

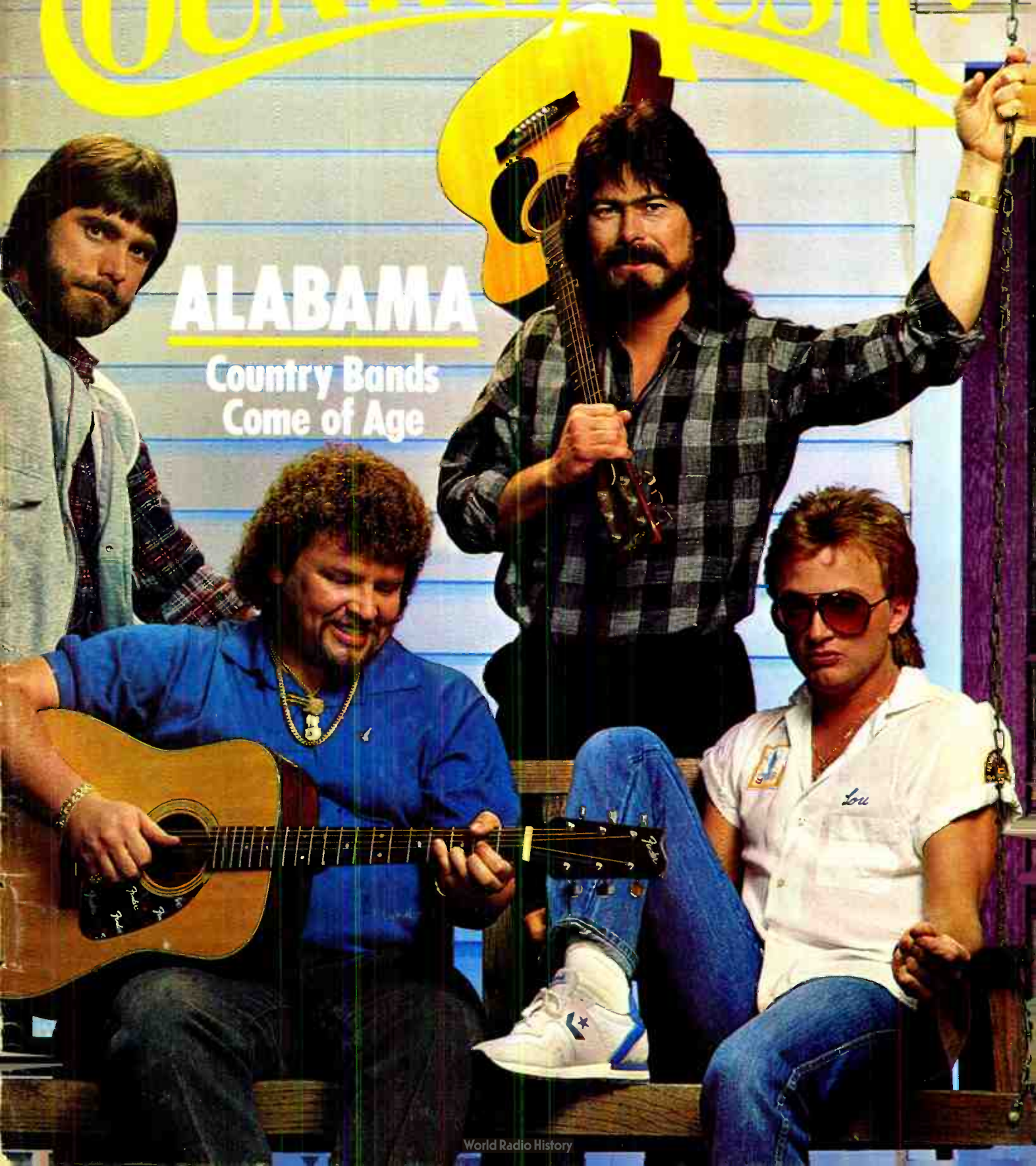
Loretta Lynn/Bill Anderson/Kathy Mattea/Sawyer Brown
Exile/Restless Heart/Nitty Gritty Dirt Band/Southern Pacific

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Country Bands
Come of Age



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from Tom Jones*



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3 Letters

Grand old flag, who's that with Wilma Lee, great Gary Morris, kibitzing with Kip, concert corral, back to basics, M-M-M-Merle, and the sweet sound of steel. All from you readers.

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by Rich Kienzle

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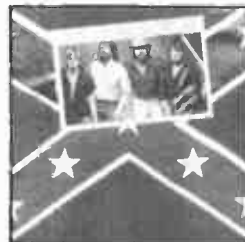
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Letters

No Album for Farmers

In response to Phoebe Allen's letter about an album for farmers, in the July/August issue, I believe she has a super-great idea. If the farmers have problems, everyone has problems. Food comes from the farms.

I dabble in poetry and have a few poems that could be lyrics for the album. Do I have any offers from Music Row to write the music for them?

