

The Statler Bros. / Suzy Bogguss / Foster & Lloyd

MARCH/APRIL 1990

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COUNTRYMUSIC



RICKY VAN SHELTON
Pull-Out Poster

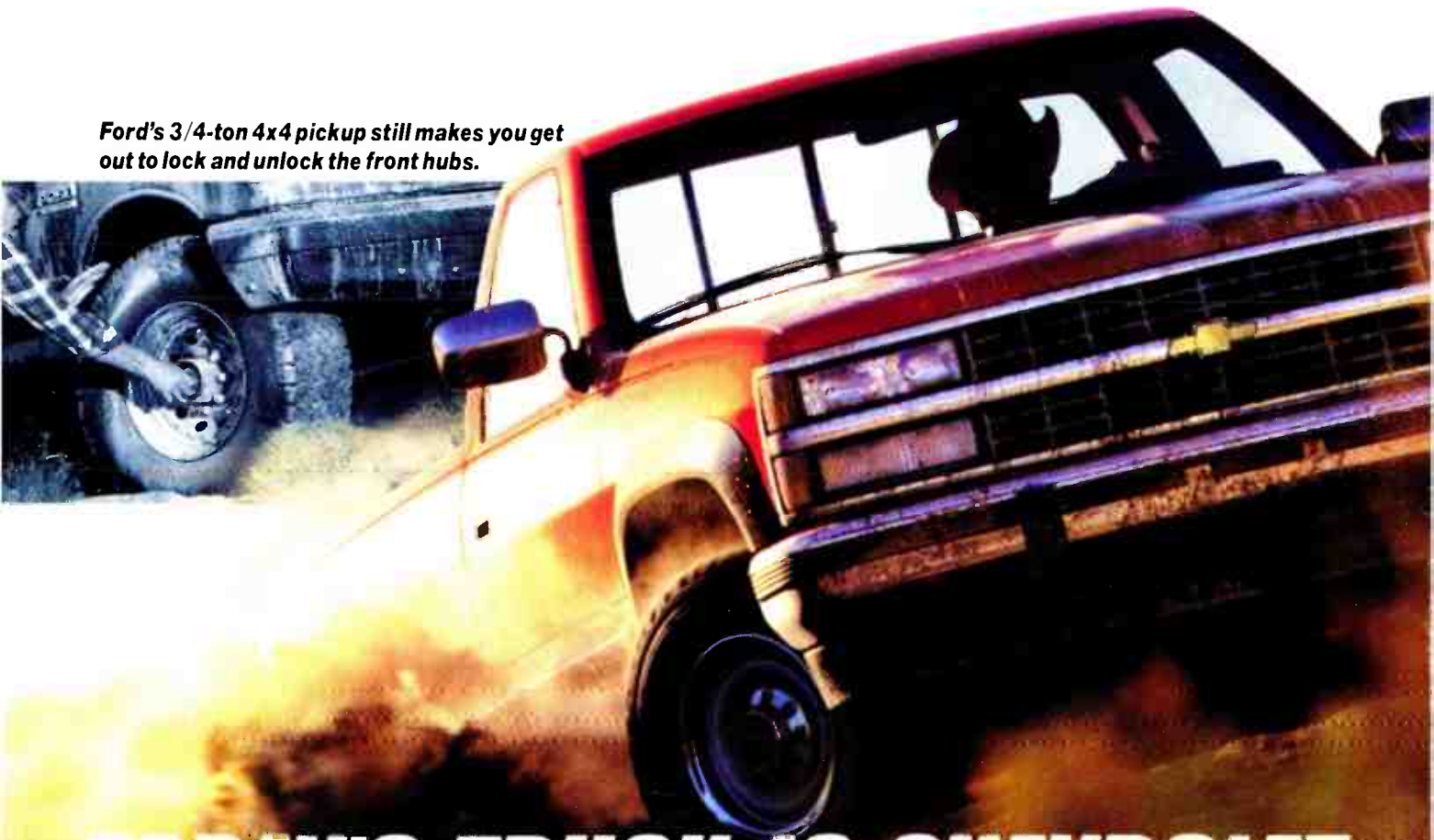
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GEORGE STRAIT

Strait Fever
Sweeps Nation

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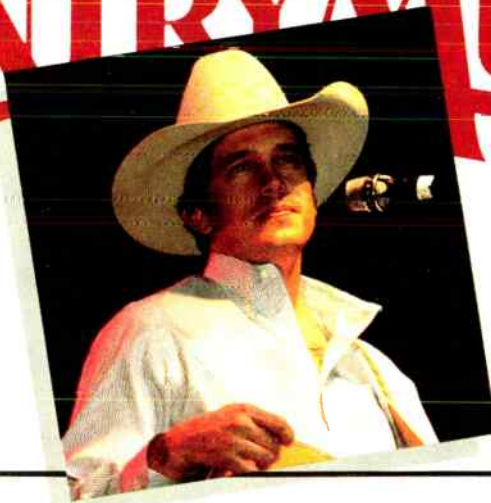
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COUNTRY MUSIC™



2 Letters

Readers respond to Randy in RandyLand, Ricky Skaggs' high performance, Dwight's centerfold, Reba's baby face, Lorrie Morgan looking ahead and two issues' worth of Record Reviews.

18 People

Alabama receives global recognition, Bill Monroe celebrates 50 years on the Opry, Ricky Van Shelton donates 20 grand and Dolly has another Number One. Also three country girls say "I do," and three country boys meet up on the road. Plus a CMM Update on Justin Tubb and more.

by Hazel Smith

26 20 Questions with The Statler Brothers

Making music and enjoying it is what The Statler Brothers do best. How do they do it? Michael Bane caught up with the foursome and tried to get some of their secrets.

by Michael Bane

28 George Strait: Strait Fever

Strait Fever reaches epidemic proportions. No matter where he goes, Strait has people swooning at his feet. Bob Allen catches up with the cause of this sensation. Together they look back at a year in which the famous Texan broke attendance records and won the CMA's Entertainer of the Year award.

by Bob Allen

36 Ricky Van Shelton: Pull-Out Centerfold

This issue's Pull-Out-Centerfold-of-the-Month features Ricky Van Shelton. Get the photos and the facts.

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While working for the same song publishing company, Rodney Foster and Bill Lloyd wrote hits for other artists. But soon they discovered something else—a sound for themselves.

by Bob Allen

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You'd think two divorces would hurt a man's career, but in Vern's case they actually helped. When wife number two called it quits, Vern sat down and wrote an album. It turned out to be a best-seller and helped him get over the pain.

by Bob Allen

48 Suzy Bogguss: Getting to the Root

She calls herself a "second generation revivalist." Even when she sings a contemporary song, her music goes back to its roots. And she yodels too.

by John Morthland

52 Record Reviews

Here's a little bit of everything. Stalwarts Johnny Cash, Buck Owens and Charlie Daniels are back with more songs, as are The O'Kanes, Ricky Van Shelton and Eddie Rabbitt, while newcomers Robert Earl Keen Jr. and The Kentucky Headhunters debut. Plus even more old favorites.

70 Buried Treasures

Rich found bluegrass and new recordings as well as reissues this time around. Look for Western swing by The Musical Brownies, ballads by Little Jimmy Dickens, gospel by Ernest Tubb and more.

by Rich Kienzle

COVER PHOTO BY STEVEN PUMPHREY

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He is a credit to country music and someone our young people can look up to and set their standards by. He is all country, a real cowboy and a very clean-cut family man.

I have only had the chance to get to one of his concerts, and it was great! We live way out in the mountains on a big ranch by the corner of Nevada. The closest town is 32 miles, and the closest major town is 52 miles away, so I don't have the opportunity to get to see many concerts. Out here we really appreciate good country music, and we know that George is Number One all the way!

Mary Lyn Brangham
Oakley, Idaho

If you loved the centerfold, we know you'll love this issue. -Ed.



Heidi Rice beats her mom to the mailbox when there's a Travis issue.

Youth for Travis

Wow, what a way to start off the New Year! Your January/February issue with Randy Travis was great!

My daughter Heidi, age 4, who got the mail before I did, was hiding it from me so she could keep it for herself. She just loves Randy and made me read her every word in the article. Maybe I ought to send for a subscription for her too!

Sheri Rice
Blandon, Pennsylvania

By-Line, Please

Patrick Carr wrote last issue's Randy Travis cover story, "Research in RandyLand." His by-line dropped off during production. Thank goodness it appeared in the Table of Contents. We apologize, Patrick. Fans knew who you were anyway.

Sing It, Dwight!

I especially liked your January/February issue because of the centerfold of Dwight Yoakam. Hey, holey jeans or not—Dwight can sing! If he wants to wear his jeans that way, then let him. That's the style—I have some too!

Joan Stockstill
Batesville, Arkansas

Lookin' for Dwight's Hat!

I've always enjoyed *Country Music Magazine*, but I just have to tell you that your January/February issue is pure gold—maybe even platinum!

An avid Dwight Yoakam fan, I had to laugh when I found you'd featured him this month in your centerfold and included the address of his fan club, since in November I'd spent hours digging through old issues to find the address I knew I'd seen which turned out to be in a 1986 issue!

The last interview I can find with Dwight is also your first, back in May/June 1988. It would be nice to hear from Dwight now since these years have been significant ones and reflect so much of his own wonderfully unique song writing. How about a 20 Questions feature?

By the way, Dwight's "trademark" here in upstate New York isn't considered to be his jeans—it's that great hat!

Flo Gorton

Hudson Falls, New York

Feature on Dwight coming soon.—Ed.

Skaggs Cover Scores

Thanks a million for the article on Ricky Skaggs on your November/December 1989 issue of *Country Music*. I was astounded when I saw him on the cover. I've been waiting for an article on him for months. Ricky has always been and will always be my favorite singer.

Sara Rose Wollman
Warden, Washington



Ricky Skaggs met Chandra Knoll and Lisa Vaughn backstage.

T-Shirts are Their Ticket

Ricky Skaggs made my daughter and niece happy when they got to go backstage last November and meet him.

They wore their Keith Whitley shirts and pins which they bought at a Redman concert in Little Rock, May 5, 1989, only a few days before Keith's death. Ricky's production manager saw them and let them go backstage.

Ricky is a super-sweet guy and one person these girls will never forget.

Georgia Vaughn
Stuttgart, Arkansas

Roy's Acuff's Precious Jewel

Can someone please tell us how we can get the words to Roy Acuff's song, "Precious Jewel"? We had an old 78 rpm of it,

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but a fire destroyed all our records and we have forgotten the words to that one.

Alan and Emmie Zenner
Phillips, Wisconsin

Ask your local music store to order sheet music from C.P.P. Belwyn, Opryland Music group's distributor in Miami.—Ed.

Reba Centerfold Hits Spot

I wanted to thank you so much for having the centerfold of Reba McEntire and all the information along with it in the November/December 1989 issue. I never thought about joining the fan club until I saw the information about it in the magazine. So I decided to, and it was the best thing I ever did. You all made sure I received my backstage pass before December 3, which was Reba's concert. You gave me the best possible Christmas gift—to meet my favorite singer in person—Reba McEntire!

Kim Pozgar
Melbourne, Florida



A pregnant Reba caught in concert in September by Denise Farrell.

Reba's Pretty Baby Face

Thanks! The centerfold of Reba in the November/December 1989 issue was the prettiest face I've seen in a while! She has got the cutest baby face and a wonderful and warming personality to go along with it!

We would like very much to see some candid photos of Reba and baby McEntire when he/she decides to come along!

David Tarleton
Charlotte, North Carolina

Roy Rogers Rides Again

In the People section of your November/December 1989 issue, I saw a picture of Roy Rogers and Riders in the Sky on *Hee Haw*.

I am 25 years old and love the old westerns that Roy and Dale made. Could you please give me an address where I could write to them?

Janet Thomas
Franklinton, Louisiana
You can write to Roy and Dale at the Roy Rogers-Dale Evans Museum, 15650 Seneca Road, Victorville, California 92392.—Ed.

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Lorrie Morgan and Stephanie Wagner take time out after a recent concert.

Lorrie Morgan's Concerts

It was great to see an article and photos of Lorrie Morgan in your January/February issue. I was fortunate enough to meet Lorrie after her fantastic concert in Lexington, North Carolina.

Her concerts are a lot of fun. She was so nice when she met people afterwards. I can't wait until her new album hits the streets. I'm looking forward to seeing a lot of great things happen to this lady in the 1990's—she deserves it all!

Stephanie Wagner
Winston-Salem, North Carolina



Sharon Hurt and her pride and joy, Andy Taylor Whitley, back home in Goodlettsville.

Whitley's Puppy Comes Home

Andy Taylor Whitley is a beautiful, jet black cocker spaniel. On February 3, 1989, I sold him to a very lovely lady, Lorrie Morgan. Lorrie told me that her husband, Keith Whitley, was on his way home from a tour, and Andy was to be his birthday gift.

On May 9, 1989, Keith Whitley died, and some time later Lorrie called me and asked me to come and get Andy because she couldn't do anything with him. We are glad to have him back home.

Sharon Hurt
Goodlettsville, Tennessee

Battle with the Demon

The article Bob Allen did on Lorrie Morgan was most revealing. It gave this fan a little more insight into the lady, not just the performer.

Keith Whitley's "battle with the

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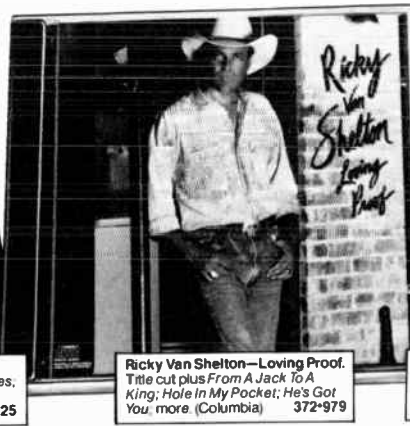
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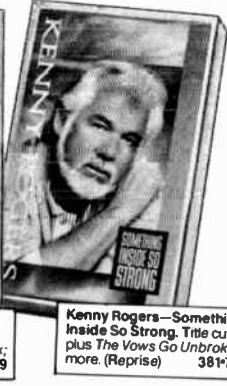
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Randy Travis—Old 8x10. Honky Tonk Moon; more. (Warner Bros.) 370-643

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demon" that Lorrie talked about is a very hard problem to deal with. I know—I dealt with it for seven years, and I commend her for her strong determination and for standing by Keith through those rough times.

K. C.
Tyler, Texas

Black Down to Earth

My brother Timmy and I spent my 15th birthday in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and enjoyed meeting Clint Black and enjoyed his show and singing. He's really gonna be a great star. He's a down-to-earth guy.

Celeste Slone
Poteau, Oklahoma



Cheryl Frey and Clint Black take five.

Three Times a Charm

I am a new subscriber and would like to say "Thank you, *Country Music Magazine*" for the January/February feature on my favorite new singer, Clint Black.

I've had the opportunity to see Clint in concert three times and would like to see much more of him in person and in your great magazine.

Cheryl Frey
Irvine, California

Fan Joins Mandrell Onstage

Michael Bane, I wish to say thank you for the wonderful article, 20 Questions with Barbara Mandrell, in your January/February issue.

She is a beautiful person who has given so much to so many. I had the privilege of joining her onstage for the taping of her "Get to the Heart" concert in Huntsville, Alabama, on April 18, 1986. The program later aired on The Nashville Network on April 25, 1987.

Thank you, *Country Music Magazine* and Barbara Mandrell, for all you do.

James Hooper
Muscle Shoals, Alabama

Hazel Tempers Truth with Kindness

Thank you, Hazel Smith, for your letter to Keith Whitley in the September/October 1989 issue. It was so heartfelt and compassionate. My tears have not yet dried.

I read my *Country Music Magazine* from cover to cover as soon as it arrives, but your People section always comes first. Unlike other columnists, you seem to seek out the pleasant things to tell us. Even your rare criticisms are tempered with kindness.

Mickey Rosenstein-Mack
Glenview, Illinois

Right on the Mark with Steve Wariner

You were right on the mark in the People section of the January/February issue when you said that Steve Wariner should have made it to the top already and that his getting there is long overdue.

I have wanted to get this off my chest for a long while now. Steve has been a star in my eyes since I first heard him sing "Kansas City Lights" back in 1979 or 1980. So let's see Wariner get the credit he deserves at the next awards show!

Larry Murphy
Greenville, Texas

Searching for Rose Maddox

In the People section in the November/December issue, there was a piece on Rose Maddox. It immediately caught my eye even though I only know her as the woman who sang a song after which I was named in 1965. I have heard my mother talk of her quite often but still do not know nearly enough about her and the song "Tia Lisa Lynn." Is there any address where I can write her and find out more?

Teealeesa Varley
Lubbock, Texas

Direct letters to Rose to us. We will forward.—Ed.

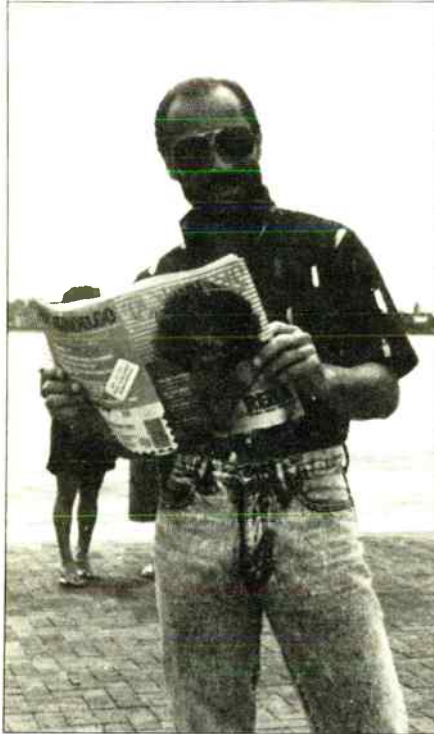
Highway 101 in Concert

My daughter Denise and I had the pleasure of seeing Highway 101 at the Walworth County Fair in Elkhorn, Wisconsin, this fall, and they were just great. *TNN* was also there to tape the show.

Grace Cummings
Lake in the Hills, Illinois



Grace Cummings' daughter Denise with Paulette Carlson, left, and Grace, right, with Cactus Moser.



LOOK WHO LIKES COUNTRY MUSIC
Lee Greenwood taking a Country Music "Reba" break before going onstage at radio station WCMS' 35th Birthday Party in Virginia Beach, Virginia, last July. Emmylou likes the July/August 1989 Reba issue, too. Wonder if Emmylou caught Reba McEntire and fan Alta Mosher reading her issue back in Letters in May/June 1989.

Where's Lee Greenwood?

Hey, *Country Music Magazine*, where's Lee Greenwood? Are you ever going to have anything on him? He's one of the best!

Laura Dobbins

Rutherfordton, North Carolina

See photo this page. -Ed.

Stuart's Sexy Eyes

I saw Marty Stuart on *Austin City Limits* about four years ago. Shortly after that you printed an article about him. I have since seen his videos and seen him on *Nashville Now*. From your article in the September/October 1986 issue, I know he has long been a well-respected session man, but I want to know why in the world he hasn't been marketed better. Besides being an excellent musician, he is a dangerously attractive man. With his zillion watt smile and his very sexy eyes, he has as much magnetism as Ricky Van Shelton—if not more.

Lynn Oatman

Liverpool, New York

Back issues available.-Ed.

A Boost for Becky Hobbs

Just a few lines to say hello to Hazel Smith. What you said about *All Keyed Up* and Becky Hobbs in the People section in the January/February issue is the truth. It is the best country album ever. "She Broke Her Promise" is one of the best love songs I ever heard in my life. She is the best singer I have heard and a super-nice lady.

Jimmy Spencer

Kings Mills, Ohio

Feature on Hobbs coming soon.-Ed.

Alabama, Artists of the Decade

In April 1989, during the Academy of Country Music Awards, Alabama won Artist of the Decade.

I realize there are people who may not think they deserve the award. But they did get it, and they do deserve the recognition for it.

Gina Burgarello

Reno, Nevada

For more on Alabama, see the People section in this issue. -Ed.

Alabama Helps Hugo Victims

Recently the group Alabama performed a benefit concert for the victims of Hurricane Hugo. I attended that concert and enjoyed it enormously.

I would appreciate anything you can do to make them aware of how grateful we all are here in South Carolina for their generosity.

Jan Jenkins

Summerville, South Carolina

Personal Interest in Crowell

I really enjoyed the story on Rodney Crowell in your September/October issue. He's a terrific performer in concert, as well as a great singer, writer and producer. I know Rodney doesn't like much known about his personal life, but we fans can't help but be interested in him. So I hope you'll have more on Rodney very soon—like a cover story!

Susan Bone

Somerville, Indiana

Or a centerfold? Stay tuned!-Ed.

What Anderson Does Best

My congratulations to Rich Kienzle for such a fine CMM Update on the beautiful Lynn Anderson, in the People sec-

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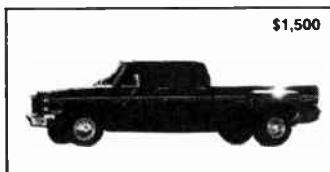
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tion of the November/December issue. What a treat it was to read the latest on one of the biggest names in all of country music. She has been my favorite since she immortalized the phrase "I never promised you a rose garden," and I'm glad she's back on track!

I hope she keeps on singing because, as the title of her last album reads, it's *What She Does Best*.

Michael Dempsey
Charleston, South Carolina

"Loveless" Seeks Loveless

I am a subscriber of *Country Music Magazine*, and I want to request that Patty Loveless come to the fair in Gridly, California, for a concert really soon. I hope her manager will book her. Please, I am a big fan of Patty's, and I would love to have dinner with the best looker and best singer in country music today. I'm single and a good man, aged 28.

Randy Cox
Oroville, California

Loveless management, are you listening?—Ed.



The lovely Loveless caught in concert by Denise Farrell.

Country Music Caught His Eye

Like so many other country music fans, I came across your terrific magazine quite by accident.

The young neighbor across the street came to the door selling magazine subscriptions as a fund raiser for his school. He had every one ever printed from *Reader's Digest* to *Life*. *Country Music Magazine* caught my eye and I ordered it. January/February's issue came in today, and I was immediately hooked.

Thanks for a superb, well-edited and classy mag about my favorite kind of music. One suggestion: how about a department or section devoted to country gospel?

Don Kelson
Woburn, Massachusetts

Any other good stories out there about discovering this magazine, send 'em in. As for including country gospel, we try, especially in Buried Treasures and in People. —Ed.

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Ricky Van—Man of the Hour

I am waiting for a centerfold of the man of the hour, day, month, year—Ricky Van Shelton.

I got to attend a Ricky Van Shelton concert in August at Tombstone Junction, Parker's Lake, Kentucky, where it was hot as blue blazes. I don't get out in that kind of heat (near 100 degrees) for anyone, but my friend and I stuck it out through a huge crowd, traffic and long lines to see his show, take pictures of him and get his autograph. I already knew he could sing, and I predicted some time ago he was gonna be *big*. Well, this guy is also *good lookin'*!

Marilyn McGuffey Combs
Waynesburg, Kentucky

How about a centerfold this issue?—Ed.



Debbie Sneed loved meeting Eddy Raven at a concert in Kentucky.

Rah-Rah for Raven

We all know what a great performer Eddy Raven is on stage. However, I recently had the privilege of meeting him after a show in Frankfort, Kentucky, and I was really impressed by the way he greeted his fans. He took time for autographs, pictures and conversation. My husband and I were so impressed by him that we drove 500 miles to see his show on New Year's Eve in Kansas City. He put on a great show there as usual. Thanks, Eddy!

Debbie Sneed
Louisville, Kentucky

Come In, Roger and Steve

Many thanks for printing a letter from me in your Foreign Correspondents section in Letters in the July/August 1989 issue. It got me over 60 replies, and I've answered all but two—Roger Luke and Steve who has 155 tapes and wants to visit England and Scotland. I've lost your addresses! Please write again.

Martin and Suzette Young
Birmingham, England

Roger and Steve, send letters to us. We'll forward the mail.—Ed.

East German Fan

I very much enjoy your *Country Music Magazine*. I hope in the future to receive more issues because I'm interested in all things "country."

We here in the German Democratic Republic have great troubles in these times, but we are free! That's the best in 1989.

Now I can make a country music show with people from East and West.

Ralph Freitag
Brandenburg, GDR

Bravo, Ralph, and all your fellow citizens.—Ed.

