

SINGLES

Edited by Chuck Taylor

POP

CHRISTINA MILIAN FEATURING JA RULE *Get Away* (3:41)
PRODUCER: Irv Gotti
WRITERS: C. Milian, I. Lorenzo, and J. Atkins
PUBLISHER: not listed
Def Soul 15492 (CD promo)

One could call Ja Rule the industry's enabler. It seems that any artist (or label) these days that doesn't have confidence in their own work enlists his help. Christina Milian was off to a respectable start with her sing-along debut "AM to PM," but she calls upon every cliché in the book for her follow-up, "Get Away." The result is a grating, generic track in which the rapper is the star, while the vocal is reduced to a connect-the-dots presence somewhere in the background. The presence of high-profile rappers is the millennium's version of what '80s samples were to the '90s—a lazy way to gain acclaim when there's otherwise not a lot of substance to get radio's attention. But no dice here. Christina Milian is as integral to this track as a cherry on ice cream—a nice topping, but far from the main event. And with Ja Rule's dominant presence on four other songs in the current top 40, we're wondering when enough is enough.—**CT**

COUNTRY

GARY ALLAN *The One* (3:38)
PRODUCERS: Tony Brown and Mark Wright
WRITERS: K. Manno and B. Lee
PUBLISHERS: Lucky Girl Music, Migraine Music, ASCAP
MCA 02195 (CD promo)

Gary Allan is one of those artists who consistently puts out good, solid country music, and this effort is no exception. The latest single culled from his *Alright Guy* album gives Allan a chance to showcase the depth and texture in his honky-tonk-tempered voice. It's an affecting performance that shows a tender side to this California country boy. The pretty ballad, written by Karen Manno and Billy Lee, is an absolute winner. The lyric finds a man offering to wait patiently for the woman he loves to return his affection: "No rush though I need your touch/I won't rush your heart/Until you feel on solid ground, until your strength is found." Allan infuses the lyric with a hopefulness and warmth that is underscored by the gently sighing steel guitar and delicate lead guitar. This is a record that should keep programmers in his corner and add to his reputation as one of the new kids with staying power.—**DEP**

JOE STAMPLEY w/TONY STAMPLEY *If It Ain't One Thing (It's Another)* (2:22)
PRODUCER: Joe Stampley
WRITERS: J. Stampley, T. Stampley, and B. Carmichael
PUBLISHERS: Mullet Music/West Express Music/Tony Stampley Music/Ensign/Montana Connection, BMI
Critter Records 615 255-1212 (CD promo)
 This rousing father/son duet serves

CONTRIBUTORS

Eric Aiese, Deborah Evans Price, Chuck Taylor. SPOTLIGHT: Releases deemed by the review editors to deserve special attention on the basis of musical merit and/or *Billboard* chart potential. NEW & NOTEWORTHY: Exceptional releases by new or upcoming artists. PICKS (►): New releases predicted to hit the top half of the chart in the corresponding format. CRITICS' CHOICES (★): New releases, regardless of chart potential, highly recommended because of their musical merit. Send review copies to Chuck Taylor (*Billboard*, 770

Broadway, 6th floor, New York, N.Y. 10003) or to the writers in the appropriate bureaus.

SPOTLIGHTS



MANDY MOORE *Cry* (3:48)
PRODUCERS: James Renald and Peter Mokran
WRITER: J. Renald
PUBLISHERS: EMI Blackwood Canada/Audio Spunk, BMI
Epic 61430 (CD track)

Time was when MTV's *TRL* was a dominant touchstone to pop culture, where video hits more often than not translated into radio favorites. But those controlling the airwaves have their own agenda now, which must explain why Mandy Moore's previous "Crush"—which spent weeks at the top of *TRL*'s daily countdown—was completely shunned by top 40 programmers. It's a head scratcher, considering what an absolute gem the track is, coupled with Moore's widespread popularity among pop radio's primary target. So will those same corporate radio executives miss "Cry" as well? Here's another exceptional song that shows this artist's above-board talent and vocal versatility. Lamenting over a relationship that ended far too soon, Moore sings plaintively to the strumming of guitars and a keen palette of acoustic instrumentation. The melody is instant, mature, and easily deserving of a place high on the charts. It's also the cornerstone of Moore's upcoming film, *A Walk to Remember*. What a crying shame if radio again misses out on the most obvious hits it's offered.—**CT**

as a frisky reminder of how much fun a couple of good ole boys from Louisiana can have when they just cut loose in the studio. Joe Stampley was a staple on country radio in the

BRANDY *What About Us?* (3:56)
PRODUCER: Rodney "Darkchild" Jerkins
WRITERS: R. Jerkins, K. Pratt, L. Daniels, and F. Jerkins III
PUBLISHERS: EMI Blackwood/RK Productions/Ttarp Music/Songs of Windswept Pacific/Ensign Music/Fred Jerkins Publishing, BMI; EMI April/LaShawn Daniels Productions, ASCAP
Atlantic 300724 (CD promo)
 It seems like forever and a day since Brandy was singing, "The Boy Is Mine" (it was 1998). She returns on the eve of her 23rd birthday with a Rodney Jerkins-helmed track that is so striking, it's destined to be one of



those marked love-it-or-hate-it songs. Brandy sings against the beat, as if someone messed up synching the vocal with the instrumental track. It's jarring, for sure, but destined to be the kind of reaction record that grabs listeners by the scruff—there won't be a passive ear in the house. The song definitely focuses on Jerkins' skills as a contemporary tastemaker; the production is in charge here, with Brandy merely giving a face to his work. Certainly, this is an effective way to let the world know that this charmer has returned (sans braids), and it's destined to be a monster at radio. But what a shame that Brandy is just a generic voice over a track. We look forward to future singles where we can actually hear her as the star.—**CT**

