

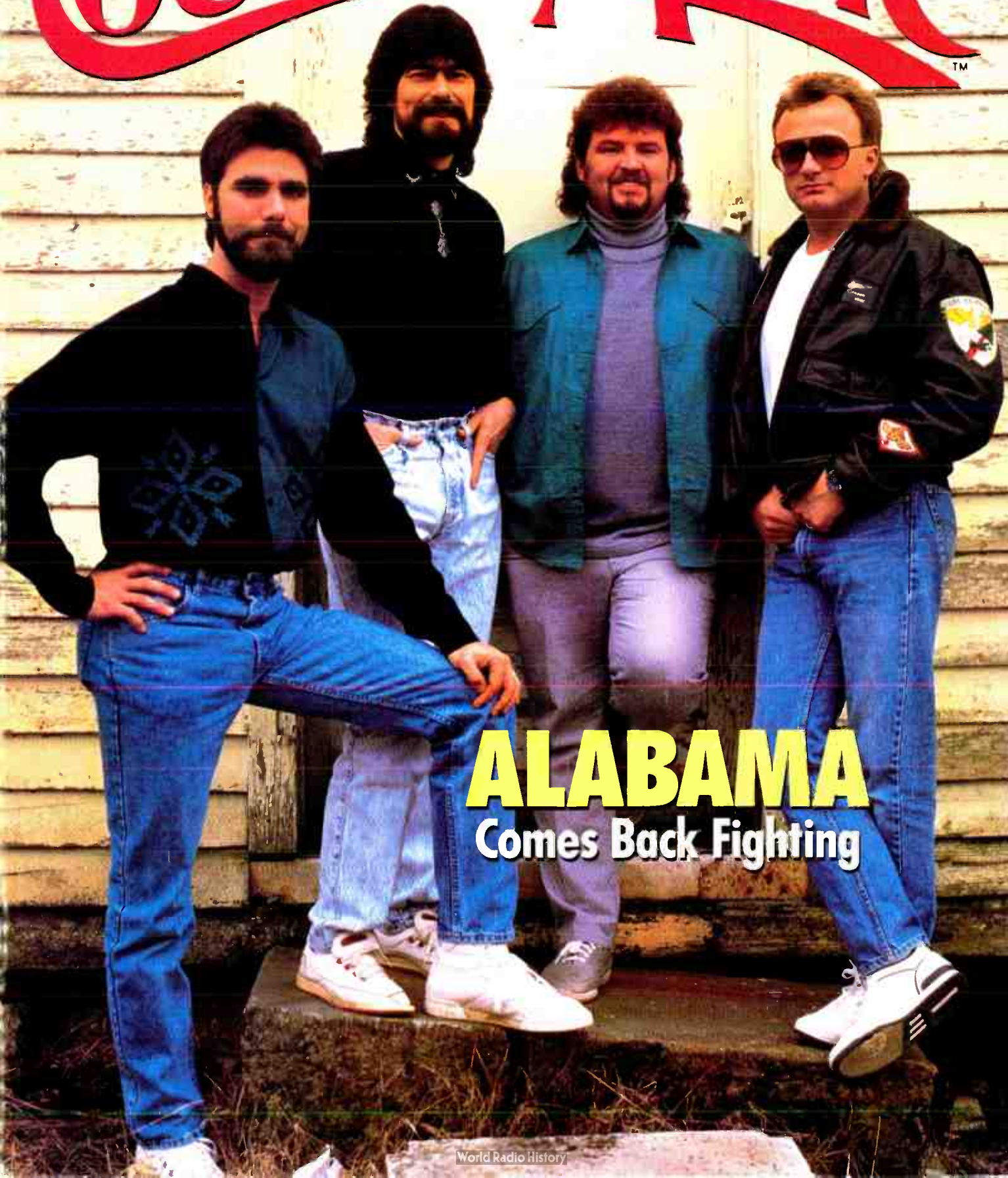
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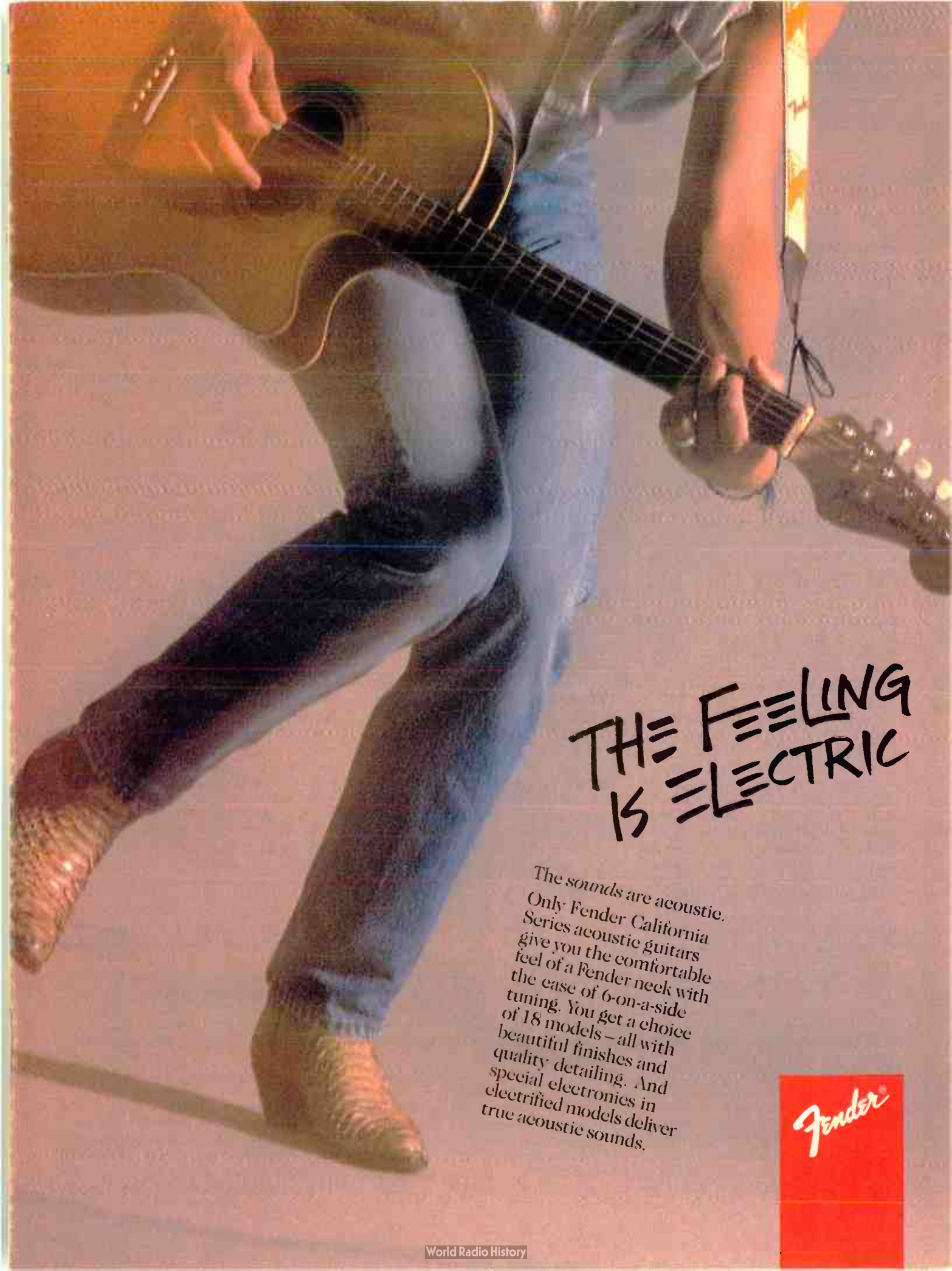
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# COUNTRY MUSIC™



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- 17 People** *by Hazel Smith*  
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- 26 20 Questions with Jo-El Sonnier** *by Michael Bane*  
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- 30 Alabama Comes Back Fighting** *by Bob Allen*  
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- 36 The Highwaymen Pull-Out Centerfold**  
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- 39 Baillie & The Boys** *by Bob Allen*  
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- 42 Mary Chapin Carpenter Gets a Nod From Nashville** *by Patrick Carr*  
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- 50 Record Reviews**  
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- 66 Essential Collector** *by Rich Kienzle*  
More good tips for country collectors—profiles on home videos from our man-in-the-know, Rich Kienzle.
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Rich comes up with reissues on Merle Haggard, Sonny James, Ernest Tubb, George Jones, Jimmy Bryant and Skeets McDonald, plus some fun times from 1940's radio.

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# Letters

## Shine On K. T.

I am a new subscriber to *Country Music Magazine*. You cannot imagine my delight to find K. T. Oslin's picture on the cover of the May/June issue—the very first issue I've ever received. I really enjoyed the cover story. K. T. is my favorite singer of all time. I admire her talent so much. Her voice is a shining light to the world of country music. Thanks so much for giving insight on our favorite country stars.

I hope K. T. knows how much her music enriches the lives of her fans.

Jean Tripp  
Ayden, North Carolina

## Always Coming Back To K. T.

Thank you for the super article on K. T. Oslin! The cover picture on the May/June issue was fabulous! It looks like she's right there in front of you! You answered a lot of questions that I had about her. I've been her fan since the first time I heard her sing "I'll Always Come Back" on the radio. And the more I find out about her the more I like and admire her. Her singing and songwriting skills are matched by no one!

She has worked at her career for 25 years—that drive and determination should speak for itself. I think the reason it's taken her until two years ago to get everyone's attention is because K. T.'s depth and insight have always been ahead of her time. She gets labeled "feminist" everytime you turn around. Maybe she just wants to see women portrayed as stronger—not these wimps and poor little things begging their cheating husbands to come back. This is 1990!

Who else but K. T. could write "find the nearest sunset and love your night into a lovely day"? If the imagery isn't enough, her voice fulfills the rest. In my opinion, K. T. Oslin is here to stay!!

Sandra Harrison  
Greenville, South Carolina

## K. T. Oslin—Burning No Bridges

Thanks for a great article on a great lady, K. T. Oslin, in your May/June issue. "80's Ladies" is my favorite video and high on my list of favorite songs. But "we burned our bras and we burned our *dinners*"—not our "bridges" as stated in the article. We're too smart for that!

I really enjoy your way of reporting about the people you interview. I always



look forward to your astute observations and the colorful way you share them!

Flo Gorton  
Hudson Falls, New York  
*Bridges, dinners...same thing! Thanks for the correction.—Ed.*

## Refreshing K. T.

A big thank you for a great article on one of the 80's ladies in your May/June issue. I really enjoyed it. It was great to find out how she feels about being on the road and writing her own music. She has class and that spark to get your attention. There's just something refreshing about her. I think she's great.

I was also wondering if you could give us an update on another great country singer, Reba McEntire, since the birth of her baby.

Dawn Chiarle  
Delmont, New Jersey  
*See People in this issue.—Ed.*

## K. T. Brings Country Music Home

Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! I cannot praise you enough on the great cover story on K. T. Oslin in the May/June issue. I've missed K. T. so much these last months while she was working on her latest album. It was wonderful to open up my mailbox and see my favorite magazine with my favorite star on the cover. While there are many wonderful and talented entertainers, K. T. is by far the greatest of them all.

My admiration for K. T. is what first brought me to love country music. Since then I feel like I've found a "home" in

country music through the many great people I have met, the friends I've made and the many faces of country music stars that have become so familiar to me and so much a part of my life.

Marilyn A. Hilb  
Arlington Heights, Illinois

## Success with Shelton Centerfold

Just a few lines to tell you how much I enjoy your magazine.

The March/April issue with the centerfold of Ricky Van Shelton was especially good. Now when are you going to do a feature story and cover on Ricky? He has a beautiful voice, and I especially love the way he can sing a ballad.

Thank you for the many hours of reading enjoyment from your magazine. Keep up the good work.

Carol Torzok  
Homer City, Pennsylvania  
*For more on Ricky Van Shelton, stay tuned!—Ed.*

## Strait Fever All The Way

I really enjoyed Bob Allen's article, "Strait Fever," in the March/April issue of *Country Music Magazine*. I've now witnessed it firsthand. My husband and I attended George Strait's Charlotte, North Carolina, concert. The place was packed—male, female, old, young, everybody. Roses, balloons and gifts were given by the fans, and handshakes, autographs and wonderful music were returned by Mr. Strait and his Ace in the Hole Band. There was all the usual screaming, shouting, sighing and swooning. There were standing ovations too—several of them. I'll never forget one concert at Six Flags, Georgia, when an elderly gentleman put his hand on my shoulder and said, "That young feller jest sung twenty-two songs." At the Charlotte concert, the crowd was larger—twenty deep around the stage. The coliseum was ecstatically electrified, and I was thinking, "Strait Fever all the way." He really is the best traditionalist—old or new.

Ellen Tonsing  
McCormick, South Carolina

## "George-ous" Strait

He did it again. Hazel Smith's and my favorite green-eyed, talented, "George-ous" singer has won the Academy of Country Music "Entertainer of the Year." Congratulations, George Strait!

A precious newborn greets the world in her own quiet way...

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## COUNTRY MUSIC MAGAZINE

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Of course, to all of his fans he has always been number one, but now the rest of the world realizes it too. I think people are getting tired of the hard-drinking, two-timing jailbirds that have dominated the country scene for so long. George Strait is like a breath of fresh air. I really enjoy reading Hazel Smith's column; she always refers to George in some way. I think this lady has very good taste. Keep up the good work, Hazel!

Bunny Gessner  
Eau Claire, Wisconsin



**Patty Hendrick, Debbie Gambill and Dorothy Anderson enjoying the side effects of Strait Fever.**

## "Strait-forward Appreciation"

I loved your article and pictures featuring George Strait in your March/April issue. My friends and I have been experiencing "Strait Fever," and we were lucky enough to have our pictures taken with him in Abilene, Texas. What a nice man! He showed us he truly deserved 1989's CMA "Entertainer of the Year."

Debbie Gambill  
Fort Worth, Texas

## Skaggs Scores with Centerfold

We enjoy your magazine very much. We especially loved the May/June issue with the Ricky Skaggs pull-out poster!

Ricky is our number one favorite country singer. We've seen him in concert 40 times to date. He is a dynamite entertainer. His concerts are very energetic and fun. He is also a very sincere and sweet person and a great family man.

Don and Carol Boomstra  
South Holland, Illinois



**Ricky Skaggs greets Don and Carol Boomstra after a recent concert.**

## Noteworthy "New Kid"— Scott McQuaig

I was very impressed with your article on "New Kids On The Country Block" in the May/June issue. I think the new singers should get some publicity. As for Scott McQuaig, he has a great voice and personality and his band, The Dreamers, are fantastic. I have known Scott since he was young, and he is a great person and a great showman. All he needs is a break. Go ahead, Scott and The Dreamers. I'm looking forward to hearing you when you make it big!

Maggie Gully  
Preston, Mississippi

## On the Lookout for Lionel Cartwright

I can't wait for your magazine to come in the mail. I was especially thrilled to see a column on Lionel Cartwright in "New Kids On The Country Block" in the May/June issue. When I first heard Lionel's song "Like Father, Like Son" last year I couldn't wait to buy the album. Now I see he has a second one out. I hope it doesn't take me long to find this one in the stores. Sure would love a cover on Lionel!

Patti Carr  
Merrill, Wisconsin



**"New Kid" Larry Boone enjoying the company of reader, Sharon Gilmore.**

## Wishing Larry Boone the Best

My husband and I had the opportunity to meet Larry Boone at the Ramp Festival in Cosby, Tennessee. Believe me, he is a super entertainer. I wish the very best for Larry and his band. They deserve it. I hope to be seeing more articles in your wonderful *Country Music Magazine* about Larry in the future. He's fabulous.

Sharon Gilmore  
Charlottesville, Virginia

## Some Vern Gosdin Trivia

Thank you for your article on Vern Gosdin in the March/April issue. I've always liked his songs and musical style, and I'm glad he's back with us. Maybe I'll catch his act in the near future when Randy Travis opens for *him*.



I wanted to call Mr. Allen's attention to something in Mr. Gosdin's career he left out, namely his brief stint as an actor in the *Maverick* series of a few years ago. Despite the good casting, the plot lines were not very good, so the only appealing thing about the program was the title song—written and performed by Gosdin.

I read *Country Music Magazine* regularly and voraciously. Thank you for keeping me up on the new and the old.

Tim Jovick  
St. Louis, Missouri

### Wonderful Willie

I love *Country Music Magazine*, and I love the article you did about Willie Nelson in your May/June issue. What a fantastic guy! You sure did make his many, many fans happy. Good ole Willie! He just keeps on keeping on. No wonder his fans love him so. He gives us his all—all the time! Thanks, *Country Music*, for a great story about a great person.

Suzanne West  
Indianapolis, Indiana

### Foster and Lloyd— Breaking With Tradition

I was very glad to see an article on Foster and Lloyd in the March/April edition of your magazine. It is unfortunate that refreshing artists like Foster and Lloyd are often overlooked because they do not fit into the conventional country music mold. Their brand of music is different from most of today's popular country music, but isn't their situation much like that of Elvis and The Everly Brothers, who have their place in country music history?

In a time when country radio stations seem obsessed with playing only certain style artists, I was glad to see your magazine is open-minded and willing to provide your readers with stories on a broad variety of country singers. I think that this diversity will keep many readers, including myself, subscribing.

Michelle Aldredge  
Snellville, Georgia

### The Cowboy Copas Legend

It was with great pleasure that I read Rich Kienzle's portrait of Cowboy Copas in the March/April *Newsletter*. A legend Cowboy Copas is and a footnote he is not! I grew up enjoying the music of Cowboy Copas. He knew how to present melody and lyrics so they would stay with you. I have had the pleasure of meeting his son, Randy Copas. Randy is an outstanding musician and entertainer also. Although Cowboy Copas is no longer here, some of his music is very much alive when presented by son, Randy.

Marty Johnson  
Tonopah, Nevada

### At Home With Hawkshaw Hawkins

It was wonderful reading the article about Hawkshaw Hawkins in the May/June issue of the *CMSA Newsletter*, but I would like to make a correction—his home town is spelled "Huntington."

Hawkshaw was a friend of mine before he became famous. He used to work in a grocery store with my uncle, and, after work, he would go over to my uncle's house and sit on the front porch and play his guitar. At that time he was a little sweet on my cousin, Mary Plyler.

I'm glad someone finally got around to recognizing him as a wonderful country entertainer.

Phyllis J. (Zihlman) Irby  
Mt. Clemens, Michigan



Roy Clark and Alberta Moore at The Great Guitar Pull in Nashville.

### Roy Clark and The Great Guitar Pull

Thanks for the article on Roy Clark in the May/June issue. I was lucky enough to be at The Great Guitar Pull at Opryland, U. S. A. in Nashville, Tennessee, where more than 1,000 guitar and banjo players joined together to form a huge guitar. The event helped celebrate the Opry's 65th birthday and photography's 150th anniversary. The Great Guitar Pull featured Roy Clark, and I had the chance to meet him and have my picture taken with him. He is a great person as well as entertainer, and I noticed his nice complexion.

Alberta Moore  
Sarasota, Florida

### Talking Out For Tubb

I want to thank you for the CMM Update you did on Justin Tubb in the March/April 1990 issue. He is a great singer, songwriter and all-around person who doesn't get the credit he deserves. I don't think you can find anyone any more country than Justin. He is outspoken about his beliefs so you know where you stand with him, but he also knows when to keep quiet. He has a good working fan club behind him with president, Nora Lee Hayes. The address is: Justin Tubb Fan Club, P.O. Box 321, Madison, TN 37115.

Della Clinton  
Cabool, Missouri

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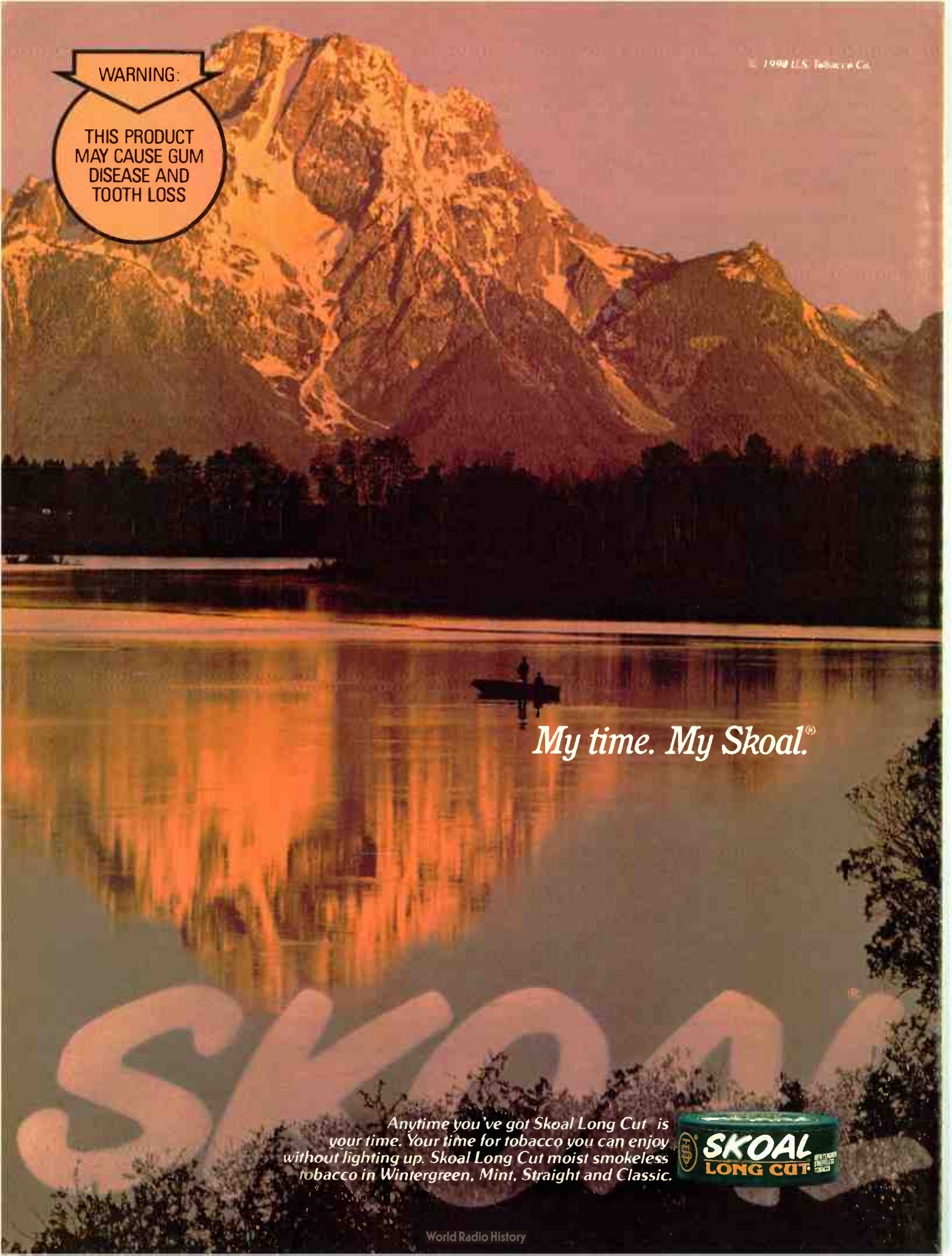
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### Just For Justin Tubb

Be still my walking, talking, crying, barely beating broken heart! Finally an article on my favorite all-time singer, songwriter—Justin Tubb! Just goes to show good things do come to those of us who wait...

Thanks, Rich Kienzle, for a long overdue story on one of the most talented people around.

Jody Pretko  
Lewiston, Idaho

### Statlers Offer Support

Thanks so much for the great 20 Questions article with The Statler Brothers in the March/April issue. *Country Music* is the best magazine, because you still print articles about the fantastic Statler Brothers, which is more than I can say about the bulk of your competitors—especially *Music City News*! We Statler fans never tire of reading about them and hope you'll have another article about The Statler Brothers *real* soon.

The Statler Brothers sponsored an ABC (Absolute Benefit Concert) for the victims of Hurricane Hugo in South Carolina. Several big name entertainers joined The Statlers such as Ralph Emery, George Jones, The Judds, Barbara Mandrell, Ronnie Milsap and Ricky Skaggs. Their efforts raised over \$200,000 for the Hugo Relief Fund.

Marge Belth  
Bloomington, Indiana



Box Car Willie pausing after his show in Branson to chat with Robert Faerber.

### Next Stop: Branson, Missouri

Outside of Nashville and The Grand Ole Opry, Branson, Missouri, has to be the number one tourist spot for country music fans. Last July, we saw Box Car Willie, and this year we saw Mel Tillis, who now has his own outdoor theater there. Both of these entertainers put on a fantastic show and stayed afterwards to sign autographs and pose for pictures. Box Car has to be one of the best all around entertainers in the business, and Mel is truly a living legend. I recommend Branson, Missouri, to anyone who loves country music.

Robert Faerber  
River Forest, Illinois



### One Great Band Deserves Another

Denise Farrell of Norfolk, Virginia, captured two hot bands on tour in the Norfolk area with current issues of *Country Music Magazine*. Highway 101 gathered around the May/June issue, and The Kentucky Headhunters posed with March/April.

### A Golden Guitar For Box Car

On February 3, I presented Box Car Willie with a Golden Guitar Award from the Texas Country Music Association for his outstanding contribution to country music.

I have worked with and seen a lot of hard-working country music entertainers including Hank Williams Sr., but I have never seen anybody work as hard and as long as Box Car Willie. His show was at least two hours long, and he worked every minute of it including playing rhythm for The Trainmen when they did several instrumentals.

Why country radio stations do not play Box Car Willie's records is a big mystery to me. I'm telling you the man is good. Box Car Willie and The Trainmen have really got their act together—great singing, great music, great comedy, etc.

After the show, Box Car Willie signed autographs until the last fan left.

Big Bill Johnson  
Greenville, Texas

### Catching Up With Kenny Starr

I am writing concerning the letter in the May/June issue wanting to know about Kenny Starr and his whereabouts. He lives in Nashville, Tennessee, and he sings about three days a week on Ralph Emery's early morning show. He also works for the Apollo Hair Systems. He's married and has two lovely girls. As far as I know he is not recording, but he makes personal appearances from time to time. He looks great and is doing well. You can write to him at: Kenny Starr, c/o Ralph Emery, P. O. Box 4, Nashville, Tennessee 37202.

Betty Pearl Brown  
Nunnally, Tennessee

### Any News on Bobby G. Rice?

Whatever became of Bobby G. Rice? He had a good sound, and his song, "You Lay So Easy On My Mind," is one of my favorites. He was popular in the late 1960's and early 1970's. Here's hoping someone knows something about him.

