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MARCH/APRIL 1997

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HANK THOMPSON
Answers 20 Questions

**VINCE
GILL**
One of the Boys



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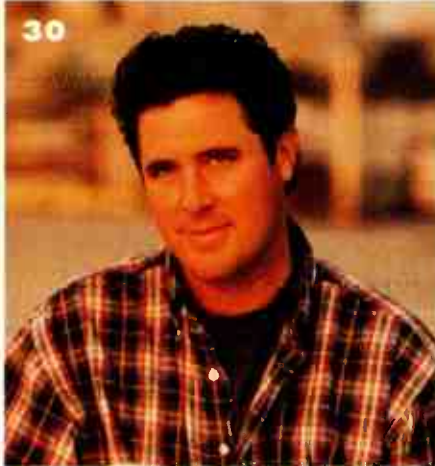
As Bill came face to face with a ravenous tiger shark, he chuckled, “Yeah, like reruns went away.”

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CHEVY S-10 LIKE A ROCK



COUNTRY MUSIC



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Looking back at his career Mark Chesnutt is happy with his accomplishments. But, he's not above talking about the pitfalls and mysteries of the music business. Other careers may have taken a faster track, but Mark's own style pleases him. His fans are happy, too.

44 Lorrie Morgan: It Just Keeps Getting Better

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There's a new marriage to Jon Randall, and a new awareness about herself. A strong new album, and writing a book about her late husband are opening up the doors of self-discovery. This is one lady to keep on watching.

68 20 Questions with Hank Thompson

by Michael Bane

Want to hear about the early years? Want to hear about today? Hank Thompson talks about both in 20 Questions. Plus, a brand-new album.



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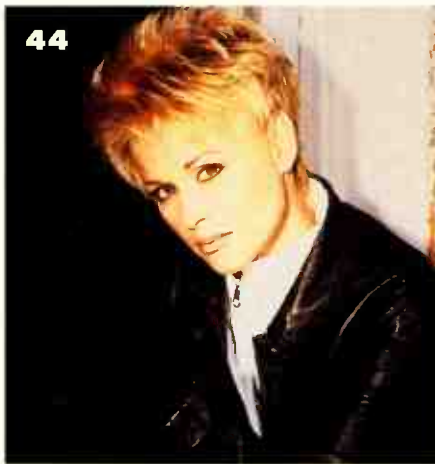
COVER STORY

30 Vince Gill: One of the Boys

by Bob Allen

Bob Allen catches up with Vince on tour on the East Coast, and gets the latest on what it's like touring in a laid-back group, where the star just wants to be a part of the band. There's golf in the afternoon, and crew meals at night. Plus, the importance of sound checks in Vince's musical life. All in all, the man ain't complaining.

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People

by Hazel Smith

When two Arkansans cried. Kathy and the Prez, Crook & Chase return, Charley Pride has his day. Weddings, engagements and upcoming births. Opry news, the Mandrell name goes on, Deana's debut and more.

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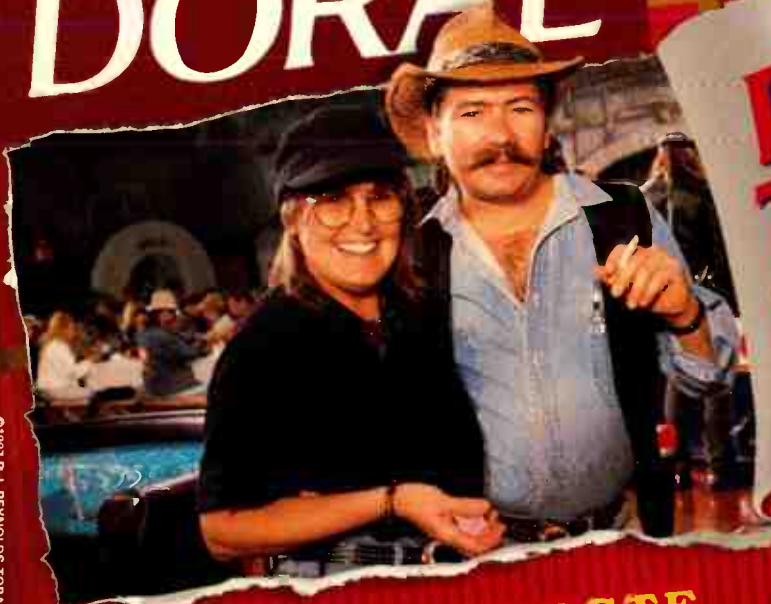
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OF SAYING THANKS TO HUNDREDS OF SMOKERS AT ONCE.

20 CLASS A
CIGARETTES



DORAL



Ryan

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and Ryan Jackson partied
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of others in Tampa, FL.

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People

DIANA WAJCIK/CBS



DIANA WAJCIK/CBS

Johnny Cash, Edward Albee, Maria Tallchief, Jack Lemmon and Benny Carter honored by the Kennedy Center in 1996. Honorees at the December gala with the Clintons and VP Gore. Lyle Lovett, Kris Kristofferson and Rosanne Cash join in the tribute on stage, aired on CBS-TV.



PATRICIA PALOMAR/CBS

WHEN TWO GREAT ARKANSANS CRIED

Didja watch the Kennedy Center Honors on television? If you didn't, shame on you, because there's no way I can tell it as wonderful as it was. It was obvious that **President Bill Clinton** was totally honored to be seated by the great **Johnny Cash**. The gleam in his eye, the smile on his lips and the occasional glance made it as plain as the nose on his face that he was in awe of *The Man in Black*. Host **Kris Kristofferson** said, "Johnny Cash and Bill Clinton deserve to be here tonight." There was a standing ovation, for Kristofferson's intro and for the two giants. Why, I stood up at the house all by myself! Joining Kris in "Songs by Cash" were daughter **Rosanne Cash**, **Lyle Lovett** and the honoree's favorite singer, **Emmylou Harris** (also the favorite of our gloating, illustrious leader, **Russell Bernard**). When the foursome were joined

by a choir, angelic vocals raised the roof with "I'll Fly Away," John's all-time favorite song. Big John was moved to tears as was the other guy from Arkansas, the President of the United States.

ANOTHER PREZ STORY

Kathy Mattea was having supper at the White House, seated between **President Clinton** and her songwriting hubby, **Jon Vezner**. Kathy asked the prez how he managed to "do it all." The president admitted that he has "down time." Time for himself to jog or exercise, listen to music or just rest for an hour or more each day. When he hasn't rested and is tired is when he makes mistakes, whether professional or personal, he told Kathy. So Kathy's taking an hour daily for herself. All of us need to take heed. Listen to music, country music, one hour daily. It's good for you.

HEY HO, RADIO

The press here in Music City reports that country artists took five of the ten slots for most-played artists on radio last year: Number Two, **George Strait**; Number Three, **Garth Brooks**; Number Six, **Alan Jackson**; Number Seven, **Brooks & Dunn**; and Number 10, **Tracy Lawrence**.

HIGHER POWER

Loranne Crook and **Charlie Chase** are back on TNN hosting *Today's Country*. Plus, they took their syndicated *Crook & Chase* talk show to Hollywood. Syndication rights for the show have been sold to Universal (corporate home of movies, TV and MCA Records). So, the couple fly home to Music Town, tape their country show, then fly back to L.A. for their daily syndicated show. That's a lot of frequent flier miles for the twosome.

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Editor: Rochelle Friedman

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ABC
PENDING

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People

Charley Pride celebrates two anniversaries—30 years on the Opry and 40 years of marriage. Bill Anderson presents a plaque from Nashville mayor Phil Bredesen declaring Charley Pride Day, and, below, Charley and wife Rozene backstage at the Opry. Congrats to the star and Rozene.



CHARLEY PRIDE HAS HIS DAY

Superstar Charley Pride was surprised when Nashville Mayor Phil Bredesen had Charley Pride Day declared in Music Town. It was on the eve of his and wife's Rozene's 40th wedding anniversary and on the 30th anniversary of Charley's first Grand Ole Opry performance. Celebs like VP Al Gore, former Prez George Bush, Waylon Jennings, Andy Williams, Reba McEntire and The Statlers sent congrats to the stunned Charley, the Pride of Mississippi. Charley spends his summers at his own beautiful theater in Branson.

ONE IN A MILLION TWICE

Cute heading, huh. But that's what it was when we celebrated with Bryan White upon the double-platinum certification of his two records...on the same day! "One in a million twice." Unlike most stars, Bryan was at the front door greeting guests. 'Course, when he hugged me, I offered to burp him, much to the amusement of Bob

Oermann and others in hearing. Steve Wariner, who is Bryan's mentor, was there in support of his pal. When I congratulated Steve on his Grammy nomination for the instrumental "Brickyard Boogie," he made me aware that it was Bryan White playing drums on the song.

UNDER THE UNDERWEAR SPELL

I reckon Hank Williams Jr. and Travis Tritt will be wearing their Fruit of the Looms this touring year. The underwear maker made the announcement that they are hitching their products to the stars. Hank Jr. and Tritt, along with Charlie Daniels and Jo Dee Messina, will be singing under the Fruit of the Loom banner for 60 shows this season. There will be CBS and TNN concert specials sponsored by the company. And on June 14, the foursome will be joined by Wynonna, Vince Gill, Bryan White and Randy Travis for CountryFest '97. Billed as the world's largest single-day ticketed event, it takes place at the Texas International Motor Speedway in Dallas/Ft. Worth. Catch the eight-some there.

FAST-MOVING STARS

Last issue I mentioned the engagement of Lorrie Morgan and Jon Randall. Well, the couple have married, honeymooned and celebrated the New Year since we last visited. Lorrie, the prettiest girl in country music, was a beauty in her floor-length off-white wedding gown with tiny criss-cross spaghetti straps across the back. The couple wed at Lorrie's lakeside mansion in Hendersonville. I must say they are the cutest couple in town. Lorrie is taking off a few months to write a book on her relationship and marriage to the late Keith Whitley. Those of us who care about Lorrie are happy Jon is by her side during this time that must be difficu

People

when she has to reach back into memories both wonderful and bittersweet to unscramble history and alcohol abuse. After all, there's Lorrie and Keith's son, **Jesse Keith**, to think about. Best of all, Jon refers to Jesse and to Lorrie's 16-year-old daughter, **Morgan**, as "our kids."

ANTICIPATING

With **Tim McGraw** and **Faith Hill** married and pregnant, their Spontaneous Combustion tour—where their romance began—is history and herstory. (His-story and her-story...see?) By chance I ran into one of the on-the-road people who was on tour with the couple. Person shook his/her head and said, "Whew. It was something. Glad it's over. You know everybody out there called Tim 'Mr. Faith Hill' because she calls the shots." Just reporting what I hear and having fun, friends.

A FARON MEMORY

When **Willie Nelson** came to town, he was broke. Willie sold some songs to support his habit and the habit of his wife and

three children, which was eating. One night Willie walked into the world-famous watering hole, **Tootsie's Orchid Lounge**, and saw superstar **Faron Young**. He sang "Hello Walls" to Faron and offered to sell him the song. Faron told Willie he wasn't going to buy the song, but he'd record it. Then Faron reached in his pocket, took out a roll of bills, peeled off five hundreds, gave 'em to Willie and said, "Pay me back when you get the money." The song was Number One for almost all of the first three months of 1961. In 1984 Willie returned the favor when he gave Faron a bull worth \$50,000.

Music Row was saddened by Faron's death, especially due to the fact it was from a self-inflicted gunshot wound. Readers, please understand. These stars are people just like you and me. They aren't saints and they aren't sinners. They have their own personal demons. Sometimes people are sick, as was the case with Faron. Emphysema kept him gasping for breath all the time, and then his prostate trouble was serious and painful. Please condone and not condemn. "Every tub must set on its own bottom," is an old country saying. So lets us let it

be, leave it setting and not question the past, but look to the future. We must, however, never stop playing those wonderful **Faron Young** songs. We must get Faron elected to the Country Music Hall of Fame. What a great entertainer.

BOXING IN HILLBILLYDOM

Nashville has a new arena, so boxing promoter **Don King** welcomed himself to town. First he hung with **Hank Williams Jr.** and talked about Hank singing before all his boxing matches. Second, Don went on the tube ranting about **Tanya Tucker's** salsa. Next we learn that Don had supper with Tanya at her four-story home. About 3 A.M., after Don departed, a fire was discovered in a bathroom on the fourth floor of Tanya's home. The star got her children out of bed and moved them to safety, and the fire was extinguished, leaving some damage.

Lastly, Don had lunch with **George** and **Nancy Jones** at their home. Nancy laid some Southern fried chicken and other goodies on the promoter. King, with his hair "don't" wild and high, announced that **George Jones** would sing the na-

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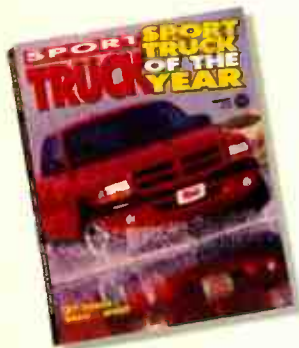
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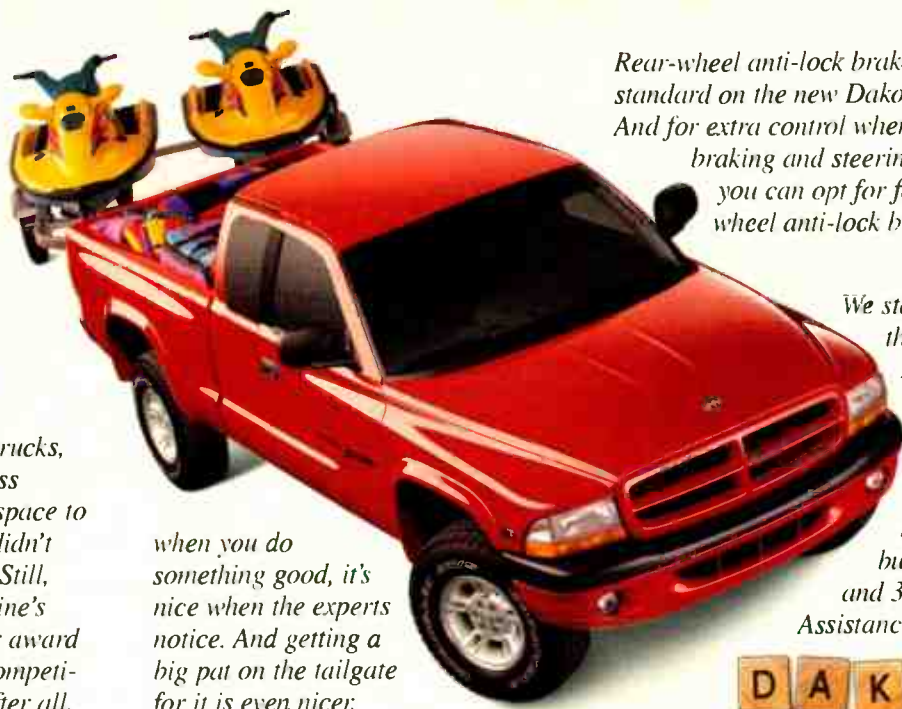


CBS

World Radio History



To those who know Dodge trucks, Dakota's slew of best-in-class designations, from interior space to available towing capacity, didn't exactly come as a surprise. Still, winning Sport Truck magazine's 1997 Sport Truck of the Year award in the face of world-class competition, was very gratifying. After all,



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People

tional anthem at the first boxing match at the brand new arena. Figures, don't it. "Who is the most loved singer in country music?" the promoter, no doubt, asked. Music Row screamed, "The Possum!" So Possum sings.

OPRY TALES

Ford trucks and superstar **Alan Jackson** are paired for 1997 with a 35 million dollar TV package. If I were the maker of Ford trucks, I'd put that assembly line on three shifts, seven days a week. They're gonna need to work that much just to keep up with the trucks the long-legged wonder sells once he gets on the tube. By the way, family man Alan is using his dad in the commercials. I'm so proud he's an Opry star. He and wife **Denise** are expecting their third child come September.

Trying to get the attention of **The Four Guys** so they could sing another song on the Opry, 4-foot 11-inch **Little Jimmy Dickens** said, "I thought I was gonna have to nudge 'em in the knees."

Superstar contender **Trace Adkins** proposed to his fiancée, a surprised **Rhonda Forlaw**, on the Opry stage following his debut performance. Trace arranged the entire surprise for Rhonda, including having her parents and his parents brought into town without her knowing. Sounds like husband material to me.

Opry star **Barbara Mandrell** and hubby **Ken Dudley** have put their dream home, Fontanel, on the market. Asking price, several million dollars. It's a tad small for me, for only 75 can sit at the dining table.

Garth and **Sandy Brooks** were all smiles, offering their congratulations; **Vince Gill** sang "Look at Us" straight from his heart, and **Grandpa Jones** said, "I hope it lasts another 25 years so they can make 50 like me and **Ramona**." The occasion was the renewing of wedding vows for **Little Jimmy** and **Mona Dickens** on their 25th wedding anniversary. The couple wrote the vows themselves and had all those big ole Opry stars bawling or close to tears.

Hank Snow is still ailing.

Skeeter Davis continues chemo.

Connie Smith's Warner Brothers record release is promised in the spring. **Marty Stuart**, who produced the record, tells me it's awesome. Connie is the Rolls Royce of the hillbilly girl singers.

Condolences to **Ricky Skaggs** on the death of his father, **Hobart Skaggs**. Hobart resided in Louisa, Kentucky, where Ricky's mom, **Dorothy**, still resides.

Loretta Lynn's first appearance since the death of her husband **Mooney** was on the Grand Ole Opry. She was welcomed back with open arms and a standing ovation

BOLD BRYAN



Bryan White recently appeared on the CBS-TV soap, *The Bold and the Beautiful*, with singer/songwriter/actress Tamara Walker. She has a recurring role on the soap as the owner of a country bar, *The Canyon Country Club*, where she often gets to show off her own vocal chops. Walker is also a staff songwriter for Nashville's C&P Publishing. Busy lady.

after several months of seclusion at her Hurricane Mills, Tennessee, home. The Hall of Famer says she will fill all the dates that she cancelled last year, and is accepting new dates. The 61-year-old Loretta still sings like an angel.

Opry star **Travis Tritt** will wed in April. **Marty Stuart** got snowed in in Albuquerque. How do I know? 'Cause he called me and told me so. **Stonewall Jackson** celebrated his 40th year as an Opry member.

Opry star **Steve Wariner** was asked by **Jim Ed Norman**, president/Warner Brothers Records, to produce a CD on Opry brother, **Bill Anderson**. Bill is thrilled. Steve is ecstatic, and Jim Ed is smart. Steve also sang at the wedding of baseball great **Nolan Ryan's** son. Sports and songs are a good mix.

Didja hear about Opry darling **Martina McBride** getting locked up inside her bus outside the Opry? She kicked and yelled and screamed, but nobody could hear her. Finally she realized it was time for her to be on stage. So the petite beauty crawled out her bus window and bolted inside the Opry. Brought the house down, too.

Atlanta Braves baseballers **Ryan Klesco** and **Javy Lopez** visited the Opry as guests of **Porter Wagoner**.

Robyn Young, son of **Faron**, performed "Hello Walls" on the Opry and said goodbye to his late father.

The **Patty Loveless** Number One,

"Lonely Too Long," refers to an affair with a buddy. Coming from the old school, the Opry star thought the song was a little risky. But nobody complained.

ON TOUR

Clay Walker's 1997 tour sees him holding a "Fourstar Blowout," packaged together with **Terri Clark**, **James Bonamy** and **David Kersh**. **Mindy McCready** is opening act for **George Strait**. **Bryan White** opens **Vince Gill's** shows. **Reba McEntire** will be coupled with **Brooks & Dunn** as co-stars. **LeAnn Rimes** opens for **Alan Jackson**. **Bryan Kennedy** and **Dan Roberts** will continue to open for **Garth Brooks** through this year.

And me. *Prime Time Country* is threatening to use me as a semi-regular, flapping my mouth about what is going on in the world of country music. I've been out there, and they say they want me back. I'd suggest that all you fans who don't have cable go ahead and get a satellite so you can tune in.

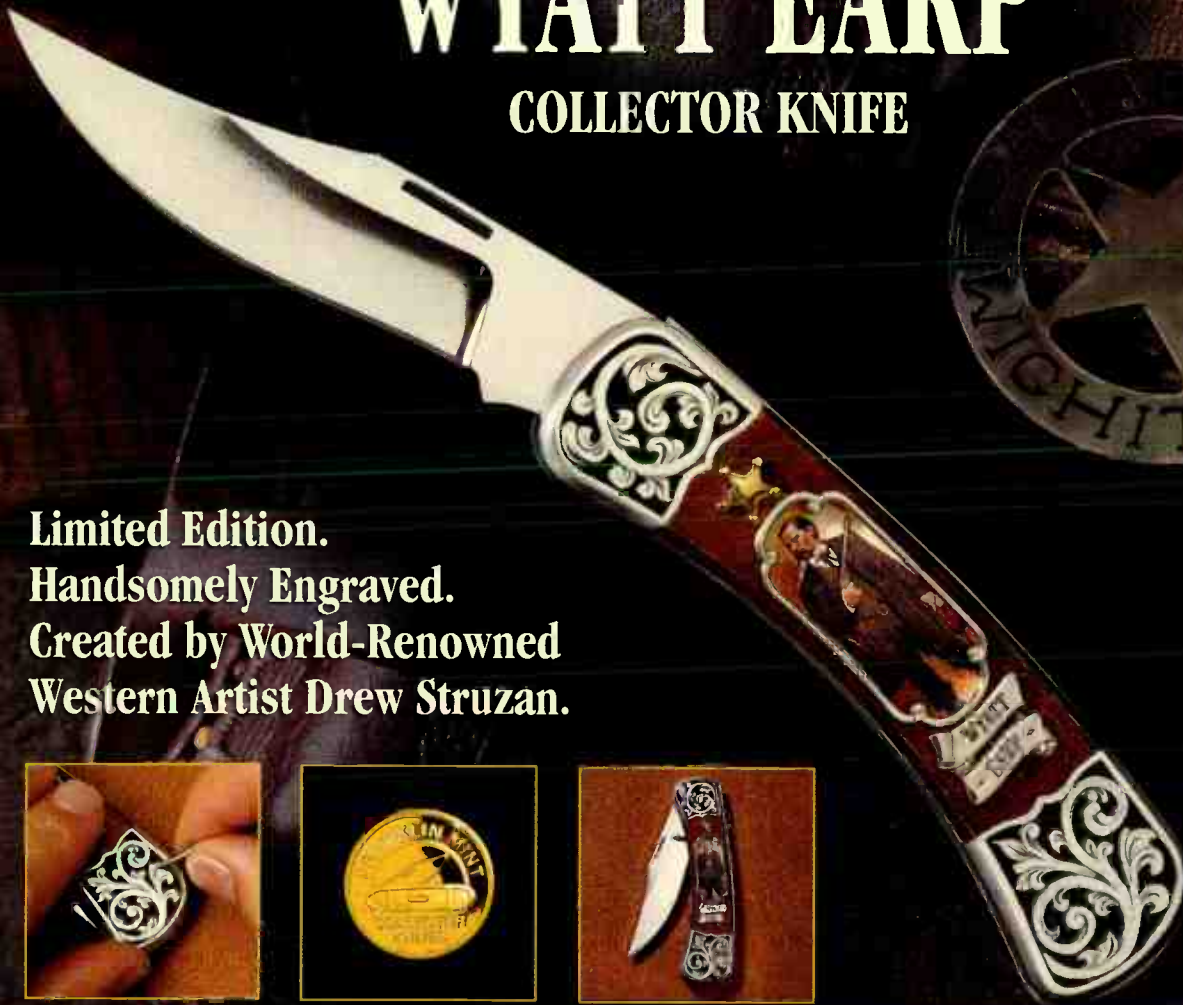
WY SUED

According to a fax from PR Newswire, **Wynonna** is shocked and saddened and denied all charges after farm manager, **Andria M. Surles**, sued her and hubby **Arch Kelley III** in Williamson County Chancery Court for \$800,000. Surles, fired in May



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People

1996, accuses Judd in the suit of making comments such as "she had a cute butt," and further claims that the star asked that she massage her buttocks in her bedroom. The plaintiff said Kelley made sexually explicit and suggestive comments to her. Surles claimed that Kelley described himself in 1995 as "being physically well endowed." Lastly, Surles charged that she received lower salary than the previous male farm manager. She is asking for a jury trial. According to the aforementioned newsmag, Wynonna's lawyers are in the process of filing counter charges against Surles, whose claims are "completely without merit."

YES, JO DEE

Applaud **Jo Dee Messina**. The Curb Records newcomer, of "Heads Carolina, Tails California" fame, took time off to read to the fourth grade kids at Mt. Juliet Elementary. We always praise singers who read to children and praise sponsors of country music stars.

MANDRELL HEART CENTER

The heart center at Baptist Hospital has been renamed Mandrell Heart Center after the entertainment family. **Irby** and **Mary Mandrell** and their three daughters, **Barbara**, **Louise** and **Irlene**, began their association with the hospital 22 years ago when Irby had open heart surgery. Barbara and Irlene's children were born there, and it was Baptist that took care of Barbara after her near-fatal accident in



Baptist Hospital's Heart Center is named after the Mandrell clan. Left to right, the proud family—Barbara, Irlene, dad Irby, mom Mary and Louise.

1984. Daddy Irby said, "I have three beautiful daughters, but I have no son to carry on the Mandrell name. I feel so honored that they're going to name something at the hospital 'Mandrell' to carry on the family name after I am gone."

DWIGHT

Sling Blade is a movie all warm-blooded women will want to see. In it, singer/songwriter turned actor, **Dwight Yoakam**, has what is described as his "most impressive film role" by *The Hollywood Reporter*. Marvelous **Emmylou Harris** and a bunch of actors showed up at the pre-

miere and attended his concert that followed at Billboard Live. I've known for years that Dwight had the most impressive tight pants. And sings a mighty impressive song, too.

WONDERS NEVER CEASE

When **Toni Braxton** listens to her car radio, all she listens to is country music. Her favorite? **Brooks & Dunn**. Matter of fact, Braxton has expressed a desire to record with the duo. Both Brooks and Dunn are still in awe of "stars." Appearing in Los Angeles, they were waiting to perform when **Englebert Humperdinck** walked by, patted them on their backs and said, "Love your music, guys." To say Ronnie and Kix fairly flipped out is putting it lightly. Agape and in shock is the real truth. Even the Entertainer of the Year award has not convinced them that they are stars. Not yet.

DEANA CARTER STUFF

Deana Carter's debut album, *Did I Shave My Legs for This*, is colored platinum, with a million copies sold. "Strawberry Wine," her debut single, was Grammy nominated. She shaved **Gary Chapman's** legs on *Prime Time Country* on TNN. She has appeared on both *The Tonight Show* with **Jay Leno** and *Late Night with David Letterman*. She's hit all the media, and most importantly, she is referred to as Deana (pronounced Dean-a), a one-name girl like **Dolly**, **Reba**, **Shania**, **Loretta**, **Tanya**, **Martina**, **Tammy**, **Wynonna**, **Kitty** and the list goes on. What's more, the Wal-Mart folks will be working with the star in 1997.



"Gold in Six Weeks" proclaimed the sign, and platinum almost as quickly. Deana Carter, center, with members of Capitol-Nashville's Sales Department **Hank Tovar**, **Sheri Kennedy**, **Bill Kennedy**, **John Cooper** and **John Rose**, celebrate her album's success.

People

GO SEE MICHAEL

It's okay if you go see the movie *Michael*. See, **Margie Hunt**, who does the song placing in movies over at Sony, made me aware that Sony/Nashville has five pieces of music in the film, four by **Chet Atkins** and friends, and one by **Willie Nelson**. Starring **John Travolta**, **Andie McDowell** and country music. See you there.

CHET'S THE BEST

Every Monday for quite a spell, the great **Chet Atkins** took the stage at the trendy Caffe Milano on 3rd Avenue and inspired one and all. First, longtime friend and fan **Mark Knopfler** of **Dire Straits** stopped by to take in the show. Another time, local resident, rocker **Peter Frampton**, was invited to pick a few by Chet. Arriving all dry-mouthed and shaky, Frampton said he really got the jitters when he heard Chet casually mention that **James Burton** was dropping by. 'Course all you readers are smart enough to know that Burton played guitar with **Elvis** and a bevy of others famed and near-famed. Frampton swears every time he remembers the picking he still gets a smile on his face that just stays plastered there like the one he had on stage that night. It happens every time pop goes country.

BRC

Ever so humble, **Billy Ray Cyrus** showed up to serve on jury duty at Williamson County Courthouse in Franklin near where he lives. The female employees went ballistic whispering about BRC's cuteness. One clerk was heard to say that he was easy on the eyes. Ever ready to do his civic duty, BRC remained nice and quiet in spite of the whispers.

Russell, Kentucky, loves Billy Ray. He showed up with a \$40,000 check that was distributed by his dad to different charities in the city. Billy Ray and **Vince Gill** do more for charity than anybody on earth. I hope you fans will continue to support these deserving artists for all they do to help those who cannot help themselves.

LUCKY ANDY

That lucky **Andy Griffith** came to Music Town, recorded a gospel album that's been certified Gold and nearing platinum, and now the album, *I Love to Tell the Story—25 Favorite Hymns*, is nominated for a Grammy. He does all those Shoney's commercials besides that. Andy probably has as much money as **Eddy Arnold**.



At one of Chet Atkins' Caffe Milano performances, Mark Knopfler sat in for a couple of tunes. Picking doesn't get much better than this.

TWO ASCAP PARTIES TO MENTION

Written by **Bill** and **Sharon Rice** and **Mike Lawler**, "Lonely Too Long" was a chart topping Number One by the lovely **Patty Loveless**. Wearing a three-quarter-length rust coat with black leggings, Patty looked every inch the star at the event held at ASCAP. Her friend since she was 14, **Porter Wagoner**, attended wearing jeans as old as the girl by his side.

We don't mention pop stuff too much, but since Nashvillians and friends of mine penned the song, "Change the World,"

which has reached the top of every chart worldwide, we will talk about it. Penned by **Gordon Kennedy**, **Wayne Kirkpatrick** and **Tommy Sims**, the song, first recorded by **Wynonna**, was pitched by Sims to **Eric Clapton**, who recorded the hit. "Change the World" changed the lifestyle of three lucky men on Music Row and made some happy wives and children.

PEACE IN THE VALLEY

Until a few years back when some people on Music Row got so blooming smart,



Celebrating the success of "Change the World" at ASCAP are business folks **Shelby Kennedy**, **Doug Howard**, **Connie Bradley** and **Tim Wiperman**, and co-writers **Gordon Kennedy**, **Wayne Kirkpatrick**, **Tommy Sims** (with his two children, **Sierra** and **Skyler**) and **Brown Bannister**. A world-class song for sure.

People

country recordings would almost always include a gospel or message song. Not something that was judgmental, just something peaceful and easy. People who love country music love gospel songs as well. That smart **Tim DuBois** over at Arista has come up with the sweetest record titled *Peace in the Valley* by his marvelous roster: Cream of country **Alan Jackson, Diamond Rio, BR5-49, Pam Tillis, Blackhawk, Brooks & Dunn, Lee Roy Parnell, Tammy Graham, Rodney Foster, Michelle Wright, Brett James** and **Steve Wariner** lend their voices to the songs of love. I do highly recommend this package.

TOWNES MADE IT RHYME

"You look so bright," **Townes Van Zandt** would say. So I hung the black back in the closet and chose the red instead. Townes would like "bright" at his funeral.

Let me tell you a Townes story. Max's Kansas City in the Big Apple was the trendy entertainment scene in the early 70's. I was there for **Kinky Friedman's** debut performance. Best I remember, I must have been four or 14 at the time. Just months off a Caswell County, North Carolina, dirt road, and I'm eyeballing an Amazon dressed in silver metallic clothing complete with helmet-shaped head-dress and a six-inch Roman cross on top, surrounded by adorers whose faces were painted blue, green and flowery. It was the late **Divine**, the famous transvestite who was an underground actor. Non-drinker I, I reached for **Tompall Glaser's**

AFTER BREAKFAST WITH GARTH



When **Garth Brooks** appeared on the Fox Network's morning TV show, *After Breakfast*, he met pop-R&B legend **Gladys Knight**. Knight was guest host of the show that week and says she's a big Garth fan. That Garth's a pip.

CHART-TOPPING TY



It's another Number One for Epic's **Ty Herndon**, whose "Living in a Moment" single—the title track to his latest album—raced to the top. The song was written by **Pat Bunch** and **Doug Johnson** (also Ty's producer and an Epic VP). Celebrating are **Sony Music exec Allen Butler, Herndon, Bunch** and **Johnson**.

Jack Daniels and **Coke** and took a sip. It just seemed to be the thing to do.

Max's had three floors. The third floor was a mini concert hall that held maybe 100. On that night, with **Kinky's** entourage of paparazzi, friends and non-paying customers, there weren't many seats for paying fans. A short, chubby singer/songwriter/piano player opened the soldout show. Later when he became a star, I realized it was **Billy Joel**.

