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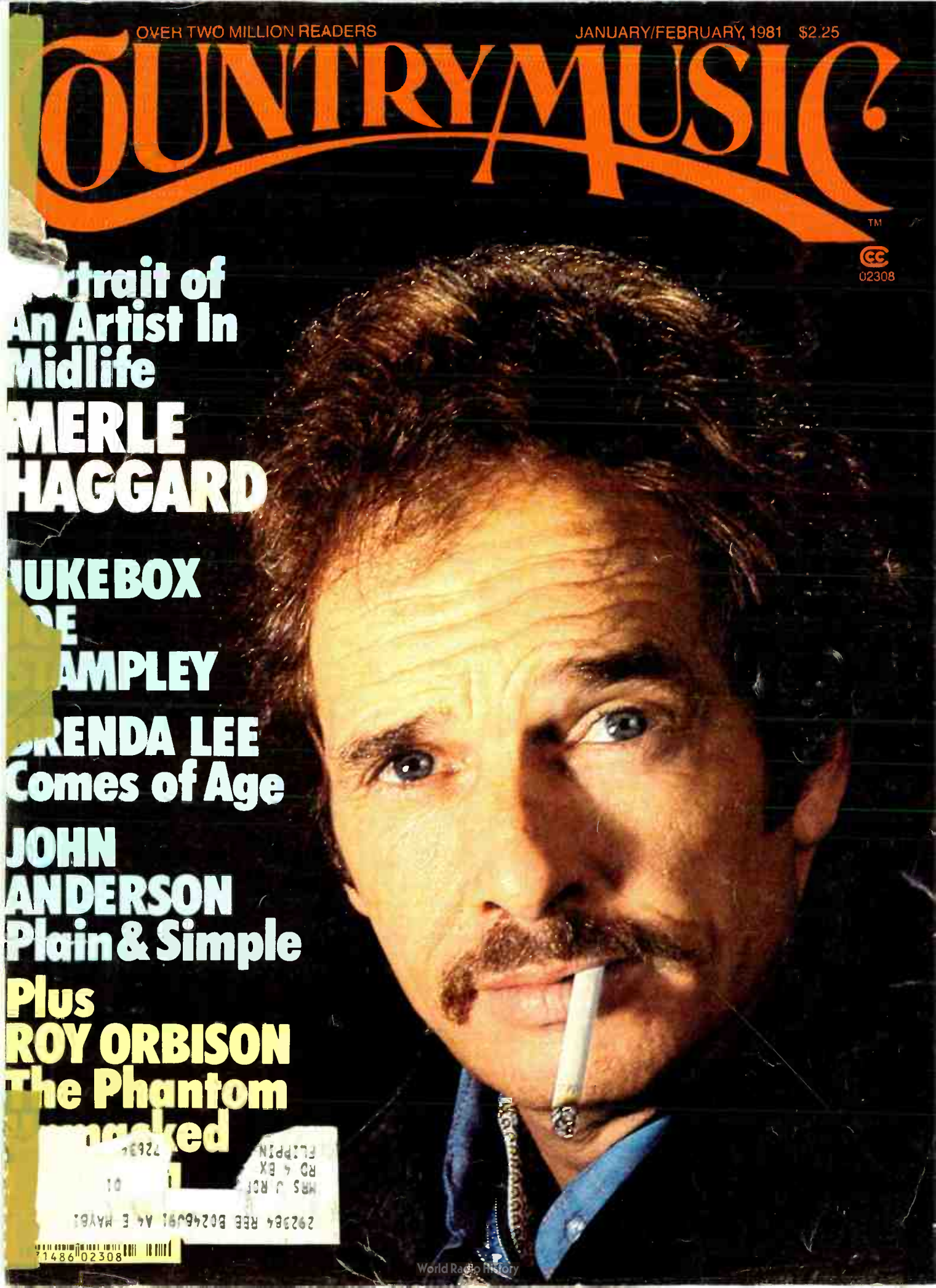

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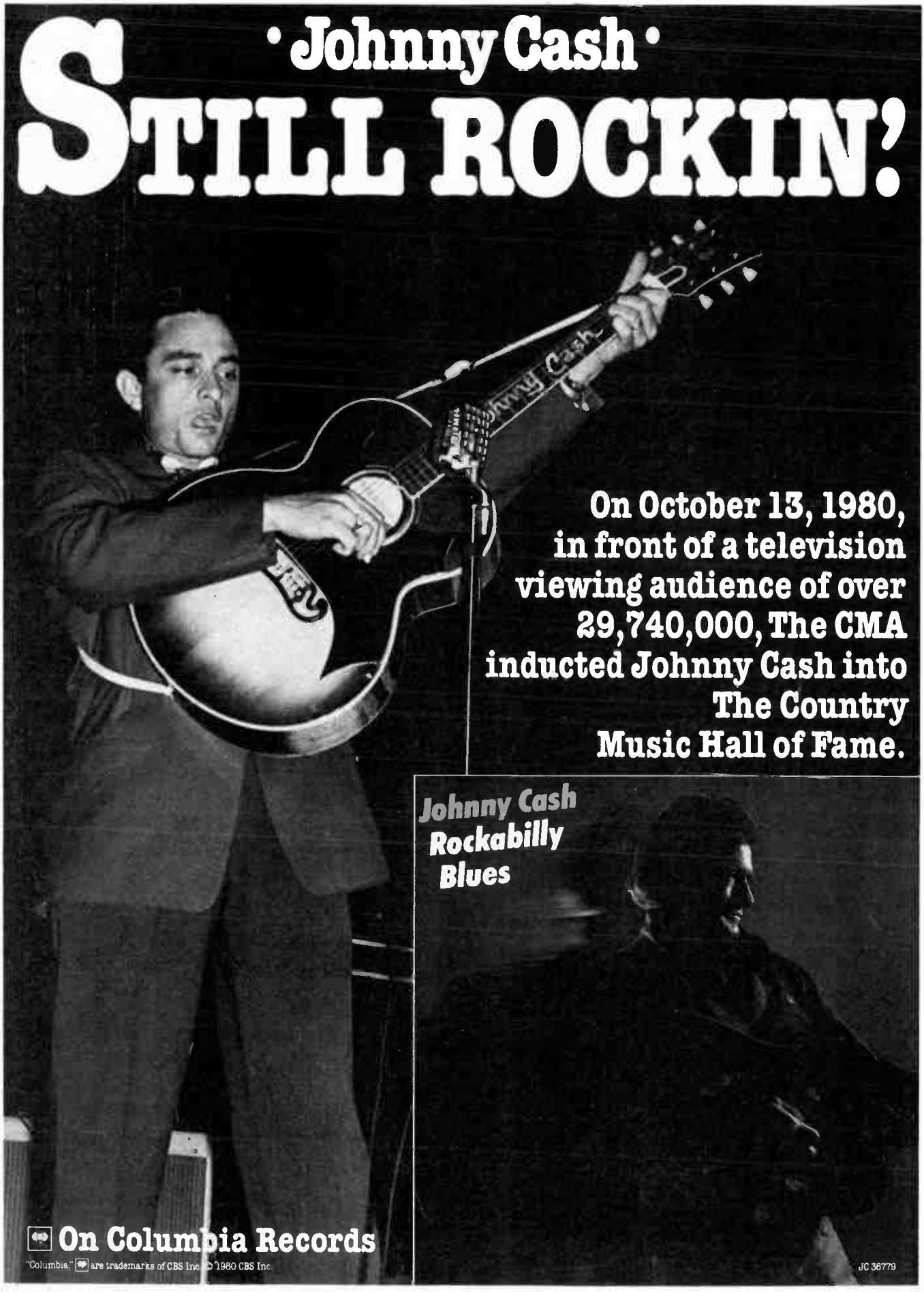

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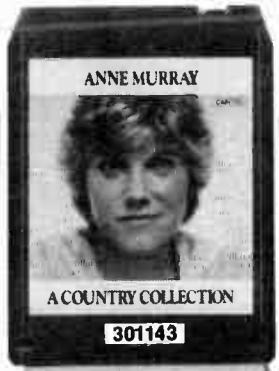

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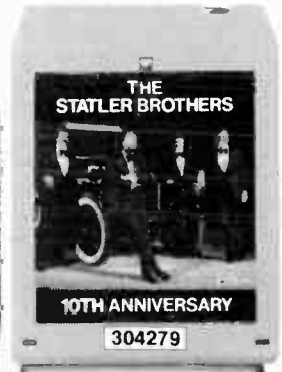

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PICKERS

By Rich Kienzle

The Harmonica Like Everything Else Was Invented In China

Listen to Willie or Waylon, Paycheck or Cash. Listen to Bob Dylan's groundbreaking 1969 country-rock album, **Nashville Skyline**, or to Johnny Cash's recording of *Orange Blossom Special*. In among all the other music, weaving in, out and around the vocals, stepping out for an occasional solo and enhancing the overall sound is a harmonica. It's a part of Willie's, Waylon's and Paycheck's bands and Cash, after putting it down for awhile is starting to feature it in his new, expanded group. And Charlie McCoy, the man who helped revive it in the early Seventies, is currently leading the *Hee Haw* house band. What's going on here? Is it a fad? What's the harmonica doing on country records in the first place?

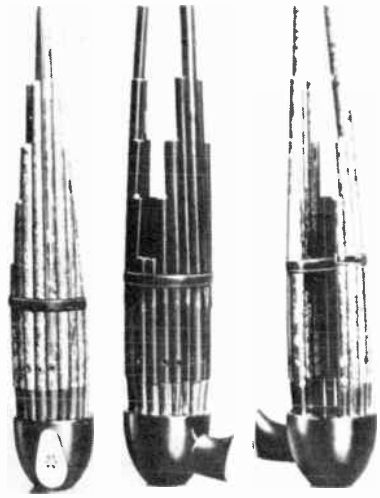
Truth is, it was around long before there *was* such a thing as a country recording, or *any* recording. The harmonica, mouthharp, or "harp" for short, was one of the earliest wind instruments to be used by rural musicians. It introduced the first Grand Ole Opry radio broadcast in 1927. Its very sound can add a rural flavor to a song, making it a thoroughly logical addition to nearly any type of mainstream country song, for it can run the gamut of emotions in a way few other instruments can. Only the fiddle can rival it for mimicing the sound of the human voice. The harmonica wails, it conjures up the image and sound of an oncoming locomotive, wind or howling coyotes. It teases, almost laughs, yet can create a deep, blue and mournful sound as well.

The harmonica was actually around long before there was any such thing as country music. Its earliest ancestor was developed around 3000 B.C. in China, where Emperor Nyn-Kwa invented a reed instrument known as the "sheng." One of them was transported to Europe in the 1700s and the principle of tones through reeds became known there for the first time. There was another instrument known as a "harmonica," perfected by none other than Benjamin Franklin himself, but it was a weird contraption that involved revolving glass discs suspended in water and touched with the fingers to produce varying tones (try carrying *that* around in your pocket!)

Finally in 1821, a 16-year-old German clockmaker with the unwieldy name of Christian Friedrich Ludwig Buschmann, put 15 pitch pipes together to create what was known as the "mund-aeoline" (German for mouth-harp). Another German clockmaker built them for awhile, then in 1857, 24-year-old Matthias Hohner began mass-producing harmonicas in Trossingen, Germany, on the same spot where the Hohner factory stands today. Around the 1860s, while the Civil War threatened in America, Hohner sent a few samples off to cousins who had emigrated there. They soon wanted more, and by the time the war was raging, harmonicas were popular with troops on both sides of the conflict, for their portability, low-cost and durability. And after the war's end, as America reunited, the harmonica remained popular in all parts of the country. As the nineteenth century was fading, rural white and black farmers were forming small bands of their own for enjoyment, and harmonicas were a part of these groups. For blacks, the harmonica was a bow to modern technology. For many years, they had used homemade "quills," three pieces of cane of differing lengths, bound together and held to the mouth. The advantages were obvious: the harmonica was not only louder, but came ready made. By the early 1900s, it was not only a part of the fairly new blues form, blacks were also using it to mimic trains and other sounds, including dogs and the wind.

One of Hohner's more popular instruments, and easily their best selling model to this date, was the *Marine Band Harmonica*, which was introduced in 1896 and sold for around 50 cents. It has been one of those rare instruments that time and technology could not improve, for the design is the same now as it was then.

It was also quite popular in white stringbands, along with the banjo, fiddle guitar and mandolin, often referred to as the "French Harp." It was also prevalent in the largely-black jug bands, which featured instrumentation much like the white string bands, but played a more ragtime-influenced music. And by the 1930s there was another group of harmonica players working, players like Larry Adler who played pop songs and John Sebastian, Sr. (father of the well-known folk-rock songwriter and performer of the Sixties) who played classical music. These two men, would later be among the first harmonica players admitted to the American Federation of Musicians in 1948. Adler also recorded one of the earliest jazz performances for the harmonica when he and French jazz guitarist Django Reinhardt recorded in France in 1937.



The first harmonica, the "sheng" was invented by Chinese emperor Nyn-Kwa.

It's somewhat ironic that the first major country harmonica player was a black man named DeFord Bailey. Racial attitudes in the South were highly conservative in those days, but Bailey nonetheless began appearing on the WSM Barn Dance even before that December, 1927 night when George D. Hay dubbed it "Grand Ole Opry" and introduced Bailey, playing *Pan American Blues*, a frenzied, rushing train number. As Peter Guralnick's excellent chapter on Bailey in his book *Lost Highway* notes, in 1928 Bailey played on 48 out of 52 Opry broadcasts, twice as many as any other performer. He toured with Roy Acuff and Bill Monroe in the late Thirties. Yet the Opry grew conservative as its stature increased, and Bailey's star began to fade, and in 1941 he was abruptly dismissed. He still lives in Nashville, his awesome musical abilities unimpaired, but spurns all recording offers. Another irony is the fact that in 1928, Bailey was among the first musicians to record in Nashville.

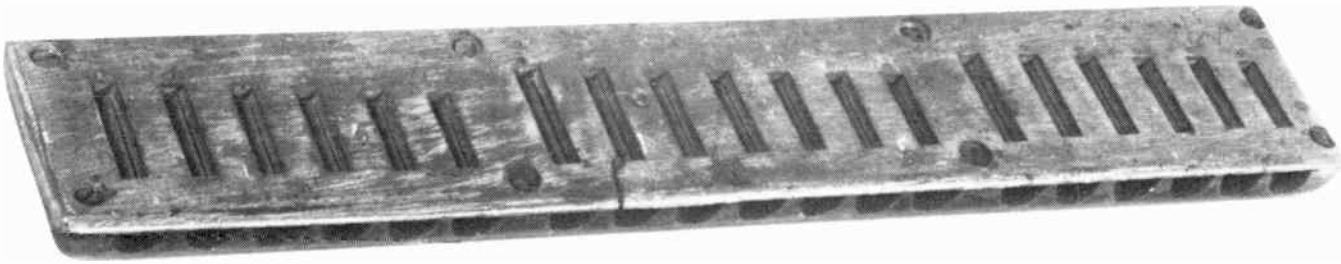
Lonnie Glosson never became the legend DeFord Bailey did, but his influence was immense. Glosson emerged in the Thirties in the Arkansas-Missouri area as a vocalist, harmonica player and guitarist, specializing in harmonica, and gained a following over KMOX radio in St. Louis. One Glosson specialty was making the harmonica "talk," something blacks had been doing for some time. Glosson's recording of *I Want My Mama*, done in the Fifties, illustrates just how adept he was at this. Over the years, he recorded for a number of labels, including Decca and Mercury.

One of Glosson's listeners became his protegé, and the man who took the harmonica's popularity among country performers to new heights: Wayne Raney. Shamefully overlooked in the last decade, Raney was born in Arkansas in 1921 and, unable to do heavy farm work because of a crippled foot, listened to Glosson over KMOX. By 1938 the pair met and teamed up in Little Rock, doing harmonica duets. Raney later worked solo in Texas. By the late Thirties, a few other acts were using the harmonica, most notably the Rice Brothers Gang (who featured a large, chromatic model), who used it as accompaniment to vocals, much as it's used today. Also working in the South was Jimmy Riddle, who played for a time with the Swift Jewel Cowboys in Memphis and later, after World War II, spent years playing harmonica behind Roy Acuff.

It was Raney, however, who did the most to popularize harmonica. Unlike most country harmonica players, Raney

DeFord Bailey

could sing fairly well, and in 1941 his talent brought him to WCKY radio in Cincinnati, where his radio show on that powerful and influential station, particularly just after World War II, sent harmonica sales



One of the first Harmonicas from 1830. Reedplates were made of lead.

Wayne Raney

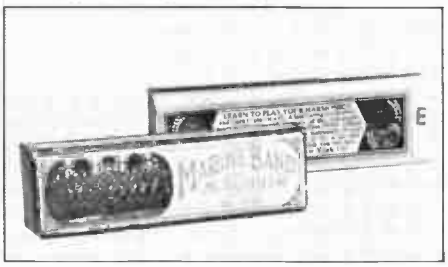
skyrocketing. Raney peddled them on his show, referring to them as "talking harps," and would play something, then go into a sales pitch for them, selling them mail-order. From 1945 to 1950, Raney was reportedly selling an average of a million harmonicas a year. Even more important was his teaming with the Delmore Brothers, who were working at WLW in Cincinnati and recording for King Records. They began using Raney to accompany them, and his playing on Delmore classics like *Freight Train Boogie* gave him even more exposure. In 1947 he began making his own records, often with the Delmores backing him. Finally in 1949, the Delmores and Raney did a session together that yielded *Blues Stay Away From Me* as a huge hit for the Delmores and *Why Don't You Haul Off And Love Me* as an equally large success for Raney, with his old friend Glosson playing behind him. Through the Fifties, however, and particularly after the death of Rabon Delmore in 1952, Raney's popularity faded. Harmonicas were more available than ever, though their popularity declined somewhat after rock music came on the scene. Though Raney recorded into the Sixties, he's since faded into obscurity.

The early Fifties brought other players in

120 year-old Harmonica. Reedplates were made of lead; wood handcarved and reeds were hammered from brass.

Raney's wake. One was Harmonica Frank Floyd, the first white musician to record for Sam Phillips' then blues-oriented Sun label in 1951. Floyd, an old medicine show musician, could play two harmonicas (one through his nose!) and pioneered the "eefing" that Jimmy Riddle and Jackie Phelps so often use on *Hee Haw* today. There was also Onie Wheeler, whose Raney-influenced music landed him a contract with Columbia in the early Fifties, and produced some excellent, semi-rockabilly material, such as his hit *Onie's Bop*. Wheeler later recorded for Sun and joined Acuff's Smoky Mountain Boys (Riddle moved over to piano) where he remains today. Other popular songs of the early Fifties that featured harmonica were Red Foley's *Old Kentucky Fox Chase*, which featured the harp mimicing the hounds (Lonnie Glosson probably doing the honors) along with Terry Fell's original recording of the classic *Truck Drivin' Man*.

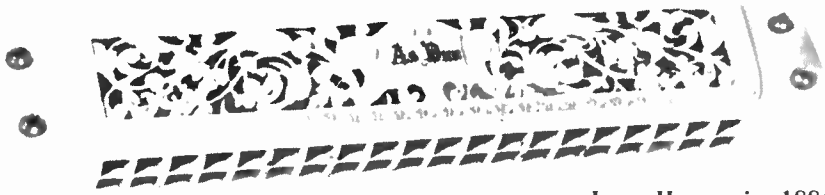
The harmonica's role among country



The harmonica has been around since 3000 BC. Such veteran country music performers as Charlie McCoy (top left), Mickey Raphael (top right), Delbert McClinton (middle left), Wesley Campbell (Glen's father; middle right), and Johnny Cash have played it for many years. Also shown is The Marine Band Harmonica.

singers faded after 1956, when rock music swept over the country. But it had actually become *more* important in folk music and blues over the years. After Bob Dylan became popular in the early Sixties, using a harmonica on a metal harness around his neck (as street singers had been doing for many years), it enjoyed increased popularity among folk singers.

Also, the harmonica's role had changed considerably in the Forties among black blues singers. As amplified guitars became a part of the blues following World War II, a new technique for amplifying the harmonica came into vogue. It was cupped in the hands, along with an inexpensive microphone and plugged into a guitar amplifier. With a bit of tremolo or reverb, the effect could be overwhelming. The chief exponents of this new style were Chicago's Little Walter Jacobs, James Cotton in Memphis, and Sonny Boy Williamson in Arkansas. Little Walter first came to fame with Muddy Waters' Chicago Blues Band and through his Fifties instrumental *Juke*. Cotton began working in Memphis in the early Fifties and played on many of the early Sun blues recordings and Williamson's recordings The "King Biscuit Time" radio show over KFFA in West Helena, Arkansas made him legendary. His occasional tours to Europe, where he was treated as royalty, enhanced his image.



Ivory Harmonica 1885.

Young white musicians were listening to these and other blues harmonica players, particularly those working in the South, and beginning to copy their playing. Among these was a Texas singer named Delbert McClinton. In 1962 McClinton recorded some harmonica backing with another singer, Bruce Channel, for a song called *Hey, Baby*. The song became one of the biggest hits of the year and did well in England. When the pair toured there later that year, they were billed with a rising group known as the Beatles. Delbert taught John Lennon the rudiments, and on the first Beatles recording, *Love Me Do*, issued in '62, Lennon's warbling harmonica kicked off the song. Through the Sixties the blues influence picked up because of the Rolling Stones, John Mayall, Paul Butterfield and other young white blues performers, so much so that Hohner even introduced a "Blues Harp," specially designed for such playing.

And though country harmonica had waned in popularity, the seeds for a comeback were already sprouting. Since the Sixties, Monument Records had Charlie McCoy under contract. A multi-instrumentalist who was born in Oak Hill, West Virginia (the same town in which Hank Williams was pronounced dead), McCoy's specialty was the harmonica, and he could play literally any style, from Little Walter's *Juke* on, an advantage (really a requirement) when working in the Nashville studios. He also contributed the harmonica to Dylan's 1966 recording of *Obviously Five Believers*, and by the late Sixties became known for this outstanding work with the Area Code 615 group, Nashville's first progressive country band. One of his own albums got critical acclaim from *Rolling Stone*, and in the early Seventies his instrumental versions of *Today I Started Loving You Again*, *I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry* and *I Really Don't Want To Know* became impressive hits. He won both Grammys and CMA awards during that time, and deserves much of the credit for bringing the harmonica back into vogue. Things began to change even further when it began showing up on albums by Waylon and Willie in the mid-Seventies, as the then-new outlaw concept began to change the face of the country music industry, not so much through revolution as through reexposing the roots that many had sometimes forgotten. And the harmonica became one symbol of that neo-classical sound. Waylon has had several harp players over the past few years, starting with Don Brooks through Roger Crabtree and, currently Gordon Payne. Willie has had the superb blues-tinged harp of Mickey Raphael with him over five years now. All of these players tend toward the amplified styles, just as the blues and blues-rock players did, which produced some haunting effects.

For sure there has been a certain ebb and flow in the harmonica's popularity among country music fans and performers. But it's happened before; the banjo faded, only to return to greater popularity, and the same thing happened with twin fiddles. And now, the harmonica is back, bringing its rural and, despite its Asian and European roots, undeniably American sound to a music that is the same. Emotion is paramount in the best country music and always will be, and few instruments are better suited to express—and compliment—the entire range of human emotions. ■

By Neal Weinstock

AUDIO

Three Good Stereo Systems on a $500 Budget

Five hundred dollars is considered, by most people who claim to know, to be about the minimum the music lover can spend to get a good stereo system. But at that paltry, insignificant price (ah, if only I had that much in the bank!), it does take a good bit of shopping to find a hi-fi you and your ears will be happy with.