Dot German  
Mesa, Arizona



### Gene Rockwell Gant Writes In

My friend Pat Melfi of Alexas Music Productions telephoned me a while back to say that he was reading about me in the "Whatever Happened To" section of Letters in the September/October issue.

I've been writing a lot of songs and was that highway patrol officer in *Uncommon Valor* and the Italian chef in a national toy commercial. I had three of my songs place in the top 25 of the Music City Song Festival, including the Grand Prize in the Novelty Division for Professional Songwriters. The song was "The Circuit Preacher." Recently, I was the opening act for the legend, Mr. Frankie Laine, in San Diego, California.

I've been doing all these things under my full name Gene Rockwell Gant. I know it has confused some of my fans, but it sure made my dad happy.

Gene Rockwell Gant  
Temecula, California



Gene Rockwell Gant kicking back with a copy of *Country Music Magazine*.



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### Mention For Marvin McCullough

Thanks for the letter in the May/June issue about Carl Belew. I sat down and dropped him a line as soon as I read about him being in bad health.

Perhaps your readers would also like to know about Marvin McCullough. He was with Capitol Records in the late 1950's. He has also been in bad health. I'm sure he would be happy to receive cards and letters from those who remember and love his music. His address is: Marvin McCullough, P. O. Box 585, Fort Smith, Arkansas 72902-0585. We here in Fort Smith sure love him and his lovely wife, Jay.

B. Galbraith  
Fort Smith, Arkansas

### Where Is Susan Raye?

I am a new subscriber, and I am so pleased with all the articles, features, and special sections. I've noticed all the letters requesting information on somewhat forgotten stars. When I was a little girl, my favorite singer was Susan Raye. The last time I heard anything about her was in 1979 or 1980. I best remember her for "L. A. International Airport." I would be so thrilled to see your answer in the next issue.

Lydia Kennedy  
Clifton, Arizona

### Quest for The Collins Kids

Just a note to let you know I greatly enjoy your magazine, especially the Letters section. Perhaps you or the readers can answer a question I have. Whatever happened to Larry and Lonnie, The Collins Kids? They appeared years ago on *Tex Ritter's Ranch Party* and also quite frequently with Joe Maphis. I would appreciate any insight on this.

Bill Cantrell  
Houston, Texas

### If the Hat Fits, Wear It

I attended my first country music concert with my parents at The Westbury Music Fair. Kenny Rogers was the star and Garth Brooks was the opening act. I am 13 years old, and I enjoyed it very much, especially when I had a picture taken with Garth and got to wear his hat!

Mario Gallo  
Locust Valley, New York



Garth Brooks and Mario Gallo trade hats at The Westbury Music Fair.

### Finding Old Friends

I was quite surprised to find a poem written by John Korzenewski in your May/June issue! My surprise was due to the fact that about ten years ago, I'd had a student with that name in my English classes at Sandoval Junior High School. Because I couldn't contain my curiosity, I called Directory Assistance and got John's telephone number. I called and found that it was indeed he who had written the poem, and we had a nice conversation talking about the "old days."

Thank you, *Country Music*, for reacquainting me with a fine young man.

Bonnie Ikamas  
Mt. Clemens, Michigan



Reba and fan, Robert Lee, enjoying themselves at Fan Fair 1989.

### Seek and You Shall Find—Discovering CMM

Thanks to Reba, I found your magazine. I never used to listen to country radio, because I preferred rock music. Then in late 1986 I heard Reba's *Whoever's In New England* album and right away became a big fan of hers. I joined Reba's fan club, started listening to country radio and searched the local area in vain for country music magazines. About a year later, in August of 1987, I took a day off from work and drove down to Paso Robles to attend one of Reba's concerts. While shopping at the Safeway store there, I browsed the magazine rack and came upon your magazine—211 miles from home!

Robert Lee  
San Francisco, California

### Anxiously Awaiting an Article On Alan Jackson

As a new subscriber who has just received my first issue, there is no doubt in my mind that I am hooked for life. Seldom do I read a new magazine from cover to cover the same day it arrives. *Country Music Magazine* will stand out as an exception.

Anxiously awaiting your next issue! My fondest hope is a for a full-blown article on the devastatingly handsome and talented Alan Jackson. His video, "Here in the Real World," brings tears to

my eyes every time I see it. I taped him on my VCR, ran right out and bought his first cassette and want to see and hear more, more of him. Beverly Dorn

Paradise, California

Stay tuned!—Ed.

### Pure Country From Jann Browne

Many thanks to Patrick Carr for writing such an outstanding review on the debut album of Jann Browne in the May/June issue. After listening to the entire album, it was no surprise to read such a great review. Jann Browne and her entire gang didn't give Mr. Carr much of a choice. From beginning all the way to the end, it's pure country. Thanks, Jann!

Stephen Andrew Flores  
San Jose, California

### Giving Marsha Thornton Her Due

I think the small record review on Marsha Thornton in the May/June issue didn't do her justice. I think Marsha is the next best voice to Patsy Cline. Marsha is a very special and talented young lady who has a voice that is soft, mellow and crystal clear. I love her video and listen to her tape all day and go to sleep with it. Keep up the excellent work, Marsha. We love you!

Kathy Daly  
LaCrosse, Wisconsin



Jersey Boy artist, Eddie Rabbitt, enjoying life at The American Country Music Awards with William Shatner, caught by J. Watson Garman.

### Rave Review From Eddie Rabbitt

I'm going down the road in my bus after reading your review of *Jersey Boy* in the March/April issue. All I can say is thank you very much for making my day and night. It was a lot of hard work, but people like you make it worthwhile.

Eddie Rabbitt

*Eddie Rabbitt*

### Hank Jr. Does It Again

Love it! Love it! Love it! I was in total agreement with your record review of Hank Williams Jr.'s *Lone Wolf* in the

May/June issue.

He's the best! I never wait for someone else's opinion or review when it comes to Hank Jr. After picking up one of his albums and listening to it a few dozen times, I always feel in my heart that he won't be able to top it. But he does every time. He never ceases to amaze me.

Betty Carlson  
Jefferson, Ohio

### Delighted With Desert Rose

I just had to write about the wonderful record review of The Desert Rose Band's *Pages of Life* in the May/June issue. I'm a big Desert Rose fan, and I'm thrilled with the record review. Thanks for giving attention to both John Jorgenson, as he is the best guitarist in country music today, and Jay Dee, who is the best pedal steel guitarist. They are both very quiet and modest about their talents. Looking forward to a cover article on The Desert Rose Band.

Sandy Frost  
San Diego, California

### Differing With Desert Rose Review

I recently received my first issue of *Country Music Magazine*. I am a big fan of The Desert Rose Band, and I read with great interest the review by Mr. Kienzle in the May/June issue on their

KATHY, JUNE, KIM AND CHRISTY CONTINUE TO BLEND THE BEST OF TRADITIONAL AND NEW COUNTRY SOUNDS. THIS LATEST ALBUM IS PRODUCED BY WENDY WALDMAN, AND FEATURES THE CURRENT SINGLE "OLD ENOUGH TO KNOW" AND THEIR VERSION OF JOHN HIATT'S "DRIVE SOUTH"

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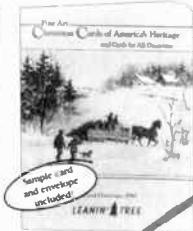
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new album, *Pages of Life*. While he had much praise for it, he mentioned being disappointed in the instrumental aspect of it. I'd just like to say that I was not disappointed with anything about it. I've already played it so much that I know all the songs on it by heart. I definitely agree that they set high standards for themselves and are living up to them.

Laura Lane  
Pinebluff, North Carolina

**Rallying for Ricky Van Shelton**

I just read the review of Ricky Van Shelton's *RVS III* in the March/April issue. I must say I was displeased. I feel you were way off track on this review. This album really shows off the dynamic power in Ricky's voice, and he stands second to no one on any of these songs. This album is as wonderful as any of his others.

Patricia Weaver  
Porterville, California

**Certified Gold—RVS III**

I'm happy to see Ricky Van Shelton's name appearing more and more frequently in each issue of your magazine. To have had his third album, *RVS III*, certified gold in just 30 days is an accomplishment that few artists can boast of. He truly has the most pure, natural voice in country music today. Looking forward to the release of his gospel album!

Thanks for an informative and entertaining publication. I just wish it were published monthly.

Annie M. Wilmoth  
Fallbrook, California

**At Odds With Bob Millard**

I read with interest Bob Millard's review of Vince Gill's *When I Call Your Name* in the March/April issue. I'm a big Vince Gill fan, but I had not yet bought *When I Call Your Name* when I read Bob's review. I finally bought the latest by both Vince and Alan Jackson. I've only listened to Alan's tape *once*, while I have listened to Vince's tape *at least* five times every day. It's a great tape, and one I strongly suggest to people with good taste.

Hey, Bob, where should my friends and I go to hum you a couple of bars of every song on Vince's tape?

Sandra Herrera  
Artesia, New Mexico

**Sticking Up For Simple Man**

This is in response to Bob Allen's review of Charlie Daniel's *Simple Man* in the March/April issue. It sounds like Bob might have slept his way through the 1980's.

Charlie's been around for a long time, and he hasn't slowed down. Believe me, he was very much around during the 80's. Maybe he didn't have the big hit

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songs, but he had some of the best songs I've ever heard in the last decade. They were all hits on my chart. Charlie's never lost direction, and thank God he believes in and loves America.

So, Bob, when you get some time, go buy Charlie Daniels' other albums, and check them out for yourself. Don't blink your eyes in the 90's or you might miss the Charlie Daniels Band.

Bobby Branyon  
Honea Path, South Carolina

### Sweepstakes Winners

CMSA member M. Kilis of Bellflower, California, won the December/January \$1,000 *Country Music* Renewal Sweepstakes which ended February 5, 1990. CMSA member and new Academy member, Al King, of Collinsville, Illinois, took home \$1,000 in the February/March \$1,000 Renewal Sweeps ending on April 4th. Congratulations to these subscribers. Watch this box for more.

### A Comment on Our Coverage

We have been subscribing to your magazine for four years, and for the most part, we enjoy it very much. We would like to know why it appears that only certain artists are being featured on the cover. Since 1986 George Strait has been featured three times and Randy Travis, Ricky Skaggs, Reba and Dolly featured twice. You have done feature stories on the Oak Ridge Boys, Rodney Crowell and The Statler Brothers but have not used their photos on the cover.

How about cover stories on the late greats of country music, i.e. Jim Reeves, Patsy Cline, Marty Robbins, Hank Williams Sr., Faron Young, etc? Roy Acuff, Minnie Pearl and Bill Monroe (who are now and have been a very important part of country music) have never been featured on the cover, not to mention the likes of Gene Autry, Tex Ritter and Roy Rogers.

There are a variety of greats that could and should be featured.

Mr. and Mrs. A. E. Hammerschmidt  
Casper, Wyoming

*You sound like good prospects for the Academy, where we will be covering many of those you mention. Meanwhile, Tex Ritter, Roy Rogers, Bill Monroe and Minnie Pearl have each been on our cover, back in the days before 1983. The Oaks and Statlers have both been on twice, all told. So, for the record, has Hank Williams. In every era, there are repeats, thanks to the popularity of certain artists.—Ed.*

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

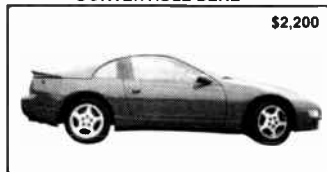
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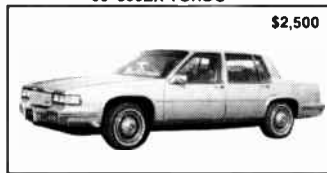
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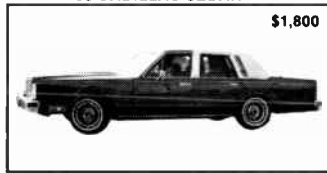
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# People

## EARTH DAY GOES COUNTRY

In conjunction with National Earth Day, some of country music's superstars joined together to create "Tomorrow's World," the official Tennessee Earth Day 1990 song. This song was distributed to radio stations and video stations nationwide to air on Earth Day and thereafter. All of the participants donated their time, talents and services to the project, including the studios and engineers, producer **Jim Ed Norman**, Warner Brothers Records, the designers, printers, video production, duplication and promotion companies and artists, as well. While many artists wanted to participate, many could not because of the limited time frame. Everything had to be finished by Earth Day, and some stars' schedules could not be coordinated. Says executive director **Robin Warshaw**, "The project was put together in a total of six weeks from when we received the demo from **Walter Campbell** at Tree Publishing to the completion."

The song, written by **Pam Tillis** and **Kix Brooks**, focuses on how vital the preservation of the environment is to the quality of life and to the future of our children. Lending their voices were **Jack Daniels**, **Curtis Stone**, **Paulette Carlson** of Highway 101, **Lynn Anderson**, **Les Taylor**, **Rusty Golden**, **Mac Wiseman**, **Shane Barmby**, **Kevin Welch**, **Vince Gill**, **Suzy Bogguss**, **Pam Tillis**, **Radney Foster** and **Bill Lloyd** of Foster & Lloyd, **Bob DiPiero**, **Dennis Robbins** and **John Scott Sherrill** of **Billy Hill**, **Cathy Burch** and **Charlene Burch** of The Burch Sisters, **Holly Dunn**, **Dan Seals**, **Butch Baker**, **Shelby Lynne**, **Johnny Rodriguez**, **William Lee Golden** and **T. Graham Brown**.

"Our goal in assisting the Earth Day movement is to raise the level of awareness through a call for environmental action from our nation's children," says **Jim Ed Norman**.

The words "Tomorrow's world is today's children" is the message the Artists United for Earth Day want to convey—a message created from the heart.



Artists United For Earth Day gave of themselves today in hopes of a better future tomorrow. **Jim Ed Norman** produced the record, "Tomorrow's World."

## CONGRATULATIONS, JUSTIN

Congratulations to **Justin Tubb** on the chart-topping Highway 101 single, "Walkin' Talkin' Cryin' Barely Beatin' Broken Heart." Justin wrote the song a couple of decades ago with **Roger Miller**, who went on to make a mint writing and singing songs. Seems everybody noticed that Roger wrote the tune. 101 even had him in the video. I just want to recognize Justin, too. A couple of Tubb's better-known songs are "Lonesome 77203" and "As Long as There's a Sunday."

## DO-SI-DO AND A VIDEO

I was happy to hear that Studio Productions is doing so well. I like **Mary Matthews**, who is the leader of the pack there, and her associate, **Joan French**. The Curb duo, **Moe Bandy** and **Becky Hobbs**, used the facility for their video, "Pardon Me (Haven't We Loved Somewhere Before)." Becky penned the song with **Candy Parton**. Another Studio project is MCA's hot new act, **Kelly Willis**. Her debut video is titled "I Don't Want to Love You (But I Do)." **Matthews** and **French** used the famed

Bluebird Cafe for part of **Kelly's** footage. And as the Black smoke continues to rise on the horizon, the man **Clint Black's** video, "Walkin' Away," turns out to have been completed by Studio Productions, too. **Matthews** traveled to Houston, **Clint's** home when he isn't on the bus, for the shoot.

Both **Mary** and **Joan** have been my friends for a long time. They have a gent named **Jim May** who works with them and other capable folks that I am not acquainted with, but I am acquainted with their work. I am impressed.

## OUR FIRST LADY

**Mrs. Barbara Bush**, now there's a classy chick. Pearls at her neck, smile on her face and no color in her hair, the nation's First Lady is something to be proud of. Our first lady, the First Lady of Country Music, is a beauty. She's got a smile on her face, a tear in her voice and a different George on her arm. I, of course, am talking about **Tammy Wynette**, who is married to her manager, **George Richey**. **Tammy** performed at the Roxy in glitzy Los Angeles recently. Folks who had the good taste and good sense to show up for the event were **Burt Reynolds** (a for-

Reporter: *Hazel Smith*

Editor: *Rochelle Friedman*

# People

mer boy friend of Wynette) and his wife **Loni Anderson**, superstars **Randy Travis** and **Ricky Van Shelton**, TV stars **Faith Ford** and **Nancy Stafford** and pop singers **Tom Petty** and **Jeff Lynne**. Bet Miss Tammy showed them rockers how it's done, don't you.

## THE HIGHWAYMEN

All of you many fans out there know that I worship **Waylon Jennings** and have for 20 years. He is one of my favorite human beings on this planet. I consider **Willie Nelson** to be a friend of mine, and I think he claims me for his friend. I hope so anyway. I am not well acquainted with **Johnny Cash** or **Kris Kristofferson**, but I am a fan of theirs, too. I can tell you right now that **Kris** is a fan of **Waylon**, **Willie** and **Cash**. They are, by god, his heroes. *Highwayman 2* is the **Highwaymen's** new album. The title's sorta confusing for someone who doesn't know, since there's four **Highwaymen**.

All this leads me to this. The sudden birth of **Jessica Lauren Gwynn** in Cas-

well County took me home. It isn't every day a body has a new niece, and I had to go. Therefore, I missed the performance of the **Highwaymen** at the **Country Radio Seminar**. Word has it they outdid themselves on their home turf. They are gonna outdo each other, outdo all others and prove they still can at the same sitting. They're pros, the four of them. They not only know every trick in the trade, those four guys invented most of them...what they didn't invent they claim they did, or maybe they might wink and allow they stole that trick from **Merle Haggard** or **Buck Owens**.

## BY GEORGE RECORDING IN MUSIC CITY

My favorite, **George Strait**, was in **Music City** recording a new album that he co-produced with **Jimmy Bowen**. The **Strait/Bowen** duo have had a long line of **Number Ones** together, both albums and singles. **George** is still in my bedroom, on the wall by the mirror. I see him and me.



**Johnny Cash and Barbara Mandrell with a very moved Ralph Emery.**

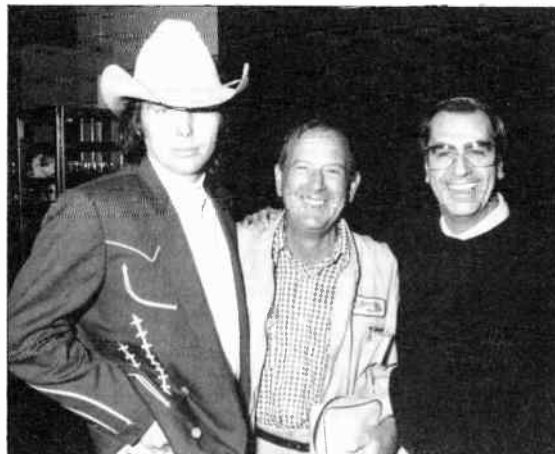
## SURPRISED RALPH

**TNN's** all-star salute to **Ralph Emery** this spring was a *total* surprise to the legendary broadcaster. The event was co-hosted by **Barbara Mandrell** and **Johnny Cash** and featured participation by more than 70 stars, some live, some on tape. **President Bush** appeared in a pre-taped segment and said, in part, "...so, **Ralph**, on behalf of **Barbara** and me, thank you, and thanks to everyone in country music for making such a great contribution to American life."

Putting together a show like this takes forever. The finished product was enjoyable as well as historical. In alphabetical order, those who appeared were: **Roy Acuff**, **Alabama**, **Bill Anderson**, **Lynn Anderson**, **Eddy Arnold**, **Chet Atkins**, **Suzy Bogguss** and **T. Graham Browne**. Also, **Glen Campbell**, **June Carter Cash**, **Charlie Chase**, **Roy Clark**, **Charlie Daniels**, **Jimmy Dean**, **Holly Dunn** and **Barbara Fairchild**. Those **Lookout Mountain** songbirds, **The Forester Sisters**, performed, as did **Larry Gatlin** and **The Gatlin Brothers**, **Crystal Gayle**, **Lee Greenwood**, **Marty Haggard**, **Merle Haggard**, **Tom T. Hall**, **Waylon Jennings**, **Grandpa Jones**, **Patty Loveless** and **Kathy Mattea**. Also taking part were **Irlene Mandrell**, **Roger Miller**, **Lorrie Morgan**, **Anne Murray**, **Willie Nelson**, **The Oak Ridge Boys** and **K.T. Oslin**. Furthermore, **Marie Osmond**, **Dolly Parton**, **Minnie Pearl**, **Jeanne Pruett**, **Jerry Reed**, **Jeannie C. Riley** (who does not look like a grandma), **John Ritter**, **Ronnie Robbins** and **Kenny Rogers**. And there were **Jeannie Seely**, **Shotgun Red**, **Ricky Skaggs**, **Connie Smith**, **The Statlers**, **Ray Stevens**, **Randy Travis** (who is looking so good), **Tanya Tucker** (looking good, too), **Ricky Van Shelton** and **Porter Wagoner**. Rounding out the list were **Steve Wariner**, the great **Kitty Wells**, **Shelly West**, **The Whites**, **Hank Williams Jr.**, **Williams**

## MENDELSON AT IT AGAIN

Our Associate Publisher **Leonard Mendelson** is always at the right place at the right time. Here he meets up with **Tammy Wynette**, **Randy Travis** and **Bill Middlekauff** of **GMC Trucks**. **Randy** and **Tammy** are on tour sponsored by **GMC Trucks**. They can be seen nationwide this summer and fall. **Leonard** also ran into **Patty Loveless** and got a chance to hobnob with **Dwight Yoakam** and **Vic Faraci** of **Warner Bros. Records**.



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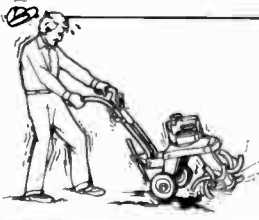
- **SAVES YOU MONEY!** Goes for half the price of larger rear-tine tillers — which you don't need for your small-sized garden.
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& Ree and Faron Young. I am plumb out of breath. I must say it is amazing that Mandrell pulled this off. I'm impressed that she fooled Ralph Emery. Emery was quite moved over the reception by his peers. He's done a lot for country music types. All these folks just wanted to help honor him.

## GET READY TO FACE SOME NEW STARS

Or, the Gospel according to Kay. I can depend on my friend Kay Smith to tell me if something was fair, good, great. Great, she yelled into the receiver: Frank Mull and his team just outdid themselves at this year's Country Radio Seminar. The New Faces Show is always a highlight. This year's was outstanding, with a promise that we will be royally entertained for the next dozen or so years by the likes of Travis Tritt, Lorrie Morgan, Mary Chapin Carpenter, Suzy Bogguss, The Kentucky Headhunters, Jann Browne, Lionel Cartwright, The Lonesome Strangers, Daniele Alexander and Wild Rose. I wish them all the best 'cause I hate to see a star fall.

### WHO'S ON TV WITH DINAH



Minnie Pearl and Roy Acuff were Dinah Shore's guests on a one-hour program, *A Special Conversation With Dinah*, taped at TNN's studios and the Grand Ole Opry House. The segment included Roy singing "Great Speckled Bird" and Dinah performing "Georgia on My Mind."

## CMM Update: *Teddy Wilburn*

"I have not worked the road at all since Doyle died," says The Wilburn Brothers' Teddy Wilburn, summing up his musical activity since Doyle's death in 1982. Doyle's passing ended the career of one of the most popular—and one of the last—of the brother duos. From 1955 to 1972 The Wilburn Brothers were solid hitmakers, Opry members and hosts of a popular syndicated TV show. Most of Teddy's few performing appearances in recent years have been on the Opry. He's also kept busy collecting antiques.

And now a young woman he and Doyle met nearly 20 years ago wants to remind everyone of The Wilburns' glory days: Patty Loveless. "We met Patty in 1971," recalls Teddy. "We were working at the Louisville Convention Center. I think (her brother, now her manager) Roger Ramey was singing with her. Patty did a solo on 'Muleskinner Blues.'" The Wilburns added Patty to their show during the summer months, when she was on summer vacation from high school, and signed her to their Sure Fire publishing company as a songwriter.

Today, an MCA compact disc of Wilburn hits, *Retrospectives*, with notes by Patty, was scheduled to be available as you read this. Patty, Roger and Teddy selected the songs. "We're hoping the success of this CD will create the possibility of another later on," Teddy explains.

The Wilburns not only influenced Patty; they helped Loretta Lynn and the now-ailing Webb Pierce in the early days of their careers as well. When The Wilburns (then a quartet of brothers) worked in Shreveport, Louisiana, they gave Pierce one of his early breaks. "We used to put Webb on our radio shows," says Teddy. "At the time he was the manager of the men's shirt department at Sears."

About his current project, Teddy explains, "I have several appearances set up because of this CD. I went up to Kentucky to do the Patty Loveless Homecoming Show this past year. I work the Opry occasionally and do local television." But, he says, "I would not want to go out



*Retrospectives* covers the brothers' hits. Teddy's at left, above.

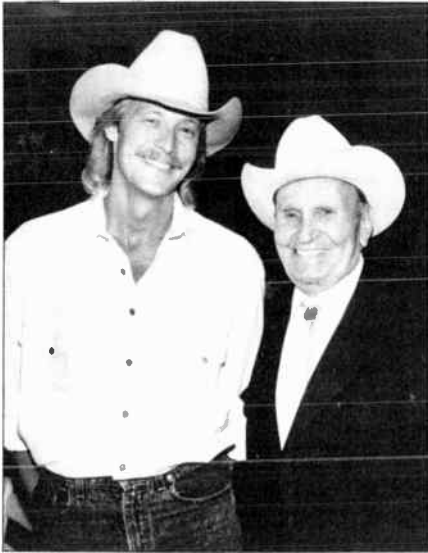
and hit it on the small club circuit using different bands every evening....And since I'm not The Wilburn Brothers *per se*, and they had a major recording career, it's different for me. I would love to travel on a show if time permitted, or if the demand ever came along whereby I would work with Patty, open for her and utilize the same band."

Teddy's closed the booking agency he and Doyle ran, but Sure Fire Music remains healthy. "We just came off a hit with Ricky Van Shelton's 'Statue of a Fool,'" he declares. "Ricky had 'Somebody's Back in Town' (a Number Six hit for The Wilburns in 1966) on the last album," Teddy continues. "On his new album he has another old Wilburn Brothers one, 'Not That I Care,' the flipside of our (1963) hit 'Roll Muddy River.' We were very fortunate a couple of years ago that Dwight Yoakam recorded 'Smoke Along the Track,' another of Sure Fire's copyrights.

"We never know what the future holds," he concludes. "I would love to become more active in the business if the demand is there. But I'm not one of these people that likes to walk up against brick walls. Willie Nelson bought up our old television shows for his new channel (the Cowboy Television Network). That and Patty carrying The Wilburn Brothers' name along, you never know what's going to happen. I may be a star!"

—RICH KIENZLE

# People



Alan Jackson meets his hero, Gene Autry, on the set of *Hee Haw*.

