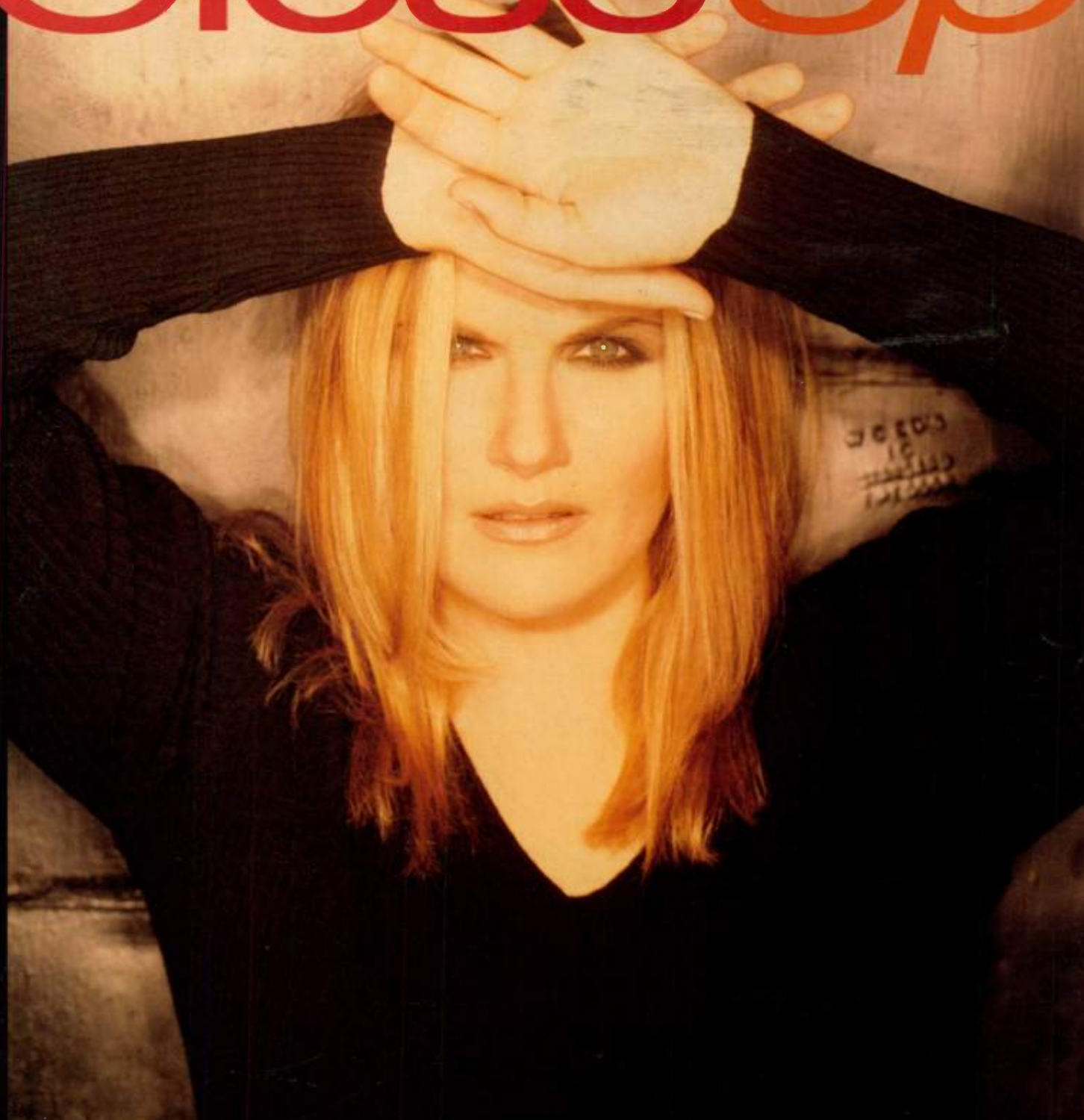


JANUARY 1998

CloseUp



INSIDE:
Mark Chesnutt
Chely Wright
Don Cook

Matraca Berg

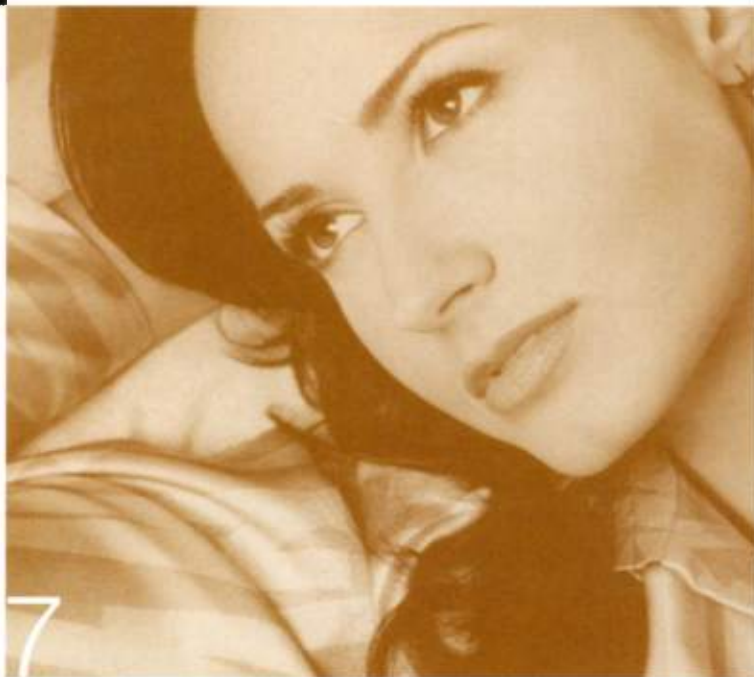




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Trisha Yearwood

Trisha Yearwood could easily coast into 1998 snuggled comfortably in the security blanket of career success. After all, she wrapped up 1997 with her first-ever CMA Female Vocalist of the Year Award, platinum certification for her greatest hits package, 10 million career sales and admirers the world over. But this gracious working woman will instead begin the new year shaking up her tried and true ways.

"I don't want '97 to be over! It's been a crazy year - a great year - but so crazy with unexpected things," Trisha says.

"When you're living in it, it's hard to step outside and look at it. What it really is, is what I've worked for my whole career, to be at this point. You're never really sure that you can be any better or be more successful and when it happens you go 'Wow'. It's fun because I've been so lucky; I've been lucky all along. This year has just felt like everything has been pushed up to the next step. It's exciting.

"I'm really proud that the most successful album in my career has been SONGBOOK because people who bought it strictly because they heard 'How Do I Live' or 'In Another's Eyes' - even if they're not that familiar with the songs on it - they are now. It represents my career to this point so that makes me proud. Sometimes greatest hits records can kind of be throw-away records, and this was approached in a different way from a label standpoint. It wasn't just a here's a greatest hits album, let's move on to the next one. It was here are three songs and let's really work them. So far two of them have gone number one, so we have one more to work on. I'm really proud of that.

"The female vocalist thing...as I said that night, I have watched the CMA Awards my whole life and to be up there was a goal and to win that award in particular was the goal, the elusive award. Now I've done it, and I've got it at home and I got my name plate yesterday. It's real now."

Yearwood received three standing ovations during the CMA Awards - one after performing her hit "How Do I Live"; another when she won Female Vocalist of the Year and the third upon entering the backstage press conference.

"I was truly overwhelmed that night by the way I felt before I even won - when I sang and received the response from the house. That's a tough room and probably the hardest place to perform that I've ever performed in my whole life, other than the Olympics.

"I felt like I shared (the win) with everybody because I had a lot of people who have every year said, 'Ya' know, we want you to win this thing.' So, when I went in the press room and I saw these people, especially these people who have supported me for so long, standing up and cheering. It was like this is for you too, it's for all of us. It's a really nice feeling to know that you've won it and that everyone's glad that you've won it.



ON THE COVER

"I've worked for my entire career to be at this point."

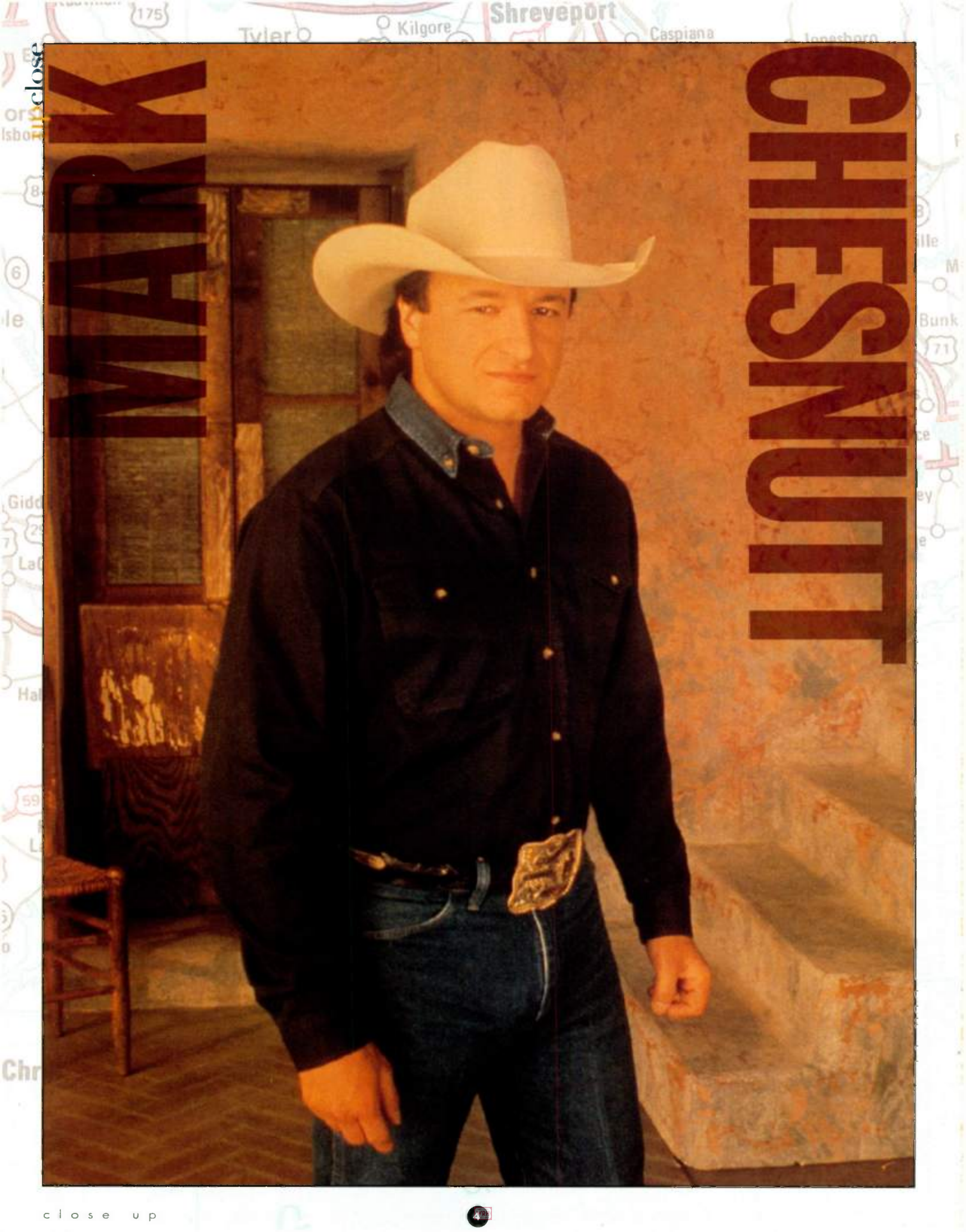
"I've always felt like I have this group support, even when I have not been nominated for awards or when an album didn't go platinum immediately or a song didn't go number one or whatever. Because I've lived here so long and I started out in the industry as a session singer, I know a lot of writers and I know a lot of people so I've always kind of felt like I had the silent support. I felt it especially in the last few years."

