

SPECIAL REPORT: Women in Country

YOUR ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO THE STARS, MUSIC & TRADITION

COUNTRYMUSIC

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2003

MARTINA McBRIDE

She's got the power – and we don't just mean her voice. How country's top female now has the clout to make her own rules.

TRACY BYRD
Not so trad – is that so bad?

CLAY WALKER
Loosens up

BRAD PAISLEY
Can he save country?

RANDY TRAVIS
At a crossroads

DOLLY PARTON
Grounded, and still soaring

KENNY ROGERS
Gambling on a comeback

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An extraordinary life

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

DEAR READER:



I have some sad news. This is the last issue of *Country Music*. It is ceasing publication effective with the issue that you now hold in hand.

I loved this magazine. I know you loved it, too. Many of you have been faithful readers for years, and I've enjoyed getting to know many of you personally through your letters, e-mails and phone calls.

But this isn't goodbye. I look forward to continuing to serve you, inform you – and hear from you on a much more timely basis – because *Country Music* is being incorporated into *Country Weekly*, our sister publication in the Country Music Media Group and the other magazine for which I serve as Editorial Director. If you're a current *Country Music* subscriber, you'll now begin receiving *Country Weekly*, the nation's No. 1-selling country music magazine, for the remainder of your subscription. If you're in the habit of buying off the magazine rack, you'll find a new *Country Weekly* waiting for you at newsstands every two weeks.

Thank you for your support, input and patronage over the past three decades. Even though this magazine won't be coming to you anymore, I hope that *Country Music* – and the proud tradition it represented – will live on in your hearts. I urge you to carry the torch by continuing to support country and its performers, buying their albums, going to their shows, listening to their music and letting their songs entertain, engage and enlighten you.

And I hope you'll enjoy following the music and the stars in upcoming issues of *Country Weekly* – the magazine that brings you "all the stars, all the news, all the time!" I look forward to having you join me there.

It has been a pleasure, and an honor, bringing this magazine to you.

Yours in country music,

Neil Pond
Editorial Director

COUNTRYMUSIC

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AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2003

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Country's top female singer has the clout to make her own rules now.

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THE Journal
OF TRADITIONAL COUNTRY MUSIC

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A photograph of a rodeo arena. In the foreground, a dark brown horse with a white blaze on its face is galloping. In the background, a crowd of people, many wearing cowboy hats, is seated in bleachers. A white sign is attached to the arena fence.

**Baby Ruth. Just a pinch
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gums is all you need.**

A small image of a Baby Ruth candy bar wrapper, showing the brand name in red and blue, and a piece of the candy bar.

The Real Deal.

Check out The Real Deal online @ BabyRuth.com ©Jennie

LETTERS

HAPPINESS IS ...

Loved the cover of Vince Gill (*June*) and the article on how happy he is since his marriage to Amy Grant and the birth of their daughter Corrina. I've seen Vince and Amy on the *Grand Ole Opry*, with Corrina coming on the show at closing. She's a very happy child, and they are a great mom and dad. I hope they continue being a happy family.

JEAN C. SWEET
METAMORA, ILLINOIS

Thanks very much for the story and update on Vince Gill, one of my favorite singers and songwriters. He deserves every award he has in his trophy case. We are all happy that he and Amy Grant found each other! They are two lovely people.

SUE JOHNSON
GLENCOE, MINNESOTA

Do you think I care that Vince Gill has found real true love and everlasting happiness? What about his original wife and daughter? What about *If you want to see how true love can be then just look at us?* I want to know how his first daughter is handling her life and how her father spouting off about how he is "happy for the first time," how he came back from the edge of depression and sadness. How does that strike her? Vince happy? At whose expense?

B. CARLENE HANDY
STUART, VIRGINIA



Vince Gill is in a joyful frame of mind with wife Amy Grant and daughter Corrina.

Sons of the Pioneers' "Cool Water" or "Tumbling Tumbleweeds" should have been included.

BETTY DAVIS
NATHROP, COLORADO

Who decided the Top 100 Country Songs list? Where are songs like "Release Me," "Wild Side of Life," "Wildwood Flower," "Silver Wings," "Steel Guitar Rag," "I Love You So Much It Hurts Me," "Great Speckled Bird," to name just a few! If your choices were made by song durability or recognition, some of the above would have to be chosen over songs by current artists like Mary Chapin Carpenter, Tim McGraw, Shania Twain, etc. I truly doubt anyone will remember these current tunes a couple of years from now, while the songs left out have been played for the past 40.

ED WEBSTER
SALEM, OREGON

I was sadly disappointed to see Conway Twitty had only one song in the Top 100. Conway is the greatest country singer of all time and held the record for the most No. 1s by a solo artist in all formats of music several years after his death.

JEREMY W. SMITH
PENDLETON, INDIANA

How could you leave off John Anderson's "Swingin' "?

NANCY AYINDE
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN?

CMT's list of the "The Top 100 Songs of All Time," as covered in your June issue, is great. At age 80, I can remember all of them from when they first came out and I have no argument with the list. But I will nitpick just a little. I do believe The

BREATHING EASIER

Thanks for the article on Chris Cagle (*June*). I'm a huge fan. My marriage was on rocky ground at one time and Cagle's song "I Breathe In, I Breathe Out" helped us find our love for each other again. With God's help and Chris Cagle's beautiful music, my husband and I are better than ever. We are praying for Chris.

DIANA HENRY
WEIRTON, WEST VIRGINIA

HOLDING HIS NOSE

Chuck Aly, I couldn't disagree more with your review of Chris Cagle's new CD. I guess you didn't listen to the lyrics of "It Takes Two," "I Love It When She Does That," "I'd Be Lying" - I don't think you even listened to the thing at all. Country music is about real life, right? Well this artist's marriage has had its ups and downs, and he has said repeatedly that this album is a reflection of his life. The CD debuted at No. 1 and Cagle's popularity is growing everyday. I guess nobody really cares what you think. As far as my rating for you as a music critic, it's zero stars. You stink!

JASON HAGOOD
KINGSPORT, TENNESSEE



Cagle's music helped a reader love again.

DELE GARAGE

... "Walk on By" by Leroy Van Dyke?

PERRY CHET KING
ALBANY, NEW YORK

... any of Collin Raye's 25 hits?

STEPHANIE MILLER
SCOTTSBORO, ALABAMA

... "For the Good Times" by Ray Price?

HAL MILLER
GREENSBORO, NORTH CAROLINA

... "Cold, Cold Heart," by Hank Williams and "All I Have to Offer You Is Me" by Charley Pride?

JACK CAMBURN
BOYNE CITY, MICHIGAN

... "Achy Breaky Heart" by Billy Ray Cyrus?

LINDA EDWARDS
JESSUP, MARYLAND

... "Pass Me By" by Johnny Rodriguez?

MARYJANE LOSEY
LAS ANIMAS, COLOFADO

... "Wabash Cannonball" by Roy Acuff?

GENE HAILEY
WHITE BLUFF, TENNESSEE

... "You Never Even Called Me By My Name" by David Allan Coe?

STEVEN BOWMAN
BLUE RIDGE SUMMIT, PENNSYLVANIA

FIGHTING WORDS

The comment the Dixie Chicks made about President Bush was out of order. I wonder where this dumb little Chick thinks she got freedom of speech. Men have bled and died for this freedom.

ELNORA HOOPER
LEOMA, TENNESSEE

My Dad was a sergeant in the United States Army during WWII, first in South Africa, then in Italy. When I was a kid, Daddy would talk about why the USA won wars. He said it was because we had humility. The second thing Daddy told me is because of this being the land of the free, we had a right to speak our minds. But, he would say, because of the honor, pride and humility, we need to be respectful. I'm tired of the Dixie Chicks' Natalie and her disrespectful big mouth. I don't like anyone



TRACY DARRINGTON/VEER/IMAGE

who talks like she does, especially in another country in front of thousands of non-Americans. One more thing I used to hear Daddy say: "Only our enemies talk down to our president and walk on our flag." My question to Natalie: Are you a free American or are you an enemy?

GUYANNA J. SCHLIPP
SAWYER, MICHIGAN

I wish everyone would please stop using the expression "all country music fans" were angered by Natalie Maines' remark about President Bush. No one cares! At least here in Kansas, I have yet to meet one person who has anything good to say about President Bush. Many have expressed disgust, but not toward the Dixie Chicks. So please stop speaking for the general public. This goes especially toward all you self-righteous disc jockeys – who do you think you are?! Life goes on. Live it with more tolerance.

FRAN WHEELER
PARSONS, KANSAS

Why is everyone mad at the Dixie Chicks for making a comment about George Bush? Grow up! Everyone has a right of free speech, don't we? I don't like the idea of people sending hate mail to the Chicks – you are as bad as Saddam Hussein. I do support our troops. The USA is my country. I was born here and I would die here. I

forgive the Dixie Chicks – why can't America? This is the land of the free. We all have the right to express ourselves.

DEANNA LIMKEMANN
COGGON, IOWA

I have been a country music fan for better than 50 years and I strongly supported the disposal of Saddam Hussein's regime. Of course, I was extremely proud of our valiant troops in that effort. I did not, however, favor giving the people of Iraq freedom of speech only to see us lose it here in the United States. I suggest that those who want to destroy the Dixie Chicks acquaint themselves with the First Amendment to the Constitution. I have a news flash for the yahoo Chick bashers: One does not have to be a Bush fan to be a good and loyal citizen of this great country.

MELVIN PURVIS
PADUCAH, KENTUCKY

I did not want us to go to war in Iraq. I felt we should concentrate on those who took down the World Trade Center. I liked Toby Keith's remarks on the *Flameworthy Awards* show, when he said, whether you're for or against the war, be for the troops.

VIRGINIA MUIRHEAD
PRESHO, SOUTH DAKOTA

I'm very disappointed in the way country music fans have treated the Dixie Chicks. I'm 73 years old and have been an ardent country music fan all of my life, but now



KEES HARRINGTON/DEANWORKS

I'm not so sure. I'm ashamed of the fans' actions at the Academy of Country Music Awards toward the Dixie Chicks. Natalie has a right to speak her mind, and one little remark could not affect the outcome of the war. What happened to the First Amendment? I hate to see my beloved country reverting to McCarthyism.

It's very sad that radio stations choose not to play the Chicks' songs. You do a person a grave injustice when you try to take away their livelihood. The girls have families to support. I greatly admire Vince Gill for standing up for them. With their talent I'm sure they will make it even with this setback and I'm behind them 100 percent. Country music should stand up for their own.

LYDIA BRAUN
SHOALS, INDIANA

PRETTY WOMAN

In your June issue, Faith Hill is wearing a hot-gossip New York outfit. I don't care if she wears a grain sack, she is tops – beautiful – and I love her. She and Shania Twain converted me from Reba McEntire, who was my former favorite. There will never be another I'm fonder of.

LYNN GARDNER
TIFFIN, OHIO

DRESS UP

I think it is about time the *Grand Ole Opry* has a dress code. Blue jeans and T-shirts should be outlawed. Bluegrass singers and pickers all dress the way performers should, and I think country singers and pickers should dress the same.

BILL HUYETT
KINZERS, PENNSYLVANIA

TANYA'S STILL GOT IT

I was really pleased to see the two positive letters you printed about Tanya Tucker in the June issue. I was also at the Strawberry Festival and I am here to tell you, Tanya has still got it. In fact, she has more than anybody else that I have ever seen in concert – rock or country. Radio ought to be ashamed of themselves for depriving us of one of the biggest talents in country music. Thanks, *Country Music*, for giving us our Tanya Tucker fix.

DELORIES MIRANDA
ST. CLOUD, FLORIDA



She'd look great in a ... grain sack?

EAR OF THE BEHOLDER

I would like to know what all these complainers are talking about. It's not what the stars wear that makes up country music, it's the music and the songs. And if they don't like it, why listen to it? I have been listening to country music all my life and have never seen a problem with it. I am 15 years old, and I love any and all country music.

SHANNA BEAVERS
CALHOUN, GEORGIA



Tanya's still thrillin'!

REVIEW DERAILED

I don't think you were listening to the right CD when you reviewed The Derailers' *Genuine (June)*. The entire album is great – fun to listen to, good dynamics and a breath of fresh air compared to the mediocre “blah-blah” that is forced down our throats by country radio. These guys are the real deal – progressive, yet respectful of the traditions that made country music great.

WES WHEELER
SHELBYVILLE, ILLINOIS

BLUE ABOUT LEANN

In my opinion the best voice in country music belongs to LeAnn Rimes. By now she should have been both Female Artist of the Year and Entertainer of the Year. But since she's been in California, pursuing her acting career, she no longer uses that great voice to the best of her ability. Country music is what she does best. I hope she goes back to country and records some hits.

JOYCE MARTIN
ARKON, OHIO

MURDER ON MUSIC ROW?

I am so tired of listening to the same kind of music on the radio again and again. And then I find the same kind of music in the magazine. Faith Hill, country? When? How? Why? She was (maybe) when she started, but she is not now. I feel so tired and sad. Country music is getting worse each day. People tend to forget what country music was, so they can't even know what it should be. I have nothing against pop or rock or anything else. But I have a lot against a lack of honesty and respect, and in my opinion when we can't distinguish between country and not country we are killing the feeling, the soul, the spirit, the truth of country music. We'll miss the feeling when it's gone, but it will be too late then.

ESTHER BERLANGA ELLINGTON
OCOOE, FLORIDA

Have a comment? A complaint? A compliment? Send your letter by e-mail to letters@countrymusicmagazine.com or by regular mail to Country Music magazine, 118 16th Ave. S., Suite 230, Nashville, TN 37203. Mark envelope: Attention: Letters. We will not print any letters that do not contain a name and contact address. We reserve the right to edit.

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Isn't She Lovely?

◀ **SHANIA TWAIN** wears one of her musical heroes on her sleeve – well, shirt – as she hooks up with **STEVIE WONDER** for a dynamic duet. Their performance from the MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas was shot for the *VH1 Divas Duets* special. The show benefits the VH1 Save the Music Foundation.

MICHAEL CALDERHEAD/VIRAGE.COM



ACM Moments

◀ The 38th annual Academy of Country Music (ACM) Awards from Las Vegas brought out the stars from country – and beyond. **VINCE GILL** and wife **AMY GRANT** grabbed a moment for a quick snuggle; **KENNY CHESNEY** was honored to meet with POWs from the Iraq conflict (**CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER RONALD YOUNG JR.** and **PFC. PATRICK MILLER**) and “Mr. Vegas” himself, **WAYNE NEWTON**.



Comedy Capers

▲ **LEE GREENWOOD** got a good grip on comic **DOM DELUISE** as they arrived at the 11th annual Movieguide Awards. The two hammed it up from the Regent Beverly Wilshire Hotel in Los Angeles.

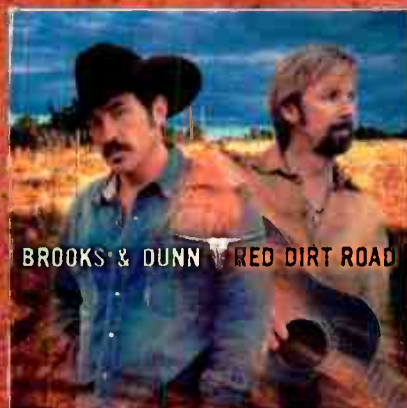
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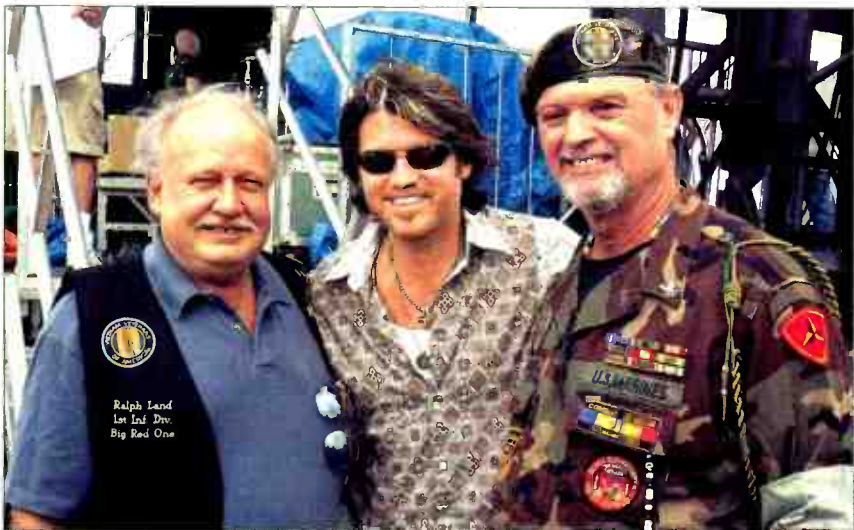
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CRAG CAMPBELL

NASCAR Country

▲ Texas' own **THE DERAILERS** caught up with ex-NFL star and current FOX broadcaster **HOWIE LONG** when they popped in on the NASCAR Samsung/Radio Shack 500 at the Texas Motor Speedway. The band's logo was proudly displayed on driver Ken Schrader's car, and they kicked off the race by performing "God Bless America."



ALAN HAYOR

Yes, Sir!

▼ **NEAL MCCOY** paid a visit to U.S. Central Command headquarters in Tampa after playing the Strawberry Festival in Plant City, Fla. McCoy had a special mission of his own – to catch up with his friend **GEN. TOMMY FRANKS** and perform a short concert for the troops.



LES MARTINEZ

V-Day With Billy Ray

◀ A newly coiffed **BILLY RAY CYRUS** had a meet-and-greet with a couple of Vietnam veterans at a concert on Armed Forces Day. Cyrus, a longtime supporter of Vietnam vets, performed at War Memorial Walking Trail Park in Oak Grove, Ky., near the Fort Campbell military base.

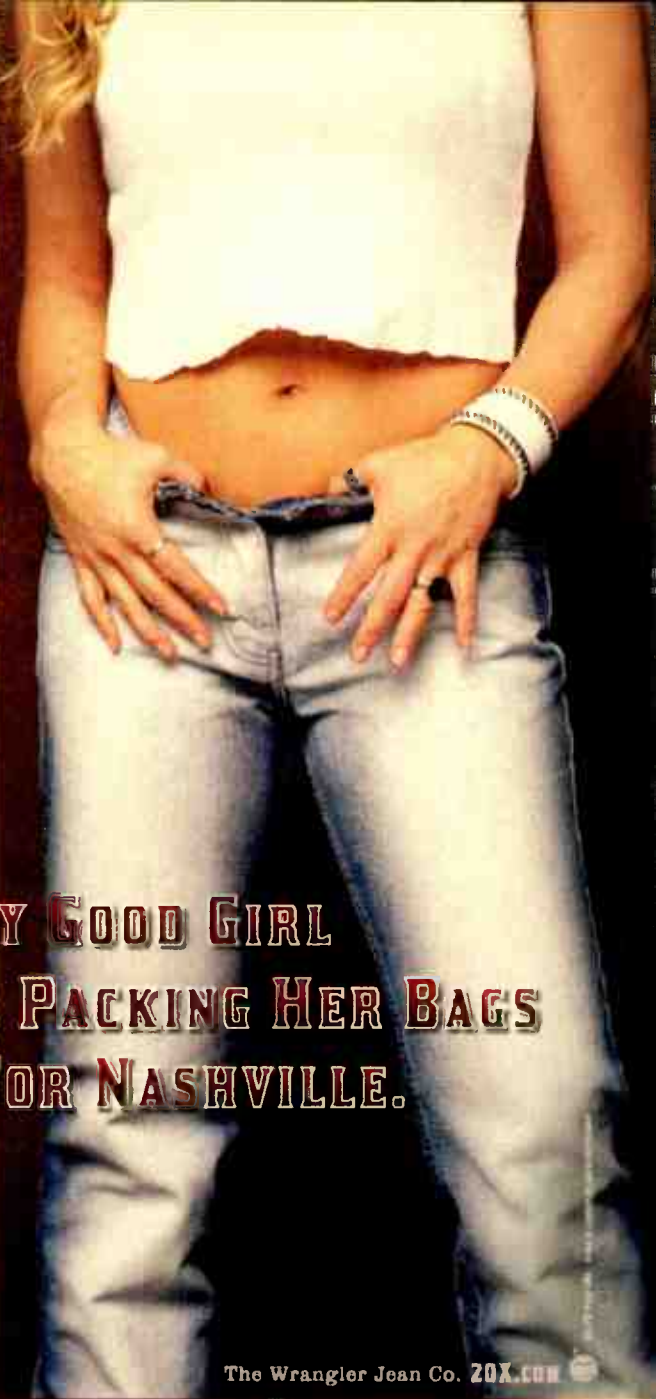
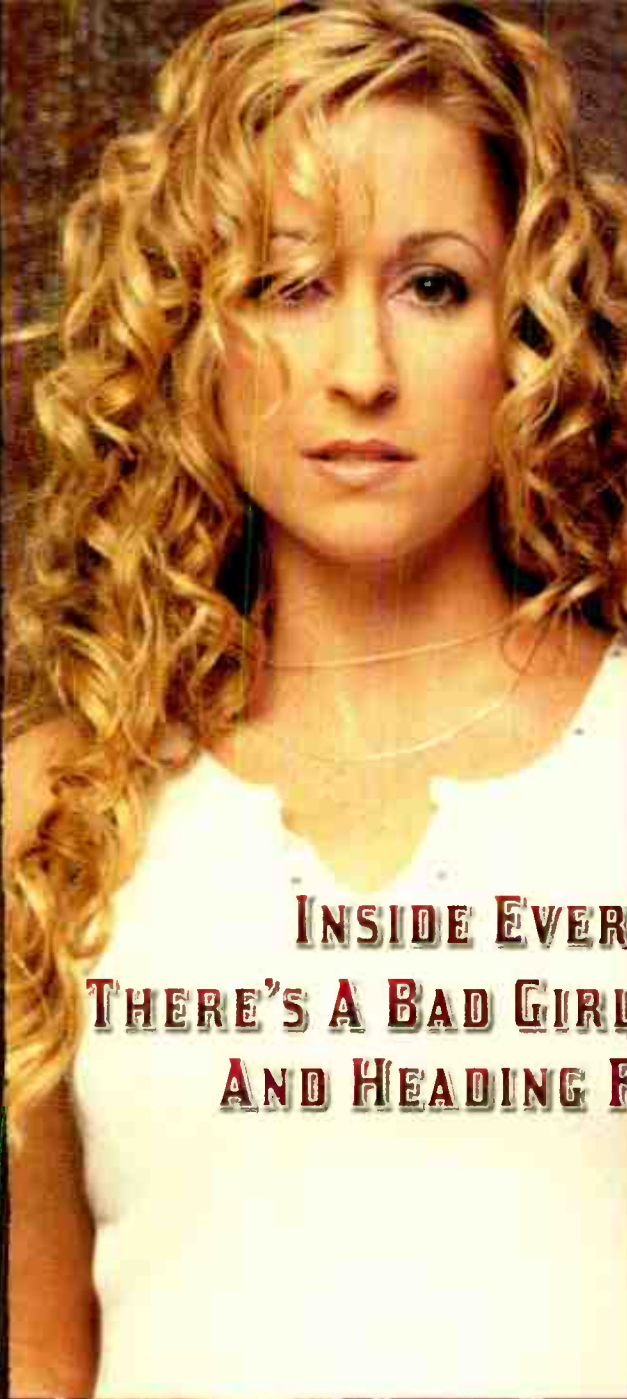
Swinging Stars

► **CLAY WALKER** got a few of his golfing friends together at the AT&T Pebble Beach Celebrity Pro-Am to swing for charity. Hitting the links were Walker, TV stars **KEVIN JAMES** and **RAY ROMANO**, **JAMES WOODS**, **GLEN CAMPBELL**, **CHRIS O'DONNELL** and – making everyone's day – **CLINT EASTWOOD**.



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PARROTHEADS

Alan Jackson joined the celebration when **Jimmy Buffett** brought his concert party to Nashville. Alan came onstage with Buffett – whose rabid fans call themselves “parrotheads” – for a duet of Jimmy’s smash “Margaritaville.” Alan’s fans will remember he recorded the song himself on *Under the Influence*, a CD that honored his heroes. Needless to say, long-legged Alan and fair-haired Jimmy performed a fine duet of the famed shaker-and-salt ditty. And, needless to say, the crowd went bonkers from such a heaping helping of good-time music.

Alan wasn’t the only surprise guest, though. Fresh from the islands – where he was filming a video for the title track of his two-times-platinum CD, *No Shoes, No Shirt, No Problems* – **Kenny Chesney** walked onstage unannounced toward the end of Buffett’s SRO concert. Once again, the crowd went wild. Tanned and buff, Kenny said he’d look over at Buffett and think of all those nights he sat on barroom stools playing for tips – and getting offered \$20 if he’d sing “Margaritaville.”

BIG GUNS

When **Kenny Chesney**’s three-month Margaritas ’n’ Señoritas Tour ended, opening act **Montgomery Gentry** surprised Chesney with a parting gift: a pair of matching silver-plated government issue Colt .45s with consecutive serial numbers. The guns had a mahogany case and Kenny’s logo branded into the pearl-handled grips.

Montgomery Gentry were



Jackson will be in action on *Today* this fall.

A.J. IN N.Y.C.

Speaking of Alan, lucky New Yorkers will be able to see him perform on Sept. 19 when he sings live at Rockefeller Center as a part of the *Today* show’s Summer Concert Series. The rest of us will tune in to NBC that morning.

STEVEN JACKSON/REXUS

just as surprised, and humbled, when Kenny, his band and entire road crew filled the stage with a standing ovation for the Kentucky boys at the tour’s final show in Lubbock, Texas.

They certainly all had plenty to celebrate. According to *Pollstar* magazine, the Margaritas ’n’ Señoritas Tour outdrew every other act on the road in any genre.

COMING HOME

LeAnn Rimes left Tennessee in a teenage snit so loud it was heard throughout the entertainment industry. She was so mad at her dad, **Wilbur Rimes**, she wasn’t speaking to him. LeAnn hated Nashville, and she said so loud and clear in *TV Guide* and everywhere else anyone would listen. A great country singer, LeAnn recorded a noncountry CD that died like yesterday’s watermelons on the vine. Melons are real stinky when they rot, you know.

Now LeAnn has made up

with her dad. She’s married, and she’s moved back to Music City. It will be nice to hear her do what she does best: sing a country song.

Welcome home, LeAnn. Let’s hope your hubby likes it here.

FAMILY PLANNING

Bryan White and his soap actress wife, **Erika Page**, gave up their apartment in Los Angeles and moved back to Music City. “Better family living,” said the Whites, who are expecting their first child. Erika is taking off time from her acting to await the birth. Can Bryan change diapers? “I’m a fisherman. I gut fish,” replied Bryan. I never heard changing diapers compared to gutting fish. Both are dirty jobs, but somebody has to do it!

Bryan and Erika’s reason for moving here is pretty much the same reason **Clint** and **Lisa Black** moved here – Nashville is better than L.A. to raise a child.

POSSUM LOVE

Asked what he thought of **George Jones**, **Vince Gill** minces no words. “If you ask 100 people, 99 will say George Jones is their favorite singer,” says Vince. “The other one is an idiot.”

HONORING VINCE

Vince, who’d rather praise other people than take a compliment himself, recently received a big honor when it was announced that he’d be given the Professional Golfers’ Association 2003 Distinguished Service Award. The award will be presented Aug. 13 during ceremonies in Rochester, N.Y. Given to Americans who display leadership and humanitarian qualities including integrity, sportsmanship and enthusiasm for the game of golf, the honor obviously fits Vince to a tee. His love for the sport and his leadership through the Vinny Pro-Celeb invitational has generated more than \$3 million for junior golf in Tennessee. Others who have received this honor include former



Bryan White and Erika Page are expecting.

SAE COOK

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It's that friendly.

President George Bush, Bob Hope, former President Gerald Ford, Jack Nicklaus and Arnold Palmer, to name a few.

WELL-ENDOWED

Dolly Parton stopped dropouts in her home county of Sevier County, Tenn., when she started giving every high school graduate \$500. Through her endowment program, Dolly has just announced that four lucky grads from four different high schools in the county will be awarded a \$15,000 college scholarship. That Dolly, she knows how to inspire people – and to let them know they're loved.

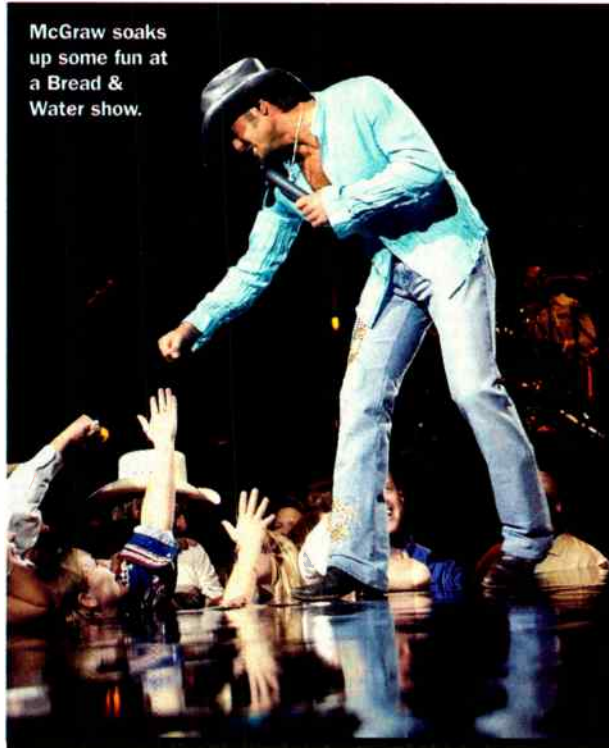
HOLYWOOD

Steve Holy's "Good Morning Beautiful," which was No. 1 for five consecutive weeks, received the ASCAP award for the most-performed song from a film for 2002. The song, written by **Todd Cerney** and **Zack Lyle,** was included in the movie *Angel Eyes.* The ceremony took place, appropriately enough, in Beverly Hills.

