deceased may be an uplifting experience for the instrument finder, the legal liabilities are far reaching. If being buried with his Stradivarius violin was a condition of the owner's will, then there is

Mandolin Brothers Talk Back!

little chance that anybody will be fiddling with his final request. But for the "last word" we suggest D.G. see an attorney.

I was greatly interested in the article in the July issue of Country Music. I have acquired my late father's Gibson Mastertone tenor banjo, serial number 9057-3. He passed away 33 years ago and it has taken quite a beating in that time. I have an eight year old daughter who shows an interest in learning to play it if I could get it repaired without it costing more than a new one. It is still in the original case although it is really a mess and smells. There is a dual light fixture inside the banjo but the wires are broken.

Mrs. J.S.R.

Warner Robins, Ga.

Gibson Mastertone banjos are considered professional quality and are sought by musicians and collectors. Your banjo dates back to 1929 according to our serial number list—a period (1922-1933) considered the golden era for American guitars and banjos. In the late '30s the popularity of the tenor faded, to be replaced by the 6-string guitar, especially the electric guitar.

The light fixture inside the banjo is not original equipment, but was added to serve a double purpose. Tenor players go for fancy instruments, and there was nothing more "flashy" at that time than alternating colored lights glowing through the head of the instrument while on stage. Banjo heads were made of calfskin then and on humid days would stretch out and soften the sound. The lights, producing heat, kept the skin head tight throughout the performance. Banjos today are set up with plastic heads which don't stretch and rarely need adjustment.

Our advice is to bring the banjo to an

experienced fretted instrument repairperson (not a violin maker or a general music store), or return it to the Gibson Company in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Have the instrument cleaned and set-up. Removing the electric lights would be recommended, and the repairman can buff the nickel plated parts and remove the green tarnish. A new hard shell case can be obtained—thus eliminating the dreadful odor.

The instrument is too valuable (and also too heavy—weighing about 15 pounds) for an eight-year-old to learn on, but whether you keep it for ten more years for your daughter or have it appraised now and sell it, we suggest that the restoration be done at this time before the instrument deteriorates further.

I own an old violin. This is what it says on the inside:

*ANTONIUS STRADIVARIUS
CREMONENEIS. FACIEBAT. ANNO 1736
I would like to sell it. Please let me know what it is worth.*

Mrs. C.G.

Saranac Lake, N.Y.

I have in my possession an old D-18 Martin guitar in excellent condition. This guitar has MARTIN written down the peg-head. I am wondering if this is a collector's item.

J.M.

Harrodsburg, Ky

American fretted instruments (banjo-mandolin-guitar) are so much easier to identify than violins. Tradition among violin makers over the last two centuries prescribed that the maker sign the instrument in the name of the Master luthier who originated that style fiddle. More than half the letters we receive about old

(Continued on page 66)

PICKERS

NEW PRODUCTS

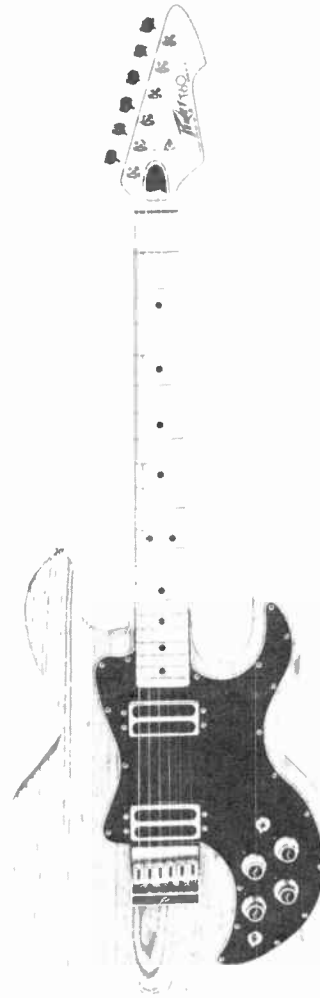
Materials for playin' pickin' and packin'...



If you're tired of showing up for your gigs dressed fit to kill but still carrying that ratty old guitar case, take heart. **Reunion Blues** of San Francisco, has come up with two leather gig bags solid body for guitars and basses.

Each bag, handcut and double stitched with edges bound in leather, is constructed so that the guitar is completely wrapped in foam rubber, with a lining where butt plate and tuning pegs usually cause wear, and there's an extra foam padded bumper inside the zipper at the bottom for added protection.

