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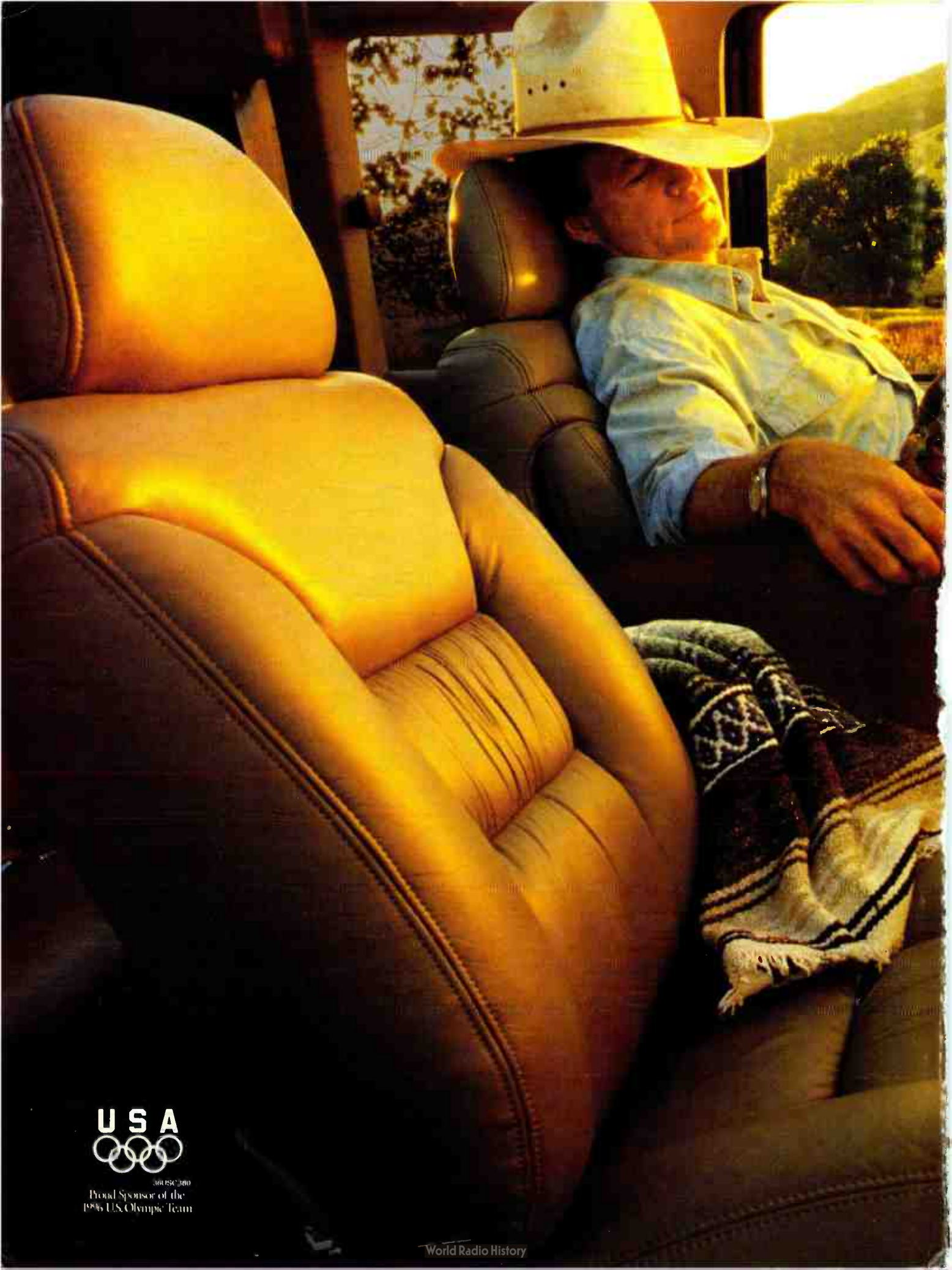
20 Questions with
TRAVIS TRITT

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JOE ELY'S
Musical Journey

SHELBY LYNNE
Her Home's the Stage

STEVE EARLE
Always On the Edge



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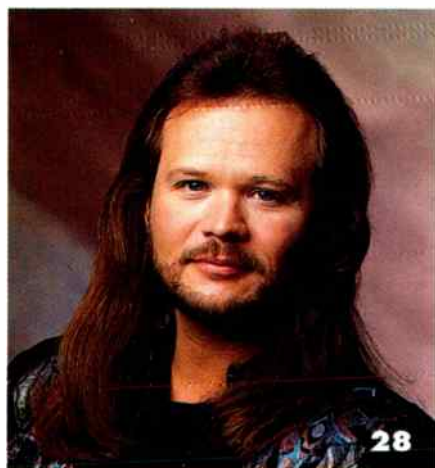
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People

BILL HONORS BILL



Bill Monroe was among the 12 recipients of the 1995 National Medal of Arts Award. Monroe and the other honorees traveled to Washington, D.C., where President Bill Clinton presented the awards at a dinner recognizing their outstanding contributions to the nation's cultural life.

TNN ANNOUNCES

The Nashville Network has selected the name and host for the flagship show to replace *Music City Tonight*. Singer and TV/Broadway actor **Tom Wopat** will be taking up the airwaves vacated by **Lorianne Crook** and **Charlie Chase** (see note elsewhere in this column for their future plans). His show is to be called *Prime Time Country*, and it'll debut on TNN in January. Wopat will continue to hold onto his recurring role as one of **Cybill Shepherd's** ex-husbands on the hit CBS comedy, *Cybill*.

SPEAKING OF HALL OF FAMERS

Speaking of Hall of Famers (don't we always?), the great **Grandpa Jones** celebrated his 82nd birthday recently. When asked what he did for his birthday, Grandpa replied, "Well, I chopped some

wood," as he laughed. This led me to ask, "Wonder how many hat-wearing, tight-butted singers even know that you use an ax to chop wood?"

THE OAKS WIFE SAGA

"Floor can be a lethal weapon," determined a Sumner County judge. Let's go back to a fist fight that occurred on the floor of a Hendersonville supermarket between Oak Ridge Boy **Steve Sanders'** current wife, **Janet**, and ex-wife, **Mary**. Mary (ex-wife), who is of Hispanic descent, was at the deli when Janet (current wife) sees her and says, "It's the little wetback." Needless to say, words led to screams. Screams led to shoving and pushing, which led to scratching and rolling in the aisles on the floor. Someone called the law. Janet, who was accused of pounding Mary's face into the floor, was charged with "aggravated assault," a

Class E felony, carrying a three to 15-year sentence. Realizing the possible outcome if there were a trial, Janet tried to have the charges reduced, claiming, "You cannot be armed with a floor, the floor is not a lethal weapon." The Sumner County judge refused to reduce the charge.

With the saga thickening, Sanders, who has his own legal troubles regarding back child support owed to Mary, had tendered his resignation from the group effective December 31st. Then, in a move that surprised even the three remaining Oaks—**Duane Allen**, **Joe Bonsall** and **Richard Sterban**—a few hours before a mid-November show in Fort Worth, Sanders called it quits and boarded a plane for Nashville. Duane Allen called his 22-year-old son, **Dee**, who had just arrived at his job waiting tables at Logan's Steak Restaurant at Rivergate Mall, saying, "Catch a plane now!" According to the help, Dee took off his apron and bolted for the airport and Fort Worth, where he could be a star instead of a waiter. Only in Music City. Ain't show biz grand.

ANDERSON AND MELLON UPDATES

The great **John Anderson** usually doesn't comply when someone calls him to sing harmony on his or her recordings. But when **Ken Mellons** called, John's answer was a quick, "Yes!" John says Ken is his favorite of the new acts. **George Jones** also sang harmony on Ken's records, as did those boys at my house, **Billy** and **Terry Smith**. In other John Anderson news, the BNA recording artist recently received a double platinum award for his *Seminole Wind* collection, and is in the studio recording a new album due for release in a month or so.

DAY OFF?

Busy **BlackHawk** had a day off in New York City. Did they rest? Noooooo. 'Course not. They taped two TV shows, CNBC's *America's Talking* and Lifetime's *Biggers and Summers*. Both their Arista recordings are platinum, if anybody's counting besides Sound-Scan.

Reporter: Hazel Smith

Editor: Rochelle Friedman

People

AILING HALL OF FAMERS

Country Music Hall of Famers **Eddy Arnold** and **Hank Snow** are not doing well. Eddy has chosen not to divulge his problem; however, the word filtered from Brentwood to Music Row of "something wrong with his blood." Eddy did say he would overcome the illness. Hank Snow, who's been plagued with glaucoma, can now barely see. He's also having kidney problems to the extent that he's unable to work the Opry on weekends...something he's always looked forward to doing.

THE BRIDE

The ever so trendy Blackstone Restaurant, just off the "Row," was the scene of a bash honoring the ever so popular **Terri Clark** for her out-of-the-box chart-topping single, "I've Got Better Things to Do." Terri was decked out in her trademark Wranglers, cowgirl hat and T-shirt. The Mercury artist allowed as how she'd been to so many Number One parties for others that she felt like she was "always a bridesmaid, but never the bride." 'Twas Terri's day...she was the bride. Another Terri note, she is quite an attractive girl. One recent day she showed up at her label, Mercury, hatless. Prez **Luke Lewis'** assistant, **Chris Carroll**, told me that the staff had to look a second time to recognize who she was.

ROCKING THE SMOKIES

After Rocking the Rockies last summer, Skoal Music brings its caravan east, to the Smoky Mountains in Newport, Tennessee, this summer. On July 6, 1996, a line-up including **Hank Williams Jr.**, **Travis Tritt**, **The Charlie Daniels Band**, and Southern rockers **Marshall Tucker Band** and **Little Feat** will perform a 10-hour concert at the Forks of River Entertainment Show Park. The event is free. Just look for entry forms at retailers and in magazines (including the last issue of *Country Music Magazine*), and write for your tickets.

ON THE ROAD WITH ROUNDER

Rounder Records 25th Anniversary Tour made a stop in Music City at 12th & Porter, and *Country Music Magazine* was there. Lead-off performer, banjoist **J.D. Crowe** and his band **New South**, offered a rousing welcome of bluegrass, followed by West Coast fiddler/vocalist **Laurie Lewis**, whose acoustic set and songs were un-bluegrass but very appealing. The marvelous **Del McCoury** and his band closed with a 45-minute set of wonderful

bluegrass. McCoury's delightful CD, *Deeper Shade of Blue*, was a Grammy nominee and got awarded recognition by the International Bluegrass Music Association (IBMA). Sitting in high cotton between Giant Records' **Rhonda Vincent** and CMT's **Traci Todd** was yours truly. Other notables in attendance were Daddy Bluegrass, **Bill Monroe**, plus **Steve Earle** and **Junior Brown**...three men who know great music when they hear it. It was truly a night of great music. Ask *Billboard's* **Chet Flippo**. He sat beside me for a while, too.

CELEBRITY THEATER

Word I got from Opryland's **Mike Hyland** is that the Celebrity Theater, which featured so many wonderful shows this season, will again have live shows with dif-

ferent artists for spring, summer and fall '96. No word yet on the talent, but I'd wager it's some of the best. It always is. Also, you'll want to know that the **Shotgun Red** show will again return to the General Jackson Showboat for '96. The best entertainment I had all summer this year was watching Shotgun Red with some kids. All ages can enjoy the daytime cruise.

HEART OF STONE

The recently divorced **Doug Stone** was seen shopping at a candle shop in Opryland. By Doug's side was a sweet young thing, probably about the same age as his socks. Very huggy-poooh and kissy-poooh, they were. Since his much touted open-heart surgery, I wonder, how is the real heart of Stone?

BUCKS' NEW FAVES



The great Buck Owens is shown with two singers he considers great enough to present with his signature red, white and blue guitars. Both **Ken Mellons** and **Chely Wright** are overjoyed being next to Buck and their brand-new instruments. Ken told me personally that it was the biggest thrill of his life.

People

GO TO PIZZA HUT (OR ORDER OUT)

Why, heck yes, I been going to Pizza Hut. Every red-blooded American lover of country music should be going to Pizza Hut. Since those smart Pizza Hut people hired those gentle outlaws, **Waylon Jennings** and **Willie Nelson**, to sell their goods, why we have Pizza Hut a time or two a week. Doesn't everybody?

HI, JIM

The Jim Beam folks at the Claremont, Kentucky, distillery hosted a 200th anniversary party. Smart they are for bringing in entertainment by **4 Runner**, **Joe Ely** and **Radney Foster**. Also in attendance for the all-day event were 121 invited men named Jim Beam! Hi, Jim.

YOU SHOULD-A SEEN HIS SMILE

ASCAP honored looker **David Lee Murphy** for his first self-penned Number One song, "Dust on the Bottle." Do I have tell you that the handsome David Lee was all smiles as he accepted his award. Present

for the 3:00 P.M. do were **Tony (wow) Brown**, who signed David Lee to MCA and produced his record, the cool and handsome **Scott Borchetta**, who promoted the song via radio, those two good-looking VP girls, **Katie Gillon** and **Janet Rickman**, and those cool press do-ers **Sarah Brosmer**, **Toni Miller** and **Jules Wortman**. A cool party, it was.

A LITTLE GOOD NEWS

During four months of his touring in 1995, **Clint Black** arranged for a food drive to benefit USA Harvest. Fans coming to the show would bring along food products and drop them off at the entrance. After all was said and done, some 288,371 pounds of food were collected, all of it going to help less fortunate Americans.

TY'S GRANDDAD

When **Ty England** made his Grand Ole Opry debut, it was almost perfect. Like he'd dreamed it would be back home in Oklahoma, it was the most exciting day in his life. The one thing that prevented it from being perfect was that his granddad,

Ed Lester, wasn't able to attend. From Ty's childhood, the two always talked about granddaddy standing in the wings by the big red curtain while Ty sang his song on the stage. Since it didn't work out, Ty did dedicate his Top Ten hit, "Should've Asked Her Faster," to him. While grandpa couldn't make it to the Opry, he did get to see his grandson at an in-store appearance at the El Reno, Oklahoma, WalMart.

THE POSSUM SEZ

Legendary **George "Possum" Jones** traveled back home to Beaumont, Texas, and stood in front of the Jefferson Theater in his hometown, where they unveiled a plaque naming a street in his honor. The Possum called it a "sentimental thing. Means more to me than anything," he said, "... 'cept maybe the hits!"

SONGWriters HONORED

The Nashville Songwriters Association International, during ceremonies at Lowes Vanderbilt, honored three of the finest. Elected to the Songwriters Hall of

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ALL IN THE FAMILY



Lorrie Morgan's upcoming new album for BNA Records will feature a duet with her son, Jesse Keith Whitley. The two are seen in the studio putting the finishing touches on "She Walks Beside the Wagon." The late Keith Whitley is Jesse's dad.

Fame were Waylon Jennings, Dickey Lee (who almost cried) and Dave Loggins. Also honored was music's most famous country songsmith, the Honorable Harlan P. Howard, who received the President's Award. Lastly, the Maggie Cavendar Award of Service was presented to the retiring Martha Sharp, whose Music Row years have given us both Randy Travis and

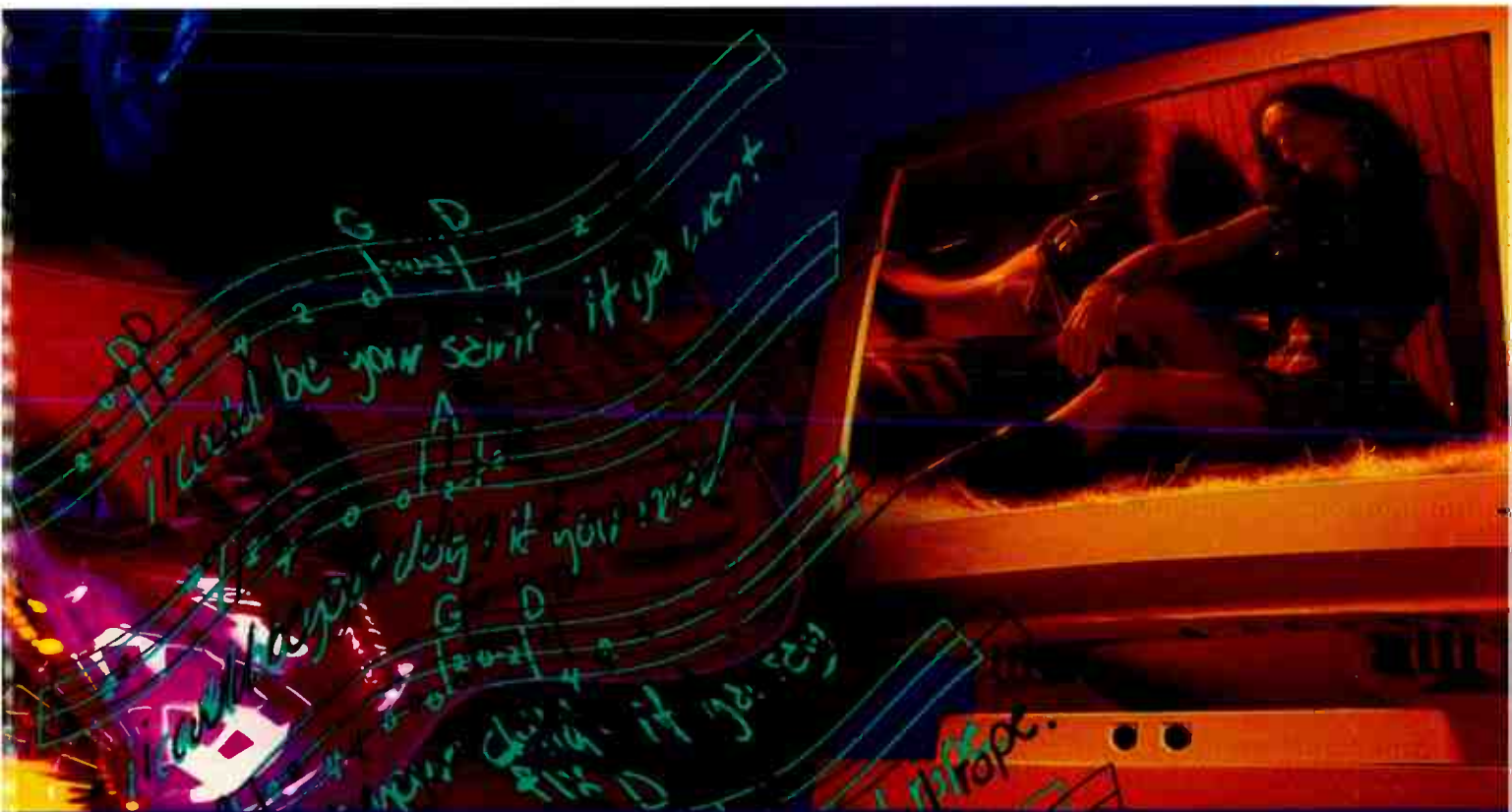
Faith Hill. Her eye for talent and ear for songs is surpassed by no one. Songwriters and songpluggers alike have lost a great friend, one who truly cares about the singers and the songs, with the departure of the great Martha Sharp. God bless you, Martha, and thanks for the friendship. I shall miss you and will remain your friend.

MARTHA ON THE ROAD AGAIN

The familiar Martha White theme song has been a mainstay on the Grand Ole Opry for a continuous 47 years. In fact, the flour company is the Opry's oldest sponsor. Also longtime on-the-road, radio and TV sponsor for the fabo bluegrass band, Flatt & Scruggs, Martha White is again taking her products on the road with bluegrass diva Alison Krauss. Natural partners these ladies are...they both love bluegrass. The company will sponsor 100 shows with Alison in '96. Martha White is also the sponsor of the popular weekly bluegrass series at the Ryman Auditorium and will continue this next year also. There ain't nothing in my cabinet except Martha White meal and flour. And I know how to use 'em.

TWINS

Singer Shelly West and hubby, television man Gary Hood, have announced the birth of twin sons. Grady and Cooper Hood weighed 4 pounds 9-1/2 ounces and 3 pounds 12-3/4 ounces respectively. Shelly is the daughter of the late Dottie West.



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COUNTRY MUSIC MAGAZINE

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Printed in the U.S.A.

People

BACKSTAGE WITH GEORGE AND TAMMY



Backstage at the Opry, following the performance extraordinaire by the "President and the First Lady of Country Music," all smiles—and with good reason after a night of music like that—are Bruce Hinton, George Jones, Billy Sherrill, Tammy Wynette, Norro Wilson and Tony Brown. Hinton and Brown, of course, head MCA Records, where George records. Sherrill, who produced George and Tammy together and separately through the late 60's and early 70's, rarely makes appearances these days, but this historic reunion was enough to bring him out.

WALKWAY OF STARS WELCOME

I stood on the stars of now divorced Louise Mandrell and R.C. Bannon, side by side they are, and watched five favorites as they were inducted into the Country Music Walkway of Stars at the Country Music Hall of Fame. Inductees included **Martina McBride, Joe Diffie, Kathy Mattea, John Michael Montgomery and Ricky Van Shelton**. These five certainly deserve this place of respect—all are great singers and great entertainers. Following the ceremonies, I got a kick out of Martina and husband **John McBride**. The McBrides have a green Chevrolet truck. John opened the door on the driver's side, allowing Martina to slide under the wheel, then he slid in close by her, Martina staying mid-seat, close to hubby, like women back home in the country who love their men.

OPRY'S MS. PRUETT

Grand Ole Opry's **Jeanne Pruett**, whose *Feedin' Friends* cookbook recipes have fed many a country fan, has an eatery at Opryland Park. Also called "Feedin' Friends," Jeanne's restaurant serves up homecooked rations. When off the road, Jeanne herself spends time at the park

visiting with the fans, and sometimes will ladle up a plate or two. Working the crowd toward the end of the season, Jeanne noticed a lady choking. Quick thinking, she bolted to the lady, applied the Heimlich maneuver and saved the woman's life. If I choke, I'm gonna scream for Jeanne.

EYE SAW

Eye saw **Patti Page** at the Wild Boar having dinner. It's no wonder eye saw the marvelous singer of "Tennessee Waltz" at the prestigious eatery—I had dinner with her! It's okay to be impressed...I was. Enjoying the meal was Mercury's Senior VP/GM **Bob "Cutie" Frank**, along with **Kira Florita** and **Faith Queensbury**. Patti was in town taping *The Statler Brothers'* TV show, doing the Opry, and appearing on **Ralph Emery's** TNN morning show. A classy lady if ever eye saw one.

CROOK & CHASE REBOUND

TV producer **Jim Owens** announced that his company will launch a new syndicated daytime chat show with former TNN hosts **Lorianne Crook** and **Charlie Chase**. The title of the show? *Crook & Chase*. Look for it this month.

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Record Reviews

Dwight Yoakam

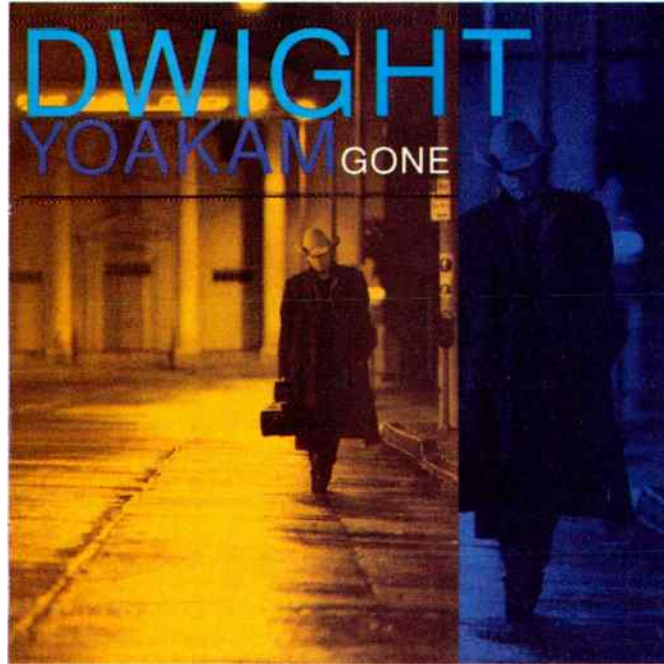
Gone

Reprise 46051

Hard as it is to believe, it's been ten years since the New Traditional movement first caught fire, coming as it did in the wake of a devastating *New York Times* story that detailed the decline and fall of Urban Cowboy and the subsequent trailing off of country record sales and radio airplay. The movement unleashed, among others, Dwight Yoakam, who roared out of L.A., frontally assaulting the Nashville establishment, antagonizing many (even though most of his diatribes were on the mark). Ten years later, most New Trads are alive and well, if not as cutting edge. A few, like Reba, sold out their country roots for greater fame (not better music).

Of them all, Dwight, without question, has truly retained his focus after a string of hits. That's not easy. Even his mentor, Buck Owens, went through a period in the late 60's where he tried and failed to make his music "progressive." For sure, Yoakam is neither as simple nor as earthy as was hinted in his early days. Nothing's worse than seeing a bright, educated country singer try to affect the demeanor of a hillbilly, but Dwight, to his credit, never went that route. This is an educated, articulate man aware of his country roots but unashamed of his intellect and insights (see last issue's cover story). Never has he done a bad album, though some are better than others. His songwriting has improved over time, and his vision grown richer and broader without compromise.

The poetic simplicity of Yoakam's songs remains at the



surface, beginning with the swirling "Sorry You Asked," a straight-ahead number with a Johnny Cash "Ring of Fire" feel that speaks for itself. "Near You" boasts a similar mix of styles: the Yoakam sound everyone knows with subtle changes in the melody and arrangement, paying homage to early to mid-period Beatles. "Don't Be Sad" begins sounding for all the world like the honky tonk Dwight of several years ago while the chorus, in places, skirts the edge of Buddy Holly. The cheesy combo organ on "That'll Be Me" similarly changes the entire feel of an otherwise standard Yoakam rocker.

