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# COUNTRY MUSIC

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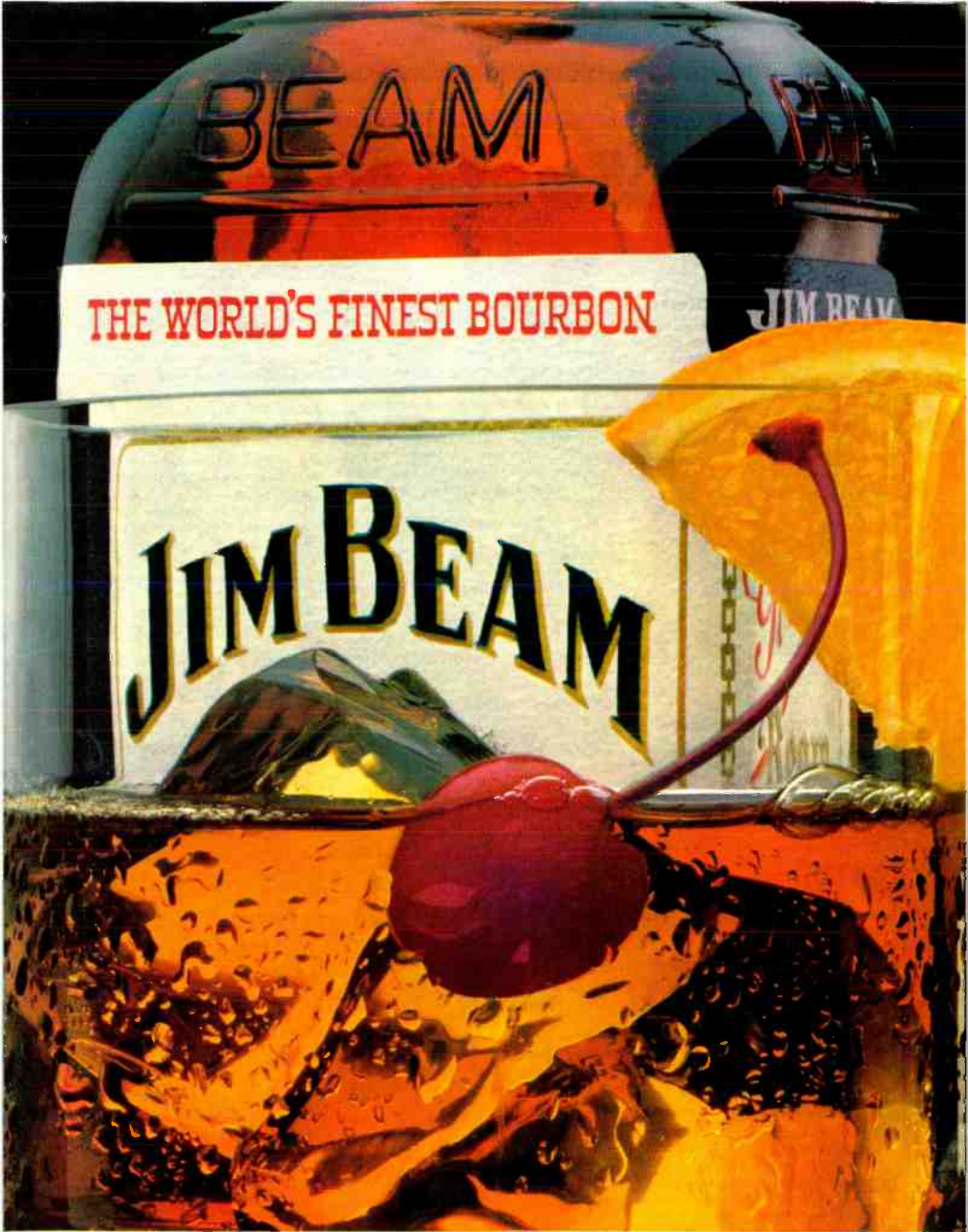
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# Letters

## A Story for the Namesake

You have a *great* magazine going for you and I love it, but I do have just one request. Please, please do an article on Jessi Colter. I have all of her albums and I know nothing (other than what I've learned through her songs) about her. Everyone knows she's married to Waylon, but there is so much more to her than that. Her music is so beautiful and says so much that it makes me curious about the talented woman who created such works of art. Please do something on her soon.

Thank you for all the other folks I love. Every article is great reading, and the pictures are beautiful. I've framed a few.  
MRS. B. MURPHY  
COVINA, CALIFORNIA

P.S. I plan to name my first daughter "Jessi Merriam" and I'd like to have something to tell the child about the beautiful lady she was named after.

## Joe Sun and Shotgun

As I think back to the music of the past 25 years, I consider the following examples to be distinctive and unique: Sun recordings of Johnny Cash and Elvis, Credence Clearwater Revival, Buddy Holly, early Beatles, Waylon between 1970 and 1975, and Willie forever. I have just added a new name to my list.

Here is what Johnny Cash says about him in the liner notes from his *Out of Your Mind* album. "He's the greatest new talent I've heard in 20 years. His style is unique, his songs are super. He's in a class all by himself, and he's first class. If he continues to keep his individuality, and always remembers who he is, what he is, and where he's going, he will soon be one of country music's biggest names and, with his diversified talents, could become one of the all-time greats in country music."

I'm referring to Joe Sun and his band Shotgun. I had the pleasure of seeing them perform twice at Trombone Charlie's in Fountain, Colorado (just south of Colorado Springs). To put it mildly, they have a very distinctive and unique sound. To be more graphic, they are so good they will make chills run down your spine and make your hair stand on end (no matter how long it is!).

I think Johnny Cash's remarks tell the

story about Joe. I'll just add that his voice is so great that once you've heard him sing any song it would be a disappointment to hear someone else sing it. As for Shotgun, they've got to be among the very top of today's bands.

During a temporary period of insanity, I let my subscription to *Country Music* run out. I will rectify that matter. Can you tell me if there have been any Joe Sun articles or album reviews (besides the June '79 article), and if I can purchase these back issues?

I enjoy your magazine very much. I don't believe there is another of its kind that can come close to *Country Music* for consistently high-quality writing. I've used your articles and record reviews as a guide to my record buying, and haven't had a bum steer yet. Keep up the great work!

If you haven't done a recent article or album review on Joe Sun, please do one soon.

BEN McCUNE  
COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO

*Hopefully your subscription will start with our April issue where we have a feature story on Joe Sun. Ed.*

## Rex Allen, Jr. and Sr.

Enjoy *Country Music Magazine* very much, and would like to let your other fans know that they haven't seen or heard nothing until they have gone to a Rex Allen, Jr. and Sr. concert. These two artists are fantastic!

It is so great to see a son and father work together with so much love and respect for one another's talent. I would like to see more family-type, good ole country-western concerts like this.

Why not have Rex Allen, Jr. on your cover one day soon? He is the nicest young man—so good to his many fans—and has such a unique voice. When you hear him on the radio, you don't have to ask who is singing; you *know* it's Rex Allen, Jr.

Have you already guessed? Rex Allen, Jr. is Number One as far as I'm concerned. Please, let's read more about him in my favorite magazine.

TERRI STONE  
ROCK ISLAND, ILLINOIS

*A story on Rex Allen, Jr. is in the works. Ed.*

## George Burns?

George Burns claims he's a country singer. *I Wish I Was Eighteen Again* was good only because Sonny Throckmorton knows how to write great songs.

Now he's put out *Willie Won't You Sing a Song With Me*, talking about Willie and Waylon. What does he know about it? He's about as country as New York City, and, as Buck Owens said, "I wouldn't live there if they gave me the whole damn town."

Leave country music to the originals who deserve the popularity they're getting. Like Marty Robbins says, "you got alot nerve comin' in here sayin' you're one of my kind." Country music doesn't belong to these phonies who don't know what they're talking about, coming around just trying to get in on it because it's popular now.

I believe in Don Williams and country music. George Burns, you make me sick.  
TERRI JOHNSON  
FAIRBORN, OHIO

## There Is a Single

I read your review of Emmylou Harris' *Light of the Stable* album in *Country Music Magazine*, and just wanted you to know that the title song has been released as a single. It was released by Reprise Records in 1975 with Brian Ahern as the producer.

HAROLD MCMICKLE  
KWYN  
WYNNE, ARKANSAS

## Hanky-Panky

I am writing in regards to my recent experience at a Hank Williams Jr. concert. I was never so disgusted with a singer as I was with Hank. I've seen Hank Jr. when he was quite the performer. However, his performance in Angola, Indiana was a farce. Not only did he show up seven hours late, he then obliged us by playing approximately 30 minutes out of what was to be an hour plus concert. He muttered the words in the songs and was constantly saying, "You can kiss my —!" Not once, but during and after the songs. He left the stage without as much as a thank you, goodbye, etc. Now, his fans stayed at the concert site for eight to ten hours to see him and were ecstatic when he finally did



# It's going around... Rosanne Cash / Seven Year Ache.



Ten achingly beautiful songs from the lady whose 1979 debut album, **Right Or Wrong** became **Rolling Stone's** country album of the year, and also found its way onto John Rockwell's, most prestigious, "Top Ten Pop Album List," in the **New York Times**.

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show. The least he could have done was to show us some common respect and give us a decent performance. In conclusion, no one person, singer or otherwise, no matter how much money he may have is above treating people as though they are people and not mere dirt. So Hank, keep it up and your fans will be telling you to kiss their ass!

REBECCA WEST  
PLAINWELL, MI.

### On Vernon's Plight

Thank you for the article on Vernon Oxford in your October issue. I don't know if there's a conspiracy against him or if he suffers from bad luck, but I do know that it's a shame this talented artist can't be heard.

I put the blame on the country radio stations. In their attempt to corral as many listeners as possible, they play only the top thirty or forty songs from the trade magazines and ignore the rest. We have three country stations in our area, and only one plays any Vernon Oxford.

RUSSELL ROSEN  
WINNIPEG, CANADA

### To Donna With Love

I'm 13 years old and love country music, but mostly Donna Fargo. I've been a country music fan ever since Donna Fargo appeared with her multi-million selling song, **Happiest Girl in the Whole USA.**

Since then, I've bought everything on her.

Recently I read an article in your magazine entitled Donna Fargo: **The Happiest Girl Battles Back.** It was one of the most touching stories I've ever read. I cried, though it all came out so happy, just to know the world does have beautiful people.

I want to say your magazine is really great. I love it and grow happier with each issue I buy.

KEITH CUNNINGHAM  
ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

### An Opposing Viewpoint

I would like to rebut the letter in the November issue entitled "Country Music Not Country?" with a word or two in defense of your magazine, Charlie Daniels and Marty Robbins.

I am in total disagreement with the Crossons, Rascoes, Smiths, Tanner and Womack. But that's what it's all about, isn't it? In this great country of ours, we are free to have our own opinions, likes and dislikes. Who cares whether or not the above named people think of Charlie Daniels as *country*? He is a super artist and deserves everything good.

Furthermore, I don't know whether Larry Gatlin bought his awards or not, but as far as I am concerned, Marty Robbins

is probably right. Larry is good and if he came to my town I would go see him. But Marty is so far above Larry, there is no comparison.

As far as I am concerned, the people from Mobile put their feet in their mouths.  
NAOMI FROST  
DENISON, TEXAS

### In Defense of Willie

In regard to Martie Gray's letter in the March issue of *Country Music*, I would like to say that I don't think the public is ever going to tire of Willie Nelson. The more he's seen and heard the better. While I'm not belittling Waylon in the least, I'm glad Willie doesn't realize his limitations because I don't think he has any. The years speak for themselves, years of being an artist who has been the favorite of people everywhere. I hope Willie goes on performing, recording, writing, and making movies for many years to come. He's Number One as far as I'm concerned, and I'll bet there are thousands who feel as I do.

BARBARA DONOWAY  
SALISBURY, MARYLAND

### The Fantastic Statlers

I have just received my March 1981 issue of *Country Music* and let me tell you, this is the *best* issue I have ever seen! You've gotten a fantastic story and some great pictures of the multi-talented Statler Brothers. This is long past due!

They are not only a super bunch of good-looking guys, but they put out an unmistakable sound. They put on a great concert. What talent! Please, more of the Statler Brothers and a little less of Kenny Rogers, Barbara Mandrell and her sisters, and Dolly.

It's so nice to hear nice things about a group, and to learn that they can make it in this tough, fast world without drugs and alcohol.

My husband and I salute your magazine for this terrific article, and let's see a lot more in your upcoming issues about Harold, Phil, Don, and Lew.  
DOLORES COWLES  
CHEEKTOWAGA, NEW YORK

I'd like to thank you on behalf of my family and myself for the cover and feature story on the Statler Brothers in the March issue of *Country Music*.

When you realize that my family ranges from my daughter, a 4-year-old, to my mother who is 87, you can see how really great the Statlers are. Their music and lyrics aren't for today or yesterday. They are for all ages to enjoy and their lyrics are about the things and times that are America.

I realize that sooner or later a new group will rise in their place. This is only right. The old must always make room for the

new if it's worthy, but for now, let it be the Statlers. They've got it all, and they never disappoint us by trying something outside of country. They are true country and always have been.

When you've said "The Statler Brothers," you've said it all.  
BERNIETA E. BROWN  
TURLOCK, CALIFORNIA

I was reading your article on the Statler Brothers, and sure was glad to finally see a story on them. I was born and raised in the big little city of Staunton, and left there for the military service. I hope some day to go back there to live.

Reading about Staunton made me feel good. I go back there as often as I can. I saw the first Statler Brothers "Happy Birthday U.S.A." show, and I saw the 1980 show that you pictured in *Country Music*, which I think is a mighty fine magazine. I've been reading it for quite a number of years.

The Statlers are a mighty fine singing group and really "down home" boys who haven't let success go to their heads. They have done a lot for Staunton, and they always have a Nashville star on their Fourth of July show. Let's see more articles on the Statlers, and keep up the fine magazine.

ROBERT STOGDALE  
HOLBROOK, NEW YORK

P.S. Your magazine always winds up in Staunton for my sister to read.

I want to say how pleased we were with the Statler Brothers feature and the statement in *bold print* that they do not drink or take drugs and didn't even as teenagers. It is important for our young people to know they can be successful without using these self-defeating substances. Too many of our country-western stars and movie stars want to brag up the fact that they are users. If our young people are going to grow up with clear, healthy minds, we'll need all the good examples like this we can get.

ELLEN ARENSDORF  
MAQUOKETA, IOWA

Thanks a million for the cover picture and article about the Statler Brothers.

I have seen them in person 13 times, four of those being in Staunton, Virginia on the Fourth of July. I also have all of their albums. Everytime I see them it's like the first time I saw them all over again. Words cannot describe how excited I get.

I've never met four nicer guys. They are "the boys next door." Everyone associated with them, including their families, secretary, and bus driver are all great people.

I'm glad they stayed in Staunton and remained "good ole boys." I love 'em.  
PAM ELLIS  
MAUGANSVILLE, MARYLAND





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# Twenty questions with

1.

I've got a list of questions here.

Well, I've just got one question. How can that stupid @#?%&\*! Johnny Paycheck make that statement in *Country Music Magazine* that him and Merle Haggard were the only two outlaws in the country music business? That him and Merle were the only two ex-convicts in the country music business? And that Johnny Cash and Johnny Rodriguez and the rest of them guys were all punks? I mean, has that guy lost his @#?%&\*! mind or what?

2.

Okay. How long have you been out on the road this time?

We've been out five months now, and I hope to be home soon.

3.

Doesn't it tear you up to be out on the road that much?

Naw. I like it. I really like it. I'd stay out here forever if it was up to me, but everybody gets to snivelling, and I go home. . . . Mostly it's the guys in the band, the ones who are

making that *big* money. They get three or four thousand dollars and that's big money to them. They want to go somewhere and spend it, which takes about two weeks. Then they want to get back to work. They're nigger rich, you know.

4.

Do you really worry about being killed on the road?

Well, I worry about it sometimes, yes. It depends on where we're playing.

5.

What's the most dangerous part of the country for you to play in?

I don't play there. *(pause)* I don't play in California or New York or any of those places like that. I had trouble in New York when I played there. We found a bomb on the bus. . . .

6.

A real live bomb?

Uh . . . yeah. As far as I'm concerned, I'm not going to put myself in that position anymore.

7.

Don't you ever get tired of living in this constant state of change? Don't you ever want to get a lit-

tle house, smoke a pipe, and get away from all this craziness?

Sure I'd like to do that, if I knew I was going to be financially secure. The thing that scares me is being 60 years-old and in an old folks home. I'm 41 years-old, and I feel like I've got maybe five good years left where I can get up there on that stage and compete with 20 year-olds for two hours. Whatever money I make now, I've got to live on it for the rest of my life.

8.

Are you really as softhearted as people say you are?

I think I am, but there are two sides to that coin, Michael. I think I'm very capable of all the things people have heard about me. I'm very capable of doing all those things, too. But I also think everybody else is.

9.

Do you think you're misunderstood?

As far as being misunderstood, the thing that bothers me about this whole thing is that I think the music should stand on its own, regardless of a person's lifestyle or whatever. If the music's good, that's what it's all about.

You're not buying my lifestyle, you're buying my music. If it's good, it's good. If it isn't, @#! it. It doesn't matter how I live. It's like, I did a show with Billy Parker on KVOO radio the other day, and a guy called in and asked how long I'd been an alcoholic. I don't even *drink*, you know! So he says, how can I write songs about Jack Daniels and drinkin' if I don't drink. It's easy, I said. It's the same way that, in a movie, I can pick up a gun and kill 15 women and children. I'm not gonna go out and do it on the street. It's just my job, man! It's my *job!* I'm an entertainer. If I only sang about the things I've done and the things I've experienced, I couldn't have made 30 albums.

10.

Do you still feel that bikers are a misunderstood minority?

Generally speaking, yes, they are. There's a stereotyped image of what bikers are and what they're supposed to be, and a lot of that has to do with some 17 or 18 year-old kid who thinks he's tough. I think most of the guys who are in motorcycle clubs—one percenters—are tough. They're not trying to act





# DAVID ALLAN COE

by Michael Bane

tough. They know they're tough. All they want to do is ride their motorcycles and be left alone, not being hassled. The sad part about it is . . . then people see some jack-off movie like *Every Which Way But Loose*, where two 50-year-old fat mothers beat up 17 or 18 guys on motorcycles. So some half-drunk guy who hasn't had a fight in 20 years goes over to three or four bikers thinking they're the same kind of punks he saw on the screen. The guy ends up getting beaten half to death. . . .

## 11.

**How come you finally left the Outlaws Motorcycle Club?**

You just can't be loyal to the two segments. You either have to be loyal to the motorcycle club, or you have to be loyal to your career. One conflicts with the other.

## 12.

**You ever see yourself winning some big country music award?**

Winning! I don't even get *nominated*, man! I've won a lot of awards, but they send them to me in the mail. I got a *Grammy* nomination, you know (for

*Take This Job And Shove It*), and it was the only year they didn't announce the songwriters' names. Anything I ever win, it's always, "David, listen. I got this award down here in my office for three months. I forgot to tell you about it. . . ." They invited us to the Grammys one year and sent our invitation three months after the show. The thing that's contradictory is that when a guy like Bill Anderson takes me around Nashville and gets me on a bunch of shows, afterwards everybody says, "Gee, he's not so bad after all." You know me personally, and you know all that shit is what you make it out to be. I believe that, eventually, it's all going to have to come to an end. Even the fastest gun in town gets old. You've either got to kill the @#?%&\*! or let him go. It's that simple.

## 13.

**What's the best place in the country to play these days?**

Louisiana, definitely. Those people are really into it. It's like Texas used to be. When you play down there, they'll tear the bar up just to show their appreciation.

## 14.

**Do you think of yourself as a country act?**

Not really. I'm even doing songs recorded by the Vanilla Fudge—*You Keep Me Hanging On*. That's how I close my show, and it's a great show.

## 15.

**Why doesn't Nashville take you seriously?**

Because if they take me seriously, then they have to realize how bad they really are. You know, if I'm an example of what's good, then they're @#?%&\*! terrible! So they ignore me.

## 16.

**What do you think is the state of country music now?**

The *gimmick* state. It's being discovered, and I think all the get rich quick people are there now.

## 17.

**Your movie career seems to have really taken off. . . .**

Yeah. I've done seven movies, the most recent one being the movie of *Take This Job and Shove It*, which'll be out in May. Lacy J. Dalton played my

wife in the movie. . . .

## 18.

**How is being in a movie different from being on stage?**

It's very much harder to me, because you're not totally dependent on your own energies. It's like you can be giving a great performance and a bird flies over, and the director says, "Okay, we've got to do it over. The bird wasn't in the scene." Or the train whistle that blew three miles away ruined the scene, and we have to do it again. Sometimes it gets very irritating to do things over and over again. I feel like the best things I do are spontaneous, as an actor or a singer, either one. If I ever have total control over the things I do, I'm going to do spontaneous movies and spontaneous records.

## 19.

**Are you down to just one wife now?**

No, no. Never. I don't believe in a one-on-one relationship like that.

## 20.

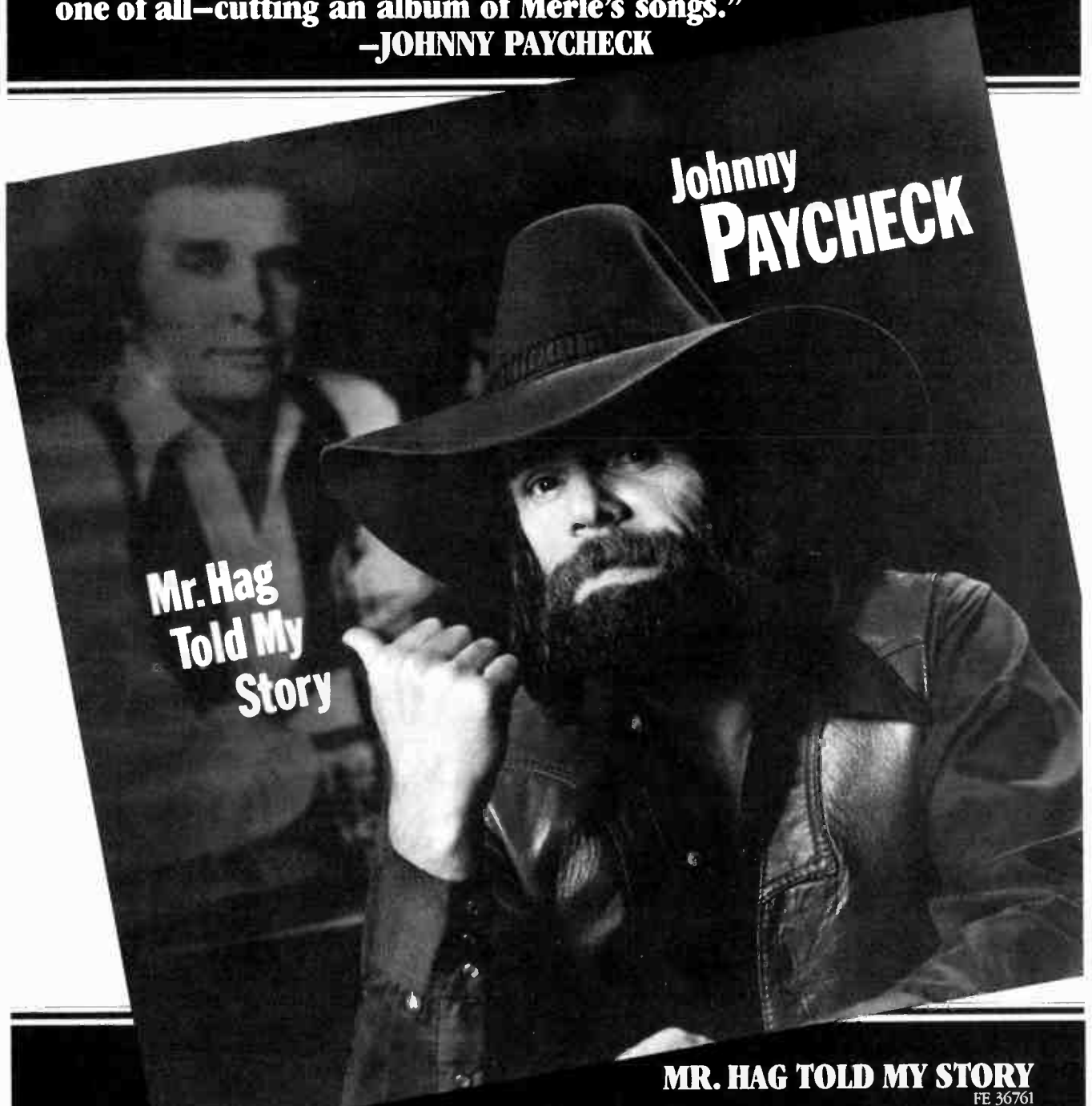
**How many do you have now?**

Well, I have two now. I had three, but one left yesterday. ■



**"Of all the dreams I ever had come true, this is the best one of all—cutting an album of Merle's songs."**

**—JOHNNY PAYCHECK**



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Produced by Billy Sherrill

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# People

by Laura Eipper Hill

There have been rumors of on-again off-again trouble between **Merle Haggard** and **Leona Williams** ever since their marriage two years ago, but all that sounded mild compared to the rumor mill explosion following the filing of divorce suits and counter-suits in court proceedings earlier this year in Shasta County Superior Court in San Francisco. Leona's attorney **Melvin Belli** apparently said that Haggard was charged with cruelty and claimed that he was addicted to drugs and alcohol, and that he beat Leona so severely that she was hospitalized for six weeks. This sounds like Belli-Belligerence . . . attempting to plead his client's case in the press. While Haggard may have a bar room image, those who know him say he drinks little these days . . . and whatever gossip may surround Haggard from time to time, it has never been connected with drugs . . . after

all, the Okie's from Muskogee. Anyway, whatever the argument may have been, it appears to have been temporary, since Leona is touring again on Haggard's show . . . everything's love-dovey again.