Alene L. Carroll
Rose Haven, Maryland

There will be no live album of Farm Aid, due to complications of various kinds, so the door is still wide open on this project. Any takers?—Ed.

I second the idea about making an album on farmers. After all, they have sung about everything else, from trucks to trains, from prison to pains, but you've never heard one about the man that keeps the world fed and clothed.

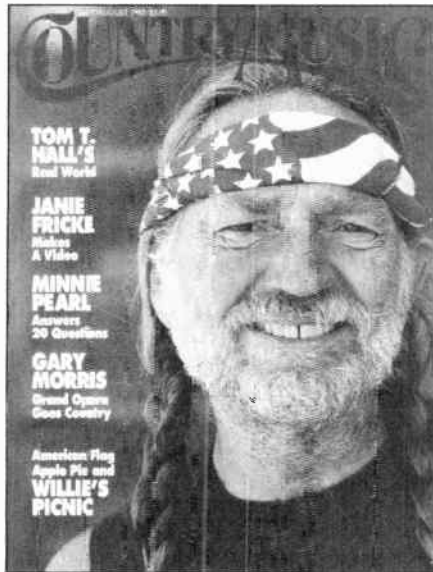
Ask Johnny Cash—if anyone can get the message across, it would be him. And he's not afraid to go against all odds to stand up for what is right.

Farmers, as American as apple pie. I ought to know. I am one.

David Curtis
Brighton, Tennessee

The world heard quite a few songs about American farmers at Farm Aid—including Johnny Cash's sure-to-be immortal rendition of "Old MacDonald" and Bob Dylan's "I Ain't Gonna Work on Maggie's Farm No More." Not to mention Merle Haggard's "Amber Waves of Grain"—all proceeds from sales of that single reportedly go to the Farm Crisis Committee—Charlie Daniels' "American Farmer" and Charley Pride's "Down on the Farm." Anyone ready to put them all on one album?—Ed.

In response to the letter about country music singers making a record for the American farmer, this farmer doesn't want charity although the act would be appreciated. If country music fans really want to help out the farmer, they can go to their local grocery store and buy some hamburger, cornflakes and other produce grown in the U.S.A. The thing that put the farmers where they are now is boycotts. Instead of spending



nine or ten dollars on a record, why not get some pork chops, which will not only meet a person's need for food but also help an American farmer.

Katie Lewman
Greenfield, Indiana

Willie and the American Flag

I have a son—he had to go to Vietnam. That is something that will never be out of his mind nor mine. The last thing I told him when he left was, "It is kill or be killed." I am bitter about it, but that still doesn't give me the right to show disrespect to the flag of the United States of America. You may ask, why do we fly it anyway? That flag is your ticket to freedom, and if it ever quits flying, Mr. John Q. Public, you have plenty to worry about.

So, Mr. Barnard, please, the next time a national holiday comes, and you decide to put the flag on the cover of your magazine, let it be aloft and flowing free, not wrapped around someone's head. Aren't you proud to be an American? I am, and also proud to be a country music fan.

Print it if you dare.

Doris Spillman
Hoxie, Kansas

I wish to vehemently protest the July/August cover picture of Willie Nelson desecrating our flag by wearing it for a

sweatband. Any patriotic American would or should know better than to desecrate our flag in such a manner. Willie apparently does not. He couldn't even sing the National Anthem for President Carter as he didn't know the words. I personally would not walk across the street to hear Willie sing if they paid me, because I don't think he can sing. But you people should know better than to print such a disgusting picture on the cover of such a great magazine. I am going to give you a choice, either print an apology to all patriotic Americans or cancel my subscription to *Country Music Magazine*. And, sir, I do love your magazine and would surely miss it.

Richard Estep, USAF Ret.
Dateland, Arizona

C'mon, Doris. C'mon Richard. We share your views; I'm sure Willie does, too. But, does anyone seriously think Willie Nelson is unpatriotic or disrespectful of the flag? That is a bandana on his head, not a flag. Just like the flag-style shoulder patches your local policeman wears—they are shoulder patches, not flags. Let's be patriotic—not sanctimonious.—Ed.

Say It With Feeling

The article on Willie's Picnic brought tears to my ears. It expresses more than just an opinion. It expresses feelings, feelings a lot of people can relate to. Michael Bane is one heck of a writer.

Country Music Magazine is like a ray of sunshine. It brightens my day each time I pick up one, even if I only have time to look at the cover.

I have been a fan of Waylon and Willie's for over twelve years. Their music has had such a big effect on my life. I just can't remember the music I listened to before Waylon and Willie.

Tena Hale
Maryville, Tennessee

Wahoo, Waylon

It is so rewarding to read in your magazine that so many of the country stars are kicking the habit of drugs and alcohol. I am a former Substance Abuse Director in a county jail system and also an ex-drunk. I know how much better you can do things sober.

