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JANUARY/FEBRUARY 1984/\$2.25

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JONES**

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Recollections by
His Brother David**

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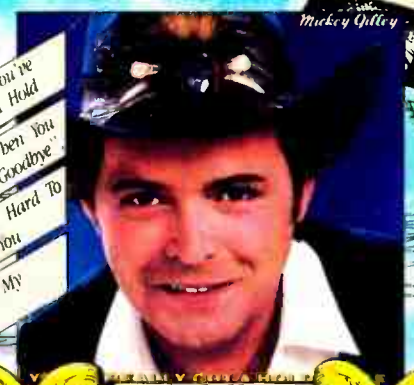
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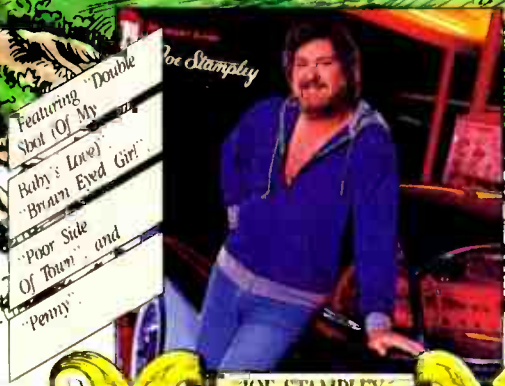
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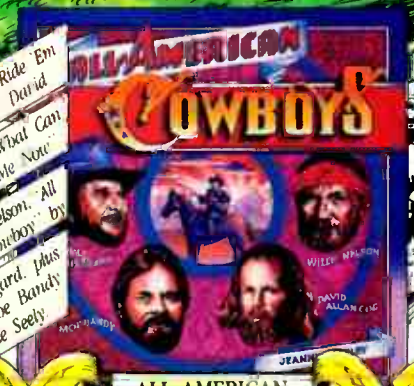
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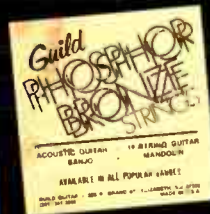
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COUNTRY MUSIC™

4 Letters

7 People

What's happening with John Anderson, Moe Bandy, Johnny Cash, Emmylou Harris, Larry Gatlin, Lee Greenwood, Waylon Jennings, Johnny Lee, Bill Monroe, Charley Pride, Hank Williams, Jr., Tammy Wynette, and more.

*by Rochelle Friedman
& Helen Barnard*

15 Joe Bonsall's Greatest Hit

Where our chief sports editor and part-time gospel rock and roll singer with the Oak Ridge Boys, remembers the day he played with the Philadelphia Phillies.

by Joe Bonsall

20 Another Round for George Jones

After almost a decade of bad trouble—and fears that he might not survive his bouts with drink and drugs and other demons—George Jones may at last have found some peace. Herewith the details.

by Bob Allen

26 Lefty Frizzell: Recollections of My Brother

Lefty was the biggest country star of his day, but we know next to nothing about him as a man. His younger brother David, now a star in his own right, shares some very intimate details and very strong feelings

by David Frizzell

34 George Strait: Keeping the Honky Tonk Faith

This young Texan's name is appropriate: Quiet and modest (but more than a little determined), he plays it cool and keeps it country.

by John Morthland

38 Roundup '83

Our editors look back at the year in country music: the rising stars, the books to find (and avoid), and one special movie, *Tender Mercies*.

44 Twenty Questions with Sylvia

Sylvia, as you know, is hot. What does she think about her sexy image, her doll collection, her Plan? And what's her other name, anyway?

*by Michael Bane & Mary
Ellen Moore*

47 Record Reviews

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66 Buried Treasures

Hank Williams, Harry Choates, Bob Wills's Texas Playboys, Ernest Tubb, Gary Stewart, Johnny Cash, the Carter Family.

by Rich Kienzle

68 Merle Travis: Farewell to a Legend

He was a great guitarist, songwriter, historian, journalist, cartoonist, and special friend of this magazine. We shall all miss him.

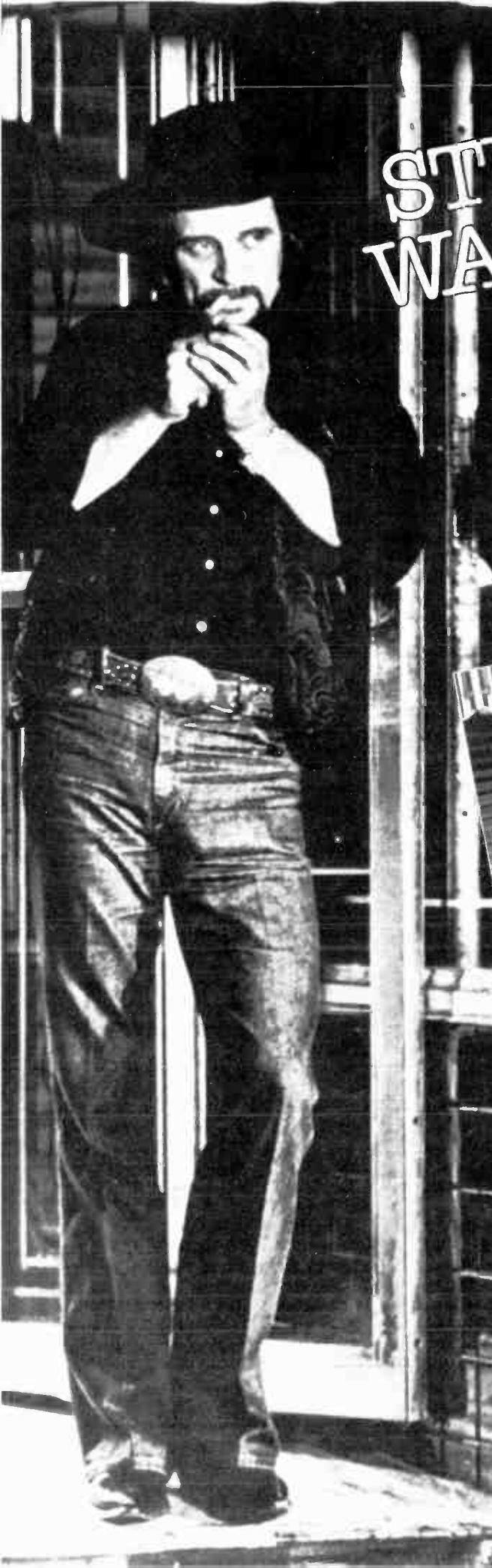
by Rich Kienzle

Cover Photograph

This is the 105th issue of *Country Music*, but it is the first issue without a color photograph on the cover. We thought the cover picture in black and white was a striking work of art, worthy of its subject George.

by Anthony Darius

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MEMBERSHIP



Letters

I would gladly "renew", but I subscribed before and only received *one* magazine, and countless letters and complaints all went unanswered. So unless you can fulfill all your prior commitments, I would not be interested in your magazine—and all our family loves country music and country music people.

Thank you for taking time to read and listen.

Laurie Abbott
Fair Oaks, California

Sorry to lose your business. But, as our letter explained, we are a new company. We bought the name, trademark, copyrights and other assets of the magazine through a court-administered procedure. So, those "prior commitments" you refer to are not ours. Your complaints and letters were unanswered by the old company because they were out of business. We would be out of business, too, if we tried to fulfill all the old company's obligations without some revenue to go with it.

So we have offered to send Country Music to any "old" subscriber for the time left on their "old" subscription, if they take a "new" one from us. I realize that this is not nearly as good, from your viewpoint, as simply getting what you expected. But, it is all we can do. And considerably better than nothing. Lots of people seem to agree... we have received over 150,000 orders in the past two months.—R.D.B.

Dear Russ,

I received your wonderful "new" *Country Music Magazine* and letter. I was thrilled to death to see my letter published in it!

I wondered what happened to *Country Music* but just assumed you were another victim of the recession. I know it has certainly affected a lot of us here. But I am so glad to see you back in business! Your issue is just as good if not better than the previous ones, and I certainly intend to keep subscribing to it.

Since I last wrote to you, we lost Marty Robbins. The article written by Bob Allen was outstanding. Marty will be missed for a long, long time. His love for his music and his fans was his undoing, but that was why his fans loved him so. He learned long ago that you only get love by giving it, something too few people have learned. Wouldn't it be wonderful if everyone could give love like Marty did? It sure would be a better world to live in!

It will be great to read about all the new performers coming up—and aren't

there a lot of them? I'll be looking forward to the coming issues, and I am proud to be a member of the *Country Music Society of America*. I'm looking forward to participating in it. Best regards and love to you all.

Alma Bentley
Durham, Oklahoma

Alma,

We can't go on like this! But it was so good to hear from you. Others have written to us about how much they like the Marty Robbins article. Thanks for your understanding and support.—R.D.B.

Dear Russ, Patrick and Michael,
Welcome back, boys! It's good to see you again. Continued best wishes.

Tandy Rice, Chairman
Top Billing International
Nashville, Tennessee

We have a lot of talented women here, too, Tandy! But thanks for the good wishes—Rochelle, Helen, Deborah, Pat, Annemarie

Welcome Back! We started out with you in 1972, and when your magazine ceased coming into our home, we missed you very much.

Also wanted to say our thanks to Bob Allen for his article on Waylon Jennings and Jerry Reed. Waylon is the very top artist there is, and his wife Jessi is a very sweet person also. We love them both. Jerry Reed is sure A-OK, too.

So glad you're back, and thank goodness you and your staff did not give up! We are back with you and behind you all the way.

Gary and Ella Mae Kessell
Gaithersburg, Maryland

It is good to be missed. Thanks for your good wishes. Did you catch the article on Waylon in the November/December issue?—Ed.

Wonder of wonders! I received your letter in yesterday's mail. I had figured my *Country Music Magazine* had gone for good. I wondered why the previous publishers didn't have the decency to even answer my letters. They returned them marked *Refused*. You are a wonderful person to do all this, and I know not only I but all the members can't thank you enough for coming to our rescue. And to think now we can all once again start receiving our favorite magazine. I am hoping that every wish and dream you have comes true. Please find

enclosed my check for \$25 to show you I do appreciate what you have done. Won't you take the \$10 for my new membership and please use the rest in some small way to help.

Mrs. C.W. Nye
Yucaipa, California

Thank God for readers like you, Mrs. Nye, and all the others who have sent donations, too.—R.D.B.

My wife had already ordered *Country Music* through American Family Publishers, and we just received our first copy. Then when we got your letter and offer to fulfill our old subscription plus an extra year for \$10, we took that too. So, if you could, please combine these so we don't receive two magazines each time, and extend the subscription for the year we have already paid for.

We really have enjoyed *Country Music* before and we know we will again.

Nobia and James Mims
Bolingbrook, Illinois

We'll take care of it for you.—Ed.

After reading the article you wrote in the September/October issue, I can understand what happened and am so happy you are taking it over. I have been a subscriber to *Country Music* since 1975.

I had my 92nd birthday last August, and I hope to continue *Country Music* for a few years. Best regards,

Georgia I. Bartholomew
Spokane, Washington

Hang in there, Georgia. We hope you will enjoy the magazine for many years to come.—Ed.

I sure am glad to hear that *Country Music Magazine* is back. The offer you have made me is great, and I'm taking you up on it. When *Country Music* stopped coming, I tried frantically to find out what happened. I called all over the country to get the matter straight. All I got was the run-around. Finally someone told me the company was defunct.

I couldn't believe it because *Country Music* was such a good magazine. If there is something I can do, just let me know.

I have an idea for the new *Country Music*: Have a calendar with the stars' birthdays and where they are performing for the month. Keep it country!

Ernest Sabino
Waco, Texas

One of the first offerings of the Country Music Society of America is a calendar of the stars published by the Country Music Foundation. It includes birthdays of the stars but not where they are touring. Tour schedules are not set far enough in advance to publish on a calendar.—Ed.

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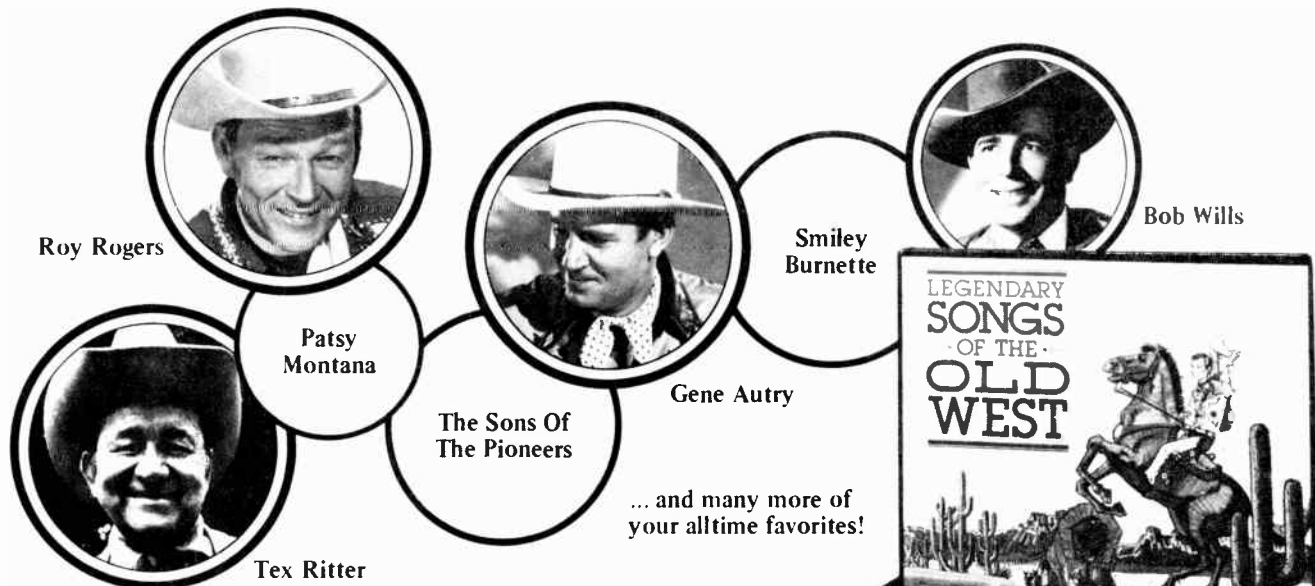
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People

FRONT AND CENTER

Little Miss Dynamite, **Brenda Lee**, is on tour in England. She's sure to knock 'em dead.

Bill Monroe will be in Japan, of all places, during March and April. It seems Bill likes to spread his music around the world—he recently completed a tour of Israel.

Closer to home, **Lee Greenwood**, 1983 CMA Male Vocalist of the Year, is maintaining his momentum with a heavy touring schedule. Watch for Lee in January in Nevada, New Jersey, North Carolina and Georgia.

The Oaks are taking their show on the road to Kentucky, Wisconsin, Iowa, St. Louis and Houston. The Oaks' big hit, "Elvira," topped the response list of "your five all-time favorite country songs" for some fifteen thousand listeners of station WDAF in Kansas City. Maybe they should add Kansas City to their touring schedule.

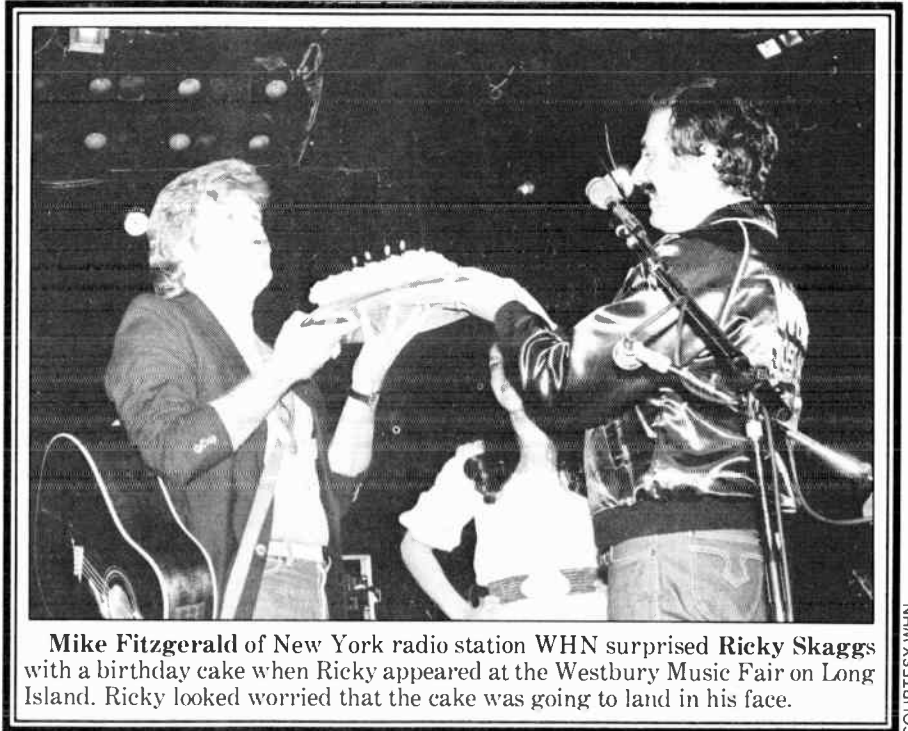
Don Williams is keeping away from the cold this January in Arizona, Nevada and California.

Desert air gets people together; a number of country artists have been sharing the same bill in Nevada. **The Oaks** and **Lee Greenwood** were together at the MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas for a week. **Larry Gatlin** and **Roger Miller** were at the Riviera. Later, **Mel Tillis** and **Glen Campbell** performed at another Nevada hotel, as did **Mickey Gilley** and **Johnny Lee**. Wonder if they all met in the casino.

A standing-room-only crowd welcomed **Ronnie McDowell** to the North Carolina Women's Correctional Center recently. Over a thousand inmates attended his show. At the end of the performance, Ronnie gave his bandana away to a crowd of jumping, screaming women.

IN THE WORKS

Rosanne Cash and husband/producer **Rodney Crowell** are in the studio in Nashville. Rodney is also working on his



Mike Fitzgerald of New York radio station WHN surprised **Ricky Skaggs** with a birthday cake when Ricky appeared at the Westbury Music Fair on Long Island. Ricky looked worried that the cake was going to land in his face.

COURTESY WHN

own album, scheduled for release sometime soon.

Con Hunley's new album, produced by **Ron Chancey**, is due out of the studio in January.

Sandy Pinkard and **Richard Bowden** have recorded a comedy album produced by **Jim Ed Norman**. A number of stars participated in the project, including **Linda Ronstadt** playing lead guitar, and **Anne Murray** on piano. Recorded live, the album contains parodies of well-known country songs. Examples are "Help Me Make It Through the Yard," "Blue Hairs Driving in My Lane," and "Mail Order Dog."

Watch for a mini-album by **The Judds**, a mother-and-daughter team from the same bluegrass country as Ricky Skaggs. Mother **Naomi** and daughter **Wyonna** blend bluesy country with their bluegrass sound.

Joe Stampley has cut an album called *Memory Lane*. It includes Fifties and

Sixties hits such as "Brown Eyed Girl," "Poor Side of Town," and "Put Your Head on My Shoulder." Joe bought a 1956 Corvette convertible to use on the front cover.

Meanwhile, the group **Atlanta** teamed up with **Charley Pride** to record some songs for a new movie starring **Shelley Winters** and **Edward Albert**, Eddy Albert's son. The film is due out in January.

Nashville's newest resident, **Emmylou Harris**, is taking some time off from performing to write songs for her new album. Emmylou's previous albums were produced by **Brian Ahern**, her husband from whom she is now separated. She might produce this one herself. She's no novice as a producer, she did a great job on the recent **Delia Bell** album. Emmylou's band members have at least six months off until she tours again. Some have taken on other projects: **Barry Tashian** is going out on his own, and

by Rochelle Friedman and Helen Barnard

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How the Club operates: every four weeks (13 times a year) you'll receive the Club's music magazine, which describes the Selection of the Month for each musical interest...plus hundreds of alternates from every field of music. In addition, up to six times a year you may receive

offers of Special Selections, usually at a discount off our regular Club prices, for a total of up to 19 buying opportunities in a year.

If you wish to receive the Selection of the Month, or the Special Selection, you need do nothing—it will be shipped automatically. If you'd prefer an alternate selection, or none at all, simply fill in the response card always provided and mail it by the date specified.

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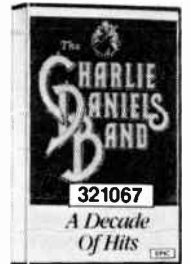
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STILL THE SAME OLE ME
- 322321 THE STATLER BROS.
TODAY
- 312652 EMMYLOU HARRIS
CIMARRON
- 321307 AIR SUPPLY
GREATEST HITS
- 322206 JANIE FRICKE
LOVE LIES



Houston; #1 All The Gold In California; Top 10 Take Me To Your Lovin' Place; more.

- 317164 LINDA RONSTADT
GET CLOSER
- 322008 LINDA RONSTADT & THE NELSON RIDDLE ORCHESTRA
WHAT'S NEW
- 315655 FLEETWOOD MAC
MIRAGE
- 321992 MOE BANDY
DEVOTED TO YOUR MEMORY
- 315630 BEST OF
JENNIFER WARNES
- 321802 JUICE NEWTON
DIRTY LOOKS
- 315606 MICKEY RYCKE
LOVERS AND LOSERS
- 321711 MERLE HAGGARD
THAT'S THE WAY LOVE GOES
- 315580 STATLER BROTHERS
THE LEGEND GOES ON
- 321638 HERB ALPERT
Blow Your Own Horn
- 310920 MICKEY GILLEY
YOU DON'T KNOW ME
- 321596 BOBBY BARE
DRUNKEN FROM THE BOTTLE SINGIN'
- 310946 SLIM WHITMAN
MR. SONGMAN
- 321414 DOTTIE WEST
NEW HORIZONS
- 310953 EDDIE RABBITT
STEP BY STEP
- 321406 Barbra Streisand
GUILTY



Latest hit Stroker's Theme; The Devil Went Down To Georgia; Still In Saigon; etc.

- 317222 EMMYLOU HARRIS
LAST DATE
- 313502 KENNY ROGERS
Share Your Love
- 317180# THE OSMOND BROTHERS
- 317156 EDDIE RABBITT
RADIO ROMANCE
- 317149 DAN FOGELBERG
GREATEST HITS
- 313445 JOHN L. HANCOCK
YOKO ONO
DOUBLE FANTASY
- 316992 LIONEL RICHIE
- 313379 DAVID FRIZZELL
& SMELLY WEST
- 321372 Barbra Streisand
SONGBIRD
- 313361 CONWAY TWITTY
MR. T
- 316901 CONWAY TWITTY
CONWAY & CLASSICS
- 313239 KENNY ROGERS
& DOTTIE WEST
CLASSICS
- 316711 HANK WILLIAMS, JR.
GREATEST HITS

- 317271 LAURA BRANIGAN
BRANIGAN
- 314419 HERB ALPERT
FANDANGO
- 319616 WILLIE NELSON
WAYLON JENNINGS
TAKE IT TO THE LIMIT
- 314393 #38 SPECIAL
Special Forces
- 314328 TAMMY WYNETTE
SOFT TOUCH

Great duets plus Willie's Top 10 solo smash Why Do I Have To Choose; more.

- 317396 JUICE NEWTON
QUIET LIES
- 314286 VARIOUS ARTISTS
DUKES OF HAZZARD
- 317024 POCO
GHOST TOWN
- 314062 CHARLENE
I'VE NEVER BEEN TO ME
- 316919 MICKEY GILLEY
PUT YOUR DREAMS AWAY
- 313817 Charlie Daniels Band
WINDOWS
- 187088 BARBRA STREISAND'S
GREATEST HITS
- 313734 WILLIE NELSON
ALWAYS ON MY MIND
- 316893 GEORGE JONES AND MERLE HAGGARD
A TASTE OF YESTERDAY'S WINE
- 297044 EDDIE RABBITT
LOVELINE
- 297531 Barbara Mandrell
Just For The Record
- 294744 Charlie Daniels Band
Milton Mike Reflections
- 297408 JACKSON BROWNE
Late For The Sky

- 317420 AMERICA
View From The Ground
- 321125 JACKSON BROWNE
LAWYERS IN LOVE
- 317750 BARRY MANILOW
Here Comes The Night
- 301473 CHRISTOPHER
CROSS
- 321109 AMERICA
YOUR MOVE
- 301432 The Oak Ridge Boys
TOGETHER
- 321018 BILLY JOEL
An Innocent Man
- 300525 THE BEST OF
EDDIE RABBITT
- 320770 STEVIE NICKS
THE WILD HEART
- 293670 DAKRIDGE BOYS
HAVE ARRIVED
- 320754 JOHNNY LEE
HEY BARTENDER
- 287003 EAGLES 1971-1975
Their Greatest Hits
- 320135 PATRICK SIMMONS
ARCADE
- 289843 POCO
LEGEND
- 292912 THE BEST OF
BARBARA MANDRELL
- 320366 CONWAY TWITTY
Lost In The Feeling
- 286864 JACKSON BROWNE
Running On Empty
- 291302 JAMES TAYLOR'S
GREATEST HITS
- 286914 FLEETWOOD MAC
RUMOURS
- 319590 MARTY ROBBINS
WHOLE SHEPHERD
JUST WHAT I NEEDED
- 290155 THE MARSHALL
TUCKER BAND
GREATEST HITS
- 291278 The Doobie Brothers
Best Of The Doobies
- 319319 MICKEY GILLEY
Fool For Your Love

- 306589 LINDA RONSTADT
GREATEST HITS
- 304253 EDDIE RABBITT
HORIZON
- 306043 GEORGE JONES
I Am What I Am
- 304204 JACKSON BROWNE
HOLD OUT
- 305268 CRYSTAL GAYLE
THESE DAYS
- 311662 BARBARA MANDRELL
LIVE
- 305250 Lacy J Dalton
HARD TIMES
- 304196 Charlie Daniels Band
FULL MOON
- 305193 LARRY GATLIN & THE GATLIN BROS. BAND
HELP YOURSELF
- 303678 BRUNO MARS
That's The Way To Me
- 304360 MERLE HAGGARD
AND RAY PRICE
SAN ANTONIO ROSE
- 302281 THE BEST OF
LORETTA LYNN &
CONWAY TWITTY
- 304279 STATLER BROTHERS
10TH ANNIVERSARY

* Available on records and cassettes only

ific next half hour.

ONE PENNY

plus shipping and handling

...AND GET THE GOLD BOX BONUS SHOWN ON TV.