Mellow and marvelous, the late **Steve Goodman** hung with us all day, riding in the label-rented limo, going to eat and joy riding all over New York City. That night, albino bluesman **Johnny Winter** showed up and sang a couple of **Hank Williams** songs at **Kinky's** request. **Townes Van Zandt**, like me, was along for the ride. Between shows, Townes got sick. Everybody bolted. Wearing a "bright" outfit, complete with heels and nylons, I cleaned him up and got him some coffee. Townes had a good memory. He never forgot.

At 52 he died. His dearest friend, **Guy Clark**, was with him, as was his family. Townes had returned home to Mt. Juliet from the hospital after having a broken hip repaired and had a massive heart attack in his bed. User and abuser, troubadour and teacher, saint and sinner, preacher and poet, singer and smoker, comic and cynic, wild and wise. A caricature of his own verse.

Famous friends/fans who remembered Townes during that Sunday afternoon service, singing his songs and telling his stories, were **Steve Earle, Emmylou Harris, Rodney Crowell, Lyle Lovett, Nanci Griffith** and **Guy** and **Susanna Clark**. It was **Susanna's** eulogy that best depicted the late poet's wit. "When I'd talk with him about drinking too much," she said, "Townes reply was always, 'People are sober in India.'"

"If I Needed You" and "Pancho & Lefty" were **Van Zandt's** most "commercial" tunes. Poets' poets and songwriters' songwriters say he had better songs. I tend to agree.

GRANDPA AND SAM IN KENTUCKY

Grandpa Jones accompanied his friend, **Sam Lovullo**, to Hopkinsville, Kentucky, to the mall where Sam autographed his marvelous book of memoirs, *Life in the Kornfield: My 25 Years at Hee Haw*. **Grandpa** joined the original *Hee Haw* cast in 1969. Sam was the show's producer. It's a shame there aren't new shows being done right now. *Hee Haw* was country slapstick at its best. More, more, more. We need more comedy entertainment. **Grandpa** has been **Grandpa** for 61 years, and he's 83. His wife of 50 years, **Ramona**, calls her husband **Grandpa**, just like everybody else in the world.



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Record Reviews

Reba McEntire
What If It's You
MCA 11500

In the past few years, Reba McEntire has become country music's most high-profile over-achiever.

No longer content to just sing and tour and leave the business side of things to someone else, she's fashioned her own little empire. Starstruck Entertainment, her multi-faceted company, handles management (her own, as well as that of other artists), song publishing, publicity and other facets of the modern music industry. Recently McEntire even built her own Music Row office building, which includes an in-house recording studio.

McEntire's music in recent years has also reflected an ambitious, bigger-is-better philosophy. Her last few albums have tended to be glossy and sophisticated efforts—far cries from the Oklahoma honky tonk rootsiness of her early records. All in all, they've sounded less like personal statements than self-conscious vehicles for expanding her huge country following while also winning over a few Michael Bolton and Madonna fans.

Judging from the credits on *What If It's You*, her 18th album, McEntire exerted more control than ever before. She co-produced it in her own Starstruck Studios and used her own road band to back her on ten songs, more than half of which are also published by Starstruck. McEntire uses this control tastefully and effectively: The new album in many ways charts a bold and refreshing course for her and makes a conscious stab at regaining some of the innocence and straightforwardness she'd lost along the way.



In the official press release accompanying *What If It's You*, McEntire even comes awfully close to disparaging *Starting Over*, her last album ("so heavy with instrumentation, so thick with production"). She brings this up to emphasize that she tried to head in the opposite direction on *What If It's You*. And on almost every track she has.

The key ingredient to this difference is the presence of her band. Eschewing the usual high-gloss layers of overdubs, they've instead stuck with a rawer, more nuts & bolts "live" sound—almost as if these songs were taped right off the board at one of McEntire's concerts.

Best of all, the scaled-down, no-frills arrangements give McEntire all the space she needs to really relax and pour her passion into her singing and embellish the lyrics with delicious dollops of her natural Oklahoma twang.

McEntire's "insider" approach to picking material

doesn't seem to have hurt either—and she didn't hesitate to go outside her own company for fine songs like the soul-searching title tune (co-written by Robert Ellis Orrall and Cathy Majeski); the heart-wrenching "Close to Crazy" (by Jerry Salley and the great Melba Montgomery); and "State of Grace" (Trey Bruce and Lisa Drew), a poignant tale about a middle-aged woman's sudden "awakening" after 13 years of punching the time clock at the local Wal-Mart.

Three other stand-out songs were written or co-written by Starstruck staff writer Sunny Russ: "She's Callin' It Love," "Just Looking for Him" and "How Was I to Know" (which shatters the old "can't-live-without-him" myth to pieces). These three have a lot in common with yet another fine selection: Walt Aldridge's and Bruce Miller's "The Fear of Being Alone." From much different perspectives, all four songs take a mature, cautionary look at the perils of letting

rash intimacy and/or bad love fill the void of loneliness and rejection.

I'm sure it's no coincidence that, along with a devil-may-care number like "I'd Rather Ride Around with You" (Mark D. Sanders and Tim Nichols) or the aching "It Don't Matter" (Tommy Lee James' tale of a married couple who fulfill all their material dreams at the cost of love and passion), McEntire has gravitated toward songs that do send at least a little bit of a message.

In an era in which country radio seems to be doing everything in its power to encourage superfluous ditties and dance tunes, this sort of thematic maturity is every bit as refreshing as the back-to-the-basics musical rejuvenation McEntire has undertaken on *What If It's You*.

—BOB ALLEN

Jimmie Dale Gilmore
Braver Newer World
Elektra 61836

In the last issue, a reader took me to task for panning two of his favorites. No big deal. That's been going on since I started here over 20 years ago. We have our say in this section, the readers on the Letters page. One particular line in that letter stuck with me. "Apparently, reviewers are looking for something much more substantial in music than the average fan." It stuck with me because it captured what, at least for me and I suspect for a few of my colleagues, is exactly the approach we use: looking for music we think has enduring quality, not just some star of the month who'll be forgotten in a couple of months.

Face it: If what we like was what sold, Jimmie Dale

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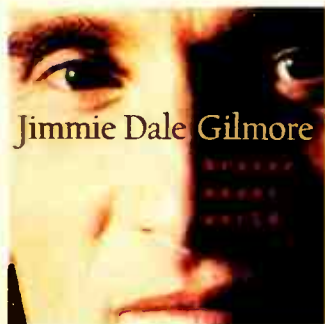


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Record Reviews



Jimmie Dale Gilmore

Gilmore would be into his umpteenth quadruple platinum record. Critics have always loved him, Americana radio, too. Forget mainstream radio, where market share matters more than music. Perhaps it's just as well. Gilmore's Texas soul, which first emerged when he, Joe Ely and Butch Hancock sang together in The Flatlanders a quarter-century ago, remains as unhomogenized now as when he was recording for small labels, and it's to Elektra's credit that since he signed with them, they've made no effort to interfere with that.

These eleven songs take a detour from Gilmore's previous work. Far heavier on atmosphere, the album expertly conjures up the wide, unending West Texas plains that spawned Gilmore. T-Bone Burnett's production and the work of a group of gifted musicians like veteran rock drummer Jim Keltner and steel guitarist Greg Leisz are expertly wrapped around Gilmore's distinct voice, with its echoes of everyone from Jimmie Rodgers to Slim Whitman. These delicate arrangements leave a lot of space around Gilmore's vocals, in keeping with the album's direction.

In the notes, Gilmore invokes the spirit of his hero Roy Orbison, and he's succeeded admirably in capturing that feel. Orbison's best work, "Only the Lonely" and "Running Scared," always had a smoldering undercurrent, and something very much like that pervades this record.

The songs have an air of Texas mysticism floating through them, beginning with

"Braver Newer World" and carrying through the vividly constructed Al Strehli number, "Come Fly Away." The mini-drama of "Border Land" has the same sort of feel as a classic modern Southwestern film drama like *Red Rock West*.

Two love ballads, "Headed for a Fall" and Strehli's "Sally," are balanced by Gilmore's own rhythmic, Tejano-flavored "There She Goes" and Sam Phillips' "Where Is Love Now." Note: for those unaware, this Sam Phillips is a female contemporary pop singer-songwriter, not the founder of Sun Records. Phillips wrote this song specifically for Gilmore, and it's stunningly produced by Burnett with some outstanding work by Greg Leisz on pedal steel. Amid all these gems is a startlingly effective adaptation of Texas blues great Blind Lemon Jefferson's "Black Snake Moan." A blues standard for decades, it emphasizes Gilmore's rootsier side with an arrangement inspired by veteran folksinger Ramblin' Jack Elliott's interpretation. Going far back in his own past, Gilmore revives Joe Ely's "Because of the Wind," a Flatlanders favorite. His familiarity with the tune is obvious, the arrangement giving it an aura of time standing still. Gilmore's own rocking "Outside the Line," a jarring blast of Texas rock 'n' roll, closes the album.

Gilmore's *Spinning Around the Sun* was a triumph musically, not just because so many in Nashville had wrongly dismissed him as too cerebral and not catchy enough for the mainstream. That album forced Nashville to acknowledge Gilmore on his terms, even though he never sought nor needed their support. No doubt, this very different record won't get Gilmore any CMA awards, but it will add to his growing—and breathtaking—body of work. Music of this level of quality is exactly the kind of excellence I'm looking for, and I make no apologies for it. —RICH KIENZLE

Iris DeMent

The Way I Should
Warner Brothers 946188

I don't know, but if I think if I had my way, I'd see that Iris DeMent was declared a national treasure of some kind. With each album, she becomes an even more vital, thrilling and timely presence on the American musical scene.

It's not just DeMent's raw, arresting, at times almost primitive, gospel-influenced songwriting, singing and piano-playing that sets her apart. It's the unflinching honesty and courage of conviction she brings to her often biting social observations. She has a way of telling us things about ourselves, and about herself, that we need to know, but don't necessarily want to hear.

Along with the usual thanks to her producer Randy Scruggs, the musicians and her husband Elmer (with whom she co-wrote two of these 11 powerful original songs), DeMent also offers a caveat of sorts in the liner notes she's written to *The Way I Should*, her third album. In them she notes: "Some of what I've said will make some people mad. It might even make some people hate me. I don't like the idea of being hated, and I've lost a little sleep lately thinking about it, but if I hid the truth about how I think and feel in order to be liked, I would hate myself, and I like that idea even less."

You immediately know what DeMent is talking about when you listen to a scathing, impassioned commentary like "Wasteland of the Free." She comes on like a rare combination of 1940's Woody Guthrie and early 60's Bob Dylan in her condemnations of everyone from hate-mongering televangelists and CEO's who make 200 times the wages of their assembly line workers while fighting the minimum wage tooth & nail, to the parents of Calvin Klein-clad chil-



dren who can't pass a sixth grade written test but can tell you "the name of every crotch on MTV." And, she concludes: *While we sit here gloating in our greatness/Justice is sinking to the bottom of the sea/It feels like I'm livin' in the wasteland of the free.*

In "Letter to Mom" (which, DeMent emphasizes in her liner notes, is *not* drawn from actual experience) she tackles the issue of child sexual abuse head on, with a harrowing first-hand confessional. In "Quality Time" she points her finely-sharpened barbs at a generation of upwardly mobile, self-absorbed over-achievers who find the notion of spending time with their own children so rare and novel that they've even had to come up with a special name for it: *There's a whole lot of people who can't make ends meet/And on the wages that they're earning, I know a family can't eat/ But I'm talking 'bout people who would sell their kid's soul/ To keep up with the Joneses no matter what the toll.*

"There's a Wall in Washington," DeMent's reflection on the immense sense of loss still lingering two and a half decades after Vietnam, has an incredible eeriness to it—it captures the numbness of someone struggling to come to grips with the meaning of their father's name etched in "cold black granite." DeMent's voice drops into an eerie, meandering plaint that breathes in and out of the hypnotic, Brian Enolike atmospherics provided by Chuck Leavell's piano, Tammy Rogers' viola, Stuart Smith's and Randy Scruggs' guitars and John Jennings' ebo elec-

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Record Reviews

tric. With the brilliant assistance of this vintage musical support team (rounded out by Harry Stinson on drums, Dave Pomeroy on bass, Lonnie Mack on occasional electric guitar, and a number of notables, including Russ Taft, Bekka Bramlett and Billy Burnette on harmony vocals), DeMent lightens things up now and again by delving into rich honky tonk, country-swing and straight country balladry on lovely songs like "I'll Take My Sorrow Straight" (co-written with her husband Elmer McCall) and "This Kind of Happy" (co-written with Merle Haggard). "Trouble" (also co-written with Elmer), is a rollicking, full-tilt blues duet with Delbert McClinton.

Judging from your letters, some of you devoted readers of *CMM* have occasionally—and perhaps justifiably—grown tired of my constant carping, bitching, pissing and moaning about all the things that are superficial, contrived and just plain wrong with today's country mainstream.

Well, for a change, I'm happy to get to tell you about something that's very right about it. And I can tell you in two words: Iris DeMent.

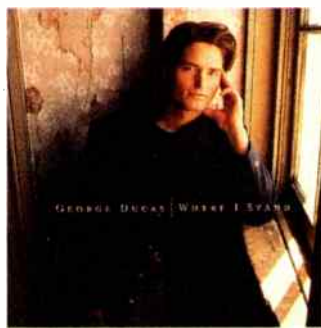
—BOB ALLEN

George Ducas

Where I Stand

Capitol Nashville 35463

Notice two things on this record. On the front cover, Ducas stares out from a sitting position. On the rear cover, he sits, holding—not wearing—a hat, no butt-end photography or goo-goo eyes coaxed out of him for the ladies. Ducas' first record didn't break him out, but the very fact he has Richard Bennett still producing him bodes well. Bennett is one of the very few who, over the past decade, has made an art of ignoring Music Row's now-fading hit formulas when they were still new and successful. He's the perfect producer to



bring out Ducas' blend of honky tonk, country and rock influences (before The Eagles, thank God).

The opener, "Every Time She Passes By," is both catchy and well-constructed. "Long Trail of Tears," written by Ducas and Michael Heeney, and "You Could've Fooled Me" both have the harmonic elements of a Beatle number mixed with a West Texas feel similar to that of Roy Orbison, who seems to be everyone's role model nowadays. The Ducas-Heeney ballad, "You're My Everything," also explores that side of the singer. Oddly enough, the album's blandest performance is the Ducas-Kostas "Heartaches and Dreams," a song that pales next to any of the other songs in this vein.

Buddy and Julie Miller's dancehall shuffle, "I'm Pretending," aptly demonstrates Ducas' ability to handle a straight, traditional sound without put-on or camping it up. Chuck Berry and Buddy Holly echoes pervade "Tricky Moon," a delightful tune penned by Ducas and Tia Sellers, enhanced by cheesy combo organ in the proud Texas tradition of Augie Meyers. "The Invisible Man," penned by Ducas and Heeney, may be Ducas' finest traditional performance of all, an agonizingly raw ballad that George Jones should grab (quickly) for his next album. Unfortunately the album ends with somewhat of a whimper: "I'd Be Lying," a generic ballad, is the only song Ducas didn't have a hand in writing and can only qualify as filler.

As things stand in Nashville

right now, it's tough to tell what the future will bring. Preliminary indicators are the Christmas rush for all record sales was underwhelming. Whether or not Ducas breaks out with this album as he deserves to, or whether he'll have to wait, I hope that he continues working with Bennett. Someone's going to have to be at the forefront of bringing us out of the current wilderness. Judging from the potential here, he might be one of those who could.

—RICH KIENZLE

Sylvia

The Real Story

Red Pony SH796CD

I have to admit, there aren't many of the pop-country flashes in the pan from the early 80's that I cared to ever hear from again. Not being a Branson kind of guy, I was surprised to cross paths with Sylvia, the perky maven of "Nobody" fame. She was at the Kerrville Folk Festival this past year. She was performing new material at the smallish Threadgill Theatre, out in the dusty thick of the hill country campgrounds, accompanied by former Kathy Mattea acoustic guitarist John Mock. She was actually pretty good.

There on the hot edge of a summer evening, the Texas air redolent with mixing scents of camp stove cuisine, perspiration and patchouli oil, I discovered the post-Urban Cowboy-era Sylvia had become Sylvia Hutton. Whereas she had always been a creature of her producer's prodigiously commercial publishing interests, she has now long been out of the spotlight and on her own. Occasionally, I'd hear that she was doing a show of children's material at Nashville's Bluebird Cafe, but there was nothing to make me think she was going to grow artistically into anything more than a sugared anomaly, a fresh-faced helium balloon whose career had

floated away over the hill before she even reached 30. I stand corrected.

Sylvia is still possessed with an easy likability and an identifiable voice, but no longer is she spinning out cotton candy for pre-teen girls. To begin with, the music is mostly acoustic, and more or less folksy. She's proffering a fine, fairly meaty portion of romantic poetics and earthy, upbeat lyrics that have an edge that



only normal life in the real world can impart. Interestingly, Sylvia wrote many of these herself with such thoughtful Nashville hitsters as Craig Bickhardt, Verlon Thompson and Kent Robbins.

Part of "the real story" on Sylvia Hutton has come out in dribs and drabs lately, although it is only hinted at in these songs. She was subjected to serious abuse growing up, and left with little identity outside that damning experience. This explains her living in fantasies of stardom, as opposed to actually engaging in serious performance, before coming to Nashville. There was a too-young, too-scared kid behind all those "Drifter," "Nobody" and "Snap Shot" hits. There is a slightly less-vulnerable, still-beautiful young woman before us now, evincing a hard-won inner strength, seeking emotional depth in the context of 90's family values acoustic country-folk music.

She's more in the Mattea/Cheryl Wheeler vein here than I'd ever have suspected of a woman I used to consider the Barbara Mandrell of her generation (she even opens the album with a Wheeler tune,

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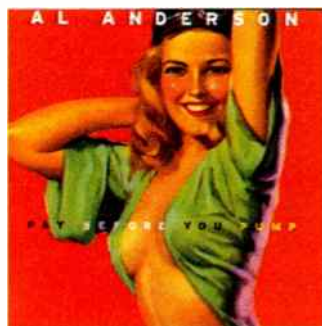
"Soon As I Find My Voice"). My favorites were the haunting story in "Thank God I'm Coming Home," and a savvy portrait of a haggard ranch hand in "Even a Cowboy Can Dream" that took me completely by surprise. "(I Love You) More Than It Has Ever Rained" is one of those artsy tunes that changes tempos over and over for dramatic effect, and doesn't resolve melodically in the end—a sign of art over commerciality. But one imagines the romance in her lyric could easily have been turned toward a commercial comeback if that's what she had wanted. I was impressed that she seems determined to reinvent herself from substance, not just recapture faded fame. Good job, Ms. Hutton. —BOB MILLARD

Al Anderson

Pay Before You Pump
Imprint IMPCD 10004

Anyone who ever saw the band NRBQ during their glory years in the 70's and 80's will remember there always came a moment in the middle of a song when mop-top bandleader Terry Adams would shout, "C'mon, Big Al!" and Al Anderson would let rip a rockabilly guitar solo to straighten every hair on your neck. He supplied the hillbilly flavors in the group's heady mix of blues, country, jazz, Tin Pan Alley and rock 'n' roll. When NRBQ sang vocals on Carlene Carter's breakthrough country album, 1993's *Little Love Letters*, it was Anderson who got together with Carter and co-wrote the album's biggest hit, "Every Little Thing." That success convinced him to quit "the world's greatest bar band," hit the road with Carter and then devote himself to the Nashville co-writing game, eventually scoring hits with Hal Ketchum and Lari White.

Pay Before You Pump is Anderson's third solo album, but only his first since leaving



NRBQ. It was co-written with Music Row songwriters; it was cut in Nashville with Nashville session musicians and features Anderson's own versions of the songs he wrote for Aaron Tippin and Shenandoah. For all that, however, it's a country-rock effort with an emphasis on the rock. He does the 13 songs with the sort of stomping beat, growling vocals and twangy riffs that he brought to his own compositions on the NRBQ recordings. It's no wonder that his songs have been so popular with such rough-edged country stars as Jerry Lee Lewis, Charlie Daniels and The Mavericks.

When he remakes his song for Shenandoah, "Lonely Too Long," he allows distortion to creep into his guitar riff, encourages Chad Cromwell to really smack the drums and invites Delbert McClinton to blow bluesy harmonica. The song's country roots are still there, but you're unlikely to hear anything this raucous on country radio. By contrast, Anderson's version of "Without Your Love" is even more quiet and understated than Tippin's, but when Anderson sings, "Danced with the devil in a bottle of whiskey," there's a stark terror in his husky whisper that will never find a home on country radio either.

Anderson and Bill Lloyd (of Foster & Lloyd) co-wrote "It Came from the South," a glowing tribute to the blues and hillbilly roots of modern American music and it's delivered in vintage rockabilly style, complete with Glenn Worf's stand-up slap bass. Music Row hitmaker Bob DiPiero co-wrote two songs with

Anderson, and they're the most country-sounding tracks on *Pay Before You Pump*. "Change Is Gonna Do Me Good" (a thinly disguised rewrite of Sam Cooke's "A Change Is Gonna Come") is an old-fashioned gospel hymn stranded halfway between Elvis and Al Green, while "Under the Hood" uses more automobile metaphors than you can count, but where you'd expect a Chuck Berry guitar solo, you hear Tammy Rogers' fiddle breakdown.

Another Music Row fixture, Craig Wiseman, co-wrote five of the album's tracks, including the Shenandoah and Tippin remakes. Wiseman and Anderson co-wrote "Get Gone" around a phrase from Johnny Cash's "Get Rhythm" and Cash's rockabilly clickety-clack train beat, but the song's radio prospects are ruined by a wonderful dirty joke in the second verse. Other tracks—such as "No Place in History," co-written with John Hiatt, and "Bang Bang Bang," sung with Elvis Costello—rock so hard that their connection to country is tenuous at best. Nonetheless, this is a revealing, rewarding look at one of the best songwriters in Nashville today.

—GEOFFREY HIMES

Kathy Mattea

Love Travels
Mercury MNCD 129

Like few other women presently working in country's mainstream, Kathy Mattea never seems to stop searching for the higher ground. Again and again, she seems to gravitate toward songs that are rife with hidden or more universal meaning: songs that introspectively explore life's enduring mysteries, often without suggesting easy outs or answers.

This sort of stylistic soul-searching was enough of a commercial risk the last time Mattea gave into it wholeheartedly, on *Time Passes By*, her 1991 album. At the time,



she was riding the momentum of her back-to-back (1989-1990) Country Music Association Female Vocalist of the Year awards.

But times have changed, and today's charts are dominated by a new wave of leading ladies—like Faith Hill, Trisha Yearwood and Terri Clark—who tend to hew a lot closer to the mainstream and avoid material that drifts too far into folk/new age territory. Admittedly, Mary Chapin Carpenter continues to pull it off, and others like Wynonna and Suzy Bogguss dabble in it. But others who've taken this road, like Nanci Griffith and Cheryl Wheeler, have ultimately had to find audiences elsewhere.

That's why it's an even bigger act of courage and leap of faith for Mattea to come out now with an album like *Love Travels*, her ninth studio album (not counting the inevitable "best hits" and Christmas packages).

A few of the songs on *Love Travels*—tunes like Lionel Cartwright's "If That's What You Call Love" and Tom Kimmel's ponderous "The Bridge"—tend toward the shorter view. That's to say, they fall somewhere within the predictable fall-in-love, break-up, make-up, together-again cycle that's the thematic engine of most great country songs. But just as many take the higher road, exploring dilemmas or epiphanies that are at least partly spiritual rather than purely romantic.

These latter songs tend to be the most memorable. "Sending Me Angels" (written by Jerry Lynn Williams and Frankie Miller) is a high-en-

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ergy, neo-gospel song which melds the rewards of temporal and eternal love. To put it more simply, it talks about finding God's love through the people you love. Matt Rollings' swirling Hammond B-3 and expressive piano give the track special authority.

Other cuts, like the title tune (Bob and Linda Halligan) and "The End of the Line" (Mary Anne Kennedy, Kyle Fleming and Mark Stephen Cawley) are not as overtly spiritual. Yet they also make the case that romantic love is the first transcendent step toward universal love.

Though she's not a songwriter herself, Mattea's finely tuned ear for the unusual has previously drawn her to the work of some of country and folk music's overlooked talents. She was one of the first to turn a Nanci Griffith tune into a hit, and she's recorded with the great Scottish singer/songwriter, Dougie MacLean.

This time she gives much-deserved exposure to a couple more gems. Her rendition of Cheryl Wheeler's "Further and Further Away" is almost as spectacular as Wheeler's original version—and that's saying a lot. "Beautiful Fool" is an absolutely lovely tribute to fallen heroes that didn't get a fair hearing on singer/songwriter Don Henry's brilliant but badly overlooked debut album. Both songs, in very different ways, grapple with the pain of loss without offering any easy remedies.

A few songs are a bit more lighthearted. "Patiently Waiting" (written by Gillian Welch, another rising singer-songwriter) is about the small-town yearning of a young woman who's nearly bursting with longing and high hopes. "455 Rocket" is a tongue-in-cheek, four-barreled highway song that gets some newgrass-flavored overdrive from Jerry Douglas' dobro and Stuart Duncan's mandolin. Jim Lauderdale's "I'm on Your Side" has an edgy provocative-ness that's a mild contrast to

most everything else on here.

But, as often as not, Deep Thoughts rule the day on *Love Travels*. And in an era when flat-brain-wave ditties about Indian outlaws and rockin' little country girls are often the chart-busters of the week, such maturity and thoughtfulness is a welcome change, for sure.

—BOB ALLEN

Hank Cochran and Billy Don Burns

Desperate Men—The Legend and the Outlaw Small Dog-A-Barkin'!
Rounder 40517-07962

With the recent death of Townes Van Zandt, we are sadly reminded that the ragged but right singer-songwriter in the old school mold is an endangered species. With the issuance of this 14-song CD on John Hartford's label by legend Hank Cochran and latterday Outlaw Billy Don Burns, we are cheered to see that they aren't going away quietly.

It's hard to imagine that anyone who has been reading this magazine for long doesn't know who Hank Cochran is, but for the uninitiated, Cochran has been in this game since the 50's and is the writer of such mainstream classics as "Make the World Go Away," "I Fall to Pieces," "She's Got You," "That's All That Matters to Me," "Don't Touch Me," "Little Bitty Tear," "It's Not Love, But It's Not Bad," and, more recently, "Ocean Front Property" and "Miami, My Amy," among others. Burns is a boy from the Arkansas Ozarks and one of those old-fashioned, rugged-individual musicians who lives for his work and writes about his life. Unregenerate neo-Outlaw and Lost Highway romantic, he sings "There's more to writing songs than making rhymes" in "Some Memories Cost a Lot."

This is a celebration of whiskey-drinking, untamed lonesome, "out of control, too close to the edge" folk. It is the soul



of that Austin, Texas, expression that Willie Nelson, Kris Kristofferson, Tompall Glaser and Waylon Jennings popularized, that Townes Van Zandt, Jerry Jeff Walker, Guy Clark, Rodney Crowell, Walter Hyatt, Joe Ely, Butch Hancock and a host of lesser lights took to new further heights, creating it out of their lives, blood and tears.

There remains in a shrinking segment a potent romance of the lone outlaw, the Billy The Kid as celebrated here in "Dead or Alive." "Outlaws at the Cross" is a paean to cowboy church, seeing Jesus as one of us outcasts "riding dead-end streets" and paying the price for being misunderstood, which—along with retreats to Mexico, poignant but necessary cheatin', drinkin', ragged but right outlook—is a key theme of the Outlaw genre. In "Patsy," Cochran pays tribute to Patsy Cline, who cut his "I Fall to Pieces," and it's heartfelt, corny and delivered in his mushy, whiskey-soaked Gabby Hayes voice.

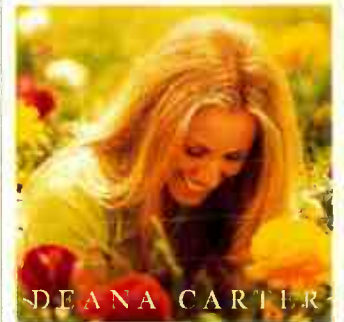
"No Shortage of the Blues" revels in hillbilly life on the road, gun fights breaking out below the bandstand. It is a shining star in a shrinking firmament of the Outlaw culture. This is what was once the cutting edge of country music, and it can still cut a mean swath through the flavor-of-the-month, hat hunks, first-person-positive catalogs any day. You'll never hear this stuff on a big station in a major market, but if you can find the record, you can bathe your ears in some real live 100-percent, 100 proof, outlaw music.

—BOB MILLARD

Deana Carter *Did I Shave My Legs for This?* Capitol 37514

Deana Carter is something of a dark horse. She languished on Capitol Records for several years and worked with various producers (Jimmy Bowen, Chris Farren and John Guess) before finally hitting platinum pay dirt with *Did I Shave My Legs for This*, her second album and her first to be released in the U.S.

Listening to the 11 cuts on *Did I Shave My Legs for This*, it's easy to understand Carter's recent breakout. But



it's also easy to see why it was a little long in coming. Her voice is not powerful as much as it is powerfully understated. Musically, she's not an exuberant, edge-of-the-stage, self-promoting songbird like, say, Shania Twain or Terri Clark. Carter's vocal charm lies in her low-key warmth and vulnerability, delicious Southern-sweetness and understated intimacy—qualities that charm you and quietly win you over without swarming all over you. Think of the twangy, sultry charm of Carlene Carter (no relation as far as I know), without the irreverence and frenzied edge.

This same sense of understated intimacy and unadorned honesty likewise infuses the half-dozen semi-confessional original songs (most of them co-written with Chuck Jones) Carter has included here. It's her style to never let the medium (i.e. her singing and the instrumentals) over-

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shadow the message—whether it's the sad, wistful remembrance of lost romantic innocence in "Before We Ever Heard Goodbye," or the wary, deadly earnestness of "Love Ain't Worth Making." Carter's got a playful, boisterous side, too. It comes through with thrilling twanginess and sensuality on the high-spirited "Is This Love" (co-written by Al Anderson and Craig Wiseman).

To be honest, my bi-focals aren't strong enough to decipher which producers produced which cuts. But all three (yep, even ol' Jimmy Bowen) deserve credit for the understated arrangements that feature Dan Dugmore (steel), Larry Franklin (fiddle) and Brent Rowan (electric guitar).

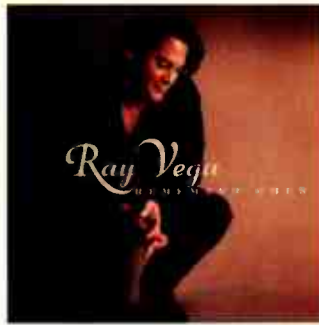
The least satisfying track is the title tune, with its intentional tongue-in-cheek hokeyness. Despite her bona fide country roots, Carter doesn't have much luck copping a hard-country Tammy Wynette pose, even when it's in half-jest. It's a tribute to the strength of Carter's more earnest compositions that they hold their own alongside Stephony Smith's lovely "That's How You Know It's Love" and a pair of gems—the hit, "Strawberry Wine," and "We Danced Anyway"—both co-written by Matraca Berg, one of Nashville's best writers.

There's been a lot of talk in recent months about women becoming the dominant innovators in today's country music. *Did I Shave My Legs for This* is just one more indication as to how true that seems to be. —BOB ALLEN

Ray Vega

Remember When
BNA 66778

Sentimentality rules Music Row these days. Gone are the good ol' boys who grew up on cowboy movies and learned that you only admitted your feelings in the direst of circumstances. In their place are baby hat acts, who grew up on



TV talk shows and believe that you can just turn on the spigot and let the feelings flow. Well, if you're going to pour out your feelings, you might as well do it with the elegant grandeur of a Roy Orbison. That's the lesson learned by Chris Isaak, James House and The Mavericks' Raul Malo, and it's a lesson applied with winning results on Ray Vega's debut album, *Remember When*.

To pull it off, though, you have to have a special voice, one that can climb across octaves without shifting gears and flutter with vibrato even as it's blasting at full throttle. Vega has such a voice, honed during his childhood years at an El Paso church and during his early 20's in The Vega Brothers band. With his brother Robert, Ray Vega wrote "You Don't Know What Love Is," and he begins the song with velvety whisper over a single acoustic guitar. As the band and string section add layer upon layer to the arrangement, Vega's voice gets bigger but never loses its velvet tone. When he finally cries out to a reluctant lover, "You don't know what love is," he holds the word "love" in a long, rolling, quivering wail as if he could make her understand its meaning by sheer lung power.

It often seemed that every other Orbison song title contained the word "Blue" or "Dream," and Vega reflects that tradition by including such titles as "I Can Dream" and "My Blue World." Plus, almost every song has echoes of Orbison in the slow build from guitars to apocalyptic orchestration, in Vega's grand-ole-operatic singing and unabashed

romanticism. These are songs about those moments when you're swept away by passion—whether it's infatuation or heartbreak—and there's no time for half-measures.