I was extremely grateful to hear

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Waylon Jennings was off the stuff. I met Waylon at Uncle Pat and Aunt Patsy's house in 1959 when he was a disc jockey on KTEN in Lubbock, Texas. Hang in there, Waylon, it gets much better sober—and to everyone else who has got that monkey off their back.

John Aynes
Oak Dale, California

My daughters and I got to meet Waylon Jennings and Jessi Colter backstage in Vegas when they were there in June. I talked to Jessi for awhile when Waylon was on stage, and I've just got to tell all her other fans what a marvelous lady she is. I know I've never met a warmer or nicer person.

Also got to meet Waylon after his show and he was very polite and *straight*. He's been my favorite since *Honky Tonk Heroes*, and I've followed his career through all the ups and downs. He and Jessi put on good shows both at Vegas in June and at Tahoe in May. We traveled almost 600 miles one way just to see the show in Vegas. That's what I think of their shows!

Waylon admits he's had a problem but got to give him credit, he's pulling out of it beautifully. I'm sure others have stuck by him as I have, and maybe we should now refer to him as "New Waylon" instead of "Ole Waylon." I just drove 50 miles in 100° weather to buy his new album, and it sounds like Ole Waylon, which is to say, it's great! He's cleaned up his act, and he couldn't have a better partner than his lovely wife, Jessi. I, for one, will always be a fan of both. So hang in there, Waylon, your fans love you and we're all pulling for you!

Betty Scott
Camino, California

I am looking forward to a *good* interview with Waylon. Waylon is an excellent entertainer, and I have *never* been disappointed in any performance that I have seen, either in concert or on TV.

Waylon is the only one I have ever seen in concert. There are only a few others I would ever want to see *on stage*. Johnny Cash and Kris Kristofferson are two of them. I've seen Waylon this year, twice, so far, once in San Carlos, California, at the Circle Star Theatre and once in Salinas at Sherwood Hall. There wasn't a closer person to Waylon in the audience at Salinas than myself—front center, about 10 feet away. I could see everything and get great pictures. The man put on a great show!

In the *Highwayman* review in the July/August issue, no one mentioned the Dam Builder—Waylon. "They have the highwayman, and the sailor and then Johnny Cash, space pilot. Flying his Starship." I'm sure it was just a slip.

Patrick Carr and Michael Bane did mention that Johnny was "weird" and Kris was "comatose," which I totally disagree with. Last, but not least, "Hey, nobody ever told Waylon he had to sing—all he ever had to do was grunt." I guess they've never listened to the variety of music he's played in the past. Too bad, 'cause personally I think he's the best . . . but it's only my opinion.

I am glad to hear Waylon is getting his life straight, for his own sake. As long as he will continue to perform, I'll go and see him.

Christi Underwood
Scotts Valley, California
The interview is coming soon.—Ed.



The Man in Black autographs outside Radio City Music Hall.

Big John Cash

As an avid reader of your magazine, I've noticed that you folks at *Country Music* take a particular liking to Johnny Cash. This is fine, because if anyone deserves to be liked, it's Johnny Cash. The man is remarkable, to say the least. He faces every problem which arises before him, and manages to win battle after battle. He's the John Wayne of country music.

I've been a Johnny Cash fan since I was nine years old—I'm twenty-six now—and have about 130 Johnny Cash albums in my record collection. I also got the opportunity to attend twelve Johnny Cash concerts. Three shows which I'll never forget were at Radio City Music Hall on February 8 through February 10, 1985. I attended all three of the Johnny Cash/Waylon Jennings concerts, and actually met the man himself all three nights prior to the shows. Those were the three best days of my life. Although temperatures were below freezing, this did not deter the Man in Black from signing autographs. Not only is Johnny Cash a legend, he is a great human being, which is even more important.

Louis Lombardi
Glendale, New York

Desperados Writing a Review

Dear Mr. Barnard, Patrick and Michael, You did one terrific job in that review of *Highwayman* in Record Reviews in the July/August issue. It's time someone spoke loud and clear about the wonderful artists and composers we used to hear. I love your word "sludge."

For several years I've thought and talked as you have, but not so eloquently! I've sent letters to broadcasting studios, but fewer and fewer country classics are played. I hope your dialogue will be read by every disc jockey, producer and broadcasting owner in our land.

I appreciate and enjoy Johnny Cash. My name for him is *Charismatic Giant*. He holds his concert audiences in the palm of his hand. I think of the poignancy in so many of his own compositions in particular. His voice is great and so clear that we get every word. His songs are terrific; they can be tender; they can be gripping stories of patriotism, of Indians, of trains and rivers, of happiness and of love. I think of "Ragged Old Flag," "These Hands," "Pickin' Time," "The Baron," "Forty Shades of Green," "America," "The Big Battle," "Lorena," and more by the score, literally! He is the greatest of storytellers—undoubtedly his son, John Carter, has had a ball.

I'd like to turn back time, but, instead, I just keep on turning the radio dial, and then I just turn it "Off."

Three cheers for *Highwayman* and for Classic Country. Thank you again.