## LET'S ALL GIVE A HAND TO THE NEW COUNTRY STAR IN A HAT

His name is Alan Jackson. He records for Arista Records. The person who is responsible for turning Arista on to Alan is ASCAP's young Shelby Kennedy. If you haven't turned on to Alan Jackson yet, well, get hip. Don't be slow as molasses. Alan Jackson is a hot young man in a hat. Give him a hand.

## FOR THE FANS

In a lengthy article about Merle Haggard in *The New Yorker*, a somewhat highfalutin' though very good publication, writer Bryan DiSalvatore referred to my being critical of the legendary star's performance here at the Starwood Amphitheater. He mentioned that I am usually benevolent and called my column "gossipy." All of this is basically true, and I must say that I am delighted to be quoted. I'd never heard of Mr. DiSalvatore, but he writes real good. I'm not in competition with DiSalvatore or any other journalist. My reason for writing this column is twofold. I love country music fans, and I get paid.

Now, what I write and the way I write is the way that I talk with any fan, any friend, my family and the people in this wonderful business. If you know about the late Jimmie Rodgers, Ernest Tubb, Jim Reeves, Tex Ritter and Bob Wills, and if you get a lump in your throat when you hear their music, then I write for you. If you get tears in your eyes when you hear Roy Acuff sing

"Great Speckled Bird" or hear Bill Monroe sing "Wayfaring Stranger" or Vern Gosdin sing "Chiseled in Stone," then I write for you. If you got chills the first time you heard newcomer Doug Stone sing "I'd Be Better Off (In a Pine Box)" or saw Garth Brooks weep following his first performance on the Grand Ole Opry, then I write for you. If the first time you heard Randy Travis, George Strait and Dwight Yoakam sing, you stopped and thanked God for pure tradition again on the country radio, then I write for you. If you love The Whites, Ricky Skaggs and Emmylou Harris, then I write for you. If you love Waylon Jennings, Willie Nelson, Kris Kristofferson and Johnny Cash, I write for you. If you love Merle Haggard, I write for you.

I did say that when Merle was on stage, it was his and it is. But *you* put him there. My thoughts were, as DiSalvatore noted, and still are, that Merle should have performed his hits at Starwood. I have nothing but praise for Merle Haggard's music. He is awesome as a songwriter and as good as anybody when it comes to singing a song.

In DiSalvatore's article Merle stated that he gives the fans his music and that "that's what matters." He then added, "Over that, I maybe owe them a smile and a thank-you."

Did any of you ever meet the late, great Ernest Tubb? Have you met Roy Acuff or Willie Nelson? Do you agree that any one of these three gentlemen in his own way is as big a star as Merle Haggard? Ernest, when he was alive,

gave autographs. Roy and even Willie give autographs. I'm not saying that Merle has to give autographs or do anything that he doesn't want to do, including sing his hits. But I am saying that fans will pay good money for just so long to see entertainers who won't sing their hits and think they don't owe their fans anything but a smile and a thank you after singing someone else's songs.

What I think I am trying to say is that there is a whole helluva lot of us who love Merle Haggard, and we just wish he loved us back. Anybody can be their own worst enemy, but nobody sings like Merle.

## AND A SON IS BORN

Polygram recording artist Butch Baker and his wife Suzanna are proud parents for the first time. They named their son Beau.

## GOLD, GOLD, GOLD, GOLD

*Chiseled in Stone*, the classic Vern Gosdin album on CBS that I have raved about, has been certified Gold according to the powers that be at RIAA. Congratulations are in order for the great Vern Gosdin. This should have happened for Vern two decades ago. Also congrats to the legendary Bob Montgomery who dared to "do Vern" when even Vern was ready to hang up his show biz hat. Other Gold albums from CBS/Epic are Charlie Daniels' *Simple Man*, Rodney Crowell's *Diamonds & Dirt* and Ricky Van Shelton's *RVS III*.



Vern Gosdin, Ricky Van Shelton, Charlie Daniels and Rodney Crowell celebrated their Gold albums at CBS Records' Goldmine Party.

# People

## GOOD-HEARTED LADY GETS A LITTLE HELP

Everybody's favorite funny lady, Cousin Minnie Pearl, has been fitted with a pacemaker. Now nearing her 50th year in show biz, the Grand Ole Opry favorite suffered a blackout—attributed to an irregular heartbeat—at a local restaurant. Lord knows, all of us are sending our very best get well wishes to the First Lady of Country Music Comedy.

## BECKY HOBBS SEZ

Becky Hobbs a.k.a. Beckaroo allowed to me as how she has to sing and pick because she writes. Her favorite of the three is to write. She further revealed to me that her fans are like family. Fans are so lucky when they have a down-to-earth favorite star who genuinely loves them back. Some just don't. Some think all they owe the fans is their perfor-

mance. Becky Hobbs sez her fans are everything.

Another fan-oriented star is the King of Country Music, Mr. Roy Acuff. No matter how tired or busy the great old man is, when a fan stops for a photo, Roy always asks, "Where you from?" He will tell the fan when he played in that town, about someone he knew there or an incident that occurred there. Then he kindly says, "Thank you very much. Go on and have a good time. I'll see you later." Hazel Smith sez that Mr. Acuff and Ms. Hobbs have got the right idea on how to treat fans.

## READ ON FOR THE TRUTH ABOUT MCDOWELL

It was a night of singing and auctioning for Easter Seals, with Ronnie McDowell and Buddy Killen. After Ronnie sang, Buddy talked (Buddy loves a mike). Then he looked down and saw Ronnie's boots and talked in the mike some more (Buddy loves a mike). Before



Ronnie McDowell, who sold his boots, and Buddy Killen, who loves a mike.

Ronnie knew what was going on, his boots were sold for \$3,000, and he had to go home barefoot. The last Ronnie knew, Buddy was still talking on the mike (Buddy loves a mike).

## TONY BROWN: *Around for the long haul*

You know how people take their favorite book—lots of time it's the Bible—and underline their favorite passages in red? Well, in the Book of Hazel, Tony Brown is underlined in red. I'm pretty much a name-dropper, all you fans know that...and I am a hanky-dropper when it comes to playing drop the handkerchief if Tony is in the game. I'd drop my hanky in a heartbeat behind that good-looking hunk.

A p.k. (preacher's kid), Tony first saw the light of day in Greensboro, North Carolina, just 30 miles from God's country and my mama and brothers. Tony's dad played guitar in the Navy band during World War II, later took up piano and preaching. The entire family played and sang in churches wherever they would let the Brown family perform.

Professionally, Tony took the gospel route, following his roots, first playing piano with The Stamps, then with The Blackwood Brothers and then The Oak Ridge Boys while they were still gospel. He played all-night sings all over the South when he was young and that was the rage. When The Oak Ridge Boys recorded country for the first time, the new direction didn't feel right to Tony, so that was his last



Tony Brown has some deep roots.

show with them. Later on he and the guys renewed their friendship, and Tony wrote songs for The Oaks' Silverline/Goldline Publishing Company in exchange for a red car. But back to the story.

I asked Tony about the Elvis connection. I was dying to hear all the details. Here's the scoop. Elvis had formed a group to open shows for him called Voice. Tony allowed it was a terrible group, but Elvis liked it.

That, my friend, is who counted. Tony met Elvis through Glen D. Hardin, who was playing piano for Elvis at the time. The piano player who worked with Voice was Swedish and had some green card problems and had to go back home. Friend Glen D. called the preacher's kid who had just quit The Oak Ridge Boys. Tony took the gig.

After a year and a half, Glen D. decides to quit the Elvis band and go on the road with Emmylou Harris. He calls Tony, who is opening shows for them anyway, and Elvis hires him for his pianist. That's how Tony came to play piano for a year and a half with Elvis.

I recall seeing Elvis perform in Murfreesboro, Tennessee...the most powerful performance I ever saw in my life. That piano player Tony looked like a movie star to me, what with his black tuxedo and flashing white teeth. Little did I know I'd end up in that good-looking guy's private office with nothing between us but his desk. Just so you will know, Tony's title at MCA Records is Senior Vice President, Head of A&R Department/Nashville Division. Be impressed.

So the year and a half with Elvis is rolling along, when Glen D. Hardin

# People

## LADY DUOS WITH A GANG OF MEN

Emmylou Harris opened a bunch of doors for a bunch of unemployed traditionalists a dozen or so years ago. Still pretty and still singing her own music and helping others where it really counts, Emmy recently teamed up with **The Desert Rose Band** to record a song written by **Chris Hillman** called "The Price I Pay." It will be included for release on an upcoming Emmylou album and also on the next Desert Rose album. Stay tuned.

## ANOTHER BACHELOR SHOT DOWN

The last of the Gatlin boys, **Rudy Gatlin**, took the marital plunge with **Kim Harmon** recently. We wish them the best. As for the groom's family and all Rudy's ex-girlfriends, the word "shocked" comes to mind, but miracles do happen in the strangest of places. This time it was at a church in Dallas.



Seated with Emmylou is Desert Rose's **Herb Pedersen**. Standing, left to right, **Chris Hillman**, **J.D. Maness**, **Steve Duncan**, **Billy Bryson** and **John Jorgenson** of **The Desert Rose Band** and producer **Paul Worley**.

calls again, this time to inform Tony he is quitting his job with Emmylou to go to work with John Denver. Yeah, Tony wanted *that* gig. So, for another year and a half Tony played piano for Emmylou's famous Hot Band. When Emmy became pregnant, Tony started working with RCA's Free Flight label. He'd work weekends on the road with Emmylou and for the recording company during the week. While Emmylou was off with the baby, Tony started working for Rodney Crowell and Rosanne Cash. The band was Tony, old friend Glen D. Hardin, Hank DeVito, Emory Gordy and Albert Lee, also known as The Cherry Bombs. Hell might be hotter than them, but there ain't no music there. In the early 1980's, Tony worked a few months with RCA, then a couple of years with Rodney and Rose. Finally, in 1983 he went to work fulltime for RCA Records in the A&R department. Tony said if he'd been given a title, he'd probably still be there today. When he left RCA for MCA, MCA had offered him the same money RCA was paying—the clincher was a title. VP does make a difference behind the name in this City of Country Music.

Tony has been with MCA for six years. His proudest achievement is creating The Master Series. The Master Series consists of instrumental

recordings by master musicians. The project made money right out of the chute for MCA/Nashville. The roster includes Larry Carlton, John Jarvis, Booker T. Jones, Edgar Meyer and Matt Rollins. Tony is equally proud of Patty Loveless. He signed Patty to the label, produced her records, stuck with her as an artist, and now he can stand back and smile as he watches her career escalate. Tony explained what a feeling of gratitude he had when he ended up producing Rodney Crowell's first Gold album for CBS—Rodney was his former mentor. Thank God for the business of music which allows this kind of turnaround, and especially country music.

Tony, who is on the verge of producing Reba McEntire for the first time, shared with me that in his heart he really wanted to do the project. Nevertheless, when he met with her, the biggest female star on the horizon today, to discuss production, he wanted to do what was best for her and her career. Driving to her home, a home she and her hubby Narvel Blackstock now share with newborn son Shelby, Tony surmised that Reba could have anybody in the world she wanted to produce her records. But when he left, he left on cloud nine. Reba had chosen him. Using the adjective "excited" would be an understatement. With my limited

vocabulary, it will have to do for now.

If you look down the MCA roster, you will see why Tony Brown is so important to us fans. There's straight-from-my-heart George Strait as well as the maker of bluegrass, Bill Monroe. Between The Bellamy Brothers and Kelly Willis there's Lionel Cartwright, Jerry Clower, Mark Collie, The Dirt Band, Skip Ewing, Vince Gill, Gerry House, James House, Irlene Kelley, Riders in the Sky, Marty Stuart, Marsha Thornton, Conway Twitty and Steve Wariner. Tony and I agreed that the new guy on the charts, Mark Collie, has the onstage moves of a Johnny Cash. Somebody else suggested he looked like Carl Smith on stage.

Lyle Lovett and The Desert Rose Band are MCA/Curb acts, and a couple of new, just-signed acts are Mark Chestnut (another hat from Texas) and McBride and The Ride.

There are execs who rise and fall like yoyos—flashes in the pan, overnight geniuses, 30-day-wonders. Not so Tony. His foundation is solid, and his rise to a position of authority has been consistent. As in love, so in music: it's the lasting kind that counts in the long run. Tony has made a big difference in Music City and in the music. He has made money for his company. He's here and he plans to stay.

# People



Reba's hubby, Narvel Blackstock, vice-president of Starstruck, and Capitol Records' new four-man group, Trader-Price, join Reba to celebrate the start-up of the Starstruck Writers Group, the company's new publishing arm. The Trader-Price bunch are Starstruck clients. Narvel's at far left.

## REGALNESS REBA

Her Regalness, Reba McEntire, has revved up her Starstruck business to the tune of 40 people. They're housing themselves in a warehouse about 15 minutes off Music Row. The huge suite of offices, furnishings, etc. were quite impressive. Most impressive was how great Regal Reba looks since the birth of her son, Shelby. Her blazing mane and ready smile welcomed those of us who attended the do. I got hugged by legendary producer/label head Jimmy Bowen, up-and-comers Mark Collie (MCA) and Wayland Patton (Capitol) and songwriter Pat Bunch and saw a bunch of people who were there to get in a good word to the star hoping she might record their songs. Reba and handsome hubby, Narvel Blackstock, have added six songwriters to their publishing stable, and I expect a lot of her songs will come from the folks at home. After recording, Regal Reba will be on the road again for the first time since November when she took off to await the little one.

## MARDI GRAS HELD IN MUSIC CITY

Contrary to tradition, the Mardi Gras was held in Nashville and not New Orleans this year. My favorite Cajun, Jo-El Sonnier, saw to that. The RCA star entertained for better than three quarters of an hour at the Cannery on Fat Tuesday, showcasing his red-hot band, his red-hot music and his red-hot new album, *Have a Little Faith*.

The Cajun King of Bogalusa—Bogalusa

being Jo-El's hometown—was dressed to the nines in his crown and robe, the robe all white trimmed in gold, flowing to the floor with a train behind. Jo-El and the band led the procession with the king bringing up the rear. Course the spicy Cajun food warmed up the night as well. Cajuns do know how to have a good time. Everybody wants to be a Cajun on Fat Tuesday, and I'm glad I was Cajun for a night.

## FINAL BOW FOR WESLEY ROSE: 1918-1990

The day Fred Rose, president of Acuff-Rose Music Publishing, first met Hank Williams in 1946, he was playing ping pong with Wesley Rose, his son and right-hand man. As Acuff-Rose grew and became a major player on the Nashville music scene, Wesley's responsibilities grew as well. And when a fatal heart attack claimed Fred in 1954, Wesley took the reins of power. He ran the company for over 30 years, always staying close to the traditions Roy Acuff and Fred Rose had had in mind when they founded the business in 1942. He entered the Hall of Fame in 1986.

Now the final Rose link to the beginnings of Acuff-Rose is gone. On April 26 Wesley Rose died of complications relating to Alzheimer's disease. He was 72.

Born in Chicago in 1918, Wesley gave virtually his entire life to Nashville's music industry from the time it started until shortly before he died. After his father's death, he expanded Acuff-Rose's activities by overseeing their new Hickory Records company which had gone into operation in 1952. Hickory Records became a major independent label that emphasized traditional music, with artists like Al Terry, Rusty and Doug Kershaw,

## TWO KENTUCKIANS PROUD OF KENTUCKY HEADHUNTERS

Kentucky Governor Wallace Wilkinson and Bill Monroe are equally proud of *The Kentucky Headhunters*, the Gov. because the group used the state's name and Monroe because the group took his self-penned song, "Walk Softly on This Heart of Mine," for their signature song—they also took it high onto the country charts. Knowing politicians and Mr. Monroe, I'd wager to guess that both gentlemen have ulterior motives for digging the long-haired country-rockers. We are all pretty much alike when it comes to dollars and sense.

## NASHVILLE LADY TURNS TO STONE

Hazel Smith, of Nashville, Tennessee, talks a lot, writes some, works hard, loves her family and friends and has turned to Stone. The original of this occurrence happened some 2,000 years ago to another chick married to some dude named Lot. Hazel never looks back like Lot's wife. She just looks ahead and digs Doug Stone. Cause that's who she has turned to lately. Doug's on CBS, he's had a hit single, "I'd Be Better Off (In a Pine Box)" also out in video, his album's titled simply *Doug Stone*, and he hails from Marietta, Georgia. Nuff said.

Margie Bowes and Wilma Lee and Stoney Cooper on its roster.

Stars who parted company with major record companies often found a haven with Hickory, including Acuff-Rose owner Roy Acuff, Don Gibson and Carl Smith. At Hickory they had more freedom than they might have had at the major labels, and Hickory became one of the more successful independents in the business, ranking 13th overall in number of charted hits among record companies in the country field. Though never formally discontinued, recording activity at Hickory had largely ceased by the end of the 1970s. Acuff-Rose itself passed into the Opryland orbit in 1985. It now goes under the name of Opryland Music Group or OMG.

As a founder of the Country Music Association, Wesley played a major role there throughout his career. He was an outspoken and articulate advocate for traditional country music years before it came back into fashion. He was also known for his willingness to serve on various committees and charitable organizations within the music industry. He was an important figure who will be missed.

—RICH KIENZLE





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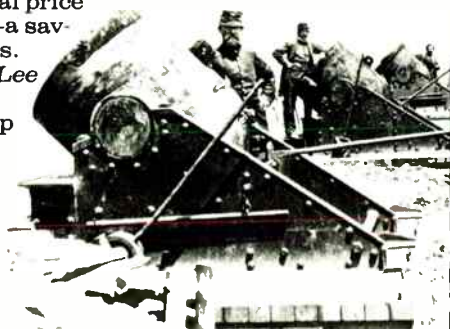
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Jo-El shot "If Your Heart Should Ever Roll This Way Again" at Manuel's Country Cajun Store in Milton, Tennessee.

# 20 Questions with Jo-El Sonnier

by Michael Bane

*The song is simple, touching lightly on time and place and pain, the way only country music can do. "Suddenly the sounds of the fiddle and accordion sweetly begin to play," sings Jo-El Sonnier, "and I can almost hear her sweet voice say..."*

*"Come On Joe" broke Cajun stylist Sonnier as a mainstream singer, another "overnight success" with 35 years under his belt. Now with his second album moving up the charts and a grueling touring schedule, Jo-El Sonnier is established as one of Nashville's rising stars.*

*"Come On Joe" is a special song. One night on the road Jo-El Sonnier agreed to sit down, talk about special songs, special people and answer 20 Questions.*

## 1

**So have you ever eaten at a good Cajun restaurant outside of Louisiana?**

To tell you the truth, no. I wish I could tell you that I did. I keep looking. There's nothing like hometown Cajun cooking. Chicken-sausage-okra gumbo and pork roast... my mama did that a long time

ago. I learned from her cooking, and she was the best. She cooked out of love. We were a small family, me, my brother, my mother and father, but we had a lot of love. Boy, I'll tell you what. You just couldn't wait to get in that house and chomp on some of her cooking. I still can remember. She's not with me now, but I remember.

## 2

**There seems to be a national fascination with Cajun culture. Why is that?**

You know, I believe that's

because of the music, and so many artists. There's the movies, like *The Big Easy*. Even the food. It's really out there, and it's wide open.

## 3

**I always figured southern Louisiana was a hard place to grow up. What lessons did you bring from your childhood to your music?**

I guess just to share my talent with love, not greed. To know that hard work is what it's all about. To persevere. And to have the patience to become who you want to

become. To be who you want to be. I've been playing 35, 38 years, and you just keep on growing, learning. You never stop learning. You just keep getting better and better. And I feel like that's what I'm doing. People come to my shows, and it makes me feel good. I've seen people cry and laugh and want to talk to me. It's really great, man.

**4**

**Do you think there's a chance of Cajun culture being absorbed by mainstream America?**

I don't believe so. It's expanding now, and I feel it's going to be bigger than ever. And that's going to leave us our culture, what our ancestors fought and died for. That's what it's all about. It's true, earthy, like the music and the food. It's here to stay.

**5**

**So how many days are you doing on the road right now?**

Oh, looking at right now, approximately 270, 280. That's about as much as I can do. The bus is my home.

**6**

**Are you doing anything other than touring?**

Well, I just came out of doing *Hee Haw*, and that was fun. I didn't realize the show had so much history about it. Twenty years. I'm 43, so I've been watching it a long time myself. I mean, I waited 20 years to do the first one.

**7**

**You're that old?**

I've played the accordion since I was three years old. It's been around me ever since I was a child.

**8**

**You started playing accordion when you're three?**

Okay, I really started playing when I was four or five years old. But my daddy put it on my lap when I was two or three years old. And I've been playing it ever since.

**9**

**What is it that attracts you to the accordion?**

I've just been mesmerized by the sound. I mean, it became bigger and bigger, and the sound became better and better as I learned to play it... around the house and in the cotton fields, for my friends.

**10**

**I've heard the accordion is a real bear to learn to play.**

Pretty much so. I think it's a really special gift from God, because of the instrument. It's a very rare instrument. It's got a lot of history, back to the 1800's.

**11**

**Does the accordion you play on stage have its own history?**

Well, it does in that it's a real special accordion to me, because it took me a long time to get the instrument. I carry about four or five of them with me when I perform. I've done some sessions with them, played on other people's records. And it took me quite a while to get the money, to afford them. My wife, Jaimie, was very supportive, you know, and helped me get my accordions. She always supported me with what I needed. You know, different accordions have different keys, so I needed different keys. And she helped me in my music, focusing on playing the accordion. I was always great, 'cause she was always there for me.

**12**

**Did you always think you'd be a musician?**

Really, I always felt in my heart that I was meant to do that, because of the tradition, the upbringing, the feeling that I had to carry on the tradition, since I had the gift of love in playing the music. I had to carry on. I always felt there was a place out there for me, because I needed a chance to expose what my music and my culture is all about. The first Cajun song that was a hit was "Jole

Blon," and Harry Choates, the singer, he died. We never really had any fathers to carry on, the other singers seemed to die so young. I appreciate them for what they gave to me. I just carry on. As I listened to the Grand Ole Opry as a boy, Hank Williams doing "Jambalaya," other country music, rock 'n' roll, blues, jazz, all different things put together a feeling that moved me.

**13**

**You recorded Cajun music before moving into the mainstream, didn't you?**

That's right. I did several English albums down in Lake Charles, Louisiana, with Gold Band, but I only had one truly traditional Cajun album out with Rounder in 1980. We didn't really get the album going until 1989. It was nominated as one of the best traditional albums of 1989, and I was really proud of that. What I had been trying to find is someone who would accept me and my music.

**14**

**Was it hard to be accepted in Nashville?**

Not really. I do love Nashville, and I've loved it ever since I heard the Grand Ole Opry through my mama's radio. Hearing the music on the radio and then on television. It's always been my heart, my life, since I was a little boy. I always felt that one day I'd like to be a part of country music.

**15**

**You've never felt like an outsider in Music City?**

No. I've always felt very at home. I've been inspired by the singers—Johnny Cash, George Jones, Merle Haggard. Major companies have given us traditionalists a chance here.

**16**

**Talk about "Come On Joe."** "Come On Joe" was hand-carried to me by Tony Romeo, who came down from New York City. I was with Teddy and Doyle Wilburn, and Tony

Romeo asked if they knew where he could find Jo-El Sonnier. I think it was Doyle told him I was sitting in the back seat. So he introduced himself, said he'd heard me on the radio and had a song he'd written specially for me. So I heard the song, and from there I've carried it with me through the years—that was 1975—until I got to make my first album for RCA. I played the song for them, and they believed in me and let me record it the way I felt it. I believe in the song.

**17**

**It's a great song; a classic.**

It is. It didn't chart high, but the people who come to my shows always request it. It makes me feel good. It's a song of hope. It's encouraging. "Count to ten, pull yourself back together again."

**18**

**That's what attracted me to the song. You've just got to get on with it.**

You've got it.

**19**

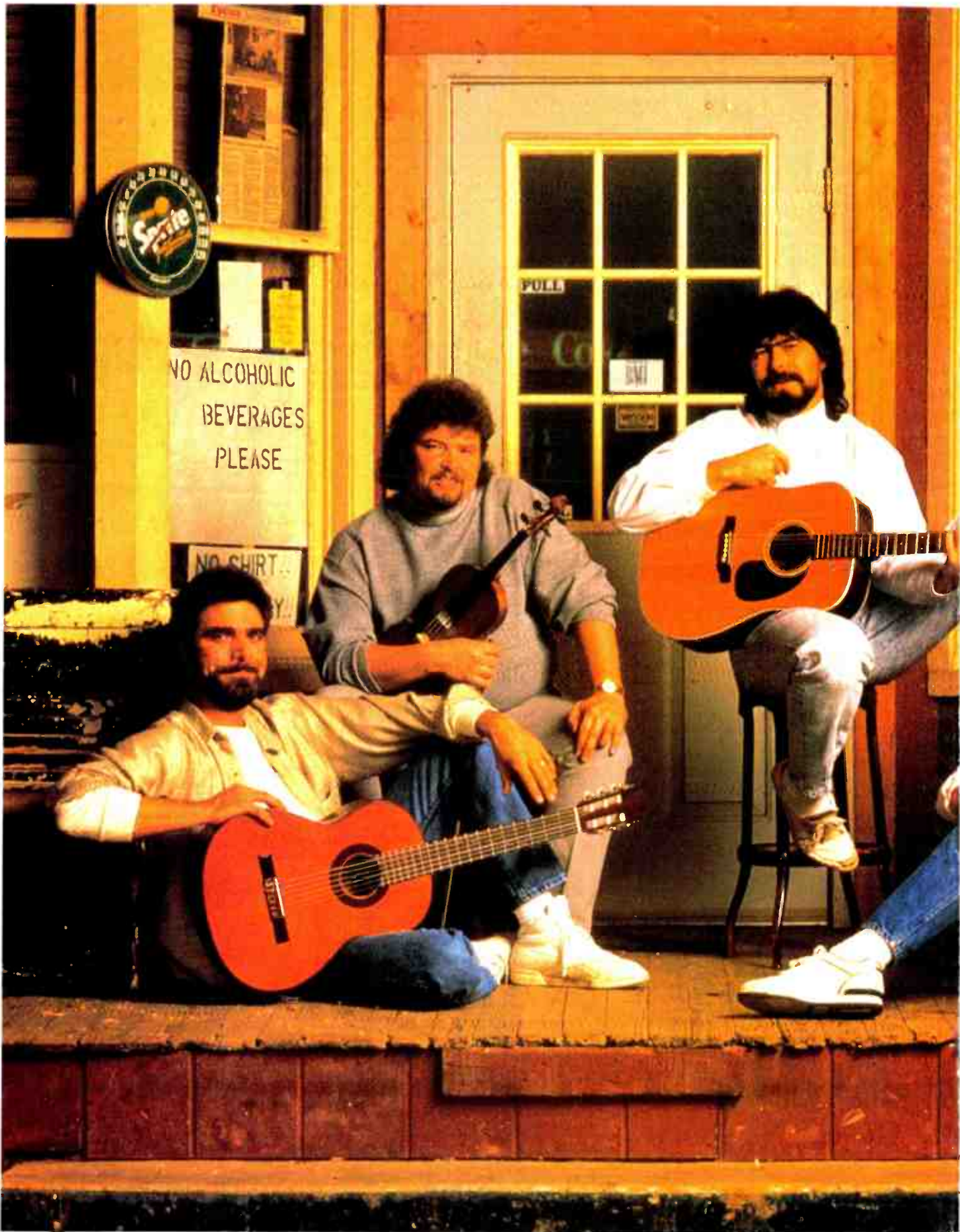
**Is there anything you'd like to record that you haven't?**

I'd like to record a Number One record! You know? Looks like I've been playing forever and ever. But I've got ahold of fate. I've got to believe that people are more understanding of what I do and my music. I guess what I'd like to say is that I'd like to thank God...and my fans...and my friends for their support. I appreciate them all for having their faith in me and my music. I just wish that my Jaimie was here to see it all.