Prices are \$132 for the small bag and \$138 for the large. **Reunion Blues**, 475 Valencia, San Francisco, Calif., 94103.



Peavy Electronics has tossed its substantial hat into the guitar ring with the introduction of the T-60 electric guitar.

The T-60 features a select ash hardwood body with a double cut-away design, bi-laminated maple neck for added strength and stability and two specially designed humbucking pickups.

The T-60 circuitry features an extremely wide tonal range capability by allowing the guitar to operate in either single coil or humbucking mode.

Each instrument is supplied with a molded case and guitar strap. Suggested retail price is a reasonable \$350.

Contact, **Peavy Electronics**, P.O. Box 2898, Meridian, Miss., 39301

The venerable **Rhodes Suitcase** electric piano has been given an overhaul and facelift, with an eye toward greater clarity, ease of operation and lower distortion. Quicker control and more power are the hallmarks of the new structural and electrical modifications.

Featuring an in-line array of combined dial and slide controls, everything needed is within quick reach of the musician's left hand as he moves along the keyboard. Vibrato functions are now separated, but located adjacent to one another on the same area of the control panel. The separate vibrato controls for speed and in-

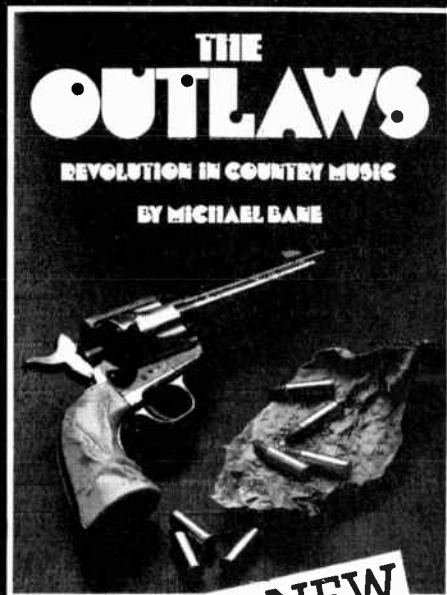


tensity also include a pilot light indicator that pulses with vibrato. Rhodes has also extended the vibrato speed and intensity ranges. Horizontal slide style lever controls on treble and bass are used for quick reference on the settings.

Sound output of the Rhodes has been increased nearly 50 percent. The instrument now includes a dual 50-watt solid-state amplifier, delivering 100 watts RMS to the speakers. The speakers themselves are also specially designed, high efficiency 12" units, mounted integrally within the case.

Still available are both 73 and 88 note models, both with updated electronics and front panel. The instruments packs into two self-enclosed ruggedly constructed cases, amp and speakers in one case, preamp and keyboard in the other. **Rhodes Keyboard Instruments**.

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By Michael Bane

The Editor of Country Music Magazine

**Willie, Waylon, Jessi, and the rest
as you have never seen them**

Country music was respectable. If you wanted to get down, you kept it to yourself. Then, a handful of accomplished musicians decided to break the rules. They struggled and fought, and Nashville called them "outlaws." Then they won, and today stand on the top of the country music charts, performing their special brand of music.

THE OUTLAWS is the brand new book from Country Music Magazine and The Doubleday Co. that tells the fascinating story of this unique revolution in country music, from the early philosophy sessions in Nashville's pinball arcade to the sun-baked mayhem of Willie Nelson's Picnics in Austin, Texas. But it is far more than the story of a musical revolution. It's a behind-the-scenes look at the rebels who brought about the change. Here are the outlaws—Waylon Jennings, Willie Nelson, Jessi Colter, Tompall Glaser, "Cowboy" Jack Clement, and David Allan "Mystery Rhinestone Cowboy" Coe. Thanks to months of painstaking research and interviewing, sifting truth from myth, author Michael Bane presents these headliners, for the first time in one place, as they really are, and as they fit into the revolution. It's a unique American success story that needed telling.

THE OUTLAWS is 160 exciting pages, with plenty of rare photos, many taken specifically for this brand new volume and never before released. If your tastes run toward that unique Austin Sound,

and Willie, Waylon and the rest of the Texas clan are your heroes, this book is must reading. So don't wait. Order your copy now, before you do anything else.