Having dipped her toe outside the comfort zone of recording with producer Garth Fundis, Trisha has decided to jump in new waters.

"I am gonna make the next record with Tony (Brown). I didn't know that before I did the Con Air thing, but I really like working with him. While we were there, we ended up cutting a couple of other things, nothing of which ended up on the record, but we thought we'd just try working together and see how it went. I really like it.

"It's kind of a strange position to be in. The hard part for me is I'm very resistant to change and Garth Fundis is one of my closest friends, and I'm scared to make a record without him. But I also feel like it's one of those things where if you're really gonna try and push yourself and change and grow and all those things, then sometimes you have to try and step out of your comfort zone a bit. I'm past the anxiety of making the change, but I'm still excited about it, and a little scared about it.

continued on page 13...



MARK

CHESNUT

Country Music losing its “traditional” sound?

Not if Mark Chesnutt has anything to do with it. Chesnutt is traditional to the bone, and plans to keep it that way no matter what happens in the marketplace or with the ever changing playlists of Country radio. “I don’t want to sound like a preacher, but I believe there’s still got to be some tradition, some Country, in Country Music, or we’re gonna lose every bit of it - everything that people like Hank Williams and George Jones and George Strait have spent their whole lives doing,” Mark has said in the past.

A second generation recording artist, Mark grew up listening to his father’s Hank Williams records. He is a collector of old Country records, and he looks to the classics for inspiration.

“I still listen to all those guys. I think they’re the best, and I’m real picky about singers. Somebody really has to be a good singer for me to listen to them. I guess that’s from growing up listening to George [Jones] and Hank and all those guys. I’m doing quite a few shows with George, and cut some stuff with him in the studio, and Waylon. It’s kind of like an extra treat to get to know your heroes.”

The 1993 Country Music Association Horizon Award winner grew up in Beaumont, where he later honed his skills in the surrounding East Texas honky-tonks. “I learned a lot about being onstage because I grew up in the clubs. I don’t think I’d be in any shape to do what I’ve done now if it wasn’t for all that. It got me strong enough to where I could sing on the road.” Critics have lauded his music as “hardcore traditional music performed with a sharp and vibrant edge,” and “the purest, hardest honky-tonk by a touring national artist in a long time.”

Chesnutt has come a long way since his honky-tonk days in Texas. He has three platinum and two gold albums under his belt, as well as 11 number-one records, including “Goin’ Through The Big D” and “Sure Is Monday”. Every one of his singles has been at least a top-10 record. Mark has had great success carrying on the sounds of George Jones, Hank Williams and Lefty Frizzell with such hits as “Too Cold At Home”, “Brother Jukebox” and “Blame It On Texas”.

In choosing songs for his albums, Mark finds it difficult to find this quality sound in songs. “It’s because everybody’s wanting to be a rock star, and I’m glad those days are going away. I’ve never wanted to be anything but a Country singer, and I think people are finally realizing now that that’s where it’s at. I think a lot of the listeners are tired of the watered down, bubble-gum sounding dance tunes all the time. It has to get back to being Country Music or it’s gonna die.”

With a lot of the music straying away from the traditional sound, Mark says that if he can’t find those types of songs he’ll just write them. THANK GOD FOR BELIEVERS, his current Decca Records lp, contains five songs that he co-wrote.

“Somebody really has to be a good singer for me to listen to them.”

“Thank God they’ve never said I was too Country.”

“Everybody in this business has been really good to me and supportive.”

“It’s always pretty easy looking for songs. I either like it or I don’t like it. I’ve been co-writing quite a bit with Roger Springer. Half of the songs on the album we wrote together. I just wanted to record some of the most Country stuff I could find ‘cause that’s what we need. With radio, I’ve been pretty lucky, and thank God they’ve never said I was too Country.”

Mark recently was tapped to take part in Seagram America’s “Crown Royal Untamed & True Tour” along with MCA recording artist David Lee Murphy and Decca Records labelmate Gary Allan. This tour marks the first time Seagram Americas, the maker of Crown Royal, has joined with its affiliate, MCA/Decca Nashville, to present such a program.

“I’m real fired up about the tour and getting to hang out with David Lee and Gary Allan. I’m pretty sure it will be a big selling tour. There ain’t no tellin’ what’s gonna happen out there - it’s going to be a lot of work, but it’s going to be a lot of fun too. I’ll be watching their shows every night, because I’m a fan of those two guys. I’m looking forward to it because it’s the biggest tour I’ve been on.”

Mark stays busy with his career the entire year. There’s no rest at home either with his two little boys, Casey Aaron (named after Elvis Aaron Presley) and Waylon Nelson (named for two of his heroes - Waylon Jennings and his grandfather), waiting for him when he walks in the door.

“I’m staying on the road pretty much year round. Some people take their families with them, but maybe they don’t have the same schedules we have. We go out and never spend the night anywhere, we leave right after the show and wake up in the next town. It’s just not the place for a kid. I have to be there, but they don’t.”

Mark Chesnutt plans to stick around as long as his fans and the industry will have him. “Everybody in this business has been really good to me and supportive. I’m glad to be here in this business. I hope to be here for as long as I want to be. I just want them [fans and industry] to know that I’m still here and that one of these days I’d like to win one of those awards.”

Dixie Weathersby

AMERICA'S **SOLD** ON COUNTRY

America's Sold On Country Tour Kicks Off 1998 in Los Angeles

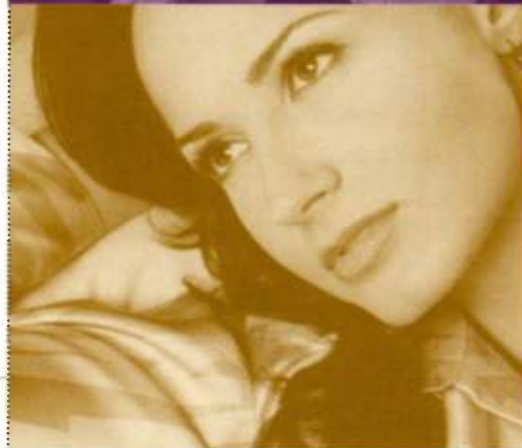
CMA Targets Key Advertisers With Entertainment and Corporate Success Stories

CMA, in conjunction with Interep and ADWEEK Magazines, will kick-off the 1998 "America's Sold On Country Tour" (ASOC) February 4 in Los Angeles. Following the success of ASOC '97 dates in New York and Chicago, the unique half-day event will once again combine presentations from noted industry executives with entertainment from top Country Music performers/songwriters to emphasize why Country Music works for marketers and how to effectively use it in an integrated marketing campaign.

"The 'America's Sold On Country Tour' is a key initiative in CMA's ongoing corporate development strategy," said CMA Executive Director Ed Benson. "By highlighting recent Country Music corporate success stories and bringing together the key people who help to make them possible, we hope to demonstrate Country Music's broad reach and unique qualities. The ASOC Tour also gives the corporate community and members of the Country Music industry a valuable opportunity to interact."

Interep Chairman/CEO Ralph Guild was enthused about the company's involvement with ASOC. "Country radio is a rock-solid format that moves product for advertisers," Guild stated. "Country Music, in its various forms, strikes a chord with the American public and touches people in a very personal way. And, radio remains the leading medium used to create this bond, as so many advertisers have discovered by achieving unmatched results via Country-formatted stations. Our Country Radio Format Network has established itself as the one-stop service for advertisers and agencies looking to reach consumers through Country radio. This event underscores our support of the format and the excitement surrounding it."

Also featured during the event will be unique performances by some of Country Music's most exciting talents. At press time, Mary Chapin Carpenter, Pam Tillis, Chely Wright and Wynonna were scheduled to perform. Further details of the ASOC Tour '98 will be in the February issue of CLOSE UP.



chely wright

thebuzz

chely wright is a risk-taker and a list-maker. As she talks about her life, one can't help getting caught up in the enthusiasm she exudes.

"Nothing is insurmountable," Chely says, speaking from one of the offices at her management company Titley-Spalding. "If I wanted eating ice cream to be my full-time job, I know that I could find a way to make that happen. If you think something is a fun thing, you can do that for your job."

For Chely, that "fun thing" was always a musical career. Currently relishing the release of her debut MCA lp, *LET ME IN*, the Kansas native had to travel a long emotional road before her career truly began to take the direction she wanted. Growing up in a household surrounded by music, Chely was partial to the sounds of Buck Owens, Loretta Lynn, Connie Smith and Porter Wagoner, among others.

At the age of 11, she started singing with bands, and a few years later formed her own band, County Line. The summer before her senior year, Chely got a job at the famed Ozark Jubilee in Branson, Missouri. She then landed a job at Opryland and moved to Nashville.

"Nothing is insurmountable."

After honing her performance skills at Opryland, Chely came to the attention of producer Harold Shedd, who signed her to Mercury/PolyGram. Her first lp, *WOMAN IN THE MOON*, was released in 1994 on the revived Polydor label. Chely's second lp, *RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF IT*, was released by another PolyGram label, the now defunct A & M.

It was at this time, Chely says, that she decided she wasn't happy, so she took it upon herself to see that changes were made. More determined than ever, Chely wrote out her "wish list" to totally overhaul her career.

"I had five things on my list," she explains. "Number one was Tony Brown. Number two was MCA Records. Number three was Titley-Spalding. Number four was that Wes Vause could be let go from A&M so that he could be my publicist. And number five was MCA Music.

"I had made my list, this particular day, when my second album was coming out, so I was still waiting to see what was going to happen over at Polydor, which then changed to A & M. But I just wrote down a list of what my perfect world would be.

"When I saw that the A&M thing wasn't working, we were two singles into the album, and they were getting ready to release the third single. I begged them not to do it. It was like, 'Let's just quit. Please let me off the label.' They said, 'No. We're going to release this single, and you're going to make another album. End of story.'

"But I got it in my head to visualize these things and figure out the ways to make it happen," Chely confides. "Even if you're contractually bound, you can always get what you want. It just took a lot of hard work. It took a big risk of me having to go out on a limb and get my other manager out of my career. It was a monetary issue, of which I didn't have. So I went to the bank to ask for money, so

that I could clear my life up. I hadn't even called Tony Brown and told him that I wanted a record deal yet. That was a huge risk."

But Chely says the risk has paid off. One by one, her wishes have come true. And she's even been surprised at the working relationship she's formed with MCA President Tony Brown.

"I had this preprogrammed notion of Tony that he would probably show up at the studio with an entourage because he's Tony Brown. But he's the most ethical, good person that I've met in the industry so far.

"A lot of times when he reads a good review, he'll call and tell me about it. That really surprised me - that he reads those and gets excited about it. Maybe he doesn't still call George Strait and tell him about his reviews, but he knows how excited I am about all of this happening. I think he's kind of playing on my level, and I like that."

Besides singing, Chely can also add writing to her list of credits. She co-wrote three songs on the new lp, including "I Already Do" with Gary Burr.