SAINT WILLIE

Thirty years ago, **Waylon Jennings** stood in the Glaser Sound Studios talking to engineer **Kyle Lehning** and me when he got a call from **Willie Nelson.** When he hung up the phone, Waylon told us Willie was talking about having a 4th of July picnic concert in Dripping Springs, Texas. "Wonder if it'll work," Waylon said.

Dripping Springs turned out to be a mini-Woodstock. In 100-degree-plus heat, an amazing, all-ages crowd went absolutely wild for the music and the fun. Women went topless at a country show for the first time in my knowledge. Rumor has had it for these 30 years that this was



McGraw soaks up some fun at a Bread & Water show.

BREAKING BREAD

So far this summer, **Tim McGraw** has performed three Bread & Water concerts. Tim and his band, **The Dancehall Doctors,** put on these surprise nightclub shows immediately following his arena concerts. They set up the show in a local bar, charge \$10 admission, sell T-shirts and caps, and then charge \$100 for requests. All of the money goes to the local American Red Cross.

In Nashville, wife **Faith Hill** played guitar onstage at the Broken Spoke, and their neighbor **Kenny Chesney** showed up and spent the entire night sharing the spotlight with Tim. Kenny didn't bring a horse to the Spoke, but I understand he brought a turkey – Wild Turkey!

the time **Billy Joe Shaver** thought he was Jesus and went out into the desert to die. A week later, Billy Joe showed up in L.A. at some club where Waylon was performing with no explanation of his whereabouts.

Willie celebrated the 30th anniversary of this 4th of July event with a bevy of big-name guests. After all, he is 70 – qualified for social security but still working 20 shows a month. I smiled when I saw **Waylon Payne** was appearing on this year's show. Waylon Payne is named for Waylon, of course. His mama is the legendary **Sammi Smith,** whose recording of the **Kris Kristofferson** standard "Help Me Make It Through the Night" is one of the all-time finest records ever made in any town. His daddy, just as legendary, is **Jody Payne,** who has played guitar and sung harmony in the shadow of Willie Nelson at every picnic and every concert for all those 30 years. Personally, I think Willie Nelson is a saint.

THE CIRCLE TURNS

June Carter Cash, always vibrant, seemed to have an ever-present halo overhead. June's presence was just as strong and just as impossible not to notice as that of her famous husband, Johnny. Whenever either of them entered a room, everyone knew it. Most of the time, they entered together. They were one, Johnny and June. Their names should have been written JunenJohnny or JohnnynJune. It's sad to imagine one without the other.

Like all of their enormous circle of friends, I prayed when Johnny sent out word asking us all to pray for June's healing. But it wasn't to be. The lady who co-wrote "Ring of Fire" had walked her last mile, sung her last song, told her last joke, danced her last jig. June passed away in Baptist Hospital on May 15; at her bedside stood Johnny and her son John Carter Cash, daughters Carlene and Rosey Carter, and Rosanne, Cindy, Tara and Kathy Cash.

When the news came, I wept for Johnny. As great as

his legend has been, he will be a lonely man without his June.

I remember a TV taping where a makeup girl tried and failed to fix Johnny's sweaty face, only to be pushed aside time and again. Exasperated, she sidled up to June and tattled. June took the powder puff in hand and walked over to Johnny with a smile. His gruff look softened as she dabbed a little powder before handing the puff back to the professional, who finished the job. June was his comforter, a role she loved and cherished. She made the Man in Black smile.

LORETTA ROCKS

The Coal Miner's Daughter was rocking in the Big Apple with alternative rock duo The White Stripes. Apparently **Loretta Lynn** heard the rocking band's version of her self-penned "Rated X" and invited them to her house for chicken and dumplings. They decided over the table to do a show together – and did. Loretta is set to do 60 shows this year and she's been working on a new studio album.

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Ten-Year Sensation

After a decade of struggle, Buddy Jewell finally scores his break by taking his music to the people



New stars
on the
rise

"I've come severely close to the spotlight a couple of times," jokes Buddy Jewell. His major-label debut album will be out this summer.

TM CAMPBELL

Buddy Jewell almost didn't try out for *Nashville Star*. Like many Music City insiders, he initially had reservations about USA Network's announcement that it planned to host a nine-week-long country talent show – an obvious knock-off of Hollywood's successful *American Idol* series.

"The word 'cheesy' kept coming up," Jewell admits.

That wasn't his only concern. At age 41, the native of Osceola, Ark., had all but given up on making a name as a performer. Instead, he'd contented himself with becoming one of Nashville's top demo singers, breathing life into the tunes of professional songwriters who'd hired him because of his strong, undeniably country voice.

Combining the smooth, effortless quality of Don Williams with the rugged, boisterous spirit of Travis Tritt, Jewell had recorded more than 4,000 demos – including the one that had convinced George Strait to cut "Write This Down" and several songs recorded by Trace Adkins and Gary Allan. At \$80 to \$100 a tune, Jewell could make \$50,000 in a good year.

Nonetheless, Jewell ultimately made a day-of-the-audition decision to try out for *Nashville Star*. The show turned out to be better than almost anybody expected, and Jewell outlasted younger, more telegenic singers. By communicating directly with fans through weekly televised performances, he beat his Nashville rap – too old, too average-looking – and won a record deal with Sony Nashville.

In doing so, he proved that older artists can have an impact if audiences get a chance to warm up to them.

Before *Nashville Star*, Jewell had worked on the fringes of Nashville's industry. "I was like a burglar, looking for a good place to break in," he says. "And, man, somebody had the house locked down good."

In the '90s he garnered brief interest from Mercury and Atlantic and nearly signed with the now-defunct Imprint Records when *Nashville Star* judge/Sony A&R executive Tracy Gershon worked for that label.

"I've come severely close to the spotlight a couple of times," he says.

But age (he was already more than 30 when he moved to Nashville) and bad timing (he once scheduled a showcase on a night when a massive tornado struck) always worked against him. And his few breaks – singing on comedian Bill Engvall's 1998 single "I'm a Cowboy" and contributing background vocals to Ray Price's 2002 *Time* album – never led to anything bigger.

Jewell's Clint Black-produced album, part of his *Nashville Star* winnings, will include three originals he performed on the show – "Abilene on Her Mind," "One in a Row" and his first single, "Help Pour Out the Rain (Lacey's Song)." Jewell wrote that song for his 9-year-old daughter. He and wife Tene have two other children, Buddy III, 13, and 3-year-old Joshua.

Now, as Jewell chooses material for his album, he finds himself in the somewhat unique position of being pitched songs for which he once sang the demo. In other words, song publishers want him to record tunes that the writers originally paid him to pitch.

"I told all the publishers, 'It's brownie points if you bring me something that I sang on, because that proves you were helping feed my family all these years.'"

— Brian Mansfield

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Heidi Newfield

Raised in California, Heidi Newfield moved to Nashville with her sights set high. As lead singer for Trick Pony, the world is her oyster and she shucks it onstage every chance she gets. Her wild-child flair makes rowdy crowds stomp and holler. She claims she couldn't do it without the support of her fans, family ... and her lipstick.



◀ IN THE FRIDGE

For a year and a half I've had a bottle of Dom Perignon that Ronnie Dunn gave me at the

beginning of the Brooks & Dunn tour that I've had no time or reason to open. Besides that I have all the condiments. It's the total bachelorette pad – champagne and ketchup.

SLEEPING WITH

A little stuffed Labrador dog that my daddy gave me because he knew I spend a lot of time alone. He said, "This is to keep you company."

LIPSTICK ▶

I can't go without lipstick. I keep a couple of lipsticks in my harmonica case. I have 'em in my bunk, in my purse and in every nook and cranny.

CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT

An old leather jacket that my father gave to



my mother as a please-forgive-me gift.

◀ COLLECTING

Pigs. I have no idea why – we raised horses



growing up. For some reason I just think they're the cutest dang things.

SONG THAT MAKES ME DANCE

"Respect" by Aretha Franklin. And anything old and soulful.

ADDICTED TO

VHI's *Behind the Music*. CMT has something similar, and I check those out. I'm fascinated by the stories of entertainers. I'm also addicted to the History channel.

WHEELS ▶

I would love a brand-new black convertible Jaguar XK8. It's the car of my dreams.

WORDS TO LIVE BY

From the time I was young I've always said, "Whatever you do, make it memorable."

CRUSH ▶

Matthew McConaughey



GUILTY PLEASURE

Ice cream. Breyer's or Baskin-Robbins mint chip or chocolate and peanut butter.

DOWNTIME

Curling up on the couch with a good movie, going for a drive, fishing, hunting and riding horses.

NEEDS CLEANING ▼

There's a room in my house where I keep my suitcases open and folded clothes are all around – and making me clean that up takes an act of God.



PETS

I have a dog named Spanky back home in California. He lives with my parents, but he's still my dog. He's a fox terrier.

MOVIE

Lonesome Dove

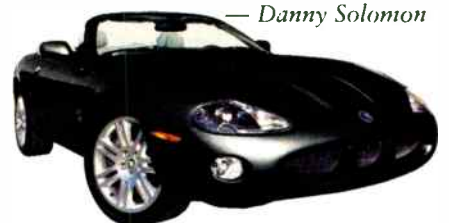
CAN'T STOP BUYING

Shoes. I'll go in for one pair and just get stupid.

FAVORITE SPOT

I love to cuddle up on my boyfriend's lap.

— Danny Solomon



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Tressed out

When it comes to hair, some male country stars just don't make the cut

Billy Ray Cyrus went off the radar for a few years after making a huge splash with "Achy Breaky Heart." Then in 1997 he re-emerged with the critically acclaimed album *Trail of Tears*. It brought his singing and songwriting a level of respect he'd not achieved earlier. He was the subject of a profile by the *Nashville Scene*, an alternative newspaper that sneers at most popular country artists. Still, they had to ask: "Despite the unexpected success, one nagging question remains: When is Cyrus going to cut his hair?"

Well, it took another six years, but it's been done. The shattering news of Billy Ray's de-mulleting even made the gossip pages of *The New York Post*. He decided to sacrifice his tumbling tresses in order to fit in – he plays a doctor on TV and noted that he never saw any doctors with mullets in New York.

A savvy observation. "Long hair on men is usually a blue-collar style," says Debra Wingo, a Nashville-based hairstylist who's snipped the heads of such artists as Keith Urban and Trisha Yearwood. The working-class guy shows his rebel streak by letting his hair grow down his back, a style that pencil pushers in office towers could never get away with. Think Trace Adkins, Travis Tritt and Blake Shelton.

Even when it's not blue collar, long hair is nonconformist. Willie Nelson became an "outlaw" after he left Nashville and let his hair grow. Urban and Joe Nichols sport luxurious shoulder-length manes that add to their not-the-guy-next-door sex symbol image.

"There's an attitude attached to long hair," says Wingo. "It's about being relaxed and more free-spirited than a businessman behind a desk."

As far back as the Old Testament, men heard hair dos and don'ts: "If a man is a Nazarite – one who is specially dedicated to God – he must not cut his hair at all." (*Numbers 6:5*). Later, the apostle Paul countered: "Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him?" (*1 Corinthians 11:14*).

And so the argument went on, century after century. In the 1600s, when most Englishmen wore their hair long, the Puritans felt a religious duty to wear theirs short, earning them the derisive nickname Roundheads. These were the men who settled America.

Their great-great-great-great-great-grandsons became the first hippies, who grew their hair as a sign of their anti-establishment views. At the time, in the 1960s, longhaired men risked violence, unemployment and being banned from



STEVE WOLKE/REACTY



CHRISTOPHER HINE

Long a poster boy for the long-in-back, short-in-front style known as the "mullet" (left), Billy Ray Cyrus recently took it all off.

Disneyland. Their hair was un-American. *We don't grow our hair long and shaggy*, Merle Haggard sang in the blue-collar anthem "Okie From Muskogee."

By the '80s, the hippies grew up to be businessmen, and they asked their barbers for haircuts more suitable to their lives. Long hair then became the province of the working class – Okies from Muskogee were proudly wearing ponytails underneath their baseball caps and cowboy hats.

If any of those guys sang country music, chances are they'd immediately hear suggestions that they cut their hair. Travis Tritt and Billy Ray Cyrus have both complained about the focus on their heads instead of their music. But the objections just made them dig their heels in more.

"The labels will try to move the artist into the mainstream," Wingo says. "But when people tell men with long hair, 'You have to cut your hair,' they're dealing with issues of masculinity. Cutting their hair means letting go of a side of them that they feel is their wild side – and if they give it up they're giving in to the machine."

That's why Blake Shelton, who took off his hat and exposed his expansive curls on his latest album cover, felt the need to chide *Nashville Star* contestant Buddy Jewell when he agreed to get his hair snipped in the show's "makeover" episode. Not to worry, though. Jewell says, "I tell people, 'My hair's just on vacation. It'll be back.'"

— Nancy Henderson



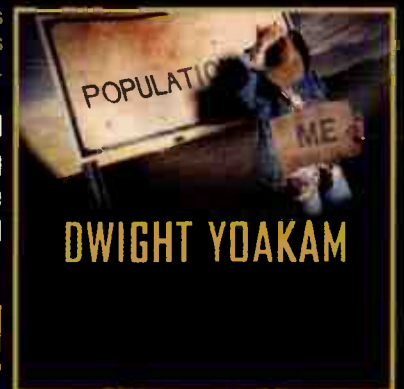
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THE LITTLE engine that could

Berry Hill is a quiet, close-knit community of modest homes, blue-collar workers and neighborly neighbors less than five miles from downtown Nashville. As small as it is, it nonetheless has its own police department, city manager, one of the region's largest cemeteries, several popular restaurants, busy retail shops and a rapidly growing nest of small recording studios.

On a recent sun-drenched, clear-blue morning, it also has country music's reigning female vocalist of the year. Martina McBride has been recording her first studio album in four years in a state-of-the-art studio here, Blackbird, that she and her husband, John McBride, bought in 2002.

Scheduled for release this fall, the new CD will be the much-anticipated follow-up to her phenomenally successful *Greatest Hits*, an album that McBride at first resisted putting out.

"The *Greatest Hits* package was RCA's idea," she admits, now with a smile. "I was hesitant at first – I didn't think it was time yet. I also was concerned about how it would affect me to go so long without new music."

So she struck a deal with her record label: She'd agree to the hits collection if they agreed to let her put an extra dose of new songs on it.

"Doing the new music really helped

While Music Row obsesses over flash-in-the-pan trends, Martina McBride has built one of country's sturdiest careers by staying true to herself. Now as Nashville's reigning female vocalist, she's making her own rules.

me with that project," she says about the four tunes she added to the CD. "We also did a new photo shoot and wrote the liner notes. So it wasn't something the record company just put out there; it wasn't the typical greatest-hits package. I felt like for some people, this might be the first Martina McBride record they've bought, and I wanted it to be really good, so that hopefully they will come along to the next album."

Indeed, the album didn't slow her momentum at all. If anything, it added fuel to her career, which still seems to be building, even though she's now in her 11th year as an artist.

Not only is McBride's long run a rarity in this age of here-today, gone-tomorrow performers, she's also the only major female star who's enjoyed career growth in the last year. At a time when big-time superstars Shania

Twain, Faith Hill and the Dixie Chicks are seeing decreasing sales, McBride's CDs are selling better than ever.

She's also been rewarded by peers in the music industry who have showered her with major awards over the last couple of years. She just won the ACM's Female Vocalist trophy for the second consecutive year and she's snagged the same honor at the most recent CMA and American Music Awards shows.

Meanwhile, *Greatest Hits* held the No. 1 spot on the country sales charts for three weeks and has remained in the Top 10 since its release. All four of its new songs cracked the Top 10 spot, with "Concrete Angel" delivering yet another strong and moving social statement from a singer known for her willingness to tackle heavy material.

That's a great run for an album that came out nearly two years ago,

BY KAY WEST



in September 2001. The songs also help track McBride's slow start, late rise and ultimate mastery of the country charts.

Greatest Hits doesn't feature any songs from her first album, which came out in 1992, at a time when McBride had long hair and sang with a more traditional style than she does now. Her second album, *The Way That I Am*, spawned her breakthrough hit, "My Baby Loves Me," an

The song was a moving and tragic recounting of the devastating ramifications of domestic violence, but at the same time, a powerful tribute to its victims and a heartfelt call to hear the voices of those who are often silenced.

Unfortunately, some radio stations refused to play the controversial song—though McBride is happy to say that all of the holdouts now play "Independence Day" as an oldie.

her 1997 album, *Evolution*, that she felt she'd finally arrived as an artist.

"We had a really different process with *Evolution*," she remembers. "Before that, I was trying to tour and make records at the same time. I would record the albums during short breaks from the road. My voice would be tired, I would be trying to do laundry, run errands and make a record all at once."

So she lobbied to change that

Martina McBride "I've always had a very strong sense of self, even as a kid. It was my upbringing, and I am really grateful for that. It has led me through the paths of my career."

upbeat testament of a woman who has a man who loves her, figurative warts and all. It began to announce Martina McBride as a strong voice for young girls and women.

That profile was verified with the release of "Independence Day," which she sang live on the 1994 CMA Awards show while nearly eight months pregnant with her first child.

Although the song stalled on the charts before reaching the Top 10, it drew customers into record stores, making *The Way That I Am* McBride's first million-selling album.

Then, in 1995, "Safe in the Arms of Love" returned McBride to the Top 10, and the following year, "Wild Angels" became her first No. 1 hit.

Despite her success, it wasn't until

process; she wanted to stay home, off the road, during the recording sessions. "The label agreed and was very supportive," she says. "It made a huge difference. It gave us time to experiment, to learn, to grow. On earlier albums, I always thought, 'If we just had more time, I would have done this differently.' But when *Evolution* was done, I *knew* it was done—and *knew* it was good. It was the best experience for me creatively I had ever had to that point."

The work paid off. *Evolution* went on to sell three million copies. In the summer of 1998, McBride became the first country performer on the all-female Lilith Fair tour. The following year she captured her first Female Vocalist of the Year award from the CMA.

By then McBride had secured a reputation as a woman in control of her music and her career. She hadn't reacted to trends or repeatedly changed her appearance or direction. Instead, a consistent vision—that of a strong, compassionate woman—runs through all of her albums.

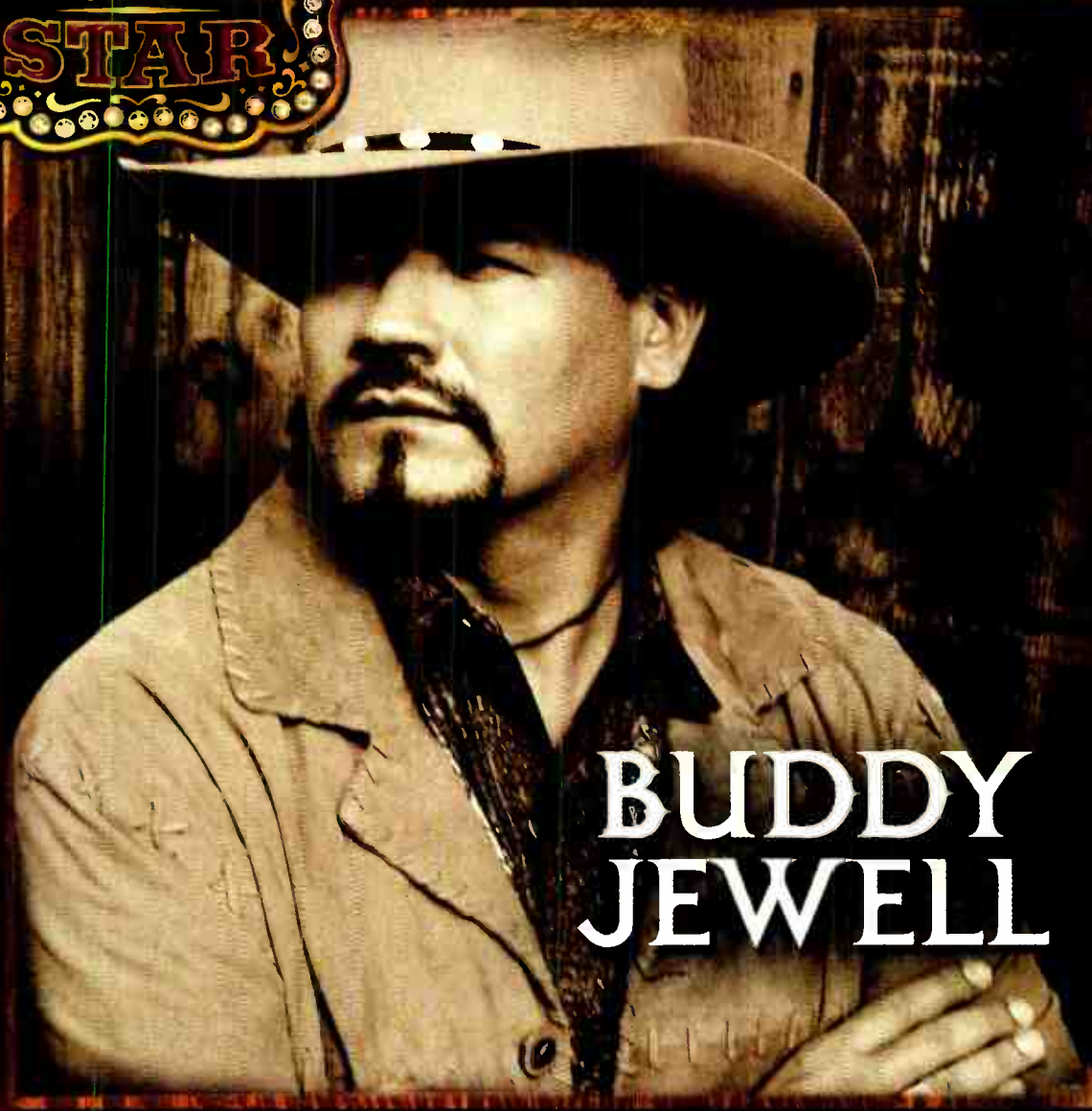
"I've always had a very strong sense of self, even as a kid," she says. "It was my upbringing, and I am really grateful for that. It has led me through the paths of my career. Looking back, there were a couple of times I was asked to do things I was not real comfortable with or didn't feel suited me, and I just said no, that's not me. It comes down to knowing yourself, and what is right for you, as an artist, as a professional and as a person."



"My career has allowed me to keep my perspective," says McBride, who recently won her second consecutive title from the Academy of Country Music as Female Vocalist of the Year.

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Martina McBride

As she says, it's all part of who she is and how she was brought up. Raised on a family farm in Sharon, Kan., the former Martina Schiff was one of 10 graduates in her tiny high-school class. Starting in early childhood, she performed as a member of her family band, The Schiffters. One of her first public performances was before a 4-H convention in Manhattan, Kan. She sang a Little Jimmy Dickens tune, "I'm Little But I'm Loud," a title that would seem to prophesize the petite beauty's future as one of the most powerful vocalists in country music.

The big voice served her well as she gained experience riding in a van through the wheat-filled plains of Kansas with a succession of struggling bands, channeling rock belter Pat Benatar ("Hit Me With Your Best Shot") and other '80s female pop hitmakers in tiny dives around the Midwest. It was during that period she met John McBride, a sound engineer; the couple married in 1988 when she was just 21.

Two years later, the couple moved to Nashville, and John landed a job as a concert engineer with Garth Brooks. Martina grabbed a gig selling T-shirts on the tour so they could be together.

All the while, the couple was focused on their shared goal: to get Martina signed to a major record company. They craftily employed a deceptive strategy, sending Martina's demo tape to RCA Records enclosed in a bright purple envelope marked REQUESTED MATERIAL, fooling an executive into thinking someone in the department must have asked for the tape. She also set her sights on working with producer Paul Worley, whose work with Highway 101, Pam Tillis and The Desert Rose Band had impressed her. She sent the new producer a tape as well.

That tape sat on his desk for about

a month before his assistant harangued him into putting it in his tape deck. "She finally said to me, 'Paul, you really need to listen to that tape,'" Worley recalls. "So I did, and it was like, 'Oh my God, this girl can really sing!' We set up a meeting. She was really young, like 23. My first impression, other than that she was incredibly talented and attractive, was that she was very serious for such a young woman. She was intense and focused. I thought to myself that there was really something to her, something beyond the obvious."

The obvious hit everyone smack in the face at a concert showcase set up for RCA and Worley. They were blown away with her performance and stage presence, and she signed to the label one year after coming to Nashville.

What lay beneath, as Worley suspected, was something that had been there all along, a quality that would help her achieve her goals on her terms, without having to compromise her principles, sacrifice her integrity or pander to prevailing trends.

"Martina has a real knack for picking great songs that work for her," says Lon Helton, Nashville bureau chief for the *Radio & Records* trade publication. "Finding those songs can be harder than writing

them; it is not an easy task. I think the reason she is able to do that so well is because she has such a clear vision of who she is, what she believes and what she wants to say. And she has that Midwestern ethic of hard work, and a commitment to being true to yourself."

McBride acknowledges that she had good role models. "I get asked a lot if it is harder in this business for a woman than it is for a man," she says. "And I say, 'Well, I don't really think about that.' But I am very aware that I don't have to think about it because of the women who came before me – Loretta, Tammy, Dolly, Reba. They had to fight those battles and break down those barriers. That is what they did for me and other female

artists today. They were great role models, and because of what they did, I can be a role model to the women who come after me."

She also makes sure she provides the right inspiration for her daughters – Delaney, who starts third grade this fall, and Emma, who will begin kindergarten.

"I tell my girls all the time that being their mom is my favorite job, and that they are the most important things in my life. When Delaney started kindergarten, we made the decision that we would not tour during the school year, only during the summer when they could go with us. We turn down a lot of gigs, some very well paying gigs, but that is what's best for us as a family."

M McBride worries about the impact her career has on her daughters, too. "It's funny," she says. "As a mom, you naturally want to brag on your kids and tell stories about them. But I have to be very aware that because of my career I am in the public eye, but my children need a private life with their mother. And when we are in real-life situations, like school events, they want me to be just a regular mom."

"I tell my girls that they have to listen to their inner voice," she continues. "Especially now as they are getting to a point where they will have to make independent decisions and be facing peer pressure, I tell them that if something doesn't feel right, then it is probably wrong. Listen to that inner voice, and it will tell you the right thing to do."

That little voice tells McBride that she's made the right choices in her life and career.

"I could maybe have done some things differently and had a bigger career, or one that happened faster," she says. "But there's a part of me that is fearful of that super-fame thing. You give up a lot for that kind of fame, and I'm not willing to do that."

"I have a great career. It has allowed me to keep my perspective, to have two kids, a marriage, a home life, to work it all in and enjoy it. If my daughters decided to go into this business, I would wish for them exactly the career I have had. I wouldn't trade it for anything.*"



McBride and husband John have been offstage partners for 15 years.

The Beacon of Hope

SALT & PEPPER SET

inspired by

THOMAS KINKADE



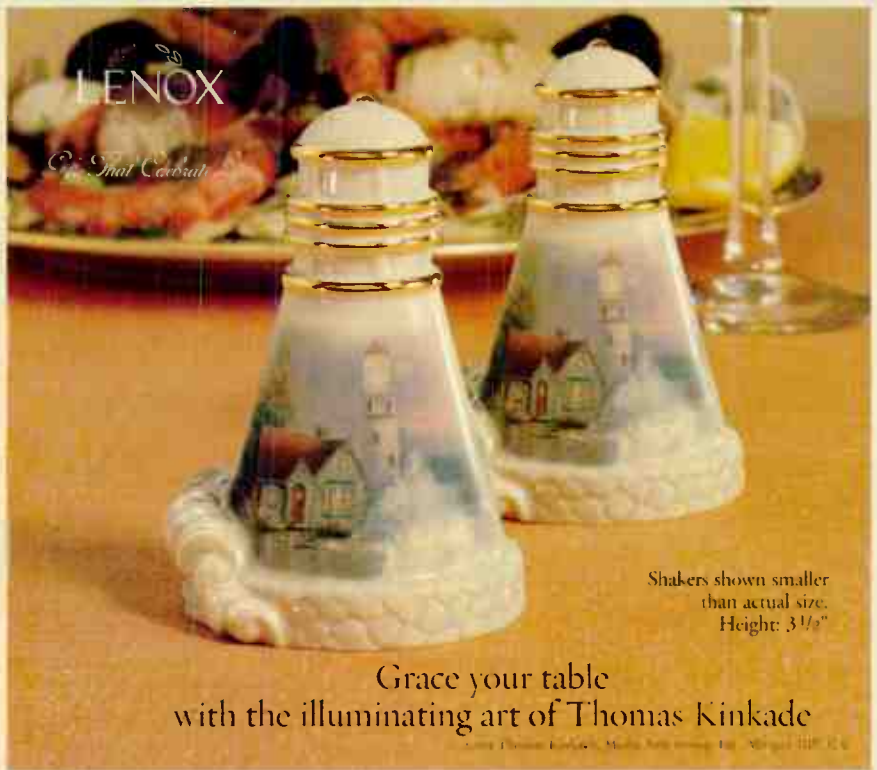
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Despite a few big breakthroughs, the number of women achieving success is dropping, and even the biggest female stars are struggling to hold their ground. What's going on?

The Gender Gap

Faith, Shania, Martina, the Dixie Chicks – country music boasts more top-selling, headline-grabbing female stars than ever, right? If ever Nashville has enjoyed a Golden Age of Women, this would be it, right?

Ask the experts that question, and you might be surprised by the answer.

Sure, recent years have brought amazing strides for female artists. Shania Twain emerged with the best-selling album by a woman in any genre with 1997's *Come on*

Over, which has sold 36 million CDs worldwide. The Dixie Chicks, in addition to topping the 20 million sales mark, set a record this year by moving more than 800,000 tickets in one day for their U.S. tour.

Still, some industry executives argue that women enjoyed a greater percentage of radio play in the past, and there were more women making significant music 20 years ago than today.

In 1981, women made up 38 percent of

BY ALANNA NASH

der



Shania Twain came on strong in the '90s. But now, like almost every other contemporary country female, she's having trouble measuring up to her past success.

The Gender Gap

the year-end sales charts; by 1990, the era of the male Hat Acts, they had dropped to 12 percent.