At a party to introduce his two new singing partners in Nashville, **Jim Ed Brown** was cordial but cool when discussing his former stage-mate **Helen Cornelius**. Musically, he said, "The duet situation is something that is a page of history, but it's a page that needs to be remembered." Brown and his two new girl singers will include some of the duets that made the Brown-Cornelius duo one of the hottest in country music, but that's as far as his relationship with Miss Cornelius goes, he said. "What I do is nothing to her. What she does is nothing to me. It's a closed chapter as far as I'm concerned." Meanwhile, Brown readily admits that he hopes his

relationship with his ex-wife **Becky** is not a closed chapter. He said he prays daily for a reconciliation with Becky, who divorced him during the brouhaha over Miss Cornelius, and described his ex-wife as "the only woman in the world for me." Brown's new show debuted in Salt Lake City, where he played to a sold-out house at the Terrace Ballroom. Local critics raved about the addition of **Dianne Morgan** and **Christy Russell** to the show, who, said one, "sang the daylights out of every number," while Brown "was still holding crowds in his hands."

## New Producer for Tammy Wynette

If **Tammy Wynette's** *Cowboys Don't Shoot Straight* sounds a bit different than what you're used to hearing from the queen of country heartbreak, you're right. The singer has ended her 15-year collaboration with producer **Billy Sherrill** and is now working with veteran producer **Chips Moman**. Sherrill, one of the originators of "The Nashville Sound," is credited with discovering Tammy while she was still an Alabama hairdresser commuting to Nashville in the '60s. Sherrill produced such blockbusters as *Stand By Your Man* and *D-I-V-O-R-C-E* as well as co-writing several of Tammy's biggest hits. Still, friends of both say, the parting was a friendly one. "They both just decided that after 15 years, it was time for a change," said Tammy's sister-in-law and office manager **Sylvia Richey**. "There were no hard feelings on either side. As a matter of fact, Tammy is still madly in love with Billy Sherrill."

## Roy Acuff Stops Show at Charlie Daniels Volunteer Jam



**Roy Acuff** stopped the show at the eighth annual Charlie Daniels' Volunteer Jam when he made a surprise appearance (even to Daniels) and presented the burly singer with a complete collection of the sheet music to every song he has sung on the Grand Ole Opry. "I'm not giving these to you because I want you to sing them, or because I want you to record them" said the King of Country Music. "I'm giving them to you as a keepsake, because I want to be a part of your life, and these songs are my life." Backstage, Acuff said the warmth

of the response from the packed Nashville Municipal Auditorium crowd—mostly young rock and roll fans—surprised him. "I wouldn't have been a bit surprised if I'd been booed, although I've never been booed in my life," he said, pushing back the brim of the black cowboy hat he'd bought that day for the occasion. "It wouldn't have bothered me if I had gotten booed, though, because I came down here for **Charlie Daniels**. As it turned out they were a nice bunch of folks who love good country music."

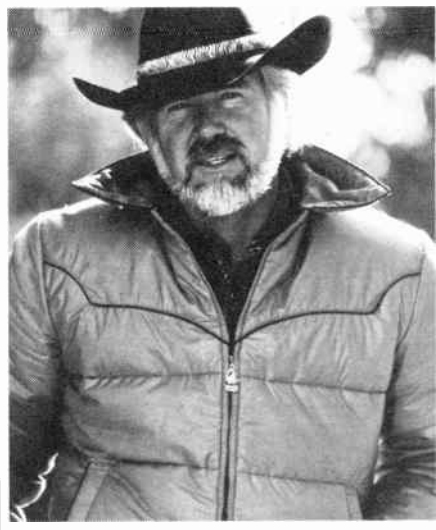
**Marty Robbins**, recuperating from a mild heart attack at home after a brief stay in the hospital, got a giant-size greeting from concerned fans in El Paso, Texas. Headed up by disc jockey **Charlie Russell** of station KHEY, hundreds of well-wishers braved a week of monsoon-like rain to sign a four-by-eight-foot plywood get well card in a local shopping mall. The card was shipped to Nashville by truck and was installed in a place of honor in Robbins' office.

Meanwhile, Marty disclosed that his favorite pastime during his recuperation was "watching television for the first time in years." His favorite program? "Afternoon re-runs of *Wonder Woman*." Rob-

bins vowed that his recent hospitalization has changed his thinking about one thing: his diet. "I don't eat right, that's my problem," said the singer, grinning. "I don't have a weak heart—if I did, I'd be dead by now." From now on he's vowed to install a new refrigerator in his bus and "carry all the food I can eat. I have a nice microwave."

## Kenny Rogers Western Wear Collection

**Kenny Rogers** joined the ranks of his country music colleagues—including **Loretta Lynn**, **Willie Nelson** and **Mickey Gilley**—who have their names emblazoned on the rear ends of well-upholstered fans. Debuting this spring, the Kenny Rogers Western Wear Collection features hats, jeans, shirts, leather jackets, sheepskin coats, belts, dressier suits, coats and pants, and down-filled outerwear, manufactured for Rogers by a variety of established western wear companies. "The response has been absolutely fantastic, even more than we expected," said Betty Bose, a spokeswoman for Rogers' Los Angeles office. "The manufacturers have been getting orders faster than they can fill them and Kenny is absolutely delighted." Miss Bose said Rogers himself gives the final okay on all the designs used in the collection, which will bear a likeness of his face in profile.



America's most prolific topical songwriter, **Red River Dave**, did it again when the hostages were released. Seemingly never without something to say about current events, the North Hollywood tunesmith cranked out four verses titled *Song of the U.S. Hostages* practically before the captives were able to get off the planes bringing them home. Dave, in case you've forgotten, is the composer of such memorable ballads as *Reverend Jimmy Jones* and *The Night Ronald Reagan Rode With*

*Santa Claus*, not to mention *Ballad of Three Mile Island* and *The Ballad of Patty Hearst*. His latest, Dave says, "is the most satisfying verse and chorus I've written in my life. I'm glad I lived long enough to write the final story in the song."

**John Hartford** tied the knot with his long-time romance **Marie Barrett** at their Nashville home, while more than 250 friends and relatives looked on. The ceremony was performed by a team composed of **Benny Martin**, **Shel Silverstein** and a local judge. Among those in attendance were **Chet Atkins**, **Roy Acuff**, **Earl Scruggs**, **Vassar Clements**, **Don Everly** and **Rodney Dillard**. A special guest was Hartford's grade school teacher **Ruth Ferris**, the woman who originally introduced him to riverboat lore. The new Mrs. Hartford, a songwriter herself, has managed Hartford's business enterprises for the past several years.

**Dolly Parton** made her long-awaited Las Vegas debut in February and, she said, was "excited to be performing in the big lights and the big money of Las Vegas, since I certainly had neither while growing up." Miss Dolly's two-week stint at the Riviera Hotel netted her an undisclosed sum, rumored at \$350,000. Her over-all contract for six weeks annually at the hotel was said to be in the "multi-million dollar range." Included in her show, she said, were a number of new things—"things I've never seen me do"—including impressions and dancing.

**Tom T. Hall**, his wife **Dixie** and talent agent **Tandy Rice** were among the select 3000 or so friends who welcomed former President **Jimmy Carter** home to Plains, Georgia, after the inauguration. Hall entertained the crowd at what was billed as "the world's largest covered dish supper" for over an hour, despite the freezing temperatures and a steady downpour. "Everyone was truly happy to have the President coming home," said Hall of the event. "When he arrived and told us the news of the hostages' release, a feeling of euphoria took over the town."

When the National Association of Record Merchandisers welcomed the returned American hostages back from Iran with a selection of record albums, country music was well represented. Among the country discs in the collection: the soundtrack album *Honeysuckle Rose, The Best of Strangers*, by **Barbara Mandrell**, *Full Moon* by the **Charlie Daniels Band**, *Loretta* by **Loretta Lynn** and *Kenny Rogers Greatest Hits*.

History of some sort must have been made recently when the two top positions of the *Billboard* charts were occupied by two of Nashville's finest. **Dolly Parton** weighed in as Number One with *9 to 5*, while **Eddie Rabbitt** grabbed the Number Two spot with *I Love a Rainy Night*. Further on down the pop charts were no less than **Ronnie Milsap**, **Terri Gibbs** and **Kenny Rogers**.

**Sue Powell**, late of **Dave and Sugar**, spent several weeks in the studio working on her first solo recording effort under the guidance of producer **Jerry Bradley** (who used to produce Dave and Sugar.) The three-member group is now being produced by **Jimmy Bowen**.

**Conway Twitty** rejoins the rock and roll elite, at least temporarily, this spring on a syndicated television special. *The Roots of Rock and Roll*. Twitty sang *It's Only Make Believe* (ah nostalgia) for the six-hour 20th Century Fox production, which features, among others, **Rod Stewart**, **Paul McCartney**, **Alice Cooper** and **Elton John**.

## John-Boy to Play Hank Williams, Jr.?

**Hank Williams Jr.'s** autobiography, *Living Proof*, is headed to the tiny screen as a made-for-television movie. The book was acquired by NBC-TV, which plans to air the film late this year as a two-hour special. No casting yet, but writer **Chuck Rappaport** has flown from Los Angeles to Cullman, Ala. (Hank's home) to begin writing the screenplay. Rumor has it that **Richard Thomas (John-Boy of the Waltons)** will play Hank, Jr.

**Gary Buck**, once the heartthrob of **The Four Guys**, has unveiled his new solo act. The handsome, blue-eyed tenor spent nine years with the quartet, but, as it turns out, Buck's career in music was something he never planned on. An Alabama native, Buck's artistic talent was his first concern. Before he fell into singing (originally with a gospel quartet), he was an artist with Boeing Aircraft Co., where he supervised the design work on Saturn missiles and space tracking systems.

**Anne Murray** was a big winner in her native Canada at the Juno awards this year. The pretty songbird was named *female vocalist of the year* and *country female vocalist of the year*, and also walked off with *single of the year* honors for *Can I Have This Dance* and *album of the year* for *Greatest Hits*, an award shared with a Toronto group, **Martha and the Muffins**. The Junos, awarded by the Canadian Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences, are the equivalent of the American Grammy Awards.

**Jerry Clower** and **Jim Ed Brown** have been replaced as co-hosts of television's *Nashville on the Road*. When the nationally-syndicated Show Biz production begins its sixth season this fall, it will be hosted by singer **Jim Stafford** and (would you believe) a pickin' and grinnin' chimpanzee named Golly Dang! Dang! (the punctuation is part of his name). The chimp should be no problem for Stafford to handle, thanks to the singer's recent chores as co-host of *Those Amazing Ani-*



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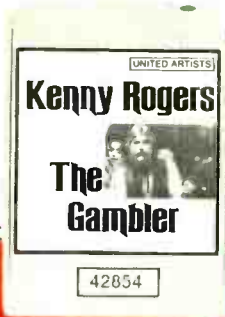




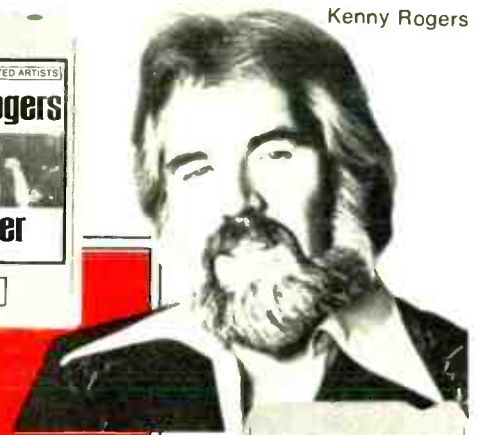
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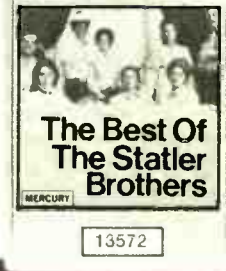
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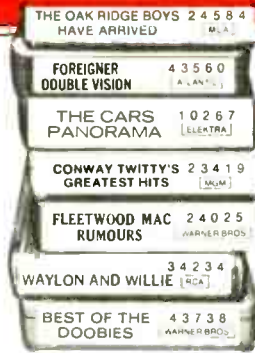
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mals. Others who will appear as regulars on the show, which is seen in 130 markets, are **Sue Powell** (formerly of **Dave and Sugar**) and **Rex Allen, Jr.**

**Ray Price** left no doubts about his status as a country music legend when he kicked off his comeback in Nashville at the Exit/In. Price, who has literally dozens of country music classics to his credit (among them *Release Me*, *Crazy Arms*, *Night Life*, and *For the Good Times*) has been in semi-retirement in Texas for the past few years. Now, encouraged by the success of his **San Antonio Rose** album with old friend and former Cherokee Cowboy, **Willie Nelson**, he's ready to roll again. His first Dimension Records album is out, he's acquired two new Rolls Royces (one to tour in, one for wife Janie), a new equipment truck and new lights and sound.

"The way I look at it, I'm reaping the oats I sowed a long time ago," said Price before the show. "If you sow good seeds, you get good returns. I've been sowing a heavy bag of seeds for a long time now. It's been a great 30 years, but now I think we're about to go into orbit . . . I feel like a bride on her wedding night."

**Roger Bowling** is best known as a songwriter (*Coward of the County* and *Lu-*

## Grand Ole Opry Band Releases Debut Album

One of country music's most-heard but least-famous bands has joined the ranks of recording artists. **The Grand Ole Opry Band**, known around the Opry for their uncanny ability to work musical miracles each week with no rehearsal, released its first record in early spring.

Titled—what else—**The Grand Ole Opry Band**, the disc is a collection of everything from *Will the Circle Be Unbroken* to *If I Said You Had a Beautiful Body*, and is doing a brisk business at Ernest Tubb's Record Store.

The band's eleven members—**Harold Weakley, Jerry Whitehurst, Jimmy**

**Wilson, Billy Linneman, Weldon Myrick, Leon Rhodes, Ralph Davis, Glen Davis, Sonny Burnett, Joe Edwards** and **Jimmy Capps**—are no studio novices, even though this is the band's debut as a group. Most are crack session musicians during the week.

If the album should become a major seller, will the Opry be left without a backup band? Never to worry, says spokesman Weakley: "No matter what happened we'd still work on the Opry. It's more than our job. It's something we love to do—something we feel fortunate to be a part of each week".

*cille*), but is making headway as a recording artist in his own right. He taped an appearance for the syndicated *Top Country Songs of the Year* special this spring for television, signed a booking agreement with the Dick Blake Agency, planned a summer tour of the U.K. and Europe and did rather nicely with his single *Yellow Pages*. Bowling's life was also brightened by the production of a film based on

*Coward of the County* (co-written with **Billy Edd Wheeler**), which stars Kenny Rogers.

**Merle Haggard's** recent hit *Leonard*, if you didn't know, is a true-life story about one of Hag's old friends, singer **Tommy Collins**. Collins, whose real name is **Leonard Sipes**, is something of a real legend in music circles. Just as the song portrays. (Continued on page 21)

## Mel Tillis and Terry Bradshaw, Good Ole Boys In The Movies

Is **Mel Tillis** becoming a member of Hollywood's Rat Pack? The singer was one of two musical acts to perform at a gala 65th birthday party for **Frank Sinatra** held at Sinatra's posh Rancho Mirage, California home. Among the other guests were no less than **Dean Martin, Cary Grant, Gregory Peck, Johnny Carson, Tony Bennett, Fred Astaire, Frank Sinatra, Jr.,** sister **Nancy** and emcee **Milton Berle**.

M-M-Mel presented Ole Blue Eyes with a brand new cowboy hat and a country ham in honor of the occasion, and Sinatra returned the favor by inviting Tillis to join him and the rest of the gang at **Ronald Reagan's** inaugural festivities. Tillis was present for the swearing-in ceremony, taped an inauguration night television special, and performed at the inaugural ball held at the Museum of Natural History.

When he wasn't busy hobnobbing with

**President Reagan** and crony **Frank Sinatra, Mel Tillis** spent a busy few weeks filming scenes for *The Cannonball Run*, in which he appears with **Terry Bradshaw, Burt Reynolds, Farrah Fawcett** and others. The film, due out in June, concerns the misadventures of two Southern stock car drivers. The film inspired this winter's *Short Trackers* on television, in which Tillis and Bradshaw appeared as characters drawn from the feature film.





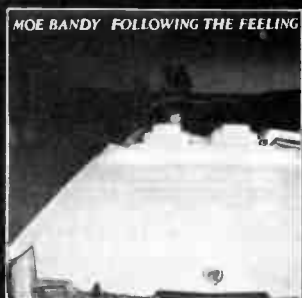
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JOE!

HEYEEEEEE,  
MOE!


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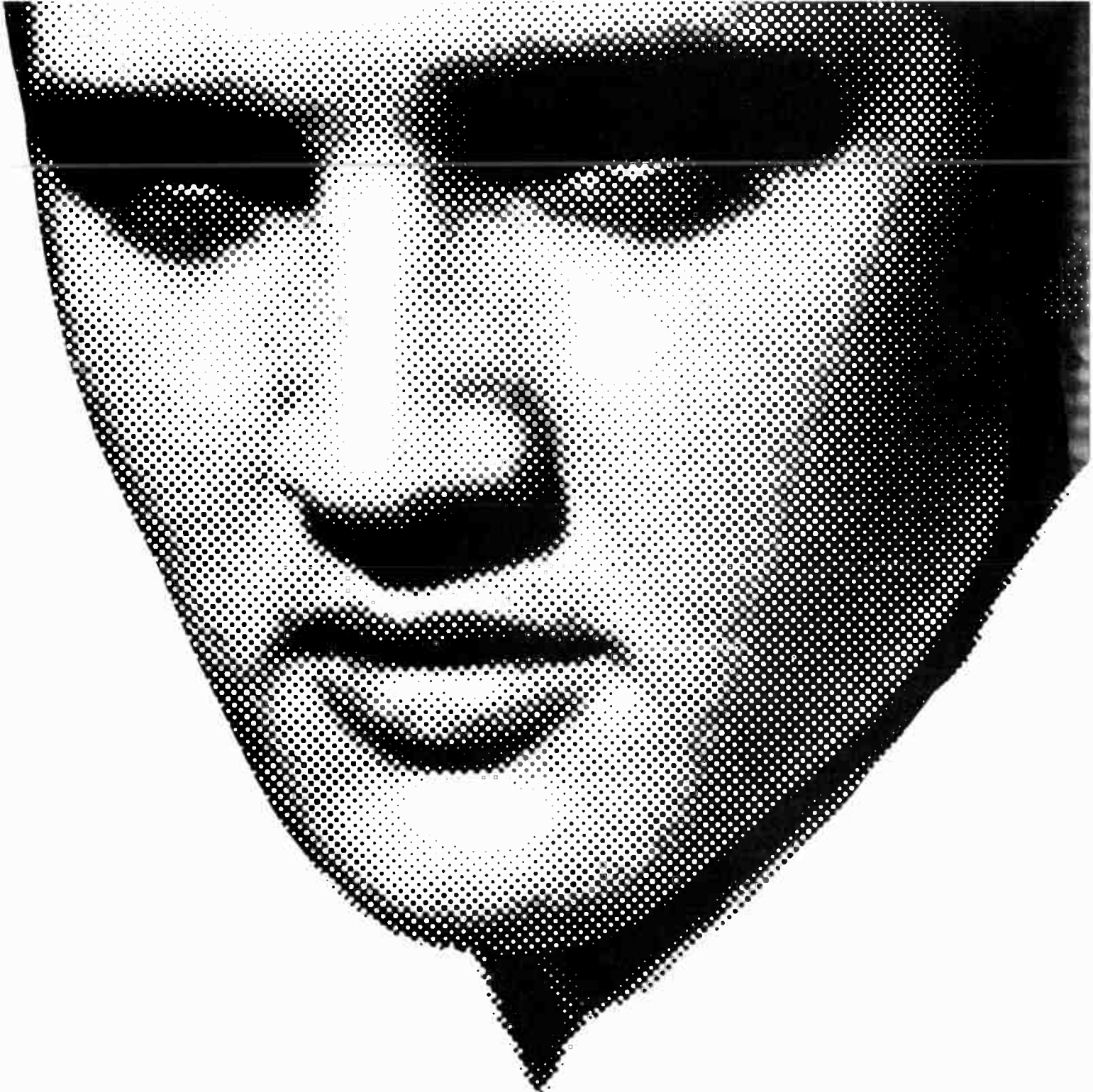


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he was once a million-selling recording act, appeared on the stage with **Elvis Presley** and wrote songs for a number of major recording stars. He also ran into subsequent trouble with booze and pills, lost family and friends, and scuttled his career.

Now Collins (who was re-named for the drink by his long-time friend **Ferlin Husky**) is making a comeback on his own. He's been writing songs again, touring the U.S. and Europe and getting his life together in country-music-legend style. "I'll admit to everything Merle said," Collins says. "He told it right, and I appreciate it. I appreciate the exposure, and I'm happy to say that I've got things pretty well under control again. My heart's back in the music business."

Jerry Lee Lewis found he had a ready-made stand-in when he failed to show up for a gig at Lupo's, a Providence, Rhode Island club. It seems that just as the crowd was growing restless at the delay in the first show, a soldier from a nearby Army base leaped onto the stage and did a better than credible set of the Killer's tunes. The performance went over so well, that a good chunk of the audience stayed around for a second set to see if Lewis could top his understudy. Apparently he did.

KIAC radio listeners in Los Angeles voted for their favorites for the 10th straight year in a row in the station's Listener Choice Awards. Winners included **Dolly Parton**, female vocalist of the year; **Willie Nelson**, male vocalist of the year; **The Statler Brothers**, group of the year; **Kenny Rogers**, artist of the decade.

When news of *Coal Miner's Daughter's* seven Oscar nominations hit the airwaves, the first person to congratulate **Loretta Lynn** was someone she had never met. Relishing the news at Harrah's in Lake Tahoe, where she was appearing, Loretta got a call from **Sammy Davis, Jr.**, who was appearing at Harrah's in Reno. "He was just delightful on the phone," said Loretta's manager **David Skepner**. "He said he loved the film, everything about it, and was thrilled that it had gotten so many nominations." Loretta, incidentally, maintained her status as one of Tahoe-Reno-Vegas' big draws. Her week-long stint at Harrah's was a sell-out, despite the fact that Frank Sinatra was booked simultaneously at the next-door Caesar's Tahoe.

**Ronnie Milsap** made his Las Vegas debut in February, with a two-week stint at the Aladdin Hotel. Sharing the bill with him was **Debby Boone**.

WVVA (Wheeling, West Virginia) Jamboree regulars proved they were really troupers when they performed despite a flood at the Capitol Music Hall which caused an estimated \$250,000 in damage and left the place "looking like Niagara Falls."

Newcomers in the Nashville family: **Lindsay Kristin Scruggs**, born to **Randy** and **Sandy Scruggs** (Randy is one of  
*(Continued on page 22)*

## Sissy gets Golden Globe for Coal Miner's Daughter

By the time the Oscar nominations rolled around, **Sissy Spacek** had already amassed nearly every major award possible for a film actress for her role as **Loretta Lynn** in *Coal Miner's Daughter*.