Five hundred dollars is also the most that most people ever pay for a stereo, although that's now inflating upward. But five hundred can still buy a good system, if not too many smoke-screens are thrown your way by salesmen who don't know their own product or who want to sell an inferior product. Buying a stereo doesn't have to be as confusing as it seems; particularly because *Country Music* has decided to do a little of the legwork for you, because we needed to do it ourselves.

A music magazine has to have a hi-fi or two around the office, don't we? Well, all of *Country Music's* were vintage models, and while a case can be made for the music of ten years ago being better than today's, today's electronic components are a whole lot better—and cheaper, too, considering how much more everything else has gone up.

Being mostly involved with recording-quality equipment over the last few years, I was surprised with the quality we put together for the money. "For the money"—that's always a consideration with any sound system. There's always a better one because there's always somebody with more money. The first decision in buying any audio equipment is how much can be spent, and the rest follows.

Having made that price decision, we decided that a basic, no-nonsense hi-fi would maximize sound quality. No tape deck, few fancy controls. And on the logic that esoteric, small companies can't challenge a big one in a popular price range—it'd be a pretty sour bottle of wine that cost only as much as a Coke—we avoided them, too. Though, truth to tell, they tended to avoid us. So we came down to a three component system: turntable, receiver, and speakers. Conventional wisdom says that however much one spends on a three part system, half should be spent on speakers, two-thirds of what remains on a receiver, and the remainder on a turntable. This pretty much establishes a proper order of the component's importance, but as we will see, often-times the better product costs less.

Country Music's conference room looked like a hi-fi store.

Still, as a general guideline, we could do worse. So we looked for speakers at around two hundred and fifty dollars a pair, and we found the **EPI** 100s, **Advent** 5002s, **JVC** TX 303s. These may not be the best speakers around, for the money, or they may be. We picked these because each one, in its own way, seemed pretty representative. The **EPI** 100s are small speakers, each less than two cubic feet. I thought that would appeal to a few people around the office, and it did—because the rooms were getting so crowded up with stereo equipment that anything easily moved out of the way was a blessing. The **Advent** 5002s are a brand new model from one of the most popular speaker companies around—and it seemed like it'd be interesting to see how they'd improve on an already sucessful formula. **JVC**, as one might guess from its name (Japan Victor Company), is Japanese, and the Japanese have not exactly been famed in this country for the quality of their loudspeakers—while they have indeed been justly famed for the superior quality of everything else they make. Nearly all hi-fi components sold in the U.S. *except* speakers and some cartridges are made in Japan. But Japanese speakers have always tended to sound tinny or wooden. A great deal of the reason for this has been that speaker cones are generally made of paper, and foreign speakers suffer from the sea air as they're shipped over. Well, these **JVC** speakers' cones are made of plastic, as with many Japanese speakers lately, so we hoped for the better.

As a matter of fact, the **JVC** TX 303s were the favorite of many in the office. They are the largest of the three, and that usually means better bass—they did indeed sound as clean and honest as many a higher priced loudspeaker. (And we had many a higher priced loudspeaker in the office for our next installment, the thousand dollar system.) The **EPIs** were valued also pretty highly, and if space is a problem, it's hard to imagine a better speaker at anywhere near their price.

And so, on to receivers. The three we tested were the **Sansui** R-30, the **Pioneer** SX-3500, and the **Hitachi** SR-5010. All are Japanese, and the product of very large manufacturers at that. The prices, tuning, and general performance of each is very similar. In fact, there's every reason why this should be so, for two hundred to two hundred and fifty dollars list price per receiver (which means they realistically sell for under two hundred, most places), each is just trying to cover the basics of this extremely complicated component as well as possible. A receiver must capture a radio signal, switch and mix from the radio to other components (turntable, tape deck . . .) and then amplify the signal so that it can power the speakers. All of these receivers did a creditable job when we tested them out, which is very good news. Time was, many receivers didn't meet their manufacturer's claims for them, so we might be glad the manufacturers are a little older, and the receivers are a little newer. Beyond that, there are subtle differences between these three, which may sway anybody toward one or another.

Although the **Sansui** R-30 has a very flashy digital display, this is not a "digital" receiver, nor should one expect a fully digital receiver for what this costs. But the benefits of digital tuning are debatable—do you really need to be able to punch station buttons at home, as in a car? Be that as it may, the look of this unit is very sleek, while its controls are somewhat clumsily placed. Useful features like high and low frequency filters are missing, as they also are on the **Pioneer**. How gladly I'd give up a "loudness" switch, which can boost bass when you cut the volume, supposedly making the music sound natural but doing a lot less than the bass control—how gladly I'd give up that useless switch for high and low filters, which do so much to make old records and bad radio reception listenable!

The **Pioneer** SX-3500 had only one FM tuning meter, making it a little more complicated to tune than need be. But it does the job well enough, once you get the hang of it. Finally, the **Hitachi** SR-5010 has a

low filter, but no high one, has perhaps the sleekest styling, the most power by a hair (at 27 watts per channel, a couple of folks in the office insisted they could hear the difference.) And it also sports by far the most convenient rear speaker and antenna connections, including a much more versatile AM antenna than any of the others.

Finally, turntables. The choices were the **Technics** SL-B2, the **Philips** AF-677, and the **Garard** GT12 MkII (a mouthful in any language, the **Garrard** is English but made in Brazil, the **Philips** is made in Holland, and the **Technics** is Japanese.) All are belt driven models, not "direct drive," because I remain unconvinced that, at the low price levels, direct drive is an advance, rather than a hindrance. The **Garrard** is a changer, which means you can stack records. Considering that effort and expense had to be directed toward this end, one would expect the **Garrard** to perform a little less well in other categories than the other units, and it does *look* a lot cheaper. Audible performance, convenience and "feel" were about the same as the **Philips**, but we can't speak for durability.

The most important function of a record player is to turn that table with as little extraneous vibration as possible. To this end the housing should be as thick and solid as possible, and the tone arm should be as light as possible. The **Philips** AF-677 receives highest marks for the most elegant tone arm design, but its base is so light that records visibly vibrated on the platter. The base of the **Technics** SL-B2 outweighed both of the others combined, protecting the record as well as many a higher priced turntable, while its arm and counterweight system was as flexible and gentle as the **Philips** at its best. The **Technics** SL-B also deserves high marks for the ease with which cartridges can be installed,as does the **Philips** for a unique stylus force gauge that should help keep records in top condition

If there were no SL-B2 we'd choose the AF-677 as the best, but then the Technics is very much around, and the best turntable we could ever *imagine* for the money. If you must have a changer, and can't possibly spend any more, we support the Garrard will do.

Country Music's managing editor, Rochelle Friedman, was in the midst of being feted for her fifth anniversary with the magazine while our final tests were going on, and in a burst of generosity (that ought to get me in good with the boss) she was given the system of her choice. Rochelle took those very space efficient EPI 100 speakers, the **Hitachi** SR-5010 receiver, and the **Technics** SL-B2, and no one could blame her.

Tony Bunting, *Country Music's* marketing director, who is also marking his fifth anniversary with the magazine was quick to grab the popular **JVCs**, the **Pioneer** receiver and the **Garrard** changer.

Next time, more surprises as we feel our way around a dream thousand dollar stereo. ■

Associate editor Suzan Crane (left) chose the Sansui receiver, the Advent speakers and the Philips turntable; Rochelle went with the Hitachi receiver, the EPI speakers and the Technics turntable.

Letters

Do We Dare Print This?

It was with interest and surprise that I read in November '80 *Country Music Magazine*, your article on "Presidents, Pickers and Politics" and your "almost" endorsement of Carter for re-election.

One statement that really took me back was the following: . . . *"Jimmy Carter is the first to actually make country music an integral part of his domestic programs, his foreign policy, and his political strategy and, in doing so, he may have done more to promote country music than any man alive."*

God, how naive I have been all these years to think that country music's roots, grew from the traditions of Americanism, independence, freedom, liberty and individual accomplishments in the traditions of our founders. Little did I know that country music actually encompasses appeasement and capitulation with the enemies of our republican form of government and a domestic policy which condones Socialism, abortion, gun control and a complete disregard for our Bill of Rights! All of this time I felt a message that wasn't there. Johnny Horton sang about Johnny Freedom, Johnny Reb, The Battle of New Orleans, Jim Bridger and many others. Men from the south became some of our nations greatest heros. But I apparently missed the entire meaning of being a grass roots, down home American. I love our Constitution, our Liberty and the Freedom that our forefathers left us. Apparently the real roots of America must be buried in some other form.

BUFFALO DUNG!!! The *only* thing missing is the original message first conveyened in *AMERICAS' TRADITIONAL MUSIC*, gospel music, the songs of the American Cowboy, Civil War Music, Revolutionary period music, the western migrations, and on and on.

As far as I can see the *new* wave of country is nothing but a Liberal Socialist in boots and jeans who calls himself country but ain't.

I am a first time subscriber to your magazine and I will be a last time subscriber. My idea of country is a hell of a lot different than yours. My idea of country embraces the concepts which made our country great. Apparently your idea of country is the same as President Carter . . .

People of the same ilk (Socialists), who happen to enjoy, or so you say, a little pickin', I even doubt that. I think that you are part of the left and the movement to destroy our traditions.

One of my heroes, and one of my favorite stories is about Sergeant Alvin York, a conscientious objector from the backwoods who epitomized what an

American should be. His reason for fighting was to save lives.

I think he would be offended and furious if he had had a Carter for a Commander-in-Chief, as should any patriotic American.

RICHARD POPOVICH
HUDSON FALLS, NEW YORK

P.S. I DARE YOU TO PRINT THIS LETTER!

No, you didn't miss the meaning of "grass roots." You missed the meaning of our article. We said that Carter promoted country music, not that country music promoted socialism. We also don't think that country music performed at The White House will weaken the Bill of Rights. So we hope President Reagan supports country music as much as Carter did. —Ed.

Doesn't Want Entertainers in Politics

Tom T. Hall in his editorial "Taking On Politics and Religion" said "Some people will tell you that entertainers have no business in politics." He should have listened to those people. I was under the impression that *Country Music Magazine* was a magazine about country music and its performers, not a vehicle for voicing one's political support for presidential candidates. Perhaps if Mr. Hall's reasoning was a little more plausible, I would have overlooked the article. However, he states that he is "simply impressed with the fact that we have a president who likes and understands country music. To understand the music is to understand the people, because the music is about the people. I would rather have a president who understands me than one who doesn't." I understand the music, should I be running for president? Am I to ascertain from this then, that in accordance to Mr. Hall's reasoning, that if Ronald Reagan enjoys classical music he would be a better political leader for Bach and Beethoven because he understands them, than for today's American people? Mr. Hall has exhibited his fine insight into human nature in his successful songwriting ability, but in the area of politics that insight and his reasoning leave much to be desired.

It was not my intent when I subscribed to *Country Music Magazine* to learn about the political beliefs of the magazine's editorial staff. My sentiments have not changed since then. This article has evoked deep reservations in my decision to renew my subscription. I am well aware of the fact that one cannot simply disregard what is happening in the world today but isn't there a magazine left that we can pick up without having to read about it. My appeal is to keep 'country music' in *Country*

Music Magazine and not our country's politics. As for Mr. Hall, he said if best, "I love . . .
Little baby ducks . . .
Old pickup trucks . . .
An slow movin' trains . . . ."
JOSEPH M. McCARTHY

You say that Tom T. should have listened when people said, "Entertainers have no business in politics." Do you mean Ronald Reagan shouldn't be president? And since you like the "fine insight" in Tom T.'s songs, maybe it would have been better if he had written a song. "Old Dogs and Presidents and Watermelon Wine."—*Ed.*

Floyd Cramer and Eddy Arnold Coming Soon

I was highly incensed to see you devoting space to endorsing Jimmy Carter's re-election bid. I have been hoping I would eventually see articles on some of my old favorites like Floyd Cramer, Eddy Arnold, and Boots Randolph, but instead I'm inflicted with more Carter propaganda, as if we don't get enough (too much) of him on the daily news.

I suppose the big-money stars you named as endorsing Carter are not bothered much by the highest inflation, interest, and unemployment rates in modern history—Mr. Carter's folkiness is more important to them. I was sorry to see that some of the stars I have admired apparently do not have brains to match their talents.

Please cancel the remaining two years of my subscription and refund my money, so I can subscribe to a local newspaper where political editorials are supposed to appear.

I'm sorry you could not take enough time from rockabilly and politics to publish a country music magazine.
FRANK J. CORNETT
GREENSBORO, ALABAMA

Sorry you cancelled your subscription—you're going to miss our upcoming features on Eddy Arnold and Floyd Cramer.—Ed.

The Gift of Music

It was just over a year ago that I made up my mind to write a letter to a man whose songs I really loved. Letter writing has become very important to me the past few years. You see, I'm incarcerated at the North Carolina Correctional Center for Women here in Raleigh.

Well, I wrote that letter to Ronnie McDowell expressing how much I had admired him and his music ever since the very first time I had heard *The King Is Gone* in 1977. I told him that because of the circumstances I would probably never be able to attend one of his concerts, but I would really love to see him perform in person.

No one could have been more surprised than I was when I received a letter in return from Ronnie himself. He even told me to keep my fingers crossed and maybe one day I would be able to see his show live. I never imagined he would take the time to answer my letter, and I was really thrilled. I wrote several more letters and joined his fan club. Months later, when our prison began an inmate newspaper, I began sending him a copy each month. After sending Ronnie a birthday card, along with three other lifers, we received a beautiful full-color autographed poster. Because of the prison policy here, I wasn't allowed to have the poster in my room, but I was able to donate it to a staff member and hang it in her office so I could see it every day.

Then one night, our third-shift relief matron, Ms. Fran Perry, really gave me a surprise. Ronnie had arranged with the prison staff for a free concert here for the women. By the time the news spread, the entire camp was psyched up and anticipated the big day.

That day was today, and it's a day that I'll remember for the rest of my life. Today has become a dream come true for me in a place where dreams and miracles are a thing of the past. Ronnie gave a fantastic performance, putting his heart into every song he did for us. He combined a little country, rock and soul to present over an hour of entertainment that had the women clapping, shouting, screaming and dancing in the aisles. Then came the moment that I'll never forget. Ronnie called me on stage from my seat in the front row. He told everyone that I was the reason he was here, and then he sang *Love Lifted Me* to me and kissed me. I was so excited that I was trembling, and I'll never be able to describe exactly how I felt right then. But I do know that for a precious while today Ronnie McDowell made me feel like "real people" for the first time in a long, long while.

After a tremendous show, Ronnie continued to show what a great man he is. Instead of immediately talking to the waiting media reporters, Ronnie sat down and signed over 400 photographs, taking even more time for direct contact with the women and giving each of them a special remembrance of the show.

Once everyone was out of the auditorium, Ronnie and the guys spent time talking with the ten of us inmates who had been chosen as hostesses for the performance. The staff here at N.C.C.C.W. had even permitted us to wear personal dress clothes for the occasion, instead of the usual prison uniform. There was lots of hugging and kissing, much to the delight of the inmates, who seldom have the chance to be around so many handsome young men.

Before the group was ready to leave, the women were already asking for a return engagement. The members of Ronnie's group and Ronnie himself really made us feel even better when they told us we had been the best audience they had ever played for.

To me, more important than all the happiness that this day has brought, is the man behind all of it: Ronnie McDowell. I found out that Ronnie has something that is seldom known these days: a heart of pure gold. He is a warm, sincere, soft-spoken and down to earth young man, who showed his great capacity for love today.
SUSAN MCMATH BROADAWAY
NORTH CAROLINA CORRECTIONAL CENTER FOR WOMEN
RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA

Keeping Track

I have subscribed to *Country Music* since 1976, and for four years I have been putting up with just about everything except country music—and I mean real country.

After looking back at all of my back issues, I noticed that not one member of the Country Music Hall of Fame has ever graced your cover. We have seen just about everybody else though, and some more than once! In 49 back issues we have seen: Waylon Jennings twice; George Jones twice; Loretta Lynn twice; Elvis, Jerry Reed, Crystal Gayle and Emmylou Harris twice. We have seen Dolly Parton, Kenny Rogers, Johnny Cash, Ronnie Milsap and Tammy Wynette three times each, and to top it all off we have seen Willie Nelson a total of four times.

Where are Roy Acuff, Bill Monroe, Ernest Tubb and Grandpa Jones? We have only read tidbit stories on them. I have seen only one article on the Crook Brothers and I have never seen any mention of Sam and Kirk McKee. Remember, these people made country music what it is today. Why have they fallen by the wayside?
EDDIE PAGE
TALAHASSEE, FLORIDA

Since you have only been a subscriber since 1976, you must have missed our May, 1975 cover story on Bill Monroe. We are happy to note that Johnny Cash has been inducted into The Hall of Fame, and do not intend for him to fall by the wayside.—Ed.

CM ≠ D

Please tell Michael Bane he has nothing to worry about ("Country Music Will Really Drive You To Drink"). Any good scientist can tell you that correlation does not equal causation.
LESLEY ADAMS, Ph.D.
OKLAHOMA CITY, OKLAHOMA

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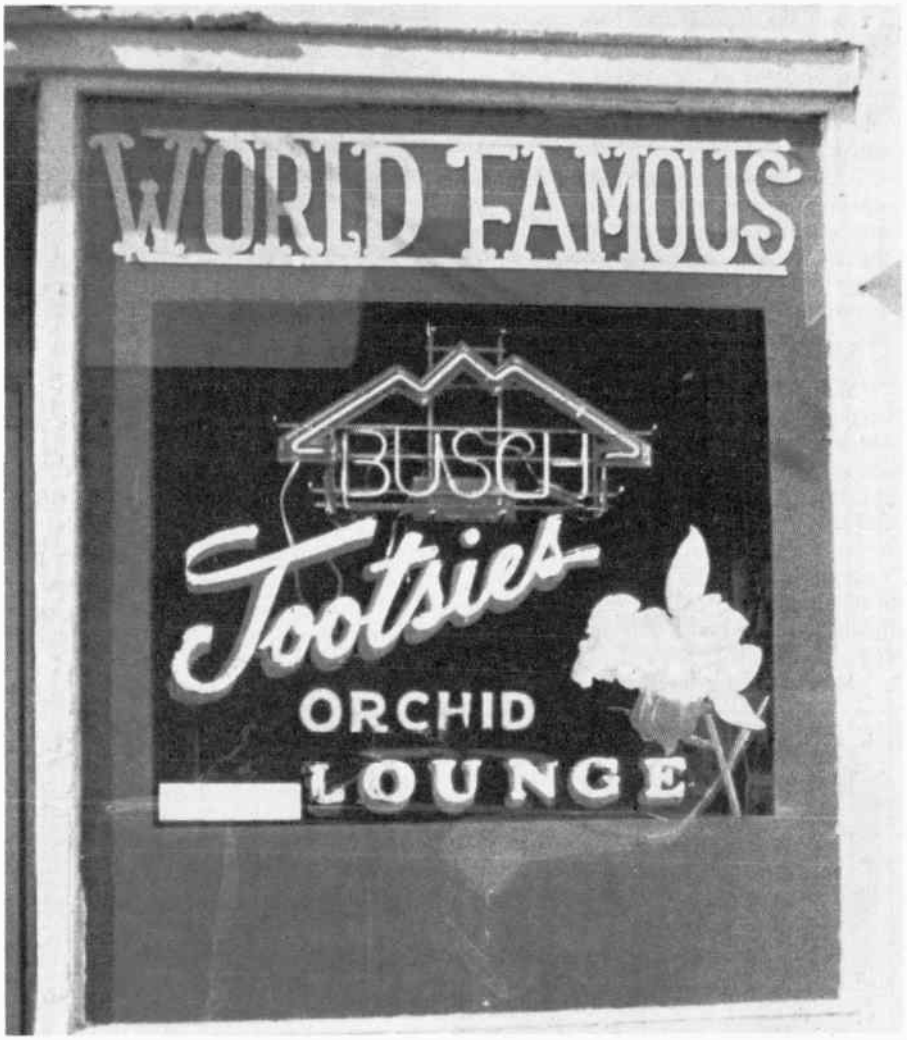
Number 7 January/February 1981
Editor and Reporter:
Bob Campbell
Nashville, Tennessee

COUNTRY Gazette

Late Country Edition
All the news that fits the space we have.
Weather: Variable, Seasonal

Tootsie's Shines In Tarnish Of Lower Broadway

The neon lights of lower Broadway in Nashville, Tennessee shine each night on a bizarre assortment of hookers, bums, drunks and occasional tourists who prowl up and down the dirty sidewalks looking for some unknown comfort in the cheap bars, cafés and porno shops that line the street. Before the Grand Ole Opry left the Ryman Auditorium in March, 1974 for the modern, safe confines of Opryland, lower Broadway offered a bit of magic for stars and tourists alike. The most famous country bar in America, Tootsie's Orchid Lounge, was a rustic, two-story watering hole where fans on a Friday or Saturday night could rub elbows with their favorite Grand Ole Opry star. Tootsie's Lounge still stands on lower Broadway and although the bar operates without Tootsie, who died of cancer on February 18, 1978, a few regular customers and tourists still visit and drink a few beers in the bar that is literally covered from one end to the other with signatures, album covers and photographic reminders of a colorful era in the history of country music.



Hattie Louise Tatum, better known as Tootsie, opened the Orchid Lounge on March 29, 1960. Located directly across the alley from the Ryman Auditorium, Opry stars would slip in the back door and sip on a beer before heading back to the Ryman for their part of the show. Her son, Howard Dodson, owns the place now, but it is managed by Oscar "Moose" Gray, a longtime friend of the family. A congenial man in his forties, "Moose" said the club was on the brink of being shut down early this year.

"Howard has had I don't know how many people try to manage this place since Tootsie died and they never did get it going —hell, they stole him blind," said "Moose," who retired from the army five years ago after 20 years of service. "He called me in Louisiana about three months ago and wanted me to take it. He said either I could come home and take it or he was gonna close it. Tootsie worked too hard keeping this club open so I couldn't see it closed, so I decided to come home."

Tootsie's Lounge appears basically the same as it always has. Much of the luster has gone, but a band plays hard country music every Friday and Saturday night and the upstairs bar is open on weekend nights just like the old days. A customer can buy a "Tootsie's Orchid Lounge" t-shirt now for $7.00 and a few copies of the last record Tootsie recorded, *Life Is But Three Days*, are available behind the bar for $2.25. Another of Tootsie's records, *Tootsie's Wall of Fame*, is on the jukebox along with the tribute, *Lovin' Legend Tootsie*, by Jimmie Rice.

Tootsie's Lounge only sells bottled beer, no hard liquor or draft beer, and each bottle goes for a buck. Miller and Budweiser are the most popular beer "Moose" sells, but he is not handling Miller right now because "they won't fix my beer sign." "Moose" said about the only time one of the Opry stars come back for a visit is when they are downtown on business, but he remembers the days when Faron Young, Mel Tillis, the late Bob Luman, Dave Dudley and The Wilburn Brothers were regular customers.

"Moose" also holds fond memories of Tootsie and tells the story of how she would use a hatpin to move reluctant customers out of her bar at closing time.