"'I Already Do' is the third single. I think that could be an important record in my career. I mean of course they're all important, but I think that could be a big one. Let's just put it this way - I hope that I have to sing that for twenty years."

When she's not playing music, Chely has plenty of other hobbies to keep her busy. A star basketball player in high school, she's very athletic and loves the outdoors. One of her newest endeavors is golf.

"I have taken up golf. I've always said, 'Aw, that's a boring sport. Hitting a little ball across the yard is dumb.' But I guess I was intimidated by it, and I was always afraid to try it.

"But I got so tired of doing these celebrity charity tournaments and not playing, just driving the cart around. I thought, 'Gosh, I'm athletic. I can do this. I can learn how to do it.' So I went with a friend and took a lesson. The golf teacher was telling me how to do this and that, and I hit the ball. It felt so good. I have golf clubs. I have a new putter and a new sand wedge. I'm actually taking lessons and going to the driving range."

Another pastime that Chely enjoys is cleaning.

"I love to clean my house. As a matter of fact, fans will bring me Comet and Pinesol to my shows instead of flowers. To me that's not weird. It's very useful and a good gift."

What's next on Chely's agenda?

"I have lots of lists going. I want to be a member of the Grand Ole Opry in a really bad way. I want to write a CMA Song Of The Year, and obviously I want to have multiplatinum success. Who doesn't? I can lie to you and say, 'I'm just happy to write songs and sing.' Yes, that is the core of my happiness, but having a multiplatinum album just ensures that I will be able to write another album and sing. So I want these things to continue so that I can do the things that really make me happy."

Mandy Wilson



CMA COMMISSIONS MOST EXTENSIVE CONSUMER SURVEY EVER CONDUCTED ON ATTITUDES TOWARD COUNTRY MUSIC

CMA officials have announced the initial results of a benchmark national consumer survey on attitudes toward Country Music. The study was conducted by New Jersey-based Edison Media Research, which specializes in researching and providing strategic information for radio stations, television stations, newspapers, cable networks, record labels, other media as well as various political organizations.

"CMA initiated this study in an attempt to better understand who our consumers actually are and what they want," said CMA President Tim DuBois. "As the trade organization representing the entire Country Music industry, we are attempting to provide information which will allow our members to better serve our fans. This is the start of a process of research which will enable us to assess consumer attitudes on an ongoing basis."

"This is probably the most extensive survey ever conducted in the music industry," said Edison Media Research President Larry Rosin. "A typical national political survey usually involves around 1,000 people. This study engaged five times that number so that conclusions in the survey could be measured within the groups of current, former and potential Country Music listeners. We wanted to look at the differences among consumer groups so that we could further explore opportunities to expand Country Music among potential and former listeners."

The study was directed by CMA's Strategic Evaluation Committee, which is chaired by Atlantic Records' president Rick Blackburn. Blackburn remarked, "Certainly research is not the end-all for resolving issues in any industry. If done properly, it should prove to be a great tool in asking the right questions. The size and technique of the CMA consumer study will prove to be a valuable tool for better positioning of Country Music in the increasingly competitive entertainment industry environment."

Edison Media Research, recognized by Advertising Age as the second-fastest growing research company in America, has built a niche for itself by developing innovative research techniques to provide its clients with a strategic advantage in today's highly competitive media environment. Edison has nearly doubled in size in each of its first three years of business.

SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

Edison interviewed 5,005 people, age 18 to 54, in the continental United States. Telephone numbers were selected using a random digit dialing procedure that gave all households an equal chance of selection. One adult was then randomly selected in each household.

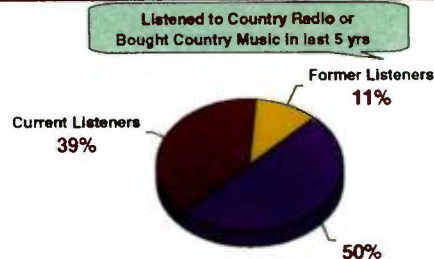
The survey followed scientific procedures in order to project the

numbers to the national population of 18 to 54-year-old adults. The margin of error was plus or minus two percent.

How the Survey Was Conducted:

- Four groups were defined:
 - Current Country Listeners (3165 interviews)
 - ▶ listened to Country radio for more than an hour in the last month or purchased Country CD or tape within the last three months
 - Former Country Listeners (885 interviews)
 - ▶ listened to Country radio or made Country CD or tape purchase within last five years
 - Potential Country Listeners (409 interviews)
 - ▶ would consider listening to Country music more
 - Non-Country Listeners (546 interviews)
 - ▶ subsample of 3482 non-Country listeners contacted

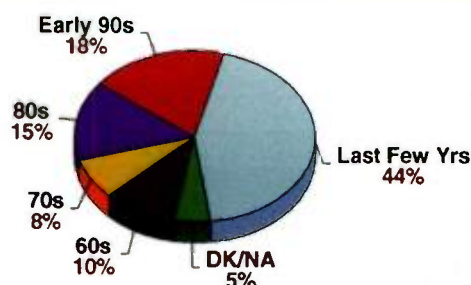
Country Listening in America:



Among the findings were:

- 51 percent of Country Music listeners said they are listening to the music more in the last year.

Favorite Era of Country Music



- 19 percent of Americans say Country is the type of music they listen to most. This led all other formats of

music as a favorite.

- The highest percentage of Country Music listeners against the total population within a region is actually in the Midwest not the South.

- The age profile of Country Music consumers very closely matches that of the general population.

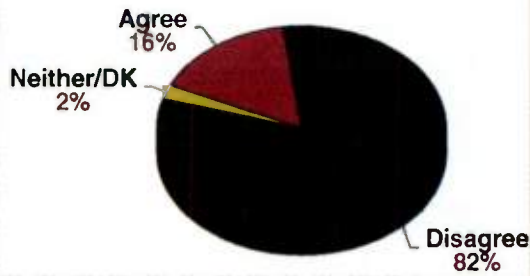
- 68 percent feel that "the new Country singers are as good as the established ones."

- As for purchasing habits, 69 percent of Country Music consumers buy more CDs than tapes.

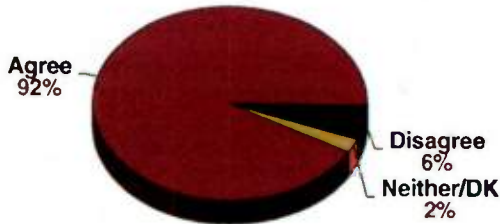
- 45 percent purchase Country Music at discount stores or mass merchandisers compared to 35 percent at a record store.

- 31 percent of listeners have attended a Country Music concert in the last year.

"Today's Country singers all look and sound the same"



"I like when Country radio stations tell the titles and artists of every song"



Name Your 3 Favorite Country Artists:

■ Garth Brooks	31%
■ Reba McEntire	17
■ Alabama	14
■ George Strait	13
■ Alan Jackson	12
■ Brooks & Dunn	9
■ LeAnn Rimes	9
■ Vince Gill	8
■ Clint Black	7
■ Shania Twain	7

1997 CMA Edison Media Research CONSUMER SURVEY

Order the complete consumer survey in a full-color, 28-page booklet.

A series of five subsequent reports will be available for a subscription price of \$100.00. The reports will contain detailed analysis of the survey data as it pertains to key interest areas i.e. radio, records, major markets, Country Music lifestyle market, age groups, etc. Subscribers will get first access to these reports, which will be shipped automatically as soon as they are published. Please indicate below if you would like to order the subscription.

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Credit card orders may be faxed to (615) 726-0314 or return order form with check or money order (U.S. funds only) payable to Country Music Association to: CMA Research, One Music Circle South, Nashville, 37203. SHIPPING: All shipments will be sent UPS or U.S. mail. For orders outside the continental U.S., please call CMA Membership at (615) 244-2840.

AWARDS

Stonewall Jackson has been awarded the prestigious Legendary Achievement Award by the Country Gospel Association. This award recognizes Stonewall's composition: "Jesus Is My Lifeline" as the longest running number-one song (four months), top 10 song (eight months) and top five song (six months) in the history of The Gospel Voice/Music City News Christian Country Countdown.

Razzy Bailey has been inducted in the Georgia Country Music Hall of Fame. An exhibit of Razzy is displayed along with personal icon Otis Redding in the R&B division of the Georgia Music Hall of Fame, in Macon, Georgia, and a second display of Razzy in the "Hot Country" exhibit with another favorite colleague, Travis Tritt.

Ricky Van Shelton's website (www.ricky-vanshelton.com) has been awarded the prestigious Pro Award from Award Net. The Pro Award is presented to outstanding professional websites that promote a company or personality product or service. The website is judged for content and/or design appeal.

Bob Saporiti, Warner/Reprise Nashville senior vice president of marketing, has received the Leonard T. Rambeau International Support Award from the Canadian Country Music Association (CCMA). The award, recognizing efforts to expand country's global presence, was presented to Saporiti by Canadian singer songwriter George Fox.

BILLBOARD MAGAZINE/AIRPLAY MONITOR has named Austin radio station KASE 101 Station of the Year and KVET FM personalities Sam and Bob as Personalities of the Year. Only five nominations are awarded in each category nationwide. The awards were determined by the readers of AIRPLAY MONITOR.

MCA Records/Nashville, represented by Pam Russell, senior director of national sales and marketing, recently received the prestigious 1996 Vendor Award of Excellence from Target. The award was given for industry leadership and for contributing to the on-going success of the national Target stores.

MCA Records/Nashville's promotion department recently received high recognition at the 1997 Gavin Country Awards. Jamie Matteson, Gavin Country editor, announced the winners at the 1997 Gavin Virtual Country Seminar. Members of the record and radio community named David Haley as the Gavin VP of Promotion of the Year and Royce Risser was named Regional Promotion Director of the Year.

Melvin Sloan, a patriarch of Southern Appalachian freestyle square dancing and his late brother, the legendary Ralph Sloan, will be inducted into America's Clogging Hall of Fame during a special ceremony in Maggie Valley, N.C. The Sloan brothers are known around the world as the dance leaders of the Tennessee Travelers (also known as the Melvin Sloan Dancers), a square dance troupe that has performed on the Grand Ole Opry on Saturday nights since 1952.

NEW COMPANIES

Dick Shuey has formed Medley Ranch Music (BMI) at 610 Maple Acres,

Holladay, TN 38341. The firm will accept outside established and new songwriters' material.

NEW MEDIA

country.com (<http://www.country.com>) and the internationally famous "Chicken Soup for the Soul" book series, have joined together to allow Internet users to participate in the selection of stories for the upcoming book,



RCA recording artist Clint Black mugs for the camera with wife Lisa Hartman Black and model-turned-sitcom-star Brooks Shields (aka Mrs. Andre Agassi) during a live auction and annual concert benefit for the Andre Agassi Charitable Foundation.

"Chicken Soup For The Country Soul". For the first time, Internet users can rate submitted stories to help determine the final selection in the 18th book of the Chicken Soup series. "Chicken Soup For The Country Soul" is scheduled for release in late 1998 and will feature 75 inspirational stories about Country Music entertainers and how they have affected the lives of others.

Hal Leonard Corporation, has announced the launch of Sheet Music Direct, a new online service that offers consumers in the U.S. and Canada the ability to purchase sheet music by downloading via the internet. This new "electronic distribution" of sheet music will offer a selection of piano/vocal/guitar and guitar tab sheet music that can be purchased through music dealers' websites and then downloaded and printed via the customer's home computer. It is located on the internet at www.sheetmusicdirect.com.