317438 ANNE MORLEY THE HOTTEST NIGHT OF THE YEAR
321398 Barbra Streisand WET
315515 ROSANNE CASH SOMEWHERE IN THE STARS
322909 Hank Williams, Jr. MAN OF STEEL
315473 MOE BANDY SHE'S NOT REALLY CHEATING
319301 GEORGE JONES SHINE ON
314963 Hank Williams, Jr. HIGH NOTES
318915 Hank Williams, Jr. STRONG STUFF
311696 JANIE FRICKE SLEEPING WITH YOUR MEMORY
318899 KENNY ROGERS We've Got Tonight
314641 Bellamy Brothers When We Were Boys
318733 MELISSA MANCHESTER'S GREATEST HITS
286740 LINDA RONSTADT'S GREATEST HITS
314443 NEIL DIAMOND 12 GREATEST HITS

317768 EAGLES GREATEST HITS - VOLUME 2
311043 LARRY GATLIN & THE GATLIN BROS. BAND NOT QUALLY
316646 JANIE FRICKE IT AIN'T EASY
316638 BILLY JOEL The Nylon Curtain
316455 BELLAMY BROTHERS GREATEST HITS



Keepin' Power; Half The Way; The Woman In Me; If You Ever Change Your Mind; etc.

317867 Christopher Cross ANOTHER PAGE
313015 CONWAY TWITTY Southern Comfort
316430 MICHAEL McDONALD IF THAT'S WHAT YOU WANT
248868 JIM CROCE PHOTOGRAPHY & MORE HIS GREATEST HITS
305284 THE DOOBIE BROTHERS ONE STEP CLOSER
316372 DON HENLEY I Can't Stand Still
318881 LAURA BRANIGAN BRANIGAN 2
316331 RICKY SCAGGS HIGHWAY 20 AND HEARTACHE
318683 RONNIE McDOWELL PERSONALLY
316349 THE ADVENTURES OF JOHNNY CASH
318626 WILLIE NELSON TOUCHER THAN LEATHER
311670 DON WILLIAMS Especially For You
311498 JOHNNY LEE Bet Your Heart On Me
318386 MARTY ROBBINS BIGGEST HITS
310235 The Oak Ridge Boys Greatest Hits
318188 MICKY GILLEY BIGGEST HITS
310102 STATLER BROTHERS YEARS AGO
321380 Barbra Streisand's Greatest Hits, Vol. II
307876 MOE BANDY & JOE STAMPLEY HEY JOE HEY JOE
310144 STEELY DAN GAUCHO
307868 WILLIE NELSON SOMEWHERE OVER THE RAINBOW
310193 CONWAY TWITTY & LORETTA LYNN TWO'S A PARTY

317933 CRYSTAL GAYLE TRUE LOVE
312322 NEIL DIAMOND ON THE WAY TO THE SKY
316703 MEL TILLIS GREATEST HITS
312314 CHICAGO'S GREATEST HITS, VOL. 1
316695 CONWAY TWITTY DREAM MAKER
311985 MERLE HAGGARD BIG CITY
316653 LARRY GATLIN & THE GATLIN BROS. BAND BLUE FEELING LOVE
311738 THE DOOBIE BROTHERS THE BEST OF THE DOOBIES
316679 MARTY ROBBINS COME BACK TO ME



#1 title smash; Top 10 Reasons To Quit; Half A Man; Opportunity To Cry; many more.

318048 GREATEST HITS OUTLAWS
313049 Barbra Streisand MEMORIES
279067 THE BEST OF JOAN BAEZ
311464 HANK WILLIAMS JR. THE PRESSURE IS ON
313080 KENNY ROGERS THE GAMBLER
310094 OAK RIDGE BOYS FANCY FREE
271809 JIM CROCE'S GREATEST HITS THE A BOTTLE
312967 TERRI GIBBS I'M A LADY
283887 WILLIE NELSON STARDUST
311209 THE KENDALLS LETTING YOU IN ON A FEELIN'
313700 KENNY ROGERS GREATEST HITS
313635 OAK RIDGE BOYS BOBBIE SUF
309997 DAVID FRAZELL SHELLEY WEST CARRY ON THE FAMILY NAMES
313106 KENNY ROGERS TEN YEARS OF GOLD
309989 CARPENTERS Made In America
313098 KENNY ROGERS LOVE OR SOMETHING LIKE IT
309476 MARSHALL TUCKER BAND "DEDICATED"
260638 CHICAGO IX CHICAGO'S GREATEST HITS
308692 Barbara Mandrell LOVE IS FAIR
310334 Rickie Lee Jones PIRATES
308619 MERLE HAGGARD BACK TO THE BARROOMS
310367 ZZ TOP EL LOCO

RICKY SCAGGS
322180
DONT CHEAT IN OUR HOMETOWN

"Superb, joyous and jubilant!" - Billboard. Title cut; Keep A Memory; etc.

307330 LORETTA LYNN LOOKIN' GOOD
315846 STEVE FORBERT
306928 THE BEST OF THE KENDALLS
315713 KENNY ROGERS LOVE WILL TURN YOU AROUND
306746 MICKY GILLEY ENCORE
315705 GLENN FREY NO FUN ALOUD
315671 CHICAGO 16

SELECTIONS WITH TWO NUMBERS ARE 2-RECORD SETS OR DOUBLE-LENGTH TAPES, AND COUNT AS TWO SELECTIONS—WRITE EACH NUMBER IN A SEPARATE BOX
212654 BOB DYLAN COLENTINE HILL, Vol. 2
318147 GEORGE JONES ANNIVERSARY—TEN YEARS OF HITS
398149
289450 STEELY DAN GREATEST HITS
399956
317131 KRIS WILLIE, DOLLY & BRENDIA THE BURNING HAND

310482 STEVIE NICKS BELLA DONNA
310508 Barbara Mandrell LOOKING BACK
316315 NEIL DIAMOND HEARTLIGHT
310748 RICKY SCAGGS WAITIN' FOR THE SUN
316299 REBA McENTIRE UNLIMITED
310839 THE ALL-MAN BROTHERS BAND BROTHER OF THE ROAD
316281 JOHN CONLEE BUSTED
307843 JAMES TAYLOR Dad Loves His Work
316232 NICOLETTE LARSON ALL DRESSED UP AND NO PLACE TO GO
307835 RITA COOLIDGE GREATEST HITS
316208 DAVID FRIZZELL THE FINE LINE BUT THIS ONE'S ALL MINE
316174 DAVID ALLAN COE D.A.C.
307710 -38 SPECIAL WILD-EYED SOUTHERN BOYS
316133 LACY J. DALTON 16TH AVENUE
307413 MEL TILLIS SOUTHERN RAIN
315853 Marshall Tucker Band TUCKERIZED

310847 DAN FOGELBERG—THE INNOCENT AGE
321356 MARTY ROBBINS 391359 A Lifetime Of Song
311001 WILLIE NELSON'S GREATEST HITS AND SOME THAT WILL BE
321026 The Doobie Brothers Farewell Tour

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I am enclosing check or money order for \$1.86 (that's 1¢ for my 11 introductory selections, plus \$1.85 for shipping and handling). Please accept my application under the terms outlined in this advertisement. I agree to buy 8 more tapes or records (at regular Club prices) in the next 3 years—and may cancel membership anytime after doing so.

Send my selections in this type of recording (check one only):
 8-Track Cartridges Cassettes
 Records

My main musical interest is (check one):
(But I am always free to choose from any category)
 Easy Listening Teen Hits Classical
 Country Jazz

Also send my first selection for at least a 60% discount, for which I am also enclosing additional payment of \$2.99. I then need buy only 7 more selections (at regular Club prices) in the next three years

FINISH HERE.

Write in numbers of 11 selections

Mr. Mrs. Miss Print First Name Initial Last Name
Address Apt.
City
State Zip

Do you have a telephone? (check one) YES NO
Do you have a credit card? (check one) YES NO
This offer not available in APO FPO Alaska Hawaii Puerto Rico please write for details of alternative offer
NOTE: all applications are subject to review and Columbia House reserves the right to reject any application.

Here is the "Gold Box" you've seen on TV ...fill it in and get an extra selection...

Special Start-Your-Membership-Now Offer: you may also choose your first selection right now—and we'll give it to you for at least 60% off regular Club prices (only \$2.99). Enclose payment now and you'll receive it with your 11 introductory selections. This discount purchase reduces your membership obligation immediately—you'll then be required to buy just 7 more selections (instead of 8) in the next three years. Just check box in application and fill in number you want

8DJ/BJ 8DK/AF 8DL/ZE 8DM/ZF

People

drummer **John Ware** is working with **Michael Nesmith** in his video production company.

IN SPORTING COUNTRY

Sportsman **Hank Williams, Jr.** recently returned from a hunting trip in Alaska where he bagged a caribou. Earlier, on safari in Africa, he killed a fourteen-foot crocodile. No word on whether the Man of Steel used a gun or his bare hands.



Terri Gibbs used a hook when she went deep-sea fishing off the coast of Morehead City, North Carolina while taping a segment for the *Country Sportsman* (TNN) series. Terri says she used to fish when she was younger. Her early experience seems to have paid off: She nabbed a 63-pound tuna.

THE NASHVILLE NETWORK

Gary Morris's favorite hobby is also fishing. At a recent appearance in Lewiston, Montana, Gary took some time out between shows to go fishing in a blue-ribbon trout stream, and then managed to work in some tuna fishing off the coast of California. We don't know if he did as well as Terri.

NAMES IN THE NEWS

They work hard for the money. . . **Edward L. Gaylord**, the new owner of the Grand Ole Opry House and related properties, is one of the four hundred richest men in America, according to *Forbes Magazine*. *Forbes* says that Mr. Gaylord lives modestly but has assets worth at least \$600 million. Other millionaires listed include **Ted Turner** of Turner Broadcasting, with stock holdings worth \$355 million, and **Gene Autry** with

holdings in real estate and entertainment worth at least \$130 million.

The Nashville Association of Talent Directors presented their "Man of the Year" award to **Don Light**, President of Don Light Talent in Nashville. **Steve Wariner** accepted the award for Don at the Opryland Hotel. The founder of the first gospel talent agency in Nashville, Don is a man of diverse interests. Among his extra-curricular activities, he drives a stock car sponsored by the Oak Ridge Boys. His booking roster currently includes **Steve Wariner**, **Delbert McClinton** and **Keith Whitley**.

Dick Blake, a major promoter and booking agent and president of Dick Blake International, died in Nashville in October. He was 62. Blake was one of the first promoters to take country performers to areas outside the South. He was involved with the careers of the **Statler Brothers**, **Ronnie Milsap**, **Barbara Mandrell**, **Brenda Lee** and **Ricky Skaggs**. Dick will be missed by many.

Loretta Lynn entered the Nashville Association of Songwriters International Hall of Fame this past October. She was performing in Las Vegas when she heard the news. "It is the greatest honor a songwriter could ever have," she said. "It means more to me than anything else because my writing is a part of me." Another accolade was bestowed upon Loretta when she was voted one of the hundred most important women in America by *Ladies Home Journal*. *LHJ* included Loretta because of her songs, her accomplishments as a performer, and her life in general. Loretta took on a seventeen-day tour of U.S. Army and Air Force bases in Germany and the Sinai this November. The lady from Butcher Holler took her whole show with her. It was Loretta's first trip to Europe in more than ten years.

Mel Tillis has purchased Cedarwood Publishing Company, one of the oldest publishing firms in Nashville, for around \$3 million. The company has over seven thousand copyrights in its catalog and is one of the largest publishers of traditional country music in the world. Tillis, who first achieved success as a songwriter for Cedarwood, is very happy with the purchase, as over six hundred of his songs were published by the firm. "Owning the copyright to those songs is something I've wanted as long as I can remember," Tillis said. Some of his Cedarwood compositions are "Ruby, Don't Take Your Love to Town," "Detroit City," "Heart Over Mind," "Emotions," and "Burning Memories." Other Cedarwood writers include **Buddy Holly**, **Wayne Walker**,



KIRK MCGEE 1900-1983

Kirk McGee, fiddler and multi-instrumentalist and a mainstay of the Grand Ole Opry since its earliest days, died on October 24th, 1983 of a heart attack. He would have been 84 years old on November 4th. Along with his late brother, guitarist **Sam McGee**, Kirk had been with the Opry since 1926, when it was still known as the *WSM Barn Dance*. In addition to performing and recording as a duo, the brothers also worked closely with such early Opry legends as **Fiddlin' Arthur Smith** and **Uncle Dave Macon**. Along with Smith, they recorded as the Dixieliners. After splitting with Smith in 1938, they remained on the Opry as Sam and Kirk McGee.

Sam's 1975 death in a tractor accident ended the partnership, but Kirk persevered, working the Opry every Saturday night. He did a solo spot and worked with the Fruit Jar Drinkers, another traditional Opry string band. Kirk made his last appearance on October 22nd, just two days before he died. He was buried near his home in Williamson County, Tennessee, on October 26th. His death cuts one of the Opry's last remaining links with its past.

—RICH KIENZLE

Danny Dill, **John D. Loudermilk**, **Carl Perkins** and **Marijohn Wilkins**.

Johnny Lee found the two winning songs from the 1983 Kentucky Fried Chicken National Country Music Songwriting Contest irresistible. Winners **Matt Bunker** of Lawrence, Kansas and the team of **Grayce Paul Kierkes** from

COURTESY COUNTRY MUSIC FOUNDATION

People

Hudson, New York and Lance Middlebrook of Sharon, Connecticut, got to watch Johnny record their songs on a special 45 record. The winning tunes, "Another Day, Another Dollar" and "Live Wire," will be distributed to 2,500 radio stations across the country.

Remember we told you about *Hee Haw*'s International Clogging Contest in our last issue? Well, now the winners are in: Pam Collins and John Hasler (individual); Mariette Winkler and Tony Isenhour (duet); the Kentucky Hoedowners (team) and the Twin River Cloggers (novelty group). *Hee Haw* has taped performances by the winners and will broadcast them on the show. Producer Sam Lovullo told the crowd, "We've already decided to do this again next year."

A seven-thousand-dollar first prize and a one-year recording contract with IBB records were awarded to Desert Star of San Jose, California at the Third Annual Seagram's Seven International Battle of the Bands. The sextet was one of the seven regional finalists picked from more than 1200 auditions nationwide. The second-place prize of three thousand dollars went to Shotgun Annie, a quintet from Powell, Wyoming. There were five third-place winners; Images from Chicago, New Natchez Trace from Decatur, Alabama, Six Gun from Bohemia, New York, The Sylter Brothers from Hopkinton, Massachusetts, and The Silver Dollar Band from Plant City, Florida. Each third-place band won one thousand dollars. The New Natchez Trace received an additional thousand for having written and performed the evening's best song about Seagram's 7, appropriately titled, "Sip a Little 7."

WHAT'S NEW ON THE TUBE

Ronnie Milsap took some time out from the studio to guest on the Barry Manilow TV special due to air in January. Ronnie will have his own TV special produced by Multi-Media sometime this year. His guests will include the group Alabama.

Gus Hardin taped a segment of *Hee Haw* which will also be seen early this year. Gus's new album, like Ronnie's, is due out sometime in February.

North of the border, in Canada, T.G. Sheppard taped a guest appearance on the *Tommy Hunter Show*. He sang a few songs and talked about some race horses he purchased recently and the new farm he bought to house them.

Country comedian Jerry Clower will take his very successful radio show,

YOUR FAVORITES' FAVORITES

If you watch country music awards shows, you know which records and artists are the favorites of the music industry—but what about the stars themselves? What do *they* like to listen to the most? We decided to find out, and since we were on the case already, we further decided to ask the stars for their *all-time* favorites. Awards are short, but life and music are long.

Just to make it easier, we let the stars pick favorite artists, or favorite albums, or favorite songs—whatever choice felt the most comfortable. What we got was a variety of answers from "I can't pick just ten" to "they are all my favorites." But we did manage to elicit some unique responses from some of country music's most respected artists. Herewith is the first installment of "Your Favorites' Favorites."

Bill Monroe, who is frequently listed as a favorite by other stars, sur-



prised us. The "father of bluegrass" doesn't always stick to the old-timers. He picked Marty Robbins, Merle Haggard, Conway Twitty, George

Jones and Ricky Skaggs as his favorite artists.

Larry Gatlin was another story. He didn't surprise us at all. His top three favorite tunes, "Alleluia," "All the Gold in California," and "Pennie



Annie," were written by...guess who...that's right, folks...Larry Gatlin! Now, what were those rumors concerning his ego? Larry's next favorite was the Kris Kristofferson standard, "Why Me Lord," which as you'll see in subsequent issues, was a favorite of many. Next came Mickey Newbury's "Frisco Mabel Joy," Roger Miller's "Husbands and Wives," Willie Nelson's "Healing Hands of Time," Hank Williams's "Your Cheating Heart," Larry Henley and Jeff Silbar's "The Wind Beneath My Wings," and "The Hallelujah Chorus" by Handel, which all goes to prove that Larry likes to keep himself in very good company. In our next issue, Eddie Rabbitt and T.G. Sheppard pick their favorites.

Country Crossroads, which he now co-hosts weekly with disc-jockey Bill Mack, to TV in May. The Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission will produce the show for the American Christian Television System. On another note, Jerry will be the featured speaker at the Royal Ambassador Speak Out in Memphis in April. He will present awards to the young men participating in the Speak Out. Speaking out is nothing new to Jerry, who says that his first experience as a public speaker was in a Baptist church. Royal Ambassador Service chapters have about fifteen thousand members in Baptist churches throughout Tennessee.

Another new country music TV series, *This Week in Country Music*, is taking off in a big way. Hosted by Lorianne

Crook and Charlie Chase, the show's format is similar to that of *Entertainment Tonight*. It's a mix of interviews with stars, performances, clips of great past performances and quick reviews of each week's top ten country records. The show boasts no re-runs: fifty-two weeks of *new* shows. The first shows in the series featured Louise Mandrell, Alabama, Conway Twitty, Lynn Anderson, Barbara Mandrell, Charlie Daniels, Johnny Rodriguez and the Oak Ridge Boys. The hosts have country music and media backgrounds: Crook was previously with Nashville's *PM Magazine*, and Chase is program director for WSM Radio, where he does a daily radio show.

Waylon Jennings's record company, RCA, is putting together a New York trip for Waylon. While in the big city, he

People

is scheduled to appear on several TV shows, including *David Letterman*, *Good Morning America* and *Night Flight*.

NOW HEAR THIS

While **Deborah Allen** was in New York for some interviews, she visited some record store chains in the area... but her albums were not in stock. So, she sang some of her songs right there. The store-owners seem to have been impressed. The next day they contacted RCA to order her albums. Also, Deborah and RCA publicist **Cynthia Spencer** gave a

command performance for a taxi cab driver. After listening to them singing in the back seat, the cab driver asked them to sing over his radio to all the people in his dispatcher's office. Of course, they say they got "one heck of a response."

GETTING BETTER ALL THE TIME

At this writing, **Tammy Wynette** was still in the hospital recovering from surgery. Her doctors put a ban on her singing for two months, and Tammy postponed fifteen concert engagements.

She'll be back on the road soon, however. Since she doesn't sing in the movie *Stick*, where she portrays **Burt Reynolds**'s ex-wife Mary Lou, her time out didn't affect that filming schedule. It's a strictly dramatic role. You may remember that Tammy and Burt were a hot item in real life some years back. While Tammy was in the hospital, **Barbara Mandrell** and **Lee Greenwood** stopped by to say hello. Tammy received more than two hundred cards a day from concerned fans.

We reported that **Moe Bandy** was recovering from knee surgery from injuries he sustained during his football

VIDEO COUNTRY

Earl Thomas Conley's video of his single "Crowd Around the Corner" is a real tear-jerker. Earl wrote the song in honor of his grandfather, and the video really pulls at the heart.

More video news finds **Jerry Reed** completing a new one for his single "I'm a Slave." Jerry wrote the song and script, and produced, directed and paid for the entire production. There are very few extras in the video, as Jerry tried to keep it a close-knit project. His band and road manager are featured in the film. The story revolves around a man who is virtually a slave to all the vices in the world: gambling, smoking cigarettes,



COURTESY RCA RECORDS



P. CASEY DALEY

running around and all that other naughty stuff.

Seems that videos don't always workout as planned. **Charley Pride**'s new one for "Every Heart Should Have One" was shot in the Chelsea

area of New York City. The filming took place from 10:30 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. the next morning, and the night air must have gotten to Charley. He caught a cold and had to be visited by a doctor at his hotel. After seeing the

People

and rodeo days. Well, are you ready for this? The surgery was taped for a thirty-minute video. Moe's single, "You're Gonna Lose Her Like That," introduces Dr. Joe W. Tippett performing the arthroscopic surgery; this was the first time the procedure had been used for such extensive knee surgery. Moe was back on his feet within a month. Now Dr. Tippett uses the film for lectures. How's that for a new kind of video?

Elsewhere on the health front, Wayne Osmond was suffering from exhaustion and had to take two weeks off from performing recently. The Osmonds had

to cancel some dates, but Wayne's back now, and the Osmonds plan to continue their touring schedule.

IT'S ALL IN THE FAMILY

Here comes the stork. Sharon White Skaggs and Ricky Skaggs are expecting their first child in April. Jannett and David Bellamy are expecting their fourth child soon. David hopes this baby will be a boy so he can have a five-piece family band.

Gail Davies's little boy, Christopher, is proving to be his mother's son. He

sings and dances to her song "Boys Like You."

The new addition to the Crystal Gayle family, Catherine Claire, is now on the road. The baby will be with Crystal when she performs at Harrah's Marina Hotel Casino in Lake Tahoe. Meanwhile, Crystal is recording her second TV theme song. This one is for a show called *Masquerade*. You may remember that Crystal teamed up with Paul Williams to record the theme for *It Takes Two*.

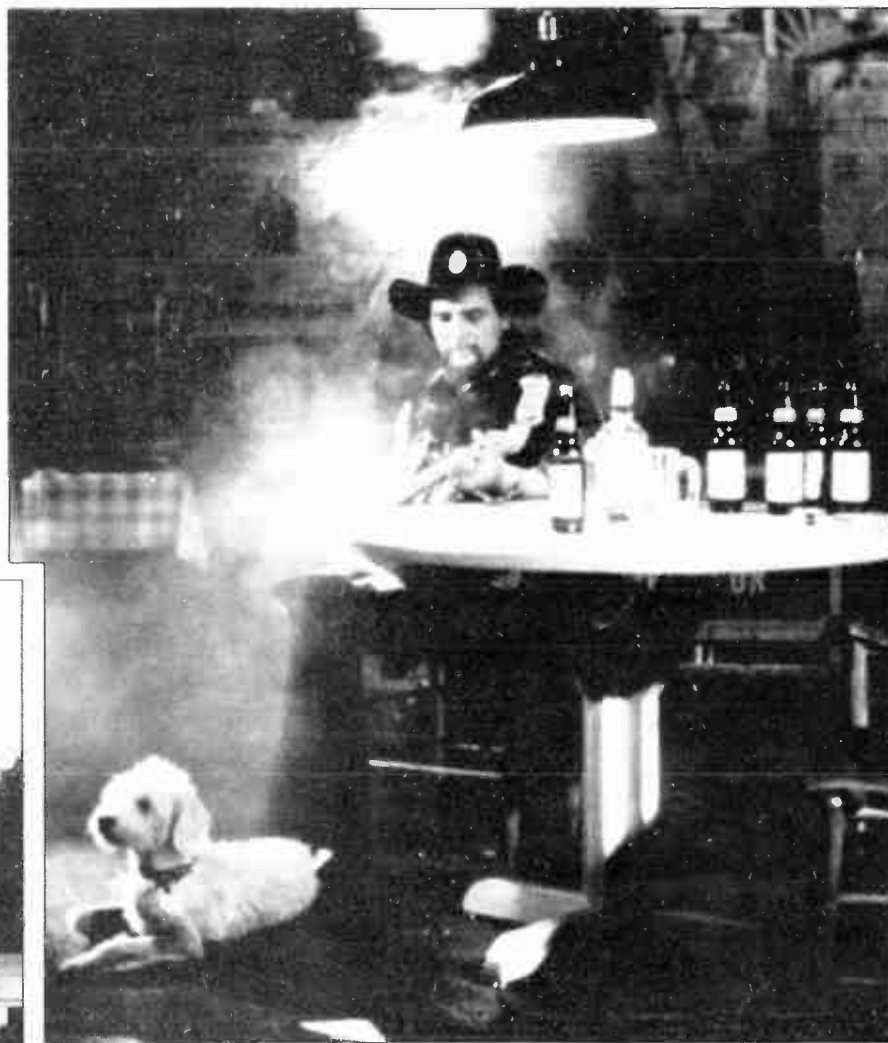
More honors for Crystal. The Caricaturist's Society of America has added her to their list of people with the most

finished product, however, Charley agreed that it was worth the pain.

Johnny Cash had a brush with the law — all in fun — while filming parts of his new video for "Johnny 99" at the County Court House in Nashville. "Johnny 99" is the title cut from Cash's new album. The Man in Black was wearing grey for the occasion, the same grey hat and suit he wears on the album cover. The judge wore black.

Waylon Jennings's video, "The Conversation," features Waylon's duet with Hank Williams, Jr. from Waylon's album *Waylon & Company*. The video includes authentic historical photographs of Hank, Sr. as well as cameo appearances by Waylon's wife Jessi Colter.

Hank, Jr. has shot his own video for



his single, "Queen of My Heart." It's a period piece set in the 1850s. According to Warner Bros. Records, more than \$1 million worth of props were used.

Speaking of period pieces and expensive items, we hear that in amongst

all this video-filming, Hank, Jr. presented his 1949 Cadillac to his good friend Waylon. What better way to show someone you care? Don't feel sorry for Hank, though; he replaced the car with a brand new white Cadillac for himself.



COURTESY WARNER BROS.

DON PUTNAM

People

interesting facial features. Crystal was chosen for her eyes, **Diana Ross** for her eyebrows, and **Barbra Streisand** for her nose. It would be interesting to see all those pieces in one picture.

Wedding bells rang for **John Anderson** and his new bride, **Jamie Atkinson**. They were married in John's home in Smithville, Tennessee among friends, band members and close family.

When John performed at the Longhorn Ballroom Dance Hall's 25th Anniversary recently, he was joined onstage by **David Frizzell**. The two teamed up for a duet version of David's hit, "I'm Gonna Hire a Wino to Decorate Our Home." Wonder what Jamie had to say about that.

BITS AND PIECES

O.K. Who has **T.G. Sheppard's** jacket? T.G. had just donated a black sequined jacket, with trousers and shirt, to be worn by a wax figure of himself in the Country Music Wax Museum in Nashville. But, alas, the jacket was stolen. Nashville police took fingerprints, but as of this writing, they had no leads. Officials are really perplexed as to why T.G.'s jacket was taken and all other valuables were left untouched. Maybe the thief wore the same size.

Remember the **Dr. Steele** album project where **Tammy Wynette** guested on one song? Well, the Seattle School District hoped to sell 10,000 copies of the *Let's All Pull Together* album at \$10 apiece, but the first day of release found nearly one-half of the albums in the hands of eager buyers. One Seattle store alone sold a thousand albums in just a few hours. The success of the project has the School District thinking about pressing more copies.