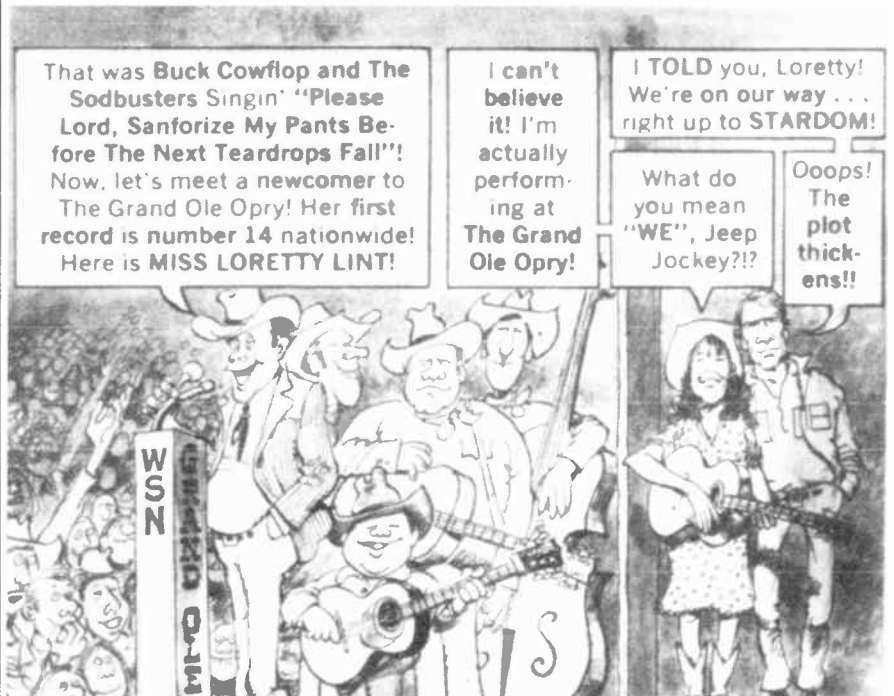
She was voted best motion picture actress in a comedy or musical by the Hollywood Foreign Press Association, which also gave its prestigious Golden Globe Award to *Coal Miner's Daughter* for best comedy or musical film of the year, and also walked off with best actress awards from the New York Film Critics Circle, the Los Angeles Film Critics, the National Board of Review and the National Society of Film Critics.

In addition to her Oscar nomination for the song *9 to 5*, Dolly Parton was nominated for three Golden Globe Awards for *9 to 5*, but failed to win one. She was probably not too distressed, though: in its first five weeks of national release, the movie *9 to 5* grossed better than \$52 million at the box office. Not bad for a



day's work, huh?

## ... and Loretta gets Spoofed in MAD Magazine.



See-Ya-in-the-Funny-Papers Department: Two of country music's finest wound up as subjects of the cartoonist's wit recently. **Loretta Lynn** came under affectionate fire from the British edition of *MAD* magazine, which ran a parody of *Coal Miner's Daughter* titled *Gold Mining Daughter*. More or less following the plot line of the film, the cartoon fable concerned the adventures of **Loretty Lint**, husband **Doodling Lint** and their friend **Patsy Climb**. Among Miss Lint's not-yet-famous (but who knows) tunes in the satire are *Please Lord, Sanforize My Pants Before the Next Tear Drop Falls* and *I'm*

*Falling Into Something and I Hope It's Only Love*. Miss Lint, an endearing character, eventually succumbs toward the end of the saga to "movie montage disease," the result of trying to relive 187 concerts and eleven years of her life into two minutes on film.

Meanwhile, **Slim Whitman** turned up in the nationally-syndicated comic strip *Funky*. Booked as the last-minute entertainment at a high school *Star Trek* convention he, is mistakenly taken for a Klingon.

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World Radio History

Earl's talented sons) and son **Chance Brett Barlow**, born to **Randy** and **Melinda Barlow**.

Picture-This Department: **Tom T. Hall** will be the subject of a special sketching session in June, when he sits for 100 visiting members of the National Association of Editorial Cartoonists, in town for their annual convention. Others who have earned the honor are **Red Skelton**, **Carol Channing** and **George Burns**.

**Paul Williams** is one of pop music's most successful songwriters, but now it seems he has a yen to make it as a country singer too. The diminutive singer was in Nashville for a hush-hush two day stint at Woodland Studios, where he recorded an album of country classics, such as *Crazy* and *I Fall to Pieces*.

Also in Nashville for a recent surprise visit was the lady who turned out to be the answer to America's favorite question: "Who shot JR?" **Mary Crosby** (Kristin Shepard on *Dallas*) arrived unannounced for a whirlwind few days with her singer/songwriter husband **Eb Lottimer**. Lottimer, say those who have heard his music, is an accomplished composer who can turn out a good country tune. While in town the Lottimers made the round of publishing companies and recording studios, and struck up friendships with a number of Nashvillians, among them **Duone Allen** of the **Oak Ridge Boys**, who expressed interest in some of Lottimer's material. Said one Music Row-er of the lady who provoked such a storm: "She's not a bit like she is on television. She's just a really nice, very sweet young woman. And even prettier than she is on screen."

**Joe English**, the drummer with **Paul McCartney's Wings** from 1975 to 1977, is making a go of it as a gospel singer and songwriter. Formerly of Macon, Georgia, 31-year-old English is now living in Nashville and has released his first gospel album, **Lights in the World**, on Refuge Records.

**Jerry Reed** took time out from taping his *Concrete Cowboy* TV show to appear at Laredo Boots' spring fashion show at Nashville's Cactus Jack's Cowboy Club. Resplendent in a pair of shiny new brown cowboy boots himself, Reed explained to visiting fashion editors that his job as spokesman for the company is to "take the word to the street people. They wanted a redneck to do that." He rolled up his pants and showed off a shiny pair of white socks peeping from his boot tops to illustrate his point.

Reed said he was "excited" about the Western craze sweeping the country and pointed to President Reagan's weakness for boots as an example of how widespread the trend is. "Of course, if I were Reagan and I had to look forward to four years of wading through crap in Washington, damned if I wouldn't buy myself a pair of hip boots." Reed cracked.

**Faron Young** and his Deputies have been seen all over the place lately. He



recently made his first appearance in eight years on the Grand Ole Opry stage, where he taped a segment of **Bill Anderson's Backstage at the Opry** for television, then travelled to Grapevine, Texas to appear in *Country Crossover*, a film based on the life of the late **Buddy Knox**, with colleagues **Tommy Overstreet, Gordie Tapp** and **Ray Price**. Tour appearances ranged from The Casino in Haskell, New Jersey, to Mama's Country Showcase in Atlanta to Whiskey Junction in Houston.

**Tom T. Hall** is already a singer, songwriter, picker, author, budding novelist, television host and connoisseur of watermelon wine, but he has now added another hat to his collection. He has been named to the board of directors of the Harpeth National Bank in Franklin, Tennessee, near his Fox Hollow home. "He's unquestionably an extremely gifted man whose creative insights will most certainly be invaluable to our efforts at Harpeth National Bank, and being a Franklin man we are especially proud of him," said **Leonard Isaacs**, the bank's board chairman.

## Charlie Daniels and Brenda Lee Co-Host Radiothon



More than 180 radio stations across the country recently participated in the first annual Country Music Radiothon to raise funds for the National Kidney Foundation. Produced in cooperation with the Country Music Association (CMA), the Radiothon aired 12-24 hours (depending on the station) of music and interviews produced in Nashville along with locally-produced fund-raising pleas. Co-hosted by **Ralph Emery, Brenda Lee, Charlie Daniels** and **Tom T. Hall**, the first-time-ever effort by the Kidney Foundation featured appearances by **Barbara Mandrell, Dolly Parton, Charley Pride, The Gatlin Brothers, T.G. Sheppard, Helen Cornelius, Razy Bailey** and others. The Radiothon, which is planned as an annual event, marks the first time the CMA has voted to support a nation-wide event held by a voluntary health agency.

**Jeannie C. Riley** fans are in for a treat in June, when the pretty singer tells all in her autobiography, *From Harper Valley to the Mountain Top*. The book, co-authored by inspirational writer **Jamie Buckingham**, says the publisher, will "reveal the underpinnings of the Nashville music industry." *From Harper Valley* will cover Jeannie's early years as a Nashville secretary trying to make it in the music business, to her overnight success with *Harper Valley PTA* in 1968, to her subsequent troubles juggling a career, children, marriage and her spiritual life. Miss Buckingham is the co-author of several popular religious books, among them **Corrie ten Boom's Tramp for the Lord and Daughter of Destiny** with evangelist **Katherine Kuhlman**.

**Kenny Rogers** followed up his super-generous gift of a multi-million dollar Malibu beach house to wife **Marianne** with yet another surprise. Can you call a \$100,000 lynx coat a mere trinket?

**Johnny Lee** did so well with the English version of *Looking For Love*, that he decided to try another one in Spanish. Producer for the new cut was **Jose Silva**, former head of RCA Records in Santiago, Chile. Silva, who pointed out the fact that there are 300 million Spanish-speaking people in the world, predicted huge success for the tune *en Espagnol* and ought to know what he's talking about. He's produced hits in Spanish for no less than **Kenny Rogers, Kim Carnes, Anne Murray, Robbie Dupree** and **The Pointer Sisters**.

**The Statler Brothers** made music history by breaking an all-time chart record in *Record World* magazine, with their **Best of** album. The hit collection managed to stay on the trade magazine's country album chart for an unprecedented 260 straight weeks, joined at times on the chart by two other of the group's offerings, **Best of The Statler Brothers Rides Again Vol II** and **10th Anniversary**. As if all that glory wasn't enough, the popular quartet also walked off with the American Music Awards listener-voted *Vocal Group of the Year* honor for the fourth straight time.

**Johnny Carver** knew he had a good tune in *Tie a Yellow Ribbon* when he first recorded it in 1973, and he was right. A Top Ten hit in the pop charts for **Tony Orlando**, Carver's version went on to become a Number One country song. What Carver didn't know, of course, was that a few years later the tune would become virtually the theme song for the 52 American hostages held captive in Iran for 444 days. When it did, Carver reasoned that re-releasing the song was a good idea, but couldn't drum up much interest until the week when the hostages were released.

"The idea really caught on, and then I thought maybe we should get the original writers of the song in on it," Carver said. Composers **Irwin Levine** and **Larry Russell Brown** were contacted at their New Jersey homes and liked the idea fine. "I

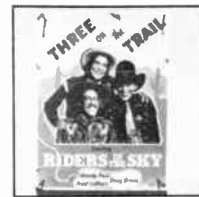
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thought maybe they'd do a little touch-up," Carver confided, "but it turned out they re-wrote the whole song into a sort of tribute to the hostages. I think in terms of what it's saying that it's even better than the original." The tune was rush-recorded, flown to radio stations around the country the same day and turned out to be a welcome shot in the arm for Carver's career in addition to a welcome home for the hostages.

**Charlie Daniels** was known as one of **Jimmy Carter's** biggest fans and supporters during the last two election campaigns, and was a frequent visitor to the White House during the Carter administration. Now, however, he says he's 100 percent behind **Ronald Reagan**. "He's won, and for good or bad he's my President now," said Charlie, who insists he's really not

politically involved. "I want to see him do good. If he can stop inflation, I'll vote for him in the next six elections. Still, you can't help but be on the dubious side . . ."

Two of rock music's best known figures were hard at work in Nashville studios recently. **Robert Gordon** spent several days working on a new album at Woodland Studios, and practically as he was leaving town, **Elvis Costello** dropped in at CBS Studios to do the same. Costello, you may recall, is no mean country singer as his duet with **George Jones** on *Stranger in the House* attests.

Word along Music Row is that **Dottie West** may soon make her movie debut with one of her country music colleagues. The vivacious redhead flew to New York after a recent engagement in Reno to talk about a role in *Best Little Whorehouse in*

*Texas*, in which **Dolly Parton** will co-star with **Burt Reynolds**.

**Johnny Cash** ended his long association as a songwriter affiliated with Broadcast Music Inc. (one of the three national organizations that collect performance royalties for writers and publishers) and signed up with their rival, ASCAP (The American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers). Although ASCAP spokesmen admitted that Cash was promised a tidy advance, they decline to say how much. It must have been pretty attractive though: Cash made the move a family affair, bringing both his wife, **June Carter Cash**, and son, **John Carter Cash**, along with him as writers in the ASCAP fold.

**Merle Haggard's** much-anticipated autobiography, *My Life's Been Grand*, is finished at last and is scheduled for publication in September by Times Books in New York. The book was co-authored by **Peggy Russell**, a reporter for the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* and an old friend of the Hag's. Haggard admits the book may shock a few people, but says it is a sincere attempt to tell his up-again, down-again life story as it happened, jail career, bad marriages and all. There's a strong possibility that the book will be made into a movie, and if it is, Haggard has already decided who he wants to play the lead: **Dustin Hoffman**.

**Dottie West** popped up all over the small screen during the first part of the year, with performances on *Hollywood Squares*, *The John Davidson Show*, **Larry Gatlin's** ABC-TV special and Home Box Office's *Country Music Family Affair*. Also to her credit were spots on *The Merv Griffin Show*, *Solid Gold* (co-hosted with **Dionne Warwick**), *The Mandrell Sisters Show* and *Midnight Special*.

**Webb Pierce's** famous guitar-shaped swimming pool—opened on Music Row after neighbors protested crowds drawn by Pierce's first guitar pool in his backyard—has finally found a buyer. Nashville's most expensive hole in the ground was sold to local hotel owner **Jack Spence**, who admits that he hasn't got the faintest idea what he'll do with the pool, located across the street from the Country Music Hall of Fame. The pool was built in 1978 and was billed by Pierce and partner as the Hall of Fame for Country Music Fans, where—for a fee—visitors could have their names engraved on a brass border around the pool. The attraction closed in 1979 after the partners fell out and has since remained depending on who you talk to, an eyesore or a unique curiosity.

Another popular Nashville act found its way to the inauguration in Washington. **Riders in the Sky**, the trio that seems to be singlehandedly bringing back the kind of music made popular by the likes of **Gene Autry** and **Roy Rogers**, performed in a "Salute to Texas" at the vice-presidential inaugural ball honoring Texan **George Bush**.

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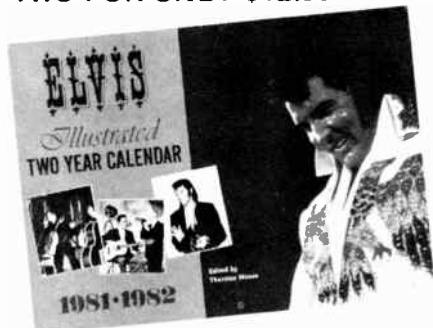
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**Biff Collie** celebrated the ninth anniversary of his *Inside Nashville* radio news service by adding five new stations to his list of customers, WYVA (Norfolk, Virginia), KSLV (Monte Vista, Colorado), KJLS (Hays, Kansas), KWMS (Pratt, Kansas), and KSLS (Liberal, Kansas). Collie's broadcast is customized for each station, and apparently is pretty convincing. It's not unusual for listeners to drop by individual stations for a visit with him.

**Larry Butler's** *Producer of the Year* Grammy last year seems to be paying off. Already noted as the man behind **Kenny Rogers** and **Dottie West**, among others, Butler completed an album with **Paul Anka** in Nashville this winter, and then flew to Las Vegas to negotiate a project with that ole blue-eyed country star, **Frank Sinatra**.


## Gail Davies Visits Country Music




While in New York to meet with her new manager, **John Dumanian**, **Gail Davies** took time out to visit the offices of *Country Music Magazine*. Gail's current single, *I'll Be There (If You Ever Want Me)*—the title track from the album—was Number Three on *Record World Magazine's* chart after 12 weeks.

## A Sad Goodbye To Scotty Wiseman

Nashville was saddened by the death of country music pioneer **Scotty Wiseman**, who passed away in Gainesville, Florida at the age of 71. Wiseman was half of one of country music's early duos, Lulu Belle and Scotty, known as "The Sweethearts of Country Music" on Chicago's WLS Barn-dance for more than a quarter of a century. The Wisemans helped found the Boone County Jamboree and the Mid-Western Hayride and numbered among their now-classic recordings *Have I Told You Lately*, *That I Love You*, *Mountain Dew* and *Tell Her You Love Her*. The Country Music Association cited Wiseman in a letter to his widow Lulu Belle, "for the legacy he leaves to the world. It can be said that Scotty Wiseman, whose artistry and music touched the hearts of so many, will truly live forever."



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## Members Squawk at Opry Cutbacks as John Conlee Becomes 59th Member

Mellow-voiced singer **John Conlee** became the 59th member of the Grand Ole Opry in February, the first "new" member since **Larry Gatlin** joined the show in 1976. (**Tom T. Hall** re-joined the Opry last year after an absence of several years.) The undertaker-turned-disc-jockey-turned-country music star said his induction into the Opry ranks was one of the highlights of a career that really got off the ground in 1978 with his smash *Rose Colored Glasses*. "My whole family grew up on the Opry," said Conlee. "In fact years ago my Dad was even asked to come down from Kentucky and guest on the Opry as a square dance caller. He never did, but it's nice that one of us has gotten on the show. Being an Opry member is a real benefit to a singer's career. Everyone, even new country music fans, knows about the Grand Ole Opry. Being able to say you're a member of the Opry opens doors to you all over the world."

Conlee said he listened to the Opry regularly as a child, until his attention strayed to rock and roll radio. He says his favorite performers were **Rod Brasfield**, **Stringbean** and **Ernest Tubb**. Though he's known as one of the more traditional young country music performers, Conlee said he hopes to "be a part of keeping the



John Conlee

Opry current musically, the way people like **Ronnie Milsap**, **Don Williams** and **Larry Gatlin** have done."

Opry general manager **Hal Durham**



Hank Snow

hailed Conlee as "one of the outstanding talents in music today," and said his addition to the cast was the first of several, in an attempt to update the show musically, the Opry hoped to make in the next year.

In order to accommodate the new acts, however, Durham said the Opry will cut back on performances by current Opry members. He also indicated that dismissal of some Opry members was "always an option," though he added that the cutbacks were a means of avoiding "adjusting the roster in that way." Durham's proposed cutbacks and further expansion of the Opry cast simultaneously brought sharp criticism from a number of established performers, some of whom had already been cut from two "spots" to one on the Saturday night Opry. "I believe it's in good taste for the Opry to groom new stars because people like me and **Ernest Tubb** and **Roy Acuff** aren't going to be around forever," said **Hank Snow**. "I don't agree, however, that they should cut back on talent that's been faithful to the Grand Ole Opry, some of them for practically as long as the show's been around . . . I don't believe the few extra bucks they'd have to pay is going to hurt them." Some Opry members maintained that the cutbacks were not a result of any planned or present expansion of the cast, but a thinly-veiled attempt to trim the Opry's budget, especially in view of a new union contract that raised the pay of Opry performers by 50 percent or more. "I'm certainly not trying to accuse anybody, but I'd hope they're bigger than trying to cut us back because we pushed this union contract through," said **Billy Grammer**. "I paid my dues for years and now, when things get a little tight, they want to minimize us."

"I think John Conlee is one of the best young singers around," said **Justin Tubb**. "But adding one act doesn't mean you have to cut several people's appearances back. I think the new contract has something to do with it."

Durham conceded that budgetary concerns were partially responsible for the cuts, but said "the union contract, which we certainly felt was a fair one, only has to do with this in an indirect way. Our other costs have gone up as well." ■

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he did. In 1939 Monroe joined the Opry and was told by George Hay, the Solemn Ol' Judge, "If you ever leave the Opry, it'll be because you've fired yourself." Needless to say, Monroe hasn't left. His recordings with Flatt and Scruggs for Columbia from 1945-49, may represent a peak of form and popularity, but he never ceased to set himself new challenges, and his music is as full of feeling today as it was when he was taking his show out in a giant tent that could hold 6000, reaching a whole generation of country people in Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama, and Tennessee who may have had no other exposure to "professional" entertainers.

*Back in days like that, say you played here today, you might play five or ten miles down the road the next day—you see, back in those days there wasn't no TV, there wasn't hardly no radio, so you didn't have to go so far then. We would leave in the morning and pull into the next town around ten or eleven o'clock. We had, I believe, seven trucks and a long stretched-out bus we traveled in. The people would be watching for you, they knew you were coming because you'd been advertised for two or three weeks, and they'd be standing on the street corners and sidewalks, you know, watching the show come in. Around half-past ten or eleven, we'd go out to where the tent would be put up. First you'd stretch the tent out, then drive the stakes down to where you could put the ropes up, just like the old carnival days. When the people got through with work, they would shave and clean up and come on out to the show. Back in those days everybody wore a white shirt, it seemed like. They were just good, down-to-earth working people, you*

*know. We started out charging \$2.50 and \$3.75 admission; after a while it went up to \$9.00 tops, and for a long time we went on with that. We played in some places there hadn't been a tent show allowed in years.*

The theme of the show was variety, just as the dominant thread of Bill Monroe's music was intricacy, variety, versatility. "If I had got up there," Monroe told Jim Rooney, "and sang everything with a little fiddle music behind me or a guitar like Ernest Tubb does, it would have got awful old." Instead, Monroe alternated lead vocals and traded off solos with fellow musicians who, while clearly under his direction, were never just relegated to the role of sidemen. In a similar way, the tent show presented a variety of entertainment, with Robert Lunn the Talking Blues Boy, harmonica wizard DeFord Bailey (the Opry's only Negro member, and proudly advertised over WSM as "our little mascot"), and Uncle Dave Macon among its most prominent stars, and, for almost a decade, a baseball game to follow the festivities. For a while Monroe carried 13 or 14 ballplayers on the road, including his banjo player, Stringbean, a first-class utility man, and maintained a team in Nashville, the Bluegrass Ballclub, as well. Monroe himself, who had been excluded from baseball games as a child because of his eyes, enjoyed playing first or third and even pitched on occasion. If someone was needed to help set up the tent, as often as not, it was Bill Monroe. "Bill loved to work," guitarist Don Reno told Jim Rooney. "Nobody could work him down. Bill was more interested in ball than he was music at this time. I reckon that this was a way of resting his mind from music. But he

like to killed me playing ball. We would work on a show one night and drive to the next town, and usually get in at an early morning hour, and he'd have a ball game set up by ten o'clock with the local team!"

It was undoubtedly this same combination of imagination and hard work, competitive drive and creativity, that gave him his staying power. When his best musicians left to go off on their own, he replaced them with men as good or better, who always brought something different to the music. When times got tough, with the advent of rock 'n' roll, although he was forced to cut back and the tent show turned into appearances at the local drive-in theater, he may have been discouraged, but he never gave up. When in the '60s he was discovered by a new college audience, he was more ready for them than they for him—not least because his repertoire had never stopped expanding, both forwards and back. At the beginning of his career he wrote very little; his first big hit was his distinctive version of Jimmie Rodgers' *Mule Skinner Blues*, and many of his most familiar songs were reworkings of



traditional old-timey tunes. As he gained confidence in his writing, and perhaps more important, acquired the emotional poise to express what was within him, his songs became more and more personal: he started to write autobiographical numbers like *Uncle Pen, Memories of Mother and Dad, I'm On My Way to the Old Home*, which he refers to as "true true songs." And although the lyrics are often somewhat abstract, you can, if you care to, gain momentary insight into the emotional intensity of Bill Monroe's life.

*I like to write that kind of a song, but you don't do it all the time. I have a lot of true stories, but I guess a lot of people don't care that much about you, you know, to care what kind of feelings you've got. I guess you have to be around a man to really know how he stands or how his life goes or what he thinks about. No, I don't think I was shy [before he started to write his "true" songs], I just didn't know how to write that kind of song more so. Of course on the Opry I always sang the numbers that made hits. Just like Acuff, Tubb, Hank Snow, people like that—people always looked forward to you being there on Saturday night so they could hear you do those songs, and records wasn't so important back in them days. But I would come with a new number every now and then, too. And that's something else that the Grand Ole Opry people don't do that they should do. They've sung the same things for 40 years, some of 'em—and still doing it. That's the trouble with many entertainers—not learning nothing new, don't write nothing, I'm not bragging, but that's something that I've always done. You try to write something, you know, that you thought people would like. I write a lot of instrumentals, then I go to adding and putting words to it. A lot of times I write the melody before I ever start writing the words. Sometimes when I pick up my instrument, the first time I make a note I'll start in on a new melody.*

Some of the songs are biographical, some are pure imagination, some are almost historical musings. An instrumental like *Land of Lincoln*, for example, he conceived as an evocation of a particular time and mood.

*Land of Lincoln, I think, is a wonderful title for a fiddle tune. To picture Lincoln when he was a lawyer, you know, going to try somebody and passing an old fiddler on the street—that's what I had in mind, the way that would have happened. He'd stop a little while to listen to the fiddler, then he went on. Damn, but I think that's a really good number: it goes way on back in the way of sounds and everything, like it would have been in Lincoln's days. No, I don't think a lot of people even think about that, the way things started—a lot of people are just out for the dollar, to put on a show—but it's played a big part in my life from the time I was a kid on. The lay of the land, the people, the people I knew when I*

*was a kid like my father, my mother, and on back—Lincoln down to Roosevelt, I mean Wilson, and people like that, that you knew as presidents. Back in those days they respected the president of the United States; they didn't talk about the other man all the time.*

Perhaps most remarkable of all is this role as conservator as well as innovator, the way in which Monroe has consciously set out to preserve the past at the same time that he has forged ahead with a music that was so fresh as to be considered revolutionary when it first appeared. In the last decade-and-a-half, he has even resurrected many of the tunes that he first learned from his Uncle Pen 40 and 50 years ago.