Talk Back, Ernie Ashworth

Have you ever heard of a fellow named Ernie Ashworth? He sang "Talk Back Trembling Lips." We last heard from him in the 1960's or 1970's. We were wondering if he has passed away.

Patricia Tenney
Winchester, Virginia

Ernie is alive and well and still performing, including monthly on the Opry. "Talk Back Trembling Lips" was due out the end of February on an album titled *World Cuts on the Emerald label, available through Music Town Distributors in Nashville. Ernie, if you're listening, come in, please.*—Ed.

Looking For Cousin Carl

My friend Darrell and I are trying to find out about his cousin, Carl Belou. We'd like to get his records if we can and find out what ever happened to him and what he's doing now. Darrell says Belou was popular in the 1960's and is from Oklahoma.

Celeste Rivas
Auburn, California

Do you mean Carl Belew of "Stop the World" fame, born in Salina, Oklahoma? Who knows his whereabouts now?—Ed.

Vicki Bird Sings

I would like to see more of the newcomers. For example, I saw a little article about Vicki Bird in the People section of the January/February issue. She is such a great singer. Please put more information on her in your magazine.

Pat Wendell
Fayetteville, West Virginia

Watch the birdie, Hazel.—Ed.



COUNTRY MUSIC CARDS

More in a series of interesting cards received by CMM. Herewith, Christmas greetings 1989 from Ralph Freitag of the German Democratic Republic and the Sandler Hudson Gallery, an art gallery in Atlanta, Georgia.

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CMSA Members Cast Your

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See Page 68

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Too Uptown

My favorite country songs are old-time country. I don't care much for this modern country sound. Songs like "The Knoxville Girl," "Maple on the Hill," "In the Pines," etc.—now, they are real country songs. This modern country is just too uptown. I can't accept it.

Steve Nelson
Burnsville, Mississippi

Sounds like the new American Academy for the Preservation of Old Time Country Music would be right up your alley. See the For CMSA Members Only page for details.—Ed.

Alone at the Top

I agree with Janie Waters in Letters in the January/February issue, who says the *Alone* album by Vern Gosdin is the best album to come along in country music in years. I have been a country music fan since 1950, and I have hundreds of albums. *Alone* is my favorite. "Chiseled in Stone" is also great—CMA Song of the Year!

Rose Ann Wilson
Jasper, Indiana

For more on Vern, see feature in this issue.—Ed.



Jennifer McCarter explains to a Kansas City crowd that she is not the twins' mother, sent by Rae Lynn Hammer.

Seeking The McCarter Sisters

Howdy! What is that old saying—"seek and you shall find"? Well, darlin', I have seeked and I still can't find anything in your magazine about my favorite trio, The McCarters.

Come on *Country Music* reporters, get busy and write some McCarter stories!

Rae Lynn Hammer
LaHarpe, Kansas

Our first feature on The McCarters ran in the November/December 1988 issue. Back issues available for \$2.50 in our New York office.—Ed.

Don't Close Your Eyes to Dwight

I am in full agreement with Valerie Croy and Cathy Carrigan in Letters in the November/December and January/February issues. Who cares what Dwight Yoakam wears? If that is the problem people are having with this

great entertainer, they need only close their eyes and listen to the man sing. The only thing is—if they go to his concerts with their eyes closed, they would miss one hell of a performance!

Paula Su Traut
Acampo, California



Dot Roggi revisits Willie Nelson outside "Honeysuckle Rose."

Willie Nelson and Dot

I was very lucky last year to visit Willie Nelson on his bus "Honeysuckle Rose" with my daughter-in-law Patty.

I have met him at least twice a year for the past ten years. I go to his concerts near and far. His music is great. He has another song out now that I love called "Nothing I Can Do About it Now." I also like "There You Are."

Dot Roggi
Glastonbury, Connecticut

Devoted to Del Wood

I read with interest the well-deserved tribute to the late Del Wood in the People section in the January/February issue. While it is true that this wonderful star is irreplaceable, the part of the article that said "no one is following in her footsteps" caught my eye.

There are many aspiring artists that have been influenced by Del Wood and one of these artists is my wife, Jeannie Weaver. Jeannie was recently asked to participate in a tribute to Del Wood and will play "Down Yonder" from the stage of The Nashville Palace.

Thanks again for your fine tribute to one of the Opry greats.

Kenneth Weaver
Jonesborough, Tennessee

Headhunters at the Mall

Three cheers for the Kentucky Headhunters for taking time to meet their fans at Bigg's Mall while they were on tour in Cincinnati, Ohio. More performers, when time allows, should do this for their fans.

J. Scott McBride
Georgetown, Ohio

For more on Headhunters, see Record Reviews in this issue.—Ed.

Can't Keep Travis Down

I have to admit that I am one of the fans who was more than a little miffed at Rich Kienzle's reviews of Randy Travis's

last two albums. When his latest, *No Holdin' Back*, came out in late September, I couldn't wait to see how it would be reviewed. It sure sounded like a hit to me! Thanks, Rich, for a great review in the January/February issue. It was really worth waiting for.

Gloria C. Cudney
South Bend, Indiana

Travis is Tops

I want to thank Rich Kienzle for the great record review of *No Holdin' Back* in the January/February issue. Rich finally got on track with Randy Travis! Yes, Rich Kienzle, you said it right with "nothing dragging over the side"! A true masterpiece!

Angie Graves
Murphy, North Carolina

This Stuart Rocks

I really enjoyed and agree with Bob Allen's review of Marty Stuart's *Hill-billy Rock* album in the January/February issue. It is the best album I own. I would like to encourage all of your readers to buy a copy. They will have some great country music to listen to.

Patricia Johnson
New Milford, Connecticut

Stand Up for Ewing—and Bravo Bogguss

I can't imagine what Skip Ewing ever did to Mr. Kienzle to deserve such a negative critique of his new album *The Will to Love* in Record Reviews in the January/February issue. Frankly, it is very refreshing to hear someone sing in a true tone and not sound like a cowboy with bad adenoids. The man must be tone deaf to say Ewing has no "real style of his own," as he definitely has. I immediately know his voice in a new song, and evidently I listen to more country music than Mr. K.

After reading Mr. K.'s critique of Kathy Mattea's album *Willow in the Wind* in the July/August issue, I decided he has become a good recommendation for me to buy the albums he doesn't like.

In contrast to Mr. K.'s usual massacre of new artists, I want to compliment Mr. Bane for his recent critique of Suzy Bogguss's *Somewhere Between*. I agree she can really sing and we have seen her in concert—she is terrific, and great to look at too.

Beverly Bigham
Rock Island, Illinois

Many wrote in to support Skip. For more on Bogguss, see feature in this issue.—Ed.

Send Letters to the Editor to *Country Music Magazine*, 329 Riverside Avenue, Westport, Connecticut 06880. Mark your envelope, Attention: Letters.

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People



BMG/RCA Records' executives and staff congratulate Alabama on their Global Achievement Award.

COUNTRY AIN'T HURT THEIR FAME

The folks in this photo that you recognize are the great group Alabama. Any red-blooded female in this country who digs country music knows these boys. Country and proud are the Ft. Payne foursome. Do you believe that some people in Music City are saying they can do better and go farther if we called the music "American" instead of "country"? Well, Alabama knows that's not a bit necessary. Let's just look closer at this foto and the reason for it. Alabama received the first Bertelsmann Music Group Global Achievement Award for their outstanding contributions to music. After 26 Number One singles and 10 Number One albums, boasting sales of almost 40 million records internationally, the fellows were honored in New York. All the Bertelsmann Music Group (who own RCA, Arista and Ariola record labels) showed up for the do. The award was presented by

Michael Dornemann, President and CEO of Bertelsmann. RCA/Nashville's Joe Galante was present, as were public relations person Brenna Davenport-Leigh and Bob Buziak, President of RCA. The stars of the luncheon were, of course, Alabama. The members of the heralded group were surprised to learn that they had record sales in Israel and Nigeria and other faraway places. Sun don't never set on the music of Music City, USA. I'd go as far as to bet that somewhere on this earth someone is playing a song by Alabama 24 hours a day, seven days a week, nonstop. What makes it so sweet is these guys are country and proud... 'cause being country ain't hurt their fame.

WHITEY SHAFER INDUCTED INTO SONGWRITERS HALL OF FAME

The great Whitey Shafer was inducted into the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame. NSAI recognized Shafer for many reasons. I will name a few—

"That's the Way Love Goes," "All My Ex's Live in Texas," "Does Fort Worth Ever Cross Your Mind," "The Baptism of Jesse Taylor," "Lucky Arms," "I Never Go Around Mirrors" and the Keith Whitley classic, "I Wonder Do You Ever Think of Me." There ain't an ugly song in the bunch, Hoss. Oh, how he sings too.

JOHNNY RUSSELL AFTER OUR HEARTS

The big man with the big heart that has been opened for surgery, big Johnny Russell, has been named honorary chairman of the 1990 Heart Gala that benefits the American Heart Association. Cardiovascular disease and strokes kill almost a million people annually. The American Heart Association is dedicated to the reduction of this figure. I'm happy my pal Johnny lent his name to this worthwhile organization. Country music stars are just giants when it comes to helping out.

Reporter: Hazel Smith

Editor: Rochelle Friedman

People



Emmylou Harris joined Bill Monroe for his 50th Anniversary on the Opry.

RONNIE MCDOWELL GONE HOLLYWOOD

Now don't get your dander up. **Ronnie McDowell** is about as Hollywood as me. He was just out there recording songs for the ABC/TV special *Elvis Aaron Presley*. Slated to air this year, the series was filmed in Memphis. **Priscilla Presley** was executive producer for the eight-episode special. McDowell sang nine songs for the show.

MONROE HONORED

The 78-year-old man of iron with nerves of steel, **Bill Monroe**, celebrated 50 years at the Grand Ole Opry recently. This, of course, means that bluegrass music is 50 years old. Can you believe that the man who invented bluegrass and named it for his homestate did not have an hour of stars and friends on national prime-time TV? Thank God for *The Nashville Network* and the Grand Ole Opry who presented Monroe on the televised *Backstage at the Opry* with **Keith Bilbrey** and also on the televised portion of the Opry. Staff Opry announcer and longtime friend **Grant Turner** hosted the event. **Emmylou Harris** dueted with Monroe on "Kentucky Waltz," "Rose of Old Kentucky" and "Blue Moon of Kentucky." That was a lot of Kentucky songs even for Bill

Monroe. The legendary Monroe blazed into "Mule Skinner Blues" to start off his set, the same song that he performed for the first time on the Grand Ole Opry back in 1939. His debut performance garnered three encores. Bill received a standing ovation in 1989. It was awesome, to say the least. The Opry audience does not rise to its feet for just anybody.

Kenny Lamb from Louisiana hand-made Bill a mandolin with his likeness on the headstock. You would not believe how tickled Bill is with the instrument. I was talking with him the other day, and he allowed that it was a good instrument. "All it needs is playing," said the Old Man of Bluegrass. And play it he will. Getting back to the celebration, the man of the night watched as friends **Dolly Parton**, **Ralph Stanley** and **Ricky Skaggs** commented via video on what Bill Monroe and bluegrass had meant to them and to country music. The greatest part of the whole 50 years is that Bill will still tell you in a heartbeat that bluegrass music is the greatest.

RICKY VAN SHELTON DONATES 20 GRAND

Ricky Van Shelton donated his entire take from a show in Spartanburg, South Carolina, to the South Carolina relief fund for Hurricane Hugo victims. The

take was a grand total of \$20,000. Good for Ricky Van, I say. And I hope he makes 20 million for his kind generosity.

JEANNIE AT THE BARN

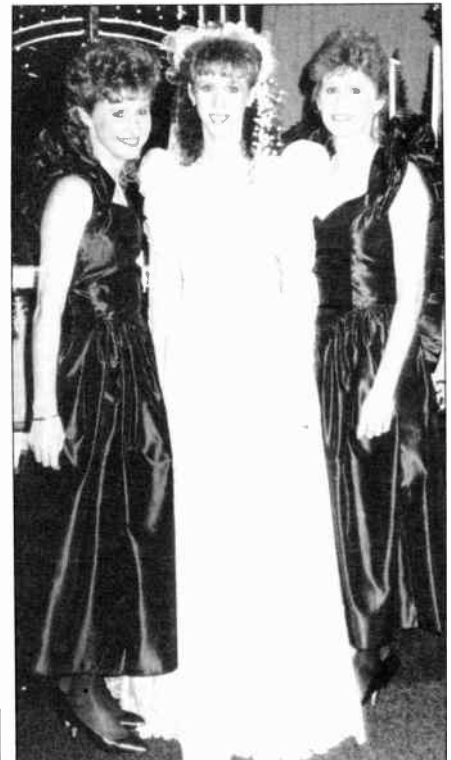
Jeannie Seeley called to tell me how excited she was to be appearing at Chaffin's Barn Dinner Theater here in Nashville in the comedy *Everybody Loves Opal*. This is the Opry star's first non-singing/just acting role. As always, Jeannie was great.

HAVE YOU NOTICED?

Friends, have you noticed that the late **Keith Whitley** bears a striking resemblance to the late blue yodler **Jimmie Rodgers**? Scary, isn't it?

I DO'S ESCAPE NO FAMILY

Cindy Burch, the youngest of **The Burch Sisters**, said "I do" to longtime beau **Lee Davis**. The private ceremony was held in the girls' hometown of Screven, Georgia. Davis, a mechanical engineer, is from Ludowici, also in Georgia, where the newlyweds will reside. Congratulations are in order.



Charlene and Cathy Burch of **The Burch Sisters** pose with **Cindy** after her candlelight ceremony.

People

JUNE FORESTER SAYS IT, TOO

The last remaining single Forester Sister weds. June Forester married the group's road manager, Joel McCormick. The couple eloped during a tour to the Caribbean and Europe. I tell you what, I don't believe that a couple is really responsible for their actions in the Caribbean. Just kidding. We wish the newlyweds much happiness.

IT'S A GIRL FOR RICHIE ALBRIGHT

Richie Albright, manager/producer for David Lynn Jones, and Richie's wife Linda Buchanan are the proud parents of a daughter, Richel Waylyn. The little tyke is named for her daddy and her daddy's friends, Waylon Jennings and David Lynn Jones. Albright was drummer for the legendary Waylors, Jennings' road band, for 17 years.

GUESS WHAT

Dan Seals goes to Kikuya (a wonderful Japanese food store) and gets his own rice. The boy is smart. There are no songs as good as a Dan Seals song, and there is no rice as good as Japanese rice.

HANK JR. AND OTHERS HONORED

Those who eat at my table figure that Madonna, Prince, Frank Sinatra, Kenny Rogers and Fleetwood Mac should be honored to be recipients of the Sony Tiffany Walkman Award along with Hank Williams Jr. Shoot, we think anybody ought to be honored to be in the same company with Hank Jr. The award was in celebration of the 10th anniversary of the Walkman. I cannot believe that wonderful machine has been around a decade.

SAWYER BROWN ENTERTAINS BENEFIT FOR SADD

Me, myself and I want to offer our thanks to Sawyer Brown for their efforts on behalf of SADD (Students Against Drunk Driving). We applaud you, and we hope that other country music people will become involved in this worthwhile cause.

HELPING TO ROLL A TRAIN

The Carson City Rotary Foundation commissioned artist Steve Saylor to paint images of celebrities inside a restored coach from the Virginia-

RCA WELCOMES BACK EDDY ARNOLD



Those of you wondering what Eddy Arnold is doing these days can rest easy. The man who sold over 75 million records, one of the first country artists to perform at Carnegie Hall, recently signed a deal with RCA for a new record which will be released soon. Arnold began his career with RCA Records the first time around in 1949. Pictured are Joe Galante of RCA sitting with Arnold and Jack Weston and Randy Goodman, standing, also from the record label.

Truckee Railroad. The rotary club hopes to raise monies from the sale of prints from these paintings. Our folks who have agreed to let their images be used for this cause include my pals Waylon Jennings and Jessi Colter along with Roy Clark, Hoyt Axton, Dolly Parton, The Judds, Boxcar Willie and Randy Travis. Paintings of the six living governors from the state of Nevada have already raised over \$150,000. And this is what you call helping to roll a train that has stood still too long.

THE CHARLIE DANIELS STORY ON RADIO

A radio special, *The Charlie Daniels Story*, which already airs on some stations, will soon be available to over 2,000 stations nationwide. Highlighting Charlie Daniels' 35-year career in country music, the special touches on his private life and his personal beliefs as well. Charlie, who has never been known to

skirt an issue, has gone head on with his *Simple Man* album and single on Epic, with anti-crime lyrics that have drawn some criticisms in print. Opinions are like mouths, everybody has got one, and me and Charlie both got ourselves a pretty good-sized one. We do say what we think and believe.

BILLY JOE ENDORSES SHURE

Billy Joe Royal is surely endorsing Shure mikes these days. He will appear in a bunch of ads. I sure like his song, "Till I Can't Take It Anymore."

OPRYLAND USA CLAIMS HYLAND

Publicist Mike Hyland has joined the Opryland Music Group as a senior public relations representative. Hyland will concentrate on the Opryland Music Group. Hyland is a well-known figure on Music Row, having represented many artists and record labels as well

People

as working as a reporter and music editor. His offices will be in the Opryland Complex on Music Row, where he will also represent Gaylord Syndicom, the TV syndication company that produces and distributes *Hee Haw*.

GOD BLESS YOU, ANNE

Condolences to Anne Boatman. Anne's husband, the late Bob Boatman, was the director of *Hee Haw* for many years. Bob was accidentally shot at the couple's Hendersonville home when a gun fell off a dresser and went off.

SKIPPING AROUND

MCA's Skip Ewing departed his manager Ken Stilts and has signed with Jack McFadden for personal representation. Stilts is well-known as The Judds' manager, while McFadden managed the late Keith Whitley.

THERE'S SILVER AND GOLD IN MUSIC CITY

K.T. Oslin's album *This Woman* has been certified platinum. That means it's sold in excess of 1,000,000 records. The young man named Clint Black, the boy with the big hat, now boasts a Gold album. Yep, that young Texan's first

album out of the chute, *Killin' Time*, shot up the charts like mercury in August. We congratulate this RCA duo for this accomplishment and for their sold-out performance at the Big Apple's famed Carnegie Hall last fall. The Carnegie Hall feat had to be a proverbial shot in the old ego for Oslin, who lived in that city for 22 years trying to keep her head above water and her belly fed.

CONDOLENCES TO JO-EL SONNIER

Jo-el Sonnier's best friend, biggest fan and darling wife, Jamie, died of a heart attack in Bogalusa, Louisiana. She had suffered for a long time with heart disease. Our prayers and condolences are sent to Jo-el. We'd also like to thank Jo-el's pal, actor Judge Rhinehold, for taking care of his pal Sonnier following the tragedy. Movie stars and country singers are real close and really help each other when there is a need.

ALABAMA AND THE RAVEN TAKE FLIGHT

Alabama and Eddy Raven appeared at the Alladin Theatre in Las Vegas recently. Eddy's Fan Club now has a hotline. Isn't that hot? If you want the number, it's (615) 822-8121. For updates and concert schedules, give a call.



Paulette Carlson and Randy Smith wed in Red Wing, Minnesota. Highway 101's lead singer and her new husband plan to live in Nashville.

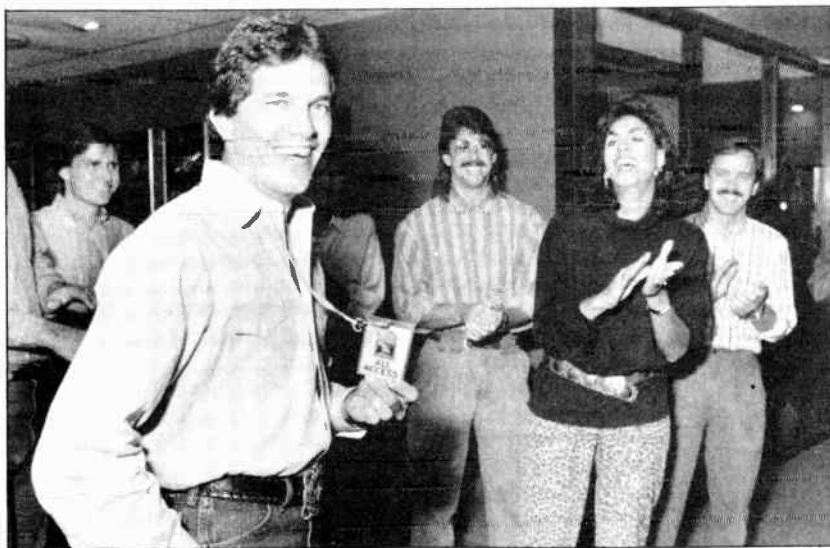
HIGHWAY 101 STILL AROUND

In the wake of rumors that they were breaking up, the award-winning group Highway 101 turned to their public relations firm, manager, record label and family to plead untrue. First of all, Paulette Carlson, lead singer and only female aboard, was getting married to Randy Smith. Secondly, Paulette was pursuing a solo album. So rumors got around town that the group was through. Truth is, they have a single on the charts, "Who's Lonely Now," plus plans to tour with biggies like The Judds, Reba McEntire and Hank Williams Jr. in addition to headlining concerts on their own. They plan to record together again soon. They also have designs on Europe for June. The breakup rumors got completely out of hand, says manager Chuck Morris. We always say back in my home in Caswell County, North Carolina, if it ain't broke, don't fix it. Far as I can tell, Highway 101 ain't broke. It don't need fixing. Just keep on singing.

STAY OUT OF THE DITCHES

Exile's first single on Arista Records is titled "Keep It in the Middle of the Road." The group also has a video of the song that you and me will probably have seen over and over by the time you read this.

ALL ACCESS



Hazel sez, "That's my all access pass that George Strait has around his neck. Now you may have read otherwise, but George and I both know that he always has an all access pass around his neck in case I show up. Here George is visiting with those wonderful folks at MCA Records who keep his music where it belongs...at the top of the charts."

People

I AIN'T GOT NO REBA JACKET

At an auction for earthquake victims, a **Reba McEntire** jacket was auctioned for \$350. The individual who bought the jacket had a big heart and re-donated it. The second time around the jacket went for \$675, for a grand total of a grand and twenty-five bucks. Thanks, generous folks, and our thoughts and prayers go out to those who still suffer the effects of the San Francisco earthquake last fall.

STEVE WARINER PRESENTS

During special presentation ceremonies at the Country Music Hall of Fame, **Steve Wariner** donated a black Takamine guitar that he'd used in recording, the suit he'd worn on his *Life's Highway* album cover, original lyrics for his Number One single, "Where Did I Go Wrong," and a pair of old Converse tennis shoes. The shoes were sweaty, dingy and very used by the star who plays basketball while on the road. MCA Records' Wariner continues to record hit records.

OSBORNE BROTHERS AT THE LONE STAR

The great **Osborne Brothers** duo took their style of bluegrass to New York's Lone Star Roadhouse. The Big Apple audience was blown away by real bluegrass as opposed to the watered-down stuff they have been punished with by and large. **Sonny** and **Bobby** have one of the hottest bands ever.

MRS. BILL ANDERSON HONORED

Becky Anderson, wife of Opry star **Bill Anderson**, was presented a special award by the National Association of Rehabilitation Nurses during their convention at the Stouffer Hotel in downtown Nashville. In 1984 Becky was in an auto accident and suffered severe head injuries. Since that time she has done extensive work helping other victims with head injuries.

THERE I SAT

I was in one of our local eateries, The Cooker, having a business lunch when almost superstar, that good-looking and talented **Garth Brooks**, walked in. He spied me, then walked the length of the building to kiss me on the mouth. The boy has great taste in what women to kiss and just as great a talent in the

songwriting/singing area. His "If Tomorrow Never Comes" chart-topped at Number One, and the hillbilly from Oklahoma hired an airplane to fly over Nashville with a banner claiming so. I don't blame him. When a hillbilly goes Number One in this town, he has a right to be proud. Congrats, sweet boy.

K.T. SINGS FOR SONGWRITERS

RCA diva, **K.T. Oslin**, lent her talents to the Nashville Songwriters Association for a benefit concert for that organization. K.T. said, "I am extremely pleased to be in a position to help the NSAI in their efforts on behalf of all songwriters." Oslin was the first female songwriter to win the prestigious Song of the Year award from the CMA in 1988 when she copped the honor for her self-penned song, "Hold Me." The song also won K.T. a Grammy.