The album's title song and first single uses a rocking rhythm and an infectious "nah-nah-nah-nah" melody hook to draw the listener into its story of remembered passion. On "Only Sometimes" Vega pretends he's over his ex-lover, but the shivering ache in his voice whenever he gets to the juicy chorus gives him away. Producers Josh Leo and Mark Bright do a good job of setting the Orbison-like stage for the songs, but it's Vega himself who steps into the arrangements and makes them work with his over-the-top exuberance. —GEOFFREY HIMES

Crystal Bernard *The Girl Next Door* River North 51416 1207

I have no strong bias against Hollywood people coming to Nashville to make a country record—hey, Mary Kay Place was actually pretty good. And the cry "Don't hate me because I'm beautiful" is a fair enough defense, so long as the music isn't outright terrible. But nine times out of ten, these efforts are just expensive custom country sessions. This one, by *Wings* comedic actress Crystal Bernard is something more.

Billy Dean, recently-divorced producer of this tempting effort, was reported to be romantically linked with Ms. Bernard. But that's another story. Taken on its own merits, Ms. Bernard's voice is throaty, breathy, and generally unremarkable, but she can carry a tune real well and on occasion sticks enough feeling in the grooves to sell a song. One never knows what part any artist contributes in a co-writing situation, but the tunes she shares credits on with proven writers Billy Dean and David Rhyne are

right in there along the commercial country vein.

Interestingly, Bernard has made a serious hobby of country singing most of her life. She writes songs as a sort of therapy and has a studio in her house. But other roads were taken long ago. She was acting in the big-time as early as 17, when she had a role in *Happy Days*, and is too big a TV star to be considering doing what it takes to really muscle her way into "the music business." Still, her duet with Dean ("Have We Forgotten What Love Is") is radio worthy. If I got the driving survivor story, "State of Mind" (which she co-wrote), in a plain brown wrapper at a country station, I'd give it some spins. Mac McAnally's "Miracle" is a fascinating, ambivalently sympathetic look at bigamy, a theme you don't hear in the current market. If Ms. Bernard is serious about a country career, "State of Mind" and a few others might actually make some noise.



Her intentions are realistic, though. "I know what everyone thinks," she says. "I'm not oblivious to the fact that every actor that has tried to sing has been unsuccessful. All I can say about that is that I've been doing this for so long for free, never thinking that anybody would listen to my music....I've been doing it for me." Given that, I can recommend *The Girl Next Door* as one of the best TV-star musical vacations I've ever heard. Billy Dean and Crystal Bernard make a great musical team, whatever else might or might not be their case. And hey, don't hate her because she's—well, cute as all get out. —BOB MILLARD

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The Dead Reckoners *Night of Reckoning* Dead Reckoning 0007

Dead Reckoning is not just a small, acclaimed Nashville record company; it's also a touring concert package. When the label's whole roster of Kieran Kane, Kevin Welch, Mike Henderson, Tammy Rogers and Harry Stinson shows up at a nightclub near you, these singer-songwriters don't each just play a set alone, nor do they sit around picking flat tops in a guitar pull. Instead they all jump on stage at once and plug in.

With Kane on mandolin, Welch on acoustic guitar, Henderson on electric guitar, Rogers on fiddle, Stinson on drums, Alison Prestwood on electric bass and Fats Kaplin on accordion, the Dead Reckoners are a real, self-contained band. The five DR songwriters take turns singing one or two of their own tunes, but they stick around to accompany their comrades.

It's just about the perfect country show, for it has its quiet, folkish moments and its loud, rocking numbers. There's constant variety, for every few songs you hear a new voice and personality, and yet there's also consistency because every performer is backed by the same band.

Now a typical Dead Reckoners live show has been documented on the new album, *Night of Reckoning*. Although it was recorded in a Nashville studio for audio-fidelity reasons, it was taped

live without overdubs and is true to the spirit of the club shows.

"I Desire Fire," the first song, shows a previously unrecorded side of Kane, who was once half of The O'Kanes. Normally a neo-traditionalist, Kane leads the way on this hard-driving, bawdy blues-rocker, pushed along by Rogers' fine fiddle work and Henderson's slide guitar.

That's followed by "Crying for Nothing," a hardcore honky tonk ballad featuring songwriter Welch's heartbroken vocal and weepy twin fiddling by Rogers and Kaplin. These openers set the tone for an album which skips back and forth between sharp-edged modernism and ancient roots, nimbly avoiding the wishy-washy middle ground of contemporary country-pop.

Later on in the album, the roles are reversed. Kane revives two old O'Kanes songs, "Rocky Road" and "When We're Gone, Long Gone," and treats them like long-lost Appalachian string-band standards. Welch, on the other hand, comes back with the noisily aggressive country-rock of "Workin' On It" and the half-spoken, half-sung Quentin Tarantino-gone-country narrative of "Waiting for the Assassin."

Henderson unveils two strong blues numbers he co-wrote with Wally Wilson, his old partner in the Nashville band, The Snakes. Stinson, who doesn't have a solo album of his own yet, debuts as a singer-songwriter on the impressive love song, "Always Will," which reminds one of Rodney Crowell.

Rogers also unveils a new song, "Pearl Earrings," whose folkie poetry is reminiscent of Nanci Griffith and Suzanne Vega. The five songwriters are very different from one another, but they manage to find common ground in one of the most exciting artist-run ventures to ever come out of Music City.

—GEOFFREY HIMES



Mike Henderson and The Bluebloods *First Blood* Dead Reckoning 0006

Of all the Dead Reckoning artists, none has the potential to appeal to as wide an audience as singer-guitarist Mike Henderson. Why? His first Dead Reckoning album, *Edge of Night*, released last year, proved him capable of putting across his particular form of country and finding an audience for it.

Also, his deep and uncompromising love for the blues could earn him major inroads into that audience as well as the rockabilly gang, since he's integrated all of these sounds while compromising none of them.

Regardless of the song, Henderson and his band, The Bluebloods—bassist Glenn Worf, pianist Reese Wynans and drummer John Gardner—tackle it with a visceral, unpolished energy unlike any other Nashville band currently on the scene.

This time, most songs are well-known blues numbers, the kind that have become such well-known standards that anyone covering them had better bring some new or different approach to make them their own.

Henderson makes that clear from the opening bars of "When I Get Drunk," carried by his voice and Gardner's piledriver drumming, and falling somewhere between blues and rockabilly.

On the more reflective Sonny Boy Williamson favor-

ite, "So Sad to Be Lonesome," Wynans' simple piano break stands out as much as Henderson's vocal and beautifully articulated guitar work. Two tunes by the late Chicago slide guitar master J.B. Hutto, the boogie-woogie "Hip Shakin' Mama" and his rocking "Give Me Back My Wig," are naturals for Henderson's slash and burn approach.

"Pony Blues" goes back to early Delta blues, and Henderson makes it his own while paying homage to its primitive origins.

As for slower numbers, blues piano legend Otis Spann's "Bloody Murder" and singer-guitarist Freddie King's "When the Welfare Turns Its Back on You" are both sharp and intense.

On the latter song, Henderson plays lead guitar in a single-string style much like King's 1960's technique, which influenced guitarist Eric Clapton, among others.

Howlin' Wolf's "How Many More Years" and a rocked up rendition of Elmore James' "Mean Mistreater" hold the intensity levels.

The sole contemporary number, "Pay Bo Diddley," is a protest song, co-written by the 1950's rock 'n' roll legend himself, about the financial chicanery of Chess Records, the Chicago blues and rock record company in the 1950's who stuck it to more than a few of the rock and blues greats who recorded for them over the years.

Dead Reckoning's indifference to categories or labels has been a revelation, particularly in the face of contrived, overly hyped other projects which were obviously crafted as marketing ploys and not honest music. It makes Henderson, Kieran Kane, Tammy Rogers, Kevin Welch and the other Dead Reckoners seem all the more noble in what they do.

It doesn't matter what the genre. What's in the package is what counts.

—RICH KIENZLE

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Vince Gill

One of The Boys

By all accounts it's a dog's life. You get up in the morning and play some golf. Then you come back and plug in your guitar and spend an hour and a half or so jamming with your buddies, pretending you're The Allman Brothers or Little Feat while they check the sound. Then, after a catered meal, you're paid a whole bunch of money to play your hits for a roomful of adoring fans. Then you climb back on your bus, which is fancier than most people's living rooms. You crack a few jokes with the band, listen to some music and maybe drink a few beers while you roll on down the highway for more golf and more music.

Vince Gill finds it pretty tough to argue with this assessment.

"Yeah, it's pretty neat," he concedes with a sheepish grin as he sinks into a sofa in his dressing room at the Trump Taj Mahal Casino in Atlantic City where he's about to play.

"Obviously, at this point I could not play the road anymore and eat and be okay and all that stuff," adds the Oklahoma-born singer-songwriter-guitarist par excellence who's sold in excess of 11 million albums in the last seven years. "But I love doin' this, ya know. I love goin' on the road and hangin' out with these guys and just bein' part of the band.

"When we're out here, it's not Vince in his suite orderin' room service," Gill assures me, laughing softly and stroking his chin as he keeps an eye on the TV in front of him that's showing a PGA golf tournament. "I've got a bunk on the bus just like every crew guy, and I eat crew meal with them every night. They're my buddies, and I always look forward to comin' out here and playin' music with 'em and tellin' jokes on the bus.

"Shoot!" He laughs and scratches his head. "Sometimes my life feels like a big vacation."

It's late afternoon in Atlantic City. Outside, the boardwalk is packed and the sun is beating down, just like in the song. Across the street on the Steel Pier, seagulls and tourists flock around the slowly revolving Ferris wheel. But the hallways in the windowless backstage area of the casino are dark.

Vince's sound check this afternoon has been pushed back an hour to accommodate his afternoon golf game which ran a little bit overtime.

"It's my passion, this game, ya know," he murmurs as he searches in vain for the remote to turn the TV down, but keeps his eyes glued on the action.

"We played an outdoor festival in Maryland yesterday,

From sound checks
to golf games to
room service or
favors for fans,
Vince has life on
the road down pat.
This star is just a
regular guy who
likes to hang out
with the boys.



By Bob Allen

and I played golf there too," adds the singer, who conveniently lives next to a course in Franklin, Tennessee, with his wife Janis and daughter Jenny. "It's what I spend most of my spare time doin'." Then he adds a little testily, "Ya know, I'd rather be out finding a neat golf course than layin' in my room watching cable."

Tough work, if you can get it. But by his own reckoning, Vince has been juggling his schedule between golf and music for the last 20 years. And in recent years he's gotten it down to—please excuse the awful pun—a tee.

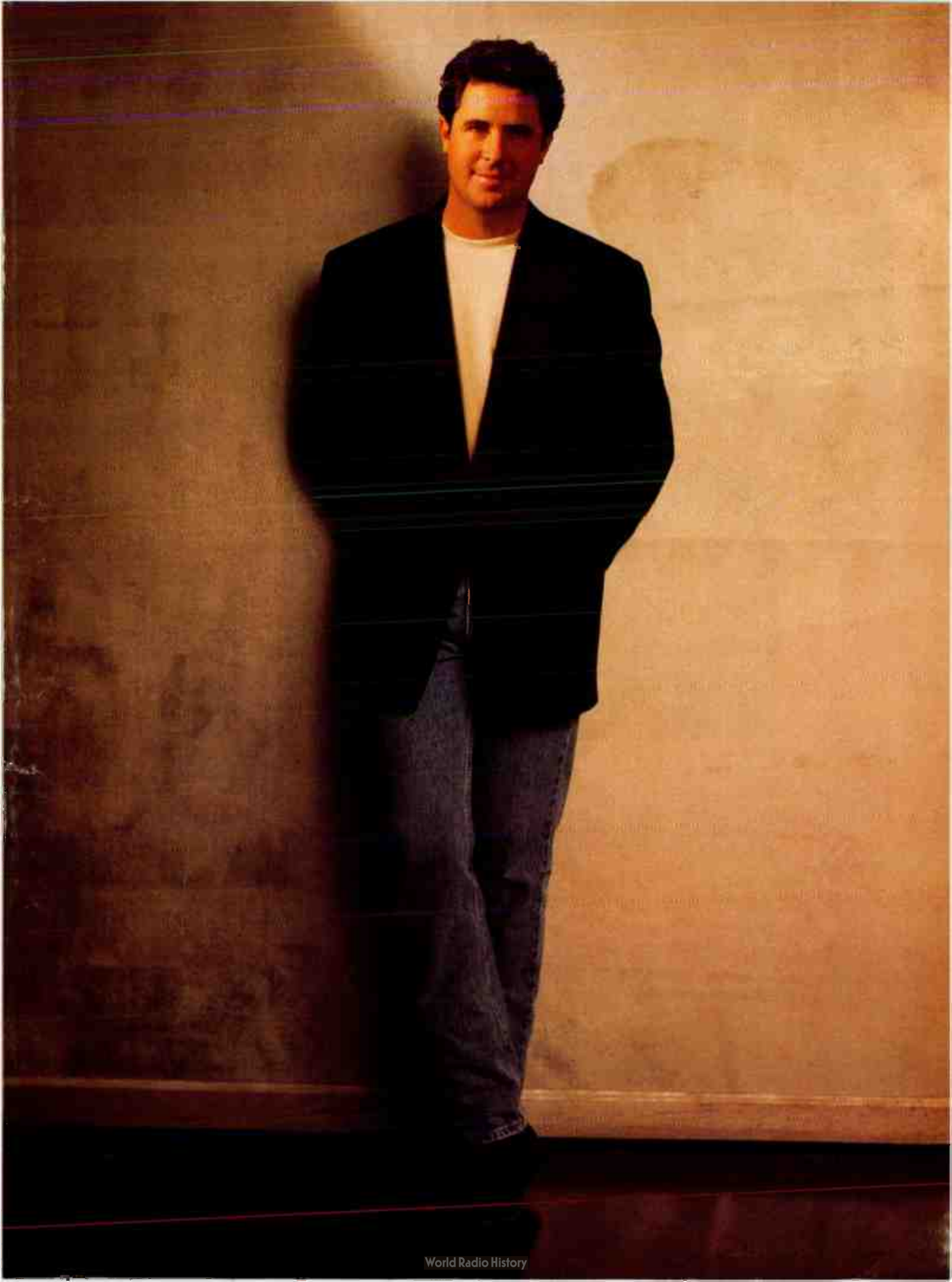
Truth be told, there is some work and actually a whole lot of logistics involved in this picture. Even though this casino showdate is a one-night stand, Gill's 43-man support team, which actually resembles a small army making camp as they assemble a mountain of lights and sound gear, has set up its own traveling command headquarters complete with multiple phone lines, faxes, file cabinets, mobile phones and four or five internet-linked laptops.

Yet there's a sort of resolute informality to it all as Gill lopes into command central, cracking jokes, clowning around and tracking down a room service menu. (He's a little late for crew dinner this afternoon, but one must make sacrifices for one's passions.) He's dressed in a blue golf shirt and shorts and fancy white and tan golf shoes. He looks tanned and fit—a bit like a big Teddy bear, actually. Yet his own weight is the persistent butt of his humor. "Yup, my plate's full these days," he quips,

patting his midriff. "That's why I'm so fat!" At one point, he turns to his road manager, pulls up his shirt, pinches his belly and comically swivels his hips. "I'm gonna do my Shania Twain routine for 'em tonight," he threatens.

Even when Gill steps back into his dressing room to watch a little more televised golf, he leaves the door open for the steady stream of visitors—everyone from acquaintances who've dropped by to say hello to a room service maid with a supply of fresh towels.

The first time I ever interviewed Vince was back in the early 1980's, shortly after he'd arrived in Nashville and inked his first solo label deal. Then, as now, he struck me as a big-hearted, overgrown kid, noteworthy for his utter lack of pretense, his unwillingness to cop an attitude and his hesitation to make any of the sort of lofty statements about his music or his mission in life that superstars are often apt





Performances are informal, sound checks even more so.

"I've always been motivated by the music and playing it well and singing it well, and not as much by the fame, stardom and money."



to make. Even this afternoon, when I press him about some intimate connection between his life experiences and the songs he writes, he scratches his chin, stares at the TV and seems more tongue-tied than hesitant. "Uh, I'm kind of a moron here....It's sometimes really difficult to explain what you do, ya know? It's uncomfortable and it's awkward....It just is what it is...."

Accordingly, in Gill's live shows there's none of the self-absorbed heroic posturing and introspection of, say, a Garth Brooks. There's none of the over-the-Las Vegas-style production values of a Reba extravaganza. Gill doesn't show videos of himself as a backdrop for his dynamite ten-piece band. He doesn't have unisex dancers turning handstands behind him when he sings "One More Last Chance." On this particular evening his stage garb will be a baggy white T-shirt and baggy jeans, and he will—graciously—spare his audience his Shania imitation.

"I've always been motivated by the music and playing it well and singing it well, and not as much by the fame, stardom and money and that kind of stuff," he insists, one eye still on the golf tourney. "My favorite days are still back when I was playin' bluegrass and we'd split the money up behind the stage when we got off. I have a simple lifestyle, and I'm not possessed by acquiring everything I can.

"I don't feel like I have anything to prove," he adds with a shrug. "And I don't feel like I ever have."

Even so, Gill does concede that, after eight Grammys and 17 Country Music Association awards (including the '93 and '94 Entertainer of the Year trophies, five consecutive Best Male Vocalist citations and last year's Song of the Year and Vocal Event of the Year awards), predictability was perhaps becoming an issue. The whispers were even starting to get back to him that his albums were becoming a little too much the same with their familiar mix of heart-wrenching ballads and sweet, guitar-driven country-rockers. It had reached a point with him, as it does with any artist who's been on a long, long roll: How do you stay fresh? How do you keep challenging yourself?

Gill found a way. Last year when he sat down to start writing songs for *High Lonesome*, his 12th career album (including various "hits" packages and a Christmas album) and his seventh for MCA Records, he knew it was time for some subtle changes. Time to add some fresh ingredients to the familiar musical stew. Basically, he set off in search of some new grooves. And he found them, of all places, during his concert sound checks.

"You'll see during sound check today that we don't do that many songs that we do in the show," he points out. "It's a time for everybody in the band to let loose and play and have some fun. A couple of songs on this new record, like 'Down to New Orleans' and 'Tell Me Lover,' are just little grooves I figured out up there during sound check, and I just stuck them aside till I was ready to write songs for the new album.

"Like 'New Orleans,' that's Little Feat and that whole 'Dixie Chicken' groove at its purest," he adds with a grin of satisfaction, referring to one of his all-time favorite rock bands. Pete [Wasner], who wrote that song with me and plays piano in the band, he played with [Little Feat's lead singer and founding member] Lowell George after Lowell left Little Feat. Pete really knows that stuff."

A distinguished guest on *High Lonesome* is Alison Krauss and her band, Union Station. They play on one of two versions of the Gill-penned title tune on which Gill revisits his own bluegrass roots. "I remember the first time I heard Alison sing, and thinking, boy, that's about as pure as a voice can get!" he recalls with a trace of wonder. "Alison's a lot like me—she's about bein' in a band, and I respect her for sticking to her guns. That's why I had her whole band and not just her play on the song. She hasn't had a whole lot of chart success, but she's stuck to her guns."

As billed, the Atlantic City sound check, where the only audience is the sound crew, some people putting up folding chairs and a couple of roadies playing catch in the aisle with a miniature football, is full of surprises. It's kind of like an "alternative" Vinnie concert. He and his big band (which features two drummers and four guitarists, including himself) turn in a rambling, extended version of the rockabilly standard, "That's All Right" (which Vince spices up by sticking out his belly and striking a few "Fat Elvis" poses). They do a fervent electric-gospel rendition of "Cryin' Holy Unto the Lord." Then the usual intermittent sound check cacophony of feedback, random jamming and instrument tunings suddenly coalesces into a radical funk-blues delivery of Hank Williams' "Lonesome Whistle." All the while, Vince lopes around stage in his golf outfit making faces and peeling off one incredible

electric lead guitar riff after another.

Of course anybody who's ever heard Gill unleash that aching, ethereal tenor of his on a near-transcendental ballad like "When I Call Your Name" or "Go Rest High on That Mountain" or "Pretty Little Adriana" from *High Lonesome* knows there's a whole other aspect to his appeal beyond hot guitar licks and his ability to incorporate influences as seemingly remote as Little Feat and Buck Owens.

Vince, at his finest, is the Great Communicator. As a songwriter and singer he often has a pipeline to the sort of deeper, more universal emotions that a lot of us have difficulty getting at. It's easy to imagine that if he hadn't discovered his gift for music and sports at such an early age, he might have made a good preacher.

You've probably heard how he came to write "Go Rest High on That Mountain," the lovely gospel song on his 1994 *When Love Finds You* album, which is probably my all-time favorite Vince Gill song. Even if you have, it bears repeating, since the song won Vince last year's CMA Song of the Year award. The fact that he was so tearful and beside himself with emotion as to be at a loss for words when he accepted the award on TV tells you something about the depth of the song's personal meaning. Gill started writing it after Keith Whitley's death. (Friends recall he was terribly broken up, wept like a child, at Whitley's funeral.)

"I just kind of wrote the first verse right after Keith died, but it felt real awkward," he recalls, rubbing his chin and staring at the TV. "So I put it away and never touched it for four or five years. Then my older brother Bob passed away in 1993, and I knew I had to finish it. I felt then like I had a real valid reason for finishing the song.

"That one's amazing," he adds, gently shaking his head. "It's probably the least successful chart single I've had in six years—radio was real standoffish with it, they sort of said, 'We can't play a funeral song on the radio,' even though if you listen to the lyric, it's a celebration of someone's life.

"Yet I'd say it's had more impact than any other record I've ever recorded. The letters, the comments from people who played it at their dad's or their brother's funeral....I've had several people put the words on their headstones....It's pretty amazing. It really strikes a nerve with people. A big chord."

The big from-the-heart song on the current album is "Pretty Little Adriana." If you don't happen to know the story behind it, it may just sound like another pretty Vince Gill love ballad written around a girl's name, but Vince tells a more poignant story.

"There was a little girl named Adriana Dickerson about 12 years old who was killed in Nashville in a drive-by shooting," Gill explains, glancing at the TV which is flashing a news update of a particularly heinous murder of a young woman in Philadelphia the day before. "I don't think they ever really found out how or why. She was just the prettiest little girl, and it really shook up the whole city

in a big way. I kind of wrote the song from her parents' point of view.

"If you listen to the song from that perspective, all of a sudden it's very different from what you first perceived it to be," he agrees. "But I don't expect everybody to get everything, and I'm not trying to explain everything so everybody does get it. I love for people to listen to music and find their own meanings."

Despite the subtle twists and turns his music has taken on *High Lonesome*, Gill is quick to emphasize that he's not trying to "push the envelope" or "change from the success I've had." If there's anything he's learned recently, it's that "people learn to like you for the way you sound, for the way you look, a whole bunch of things. And if you change that too much, they feel like you've deserted them."

It took something as simple as his self-inflicted Forrest Gump-style whiffle haircut to bring that point home to him last year. He laughs uneasily when he recalls the day he took out a pair of clippers, and with his wife Janis looking on, gave himself the "do" that made him look like he'd gotten in the way of a rotary lawn mower.

Then he watched the whole country music world go nuts.

"It was pretty funny to see everybody flip out the way they did," he says, rolling his eyes. "But it was also kind of sad, kind of sobering." He shrugs and frowns. "It was like 'Doggone, I thought ya liked me for the way I sing, but I'm just a haircut to ya.'" Then he laughs grudgingly: "I remember I went out to the Opry to play a show, and Grandpa Jones hollered at me, 'Did'ja just git outa prison!? Did'ja lose a bet!?"

Much to the relief of his record label execs (they anguished over the new hairdo's potential to undermine his career) and his 14-year-old daughter Jenny (she screamed when she first saw it), Vince's fluffy locks have since grown back. Still, he teases the Atlantic City audience that night, telling them, "How do ya like my new hair? I got it from the men's hair club!"

"There were actually several reasons I cut it, and maybe no reason at all," he tells me in response to the obvious question. "I hate people to judge a book by its



"I just kind of wrote the first verse right after Keith died, but it felt awkward. So I put it away."



Awards: platinum for *Souvenirs*, CMA's for Vocal Event of the Year and Song of the Year in 1996.



Vince with his buzz cut back in 1995.

"I never felt I had to drink a beer or smoke a cigarette to be cool. Or any of that stuff."

One of Vince's pet projects—The Vinny.



cover. I hate for people to be caught up in peer pressure, like they have to look a certain way and all that stuff matters. I see these poor kids from Make-A-Wish [one of numerous charities to which Gill lends his time and talents] with cancer, and their hair's gone. They just think, gosh, I don't have my hair. I'm really weird! Well, I just wanted to be able to say to them, 'Hey, I'm pretty popular, and my hair's gone.'

"I also wanted to show my kid, she's 14 years old and goin' through the peer pressure thing. I wanted to give her the message, like, you might wanta start drinkin this beer or smokin' this cigarette, and you might wanta start doin' a lot of things....And this was kind of a way to teach her that just because somebody tells you that you might oughta try something doesn't mean you should.

"I never bowed to peer pressure as a kid," Gill adds with a touch of defiance. "I never felt I had to drink a beer or smoke a cigarette to be cool. Or any of that stuff." He chuckles: "In the mid-70's it was pretty weird to be in high school and be a bluegrass, ya know?"

You never bowed to peer pressure as a kid? I can't help but ask him, slightly startled. (I know I sure did!)

"Heck, no," he replies sheepishly. "My dad was pretty strict, and there was a fear factor that worked. And I'm glad! I mean, at the time I was probably thinkin', God, why can't I go have my hair long like the other kids? It would wear me out. But I was afraid to go get drunk and get thrown in jail. He'd kick my butt! And now, I'm really thankful. Some of that fear was a good fear."

To this day, Vince remains committed to doing what he feels is the right thing. If you poke around, you'll find dozens of instances where he has gone the extra mile with people who've found their own personal meanings in his music. To wit, after the Atlantic City show I run into some folks who'd seen Vince play at the Tangier Sound Festival on Maryland's Eastern Shore the night before. Afterwards they'd jumped in their car and driven a hundred and some miles up the coast to see him again tonight. There is still a certain quiet reverence in their voices when they recall an incident at the Maryland show—something which Gill had, characteristically, not even mentioned to me.

Before the Maryland show Gill had gotten a letter from the widow of a Maryland State Trooper named Edward A. Plank, whose mother this writer happened to grow up

with. Trooper Plank was shot to death by a drug dealer last fall during a routine traffic stop. In her letter, Lori Plank, the trooper's widow, recalled how her husband had always loved to work security at the annual Tangier Festival. She went on to relate how the song "Go Rest High on That Mountain" had, in the months since, become "Eddie's song" to those mourning his death. Mrs. Plank asked Gill if he might dedicate the song to her husband's memory when he played that night.

Entertainers are, of course, barraged with such requests, and it's usually nothing personal if, in the midst of their hectic schedules, they can't always accommodate them. But with Vince it is something personal. That night in Maryland he not only dedicated the song to Officer Plank, he invited the Plank family, along with the other Maryland troopers working security that night, and the widow of Trooper Lanzi, another Maryland officer recently killed in the line of duty, up on stage while he sang "Go Rest High on That Mountain." Later, he had everyone backstage for a visit. For a community torn up by this tragic loss, it was a significant step in the long healing process.

"Ya know, if there's some way I can sing a song or raise some money or help somebody out, it just makes good sense to do it," Vince shrugs when asked about his inclination to make the extra gesture from the heart and to give a little more of himself. "Even back when I first came to Nashville, I invested in the community. I was there to help with anything they needed, as far as charity work or playing and singing on other people's records. It was not just to try and further my career. I was really honest about being everybody's buddy. That's just how I react to life. I mean, I'm the one who has to answer to myself when this is all finished."

Gill, in his spirited, two-and-a-half-hour-plus show at the Trump Taj Mahal, once again goes the extra mile. His rafter-shaking, show-closing rendition of Lee Roy Parnell's "Don't Bother Knockin' (If the House Is Rockin')" leaves the audience standing and cheering at the top of their lungs.

Of course, most everybody out there in the crowd gets to go on home. But before the cheering has even faded away, Gill and his buddies are already feverishly packing up to be on the road by midnight. His next stop is Toronto.

Even as wonderful as his life seems to be, and all the people out there he gets to touch, I can't help but ask if he doesn't sometimes wish he was climbing into his own bed instead of a bunk on his luxury bus.

"Oh, yeah, sure," he replies. "You know that Alabama song, 'In Pictures'? I well up every time I hear that. I do get to spend a great amount of time at home with my kid [as he calls Jenny], but I wanta be there every second. I don't wanta miss a thing.

"Yeah, sometimes I do wish I could play on the softball team Tuesday night, bowl Wednesday night, go to the minor league baseball games every night and do all that stuff," he concedes. "But I don't know what that kind of life would be like and never have.

"On the other hand," he adds with the goofy grin of a kid who's just won the neighborhood air guitar contest, "a lot of the folks who do get to go home every night would sit here and say, 'Man, I wish I could do what you do: cruise around on that bus and watch movies and drink beers after the show and hang out and have fun and travel and play golf every day....'

"And I do have a great life," he says with a soft laugh and a look of mild amazement. "I don't think there's a living soul out there I'd trade places with." ■

Newsletter

REVIEWS & FEATURES

Your Participation Requested

As we've mentioned before, 1997 marks the 25th Anniversary of *Country Music Magazine*. And while we're still working on the specifics—assembling ideas and possibilities for how best to celebrate this milestone—one thing is certain: the September/October issue will be something special. Given that, it seems that the *CMSA Newsletter* should play some kind of a roll in the festivities. So here's your chance.... We'd like to hear from mem-

bers with *your* thoughts on the past 25 years of country music, and *Country Music Magazine*. The subject is wide open: you can write an essay or letter of up to 100 or 200 words spelling out what the magazine and/or the music has meant to you over the years. Or you may choose to come up with your 25 All-time Favorite Albums. Whatever you choose. We'll compile your entries and run them in the September/October *Newsletter*. Happy writing! We'll look forward to hearing from you.

Members Hit the Concert Trail

CMSA members from all over the country have been actively attending concerts over the past few months, and here are a few of their reports on such favorites as K.T. Oslin, George Strait, Wynonna, Dwight and more.

K.T.'S FANS ALWAYS COME BACK
I am 73 years old and I traveled by myself over 1600 miles in my motor home to see K.T. Oslin perform at the MusiCity Cares AIDS benefit concert in Nashville. Since she had only met me at previous concerts in California and Nevada, I wondered if she would remember me. Well, at the reception prior to the concert, she called me by name and greeted me with open arms and a big hug. K.T. was absolutely fantastic in her first concert in five years. She promised she would "always come back" and the Die Hards are waiting with open arms and love, hoping that this concert will be the first of many to come.

Miriam Hilton
Bridgeport, Illinois

P.S.—I've since moved from California to Illinois!

MAVS WORTH THE MONEY

As a birthday present, I took my wife to Foxwoods Casino in Ledyard, Connecticut, to see The Mavericks. They put on an excellent show! We saw them two summers ago when they were on tour with Mary Chapin Carpenter. We noticed how their stage work has improved. They're a lot looser than they were, and they had fun with the audience. One example was when, between songs, Raul Malo (lead singer) played a few bars of a Led Zeppelin song. I saw a sly look on his face as he looked out into the crowd. I looked



Die Hard fan Miriam Hilton drove 1,600 miles to see K.T. Oslin perform.

around, and most people looked puzzled because they didn't recognize the song. That was a fun moment for me. Also in their concert, they played some Spanish-style music. I'd heard them before, but

don't know the titles. It would be great if they'd put an album out with these songs on it. Just wanted Mavericks fans to know that, if they can see them in concert, it's well worth the expense!

Kenneth McKenna
Providence, Rhode Island

In This Issue

- Member Concert Reviews
- Vintage Violin
- Collections and Readers Create
- Skeeter Davis in Legends

Editor: *George Fletcher*

Executive Editor: *Helen Barnard*

Art Director: *Katheryn Gray*

DWIGHT YOAKAM ELECTRIFIES

Last July, my husband and I traveled from Scott County, Kentucky, to Riverbend in Cincinnati, Ohio, to see our favorite country solo artist, fellow Kentuckian Dwight Yoakam. An hour before Dwight's performance, David Ball took the stage amidst an awesome electric thunderstorm. David and the storm set

the mood for what was to transpire in this outdoor arena in the next set.

Dwight took center stage, the lightning stopped, and he took control. Needless to say, this was the most electrifying show I've ever seen. Not real fancy, just great emotional country music. In closing, we'd like to thank him for sharing himself and his talent with us. To us, he is truly a country legend.

**Penny and Dwight Lowe
Georgetown, Kentucky**



Stephanie Tessmer and friends with BRC.