Accidents will happen... When **Lee Greenwood** was asked to take his CMA Male Vocalist of the Year trophy along to tape some DJ sessions the day after the Awards show, he was more than happy to do so. Then an embarrassed DJ accidentally hit Lee's glass award with a tape recorder and chipped a corner off the base. When Lee was asked if he wanted the CMA to replace the broken trophy, he said, "Not on your life. I'm holding on to the one they gave me, but I believe I'll keep it on the mantle from now on." Wise choice, Lee.

When you're in the music business, you get to have some very famous friends. **Shelly West** was surprised by two of them recently. The first was **Clint Eastwood**, who came by the Britannia Studios in California where Shelly was

working on her *Red Hot* album. Imagine that? Later, when Shelly was appearing at the Sahara Hotel in Lake Tahoe, Nevada, surprise number two occurred. Her mother, **Dottie**, appearing across the street, took time to join her on stage.

Conway Twitty released a new Christmas album, *Merry Twismas From Conway Twitty and His Little Friends*. The album, which follows a story line, marks the first time that Conway's famous friend, the **Twitty Bird**, comes to life, and actually sings. One hundred people were auditioned for the part of the Twitty Bird. Nashville ventriloquist **Tena Clower Sherman** won the role. The album contains old tunes like "White Christmas" and "Jingle Bells" and some new ones like "Christmas Is for the Birds." Conway kept the Christmas spirit up by turning his entertainment complex into a wonderland of lights and giant animated displays, and with a series of holiday concerts.

We told you about one of **Terri Gibbs's** hobbies; well, she has another. She loves to read and has a library of books in Braille. Her favorite author is **Phyllis Whitney**, with whom she corresponds regularly. Now Miss Whitney has announced that in her latest book, *Rain Song*, the heroine's favorite singer is Terri. Maybe someday Terri will sing a song about Miss Whitney.

The **Gatlin Brothers** like to golf. All three brothers entered the pro-am tournament at the Kapalua International Championship of Golf on the Hawaiian island of Maui. **Steve** slammed a hole-in-one off the seventeenth tee. Steve has been playing for about twelve years, and this was his first hole-in-one. He was awarded a 1984 Toyota and a new golf cart for his efforts, but it turned out to be a good news bad news situation. Of course, the good news was the prizes, but the bad news came from the United States Golf Association, which immediately revoked Steve's amateur status for a period of two years. Well, we all *knew* that Steve is a pro.

THE RUMOR MILL

The family's fine? Well, it seems that there might be some question in the famous **West/Frizzell** corral. Rumor has it that **Shelly** and her husband **Allen** have gone their separate ways, and Allen was seen palling around Nashville with **Leona Williams** following her separation from **Merle Haggard**.

We also hear that **Larry Gatlin** and the **Gatlin Brothers** are moving from CBS to MCA records. ■



PRESIDENT ASKS OAKS TO DELIVER

As we all know, President Reagan has his problems with the United States Congress. Recently he used the Oaks to send Congress a message; he asked them to dedicate their latest album *Deliver* to that august body. The Oaks were delighted, and members of the House and Senate, gathered on the South Lawn for the President's barbecue, applauded and called for more. The Oaks sang an encore while President and Mrs. Reagan danced.

Joe Bonsall's Greatest Hit

What a Day for a Daydream

It's always depressing when baseball season is over, but this year it was worse than usual. My all-time heroes, the Philadelphia Phillies, lost the World Series. Then, to make matters worse, one of my all-time favorite players, Pete Rose, was let go. So, to escape the pain, I've been going back...back to the 1981 season, when I got a chance to live out a daydream...

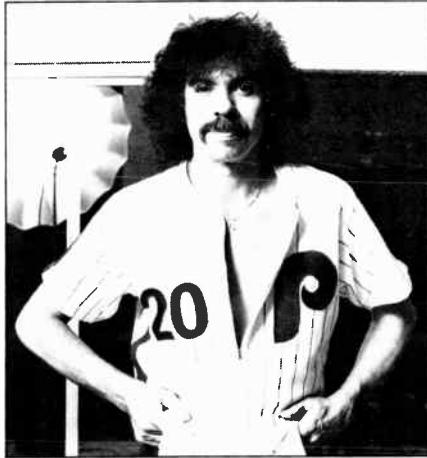
It's a gray, overcast morning at Philadelphia's Veterans Stadium, as the World Champion Philadelphia Phillies arrive and start preparing for pre-game workouts and a ritual called BP (batting practice).

The crimson-colored locker room is alive with the "heros of summer", all dressing, talking, joking, listening to music, and generally having a good time. Looking around in a boyish wonder, I am in awe of all of this talent—Schmidt, Rose, Carlton, McBride; all here preparing physically and mentally for a Saturday afternoon baseball war with the Houston Astros, to be televised on NBC.

Outside the dugout the ground crew toils over smooth dirt and white lines. Various members of the press corps await the possibility of pre-game interviews; Bryant Gumble, Tony Kubek and Joe Garagiola hash over various tidbits of information and fun they will use to spice up today's broadcast. The smell of hot dogs, beer and soft pretzels fills the air. The thousands of fans gathering outside will soon add their boos and cheers and live up to all the requirements of a "Philly crowd".

Inside the clubhouse, I am in front of an empty locker, between Ron Reed and Tug McGraw. As I dress in a Phillies uniform or "uni" as the term goes, Manager Dallas Green grabs me by the shoulder and says, "Have a good workout, I'll be watching." Gary Matthews shows me exactly how to get my stirrups and socks adjusted with just enough red showing below the knee of my pants. Ron Reed gives me a glove to use and warns me not to get clunked on the head. Mike Schmidt talks about Kenny Rogers. Pete Rose talks about Joe Niekro's knuckleball, and I'm looking around for Riccardo Montalban or that little dude "Tatoo," for surely this is *Fantasy Island*.

As I walk down the tunnel and out of



the dugout wearing my uni with the "P" proudly displayed over my heart, Joe Garagiola grabs me by the arm, "Hey, look at you! How's the rest of the guys? Haven't see ya since Amana. Man, you guys are great for baseball." A quote he would repeat that afternoon on NBC, linking up the Oak Ridge Boys with the national pastime.

After taking nine strokes in the batting cage, getting four good knocks according to Rose and Bowa, I jog out toward center field and join in "shagging flies." WFL/FM is blaring over the stadium sound system, as it is still an hour before the public is let inside.

Crack! Here comes one. Oh man, get back. Everyone is looking! *Agh!* Missed it totally. A few laughs. Reed and Unser yell, "Put a helmet on him, so he doesn't get killed!" *Crack!* Another one. Boonie hit a rope just to my left. Move it, Joe! Four steps more. Glove up. *All right!* Thank God, perfect catch. Some cheers from Sparky Lyle and L.C. (Larry Christensen). "Nothing to it!" I say. *Pheww!*

Like magic, "Elvira" starts playing over the sound system. Cheers from the World Champions of Baseball for "ommpah-pah-mau-mau." And I'm feeling like a million bucks.

I grew up in this city, in the Northern section known as Harrowgate, around the vicinity of Kensington and Allegheny, and I've loved the Phillies all my life. So, here I am in a dream come true. I've been friends with a lot of ballplayers for several years and through the Oak Ridge

Boys and country music I've had a lot of fun times inside the sports world: singing the national anthem, touring spring training camps, having Joe Niekro and Doug Flynn sing (??) on our stage, meeting the legends such as Musial, Mantle, Ford and Banks at various golf tournaments, socializing with Yankees, Royals, Mets and Astros. I know enough funny stories to fill a small novel, but today really "takes the cake," as they say. A rare weekend off from the Oak Ridge Boys, and look where I am!

After a shower, fifteen minutes before game time, I thank the guys, especially my good friend, pitcher Ron Reed, for making it all possible. I make my way to my seat between home plate and the first base line, Section 229, Row 9, Seat 6.

The Phillies hit four home runs that day: two by Texas catcher Keith Moreland, one by Manny Trillo, and a literal "moon shot" into the upper decks by one of my favorites, Mike Schmidt, all behind the pitching of Dick Ruthen and Tug McGraw, walloping the Astros and (ouch) good friend, Joe Niekro, 9 to 2.

After some reminiscing and goodbyes to Mom, Pop and sister Nancy, I fly to Nashville to prepare for a ten-day tour of the West Coast, where the Oak Ridge Boys will perform at several fairs and tape some network television. I can't wait to tell my story to Duane, William, Richard, Raymond, the band and our great crew, back in my natural habitat. I realize how lucky I am. "Elvira" is on the radio, the Phillies are heading for the playoffs, and Riccardo Montalban *must* be around here somewhere...

Ah, what a day for a daydream. But that was then, and this is now. The Phillies lost, but I still love 'em. And, after all, I guess the season wasn't a total loss. I read in *Country Music* that the Oak Ridge Boys got to sing the "Star Spangled Banner" at the 1983 All-Star Game in Chicago's Comisky Park...on network television.

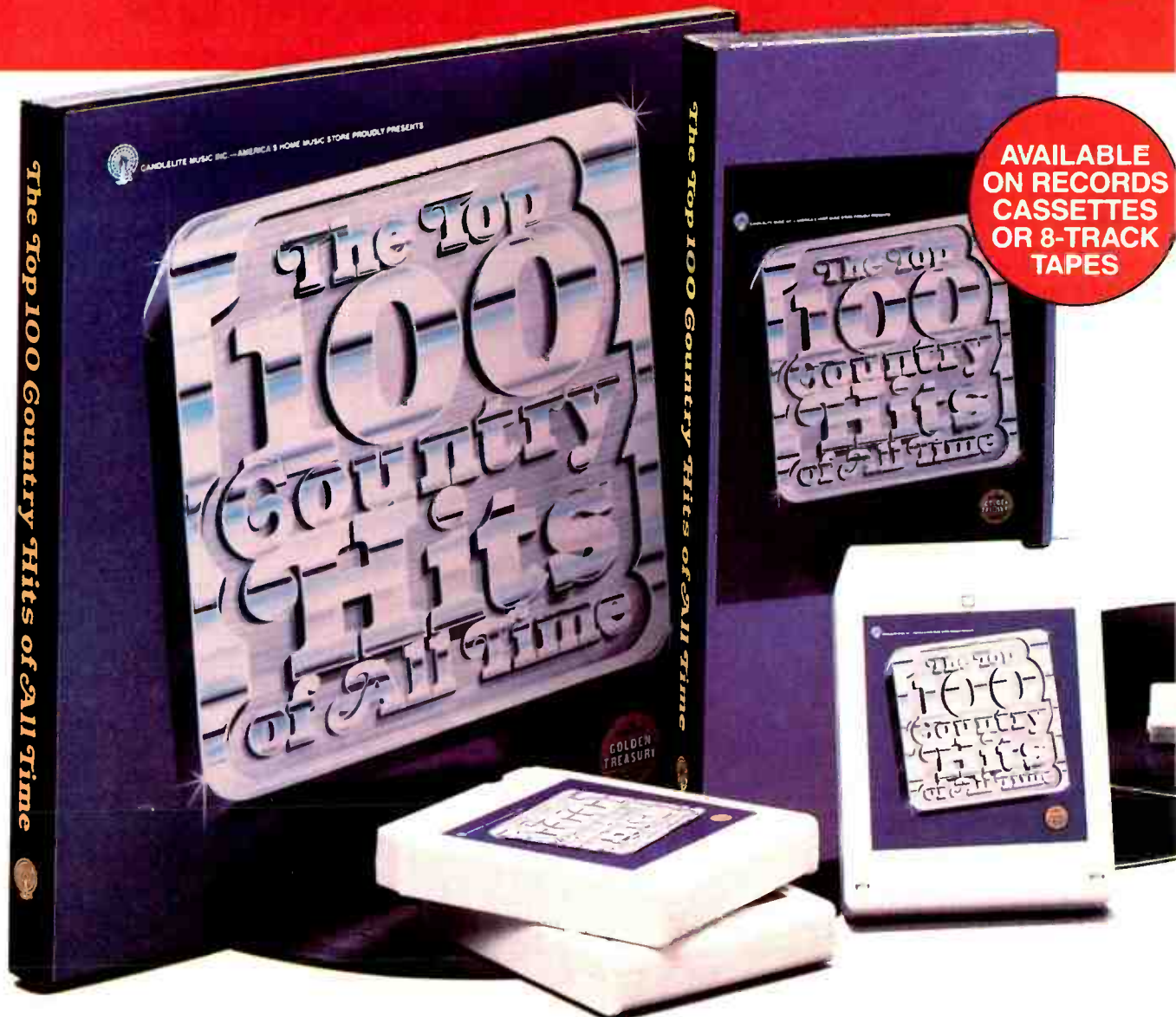
Well, pardon me, I have to go suffer with the Eagles, try to help the Seventy Sixers with their second straight NBA Championship and prepare myself mentally for the 1984 baseball season. ■

Joe Bonsall is our chief sports editor. On his days off, he sings fake Fifties rock and roll with a gospel-style, country music quartet called The Oak Ridge Boys.

by Joe Bonsall

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ROUSER" • "DARK MOON" • "MY SPECIAL ANGEL" • "IN THE MIDDLE OF A
HEARTACHE" • "RIGHT OR WRONG" • "TENNESSEE WALTZ" •
"MOCKINGBIRD HILL" • "SINCE I MET YOU BABY" • "I'LL NEVER PASS THIS
WAY AGAIN" • "STANDING IN THE SHADOWS" • "SO SAD" (TO WATCH GOOD
LOVE GO BAD) • "I LOVE HOW YOU LOVE ME" • "OH, OH, I'M FALLING IN LOVE
AGAIN" • "HONEYCOMB" • "KISSES SWEETER THAN WINE" • "BURNING
BRIDGES" • "I'M SO LONESOME I COULD CRY" • "I CAN'T HELP IT IF I'M
STILL IN LOVE WITH YOU" • "LITTLE THINGS MEAN A LOT" • "ALL ALONE AM
I" • "HURT" • "ROSE GARDEN" • "TALK BACK TREMBLING LIPS" • "AM I THAT
EASY TO FORGET" • "THERE GOES MY EVERYTHING" • "WHY ME, LORD" •
"MOUNTAIN OF LOVE" • "MY ELUSIVE DREAMS" • "ALMOST PERSUADED" •
"CHURCH IN THE WILDWOOD" • "PLEASE HELP ME, I'M FALLING" •
"AMAZING GRACE" • "GREEN, GREEN GRASS OF HOME" • "MAKING BE-
LIEVE" • "THEN YOU CAN TELL ME GOODBYE" • "HIGH NOON" • "HARPER
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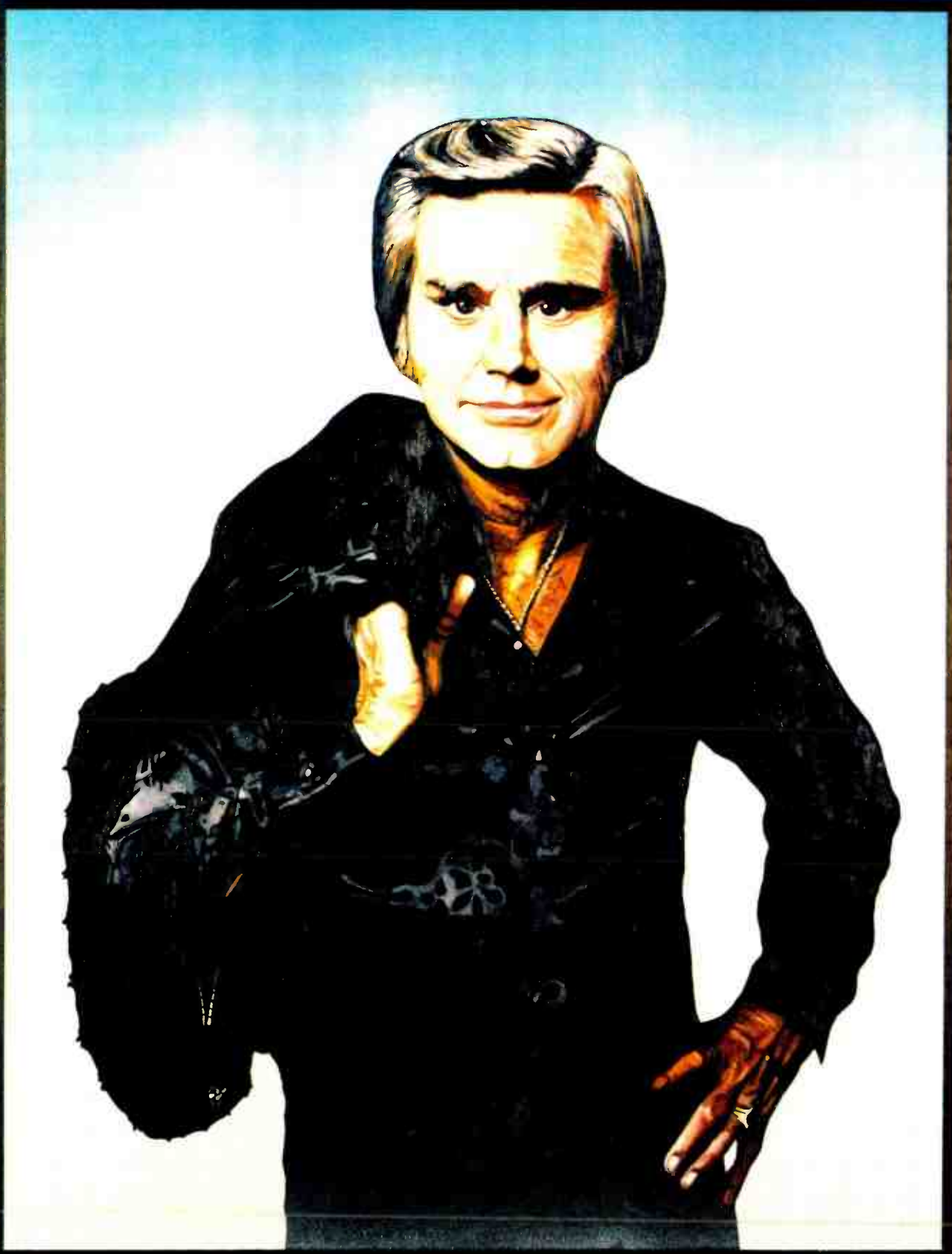
GEORGE ♄ JONES

75*12*3=JUPITER
153*9=MARS

3

REGENERATION: TENNESSEE WHISKEY

AMBITION: IF MY HEART HAD WINDOWS



FATALISM: WHY BABY WHY?

DOMINANCE: NEAR YOU

8

COSMIC COUNTRY

9

99 PER CENT OF THE UNIVERSE IS RURAL AND ITS LOVE IS EXPRESSED BY THE 4 ELEMENTS: AMBITION, DOMINANCE, REGENERATION AND FATALISM.

HOMAGE TO COUNT LOUIS HAMON

ANOTHER ROUND FOR GEORGE JONES

“Fame requires every kind of excess.”

—Don DeLillo, *Great Jones Street*

Often, particularly among the more hard-bitten, badgered, and underpaid members of the country music press corps, there is a tendency to make light of a man's plight as he stands on the brink of personal disaster, a tendency to put emotional distance between ourselves and the more disturbing aspects of the trials and tribulations of a public figure like George Jones. After all, for us journalists there is seldom time to assess just what such potential tragedies-in-the-making mean in human terms; and there is little

Boston artist Paul Laffoley painted this portrait of George Jones (opposite) with his radio tuned to WBOF, Boston's country music station. The energy Paul sensed in George's personality and the words of the songs on the radio inspired him to do a numerological analysis of George's name. He came up with the numbers, the planets, and the related themes written on the frame, all expressive, he felt, of George's personality and the ideas of his songs.

time to ponder just how they might apply to one's own personal problems. No, we writers must shrug it off, crack a cynical joke, and move on; because there's always another car wreck just down the road to write about, always another plane crash or another suicide to cover somewhere.

This has certainly been the case with the tragedy that seemed to be in the cards for George: the tragedy that George Jones devotees would have had to face if a man who'd reached millions with his music had died sad and alone, without so much as one of those millions being able to reach him.

But now, it's another round for George Jones. Now, once again, when so many had given up on him, he's fooled us all. Like a cat with nine lives who knows he has already used up at least ten of them, he has beaten the odds once again.

by Bob Allen

In Nashville and the rest of the entertainment world, the decline of George Jones became the spectator sport of the moment.

When fame's dark forces are held in check, when the strong emotions it calls up are harnessed to corporate horsepower with assembly-line efficiency, it can be a wonderful beast of burden, an immense profit-making machine. Just ask Kenny Rogers or Conway Twitty. But when those dark forces are given free rein, when they are unleashed upon a person who is unprepared to deal with them, the victim can suffer a great deal.

The annals of both country and rock music are littered with the carcasses of performers who were sucked dry by the monstrous demands of celebrity. Consider Elvis Presley, for starters—found dead on his bathroom floor at the age of 42 with no fewer than eleven potentially dangerous drugs percolating through his system. Consider Hank Williams, found dead on the back seat of his Cadillac at the age of 29 with several substances (including morphine) working in lethal commerce with the alcohol in his bloodstream. In the rock and roll world, consider ex-Beatle John Lennon, gunned down outside his New York City apartment by a fan whose twisted brain had formed bizarre fantasies after listening too hard to the lyrics of Lennon's songs. Consider all the other rock and rollers: Janis Joplin, Jim Morrison, ex-Rolling Stone Brian Jones... and the list goes on.

Others besides Presley and Williams line country music's hall of doom. There is Mel Street, a gifted singer (and George Jones fan) who shot himself to death in the bedroom of his Nashville home on the morning of his 45th birthday, back in 1978. There is Lefty Frizzell, the great Texas honky tonk singer who died at the age of 47 from a massive stroke after spending too many years looking at the world through the bottom of a whiskey glass. Going further back, there is Jimmie Rodgers, the father of modern country music, dead from tuberculosis at the age of 35, and Harry Choates, the influential Cajun fiddler responsible for the original version of "Jole Blon," who died at the age of 29 while being held in an Austin, Texas jail on charges of deserting his wife and child.

There are also others—like Jerry Lee Lewis—whose immense burdens and tragedies have not yet killed them but seemingly left them wandering aimlessly among the living like hollow, empty shells.

And then there is George Jones, the man who as recently as a year ago seemed on his way to ending up on this same scrap-heap of musical history, on his way to having his own star hung in doom's Hall of Fame. In frighteningly

rapid succession, George suffered through a multitude of exhausting personal disasters which rained down on him like some sort of hellish Morton's Salt.

First of all, within the space of a few years there were numerous drunk-driving arrests. So many of them, in fact, that some of the more cynical of us suggested that a major whiskey distilling company might hire George to do a series of personal endorsements: something along the lines of him standing by the side of a road in rural Mississippi, with an overturned 1982 Cadillac in the ditch behind him, a wide grin on his face, and a bottle of his favorite brand of 80-proof painkiller in his hand. The caption would read: "*I Never Leave Home Without It!*"

Then there was the bizarre incident in 1978 in which he came close to shooting his friend, songwriter Peanut Montgomery, to death. There were at least two lengthy hospitalizations (in 1979 and 1982) for drug and alcohol abuse; neither of them seemed to do much good. There was a highly-publicized bankruptcy petition, an alcohol-related car wreck in Mississippi, a cocaine arrest in that same state (charges were later dismissed) and a bizarre tangle of litigation that seemed to ensnare him ever tighter: numerous lawsuits filed against him by ex-wives, creditors, ex-managers, and angry promoters at whose shows he'd failed to honor his commitments to perform. One promoter in Ohio filed against him to the tune of \$10.2 million. In another case, in an attempt to satisfy a \$25,000 judgment brought against him in Virginia in 1982, a county sheriff cornered him after he performed a show in that state and seized his wristwatch and his diamond rings—confiscated them right off his hands and fingers. All the while, roving TV camera crews seemed to lurk in the bushes at every corner, trying their damndest to catch George in the act of screwing up one more time.

In an industry strewn with dead and half-dead legends, all this was par for the course, really—merely the stuff of which true legends are made. As George's troubles multiplied and his personal confusion deepened, awards were heaped upon him, among them a Grammy and two consecutive Country Music Association "Male Vocalist of the Year" trophies. His records sold faster than ever before, earning him a gold single ("He Stopped Loving Her Today") and a platinum album (*I Am What I Am*) as they sailed past the million-sales mark.

The personal descent continued through all this hooplah. George's weight dropped from 145 to 98 pounds. According to friends, his gums bled from malnutri-

tion. He spent his days fleeing and hiding from his persecutors both real and imagined; he dwelt for several years in a twilight state of depression and nervous exhaustion.

"He wouldn't eat for days at a time, and he'd drink whiskey straight from the bottle, until it made him sick," says one friend who spent a good deal of time with him at his home in North Alabama during those dark days. "But even when he vomited, he wouldn't turn loose of that bottle. He'd hold on to it. And unless you got it away from him and hid it, he'd get up and wipe his mouth off and keep right on drinking.

"One time, I saw him get on one of his terrible paranoia trips," the friend adds. "He took a quilt and rolled it up on his couch until it looked like a person. Then he took a pillow and drew a face on it. And he made out like the couch was a casket, and he took his pistol and shot through the pillow. Then he started callin' all his friends up on the telephone, tellin' 'em: 'The King is dead! The King is dead!'"

Through his worst times, George's fans and the American public in general did not turn their backs on him. For one thing, they were far too fascinated by his dark journey to let their attention lapse. In Nashville and the rest of the entertainment world, the decline of George Jones became the spectator sport of the moment. When he bounced a \$747 check written to cover fines resulting from his 1982 Mississippi auto wreck and drunk-driving charge, it was rumored that an affluent fan offered to make good on it as long as he could keep the check itself as a souvenir. During the darkest hours, some of George's sisters back in Texas were besieged with phone calls from Texas oil millionaires and the like, offering to cough up cash loans to tide him over until he got himself back on his feet.

Perhaps there was another reason, apart from morbid fascination, for the fans' loyalty. Despite all the fame and adulation that has been heaped upon him, George is one of the last of today's country artists to remain untouched by the veneer of record company hype and the intrigues of "image consultants." These days, record companies hire such people to tell their artists not only how they should wear their hair and move on-stage, but also what they should say (and *not* say) to their audiences and to the press. George, amid all his weaknesses, has never allowed himself to become a part of this phoniness. To the end, right

down to the wire, win or lose, he has always been his own man.

Behind the headlines and between the lines of the press releases and news articles, George's fans have also seemed to sense that the man is a victim, more than anything else, of his own unbridled compulsiveness, his own depth of humanity, his frightening vulnerability to pain and his immense capacity for suffering. To these people, he has always been like a favorite uncle or a black-sheep brother—a man whose problems with alcohol, drugs, car wrecks, marriage and divorce are really no different from their own. To these people (this writer being one of them) George has,

through it all, remained a hero—a flawed, tarnished hero, more a Jake LaMotta or a Roberto Duran than a Jack Dempsey or a Sugar Ray Leonard—but a hero nonetheless.