'70s and '80s, and he has continued to be a strong live act on the road. He resurfaced on record last year with a wonderful album, *Somewhere Under the Rainbow*. This new single



ALABAMA *The Woman He Loves* (3:48)
PRODUCERS: Teddy Gentry and Randy Owen
WRITERS: T. Seals and E. Setser
PUBLISHERS: Irving Music/Baby Dumplin' Music, BMI
RCA 69096 (CD promo)

There's a reason the guys from Alabama—Randy Owen, Teddy Gentry, Jeff Cook, and Bennett Vartanian—have won every country music award and garnered nearly every possible accolade during the past two decades—they are one immensely talented and very classy act. They continue to demonstrate their hit-making skills on this lovely, understated record. Alabama has always had a knack for recording love songs that the average country music fans readily relate to and embrace as their own story. They do it again on the gorgeous "The Woman He Loves." Penned by Eddie Setser and Troy Seals, the chorus says, "You can tell a lot about a man by the woman he loves/Cause nothing else shows a part of his soul like she does." It's a beautiful lyric, and lead vocalist Randy Owen puts his heart and soul in each tender line. In a sea of soundalike newcomers on country radio, this man's distinctive, smooth, Southern voice feels as inviting as a warm, handmade quilt on a chilly winter's evening. From the quartet's *When It All Goes South*, its 23rd album on RCA.—**DEP**

is culled from that collection and features his up-and-coming son, Tony, newly signed to DreamWorks. Timing out at 2:22, the single is quick and potent. Both singers have

NEW & NOTEWORTHY

JOE BONAMASSA *Miss You, Hate You* (3:37)
PRODUCER: Tom Dowd
WRITERS: J. Bonamassa and R. Feldman
PUBLISHER: not listed
Medalist Entertainment 1000 (CD promo)

When Bob Seger called for some of that old time rock'n'roll all those years ago, he could have been harkening Joe Bonamassa, who's got the blues so bad, you'll swear he's been coming up against hard knocks for decades. He's actually only 24, but he has already worked with and gained acclaim from the likes of George Thorogood, John Lee Hook-



er, Gregg Allman, and Phil Ramone. In fact, he started playing guitar at age 4, and warmed up for B.B. King

in upstate New York at the age of 12. Debut single "Miss You, Hate You" throws in all the ingredients of a classic rock moment, led by a thrush of driving guitars, courtesy of Bonamassa, and a vocal that sounds like sandpaper against velcro. Four versions complement the CD promo, adding varying degrees of his guitar virtuosity—stations would do well to go with the full-length rock remix, which smokes like a cannon. Bonamassa is a bold talent, who rises above narrow radio formatics. Airplay is well-deserved, but this guy is destined to break bad with or without corporate radio's aid.—**CT**

impressive but quite distinctive vocals, and there's a raucous road-house energy that makes this an appealing record. Lyrically, the song brings to life an oft-used cliché in the title that sums up everyday frustrations. Listeners will find it relatable, and programmers would do well to give it support. After all, how often do they have a chance to let their audience hear a well-loved, familiar voice and introduce them to his talented offspring at the same time?—**DEP**

ROCK

SHANNON MCNALLY *Down and Dirty* (3:51)
PRODUCER: Ron Aniello
WRITER: S. McNally
PUBLISHER: not listed
Anise/Capitol 15146 (CD promo)

Shannon McNally previews her *Jukebox Sparrows*, which streeted Jan. 8, with this laid-back hybrid of Americana. Singer/songwriter McNally, continuing the proud and rare tradition of female blues-rockers like Bonnie Raitt, assembles a number of legendary session men for the album, an excellent lineup for a first outing. But the real star on this cut is McNally's rich, soulful voice, as it slides over the notes with just a hint of twang; hearing that voice, in fact, makes it hard to believe that McNally is actually from Long Island, N.Y. The song moves along courtesy of a funky bass line from all-star bassist Bob Glaub. Ron Aniello puts the track together; the man who combined bowed strings with rock on Life-house's "Hanging by a Moment" punctuates the breakdown on "Down and Dirty" with a toy piano line. This is solid fare for triple-A, especially for any blues specialty shows.—**EA**

DANCE

LAURA BRANIGAN *The Winner Takes It All* (6:35)
PRODUCERS: Matt Piso and Vito DeLaura
WRITERS: B. Andersson and B. Ulvaeus
PUBLISHER: Polar Music International AB

Behemoth-Boink Records (12" single)
 It seems like a lifetime since we last heard from '80s diva Laura Branigan. After years of false starts and unfulfilled rumors, the diva behind such evergreens as "Self Control," "Solitaire," and "Gloria" returns with her take on the 1980 top 10 ABBA classic "The Winner Takes It All." Stalwart fans of Branigan have likely shaken their booties to the lively strains of Agnetha, Frida, Benny, and Bjorn's original version, and that remains a tough act to follow. But Branigan gives it the gusto on a track that doesn't try to be self-consciously trendy. It starts off slowly and quietly, and then explodes into a satisfying high-energy thumper, with that instantly recognizable soprano taking no prisoners. Those who long for the days when vocalists led the way on the dancefloor will feel like they're breathing in spring air with this welcome return. For information, contact distributor Strictly Rhythm at 212-254-2400.—**CT**