**20**

**When did you lose her?**

What is it now? June? Last year. I lost her in November. But her spirit's around me. My daddy's 80 years old, and I'm surrounded with a lot of love. Her spirit goes with me wherever I go, and it always stays in my heart. And I...just go with a little faith every day...carry on, 'cause that's what they would want me to do.





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# ALABAMA COMES BACK FIGHTING

*After a spell in the doldrums, the best-selling country band of the 1980's is back with a new sound, new commitment and a new cause.*

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**N**ow, isn't this a switch. Here's Randy Owen, lead singer/songwriter and charismatic centerpiece of the world-famous Alabama Band, which has sold some 39 million albums as an RCA recording act. Owen is chatting about what he likes to do for relaxation on those all-too-rare Saturday afternoons when he's at home in Fort Payne, Alabama, with his wife and three kids. He doesn't golf, he doesn't play tennis, he doesn't take flying lessons or scuba dive—though God and his accountant know that he could certainly afford to. No. Instead, Owen and his wife and children go out and pick up bottles and cans along the road.

"It's just somethin' we do," Owen shrugs and grins. He recognizes the irony of a multi-millionaire, internationally famous country celebrity spending a leisurely afternoon out on a trash-strewn highway, gathering up other people's litter—old papers, plastic and aluminum Pepsi and Budweiser cans—then toting it down to the local recycling center. But he believes in teaching by example.

"Yeah, we do go out and pick up cans," he confirms with that characteristic defensiveness and self-righteousness of old. "I've even got a college fund set up for my kids from the papers and cans we've picked up." He grins again: "I

think there's twenty-seven dollars in the account right now. People drive by and say, 'Is that Randy Owen out there!? Pickin' up cans!?' He don't need to *pick up cans!*....But," he shakes his head insistently, "I do need to pick up cans.

"I go along and gather up the cans and paper and plastic outa the backs of their pick-up trucks," Randy adds, referring to the men and women who work on his land. "I don't feel cheap about that. I feel like a million dollars. I feel like I'm doing something which, within two years, people will say, 'Now I know why he's doing that.'"

What a refreshing change for the ever-staid, ever-conservative, ever no-risk-taking Alabama Band. No more content to be just music-makers, they've become men with a mission.

As they discuss their ecological enlightenment, Owen and his first cousin, Gentry, both founding members of Alabama, are seated in a cramped corner office in RCA's new Nashville headquarters. It's a sleepy, overcast morning. The two Alabamans have sacrificed a rare day at home to come up to Music City to host some advance screenings of their new video, to air the first single and title song from their new album, *Pass It On Down*, for the music press and to give some interviews to help pave the single's way. This single is a serious departure from your average,

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*by Bob Allen*

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run-of-the-mill Alabama radio hit. "Pass It On Down" deals pointedly with topics such as global pollution and the destruction of the Brazilian rain forest—not exactly standard fare for country hit-makers.

The interview atmosphere, too, with just Owen and Gentry in attendance, is a far cry from the old days. In the past, interviewing all four band members at once was like being the fall guy in a verbal wrassling match with a four-man down-home tag team. Back in those days, the Fort Payne foursome took gleeful delight in harassing a feckless reporter like me who'd had the audacity to write a few less than favorable reviews of Alabama's records over the years. Mark Herndon and Jeff Cook, in particular, could even be downright surly, more intent on topping one another with snide, sarcastic one-liners than on answering questions. And when the *wrong* questions were popped, threats arose from Cook or Herndon to pull the plug altogether.

But this time around, even the always likable (if sometimes touchy) Randy Owen, who's been known in the past to succumb to bouts of big-headedness, is exceedingly gracious, low-key and soft-spoken. One quickly senses a certain serious, earnest maturity and deliberation that wasn't there before.

Owen and Gentry politely brush aside inquiries about the band's creative and commercial bottoming-out period in the late 1980's and its subsequent resurgence with *Southern Star* in 1989. Again and again, they steer the conversation back to pressing matters: the environmental issues which they address in "Pass It On Down" (the record and the video). That, after all, is really what they've come all the way up from Fort Payne to talk about.

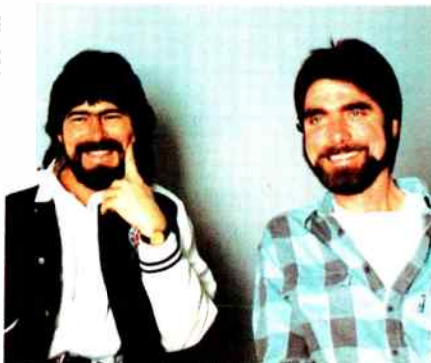
"You used the word 'adventurous' a while ago...well, you hit it right on the head," the sleepy-eyed Owen remarks as he sips on his Diet Coke and ponders the risks inherent in trying to float an issue-oriented country single like "Pass It On Down" past the unimaginative and sometimes downright repressive iron ears of country radio programmers. It's no easy task to try to get their ecological message across to conservative country listeners, who, as a rule, tend to resent being preached at or lectured to in song or having their music diluted with anything resembling a "message."

"Yeah, it is a risk alright," Owen agrees with a hearty nod of his head and a furrowing of his brow that lets you know that he's up to the task. "But I feel in my heart it's the right thing to do. The only thing to do."

Dressed in Levi's and a fancy "RCA Team" satin jacket over a designer

white dress shirt, Owen looks every bit the country rock star on his morning off. On his right hand—perhaps as a reminder of where he came from—he sports a big blue high school ring. Yet he is as articulate as a college professor as he conveys the depth of his band's commitment to environmental action.

"We definitely are in the eleventh hour in terms of saving our environment," Teddy nods in agreement. Gentry, as always, is as comfortable as an old shoe, dressed casually in a plain white T-shirt and a plain gray flannel shirt that might have come straight off



*"I talked to a lady here recently, and she told me how she took her first load of newspapers to a recycling plant, and how it made her feel so good....well, it's that way for us."*

the rack down at the Wal-mart store. Gentry and Owen have obviously been reading up on all this environmental stuff. "Scientists, for years, have been talking about the ozone layer. Now I think it's getting to the point where people are saying, 'Hey, this is *my* problem, and it's not going to go away.'

"I believe that we, the *core* of society—the moms, dads, grandpas, grandmas and the kids themselves, if they get the right education and understand what we're trying to do—we can change it," Gentry continues fervently. "We can turn it around. But it has to start right in the home.

"You lead by example," he emphasizes. "I talked to a lady here recently, and she told me how she took her first load of newspapers to a recycling plant, and how it made her feel so good....Well,

it's that way for us."

"We're trying to touch the people who need to be touched most of all," Owen interjects. "The hard-working people who get up at five-thirty in the morning to get their kids ready for school, the folks that are so busy that life sometimes feels like it's closing in on them from all sides. They probably need to be involved in this more than anybody. They all have kids, and they're the ones who stand to gain the most from this movement."

Adds Gentry: "I think the environmental movement has come further in the last twelve months than ever before. You can't hardly turn on the TV without seeing something about the environment. I think we need to be reminded and brought face to face with it every day."

"We'd like to see it set up at our shows where our fans did something with recyclable paper or cans or did some sort of project along with local radio and TV stations," Owen suggests. "We know it would be good for our concerts, sure. But, hey—we *believe* in this! This is not something we're doing to make money. There are lots of other things we could do if that was the idea."

Mind you, Alabama's laudable new human-service, environmental-protectionist orientation is not an isolated impulse in the country music industry today. A new age of awareness seems to be dawning on Music Row, as it is elsewhere. To their credit, numerous Nashville recording stars, songwriters and industry executives have banded together to form worthy organizations like Entertainers Against Hunger and the Earth Communications Office (ECO), a foundation whose membership includes Rosanne Cash, Emmylou Harris, Kathy Mattea, Ronnie McDowell, Sweethearts of the Rodeo and many other stars, all dedicated to raising public awareness of such timely issues as the depletion of the ozone layer, the poisoning of our atmosphere and the destruction of the world's rain forests. Also this year a number of artists donated their time to record "Tomorrow's World," a powerful Earth Day theme song.

But Alabama may well be setting a precedent: putting their money where their hearts are—so to speak—and putting their careers on the line. After all, a single release like "Pass It On Down" is a risky venture, at best. Its success—or failure—could determine the commercial success—or failure—of the new album, even of the band's future recording career—which has been in precarious shape these past few years. And that's a mighty big investment. But as Owen and Gentry point out, "Pass It On Down" is something they felt they *had*

to do—for a number of different reasons.

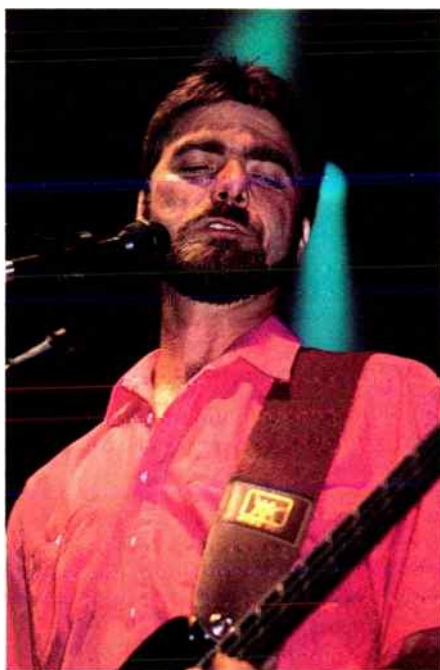
"It reaches a point where, as far as physical things go, you say, 'Well, I've got everything I've ever dreamed of, and more,'" Gentry offers quietly. "Then you look around you and see all the people who aren't in as good a shape as you are, and I think if there's any humbleness about you at all, you think to yourself, 'What can I do to help in this situation?'"

Owen agrees that the glory of celebrity, the wealth, the awards and the adulation, after a time, begin to offer a diminishing return of satisfaction. "For me, I've really felt that in the last five years," he admits. "One of the things that continues to satisfy me, though, is doing things I believe in, without being a preacher or a soldier about it. You know: you're given a certain amount of talent, and then you're one of the lucky ones. We've been given a certain amount of star status, or celebrity status or whatever. And the way you make an impact is, you use that for positive things. That's what we've tried to do with Alabama."

**P**ublic service involvement is certainly nothing new to Alabama. They've worked extensively raising money for St. Jude's Children's Hospital, and last year they staged a series of benefits for the victims of Hurricane Hugo, the storm that wreaked such devastation across the southeastern U.S. In conjunction with the Marlboro Country Tour, they've also made donations to local food banks and soup kitchens and even given up free afternoons to toil in the soup kitchens themselves a time or two. And, of course, their annual June Jam in Fort Payne raises hundreds of thousands of dollars each year for dozens of civic and charitable causes in their own hometown, county and state. For these efforts, The Country Broadcast Award Committee of the annual Country Radio Seminar recently presented the members of Alabama with the Seminar's first Humanitarian Award.

Environmental activism, like charity, often begins at home. For the record, all four members of Alabama are family men now and feel all the weight of responsibility, duty and obligation that comes with having children. Randy Owen leads the pack with three kids, ages 12, 8 and 2. Teddy Gentry has two, ages 12 and 10, and Jeff Cook has a 15-year-old daughter. Drummer Mark Herndon, a newcomer to the family scene, has a one-year-old daughter.

"This song is for the kids," Owen points out emphatically, returning to the topic of "Pass It On Down." "We have families and we care about our kids. We especially care about what



**Even when times were tough, band members Jeff Cook, Randy Owen, Mark Herndon and Teddy Gentry stuck together. Owen says it's because they believe in what they're doing.**

kind of air they're gonna breathe and what kind of rivers they're gonna have to swim and fish in in the future and what kind of soil they're going to till if they're farmers. I wanted the kids that you see in the new video to be featured in it even more, because they're the ones who really stand to gain from this movement. They're the ones who 'Pass It On Down' is for. We really hope that in the year 2010, we'll be old men by then, but we'll still be happy if we are able to pass it on down and make a difference."

The original idea for "Pass It On Down" evolved from a conversation that

Teddy Gentry had at home with his 10-year-old son, Josh.

"He was fishing in the river over by Centre, Alabama, one day, and I'd just heard the day before that it wasn't safe anymore to eat the fish that feed off the bottom of the river," Gentry recalls. "Me and my son were talking, and I told him that unless things change, he might not ever be in the position I was in: he might not ever get to take his son fishing. There may not be any fish left."

"There's been other times when we've wanted to do something like 'Pass It On Down,'" Owen admits. "But this is the

first time we've got the blessings of everybody—the record company, our management company and all four of us!" He laughs. "Believe me, getting the four of us to agree on any single release is hard enough!

"I suppose there were other times when RCA, the management company or whoever was right in holding back our *idiot juices* from flowing: telling us, 'This is just *not* something Alabama can do,'" Owen concedes with a sheepish grin. "And there is a heavy responsibility that comes from knowing that there are fifty people who work on our staff or on the road, who all have families and must be taken care of. But on the other hand, you need to take risks; you want to try new things. You don't want to feel like you're stale."

Owen is quick to admit that Alabama was tired. (Look at some of the band's album sales for the 1980s, and see if you can detect any sort of little ol' pattern here: *Mountain Music*, 1982—5 million units; *Roll On*, 1984—4 million; *40 Hour Week*, 1985—2 million; *Just Us*, 1987—1 million; *Alabama Live*, 1988—800,000. After 21 consecutive Number One singles (26 of them, all told) and ten Number One albums, Alabama's iron grip on the country charts was coming unraveled. More and more critics were turning on them, and even their longtime fans and their record company seemed to be stifling yawns.

The real ringing of the death knell could be heard in the distance when they began getting awards like the Academy of Country Music's Artist of the Decade award—sort of a polite send-

off and nice way of saying, "You've had a great run, guys.... See ya around."

Owen admits that there was a time when he could feel it all slipping away, like a man trying to run up a down escalator. The band was killing itself on the road, had dangerously lost touch with the people at the record label and could see its record sales dropping. Owen says that, between the exhaustion, worry and frustration of it all, he was on the brink of a nervous breakdown.

*"Then you look around you and see all the people who aren't in as good a shape as you are, and I think if there's any humbleness about you at all, you think to yourself, 'What can I do to help in this situation?'"*

"The critics, the record company—I think we all agreed that it was time for a change," he sighs as he recalls those anxiety-ridden times. "First of all, we'd done way too many shows—like 175 a year, which is unheard of for a band that plays to seven, eight, ten, twelve, fifteen thousand people a night like we do. You just burn people out. You burn

radio out, the audiences, the record company, the critics...." He shakes his head wearily: "It gets to the point where everyone's thinking, 'Oh no, here's Alabama again....'"

So, after cranking out an album a year, almost like clockwork, for eight or nine years, Alabama took a much-needed break. They went a full two years between studio albums, and they seriously cut back on their road time. They parted ways with their longtime producer/mentor Harold Shedd (who now heads Mercury/Polygram's country division), the man largely responsible for leading them along the treacherous road from obscurity to superstardom.

When they were finally ready to begin sessions for their 1989 album, *Southern Star*, they enlisted the help of not one, but two, new producers: veteran Barry Beckett and newcomer Josh Leo. In a unique arrangement, Beckett—along with the four band members—produced the tracks on Side One of *Southern Star*. Leo was responsible for the tracks on Side Two.

"Barry and Josh had two really different approaches," Owen recalls. "Josh was band-oriented, so we played on most of the tracks he produced. With Beckett, the band didn't play on as many. Josh took us out to this little studio in the country—I wouldn't even be able to find my way back out to it today, if I had to—where we did 'Song of the South' and a couple other songs. We just laid down the basic tracks with four instruments. We set the drums out in the middle of the room, instead of in an isolation booth. That's also how we did this new album."

"They were ready to get more involved in making their own records," Josh Leo recalls. "I think they also wanted a co-producer who was a little more familiar with the rock 'n' roll side. There is a part of them that is rock 'n' roll. They grew up in the 1960's, as I did.

"I've always tried to produce records more from a 'live' standpoint," Leo emphasizes. "When I started working with the guys, I moved them into a smaller studio than they were used to and got them set up closer together, sort of like they set up on stage. The interaction's a whole lot better that way. I also took them into a rehearsal hall before we went in the studio, so we had a chance to take the songs and beat them around a little and give everybody a chance to throw out ideas.

"All four of them played on my side of *Southern Star*, and on *Pass It On Down*, too," Leo continues. "Before we started *Pass It On Down*, we all sat in a room one day, from about nine in the morning until ten at night, going through bags and bags of songs—two or



The video for "Pass It On Down" was shot on two locations in California and features children from the International Peace Choir. "This is a record for the kids," says Owen.



three hundred songs. They went all the way through with me from picking the songs to okaying all the final mixes and saying, 'I'm sorry, we need more snare drum there, more lead vocal there,' or whatever.

"In the process, I've watched every one of them grow impressively—not only as musicians but as arrangers. On the new LP, they came up with some great ideas themselves, as far as how to begin songs, how to end them, how to make certain transitions. I got an incredible amount of creative input from the band at every step of the way."

"We *definitely* co-produce our own albums," Owen affirms, as if anxious to dispel all rumors to the contrary. "To tell the truth," he adds with a hearty laugh, "sometimes the producers don't get much say about it. I remember when Barry Beckett mixed 'Southern Star.' I listened to it and called him and said, 'Barry, these vocals are awful!' I told him it just wasn't Alabama, it wasn't explosive enough; when you start a song out with vocals, they've got to be *powerful*. There were other things that I thought needed changing, too—like I wanted the left-handed piano in the first verse to be a lot bigger in the mix. Of course, Barry was playing the piano, and he naturally didn't want it too loud."

Owen chuckles again as he continues the story: "Barry smokes, and when you tell him something he doesn't want to hear, he doesn't say anything. He just takes a big puff. I could hear him just puffing away over the telephone. Finally he says, 'Well, okay, we'll re-mix it again.... But it's *your* money.'"

Ultimately the competition between the two producers, along with the extra elbow grease and attention to detail, paid off. *Southern Star*, with its lively band-style performances and bright vocal harmonies, was Alabama's best album in years—in fact, maybe the best ever. It recaptured the enthusiasm of the band's old fans and even won them some new ones. When NBC *Nightly News* anchorman Tom Brokaw recently visited George Bush in the White House, he found a copy of *Southern Star* in the President's cassette deck. The album even won the grudging respect of a number of hard-bitten music critics, including yours truly, who'd all but given up on the band.

As I said right here in *Country Music*, "The sort of album I always felt they were capable of." "Just when it looked as if Alabama were never going to make another listenable country album...they turn out this album, which is sometimes touching, sometimes lively, sometimes both," *People Magazine* chimed in. "These tunes," the review continued, "are all performed



Record numbers, as usual, attended Alabama's 1989 June Jam, which benefits charities in their hometown of Ft. Payne. The group was awarded the Country Radio Seminar's first Humanitarian Award for all their efforts. Pictured with Alabama are Ed Salamon and Frank Mull of the Award Committee.

with a sense of spirit and attention, in marked contrast to the lifeless, Muzaky approach that the band has taken in recent years...."

Owen and Gentry are optimistic that *Pass It On Down* (the single, album and video) will generate a similar response. "But the big payoff for us," Gentry insists, "is if 'Pass It On Down' makes a difference. I'd like to see people who've never gotten into recycling before start recycling."

"Ya know, we grew up in the 1960's," Owen adds philosophically. "Well, I sense a time coming when environmental issues, and possibly health issues too, could grow to where they're like the political movement we got involved in back in the 60's. It feels like it's building up from the grassroots. And I think events in Rumania and elsewhere this past year have shown us, more than anything, just what people *can* do when they really believe in something and get together behind it."

If "Pass It On Down" and its public

statements should fall on deaf ears, Owen insists Alabama will weather the storm and harbor no regrets: "If you're gonna go down not having a Number One record, then I say do something you believe in, say something you want to say."

"We've been through times when we've won lots of awards; we've been through times when things were not quite as good, when the music business seemed ready to write us off," he muses with stoic self-assurance. "And we're survivors. Where times like that might have torn some bands apart, it brought us closer together. Because we believe in what we're doing—in fact, there have been times when it felt like we were the *only* ones who believed in what we were doing."

"But Alabama's not gonna just drop by for a while and then leave." Owen grins again, that familiar glint of steely resolve and self-possession flashing in his dark eyes. "We're gonna be around for a while." ■



### Webb Pierce Special

Webb Pierce was a legend in his own time, in the 1950's and early 60's, holding on to the Number One spot on the country charts for weeks and months at a time. Rich Kienzle profiles him in this issue's Legends of Country Music in the CMSA Newsletter. Herewith Rich's remarks on available albums:

No comprehensive Webb Pierce Greatest Hits collection currently exists, and that's regrettable. However, the hole's far from dry. Longhorn Records, until recently known as Stetson, has three vintage Decca albums available that comprise at least some of his best work, including what may be the best single album he ever recorded.



*The Wandering Boy* (HAT 3119). LP or cassette \$11.98, originally released in 1955, contains several of Webb's first big hits for Decca—the originals, not the later re-recordings—including "Wandering," "Back Street Affair," "There Stands the Glass" and "Slowly." The essence of Webb can be heard on those and eight other numbers.

*Webb!* (HAT 3019). LP or cassette \$11.98, originally appeared in 1959 and contains two big hits: "Tupelo County Jail" and "Falling Back to You."

*Cross Country* (HAT 3004), LP or cassette \$11.98, released in 1962, is almost worth having just for the color photo of Webb in his sequined finery posing with his silver-dollar Pontiac. Among the 12 songs, which include Webb's versions of hits like "Heartaches by the Number" and "Waterloo," are his three hits, "Alla My Love," "Crazy Wild Desire" and "Take Time."

### Other Members' Specials

CMSA members may deduct \$2 from the price of any CD, LP or cassette listed in *Buried Treasures* in this or any issue of *Country Music*. Artists included in *Buried Treasures* this month are Merle Haggard, Sonny James, Ernest Tubbs, George Jones, Merle Travis and more. CMSA members may also take 25% off CD's and cassettes offered in *Record Reviews* and *Top 25*.

### More Lucky Winners

Two more members have won renewal sweepstakes recently, M. Kilis of California who won the December/January \$1000 Renewal Sweeps and Al King of Illinois who won the February/March \$1000 Renewal Sweeps. Al King is also an Academy member.

### Academy Gears Up

The American Academy for the Preservation of Old Time Country Music, founded by Russ Barnard and Silver Eagle Publishers, in gearing up to produce its first *Journal*. Cover story will be Jimmie Rodgers: The Father of Country Music, with coverage of this year's Jimmie Rodgers Festival in Meridian, Mississippi. To join the Academy, send check for \$7.99—special half-price offer for CMSA members, regular price \$16—and your suggestions for the next six cover stories to address below. Mark your envelope, Attention: Academy. For more on the Academy, see this issue's CMSA Newsletter.

### How to Order

To order any item listed on this page, send check or money order to *Country Music Magazine*, Dept. 7890N, 329 Riverside Ave., Westport, CT 06880. Add \$1.95 postage and handling for first item ordered, \$.95 each additional.

## MEMBERS POLL/JULY 1990

# VOTE

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? \_\_\_\_\_ CD's? \_\_\_\_\_
- Which ones did you like best? List performers and album titles.
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_

### Your Choice for Album and Single of the Month

3. 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)

### Do You Shop by Mail or Phone?

4. About how many purchases have you or someone in your household made by mail or phone in the last 12 months? \_\_\_\_\_

5. About how much was spent for all purchases made by mail or phone in the last 12 months? \_\_\_\_\_

6. Did you or anyone in your household buy any albums by mail or phone?  Yes  No

How many records? \_\_\_\_\_ cassettes? \_\_\_\_\_ CD's? \_\_\_\_\_

7. Do you or anyone else in your household belong to any record clubs?  Yes  No

8. Check any of the following from which you or anyone in your household bought an album in the past 12 months.

- Columbia Record and Tape Club
- RCA Music Service
- Time-Life Music
- Reader's Digest Music
- TV album offer

### Who Can Vote

Only CMSA members are eligible to vote. If you are a member, write your membership number here. \_\_\_\_\_

If you are not a member but would like to join and vote immediately, fill out the poll and enclose your check for \$16 for one-year CMSA Membership (you get an extra year of *Country Music Magazine*, too).

Fill out poll and mail to: July Poll, *Country Music Magazine*, 342 Madison Avenue, Suite 2118, New York, New York 10173.



**THE HIGHWAYMEN**

COUNTRY MUSIC MAGAZINE JULY/AUGUST 1990

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PULL-OUT  
CENTERFOLD  
OF THE MONTH

# THE HIGHWAYMEN

## Facts of Life

### Personal Data

**Cash:** Born February 26, 1932 in Dyess, Arkansas. Family: Wife, June Carter Cash; son, John Carter Cash; four other children from previous marriages.

**Jennings:** Born June 15, 1937 in Littlefield, Texas. Family: Wife, Jessi Colter; son, Shooter; six other children from previous marriages.

**Kristofferson:** Born June 22, 1936 in Brownsville, Texas. Family: Wife, Lisa; sons, Jesse, Jody and Johnny and three adopted daughters; three other children from previous marriages.

**Nelson:** Born April 30, 1933 in Abbott, Texas. Family: Girlfriend, Annie D'Angelo; sons, Lucas and Jacob; five other children from previous marriages.



The Highwaymen live.

**Nelson:** 35-plus albums, 17 Gold, 8 platinum, 4 multi-platinum. Note: Gold album, over 500,000 sold. Platinum, over 1,000,000 sold.