"I've got a whistle now, but it is not the same whistle she had," "Moose" said. "The one she had sounded like a siren. She'd blow that whistle and take this hatpin—now this is not the original Charley Pride hatpin, but it's similiar to it —but she'd take that pin and start around behind the bar and you'd better be headin'

for the door 'cause she'd give you some of that pin in your rear. She's stuck many of 'em with it. The reason Charley Pride bought her one is that she had a little short one and got Charley with it one night. He just went out and bought her a long one. She'd get anybody with that pin, she didn't care who it was.

"But she would also help anybody," "Moose" added. "In fact, when we had a kitchen, many of 'em would sit here and she would feed them to keep 'em from starving to death. She's helped many a young songwriter."

In addition to being a hangout for Opry stars on the weekend, many of the country artists would socialize in Tootsie's during the week, and songwriters would pitch songs right in the booths across from the downstairs bar. "Moose" remembers a young, struggling Willie Nelson coming in to offer his songs.

"Willie used to come in here when he first tried to get his songs going," "Moose" said. "He'd park out front there and come in and leave his wife and kids out in the car in the hot sun. He would just sit and talk to the stars. You know that song, *Hello Walls*? Willie wrote that for Faron Young. He give it to him right over there in that booth. He told Faron, 'I believe we finally got one that'll go.' Faron took it and recorded it."

"Moose" also said one songwriter ("Moose" has since forgotten the writer or the song) came in one day and said he was broke and needed to sell a song. He sold the song for $50 and it ended up selling a million records.

Tootsie considered herself a close friend of many country stars, and she would get upset if any of them failed to come by and say hello for an extended period of time. In fact, "Moose" said she would take their song off the jukebox if too much time had elapsed without a visit.

"Just before she died, Roger Miller hadn't been by to see her in a long time. She was real funny about that," "Moose" said. "She got mad and took Roger's record off the jukebox. About a week later he showed up. She went out and got another record and put it back on."

Tootsie's Orchid Lounge may only echo a faded past and the bar may be slipping into old age, but "Moose" cares about the lounge and he will take the time to tell a few priceless stories if asked. For those memories, Tootsie's is well worth a trip into the neon jungle of lower Broadway.

JIMMY DEAN HEADS BENEFIT — While appearing at the Nugget Club in Sparks, Nev., Jimmy Dean learned that 12-year-old Rick McKinley, a leukemia patient, owed $25,000 in medical expenses. Dean called on a few good friends like Roy Clark, Larry Gatlin, and Zella Lehr, and they performed a benefit which covered the youth's debt. Shown backstage at The Nugget are (l-r): Gatlin, Dean, McKinley, Clark and Joe Moscheo of Broadcast Music Inc., who also organized the benefit.

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NSAI Elects Four Hall of Fame Members

The Nashville Songwriter's Association Int. (NSAI) held its 11th annual Hall of Fame Awards Show last fall and elected Ray Stevens, Ben Peters, Mickey Newbury and Hudie Ledbetter (known as Leadbelly) into the Hall of Fame. Held on a quiet Sunday night, the *Manny* Awards (for manuscript) opened the annual Grand Ole Opry Birthday Celebration and DJ Week which highlights the country music industry each year in Nashville.

More than 500 songwriters, publishers, artists and industry members attended the banquet and show at the Hyatt-Regency Hotel. Songwriter Hal David, president of the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers, gave the keynote address. Introduced by emcee Ralph Emery, David stressed the continued growth of country music.

"The most exciting growth in our business today is taking place right here in Nashville," said David, who teamed as a lyricist with Burt Bacharach to write most of Dionne Warwick's hits. "The excitement of Music Row reminds me of the excitement of the Brill Building which was New York's Music Row in the '60s."

This year's inductees join the ranks of such distinguished writers as Hank Williams, Lefty Frizzell, Kris Kristofferson, Jimmie Rodgers, A.P. Carter, Willie Nelson and Johnny Cash. The Hall of Fame now includes 85 writers.

Stevens, a multi-talented artist who sings as well as produces, moved to Nashville from Georgia in 1962 and soon hit with *Ahab The Arab*. He has also written *Mr. Businessman, Everything is Beautiful* and *The Streak*.

Known as a "writer's writer," Newbury's songs have been recorded by Willie Nelson, Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, Olivia Newton-John and many others. Newbury moved to Nashville from Houston, Texas, in the middle '60s and along with Kristofferson, Billie Joe Shaver and Eddie Rabbitt, Newbury was considered one of the "new breed" of Nashville writers that expanded the scope of country songs. *She Even Woke Me Up To Say Goodbye, Sweet Memories, San Francisco, Mabel Joy* and *American Trilogy* are but a few of his songs.

A veteran of the Nashville music industry, Peters has had songs recorded by John Conlee, Charley Pride, Kenny Rogers and countless others. He has won both Country Music Association awards and a Grammy Award for his songs. *Kiss An Angel Good Morning, That Was Before My Time* and *Daytime Friends and Nightime Lovers* are among his best-known tunes.

The genius of Leadbelly was not recognized during his lifetime. He spent a few years in prison and he died in 1949. He is known as one of the finest folk and blues singers of all time and recorded more than 100 songs in his career. Leadbelly wrote the classic *Good Night Irene*.

NEW HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES — From left to right are Queen Robinson (accepting for Hudie Ledbetter), Ben Peters, Ray Stevens and Mickey Newbury.

HOMETOWN HONORS DUANE ALLEN — Duane Allen of The Oak Ridge Boys was honored last summer with a "Duane Allen Day" by his hometown of Paris, Tex. The ceremonies lasted all day and ended with a benefit performance by The Oak Ridge Boys. In the photo (l-r) are: Buddy Taylor, Allen's former high school basketball coach; Allen's wife, Norah Lee; and Duane Allen.

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8 TRACK TAPE - 8TM-1870 $4.98

GENE AUTRY - CS-1035 ALBUM $2.98
Mexicali Rose; Boots And Saddle; Have I Told You Lately That I Love You; You Are My Sunshine; South Of The Border; Sioux City Sue; Mule Train; Someday You'll Want Me To Want You; Goodnight Irene; Home On The Range; I Love You Because; That Silver Haired Daddy Of Mine; Red River Valley; Buttons And Bows; Back In The Saddle Again.
8 TRACK TAPE - 18C-01035 $4.98

PATSY CLINE - MCA-12 ALBUM $2.98
Walking After Midnight; Sweet Dreams; Crazy; I Fall To Pieces; So Wrong; Strange; Back In Baby's Arms; She:s Got You; Faded Love; Why Can't He Be You; You're Stronger Than Me; Leavin' On Your Mind.
8 TRACK TAPE - MCAT-12 $4.98

PATSY CLINE - MCA-87 ALBUM $2.98
I Fall To Pieces; Foolin' 'Round; The Wayward Wind; South Of The Border; I Love You So Much It Hurts; Seven Lonely Days; Crazy; San Antonio Rose; True Love; Walking After Midnight; A Poor Man's Roses; Have You Ever Been Lonely.
8 TRACK TAPE - MCAT-87 $4.98

PATSY CLINE - MCA-90 ALBUM $2.98
She's Got You; Heartaches; That's My Desire; Your Cheatin' Heart; Anytime; You Made Me Love You; Strange; You Belong To Me; You Were Only Fooling; Half As Much; I Can't Help It; Lonely Street.
8 TRACK TAPE - MCAT-90 $4.98

PATSY CLINE - MCA-224 ALBUM $2.98
Faded Love; I'll Sail My Ship Alone; When You Need A Laugh; Crazy Arms; Always; When I Get Thru With You; Blue Moon Of Kentucky; Someday You.ll Want Me To Want You; Who Can I Count On; You Took Him Off My Hands; Your Kinda Love; Does Your Heart Beat For Me.
8 TRACK TAPE - MCAT-224 $4.98

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8 TRACK TAPE - TRR-254 $4.98

RED FOLEY - MCA-86 ALBUM $2.98
I'll Fly Away; The Last Mile Of The Way; No Tears In Heaven; Were You There; This World Is Not My Home; My Sould Walked Through The Darkness; I Just Can't Keep From Cryin'; Lord I:m Coming Home; Only One Step More; Stand By Me; Farther Along; Life's Railway To Heaven.
8 TRACK TAPE - MCAT-86 $4.98

RED FOLEY & KITTY WELLS MCA-83 ALBUM $2.98
One By One; Just Call Me Lonesome; As Long As I Live; A Wedding Ring Ago; Make Believe; Candy Kisses; You And Me; Memory Of A Love; I'm A Stranger In My Home; I'm Throwing Rice; No One Buy You; I'm Counting On You.
8 TRACK TAPE - MCAT-83 $4.98

RED FOLEY - MCA-147 ALBUM $2.98
Beyond Th4e Sunset; Should You Go First; Peace In The Valley; Steal Away; Just A Closer Walk With Thee; Out Lady Of Fatima; The Place Where I Worship; Someone To Care; The Rosary; Will The Circle Be Unbroken; Old Pappy's New Banjo; I Hear A Choir; When God Dips His Love In My Heart.
8 TRACK TAPE - MCAT-147 $4.98

LEFTY FRIZZELL - CA-9288 ALBUM $2.98
Saginaw, Michigan; Mom And Dad's Waltz; Release Me; Asways Late (With Your Kisses); I Love You A Thousand Ways; She's Gone Gone Gone; If You:ve Got The Money I've Got The Time; The Long Black Veil; I Want To Be With You Always; Shine, Shave, Shower (It's Satruday); A Little Unfair.
NO TAPE AVAILABLE

GUY LOMBARDO - MEDLEYS MCA-103 ALBUM $2.98
Blues In The Night; The Birth Of the Blues; I Gotta Right To Sing The Blues; Memories; Let The Rest Of The World Go By; My Buddy; Secret Love; Love Nest; Love Is The Sweetest Thing;Something To Remember You By; The Very Thought Of You; You:re My Everything; Kiss Me Again; A Kiss In The Dark; I:ll See You Again; By The Light Of The Silvery Moon; Shine On Harvest Moon; Moonlight Bay; As Time Goes By; Bidin' My Time; Breezin' Along With The Breeze; I Want To Be Happy; I'm Looking Over A Four Leaf Clover; Happy Days Are Here Again; April Showers; September In The Rain; I Only Have Eyes For You; If I Could Be Wiht You; It Had To Be You; In A Shanty In Old Shanty Town; Three Little Words; Baby Face; Somebody Loves Me; Don't Take Your Love From Me; What Is This Thing Called Love.
8 TRACK TAPE - MCAT-103 $4.98

LORETTA LYNN - MCA-5 ALBUM $2.98
Everybody Wants To Go To Heaven; Where No One Stands Alone; When They Ring Those Golden Bells; Peace In The Valley; If I Could Hear My Mother Pray Again; The Third Man; How Great Thou Art; Old Camp Meetin' Time; When I Hear My Children Pray; In The Sweet Bye And Bye; Where I Learned To Pray; I'd Rather Have Jesus.
8 TRACK TAPE — MCAT-5 $4.98

LORETTA LYNN - MCA-6 ALBUM $2.98
You Ain't Woman Enough; Put It Off Until Tomorrow; These Boots Are Made For Walkin'; God Gave Me A Heart To Forgive; Keep Your Change; Someone Before Me; The Darkest Day; Tippy Toeing; Talking To The Wall; A Man I Hardly Know; Is It Wrong; It's Another World.
8 TRACK TAPE - MCAT-6 $4.98

LORETTA LYNN - MCA-7 ALBUM $2.98
Who Says God Is Dead; I Believe; Standing Room Only; The Old Rugged Cross; Harp With Golden Strings; If You Miss Heaven; I'm A'Gettin' Ready To Go; In The Garden; Ten Thousand Angels; He's Got The Whole World In His Hands; Mama, Why.
8 TRACK TAPE — MCAT-7 $4.98

LORETTA LYNN AND CONWAY TWITTY MCA-8 ALBUM $2.98
It's Only Make Believe; We've Closed Our Eyes To Shame; I'm So Used To Loving You; Will You Visit Me On Sunday; After The Fire Is Gone; Don't Tell Me You're Sorry; Pickin' Wild Mountain Berries; Take Me; The One I Can't Live Without; Handin' On; Working Girl.
8 TRACK TAPE - MCAT-8 $4.98

LORETTA LYNN AND CONWAY TWITTY MCA-9 ALBUM $2.98
Lead Me On; Shade Tree Music; When I Turn Off My Lights; Never Ending Song Of Love; Playing House Away From Home; You:re The Reason; How Far Can We Go; You Blow My Mind; Easy Loving; Back Street Affair; I Wonder If You Told Her About Me; Get Some Lovin' Done.
8 TRACK TAPE - MCAT-9 $4.98

LORETTA LYNN - MCA-113 ALBUM $2.98
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8 TRACK TAPE - MCAT-113 $4.98

LORETTA LYNN - MCA-444 ALBUM $2.98
They Don't Make 'Em Like My Daddy; Behind Closed Doors; If You Love Me; I've Never Been This Far Before; We've Already Tasted Love; Out Of Consideration; Trouble In Paradise; I Love; Don't Leave Me Where You Found Me; Ain't Love A Good Thing; Nothin'.
8 TRACK TAPE - MCAT-444 $4.98

LORETTA LYNN - MCA-471 ALBUM $2.98
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8 TRACK TAPE - MCAT-471 $4.98

LORETTA LYNN AND CONWAY TWITTY MCA-335 ALBUM $2.98
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8 TRACK TAPE - MCAT-335 $4.98

MILLS BROTHERS - MCA-188 ALBUM $2.98
Paper Doll; I'll Be Around; You Tell Me Your Dream, I'll Tell You Mine; Till Then; You Always Hurt The One You Love; Don't Be A Baby, Baby; Across The Alley From The Alamo; Be Ny Live's Companion; The Glow Worm; Queen Of The Senior Prom; Smack Dab In The Middle; Opus One.
8 TRACK TAPE - MCAT-188 $4.98

PATTI PAGE - CS-9326 ALBUM $2.98
Tennessee Waltz; Cross Over The Bridge; Old Cape Cod; Doggie In The Window; Mister Mississippi; I Went To Your Wedding; Mockin' Bird Hill; Allegheny Moon; With My Eyes Wide Open I'm Dreaming; Changing Partners; Detour.
8 TRACK TAPE - 18C-09326 $4.98

RAY PRICE - CS-8866 ALBUM $2.98
Crazy Arms; You Done Me Wrong; City Lights; Invitation To The Blues; I've Got A New Heartache; Who'll Be The First; Heartaches By The Number; The Same Old Me; Release Me; One More Time; My Shoes Keep Walking Back To You; I'll Be There.
8 TRACK TAPE - 18C-00094 $4.98

CARL SMITH - CS-8737 ALBUM $2.98
Hey Joe; There She Goes; Old Lonesome Times; Are You Teasing Me; I Feel Like Cryin'; Doorstep To Heaven; Let Old Mother Nature Have Her Way; The Little Girl In My Home Town; If You Saw Her Through My Eyes; You're Free To Go; Gettin' Even; I Overlooked An Orchid.
8 TRACK TAPE - 18C-00110 $4.98

ERNEST TUBB - MCA-16 ALBUM $2.98
Walking The Floor Over You; Rainbow At Midnight; Let's Say Goodbye Like We Slad Hello; Another Story; Thanks A Lot; Half A Mind; I'll Get Along Somehow; Waltz Across Texas; It's Been So Long Darling; Mr. Juke Box; I Wonder Why You Said Goodbye.
8 TRACK TAPE - MCAT-16 $4:98

ERNEST TUBB - MCA-84 ALBUM $2.98
I'll Get Along Somehow; Slipping Around; Filipino Baby; When The World Has Turned You Down; Have You Ever Been Lonely; There's A Little Bit Of Everything In Texas; Walking The Floor Over You; Driftwood On The River; There's Nothing More To Say; Rainbow At Midnight; I'll Always Be Glad To Take You Back; Let's Say Goodbye Like We Said Hello.
8 TRACK TAPE - MCAT-84 $4.98

ERNEST TUBB - MCA-341 ALBUM $2.98
I've Got All The Heartaches I Can Handle; The Texas Troubadour; Missing In Action; Don't She Look Good; A Daisy A Day; Texas Dance Hall Girl; Miles In Memories; The Lord Knows I'm Drinking; Pass Me By; What My Woman Can't Do; The Last Letter.
8 TRACK TAPE - MCAT-341 $4.98

KITTY WELLS - MCA-121 ALBUM $2.98
It Wasn't God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels; This White Circle; Mommy For A Day; Release Me; I Gave My Wedding Dress Away; Amigo's Guitar; Heartbreak U.S.A.; I'll Repossess My Heart; Password; Searching; Making Believe.
8 TRACK TAPE - MCAT-121 $4.98

KITTY WELLS - MCA-149 ALBUM $2.98
Dust On The Bible; I Dreamed I Searched Heaven For You; Lonesome Valley; My Ones Are Waiting For Me; I Heard My Savior Call; The Great Speckled Bird; He Will Set Your Fields On Fire; We Buried Her Beneath The Willows; One Way Ticket To The Sky; I Need The Prayers; Matthew Twenty-Four; Lord, I'm Coming Home.
8 TRACK TAPE - MCAT-149 $4.98

Opry Stars Featured In New Record Sales

Country music is enjoying an astounding growth of popularity now, but ironically, most of the regular performing members of The Grand Ole Opry are ignored by the major record companies. The Opry stars play to packed houses every weekend of the year, but the big companies feel they cannot sell records. However, Nashville's Pete Drake disagrees with this view, and he is quietly and efficiently producing many of these artists on his First Generation Label in a special **Stars of the Grand Ole Opry** record series. Drake, legendary steel player who now operates his own recording studio and publishing office, has signed an agreement with Columbia House for the mail order distribution rights to his First Generation Records label.

Two years ago, Drake produced Ernest Tubb's **The Legend and the Legacy** on First Generation and the album has sold over 200,000 copies and is a collector's item. Many current stars, including Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, George Jones and Merle Haggard, contributed vocals on the album. In the new recording series, Drake is producing entirely new albums on Billy Walker, Justin Tubb, Jan Howard, Stonewall Jackson, Ray Pillow, The Vic Willis Trio, Del Wood, Hank Locklin, Charlie Walker and Tubb. In a separate arrangement with Cleveland International Records, Drake is producing Slim Whitman, who is currently riding a new wave of popularity. Drake said he strongly believes in the Opry stars and is working on an overseas marketing campaign also.

"All of these artists are proven hit record sellers," Drake said. "We at First Generation feel very lucky to have them on our label. With the resurgence of country music on radio and through the film and video media, these artists all have the ability to strike again with their records.

"The arrangement with Columbia House and its Columbia record club is just the beginning of a marketing campaign for this album series," Drake added. "We are also negotiating with other parties for domestic retail distribution as well as full foreign distribution."

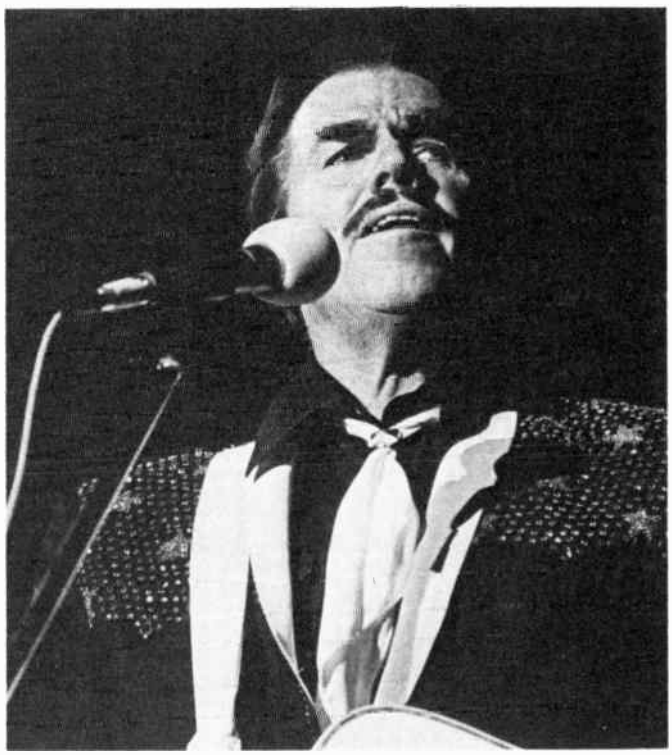
Along with the **Stars of the Grand Ole Opry** series, Drake is equally excited about his new association with Whitman. Whitman's album, **Songs I Love To Sing**, has been particularly successful in Europe and the single, *When*, has sold over 200,000 singles.

"Not everybody is aware these days of just how big a legend Slim is," said Drake, who once produced a country album for former Beatle Ringo Starr. "Here in America we have a tendency to forget those people who were superstars a generation ago. But over in England, just the reverse seems to be true. Slim is as big as ever over there."

Six months ago no record company in America wanted Slim. Then that television commercial came out and suddenly everyone remembered *Rose Marie*, *Indian Love Call* and *Red River Valley*. And television exposed Slim to young fans. They are buying his records in droves.

"Suddenly all the major record companies were interested in Slim," Drake added. "We decided to go with Cleveland International which is distributed by CBS. The label is headed by Steve Popovich, who is an old friend of mine and one of the greatest promotion men this business has ever seen. It's always gratifying to have a hit record, but it really is a treat to be associated with a hit by an artist like Slim. He's never compromised his music to be commercial or follow a trend. He's always just been Slim Whitman. That's what makes him so great."

Pete Drake

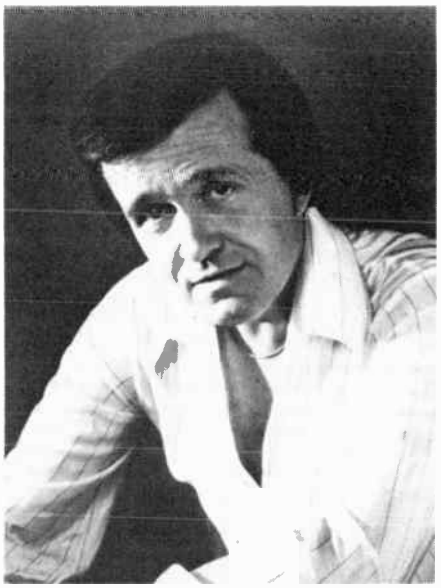


Slim Whitman

Anderson Joins Daytime 'Soap'

Daytime television and Bill Anderson are already old friends, and now Anderson is joining the family. After several guest appearances on *One Life To Live*, the daytime soap opera, Anderson has joined the cast as a regular member.

Anderson made guest appearances on the show last year in cameo roles. In one



memorable episode, Anderson performed on a fictitious Grand Ole Opry show with country music hopefuls Becky Lee Abbott and Johnny Drummond. The opry stage was entirely reconstructed in a New York studio. Last fall, Mary Gordon Murray and Wayne Massey, who play the parts of Becky Lee and Johnny on the show, made a real-life appearance on The Grand Ole Opry in Nashville with Anderson. Ms. Murray and Massey sang duets on *Don't Fall In Love With A Dreamer* and *Stand By Me*. During the show, Jacqueline Smith, head of daytime TV programming for ABC, asked Anderson to be a member of the TV cast.

Anderson's contract includes several appearances each year with four, one-year options. He is not yet sure just how large a part he will play on *One Life To Live*.