*I'd run over them, say, a few times a year, but they would never have died. I could have remembered them if I'd never played them, but it don't hurt to go over them, you know, to remember the sound of it and everything. I wanted to save those numbers and do 'em as near like Uncle Pen would have played them, so that people would know that. Then it would be doing something good for him, too, rather than just let the number die away. It gives me a great feeling, because he would never have thought that this would have happened. He was a wonderful uncle and a good man.*

It is only when the interview is over that Bill Monroe loosens up a little, and his dry, laconic responses take on a certain irony as he accepts an invitation to lunch by asking, "You boys sure your money'll hold up now?" At the restaurant, a comfortable family-style coffee shop, he is greeted warmly by several men and women who appear to be regular customers. One couple holds up a copy of the *Nashville Tennessean* with his picture on the front of the Living section. "He's a hard working man," Bill Monroe says, with what appears to be a twinkle in his eye. "You've got the talent," says the husband, offering him the newspaper. "It's held up pretty good." Bill Monroe agrees, thanking the

man for the paper and returning to his lunch. He is a brisk eater, as efficient at this activity as in every other aspect of his life, and he wipes his plate clean long before his two companions are finished.

After lunch he says that he has a surprise for us. We follow him in his pickup out the highway towards where we know he lives. As we pull into a shopping center at the side of the road, I wonder if he is going to stop at the Fotomat or drive-in bank, but instead he gets out of the pickup, appears to be sighting something, then shakes his head, pulls the truck up a little further, and nods with a faint smile of satisfaction. "There," he says, "over the Dollar sign, you can see it now," and he directs our attention over the supermarket sign up into the hills. Well off in the distance, nestled on high ground, is a substantial tract of cleared land obviously put to agricultural use. "That's my farm," he says with pride. "It looks beautiful," we murmur, and we stand there for a few minutes admiring it. Then we shake hands all around, he wishes us good luck, and we watch Bill Monroe drive off up the highway towards his home.

Earlier he had asked what were the last lines of the story; he wanted to make sure that they said something appropriate, something fitting, and we reviewed the last exchange on the interview tape. I had asked him if he had any regrets, and after a long silence he volunteered, "Well, I guess a man could be more saving when he's young. He could put more money away to help him when he's older." But what about his family? I wondered. Did he ever regret the isolation that an entertainer's life necessarily engenders? "My family knew that I was going to have to do this kind of work, because I had got into it, y'see, and I had a daughter and my son James—Melissa was my daughter. But I reckon they allowed for it, and they was always waiting for me when I'd get back Friday evening or Saturday. I guess if you love each other it'll take care of everything. ■



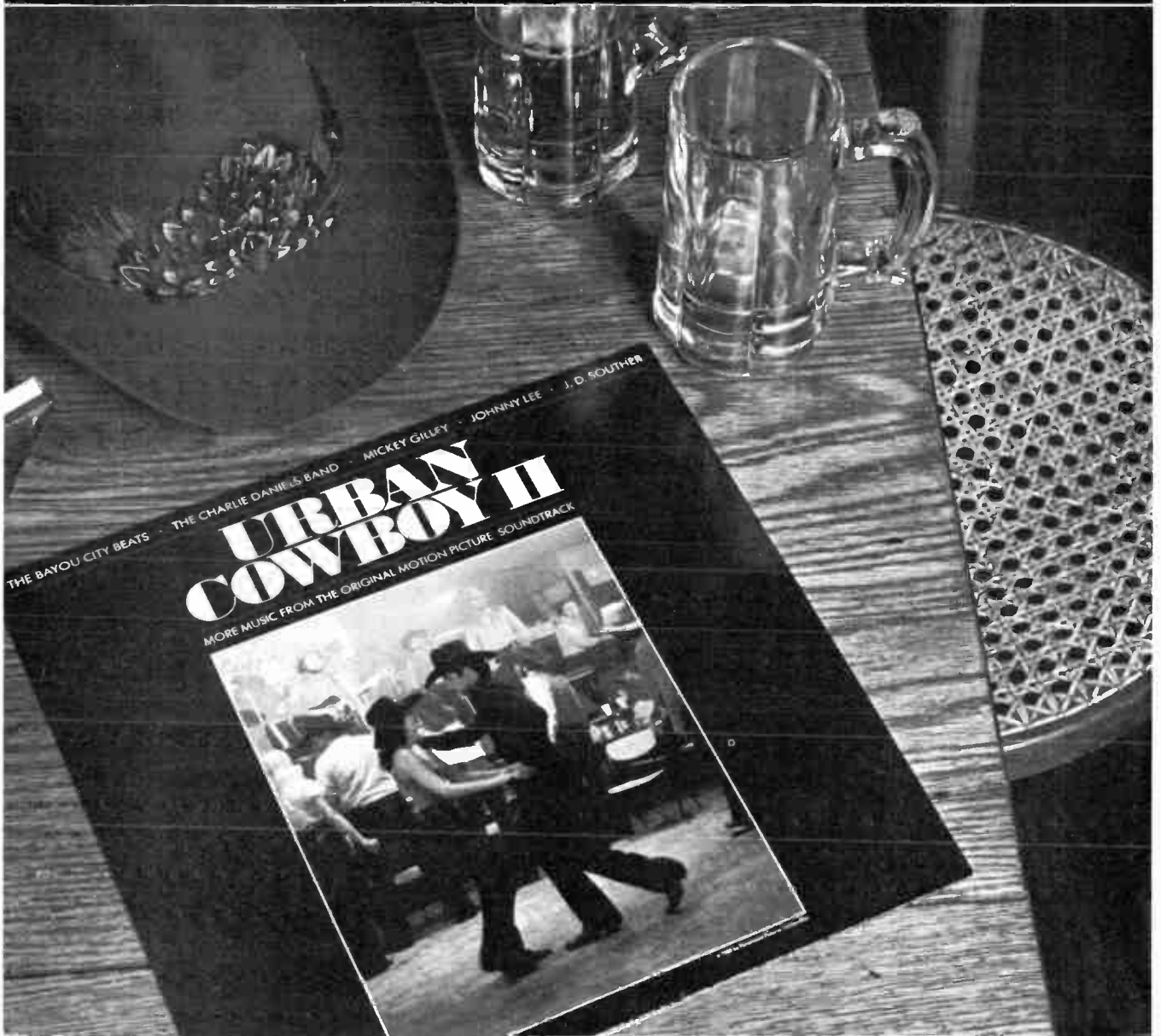
It is only when the interview is over, that Bill Monroe loosens up and accepts an invitation to lunch, where he is greeted by several regular customers.



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# The Songwriter's Best Friend

Bare leans casually into the mike, his Fender hung comfortably and The Pulleybone electric at his back, and croons the following lines, part of a modern Bare-style love song:

*"I called up the police,  
told 'em you stole my car  
I showed some naked pictures  
of you down at the bar  
I pointed out the part of me  
you used to kiss  
And if that ain't love,  
what is?"*

The sloppy Bare baritone vamps these lines with offhand humor: the man in the song does things like tear up his girlfriend's clothes and throw her out in the rain (and flush her birth control pills down the drain); the Pulleybone accompanies with a strong blues funk; and the cow-hippies in the crowd, many of whom are already half blind on beer and assorted drugs, encourage each revolting insult with loud whoops, much stomping of the boots, and what appears to be very little understanding of the song's ironic intent. This is Bobby Bare, 1980, doing a first set designed specifically to showcase his latest album, *Drunk And Crazy*. In the parlance

of the trade, he's "supporting the album." He's doing well, too; the cow-hippies, those plumbs of the 18-to-30-year-old buying market, are obviously all fired up. Drunk and crazy's where it's at with them; Bare's hit it again. With Shel Silverstein writing those good, twisted songs, and the Pulleybone a band tight and hot enough to blow down any old set of walls, and Bare's stage presence as attractive as it always was, he's in fine shape for the workathon. These days, Bare's being very serious about his career as a recording artist.

Bare, despite the laconically outrageous humor and sleaze-material tendencies which come his way both naturally and via Shel Silverstein, is a serious kind of fellow overall. His has not been the career of gadfly or simple star. He has diversified—he has been a standard country singles star, a music publishing businessman, an album specialist in a singles market, and now he is a full-time committed road and recording act—but each phase of his career has been characterized by thought, effort, consistency and success. He's been quiet and canny and effective throughout, and, at times, particularly in the mid-1960s and early 1970s, Nashville's fastest-changing and most creative modern period, he has been an extremely significant moving force

in the progress of the music and the character of the business which surrounds it.

It's strange, when watching him shake a club-full of cow-hippie buns—for all the world the consummate drunk 'n' crazy cheerleader misted by the sweat of his devotees—to remember him sitting quietly around the outlaw-oriented studios and offices back in the Nashville of '71 or so, passing the odd quip and chortling along with his crazier colleagues, but obviously keeping a steady eye on business all the same. His presence in those situations was easy and comfortable and reassuring; the Bare took care, and the crazy boys needed him, and the Bare was there.

The Bare, in short, is a complex but steady individual, much given to excess and humor and getting it on, but also thoughtful and smart in practice, not at all silly in method. After the sweat-spraying *Drunk And Crazy*—supporting incident in the honky-tonk and a good night's sleep, for instance, he and I had a long lunch together, and, between sneezes and coughs and sniffles brought upon us by his virulent case of the flu (which, it should be noted, was totally invisible to those Bare-loving cow-hippies), the following entirely sober dialogue took place:

## COUNTRY MUSIC Interviews

# BOBBY BARE

by Patrick Carr

**How much work do you do these days, Bobby?**

I'm working damn near every day.

**Why?**

Supporting the album. In order to get support from the record company, I have to give it a total commitment on my part. The commitment has to start with me, and go on from there. Like, if I say, "Yeah, this is an album I believe in, and I'm going to support it *sorta*," then that's just about what I'm going to get back. They'll bust their ass and work for me *sorta*. The bot-

tom line for anything is hard work. There's no mirrors and no magic wand you wave around—you just work your ass off, and in return, you get paid for it. That's it.

I went for years and just worked weekends; I didn't carry a band or even a guitar. I know how *not* to work, 'cause I was real good at it for a long time.

**So what changed your mind?**

I wanted to stay in the business, and the business was changing to the point where I knew that if I wanted to continue making records—and I *love* to make records—

then I was going to have to put my mouth where my money was. It's a lot more competitive now than it was when I started. Everybody that comes up sings better than I do.

**Do you like it this way?**

I like it the way it is now, yes. It's more adventuresome. There's more action. That's what keeps me going. I get bored easy—*real* quick. I guess that's why I've never done the same thing over and over, like most people do. I hate to repeat myself, which is what the record company

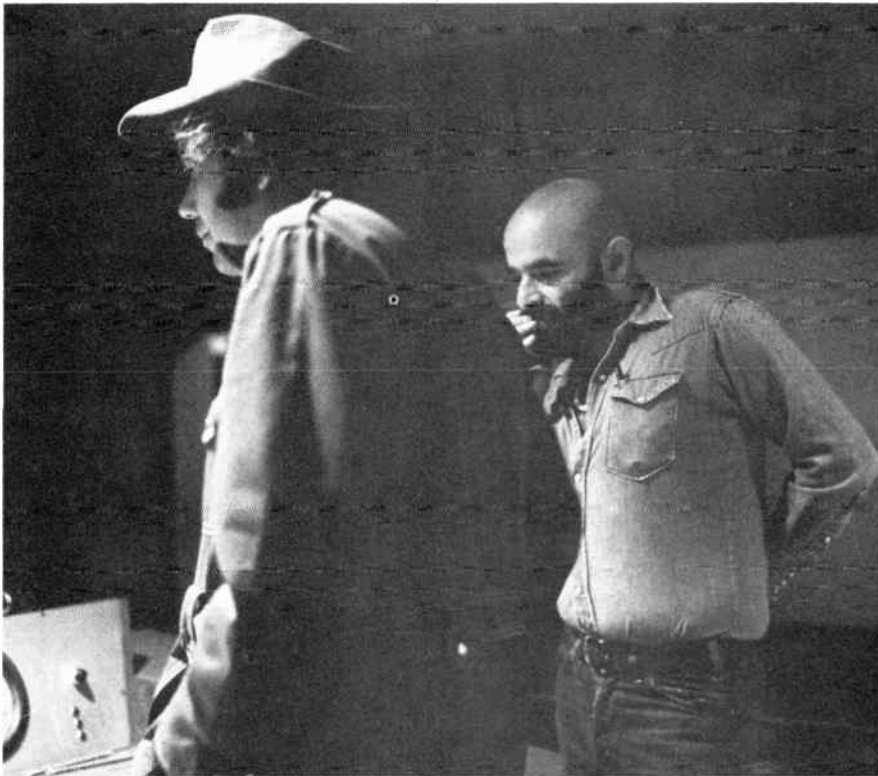
would like me to do. They'd like me to do safe things and be predictable. But it's my feeling that even though it's easier for the record company to sell albums when they know what's coming, that only lasts for a little while. If you're doing the same thing over and over again, then they file you away and forget about you, and it's over—but in the meantime, of course, you've probably gotten very rich in the process.

But hell, that way it gets boring. You're working on the assembly line, which is I

**Shel Silverstein is the source of a great deal of your material. How did you get hooked up with him?**

Well, a while ago I decided that I was finished with cutting singles, like they still do in Nashville—you know, it's "Let's cut a hit single, then take the rejects and make an album out of them, and name the album after the hit single." I wanted to do more than that. I wanted to cut a whole album that made sense.

So I went to most all the writers I knew



Bare and songwriter-friend Shel Silverstein. "He's probably the most creative person I've ever met," says Bare.

guess what 90% of the world is doing. This way, I'm putting my ass on the line about three times a week, playing new places for country music and doing certain songs in places where they don't expect them and so on, and it's exciting. It's like gambling: gambling ain't no fun unless you're gambling over your head. If you can afford it, it ain't no fun.

**About playing new places—was there a point at which you decided to go for a younger crowd?**

Not necessarily. I just record what I like to do. I don't think you can go to a younger crowd—I think they come to you. You can't force something onto them; it's just too difficult, it never really works. Every crossover hit I ever had was bare-ass backwards anyway. They were rock and roll hits first, then they crossed over country. *Detroit City* started out on KFWB in Los Angeles, a hard rock station. *Shame on Me* was Number One pop across the nation before it ever got played on a country station. So I definitely don't have that stuff figured out; I wouldn't even know how to begin.

in Nashville, but they were geared for the singles business. They'd have a song or maybe two songs, but the idea of an album freaked them out. It was like, if you didn't want to do a "tribute" album to a great writer, they just didn't have an album.

So I ran into Shel, whom I already knew, at a party at Harlan Howard's house after the CMA Awards Show that year when Kristofferson freaked everybody out, and I told him that I wanted to do a whole album which had continuity and thought behind it. Two days later, he called from Chicago and said, "I got an album." He flew down to Nashville that same day, we sat up all night listening to the songs, I set up the studio time, and we went in and did the *Lullabies, Legends And Lies* album. It had three Number One singles on it, too. Jerry Bradley at RCA said that if he'd known what I was doing, he'd have stopped it. He wanted me to do *Detroit City* over and over again.

So that's how Shel and I got together, and we're together still. He's probably the most creative person I've ever met.

**He writes an awful lot of songs about**

**sleaze and excess in general—*Quaaludes Again, Drunk and Crazy, Food Blues, Rock & Roll Hotel* and all those others—and you sing them. Does life around you and Shel tend to be as loony as the songs?**

Well, the pace we've got goes like this. As soon as we wind up tonight, we load into the bus and go to Hamilton, Ontario and do a show tomorrow night. As soon as that show's over, we load into the bus and drive to Wheeling, West Virginia and do a show there. As soon as that show's over, we load up the bus and drive to Fairfax, Virginia and we do that show—so there's not a whole lot of time for hanging out and partying. On the other hand, the last time I was in New York, we made the rounds, and we *did* get drunk and crazy. We wound up at the Lone Star Cafe, and it took my wife and a couple of friends to get me outa there—and I ain't that heavy.

**That sounds logical. What about Nashville? What's the scene like there these days?**

All the action and excitement started around the mid-60s and really heated up in the late '60s. There was *lots* of good action then. Everything was changing, and you could feel it changing, and you knew that you were a part of it and that it was relevant. About '69 or '70 it was *steaming*.

I'm not saying that it's not happening now, but it's fragmented now. It's not a group now. Then, it was a bunch of creative people all hanging out together—the songwriters, mostly. I've always felt that the songwriters control the direction of the music anyway. There's nothing that singers and musicians and producers can do about it—they may *think* there is, but hell, they're following the creative writers like puppy-dogs. Anyway, back in the mid- and late '60s was when the action was. It's more businesslike now.

**Why is it fragmented now?**

Well, I started producing my own records back then—around '70, I guess—and that opened up a big can of worms, and everybody started doing it. All the in-house producers started getting wise, and split from the record companies to start producing independently and controlling the song publishing themselves.

**You were the first to make that move, right?**

As far as I know, I think that, yes, I was. I didn't even think about it at the time. At the time I was just tired of going from one producer to another—RCA had maybe five producers, and you never knew which one you'd be working with next. Now, Chet Atkins was wanting to get out of producing anyway, so my wanting to produce my own records wasn't any big deal. It was just a whole lot easier to simply set up studio time than to chase down a producer who was doing four or five other artists and try to work myself into his schedule.

**So there was no fight.**

No, no. It was easy. There *would* have been a fight if they'd known what I was starting.



So what has it all led to?

What's happening now is that the big record labels are fast becoming distributors only. In other words, there's a very limited number of in-house producers. The bulk of the product is controlled by independent producers and artists. I mean, I'm sure that at this point, if Kenny Rogers wanted to launch Kenny Rogers Records and have his parent label simply sell the records for him, the label would say, "Sure, Mr. Rogers, anything you want," and that's the way it would be.

**What do you think of the quality of the music these days?**

I think the quality's great. I think a lot of the people involved are great singers. I think that the quality of the sound is much greater because the studios have improved. Production's much better because of the 24-track boards. The only thing I question is the quality of the material. I think that they could go out and find better material for the artists.

**Do you think that the material is there?**

I think it's there, but I also think that there are too many producers and artists who are recording too many songs that they control and own—basically, they're recording them for financial reasons. I've never done that myself—but then, I've never gotten filthy-ass rich, either. There's a whole lot of money in song publishing and in owning a piece of the action, and I think that the quality of the records suffers because of that.

The situation hasn't really changed that much; it's just rearranged itself. These days, most of the songs you hear on the

charts are either owned or partly owned by either the artist or the independent producer. It used to be that the publishing houses would hire writers on salary or on a draw, and take the songs into the record company, and control it like that. Now, like I said, it's more fragmented. There are a whole lot of great new writers in town right now, and this situation is forcing them to work as freelancers. They can't go sign on with the publishing houses because the artists and the independent producers don't want to give away the action to the publishing houses unless they have to, so it's real hard on the writers. These guys *have* to be freelance so that they can leave the publishing rights to their songs open for the artists and the independent producers—and when you're freelance, you don't get no weekly draw, no steady money. You have to do whatever you can to eat.

It's the same ballgame as it was. There are just a few different rules. The new writers are getting screwed in new ways. **Well, that's nice. Business as usual. What about the atmosphere around town, though? Does the business fragmentation translate to the social scene?**

Sure does. Everybody's so damned busy, you only get to see your friends when you're on the road, when you're doing a show together or something. Back in the '60s and even the early '70s, everybody was just hanging out. I was only working the road Saturday nights, so that gave us the whole week to hang out and work on songs and listen to new material and hear things. Now, everybody's busy, they're all off in

different directions. The last time I saw Billy Joe [Shaver] was when we worked St. Louis together; the last time I saw Willie was when we did two nights at Red Rocks [Colorado] back in the summer; it just so happened that Kris was working around there at the same time, and that was the first time I'd seen *him* in a year-and-a-half. That's the way it is. The only hold-outs, the only guys still hanging out are Shel and Bob McDill, and neither of them wants to be a star.

**Back in the '60s, did you foresee any of this?**

I was very much aware of the impact that was coming—I could see the radio stations getting more and more interested in who was writing the songs, so yeah, I could see the singer/songwriter thing being big—but otherwise, no. Not about what *I* was going to do. It's been through different stages with me. When it started out, all I wanted to do was get on record. So I got a record, and it wasn't a hit. So I wanted to get a hit record. So I got on RCA and had a whole string of hit records. Then I went through a stage where I could see that the real action was in working with songwriters, so I started a publishing company and worked with songwriters. Then I wanted to do albums, so I did albums. Then I noticed that for some reason, I wasn't getting good support for the albums, so I changed labels and got new management, and so here we are. They're working their asses off for me, and I'm working my ass off for them, and we're all making money.

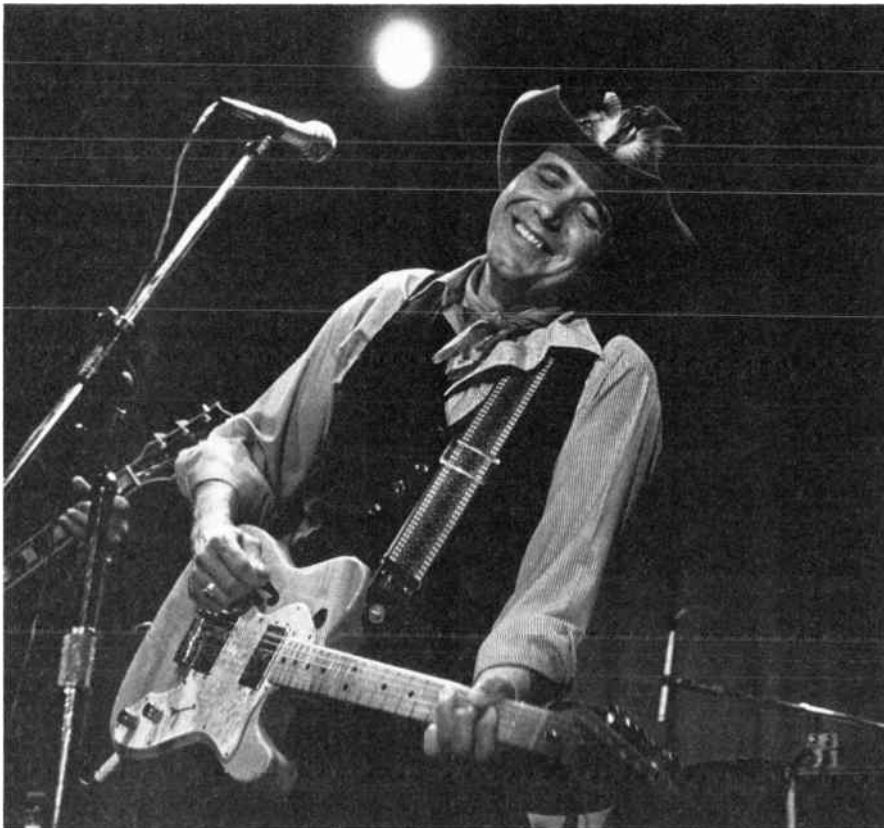
The only problem is that I'm working with albums, and deep down I know I'm right, but the only gauge for success that you have—and this is *terrible*—is whether an album goes gold or platinum. Now, so far, I haven't had a gold or platinum album. Maybe when I do, that will end this stage of my career. Then I'll go into—oh, something else. Where *do* you go from there?