George himself grasped this fundamental insight and commented on it several years ago, just weeks before his first lengthy hospitalization. Drink-and drug-ravaged, skeletally thin and woefully haggard, he stood onstage in a dreary Texarkana club one night, and laughed darkly down at his audience.

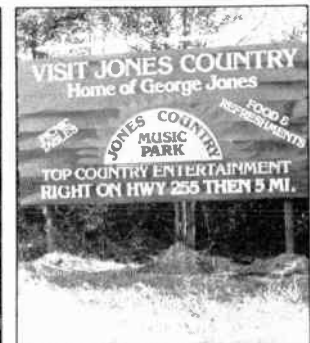
"You're lookin' at the one in country music who's messed up more than any of 'em," he told his followers with a cold, death-like grin. "But just remember, as

you drive home with your wife, or your ex-wife, or somebody else's wife, that you're in a bigger fix than I am!"

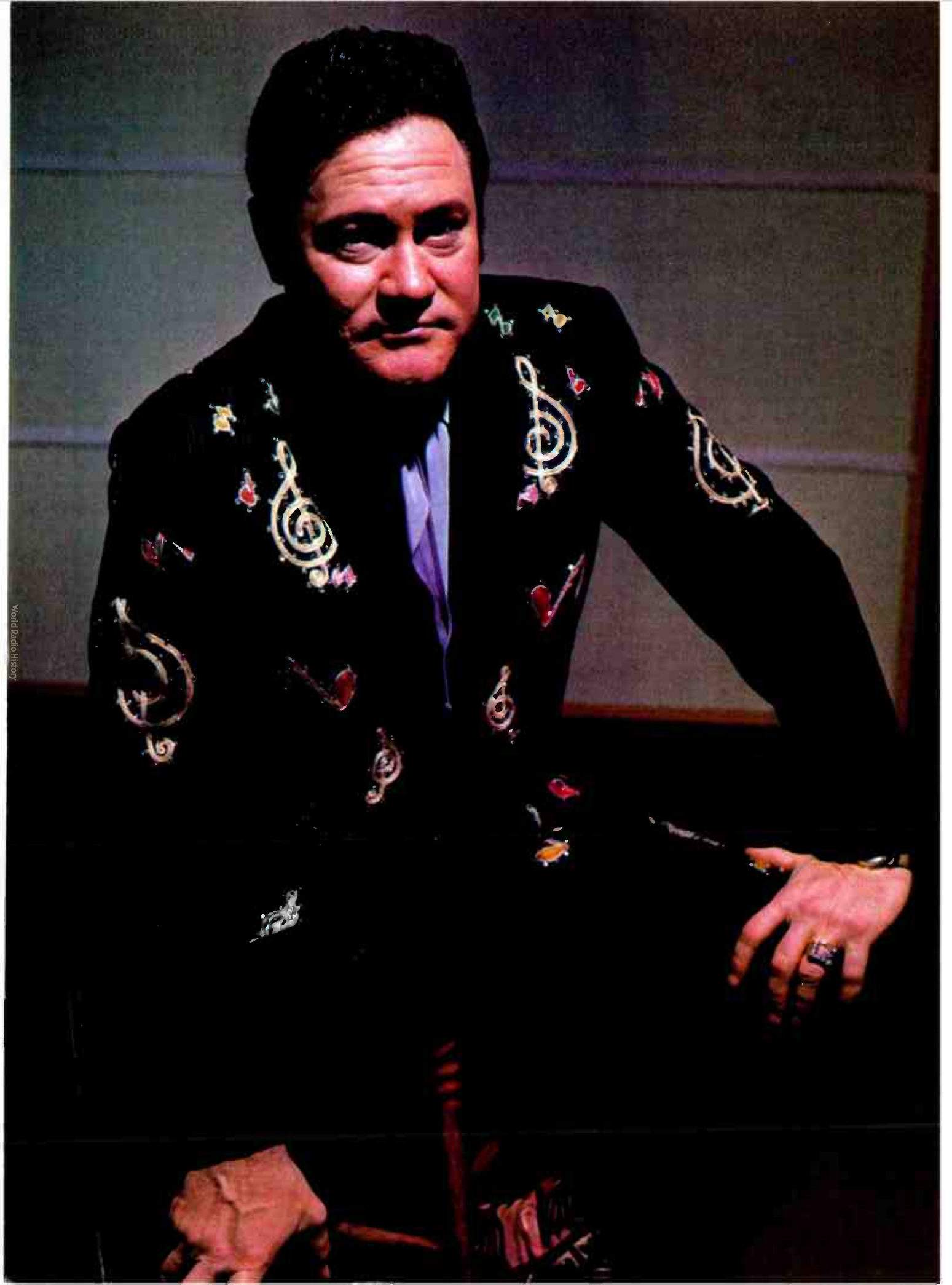
"George has never understood all the hooplah," says Rick Blackburn, head of the Nashville division of CBS Records, George's label. "He gets very confused about it all sometimes, like maybe it's all a mistake or something. His attitude is something like, 'Turn the spotlight off! What did I do wrong to make all this happen!'"

"But if you analyze it, that humbleness of his is all part of his success," Blackburn adds. "That's what makes the music fans and the American public root for him—and our studies show that the average

JONES COUNTRY

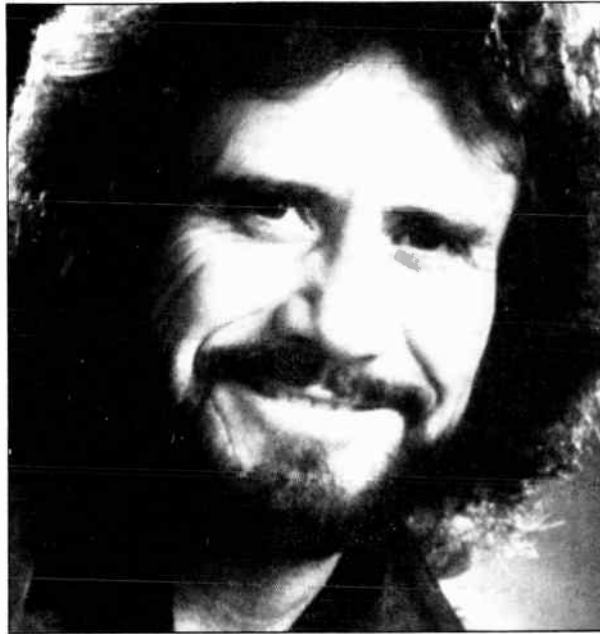


Good times at the opening of Jones Country, George's Texas entertainment park. The fans bought up those goodies, and George was joined on stage by John Anderson, Little Jimmy Dickens, and Gail Davies.



LEFTY FRIZZELL

At his peak in the early 1950s, Lefty Frizzell was the biggest star in country music. At one point, he had no less than four records in the Billboard Country Top Ten. By 1954, however, his career had slumped. Although he had hits again in the 1960s and early 1970s, he never matched the huge success of those early years. Lefty died on July 19th, 1975, of a massive stroke. He had written some of his finest songs during the three or four years before his death. He was a brilliant songwriter (“If You’ve Got the Money, I’ve Got the Time,” “Saginaw, Michigan,” “That’s the Way Love Goes,” “I Never Go Around Mirrors,” and many, many more), and his vocal style is still the standard by which honky tonk



singers are judged; Merle Haggard, George Jones, and Willie Nelson all acknowledge the enormous influence he had on their work. Lefty was the songwriter’s songwriter, the singer’s singer.

Unlike Hank Williams, whose public and private life is the stuff of countless stories and endless investigations, Lefty remains an elusive figure. One man, however, remembers him very well indeed: David Frizzell, his younger brother by ten years. Now a country star in his own right, David began his professional musical career as Lefty’s partner on the road during the mid-1950s. I found David out on that same road, in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and tape-recorded the following recollections of a very great man.—Patrick Carr

A POWERFUL MAN

Recollections of My Brother by David Frizzell

I was about nine years old when Lefty became very, very important in my life. Before that, he was important just as a brother, but he was gone all the time. He’d come by the house every so often, and with him there would always be a big string of people, so I got the idea that he was something big. But when I was about nine, I was staying with my uncle down in Kermit, Texas, and my uncle took me over to a radio station where this lady had a show on which she sang live. They started taking me over

there every Saturday, and I’d sing Lefty songs. That’s when I really became aware that Lefty was a very, very big, important man. He was the Elvis of his day; he was the most sought-after singer. For a young kid of nine, it was almost like, “This guy is not *real*. He’s somebody you hear on the radio.” Even today, it’s hard sometimes to think of Lefty and my brother being one and the same.

Before that, I remember him trying to write songs, and I remember him being very poor. I remember Mom and Dad—and *they*





Partners on the honky tonk road: Lefty and David Frizzell in the 1950s.

were poor—trying to help him, because by the time he was seventeen he was married, and when he was eighteen he had a baby already. I remember Lefty and his wife not having enough to eat; they would split a hot dog a day between them, and have just enough money left over to buy food for the baby.

Then he made it, and it was such a fast thing. All of a sudden, people were pushing money at him every which way to get him to do things. That had to have a tremendous effect on him, as opposed to the way it happened to me. I've always made good money in country music—not great, but good—and I've never gone hungry like he did. For him, it was awfully rough. When he made it, it was like he was in a slingshot from poverty to all the money he could possibly stuff into his pockets. After hitch-hiking with his guitar strapped to his back and his wife and daughter walking the road with him, he was owning five Cadillacs at a time, and homes everywhere, and people were shaking his hand and patting him on the back and saying he was the

greatest. He couldn't buy enough Cadillacs, couldn't buy enough planes, couldn't buy enough property. Like anyone coming out of total poverty, he wanted to buy everything he saw. He'd buy a new Cadillac and drive it until it ran out of oil, and then he'd go get another one.

After that first big success came the tough years. Lefty played every little dive I've ever seen. Everybody in country music during those years was doing the same thing: trying to survive, trying to get by. Those were the years I worked with him, from the time I was sixteen until I was twenty. He was only pulling \$300 or \$350 a night in those little clubs. He'd just book a million of them. He didn't have a band or anything. We'd use whatever local band was there, and that was so hard on him. Nine times out of ten they didn't know his songs, and we'd be playing some run-down club somewhere, or out in a pasture with the cows doing background for us. I collected all the money and held it; I'd turn it over to Lefty when we got back somewhere close to home. Sometimes, of course, we didn't

get paid. Sometimes that was because he didn't show up on time, or he couldn't do the second show, but other times the people were just crooks.

He missed a lot of shows for a while, and he always had this thing about being late. A lot of times, we'd get into a town maybe two or three days before a show, and he would hide. He wouldn't go to the best hotel in town; he'd get one where nobody would ever think of looking for him, and he'd hide for however many days it was. He'd send me out for food. Then we'd drive up to the show, and we'd hide some more, until I'd say, "Lef, we ought to let these people know you're here, you know. We're about an hour late now." He'd wait a bit longer, then say, "Okay. Let 'em know I'm here so they can let me in the back."

This became a way of life for him, always being late. He'd maybe start getting ready by the time he was supposed to be there, and that just used to wear me out. I'm the other way. Maybe I learned that from him, because I waited and waited for him until it's a wonder I didn't have ulcers.

He'd never go to restaurants, either, so we used to stop on the road and go into little grocery stores and pick up Dr. Pepper and cheese and crackers and those hot bell peppers. It was me that went into the stores almost always. Lefty didn't like to go anyplace where he thought he might be recognized, where he would have to talk about being Lefty Frizzell. I'm beginning to understand that, now that some of it's happening to me. If somebody asks me one more time how Shelly West and I met...

He hardly ever did interviews—all the press was stock material from a bio—and he hardly ever did TV. That was the songwriter in him. The songwriter wanted to be obscure. The fame didn't matter to him. He really was a writer-type personality. Talking about business and investments and all that stuff didn't do it for him, either. He wasn't a businessman. He was always leery of signing contracts, and his business—even his bookings—was word-of-mouth. What really mattered to Lefty was that he could outwrite you in a song.

He had a real sense of humor, too. Even when his records stopped selling, he'd find a way to make *that* funny.

The slump in country music really affected him. I think it was about that time that he turned to the bottle. He had to have a drink before he got into a club, and he'd have to have a bunch of them before he went on. Sometimes he wouldn't make it to the second show. He wasn't really happy about performing, except maybe in the early days; I don't think he was really cut out to be a tremendous performer. He had to have a drink, and I think he got to rely on it, and that became a problem for him. He drank a lot.

In my dreams, after Lefty passed away, there would be me and him dodging bullets, and he never died. He never got hit.

I never saw him get totally drunk, though. He always got it up to a point, and then levelled off, and when he started to come down from there, he'd take another drink to get himself back up. He was a pro; he knew how to do it. Once he'd got up there, he'd take a drink once every hour or 45 minutes, and when he'd got that handled right, he'd be hot, he was right on. But if he took a drink every 30 minutes, he'd go out on the other side.

After a while he started drinking whether he was working or not. He found out that he wanted it every day. And that hurts. It happens to a lot of creative people. To me, Lefty was so big-minded, and he had so much willpower, that I was really surprised that he let anything control him. He was just so *strong*. He was powerful.

He was a tough little character, too. He'd punch you out real fast. He had a temper which was just unbelievable. I've seen it a lot of times. It would make you shiver. His anger would be so intense that his whole body would tremble with it until he'd lash out. And he'd lash out real quick. He'd explode on you one time, and that would be it. Whoever it was would be lying there, and then the anger was gone. There's no sense in taking it out on somebody who can't get up.

Despite everything, he was a great performer. He had a way about him; he had that power, that personality. He walked out onto a stage, and it was like "Lefty Frizzell *is here*." Those people would just run and crowd the bandstand. I've never seen anything like it with anybody—and those weren't kids in his audiences, either; they were older people, country people. They wanted to see this curly-headed guy curl these songs. I think he was basically a writer personality, but his personality was so tremendous that it made him a great entertainer. He just stood there and sang, like George Jones. Each person in the audience would think he was singing directly to them. He would look right at them. He'd look them right in the eye. He touched them, and they felt it. An incredible man.

All kinds of people tried to imitate him. He used to say, "David, you've got to be different. You've got to be yourself." If he ever saw somebody else trying to be like him, he'd change somehow. He would not let anybody be like him. He was just *different*—in the way he'd slide one foot a little bit after he'd had a drink or two, in the way he'd change the vocabulary—and everybody was interested in the way he did things. I don't think he took it as a compliment that people

imitated him. "I wish they'd cut that out," he told me, "I'm having enough trouble with it myself."

What a book he could have written. What stories he could have told. He always said to me that he wanted to write short stories. He loved those little Alfred Hitchcock stories, and *Ripley's Believe It Or Not*—that was his reading material. He would have been a great short story writer. He even had a pen name picked out: Aaron Farrell. Apart from reading, he liked to fish, and he even liked to golf a little, but mostly he liked to hang out with his songwriter friends.

But those slump years... I think that when he was young, just starting out, he wanted to get into the business so badly that he was real enthusiastic. Then, about '54 or '55, he got tired. He'd been used and abused by everybody that could get their hands on him. He'd been taken to the cleaners a few times by so-called managers. He had tremendous problems with people trying to steal his songs and steal him blind in other ways.

I really don't think his drinking had much to do with how his creative abilities were in those days. I think he was just tired. He didn't have any enthusiasm.

He never knew loyalty. He never had a loyal group around him. In the big-time days he had bands, but he didn't even know some of those people. I can remember him saying, "Gee, I wish they'd introduce me to some of those musicians. I don't even know who the hell they are!" They would change so often, and his band-leader or somebody else would handle it. Lefty never met them.

I learned a tremendous amount from that man. I learned how to walk onto a stage from him, I learned good and I learned bad from him—but I learned loyalty where he didn't. So many people had screwed him in so many different ways in the years when he was hot, that he could not comprehend loyalty in a fellow-musician. He was so good, and so creative, but he did not trust people.

In his last few years, he'd started writing again—I think he got inspired by hanging around with his songwriter buddies—and he'd started getting Top 20 hits again. He told me then that he wanted to get a hit, but he was scared to get one. He said, "I know what it means. I know how much it takes out of you. I know the demands that people will start making on me again." He wanted to prove to *himself* that he could do it—I don't think he wanted to prove it to anyone else that much—but he *was* scared.

Everybody who ever laid hands on Lefty tried to rip him. They raped the

poor man. He was unintelligent in the ways of business, and they did a job on him. They ruined a very naive, beautiful, unassuming guy by taking him for every damn thing they could.

When Lefty died, the impact was awesome, like the world coming to an end. I couldn't believe it. "You're not going to tell me he's dead! Lefty would not put up with it. He's too strong! You're lying to me." Even today, I still can't believe it. I could not believe that he could succumb to simply passing away with a stroke. I thought, "There's no stroke in the world that can get this guy! He's too *mean*. He's too strong."

In my dreams after he passed away, there would be me and him dodging bullets, and he never died. He never got hit. For years, every night, there'd be me and him doing this or that, then all of a sudden people would be trying to hurt him. I'd be trying to help him, and I'd be getting hurt, trying to make sure people didn't bother him.

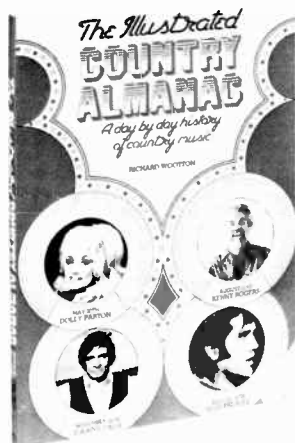
Then one night I had a different dream. This one was more real than any other dream I've ever had; it was so clear that it was like I was really there.

It was almost like a press conference. My dad, me, and Lefty were standing together, and in the background were Willie Nelson and Merle Haggard. Now, Merle has always been tremendously important to me, and he was important to Lefty, but I was never close with Willie, so I don't know why *he* was there. They were both there talking to people, like at a press conference, and while they were talking, Lefty turned to my dad and said, "I was only joking. I never did die. I never really was hurt that bad."

I was *so* hurt. For the first time in my life I took ahold of his shoulder, and I grabbed him as hard as I could, and I shook him as hard as I could, and I said, "Don't you ever—*ever*—play like that again!"

Since then, I have never had another dream about Lefty. I have tried to figure that dream out, and the only thing I can come up with is that all those years, I felt inferior. I felt like I had never accomplished anything like that man had. I had everyone in the world telling me, "Hey, Lefty is the best, and you'll always be second best." But at that time, in that dream, I felt that I was equal to that man. For the first time in my life, I stood up to him. It was only in my dream, but maybe it was enough to finalize everything.

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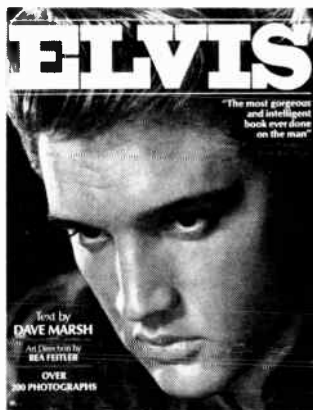
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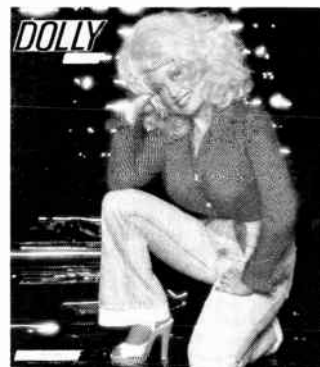
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World Radio History

GEORGE STRAIT

Keeping the Honky Tonk Faith

by John Morthland

Of all the rituals a country music star must perform, one of the trickiest is the “in-store promotion,” in which the artist goes to a record store to meet the fans for an hour or so. The fans line up to get autographs on album covers, photographs, posters, scraps of paper, arms, whatever. They want their picture taken with their hero. Ideally, the star will do more than just act pleased to meet the fans—he will feign some kind of passing familiarity with each one, as if he knows what kind of person would be his fan to begin with. At the same time, he must move them along quickly, because if he’s not to the end of the line after his hour is up, he must stick around (which ruins his schedule), or risk disappointing them by leaving before they get their chance.

Although he is a relative newcomer to the business, George Strait has his in-store promo technique down cold as he sits behind a table at a Waco, Texas, record store one stifling Saturday afternoon. The line of fans stretches out into the mall, but he appears unruffled as he goes about his business: Sign *For Debbie* (or whoever), *George Strait*, on whatever is thrust in front of him; stand up quickly; lean across table; place chin just over shoulder of fan; smile winningly into camera; sit back down just as quickly. Next.

The ritual proceeds smoothly until Tammy, a teenager like a surprisingly large number of the others in line, comes along. As George leans forward at the table with his pen, he gives her a questioning look. He needs to know her name before he can sign, but there is a problem. Tammy can’t remember her name. At first, even *she* does not realize what’s wrong, but then she looks frantically back at her friends and lets out

a high, erotic squeal that has a question mark at the end of it. One of the other girls gives her the necessary one-word piece of information, and she turns back to the star.

“It’s Tammy,” she sighs. As George writes, she speaks again.

“Can I have a kiss, please?”

Now this could be a *real* problem. It’s not just that George Strait has recently picked up an annoying sinus bug complicated by fatigue. There are also practical matters. He’s due soon for a sound check at the country dance hall he’s playing tonight in the nearby town of Mexia. If Tammy gets her kiss, half the girls in Waco might also want one, and in addition to the health factor and the extra time the kissing will consume, George isn’t the type of guy who likes kissing strangers, no matter how bemused he is that *they* like to kiss *him*. So he mumbles, as gently and as humbly as he can, that a kiss would not be, er, *appropriate* just now.

“Not even on my hand?” Tammy is persistent. George is struggling to stay cool.

“Okay, how about on my cheek then?” she pleads, leaning so far into his face that he can’t avoid her. The deed is done, the precedent set, and Tammy squeals and giggles and speaks that teenage body language as George goes back to autographs. But she isn’t through; as the line moves on, Tammy hovers in the background:

“I begged. I’m in love with you, George.”

“I want to be your babysitter, George.” (Great line, Tammy!)

“I looked outside for your bus, George. I couldn’t find it. Where is it? Ooh, please...”

“You wanna come over for dinner, George?”

It is a maxim that country music stars simply are not sex symbols to teenage girls, but teenage girls seem to have this thing for Strait anyhow. He is young (31) and, as the cliché goes, ruggedly handsome. That tells part of the story, but only part; the rest defies explanation. I have no theories as to how a sixteen-year-old girl can identify so strongly with an adult song like “If You’re Looking for a Stranger,” but I saw dozens of them who had finessed their way to the lip of



COURTESY MCA RECORDS

the stage, swooning at him as he sang the song that night in Mexia. The next night, he played Aqua Fest, an annual Austin gala held on the banks of the Colorado River, and though Aqua Fest is much more of a family affair than a barn-sized honky tonk like the one in Mexia is, he drew similar fans with similar thoughts on their minds.

George Strait says that he has no theories, either. "I don't think of myself as a sex symbol," he chuckles on the bus between shows in Mexia while his

Ace in the Hole Band plays a dance set of its own. I suspect, however, that he has some thoughts he's not letting on about, and not just because his wife of twelve years, Norma, who often travels with him when he's working near his central Texas home of San Marcos, is also on the bus. So I try a different tack. Does he think he has any image at all?

"Oh, I dunno. Do you think I do?"

"Not really."

"Well, I probably don't, then. I cer-

tainly don't see myself as having an image. I find all this stuff... I can't take it as seriously as some people, but I think it's really great that it's happening to me finally after trying to get someplace all these years. But I don't think I've really snapped to about how far I've gone and where I'm at right now.

"I don't mind it so much, but when you're tired like I was today, it's hard to get up there. It does feel weird—that's why I say that unless I really

"There was a period of time when I listened to nothing but Merle Haggard and George Jones, but then, there was a period of time when Haggard and Jones were the only two keeping pure country music alive."

think about it, I don't snap to it. But when I walk into a place like that record store and see all those people there, I go *whoa*. . . It's hard for me to picture myself that way. I picture myself the same way I always did. I don't really see myself as a star or anything."

Actually, although country fans can usually identify his songs more easily than they can identify the singer himself, George Strait has several possible images. Firstly, there is the teen idol image. This is tempered by his appeal to men as an ordinary guy—when Strait goes onstage, he changes into a fresh Western shirt and dons his white hat, but he's wearing the same Wrangler jeans he's had on all day. Then there's the fact that for much of his life, he's been a real cowboy—running a ranch, roping cattle, the whole bit. There's also the Texas angle, which he exploits with the zeal of a true Lone Star chauvinist.

Finally, there's the fact that since his 1981 breakthrough with "Unwound," Strait has cut a slew of hits like "Down and Out," "If You're Thinking You Want a Stranger," "Fool Hearted Memory," "Marina Del Rey," and "A Fire I Can't Put Out." These songs are sparsely produced, and they flaunt unashamedly country lyrics full of pain, passion, corn, and clever word plays like, "Every time you throw dirt on her/You lose a little ground." In an era of bland, baroque orchestrations and banal pop lyrics, this makes Strait, along with Ricky Skaggs, John Anderson and a few others, a guardian of the honky-tonk faith and a charter member of the new keep-it-country movement. As Jeff Nesin wrote in the *Village Voice* after a 1982 Strait show in New York, "His name sure is apt."

Strait is not an easy interview. He approaches the task with no frills, no fooling around, the same way he does an in-store promo or a concert, for it's all part of the same job. He answers questions promptly and directly, but as briefly as possible; he volunteers nothing extra. Some of this is probably shyness, and a reflection of his desire to let his music alone speak for him; but because he has so much savvy, some of it must be more calculated. At the same time, he laughs often, and his voice takes on an incredulous tone as he talks about his career, as if he really can't believe all that's happened to him

in the last couple of years—as though he's been only a passive participant suddenly thrust into the spotlight. This is an ingenuous stance that obscures how much drive and ambition he has underneath. Passive people don't become stars; they don't do hard manual labor on a ranch all day and then play the juke joints half the night six times a week as Strait did for many years. George has known for some time what he wanted and what he had to do to get it. Take the case of the Ace in the Hole Band.

Strait hooked up with the band in 1975, when he returned from military service in Hawaii and registered at Southwest Texas State University to get a degree in agriculture. "I knew I wanted to be a singer and I knew that would give me the opportunity, more free time, to do that," he says. "Plus a little extra money with the G.I. Bill and everything. Plus my dad wanted me to finish school real bad, and I think it was a good idea then. I was ready to go back to school. But mainly, it gave me more free time to work on getting a band together."

He put notices on campus bulletin boards advertising himself as a lead singer in search of a band. The four-piece Ace in the Hole Band responded, and George began singing with them. While still in college, they worked regularly in south and central Texas.