BILLY RAY LOVES HIS FANS

My eight-year-old daughter loves Billy Ray Cyrus. Not only because of his music, but because of his love for his fans. Her room is covered with his pictures. We have been attending his concerts since 1993 and have been totally entertained at each one. Billy Ray cares for his fans. He constantly entertains and interacts with them throughout every concert.

In August 1995, we attended a concert at the Melody Fair near Buffalo, New York. Again on August 4, 1995, we attended another concert at Melody Fair. Billy Ray was involved with his audience—he even invited our daughter Stephanie and her friends, Leigha Gallagher and Rosann Forsyth, on stage with him and let them stay there throughout the entire song, "She's Not Crying Anymore." It was a thrill for me to know she was having this experience. They talked about it all night and are still talking about it! They are ecstatic! It was the experience of a lifetime for her, and I thank Billy Ray for caring so much for his fans that he would do something like this for young girls. They will never forget it.

We will attend his concerts whenever he is in Buffalo. There are very few performers who even get near their fans, let alone allow *them* to get near him. He's a wonderful entertainer and a wonderful person.

**Suzanne Tessmer
Angola, New York**



One of Kari Celestine's shots of Wynonna.

ON THE ROAD FOR WY

I am writing to share a couple of concert photos I took of Wynonna at the State Fair of Texas in October. I traveled over four hours to get to Dallas and sat at the concert stage all day long so I'd be able to see Wy's show front row center. Wynonna continues to be my idol, mentor and greatest inspiration. Her Revelations Tour is awesome!

**Kari Celestine
Diboll, Texas**



Patricia Boyd met up with Scott Joss.

PRAISE FOR DWIGHT'S SIDEMEN

Country Music Magazine is the true source for what is happening in country music! I hope you will publish a review of Scott Joss' *Souvenirs* on Pete Anderson's Little Dog Records. It sits at Number Seven on *Gavin's Americana Charts*, but has received little attention. It is a delightful record with back-up by Pete Anderson and other members of Dwight Yoakam's band. Scott plays fiddle and sings back-up in Dwight's band, and I was able to meet him at a recent Dwight Yoakam concert. I attended 11 shows on the Gone Tour—what a thrill!

**Patricia P. Boyd
Ft. Myers, Florida**

ROBIN SUE'S ANNUAL GEORGE STRAIT REVIEW

Time again for my annual "George Strait Plays McNichols Arena Review." This show took place on October 25, 1996. In three years of seeing George Strait's in-the-round staging, I've only seen one opening act, Terri Clark, effectively use all four sides—not that a proscenium stage could have contained her. Bounding around like a wide-eyed, hyperactive kid, she paused only long enough to say, "I'm a little out of breath tonight—it couldn't be the altitude, could it?" before tearing off again, and it was wonderful. The first female "hat" had the crowd revved up plenty for the headliner.

The promotional film from Chevy (the tour sponsor), shown on new video screens, also helped. I thought the roof of McNichols would blow off!

As reticent as Terri Clark is demonstrative, George Strait is still as enthusiastic as she is about the music. Thanks to the aforementioned screens, you could see every expression on his face—pride in the smooth solos taken by the Ace in the Hole Band, a big grin introducing songs that provoked an especially loud response from the sold-out audience (such as the recent CMA-award-winning "Check Yes or No"), or when he closed his eyes and leaned into the mike and the music to sing "Carried Away."

When I began going to see George Strait concerts 10 years ago, you could expect a quarter of the show to be covers. While he doesn't have room for them anymore, hearing "Cherokee Maiden" again brought back that time. And, George, please, please record Merle Haggard's "Seashores of Old Mexico." I (and a lot of others) love the way you sing that song.

**Robin Sue Lehmann
Aurora, Colorado**

The Older the Violin...

Member Linda Allen of Damascus, Arkansas, has a violin in her family that seems to be over 200 years old. She would like more information on the instrument, and wonders if any country stars might be interested in it. Here's her story.

I'm writing to find out if you know of anyone that would be interested in an antique violin my mother has. It's made of cherry wood with pearl tuners, and includes a bow with pearl ends. It has written inside of it "Antonio Stradivarius Cremona Anno 17."

My father had gotten the violin at his uncle's auction in the late 1960's. His uncle, George Dieker, was in his 80's when he passed away, and had the violin

from the time he was just a boy. Included with it are some music books. One was published in 1823 by Mr. and Mrs. Frank J. Benjamin, and the other was published in 1894, with some notes from a music school in Chicago which doesn't exist anymore. My father passed away in 1972, and my mother has had the instrument since then.

We all love country music, and would like the violin to go to someone who would appreciate it and take good care of it. My mother would like to sell it before anything happens to her.

Linda Allen
Damascus, Arkansas

Members and Country Music Magazine readers have written in about old violins before. As antiques, they are best appraised by professional people—sheet music and songbooks also. —Ed.

Members' Favorite Albums

We revisit the popular topic of Top Ten Albums as members from New York, Utah and Ontario, Canada, send in their picks for the best. Have you sent in your list yet?

TOP TEN ALBUMS OF 1996

Paul Brandt
Calm Before the Storm

Terri Clark
Just the Same

Various Artists
Cryin' Lovin' or Leavin'

David Ball
Starlite Lounge

Keith Gattis
Keith Gattis

Merle Haggard
1996

Wade Hayes
On a Good Night

Marty Stuart
Honky Tonkin's What I Do Best

Travis Tritt
The Restless Kind

Trisha Yearwood
Everybody Knows

I'm waiting for Dwight to release his album of cover tunes. That'll be at the top of my list!

R. Smith
Barri, Ontario, Canada



The Allen violin.

SCOTT DAVIS' FAVORITE ALBUMS

Ronna Reeves
After the Dance

Brother Phelps
Any Way the Wind Blows

Linda Davis
Some Things Are Meant to Be

Martina McBride
Wild Angels

John Michael Montgomery
John Michael Montgomery

Scorpions
Pure Instinct

Metallica
load

Van Halen
The Best of Van Halen

Lorrie Morgan
Reflections

Chely Wright
The Woman in the Moon

Scott Davis
Hinckley, Utah

TOP TEN ALBUMS OF 1996

Steve Earle
I Feel Alright
I play this one every day!

Robert Earl Keen
No. 2 Live Dinner
Wonderful mix of country, rock, Western swing, blues, Tex-Mex and folk.

Merle Haggard
1996
The best work in 15 years from an American icon.

Various Artists
Not Fade Away (Remembering Buddy Holly)
Great renditions of classic songs.

George Jones
I Lived to Tell It All
Country music's best singer, period.

Willie Nelson
Spirit
Simply beautiful.

Waylon Jennings
Right For the Time
The great voice is right up front this time.

David Ball
Starlite Lounge
The best of the modern honky-tonkers.

Randy Travis
Full Circle
It's not *Storms of Life*, but it's not bad.

Lyle Lovett
The Road to Ensenada
This one is country and it's good.

Lawrence Lehneman
Brooklyn, New York

November 1996 Poll

George Strait *Blue Clear Sky*
George Strait "I Can Still Make Cheyenne"

One thing you can be sure of, if George Strait has a single out, it'll be a CMSA member favorite. Same holds for his albums. For three polls in a row now, Mr. Strait has held the top spot in both your single and album picks. Not sure if this is a record (we'd have to go back and check every previous poll to determine that), but if it's not, it's pretty darn close!

Your other single favorites are as follows: Patty Loveless comes on strong

in second with "Lonely Too Long," while Travis Tritt takes third with "More Than You'll Ever Know." In fourth is young Bryan White and "So Much for Pretending." And fifth place goes to Trisha Yearwood and "Believe Me Baby (I Lied)."

In your album picks, following George is fellow member favorite Alan Jackson with his *Greatest Hits Collection*. Third place goes to teenage sensation LeAnn Rimes and her debut effort, *Blue*. Another favorite, Vince Gill, takes fourth with *High Lonesome Sound*. And rounding out the Top Five picks are Brooks & Dunn with their *Borderline* album.

CMSA COLLECTIONS

Attention, Members!

All CMSA members are welcome to participate in the Collections section, but please keep in mind the following rules: 1) Membership number *must* accompany entry. 2) Entries *must* be kept to 40 words or less (we may occasionally be *slightly* flexible on this, but only in Information, Please). 3) Entries for Pen Pals from members under the age of 16 *must* be accompanied by a note from a parent or guardian giving permission. 4) Only one entry per member per issue. 5) We reserve the right to edit for space and style. 6) Requests for romance or photos will not be printed. 7) Entries that do not follow these guidelines will be discarded.

Information, Please

Please write each other directly about information or items listed. When corresponding, include SASE. We reserve the right to edit for space and style.

- Wanted: VHS video tapes of Statler Brothers TV specials—*An Evening with The Statler Brothers: A Salute to the Good Times* (1981); *Another Evening with The Statler Brothers: Heroes, Legends and Friends* (1984); 100th Episode of TNN series (February 1996). Will supply tape and postage. **Debbie Patterson, 641 S. Elm, Buffalo, MO 65622.**
- For sale: concert and offstage photos of all your favorites. Also, magazines, trading cards, buttons, LP's, etc. Name favorites. I am looking for anything on Crystal Gayle, Dwight Yoakam, George Strait and Martina McBride. Send SASE for lists. **Galen Duncan, 3517 Grier Nursery Rd., Street, MD 21154.**
- For sale: free autographed photos of all your favorite stars. The only directory available dedicated exclusively to country fans. Hundreds of weekly updated addresses. Easy how-to info. Proven method, guaranteed results. Send \$15. **David Luhn, 3504 Westview Rd., Westminster, MD 21157-7735.**
- Wanted: anything and everything on Patty Loveless. Especially after magazines, photos, videos and press kits. Also interested in writing to other Patty fans. **David Hume, 3636 West Colfax Ave., Denver, CO 80204.**
- Wanted: anything about Vince Gill. Articles, VHS video, especially video from CMT. Send price list. Also would like to correspond

with other Vince fans. **Marybeth Mitchell, 67 Alcove St., Meriden, CT 06451.**

- Wanted: anything and everything on K.T. Oslin, old and new. Am compiling a history of K.T.'s career. Will buy or trade, have tons of material on many country singers. Am extremely interested in purchasing K.T. Oslin collections. Will pay reasonable price. **F. Brooks, P.O. Box 150712, Nashville, TN 37215.**

- Wanted: the movie *W.W. and the Dixie Dance Kings*, starring Don Williams. **Shirley Nolt, 57 Harristown Rd., Paradise, PA 17562.**

- Looking for music by Vestal Goodman and The Happy Goodmans, especially "What a Beautiful Day for the Lord to Come Again." Must be in good condition and reasonably priced. **Wanda Owen, P.O. Box 254, Paris, AR 72855.**

- Thirty years accumulation of country & Western material for sale (1000's of 45's, 78's, LP's, CD's, and lots of books, magazines, posters, etc.). Let me know what era (1950's-90's), and/or artists and personalities are of interest, and I'll send a listing of what I have. A stamp or two appreciated, but not necessary. **Jan Martin, RR1, Box 333, Amboy, IN 46911.**

- New and used LP's/45's/CD's/audio & video tapes and equipment available. Send want lists with SASE or IRC's, and collect phone number for reply. **Joel J. Hollin, 2113 Parkdale Ave., Glenside, PA 19038.**

- Help! Avid fan and collector of Tanya Tucker, Bryan White, Jeremy Jackson (of *Baywatch*), Gary Allan, Lorenzo Lamas. Want anything/everything: shirts, posters, promo flats, photos, clippings, CD's, singles, tickets, backstage passes. I have a lot of items for sale or possible trade. Send \$2.00 for six-page list. **Waitman Myers, 710 N. Lewis St., Glenville, WV 26351.**

- Let's spread the "country sunshine" left by Dottie West. I will pay all prices for any memorabilia on Dottie. Most interested in photos, albums and TV appearances/videos. **Corey Ryder, P.O. Box 418, Hyde Park, VT 05655.**

- Wanted: VHS video of 90-minute *Prime Time Country* episode with Wade Hayes and Ty England. It aired last summer. Send price. **Yvonne Roark, 11666 N. 28th Dr., #185, Phoenix, AZ 85029.**

- Good condition, used country

tapes for sale. Garth, Faith Hill, Tim McGraw, Andy Childs, Trisha Yearwood, Clay Walker, Suzy Bogguss and many more. I also have *Common Thread*, best offer takes it. Reasonable prices. Send SASE for list. Will trade for Dwight items. **Li Patterson, 802 S. Mill St., Apt #71, Reed City, MI 49677.**

- For sale: small cardboard stand-ups of Alan Jackson, Tanya, Lorrie Morgan, Reba and Randy. Also magazines, LP's, on-stage photos and 45's. Send list of favorites and SASE. **Pam Loftis, 709 Tulip Circle, Gallatin, TN 37066.**

- I am looking for the novel *Pride of the Prairie*, by Margaret Hill McCarter. It was probably written in the 1930's or 40's. It tells about my grandpa's life with the 7th Calvary and his rides with General Custer. **Robert L. Thatcher, 5715 Winchester St., San Diego, CA 92139-3039.**

- Desperately seeking anything on Shania Twain: photos, videotapes, posters, etc. Especially interested in obtaining a cardboard stand-up. Send list/prices. **Chad Sexton, 203 Oak Park Dr., Oneida, TN 37841-2811.**

- For sale: close-up concert photos of LeAnn Rimes, Reba, Dwight, BRC, Vince Gill, Ty Herndon, George Strait, Tiny Tim and many more. Send SASE for photocopies of your favorite. **Richard D. Moore, 20 Maple St., Hopedale, MA 01747-1116.**

- For sale: many articles, pin-ups, magazines, tapes, newspaper and book features on all your favorite artists: Dwight, Garth, Clint, Billy Ray, Terri Clark, Michelle Wright, Shania, Reba, etc. Will trade for Dwight items. **R. Smith, 128 Henry St., Barrie, Ontario L4N 1E1, Canada.**

- Looking for several Lorrie Morgan items: fan club newsletters, January 1991-December 1993; singles that were not on her albums (already have "Candy Kisses"), VHS video of her *On the Record* interview with Ralph Emery. Will pay good money. Not looking for photos, have many already. **Tim Moule, 8516, 10022 Catalpa Ln., Grass Valley, CA 95945-5253.**

- Wanted: photos, videos, articles or anything you may have for sale or trade on The Statler Brothers. **April West, 324 Crest Ln., Westminster, MD 21157-5808.**

Pen Pals

Make new friends by mail. Pen Pals is a means of introducing CMSA members who wish to cor-

respond. It is NOT a "personals" column. Physical descriptions and requests for romance or photographs will not be printed. We also reserve the right to edit for space and style. Parent's written permission required for those 16 and under. See additional rules in box at the start of this page.

- Single female, age 18, looking for some pen pals. Favorites are Reba, Alan Jackson, Faith Hill and Tim McGraw. Would love to hear from anyone, male or female. Will try to answer all. **Yvonne Seabolt, P.O. Box 666, Kalkaska, MI 49646.**

- Hello from Wichita Falls! I'm 18 and truly enjoy listening to country. My faves are George Strait, Alan Jackson, Hank Jr., Tim McGraw, and the list goes on. I also enjoy dancing, reading, playing pool and attending concerts. Waiting to hear from ya! **Heather Hoppe, 5529 Lucky Ln., Wichita Falls, TX 76306.**

- Hi! We're looking for pen pals overseas who share our love of country music. Our favorites are Garth Brooks, Travis Tritt, Marty Stuart, Alan Jackson and Shania Twain, to name a few. We have great difficulty getting much information on any of them over here. Will answer all. **Sharon and Tory Edgley, P.O. Box 742, Hervey Bay, QLD 4655, Australia.**

- I'm a 17-year-old cowgirl. Interests include all animals (especially horseback riding), all kinds of music, fishing and writing. My favorites in music are Tracy Lawrence, Garth, Terri Clark and Sammy Kershaw. All cowgirl and cowboy letters will be answered. No inmates, please. **Jamie Buchanan, 73 Little Henson Creek Rd., Newland, NC 28657.**

- Number One Elvis Presley fan would love to hear from Elvis fans worldwide and across America. Come on, fill my mailbox. Will answer all. No inmates. **Trecia Floyd, 510 Boston Hill Rd., Monticello, KY 42633.**

- Address correction: Last issue, my ad was printed with the wrong state. 57-years-young, lifelong country music fan. Enjoy photography, yard sales, reading, pen pals, rodeos, quilting, going to concerts. I enjoy both old and new country, especially George Strait. Married with one son. **Carolyn Banks, 10578 N. 500 W. Rd., Wheatfield, IN 46392.**

- Twin country boys, 15, would like to correspond with other guys any age. Favorites are Alan Jackson, Garth, Shania Twain and



TY HERNDON

COUNTRY MUSIC MAGAZINE MARCH/APRIL 1997

World Radio History

PULL-OUT
CENTERFOLD
OF-THE-MONTH

TY HERNDON

Facts of Life

Personal Data

Full Name: Ty Herndon
Birthdate: May 2
Birthplace: Meridian, Mississippi
Hometown: Butler, Alabama
Residence: Dallas, Texas
Family: wife, Renee; mother, Peggy; father, Boyd (deceased); sister, Alicia
Hobbies: Fishing, hiking, mountain biking, roller coasters

Vital Statistics

Height: 6'
Weight: 185
Color eyes: Brown
Color hair: Brown

Favorites

Colors: Burgundy, dark green
Foods: Chicken and dumplings, vanilla bean ice cream and "my Grandma Myrtle's cathead biscuits"
Vacation Spot: Anywhere tropical
Sports Events: Football, track and field events
Sports Teams: Dallas Cowboys, Atlanta Braves
Author: Anne Rice
Book: *The Vampire Chronicles*
Movie: *Somewhere in Time*
Most Prized Possession: "My late father's knife collection, my wife had mounted and framed for me for Christmas 1994."

Musical Background

Instrument: Piano
Influences: Ty comes from a musical family. His mother and her two sisters had their own radio show performing as The Todd Sisters, and his grandmother is a "mean flat-top guitar picker to this day." She is 80 years old and has a weekly radio show which is broadcast from the local senior citizens' center in the family's hometown of Butler, Alabama. Other in-



Ty and his wife Renee.

fluences include Merle Haggard, Janie Fricke and Connie Smith.
Start in Music: "I did a lot of singing in church and traveled all over Alabama, which when you're a kid seems like traveling all over Europe." His first paid performance was when he won \$75 First Place Prize at the Toxey Talent Show in Toxey, Alabama.

Recording Career

Record Label: Epic Records, 34 Music Square East, Nashville, Tennessee 37203.

Album	Release date
<i>What Mattered Most</i>	1995
<i>Living In a Moment</i>	1996

Singles

"What Mattered Most"*
"I Want My Goodbye Back"
"Heart Half Empty" (duet with Stephanie Bentley)
"In Your Face"
"Living in a Moment"*
"She Wants to Be Wanted Again"
*Number One Single

Videos:

"What Mattered Most"
"I Want My Good Bye Back"
"Heart Half Empty"
"Living in a Moment"
"She Wants to Be Wanted Again"

Band Members: Ty Herndon, vocals; Randy Jeher, bass; Wes Hendrix, guitar; Darin Johnson, guitar; Drew Keller, keyboards; Jim Lindsey, steel guitar; David Pinkston, drums.

Career Highlights

Awards: 1993 Texas Entertainer of the Year, which later led to a record contract with Epic Records; Best New Artist at 1995 Country Radio Music Awards; 1997 American Music Award, Contemporary Achievement, from Alabama Music Hall of Fame.

Nominations: Favorite New Artist, Country at 1996 *American Music Awards*; Best New Artist 1996, *Performance Magazine* Readers Poll Awards; International Rising Star, 1996 British Country Music Awards; Star of Tomorrow, Male Artist in 1996, TNN/*Music City News* Awards.

Singles Highlights: "What Mattered Most" charted with a record 133 radio stations playing the song during its chart entry week—the most for a debut single.

Fan Club

Ty Herndon & Friends, Leigh Ritsema Fan Club President, P.O. Box 120658, Nashville, Tennessee 37212.

MARK CHESNUTT

GREATEST HITS

Years and years from now, when listeners comb through the country sounds of the 1990s they'll come across Mark Chesnutt and say, "Yeah, this guy was the Real Deal." ...When they do, they will smile the smile of discovery.

—Robert K. Oermann



TEN HITS AND TWO NEW SONGS

Including the smash hit
"IT'S A LITTLE TOO LATE"

Selections:

Bubba Shot The Jukebox
Too Cold At Home • Blame It On Texas
Almost Goodbye • It's A Little Too Late
O' Country • Brother Jukebox
Gonna Get A Life • Let It Rain
It Sure Is Monday • Goin' Through The Big D
I'll Think Of Something

DECCA
RECORDS

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CMSA COLLECTIONS

Ty Herndon. We also like camping, reading, movies and writing to new friends. Will answer all. Please write. **Geoffrey R. Kane and Raun G. Kane, P.O. Box 6164, Kingston, NY 12402-6164.**

•Hello! I'm a 23-year-old, single female looking for country-loving pen pals. Race, religion, gender or age unimportant. I love Tracy Byrd and Wade Hayes. Also like NASCAR, singing and much more. Greg Treadway, if you're out there, please write! Everyone else write, too. No chain letters, please. **Carol Baker, 306-C Surlis Dr., Four Oaks, NC 27524.**

•Hello, country music lovers. True-blue, 40-year-old country boy from Nashville, who made a mistake, would like to hear from you. My favorites are George Jones, Merle Haggard, Charley Pride, Conway Twitty, LeAnn Rimes, Tanya, Loretta and many, many more. Interests are songwriting, hunting, fishing, camping. Would welcome all letters. **Steve R. Bunch #709856, Century C.I., P.O. Box 248-G-115, Century, FL 32535-0248.**

•Hey, you country boys with old-fashioned values! Write to me. I'm a 21-year-old female. I love to take long walks, read unique books, go camping and listen to country music on the radio. **Sonya Ehman, 2435 S. Main St., Butte, MT 59701.**

•I'm a 37-year-old, divorced country boy. I love writing letters, poems and songs. Some of my favorites are Reba, Linda Davis, Bryan White, LeAnn Rimes and many more. Want to hear from country fols who like to write and get letters. **Bruce Lane #024867665, 1733 Wetherly Ct., Las Vegas, NV 89115.**

•Hi! I'm a 21-year-old, single female. I love country music and soft rock. My favorites are Bryan White, Dwight Yoakam, Alan Jackson, Reba McEntire, John Michael Montgomery and many more. I also enjoy collecting things, making new friends, getting and writing letters, and writing poetry and short stories. I'm looking for guys or girls of any age to write. No inmates, please. **Kimberly Thomas, P.O. Box 221, Azalea, OR 97410.**

•Howdy! If anyone would like a pen pal, age 18, I'm especially looking from pen pals from Africa, age 12-21. **Jessica Squier, 13 West St., East Hampton, CT 06424-1411.**

•Hello! My name is Randy Carpenter. I am 37 years old and

temporarily incarcerated. I am looking for any lady that wants to take time to write. **Randy Carpenter, #223721 B-113-B, 2500 S. Sheridan Rd., Muskegon, MI 49444.**

•Hi! I'm a 22-year-old, male country fan. Favorites are John Michael Montgomery, Faith Hill, Garth Brooks and most others. My hobbies are football, basketball, volleyball, any sports. Currently in prison. Will answer all. **Khan Nguyen #56321, El Dorado Correctional Facility, P.O. Box 311, El Dorado, KS 67042.**

•Hello! 27-year-old Desert Storm vet, looking for friendly correspondence. I love country music, animals, the outdoors, travel and sports. This cowboy currently corraled, but would like to hear from all. **L. David Bauer #46680, P.O. Box 2500, Lincoln, NE 68542.**

•Hello, I'm from Iowa and I love country music. Some of my favorites are Alan Jackson, Vince Gill and Lorrie Morgan. I am 60 years old and want new friends who love country music. **Darlene Livingston, 124 E. Main St., New Hampton, IA 50659-1495.**

•Howdy there! 36-years-young, single male prisoner. Seeking pen pals and possible friends. Some interests are music, reading, writing, drawing, computers and work. Favorites are Alan Jackson, Tanya, Garth, Reba, Patty Loveless and more. **Daniel James E-71473, P.O. Box 7500 B5-114, Crescent City, CA 95531.**

•I am 51 years old, married with six children. Want female pen pals only. My hobbies are playing pool and darts. My favorite music is country. I enjoy reading and writing. I like Johnny Cash and Alan Jackson. **Carol Johnson, N6536 County Rd. D, Arkansas, WI 54721.**

•Hi. Easy-going, liberal guy would like to exchange letters on music with other males. **Bob Steinman, 6332 Mary Todd Ln., Centreville, VA 20121.**

•Country girl from central New York seeks pen pals. My name is Annette, and I'm 30 years old. Would like to hear from men and women, ages 21-35. My interests are nursing, sports, outdoors, writing letters and music. Will answer all. No inmates, please. **Annette Smith, 140 Gaskill Rd., Owego, NY 13827.**

•Hello! 22-year-old female looking to write to cowboys and cowgirls, 18-30. My interests include traveling, two-stepping, rodeos, outdoors, writing letters and college

basketball. Would love to hear from all, especially cowboys in the military. **Karen Overby, 1010 Victoria Pl., Waldorf, MD 20602.**

•Hi! 24-year-old male looking for new pan pals. Favorite artists include Reba, Garth, Lorrie Morgan and many more. Will answer all. **Mike Wilt, 4424 Vista St., Philadelphia, PA 19136-3709.**

•Hello, ladies. I'm 20 years old, doing time until August. I love country music and a country way of living. **Cecil Roark II, P.O. Box 128, 11805 Kentucky State Penitentiary, Eddyville, KY 42038-0128.**

•Hello, country fans! I'm a 51-year-old fan of country music, with interest in crafts, rodeo, camping with scouts and reading. Would like to hear from fans willing to write. Friends call me "Heaven." **Jenell Butts, 3509 S. Bronson Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90018-3656.**

•Howdy there! Single, 30-year-old, incarcerated male. My roots are in TX, KY, IN, TN. Seeking pen pals from all over. Enjoy all country music. **Horace Hensley #643557, Rt. 4, Box 1500, Beaumont, TX 77705.**

•I'm a single, 31-year-old girl. Would like to hear from males and females, ages 25-35. Favorite artists are Oak Ridge Boys, Neal McCoy, Travis Tritt, Clay Walker, Rhett Akins and many others. Favorite sports team is Miami Dolphins. No inmates, please. **Karen Eble, 1000 Olmstead Ave., Evansville, IN 47711.**

•Hello. I am 21 years old. I like George Strait and Kenny Chesney. I'm looking for pen pals. I also like to read and sing. Will answer all. No inmates, please. **Michelle Tindall, 3070 S. Nellis Blvd., Apt. 3070, Las Vegas, NV 89121.**

•I'm a 33-year-old country boy seeking pen pals from sea to shining sea. I enjoy old and new country. Some favorites are Alan Jackson, Reba, Garth, George Jones, Patsy Cline and many more. I also enjoy BBQ's, wild animals and Western movies. **Michael J. Rowland, J-08318-4B1L-31, P.O. Box 3481, Corcoran, CA 93212.**

•Wanted: some country music fans to share thoughts in a quality pen-ship. Enjoy life, nature and all outdoors, sports and laughs. **Robert Hoskins, #933223, D-CH, West #364, Indiana State Prison, Box 41, Michigan City, IN 46361-0041.**

•Hello! I'm a 31-year-old, single fe-

male. I love country music and dancing. Favorite artists are Collin Raye, Wy, Billy Dean, Reba, Garth and Terri Clark. I collect 8x10 pictures of concerts I attend. I enjoy the outdoors, shooting pool, movies and road trips. Would love to hear from males. No inmates, please. **Stacy Strong, 806 W. Baker Ave., Fullerton, CA 92832.**

•Hi, friends! Seeking pen pals—Durinda, 16, loves Reba, riding, drawing and singing; Erin, 14, loves Clay Walker, George Strait. riding, singing, volleyball and football. Looking for friends, 13-17, guys and girls. We'll write back! No inmates, please. **Erin and Durinda, c/o Roy Burcham, 300 Moore Rd., Tuscumbia, AL 35674.**

•26-year-old cowboy doing time in Texas. Looking for any ladies, 20-36, to write. Will answer all. Enjoy country music and Southern rock, rodeos and the great outdoors. Inmates welcome. **Luke A. Norton #670314, P.O. Box 2000, Colorado City, TX 79512-2000.**

•Hey, drop me a line! Been a country music fan forever. I write "The Good, Bad and Ugly"...and have been all. My hobbies include cartooning, road trips, photography. **Brenda Stueve, P.O. Box 9413, San Bernadino, CA 92427.**

•This cowgirl, born 2/16/74, is looking for some cowboys to write to. I love the outdoors and ranching. Listen to most country artists, but my faves are George Strait, Brooks & Dunn, Chris LeDoux and Randy Travis. Please, no inmates or chain letters. **Jennifer Trusty, 13005 Cnty. Rd. 22, Granada, CO 81041.**

•Hi from the Peach State! I'm a 23-year-old female looking for pals, age 18-30. Favorites are Black-Hawk, Bryan White, LeAnn Rimes, Tim McGraw, Tracy Lawrence, Alan Jackson, JMM, Travis Tritt, Shania. I love teddy bears, carousels, NASCAR, shooting pool and lots more. No men, prisoners or chain letters. **Angie Shaw, 1319 McKibben St., Lot 47, Cedartown, GA 30125.**

Send requests to Country Music Magazine, 329 Riverside Ave., Westport, CT 06880. Mark envelope, Attention: Collections. Entries sent without membership number will be discarded. Collections is printed as a service to readers, and Country Music Magazine assumes no liability for any losses or damages resulting from any Collections page correspondence. Parents, be aware of children's correspondence.

Skeeter Davis

Life hasn't always been easy for Skeeter, but she's a fighter who built a successful career. Her Opry stardom and string of hits speak for themselves.

By Rich Kienzle

Skeeter Davis has endured more ups and downs in her career than most people, and as this is being written, her 14-year marriage to bass player Joey Spampinato has ended, and she's enduring another bout with cancer. Without question, this one isn't an easy battle. Cancer is a difficult disease at any age, but at age 65 (and she's never been coy about admitting her age), it's even tougher. The difference is that in a career stretching from the 1940's, with a Gold record and five Grammy nominations along the way, Skeeter Davis has endured tough times and hard knocks before, blows that would have ended many careers far sooner.

She was born in a two-room shack along Eagle Creek, just two miles from the tiny hamlet of Glencoe, in Northern Kentucky on the morning of December 30, 1931. Her parents were William and Sarah Penick, who named their first child Mary Frances. At the time, they were living in the shack with Sarah's parents. Soon after Mary Frances' birth, they moved to their own tiny house nearby.

Skeeter never shied away from the fact she came from hillbilly stock, in fact, she was always proud of it. Nicknames were common in the family. Her mother was known as Punzie, and all seven Penick kids had nicknames (more than we could list here). It wasn't easy for Mary Frances. When she was three, Punzie's father was murdered, which traumatized Sarah for years afterwards, and during those years affected her relationship with her own kids. The Penicks moved to Cincinnati, Ohio, where William Penick worked in an ice cream factory, then moved back to Kentucky, to the town of Dry Ridge, not far from Glencoe, the town Skeeter always considered her hometown. Her grandfather gave her the nickname "Skeeter," and it stuck.

She listened to the Opry Saturday nights and was singing at school and home throughout the 1940's, learning songs from the radio, the movies and



COURTESY RICHARD WEIZE

The Davis duo, Skeeter and Betty Jack.

wherever else she could hear music. By 1947, William Penick was working in Covington, Kentucky, across the Ohio River from Cincinnati and the family moved to the area. Attending Dixie Heights High School, she met another teenager named Betty Jack Davis, who was singing around the area. The two had a good vocal blend and by the late 40's, were getting notice around the area as The Davis Sisters, which gave Skeeter the second half of her performing name.

Their local work led them to a job at WJR's *Barnyard Frolics* in Detroit, where they recorded what they thought was a demo recording for the Detroit-based Fortune label, but Fortune actually released it as the first Davis Sisters record, and two more singles as well. Their backup band suggested the girls approach RCA country A&R man Steve Sholes, who listened to them in New York, then again in Nashville, where he signed them. They covered "I Forgot More Than You'll Ever Know," a Capitol single that Sonny James had recorded. Their version would hit Number One for eight weeks and break onto the pop charts. In 1953 they did their first session in Nashville.