NEWS LINE

29th Annual Country Radio Seminar will be held February 25-28 in downtown Nashville. For registration contact

Country Radio Broadcasters, Inc. (CRB), 819 18th Avenue South, Nashville, TN 37203; Fax: 615/329-4492; Internet: www.crb.org



Capitol Nashville artist Dean Miller, backstage with actor John Goodman at the Roger Miller Remembered song-filled tribute held at the Grand Ole Opry. The show will air in March.

Congress adopted important legislation on November 4 to restore Copyright protection to virtually all songs recorded prior to 1978. HR 672, the "Copyright Corrections Act," supported by the Nashville Songwriters Association (NSAI), ensured that pre-1978 songs would not lose their copyright protection and prematurely fall into public domain.

Ken Berry, president, EMI Recorded Music has announced a reorganization at Capitol Nashville. **Pat Quigley** will be president & CEO of Capitol Nashville. He was previously executive vice president & general manager for the label. Former president & CEO, **Scott Hendricks**, and Ken Berry are in advanced discussions regarding the establishment of a Virgin Nashville operation with the expectation this will be launched early in 1998.

PRIMESTAR, a provider of digital satellite TV entertainment, announced today that it has renewed and expanded its highly successful sponsorships involving NASCAR auto racing, the American Red Cross and Country Music star **Clay Walker**.

Fireside Studio (813 18th Ave. S) has been sold to California-based screenwriter/songwriter **Jim Sagorac** and Nashville session guitarist **Eugene Moles**. The studio, once owned by **Porter Wagoner** and **Dolly Parton** will be operated by engineer **George Clinton**, office manager **Vanessa Soner**, and Moles as studio/property manager.

ABC Radio Networks' Real Country Network is introducing a

new host, new format and new features. The Saturday evening request show, Real Country's "All Time Favorites", with host **Richard Lee**, will feature contests, listener interaction and interviews with Country Music artists.

United Stations Radio Networks Inc., has acquired "The Road", a weekly two-hour show featuring live concert performance. United Stations will now oversee all production, affiliate relations, distribution and advertising sales for the AIRPLAY MONITOR nominated program. Stillman & Company's President **Winslow Stillman** and executive vice president **Charles Crutchfield** will continue to serve as executive producer.

Travis Tritt announced that his 1998 tour will be sponsored by **Pontiac Trans Am Firebird** and the **National Hot Rod Association (NHRA)**. The tour will incorporate 45 cities, 15 of which will be directly tied into designated NHRA races.

CMA recently joined **M.U.S.I.C.**, Musicians United for Strong Internet Copyright. Approximately 200 groups that span all the creative industries - including film, publish-

ing, software and music - as well as educators, entrepreneurs, retailers and researchers have come together to urge ratification of the **World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)** treaties as well as protection of creativity and copyright in cyberspace. The treaties, if ratified, will raise the level of copyright protection for American music throughout the world and will effectively require other countries to provide protection consistent with the current U.S. law. For more information or to join the coalition, contact Joel Flatow at RIAA (800) 223-2328.

Jamie Nehasil has joined **Refugee**



Management International as an associate manager. Previously employed as an assistant at Mike

Robertson Management, Jamie will report to executive vice president Judy Seale and president Stuart Dill.

Richard McVey II has been named managing editor of **MUSIC CITY NEWS**. McVey was previously associate editor and replaces Danny Proctor. **Brenan Sharp** has been named art director. Sharp was previously a graphic designer and production coordinator.

Scott Johnson has been promoted to director of **Tree Productions**. He previously served as an assistant to creative services. **Philip Self** has been promoted to director, Film & TV Music. Self was formerly synchronization manager for the company.

Kathy J. Kinsch, associate in First Union's private client group, has joined **First Union's Entertainment/Music Division**. Working with Entertainment/Music Division head Joe Moscheo, her responsibilities include support and service of existing Entertainment/Music Division client relationships, as well as solicitation of new business.

Jenny Shields will be the new manager of national promotion for **Atlantic Nashville**. Her primary focus will be the Northeast region. Prior to this, Shields was the West Coast promotion manager for Atlantic and was based in Los Angeles.

UPDATE

RCA Record Label Group has announced the promotion of several staff members. **Cindy Mabe**, formerly national promotion coordinator for RCA, has been moved to the newly created position of administrator for RLG artist development. Filling Mabe's former role is **Cindy Heath**, who was formerly Gavin promotion rep for the company. **Chris DeCarlo** has been named Northeast regional promotion manager. She was the assistant program director/music director at WDSY in Pittsburgh. **Lawrence Loring**, a seven-year RLG employee, has moved to manager, production. Loring began as an intern at RCA in 1990.

Mike Chapman, radio and promotion veteran, was named Southwest regional promotion manager for **Asylum Records**.

COUNTRY WEEKLY has announced the following staff appointments. Photo Editor **Jeanne Milewski** and news editors **Daniel P. Ray** and the magazine's Nashville bureau chief, **Rick Taylor**, are appointed senior editors, reporting directly to editor Cliff Barr. In addition, three staff writers - **Tamara Saviano**, **Rick Haydan** and **Catharine Rambeau** are promoted to senior writers.

Stan Hitchcock, the former creative head of CMT, and the founder of Americana Television Network, has moved the corporate headquarters for **Hitchcock Productions** to 92 Plumlee Drive, Hendersonville, TN 37075; phone (615)264-3292; fax (615)264-3308.

Shane Adams has been hired as director of creative services of **Mike O'Rear Publishing Company, Inc.** Adams was formerly the creative assistant at Criterion Music.

Mike Sebastian has been appointed to vice president music publishing for **Starstruck Entertainment**. He was formerly general manager with the company.

Rebecca Brown has been upped to senior director for **SESAC's** Nashville office. Brown works with songwriters and publishers in pop, Country and Christian music. **Tim Fink** has been appointed to director and works with songwriters and publishers in Country, Christian, rock and



(from left) Curb Records CEO Mike Curb, Country Music Foundation director Bill Ivey, Johnny Paycheck, Tim McGraw, Jeff Foxworthy and Moore Entertainment president Steve Moore are part of McGraw's second annual New Year's Eve Blast, held at the Nashville Arena. The artists performing donated their performance fees and all proceeds to the Country Music Hall of Fame's \$15 million campaign.

television/film. **Trevor Gale** is now director in the New York office and specializes in urban and R&B music. **Kevin McManus**, also based in New York, is now associate director and primarily works with alternative and rock songwriters and publishers.

Sarah Smith has been named manager of administration at **Crutchfield Music**. Her new responsibilities will include contract administration and studio management.

John Rose has been named head of sales and marketing for **DreamWorks Records Nashville**. He was formerly vice president of sales for Capitol Nashville.

Chris Farren producer/songwriter has signed a deal to provide ongoing production services to **MCA Nashville** artists. Farren will continue to produce outside acts but will concentrate his efforts on developing and producing acts for his newly formed imprint deal with MCA.

Theresa Durst has been appointed to the first regional promotion director for **Lyric Street Records**. She was previously the Southeast regional promotion director for **Almo Sounds**.

Pecos Film Company has moved to 1111 16th Avenue South, Suite 303, Nashville, TN 37212; (615)327-1400; fax (615)327-0431.



BOOKING:
Tammy Wynette to The Bobby Roberts Company, Inc...
MANAGEMENT:

River Road to Refugee Management International...**Scott Whitaker** to Management Associates, Inc...**Brady Seals** to Gary Haber...**RECORDING:** **Austin Lounge Lizards** to Sugar Hill...**The Tim Briggs Band** to Intersound...**Lari White** to Lyric Street Records... **PUBLISHING:** **Melanie Spradlin** to Mop Up Music, Inc.



artist/label

Jim Collins
Kris Tyler
Prairie Oyster
BlackHawk
Shania Twain

title

“The Next Step”
“What A Woman Knows”
“She Won’t Be Lonely Long”
“Postmarked Birmingham”
“Don’t Be Stupid
(You Know I Love You)”

producer/director

Steven Goldmann/David Pitchard
Steven Goldmann/Susan Bowman
Michael McNamara/Brian McNamara
Robert Deaton/George Flanigen
Larry Jordan/Jack Gulick



The 9th Annual Country Gold
International Country Music
Festival held in Kyushu Island,
Japan featured (l to r) Judy Scale,
Good Time Charlie Nagatani,
Diamond Rio’s Gene Johnson,
Chely Wright and Diamond Rio’s
Marty Roe.

INTERNATIONAL
UPDATE

Trisha Yearwood ...continued from page 3

“This afternoon I’m going over to have a song meeting with Tony. The past six years I’ve gone to Garth Fundis’ office and played him songs. It’s hard even after I’ve known Garth for this many years to go in and say ‘I believe in this song’ because what if they think ‘she’s stupid’ or ‘what is she thinking?’ Now I’m doing that with a whole different person.

“I’ll make another record with Garth Fundis, and we know that. We are fine. I think the greatest hits album gave me a chance to take a breather and say this is what I’ve done so far and I want to turn the corner, not to make different music, but to just try give it something fresh.”

Despite the new partner, Trisha doesn’t anticipate much of a departure from her trademark style.

“I think that the songs will lead the way. I’m not looking to make a particular kind of record, like more country or more pop. The songs really do dictate. And I’ve got a couple of things that, I don’t know how they’ll come out, but I think the record will end up sounding different just like I can hear the difference in the sound of the production of the things I cut with Tony and the things I cut with Garth. Maybe a lot of people won’t notice them, but there are subtle differences which I think is good. But I don’t think musically I’m looking to do anything any different. I really won’t know until I get in there and start cutting songs what it’s gonna be.

“It’s always been with Garth, pretty much fifty-fifty (on selecting songs). He’s got a really great ear for songs. But I also think, one of the reasons he and I have always worked so well together, is that we like the same things. You try to find somebody that hears the same thing in their head that you

do and we’ve always been drawn to the same kinds of songs. I’m hoping that will be the way it will be with Tony.”

Also in the hopper is an album of duets with Garth Brooks and possibly sharing the stage more often with the longtime friend.

“I don’t have much on the books yet because Garth (Brooks) and I have been talking about the possibility of doing some shows together, which will be cool. It’ll probably depend on if we think we can get this album out by April and probably really start doing the touring around then and maybe I’ll make another trip to Australia.”

Earlier on the day Trisha visited with Close Up, Garth eluded to the duet album as he announced the release of his new solo album.

“This is the elusive album that we’ve talked about for so many years, but it really is gonna happen. The good news is he’ll have his album out, which I’m really glad about ‘cause I’ve had a chance to hear it and I think it’s incredible. I’m scheduled to go in the studio in January, and I’ll have an album out hopefully by early spring. Then we’re planning on going in the studio kicking things around and getting started.”

With so many treasures in her hopechest, Trisha has one dream left to be realized.

“The elusive artist that I want to work with is (Linda) Ronstadt. She’s the queen. Once I’ve sung with her I’ll probably retire. So I’m waiting.”