"So we were backstage when the Big Bopper—J.P. Richardson—asked me if he could take my place on the plane because he had the flu. I told him it was all right and he made it all right with Buddy. Then Richie Valens asked Tommy Allsup if he could take his place. A lot of people say it was Buddy who took my place, but it ain't the way it was at all. You know, it was real funny. That night after the crash we played some auditorium in Moorhead, and after we played they tried to dock us for the money Buddy and the Big Bopper and Richie Valens would have gotten—after begging us to play..." — WAYLON JENNINGS

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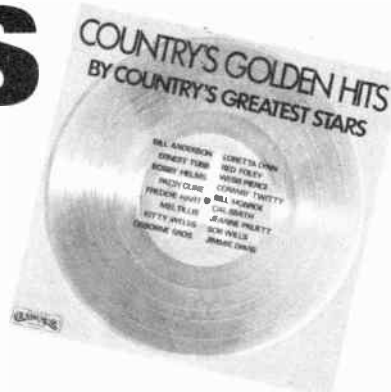
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COWBOY

(Continued from page 38)

emphasized the fact. Despite a grand promotional tour by Larry, it flopped. The experience taught him a few lessons. First, he needed a band.

Enter Michael McGinniss, former New Christy Minstrel, and freelance musical director ("We call him chute boss because cowboys don't have musical directors") whom Larry met about a year ago in Vail, Colorado. In January of 1977, the Golden Nugget in Las Vegas approached Larry about performing, and he remembered McGinniss, who said that January would be a bit early. After a bit, they found a strange country band up in Santa Barbara, Captain Crunch and the Deep Cross Cowboys, and, with a few modifications, they became Larry's backup. It was a fair exchange: they taught Larry about music, and he taught them about playing rodeos and being on the road. "I remember the first rodeo we played," Larry laughs, "I like to have the band come out on a trailer or a flatbed truck and have them start vamin', and then I'll make my entrance on a buckin' horse, wait til I get to the right place, and then jump off and start singin'. So the first time I did this, the bass player asked, 'Don't we have any insurance on our equipment? What if that buckin' horse gets up on the stage with us?' and I said, man, if he gets up there on the stage, you might not have to worry about your equipment. . . . And his jaw dropped open."

"Still, music is keeping me a lot closer to rodeo than the acting. I really do like playing rodeos, of course, and I sometimes enter events just for kicks. For me, I'm starting to learn a whole new thing, I've improved a hell of a lot as a singer from the time we did the album, and I'm really getting better at the guitar. Beginning to write some songs, too, and now people like Rodney Crowell are sending me songs. And you know? I don't care about when I do my next record. Snuffy says never to put your own money in your master, but look at that little rodeo book I did. If I take that to a publisher and sell 10,000 copies, I'm gonna make a thousand dollars, maybe. But I did it on my own, had my mail-order business and made probably \$15,000. I'm a gambler: if I'm gonna send my own body in on a bull, I'll bet on my own ability. That's why I may just do the next album myself, with my band, the way I like it, and if no record company likes it, well, I've already done the book. And sellin' albums off the stage is an old country tradition."

"Yeah, doing the music thing is like riding your first bull. You talk about it and you hear about it, but once you get on it, you learn a whole lot more than you ever thought. It takes 8 seconds to go through maybe five years of what you've been preparing for. Hey, but I'm ready for this one!"

MICKEY

(Continued from page 42)

unusual enough, with its quonset hut decor, multiple screens flashing advertisements and warnings ("Ladies: Beware of Thieves at Work"), parquet dance floor filled with couples of all ages, shooting gallery, pool tables and drunken cowboys elbowing up to the sledgehammer strength test or the mechanical bucking bull which no one rides for long. All of these features are, I suppose, standard Texas ballroom to one degree or another. What isn't standard anything is the unique spirit of Gilley's, where you find a kind of easy intimacy and tightknit feeling hardly characteristic of a wide-open club. There's Minnie at the door always cited as the catalyst for Mickey's unexpected success. Then there are Betty and Ann behind the souvenir counter, which is stocked with Gilley t-shirts, sweat shirts, records, pictures, buttons, posters, bumper stickers and other Gilley paraphernalia. Mickey's wife, Vivian—who met her husband 15 years ago at the Nesadel when a girlfriend who liked his music dragged her out to see him—is in charge of the fan club, whose surplus wares occupy an entire stock room of what reporter Bob Claypool calls "Gilley's K-Mart." At the center of it all is 50-year-old Sherwood Cryer, weather-beaten, dour-looking, who started out as a welder at Shell and surveys his giant club with an invariably woebegone expression, invariably clad in mechanic's zip-up coveralls.