This pattern pervades the entire album—as always, a Pete Anderson production. It's a textbook example of how an artist can maintain the sound that made him famous while still experimenting and broadening that sound beyond its known boundaries. "Never Hold You" roars out with a

quintessentially Yoakamesque arrangement and a few stylistic steals from The Rolling Stones of 30 years ago, when they were still worth hearing. The drama of "This Much I Know" is enhanced by stark martial drums, electric piano, Scott Joss' exquisite solo fiddle and vocal harmonies from Beth Andersen. The arrangement telegraphs the song's simplicity while giving it a stateliness to complement the lyrics. "Nothing," a Yoakam-Kostas effort, uses drums, Memphis-style R&B horns and strings (that's right, strings) in a similarly creative way.

The lighthearted feel of "Baby Why Not" reaches its peak as Yoakam plays around with the song at the end. Skip Edwards' Tejano-style accordion provides the same texture that made the Dwight/Buck duet on "Streets of Bakersfield" so special (harmonies from Joy Lynn White don't hurt, either). The moody "One More Night" has the feel of 60's soul music with a no-frills

arrangement that has more going on than one realizes, complete with sitar from Pete Anderson and Tom Brumley's pedal steel twanging away amid the guitars.

All this creativity reaches its peak with "Heart of Stone," a Yoakam-Kostas number that fuses a quintessential honky tonk ballad with "pedal piano" of the sort Floyd Cramer made famous, a 60's Nashville Sound vocal chorus, twin fiddles and one of the most lavish symphonic string arrangements this side of the Nashville Symphony. Every component (including Jim Lauderdale's vocal harmony) fits perfectly, and the performance, encompassing nearly everything that's happened in country in the past 40 years, is a masterpiece, pure and simple.

Despite his movie appearances and so forth, diversions that have sapped many an artist's edge, it remains clear that the ten years that Dwight Yoakam has been in our midst deserve more than just a *Greatest Hits* package. *Gone* is Yoakam's means of marking that decade, not by looking back, but by looking ever ahead. —RICH KIENZLE

Aaron Tippin

Tool Box

RCA 66740

I've never once done an interview or read a press release in which the artist in question didn't proclaim his or her latest album to be "the very best I've ever done," or "the first one that's really me." (Wouldn't it be refreshing if, just once, somebody said, "Well, this one ain't as good as the last one, but it's okay." Not in this lifetime, buddy!)

Oddly enough, when Aaron Tippin makes such boasts

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Record Reviews

about *Tool Box*, his fifth and latest album (which he calls “the big one”), he’s not far wrong. For one thing, the song choices are, for the most part, sterling, and the productions impeccable. Even more important, Tippin has simply never sounded so soulful, so melodic. Quite frankly I had no idea he had this much range and depth as a singer.

Die-hard Tippin fans need not despair, though. There’s still a fair amount of the old, familiar Tippin here. Songs like “Ten Pound Hammer” (written by Dennis Linde) and the title tune, “Country Boy’s Tool Box” (co-written by Tippin and Ronnie Rogers, this one originally appeared on Tip’s 1994 album, *Looking Back at Myself*), practically bowl you over with their rowdy, twangy, hillbilly overkill.

Yet the cuts on *Tool Box* that really linger in the imagination are those on which Tippin plumbs unprecedented territory. Two of the best of these are “That’s as Close as I’ll Get to Loving You” and “Without Your Love.” He imbues the latter song with such thrilling soulfulness and desperation, and such deft vocal phrasing, that he brings to mind great underrated singers of yesteryear like Earl Thomas Conley and Jon Conlee.

On these tracks and most of the others producer/guitarist Steve Gibson subtly frames Tip’s vocals with piston-solid-and-precise rhythm tracks and

deft guitar and fiddle fills. Time and again, the crisp, incisive productions complement the singer without swarming all over him.

“Real Nice Problem to Have” (Rick Bowles and Tom Shapiro) is a more rhythm-heavy barroom song which Tippin nails with a savvy balance of nonchalance and disappointment. The charm of his version of Billy Swan’s 1974 monster hit, “I Can Help,” lies in its faithfulness to the bright, irrepressible romantic optimism of Swan’s original version.

Mind you, I’m still fond of the original unreconstructed Tippin: the full-throated South Carolina redneck who can out-howl Hank Williams and sounds like he’s holding a pipe wrench in one hand and waving an American flag and a shotgun in the other. That Tippin is alive and well here, too. “You Gotta Start Somewhere” is a tie-one-on, burn-the-barroom-down honky tonker on which he pulls out the stops. “She Made a Man Out of a Mountain of Stone” (co-written by Tippin and Terry M. Brown) is a clever, tongue-in-cheek exercise in turning an old cliché inside out and building an improbable story line around it. I didn’t think I could stomach another “radio” song; but Tippin plays the sorrowful hillbilly rube so convincingly on “How’s the Radio Know” that his guileless heartbreak and hooky vocal fi-

nally sucked me right under.

Maybe I’m exaggerating things when I talk about the “new” Tippin and the “old” Tippin. The best thing about *Tool Box* is the way Gibson and Tippin have so intelligently embellished Tippin’s innate rawness with some new refinements. I think they call it growth. And maturity. If so, there’s a whole lot of it here.

—BOB ALLEN

Mark Chesnutt

Wings

Decca DRND-11261

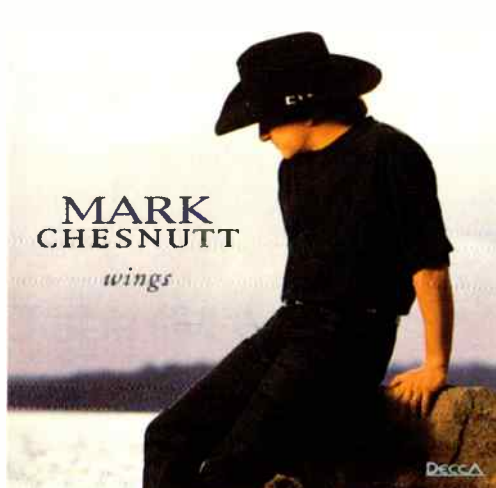
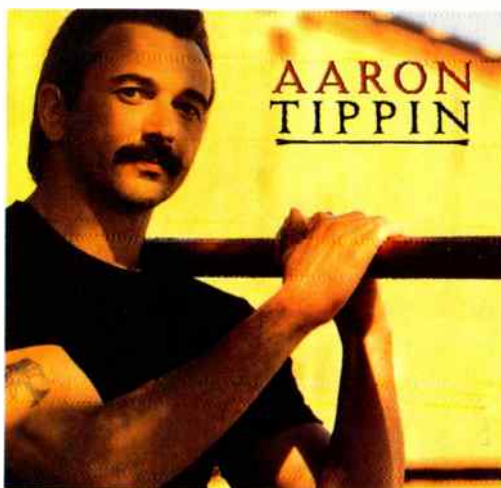
Some of you may or may not recall my review of Mark Chesnutt’s debut album, *Too Cold at Home*, some years back. To put it mildly, I wasn’t impressed. I felt Chesnutt’s potential was hogtied by weak material and mediocre production by Mark Wright, who seemed bent on smothering Chesnutt’s raw Beaumont edge in 20-year-old pop overtones to satisfy radio. It worked in the short run. Still, things didn’t improve until Chesnutt’s last album, *What a Way to Live*. Now, with Wright stepping aside, Chesnutt is working with the dead level best: MCA Nashville head honcho Tony Brown. Brown’s genius for tempering his commercial ear with respect for artists’ visions has finally unleashed Chesnutt to make the album everyone

knew he could make.

It’s not that he sings better. In the past, Chesnutt gave even bad material his best. The difference is that Brown’s production, fused with sparkling material from cutting edge composers like Jim Lauderdale and Todd Snider, allows Chesnutt’s intensity to burst forth like a Texas gusher. “As the Honky Tonk Turns,” a miniature portrait of a barroom crowd, penned by Chesnutt, Roger Springer and Tommy Nixon, sets the tone from the first few bars. He does equally well with the similar theme of Mack Vickery’s “Settlin’ for What They Can Get.” He also turns in a masterful performance of a song that’s already a standard of the 90’s (and beyond): Jim Lauderdale’s brilliant “The King of Broken Hearts.” Todd Snider’s “Trouble,” describing the temptation to cheat and the fear of discovery, rides atop a danceable (not line-dance) beat. Chesnutt’s fine performance also speaks well for Snider, who’s done his own fine MCA album and could become a musical fountainhead on Lauderdale’s level.

Chesnutt perfectly conveys the shame and self-recrimination of “(I Think) I’ve Finally Broken Mine,” the woeful tale of a relationship destroyed by repeated stupidity. A less somber embarrassment surfaces in “Wrong Place, Wrong Time,” a tale of two husbands, wives out for the evening, who run afoul of both patrons of a biker bar and the cops. The bouncy, Buck Owens-flavored “It Wouldn’t Hurt to Have Wings” clearly inspired the album’s title and provides a welcome change of pace.

On the Jim Lauderdale-Clay Blaker ballad, “I May Be a Fool,” with its message of pain and closure, Chesnutt’s smoky vocal is complemented by some lonesome lead guitar, which provides similar color in the right places on other numbers. Veteran songsmith Jerry Chesnut (no relation) wrote “Pride’s Not Hard to Swallow” in 1973, the year the song,



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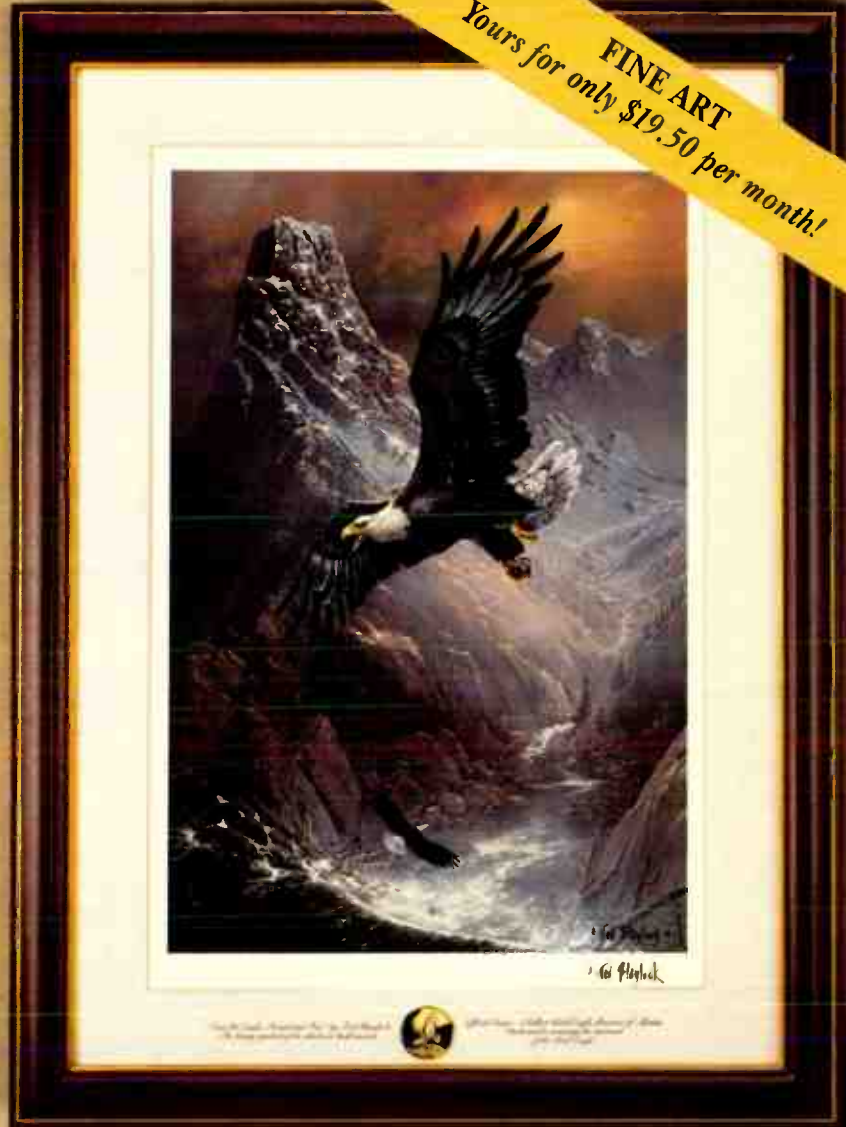
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Record Reviews

which celebrates contrition, went Top Ten for Hank Jr.

Listening to this, Chesnutt's finest album, I recall the reader mail in response to my first review. One angry, unpublished letter rebutted me track by track, the writers firmly advising me that "the Good Lord watches over Mark Chesnutt," a good line. I wanted to respond to the remark (but never did) by saying, "I'm glad the Good Lord watches over Mark. Perhaps He might find him a new producer so Mark can make the album he's capable of making." Hallelujah.

—RICH KIENZLE

Tim McGraw

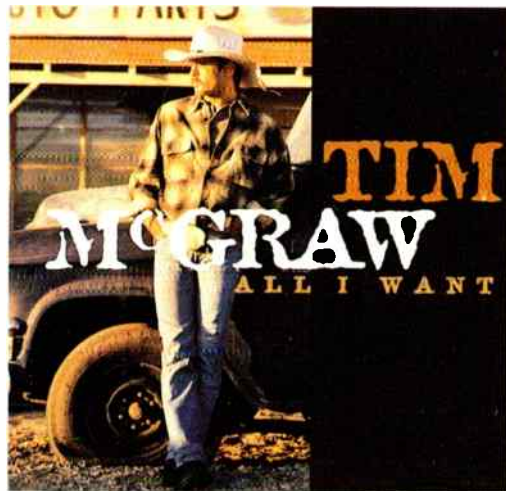
All I Want

Curb 77800

The title tune to Tim McGraw's new album is one of those great cuts that just jumps right out at you. Written by Tony Mullins, Stan Munsey and Don Pfriemer, it's a working man's lament that seems to capture all the disappointments of an entire generation: those whom the sociologists often refer to as "the declining middle class." Obviously, McGraw himself was moved by the song's homespun eloquence and its timeliness. He sings the fire out of lines like, "I just wanna break even someday before I die."

Unfortunately, it's pretty much downhill from there. Seldom in the course of *All I Want's* remaining 11 tracks does McGraw rise above the level of well-intentioned, utterly competent ordinariness or even come close to equaling the intensity of "All I Want in Life" (the song's full title). The best that can be said on his behalf is that he works competently and respectfully within the predictable stylistic confines either he or his producers, James Stroud and Byron Gallimore, have imposed on him.

All I Want is nothing if not



predictable. The songs, with few exceptions, are safe, radio-friendly and emotionally undemanding to the point of being dull. Though the tracks have energy, the production seldom rises above the usual smooth, paint-by-numbers, "Young Country" mix of relentlessly clean and bright guitars, keyboards and strings.

McGraw has always been an unabashed Keith Whitley fan, and it's an influence that he wears well. Thus another one of *All I Want's* too few transcendent moments comes on "I Didn't Ask and She Didn't Say." This pretty little middle-of-the-road ballad is strongly reminiscent of Whitley in his "Miami, My Amy" phase. Far too many of the rest of the cuts, though, are merely ditties: superfluous, sometimes downright silly songs that often choke on their own lyric cleverness. Too frequently their only substance lies in their souped-up arrangements and McGraw's pleasant, journeyman singing.

"I Like It, I Love It," for instance, is a raunchy, tacky dance tune that may well inspire an even tackier video and launch a thousand line dances. "Maybe We Should Sleep on It" has a similar dumb-dumber quality. (Actually, they should make a video of this one; the comic possibilities are endless!) "Renegade" (written by Jeff Stevens and Steve Bogard) is a rocked-up, macho man anthem (à la early Charlie

Daniels). It's marred by cliché-ridden lyrics—though vaguely redeemed by McGraw's exuberant singing. "When She Wakes Up and Finds Me Gone" is a soppy ballad whose melodramatic production almost overwhelms McGraw's underwhelming vocal.

I know it's an awful lot to suggest that McGraw and his producers try to find more songs like "All I Want in Life" the next time around—that is, songs that actually say something. But whether they do or not will ultimately determine whether McGraw's career finds a context beyond the barren mediocrity of mid-90's mainstream or merely recedes into inevitable footnotoreity.

—BOB ALLEN

Pam Tillis

All of This Love

Arista 18799

To put it in a nutshell, Pam Tillis proffers what may be the best record of her career, and she produced it herself.

The instrumental tone is sort of power acoustic, with lots of emphasis on wooden instruments—acoustic guitars, fiddles, mandolins, deliciously understated bass, and percussion with the temerity to do everything but bang and thump all the time. Starting with the single straight-ahead heart song, "Deep Down," through the sweet, poetic "All



This Love," there is humor, loving, losing; in short, some of the finest written lyrics issued on a country record this year sung by a voice so powerful and incisive you could harvest wheat with it.

Interestingly, Tillis and husband Bob DiPiero share only one writer's credit on this CD; Tillis and brother Mel Jr. share another. This is a departure, since Tillis and DiPiero have been responsible for many of her most memorable hits of recent years, but the album proves that Pam can still pick 'em, even if she doesn't have time to write 'em. She chooses Bruce Hornsby's "Mandolin Rain" for cover treatment so new that you almost fail to recognize it as Hornsby's signature hit. Don Schlitz and Nashville's million-dollar deejay Gerry House co-wrote "The River and the Highway," a melancholy, ambiguous road-ballad that Tillis nails with eerie accuracy. Western swing-time fun comes wrapped in the taunting "You Can't Have a Good Time Without Me."

The token funny song is "Betty's Got a Bass Boat." In this tune a Plain Jane finds that the way to a man's heart is through the boat dock. Songs like this, delivered with the same exuberant, cutting wit of "Cleopatra, Queen of Denial," are a sign of intelligence, of a woman who doesn't have to take herself too seriously, or predicate her image on her belly-button.

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is a fatalistic epic about frontier justice (if you can call it that). It glistens with rich lyric embroidery and has such a spare arrangement that it could easily be a lost chapter from Cormac McCarthy's classic western, *Blood Meridian*, set to music.

"Out in California" (co-written with Dave Alvin) is the wrathful plaint of a man being driven mad by lust and jealousy and bent on retribution. Russell's rumbling, menacing vocal and the raw, guitar-driven instrumental track make it sound like some longlost Johnny Cash classic from his "Folsom Prison" days.

These are just a few of the pleasures that lurk in the grooves of *The Rose of the San Joaquin*. This is simply one of the most inspired, intelligent and intriguing new records I've heard all year.

—BOB ALLEN

EMMYLOU HARRIS



Emmylou Harris

Wrecking Ball

Asylum 61854

I have always argued that anybody who doesn't love Emmylou Harris just where she stands needs a bigger soul. Self-possessed, slightly mysterious, embodying a personality paradoxically warm as a banked fire yet icily aloof, genuinely hipper than most country singers, with a voice that's a mixture of leaded crystal and stainless steel, she has always been much more a risk-taking artist than merely an album-a-year recording commodity.

The incomparable Ms. Harris has not been inclined to cut a mainstream commercial country record for many years now. Her last, 1993's *Cowgirl's Prayer*, ostensibly aimed at getting country airplay, but missed by a pretty wide margin being at the end of the day neither fish nor fowl. After the artistic triumph/commercial failure of *The Ballad of Sally Rose*, I suspected that someday she'd stretch her wings and fly away. On this new outing she followed her inclinations right on out of the country realm entirely and created a brilliant, nonpareil, acoustic adult record.

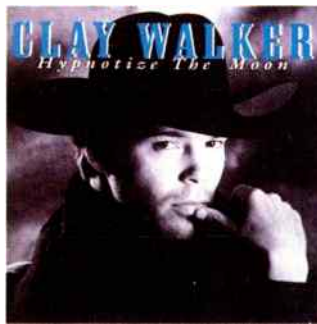
Drawing on production by Daniel Lanois (U2, Bob Dylan, Neville Brothers, Peter Dinklage), she aims very wide of country, to somewhere else quite wonderful, and this time hits her mark. Of course, when she opens her mouth, she's still that Blue Kentucky Girl singing left-field folk-country-based songs by Neil Young, Steve Earle, Dave Olney, Anna McGarrigle and Lucinda Williams. "Orphan Girl," written by Gillian Welch, is a classic gospel-based folk song, and Harris wrote "Waltz Across Texas Tonight" with Rodney Crowell, but to call the treatment in any sense "country" would be an untenable stretch.

But wait, there's more. Then comes Jimi Hendrix's "May This Be Love," and, Toto, I don't think we're in Kansas anymore.

You will sooner hear this music on what's known as Triple-A radio (adult album alternative) than on a country station. Asylum knows that both Daniel Lanois and Emmylou Harris have a core of diehard fans who will seek out their new offerings. If you are one of those, seek out *Wrecking Ball*, and you will not be disappointed. For that matter, if you're getting tired of the rapidly stagnating, cute-young-cowboy flavor-of-the-month that big-time country radio seems currently addicted to, dial either Americana or Triple-A once in a while and

pick up on John Prine, John Hyatt, Guy Clark, Junior Brown, Steve Earle, Linda Ronstadt, Jerry Jeff Walker, Tim O'Brien, Kieran Kane and Doc Watson, etc. That's where much of the more interesting fringe flavors of country have gone.

—BOB MILLARD



Clay Walker

Hypnotize the Moon

Giant 24640

Open Clay Walker's third album, and it's quickly apparent what part of the package ranks as most important. His carefully lighted face is everywhere. Not only is he shown brooding under his broad black hat on the cover; three other shots feature him glaring with implied heat within the five fold-out squares that accompany the cover photo on one side of the booklet. Flip it over and—surprise, surprise—the entire 9x14 spread is a hangable poster of the handsome young Texan. It's creased, but teenyboppers have never worried about aesthetics when thumbtacking this month's heartthrob to the wall.

What's inside won't distract anyone, either. Two years ago, Walker's debut displayed promise, even if he presented himself as George Strait Lite, an attractive, easy-going fella whose manners were as sharply defined as his chin. Since then, whatever qualities Walker originally flashed have dimmed and faded into a faceless, personality-less blur. Clay Walker rivals Rick Trevino as the blandest of the

big-selling young cowpokes who unerringly adhere to the 90's formula of light swing, goofy novelties and romantic balladry.

Walker's influences are obvious. "Who Needs You Baby," his lightweight hit, mirrors George Strait's relaxed Western swing. And if "Hypnotize the Moon" tries to carbon copy Strait's intimate way with a ballad, perhaps it's because it was written by Steve Dorff and Eric Kaz, who gave George "Cross My Heart," the showstopper from *Pure Country*.

Elsewhere, Walker sounds like a different famous voice altogether. On "I Won't Have the Heart," he slides words in a near yodel, sounding as if he's trying to win the Garth Brooks Soundalike Award by employing a technique that persuaded Waylon Jennings to refer to Brooks' vocals as reminiscent of Mr. Haney from the old TV sitcom, *Green Acres*. The same mannerism returns on "A Cowboy's Toughest Ride," which also carries on Brooks' obsession with rodeo imagery. Walker co-wrote both songs, and two others on the album, with Kim Williams, one of Brooks' favorite writers as well. Adding to Walker's problem is that he doesn't convey Brooks' passion or sense of theatrical drama, nor does he come across with the informal ease and warmth that makes Strait so singular a talent.

The only song in which Walker establishes himself as someone different than those he imitates is "Bury the Shovel," an intricate pop-country song. Walker nimbly keeps pace with the snappy, Spanish-influenced acoustic guitar of Larry Byrom. Nothing monumental, but at least it finds him seeking his own ground. For now, though, he's more image than individual. One of his recent videos portrays him as a 40's style, Hollywood cowboy hero in the tradition of Gene Autry and Roy Rogers. It seemed a fitting role: Walker compares to a real country

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singer as Gene and Roy compared to true ranchhands and trail riders. Walker is a pretty, dressed-up version of a country singer; he doesn't show the grit or face the problems that separate the legends from the posers. If that doesn't change, he'll ride into the sunset long before his face creases for real.

—MICHAEL MCCALL

Keith Whitley
Wherever You Are Tonight
BNA 66762

Shortly after Keith Whitley died in 1989, it was announced that: yes, he had quite a bit of unreleased material in the can; but no, it would not be posthumously released, because Whitley, when he was alive, simply did not think it was up to snuff.

Well, we all knew that estate taxes and record company bottom lines being what they are, this was a promise made to be broken. After all, there's gold in them there vaults! But listening to *Wherever You Are Tonight*, yet another (and probably not the last) batch of previously unreleased Whitley tracks, I'm glad the promise was broken. Though most of these cuts are considerably off the mark of the late singer's very best performances, they're worthy of his memory all the same. Above all, they serve to enlarge upon his reputation as a singer and, even more, as a songwriter.

These tracks first came into being some years ago as demo recordings which Whitley made of songs he'd written with leading writers of the day like Don Cook, Gary Nicholson, Max D. Barnes and Curly Putman. Recently, producers Steve Lindsey and Benny Quinn dug them out of the vaults. With the blessing of Lorrie Morgan, Whitley's widow (who's credited here as executive producer), they stripped everything off the original recordings except Whitley's vocals, then built all



new state-of-the-art instrumental and harmony tracks around them.