"There had been periods where women were really doing great stuff compared to everybody else," says Bandit Records chief Evelyn Shriver. One such period included the '80s, when country featured Reba McEntire, The Judds, K.T. Oslin, Rosanne Cash, Emmylou Harris, Mary Chapin Carpenter, Patty Loveless, Kathy Mattea, Paulette Carlson of Highway 101 and others.

"Those women ended up selling real numbers, too," says Shriver, "and suddenly it was like, 'Wow! Maybe we've been concentrating on the wrong things.'"

In the early '90s, though, the charts became overrun by a glut of galoots, many of them manufactured male stars who quickly cooled. Cool women still emerged on occasion – Trisha Yearwood, Martina McBride, Pam

Tillis and Suzy Bogguss among them. But instead of gaining on the advances of the '80s, women seemed to drop deeper into the background.

Then suddenly women thrust forward again: Faith Hill and LeAnn Rimes exploded out of the gate, and they were followed by Shania Twain, Lee Ann Womack, the Dixie Chicks, Jo Dee Messina, Terri Clark and SHEDDAISY.

Despite the dominant advances of the late '90s, though, in 2003 women once again make up barely 12 percent of the charts. A check of the singles charts one week in May found only four female singers – Martina McBride, Jessica Andrews, Jo Dee Messina and Sara Evans – with hits in the Top 30.

What happened?

A difficult question to answer, and no one thing is to blame. But once Hill and Twain reset the bar for pop-crossover sales, the freedom that women once enjoyed for quirky expression seemed to dry up: Nearly every female was expected to aim for the pop-crossover market.

What's more, Nashville's record companies have today either consolidated into corporate amalgams or closed shop. That means the pressure is

on to routinely hit high sales numbers, resulting in a kind of homogenized sound that appeals to pop fans as well as the country audience.

But not even Hill and Twain can match their former sales numbers. Hill's two-million-selling *Cry* hasn't generated near the heat of her previous album, the eight-million-selling *Breathe*. And Twain's two-disc *Up!*, despite brisk opening sales, hasn't sustained the kind of frenzied interest as her previous two CDs.

Just why is uncertain, but theories abound.

"I wonder if Shania and Faith's diminished presence has more to do with the pop format's tiring of them than the country format," says Charlie Cook of the Westwood One radio network.

As RCA Nashville president Joe Galante points out, the pop format has been concentrating on hip-hop and rock. "That makes it tougher when you're a Nashville artist making a record expecting pop support to be there and it isn't," he says.

There's also the issue of how Hill and Twain may have alienated their core country audience, says Cook. "Faith made an album that didn't look at her country base strongly enough. Her suc-



Tammy Cochran



Deana Carter



Jo Dee Messina



Jessica Andrews



Martina McBride

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The Gender Gap

cess came out of country last time, and maybe she pushed the envelope more than she even realized she was pushing it."

Perhaps Hill and Twain, in striving for pop success, tried to be too many things to too many people. And it's not just those two top stars who suffered from a desire to expand their audiences beyond country fans. Chet Flippo, editorial director of CMT.com, says his favorite female singers of the last decade – including Trisha Yearwood and Lee Ann Womack – also changed their sounds in search of crossover success. "All of them seem to have gone away from country in favor of experimentation with pop," Flippo says. "I don't know if there was a conscious effort to cross over, which is obviously not working, or if they just lost their way."

Jim Ed Norman, head of Warner Bros. Nashville, is quick to defend his artist, Faith Hill, and others. "An artist can either do exactly what she did last time, or she

"Now the standard for women is just to be a babe, somebody who can get a cosmetics deal," says Shriver. "Just look at what's coming out. It's more about the look and the imaging and the marketing than the music. We have enough cover girls. Where are the Emmylou Harris?"

Still, one of the youngest hitmakers, 19-year-old Jessica Andrews, has conducted her career with the wisdom of a veteran, sometimes taking two years between albums. "I don't try to make music to be pop or country," she says. "I write songs that come from my heart and nothing less. It is just about making an album of the best music I can."

Faith Hill would doubtless say the same, and yet country radio and some country listeners have punished her for stepping too far outside the format, something Jo Dee Messina sees as dangerous. "If we start to pick on our own people, especially the successful ones, and then sit back and say, 'Well, our industry is getting smaller,' we've only done it to ourselves."

"Look," says Shriver, putting a finer point on the topic, "we are an industry that will eat its young just for the sake of having something to say on morning radio."

Perhaps the best example of that is the

brouhaha over Natalie Maines' infamous statement on President Bush and the war in Iraq. The Dixie Chicks may have been the biggest female act of the year, but they hit a landmine with that comment, stalling them at radio and temporarily affecting sales of their six-million-selling *Home* album. Talk radio, it seemed, kept the controversy pumping when most fans were willing to forgive them, even as the genre desperately needed an act with such verve, appeal and musicianship.

"If we are all unique and individual, then there is room for all of us," asserts Deana Carter, whose career is back on track after derailing some years back. "The Chicks are awesome at keeping it spicy, and you need spice. That's how we keep creating music."

This shakeout aside, the genre seems to be suffering from what Flippo calls a lack of female leadership. "There is a vacuum in some sense among women singers right now, a voice of reason," he says, "and a terrific 'A list' artist who can lead women and be an example."

But, insists the Country Music Hall of Fame's Jay Orr, such things are cyclical and there's no reason for panic. The current status is merely a "correction" for a mass signing of women a couple of years back

"If we start to pick on our own people, especially the successful ones, and then sit back and say, 'Well, our industry is getting smaller,' we've only done it to ourselves."

can take a chance," he says. "When you take a chance, there's always the possibility that you have gone too far. But you never know until you do, and I welcome and revere the artists who push that line. That's what Thomas Jefferson did in his field, or Mozart and Beethoven in theirs."

Veteran artist manager Larry Fitzgerald agrees. "I don't think making crossover music is a bad thing," he says. "If we can get more people interested in our format, come on. We're talking about selling records and tickets and developing artists, and I don't think anybody has had the impact on the world like some of our female country artists – the Chicks, Shania and Faith. If they can do that within or outside the format, God bless 'em. There's always going to be plenty of pure country artists to keep the format strong."

Perhaps Nashville has put too much emphasis on imaging, marketing and everything that goes into star-making.



J. SCOTT WYNN/RETNA

Dixie Chicks



TAMMIE ARBOY/AF

Jennifer Hanson



SCOTT DOWNE/CELEBRITY PHOTO

Trisha Yearwood

that included Jennifer Day, Susan Ashton, Alecia Elliott, Shannon Brown and Julie Reeves, none of whom lit up the charts. Women listeners have always craved "woman-to-woman" songs, but they also like hearing (and looking at) Tim McGraw, Keith Urban and Kenny Chesney.

"Seems like you always end up with [too much of] whatever seems like a good idea," says Orr. "About three years ago, radio began to say, 'Well, male listeners aren't being served.' The space available for male singers seemed to be more wide open at that time, and labels saw an opportunity to give us this crop of male singers."

As such, not as many young women have been in development at record companies of late, though such promising performers as Carolyn Dawn Johnson, Kellie Coffey and Jennifer Hanson have already generated success. But overall, the labels have not done a spectacular job of distinguishing their new female acts.

"There are so many singers coming out of the box, it's confusing for me as an artist to keep them all straight, so I can imagine how it is for the public," says Tammy Cochran, one of the brighter lights who has yet to achieve her full potential on the charts. "It's hard to set yourself apart from them and make yourself stand out in some sort of way."

One of the ugly truths of the business is that many label heads believe that men have careers, while women have songs. And where females are concerned, labels are sometimes cautious to invest the \$750,000 to \$1 million it takes to bring a young singer to the marketplace.

Deana Carter believes that wherever the music goes, females will be a vital part of it, even if they get second billing. "I'm always excited to see new things that women in music are doing across the board. I mean, it was Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, and she did everything he did but backwards in three-inch heels, you know?"

For her recent comeback, Carter was lucky to ally herself with BMG's Galante, who has always believed in women, bringing both The Judds and K.T. Oslin to the fore in previous eras.

"There have always been great female singers, and they have always made up a good percentage of the format," he says. "Right now the belief is women can't happen. We're just going to have to prove them wrong."

Breaking the Glass Ceiling



Despite decades of sexism, female artists have overcome formidable obstacles to reach the highest levels of stardom. Who'll be the next queen?

When Mary Chapin Carpenter first entered country music, someone called her a "girl singer." She took it as an insult. However, the pejorative label had been around for decades, tracing back to package shows of the '40s and '50s, which usually featured one female performer amid a large cast of male stars.

That the label lasted at least into the '80s suggested that the industry still didn't expect much from female country performers. Labels aside, though, country's women have not only survived and distinguished themselves, they have triumphed. The token "girl singer" of yes-

teryear is the headliner of today, and now, instead of some Stetson-topped cowpoke, it's a woman who holds the record of selling the most copies of a single album.

While women have historically occupied fewer slots than men on any given

Breaking the Glass Ceiling

chart, Nashville is well past the days when label heads believed women didn't sell records and concert tickets. Despite the inroads cut by Kitty Wells and Patsy Cline, Tammy Wynette was perhaps country music's first true female superstar when "Stand By Your Man" and "D-I-V-O-R-C-E" catapulted her career in the late '60s. Dolly Parton broke a record in the late '70s for the most money offered for a Vegas run. Then Reba McEntire set a

new standard in the '80s with her across-the-board successes.

new standard in the '80s with her across-the-board successes.

In the '90s, Shania Twain shattered the ceiling for record sales, and the Dixie Chicks followed, this year racking up the biggest one-day concert take (867,000 tickets totaling \$49 million) in music history – surpassing Madonna, U2, 'N Sync, Paul McCartney and even The Rolling Stones.

For all their unique qualities – beginning with the rock energy of Natalie Maines, and bolstered by the group's formidable songwriting and instrumental skills – the Chicks owe a debt of gratitude to every professional female country musician who came before them. And that's starting with

cousins Sara and Maybelle Carter, who with Sara's husband, A.P. Carter, became known as The Carter Family, the first significant recording stars of the genre.

To be sure, Sara Carter knew her way around an autoharp. But Maybelle changed the sound of popular music forever in crafting the "Carter lick" on the guitar, in which she picked out the melody on the instrument's bass strings and kept rhythm by downstroking the higher ones. The group also conjured the harmony-singing style that dominated all of country music for decades, including Mother

tearful defiance, not only struck a chord with women, but led to Nashville signing other female singers and exploring new imaging and marketing strategies aimed at female listeners.

If women singers were largely underappreciated by the music business, they were nonetheless popular with female fans. As Wells plainly shows, the women who have stood the test of time have been stylists – original artists with instantly recognizable voices and styles.

Patsy Cline was light-years away from Wells in vocal quality; her smooth, sophis-

With sales currently sagging for female artists, the time is ripe for someone new to completely turn our heads again.

Maybelle's subsequent pairing with daughters June, Helen and Anita.

The Carter Family gave rise to a host of string bands, of course, including all-female ensembles such as the Coon Creek Girls, who formed in 1937. But the first solo woman to make her mark in commercial country music was Kitty Wells, the "girl singer" on the Johnnie & Jack show of the '40s.

Wells, who took her name from a Pickard Family song, was a 33-year-old wife and mother when she joined the ranks of female singers who courted the honky-tonk sound. Her 1952 recording "It Wasn't God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels," sung in a strong voice of nearly

ticated, well-modulated alto contrasted sharply with Wells' piercing, pinched soprano. But in a sense, she was her spiritual daughter and then some, a saucy, yet softhearted, take-no-guff woman whose exquisite voice throbbed with barely contained emotion. The leading figure of the Nashville Sound movement of the early '60s, Cline was much mourned and nearly deified after her death in a plane crash in 1963.

In the last years of her life, "the Cline," as she called herself, befriended a young Nashville hopeful named Loretta Lynn. Cline was so generous, her acolyte recalls, as to share even her underwear. ("Them dadgum panties," Lynn once said. "They



The Carter Family, 1955-56



Reba McEntire, 1993



Jeannie Seely, 1971



Kathy Mattea, 1993

were hand-me-downs, because she'd wore 'em forever, too.")

But while Lynn never considered herself the singer Cline was ("There's never been nobody before her or after her sing as great as Patsy Cline"), she picked up her torch. In many ways, Lynn – arguably the most successful traditional female star – has served as a link between bedrock and contemporary country thought. Her sharp-tongued, social-minded songs "The Pill" and "Don't Come Home A-Drinkin' (With Lovin' on Your Mind)" claim independence for the protagonist of the song, if not for women in general. With her distinctive, hill-country accent and her ability to convey strong emotion in storytelling style, she is the personification of country music, an icon more than deserving of the motion picture (*Coal Miner's Daughter*) based on her autobiography and incredible backwoods roots.

Lynn would inspire a passel of would-be performers, including Naomi Judd, who teamed with her teenage daughter, Wynonna, in the '80s as the irresistible Judds – and also Patty Loveless, Lynn's distant Kentucky cousin, who would keep the traditional country sound on the radio long after most women had abandoned it.

But Loveless would also be molded by Porter Wagoner and Dolly Parton, who took her under wing after first meeting her as a 14-year-old schoolgirl. Parton

also had first come to Nashville as a teen, but her intention was to stay. On June 1, 1964, the day after graduating high school, 18-year-old Dolly Parton moved to Music City from East Tennessee, toting her songs and belongings in a cardboard suitcase. Along with Lynn and Tammy Wynette, she would become one of the era's defining female voices and writers, covering such rural topics as daddy's working boots, mama's kettle and, in her unforgettable "Coat of Many Colors," the pride of ingenuity, the sting of ostracism and the magic of believing.

In the late '70s, she helped lead the country-pop movement (her glorious pop ballad "I Will Always Love You" has had numerous revivals, eventually branching out into movies on both the big and small screens. Indefatigable today at age 57, she continues to make viable and even Grammy-winning music, mostly by redefining her mountain roots.

If any Nashville woman can escape the ageism trap, it is Parton. She may be the matriarch of the format today, keeping herself young not only in appearance (by strategic nips and tucks, to which she freely admits), but also by her ambition to stay in the business. In 2002, when asked what cartoon superhero she would most like to be, she responded, "Probably Spider-Man, because he is so hot – and I want to be again."



Jeannie Riley, 1968

COUNTRY MUSIC FOUNDATION



Lorrie Morgan, 1994

TAMMIE ABBOTO



Patti Page, mid-'60s

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Breaking the Glass Ceiling

By the late '60s and early '70s, Dolly and Loretta dominated the country charts along with a third woman, Tammy Wynette, a Mississippian who had known almost nothing but hardship and who sang in a voice that threatened to break into a sob with every note. Paired with husband George Jones, the two became the most influential male-female duet team in country history. But on her own, Wynette was the primary exponent of "woman-to-woman" songs. The first woman in country music to earn a platinum album, she won a fiercely loyal following among long-suffering females, which she would hand off to Reba McEntire and Lorrie Morgan in the '80s and '90s.

The '70s would be a shake-out period for country's women performers, as the music became more stylistically diverse and flirted more with pop influences. The teenage Tanya Tucker brought a Lolita-ish sensuality to the genre, while Emmylou Harris managed to pay homage to the genre's starkest tradition and also file a progressive edge on its sound, becoming a sort of

iconic, hippie earth mother to generations to follow.

Still, the dominant woman of the '70s was Barbara Mandrell, a multi-instrumentalist and showbiz dynamo who infused white-bread country with a stiff shot of R&B. With her 1973 hit, "The Midnight Oil," she also jolted staid country radio with frank lyrics of women's sexuality, a theme she would continue to explore.

It took a spunky Oklahoman named Reba McEntire to put an end to Mandrell's era, and the redhead would reign as the most successful female performer of the '80s and '90s. At first a trad-country stalwart, McEntire later realized that to attain the goals of her lofty ambition she would need to broaden her sound. But in adding the pop elements that would make her both a musical icon and a household name, she never quit singing songs aimed largely at her own sex.

"I'm trying to sing songs for women, to say for them what they can't say for themselves," she once said. She succeeded.

In the '90s, as the male Hat Acts dominated the airwaves, women found themselves hard-pressed to make a dent in the charts. But country was primed for diversity like never before. In 1995, Shania Twain recorded her second

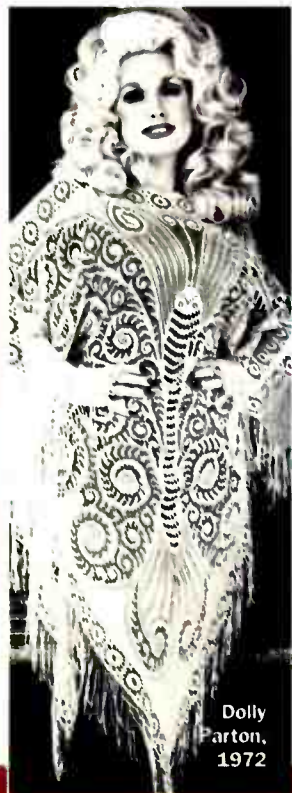
album, *The Woman in Me*, a heavily produced mix of perky pop hooks and dance music, dressed with the most superficial of country licks. With sales of more than 10 million copies, it quickly became the biggest-selling album by a female country artist, putting her in a sales pantheon with pop artists Alanis Morissette, Whitney Houston, Mariah Carey and Carole King.

Twain inspired imitators, and Nashville producers filled the bins with peppy ear candy. For a brief moment in 1996, a 13-year-old with a stunning grown-up voice forced country music to look to its roots as LeAnn Rimes issued "Blue," a retro-sounding song originally written for Patsy Cline. Rimes became the first country performer to win a Grammy for Best New Artist in nearly 30 years.

But shortly after her fairy-tale rise to stardom — in 1997, she had three albums certified multiplatinum — she began to sink in a mire of schlock. Soon the teeny-hopperization of country was wholly underway.

Which brings us to today. With sales currently sagging for female artists, the time is ripe for someone new to completely turn our heads again.

Who will be Nashville's next queen? At the moment, the crown is up for grabs. — Alanna Nash ★



Dolly Parton, 1972



The Judds, 1988



Jan Howard, 1971



LeAnn Rimes, 2003

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Tracy Byrd has a happy houseful of three kids, a hit he doesn't care if you call 'novelty' and a reputation as a straight arrow he'd like to clarify. And a comeback that came when he broke free of his traditional roots

Dad Not Trad

There's little question the living room in Tracy Byrd's Texas home belongs to his children. There's not a platinum plaque or award trophy to be found. But against the wall are three toy chests overflowing with dolls representing *Toy Story*, *Shrek* and Barney. And hooked up to the television, next to a sizeable stack of Disney DVDs, is a karaoke machine complete with dozens of ready-to-sing CDs.

His three kids have already developed catholic tastes, singing along with everything from Britney Spears and Nelly to the Dixie Chicks and Faith Hill. But you won't find them singing any of Tracy Byrd's hits.

"I'm second-rate stuff around here," Byrd says with a laugh. "It's a little humbling."

Even if the toughest audiences are sometimes closest to home, Byrd's not hurting for attention. He's in the midst of a genuine comeback. After being written off by most of Nashville as yesterday's news, he came back last year with the chart-topping "Ten Rounds With Jose Cuervo,"

proving lightning can strike twice.

Now his recent single "The Truth About Men" and the album of the same name look poised to prove it can happen three times. With Andy Griggs, Blake Shelton and Montgomery Gentry singing along, "The Truth About Men" is definitely a party song.

But it's more than that to Byrd. To him, the single's success signals the conclusion of a sobering series of reality checks.

"There was definitely a time I thought about giving up," Byrd says. "I had moments where I thought I'd be a nostalgia act, just touring off my old hits. And it

hurt, because my goal was always steadiness and longevity. I always patterned myself after my heroes, guys like George Strait and Merle Haggard, and wanted the long careers they had. Early on, anytime I mentioned that people would say, 'Boy, those kind of careers are hard to come by these days.' And I found that out the hard way. My career lost momentum – and then it nearly stopped."

Heading into the millennium, Byrd found himself increasingly at odds with country music's move

towards a more polished pop sound. Across five albums for MCA, he had built a reputation as one of the biggest stars of the neo-traditionalist movement. Even if that "neo-traditionalist" tag initially seemed limiting, Byrd made the most of it; tunes like "Watermelon Crawl" and "Lifestyles of the Not So Rich and Famous" revealed a lighthearted, fun-loving regular guy, while smash hits like "Keeper of the Stars" and "Holdin' Heaven" established him as a romantic, and utterly believable, balladeer.

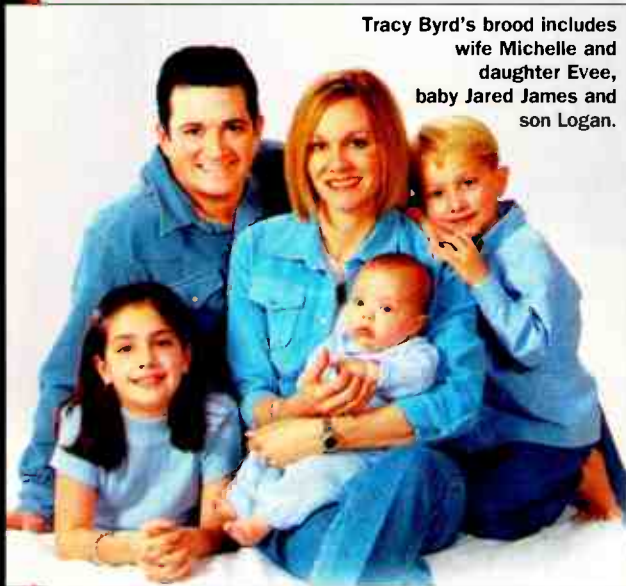
Yet by 1998's *I'm From the Country*, Byrd found himself not just on the wrong side of country's pop crossroads, but also increasingly at odds with his label. After working his way out of his MCA contract with a greatest-hits collection in 1999, he vowed to open a new chapter at a new label. RCA, by retooling and rethinking his traditionalist approach.

"I realized I had to open my mind musically," Byrd says. "I simply needed to be less traditional. Before that, I resisted anything but the most traditional country songs I could find. I just felt like that was what I had been put there to do and what came naturally to me. And it worked for a while. But things had changed."

Rather than delivering the change-up he'd promised RCA, 1999's *It's About Time* served up more of the same ol' same ol'. "It was probably one of the most 'country' country records of the last five years," he says now, in retrospect. "It was a huge mistake."

For his second RCA album, Byrd finally delivered on the promise. "I felt like my back was against the wall and a firing

Tracy Byrd's brood includes wife Michelle and daughter Eevee, baby Jared James and son Logan.



BY ANDY LANGER



So

"I don't think I've sold out as much as I've wised up," says Byrd.

COURTESY/ALC

squad was in behind me," he says of the meticulous search for songs and the resulting *Ten Rounds* sessions. Poking fun at "boy-band crap," Byrd and longtime Beaumont associate Mark Chesnutt hit the charts with "A Good Way to Get on My Bad Side." And while the moving, Latin-tinged follow-up, "Just Let Me Be in Love," proved Byrd was serious about changing his tune, it was *Ten Rounds'* title track that returned Byrd to the charts' top slot.

"I don't care if you call it a novelty song," Byrd says. "It used to bother me, but on radio and in my shows, the funny songs really seem to have a shelf life. It just took me a while to see that those kind of songs are my niche. Everyone has their thing. And for too long, I may have been staring mine in the face and trying to run away from it instead of embracing it. When things went south, maybe it's because I'd stopped giving my fans what they really wanted."

With *The Truth About Men*, Byrd wound up with a collection of tunes every bit as fun and anthemic as titles like "Drinkin' Bone" and "How'd I Wind Up in Jamaica" suggest. "We got



JOE HADDOCK

Byrd gets a little help from his friends (left to right) Blake Shelton, Andy Griggs, Eddie Montgomery and Troy Gentry while filming his "The Truth About Men" video.

loosen up. The bottom line is that silly and stupid makes us feel good."

"The Truth About Men" also plays off one of Byrd's strongest suits: his ability to find himself in songs others have written. Byrd has never been apologetic about his sweet tooth for what he considers three of life's finest pastimes: hunting, fishing and partying. Even so, Byrd believes people give him too much credit for being one of

the opportunity for Byrd to enjoy more good times, even if he admits he's veering off the trad-country path.

"I don't think I've sold out as much as I've wised up," says Byrd, who admits that three years ago he would've resisted throwing in the Van Halen and ZZ Top covers that are now highlights of his live shows. "It finally become evident to me it wasn't going to come around to straight traditional country again, and if I was gonna play I better get back in the game.

"It just occurred to me that fighting tooth and nail to cut records that sound like the honky-tonk albums from the '70s or '80s is a losing battle. I don't know that we've been less traditional. We just found little edges to carry it forward."

Truth be told, back in his Beaumont living room, perhaps the last thing on Byrd's mind is the traditional vs. pop debate. Instead he's worrying about the infant sleeping upstairs, the landscapers working out front, and the fact that his album's success means he'll spend much of his year away from his family. But he wants you to know he's not complaining.

"It's sweet to be back," Byrd says. "To have hits in an industry that I know more about now than I did the first time is amazing. The first time, I didn't know how tough an industry this is. I was young and just out there doing it. I didn't care why. It's awesome to know you're in it because you love it. To know that and still have hits is that much sweeter. I definitely appreciate what I have." *

Tracy Byrd

"I'm sometimes viewed as prim and proper, clean and straight, when I'm not."

great songs because everybody knew we were back," says Byrd. "It's hard to find good songs when you're down in the gutter. Publishers don't want to throw them at somebody that isn't on a roll."

Though some at RCA wondered aloud if "The Truth About Men" wasn't too tongue-in-cheek for a country glued to the war on cable news, Byrd says he fought hard for it to be the album's introductory single. He believes it hit pay dirt for the same reason "Ten Rounds With Jose Cuervo" worked so well on the heels of the Sept. 11 tragedy.

"This is still America," Byrd says. "And one thing we like to do in America is party and have a good time. Everyone lives for the weekend. We enjoy our lives. Both times, I figured people were ready for a party song. Music is an escape – whether it's to a somber place where you can get inside your emotions or to take you to a place where you can

country's straightest arrows.

"I enjoy being known as a nice guy, but I think because I'm so public with my wife and kids I'm sometimes viewed as prim and proper, clean and straight when I'm not," says Byrd, who's also known for giving back to the community with his Homecoming Weekend in Beaumont – a three-day fundraiser full of fishing, golf and music that's resulted in the Tracy Byrd Hyperbaric Medicine and Wound Care Center at a children's hospital.

"I'm a God-fearing man, but I'm not a Bible thumper – I love to drink beer and party. I can get crazy with the best of them. I've done meet-and-greets after having two or three beers on the bus. They'll say, 'You've been drinking?' And I say, 'Sure, I've been drinking – you haven't?' I feel like life's too short not to have a good time."

There's little question the success of "Truth About Men" should provide

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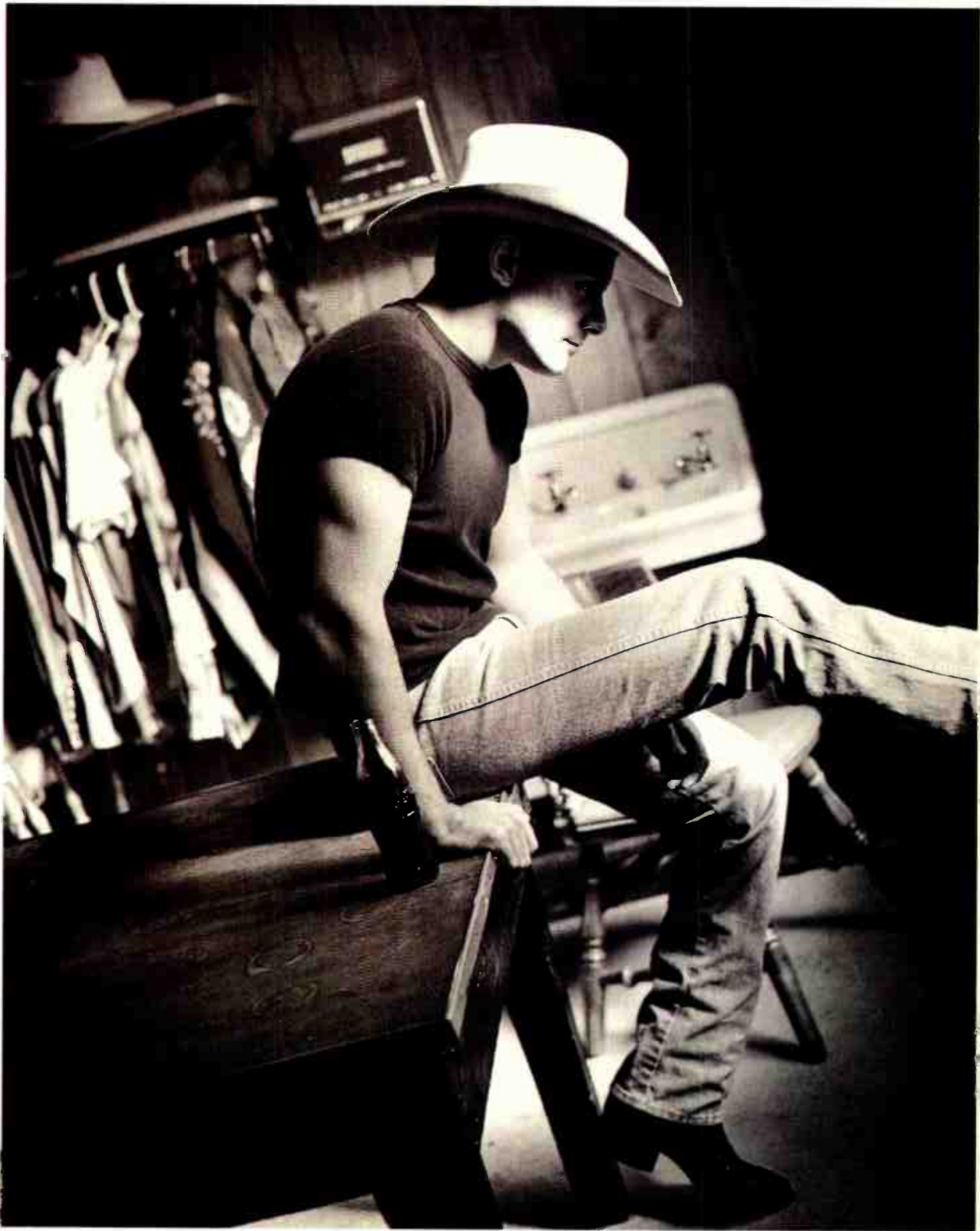
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GREAT EXPECTATIONS

The pressure is on. Brad Paisley is huddled in a Nashville studio, putting the finishing touches on his highly anticipated third album, *Mud on the Tires*. Timing is crucial, as all the big marketing plans are aimed at getting the album out by late July. But Paisley only has a few days to devote to finishing the album between the obligations of his high-profile spot as part of Brooks & Dunn's Neon Circus tour.