Mrs. LaMoyné Harlan
Claremont, California

Tom T. Terrific

I just had to sit down and write this note before I've even finished the article on Tom T. Hall in your July/August issue. That man is fantastic and he has more fans than he realizes. I am a local singer and songwriter and can really identify with Tom when he says he hates meetings and business and that he's not happy doing anything else besides being creative. I too like to see something happen when I work and have not found that kind of satisfaction in anything but music, even though it makes it difficult to earn a living so I can keep on writing and singing. And I thought I was an odd bird. Glad to hear I'm not so abnormal.

Please do not print my name. I get enough grief from friends and family about not meeting my responsibilities as a mature, responsible adult. They call my singing "playing." They say grow up. If they saw this, they'd never let up on me.

Name Withheld
Ft. Pierce, Florida

Ordinarily we don't print letters with names withheld. This time, we decided to, in honor of all would-be, struggling

songwriters who, like you, may be having identity problems.—Ed.

The interview with Tom T. Hall was one I really enjoyed. For those of you who have not had the opportunity to read Tom T.'s book about Nashville—you are missing a chance to gain a lot of insight into the Nashville scene during the 1960's and 1970's. I really enjoyed the book, and I have admired Tom T.'s talent for quite a few years.

Tom's thoughts about how the Opry should be handled were right on target. The Opry should not be "For Sale" to the highest bidder—*ever*. It is truly an art form, and country music fans should try and get legislation passed to insure that this is recognized and that it is financed accordingly. Perhaps this magazine could spearhead a campaign to accomplish this.

Virginia L. Engh
Silvis, Illinois

*The Ryman is being preserved as a historic landmark—we're in favor of that. The living Opry out at Opryland seems to be in good hands. It's both an art form and a business. Glad you liked the interview. For others who asked, Tom T.'s two books, *The Storyteller's Nashville* and *The Laughing Man of Woodmont Cove*, both published by Doubleday, are out of print. CMSA members can try for a copy through the Information, Please column of the Newsletter, or check your local library.—Ed.*

The Governor and the Lady

I would like to call your attention to the picture of Wilma Lee Cooper in People in your July/August issue, captioned "Wilma Lee Cooper and Tennessee Governor Lamar Alexander took to the streets on Mule Day." This is *not* Governor Lamar Alexander. It is Mayor Dickie Fulton of Nashville, who is a candi-



The real Gov—this is the man we should have pictured in our July/August issue with Wilma Lee.

date for Governor of Tennessee. I hope is that Wilma Lee really spent time with the present governor, as is quoted. She will really be embarrassed if she finds out she was with Mayor Fulton.

Ruth B. White
Madison, Tennessee

Our apologies to everyone except the mule. The Governor's office laughed at us when we called up to confess to them. They'd seen the mislabeled photo also.—Ed.

A Pearl of a Girl

Thank you so much for the article on Minnie Pearl in the July/August issue. I wish it had gone a little further, though. Does she have a fan club, and does she answer her letters personally? I'm interested because in the early 1950's I lived in the same town as her mother, near Grinders Switch, Tennessee. Also my father was a blacksmith, and he did work for her brother-in-law.

Jean Reed
Jasper, Alabama

Minnie Pearl answers her mail personally. To reach her, write The Minnie Pearl Museum, 1500 Division Street, Nashville, Tennessee 37203.—Ed.

The Mighty Morris

Thank you so much for the Gary Morris pictures, especially the full-page color, and the fine story by Helen Barnard in the July/August issue. I belong to his fan club. Also a daughter and three grandchildren belong—each have their own membership.

How about something just as good on Razy Bailey again? *Country Music* brought Razy to my attention in 1981. And how about Slim Whitman and a boost for his son Byron? They are great.

I love country music because there is room for the older singers too, but they don't get the promotion they've earned. I love so many of the older singers, and I buy their records. I love to read record reviews.

Elsie Kolonich
Holt, Michigan

Do you have a good source for the older singers' records? Many readers have asked us.—Ed.

Mr. Morris has a gift in his voice. When he sings or I see him on videos, it just makes me want to get the answer to one question. Where was he before I got married? And he's even a born and bred Texan. Help, how do I find him?

By the way, I'm not crazy. Just a country girl.

L. T. Clark
Lorena, Texas

For you and others who have asked, Gary's fan club address is: GMFC, c/o Betty Urbanek, 607 West Church Drive, Sugarland, Texas 77478.

Janie Fricke, and I
article about the
my favorite song,
"Memory is Me." I
as well as her voice.

Nancy Collins
Petersburg, Virginia

Kip's Corner

I would like to congratulate Kip Kirby for the *great* write-up on Johnny Rodriguez' *Full Circle* album in the July/August issue. *Full Circle* is definitely not going to set on many shelves, unsold, under "R." I think it's a great album—his best in years—and I'm glad Kip wrote it up like she did!

It was also a shocker to open the July/August *Newsletter* and see myself looking back at me.