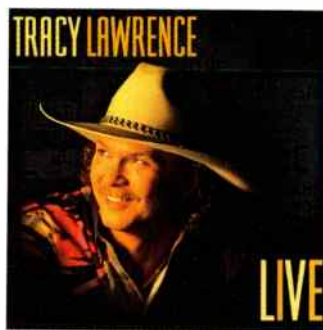
Taken as a document of yet another facet of Whitley's formidable talents—his songwriting in this instance—*Wherever You Are Tonight* is a worthy collection. Yet, by its nature, it suffers from obvious limitations. Whitley's vocals are, alas, merely demo vocals. Demos, of course, are little more than sophisticated work tapes which are often recorded hurriedly in order to “shop” a song around to producers and other recording artists. As a result, Whitley's singing often lacks that extra level of emotional intensity that a good producer can pull out of a singer during more extensive master recording sessions. And given their source, these Whitley originals, composed over a number of years, naturally don't hang together in any conceptual or even coherent way. Few of them are gems.

Still, there are flashes of the brilliance that Whitley attained in the last couple of years before his death. “Blind and Afraid of the Dark” (co-written with Max D. Barnes) and “Light at the End of the Tunnel” (co-written with Don Cook) are strongly reminiscent of Whitley at his spiritually searching (“No Stranger to the Rain”) best. By contrast, “Buck,” a comic tribute to Buck Owens that Whitley penned on his own, reminds of us his zaniness and his uncanny talents as a mimic.

With every passing year more and more people seem to realize just how great Whitley was. And, ironically, in death

he is afforded a level of respect that often eluded him in his lifetime. If real country music survives well into the next millennium (and given its current precarious state, I have my doubts), I really believe Whitley's influence will eventually preside over it as a James Dean-like figure. If so, then *Wherever You Are Tonight* is clearly another significant cornerstone in the memorial that time and good taste are gradually building to him.

—BOB ALLEN



Tracy Lawrence
Live
Atlantic 82847

As much time as country artists spend out on the road—200 or more nights a year in most cases—you'd think they'd release a lot more live albums. Yet the whole idea of concert recordings seems to scare the pants off the control freaks at Nashville's record companies. What? Record an album without the A-Team session guys? Without a chance to recut every track? With all those unpredictable fans whooping and hollering?

Fortunately, a handful of country acts have dispensed with the conventional wisdom this year and released terrific live discs. Marshall Chapman's *It's About Time...Recorded Live at the Tennessee State Prison*, Dwight Yoakam's *Dwight Live*, Billy Joe Shaver's *Unshaven: Shaver Live at Smith's Olde Bar* and Tracy Lawrence's *Live* are all fine examples of what can hap-

pen when you put an exciting singer in front of an excitable audience. The notes and tempos may not be as perfect as at the sessions taped in Nashville's studios, but the chemistry sparked between the performers and the listeners seems to loosen everyone up and make the songs a little rowdier.

At the baby-cheeked age of 27 and after just three studio albums, Lawrence has already racked up enough Number One and Top Ten singles to justify a greatest-hits package. Instead of simply recycling those singles, he decided to re-record them as a live album. The usual approach to making a live album is to pick one particular concert at random, tape the show and accept the results, good or bad. Lawrence, though, realized that the greatest strength of live music is its unpredictability; sometimes the electricity between the performer and the crowd makes a song sizzle and other times the whole thing falls as flat as possum dropped from an airplane.

So Lawrence built a portable studio in his tour bus. Not only did he record every show, but he made his musicians listen to the tapes so they could hear what was working and what wasn't. As a result, the band, nicknamed Little Elvis, refined the arrangements and eliminated the extra fuss and clutter which are the biggest sins of live music. The 10 songs on *Live* are taken from several concerts at the end of that process, and they boast a no-frills approach which allows the band to push Lawrence hard without getting in his way.

Three songs on the set—“I Threw the Rest Away,” “Sticks and Stones” and “Alibis”—are given the acoustic, unplugged treatment. Because country songs such as these are dominated by lead vocals and rhythm guitars whether they're plugged-in or plugged-out, the difference between the two approaches isn't nearly as dramatic as it is in

Record Reviews

the rock world. The album's other seven selections are obvious choices such as "Runnin' Behind," "Today's Lonely Fool" and "I See It Now." Missing in action are such Lawrence gems as "Hillbilly with a Heartache," "My Second Home" and "We Don't Love Here Anymore."

When you hear Lawrence joking around with his audience, asking if they're "partyin' hard tonight," you can hear just how unsophisticated and spontaneous this recent refugee from Texarkana still is. In other words, he's not all that different from his working-class fans. It's that unguarded glee which allows him to deliver the corny punch line to "I Threw the Rest Away" with such gusto every night, and it's that just-folks charisma which makes him one of the most enjoyable mainstream stars in Nashville today.

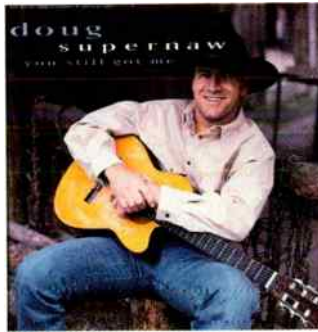
—GEOFFREY HIMES

Doug Supernaw *You Still Got Me* Giant 24639

O' Doug has had him a hard way to go the last few years: personal problems, including a difficult divorce with children involved. Still, I just can't for the life of me figure out what makes this guy glom onto such a lame bunch of second-tier cowboy mediocrity as leads off this record.

"When you're not the world's greatest singer," says Supernaw prophetically, "you have to reach down through your vocals and sing from your heart." This album only works when he does that, which is only about half of the time.

The good stuff—and there is a good amount of it—starts in the middle and is entirely in the range of slow numbers. For my money, the Skip



Ewing/Bill Anderson co-write, "Roots and Wings," is the sweet, sensitive love ballad needed as an antidote to the half-crazed rendition of "What'll You Do About Me" on his last album, and the attendant damage it did Doug's image, at least in some circles. It's lovely piece of work, a beautiful melody and lyrics rife with family values and appreciation of the support and companionship parts of love. Of course, you have to wade through five tracks of absolute

twaddle to get there, but with modern day CD players you can always skip right past them—I recommend it. Skip track number seven, too. Written perhaps in a back-of-the-bus road haze by Doug and the band, it's just a mediocre bar stool tribute to drinkin' buddies, who frankly come off as a hardbitten bunch badly in need of a 12-Step program.

I like to identify with an artist, to share the experience of a song when I can, and when Supernaw lit into "I've gone from everything to nothin'/ You've gone from here to far away/I used to wake up in the morning/Thinking everything was possible/Now there's just no way..." in "A Fire in the Rain," it struck me as true and honest; not to mention a darn good song. He also dug back more than a decade for a little-known and wonderfully retro gem called "The Note," originated in 1984 by Gene Watson

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Record Reviews

and later covered by Tammy Wynette, which is where I remember it from.

Doug and the band show they actually can collaborate in writing an above average song (having proved already they are adept at the barely average variety) with the album's closer, "What in the World." It likens the effect on him of a woman's leaving to a burglary, using material imagery but clearly talking about the damage to spirit.

I guess it was Supernaw's time in life to have an ear for the ballads, because those are the good parts of this record. He delivers them with an unaffected pathos. Still, I think this record ought to bear a discount price because all the uptempo elements are so doofus and second rate.

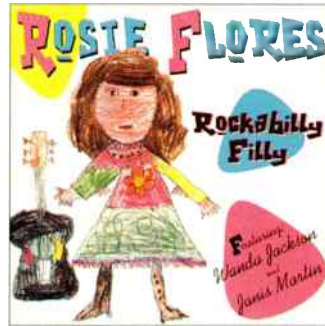
—BOB MILLARD

Rosie Flores

Rockabilly Filly
HighTone 8067

At its dead level best, true rockabilly's spontaneity and crazed edginess stops just short of careening out of control. If it sounds the least bit arranged or studied, it collapses, like those new recordings that sound like the participants took notes while listening to Sun reissues. That's not a problem here. The production, handled by Flores and Greg Leisz, is outstanding. Nor can one carp about a choice of musicians that includes Albert Lee and neo-rockers James Intveld and guitarist T.K. Smith. Flores herself knows rockabilly. She looks like Wanda Jackson in her prime, and has long performed songs like Wanda's 1956 hit, "I Gotta Know," onstage.

Nonetheless, for all her years on the scene, Flores has scooted all over the musical spectrum without finding her own niche. Rockabilly certainly isn't it. Flores lacks not only the vocal power, but the vocal shouts, growls and snarls



any singer, male or female, needs to pull it off. Her attempts to sing "tough" come off cute. These inadequacies (her lead guitar playing is merely competent) hit the listener from the first song, "Crazy Mixed Emotions." The excellent Flores-Tom Russell number, "Wrong Side of His Heart," is a song Kelly Willis could run away with, but Flores can barely hiss out the lyrics. On the blues-drenched "Boxcars," the needed edginess never materializes. The lyrics of "Poor Girl's Town," written by Flores, Russell Scott and Terry Clarke, are as flat as her performance. An interpretation of Lefty Frizzell's "Stranger" possesses charm, yet her timidity leaves it hanging. Terminal cuteness turns the nicely-arranged oldie, "Bop Street," into barely tolerable bubble gum.

Perhaps the biggest mistake was the well-intentioned guest appearances by two original 1950's female rockers, Janis Martin and Wanda Jackson. Martin, of "My Boy Elvis" and "Bang Bang" fame, sings her own masterful composition, "Blues Keep Callin'," with Flores, along with "Hard Times." Unintentionally, her tough, resilient voice blows Flores out of the studio. Jackson does the same on "His Rockin' Little Angel" and the remake of her 1958 bopper, "Rock Your Baby," to the point one feels embarrassed for Flores. Just once does she wind up in her element: on a masterful acoustic performance of the old ballad, "Don't Let Our Love Die." Here, for one brief moment, Flores finds her footing, proving her light,

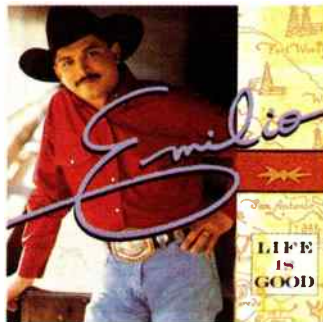
airy voice thrives amid acoustic music.

HighTone has proven a fertile spot for unclassifiable hard country and alternative types like Buddy Miller and Heather Myles. Flores would have a place there with the right music for her dainty voice. Try as she might, a Rockabilly Filly she ain't. —RICH KIENZLE

Emilio

Life Is Good
Capitol 32392

Right away, Emilio establishes why he's regarded so highly in his home region around San Antonio. From the first words of "Even If I Tried," it's obvious that this voice—full, deep, strong, inherently manly—demands attention. Its owner guides it with an easygoing mastery that is stout, clear and emotionally expressive. Unlike



many singers who possess his talent, Emilio understands subtlety. He enjoys toying with words in order to add impact to their meaning, instead of just belting out everything and impressing listeners with sheer force.

Of course, wanting to become a success in mainstream country music means diluting whatever unique attributes Emilio owns so that he sounds more like everyone else. But the singer holds his own better than most on his first record. There's far too much personality and natural ability bursting through on *Life Is Good* for Emilio to assimilate as blandly as, say, Rick Trevino. For Emilio, his heritage is part of

what sets him apart and gives him an essence of his own.

At his best, Emilio proves how entertaining mainstream country can be when goosed by a spirited vocalist. Like Aaron Tippin or Sammy Kershaw, Emilio manages to bring life to simple, often-replicated formulas through force of personality and sheer determination. For that reason, "Even If I Tried" and "Long As I Got You" jump with good-time energy. But what will likely serve him best is the passionate way he fills a ballad with meaning. The trend these days is to croon with warm ease; Emilio comes on much stronger. As he proves by his dramatic reading of "It's Not the End of the World," he's not afraid to delve fully into the sentiment of a song. Unlike some singers, when he admits pain, it doesn't sound guilty or self-pitying; it sounds like a man finding the strength to concede how bad he feels.

But the album falters just where it should soar. Both "Life Is Good" and "Honky Tonk Habits" could rank as top-rate, feel-good honkers. The latter comes close: it just sounds as if the honky tonk habit he's trying to stop involves a high-tech bar with a giant, thickly varnished sunken floor rather than some hole-in-the-wall drinking hole with peanut shells sticking to soles of shoes. The title song is much worse: the chorus gets whitewashed by lifeless choir harmonies that sound piped in from Wall Street.

By the end of *Life Is Good*, even the most devoted Emilio fan will celebrate CD technology. Both "It's Not the End of the World" and Emilio's pointless version of Van Morrison's great but overdone "Have I Told You Lately" are offered in English and Spanish versions. Okay, that may seem like overkill to most of us. But, remember, this is about marketing. The question is: Is it good long-range planning to make a buyer feel as if he or she is the one being played?

—MICHAEL MCCALL

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20 Questions with TRAVIS TRITT

by Michael "Norton's Rule" Bane

Travis Tritt, hospitalized for exhaustion? We thought Nashville's last existing outlaw was at the very least ten feet tall and bulletproof, so when we heard that he's been moving a little slowly, we thought 20 Questions should track him down and beat the truth out of him. As usual, rumors were greatly exagger-

ated—Tritt was his normal self, running double speed, when we caught up with him in St. Louis.

1 *So what have you been doing lately, other than working yourself to death? That's about it, man! Tonight's the last show of the tour...we're wrapping it up tonight.*

2 *So tell me about this passing out from exhaustion thing. This doesn't sound real good, Travis.*

Man, it scared the s**t out of me. I went up to do the Fan Fair thing. I was fine. I mean, I'd been working real hard, staying real busy. We'd just started the tour up again, four or five weeks prior to that. I

was staying real busy, but you know that's not unusual. But I went out to dinner...I was on my way to go to dinner; I'd been in the studio all day, and the next thing I knew I woke up in the emergency room. The doctors checked me over, and they said I had a severe case of dehydration and exhaustion and that I needed to kick back for a little while.

3 *Obviously, you didn't kick back for long...*

Naw...well, I kicked back until I felt like going out and doing something again. The weird thing was, up until that point, I really didn't feel bad or anything. I didn't feel like I was exhausted. I didn't feel like I was running out of steam. I'd been doing my shows like I normally do.

4 *So there were no warning signs or anything?*

Nothing. Just here one minute and gone the next. But it scared me, because I'd never even spent a night in the hospital before. I've always been healthy as a horse. And it was really kind of weird. I stayed out for about three weeks. Then I felt good, so I went back to work. Of course, I've been trying to eat a little bit better, make sure I drink a lot of water, all that good stuff. Thank God, no relapses or anything.

5 *Do you have any kind of break planned for now?*

Yeah, as a matter of fact, I'm going to have a little bit of a break, the next week, week and a half off. Then I go back into the studio to start on the next album. Then I've got the rest of the month, January and February off. Of course, I'll be working on the album. I don't really go back on the road full time until April, when I've got an extensive tour overseas...

6 *You've got to be careful, Tritt...Your shows are so high energy anyway...*

Yeah, that's true. I guess I realized that this year more than any other time. But, you know, it's hard to slow down when you've got good things going on.

7 Sort of a Catch 22 there... don't you think?

Exactly. Then people say, well Travis, don't exert so much energy in the shows... Well, that's like asking a rooster not to crow! It's part of the way I entertain, what I do. I can't change that.

8 So you've got the Greatest Hits package out...

And it's doing great. It just went to Number Seven in *Billboard*, and it's already been certified Gold several weeks ago. I'm very pleased with it. We've got one more single off that album, the "Only You" single, which we'll release after the first of the year. That's tied in with the movie, *Syt. Bilko*.

9 Did you get to have a part in the movie?

I played myself, actually. The director who did *My Cousin Vinny*, which I wrote some things for, called me and asked me to write for the new movie. So I did. Then he said instead of just having me on the soundtrack, why didn't I just come be in the movie and do the songs? I get to play myself playing at this club where all the guys from *Bilko's* unit hang out. It's kind of a cool thing.

10 Hey, I loved you in *Tales from the Crypt*. It's not often you get to see a dismembered country music singer... (Laughs.) Thank you...thank you. Hey, that was fun! That was really a lot of fun. I like roles like that, where I can just be wacky, really outlandish.

11 What else are you doing acting-wise?

I've got an episode of *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman* coming out in January, and I just did an episode of the *Jeff Foxworthy Show*.

12 He's the "you might be a redneck if..." guy. Did he have you as the prototypical redneck?

Naw. No way! (Laughs.) Although, I agree I could be. Jeff and I have known each other for a long, long time, and he asked me to come out and play

myself on the show. They wrote an entire script around me doing that, so it was a good time.

13 I see you also just broke into Hank Jr. territory... Yep, I just did the theme song for NCAA basketball on television...

14 Did you get as many zillions of dollars as Hank Jr. was rumored to get? (Laughs.) Well, yeah, I made pretty good. I didn't quite make what Hank made of *Monday Night Football*, but I figure by next year, if they want it again, it'll cost 'em more. (Laughs.) Naw, it was a neat thing to do. I'm very excited

if I ever get a chance to visit it...It's like that Joe Walsh song—"I've got a home; they tell me it's nice."

16 So you're going to be performing in Atlanta for the Olympics?

Man, that's so exciting! As soon as Atlanta announced that they'd gotten the Olympics, I got on the telephone and called all the people I knew in the Atlanta city council and the like. Because, if you look back, I've been involved in every single thing Atlanta has done. I sang at the World Series; I sang at the Super Bowl. I like being involved in Atlanta events, being the only

the fact that I'm different. And I like that. I don't like anybody telling me I need to conform to this or conform to that or be a part of that cookie-cutter approach that Nashville sometimes has to making records. Don is just the opposite. He says, "Man, the more different you can be, the better."

18 How much have you written so far?

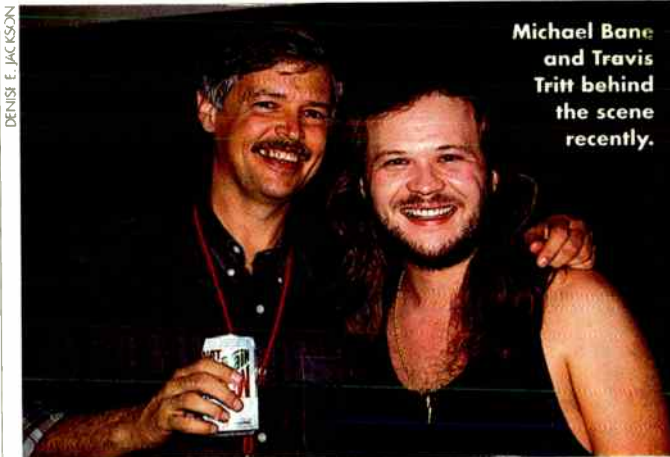
Well, I've got seven or eight things written, a combination of mid-tempo and ballads. I'm looking around for some up-tempo stuff, and I've got some leads on some good songs. Don's also lining up some tapes I'll be looking at. The way I cut albums, I go in and cut 16, 17, 18 songs, then pick the ten I feel best about. We'll see what happens.

19 Are you ever going to get a chance to do anything else with Marty Stuart, or are you both going to keep touring until you keel over dead?

Marty is just wrapping up his tour, and he and I have plans to get together in the next month or so and do some writing. I'm going to record a song with Marty on his next album, and I think I'm going to get Marty to do one with me on my next album as well. We've written one together, at least, started it, that's called "Double Trouble," and that's going to be a real cool song. That'll probably be on my album. The one for his album is a song called "Honky Tonking Is What I Do Best," that we wrote earlier this year. There's been some talk about a return of the "No Hats" tour—a rumor, I guess you'd say—and that's something he and I are going to kick around.

20 Enough of this music junk. Let's get down to the real important stuff now. Got any new Harleys?

No. And Michael, you know, I haven't found time to ride the ones that I've got! I went down to the Harley dealership a few weeks ago, though, and checked out a new Road King. God, I'm in love with that motorcycle! Man, what a beautiful bike! I got my eye on that one.



Michael Bane and Travis Tritt behind the scene recently.

about it—it's an opportunity to get my music out to a lot of people who might not have heard it. We just did a video on it, and it'll air for 18 consecutive weekends on ABC.

15 I've gotta ask you, last time I was in Georgia, there seemed to be crews working around the clock on your house. Did you ever get the darn thing finished?

Yes, as a matter of fact, I did. Finally. We finally got everything taken care of. Man, that was probably one of the things that contributed to my exhaustion. It was like I'd come off the road, then go straight back to work. I ended up firing a contractor and hiring new people to come in and fix all the problems the first contractor caused. It was just a horrible pain in the butt, man. But it's finished. It's got a couple of horses out there, and

country music artist from Georgia who still lives in Georgia. Atlanta is my home town, and I want to champion it. The folks in Atlanta agreed that I should sing, and I'm honored.

17 So what else is interesting, other than the road.

Well, I'm really excited about this new album, because I'm working with a new producer—Don Was. That is really exciting. We haven't recorded anything yet, but we've worked together in the past on the country rhythm and blues thing and on the Elvis tribute. That last Rolling Stones album he did was one of my favorite albums of last year. Don's got a real open mind for me doing the kind of music I like. He recognizes that I have a definable image that is something I've been very true to, very loyal to. And he encourages me to flaunt that, you know. Flaunt

TRISHA YEARWOOD

Charts Her Course



Trisha Yearwood in her bus seems relaxed and cheerful, and that's a relief. Four years ago, parked outside a New York City club, nursing strained vocal chords, surrounded by MCA top brass, about to debut her risky second album for as concentrated a collection of nationally reputed gossips, critics and trendsetters as company influence could pack into one smoke-filled barroom, she wasn't nearly as happy. But the problems weighing on her then worked out over the semi-long haul, and today things have changed, although they haven't really.

That's the story: the straight, more or less unwavering path of Ms. Trisha Yearwood and her unusually fine music from then to now. It hasn't been a very dramatic journey—no train wrecks, no plunges into personal hell or starry streaks across the multi-platinum heavens—but it is rather gratifying.

Tonight the bus is parked in downtown Charlotte, North Carolina, by the backstage loading dock of a very smart performing arts center. Trisha is working one of her occasional dates with a full symphony orchestra, a facet of her career which began about 18 months ago when the Atlanta Symphony invited her, as a native Georgian, for a guest performance that went very well for all concerned.

It's a different bus this time, and the bus is indeed different. The front parlor, where your typical Nashville home on wheels concentrates its darkest wood, richest leather, deepest velour and manliest matte-black electronics, is light and airy, with blond wood trim and a mirrored ceiling creating a pleasant illusion of space to spare. The decor is Trisha's personal design, and she's finally got it right, she says, just like she wants it.

Of course, there's a cellular phone handy, and right before we begin our interview, it rings, and of course the call is from her husband, Robert Reynolds, out on the road some-

place playing bass with The Mavericks. I'd say that she's finally got that right, too. After she ends the call with a promise to talk later, I mean it sincerely when I observe that "y'know, I really like that man."

"Yeah. I do too," she laughs. "When I met him, I thought, this guy is so nice. He can't be this nice! I'm waiting for the other shoe to fall here—this guy's gonna be, like, an ax murderer or something. But he really is that nice, he really truly is. It's genuine, and it made me fall in love with him, basically. He's got such a good heart, he's such a good guy."

More on marriage later, though. For now, career. Does Trisha see, as I do, a steady improvement in her work over her first four albums (not counting 1994's *The Sweetest Gift* Christmas album) followed by a sudden leap forward on her fifth and current release, *Thinkin' About You*?

"No, not really," she says. "I hope that they get better, but they're like children for me, you know. I'm proud of all of them, and I don't have any regrets about them. But I did know when I was making *Thinkin' About You* that it was special. I felt excited about it, and I felt like the quality of the songs was incredibly high. Not being a writer per se, I'm so much at the mercy of songwriters, because I have to trust that I'm going to find these little gems that are very hard to find. And they were just there this time. So I was excited for it to come out because I felt good about it, and I felt like I wanted other people to hear it, see what people thought. Luckily, they liked it."

She's right, I think. The songs—Gretchen Peters' "On a Bus to St. Cloud," Melissa Etheridge's "You Can Sleep While I Drive," Larry Henley's and Red Lane's "Til I Get It Right" and the rest—are so well crafted and so well fitted to her sophisticated but passionate post-country sensibility that the album will probably stand for some time as a truly stellar example of the interpretive singer's art. It is also—no small achievement—a work in which

Four years after "She's in Love with the Boy," Trisha Yearwood is still calling the shots in her career. A new marriage and a new home help balance the equation.



By Patrick Carr



Wedding day, May 21, 1994. Yearwood and Reynolds spend a lot on phone calls when they are apart.

the separate traditions of Nashville country-folk and California country-rock have been fused into a genuinely superior modern pop album. (For let's not pretend that Trisha's work, and even less that of comrade/competitors like Wynonna Judd and Mary Chapin Carpenter, has any significant country-country content at all. Which, sadly but truly, is exactly what elevates it above the contemporary norm; with bad Nashville country mired in beefcake and bull manure, good Nashville pop sounds positively classy.)

I bring up another sad truth. "It's sort of unusual for a Nashville artist's fifth album to be better than her first."

She doesn't bite. "Well, I would much rather that it go that way than the other way."

I try again. "So you must have been really sticking to your guns."

"Well, yeah. I'm very song-driven as an artist. I mean, as a listener of music and a fan of music, I've always been into lyrics, and I've always been very true to myself as far as what moves me to sing, and I've never recorded a song I didn't believe in. Which means—'cause I've kind of been in on this country boom, I've kind of rolled with it and I've seen things change just in the four or five short years I've been making albums—that there have been times when I've heard songs come by me that I know, I know, are just ready to be line danced to, that I don't have any feeling for but I know are going to be huge. And I've had to say to myself, well, if I passed Emmylou Harris on the street, would I be able to hold my head up?"