Moreover, Paisley's already lost three or four hours' time due to some severe thunderstorms moving through the area. Now that he can get back to work, what's he doing? Noodling around on his guitar, laughing and trading increasingly bizarre licks with burly, middle-aged guitarist Redd Volkaert.

Paisley, Volkaert and producer Frank Rogers are laboring over an instrumental, one of two featured on the new CD. Paisley is seated in the center of the room in front of the mixing console, facing Volkaert, who resembles a 19th-century sea captain with his Quaker-style reddish beard, blue short-billed cap, little gold hoop earring and husky, tattooed forearms.

Later, when asked if Paisley could cut it as a studio musician in Nashville, Volkaert doesn't have to pause before he answers. "Easily," he flatly declares.

"He's such a great player," continues the former guitarist for Merle Haggard. "To me, it's inspiring to see a guy that young who's that eat-up with a guitar. Plus, he's doing great as a commercial success."

Paisley, who played lead guitar on his first two albums, is well known as a string whiz on Music Row. A lightning-fast picker, he's mastered all the pulls, bends and pops that define the classic country guitar sound,

A West Virginian with high hopes, Brad Paisley is a triple threat – master guitarist, vocalist and songwriter – who just may be the savior of traditional country music

and he's not shy about throwing in clusters of notes that zip by like a hail of electrified Earl Scruggs banjo licks.

But Paisley is, of course, much more than a hotshot guitar player. As fans have learned since his 1999 debut album, *Who Needs Pictures*, he's a triple threat as a formidable guitarist, hit songwriter and an appealing high-baritone singer.

He's also a keen student of country music history who names Buck Owens' *Live at Carnegie Hall* as his favorite album; he counts veterans Little Jimmy Dickens and Bill Anderson as good friends: and he was genuinely choked up when he was named the Grand Ole Opry's youngest current member in 2001.

He also happens to be a modest and polite young man with a sharp, dry wit. All of this has made him the veritable poster child for traditional country, which means that more is expected of him.

Small wonder that George Jones said in a letter to Paisley that was read at his Grand Ole Opry induction: "I am counting on you to carry on the tradition and make folks sit up and listen to what good country music should sound like."

Talk about who's gonna fill their shoes. Talk about pressure.

At his best, the 30-year-old West Virginian combines the blue-collar songcraft of Alan Jackson with the guitar chops and quick wit of Vince Gill. Yet for all his promise and early career success,

BY PAUL KINGSBURY

Paisley is undeniably at a career crossroads. He's well known enough to have already developed a fervent fan base, but he's not a one-word household name like Garth, Faith or Shania.

A lot is definitely riding on this third album.

Paisley downplays the pressure in his characteristically low-key way. "You're trying to win as many people over as you can," he says, "and balance that with making records that I love to make."

Despite his unassuming manner, *Mud on the Tires* suggests a substantial leap forward. There's more variety, with the themes ranging from his trademark humorous observations on romance to distinctly moodier offerings, such as a darkly clever story song with a moral, "Fine Cuban Cigars," and an atmospheric lost-love ballad called "Somebody Knows You Now."

Paisley's vocals show a new maturity, too, with well-placed falsetto touches and a newfound grittiness in his lower register on the more reflective numbers. His masterful reading of the aching Vern Gosdin ballad "Is It Raining at Your



Paisley laughs it up with two of his heroes, Bill Anderson and Little Jimmy Dickens, who have now become Opry buddies and guest vocalists on his new album.

several of them. "Some people struggle at it, and some people have the gift. And because his singing style is understated — he doesn't oversing anything — I think it's been overlooked a little."

Something that has not been overlooked over the past year is Paisley's natural ease on camera. He seems right at home in the comical, star-filled videos for "I'm Gonna Miss Her (The Fishin' Song)" and "Celebrity," rubbing shoulders with big-name guests like ESPN sportscaster Dan Patrick and Jerry Springer in the former, and *Seinfeld*'s Jason Alexander and William

ity translates very well on the screen. I think that somebody will discover somewhere along the line that he's a potential host for an awards show."

Despite the increased air time and positive reviews for his video and TV appearances, Paisley is quick to point out that acting is *not* his new focus. "I have absolutely no desire to be an actor," he says. "I'm a guitar player first. I like to play the guitar, I like to write songs and sing. As far as I would go with acting is being in a parody of something or a music video. I feel like I can do it in an adequate fashion when I have to, but for the most part it does not appeal to me. It's harder work than what I do."

Paisley has intimate knowledge of what it takes to be a Hollywood actor because he's now married to one. On March 15, he and actress Kimberly Williams (the co-star of *According to Jim*, and his domestic antagonist in the video for "I'm Gonna Miss Her") were married in a small, private ceremony in Malibu, Calif.

To accommodate two thriving careers, the newlyweds currently split their time

Brad Paisley "I just need a couple of songs in a row that would make people take a little more notice, maybe. I may never get 'em. Doesn't matter."

House" may be his single best vocal performance on record yet.

If nothing else, the impressive slate of guest performers on the new album is likely to arouse curiosity. In addition to Volkaert on guitar, guest vocalists include Alison Krauss, Vince Gill, George Jones, Bill Anderson, Little Jimmy Dickens, even comedians Jim Belushi and Dan Aykroyd. "It's so much cooler than having a couple of backup singers from town singing *yeah, yeah, yeah*," Paisley says. "Why not get the Blues Brothers?"

After he finishes with Volkaert, Paisley instructs the engineer to cue up a nearly finished track, the hushed, minor-key ballad, "Somebody Knows You Now." Written by Paisley, it's an impressive song with a subtle lyrical touch and an emotional payoff.

"I just think he is truly one of the most gifted songwriters out there," says Rogers, who has produced every track Paisley has recorded — and co-written

"Captain Kirk" Shatner in the latter.

Paisley has also appeared twice on the ABC sitcom *According to Jim*, starring Jim Belushi, and has made additional appearances on *Star Search*, *Jeopardy* and as co-host of CMT's *100 Greatest Songs of Country Music* concert. He's expected to have a supporting role in a TBS television movie based on his No. 1 hit "He Didn't Have to Be." For now, the movie remains in development. "That's what I hear," Paisley deadpans, clearly not holding his breath for the project to materialize — and after all, he's already got enough on his plate to keep him occupied.

The head of his record company, RCA Label Group chairman Joe Galante, says Paisley's natural charisma will play a key role as his career develops. "I think the picture of what becomes an Entertainer of the Year is taking place," says Galante. "He's a very funny guy. He's a very handsome guy. He's very self-effacing. That humil-

narily equally between homes in Nashville and Los Angeles, and they make a big effort to be together as much as their schedules will allow.

"Right now I'm in the middle of the first time we've ever gone three weeks apart," he says. "Would you believe that? In two years of knowing her, we've never gone more than 9 or 10 days apart, and we're about to go three weeks. That's pretty dang good."

Kimberly Williams wasn't a country fan before she met Paisley on a blind date. "She gets it now," says Paisley, "to the extent that her song choice that she walked down the aisle to was 'Walk Through This World With Me.' An African-American gospel choir sang that, and that was something else. Then there was our first dance, which Redd Volkaert played and sang, and we danced to that at our wedding."

She still has more to learn, though. When his wife met Vince Gill, she told Paisley, "Man, what a nice guy!" Only she

had no idea the affable fellow was also country music royalty. "I said, 'You don't get it,'" Paisley recalls, cracking up as he relates the story. "That guy there has won more CMAs than anybody in history! And she said, 'What's a CMA?'"

When thinking about his own career, Paisley admits he pays attention to Gill. "I've always liked how Vince seems the type who's into music," says Paisley. "Vince is the type that if I were to call him up tonight and say, 'There's one other guitar part that needs to be on this record,' he'd get in his car and come over here now."

"In getting to know him a little bit I try to be real careful about that. The farthest I go with it is on the *Opry*. There've been two different occasions on TV when we've sung songs together and picked: When he was hosting one night and when I was hosting the other. We were on the same televised portion and just decided to play. That was good."

Gill was a talented but struggling artist when he broke out of the pack with "When I Call Your Name" in 1990. In 1992, he began his long stint hosting the CMA Awards. He went multiplatinum the following year.

One song can start that kind of snowball effect for a recording artist. Is Paisley just one killer song away from hitting Vince Gill's level of sales and name recognition?

"I'm probably two songs away from it," Paisley says. "I need just a couple songs in a row that would make people take a little more notice, maybe. I may never get 'em. Doesn't matter."

As Paisley knows, country music used to support careers that lasted decades. Today, recording careers can fade much more quickly. Asked how long he thinks he might have in the spotlight, he turns pensive.

"I don't know," he says. "Man, I probably have the worst vantage point of anybody for that. I'd like to do this for a while. But if I can't, then I'll just write songs, play guitar on sessions – whatever people have for me."

Then he lightens up and chuckles. "And you know," he smiles, "go to the mailbox."

True enough. Though he is unfailingly modest about his considerable talents, Paisley knows deep down that, one way or another, he's likely to be receiving royalty checks for a long time to come. *



TONY FRIPSKUG/MEDIA

(Clockwise from above) Paisley enlists the help of colorful TV talk show host Jerry Springer for his video "I'm Gonna Miss Her (The Fishin' Song)"; wails on guitar at a concert; and pops up on TV with appearances on *Jeopardy!* and *According to Jim*, starring Jim Belushi; offstage, it's a glamorous life with his new bride, actress Kimberly Williams.



MIKE QUASTELLA/IMAGE.COM



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TOUR/ALAMY

Summer Passion

The year-round tomato simply can't match the sweet perfection of the homegrown variety

For millions of weekend farmers, hope springs anew every spring with the arrival of new vegetable plants. The annual parade of promise begins to assemble about mid-April, and by May garden centers and farmer's markets are fields of dreams. Row upon row of tiny green plants stretch as far as the eye can see. With a devoted effort, a little bit of skill and a touch of good luck, in just a few months time they will yield a bountiful harvest of cucumbers, okra, peppers, yellow squash, zucchini and beans.

Then there's the most glorious bounty of all – homegrown tomatoes.

At the Nashville Farmer's Market, I can walk right by the okra and peppers, and I hardly give the yellow squash and zucchini a second glance. Tomato plants, however, I cannot resist.

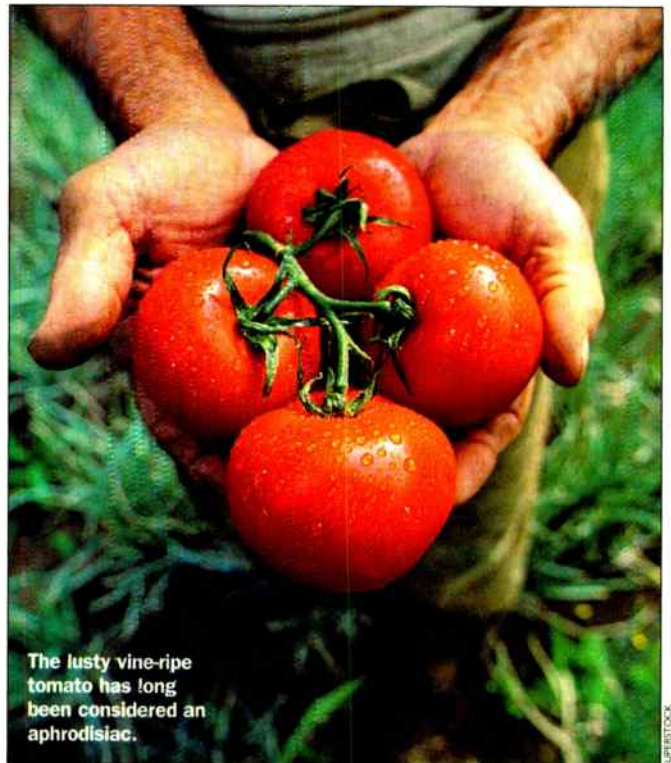
Maybe it's their names, printed on small plastic sticks inserted into the dirt of each plant. There are bragging rights announced by Big Boy and Better Boy, the solemn Bradley, his romantic counterpart Juliet, and the fetching Pink Girl. There's Brandywine, an immigrant from Amish farms up north, and three macho men: Beefmaster, Ramapo and OG 50 Whopper. There's Market Pride and Mountain Pride; Jet Star and Red Star; Red Pear and Yellow Pear; Patio, Pixie, Tiny Tim and Small Fry.

By turns boastful, flirty, coy, witty, commanding, charming and intriguing, the clever monikers for the tomato plants distinguish them from their mundane colleagues, Mr. Cucumber and Ms. Bean.

Maybe it is the ambiguous nature of the tomato – a fruit, not a vegetable after all – that makes its mysterious history so seductive. Indigenous to the Andes, it was domesticated in Mexico, where it was discovered by early explorers and brought back to Europe about 1523. Thanks to its membership in the deadly nightshade family, many believed it to be poisonous; conversely, it also came to be regarded as a powerful aphrodisiac. Isn't that the way love is?

The seeds of my passion for homegrown tomatoes were planted in my childhood, right in my father's yearly backyard garden. He might allow a row or two of radishes, but most of the garden was devoted to tomatoes.

From my bedroom window, I could see the small yellow blossoms that sprouted where the fruit would eventually appear. As they grew taller, my father pounded wooden stakes into the ground beside each plant, tying up the main stem with strips of cloth that had once been my mother's dress or our bathroom curtains. My father always ate the first ripe tomato of the summer, sometime around the Fourth of July, standing right there in the garden. He would always pro-



The lusty vine-ripe tomato has long been considered an aphrodisiac.

SHUTTERSTOCK

nounce it the best tomato ever. In my view, the best way to eat them is still warm from the garden, cut into wedges, and sprinkled with a good, coarse salt.

As the summer went on, the plants grew so heavy with fruit that no amount of tying could keep their spiny green branches from falling over to the earth. By September, the yield became scarce, the hard green tomatoes that clung stubbornly to the vine doomed to early demise. In October, the plants were pulled up and discarded onto the burn pile; in hindsight I see it was probably a melancholy milestone for my father, far more symbolic than I realized as a small child.

There aren't many country songs about tomatoes, but there's at least one great one. Guy Clark trumpets the tomato's praises in a 1983 song called simply "Homegrown Tomatoes." In it he sings:

*Plant 'em in the springtime, eat 'em in the summer
All winter without 'em's a culinary bummer
I forget all about the sweatin' and the diggin'
Every time I go out and pick me a big'un*

Thanks to modern technology, tomatoes are now available all year round, but that's not necessarily a good thing. I think January tomatoes should probably be illegal; I would sooner eat a softball than a hot-house tomato.

In most of America, local homegrown tomatoes usually start coming in about the end of June, and by late July there are bushels and bushels of them. Though Florida and even Alabama tomatoes are trucked up sooner than that, tomato purists pass and wait for the local homegrown to ripen on the vine.

"I like to wait 'til we get 'em in on our place, just 20 minutes from here," says Charles Jackson, a longtime vendor at Nashville's Farmer's Market. "Those are some good eatin' tomatoes. There ain't nothin' like a homegrown tomato, no sir."

— Kay West

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After a lengthy absence, Randy Travis returns to country radio with a surprising comeback — a song about a preacher, a hooker ... and the Lord

second. comi

A funny thing happened to Randy Travis long after he rode off into the sunset. He found himself back and high on the charts again with a simple, powerful song.

But “Three Wooden Crosses,” his surprise hit, is no typical comeback anthem. The first single off Travis’ second Christian album, it’s a song with an overtly religious message, one that, on the surface, would have seemed to have little hope of ever getting airplay on mainstream country radio.

But that’s exactly what happened.

Fans who have loved Travis since he brought traditional sounds back to country music in 1986 no doubt missed his deep twang; before “Crosses,” he hadn’t hit No. 1 since 1994’s “Whisper My Name” topped the country charts. That he should stage a comeback with a gospel song is another astounding feat in a landmark career.

“It’s really unusual for a Christian record to even hit the country charts,” explains *Billboard* chart director Wade Jessen. “It hasn’t happened with a song recorded specifically for a Christian album since Bob Carlisle’s ‘Butterfly Kisses’ in 1997. Randy’s song is doing so well, first and foremost, because it’s a great story. Second, he’s a familiar artist to country listeners. I’m not sure an unknown artist could have had similar results with the same song.”

The renewed success delights Travis. “It’s a bit of a surprise that it turned out to be a pretty big record,” he says. “I haven’t released a single in several years, so it feels pretty good to get onstage and hear that response and think, *Hey, a new hit!* I was going through a little withdrawal.”

Travis did receive critical acclaim when he first entered the Christian music arena with his 2000 album *Inspirational Journey*. Always open about his troubled youth — he’s long credited music and manager/wife Elizabeth for saving him from drugs, alcohol and a life of crime — it was while promoting *Journey* that Travis opened up for the first time about the role faith played in his redemption.

“When I grew up, religion was the farthest thing from my mind,” he says. “I was an alcoholic and a drug addict, and I was arrested I don’t know how many times. I was not a good kid, that’s the truth.”

But in his mid-20s, Travis began reading the Bible. “No one told me to do that, but that really started changing me, just by reading a little every night. It brought a real calm over me. From that point on I decided I was going to get on the right track and stay there.”

Joking that he’s slow to change, Travis says it took another 10 years before he eventually dropped the booze and the drugs. He always kept the Bible, but it wasn’t until 1996 that he and his wife were baptized at a small country church outside of Nashville.

Though it happened quietly, Travis says he wasn’t hiding anything from his fans. “In country music,” he says, “people don’t ask if you’re saved, if you’ve been baptized, how do you stand in your faith. Those questions don’t come up. So people were probably a little surprised when they saw me do a gospel album.”

No doubt they were even more surprised when he agreed to do a second one, but Travis says he never intended his gospel foray to be a one-time shot. *Rise and Shine*, released in October 2002, wowed critics yet again with its masterful story songs (six of which Travis wrote) and timeless, old-school country sound.

Travis was instantly sold on “Three Wooden Crosses” when he heard the demo. “I think ‘Three Wooden Crosses’ is like ‘He Walked on Water,’ a very story-oriented song,” he says. “There is a gospel message in it, but it’s not like it’s hitting you over the head with a sermon.”

At a time when Darryl Worley’s patriotic “Have You Forgotten?” and Toby Keith’s chest-thumping “Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue (The Angry American)” have captured fans’ attention and dominated the charts, Travis’ song — about “a hooker, a preacher, a farmer and a

teacher” whose fates become entwined on a bus — didn’t seem to fit the gung-ho, flag-waving mood of country listeners. His record label, Word, decided to release the song to smaller radio stations that might be more likely to find room for it on their playlists.

They did, and requests started coming in like crazy.

“When that starts happening, other radio stations jump on board,” says Travis. “It made bigger stations in bigger markets think, ‘Maybe this is something we should consider playing, even though it’s a gospel song off a gospel album.’ A lot of them started on it because people were calling them and asking them to play it.”

Now with a fresh hit under his belt, Travis has his eye on the future. Country music will always be his home because, as he jokes, “what else am I gonna do with this voice?” But he’s not finished spreading his brand of gospel, either. “With the friends we have at this record label, my wife and I have decided that this is something we’re going to continue doing.”

— Lisa Zbito



ng

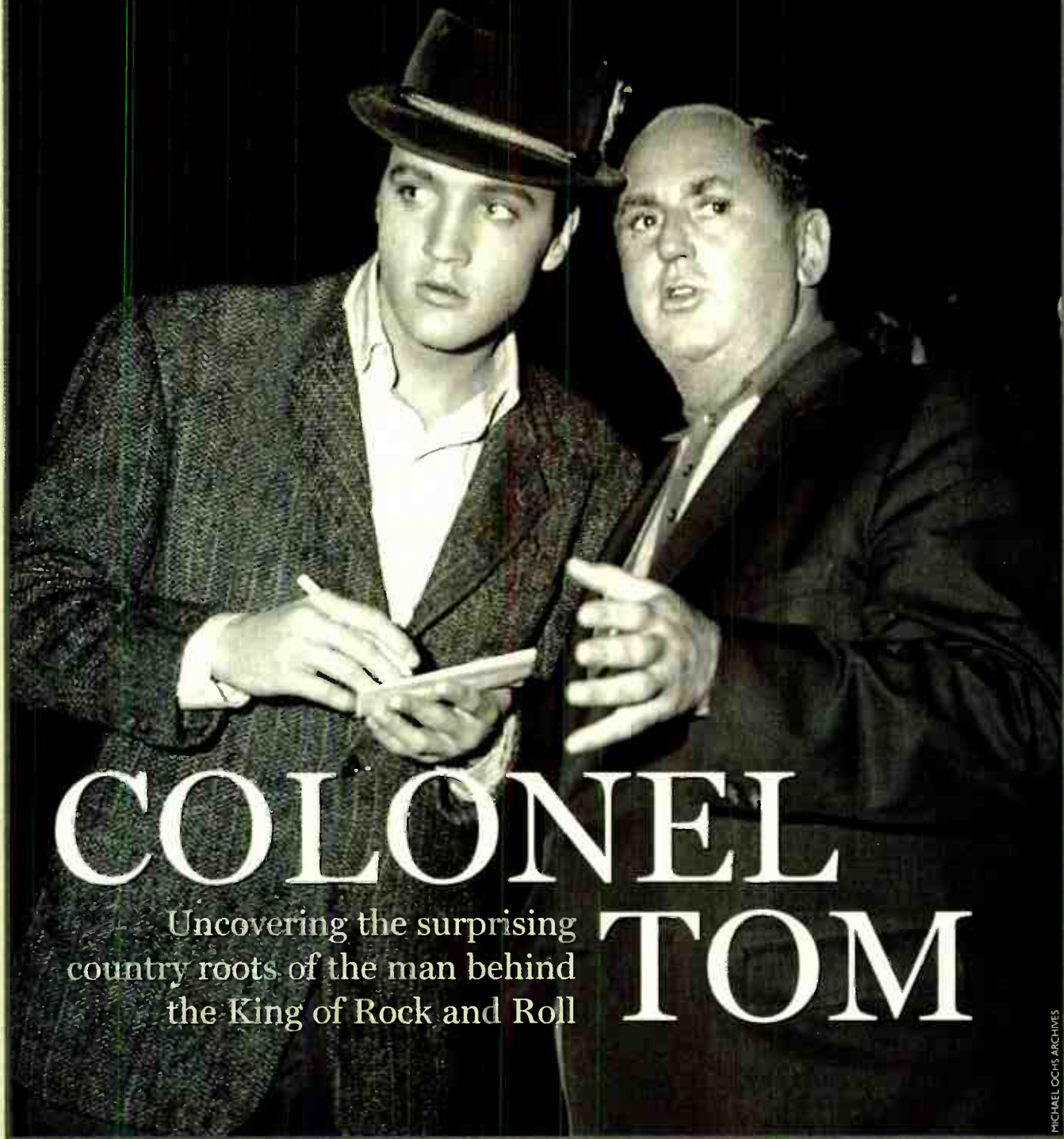
World Radio History



JOHN DOLAN/WARNER BROS.

THE Journal

OF TRADITIONAL COUNTRY MUSIC



COLONEL TOM

Uncovering the surprising
country roots of the man behind
the King of Rock and Roll

PRECIOUS MEMORIES FROM THE COUNTRY MUSIC HALL OF FAME AND MUSEUM



TRAGIC Ending

Patsy Cline was the most famous – but not the only – star lost in the Camden airplane crash

On March 6, 1963, Nashvillians were stunned to see the afternoon newspaper's stark, bold headline: 4 OPRY STARS DIE IN CRASH. The first lines of the story were heartbreakingly blunt: "The remains of four country music personalities, including three nationally known *Grand Ole Opry* stars, were found this morning in the scattered bits of a private plane which crashed in rugged woods near here."

The previous evening, Randy Hughes had attempted to fly his small Piper Comanche aircraft though a blinding thunderstorm on the last leg of a return trip to Nashville. The plane crashed near Camden, Tenn., killing Hughes and singers Patsy Cline, Cowboy Copas and Hawkshaw Hawkins. It was the single worst disaster in country music history.

Ironically, Cline, Copas and Hawkins had undertaken the ill-fated trip after taking part in a benefit concert for the family of Cactus Jack Call, a popular Kansas City disc jockey who had died in an auto accident days earlier.

The irony didn't

end there. Two days after the plane went down, Jack Anglin of Johnny & Jack fame was killed in a one-car crash on his way to a memorial service for Patsy Cline.

Of all those lost, Cline was the biggest star. Just 30 when she died, she is still considered country music's quintessential torch singer. After Owen Bradley began to produce her records in 1960, she consistently found herself at or near the top of country charts and was beginning to make her presence felt on pop charts as well. And two posthumous hits – "Leavin' on Your Mind" and "Sweet Dreams" – cracked Top 10 on the country charts. In 1973, Cline was voted into the Country Music Hall of Fame.

But Cline certainly wasn't the only star onboard that day. Dubbed "Waltz King of the Grand Ole Opry," Cowboy Copas had a career dating back to the '40s, and a No. 1 hit, "Alabam," in 1960. Hawkshaw Hawkins, once described as having "11 and a half yards



Among the items recovered from the crash site were Cline's favorite cigarette lighter and the plane's clock (below).



The accident that claimed Cline's life and three others is still the most tragic in country music history.

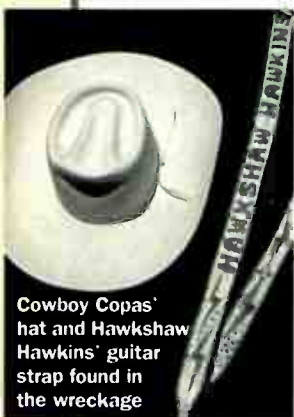


of personality," was considered one of country's best honky-tonk singers. He also charted a posthumous No. 1, "Lonesome 7-7203."

Lesser known was pilot Randy Hughes. Not only was he Cline's manager, who played guitar on her later recording sessions, he also started a music publishing company, ran a small insurance firm and worked as a stockbroker. He was also Copas' son-in-law.

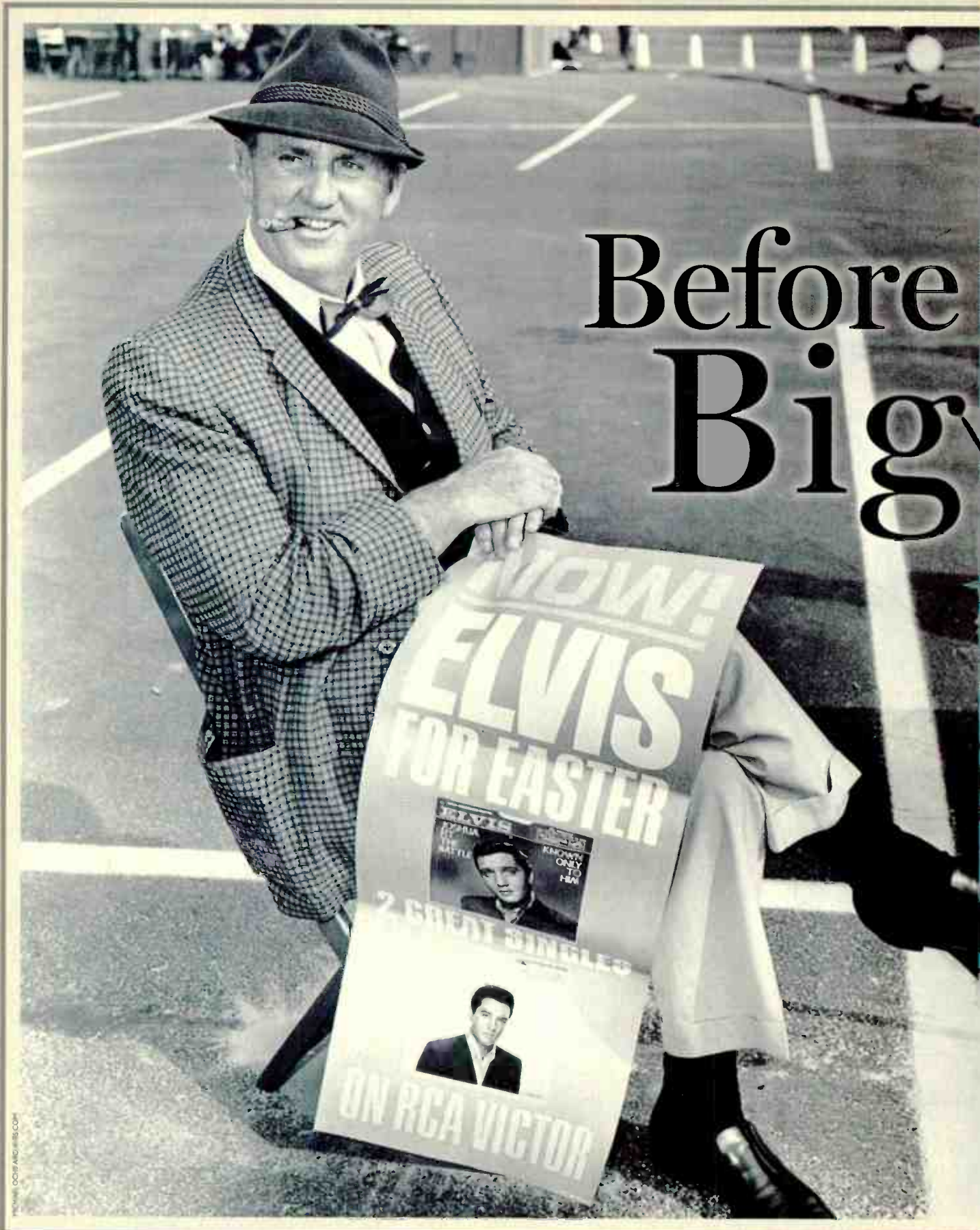
Four artifacts from the Hall of Fame collection offer a sad reminder of the Camden crash and the talented lives that ended too soon. Cline's cigarette lighter, Hawkins' white leather guitar strap, and the small clock (2½ inches square) from the doomed Piper Comanche all came from the crash site. Copas' white felt Western hat sits alongside them.