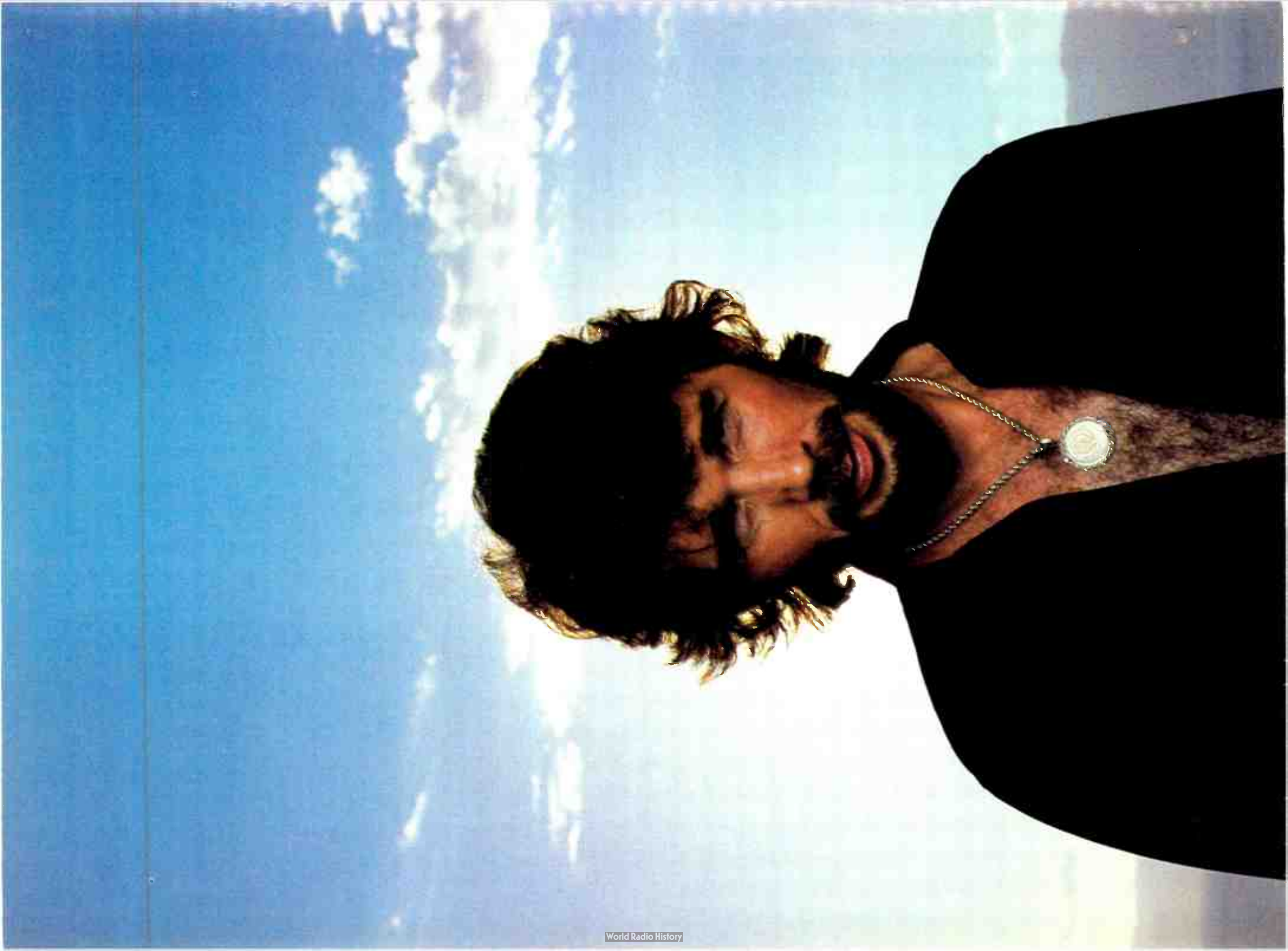
**Got any ideas?**

Yup. I'll do a play.

\* \* \*

The next night, the future playwright, ex-singles star, ex-publisher and not-yet-gold-album-maker rams back at the crowd with more first-set **Drunk And Crazy** album support. He's suffering—the antibiotics and the codeine in his cough medicine are messing him up no end—but once again, you'd never know it. The second set, played to the same crowd, is less promotional, more varied, and more country. Bare reaches back for *Detroit City* and *500 Miles From Home*, and the cow-hippies, mellow now that the first blast of alcohol has given way to fatigue, respond as appreciatively as ever. This move by Bare, like everything else he's done in his long career, is entirely sensible. ■







# Eddie Rabbitt

by Bob Allen

Twelve years ago, when Eddie Rabbitt first came to Nashville, his job was writing songs for a music publisher for \$37.50 a week. Today, with the help of his friends and collaborators, Even Stevens and David Malloy, he has one platinum album (current sales at 1,500,000), two gold albums, thirteen Number One country singles, including his latest, *I Love a Rainy Night*, which also hit Number One on the pop charts, and a network TV special behind him. With these accomplishments, and with competitive Nashville record executives tooting his horn, the 36-year-old Rabbitt may be country music's next musical superstar/sex symbol. But Rabbitt does not have extraordinary fantasies about stardom. In fact, he's approaching his career nowadays with the same winning formula of cautious calculation and insistence on doing things *right* as he did when he first hit Nashville.

**E**ddie Rabbitt is sitting behind the wheel of his new white Cadillac, next to his wife Janine, in the parking lot of a Shoney's Restaurant in a Nashville suburb. His abrupt response to my rather innocent question, "Do you live on this side of town?" seems rather odd, even though we had just met.

"No!" Rabbitt answers sharply, shaking his head impatiently as if to dismiss the subject. "I don't live anywhere!"

There is an awkward silence as he

steers the Cadillac out of the parking lot and on to a cross-town boulevard.

"I've turned down interviews with magazines like *People* because they wanted to go to my house, and I wouldn't let them," he finally begins as he explains this, his most fiercely guarded secret. "It's just that Janine and I live alone, and I want to protect her while I'm gone. I don't want any tour buses coming by or people hanging around the front yard with cameras. I don't want people knowing where I live, because pretty soon, it becomes

a target for burglaries and all sorts of things.

"I heard a story about Tammy Wynette where she was at her house one night having supper, and the next things she knew, poof! poof! Through the big dining room window she sees flashbulbs going off.

"I'm not at the point now where I have people camping on my lawn and all that," Rabbitt adds. "But I'm thinking of the future in case this thing does get hotter."

All indications are that Rabbitt's con-



Shown here with Eddie and wife Janine, are Stan Moress, Eddie's manager (left), and Senator Howard Baker (right).

cern is justified. Already, with his own network TV special, wide exposure from his nationally televised commercials for Miller Beer, two gold and one platinum album and 13 Number One singles under his belt—there are a whole lot of people out there now who know who Eddie Rabbitt is, and would probably like to get to know him better. His latest single, *Drivin' My Life Away*, is topping both the country and pop charts—right alongside the likes of Boz Scaggs and the Rolling Stones. So it's little wonder that he has developed a preoccupation for maintaining a strict veil of secrecy around the refuge of his quiet home life.

And all of this is complicated by the fact that, like any recording artist poised on the verge of superstardom, maintaining the career momentum for which he has worked so hard during his 12 years in Nashville, he is gone from home much of the time. This time around, for instance, he is just in from two weeks of touring; and now, after only a day and a half at home, it's nearly time for him to head out again. His few hours left with Janine are spent taking care of mundane last-minute details: picking up his clothes from the laundry and the drycleaners, and . . . giving an interview to *Country Music Magazine*.

"How do you get to the drycleaners anyhow?" he laughs as he asks Janine, the quiet, attractive woman whom he married four years ago after a four-year courtship.

"Eddie's lived here for 12 years," she laughs softly as they kiss and hug each other in a genuine display of warmth and affection, "and when we ride around town, I always have to give directions!"

Janine, the daughter of a retired CIA officer and the holder of a master's degree in art history, recalls that she first met Eddie through some friends while she was attending Vanderbilt University in Nashville.

"I've never changed my ideas about Eddie," she insists. "When I met him, he was already successful as far as I was concerned."

"Ha!" He laughs as he squeezes her hand. "A couple of hit songs and a lot of debts!"

"But you *were*, really," she reassures him softly. "Nothing's really changed for me," she adds. "He's out on the road a little more now, but still, I knew all this was going to happen."

At home, Janine takes care of their pets—fish, birds and cats. She also keeps some of the books for Eddie, and they share an interest in hobbies like video and history. "Eddie's crazy about history," she explains. "We'll sit and watch those history things on educational TV and things like that. And when he's home, I like to cook."

Eddie smiles and hugs her. "She's a great cook! She makes the best lasagna in the world! I lose six pounds out on the road, and I swear, I come home and gain it back in two days!"

After the quick trip to the drycleaners and the laundry, their time together is almost up. Before Rabbitt drives down to his Music Row office to begin preparations for his departure on the tour bus later that night, he drives back to the restaurant parking lot where Janine has left her car. They sit alone in their car kissing and talking for quite a while before finally leaving to go their separate ways.

**I**ronically, when Eddie arrives at the offices of Briarpatch Music, his publishing company, on 16th Avenue South, a little later, he can't find a parking space in his own lot. But he finally does manage to park the Cadillac, and he makes his way into the comfortable, recently renovated two-story house where five or six of his employees and associates are already gathered. There is

a distinct family atmosphere to the place; lots of easy laughter and warm humor all around.

And besides friendliness, the office also emanates the distinct, confident feeling of success: there are literally walls and walls full of awards—plaques, gold records, framed certificates, photographs—all earned by what Eddie occasionally refers to as "the Trinity:" himself and his two close friends and associates, long-time songwriting partner Even Stevens and long-time producer David Malloy. One wall alone holds thirteen BMI pop songwriting awards (presented for more than 250,000 radio airplays on a song) that the three of them have earned in just the past year.

As he walks down the hall, Eddie pauses for just a moment and shakes his head with mild disbelief as he studies the framed citations. "I remember when I first came to town about 12 years ago, looking into an office that had three of these on the wall," he recalls in a soft voice. "I remember thinkin' to myself, 'Gee, what could I *ever* do to get just *one* of those?'"

**T**he rows of framed BMI Awards on his office walls are really only one indication of the distance Rabbitt has covered in the last 12 years, though. And they are only a small indication of the kind of impact his career is having on Nashville's dramatically changing music industry.

One other very obvious indication of this is the kind of attention that Rabbitt has been getting from heavy-weight Music Row executives like Rick Blackburn, head of CBS Records' Nashville division.

Now, it's not unusual for the head of a major label like Blackburn to assemble his large staff in his office and play an album for them and proclaim, "*This* is what's happening in country music today!"

Similarly, it's not unusual for such a high-power record label executive to personally call up the album's producer and congratulate him, or to take the artist aside and do the same.

But it is very unusual when you consider that the album in question, Rabbitt's latest, *Horizon*, is by an artist who is under contract to Elektra—not CBS. In fact, when you think about it, it's rare—almost considered bad form, in fact—for the head of one record company to say *anything* nice about an artist who is enjoying success with a competitor.

So, when such praise comes from a knowledgeable and high-placed executive like Blackburn, having no vested interest, it is praise that is not to be taken lightly.

It is also evidence—along with the TV special, the gold albums and the fact that *Drivin' My Life Away* seems to echo from every jukebox and car radio across the country—that Rabbitt's career as both a recording artist and a songwriter (originals



by Eddie, Even Stevens and David Malloy continue to be recorded by other name artists like Dr. Hook and Tom Jones, and a cover version of Rabbitt's *Rocky Mountain Music* by a German artist recently earned a gold record in that country) is in fast-forward. But it's nothing that happened overnight, mind you. Rather, if you look closely at Rabbitt's career, there has been a slow pattern of steady and rather calculated growth.

After hitting town in 1968, it took Rabbitt only a couple of years to break through the ranks of starving songwriters, and place his songs with artists like Elvis Presley (who, over the years, recorded three Rabbitt originals, *Patch It Up*, *Inherit The Wind* and *Kentucky Rain*, which was Presley's 50th gold single) Ronnie Milsap, and Willie Nelson.

Then, in the mid-1970s, after several minor label deals that fell through, Rabbitt signed with Elektra. And when it came, he was ready for it. His third single hit the Number One spot, as did the next ten that followed.

And always, there was that caution and calculation: before he put a band together and hit the touring circuit, he waited—a long time. Only after his third Number One record was under his belt did he finally take to the road. "I didn't want to do it until I could afford to do it right," he explains, "until I could carry a seven-piece band with me to get the sound that I wanted. And that's what I did."

And through his career, Rabbitt has persisted with this sort of careful, perfectionist's care for his music—just like when he made the trip to Hollywood to tape his TV special, which was eventually viewed by nearly 15 million people during prime-time. As soon as he arrived in the studio parking lot and saw his name misspelled (with one 'T') on his reserved space, he knew he had some work on his hands. After several sleepless nights spent assisting in some major script rewrites ("I would read parts of the script and have to tell them, 'Listen, I just can't say that!'", and vetoing a few of the fancier dance steps the Hollywood choreographers had cooked up for him ("At 6' 3" and 195 pounds, I can't do a softshoe routine very well!"), he faced the biggest battle of all when he realized that only one evening had been allotted to mix all of his recorded music which would be heard on the show, and that the mixing would be done by one old man who had never even heard his records.

"They got into doing *Suspicious* earlier in the day, and when they got into that beautiful flute part, you couldn't even hear the flute. And when you *could* hear it, it was so out of tune that you couldn't believe it. So later, they left this one guy to mix everything, and because of union rules, he supposedly had to have it all done by midnight . . . WRONG!" Eddie smiles. "He didn't get out of there until three in the morning . . . and he had me looking over

his shoulder the whole time.

"Those people in television really think they can fool millions of people," he adds. "And anybody with half a mind that's involved in it knows it's bad."

Such last minute panic rush jobs are the kind of thing that Rabbitt hates; but they also demonstrate the sort of caution and control he has insisted on maintaining over all the aspects of his career, almost since the start.

It's kind of like what his wife Janine says in explaining their four-year courtship: "Eddie's Irish. He likes to plan everything a long time."

**I**t's funny," says Jim Malloy, father of David Malloy, former head of Elektra Records' Nashville operations, veteran producer and present partner in the Rabbitt/Malloy/Stevens publishing concern, who, as he speaks, is standing in the small backyard behind their office, near the garage that houses their new 24-track studio. "Back when I produced a Sammi Smith album called *Help Me Make It Through The Night*, in 1971, I used two sets of liner notes on the back. One was written by Kris Kristofferson who wrote the title song, and the other was by Eddie Rabbitt. He didn't even have a song on the album. I just knew him from running into him in all the local joints like the Pancake Pantry at 3 a.m., where everyone went after all-night recording sessions.

"And I remember him askin' me then,



'Why would you use *me* for liner notes?' And I just told him, 'Because one day you're gonna be famous, man!'

"I've been associated with stars all my life," Malloy continues. "Thirty-one gold records, seven Grammy Awards and everything else. But certain people just have it, and you know it when you see it. And Rabbitt's got it. He's got a great voice, he's a helluva guitar player, he's got

the looks . . . he's got charisma. He's got the right amount of age, around 36. And he's mature. There's none of this kiddie bullshit with him.

"And all along, he's had the determination. I mean, in this business, you gotta want it so bad that if you had to, you'd sleep on this rock pile here [points to the side of the house] all night just to get in that studio for ten minutes to lay down a song. And he would have done that."

When Malloy first met Rabbitt, he was still fresh off the Greyhound bus that brought him to town from East Orange, New Jersey, where he had spent most of his early life.

Even though at first in Nashville, Rabbitt felt a healthy fright ("There were just so many people out on the street that were better than me, and they couldn't get label deals or anything"), it wasn't long before he got his sense of direction and that sense of carefulness and determination took over. Maybe it was the Irish in him; maybe it was that something special that often comes from being the first child born in America to immigrant parents—an ability to still believe in that American Dream in a much more clear-eyed and untarnished way than those of us whose ancestors have been born and inbred here for so many generations.

Rabbitt's father, Thomas Rabbitt, migrated to America from Galway County, Ireland in 1924. And for the next 16 years, until he married Eddie's mother, who was also born in the old country, he made a good living playing Irish music in

New York City. "Thirty-five dollars during the depression," Eddie smiles fondly. "'Foreman's wages,' he used to call it."

Eddie was born in Brooklyn, New York, but the family moved to East Orange, where he grew up, when he was still a baby. He grew up listening to the sounds of his father's fiddle and accordion; and when he was 12, his scoutmaster got him started by teaching him a few chords on the guitar.



**“The Trinity,” Eddie, Even Stevens and David Malloy pictured at their offices, where, on one wall alone, hang thirteen BMI Awards.**

In high school, Rabbitt was a model student until he went through some changes and dropped out at 16. After a few years of wandering around the country and working an array of odd jobs, he ended up back in East Orange playing music. By the time he was in his early twenties, he was heading one of the more successful bands in the area.

But it wasn't enough. So with \$1,000 in savings in his pocket, he hit Nashville. He lived in an \$80-a-month attic apartment for the first couple of years. “It just had one window, and it got *real* hot in the summer,” he recalls. “And I didn't have anything. No car, no TV, no radio, nothing. All I had was this pet rooster that somebody gave me!”

When he met his perennial songwriting partner, Even Stevens, he recalls that he was making \$37.50 a week as a staff writer for Hill and Range Publishing Company, and Even, “didn't even have a dollar to put gas in his car.” But the two became friends. After six months or so, they began writing songs together, and in another six months, they began having hits with them.

Two members of “the Trinity” were in place.

“For years and years Eddie and I would spend eighteen hours a day together, writing,” Even recalls as he walks into one of the spacious reception rooms of their offices and takes a seat on one of the sofas next to Rabbitt. He picks up a pair of his special “Even Stevens Dice” (which roll only sevens and elevens) and plays with them thoughtfully as he recalls those years. “We even rented two sides of a duplex right next to each other for a couple of years.”

“Yeh,” Eddie laughs, “we even had this little intercom system hooked up where we could talk to each other through the wall. Every morning when I got up, I'd call him or he'd call me: ‘Hey, Even, you awake yet?’” Eddie groans painfully in a mock imitation of his close friend. “‘Yeh. . . .’ ‘Then come on over here, and we'll finish this song!’”

“Yeh,” says Even with a trace of nostalgia in his voice, “I remember you had this *big* Christmas tree in there one year. Great big! With lights and everything

on it!”

“Yeh,” says Eddie, “wherever I go, I have to have a Christmas tree. I'm a romantic in a lot of ways . . .”

The two of them also began making their own elaborate home demonstration tapes of their songs on a portable recorder. One of these “demos,” with Eddie singing the lead vocal, was heard by Jim Malloy's son, David Malloy, a young man in his early twenties, who was a sound engineer at Ray Stevens's recording studio. Although no one realized at the time, the third member was about to enter “the Trinity.”

“I first met Even back around 1975,” recalls Malloy, who is sitting on another sofa across from Rabbitt and Stevens. “He used to come into Ray's studio sometimes. He was writing with this guy named Eddie Rabbitt. I'd never met the guy, but the name was wild. Then I heard those demos with Eddie singing the lead and all his own harmonies, and it sounded great!”

So great, in fact, that Malloy took it upon himself to sneak Rabbitt into the empty studio during idle hours between sessions. There, he made master recordings of several of Rabbitt's original songs, using just Rabbitt's voice and acoustic guitar. Over the following months, he talked some of his studio musician friends into coming in during their spare moments and adding instrumental tracks to the songs. Then later, banging ashtrays with pencils instead of cowbells and shaking macaroni in prescription jars for maracas, they added some percussion flourishes of their own.

One day, not too much longer after they'd finished these sessions, Russ Miller, who at the time was in the process of opening a country division of Elektra Records in Nashville, happened to be in Stevens's studio, and by chance, he heard these tapes being played through a closed door. After listening to them a couple of more times (this time with the door open), he told Rabbitt, “I want *you* and I want that *record*.” A week or so later, he had a contract to Eddie; and a few months later, Rabbitt's first single reached number 17 in the national charts. At least one of those first make-shift sessions put together in Ray Stevens's studio by David Malloy ended up on Rabbitt's first Elektra album; and Malloy has produced every one of Rabbitt's seven albums since then.

Just for nostalgia's sake, Eddie, Even and David rummage through the large closet that holds their huge library of original demo tapes and dig out the original demo of *Rocky Mountain Music*, one of Eddie's first Number One songs. As the tape plays loudly through two huge speakers in the office, the three of them clap, sing softly and sway rhythmically around the room to the insistent beat of the song. The demo, made years ago on their home two-track machine, is crude—a \$15 guitar with four strings (serving as a bass),



a D-tuned guitar played with a screwdriver (substituting as a pedal steel guitar), and a pair of bongos somebody grabbed off the wall (standing in as drums). But still, oddly enough, it has all the magic and power that later emerged when the final version of the song was recorded in a master studio with professional musicians.

"It's *better* than the record!" Even Stevens shouts gleefully against the wall of sound as he moves around the room clapping and singing.

Rabbit pulls another ancient demo tape from the closet which contains 200 or 300 unrecorded originals written by him and Stevens and Malloy. This one is a particularly melodic and folksy sounding number, something about walking alone in the wind on the cold streets of Chicago. "Listen to that!" Eddie grins as he snaps his fingers to the beat of the song. "These things are *years* old and listen to them! And people think that we've changed, and we're trying to cross over with our writing. . . ."

"Some of these songs are seven, eight years old," David Malloy agrees, "but there's still that same feel . . . that same drive. . . . It's always been there."

**A** little while later, David, Even and Eddie and the conversation all move to the 24-track studio that they have just completed building in the garage behind their publishing company. David and Even are fiddling around behind the glass in the control room, and Eddie is sitting quietly behind the 1927 Steinway piano in the studio. As he almost unconsciously begins pounding out the chord riff and singing the chorus of yet another unfinished Stevens/Malloy/Rabbit composition, the other two drop what they are doing, gather around the piano and begin singing along, caught up in the spontaneous magic of the moment.

"It's hard to believe sometimes the great things that seem to happen when the three of us work together," Eddie says softly as he takes a break and leans forward, resting his hands comfortably on the piano keys. "We even write songs when we're in the studio recording other songs. Like *Suspicion*, we wrote literally in five minutes and ten seconds in a studio in L.A. after an all-night session. We started writing it around seven in the morning, and by the time I left to catch an eleven o'clock flight, we already had the basic tracks recorded.

"We're like a family, really," he adds thoughtfully. "I don't think there will ever be anybody in my life, outside of my real family, that I'm as close to as these people. I'd trust them with my life. We *are* a family in a strange way," he adds. "I wouldn't think of going in the studio *without* David and Even. It would be like the arm not being on the body. It just wouldn't be right.

"And we all feel real lucky that the thing

is growing and getting bigger, yet still staying true to a certain . . . *ideal*, I guess you'd call it. It sounds corny, but it's true."

One barometer of this growth is the girls—the girls that now scream at Eddie's concerts and tear at his clothes and try to get into his car when he is leaving a show. They pull his hair, they throw themselves at him. They even throw things on stage—sometimes some strange things. For instance, Rabbit got his informal initiation into the ranks of American sex symbols (a term that he finds odd when he hears it applied to himself) at a recent concert in Del Mar, California when he had a bra thrown at him for the first time.

"That's because you haven't gone out with any girls that wear bras for years, right?" Even snickers.

"I saw something go flying by me while I was singing, and it hit the floor, and I didn't know what it was . . ." he shakes his head.

"Yeh, right. . . ." Rabbit says offhandedly. ". . . so I picked this thing up off the stage, and it must have been a 46 quadruple-D! I mean, you could've carried a couple of watermelons around in it. . . ."

"Did you tell the audience," Even badgers him lightly, "that, 'This is two of the biggest reasons I got into this business?'"

"Yeah, I did," Eddie laughs softly.

"C'mon, Eddie, let's talk some more about girls," suggests a visitor. "My editor specifically wanted me to find out about that. . . ."

"Yeh, Rabbit," Even says slyly, "how many girls *have* you nailed?"

"Hmmmimim," Eddie frowns uncomfortably, "p.m. or a.m.? Previous to marriage or after?"

"Well, when did you first discover there was a difference?"

"Uh . . ." (uneasily) "when I got married. . . ."

**A** little while later, it is dark out on 16th Avenue South. Rabbit is sitting on one of the sofas in the front room of their offices, sipping on a cup of black coffee. Every once in a while he stares thoughtfully out toward the darkened street. It's nearly time for him to say his affectionate goodbyes to everyone here at the office. They are all getting ready for the festivities that night at the grand reopening of the Exit/In, one of Nashville's better known music



clubs. But Rabbit, in just a short while, must go off alone to meet his band in a dim, dreary rehearsal studio across town, where he will spend a few hours breaking in a new steel player before boarding the bus for an all-night ride to Cincinnati. During this last few quiet minutes in the office, the subject turns back to fame and all its implications.

"I don't know," Eddie says thoughtfully as he shifts his tall frame and leans forward on the sofa. "A lot of things happen and you get down the road and look back at them and say, 'Oh, I must have planned it that way. . . . Maybe I did . . . you never know. I could not be talking to you at all right now. I could still be sitting somewhere wondering why it didn't happen."

"If all this had happened to me ten years ago, I might have really turned into a cocky, egotistical guy who thought he really *was* great," he smiles. "But it's strange. As it's happening now, the crowds at concerts, the security, the girls screaming . . . it's kind of like I'm looking at it all from a distance, like it isn't me or something. It's just like you've seen newsreels or pictures of it happening to someone else, and then there *you* are. . . ." a trace of bewilderment creeps into his voice . . . "there *you* are, shootin' down hallways, people grabbing at your clothes and screaming, rushing to the car as fast as you can. . . ."

"But it's nice that it's creating that kind of energy," he adds. "It's a compliment. It's nice to have that kind of reaction when you go on stage rather than just polite applause or no reaction at all. To get some reaction back, I think, is the reason we all pick up a guitar in the first place.

"But even if I believe it all or not," he adds, "I'm real careful to keep in mind that tomorrow night, they'll be screamin' at someone else."