Unfortunately, Betty Jack Davis wasn't around to see the song's success. She and Skeeter had traveled to Wheeling to play the WWVA *Jamboree* in their new car on August 1, 1953. A male friend of Betty Jack's, home on leave from the Navy with another sailor, met them there and was driving the girls back to Kentucky on the morning of August 2. Just 20 miles from home, a car in the opposite lane hit them head-on. Betty Jack's friend, who was driving, was uninjured, his sailor friend only slightly hurt. Betty Jack Davis was killed instantly. Skeeter suffered a brain concussion. The Davises took Skeeter under their wing as she recovered, making her misfortune even worse. In her autobiography *Bus Fare to Kentucky*, Skeeter recounted how Betty's grief-stricken but manipulative mother accused Skeeter of killing her daughter and virtually forced her to continue performing with Betty's sister Georgia using that sick and untrue premise. With Skeeter depressed and discouraged over Betty Jack's death, The Davis Sisters resumed recording and performing.

Then, in 1955, Chet Atkins, whose ear for talent was beyond question, summoned Skeeter to Nashville to record with Hank Snow. He also had her try recording on her own, overdubbing her voice on the tape so she could harmonize with herself. She and Georgia continued touring together, and Skeeter had a brief, unhappy marriage, virtually arranged by the Davises, that at least allowed her to leave their controlling grasp for good. Finally, she decided to make her first solo tour with Ernest Tubb. In 1958, she joined Tubb's regular touring show, and was soon recording her own material for RCA. Her first solo single didn't chart, but in 1958 "Lost to a Geisha Girl," an answer to Hank Locklin's hit, "Geisha Girl," became her first solo hit. In 1959, "Set Him Free" became her first Top Ten record, leading her to end her marriage, move to Nashville and join the Opry.

Another Hank Locklin answer song, "I Can't Help You I'm Falling Too," which Skeeter wrote herself, was a response to his hit, "Please Help Me, I'm Falling," and held the Number Two position for three weeks in 1960, followed by her vocal recording of the Floyd Cramer instrumental hit, "Last Date"—retitled "My Last Date (With You)"—a Number Five single early in 1961. She had another Top Ten that year with "Optimistic" and in 1962 came another: "Where I Ought to Be." Chet Atkins used overdubbing on her first LP, *I'll Sing You a Song and I'll Harmonize Too*, which took advantage not only of this well-established technol-

ogy, but also Skeeter's ear for harmony. This was the era of the Nashville Sound, and the steel guitars and fiddles on her records had been replaced with neutral instrumentation, which would do exactly what it was supposed to do: help her music appeal to pop, even teenage audiences.

She'd first met WSM all-night disc jockey Ralph Emery in 1960, when she appeared on his show. Despite suggestions from friends that she avoid it, when Ralph proposed to her, they married later that year. The four-year marriage was a disaster. Both have written autobiographies putting their individual spins on it and leave no doubt that ample hard feelings and ill will have remained for decades since the marriage ended in 1964.

During those four years, Skeeter had the hit of her career with the ballad, "The End of the World," a song released late in 1962 that, in 1963, would make it to Number Two on some country and pop charts and Number One on others. "I'm Saving My Love," a country Top Ten, followed in the spring of 1963. Late that year, "I Can't Stay Mad at You" broke the pop Top Ten and the country Top 20, a measure of Atkins' success at broadening Skeeter's audience.

The mid-60's saw Skeeter free of Emery, closer to her family and touring. In 1964 she had a Top 20 single with "He Says the Same Things to Me" and a Top Ten with "Gonna Get Along Without You Now." In 1965 she and Bobby Bare remade the 1953 Jean Shepard-Ferlin Husky hit, "A Dear John Letter," which peaked at Number 11. She had more modest successes in 1965, then returned to the Top Ten with "What Does It Take (To Keep a Man Like You Satisfied)" in 1967. Still recording LP's for RCA and active on the road, her hitmaking days were nonetheless fading. The crossover pop hits were gone, though she hit the Top Ten one more time in 1969 with "I'm a Lover Not a Fighter." Her singles began to fade, charting only in the lower sections for a few weeks before dropping off. Her final Top 20 single, "Bus Fare to Kentucky" (also the name of her 1993 autobiography), came in 1971. But her touring, here and overseas, didn't slow a bit.

A committed Christian in her own right, in 1973 Skeeter wound up ensnared in controversy after she saw a group of so-called "Jesus people" she'd previously met on the road arrested at a Nashville mall for witnessing on the premises. It upset her to the point that she raised the issue of the arrest onstage at the Opry during a performance, which angered the show's management and some of her fellow performers. There was also a back-



GENE BEAR ARCHIVES

stage confrontation with a Nashville police officer who handled Opry security. Suddenly, many of her concert appearances and scheduled Opry dates vanished as she endured a 15-month suspension imposed by WSM. She blamed the Nashville media for distorting the incident. Some fellow performers defended her, some didn't. Her bookings continued to suffer while she became more active in religious activities, though she never turned her back on singing country.

Eventually Skeeter returned to the Opry, though she left RCA around that time. One of her two Mercury singles, "I Love Us," became her final chart record in 1976. Through the 1970's, she continued working the Opry and show dates, then in 1981, she found members of the rock band NRBQ were huge Davis Sisters fan. She did a tour with the band and Carl Perkins that year, and became close to the band's bass player, Joey Spampinato. She and

the band recorded a surprisingly fine LP together: *She Sings—They Play*, with a quirky choice of songs (everything from "Someday My Prince Will Come" to The Carlisles' "Ain't Nice to Talk Like That"), that garnered considerable acclaim for not only its humor and ingenuity, but for her strong singing throughout. It served as a reminder of her continuing strength as a singer who marched to her own drummer. Skeeter and Spampinato married in 1983, each of them continuing their careers separately. Her first, successful bout with cancer came in 1988.

Skeeter Davis' career has in some ways been very different from that of many other female singers in Nashville. Her image, her music and her outlook have always been very much her own.

Albums Available
See For CMSA Members Only page.

Readers Create

Remembering the Legends

Joyce Winegar of Palo Cedro, California, sends us her tribute to "the great country legends we all miss so much." Joyce says that Hazel's tribute to Bill Monroe in the November/December 1996 issue of Country Music inspired this writing.

Country Legends

A star falls like a teardrop
and it's lonely in my heart
as tonight another Country Star
joins those Legends in the sky.

I still miss Ole Hank,
Tex Ritter and Patsy Cline.
And I feel just like
Miss Minnie Pearl
was a personal friend of mine.

I miss Roger and Conway
Keith Whitley and
Tennessee Ernie Ford.
And Lord, I'd give a lot
to hear Marty Robbins
just once more.

How I miss those
Country Legends
singin' their Country Songs.
Now Bill Monroe
is up there with them
one more Country Legend gone.

There's Patsy Montana,
George Morgan, Roy Acuff
and Ernest Tubb,
Lofty and Elvie
so many gone, so many loved.

Oh I feel just like
every one of them
was a personal friend of mine.
And Lord, I'd give a lot
to hear Marty Robbins
one more time.

How I miss those
Country Legends
singin' their Country Songs.
Now Bill Monroe
is up there with them
one more Country Legend gone.

—Joyce Winegar

Rodeo Love Story

Continuing our rodeo theme in this edition (see Chris LeDoux sketch above), Teresa Griffin of Wellsville, Kansas, sends us a song she wrote which, she says "was inspired by the wonderful lady country singers topping the charts today. I think it's about time a female recorded a rodeo song!"

Little Cowboys Don't Fall in Love

I met you back in '74
when Daddy was ropin' at the rodeo,
hypigtails at the county fair.
I won my first horse show.
Well I was only eight years old
and you were all of ten,
but in your jeans and white T-shirt
I thought you were somethin' then.

You were a little blonde boy actin' all
grown up.
You had your hat pulled down, lookin' tough.
Bulls and broncs were quite enough,
you see little boys don't think about love,
no, little cowboys don't fall in love.

Well the years quickly passed
and the years were kind,
'cause Honey you grew up,
lookin' mighty fine.
Rancho never occupies your mind
no, you're too busy thinkin' about last
night's ride.
On the road, never time to five,
your heart belongs to that arena spotlight.

Yeah that little blonde boy, he grew up.
Still wears his hat pulled down, lookin' tough.
Bulls and broncs, girls I wish you luck,
some grown up boys don't think about love,
and this cowboy will never fall in love.

Hey, I can't compete with those bright lights,

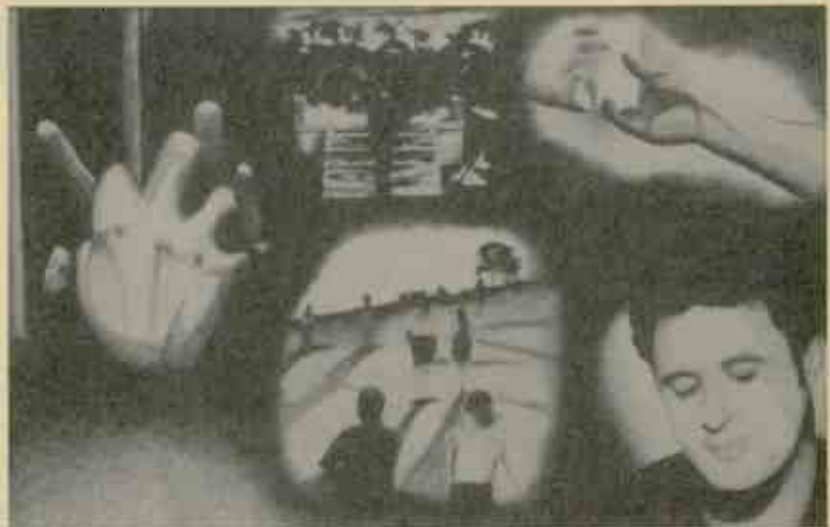


Riding with LeDoux

Member Thomas Wolf gives us a look at singer/songwriter/rodeo favorite Chris LeDoux. Says Thomas, "I currently ride bulls in rodeos, and Chris is my inspiration and hero. I never would have started if I hadn't heard all his great rodeo songs." Thomas hails from Canton, Ohio.

reflectin' in your blue, blue eyes.
Come on baby, give me some time,
Daddy warned me about the rodeo life,
yeah, Daddy warned me about the rodeo life.

—Teresa R. Griffin



Giving Back to Vinny

Tammy Frederickson, who did a painting of Vince Gill (featured in January/February 1995), and then met Vince and had it signed, is at it again. Her latest take on Vince was inspired by his "World's Apart" video. She donated this one to Gill's charity event, The Vinny, which features an auction. Tammy's from Portage, Wisconsin. She made the donation because she was so appreciative of meeting Vince.

Faron Young

1932-1996

It had to have shaken Faron Young to the bone. Age, hard living and changing times took their toll. Emphysema and prostate troubles left him in physical pain. Generations removed from the current scene, he was no longer the dark, handsome "Young Sheriff." The effect it had on his body was bad enough, but the effect on his spirit was even worse.

Still, this was *Faron Young*, known for a tougher than tough constitution. Worried as his friends were, nobody expected he'd shoot himself in the head as he did on the afternoon of December 9, 1996. Twenty-four hours later, he was gone. Private services were held on Friday, December 13. When the will was probated, two sons each got \$200,000. A daughter born out of wedlock got \$50,000, while son Robyn, who'd testified against Faron in his divorce proceedings, received \$1.

His death brought back memories of the black-haired, handsome, spangle-suited, proud hillbilly who in many ways embodied the 1950's country singer of the post-Hank Williams era. Originally, he sang much like Hank before finding his own boisterous, full-throated style, his vitality giving his music a robust but edgy feel.

Shreveport, the first town Faron conquered as a performer, was also his hometown. Born February 25, 1932, he grew up on a dairy farm near the city. His earliest idols were pop singers Frank Sinatra and Nat King Cole. In high school, he sang and acted in plays. His dad bought him a guitar, but Faron paid country music little mind until a football coach got him to listen to Hank Williams and Eddy Arnold, and got him to sing in the coach's country band in local honky tonks.

After high school, Faron attended one year of college, then quit in 1951 to sing and write songs fulltime. He met *Hayride* star Webb Pierce, who took him under his wing. Not only did Faron join Webb's touring band, Webb helped Faron land a place on the *Hayride* and make his first records. Faron and Webb also sang and played records on KWKH's *Red River Roundup* show. Capitol country A&R man Ken Nelson, visiting Shreveport in January 1952, first heard Faron on that show as he was being driven to the airport. He told the driver to return to KWKH, and soon had Faron signed.

The first Capitol singles faltered, but Nashville disc jockey Hugh Cherry helped Faron land a guest spot on the



Opry in mid-1952. Arriving with his girlfriend, Billie Jean Jones, he met old friend Hank Williams (not yet fired by the Opry) and they double-dated. When Hank made his attraction to Billie Jean obvious to Faron, he stepped aside.

Faron became an Opry cast member, but the Korean War stifled that euphoria. At age 20, a prime candidate for the military draft, his greetings from the government arrived that November. His background led him right into Army Special Services, and he spent his hitch performing at state-side military bases and recording musical programs for Army recruiting. Meanwhile, "Goin' Steady," a ballad Faron recorded shortly before his induction, became his first national hit, reaching Number Two in 1953. On leave, he recorded, and was able to appear on the Opry as well.

Faron's discharge late in 1954 commenced a flurry of activity. First came his classic "If You Ain't Lovin' (You Ain't Livin')," a 1955 hit for him, revived years later in 1988 by George Strait. Soon came the lusty "Live Fast, Love Hard, Die Young" (his first Number One single), "All Right" and "It's a Great Life (If You Don't Weaken)." He made his wildly exuberant 1956 version of Ted Daffan's "I've Got Five Dollars (And It's Saturday Night)," a honky tonk anthem. Following that came "You're Still Mine," "Sweet Dreams" and "Turn Her Down" (1956), "I Miss You Already (And You're Not Even Gone)" (1957), "Alone With You" and "Every Time I'm Kissing You" (1958).

More photogenic than many singers at

the time, a role in the 1955 B-western *Hidden Guns* as the son of a sheriff led to his nickname "Young Sheriff" (he also did a short-lived TV show under that name), later amended to "The Singing Sheriff." For all his contentiousness, he was also known as the "softest touch in Nashville," the man who hired a struggling singer named Roger Miller to play drums in his band, and later took on an equally struggling Kris Kristofferson to hang drywall in one of his Nashville office buildings. His hit version of "Hello Walls" made Willie Nelson the hottest songwriter in Nashville in 1962. Never renowned for his racial enlightenment in the 60's, he nonetheless became one of Charley Pride's earliest supporters in Nashville.

In 1962, Faron left Capitol for Mercury Records. A year later, Faron and Preston Temple founded the pioneering fan publication *Music City News*. From 1969 through 1974, he had an unbroken streak of Top Ten singles on Mercury, starting with the honky tonk shuffle, "Wine Me Up" (revived by Larry Boone in 1989), and his 1971 Number One, "It's Four in the Morning," and ending with "Some Kind of a Woman" in 1974.

Faron's hell-raising was as legendary as his music. He never hesitated to speak his mind, no matter what. His wilder escapades made the papers, like a fight he had in a Nashville pool hall, or an occasional drunken performance (usually including his imitations of legendary boozier Dean Martin). Other stories of onstage and off-stage misbehavior added to the legend.

He ran out of steam at Mercury in 1979, the same year that he sold *Music City News*. A 1980-81 shot with MCA did little. Through the 80's he didn't record, except for a few tries with Nashville's Step One Records. When he and his wife Hilda divorced in 1987, she cited numerous violent episodes at home. Being a regular on Ralph Emery's TNN show, *Nashville Now*, gave him continuing exposure, but Faron's drinking and attitude didn't mellow. Emery's show ended, and Faron's visibility fell further. His name was seldom heard—until his death.

One can only hope that in death, Faron found some of the peace that eluded him toward the end of his life. Looking back, one can only sum up his career in words with which the Sheriff would probably agree: A hell of a run, that's what it was.

—RICH KIENZLE

He may not be a mega-selling superstar, but in a sea of hatted hunk flavors-of-the-month, Mark Chesnutt stands out as the real deal.

Mark Chesnutt

Sure and Steady Sets the Pace

By Bob Millard

Street lights snap on early at the end of an already gray day on Music Row the week before Thanksgiving. Ghostly beams and shadows ricochet off steel and glass buildings up and down Music Row. Wet streets reflect headlights and taillights in weird, wiggly ways. There's a crisp chill to the wind on the street below, but inside Decca's tinted glass offices it is the same seasonless climate that all big corporations seem to have year 'round; welcome to Music City Twilight Zone.

Inside the new Decca/MCA building there are few clues to what continent you're on, much less what time it is or how long you've been there—and Mark Chesnutt has been there all day. Take the mind-numbing exhaustion of 12-hour-a-day cross-country media blitz and add the cumulative effects of a sinus infection that won't go away and the various medicines he has been taking all day to fight it and you have one goofy, brain-dead hillbilly wandering the halls of Decca Records. Mark Chesnutt is more than two weeks into a press tour promoting his new *Greatest Hits* album.

I find him making label-mate Helen Darling howl with his imitation of a prominent Canadian multi-platinum superstar.

"Whaddaya think?" Chesnutt says, coming around the corner to show Darling a belly button winking out of a slightly pudgy midriff below his knotted golf shirt.

"Very cute," says Darling, laughing warmly.

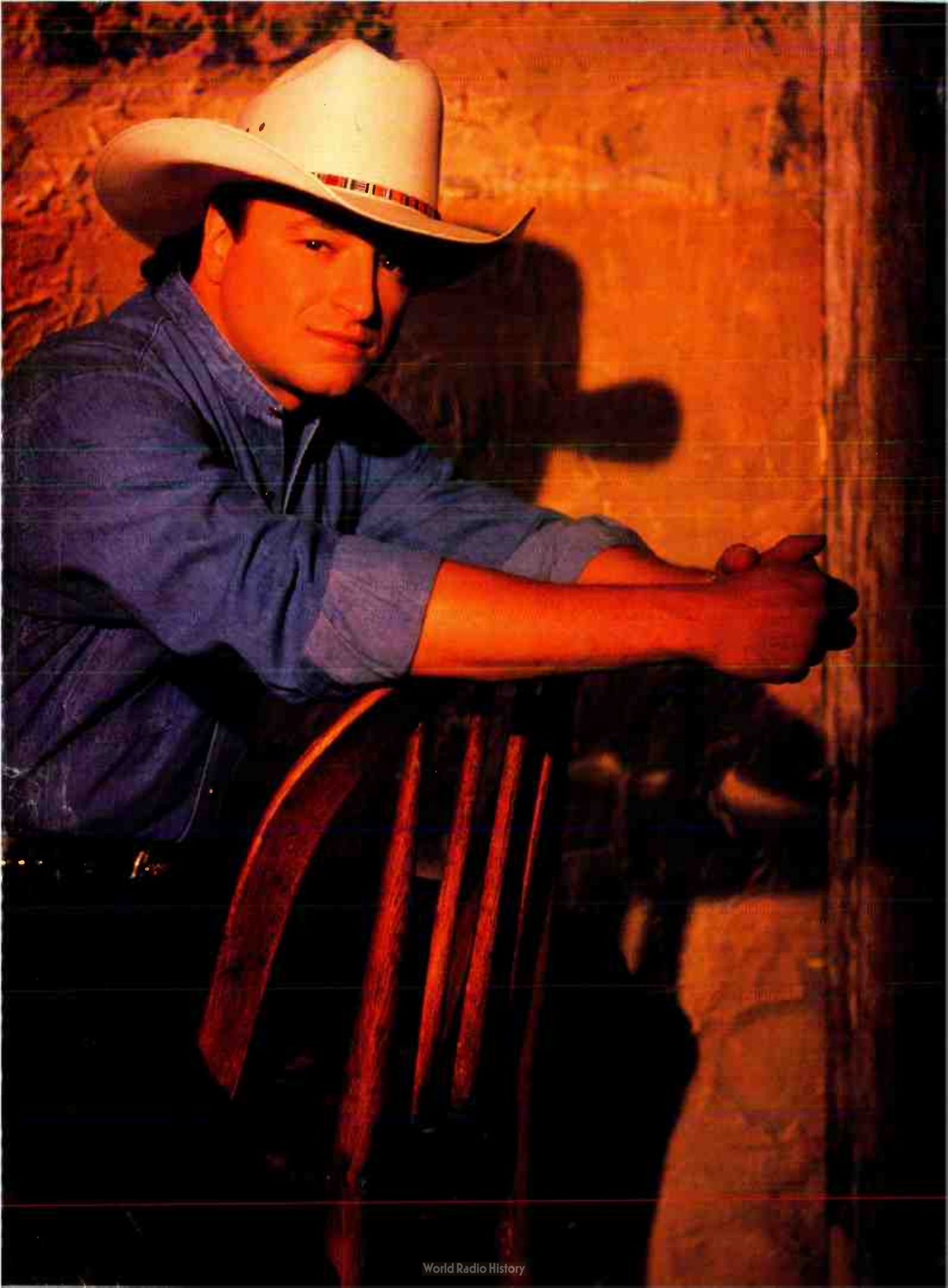
"Is this going to be your new look for the 90's?" I ask.

"Hey, if it'd work, I'd do it," Chesnutt says. "Not enough people out there know who I am."

After six Gold and platinum-selling CD's of genuine, solid honky tonk country music, Chesnutt is frustrated by this reality: In a "personality"-hungry media age he is not a "celebrity." In a time when the mega-selling acts are bigger than life, Chesnutt is refreshingly life-size.

This is only a problem because country music has become a big money, big market, media-driven industry, whereas it was founded, developed, shaped and nurtured for the first 60 years or so in rodeos, blue collar juke joints and small town high school gymnasiums. It also grew up in the intimacy of listeners' living rooms, where radio shows like the *Louisiana Hayride*, *WLS Barn Dance*, *Renfro Valley Barn Dance*, *Wheeling Jamboree*, *Big D Jamboree* and the Grand Ole Opry were like members of the family.

That kind of face-to-face guy, Chesnutt is a singer, not a personality; a straight ahead, what-you-see-is-what-you-get singer in the finest country music tradition. He's a second generation Beaumont, Texas, honky tonker who came up through his



“You can tell by the music....The record companies are pushing the songs.

They’re making a lot of stars, but they aren’t making very many careers.”

teen years in smoky barrooms under the challenging tutelage of country-singing Bob Chesnutt, his dad. As Steve Earle was overheard to say during last fall’s Country Music Week activities, “There ain’t but one real good hillbilly singer left on Music Row—Mark Chesnutt.”

It’s not as though he hasn’t achieved all the other earmarks of success, but they have come via great, plodding effort. Chesnutt has earned nine Number One singles and at least seven Top Tens, including “Bubba Shot the Jukebox,” “Too Cold at Home,” “Goin’ Through the Big ‘D’” and “Gonna Get a Life.” Still, he considers his records a slow sell. Perhaps fine songs and a great, unapologetically country voice are not enough anymore. Chesnutt wonders about that sometimes, but he’s too busy making a living to worry. Which is not to say that he doesn’t have a few well-chosen words to say about the situation when properly prodded.

This early autumn evening I try to loosen up Chesnutt, who is yawning and clearly punchy as we sit down for what will be his umpteenth interview since getting started at 6:30 that morning. I say I had always thought an artist puts out a greatest hits album when they need a break from recording, when they need a little rest. Chesnutt erupts in a burst of explosive laughter.

“Take a break, hell!” he says. “Man, I’ve done more promotin’ on this album than any of ‘em.”

He has also had a bit more creative input into this one. Chesnutt is not known as a songwriter. He has only had a hand in a couple of tunes on his previous albums, but he is third-writer on both the singles scheduled from his *Greatest Hits* collection—“It’s a Little Too Late” and “Let It Rain.” He’s quick to give credit where he says it’s due: to his collaborators, especially Roger Springer, who wrote both songs with Chesnutt.

“Yeah, they let me put my two cents worth in, for what that was worth,” says Chesnutt. “We’re gettin’ ready to go into the studio and make a new record in January, and I’ll write something for that—if it happens. I’m not ever gonna be one of those guys that just cuts his own songs. I don’t want to limit myself like that. Besides, I’m not good enough to do that.”

As we talk, he begins to settle down and open up; his laconic drawl and wry, self-deprecating sense of humor find their pace.

“No, the main reason we put out a greatest hits album is that...well, there’s not a whole lot of people that knows that I’ve been around this long. They don’t realize how many hits we’ve had. I’m still pretty new and unknown to a lot of people. Decca said, ‘Hey, why don’t we put out a record with all your hits on it,’ then they turned around and only put ten of ‘em on it. I’ve

had 20 singles, but maybe all of ‘em weren’t great. This is supposed to be ‘greatest hits.’”

He laughs at himself, but the sore spot is close to the surface as he goes on. Is it frustrating to have been around this long, to have served up solid country hits, to have stayed truer to the country roots than any of the flavor-of-the-month hat hunks who have popped up with teeny bopper romance material on million-selling debut CD’s?

“Oh, yeah!” he says emphatically. “I see somebody come up out of nowhere and within six months have a million-selling record and be selling out 15,000-seat venues, and I wonder, ‘Damn, what’d I do wrong?’”

And yet, there is no bitterness in his voice. He’s laughing under his breath even as he acknowledges that he’s not as tall, dewy-eyed handsome or romantically packaged as some others. Mark Chesnutt is not manipulating an image; not using a college degree in marketing more than his vocal chords here; he’s a plain great singer who dropped out of high school to pay his dues working in clubs.

“That’s the only way I knew how to do it,” he exclaims. “Maybe I did it wrong; I don’t think so.”

Chesnutt subscribes to the theory that a large portion of the new kids on the country block probably couldn’t sing a Merle Haggard song all the way through to save their lives; they don’t know where the music came from.

“A lot of them don’t,” he says grimly. “You can tell by the music. The record companies are pushing the songs. They’re making a lot of stars, but they aren’t making very many careers.”

Despite the crushing work load that keeps him away from home more than 200 days a year, life is good for the Chesnutt family. He and wife, Tracie, welcomed their second baby boy on December 18. Although the official due date was January 8—Elvis Presley’s birthday—Casey Aron Chesnutt arrived three weeks early.

“Casey is after my wife’s great grandfather, or somethin’, and Aron is after Elvis,” he drawls. Early arrivals run in the Chesnutt family. Mark was even predicting it. “Waylon [Mark’s two-year-old] came like three weeks early. But he was full term. I don’t think them doctors can really pinpoint the date.”

With all these Elvis Presley connections, it was only natural that his consultation with the orchestra leader for The King’s Las Vegas comeback stand would lead to rumors that Chesnutt was planning a Presleyesque road show for 1997. Don’t expect any Elvis sightings from his show, explains Chesnutt.

“He’s a friend of mine, and my manager thought it would be a



good idea if he would come out on the road with me and give me some suggestions about pacing and all that," he says, sipping what he estimates is his 15th cup of coffee for the day. "Word got out that he was gonna help me put together a show—choreograph it and all that, but that's not so. Everybody got the wrong idea. I knew that was gonna happen. I saw it in [a tabloid weekly newspaper] one time, but that's not true."

The real influence on Chesnutt's style remains Bob Chesnutt, who was felled by a heart attack just as Mark's first single was taking off.

"He's the one that got everything started; he was my dad. He's always gonna be with me," says Chesnutt. "There's not a day that goes by, or hour, or minute that goes by that I don't think about him, think of something and how he would've handled this. That's the way it's always gonna be."

Bob Chesnutt had the fire in his belly of country music ambition. Bob did a spate of independent country records when Mark was a child, but they never really took off. Mark still has copies of those records. In light of the Hank III project, does Mark think he might someday want to duet with his late father through similar digital studio magic?

"Yeah, somebody sent a note with that suggestion, somebody in radio maybe, about taking one of my dad's old songs and singin' with him like the three Hanks. I don't know, maybe someday."

The legacy of his father's coaching is contained in a need to constantly improve, a self-deprecating sense of humor and a streak of stubborn decency and humility.

"He always told me I was good, but I wasn't ready," Chesnutt explains. "He never told me I was good enough, even when I got the deal. But, that was his way of keeping me working. I don't think that anyone is ever 'good enough.' George Jones, Merle Haggard, Elvis—those guys are 'good enough,' but I don't think I am. I think I'm tryin' to be, but I'm gonna just keep tryin'. That's why Jones is so great after all these years; he's still out there tryin', still singin' his butt off."

If Chesnutt is a less a candidate for *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* than a simple, hard-working journeyman "working my ass off" as he puts it, he is a fairly content one.

"You know, sometimes I wonder why I haven't sold just millions and millions of albums, but then sometimes I have to think, well, I have sold millions," he says. "It took me years to get my first platinum album. Sometimes I wonder why that happened, but at the same time I'm not bitchin' about anything. I think everything's goin' real well."

He plans to keep at this business of honky tonk singing until he drops in his traces.

"I probably will," he agrees. "I'll probably keep goin' 'til I can't no more. Like I say, I don't make the kind of money where I can take six months off. I gotta stay out there; I gotta keep doin' it to survive. This is what I do for a livin'. If I sold 20 million records next week, I would probably still do 200 shows next year."

But there are obviously more than financial reasons driving this road hound.

"This is what I wanted to do; I wanted to be a singer," he continues. "I have a great time out here, and if I don't sound like it right now, it's because I feel like hell. It's a lot better than anything else I could be doin'."

He hears that from the artists in whose footsteps he has followed, too.

"I think of George Jones as a friend; someone I can call. But ever'time I call here lately, he's out on the road workin'. George and Waylon both told me that they're workin' harder now than they ever did before. You have to really promote yourself now to sell any records or concert tickets or to get any airplay. You really have to work hard at it. Things don't just happen; you have to make it happen. They tell me that it's harder now than it was 30 years ago...20 years ago...15 years ago.

"Hell, there wasn't that many singers, wasn't that many acts," he laments. "Now, there's tons of 'em out there on the road. I don't remember how many, but there's hundreds of touring acts. Boy, that makes it tough. You know, people really don't have the money to go see five or six shows a month. And a lot of



Chesnutt on stage, doing what he does best. He's not in it for the money.

these people are chargin' so much for a ticket because they're carryin' a million-dollar damn light show or three or four buses and trucks. But I don't do that. I don't have all that stuff. I'm a pretty bare bones country show, so I can play in a club and not worry about having to charge 50 bucks.

"But everything's so damned expensive," he confesses. "You end up doing a lot of shows just so you can stay out there."

And in that statement you find a key to understanding this man. "Staying out there" and singing for the folks gets in the blood like a virus there's no cure for.

"You don't do this just for money," he says, though he might only be speaking for himself. "You do it 'cause you love the music and the lifestyle. I like to travel. I like to keep movin'. Believe it or not, I like the pace. It's nice to be able to sing in front of a different crowd ever' night and see different places. It's not worth a shit when you feel bad, but you gotta entertain even when you don't wanna entertain. And that's when you're professional. Either you can do it or you can't—you either are or you ain't."

So, I ask, what are you going to do different this year? Aside from possible changes in corporate sponsorship, he can't think of anything.

"I don't know," he says, as if this is the first time the idea of changing his ways has occurred to him. "Nothin', really, other than tying my shirt up in a knot, I don't think there's anything [new] I can do. I'm still gonna keep doin' my kind of music; keep doin' what I'm doin.' As long as there's somebody there to hear it, I'm gonna keep puttin' it out there." ■

About the time you think life has
gotten as good as it can, for

Lorrie Morgan

...It Just Keeps Getting Better



By Bob Millard

Things can change fast.

I remember laughing last summer with Lorrie Morgan—single, freshly and amicably split from a powerful boyfriend, Tennessee Senator Fred Thompson—as she showed off her newly installed belly button ring. Somehow, that ring and the new album for 1996, *Greater Need*, tied in to reflect Lorrie's coming of age. The album was full of tunes addressing her status as a full-grown woman, comfortable with herself thanks in part to Thompson's nurture, yet just as willing as ever to be unabashedly still a kid at heart.

She also mentioned her new *ad hoc* duet partner, Jon Randall, with whom she shared the hit single "By My Side." Talk about your prophetic titles. But, back then she said they were "just good friends," little more than professional acquaintances. Before that story could run, her story began changing at a rapid clip. I reminded her as we talked again at Christmastime about her hands-off description of her relationship with Randall; by this time they were married!

"That must have been months ago," she said, laughing.

Because they parted friends, she had nothing but good things to say of the glamorous fling with Senator Thompson in the nation's capitol.

"It was fun," she exclaimed. "Yeah, Washington was fun. Fred opened a lot of doors for me. He was the perfect Southern gentleman, I will tell you that. He broadened my vision of the world. If someone can come into your life and add something to it like that, then regardless of whether the relationship ended or goes on, it was meaningful.

"Something good came out of the relationship because Fred taught me a lot

about a lot of different culture things. I followed the news in politics much more than I ever had in my life. I learned a lot, met great people. I was taken to some of the best restaurants I have ever been to, great parties, and not only that, but I was treated like a real woman. I was treated like my dad would have loved to see me treated. That meant a lot to me. Fred and I became like best friends, and I kind of like to think that that's where we'll always remain."

Once widowed and twice divorced, with Dallas Cowboys' quarterback Troy Aikman still apparently "the big one that got away," Lorrie has not had a restful time where affairs of the heart are concerned. Now there was a new husband, a new album scheduled for recording dates in January, and a book deal that reportedly topped even those made by Dolly Parton, Barbara Mandrell, Naomi Judd, Reba McEntire and Ralph Emery in recent years.