Shannon Heim

1997 BRITISH COUNTRY MUSIC AWARDS WINNERS ANNOUNCED

Male Vocalist:
CHARLIE LANDSBOROUGH
Female Vocalist:
SARAH JORY
Group/Duo:
CHEAP SEATS
Rising Star:
CHEAP SEATS
Album:
COYOTES. Coyotes. Round Tower Records
Bluegrass Band:
DOWN COUNTRY BOYS

BRITISH COUNTRY MUSIC AWARDS

RCA recording artist Sara Evans and British comedian Rory McGrath presented the 1997 British Country Music Awards in Birmingham, England on November 16. For the first time in its three-year history, the event was open to the public, with a large crowd filling the auditorium at Birmingham's International Convention Centre. An edited version of the awards ceremony aired on BBC Radio 2 on November 27 and BBC TV-2 on December 20.



▲ Sara Evans and Rory McGrath host the 3rd Annual British Country Music Awards.

▲ The Cheap Seats were the big winners at the 1997 British Country Music Awards.

The program featured performances by Evans, Dale Watson, British duo Cheap Seats, recipient of a special achievement award Albert Lee and British Rising Star Award nominee Adam Couldwell. Dolly Parton was presented with the Country Legend Award during a special taped segment featuring her and Vince Gill. Other award winners were: ▶

INTERNATIONAL AWARDS

Male Vocalist:
GEORGE STRAIT
Female Vocalist:
TRISHA YEARWOOD
Group/Duo:
BR5-49
Rising Star:
LEANN RIMES
Album:
LEE ANN WOMACK. Lee Ann Womack. MCA/Decca
Independent Label Artist:
DALE WATSON (Hightone)
Bluegrass Group:
ALISON KRAUSS & UNION STATION



▲ Newcomer Adam Couldwell performs on the British Country Music Awards.

▲ Charlie Landsborough shows off his award with co host Rory McGrath.



Don Cook

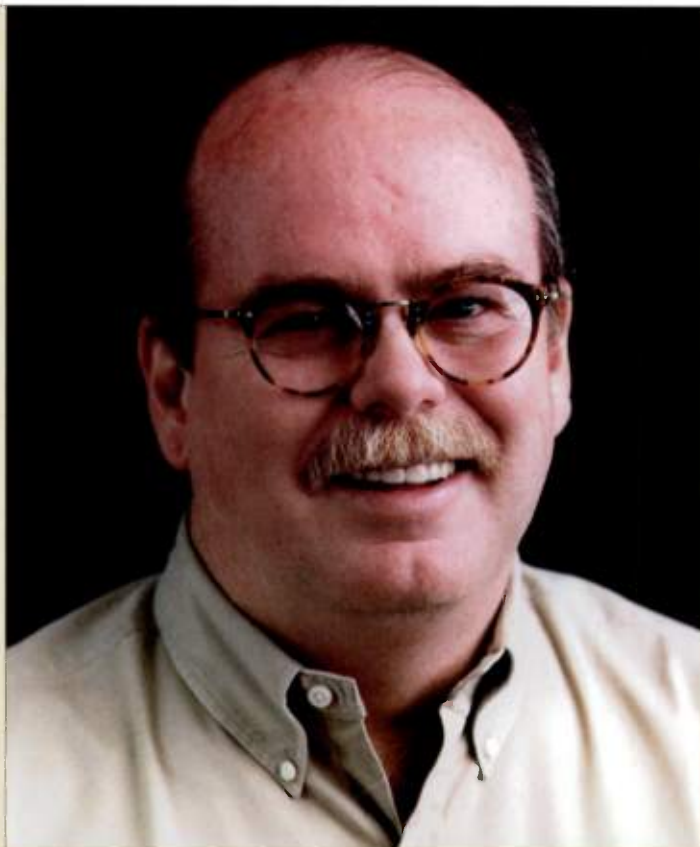
As a producer, Don Cook lists Alabama, Brooks & Dunn, Wade Hayes, Tracy Lawrence, Lonestar, and The Mavericks among the artists that he's worked with. And though the roster is impressive in itself, what's even more interesting is the different "hats" Don has learned to wear while collaborating with a vast array of creative personalities. Besides being a producer, Don is also a songwriter, the head of his own label, DKC Music, and the senior vice-president of Sony/ATV Music Publishing. While most people might find this workload very difficult, Don says he thrives on it, and each role he plays somehow enhances the others.

"I was a songwriter for years before I decided to start pursuing production," Don says. "In fact, I didn't really decide myself to do it. Circumstances just sort of caught me up in it. I became a semi-willing participant in the flow of events that lead to my first production project. I'm really glad that I did, but production was not something that I pursued on a real official basis. Production was something that I learned how to do to get my songs cut."

Don got off to a big start with his first production project. In 1990, Arista Records president Tim DuBois asked him to be a co-producer and writer for the first Brooks & Dunn album. Since that time, his relationship with the duo has resulted in 13 number-one singles.

"It's been a real team effort, and I love working with those guys. I feel like they're great friends as well as creative and business partners. We've had a great run. I hope we can hang on for a while longer."

Besides producing Brooks & Dunn and working with other solo artists, Don has also been associated with groups like The Mavericks and Alabama. He says working with groups is an entirely different process.



"Working with groups takes a different kind of communication skill. Everybody has to be communicated to on an equal basis. There's usually some leader figures that you have to deal with on an individual basis. It's a fun thing."

"I LIKEN MY ROLE AS A PRODUCER TO SOMEONE WHO IS CHARGED WITH DEALING WITH A BUNCH OF RACEHORSES."

"I liken my role as a producer to someone who is charged with dealing with a bunch of racehorses. Artists are not like everybody else. They're real high-energy creatures that have to be treated very carefully. I don't mean that in an insulting way at all. They can do things that the rest of us can't do, and we idolize, and in some cases, worship the talent that they have. On other levels, they're not very good at doing some of the things that everybody is really good at."

"I enjoy those kinds of people. A lot of them will tell me that I'm a glutton for punishment. This is a real sticky issue to talk about, but it's really true. Artists are just an incredible breed apart from the rest of us. I guess there are just people who are called to work with them, and I feel like I'm one of those people. I love it. There are a lot of days when I talk to every artist that I work with. Half of them are real happy, and the other half are real upset."

Another area where Don has been instrumental in the start of an artist's career is DKC Music, a smaller imprint label of Sony. In his words, he started DKC Music in order to be able "to work with the

artist as a person and not as just another up-and-coming Country star". DKC Music's debut artist is Wade Hayes. Don explains how the deal with Sony came together.

"It's a production deal where I'm allowed to put my imprint on production projects that I bring to the label. In the case of Wade, it's been a very healthy relationship. We've done well, and we've helped to increase our sales. It's gotten off to a good start.

"We're about to release Wade's new album. The first single off of it was just released, and it's starting to get really good response. We have real high hopes for his third album. Our first two albums were gold. We're trying as carefully and systematically as we can to grow his career into the next level of sales and acceptance."

Don says he has very strong ideas about finding songs for the artists he works with.

"I try to match songs with artists in such a way that it doesn't seem that I'm second guessing what the artist wants to do. I think any of us that don't know artists intimately don't know what they want to do. We sometimes as A&R, publishing or songplugging entities insult artists by presuming that we know what they want to do or presuming to tell them what they need to do.

"My philosophy about songs is to put a great song in somebody's hands that you know can handle the song, and if they share your feelings about the possibilities for that song, then you've made a good match. But you're not presuming that they need to do that song. And you're not giving them something that sounds like something they've already done.

"I'm very careful about that. I think artists appreciate that because if they could get everybody that plays them songs together and just say a few things to them, they'd say, 'Just pitch me great songs. Don't pitch me what you think I'll like. Give me something you think is wonderful, and I'll try to come to it creatively.' If it doesn't work, it's because the way the song exists and the way the person sang it doesn't connect."

As a songwriter, Don has penned tunes for Conway Twitty, George Strait, Vince Gill and Alabama among others. Though he can't always predict if an artist will like a song, Don says to get his seal of approval, a song must hit a certain nerve.

"I have this part of my being that I call the 'Monkey Nerve'. Some songs press it, and some songs don't. It's just that thing that we all

have that responds to a great song. There's no intellectual process. The words and the way they're said and the way it's played just come together to create a real pleasing response. I'm totally anti-intellectual about figuring out songs. I'm real black and white - real simplistic about whether I like songs or not. I don't ever try to talk myself into a song. I either like it or I don't."

"PRODUCTION WAS SOMETHING THAT I LEARNED HOW TO DO TO GET MY SONGS CUE."

When he's not working, Don tries to spend as much time with his wife Charmaine and 10-year-old daughter Mary Katherine as possible. They often visit him in the studio, and Mary Katherine knows all the artists that he works with. Her biggest concern, Don says, is getting her dad in music videos.

"She can't understand why I don't do my own video. Her friend Molly Brook's dad, Kix, has lots of videos, and she can't understand why I can't do one video for CMT. The

fact that I explained to her that I'm not an artist doesn't mean anything. Actually, we had Bob Titley, Brooks & Dunn's manager, over to our house, and I left her alone with him for a few minutes. When I came back, she was working on him to be in the next Brooks & Dunn video. She wanted to dance and get her friend Emma in it too. She had no trouble putting Bob Titley on the spot."

Music videos may or may not be in his future. But for now, Don says, he's continually finding new ways to balance his present workload and face new challenges.

"I can see how someone who didn't try to manage their stress level could absolutely go crazy because there's always something. When I was just writing and not doing anything else, I really had trouble leaving unresolved issues on the table. Now that I work at a big publish-

ing company, produce several artists and have several songs going writing-wise at all times and several album projects either in preproduction or production, I've come to realize that there are a lot of unresolved issues that you just have to leave on the table and go home at night. You have to say, 'I got that as far along as I could. I'll start back on it tomorrow or the next day.' I really had trouble with that before, but it's a skill that I have learned to do a lot better. All this is just a matter of trying to learn how to focus. I'm certainly not the best person at it, but I'm 10 times better than I was five years ago.

"I REALLY USE ALL MY DIFFERENT ROLES AS SORT OF A RESPITE FROM THE OTHER ONES."

"I use all my different roles as sort of a respite from the other ones. It's really an energizing way to work for me. I really enjoy going from one thing to another. I think if I had to do any one of them all the time, it wouldn't be nearly as much fun."

Mandy Wilson

POSTCARDS FROM ALONG THE WAY

The Delevantes take on international touring



international

Great sushi in Helsinki, four-course meals in Italy and enthusiastic audiences around the globe are just a few of the things that Bob and Mike Delevante had to write home about during the international touring they've done in the past 18 months.

The Capitol Nashville duo is cultivating a career abroad alongside its U.S. endeavors. Their journey began in the summer of 1996 and continued in early 1997, when they played 32 shows in 17 countries including Slovenia and Croatia during a tour with Steve Earle. They recently followed up on these acoustic adventures on tour with a band and opening for Emmylou Harris in Scandinavia. An extensive tour is planned for March with 20 stops in 14 countries, with CMT Europe as a major sponsor.

Even the marketing of the duo's current Capitol Nashville lp has incorporated an international twist. Taking a cue from the title, POSTCARDS FROM ALONG THE WAY, the Delevantes sent postcards from their stops around the world to media in the U.S., and while touring domestically, wrote to international media outlets.

Bob and Mike say international touring became a priority as they learned about the acceptance found globally by alternative Country or roots artists. Monty Hitchcock Management led the way, having guided Harris to international prominence.

"We want them to have a long-term global career," said Bryan Taylor of the management team. "You can have your ups and downs in the U.S., but the European fans are loyal. Plus, it's fun, and we can make money there." Developing the Delevantes internationally makes perfect sense, Bryan explains. "Europeans have a huge amount of respect for American singer/songwriters."