Even Stevens comes in the room to say his final goodbyes to Eddie. They shake hands several times, and Eddie actually found it touching that two men who have worked together—and at times, almost lived together—for ten years, can come through so many trials by fire and yet still remain such fast, close friends.

"I tend to blame a lot of this on having the right people around me," says Eddie after Even has left. "Having Even and David and trusting them infinitely. There are just a lot of amazing things that happen around here, and those little arguments that sometimes grow into wars, they never happen. . . . It would be an insult to 'the Trinity'.

"I don't know how long all this will last," he adds as he glances around the quiet offices, "because human nature being what it is, a lot of things could happen. But it sure is nice when it comes together like this, especially for as long as it's been together now.

"It's really precious," he smiles. "You couldn't buy it with money." ■

## WATCH THIS FACE

# Deborah Allen

by Bob Millard

On the surface it's not such an unusual story. A pretty young girl gets a break singing duets with a famous country music artist. They have a string of Top Ten records together, then she breaks off on her own for success as a solo act. No, it's not Dolly and Porter. It's Deborah Allen and Jim Reeves I'm talking about. What's unusual is that her singing partner died when she was ten years old.

Deborah Allen is on her own now, with an album called *Trouble in Paradise* (Capitol) and a single, *Nobody's Fool* which came into the charts in the 80s with a bullet and jumped ten points or better every week for the first three weeks. The single continued to climb with its bullet still in tow for some time after.

The album contains songs with a lot of contemporary pop and folk influences, though the traditional country and gospel sounds are also there. Deborah is a talented songwriter, too, having written songs recorded by Tammy Wynette, Loretta Lynn, Conway Twitty and T.G. Sheppard, among others. She shows her abilities by writing or co-writing every song on *Trouble in Paradise*.

Though she is just now coming into her own, Deborah Allen had a large taste of success early last year in the form of three consecutive Top Ten hits, posthumously overdubbed with the late Jim Reeves. "I've known I wanted to be a singer since I was four years old," says the 27-year-old Ms. Allen. But surely the last thing to cross her mind when she came to Nashville in her late teens was that her entry into the limelight would be as the singing partner of a man who'd died when she was only ten!

Deborah was chosen by RCA producer Bud Logan to do the Reeves duets because, as the old saw goes, she happened to be in the right place at the right time. Two of her best friends and co-writers, Rafe Van Hoy and Don Cook, had written *Lady, Lay Down* which Logan had produced for artist John Conlee. She went with them to a party which Logan also attended. As so often happens at such parties, by the end of the night a guitar was passed around and everyone took a turn singing their own compositions. Deborah sang *Goodbye Love*, which was later recorded by Brenda Lee, and a novelty tune called *I'm in Love with a Dirty Old Man*.

She didn't have to think twice the next day when Logan called offering her the job overdubbing harmonies on five Jim Reeves songs he was preparing for posthumous release. It didn't even matter to her that she wouldn't be mentioned on any of the records. As the first two releases, *Oh, How I Miss You Tonight* and *Don't Let Me Cross Over*, rose quickly in the charts, so did interest in the mysterious, anonymous girl singing with the late country music great. Inquiries as to her identity led RCA to include her name on the label of the third release, *Take Me in Your Arms and Hold Me*. Ironically, the first of the Reeves/Allen duets to feature her name in the billing, though the biggest hit of the three, may well be the last. The fact that she signed a contract to make records with Capitol records may prevent any more RCA releases featuring Deborah.

"I don't see me doing any (Jim Reeves duets) in the near future," she said. "We cut five songs, two were Top Ten and the last was Top Five. They have two in the can though, and I feel like eventually they will release them.

"They haven't released my favorite one yet," Ms. Allen continued. "That was

*When Two Worlds Collide*. The reason that was my favorite was because that was when it really hit me what was happening. I thought, two worlds really are colliding—I'm here and he's in a totally different place—I got a very eerie feeling."

Deborah, the daughter of a Memphis auto upholsterer, had no formal music training as a child. She got lots of tips from her big sister, Nancy, who was a church organist and director of the choir in which Deborah sang. She came to Nashville in 1973 where she was befriended and encouraged by Shel Silverstein. That year she got work singing and dancing in the chorus line at Opryland and was selected to go with Tennessee Ernie Ford and other Opryland performers on a country music tour of the Soviet Union.

Deborah's affiliation with Opryland meant more to her than just a regular income and a trip overseas, though. During her last performance on an Opryland television special, she was spotted by Jim Stafford and invited to fly out to Los Angeles and work in the chorus of his summer replacement series in 1974. That opportunity, in no way meaning to downplay Deborah's enormous talent, was





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another instance of her uncanny luck of being in the right place at the right time. She almost didn't work that last Opryland special because she wanted to go to New York City, but the decision to work one last show turned into a two-and-a-half year gig working with Jim Stafford.

"That was a great experience for me," she said. "I learned a lot by being out there, and I made a lot of friends working on his show. But I do have to admit that I got homesick after about three years so I moved back to Nashville."

Back in Music City for the second time, Deborah was encouraged again by Shel Silverstein, this time to start writing.

"I hadn't really tried to write before that," Deborah explained, "but I was so naive back then that if someone said I could do something then I just naturally went ahead and did it."

Executives at MCA Music also had faith in her, and she became a member of their roster of songwriters. Zella Lehr was the first to record one of Deborah's songs, *Danger, Heartbreak Ahead*. Many others have followed since. With the faith and encouragement of songwriting buddy Rafe van Hoy, Deborah came within an inch of co-starring with Willie Nelson in *Honeysuckle Rose* in the part eventually played by Amy Irving. Van Hoy took Deborah to meet Mickey Raphael, Willie's harmonica player, one night when the Nelson entourage was in Nashville. After she played Raphael a new song she had written, he sat quietly looking at her for a moment, then asked, "Can you act?" Deborah recalls, "I just said, duh . . . then Rafe jumped in and almost shouted—'yeah, she can act!'"

She met Willie Nelson that night, but thought no more about the incident until she was visiting Los Angeles a few weeks later. A phone call to Raphael led to a meeting with film director Jerry Shatzberg. He gave Deborah a screen test and everything looked right for her getting the part of Slim Pickins's daughter in *Honeysuckle Rose*.

"I was real happy, but I told them I wasn't going to let myself believe it till the contracts were signed," she explained. "As it turned out, Willie wanted a singer who could act, but the film producers wanted an actress who could sing. That was pretty exciting there for a while, but I really believe that things work out for the best. If I'd got that part, I would have been put a year behind in getting to work on my album."

So, for the time being, Deborah Allen is going into the studio to record more songs, mostly those written by herself or with Van Hoy and Cook. She hopes to go on tour this winter, playing a number of showcase engagements to promote her album, *Trouble in Paradise*. Listening to Deborah Allen sing, though, or looking into those big, innocent hazel eyes of hers is no trouble—only paradise.

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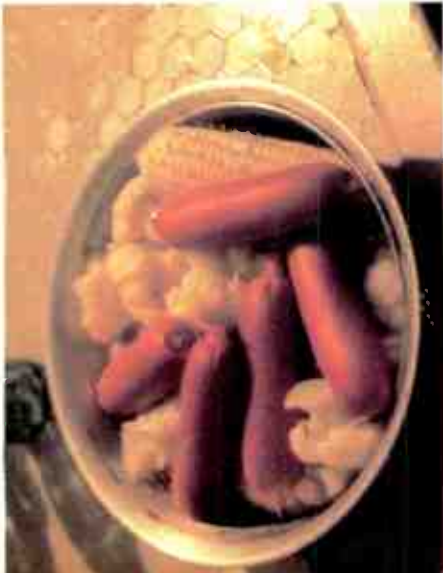
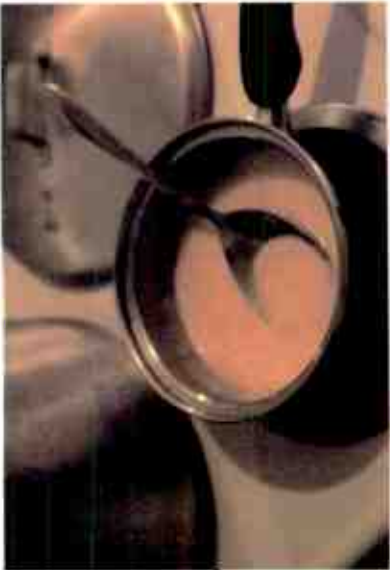
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# Audio

Special Report: Part I: Making your own cassettes with the right equipment can give you better sounding tapes. Part II: clean records sound Clean.

## Part I: Cassette Recording at Home With Professional Results

When I told my friend Peter Dobbin, who reviews equipment for *High Fidelity Magazine*, that I wanted to find the best cassette tape recorders for under \$400, he said, "Good luck! Boy, I don't envy you. I don't know if we've seen anything listenable at all in that range in a long time." We were speaking of retail list prices, so translate that magic number into \$200 to \$300 when living in the real world. But how can this be, friends, when in any other category of audio equipment, four hundred dollars will buy a pretty darn good product?

Now we see why hi-fi manufacturers and retailers are still making barrels of green on tape recorders while the rest of the audio equipment world is very low on profit! Be that as it may, what is it that makes a tape recorder (or tape "deck," for short) good? And what is it that makes the lower-priced ones often not so good?

The answer to that can be found in the answers to two other questions. (I feel like a little kid this month that can't stop asking, "Why?") First, we'll reveal some of the inner meaning behind all that mystical gobbledy-gook known as "the specs." Then we'll get down to cases and see how seven progressively more expensive tape decks measure up. But before any of this, there is one last-shall-be-first, most important question:

**Why Do You Want a Tape Deck?** You probably already have a record player, but you can't record with that, only play back what someone else has recorded. A tape recorder records. Sounds simple, so far. It records off the radio, or off of a record and, with a microphone, can record live music. It can record sound from a television or from another tape deck or even off of itself. A tape deck is a creative tool, and depending on how creative you want to get with it, you're going to need a different sort of deck.

There's something else to remember about how a tape recorder functions: No home tape deck, no matter how expensive, can produce a recording to match the quality of a record album, assuming that the engineers who made the album did their

job at all well. Unfortunately, there are many albums any listener can think of with abysmal technical quality. Even more unfortunate, most *every* pre-recorded cassette ever made is of much lower quality than almost any tape you can make yourself. Discs are passive entertainment—you listen to them. Tape recorders, by nature, provide active entertainment—when you make tapes yourself.

One use for a home tape recorder is to make your own music, by recording yourself. It may not come out as well as the latest product of a Nashville 24-track digital studio recorder, but when it comes to the music that goes onto that tape, you probably "ain't no Elvis" either. The object of a tape deck is creative fun.

**Why May You Want One Tape Deck Instead of Another?** Because it is particularly suited to your needs. No one wants a tape deck just to play pre-recorded cassettes—they are more expensive and have lower fidelity than records. But many people *do* want a cassette deck to record songs from friends' records or from the radio or to copy their own records for use in their cars. If this is *all* you want a tape recorder for, you probably want a lower-priced deck. Perhaps one like the **Onkyo TA-2020**, which lists at \$230 and can be purchased at discount stores we called in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles for as low as \$178.

What do you get in a two hundred dollar tape deck? Just the bare bones, and lucky to come away with that. The meters which measure volume are crucial to any good

recording, and on the front panel of the TA-2020, these meters do a creditable job. They are not a hundred percent accurate—in fact they test out on our workbench at about ninety-four percent accuracy. And that means that the inexperienced user could make a tape which is distorted a good percentage of the time. Yet these meters are more accurate than we expected in this price range.

Frequency response, or the range of highs to lows, is about the same here as in an average FM radio. Two "heads" are employed in the **Onkyo**—one to play and the other to record and erase. Three heads, one for each function, would provide far superior recording, but would certainly not be expected for this price. Ditto for better frequency response. Dolby noise reduction is included, which is to be expected, as is the capacity to use "metal" tape, chromium tape, or standard iron-oxide tape.

All this makes for a pretty good effort, and if you're not one to blow the mortgage money on the hi-fi, it may be wise to stop reading here. Otherwise, you may find out how more money spent does not merely give you more options (pessimists read: "make life more difficult"), but actually makes the task of recording a whole lot easier.

**Why Spend More?** For instance, let's step up to the **Vector Research VCX 300** at \$400 list. For a hundred and seventy dollar-higher list price, which translates to no more than fifty dollars more at your local hi-fi discounter, you get better fre-



Clockwise from lower right: Vector Research VCX300, Pioneer CT-F1250, Onkyo TA-2020, Tandberg TCD-440A and Vector's VR-5000 which was used for amplification.

quency response, more accurate meters, about 2% less noise in the recording process (this is measured in a specification known as "signal-to-noise ratio" and most often lied about, subtly, by manufacturers—we measured all the decks ourselves), and a cosmetically better looking unit. It does nothing more, but it does everything better. We are not putting down **Onkyo**—the TA-2020 is about the best deck we could find for its price. And we are not particularly touting **Vector Research**: this happens to be the deck we tested, and a good deck for the money; but at this "price point" (as the hi-fi dealers say instead of just plain "price"), good decks start to proliferate. A recent *Consumer Reports* rates the top \$400 list price decks from **Akai**, **Hitachi**, **Onkyo**, **JVC**, **Teac**, **Technics**, **BIC**, **Sansui**, **Kenwood** and **Pioneer** all about even.

We mentioned "metal tape capability" when speaking of the TA-2020, and the VCX 300 has it too. Whatever "it" is. Well, the latest word in tape quality is the "metal" stuff. Actually, metal tape means pure metal bonded right to the plastic tape backing, instead of fine particles of metal oxide. Basic recording tape has iron oxide (high quality rust) as its magnetic base. Anyway, the new metal tape allows higher quality recording—but only if your equipment is up to it.

Metal tape means slightly higher sensitivity than chromium dioxide tape (high class chrome rust—that's the stuff you thought was the high priced tape till you saw what they're charging for "metal"), and a lot higher sensitivity than regular iron-oxide. But it only makes sense to use higher sensitivity tape with a high sensitivity deck. **Onkyo's** deck, and **Vector's**, and almost everyone else's we can think of (saying "almost" leaves us an out, but it's probably unnecessary) for under \$500 simply does not have the sensitivity to benefit from metal tape and even if it did, we doubt that the average human ear would hear it.



From top: Nakamichi 480, Lux K15, JVC KD-A77 and the Mitsubishi DA-R7 receiver for comparison testing.

Also, metal tape costs twice as much as chrome tape, and perhaps gives only slightly better performance. Or perhaps not. When everybody wises up to this, so that the price drops, then it may be worth buying.

Anyway, our next deck, the **Nakamichi 480** (\$495 list and about \$400 discounted), has exactly the frequency response of the human ear. Recording noise was so low on this deck that we preferred not even using the noise reduction switch (while reducing background noise, so-called "noise reduction" also tends to reduce a lot of the highs that you want to keep, trading off noise against muddiness). This deck, far from any muddiness, sounds as clean as can be. Extremely accurate metering is set off by loads of flashing lights, all in a lovely little black box. In sum, the 480 offers absolutely the most that one can expect from a deck with only two heads.

**What Else Could You Want?** Well, a third head. Why? The sound is not so much better (it couldn't be much better than the **Nakamichi**) as is the durability of the unit. Then there is the very helpful ability to play back either the source material or to play what is being recorded as it is being recorded—impossible with only two heads. Tape hiss can be reduced by separating head functions to three different heads, too. The **JVC KD-A77** (which sells for \$570 suggested list price, and which we found discounted to \$449.95 in New York and \$399.95 in Chicago) is a three-head machine, and more. What more?

**What Are Bias and Eq?** These are the switches everyone ignores. The most confusing switches on the front panel of any tape deck. Actually, they make slight adjustments in the recording process to allow for different types of tape—like metal, chromium, or oxide. The **KD-A77** is one of the few decks for under, say, \$750 to include an oscillator for accurate adjustment of these little details, if you're really serious about your cassette recording. The **KD-A77** is perhaps our favorite deck of all that we've tested this month, based on its very adaptable size, attractive styling, and superb performance. Personally speaking, this reviewer would never want more from a cassette deck. What more is there? There are some decks which will hold a peak meter reading—making level adjustment, and perfect recording, a snap for anyone. A valuable feature, but not one an experienced person really needs. It should save hours of practice for the wealthy amateur (I wish I were.). Then there are decks which can be programmed to play selections out of order, in any order. However, making the initial program takes as much trouble as picking them out manually—and then how many times in a row are you going to play those same selections?

In any case, the **Pioneer CT-F1250** provides all of this stuff, for \$695.00 list—and obtainable for about a hundred dollars less. The improvements are certainly worth

the extra hundred and twenty-five bucks over the **KD-A77**, but like the walnut package the **CT-F1250** comes in, the added quality may not be reflected in the sound.

There were two other cassette decks we tested for this story, the **Tandberg TCD-440A** (listing at \$950 and not widely discounted) and the **Lux K15** (listing at \$895 and also not a discount item). They were both lovely on the outside—both sported rosewood—and offered no more performance, really, than the **JVC KD-A77**. Both decks are excellent. Both will impress your friends more if you leave the price tag on.

Finally, we reviewed one other tape recorder, and this brings us more in the direction of personal preference in answering a final question:

**Really Now, How Do You Improve On The KD-A77?** It brings us back to the original reason for a tape deck. Creativity. For creative home recording, there is no substitute for an open-reel deck—the original and slightly clumsy type of tape recorder. Instead of gadgetry, why not invest in creativity? The **Teac X-3** that we tested actually costs less than the **JVC KD-A77**—\$560 list. And it will make a recording that's better than the pros had to work with twenty years ago. This is just a basic open-reel package—a no-frills package, but it does the job, and with great durability. Picture yourself a pro? This is the way to go.

Why? The sound is much higher quality than even the most expensive cassette decks we tested. That ought to be enough. Also, the open-reel tape can be edited, and editing is an art in itself. Drawbacks? Open-reel takes a minute to thread each time, while you just plop a cassette in. For the average home hi-fi, a cassette deck may be enough, but if you are a musician or an audio freak or a rising star, or all of the above, a deck like the **X-3** can be that first step of that long journey... to who knows where?

## Part II: New Equipment Makes Old Records Sound Like New

If you count all the albums in that rack next to the stereo, and multiply by what each of them cost, most of us come up with a total investment in records that's bigger than what we've spent on the hardware to play them on. This is pretty much the patented ad line of the record care accessory companies: considering the investment, why not protect it?

The record care people have a point, and to back it up they've also got dozens of strange and different brushes and fluids and sprays and blotters and vacuum cleaners and real-live ray guns to keep dirt from filling up your grooves and eating away





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your stylus. Some sort of record care is surely absolutely necessary for anyone who wants to extend the life of his records beyond a few dozen plays. Otherwise, you might as well do your listening to a bowl of Rice Krispies, because we all know that's what those Golden Oldies get to sounding like. Well, a little record care can keep you from feeling like a Golden Oldie before your time.

Of course, there can also be too much of a good thing. We've been testing out various gadgets that keep records clean—or that claim to keep records clean—for some time now, and some of these items have even made our records dirtier, and worse sounding, than they were to begin with. And then some are so good that they quickly make themselves indispensable.

The most effective type of product by far

is also the most common: these are brushes that are wetted down from the inside with a cleaning fluid, then wiped along the width of a spinning record. Prices for these range from ten to twenty dollars, in our survey, from **Radio Shack** to **Pickering** to **Audio-Technica** to **Discwasher**. Despite differences in price, they all performed about as well, though the **Discwasher** took a little less time, and **Pickering's** little sponge rubber attachment to remove the lint from the brush was the most handy arrangement. Without the sponge rubber, the **Pickering** is exactly the same unit as **Audio-Technica's**, and I found their design to be the easiest to grip and use, though not as esthetically appealing, perhaps, as **Radio Shack's** and **Discwasher's** real wooden handles.

The only problem with these devices is

that they take some practice to use properly, and if you're a bit tired or if you're celebrating, you're likely to mess up. Therefore, **Hitachi's** little battery-operated, mechanized brush is a most welcome and unique tool. Though it does not do as good a job as the hand-held brushes at their best, it does an acceptable job all the time, without hassles, without costing any more than the others. It's also sort of fun to watch it spin around the record, too.

Another thing that's a plus for the **Hitachi** L-od (don't ask what those letters signify—everything else except those letters that accompanies the L-od is written in Japanese, including instructions!) is that it removes static. It does not remove all static from the record, but it removes enough so that, in wintertime in my dry apartment, the whole cleaning process is not a waste of time. When using the manual brushes, static can actually increase, and attract more dirt than was on the record in the first place, unless some other anti-static device is used. Of course, the same companies that make the brushes also make anti-static devices, and these are the second category in the record care biz.

There are ionizing ray guns with which you can zap your record collection, but unfortunately, they really don't work very well. About the only products that really do the job are spray formulas, like **Stanton's** Permostat and **Audio-Technica's** Lifesaver. These spray on like a perfume, then are buffed dry, and keep the record static-free forever. Unfortunately, they are a bit expensive, running from twenty to thirty dollars for a bottle that will conquer about thirty records. Another drawback is that if the record is not perfectly clean when you use these, you just rub that dirt in and make it forever worse. Which makes it well-nigh impossible to use these items at all in my apartment in the winter. Because I've got to get rid of the static to clean the record, and have to clean the record before I can get rid of the static—I'd rather stick with **Hitachi's** L-od till spring. Which has already arrived as you read this, so disregard all this till next winter.

Yet another problem with **Audio-Technica's** Lifesaver was that our brush, used to buff the stuff in, kept losing fibers as I rubbed, and engraving those fibers in the record. This is not the right way to treat Emmylou Harris.

A better way is the Scotch Record Care System, which combines an anti-static fluid (called Sound Life) like Lifesaver and Permostat with a regular cleaning brush. The device hooks on to your turntable spindle like **Hitachi's** L-od, and it does indeed make anti-static and cleaning an easy, one-time process. **3M**, the manufacturer, claims that you only need use it once and records are protected almost forever. This is something of an overstatement, since records do tend to get dirty from handling. But not much of an overstatement, if you are careful. Records do not

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have to be perfectly clean before treating them, as with the other anti-statics: they get clean at the same time. Only drawbacks of the system are, first, that you must do your whole record collection (up to fifty) at once or the fluid will evaporate. And, second, that the stuff tends to spill every so often and gunk up records and record player. In sum, this is a fine product for those who are careful and methodical enough to make use of it. In my sloppier moods it was difficult to use, and messy.

Then there are stylus cleaners, meant to clean all the dirt from the needle. You say you didn't know that could get dirty? Read carefully here, if that's your answer. Managing editor Rochelle Friedman has a record player in her office with a stylus so filthy it took me fifteen minutes to clean it. With an array of free samples from the record care industry to choose from, it was



The Hitachi L-od: a vacuum sweeper for your records.

soon obvious that the dentist-like tools of **Pickering's** kit were the most effective for the really dirty stylus, whereas for the microscopic stuff left at the end. **Audio-Technica's** stylus cleaning fluid, which looked and smelled a lot like nail polish remover, seemed easiest and best. **Pickering** for the big job. **Audio-Technica's** fluid for the preventative, and Rochelle couldn't believe her vintage Shark compact stereo had sound that good left in it.

But lo and behold, another package arrives in which we find the **Discwasher** SC-2 system which seems to do everything the above two systems do, and in a smaller, prettier package.

Finally there are other miscellaneous accessories, like non-static record jackets—which don't do much to solve static problems by themselves, but certainly help, and cost only a dime apiece. And like complex brush and roller assemblies that can be attached to your record player's tone arm for that ultimate, last chance spotlessness. This one, again from **Audio-Technica**, may be for audio fanatics only, but it does its job with no work at all after a half-hour installation.

All of the products we have mentioned in this story did more or less what they are supposed to. The only ones that I've avoided naming are the anti-static guns, because none of them worked well, with the exception of **Signal's** electronic stylus cleaner. This does its job very well, but

only on styli that are pretty well kept. It also buzzes, for those who think that they'd enjoy that.

The only regrets I have about all of these record cleaning products is the Enmylou Harris record that got destroyed by the so-called **Lifesaver**. Called **Quarter Moon In A Ten Cent Town**, it is a greatest-hits album with a difference. It is an "original master," half-speed digital disc, issued by **Mobile Fidelity Sound Labs**. Or, in the parlance of the trade, it is a "super-fi disc."

There have always been "super-fi" records, as long as there have been records. They used to be recordings of trains and thunder, and then the sound effects graduated to stormy, booming classical music when stereo came in. The quadrophonic sound fad came and went, and now we have "digital" audio. As before, most of the digital super-fi records are classical, but a few began to come out last year with rock and roll, and now one company, **Mobile Fidelity**, is releasing a few country super-fi discs. There are six of them, so far: Kenny Rogers' **The Gambler** and his **Greatest Hits** double LP, Crystal Gayle's **We Must Believe in Magic, Sundown** from Gordon Lightfoot and Creedence Clearwater's **Cosmo's Factory**, as well as the aforementioned **Quarter Moon**.