"We did a lot more swing than we do now. We always did the good old songs; we were never a Top 40 band. That was one of the things we wouldn't do, and it cost us a few jobs," Strait stresses. This is still a point of honor with him. "A lot of the stuff that was out at that time, we didn't consider it to be the kind of stuff that we thought of as real country music. I just don't like to go into a country dance hall expecting to hear a country band, and they're onstage playing 'Taking Care of Business' or stuff like that.

"But really, the band had no leader, or everybody was the leader, and that was a problem. I always wanted to go out on my own, you know. I told 'em that from the very beginning, that I was in the music business primarily for myself, that I didn't wanna be in another Asleep at the Wheel or something like that. I'm not trying to sound like I've got a big ego or anything, but that's the only reason I was in the business — I felt I could make records and sing. So every opportunity I got, I would go out on my own. I went to

Nashville three times before I signed with MCA."

He went first in 1977, cutting some demos (with songwriter friend Darryl Staedtler) that went nowhere. He went again in 1980, this time under the sponsorship of San Marcos nightclub owner Erv Woolsey, a former ABC-Dot promo man, who fixed George up with producer Blake Mevis. (Woolsey has since returned to the music biz himself.) The initial demos with Mevis were better than his first efforts, but still not good enough. But early in 1981, Mevis found "Unwound," George cut it, and the MCA contract followed quickly.

All this time, however, George had still been working with the Ace in the Hole Band; they had even cut three singles for D Records (owned by former George Jones manager and producer Pappy Daily, whose grandson Mike is Strait's steel player) under the name "Ace in the Hole Band, George Strait vocals." Suddenly the band's lead singer was recording hits in Nashville, using professional session musicians; suddenly (it seemed), the band itself was relegated to anonymous backup work behind a star singer.

"Well, you know, it was a touchy situation. I'm sure they had mixed emotions," Strait admits, "but there wasn't much arguing; there wasn't much to argue about. It all just kinda fell into place. I'm not a hard guy or anything. I didn't try to rub it in or anything like that. I didn't feel there was anything to rub in. And it turned out for the best. I think. It's a whole lot better now for everybody. *They're* certainly happy about it."

Which does seem to be the case, because three of the original four band members are still with Strait—Daily on steel, Terry Hale on bass, and Tommy Foote, who gave up drumming a few months back to become George's road manager. As Daily put it backstage after the Aqua Fest show, "This works out fine for us. We couldn't make a living working small Texas clubs forever, and we weren't good enough to go to Nashville and make it as sidemen; we wouldn't have wanted anything to do with Nashville anyhow. We know you gotta have a front man—no *bands* make it in country music—and working steady for George is a good job."

The band, meanwhile, has grown to seven pieces, and is one of the more flexible swing/traditional country

units on the circuit today. They have to be for their boss is no entertainer. He simply smiles at the intro of each song, sings it as true and straight (there's that word again) as he knows how, smiles at the end, and goes on to the next one. There is no between-songs patter, and there are no jokes and no skits, so the Ace in the Hole Band has to help carry the show more than most other bands.

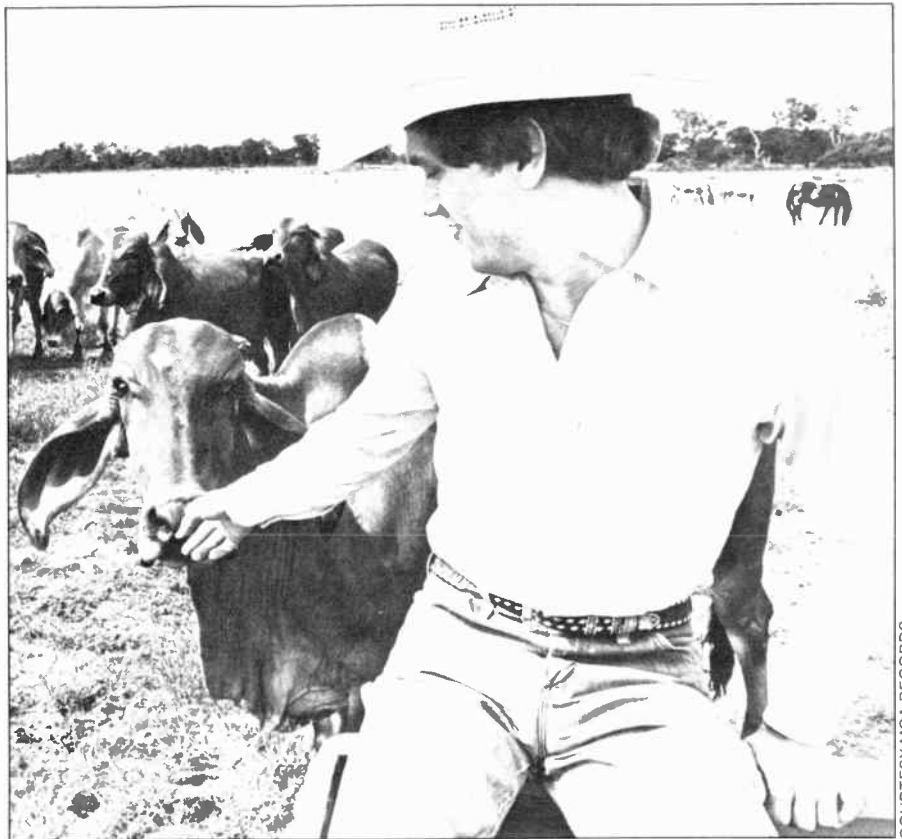
When Strait signed with MCA, he was long out of college and managing a ranch outside San Marcos; when "Unwound" shot into the charts, he quit that job to hit the road. By then, he had been singing nearly a decade. He was born in 1952 in Poteat, Texas, southwest of San Antonio. His parents divorced when he was in the fourth grade, and George and his brother were raised by their father down the road from Poteat in Pearsall. There is nothing musical in George's background. His father was a junior high school math teacher who had inherited a 2,000-acre cattle ranch forty miles away in Big Wells. Father and sons lived in town during the week and ranched on weekends; there wasn't so much as a record player in either home.

Strait sang briefly with a junior high school rock and roll combo that never made it out of the garage. There was country music all over the south Texas area where he grew up, and he developed an obsession with Bob Wills. He didn't take up singing seriously, however, until 1972. By then he had married Norma (twice—they ran off to Mexico when she was still a high school senior, then repeated the ceremony later in a Texas church to pacify their angry parents. They now have two kids, eleven-year-old Jennifer and two-year-old George Jr., or "Bubba."), joined the Army and was taking finance training at Fort Ben Harrison, Indiana.

"For some reason I got it in my mind that I could possibly make a career out of singing, so I bought me a guitar and songbooks, and I started learning and practicing, anything I could get my hands on. Until then, I didn't even know how to play guitar."

From Indiana, he was transferred to Hawaii, where he first played in what he remembers as "a terrible band, terrible—bad players, and I was so green, I'm sure I was just as bad as the rest of 'em." Then he lucked into a sweetheart deal. A general just back from Korea organized rock, soul, Hawaiian, and country bands to entertain on the numerous military bases on the islands. Strait won the lead singer's slot in the country band.

"So that's all I did for my last year in



COURTESY MCA RECORDS

Strait, a Texan and a cowboy too; he grew up working his father's cattle.

the Army," he laughs. "When we weren't playing for some kind of Army function, we were rehearsing. We stayed pretty current—we played a lot of Top 40 stuff—but we played a lot of older stuff, too. We'd work up two or three or four new songs a week. Oh yeah, and we shot a lot of golf. We were directly under the general; if we screwed up it was bad news. But he really left us alone to do what we wanted. We had a large rehearsal space and all the equipment we needed, and we were free to play civilian gigs on our own when we weren't playing for the Army."

That's where Strait began developing his style, and his taste for only the hardest of hard country songs. When he returned to the States and found the Ace in the Hole Band, he was specializing in oldies by Wills, Johnny Bush, Ray Price and the like. "There was a period of time when I listened to nothing but Merle Haggard and George Jones," he says, "but then, there was a period of time when Haggard and Jones were the only two keeping pure country music alive."

Strait feels strongly about this issue—so strongly, in fact, that after cutting two albums with producer Blake Mevis, he switched to Merle Haggard's producer, Ray Baker, because of it. "We just got to where, you know, he wanted a little bit different direction than what I did," he says. "Blake and I are still friends, but we just thought it was

best for both of us if we just parted ways. He was more interested in a more contemporary-type sound for me. He wanted broader appeal or something. And I just wanted to do straight old country songs.

"I don't think there's anything autobiographical about my material, unless it's subconsciously," he adds. "I just look for a song I like, and when I hear it, I know it right away. I don't even look for any particular thing in a song, nothing I can put my finger on. I just relate to them as country songs, and I like good country music. I think of it as a hook and a good strong melody; that's pretty much the kind of song I look for, a song with a story."

He doesn't write many songs himself, however, and he doesn't expect to: "I Can't See Texas From Here" is his only original to make it to wax so far. It's not just that Strait lacks confidence in his writing, either; he also lacks interest. He'd rather be watching soap operas on the tube, thank you. Or movies on video. Or football games. Anything, really. Does this mean that George Strait, neo-traditional country singer and former ranch manager, is at heart a lazy man?

"Yeah," he laughs again, a little longer and a little louder. "Gettin' a whole lot lazier, too. I go out and sing, get back in the bus and sit down, travel down the road, get out, go sing, get back in the bus. That's what I do." ■

Roundup '83

RISING STARS

This article is not about new artists. It's about developing artists. There's a difference.

Developing artists are not unknown. They aren't, for the most part, even new. Typically, they've had hit records. A couple have even managed a Number One. You'll see their records on truckstop jukeboxes. Although you may not recognize their faces, their voices are familiar. In varying degrees, they have gained national acceptance.

However, they are not stars. They aren't household names. They aren't headlining coliseums on their own box-office draw. They haven't, to coin a phrase, "made it" yet. But they are up-and-coming heavyweights, artists predicted to go the distance, promising contenders on whom the smart money is betting. These are the country artists likely to make big noise in coming months. Whatever success they've already achieved, they've got a lot more ahead.

As for the current crop of

developing stars, it seems unusually healthy. Each of the acts spotlighted in this article—Karen Brooks, Gary Morris, Steve Wariner, Gus Hardin, Deborah Allen and Leon Everette—has talent, spunk, individuality, charisma. They've borrowed freely from other musical styles without losing legitimacy. Their music isn't watered down or compromised. In differing amounts, they've combined country, rhythm-and-blues, soul, rock and pop. An intriguing mix, and one that shows how far country's appeal has spread. Ten years ago, country radio probably wouldn't have touched a record by these artists—but then, ten years ago, these artists probably wouldn't have considered singing country music. That would have been country's loss.

Karen Brooks

Getting Karen Brooks off horseback long enough to discuss her music isn't easy. Four-legged interviewers stand a

stronger chance with this rangy Texas-bred singer/songwriter, who once went by the stage name of "Dallas" Brooks. Two-legged interviewers who can ride are likely to see Brooks at her most natural, cantering the fences of the Franklin, Tennessee, farm she shares with rancher/husband Jack Lawrence.

Or you can catch her hanging out in the Warner Bros. publishing offices on Music Row, bantering with the other (mostly male) writers. Brooks fits in easily—"one of the guys." There's plenty of talk about music, plus fragments of unfinished songs, maybe also a new tune Karen's got drifting through her mind.

Brooks is working on her second album. The first, *Walk On*, snapped critics to attention, earning enviable reviews. She had three successful singles from the album; the initial release, "New Way Out," went Top Twenty. A studio duet between Brooks and T.G. Sheppard, "Fakin' Love," gave Karen a taste of the Number One spot. As a writer for other singers, she's proven her worth with cuts like "Couldn't Do Nothin' Right" for Rosanne Cash, and "Tennessee Rose" by Emmylou Harris.

Karen Brooks is a definite high roller in the country sweepstakes. Frank, offbeat, wryly humorous, she has a husky tone and a laconic way of phrasing her words, coolly intense yet distant. If there were such an animal as FM/AOR country, this artist would be at the top of the playlists.

Gary Morris

Talk about Gary Morris and you're talking about a stick of dynamite with a lighted fuse.

His is a volatile, energetic country, full of pop overtones, appealing ballads and fast-paced rockers with razor-edged harmonies. He's also got (pardon us) s-e-x appeal.

Like Karen Brooks, Morris writes for Warner Bros. Music and records for Warner Bros.



Gary Morris

Records. His shaggy good looks, soaring vocal range and magnetic stage presence would have made him an ideal candidate for pop stardom had he so chosen. But Gary insists that his first love is country music. It's what he grew up on in Texas, what he performed when he moved to Colorado, what he's building his career on now that he lives in Nashville.

His string of hits gets longer with each new release: "Don't Look Back," "Heading For a Heartache," "Velvet Chains," "Dreams Die Hard." With the release of "The Love She Found in Me," he took a step up the ladder, shifting toward a more solid, sophisticated sound, repeated again on "Wind Beneath My Wings."

Morris's first album glued itself to *Billboard's* album charts for six months. His second, *Why Lady Why*, shot into the top of the same chart shortly after it was shipped to stores. This past summer, Morris and his high-energy band toured almost non-stop.



Karen Brooks

proving their versatility when they opened several concerts for Australia's pop Little River Band.

Charisma and powerhouse vocal performances give Gary Morris a clear lead in the race for stardom.

Steve Wariner

Wariner isn't exactly new to country fans. He's been recording for RCA since 1978. But his career has moved slowly: despite a Number One with "All Roads Lead to You" and his popular signature tune, "Kansas City Lights," Wariner has at times been tagged as a Glen Campbell sound-alike mired in a sea of less-than-exciting country-pop ballads.

That's changing. Wariner is breaking out musically, shaking free of previous restraints on stage and in the studio. He's using a band in his re-designed live shows, often rocking out with surprising force between the gentler numbers.

Wariner gives credit to producers Tony Brown and Norro Wilson, who have taken over his studio recording, for helping him shift direction. "I don't think people will be comparing me to Glen Campbell now," he says. That's an understatement. Steve's cutting things closer to the bone now, going for a brighter, fresher, more muscular sound.

It was his lightning-fingered

guitar skills that first brought him to the attention of Chet Atkins, who produced his early RCA singles. Wariner is a highly-polished instrumentalist: unlike most Nashville-bound hopefuls, he arrived in town back in 1973 already employed—as a bass player for Dottie West. Later, he joined Bob Luman's band and worked with Luman both on the road and in the studio.

Wariner's affable charm, vigorous performances and full-throated style give him all the ammunition he'll need to rise to the top.

Gus Hardin

Hardin sounds like what might have happened if Aretha Franklin had run out of money in Nashville on the way to Muscle Shoals. This diminutive singer with the boy's name has an unforgettable belt-strapper of a voice: tough, raw, bruised, whiskey-bent and hellbound between blues and country, with rock slugging it out for second place.

Hardin skyrocketed onto the charts with her first record, "After the Last Goodbye," proving that country/soul can survive. One of the newest artists on RCA, she's already doing 99% of her shows in coliseums and auditoriums, opening for such macho acts as Hank Williams Jr., David Allan Coe and Alabama.



Gus Hardin

"There aren't a lot of other females who can play to their crowds, I guess," Hardin says with a chuckle. "I'm fortunate to fall in a category where I'm used to playing for anybody. It's all those years in night-clubs."

Her life reads like a country movie script: married six times (three times by the age of 23), she had a daughter to support through club gigs and bar dates where beer brawls alternated with the scheduled entertainment. Hardin was virtually unknown outside her native Oklahoma until a year ago; today, Muscle Shoals producer Rich Hall candidly calls Gus "the most exciting singer I've worked with in years," and compares her with Aretha. Hall ought to know: he worked with the original.

Hardin sings like a woman who's lived all her lyrics. Brush away the cigarette haze from her voice, and still there's the gutsy, defiant vulnerability, the soul-shivering passion that makes her unique. "People are just now getting used to who Gus Hardin is," she says dryly. "They aren't asking, 'Is *he* here yet?' now." Could be the beginnings of superstardom for this powerhouse.

Deborah Allen

Saucer-eyed Allen has an innocence in her high sweet soprano reminiscent of Dolly's cornflower-drenched Appalachian purity. But Allen's not from the rural mountains of East Tennessee; she's from the other side of the state, over by the blues bedrock of Memphis.

When Allen signed with RCA halfway through the year, it was a homecoming of sorts.

Steve Wariner

She almost signed with the label in 1979, back when she was overlubbing her voice onto old Jim Reeves tracks with producer Ray Baker. The unlikely combination worked: disc jockeys played their five singles and wondered aloud about the identity of the mystery female voice.

Deborah resisted Nipper's advances, signing instead with Capitol. It wasn't a particularly rewarding move. Both label and artist had trouble nailing down a direction. Her singles were well enough received, but failed to ignite her career. Her only album for Capitol was titled, aptly enough, *Trouble in Paradise*. She fared better as a songwriter, racking up a collection of cuts by artists as diversified as Diana Ross, John Conlee, Sheena Easton and Tammy Wynette.



Deborah Allen

Allen, one of the few country singers ever to tour the Soviet Union (with Opryland USA), made her debut on RCA this fall with a strongly pop-flavored song she co-wrote, "Baby, I Lied." It was an immediate success and paved the way for a mini-album produced by husband/writing partner Rafe VanHoy. She typifies today's new Nashville performer: contemporary and capable of multi-format accomplishments. Expect to hear a lot more from Deborah.

Leon Everette

Everette was born in South Carolina and spent part of his



childhood in Queens, New York. Godawmighty, that's Long Island. What kind of country singer comes from Long Island?

Leon Everette is unafraid of doing things his way, in his own time, in his own style. An



Leon Everette

artist unparalyzed by the thought of handling his own production, he selects his own material and makes his own career decisions.

Everette came into the big leagues through the back door of a small independent label, Orlando Records, formed by Everette's manager expressly to release his product. The play worked; after a promising

debut on the Country Radio Seminar's New Faces Show in 1980, RCA picked the singer up.

Everette has had ten Top Ten singles, ranging from "Over" on Orlando to nine consecutive hits on RCA. His country is straightforward, invigorating, crisp, clean. After several years of producing himself, Everette is now in the studio with Blake Mevis, a producer first recommended by the record company, then chosen by Everette when he realized that every record of Mevis's he heard on the radio was one "I'd find myself turning up twice as loud."

He credits Mevis with "taking me in a direction I didn't think I could go... more refreshing, more stylized, with an easy crossover feel." Everette believes that he's on the brink of the elusive Number One single this year: "I think I'm ready. My idea of success is to be Kenny Rogers on stage, then drive into my little hometown in South Carolina, barefoot in my '69 Chevy pickup, and be just ol' Leon Everette."

—KIP KIRBY

MOVIES

There has been a rash of movies with country music connections in recent years. Generally, they exploit the connection. Sometimes that makes good entertainment, as it does when Burt Reynolds romps through *Smokey and the Bandit Number X*. Sometimes, however, it is a pitiful, foolish insult, as it was in Clint Eastwood's *Honky Tonk Man*.

In that disastrous epic, ol' Clint plays a singer/songwriter whose personality seems loosely based on ol' Hank—although the movie is set in the Dust Bowl 1930s. Nothing wrong so far, but when ol' Clint arrives for his Grand Ole Opry audition, for instance, he goes to the Ryman Auditorium. The Opry didn't move to the Ryman until 1943. Once there, he says that he's been playing on the Louisiana Hayride, which didn't exist until 1948. This kind of easily avoidable historical inaccuracy, coupled

with Snuff Garrett's music—which sounds more like western Los Angeles in the Seventies than western Oklahoma in the Thirties—reflects nothing but scorn for the audience. That means *you*.

There are, however, exceptions which make the country music/movie connection worthwhile. Surprisingly, some of the best country music-connected movies have appeared on network television. CBS, for example, appears to have the good sense to let Johnny Cash pick good scripts. Cash has drawing power, and is a credible actor in the right role. His performance in *The Pride of Jesse Hallam* won him an Emmy nomination for his portrayal of an illiterate Kentucky farmer who has to move to Cincinnati to get medical care for his child. The upheaval he and his family face in dealing with urban life, and his struggle to learn to read, made a

gripping story.

Cash's last TV movie, *Murder in Coweta County*, cast him as a county sheriff determined to track down and bring to justice the murderer of a white sharecropper. The murderer turns out to be a local bigwig, and in the end he is convicted on the hard-won testimony of two black field hands. The script of this excellent drama was based on real life—the actual case was the first occasion in the history of the South when a white man was convicted of a felony on the testimony of blacks—and Cash cared deeply about the film. In fact, he had been trying for years to see the project reach fruition.

His concern showed through in every aspect of the production: in his own stern, surprisingly skillful portrayal of the sheriff; in the often hilarious performance by June Carter as a loony backwoods clairvoyant; in the accuracy of the locations and the dialogue, and finally in the sense of outrage (and justice) which pervaded the film.

Another excellent TV movie was *Living Proof*, the Hank Williams, Jr. autobiography co-written by *Country Music* Editor-at-large Michael Bane.

Hank, Jr.'s real-life story is of course a made-for-TV melodrama waiting for a producer and crew: Son of Showbiz Legend/Folk Hero Serves the Sacred Memory, Grows to Manhood, Struggles for His Own Identity, Comes to Pieces in Spectacular Fashion, Looks Death in the Face, Realizes the Value of Life, Becomes His Own Man At Last, Lives Happily Ever After (?). This means that the story is an absolute goldmine of clichés, and it is to the credit of everybody involved in the production (not least Richard Thomas, John-boy himself, as Hank Jr.) that the film ended up as something more than the latest *Dynasty*-re-run. Thomas played the role like a real adult, and enough true grit made it to the final cut to render the product quite convincing. Michael Bane and even Hank, Jr. himself were not appalled. "It got the point across to me," said Bocephus, "so I think it did to everybody else."

By contrast the television

treatment of another great story, Tammy Wynette's book *Stand By Your Man*, missed an opportunity for excellence by mis-casting the George Jones role and twisting the story too much. Still, it was worth watching.

Elsewhere, in "real" movie-land, *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas* put Dolly Parton up there on the silver screen for a rollicking theatrical good time with good ol' Burt Reynolds. Good for Dolly, and good entertainment—but nothing at all to do with country music. And of course we must also mention *Urban Cowboy*, the movie for non-cowboys which launched a few million pairs of boots onto the thoroughfares of big cities everywhere, and made it to TV in '83. So there; we mentioned it.

Fortunately, picking the winner from recent Hollywood efforts is easy. *Tender Mercies* is, hands down, the best movie ever made about the people who write, sing, and listen to country music.

—THE EDITORS

Tender Mercies

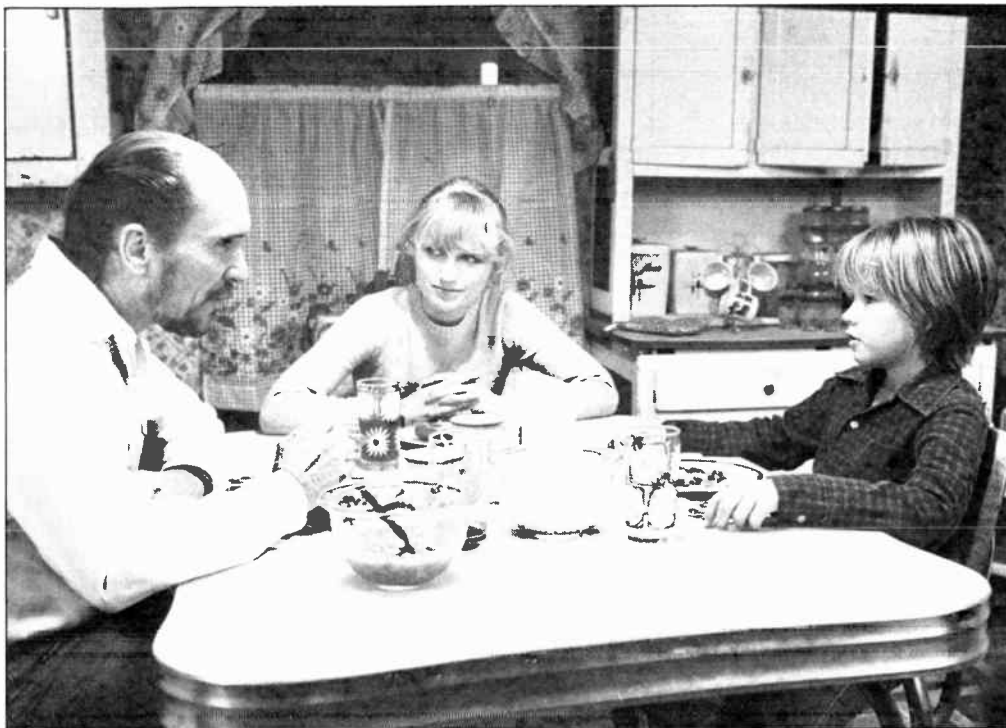
T*ender Mercies* is a beautiful, authentic movie. It presents a portrait of a part of this country that many will recognize: small town, vast land, and the people who live there. These people are connected to the America of the big cities and suburbs in many ways—particularly in the entertainment they enjoy—but they have their own sense of how to do things, how to treat people, how to speak. Their life, their music, and their religion are important in *Tender Mercies*. Screenwriter Horton Foote and Bruce Beresford, the director, present all this without distortion; so much, so sympathetically.

The movie's story centers on Mac Sledge, a middle-aged country music star played by Robert Duvall. Sledge has been troubled by personal problems, particularly drinking. He drifts into the Mariposa Motel, a small clapboard affair at the crossroads near a central Texas town, and is abandoned by a travelling and drinking companion. He wakes up hung-over, broke and alone. The story picks up at that point.

Sledge goes to work for Rosa Lee, the young woman who runs the motel, played by Tess Harper, and eventually marries her. He gradually becomes a father to her 8-to-10 year old son. He also begins writing songs again, and, in a small way, re-enters the world of performing.

Sledge's songs, all but one of them sung by Duvall, dominate the sound track—when it is not dominated by the Texas wind—and Duvall's singing is remarkably good. His voice is true and penetrating, his delivery restrained, emotional but subdued, not flamboyant; the style is completely in character. Duvall may have been listening to George Jones. It must have been tempting to think about using Jones or some other well-known voice to sing the songs, but it is typical of the movie that the choice was made to go with things as they were. One touch—among many—of authenticity. Duvall must have been pleased.

The high-pressure world of professional singing which Sledge has left behind appears in the film. Sledge's ex-wife, Dixie, played by Betty Buckley, sings at the Grapevine Auditorium, a real country music hall not far from the town where the fictional Mariposa is located. Sledge goes to hear her. She sings two of her songs which seem to be about him, although she does not know that he is listening. He looks uncomfortable during the performance and leaves in the middle. He tries to see his daughter backstage but instead runs into Dixie. They fight. Mac leaves after speaking briefly with Dixie's manager, an old friend, outside. Every detail of the backstage scenes rings true: the corridors, the clothes, the manner of the manager. This is the real world of the professional touring artist. This world appears again near the end of the film, when Sledge's daughter dies in an auto accident and Sledge goes to Dixie's home for the funeral. The decor of the house, particularly Dixie's bedroom where she lies grief-stricken, is perfect again. This is how these homes look. The real world. It may seem painful that Sledge does not embrace his former wife as she lies



grieving in the bedroom, but he does not. This may have been Duvall's decision. People are not perfect, and he is playing a person.