— Elek Horvath



Cowboy Copas' hat and Hawkshaw Hawkins' guitar strap found in the wreckage

Before Big



WWW.OCIA.ORG/ISS.COM

He's famous for launching Elvis Presley into superstardom. But the late Col. Tom Parker also had his hand in many country careers. So why does Nashville continue to spurn him?



AP PHOTO

Parker shares a lighthearted moment with his talented young charge in 1957 (above), and catches up with *Opry* star Minnie Pearl in Spokane, Wash. (below)

the Next Thing

BY ALANNA NASH

In 1993, Nashville broadcaster Ralph Emery phoned Col. Tom Parker at his home in Las Vegas. The 84-year-old wouldn't discuss his most famous client, the late Elvis Presley. Instead, he was more interested in a topic never far from his mind: country music.

"The artists are losing the country flavor a little bit in the dressing up," Parker complained. "They're getting away from the country atmosphere. One guy who always stayed with his costumes is Hank Snow."

"You like the rhinestones?" Emery asked.

"Well, they should use that once in a while to retain the early days of when they started," the Colonel replied. "Just think of the impact they would make on the shows they do in New York if they were all in their costumes. Not gaudy, but country style. They shouldn't dress too modern."

Parker, who died in 1997, may have forged his legacy with rock 'n' roll, but the longtime resident of Madison, Tenn., just a few miles outside of Music City, never forgot his early years as the man who brought Eddy Arnold to stardom. And he loved to reminisce about his days as one of country's premier booking agents and promoters, working with Pee Wee King, Roy Acuff, Minnie Pearl, Ernest Tubb, Hank Snow, Benny Martin, Rod Brasfield, Clyde Moody, George Morgan, Slim Whitman,

the Duke of Paducah and the Carter Family.

For a short spell, he also managed June Carter as a solo act. That association came with an added benefit for the singer. "He introduced me to Johnny Cash's music," June Carter Cash remembers of Parker. "We would stop in all of the little restaurants down in the South, and he always played his records on the jukebox. He loved to hear him sing."



COURTESY GRAND OLE OPRY ARCHIVES

In later years, when Music City's stars came to Las Vegas after the Colonel (given his honorary title by Jimmie Davis, the singing governor of Louisiana, in 1948) moved there in the 1980s, he sought them out. It was Parker who suggested to George Strait that he team with film producer Jerry Weintraub to make his movie *Pure Country*.

"He kept telling me, 'George, you gotta

do movies,'" Strait once recalled. The Texas singer also listened to Parker's advice about not wearing his tuxedo coat with blue jeans. Strait found the Colonel "a real nice man. I really enjoyed knowing him."

So did Tanya Tucker, whose father, Beau, consulted the Colonel about managing her when she was 11. Tanya herself came to know Parker in the last decade of his life.

"Every time I'd go to Vegas, he'd call me and want me to come down to the hotel at Caesar's and have breakfast with him, and we became good friends," said Tucker. "But when Elvis died, I was bitter at a lot of people, and he was one of 'em. I had a real bad picture of him back then."

Indeed, a negative image still hangs over Parker today, even though he brought innovative packaging, marketing and touring to country music. A lifetime member of the Country Music Association, Parker bragged of giving the organization one of the first donations to build the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum. Parker also honored the museum by making it the repository of Elvis' famous, customized gold Cadillac.

The fact that Parker has never been inducted into the Hall of Fame is cause for outcry by some of his supporters — especially since other promoters with whom he was associated, including Connie B. Gay and Hubert Long (a Parker acolyte from the Eddy Arnold days), have been.

"It's unconscionable," declares Texas talent manager Mike Crowley, who worked on the Presley tours of the '70s and went on to help guide the careers of Jimmie

COL. TOM PARKER

Dale Gilmore, Matraca Berg and Hal Ketchum. "This man is a pioneer in the modern-day country and rock business, and he's viewed as a pariah by both. If he'd played the political game, he would have gotten all of it, but he was content in doing what he did – and was a very strong business person. That's the guy that I knew."

The criticisms come from different directions. There are those who blame Parker for his failure to save Presley from himself in the '70s. And there are those who hold him accountable for putting Nashville music in a financial tailspin when Presley, originally a country act, helped spawn rock in the late '50s.

Jo Walker-Meador, the CMA's executive director from 1962 to 1991, says she doesn't blame Parker "for taking [Elvis] where the money was. That's under-

with. And he was a wonderful guy."

As a Vanderbilt student in the late '50s, Denny worked in the Colonel's office and was surprised to find that Parker "gave an immense amount of money to charity, and didn't want anybody to know it. But he was really a wheeler-dealer, and he just had an innate ability to understand what he should do next. He was never uncomfortable in any situation because he *was* the situation."

Born in Holland as Andreas Cornelis van Kuijk, Parker came to America in 1929. After a stint in the U.S. Army, he worked in carnivals during the height of the Depression. It was there that he learned the merchandising and marketing skills he would later apply to the music industry.

His entree into the music business was Gene Austin, the '20s crooner ("My Blue Heaven") who needed an advance man for his tent show in the late '30s. When times were tough, Parker was forced to get creative, as he did when one town slapped an amusement tax on the show.

"Tell me," Parker is supposed to have asked the local sheriff, "is there a tax on watermelons around here?" The answer was no, and patrons arrived to find a makeshift watermelon stand next to the tent with a sign overhead: FREE ADMISSION WITH PURCHASE OF WATERMELON. It saved his tax, Parker later said, but no one clapped during the show – they were too busy balancing those watermelons on their laps!

Parker first began booking country shows – particularly Pee Wee King and Roy Acuff – while he was employed by the Hillsborough County Humane Society in Florida. Acuff later flirted with the idea of letting Parker manage him. But eventually the band-leader thought better of it, and told Parker to keep his eye on a young vocalist, Eddy Arnold.

Partly with that in mind, Parker became the agent for the 1944 Jamup & Honey tent show, which featured an up-and-coming Arnold. On the road, Parker traveled with veteran vaudevillian and *Opry* performer Uncle Dave Macon.

"Uncle Dave used to carry a ham with him," Parker recalled to Emery.

"We'd go into little towns like Hope, Arkansas, and Uncle Dave would bring the ham into the cafes and get the cook to slice it and we'd have country ham and eggs in those restaurants."

Parker became Arnold's manager in 1945 and worked tirelessly on the singer's behalf. He'd type hundreds of letters – dropping down to the red strip of his typewriter ribbon every time he wrote Arnold's name – on flamboyant stationery festooned with Arnold's photograph. Soon the Colonel was prosperous enough to move to a stone house in suburban Nashville.

Their association made Arnold one of the biggest stars ever to emerge from Music City. But Parker's brash, rough-hewn style clashed with Arnold's country-boy gentility. In the early '50s, Arnold learned that Parker, who took a 25 percent commission for exclusivity, was working with other artists on the side. When the Colonel began booking dates for Hank Snow in 1953, Arnold dissolved their business dealings. Yet the two remained friends. "I thought a lot of him," a tearful Arnold said at Parker's memorial service.

By the '50s, the Colonel had begun booking several *Grand Ole Opry* stars, placing many of them on New York radio and TV shows. He also managed the 1954 "RCA Victor Country Caravan," a package tour designed to showcase label stars Chet Atkins, Minnie Pearl, Hawkshaw Hawkins and the Davis Sisters. Hank Snow headlined. Snow was already a star, but became even bigger after Parker got him on the Perry Como show. The two made a deal to expand the agency to give Snow part ownership.

But that would soon change: Parker was looking for the Next Big Thing. He found it in 1955.

Recalls David Wilds, whose father was Honey Wilds of the comedy duo Jamup and Honey, "When Tom was driving to New York ... he and his first wife Marie stopped and spent time with us. I was about 11, and remember sitting in our living room and hearing Marie tell Mother, 'Tom's found this wonderful boy, just the most remarkable thing. Honey, he sings sexy hillbilly.'

"My mother looked kind of bug-eyed, and Daddy thought Tom had lost his mind. He thought Elvis was the biggest mistake Tom ever made." ❁



COURTESY GRAND OLE OPRY ARCHIVES

In this staged photo, Parker seals the deal with country's Whitey Ford, the "Duke of Paducah." Other country acts Parker worked with include Roy Acuff, Ernest Tubb, Hank Snow and June Carter Cash.

standable, particularly at that time, when it was difficult to sell a lot of records in the country field."

As for industry recognition, "I don't think the CMA should pick the Colonel out and just give him a special award of some kind," she adds, "but he may be elected to the Hall of Fame. He's likely to be, eventually."

One person who believes Parker should be in the Hall of Fame is Music Row veteran Bill Denny, son of Jim Denny, the late *Opry* manager and Hall of Fame member. People who accuse Parker of mishandling Elvis' career, Denny insists, "are probably misinformed. He was fortunate for all the acts he was associated

THE STORY BEHIND THE SONG “When I Dream”

WRITTEN BY SANDY MASON

“When I Dream” was a fast write but a slow hit for veteran Nashville songwriter Sandy Mason, who is also the co-writer of Garth Brooks’ “Two Piña Coladas.” Born in Birdville, Pa., and raised along the Allegheny River, Mason began performing at age 12 as a ventriloquist. “I did that 12 years,” she recalls. “I hosted my own children’s show in Pittsburgh, *Popeye and Friends*. I

toured the eastern U.S. and Canada and performed in vaudeville revivals on Broadway.”

In her early 20s, Mason moved to Manhattan. She began commuting to Nashville to write songs, eventually gaining publishing alliances with Acuff-Rose and Combine Music. She also performed, signing with Hickory Records and denting the country charts with “There You Go” in 1967. But her greatest success as a vocalist came when she teamed with Billy Davis to create more than 30 Coca-Cola jingles.

Mason moved to Nashville for good in 1973 and signed a publishing contract with producer/songwriter Jack Clement. Shortly afterward, she took a working vacation so she could write while spending time on a beach.

“I was down in Florida – in Cortez, near Sarasota – by myself,” she says. “I wrote three songs, really worked hard on them. The fourth song was ‘When I Dream,’ and it wrote itself. I kinda went down into the depths of my soul. I remember going into a place inside that I rarely have gone.”

The next day she sang the four songs she’d written the previous day to see how they sounded after letting them rest. “After I played ‘When I Dream,’ I danced around the room!” she says. “I loved it. The other three I don’t even recall.”

Back in Nashville, she played “When I Dream” for producer Allen Reynolds, who was getting ready to record an album with singer Crystal Gayle. “He wanted to hear it again and again,” she says. “He loved it.”

Gayle promptly recorded “When I Dream” for her 1975 album, *Crystal*. Alas, it wasn’t chosen as a single.

Her old boss, Jack Clement, recorded a fine version of the song in 1978. It barely charted in America, but enjoyed success in Australia.

Reynolds and Gayle still believed in the song, so they took the unusual step of recording “When I Dream”

again, making it the title track for Crystal’s fourth album. This time it was chosen as a single – and it raced to No. 3 on the country singles charts in the summer of ’79.

More than 50 other artists have recorded the song since, including Willie Nelson, Bing Crosby, Glen Campbell, Julie Andrews, Mac Davis, Helen Reddy and Lynn Anderson.

“I tried to get ‘When I Dream’ to Barbra Streisand, but I never could get it to her door,” Mason says.

Four years passed between Crystal Gayle’s two recordings of “When I Dream.” The 1979 version became a Top 5 country hit.

“Now I want to get it to Norah Jones – it’s perfect for her.”

Mason’s other notable successes include “All I Wanna Do in Life,” a song recorded by Gayle and Marianne Faithfull. She continues to write and record. *There Goes That Song Again*, her fourth and latest album, offers lush, atmospheric interpretations of ’30s pop standards. It’s available online from CD Baby or by sending \$15 to P.O. Box 128153, Nashville, TN 37212.

— John Lomax III



“When I Dream”

BY SANDY MASON

I could have a mansion
that is higher than the trees
I could have all the gifts I want
and never ask please
I could fly to Paris
Oh, it’s at my beck and call
Why do I go through life
with nothing at all?

Chorus:

But when I dream, I dream of you
Maybe someday you will come true

I can be the singer
or the clown in every room
I can even call someone
to take me to the moon
I can put my makeup on
and drive the men insane
I can go to bed alone and never
know his name
(Repeat chorus twice and fade)

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Bye Bye Love

**Felice Bryant,
Nashville's first
full-time female song-
writer, leaves behind a
monumental legacy**

With the passing of Felice Bryant, the Nashville songwriting community lost its matriarch.

When she and husband Boudleaux Bryant moved to Music City in 1950, they became the first full-time composers to call Nashville home — and their success and dedication to their craft helped mold the city into one of the most active and supportive songwriting communities in the world.

Bryant died of cancer on April 22, but her extraordinary song catalog will live forever. Her work includes Everly Brothers classics “Bye Bye Love,” “All I Have to Do Is Dream” and “Wake Up Little Susie”; Buddy Holly’s “Raining in My Heart”; Charley Pride’s “We Could”; and The Osborne Brothers’ “Rocky Top,” now celebrated as Tennessee’s state song.

In one of her last interviews, Bryant recalled her and her husband’s decision to move to Nashville to devote themselves to writing — rather than performing — songs.

“That was unheard of at the time,” she said. “People would say, ‘You’re not an entertainer?’ Because everybody who wrote songs in Nashville also picked and sang. Now I hear that there are thousands of writers in Nashville. But Boudleaux and I were the first professional writers.”

The Bryants were also one of American music’s great love stories. Born Aug. 7, 1925, Felice met Diadorius Boudleaux Bryant when the fiddler was performing in the Schroeder Hotel in her native Milwaukee in 1945. Matilda Genevieve Scaduto — Boudleaux affectionately dubbed her “Felice” — was singing in USO shows and working as an elevator operator in the hotel. She struck up a conversation with the visiting musician and eloped with him three days later.

After they settled in his hometown of

BY ROBERT K. OERMANN

Moultrie, Ga., Felice became bored and began to write poems. She showed them to her musician husband and a songwriting team was born.

They began collaborating, mailing their tunes to various publishers hoping to get a break. After months of rejection, Nashville’s Fred Rose took the Bryants’ “Country Boy” to *Grand Ole Opry* star Jimmy Dickens, who turned it into a Top 10 hit in 1949.

Rose convinced the Bryants to move to Nashville, even providing a train ticket and a hotel room for their first visit. “At first, we were told that songwriting was a closed operation — ‘the boys won’t let you in,’” Felice recalled. “I thought, ‘Baloney!’”

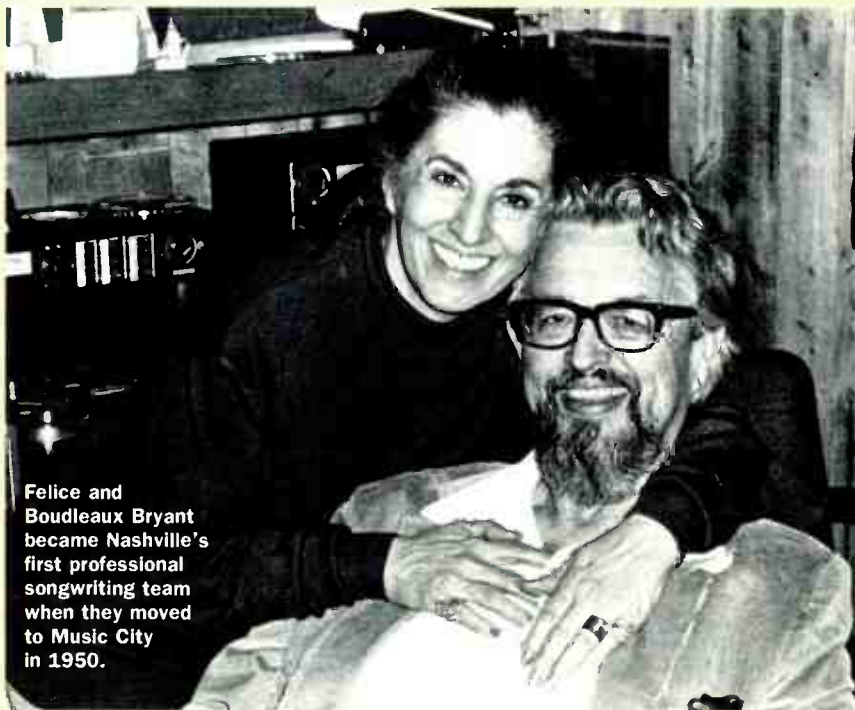
Rose persuaded them to record as Bud

and Betty, signing them to MGM Records. But what the Bryants really wanted to do was write. Good thing, too, since their recordings failed, but their songwriting took off.

In the early ’50s, Boudleaux enjoyed several top hits by such major artists as Dickens (including his trademark “I’m Little but I’m Loud”), Carl Smith, Eddy Arnold and Red Foley.

“When we felt our luck turning, we wrote so much it was ridiculous,” Felice said. “We wrote all the time, thinking, ‘This is going very well!’”

Felice Bryant usually came up with the song ideas. Then Boudleaux wrote the melody and worked with Felice to craft the words to fit. “Boudleaux was always right, because he knew what he was talking about,” she says. “But I wasn’t always



Felice and Boudleaux Bryant became Nashville's first professional songwriting team when they moved to Music City in 1950.

wrong, even if I didn't know what I was talking about."

Felice sometimes tempered Boudleaux's artistic tendencies; she was the one who made sure what they created was commercial as well as creative.

"I was always able to pick out a hit; I was just gifted that way," she said. "When Boudleaux thought he had a hit, which wasn't often, he really had one. He knew 'Bye Bye Love' was a hit. He knew 'All I Have to Do Is Dream' was a hit."

"Wake Up Little Susie" is one example where Felice's opinion helped make a song more commercial. When Boudleaux was writing it, he started "getting a little risqué," Bryant said, so she had him change a few key lines to make it more innocent. It was Felice's idea to put "the kids in a drive-in movie, falling asleep," instead of engaged in a more amorous activity.

One of their most famous tunes came from a spat. The Bryants were working on songs for an Archie Campbell album in 1967. Bored, Felice insisted on leaving the writing session and doing something to break the mood. Irritated by her complaints, Boudleaux angrily strummed his guitar and barked out the title "Rocky Top."

"Then the song just kind of wrote itself," Felice said. "What a relief that song was, because I needed some pep. As soon as we got back to Nashville, Sonny Osborne calls up and says, 'Bobby and I have a session tomorrow. Do you have anything?' Boudleaux said, 'Well, yeah.' After he hung up the phone, he said, 'Honey, do we have anything for The Osborne Brothers?' I said, 'How about that bluegrass thing?' He said, 'What bluegrass thing?' Neither one of us could remember the title."

Boudleaux passed away in 1987 at age 67. Felice remained in Gatlinburg, where the couple was living at the time.

The pair was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1991. "I was out of my mind that night," she chuckled. "I couldn't read my speech. It was the most thrilling thing in the world, but I needed to lean on Boudleaux's arm. To be up there by myself just felt wrong."



Bryant had an ear for tunes that could be both artistic and commercial. "I was always able to pick out a hit; I was just gifted that way," she once commented.



COUNTRY MAG

woman's work

She's happily married, a mother of two and a singing star. Still, Sara Evans asks for more.

Like every morning in recent memory, this has been a hectic time for a sleep-deprived but fresh-faced Sara Evans. She didn't get to sleep until long after midnight, and any hopes of a restful night were dashed two hours later, when son Avery, nearly 4, ambled into his parents' room in tears. Not to be outdone, 14-week-old daughter Olivia cried for a bottle at 4:30 a.m. and again at 7:30 a.m.

Able to deny the morning's cruel summons no longer, Evans, 32, and her husband of nearly 10 years, Craig Schelske, awake for the last time at 8:30 to have breakfast before meeting with the termite inspector. Clad in gray J. Crew capri pants and a white tank top that highlights her sunburned shoulders (a casualty of her weekend outing at Nashville's Iroquois Steeplechase horse races), Evans tries to ignore the large boxes stacked next to the striped sofa in the living room. She's in the midst of packing up all of her family's belongings in their 2,400-square-foot ranch house in a Nashville cul-de-sac to move to a 12-acre farm in nearby Williamson County.

Despite the chaos, cries and laughter, this is the calm before the storm. The one-time Missouri farm girl will soon unveil *Restless*, her fourth album and much-anticipated follow-up to her nearly double-platinum *Born to Fly*. Things will really pick up next week, when she'll attend the Academy of Country Music Awards. Next comes a video shoot, photo shoot, surprise birthday party for Schelske, the move and then, just before her summer tour starts, the promotion of the new CD begins in earnest.

After experimenting with a more pop-country flavor on her last release, *Restless* marks a return to Evans' country roots. But this time, her undeniable twang is mixed with Irish drums, R&B horns, island drums and organ. There are several funky country tunes with a bluegrass flair, and, of course, a few trademark chill-inducing ballads, such as "Need to Be Next to You" and "I Give In." She co-wrote five of the album's 13 tracks, including "Niagara Falls," which features three-part harmony with her sisters Ashley and Lesley.

"This is hopefully a more mature and more confident version of me," she says of *Restless*. "It's very rootsy and really deep. I'm just incredibly proud of it, and I pray that it's successful because I poured everything I had into it, laboring over the songs and the mixes and the instrumentation and all that."

With this fresh sound comes a new image, one that is more sun-kissed, all-American farm girl than sexy, statuesque vamp.

"I'm really in the frame of mind to simplify now," she says. "Less is more. I've been real glamorous in the past, and I'm really wanting to look more natural."

Whatever her look, Evans' career has been a slow and steady rise since the release of her debut album, *Three Chords and the Truth*, in 1997. While that CD made the critics' list of the year's best CDs, its three singles failed to crack the Top 40.

But Evans drastically overhauled her music and image before releasing her second album, *No Place That Far*, in 1998. Out went the shuffles and old-



BY BEVERLY KEEL

Sara Evans

fashioned elegance; in came a sexy, modern siren belting out big ballads and bouncy country-pop. The move worked – the album sold gold and its title track became her first No. 1.

Her career was catapulted to the next level after the 2000 release of *Born to Fly*, thanks in large part to the success of the chart-topping title track and the smash hit “I Could Not Ask for More.” The success of *Born to Fly* sealed her reputation as one of the finest female vocalists in country.

Now the pressure is on to top that success, and Evans insists she’s up to the challenge. “There’s a lot of pressure I put on myself, and I’m feeling it right now,” she admits. “*Restless* is coming out and I wonder, ‘Is it going to happen? Is it going to be as well-received?’ I definitely want people to think, ‘She’s getting better all the time.’”

She laughs at the timing of her albums. “It seems like I always start a new project and a new tour after having a baby!” she laughs. “Every time Terri Clark sees me, she says, ‘You are always having babies!’ I’m like, ‘I only have two kids,’ but in her mind, I’m always pregnant.”

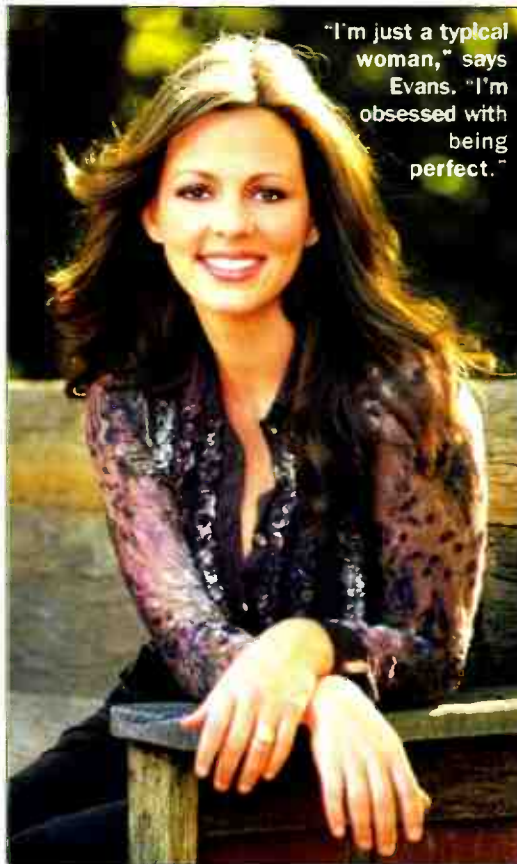
During the last 18 months, Evans discovered at least one thing at which she’s not very good – being away from her husband. In the spring of 2002, she had just wrapped up her tour and was helping her husband campaign in his (ultimately unsuccessful) Congressional race in his home state of Oregon. But there was only a month to go on the campaign trail.

“It would’ve been better if I had been able to take a year off from my career and campaign with him,” she says. “It was so stressful because every time I would have a little break, I would fly to Oregon. It was so hard because I was exhausted, and Craig was exhausted, and we weren’t together. Craig and I are really good together, and we are really bad apart. The main thing we learned from that was we need to be together.”

She says she felt incredible guilt for not being able to support his career more, especially since he’s devoted many years to boosting her professional life. “We were both under an incredible amount of pressure and stress,” she says.

“Craig put everything on the line to try to win this election. We learned a huge lesson, which is understanding that God’s will is everything. If you step out ahead of what he has planned for you, it’s just disaster. I think that is what we did. We didn’t pray about it enough or think about it enough.

“I have no doubt that Craig is supposed to be a congressman, senator or even more. But it just wasn’t the right time. The next time he does it, it will be a situation where I take a year off to support him.”



“I’m just a typical woman,” says Evans. “I’m obsessed with being perfect.”

everybody is looking at you like you think they are. You are being so self-centered.”

“Even though I’m criticizing myself, I’m constantly talking about myself – my hair, my skin, my voice, my clothes. That’s why I don’t do well with pregnancy, because I border on having some disorders about how I think I look. I’m just a typical woman; I’m obsessed with being perfect.”

As her belly grew, she returned to the studio, where she had already begun recording songs for *Restless*. She spent about a year on her new project, completing it just one month before she gave birth.

“It was in December, and I walked in and I’m like, ‘This isn’t even funny anymore. I’m not even cute!’ Up until the sixth month, people said, ‘Oh, you’re so cute.’ I had stopped hearing that for a while. It was like, ‘I know. I’m miserable.’”

Despite her discomfort, Evans discovered a newfound confidence in the studio. Since she had been touring nonstop for three years, she was vocally the strongest she had ever been. Unlike the early sessions for *Born to Fly*, when she was plagued with a nagging cold, Evans was healthy for the entire process.

“I had already made one album with [producer] Paul Worley, so I was very confident in working with him,” she says. “Coming off a double-platinum record makes you feel pretty good about yourself. You’re going into it with a whole new frame of mind. Instead of wondering if the musicians like me, it was like, ‘We did good on *Born to Fly*, didn’t we?’”

On Jan. 22, she gave birth to 8-pound, 7-ounce Olivia Margaret. When she called her family to share the good news, she noticed that she was hoarse. “I thought it was just from the drugs or the stress of the C-section, but it just never got better.”

Eventually she visited a doctor, who discovered that all of that yelling during labor had caused a blister to form on her vocal cords. In late April, Evans was anesthetized for a 20-minute procedure to remove the blister.

“I had to not talk for five days, which was great for Craig,” she says with a

The day after her husband’s loss, Evans performed on the ACMs in Los Angeles.

“Then the day after the ACMs, I found out I was pregnant, so we were grateful that he lost – we really were,” she says. “How in the world would we have handled that?”

With this baby she struggled through five months of morning sickness – plus she had other issues.

“Pregnancy does not sit well with me because I’m obsessed with my looks. It’s a total form of self-centeredness. Craig is always saying, ‘Honey, stop focusing so much on yourself. Not

laugh, before turning serious about her surgery. "I was nervous, for sure. But there is only so much you can control. I told myself, whatever happens, happens. I knew it would be fine though, from what the doctors were saying."

Despite all of the personal upheaval, Evans never took a break from her work schedule. Indeed, she gave birth on a Wednesday afternoon and was home by Friday night.

"I put so much pressure on myself to bounce back physically that I really delayed my recovery," she says. "I don't know why I do stuff like that."

Two weeks later, she summoned her business advisers to her home for a career update, only to find herself completely overwhelmed with the plans of the CD's launch. "When you have a 2-week-old baby, you're not even there," she says. "You can't even comprehend that you'll be able to do all of this stuff."

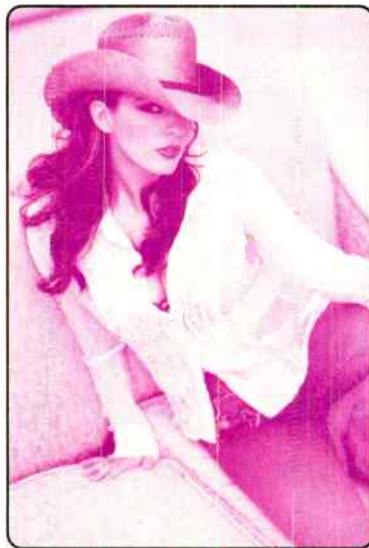
Evans' manager ordered her not to even call the office for three more weeks, and Evans obeyed – for a while. "Sure enough, I called her and said, 'Do you think I need to go to the Country Radio Seminar?'" She said no.

"I just feel so competitive," Evans explains. "You feel like, 'If I'm not on the radio, somebody else is going to be.' So I'm really working on that."

Perhaps ironically, Evans now accepts that she has little control over much of what happens in her life. "I get so caught up in just stupid things, like we all do, and then at the end of the day, I say, 'This is ridiculous!' Where I am right now in my life is learning the lesson that everything is fine. Everything will work out, everything always works out."