The brothers agree. "It's amazing how much they know about American music," Bob says. "I think it's an event for them when someone comes to play, and they appreciate that you've made the effort." Mike concurs, "People really know the music, the musicians. I found that a lot more evident than in the States. People really take it seriously."

The duo's gigs have ranged from small clubs to larger auditoriums and outdoor festivals.

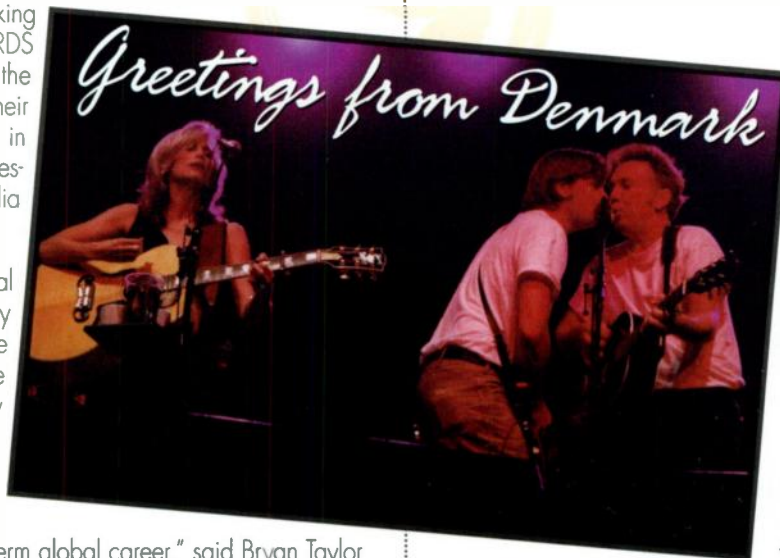
"People come out to the shows that you would expect to see at a Steve Earle show, but then you also have people in hats who are line dancing," Bob says. "Mike and I were playing acoustic and they were line dancing to it," he says, recalling a show in Sweden. "We played acoustic in between bands at big, huge outdoor festivals. In the States that might not work because with an acoustic act you might lose the momentum. But it did."



In addition to performing, the brothers included media in their itineraries. Their videos have been playlisted on CMT Europe and VH-1, which was a great help to their recognition factor, Mike points out.

Along with the hard work, they take time to enjoy the sights and have fun with their music.

"We always want to see the countryside," Mike says. "We get out and go to the town center if nothing else. How can you go and not see things?"



They say they found themselves playing in beautiful auditoriums and halls that had top-quality sound systems. They even took time for some impromptu performances on the last trip at clubs where they had gone after their scheduled gigs. Combining a few of their bandmates with those of Harris' group, they performed under the guise of Six Cadillacs and a U-Haul. They also sat in with local artists on occasion, including an in-the-round on one occasion with Buddy Miller and a Norwegian artist.

All in all, the guys say their career path will continue to include international development. "The immediate response makes it seem worthwhile - audiences are really appreciative. Time will tell. It seems like it's translating into sales, but it takes a while to gauge that."

Any tips for other artists considering an international tour?

Bob and Mike contemplate this... Then Mike says, "Pack lightly... Use suitcases with wheels... Buy lots of underwear and throw it away - it's cheaper than doing laundry."

Shannon Heim

Who comes to mind when you hear "Wild Angels", "You Can Feel Bad", "Strawberry Wine", "We Danced Anyway" and "Everybody Knows"? More than likely it is Martina McBride, Patty Loveless, Deana Carter and Trisha Yearwood respectively. All four women have two things in common. First, each has achieved a number-one record in the last 12 months with one of the aforementioned songs. And secondly, all have had the good fortune of working with Matraca Berg, the writer of all five chart-toppers.

Berg was recently honored by CMA with a Triple Play Award for having three number-one hits in a year. She came close to claiming two awards by having five number-one hits. Berg was named Songwriter of the Year for the 1997 Nashville Music Awards and is again a contender in this category for 1998.

Matraca was also honored by NSAI (Nashville Songwriter's Association International) this year for Songwriter of the Year. "I felt so much gratitude. I was overwhelmed. I couldn't really talk, and I made the most awkward speech ever! [laughs] I wasn't expecting it, and I had been listening to a medley of all the Songs Of The Year from the past 25 or so years. There was 'For The Good Times' and a lot of Kris Kristofferson songs and some great Bob McDill songs. I was just overwhelmed that 15 years from now mine would be in that medley of songs. It was just awesome and awe-inspiring, and I was so humbled by that."

In September at the "31st Annual CMA Awards", Matraca, along with longtime writing partner Gary Harrison, won the highly regarded CMA Song of the Year Award. "I used to watch the CMA Awards on TV with Mom. I always fantasized about winning one. It's almost surreal actually winning!"



Matraca

"It's not often that I get to introduce a poet, but here is one of our very best. One of the most poignant moments of the evening... Miss Matraca Berg."

Vince Gill's introduction
at the "31st Annual CMA Awards"

Matraca is the lyrical poet behind many artists' career boosts. The Rising Tide singer/songwriter is now composing songs for her own albums, 11 of which can be found on her critically acclaimed album, SUNDAY MORNING TO SATURDAY NIGHT. Though it's her first album on Rising Tide, this is the third release in her career. She feels this is her best work yet.

"What I wanted was an undiluted representation of myself on record. I came close with the first record. I was pretty green and pretty young. In the second album I think I lost my focus because of political moves with the record label, and lack of success on the first record. And now I just want to make a natural progression from where I started in the beginning. I want to establish an identity for myself because my identity has always been linked to other artists, of course, because they record my songs. That was the sole focus of the record."

With so many of today's top female artists clamoring for and recording her material, Matraca has kept 11 incredibly crafted songs she co-wrote for herself.

"I always write for myself. I don't write for other people. At this point, this is the first chance I've had to actually hold a song in a long time. I just keep them until I know...before I go into the studio. It pretty much shows itself to you, and it isn't a matter of what song is stronger or weaker. It's what is going to be appropriate for the record. When you group songs together, it is important how they fit, and what you want to say on that particular record. And if something doesn't fall into that, then obviously it needs another home."

SUNDAY MORNING TO SATURDAY NIGHT came together with the help of legendary producer and Rising Tide's Senior Vice President of A&R, Emory Gordy, Jr., known for his work with George Jones, Jimmie Dale Gilmore, Bill Monroe and Patty Loveless. Matraca says she was able to give a lot of input.

"I've never had as much creative freedom as I've had on this record. Emory has an incredibly open mind and is such a good soul. There were times in the record when I just sat back and watched Emory because he is brilliant. I learned so much from him. I never felt like he was condescending to me. He never said, 'Look kid, I know what to do.' He was genuinely interested in my opinions and what I wanted."

This album not only benefitted from the skill of Gordy, but also the talents of many of Matraca's friends and family such as the Cox Family, Suzy Bogguss, Faith Hill, Patty Loveless, Martina McBride, the Mavericks' Raul Malo, Nitty Gritty Dirt Band's Jeff Hanna, Kim Carnes, and the Calloway Sisters. Matraca also collaborated with Gary Harrison, Sharon Rice, Stan Lynch, Randy Scruggs and Alice Randall for the album's material.

"I think the songs just screamed for whoever was on them. The songs picked the artist. 'Give Me Tonight' was perfect for Raul, and he plays guitar on it as well as sings with me. Raul is practically family. Our families hang out together. I've known Patty for years, and I just love her and Suzy and Faith. I knew Faith before she had a record deal. Everybody had so much fun. It was like a coming together, a family project or something."

"The Resurrection", co-written with Alice Randall, is a compelling song about the changes she has seen happen in Nashville since growing up around Music Row with her mother, Icee Berg, a Nashville session singer, and her aunts, The Calloway Sisters. Matraca feels there is very little left of "yesterday's" Nashville.

"It was like a coming together, a family project or something."

"I think I tend to romanticize the past. Because of the world I was exposed to as a child, with the great songwriters that I grew up knowing. I grew up admiring people like Kris Kristofferson, Loretta Lynn, Sonny Throckmorton and Mel Tillis.

Everybody just seemed so free and so wild. It just seemed like a freer time creatively than it is now. I think the competition is so stiff now that people tend to examine things very closely before they'll put their foot out there. I would like to see that happen again here. I heard Patty's new record. It's incredible. She's stepping out even further and more powerful than ever, and the songs are amazing. So I think it's happening."

Matraca remains a key part of the "old" Nashville and a vital link to the future Nashville.

"We have to care about the music because even if other people don't care about the music...it's [the commercial side of the industry] going to affect the music in the long run, if we let that trickle down to us. I know that there's a lot of money at stake now. The competition is just incredible. In the music business it's up to the writers to make sure we move forward and don't get fearful."

"In the music business, it's up to the writers to make sure we move forward and don't get fearful."

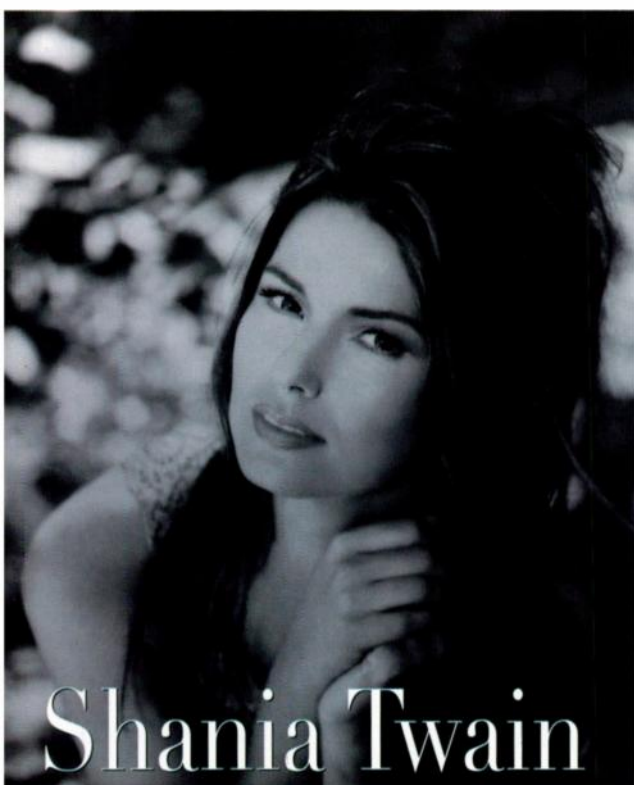
The past year was a remarkable year for Matraca with her songwriting and with her new album. On top of that, she delivered a stellar performance of "Back When We Were Beautiful" on the "31st Annual CMA Awards" in September, one day after the release of her Rising Tide debut. Since that performance she says, "Many people (fans) approach me in a gentle, sweet way. It's not about me, it's about them, it's about the song. I like that.

"I think I'll need another year or so to put this past year into perspective. I've realized a lot of dreams. There has been almost a closure of the past decade. I feel I'm standing in brand new territory. I guess I thought it would take me longer. It's time for more dreams!"

Dixie Weathersby

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A GLIMPSE INTO THE FUTURE



Prognostication is best left to Isaiah, Notradamus, sportswriters and weathermen. Journalists do better reporting the news than forecasting it, but the folks at the Country Music Association like to look ahead, so they've asked for a picture, however cloudy, of what might lie in store for Country Music in 1998.

A few things we know for certain.