"Emmylou's pretty much the integrity police for me. I think about artists like her whom I respect, the choices they've made in their careers, and that's re-



AKAUL MAYOR

ally the criterion: Is this what I believe in? And that means that every song doesn't go Number One. It means that I'm consistently selling a million records, not five million. But I'm sleeping really good at night, and I'm feeling like this is where I'm supposed to be. This is my place."

Which raises a pretty obvious question. "How are the folks at MCA handling that?"

"Well, I'm sure they'd love for me to sell five million records, but I think they're in my corner. I think what happened was that when 'She's in Love with the Boy' hit, it was so huge and it was so mainstream, so down the middle, that MCA thought, okay, we've got the next Reba

McEntire on our hands; that's the kind of artist she's going to be. And then, when I released the *Hearts in Armor* album, I think they had to kind of rethink and learn, and it took a couple of albums for them to understand that okay, this is the kind of artist she really is; 'She's in Love' is just part of what she does. And I think they've come around to understanding that, and instead of trying to make me be something I'm not, they've accepted what I do and supported it. I really do feel that I have their support."

Those *Hearts in Armor* days were tough. MCA's "rethinking" was difficult for everyone involved—just how difficult is recounted in great detail in journalist Lisa Gubernick's book, *Get Hot or Go Home: Trisha Yearwood, The Making of a Nashville Star*—but thankfully, the whole tedious process is now in the past and can be reduced to a couple of lines. "You know, *Hearts in Armor* sold a million records in six months, and some people were disappointed by that," Trisha says. "That floors me to this day. I thought that was pretty good."

She's laughing as she says this, by the way—a good laugh, showing pleasure taken from the play of life's absurdities. It's not a sound I heard on that bus four years ago.

We're getting to the hard part, such as it is. To begin with, there's a subject raised by something Ken Kragan, Trisha's very savvy, heavy manager (Kenny Rogers, Lionel Richie, "We Are the World," etc.) said in an interview, to the effect that her career is going very well, but has yet to achieve that "plateau" where an artist is showered with awards and bathed in the praise of her peers.

"Trisha, how have you been doing with awards?"

She thinks for a second. "Ah, I've pretty much been, ah..."—she starts to laugh— "...shut out. I mean, was I nominated for anything this year?"

I don't think so, I say.

"No, I don't think I was. I didn't

Trisha onstage at the CMA Awards with Linda Davis, Reba and Martina McBride. Trisha appeared twice on this year's show.



HARRISON McCCLARY

have a single CMA nomination this year. But I did two performances on the show, which I thought was pretty cool. I wasn't nominated for any ACM's this year, either. I won a Grammy for "I Fall to Pieces" with Aaron Neville. That was great.

"You know, the funny thing is that '95 was the first year that Ken decided to...well, you know how when it comes CMA Awards time, everybody sends out flyers and little cards romancing everybody in the CMA to vote for them? I've never done that. We decided we'd do that this year, so we sent all these really nice cards. Each one had a different picture, and every week they'd get a new card that had a really cool quote from somebody. They were really nice. And this was the first year I didn't get any nominations!" She laughs again. "So we decided we would spend our money another way."

Now she grimaces. "I don't know what the answer is. The honest truth is that I'm always a little bit surprised to not be nominated for something. I mean, I had two Number One records off of *Thinkin' About You*, which for females is—well, there's not a whole lot of us that have done that in a year. So I was surprised, certainly. But it's not going to change a bit about the way that I make a record. When I'm in the studio recording and looking for songs, the last thing on my mind is that maybe I'll win an award."

Perhaps, I venture, she doesn't get nominated because she doesn't schmooze. Performers who win a lot of awards seem to spend a lot of time making kissy-kissy in all the right places.

"Well," she counters, "what did you think of this year, with The Mavericks and Alison Krauss winning, who aren't schmoozers?"

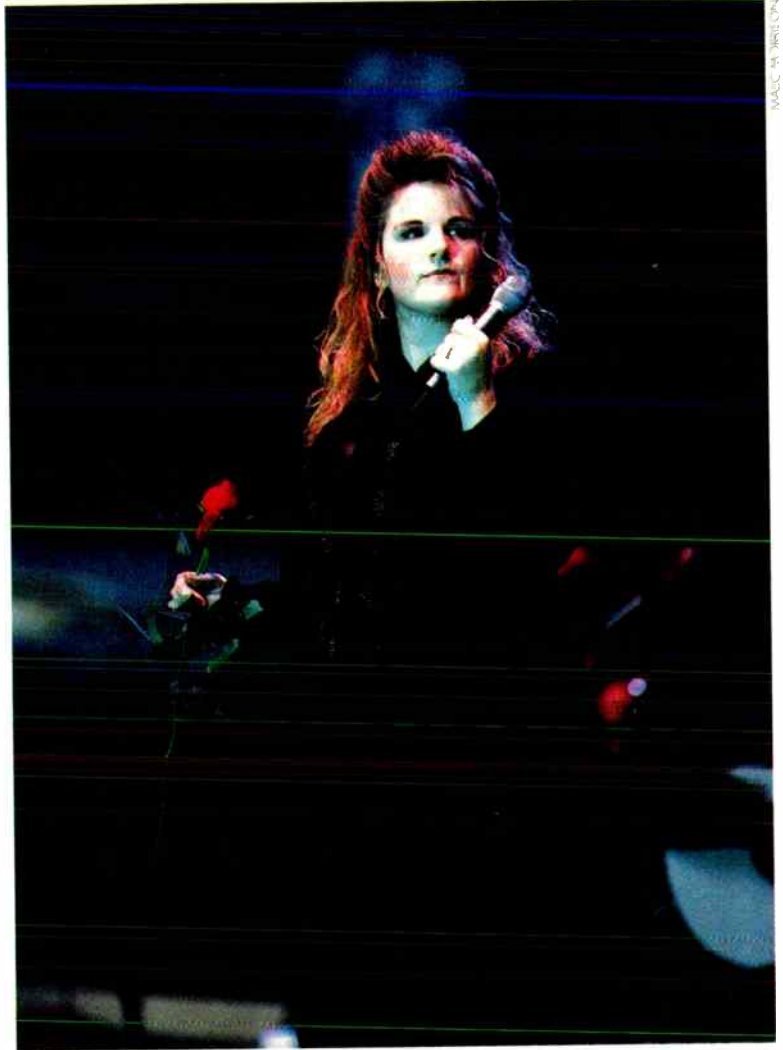
She's got me there. Maybe I don't know what I'm talking about. I do, however, get the idea that we should quit this awards stuff, which to one way of thinking is meaningless anyway. The problem is, to another way of thinking it means almost everything.

Ditto with another subject, which we'll call "the weight issue." Given the enormous resources our society devotes to the topic, it is perhaps no wonder that the first thing out of most music businesspersons' mouths at the mention of Trisha's name is some comment, usually of the demeaning, patronizing or outright insulting kind, about the increase in her body size since the *Hearts in Armor* days. The whole deal p's me off, so I've decided to ignore it in our interview. It comes up anyway, though, when I ask Trisha to confirm my impression that she's not a person who's ever had any problem with booze or drugs (we've been talking about mutual acquaintances who do).

"Growing up, I was never around drugs," she says of her securely middle-class childhood in little Monticello, Georgia, where her mom taught school and her dad ran the bank. "I never saw it. Neither of my parents even drank alcohol. So I have a real hard time relating to all that. But I can probably talk on the evils of food for about three days."

She's getting a handle on it, she says. Her personal assistant doubles as a personal trainer, so she's exercising more or less every day and eating healthily, so she's losing weight steadily and slowly, which is the way to do it if you want to keep it off. As we speak, she's lost 16 pounds in four months.

And that will end our coverage of the Trisha Yearwood Weight Issue. Additional programming is of course available in trendy Nashville grills and bicoastal executive teleconferences, and those wishing saturation coverage will no doubt be able to find it in the



IMAGIC BY WIRE/CON

Enquirer should Ms. Yearwood ever change her mind and decide to become another Reba.

In the meantime, let's solicit her opinion in an area of expertise she doesn't share with half America's non-starving adult population, namely that of having made it to the top of the country music business. Moreover, let's move quickly through a field in which she is quite exotic—Nashville's complete takeover by the suburban middle class is at least a decade away, after all, so being a banker's daughter at the top of the country charts still makes a person a little unusual—and let's move on to the area in which she is genuinely unique. Trisha is still the first and only person to have become a country star by going to school; her course to stardom began, quite intentionally, with her studies for a music degree at Nashville's Belmont College. Since these days she's sometimes to be found in college lecture halls, sharing her experience as part of her sponsorship deal with the Discover Card, I'm wondering how she'd answer the question I'd ask if I were an undergraduate: What has the real-life music business taught her that college didn't?

She laughs a lot at that one. "Hmm. That is a big question. A quick reply? Don't get into the business! No, not really...I think what I've learned is to trust your own instincts, which is probably something I



STEVIE GRANITZ/RETNA

Awards have been elusive, but Trisha won a Grammy with Aaron Neville for "I Fall to Pieces."

learned from my parents rather than any schoolbook or from being in this business. You see, there are 50 million people who want to be in this business, so the temptation is to not use your brain, and to say 'I'll sing however you'd like, I'll look however you want me to, just to get in the door! To have a record deal, I'm willing to have no opinion, because I want this so bad.' I learned early on that that probably happens more often than not, or at least it happens a lot.

"When I first went to MCA, I took a gamble by having my own opinion, but since that's the way we started, it's helped me greatly in these last five years, because whatever kind of respect level you go in at, that's pretty much where you're going to remain. If you start out with them respecting you, you can pretty much keep it that way."

As to other lessons, well, "I don't know if these are things that the business has taught me or not, but my philosophy is one of responsibility. It's very difficult to be a boss. It's difficult to be the bottom line, and to have to be the one to fire somebody, or to be out here on the road and have 20 people who depend on you for their livelihood and to feel responsible, and then to learn how to separate yourself from that and not take it all personally.

"I do it, though, because, as I always say, my name is on the bottom line. If I'm not making the decisions, if I'm letting Ken Kragan or my accountants or my publicist make the decisions, then I'm still responsible if there's a mistake. And if that happens, I sure don't want to be standing there saying, well, I let my accountant talk me into this, and I wish I hadn't done it. I don't want to feel that way."

Four years ago, Trisha was saying that kind of thing but not really living it. "I remember in the beginning whining about, y'know, 'What else do you want me to do? I just can't do it, there aren't enough hours in the day, I can't do this, I can't do that, you're trying to kill me!' Then I came to a kind of realization. It was when I first read the galleys of Lisa's book. The stuff in there really brought it home about what a hard year it had been and what life changes I'd been through, and I was in tears when I finished. But after that it was kind of like I regrouped and went, okay, I think I'm unhappier than I realized until I read about it. Let's see what I can do to make this better."

She was aided greatly, she says, by her union with Robert Reynolds. "I feel more settled," she says. "I don't tour like I used to. I mean, I do as many dates, but I'd rather go out for two weeks and then be home for two weeks. I was going out for three or four days and coming home for three or four days, and that way you feel like you're never really anywhere, and it was driving me nuts." Now she and her husband have a log-and-rock home on 18 acres of wooded land north of Nashville, and there it's "comfortable and private and peaceful. That's the element I didn't have before, a place to go and feel, this is the ultimate, and to get rejuvenated to go back on the road. We had to buy a four wheel drive to get in there, that kind of thing, so now I'm a truck



"I'm very song-driven as an artist. I mean, as a listener of music and a fan of music, I've always been into lyrics. I've never recorded a song I didn't believe in."



drivin' woman, living at the top of this hill, and it's just our little place."

That sounds nice, doesn't it, and a long way from "She's in Love with the Boy." I sit back and ask her to describe the man who made it all possible.

"'Lunatic' comes to mind," she laughs. "No. He's very hard to describe because he is probably the most unique man I've ever met. All those really horrible, stereotypical things about men, like sitting in front of the TV, watching football, wanting a beer, all that stuff you see portrayed in every sitcom in America, he's just so 'anti' those things. And he's an adventurer. He's much more of an adventurer than I am, and I think he has made me into more of one. I'm the kind of girl who'll plan a weekend trip for three months in advance. Robert is the kind who will say, 'What are you doing? Let's pack a bag and go right now!' That's the difference, and somehow we've met in the middle—which means in a good way that we've taken off and just gone to

Ireland, we've done crazy things like that, and in a bad way it means that I'm at the door clicking my heels, trying to get him to the airport on time."

She pauses a moment, then goes on. "He has a kind heart. He's a sweet guy, and he's a good person, and he's funny. We laugh a lot, which is I think very important, especially in the business we're in. He's a good guy. I went through my whole adult life saying that guys were scum and dogging them at every turn with my girlfriends, but I can't do that about him, 'cause he's just not a jerk."

That raises an obvious question. "So what's your position now, Trisha? Is Bobby the exception who proves the rule, or what?"

"No, no, no. I basically think that if I can be brought around...No, I don't think that. I think part of it is that I'm 31 years old, and you get a little more realistic about things. You realize that you're not going to find Prince Charming coming up on the horse with no problems and no dysfunction, y'know...I mean, we don't have the perfect relationship, we don't have the perfect life, we have plenty of problems, but I think you make a commitment to work through those problems and to work with the other's quirks. I was very cynical when I met Robert. I'm not nearly as cynical anymore, so the whole male population looks better in my eyes now. I really do like men."

We go on talking for a while—about the huge phone bills and travel bills Trisha and Robert stack up by talking and being together whenever and wherever they can; about Trisha's continued happiness with her producer, Garth Fundis, and her continuing pursuit of that elusive big duet with her first mentor, Garth Brooks; about her great admiration of Patty Loveless' work; about various other aspects of her professional and personal life—but for the purposes of this article the details aren't important. The spirit is, though. It's one of confidence, security, poise and resolve lightened by good humor.

That's not a bad four-year report card, really. I'd say it shows continuing potential—which was obvious right from the start—plus character development, too. ■



BILLY RAY CYRUS

COUNTRY MUSIC MAGAZINE JANUARY/FEBRUARY 1996

PULL-OUT
CENTERFOLD
OF-THE-MONTH

BILLY RAY CYRUS

Facts of Life

Personal Data

Given Name: Billy Ray Cyrus
Birthdate: August 25, 1961
Birthplace: Flatwoods, Kentucky
Residence: Franklin, Tennessee
Family: Wife, Leticia; children, Christopher Cody, Destiny Hope and Braison Chance; mother, Ruth Ann; stepfather, Cletis Adkins; father, Ron; stepmother, Joan; brothers, Kevin and Mack; sisters, Angie, Lisa and Cherie.
Hobbies: Working out with weights, riding a four-wheeler and horseback riding.
Favorite Animal: His horses—Randi, Lady and Roan
Favorite Colors: Red, white and blue
Favorite Foods: Steak, fried chicken, cherry pie, pecan pie, chocolate cake and milk.

Vital Statistics

Height: 6'
Color of eyes: Hazel
Color of hair: Brown

Recording Career

Record Label: Mercury Records, 66 Music Square West, Nashville, Tennessee 37203.

Albums	Release Date
<i>Some Gave All</i>	1992
<i>It Won't Be the Last</i>	1993
<i>Red Hot + Country*</i>	1994
<i>Storm in the Heartland</i>	1994

*Various artist compilation, including "Pictures Don't Lie" by Billy Ray.

Singles
"Achy Breaky Heart"
"Could've Been Me"
"Wher'm I Gonna Live"
"She's Not Cryin' Anymore"
"Some Gave All"
"In the Heart of a Woman"



"Somebody New"
"Words by Heart"
"Talk Some"
"Storm in the Heartland"
"Deja Blue"
"One Last Thrill"

Videos
"Achy Breaky Heart"
"Could've Been Me"
"Wher'm I Gonna Live"
"These Boots Are Made for Walkin'" (European release)
"She's Not Cryin' Anymore"
"Some Gave All"
"In the Heart of a Woman"
"When I'm Gone" (European release)
"Words by Heart"
"Talk Some"
"Ain't Your Dog No More"
"Teach Your Children" (from *Red Hot + Country* compilation album)
"Storm in the Heartland"
"Deja Blue"
"One Last Thrill"

Top Awards

- 1992 CMA Single of the Year, "Achy Breaky Heart"
- 1992 American Music Awards, Favorite New Artist—Country and Favorite Single—Country, "Achy Breaky Heart"
- 1992 *Billboard* Music Video Award, Best New Artist—Country and Best Male Artist—Country, "Achy Breaky Heart"

Billy Ray has also received a number of awards for his humanitarian efforts.

Fan Club

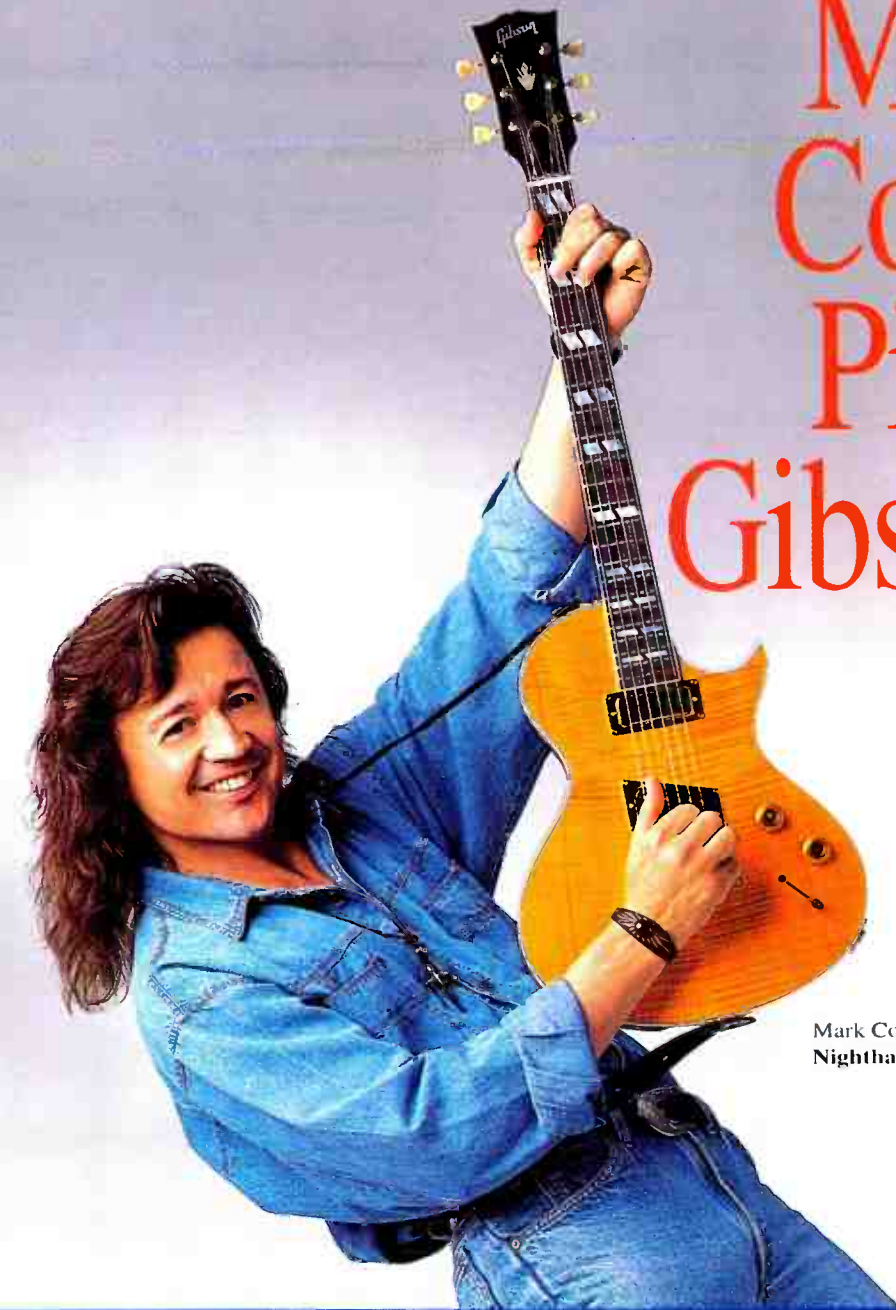
Billy Ray Cyrus Fan Club, P.O. Box 121854, Nashville, Tennessee 37212.



Trivia

- Some Gave All*, Billy Ray's first album, became the biggest selling debut in history, racking up sales of 10 million and earning five Grammy nominations.
- His band, Sly Dog, is named after his one-eyed bulldog.
- Billy Ray and Sly Dog played for years at the Ragtime Lounge in Huntington, West Virginia, before Cyrus got his big break. He says, "We played everything from Johnny Cash to Bruce Springsteen. We did anything and everything."

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JOE ELY'S Musical Journey

Childhood memories and Texas heritage help fuse Ely's musical mixed bag.



By Geoffrey Himes

Chance encounters have a habit of changing Joe Ely in unexpected ways. Perhaps that's why the West Texas singer has gone off on so many detours in his 25-year career. Perhaps that's why his music—a gumbo stew of honky tonk, rockabilly, troubadour-folk and Tex-Mex—has always been so hard to pin down.

Back in 1968, for example, Ely was just a 21-year-old kid bouncing around Lubbock, Texas, trying to make enough money playing rock 'n' roll to quit his day job. One day, west of town, he picked up a scrawny, bedraggled hitchhiker, who said he was headed to Houston from San Francisco, where he had just recorded his debut album.

"I had done enough hitchhiking in my time," Ely recalls, "to know he was standing in a terrible spot. I didn't know him from Adam, but I drove him to the other side of town and showed him a good spot to get a ride. All he had with him was a backpack, and when he opened it up, there wasn't a stitch of clothes inside, just copies of his first album. He pulled one out and gave it to me. I went over to Jimmie Dale's that night and we listened to it. That's all we played for the next three months."

The hitchhiker was Townes Van Zandt. His debut album, *For the Sake of the Song*, convinced Ely and his Lubbock pals, Jimmie Dale Gilmore and Butch Hancock, that there was common ground between Ely's love for Jerry Lee Lewis-style rockabilly, Gilmore's love of Johnny Cash-like honky tonk and Hancock's love for Dylanesque folk. The three formed a band called The Flatlanders and recorded an album in Nashville for Sun Records just three years after Ely's fluke rendezvous with a hitchhiker.

A similar chance encounter completely changed the course of Ely's current MCA album, *Letter to Laredo*. At the end of '93, he finished up touring behind his brilliant '92 album, *Love and Danger*, and spent a few weeks in Spain to unwind. He came back to his current

home in Austin, Texas, with sounds and images of Spain jangling in his head as he prepared to start writing the next album. It was then he received a call out of the blue from someone called Teye (pronounced tie-ya).

"I had never met him," Ely explains, "but he was a friend of someone I knew in Spain. He was a flamenco guitarist who was coming to Texas, and he wanted to know if there was anything he could play on my next record. I told him, no, not really. But he got me thinking of this book of poetry, *Gypsy Ballads* by Federico Garcia Lorca, which my friend Michael Ventura had given me back in the Flatlanders days. Lorca used to travel around Spain with the gypsies; he'd listen to their songs around the campfires and make up new words for them.

"That book meant a lot to me when I was young, so I called Teye back up and told him, 'As a matter of fact, there are a couple of songs you can play on.' Actually, I was lying, because I didn't have anything recorded yet. So I rushed down to the studio and laid down some tracks in a hurry before he got to town. When he arrived, I liked what he played so much that I decided to do the whole album with that sort of acoustic, gypsy feel."

Joining Ely and Teye on the album are Lloyd Maines on dobro and acoustic slide guitar, David Grissom on acoustic guitar and Ponty Bone on accordion. In keeping with the overall Spanish/gypsy feel, the album includes Butch Hancock's "She Finally Spoke Spanish to Me," which is a sequel to an earlier Hancock song recorded by Ely, "She Never Spoke Spanish to Me," which was itself a response to the old standard, "Spanish Is the Loving Tongue." A new Ely song, "Ranches and Rivers," evokes the flat, dry landscape of West Texas as it tells the story of a poor ranch hand asking the rancher's daughter to run away with him to Mexico.

A highlight of the album is "Gallo del Cielo," Tom Russell's long story-song about cockfight-





ing on both sides of the Mexican-American border. Before Ely sang the song at The Barns of Wolf Trap in Virginia this year, he told his own story about playing at Jay's Cockpit Lounge, which was owned by the sheriff in Cankton, Louisiana. The sheriff, it seems, ran cockfights behind his bar and invited musicians to join the betting. "It was the only gig I ever had," Ely explained, "where chickens were the opening act."

With his pointed black cowboy boots, his tight black denim pants, his black T-shirt, his black blazer, his backward wave of black hair and his creased, cragged face, Ely looked like a shorter Johnny Cash on stage. Just as Cash has done recently, Ely was touring by himself with just an acoustic guitar, and like Cash, he sang in a gravelly twang which hinted at a lot of hard miles. Ely didn't adopt Cash's stately rhythms, however; instead he rocked harder as an unplugged solo act than most bands do with a whole mountain of amps.



Ely and Bruce Springsteen. The Boss guested on Ely's current album.

In fact, before Ely played his composition, "For Your Love," in Virginia, he said, "Chris LeDoux recorded this as a single last year and made a video of it. I swear I didn't recognize a scene in the video from when I wrote the song. But I didn't write this for content; I wrote it for speed." He demonstrated what he meant by racing through the jumpy, funny song like a man with his shirttail on fire.