In fact, things are much better than fine. "Ever since Avery was born, it's been the best time of my life," she says. "Every single day, waking up is like Christmas. God has blessed me over and over. I feel like I'm in this little bubble of grace right now."

"I'm not the hugest star," she says. Then she laughs. "Yet. But when you talk about the things that matter in life, I really do have it all. Do I want more? Yeah. Am I continually trying to find that next thing? Always. But if it all goes away tomorrow, I still have Craig, Avery, Olivia, my friends and family and my relationship with God." *



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COUNTRY MUSIC HALL OF FAME

June Carter's introduction to life onstage came early with Mother Maybelle and the Carter Sisters: June, aunt Sara Carter, Anita, mother Maybelle and Helen.



MICHAEL OCHS MANTON

Born into country music royalty, June Carter Cash achieved great success on her own in music, TV and movies. But her greatest legacy came from how she touched the famous, the infamous and the unknown with unconditional love, high spirits and gracious living

In her song "I Used to Be Somebody," June Carter Cash looked back at her one-of-a-kind life by listing many of the famous people she knew well. But anyone who spent time in her presence realized she wasn't just a friend of the celebrated; in person, she had as much charisma and personal force – indeed, as much star power – as the many legends she nurtured and inspired. However, along the way, she undoubtedly collided with some of the most important cultural icons of her time.

It's a stunning list. "I Used to Be Somebody" tells of her relationships with Elvis Presley, Hank Williams, Patsy Cline, James Dean, Marlon Brando and playwright Tennessee Williams. All of them were more than casual acquaintances, and she met all of them before uniting with her soulmate, Johnny Cash. And the list could have gone on and on, including not just entertainers and artists but world political and religious leaders. But that's just how June Carter Cash was – she had an impact on people's lives. It wasn't just the famous she comforted and cultivated, but a countless number of souls who crossed her path. She had the kind of open-hearted, energized warmth that pulled people in and made them feel special.

That's why, upon her death on May 15, she was toasted not so much for her career or her artistry, but for a lifetime of meaningful relationships. It wasn't just the famous who showed up at her funeral or who asked to speak on her behalf. Regular folk from across the nation traveled to bid goodbye to a friend, several getting up to tell stories about how she'd personally touched their lives.

Born Valerie June Carter on June 23, 1929, in Maces Springs, Va., she learned early on to draw on her charisma, her warmth and her wit. The middle of three daughters born to Maybelle Carter of The Carter Family, June's early life combined the rugged existence of backwoods Appalachia with the rigors of traveling during the Depression with the era's most famous country music group.

At the time, it was natural for entertainers to bring their children into their stage shows. June began performing in 1939 at age 10, when her family moved to Texas and she started a trio with her sisters to perform on a Texas border radio station and to play autoharp behind

the rest of the Carter Family.

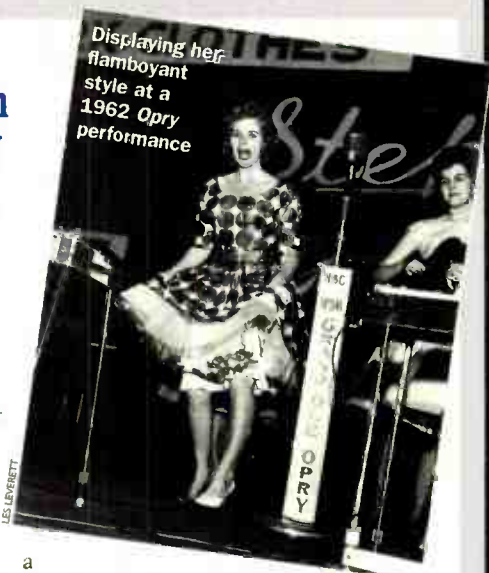
Shortly after the Carter Family retired in 1943, Maybelle formed a group with her daughters. June realized she wasn't as gifted vocally as older sister Helen and younger sister Anita, so she made up for her limited voice by forging her wit, her dancing ability and her fearlessness into an engaging stage presence.

Mother Maybelle and the Carter Sisters worked their way up the country music ladder of the 1940s, moving from the *Old Dominion Barn Dance* in Richmond, Va., to the *Tennessee Barn Dance* in Knoxville (where they hired a young guitarist named Chet Atkins) to membership at the Grand Ole Opry in 1950. Their old-fashioned family harmonies, sharp instrumental ability and June's outrageous stage antics made them Opry favorites at the height of the show's national appeal.

In Nashville, Carter became close friends with Hank Williams and his wife Audrey. In a famous incident, a bullet from Williams' pistol, shot in a drunken argument with Audrey, narrowly missed June. Audrey often stayed with June whenever she and Hank fought or separated. "I spent a fair amount of time trying to keep Hank from killing Audrey," Carter Cash told this writer in a 1999 interview at her Hendersonville home.

She also recalled a turning-point phone call that took place between the two while Audrey stayed with her. "I remember him calling our house there at the very last," she said. "He told me, 'Look, I'm fixin' to marry. Let me speak to Audrey. I need to talk to her because I'm fixing to do something real crazy. Maybe this will get her straightened out.' When she got on the phone, he told her, 'If you can tell me it's going to be different between us, then I'm not going to marry who I'm fixing to marry.'" The conversation erupted into an argument, and within a couple of weeks Hank Williams had married Billie Jean Jones Eshliman. Within three months, he was dead.

In 1952, Carter married country star Carl Smith, a union that lasted four years and gave them a daughter, Carlene Carter. Meanwhile, in the early '50s, Col. Tom Parker began managing Mother Maybelle and the Carter Sisters, providing them more road work, including stints as the opening act for



BY MICHAEL McCALL

June Carter Cash

another of the Colonel's clients, Elvis Presley. June also toured with Presley as a solo opening act.

While on tour, noted movie director Elia Kazan (*On the Waterfront*, *East of Eden*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*) asked novelist and screenwriter Budd Schulberg to attend a Presley concert to see if he was a potential movie actor. After seeing a show, Schulberg called back to say he was struck more by the opening act, June Carter. Kazan flew to Nashville to meet her and eventually persuaded her to take an acting workshop in Manhattan.

"I was making money in my own little world, and at first I wasn't interested in going to New York City," Carter Cash said. "But I had left Carl Smith about a year and a half before that because I didn't think he had treated me right. I thought it might be good to get away from Nashville for a while. So I took Carlene and moved up there."

In New York, Kazan introduced her to famed acting teachers Lee Strasberg and Sandy Meisner. She spent two weeks with Strasberg at the Actor's Studio and longer than that with Meisner at the Neighborhood Playhouse. While in New York, she also appeared regularly on popular TV variety shows hosted by Jackie Gleason and Garry Moore, and on the TV soap operas *The Secret Storm* and *The Edge of Night*. Through Kazan, Carter became close to Marlon Brando, the hottest young actor at the time, and James Dean, who was a fellow acting student.

After returning to the road as an open-

ing act for Presley, the future King of Rock and Roll asked her for acting advice. Carter thought he had the moody charisma of Dean and Brando, and told him so. "I remember trying to teach him everything I learned in a year and a half — only he had just two weeks," she said. "But he learned quick, and I think I really helped him." She coached him through a short screen test with a serious, dramatic role, and she thought it was the best acting she ever saw him do. From there, he went to the set of *Love Me Tender*, the

have a sense for it. He wanted his half, and that's what he got."

At the time, Carter openly encouraged Presley to break his contract with Parker, who got 50 percent of all of Presley's income while cutting side deals where he kept all of the money. "Elvis could have taken him to court," she said. "He should have never paid him that half. 'Don't let him do this to you,' I'd tell him. He would tell me he wasn't going to do it, but he did. I just felt like he settled. I didn't. I moved on and did something else."



COURTESY RISK RECORDS



HEINLASHOOTING STAR

Carter recorded a critically acclaimed solo CD in 1999 (above); she met Johnny Cash on a 1962 tour and the two tied the knot six years later, forming one of country's strongest partnerships.

first of his long list of B movies.

"I was never happy with what he settled for," Carter Cash said. "I decided that if I was going to go into acting, I would not settle. Elvis didn't have to; he just did. I told

him, 'If you do this, you could do it right, and it would be good. But you be sure and not settle for some crummy thing they give you. You'll be wanting to do just what the Colonel wants you to do, and I know what the Colonel is like. Colonel Parker didn't know what was good and what was bad. He just didn't

After narrowly missing roles in Kazan's critically lauded movies *A Face in the Crowd* and *Wild River*, she starred in another movie, *Country Music Holiday*. She later would appear in several others, including an acclaimed role in *The Apostle* with Robert Duvall, who she had first met when both were New York acting students. But when she began to be typecast in the '50s in B-role movies, she returned to Nashville and the *Grand Ole Opry*.

She had a brief marriage to Rip Nix, a college football star and champion boat racer, and she gave birth to a second daughter, Rosey. She also met Johnny

Cash backstage at the *Grand Ole Opry*, where she told him that her friend Elvis Presley constantly played his songs on the jukebox and the acoustic guitar.

In the early '60s, Cash hired Mother Maybelle and The Carter Sisters to join his touring show. Their relationship grew more intimate, but



AP PHOTO/JOHN RUSSELL (4)

heart will go *boogety, boogety, boogety*, and you'll get messed up."

She also confronted addiction and other problems with loved ones. June was the godmother of Hank Williams Jr., and Audrey Williams, when near death, asked June to always look after her famous son. She did. The day Hank Jr. fell off a mountainside during a hunting trip in 1975, shattering most of his face and nearly killing himself, the Cashes rushed to Montana and June stayed with him as he persevered through long hospital stays and extensive facial surgeries.

She faced similar problems closer to

beyond her family – wayward souls, drawn to her by forces known and unknown, always found their way into her prayers. In her 1987 book, *From the Heart*, she observed that her husband would awake in the middle of the night, see her on her knees on the floor with hands clasped, and ask, "Who is it now?"

One of the many Carter Family songs June loved to sing included "Will the Circle Be Unbroken?" To close her album *Press On*, the last album she released in her lifetime, she recorded it the way she liked to hear it, markedly slower than the usual hand-clapping version so familiar as a closing encore at festivals and special musical gatherings. June sang it so that a listener could recognize its mournfulness at the passing of life as well as its celebration of the circle of the life.

The lyrics begin with a family watching as its matriarch, its bastion of spiritual strength, passes by in a hearse.

Carter admitted it frightened her. "I'd already seen what pills did to Hank Williams, and I could see them doing the same thing to Johnny Cash," she said.

But she found him impossible to resist, and she wrote the song "Ring of Fire" in 1962 with Merle Kilgore, pouring her conflicted feelings about Cash into the lyrics. "I hadn't told anybody yet, but I was in love with this man," she recalled in 1999. "I was in love with him, but he was a wild man, and there wasn't any indication he wasn't always going to be a wild man." Cash stayed wild for a while, too, but their on-again, off-again relationship led to the Man in Black agreeing to forego drugs to win her hand for good. They married in 1968, and the two would record often together, as they did on the rip-roaring duet "Jackson."

Though Cash continued to occasionally struggle with addiction, his wife steadfastly helped him in the fight. "If you always follow your heart, that old heart will get you in trouble," she told this writer in a 1990 interview while observing that their religious beliefs gave them both strength. "If you have boundaries that hem and haw and fly up in the air, you might as well give up, 'cause that



Carter's funeral at the First Baptist Church of Hendersonville (Tenn.) was open to the public, at the request of Johnny (right). The service featured song tributes from Sheryl Crow and Emmylou Harris (above left) and a moving speech by stepdaughter Rosanne Cash (far right).

home. Both of her daughters battled drug problems, and June spent years worrying she'd get a call saying one of them had died. "I used to pick up the phone and some friend from Las Vegas or Los Angeles or Texas would say, 'It's Rosey,' and I'd say, 'Is she alive?'"

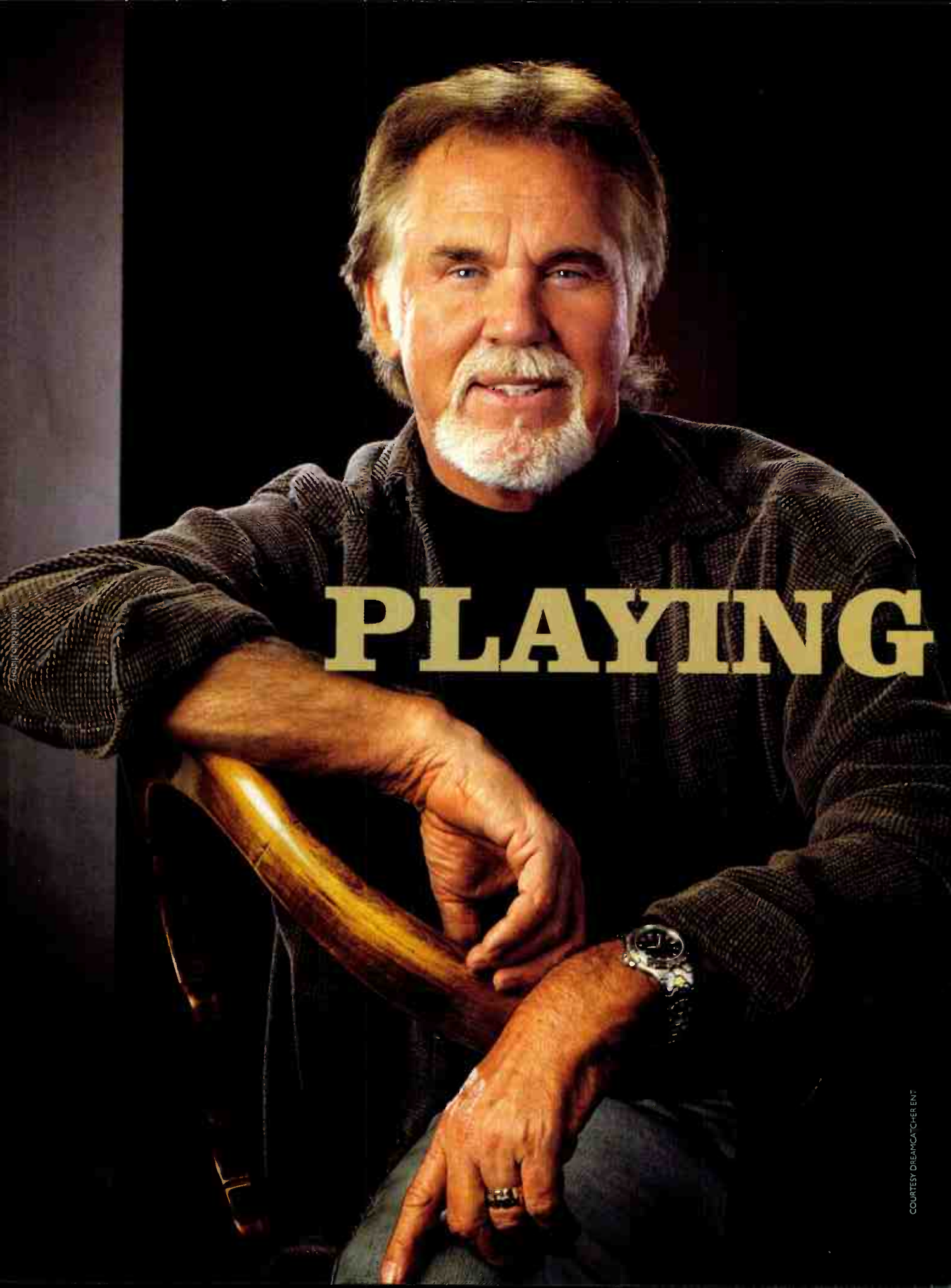
Similarly, in 1999, she talked of how she prayed for daughter Carlene Carter and boyfriend Howie Epstein, a former member of Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers who died earlier this year of a heroin overdose. "That rock 'n' roll thing can get you in trouble," she said sadly.

But, after willingly giving up most of her own showbiz career, June took on the role of nurturer with relish and without complaint. It extended far



Undertaker, oh undertaker, she sings, please drive slow, because that lady you are hauling, oh Lord I hate to see her go. A whole lot of wayward souls experienced that same emotion as June Carter Cash was laid to rest. But the song goes on to say that there's a better home a-waiting, and the matriarch of the Cash and Carter clans steadfastly believed that was where she was headed.

June Carter Cash believed that the love she so generously gave, and the suffering she so willingly absorbed, was all a part of the journey leading her home. ★



PLAYING

The Gambler is in his Atlantic City hotel suite, contemplating the odds. "I don't care who you are or how good friends they are with you, every radio station in the United States is looking for a reason to say no," says Kenny Rogers, musing on his chances for further success, two decades after hits like "Lady," "Islands in the Stream" and, yes, "The Gambler," made his name synonymous with country-to-pop crossover success. Not that the frosty-haired, crimson-faced star is the least bit bitter at seeing his days as a regular chart-topper recede into the rearview mirror. Quite the opposite.

"Hey, I had an amazing run," Rogers says, relaxing in his room with a view of the crashing surf at the Hilton on the Atlantic City boardwalk. "If I never get another hit, it's been wonderful." Rogers may sound comfortable about the status of his career – he's just released *Back to the Well* on his own Dreamcatcher label, and has various projects in the works, like the recent publication of his children's book *Christmas in Canaan* – but he's also angling for one more shot at the top.

Calling himself a "student of the business," Rogers, who turns 65 in August, looks at it this way: "Thirty new records are released to radio stations each week. At best, they can add maybe two to their playlists. So they've got to say no to 28 people. And if you give them a reason – it's too pop,

with a cardboard cutout of the star, and rapping along with Coolio in a self-mocking *Gambler* video segment. And he coasted through hits such as "Lucille," encouraging an audience singalong and then poking good-natured fun of the quality of his fans' vocalizing.

But "I'm Missing You" was different. While images of soldiers saying goodbye to the families before departing for Iraq were shown on twin video screens, Rogers sat on a stool in the dark, eyes closed, his raspy voice earnestly pulling every bit of feeling he could from Wariner's ballad.

"The thing about 'Missing You' that's so unique," Rogers says back in his suite, "is that it does for this war what 'Ruby, Don't Take Your Love to Town' did back during the Vietnam War."

What Rogers means is that the song brings an international conflict of overwhelming size down to a human level. In 1969, Mel Tillis' "Ruby," about a disabled veteran, was a hit for Kenny Rogers & The First Edition, and along with "Just Dropped In (to See What Condition My Condition Was In)" and "Reuben James" became

a highlight of the psychedelic-country-pop band's hit parade.

"Wariner's song does what the great songwriters can do," Rogers says. "It puts you in a place you've never been, inside the mind of someone you don't know, and makes you feel their pain."



Early Edition:
Rogers in the 1970s

TO WIN **As he turns 65, Kenny Rogers believes he can land what other legends can't: a radio hit**

too country, it's too fast, it's too slow – they *will* say no."

That would put the chances at 15-to-1 – and those are not odds that would excite Brady Hawkes, the whiskered risk-taker Rogers played in five *Gambler* TV movies in the '80s and '90s. "What you have to do is come up with one of those two songs that they *can't* say no to," he says. "And that's what 'The Greatest' was."

"The Greatest" was the hit written by Rogers' old buddy Don Schlitz (who also penned "The Gambler") about a boy, a bat and a baseball that, together with "Buy Me a Rose" – which hit No. 1 on *Billboard's* country charts in May 2000 – made Rogers' 1999 album *She Rides Wild Horses* an unexpected million-seller.

On *Back to the Well*, Rogers is hoping he's got another "Greatest" up his sleeve. The song is "I'm Missing You," a Steve Wariner composition that was originally intended for the soundtrack of the Vietnam movie *We Were Soldiers*.

During his 80-minute set at the Hilton showroom, "I'm Missing You" stood apart for the emotional commitment he put into the performance.

The show was filled with showbiz conventions like Rogers' schtick of throwing a \$10 bill at a guy in the front row every time he named one of his hits. In Atlantic City, Rogers also got laughs by performing "We Owe Them More Than That," his *Back to the Well* duet with Tim McGraw,

Over the course of a 40-year-plus career that stretches back to his beginnings as the fourth of eight children growing up in a Houston housing project, Rogers has been most everywhere. And on this particular night in May, he's feeling some pain of his own.

That's because Rogers – who lives outside Atlanta with Wanda, his fifth wife of six years – is still recovering from an operation he had in January 2003 to correct a spinal condition called spondylosis. He had successful "serious cervical spine surgery," he says, after a doctor told him the condition could land him in a wheelchair.

"I still can't get my right arm up above my head," says Rogers. "I tell you, I've never been so scared in my life. It's one thing to not feel good. It's another to not be able to care for yourself."

Rogers' show at the Hilton is only his fifth since returning to the road after four months off, but he's careful not to show the audience any signs of rustiness.

"The pain I can deal with," the student of the business says. "I just don't like it when it's obvious to the audience. Once you tell them, that's all they see. It's like saying, 'Don't look at the pink elephant.'"

Rogers started soaking up serious wisdom about his chosen career as a Texas teenager. His father, Floyd, was a carpenter, and his mother, Lucille, a housekeeper.

"He was an alcoholic most of his life," Rogers says of his

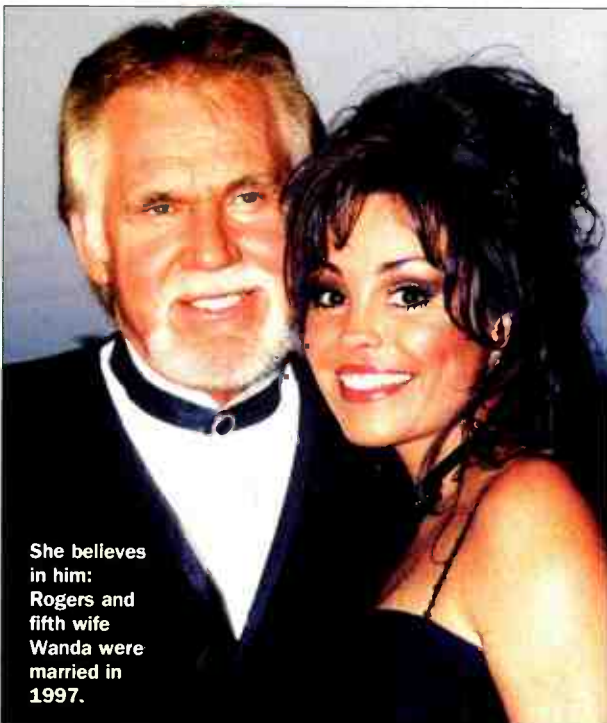
BY DAN DELUCA



Know when to hold 'em: With Reba McEntire in the 1991 TV movie *The Gambler Returns*

GARY NOLIN/ABC

Kenny Rogers “They used me for a poster boy for what not to play on radio.”



She believes in him: Rogers and fifth wife Wanda were married in 1997.

RANDY RADCLIFF

father, who died before his son's biggest run of success began with “Lucille” in 1977. “But he was a cool guy. He had moved the family down to Houston from Apple Springs, Texas, so his kids could have a better life. And he had nothing when he moved down there. He used to get down to the shipyards and stand in line to get a day's work, and sleep with his shoes under his head.”

Rogers joined a doo-wop band called The Scholars in 1955. His first single as a solo artist, “That Crazy Feeling,” earned him a spot on *American Bandstand* in 1959.

He then hooked up with blind jazzman Bobby Doyle, playing upright bass in the pianist's trio from 1960 to 1966. After the band split up, Rogers landed with the commercial folk outfit The New Christy Minstrels, whose members also included Kim Carnes, with whom Rogers would score a hit duet on “Don't Fall in Love With a Dreamer” in 1980.

Rogers' new album contains its fair share of easy-listening music. But it also kicks up a ruckus with “Suitcase Full of Blues,” which features Lee Roy Parnell on slide guitar, and revisits Old West themes with Mark Knopfler's “Prairie Wedding.” The album's banjo-flavored title track may be the most down-home piece of music Rogers has ever recorded.

“The album is a little more organic, it's a little less pop and a little more country than some of the things I've done in my career,” he says. “I've never done bluegrass music before, but it's a very infectious music. When we do it in the show, people start clapping their hands and tapping their feet.”

There's an irony in Kenny Rogers making a rootsy career move, considering that in the years before the New Traditionalist boom of the mid-1980s, he was responsible as anyone for moving country away from its roots.

“Not by design, but because of my jazz background and because I was comfortable with songs that were less country and more pop, I kind of moved country radio to the pop area,” he says. “And there's no question – again, not by design – that it hurt traditional country artists.”

When the pendulum swung back to traditionalists in hats, Rogers didn't take it personally. “There was a time where, no matter what I did, they used me as a poster boy for what *not* to play on the radio. But I never complained about it. And I will tell you today that the single reason that radio gives me a break is that I didn't bitch about it.”

These days, Rogers does up to 160 shows a year, including lots of casinos. “There's ‘The Gambler,’ so there's that association,” he reasons. “The casinos like me, because I bring a lot of players in.”

Rogers isn't one to sit back and admire his trophy case – he's won three Grammys and five CMAs, though never Entertainer of the Year. “I get bored. I have to be doing something,” he says. “I've been home so much, with the surgery ... I don't get depressed, but I get this unemployed feeling. So I need to be out there. It's good for me.”

Back to the Well doesn't need to be a commercial success for him to be satisfied artistically, Rogers says. “It can be frustrating because nothing stifles creativity like the lack of an outlet. But as long as somebody's listening and as long as radio stations are giving it a shot, I'll keep doing it.” *



Before After
April Frederick, age 26



Before After
Victoria Gray Lewis, age 30



Before After
Paula Moulder, age 19



Before After
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Days as desperate and restless as these spawn albums like Joe Ely's new *Streets of Sin*. When recording his first solo work in more than five years, Ely drew inspiration less from the front-page headlines than the smaller human-interest stories buried deep in the newspaper. His songs are not so much about the tumultuous times, but a reaction to them.

"I didn't want to make a war record or a political record," explains Ely from his home in the Texas Hill Country just west of Austin. "I thought people get enough of that in the media. Every time you turn on the news, there's some big alert, and it's all so dramatic, and everything is huge in scope. I wanted to do something smaller.

titled *More a Legend Than a Band*.

On his own, Ely gave his music an electric honky-tonk swagger, combining roadhouse roots with rock dynamics in a manner that would receive rave reviews from the country and rock press alike, paving the way for the likes of Steve Earle and Dwight Yoakam. Though Ely failed to

Sin and SIMPLICITY

In a time of extraordinary world events, Joe Ely finds himself drawn to tales of ordinary life

But I'm as influenced by what we're going through as anyone – and this is a dark record, reflecting a pretty bleak period."

The project represents a back-to-basics renewal for Ely, in contrast to the more ornate, flamenco-laced arrangements that marked his music of the late '90s. With its spare bluesiness, bittersweet undercurrent and elemental imagery, the CD suggests a full-circle return to the sort of organic artistry that distinguished Ely's 1978 classic *Honky Tonk Masquerade*.

Over the decades, the Amarillo-born, Lubbock-raised Ely has proven a far more influential artist than a commercially successful one. In the early '70s, he joined forces with fellow Lubbock residents Butch Hancock and Jimmie Dale Gilmore in The Flatlanders, who put a West Texas spin on the musical currents that were part of the work of The Byrds, The Flying Burrito Brothers and Bob Dylan. Ahead of its time and like nothing else emanating from Texas, the group's blend of folk, country, blues and even psychedelia was subsequently released on an album aptly

attract much of a popular following in this country, a tour of England found him embraced by the punk-rock crowd and championed by the British punk icons The Clash, who recognized a kindred spirit in his uncompromising musical instincts and exciting live performances.

While Ely's reputation in concert rivals that of his buddy Bruce Springsteen, *Streets of Sin* exchanges the pedal-to-the-metal intensity that he brings to the stage for a more reflective approach. It follows a pattern that

has marked his career, capping each of the last three decades with a live album and then opening a new chapter with the next studio release.

"These days, I really enjoy going into the studio more than playing live," says Ely, whose Spur Studio on his property allows him the liberty to record whenever inspiration strikes. "I felt kind of played out on the road, like I'd heard it all before and wasn't making progress with new

music. Keeping the road going is tremendous work – beyond full-time ... all of your time."

Reuniting with The Flatlanders for 2002's *Now Again* album and tour put Ely back in touch with some of the magic that had drawn him to music in the first place. Taking a break from touring gave him time to take stock, to reassess where he has been and where he's going. Those sentiments are best expressed in *Streets of Sin*'s last song, "I Gotta Find Ol' Joe."

"You're always losing part of yourself in the dusty plains where I grew up," he says. "Every time I start a new record, I go back to Amarillo or Lubbock, because that just



COURTESY ROUNDER RECORDS



seems like a starting place. This time, I was driving back one night for the funeral of a friend, and I wrote that song in the dashboard lights. It was kind of a recognition of how short this life is, and how you're always having to rediscover pieces of yourself that you've left behind."

While another of the album's more personal songs, "That's Why I Love You Like I Do," ranks with Ely's finest, the majority of the material — including a couple of Butch Hancock songs — finds him assuming characters or playing reporter. He draws inspiration from the loss of a family farm ("All That You Need"), a gambler's streak ("Run Little Pory"), a traffic accident

("Twisty River Bridge") and a natural devastation ("A Flood on Our Hands").

Some of the material blurs the line between autobiography, reportage and fiction, with "Carnival Bum" drawing on the days when Ely was a vagabond, finding carnny and circus work before turning to music.

"There was always this weird romantic attraction, but when I traveled with them, I got to see the insides of these lives that were pretty damn sad," he says. "But they all had a rainbow on the wall they were headed towards, maybe a girlfriend or a dream of getting a fishing boat."

In addition to his new album's release,

Ely has been recording with The Flatlanders on a follow-up to *Now Again* and putting the finishing touches on his first novel, *Super Reverb*, which takes place during the peak of the Vietnam War. He also completed an acoustic album, which he shelved in favor of *Streets of Sin*.

"It just didn't feel right for now," he says. "I have to listen to a record while I'm doing it and have the record tell me where it's going. I start things, and then they never end up the way I'd envisioned them. I've learned in the past that you can never control a record. It always controls you."

— Don McLeese

Star Power

Who better understands the realities and difficulties of fame than stars? And who better to joke about the falseness and excess of some celebrities than three humble country boys like Vince Gill, Kenny Chesney and Brad Paisley, who gained their fame through hard work and undeniable talent?