Shania Twain will tour for the first time this year after staying off the road while her last album, *THE WOMAN IN ME*, smashed records by selling more than 10 million copies in the U.S. Her new set, *COME ON OVER*, sounds ready-made for an extended road trip. Most of the 14 songs have a high-energy feel. "I'm basically a bar singer, and I've been singing in clubs my whole life," she says. "Now I'm waiting anxiously to get out there." Look for Twain to hit the road in May.

Reigning CMA Entertainer of the Year Garth Brooks will extend the world tour he's been on for two years now, playing bigger halls through the balance of 1998. He'll be supporting his highly touted new album, *SEVENS*, and he'll be trying to build on the momentum generated in August by his Central Park concert and HBO special.

Look for a new TV special, shot last summer in Ireland, around March. And Brooks says he wants to put out at least three more CD collections during the year, including a box-set of his earlier studio albums, a set of duets with Trisha Yearwood and a second Christmas album. Did somebody say "flood the marketplace?"

LeAnn Rimes tells *USA TODAY* she's working on a new album for release early this year. Why stop at one? She and mom Belinda are relocating to the Nashville area in the wake of her parents' divorce, and LeAnn wants to cut back on touring, though she'll be out this year with fellow fresh-face phenom Bryan White.

Tim McGraw will limit his exposure by cutting back on the number of dates he plays this year. He'll do some Canadian dates, then join George Strait for a series of shows in stadiums and major domes. This summer McGraw plays fairs and festivals, then he'll finish the year with touring on his own.

Vince Gill is taking the first half of the year to work on a new album and reflect on where his career will go next. He'll pick up touring come summer.

Brooks & Dunn will continue to play as a package with Reba McEntire. Alan Jackson and Deana Carter are a team. And Clint Black makes his first-fledged touring circuit in five years.

This will be a heavier touring season than in recent years, predicts Creative Artists Agency agent Ron Baird. Because there are more options available to consumers than ever before, competition has become more intense. According to Baird, Country Music shows have to be remarkable packages and bigger-than-life events to be successful. "The size of the entertainment dollar has not grown," he explains. "The choices on how to spend it have."

As 1997 drew to a close, Country Music's share of the record-buying market looked to be holding steady or even making a slight rebound, but, as usual, there's talk of change on Music Row.



Nashville Music Journalist Jay Orr Brings News For 1998

Consensus seems to be that consolidation will sweep through the industry. Some labels will circle the wagons, concentrating their work on forces behind smaller, more focused rosters. Capitol Nashville, scheduled to move into a new building at the start of the new year, is under new leadership, with former chief Scott Hendricks pondering an offer to run a satellite label.

By the end of the year, the RCA Label Group (RCA and BNA), Arista Nashville and other Nashville-based divisions of BMG Entertainment are scheduled to be together on a high hill at the south end of Music Row, in the newly renovated Home for the Elderly built in 1916.

The Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum should be breaking ground on its new downtown location during the year, and the parent organization, the Country Music Foundation, will kick into high gear in its effort to raise \$15 million toward the overall cost of the \$35 million project. Target date for opening the new museum is early 2000.

A few things won't happen in 1998. For one, Country artists will not be performing at Opryland and young music hopefuls will not be honing their talents in the park in hopes of a big break. Now closed, the facility will re-open in the year 2000 as a shopping/entertainment complex some are referring to already as "Shopryland".

And Country Music's fortunes won't take a nose dive. The recent consumer survey commissioned by the CMA indicated that 39 percent of Americans are consumers of Country Music, 11 percent more have been consumers within the past five years, and an additional six percent are potential listeners.

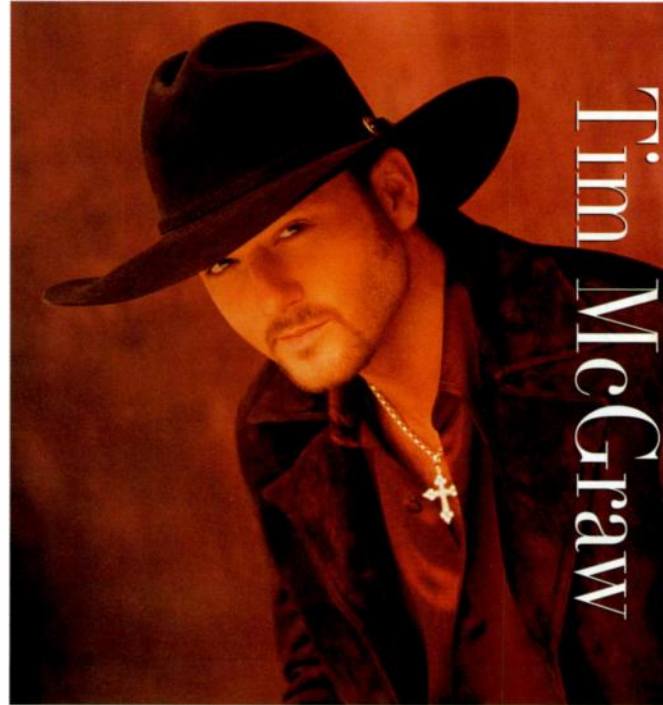
Of the current consumers, most prefer more recent Country Music, and an overwhelming number feel that today's Country singers do not all look and sound the same.

A long list of young talent is poised for a shot at the big time, among them Jim Collins, Matt King, Jason Sellers, Blake & Brian, Chris Knight, The Kinleys, Rebekah Del Rio, Ruby Lovett, Sara Evans, The Lynns and Kris Tyler.

As has always been the case, it will be important to find and develop more new artists, to keep revitalizing the genre and to give it some commercial depth. For too long, a thin layer of superstars have accounted for a disproportionate share of Country Music sales, while mid-level artists work to keep their bills paid.

A great man once said, "If we take care of the music, the rest will take care of itself." And another great man recently observed, "The funk will always come back around."

It's time for some new funk, some magic grounded in the great traditions of Hank Williams, Bill Monroe, Willie Nelson, Buck Owens, Merle Haggard, Patsy Cline and Johnny Cash. When that comes back around, the rest will take care of itself.



Jay Orr

(Jay Orr is the music editor for The Nashville Banner and the recent recipient of CMA's 1997 Media Achievement Award.)



KIDS ON STAGE

At one time or another, everyone experiences stage fright. It may be during childhood when the thought of having to stand before all your classmates and perform in a school production convinces you that you're violently ill and you should stay home for the day. It could be during a musical competition, when everything seems to ride on your ability to stay focused on what you're doing and deliver the best performance possible. Or it could be during that all important presentation you've got to nail to win a new client and convince the powers that be that your ideas are worthwhile.

But regardless of one's occupation, whether it is in the music industry or not, each person must take to the "stage" and be able to effectively communicate his or her ideas to succeed. That philosophy prompted entrepreneur Aubrey Preston to organize a unique program called "Kids On Stage" being implemented at the Hillsboro School. Located in Leipers Fork, in Williamson County just outside Nashville, the Hillsboro School hosts grades K-8.



Deana Carter leads participants of "Kids On Stage" in song.

"I think you can make a pretty big impact on the freedom and the choices that kids have in their life," Aubrey says. "It's just striking to me that probably over half of what we do in our careers, particularly as you move on up the ladder and get into the corporate world, involves communicating and publicly presenting ideas. But in our national education system, you can go all the way through and get a Harvard MBA with one speech class the whole time. Kids On Stage will give kids a lot more confidence later in their lives whether they sell insurance or are the CEO of a company."

Using nearby Nashville's music industry as a resource, the Kids On Stage program started out with a summer camp that taught kids about what it's like to be a recording artist.

"We had each of the artists come in, play a couple songs and talk about what it was like being a recording artist," Aubrey recalls. "Deana Carter advised all the kids to learn to play an instrument. Her advice to them was that her guitar had really helped her to be self-contained so that she could perform without a band sometimes. I remember Trace Adkins talking to them about the pluses and minuses of a family life and the reality of the sacrifices that go along with it."

But the purpose of Kids On Stage is not to teach children to be professional artists. Instead, it uses music and the arts to boost

their confidence and communication skills and helps to teach them about subjects, such as science, in an entertaining manner.

"I know that the school board and the school superintendent got so excited about Kids On Stage that they have declared the school an arts-based school," Aubrey says. "They've moved 21 of their 31 teachers that they had to other schools, and they brought in hand-picked teachers with arts backgrounds so that they teach social studies, for instance, through the arts. They teach everything. They might study sound, so that it somehow ties back to being on the stage. They practice good public speaking skills in all the classes.

"Kids On Stage is structured a lot like music classes in the schools, except that in this particular school, the music and the drama areas have the most influence on the campus instead of having the least influence. I can't tell you the exact schedule, but a lot of the kids are in there every day, and some may be in there every third day. It's a priority of the administration of the school, all the way up to the school superintendent, to take the kids through there as much as they can. If the kids keep their grades up, they can go to what they call 'extra dose' and pick between photography class, drama, music and dance instead of study hall.

"The kids have a great incentive. They love these classes. We make them so great that kids are dying to go to them. It's like candy. It gives them an incentive to really work on their grades during the day and that kind of stuff so they can go to that. For a kid that's a young Kix Brooks or Ronnie Dunn, those kids probably along the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh grades become as passionate about a guitar and singing as kids do about Nintendo. We just want to provide a supportive environment for kids like that."

The Kids On Stage venue is a state-of-the-art facility, complete with top-of-the-line instruments and equipment that most schools could only dream about.

"It's a music room and a band room and a recording studio all connected in one suite. The block walls have been covered with bead board, and there are mirrors on the walls so the kids can see themselves. The band room is a black box theater, so it's all blacked out and has full theatrical lighting. The room is fully tuned for

"Kids On Stage will give kids a lot more confidence later in their lives whether they sell insurance or are the CEO of a company."



acoustics. It's got acoustical treatment on the ceiling and different kinds of shapes and acoustical treatment on the walls to tune it to where it's got to be one of the best sounding rooms around Nashville for its size. It holds about 125 people."

Aubrey says the idea for Kids On Stage grew out of a concern for the children attending Hillsboro School. Though Williamson County is regarded as a highly affluent area, many of the students come from financially disadvantaged homes.

"The Hillsboro School is the lowest scoring on the T-cap scores, the standardized test that compares all the schools against each other throughout the state of Tennessee. Believe it or not, 31.5 percent of the kids that go to this school live below the poverty level. That's not what Leiper's Fork is known for. We're known for large mansions, Country stars, health care executives and those kinds of things, but those people, pretty much across the board, send their kids to private school, so they're not part of the public school. They really represent a relatively small number of the population."

Because of its success, Aubrey believes that Kids On Stage could work for other schools. Right now, he says everyone involved with Kids On Stage is focusing their efforts on Hillsboro School in the hopes that it can be a model for other communities interested in implementing similar programming.

"We think it's the most natural area for a community-based project to work with the school systems, on existing sites in the school system. It could be a model across the country for mid-sized communities because the likelihood of ever being able to have a children's community theater is probably pretty low, because there's just not the funding there for it.

"With a model like Kids On Stage you can go on to a school site and put this venue within an existing shell where the heat and the electric and the property taxes are already being paid anyway, and they could do it in cooperation with the school system. If the school system already has the space, you can raise a little bit of money with the corporations in the community. It really is a model that pretty cost effectively could be put in a lot of communities versus building a free standing children's theater.

"If you can present the music class and the drama class at such a professional level with a great sound system and great gear and lighting, you make it more exciting than PE class, which I think is the front runner to date. You make it so that kids don't want to miss school because they don't want to miss Kids On Stage. It's very exciting."