"I suspect that we are going to play it by ear," Anderson said. "In the other episodes, I've acted as sort of advisor to Becky. Becky's character on the show is going to become more key and I expect most of what I'll be doing will be with her. I've asked very few questions of ABC because I'm afraid they'll tell me they're only teasing."

In addition to his new role on *One Life To Live*, Anderson hosts the nationally syndicated *Backstage At The Opry* television show. Naturally, he has cut back on his concert schedule, but Anderson feels the television exposure provides a healthy balance to his career.

"We've seen a very positive response to my *One Life To Live* appearances reflected already in fan mail and in personal appearances," Anderson said. "One lady at a show in Cleveland recently came up and said, 'so that's what you do. I've seen you on soap operas and game shows and talk shows, but I didn't know if you juggled or danced or what. Now I know and I like it'."

New Nashville Songwriter Workshop

On each and every Wednesday night in Nashville, Tennessee, with no applause or fanfare, a dedicated group of men and women from every walk of life meet for two hours in a classroom at Belmont College just off of Music Row and work toward a common dream—developing and honing professional songwriting skills. Under the direction and sponsorship of the Nashville Songwriter's Association International (NSAI), on the average of 40 everyday people critique each others' songs and discuss the general business of songwriting. Some have talent, some will never write good songs, but a binding thread among the group is a love for the pure joy of writing songs.

The songwriter's workshop began in December, 1978 under the leadership of Bob McCracken, who suggested the idea to Maggie Cavender, executive director of NSAI. As it turned out, Cavender had always wanted to implement a workshop of this nature.

"This had been a dream of mine for a long time," Cavender said. "I approached our board of directors with the idea and they approved it. We had our first meeting in a downstairs room here in this building with maybe 15 people there. We just tossed around ideas. Since that time, it has grown to the extent we had to move out to Belmont. Within just one year, the growth and maturity of those people who were there every week, plus the others who came, pleased me so much. The material improved so much from what they first started bringing.

"We have had professional songwriters like Rory Bourke, Don Wayne and Nat Stuckey join our group and they didn't say a word," Cavender added. "They later said they learned a great deal themselves. The main thrust or improvement in this past year is that the critique has become so exceptional. We are open and honest in our critique. We don't jump up and down and say what a great song this is or what a bad one that is. We aren't there to applaud a song, but to examine it."

The workshop is structured so each person can bring a song and have it played for critique from the group. Each person can bring one song on a cassette and ten songs are played before the group each night for discussion. Naturally, if one person has his or her song critiqued one week, that person should wait a reasonable period of time before bringing in another song. After a song is played, the writer is asked to critique his own song—Why do you think it is finished? Where do you think the trouble spots are? According to Cavender and McCracken, who leads the workshop along with Woody Bomar, this self-critique allows a certain insight on what a writer knows and how much a writer stands to gain from the workshop.

After the self-critique, the group discusses the song and evaluates the structure, melody and lyric content. If no one has any suggestion for improvement, the group throws around ideas about where in Nashville the song can be pitched. McCracken said the workshop really helps aspiring writers and he named one regular member who has shown tremendous improvement in a relatively short time.

"Sometimes these writers feel neglected or like they are the bottom of the barrel writers, but they are not," McCracken said. "They just need direction and we help them in that area. When Bill Umphleet started coming to the workshop, I really didn't see any promise in him or his first song. He was way off base. But he surprised me so much. In a short time, say seven months, he became a writer and started knocking me out with some of his ideas. He became so down-to-earth and conversational in his lyrics. Everything tied together and he even started presenting the songs better on tape."

Another aspect of the workshop is that the critique educates writers to correct a common mistake, writing about subjects too narrow for general appeal.

"For new writers coming to Nashville, the most common flaw I have found is that they write about things only their family or people where they are from could associate with," McCracken said. "Once they come to Nashville and our workshop, they learn how to write something the whole country can relate to."

Basically, the workshop members belong to NSAI, but sometimes non-members come to sessions. Also, out-of-town members who are visiting Nashville are encouraged to sit in on a workshop and organize similar workshops in their area. Another offshoot of the songwriter's workshop is a program in which out-of-town members can send a song on cassette to Nashville and it will be evaluated by a panel of two or three NSAI writers. The critique is recorded on the back side of the cassette and returned to the writer.

Songwriting is a business and the ultimate goal of most writers is to earn a good living from their work, but the simple beauty of the atmosphere of the workshop is the creative attitude of most of the members. "You don't hear as much about money and records as 'I want to write a good song," Cavender said.

HI THERE, M M MEL — Nancy Sinatra, who had the big 60's hit, **These Boots Are Made For Walking**, recorded in Nashville for the first time last fall. She teamed with Mel Tillis on a duet of the Englebert Humperdinck hit, **After The Loving**.

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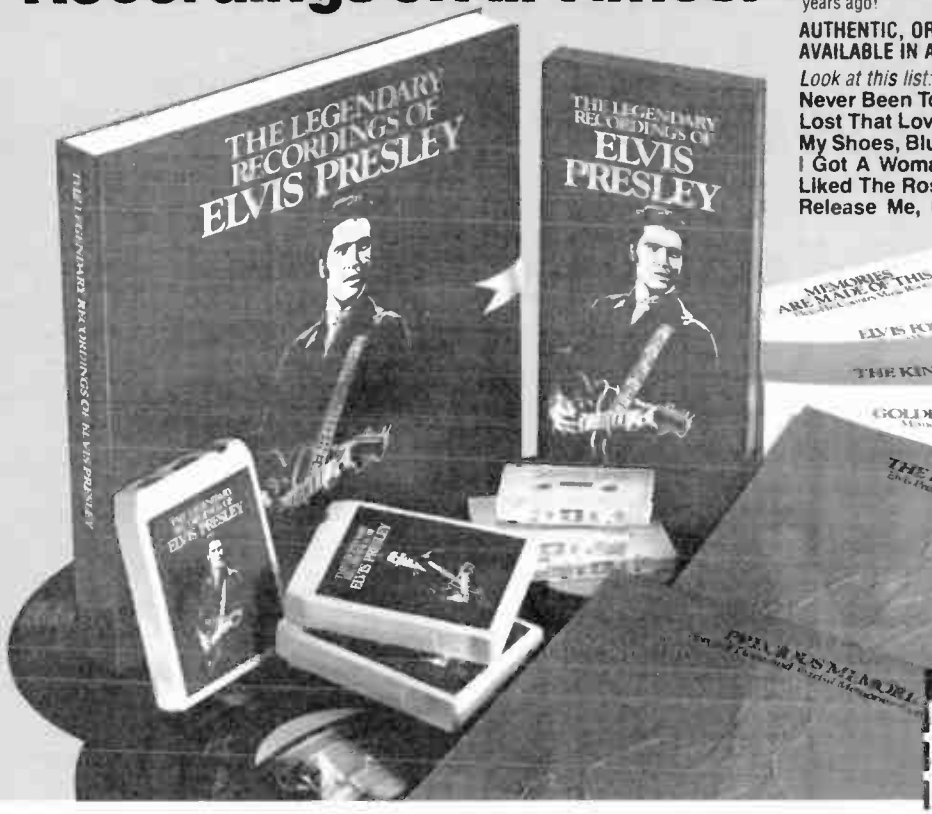

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Juke Box Joe Stampley

By John Morthland

It is tucked away near the end of the second side of his recent **After Hours** album, and it wasn't scheduled to become a single until popular demand interceded. But for Joe Stampley, *There's Another Woman*, the confused confession of a family man whose marriage has gone stale for reasons he doesn't understand, is perhaps his most important song ever; he describes it as being "kinda my life story in a song."

Stampley wrote it in 1979. "It took me about ten minutes, and those usually turn out to be the best ones," he explains, "because that's exactly the way I felt when I wrote it." About three months later, in November of 1979, Stampley moved out on his wife of 18 years and their three children.

We are talking over a lunch of pork chops, turnip greens, pinto beans and cornbread at Hap Townes, one of the best of Nashville's numerous country diners, where the meat and choice-of-vegetables runs little more than the cost of a Big Mac and fries. Though he hasn't been by for some time, it is Stampley's favorite spot. An unreconstructed country boy dressed in cowboy shirt, blue jeans and eelskin boots (the same clothes he wears onstage), Stampley is speaking in a soft southern accent, reluctant to say too much, even though he brought the subject up, because his divorce is not final and there are also the kids' feelings to consider. He will allow as how he knew the "other woman" six years before he left his family to join her, and other than that, he will talk mostly in generalizations.

"At a certain point, there just seemed to be something that was lost, that had been there before and than wasn't. Maybe people just get to a stage in their life where they lose contact with each other. I don't know. I have to be honest with you, I really don't," he sighs. "There's one line in that song: 'I've tried living my life for everyone else/But now I'm starting to live for me.' That's the key line in that song, and I think more people should do that, because life's too short.

"I had been living a kind of a lie with myself, and with my children and ex-wife. So I had to put it all out on the table. As a matter of fact, I've probably seen my children as much or more since I've left as when I was home, because I've made it a special point to go on some trips with my kids. And . . . it's a rough life, rougher than people think. It's a lot of miles and a lot of travelling," he continues, suddenly changing direction almost in midstream. "Country music, I'm a firm believer, tells it just like it is. For me, a song has to tell a story or paint a picture, that's what I look for. That's where the first verse tells you what the situation is, and then the next verses progress along, and you keep seeing what is happening."

There are several ironies at work here. The first is that whatever he's had to come to terms with in the last year or so, several of his associates claim Joe is happier and more optimistic now than he's ever been in the past; Joe, who describes himself as being a former worry wart, is inclined to agree. The second is that while many register surprise when they learn Stampley wrote his own hit single, there's really nothing new about that; he's written or co-written such past hits as *Whiskey Talkin'*, *If You Touch Me (You've Got to Love Me)*, *How Lucky Can One Man Be*, *Dear Woman*, *Bring It On Home to Your Woman*, and *Nighttime and My Baby*, and he has picked up four BMI awards (signifying 175,000 airplays each) for his efforts. The third is that Stampley's fortunes seem to rise as his records become increasingly harder country, and this is a time when the rest of Nashville is leaping headlong into Hollywoodized MOR music. Finally, there is the question of how this particular song became a hit at all, since it breaks one of Nashville's most hallowed songwriting rules.

"CBS told me to do such and such songs off the album while I was touring, and I was supposed to let them know which were getting the best reaction," he laughs after lunch as he steers his pickup truck onto the Interstate that leads toward his leased home near Brentwood. "So I called in and said, 'Hey, you would not believe the reaction on *There's Another Woman*. They said, 'Oh, no, that can't be the one. Women ain't gonna like that song, I'm telling you.' Because women just aren't supposed to go for a song like that. But I said, 'Well, why are they asking for it? Why do they come back and request it again and again?' Well, I can tell you what some of them said to me. There's been 40 or 50 who told me that was *their* life story. Now if that many told you that, think how many there probably *really* is all together. That's life, it's real life, and I'll say it again: what's so great about country music is there's so many songs that you can put yourself into."

If Stampley sounds triumphant, he has every right to be. At the age of 37, he notes, "Things are getting better all the time. You can reach a certain plateau and then just kinda stalemate, but lately I'm real pleased with how much things are going my way. This is the first time either me

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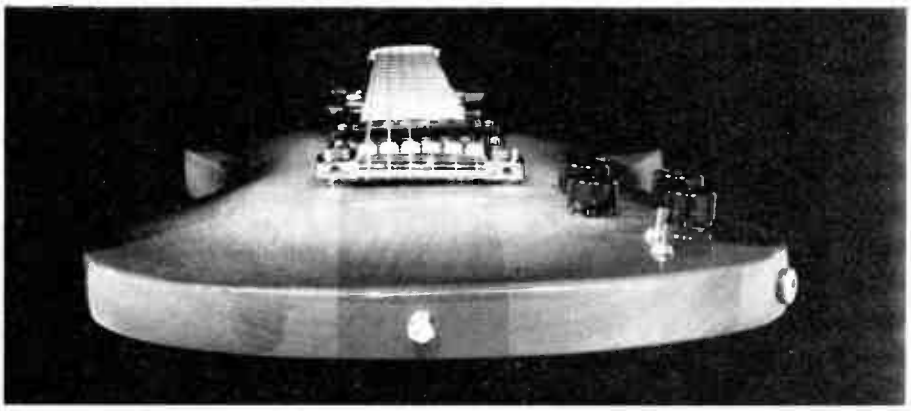
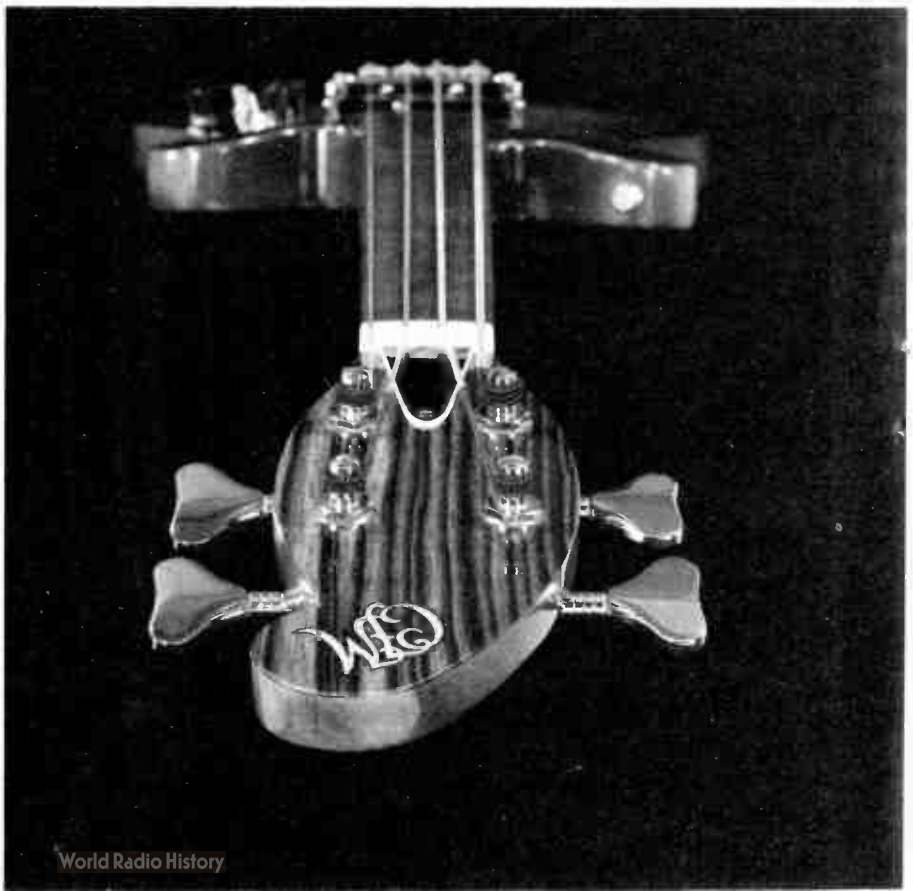




Brenda Mae Tarpley of Lithonia, Georgia Comes of Age

By Michael Bane

Brenda Lee's house sits smack in the middle of the wrong neighborhood, right alongside houses of people who are probably fans of hers. Instead of stately columns and the green hills of Nashville's choicest environs, Brenda Lee's house looks out over a big garden, which has grown to take up most of the backyard. ("You should taste her pickled peppers," crows husband Ronnie Shacklett. "They're really great.") Instead of a baronial mansion done in Early Funeral Parlor, Brenda Lee's house is cluttered with overstuffed furniture, mementos of 30 long years on the road, artifacts that have somehow wormed their way into the lives of Mr. and Mrs. Shacklett — including one stuffed boar's head that may or may not have crawled onto the den wall on its own power, since nobody can remember exactly how it got there. It is a house, all in all, that says volumes about the way Brenda Mae Tarpley from Lithonia, Georgia, has coped with being one of the best known and longest lasting female vocalists in the history of popular music.

"It's all in the matter of the way you digest success," says Brenda Lee. She is still "tiny," all four-foot, eleven inches of her, still red-headed, still younger-looking than her 35 years. "It's the way you *taste* success... If you know you're good, that's all that matters. You don't have to have a hit record every day."

Cliches aside, every once in a while a person comes along whose life really is weirder than fiction. Consider the story of a little girl who went on the road when she was five, working to support a poverty-stricken family. She begins recording when she is 11, and she quickly becomes a star. Three years later she is a major superstar, on par with, say, Elvis Presley. Millions of people buy her records, entranced by this huge, bluesy voice coming form this tiny girl. One critic, in fact, describes her voice as "part whisky, part negroid and all woman." She is 15. To top off her fifteenth year, she records a Christmas song, *Rocking Around The Christmas Tree*, which promptly becomes one of the largest selling Christmas songs of all time and joins *White Christmas* and *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* as a seasonal classic. Ironically, as she gets older, she becomes even more successful, transcending trend after trend with her incredible voice. She survives the cataclysmic birth of rock and roll, the payola scandals, the rise and fall of doo-wop, the coming of the Beatles, soul music, psychedelia and the San Francisco Sound, the birth of disco, the fall of acid rock, the rise of country. She is still on the charts when Janis Joplin, perhaps the only other white female vocalist with the range and power to deliver the blues, rides the needle down in flames. She begins, after 15 long years, to be absent from the charts more and more, and advisors advise a quick change in style. Sing disco, they say, sing soft rhythm and blues with lots of orchestration. With your voice, they tell her, it'd be a snap to break onto the dance floor. But she refuses. I am what I am, she says, and I sing what I sing. So fail, they reply, and for a while she does.

Brenda Lee all grown up.

The country comeback of Brenda Lee in recent years may not have been the most earthshattering story in popular music, but it is certainly one of the most satisfying. At a time when most country singers are not only willing to change their styles but, if necessary, sell their grandmother into white slavery for a pop hit, Brenda Lee has returned to the top by holding her ground. Becoming a country act wasn't a plot on the part of her management; rather, the musical world turned underneath her. When she opened her mouth to sing, what came out was still vintage Brenda Lee.

"Really, the first song I ever learned to sing was Hank Williams' *Mansion On The Hill*, says Brenda Lee. In fact, her first recorded song in 1956 was *Jambalaya*. "I don't think that I've ever been rock and roll in the true sense of the word. If I put out those songs from the 1960s — *Fool #1, All Alone Am I, As Usual, Thanks A Lot, I Want To Be Wanted* — today, they would be country. I guess I've come full circle. I never made the decision to change anything."

To be sure, when young Brenda Lee — "Little Miss Dynamite," she was called — started, it was in a much younger and, in a sense, much more innocent music business. Her biggest successes came in popular music's "in-between" period, the time be-

tween the mellowing of Elvis (and the subsequent waning of the rockabilly fires) and the coming of the Beatles. During that time, the industry was still trying to make heads or tails of what was happening — "Got a little girl here who sings lost love songs like a Negro jazz singer. Great! Let's put her on the radio. . ." — and were less tied into the traditional categories, such as country, rock, pop, rhythm and blues.

"You'd do a show and there'd be 82 acts on the bill, each of us making $1200 or so — and let me tell you that was big money back then," Brenda Lee says. "There was always a lot of cameraderie; I guess it was a time in the music business when people were glad to see other people succeed. I was always the little one, the baby sister. And it was tough! Here I wanted somebody to *flirt* with me, and instead they were all telling me their troubles! But people like Fabian and Duane Eddy and Bobby Rydell became close friends."

Her successes were nothing short of phenomenal. Her voice itself had all the sweep of, say, Connie Francis, the then-reigning queen of female vocalists, but it retained the hard-edged hint of the blues. The blues said that here was a woman who had done it all and seen it all and had already been there; the fact that the blues lied mattered not at all. It was the world-weary quality of the blues that set (and still sets) Brenda Lee apart from the rash of other female vocalists. Not surprisingly, her background is similar to the stories of the other great southern singers, who were all inexplicably and inexorably drawn toward black gospel music.

"We didn't have a radio or a record player, but there was a black family down the street with eight or ten kids, and we used to go to church with them. We'd sit there in that church and listen to that music." Ironically, the black gospel absorbed by young Brenda Lee didn't help her a bit in her own church, the strict Southern Baptist. "I never could sing in our own choir," she says. "I phrased differently — I guess I always sang a little oddly. And that was always a great heartbreak to me, because I wanted them to know I was going to heaven. You couldn't move in the choir, either — sometimes I'd get to singing and slap my leg, and that was *forbidden!*"

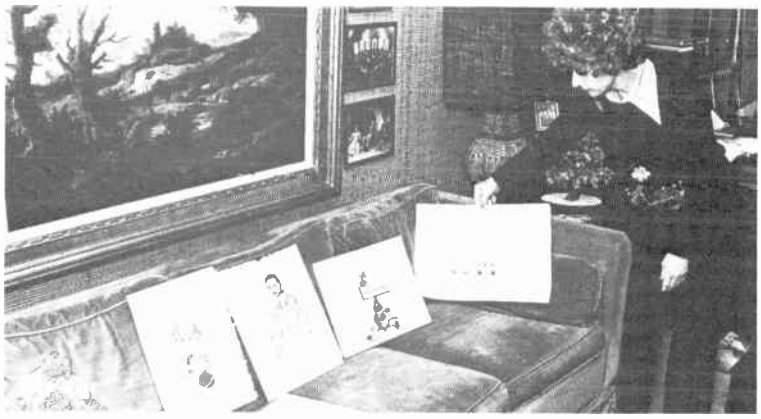
The pain of not singing in the choir, however, was nothing compared to the shock of hitting the most secular road of all, that of entertaining. "Every Saturday night we'd go to Atlanta and play the sports arena, which was a huge hall. We'd play there Saturday night, then the next Sunday I'd hear in church how all those people were going to hell. It was hard on me, I'll tell you."

Her story from there on has the trappings of your basic show-biz legend. She was discovered by Red Foley, who arranged for her to appear on *The Ozark Jubilee* television show. From then on, the only way was *up*, some 90 *million* records' worth of up. Right up until the early 1970s, when she ran right into a wall. The business had changed, and the market for female interpreters of pop music, subcategory blues, was somewhere on the low end of "slim" and "none." "I was neither fish nor fowl, and the company didn't know what to do with me. The recording industry had changed — I'd like to think that record companies had a little more heart back when I was recording my hits — and you had to be either rock or country or rhythm and blues. They just didn't know what to do with me.

"I just couldn't change my style," Brenda Lee says, and this she fervently believes. "That's what I am. That's my *life*." And so, for a while, Brenda Lee simply didn't record. She took a two-year break for the birth of her second daughter, Jolie, and watched the music business from the wings. When she began recording again, it was as a country singer.

"When I was recording back in the 1960s, what a country singer meant was rhinestone shirts and stuff like that," says Brenda Lee, "and maybe it got a little too slick. But here I am, back to proving myself all over again, just like a new artist. It's understandable — frustrating, but understandable."

And here is where Brenda Lee is different. There is probably not an artist in Nashville who has not said, at one time or the other, that "you're only as good as your last record." Most artists profess to believe in that particular truism, and a few probably do. But Brenda Lee *understands* it and is not bitter. Because, I think, Brenda Lee has made her peace with her talent, her gift. She is, if one is allowed a snap judgment, *centered*, stable, and it is a stability that comes from not requiring a constant validation of who she is and what she does. When she says that while she would like — no, *love* — one more huge hit record, another *I'm Sorry*, another *As Usual*, she is more than happy with records that are in the


Married for 18 years, Brenda now has time to enjoy life with her husband Ronnie Shacklett and daughters Julie and Jolie. Some of her hobbies include art, reading, cooking, and of course, music.