The small-time world of country music, local artists hoping to make it big, is also represented in *Tender Mercies* by four young men with their own band who come looking for Sledge at the Mariposa. These boys are endearing. Their combination of deference and admiration is just what Sledge needs. Gradually he accepts them. He lets them use one of his songs, and they persuade him to perform with them at a local dance hall. This occasion is a breakthrough for Sledge. He regains his sense of himself as a performer. He rejects the advances of Dixie's manager, hot for him now that his talent is returning. He tosses down the big-timer's money in front of the faded Purina feed store on the small town's dusty street, and goes on to pursue his fortunes with the four young men. It is an interesting decision, as low-key and "on key" as the entire movie.

As good as the music and the vision of the music world are in *Tender Mercies*, the portrait of the land and people is even more interesting and satisfying. The land itself dominates the movie. Anyone who has ever been in Texas or any

of the High Plains states (or for that matter the "Outback" of Australia, director Bruce Beresford's native land) knows how overpowering that combination of wide flat land and enormous sky can be. A number of scenes in the film, including several with rather intimate or important dialogue, take place outdoors. Typically these scenes begin or end with the camera looking levelly across long stretches of ground towards the horizon. Weeds loom in the foreground. Sometimes clouds ride above. Over it all is the monotonous wind, bending the trees, blowing people's hair and their clothing. People who live in places like this Texas crossroads know what it is like to be exposed day after day to that enormous sky, those endless vistas, that relentless wind. They know what it is to cope with that light, that dust, that heat, that cold. It gives many of them a certain low-key quality. It is as if they have made an accommodation to something elemental.

To be true to the style and temper of the people involved, *Tender Mercies* has retained an almost documentary quality. There is almost no drama in this movie. Major decisions by the main characters are made off-camera. Only the effects or the results are seen. The events themselves are not

presented as highly dramatic incidents but as moves made in life, as people often make them, not on impulse exactly, but between breakfast and dinner, as part of the context of a day, or in response to a felt need that may or may not have been expressed in words. Mack Sledge and Rosa Lee, for instance embark initially on a marriage of convenience, although it ends up going far beyond that. They discuss getting married in a rather abrupt conversation held outdoors. No decision is reached. When we see them again, they are married. Similarly, when Sledge decides to join Rosa Lee's church, we do not see the soul-searching or the conversations that may have preceded this step. We see the event: baptism by immersion, totally unannounced, coming right after Rosa Lee's son's immersion. Shocking to see Duvall's old bald head emerge from that font. The audience giggles, it is so unexpected, but this is happy laughter, the way we laugh at ourselves when we have done something right in spite of everything. Following the baptism there is some rather important conversation between Sledge and the boy, but this too is low-key, just part of an invisible process. It happens in the pickup truck as Sledge, Rosa Lee and the boy are driving home, and it is

very brief. "Do you feel different? We're supposed to feel different." "No...not yet."

Tender Mercies does not seem to want to be dramatic. Instead, everybody involved seems to be trying to capture people as they are, using particular settings and situations as vehicles to accomplish this purpose.

In a *Saturday Evening Post* article, Horton Foote, who wrote the original screenplay, commented on his restrained approach to his material.

"It's just how I write," he said. "I've been told often that it's not commercial, but that's how I do it, and I'm stuck with it. When I try it the other way, I get into trouble. I'm not against jazzing things up; I just don't know anything about it! Some of those quiet long shots in *Tender Mercies* make me nervous. But if that's your talent, that's your talent..."

Foote also told David Sterritt, who wrote the article, that the idea for the story came from his own life. His nephew was in a local band, like the four young men in the film, and they were helped by an older singer similar to Mac Sledge.

The importance of the movie's "real" feel has been underscored by Robert Duvall in a *Rolling Stone* interview with Robert Ward.

"Just say this," said Duvall. "Just say it's got to be real. That's what I'm trying to do. And that's hard. I drove over six hundred miles of road in Texas listening to accents, watching how people held their bodies, talking to farmers. Man, I wanted my character to be real. But I loved it, too. I loved talking to those people. You know, that's what my acting is all about. Dignity. Trying to find the dignity in the man...The center, and especially the South of this country, have been patronized and made fun of...If I can do anything at all in my work to show what dignity is in the common man, then that's what my life is really all about."

Taken from this point of view, the movie is a success, totally.

There are some dramatic moments in *Tender Mercies*, revolving mostly around Sledge's daughter Sue Anne, played by Ellen Barkin. The renown-

ed New York movie critic Pauline Kael likes Sue Anne's scenes more than any others in the movie. She finds Duvall and the rest uninteresting—too subdued. Duvall knows that Kael is not moved by what interests him. Speaking of his performance in *True Confessions*, which Kael also criticized as being "too low-key," Duvall said (again in *Rolling Stone*), "Things have to be lifelike. Like pauses. There are pauses in life, you see, when you and I are talking, and there are beats in scenes that really make them work."

There are many pauses in *Tender Mercies*, and certainly many—for some people too many—in the reunion scene that takes place between Mac and his daughter in Rosa Lee's living room. Ellen Barkin brings a great deal of intensity and an outspoken quality to the scene, but the character she plays is drawn from the big-city, big-time, super-highway world, where life is more flamboyant and emotions are more openly expressed. Sue Anne knows her daddy has responded to her in that tense, strained scene even though he has said very little, and the song Sledge sings afterwards tells us this also. Besides, Sue Anne's need to reach him overpowers any gaps in the situation. She plans to return a few days later with her husband, and she does return, but Sledge is gone and only Rosa Lee is at home. Sue Anne borrows money. As she drives too fast out of the driveway of the motel, gravel spurted from the tires of her fast, sporty car, we know there's trouble coming.

Sue Anne's death puts Sledge's new-found sense of well-being and emotional satisfaction to the test. The crisis has nothing to do with his professional development as a songwriter and singer. The issue is, if there really is some tenderness and some mercy in this life, coming from whatever direction—as his experience with Rosa Lee has led him to expect—then how come this tragedy? After the funeral, which he attends alone, Sledge puts this question to Rosa Lee. She cannot answer. There is no answer to this question. It is something people think about and sing about forever. In the words of

one of Mac's own songs, "It's so hard to face reality." Rosa Lee is sad and sorry for Mac, but she does not appear unduly frustrated or upset. She leaves him to his grief in the garden, hacking at the earth—and at the vegetables in it—with a hoe. Her exit expresses her understanding. Talking is not what's needed.

This scene has taken place outdoors. Sledge is left with the land and the wind.

The final scene also takes place outdoors. It is the emotional and visual conclusion of the movie. After his talk with Rosa Lee, Mac briefly re-enters the house—a house which, like all the other interiors, including the dance hall and the church, is perfect for the place and the people. He takes the football he has brought back

from his trip as a present for his step-son and goes out to meet the school bus. The boy steps off the bus, and the two of them start playing catch. Higher and higher goes the football, longer and longer the throws. Sledge's face becomes animated. Both the boy and man are laughing, calling. The camera has moved way back, and we can just barely hear them. The camera recedes even further until the whole scene becomes framed by the sky—blue sky with white clouds in it, the land dun-colored and golden, the white buildings isolated on the prairie, the father and son, and the wind. Like the prairie grass that comes up each year out of the old shaft, new life comes up out of the old.

—HELEN BARNARD

BOOKS

The current batch of country music books is a mixed bag. We'll begin with the worst of them.

So far, there has been no real biography of Waylon Jennings. R. Serge Denisoff's *Waylon: A Biography* (University of Tennessee Press) is meant to be just that. It isn't. Denisoff, an Ohio sociology professor, has given us 304 pages which add up to an unmitigated disaster. Badly written, shallow and often pretentious, the book reflects an inadequate understanding of both Waylon himself and country music as a whole.

The bulk of Denisoff's research was accomplished by plowing through reams of newspaper and magazine clips, so it is not surprising that the book seems more like a mish-mash of other people's thoughts than a cohesive narrative. Denisoff did a few significant interviews (most notably with Waylon's brother Tommy and ex-manager Neil Reshin), but they don't really help. The text is loaded with clichés, abortive attempts at cleverness, and simplistic judgments. The digressions into subjects like California country-rock hurt more than help, and most of the photos are irrelevant to

Waylon's life and career.

Among Denisoff's conclusions rests a real gem. On pages 232-33 he states, "Contributors to...*Country Music Magazine* were as intolerant of the traditional country sound as the old-timers were of the progressives." That is an amazing statement: Although Denisoff cited numerous articles from this magazine that seem to support his view, apparently he never read enough of the other stories to note either our regular coverage of "traditional" artists or our longtime understanding of the fact that Waylon and company have a great deal in common with Bob Wills, Hank, Lefty and the rest. Hard-core Waylon fans might enjoy this book, but in the end, there is still no definitive Waylon biography.

Great Balls of Fire: The Uncensored Story of Jerry Lee Lewis (Quill) comes from a well-qualified author: the Killer's third wife and second cousin, Myra Gail. Their 1958 marriage, which took place when she was just thirteen, was a *cause celebre* that derailed his career for nearly a decade. Where Nick Tosches' excellent *Hellfire* was a biographical expedition into Jerry Lee's soul, Myra Gail has opt-

ed for straight narrative, often far more outrageous than one might expect. The accounts of Jerry Lee's draft registration day and the Australian tour where he got teen heart-throb Paul Anka loaded on beer are hilarious.

Myra Gail's account of her transition from cousin to lover to spouse is interesting, but the book takes on a soap opera tone as it covers the couple's worsening domestic situation. Myra Gail discusses the string of tragic deaths in Jerry Lee's family, putting his recent misfortunes in clearer perspective, but at times she tells us more than we need to know. Four paragraphs on a minor court battle with ex-wife Jane is about three paragraphs too many.

And although this is biography, the narrative peters out after describing the couple's 1971 divorce, then sputters towards an unsatisfying conclusion. Neither Myra Gail or collaborator Murray Silver write on Tosches' level, but the two books compliment each other. Read Tosches for the spirit, Myra Gail for the detail.

Archie Campbell: An Autobiography (Memphis State University Press) is a real sleeper. Campbell's droll humor may pervade *Hec-Haw* these days, but his background was no joke. Growing up poor in East Tennessee, he made it to college but quit just before graduating because he couldn't afford new clothes for the ceremonies. The bad times continued as he drifted on the road during the Depression. After he settled in Knoxville, his bad luck continued. His own band fired him; for a time he nearly starved. And his success as a comedian at WNOX Radio was no comfort; his first marriage foundered, and financial irresponsibility left him deep in debt. But he climbed out, moved to the Opry, and in 1969 joined the original cast of *Hec-Haw*.

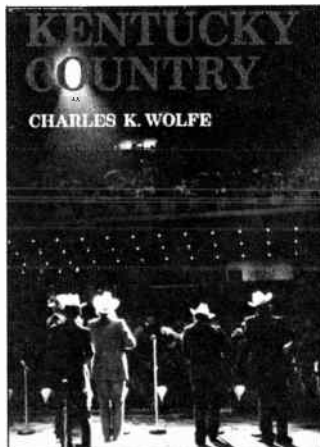
The early chapters are as compelling as the best parts of *Coal Miner's Daughter*, while the later chapters are less impressive, for the more successful Archie becomes the less he has to say. The three chapters on *Hec-Haw* are long on platitudes and short on substance (aside from some good Junior

Samples anecdotes). But don't let this deter you: this book deserves a wider audience than it'll ever get.

Roy Acuff's Nashville by Roy Acuff with Bill Neely (Perigee) combines autobiography and portraits of fellow performers. The early chapters are simply superb. Acuff's tales of his early days are well-crafted (it seems that he had a less pious side then, enjoying both his booze and a good fistfight on occasion), and his recollections of DeFord Bailey, Uncle Dave Macon and the Delmore Brothers are revealing. So is his story of a young Minnie Pearl, uncomfortable in her new, countrified character, who bombed so often that he had to drop her from his show until she gained confidence.

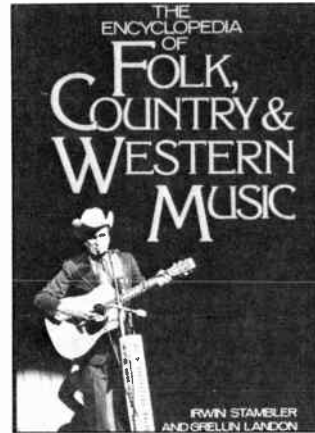
The book has some inaccuracies. For example, Acuff insists that he never changed his band's structure, but in fact he electrified the guitars and dropped the trademark Dobro sound for a time in the Fifties. Even so, this book has considerable merit, faults and all.

Less worthy is George William Koon's *Hank Williams:*



A Bio-Bibliography (Greenwood). Of 180 pages, the bibliography (a list of books and articles about Hank) consumes four-and-a-half pages. The rest are pure padding. A sixty-page Hank biography largely re-hashes facts from the Roger Williams and Jay Caress books, and particularly from Koon's favorite, Chet Flippo's fictionalized non-biography. Koon's attempts to analyze Hank's songs are amateur psychology at its worst. His interviews are laden with remarkably stupid questions ("Did Hank

ever drink to get happy?" is one gem), and while the discography purports to "clarify and heighten information about Hank's recording career" (whatever that means), it is little more than a list of various singles and albums. Only the previously unpublished photos



(including a beauty of Hank as a thirteen-year-old punk) are worthwhile. At \$29.95 the book is no bargain, and only somebody desperate for every published word about Hank could possibly want it.

Charles Wolfe's *Kentucky Country* (University of Kentucky Press) is a different proposition entirely. The book covers the influence of Kentucky on country music through the achievements of its performers. In the hands of a lesser author, this could be pretty boring, but Wolfe's greatest strength is the accessibility of his writing. Well-organized, witty and lucid, drawing on solid analysis and telling anecdotes, this is a book from which both the casual fan and the serious scholar can learn.

Wolfe begins with an impressive story of a rediscovered song written to commemorate a sensational 1896 Kentucky murder, which leads into a fine essay on the development of traditional Kentucky songs. Then he examines the contributions of Kentucky performers—old-time fiddler Doc Roberts and singer Buell Kazee, Thirties stars like Bradley Kincaid, Forties performers such as Cousin Enemy, Molly O'Day, Grandpa Jones, Red Foley and Merle Travis, and contemporary Kentucky-bred artists Loretta Lynn, the Osborne Brothers, Ricky Skaggs and John Conlee. Although

the text runs only 175 pages, Wolfe makes every word count.

Country music reference works are in short supply these days. Dellar and Thompson's encyclopedia is out of print, but Irwin Stambler and Grelun Landon's *Encyclopedia of Folk, Country and Western Music* (St. Martin's) was recently revised and re-published. New entries expand it to more than nine hundred pages, making this perhaps the ultimate current reference work on this subject. Scores of major and minor artists are covered, there are complete listings of various awards (CMA, ACM, NARAS), and much of the artist data was obtained by direct interviews. The illustrations are excellent; they too have been updated.

There are some drawbacks, however. I question the wisdom of including folk music in this book. Since the folk listings include everyone from John Jacob Niles to the Eagles, such artists might better be covered in a separate book. Also, Stambler and Landon scramble their priorities occasionally. Jazz violinist Stephane Grappelli is inexplicably included, as are inconsequential country artists like singer/actress Mary Kay Place, but Ricky Skaggs, Carlene Carter and John Anderson are ignored. Bob Wills's 1960s vocalist, Leon Rausch, is given a generous entry while Tommy Duncan, Wills's most important vocalist, gets nothing. There are also factual errors that should have been caught, and while you will find entries about all sorts of obscure artists, if you're looking for any on Johnny Horton, Cowboy Copas or Smokey Rogers, you won't find them. Despite all these problems and the book's \$50 price tag, it is the best reference work available.

Less costly, but highly entertaining, is *The Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum*, published by the Country Music Foundation Press. It features beautiful color photos of selected exhibits, thumbnail sketches of various musical styles, and a complete listing of all Hall of Fame members through 1982 with their official color portraits. This is a nice way to tour the museum from your living room. ■

20 QUESTIONS WITH SYLVIA



COURTESY RCA RECORDS

Sylvia, the one-name phenomenon, has gone from being a Music Row secretary to being a Music Row superstar in just four short years. This year, her song "Nobody" was the only country single to sell more than one million copies. Has success spoiled Sylvia? And what happened to her second name anyway?

by Michael Bane and Mary Ellen Moore

1

Why do you use only one name?

My last name is Kirby, and my producers thought Sylvia Kirby... Well, that just doesn't cut it, so I suggested "Sylvia."

2

Whom do you admire most in country music?

I have to say I've learned a lot from a lot of different people. My producer, Tom Collins, produces Barbara Mandrell, so when I was his secretary I had kind of a ringside seat watching how she handled her business and recording. So that was an education, and I really learned a lot from her. I admire her not only for her talent but for her business sense. And Dolly Parton. I really admire Dolly because I met her once.

3

Didn't you draw Dolly's portrait?

Yes, I drew it from an album cover. In Indiana where I grew up, there's a place called the Little Nashville Opry House. I went there when Dolly was performing, and I knocked on the door of her bus to give her the portrait. She started talking to me, and I asked her how to get started. She was real honest with me. She said, 'Hon, my whole family's trying to get started,' and she told me how hard it was. *But* she was very encouraging, and she told me not to let anybody tell me I couldn't do it, because if I worked real hard, maybe I could. And I carried her words with me and was influenced by her encouragement and honesty.

4

Do you consider yourself a sex symbol?

No. No. I would worry about someone who thought of themselves as a sex symbol, wouldn't you? I'd really worry about them.

5

Is life on the road especially hard for a girl singer?

I don't complain. I chose this lifestyle, and I love it. I like to travel. But I do think it's tougher on a girl because I spend two-and-a-half or three hours a day on make-up and hair, and all that, to get ready. So I lose a lot of sleep to all those hours I have to spend on make-up. And I think that's important, to look good. I mean, I don't go out to the mailbox without make-up on. But I think that's the only way life on the road is harder on a girl singer.

6

Does any incident on the road stand out in your memory?

You always hear stories about entertainers who fall off the stage. Well, I finally fell off the stage this summer. I thought it was funny.

7

How are you involved with the Dream Makers?

The Dream Makers work with children who have a life-threatening disease, not necessarily something fatal, and what they do is take these children and find out what their dreams are. Maybe they want to meet Kenny Rogers. Or maybe they want to go to Disney Land. So, the Dream Makers will arrange this—they make the children's dreams come true. I spent one day with a little girl who had leukemia. Her dream was to meet me—which I thought was really neat! We had a great time.

8

Speaking of children...don't you collect dolls?

Yes (*laughs*). I've been collecting them for a year and have fifty now. They're porcelain, but they're not antique. A lot of people ask me if they are antique. I'll go around looking for them, and sometimes they'll



just look at me and say (*in a squeaky little voice*), "Take me home." When they do that, I just can't *not* take them home.

9

Do you have a favorite doll?

I have to say that the very first doll I bought is my favorite. Her name is Pouty. She's beautiful.

10

Do you have any pets?

No, I'm not home enough, and it wouldn't be right. But someday I'm going to have a real family—children *and* a dog.

11

Weren't you recently divorced?

I call it unmarried. You know why? I think of it as a positive thing. I'm a positive person, and divorce sounds so negative and bad. But I don't think it was bad. I just got married too young. (*She was twenty*). He was much older than me and basically, we grew apart. But we're still real good friends. And I know I'm a lot happier.

12

You were out looking at houses today. Are you planning on buying in Nashville?

Yes. This is the only place that I would want to make a permanent residence. I might like to have a home in Los Angeles or an apartment in New York sometime, depending on my



career, but I want Nashville to be home. I love it. The house I own here now is up for sale. It's too secluded, and on a high hill. I want a level yard so you don't fall off the mountain when you mow your lawn.

13

Do you mow your lawn?

(*Laughs*). No. Someone else does it. I'm never home. If I waited for me to mow it, it would be a jungle.

14

Do you consider yourself a high-energy person, especially with Barbara Mandrell as your role model?

In reference to Barbara, I have never seen anyone like her—she's a workaholic, and I would not consider myself a workaholic. When I am on stage, my energy level is really high. But the way I am personally is real laid-back. I move *reaaaalllllll sloooooow*.

15

What did you want to be when you grew up? Was it always a country artist?

Always. It wasn't until I got to high school and saw all my friends go off to college afterwards or get married that I knew I wanted to be a singer, but I was singing from the time I could walk and talk. When I was real little, I thought about being an engineer because we had a train track by our house, but that was a fleeting thought. (*Laughs*)

16

What's it like to have risen from secretary to star?

It was really all part of my plan. I didn't go to Nashville to be a secretary, but I did want to learn a lot about the business, and I did that as secretary to Tom Collins.

17

Would you like to be in a movie?

Oh, yes. That's also part of The Plan.

18

What type of role would you like when you do get to the movies?

I really want to do my homework before I decide. I know the kind of things I *don't* want to do. I don't want to have a cameo role as a country singer in a bar.

19

What type of music other than country or pop do you listen to?

I've started listening to classical music. I'm learning that a lot of the old classical music has been incorporated into contemporary music, particularly in movie themes. I recorded "The Wayward Wind" with James Galway, the classical flutist, and that's when I got into listening to classical music. It really surprised me! I never thought I'd like it.

20

Do people recognize you when you go out?

Yes, they do (*sounds disbelieving*). I enjoy it. To me, it's an indication of how well you're doing. If people don't recognize you, you should start worrying. Most of the time, the people who recognize me are young children, from three-year-olds to teens—a lot of little girls. ■

Gone But Not Forgotten

Marty Robbins

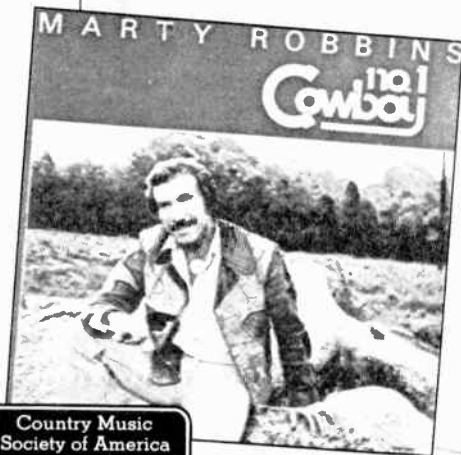
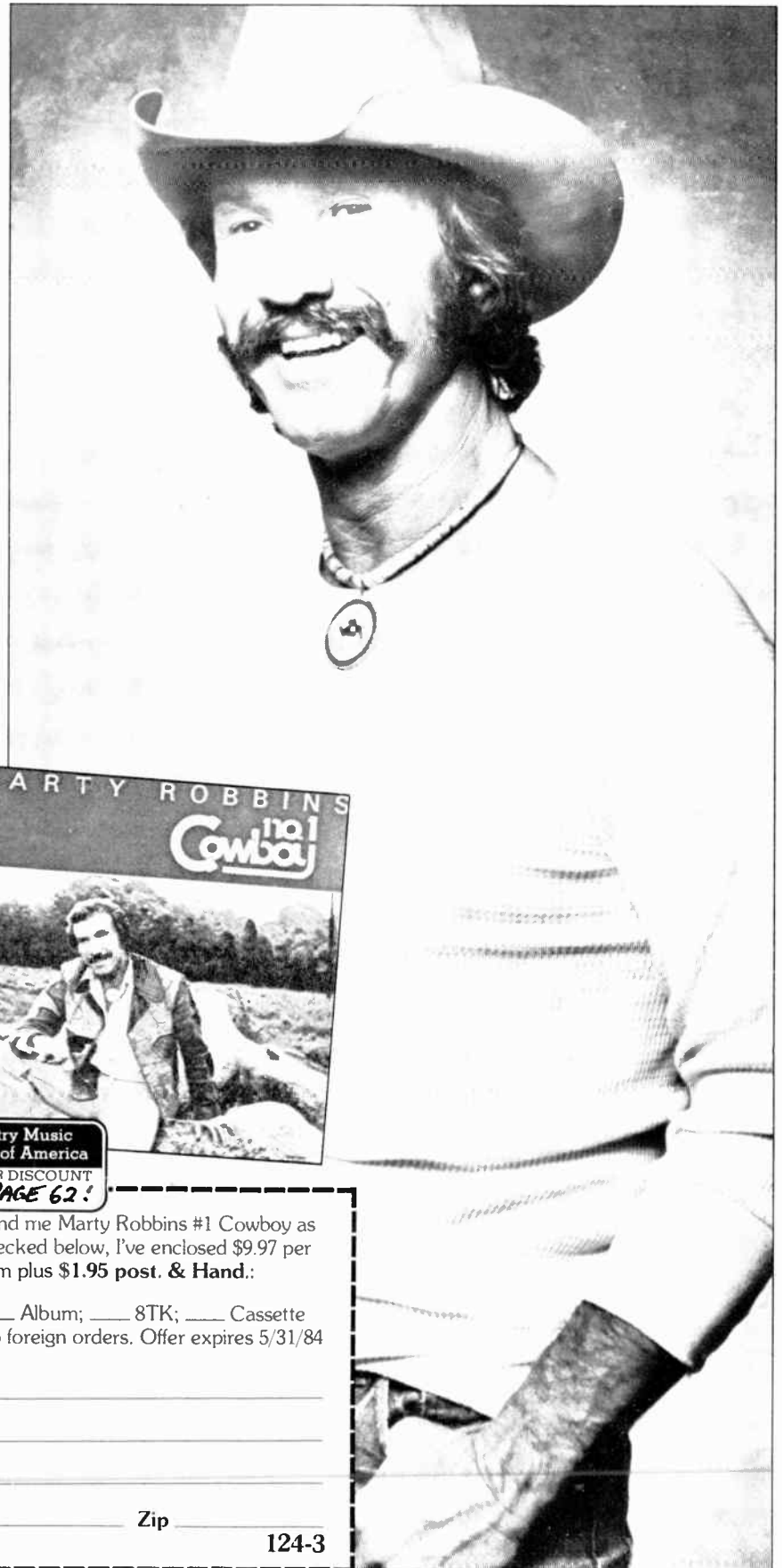
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Record Reviews

Kenny Rogers

Eyes that See in the Dark
RCA AFL1-4697

E*yes that See in the Dark* is a curious title for a Kenny Rogers album. He isn't the sort of artist who sees things in shadow-patterns; his vision tends toward the daylight



variety, clear-cut and without complexities. This is, after all, the man who has had massive hits with such straightforward soul-sloggers as "Lucille," "Ruby, Don't Take Your Love to Town" and "Lady."