NASHVILLE MARQUEES

The movie theaters in Music City featuring *Steel Magnolias* with Tennessee's favorite child **Dolly Parton** all read like Dolly had top billing. Starring: **Dolly Parton**, **Sally Field**, **Shirley McClain**, etc. I just love it. By the way, Dolly whizzed through town, stopping at CBS long enough for a Number One party for her self-penned "Yellow Roses" single. This is the second chart-topping single from her *White Limozeen* album.

TWO FRIENDS BECOME ONE

Roy Wunsch is the main man at CBS/Nashville. For years **Mary Ann McCready** worked next door to Roy in marketing. They were the best of friends. This wonderful friendship became a blendship on Thanksgiving. The duo were married in Roy's hometown, St. Louis. Congratulations to the happy pair. I personally send my love and good wishes. Next year I won't have to send them two Christmas cards.

THE IRREPRESSIBLE HAZEL SMITH

One of the most eligible bachelors around town is **Tony Gottlieb**. The handsome Tony manages **Dan Seals** and is partners with **Kyle Lehning**. Kyle produces folks like **Randy Travis**, **Baillie and The Boys**, **Anne Murray** and, of course, **Dan Seals**. Bigtime stuff. Tony and I occasionally go out on the town, the handsome, eligible, young man and the...me. Tony recently escorted me to F. Scott's, real close to being one of them 'six forks' places, where we were seated at tables with white linen cloths and more silverware than mama raised our entire family with. The food was just lip-smacking good, and the company was the best. Friends we bumped into on the memorable occasion were CBSer's **Bob Montgomery** and **Mike Martinovich**, and other fine folks. A good time was had by all.



Dolly was honored at an intimate gathering commemorating the 23rd Number One single of her career, "Yellow Roses." Leading the applause for Dolly is CBS' Roy Wunsch, president of the Nashville label.

People

THE HAT TOUR



Garth Brooks, Ricky Van Shelton and Clint Black. What a trio! These three bright stars played three dates together not long ago. In Tulsa the trio broke previous crowd records and packed in over 10,000 people at the Tulsa State Fair. Somehow that doesn't surprise me, what with all that talent and good looks. Three for the price of one, I say that's a good deal. By the way, the stuffed devil is Ricky's favorite road mascot.

TANYA TUCKER'S BIRTHDAY

When you are 31, you are still young enough to give yourself a birthday party, and that's just what Tanya Tucker did. For this, her second year to honor herself, Tanya chose the Magnolia Room at the Opryland Hotel. Little Presley Tanita Tucker was the star of the show. Other stars who graced the party were Marie Osmond and children, Steven Wayne Horton, members of The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, Highway 101 and Restless Heart and former Three Dog Nighter Corey Wells. Ralph Emery dropped the TNN cameras for an on-the-scene Nashville Now look. Beau Tucker, Tanya's dad/manager, surprised her with three midget horses.

JERRY JEFF WALKING STRAIGHT

Jerry Jeff Walker, the Texas poet whose legendary bouts with drugs and booze could fill a complete library shelf, is straight, alive and singing...and has recently signed with the Jim Halsey Agency. Walker's music is presently released on Tried and True Music.

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SIGNATURE II

Following the acclaimed *Signature I* album comes RCA's *Signature II* with Robert Byrne, Bill and Sharon Rice, Peter McCann, Matraca Berg and Harlan (Big Daddy) Howard. The 10-song record is by no means a demo slouch. I wouldn't be surprised if they released "That's Just Bar Talk" and "Be Careful Who You Love (Arthur's Song)" by Harlan and "Lying To the Moon" by Berg as singles. The sixtyish Howard just said 'I do' for the 5th time (on paper), this time to 27-year-old Melanie Smith.

THE OAK OUT OF THE FOREST

William Lee Golden, who was a member of The Oaks back in 1983 during their first White House stop, was sorta ousted in 1987 but has continued to be involved in music. He's now signed with Polygram Records to do a solo album and has been touring with his two sons. I don't think William Lee has been to the White House lately; however, I did see him at Kroger's last week.

STEVE EARLE AND GUITAR TOWN

Country/rock artist Steve Earle presented the clothes he wore on the *Guitar Town* album and the guitar he was holding to the Country Music Hall of Fame recently. He also presented the CMF with posters of himself wearing and holding the same.

THOSE WEST GIRLS

Dottie West has been a mainstay in country music for more years than she wants to admit and still is as beautiful as she was when she started. The red-head spawned a daughter who is just as pretty, who has red hair too, and named her Shelly West. Both the West girls have boasted spectacular separate careers. Sure, they had surprised each other by showing up and walking onstage while the other was singing from time to time, to the delight of the audience and each other. They had never performed as a "West duo" until recently, though. After their successful pairing at the Louisiana State Fair in Shreveport, their booking agency, The Bobby Roberts Agency, is pairing the duo for the 1990s. They are not another mother-daughter act like The Judds, however. They still plan to maintain their separate images.

GMM UPDATE: Justin Tubb

Ernest Tubb died five years ago, but his legacy is very much on the mind of his eldest son, veteran artist Justin Tubb. "We never missed a beat as far as doing *The Midnight Jamboree* and taking care of the Ernest Tubb Record Shops were concerned," he explains. "I'm still hosting. I did the *Jamboree* half the time from back in the 1960's, and about 1975 he turned it over to me because he was never here.

"It upsets me it doesn't get more publicity," Justin continues. "We are the second oldest continuous-running live country music show in America next to the Opry. The others have gone off the air or changed their format. We've been on the air this coming May for 43 years and haven't missed a Saturday night yet." The record shop business is also going strong. Shop number four is now open in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, near Dollywood.

Justin's had problems booking his own dates. "I had a tour of England and a deal in Calgary, and about five or six other dates booked between August 1st and the end of the year, and every one of them fell out. I had \$28,000 worth of work fall through within a period of two weeks—just one of those things. I don't want to go 200 days a year, but I like to go out and keep in touch with the fans."

He understandably declines comment on legal wrangles between himself and Olene Tubb, Ernest's last wife, wrangles that have gone on since E.T. died. But he has been busy helping promote Rhino Records' *Ernest Tubb Live, 1965* album, a live E.T. performance done in Washington State nearly 25 years ago. This release pleased him, but he's anything but pleased with his dad's old record company. "MCA has *not one thing* available by my dad," he says.

In 1977 Justin released "What's Wrong With the Way that We're Doin' It Now?"—a lament about that era's crossover country-pop. Randy, Dwight and Ricky have changed that, and Highway 101's new *Paint the*

Town album features "Walkin' Talkin' Cryin' Barely Beatin' Broken Heart," a minor 1964 hit for Johnny Wright co-written by Justin and Roger Miller. "That says a lot about our music from that era," says Justin, "that they keep goin' back and pickin' up songs. It says what I been sayin'—there *wasn't* nothin' wrong with the way we were doing it.

"I'm not trying to see the music go back to Square One. That would be ridiculous," Tubb admits. "Country music has always changed. There's been change from the time that Pee Wee King and my dad and Eddy Arnold joined the Opry. And adding electric guitars and drums was a gradual, normal process accepted by everybody. They continued to work side by side with the bluegrass people. But with the changes they've had lately, they tried pushing us out, ignoring us and getting rid of us."

In 1947 Ernest Tubb fought to replace the term "hillbilly" with the more dignified "country and western." Today, with Dwight and others using the term proudly, Justin says, "I think that my dad would agree—I'd rather be called a hillbilly now than a country music singer because of what country music has come to connote: crossover, pop-country, rock-country, everything else. I am a traditionalist, Hank Williams, honky tonk kind of musician. If they want to call us hillbilly, I'm all for it."

One major project occupying Justin's time recently was preparing for the sixth *For E.T.* Radiothon over WSM. Ernest died of emphysema, and the fund is dedicated to helping the American Lung Association fight the disease. The first radiothon was held in 1985. This year's was to be held on February 10-11 right after the Opry, live from the Opry stage, from midnight to 5 A.M. Central Time. "We'll have a toll free number they can call," he said. Donations, welcome year-round, can be sent to *For E.T.* Ernest Tubb Record Shop, P.O. Box 500, Nashville, Tennessee 37202.

—RICH KIENZLE



JIMMY

DON

HAROLD

PHIL

20 Questions with A WHOLE BUNCH OF STATLERS

by Michael Bane

As a matter of fact, The Statler Brothers have been around since the dawn of time, or thereabouts. The nucleus of the Brothers—Don Reid, Philip Balsley and deep bass Harold Reid, began singing together at the Lyndhurst Methodist Church in Staunton, Virginia, in 1955. The group was originally named The Kingsmen, but they changed it to The Statler Brothers after being smitten by the name when they saw it on a box of tissues.

Since then, The Statlers have won crates of awards, riding out the waves of country music with their distinct

1950's tinted harmonies. Not surprisingly, we caught up with all four Statlers—Harold, Don, Phil and the newest Statler Jimmy Fortune—at the Statler home base in Virginia. Also not surprisingly, they gave us 20 answers to 20 questions.

1

Would you guys characterize your music right now as being different from The Statler Brothers' music of 10 or even 20 years ago?

Don: We try to keep our music fresh without a great amount of change. Now, of course, the

songs change. But as far as style and harmony, we try to be something our fans can depend upon. We don't jump on every fad wagon that comes along. We know what we do best; we try to do Statler music, and we've done that all along. We're always trying to keep up, of course. At the same time, we still try to be ourselves.

2

Give me a quick snapshot of the state of country music right now, from The Statlers' perspective.

Jimmy: It's kind of gone

through some changes, hasn't it? To a kind of rock tradition, what rock 'n' roll was 20 years ago is what country music is today, seems like. But it always comes back to tradition, to go back to your earlier question. That's why we try to stick to what we know best.

3

But do you like the country music that's around now?

Phil: Yeah, sure we like some of it. You've got some great new artists coming along that weren't here five years ago. Heck, country music is great right now!

4

Phil, how would you describe a great country song?

Phil: Ha! I don't know! I'm not a writer. I depend on these other guys a lot for that.

5

If you really think about it, though, the real question is what does a singer look for in a good song? Everybody knows songwriters know everything.

Don: Okay, you look for a lyric that the majority of people can relate to. You look for a melody that's going to make somebody turn the radio up, something catchy. So, basically, you're looking for something that's a little bit different; that's got a decent story, maybe a little bit different twist on a old message.

6

There's a limited number of messages out there...

Don: They always said that there were seven plots for movies and stories, so I guess that goes the same for songs...

7

My baby's done left me; my baby hasn't left me but I wish she would...

Harold: And I ain't got no baby!

8

Out of all the millions of songs you've done, do you have your individual favorites?

Don: You know it's strange, but we never get tired of singing what the people want. You go out every night and you do the hits, and people ask you, "Don't you ever get tired of doing those year after year?" And that's a no. As long as they're applauding and liking it, you never get tired of it.

9

Yeah, but aren't there one or two songs that if you sing just one more time, you're going to scream?

Harold: Uhhhhhhh, not really. It's like Don says, you

go out there at night... I guess if you sat and thought about it...if you sat down and analyzed and said, "By golly, I'm so tired of singing 'Bed of Roses' or 'I'll Go to My Grave Loving You' or 'Elizabeth' or whatever. Then, all of a sudden, you get out there and the people start enjoying it, it's brand new again. It really does take on a new flavor.

10

What does it take to have the kind of longevity you guys have had?

Harold: It boils down to having a good time. We go out on stage, and we literally have a good time with the people. Up there on stage, we don't have any inside jokes. We don't have any jokes that are floating around between us up on stage. We let the audience in on everything that's going on. And, usually, the joke is on us, and we like it that way. It's kind of like sitting in the living room with them and having a good time.

11

Do you think that not being in Nashville has contributed to your longevity?

Harold: Yeah, no doubt about it. We were told early on—very early on—that we couldn't live in Virginia; that we couldn't stay at home and stay in the music business. We had to live in New York or L.A. or Nashville. That's the only way we could do it. And we were either too stupid or too green or too stubborn to take that kind of advice. As history has proven, we stayed here. And we made it work. I think we're better off for it. They say you can't go home, so the trick is never to leave.

12

I'll bet there were some times, though, when you were saying, "Pack the bags!"

Harold: Well, at one time, before we really got in the business, that's what we thought we might have to do. Then, we just never seriously considered it.

13

How are the Fourth of July shows going these days?

Harold: Crowds of 80, 85 thousand people every year from—literally—all over the world. I think last year we had all 50 states represented and about 18 foreign countries...

Jimmy: And five planets...

Harold: And five planets.

14

I heard this strange story that Ricky Van Shelton was scheduled to appear with you guys last year, but that he made so many demands for special treatment that he got dropped from the bill...

Harold: Yeah, that's true. We did the show by ourselves—it was the first time ever we'd televised it, did you know that?

15

What sort of extravagant backstage treatment did he want, out of idle curiosity?

Harold: You know, I don't even remember. It was so unimportant, I don't even remember what it was.

16

Do you guys have any extravagant demands in your own contracts?

Harold: I'll tell you the truth, of all the demands and contracts floating around this business, we send out a contract that doesn't even have a rider on it. And most people who've been in the business six months, they've got an eight-page rider that includes everything from shining their shoes to trimming their hair, whatever exotic things they want to eat backstage. And we don't even have a rider. We just go where we go, give the best show we can, get on the bus and come back home. Try to be as little trouble to anybody as we can be. Sometimes—I'm serious—you see an artist who's only been around less than a year, and they'll have a five or six-page rider on their contract. To us, you haven't hardly earned that yet. Of course, you can never

earn an eight page rider, but that's a whole 'nother interview.

17

Country music today almost seems like a career move for a young singer, maybe they studied it in college or something...

Harold: It's very calculated, sure. And I'm not saying that you have to pick cotton, because a lot of great people did not pick cotton—and that's another interview, too. But I feel like if you're one of the people who has something to say to the people, then you have a place there. But if you just chose it as a career move, time will tell. That's between them and their fans.

18

Last time I saw The Statler Brothers, I was amazed at the age-span of the crowd—from babies to grandmothers...

Harold: On top of that, our fans are ageless. Our fans don't age. That's something else that's a secret we have that nobody else knows. If you're truly a fan of The Statler Brothers, you're ageless.

19

Nice trick. Okay, here's one. Aside from performing, what's your absolute favorite activity?

Harold: Sex.

Don: Second is movies.

20

And, of course, finally, do you ever miss the Ole Roadhog?

Phil: Well, he does haunt us from the dim past.

Don: Did you say *dim* past?

Phil: Yeah, well, we don't miss him. It was a nice little era. And he may pop up again some day. Who knows?

Harold: You know, when we did the Roadhog, it was pretty bad. The people started sending us tapes of these little Saturday morning shows on local radio, and they were *worse* than the Roadhog. We still have those tapes here in the archives.



PHOTO: TERRY CALOUGE

Strait FEVER



Gasping, sighing and swooning are just some of the symptoms of an epidemic that has been sweeping the country. It's a harmless malady, the kind a certain Texan at least hopes will never end.

by Bob Allen

It's just a couple of weeks before the end of 1989, near midnight at the Las Vegas Hilton's showroom. At the front tables a good-natured but friendly sort of mayhem has broken loose as George Strait winds up his near two-hour-long concert. Hardly anyone is still in his or her seat. People are standing on their tiptoes, shouting and screaming, scurrying up and down the aisles, waving their programs and rushing expectantly toward the stage.

But all this commotion is not to be feared: it's merely one of the more recent manifestations of the "Strait Fever" epidemic that is breaking out everywhere these days.

"George loves to have the fans up close, as close as they can get to the stage, to where they can walk up and take pictures," Erv Woolsey, Strait's manager and close friend later explains. "He loves to look out there and see 'em being happy. He sees them having fun and he plays off that. It makes it more fun for him.

"Everybody's been pretty calm here," Woolsey

adds with a laugh. "But in other places we've had a couple of stage jumpers! It was amazing how they wrapped themselves around him! You can't peel 'em off! It just seems like it takes forever, but George just stands up there and smiles!

"I've seen many a night," Woolsey chuckles again, "going from the hotel to the bus, where he ends up with lipstick all over his face and people grabbing him. But that's what we work for. I know he enjoys it; he's human, but he keeps it in proper perspective. It would be *awful* lonely between that bus and hotel if *nobody* was there."

Strait himself, wearing a black Resistol hat instead of the usual white one and a pale blue Western shirt, is wrapping up his Saturday night show with "You Look So Good in Love." As he purrs his way through the recitation in the middle of the song, his delivery sends the women in the audience gasping, sighing and swooning and sets the flash bulbs popping.

Then Strait and his agile, masterful, eight-piece Ace in the Hole Band move into "This is Where the

Cowboy Rides Away,” another crowd-pleaser that starts the gals shrieking, cheering, bouncing out of their seats and surging toward the stage.

Next, Strait winds things up with a couple of exquisite Western swing showpieces—“Big Balls in Texas” and “Dance Time in Texas.” These numbers give the band a chance to strut instrumentally while Strait grins and ambles down to the apron of the stage where he signs a few autographs and gathers up the bouquets of long-stemmed roses that are laid at his feet by his feverish devotees.

As Strait skirts the front of the stage,

Mind you, George Strait doesn't break dance, moonwalk or even indulge in hip-shaking or towel-dancing, in the style of Dwight Yoakam. But he's sure learned to work a crowd and seems to be having a good time doing it. On this particular evening, “Strait Fever” is running rampant.

A woman sitting at my table suddenly asks to borrow my pen and rushes frantically up to the stage to try and get George to autograph her neck. Another inquires with a trace of urgency, “Are you going to talk to George later!? If you do, tell him to go back to the *white* hat! The black one gets lost in the shadows!”



George considers Vegas a difficult venue. “It’s a great place,” he says, “but you’ve got to pace yourself.” Signing autographs is a big part of his show. He enjoys it almost as much as his fans.



dozens more in the crowd—most of them women and a smattering of children—bounce up and down on their heels and beckon him, shouting, screaming and waving their hands over their heads: “George! Over here!” “George! Pleeeeze!!”

The band plays on as Strait grins his lopsided grin again and again and touches the brim of his hat as he leans over to sign more autographs and hug a small girl who's been hoisted up on the stage. Someone hands him a big silver balloon on a string. Strait is still grinning as he wanders over and ties the balloon to one of the amplifiers. Someone else hands him a cowboy hat; he signs its brim and gently tosses it back. Then a fan hands him a toy monster. “Now that,” he laughs as he walks over and sets it atop the amplifier by the silver balloon, “is a *real* conversation piece!”

Then the lady feverishly scribbles a partially illegible message on the back of a program and hands it to me in hopes that I can pass it on to the singer: *We met in Arizona. Can we talk?*

Meanwhile, Strait signs one last batch of autographs and gathers one final round of bouquets just in time to scurry back to the microphone and belt out the last verse of “Dance Time in Texas.” Then, with the audience still clamoring for more, he tips his hat and saunters off into the shadows beyond the dimming stage lights.

It may be holiday time in Vegas, but for George Strait, looking back over 1989, the year must have seemed like Christmas nearly every day. Just as some industry observers were beginning to suspect that Strait's rather daunting popularity was about to peak, it instead surged on to new heights:

“Strait Fever” continued to spread faster than the common cold.

Even Ery Woolsey, Strait's fellow southwest Texan, one of his closest friends, and his manager since the beginning, seems quietly amazed by it all: “George's first record came out in March 1981, and now we're rolling into the 1990's. And he's stronger than ever. He's still going up steps, and every record gets better. You think, what else can he do? And then something else happens!”

During 1989, Strait continued breaking attendance records across the country. A while back, he broke the house record previously held by Elvis Presley at the Vegas Hilton. Early in the year he set a new mark at the Houston Livestock and Rodeo Show where he sold out 48,000 seats in that city's astrodome in less than 24 hours. At the Houston Summit Arena he racked up over a million dollars in ticket sales with five shows, outdrawing everyone else who'd ever performed there except Michael Jackson, Kenny Rogers and the opera singer Pavarotti.

Even Strait's 53-minute concert video (much of which was shot at the Vegas Hilton) was recently certified platinum for sales in excess of 50,000—a remarkable figure for a music video. Not long ago the syndicated PBS/TV show, *Austin City Limits*, even extended its customary half-hour-per-performer format to devote a full hour to Strait and his band.

At the same time, Strait's 1989 album, *Beyond the Blue Neon* (the eleventh of his career), received considerable critical acclaim; many consider it his best ever. “I think it's the best I've ever done,” Strait himself later offers. “I felt excited when I came out of the studio, like I'd accomplished something I'd wanted to accomplish for a long, long time.”

More than twenty weeks after its release, *Blue Neon* was still hanging in the country Top Five album charts. Having already sold over a half million copies, the new album has drifted in and out of the top spot several times as it marches briskly toward the million (platinum) sales mark. Three Number One singles, “Baby's Gotten Good at Goodbye,” “What's Going on in Your World” and “Ace in the Hole” (Strait's 11th consecutive Number One and the twentieth of his career), have thus far been pulled from it.

If all of this is the cake, then there's been a heck of a lot of icing, too. Strait has paid a visit to the White House and met with the President, and at a recent ceremony in Texas the widow of the late Western swing king, Bob Wills, presented him with a hat that once belonged to her husband, in apprecia-

tion of all that Strait and The Ace in the Hole Band have done to perpetuate Western swing music and the legacy of Wills.

In another strange outbreak of "Strait Fever," this one amongst Texas socialites, one of the singer's trademark white Resistol hats (which have, in their own way, become as emblematic as Michael Jackson's glove) fetched \$6500 at a celebrity auction to raise money for cystic fibrosis.

And—how *could* we forget!—Strait was also the 1989 recipient of the Country Music Association's Entertainer of the Year award.

"I'll tell ya what!" a very tired-looking George Strait tells me rather dreamily as he sips a watery-looking mixed drink in his dressing room a half an hour or so after the Saturday night Hilton show has ended, and long after the clock has struck midnight, "I *really* wanted that thing, and I was just about to think that it was gonna slip by me. It just knocked me out when they called my name! It's just one of those things that everybody in this business wants to get."

The backstage scene at the Hilton, despite the well-intentioned and rather well-mannered mania on the showroom floor a while earlier, is subdued. For that matter, just about everybody seems to be yawning. A couple of hotel security guards keep watch on the corridor outside the dressing room, though no one much seems to be trying to challenge them. In the outer dressing room, a few bandmembers and various members of Strait's almost family-like inner circle—his road manager, booking agent, fan club president (who is his booking agent's wife) and a few invited guests—are quietly relaxing and chatting.

In a separate dressing room Strait and Norma, his attractive wife of seventeen years, are perched on stools at the little bar in the suite. Norma is yawning and staring into her glass of white wine. George's eyelids are drooping too, and his voice is breaking with fatigue as he discusses the rather disappointing mega-buck Leonard-Duran prize fight which he'd attended down the strip at The Mirage Hotel a couple of nights earlier. He was appalled by the rudeness of the fight crowd, but thrilled to catch a glimpse of Mohammed Ali: "When he walked in, I was on my chair, ya know!" Strait's eyes widen with boyish enthusiasm and his voice cracks again. "I at least wanted to get a look at the guy, because he's one of my all-time heroes."

Meanwhile, Erv Woolsey, the instrumental behind-the-scenes figure in Strait's phenomenal success story, comes into the room. He shows George some prospective photos and art work for his up and coming album which have

been Federal Expressed to him from Nashville for Strait's approval. Then he, too, yawns and goes off in search of two aspirin and a glass of water.

Mrs. Strait blinks and yawns again, then gets up from her stool and walks over and stretches out on a sofa in the corner and closes her eyes. George blinks, sips his drink, glances over at his wife, then runs his fingers through his perspiration-damp hair. It looks as though the aftershock of a remarkable year and too many late nights in Vegas are about to do him in as well.

"It *has* been a great year, for sure," he drawls in weary agreement. "But I tell ya," he shrugs, "I'm ready to go. About ready, really, to wind it up for the year. Vegas is a great place, but a really difficult place to work. It's harder for me than just about anyplace. The room is so small, you sort of feel like you're under a microscope!" He laughs and scratches his head as he reviews the previous four days of jam-packed activities: nightly performances, a regional fan club meeting, participation in an invitational golf tournament, meetings with his various corporate sponsors, the prize fight, attendance at the National Rodeo finals in progress across town (where he was both an awards presenter and a spectator) and endless social visits with various friends he's made along the way, including professional football players, rodeo champions and Colonel Tom Parker, Elvis's mentor.