Sherwood Cryer is a story in himself. Because of the coveralls, and because you will frequently find him taking out the trash or pushing a broom, he is frequently mistaken for the janitor in his own club. According to Vivian Gilley, "That club is his whole life," and watching him take care of business, personally attend to every detail, dive into every fray, one is inclined to agree. He doesn't drink, he doesn't smile much—Gilley's Club seems to occupy all of his attention. That and Mickey Gilley. "You see, Sherwood was never close to anyone before," says Vivian. "He's closer to Mickey than he is to his own brothers." "Everybody I ever talked to before was just bullshitting," says Mickey.

Sherwood first called him when Mickey had gone out on his own in 1970 to take over the Bel Air. At first Mickey was leery of him "because everybody thought he was part of the Mafia," both because of his extensive holdings and because he patrolled his property at night with a loaded shotgun. It was only when the Bel Air looked as if it was going under and Mickey had seen no money in three weeks that he finally agreed to meet with Sherwood and take a look at the club Sherwood had been boasting about. The club turned out to be Shelley's, an open-air drive-in which Mickey had been past a million times. "It was trashy. I just shook my

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head. "Well, what do you think?" "It wouldn't work." "What does it need?" I told him, "It could use a dozer to clear the lot off to start with."

Sherwood wouldn't drop the subject, though, and, after being badgered for suggestions, Mickey finally gave him a list of non-negotiable conditions, ending with a 50-50 partnership and a \$1000 a week guarantee for Mickey and the band. "Okay, you got it. When do you want to come to work?" I said to myself, "He's just gonna give me \$1000 a week and put in all these changes? No way." He said, "What do you want to call the club?" "Let's just call it Gilley's." Three weeks later I drove out there. I figure he's forgotten all about it by this time. First thing I saw when I drove up was that big sign—it was beautiful: I mean, it was the same sign we got now, but it was brand-new at the time. I never seen anything so flashy. They was going full-blast paneling the ceiling. I just walked in and looked around—no one knew me from Adam. And I thought to myself, "This has got my name on it." And it really made me feel like something. So I finally got in touch with him. "Well, what do you think?" "Well," I said, "it's looking pretty good." "When do you want to open?" "Wednesday." "Fine, I'll have it ready by then." And he did. The club became an almost instant success. And expanded, first doubling its capacity of 750, only recently adding one another wing which brought it up to 3000. When Mickey finally hit it big, it seemed to mean as much to Sherwood as it did to Mickey.

"One of the things that really intrigued me," says Mickey, "was that he really believed in me; he just loved my music. Everybody else was blowing smoke, but Sherwood really liked what I was doing."

"When Mickey started going on the road," says Vivian, "it really killed Sherwood. He couldn't leave the club, that's his baby, but it like to broke his heart, he just missed having Mickey around so much. He got to where he started flying in to do all the TV shows. And you know Sherwood, I don't think he ever wore a suit in his life, but when he went to the CMA Awards, he went out and got himself a tux. I really wish you could have seen him in his tux."

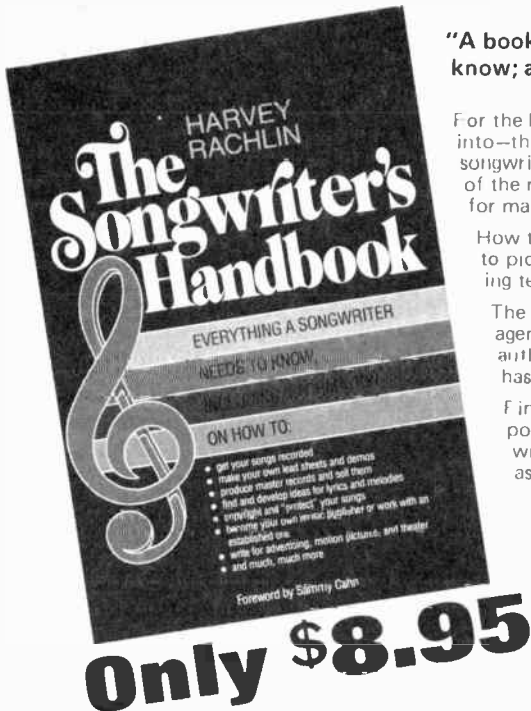
For every hit record that has come out, Sherwood has selected an expensive gift, and Mickey in turn has bestowed his whole-hearted trust in Sherwood. "He just loves for me to call him and shoot the breeze, say, 'hey, boss, it's Mickey.' I'll tell you the reason why Sherwood admires me so. Because I'm the first person that he's met in this business, when I say I'm going to do something, I actually sit down and figure things out in my head and do it. I direct the TV show, I write the ads, and I really study it; I watch it religiously to learn from my mistakes. That's the reason why everything I tell him, he listens; he takes it serious because he knows I'm serious about it."