Kay Walker
Lawndale, Illinois

Fans and stars at concerts across the country were featured in the July/August Newsletter. Kay and Johnny Rodriguez were among those pictured.—Ed.

In his July/August review of *Full Circle*, Kip Kirby captured the true essence and appeal of the album and the entertainer. To those who would ignore the album and Johnny because of Johnny's past personal problems, remember, entertainers give us the gift of their talent; we should not expect them to give us body and soul.

Rita Hayden
Mulberry, Kansas

Her review . . . that's Ms. Kirby. Did you catch the feature on Johnny in the September/October issue?—Ed.

I applaud your magazine for giving space to today's young performers. That's why I especially enjoyed Kip Kirby's review of *Restless Heart* in the July/August issue. This is the only album I've bought this year, and Kip knows what she's talking about when she writes of the band's excellent musicianship and tight harmonies. But I wonder if she knows that one of the members of the group, Paul Gregg, has a brother in another up and coming group from Nashville—and Kip, if you like *Restless Heart*, you're going to love The Tennessee River Boys!

Amy Tansey
Cincinnati, Ohio

For more on Restless Heart and today's bands, see "Country Bands Come of Age," also by Ms. Kirby, in this issue.—Ed.

On the Road Again ... with Shelly and David

While I was in Branson, Missouri, this July, at Roy Clark's theater, I was lucky to see two very nice people—



Kip and Dolly—Kip's on the left.

Shelly West and David Frizzell. They sure did put on a good show. Also they came out after the show and talked to the people—just as if they were one of us.

Mary Browning
Garden City, Kansas

... with Tammy Wynette

This past June I had the pleasure of seeing Tammy Wynette at Indian Ranch in Webster, Massachusetts. Tammy has been my ultimate favorite for many years. I have 27 of her records and eight of her with "the possum," George Jones.

Several years ago, we had seen Tammy at Oakdale Theater in Connecticut with The Oak Ridge Boys. That show was also good, but very formal compared to the Indian Ranch show. She changed clothes six times during the Indian Ranch shows! Excellent.

Sylvia E. Sefton
Granby, Massachusetts

... with Atlanta

Atlanta performed at our county fair in July, and I think they are a fabulous group of entertainers. They are not only fantastic artists but a great bunch of



Dressed to the nine's—Tammy Wynette, l., at the Indian Ranch show, and Atlanta, r., with Tim O'Dell in Indiana; Tim's in the hat.

friendly and warm people. I recommend their show to everyone, and I guarantee you'll find their music excellent.

Tim O'Dell
Elkhart, Indiana

... with George Strait

The George Strait concert at "Starfest" in Dallas on July 15 was great. George sang all the songs I was hoping to hear, from "Unwound" to "The Fireman." The new songs were beautiful. I'd heard one at Fan Fair, but hadn't heard "Something Special" before. It was pleasant to hear George's version of a couple of classics, too. The concert was sold out, naturally, and the crowd was enthusiastic.

Connie Patterson
Coppell, Texas

... with Leon Everette

My husband and I were fortunate enough to meet Leon Everette when we went to the Jim Miller Concert in Conway, Arkansas, on July 27 and 28. He put on two magnificent shows. He talked to us just as if we were family. He takes time from his busy schedule to greet his fans and mingles with the crowd during his outdoor shows. I even got to dance a few steps with him. He's one in a million. Too bad more stars don't follow his example. He gave autographs to everyone who wanted one. People sang and clapped and really enjoyed themselves. They left happy, knowing he gave them their money's worth and knowing it came from the heart.

Erma Solida
Pleasant Plains, Arkansas

... with Vince Gill

Vince Gill gave a terrific performance at the L. C. Walker Arena in Muskegon, Michigan, recently. Vince performed without a band—it was just him and his buddy B. James Lowry. And it couldn't have been better. It was absolutely great. Vince is a natural. When I asked him to sign my t-shirt after the concert,

he said, "I'll be glad to," and chatted with me until he was finished signing it. Where can I write to him?

Patricia A. Golden
Muskegon, Michigan

To reach Vince Gill, write c/o RCA Records, 30 Music Square West, Nashville, Tennessee 37203. For more about Vince, see People.—Ed.



Cajun Doug Kershaw embraces fan Marie Deslongchamps.

... with Doug Kershaw

Thank you, Doug Kershaw, for making the Lake Linden Centennial Celebration an extra-special, unforgettable experience for myself and all of the other fans who were at your concert at the Torch Lake Arena in Lake Linden, Michigan, on July 6.

Doug, they call you "The Raging Cajun" because you hit that stage with that hot, steaming fiddle of yours and cut loose, singing and playing all of those lively, infectious Cajun tunes. Wow, that Torch Lake Arena came to life.

Doug's also one of those country artists who really loves his fans—will take time for his fans, sign autographs, shake hands, shoot the breeze a little with us, take pictures and give that kiss. He's a real gentleman.