Ely had just spent nine hours driving from Boston to Virginia, and he was in a road-weary mood. "I sent my agent a map for Christmas," Ely complained. "I guess I better send him another one for his birthday. With a stake through it." Homesick for some Texan food, Ely repaired to the South Austin Grill in Alexandria, Virginia, after the show. Over a plate of enchiladas smothered in cheese and chiles, he tried to explain the "Spanish tinge" of his new recording.

"Every album I've ever done connects in some way to a memory from my childhood," he said. "This one reminds me of weekends in Lubbock, when all the Mexican workers would come into town from the surrounding cotton fields. My dad owned a used-clothing store, and he taught me how to sell clothes to the Mexicans: You price a shirt at 25 cents; they offer you a dime; you say 20 cents and sell it to them for 15. On Saturday night, there'd be 10,000 Mexican workers in a town of 90,000, and you'd hear their music everywhere—in theaters, in bars, in cafes, in parks. I loved that music, and it has stayed with me ever since."

Lubbock and the hard-scrabble West Texas plains around it would seem an unlikely source for musicians, but the area has produced far more than its share. Buddy Holly and his Crickets—including Waylon Jennings and Sonny Curtis—were from Lubbock, as are Ely, Gilmore and Hancock. Delbert McClinton and Mac Davis were born there, and Roy Orbison came from the West Texas town of Wink. Many of Bob Wills' Texas Playboys

came from the region, and Wills himself played the area regularly. Is there something in the water out there?

"No," Ely says, "it's all attributable to Buddy and Bob Wills. I moved to Lubbock when I was 11 and found this thriving musical scene. The only reason it was there, out in the middle of nowhere, was Buddy. He had gotten a national recording contract, which had seemed so far removed from our lives in Lubbock. But people felt if Buddy could do it, so could we. So we put a lot of energy into our music."

"Bob Wills had put the jump into country music, and there were all these older Western swing players around Lubbock who could do anything—country, rock 'n' roll, you name it. That's how you learned: You stood around and watched those old guys, acting like you really weren't looking. That's the problem with today's musicians; they're trying to learn from younger players. You don't learn anything from younger guys; you learn from older guys."

Letter to Laredo would have been released much earlier, but it was interrupted for six months when old Lubbock pal Terry Allen invited Ely to work on a stage musical called *Chippy: Diaries of a West Texas Hooker*.

Based on the journals of a real-life, Depression-Era prostitute, the book was written by Terry and his wife Jo Harvey Allen, who played Chippy on stage. When the musical traveled to the Plays and Players Theatre in Philadelphia and Lincoln Center in New York last year, the cast included Ely, the Allens, Butch Hancock, Robert Earl Keen and Jo Carol Pierce. Everyone contributed as singers and songwriters to the resulting soundtrack on Hollywood Records, *Songs from Chippy*, but it was dominated by Ely, who wrote and sang the half-dozen strongest tunes.

"I loved the music from that show," Ely says today, "but I was disappointed in the theatrical part. It started out as a real collaborative effort, but Terry and Jo Harvey got too possessive and strangled it. You knew she wasn't a savory person from the beginning; you didn't have to go into 15 minutes of syphilis and dead babies. The music brought you up, and then the dialogue brought you down."

Nonetheless, the experience inspired Ely to start work on a screenplay about his Uncle J.B. "He was a drunk," Ely explains, "a multi-millionaire who owned airplanes, Cadillacs and hundreds of miles of cotton fields. He never drank out of the same glass twice. I remember, when I was a little kid, he'd drive us down little dirt roads in the cotton fields at 110 miles per hour. He'd make himself a drink, finish it and throw the glass out the window."

Letter to Laredo was interrupted again when Ely was walking alone through his hometown of Austin one night in March. Never one to walk around a fence he could jump over, Ely leaped over a parking-lot fence, got his boot caught in a chain and smashed his collarbone. Worse yet, he lay there helpless for several hours until someone found him. It took him all summer to recuperate, and the album's spring release date was pushed back to the fall.

One good thing came out of the delay, however. Bruce Springsteen, a longtime Ely fan, called and asked if he could sing some harmonies on the project. So, while Ely underwent physical therapy, the tapes traveled to Los Angeles, and the Boss added vocals to "All Just to Get to You" (sort of a sequel to "For Your Love") and "I'm a Thousand Miles from Home" (a road-weary lament). Other guest vocals were contributed by bilingual Raul Malo of The Mavericks on "Gallo del Cielo" and by Jimmie Dale Gilmore on "I Saw It in You."

Now with the release of *Letter to Laredo*, Ely wonders if there's room for him on country radio. "There's a lot of filler in contemporary country music," he says, "but there's enough great stuff to give you hope." What does he consider the great stuff? "Well, I like Mark Collie a lot, which probably explains why he just got dropped by MCA. I like Greg Garing a lot, and Lee Roy Parnell. There are still a lot of great songwriters in Nashville, like Gary Nicholson and John Prine. And, of course, I love John Hiatt, Lucinda Williams and Jimmie Dale. If there's room for them, there should be room for me."

There should be. ■

STEVE EARLE

Always on the Edge

◆◆◆
By Patrick Carr

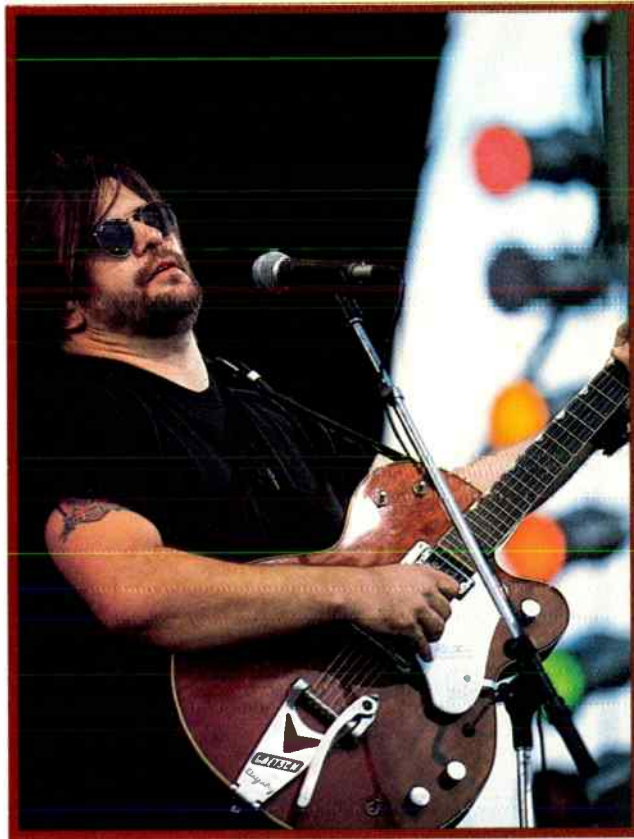
The personal drama has to come first, of course, so here we are at the Nashville office of the fittingly named Mutiny Records, having a very frank talk with Steve Earle. As he speaks, he's been almost ten months free from jail, almost a year from the drugs that put him there. "So how old were you when you first shot up heroin, Steve?"

"Thirteen," he says, "but use of needles isn't really a factor one way or the other. I stopped using needles for years after I came up from Texas. There wasn't any cheap heroin here, so I drank instead and smoked a lot of pot. Then I didn't do any drugs at all for about two years, but that eventually slipped back into drinking again. I didn't start shooting dope again until right before *The Hard Way* came out... Then I started smoking cocaine. I'd stayed away from coke for years 'cause I didn't like it, but I couldn't really get high on opiates any more. There was a limit to that. They never really lose their ability to kill you, but they do lose their ability to get you high."

That's not an unfamiliar story. Even when the teller is quite arguably the best country/roots/rock singer/songwriter of his generation, it's just another tale of addiction. The details of the journey change from junkie to junkie, crackhead to crackhead, alcoholic to alcoholic, but in the end the road goes only two ways: towards sobriety or death.

In the early 90's, just a few years after *Guitar Town* had established Steve Earle as edge country's most compelling voice since Gram Parsons, it felt like we'd lost him already. He was making no music at all—"I didn't even have a guitar for three or four years"—and he wasn't on the scene. Instead he was off in the black neighborhoods of South Nashville, where "I didn't see any white people for about three or four years. Black people don't listen to my music. I mean, I didn't have to go down there. I could have beeped people, and they'd have brought me dope. I stayed down there 'cause I liked it down there."

It was in South Nashville that, as he puts it in recovery slang, one of the "yets" happened to him—as in Hey, I'm okay, I haven't lost any limbs yet. He'd just dropped off a friend outside a crack spot when "the police came up out of the projects and



HARRISON MCCOY

saw him getting out of my car and thought he'd walked up to the window of my car and served me, and so they followed my car and stopped me." They found a small amount of heroin on him.

After the bust, Steve says, he tried to get straight, and had some success with his heroin addiction through methadone programs, but the crack kept calling him back, and his life just continued unraveling. Then he really messed up. Confused about the date for his sentencing hearing on the heroin charge, he awoke one day in Chattanooga to read in the newspaper that they'd held the hearing without him and sentenced him to 11 months and 29 days in the Nashville jail.

His time wasn't as hard as it could have been because he was protected by the jailhouse power of a South Nashvillian he'd known on the street. He also got out of the jail itself, though not his sentence, by signing up for a 30-day treatment program in a separate

facility. "I thought the food would be better," he explains. "It wasn't, but other aspects of the accommodations were. "I had in the back of my mind that I could probably walk out of that treatment center any time I wanted to. If I did, that was a felony escape charge, but just in case, I had my wife hang onto a bottle of methadone stashed in my refrigerator."

Seven or eight days into treatment, he made a decision. "I called her and had her throw the methadone away—and I had to burn a phone pass to do that. I only got two a week." And he stayed straight when he got back to jail. "Believe me, I went to any kind of A meetings they had, 'cause I'd just gotten out of treatment and being back in jail was real hard. It's not like there isn't any dope in jail."

When I ask him to explain his decision, he shrugs. "It's really a matter of—well, I looked up one day and I wasn't dead, and I decided for some reason I didn't want to be, so I had to start doing something different."

He doesn't want to discuss his recovery since getting out of jail. "It goes against all the principles of how I got clean in the first place to go any further talking about it," he explains, "and really, nothing I do or say is going to get anybody else clean. If

I thought it would, I'd say plenty."

It's important to note that Steve's word isn't all we have. There are also the monthly drug tests mandated by the terms of his probation. If he were doing any kind of dope, his urine would test positive—he'd "throw dirty"—and he'd be back in jail, not sitting here talking about new deals, plans and music.

And accomplishments. *Train a Comin'*, the all-acoustic album he made for the small, independent Winter Harvest label after his release, went straight to the top of the *Gavin Report's* Americana chart, and deserved to do exactly that and more. It's a beautiful piece of work, every bit as worthy in its way as *Guitar Town*, *Exit 0*, *Copperhead Road* and *The Hard Way* were in theirs: honest in feeling, rich in ideas, fluid in language, precise in detail, soulful in melody and musicianship. In that last regard it offers fine work by some of the best acoustic musicians alive: Norman Blake on guitar, Peter Rowan on mandolin, and Roy Huskey Jr. (who else?) on bass—deeply felt, intuitive stuff all the more effective for the strength of Steve's guiding hand and the quality of the basic material.

In that regard, *Train a Comin'* differs substantially from any of the earlier albums. The songs are tied together by a musical approach rather than a lyrical theme such as the workingman's-blues thread running through *Guitar Town* and *Exit 0*, and their origins reflect their diversity. The sadly lovely "Goodbye" was the first song Steve wrote when he got out of jail—his first writing, he says, for four years. "Sometimes She Forgets," covered by Travis Tritt, dates from 1979, when Steve had been in Nashville five years. "Tom Ames' Prayer," a brutally whimsical little gunfighter song set in the 1880's, was written in 1976—"Right after that, I remember, Guy Clark and I got stinking drunk in broad daylight to celebrate the fact that Gordon Lightfoot's 'The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald' was a big pop record, 'cause we thought there was some hope for people that wrote long story songs"—while "Ben McCulloch," another gem of historically set real-life reflection, began with a piece of Civil War lore Steve learned as a young teenager, but wasn't committed to chord and paper until 1995.

That song, by the way, offers ample proof that Steve's great gift for writing in others' voices is intact. The Texas infantryman damning the harsh and bloody ways of regimental commander Ben McCulloch is every bit as vivid as the Vietnam vet defying the Feds up "Copperhead Road" or the wage slave singing so convincingly of rebellion and resignation in *Exit 0's* "The Week of Living Dangerously," or for that matter the P-47 pilot drinking wartime Camden Town dry in "Johnny Come Lately." It makes sense that Steve does these voices so well; he's voraciously curious about other times and places, consuming literature at a high and constant speed. As we speak, he's reading Jack Hurst's recent book on Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (for the second time), and *Company H*, a Civil War diary written, most unusually, by an enlisted man.

While we're noting things about Steve Earle that haven't changed, we should mention that he still chain-smokes cigarettes, still dresses like a biker gone to seed, still holds strong opinions about important matters, still speaks his mind when it might be better for the general tranquility if he didn't, and still refuses to make music just for fame and fortune. On top of all that, he's still a true believer in, and ardent fan of, real country music (and real rock 'n' roll); he still writes some of the most heartbreaking love songs you ever heard; and his music still can't get within four or five states of any self-respecting major market country radio station. Radio- and CMA-wise, he is most emphatically not a "country artist."

It's old history now, and maybe it's not even worth dredging up. The moment in the mid-80's when Steve Earle's raw, rootsy, reality-based power twang might just have melded with the country mainstream—and changed what we're hearing on the radio today—presented itself briefly and then passed, probably forever. Perhaps that was inevitable. The Nashville establishment has always been reluctant to accept artists unwilling to strike an acceptably convincing pose of

wholesomeness and sing the company song when it counts.

Steve says that he accepts his definitely-absolutely-no-way-country status. "I've been a noncombatant in that area for a long time, though it wasn't originally by choice. When I first started making records, I felt that I was doing something for country music, and then after a while you realize you're trying to save something that doesn't want to be saved, and it was sort of, well, give up."

A major component of the problem was, and remains, purely musical. As Steve puts it, "for me, it was really a day-to-day thing of weighing what sort of resistance I was getting, using country as a home radio format, against where my music was going naturally."

That means he's more than willing to follow an album of heavy electric fuzz and wild Celtic pipes with a work of strictly traditional acoustic instrumentation, and follow that with a disc mixing it all up in a thoroughly funky roots/rock/country sort of way, as he's done with his new, as yet unnamed and unreleased album. That certainly troubles the serenity of format-obsessed recording executives, but "I've just done what I felt I had to do to retain some sort of integrity and some sort of legitimacy as an artist—some reason to make another Steve Earle record. It's never going to be just that I've got a pretty voice, 'cause I don't, so I've got to try a little harder."

He pauses and reflects for a moment, then starts again.

"Y'know, the music business doesn't have anything to do with my drug problem. They're separate things. I've done music all my life and I've been a junkie all my life. I never felt particularly embattled. Other people sort of assume that there's some sort of parallel between my butting heads with the music business and what happened to me. That's not true. I was always good at being a songwriter and recording artist and producer. I was just real bad at being a husband and father, stuff like that. Although I do know I tried, it's those things I failed at. As far as music goes, I've sold a pretty fair amount of records to have stuck to my guns the way I have."

That's a chilling statement, but it's true, and in it is the bottom line as far as the music business is concerned. "Major labels are talking to me right now for one reason: because I've never lost a dime for them, ever. I've never, ever had a record they lost money on. And that's the deal. For them it's a free roll in the game. They know there's a fan base out there that's going to get them their cost back. And I don't make particularly expensive records because I don't believe in it, so it's a win/win situation."

His situation as he speaks is indeed winning. As co-owner of his own record label shortly to strike a distribution deal with one of the industry biggies, he's free to make his own music the way he wants it made, and to record and/or produce other acts of his choosing. It all adds up to a kind of fully functional rebel stronghold right there in the heart of Music Row—or, speaking with more geographical precision, just off the northwest corner of the two-avenue strip constituting Music Row proper.

"I operate kind of outside the system," he says today. "I know that they're still over there"—jerking his head in the general direction of Sony, MCA and the rest—"and they know I'm still over here." He laughs. "We have times when we're feeling a little paranoid, and we half expect a preemptive strike at any moment."

It's not violence that's coming, though. It's bids, offers, contracts—money. A clean and sober Steve Earle is just too hot to resist.

Our conversation rambles all over the place: to The Pogues, our favorite Anglo-Irish rock/punk/folk/thrash band, and the condition of Shane McGowan, their former lead singer/songwriter and leading drinker; to the related subject of London cops, with whom both Shane and Steve (and I, for that matter) have had more than one painful experience; to the death penalty, against which Steve still feels compelled to argue; to hunting, which he still enjoys; to cars, which he's not allowed to drive these days; and, for a long time,

to what I guess we have to call the old days, the cosmic cowboy, redneck rocking, hippie country years in Texas, Nashville and New York. Steve remembers being introduced to Gram Parsons by a tape belonging to his boss on a swimming pool construction crew in San Antonio. The first time he met Emmylou Harris, he says, she gave him half her cheesburger, "and I like to died on the spot." He remembers how easy it was to lose your ambition in Austin ("the dope's too cheap and the women are too pretty") and how tempting to sell your soul in Nashville. He remembers how great Gene Watson started sounding around 1975, and how wonderful Lefty Frizzell's voice was in that year, just before his comeback after years of drink, drugs and general abuse ended in a massive stroke. "Man, some of those records he made before he died!" he marvels. "That was such a drag, to have that happen. To get things back on track and have hits, but the damage was done, and he was gone..."

I don't know if Steve hears the flutter of an angel's wing when he says these words, but I do. He looks strong, though. He's too pale and too heavy and he smokes too much and his eyes are ringed with darkness, but there's a fierceness about him which bodes well. There's a fire in his belly. He looks to be thrusting away from death.

His combative spirit burns on. As always, he has a lot to say, especially about the music business—though partly that's because the music business always has a lot to say about him. For instance there was that remark by his old producer and now MCA President Tony Brown in a *Spin Magazine* interview, to the effect that Nashville has forgiven many alcoholics, but never any junkies.

"What crap!" Steve says. "I'm not the first person that's ever been addicted to narcotics or cocaine in this industry, in rock or country."

He certainly isn't. There have been periods in Nashville's history, notably the entire 60's and 70's and most of the 50's and 80's, when half the Nashville music business couldn't get through Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday or Sunday without a few snorts or caps or pills or poppers of some controlled substance or other.

The issue kicks off quite a train of thought. We'll go along for the ride.

"The implication, see, is that I'm not going to be forgiven. I didn't know Tony Brown was in charge of that, actually. I was here 10 years before Tony Brown got here, and I'll be here at least 10 years after he's gone. I don't really have a beef with Tony. It's just when he makes statements like that, it's like, hey, don't get above your raising.

"Tony's really talented, though, and I can be a real jerk purist sometimes. Once I got drunk and told Bob McDill that I couldn't accept 'Baby's Got Her Blue Jeans On' from the man who wrote 'Amanda,' and that was unfair. Bob's got his own reasons for doing what he does, and he's a great, great, great songwriter. But as drunk as I was, and with what was going on in town at the time, I meant it when I said it, and I still don't totally disagree with that sentiment. It was just wrong for me to say it, and I had to apologize for it.

"I mean, you can fool people for a while, but the one thing the business has to have is songs, and great songs...there's a lack of great songs on country radio right now, and some great writers are writing to the lowest common denominator. I have a hard time forgiving that. I'm not a country act anymore, somebody

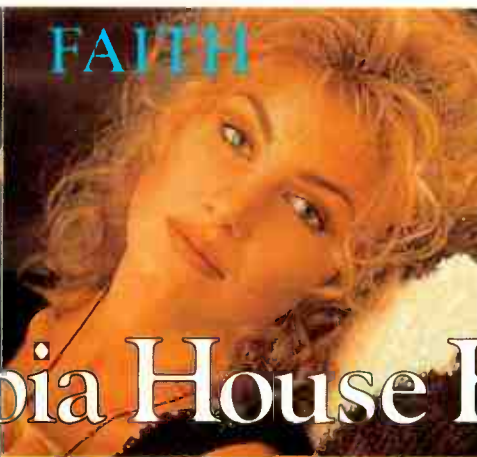
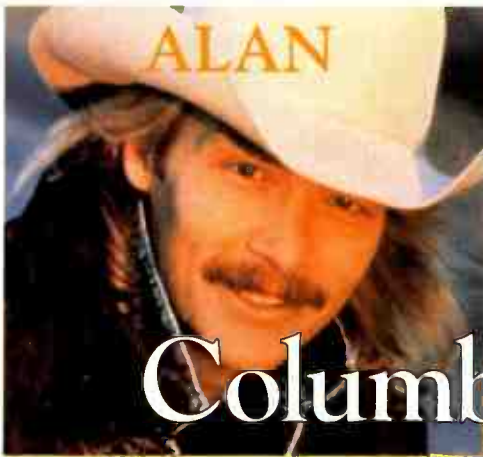


Train a Comin', Steve's all-acoustic album, hosts some of the best musicians alive. Bass player Roy Huskey Jr., guitarist Norman Blake and mandolinist Peter Rowan joined Earle in the studio.

else decided that a long time ago, and that's okay. I don't want to be associated with what I'm hearing on country radio right now, as a whole.

"You see, it's important for me that a song says something, and it's important to me that there's blood on the tracks, that something you really really care about gets into it somewhere. And I think great country music was always about that. Sometimes it was manufactured, but at least it was manufactured by people who were real aware of, and respectful of, their audience. Was it P.T. Barnum who said you'll never go broke underestimating the intelligence of the American public? I don't believe that, in the sense that it's an absolute truth. I believe that there's some truth in it, but a lot of it has to do with the fact that if garbage is all that's made available to people, it only takes one generation to drop the ball. People forget pretty rapidly. And here in Nashville, we've become real style over substance oriented." Which suggests what might one day make a pretty good epitaph for Mr. Steve Earle: Substance.

News arrives at deadline time. For a start, there is no more Mutiny Records in Nashville. A New York outfit got to the name first, so now Steve's operation is called E2 (that's "E" for Earle and "E" for Jack Emerson, his partner). Also, Steve's recordings, and those of others signed to E2, will now be marketed and distributed by Warner Brothers, whom Steve, Emerson and manager John Dotson chose in end-game competition with Giant, Virgin and Mercury Records. And as we go to press, Steve has lived another 80 days straight and sober. ■



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Shelby Lynne

Her Home's the Stage

In the old days, when Roy Acuff and Hank Williams held sway, backstage at Nashville's Ryman Auditorium on music nights was a smoky, crowded affair, with only two tiny wooden dressing rooms without plumbing, and space enough only to tune up before striding the 20 steps to the Grand Ole Opry stage. Acuff, the patriarch, often dominated the dressing room on the Fifth Avenue wing, Hank held court in the men's room, and everyone else took turns getting ready in the transitional dressing room near the back door leading into the alley that separated the Mother Church of Country Music and its real green room, the back room at Tootsie's Orchid Lounge.

Much has changed since those days. This night, early autumn with a chill in the air in a city that has sprouted a plethora of skyscrapers and high-dollar tourist destinations, I settled in to watch Shelby Lynne treat a near-capacity crowd to 45 minutes of country, jazz and R&B, all mixed up by one of country music's most diverse and talented singers. By the time she tears into a funkied up version of "Restless," she has the audience in the palm of her hand. This is no glitzy manipulator, no costume-changing Vegas-oid, and this is damn sure nothing like it was in the "good ole days" of my own 1960's Nashville adolescence. About the time she lets her bass player take a Stanley Clarke-style jazz solo, following her drummer's country-funk drum solo, I'm figuring if Roy Acuff has any idea what's going on center stage at his beloved Ryman, he is rolling over in his grave.

Puffing on a scrounged Lucky Strike in the remodeled comfort of the old transitional dressing room as BlackHawk performs 50 feet away, Shelby likes that idea.

"I figured Ol' Acuff and Hank were saying 'Hmmm,'" she replies proudly, spitting loose strands of tobacco into the air. "But they can't help but dig it. You can't tell me that."

Shelby Lynne seems to have found herself musically on small independent labels in a way she never did at the majors. Her

brilliant 1993 country-jazz big band album, *Temptation*, on Morgan Creek Records, introduced her as a woman in charge, instead of a woman at odds with her eclectic influences and confluences of earthy and celestial Southern styles. The songwriting collaboration of Lynne, Jamie O'Hara and producer Brent Maher turned in some of the best efforts for that record. They do the same with her latest, *Restless*, on Magnatone Records, which Maher now heads. This time, amongst brilliant blues, country-jazz and swing, they take several direct shots at mainstream country radio, which has consistently shut Shelby Lynne out of the Top 20. Still, she has become one of the underground favorites of Nashville's top performers, including Vince Gill, Faith Hill and The Mavericks, who have brought her in to spice up their own recent records.

About past singles, Shelby is sanguine.

"Well, I always hope they'll do well," she says with a shrug. "I can't predict anything, and the minute I try to, I feel like that's bad karma. I just go day by day and try to move with it."

Shelby is not one of those sweet, sexy little belles

whose life has been cheerleader, prom queen, church singing or a happy couple of summers singing at Opryland. And in a business where trivial, charming bull feathers and prompted product-pimping are the bread and butter of most interviews, she is—how shall we say this?—blunt, salty, serious, and as edgy as a broken bottle. She seems most at home on a stage, pouring her Mobile, Alabama, soul out into a microphone.

"Doin' a show is what I am," Shelby says with an intensity that telegraphs that the defensive, smart-aleck banter has temporarily ceased and the heart is on the sleeve. "I get everything I could possibly get from that on stage. That's where I was born to be."

Little sister, Allison Moorer, is a backup singer in the dynamic eight-man group that backs Lynne. The younger Moorer's presence on stage and in the star's bus helps make lonely road life seem more like home.