What makes these records better than standard records? Well, we listened as hard as we could to the exact same recordings of a couple of cuts off the Emmylou Harris album (*To Daddy* and *Leaving Louisiana*...) and we are sure that no one—no one—could tell the difference between the \$15 Original Master Recording and the normal pressing just by listening. That allowed for, it must also be said that at the very beginning, when you first put the needle down you can tell that the high priced record sounds a lot cleaner, but within seconds, your ear adjusts and you no longer notice the difference. More care has been taken with the higher priced album, and it shows—it will not be warped, scratched, or have any lumps in the vinyl. The cardboard and plastic packaging will be much higher quality. But unless you compare a super-fi disc to a real lemon of a pressing of a standard disc, don't expect to hear the difference. If you want to pay twice the price to look at your records, that's up to you. Yes, you can hear the difference on a sound effects album. Buy Mobile Fidelity's recording of Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture* with real Civil War cannon, if you are into sound effects. But don't play it at loud volume—the cannon will blow your speakers out.

You will read in many a hi-fi magazine about how great these new super-fi discs are. Believe who you will, but do yourself a favor and save what it would cost to hear for yourself, then shell that out for a record cleaning gizmo. Your ears will thank me, and so will your wallet, when you save on replacements of would-be junky records and broken needles. ■



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# Pickers

If there was a Country Music Instruments Hall of Fame, it would be dominated by a wide variety of legendary banjos, mandolins, electric and acoustic guitars manufactured by The Gibson Company.

Orville Gibson was an eccentric. Born in New York State in 1856, his family included, among his sisters, a novelist and an artist. Orville, however, wound up in Kalamazoo, Michigan, working as a clerk in a restaurant, a shoe store, and various other establishments. In his spare time he carved wood and played the guitar. Gradually, he became fascinated with the two interests; so much so that he combined them and began constructing stringed instruments, including violins, guitars and mandolins, in his 10-by-12-foot workshop. Using only the hand tools available in the 1880s, Gibson pioneered the use of the arched, carved top and back principle, common in violinmaking, on guitars and mandolins. He built guitars, including some with hollow necks, to improve the tone quality. One such model featured a huge oval soundhole and, just below it, an inlaid butterfly design that, today, would make Dolly Parton swoon. All of Gibson's early instruments were objects of incredible beauty, and some, such as his unique harp guitars, could have been displayed in the finest art galleries.

By 1896, Orville Gibson was listed in the Kalamazoo City directory as "musical instrument manufacturer" and began to achieve recognition for his innovations and fine instruments. In 1902 some local businessmen pooled their money, and with the \$12,000 they raised, worked out an agreement with Gibson. For some money and royalties, he would teach his construction techniques to the employees of the new Gibson Mandolin-Guitar Manufacturing Company. It was a good time to start such a business, since mandolins and similar instruments were popular. Their 13 employees first worked in an old bakery in town, but quickly expanded. Their early catalogs were exquisitely immodest, hyping their wares in the most flowery prose imaginable, showing an aggressive approach to marketing that the company continues to this day. Many musicians and groups were featured in the catalogs, endorsing Gibson products (mandolin orchestras were particularly popular). In 1911 the company moved to another Kalamazoo location. A year later, Orville Gibson died of heart problems. His health had been failing, and he had long before



Orville Gibson was an eccentric.

withdrawn from active participation, though he still received royalties.

Through World War I, The Gibson Company continued to flourish and expand, moving into a newly-built factory in 1917 (their current location), but their greatest activity came in the 1920s. Tenor banjos were now popular in dance orchestras, and some true innovators were coming into the company. Lloyd Loar, a musician and acoustical engineer, joined the company and brought his knowledge of sound and tone to their instruments. He held a number of positions, and, along with the equally talented Lewis Williams, he worked on the design of three instruments that would go down in country music history: the L-5 (archtop guitar), the F-5 Master Mandolin and the Mastertone Banjo.

By the mid-twenties, "hillbilly" music was beginning to get substantial attention from record companies and radio stations. The WSM and WLS barn dance shows were becoming known, and many performers used Gibsons. Guitarist Staley Walton of Dr. Humphrey Bate's Possum Hunters, one of the early Grand Ole Opry groups, used a Gibson flattop guitar, as did Ed Poplin, who also worked on the early Opry. It seemed that as rural musicians became more involved with recording and

broadcasting, the importance of using better-sounding stringed instruments wasn't lost.

Two of the earliest stars in country music were also Gibson aficionados through virtually their entire careers. Maybelle Carter used a Gibson flattop guitar on the Carter Family's first recording session in Bristol, Virginia in 1927, but sometime after that began using the L-5 archtop that became her trademark. And Uncle Dave Macon, one of the earliest Opry stars, is rarely—if ever—pictured with anything but a Gibson banjo. One photo of him and son Dorris, shows a five-string banjo, a banjo-guitar, an archtop round-hole guitar, and a tenor banjo, all Gibsons.

The 1930s established Gibson even further with country performers. Hank Williams, then a young man just starting down the road to legend, was playing around Alabama in the late thirties. His first good guitar was a Gibson flattop sunburst model that he used constantly, until one night, torn between saving his guitar or being stomped in a honky-tonk fight, he sacrificed it over his opponent's head. Even though Hank would later use other brands, he never got away from Gibson. In fact, one of the most famous Hank Williams photos shows him with a sunburst flattop not terribly different from that first one.

Another popular legend-to-be, Bill Monroe, was using an L-7 mandolin both with his brother, Charlie, and afterward, when he formed the Blue Grass Boys. However, he would not become known for using an L-7.

As other country styles emerged from the Southwest in the thirties, Gibson would figure prominently in their development: the Singing Cowboys, western music and western swing. In 1936, Gibson marketed two new types of instruments, the EH-150 Hawaiian steel guitar and the ES-150 Spanish guitar. Both were electrically amplified. As the Western Swing music of Bob Wills, Milton Brown and others spread through the region, the idea of amplified guitars and steels (which had been invented before Gibson introduced their models) spread. Guitarist Muryel "Zeke" Campbell of the Light Crust Doughboys was among the first to use :



ES-150, which later became known as the "Charlie Christian Model", since it was used by that jazz guitar innovator. Eldon Shamblin of the Texas Playboys used both an ES-150 and a Super 400, Gibson's huge, ornate archtop guitar in his work.

Singing Cowboy movies also became popular during the thirties as Americans looked for heroes. As more country singers came along, accompanying themselves as they sang, a larger guitar was needed that would give a fuller, richer accompaniment. Martin had introduced their popular "dreadnoughts" and Gibson began to look for a similar idea. They didn't have to look far. Gibson President Guy Hart met Western singer Ray Whitley in New York in 1937. Whitley made some suggestions

for a design of a larger guitar. Hart invited Whitley to Kalamazoo, and after meeting with the company's engineering staff, work was begun. In 1938 they presented Whitley with the incredibly beautiful SJ (for Super Jumbo)-200, a tastefully ornate guitar that gave exactly the sort of sound Whitley wanted. The guitar caught on with other Singing Cowboys, including Gene Autry (whose model featured an inlaid horseshoe on the fretboard), Jimmy Wakely and Tex Ritter. The modern J-200 has remained popular with everyone from Eddy Arnold and Elvis to Emmylou Harris.

As I said before, Bill Monroe and his L-7 mandolin never became an image ingrained in the psyche of American music. In 1941, he was walking down a Miami,

Florida street when he spied an F-5 mandolin in a barbership window. It was built in 1923 and signed by Lloyd Loar himself. After \$150 had changed hands, Monroe had an F-5 mandolin. And the F-5, because of Monroe, would become *the* bluegrass mandolin. When bluegrass music became popular in the late forties, the F-5 became one of the most coveted instruments (and designs) among serious country musicians, and it remains so today. Ironically, Monroe's own F-5 was missing the Gibson name for a number of years (more on that later).

Gibson also brought out a pedal steel in the late thirties, known as the "Electraharp," designed by a Connecticut inventor named John Moore, who later joined

Les Paul in 1943, surrounded by Gibsons.

Earl Scruggs and his RB-250.

The first J-200 was Whitley's



Maybelle (on the left with L-5), A.P., and Sara Carter.

Emmylou Harris plays a beautiful, all-black J-200.



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P. 61 Carter Family - House of Cash

Gibson. But it didn't take off quickly with country performers. There was plenty of prejudice against electric guitars of any sort for many years in country circles. And it wasn't until World War II that they were permitted on the stage of the Grand Ole Opry. By then, however, Gibson, like many other American businesses, was producing war-related materials, including parts for radar sets and glider skids.

More Gibson archtops than ever were being used by country bands after the war, though the reason seems unclear. Perhaps the growing use of amplified instruments meant that a stronger rhythm was needed in country bands, and the archtops could provide that. More electric models were developed, including the ES-350, a double pickup model, and some new steels, including the nonpedal "Console Grande," which Don Helms played on many of the classic Hank Williams recordings. And the Gibson RB-250 Mastertone 5-string banjos, played by Earl Scruggs with Bill Monroe, and then with Flatt and Scruggs, was becoming as much a legendary instrument as Monroe's F-5. In the Texas Playboys, Johnny Gimble generally used a Gibson electric mandolin.

The early fifties saw Gibson expand into yet another area. In 1952, the company introduced its solidbody "Les Paul" electric guitar, named for the legendary guitarist and experimenter who, with his wife Mary Ford (a former Western vocalist), was riding a crest of hit recordings. Les himself began as a country entertainer named "Rhubarb Red" and had influenced Chet Atkins in Chet's youth (Jim Atkins, his older brother, played with the Les Paul Trio before World War II). In the late thirties, Les tried unsuccessfully to convince Gibson to develop a solidbody guitar. The Rickenbacker Company had marketed a solidbody electric guitar in the thirties that looked much like their solidbody electric steels, and had had marginal success with it (Bob Willis wouldn't let Eldon Shamblin use one), so Gibson's initial disinterest was understandable. The popularity of the Fender Telecaster, however, changed that view. The solidbody's time had come. Les had some input into the guitar design, but Gibson's engineers did the bulk. Les did design the original "trapeze" tailpiece.

Some country performers used Les Pauls in the early fifties, but it was more popular, initially, with pop artists. Ironically, one country artist who did use one was Doc Watson, who played in a North Carolina country band in the fifties, before anyone knew him as an acoustic folk/bluegrass guitarist. On the advice of country guitarists Hank Garland (composer of *Sugarfoot Rag* and Nashville session legend) and his friend, Billy Byrd, (of Ernest Tubb's Texas Troubadours), in 1955 Gibson designed what came to be known as the "Byrdland" (combining the two names), a guitar popular in country,

jazz and rock circles.

Gibson made a number of custom guitars for country artists during the early fifties. In 1954, they built a huge and ornate custom Super 400 Electric for Merle Travis and custom guitars for Tennessee Ernie Ford, Porter Wagoner, Hawkshaw Hawkins, and Eddy Arnold (probably the J-200 described earlier).

Gibsons were also prominent in the early days of rockabilly. Elvis often used a J-200 with an ornately, custom-designed leather veneer. And Scotty Moore, who for a time used an ES-295 goldtop model when playing lead guitar with Elvis, finally moved up to the blond L-5 electrics that he



Cash's J-200, missing since the '60s.

used on most of the early hits and onstage. There are numerous photos showing it, gleaming like a flashy Cadillac, behind Elvis.

Another rockabilly partial to Gibson was Carl Perkins. After starting out with an inexpensive guitar, he used a Les Paul goldtop, the first good guitar he had, and used a triple-pickup ES-5 Switchmaster on occasion as well (including the Sun session that resulted in *Blue Suede Shoes*). In fact, he used Gibson through much of the fifties, including a variety of Les Pauls, and when he reemerged in the late sixties with Johnny Cash, he was using an Epiphone hollowbody electric made by Gibson.

Other country artists partial to Gibson included Don Gibson, who favored the acoustic archtop Super 400s and the Everly Brothers, who subsequently had a Gibson model similar in appearance to the J-200 with a pickguard that took up much of the body and a beautiful, polished jet black finish. Homer & Jethro were Gibson endorsers through most of their peak years, with Homer Haynes (a far better rhythm guitarist than many realized) favoring a cutaway L-5 acoustic, and Jethro Burns using an A-5 Florentine double cutaway.

In 1958 Gibson began making a new line of guitars: the electric double cutaway; thin-bodied models, including the ES-335 and ES-355, which some artists and studio players favored. Hank Garland, who'd begun to do Elvis sessions in the early sixties, used one of these models on many of Elvis's recordings according to his friend, guitarist Harold Bradley. These models also gave many country players (who didn't want to use the solidbody guitars)



the option of getting a more mellow jazz sound, if they wanted it.

The popularity of Gibson mandolins and banjos increased greatly into the seventies. There were a variety of different models available, and as bluegrass became an established form of country music, the company introduced the All American and Florentine banjos. Their mandolin lines also expanded, and not long ago, the company re-introduced an original F-5L mandolin designed as an exact reproduction of the classic Lloyd Loar models of the '20s.

Which brings us back to Bill Monroe. Sometime around 1951, the neck of his F-5 was broken in an accident. He sent it back to the factory for repair and requested they do some additional work on it. To say that he wasn't satisfied with the results would be an understatement. He gouged the inlaid mother-of-pearl "Gibson" name out of the peghead with a penknife. Soon this model became almost as legendary as Monroe himself, and the aforementioned tale became a part of bluegrass lore. Monroe would have nothing to do with Gibson—until last year. After a meeting with Gibson officials, during which they presented him with one of the new F-5Ls, they were reconciled. The old original was taken back to Kalamazoo, some repairs were made (the marks of wear on the body remain, a tribute to its years) and Monroe and Gibson reunited as friends last fall, his F-5 bearing the Gibson name installed once again. (See photo on page 32.)



Monroe's F-5 with the "Gibson" missing.

Gibson Les Pauls today are far more in evidence in country bands than before. Charlie Daniels has used one, an original sunburst, and even made the newspapers when it was stolen last year. They can be seen in many road bands today: Jack Greene uses an old archtop Super 400 onstage. Toy Caldwell, leader of the Marshall Tucker band, uses a Les Paul often, and Jody Payne. Willie's lead guitarist, often used a mahogany-finished ES-355 when backing Willie. Travis still uses his Super 400, and Emmylou's J-200 with its black finish and inlaid rose is something that Orville Gibson himself would have probably appreciated.

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# Record Reviews

## Emmylou Harris

### Evangeline

Warner Bros. BSK 3508

You can usually tell when an artist has decided to change their music in this business. They dump their regular road and studio bands, their producer, and swagger, head held high, into the studio ready to tackle their new sound. Sometimes it works. More often they don't see the quicksand rising around their feet. Fortunately those mistakes are exactly the ones Emmylou has sense enough *not* to make. *Evangeline* shows her expanding into pop-flavored material with her regular band—and vision—intact. The sense of continuity this provides simply underscores the longstanding excellence of her work, and her willingness to diversify by selecting the right songs: not just whatever's around.

And diversification is the prevailing wisdom here. You can play this album next to *Roses in The Snow* or *Blue Kentucky Girl* without any great shock. There's Rodney



Crowell's *I Don't Have To Crawl*, an understated yet hard-edged number; *Spanish Johnny*, a beautiful rural ballad by the grossly underrated composer Paul Siebel; John Fogerty's *Bad Moon Rising*, one of

his finest numbers; and Emmylou's beautiful rendition of *Evangeline*, a Robbie Robertson-penned tragedy. James Taylor's *Millworker* is similarly evocative in her hands. Crowell's *Ashes By Now*, a

song of tension and frustration, gets a beautifully terse vocal that works perfectly with the impatient, taut arrangement.

The two most unusual numbers, however, are neither contemporary in sound or origin. *How High The Moon* comes directly from the 1951 Les Paul-Mary Ford million-seller, with a more acoustic emphasis (and some electric licks from Albert Lee that cross Paul and Merle Travis), yet Emmy's vocal is far more emotional and less gimmicky than Mary Ford's. *Mister Sandman* seems cut from the same cloth, with Linda Ronstadt and Dolly Parton getting a sound similar to the old Mary Ford multitracked vocals. Both songs are a tribute to the Emmy/Ahern team's knack for integrating *anything* into her music, no holds barred.

I'm not even going to predict what she'll try next album, but it's going to be interesting, and I'm betting it will become as much a part of her music as everything she's done in the past. RICH KIENZLE

## Billy Crash Craddock

### Crash Craddock

Capitol ST-12129



There's something out of whack in this album. For the most part, the instrumen-

tal are driving, dynamic. The production is slick and professional. And Craddock shows his usual skill and abandon as he throws his exceptionally good voice into one well-delivered song after another. So what's the problem?

In front of all that skill and energy we too often find lyrics which are sheer nonsense. Instead of emotion and gutsy feelings, we find gimmicky hook phrases like "strip it down, let it brown" (about the compelling subject of sunbathing), "you got what it takes to get what I've got" and "ain't it the truth, Betty Ruth?" One's sense of appropriateness and

order is jarred like firing marshmallows out of antitank guns, or tipping an intercontinental ballistic missile with a bag of . . . er . . . fertilizer. I suppose the idea was to duplicate the commercial success of songs like *Rub It In*, *Rub It In* and *Wiggle Wiggle*. But while I don't blame any artist for wanting commercial success, I can't help feeling that the dynamic Craddock touch would be far more powerful if devoted to subjects like life, death, love, toil and conflict—things which hit people where they live.

I don't mean to condemn this album, however. Craddock in action is impressive even if the

material is weak. The opening cut, *(You Say You're) A Real Cowboy* throws some welcome mud at people who start believing they are cowboys because they wear western clothes. *Making Plans* is a fine country number in which a soon-to-be-deserted lover prepares for the impending bleakness of life alone. And *It Was You*, though a bit on the creamy side, is a pleasant waltz which extols the virtues of the lover he let slip away.

It becomes a toss-up. If you like standard Craddock you'll probably like this album. But to my mind it's a bit schizophrenic.

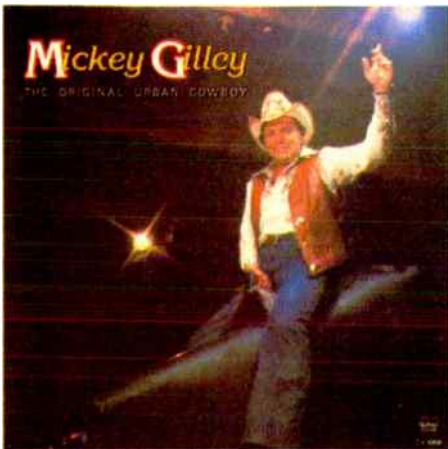
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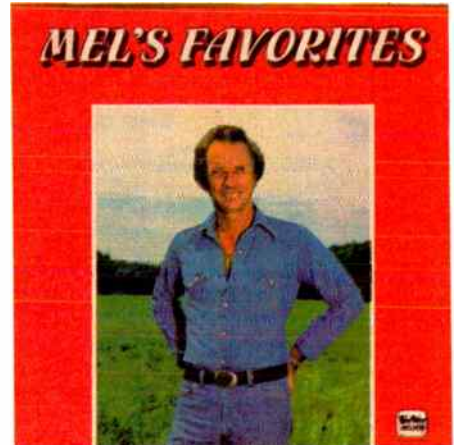
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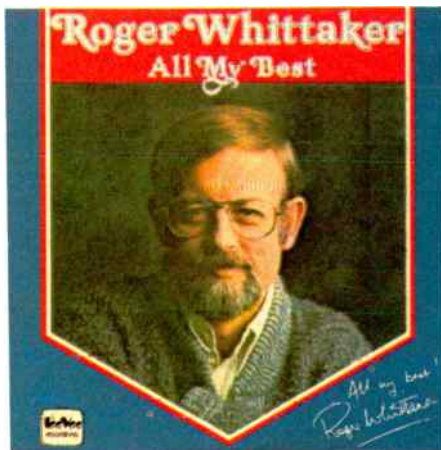
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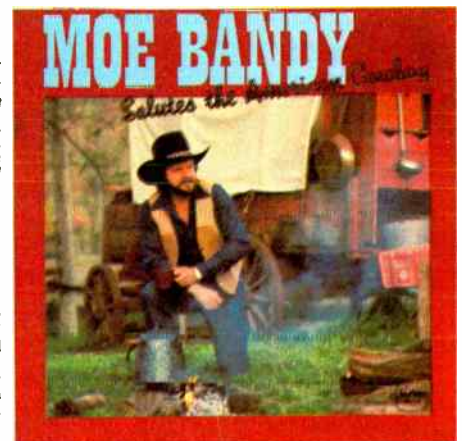


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# Record Reviews

## Waylon and Jessi Leather and Lace RCA AAL1-3931

The cat has been let out of the bag. A modern-day fable has been laid bare and an image has been shattered—hopefully carried face-down to the great graveyard where all lies and false images are forever buried. Big ol' tough, telecaster-outlaw, mean-as-a-snake Waylon Jennings, hiding under his black hat, has been fooling us all this time (or, more likely, we have fooled ourselves). Waylon hides a heart of gold tuned to a sweet soul.

**Leather and Lace**, the first duet album for Waylon and Jessi, reveals a tender, gentle side of Waylon rarely heard on record. **Leather and Lace**, a perfect title, seems more like a love tribute from Waylon to wife, Jessi. He defers artistically to Jessi, which is a beautiful gesture as well as a sign of strength and maturity.

**Leather and Lace** does not exactly sparkle. Rather it glistens like fine, rubbed leather. It is a warm, honest

album, and the respect between the two artists permeates throughout each cut. Actually, the album is not a series of duets. Waylon sings solo on four tracks and Jessi sings solo on three songs. But Waylon weaves lightly (yes, lightly, as in a feather touch) in and out of Jessi's solos. Jessi also wrote or co-wrote five of the 10 songs.

The single most impressive aspect of **Leather and Lace** and of most Waylon Jennings' work is his sensitivity and good sense in treating each album as a musical unit. As a producer and singer, he has consistently in his career respected the song (and if that sounds simplistic, consider the many records in which the string section overpowers the vocals, or the vocals are too harsh for the music). Waylon, who co-produced the album along with Richie Albright, could have easily dominated this LP, but he wisely chose to understate his vocals and record songs that compliment both him and Jessi and give balance to the album.

The LP opens with the old Chuck Berry rocker, *You Never Can Tell (C'est La Vie)*,

which is a pure duet. *Rainy Season*, basically a solo by Jessi, is followed by *It'll Be Alright*, a new song co-written by Waylon and sung solo by him. The classic *Wild Side of Life* is split right down the middle. Waylon sings the first half



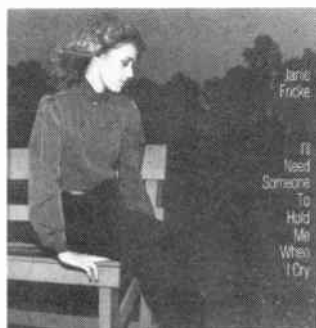
and Jessi solos on the last half, sounding eerily like a young Kitty Wells. Another new tune, *Pastels and Harmony*, seems at first glance, a bit out of character for Waylon. But throughout his career, Jennings has recorded tunes that are out of the normal Nashville mainstream. *Pastels and Harmony* is poetic with soft images playing on top of an intricate melody line—definitely a song

no self-respecting macho cowboy would ever record.

*I Believe You Can*, another Jessi Colter song, kicks off side two and is crafted with beauty and simplicity. Jessi accompanies herself on piano and sings solo until the middle of the song. Only then does Waylon harmonize with Jessi—a sweet, almost exquisite vocal. Then, in a switch, he sings lead on Jessi's *What Happened To Blue Eyes? I Ain't The One* is another duet; an average song. Waylon closes the album with a tasteful version of Mickey Newbury's *You're Not My Same Sweet Baby*, a soft waltz where, again, Waylon sings with gentle care.

**Leather and Lace** stands a good head and shoulders above any country duet album I have heard in a long time. Waylon and Jessi, I am sure, are both very private, complicated people, but they have allowed us a glimpse into the spiritual regions of their musical and personal relationship. **Leather and Lace** is no half-baked job, rather a work of love and artistry.

BOB CAMPBELL



## Janie Fricke I'll Need Someone To Hold Me When I Cry Columbia JC 36820

Now that your average Music Square executive has

stopped upchucking at the sound of a steel guitar or fiddle, traditional-sounding country songs are showing up more and more frequently on the A sides of country albums. Some albums—like this one—even have more than one such number, and the traditional sounds are getting more pronounced instead of being snuck in here and there. What is Nashville coming to?