**Kristofferson:** 13 films, including *Pat Garret & Billy the Kid*, *Semi-Tough*, *Heaven's Gate*, *A Star Is Born*, *Songwriter*, *A Pair of Aces*.

**Nelson:** 9 films, including *Electric Horseman*, *Honeysuckle Rose*, *Songwriter*, *Stagecoach*, *A Pair of Aces*.

### Vital Statistics

**Total height:** 23' 7"  
**Total weight:** 760 lbs.  
**Color eyes:** Black and blue  
**Color hair:** Varies  
**Famous for:** Hard living, operations, the Outlaw Movement

### Recording Career

**Record label:** CBS Records, 34 Music Square East, Nashville, TN 37203.

Albums	Release date
<i>Highwayman*</i>	1985
<i>Highwayman 2</i>	1990

\*Gold album. Platinum worldwide.

**Broadcast Videos**  
"Highwayman"  
"Silver Stallion"

**Individual Careers**  
**Cash:** 114 albums, 7 Gold, 9 platinum  
**Jennings:** 63 albums, 12 Gold, 3 platinum, 3 multi-platinum  
**Kristofferson:** 19 albums, 5 Gold

### Major Awards

**Cash:** 1969 CMA Entertainer of the Year/1980 Country Music Hall of Fame/seven Grammys.  
**Jennings:** 1975 CMA Male Vocalist of the Year/1976 CMA Album of the Year. *Wanted! The Outlaws!* one Grammy.  
**Kristofferson:** 1970 CMA Song of the Year. "Sunday Morning Coming Down"/1977 Songwriters Hall of Fame/three Grammys.  
**Nelson:** 1973 Songwriters Hall of Fame/1979 CMA Entertainer of the Year/five Grammys.

### Movie Credits

**Cash:** 11 films, including *Gospel Road*, *The Gunfight*, *The Pride of Jesse Hallam*, *Stagecoach*.  
**Jennings:** 4 films, including *Nashville Rebel*, *Follow That Road*, *Stagecoach*.

### Previous Employment

**Cash:** Door-to-door appliance salesman  
**Jennings:** DJ, bassist in Buddy Holly's band  
**Kristofferson:** Helicopter pilot, janitor in Columbia Records Studios  
**Nelson:** Door-to-door Bible salesman

### Fan Clubs

Some of these boys have fan clubs, some don't. Waylon doesn't. Kristofferson, it's not clear. Cash belongs to The Johnny Cash and June Carter Cash International Fan Club. Willie's fan club operates out of his management office. For information on how to join, write *Country Music Magazine*, Reader Service Dept. 7890, 329 Riverside Avenue, Westport, Connecticut 06880.

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by Bob Allen


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**I**n my line of work, you can't help getting cynical over the endless parade of faded pop stars, rock 'n' roll burn-out cases and aging beauty pageant queens who make pilgrimages to Nashville to record an album and rediscover their "country roots." That's why it's such a shock, such a pleasant breath of fresh air, to hear Kathie Baillie, 38-year-old, New Jersey-born lead singer of Baillie & The Boys, offer with a blithe shrug: "I don't really have any country roots. My mother liked Patsy Cline, and that was about all my exposure. I was much more of a folkie. I grew up on Connie Francis records, and Judy Collins, and Joan Baez, and Cat Stevens and Brenda Lee. I played Brenda Lee's records till her songs were coming out my ears! I still sing 'Sweet Nothings'."

"I was a Ventures nut!" laughs Baillie's husband, 36-year-old Michael Bonagura, also a Garden State native. "I've still got about 50 Ventures albums, and I listen to 'em all the time." The Ventures were a California surf group that popularized early 1960's instrumental hits like "Pipeline." "I saw them live a couple years ago, when they came through Nashville," he adds, "and they were great!"

Someone should give Baillie and Bonagura, who, as lead singer and lead guitarist respectively, comprise two-thirds of the RCA harmony group, Baillie & The Boys, a medal for their candor—though it's doubtful there'd be much room for it on their mantel right now, considering what a great year this past one has been for them in terms of both acceptance and awards. The third member of Baillie & The Boys these days, harmony singer/bassist Lance Hoppen, formerly of the pop group, Orleans, recently replaced founding member Alan LeBoeuf. LeBoeuf departed about a year ago to pursue a solo career after having been partners with Kathie and Michael for years.

Over the past couple of years, Baillie & The Boys became a strong presence on the national scene with hits like "Heart of Stone"—which reached the Number Four spot on the country singles charts, "I Can't Turn the Tide," "She Deserves You"—written by Baillie about her sister's painful divorce, "Oh Heart," "Long Shot" and "Wilder Days." The group's three albums, produced by Kyle Lehning, Randy Travis' longtime producer, have also been warmly received by music critics. "Part pop, part folk, part country...Baillie and her boys are vocal artists of the first rank," wrote *The Chicago Tri-*



# BAILLIE & THE BOYS

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*Husband and wife Kathie Baillie and Michael Bonagura were used to taking life one step at a time. When things finally started to happen, they had to make some quick decisions.*

bune. "A new dimension in country harmony..." added *United Press International*.

In the past year, B&B have also garnered nominations as Vocal Duo of the Year from the Country Music Association, the Academy of Country Music and The Nashville Network. *The Lights of Home*, the group's newest album, promises to carry this career momentum forward at an even faster pace. Four months in the making, the album has a more personal and heartfelt quality to it; it also features Baillie much more prominently as lead singer. And it is their most pronounced nod yet in the direction of their folkish roots.

"I think the new album is probably more indicative of the music I grew up on," Baillie agrees. "It kind of reminds me of that music: of Joan Baez, Judy Collins, Cat Stevens, Bob Dylan and various harmony groups of that era. I think part of that is because there are more story songs this time around—like the title song, which reminds me very much of my own life."

"I do think this album is a bit more personal and autobiographical, a little bit more about Kathie and me," Bonagura chimes in; he co-wrote four of the new tunes. "For myself, I didn't try and write radio songs, and I didn't try to write for anybody else. I feel almost as if we've earned our stripes now, and we are able to do a little bit more of the music we've wanted to do. Which is not to say we didn't *want* to do the earlier albums, but on the other hand, I don't think a song like 'The Lights of Home' or 'I Love Our Love,' which Kathie wrote eight or nine years ago, would have worked on our first two albums. This time, I think we really took an opportunity to open up our hearts a little and show a different side of us."

Baillie & Bonagura, it would seem, are not the sort of people to act rashly or do anything in a terrible hurry. Their "overnight success" story was, in fact (like so many), more than two decades in the making. The husband and wife team met way back in 1973. Shortly thereafter Baillie began performing as part of the band that Bonagura and LeBoeuf had put together years before, in the late 1960's, when they were still in high school.

Baillie & Bonagura met on "a musical blind date" about 17 years ago, when Baillie was living with her parents in Wilmington, Delaware, working as a secretary, and Bonagura was attending the University of Delaware and playing music in a "fondue room" in a little town just across the state line in Pennsylvania. "I got her number from a mutual acquaintance," Bonagura recalls with a laugh. "When I called her, the first words she said to me were, 'Now, I'm

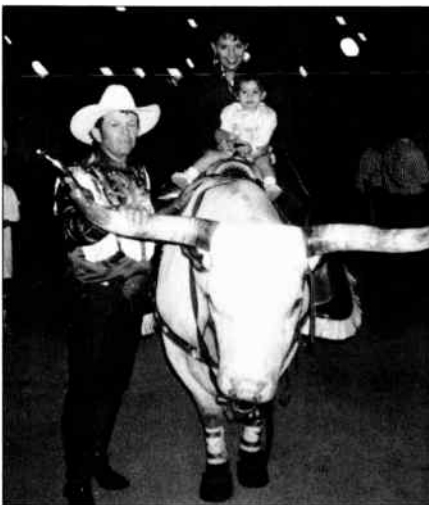
not into that hard rock stuff, so if you are, just forget it!' I told her, 'I'm not. All I want to know is do you have a car?'"

"I don't believe we fell in love right away," Baillie reflects. "I can't remember...I guess we did."

"I don't know if *you* did," Bonagura protests with a grin, "but I still remember the very first song you ever sang for me—Roberta Flack's 'Killing Me Softly.' It was during a break, in the kitchen of the club where I was playing."

"Oh," Baillie sighs, "here we go."

**S**tarry-eyed as it all may seem, it took B&B seven years of courtship before they finally tied the knot and then a decade of marriage before they had their first child. In the meantime, they, along with LeBoeuf, spent more than 13 years performing on the East Coast Ramada Inn/



**Alyssa travels with her mom and dad. In Texas, she saw her first rodeo.**

coffee house/ski lodge circuit while doing occasional session and jingle work in New York with everyone from Gladys Knight & The Pips and The Ramones to the rock group, Living Color. Finally they got around to giving Nashville a try. And though they'd always been prone to taking one step at a time, they've since discovered that when opportunity comes knocking—especially in the form of a major label contract—there sometimes just isn't time to map out the future: you have to jump in and go with the flow.

This philosophy was spelled out to the couple in no uncertain terms when Kathie Baillie discovered on the eve of the release of their single, "Oh Heart," and on the brink of a grueling, extended national tour that she was three months pregnant.

"This was after we'd been *trying* for years and years," she shakes her head with a look of irony as she sits in the Music Row offices of her management

company, handling her daughter, Alyssa Baillie Bonagura (who is now a healthy, strapping two years old), on her knee. "I'd been taking fertility tests at Vanderbilt Hospital (in Nashville) for four years, until I finally didn't feel like doing it anymore, and said, 'Who cares!'"

"You can't imagine how difficult it was for me, a new artist, with a brand-new label deal, to go in and tell Joe that I was pregnant," Kathie says, referring to Joe Galante, head of RCA Nashville. She smiles weakly and cringes as she tousles Alyssa's hair. "But he was very supportive. We talked it over, and I decided to go on and do the tour, and I ended up staying on the road until I was seven-and-a-half months pregnant. It was very difficult, and I was sick most of the time. At one show, out in Montana, I was deathly ill. I didn't think I could get out of bed, but I did—five minutes before the show. And afterwards, I went right back to bed."

She laughs and shakes her head again. "Just a couple weeks before Alyssa was born," she adds, "RCA held a river cruise on the Opryland's General Jackson Showboat. As I went on board, Joe said to me, 'Now, Kathie, I can't turn the boat around in the middle of the river!' Then Naomi Judd came over and told me, 'Don't worry, if you have the baby here, I can deliver it.' We all laughed and said, 'Just imagine the press angle on that!'"

Just two days before Alyssa was born, Baillie was still in the studio putting the final vocal touches on their *Turn the Tide* album. And a little less than a month after the baby's birth on April Fool's Day, 1988, Baillie & The Boys were back on the road, appearing with T. Graham Brown in Iowa. They brought Alyssa along with them after converting the back of their tour bus into a nursery.

"I didn't intend to bring her up on the road," Baillie explains, "but with both of us out there, I thought that made more sense than leaving her home with someone else. So I had my mother come along on tour with us to help me out. Now Alyssa's like us!" she laughs proudly. "She likes the road better than home!"

As it turned out, the crisis of balancing pregnancy and parenthood with their shared fast-track career had no sooner been resolved than Baillie & Bonagura had another bombshell dropped in their lap: With almost no advance notice, founding member LeBoeuf, whom Bonagura still refers to as "much of the brains and nucleus of the group," announced he was leaving.

"It just happened suddenly—boom!" Bonagura recalls. "Just a few days before we were booked to do a TV show. He'd been a major part of our music for years, but he just wasn't happy doing it

anymore. Fortunately, we were able to find Lance, whom we've known since the late 70's when he produced a couple of demos on us. Lance literally learned our songs from tapes on the airplane on the way down to the TV taping.

"I don't want to hurt Alan's feelings," Bonagura adds, "but musically we don't miss him at all. But I do miss him as a friend; I miss not calling him up and saying, 'Come on over and watch a movie' or 'Let's play some tennis.'"

Baillie & Bonagura admit that even their decade and a half as professional musicians didn't begin to prepare them for the hardships they would encounter during their first two-and-a-half years in Nashville, before they signed with RCA in 1986. Times were lean, to say the least. "Grim" is the word that Baillie uses. In fact, they'd been doing so well on the club circuit that Music City proved, at first, to be a dizzying financial step downward.

"For years, we made a good living," says Baillie, recalling that during their club years they had a nice house in the Jersey suburbs and new cars—a nice middle-class sort of life. "The 70's were fun—it was a great time for acoustic music, which is more or less what we were playing." About that time, Baillie, Bonagura and LeBoeuf met New Jersey-based producer Tommy West, who produced the late Jim Croce and later served as head of Nashville's ill-fated MTM Records label, where he produced artists like Holly Dunn. West signed the three to his publishing company and suggested that they give Nashville a try.

"For two years we'd been playing this club in Bermuda," Baillie recalls. "They paid our board and our meals, so we were able to save some money. We sold just about everything we owned in New Jersey and used the money we'd saved in Bermuda to move to Nashville, where Tommy said he'd be able to use us as background vocalists on some of the sessions he was producing."

"The first week in Nashville, we sang on two or three different albums—Ed Bruce, Ronnie Rodgers, and we thought, 'Man, this is great!'" Bonagura explains. "Then for the next year and a half, the phone didn't ring at all."

Baillie & Bonagura supported themselves at various odd jobs. He delivered pizzas and worked ("for one day") for a moving company at minimum wage and ("also for just one day") as a host in a fancy restaurant. Baillie taught an aerobics class and worked for a while as a receptionist at MCA Music. "Part of my job was to call *other* singers up to sing on demo sessions," she remembers. "They didn't know I could sing; I wanted to give them tapes, but I figured they wouldn't listen to them." They also sang



**A couple in harmony, Kathie and Michael perform "Perfect," their video and single from *The Lights of Home*, outside Columbia, Tennessee.**

together at Opryland and at a local seafood restaurant, the Sailmaker.

"I doubt we made more than six thousand dollars a year between us the first couple years in Tennessee," Bonagura recalls. Adds Baillie: "I used to cry when we'd go to the grocery store and only have enough money for a loaf of bread and a bag of lentil beans."

But then the proverbial worm began to turn. They had been writing and

Martin, a publisher, also came in and heard us, and she also told Joe about us. In the meantime, Kyle Lehning had made a production demo of us, which he took to Galante, too." Lehning had, in the meantime, put them to work singing background vocals on Randy Travis' first three albums and on some Dan Seals sessions as well.

"I mean," Bonagura adds with amazement, "this all happened in about 48 hours!"

Shortly thereafter, Galante called them in for a live audition, which they passed with flying colors. Not only did he sign them to the label, he also came up with the group's catchy name.

"I think the thing that has really moved us in the past few months is the way the public has been reacting to our music. It's just incredible. That reaction you get in front of an audience is the real world. That's where all the hype, or even a hit record, doesn't come into it. It just boils down to whether or not people like what they're hearing.

"We've been off the road for three weeks now, and I miss it already!" Baillie laughs. "A lot of people don't understand what a great relationship Michael and I have, and how much easier that makes it all. We're best friends, and, of course, husband and wife and now mother and father. I'm not really sure how we do get along so well on the road, but we do. Not that we don't argue left and right; we do," she shrugs. "But maybe that's what keeps our relationship strong."

Bonagura concludes with a grin, "We're probably the only group anybody knows of who can have six dates a week booked and still call their manager to complain: 'Hey, what's wrong!?' We've got Tuesday night open! We wanta work Tuesday! Book us!"

*"I still remember the very first song you ever sang for me—  
Roberta Flack's  
'Killing Me Softly.'"*

—BONAGURA

singing their own material for years. At that point, a song Bonagura had written called "There's No Stopping Your Heart" became a Number One hit for Marie Osmond; Bonagura's songs have also been recorded by Moe Bandy, Anne Murray and The Forester Sisters. Last but not least, they landed a gig at the Hall of Fame Motor Inn near Music Row, where they played six nights a week for six months.

"At that point, it seemed like after 15 years of trying to figure it all out, everything started happening at once," says Baillie. "In fact, three or four major things happened all in one week. Jeff Cook (of Alabama) came in and heard us at the Hall of Fame lounge and made a live tape which he gave to Joe Galante. Then that same week, Mary





# Mary Chapin Carpenter

## *Gets a Nod from Nashville*



*Her music was recorded in the nation's capital,  
but it came out Music City, U.S.A.*

**L**istening to Mary Chapin Carpenter's solidly modern-mainstream country singles—the bold and brassy one night stand come-on of “How Do,” the cleverly hooked love victim's put down of “Never Had It So Good”—you can't help forming a certain image. The woman singing those songs, you figure, has to be sort of fast: to drive a bright red turbo, own a few pairs of painted-on jeans and know a fair bit more than Mama ever taught her.

Of course things in show business are only rarely what they seem, but surely, you figure, even if the image doesn't match the reality of the singer at all—even if the real Mary Chapin Carpenter is a modest young woman in Hush Puppies and a Subaru and the songs are just her fantasies—she must at least be a good ole gal. Only a good ole gal would want to sing those songs, right?

Wrong. In reality Mary Chapin Carpenter is not a good ole gal at all. She is an upper-middle class college graduate from New Jersey, raised and educated in Princeton, then Japan and finally Washington, D.C., where she makes her home today. And although she is quite rightly recognized as one of the strongest new voices on the Nashville scene, the fact that she is considered “country” today is more an accident of fate than anything else. Or it's the result of

Music Row's modern expansion program, or of general cultural diffusion, or of the collapse of traditional class barriers between forms of music, or all of the above. Whatever, the fact remains: Country is not Mary Chapin Carpenter's native tongue.

For every artist there is a point in life where his or her art really begins to take hold, and young Mary Chapin (she uses both names, not just Mary) was no exception. For her the point came when she was in the seventh grade of an international school in Tokyo which she was attending while her father worked as publisher of the Asian edition of *Life Magazine*.

“We had a science teacher who'd hold these after-school sessions where we'd sit around and play guitar, these kids from all around the world,” she remembers. “That's when the light bulb went on in my head. It was like, *Ooooh, I really like this!*”

The music she began playing, and continued over the years, was a little of everything available via her parents and older sisters—“Dad was into jazz, Mom was an opera fan, my sisters had all the hip records”—plus whatever else reached her ears one way or another, a mix of “Beatles, Motown, rock, pop, folk, country. You know, the usual stuff.”

Eventually she began writing her own songs. They were

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*by Patrick Carr*

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**Mary Chapin had been performing for quite some time when she decided to keep at it at all costs. Her decision paid off.**

“silly things,” she says. “I mean, what does a 13-year-old write about? Angst. How green the leaves are on the trees. You know.” The corners of her mouth turn down in a self-mocking little smile.

Well, yes. If you’ve heard enough of Mary Chapin’s mature work, the sensitive, often inward-looking and frequently pained songs which don’t get on country radio, it’s not hard to imagine what her early efforts sounded like. It’s not overly difficult to empathize with how her father must have been feeling when he suggested quite firmly that she do something with her music other than play it in his house all day.

That suggestion occurred in Washington, D.C., after Mary Chapin graduated from high school but before she went to college. She had, then, achieved legal drinking age, and as it happened

her father’s house was right up the street from a bar featuring an “open mike” for persons such as herself, D.C. then as now being an environment relatively thick with guitar-and-ambition-equipped young bards willing to work cheap. So she went down the street, and one thing led to another, and then she asked the bar owner for a singing job and got it.

“I was in heaven,” she remembers. “There I was, at 18 or 19, getting a job doing what I really loved. It was wonderful.”

It stayed that way, she recalls, as she went through college alternately majoring in something called “American Civilization” and playing everybody’s favorite singer-songwriter songs in bars, but in the years following graduation it began to pall—and continued to

pall until, at the age of 26, “I totally crashed and burned.”

She explains. “I was more and more aware of the fact that I was keeping my singing job to sell beer. I mean, I was sitting there doing other people’s music, and it was a disaster. I’d started playing music because it made me happy, and now I was miserable, just utterly empty. That was a time of great sadness, insecurity, questioning and crisis.”

Like many others faced with such a situation before and since, she quit. Unlike most, though—unlike all those thousands of musicians selling cars or writing computer programs or otherwise doing something other than what they really want to—she didn’t go all the way. She went looking for a career, but at the point where she was finally offered a job as a researcher for a D.C. consulting firm, she panicked. “I just couldn’t do it,” she says. “I realized that for me, there just *had* to be another way to be happy doing music.”

The answer she found was a flexible part-time job with a “small philanthropic foundation” and a new resolve to make her own music, not somebody else’s.

That, she says, was “utterly different.” Working with her friend and guitar player John Jennings, she started making a tape of her songs, first in Jennings’ basement and later in a real recording studio, cutting tracks as she made the money to pay for them. What she had in mind was “a tape for my pocket, to give people and sell at my gigs.”

What she got was a lot of local acclaim for her new music, which was very nice, and a recording contract with CBS Records, which was almost incredible. As she tells the story, she was just about to sign a contract with Rounder Records, the classy but small independent label specializing in folk-style music, when she got a call from Larry Hamby, a CBS Nashville Artists and Repertoire man who had gotten strong wind of her local celebrity. Don’t sign yet, said Hamby, promising to listen to her tape as soon as he arrived in D.C. that weekend.

Needless to say, she didn’t sign with Rounder. Instead her tape was released on the Columbia label as the *Hometown Girl* album, causing influential critics to say very positive things and prompting what her biography calls a “growing industry buzz.” While the sales of *Hometown Girl* were not spectacular, then, the new writer/singer had certainly arrived. She had a good setup for her second album, the one which rendered those solid modern-mainstream country singles.

That album’s title is *State of the*

*Heart*, and it's an unusual piece of work. Distinguished from the crowd by the underlying cohesion peculiar to albums on which the songs were written by the person singing them, it doesn't otherwise sound markedly different from, say, a Patty Loveless record, and that's what's unusual: Mary Chapin achieved a state-of-the-art, modern-mainstream country album without recording in Nashville, without hiring Nashville musicians and without the supervision of a Nashville producer. Instead she won the concession of creative control from CBS and, with the help of her musical ally John Jennings as co-producer, did the whole job in D.C. with her own musicians.

She considers that an achievement, as well she should. "I have absolutely nothing against Nashville production," she says, "and in fact I look forward to the time I can take advantage of it. I feel quite strongly, though—and I feel a sense of pride about this—that you don't have to be in Nashville to make a good country record, or for that matter be in New York to make a good rock record or L.A. to make a good pop record. I just disagree strongly with the idea that you have to work in a particular place to make a viable-sounding piece of work in a genre that's become identified with that place. If the music is written with a certain feeling in a certain style and executed as such, it shouldn't matter where you do it."

The subject of where music belongs having been raised, we might as well tackle the obvious next question: How does non-native country singer Mary Chapin Carpenter handle the issues of legitimacy her existence raises a little more often than she might prefer?

"Well, I've thought about that, as you might imagine," she says, "and what I think is this. On the one hand country music wishes very much to be accepted by the rest of the world and walks around with a chip on its shoulder because the rest of the world won't take it seriously. At the same time, though, it wants to maintain itself as an insulated community and be immune to outside forces. So it's scared to take chances and risks, to show the world that there is something really valid and wonderful and fabulous and unique going on here."

Yes, I tell her, I agree. Music Row's unfortunate coupling of a cultural inferiority complex and a bunker mentality has always struck me as unproductive, to say the least.

Mary Chapin continues. "I think that it's wonderful when new artists come along in any creative field and breathe new life and point to new directions and shake things up," she says. "That's not to say that there's not respect and honor and dignity for artists who have come



before; it's just that to be always changing and growing artistically, to be growing up and out, is what it's all about."

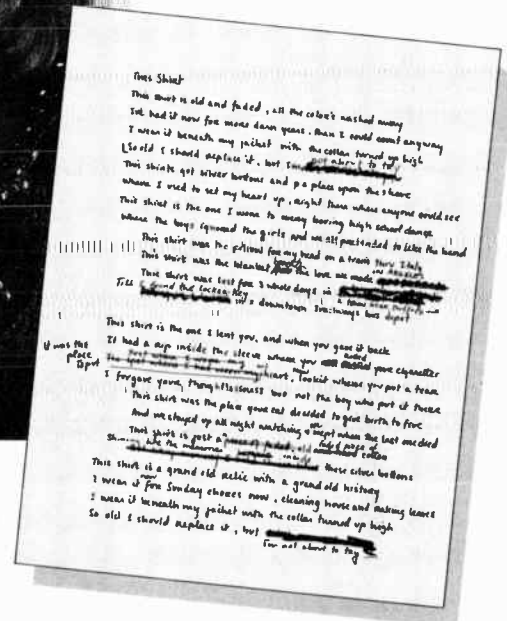
She laughs. "That sounds so much like a cliché, doesn't it? All the same I really think it's true. And I also think that country music is the most exciting place to be these days. I think this is where all the cool things are happening."

**I**n person Mary Chapin Carpenter seems like an intelligent young woman, not noticeably fast in the tight-jeans-and-turbo manner but not exactly dull either. She divides her life between being a professional entertainer and living a quiet home life of running, reading and movie renting in D.C. Her favorite books are *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Eudora Welty's *One Writer's Beginnings*. She doesn't exhibit any need of poses or smokescreens; she seems honest and open, and she has the attractive attribute of a nice, dry, often self-mocking wit.

She is, for example, quietly amusing about what has been called the "introspective," "bleak" and "moody" nature of many of her songs, particularly those she wrote before succumbing to what one critic called the "weary optimism" of her second album.

"Well, yes, I do tend to dwell on the dark side of things," she says with a laugh. "I write about things I know about: depression, guilt, despair, failed relationships, you know. But everybody has moments of despair; it's just that I exploit mine."

This year's ACM award for Top New Female Vocalist was a special honor. As for her songwriting, she says, "I write about things I know." "This Shirt," one of her own tunes, is a favorite of hers in concert.



Gee, I wonder out loud, has Mary Chapin's love life been as awful as her songs suggest it's been?

"No, no," she laughs. "Believe me, I haven't been a total failure in matters of the heart. But you know how it is: The less pleasant, more drama-oriented scenarios have more of an edge to them, don't they? And writing for me is a cathartic process, so when I'm feeling bad, I write about it. When I'm enjoying myself, I don't have time."

You'd think that might be a problem these days with things going so well professionally for Ms. Carpenter, but apparently it isn't. The positive love song, "Read My Lips," on *State of the Heart* shows that she has learned to write from a position of emotional strength just as other songs demonstrate the lightening subtlety of her touch and the widening span of her style. She seems to be a writer whose creative vision is actually enhanced by commercial success and personal satisfaction.

For her part Mary Chapin professes to be very happy with the way things are going, and I don't doubt her sincerity for a moment when she says, "Really, I'm having a wonderful time in country music. I'm just tickled pink that there's a place here for an artist like me."