"Yes, she does," Shelby con-

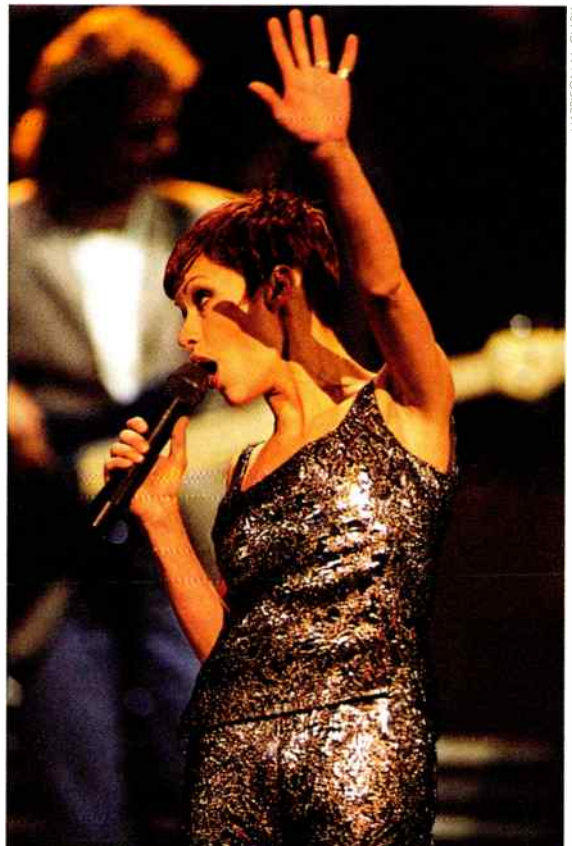
**No choreographed
moves, no
strategic design,
this woman's
music is strictly
emotion, natural
and alive.**



by Bob Millard



AT HOME PERFORMING: Shelby says she was born to be on stage. Videos, like her current, "I'm Not the One," have put her in the TV spotlight, but it's on stage where she's most at home. She says her band "are all leaders" and feed off each other. Sister Allison adds special comfort as singer and traveling companion.



fesses. "We are very close. She's a fine singer, and she can predict what I'll do musically."

And the band, I ask, are each and every one of them jam-session groovers?

"They're all leaders and I stress that point," she adamantly asserts. "I insist that each one of them contribute something, 'cause they have eight individual styles. That's what I like. I don't expect to do a show and have my players play the licks like the record. I tell them I expect them to play something as good or better—kick my ass and I'll kick yours back."

Shelby Lynne lives for music, seems to live through it more than most country entertainers, who tend to live in the moment as "celebrities" and through a cumulative experience called the "career." Shelby has survived a lot, and a blues edge clings to her vocals. She has the scorched soul of a Billie Holiday, the street-wise mouth of a Patsy Cline, and a voice that makes believers of the most skeptical, once they've see her in concert. It's probably because she is so alive in the moment, incapable of going through the paces of a predictable, repeatable, choreographed show.

"It's strictly my feelings and my soul, my heartaches, my pain and my joy," she says. "And it's different every time."

"And it's not because I make it that way; it's because I feel it

different every time. We don't feel the same every day. There's no way I could sing 'Restless' just like the record, and there's no way I could sing 'Wish I Knew' just like the record. It won't ever happen again. That's what's very important to me, and I stress to my band and the people that surround me: If it's good, hopefully it'll be just as good next time; it may not be."

So, Shelby Lynne forges ahead with one of her best efforts and certainly her most commercial album to date. Even that doesn't guarantee what the show will be like, but if it comes to your neck of the woods, it is an outstanding slice of a life lived in the music, in the moment, on the edge of a musical self-discovery that is really fun to watch and listen to.

But don't ask what's next; she doesn't know.

"My musical dreams change every day," she explains, turning to stub out the Lucky, eyeing the greasy bologna roll-ups on the dressing room deli tray with deep suspicion. "I do everything that I want to do eventually."

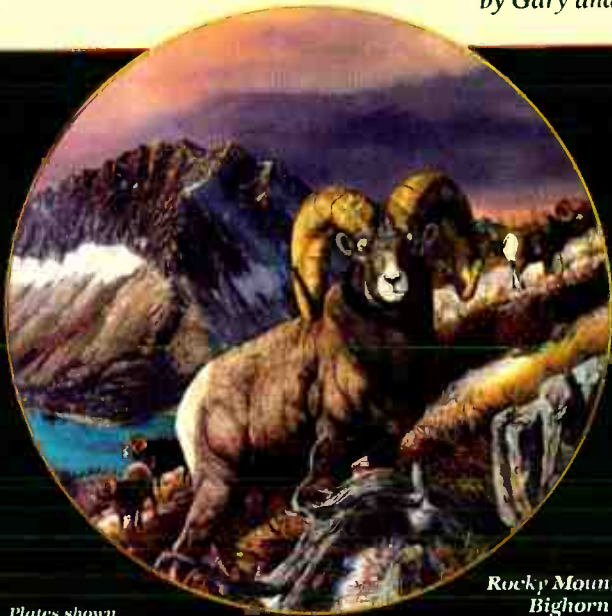
She doesn't miss a beat when asked what it might take to get her nonpareil talents into the commercial forefront.

"All I know about music is what moves me," she says. "If I feel like doin' hip-hop one day, I'll do it. But right now I like to do what I'm doin'... I just do music that I feel good doin'." ■

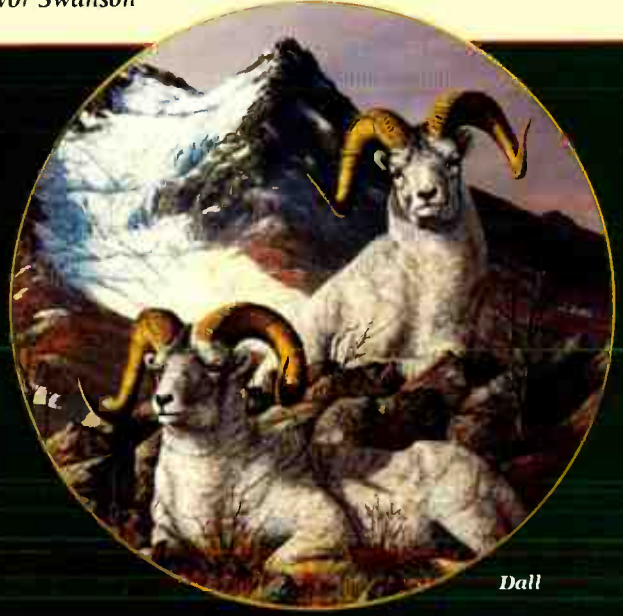
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by Gary and Trevor Swanson



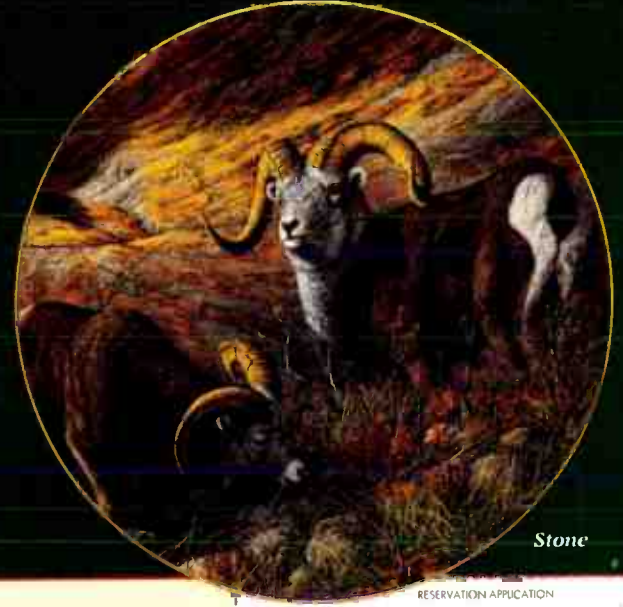
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Clark Country

Yeah, right. I need to add another new “hat act” to my ever-growing CD collection like I need a hole in the head. What’s that you say? The wildly talented, effervescent, Stetson-wearing Terri Clark? Well, I guess that hole in my head doesn’t look so bad after all. The highest praise I can bestow upon Geoffrey Himes’ September/October album review, after listening to Terri’s flawless, bare-bones country debut, is I could’ve written the darn thing myself!

Jon R. Mittler
 Amherst, Ohio

Questioning “Clanton’s ‘Claudette’”

I’m confused! In his review of the new Bellamy Brothers album in the September/October issue, Bob Millard refers to “Jimmy Clanton’s classic ‘Claudette.’” I always thought Roy Orbison wrote “Claudette” (so does Cadence Records). Is this a different song from the Everly Brothers hit? Did Jimmy write a different song called “Claudette”? Or did he record the Orbison/Everly classic in a classic version that I’ve never heard of?

Thanks for clearing things up!

Dick Estel
 Fresno, California

All the same song. Orbison wrote it, the Everlys hit the Top 40 with it in May 1958, and Clanton cut it as the B-side to his July 1958 hit, “Just a Dream.”—Ed.

Bob, Byrd and JMM

I can’t help writing you about Bob Allen’s reviews of Tracy Byrd’s *Love Lessons* and JMM’s *John Michael Montgomery* in the September/October issue. I’m glad his opinion of these two is in the minority! Just look at the Top 25 Albums in the same issue! They are Number Six and Number Two!! I’m glad I never go by what a review says anymore.

And, Bob, when I see a record review, I like to read about *that* album, not your personal feelings or comparisons of the artist. That was wasted space. Stick to the subject at hand: the artistic merit of the album!

Susan Bogucki
 Broadalbin, New York

Thelonious Who?

I was angered to read the review by Bob Allen of John Michael Montgomery’s new album, which is self-titled, in the September/October issue. I believe that it was not a review of the album, but a total unfair attack on John Michael as a person. I don’t believe Bob Allen listened to the music, and trashed John because he considers John to be a “pretty boy” and not talented. He compared John Michael to vintage Thelonious Monk (who???) and a newgrass band called Chesapeake. I thought the reviewers were supposed to judge each album by the music and not compare? What’s up with that?

I don’t think rude comments were called for either. And I quote: “‘I Can Love You Like That,’ a recent smash single, is actually a finely sung ballad—though listening to it too many times in a row is like drinking a cup of coffee with half the sugar bowl emptied into it. Barry Manilow could really make hay with this one. And may yet.” Totally uncalled for jibber.

I don’t believe Bob Allen to be a true professional, not just by the review of John Michael Montgomery, but also the review of Tracy Byrd’s new album, *Love Lessons*. I say keep Bob Allen to the older stars, which he obviously likes by the review of Joe Ely (who???)

Laurie Robbins
 Enola, Pennsylvania
More on Joe Who? in this issue.—Ed.

Our Future

My name is Clayton M. Pepper. I am in the seventh grade. I’m 13 years old. I go to school at Rosa Scott Middle School. I listen to country music all the time. My favorite country singer is George Strait. My mom and I went to the Mississippi State Fair last night to hear Wade Hayes and Brooks & Dunn. They were awesome. I hope to become a star too one of these days.

Clayton M. Pepper
 Madison, Mississippi

Keep It Comin’, Merle

Hi, and thanks for actually reading this. I’ve experienced many types of artists in country. Merle Haggard is the best. I’ve got most of his music on records, 8-tracks, cassettes and now CD. Seen him in South Dakota one time, WeFest in Detroit Lakes, Minnesota, last year at the Casino in Mahanomen, Minnesota.

I realize Merle in the past hasn’t cared for much publicity. Seen him recently at the CMA awards. I wonder if the Hag has the same idea George Jones has, and that’s more or less the hell with radio. I think Merle once said if not soon, as far as more play on radio, publicity, he will hang up his music.

Hag, if you read this, don’t leave.

Robert A. Bagaus
 Detroit Lakes, Minnesota
Merle’s new album out soon on Curb.—Ed.

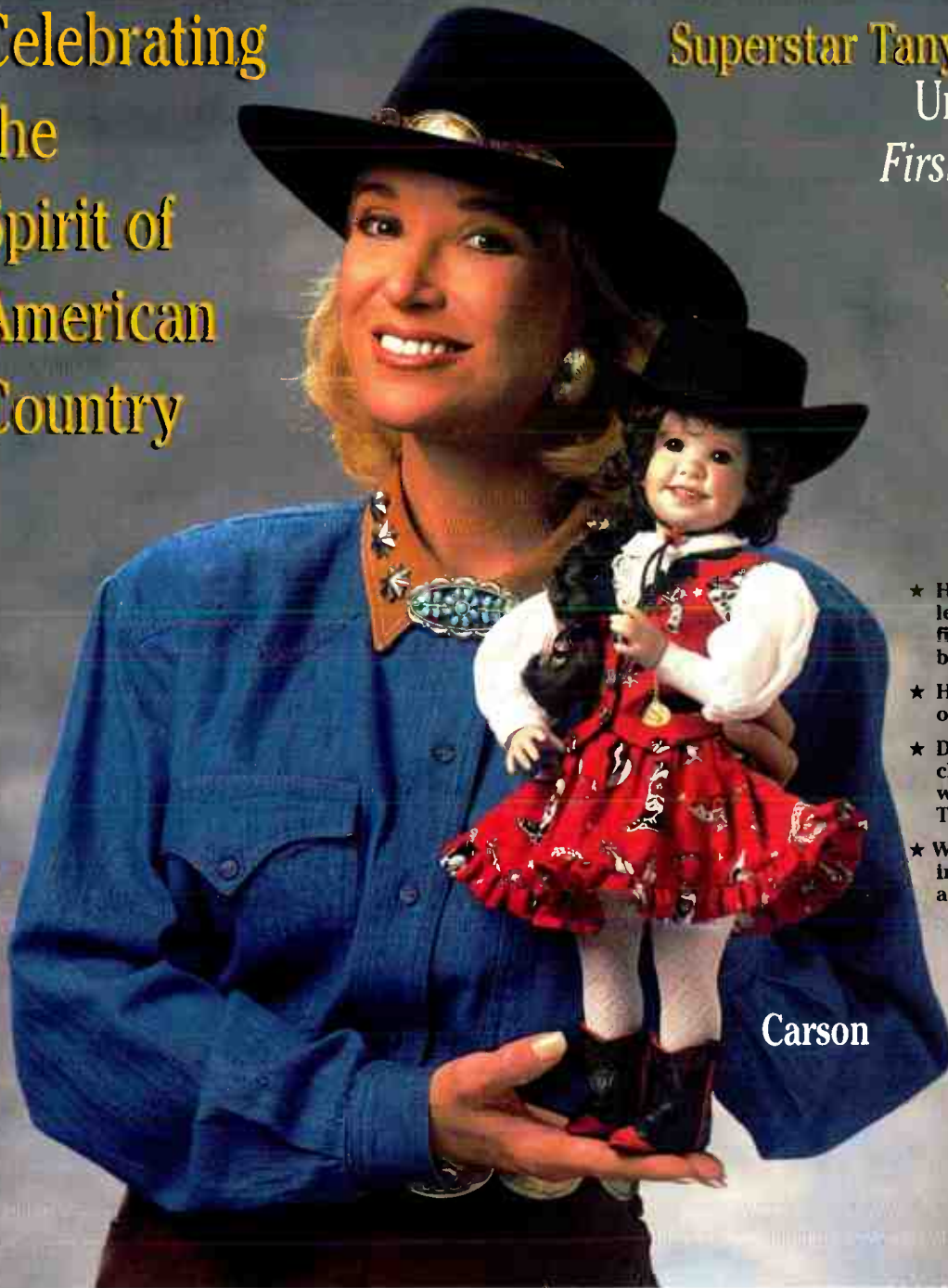
More Crystal, Please!

I’ve been a fan of *Country Music Magazine* for many years, but I find each issue more disappointing than the last with nothing ever printed on my most favorite lady, country artist Crystal Gayle. This superstar is right up there with Dolly and Tammy as having the most Number One songs, even more than her sister Loretta Lynn. Crystal is still very, very active on TNN, concerts and albums. Her latest is *Someday*. The CD is super-outstanding.

More Crystal, please! The only ladies of country music that can come close to

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 Statement of Ownership, Management and Circulation
 PS Form 3526 July 1982 - Required by 39 U.S.C. 3685

1. A TITLE OF PUBLICATION: COUNTRY MUSIC 1B PUBLICATION NO. 44-1-8 9 0 2
 DATE OF FILING: 9/29/95 3 FREQUENCY OF ISSUE: BIMONTHLY 3A NUMBER OF
 ISSUES PUBLISHED ANNUALLY: 6 3B ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION PRICE: \$15.98 4
 COMPLETE MAILING ADDRESS OF KNOWN OFFICE OF PUBLICATION: 600 3rd Ave.
 9th Floor New York, NY 10016 5 COMPLETE MAILING ADDRESS OF THE HEAD
 QUARTERS OF GENERAL BUSINESS OFFICES OF THE PUBLISHER: SAME 6 FULL NAMES
 AND COMPLETE MAILING ADDRESS OF PUBLISHER, EDITOR AND MANAGING EDITOR:
 PUBLISHER: Russel D. Barnard, Country Music Magazine, 329 Riverside Avenue, Westport,
 CT 06880 EDITOR: Same MANAGING EDITOR: Rachelle Friedman, 600 Third Ave., 9th
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 gagees, and Other Security Holders owning or holding one percent or more of total amount
 of Bonds, Mortgages or Other Securities. None 10. Extent and Nature of Circulation: Aver-
 age Number of Copies Each Issue During the Preceding 7 Months: A Total No. Copies
 (Net Press Run), 733,519 B. Paid and/or requested Circulation 1. Sales through dealers and
 carriers, street vendors and counter sales, 23,089 2. Mail Subscription, 633,696 C. Total
 Paid and/or requested circulation (Sum of B 1 and B 2), 656,785 D. Free distribution by mail
 carrier or other means, 2,483 E. Total Distribution (Sum of C and D), 659,268 F. Copies not
 distributed: 1. Office use, left over, unaccounted, spoiled, after printing, 2,033 2. Return from
 News Agents, 72 3. B. G. 3rd. Su. at E. 1st. F. 2. should equal net press run - show
 A - 733,519 A. Total Number of Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: Total
 No. Copies (Net Press Run), 724,545 B. Paid and/or requested Circulation 1. Sales through
 dealers and carriers, street vendors and counter sales, 21,972 2. Mail Subscription, 628,052
 C. Total Paid and/or requested circulation (Sum of B 1 and B 2), 650,024 D. Free distribution
 by mail carrier or other means, 2,493 E. Total Distribution (Sum of C and D), 652,517 F.
 Copies not distributed: 1. Office use, left over, unaccounted, spoiled, after printing, 2,000 2.
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Crystal in the past 20 years are Martina McBride, Faith Hill and Patty Loveless, and they have a long ways to catch up and have a noticeable classic such as "Don't It Make My Brown Eyes Blue." Think about it!
 Galen Duncan
 Street, Maryland

Reading 101
 I am writing in reply to a letter you printed in the Letters section of the September/October issue, "Can Live Without 'Em." If Alice would spend more time reading *Country Music Magazine* than picking it apart, she would find that George was and still is a "big" influence in country music. Garth's influences: George Jones, November/December 1994 issue. One of Alan's idols: George Jones, May/June 1994 issue. George didn't nearly kill country music, he started the inferno that it is today.
 Joel Daniel
 Lubbock, Texas

P.S.—Hang in there, Possum. They'll understand someday.

Across the Big Water
 It was interesting to read the comments about Tammy and George in the September/October issue. The older artists are still around simply because the fans want to see them, and they get a good reception wherever they appear. In June I was in a party of 24 European fans of country music who visited Fan Fair, and we were privileged to see Tammy and George. Heavy rain did not deter the thousands who were waiting. We also traveled to Tupelo, Mississippi, for the first concert in the Reunion Tour, and the reception they received was tremendous. On 25th September in London, Tammy and George were welcomed with just as much enthusiasm.

Here in the UK we have many country radio programmes that play requests from listeners, and those who are still very popular are Waylon, Willie, Merle Haggard, Dolly, George and Tammy.
 Tina Kerswill
 Borstol, England

Classic
 Three recent episodes in my life have prompted me to write you. The first happened while I was listening to a Tammy Wynette CD and a friend walked in. He looked at the cover and made the comment that she wasn't very attractive. My response was "maybe not, but she can sure sing the hell out of a song."

The next episode happened a week or so after that. I was watching *Day One*. Waylon Jennings said, "If me and Willie had to make it in music today, we'd be in a lot of trouble." I laughed at first, but, after thinking about it, I got scared. They are two of the greatest country musicians, singers and songwriters that ever lived. Yet, if they were to walk on the

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scene today, they wouldn't ever "get a shot" in this video-crazed age. This should worry more people than it does.

The final episode, the one that pushed me over the edge, was reading Patrick Carr's "At What Price Glory" column in *Final Note* in the September/October issue. This reminded me of the article he wrote about George Jones in the same issue and the TNN *Full Access* special I watched a couple of weeks ago. George Jones is the greatest living country singer. Period. And it's a damn shame he, Merle Haggard, Tammy Wynette, The Statler Brothers and all The Highwaymen are being snubbed on radio. That should worry more people, too.

I know I haven't said anything that hasn't been said before, but I wanted to throw my name on the list of "classic" country music supporters. We may be few, but may we be heard.
 Chris A. Antonucci
 Henniker, New Hampshire

Lucky Winners
 The winner of our June/July 1995 \$1000.00 Renewal Sweepstakes is J. Price of Missoula, Montana. Congratulations!

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PAYMENT: All classified advertising must be prepaid with order. Make check or money order payable to Country Music Magazine. For credit card orders (Visa/MasterCard only), include account number, expiration date and the amount you authorize Country Music Magazine to charge your account.

CLOSING DATE: Country Music Magazine is published 6 times per year. The next available issue is March/April which closes January 19th; the May/June issue closes March 20th.

Mail advertising copy, payments and production materials for display ads to: Country Music Magazine, Classified Department, P.O. Box 570, Clearwater, Florida 34617-0570. For overnight courier service send to: 1510 Barry Street, Suite D, Clearwater, Florida 34616. Telephones: 1-(800) 762-3555; Canada (813) 449-1775; Fax (813) 442-2567.

FOR CMSA MEMBERS ONLY

VOTE

MEMBERS POLL/JANUARY 1996

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

Bought Any Good Records Lately?

1. Did you buy any albums (records, cassettes or compact discs) in the last month? Yes No
How many records? _____ cassettes? _____ CD's? _____

2. In the boxes below, write the numbers of any of the albums on the Top 25 list in this issue which you bought in the last month.

3. For any albums you bought in the last month not on the Top 25 list, write performer's name and album titles in the space below. (Attach a separate sheet if you need more room.)

Your Choice for Album of the Month

4. List numbers of your five favorites from Top 25 in this issue.

Singles (list 5 numbers)

Albums (list 5 numbers)

What Magazines Do You Subscribe To?

5. Do you subscribe to any other magazines about country music? (Check all that apply.)

- Music City News*
- Country Weekly*
- New Country*
- Country America*
- Modern Screen's Country Music*
- Country Song Roundup*

6. a. For any of the magazines listed in Question 5 that you don't subscribe to, do you buy them on the newsstand?

- Yes No

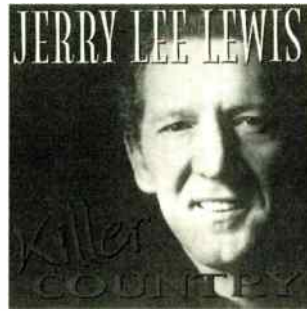
b. If yes, which ones? _____

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 CMSA member but would like to join and vote immediately, enclose your check for \$16 for a one-year CMSA membership (you get an extra year of *Country Music Magazine*, too).

Fill out poll and mail to: January Poll, *Country Music Magazine*, 329 Riverside Avenue, Suite 1, Westport, Connecticut 06880.



Jerry Lee Lewis Special

Unlike many of our Legends features, Jerry Lee Lewis is well-represented by reissues of his best material. *All Killer, No Filler* (Rhino 71216) is the one set any Jerry Lee fan needs to have. For sure, Bear Family has chronicled all the Sun recordings and is working on the Mercury years, but this set—42 songs on two CD's or 34 songs on two cassettes—covers the high points of his career from his rockabilly beginnings at Sun through the Elektra era, including all the obvious country hits from the 50's through the 1970's. For someone who wants the level best of Jerry Lee all in one spot, at a respectable price, this is the one to get. Regular price \$25.95 cassettes, \$45.95 CD's. Members' price \$21.95 cassettes, \$39.95 CD's.

Bear Family's *The Locust Years...* (BCD 15783) is the first CD reissue of his complete Smash studio recordings from 1963 through 1969—166 songs on seven CD's, plus a lengthy 1976 interview on disc eight. It includes several years of unsuccessful rock recordings, and the first try at country success in the form of his 1965 LP, *Country Songs for City Folks*, on which he simply covered other people's hits. All the 1968-69 country hits are here: "Another Place, Another Time," "What's Made Milwaukee Famous" and "She Still Comes Around (To Love What's Left of Me)." Also included is a duet LP with his sister Linda Gail Lewis. Live material here includes performances from his 1966 Fort Worth, Texas, show that Smash had released as *By Request: More of the Greatest Live Show On Earth*. An eight-CD boxed set. Regular price \$209.95. Members' price \$189.95.

Mercury has *Killer Country* (314-526-542), a 20-song collection of his hits for that label, including "Another Place, Another Time," "What's Made Milwaukee Famous," "She Even Woke Me Up to Say Goodbye," "Waitin' for a Train," "Who's Gonna Play This

Old Piano," "Middle Age Crazy" and 14 more. It includes a brief essay by Colin Escott. Available on cassette or CD. Regular price \$10.95 cassette, \$16.95 CD. Members' price \$8.95 cassette, \$14.95 CD.