But first, let's talk wedding and home life. How did she come to wed Jon Randall, former Emmylou Harris sideman and an ex-RCA recording artist in his own right?

"Well, it was just one of those things," says Lorrie. "Actually, it started off as a great admiration of each other and a great appreciation for each other's talents.

"The first time I met him was on the RCA boat show a couple of years ago. I was a huge fan of his from that moment on. I thought he was just one of the greatest singers that I'd ever heard. Then, Joe Galante approached me about doing a duet with Jon on my last album. I said, 'Sure, I'd be glad to.'

"Of course, we went in the studio, and you really don't know how you're going to





sound with someone until you really go in there and try it. It was one of those magical moments between us. Like I said, we grew from there—from really appreciating each other's talents and having a great admiration for each other."

But, even in Music City, true love does not grow in the rarified atmosphere of the recording studio.

"Oh, he came out to a couple of my son's baseball games last year and a couple of basketball games," she explains. "It was just one of those things that grew from a friendship thing to love. And then marriage."

When you are as strong and independent a woman as Lorrie Morgan has had to be, it can be nice to be needed. Jon Randall seems to be a man who needs Lorrie, which is certainly different, one would imagine, than her other men in the past several years. In 1995 he went through an ugly, scandal-ridden lawsuit filed by an angry ex-girlfriend, lost his record deal and generally saw his confidence slipping away. Emotionally, he needed support, and she seemed pleased to have a sensitive man around. It probably didn't hurt that, as with the late Keith Whitley, Jon has talent that puts them as equals in the entertainment world, a world of which few outsiders appreciate the nuances and the highs and lows.

"Jon is just so unique," Lorrie explains. "I think that people are missing out on his uniqueness because he's not the typical cowboy hat singer. It's kind of one of those things like when they told Willie Nelson that he stunk and to leave town—blah, blah, blah, and you know how *that* turned out. I think Jon is going through what we've all had to go through, which is getting that confidence built up, and as soon as he lands the right record deal and publishing deal, he's gonna have a lot more confidence about himself."

Of course, Lorrie's life has long been fodder for the grocery store tabloids. It stands to reason that the at-home wedding of these two attractive, talented country artists had the potential to become a media circus, and it very nearly did. "It was very surprising because we had promised *People Magazine* and a couple others an exclusive photo from the wedding so they wouldn't show up at our house in Hendersonville," she says, but she had underestimated the celebrity mags' interest in her.

"Crazy enough, there were more photographers out in the yard than there were people in the wedding itself. We live right on the lake, and there were people in boats with these telephoto lenses out on the lake and in the front of the house. It was unbelievable."

Inside, it was a different story.

"My daughter, Morgan, surprised us with a poem that she had written. It was

kind of about what she and I and Jesse had been through in the last few years and how she wanted to welcome Jon into the family. It was a very emotional point in the wedding and very beautiful."

Lorrie and Jon share the lake view home and have found a silver lining to the temporary derailment of his recording career: They have time to actually share a domestic life.

"You know, we've had a blast living the domestic life, in the words of John Conlee," she said. "Jon and I love to cook together; we do everything together. He makes great chili. He makes the best chili I've ever had in my life.

"He's so sweet. He brings me breakfast in bed, and he cooks great scrambled eggs. I couldn't ask for a more perfect husband."

Her son and teenaged daughter seem to share her happiness at having a new man of the house around.

"They love him to death," Lorrie brags. "They absolutely love him to death. They are more at ease with themselves and me than I've ever seen 'em before, ever. He's never been a father before. He said, 'Gee, this is all new to me, and I don't know what I'm doing.' I said, 'Look, I've been a mother for 16 years, and I don't know what the hell I'm doing.' It's just wing and a prayer, you know?"

Part of Lorrie's coming of age, recognition of adulthood (now that she's reached the early cusp of middle age), is reflecting on her past. Sure, there's a new album due out in 1997, and another duet with Jon Randall scheduled, but the big item on her agenda is that million-dollar book deal with Ballantine Books in New York, a contract to share the story of her life with Keith Whitley. With a movie deal almost certain to follow, this memoir promises to do something that Lorrie's music career never quite did—put her on easy street. Regardless of retrospective and tribute albums honoring her late husband, his legacy has been smaller than that of Jim Reeves or Patsy Cline.

"I'm doing the life of Keith Whitley and myself together," she says, rejecting the terms biography and autobiography. "It's not Keith's life story and it's not my life story, but our lives together. We're calling it *Forever Yours, Faithfully*."

And the rumor of a million dollars for the project?

"Well, that's what they're telling me," she says, somewhat guardedly. "You know, I'm very happy. We landed a great deal, and possibly one of the best ones to come out of Nashville so far. It'd taken me a long time to agree to do this, but I wanted to get the truth written in the book before someone else wrote something stupid, you know?"



Lorrie and husband Jon Randall at their wedding.

She was involved this winter in intensive interview sessions with author George Vecsey. Vecsey wrote *Coal Miner's Daughter* for Loretta Lynn and came as close as humanly possible to making sense of Barbara Mandrell's ponderously digressive recollections. Vecsey has proven that where there is a consequential story to begin with, he can bring it home marvelously between the covers of a book. But it is not an easy task for Lorrie to regurgitate the agonies and ecstasies, the emotional roilings of that marriage that ended tragically when Whitley accidentally drank himself to death just when he was on the verge of major stardom.

"We take two to three hours a day and just sit down [and talk]," she said. "Which is basically all you can do, because when you're really reliving stuff like that, you have to relive the full emotion or it doesn't come across. It somewhat drains you."

And it is very hard to embrace all the lost joy and lingering pain of that story.

"Yes, it really is," she confessed. "You know, you sit and think about it from time to time, you relive memories or whatever, but to really get it across to someone what the feeling was and to really make the writer understand where you are coming from and feel it himself, you really have to contact each other with the heart. It's not just sitting down and saying, 'Well, then we went to there, and then we did this....' It's really ex-

pressing feelings and emotions that were dealt with then."

I tell her how I remember the days after Keith died, how she was criticized for going to the Grand Ole Opry and visiting backstage the weekend after the funeral, and how many believed she took advantage of the attention and her first really big single, that coincidentally happened at the same time, to get on about her life and rising career.

"Well, I don't know that it was exactly that I got the attention I deserved because Keith died," she corrected me. "People said they didn't know how I did it. Well, it would have been real damn easy for me to lay down and die right beside him. But, with two children and bills to pay... and believe me, there were bills and we had no money. There was no will, there was nothing left, there was nothing. So, I didn't have a choice.

"It's like I've said before, people have to deal with their grief in their own way. If people didn't understand it [her going to the Opry—where all her friends and support system were—after Keith's funeral], well, I really didn't give a damn."

Lorrie Morgan laughs, but there is a determined tone in her voice when I ask if she fears "testing positive for Branson" any time soon.

"No, that's definite," she said.

But she does plan to reduce her tour schedule in 1997 drastically, in large part, one suspects, to engage in controlling involvement with the book/movie project as it unfolds. Immersing herself in family life is another, and probably not secondary, reason for the cut back in concerts.

"Yeah, I'm only gonna do about 45-50 dates next year," she confirmed.

"Well, you know, I'm late-30's now and I've been out on the road 20 years. My children have almost grown up without me being there. There's things that they're doing now that I want to be a part of. There's things that are more important to me now than getting applause every night. I think that I'll always need that applause and that stage feeling. I'm by no means retiring, but I want to be able to enjoy the road and not be burned out on it."

The mere fact that only part of her life story could draw a million dollars from New York publishers and probably more from Hollywood producers is sure evidence of an extraordinarily eventful and drama-packed life. Not to mention the grind of concerts and recording schedules running wall-to-wall for year after year. She deserves a rest. She deserves a little home life. She deserves to exorcise those memories and get paid handsomely for them. It has to be one of the most compelling stories ever in country music. I can hardly wait to read it. ■

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Letters

Dolly a Great One

I just started reading my January/February 1997 issue of *Country Music Magazine*. I have read about half way through it and had to stop and write this letter. First of all—Dolly Parton is a great one for the cover. She is a great singer, a fine person and has a *country* heart of gold. I read everything I can get my hands on about her and buy all of her tapes.

I loved the cover story, but it broke my heart to think that she can't get her music played on country stations. I will listen to her music anytime and anywhere. I have called the radio station in my area many times with requests for her songs, and I will keep doing it too. Hey! All you loyal Dolly fans out there, call your radio stations and request her songs.

I love to hear her sing, but I also enjoy listening to her laugh and talk. There is no pretense about her, and that's what we need more of. To me, she is still country and always will be. She will also always be Number One in my book.

Doris (Cricket) Kimbrell
Iron City, Tennessee

"I Will Always Love Dolly"

Thanks for the beautiful cover and story with Dolly in the January/February issue. My family and I enjoy the Smoky Mountains about four times a year (it's our second home) along with Dollywood and The Dixie Stampede. While there, we always listen to Dolly's station. To be truthful it is about the only time we get to hear her on a radio station *all* the time. I think the radio stations need to wake up!

Julia R. Johnson
Jackson, Ohio

No-Holds-Barred Dolly

Thank you, thank you, thank you. I couldn't possibly thank you enough. You have just made me and one hundred million other Dolly Parton fans very happy. What a thrill it was to see Dolly's beautiful face grace your cover once again—50 years old and the woman is still stunning.

I truly admire her honesty. It was an up front, no-holds-barred interview. Thank you, Mr. Himes, for the wonderful review of Dolly's *Treasures* in the same issue. She truly is something to treasure. Dolly Parton is what all country artists should strive to be.

Richard L. McGuire
Vermilion, Ohio



Mustache Madness

Thank you for the great cover story on Alan Jackson, November/December 1996 issue. I have subscribed to *Country Music Magazine* for four years, and this is my first letter. I am a devoted fan of Alan Jackson's, and have even devoted one room of my house with as much memorabilia as I have been able to get. Alan Jackson rates right up there with my other all time favorites such as George & Tammy, Merle Haggard, Waylon Jennings and George Strait. And he is anything but dull or boring!

This phone call from Sharon Stone. Who does she think she is? What woman, other than a wife, has the right to even make a request such as a man shaving off his mustache! So Denise, as Alan's wife, please start yelling, and don't stop until you put this woman back in her place where she belongs, Hollywood! Thank God the band members have! Remember, this is the woman who dumped on Dwight Yoakam....and who cares if she *might* appear on a video of Alan's, certainly not I.

Debby Poulsen
Indianapolis, Indiana

A Plan for Alan

Alan Jackson has a fantasy about buying a radio station (cover story in November/December issue) "and just play real country music on it." I've had that same fantasy only I don't have the money or power to do it. As a listener I worry that

real country is becoming extinct—I'd buy a short-wave radio up here in Canada just to hear it on the radio again. Why don't some of the successful country artists (like Jackson) get together and actually buy a radio station! A lot of people would be grateful.

Violet Frazer
Calgary, Alberta, Canada

Saved by the Bell and Alan

I wasn't going to renew my subscription to your *Country Music Magazine* till I got the last two (September/October, November/December 1996). One pull-out poster of Alan Jackson, the next issue a front cover of Alan plus the interview with him. Am so glad you are finally giving him some long overdue credit for his music. Saw him in concert this summer, and he was great! Thank you, thanks.

Marilyn Hughes
Winterset, Florida

More David Lee Murphy

You've almost got it—the makings of a perfect CMM cover! His *name* was on the January/February cover. How about goin' all the way and doin' it right! Let's see David Lee Murphy on the cover! Such a talented and refreshingly enjoyable artist! Thank you, CMM, for the great article in the January/February issue, and thank you, David Lee, for "Gettin' Out the Good Stuff"!

Linda Beatty
Hesston, Pennsylvania

Proud to Be...

I just wanted to write and say thank you for the great article on David Lee Murphy in the January/February issue. When I saw his name on the cover of your magazine, I had to buy it! I've had the pleasure of seeing David Lee in concert many times. He always takes the time to meet his fans and sign autographs. It's guys like him that make me proud to be a "Genuine Redneck."

Tammy Crump
Culver, Indiana

Kudos on HighTone

Kudos bigtime to you! Thank you for giving a nod towards the California-based HighTone Records in your January/February issue. Next up Little Dog Records! Artists like Dale Watson, Dave Alvin and Marty Brown are far too overlooked! They along with Lucinda Williams, Joy Lynn White and Jim Lauderdale (and,

yes, even Dwight Yoakam) are responsible for keeping the "dust-bowl cowpunk/honky tonk" style alive. Thank God for these artists! They offset the poisonous milk toast of Bryan White, John Berry and Shania Twain.

Synde Korman
La Mesa, California

Mr. Marty Brown

In my 53 years, I've seen a lot of country singers come and go. I was so thrilled to see my very favorite, Marty Brown, spotlighted in your January/February issue. (Dwight Yoakam is my second favorite.) Thanks, too, for Geoffrey Himes' record review (November/December 1996) of Marty's *Here's to the Honky Tonks*. I can listen to Marty's music all day without getting tired of it.

Kay Miller
Ashland, Wisconsin

Cover Ms. Bogguss

I want to say thank you for the article on Suzy Bogguss in your November/December issue. There is one suggestion I would like to make. Isn't it about time for your magazine and other country music magazines as well to finally put Suzy on the cover? She hasn't graced a cover I've seen or know of. Come one, let's put this beautiful, talented lady where she belongs.

Jimmy Bowers
Greenville, South Carolina

Guys in the Middle

Thank you for the magnificent centerfold of Diamond Rio in the January/February issue. This group is the best sound of today's music. If you have ever seen them live, in concert they put on one fantastic show. I would like to see them with the coveted Entertainer of the Year award. Come on, world, open your ears to real talent!

Valerie Hatton
Frankfort, Ohio

Centerfold Crazy

Thank you so much for your centerfold of Bryan White in the November/December 1996 issue. I'm a new subscriber to *Country Music Magazine*, and when I received my first issue, I was disappointed when I realized that ya'll have centerfolds! The reason for that is this: I thought that I'd missed the one of Bryan!

I've read the Facts of Life about Bryan about a hundred thousand times! I feel like I know him better than his best friends do. Now could you do a centerfold of Ricochet, Paul Brandt or Wade Hayes?

Sarah Strack
East Alton, Illinois

White Fan on Cloud Nine

I just wanted to thank you guys for finally featuring Bryan White in your November/December issue. It's the best centerfold yet! I've been waiting and

waiting for something on him to appear in your mag. I never gave up hope because you guys are the best, and I knew sooner or later he'd be in there in some form or fashion, and there's no better way than a centerfold!

You can't go wrong with anything on Bryan because he's the best! I'll be waiting for the next feature on him anytime soon. Hey, how about a feature on Ty England or Wade Hayes in the near future?

Caroline Morris
Elk Creek, Virginia

Carr Cover Loretta Lynn

Patrick, you are my only hope. No one talks about Loretta. "Young Country" radio and "Young Country" (why am I capitalizing such vulgar words?) fans think she is an embarrassment and about 90 years old. I am only 28, and I know the staggering credentials of the woman who once was the biggest star in the world. I remember when she was named Female Vocalist 22 times while competing with the company of Connie Smith, Tammy Wynette, Lynn Anderson, Dolly Parton, Donna Fargo, Dottie West, Crystal Gayle, Emmylou Harris...etc. I'll pause on this topic.

Loretta deserves the exact adulation, esteem, acclaim and, simply put, overblown worship that George Jones, Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings receive



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QUIZ

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1. What is Vince Gill's favorite pastime, whether at home or on the road?
2. Which singer did Lorrie Morgan recently marry?
3. How many Number One singles does Mark Chesnutt have?
4. Which fellow legend helped Faron Young get his start?
5. Where was Ty Herndon born?
6. When did Hank Thompson make his first record?
7. Chevy's S-10 is the only compact truck that offers a particular useful feature. What is it?

ANSWERS TO LAST ISSUE'S QUIZ:

1. Blue Eye Records
2. Tim McGraw
3. two
4. Larry Sloven and Bruce Bromberg
5. Hank Williams Sr., Hank Williams Jr. and Shelton Hank Williams III
6. Gene Johnson and Brian Prout.
7. Chevy Trucks

Chevy Trucks
LIKE A ROCK



from the "young country" singers. (Note I said singers, not artists, or should we call them posers?) Loretta's credentials dwarf her male counterparts, but no one seems to notice.

Like her or not, Patrick, you are the fan's last hope of reading anything innovative on her 1997 comeback and supreme legend.

Mike Shiplett
Akron, Ohio

See *People* in this issue for a Loretta sighting, and please stay tuned.—Ed.

Kienzle on Jackson

In the January/February issue, Rich Kienzle reviewed Alan Jackson's album *Everything I Love*. It was a good review, but then I haven't read a bad review yet of this album. I agree with everything Rich said because to me this album is everything I love!

But I didn't agree with his comments regarding the "Who's Cheatin' Who" song. I would like to know what a "mindless dance club arrangement" is? I have seen Alan perform this song in concert four times last year, and the response to this song is outstanding. The crowd gets into a frenzy when he sings it.

"Little Bitty" may be an "uninspired celebration of the...solid aspects of blue collar life," but Rich seems to forget just where Alan Jackson came from. He was what this song is all about at one time, and I think it is a tribute to that time in his life and to the "little bitty blue collar" people who buy the records, stand in line for hours to get tickets to the concerts and are devoted and loyal fans. I think he chose this song for his album "because" he is Alan Jackson.

Thanks for letting me have my say. I love *Country Music Magazine*.

Jane C. Majeski
Manahawkin, New Jersey

Keepin' an Eye on JMM

I am relatively new to your magazine and really enjoy it a lot! I am a happy subscriber. I have to comment on the record review of John Michael Montgomery's *What I Do the Best* in the January/February issue. The reviewer cuts a bit of a low blow when he cracks about John Michael having trouble carrying a tune in real life. I owe my entire turn around to country music to Mr. Montgomery because I just love his voice, and at first I just listened to CD's, and sure, aren't most tunes engineered to sound the best? It wasn't until I recently heard John Michael in concert that I realized some of the things I had heard from commentators regarding "his real voice" weren't true. He sounded great, and I know how to spot a flat note. He sang his heart out, song after song, and there were just as many men at the concert rockin' and a-rollin' and having a great time as women. Sure, he is down-

right "hunky." I mean John Michael is totally gorgeous, but I wouldn't have ever even paid any attention without my ears falling first. A die-hard JMM fan am I. Singing is what he does best, at least from what I know! I would like to know what he does better!

Liz Evans
Riverside, California

Surgery for Millard

I'm writing to respond to the review on Paul Brandt by Bob Millard in the January/February issue. The man should definitely get another job. Not only is Paul Brandt's voice one of the best in country (in my opinion), but his songwriting for a novice is excellent. It takes years for some country singers to make it; he's only 24 and they found him. He did not have to even try—all he did was sing. That kind of voice comes around once in a lifetime and deserves to be heard. I can't wait for his second album and third and fourth and so on. Bob Millard should have the wax removed from his ears, and a little brain surgery would not hurt either.

Dawn LeMay
West Islip, New York

Millard Sinks, Brandt Rises

I am writing in regards to the record review of Paul Brandt's debut album, *Calm Before the Storm*, featured in the January/February 1997 issue. I can not believe Bob Millard could sink so low as to completely rip apart Brandt's effort. Thank God not everyone is as narrow-minded. I was mesmerized by Brandt's deep voice, and I fell in love with the album's heart-wrenching ballads such as "I Do" and "I Meant to Do That." Brandt also gives a wonderful performance with the lively "Twelve-Step Recovery" and "All Over Me," only to mention a few. Sharing my view are friends that had no previous interest in country music until Brandt hit the airwaves.

I commend Paul Brandt on his magnificent debut album, and I hope he does not take Bob Millard's opinion to heart. I hope Paul realizes that there are plenty of fans out here in musicland that love what he has brought to country music.

Christy Farrell
South Sioux City, Nebraska

Beyond Belief

I just read Bob Millard's record review of Paul Brandt's album, *Calm Before the Storm*, in the January/February issue, and I can't believe it! Did Mr. Millard listen to the same CD that I listen to everyday? I think that Brandt's album is one of the best of 1996. His wonderful voice is instantly recognizable. Brandt will not only have a second album, he will be around for a long time. Stay calm, Mr. Millard!

Laura Duch
Barnesville, Ohio

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Measure of Our Reviewers

I am going to have to speak up against the review given on Kevin Sharp's album, *Measure of a Man*, in the January/February issue. Sharp is fabulous and so is his album. Bob Allen did not even mention the song, "Nobody Knows." That song happened to go to Number One on the country charts recently. So what if Bob Allen thinks Kevin is more of a pop singer than a country singer? All I know is if it is good music, I don't care what category it falls under.

I am beginning to wonder if the people who give your reviews even love music like I do, not only because of the bad review of Kevin's album, but also because of the bad review of Billy Ray Cyrus' album *Trail of Tears* in your November/December 1996 issue. Kevin Sharp's and Billy Ray Cyrus' CD's are my only CD's I own and care to listen to. I don't care if they sing rock, country or pop or even rap. I love them both very much, and their songs have touched my life. For that I will always be very thankful and their devoted fan.

Tracy Coffey
El Dorado, Kansas

Reached Her Limit/Makes Her Point

I am totally appalled by Rich Kienzle's review of *Three Hanks* in your January/February issue. *Three Hanks* was a turning point for me. I found it refreshing to see someone have the guts to bring back some of the "old sound" of country music that is not played much today (and this from someone who never enjoyed the "old sound"). Since the release of this CD, I have found myself listening more and more to country music on the radio. Not to mention the fact that I bought a few copies of the CD for gifts. (And not one person has disliked the music.)

So, even though Rich Kienzle felt that "singling out a particular performance as the worst is difficult," I find that singling out a music critic as the worst is one of the easiest things I've ever done in my life. It can be summed up in two words...Rich Kienzle.

Hank Jr. does need to go back to writing his own songs like he did years ago. Country music has not been the same since. However, he has always marched to his own drum, and for that, I say, "More power to you, Bocephus."

Martha L. Chavez
Palm Beach Gardens, Florida

BRC a Good Man

In response to Bob Millard's record review in the November/December 1996 issue, I cannot understand why critics are so down on Billy Ray Cyrus. Is it because Billy Ray Cyrus "did it his way" and did not slide in on the skirt/shirt tails of someone who had already made it big? Or maybe it is because he is a shy, quiet, decent man who doesn't play all the crooked

political games. He has shown an honest decent man can make it with a lot of hard work and luck. And he's a man who speaks to his God in private and does not loudly proclaim God in every interview, talk show, etc., and not put action behind the mouth. It seems an honest, decent individual does not have a chance in the country music business.

Marilyn Cantrell Haney
Paintsville, Kentucky

First Things First

The first thing I do when my *Country Music* comes is flip through the pages to see if there is anything about Travis Tritt. If there is, that makes my day. So I was happy to see the laudatory review of his great new album, *The Restless Kind*, by Bob Allen in the November/December 1996 issue. Thank you, Mr. Allen. I too think highly of it. It deserves an award, and so does Travis himself. Wake up, Nashville! Don't you realize what you have in Travis Tritt? In the present gloom of proliferating, lackluster sound-alikes, he stands out like a bright flame.

Dorothy S. Leonard
Altadena, California

Only K.T.

Just a note to thank Rich Kienzle for his *fantastic* and *so true* review of K.T. Oslin's new CD *My Roots Are Showing* in your November/December issue. He is so "on-track." K.T. has this unique talent of being able to take someone else's song and make it totally hers. Also a brief "eye witness" observation about how hard K.T. works for charities. K.T. had a long sound check the day of the MusicCity Cares concert, but as tired and hungry as she was, K.T. stood and signed over 200 posters for special ticket holders. Then attended the reception, where she graciously posed for photos, then put on a fantastic concert. It is a real shame that most people are clueless as to how hard these entertainers work, even when they are donating their time and talent.

Also, would like to thank Hazel Smith for mentioning K.T. in her People section in the November/December issue.

Fran Alsbrook
Nashville, Tennessee

For feature on K.T., stay tuned.—Ed.

More Emotional Girl

Yeah! That's right, we need more Terri Clark (Record Reviews, January/February). More articles, pictures, a lot of pictures. Your magazine is great, but I need more Clark. I've seen her twice, once with George Strait and another by herself at the Crazy Horse, Santa Ana. She was great. She sounds great, and she'll be great in this business. She's the 90's Linda Ronstadt. Keep it twang, Terri.

Thomas Singleton
Buena Park, California

Loveless Cover

Do you not like Patty Loveless? She is the CMA and ACM Female Vocalist of the year, yet she has yet to be a feature in your magazine. Patty is an awesome vocalist who works hard for the awards she so much deserves. Is she going to be on the cover anytime soon?

Nicole Spaller
Smyrna, Tennessee

Great minds move in the same channel. Please stay tuned.—Ed.

Carlene Carter, Rockabilly, Cookies

Carlene Carter—the first and last word in country. Why has she never been on your cover yet, or a pull-out poster? She deserves it! Carlene's the reason I really got into country music in the late 80's. She's so beautiful, talented and the best singer/songwriter. I was sure disappointed when she didn't come to town with Pam and Lorrie on tour.

How about articles on rockabilly? Wanda Jackson, Kelly Willis, Rosie Flores, Becky Hobbs, Rhonda Vincent, Lorrie Collins, Jackie DeShannon, Lou Ann Barton and Sue Foley. There's much more to country than Garth, Tritt, Billy Ray, Alabama, Brooks & Dunn, etc. All cookie-cutter garbage.

Don Lechner
Cincinnati, Ohio

Farewell to Faron

A lot of Faron Young's fans back here in Wisconsin would appreciate one last review of his life and recording career. This would be a nice tribute. Most of the time we saw him at our Little Grand Ole Opry Theatre, which is an outdoor one. We were packed in seating facilities like salmon, just to see Faron put on a show. He always kept his audience wondering what he was going to do next, and it always came out as a good show. Our Last Tribute to Faron Young: Sweet Dreams!

Bert Elwood
Reedsburg, Wisconsin

Tribute to Faron

It's too bad we can't pay tribute to someone until they are gone. Faron Young deserves to be in the Hall of Fame, and I hope Ralph Emery personally sees to it, if he has to fight for it.

My memory of Faron goes back to the days when country music came to Cobo Hall in Detroit. I was always there to see all those great shows. On one occasion, Faron was on stage singing his songs, when a lady who seemed to be slightly intoxicated approached the stage trying to talk to him. He was very kind and said, "Go sit down, darlin'," but she was very persistent. He kept repeating, "Go to your seat, darlin'." She was interrupting his show. Finally the guards removed her but not at his request. I have never forgotten the wisdom he used by talking

kindly to her. I didn't approve of his language on the Ralph Emery show, but I guess life turned him that way.

I treasure all his hit recordings, and I will remember him as a great entertainer.

Louise Gist
Taylor, Michigan

Credit to Faron

I hope you will have an article in tribute to Faron Young in an upcoming issue. He's never received the credit he deserves for his contributions to country music. Hopefully this can be corrected by his induction into the Country Music Hall of Fame.

Faron and other performers of the 1950's and 60's were country when it wasn't cool and you couldn't make a fast buck in it like today. They paved the way for today's country. It's a shame country radio won't play their music—it's real country.

So long, Faron. Your marvelous voice, your tell-it-like-it-is attitude and wonderful sense of humor were refreshing and will be greatly missed.

Lu Morley
Hiawatha, Iowa

See pages 10 and 39 in this issue.—Ed.

Fan Plunks Money Down

Because I'm a die-hard Hank Williams and Bocephus fan, I bought the *Three Hanks* CD on its release day, but, I admit, not without some reservations.

One, using Hank Williams' songs and voice and overdubbing Bocephus' voice sounded a bit "too gimmicky." Two, would the "third Hank" (Shelton) be, well...worthy. There's already too many new faces/butts/hats in country music that really don't belong in country music, and third...well, all I could think of was Hank Jr.'s great song, "Living Proof." Enough to really make the intentions behind *Three Hanks* doubtful at best.

Well, I'm very glad to say this fine CD put all those mixed emotions at bay with what, at least to me, is one of my favorite efforts to come out of Nashville in the longest time. The music sounds fresh, and there is a genuine attitude apparent throughout that just propels the listener along like a ride in a Phantom jet. As for "Hank III," well...my Lord, doesn't that "Family Tradition" run strong?

Leigh W. Cole
New Baltimore, Michigan

Sweeps Winner

The winner of our October/November 1996 \$1000 Renewal Sweepstakes is Robert D. Ferguson of Laurel, Florida.

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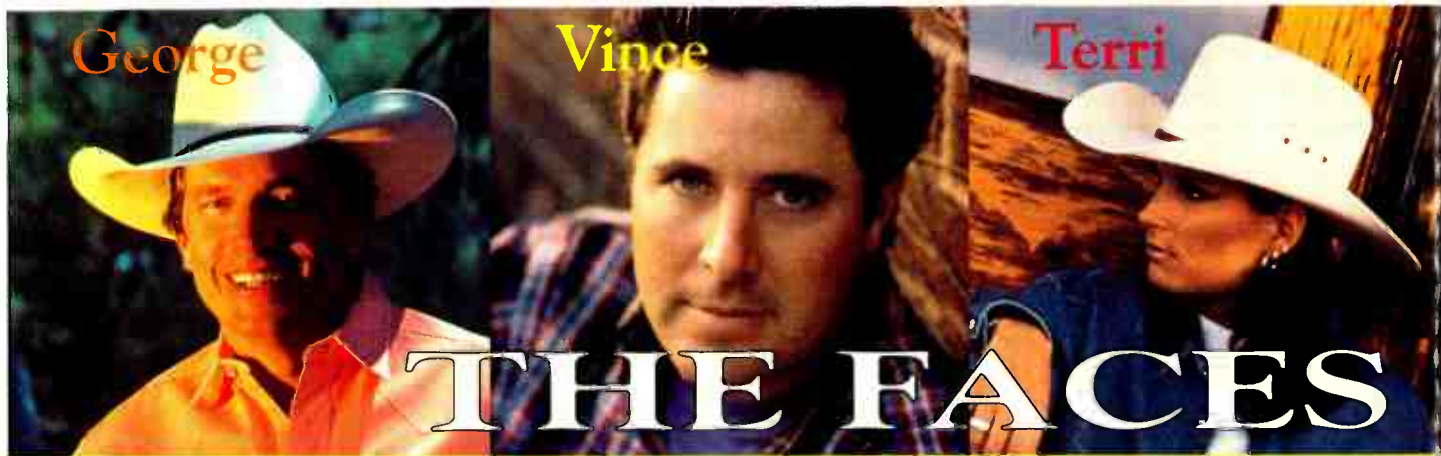
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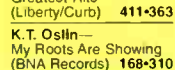
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Wynonna Judd—Wynonna (MCA/Curb) 435-909

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The Statler Brothers—Grt Hits, Vol. 3 (Mercury Nashville) 425-108

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George Strait—Ten Strait Hits (MCA) 432-617

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Vince Gill—I Still Believe In You (MCA) 448-571

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The Best Of The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band—Twenty Years Of Dirt (Warner Bros.) 345-744



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Ty England—Two Ways To Fall (RCA/Novus) 165-696

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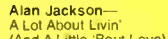
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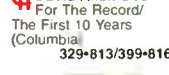
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Kevin Sharp—Measure Of A Man (Asylum) 173-641

John Berry (Capitol Nashville) 463-265

Trace Adkins—Dreamin' Out Loud (Capitol Nashville) 159-582

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Martina McBride—The Time Has Come (RCA) 123-752

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- PS. No risk to try us.** We'll refund you the entire amount of your membership if you're not satisfied for any reason, use return shipping within 10 days of our expense. For a full refund and with no further obligation, I expressly list Yes (1) on the D.P.Y. Making your selection of the new (1) card.
- If the Application is missing,** write to Columbia House, 1400 North Fruitridge Avenue, Terre Haute, Indiana 47811-1130.

©1997 The Columbia House Company

RUSH ME THESE 11 NOW

1.	4.	8.
2.	5.	9.
3.	6.	10.
	7.	11.

2 Bonus Offer: Also send this 12th one at a discount for which I've enclosed an additional \$6.98. (Shipping/handling will be billed.)

And I'm entitled to this 13th one FREE!