Marie Deslongchamps
Allouette, Michigan

... with the Dirt Band

After having seen The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band at Red Rocks near Denver in June



Leon Everette surrounded by fans at outdoor concert in Arkansas.

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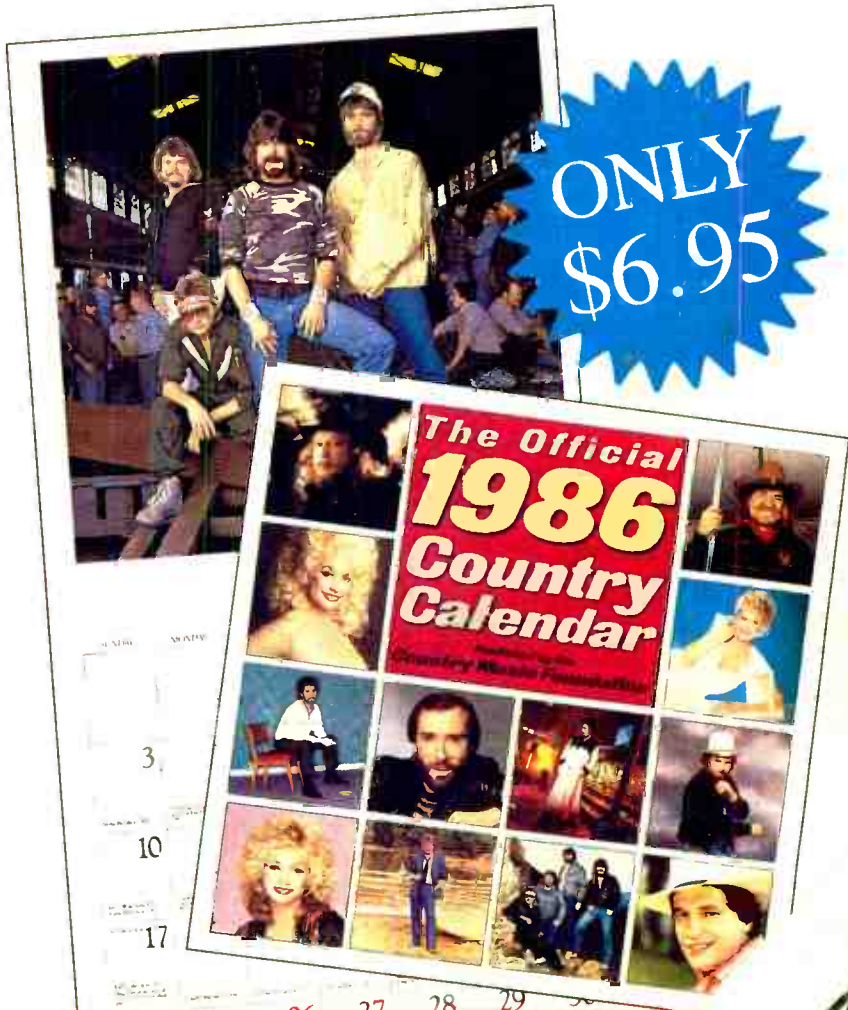
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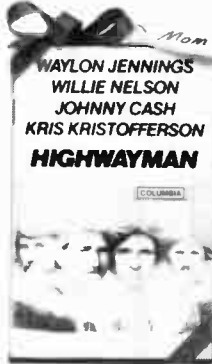
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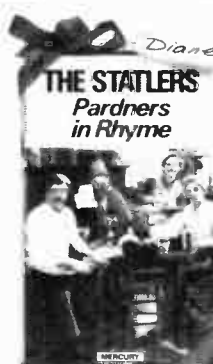
335067. Top 10 Country Album Chart—and #1 Country Single hit!



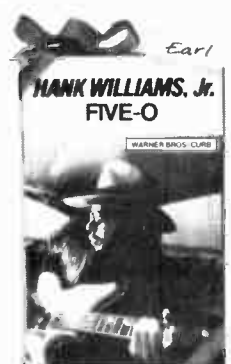
336362. Top 10 Country Album with hit *Touch A Hand. Make A Friend*; etc.



335109. *God Bless The U.S.A.: Somebody's Going To Love You*; many more.



335885. *Too Much On My Heart: Hello Mary Lou: Amazing Grace*, more.



335778. #1 Country hit *I'm For Love: I've Been Around: New Orleans*; etc.

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- 33552 PRINCE & THE NEW POWER GENERATION
- 335604 MEN AT WORK TWO HEARTS
- 329904 JOHN SCHNEIDER Too Good To Stop Now
- 329631 RICKY SKAGGS COUNTRY BOY
- 328906 EXILE KENTUCKY HEARTS
- 328658 JULIO IGLESIAS 1100 Bell Ave. P...
- 337931 ROGER MILLER GOLDEN HITS
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GREATEST HITS, 2

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511/586

and again in Cheyenne during Frontier Days in July, I can't sing their praises enough! In Cheyenne, it rained during their entire performance, but that didn't keep them from putting on a terrific show. The songs from their new album, *Partners, Brothers and Friends* are really great.