On the other hand, you can't fault him for trying. Unlike certain other artists, he never rests on his laurels. He doesn't play it safe, and every new release doesn't, to his credit, sound like a sly rehash of "The Gambler" or "Coward of the County." Throughout his career, Rogers has openly experimented with styles, material and producers. And he must be doing *something* right. It's not every artist who can make the transition from playing bass in a jazz trio to singing folk music to fronting a pop/rock band with a drug-related hit like "Just Dropped In (to See What Condition My Condition Was In)," and end up topping the country charts.

So Rogers deserves respect—grudging or otherwise—for his willingness to put himself into new hands and unfamiliar

musical situations. It was his idea to work with the Commodores' Lionel Richie; and it was apparently also his idea to approach Barry Gibb for this debut RCA project. Just in case you didn't know already, it's been broadly hinted that Barry is the creative force behind the Bee Gees, whose *Saturday Night Fever* soundtrack album singlehandedly turned 1977 into the Year the Recording Industry Will Never Forget.

Barry seems to share Kenny's penchant for studio experimentation; it's a far cry from *Saturday Night Fever* disco to Kenny's brand of amiable pop. The pressure on Mr. Gibb to come up with an album worthy of Kenny's ballyhooed twenty-million-dollar-plus deal with RCA must have been enormous, but he seems to have handled it well. He may be criticized by some in the industry for co-writing all the songs on the album rather than letting a few outside songwriters earn their rents for the next ten years, but surely he anticipated that.

The resulting album is intriguing, if not monumental. Those who accidentally refer to it as "Kenny Rogers Sings the Bee Gees" can be forgiven. There's no doubt whatsoever who produced, wrote or performed on this project. The Bee Gees' stamp is obvious, but, properly translated, this guarantees technical perfection, instrumental excellence—and commerciality.

The played-to-death first single, "Islands in the Stream," is one of the album's strongest moments. Even if the song has worn out its welcome through overzealous programming, it was a masterstroke by Gibb—or Rogers—to entice Dolly Parton into the project. The arrangement is exactly what's required: infectious, easy to hum, hard to resist. Very Bee Gees.

The material on *Eyes that See in the Dark* is primarily pop; not counting "Islands," the two concessions to country are "Buried Treasures" and "Evening Star." Both these tracks feature the Gatlin Brothers on vocal harmonies.

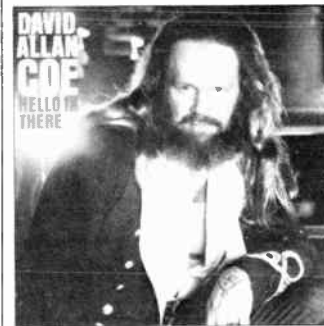
Rogers acquits himself well on this album, proving once again that he is a flexible and immensely likable performer with a voice that wears well. So what if he isn't the world's greatest singer? He tries hard to avoid being predictable, and you can't fault the man for that.

—KIP KIRBY

David Allan Coe

Hello in There
Columbia FC 38926

I have been writing David Allan Coe record reviews for some time now, and it usually feels like shouting down a long tunnel. I have said it before; I will now say it again. David Allan Coe is con-



sistently one of the most talented people working in country music, sub-style *hard* country music.

David has always refused to compromise his music, and the result is a collection of records and songs that is clearly the most unrecognized, unappreciated body of work in the whole field. I don't think *Hello in There*, his newest album, is quite as good as *Castles in the Sand*—his last and probably most consistent

if not all-time best album—but all the same, it is very good. It represents the distilled essence of the "outlaw" country music of the late 1970s, the willingness to fuse old country with some new rock licks. David has always mined that vein more effectively than almost any other artist, partly because he's worked so hard at it. He's country, sure, but there is lots of other stuff floating around in his music. His version of Troy Seals's "Crazy Old Soldier," for instance, sounds about equal parts Hank Jr., George Jones and the Allman Brothers.

If there is a central theme to the music of David Allan Coe, it is the same theme that runs through his life—melancholy. Appropriately, David has dedicated this album to John Prine, one of the greatest talents ever to get lost in the shuffle of the music business. The title cut, "Hello in There," is one of Prine's best, if saddest, songs, and David's version doesn't miss a tear.

The melancholy is ironic, because David is a survivor, both musically and personally. He sings a bluesy, honky tonk brand of country music, and there are fewer and fewer people doing that each year. In fact, David makes records with an almost evangelical fervor: the last defender of the True Faith. He's a crazy old soldier, just like the song says, but he's better than just about everybody else on the scene.

—MICHAEL BANE

George Jones

Jones Country
Epic 8692-2

Much has been made, in these pages and elsewhere, of George Jones's most recent rehabilitation; of how, after spending most of the last

Record Reviews

decade living on life's ragged edge and knocking on death's door, he has pulled himself back together and mastered some of the basics of survival, country style.

There may, however, be a cruel irony at work here. The fact is that it has often been in the midst of his darkest and most depressing times that The Possum has turned in some of his most moving vocal performances.

But if George is on the rebound again—as indeed he appears to be—his new-found happiness has certainly not been detrimental to his singing. *Jones Country*, in fact, is a small triumph; it marks an energetic and enthusiastic return to the hard country and honky tonk that have always been basic to George's style and from which he has always drawn his greatest strengths as a singer. George performs truly memorable versions of two modern hard-country clas-



sics, W. Scott's "Burning Bridges" and John Anderson's "Girl at the End of the Bar," and lays it on the line with a couple of good old-fashioned "get drunk, get down, and wallow in it" heartbreak songs, "You Must Have Walked Across My Mind Again" and "Wino the Clown." The strong, relaxed recitation on "Radio Lover" is the final proof of a newly revitalized and self-confident George Jones.

Billy Sherrill, who recently celebrated his twelfth anniversary as George's producer, also deserves praise for *Jones Country*. Sherrill is, of course, notorious for his past tendencies to saturate the hard-coun-

try sound with layers of orchestration and background vocals, but on the other hand he has also demonstrated a flair for capturing the bare essence of the hard-country sound (as he did on George's classic 1976 album, *Alone Again*). On *Jones Country*, that flair is much in evidence; if you can hear one violin or cello on any of these tracks, you've listened a lot more closely than I have.

Jones Country proves that George can make good records even if he's feeling good, and it's a healthy shot in the arm for back-to-basics country music.

—BOB ALLEN

George Strait *Right Or Wrong* MCA-5450

This album, George Strait's first collaboration with veteran producer Ray Baker (Moe Bandy, Joe Stampley, etc.), enhances and extends Strait's reputation as one of the best of Nashville's newest crop of solid, right-of-center country singers. Strait seems to have made progress assimilating the music that has influenced him, and growing beyond it. The result is that he emerges with his own unique strengths more in evidence than ever before.

Strait's singing style is deeply rooted in (but certainly not confined to) the musical traditions of Texas and the greater Southwest, and on *Right Or Wrong* those traditions show through. "I'm Satisfied with You" is Texas beer-hall music performed in a style reminiscent of Oklahoman Hank Thompson, and the title song, on which Strait turns in a particularly strong, confident vocal, is an old Milton Brown/Bob Wills Western Swing classic.

It is, however, on the more contemporary-sounding material—"You're the Cloud I'm On" and "Eighty Proof Bottle of Tear Stopper"—that Strait really demonstrates the class

which justifies comparisons with Merle Haggard, Lefty Frizzell, George Jones and all the other great vocal stylists



from whom he has learned (a point reinforced by his moving rendition of Hag's "Our Paths May Never Cross."). It is on these two songs and on the determinedly contemporary "You Look So Good in Love" (which has "hit" written obviously and self-consciously all over it), that the strong, soulful textures and precise control in Strait's voice are most apparent.

Quite simply, Strait has never sounded better than on *Right Or Wrong*, his third MCA album. To listen to him here is to catch one newcomer in the process of emerging as one of country music's most distinguished singers.

—BOB ALLEN

The Oak Ridge Boys

Deliver
MCA 5455

There are some genuinely delightful cuts on this album. For starters, William Lee Golden leads the vocals on a nostalgic "Ozark Mountain Jubilee" as effectively as he did on last year's Christmas-time gem, "Thank God for Kids." The song is especially expressive because Golden's is not your typically easy, hit-all-the-right-notes lead voice; he has to strain for it, and you love him for that. Another great attraction is the luscious four-part gospel harmony on "In the Pines." This is what Southern Gospel quartet sing-

ing is all about, and here the Oaks re-visit those roots of theirs quite beautifully. Then there is "Through My Eyes," a wonderfully uplifting and tender song which seeks to reassure a woman who is wondering whether age is making her unlovable.

The rest of the album, however, has its problems. "Break My Mind" is a great song (my old college drinking buddies and I used to fall back on it when the beer keg started to float on the pool of water left in the washtub), but the Oaks' version is too soggy and slow to be effective. "Ain't No Cure for That Rock 'n' Roll" borrows the bouncy, hook-laden formula which made "Elvira" and "Bobby Sue" such great hits, but it does so too self-consciously; the Oaks even call out those song titles during one of the verses, just in case we don't get the connection ourselves.

While *Deliver* is a creditable effort, it falls short of several albums the Oaks have made in recent years. What it lacks in quality on some tracks, however, it makes up for in, um, other ways. In keeping with its title, the album contains a 24-page mail order catalogue and order form offering all kinds of goodies. Buy your Oak Ridge Boys night shirts and baseball caps here, folks. A nice, frameable blue-tone photo of the Boys and their band is also enclosed.

—BOB MILLARD

Tony Joe White

Dangerous
Columbia FC38817

Ian Tyson

Old Corrals and Sagebrush
Columbia FC38949

Tony Joe White? Ian Tyson? Together? In one review? It seemed a little crazy to me, too—and crazier still once I'd thrown my own "weird factor" into the mix. Hell, I liked both

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Record Reviews

records, but I had to allow as how a fella'd be hard put to come up with two white boys with less in common.

To be honest, even the fact that both Tony Joe and Ian Tyson make music which falls (barely) within the boundaries of "country music" is misleading, since they're camped just inside the fence at opposite ends of the pasture. You'd need an Exxon map to establish a relationship between them.

Clearly, Tony Joe's songs are several country miles closer to those of prominent non-Opry-members like Isaac Hayes and Bill Withers than they are to Tyson's. Ian's affinities lie with the likes of Gordon Lightfoot and John Stewart, themselves hardly staples of the country charts.

So why not two reviews? Well...dammit...I couldn't say, not right off. But there *was* something there, like an itch. I just couldn't locate it. And the longer I listened to the records, the longer the odds became.

Tony Joe's *Dangerous*, for instance, is a sleek, soulful record about romantic adventures with sexy Southern women (girls, too). Recorded in



Memphis in a state-of-the-art studio with state-of-the-craft musicians, it percolates along in a muted urban funk groove so laid-back and sensual that I was forced to note on the sleeve, "If you can't get laid to this one, you can't get laid." After considerable field research, I still think that this is a valid comment—assuming, of course, that you don't try out Tony Joe on your neighborhood feminist. If you *are* stupid enough, watch out for T.J.'s ultra-smooch re-

make of "Our Day Will Come," one of the ultimate Prom Persuaders of the early Sixties. It has a "Come to yo' Love Daddy, honey chile" recitation over the intro in which, as Tony Joe White approaches Barry White, most "modern women"



approach apoplexy. But don't let this turn you off the record. The rest of the album is damned nice if you like mushy-macho, and one tune, "Down by the Border," is lovely even if you don't.

Now, if I could just print the opposite of the last paragraph, I'd have described Ian Tyson's *Old Corrals and Sagebrush*, which is about lonesome Canadian cowboys rather than companionable Southern girls. Its groove is "high plains folk" as opposed to "urban funk," so forget about mega-studios and heavy-hitter studio cats: *Old Corrals* was recorded live through a mixing board onto two-track tape with a hardy pro-am cowboy band in a living room in Calgary, Alberta. And it sounds great.

What's more surprising, it sounds heartfelt. In fact, I'd say that it's hands down the best record about working cowboys since Harry Jackson's *a capella* Folkways epic, *Cowboy Songs*. Somehow, like the best cowboys I know, the album manages to be innocent without being stupid, and ironic without being negative, and in doing so it manages to combine an adolescent enthusiasm for the beauties of the out-of-doors with a working man's wry, laconic vision of the faithless workings of the world.

The album contains a number of Tyson originals (Ian sounds more like Merle Hag-

gard than Merle Travis these days) and a clutch of first-class "real" cowboy songs of the sort John Lomax collected and Harry Jackson remembered ("Leavin' Cheyenne," "Git Along Little Doggies," "Diamond Joe," and—my own longtime favorite—"Windy Bill," a cautionary tale for ropers about the wisdom of using a quick-release Spanish-hitch to fasten one's riata to one's saddle-horn rather than tying it down tight). There are also three contemporary originals by other writers, two of which (Gary McMahon's "The Old Double Diamond" and Tom Russell's cockfighting saga, "Gallo de Cielo") are as good as they get.

In the end, I was driving around just thinking, ready to conclude that the only quality shared by White's and Tyson's albums was stylistic clarity of

the kind which occurs when an artist fits music to a subject which commands his pure, full attention, when Waylon's cut of "Honky Tonk Heroes" came thrumming out of the car radio. The song made me realize that the contradictions which lend so much richness and complexity to Waylon's best music also account for the confusion and lack of focus of his worst. Then, finally, I got my itch scratched. It occurred to me that if you sorted out those contradictions, you would end up with two pure but totally different styles of life and music which would closely resemble those of Tony Joe White and Ian Tyson.

This explains why a straight guy like me, by playing both of these albums over a period of time, ended up as schitzzy as Waylon and had fun doing it.

—DAVE HICKEY

Louise Mandrell *Too Hot to Sleep* RCA AHL1-4820-A

Louise Mandrell's strength is the breathily sexy song. Her new album offers two such numbers, "Too Hot to Sleep" and "Fool with Me," and it is no coincidence that both songs were written by her husband, R.C. Bannon, and John Bettis. Even the least sensitive ear can recognize this talented team's hand in Louise's material; almost without exception, the songs written by others (mostly ballads) leave the listener wishing that Louise would do more



of what she does best.

Part of the problem is the fact that on the slower numbers, Louise's voice bears a pronounced family resemblance to that of her big sister Barbara. This of course is understandable, but it leaves me, for one, feeling a little uncomfortable. The other part of the problem is that the songs themselves are simply inadequate.

When she launches into the perkier, upbeat cuts—and there are several here—Louise leaves all family resemblance to her big sister behind. Next to the sexy songs, numbers such as "A New Girl in Town," "Lady Killer" and "Runaway Heart" (the exception to the Bannon-Bettis string of winners) are where she really shines.

It's gratifying to know that some performers still care enough to continue to strive for improvement. If this album is any indication, Louise's next should be a real breakthrough, as she gains more confidence to go with the songs best suited to her.

—MARY ELLEN MOORE

Record Reviews

Lefty Frizzell

Lefty Goes to Nashville
Rounder Special Series 16

The Legend Lives On
Columbia FC 38938

Time, momentum, current trends, and an air of mystery and tragedy are all essential elements in the rise of a cult figure. You could almost see these factors beginning to mesh for Lefty Frizzell even before his death in 1975. His big hits were behind him; he didn't get played on the radio much (though he was still making incredibly good records), but his unique, elongated vocal phrasing was already influencing two generations of singers, among them Merle Haggard, George Jones, Willie Nelson, Stoney Edwards, Moe Bandy and John Anderson—not to mention Lefty's younger brothers, David and Allen.

Certainly David's rise to fame did not hurt Lefty's cause, and as younger performers drank from the Frizzell chalice, there arose a concerted push to get Lefty into the Hall of Fame. This was accomplished in 1982. Since then, there have been four reissues of his records. One forthcoming German collection will include *all* his Columbia and MCA recordings in a massive boxed set.

Lefty Goes to Nashville, unlike Rounder's earlier anthology, *Treasures Untold*, deals with the transitional period of Lefty's career, when he left Jim Beek's Dallas studio to record in Nashville. The earlier set ended in 1953 amid his

Jimmie Rodgers tribute recordings. This one picks up there, beginning with a plaintive, sparse version of "I'm Lonely and Blue" that clearly illustrates Rodgers's influence on Lefty. Without the thick, amplified textures of his usual large backing band, the true delicacy of his voice comes through clearly.

The remainder of the Texas recordings are superb. "Sweet Lies" conveys weary cynicism in delicate waltz time. "Two Hearts Broken Now" and "Tragic Letter" are outstanding, and though the liner notes don't indicate it, they are duets with the legendary harmonica player, Wayne Raney, a longtime friend. Side two moves into the more polished sounds of 1960s Nashville. "How Far Down Can I Go" is a study in anguish. "Little Old Wine Drinker," inspired by a silly mid-'60s wine commercial, would be a mere string of clichés were it not for Lefty's taut, urgent delivery. His treatment of David Houston's classic 1964 hit, "Almost Persuaded," comes close to surpassing the original.

In the liner notes to the Columbia collection, David Frizzell states, "I'm awfully upset that some of Lefty's later stuff is so overproduced and badly arranged. He deserved better treatment...A voice like his doesn't need theatrics or sound effects." *The Legend Lives On*, produced by David and brother Allen, attempts to rectify that problem by stripping off the original backing and replacing it with contemporary studio accompaniment. This is a risky and often tacky practice that can ruin the integrity of older recordings, as it did with Jim Reeves's and Patsy Cline's "modernized" albums. At worst, it's mere gimmickry.

At best it accomplishes nothing. I listened to the original versions of several songs on this album and came to a couple of conclusions: Firstly, David was correct about the lousy productions; secondly, the new backing isn't signifi-



cantly better. The new pickers get carried away at times, as their pointless jam session at the end of "The Marriage Bit" reveals. The new background vocalists, "Donna Fay Toadvine" (Shelly West) and her husband Allen, sound no different from the originals. The

difference between slick '60s and '80s accompaniment is not that pronounced.

Ultimately, the questions is: Do these changes destroy Lefty's original performances? Not really. Do they improve them? Not really. What CBS and the Frizzells *should* do is compile a beautiful two-record retrospective, complete with reminiscences from friends, similar to the recent Time-Life Marty Robbins collection. Warm, knowing anecdotes from David, Allan, Hag, Willie and other friends, combined with Lefty's most enduring recordings, would be a far more appropriate tribute than this made-over material.

—RICH KIENZLE

John Anderson

All the People Are Talkin'

Warner Brothers 1-23912

John Rocks? John Cuts Loose?

Would these be more appropriate titles for the new John Anderson album? What has happened to the Young Turk of the honky tonk revival? Well, the success of "Swingin'" obviously figured into this album



enough to let him indulge his rock and roll instincts more than in the past. Following the melancholia of his last album, *Wild and Blue*, this is in some ways a good idea; it's a smart way to avoid a rut. So Anderson runs the gamut this time out. He is only partially successful.

First, the successes. The title tune, in the style of "Swingin'".

is clearly designed to cross over, and has a pleasing Ray Charles flavor. "Blue Lights and Bubbles" features some of the most lucid honky tonk imagery I've heard in years, and Anderson returns momentarily and effectively to the Lefty Frizzell tradition on "Call on Me."

The rockers, however, run into some problems, chiefly an annoying sameness of Jerry Lee/Chuck Berry cut-time arrangement. While Anderson stomps through Gene Simmons's hit "Haunted House" with good-natured gusto, and the Mack Vickery/Merle Kilgore "Let Somebody Else Drive" is a very clever homily against drunk driving, the latter song and "Black Sheep" and "Things Ain't Been the Same Around the Farm" all sound alike—an unfortunate effect which detracts from their excellent lyrics.

Three tracks are flat-out disasters. "Look What Followed Me Home" is silly and mawkish; "An Occasional Eagle," an ode to our national bird, is so precious and pretentious that it simply self-destructs; and "Old Mexico," despite its humorous Randy Newman-style overtones, sounds like a tourism ad.

I don't think that John Anderson should limit himself

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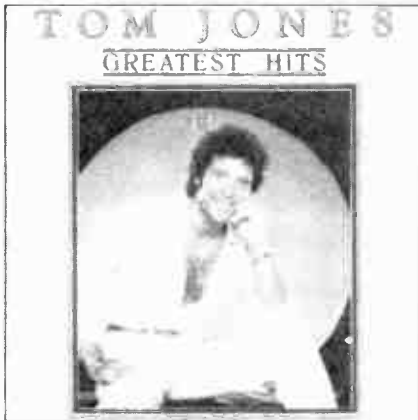
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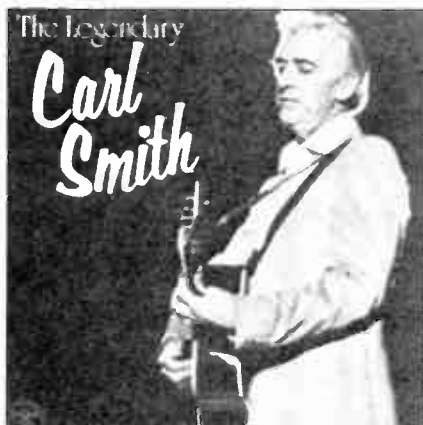
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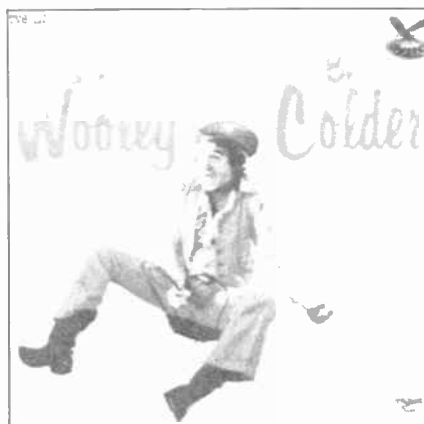
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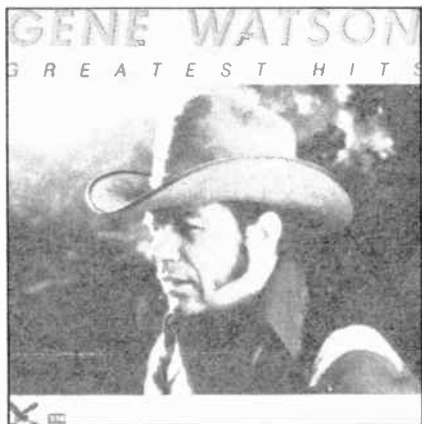
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Record Reviews

to hard country, but between the marginal material and the one-dimensional arrangements, he has stumbled enough to make *All The People Are Talkin'* his most uneven album to date.

—RICH KIENZLE

Crystal Gayle

Cage the Songbird
Warner Bros. 23958-1

Crystal's new album opens with the single, "The Sound of Goodbye." Like seven of the songs here, it's about somebody leaving somebody, but Crystal's delivery is so happy, so up-beat, that you have to listen closely to the lyrics to find out that it's a sad song. This odd technique worked on her "Half the Way" hit, but here you get confused; you don't know whether Crystal is really unhappy that her man is leaving. The problem crops up again in "On Our Way to Love," the only positive love song on the album. Crystal's delivery is melodramatic, heart-rending; it sounds as if she is really hurting. If she could have traded her emotional approach on these two songs, both of them would have work-

ed. You wonder why she didn't.

"I Don't Wanna Lose Your Love," on the other hand, is Crystal at her best. The tug in her voice gets you involved, evoking those feelings you expect when you listen to a Crystal Gayle song. Similarly, she is comfortable with Rodney Crowell's "Victim or a Fool," "Turning Away," a new song which sounds like a Fifties rocker (complete with Jim Horn's saxophone and minus the strings which accompany all the album's other songs) is very nicely sung. So is her version of Tom Waits's "Take Me Home." Then of course there is the album's title song, "Cage the Songbird," written by Elton John and dedicated to Edith Piaf, the great French singer. Crystal's vocal puts Elton's original to shame.

Four songs here, then, are definitely up to par. That leaves six which are not. Perhaps the reason is that this is Crystal's first album with producer Jimmy Bowen. It would not be surprising if Crystal and Bowen were not as well tuned to each other as she and Allen Reynolds, the producer with whom she rose to fame. Also, Crystal is listed on the album as "Director." What does that mean? Who decided what?

Despite these problems, Crystal's voice is as beautiful as ever; she may sing the wrong emotions at times, but she sounds just fine. Considering that she was pregnant when she recorded some of these songs, and a new mother when she recorded others, she does well. Perhaps next time, she and Bowen and the basic material will mesh a little better.

—ROCHELLE FRIEDMAN

Lucky Oceans and Asleep At the Wheel Revue

Lucky Steals the Wheel
Blind Pig BP 1282

Ten years ago, Asleep At the Wheel introduced themselves with their first album, a sincere if somewhat affected attempt to emulate Bob Wills and Moon Mullican. Still, the core of the band—leader/guitarist Ray Benson, vocalists Chris O'Connell and Leroy Preston, pianist Floyd Domino and steel guitarist Lucky Oceans—demonstrated clear potential. They fulfilled that promise on the magnificent *Texas Gold*, a 1975 album which flawlessly synthesized Western Swing (their main focus), honky tonk, 1940s rhythm-and-blues and boogie-woogie. The group expanded. They added rockabilly to their repertoire ("My Baby Thinks He's a Train" is a Leroy Preston composition), and then some Kansas City jazz. Their 1978 version of Count Basie's "One O'Clock Jump" won them a Grammy.

Big hits were elusive, however, and band members drifted away until Ray Benson was reduced to hiring pickup musicians. The deterioration showed on their ill-focused, disastrous 1980 *Framed* album. But now, there is good news for Wheel fans: Lucky Oceans (who left the band around '79) has revived the old magic by reuniting Benson, O'Connell, Preston, Domino, late 1970s vocalist John Nicholas, and

other sidemen (including Johnny Gimble) for an exuberant celebration of their collective musical vision.

The years have matured most of the principals. Lucky Oceans himself has become a formidable lap steel player with great self-assurance and finesse, soloing in the Noel Boggs/Joaquin Murphey style on four tasteful instrumentals. Chris O'Connell has also improved dramatically—her lilting vocal on "Deep Water" is controlled, and her phrasing on the explosive arrangement of Faron Young's 1954 hit, "If You Ain't Lovin'," while still not quite up to Anita O'Day level, exudes zestful confidence, and for his part, John Nicholas turns the hackneyed "Careless Love" into a four-minute Western Swing rave-up. Only Leroy Preston, once a dynamo within the band, seems weak. His "Same Chain" is muddled and listless.

Unless the Wheel gang wises up and reunites as a working unit, this album could be the last hurrah of the 1970s Western Swing revival. If so, it's one hell of a finale.

—RICH KIENZLE

Shelly West

Red Hot
Viva 23983

First the good news. Shelly West is letting no dust settle on her efforts to become one of country's finest singers. As a vocalist, she's getting better all the time.