Top Ten or even the Top 20, one believes her. One can sense her drive that seems to be totally under control, and that is nothing short of a minor miracle.

Consider her marriage to Ronnie Shacklett, eighteen years and still percolating. "Ronnie and I are partners, first and foremost, in everything we do. I wouldn't have anything if it wasn't for him.

Like some other husbands of famous performers, Ronnie Shacklett has been quite successful on his own, in his case with a construction business. The difference is that he has kept in touch with and, in a sense, helped managed Brenda Lee Shacklett's career from the very beginnings of the marriage. His canny business sense has helped Brenda Lee weather the slow periods in her career, and even now she is quite frank enough to state that the Shackletts could get along fine without the money she brings in from performing. Ninety million records, even with the "casual" bookkeeping of the 1950s and most of the 1960s, amounts to more than granola money.

"I wouldn't want Ronnie to be just here waiting for me. He's his own man, and he's talented. When we married, he was already making $75 a week," she says. They met at a Jackie Wilson concert in Nashville, and Ronnie Shacklett didn't know Brenda Lee from a hill of beans. Oh sure, he knew she was a singer, but he didn't follow popular music, didn't buy records, and didn't listen much to the radio. It was love at first sight.

"After we were married, I don't guess we had much time to think about things. We had our hands full. We lived in this little apartment, and I thought we were doing just grand," Brenda Lee laughs, and it is a husky laugh. "You know, the older you get, the more you realize how *hard* it really was: the odds you were up against. Maybe it seems like more of a challenge as you get older."

More than her, she says, Ronnie Shacklett kept the home in order, providing a stable base for daughters Julie and Jolie. Julie, in fact, traveled on the road with her mother until she started to school, and Brenda Lee recently turned down an incredibly lucrative offer from Vegas because it would force her to be away from the little restored house for too long. "It used to be that every time I came back from the road, I had to get reacquainted with my kids again, and I honestly think it was harder on me than on them. They don't feel threatened — Dad was always here, and that had a very calming effect. Ronnie, more than me, has raised these girls, and that's hard for me to say."

Brenda Lee is the first to say that her country career is "not setting the woods on fire," although it has been a good one so far. *Tell Me What It's Like*, a vintage Brenda Lee performance if there ever was one, was nominated for a Grammy in 1979 and her most recent song, *The Cowgirl And The Dandy* ("I mean, really, wasn't that song just like *Johnny One-Time*," she says) easily cracked the upper levels of the charts.

"Am I scared? I'd say no. The only thing I really fear is myself. I love what I do so much, that I don't ever want to stop doing it. And I'm afraid that someday I will have to get out of it, because to stay would mean prostituting myself, and I won't do that," says Brenda Lee. "I'm afraid that day will come."

It's awfully hard, she adds, to have been in the business for so long, and then to be told that "they" can't use you because you don't have a hit record. Of course, lately she hasn't had that problem — in fact, her record company recently launched a new promotion, which featured a new, made-over Brenda Lee. Instead of a little girl (which she almost can't help but look like; she is disgustingly cute), they made her into a sultry woman with a "come hither" look (at least, that's what all the publicity material says, honest). And she does, to be totally honest, look like a hot number in those photos. The real Brenda Lee just laughs. "Now when I go to the beauty parlor, I call ahead for an estimate," she says. "They gave me this dress to wear, and it was slit up to *there*. Well, I told them, you're not going to get the right effect with my six-inch legs. With all that gam hanging out there, I'd feel like I was wearing my mother's clothes."

In the meanwhile, Brenda Lee presses on, doing what many people call one of the finest and most dynamic stage shows in popular music, collecting books (Taylor Caldwell and Truman Capote are special favorites), and working on the little house ("Listen, I've lived in all the *right* neighborhoods, and I didn't like it. I don't need a big house to remind me of who I am.").

"Sometimes you feel like a puppet," says Brenda Lee, Little Miss Dynamite, still, at 35. "Oh lord, will they pull my strings? Will they pull my strings at all?" ■

Haggard at the Crossroads

AN INTERIM REPORT

A Portrait of the Artist in Mid-life

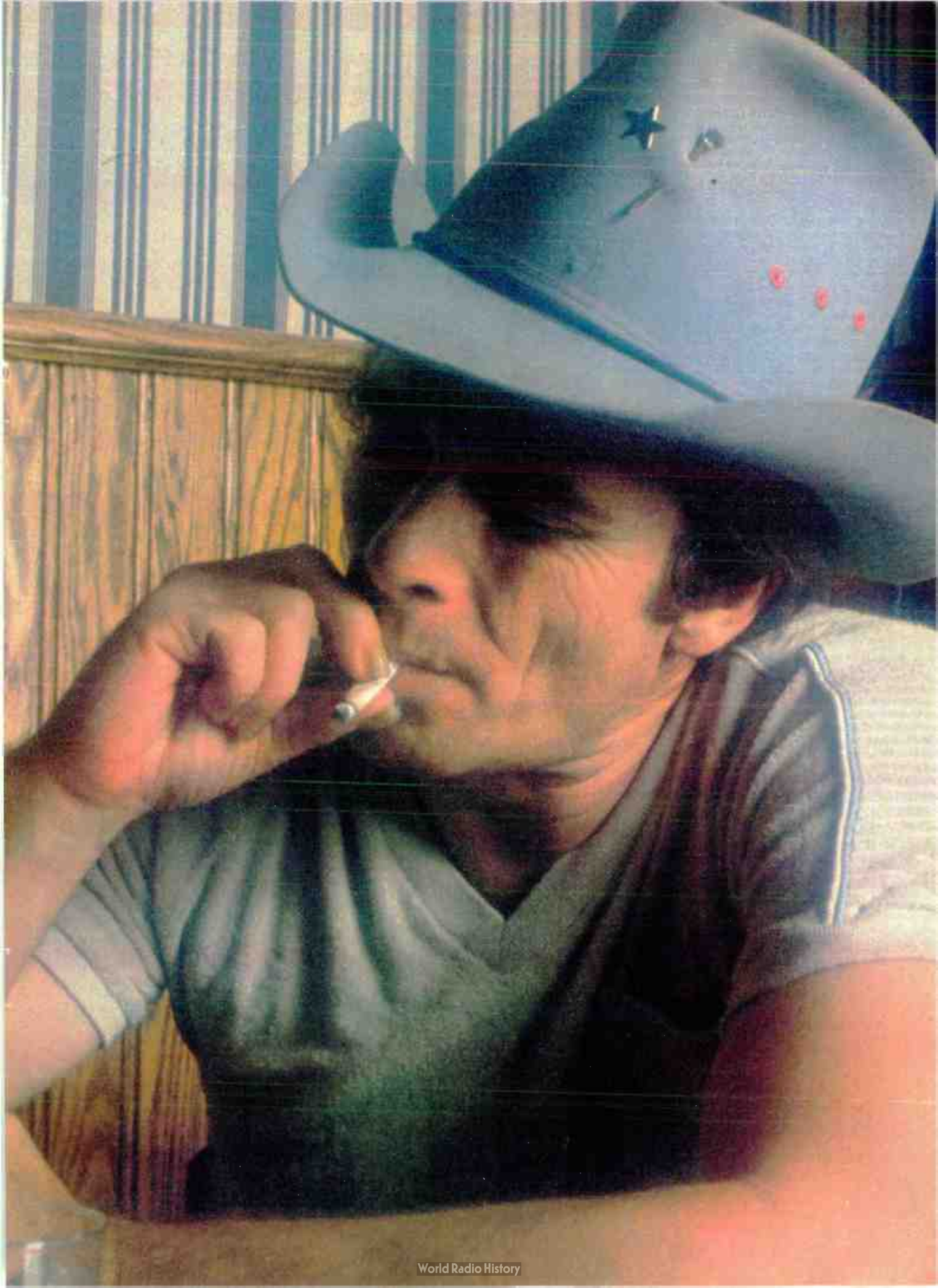
By Peter Guralnick

Porthole Bar, Ridgecrest, California, 1960. Haggard, at right played lead guitar in Lewis Talley's band.

Merle Haggard seems to occupy a permanent niche in the eye of the storm. The last time I saw him, in the fall of 1978, he was just about to get married to Leona Williams but had somehow neglected to arrange the details of his divorce from Bonnie Owens some three days before the wedding. This time, in the spring of 1980, he is in the midst of the well-publicized and protracted misunderstanding with Leona which started virtually on the day of the marriage. "I wouldn't give the marriage till Wednesday," says one insider dryly. "And this is Monday." With which Merle seems inclined to agree. He is also at a point in his career when everything seems up for grabs: management, musical direction, lifestyle (he has given up drinking recently, he says, but not "carousing"), movie and television options, art.

Perhaps this is Merle's own brand of mid-life crisis. Perhaps it is simply that he enjoys having people fight over him. Certainly he does nothing to interfere when long-time intimates vie for his attention, when veteran band members smolder with resentment over the favored treatment accorded to newer recruits, when rumors swirl that he will soon be leaving his record company, MCA, because Jimmy Bowen, the head of Elektra's Nashville office, is producing his new album. If anything, Merle seems to promote all this conflict, to enjoy the sound of battle raging all about. And unquestionably there exists a deep ambivalence within Merle himself, a clear sense of what he *doesn't* want to do but an uncertainty about what he does, which reflects itself even in an appearance that can alter radically (from scruffily bearded to dapperly mustached to conventionally clean-shaven, from glittering star to seedy barfly) almost from day to day. Perhaps as Merle says, "The more that's going on, the more life I'm able to be involved with and learn about, the more it seems to replenish my well of ideas." Perhaps, as friends suggest, he enjoys orchestrating all this drama simply because he is bored. About a year ago, he says, he nearly gave up performing and then changed his mind, not out of any love for what he knew but, typically, out of fear of what he didn't. "I found myself wanting to get out of the business simply because I wanted to see if I could do anything else. But I got just far enough away from the business to realize I *couldn't* do anything else. So I decided to stay with it."

He announces this in concert at the Jim-



mie Rodgers Memorial Festival in Meridian, Mississippi; he says it in his songs; he reflects upon it in his most private moments. But you'll notice that what he's talking about is not "music" but "business," not song writing but self-promotion, not playing the guitar, his first and perhaps still his most consuming ambition, but selling himself as a product. For Merle Haggard is perhaps the last true outlaw, the one hold-out against wrapping up and merchandising feelings, the last rebel against high-gloss packaging. The music industry today, it almost goes without saying, speaks less of music than it does of industry, but for Merle Haggard clearly the only truth lies in art. Even after 20 years in "the business" he still lives, breathes, sleeps—he is consumed by music.

You can hear it in his records. It comes out in his songs. You even see it in the sound check rehearsal for his Saturday night performance at the Jimmie Rodgers Memorial Festival. Arriving shortly after one, the ten-piece band (complete like Willie's band with *two* drummers and *two* lead guitars) sets up on the stage of the Temple Theater whose flashing marquee proclaims the arrival of the stars in downtown Meridian. The theater, built in 1928 (though it never saw the presence of native son Jimmie Rodgers—*he* played the old Opera House) boasts such features as a painted railroad backdrop; ornate friezes, hardback seats, the pervasive smell of popcorn, and something that looks like a marble birdbath set off in a lighted alcove. Meridian, a pleasant town of 50,000 with a park dedicated to the memory of its most famous citizen and a museum built as a replica of the Mobile and Ohio railroad depot in Stonewall, Mississippi, is obviously geared up for the annual week-long event, and Merle is geared up to play it, since Jimmie Rodgers- -along with Bob Wills, Bing Crosby, and Lefty Frizzell—is one of his few genuine publicly acknowledged heroes. Nonetheless it seems a little incongruous for the star himself to show up early for a sound-check, normally the most perfunctory of ceremonies in which a balance is struck for the various mikes and instruments and voice levels are checked.

The few Shriners and Festival organizers who happen to be about (the Hamasa Shrine Temple owns the theater, and throughout the performance security is provided by a fez-topped Hamasa Patrol) are understandably thrilled, and several shake hands and introduce their wives, but for Merle this is obviously more than a star turn. For the next three hours he puts his band through their paces, working out arrangements, calling for slight modifications, picking up clinkers, but mostly just savoring the opportunity to hear the band, to use this collection of remarkable soloists and ensemble players as an instrument to express his own voice. Duke Ellington was once asked what kept him on the road with his band, why he would go continue to through all the turmoil, emotional and financial, that is involved in maintaining an organization of this sort. He replied that it was more a matter of self-indulgence than anything else—he simply wanted to hear his music played right—and one gets the feeling with Merle Haggard that it is little different. As

Even after 20 years in "the business" he still lives, breathes, sleeps—he is consumed by music.

the band warms up on Bob Wills numbers and Merle Haggard hits, as they ramble easily through a limitless catalogue of standards and original compositions, you realize that for Merle Haggard this is his reason for being. Merle sways motionlessly in place, knees bent, face for once relaxed and even smiling, directing the action with is fiddle bow, while the band takes off on an extended jam, white-bearded guitarist Grady Martin contributes an exquisite solo, and original Stranger Roy Nichols responds with an equally compact even more sizzling break. Long-time associate and sometime busdriver Lewis Talley does a couple of Ernest Tubb numbers after much encouragement from Merle, and Merle himself tosses off vocals as casual as they are deeply felt. It's as close as you're going to get to the spirit of Jimmie Rodgers or Bob Wills in the stream-lined '80s.

Towards the end of the afternoon, just as Merle is nearly done working out an arrangement of *Miss the Mississippi And You* with Roy Nichols and Norm Hamlet, the only members of the band who played on Merle's classic Jimmie Rodgers tribute album, a blind man named Van Williams, a Meridian native who lost his sight in the Second World War, is led in by his wife. The man is wearing a Jimmie Rodgers railroad cap and, it is explained to Merle, knows all of Jimmie Rodgers' songs. He is a fixture at the Festival and appeared briefly the night before. Merle is obviously intrigued, announces to the band that he wants everyone to meet Van Williams, and then coaxes Van to do a number. For the next 45 minutes Jimmie Rodgers' arching blue yodels float out over the Temple Theater, while Merle expresses encouragement, astonishment, delight, and finally determines that he will feature Van on his show that evening. It is an odd night to see this most undemonstrative of men waxing so enthusiastic, all kindliness and courtliness and acting the part of the dutiful son. The afternoon ends with Merle coaxing Van to do *Miss the Mississippi* and finally *Never No Mo* for Lewis, throwing in a guitar fill now and then, adjusting Van's mike, knocked out again and again by the older man's near perfect mimicry,

Merle and son Noel

oblivious to the band's obvious boredom.

The audience at the Saturday night show gets to see almost none of this side of Merle. Merle seems almost to close off, as he so often does in live performance, become stiff and stand-offish and almost formal in presenting the kind of show that he thinks is expected of him. When I first saw him in the mid-'60s, he used to feature imitations in his act, almost as if he couldn't believe that people had come to see him, and now he seems to run through his own hits equally mistrustfully, disturbed perhaps by the feuding in the band, possibly thrown off by the mismatched rhythms of the two drummers, irritated when a woman in the audience calls out, "Smile, Merle," and he replies, "Why? I only smile when something's funny." There are no really personal songs, there is nothing from his recent autobiographical masterpiece, **Serving 190 Proof**, and in fact one sees little of the simple enthusiasm that was evident all through the afternoon until he introduces Van Williams towards the conclusion of the first show. The audience responds with suitable politeness (it is an audience made up of the faithful after all, with one contingent of Australians who have planned their U.S. tour around the Jimmie Rodgers Festival and Fan Fair) but is less thrilled to have their star do little more than orchestrate the cheering for a local musician. Merle for his part couldn't care less. He lets Van close out the show with *Miss the Mississipi And You*, the song that he'd rehearsed with the band that afternoon, and spends the entire time between shows not with his wife, who is out in front of the theater signing autographs, nor with any of the celebrities who clamor for his attention, but picking Jimmie Rodgers songs and exchanging self-deprecating small talk with Van Williams on his bus. When he finally has to go in for the second show, he brings Van back with him and insists once again that Van end the evening with *Miss the Mississippi*. Some in the audience might suspect that they are being shortchanged, the band, dressed in black western suits and white cowboy hats, just looks uncomfortable, but really Merle is convinced that he is giving people a priceless opportunity to hear *the real thing*. You know that if some Hollywood producer were to come along right now and offer him the chance to score and *star* in the next Clint Eastwood movie, he'd pass it up just for the chance to pick some more with Van Williams.

Merle Haggard is perhaps the last true outlaw, the one hold-out against wrapping up and merchandising feelings, the last rebel against high-gloss packaging.

I live the kind of life
that most men only dream of
I make my living writing songs
And singing them
But I'm 41 years old, and
I ain't got no place to go
When its over
So I'll hide my age and make the stage
and try to kick the footlights
out again.

"People don't realize," says Merle Haggard almost resentfully, "that entertainers go through the same hardships of life as everyone else. When a plumber has someone close to the family pass away, they don't go to work—but an entertainer . . . At five minutes to nine they call me one night and said Lefty Frizzell had passed away. I went on. That's hard to do. You can't project how an entertainer will feel for an engagement that was planned months ago and predict his mood. Entertainers have the same feelings as anyone else, but they have to be phony about them. You have to go out and smile when you don't feel like smiling; somebody points a camera at you, and you put on that old Instamatic grin. Which is part of the profession, I guess. But sometimes part of the profession makes you feel like a prostitute. That's what that song is about. I've had letters that say, 'I hope that isn't —I would be very disappointed to find that as many people as love your singing that you really feel that way. I hope it's just a passing mood, I'm sure that it is.' Well, *life* is a passing mood. You know, when I see an artist like Lefty who had everything, every ingredient it took to become a monster, a legend, a Presley, with the exception of management—that was the only thing he lacked, but people he came by made him hate the business before he ever really got into it, they killed his desire and ambition. I guess maybe *Footlights* started that night when I got the call."

"People don't realize that entertainers go through the same hardships of life as everyone else."

Back in Nashville a few days later he is working on the final mix of one of the new tunes from his new album with producer Jimmy Bowen, himself an exile from L.A. and rock 'n' roll. Bowen is calm and professional and Merle, who scarcely reads because he hasn't got the patience, is genuinely intrigued by the technology, a more than willing student and an apt one, too. Work begins around seven o'clock in the evening and when it is over at 2 a.m. only the one number will have been wrapped up, but Merle never loses interest, his attention never flags, and he even manages to write a new song during a break. When he goes into the soundbooth to overdub his vocal, there is none of the

coldness that you might associate with a canned sound, and although the song itself seems slick and pedestrian Merle invests it with a feeling and a passion that show up in each minute variation, in each new vocal twist. It is a true marriage of craft and passion, art and instinct, and here, just as the soundcheck, there is no question that Merle Haggard is fully engaged, able to forget for a moment the embarrassment of his duet with Clint Eastwood in *Bronco Billy*, or even the compromise that this meticulously produced album itself represents in its attempt to transform Merle Haggard from country music legend to genuine pop star. Obviously Merle is going to have to face a lot of tough decisions in the next few months: will he really dedicate himself to cross-over success; will he look for more media exposure, streamline his organization, get rid of the hangers-on, tone down an autobiography that promises to tell the unvarnished truth so that it will be more acceptable to public and publisher? Merle strains against the mold, clings desperately to the irrational response, however outrageous. He makes brave statements that indicate he will *never* tailor his beliefs to fit the proper image, never rein himself in to do what he is supposed to do. He lashes out wildly at an enemy he cannot quite identify, an invisible enemy who has transformed the American dream from the great move west to the move to the suburbs, transformed

"It seems like if you do well on TV you lose a lot of your mystique, a lot of your drawing power."

the hero from rugged individualist to Saturday afternoon hero.

"It seems like if you do well on TV," he says, doing his best to put his finger on just what it is that's disturbing him, "you lose a lot of your mystique, a lot of your drawing power. I've argued and argued this point with people who are a lot smarter than I am, that for you to do well enough to get the type of shows that you want you must be on there so much that the people in New York know who you are. And when you get to where the people in New York know who you are, you've usually done too much of it. Really, I don't see any way of doing a happy medium but there's no way to prove my point. So we go ahead, we attack television like we're planning to do now, and when the bottom falls out of the whole thing, well they're going to say it's this or it's that, but I think it's very simple: people get sick of seeing you every time they turn on the TV.

"Well, you take some performers," he says, then singles out one prominent country entertainer in particular. "I feel sorry for him. He's been so overexposed at this point, people turn on their television and they see him—they're sick of him. He can't get a hit record. The disc jockeys themselves are tired of seeing him.So this man's only alternative is to work the fairs and such things where there's a built-in crowd to begin with. Oh, he makes big money, but he knows, I'm sure, as well as anybody else what he is and who he is—he's a piece of . . . he's a product of the industry. He's not really a creative artist at all."

And that's really what it all comes down to for Merle Haggard. That's probably the worst fate that he can imagine, to become "a product of the industry," to give up the

"I've enjoyed the career, I think, a lot more than I would have if I'd tried to capitalize on every damned thing that happened to me."

freedom of the creative artist, perhaps the last frontier. His emotional reaction to fear of selling out takes many forms and perhaps, as much as anything else, is the explanation for his instinctive politics. Whenever he feels cornered, whenever he has begun to feel boxed in, Merle Haggard has lashed out, and probably he would be the last to deny that his behavior has been destructive, reckless, ill-considered at times. It has never caused him to abandon his music, though. The one constant in his life has been music.

I've been running from life
I keep running from life
I'm still running from life
But I can't get away.

"A lot of these people around me," says Merle Haggard a little sorrowfully of the retinue that has surrounded him off and on for 20 years now, "are sometimes not nearly as responsible as they need to be. They let me down in a lot of ways that other people would not allow. But their heart was always in the right place. They were always there to pick me up when other people wouldn't give a shit. They're not trying—I don't think—to get in my pocketbook. Because of some of their irresponsibility—and the irresponsibility I shoulder as much as anybody. It's not just their fault, it's my fault. It's their fault for allowing me to be that way and my fault for allowing them to be that way that we have not reached the height in our career that might have been available. But I really don't care. I've enjoyed this career, I think, a lot more than I would have if I'd tried to capitalize on every damned thing that happened to me. There were times when I could have jumped on a television special. I could have had my own network show if I'd pursued it. There were many directions I could have gone in, many things I could have done, but I chose to attack it on a low-key basis and to enjoy it and screw around and write songs and make records

and run up and down the highway in buses and stay with the people I wanted to be with rather than take that other route—I'm sure you know what route that is. And there's lots of other reasons why I didn't go that way. There was so many people wanting me to go one way or another that I couldn't be sure of what direction to go in. I had no way of knowing who was ready to screw me and who was wanting to do me right. So I just stayed where I was, and I just stayed with the people I was with."