The Oaks were in Cheyenne also and set a new record for attendance. "Step on Out" is their best show ever, and I thought the others were unbeatable.

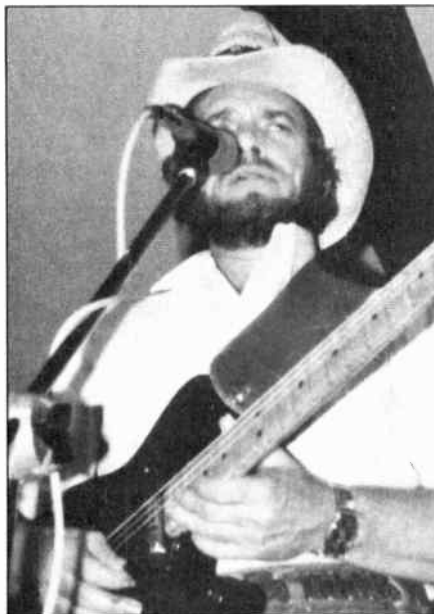
Also, to anyone who hasn't seen a Hank Jr. concert, you are missing one of the greatest "in person" performers ever! His new album, *Five-O*, is truly a masterpiece, from "New Orleans" to "Ain't Misbehavin'"! Bocephus has done it again.

Elaine Henderson
Craig, Colorado

Here's Haggard

Please thank Patrick Carr for taking the time to *listen* and to appreciate Merle Haggard's latest release, *Kern River*. Merle is the rock in the ongoing storm of change in country music.

I like uptempo music but neither a rock beat played on a Fender Telecaster nor a love song backed with sugar and 1000 strings make songs country. With this in mind, I bought *Kern River* the



Suzie Campbell's 1979 photo of Merle Haggard shows it can be done.

first time I saw it in the store. As Mr. Carr points out, "It is simply impossible for Merle to make an album that is not higher in basic quality than just about anything else around." This is because Merle cares deeply for the music he makes. If you don't believe that, just

listen to his music with headphones on and your eyes closed. His sad songs will make you cry and his western swing songs will have you "Ah-haa-ing" in no time.

Mr. Carr also mentions the perfection of The Strangers, who cannot be topped. As is with anything, practice makes perfect, and a band that has been together as long as this could not sound bad. The ease with which they play their jazzy riffs and hot licks always amazes me. How Alabama wins Band of the Year is a joke, but awards are almost always popularity contests, not talent itself. I know I sound prejudiced, but how many other superstars around, besides Merle, play western swing or a beautiful country waltz regularly?

What was so different about country music was its lack of loud, full-of-barchord sameness. Country music can be beautiful and still be country—just listen to Hank Williams' "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry." You can call me a dinosaur, but until Nashville chooses love over money, I'll stick with Merle and The Strangers, my country heroes.

Kurt D. Gay
Claycomo, Missouri

I love to read about my idol, Merle Haggard. I've seen him in concert—it was

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the Willie Nelson Picnic on July 2, 1983, at the dome in Syracuse. But I sat far away from him. I couldn't make him out. I could hear him sing, but I couldn't see him.

I wrote to Merle a few times and never got an answer. I send him songs, pictures and also a poem I wrote—it was published in *Country Rhythms Magazine*. Merle has so many different addresses. I wrote to every one of them and can't seem to get answers to my questions and nothing about his concerts, which I wrote and asked for—his concert tours, where he is appearing.

I guess they never read their mail. They just dump the letters somewhere, I guess. Even at most concerts they leave the fans cold. If it weren't for us fans, they wouldn't be where they are today. They could at least show a little sign of love.

I know I can say this for Conway Twitty and his son Michael—they sit on the stage and sign autographs, and they appreciate their fans, and that's what fans love.

Please tell me, how can I get an answer from Merle Haggard? Do I have to go up in the mountains to look for him, there in California?

Mary T. Sgroi
Frankfort, New York

In the past Merle has not had an active fan organization nor have there been established procedures for handling his mail. His new management plans to change all that, including having Merle's concert schedule available to the public after the first of the year. In the meantime, direct letters to Merle c/o Jeff Walker, P.O. Box 24454, Nashville, Tennessee 37202 or c/o CBS Records, 34 Music Square East, Nashville, Tennessee 37203. Or you could try the California hills—that's where Maxine Eden found him.—Ed.

I really enjoyed the review of *Kern River* in the July/August issue. My husband and I are both big fans of "the Hag," along with many of our friends.

I have seen him twice now, and read his book, *Sing Me Back Home—My Story*, written with Peggy Russell. Can you tell me if he is touring now, and where? We would love to catch another of his concerts.

Also, it has been said that Merle doesn't allow pictures taken of him during shows. Well, I don't know about now, but here is proof that he used to.

Suzie Campbell
Valencia, Pennsylvania

On Merle's itinerary, see above. As for his policy on fans taking photos, according to his present management he likes to give fans as much leeway to take pictures as possible. He does not, however, like to interfere with the rules laid down by particular promoters or

concert halls, and, where TV is involved, restrictions also apply.—Ed.