Mickey and Sherwood—maybe their

names will be in the headlines tomorrow with news of a lawsuit, but I doubt it. It was Sherwood and Vivian who backed Mickey up right along, told him he was important when he himself seemed to doubt it, helped give him the same sure sense of place which sustains him today. It was Sherwood more than anyone who provided the push that finally helped put Mickey over. Sherwood looks out for Mickey's career, and Sherwood pays the bills, even going so far as to put up some of the money for Producer Eddie Kilroy's Nashville offices when Playboy wouldn't come up with it themselves. "Once he saw that I had a chance to make it nationally," says Mickey, "he put everything he could behind me. He wanted everything first class."

Mickey Gilley has had almost a dozen Top 10 hits in the last three years and has in the process finally become a well-established star. When he went out on the road he was nervous at first, but he's since developed a full-scale show with dramatic special effects, his accompanying group, the Bayou Beats have become the Red Rose Express, and Las Vegas is on the horizon. He seems to be taking it all in stride. The astronomical jump in his income in just one year may have thrown him a little, because, as he says, "I had nothing to spend it on." He still lives in the same modest house with Vivian and their son Greg and seems almost embarrassed at the unpretentiousness of their surroundings. He shows me a publication of the Paint Horse Association, which profiles him in this new venture, and he thinks he might like to buy a small airplane, a four-seater (he got his pilot's license a few years ago) at some point. His only other primary concern has to do with the careers of his featured singers, Johnny Lee who's been with him for seven years and recently had three or four hits on GRT, and Toni Holcolmb, whom he has been producing on his own. He wants to handle Toni in such a way that "she will never have anything to be embarrassed about. If I had had someone to look out for me, then my career wouldn't have been embarrassing to me." He even seems to have come to terms with the specter of his more flamboyant cousin, and though he never expects to surpass Jerry Lee (I never thought that as a piano player I was anywhere near as good as him"), he no longer seems to feel so acute a sense of inferiority and worries instead about Jerry's health and truculent attitudes ("He didn't love music any more than me, and one thing I got him beat on, I admire and love people more!"). Sometimes you get a glimpse of a darker side, as when he contemplates his strict religious upbringing and the life he leads today. "I know I don't live like I was raised to live," he says. "I was taught it's wrong to drink, and I drink some. I used to smoke, even though I quit smoking a few years ago. But I don't never try to put myself down. I take care of my family, I take care of my

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Mama and Daddy. I think I do what's right for me."

In fact Mickey Gilley seems to have it all together, and in this sense he is one of the most unusual popular entertainers I've ever met. As we drive along in his pick-up, he points out the landmarks of the last 20 years. There's the Ranch-House, and there's the Nesadel. Here's Cheri's Drive-In and Charley's Liquor and a whole block of other property that Sherwood owns. Dement Field is deserted, but we stop for a moment to look at the stands where thousands of screaming fans saw Jerry Lee kick back the piano stool for the first time. It was practically unpopulated when he first came out, just bleak open land. Now it's been all built up. You can smell the industry and the oil in the breeze that comes off the Channel. "I think that whatever people do, it has to be something they're interested in and love. I think what finally did it for me," says Mickey Gilley, "was determination, not giving up, finally taking a good hard look at myself and saying, 'Hey, you have to be yourself. Anything less, and you're only fooling yourself and the public. And the public is real, real hard to fool. Hey,'" he says, rolling down the window of the truck. "I don't think I'd be bitter if the whole thing stopped tomorrow. You know, I accomplished what I set out to do. You can't do any better than that." ■

PHOTO CREDITS

- P. 4 Bullet Awards - C. Zlotnik
P. 13-15 Mary Kay & Willie - C. Zlotnik
P. 24 Don Williams - L. Kamsler
P. 26 Don Williams - N. Clark
P. 28 Jerry Jeff - J. Van Beekum
P. 32 Jerry Jeff - E. Roberts
P. 34 Dolly Parton - L. Kamsler
P. 36 Larry Mahan - C. Krall
P. 38 Larry Mahan - B. Kruger
P. 40/41 Mickey Gilley - Geoff Winningham
P. 44 Jeannie Seely - C. Thomas
P. 50 Hank Jr. - Michael Bane
P. 51 Lonnie Mack - J. Moore
P. 52 Jim Owen - Courtesy CBS
P. 55 Linda Hargrove - Courtesy Capitol
P. 58 Mandolin Bros. - L. Kamsler