Buried Treasures Special

Check out this issue's Buried Treasures column for a number of important reissues, including a slew of new Bear Family boxed sets. Members' discounts for items featured here are as follows: on the Bear sets, deduct \$20.00 (your price on the four-CD sets is just \$99.95; on the six-CD sets, it's \$149.95); on the Mercury boxed set, members may deduct \$10.00; and on the Tennessee Ernie Ford single CD, take \$2.00 off. Include membership number if taking discount. See ordering instructions in Buried Treasures.

Essential Collector Special

CMSA members also get a discount on all items in Essential Collector. Deduct \$5.00 off the regular price of the boxed sets on Willie Nelson, Tom T. Hall and Ralph Stanley. On all other items—The Hillmen CD, the Opry book, the Buddy Holly book, and the Tootsie's Orchid Lounge video—deduct \$2.00 off the regular prices. Include membership number and see ordering details on the Essential Collector page.

10 Years Ago in CMM

From the January/February 1986 issue of *Country Music Magazine*: Our cover story had Merle Haggard hooking up with Patrick Carr for a reflective chat. The Judds made their second feature appearance; in it, then 18-year-old Wynonna, discussing their constant togetherness, quipped: "It's like tying two cats' tails together and throwing them over a clothesline." News in People included the birth of Barbara Mandrell's new baby, Nathaniel; and Jett Williams surfaced as Hank Williams Sr.'s daughter. Ronnie Milsap sat atop the album chart with his *Greatest Hits Volume 2*. The Statler Brothers held the Number One single with "Too Much on My Heart." CMSA members selected Alabama's *Forty-Hour Week* as their favorite album, and George Jones' "Who's Gonna Fill Their Shoes" as favorite single.

How to Order

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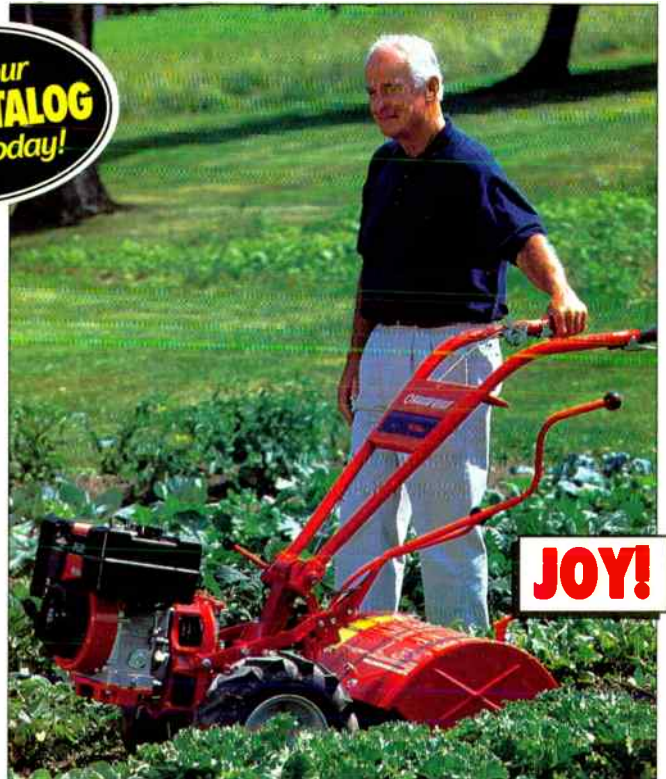
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TOP 25

Singles

1. George Strait *Check Yes or No*
2. Clay Walker *Who Needs You Baby*
3. Alan Jackson *Tall, Tall Trees*
4. Lorrie Morgan *Back in Your Arms Again*
5. Little Texas *Life Goes On*
6. Alabama *In Pictures*
7. Aaron Tippin *That's As Close As I'll Get to Loving You*
8. Brooks & Dunn *Whiskey Under the Bridge*
9. Clint Black *Life Gets Away*
10. Pam Tillis *Deep Down*
11. Lonestar *Tequila Talkin'*
12. Travis Tritt *Sometimes She Forgets*
13. Tim McGraw *Can't Be Really Gone*
14. Bryan White *Rebecca Lynn*
15. Vince Gill *Go Rest High on That Mountain*
16. Jeff Carson *The Car*
17. Tracy Byrd *Love Lessons*
18. David Lee Murphy *Dust on the Bottle*
19. Dolly Parton & Vince Gill... *I Will Always Love You*
20. Mark Chesnutt *Trouble*
21. Doug Stone *Born in the Dark*
22. The Mavericks *Here Comes the Rain*
23. Daryle Singletary *I Let Her Lie*
24. Garth Brooks *The Fever*
25. Lee Roy Parnell *When a Woman Loves a Man*

Albums

1. Alan Jackson *The Greatest Hits Collection*
2. Tim McGraw *All I Want*
3. Shania Twain *The Woman in Me*
4. Reba McEntire *Starting Over*
5. Jeff Foxworthy *Games Rednecks Play*
6. Garth Brooks *The Hits*
7. John Michael Montgomery . *John Michael Montgomery*
8. Dwight Yoakam *Gone*
9. Travis Tritt *Greatest Hits—From the Beginning*
10. Faith Hill *It Matters to Me*
11. George Strait *Strait Out of the Box*
12. David Lee Murphy *Out With a Bang*
13. Vince Gill *When Love Finds You*
14. Alison Krauss *Now That I've Found You: A Collection*
15. BlackHawk *Strong Enough*
16. Aaron Tippin *Tool Box*
17. Clay Walker *Hypnotize the Moon*
18. Dolly Parton *Something Special*
19. Collin Raye *I Think About You*
20. Tim McGraw *Not a Moment Too Soon*
21. The Tractors *Have Yourself a Tractors Christmas*
22. Little Texas *Greatest Hits*
23. Martina McBride *Wild Angels*
24. Bryan White *Bryan White*
25. Pam Tillis *All of This Love*

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Here it is, folks! Your quick and easy order form for your choice of the Top 25 **Albums** currently on the country music charts. Everyone may order, but members of *Country Music Magazine's* own Country Music Society of America get 25% off list price. Albums listed on this page are available on CD or cassette. **Sorry, no singles, LP's or 8-track tapes available.** To order, fill out coupon on this page and include your check or money order. Be sure to specify format. Allow six to eight weeks for delivery. To join the CMSA and save 25% on every CD or cassette you buy, send \$16 to cover membership dues and use members' prices. Dues entitle you to an additional year of *Country Music Magazine*, the CMSA Newsletter with every issue, membership card, discount coupons, other merchandise discounts and more.

NEW YEAR

VIDEO SALE

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Pieces of Time - 40 mins.

Dwight's latest video features eleven songs, including "Suspicious Minds," "The Heart That You Own," "Turn It on, Turn It up, Turn Me Loose," "Takes a Lot to Rock You," "You're the One," "Ain't That Lonely Yet" AND MORE! Item No. V9P - \$19.95

RAY PRICE, JIM REEVES & ERNEST TUBB - 60 mins.

These three legendary stars bring you 24 songs including "Crazy Arms," "I've Lived a Lot in My Time," "If I Never Have Anything Else," "One Broken Heart Don't Mean a Thing," "Then I'll Stop Loving You," "I Wonder Why You Said Goodbye," "Yonder Comes a Sucker," "Bimbo" and "My Lips Are Sealed." Item No. V1S - \$19.95

NEW! SECOND FIDDLE TO A STEEL GUITAR - 107 mins.

Audrey Williams, widow of Hank Williams Sr., and entrepreneur Victor Lewis merged talents and interests to bring you *Second Fiddle to a Steel Guitar*. This rare production features 17 old-time artists and 30 of the best country songs including "Born to Lose," "Jambalaya," "Hello Walls," "Don't Let Me Cross Over" and "Two Worlds Collide." You'll see stars like Lefty Frizzell, Dottie West, Bill Monroe, Webb Pierce, Faron Young and more. Minnie Pearl and others are shown in zany backstage antics between songs. Item No. V7E - \$29.95

BILL MONROE

Father of Bluegrass - 90 mins.

With the cooperation of Bill Monroe, ex-Blue Grass Boys and other performers he influenced, this documentary clearly defines Bill Monroe's unique role in American music. It covers his early years in Kentucky with great footage. The era of The Monroe Brothers, his early years on the Opry, the Flatt-Scruggs-Wise version of The Bluegrass Boys—all are covered. Item No. V2K - \$19.95

NEW! HUNKS WITH HATS

G. Books, A. Jackson, C. Black - 30 mins.

Garth Brooks, Alan Jackson and Clint Black, three of country music's biggest stars give you a rare look at what they're all about. They reveal their innermost feelings about their music, lives, families and fans. It's a rare glimpse fans rarely get. Item No. V5K - \$19.95



NEW! LORRIE MORGAN

War Paint - 31 mins.

This new release features both her #1 video hits, "Something in Red" and "Watch Me." It also features "I Guess You Had To Be There," "Half Enough," "My Favorite Things," "My Night to Howl" and "If You Came Back from Heaven." Item No. V2Y2 - \$16.95

NEW! LORRIE MORGAN

Proudheart - 60 mins.

You also don't want to miss Lorrie making her acting debut in this memorable and touching drama about a factory worker and her daughter returning to her blue-collar hometown. *Proudheart* includes two songs expressly written for the film by Lorrie herself. Item No. V10A - \$19.95

NEW! TOOTSIES ORCHID

Lounge - 60 mins.

Willie Nelson hosts this all-star program celebrating Nashville's famous Tootsie's Orchid Lounge, where a group of songwriters hung out together 30 years ago and penned some of America's most popular songs. Included is footage of Jim Reeves, Patsy Cline, Mel Tillis, Ray Price and others. Item No. V1N - \$19.95

NEW! LOUISIANA

Hayride - 62 min.

During its heyday the *Louisiana Hayride* rivaled the *Grand Ole Opry* in the number of careers that it spawned. Hank Williams Jr. narrates this documentary, which explores the Shreveport, Louisiana, musical roots of some of country music's most venerable stars—such as Hank Williams Sr., Johnny Cash, Johnny Horton and George Jones. This unique program uses old photographs, film clips and live transcriptions of radio show recordings to tell its story. Item No. V8W - \$14.95

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NEW! JIM & JESSE

And The Virginia Boys - 30 mins.

This nostalgic video features eleven favorites including "Are You Missing Me," "Somewhere Down South," "Sleepy-Eyed John," "Sunny Side of Life," "Farewell Blues," "Swing Low Sweet Chariot," "Paradise" AND MORE! Item No. V10B - \$29.95

VINCE GILL

I Still Believe in You - 24 mins.

Vince Gill has joined the esteemed ranks as one of country's premier entertainers. Now you can enjoy this popular star on his only home video performing: "When I Call Your Name," "Never Knew Lonely," "Pocket Full of Gold," "Liza Jane," "Look at Us" and "I Still Believe in You." Item No. V1M - \$19.95

NEW! DON WILLIAMS

Video Collection Vol. 1: Echoes - 55 mins.

Here is Don's first-ever video collection featuring fourteen of Don's favorite songs. Included are "Good Ole Boys Like Me," "The Ties That Bind," "That's The Thing About Love," "Till The Rivers All Run Dry," "It Must Be Love," "I'm Just a Country Boy" AND MORE! Item No. V10E - \$19.95

JIM REEVES

Golden Memories - 50 mins.

Here are some of Jim's biggest hits in a never before released collection of his most memorable television performances. Each song is performed in its entirety. This video is the most requested item by Jim Reeves fans and collectors. Item No. V4G - \$29.95

MARTY ROBBINS

Super Legend - 120 mins.

Here is the best-selling home video on Marty Robbins ever released. And it's no wonder when you consider that it features 18 performances including "El Paso," "White Sport Coat," "Devil Woman," "Ribbon of Darkness," "Don't Worry 'Bout Me," "This Time You Gave Me a Mountain" plus Marty's Grammy-winning song, "My Woman, My Woman, My Wife." It also includes rare appearances from early television shows and movies. Item No. G2A - \$39.95

GARTH BROOKS

Live TV Special - 85 mins.

Here is Garth's first NBC special complete with additional interview and backstage footage. There are 15 hit songs, including "Not Counting You," "Two of a Kind," "The Dance," "Rodeo," "We Bury the Hatchet," "The Thunder Rolls," "The River," "Papa Loved Mama," "Friends in Low Places" AND MORE! Item No. V3H - \$29.95

LORETTA LYNN

Honky Tonk Girl - 60 mins.

This lively and personal portrait follows Loretta from rural Kentucky to the clubs of the Northwest, from her first appearance on the Grand Ole Opry to the 1970's Country Music Entertainer of the Decade. This video features rare never-before-seen home movies and photos and over 20 classic songs and performances. Item No. V8A - \$24.95

WEBB PIERCE & CHET

ATKINS - 60 mins.

This 27 song collection features such classics as "I'm Walkin' The Dog," "More and More," "I'm Gonna Quit," "Pickin' The Blues," "Slowly," "Georgia Camp Meeting," "I'm Really Glad," "Arkansas Traveler," "Why I Want To Cry," "I Don't Care," "Wildwood Flower," "Love Love Love," "Why Baby Why," "There Stands The Glass," "New Silver Bells," "You're Not Mine Anymore" and "It's Been So Long." Item No. V21 - \$19.95

NEW! DOC & MERLE WATSON

Doc & Merle - 60 mins.

Doc & Merle reaches deep into the relationship between Doc and Merle Watson. It gives an historic overview of their evolution as musicians and explores the special bond between them and the North Carolina mountains. This documentary is a rich mixture of music, informal interviews, old photographs and rare film footage. Item No. V10C - \$29.95



NEW! ALAN JACKSON

Livin', Lovin', And Rockin' That

Jukebox - 28 mins.

Here are seven #1 videos from two Double Platinum albums including "Don't Rock the Jailhouse," "Someday," "Midnight in Montgomery," "She's Got the Rhythm (And I Got the Blues)," "Chattahoochee," "Mercury Blues" AND MORE! There's also never-before-seen footage. Item No. V6K - \$19.95

NEAL MCCOY

You Gotta Love That! - 45 mins.

This young star's career really took off with his RIAA Gold *No Doubt About It*, which yielded two Number One country singles (the title track and "Wink") and the top five "The City Put the Country Back in Me." This video also includes "If I Built a Fire," "This Time I Hurt Her More (Than She Loves Me)," "Where Forever Begins," "No Doubt About It" AND MORE! Item No. V4N - \$19.95

NEW! CHRIS LEDOUX

Live - 60 mins.

This 1992 performance includes "Cadillac Ranch," "Wild and Wooly," "Ridin' for a Fall," "Seventeen," "Hooked on an 8-Second Ride," "Workin' Man's Dollar" AND SEVEN MORE! Item No. V10D - \$24.95

WEBB PIERCE

Greatest Hits - 52 mins.

Shortly before his death Webb personally created, from rare filmed performances, a compilation of his greatest hits, narrating and providing background on the songs, their writers and their origins. This program contains 17 of Webb's greatest hits including "Wondering," "More and More" and "There Stands the Glass." Item No. V2R - \$19.95

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Buried Treasures

by Rich Kienzle

Marty Robbins: Bear Family Records, the European firm that capably chronicled the Columbia recording career of Marty Robbins on a series of LP's in the pre-CD era, has done it all again, now on CD. They've reissued Robbins' rockabilly, pop, Caribbean, Mexican and Hawaiian recordings on individual discs, as well as a five-CD box of his complete 1951-1958 country mate-



rial. Two final boxes, just now released, complete the lineup. *Country 1960-1966* (BCD 15655) brings together 102 songs on four CD's, covering his mainstream country and gospel material including "Don't Worry," "Devil Woman," "It's Your World," "Cigarettes and Coffee Blues" and other big hits. His gospel LP, *What God Has Done*, is here in its entirety, as are the *My Kind of Country*, *Devil Woman* and *RFD* albums.

Robbins' consistency was impressive. Seldom did he make a bad record. Even his one political protest record, "Ain't I Right," a 1966 anthem of hard-line conservatism recorded during the Vietnam War, is well done, if a bit strident. After Columbia refused to release it, an angry Robbins had his backup singer, Bobby Sykes, re-record it for a tiny label.

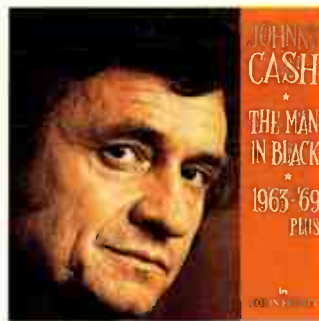
Under Western Skies (BCD 15646) reaffirms Robbins' place as one of the truly great Western vocalists. This four-CD, 97-song collection compiles all his Western recordings, starting in 1959 and ending 20 years later. The Columbia singles and Western LP's are all here, as

are the Western songs he recorded during his brief early 70's period with MCA. Both the long and edited single versions of "El Paso" are here. (Columbia issued the longer version and an edited version to radio, thinking they'd prefer the shorter one. The long one became the hit.) "Big Iron," "Cowboy in the Continental Suit," "Feleena (From El Paso)," "Tonight Carmen," "El Paso City" and "All Around Cowboy," the latter being the final Western hit of his career, can all be heard in superb sound. The booklet features the usual rare photos, posters from Robbins' Western movies, stills from those same movies and never-seen onstage color photos of Robbins and his band. In a departure for Bear Family, the essay by Western music authority Guy Logsdon, which capably surveys this aspect of Robbins' career, is accompanied by lyrics for the songs.

Mercury: The 50th Anniversary of Mercury records has inspired several reissue projects. *Fifty Years of Country Music from Mercury* (314 526 691 2) covers the label's country history. Unfortunately, the results are both disappointing and incomplete. Part of the problem is the size of the set. When Mercury did its rhythm and blues collection, the boxed set consisted of seven discs; in this country collection there are only three discs to cover half a century. It begins all right, with the first Mercury country single: "A New Ten Gallon Hat" by Sheriff Tom Owen and his Cowboys from 1945. Worthy obscurities by Robert Lunn, Mac Odell, Jerry Byrd, Lonnie Glosson and The Carlises appear. So does Eddie Hill's "The Hot Guitar," which, despite the song notes, features Chet Atkins and Hank Garland, not electric mandolinist Paul Buskirk. Buskirk played on "Steamboat Stomp," the single's B-side, not issued here.

Three CD's make it impossible to truly survey Mercury's

Smash's country achievements. Major artists like Faron Young, Roger Miller, Tom T. Hall, The Statler Brothers and Jerry Lee Lewis get but one song each, often not even their biggest hits. Given the tight space, why co-producer Jimmy Guterma would include the 1969 Sir Douglas Quintet song, "Dynamite Woman," which barely made the pop charts, is beyond me. Including Jerry Kennedy and Friends' non-hit version of "She Even Woke Me Up to Say Goodbye" makes no sense given the exclusion of the Kennedy-produced 1969 Jerry Lee Lewis version, which was a Number Two country single. And did the box need to end with contemporary fare like "Achy Breaky Heart" and Shania Twain's "The Woman in Me"? On a six or seven disc set, newer material would be more appropriate, given these songs' recent importance to Mercury. But with such stingy programming, more past hits and rarities and less contemporary non-hit flotsam like The Normaltown Flyers would



have helped. Mercury's heritage deserves more than this scattershot portrait, but I suspect co-producers Guterma and Colin Escott aren't to blame. Decisions on the number of discs and the inclusion of modern fare would be Mercury Records' prerogative. In the end, this mishmash of material is hardly Mercury Nashville's finest moment in reissues.

The Teen Kings: Hearing live, non-studio rockabilly from the 50's is a rarity. Releases of early live Elvis material, legal and

otherwise, and tapes from 50's TV shows like *Town Hall Party* provide a glimpse that's usually hindered by lousy sound. Not so here with The Teen Kings' *Are You Ready?* (Roller Coaster RCCD 3012). Recorded in 1956 at KOSA-TV in Odessa, Texas, where they did a Saturday afternoon broadcast, their roaring, primitive music comes across surprisingly clear; as does the distinctive voice of their lead singer: Roy Orbison, just at the dawn of his career.

The band's repertoire isn't anything earth-shaking. The 17 songs include "Ooby Dooby" and "Go! Go! Go!" as well as "Rockhouse" along with Chuck Berry's "Brown Eyed Handsome Man," "Blue Suede Shoes," a hot instrumental called "Racker Tacker" based on the instrumental break on Elvis' recording of "My Baby Left Me," Fats Domino's "All by Myself" and so on. The disc's fine sound and raw energy drive home the punch of rockabilly in its heyday. Orbison was just beginning back then, his career as a balladeer still several years in the future. The packaging features period photos of the group (Roy wearing nerdy eyeglasses instead of shades) and an excellent essay by Mick Perry.

Johnny Cash: Bear Family's fourth CD box to chronicle Johnny Cash's recording career concludes the series. *The Man in Black: 1963-1969 Plus* (BCD 15588) covers all his Columbia studio recordings (152 performances on six CD's), excluding historical and Americana songs like "Mister Garfield" and "The Ballad of Ira Hayes." Those were all released on the four-CD Bear Family *Come Along and Ride This Train* boxed set. Live material like the easily available *Folsom Prison* and *San Quentin* LP's, plus the soundtrack from his *Gospel Road* film aren't included. His 1964 performance at the Newport Folk Festival (available on the *Nashville at Newport* com-

pilation reviewed last issue) is included as a bonus.

The collection begins with "Ring of Fire" and runs through all his solo hits from that period: "The Matador," "Understand Your Man," "Orange Blossom Special," "Happy to Be With You," "The One on the Right is On the Left," "Everybody Loves a Nut," "Boa Constrictor," "Blistered," "You Beat All I Ever Saw" and "Rosanna's Going Wild."

Also included are his best-known 1964-69 duets with June Carter, among them "It Ain't Me, Babe," "Jackson" and "Long Legged Guitar Pickin' Man." Along with his classic *Carryin' On* LP with June, the set features Cash's *Orange Blossom Special, I Walk the Line* and *Everybody Loves a Nut* albums, as well as *Keep on the Sunny Side*. Cash had appeared as a guest on this 1963 Carter Family album. During this period, he made some of his greatest music (despite near-fatal drug problems) and continued blazing his own trails.

The set comes with a comprehensive booklet and tons of photos, some of a wasted-looking Cash in the studio. Another shows him during his 1966 drug bust, while yet another rarity shows Cash and an attorney examining a white supremacist leaflet attacking Cash, the group's reprisal for his pro-Indian recordings. A number of seldom-seen photos show an obviously recovered Cash at his 1968 wedding to June. For anyone who wants all of Cash in his prime, this series has it.

Flatt & Scruggs: *Flatt & Scruggs, 1964-1969 Plus* (BCD 15879), the third volume of Bear Family's Flatt & Scruggs series (173 songs on six CD's), winds up this definitive chronicle of bluegrass' best-known duo. Purists may wince, since this era encompassed the folk, pop and rock-influenced recordings. Always open to music beyond bluegrass, Earl Scruggs wanted to broaden the duo's repertoire, since their appeal had spread beyond their hardcore audience. Earl's insistence on adding this modern fare so upset hardline traditionalist Lester Flatt that he and Scruggs parted ways in 1969.

At the time, the duo's college appearances, articles in major magazines and past regular appearances on TV sitcoms like *The Beverly Hillbillies* had given them so much exposure that some fools actually assumed they, not Bill Monroe, created bluegrass.

The collection, however, isn't totally skewed to 60's modernism. It also includes LP's that reflect the quintessential Flatt



& Scruggs sound: *Live at Vanderbilt University*, the 1966 gospel LP *When the Saints Go Marching In*, and *Strictly Instrumental* with Doc Watson, recorded the same year. There's also *The Story of Bonnie and Clyde*, an LP of new songs based on the film (Flatt & Scruggs' original 1949 recording of "Foggy Mountain Breakdown" appeared on the movie soundtrack, and six songs for the *Bonnie and Clyde* album were penned by longtime bluegrass fan Tom T. Hall.) What upset Lester and many of their older fans wasn't their *Beverly Hillbillies* TV appearances (they recorded a 1965 LP with the show's cast) so much as their tendency to

record whatever folk or folk-rock hit was hot at the moment. That led to the end in '69. The booklet, written by Lawrence Talbot, aptly sums up the duo's final work together.

D Records Story: After Pappy Daily, the founder of Starday Records, split with his partner Don Pierce in 1958 (Pierce took Starday and moved it to Nashville), Daily quickly set to starting a new Houston record company: "D" Records (for Daily), later joined by former performer and disc jockey Gabe Tucker. D was primarily a regional label, aside from a few big hits like Claude Gray's "Family Bible." Nonetheless, it had some high powered talent, some country, some Western swing, some rhythm and blues, some in between, and even the odd polka single. Willie Nelson, Margie Singleton and The Big Bopper did some of their early work on D, as did regional favorites like rockabilly Ray Campi and Eddie Bond and honky tonkers Benny Barnes, Eddie Noack and James O'Gwynn.

The four-CD, 127-song *The D Records Story Volume 1* (BCD 15832) covers D's first two years. Some pleasant surprises are obscurities like Wortham Watts' tough rock instrumentals, "Lonesome" and "Cotton Picker," along with fine honky tonkers, among them Eddie Noack's "Have Blues, Will Travel" and James O'Gwynn's "If You Don't Want to Hold Me." The Big Bopper's original "Chantilly Lace" appeared on D after Mercury Records rejected it (when it started sell-

ing, Mercury grabbed it). Early material by Johnny Dollar also appeared on D, as did some of Harry Choates' best Cajun swing. "Draggin' the Bow," "Honky Tonk Boogie," "Jole Blon" and other Choates numbers have never sounded as clear and full as they do here. Admittedly, everything on such an all-inclusive set can't be a gem. There are songs one will want to skip over after the first few seconds. The gems, not all of them from big name artists, make this, the first of a projected series, special.