3 The music I like most is (check one):

<input type="checkbox"/> Soft Rock Mariah Carey Michael Bolton	<input type="checkbox"/> Hard Rock Tom Petty Van Halen	<input type="checkbox"/> Rap/HipHop Fugees LL Cool J	<input type="checkbox"/> Alternative Alanis Morissette No Doubt	<input type="checkbox"/> Latin Enrique Iglesias Marc Anthony
<input type="checkbox"/> Metal Ozzy Osbourne Korn	<input type="checkbox"/> R&B Babyface BLACKstreet	<input type="checkbox"/> Dance/Pop La Bouche 2 Unlimited	<input type="checkbox"/> Light Sounds* Barbra Streisand Neil Diamond	<input type="checkbox"/> Jazz* Fourplay Joshua Redman
<input type="checkbox"/> Contemporary Christian Steven Curtis Chapman Point Of Grace	<input type="checkbox"/> Gospel CeCe Winans Kirk Franklin and the Family			

*These Club members will be serviced with CDs only

4 I Prefer Cassettes. (You may order Cassettes with the same 10-day no-obligation offer.)

Mr. _____ Age (09) _____

Mrs. _____

Miss _____

Print First Name Initial Last Name

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Do you have a telephone? (01) Yes No If yes, write in number. (05) (_____) _____

Do you have a credit card? (03) Yes No

Note: We reserve the right to request additional information to accept any application or direct any membership. These offers are available in APC, PPC, Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, with for details of alternative offer. Canadian residents shipping from Toronto. Some terms may vary. Application forms fax available to all orders. 800-841-1111

Reminder: If you want cassettes, be sure to check box, otherwise you will be sent CDs. **3FP-BS-MF-8V-8W**

CLASSIFIED

For Ad Rates Call (800) 762-3555
Fax (813) 442-2567

ADDRESSES

COUNTRY STAR ADDRESSES BY REQUEST! Send us the names of the stars you want to write to, and we'll send you their addresses. \$2.00 per star. Send self-addressed, stamped envelope. Country Lists, Dept. CM-1, P.O. Box 41219, Nashville, TN 37204.

BOOKS/PUBLICATIONS

COUNTRY MUSIC RADIO ATLAS, 50 states, \$9.95 plus \$3.00 S&H: Country Music Traveler. P.O. Box 841, Derby, KS 67037.

COUNTRY MUSIC AWARDS PROGRAM - ACM TV show April 23, 1997. Official Souvenir Program. First time offer. 24-hour recorded message. (800) 643-5668, Extension 4444.

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FREE INVENTION PACKAGE. Davison & Associates offers customized development, patenting and licensing of new products and ideas. Proven Results: 1-(800) 677-6382.

\$1,850 WEEKLY! Mailing our reports. Free supplies. IBM Enterprise, Box 721169, Houston, TX 77272-1169.

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SINGLES. MEET OTHERS. Write: Club, Box 11434-CM, Fort Worth, TX 76110.

JAPANESE, ASIAN, EUROPEAN FRIENDSHIP! Inter-Pacific, Box 304-M, Birmingham, MI 48012.

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MISCELLANEOUS

MEET LATIN LADIES! Videos, tours, free photo brochure! LatinIntros, Box 924994 CW, Houston, TX 77292-4994. (713) 896-9224.

THE NATION'S PREMIER ADULT CHATLINE & dating service. 1-(268) 404-4416. Only regular long distance applies. 18+.

RUSSIAN LADIES seek love, romance through correspondence. Free catalog. Exciting Moscow tours. Anastasia-CM, Box 906, Winchester, KY 40392-0906. (606) 745-0776.

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OF INTEREST TO ALL

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FREE ADULT OR CHILDREN BIBLE study courses. Project Philip, Box 35-M, Muskegon, MI 49443.

STEEL GUITAR WORLD MAGAZINE, absolutely steel guitar paradise. Bravo! Free details: Steel Guitar World Magazine, P.O. Box 9297, Dept. B-97, Spokane, WA 99209-9297. (Visa/MC) orders 1-(800) 484-5789, Extension 7698. <http://www.steelguitarworld.com>

POSTERS/PHOTOS

CELEBRITY PHOTOS SEND SASE - Name favorites. Photoworld-CMM, P.O. Box 20747, Houston, TX 77225.

REAL ESTATE

OZARK MOUNTAIN ACREAGES. Nothing down, we finance, environmental protection codes, huge selection. Includes Branson area. Free catalog. Woods & Waters, Box 1-CM, Willow Springs, MO 65793. 1-(417) 469-3187.

RECORDING

YOUR GOALS ARE MY GOALS. Work with award winning artist, in artist development recording. Let me help you achieve your goals. MidLand Productions, P.O. Box 2303, Hendersonville, TN 37077. (615) 824-1503.

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING INFORMATION

RATES: Regular classified ads are \$6.50 per word. Minimum ad 10 words. All advertisements are set uniformly. They are set solid with the lead words set in caps. Abnormal capitalization, type variations, illustrations and borders are not permitted. The classified display rate is \$340 per column inch. The magazine will pub-set most regular type faces at no charge. The column width is 2.25 inches including border. For ads using either an illustration or halftone, send negative film, 133 line screen.

PAYMENT: All classified advertising must be prepaid with order. Make check or money order payable to *Country Music Magazine*. For credit card orders (Visa or MasterCard only), include account number, expiration date, signature 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 May/June, which closes March 20th; the July/August issue closes May 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; International (813) 449-1775; Fax (813) 442-2567.

RECORDING

PERFORMERS: Try melody lease. Costs nothing unless and until you are satisfied. Millar, #604, 1202-13 Avenue S.W., Calgary, AB. T3C 0T1

RECORDS/TAPES/CD'S

TRADITIONAL COUNTRY AND GOSPEL. Cassettes, compact discs, videos. Free catalog. Royal, P.O. Box 39246B, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33339.

SINGERS

SINGERS: 5 EASY WAYS to improve vocal performance. Send \$7.97 to: T. Read, 9516 Timberlake Road, #228, Lynchburg, VA 24502.

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POEMS, SONGS WANTED. \$100,000 - recording contract possible! Free appraisal. Majestic Records, Box 1140, Linden, TX 75563.

URGENT! SONGS, POEMS NEEDED. Radio, TV, royalties. Hollywood Records, 6000 Sunset, Studio M, Hollywood, CA 90028.

WANTED COUNTRY GOSPEL song poem hits! \$5,000 cash advance royalties information! Top Records, Box 23505-K, Nashville, TN 37202.

POEMS/LYRICS NEEDED by hit songwriters. Win awards! Free evaluation! Send poems: Edlee Music, Box 15312-CMM, Boston, MA 02215-5312.

POEMS WANTED FOR MUSICAL SETTING and recording. We pay above costs on selected poems. Jeff Roberts Publishing, 299 Newport Avenue (CM), Wollaston, MA 02170.

HOLLYWOOD RECORDERS makes songwriter demos. Free information, samples. 603 Seagaze, #138, Oceanside, CA 92054. (619) 757-7446.

LYRICS, POEMS FOR MUSICAL setting and recording. \$1,000 for best poem. Publishing available. Talent (CM), P.O. Box 31, Quincy, MA 02169.

PRODUCER - ACCEPTING SONGS, poems, lyrics! Studio 3, P.O. Box 120145, Nashville, TN 37212-0145.

CALL FREE, Nashville singer and songwriter information. Free publisher's list. 1-(800) 345-2694.

YOUR OWN SONG! Write just lyrics or lyrics and music. Nashville singers and musicians will bring your song to life. Visa/MasterCard accepted. Information and sample available. Nashville Digital Demos, 113 Catawba Court, Nashville, TN 37013. 1-(800) 484-8581. Code 3631.

BRAND NEW BOOK RELEASE!

GEORGE STRAIT

THE STORY OF COUNTRY'S LIVING LEGEND

People Magazine listed him as one of the 50 Most Beautiful People of 1995.

He broke Elvis Presley's record for consecutive sold-out performances at the Las Vegas Hilton.

He holds the record for the longest list of Number One hits of any male country music star, with 22 hits and 17 top-selling albums.

He's George Strait and, in this biography, journalist Mark Bego presents the story of his dazzling career, both on the stage and behind-the-scenes.

It's the story of a small-town Texas son, groomed to take over his father's ranch after he got out of the Army. But George was bitten by the music bug while stationed in Hawaii, taught himself how to play the guitar, and was on his way to stardom.

After kicking around local dancehalls and honky tonks with his own Ace in the Hole Band, he set out for the capital of country music, Nashville, Tennessee, and was signed by MCA Records. After his 1981 debut album, *Strait Country*, the rest is music history, with hit album after hit album.

This is one story you don't want to miss!

Hardcover, 304 Pages, 16 Pages of Personal and Performance Photos, Complete Discography, \$22.95



FREE CASSETTE WHEN YOU ORDER IN THE NEXT 10 DAYS!

Order in the next 10 days and you'll also receive George Strait's MCA album, *Strait From the Heart ...FREE!* This bestselling cassette features ten hits including "Fool Hearted Memory," "Amarillo by Morning," "Marina Del Rey" and "A Fire I Can't Put Out." Available on cassette only.

MAIL TO: Nashville Warehouse, Dept. 0304973,
P.O. Box 292553, Nashville, TN 37229

YES! Send the George Strait Biography for \$22.95 plus \$3.45 postage and handling. Be sure to include my **FREE** Cassette. (B9G/39315)

Check enclosed.

Instead charge my:

Visa MasterCard Discover Card

Card No. _____

Expiration Date _____

Signature _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____

Zip _____

VOTE

MEMBERS POLL/MARCH 1997

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)

Vacation Travel

5. Did you travel on vacation in the past 12 months?
 Yes No

6. What means of transportation have you used for vacation travel in the past 12 months?

- Automobile Airline
 Train Bus
 Cruise ship RV

7. Have you travelled to any of the following states for vacation in the past 12 months?

- Tennessee Missouri
 Texas South Carolina
 North Carolina Alabama

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: March Poll, *Country Music Magazine*, 329 Riverside Avenue, Suite 1, Westport, Connecticut 06880.

Skeeter Davis in Legends

Bear Family's *I Forgot More Than You'll Ever Know* (BCD 15722) is a double CD that includes the complete Davis Sisters repertoire for Fortune, Star and RCA Victor (featuring Skeeter with both Betty Jack and, after Betty's death, her sister Georgia). The two densely-packed CD's include various takes and versions of different numbers, including "I Forgot More Than You'll Ever Know," "Rock-A-Bye Boogie," "Heartbreak Ahead," "Just Like Me," "Gotta Git A-Goin'" and many, many more, including comprehensive notes. A two-CD set. Regular price \$49.95. Members' price \$39.95

RCA's Essentials series has *The Essential Skeeter Davis* (RCA 66536), which covers 20 selections from 1953 to 1971 starting with The Davis Sisters' hit, "I Forgot More Than You'll Ever Know." The remaining 19 songs focus on Skeeter's solo career, beginning with her 1959 Top Five single, "Set Him Free." Naturally, such later hits as "Optimistic," "Where I Ought to Be," "I Can't Stay Mad at You," "Gonna Get Along Without You Now" and, of course, "The End of the World," are included here. Her later career is represented by "I'm a Lover Not a Fighter" and her 1971 "Bus Fare to Kentucky," later the name of her autobiography. Available on cassette or CD. Regular price \$12.98 cassette, \$18.98 CD. Members' price \$10.98 cassette, \$16.98 CD.

Buried Treasures Special

CMSA members are entitled to a discount on all of the products featured in this section. Take \$2.00 off the price of each of the following items: Bobby Bare, Charlie Rich, Flatt & Scruggs and Lefty Frizzell. On the boxed

sets by Jean Shepard and Darrell McCall, members deduct \$40.00 off regular prices—pay just \$125.00. Include membership number if taking discount. See ordering instructions in *Buried Treasures*.

Essential Collector Special

Members also get a discount on anything featured in *Essential Collector*. Take \$2.00 off the price of each item, including reissues on Gary Stewart, Guy Clark, Sammi Smith, Lefty Frizzell and Hank Thompson, plus books on Pee Wee King and the photos of Les Leverett. Include membership number if taking discount. See ordering instructions on the *Essential Collector* page.

Classic Photo

Here's a classic shot of the recently-departed Faron Young and the prize bull he received from old friend Willie Nelson in the mid-80's. The story goes back to when Willie first arrived in Nashville. Needing money to feed his family, Willie tried to sell "Hello Walls" to Faron. Faron refused to buy it (unlike many stars of the time, who practically "stole" songs from struggling songwriters), but recorded it and loaned Willie \$500 to tide him over. Faron's recording was a huge hit, and netted Willie many thousands in royalties over the years. As payback for that long-ago debt, Willie presented Faron with a top-of-the-line stud bull worth \$50,000. See both Hazel Smith's People column and Rich Kienzie's obituary for more on The Singing Sherriff.

How to Order

To order items listed on this page, send check or money order to Nashville Warehouse, Dept. 030497N, P.O. Box 292553, Nashville, Tennessee 37229. Include \$3.00 postage/handling per order. Canadian orders, add \$3.00 additional.



EDITOR'S CHOICE (TURN TO PAGE 63 TO ORDER)



ALAN JACKSON: GONE COUNTRY

Loaded with more than 100 full-color and black-and-white photographs, *Alan Jackson: Gone Country* is a celebration of this great vocalist and an insightful look at his life and music. It starts by examining his hardscrabble roots, when his family lived in a converted toolshed that his grandfather built for his parents. After working as a carpenter, Jackson started playing small clubs and bars in a band called The Strayhorns. Bestselling author Mark Bego also explores Jackson's big breakthrough in the 90's, his rise to the top of the country charts, his philosophies about music, his inspirations and his off-stage pastimes.

Jackson's life has been as vivid and unusual as any country lyric. *Alan Jackson: Gone Country* separates fact from fiction, and what emerges is a candid but affectionate account of the popular singer's life and music. Ask for Item #B5A, \$19.95.

THE OFFICIAL LICENSED DWIGHT YOAKAM PHOTO WATCH

This recently released country music accessory is currently one of our most popular items. Choose Dwight with a plastic strap (Item #J2L) for \$29.95, or genuine leather strap (Item #J2M) for \$39.95.



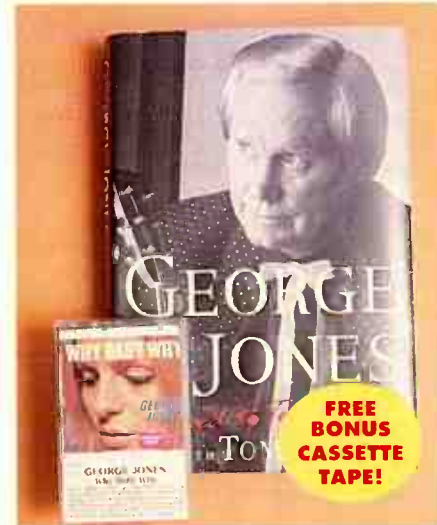
THE GEORGE JONES AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Here, for the first time, in *I Lived to Tell It All*, George Jones delivers a no-holds-barred account of his excesses and ecstasies. How alcohol ruled his life and performances. How violence marred many friendships and relationships. How money was something to be made but never held on to. And, finally, how the love of a good woman can ultimately change a man, redeem him, and save his life.

Notorious for evading the press, the subject of two unauthorized biographies and countless cover stories, George Jones finally comes forward with his own story, told to highly respected author Tom Carter. Ask for item #B10A/R12, \$23.

ORDER NOW AND GET A FREE GEORGE JONES CASSETTE!

Why Baby Why features the title song plus hits like "Frozen Heart," "You Never Thought It Would Be You," "One Is a Lonely Number," "Settle Down" AND MORE!



SPECIAL TRIBUTE COLLECTION! THE BEST OF BILL MONROE ON FIVE CASSETTES—47 HITS FOR ONLY \$19.95!

We have put this special cassette collection together to give Academy Members the opportunity to enjoy the best from one of country music's great legends. Featured on these five cassette tapes are such songs as "Orange Blossom Special," "Uncle Pen," "Footprints in the Snow," "Blue Grass Breakdown," "I Saw the Light," "Shenandoah Breakdown," "Mule Skinner Blues," "Prison Song," "Blue Moon of Kentucky," "Nine Pound Hammer," "Can't You Hear Me Calling," "Shady Grove," "The Long Bow," "Mighty Dark to Travel," "Music Valley Waltz," "The Old Crossroads," "The Old Brown County Barn," "Stay Away from Me," "Bluest Man in Town," "Angels, Rock Me to Sleep," "Dancin' in Brancin'," "Gotta Travel On," "New Mule Skinner Blues," "In the Pines," "Roanoke," "River of Death," "Boat of Love," "Girl in the Blue Velvet

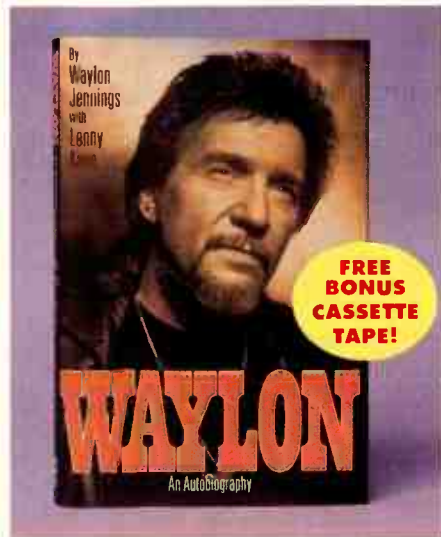
Band," "Toy Heart," "Rocky Road Blues," "Blue Yodel No. 4," "Kentucky Waltz," "Summer-time Is Past and Gone," "Will You Be Loving Another Man," "I Hear a Sweet Voice Calling," "Molly and Tenbrooks (The Race Horse Song)," "Old Danger Field" AND MANY MORE! Cassettes only. Item #CASS20, regularly \$34.75, now \$19.95. YOU SAVE \$14.80!

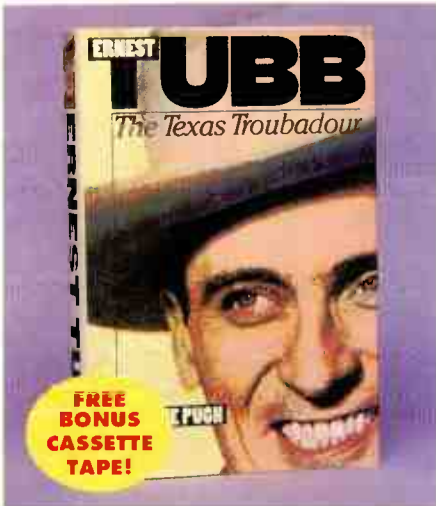
WAYLON: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

A contemporary country music legend—you know it! Over 27 million records sold to date, 16 hitting Number One—but what about the man behind the music? Now, for the first time, Waylon tells all about his towering career that stretches from the mid-50's, when he was a young protege of the great Buddy Holly, through four fabulous decades of country music. Johnny Cash says, "Of all the books about or by celebrities, it isn't very often that one comes along that I have the slightest interest in. I love this one." But probably Willie Nelson sums it up best when he says, "No one knows Waylon's story better than Waylon himself. Finally, here is the autobiography we've all been waiting for." Well, Willie, I know I have. Item #B5W/R13, \$23.

FREE WAYLON JENNINGS CASSETTE!

Order now and you'll also receive Waylon's popular *Taker* cassette...FREE!





NEW! ERNEST TUBB: THE TEXAS TROUBADOUR

In this new definitive biography of the legendary Ernest Tubb, noted author Ronnie Pugh brings one of country music's greatest performers back to center stage. Delving into fan club journals, songbooks, newspaper broadcast logs, record company files and hundreds of interviews, author Pugh draws a picture of Tubb—exploring both his personal and professional life—that is unprecedented in its intimacy, detail and vitality. Hardcover, 455 pages, illustrated. Item #B7E/R15, \$29.95.

ORDER NOW AND GET A FREE ERNEST TUBB CASSETTE

Get the Ernest Tubb cassette, *Walking the Floor Over You*...FREE...when you order this great biography in the next 10 days!



THE ESSENTIAL HANK WILLIAMS

The Essential Hank Williams gives Hank's fans a wide array of information that will provide insight into why Hank Williams was who he was. It will rekindle the Hank Williams' magic with stories never before told and pictures never before published. The photos originated from recently discovered original negatives of pictures which were taken while Williams was in the prime of his life. It is a fascinating volume, sure to be enjoyed by every country music fan. Item #B5K, \$14.95.



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, this 1/18 scale model is nearly a foot in length and comes complete with the history of this famous car. Item #G2G, \$49.95.



ELVIS PRESLEY PROFILE WATCH WITH ROTATING GUITAR SECOND HAND

The handsome *Elvis Profile Watch* features the most unique second hand—a rotating guitar. It makes a great conversation piece. Item #J2B, \$49.95 (specify male or female size).

CHET ATKINS VIDEO INSTRUCTION COURSE: GET STARTED ON GUITAR



Learn to play the guitar (or sharpen your existing skills) with one of the grandmasters of guitar pickin'. With the acclaimed Chet Atkins Instruction Course, *Get Started on Guitar*, beginners can have fun learning the

basics, and advanced players will discover a goldmine of helpful hints and ideas. The set includes a one-hour video, a 112-page instruction book and a 40-minute audio cassette—all three components cross-referenced to each other and packaged in a sturdy plastic case. The instruction book will guide you through the music Chet plays in the video. Each tune has its own chapter complete with advanced tips and basic information. There are also special easy-to-read reference sections titled "Playing Chords," "Finger-Picking Chords," "Playing Melodies" and "Playing by Ear." The video shows split-screen close-ups so you can see exactly how the techniques are done. It's a great gift idea. Ask for Item #B2G, only \$69.95.

COUNTRY MUSIC T-SHIRTS

Anytime is the perfect time to wear 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 "I Love Country Music" T-shirt. This navy blue shirt features a guitar and banjo with red and white lettering. Each shirt is only \$14.95. 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" T-shirt is Item #G2O. Order adult sizes M, L, XL and now, XXL.

I LOVE COUNTRY MUSIC CAP (Not Shown)

Also get our popular adjustable "I Love Country Music" Cap. The message on the cap matches the design on the T-shirt in the picture. Ask for Item #G2N, \$8.95.





FREE BONUS CASSETTE TAPE!

DOLLY PARTON DOLL

This replica of Dolly Parton stands one-and-a-half feet tall. She's wearing a red leatherette dress accented with gold and white lace. In her gold-tone belt is a red, ruby-like stone, and the whole ensemble is topped with a gold-tone necklace. Order right away, we'll give you an early Dolly album on cassette, *Just the Way I Am...* FREE! The Dolly Doll costs \$49.95 and includes a stand. Ask for Item #D1A/R4A.

FREE "I LOVE COUNTRY MUSIC" LAPEL PIN WITH EVERY ORDER!



COUNTRY MUSIC'S FAVORITE ALLSTAR T-SHIRTS—ALAN JACKSON, REBA MCENTIRE, TRAVIS TRITT (NOT SHOWN) AND VINCE GILL (NOT SHOWN)

These popular high-quality T-shirts are 100% cotton, which makes them all-American sturdy and guaranteed to last. Each shirt is concert quality—without the typical high concert price tag. Each shirt comes in the men's sizes specified below. Each shirt is \$16.95. Order by size and item number. Alan Jackson (M, L, XL, XXL) Item #G5J
Reba McEntire (M, L, XL, XXL) Item #G2D
Travis Tritt (L, XL, XXL) Item #G5X
Vince Gill (L, XL, XXL) Item #G5A



GEORGE STRAIT FOUR CASSETTE/CD SET: STRAIT OUT OF THE BOX (Not Shown)

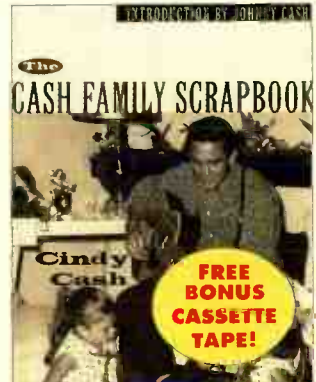
This *Billboard* Top Ten set is the ultimate George Strait collection. The four cassette tapes or CD's feature 72 songs, and there's a 72-page illustrated booklet. Just some of the songs you'll find include "Right or Wrong," "Let's Fall to Pieces Together," "Does Fort Worth Ever Cross Your Mind," "The Cowboy Rides Away," "The Fireman," "The Chair," "You're Something Special to Me," "Haven't You Heard," "Wonderland of Love," "I Cross My Heart" AND MORE! SPECIAL BONUS: ORDER IN THE NEXT TEN DAYS AND YOU'LL ALSO GET THE \$7.95 BOOK *GEORGE STRAIT: AN ILLUSTRATED MUSICAL HISTORY* (Not Shown)...FREE! Item #MCAD-11263, cassette \$49.98, CD \$59.98.

NEW! THE CASH FAMILY SCRAPBOOK

For the first time in the more than 40 years that Johnny Cash has been in the public eye, he has agreed to allow his daughter Cindy Cash to open up his private life to view. More than 200 family photographs and memorabilia help to tell the Cash family story. This fascinating new book starts at the very beginning—with the wedding and honeymoon photos of Johnny and Vivian Liberto Cash. Proceeding chronologically through life on stage and at home, each photograph is accompanied by Cindy's text, with contributions from all the Cash family members. Ask for Item #B&J/SUC139, \$20.

GET A FREE JOHNNY CASH CASSETTE

Order in the next ten days and you'll also receive the Johnny Cash cassette, *I Walk the Line...* FREE!



FREE BONUS CASSETTE TAPE!

NASHVILLE WAREHOUSE EDITOR'S CHOICE ORDER FORM

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Buried Treasures

by Rich Kienzle



Lefty Frizzell: After a considerable delay, Sony Legacy has resumed their Columbia Country Classics series with three long-needed packages. *Lefty Frizzell: Look What Thoughts Will Do* (Legacy 64880) is a two-CD, 34-song Frizzell Columbia retrospective that concentrates on his greatest work for the label from 1950 through 1965. Everything you'd expect is included, from the original versions of "I Love You a Thousand Ways" and "If You've Got the Money I've Got the Time" to the original "Look What Thoughts Will Do," "Always Late" and two songs from Lefty's Jimmie Rodgers tribute album. Numbers like "I'm an Old, Old Man" and "Run 'Em Off," both later expertly interpreted by Frizzell-ophile Merle Haggard, also appear, along with Lefty's brilliant, prescient 1956 honky-tonk warning, "Just Can't Live That Fast (Any More)."

Among the rarities featured is his engaging duet with Johnny Bond on "Sick, Sober and Sorry." His later Columbia work is well-represented, including his expert 1958 interpretation of Marty Robbins' "Cigarettes and Coffee Blues" and his last big Columbia hit, "Saginaw, Michigan." Seven tunes, among them "Don't Think It Ain't Been Fun Dear (Cuz It Ain't)," "You Want Everything But Me," "You Can Go on Your Way Now" and "All of Me Loves All of You," were released only on Bear Family's comprehensive

Frizzell boxed set, and appear here for the first time in the U.S. The packaging is fine, but strangely enough, Legacy didn't feel a Frizzell collection of this magnitude deserved substantive, factual notes. The fine Lefty appreciation penned by our own Patrick Carr is all right, but would have been more effective coupled with notes by a Frizzell authority.

Flatt & Scruggs: Bear Family has already chronicled, for all time, the complete Mercury and Columbia recordings of Lester Flatt and Earl



Scruggs. Realistically, of course, those sets are awfully pricey. More in line with most budgets is *'Tis Sweet to Be Remembered* (Legacy 64877), another 34-track Sony Music collection assembling Flatt & Scruggs material from 1950 through 1967 (the duo disbanded in 1969). All the favorites you'd expect are here, including the 1951 title song (penned by Mac Wiseman). Earl's five-string banjo showcases "Earl's Breakdown," "Foggy Mountain Chimes," "Foggy Mountain Breakdown" (a 1967 re-recording—the original version was on Mercury), "Flint Hill Special" and "Randy Lynn Rag," all bluegrass instrumental standards today.

Other welcome inclusions are the Josh Graves Dobro workout on "Shuckin' the Corn" and The Carter Family's "You Are My Flower." The original version of "Crying My Heart Out Over You," later an early hit

for Ricky Skaggs, likewise deserved inclusion. The F&S chart hit, "Polka on a Banjo," appears as do three of their TV-related songs: "The Ballad of Jed Clampett," "Pearl, Pearl, Pearl" and "Petticoat Junction." To provide balance at the end, two of their covers of contemporary pop tunes of the 60's, "Nashville Cats" and "Down in the Flood," appear. Such material led to the duo's split in 1969 when Lester Flatt opted to stick with more traditional bluegrass and Earl chose a more progressive direction. Packaging is fine, though again, Patrick's appreciation needed more substantive notes by a bluegrass authority to back it up.

Charlie Rich: I've long felt that if anyone deserved a boxed set treatment, it was Charlie Rich, and I held that sentiment even before he died in 1995. Few took a more circuitous route to stardom, made so much great and underappreciated music before the masses knew of him, then paid such a musical cost to attain greatness. Rich was among the most honest of performers, and he became a star at a time when phoniness was becoming routine. He had his run, made his money, faded quietly into obscurity and three years before his untimely death, returned with his greatest album of all: *Pictures and Paintings*.

It's not a boxed set, but Legacy's *Feel Like Going Home: The Essential Charlie Rich* (Sony Legacy 64782) is at least a start, in that the 36 tracks here understandably include 20 from Epic, but the entire first disc samples 16 songs from his early years.

From Sun Records' Phillips International label come five songs, including "Lonely Weekends" (his first pop hit), "Break Up" and "Sittin' and Thinkin'," followed by four songs recorded for RCA's Groove Records subsidiary, including his still-masterful

renditions of "River Stay 'Way from My Door" and "Big Boss Man." His period at Smash Records, which gave him his second pop hit, "Mohair Sam," in 1965, is also included. Several songs from his still brilliant *The Many New Sides of Charlie Rich* and one number recorded for the Memphis-based Hi Records in



1966 (before he signed with Epic) appear. The Epic era features the obvious tunes like "Behind Closed Doors" and "The Most Beautiful Girl," but the smart move was not just going with hits, but including pre-stardom Epic tracks such as "Stay," "I Almost Lost My Mind," "Set Me Free" and the still-brilliant "Life's Little Ups and Downs," written by Charlie's wife Margaret Ann. These have lost none of their power. The collection ends with two of the best performances from *Pictures and Paintings*: the title song and "Feel Like Going Home" (also featured on a 1973 demo). The notes make sense, mixing reflections from various colleagues including the reissue's co-producer, CMM contributor Peter Guralnick, who wrote passionately about Rich before anyone cared. Also quoted are Margaret Ann Rich, Sam Phillips, Billy Sherrill and others, as well as an excerpt from a 1992 interview with Charlie which aired on National Public Radio.

Darrell McCall: I annotated this collection, so no judgments, just the facts. Darrell McCall, frequently heard on

the Opry nowadays, has never become the star in America he is in Europe. He began his career in rural Ohio and came to Nashville in 1959 with his buddy, Ohio native Donny Young (aka Johnny Paycheck). McCall briefly toured with the Nashville pop vocal group, The Little Dippers, but did most of his work in the 50's and 60's as bass player and opening act in the bands of Faron Young and Ray Price. *The Real McCall* (Bear Family BCD 15846) assembles 153 of his recordings from 1959 through 1980 on five CD's. McCall, who worshipped hard country, had to struggle to record it. He wound up recording teen pop tunes that he hated for Capitol and Phillips Records since his manager, Hubert Long, felt (wrongly) that Darrell could be a teen idol.

The material ranges from some hard country sessions McCall did at Starday in 1959 and his pop-rock for Capitol (1961), to a blues demo he made in 1961 and his 1962-64 Phillips material, including the 1963 country hit, "A Stranger Was Here." The hard country he began recording for small labels like Wayside (1968-1969), American Heritage (1972-73) and Avco (1975), as well as major labels like Atlantic (1974), Columbia (1975-77, a contract he got through Willie Nelson's Lone Star production company) and RCA (1979-1981—Ronnie Milsap co-produced his first session), is here as well. All this is presented intact, along with a 1964 Opry performance, some Army recruiting shows from the early 60's and 1975, and even various Lone Star beer commercials from 1980.

Jean Shepard: Anyone who bought the Country Music Foundation's Jean Shepard CD last year, and found her straightforward, no-nonsense Capitol recordings irresistible and wanted more, can now have their wish. The five CD's making up Bear Family's *Jean Shepard: The Melody Ranch Girl* (BCD 15905) contain her complete Capitol output 1952-1964 (she was a

Capitol artist until 1972). One can hear her remarkable journey from Oklahoma-born, California-reared teenage singer with The Melody Ranch Girls to Capitol artist (after Hank Thompson heard her). Her first single, "Crying Steel Guitar Waltz," with Speedy West on steel, went nowhere, but when producer Ken Nelson teamed her with Capitol artist Ferlin Husky, who'd had no hits, the 1953 ballad, "A Dear John Letter," was the breakthrough for both.

After time in Missouri and Texas, Shepard moved to Nashville and joined the Opry in 1955. Until 1958, she still recorded in L.A. with some of



Bakersfield's best sidemen (including Buck Owens on guitar). All her hits during these 12 years are here, including "Forgive Me John" with Ferlin, "A Satisfied Mind," "Beautiful Lies," "I Thought of You," "Second Fiddle (To an Old Guitar)," and everything else in between, as well as a dozen previously unreleased tracks. All

of her albums in this period, from her pioneering 1956 LP *Songs of a Love Affair* to *Lonesome Love, Lighthearted and Blue, Got You on My Mind, It's a Man Every Time, Heartaches and Tears* and *This Is Jean Shepard* are here. The collection is topped off with a 35-page booklet, complete discography and fine essay by *Journal* contributor Chris Skinker.