As he speaks you get a momentary vision—a vision of Merle and Lewis and Bonnie, of Fuzzy Owen, who first recorded Merle for his cousin Lewis Tally's label, and Tex Whitson, Merle's new manager who has more or less replaced Fuzzy. It was Lewis, who brought Merle, fresh out of prison, to Tex's Desert Inn in Ridgecrest, California. Lewis was, according to Tex, "the biggest thing in Southern California; California's answer to Hank Williams. I believe he could go back today, he was that popular. Merle was trying to be a lead guitarist. That was all he cared about, and Lewis just kept raving about, 'This kid . . . this kid.' It turned out to be Merle." Fuzzy coached Merle endlessly—on diction, on mannerisms, on what makes up a hit song. Merle met Bonnie at the Blackboard, where she was waitressing and sang on Tuesday nights, and Merle played the relief shift. At the Porthole which succeeded the Desert Inn, "we checked for knives and guns at the door," says Tex. "If they didn't have 'em, we issued 'em." It all seems so much simpler, so much more innocent in a way, bathed in the light of nostalgia, though Tex, a self-admitted felon, claims that it is far easier now. "If I'd known then how easy the music business was, I could have saved myself seven years in the pokey!" It is the longest-running

"I never dreamt about success. Really, all I ever intended to do was to make a living."

hit on Broadway in which the actors shuffle about, exchange roles, take a temporary leave of absence . . . but one doubts they will ever quit the show.

"As a kid I never even thought about growing up," says Merle "I just enjoyed being a kid. I got away with as much as I could get away with. I guess I didn't think about growing up because I thought I was grown. I never dreamt about success. Really, all I ever intended to do was to make a living. I've had far more success than I ever could have imagined—I guess I didn't set my sights high enough! Sometimes," says Merle Haggard with only a hint of wistfulness in his voice, "I wish maybe I hadn't had as much success as I have. You know, it kind of ruins your incentive." But then with that hard-won Okie sense of self-knocking good humor he recovers: "I guess you've just got to keep making up goals." ■

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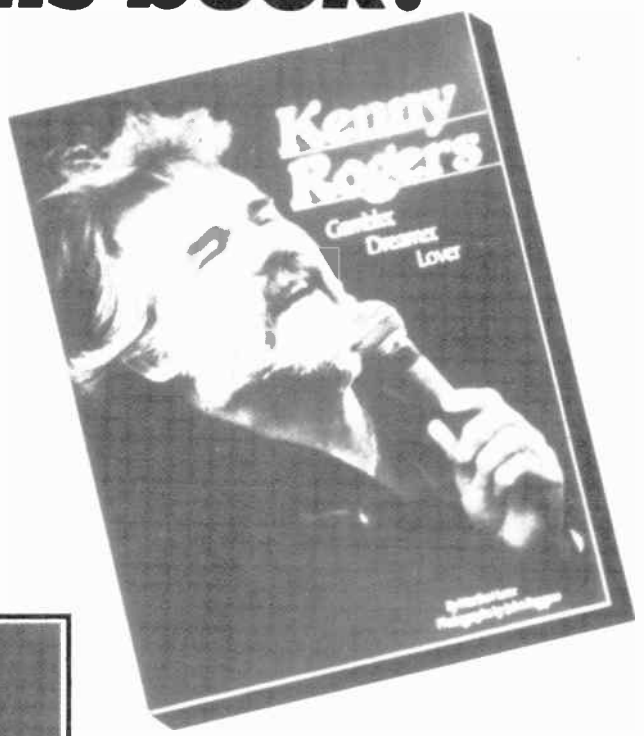

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Roy Orbison
The Phantom Unmasked

The Voice, the Big O, the Man of Mystery, turns out to be a friendly talkative fellow.

By Patrick Carr

The band, snugly dressed in the inevitable black and white, performs a sly Eagles-disco warp of the theme from *Star Trek*. It's weird, very weird. Their white sashes sway softly around their black satins; the music, stirring and schmaltzy, soars through the club. The audience seems confused. This is a *Roy Orbison* show! What's the *Star Trek* stuff?

There's no time for that now, though, because here comes Roy. Nobody in the audience has seen him in the flesh before—he's a memory from television, a legend, some sort of wraith—and when he actually appears, looking like a vanilla popsicle in a black wrapper, everyone goes nuts. It's *Roy Orbison!* It's the singing phantom of yesteryear, Mr. Plastic-Face, the man from another planet! We concentrate on the head—in our memories, it's the only part which moves, save for that reflex twitching of the hands down there against the dead black bodily parts—and yes, the head is doing its stuff. It's vibrating six inches away from the mike, the black mop atop the white slash of forehead and the black cut of the shades, the whole assembly sinking down to a tight-tensed little mouth before it recedes sharply into a pale, black-satin-closed vee of chest. Yep, it's just like then: The mouth seems to be the only connection to the soul. What an image. He's singing *Only The Lonely*, and when you close your eyes you know for sure that with the mouth's pinpoint on the heart, and the presence's utter sense of the alien, the package is *very* Trekky, very outside, and on the ball with Outer Nowhere. It's scary and it's great.

* * *

The Roy Orbison story is well known, but it bears repeating. He began as a Sun Records rockabilly singer, moved on to an alliance with producer Fred Foster in the early Sixties, scored countless eerie hits like *Crying* and *Blue Bayou* and *Pretty Woman* and *It's Over*, got lost in the late Sixties shuffle when he left Foster for

MGM, and then joined many of the other original rockabillies in "international" stardom, U.S. frustration, and the search for some way—a producer, a situation—in which to make more great records.

In Orbison's case, his disappearance from the American scene was vibrant. There were deaths around him—his wife, two of his kids—and most of his fans leapt to conclusions which seemed obvious: The ghost-man's deathly karma was both real and catching, the tragic vibe was all

around him, the image lived and was running a show too raw to be played out in public. Thus it was that his disappearance went relatively unquestioned; it was obviously a slow nightmare which should be abandoned as other music and images, mostly more kinetic and certainly less depressing, pressed for attention.

When Roy appears today, then, Mr. Spock at the Lone Star Cafe, most of the crowd does not know about all the other records and the English accolades and/or anything else at all about him since *then*. As he sings those lovely, bone-chilling songs of his with perfect control and power and nuance, they feel instead that things are just as they were.

Downstairs at the Lone Star between sets, the man becomes available for an interview. The set-up has been hard, fraught with paranoia among the intermediaries and loaded with the possibility that Mr. Orbison may be too weary or sick or mournful to talk, but determined efforts have been made and the situation has fallen into place.

Nervousness attends the meeting. Mr. Orbison does indeed look most chilling, and the shades are positively sinister. Will he talk?

He talks. Asked how his career is going these days, he delivers his answer in spades. He's hotter than ever in England and Europe and Australia, he says; he's been filling big halls on a U.S. tour and in Canada; he has his first-ever country hit single, *That Loving You Feeling Again* with Emmylou Harris; he's in demand, he's making money, things are cracking. He makes these points quietly and thoroughly, identifying the facts with patience and grace about how he's not, by any means, a has-been. He's wearing a loose-fitting white shirt now, he's feeling the blast from the Lone Star's rickety old floor fan, he's got his Camels and his matches and his ashtray. He seems sly and collected and humorous; he has about him an elfin air quite foreign to the frigid melancholy of his image. Also, he's smiling as he talks. Up close like this, you can see the humorous twist around the corners of his mouth and even the trace of a sparkle behind the shades.

There's something about that smile, something familiar but somehow wrong, out of place . . . It takes a while to identify it, but then it sinks in: This cautious but genuine expression of humor is the same phenomenon which appears onstage and on the TV tube, in the image, as a very odd grimace indeed, Spock's nervous tick.

The observation opens up a new perspective on Mr. Orbison. Is he *not* in fact a being of weirdness and tragedy? Does the image have a life of its own, existing perhaps only in the songs and the performances?

There's nothing like a direct approach on such matters, so the question is asked. Mr. Orbison says that no, he and the image do not really resemble each other; they don't now and they didn't then. He says that he is not a tragic personality, and makes the additional point that most of his songs aren't tragic, either.

There we have it, then. While reflecting on the uncanny power of the image's separate life, it is now possible to relax, abandon all uneasiness about how to interview a singing phantom, and discover interesting and under-exposed facts about Roy Orbison by means of a sane and friendly chat.

* * *

The question of the image must come first. The story of the shades is well-known —he left his regular spectacles on his plane one night, wore his special wraparound glare-reducing set onstage instead and thereby launched a phenomenon he would have been extremely foolish to discourage —but what about the rest of it? The black clothes, for instance?

"There's a very simple explanation," he says. "When I was a young boy, we always used to play cowboys and Indians and good guys and bad guys, and I always had to play the bad guy or the other guys would go home. Well, bad guys wear black shirts and I always wanted a black shirt, but we couldn't afford one. I was in my teens before I could get one, and even then it had some white on it. Then when I got more money I went for the all-black clothing thing. I remember the first time I ever got to buy black shirts in lots. It was in Scotland . . ." Roy commences to relate the story of his first mass purchase of black shirts in detail and at length. It's so pleasant to hear him ramble on like any old Joe, that the reason *why* he always had to be a bad guy in those boys' games never surfaces. Obviously, though, his attraction to the bad guy stance—the loner, the misfit

"When you become a superstar, which I became, I don't think you should give up what you love to do. The same thing goes for when something traumatic happens to you—you shouldn't give it up then, either. It's a lifestyle which has stood me in good stead. Not a lot has changed."

—was a significant ingredient in his choice of image. His maintenance of the pose for some twenty years has been, just as obviously, very smart.

This is all a little distressing—it raises the possibility that there may be no more great Roy Orbison records—but there's really nothing else to be said about the subject, and so we proceed to other matters. Time is pressing, and there is still the question of Mr. Orbison's personal life. We know that he is married (he married again, in 1969, after the tragic death of his first wife in a motorcycle accident) and that he lives in the Nashville region, but apart from that there's *nothing*. Orbison does not seem to socialize. What does he do with his time when he's not being the Image?

Well, says the man, he builds model airplanes. He began as a kid when his imagination was captured by his uncles' stories about World War II and he's never stopped since. He's serious about it, too. He builds Museum Scale models which fly —the absolute top of the line in the modeler's world, requiring months of intricate labor and painstaking research; his

first model was a Battle of Britain Spitfire (either the Mk. IA or the Mk.II, he doesn't recall exactly), and right now he's half-way through a Messerschmidt Bf. 109 "Gustav," as flown (he points out) by the great German ace Erich Hartmann (365 kills). The writer possesses a certain body of knowledge in these regions, and so Mr. Orbison is put to a strenuous test: Does the abbreviation "M.B.5" mean anything to The Big O?

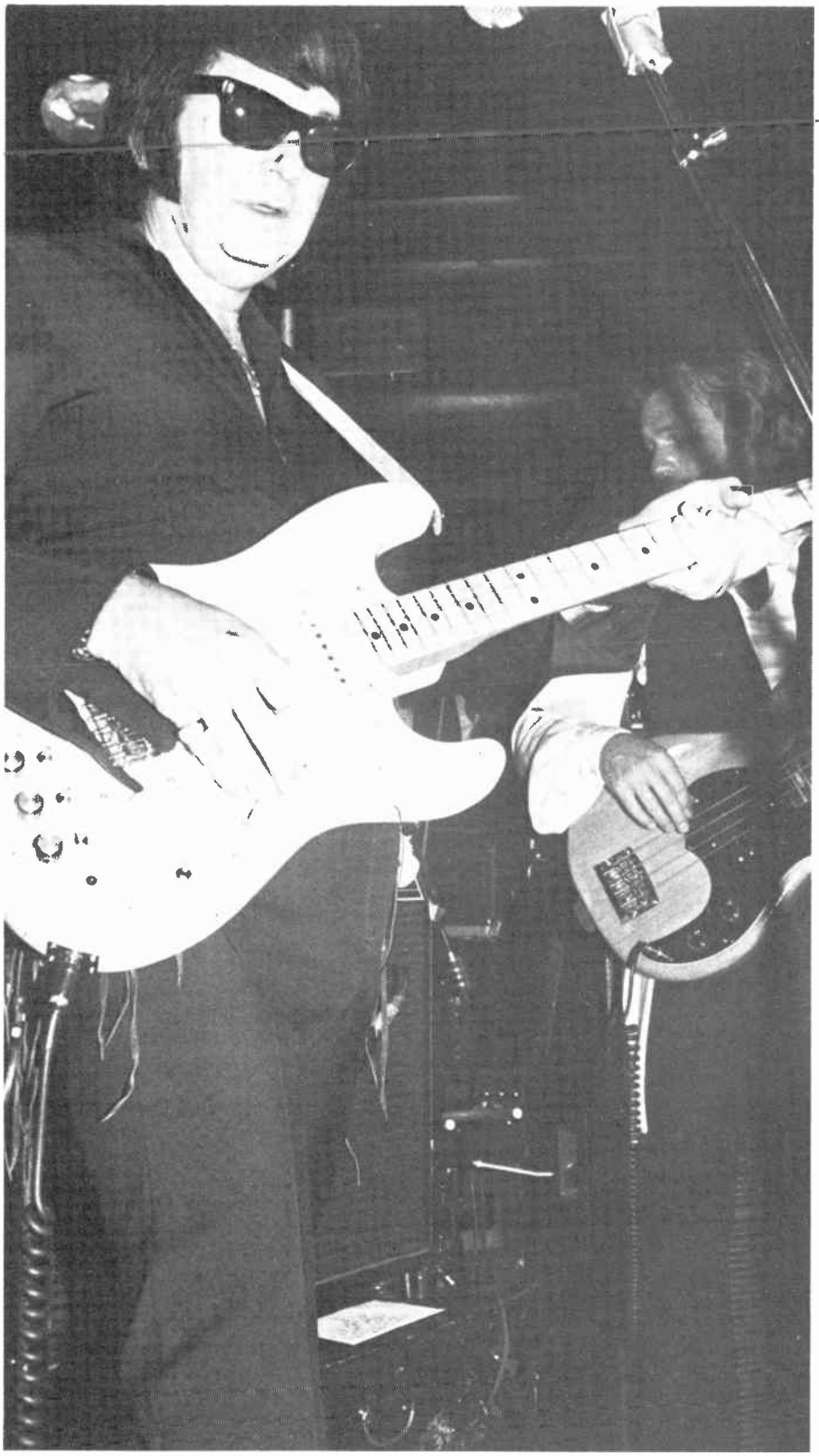
Indeed it does, and The Face lights up in pure pleasure as the mystery of the Martin-Baker 5, an absolutely superior British piston-engined World War II fighter plane which somehow never found its way into production, is discussed and analyzed. The mystery is not penetrated to its conclusion—nobody seems to *know* why the M.B.5 never went into production—but the discussion does lead somewhere.

"I've never thought of myself as having a philosophy," says The Big O, "but if I have one, all that—the details, the reasons *why*—is part and parcel of it. I'm a great student of history. What happened was that from the time I first found about that war, which I didn't understand, I wanted to find out why people did that. Then in order to find out what happened, I had to go back to the First World War and the period in between, because actually, it was all one war in two parts. Then, in order to find out what caused *that*, I had to go back to the 1870s, then back to Charlemagne, and back all the way to Roman times when they tried to cross what is now Germany and didn't make it . . . Y'know, people think of history like they think of model airplanes, as kind of a drab thing, but you find out about the old peoples' lifestyles—how they dressed, how they lived, everything—so it's fascinating. I've been trying to understand everything from the Roman times to now, and I'm still doing it.

"I mean, when you become a superstar, which I became, I don't think you should give up what you love to do. The same thing goes for when something traumatic happens to you—you shouldn't give it up then, either. If you like to do a little reading before you go to bed every night, you should do it whether you're a star or not, whether you've got a hit record or not, whether you've just had a loss in the family or everything is fantastic. It's a lifestyle which has stood me in good stead. Not a lot has changed."

All this makes perfect sense. The Big O—The Voice, The Phantom, The Man From Nowhere, He Who Is A Mystery—is not carried off to some secret crypt or pod or personalized life-support system following his unearthly public appearances; rather, the man goes away and continues his studies, the life of the mind.

As the time for another show at the Lone Star draws near, Roy's manager intrudes to end the interview. The process of disconnection is slow, though—Roy is talking about a model airplane he saw recently which had true-to-scale *fingermarks* on the wings from where ground-crew members pushed it to get it out of its dispersal bay!—but it is inevitable: The Image must be prepared for public consumption.



Next up in this image business is his stance while onstage, that total-weirdness lack of motion which came across to its best effect on lip-synched TV appearances. As with the other elements of the image, this ingredient turns out to be a half-accident subsequently exploited to the full. Specifically, Roy Orbison songs do not feature instrumental breaks—Roy doesn't like them, thinks they interfere with the power of the song—and so the singer has to stay on the mike for the duration of the song. Also, since he does not sing loudly—he *never* bellows—he has to stay close to

the mike in order to squeeze every last ounce of volume and nuance from his pipes. He admits that this technique has been somewhat helpful in the creation of his myth. Lastly but certainly not leastly, he confesses to being nervous onstage. This last fact might have something to do with his utterance of approximately one dozen spoken words per show.

So much, then, for the mystery of the image. There remains the mystery of his recording career. The abrupt nose-dive which occurred in this area in the late Sixties has been well documented in this and other magazines—basically, Roy never found the right combination of material, production and promotion after his split with Fred Foster, and was moreover quite shattered by the loss of his wife and sons, to the extent that he was unable to give enough to his music—but the current situation is obscure, to say the least. There was an Elektra album some two years ago, and now there is his country single, but otherwise there is the sound of utter silence. Is anything happening?

"Well, I'll probably start working on a recording deal when I get the chance," Roy says. "I just haven't had the chance lately, I've been so busy with dates. But when I stop for a month or so, which will be pretty soon, we'll work out some kind of recording deal, and maybe even record. It doesn't leave a lot of time for writing, though." This situation, even though Roy says that several labels are interested in him, sounds somewhat vague. As to what happened to his Elektra deal, Roy's answer is short and none too sweet. "Nothing," he says. Prompted, he explains that two events—his recording of the album and the drastic recession in the music business in general—coincided with unhappy results. "I don't know whether the recession had anything to do with my album release," he says, "but it certainly had a lot to do with my not staying on the label. I think they tried to push the record—a little bit—but everybody in the business was taking a real beating at the time, and things were kind of crazy."

He wasn't satisfied with the album anyway, he explains; the sessions were only half concluded when everybody had to pack up and stop spending money, so a lot of the material which made it onto the album was not of the highest quality.

The problem now, he says, is to find a producer he can work with. He worked well with Fred Foster because Foster let him have a great deal of input and control over the recording process. The songs were cut more or less "live," and they were cut the way he wanted them. Since then, he has not found such a situation, and has developed a distinct aversion to the process wherein the singer shows up and sings, and the producer does everything else.

He has also developed an aversion to modern studio technique—he doesn't like a lot of over-dubbing, for instance—and so, with modern technique so thoroughly entrenched these days and so many producers with very strong opinions, he is finding that a good man is hard to find. "I want a producer I can work *with*, not be produced *by*," he says. "If I can't get my input in there, then I can't call a record my failure or my success." He's still looking for the right man (again, he refers to "five or six" possibilities), but so far he hasn't found him. If he doesn't find him, he says, he won't bother to record. ■

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PEOPLE

By Bob Campbell

Joe Bonsall of **The Oak Ridge Boys** is not one to let a little thing like the *CMA Awards Show* spoil his love for baseball. Following the nationally televised awards show in which The Oaks were nominated for, but did not win *Group of the Year*, Bonsall preferred to talk about his favorite baseball team. "That's the breaks. You win some and you lose some," Bonsall said. "What's important is the Phillies won the pennant. (Philadelphia had beaten the Houston Astros the night before to win the National League playoffs.) I was there and it was incredible."

George Jones, winner of the CMA's *Male Vocalist of the Year*, has recorded an estimated 147 albums in his long career. **Emmylou Harris** has said of Jones, "When you hear George sing, you are hearing a man who takes a song and makes it a work of art."

Early last fall, **Sue Powell** of **Dave and Sugar**, left the group to strike out on her own. Sue contends basic music differences forced her to leave the group. "When I joined Dave and Sugar four years ago, it was a group. Recently, I felt my role being slowly reduced from an equal partner to a backup singer. My final decision to leave came after our last recording session as Dave and Sugar, when it became obvious that the identities of Sugar would never be promoted beyond the level of backup singers. There was simply a basic difference in philosophy on what the group should have been. I definitely plan to continue recording as a solo artist and will stick to the country market."

Helen Cornelius

Since last fall's sudden and emotional breakup of the duo between **Helen Cornelius** and **Jim Ed Brown**, Ms. Cornelius has plunged ahead with new goals and musical direction. At a recent press conference in the offices of United Talent in Nashville, her new booking agency, Helen said the breakup happened because of deep personal differences and she talked of future plans. She has hired a new band to work with her and she is changing producers, among other things. Basically, Helen is rearranging her entire show. "I am dreaming big dreams now. I came to Nashville with a lot of ideas and they got waylaid for awhile, but they are on top again. The duo was a good thing, but this may be the greatest thing that has happened to me. I intend to take my new show to the fullest. The duo was a little old fashioned. It has reached a time in country music where you have to entertain folks. I want to move more on stage and show people I feel a song. I have a lot of my own songs that I have believed in for a long time that I want to do. I really want a high-energy, classy, lady-like show." Also, when I first started, I worked with piano. My greatest love is keyboards and a big part of my new show will be nothing but me on piano."

Ms. Cornelius also said her new band, called **The All-American Band,** is from South Carolina and includes six people who are versatile on virtually every instrument. She stresssed that all forms of music would be represented in her new act. "Country will be there, but I will utilize all kinds of music," Helen said, dressed in a tasteful grey pant suit with a herringbone coat. "We will do some cajun music, bluegrass and contemporary music. I can hardly wait to get on the road."

Singer/writer/producer **Ray Stevens** was inducted into the Georgia Music Hall of Fame during the second annual Georgia Music Week in Atlanta last September. He was presented with the prestigious "Gregory" Award for his role in Georgia's musical heritage.

Jacky Ward's hit single, *That's The Way A Cowboy Rocks and Rolls*, was written by veteran swamp rocker **Tony Joe White**. Tony Joe wrote and sang the million selling *Polk Salad Annie* a few years back. He also wrote the beautiful *Rainy Night in Georgia*, which was a big hit for **Brook Benton**. Tony Joe still picks and sings, and he played the Exit/In club in Nashville during DJ week.

Speaking of the Exit/In, the renovated showcase club was booming during DJ Week. **Asleep At The Wheel, Mickey Gilley** and **Johnny Lee, The Bellamy Brothers, John Anderson, Bobby Bare, Lacy J. Dalton, Rodney Crowell** and **Rosanne Cash** all appeared at the club in the same six-day period.

Ed Bruce and his **Tennessee Cowboy Band** appeared on The Grand Ole Opry last fall for the first time since the Opry moved from the Ryman Auditorium in downtown Nashville. He sang *Mamas Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up To Be Cowboys* and *The Last Cowboy Song*.

Carlene Carter

Carlene Carter, daughter of **June Carter Cash** and **Carl Smith**, stopped off in Nashville for a brief visit recently. She currently lives in London, England with her husband, rocker **Nick Lowe**. While in Nashville, she presided at a press luncheon given by Warner Brothers Records to publicize her new album, **Musical Shapes**. Dressed in black leather pants with a loose blouse and long, tousled blonde hair, Carlene said she was happy to be back in America, but she enjoyed London. She also likes recording in England. "I can cut the kind of country I like in England better because the musicians don't really know what they are doing with country music. They just pick with feeling and it comes out right."

In the course of a rambling conversation with local journalists over a buffet lunch, Carlene revealed she has been making an honest effort to get to know her father better. "I am getting to know my father again and have realized he is a good man," Carlene said. "I never even heard his records when I was growing up. He never played them. One day I asked him to play me some 'cause I had never heard them. I stay with him a lot when I am home now. He's just a cowboy. All he likes to do is

fool with his horses. I'll come stay with him and he'll say, 'I'm going out to the barn.' Then when he gets back, he just lays down and takes a nap. He is really a great guy." Carlene is in the midst of a nationwide tour of radio stations promoting her album.