"Out here," Strait emphasizes, "you've really gotta pace yourself." He

grins his sheepish grin again: "Especially if you're like me and you like to go out and take part in what Las Vegas has to offer. If you don't, you'll wear yourself out."

"This is the last show I have this year, except for a New Year's Eve show in Houston. Then, after the first of the year, I'll start my next album." He frowns: "I was supposed to go in the studio in October, but this past summer we ended up probably working more dates than we ever have in one summer. I don't know how it happened, or why. But it did. And I was just totally burned out and just needed to get away some place and rest. So we postponed the studio sessions until February, when maybe I'll feel a little better."

Aside from the fact that he's a man badly in need of an end-of-the-year vacation, Strait looks great—like he's 37, going on 28. He's enviably trim and handsome in an almost boyish way. And he still seems to wear the same exact hat size that he wore before all the fame and adulation came his way. Which is to say he's polite, low-key, down-to-earth and even ever so slightly bashful and awkward in the interview situation. The rumor has never been verified that he once made an appointment with his dentist to have a root canal in order to avoid an interview. "It's weird for me to say things about myself....I feel real funny talking about myself," he recently confessed to a Nashville newspaperman.

In a way, it's even a little difficult to reconcile this quiet, modest young man

TERRY CALONGE



George owes part of his success to his Ace in the Hole Band. Their Western swing keeps the audience on its feet.

with that poised and ultra-confident-looking figure in the spotlight who presided so masterfully over an audience of nearly 2,000 just an hour earlier. Strait, after all, has become a sort of neo-Marlboro Man role model and hero figure for a whole generation of rural Americans. The trademark Strait starched Wranglers, white shirt and white Resistol is definitely the "in" look with the rodeo crowd this year. At least from a distance, Strait makes all the fame, the arena performances and the constant demands of superstardom, look oh-so-easy.

"Easy!?" he rolls his eyes and lets loose a loud guffaw of laughter. "Well, it's not! I'll tell ya! It kind of comes and goes. You have your good nights and you have your bad nights. Making the transition from clubs to concerts was a *major* adjustment for me. In a club, if the people are up dancing, you know you're doing good. But to get the crowd reacting in a concert hall, that's another story. It's so different, and you've got to work a whole lot harder."

Despite his weariness and his demanding schedule, Strait did finally manage to set aside a few bits and pieces of time in Las Vegas to chat. Later, our conversation was resumed by mobile radio phone from his 8,000-acre ranch deep in southwest Texas brush country where the singer hid out with his family and friends during his much-needed vacation. As the radio signal wavered in and out, his son, George Jr., could be heard playing in the background. "He's older now, and he gets mad if anyone but me calls him 'Bubba!'," Strait laughs. Strait sounded relaxed and light-hearted: more than gratified with the way 1989 had turned out for him and eager to get on with the new year.

CM: *What have you been doing down there in Texas for relaxation?*

STRAIT: A lot of deer hunting. There's some of the best white-tailed deer hunting in the world down here. I've seen quite a few, though I haven't got any yet. I'm getting a little picky—I got a pretty nice one last year in Boonie Crockett that scored pretty high on the record books.

A lot of my relatives come down to visit, too. My whole family, my brother and his family all hunt, and my wife hunts too. *Laughs.* We've got people coming in and out of here all the time, especially this time of year!

CM: *You're got a mess of cattle down there too, don't you?*

STRAIT: Yeah. I've got some heifers I've got turned out right now, but I've mostly been messing with my horses,

doing a little team roping when I haven't been hunting. I've also been going through some tapes, picking songs for the next album, which I'll start recording in a month or so.

CM: *Is the new album going to be the same back-to-the-basics approach as *Blue Neon*?*

STRAIT: Yep. I don't see any reason to change. On the last one I really tried to get away from all the effects the players use on their instruments and just get it down to where you've got your basic guitar and steel guitar sound, with real



ALAN MATOK

1989's CMA Entertainer of the Year.

simple arrangements. And I really feel like I got that; I really don't think you need all that extra stuff.

CM: *How is the cattle business these days?*

STRAIT: *Sounding just like a seasoned farmer.* Gosh, it's been so dry down here! We had a good rain a while back, and that helped a little. I bought this place three years ago. *Chuckles.* But I'm beginning to believe I brought bad luck down here! We didn't have any rain for about the first two years! I've got it stocked real light right now. I've got quite a few ropin' horses, some ropin' steers and some cows.

CM: *Do you ever get bothered by fans down there? Have tour buses come by the house? Helicopters fly over the ranch?*

STRAIT: *Laughs.* Naw, fans don't bother me that much—I'd be worried if they ever *stopped* bothering me! But there's

nobody hardly down here. We're pretty far out of the way. It's way back in the South Texas brush country, almost a two-and-a-half-hour drive from San Antonio, which is where I live most of the time. I spend most of the summer here—at least when I'm home. I'd live down here fulltime if I could. But it's not convenient for my family. There are no schools around, and I'm on the road a lot, and it's a long, long way from an airport.

But no—as far as people bothering me, really they don't. As far as people walking up and wanting an autograph, I'll give it to 'em. And—you hear this all the time—the only time it's really a bother is when you're sitting down having lunch and somebody walks over, and you're just sitting there with your mouth full of food, and they say, "Can I take a picture of you?" *He laughs uproariously.* "Well, my mouth's full of food right now."

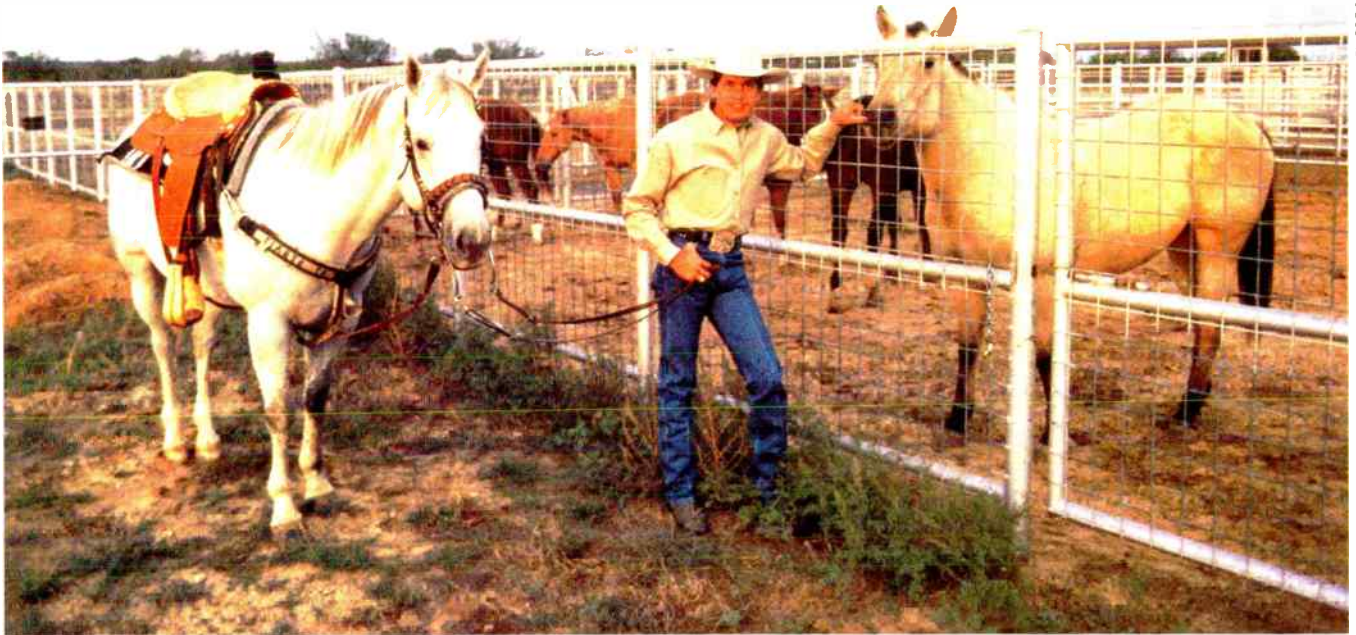
CM: *What about the stage-jumpers—the girls who climb up on stage and wrap themselves around you?*

STRAIT: *Laughs.* Well, I'm not gonna try and tell you that's all old hat! But—yeah, it's all part of it. As far as people jumpin' on stage, I like it that people get that excited by the music. I don't mind. I'm like any other musician, in so far as I feed off that kind of energy. And we've got good security, so the ones that get up on stage don't stay there long! But you know, if I didn't have fans, what would I have? The day I'll start worrying is the day that *nobody's* out there waiting for us!

CM: *Has fame involved any other adjustments for you? I remember a couple of years ago, someone who worked for you told me, "George hasn't changed, but we have. Now, he's not just George; he's George Strait, and we tend to tiptoe around him."*

STRAIT: Yeah, I think there was some of that, but I'm over that now. I've been in the business long enough now that I've adjusted to it. But yeah—there was a degree of adjustment, because I don't believe I changed all that much, but all of a sudden people treated me different. Some of them, who I'd known forever—I don't know whether it was jealousy or what—but all of a sudden things were going good for me, and they treated me like I was a bad guy for it!

I don't know. *Pauses.* It sounds corny, and I know it's been said a lot, but money doesn't solve all your problems. Success is a relative thing, and there are lots of other ways to measure it besides money. And sure—I've been real successful at what I do, and I've made a lot of money in the music business these past few years. But it really hasn't



changed me: I just see myself as what I am, a successful country singer, nothing more.

CM: *But there is a sort of storybook quality to your success. I mean, you've achieved a level of stardom that millions dream of but only a chosen few attain. I doubt if there are very many of us who don't daydream about something like that when we're growing up. Did you?*

STRAIT: *Thoughtful pause.* No. No. I never did dream about it. Never did think about it. I mean, every kid dreams about growing up to be President or something, and I guess I did too. But all I ever thought about when I was eighteen or so, was, "Uhm, maybe I should go in the army." *Laughs.* Which I did! I wasn't that crazy about it, but looking back, I think it did me good.

CM: *You weren't raised up in a musical family, so to speak, were you?*

STRAIT: No, not really. My dad, of course, raised my brother and me on his own, and he raised us in a real religious atmosphere. We're all Baptists, and he always told me that the Lord would tell me what he wanted me to do with my life, and I kind of believe that's really true. So I didn't worry about it much, didn't think about it that much—except maybe that I needed to join the army! Later, when I was in the army, I did start dreaming about a music career. I remember Norma and I would lie awake sometimes, dreaming about how it could be. But we never dreamed it would reach the level it has. My father, I



At his ranch in Texas, above, George keeps an eye on the animals and tends to chores like any other rancher. He also takes part in events at the annual George Strait Team Roping in nearby Kingsville.

think, after I started playing, encouraged me somewhat with music. But I can't blame him if he looked at it from a practical angle. I mean, he knew how many tried, but how few succeeded.

CM: *You seem a very practical and levelheaded person, George. You've got a college degree and almost took a full-time job designing cattle pens at one point. I'm sure there must have been some times along the way when you yourself wondered if it was all just a crazy pipe dream.*

STRAIT: Oh yeah! Yeah! I'd think about that all the time! All the time! Especially after I'd been at it a while and nothing much was happening. Of course, all my friends would tell me, "You sound great!" But I couldn't help thinking they were just saying that because they *were* my friends. It especially got to me after I'd made a couple of trips to Nashville and did some ses-

sions that I thought were really good, and the labels all turned them down. Then I really got to thinking that I didn't want to be 40 or 50 years old and still playing the honky tonks.

CM: *I'm sure you're very glad you kept at it. It seems like every year things just get better for you. 1989 was a really big one, including the CMA Entertainer of the Year Award.*

STRAIT: No question about it! One of the greatest years I've ever had! It would be hard to top it in 1990! And the Entertainer of the Year Award...I'll tell you, that's one of the greatest feelings *ever!* I'd really wanted that thing, and I was just about to think it was going to slip by me! *Dreamily.* It was a real boost for me. I've been on the road now for about eight years, hitting it pretty hard. It just gave me a real shot in the arm, and it couldn't have come at a better time. To be recognized on that level is some-



George's newest venture is his store, The Texas Connection, in the Wax Museum building on Music Row in Nashville.

thing I'm really proud of. *Laughs.* It's just one of those deals where...where...I got it now! I may never get it again, but I got it once!

CM: Which brings us to the inevitable question of peaks and cycles. It seems as if after these last few years, after you'd set attendance records everywhere, sold so many albums and gotten such great reviews, people would just assume that you'd gone as far over the top as you could go and that you would soon run out of steam. Yet, year after year, you've managed to climb a little higher. Last year, you made *Beyond the Blue Neon*, which many think is your best album ever.

STRAIT: I think it is, too.

CM: How did it feel, selling out the Houston Astrodome?

STRAIT: I can't put it into words what it feels like to play a place that big! You can't see the audience, but you can hear them, you can feel the energy! Boy, I get nervous before a show like that! I mean, we're maybe up there for an hour and a half, but after we're through, I'm all hyped up for hours and hours. Then when I finally do settle down, I feel exhausted! Drained! Like I'd been up on stage for eight hours or something!

CM: The inevitable question though is that everybody in this business sooner or later peaks. I can't think of anybody who's managed to sustain that level of popularity forever. Even artists like Willie and Waylon and Kenny Rogers, who more or less owned the 1970's, are no longer the huge concert draws that they once were. Do you ever think about how it might be, five or ten years from now, when things do cool off?

STRAIT: Yeah, yeah. I think about it a lot. I just hope it is five or ten years from now! *Laughs.* It would be great! But in the music business, I don't care what part of it you're in—country, rock—you're up one time and down the next. When it ever happens to me, it's going to be hard to accept, as I'm sure it is for anybody.

CM: Do you suppose you'll still be playing ten years or even twenty years down the road?

STRAIT: I'm not thinking about quitting, if that's what you mean. We'll be out there playing as long as there are fans who want to hear us. I love to get out there and play. All the traveling to and from sometimes wears me down, but the time up on stage with the band is always great.

CM: You and your band made a brief appearance in a movie called *The Soldier a while back*. I'm sure you're sent a lot of scripts; do you see acting in your future? Do you plan on trying to make the transition to the silver screen?

STRAIT: I was in that one movie with my band. We were in this scene in this club, and a fight breaks out and we're supposed to keep on playing like nothing ever happened. That was pretty natural for us, since that *did* happen a lot back in the honky tonk days!

I'm looking forward to trying something like that again. Hopefully, this summer we'll be going overseas to film some westerns. We were going to do it last year, but we didn't get it worked out in time. It would be something new and different, and that's what I like about it. But you never know, it might turn out to be the dumbest thing I ever did in my whole life!

CM: Who are some of your own favorite actors, ones you like to watch?

STRAIT: I love Jack Nicholson. He's maybe the greatest actor of the decade. I loved him and Marlon Brando in *Missouri Breaks*. And *The Outlaw Josie Wales*, with Clint Eastwood, is probably my all-time favorite western.

CM: Russ Barnard will kill me if I don't ask you about your recent trip to the White House, and the "gift" that President Bush gave you.

STRAIT: Sounding a bit dreamy. Yeah! That was great! I was up there for this ceremony to honor people with vo-tech educations who were "success stories." What a great experience! He's a great guy! Really nice! He came out and met us all. We shook hands, and he seemed to know a lot about me. He said, "You're from Poteet, Texas, aren't you?" I said, "Yeah, I was born there." Then later, somebody came and told me, "The President would like to see you in the Oval Office." So we went up, and there I was in the Oval Office! Norma and Bubbaher, I mean *George, Jr.*—were up there with me, and George had taken the day off from school. So the President says to him, "George, I better give you an excuse from school." So he wrote him a note that said, "Please excuse George Strait Jr. from school. He had to come up to the White House to see me," and signed it! He was just so nice! So great! Then he took me into this special office he had and showed me this desk some friends of his had built for him that had speakers built right into it, and he was playing some country music. He really is a country fan; I think he's serious about that. Then he asked me if I'd seen the latest issue of *Country Music*, that there was a picture of me in the centerfold. I told him that I'd been on the road and I hadn't seen it. So he pulled a copy out of his desk and gave it to Norma. It was a great experience!

CM: George, one final question. I know you were asked about this a hundred times while you were in Vegas, but I have to ask you myself: a couple of nights I noticed you were wearing a black hat, George! That's quite a change, isn't it? What sort of deeper meaning are we supposed to read into that?

STRAIT: *Laughs.* Yeah, I've been asked that a million times! There's really nothing significant about it at all. Really, it's just a personal preference. *He grows a trifle defensive.* I still wear white hats sometimes. Then I'll go back to wearing a black one. I kinda prefer the black one. I think people get into that good guy, bad guy deal with the black and white hats a little too much. I think that's kinda silly, don't you? ■



RICKY VAN SHELTON

COUNTRY MUSIC MAGAZINE MARCH/APRIL 1990

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PULL-OUT
CENTERFOLD
OF THE MONTH

RICKY VAN SHELTON

Facts of Life

Personal Data

Birthdate: January 12, 1952
Birthplace: Danville, Virginia
Family: Wife, Bettye; mother, Eloise; father, Jenks; brothers, Ronnie, Don; sisters, Judy, Cacky

Vital Statistics

Height: 5'8"
Weight: 160 pounds
Color eyes: Green
Color hair: Brown
Famous for: White muscle shirt

Recording Career

Record Label: Columbia/CBS Records, 49 Music Square West, Nashville, Tennessee 37203

Albums	Release Date
<i>Wild-Eyed Dream</i>	1987**
<i>Loving Proof</i>	1988**
<i>Ricky Van Shelton Sings Christmas</i>	1989
<i>Ricky Van Shelton III</i>	1990
*Gold Album, over 500,000 sold.	
**Platinum Album, over 1,000,000 sold.	

Number One Singles

"Somebody Lied"
"Life Turned Her That Way"
"Don't We All Have the Right"
"I'll Leave This World Loving You"
"From a Jack to a King"
"Loving Proof"

Videos

Broadcast Videos
"Crime of Passion"
"Somebody Lied"
"Life Turned Her That Way"
"I'll Leave This World Loving You"
"Statue of a Fool"



World Loving You"/*Music City News* Best Male Vocalist, Album of the Year, *Loving Proof*, Single and Video of the Year, "I'll Leave This World Loving You"

Favorite Pastimes

Fishing, hunting for arrowheads and collecting vintage autos. Ricky's auto collection includes three 1958 Edsels, a 1955 Buick, a 1953 Ford pickup, a 1953 Studebaker, a 1950 Chevy and a 1942 Pontiac—not all in running condition. Ricky also likes bush hogging. Current new project is starting a herd of beefalo. He has four animals now, one named Bettye after his wife. Ricky thinks beefalo, a cross between standard cattle and buffalo, may be the meat of the future. It tastes like steak but is low on fat and cholesterol.

Fan Club

Ricky Van Shelton Fan Club membership includes quarterly newsletter, quarterly itinerary, RVS fact sheet, RVS picture, RVS merchandise brochure, RVS lapel pin and RVS fan club T-shirt. If you would like to join, see instructions below.

Television Highlights

From Grit to Gold, TNN Special, November 1989
Ricky Van Shelton Sings Christmas, TNN Special, December 1989

Major Awards

1988 CMA Horizon Award/ACM Top New Male Vocalist/*TNN Viewers' Choice* Favorite Newcomer/*Music City News* Star of Tomorrow
1989 CMA Male Vocalist of the Year/*TNN Viewers' Choice* Favorite Male Vocalist, Favorite Song and Favorite Video, "I'll Leave This

How to Order

To join the Ricky Van Shelton Fan Club and get all the items listed above for \$10, or to order albums listed under Recording Career (cassettes only, \$8.98 each) send check or money order made out to Country Music Reader Service to: *Country Music Magazine*, Reader Service Department, 329 Riverside Avenue, Westport, Connecticut 06880. Add \$1.95 postage and handling for first item, \$.95 each additional item.



FOSTER & LLOYD

An Unexpected Union

Through a fortunate accident Radney Foster and Bill Lloyd were thrown together to write songs. They came up with the hits but also found a sound for themselves.

by Bob Allen

The name sounds like it might have been lifted from a sign in front of a dental practice or a small town law office. The two members—Bill Lloyd and Radney Foster, who are a baby-faced 33 and 30 respectively—could, with their casually stylish duds and articulate, self-assured breeziness, easily pass for third-year law students out slumming it on a weekend.

But don't let the youthful looks or the carefully cultivated yuppie/hipsterish image fool you—Foster & Lloyd are all

music, and all music *business*. On a busy weekday morning, one of their rare days off the road, the two of them are in their manager's airy, atrium-like Music Row office, poring over recent issues of *Billboard*, making a slew of phone calls and attacking a pile of major and minor career decisions with an almost fanatic zeal.

First off, there are some advance phone interviews to promote an upcoming show in the Midwest. Then there's the matter of choosing a director for their next video. "I don't want *blank*," Lloyd says to Foster. "I've seen his stuff; he's too flashy. But I also talked to *blank*. I really like the videos he's done, and I'm

having him send us some samples...."

After all, Radney Foster and Bill Lloyd know too well that they are still in a somewhat precarious position. Sure, they've had a couple of Top Five singles and a warmly received debut album, *Foster & Lloyd*, which sold a respectable 130,000 copies and showed up briefly on the pop charts. Next came a critically acclaimed second album, *Faster & Louder*—the title's a tongue-in-cheek word play on the group's name which hints at the slight musical shift and acceleration that's taken place in their material after more than a year spent honing their sound on the road.

But they also know far too well that

back issues of *Billboard* from previous decades are full of advertisements and rave reviews for dozens of groups that streaked across the sky like summer lightning with similarly impressive but short-lived track records before vanishing forever. "The artist is gone, but the T-shirt lives on," someone once observed. And it's true: at home I've got a dresser drawer full of custom-printed promotional menswear articles of clothing that, even through a hundred washings, have outlasted by far the recording artists whose careers they were meant to commemorate.

Then, too, there is a certain risk inherent in the musical terrain that Foster & Lloyd are attempting to straddle: that uneasy, no-man's land where country meets rock.

They are quick to point out—almost as apologists for what they're trying to do—that there was a time when these two often warring camps of popular music were comfortable bedfellows. "Elvis Presley was really singing coun-

try music interjected with rhythm-and-blues," Bill Lloyd is fond of reminding whomever will listen. "But, above all else, he was a hillbilly singer."

In more recent decades—mostly due to the divisiveness of radio formats and the generation gap—people have tended to forget all about those long-gone times, and instead country and rock have tended to square off and face each other down from across a cultural barricade equivalent in its exclusivity to an electrified barbed-wire fence.

As for Foster & Lloyd's own music, with its impeccably clever two-part harmonies (which have even won them cautious comparison to The Everly Brothers), intricate pop melodies and aggressive electric guitar flavorings, Radney Foster explains: "We're trying to take our personal best of country and rock and slam them together. We feel that what we're doing has a place with both country and rock audiences if they are exposed to it."

The great musical divide that has so

often existed between country and rock is like a slender keyhole through which many have attempted to pass in recent times. But only a relative few have succeeded.

But to F&L—as Lloyd points out—the divide only exists in other people's minds, and in the imaginations of those people in the music industry whose job it is to put records, like apples and oranges, into separate bins. "We pretty much grew up out of the country we first heard, which was the country-rock of The Byrds, Emmylou Harris, Poco, The Eagles, The Burritos, which was really a bunch of hippies who'd embraced country music. That's where we started, and we sort of went backward from there and discovered a whole bunch of earlier stuff that we liked.