By coincidence, the three guys have each recently released hit songs that tackle the topic of fame. Gill and Paisley have sly fun with the idea of stardom's formulas and stereotypes, poking at the inflated egos and superficial poses that stars new and old sometimes adopt. Chesney takes a good-natured swipe at the image-making hype and royalty status that some stars assume, but he also underscores that it takes hard work and dedication to earn the opportunity for a shot at the gold ring.

Paisley's song, the hilarious "Celebrity," proves once again that the West Virginian loves crafty wordplay. He's already built a reputation for injecting humor into his lyrics with the hits "I'm Gonna Miss Her" and "Me Neither," both of which comically portray aspects of male behavior.

Paisley's "Celebrity" broadens his canvas to look at American stardom. Here he takes aim at

Kenny Chesney, Vince Gill and Brad Paisley poke fun at the superficial silliness of fame

reality shows and all the silly, irrational ways fame and its pursuit makes people behave. "Celebrity" satirizes what is artificial and false about the entertainment industry in wry, witty style.

Vince Gill focuses more on musical talents, though "Next Big Thing" could translate just as well to those seeking fame in other areas. The song humorously highlights how image threatens to overtake substance as the primary means to attaining musical success these days – and it lightly criticizes the effect that action can have.

Gill satirizes how today's talent scouts focus on grooming newcomers to fit a blueprint of look, sound, personality and the ability to stir up public attention – all of which, he sings, seem more important than talent these days.

More than ever, the entertainment industry has created a mold it expects potential stars to fit. No longer is the search for wholly individual talents who carve their own paths; instead, newcomers are expected to re-shape themselves to fit the predominant idea of what a star looks like, sounds like and acts like.

Gill, in assuming the role of ambitious newcomer, cannily shows what's expected in Nashville: *I'll get a cowboy hat/Some real tight jeans/Lose a little weight and get a belly-button ring/You better stand back/I'm a lean machine ... Everybody's waiting for the next big thing.*

These days, the next big thing often just seems like a younger, more eager



Brad Paisley's new song, "Celebrity," takes a playful stab at stardom.

version of the previous big thing. But that's what happens when marketing and packaging becomes more important than what's inside.

This is not to say that true passion, talent and longevity no longer exist in today's stars – of course it does. Chesney celebrates both old values and new flash in "Big Star." The female singer he depicts in the song achieves her dreams by busting her chops and paying her dues. She practices, she has a vision and she uses her positive energy to rise through the ranks. When she ultimately gets onstage and is ready to embrace the glories of fame, she knows she's earned it.

"Celebrity," "Big Star" and "Next Big Thing" offer different perspectives on the issue of stardom, but there is a common thread that unites all three songs: Behind the smiles, Paisley, Gill and Chesney all know full well that there are ways to build a career on substance, because they've each done it. And they know that true, durable success requires passionate pursuit – not just a happenstance or manufactured encounter with fame.

These three songs playfully remind us that while there may sometimes be shortcuts to success, flickering fame itself is no substitute for the satisfaction of remaining true to yourself, working hard and climbing to the top the hard way.

— Hollie Woodruff



RANDI RADCLIFF



TEF CAMPBELL

Both Kenny Chesney (above) and Vince Gill (left) use their new songs to take a good-natured swipe at hype.

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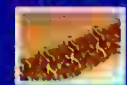
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re-model

No longer the 'aw-shucks' cowboy-next-door, he's re-inventing himself as hipper and more aggressively ambitious. Meet the new Clay Walker.

Cla

After riding the early '90s country boom to platinum sales, Clay Walker entered the new millennium with little to show for his efforts.

"We realized we've done all right with our album sales and chart success, but we'd really done it kind of quietly," Walker says. "There really wasn't a lot of exposure."

Despite six No. 1 singles, Walker hadn't built a sustaining career. He wasn't a leading concert headliner and his mantel held no award trophies. The Nashville establishment didn't seem to take him seriously.

Topping it off, Walker's label, Giant, folded during a spate of corporate downsizing. He was shifted to Giant's bigger partner, Warner Bros., which put out his 2001 album, *Say No More*. But that album failed to yield hits, and Walker found himself in the news only when it came to discussing his experiences battling multiple sclerosis (see sidebar).

By then, he knew it was time for a change.

"Stepping back and looking at everything, I just wanted to put the best and biggest team around me to give myself a really legitimate shot," he says. "It takes a very, very big effort by everybody around you to make it happen."

To that end, Walker has transformed virtually every aspect of his career. Today he has a new label affiliation (RCA Records), a new manager and a fresh perspective. The aw-shucks humility that was once his trademark – and maybe his bane – has been tempered by a much-needed shot of ambition.

In 1998, Walker elicited a round of eye-rolling when he

said he didn't like the name of his *Greatest Hits* project because he disliked having the word "great" associated with anything he did. But today, the new Clay Walker is more determined to fully exploit his talent. "I think we always operated from a standpoint of safety," Walker says of his career. "It would have been a lot more fun and lot more adventurous to take a few more risks and been a

little bit more like reality television – people want to see the real stuff, and they also want to hear real music."

Even his image has been turned on its ear. The uniform of starched shirt, Wranglers, boots and belt has been replaced. Today he's wearing a bright blue Adidas track suit, the kind L.A. rappers wear. The ubiquitous cowboy hat has been replaced with a ball cap.

"I like the new style of jeans that are out there now," he says. "I like what's going on fashion-wise today. It's not that I want to get a big makeover of who I am, it's just that I want to incorporate a little of it. I want to let people know a little more about me – and that is, sometimes I

do go out and dress different. I want people to know I am not so uptight."

As for his music, Walker says his RCA debut, *A Few Questions*, takes a fresh, looser approach. At the suggestion of RCA, Walker worked with a new producer, Jimmy Ritchey, who "brought a whole different creative side to the process," says Walker.

Joe Galante, chairman of the RCA Label Group, praised Walker's willingness to change and update his sound and



BY LISA ZHITO

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COURTESY: A&G

Clay Walker

image. "Clay, to his credit, was not afraid to try something new," Galante says. "Too many artists stick with what's comfortable and what's familiar."

Galante had always been impressed with Walker's vocal ability, but seeing him perform live sealed the deal. "That's a deadly combination," Galante says, "the fact that you have a great singer and a helluva entertainer."

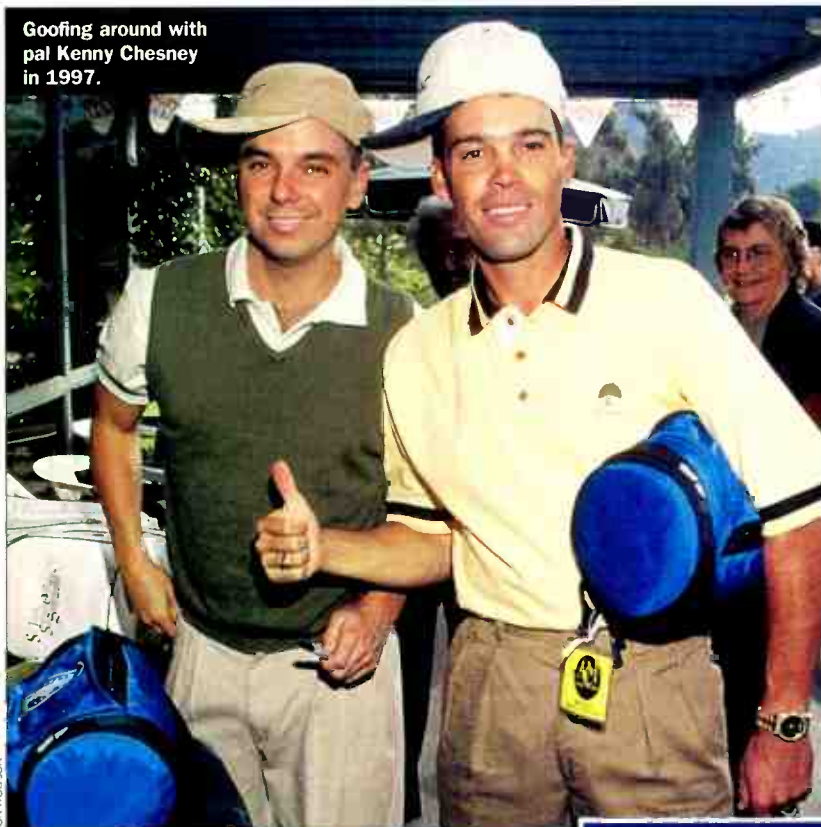
It must be frustrating for Walker to see so many of his one-time contemporaries now enjoying their time in the sun — stars like Kenny Chesney and Toby Keith, who debuted around the same time as Walker.

"I don't ever say 'should have.' I say 'can,'" he says when asked if he compares himself to those artists. "Because there's still the future. If there wasn't, I may be bitter about that, but I don't feel that right now. I do look at other artists that came out around the same time as us; I think Kenny had a deal on Capricorn right before we came out, and Toby was on Mercury before we came out. So it's about time now for us! If the cycle is going to go in order, then it's our turn."

Now Walker is eager to get back on the road and show people that not only is he still around, but he's more adventurous and more mature.

Perhaps the biggest change is in his attitude. "I think I was always afraid of Nashville, because there's so much talent in this town," he says. "It's overwhelming when you come here. But the last two years, I've enjoyed this place, I almost feel like it's home. I don't feel like an outsider any more. I feel like I belong here." ★

Goofing around with pal Kenny Chesney in 1997.



Clay's Cause

Battling multiple sclerosis, Clay Walker goes from private struggle to public spokesperson

It was April Fool's Day 1996 when Clay Walker was introduced to multiple sclerosis. On tour in Canada, he awoke to find his right leg almost entirely immobile and the fingers of his right hand so numb he couldn't hold a guitar pick. Worst of all, his face was wracked with spasms that would last eight weeks and bring blisters to his eyes.

"The first attack was very serious, really devastating," he recalls. "It was a wicked little bout with it, because I had no idea what it was. It was scary."

Now in remission, Walker mostly has battled his disease privately, despite occasional interviews and stories on his experiences. But this year he decided to become more public, forming the nonprofit Band Against MS Foundation (bandagainstm.org). The group's purpose is to share information about the disease and raise funds for research and MS programs.

"I've taken a lot of time trying to understand what MS is and what I can do to not only help myself, but to help other people that have it," he explains. "We're putting a lot of effort into the foundation, because they're very close to finding a cure for this and it would be great to be part of that and help."

Today Walker continues to take medication, but he calls himself lucky because the disease "has stayed pretty much where it started out" for him. "I have about a five percent weakness in my right leg, and that's it. My hands are back to normal, but my right leg is a little weaker than my left. But I still ride horses and run and play football. I'm very athletic and energetic. It really hasn't affected how I perform or anything. I'm the only one who knows that there's a small weakness there."

— L. Z.

LONE STAR

Richie McDonald talks junk food, love songs, tossed underwear and pig sweat

Which Andy Griffith Show character do you most identify with? Thelma Lou! Just kidding. I'd like to say Barney, because he's the funny, goofy guy everybody loves. But if I'm being honest, I would have to say Andy. He's family-oriented, levelheaded and musical. I just love it when he picks up the guitar.

What traits have your kids inherited from you? My sense of humor. We're always playing practical jokes on one another; they really know how to make me laugh and get a reaction out of me. That, and my nose!

What's your favorite restaurant? It's a tie between Whataburger in Texas and Cracker Barrel. I'm a junk-food junkie.



BRAD WALKER

Lonestar's lead singer Richie McDonald is psyched about the three new songs on Lonestar's *Greatest Hits*, released in June. How psyched? He sang one of these songs, "I Pray," in its entirety over the phone while driving in the rain. Between verses, he answered questions.

How do you stay thin? I run about three miles a day. I guess that takes care of it!

Speaking of running, is it true you ran a marathon? Yeah, that was two years ago – and I'm still recovering. I finished, but honestly, two years later my body is telling me it was the wrong thing to do. But the sense of accomplishment I got from it was pretty satisfying.

What was going through your mind during that marathon? Help! I trained, but you don't know what the outcome is going to be until you're actually in it. About mile 18 I thought I wasn't going to finish, but then I looked for a little support from God and from the people on the sidelines who were handing me Oreos and Gummi Bears. Somehow I got the strength I needed to finish – and I did it in 4 hours and 30 minutes.

Have women ever tossed underwear at you onstage? In the early days, when we played in bars and clubs, there were definitely times when inebriated women did throw brassieres and panties onstage. We don't get that much any more since now we mostly play family-type venues. But every now and then we get a bra thrown at us, and it makes us feel so thankful that we've inspired them!

Push comes to shove, what is your favorite album of all time? That's hard, because I listen to so many different types of music. But there is this one particular compilation CD I ordered off the TV called *Love Songs*. It has all the old songs I grew up listening to – Lionel Richie, Christopher Cross, Bread. Some might think that sounds corny, but I really love those romantic ballads. And those songs have influenced the direction Lonestar has gone in, like our ballads "Amazed" and "I'm Already There."

Would you rather do an interview or go to the dentist? I can get through an interview, but I hate going to the dentist. If it wasn't for my wife, I would never go to the dentist. My teeth would be rotting out if she didn't make the appointments for me.

Do you sleep on airplanes? I don't know if you can call it sleeping, it's more like catnapping. I don't really sleep well on planes or buses, I just rest. If I'm just desperately tired, I will fall asleep, but it's not the easiest thing for me. I'd much rather look at the in-flight magazine.

Which would be tougher, giving up your cellphone for a month or not showering for a week? I could definitely live without my cellphone for a month, but I don't think the people around me could live with me if I didn't shower for a week. It would get very ugly. I have always sweated like a pig, so it would just be unbearable for people to be around me.

— Kath Hansen

Gadgets every country fan needs to know about!

— Nick Krewen



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JUNIOR CHEF

Far be it from us to suggest what Faith and Tim might get their three daughters for Christmas, but the Barbie Mixin' Magic Real Food Kitchen might just be the ticket. At \$29.99, the kitchen comes with a working blender, mixer, fridge and water dispenser. All the better to serve up desserts for visiting "Uncle Kenny" Chesney! (1-800-524-TOYS)



STARS ON 45

For the tech-savvy music lover with a nostalgic streak, here's a blank CD that looks like an old 45 vinyl record. Made by Verbatim, the digital discs come in packs of 5, 10 and 50 and are ideal for preserving your Charley Pride or Buck Owens single collections. (www.verbatim.com)



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Guitarists need room to practice quietly, too. For those dreaming of becoming the next Vince Gill or Keith Urban, may we suggest the Yamaha's Silent Steel String Acoustic/Electric Guitar. At \$800, the instrument offers a lightweight body easy for transport and allows you practice with headphones – or without. (www.yamaha.com)



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- Bonnie Shores, NV

"I felt as if I had no energy. I just got the bare things done at home and I would head for the couch. I work out now. I feel 10 to 15 times younger!"

- Greta Kenward, BC, Canada

"My life was so hectic, I could hardly keep up. I was so exhausted. I just didn't have the energy to do all the things I needed to do. Now, I feel like I have my life back again!"

- Judy Griffin, MD



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Martin, seen here in younger days, still performs at age 75. He's the subject of a new movie.

Act Naturally

Country music thrives by telling real-life stories. Now a handful of filmmakers are finding inspiration in the real-life stories behind country music.

King of Bluegrass: The Life & Times of Jimmy Martin has been shown at film festivals across the country, winning kudos for its portrait of one of bluegrass's most charismatic and colorful players. *Distant Son*, still in the works, recalls the tour of Jimmie Rodgers and Will Rogers, which raised millions of dollars to feed Americans during a 1930s famine. *For the Love of Dolly*, also still in production, examines the devotion of Dolly Parton's fans.

George Goehl decided to make *King of Bluegrass* after seeing Martin perform at a bluegrass festival. "He's such a character, I wanted him on film," says Goehl, who had never made a movie before. "A lot of peo-



Director George Goehl films Martin's paid-in-advance tombstone.

ple don't know who he is, and that's a shame because he's one of the most important and influential figures in bluegrass."

Knowing that film festivals cater to a limited audience, Goehl is working towards showing the documentary in art-house theaters. It will also come out on video and DVD this year. Goehl's back at his regular job again as a community organizer, but says he loved the filmmaking process. "I'm hooked," he admits. "I know that I'll be making more films about country music."

Keeping it Real

From the time it debuted three years ago, the Take Country Back website has complained about the state of country radio. Now they're doing something about it. TCB Radio,

evolve – the Bakersfield sound was an evolution. But don't mutate it."

Listeners from around the world tune in to hear a mix of Western swing, country, Americana and whatever else strikes Joulie's fancy. "The response we've gotten proves that people don't want to hear just one type of country music," she says. "Country music was always varied. It hasn't been stale until recently."

TAKE COUNTRY BACK!

Too Country And Proud Of It!

their new internet station, plays songs you won't likely hear on your local radio station.

Laurie Joulie, co-founder and music programmer of the website, says the criterion to get on their playlist is simple. "It has to be real country." And what's that, exactly? "It's a sound," Joulie explains. "It can

While *takecountryback.com* continues to rail against radio for embracing country music that veers into pop, Joulie would never ignore an artist just because they're popular. "If Faith Hill put out a great country song and it was real and listeners liked it," she says, "I'd add it into the mix."

Nashville No



West Coast cool cat Pete Anderson

Sure, this statement about a new CD may sound like normal music-business hype: "My feeling, based on the feedback I'm getting, is that *A Country West of Nashville* is going to create something of a mini-phenomenon." But it comes from Pete Anderson, and the last time he put together a country compilation album, it included unknowns like Dwight Yoakam, Lucinda Williams, Rosie Flores and Jim Lauderdale.

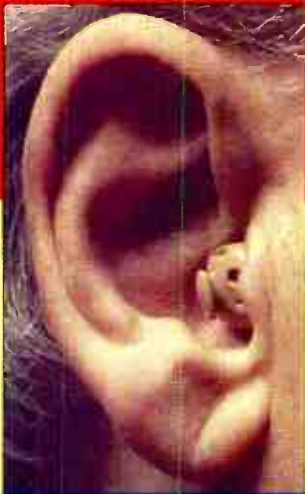
They, along with Anderson, have had significant success since 1988's *A Town South of Bakersfield, Vols. 1 & 2*, which captured the groundbreaking Los Angeles cowpunk movement. Best known now as Yoakam's guitarist and producer, Anderson decided the time was right to record a whole new slate of unknown country artists. His one rule was that they couldn't live in Nashville and they couldn't have a record deal.

"We've got artists from all over," he says of *West of Nashville*. "With the Internet, the disassembly of major record companies, and the disassembly of the stranglehold that the country music industry has on country music, people don't have to live in Nashville or Austin to make their living anymore. And that's a bright spot for this record. There's a lot of people out there, a lot of positive things happening in music."

The album is available online at littledogrecords.com or by calling (818) 557-1595.

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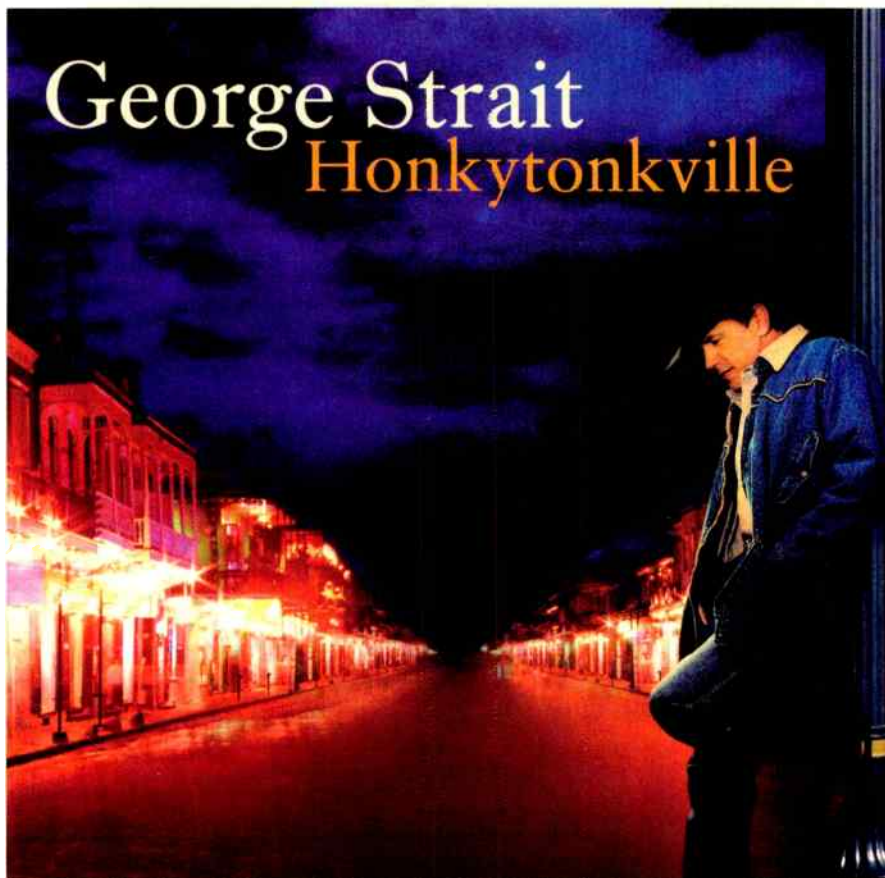
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GEORGE STRAIT
Honkytonkville

MCA
★★★★

Strait fans must be positively giddy with excitement, as this year has brought a bumper crop of music from their man. First there was February's *For the Last Time – Live From the Astrodome*, Strait's first-ever live recording. Now it's followed a mere four months later with *Honkytonkville*, his first studio release in two years. What have we done to deserve such riches?

Honkytonkville is classic George Strait, blending sweetly sentimental ballads with toe-tapping up-tempo numbers and a witty ditty or two. Strait's genius has always been in finding songs that weave deep emotion into a deceptively simple lyric that mostly eschews tired Music Row clichés. *Honkytonkville* is full of such gems, from the drown-your-sorrows title track to the bitterly plaintive "Look Who's Back From Town" and the sweetly poignant hit "Tell Me Something Bad About Tulsa."

Strait and co-producer Tony Brown brought a sizzling cast of supporting players onboard, including keyboard player Matt Rollings and steel guitarist Paul Franklin. Strait's vocals are, as always, effortlessly sublime.

In fact, there's a depth to his performances that longtime fans will recognize as classic Strait. Case in point is his delivery of the touching "Cowboys Like Us." Strait adds a subtle hint of regret to the chorus that, in lesser hands, would have no doubt been tossed off as a one-dimensional line about machismo. Strait knows better, which is why he remains one of country's greatest song interpreters.

Another Strait trait is sly humor, and *Honkytonkville* is full of lighthearted moments. "I Found Jesus on the Jailhouse Floor" and "Honk If You Honky Tonk" are two obvious choices for a chuckle, but even some feel-good love tunes show a refreshing wit. "Four Down and Twelve Across" is a stellar example of a whimsical love song that doesn't drown in its sap.

This is what country music is all

about, folks. Thank goodness we still have people like George Strait out there who can keep it real for us.

— Lisa Zbito

TRACY BYRD
The Truth About Men

RCA
★★★

Tracy Byrd's eighth studio album may set a new standard for truth in advertising.

Having given the world "Lifestyles of the Not So Rich and Famous," "Watermelon Crawl" and "Ten Rounds With Jose Cuervo," Byrd has built part of his career on easy-access fun. *The Truth About Men* hits that chord early and often, opening with the radio-friendly "Drinkin' Bone," which, in case you didn't know, is connected to the "party bone." Two songs later, Byrd lifts a tropical glass in "How'd I Wind Up in Jamaica." The cliché-filled title song features Byrd, Andy Griggs, Blake Shelton and



Montgomery Gentry celebrating the by-products of testosterone.

Mindful that his biggest hit was a ballad – "Keeper of the Stars" – Byrd taps love and loss on three tender songs. Elsewhere he goes for rural nostalgia on "Tiny Town" and cheers on single moms with "That's What Keeps Her Getting By."

A fine in-the-pocket country stylist, Byrd's voice is captured well by producer Billy Joe Walker, who sticks to the center of the road with the album's instrumentation, stepping out only on the island-tinged "Jamaica." Walker's production is so targeted, the listener can deduce the song's topic before the vocals begin – be it a smoldering romancer, melancholy breakup song or paint-the-town shuffle.

That's not a knock, merely an indication that *The Truth About Men* is exactly what country fans have come to expect of Tracy Byrd. The album never rises above itself, but neither is it likely to disappoint those who know what they want from this true Texan.

— Chuck Aly

MARTY STUART

Country Music

COLUMBIA NASHVILLE

★★★★

Considering that his critically hailed 1999 song cycle *The Pilgrim* tanked in the marketplace, some might consider Marty Stuart's latest release to be an overt stab at resuscitating his commercial career.

Well, yes and no. You can't blame a guy for trying to find a berth at country radio. But more important, *Country Music* returns Marty to what he's always done best – straight-up hillbilly rock that recalls such earlier gems as "Tempted" and "Burn Me Down."

Stuart has never gotten enough credit for his ability to reconcile the historical roots of country with the pulse of the rock age. That knack is in full force here. With the sharp smack of drums and a rockish count-off call, Stuart kick-starts his new release with an entrancing, modern take on the 1955 Porter Wagoner hit "A Satisfied Mind."

This is smart country-rock – the roots of the genre still peek through, but it's

TRACE ADKINS

Greatest Hits, Volume 1

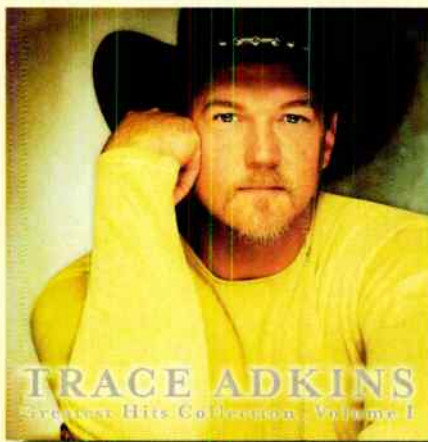
CAPITOL

★★★★

The feminist Susan Faludi wrote a 1999 book, *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man*, that outlined how common men are disenfranchised in American culture. In a society where job layoffs have become routine and the media is obsessed with celebrity images of masculine perfection, Faludi said, the emotional pain of men – in particular, working-class men – gets short shrift.

If there's a current musical spokesman for this voiceless lot, it's Trace Adkins. His unpretentious quality shines through on his first greatest-hits collection (which includes two new songs), where Adkins sings about double shifts and divorce, minimum wage and downsized dreams. With lovely flourishes of violin and cello rising beneath the hillbilly staples of fiddle and steel, "I'm Tryin'" sets the tone: *It's been two years since we finalized/Still ain't used to puttin' 'ex' in front of wife/but I'm tryin'.*

This is no pretty boy moaning about punching the factory clock. At 6 feet 6 inches, Adkins is tall as a tree with a world-weary, basement-deep baritone. Even when he's crying, he never sounds



whiny or wimpy.

In this blue-collar topography, love becomes the only soft place to fall at the end of a hard day. It's also a land of earthy admissions: *Gimme, gimme some more*, Adkins growls in the sexy, swinging "More," followed up by the funky blast of "Chrome" and the sly, honky-tonk steam of "I Left Something Turned on at Home."

These are solid portraits of male domestic life: losing love, finding love, getting the kids off to school. In short, hangin' in and holdin' on. Nothing fancy, just simple stuff. Stuff that in Adkins' strong hands always rings with a common-man truth.

— Chrissie Dickinson

Country Music rates all recordings as follows:

- ★★★★ EXCELLENT A classic from start to finish.
- ★★★★ VERY GOOD An important addition to your collection.
- ★★★ RESPECTABLE Recommended with minor reservations.
- ★★ FAIR For loyal and forgiving fans.
- ★ POOR Seriously flawed.

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REVIEWS



also honest music that doesn't pretend The Rolling Stones never happened.

A teenage prodigy who apprenticed with bluegrass legend Lester Flatt, Stuart is a stellar picker whose primary weakness has always come in the vocal department. His frequently thin pipes are seldom a match for the visceral punch of his musical chops. As a singer ... well, he's a great guitarist and mandolin player.

But Stuart often makes up for his vocal deficit in the heart department, most

notably on the haunting, rural reflection "Farmer's Blues," a moving duet with Merle Haggard. At a time when too many "legendary" guest spots feel manufactured, it's a credit to both men that this cut teems with organic feeling. It's also a credit to Stuart that he doesn't get blown off the map by the titanic Hag, a genuine risk for even the most accomplished singer.

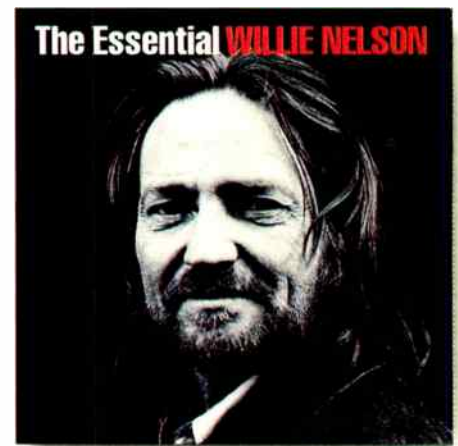
— C. D.

WILLIE NELSON The Essential Willie Nelson

COLUMBIA LEGACY
★★★★

Happy 70th birthday, indeed. This 41-song, two-CD set is a superb value in that it accomplishes almost as much as a box set. It begins with Nelson's ultra-rare, lovely Bellaire Records single of "Night Life," originally released in 1961, then picks up "Hello Walls," "Crazy," and "Funny How Time Slips Away" from his 1962 Liberty Records LP.

His short stint at Monument Records is represented by his 1964 performance of "I Never Cared for You." Three tunes from his wildly uneven tenure at RCA are included, as are a pair of tracks from his



brilliant work for Atlantic in the early '70s.

"Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain" introduces Willie's multimillion-selling years with Columbia, which make up the meat of this collection. Nearly all his big hits from the '70s and '80s are here, as well as duets with Leon Russell, Waylon Jennings, Julio Iglesias, Ray Charles, Ray Price and Merle Haggard.