Tennessee Ernie Ford: October 17, 1995, marked the 40th anniversary of the release of Tennessee Ernie Ford's multi-million selling "Sixteen Tons." To commemorate the occasion, Capitol Nashville has reissued the 1960 LP, *Sixteen Tons*, for the first time ever on CD, with



the original cover art and track lineup. I annotated the new collection, so a simple statement of fact is in order. This album actually served as a "greatest hits" package of sorts, combining the title song with a number of earlier hits, many of them his country boogie numbers from the late 40's, most notably "Country Junction," "Smoky Mountain Boogie," "Mule Train" and "Anticipation Blues." Early 50's favorites "Shot Gun Boogie," "Cry of the Wild Goose" and "Blackberry Boogie" represent some (not all) of his biggest pre-"Sixteen Tons" hits. The album also mixed in lesser known boogie numbers like "Milk 'Em in the Mornin' Blues" and "Catfish Boogie" with his version of Woody Guthrie's "Philadelphia Lawyer" and Eddie Kirk's "Bright Lights and Blonde Haired Women" (the latter never issued on a single, only on the original LP).

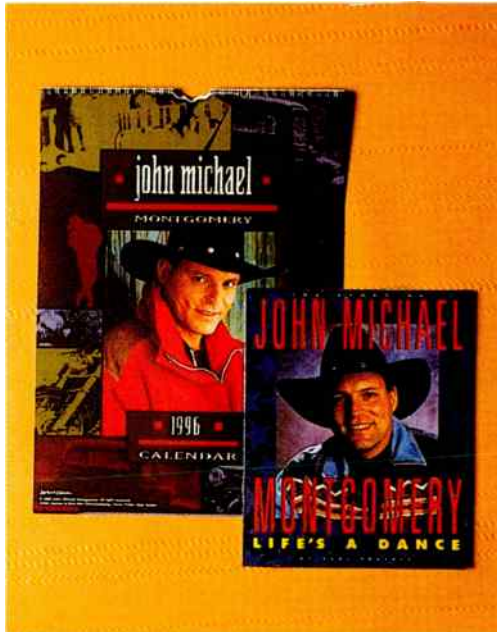
How to Get These Treasures

Available in formats shown at prices shown: Marty Robbins, *Country 1960-1966* (BCD 15655), a four-CD boxed set, \$119.95/Marty Robbins, *Under Western Skies* (BCD 15646), a four-CD boxed set, \$119.95/Various Artists, *Fifty Years of Country Music from Mercury* (314 526 691), a three-CD boxed set, \$74.95/The Teen Kings, *Are You Ready?* (RC 3012), CD only, \$24.95/Johnny Cash, *The Man in Black: 1963-1969 Plus* (BCD 15588), a six-CD boxed set, \$169.95/Flatt & Scruggs, *1964-1969 Plus* (BCD 15879), a six-CD boxed set, \$169.95/Various Artists, *The D Records Story Volume 1* (BCD 15832), a four-CD boxed set, \$119.95/Tennessee Ernie Ford, *Sixteen Tons* (CDP 33833), CD only, \$12.95. Send check or money order payable to Nashville Warehouse, Dept. 010296, P.O. Box 292553, Nashville, Tennessee 37229. Add \$3.95 postage and handling. Canadian orders, add an additional \$3.00 postage. **CMSA Members, see For Members Only page for discounts.** Offer expires May 31, 1996

EDITOR'S CHOICE

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BRAND NEW! JOHN MICHAEL MONTGOMERY BOOK: LIFE'S A DANCE

John Michael Montgomery grew up traveling with his parents' band through an endless succession of bowling alleys, VFW's, CB radio conventions and honky tonks. When the 1990's began, he was grinding out country music several nights a week in obscurity at Austin City Saloon in Lexington, Kentucky, dreaming of a far-off day when he

might just hear his name on Bob Kingsley's "American Country Countdown" radio show. What a difference a few years makes. Now, noted journalist Paul Prather takes you along on John Michael's astounding rise, from a childhood on the wrong side of the tracks to years of paying dues as a barroom picker to an incredible surge in fame. You'll meet John Michael's father, Harold, who served as his inspiration. His mother, Snookie, who warned him to marry if he wanted to become a star. His brother, sister, friends and fellow musicians. And you'll meet John Michael himself, as he describes the joys and tribulations of a life devoted to making great music. This new book includes more than 100 photographs, including never-published, behind-the-scenes shots of John Michael as a toddler, a teenager, a blond-haired young singer looking for a hit, and a national heartthrob. Ask for Item #B2V, \$14.95.

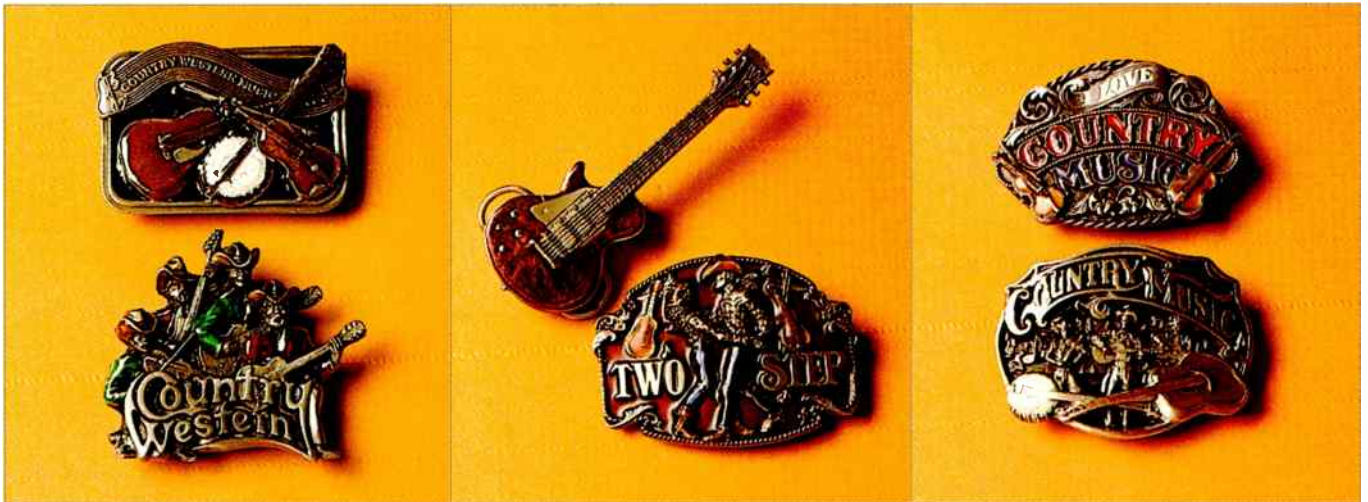
BRAND NEW! JOHN MICHAEL MONTGOMERY 1996 CALENDAR

John Michael Montgomery fans are also going to love this new, first-time-ever, Photo Calendar. It features twelve candid color photographs of this country music superstar. Some are upclose face shots and some are full body portraits. Many of the photos were shot specifically with this fabulous Calendar from Landmark Company in mind. It opens to a big 33" x 11 3/4". Don't miss it! Ask for Item #G6G, \$10.99.



LAST CHANCE TO ORDER! THE NEW 1996 COUNTRY MUSIC FOUNDATION PHOTO CALENDAR

This official Country Music Foundation Calendar is always a hit with *Country Music* readers, and the 1996 edition is proving no exception. It opens to a big 20" x 12" and features great color photos of George Strait, Alan Jackson, Garth Brooks, Dwight Yoakam, Wynonna Judd AND SEVEN MORE! Item #G1B, \$8.95.



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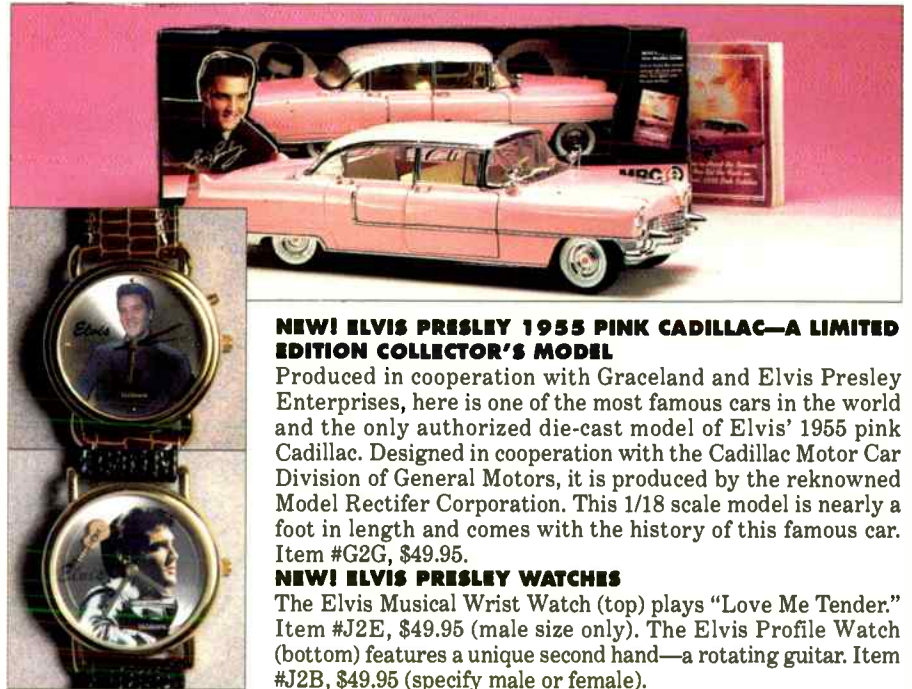
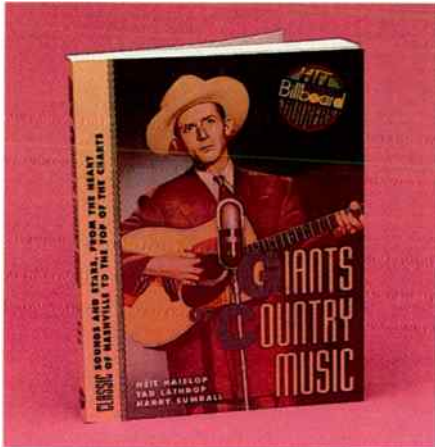
Here is the most extensive collection of country buckles we have ever offered. Each buckle is crafted in high quality pewter and includes unique color highlighting in gleaming enamel. At the top left is the Country Western Music edition with white banjo and brown guitar and fiddle on deep blue background, Item #G1L. Below it is the Country Western Band buckle with green and red enamel, Item G1M. The top middle is the brown enamel Guitar buckle, Item #G1N.

Below that is the brown and blue Two Step Dancers edition, Item #G1R. The top right is our always popular red, white and blue lettered I Love Country Music buckle, Item #G6J. And finally, there's the Country Music Trio buckle featuring the trio on a deep blue background with a brown guitar crossing a white banjo, Item #G1S. Each buckle sells for \$9.95. Order any two for \$18.90, three for \$27.90, all six for only \$49.95. Please specify each item number.

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BRAND NEW BOOK! BILLBOARD'S GIANTS OF COUNTRY MUSIC

Author Neil Haislop's *Giants Of Country Music* is the latest volume in the acclaimed *Billboard* Hitmakers series. This new 258-page edition focuses on the artists, singers, songwriters and superstars who populate this rich and exciting genre. *Giants of Country Music* offers an inside view of 180 of country music's biggest names. The appeal of this book is its large number of interviews with scores of country music's greatest stars, making this a different kind of country music reference. Dozens of these interviews have never before been published, with such stars as Garth Brooks, Clint Black, Willie Nelson, Mary Chapin Carpenter, Dwight Yoakam, Randy Travis, to mention a few. These entries are "up close and personal," providing the artists' own views of their musical origins, styles, and overall contributions to the country sound. Over 120 photos illustrate the authoritative and entertaining facts on these headliners. Item #B9B, \$21.95.



NEW! ELVIS PRESLEY 1955 PINK CADILLAC—A LIMITED EDITION COLLECTOR'S MODEL

Produced in cooperation with Graceland and Elvis Presley Enterprises, here is one of the most famous cars in the world and the only authorized die-cast model of Elvis' 1955 pink Cadillac. Designed in cooperation with the Cadillac Motor Car Division of General Motors, it is produced by the renowned Model Rectifier Corporation. This 1/18 scale model is nearly a foot in length and comes with the history of this famous car. Item #G2G, \$49.95.

NEW! ELVIS PRESLEY WATCHES

The Elvis Musical Wrist Watch (top) plays "Love Me Tender." Item #J2E, \$49.95 (male size only). The Elvis Profile Watch (bottom) features a unique second hand—a rotating guitar. Item #J2B, \$49.95 (specify male or female).

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Here is the most popular country music buckle we have ever offered. It features a brown fiddle and white banjo inlaid over an outline of the USA, with a deep blue background. Now, for the first time, we are offering it, separately or together, with our new matching Key Chain and Lapel Pin. For the new Lapel Pin ask for Item #G1T, \$2.95. For the new Key Chain ask for Item #G1K, \$5.95. For the Buckle ask for Item #G7L, 9.95. Order the Buckle and Key Chain together and you get the matching Lapel Pin FREE!



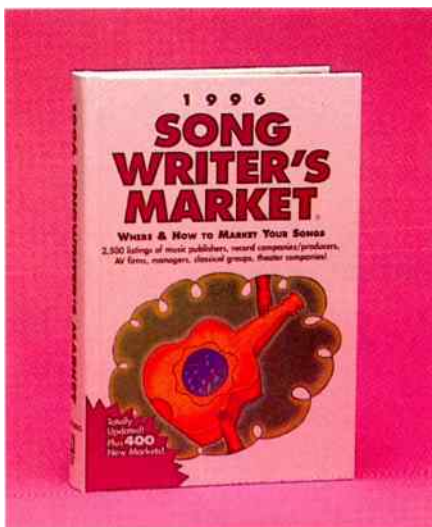
PRE-PUBLICATION SPECIAL! COUNTRY MUSIC MAGAZINE'S OWN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY OF COUNTRY MUSIC

This highly-anticipated edition is an unparalleled look at country music—the music of America's rural working people. And who better to tell this colorful story than the people who have brought you America's favorite country music magazine for over 20 years? With over 650 photographs, some rare and never seen, some so familiar they've become classics, this account traces the music from its origins through to its present blossoming into a billion-dollar industry. The Editors of *Country Music Magazine* bring to life the voices, sounds and feelings evoked by the music of each era, from the Great Depression through the World War II boom to the Nashville Sound. They revisit the folk revival of the 60's, the Outlaw movement, the Urban Cowboy craze and beyond. Hundreds of artists are here, from The Carter Family, Jimmie Rodgers, Hank Williams, Kitty Wells, Porter Wagoner and Hank Snow, to today's stars like Dwight Yoakam and Garth Brooks. In the foreword Johnny Cash says, "To me, *The Illustrated History* is a valuable document. Through it I touch my roots and, in doing so, find a strong kinship with the minstrels and troubadours of old." This brand new volume is absolutely essential for any fan of country music, whether their taste runs to the traditional or today's modern country sound. Reserve your copy now and **YOU SAVE OVER 10%**. Pay \$19.85, Item #B2T.



AND DON'T MISS OUR BESTSELLING ENCYCLOPEDIA!

Also published by the Editors of *Country Music Magazine*, the *Comprehensive Country Music Encyclopedia* is the best country music reference you'll find anywhere. This bestselling answer book gives you over 600 alphabetically arranged entries—from Acuff to Zydeco—covering the people, places and events that have made country music what it is today. With more than 600 photographs, this hardcover edition usually sells for \$25.00. You pay just \$21.95. You **SAVE OVER \$3.00!** Item #B1S.



NEW! 1996 SONGWRITER'S MARKET

Get your songs into the right person's hands, with this year's newly revised edition of the *Songwriter's Market*, containing 2,500 listings of song markets, each with the most complete and current information on contact names, royalty/pay rates, song submission, types of songs wanted and vital tips from the "buyers." There are lists of clubs, associations, contests, workshops, publications AND MORE! Item #B2N, \$21.99.

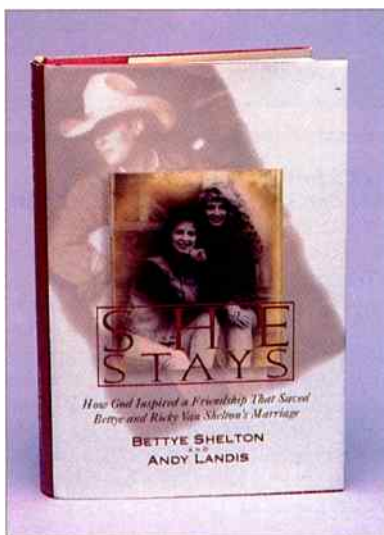
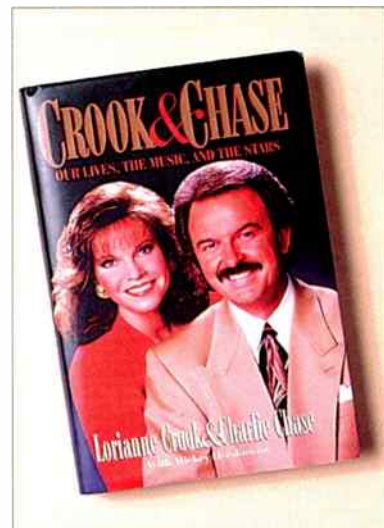
FINDING HER VOICE: THE SAGA OF WOMEN IN COUNTRY MUSIC

The newly released softcover edition of this bestseller is the first book to take a long, hard look at the ladies who shaped country music, from Maybelle Carter and Kitty Wells right up to current headliners like Dolly Parton and Reba McEntire—and everybody in between. *Entertainment Weekly* calls it "A landmark in the archives of country music...A+." We call it must reading. Oversized softcover edition, 594 pages, heavily illustrated. Item #B20-PB, \$18.95.



NEW BOOK RELEASE! CROOK AND CHASE: OUR LIVES, THE MUSIC, AND STARS

Lorianne and Charlie, the popular and controversial former hosts of *Music City Tonight*, The Nashville Network's nightly prime-time show, talk about their careers and share their favorite anecdotes about the biggest stars in country music. Following in the tradition of such bestsellers as Ralph Emery's *Memories*, and the Reba and Dolly autobiographies, *Crook and Chase* is a first-hand look at the most popular music in the world by way of up-close and personal stories about Vince Gill, Wynonna, Garth Brooks, Reba McEntire, Billy Ray Cyrus, and the many country stars who regularly appeared with Crook and Chase on their show. This is a book that country music fans and the millions of viewers of *Music City Tonight* will find of great interest. You should not miss it! Hardcover, 6 1/8" x 9 1/4", two 8-page black and white photo inserts. Item #B7T, \$22.



NEW! SHE STAYS: How God Inspired a Friendship That Saved Bettye and Ricky Van Shelton's Marriage

She Stays takes you behind the scenes of the dream-come-true romance of Bettye and Ricky Van Shelton to a world of personal struggle and turmoil that threatened to destroy their marriage and everything they held dear. When co-author Andy Landis picked up the phone to call a woman she scarcely knew, she entered into what would culminate into a friendship of shared confidences, tears, and triumph that Bettye believes could only have been part of God's wisdom and plan. In *She Stays*, which is also a featured song on the new album, *Common Ground*, and pays tribute to Bettye's courage, you'll see firsthand the impact of shared burdens and reaching out to others in pain. Visible throughout the Sheltons' separation and reconciliation, as well as Andy's sometimes troubled relationship with Ricky's longtime producer and friend, you'll find an overwhelming faith in God and prayer, and

witness the strength to be gained from having God's hand, as well as a fellow human's, to hold during times of despair and crisis. *She Stays* also brings you face-to-face with a woman's commitment to her marriage and the pain of forgiving what to many would be unforgivable—including infidelity and alcoholism—unless you knew that what you had was really worth keeping. Hardcover, 286 pages, eight pages of photos. Item B6M, only \$16.99.

COUNTRY MUSIC T-SHIRTS

The holiday season is the perfect time to get the widely recognized *Country Music* logo on a 100% cotton Champion T-shirt in navy blue or red. The logo is in white. Or pick our other bestselling "I Love Country Music" T-shirt. This navy blue shirt features a guitar and banjo with red and white lettering. They are \$10 each. For the *Country Music* Logo T-shirt in navy blue, ask for Item #G2P. For red, ask for Item #G2Q. The "I Love Country Music" is Item #G20. Order sizes S, M, L, XL and now, XXL.

I LOVE COUNTRY MUSIC CAP (NOT SHOWN)

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VOLUME TWO—45 MIN.

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Lost in the Flickering Glow

My TV's talking to me again. It does that; sits down there at the end of the family waterbed and spews out all this *stuff*. Whoa. If I want, I can watch some bright young thing with a \$100 haircut telling me everything I'd ever want to know about Bufo toad infestation (which boils down to this: use the shotgun, never the dog, unless of course you want *him* poisoned). Or I can tune in TNN, see what Lorianne Crook is wearing tonight.

You know...My God, is that really a dress? Did she perhaps not wander in the back door of Jimbo's Fantasy Lampshade Warehouse, mistaking it for the new *Music City Tonight* dressing hut?

She's colorful, though, you have to give her that. I myself wouldn't wear orange, kelly green, lavender, black and khaki together, especially with—are those wings?—but hey, I don't get 50 bucks a week wardrobe allowance, so what do I know?

Well, one thing I know is that this particular form of entertainment will be history by the time you are reading these words. Instead of dear old Lorianne and Charlie (who's always seemed a bit upset about something, don't you think?), we'll have a whole new show done by Dick Clark Productions. TNN spokespersons have been hinting brightly that the new show will be—well, not exactly more professional or less staggeringly *cheesy*, that's not what they meant, but, er, let's say "more representative" of, er, "today's Nashville music community." I guess that means farewell to the Final Net and pet raccoons, *bon soir* to the Kiwifruit and personal trainers. For sure it means Tom "urbane cowboy" Wopat hosting the nightly parade, and that's nice, I guess. He's handsome, and he certainly knows the nature of the beast.

The new show might be okay, and I know it'll feature lots more of your favorite contemporary country entertainers, because that's what finally got Lorianne and Charlie the boot, the fact that most Nashville record company decision makers, booking agents and artist managers were starting to turn blue at the idea their stars might even be mentioned on "that show." So y'know, the new deal will be in tune with the demographic, responsive to

industry trends, all that stuff. Then too, we won't have to worry the way we do whenever Lorianne and Charlie hit their marks; whatever else, Wopat's show is unlikely to be nerve-wracking.

I don't like the idea. I think I'll really miss lying there, bathed in the blue light and lost in the loony zen of *Music City Tonight* during that part of the evening when the moon rises, the bats begin to



Lorianne Crook and Charlie Chase get the boot. Will TNN's airwaves ever be the same?

stir, and the kids try to choose between accepting sleep and tunneling out of their bedroom. I'll miss Lorianne's mental hygiene tips and amazing hair sculptures. I'll miss waiting for Robinson's Racing Pigs to guest, maybe even on the same show with Johnny Paycheck and Irlene Mandrell. I'll miss wondering just who it is that Charlie would like to harm, and how he might wish his life were different, and not really *where* he found that tie, but *why*? And on that terrible day when the loony light flicks off forever, I'll stand there with my head bowed and my gimme cap held over my heart, and mourn the passing of something special. We've always had plenty of profoundly predictable TV modeled on *American Bandstand* (which, for you youngsters, is where Mr. Clark got his start back in the 1950's), but there's been precious little propelled, like *Music City Tonight*, by the

half-mad spirit of the county fair.

Which reminds me that when I started this column, I meant to write seriously about country music television. Oh, well, too late now.

Here's something I need to share. Did you watch the 1995 CMA Awards Show? Wasn't it wonderful how Alison Krauss kept saying "this is really weird!" as she won award after award, and didn't you notice how the people performing on the show seemed to be actually enjoying themselves? Most of all, though, did you catch Marty Stuart's little anecdote about Roger Miller sneaking up behind Ronnie Milsap at a dinner some years back, clapping his hand over Ronnie's ears, and saying, "Guess who!"

And that reminds me of a time I think I remember (though I'm not totally sure) circa '72 at the old King of the Road hotel in Nashville, when Ronnie had a gig as the house band and everyone-but-everyone showed up to party. Marty Robbins was there the time I might remember, and here's how it goes: Someone challenges him to get up with Ronnie and the band and sing "El Paso" in its entirety, and he does that—gives it a shot, but can't get all the way through (there are some who say he never could without his crib sheet). Marty, though, turns it around, and challenges the whole room—remember now, this is a crowd that puts its bread on the table with country music, that's as inside as they get—but the only one to even get near the whole lyric is a pale young guy at the back of the room who turns out to be a tourist from Dusseldorf. So we get to hear "El Paso" sung entirely and correctly, more or less on key, in a thick German accent. Which I guarantee you is *very* special.

Auf wiedersehen, y'all.

By the way, I left some items off my last column's Best of 1995 list. They are the Chet Atkins/Suzy Bogguss collaboration, *Simpatico* (Capitol 29606); Martina McBride's *Wild Angels* (RCA 66509); and Big Sandy & The Fly-Rite Boys' *Swingin' West* (HighTone HCD 8064). All fine, fine work.

Editor-at-Large Patrick Carr has been with CMM since September 1972.



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