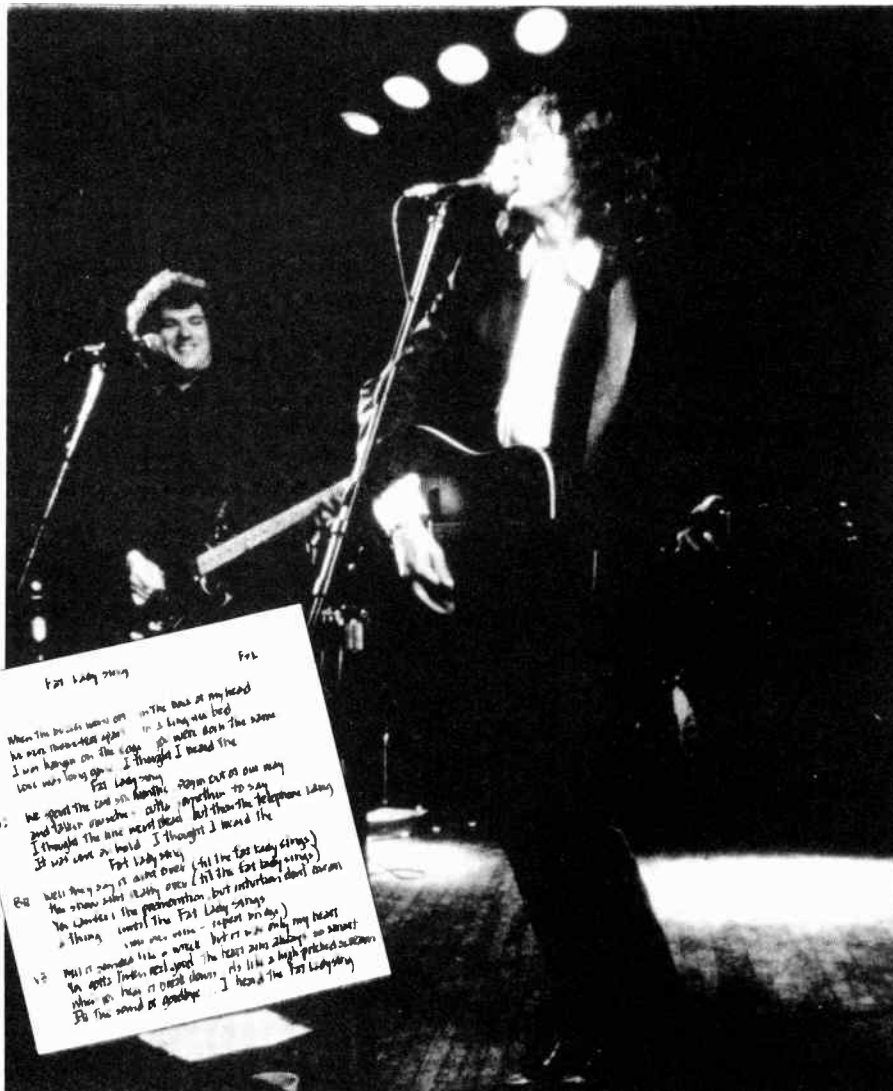
"If you look back at country music in the 1950's and 1960's," he continues, "there was—unlike in the 1970's—something for everybody. There was lots of rockabilly. There were The Everly Brothers and Buck Owens, who was definitely rocking pretty hard.... Fortunately, it seems like in the 1980's, country radio has opened up and started embracing some new styles again."

All of which might suggest that there is a degree of calculation or torch-carrying behind Foster & Lloyd's smooth, harmony-laden brand of neo-country-rock. But they're quick to point out that there's really not—that the whole process that led these two young Nashville songwriters to team up as a duet and record for a major label was really all just a lucky accident. In fact, each of them was deeply entrenched in pursuing a solo career of his own until fate and happenstance threw them together a few years back.

Foster, the one with the glasses and the longish hair, hails from Del Rio, Texas. At an early age he cut his teeth playing in local country and rock 'n' roll garage bands. "In the early 1970's there was a generational schism and a musical schism between country and rock," he recalls. "But I was one of the few people I knew who could float freely from the rock segment to the country segment without any problem."

Foster also began writing songs when he was in his teens: "I don't know," he shrugs, "I think there is a certain *personality* that makes you want to sit in a room and try and write songs while your friends are out going to football games or cruising the strip."

After high school Foster ended up studying forestry and geology at the University of the South, in Sewanee, Tennessee, about a hundred miles southeast of Nashville. But the allure of nearby Music City proved too much: in



Songwriting clicked for Bill Lloyd and Radney Foster; inset, lyrics to "Fat Lady Sings" from their songwriting notebook.

the early 1980's he left school to pursue a country songwriting career.

Bill Lloyd is an army brat whose family eventually settled in Bowling Green, Kentucky, about a hundred miles north of Nashville. In Bowling Green Lloyd worked in the record retail business and played in country, rock and folk groups in the small but thriving live music scene there. Somewhere along the way he was also employed briefly as an engineer in The Record Plant, a famed New York recording studio. But by the early 1980's, the gravitational pull of Nashville's music industry overcame him, as well. Once in Music City he wrote songs, put together his own band and became part of Nashville's "street rebel rock scene," even recording a solo album, *Feel the Elephant*, for a small Boston-based label.

Meanwhile, Radney Foster was supporting his songwriting aspirations by working as a courier for a law firm, waiting tables and working construction. He recalls that once he was even hired to dress up in a fireman's outfit at Fan Fair and hand out a record called "Red Hot." "I don't even remember the artist's name," he laughs.

The two men did not meet until 1985, when they were both signed separately as staff songwriters with the now-defunct MTM Music's publishing company.

"I'd been signed to MTM for a couple months, and I met Bill the first day he was signed," Radney recalls. "They told me, 'Why don't you hang around with this new guy.' So I did. We were both kind of the new kids on the block."

"We were signed from different perspectives," Lloyd explains. "Radney was signed as a country writer, and I was signed as a pop writer. But I wanted MTM to take my country songs seriously, and Radney wanted them to take his pop songs seriously."

Foster & Lloyd, who then could have just as correctly been referred to as Lloyd & Foster, found that they had an instant affinity for each other. Often at night they'd hang around MTM's Music Row offices for hours ("it was cooler than our apartments") with their guitars in their laps, talking about life, "until we eventually got a spark and a song would come up."

Not only did F&L enjoy each other's company immensely, they had *fun* collaborating on songs. Even better, the songs they wrote together began getting recorded almost right off the bat. "It turned out that when we wrote together, it meshed in a way that the people at MTM liked better than what each of us was doing apart," says Foster.

Songs bearing the Radney Foster & Bill Lloyd imprimatur were soon recorded by Sweethearts of the Rodeo



Foster and Lloyd chose Dean Lent to direct their video *Suzette*, filmed on location, above, in Gallatin, Tennessee. The duo teamed up with Rodney Crowell, left, for a tour performance in Kentucky. Patty Loveless and Southern Pacific were on the same bill.

("Since I Found You"), Ricky Van Shelton ("Crazy Over You"—which later became a Number Three single for F&L when they included the song on their debut album), Juice Newton, The Forester Sisters and Marshall Crenshaw (who also played guitar on one cut during the *Faster & Louder* sessions).

The real surprise came one day when Lloyd carried a demo tape the two had made of some of their original songs over to a friend who was an executive at RCA Records, which is only a few paces across the alley from MTM. The motivation behind this, Lloyd insists, had nothing to do with a recording contract, but was done merely in hopes of getting some of F&L's songs recorded by RCA artists. The idea of recording the tunes *themselves*, as a duo, had not crossed their minds.

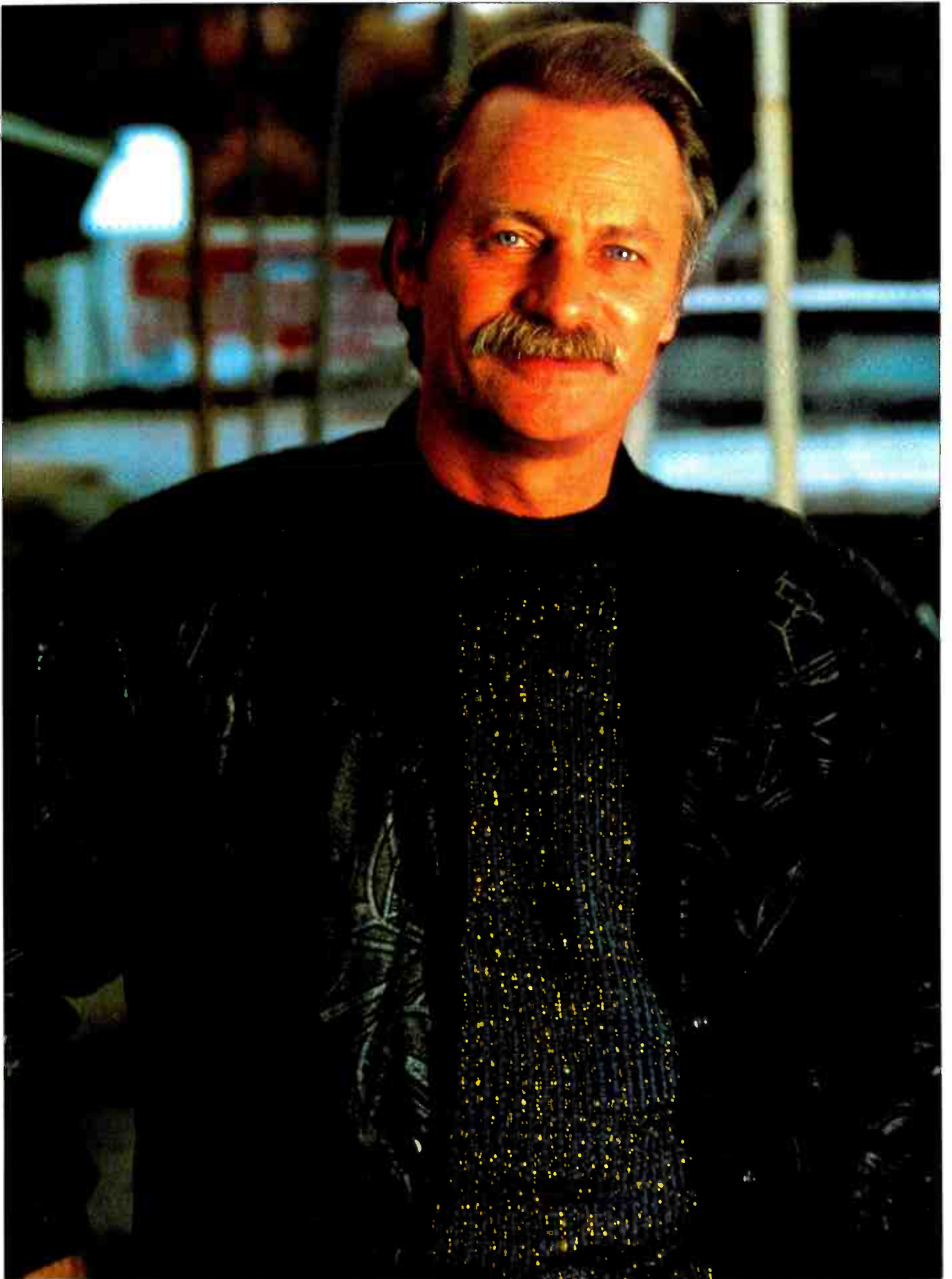
"The RCA exec I had given the tape to listened to the songs, and when he got back to us, I asked, 'What did you think of the songs?' He said, 'We like the songs, but you guys have a *sound* here.'" Lloyd laughs: "I just said, 'Yeah, yeah, but what do think of the songs? Do ya think The Judds might record some of 'em?'" He said, 'No, you guys don't understand....' And we really didn't,

not until RCA asked us to audition for them. At that point, even though Radney and I were writing a lot together, we were both headlong into our separate careers."

But after passing the audition, and going through a requisite period of soul-searching and lengthy consultations with their wives and close friends, the two songwriters signed with RCA, and then and only then did the musical entity of Foster & Lloyd officially come into being.

And now, after two albums which they produced themselves and several hundred live dates played together, the Foster & Lloyd alliance is still clicking along, still forging ahead full steam through the treacherous rock-meets-neo-country terrain. "More or less what happened is, the door swung open and we ran through," Lloyd recalls. "But if we didn't think we could sustain our relationship—as co-writers and as friends—we would never have done it."

"Maybe we're not making an 'overnight' splash like Randy Travis or Ricky Van Shelton," he adds. "But we're having fun, and we're getting to make the kind of records we want to make. So," he smiles and shrugs, "so far, so good." ■



VERN GOSDIN

Goes It Alone

In true country music form, Vern Gosdin takes matters of the heart and makes them into hit songs. By Bob Allen

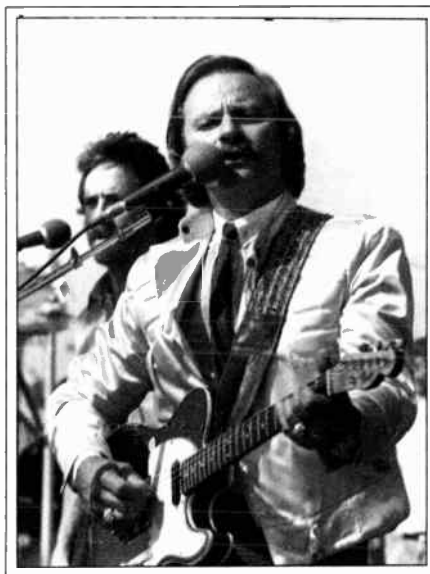
There is a day in Vern Gosdin's life which, most likely, he'll never forget. It was the afternoon about a year or so ago when he discovered that his second wife, to whom he'd been married for eleven years, was gone for good. That very day he began working on the songs for *Alone*, his most recent album.

"I was out on the road doing my thing, and I came home that day and called her in Atlanta where she was visiting her mother"—Gosdin laughs darkly and stares at his hands, letting you know that even though he can laugh about it now, there was nothing funny about it at the time.

The forty-five-year-old Alabama-born singer grimaces and glances around the shadowy air-conditioned conference room in CBS's Nashville offices where he is sitting on a stifling hot July afternoon. "My first question to her was, 'Do you want me to come after you, or meet you halfway, or are you flying in, or what?' She says to me, 'You don't know, do ya? I don't live there anymore.'"

"Whew!" Gosdin whistles through his teeth in dismay as he recalls that particularly poignant moment: "I haven't wrote *that one* yet!"

"Anyway..." Vern leans forward in his chair, presses his gnarled hands and elbows against the shiny table top in front of him and continues his tale of creative inspiration born of lost love: "Then she says to me, 'Go check the closets.' And I did, and every one of 'em was empty! What a shock!" he laughs darkly again. "All I could think to do was see how hard I could kick the refrig-



erator. I nearly broke my foot! But then, once I'd calmed down a little, I sat down and started writing songs right then, because it was something to do, and that was on my mind all the time. It was sort of a relief to be able to write about it. I was able to get it off my chest without having to sit around and tell it all to somebody—since it's kind of boring for anybody to have to sit and listen to someone else's 'divorce' story. So, that's where the songs on this new album came from. To tell you the truth, it helped me get over it."

Gosdin's sorrow, anger and loss may have subsided somewhat with the passage of time. But in the meantime, he has literally poured them into the grooves of *Alone*, his latest album, his second for CBS. The album is, in fact, so fraught with the mixed-up pain, moods and emotions of a broken marriage that

it could easily have been called "The Ten Stages of Losing Love and Letting Go."

Above all else, however, *Alone* is a more-than-worthy follow-up to *Chiseled in Stone*, Gosdin's exquisite 1987 album which marked an impressive career revival for him after a long stretch in the doldrums. During much of that down time he was not even on a record label.

Though recorded with veteran producer Bob Montgomery on a shoe-string budget, *Chiseled in Stone*, Gosdin's debut CBS album, spawned a Number One single, "Set 'Em Up, Joe," and two Top Fives, "Do You Believe Me Now" and "Who Are You Going to Blame It On This Time." Additionally, the album, which is now hovering near the Gold (half million sales) mark, garnered two Grammy nominations, Best Male Vocal Performance—Country and Best Country Song. The song, "Chiseled in Stone," written by Vern and Max D. Barnes, won the 1989 CMA award for Song of the Year. All of which, needless to say, is heady stuff for an ol' boy from Alabama who, just a year or so earlier, was all set to leave Nashville and try his luck elsewhere.

Even when pitted against new releases by the likes of Randy Travis and George Strait, *Chiseled in Stone* came out on top in some critics' minds as the year's best album. George Jones called Gosdin personally to let him know it was his favorite. "I can't tell you how good that felt," Gosdin laughs, "because one thing about Jones, to get him excited just about takes an act of Congress!"

All in all, *Chiseled in Stone* raised Gosdin's stock in the business to a new level, the likes of which he's never known before. It's brought renewed attention to his remarkable hard country voice, which can hold its own even against legends like Jones or Haggard.

Gosdin, opening for Randy Travis, recently played for a crowd of more than 20,000 in Bristol, Tennessee. This may be all in a day's work for Travis, but it's indeed something new for Gosdin. Yet he points out that the road has always been good to him. "I work the road with George Jones once in a while," he adds.

1989, a banner year for Vern, saw him inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame's Walkway of Stars. Here he is with Bill Ivey, director of the Hall of Fame.



ASCAP honored Vern and Max D. Barnes (center) for 1989's Most Performed Song, "Chiseled in Stone." With Vern and Max are Merlin Littlefield and John Briggs of ASCAP.



"And it's always a pleasure, because we draw the same kind of people—die-hard country fans. For that matter," he shrugs, "I've been keeping busy on the road all along—with or without hit records, and with or without a record deal. I was drawing good crowds, too—standing room only sometimes. But nobody in Nashville knew anything about it, and I didn't tell 'em," he frowns. "I really didn't care. I was just doing my thing. But the way things are happening now," he suddenly breaks into a smile, "I've just been having a good time! I've just been enjoying the

fire out of all this!"

Gosdin emphasizes that his current success has been elusive and a long time coming. "I think from 1976 up until today, I've had about thirty records on the *Billboard* charts—twenty-six of 'em on independent labels. I've cut something like twenty-six albums, but don't nobody even know about some of 'em, because they never even made it into the stores where you could buy 'em!" He grins wearily as he recalls the distinct lack of promotion and distribution that many of his releases received at the hands of the various small labels that issued them. "I think at one time or another I've been on about every small record label there is! Just before all this came along, I'd just about given up on Nashville. I was gonna go out to Haggard's studio in California, and we was gonna record an album together and sell it on TV." He chuckles and glances around the posh conference room again. "I'm sure glad I stuck around though: this past year has been the best I've ever had!"

There has been, from the very start, a sort of wayward quality to Vern Gosdin's long career. "I've come back and left so many times that I've forgot what I'm doing—coming or going!" he once joked. For better or worse, he has always been far more interested in the music itself than in the often complex *business* of making music.

A native of Woodland, Alabama, he recalls that he's been singing "ever since I was big enough to stand alongside my mother in church." When he was still a youngster, he sang with his parents and his brothers on *The Gosdin Family Gospel Show* on radio station WVOK in Birmingham.

But by the mid-1950's he'd already migrated to Chicago and was playing music there. In 1961, Gosdin left for the West Coast where he spent the better part of a decade. At first, he worked as a welder. Later he played in a bluegrass band with his brothers Rex and Ray. Later on, he and Rex (who died of a heart attack a few years ago), teamed up as The Gosdin Brothers. They opened shows for everyone from Merle Haggard to The Byrds and had several records enter the low ends of the charts before going their separate ways. The Byrds at one point recorded a song Vern wrote called "Someone To Turn To," included on the soundtrack of the movie *Easy Rider*, and Vern and Ray worked in a bluegrass band called The Golden State Boys with Chris Hillman, a founding Byrd now active in The Desert Rose Band.

Eventually Gosdin wearied of the Southern California music scene. "I had

some good years out there. I had a lot of fun; I didn't make any money," he says. He came back east and settled in Atlanta where he started the Arrowhead Glass Company.

"I worked for builders," he explains. "It would be my job to go into a new subdivision and put in all the fixed glass—doors, windows, tub enclosures, mirrors....My company eventually got so successful that I just started staying on my boat up on Lanier Lake. It got to where my average work week was about nine hours. Then one day I just said, 'I think I'll go to Nashville and cut a record and give it one last try.'"

In Nashville, Gosdin eventually wound up on Elektra Records where he recorded a pair of songs called "Yesterday's Gone" and "(Just Enough to) Keep Me Hangin' On" (which he'd first recorded with his brother Rex for a small Bakersfield label nearly a decade earlier). Then he somehow got it into his head that he wanted Emmylou Harris to sing on these two songs with him.

"I called her manager, who is my manager now, and said, 'Eddie, I wanta see if I can get Emmylou to come to Nashville and sing on my records,'" Gosdin laughs as he recalls his own audacity. "Eddie just said, 'I dunno, Vern, she's real busy these days, it could be a problem....' I just said, 'Ask her anyway.'"

Gosdin managed to get a taped copy of his recordings of the two songs to Harris. But after weeks had passed and he'd heard nothing, he assumed the idea was dead in the water. Not so, as he explains: "Then one day Eddie called me out of the blue and said, 'Vern, I walked into Warner Brothers and heard Emmylou talking about how she was getting ready to record with a guy from Atlanta who sounds something like George Jones. I can't think of who she could be talking about but you.'"

Once Harris had added her vocals to the two cuts, Gosdin recalls how everybody at Elektra "all of a sudden got way more interested in them. They took 'em back in the studio, took some instruments off, added some others and remixed the whole thing. Both records ended up being Top Ten hits for me."

But by then, Gosdin's first marriage had also fallen by the wayside—inspiring yet another hit song. "My first divorce was supposed to have been a 'no-fault' divorce," he explains. "Nobody was going to get an attorney. We were just going to go before a judge, and I'd give her everything and leave. I gave her the house, the glass business. I just took my clothes and my car. I wanted it that way. But I guess she got nervous," he laughs. "She hired an attorney anyway, then sent me the bill! When I showed it to Max, he just said, 'Well, if she's gonna do



1988 was a good year for Vern too, as he achieved his first Number One single for CBS Records with "Set 'Em Up, Joe" from the *Chiseled in Stone* album. The song was written as a tribute to Ernest Tubb by Vern and buddies Dean Dillon (seated left), Hank Cochran (seated right) and Buddy Cannon (standing right) during a retreat in the hills of Gatlinburg, Tennessee.

you wrong, she may as well do it right!" About forty-five minutes later, we had us a song. It was the first hit Max and I ever wrote together." Max, of course, is none other than Max D. Barnes, one of Gosdin's closest friends and his most frequent songwriting partner.

After a brief string of hits with Elektra in the mid-1970's, including "Till the End" and several other memorable duets with Janie Fricke, Gosdin kept busy on the touring circuit while bouncing around from one puddle-jumping independent label to the next, with no more than modest success on the charts. "Any time I'd find an independent label that would stay in business for a while, I'd get a few hits," he recalls wryly. "But then sooner or later they'd go out of business, and I'd be high and dry again."

In the mid-1980's he landed with yet another Nashville-based independent outfit, this one Compleat Records. There, he managed to put together another brief run of hits: "If You're Gonna Do Me Wrong (Do It Right)," "Way Down Deep" and "Dim Lights, Thick Smoke, and Loud Loud Music." He also recorded a memorable gospel album called *If Jesus Comes Tomorrow (What Then)?*

While on Compleat he also pulled off the near-impossible: he scored the first Number One record of his career, "I Can Tell By the Way You Dance (You're Gonna Love Me Tonight)"—something which is almost never accomplished by a small label in today's record business where the top of the charts is more or less owned by big-bucks corporate giants with huge promotional budgets to grease the wheels of the radio and record distribution industries.

"So there I was," he shakes his head with a look of lingering bitterness. "I wasn't making any more money, but there I was with a Number One record, and I couldn't tell a bit of difference. It wasn't long afterwards that I found out the only reason Compleat had signed me was for a tax write-off. I was trying to get a Number One record, and they didn't even want one!"

Even though Compleat Records bit the bullet soon thereafter, leaving Gosdin label-less once more, the success of "I Can Tell By the Way You Dance" did enable him to raise his asking price for personal appearances enough to get himself a bus and put together a decent road band.

By now, he'd also begun putting more and more time and energy into songwriting—a talent he'd more or less over-

looked during his first two decades in the business. He discovered that when he put his mind to it and collaborated with writers like Max D. Barnes, Dean Dillon and Hank Cochran, he had a real flair for writing hits—as evidenced by the fact that he co-wrote nine out of ten of the songs on both *Chiseled in Stone* and *Alone*. Gosdin's original tunes have also been recorded by George Strait, the late Keith Whitley, George Jones, Merle Haggard, The Oaks and Mel Tillis, among others.

Nevertheless, after the demise of Compleat, Gosdin began to feel like he'd been around the Horn one too many times. He was all set to head for California when, out of the blue, he got word that producer Bob Montgomery, a veteran who has worked with everyone from Gary Morris and Johnny Rodriguez to Razyzy Bailey, Marty Robbins and B.J. Thomas, was looking for him. "Though I was familiar with the music Bob had produced, I didn't know him," Gosdin recalls. "I wouldn't have recognized him if I'd passed him on the street. Fortunately, *he* knew me and was interested in producing me and giving me another shot at it." Gosdin shakes his head and smiles warmly, adding, "Bob's the best thing that ever happened to me."