Photo of Sleepy LaBeef in the February issue of Country Music was credited to the wrong photographer. Photo was taken by William R. Dickinson. Our apologies,

DON WILLIAMS

(Continued from page 26)

playin' in your living room, sound. It was a sound birthed in the studios of JMI Records years ago, midwifed by producer Allen Reynolds, whose latest success is with Crystal Gayle. JMI, founded by the irrepressible Jack Clement, was an experiment in making a different kind of country music, something other than the Nashville Sound of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The chemistry between Williams' subdued vocal style and Reynolds' super-clean production was perfect, and the result was Williams' astounding first album, *Don Williams-Volume One*, perhaps destined to become a country classic.

"That sound just happened," Williams says. "There wasn't anything about it we tried to create or contrive. It was really Allen Reynolds and myself. Allen and I feel the same way about a lot of things musically. There was never really anything done with the records without me being there. I think we learned a lot from each other."

In fact, the first time Williams made the charts wasn't as a country singer. He made it with a folk group he organized called the Pozo Seco Singers, and the song was called *Time*. The Singers got together in 1964 and disbanded in 1971. Williams left music the first time when he got out of the Army, and he got jobs driving a bread truck, working in the oil fields and—an unlikely one for anyone as shy as he is—collecting bills. When the Pozo Seco Singers broke up, Williams and his father-in-law owned a furniture store, but the business started straining their relationship. In 1972 Don and Joy Williams decided they belonged back in Nashville.

It wasn't long before people wanted to hear Don Williams in person, and he had to hit the road. After some nerve wrecking nights at the mercy of local bands, Williams knew he had to do something. Typically, he came up with something a little different. He hired only Flowers and Williamson to back him.

"I decided I'd get two people who could at least help me duplicate the essence of the records, with harmonies," he says. "We've all kind of grown together. I think that's one thing that's made us a unit."

"I like my personal appearances. The only thing that makes it tougher is that personal appearances are not a creative part of the business. Some feel it helps record sales, which I guess it does.

"For me, personally, personal appearances feel like I'm circling back to thank somebody for what they've done. When I think I'm not too pressed or too tired I enjoy it all. I try to strike a balance with my time so I can continue to enjoy it all." ■

PICKERS

(Continued from page 59)

fiddles refer to "original" Stradivari, many of which were made in the last hundred years—obvious copies. Yet the owners are hopeful that they may have a \$200,000 instrument. This tradition is unfortunate since the real maker of the piece can only be determined by firsthand examination by an expert in violins, and only then by noting the physical eccentricities in the carving, the wood and the finish. Since the used violin market is 300 years old, the better violins in existence will *already* have a Certificate of Authenticity from one of the major violin houses—if your Strad doesn't have papers, chances are it's not a real Strad.

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In the second letter the brand is quite clearly written (inlaid) on the peghead of the guitar and stamped inside the instrument on the wooden brace. Martin is one of the most desirable American flattop, round soundhole guitars. Having the Martin logo written vertically down the peghead, is very unusual and was reserved only for their deluxe models. If the model of the writer's guitar is, in fact, a D-18, then the guitar was either custom-ordered or the peghead inlay modification done later. In a situation like this we would require photographs of the instrument and would have to know the serial number of the instrument in order to make any judgment about its originality or value today. ■

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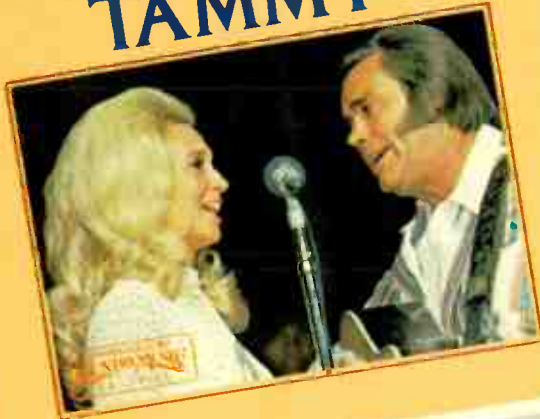
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