In this album, the title cut, which is also the opening cut, is a well sung, well arranged country number which begs a departing lover to stay long enough to ease the jilted party through the shock of being jilted. Three of the remaining four A-side pieces are also solid

country pieces. *Going Through The Motions* grieves over the need to go through the motions of being in love instead of simply ending what had been a good relationship. *Pride* is about an age-old dilemma. Should the cheated lover listen to her heart, which says stay, or to her pride, which says walk out? *Down To My Last Broken Heart* is a country masterpiece which expresses the disillusioned lover's reluctance to love again. It could become a standard.

On the B side, we find four cuts in the sophisticated pseudo-country vein which remains dear to Nashville's heart, I'm afraid. They are weak in lyrical content, but are

rendered listenable by Janie's fine voice and Jim Ed Norman's good production. But the opening B cut is something else again. It's a revival of *Cry*, the late '40s pop hit which, recorded by Johnny Ray, helped usher in the era of the pop vocalists who, in turn, helped to hasten the demise of the big bands. Janie's version is good, while not nearly as dramatic as Ray's, which is probably just as well. For some reason, Ray could pour out astonishing amounts of melodrama and get away with it, artistically, where most singers could not, and cannot. Janie, I suspect, would have fallen flat if she'd tapped his style too closely.

ART MAHER

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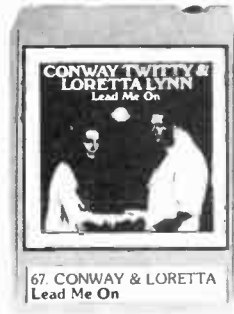
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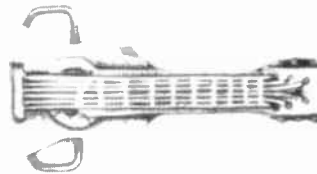
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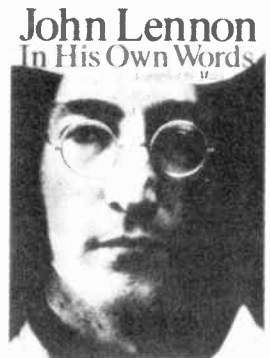
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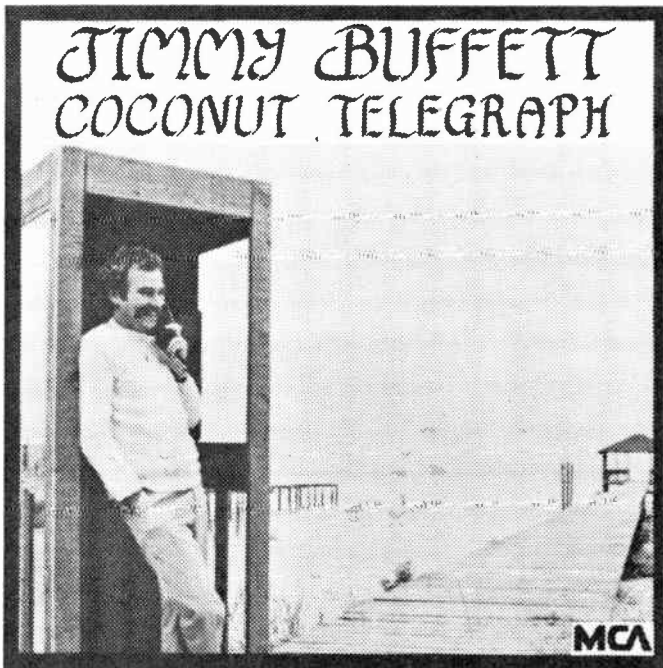
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# Record Reviews



## Jimmy Buffett Coconut Telegraph MCA-5169

Seldom does an artist get away with building a name around a style of music so firmly that the style almost becomes synonymous with his name. Jimmy Buffett calls his music shrimpboat rock. Whatever it is, it derives much of its appeal from the age old fantasy of being off somewhere on an island, even if not all of the songs are in an island setting.

*Coconut Telegraph* comes at least three years after Buffett's monster hit, *Margaritaville*, and the sound is still holding up well. In addition to the tranquil feel of the melodies and instrumentation, there is a definite positive slant to the topics in the songs. Some are very light in lyrical content, such as *Coconut Telegraph* and *The Weather Is Here*. *I Wish You Were Beautiful*. *It's My Job*, however, looks at the stresses of life, and concludes to strive for the complacency of a street sweeper.

A number of other cuts, including *The Good Fight*, dedicated to Mohammed Ali, could also be thought-provoking. But the lull of the Caribbean-flavored sounds makes passive listening more likely. There is also a tune about a man's reflections on the passing of John Wayne. It too would not appear on the surface to have any deep meaning. Thus, Buffett has taken the vehicle of the island sounds and successfully adapted it to fit almost any kind of song. Each of the tunes on the album bears a personal dedication. So something is definitely being said, if you feel in the mood to interpret it.

How the old song *Stars Fell on Alabama* got into the picture is a mystery, but it carries the light end of the record, as does the Jimmy Buffett—David Loggins number, *Island*. If Buffett keeps "wasting away" out there at the present rate, he'll probably last as long as John Denver has with his fantasies in the mountains.

BILL OAKEY

## Moe Bandy and Joe Stampley Hey Joe! Hey Moe! Columbia FC 37003

One of the hostages in Iran, a marine from Texas, brought home the true American spirit when he announced that he was ready to get back to chasin' women. The next best thing to chasin' women is getting ready to go chasin' women. And of course, the ingredients for that are a couple of six packs, a good buddy, and some rollicking, foot stompin' honky-tonk music.

Getting right for a wild night couldn't be helped along any better than with *Hey Joe! Hey Moe!* These guys may have thought their *Just Good Ole Boys* album from last year was a one time lark, but they sure enough wound up as the CMA's *Vocal Duo of the Year*. That award speaks not only for them, but also for the demand for a taste of the honky-tonk flavor we once got from Charlie Walker, Johnny Horton, Lefty Frizzell, and others.

The fine art of carousing is celebrated in high style on cuts like *Drinkin'*, *Dancin'*, *Drunk Front*, and *I'd Rather Be A-Pickin'*. The message comes through that fishing beats working, a hangover can be cured with two beers, putting down country music can start a fight, and tight Levis are preferred over evening gowns.

I don't know why it is that old Chevrolets have made it so prominently into country song lore, but the beat up one pictured on the back of this album fits as perfectly as the name Rosie for a barmaid. The only thing not quite so standard about the record is the tune about the honky-tonk "queen" who turns out to be gay.

If you remember the days of songs like George Jones and Gene Pitney's *I've Got Five Dollars* and *It's Saturday Night* or Charlie Walker's *Let's Go Fishin' Boys the Girls are Bitin'*, you've got the spirit of Moe and Joe on this one. It's a fun loving tribute to the red blooded American male.

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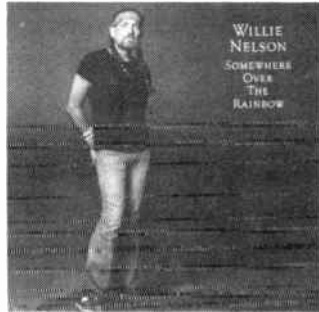
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# Record Reviews

## Willie Nelson Somewhere Over The Rainbow

Columbia FC 36883

I don't think this is, as the advance publicity suggested, the follow-up to *Stardust*. The choice of songs is similar, but the symphonics are replaced by Willie and five other musicians (none in his regular band), playing acoustic instruments. The musicians, Johnny Gimble, two bassists (Nashville's studio veterans Bob Moore and Dean Reynolds), mandolin great Paul Buskirk (once of Johnny and Jack) and Fred Powers, guitarist and occasional nasal vocalist, cut this live, at Mickey Gilley's studio, with no over-



dubs.

This all might seem bizarre to fans of Willie's regular records, but it shouldn't, since he's long admired the 1930s French jazz group, The Quintet of the Hot Club of France. That all-acoustic group featured jazz guitar legend Django Reinhardt and swing

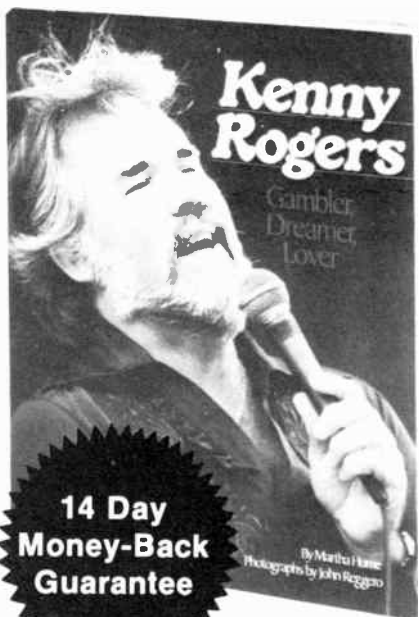
violinist Stephane Grappelli, both of whom influenced many of the western swingers Willie grew up listening to. His own guitar work even has a bit of the Django fire at times. Nor is he the only one into this music; Chet Atkins and Don Gibson are both Django fans. And, as you may have guessed, so am I; I have as many Django albums as I do George Jones albums.

So the album works as acoustic country/jazz and western swing, as three of the songs are western standards. Willie's voice is more restrained than usual, and at times the music gets almost 100 laid back, particularly on *My Mother's Eyes* and *Over The Rainbow*. Yet that same

looseness enhances *Exactly Like You*, the Bob Wills-inspired *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star* and *Won't You Ride In My Little Red Wagon*, the exhilarating Rex Griffin tune made popular by the great Hank Penny. Gimble does the bulk of the solos, sounding more like his idol black jazzman Stuff Smith than Grappelli. I wouldn't call this a blockbuster like *Stardust*, but it's a perfect example of the sort of records people made in the days before recording studios looked like the set of *Star Wars*, when musicians sat down and just *played*. For that alone, it's worth hearing Willie and friends swing through the past. RICH KIENZLE

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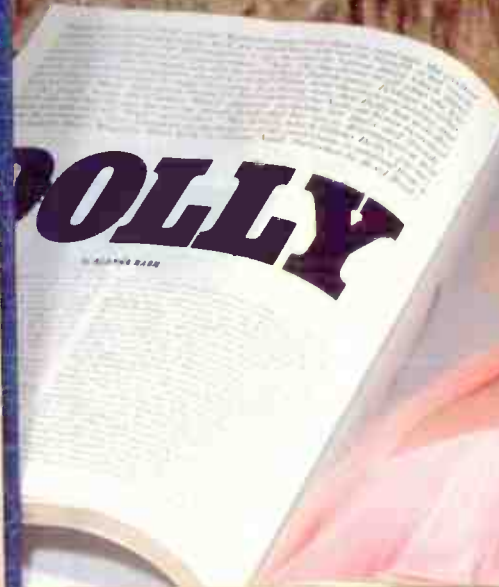
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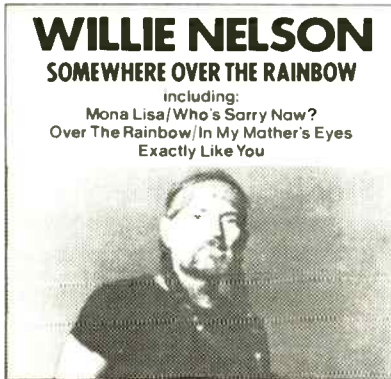
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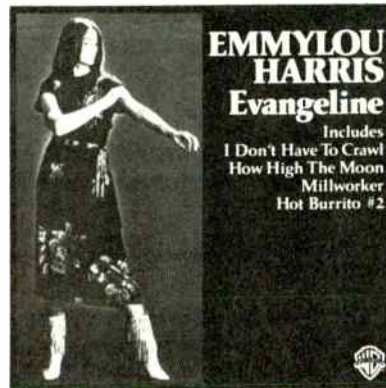


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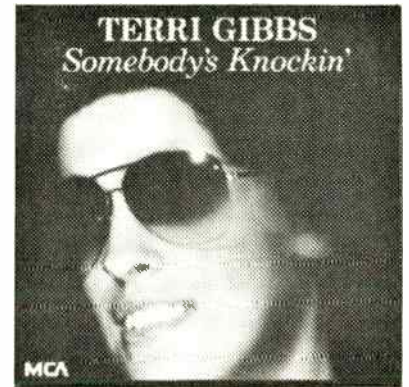
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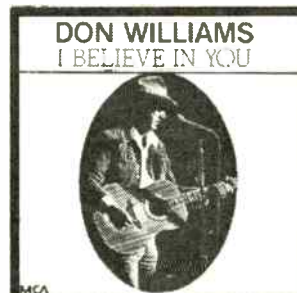
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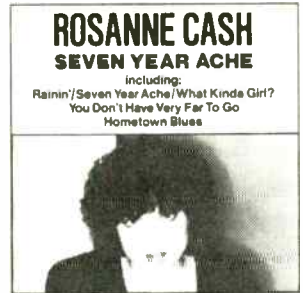
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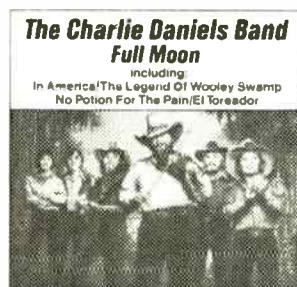
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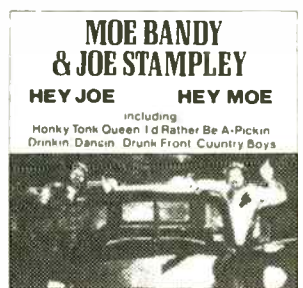
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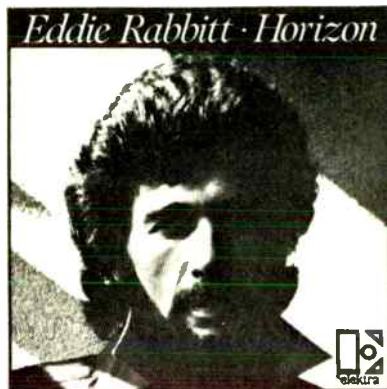
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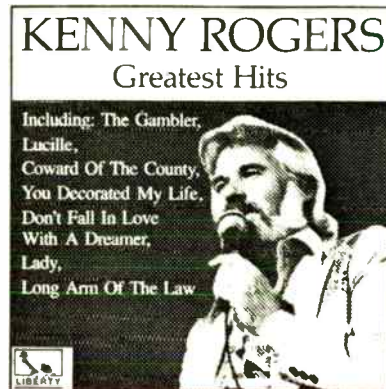
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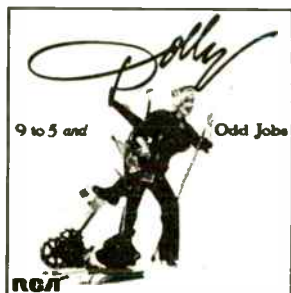
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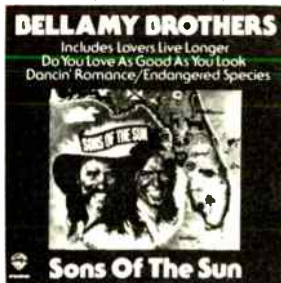


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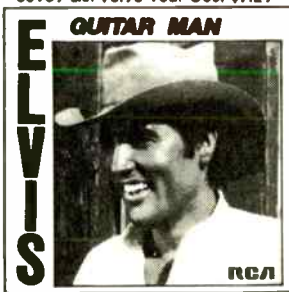
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# Record Reviews

## Alabama Feels So Right

RCA AHL1-393U

The rise of Alabama from bar band to national prominence is one of last year's great success stories in country music. They are a talented bunch of good ole boys who have worked hard to escape the labor mills of all those smoky, hard-edged clubs that look alike in every town. Bar bands tend to bury themselves in musical blandness after countless nights of covering hit songs and competing with drunks, but all that playing seems merely to have polished the music of Alabama to a fine edge. The group blends rich, smooth harmony with excellent material. Alabama now has enjoyed three legitimate hit songs—all from its debut RCA album. But the proof of a group's staying power normally can be found squarely in the strength of its second album, a harder nut to crack.

So, I'll tell you straight. If you liked the first LP, you will like this one. *Feels So Right*, in my humble opinion, lacks a song with the power, say, of *My Home's In Alabama*, but it is as solid as a blacksmith's anvil. The biggest improvement lies in the production, which is crisp and unpredictable in an interesting fashion. For instance, there is a place in *Feels So Right* (maybe my favorite song) where the lead guitar leaps out unexpectedly and with grace right over the top of a lyric line. In fact, the lead guitar work is fluid and bright throughout all 10 tunes.

The album slows down in the middle of side two, somewhat like a boxer who needs a breather in the late rounds. With the exception of *Old Flame*, a straight-ahead country love song, and *Hollywood*, an Eagles-flavored story of lost dreams, the material on side two fails to match the overall quality of the opening side. Beginning with *Feels So Right*,

however, side one slides the listener through a batch of well-crafted songs.

If I had to choose three songs from this LP to keep me company on a long car ride, *Feels So Right*, *Burn, Georgia, Burn* and *Fantasy* would get the nod. All three tunes are supported by a great marriage of lyric and melody. *Feels So Right* is a sophisticated, country-pop love song marked by a biting guitar solo and may prove to be every bit the equal of *Why Baby Why*

or *My Home's in Alabama*. *Burn, Georgia, Burn* is a Civil War song . . . that is, a love song set in Atlanta during the Civil War. Sung by bass player Teddy Gentry, the song effectively captures the mood and rustic flavor of the old south.

The song that stands out on the album, for better or worse, is *Fantasy*. True-blue country fans may not like a little salt with their sugar, but *Fantasy* closes out side one with a strong dose of slick, country-r&b that

sounds as if it came right out of Los Angeles. It is an interesting choice for the album and serves notice that Alabama is capable of writing and singing a broad style of music. *Fantasy* glides on a taut rhythm track that seems to sail toward some distant cloud. Maybe these boys are preparing us for some future changes in their music.

*Feels So Right* may not be the best album released this year, but it sure proves Alabama is no fluke. BOB CAMPBELL

## BURIED TREASURES

by Rich Kienzle

Boxed sets of Elvis material are certainly nothing new; there have been numerous collections over the years. The most recent, **Elvis Aron Presley** wasn't, from some reports, quite the hot seller many expected it to be, judging from the fact that some stores are discounting the price. But there is yet another Elvis collection that can only be called the Ultimate Early Elvis. **Elvis The Legend: 1954-1961** (ELR 1), the first volume of a projected series by Australian RCA that issues all of Elvis's 1954-1961 releases in the order they were recorded, beginning with *That's All Right (Mama)* in July, 1954 through the *Blue Hawaii* soundtrack sessions in March of 1961. There are a dozen LPs in this beautiful collection, 192 songs, as well as some rare interview material including one distributed to radio stations by *TV Guide* in the fifties (and worth \$3500 in its original form). The sound on this collection is pure original mono and (where applicable) stereo, and a beautiful accompanying booklet gives complete recording data, chart positions and an interesting monthly chronology of his career from 1935 to 1961. I have yet to see a better collection of early Elvis, and more volumes are planned.

Many know Galax, Virginia, today as the scene of many old-time music festivals, but the region, in Western Virginia,

was also a hotbed of fine old-time stringband music in the 1920s and 1930s, music that was captured on record by numerous labels. The area had its fiddlers, banjoists and stringbands, the best known musician being "Pop" Stoneman (father of *Hee-Haw's* Roni) who is featured on one volume of **Round The Heart of Old Galax** (County 533-4-5). Volume Two examines the unique music of the Ward Family, also from that region, while Volume Three looks at a variety of Galax area performers. This is a striking and moving look at what rural music was in one small area over half a century ago, not slick or sophisticated, but an integral part of one's local culture.

A more current recording along similar lines is 72 year old fiddler Art Galbraith's **Dixie Blossoms** (Rounder 0133). A retired postal worker, Galbraith grew up in Southwestern Missouri and was steeped in traditional fiddle music, learning many tunes from his uncle, a brilliant Missouri fiddler. Accompanied only by guitar, he demonstrates an exquisite, velvet tone and reserved style that results in beautifully understated versions of *Ladies' Fancy*, *Billy In The Low Ground*, *McCraw's Ford* and 13 other tunes.

If you've been reading this

column any length of time, you've probably seen a lot of anthologies, mostly bluegrass, rockabilly, western swing and similar styles. **Memphis Country** (Cowboy Carl CCLP-103) is a bit different, dealing with a number of artists who worked with the Gene Williams Country Junction show out of Memphis in the mid-sixties. Williams, who grew up near Johnny Cash in Arkansas, had a number of fine artists under his wing, and the performances here include Memphis legend Slim Rhodes, Sonny Williams' fine *Too Much Competition*, Ray Coble's *Better Run Suzie* and 17 other obscure, but excellent tracks, all very basic, but well-performed.

Ernest Tubb fans will be interested in a new limited-edition German LP. **Country Stars of the Past** (Castle 8015) features some early Tubb material, such as *Journey's End*, *Over The River* and *Answer The Phone* taken from 40s and 50s radio shows.

The Ultimate Elvis is \$123.20, the Tubb \$12.18 postpaid from Down Home Music, 10341 San Pable Avenue El Errito, CA 94530. The Memphis Country is \$7 postpaid from Cowboy Carl, Box 116, Park Forest, IL 60466. The Galax sets are \$6.75 each, postpaid from County Sales, Box 191, Floyd, VA 24091.



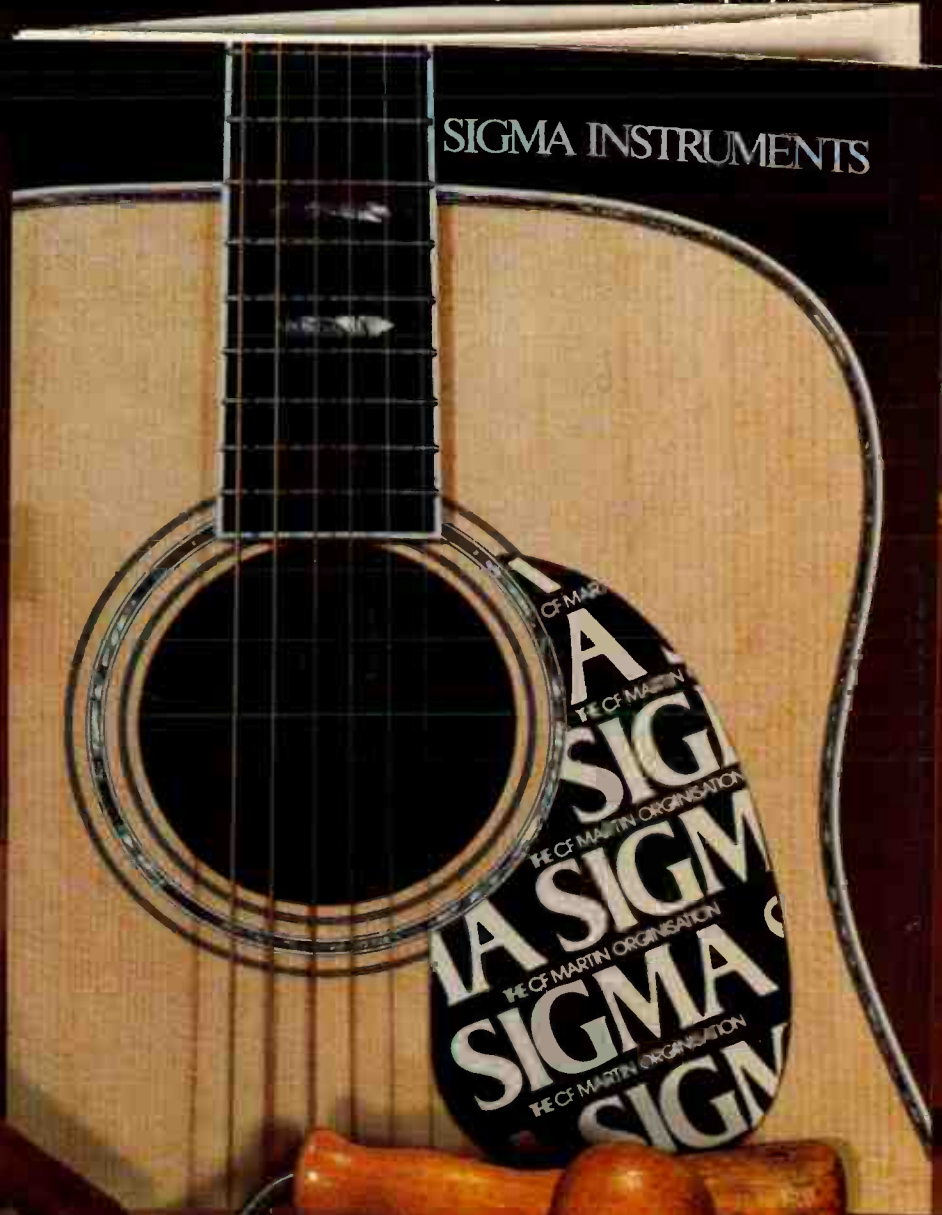
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