A*nytime I'd find an independent label that would stay in business for a while, I'd get a few hits. But then sooner or later they'd go out of business, and I'd be high and dry again."*

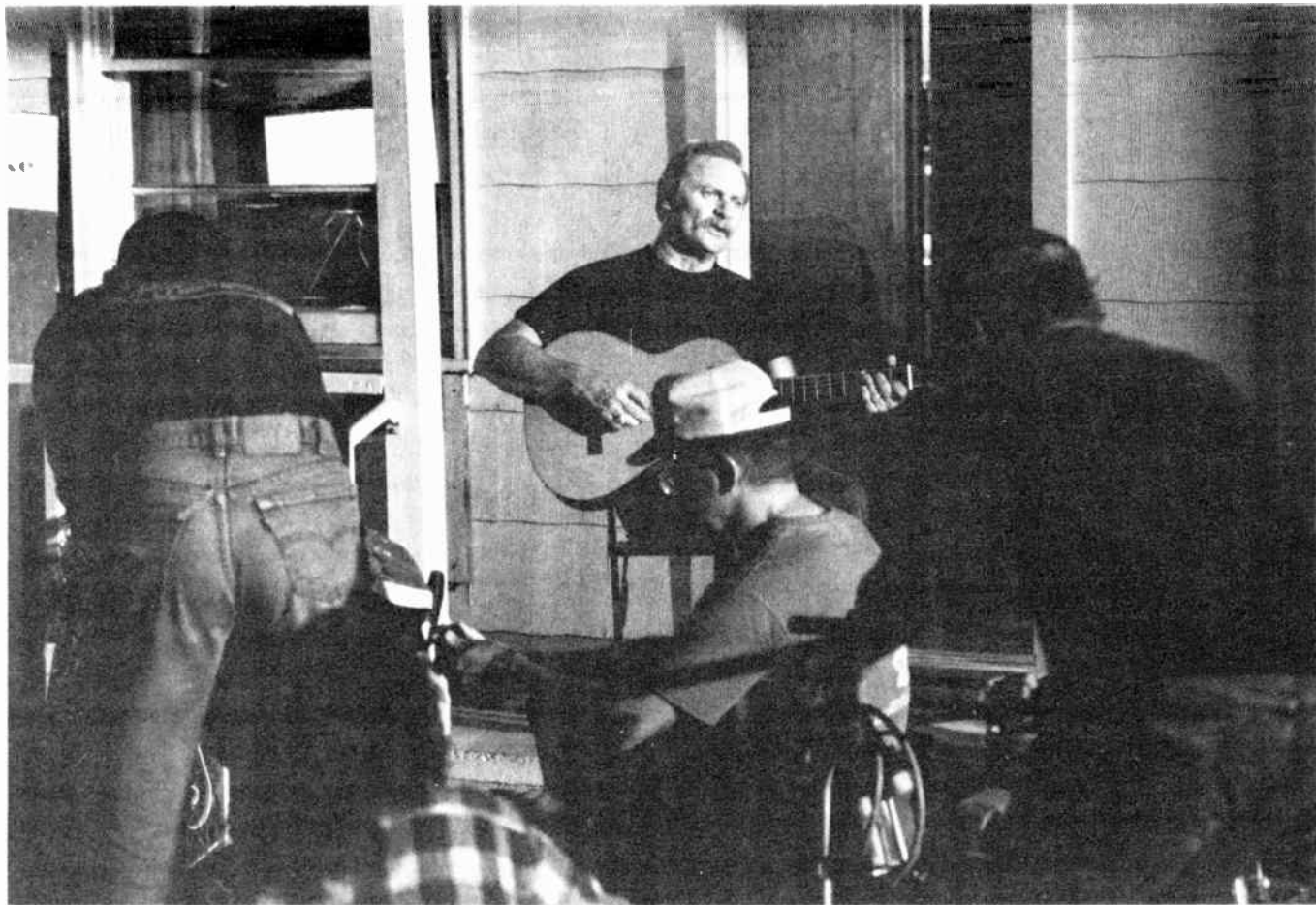
It was Montgomery who put together Gosdin's deal with CBS and produced *Chiseled in Stone*. When "Do You Believe Me Now," Gosdin's first CBS single release, reached Number Four, he and Montgomery realized they were indeed on to something and that the market was once again ripe for good hard country music. Soon thereafter "Set 'Em Up, Joe" went to Number One,

and they've been on a glorious roll ever since.

Gosdin admits that lately he hasn't gotten to spend a whole lot of time at his place in the country just outside Nashville. Even as he wraps up this interview, Max D. Barnes is waiting for him out in the lobby, hoping the two of them can get in one good afternoon of songwriting before Gosdin hits the road again.

Even so, you'll hear no complaints from Vern: "I've been having a good time! It's hard to get tired of having too much fun!" he laughs with satisfaction. "It's been a long haul getting here, but I've had a lot of experiences along the way I wouldn't trade nothing for. It's also kind of nice that after all these years, I never go anywhere in the United States without running into people I know. That's a really good feeling."

He shakes his head softly, then laughs outrageously as he wonders aloud where his career might be were it not for two painful divorces: "When I think about it, it seems like I tend to average about ten hit songs per ex-wife. That's not a bad average, is it!" he chuckles softly. "Right now, I wanta get rested up real good and see if I can't find me another one to write about!" ■



As he shoots his latest video, *That Just About Does It*, Vern says he's busy but he's having a great time.

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Dear Friend,

I made \$9,800 in 24 hours. You may do better!

My name is John Wright. Not too long ago I was flat broke. I was \$31,000 in debt. The bank repossessed my car because I couldn't keep up with the payments. And one day the landlord gave me an eviction notice because I hadn't paid the rent for three months. So we had to move out. My family and I stayed at my cousin's place for the rest of that month before I could manage to get another apartment. That was very embarrassing.

Things have changed now. I own four homes in Southern California. The one I'm living in now in Beverly Hills is worth more than one million dollars. I own several cars, among them a brand new Mercedes and a brand new Cadillac. Right now, I have a million dollar line of credit with the banks and have certificates of deposit at \$100,000 each in my bank in Beverly Hills.

Best of all, I have time to have fun. To be me. To do what I want. I work about 4 hours a day, the rest of the day, I do things that please me. Some days I go swimming and sailing — shopping. Other days, I play racquetball or tennis. Sometimes, frankly, I just lie out under the sun with a good book. I love to take long vacations. I just got back from a two week vacation from — Maui, Hawaii.

I'm not really trying to impress you with my wealth. All I'm trying to do here is to prove to you that if it wasn't because of that money secret I was lucky enough to find that day, I still would have been poor or may be even bankrupt. It was only through this amazing money secret that I could pull myself out of debt and become wealthy. Who knows what would have happened to my family and me.

Knowing about this secret changed my life completely. It brought me wealth, happiness, and most important of all — peace of mind. This secret will change your life, too! It will give you everything you need and will solve all your money problems. Of course you don't have to take my word for it. You can try it for yourself. To see that you try this secret, I'm willing to give you \$20.00 in cash. (I'm giving my address at the bottom of this page.) I figure, if I spend \$20.00, I get your attention. And you will prove it to yourself this amazing money secret will work for you, too!

Why, you may ask, am I willing to share this secret with you? To make money? Hardly. First, I already have all the money and possessions I'll ever need. Second, my secret does not involve any sort of competition whatsoever. Third, nothing is more satisfying to me than sharing my secret only with those who realize a golden opportunity and get on it quickly.

This secret is incredibly simple. Anyone can use it. You can get started with practically no money at all and the risk is almost zero. You don't need special training or even a high school education. It doesn't matter how young or old you are and it will work for you at home or even while you are on vacation.

Let me tell you more about this fascinating money making secret:

With this secret the money can roll in fast. In some cases you may be able to cash in literally overnight. If you can follow simple instructions you can get started in a single afternoon and it is possible to have spendable money in your hands the very next morning. In fact, this just might be the fastest legal way to make money that has ever been invented!

This is a very safe way to get extra cash. It is practically risk free. It is not a dangerous gamble. Everything you had has already been tested and you can get started for less money than most people spend for a night on the town.

One of the nicest things about this whole idea is that you can do it at home in your spare time. You don't need equipment or an office. It doesn't matter where you live either. You can use this secret to make money if you live in a big city or on a farm or anywhere in between. A husband and wife team from New York used my secret, worked at home in their spare time, and made \$45,000 in one year.

This secret is simple. It would be hard to make a mistake if you tried. You don't need a college degree or even a high school education. All you need is a little common sense and the ability to follow simple, easy, step-by-step instructions. I personally know a man from New England who used this secret and made \$2 million in just 3 years.

You can use this secret to make money no matter how old or how young you may be. There is no physical labor involved and everything is so easy it can be done

Here's what newspapers and magazines are saying about this incredible secret:

The Washington Times:

The Royal Road to Riches is paved with golden tips.

National Examiner:

John Wright has an excellent guide for achieving wealth in your spare time.

Income Opportunities:

The Royal Road to Riches is an invaluable guide for finding success in your own back yard.

News Tribune:

Wright's material is a MUST for anyone who contemplates making it as an independent entrepreneur.

Success!

John Wright believes in success, pure and simple.

Money Making Opportunities:

John Wright has a rare gift for helping people with no experience make lots of money. He's made many people wealthy.

California Political Week:

... The politics of high finance made easy.

The Tolucan:

You'll love ... *The Royal Road to Riches*. It's filled with valuable information ... only wish I'd known about it years ago!

Hollywood Citizen News:

He does more than give general ideas. He gives people a detailed A to Z plan to make big money.

The Desert Sun:

Wright's *Royal Road to Riches* lives up to its title in offering an uncomplicated path to financial success.

whether you're a teenager or 90 years old. I know one woman who is over 65 and is making all the money she needs with this secret.

When you use this secret to make money you never have to try to convince anybody of anything. This has nothing to do with door-to-door selling, telephone solicitation, real estate or anything else that involves personal contact.

Everything about this idea is perfectly legal and honest. You will be proud of what you are doing and you will be providing a very valuable service.

It will only take you two hours to learn how to use this secret. After that everything is almost automatic. After you get started you can probably do everything that is necessary in three hours per week.

PROOF

I know you are skeptical. That simply shows your good business sense. Well, here is proof from people who have put this amazing secret into use and have gotten all the money they ever desired. Their initials have been used in order to protect their privacy, but I have full information and the actual proof of their success in my files.

'More Money Than I Ever Dreamed'

"All I can say — your plan is great! In just 8 weeks, I took in over \$100,000. More money than I ever dreamed of making. At this rate, I honestly believe, I can make over a million dollars per year." A. F., Providence, R.I.

'\$9,800 In 24 Hours!'

"I didn't believe it when you said the secret could produce money the next morning. Boy, was I wrong, and you were right! I purchased your *Royal Road to Riches*. On the basis of your advice, \$9,800 poured in, in less than 24 hours! John, your secret is incredible!" J. K., Laguna Hills, CA

'Made \$15,000 In 2 Months At 22'

"I was able to earn over \$15,000 with your plan — in just the past two months. As a 22 year old girl, I never thought that I'd ever be able to make as much money, as fast as I've been able to do. I really do wish to thank you, with all of my heart."

Ms. E. I., Los Angeles, CA

'Made \$126,000 In 3 Months!'

"For years, I passed up all the plans that promised to make me rich. Probably I am lucky I did — but I am even more lucky that I took the time to send for your

material. It changed my whole life. Thanks to you, I made \$126,000 in 3 months."

S. W., Plainfield, IN

'Made \$203,000 In 8 Months'

"I never believed those success stories ... never believed I would be one of them ... using your techniques, in just 8 months, I made over \$203,000 ... made over \$20,000 more in the last 22 days! Not just well prepared, but simple, easy, fast ... John, thank you for your *Royal Road to Riches*!"

C. M., Los Angeles, CA

'\$500,000 In Six Months'

"I'm amazed at my success! By using your secret I made \$500,000 in six months. That's more than twenty times what I've made in any single year before! I've never made so much money in such short time with minimum effort. My whole life I was waiting for this amazing miracle! Thank you, John Wright."

R. S., Mclean, VA

As you can tell by now I have come across something pretty good. I believe I have discovered the sweetest little money-making secret you could ever imagine. Remember — I guarantee it.

Most of the time, it takes big money to make money. This is an exception. With this secret you can start in your spare time with almost nothing. But of course, you don't have to start small or stay small. You can go as fast and as far as you wish. The size of your profits is totally up to you. I can't guarantee how much you will make with this secret but I can tell you this — so far this amazing money producing secret makes the profits from most other ideas look like peanuts!

Now at last, I've completely explained this remarkable secret in a special money making plan. I call it "The Royal Road to Riches". Some call it a miracle. You'll probably call it "The Secret of Riches". You will learn everything you need to know step-by-step. So you too can put this amazing money making secret to work for you and make all the money you need.

To prove this secret will solve all your money problems, don't send me any money, instead postdate your check for a month and a half from today. I guarantee not to deposit it for 45 days. I won't cash your check for 45 days before I know for sure that you are completely satisfied with my material.

\$20.00 FREE!

There is no way you can lose. You either solve all your money problems with this secret (in just 30 days) or you get your money back plus \$20.00 in cash FREE!

Do you realize what this means? You can put my simple secret into use. Be able to solve all your money problems. And if for any reason whatsoever you are not 100% satisfied after using the secret for 30 days, you may return my material. And then I will not only return your original UNCASHED CHECK, but I will also send you an extra \$20.00 cashiers check just for giving the secret an honest try according to the simple instructions.

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SWORN STATEMENT:

"As Mr. John Wright's accountant, I certify that his assets exceed one million dollars."

Mark Davis



SUZY BOGGUSS

by John Morthland

Getting to the Root

Suzy Bogguss wraps up a phone interview with a radio deejay in the adjoining room, then walks into a Capitol Records conference room, hand extended in greeting. She is wearing a long black and white dress, black blouse and turquoise jewelry, and everything is perfectly in place, everything is immaculate.

"Pardon my dress, I'm not even wearing any socks. I'm gonna have to be in the studio for a while this afternoon, and I just wanted to be comfortable," she laughs as she shakes my hand, and right then and there, I realize that Suzy Bogguss aims to please or know the reason why.

So far, she's succeeding, too. With a debut album that has yielded at least two hit singles and favorable comparisons with everyone from Linda Ronstadt and Emmylou Harris to Patsy Montana—three of her idols, it should probably be added—the 32-year-old Illinois native is the leading contender for country music's female rookie-of-the-year crown at the very least.

She's done it in some unlikely ways, too. Where Ronstadt, for example, applied a rootsy touch to basically pop material, Suzy has given a pop sheen to country-style tunes. We're talking here, fergoodnesssake, about the country artist who brought back the yodel. She's not kidding when she calls her-

self a "second generation revivalist."

"That's because a lot of the people that I have grabbed onto, like Muddy Waters or Hank Williams, I got through other artists because they were reviving some of their songs. So I learned about the origins of that music," she explains. "And that's why I call it rootsy music, too, because my music is influenced by real heavy roots music even though it might be a contemporary song that I'm singing; the way that I sing and the way that I phrase and everything else comes from the roots of the music that I heard when I started researching and listening to all this.

"For instance, listening to Emmylou Harris and Linda Ronstadt and Arlo Guthrie and people like this, I learned about Arlo's dad. I didn't listen to Woody Guthrie, but, by golly, I sang 'This Land Is Your Land' when I was in sixth grade, and I learned about it. And Linda Ronstadt taught me about Patsy Cline and Hank Williams. So I'm hoping that these kinds of influences can help me create music that is interesting for other people and that can do for other people what certain artists have done for me," she adds.

Which is not an unreasonable way of looking at these matters. The quandary about "real" country, and about country versus pop, will, thanks to artists like Suzy, undoubtedly be debated for as long as there

As a kid she sang what sounded right to her. Years later she found her music had a common thread.

Record Reviews

Johnny Cash

Boom Chicka Boom

Mercury/Polygram 842 155-4

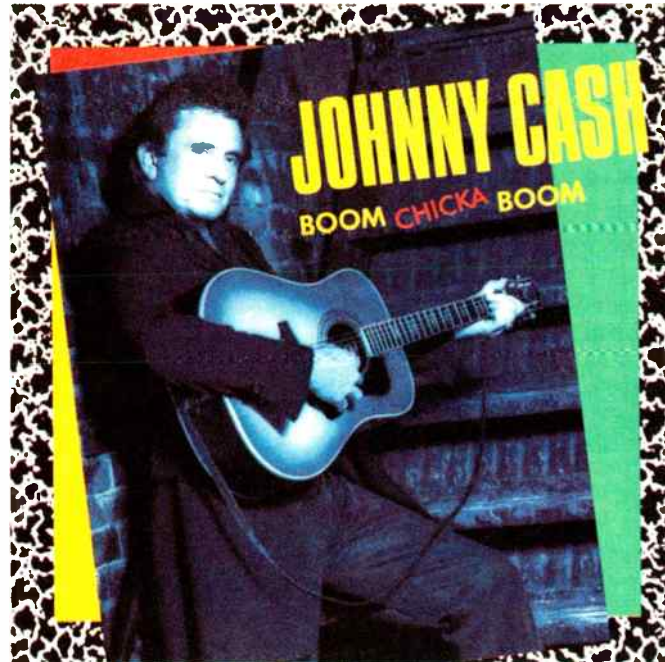
By one recent count Johnny Cash has released more than 400 albums and had over 130 hit records in the last 35 years.

In terms of overall achievement—hit records, awards, or however you choose to measure it—Cash is to country music more or less what Richard Petty is to NASCAR racing: an undisputed champion who is so far ahead of the pack that no one is likely to ever surpass his overall career record.

And—like Petty, whose wins have been few and far between in the past few seasons—Cash has fallen a little bit off the pace in the last few years, and made some rather uneven and forgettable records.

Boom Chicka Boom (the title is a tongue-in-cheek reference to the metronome-like, 1/2-time, guitar rhythm signature that has, over the years, become synonymous with Cash's music) is clearly a step back in the right direction: it marks a conscious and effective return to the scaled-down, austere musical perspective of his vintage years of the late 1950's, 1960's and 1970's when Cash was country music.

The solid, no-frills music on *Boom Chicka Boom*, produced by Bob Moore, a long-time Cash musical associate, is furnished by a dependable core group of seasoned session pickers that includes Moore and Roy Huskey Jr. on bass, W.S. Holland on drums, Reggie Young on electric guitar, Cash and Ray Edenton on acoustic guitar, and Earl



Ball and "Pig" Robbins on piano.

The real source of vitality on this new album is Cash's reawakening as a songwriter. Four of the ten cuts on here are his own. On the lyrically inventive, vocally playful "Farmer's Almanac," Cash rediscovers his powers as a social satirist as he demonstrates how tidbits of old-fashioned wisdom and advice either do or don't apply to the complexities of modern life: *If a man could have half his wishes, he'd double his trouble.*

On "A Backstage Pass," he uses broader strokes of droll humor to recall a behind-the-scenes visit to Willie Nelson. "Don't Go Near the Water" is a soulful, disturbing lament on mankind's apparent determination to poison the environment and relegate his own species to a fate similar to that of the dinosaurs. It rings with the commanding moral

timbre of Cash protest songs of old, like "The Ballad of Ira Hayes."

Looking to outside sources, Cash has made some wise, if slightly predictable, choices as well. His rendition of Harry Chapin's "Cat's in the Cradle," an oft-performed tale of time slipping away and the widening gulf between a father and son, reminds us once again just how moving and versatile Cash's trusty old gruff baritone can be. "Monteagle Mountain" by Richard McGibony is an old-fashioned truck-driving song with a great guitar hook. Elvis Costello's "Hidden Shame" is a twisted tale of death and remorse. "Harley," by Chick Rains and Michael Martin Murphey, is a ballad about the dark clouds that lurk behind the silver lining of a self-made millionaire's success. It's a story with which, from the way he sings it, Cash clearly identifies.

Cash gives a tip of his hat to his gospel roots on Willie Nelson's "Family Bible," on which he's accompanied by his mother, Carrie Cash.

For quite a long time there it seemed as if The Man in Black's dark clothes didn't fit him right anymore—that Johnny Cash was not having a very good time being Johnny Cash. But on *Boom Chicka Boom* he sounds like he's musically and personally comfortable with himself once again.

After 35 years, 130 hits and 50 million records sold, that sounds to me like a good start.

—BOB ALLEN

Ricky Van Shelton

RVS III

Columbia C 45220

It's been three years and he's no longer in the vanguard. We're used to him, and we have a pretty good idea of what he's going to do before he does it. God, that sounds like something out of *USA Today*, that abuse of the word "we." Sorry.

The point's still valid, however. It's easy to become bored with artists who sounded fresh and vital a couple of years before. There are many things that can go wrong with follow-up albums, including getting carried away with material that doesn't fit the artist, slacking off on the quality of the record and changing producers. And when producers change, there are even more risks that something's going to get messed up. It's happened with several of Ricky Van Shelton's New Traditional peers.

Shelton and producer Steve Buckingham, however, have

Record Reviews

avoided those very real pitfalls and held to a consistent sound. The only difference, and a dismaying one at times, is that they lean a bit heavier on ballads than they did on the last two albums, a balance I wish they hadn't altered.

On the plus side, the ballads don't all sound alike, and both the contemporary material and the oldies—and no one revives old material like Shelton—were extremely well chosen. Clearly a lot of time still goes into song selection.

They kick off perfectly with Chris Waters/Tony King's "I've Cried My Last Tear for You," done up shuffle style. Not all of the ballads are anguished, as demonstrated by the optimistic Kix Brooks/John Wesley Ryles/Mark Sherrill number "I'm Starting Over," which celebrates renewal. But the anguished ones, such as "I Meant Every Word He Said," co-written by veteran Nashville songsmith Curly Putman, Bucky Jones and Joe Chambers, ooze despair.

Other love songs are direct and to the point. "You Would Do the Same for Me," a Mike Reid/Rory Bourke ballad, makes its point with exquisite simplicity. And even more direct and simple is "I Still Love You," a rare Shelton-penned number that ends Side Two. Compared to the other material here, it's not earthshaking, but over time Ricky might become a potent writer, as Randy Travis has. Obviously the older gems Shelton's recorded in the past are having a good influence on him.

Speaking of the remakes, Side One's are every bit as strong as they've been on the last two albums, obviously selected to fit Ricky's vocal style. He turns "Statue of a Fool," a Number One record 20 years ago for Jack Greene, into a powerful and compelling performance that ranks with any of his best ballads. However, "Life's Little Ups

and Downs," the old Charlie Rich number written by Rich's wife Margaret Ann, falters. Shelton gives it his best, and his best is quite good, but Rich's material (especially that written by Margaret Ann) has always been tailored so closely to his style it's hard for someone else—even Shelton—to do it justice.

They've really gone back to dig up "Not That I Care," an underrated masterpiece penned by veteran Texas honky tonk composer Cindy Walker. This number, the story of a man desperately trying to act unconcerned about a collapsed relationship, was a minor hit for Jerry Wallace in 1966, charting at Number 44, but like "From a Jack to a King," it becomes Shelton's the minute he begins to sing it.

The kickers on Side Two generally fit the past mold. The churning "Love Is Burnin'" is the weakest, being little more than strung-together rockabilly clichés. Why didn't they include the terrific version of Ernest Tubb's "Thanks a Lot" that Ricky's been doing on stage recently? It's better than most of the uptempo material here. His stab at Roy Orbison's "Oh, Pretty Woman" is clearly a tribute to Orbison, the man who's influenced every good ballad

singer.

I hope Buckingham and Shelton don't let ballads totally overwhelm future albums, given the fact that balancing material has worked so well for them in the past. The consistency on *RVS III* is as high, if not quite as awesome, as on his past albums, and that should hold everyone for another year, until *Ricky Van Shelton IV* (or whatever they'll call it) shows up sometime probably in early 1991. —RICH KIENZLE

Charlie Daniels Band

Simple Man
Epic AEC 45316

I'm not sure where Charlie Daniels and his band wandered off to for the latter half of the 1980's. Daniels didn't quit the business or anything. (He's never ceased to be an impressive draw on the concert trail.) He just sort of seemed to lose direction, was a long time without a hit and fell out of step with the times during the prevailing neo-traditionalist craze. I've heard he also had management problems, and I know he wrote a book or two of short stories.