Mandy Wilson



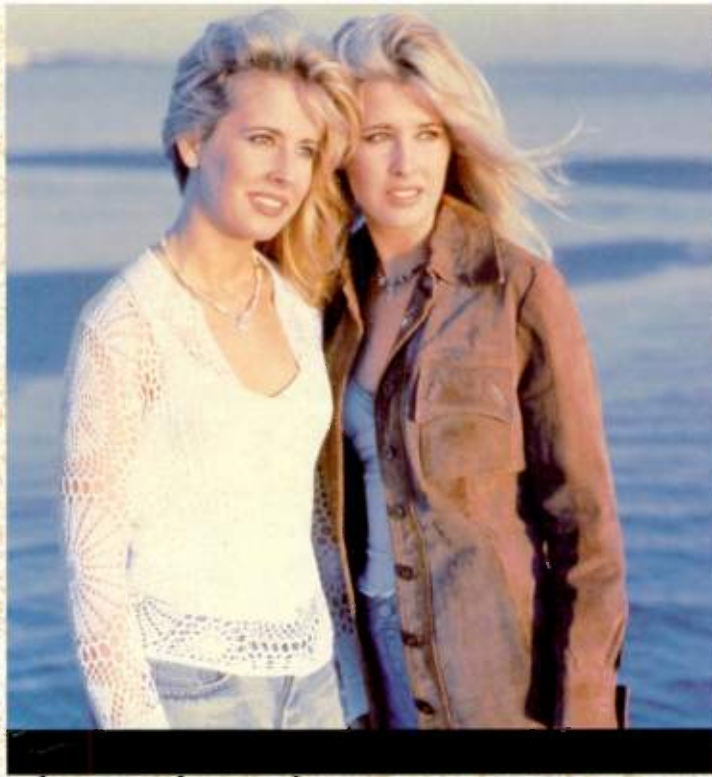
matt king

Record Label: Atlantic Records
 Album: FIVE O'CLOCK HERO
 Single: "A Woman Like You"
 Influences: Mac Wiseman, Eddie Van Halen,
 Keith Whitley and Merle Haggard

All that Matt King had to do was play "A Woman's Tears" for executives at Atlantic Records one time before shaking hands as their star-to-be.

"I feel a real responsibility to connect to an audience," says King. "I don't want to be just another record-maker. I want to make music that strikes people on an emotional, gut level."

Raised in the Smoky Mountains near Asheville, N.C., his father is a bluegrass guitar player, his mother played gospel piano and he and his little sister Tanya were belting out Baptist tunes from the time they were children. He started making up songs as a little kid and recalls writing the words out on a piece of paper, then burying them in the backyard and marking them with a stick. He played in bands through high school and in 1994 moved to Nashville playing writer's nights and singing on demos.



the kinleys

Record Label: Epic Nashville
 Album: JUST BETWEEN YOU AND ME
 Single: "Please"
 Influences: Everly Brothers, the Judds

Heather and Jennifer Kinley, twin sisters who hail from Philadelphia, discovered at an early age that they were able to blend their voices together in a way that is reminiscent of their inspirations — the Everly Brothers and the Judds, and yet remain true to a style that is all their own. The twins decided to bring that style to Nashville and pursue their dreams at the ripe old age of 19. "It was scary, but exciting," Heather reminisces, "We spent nights waitressing and days working on songwriting. We crashed parties, went to writers' showcases, spent a year at the Courtyard Café doing covers. Jennifer on piano, me on guitar. We were growing and learning."

Now, with the release of their debut album, their hard work has paid off. Penning five of the record's tunes with some of the industry's finest songwriters and carefully picking other material that reflected their personalities. The aim, Jennifer says, was to "find something that really moved us. Because we hope that if it moves us, there's a good chance it will move other people, too." Heather sums up, "We simply poured our hearts into this music."

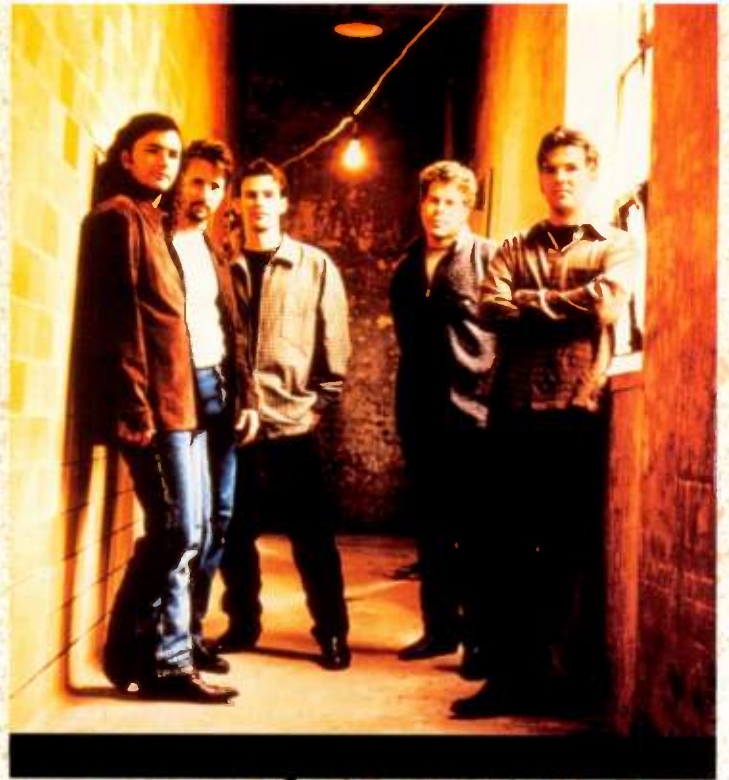


michael peterson

Record Label: Warner/Reprise Nashville
 Album: MICHAEL PETERSON
 Single: "From Here To Eternity"
 Influences: Cole Porter, Hoagy Carmichael, Roger Miller, Willie Nelson and Jimmy Webb

Raised on the Columbia River in Eastern Washington, Michael Peterson would spend countless hours in front of a record player at his grandmother's house instead of playing sports with his friends. She introduced him to the music of such greats as Cole Porter and Hoagy Carmichael. She was also the first person to expose him to the greats of Country Music such as Roger Miller, Willie Nelson and Jimmy Webb. "'Funny How Time Slips Away' by Willie Nelson, is one of my favorite songs of all times," says Peterson. "Maybe it's because I used to be afraid that time would pass before I got to leave my mark on the world. Maybe that's why I'm so driven."

Michael chose football over music for the first time in his life when he earned a scholarship for both from Pacific Lutheran University. Ironically, the relationship he developed with quarterback Brad Westering, who gained success as a producer for Denise Williams, gave Peterson his first professional opportunity as a songwriter. Then he began traveling to Nashville once a month to build working relationships with songwriters such as Josh Leo and Robert Ellis Orrall. The two eventually came together to co-produce his debut album.



sons of the desert

Record Label: Epic Records
 Album: WHATEVER COMES FIRST
 Single: "Hand of Fate"
 Influences: Trisha Yearwood, The Eagles, Jackson Browne and Diamond Rio

Texas natives Drew and Tim Womack and Doug Virden began Sons of the Desert in Waco. The group has undergone numerous personnel changes since its fledgling days, evolving into today's lineup which also includes Brian Westrum and Scott Saunders. In addition to personnel changes, they also refined their sound. "The band has evolved so much," says Virden. "When we started we were more bluegrass oriented."

They honed their skills in dance halls and nightclubs, playing great music that spanned the musical spectrum. "We gravitated toward anything progressive," Drew says. It makes sense, then, that when it came to penning originals and selecting songs for their album, they would craft a style that incorporated the best of all styles.

Emphatically, what always comes first for Sons of the Desert is the music. They've paid their dues in honky tonks and the endless club circuit. They traveled for a two-year period in a \$3,500 1972 Dodge Apollo RV. Right after leaving the showroom floor, it caught fire and wasn't driven until the band bought it 20 years later. It served them well despite lights failing on the highway, sparks occasionally flying and the band's suspicion, Virden says, that there might've been "demons on board!"

NAMES IN THE NEWS

NEWS MAKERS:

Doug Stone announced that he and his wife, **Beth**, are expecting their first child early this summer. Doug and Beth celebrated their first wedding anniversary this past December.



Alyssa Bonagura, the 9-year old daughter of **Kathie Baillie** and **Michael Bonagura** (Baillie & The Boys), stole the show during a celebrity basketball game and concert hosted by **Vince Gill**. As the concert began, **Chely Wright** asked **Amy Grant**, Kathie and Alyssa to sing background harmonies on her recent hit "Shut Up and Drive." Alyssa did such a good job that she sang with Grant on "It Takes A Little Time." When Gill asked her to sing solo she sang an R&B version of "I Swear", with backup provided by her dad. The down side came the next day when she arrived home from school in tears because none of her friends would believe what she had done the night before.

New on the Nashville scene, Arista recording artist **Jim Collins** recently spotted **Garth Brooks** while breakfasting at Nashville's

famous eatery, the Pancake Pantry. Choosing not to disturb the superstar he continued to eat his meal, but as he was finishing he felt a tap on the shoulder. Collins turned around to find Garth asking the question "Are you Jim Collins?" As it turns out, Garth had caught one of Collins' many performances in Texas, where the *Dallas Observer* referred to him as "The King of the Honky Tonks."

RCA recording group the **Thompson Brothers Band** was tapped by Coca-Cola to write and sing a new national commercial for the world's number-one soft drink. The spot aired on radio stations from November 24 through the end of the year. The group followed in the footsteps of label-mate **Sara Evans**, who's version of "Always Coca-Cola" aired last summer.



GOOD WORKS:

Olivia Newton-John has signed a new deal with MCA Nashville. The 1974 CMA Female Vocalist of the Year plans to release her new album this summer. Most recently she was paired with the **Raybon Brothers** on their single "Falling." She also took time out of her

schedule to sing at a recent benefit concert, Operation Smile, which raises funds to perform surgery on children with facial deformities. After receiving three standing ovations, she went on to perform one of her best known hits, "You're The One That I Want", with Country Music's nice guy **Vince Gill**.



After a recent performance in Texas, it was discovered that one of **Kenny Chesney's** guitars was missing. Assuming that it had been stolen, they were surprised to learn that a fan had found the missing guitar in the parking lot after the concert and shipped it to Kenny's fan club. Kenny showed his appreciation by autographing the guitar and sending it back to the fan with the message "Liz, Thanks for being a great person, hope to see you in Texas soon. Love Ya, Kenny Chesney."

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cma events

February

- 4** ASOC / Beverly Hills Hotel / Los Angeles, CA
- 5 - 6** Board Meeting / Four Seasons Hotel / Los Angeles, CA
- 6 - 14** CMA Delegation Trip to Sydney and Melbourne, Australia

May

- 13** MINT / Nashville Arena / Nashville

Don't forget CMA's website at
www.countrymusic.org

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datebook

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- 21-22** 3rd Country Music Fair Berlin / Berlin, Germany /
Phone & Fax: +49-30-412-88-00 or +49-30-687-24-32
- 6-March 22** Country Festival / Albisguetli, Switzerland /
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CMA Executive Director Ed Benson congratulates Trisha Yearwood and Garth Brooks at a party held in their honor at ASCAP for their recent number one "In Another's Eyes".

(l to r) Connie Bradley, Ed Benson, Trisha Yearwood, Garth Brooks, Bob Doyle
Photo Credit: Alan Mayor