In fact, lately both West and her singing partner, David Frizzell, seem to have been faring better individually than as a duet. That's a paradox, since their success was founded on the strength of their instant classic, "You're the Reason God Made Oklahoma." That, however, was before they started recording schmaltzy, too-cute numbers like the recent, unsuccessful "Pleasure Island." There appears to be a danger that as a duet, Frizzell and West are evolving into



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COUNTRY MUSIC SOCIETY OF AMERICA

11 GREAT REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD JOIN NOW

Letter from the Publisher

Attention Country Music subscribers! In looking over your magazine you no doubt have been noticing references to something called *The Country Music Society of America*. And, you've probably wondered just what it's all about. That's why I'm taking a minute now to fill you in on the details.

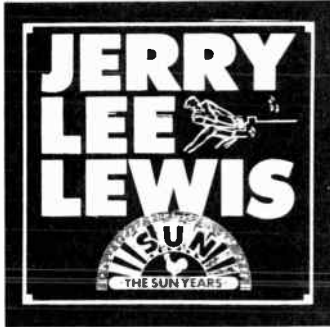
For a long time, I have felt that you and I and other fans, whose knowledge and love for country music is above average, should have an organization to serve our interests. Not something for just everyone, but something special for serious country music loyalists. We buy the records. We listen to the radiostations. We spend the money to go to the concerts. So how do we make our voice heard?

The answer is the *Country Music Society Of America*. With 40,000 members already and another 200,000 expected by the end of the year, we are the largest most influential organization of music fans in the country.

Already, response to this novel idea has been overwhelming. So overwhelming in fact that I have decided to give you regular *Country Music* subscribers a once only opportunity to get a free *Charter Membership* when you extend your current subscription for an additional year. This is the time you should sign up. And here are 11 great reasons why...

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—Russ Barnard
Publisher

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FOR MEMBERS ONLY

BALLOT BOX

CAST YOUR VOTE

What are the ten best all-time country songs? Who are the ten best country singers ever? Not for 1984, but, for all time. We have been asking country music stars these questions. The first answers, from Bill Monroe and Larry Gatlin are reported on page eleven of this issue. But we want to know what you think. Fill out this ballot and mail to: Favorites, Country Music, 450 Park Avenue South, New York, New York, 10016. We'll use your votes to nominate finalists and report the results to you later.

ALL-TIME 10 BEST SONGS

1. _____
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3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
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9. _____
10. _____

ALL-TIME 10 BEST SINGERS

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10. _____

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Membership Hits 50,000

Just before Christmas, we enrolled our 50,000th member. To keep this momentum going, we are asking each member to try to get a friend or neighbor to join by March 1. Just get them to fill out the form on page 61. If you would like to help organize a Society Chapter in your area, read the item below.

Chapters Organizing In Six States

Local Chapters of the Society are being organized now in Tennessee, Alabama, Oklahoma, Ohio, Wisconsin and North Carolina.

If you are in these states and want to help, contact the temporary Chapter President nearest you: Rick Owens, Box 5051, Montgomery, Alabama 36103; Carl Drake, Box 1227, Anadarko, Oklahoma 73005; Marie Lewis, 230 East Nottingham Road, Dayton, Ohio 45405; Betty Weinaug, 1334 West Pine Street, Appleton, Wisconsin 54914; Alma Todd, Rt. 12 Box 350, Winston-Salem, North Carolina 27107; Steve Heiss, 13321 Jones Gap Road, Soddy, Tennessee 37379; Irene Gibbs, 127 Star Boulevard, Madison, Tennessee 37115.

Answer Book Completed

The members' 1984 *Answer Book* took longer than planned to finish. But you'll find it worth the wait. (If you haven't already received your 1984 Member's Pack including your copy of the *Answer Book*, you will soon.)

We decided to publish the *Answer Book* in conjunction with the Country Music Foundation in Nashville. Although this delayed the project, it gave us access to the CMF's valuable store of historical information, which every member should find useful. After you have had a chance to read the *Answer Book*, let us know if you have suggestions for improving it next year.

1983 Awards Ballot Did You Vote?

The 1983 Awards Ballots are being counted now. There is still time to enter your vote. If you haven't sent in your ballot, do it now! It is on page 23 of the November/December *Country Music*.

Movie Country

Have you seen the movie "Tender Mercies" starring Robert Duvall? If you have, please write and tell us what you thought of it. This movie should have gotten wider distribution. If you would like it to come to your town, let us know. You can read our review of it on page 40 of this issue.

Keeping Track

We are compiling a list of readers and Society members who have a complete set of CMM, starting with the first issue published in September 1982. That was Volume One, Number One, with Johnny Cash on the cover. If you have a complete set of magazines, let us know. Write to: Complete Set, Country Music, 450 Park Avenue South, New York, New York 10016. So far, there are nine names on our list. We are sure there are many more. One is Eunice Minor of Abilene, Texas who is 80 years old.

How to Join the Society

If you would like to join the *Society*, or if you have friends who would, there are two ways to join. First, anyone can join for one year by sending a check for \$15.00 to the Membership Director, Country Music Society of America, P.O. Box 2000, Marion, Ohio 43306. Secondly, subscribers to *Country Music Magazine* can convert their present subscriptions to Charter Memberships by taking the special offer described on page 61 of this issue.

Buy Any Record Lately?

Write and tell us about the records you have bought recently. Did you like them? Did you get your money's worth? Who were the performers?

Record Reviews

country's version of Rock Hudson and Doris Day.

So here we have Shelly solo, looking (as the title says) quite red hot. The photograph on the cover exudes a passion reminiscent of Rita Hayworth in her prime. This is one sexy artist, with vocal talents to match.

But while West is undeniably hot, much of the material on this latest release is not. It's hard to believe that producers Steve Dorff and Snuff Garrett would ignore the vast range of superb country songwriters on today's scene and opt instead to include such trite, self-penned tunes as "Small Talk" and "Let's Make a Little Love Tonight." It's also surprising that they would choose to follow a track as memorable as Austin Roberts's "Now I Lay Me Down to Cheat" with a contrived TV commercial sound-alike such as "Somebody Buy

this. Her career is too young, and her artistry too promising, to be hampered by production shortsightedness. She needs strong, powerful, well-written numbers that let her work some genuine emotion into the performances. She seems perfectly capable of yanking heart-strings and soothing souls, but there's not much indication of that here.

Shelly does her best to smolder, but *Red Hot* just simmers slowly.

—KIP KIRBY

Exile

Exile
Epic B6E-39154

In 1978, Exile hit the top of the pop charts with "Kiss You All Over," a melodic piece of radio fluff that was in the right place at the right time. Since then they've had nothing but dry years, so now the Kentucky group is taking a crack at the country market. Exile is not without credentials in that area. Their songs—most of them written by guitarist J.P. Pennington, often in collaboration with keyboard man Mark Gray, who's already left the group—have been recorded by such country stars as Dave and Sugar, Kenny Rogers, Janie Fricke and Sheena Easton, and Alabama has ridden two Exile songs, "Take Me Down" and "The Closer You Get," to the top of the charts.

Now, guess who Exile sounds an awful lot like?

While they're not dead ringers for that group named after the state George Wallace governs, they're way too close for comfort. Pennington and Les Taylor, the lead singers, have anonymous voices. Chipper harmonies cover for them. The band sound is bottom-heavy, the beat fairly pronounced, and the individual songs make it mostly on melody alone.

But admittedly, not everything is so blatantly in the Alabama mold. Exile can sound like all sorts of country. "High Cost of Leaving," their first single, is more of a George Jones rip, while "Woke Up in Love" has the secularized gospel arrangements of the Oak Ridge Boys. It's hard to find anything remotely original in songs like "Take Me to the

River," an I'm-country-and-I'm-proud declaration, or "I Just Came Back to Break My Heart Again," a ballad with swelling strings that announce *Pop Crossover Here*. Most of these numbers are cliches, and while I'm the first to admit that cliches are the backbone of a country song, a good country writer will use those cliches in an illuminating fashion, give them some kind of new meaning. That doesn't happen here.

These may prove to be just the cliches people want to hear, however, and those melodies (plus Buddy Killen's sympathetic production) won't hurt, either. The creation of radio fluff is often what making records is all about. But that's the only consolation here: when I think about it, "Kiss You All Over," despite its success, wasn't such a hot rock record, either.

—JOHN MORTHLAND



This Cowgirl a Beer." And it's pushing the limits of cleverness to finish the song with the sound of beer foaming into a glass, just in case we missed the point.

West deserves better than

Other Recent Albums

Big Al Downing *Big Al Downing* (Team TRA-2001), Mickey Gilley *You're Really Got a Hold on Me* (Epic FE-3900), Jim Glaser *The Man in the Mirror* (Noble Vision NV-2001), Emmylou Harris *White Shoes* (Warner Bros. WB-23961-1), Tom Jones *Don't Let Our Dreams Die Young* (Mercury 814 448-1M-1), Johnny Lee *Greatest Hits* (Warner Bros. WB-23967), Charly McClain *The Woman in Me* (Epic FE-38979), Ronnie McDowell *Country Boy's Heart* (Epic FE-38981), Michael Martin Murphy *The Heart Never Lies* (Liberty LI-51150), Willie Nelson *Without a Song* (Columbia FC-39110), Ricky Skaggs *Don't Cheat in Our Home Town* (Epic FE-38954), T.G. Sheppard *Slow Burn* (Warner/Curb 23911), Joe Stampley *Memory Lane* (Epic FE-38964), B.J. Thomas *The Great American Dream* (Columbia/Cleveland International FC-39111), Conway Twitty *Merry Twismas from Conway Twitty and His Little Friends* (Warner Bros. WB-23971), Larry Willoughby *Burning Bridges* (Atlantic America 7 90112-1).

Reba McEntire

Behind the Scene
Mercury 812 781-1

Reba dedicates this album to "all the folks behind the scene," but delivers a record which is very out-front. She is out-front about the pain of betrayal; about leaving and sometimes coming back; about kicking the old cheatin' s.o.b. out on his ear; about good times and hopefulness. She seems to run the range, but nothing on the record is left "behind the scene."

Of particular interest are the rocking and rolling first hit from the album, "Why Do We Want (What We Know We Can't Have)," the plaintive "There Ain't No Future in This," and "One Good Reason." This last song also rocks, but the lyrics are about putting an errant lover in his place, where he better damn well come up with some good excuses or watch her tail lights recede into the distance. Along those same lines, "Reasons" cuts

some poor slob of an ex-boyfriend a new you-know-what with it's biting, humorous put-downs. This lady sure knows how to make a point, stick it in and twist it.

But Reba also brings home the pain of love with several classically country heartbreak scenerios, then laughs it all off



again later. Her prairie-pure vocals cut through, and prove that she more than deserved her Country Music Association Horizon Award nomination this year. In fact, she might well have walked off with the prize had her real-life "behind the scenes" situation at ballot time not been fading out at Mercury. Reba's next album will be on the MCA label.

—BOB MILLARD

FOR COUNTRY COLLECTORS ONLY

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Eddy Arnold

RCA 20-2332 Don't Bother to Cry
I'll Hold In My Heart
RCA 20-2806 Bouquet Of Roses
Texican Baby
RCA 21-0002 Don't Rob Another
Man's Castle
There's Not A Thing

Pee Wee King

RCA 21-0489 Slow Poke
Whisper Waltz

Sons Of Pioneers

Decca 46027 Cool Water
Tumbling Tumbleweeds

Gene Autry

Col. 20027 Old Missouri Moon
Tumbling Tumbleweeds
Col. 20377 Here Comes Santa
Claus
Old Fashioned Tree
Col. 37183 Back In The Saddle
Again
Tumbling Tumbleweeds

George Morgan

Col. 20594 Room Full Of Roses
Put All Your Love

Carl Smith

Col. 21129 Hey Joe
Darling Am I The One

Tex Williams

Cap. 40001 Smoke Smoke Smoke
That Cigarette
Roundup Polka
Cap. 40276 With Men Who Know
Tobacco Best
Three Old Girls In Blue

Ted Daffan

Ok. 6706 No Letter Today
Born To Lose

Vaughan Monroe

RCA 203411 Ghost Riders In The Sky
Single Saddle

Patty Page

Merc. 5534 Tennessee Waltz
Boogie Woogie Santa
Claus

Frankie Lane

Mec. 5345 Mule Train
Carry Me Back To Old
Virginia
Col. 39998 Your Cheatin' Heart
I Believe

Red Foley

Decca 46136 Tennessee Saturday
Night
Blues In My Heart
Decca 46143 Just A Man And
His Don

Webb Pierce

Decca 29480 I Don't Care
Good For Nothing Heart

COLLECTOR ALBUMS

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Jim Reeves

RCA 2284 Tall Tales Short
Tempers

The Browns

RCA 2345 Songs From The Little
Brown Church

Hank Snow

RCA 2285 Silhouettes

Chet Atkins

RCA 2717 Teen Scene

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RCA 2851 Southern Gospel Style

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Buried Treasures

Re-issues, Rarities, and the Hard-to-Find

by Rich Kienzle

Hank Williams's records have been re-issued in Greatest Hits packages, as "Hank with Strings" creations, as theme sets, as Collector's Editions; you name the format, and you can bet that somebody, somewhere, has released two (or three, or four) albums following it. Recently, the list of re-issues was expanded by a massive twelve-album boxed set from Japan, and by a series of American reproductions, complete with the original cover art, of Hank's 1950s albums. Nice, but nothing startling. Now, however, come two re-issues which bring new dimensions to the man's recorded legacy.

Hank Williams (TLCW-011) is part of Time-Life's *Country and Western Classics* series. It presents forty well-known and obscure songs in crystal-clear mono sound and in chronological order, beginning with the first sides Hank recorded for the Sterling label in 1946. Comments on most of the songs would be redundant, but if the Japanese boxed set, at \$110, boggles your budget, this collection is a decent alternative; it crosses the entire spectrum of Hank's career, and it also features songs rarely re-issued, including Luke the Drifter tracks like "No, No Joe," a 1950 anti-Stalin recitation. It also features duets between Hank and his wife, Audrey, which remind you why Hank tried so hard to keep the lady off-stage.

Two of the tracks, demo tapes known only to discographers until now, have never been issued before. One, "My Main Trial is Yet to Come," a Pee Wee King-Joe Frank composition, is a prisoner's doleful lament on his impending execution and final judgment. The Drifting Cowboys' accompaniment was added after Hank's death. The other, "The



Log Train," is a truly moving performance. Alone with his guitar, Hank reveals a songwriting style barely hinted at elsewhere in his work. Although many of his greatest ballads were personal in the sense that they were inspired by his troubles with Audrey, their lyrics were "universal" in theme. This song, however, is autobiographical in a more literal way; rooted in his Alabama childhood, it's a musical evocation of the days of the logging trains on which his father, Lon Williams, worked as an engineer.

The packaging of this set is outstanding. The booklet included with the records contains a basic biography by Roger M. Williams, author of *Sing A Sad Song: The Life of Hank Williams*, and a fascinating set of notes on each song by Charles Wolfe and Bob Pinson. Their research yielded a great deal of new and revealing data, including the origins of several of the songs, details about recording

sessions and sidemen, and other fresh insights. We learn, for instance, that Hank and his producer/mentor, Fred Rose, argued heatedly about whether "Lovesick Blues" (the song that brought Hank to the Opry) was worth recording.

Another cache of unissued Hank Williams material was released recently by the California-based Arhoolie label. The four-song EP (Arhoolie 548) features three gospel songs and one ballad recorded at the home of Fred Maddox, of the Maddox Brothers and Rose. The songs are "Going Home," "Mother is Gone," "A Home in Heaven" (the only one of these songs ever commercially released), and "Now at Last You've Gone and Left Me." The vocals, accompanied only by Hank's guitar, are plaintive and intimate, and the sound is above average for a home recorder.

Harry Choates had a lot in common with Hank. A brilliant fiddler and a performer with an exuberant vocal style,

Choates was best known for his classic 1946 recording of "Jole Blon," the first Cajun record to become a nationwide hit. Severe alcoholism limited his fame to Louisiana and Texas, and like Hank he died at the age of 29.

Choates was a true innovator. His electrifying synthesis of Cajun fiddling, honky tonk, blues and Western swing gave him a highly commercial—and danceable—sound, and he paved the way for the later mass commercial success of Cajun artists like Jimmy C. Newman and Doug Kershaw. *The Fiddle King of Cajon Swing* (Arhoolie 5027) is an incisive compilation of his best recordings for the Gold Star label. "Jole Blon," now owned by another company, isn't included, but the sixteen numbers here provide an outstanding overview of Choates's talent.

For several years the Texas-based Delta Records label has been issuing newly-recorded albums by various Texas acts. A few, like the Willie Nelson-Johnny Bush collaboration, have succeeded. Most have not. *The Original Texas Playboys' Heaven, Hell or Houston* (DLP-1142) is typical of the label's low standards. The band, led by Leon McAuliffe, the Playboys' steel guitarist from 1935 to 1943, consists largely of former Playboys whose overall musicianship is often embarrassingly sloppy. Of all the band members, only veteran Playboy guitarist/arranger Eldon Shamblin plays with his old fire and precision.

Even allowing for the advancing age of many of these men (some of them are in their seventies), the off-tempo, off-key musicianship is inexcusable. Bassist Joe Ferguson's vocal on "Stardust," for instance, is so out of tune that I

cannot believe it went unnoticed. This is no way to handle Bob Wills's legacy.

It is a sad fact that Ernest Tubb's health has deteriorated; the emphysema that plagued him for years may have ended his marathon touring. With that in mind, and because so many of his finest Decca re-

cordings are now unavailable, it is comforting to know that the Rounder label has released *Honky Tonk Classics* (Rounder Special Series 14).

The big hits are not emphasized here. Instead, the focus is on lesser-known tunes recorded between 1940 and 1954. Two numbers, "Blue Eyed

Elaine" and "There's Gonna Be Some Changes Made Around Here," are clearly 1960s re-makes of earlier material which have been included by mistake (Ronnie Pugh's excellent liner notes refer to the original 1940s recordings), but they are not bad at all, and the genuine '40s and '50s cuts

are among Tubb's finest work. They include "I Ain't Goin' Honky Tonkin' Anymore," "Filipino Baby," the seldom-heard "Answer to Walkin' the Floor Over You," and the wry, bluesy, "I Need Attention Bad." This is E.T. at his peak. Hopefully, Rounder will not stop at just one collection. ■

The Essential Collector

The Editors' Guide to Classic Country Albums

Ray Charles

The Legend Lives
Arcade ADEG 139

As readers of this magazine will know, Ray Charles recently made "another" country album (see *Born to Win* by Peter Guralnick, November/December 1983). His first venture into country happened twenty years ago, when he released *Modern Sounds in Country and Western Music*, Volumes 1 and 2. Those two albums, on which Ray treated a dazzling selection of country songs ("Your Cheating Heart," "Born to Lose," "I Can't Stop Loving You," "You Win Again," etc.) in his own inimitable style, represented a major turnaround in popular music, and were hugely successful.

The music still sounds great, partly because the songs are so good and partly because R.C. sang them with such spirit. The two original albums are no longer available, but this record is an intelligent selection of the tracks they contained. Eighteen songs, all killers. As demonstrations of how country songs can be "crossed

over" with all their class intact (and then some), they are without parallel in the history of country music.

Johnny Cash

Rockabilly Blues
Columbia JC 36779

Johnny Cash offers us all kinds of messages, most of them impressive, but in the end he must be judged on his music. That is why *Rockabilly Blues*, appearing in late 1980



after a long string of compromised or lackluster recordings (not including *Silver*, which hinted at what was to come), was such a thrill.

Cash intended the album to be a thoroughly modern return to the strongest of his

roots, and he succeeded. As Patrick Carr wrote at the time, "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 re-states and re-works the muscular heart of rockabilly music, re-energizes the fading intelligence of the modern country song, and scatters pretenders to the winds... Good old Cash, still the father-figure but still the renegade too; still the Indian in the white man's camp."

The Carter Family

Legendary Performers, Vol. 1
RCA CPM1-2673

They wander in—they're a little ahead of time and they came about 25 miles and they've come through a lot of mud and he's dressed in overalls and the women are country women from way back there—calico clothes on, the children are very poorly dressed...

That is how field recordist Ralph Peer described his first impression of the Carter Family in Bristol, Tennessee, 1927. Peer, who discovered Jimmie Rodgers on that same trip, recorded the Carters—A.P., his wife Sarah and sister-in-law Maybelle—and they went on to become the longest-lasting and most influential country family band on record. Of the many Carter Family albums available, this is probably the most essential. It features material ("Wildwood

Flower," "Keep on the Sunny Side," etc.) recorded between 1928 and 1941, and includes a fine booklet written by Johnny Cash. A piece of history, and lovely music.

Gary Stewart

Greatest Hits
RCA AYL1-4254

As John Morthland put it, Gary Stewart is "a country Puck, ruminating on what fools we mortals be. He offers sin-with-a-smile, and if you can't take it that way, why take it at all?"

Stewart's first three RCA albums were wild and wonderful, thrilling fusions of Hank Williams, Jerry Lee Lewis, the Stanley Brothers, the Allmans, and all kinds of echoes from the mountains and the honky tonks; nowhere else has the crazed fever of rockabilly and the trembling pain of hard-core country been so passionately and cleverly com-



bined. It's hard to choose between *Out of Hand*, *Steppin' Out* and *Your Place or Mine* (and *Out of Hand* is now out of print), so the *Greatest Hits* record, culled from those three albums, is your best bet. ■

How To Get These Treasures

If you would like to buy any of these records, they are available from Nashville Warehouse, P.O. Box 236, Hendersonville, Tennessee 37075. Send your order with check to them. (A 10% discount can be deducted by Country Music Society of America members.) *Hank Williams (TLCW-011)* \$19.95, *Hank Williams EP (Arhoolie 548)* \$3.00, *The Fiddle King of Cajun Swing (Arhoolie 5027)* \$7.50, *Heaven, Hell or Houston (DLP-1142)* \$8.98, *Honky Tonk Classics (Rounder Special Series 14)* \$7.98, *Gary Stewart's Greatest Hits (RCA AYL1-4254)* \$7.98, *Johnny Cash Rockabilly Blues (Columbia JC 36779)* \$7.98, *The Carter Family Legendary Performers, Vol. 1 (RCA CPM1-2673)* \$7.98, *Ray Charles The Legend Lives (Arcade ADEG 139)* \$7.98. Add \$1.95 postage and handling for one album, \$1.00 for each additional album.

Merle Travis

Farewell to a Legend

Writers don't often get the acclaim you might think. Usually complaints tend to outweigh fan mail; true compliments are rare. That's why I will never forget the day not long before Christmas of 1981 when an envelope obviously containing a Christmas card showed up with an Oklahoma postmark. Now, I know people in Oklahoma, but none that send cards. I don't send them myself, so the only way to find out who had sent this one was to open it. The card had a beautiful Indian illustration on the outside, and the moment in which I read the hand-written message on the inside was one of the most moving since I started in the business.

Ol' pal Rich: I ain't 'ner never will find words to tell how I appreciate what you've wrote about me—and a lotta other hillbillies.

—Merle Travis

I hadn't expected that. I'd written a few stories about Merle, or stories in which he figured, and had done liner notes for one of his CMH albums. I'd been a fan for years, listening to his records (and sometimes paying outrageous prices for the rare ones in auctions) and trying to copy his guitar-picking, but I'd never met him except over the telephone. That sort of praise, coming from Merle, himself a peerless country historian and journalist, really meant something.

Merle Travis was country music's Renaissance Man. Songwriter extraordinaire, guitar stylist, peerless vocalist, actor, raconteur, wit, cartoonist and journalist: All these descriptions were correct. Merle, however, never agreed. His constant, often painful modesty led him to deny that he was any of those things. But he will do so no more. On the morning of October 20th, 1983, his magnificent, creative life ended, 65 years after it began, at his home at Tahlequah in the Cherokee Nation of eastern Oklahoma.

He'd lived there for several years with his wife Dorothy. He still played some show dates, but had settled down into the role of elder statesman, which seemed appropriate after his 1977 induction into the Country Music Hall of Fame. He'd had no severe health problems, but years



COURTESY COUNTRY MUSIC FOUNDATION

of hard living had taken their toll; he looked his age.

His music, of course, left the most indelible mark. Merle Robert Travis was born in Rosewood, Muhlenburg County, Kentucky on November 27th, 1917, the son of a coal miner. He absorbed the sights and sounds of the western Kentucky coal country throughout his childhood, and quickly zeroed in on the area's music. A local guitar-picking style caught his ear. It was a complex technique, involving picking a melody on the treble strings with the right index finger while plucking syncopated bass accompaniment with the thumb. A black Kentucky guitarist named Arnold Shultz had taught it to other local guitarists, among them Travis's neighbors, Ike Everly and Mose Rager, who taught it to Merle. He made it the keystone of his music. Had it not been for Merle, that style, known today as "Travis picking," might have remained an obscure regional phenomenon.

Merle became a professional musician before he was eighteen, apprenticing with Clayton McMichen, then moving to Cincinnati's 50,000-watt radio station, WLW. The signal travelled as far as Georgia, where one night in the late thirties an asthmatic, guitar-mad adolescent named Chester Atkins picked up

Merle on his homemade radio. It changed Chet's life, and he never failed to acknowledge that inspiration.

Chet Atkins, however, was only one of many who were influenced by the Travis style. In the 1940s, Merle's Capitol transcriptions and his later instrumental albums influenced scores of other guitarists, among them Doc Watson (who like Chet, named a child for Merle), Jackie Phelps, Paul Yandell, Jerry Reed, Tom Bresh and countless others.

Merle's songwriting was a true gift; he could compose on the spot, as he did in '46 when his pal Tex Williams was in danger of losing his Capitol recording contract. Merle wrote "Smoke! Smoke! Smoke! (That Cigarette)" for him, saving Tex's contract, and giving Capitol its first million-seller in 1947. His own best-known numbers were born in the same way. Asked to record an album of folk songs by Capitol producer Lee Gillette in 1946, he replied that he knew none. "Write some!" said Gillette. The result was *Folk Songs of the Hills*, a collection of original songs that combined pieces of traditional numbers with material from his imagination and his Kentucky memories. New as they were, the songs were so superbly crafted that they sounded ancient; many thought they were. "I Am a Pilgrim," "Dark as a Dungeon" and "Sixteen Tons" all became American standards. Tennessee Ernie Ford might have had the hit with "Sixteen Tons," but Merle's original, sung alone with his Martin acoustic, was far more chilling.

But Merle Travis was more than all this. He was that rare individual born to create—whether on-stage, in the studio, with a sketch-pad or at a typewriter. He was a complex man, a virtuoso who denied his virtuosity. He understood his world, but wouldn't acknowledge his role in shaping it. He inspired great love and loyalty.

We owe you, Merle. Wherever you are, you'll dispute this, but your passing left far more than an empty place at the core of country music. Really. ■

Editor's note: Merle Travis, a quiet legend among country music professionals, was a particular friend of this magazine. He wrote for us, he served on our board of editors, and he championed the magazine publicly. For this as well as for his music, we thank him and we will miss him.—R.D.B.

by Rich Kienzle

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