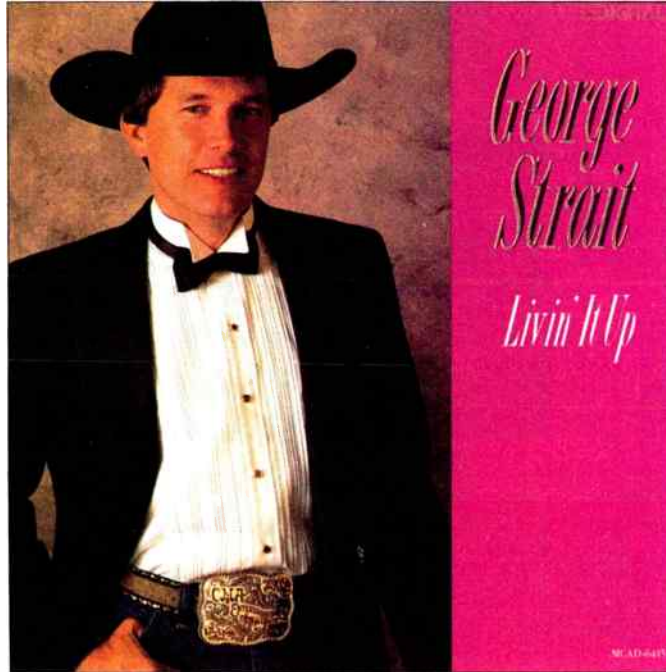
# Record Reviews

## George Strait *Livin' It Up* MCA-6415

It's a tribute to George Strait's sterling musical instincts that after nearly a decade as a recording artist, he has, in these last few years, clung so tenaciously to his unerring, keep-it-to-the-basics sensibilities. To say that he and co-producer Jimmy Bowen have gotten their record-making down to a formula is, in this case, not a criticism. In the particular instance of *Livin' It Up*, Strait's tenth and newest album, it's a compliment.

On *Livin' It Up*, Strait has rounded up more or less the same no-frills line-up of session musicians that he used on last year's outstanding album, *Beyond the Blue Neon*, a piece of work which was, in and of itself, a hard act to follow. There's Eddie Bayers—drums, Steve Gibson—acoustic guitar, Reggie Young—electric guitar, Paul Franklin—steel guitar, Johnny Gimble—fiddle, Floyd Domino—piano and Curtis and Liana Young—background vocals. Jim Horn does play saxophone on a track or two, and that's about as fancy as it gets.

The only change-up this time is that Strait has used his own Ace in the Hole Band on two cuts, to good effect. This crackerjack, eight-piece road band proves that it can carry its own weight in the studio as well as on stage. Though Strait's song choices are inspired, they too hold few surprises. There are two offerings co-written by Dean Dillon, one of Strait's favorite Nashville writers. One of these, "I've Come to Expect



It From You," is a knock-out. It's one of those mysterious songs that, by conventional measures, *shouldn't* work: it has only a hint of a melody, and the lyrics are almost conversationally mundane. Yet the insinuating shuffle beat, the purring, quirkily phrased vocal reading that Strait brings to the song's bitter, resigned message and the great guitar interplay from the session pickers all serve to make it one of the most compelling cuts on here.

There are also delicious oldies from Harlan Howard—"Someone Had to Teach You," Conway Twitty—"She Loves Me (She Don't Love You)" and Carl Perkins' "When You're a Man on Your Own" sounds like some longlost gem from the Hank Williams song catalogue; Strait breathes magic and conviction into it with his mournful, Williams-style vocal.

And, of course, no George

Strait album would be complete without a couple of excursions into Western swing. The vehicles Strait has chosen this time are Bill Mack's "Drinking Champagne," an old Cal Smith hit from the 1960's, and "Heaven Must Be Missing You Tonight" by L. David Lewis and David Chamberlain.

What ties it all together on *Livin' It Up* are Strait's inspired yet almost casually expansive vocals (he reportedly completed the vocal tracks for *Livin' It Up* in a record two or three days of sessions) and the minimal but masterful instrumental accompaniment. Strait sings this diverse collection of rediscovered oldies and future classics as if he owns them.

If you had to sum up the musical philosophy behind Strait's last several albums, it would probably be something real simple-like: "If it ain't

broke, don't fix it." And as long as he keeps turning out albums as fresh, unpretentious, satisfying and down-to-earth as *Livin' It Up*, one can only say, "Amen to that, brother. Amen."

—BOB ALLEN

## Alabama *Pass It On Down* RCA 2108-4-R

Alabama's last album, *Southern Star*, released in 1989, probably saved the band's recording career from the scrap heap. Not only was it Alabama's finest musical effort in years; it also marked the group's creative rejuvenation and signaled its commitment to making decent music.

*Pass It On Down* takes this commitment, and—if you will—maturity, a step further. It's every bit as ambitious and even more adventurous than its predecessor. Where *Southern Star* seemed to reaffirm and sharpen Alabama's traditional musical identity, *Pass It On Down* enlarges and expands it. This time around, Alabama has broken the mold. You can hear the band doing songs that, just a few years ago, nobody would have imagined hearing on one of their albums.

For instance, there's a flat-out honky tonk song, "Jukebox in My Mind," and a south-of-the-border flavored number, "Gulf of Mexico," which even features some mariachi flourishes. Then, of course, there's the title song and first single, which makes some eloquent and pointed statements about the global environment. Taking this kind of stance is something new for this outfit.

*Latest albums from George Strait, Alabama, Patty Loveless, Alan Jackson, Travis Tritt, David Lynn Jones, The Forester Sisters, Jeff Stevens and The Bullets, Mark Collie, Doug Stone and more.*

Above all, nearly every track on *Pass It On Down* seems to resonate with the energy of collaboration. The band members themselves, who share co-production credits with Josh Leo and Larry Michael Lee, have obviously become far more involved in the recording process. Owen, Gentry and Cook have instrumental credits too, along with a host of supporting session players, including Sam Bush and Bernie Leadon. The band's three principal members similarly had a hand in writing six of the songs on *Pass It On Down*, often in tandem with their frequent co-writers, Ronnie Rogers and Greg Fowler.

The subtle and imaginative touches of Josh Leo and Larry Michael Lee can be heard throughout. By coaxing unusual and provocative tones, textures and shadings from the standard instruments and enhancing these with occasional off-the-wall flavorings of synthesizers, oboes, cellos, trumpets and high string guitars, they've given finely layered and multi-colored textures to many of the tracks. But these aesthetic embellishments seldom come at the expense of vitality. The vocals and basic rhythm tracks all have an appropriately crisp, brassy, live quality that gives many of the cuts an extra edge of immediacy.

The surprise star this time around is Jeff Cook, who sings commanding lead on two songs recorded in his own studio. "Until It Happens to You," co-written by Cook, Gentry, Fowler and Rogers, is about the craziness of falling in love. "I Ain't Got No Business Doin' Business Today," written by Danny

Morrison and Johnny Slate, is a sassy, rhythm-and-blues-flavored tribute to good old-fashioned lust. Randy Owen shines on a pair of love ballads, "Forever's as Far as I'll Go" by Mike Reid and his own "Goodbye (Kelly's Song)," a tribute to his wife which features a fine piano arrangement.

There are, of course, a couple of standard "ain't life great down South" ballads on here. (What would an Alabama album be without them!) "Down Home," co-written by Josh Leo, is one of the more tepid cuts; but Ronnie Rogers' "Moonlight Lounge" is a lively celebration of a rowdy country Saturday night of dancing, drinking and skipping rocks down by the creek. "Here We Are" by Beth Nielsen Chapman and Vince Gill may have been written about everlasting love; but with their outstanding harmonies, Owen,

Gentry and Cook turn it into a resounding autobiographical statement.

*Pass It On Down* is a refreshing change, to say the least. After a decade of recording and 40 million albums sold, Alabama is growing up, loosening up, buckling down and finally becoming the sort of first-rate musicians many of us thought they were capable of being for a long time.

-BOB ALLEN

**Patty Loveless**  
*On Down the Line*  
MCA-6401

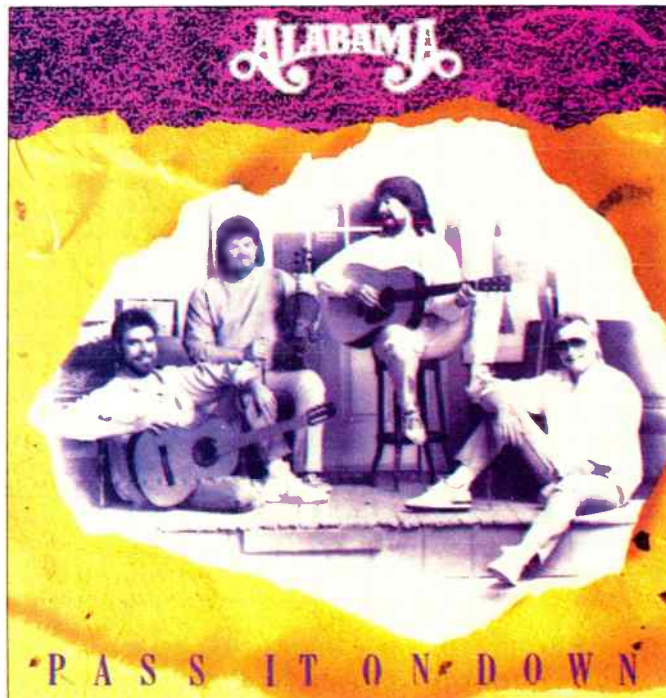
**P**atty Loveless' latest album points up a major difference between New Traditional artists whose roots lie in rock and country and those grounded in urban folk music. With the latter, their folkie roots always linger in

the background and sometimes cause them to fall back on material that sounds neither new nor traditional, but more like recycled James Taylor pablum from the 1970's.

Not so with Patty, who grew up singing traditional music in Kentucky and retains it at the heart of whatever material she attempts. That's kept her far more consistent, yet she's unafraid to experiment with her basic sound, be it by adding the more rough-hewn edges of rock or by simply trying a more creative arrangement true to her style. This kind of intelligent and inventive change proves that an artist doesn't have to dump his or her trademark sound to step away from it.

That versatility is at the heart of *On Down the Line's* success, as is the overall high quality of most of the material. Some of the strongest titles come from "Timber" composer Kostas Lazarides, including the driving "Overtime" and the churning "On Down the Line," the latter featuring a vocal that rips and snarls from beginning to end.

When Patty sings/roars, "My tractor don't get no traction," she's not kidding. No wonder they picked this as the first single. She also takes a direct, candid look at the state of women today on two other powerful numbers. Lucinda Williams, no minor vocal talent herself, is responsible for the evocative "The Night's Too Long," a female blue collar tale sung by Patty with just the right amount of understatement. In lesser hands it might have been oversung or overdramatized in a way that would have undercut its meaning. "I'm That Kind of



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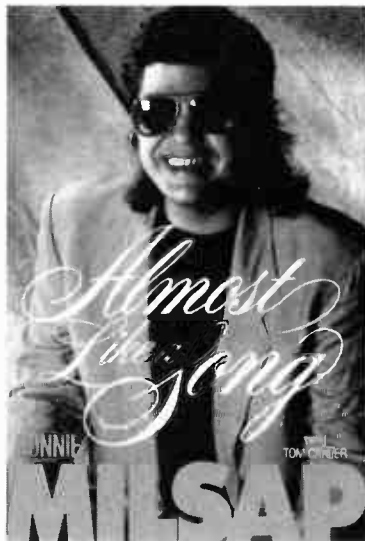
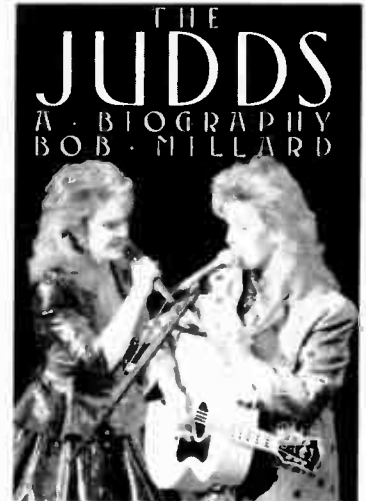
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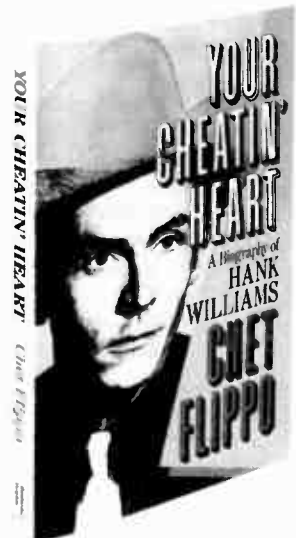
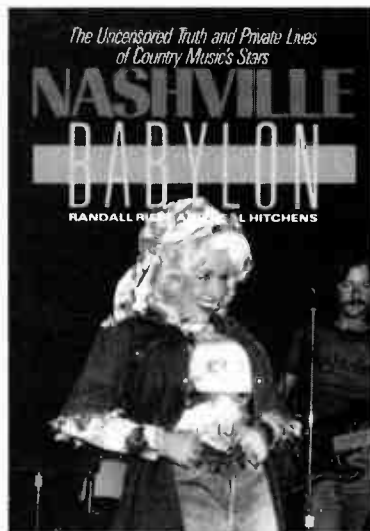


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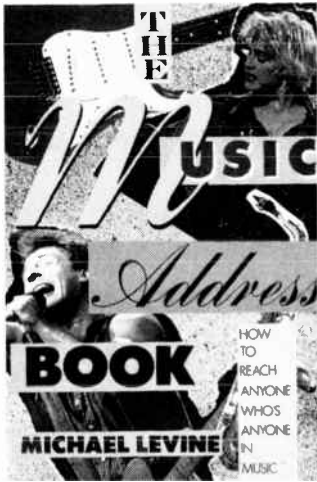
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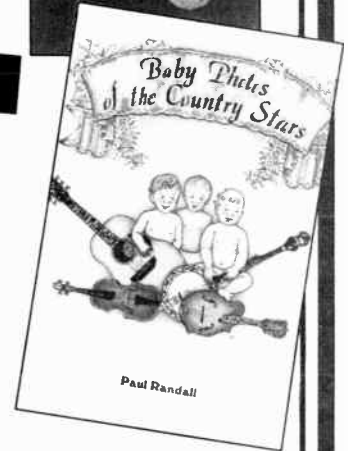
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# Record Reviews

Girl" cries out for a middle ground between bed-hopping and 1950's prissiness against a rock background with some gut-wrenching guitar from Richard Bennett.

"Looking in the Eyes of Love," a Kostas-Tricia Walker tune, is the most pop number here, but gritty in Loveless' version. Earthier still is Claire and Larry Lynch's serene rural ballad, "Some Morning Soon," putty in Loveless' hands. Simply arranged and brimming with high, lonesome textures, this is one that Bill Monroe could record without batting an eyelash.

Patty bears down ruthlessly on the smoldering "You Can't Run Away From Your Heart," a Wendy Waldman-Jim Photoglo composition with a harsh, dark-hued arrangement different from yet rooted in her basic sound. Paul Kennerley's exquisite "I've Gotta Stop Loving You (And Start Living Again)," is a delicate, haunting waltz that sounds almost like an obscure Louvin Brothers recording. The essence of Loveless is captured in this number, the most traditional sounding of all.

Even the lesser numbers are by no means bad. Kennerley's "Blue Memories," written with Karen Brooks, is a minor number, neither totally forgettable nor a high point. Likewise, "Feelings of Love," which winds up the album, would work better on a live show than it does here. Neither is a throwaway, though both pale in the headier company of the other tracks.

Tony Brown's production efforts mustn't be overlooked in this whole undertaking, either. The use of one group of excellent musicians, built around guitar innovator Albert Lee, fiddler Mark O' Connor (playing real country, not the New Age noodling he often comes up with on his own records) and steel guitarist Paul Franklin, has given the

record consistency. Plus, the musicians' ingenuity permits them to create totally different backgrounds effortlessly when needed.

Time flies. It's been over four years since Patty's first single, "Lonely Days, Lonely Nights," hit the charts (peaking at Number 46) in 1986. Given the way artists can blow it these days, it's all the more amazing that Loveless has not only retained her original vision but also succeeded on each outing. This may be her best ever.

—RICH KIENZLE

## Alan Jackson *Here in the Real World* Arista AR-8623

**A**rista Records, better known for its slew of pop and rock superstars, is the latest of many pop labels trying to make a mark in Nashville. Such ventures often fail. Sometimes the company, not knowing who to sign, grabs every has-been and yahoo with a guitar, talent preferred but not required. At other times, the company's overall commitment to country really isn't there, even though they may have had some fine releases. I wouldn't, however, bet against Arista. They've signed some truly talented artists, Michelle Wright and

Lee Roy Parnell among them, and their first big success: Georgia newcomer, Alan Jackson.

As I write this, Jackson's debut single, "Here in the Real World," is in the Top Ten and could very well do for him what "On the Other Hand" did for a similar singer on another label four years ago. Jackson, a singer/composer whose intense vocal style conjures up images of Ricky Van Shelton or Keith Whitley, seems to indicate that the second wave of talented traditionalists that started with Clint Black is still upon us, a hopeful sign that could wash away the bad taste of some of the mediocrities that have popped up over the past year.

Co-producers Keith Stegall and Scott Hendricks used the sleek yet traditional sound that Steve Buckingham developed with Ricky Van Shelton as the basis for the sound here. But Jackson's crystal-sharp vocals and peerless phrasing give it a different dimension. To boot, he's a formidable songwriter who, like Merle Haggard, composes first and foremost for himself, helped by various collaborators. The weakest number here would be a strong one on many other debut albums.

The success of "Real World" speaks for itself. "Wanted" puts a new and

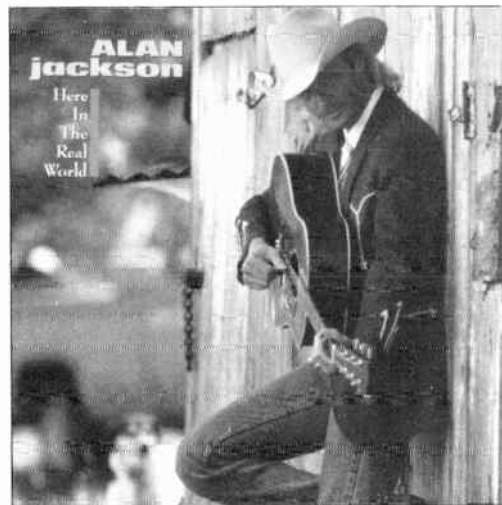
inventive spin on the personals section of the newspaper. It's a ballad of remorse and forgiveness. The autobiographical "Home" is a poignant, obviously heartfelt memoir of Jackson's and his parents' early life.

The realistic view of life on the road for a smalltime hill-billy act, frustrations and all, put forth in "Chasin' That Neon Rainbow" combines both cynicism and joy in a way only those who've been there can understand. That Jackson accomplishes this feat in little more than three minutes is amazing. On top of that, his acerbic, Lefty Frizzell-flavored wit shines on both "She Don't Get the Blues" and the George Jones-ish "Short Sweet Ride."

Even Jackson's happier numbers, "I'd Love You All Over Again" and "Ace of Hearts," are free of sappiness and those greeting card sentiments that often plague love songs. And "Blue Blooded Woman" takes the city girl-country boy idea, an old and usually predictable one, over some witty and thoroughly enjoyable ground without being corny or trite.

In the past four years, we've been treated to some truly incredible debut albums that will remain classics into the next century (ten years away, remember). Add this one to the list.

—RICH KIENZLE



# Record Reviews

## Travis Tritt *Country Club*

Warner Brothers 9-26094-4

**T**ravis Tritt catapulted onto the charts and into the public's awareness late last year with the surprise novelty hit, "Country Club," written by Catesby Jones and Dennis Lord. The song is now the title tune of his debut album.

Although Tritt didn't write "Country Club"—and although it's one of the few tongue-in-cheek numbers on this album—my guess is that it gives a pretty good idea of where this Georgia-born, defiant, down-home, young good ol' boy is coming from, musically and philosophically.

Mind you, Tritt's not the world's greatest singer. He's more a Joe Stampley than a George Jones; he's got way more low-moaning Southern soul, spunk and grit than he does vocal range, and he's still just a trifle wet behind the ears as a songwriter. Even so, his music is infused with peckerwood rebellion, redneck swagger and a tiny bit of honky tonk sleaze thrown in for good measure. It's an engaging recipe that makes him a welcome presence on the scene.

When Tritt hits the mark as a songwriter (and he hits way more than he misses with the five songs he wrote or co-wrote here), he has a colorful, bittersweet flair for the autobiographical and an irreverent, sometimes indignant, sense of blue collar Southern pride. "Son of the New South," co-written with Larry Alderman, is a typically clenched-jawed, defiant celebration of his hard-bitten, homespun roots which more often than not manages to prevail over old clichés: *Now I've been called a hillbilly, I've been called a redneck too! But I ain't backwards, dumb, or poor, I'm just red, white and blue....*

"Help Me Hold On," co-



written with Pat Terry, is an achingly soulful song about the desperation of a once-stubborn man who is finally faced with abandonment by his unhappy lover. Tritt sings it as if he's been there a time or two himself. On "Put Some Drive in Your Country" Tritt and producer Gregg Brown, who doubles on acoustic guitar, lead the band of session musicians in a relatively meek instrumental performance which pays homage to Tritt's Southern boogie roots. Reggie Young and Billy Walker Jr. wail away on electric guitars, and Larry Byrom plays a screaming electric slide guitar, all of which has been disappointingly submerged in the final mix—chances are for fear that country radio stations wouldn't play the song if it rocked too much. "Put Some Drive in Your Country" is Tritt's tribute to heroes like Duane Allman, Waylon Jennings and Hank Williams Jr., who, as the song says, "put some drive into country, keep country drivin' on."

All in all, Travis Tritt comes across on *Country Club* as a sort of squint-eyed, leather-clad diamond in the rough. At times, he's rowdy, musically unpolished and occasionally even awkward. Sometimes—maybe a bit too much of the time—in the spirit of Hank Jr., he revels in sneering, swaggering and boasting about his unregenerate redneck ways: about drinking beer from Dixie cups, bouncing around in pickup trucks and "being baptized in 100 proof and



saved by the Blood of the Lamb."

But even though he clearly needs some seasoning, one hopes that all the record label people and the radio consultants won't encourage Tritt to clean up his act too much. Now that Duane Allman is gone and Waylon and Hank Jr. have become middle-aged and semi-respectable and Steve Earle's gone rock 'n' roll, country music needs a few more anti-heroes.

—BOB ALLEN

## David Lynn Jones *Wood, Wind and Stone* Polygram 836 951-4

**H**alfway through this second album from David Lynn Jones, whose *Hard Times on Easy Street* was such an inspired and inspiring debut, I'm wondering what went wrong. The new record isn't only depressing in the predictable way—that is, in being the not-so-wonderful follow-up you can almost count on from country artists who have burst upon the scene with great first albums. In this case the music itself is also depressing.

Really, what we've got here are wall-to-wall bummers. The tone is set right up front with "I Feel a Change Comin' On," which despite its optimistic title is a turgid little exercise in resentment and self-pity written, says David Lynn in an interview included in the promo package accompanying the cas-

sette, while "I was waiting and waiting to hear if I had a record deal." Okay. Fair enough. Next?

Well, next is no better: the spiritually bankrupt, might-as-well-blow-your-brains-out "Lonely Town," followed immediately by the very similarly themed "Walkin' Through the Fire," then "When Times Were Good" (they're awful now, of course) and, rounding out Side One, "Let It Fade," a non-linear stew of dire, hopeless and otherwise unhappy images of which David says, "You can read what you want into it."

So far, then, there have been no songs as ambitious or original as the somber but large-minded pleasures of *Hard Times on Easy Street*—"Living in the Promiseland" or "The Valley of a Thousand Years," for instance—and while this new album has the familiar folk/rock/gospel-leaning Jones style, it sounds cautious and muted. This certainly isn't the feel David Lynn spoke of wanting for his second album, a harder, more energetic sound to be coaxed from his band and visiting rock 'n' roll hit man, Mick Ronson. Perhaps the notion of such a progressive approach bit the dust during a production time-out called by Polygram, during which, David says, "We decided if I should be doing rock or country." Whatever; Side One of *Wood, Wind and Stone* offers creative and emotional regression, not progress.

Ditto for Side Two, even if it does feature the most meaningful songs on the album, the sad "We Were All a Lot Older Than" about David Lynn's grandfather, and the bitter "Our Father's Son" about his father. The flavor of the latter song is implied in its writer's comment: "If my dad listens to the album, it will be the last song he hears."

So really, what *did* happen here? David didn't get divorced or go through any other shattering life experi-

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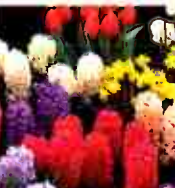
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# Record Reviews

ence between albums, so how did the mature, caring, thoughtful and creatively adventurous spirit behind *Hard Times on Easy Street* get transmuted into the anxious, self-centered, more or less conventionally country stinkin'-thinkin'-and-drinkin' character singing the blues on *Wood, Wind and Stone*?

There is an answer to this question, and its name is Harold Shedd. It was Mr. Shedd, the packager of Alabama and now the big cheese at Polygram, who chose the songs for the album. So instead of being the writer/singer's idea of himself and his music, as *Hard Times on Easy Street* was, the new album is the boss' version of his boy. And evidently the boss preferred—or judged more commercial—the relatively conventional, downhearted material written in David Lynn's difficult past to whatever he's writing in his more nourishing present. The only song on this album from the batch recorded recently in Jones' own Bexar, Arkansas, home and studio is "Our Father's Son." In fact, two of the album cuts, the life-is-trash anthems "Walk Through the Fire" and "Lonely Town" (the latter chosen as the first single from the album), date all the way back to 1976, when David Lynn was "playing the single bar thing" in Houston.

Now, I don't know what the artist thinks of all this, and my brain just melts when I try to judge the commercial wisdom of twisting a writer/singer as passionate and creatively sophisticated as today's David Lynn Jones into a shape designed to appeal to the ultraconventional tastes of country radio programmers (which I guess is what Shedd tried to do here, albeit without any evident method), but at least I know exactly what I think of the resulting music. I think it's as dull and as disappointing as it is depressing, and I think that's a crime. —PATRICK CARR

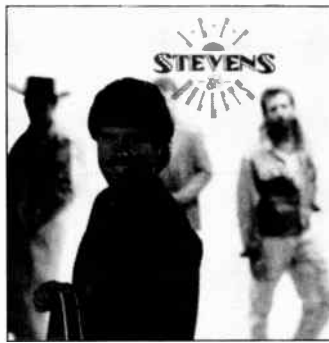


## The Forester Sisters *Come Hold Me* Warner Bros. 9 26141-2

**T**here's a little something new in The Forester Sisters' sound in this album, and I for one welcome it. I should confess that I've never been as big a fan of these girls as Michael Bane (who I think once wanted to marry most of them), so any change from their patented nasal, tending-toward-flat signature holds promise in my book. With a few of these numbers, they make some singularly fine music.