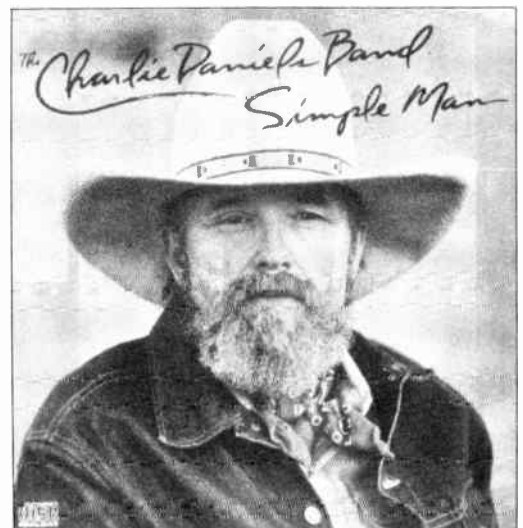
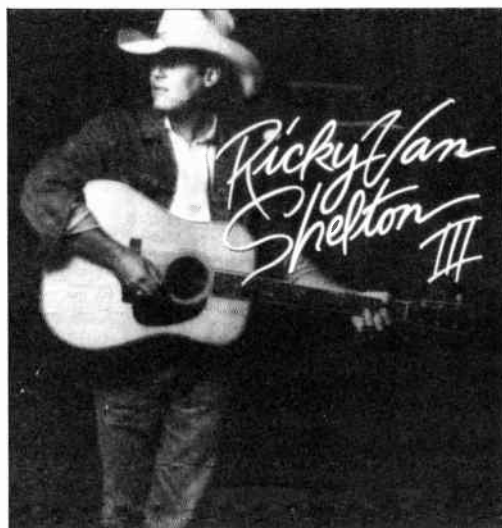
But with *Simple Man*, Daniels' new album, a follow-up to his 1988 "comeback," *Homesick Heroes*, the old boy

has resolutely shaken the last layers of dust and cobwebs off his recording career and makes it clear that he's back with a vengeance.

In fact, you'd probably have to go back a decade or so, to when the CDB (Charlie Daniels Band) was recording landmark albums like *Fire on the Mountain* and *Million Mile Reflection*, to find a CDB album this impressive and resolutely on the mark.

The title song on *Simple Man* has already generated a tempest in a teapot since its release as a single a few months back. Once again—as in "Leave This Long-Haired Country Boy Alone," Daniels gives the world a piece of his mind and reminds us what a shoot-from-the-hip social commentator he can be. In the back-to-the-basics, grass-roots populist protest movement, he's got the bombastic eloquence to match Hank "A Country Boy Can Survive" Williams Jr. or Merle "Okie From Muskogee" Haggard any day. "Simple Man" is, for that matter, perhaps the strongest statement of its kind since Hag's "Okie."

Not all will agree with Daniels' sentiments in "Simple Man" or in "What This World Needs Is) A Few More Rednecks," a rollicking juke box-style song which sort of expands upon the same theme. Academically speak-



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Record Reviews

ing, "Simple Man's" sentiments are boorish, anti-intellectual and reek of sadism and vigilantism.

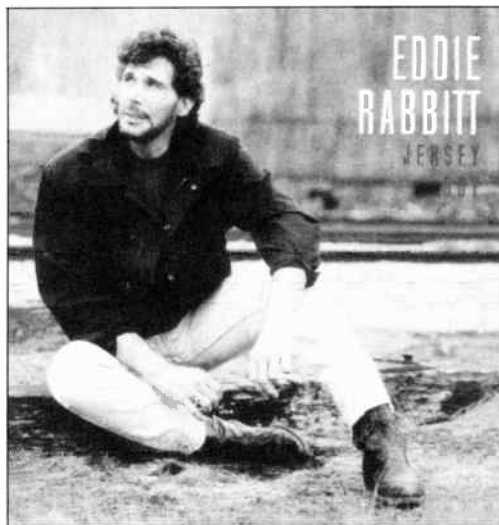
But speaking from the heart, "Simple Man" is a powerful statement, exquisite in its honesty and justifiable outrage. And in an era when Federal judges are assassinated by pipe bombs and drug dealers put a \$20 million bounty on the U.S. President, there is indeed something in us that *wants* to believe that the nation's multifarious problems could all be solved with a Bible, a shotgun and a hanging rope.

Thus, it's hard not to secretly applaud when Daniels proclaims: *As far as I'm concerned there ain't no excuses/For the raping and the killing and the child abuse/And I've got a way to put an end to all that mess/Just take them rascals out in the swamp/Put them on their knees and tie 'em to a stump/And let the rattlers and the bugs and the alligators do the rest....*

Simple Man is rounded out nicely by a couple of laid-back, growling and lazily defiant country blues songs: "Saturday Night Down South" and "It's My Life" (a sort of midlife sequel to "Leave This Country Boy Alone"). And, of course, there's a trucker's song ("Mister DJ"), a rousing boogie-woogie fiddle tune ("Play Me Some Fiddle") and a bittersweet, over-the-shoulder retrospective ("Was It 26").

Daniels reveals particular depth of sensitivity and empathy on "Old Rock 'n' Roller (Playing in a Back Street Bar)," a poignant musical character sketch of an aging, over-the-hill rocker caught in a time warp and chasing impossible dreams.

There's something terribly encouraging and invigorating about listening to someone bounce back on the run from the midlife career doldrums the way the CDB has on *Simple Man*. We can only hope, with work this strong,



that old Charlie will keep right on running and keep right on looking back over his shoulder and calling the shots as he sees them.

—BOB ALLEN

Eddie Rabbitt
Jersey Boy
Capitol C4-93882

Pay dirt! After a spate of listless records over the past several years, Eddie Rabbitt has really come through with this one.

Everything is here: fresh melodies, predominantly uptempo rhythms and lyrics that bear repeat listening. To begin with, Rabbitt has a new co-writer, Reed Nielson, to charge him up and suggest new directions as Even Stevens did the first ten years of Rabbitt's career as an artist.

There's a bow to various commercial country song styles, such as the newgrassy "Tennessee Born and Bred," and echoes of West Coast country in "On Second Thought." But at the core are some revealing and compelling autobiographical songs that tap something almost Bruce Springsteen-honest. The album reaffirms the every-workingman places that Rabbitt comes from. I'll put the exultant "Runnin'

With the Wind," the bittersweet and nostalgic "They're Tearin' My Little Town Down" and "Jersey Boy" up against The Boss for genuine heart any day. In "American Boy," Rabbitt manages to tap something that's upbeat yet similar in feeling to the heart-in-throat, unashamed patriotism of a first-time look at the Vietnam War Memorial. None of the fulsome, calculated jingoism of a "God Bless the USA" (oh, I forgot, it's "God Bless Canada" these days).

Given the self-derived sameness of much of his recent output, it's almost surprising that Rabbitt's new material moves him off the pat "Eddie Rabbitt" riff that (for some of us) wore thin after the first twelve years. It's as if Rabbitt has his heart and mind in the music for a change. Not to be cruel about the past few years' work—Rabbitt's tragedies have been the kind that would put a lot of people down for the count.

It's as if Rabbitt absorbed the blows, went through the changes and somehow took the standing eight-count until his focus cleared. He's still Rabbitt—light, lilting, stack harmonies over silver-feathered rhythm tracks—but he seems to have come back with new substance in a way that too few country acts ever do.

—BOB MILLARD



Buck Owens
Act Naturally
Capitol 7 92893 2

Following "Streets of Bak-ersfield," Buck's 1988 hit duet with Dwight Yoakam, Buck's old label Capitol resigned him and released *Hot Dog!*, an album largely consisting of remakes of his pre-Buckaroo hits of the late 1950's and early 1960's. The title track made a modest dent in the charts, but hardly set the Great Buck Comeback into motion. If nothing else, however, *Hot Dog!* proved that despite the fact Buck was pushing 60, he could still cut it.

Act Naturally is in many ways a far stronger effort. Granted, there's not much one can say about the gimmicky duet on the title track with ex-Beatle Ringo Starr, who sang The Beatles' hit version of the song. And the "Crying Time" duet with Emmylou Harris is certainly no big deal, as they've sung together before on her hit, "Play Together Again Again."

With his last outing Buck revived his late 1950's honky tonk sound, the sound of his first hits on Capitol. This time he wisely emphasizes the now-classic, twang-heavy mid-1960's sound of the Buck-

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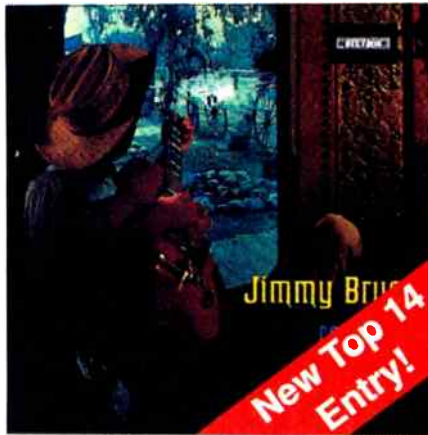
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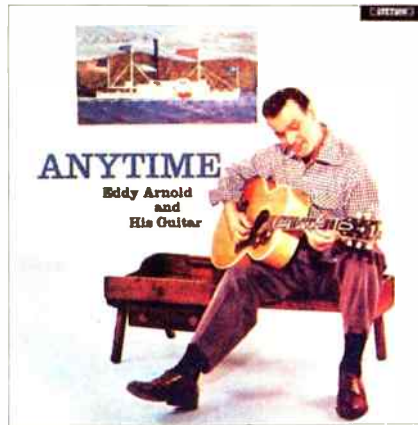
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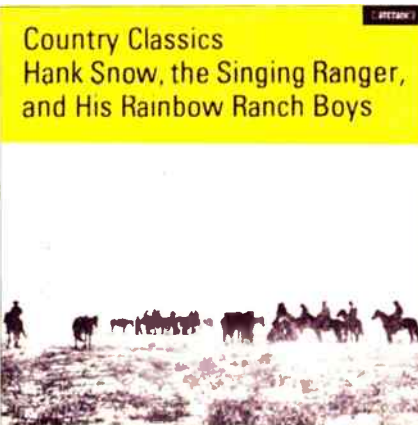
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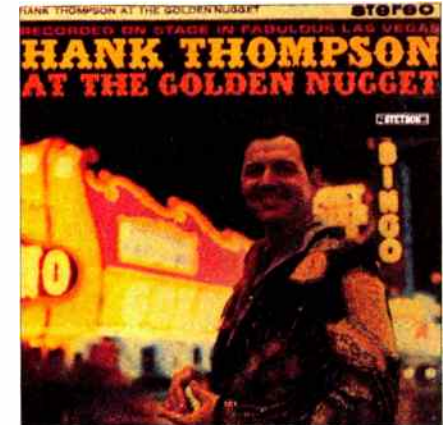
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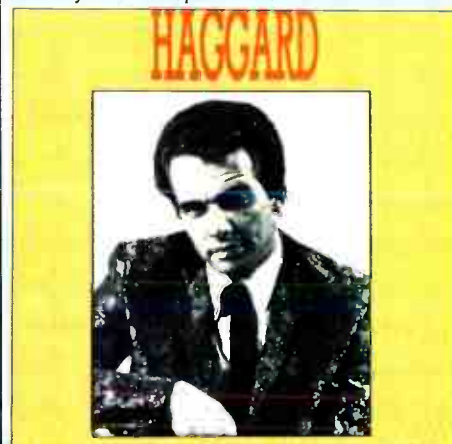
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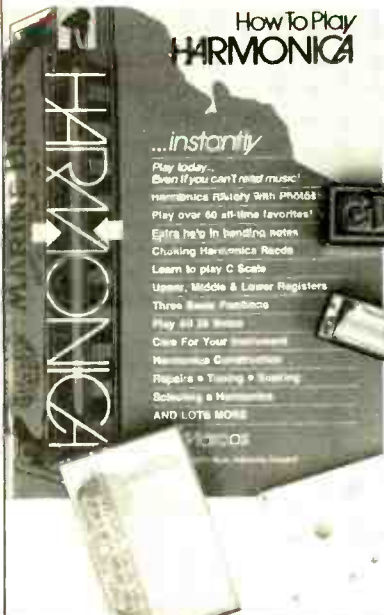
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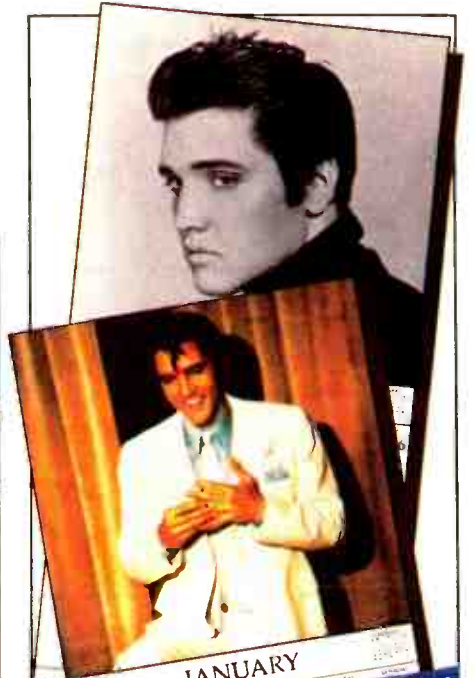
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Record Reviews

aroos, which had a far greater impact. Fact is, this one clearly drips Buckaroo. At least part of the reason is that Buck's own current edition of Buckaroos were augmented by some formidable talent including Bill Lloyd of Foster and Lloyd (known admirers of the Owens sound), Bakersfield steel guitar virtuoso and Waylon cohort Ralph Mooney and Nashville producer and studio guitarist Richard Bennett, the best six-string bass player since Grady Martin's and Harold Bradley's glory days.

Most tracks are remakes of older recordings that fuse the spirit of the originals with a heavier, 1980's beat. Two of the strongest are "Take Me Back Again," an obscure number Buck wrote in 1961, and the fine reprise of his Number 10 hit back in 1965, "Gonna Have Love." He does just as well with a soaring version of Wynn Stewart's old hit "Playboy."

The three new Owens originals seem less memorable, but only because of the company in which they're displayed. "I Was There," "Rock Hard Love" and "Out Chasing Rainbows" are strong enough to establish Buck hasn't lost his touch as a songwriter. And the rocking novelty "Brooklyn Bridge," an Owens number from 1979, could be the hit that eluded him last year. It's catchy, witty and expertly arranged. Whether Capitol releases it as a single is another matter.

Buck is a young 60, but realistically speaking, few artists his age are showing up on the charts. Most of today's disk jockeys know him only through *Hee Haw* or "Streets of Bakersfield." Many were in diapers when he dominated the scene. It really doesn't matter that *Act Naturally* is as contemporary and vital as anything else on the charts. Unless Capitol works to get it the airplay and promotion it deserves, I fear that despite Buck's artis-



tic vitality, his "comeback" could be jeopardized. That would truly be unfair.

—RICH KIENZLE

The O'Kanes *Imagine That* Columbia 45131

Given my longtime enthusiasm for The O'Kanes, this one's been a tough judgment call. I knew they were special the first time I heard them two years ago; the fact that their second album surpassed the first was downright inspiring. That doesn't always happen, but it seemed they were growing and expanding their horizons within that delightfully rough sound of theirs.

Yet this time something's...*missing*, and it didn't take long to fathom what that "something" was. On the surface the sound is much the same, and so are the songs. I will say the selection of Allen Reynolds as producer was not one I welcomed. I've always felt Reynolds, ex-producer of Crystal Gayle and Don Williams, was a master at creating mellow, laid-back and ultimately colorless acoustic mood music. He didn't exactly do Kathy Mattea's last album any good. There are no surprises with Reynolds as producer. It's all cut and dried, and in places more than a bit slicked-up.

And so it is here, with disappointing results. The clomping O'Kanes rhythm barely varies from song to



song, which doesn't help the texture of the album much; *Tired of the Runnin'* had more variety. Worse yet, some of the band members who made the group sound so special are barely around, because more use was made of studio musicians. The O'Kanes' magnificent accordionist Jay Spell only appears twice. And the extended instrumental jams that made the last album stand out aren't here at all. It's as if they consciously went into the studio to make a "commercial" record.

Blaming Reynolds alone, however, wouldn't be fair since the ten Kane-O'Hara numbers also aren't up to snuff. Not that any of them are total disasters. In fact, I suspect "The Better to Love You" could be a strong hit single. But taken together, they're largely trivial and predictable—and unpredictability has always been The O'Kanes' strength.

There's nothing wrong with songs like "Is the Party Over" or "Why Should I." They're simple and direct, but don't take any odd twists or turns to set them apart. "Tell Me I Was Dreaming," a break-up ballad, has that gauzy but predictable lilt of similar Everly Brothers numbers. "Diddy All Night Long," which sounds more than a bit like the Peggy Lee song "Fever," is more vivid, but would have been only a minor moment on their last two albums, as the lyrics don't make much sense.

"Imagine That" and "Climbing Mountains" both

deal with loss and pain, but don't differ much from most other similar songs. "Nobody Wins," a plea for reconciliation, falls flat. "This Ain't Love" is supposed to have a haunting, minor-key feeling, but it doesn't go anywhere lyrically or musically, even though Kane, O'Hara and bassist Roy Huskey are the only ones on the track. And while "Will You Travel Down this Road with Me" has its moments, it, too, doesn't go anywhere.

The reasons an album fails are usually pretty easily figured. They're harder to pinpoint when the work sounds and feels all right on first hearing, then on closer listening reveals far less than you'd hoped for. And no, I'm not writing The O'Kanes off. But I hope next time out they go back and recapture the inspiration in their early material. It would be sad to see such a terrific band—as at their best they still are—keep playing it as dull as they did this time.

—RICH KIENZLE

Kentucky Headhunters *Pickin' on Nashville* Mercury 838 744-1

Kentucky Headhunters is an honest-to-god roadhouse country/rhythm-and-blues bar band from Glasgow, Kentucky. They did not work their way up through summers in an Opryland touring show learning to imitate Merle Haggard for indiscriminating tourists. The Headhunters mix Dallas-cum-Chicago white-boy electric guitar blues with unself-conscious 1980's long-haired rural country sensibilities and come up with a hot, club-tested sound that apologizes to no one for introducing the ghost of Hank Williams to the ghost of Michael Bloomfield and making them like each other. Folks, this is what people are paying to hear on a Friday night—if they're lucky—in those nasty

Record Reviews

ol' working-class beer joints out there in the "real" grease-under-our-fingernails America where they still ain't heard of Sylvia and Barbara Mandrell.

Headhunters break loose with a boogied-up version of Bill Monroe's "Walk Softly on This Heart of Mine," which has to remind you of how Ricky Skaggs marked off his territory by rocking Flatt & Scruggs' "Don't Get Above Your Raisin'" back in 1981. They cover a couple of other country standards like "High Steppin' Daddy" and "Oh Lonesome Me," and I guarantee you never heard "Skip a Rope" done the way Kentucky Headhunters do it. They tear it down to parts, bore the pistons out to oversize and put a racing carb on top—it roars like no stock model does. When these guys cover a tune, they really remake it altogether, putting their own stamp on it.

Their original tunes range from the breezy "Rag Top" to the insinuating cheating song, "Some Folks Like to Steal," to the frank and humorous "My Daddy Was a Milkman." The blues elements tend to come through a little more distinctly in their originals, and the harmonies are probably made closer by the fact that there are two pairs of brothers in this five-man group.

All in all, there is something gritty and real about this act and their debut record, rough edges and all. In fact, it may be the rough edges that make their very un-Nashville sound so appealing. These guys don't have coordinated stage clothes or \$100 razor hairdos; they don't even seem like the kind who will have them when they get that much money to spare. They exude the essence of factory workers jamming on lunch break, quintessential outsiders doing it for the music. Hank Williams was an untamed outsider looking in, which is one reason why the



Opry had to cut him free—and why the working people of the rural South never have. These guys may piss off a few of the more conservative country establishmentarians, but they're honest to their own crossed country roots, not somebody else's, and I think they make damn fine music. —BOB MILLARD

Robert Earl Keen Jr. *West Textures* Sugar Hill SH-1020

I had no idea who Robert Earl Keen Jr. was when his name first started jumping out at me from the songwriter credits on various great albums. Turns out, however, he wrote the two most outstanding songs on two recent albums that were each chock full of outstanding songs: "This Old Porch" on Lyle Lovett's debut album, *Lyle Lovett*, and "I Would Change my Life" on Nanci Griffith's *Little Love Affairs*. Keen actually co-wrote "This Old Porch" with Lovett, his former neighbor, and "I Would Change my Life" on Griffith's album stands out even amongst other gems by Griffith herself and Harlan Howard.

Keen's own first two albums—*No Kinda Dancer* (Rounder, 1984) and *The Live Album* (Sugar Hill, 1988)—largely self-produced, left something to be desired in both the vocal and production departments, and his own versions of the above-mentioned originals paled against



Lovett's and Griffith's covers of them.

But on *West Textures*, Keen, with the help of producer Jim Rooney (who produced some of Nanci Griffith's fine early albums), has finally tuned it all in. He's at last on target with his vocal delivery, neither oversinging nor under-singing, and comes up with a very impressive collection of new originals. With this effort, Keen has catapulted himself onto the same pedestal shared by his former mentors, Guy Clark and Lovett.

Guy Clark's Texas songwriting influence is especially evident here, not only in Keen's writing, but in his compelling, coarsely textured vocals as well. The folksy, off-the-wall humor of "Five Pound Bass" is delightfully reminiscent of Clark's "Homegrown Tomatoes." Only a budding master like Keen could apply these influences as effectively as he does on *West Textures*.

The album's centerpiece is a rambling, wildly compelling neo-outlaw ballad, "The Road Goes on Forever," which stands tall against similar recent masterpieces in the same vein, such as Joe Ely's "Me and Billy The Kid" and Lovett's "L.A. County." Jonathan Yudkin saws away in a frenzy on his fiddle as Keen offhandedly draws out verse after verse of this darkly enticing, murderous narrative about a drug dealer and his girlfriend on the lam, just like it was some chilling, urgent tale being told from a late-night bar stool.

The haunting "Mariano," a close-up portrait of an old Mexican immigrant worker, is sensitive and mystical. "Leavin' Tennessee" is a tender love ballad, seemingly drawn from Keen's own dark, disillusioning early days in Nashville.

In keeping with Texas songwriter/singer tradition, Keen's also included an outstanding south-of-the-border outlaw ballad, "Sonora's Death Row," written by a thus-far unknown named K. Farrell. In doing so, he proves once again that Texas really is a bottomless pit of songwriting talent.

Above all, this rich, satisfying new album is proof positive that the enduring Texas country-folk songwriter tradition spawned by the likes of Townes Van Zandt and Guy Clark is alive, well and in good hands with fine second-generation talents like Robert Earl Keen Jr.

—BOB ALLEN

Vince Gill *When I Call Your Name* MCA-42321

There's no arguing that Vince Gill has talent. He's got as fine a bluegrass-tinged tenor as anyone. And, as this record again showcases, he's a darned good musician, offering acoustic and electric lead guitar and mandolin work that is absolutely—well, more than competent, if not stylistically memorable.

And I guess that's the problem with Vince Gill for me. As good a writer, singer and musician as he is, his records just seem to roll by without giving me anything much to grab a hold of.

I couldn't specifically criticize any of the songs here. "Never Alone," for instance, sounds almost as good for Gill as it did on Rosanne Cash's *Rhythm and Romance*. He used the same signature Rosanne guitar licks, any-

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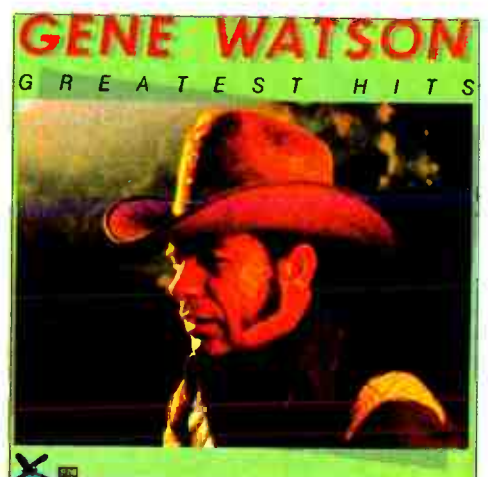
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Cowboy Copas Special

The versatile Cowboy Copas, star of many a CMSA member's photo album, is featured in *Legends of Country Music* in the *Newsletter* this month, courtesy of Rich Kienzle.