Legendary songwriter **Bob Nolan**, one of the **Original Sons Of The Pioneers**, passed away a few months ago, and **Marty Robbins** passed along this eulogy. "Nolan was a true songwriting genius. He had the ability to say simple and powerfully what he felt. I'd like to see a tribute to his music and to him as a man. He was a gentleman and a friend of mine."

Pop singer **Vic Damone** has been recording in Nashville under the production of none other than **"Cowboy" Jack Clement**, who has produced such folks as **Waylon Jennings, Jerry Lee Lewis** and **Louis Armstrong** in his long career. "I don't know how you would describe what we are doing," Clement said. "I think of it as the definitive Vic Damone album, that's all. I wouldn't want to label it country or anything else for that matter. He's my favorite crooner and has been for years. I've wanted to put a dobro with his voice for a long, long time. In fact, I may play the dobro myself on this album."

Mickey Gilley revealed to **Laura Eipper** in **The Nashville Tennessean** that he originally thought the idea of a broncing bull in his **Gilley's Club** was a silly idea. "When Sherwood (Cryer, Gilley's manager and business partner) first told me he wanted to put the bull in Gilley's, I thought it was a big mistake. I just didn't think it belonged in a club where people came to listen to music and dance. Who,I thought, who would ever ride one of those things? Well, the next thing I know there's a guy named **Aaron Latham** coming down from New York to do an article for *Esquire Magazine*—and you know what happened then."

We caught **Lee Clayton** running around music row recently with his legendary dog, **Elvis Firewolf**. Lee's dog is part wolf and part German Shephard, and Lee picked him up in the desert in California where he lived a few years ago. Lee has moved back into Nashville from his farm outside town and he has been trying to find a new home for Elvis Firewolf. One of the problems Lee has to overcome is that Elvis cannot be around other male dogs. Because of his strong territorial instincts, Lee says the dog just automatically kills any male dogs he sees. "He's cool around female dogs, though," Lee adds. For those in the dark, Clayton wrote the original outlaw song, *Ladies Love Outlaws*, which **Waylon Jennings** recorded back in the early '70s. He also wrote if *You Can Touch Her At All*, a hit for **Willie Nelson.** Lee has recorded three brilliant albums of his own material **—Lee Clayton, Border Affair** and **Naked Child.** He has recently been working on a new album for Capitol Records. ■

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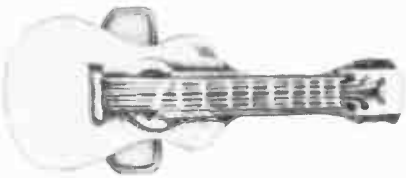

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JOHN ANDERSON

By Bob Allen

"I just like to keep to the basics," says John Anderson (no relation to the recently defeated presidential candidate). "I don't like to put no frills around anything. I feel there's enough people doin' that with music these days anyhow. I really just like to get as plain and simple as I can get when it comes to writin' and singin'."

About ten years ago, back in central Florida, John Anderson used to sing and play electric guitar in a hard rock band called The Living End. Today, in fact, when he stands on a stage behind a microphone with his long blonde locks down past his collar, with his tight blue jeans and his self-assured way of clutching his guitar, he still looks vaguely like the rocker he once was.

But it's when Anderson opens his mouth to sing that the real surprise comes. When he launches into one of his original country numbers like *Girl At The End Of The Bar, Low Dog Blues* or *She Just Started Likin' Cheatin' Songs*, it's almost uncanny, the force that he unleashes; with the suppressed pain and sorrow that he can con-

"I just do a song and make it as believable as I can. If it's a good song and if I can believe in the song myself, then I can get it across."

vey with that powerful, yet skillfully controlled voice of his, you might think George Jones was hiding behind a curtain.

"I just do a song and make it as believable as I can," Anderson shrugs and explains softly, sipping on a cup of coffee as he sits in the Nashville offices of Warner Brothers Records late one sunny morning. He speaks in a heavy Florida drawl and occasionally pulls thoughtfully on the brim of his straw cowboy hat. "If it's a good song and if I can believe in the song myself, then I can get it across."

But it's more than just believing, really. Much more. The truth is, there are just frighteningly few people around these days who really have either the golden vocal cords and the deep sense of conviction that it takes to sing a good hardcore country song the way it was meant to be sung.

Perhaps that's why when a new artist like Anderson does come down the pike, the response is so overwhelming. His first single for Warner Brothers, *Girl At The End Of The Bar*, for instance, reached the Top 20. *She Just Started Likin' Cheatin' Songs*, one of his more recent singles, went comfortably into the country Top Ten and also earned him a nomination from the Academy of Country Music as *Best New Male Vocalist*. Though another single, *Your Lyin' Blue Eyes*, only reached the Top 20, it sold more than 200,000 copies—more than some number one country singles do.

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John Anderson, his debut album for Warner Brothers, is a showcase of his virtuosity, both as a writer and a singer in the hard country vein. The album features a whole roster of veteran country session pickers like Pete Drake, Pig Robbins, Buddy Harmon, Buddy Spicher, Reggie Young and Kenny Malone, all of whom found themselves back in their natural element during the sessions with Anderson.

"Those guys are some of the best in the world," Anderson says softly, expressing his pride at having these men on his sessions. "They work every day in the studios, day in and day out, but sometimes they don't get a chance to play what they play best: the sound that made them so great in the first place. But with the stuff I'm doin', they have a chance to go back and play the old Nashville sound if they want to do it.

"And I guarantee you, when you go in the studio with three or four good country songs, those guys come around!" Anderson smiles. "And when you get those guys excited, you can be sure you're gonna hear somthin' pretty decent!"

The son of a retired marine, Anderson has been listening to country music since his early years in Apopka, Florida, even though it wasn't played around his house much. Growing up with his five brothers and sisters, he began playing guitar at age seven, and then a couple of years later he became a member of The Living End. "It was a rinky-dink little rock 'n' roll band at first," he recalls humorously, "but by the time we were 12 or 13, we could cook right along! We were the best in town, man—even if it was really small town!"

But by age 15, he had already wearied of the hard life of the rock musician who is forced to carry his own amplifiers from show to show. He was instead, drawn to the gentler strains of acoustic music which an older sister of his was playing with her small group.

At age 18, after he had finished high school, he decided to move to Nashville and follow in the footsteps of this same older sister who had gone there to pursue a musical career. For the next eight years in Nashville, he made his way working at a variety of odd jobs—plumber's helper, carpenter's helper, laborer, bagging groceries. . . . On one of his many construction jobs, he even helped put the roof on the new Opry House at Opryland. ("Those big black singles are hangin' up there on account of me!" he laughs.)

At other times, he found work—often along with his sister—singing in the small joints along Lower Broadway in downtown Nashville; then eventually he graduated to playing the fancier nightclubs in nearby Printer's Alley. "I use'ta spend my whole life in those clubs practically," he recalls wistfully. "It was just a matter of gettin' by in Nashville during the winter.

"I think a lot of what's happened to me since then just came from having the opportunity to be around people like George Jones and Fred Carter, Jr. that I look up to," he adds. "I had chances to sit down and talk to them after a show, and maybe sometimes just sit on a couch somewhere and pick up a guitar and sing with them. You learn that way. And I also got some encouragement from them, at least enough to keep going."

A producer named Earl Richards, who was a friend of a friend, happened to hear Anderson singing in Printer's Alley one night and signed him to a small label called Ace Of Hearts. Though his several years with Ace Of Hearts Records produced no hits, some of the recordings that he made for the label did eventually come to the attention of Al Gallico Music Publishers, and through them, they were heard by Norro Wilson at Warner Brothers, his present producer. About two years ago, Anderson was signed to Warners.

Today, Anderson resides with his wife in "a little house in the woods," some 70 miles east of Nashville, near the small Tennessee town of Smithville. But most of his time these days is spent traveling between the clubs across the country where he makes his living. In fact, as he talks this particular morning, he is about to leave for an eleven hour drive to Texas. In a little over a year, he has put 114,000 miles on his old Chevy Caprice (15,000 miles in 20 days during one particularly busy period in July!), and he has played every venue from a country music festival in Edinborough, Scotland to Gilley's Club in Houston. "The parkin' lot there (at Gilley's) is about six acres, and when they fill that up and start parkin' along the road, you know there's some folks in there! It was kinda spooky (playing there) at first," he admits. "But then I realized that a bunch of them had come to see me, so I figured I'd better get myself right!"

"Some people seem to be knocked out by what I'm doing.' "

Anderson notes that when he plays clubs across the country—particularly in states like Texas, Georgia and Florida—he is left with the feeling that there is a real thirst for genuine hard country music—the kind of music you can drink beer and dance and play pool to. "Some people seem to be pretty knocked out by what I'm doing," he admits. "They'll say things like, 'You're the best that's come through here in a long while,' and things like that.

"Then I'll hear others yell, 'Play some rock 'n' roll!' " he grins. "And I still do sometimes.

"When I was out in California, I had a few people come up to me and say, 'Well, how does it feel to be a rock star?' ' He laughs and shakes his head.

"That kinda goes to show you anyway, you just never know!" ■

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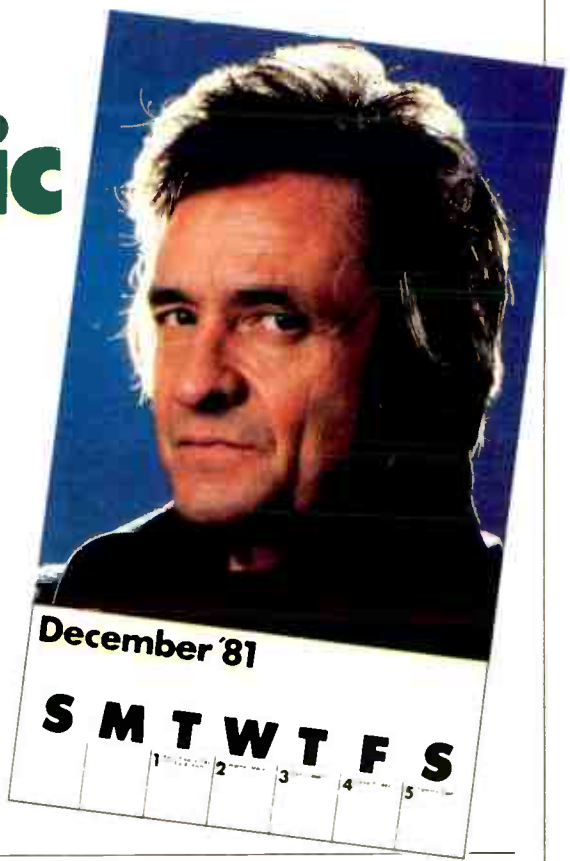

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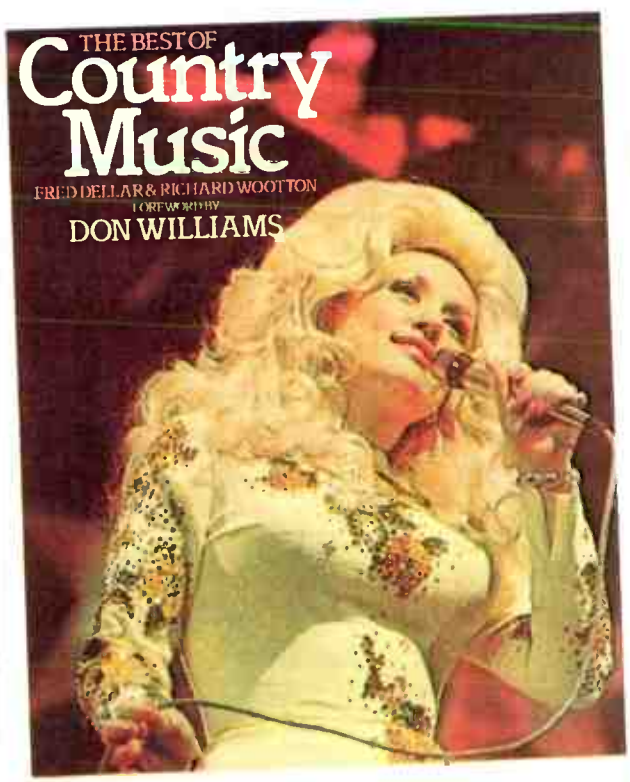

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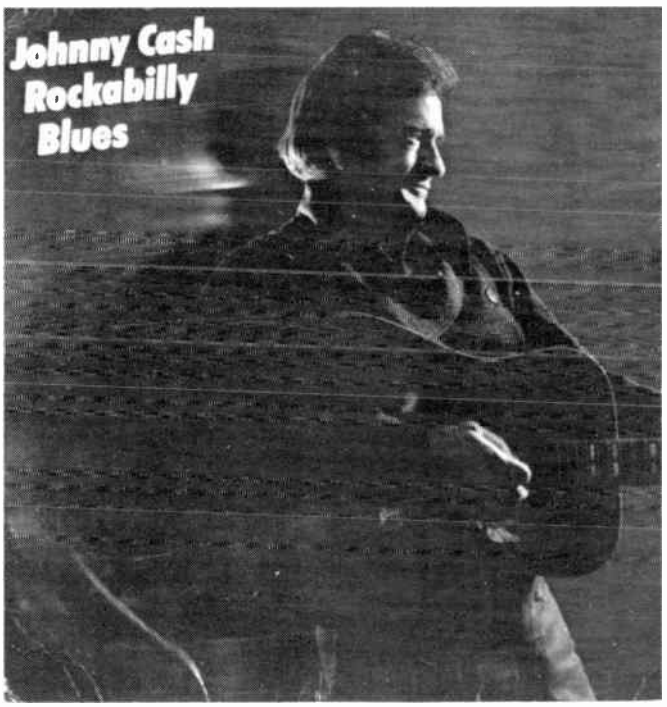
Record Reviews

Johnny Cash
Rockabilly Blues
Columbia JC-36779

Cash has been edging up to it these last few years, and now he's hit it. He's pulled the stops out, he's followed the purely personal dictates of his musical genie, and he's made the best album of his life. **Rockabilly Blues** is so great that it seems almost inane to call it the most inspiring country album of the last five, ten, or twenty years.

Given Cash's voice, his intelligence, and his musicality, the achievement should not come as a surprise, but it does, for despite his repeated statements to the effect that he's been wanting to make an album like **Rockabilly Blues** for some time now, it has sometimes seemed that the work might never surface, that somehow or other Cash would get distracted by the demands of one of his many other (non-musical) roles—a great moral force, a great statesman, a great patrician, a great family man—and would simply fail to fully apply himself to the task of being a great recording artist. This awkward possibility, of course, is now irrelevant—oh me of little faith!—and instead we are confronted with the fact that in his middle-middle age, with a quarter-century of recording behind him, Cash has come down from his mountain, gathered only the best of his buddies around him, found himself a whole new fountain of youth, and busted loose with a vengeance. His album restates and reworks the muscular heart of rockabilly music, re-energizes the fading intelligence of the modern country song, and scatters pretenders to the winds.

The quality of each component of **Rockabilly Blues,** overall a triumph of strength, determination, confidence and taste, represents a quantum-leap over even the best of Cash's recent work. Earle Poole Ball and Jack Clement



and Nick Lowe are all producers infinitely more in tune with the basic true-grit Johnny Cash style than Brian Ahern (**Silver**) or those others who went before; Billy Joe Shaver and John Prine and Steve Goodman and Kris Kristofferson and Cash himself are all songwriters worth twice as many Larry Gatlins as can dance on the tip of an ego; a few electric guitars in the right hands please the angels more than all the Jordanairs who ever got hooked on Geritol, all the banks of viols which were ever put out to pasture by a $20,000 synthesizer; the studio and engineering values of **Rockabilly Blues** make John's House of Cash products sound like hush-puppies bounced on styrofoam. People *worked* on this album, and they knew what they were doing, and they had fun, and they were serious.

The surprises are everywhere. They're in the total absence of cuteness and sentimentality and corn. They're in the hard, sure, passionate Cash baritone which somehow seems to have lost its old, peculiar quiver, in the desperately chilling edge to his vocal on *Cold Lonesome Morning* and in the authentically depressive theme of that self-written song. They're in the wondrous rockabilly Fender flow of Cash's *W-O-M-A-N*, a cunning and curly-crafted song which kicks and kicks some more. The re-emergence of Billy Joe Shaver under Cash's wing is also a surprise—we've missed that messed-up son-of-our-times ever since, for whatever reasons, the ex-Outlaws stopped recording his songs a few years back—and both *The Cowboy Who Started The Fight* and *It Ain't Nothing New Babe* are as eerie and haunting and lyrically original as any song Billy Joe has ever written. *It Ain't Nothing New Babe*, in fact, is just a pure masterpiece. Supported by an uncanny Dobro in the hands of Jack Clement (!), the song smashes form, breaks ground, and twists the heart. Cash strokes it with masterly care. For this performance alone he is to be praised to the skies, but there's also the point that in recording Billy Joe's songs and one by John Prine and Steve Goodman *(The Twentieth Century is Almost Over)*, and—surprise again!—a brilliant new blues *(The Last Time)* by the lately-soft Kris Kristofferson, Cash has picked up the traces of the early Seventies quality-song movement so shamefully abandoned by the Willie/Waylon axis in particular and the mass of country entertainers in general. Good old Cash, still the father-figure but still the renegade too; still the Indian in the white man's camp.

PATRICK CARR

Record Reviews

Charlie Rich
Once A Drifter
Elektra 6E-301

From the first song on **Once A Drifter**, Charlie Rich's debut album for Elektra Records, it becomes obvious that a change of labels and a change of producers has done him a world of good.

Rich's recent United Artists studio efforts were noticeably lackluster and directionless; but working now with Jim Ed Norman for the first time on **Once A Drifter**, Rich seems to have once again found enough interesting material and creative energy to make him feel excited about being in the recording studio once again.

As suggested by the title, many of the songs on **Once A Drifter** are unified by their imagery of restlessness which Rich is able to interpret with much flair and evocativeness. *Good Time Charlie's Got The Blues*, a neo-classic written some years ago by Danny O' Keefe, for instance, is such a natural hit for Rich that his delightful version of the song makes you wonder why he didn't get around to recording it years before this. *Angelina* by Jerry Careaga and Randy Newman's *Marie* are just two other cuts that stand out among the album's ten carefully chosen selections.

I don't hear any blockbusters like *Behind Closed Doors* or *Rollin' With The Flow* on **Once A Drifter**, but the renewed excitement and the resurrection from listlessness that one senses in Rich's performances are justification enough for celebration and reason enough to believe that this album is a step in the right direction.

And that's good news, because Charlie Rich is far too great a stylist to stay on the back burner for too long.

BOB ALLEN

Loretta Lynn
Lookin Good
MCA-5148

This is a skillfully produced album with few outright flaws, if any, in its execution. Loretta, the musicians and producer Owen Bradley all do their parts well. But the material is simply too bland for a gutsy country singer like Loretta Lynn.

For the most part, the subject matter of the songs is typical modern country music. And sometimes, as in *Cheatin' On A Cheater* and *Workin' Man*, we hear themes reminiscent of those which did so much for Loretta's career. The former is mildly combative and tells a cheating lover that he's about to get what's coming to him—a familiar theme for Loretta, but not as tough and convincing as some of her older marital fight songs like *The Pill*. *Workin' Man*, which sings the praises of working-man love, may have been included because of the success Loretta had with *Coal Miner's Daughter*. While *Workin' Man* is done well, it lacks the poignancy of the older songs. Perhaps she ought to do more songs from her own heart and fewer from the pens of others. (She wrote none of the songs on this album.)

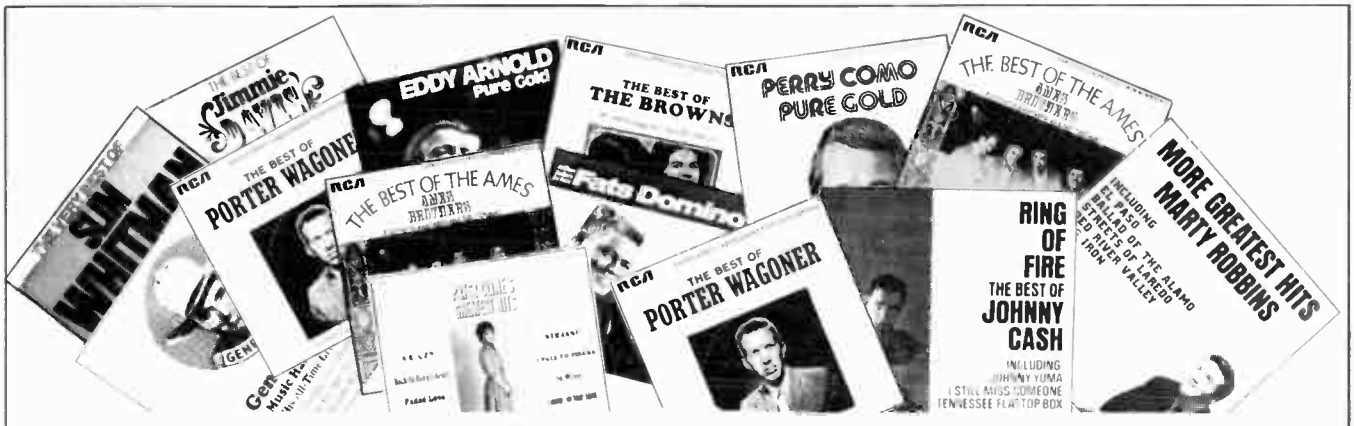
Sometimes I Go Crazy describes in straight-forward terms, with equally straight-forward backup, the anguish of the deserted lover. *I Don't Feel Like Livin' Today* has a similar message, but the backup verges on the melodramatic. *Everybody's Lookin' For Somebody New* is leavened with a touch of gospel sound that offers a nice change of pace, while *Crackerjack Jewelry* asks the time-honored question, "Wasn't life better when we were poor but still had time for each other?"

Somebody Led Me Away, one of the stronger cuts, tells a cheating lover that while he was leading someone on, someone else was leading his lover away—a not uncommon sequence of events in real life as well as in country lyrics.

Also among the stronger cuts is *Since I Met You*, which has an unusual twist. It refers to the treasured heirlooms around the old homestead—Grandma's bible, Grandpa's trunk. Country's usual treatment of anything around the old homestead is to give it almost mystical powers to banish modern-day troubles. One hand on Granny's bible and the other on the old trunk and, Poof! You're as happy as an innocent babe. But in this song, the heirlooms are actually rendered meaningless by the advent of a lover. (Such gall. Soon they'll be telling us that folks *do* smoke marijuana in Muskogee.)

In this entire album there is only one attempt at Loretta's traditional earthiness. *What Am I Gonna Do* is executed with a touch of raunchiness characterized mostly by a fuzz-toned guitar. But, like so much of this album, the effect is too subdued, and only serves to remind us of the gutsy, rawboned music that Loretta does so well and seems to have gotten away from. She is no middle-of-the-roader. This album is middle-of-the-road.

ART MAHER



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Record Reviews

Emmylou Harris

Light Of The Stable (The Christmas Album)

Warner Bros. BSK 3484

I never buy Christmas albums, but I like to review them. It's nice to hear singers I like sing good old fashioned Christmas carols the dozen or so times I listen to a record I review.