For their many fans, there will be no disappointments whatsoever. It's Foresters' business-as-usual with "Nothing's Gonna Bother Me," "I Struck Gold" and the obligatory Western swing number, "You Can't Have a Good Time Without Me," which, being a Russell Smith/Lewis Anderson/Lisa Silver composition, is a cut above the usual. Even the frothy, uptempo "You'll Be Mine" and the formulaic romantics of "Born to Give My Love to You" deliver the girls as we've all come to know them.

But where this record and The Foresters really shine is in the stuff that doesn't fit the mold. John Hiatt's "Drive South" features Kim and David Bellamy on lead vocals, with Howard, Christy, June and Kathy filling in harmonies when called for. Probably because Hiatt is not your average or even your above-average Music Row



tunesmith but a blues-based rocker with strong lyric sensibilities, the song lends power that raises everyone a notch above their usual performances—Kim especially hammers her notes with a clarity and authority not usually apparent. This gets my vote as best cut on the album.

It's Patsy Cline meets The Andrews Sisters on the title tune, and, again, The Foresters step out of their typical vocal roles with a different kind of melody and harmonies and hammer the number home. "Better Be Some Tears" features some hard-edged lyrics I liked quite a bit, also.

All in all, some risks were taken, surrounded by enough safety nets that no one will take a fall giving this record a spin. —BOB MILLARD

## Jeff Stevens and The Bullets *The Bullets* Atlantic 82079-4

**W**hat a nice surprise. Jeff Stevens and The Bullets, emerging onto a major label from the East Coast club circuit, have come up with a keeper. This one goes straight onto my close-at-hand shelf and stays there.

So what do we have here? Good solid folk-country-rock music, basically, with a servicable vocalist, a tight little band and a ton of taste. In every respect, from the artists Jeff Stevens cites as his main influences—Johnny

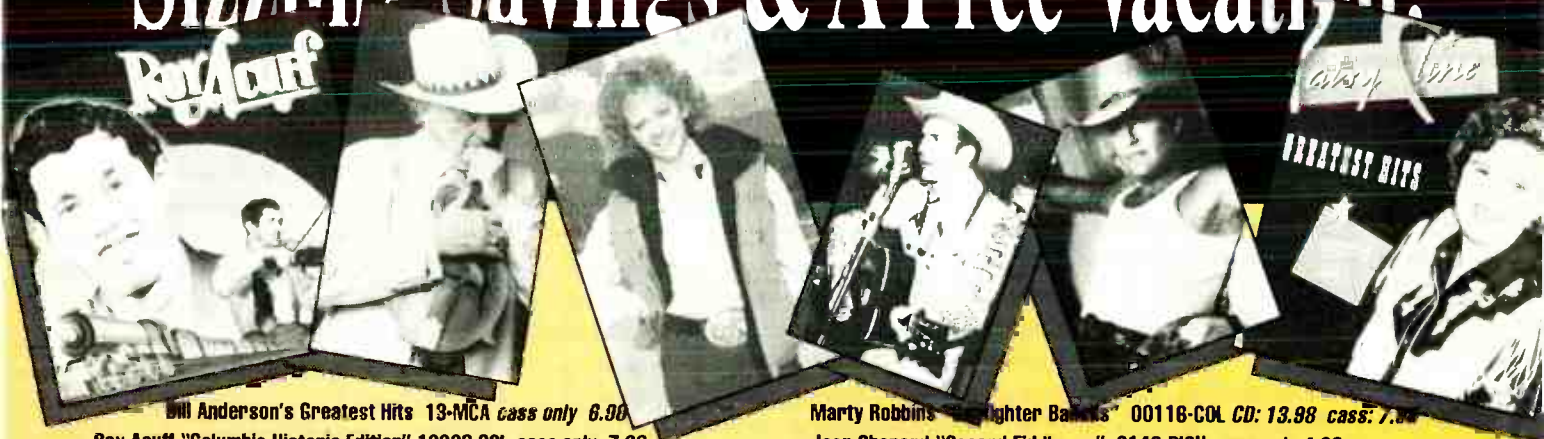
Cash, Waylon Jennings, John Fogerty, Lynyrd Skynyrd—to the songwriters he and his boys have patronized for their debut album—Bruce Springsteen, Janis Ian, Bobby Lee Springfield, themselves—the choices behind this music are very smart and very right. They add up to an album which really hangs together in sound, feeling and meaning.

The songs in particular are fitting, for rather than choose the safe track and serve up the usual Nashville mix of love ballads, toe-tappers and oldie-goldies, Stevens and his colleagues, including producers Nelson Larkin and Ron "Snake" Reynolds, have searched out a truly fine collection of what I call real-life songs: works grounded in the genuine subtleties of society and personality as opposed to products of the imagination, romantic or otherwise. With this kind of material, you get to hear some much more than averagely interesting stories, like the tale of the two semi-outlaws who find love and go straight together in "Johnny Lucky and Suzy 66," or the fortunes of the various folks caught on the shifting turf of "Boomtown" or the repercussions of the choice made by "Roseanne" when she married for love instead of money.

It's nice that apart from anything else (their high basic quality, for instance), most of these songs are about the kind of people most likely to listen to them, the working people who go to honky tonks and buy country records, and it's nice, too, that the songs don't even come close to simplifying or patronizing their subjects; Stevens' vocals have an open, honest feel which helps a lot in this accomplishment. And it's also nice that this album revives the country tradition of the story song in such style.

You could argue, I suppose, that observational songs like these can suffer from a lack of passionate personal involvement, but you'd

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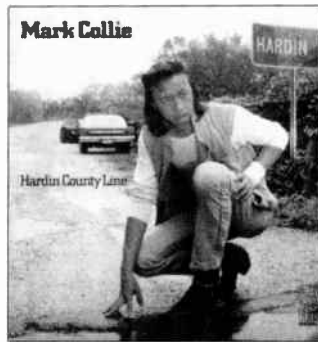
# Record Reviews

have a hard time selling me on that, especially when these days most of the love and loss and loneliness songs you hear on the radio were actually written by teams of sharply dressed, well financed, efficient young men punching a clock in sunlit publishing company offices. I hear more personal truth in "The Way of Love," a happy and moving anthem written by Jeff Stevens and his drummer, Terry Dotson, about non-romantic love—the bonds and generousities within families, that sort of thing—than I hear in the great majority of contemporary country heart-to-hearts. And anyway, if you happen to enjoy a really superior old-style romantic love-and-heartache fix now and then, as I do, you've got a couple of winners here, Pat McLaughlin's industrial-strength "You Done Me Wrong" and Bobby Lee Springfield's clever "Chain Gang." They're both toe-tappers too, and hooked to the max, so Stevens and his Bullets are radio-programmable as well as interesting.

Bobby Lee Springfield's name has cropped up a couple of times already here, and I guess that's no coincidence, for his debut album a couple of years back was quite like Stevens' today in the brightness of its sound and the lightness of its touch. The very engaging rockabilly, Bobby Lee, is a good reference point, then, and so is the very soulful country-blues legend, Lonnie Mack; if you can imagine music centered between those two worthies, you've got the sound of Jeff Stevens and The Bullets.

In his record company bio, Stevens stresses the importance of doing "quality work" and says, "I feel like if we put out music honestly, the way we want to do it, then the success will come." Those words don't sound at all hollow in the context of his first, excellent major label record. Let's hope they never do.

—PATRICK CARR



**Mark Collie**  
*Hardin County Line*  
MCA MCAC 42333

**A**t first I thought Mark Collie's often-thin voice might prove a drawback, that he'd get tedious with time because there just wasn't enough there to put too many different songs across. Instead, it grew on me. It's an ideal vehicle for conveying the wistful emotions behind so many of his songs. Here is a man who knows a thing or two about loss.

That is basically what he's writing and singing about on "The Good News and the Bad News," where his vocals show a lot of poise over a great band groove; on "Let Her Go," which is his weakest performance since he's still a limited ballad singer; on "What I Wouldn't Give"; on "Where There's Smoke," which is the kind of song Jerry Lee got to sing in his country heyday; on "Looks Aren't Everything"; on "Another Old Soldier," a very smart—and very bitter—antiwar song; as well as on the title song. Whether angry or bittersweet or stoic or confused, all these songs are tinged with the emotions of someone who has just lost something important. And as good as they are, and as well as they go together, Collie adds something extra—he mixes things up a little. "Bound to Ramble" hauls that tired old conceit out, polishes it off and makes it believable one more time, thanks in no small part to James Burton's

chiming guitar figure. And on songs like "Something With a Ring to It," which is sort of rockabilly-lite that works, and "What I Wouldn't Give," Collie shows he can toss the word play around as cleverly as the next Nashville writer.

It helps that co-producers Tony Brown and Doug Johnson have fixed him up with a dream studio band highlighted by Barry Beckett on piano, Mac McAnally on acoustic guitar and the aforementioned Mr. Burton, whose lead guitar lines, as always, are stylish, unique and unforgettable. But give Collie the bulk of the credit, because his songs and performances gave the producers and sidemen a lot to work with.

—JOHN MORTHLAND



**Doug Stone**  
*Doug Stone*  
Epic ET 45303

**D**oug Stone's voice is a slick composite of virtually every successful young male singer to emerge in the last few years. That's to say it doesn't have a lot of character or personality of its own but is comfortable enough and familiar enough that radio should be—already is—happy to welcome him into the fold. I don't think that's a very good thing in and of itself, but I do concede it's inevitable.

Truth is, Stone doesn't handle the more hard core, straight-ahead country very well even if that's the image he seeks to project. "I'd Be

Better Off (In a Pine Box)," though it proved to be a big hit, is a good song rendered blandly, so much so that the huge arrangement overwhelms Stone before things are over. "Fourteen Minutes Old" is another solid country song he can't quite pull off. No, where Stone excels is on something like "In a Different Light," where he makes the transition from hard country to more middle-of-the-road fare seem deceptively simple.

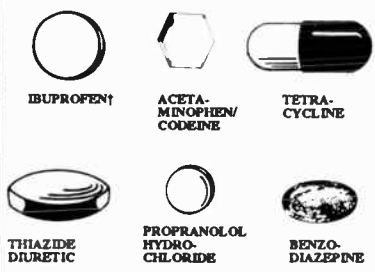
Stone is a smoothie and thus better suited to this kind of material. "These Lips Don't Know How to Say Goodbye" is another that plays pop arrangements and vocal stylings off against a country voice, and "My Hat's Off to Him" starts sweet and just keeps getting sweeter. These cuts belong to producer Doug Johnson as much as to Stone.

Quite simply, there's not a lot of emotion in the guy's singing. Stone and Johnson will likely turn out to be the team that figures out how to translate the New Traditionalism into easy listening, just as all the rough edges of Outlaw eventually led to Urban Cowboys singing super-club ballads over an army of strings. As I said, I don't think it's a good thing, but it's inevitable.

—JOHN MORTHLAND

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We all take drugs prescribed by our doctor for their good effects, like relieving pain, fighting infection, birth control, aiding sleep, calming down, fighting coughs, colds or allergies, or lowering heartbeat and blood pressure.

### DO YOU HAVE ANY OF THESE BAD SIDE EFFECTS?

Prescription drugs can cause headache, upset stomach, constipation, stuffy nose, short breath, high blood pressure, fear and ringing sounds.

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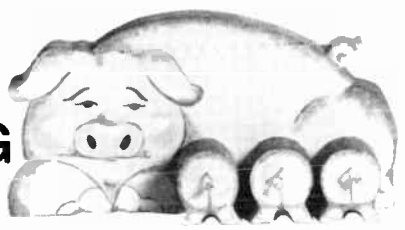
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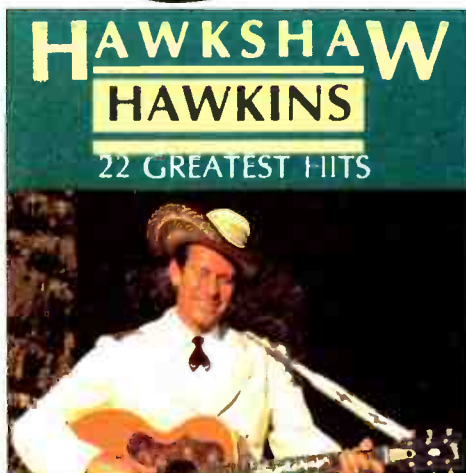
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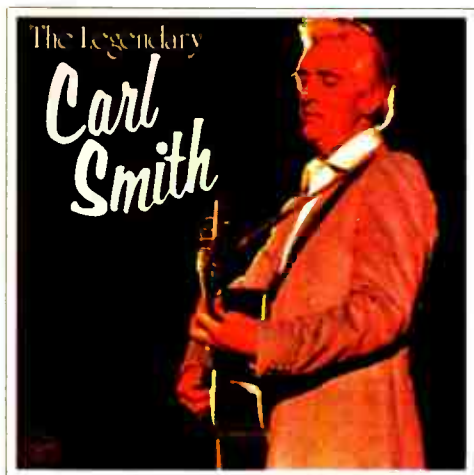
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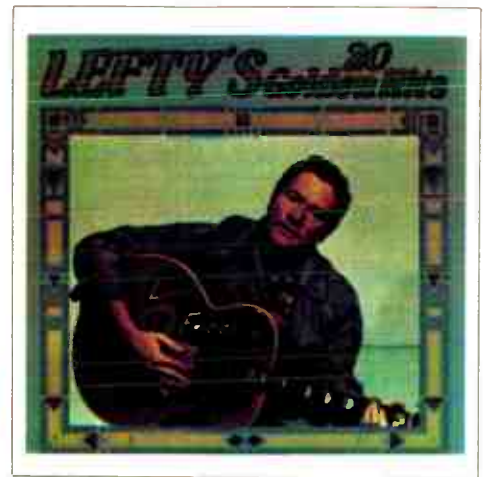
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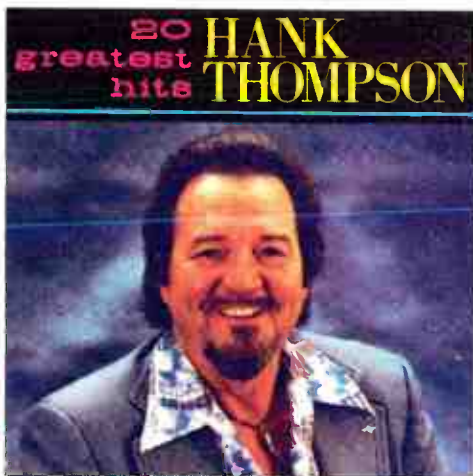
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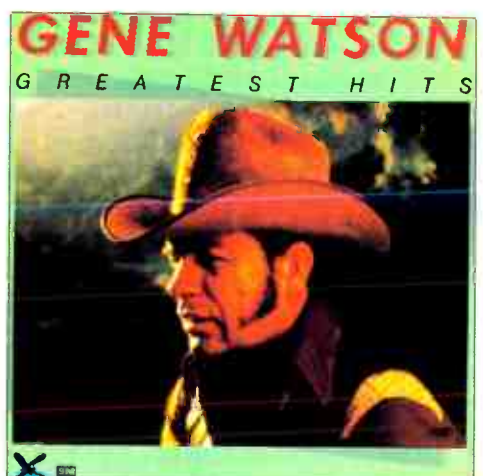
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(Columbia) 380-725



Ricky Van Shelton—*RVS III: Statue Of A Fool; Love Is Burnin'; Oh Pretty Woman;* etc. (Columbia) 402-040

Rodney Crowell—*Keys To The Highway; Many A Long Way; Lonesome Highway;* etc. (Columbia) 389-247

Linda Ronstadt—*Cry Like A Rainstorm, Howl Like The Wind.* With Aaron Neville on *Don't Know Much and All My Life.* plus many more. (Elektra) 389-874

The Charlie Daniels Band—*Simple Man.* The cut plus more. (Epic) 400-523

Country Songbirds	
LACY J. DALTON SURVIVOR 380-907 (UNIVERSAL)	MELISSA ETHERIDGE BRAVE AND CRAZY 388-090 (RELAB)
ROSANNE CASH HITS 1979-1989 376-665 (COLUMBIA)	BONNIE RAITT NICK OF TIME 381-087 (CAPTIVE)
PATTY LOVELESS Honky Tonk Angel 374-629 (MCA)	TANYA TUCKER GREATEST HITS 386-250 (CAPTIVE)
K. D. LANG SHADOWLAND THE OWEN BRADLEY SESSIONS 370-288 (SIRE)	ANNE MURRAY Greatest Hits Volume 2 385-385 (CAPTIVE)
PATSY CLINE 12 Greatest Hits 365-924 (WARNER BROS.)	HOLLY DUNN The Blue Rose Of Texas 384-222 (WARNER BROS.)
D. PARTON/E. HARRIS L. RONSTADT-TRIO 352-633 (WARNER BROS.)	THE FORESTER SISTERS GREATEST HITS 383-869 (WARNER BROS.)
SUZY BOGGUSS Somewhere Between 381-525 (CAPTIVE)	REBA MCKENTIRE Sweet Sixteen 383-562 (MCA)
K. D. LANG AND THE RECLINES Absolute Torch & Twang 381-624 (CAPTIVE)	MARY CHAPIN CARPENTER State Of The Heart 383-505 (COLUMBIA)
JOAN BAEZ Speaking Of Dreams 401-216 (CAPTIVE)	BARBRA STREISAND A Collection: Greatest Hits... And More 401-141 (COLUMBIA)
THE OAK RIDGE BOYS American Dreams 404-434 (CAPTIVE)	BEST OF GLEN CAMPBELL 403-444 (CAPTIVE)
THE KENDALLS 20 FAVORITES 1383-794 (MCA) 393-793 (MCA)	CONWAY TWITTY House On Old Longview Road 383-646 (MCA)
ROGER WHITTAKER I'd Fall In Love Tonight 383-679 (MCA)	Gene Watson Born On The Fourth Of July Original Soundtrack 404-947 (MCA)
BELLAMY BROS. Greatest Hits III 383-653 (MCA/CBS)	MICHELLE 404-483 (MCA)
LEE GREENWOOD This Is My Country 369-553 (MCA)	EARTH, WIND & FIRE HERITAGE 404-004 (COLUMBIA)
<b>PETTY'S HOTTEST.</b> Tom Petty— <i>Full Moon Fever.</i> (MCA) 382-184	
LINDA RONSTADT'S GREATEST HITS 286-740 (SOUTHWEST)	THE BAND *1388-181 (MCA) 398-180 (CAPTIVE)
DEBRA WILLA, MARR AND YOUNG DEJA VU 404-202 (ATLANTIC)	BO DIDDLEY Bo Diddley Is A Gumballer 379-677 (CHEER)
JIM CROCE 403-154 (MCA)	ROY ORBISON ALL-TIME HITS 377-945 (COL. SPECIAL PROD.)
JIMI HENDRIX EARLY CLASSICS *402-677 (SPECIAL MUSIC CO.)	THE WHO Who's Better, Who's Best 1376-657 (MCA) 396-655 (MCA)
EAGLES LIVE *400-713 (ELEKTRA) 390-716 (ELEKTRA)	CARL PERKINS GREATEST HITS 374-199 (RELAB)
JOE COCKER Mad Dogs And Englishmen 1389-783 (AW) 399-782 (AW)	THE DREGS Divided We Stand... The Best Of The Orage 386-979 (ARISTA)
RANDY TRAVIS OLD 8 X 10 370-643 (WARNER BROS.)	RICKY VAN SHELTON LOVING PROOF 372-979 (COLUMBIA)

THE O'KANES IMAGINE THAT 402-057 (COLUMBIA)	DOUG STONE 405-100 (EPIC)	SOUTHERN PACIFIC COUNTY LINE 403-824 (WARNER BROS.)	GIRLS NEXT DOOR HOW 'BOUT US 403-543 (ATLANTIC)	
BOBBY BROWN ...Ya Know It! 402-602 (MCA)	T. GRAHAM BROWN Brilliant Conversationalist 357-376 (CAPTIVE)	THE BEST OF FRANK SINATRA *1332-247 (MCA) 392-241 (MCA)	CARPENTERS Lovelines 388-942 (SAB)	
WILLIE NELSON GREATEST HITS 1311-001 (COLUMBIA) 391-003 (COLUMBIA)	Forester Sisters You Again 359-281 (WARNER BROS.)	BARBRA STREISAND'S Greatest Hits, Vol. II 321-380 (COLUMBIA)	JANET JACKSON Rhythm Nation 1814 388-918 (AW)	
GIPSY KINGS MOSAIQUE 402-727 (ELEKTRONORNIK)	THE STATLER BROTHERS THE BIG HITS *360-669 (COLUMBIA)	MELISSA MANCHESTER GREATEST HITS 318-733 (ARISTA)	NANCI GRIFFITH One Fat Summer Evening 376-244 (MCA)	
JUICE NEWTON GREATEST HITS 328-609 (CAPTIVE)	GEORGE STRAIT GREATEST HITS VOL. II 361-006 (MCA)	JOHN TESH GARDEN CITY 388-876 (SAB)	CHARLIE DANIELS BAND Homesick Heroes 375-626 (EPIC)	
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JOHN ANDERSON GREATEST HITS 330-720 (WARNER BROS.)	GEORGE JONES SUPER HITS 362-699 (EPIC)			
THE BEST OF DOTTIE WEST *331-819 (LIBERTY)	MANTOVANI ORCH. A Night In Vienna 378-737 (SANDWICH)	BIG AUDIO DYNAMITE Megatop Phoenix 388-215 (COLUMBIA)	RICKIE LEE JONES FLYING COWBOYS 388-199 (REPERE)	
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BASIA: London Warsaw New York 401-752 (EPIC)	GARY MORRIS HITS 362-939 (WARNER BROS.)	MEL MC DANIEL Rock-A-Billy Boy 378-885 (CAPTIVE)	THE BEST OF VERN GOSDIN *374-447 (WARNER BROS.)	
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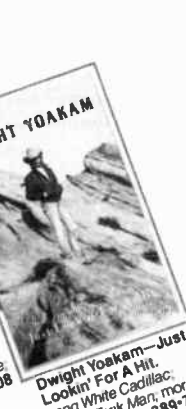
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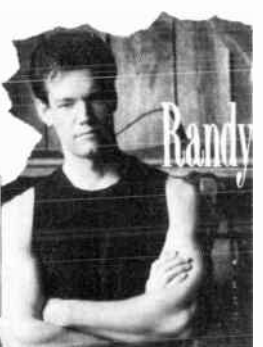


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# Essential Collector

Country  
Video  
Library

This will be a first—our first look at some of the excellent video collections being released nowadays. Basically, country videos fall in one of four categories. *Documentaries* explore an artist's career in detail through interviews and reminiscences of friends, family, fellow performers and usually the artist himself. Vintage film or video clips are used to illustrate phases of his or her career, and a narrative ties it all together. Done well, documentaries can reveal much about an artist and provide new insights. *Concert Videos* are live concert appearances that bring the stage right into your home. *Video Collections* present the artist's music videos, strung together into a program. *Reissue Videos* are much like the material we cover in *Buried Treasures*: newly-released versions of old film or video performances, movies or vintage TV shows from the past. These can capture the mood of an era better than anything else.

We don't have any video collections this time, but some excellent documentaries, concert and reissue videos have turned up that are easily among the best on the market. So here we go. Watch for more books next time.

**Jerry Lee Lewis: *I Am What I Am*** is an unapologetic, hour-long view of The Killer's life and one of the best-researched documentary videos currently in print. If you thought the *Great Balls of Fire!* film starring Dennis Quaid was a candy-coated dud, don't worry—this is the Real Thing. The scenes from Jerry's hometown of Ferriday, Louisiana, alone, showing many of the places where he hung out as a kid, are a treasure. We even get to see what's left of the notorious Blue Cat Club across the river in Natchez, Mississippi,



where Jerry Lee got some of his earliest performing experience.

Despite a couple of brief staged scenes using actors, the narrative is strong and well-paced, particularly the hilarious section about his brief and not altogether ethical interlude as a vacuum cleaner salesman before he went into music full time. Interviews with Johnny Cash, Carl Perkins, Sam Phillips and Jack Clement effectively cover his early days at Sun.

The scandals and tragedies, however, aren't overlooked. The controversy over his marriage to 13-year-old Myra is dealt with honestly, as is the death by drowning of his son Steve. Comments from Jerry Lee himself, from Kris Kristofferson, Chuck Berry, Tanya Tucker, Mickey Gilley, Roy Orbison and Steve Allen (Jerry made his first national TV appearance on Allen's TV show) add worthwhile insight. And by the standards of the 1950's, the clips of his early TV appearances make him seem positively demonic. His switch to country music is documented through interviews with his Smash Records producer, Jerry Kennedy.

**Marty Robbins: *Super Legend*** Marty Robbins was known in life and death for his excellence and consistency. He did many things and did them vigorously and exceedingly well. Happily, *Marty Robbins: Super Legend* reflects the same care and high standards. This two-hour video, produced in 1987 and hosted by John Schneider (who looks amazingly like Marty's son, Ronnie), features interviews with Marty's family, including his widow, Marizona, who remained in the background during Marty's life. Also on board are individuals who played a major role in his career, from Little Jimmy Dickens, who discovered Marty in Phoenix in 1951 and helped get him signed to Columbia, to Roy Acuff, who recalls his first appearance on the Opry.



Beautiful color clips of Marty performing his early hits, "I Couldn't Keep From Crying" and "Singing the Blues," bring back the younger Marty, rising out of the early 50's era of Hank and Lefty, a time now gone forever. Those who knew Marty's music knew he was also a fine rockabilly singer, and the clip of him performing Chuck

Berry's "Maybelline" is a treasure in itself.

Other clips show him in action in later years on the Opry jamming with Merle Haggard, whose dead-on imitation of Marty singing "Devil Woman" is one of the video's most priceless moments. Scenes from some of his Western film appearances are used to illustrate his love for western lore, complete with hilarious recollections from Faron Young, who co-starred with Marty in one Western. Champion auto racers Bobby Allison and Darrell Waltrip discuss Marty's passion for the sport, a passion illustrated by video coverage of two of his violent accidents on the track, accidents that eventually led to his giving up active driving.