Billy Jack Wills: I annotated both the original and revised version of *Billy Jack Wills and his Western Swing Band* (Joaquin JR 2503), so here's what it is, and no more. The original LP version appeared on the now-defunct Western Records nearly 15 years ago, featuring not Bob Wills-style Western swing, but the younger, progressive style developed by his youngest brother Billy Jack, formerly Texas Playboy bass player, drummer and vocalist. This was music that took into account Bob's style of swing, but also postwar phenomena like bebop jazz and R&B. At times, it got awfully close to early rock 'n' roll.

The band, led by Billy, with Tiny Moore playing mandolin and arranging, worked at Bob's Wills Point Ballroom in Sacramento and had a daily radio show over KFBK. They transcribed material to broadcast if they were out of town, and these 19 songs come from those transcriptions. With steel guitarist Vance Terry, they revitalized

Playboy tunes like "Lonesome Hearted Blues" and old big-band numbers like "Tuxedo Junction" and "Dipsy Doodle." One track, "Steel Guitar Stomp," from the second *BJ Wills Western* LP is included, as are two never-reissued transcribed tunes: "Get Along Home Cindy" and the instrumental "Caravan."

Bobby Bare: RCA is continu-



ing their Essentials series, though with decidedly mixed results, given the company's seeming ignorance of their back catalog which has resulted in occasional errors. One welcome collection, however, is *The Essential Bobby Bare* (RCA 67405), a 20-track collection that covers all of Bare's biggest hits, but begins with "All American Boy," the 1958 Bare recording satirizing Elvis' induction into the service. Problem is, this isn't the original recording released on Fraternity Records, but a 1963 RCA remake. How hard would it have been to license the original from the owners of Fraternity?

Otherwise, the collection is truly essential, assembling such Bare favorites as "Detroit City," "500 Miles Away From Home," "Four Strong Winds," his and Skeeter Davis' remake of Jean Shepard and Ferlin Husky's "A Dear John Letter," "Streets of Baltimore," "Margie's at the Lincoln Park Inn," "Ride Me Down Easy," "Daddy, What If," "Marie Laveau," "The Winner" and "Dropkick Me Jesus," only a Top 20 song at the time, but a favorite in more recent years. Good as this collection is overall, a case could be made for reissuing some of Bare's classic RCA LP's individually as well.

How to Get These Treasures

Available in formats shown at prices shown: Lefty Frizzell, *Look What Thoughts Will Do* (Legacy 64880), available as a two-CD set only, \$24.98/Flatt & Scruggs, *'Tis Sweet to Be Remembered* (Legacy 64877), available as a two-CD set only, \$24.98/Charlie Rich, *Feel Like Going Home: The Essential Charlie Rich* (Legacy 64782), available as a two-CD set only, \$24.98/Darrell McCall, *The Real McCall* (BCD 15846), a five-CD set, \$165.00/Jean Shepard, *The Melody Ranch Girl* (BCD 15905), a five-CD set, \$165.00/Billy Jack Wills and His Western Swing Band, *Billy Jack Wills and His Western Swing Band* (JR 2503), CD only \$19.98/Bobby Bare, *The Essential Bobby Bare* (RCA 67405), \$12.98 cassette, \$18.98 CD. Send check or money order payable to Nashville Warehouse, Dept. 030497, 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.**

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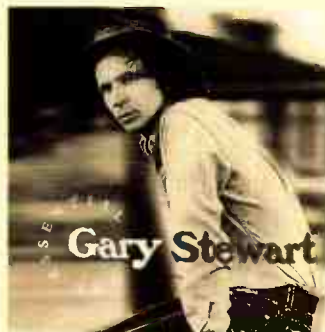
Essential Collector by Rich Kienzle

■ Recordings ■

Gary Stewart: *The Essential Gary Stewart* (RCA 66932) duplicates 11 of the 1970's honky tonk master's songs released on the HighTone CD, *Gary's Greatest*, some years ago, yet there are also nine others not on that collection, including "Mazelle," "Honky Tonkin'," "Cactus and a Rose," "Are We Dreamin' the Same Dream," "I See the Want in Your Eyes" and a duet with Dean Dillon on "Brotherly Love." The material pretty well speaks for itself, but RCA should go a lot further (though it probably won't) by issuing some of Stewart's other RCA LP's on CD (HighTone reissued Stewart's RCA debut *Out of Hand*). This is all right for what it is, but Stewart deserves a lot more.

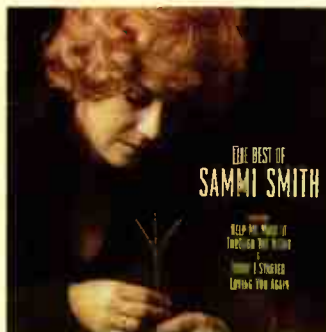
Sammi Smith: Everyone expected great things from Sammi Smith, and with good reason. In 1970, her recording of Kris Kristofferson's "Help Me Make It Through the Night" on Mega Records not only earned her a Gold record, it topped the country charts, made the pop Top Ten, and won her the Single of the Year award from the CMA. She seemed to be teetering on the edge of real stardom, having numerous hits, but none to match the success of "Help Me Make It." She was close to Willie in the early days of the Outlaw movement, open to recording a variety of material like the pop-folk tune, "City of New Orleans," before such recordings were common by female artists. In the end, after one last Top Ten with Merle Haggard's "Today I Started Loving You Again" in 1975, Smith continued recording but never recaptured that early momentum.

The Best of Sammi Smith (Varese Sarabande VSD-5574) assembles 14 songs from her years with Mega, and two 1979 recordings for Cyclone. Beginning with "Help Me Make It,"



and her first Mega hit, "He's Everywhere," it includes "Then You Walk In" (the Top Ten followup to "Help Me Make It"), and covers her own composition, "Kentucky." Also included are "I've Got to Have You," "The Toast of '45," "I Miss You Most When You're Right Here," "City of New Orleans," "The Rainbow in Daddy's Eyes," "Long Black Veil," "Cover Me," "Today I Started Loving You Again" and the Western swing standard, "My Window Faces the South." From Cyclone come the A-sides of her 1979 singles—"What a Lie" and her cover of The Box Tops' pop hit, "The Letter." The songs are generally well-chosen, and though compiler Todd Everett's notes rattle off the facts competently (except her birth year: 1943), and feature quotes from Smith herself, I was disappointed he never asked the one question that needed asking: Why does Smith, given the excellence of her early music, think she never succeeded as everyone thought she would?

Guy Clark: Guy Clark's material has long been in need of re-issuing, making *The Essential Guy Clark* (RCA 67404) an extremely welcome effort. Though certain RCA Essentials are of questionable value, Clark's importance has long been known among artists, but the general public, while well aware of songs like "Desperadoes Waiting for a Train" and "Texas: 1947," have known little about the writer. Despite his excellence in the field,



Clark the recording artist hasn't done well. His only chart singles (hardly the best way to determine excellence) were modest, post-RCA entries from the late 1970's and early 1980's when he recorded for Warner Brothers. His influence on a group of artists ranging from Johnny Cash and Rodney Crowell to Kathy Mattea, Emmylou Harris, Brooks & Dunn and Vince Gill says much about the enduring value of his music over the past quarter-century.

Half of the 20 songs come from his 1975 masterpiece, *Old No. 1*, which contained "Texas: 1947," "Desperadoes," "Instant Coffee Blues," "Rita Ballou," "L.A. Freeway" and "That Old Time Feelin'." Another nine songs were taken from his 1976 album, *Texas Cookin'*, including the title song, "Virginia's Real," "Me I'm Feelin' the Same," "Broken Hearted People," "The Ballad of Laverne and Captain Flint" and "Don't Let the Sunshine Fool You."

One number, "Fools for Each Other," was licensed from Warners. Strangely enough, the most popular hit of his three Warners singles, "Home-grown Tomatoes," wasn't selected, the only questionable choice on the record (not bad, given RCA's usual lack of logic). Though brief, Wade Jessen's notes do an excellent job of placing Clark in historical context by showing his very clear connections to the present.

Hank Thompson: In the past year, Bear Family has released

Hank Thompson's complete Capitol recordings on a 12-CD boxed set, and Capitol-Nashville produced a sampler of 20 Thompson tunes on a single disc. Of course, Thompson fans realize that after he left the label following his final session in 1964, he landed very briefly at Warner Brothers, then moved to Dot Records, staying even after the label became MCA. For sure, the music was different after Hank joined Dot—produced in Nashville, usually by Joe Allison or Larry Butler, with a far less Western-swing flavor. Though upon looking back, Hank says he favors his Capitol work, he had some success on both Warners and Dot, and *The Best of Hank Thompson* (Varese VSD 5747) brings together 16 of his best-known Warners and Dot/MCA singles on one package. While MCA did their own collection a few years back in their Hall of Fame series, this one is geared more to the casual fan, and the fact that two hits from Warners were included certainly gives it more balance.

Warners recordings featured here are "Where Is the Circus," "He's Got a Way with Women" and a third track, a remake of his and Merle Travis' 1955 Capitol hit instrumental, "Wildwood Flower," which also featured Travis (who for years recorded with Thompson on both Capitol and Dot singles). From there, it's into the Dot material, beginning with "On Tap, In the Can, or In the Bottle," the streamlined "Next Time I Fall in Love (I Won't)," "The Mark of a Heel," "I've Come Awful Close," "Smoky the Bar," "Most of All," "I See Them Everywhere," "Oklahoma Home Brew," "Who Left the Door to Heaven Open," "The Older the Violin, The Sweeter the Music" and three songs, "Mama Don't 'Low," "I Hear the South Callin' Me" and "The King of Western Swing," that marked his late 1970's return to a modern Western swing

sound. The album also features capable notes by *Journal* contributor Laurence Zwisohn, who had the foresight to tap Hank's own vivid, well-spoken memories about this later stage of his career.

Lefty Frizzell: For those new to Lefty Frizzell, I'd recommend the Legacy double CD (see Buried Treasures in this issue), but if you already have it, or want to hear his sound at the end of his career, not long before his untimely death at age 47, *The Best of Lefty Frizzell* (VSD 5733) brings together selections from his last two LP's for ABC, recorded from 1972 through 1974. The first album, the acclaimed *The Legendary Lefty Frizzell*, proved him still a very viable artist, singing with more maturity and thoughtfulness. The second, *The Classic Sound of Lefty Frizzell*, continued that high level of excellence despite his heavy drinking and refusal to take blood pressure medication, which led to his fatal 1975 stroke.

The songs here included prime material from master honky tonk composers like Whitey Shafer and Doodle Owens, Lefty himself, his longtime disciple Merle Haggard and even Jimmy Buffett and Jerry Jeff Walker's "Railroad Lady." None of the ABC singles were big hits ("Lucky Arms" barely cracked the Top 30) but "That's the Way Love Goes," a Frizzell-Shafer number that's become an enduring ballad, remains one of his finest later moments. "Falling," a remake of "I Love You a Thousand Ways," "I Never Go Around Mirrors," Haggard's "Life's Like Poetry," "I Buy the Wine" and "My Wishing Room" remain outstanding numbers today, ones that lead one to wonder, 20 years after his death, what might have happened had he stayed around longer.

■ Books ■

Les Leverett: Veteran Grand Ole Opry photographer Les Leverett has been a mainstay of Nashville for decades, capturing some of the Opry's—and Nashville's—best mo-

ments onstage and backstage for over 36 years, showing the reality behind the usual posed publicity shots. Les is also a Contributing Editor for our sister publication, *The Journal*, and his photos have appeared in those pages since the magazine began. *Blue Moon of Kentucky* is Leverett's first photo book, containing 75 photos taken from 1961 through 1994. They aren't arranged consecutively, but that enhances the experience of jumping back and forth through time. The first section emphasizes bluegrass, starting with a 1970 photo of a jam session at Bill Monroe's Bean Blossom festival.

Evocative shots of Flatt and Scruggs reading mail on their bus and stopping for a bite to eat on a Mississippi tour in 1961 show the more mundane side of touring. A 1972 photo of Roy Acuff with long-haired Sam Bush says much about Acuff's discomfort with the youth culture of that day. Various photos of Bill Monroe, to whom the book is dedicated, show sides of him offstage. Among the images are a close-up of his hands and his mandolin, a meeting with another Kentucky giant, Colonel Sanders, and one of Monroe taking a solitary walk at Bean Blossom. All reveal much about the private man. A 1971 photo shows a young Keith Whitley and Ricky Skaggs as sidemen with Ralph Stanley's band.

The second section features other Opry artists, including a priceless one of Minnie Pearl. Wilma Lee Cooper. Jan Howard, Skeeter Davis, June

Carter and Kitty Wells appear, circa 1961. A 1972 photo of the *Hee Haw* cast on the set, including Grandpa Jones, Merle Travis, Archie Campbell, George Lindsey, Lulu Roman and a dozing Junior Samples, captures something entirely different than the on-camera side of the program. A shot of Jimmie Davis and Patsy Cline in November 1961 says much about the generational differences of performers of that day. A shot taken at a Carl and Pearl Butler session with Pete Drake and Grady Martin backing Carl and Pearl shows the more clinical side of the recording process, as does a 1969 Leverett shot of a Porter Wagoner session.

One 1970 shot of two giants, Johnny Cash and Louis Armstrong, together when Satchmo appeared on Cash's ABC-TV show not long before his death in 1971, has the sense of coming full circle, since Armstrong once backed Jimmie Rodgers. One leaves this book satisfied, yet wondering what other gems lie among his decades of film. If anyone's photos deserve to be published in a thick, super-expensive coffee-table book, Leverett's do.

Pee Wee King: Pee Wee King's seven decades as a performer have long justified a book, and finally, in *Hell Bent for Music*, written with Louisville college professor Wade Hall, we get quite a respectable effort. Having long ago cut back on active performing, the co-writer of "Tennessee Waltz" (with his vocalist-fiddler Redd Stewart) is seldom in the public eye anymore, but

those many decades in the business leave plenty of stories, beginning with his boyhood growing up (his real name: Frank Julius Anthony Kuczynski) in Milwaukee, going from accordionist in his band, The King's Jesters, to member of Gene Autry's band in Louisville to member of Louisville's Log Cabin Boys to leader of The Golden West Cowboys. His career was greatly enhanced by Joe L. Frank, his father-in-law and one of the first truly great country music managers. Pee Wee came to the Opry in 1937 and later hired Eddy Arnold as his first male vocalist.

Gene Autry fans will likewise enjoy the stories about Autry, whom King considers his closest friend. Among the many stories of road tours of the 1930's and 1940's, he tells of writing "Tennessee Waltz" with Stewart one night while on tour, and about some of the business chicanery (some involving Ernest Tubb) following the song's success. Likewise, he covers his departure from the Opry in 1947 to work in TV in Louisville and in the Midwest while touring and having hit records like "Bonaparte's Retreat" and "Slow Poke." He also discusses writing, also with Stewart and Chilton Price, "Slow Poke" and the pop standard, "You Belong to Me," a 1952 pop hit for Jo Stafford and the biggest of her career.

Though pain comes through when he discusses J.L. Frank's apparently accidental death, overall Pee Wee is not bitter over the fact his time has passed, but glad he came along for the ride before slowing into semi-retirement. King recalls with amusement meeting Charley Pride, who proceeded to amaze him by reciting for Pee Wee the name of every member of The Golden West Cowboys and the instrument they played. Having suffered two mild but not debilitating strokes in 1978 and 1994, he looks back on his career with pride and pleasure, bringing the book to a classy close, a work enhanced throughout by Dr. Hall's capable editing.

How to Get These Collectibles

Books: Les Leverett, *Blue Moon of Kentucky* (B8M), \$15.00 (softcover)/Pee Wee King, *Hell Bent for Music* (B7Z), \$19.95 (hardcover). **Recordings:** Gary Stewart, *The Essential Gary Stewart* (RCA 66932), \$12.98 cassette, \$18.98 CD/Guy Clark, *The Essential Guy Clark* (RCA 67404), \$12.98 cassette, \$18.98 CD/Sammi Smith, *The Best of Sammi Smith* (VSD-5574), CD only, \$14.98/Lefty Frizzell, *The Best of Lefty Frizzell* (VSD 5733), CD only, \$14.98/Hank Thompson, *The Best of Hank Thompson* (VSD 5747), CD only, \$14.98. To order, send check or money order to Nashville Warehouse, Dept. 030497EC, P.O. Box 290216, Nashville, Tennessee 37229. Add \$3.95 postage and handling per order. Canadian orders, add \$3.00 extra for postage. **CMSA members, see For Members Only page for discounts.**

Offer expires July 31, 1997

Everybody wants a hit on the charts. Hank Thompson wants his 78th. That includes chart songs in the 1940's, 50's, 60's, 70's and 80's. Now he's looking for that sixth decade. Hank Thompson is an unlikely legend, soft-spoken, articulate and modest. Yet his honky tonk changed the world, and he and his Brazos Valley Boys took country music to places it had never before imagined. We caught up with Hank resting on his boat, the *Whoa Sailor*, named after his early hit, and he agreed to answer 20 Questions.

1 Tell me about this new record of yours.

Well, we're just doing some things—a lot of new songs and a few of my old standards. We got the cooperation of a lot of people with it, and it's coming off real well. I've got a lot of expectations for it.

Vince Gill was the first one to record with me. Next Junior Brown and David Ball; then we had George Jones come in, Brooks & Dunn and a new girl named Bekka Bramlett. She's doing some recording on her own, and in fact she was in the studio. We asked her to come over and sing with us on this record, and it worked out real well. She does an excellent job on it. Joe Diffie is on it, and Marty Stuart, too.

2 Do you think Marty came just because he's trying to figure out a way to get all your old suits?

Well, you know, strangely enough I gave him a pair of my old Nudie pants. Pink...

3 Pink pants! He probably loved that...

I knew that he collected those things. I said, "Well, Marty's coming in for this thing, and I'm just going to go look back in my attic and dig out one of the old Nudie things that I know he'd get a kick out of." So I found a pair of pink pants with all the rhinestones and embroidery on it. I said, "This looks like Marty. So I'll just take this to him." He was tickled to death with it.



20 Questions with HANK THOMPSON

By Michael Bane

4 I think it's really incredible that you're looking at your sixth decade of charting songs. You must think it's incredible, too.

Well, it really is. I never thought when I made my first record back in August of 1946 that in late 1996 I would still be making records.

5 Careers were kind of different back then, weren't they? And people's ages...

It's all relative, isn't it? I remember when I was a kid, I

thought somebody who was 30 was ancient, beyond belief. I couldn't conceive of somebody being 40 or 50. Now that's young to me. Somebody says to me, "Man, I just turned 50!" I say, "Don't look to me for any damn sympathy."

6 You're 71?
Yes.

7 Wow. Where do you get the energy? You never seem to have lost your love for the business.

Well, that's what attracted me to it to begin with. I really don't understand people who have a chance to do something like this and then say they're burned out, bored, all that kind of stuff. If I didn't get to travel, I wouldn't get to see my friends. The friends I've made through all these years are everywhere, from Seattle to West Palm Beach, San Diego and Bangor, Maine, and all points in between. If I didn't get around, I'd never get a chance to visit with them.

8 Do you have any favorite songs out of 50 years? Are there any of your classics that you'd rather cut your fingers off than play?

Well, I enjoy all the music—most every song I've ever recorded was a song I thought was awfully good, and had a chance of being a big hit, or I wouldn't have recorded it. Some I thought maybe a little bit more so than others. I tried to do a variety of things, so that I wouldn't be in a rut of just doing that one type of a thing. I don't have a song that I say, "Well, this song, I think, is the best song above all other songs that I've ever heard." I don't have any one favorite. I don't have any song that I say, "I detest having to do this song." I'll have to agree, some I like a little more than others. But it's just a matter of mood or something.

9 Let's talk a little bit about "Wild Side of Life."

"Wild Side of Life" did have a big influence in the business, but there were many giant songs in country long before that one came along—"San Antonio Rose," "Cool Water" and some of those things that Gene Autry did. The importance was not only the fact that it was a big song—it was a Number One song of the year back in 1952—but that Kitty Wells sang the answer to it, "It Wasn't God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels." That was the importance of it, because until she came along, women were of no import in this business. As a matter of fact, not in the music business,

period. There weren't any women in this business on a par with their male counterparts. So when Kitty Wells came along and had a big hit on the answer to that song, her success and her continued success is what made it possible for someone like Patsy Cline and Tammy Wynette to come along. That song was a turning point in our industry. Here the door was finally open to where a lot of the fine female vocalists were at last recognized and appreciated.

10 *I think you're being too modest. Did Kitty come and talk to you about the answer to the song?*

No, I was not aware of it until I heard it on the radio. I thought, well, that's great. What really happened was the timing. Our record had been up there in the Number One spot in 1952 for weeks and weeks, and it had about run its course, and was on its way down. When Kitty came out with that thing, well, it hit. And when it did, it brought mine right up again. I probably got an extra couple of months run in the Top Ten out of it because of her record.

11 *The music you played was a little harder edged than the more traditional Western swing, sort of moving swing into the future...*

I liked the Western swing, but I didn't like the way it was presented. The band was the thing, and the vocalist was incidental, like in the pop field, with big bands like Glenn Miller and the Dorseys, and Paul Whiteman. The vocalists were incidental to the arrangement. Sinatra was featured as a singer on the arrangements of Tommy Dorsey. Same with Bob Wills. Bob Wills was the featured thing; whoever was singing was just a part of the band. Well, I like to feature me as the main thing, and the band as secondary. But I want that band to have that good vibes and good music to it and good variety. Not just what we called back then "hillbilly" music, which was just real

simple, not much rhythm, just fiddles, mandolin and guitar. I wanted that sound of real country, but I wanted it to have more flavor to it. So that was the medium I was striving for. The problem I had was being able to keep that ideal with the musicians I was using and not let them play like Bob Wills.

12 *Well, that is the problem with groundbreaking music, isn't it?*

To break them of the habit of trying to do what they had been brought up doing. That was the thing that I had to do, and it was difficult. One time I had to say, "Boys, I don't want to hear one Bob Wills song played in this band." You should have seen the jaws drop. "I don't want to hear those Bob Wills licks; play something else. There's already a Bob Wills. We're not going to be another one. We're going to be completely different. We're going to be the ones other people will imitate. But you're going to have to be creative." And it gave the guys a free hand to do something and create something.

13 *You hear a different music in your head; then you have to go out and teach the musicians around you what it is that you're hearing. That's a tough row to hoe.*

It really is. But I had a few musicians who were creative and liked the opportunity to do those things. I liked encouraging them to come up with things and getting their own identification. That took time. But we did it.

14 *Were you the first country singer to play Vegas?*

No. But I was the first one to take a country music show into Las Vegas. Out on the strip, in the big rooms, Eddy Arnold and Jimmy Wakely had played there, but they were just part of the production. I took the Brazos Valley Boys and our regular show. We did the same type of production that we would have done if we'd played Phoenix, or Sacramento, or Oklahoma

City. I met with some resistance on the thing. They said, "You know, this Vegas crowd is not going to like this all country music thing. You've got to have the dancing girls and the big orchestra and the jugglers and all that." I said, "You say the Vegas crowd; I look out and see the audience in Las Vegas, and these are the same people that I see in Salt Lake City, in Phoenix, in Los Angeles, Dallas, Denver." Back when I played there, the population probably wasn't 25,000.

15 *When was that?*

1957.

16 *Must have been a totally different place then...*

It was. You could go from one end of Las Vegas to the other in 10 minutes. We used to play the Nugget, the lounge. During the week we'd have good crowds, but we were appealing largely to the dealers, bartenders, cab drivers and people like that who worked there. But on the weekends, it'd be full of people. It was a friendly town. I'd walk into any casino, and the dealers or bartenders or the cocktail waitresses would say, "How you doing, Hank?" I'd get in a cab and, "How you doing, Hank? I saw you the other night." It's different now.

17 *You took your show everywhere; that was also a groundbreaking type thing. We took it into a lot of the ballrooms and places that country music had never been.*

18 *When you got to some place like Carnegie Hall for the first time, did you ever just before going on say, "Wow, what have I done?"*

Carnegie Hall, when I got around to playing it, country music had come a long way, and there had been some other country music shows in there. But I was the first one in a lot of those places to ever do that....We had fun.

19 *I liked that story about Ernest Tubb got you on?*

Ernest got me on the Opry, and I worked there that one Saturday night. I had already made up my mind I was going to leave there anyway, because I couldn't do the kind of music I wanted to do in Nashville and the Opry. So I left the Opry, but I ran into Hank Williams. I'd gone up there on a Monday to pick up my check. Hank said, "Somebody told me you were leaving the Opry." And I said, "Yeah." Hank said, "My gosh, this is what we thought of all our lives, getting to be on the Grand Ole Opry, and here Ernest got you on it, and now you're going to leave?" I said, "Yeah." And I said, "I'm going to frame this damn check right here"....it was nine dollars and something. I said then I'd put a sign, "Why I left the Grand Old Opry," and hang it up on my wall. Of course, the irony was I needed the nine dollars; I had to go cash the check so I could get enough money to get back to Texas. Nine dollars was a lot of money back then, but it wasn't all that much for Saturday night. Hank Williams got a big kick out of that thing; he used to tell that story all the time. It was one of his favorite things to tell about. At that time the Opry was so demanding; it was such a hassle with the people involved. You felt like you were a circus animal—they fed you well, but they cracked the whip.

20 *How do you think you were able to avoid the demons that haunted so many acts? That killed Hank?*

Well, I think it's a matter of temperament. Some people are not able to cope with situations that are alien to what they've been brought up to think they're supposed to do, to be able to cope with all the success. Somebody like Lefty Frizzell, just a truck driver, and all of a sudden he's a big idol and making a bunch of money. And it's just, "How do I handle this?" I think that's it. I always knew what I wanted to do. I knew I was going to be successful. From boyhood what I wanted to do was I wanted to be in this music.

TOP 25

Albums

1. LeAnn Rimes *Blue*
2. Deana Carter *Did I Shave My Legs for This?*
3. Alan Jackson *Everything I Love*
4. Clint Black *The Greatest Hits*
5. Kevin Sharp *Measure of a Man*
6. Reba McEntire *What If It's You*
7. Shania Twain *The Woman in Me*
8. Mindy McCready *Ten Thousand Angels*
9. Brooks & Dunn *Borderline*
10. George Strait *Blue Clear Sky*
11. John Michael Montgomery . *What I Do the Best*
12. Bryan White *Between Now and Forever*
13. Garth Brooks *The Hits*
14. Alan Jackson *The Greatest Hits Collection*
15. Collin Raye *I Think About You*
16. Faith Hill *It Matters to Me*
17. Trace Adkins *Dreamin' Out Loud*
18. Terri Clark *Just the Same*
19. Mary Chapin Carpenter *A Place in the World*
20. Gary Allan *Used Heart for Sale*
21. Mark Chesnutt *Greatest Hits*
22. Various Artists *The Best of Country Sing
the Best of Disney*
23. Vince Gill *High Lonesome Sound*
24. Travis Tritt *The Restless Kind*
25. Tracy Lawrence *Time Marches On*

Singles

1. Kevin Sharp *Nobody Knows*
2. Tracy Lawrence *Is That a Tear*
3. John Michael Montgomery . *Friends*
4. Mark Chesnutt *It's a Little Too Late*
5. Trisha Yearwood *Everybody Knows*
6. Vince Gill *Pretty Little Adriana*
7. Brooks & Dunn *A Man This Lonely*
8. Clint Black *Half Way Up*
9. Faith Hill *I Can't Do That Anymore*
10. Tracy Byrd *Big Love*
11. Rick Trevino *Running Out of Reasons to Run*
12. Daryle Singletary *Amen Kind of Love*
13. Deana Carter *We Danced Anyway*
14. Patty Loveless *She Drew a Broken Heart*
15. Travis Tritt *Where Corn Don't Grow*
16. LeAnn Rimes *One Way Ticket (Because
I Can)*
17. Bryan White *That's Another Song*
18. Toby Keith *Me Too*
19. George Strait *King of the Mountain*
20. Mindy McCready (featuring
Richie McDonald) *Maybe He'll Notice Her Now*
21. Tim McGraw *Maybe We Should Just
Sleep On It*
22. LeAnn Rimes *Unchained Melody*
23. Reba McEntire *How Was I to Know*
24. John Berry *She's Taken a Shine*
25. Alan Jackson *Everything I Love*

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THE FINAL NOTE

by Patrick Carr

Worry, Worry, Worry

I spent the first day of this grand year with Johnny Cash, hanging out at his 250-year-old, six-bedroom Great House set in the lush tropical hills high above the Caribbean. It wasn't my typical way of getting away from it all—my vacations usually involve a minivan and cheap rental property—but I was willing to tolerate it, even if I had to do my job, which was helping Cash with his new autobiography.

So there we were, working away, but in between working at enjoying the cuisine and working at riding around in the golf cart waving at the Rastas, we got to relax now and again and worry about the future of country music (which is my favorite pastime. I've got *Born to Worry* tattooed on my left bicep, *Country Music* on my right).

Worry, worry, worry. We know country music will prosper, but will it survive? That's the question.

"You know, John," said I, "I wonder if country music, the mainstream stuff, isn't becoming a music without a culture. I mean, there are fewer and fewer real country people and less and less real country life—no more kids picking cotton, precious few family farms, hardly anybody growing up to the rhythms of the land, without the media yelling in their ear—so what do people who call themselves country have in common? Maybe all they have, apart from the music, is the stuff: the boots, the hats, the jeans, the pickup trucks. Maybe that's why so many songs coming out of Nashville are *about* the stuff and *about* being country—you know, when a culture disintegrates, people have to try real hard if they want to stick with it. They have to force it."

Cash said, "I don't know if that's true, but I wish I'd said it. And yeah, kids today don't grow up like I did. No way they could."

Cash, who is now 64, was raised to roam the Mississippi bottomland and work in the cottonfields beside everyone else in his family; he didn't wear shoes year-round until he was 15. The only youngsters in the United States still living that kind of life—and a much more desperate, less satisfying version of it than Cash's generation ever experienced—are the children of agricultural migrant workers, Mexicans and Haitians



Cash ponders. Carr worries.

mostly. Everybody else is behind the counter at McDonald's, or studying for college, or honing their crime skills, or playing Nintendo, or learning to sing about porch swings and pickup trucks and honky tonks. What kind of music does that produce "naturally"?

Worry, worry, worry. Something else bothers me. When you have the great majority of under-30 country fans hooked on pop in a cowboy hat—music with its roots far deeper in 70's Top 40 music than any style A.P. Carter or Bill Monroe or Hank Williams would have recognized—what happens to the traditions of country music? Are they to be kept alive only on the fringes of the marketplace, out among the mostly urban, college-educated folkies, former hippies, country punks and unaligned music freaks who are about as far from Music Row's target consumer, ideologically and socially, as it's possible for two classes of Americans to be?

That sort of divergence, Garth Brooks and Shania Twain over *here* in one market, Johnny Cash and Emmylou Harris over *there* in another, is more extreme today than it's ever been. It's snuck into my own thinking; a while ago I found myself talking to Russell, our Editor/Pub-

lisher, about creating a new, separate department within our Review section to deal with what's now being called alt.country—that whole rabble-rousing grab-bag of artists like Son Volt, The Waco Brothers, Robbie Fulks and all—and the notion seemed perfectly natural; neither of us even blinked, let alone started foaming at the mouth and throwing furniture, which is what we *should* have done. That idea just stank. I mean, can you imagine all the phone calls back and forth, trying to pin down who belongs in alt.country and who's just plain country country, and why? You find yourself doing that kind of thing for a living, you might as well go into radio.

See, here's where it's really at. The Waco Brothers *belong* snuggled up against Lorrie Morgan (you like that idea, Lorrie?). Shania Twain belongs with Johnny Paycheck, and Steve Earle should be mixed right in with Vince Gill. Come to that, Tanya Tucker fits just fine with Sheryl Crow, and Marty Stuart sounds swell with Bob Dylan and Elvis Costello and George Clinton and Aretha Franklin and Dick Curless and Dinah Washington and Bob Marley and John Coltrane and Neil Young and Hank Williams and...

I could go on—I could go on forever, pretty much—but you get the idea. Music is an emanation of the human spirit. It has no natural boundaries. It gets fenced in and divided up only because a) most people like to keep their horizons close, and fear what they don't know; b) most people use music as a way of fitting in somewhere, and not somewhere else; and c) most people get their music through a system (radio) whose sole purpose is to capture the attention of large numbers of consumers who buy the same kind of stuff as each other, and sell that attention to marketers of said stuff. Play Alternative rock, sell Birkenstocks. Play 70's rock, sell sports utility vehicles. Play country, sell (guess what?) hats and boots and porch swings and pickup trucks...

Where does all this leave us? Worry worry worry. I don't know about you, but I've got a headache. Hey, Cash, want to go pick bananas?

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



World Radio History



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