The set winds up with his Emmylou Harris duet "Everywhere I Go" from 1998's justly acclaimed *Teatro* album, the

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recent, award-winning “Mendocino County Line” with Lee Ann Womack and the previously unreleased “One Time Too Many” with Aerosmith – and believe it or not, Steven Tyler actually works as a country harmonizer, at least for the first half of the duet. After that, Willie hangs on for dear life while the band rocks the dickens out of the song.

Instead of liner notes or session information, the booklet contains a plethora of praise from 47 of Willie’s fellow artists.

— Robert K. Oermann

T. GRAHAM BROWN

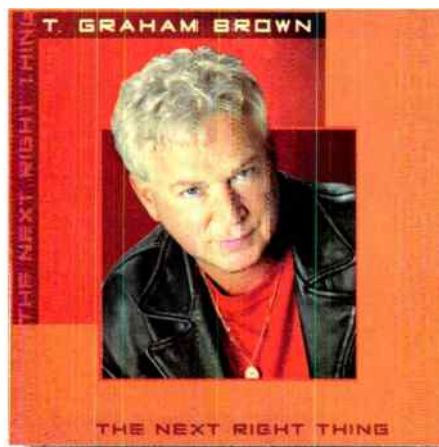
The Next Right Thing

INTERSOND

★★★★★

Like Delbert McClinton, T. Graham Brown has effortlessly absorbed country, rhythm & blues and rock down to the bone, an amalgamation of genres that shades his unique songs.

Although his commercial heyday was in the '80s, time has only burnished his soulful approach to his material. On his latest release, he moves seamlessly between roadhouse rockers, country-soul meditations on being a better man, piercing balladry and a roaring confrontation with the insidious power of addiction



(the self-penned “Monkey”). Also here is a redux of his own battle with the bottle, “Wine Into Water.”

Brown avoids feel-good pronouncements. A lesser artist would be smashed on the shoals of “Which Way to Pray,” an unnerving ballad about a sexually abused girl who grows up and into a spiral of adult abuse, only to be confronted later by the specter of her dying father. Confusion, horror, spiritual uncertainty – it all collides here in Brown’s evocative, low-key telling. Should she forgive the man who destroyed her life? *Sometimes we just don’t know which way to pray,*

SUZIE BOGUSS

Swing

COMPADRE

★★★★★

Occasionally, in this deftly executed foray into 1940s-style swing, Bogguss and co-producer Ray Benson of Asleep at the Wheel seem a bit over-awed when tackling timeless, familiar swing classics like Billie Holiday’s “Comes Love,” Nat King Cole’s “Straighten Up and Fly Right” and Duke Ellington’s “Do Nothing Till You Hear From Me.”

Granted, Bogguss delivers some absolutely delicious vocal phrasing, and the musicians, most of them present and former members of Asleep at the Wheel, masterfully capture the genre’s subtle instrumental shadings. Yet somehow, despite – or maybe because of – their finesse and savvy, they seem to glide right over the soul of the songs.

Fortunately, Bogguss and Benson (who turns in a gruff-voiced duet on “Cupid Shot Us Both With One Arrow”) also found a batch of fine new songs written resolutely in the '40s swing vein by Nashville songwriters



Paul Kramer and April Barrows.

These sprightly new swing tunes, with their deft melodies and clever lyrics, stand proudly next to the Ellington and Cole classics. Kramer’s “Picadilly Circus” and Barrows’ “Burning the Toast” are particularly imaginative.

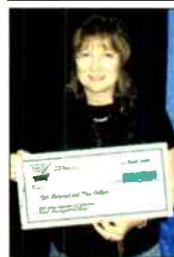
Most important, Bogguss is able to slip inside these fresh songs and inhabit them in a subdued but thrilling way that combines warmth, charm, wit and humor.

— Bob Allen

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he sings. Sometimes there is no right answer. Brown leaves the song hanging without a definitive conclusion, much like life itself.

On "Middle Age Crazy," a Jerry Lee Lewis hit from 1977, a man trades in his sensible Oldsmobile for a Porsche and cheats on his wife with a young girlfriend. With the soulfulness of the late Charlie Rich, Brown nails the desperation of a midlife crisis without reducing the protagonist to a caricature. Similarly, his duet with George Jones, "Bag of Bones," is an effective take on aging, a melancholy cry of the heart from two men who have been there, done that and are still standing to tell the tale.

— C. D.



ANDREA ZONN
Love Goes On

COMPASS
★★★★

Like her longtime friend Alison Krauss, Andrea Zonn has a beautiful voice, exceptional abilities as a fiddler and a sensitive, free-ranging ear for a good song. Unlike Krauss, she has worked extensively as an accompanist rather than as a bandleader, lending her skills to tours and recordings by Vince Gill, Lyle Lovett, Trisha Yearwood and others.

On her first solo album, Zonn proves she's got the talent, if not the inclination, to stand in the spotlight.

With help from a long list of friends that includes Krauss, Gill, banjo stylist Alison Brown, songwriter Marcus Hummon, Dobro superstar Jerry Douglas, Opry drummer John Gardner and numerous others, the Illinois native has crafted an elegant set with a strong spiritual flavor. Defying easy categorization, she ranges from a tasty blend

CHARLIE ROBISON

Live
COLUMBIA
★★★

Have marriage and fatherhood mel- lowed Charlie Robison? Judging by the testosterone-fueled *Live*, not in the least.

Recorded at the singer/songwriter's favorite haunt, Gruene Hall in New Braunfels, Texas, Robison and his band, The Enablers, move from one swaggering dose of machismo to another, covering 15 tracks of live music plus one new studio recording.

Gruene Hall is home turf for Robison; indeed, his last live album, *Unleashed Live*, which also featured brother Bruce Robison and fellow Texan Jack Ingram, was recorded here. In that regard, *Live* offers a classic concert experience with the hoots and hollers of an ardent home-town crowd, the "drunken angels" hand-picked from the audience who perform a pitch-imperfect chorus of "The Wedding Song" and the spoken-word embellishments as Robison engages his fans.

But what was no doubt a killer concert becomes tiresome on CD; the drunken fans grow irritating, and one wearies of Robison's party-boy persona, especially his misogynistic comments (including one crude barb about Monica Lewinsky).

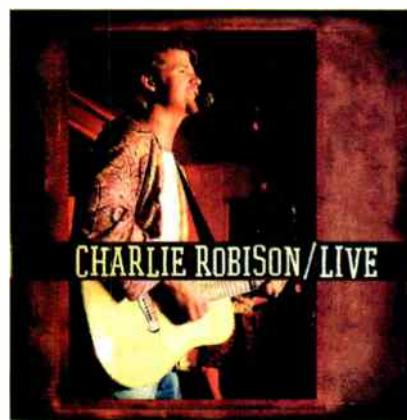
As a songwriter, Robison typically

of funk and Celtic overtones on the opening "Heads Up for the Wrecking Ball" and "Weather With You" through the gentle, philosophical folk-country of "In My Own Backyard" and the closing title track, a lush ballad that offers a quiet note of hope.

Many are a far cry from country's stereotypical three chords, but they nevertheless carry a lot of truth, and Zonn's intimate, expressive soprano guides the listener through the often sophisticated structures and arrangements to each song's essential point.

Indeed, if there's any complaint at all to be made here, it's more in the nature of a wish — namely, that Zonn might cut loose from her self-imposed restraint a bit more often. Still, there's little wrong and much right with a collection of thoughtful, contemplative jewels.

— Jon Weisberger

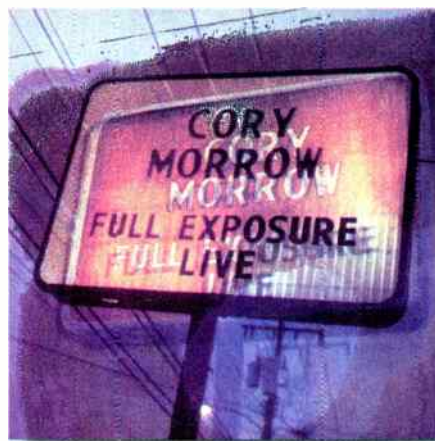


offers an unjaded look at working-class life. His story songs are dark and unsentimental, but they are usually tempered with empathy. His characters suffer in love, they indulge in booze, drugs, violence and crimes of passion, but we feel for these people even as we witness the downward spiral of their lives.

Thankfully, the new studio track "Walter" has plenty of the old humor and heart that make Robison such a standout. But coming at the end of more than an hour's worth of boozy brag-gadocio, it's too late to do much good.

"I'm a dumbass hillbilly from Bandera, Texas," Robison declares at the close of *Live*, and he works a little too hard to earn that label here. Time to untap the keg, turn the lights up, pour yourself into a cab and call it a night.

— L. Z.



CORY MORROW
Full Exposure

WRITE ON
★★

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fans get a bit of everything on *Full Exposure*: three new studio tracks, a live CD and even a DVD that allows them to watch their hero in concert.

That the Houston-born Morrow has already conquered the state of Texas is beyond debate – the thousands gathered at the Cynthia Woods Mitchell Pavilion for this recording show no shortage of enthusiasm for his blue-collar country rock.

Whether he's able to break out of his regional stranglehold is another matter. The three new Ray Kennedy-produced tunes that preface the concert don't make a good case for national stardom. "Nothing Better" owes a large debt to Tom Petty circa *Southern Accents*, but captures none of the finesse. "GTMO Blues" is a grassy-flavored narrative with cheeky attitude, but even Morrow's throaty drawl sounds indifferent and unconvincing. "21 Days" is yet another self-centered whine-and-roses, life-on-the-road anthem without much purpose.

It isn't until the party starts, courtesy of "Texas Time Travelin'," that Morrow shows his stuff. He draws the crowd in with the frequently funny "Songwriter's Lament," while his like-minded compadre Pat Green makes an appearance – to the crowd's delight – during a cover of Waylon Jennings' "Are You Sure Hank Done It This Way?"

It should be noted that the strongest songs in Morrow's booze-'n'-broads cache belong to other sources: along with Jennings, Billy Joe Shaver's "Live Forever" is a diamond among the rough. Even the CD-closing "Beer" offers a few Bob Marley numbers in a medley, and they illustrate the melodic weakness of Morrow's own tunes.

Morrow's *Full Exposure* shows he can excite a crowd; what it doesn't show is that he can write a song to match those of his heroes.

— Nick Krewen

THE GIBSON BROTHERS

Bona Fide

SUGAR HILL

★★★★

Upstate New York's Gibson Brothers were on the fast track to bluegrass success in 1998, releasing their fourth album and winning the International Bluegrass Music Association's

MARCEL

You, Me and the Windshield

MERCURY

★★★★

A former minor-league hockey player with major-league music dreams, one-name Marcel makes his recording debut with this collection of autobiographical songs.

He has a rocker's unpolished vocals and movie-star good looks, but his self-penned songs are the most promising thing about this newcomer. His lyrics are intelligent, employing clever word-play but still offering vivid pictures of one whose itinerant life embraces a lot of arrivals and departures.

Indeed, the aptly titled *You, Me and the Windshield* covers a lot of ground, literally; nearly every song addresses an aspect of life on the road. There is loneliness, expressed on "This Old Diesel," and the promise of adventure, on the title track. Marcel must know what it's like to be a traveling man; he spent years on the road playing hockey and more recently commuted between Nashville and Los Angeles to jump-start his music career. Throw into the mix a romantic relationship with an equally on-the-go recording artist – rising star Jessica Andrews – and there's plenty of grist for the song-writing muse.

Easily the strongest cut here addresses the latter issue. "Missing You" is a candid look at love when the object of one's affection is never home. The double-entendre of the title is clever –



How I'd love to hear you say you love me too, but I keep on missing you – but it never gets in the way of the song's honest expression of a painful separation. Marcel duets with real-life love Andrews on another ballad, "I Won't Hold You Down," which bears an "if you love someone, let them go" message. Vocally, the two are worlds apart: Andrews' powerful pop warble is a stark contrast to Marcel's reedier rocker's growl. But what Marcel lacks in vocal chops he makes up for in sincerity.

In fact, the album's weakest points are its lightweight up-tempo tunes: "Perfect Situation," for one, sounds like a revved-up copy of Tim McGraw's "Something Like That," with a bit of John Michael Montgomery's "Sold" thrown in for good measure.

Marcel's debut shows there's work to be done if he's going to have staying power. But he's off to a promising start.

— L. Z.



Emerging Artist of the Year award. But then they seemed to disappear.

In truth, the band spent the ensuing

years chasing a major-label deal that never came to fruition. *Bona Fide* marks their return to the bluegrass field, and it reveals that while their time away might not have produced a tangible result, it was hardly wasted.

The songs that make up the new collection are a dandy bunch, and most come straight from banjo-playing Eric Gibson and his guitarist brother, Leigh. Refreshingly, the brothers stretch beyond the usual bluegrass subjects, offering sharply drawn characters in small-town stories that remind the listener of Tom T. Hall's creations – and sure enough, the Storyteller himself makes a brief cameo on their version of his "Don't Forget the Coffee, Billy Joe."

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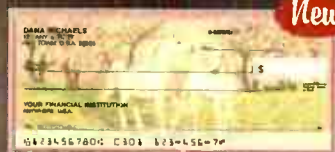
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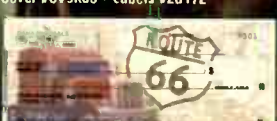
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BOOKS

SOUTHWEST SHUFFLE: PIONEERS OF HONKY-TONK, WESTERN SWING, AND COUNTRY JAZZ

By Rich Kienzle

(ROUTLEDGE, \$19.95)

For more than two decades, Rich Kienzle has written countless album-liner notes articles in numerous magazines, including this one. After so many years on the job, his research – taped interviews, notes, clippings and the like – probably fill a large attic. Fortunately, Kienzle has mined that attic for a collection of tantalizing artist profiles that ultimately beckon the reader to hear the music. And isn't that what good music writing should do?

In *Southwest Shuffle*, he focuses on the Dallas/Los Angeles arc where Bob Wills is the patron saint of musical souls. The Southwest style was set and refined in the '30s and '40s in the cavernous dance halls of Texas and California, where two-steppers craved its swinging, bluesy sound. It was a sharp contrast to the country music back east, a more provincial style hemmed in by mountain hollows and corn rows.

In *Shuffle*, a host of freewheeling artists come to life, including Hank Penny, Wade Ray, Willie Nelson and Spade Cooley. At the core is Kienzle's Southwest trinity: Hank Thompson, Ray Price and Tennessee Ernie Ford.

Texas-born Thompson is one of the legs that post-Second World War country music stands on. He recorded influential hits, employed seminal band members and mentored a cadre of up-and-coming stars, including Billy Walker, Jean Shepard and Wanda Jackson. Thompson's role is often forgotten; Kienzle makes sure it isn't.

Ray Price, on the other hand, is somewhat better remembered today. In *Southwest Shuffle*, he's an enigmatic hero, redeeming country



music from the oozing Nashville Sound in the 1950s only to join the ooze in the '60s.

Tennessee Ernie Ford proves the weakest third in Kienzle's trinity. The affable Ford rode his gigantically popular 1955 hit, "Sixteen Tons," to mass appeal. Writes Kienzle, "Ernie brought country music and Southern gospel to a white-bread, split-level, gray-flannel America that wouldn't have crossed its suburban streets to see a *Grand Ole Opry* artist." That's true, but Ford grows unnaturally large in Kienzle's eyes. A longtime fan, he claims that Ford's boogie records were "among the profound harbingers of rock and roll."

Harbinger? Certainly. Profound? No. Rhythm and blues artists such as Big Joe Turner, Louis Jordan and Big Mama Thornton were profound influences, as were Hank Williams and Bill Monroe on the country side.

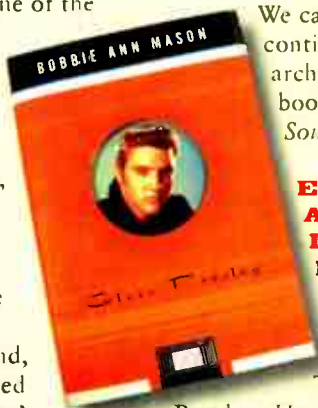
Following on a theme, Kienzle bestows undeserved credit on Ford's NBC-TV program, which ran for five years starting in 1956, for guaranteeing the success of country music's TV network shows. However, America's love affair with country shows stretches back to 1940s network radio. Long before Ford, the networks courted the likes of Eddy Arnold and Gene Autry, and barn dances such as the *Grand Ole Opry* and the *Louisiana Hayride*.

Kienzle's revisionist treatment of Ford falters, but the 17 other profiles are built of sturdier stuff. We can only hope that he continues to mine his archives and produce books as satisfying as *Southwest Shuffle*.

ELVIS PRESLEY: A PENGUIN LIFE

By Bobbie Ann Mason

(PENGUIN PUTNAM, \$19.95)



Two years ago, Random House published Mason's *Zigzagging Down a Wild Trail*, a col-

lection of short fiction. But could there be a trail wilder than Presley's? From his needy childhood to the concert barnstorming of the '70s, Mason zigzags down the King's crazy path with a clarity and sensitivity shaped by her Southern heritage.

WAKING UP IN NASHVILLE

By Stephen Foehr

(SANCTUARY, \$18.95)

British travel writer Stephen Foehr takes tea with a diverse lot of Nashville personalities: the ragged fame chasers and barroom philosophers who haunt Lower Broadway and the scions of Music Row, such as label executive Tony Brown and superstar Vince Gill. It's an absorbing glance at

today's country music industry, flawed only by the frequent misspellings of artists' names and other glaring errors that too often plague British accounts of American country.

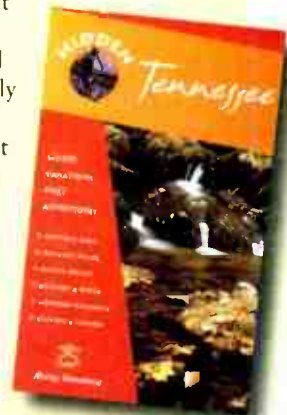


HIDDEN TENNESSEE

By Marty Olmstead

(ULYSSES PRESS, \$16.96)

Should you follow Stephen Foehr to Nashville, you might bring along Marty Olmstead's practical travel guide. Recently updated, *Hidden Tennessee* points out the obvious stops in Music City, such as the Ryman Auditorium and Andrew Jackson's Hermitage, but there are lesser-known destinations, too, like the Museum of Beverage Containers & Advertising.



— Michael Streissguth

REVIEWS

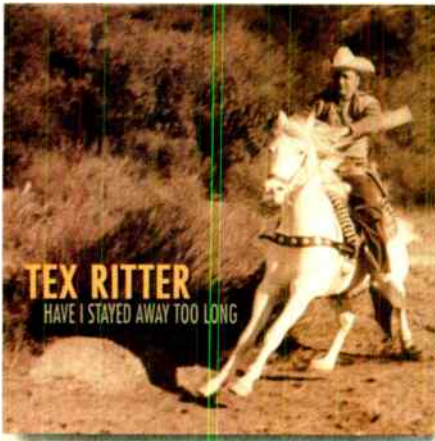
There are a couple of other covers, too, including a hot instrumental, Flatt & Scruggs' "Shucking the Corn," and gospel evergreen "The Lighthouse." But the original songs stand out as one of the strongest points in the Brothers' music.

With their well-matched voices, Leigh and Eric trade off leads without dropping a stitch, and their harmonies will remind listeners of earlier country siblings like the Louvin and Delmore Brothers.

Longtime bass player Mike Barber and new mandolinist Marc MacGlashan carry out their jobs with creative dexterity, while a handful of guests, including fiddlers Luke Bulla and Jason Carter, fill out the sound from time to time without grabbing center stage.

Add it all up, and there's no doubt that The Gibson Brothers are, indeed, bona fide. It's good to have them back.

— J. W.



TEX RITTER Have I Stayed Away Too Long

BEAR FAMILY

★★★★★

After signing with Capitol Records in 1945, cowboy actor Tex Ritter began recording a series of transcriptions for broadcast on radio stations. These four CDs collect those performances, all captured over the next seven years.

In many cases, these are live versions of his hit singles, with the primary difference being that the backing band is more simplified than on his full-fledged recordings. But the overall sound is quite pleasing, generally including only fiddle, electric guitar, steel, upright bass and accordion.

Among the standouts are "Green Grow the Lilacs," which Ritter initially popularized on the New York stage in

1931, as well as such Western standards as "Home on the Range," "Red River Valley," "Whoopee Ti Yi Yo (Get Along Little Dogies)," "O Bury Me Not on the Lone Prairie," "Ridin' Ole Paint," "My Darling Clementine" and "I'm an Old Cowhand."

The repertoire is also scattered with material as diverse as Hank Williams' "Move It On Over," Leadbelly's "Honey Chile," Bob Wills' "San Antonio Rose" and Jack Guthrie's "Oklahoma Hills," all performed in Ritter's drawling, hound-dog baritone.

The set includes a jumbo booklet containing color reproductions of the star's comic book covers, a complete discography of the selections and an informative essay by cowboy-music expert Packy Smith.

— R. K. O.

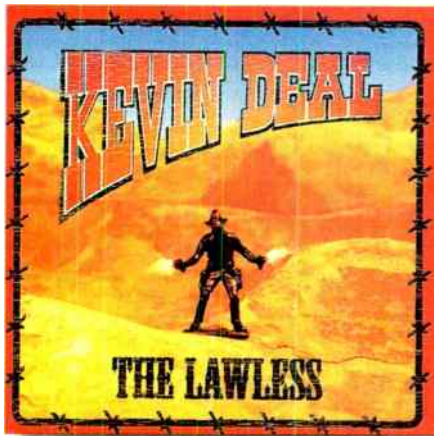
KEVIN DEAL

The Lawless

BLIND NELLO

★★★★★

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solid foundation. He chooses his words carefully, whether it's spinning yarns with an unlikely biblical twist ("Gideon") or pinpointing the lonely paradox of a trucker ("Diesel"). And with a slightly fatigued, granular drawl just this side of John Prine, Deal's storytelling brims with believability – especially on the standouts "Quicker Than the Eye" and "Pick 'Em to Win." Deal benefits from the fine support from ever-reliable producer Lloyd Maines, who also contributes on Dobro, lap steel and guitar. Freddie Spears' mandolin adds to the grass-roots feel, while the rhythm section of bassist

Jonny Jackson and drummer Paul Pearcy is subtle yet energized.

A well-placed acoustic blues rendition of Lynyrd Skynyrd's "Mississippi Kid" with Spears handling lead vocals, and two other covers – the mournful Hank Williams classic "Lonesome Whistle" and fellow Texan Max Stalling's "Freedom for Mary," with aching harmony from Terri Hendrix – are also seamlessly woven into the mix.

As Bob Dylan once wrote, "To live outside the law you must be honest." On *The Lawless*, Kevin Deal keeps it honest – and real.

— N. K.

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Merlefest Live! - The 15th Anniversary Jam

WWW.MERLEFEST.ORG

★★★★

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Fresh Faces at Merlefest 2003

WWW.MERLEFEST.ORG

★★★★

Over the last 16 years, the annual acoustic musical gathering known as Merlefest has grown from one stage on a flatbed truck to one of the most famous Americana music events around. Held in remembrance of guitarist Merle Watson, Doc Watson's son and musical partner, the festival now covers 10 stages and draws top pickers from across the world to its bucolic setting of Wilkesboro, N.C.

In 2002, a special jam was held to celebrate the 15th anniversary of the festival. It is these one-off, unrehearsed jams that make Merlefest such a special event, and with the release of the *15th Anniversary Jam* on CD and DVD, those who don't attend can get a feel for how special it is.

The lineup reflects a typical cross-section of Merlefest artists, from legends like Earl Scruggs to country stars like Patty Loveless and Alison Krauss to bluegrass acts

like Blue Highway and Nashville Bluegrass Band and eclectic wanderers like Tim O'Brien, John Cowan and Peter Rowan.

Doc Watson is the one constant, both at the festival and on the anniversary CD, as he sits in with various compelling combinations of players. Highlights include his animated version of "Sweet Georgia Brown" with contributions from fiddler Stuart Duncan, mandolinist Chris Thile and banjoist Pete Wernick, and on the DVD only,

"Salt Creek," which brings together Watson with guitarists Tony Rice and Sean Watkins.

Fresh Faces of Merlefest 2003 is similarly diverse. Any CD that features such renowned acts as Hot Rize and Doyle Lawson & Quicksilver, the current IBMA Vocal Group of the Year, isn't exactly a collection of newcomers. But if the faces aren't fresh, the music

certainly is, especially with strong contributions by the talented Lynn Morris, Dale Ann Bradley, cowboy singer Don Edwards and bluegrassers Mountain Heart, among others.

The *Merlefest Live* DVD and companion CD are just enough to whet the appetite as the countdown starts toward Merlefest 2004.

— Jeff Wall



FEATURING

Doc Watson and Friends

Richard Watson

Jamie Bush

John Cowan

Jerry Douglas

Alison Krauss

Albert Lee

Patty Loveless

Tim O'Brien

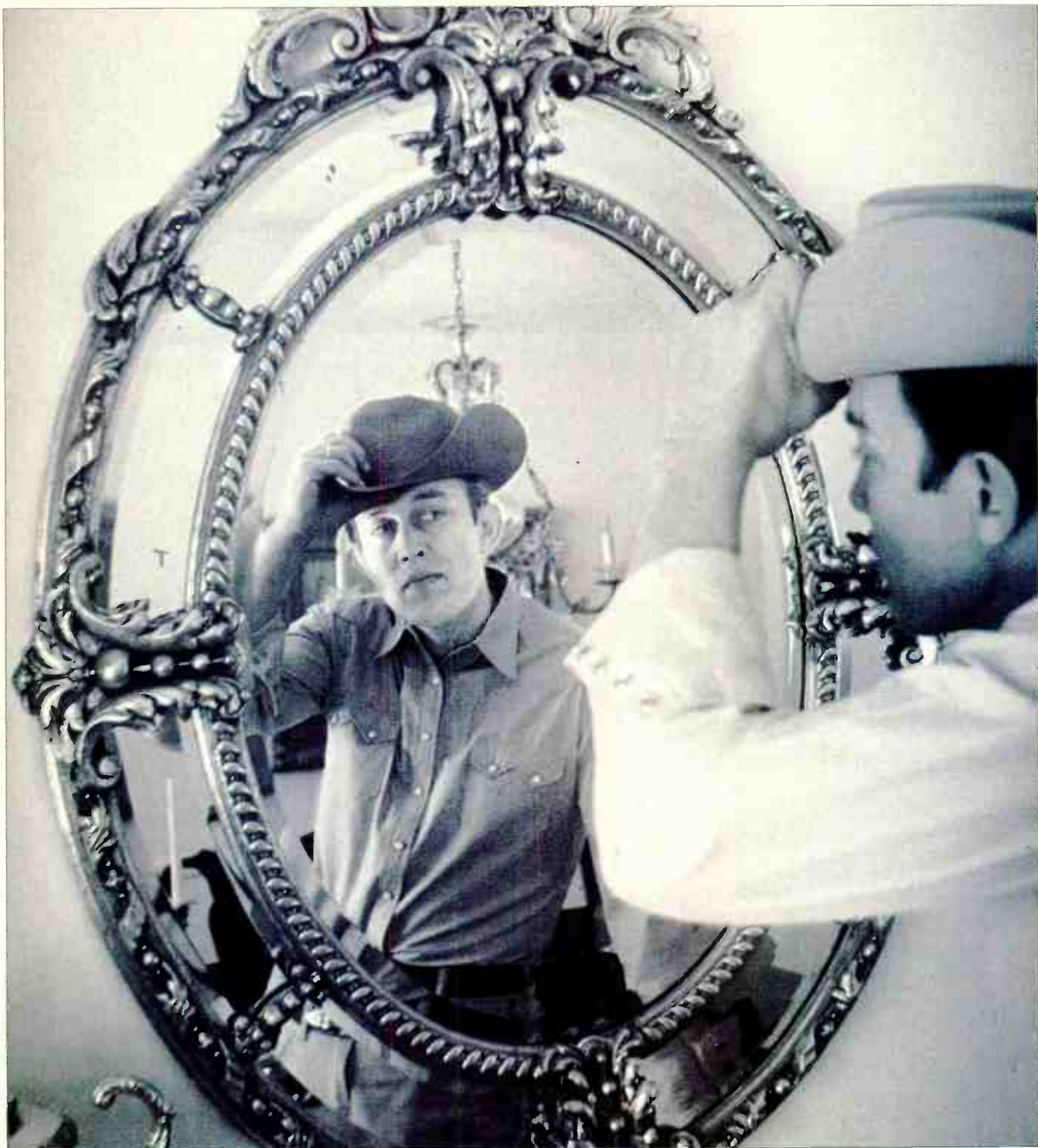
Tony Rice

John Seewan

Zach Slaughter

Chris Thile

www.merlefest.org

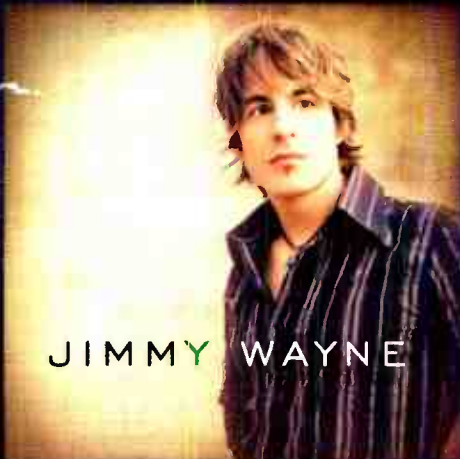


Singer, Showman, Sausage Maker

Jimmy Dean has played many roles in his 75 years: country singer, TV star, movie actor and sausage king among them. His deep voice brought character to such famous recitations as his 1961 hit, "Big Bad John." But he became a household name

when ABC televised his network variety program, *The Jimmy Dean Show*: Here, he's shown in the last year of his show, 1966—two years before he founded the Jimmy Dean Meat Co., which would forever link his name to pork sausage.

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