Longtime band members Bobby Sykes and Don Winters show up throughout, at one point recalling the harrowing 1971 show where Marty, suffering his first heart trouble, refused to disappoint an audience and pressed on with a scheduled show. He had the 15th cardiac bypass operation ever done. The documentary ends with his induction into the Hall of Fame and his death. This is the ultimate record of Marty.

Another offering featuring Robbins, *A Man and His Music*, is simply a 55-minute concert video recorded live at the Opry in 1980, two years before he died. It's a superb account of the strength and power that remained in his music even near the end. He sings all his hits, including his version of Elvis' "That's All Right (Mama)." Marty had been the first to cover Elvis' recording in 1954. I don't normally recommend you splurging, but Robbins fans would do well to get both videos. *Super Legend* tells the story. *A Man and His Music* lets the music do the talking.

**George Strait:** *George Strait Live!* is a 52-minute concert video recorded several years ago at the Dallas Reunion Arena. He tears through 16 numbers—not all of his big hits, but a substantial chunk of what put him where he is today, showing clearly why he's one of the best entertainers the industry's seen in years. From his first chart hit, "Unwound," through "The Fireman," "Does Fort Worth Ever Cross Your Mind," "All My Ex's Live in Texas," "Marina Del Rey," "Amarillo by Morning," "You're Something Special to Me" and "It Ain't Cool to Be Crazy About You," Strait's energy never lets up.



Several of his big ones aren't here, including "The Chair," but he does cover a couple of honky tonk classics: Hank Thompson's "A Six Pack to Go" and "Deep Water," written by Fred Rose, originally recorded by Bob Wills. The Ace in the Hole Band is as awesome as you'd expect, with the twin fiddles of Benny McArthur and Gene Elders particularly outstanding.

**Music City U.S.A.:** *Music City U.S.A.*, a reissue video, is a mixed blessing of sorts. This 81-minute film, produced by former Hank Williams bass player Hillous Buttrum, uses a hilariously bad plot featuring T. Tommy Cutrer (a veteran announcer,

singer and Tennessee politician) as a "visitor" to Nashville, greeted by Webb Pierce, Webb's longtime associate Max Powell, and of course, Buttrum himself, who manages to show up throughout the film.

Once you get beyond all the flaws, you find a fascinating portrait of Nashville circa 1965. Today the tourist trade mostly centers around Opryland, removed from downtown Nashville. But in the 60's, everything revolved around downtown, when the Opry was still located at the Ryman Auditorium. Cutrer banters with Bashful Brother Oswald at the Old Roy Acuff Exhibit and visits Shot Jackson during the days when Shot built Sho-Bud steel guitars. In fact, guitar freaks can see a number of great old instruments, including the custom-built Gibson J-20's played by The Wilburn Brothers as they sing "Trouble's Back in Town" and a Martin archtop guitar in the hands of Webb Pierce.

Loretta Lynn sings her 1964 hit, "Wine, Women and Song," from long before the days of "Coal Miner's Daughter." Jean Shepard contributes her 1964 hit, "Second Fiddle." Justin Tubb and Lorene Mann, holding telephones in a terminally cute skit that anticipates today's videos, sing their duet, "Hurry Mr. Peters." Jimmy C. Newman performs "Artificial Rose," while The Osborne Brothers, looking like gawky teenagers, give us "My Baby's Comin' Home." Dave Dudley adds his pro-Vietnam ballad, "What We're Fighting For."

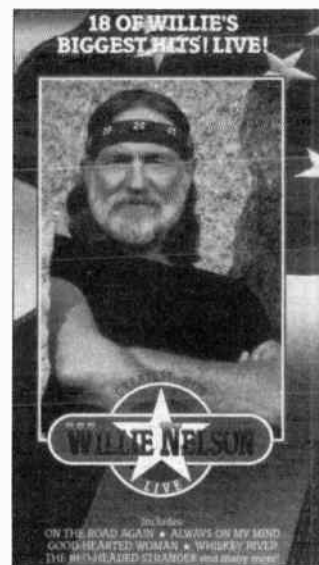


**Merle Haggard:** Hag's 45-minute *Poet of the Common Man*, narrated by Ralph Emery, is a concert video, cut in Nashville. In addition to performing, Merle whittles, recites original poems and discusses the origins of some of the songs, among them: "Kern River," "A Place to Fall Apart," "Big City," "Ramblin' Fever," "Mama Tried," "Footlights," "Silver Wings," "My Favorite Memory," "The Moment I Lost You," "Workin' Man Blues" and "The Fugitive"—all excellent performances. The Strangers were hot that evening, with intense fiddling from Jim Belken and blazing lead guitar by Clint Strong.

Nevertheless, I can't help but think there could and should have been more. It would have been nice, for example, to hear Merle plow through more of his Bob Wills and Jimmie Rodgers repertoire, some of the old pop

songs he jazzes up in concert and more of his early Bakcrsfield material. This will do for the moment, but in all honesty, the definitive Hag video has yet to be made.

**Willie Nelson:** Willie Nelson's *Greatest Hits Live!* is, like the Strait video, an hour-long, no-frills run-through of Nelson's biggest hits, beginning with "Funny How Time Slips Away" and lurching through "Always on My Mind," "Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain," "Good-Hearted Woman," "Night Life" and all the other biggies you'd expect. Since Willie seldom changes his show, you can pretty well figure what this one's going to be like if you've ever seen a concert.



The band is as consistent as always, and aside from Willie's voice and guitar and Mickey Raphael's harmonica, Bobbie Nelson proves her mettle on piano with some truly wild solos. It's not always obvious on records just how much she contributes to Willie's sound, because those contributions are often subtle. In concert, however, you can see and, more important, hear, just why she's been the cornerstone of the band, equal to either Raphael or Willie's longtime drummer, Paul English.

If you want Willie's stage show in your home, at least the ones he's been doing for the past decade, this video captures it all. —RICH KIENZLE

#### How to Get These Collectibles

Available at prices shown: Jerry Lee Lewis, *I Am What I Am* (G9A) \$29.95/Marty Robbins, *Super Legend* (G2A) \$39.95/Marty Robbins, *A Man and His Music* (G1G) \$39.95/*Music City U.S.A.* (G8G) \$59.95/George Strait, *George Strait Live!* (G2G) \$29.95/Merle Haggard, *Poet of the Common Man* (G5B) \$19.95/Willie Nelson, *Greatest Hits Live* (GLJ) \$29.95. To order send check or money order to Nashville Warehouse, P.O. Box 5090, Ronkonkoma, NY 11779. Add \$2.50 postage and handling for first item ordered, \$1.00 each additional. To order Willie Nelson and Bud Shrake, *Willie: An Autobiography* (B4H), omitted from last issue's Collectibles price list, send check or money order in the amount of \$19.95 plus \$1.95 postage and handling to Nashville Warehouse at address above.

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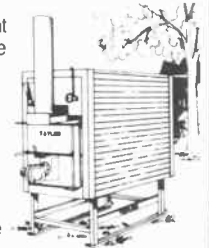
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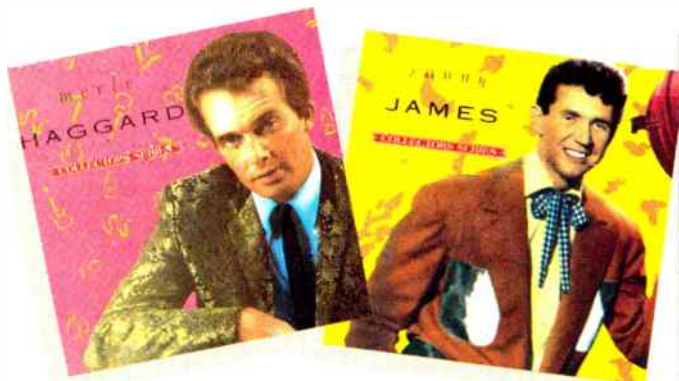
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# Buried Treasures

Reissues,  
Rarities and the  
Hard-to-Find

Before we get started, there are two things I'd like to mention. First, it's my unpleasant duty to remind you that the record album, or LP as we know it, is headed for extinction. We will feature LP's in this column when still available, but cassettes and compact discs have all but taken over. Many of you still like LP's and even 8-tracks, but times do change, and ironically the move to CDs has been a boon to the reissues market. Even major labels are now releasing more vintage material from their vaults than ever—on CD. Second, I've begun working on reissues with several record companies myself, helping choose repertoires and writing liner notes in some cases. In the past I've avoided mentioning those titles since it seemed tacky to do so. But part of my job is to tell you about interesting reissues, and I think I've found an ethical way to include things I've had a hand in. If I've worked on an album, I'll simply tell you about the material, without editorializing. That said, here's this issue's treasures:

**Merle Haggard:** Longtime Buried Treasures readers may have noticed that the only Hag reissues around these past few years have been British imports. At last that's changed, thanks to two new American collections that, together, cover 18 years (1963-1981) of Merle's career. Capitol Records' fine Collector's Series weighed in with the first. Their *Merle Haggard* (7 93191 2) covers most, though not all, of the essential Capitol sides. It kicks off with "Swinging Doors," Haggard's second Top Ten record ("Strangers," not included, being the first). From there it makes a run through 20 Haggard songs of the late 1960's, among them "The Bottle Let Me Down," "Hungry Eyes," "Workin' Man Blues," "Daddy



Frank," "Okie From Muskogee," "The Fightin' Side of Me," "Emptiest Arms in the World," "Movin' On," "Cherokee Maiden" and more.

Rhino's *More of the Best* (R2 70917), which I annotated, covers some of the gaps in the Capitol collection, including Merle's first chart hit, "Sam Hill," from 1963. "Branded Man," "Mama Tried," "Silver Wings," "White Line Fever," "It's Not Love (But It's Not Bad)," "If We Make It Through December," "Someday We'll Look Back" and "It's All in the Movies." It also brings together seven of his biggest MCA hits from the late 1970's to the early 1980's, among them "Ramblin' Fever," "If We're Not Back in Love by Monday," "I'm Always on a Mountain When I Fall," "It's Been a Great Afternoon," "I Think I'll Just Stay Here and Drink" and "Rainbow Stew."

**Sonny James:** I tried to interview Sonny a couple of years ago for our *CMM Update* feature but found his management curt and uncooperative. Sonny remains a gem. His rating as Number 19 out of the 100 top country record-sellers is a formidable achievement. His hits, like Haggard's, have long been out of print. Now Capitol's new *Sonny James* package (7 91630 2), part of their Collector's Series, compiles 20 of his biggest hits, beginning with his 1957 country and pop smash, "Young Love," ending with 1972's "That's Why I

Love You Like I Do."

This album includes everything that matters: "Baltimore," written by longtime Bill Anderson associate, Jimmy Gately, "You're the Only World I Know," "Take Good Care of Her," "Room in Your Heart," "Heaven Says Hello," an early country version of "It's Just a Matter of Time" (the Brook Benton song Randy Travis revived last year) and Sonny's 1969 remakes of Roy Orbison's "Only the Lonely" and Johnny Preston's "Running Bear." His two slick interpretations of the rhythm-and-blues classics, "Bright Lights, Big City" and "Empty Arms," show the different direction he was taking toward the end of his days with Capitol.

The album's weakest point is its liner notes, a sterile recitation of the most basic facts by Steve Kolanjian.

**Ernest Tubb:** I worked on this one, so here are the bare facts. Ernest Tubb never recorded a live album for Decca. His *Hittin' the Road, On Tour and Midnite Jamboree* albums were actually studio recordings with live introductions and applause spliced on. By contrast, Rhino's *Ernest Tubb Live: 1965* (R 70902) was recorded, in stereo, at the Magic Castle Ballroom between Seattle and Tacoma by ex-Texas Troubadour drummer-turned-recording-engineer, Jan Kurtis. At this time in his career, Tubb carried an "all-star" group of Troubadours

that included Jack Greene on bass, Cal Smith on rhythm guitar and the guitar/steel guitar team of Leon Rhodes and Buddy Charleton.

E.T. does all his big hits, from "Soldier's Last Letter," "Driftwood on the River" and "I'll Get Along Somehow" to "Rainbow at Midnight," "Blue Eyed Elaine" and "Drivin' Nails in My Coffin." Several later hits, including "Pass the Booze" and "Thanks a Lot," round out the album. The Troubadours themselves do a brief solo spot, as they did when Tubb took a break, with Cal Smith singing the old Hawkshaw Hawkins hit, "Lonesome 7-7203," by Justin Tubb. A word of warning, the CD has several more tracks than the cassette version.

**George Jones:** When George Jones was a kid in Texas, he once got to back Hank Williams when Hank appeared on a small local radio station during a tour. Hank was a major influence on George, and when the booze and pills seemed to be winning, the Hank comparisons began to take in more than just singing. Hank's music also accounted for one of George's best albums for United Artists, *My Favorites of Hank Williams* (HAT 3136), now out on Longhorn.

George's feel for these dozen numbers comes forth on every note, making clear just how much he absorbed himself in those black-and-yellow-label MGM recordings of his. Backed by muted, sparse, Hank-style accompaniment, George's special way of phrasing puts these numbers, particularly "I Just Don't Like This Kind of Living," "You're Gonna Change," "You Win Again" and "Mansion on the Hill," across nearly as effectively as Hank did himself. One suspects that as proud as Hank was of pop singers like Tony Bennett cutting his songs, this is how he wanted them sung.



**Jimmy Bryant:** After the legendary guitar/steel guitar team of Jimmy Bryant and Speedy West separated in the late 1950's, when Speedy moved to Tulsa, Bryant continued as a busy session musician in L.A. He also started recording for Imperial Records. With Imperial Records producer Scotty Turner handling his recordings, Jimmy headed in a more commercial direction. Some albums were relaxed to the point of boredom. Others were nearly as hot and jazzy as the Capitol sides.

*Bryant's Back in Town* (HAT 3137), originally released in 1966, shows the more relaxed Bryant. The music isn't the sophisticated country jazz he recorded with Speedy from the early to mid-1950's. It is far more commercial material that probably reached a lot of people who thought his and Speedy's earlier playing was a bit way out. Most numbers are originals, and on some, like the Latin-flavored "Elena Good-bye," he plays an acoustic instrument. Nevertheless, the dizzyingly fast playing he's known for remains aboard, as "Model 400 Buckboard," "Fender Bender" and the aptly titled "Blow Your Hat in the Creek" all prove. The only standard here is a melancholy "Fraulein."

**Skeets McDonald:** This one's a sleeper for honky tonk fans. Skeets McDonald was not really a heavy hitter. While his career began in Michigan, he enjoyed his biggest success after he settled in California in 1951 and signed with Capitol. A regular on the popular L.A. TV show, *Town Hall Party*, his biggest hit was his Number One recording of "Don't Let the Stars Get in Your Eyes" for Capitol in 1952. Some of his best work, hit or not, was done for that label, and his 1958 *Goin' Steady With the Blues* (HAT 3138), is now out on Longhorn.

The mix of raw country blues, honky tonkers and one novelty number reveals a fine, expressive singer who never got the credit he

deserved. Some numbers here are oldies, like Ernest Tubb's "Tomorrow Never Comes," Fred Rose's "Blues in My Mind" and Johnny Bond's "Gone and Left Me Blues," done with a slightly more upbeat accompaniment than the original versions. Others, like the title track, written by Harlan Howard, and McDonald's own "Hawaiian Sea Breeze," were newer compositions. Fans of Joe Maphis can hear his blistering lead guitar on nearly every track, as well as the hot boogie woogie piano of Capitol country boogie master, Merrill Moore, a player who influenced Jerry Lee Lewis. All the music here very much anticipates the early 1960's Bakersfield sound.

**Merle Travis:** The last recordings Merle Travis made before he died in 1983 were done for the L.A.-based outfit, CMH Records, ten years ago. CMH owner Martin Haerle put Travis in an atmosphere with players who could help him re-create his Capitol recordings of the late 1940's and early 1950's. *The Merle Travis Story* (CMH CD-9018) is the compact disc reissue of the original 1980 double LP: 24 remakes, done in the spirit of the originals with backing by a band that included ex-Texas Playboys Alex Brashear (trumpet), Herb Remington (steel) and Johnny Gimble (fiddle).

You can anticipate most of these. "Sweet Temptation," "Divorce Me C.O.D.," "Cincinnati Lou," "Fat Gal," "Steel Guitar Rag," "I Like My Chicken Fryin' Size,"

"John Henry," "Bayou Baby" and "Kentucky Means Paradise" are here, as is his only known recording of "Smoke! Smoke! Smoke! (That Cigarette)," the 1947 number he wrote for Tex Williams. He also performs several alone with acoustic guitar, including "Sixteen Tons," "Nine Pound Hammer," "Dark as a Dungeon" and "Re-Enlistment Blues." His voice was leathery, his picking a bit slower, but his spirit was there in spades. CMH has enough Travis material for several more sets, much of it never-before-issued.

Longhorn recently released another Travis collection, this one a reproduction of a vintage Capitol album. *The Merle Travis Guitar* (HAT 3132), is a collection of unaccompanied instrumental electric guitar performances originally recorded in the late 1940's and early 1950's, most of them as part of the Capitol Transcriptions (recordings sold or leased to radio stations). These were originally released on LP in 1956.

For fans of Merle's playing, the 12 numbers covered run the gamut of his instrumental repertoire. "Blue Smoke," one of his most intense instrumentals, leads off Side One. He also makes short work of both the old big band number, "Bugle Call Rag," and "Walkin' the Strings." Merle's knowledge of pop songs outside the realm of country was always impressive. And he capably interprets some ancient ditties like "On a Bicycle Built for

Two," "The Sheik of Araby," "The Waltz You Saved for Me" and "Goodbye My Blue Bell," the latter dating back to Civil War days. For fans of this style, which influenced everyone from Chet Atkins to Elvis' original guitarist, Scotty Moore, this is definitely the album to get.

**Farm and Fun Time:** This one's a treasure. *Live Again-WCYB-Bristol Farm and Fun Time* (Rebel REB 854) was compiled from late 1940's transcriptions made at radio station WCYB in Bristol, Virginia, transcriptions of their popular noontime *Farm and Fun Hour*. The show attracted some of the first great bluegrass acts to follow in the footsteps of Bill Monroe, including the five here: the early Flatt and Scruggs lineup with Mac Wiseman singing tenor, The Stanley Brothers, Mac Wiseman and The Country Boys (dating from before Wiseman's brief run with Lester and Earl), The Sauceman Brothers and Curly King and The Tennessee Hilltoppers.

The Saucemans, Carl and J.P., sound less bluegrassy than the others here since they sing mostly ballads. "Road of Sadness" and "Letter that Broke My Heart" are particularly outstanding. The three 1949 Flatt and Scruggs tracks include "Roll in My Sweet Baby's Arms," "Rainbow of My Dreams" and the chilling sacred number, "That Home Above," where Scruggs switches from banjo to guitar. These three numbers are easily the best performances here—the band is really hot. Wiseman's three 1950 solo performances are well sung and anticipate the sound of his early Dot recordings. For Stanley Brothers collectors, there are four numbers, three of them outstanding—"Short Life of Trouble," "Blackberry Blossom" and "Rose of Old Kentucky"—none ever commercially recorded by Carter and Ralph. Excellent local-favorite artist, Curly King, seems fairly mundane amid such lofty company.

—RICH KIENZLE

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# TOP 25

## Singles

1. Ricky Van Shelton . . . . *I've Cried My Last Tear for You*
2. Clint Black . . . . . *Walkin' Away*
3. George Strait . . . . . *Love Without End, Amen*
4. Tanya Tucker . . . . . *Walking Shoes*
5. Keith Whitley . . . . . *I'm Over You*
6. Doug Stone . . . . . *I'd Be Better Off (In a Pine Box)*
7. Travis Tritt . . . . . *Help Me Hold On*
8. Alabama . . . . . *Pass It On Down*
9. Lionel Cartwright . . . . *I Watched It All (On My Radio)*
10. Steve Wariner . . . . . *The Domino Theory*
11. Kathy Mattea . . . . . *She Came From Fort Worth*
12. Reba McEntire . . . . . *Walk On*
13. The Desert Rose Band . . . . . *In Another Lifetime*
14. Eddie Rabbitt . . . . . *Runnin' With The Wind*
15. Lacy J. Dalton . . . . . *Black Coffee*
16. The Judds . . . . . *Guardian Angels*
17. Robin Lee . . . . . *Black Velvet*
18. Garth Brooks . . . . . *The Dance*
19. Restless Heart . . . . . *Dancy's Dream*
20. Dan Seals . . . . . *Love On Arrival*
21. Rodney Crowell . . . . . *If Looks Could Kill*
22. Randy Travis . . . . . *He Walked On Water*
23. T. Graham Brown . . . . *If You Could Only See Me Now*
24. Alan Jackson . . . . . *Here in the Real World*
25. Kentucky Headhunters . . . . . *Dumas Walker*

## Albums

1. Clint Black . . . . . *Killin' Time*
2. Kentucky Headhunters . . . . . *Pickin' on Nashville*
3. Travis Tritt . . . . . *Country Club*
4. Ricky Van Shelton . . . . *RVS III*
5. Alan Jackson . . . . . *Here in the Real World*
6. Randy Travis . . . . . *No Holdin' Back*
7. Kathy Mattea . . . . . *Willow in the Wind*
8. Willie, Waylon, Johnny & Kris . . . . . *Highwayman 2*
9. Hank Williams, Jr . . . . *Lone Wolf*
10. Lorrie Morgan . . . . . *Leave the Light On*
11. Garth Brooks . . . . . *Garth Brooks*
12. Restless Heart . . . . . *Fast Movin' Train*
13. Doug Stone . . . . . *Doug Stone*
14. Charlie Daniels Band . . . *Simple Man*
15. Dan Seals . . . . . *On Arrival*
16. Keith Whitley . . . . . *I Wonder Do You Think of Me*
17. k.d. lang . . . . . *Absolute Torch and Twang*
18. Paul Overstreet . . . . . *Sowin' Love*
19. Sawyer Brown . . . . . *The Boys Are Back*
20. Randy Travis . . . . . *Always and Forever*
21. Patty Loveless . . . . . *Honky Tonk Angel*
22. George Strait . . . . . *Beyond the Blue Neon*
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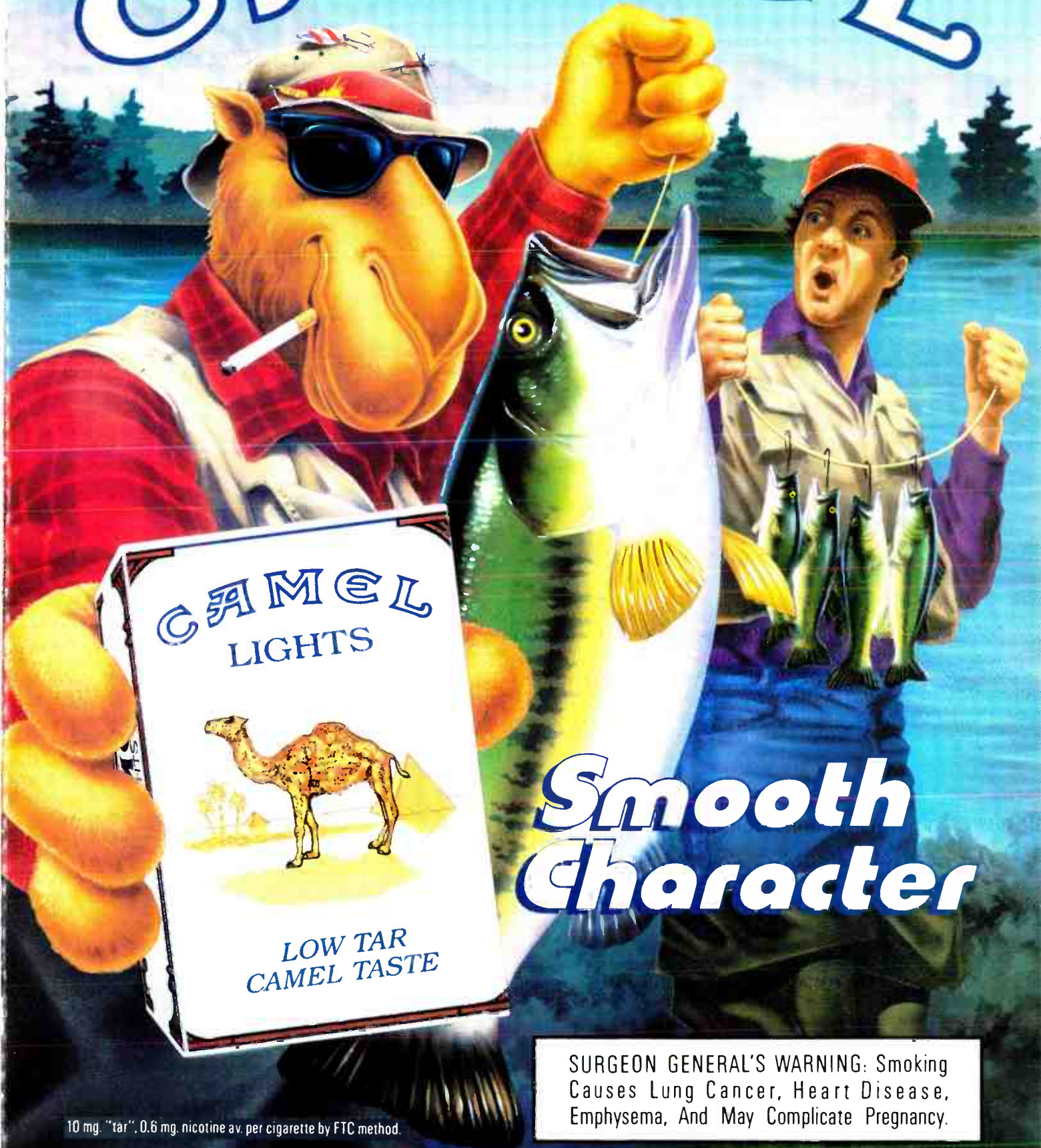
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Character*

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10 mg. "tar", 0.6 mg. nicotine av. per cigarette by FTC method.

**Bonnie Kolano, Courier Service Owner.** When Bonnie Kolano took her 1984 Toyota Truck in to trade for a new 1990 model, she had just one concern. "I was afraid they wouldn't want my trade-in," Bonnie said. After all, her 400-mile/day, 5-day/week courier route had put over half-a-million miles on the odometer. Happily, however, her dealer knew an opportunity when he saw it. Today, Bonnie's old truck is displayed prominently in his showroom. A monument to Toyota reliability. And Bonnie? She's back on the road in her new Toyota Truck. "So far, it's even better than the last one," Bonnie said recently. Of course, she expected nothing less.

Call 1-800-GO-TOYOTA if you'd like a truck brochure or the location of your nearest dealer.

***"After 516,043 miles,  
my last truck is still in  
showroom condition."***

***"Toyota, I love what you do for me."***