This time there were only four of the good old fashioned kind. Three of them, *O Little Town Of Bethlehem, The First Noel* and *Silent Night*, are prettied up with pleasant country harmonies by Sharon Hicks and Cheryl Warren, aka the White Girls. The fourth, *Away In A Manger*, has a harmony by Nancy Ahern, Brian Ahern, who produced, arranged, and helped engineer, did some playing on this record. For some reason, the melody of *Away In A Manger* was completely altered after the first line here. It sounds more modern now, and although it's still pretty, I like the old way better.

There is one other traditional song here, an Irish lullaby called *Golden Cradle*. Not having heard the song before, I had a hard time telling melody from harmony. Maybe that's why it didn't repeat itself in my head, like Irish lullabies usually do.

The other five songs are modern. This is a ten song album clocking in at 30 minutes in the contemporary tradition of lets make the record as short, and consequently as cheap, as we possibly can. So much for seasonal generosity.

The prime selection and showpiece of the album is the title cut, *Light Of The Stable*. I asked Warner Brothers if they planned to release this cut as a single, and they said they have no plans to do so. That's a shame. This version of that song could well become a Christmas standard. The song could have been written a hundred years ago or yesterday, and the harmonies by Neil Young, Dolly Parton, and Linda Ronstadt are simply perfect.

Of the remaining four songs, *Little Drummer Boy* was the only one I was familiar with. *Christmas Time's A-Comin'* and *Beautiful Star Of Bethlehem* are slight songs, but the bluegrass arrangements are

nice. Despite a great harmony by Willie Nelson, *Angel Eyes* was flawed by hard to understand lyrics. Not that the lyrics I could hear—Angel Eyes/Angel Eyes/The ways of the world are feeble/Don't give up on simple people—made me eager to hear the rest.

All the arrangements are understated and appropriate, acoustic on the old carols and never overdone on the others. Still, the only indespensible cut is *Light Of The Stable*. That's just indispensible for everybody. I'm sure fans of Emmylou and Christmas will like the rest of the album.

PETER STAMPFEL

Merle Haggard

Back To The Barrooms

MCA-5139

I got a bit nervous when I heard the first track of this album. Nothing against *Bronco Billy*, mind you, but *Misery And Gin* just never seemed to work for Hag, sounding as it does like Cole Porter strained through Barry Manilow and backed with string arrangements that threatened to swallow everything in their path. Well, maybe it isn't quite that bad, but I am having some real problems figuring out just what Hag's up to these days.

Back To The Barrooms is a wildly inconsistent album, especially compared to **Serving**

190 Proof or just about any of his Capitol albums from the Sixties and early Seventies. Instead of using his Strangers, or even that huge Texas Playboy type band he sometimes creates, he depends here upon only two Strangers, steel guitarist Norm Hamlet and hornman Don Markham. The remainder are Nashville musicians, playing totally competent and boring music. But even that's not as bad as the material. On one hand there's the incredibly touching *Leonard*, a true-life portrait of veteran singer and longtime Haggard idol, Tommy Collins, that should rank with his best original work, along with the engaging *Back To The Barrooms* and *I Don't Want To Sober Up Tonight*. On the other, there's his sloppy treatment of his own *Make-Up And Faded Blue Jeans*, a song that literally goes in circles. *Easy Come, Easy Go* is likewise thoroughly unsuited to him. Only one other tune, his rendition of Hank Jr.'s *I Don't Have Any More Love Songs* seems to stir his interest at all.

I can't figure the problem here, but maybe it's time for Hag to get out of the studio, get the Strangers together and hit the stage somewhere with a mobile recording van parked outside.

RICH KIENZLE

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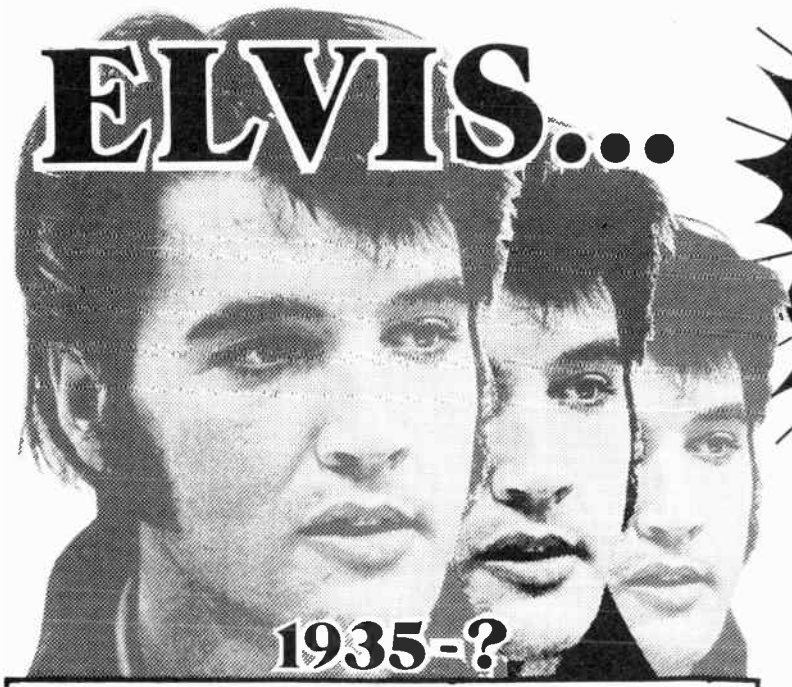

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Record Reviews

Patsy Cline
Always
MCA-3263

Though she died 17 years ago, Patsy Cline's music has remained to influence many country-oriented female artists who have come along since.

Through the years, her albums have also continued to sell; and her portrayal in the film, *Coal Miner's Daughter* as a major character in the early career of Loretta Lynn has created a renewed interest in her music. In response to this, veteran producer Owen Bradley, who was Patsy's original producer, in hopes of making her even more accessible to today's new country audiences, has taken a selection of her original hits back into the studio where he stripped everything off the tracks but her voice, and then added new, updated arrangements.

The ten selections on **Always** are the results of this project, and they are a moving collection of songs whose arrangements, even though they have been updated, seem to remain faithful to the basic integrity of the original versions. These new arrangements are, for the most part, tastefully executed; and in fact, they seem to bring to the forefront even more clearly, just how powerful and universal Patsy Cline's appeal as a vocalist was.

One thing of which the selections on **Always** particularly remind us is Patsy's awesome abilities as a pop singer. She was one of the best ever, and as such, she had more in common stylistically, in many ways, with a Patti Page of yesteryear or a Linda Ronstadt of today than she did with many of the more traditional female country singers. Selections on **Always** like *South Of The Border* and the title song, written by Irving Berlin, demonstrate the power and ease with which she was able to master the intricate melodies and emotional nuances of top-flight pop material.

It's difficult to speculate just what sort of impact Patsy Cline would have were she alive today. But the material on **Always** makes it easy to believe that she would be a giant whose immense vocal talents would win the affections of country, rock and easy-listening fans alike — much as Linda Ronstadt has. Her music is simply that good, and that enduring.

BOB ALLEN

Various Artists
The Legend of Jesse James
A&M SP 3718

Concept albums are tough propositions. For one thing, there's no middle ground; they either work beautifully, as Willie's **Phases and Stages** and **Red Headed Stranger** did, or wind up consumed by the flames of pretension and mediocrity, evoking more laughs than serious reactions. But those who can carry it off can add a new dimension to their work. This one comes from the same folks who produced **White Mansions**, the Civil War epic that featured Waylon and Jessi among others, and is precisely what the title states: the entire Jesse James legend (as much as could fit on one record) sung by ex-Band drummer Levon Helm (Jesse), Johnny Cash (his older brother Frank), Charlie Daniels (fellow outlaw Cole Younger), Emmylou Harris (Jesse's love) with Rodney Crowell, Albert Lee, Jody Payne and Rosanne Cash in supporting roles. Considering the backgrounds of the principals, all were well chosen. Cash, after all, pioneered these sort of records nearly 20 years ago, and Helm's memorable vocal on The Band's *The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down* helped to make that song a classic. Daniel's talents in this area, of course, are best exemplified with *The Devil Went Down To Georgia.*

The music itself, varying from bluegrass, gospel and stomping rock to lush orchestrated ballads, works well with the plot, which pays ample attention to historical detail (laudanum, mentioned in one song as a painkiller, was just that in the 1800s.) The moods and insights are well-integrated and compelling with only a few rough edges, such as Albert Lee's garbled vocals.

Not only is **The Legend of Jesse James** a success from the listener's viewpoint, it's also a damn fine model for other artists who might want to try something similar in the future. If you're gonna do, you might as well do it right.

RICH KIENZLE

Record Reviews

Conway Twitty
Rest Your Love On Me
MCA 5138

Strangely enough, for some reason Conway Twitty has *always* managed to straddle the fence between country and rock, forever graceful, never losing his musical balance. How many artists could wallow straight-faced through a corn-ball country corncake like *Happy Birthday Darlin'* and then turn right around on the same album and hit a cooker like the Sanford-Townsend Band's FM hit, *Smoke From A Distant Fire?* Or come up with a red-hot version of *Truth On Your Love Light* that would give Bobby Blue Bland reason to pause?

You've got to hand it to the man: he's nothing if not versatile. He's probably the only country artist around who could figure out a way to cover *My Sharona* if he wanted to.

Maybe it's this willingness to experiment with styles and sounds that's contributed to Twitty's longevity and appeal. His last two albums (**Crosswinds** and **Heart And Soul**) both carried an eclectic mixture of tear-jerking country ballads and off-the-line smokers designated to steam up a turntable. And perhaps this was due partly to the presence of David Barnes as co-producer on both those LPs. With Barnes around in the driver's seat, Twitty seemed inspired with a certain intangible creative derring-do that gave a gritty undercurrent and energy to the finished product.

This time around, though, Barnes is nowhere in sight, and Conway appears rather less inclined to hurl himself off a musical cliff and run with the tide. Instead, he's opted for a mellower package, a softer overall presentation. Ron Chancey (known for his work with the Oak Ridge Boys and Brenda Lee, among others) has replaced Barnes as co-producer —and Chancey is not one to fall into the trap of overfoliaged orchestrations that mar certain other Nashville-cut albums. If he's not a rocker, he's still a clean, effective force behind the control board.

So what they've come up with here is a bright, smooth package that contains some fine standouts: *I Still Believe In Waltzes, For All The Right Reasons, We're Gonna Try It Tonight*, and the already-smells-like-a-country standard, *A Bridge That Just Won't Burn*. The material stays fairly close to home with a decided country slant.

And if the gravel 'n' guts vocals that have signatured other Twitty recordings recently have mellowed, well, he's still a formidable artist. It's just that personally, I miss the element of surprise in his records that found a Bob McDill tune sequeing into Bob Seger, or *She Thinks I Still Care* leaping into a no-holds-barred *Night Fires*. Twitty is one of the few artists in country who's capable of delivering unpredictability, and it's fascinating when he lets go to sail in unchartered waters.

KIP KIRBY

BURIED TREASURES

by Rich Kienzle

It looks like the rockabilly boom everyone's been expecting is finally here. The anthologies are still pouring in from Europe, and recently Billy Burnette, son of the late Dorsey Burnette, was signed to Columbia, the first new rockabilly artist they've signed since the Fifties. There are some outstanding new ones from Europe and if all goes well, we'll look at the Charly reissue series from the Sun label in the next issue.

One of the great myths about rockabilly is the idea that nothing like it happened before Elvis came along. Truth is, the "country boogie" idiom had been around since the late Thirties and really began to take off after World War II. One of the first labels to take it seriously was Bullet Records of Nashville, a label that also made the first recordings of bluesman B.B. King. **Boogie With A Bullet** (Redita LP 109) is a fascinating chronicle of the label's country and country-boogie activities in the Forties, with fantastic rocking tracks by Butterball Paige, the electrifying *Tom Cat Boogie* by Johnnie Lee Wills' western swing band, some hot boogie woogie from Bill Nettles and pre-Jerry Lee pianist Roy Hall, *and Guitar Blues*, a jazz-tinged number by "Chester" Atkins and the 1950 *Jealous Lies* by Ray Price. Both are the first recordings made by either Chet or Ray.

England offers two new rockabilly sets. **Imperial Rockabillies** (UA UAG 30312) features some of the late Bob Luman's earliest recordings, along with two previously unissued tracks by Dorsey Burnette, including his original recording of *It's Late*, which he wrote for Rick Nelson in 1959. **Victor Rock 'N' Rollers** (RCA PL 42809) looks at the artists the label signed in Elvis's wake, including Janis Martin, the "female Elvis," a weird version of *Blue Suede Shoes* by Pee Wee King's Golden West Cowboys, *Sugar Sweet*, an early David Houston number and other tracks by lesser-known artists, produced by Chet Atkins (who produced most of them) along with country guitarists Grady Martin and Hank Garland, both of whom could rock with the best of them, as well as Floyd Cramer and others.

Dakota Dave Hull and Sean Blackburn have been a mid-western folk-blues-swing team for sometime now, and have recently gone hole-hog into western swing. Not the Bob Wills material, but the earlier, funkier fare of Milton Brown and The Lightcrust Doughboys. **River of Swing** (Flying Fish-236) features them performing with a large backup group mocking off enthusiastic renditions of the Delmore Brothers' *Mississippi Shore*, Bill Boyd's *What's The Use* and nine other songs. Since Asleep At The Wheel's been drifting away from the older sounds, its nice to see someone picking up the ball.

Back in one of the earliest issues of *Country Music* was a story about an obscure guitar genius named Phil Baugh, and how he was tracked down after writer Charlie Burton found an old LP of his, titled **Country Guitar**, that spotlighted Baugh's Telecaster virtuosity and the vocals of Vern Stovall. Recently Longhorn Records reissued the album (LP-002) with some added material. If you wondered why the fuss at the time, you can now hear Baugh, now a successful Nashville session man, playing some incredible music.

Since Johnny Cash is now a member of the Hall of Fame, it's all the more appropriate that Columbia's Limited Edition series has seen fit to reissue **Now There Was A Song!** (LE 10019), a late 1960 album of country hits of that era done, surprisingly enough, with twin fiddles and steel in the George Jones style.

The Bullet, Imperial and RCA rock LPs are $9.50, $11.98 and $9.98, plus $2 postage, from Down Home Music, 10341 San Pablo Ave. El Cerrito, CA 94530; the Phil Baugh LP is available from Keith Kolby, 6604 Chapel Lane, Fort Worth, Texas 76135. Write for information. Most larger stores carry the Cash and Hull/Blackburn.

Record Reviews

John Hartford
You And Me At Home
Flying Fish 228

You And Me At Home is a theme album—"an album of love songs for grown-ups and other minority groups." Although it's a very tight album, it was a very quick album, recorded in two days flat last December in Nashville. But the main thing that stands out is that this is an experimental album.

The experiment took place on eight of the ten songs on the record. (There are actually eleven cuts here, the title selection is reprised instrumentally on the last cut.) All eight of the above mentioned songs are constructed in the same way. They started with John and the backup chorus singing the song's refrain together. For instance, *You And Me At Home* starts with everybody singing, You and me/You and me/You and me at home. Everybody sings this twice, then, while the backup chorus continues singing that, John puts a new melody—a countermelody—

over their part. There is no bridge. The chorus has the repeated refrain going throughout the entire song.

Seven of these songs are solid and simple, and one of them, *Your Stuff*, is airy and jazzy, more complex. But eight songs with the same basic shape was a little too much of a good idea.

The words were no problem. With John, they never are. With other people holding down the basic melody/refrain, John is free to do some real fooling around with the words he writes and sings. *I Believe In You* is the one that's been repeating in my head the most, with *My Love For You* a close runner-up. *Ladies Live Such A Long Long Time* is another goody. It's about the fact that women live longer than men, and why.

But I do wish there would have been bridges on at least a couple of these songs. John's dead-on sense of note choosing makes his bridges unusually exciting, bridges being natural jumping off places for the melody, and John being a great jumper-offer. There's only one song with a bridge on the album, *Imagination Fired By Books*. Naturally, it's a lulu.

The most unusual song here is *Don't Go Away*. I don't know whether to call it jazzy blues or bluesy jazz, but it's a beautiful haunter. Buddy Emmons' steel guitar and Hartford's fiddle do some fine intertwining here.

John's got a great new way of putting a song together here. I really can't blame him for going a little bit overboard with it.

PETER STAMPFEL

Jerry Lee Lewis
Killer Country
Elektra 6E-291

I think a lot of my contemporaries in their late twenties could take a lesson from the Killer when that first fear of getting older hits them, that hysterical anxiety that results from the realization that time is chopping away. Some get over it and some don't; myself, I couldn't care less. Elvis got upset when he turned forty, but not Jerry Lee. Now, at forty-five he's still careening headfirst across the universe, filled with madness and fueled by Jack Daniels. I think he has the ultimate answer: have another drink and the hell with it all. Anyone who can make albums like the last few he's done has nothing much to sweat.

Still, there's a bit more introspection this time around and some surprising self-confession. Listen to the liberties he takes with the lyrics of *Folsom Prison Blues*, perhaps referring to his own escapades with guns and shooting. In two Foster/Rice compositions, *I'd Do It All Again* and *Thirty-Nine And Holding*, he sings of faded, piano-pounding singers in the former and of a man rooted in the Fifties living in the Eighties in the latter. Both sound suspiciously familiar. So does the world-weary honky-tonk singer of *Change Places With Me*, a skillful dissection of the conciousness of that entire species. His version of Ray Griff's *Mama, This One's For You* combines raffishness with some heartfelt emotions, that play perfectly against the Dixieland arrangement (one of the nicer things producer Eddie Kilroy has added to his recent albums). The rockabilly macho of *Jukebox Junky* and *Let Me On* stand out all the more because of the variety of the other material.

That variety is no more apparent than on the last song anyone would expect from him: *Over The Rainbow*. And though I kept expecting him to rip into doubletime at any second, he plays it straight. Kilroy's challenges of this sort seem to be what he needs (had he only had the chance to produce Elvis . . .).

When Jerry Lee was on Mercury it seemed like his albums were coming out every other month, judging from the sloppiness and lack of attention to detail. But Kilroy and Jerry Lee are digging deep here, and it's worth hearing.

RICH KIENZLE

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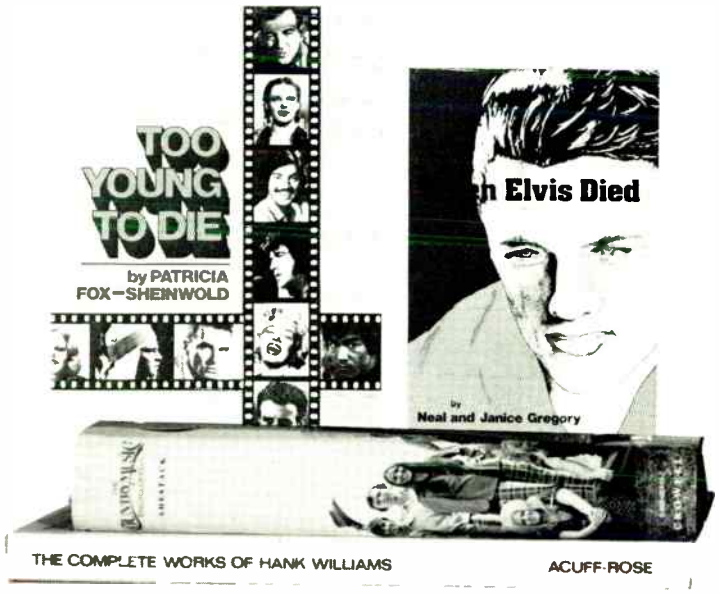

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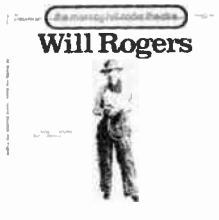

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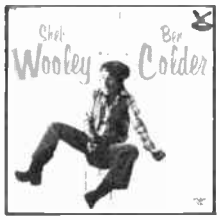

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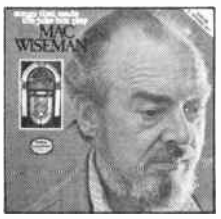

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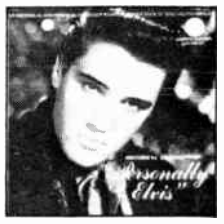

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Record Reviews

Brenda Lee
Take Me Back
MCA-5143

No one can refute the fact that Brenda Lee is among the finest vocalists in the last half of the twentieth century. She's been belting out tunes since she was a teenage sensation in the Fifties. Her contributions to music have been immense, so much so that even if she never recorded again, her mark would still be indelible.

Fortunately, she has not retired and since she is still only in her mid-thirties, she has many more years of singing ahead of her. Her latest release, **Take Me Back** is a statement of musical maturity and versatility, and lends credence to the fact that she is better than ever, if that's possible.

Produced by Ron Chancey, this album may be her best in years. Chancey's production is masterful in that it never overpowers the main ingredient—Brenda's powerful vocals.

The selection of material on this LP is top shelf all the way. Brenda has a knack for choosing excellent songs and then improving them with her voice. Few artists can interpret a lyric with more emotion than Brenda.

The material ranges from the Chips Moman/Bobby Emmons tune, *Staring Each Other Down*, a bluesy ballad, to *What Am I Gonna Do*, a rocker written by Kim Carnes and Dave Ellingson. There is literally not one mediocre song to be found on this album. Other top notch tunes include *Too Many Nights Alone* by Even Stevens and Shel Silverstein; Jimbeau Hinson's *Broken Trust*, with background vocals by the Oak Ridge Boys; and *Every Now And Then*, a killer ballad written by Shayne Dolan and Rock Killough.

The true test of artistry is whether or not it can withstand the test of time. Brenda Lee is one of the most enduring singers of our era. **Take Me Back** should only add to her laurels.

KELLY DELANEY

Jacky Ward
More! Jacky Ward
Mercury SRM 1-5030

More! Jacky Ward is the personification of middle-of-the-road country, fitting perfectly into the definition of what has come to be termed the "Nashville Sound". Small wonder, since the LP was produced by Jerry Kennedy who helped mold this distinct musical formula.

Ward's voice is as deep and smooth as blended whiskey, framed with the string arrangements of Bergen White. While there are no holes in Kennedy's production, the songs do lack any kind of spontaneous excitement. This is a solid, though not necessarily inventive style of musical architecture.

As a vocalist, Ward seems most comfortable with ballads. He's a crooner and the selection of material is well-suited to his voice. Even the more uptempo tunes have a certain reserved quality to them. The best of the lot is a Bob McDill tune entitled *Save Your Heart For Me*, which has a bouncy beat with a sing-along chorus. There are also remakes of *It Doesn't Matter Anymore*, written by Paul Anka and sung into immortality by Buddy Holly, and the Cynthia Weil/Barry Mann composition, *I Just Can't Help Believin'*", a big hit for B.J. Thomas. Ward's performance on both numbers is commendable though hardly memorable when compared to the aforementioned versions.

With the exception of one song, the subject matter on this album is love. The one outsider is Tony Joe White's, *That's The Way A Cowboy Rocks And Rolls*, which is a little too mellow to be convincing. You'd be a bit hard-pressed to find a bonafide cowboy who rocks out anywhere near the way this tune sounds. On its behalf, it is consistent with the overall restrained sound of the album.

Over the past few years Ward has steadily moved upwards through the ranks of male country vocalists. **More! Jacky Ward** showcases his considerable talent.

KELLY DELANEY