Rich's discussion of the life and career of Cowboy Copas mentions the fact that Copas's most important work was done for two labels—King and Starday. Both labels are now owned by International Marketing of Nashville, who have been reissuing various vintage Starday and King albums, including three by Copas plus one cassette-only Greatest Hits collection. Members deduct \$2 from the price of every item.

Tragic Tales of Love and Life (KLP 714), originally released in 1960, is made up of various numbers from Cowboy Copas's King years including the original "Tragic Romance," "Hangman's Boogie" and 11 other numbers from the 1940's and early 1950's, \$8.98 LP, CD or cassette. *Opdy Star Spotlight* (SLP 157) has no big hits, but concentrates on Copas's versions of other artists' hits, such as "Wings of a Dove," "The Rebel—Johnny Yuma," "A Satisfied Mind" and "Loose



Talk." \$8.98 LP, CD or cassette. The back of the LP features a rare early photo of Copas with daughter Cathy and a shot of a very young Ralph Emery. *Mister Country Music* (SLP 175) comes from the period not long before his death. It includes "Sal," "A Thousand Miles of Ocean," "Soft Rain," "Louisian" and others—no big hits, \$8.98 LP, CD or cassette.

The cassette-only *24 Greatest Hits* (DLX-7811) covers a number of Copas hits, mostly re-recordings he did when he signed with Starday. However, some tracks, like "Tennessee Waltz" and "Breeze," are the King originals. The list of songs includes "Filipino Baby," "I Dreamed of a Hill-billy Heaven," "Wings of a Dove" (again), "Flat Top Guitar," "Wreck on the Highway" and more, \$9.98, cassette.

Buried Treasures Special

Members are entitled to deduct \$2 from the price of every item offered in *Buried Treasures* in this and every issue. Artists covered by Rich Kienzle this month include Ernest Tubb, Conway Twitty, The Stanley Brothers and Little Jimmy Dickens.



January '90

S M T W T F S

Legends Calendar Debuts

We always listen to what our members tell us. So when you told us to include more of your longtime favorites in our calendar, we did—in 1989, Minnie Pearl and Bill Monroe. In 1990 we launched the *Legends of Country Music* calendar, based entirely on performers from the Hall of Fame.

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A new society is forming, based on members' and others' interest in preserving America's country music of the 1920's and 1930's as well as its distinctive sounds from the 1940's and 1950's. Charter memberships cost \$7.99, a special half-price offer for CMSA members only, and include the Academy's new magazine, *The Journal of the American Academy for the Preservation of Old Time Country Music*, plus the *Legends* calendar and other benefits. Thousands have already joined. You can too by sending \$7.99 and your suggestions for the first six cover stories to our address below. Mark your envelope, Attention: Academy.

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MEMBERS POLL/MARCH 1990

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Your opinions can help influence record companies, radio stations, record stores, concert promoters, managers and performers. As a CMSA member, you have an organized way of making your opinion known, by filling out the Members Poll. We forward the results of the Polls to those involved in the business of country music who are interested in what fans are thinking and doing, and we publish the results.

Bought Any Good Records Lately?

- Did you buy any albums (records, cassettes or compact discs) in the last month? Yes No
How many records? _____ cassettes? _____ CDs? _____
- Which ones did you like best? List performers and album titles.
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Your Choice for Album and Single of the Month

- To vote, list the numbers of your top five favorites from the Top 25 on the last page in this issue.

Singles (list 5 numbers)	Albums (list 5 numbers)
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- About how many purchases have you or someone in your household made by mail or phone in the last 12 months? _____
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Record Reviews

way. "Never Knew Lonely," "We Could Have Been," "Sight for Sore Eyes" and "When I Call Your Name" feature Gill's haunting high lonesome cryin' song signature as well as any he's ever done. Kathie Baillie and Patty Loveless, respectively, kick in memorable harmonies on the last two of those, by the way. But I got such a bellyful of that style from the years at RCA when that's about all Vince did that it still hits me as whiney. To his credit, he tackles contemporary Western dance styles with "Ridin' the Rodeo" and "Oklahoma Swing" with enthusiasm and accomplishment. Desert Rose's Herb Pederson lends his voice on the former, while Reba McEntire sings strong backing vocals on the latter.

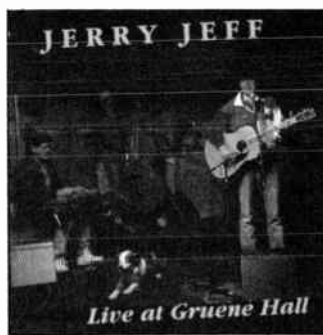
Maybe that's the problem with this record. What you remember most is the sound of distinctive backing singers like Loveless and McEntire. What we have here is a great record of radio fodder. Like cheese puffs, there is a pleasant transitory flavor, but not much substance. I bet these songs will get played from coast to coast and not a dozen people will be able to hum me two bars of any of them when the singles are over. Which is a shame because Vince Gill is really a nice guy, and, like a baseball player who consistently singles to short left but somehow never scores, he undeniably has talent.

—BOB MILLARD

Jerry Jeff Walker

Live at Gruene Hall
Tried & True TTMC 1698

Jerry Jeff Walker, like many another member of his generation, has gone through his changes in the last few years. The former Austin wildman gave up his drinking and drugging, turned to jogging and health foods, and just generally began comporting himself in



a manner that left more than a few people more than a little confused. But that was understandable, given that his public persona was so closely tied to his music—he carried on recklessly and sang about it rather erratically. His fans loved him for that, for being the guy willing to do their hard living for them, regardless of the quality of his work. Now Jerry Jeff and those fans are having to adjust to one another all over again.

As evidenced on *Live at Gruene Hall*, a cassette and CD recorded at one of the oldest and prettiest dancehalls in the Hill Country, there are some growing pains involved. Jerry Jeff was always something of a sentimentalist—that side of him is one of the things his drunk and disorderly demeanor was meant to hide, or at least balance out—but when you get to Side Two of this effort and find, with the exception of "Trashy Women," virtually nothing left *but* sentimentality, it can wear thin. While it's no mystery why he abandoned the edge he used to use, he still needs an edge of some sort.

His voice, on the other hand, is well-suited to his material; it still conveys both experience and this kind of childlike glee that never goes stale. And technically it's a better instrument than ever. He's not always melodically up to something like "Long Long Time," but just the way he repeats the word "me" almost as an afterthought at the end of a line about drinking to "my compadres and me" on "Man in the Big Hat,"

well, it tugs at the heartstrings, folks.

He turns his own fair share of snappy lines ("They told me a lean dog can run a long race," he declares in "Lovin' Makes Livin' Worthwhile"), but he also introduces a sharp new northwestern songwriter named Chris Wall. In addition to "Rodeo Wind," and the aforementioned (and delightful) "Trashy Women," Wall is responsible for "I Feel Like Hank Williams Tonight," a weeper about the therapeutic values of music with a guitar solo by Champ Hood that's too damn sad.

He's not for everyone—never was, really—but if you're partial towards the folkish end of contemporary country, Jerry Jeff can show you a trick or two.

—JOHN MORTHLAND



Jimmie Dale Gilmore

Jimmie Dale Gilmore
Hightone HC8018

I admit it took me a while to catch on to Jimmie Dale Gilmore.

Even after several friends of mine whose musical tastes I respect started jumping up and down about him, it took me quite a while to "get it" and to start jumping up and down myself. Like Guinness beer, raw oysters, Roy Acuff, Hank Thompson, The Rolling Stones and a number of other things—except fried chicken livers; never fried chicken livers!—that I've since come to love, Gilmore just didn't set right with me at first.

Suddenly, though, after a

half dozen spins of his new album, *Jimmie Dale Gilmore*, it all sort of fell together in an unbelievably wonderful way. The next thing I knew, I was sashaying up and down the hall to "Dallas" (an upbeat but slightly cynical Gilmore original first recorded and popularized by Joe Ely) and the rowdy beat of "The Hardwood Floor."

Now I'm beginning to suspect that this lanky Texan and former sidekick of Joe Ely and Butch Hancock may well be the closest thing we're going to get to a latter day Ernest Tubb or Hank Thompson. Gilmore, Ely and Butch Hancock, by the way, were in a band together in Lubbock, way back when, and Ely produced Gilmore's first Hightone album. Hancock, with no fewer than five writing or co-writing credits herein, is a hidden force on this one.

Gilmore (much like Tubb, Thompson, or Acuff) has a raw, unvarnished singing style—drawling, tenor-ish and wildly expansive—that takes a little getting used to. But with his robust, crooning, diphthong-bending vocals, and with the help of veteran session men like Harold Bradley, Lloyd Maines and David Briggs, Gilmore makes the bottles bounce and the rafters rattle with rollicking covers of Mel Tillis's "Honky Tonk Song" and Hancock's "Red Chevrolet."

Gilmore also ventures movingly into more introspective, heartfelt territory with his own "Deep Eddie Blues" and Hancock's lovely "When the Nights are Cold."

There's hardly a cut on here that doesn't sparkle with Gilmore's steel guitar-weepy, fire-blazing, neo-honky tonk sound. And I should know—I've played this sucker about five times already since I got up this morning!

Jimmie Dale Gilmore may indeed be one of the best albums I've heard all year.

—BOB ALLEN

Buried Treasures / *Reissues, Rarities and the Hard-to-Find*

Because there's so much reissue material coming out, we've only occasionally dealt with bluegrass and new recordings. This time, we feature both, as well as our usual selections.

Ernest Tubb: Continuing to mine the vast catalog of Ernest Tubb Decca albums, Stetson comes up a winner with his excellent 1963 gospel album *The Family Bible* (HAT 3120). This is an outstanding mix of E.T.'s rendition of the Claude Gray hit (written by Willie Nelson) with a number of other traditional hymns and country gospel favorites. All adapt well to the Tubb style, whether it be gospel songsmith Alfred Brumley's "If We Never Meet Again," The Carter Family's "Lonesome Valley," "When It's Prayer Meetin' Time in the Hollow" or "Stand by Me," the gospel tune most associated with E. T.

Not surprisingly, E. T. also tackled Hank Sr.'s "I Saw the Light," "Great Speckled Bird" and "Precious Memories." There's even a remarkably good rendition of Ferlin Husky's hit "On the Wings of a Dove," which on the surface doesn't seem like a natural for Tubb's vocal style. As usual, there's spare accompaniment from The Texas Troubadours and, on the cover, a rare photo of Tubb with his parents and siblings.

Conway Twitty: After making some unreleased rockabilly test recordings for Sun and some unsuccessful released sides for Mercury, Conway's first real success came with MGM Records in 1958 with "It's Only Make Believe" and "The Story of My Love," followed in 1959 by "Mona Lisa." All that ended up on his first album, *Conway Twitty Sings* (HAT 3127). This is pretty tame stuff, interesting mainly because Conway co-wrote not only "Make Believe" but also four other numbers on



here, including "The Story of My Love."

None of it really hints at his later success with country, as he wound up recording pop tunes like "Sentimental Journey" and the horribly over-performed "You'll Never Walk Alone," but this was typical of the music rock singers of that era were required to sing. Given that fans haven't had much early Conway to choose from, it's interesting to compare this music with what came later. **Little Jimmy Dickens:** His best-known records may have been novelty songs, but to judge Dickens as a wacky, sassy novelty artist alone gives only half the picture. He was also a compelling ballad singer, something his late 1940's and early 1950's hits for Columbia don't reflect since most of the ballads were on the flipside of his records. But Rounder Records' new Dickens reissue, *Straight ... From the Heart: 1949-1955* (P 20587), reveals that side of his music. It doesn't take more than a couple of tracks to note the Roy Acuff influence. Dickens' voice, however, had a bit more texture than Roy's rougher-edged sound. The sincerity and emotion literally drip off every word.

The first track, the never-before issued "Sea of Broken Dreams," a waltz-tempo ballad from 1951, makes his strengths clear. The other material was just as well chosen: "Wedding Bell Waltz" is a Dickens original, "I've Just

Got to See You Once More" is upbeat, and the edge in his voice is as strong as it is on "A Rose from the Bride's Bouquet," which conveys true devastation. As Kyle Cantrell's liner notes state, "Dickens' delivery is so convincing the listener will swear the songs are... Jimmy's personal experiences."

One truly fascinating performance is his version of the Hank Williams/Luke the Drifter recitation "Be Careful of Stones That You Throw," which he sings without reciting. Though I wish Rounder had added "Where Did the Sunshine Go," one of the more obscure ballads, two uptempo tunes provide contrast: the gospel number "The Little Old Country Church House" and one of his lesser-known but great novelties, the cocky "Out of Business." The famous Dickens "twin guitar" sound is featured throughout, including the work of his original guitar duo, Grady Martin and the underrated Nashville guitarist, Jabbo Arrington.

Jimmie Davis: A couple of issues back, we profiled Jimmie Davis in the CMSA Newsletter and mentioned that his original recording of "You are My Sunshine" isn't in print. But if you want to hear him sing it or any of his other greatest hits in a later version, here you go. *You are My Sunshine* (HAT 3121), originally released in 1959, is made up of late 1950's versions produced by Owen Bradley

with standard slick, Nashville Sound backing. Davis is in fine voice and turns out workmanlike versions of "Sunshine" and 11 other songs he either wrote or co-wrote (Davis bought songs and copyrights on songs from other composers during the 1930's).

The set is a good survey of just how many country standards Davis was associated with: "I Hung My Head and Cried," "There's a New Moon over My Shoulder," "Nobody's Darlin' but Mine," "It Makes No Difference Now," "My Mary" (the old Milton Brown favorite), "Live and Let Live," "Worried Mind" and "Columbus Stockade Blues." He was in fine voice, and as much as I wish someone would reissue the originals, this will do until then.

The Stanley Brothers: We also profiled The Stanley Brothers in the CMSA Newsletter not long ago and discussed what Stanley material is still available. Quite a lot's been reissued. However, one blank area, one with some of their best work, was their 1953-58 period with Mercury. Stetson has put a major dent into that void by reissuing The Stanleys' 1958 Mercury album *Country Pickin' and Singin'* (HAT 3125)—not a very clever title, but most bluegrass albums of that day were similarly named.

Most of the dozen songs are Stanley originals like the quiet, dramatic masterpiece "The Flood," one of those great modern vignettes of rural life that The Stanleys were known for. The mix consists of "You're Still on My Mind," the ungodly high harmonies of "Angel Band" and "Who Will Call You Sweetheart" as well as "A Voice From on High." Even the instrumentals, with Ralph's banjo showcasing on "Big Tilda" and the unrelenting drive of "Fling Ding," are all high quality. This album by

no means covers the complete Mercury recordings (which leaves plenty of room for other reissues), but it's a start—and a must-have for fans of traditional bluegrass. **The Osborne Brothers:** The Osbornes haven't always gotten the credit, but they pioneered bluegrass on college campuses before it became fashionable and later pioneered the use of electric instruments and drums in bluegrass. *Country Pickin' and Hillside Singin'* (HAT 3129), their 1959 album for MGM, was issued just before they did their historic concert at Antioch College in Ohio. Osborne fans will want these 1956-58 recordings (featuring vocalist Red Allen) since The Osbornes' first recording of "Ruby, Are You Mad," and their Number 13 country hit, "Once More," from the spring of 1958, are found here.

The remainder of the collection consists of bluegrass tunes like their version of Charlie Monroe's version of the ancient folk tune "Down in the Willow Garden" and more recent mainstream country hits like Kitty Wells' "She's No Angel," Jimmy and Johnny's "If You Don't, Somebody Else Will" and Leon Payne's "Lost Highway." Sonny's and Bobby's skills as instrumentalists were apparent even then.

Carl Story: Without question, Carl Story has been one of bluegrass' most prolific recording artists. He was also among the first country performers signed to Mercury Records. *Gospel Quartet Favorites* (HAT 3128), originally released in 1958, was the first of dozens of albums Story has done in the past 30 years, and like many of the later ones, it concentrates on sacred music.

This set combines Albert Brumley's "I've Found a Hiding Place," Wally Fowler's "The Circle Was Broken," "Gone Home" (written specially for Story by Bill Carlisle), The Louvin Brothers' "My Lord's Gonna Lead Me Out" and traditional songs like "Are You Afraid to Die."

Story had a fine band at the time and stressed an ensemble sound both vocally and instrumentally. His was not a group of soloists specializing in hot instrumental licks, and that made them different from many bluegrass units of that time.

Jimmie Skinner: It's been said that a little of Jimmie Skinner goes a long way. Skinner, whose style fused the music of Jimmie Rodgers, Ernest Tubb and bluegrass, had been around since the 1940's, and it's true most of his tunes tend to sound alike. His 1957 album *Songs that Made the Jukebox Play* (HAT 3126) doesn't include all his hits, but does offer two of his biggest: "I Found My Girl in the USA" from 1957 and "What Makes a Man Wander" (1958). Also among the 12 tracks are two duets with obscure singer Connie Hall: "We've Got Things in Common" and "Where Do We Go From Here." The original version of his "Doin' My Time," recorded by Johnny Cash during his days at Sun, is also included, and proves clearly how Cash's vocal style was influenced by Skinner. Skinner even used the trademark Cash boom-chucka sound on "Where My Sweet Baby Goes," here a case of the teacher imitating the student.

The Musical Brownies: It's an established fact that Milton Brown and his band, The

Musical Brownies, were the first real Western swing band. Their records for Decca through 1935 and 1936 were, in the eyes of some swing aficionados, better than Bob Wills' early recordings, since The Brownies included pioneer electric steel guitarist Bob Dunn and pianist Fred "Papa" Calhoun.

This past summer Milton's brother Roy Lee, now in his seventies, recorded a Brownies tribute, *Western Swing Heritage* (Priority PTS-3001). This cassette-only release doesn't recreate The Brownies note-for-note, which would be impossible since most of its ex-members are dead, but even with its more modern sound, Roy Lee has revived The Brownies' infectious joy and spirit.

These 14 numbers feature some excellent vocals from Roy Lee (whose physical resemblance to Milton is ghostly) backed by such outstanding Fort Worth musicians as guitarist Billy Luttrell, pianist Johnny Case, fiddler Wes Westmoreland, steel guitarist Tom Morrell, fiddler and electric mandolinist Randy Elmore and former Texas Playboy Leon Rausch on bass and vocals. Brownie favorites "Four or Five Times," "If You Can't Get Five Take Two," "Texas Hambone Blues," "Chinatown, My Chinatown" and "My Mary" are complemented by the only known

recording of the band's closing theme song, which is untitled on the cassette.

Time-Life Country USA: Time-Life's *Country USA* series rolls on with some strong year-by-year entries from the 1950's through the 1970's, including these two covering two of the best years for all-time classic country hits: 1963 (STL-115) and 1965 (STL-CTD-11). Included are a staggering number of enduring hits, all, note this, the original versions. With typically superb sound from remastering wizard Bill Inglot, the 24 numbers on each set, many of them long out-of-print, constitute some of the best of the decade.

1963 includes Buck Owens' "Act Naturally" and "Love's Gonna Live Here," Dave Dudley's "Six Days on the Road," Patsy Cline's "Leavin' on Your Mind" and "Faded Love," Ernest Tubb's "Thanks a Lot," Ray Price's "Night Life," Bobby Bare's "500 Miles" and "Detroit City." Those plus Hank Snow's "Ninety Miles an Hour (Down a Dead End Street)" and the original Ned Miller version of "From a Jack to a King" make this an album well worth having.

1965 includes Buck Owens' hard-to-find versions of "I've Got a Tiger by the Tail" and "Before You Go." Merle Haggard's first big hit, "Strangers," is here, along with Eddy Arnold's "Make the World Go Away," "Blue Kentucky Girl" by Loretta Lynn, and Johnny Bond's boozy novelty "Ten Little Bottles." One of Marty Robbins' best numbers of the mid-1960's, "Ribbon of Darkness," balances things out, along with Porter Wagoner's "Skid Row Joe" and his memorable and definitive version of "Green, Green Grass of Home." Stonewall Jackson's "I Washed My Hands in Muddy Water" and Chet Atkins' "Yakety Axe," his adaptation of Boots Randolph's "Yakety Sax," are here as well. All the Time-Life collections, available by subscription only, are good; these two are particularly worthwhile.

—RICH KIENZLE

How to Get These Treasures

Available in LP or cassette at prices shown: Ernest Tubb, *The Family Bible* (HAT 3120), \$10.98/Conway Twitty, *Conway Twitty Sings* (HAT 3127), \$10.98/Little Jimmy Dickens, *Straight...From the Heart: 1949-1955* (P 20587), \$10.98/Jimmie Davis, *You are My Sunshine* (HAT 3121), \$10.98/The Stanley Brothers, *Country Pickin' and Singin'* (HAT 3125), \$10.98/The Osborne Brothers, *Country Pickin' and Hillside Singin'* (HAT 3129), \$10.98/Carl Story, *Gospel Quartet Favorites* (HAT 3128), \$10.98/Jimmie Skinner, *Songs That Made the Jukebox Play* (HAT 3126), \$10.98. Available in cassette only: Roy Lee Brown, *Western Swing Heritage* (Priority PTS-3001), \$10.98. Available in LP, cassette or CD at prices shown: Time-Life, *Country USA: 1963* (STL-115), CD \$16.99, LP or cassette \$14.99/Time-Life, *Country USA: 1965* (STL-CTD-11), CD \$16.99, LP or cassette \$14.99.

To order, send check or money order to *Country Music Magazine*, Dept. 3490, 329 Riverside Avenue, Westport, Connecticut 06880. Add \$1.95 postage and handling for first item ordered, \$.95 each additional. CMSA members, see For CMSA Members Only page for discounts. Allow six to eight weeks.

TOP 25

Singles

1. Clint Black *Nobody's Home*
2. Tanya Tucker *My Arms Stay Open all Night*
3. Ricky Van Shelton *Statue of a Fool*
4. Alabama *Southern Star*
5. Keith Whitley..... *It Ain't Nothin'*
6. Skip Ewing..... *It's You Again*
7. Steve Wariner..... *When I Could Come Home to You*
8. Rodney Crowell..... *Many a Long & Lonesome Highway*
9. Vern Gosdin..... *That Just About Does It*
10. Desert Rose Band. ... *Start all Over Again*
11. Lorrie Morgan. *Out of Your Shoes*
12. Eddie Rabbitt..... *On Second Thought*
13. The Judds *One Man Woman*
14. Billy Joe Royal *Till I Can't Take It Anymore*
15. George Strait..... *Overnight Success*
16. Kathy Mattea *Where've You Been*
17. Ronnie Milsap..... *A Woman in Love*
18. Highway 101 *Who's Lonely Now*
19. Willie Nelson. *There You Are*
20. The Oak Ridge Boys .. *No Matter How High*
21. Shenandoah. *Two Dozen Roses*
22. Garth Brooks *If Tomorrow Never Comes*
23. Don Williams *I've Been Loved by the Best*
24. Lionel Cartwright *In My Eyes*
25. Baillie & The Boys.... *I Can't Turn the Tide*

Albums

1. Randy Travis..... *No Holdin' Back*
2. Clint Black *Killin' Time*
3. The Charlie Daniels Band..... *Simple Man*
4. Reba McEntire. *Reba Live*
5. Dolly Parton..... *White Limozeen*
6. Sawyer Brown *The Boys are Back*
7. Lorrie Morgan. *Leave the Light On*
8. Dwight Yoakam. *Just Lookin' for a Hit*
9. Ricky Van Shelton *Loving Proof*
10. Garth Brooks *Garth Brooks*
11. Shenandoah. *The Road not Taken*
12. Hank Williams Jr. *Greatest Hits III*
13. Keith Whitley..... *I Wonder Do You Think of Me*
14. Kentucky Headhunters *Pickin' on Nashville*
15. George Strait..... *Beyond the Blue Neon*
16. Willie Nelson. *A Horse Called Music*
17. Vern Gosdin..... *Alone*
18. Rodney Crowell..... *Keys to the Highway*
19. K.T. Oslin..... *This Woman*
20. The Judds *River of Time*
21. Kenny Rogers..... *Something Inside so Strong*
22. Kathy Mattea *Willow in the Wind*
23. Alabama *Southern Star*
24. Randy Travis..... *Always & Forever*
25. k.d. lang *Absolute Torch & Twang*

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