Back to Basics

I wish the CMA and Nashville, in general, would quit trying to redefine country music. Do they really think they have to re-invent the wheel every few years to sell records to another generation of kids?

If they just keep it simple, people will come to country music, buy the recordings, go to the dance halls, etc. No need for all the hype, weird clothes and monkey-shining rock groups. It's the music, basically, a country fan wants—not the bull you see used to sell rock/pop. I read that the average country record buyer is 37 years old—so, who gives a damn about George Jones as a sex symbol—just as long as he sings.

I'm beginning to believe that all great music was developed before electricity. If we only used it for general amplification, like at a bluegrass festival, we would be better off, I believe. A real country band and a symphony orchestra have in common that they just set up and start playing. People come to hear the music, or dance to it, and the rhinestones are in the audience, not on the stage.

If the country music business is returning to basics, like I hear it is—thank God—Nashville had better send all those crock musicians and producers back to Los Angeles, San Francisco and New York City and let them get back into the orchestrated noise business again—they can dye their hair purple this time. Make money fast, because 10 years from now your fans won't remember a thing you did.

In country music you don't get rich quick, except in rare cases, but, if the people like what you do, they will support you and honor you for many, many years.

Frank Hall
Houston, Texas

I am a country music fan and really love it. However, your magazine, the Grand Ole Opry and The Nashville Network on TV all have a huge hole in your articles and/or programming—old-time country music and bluegrass. All of you seem to have just moved on and left it way out in left field. Please bring this music back to the public in both articles and programming.

Frank Hanks
Pleasant Grove, Alabama

Bluegrass and old-time country performers are covered regularly in the CMSA Newsletter. Join the Society and enjoy Legends of Country Music. This month's feature is on Uncle Dave Macon. For a review of the latest album by Bill Monroe and the stars of the Bluegrass Hall of Fame, see Record Reviews.—Ed.



Carlos Minor and the steel guitar go back a long way—l., 1971; r., today.

Sweet Steel

In my opinion—being a steel guitar picker and writer of recorded country songs in the past—the reason less steel guitar is being used in country recordings today, the reason that beautiful sound of the early 1940's and 1950's is gone, is because steel guitar has become a mechanical sound, pedal wise. I dig all forms of steel guitar, dobro—non-pedals, which is what I play—and like pedal steel guitar and some great pickers of pedals, but, in my opinion, most all, if not all, sound alike: no great styles like the great Jerry Byrd, my favorite, or Roy Wiggins or Leon McAuliffe or others. These guys played real steel guitar. Not to forget some other great non-pedalers still around today. . . . But I feel the real beauty of tone, feel, touch on steel is *very rare* today in steel guitar, in the mechanical age of steel.

I find it does make it more easy for youngsters to learn today on pedals, and manufacturers of same make a good buck compared to the less expensive steel guitars of early years. Fine, more power to them, but there's a thing in music called tone, feel, touch, as stated before. It's what gets to a listener, and it appears today the listener is not listening.

Recently I sat side by side with a young pedal steel player, and we traded licks on steel guitars, and the bass man said he could hardly tell that there weren't two pedal steel guitarists in the band, as I was throwing in pedal sounds by slant positions, etc. The young pedaler asked me, how did I get pedal sounds without pedals? He was unaware of the old school of music on the steel guitar.

Anyhow, that's just one steel picker's opinion. To each his own, I say!

Carlos Minor
Sesser, Illinois

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WILLIAMS GETS THE REAL THING

They call Don Williams the Gentle Giant—I call him friend. Don, whose laconic nature is almost as famous as his songs, finally got mad about something and let somebody have it! The target was none other than the Coca-Cola company. When they tried to wean him from Coke, he got so furious he was ready to go to Atlanta or China and find the old recipe. He adamantly refused to break his old habit. Not only that, he went into his record collection and found one of his own albums from several years back where he is pictured standing by an auto with a Coke in his hand! Loyalty? You betcha. And as Don was in Nashville singing "Stand By Your Coke," people from sea to shining sea and in Russia too were screaming, "We want the old! Down with the new!" Some even claimed that they suffered withdrawal symptoms and almost had to go in for therapy while drying out from their addiction to old Coke.

Never fear though, Don Williams is here. Don was the first celebrity to take a public stand against the "new Coke" in a nationally syndicated newspaper article. Not too long after his article appeared, Coca Cola announced the re-emergence of the "old Coke," now called "Classic."

Don, who'd just as soon stay home with his wife as to go out and be famous, has signed on the dotted line anew. A man who isn't subject to change without reason, when his contract expired with MCA, Williams took himself down 16th Avenue, on famed Music Row, to Capitol, where long-time friend Jim Foglesong resided and said, "I want to make phonograph recordings at your label." Foglesong, who ain't always in a hurry, offered Don whatever he asked, I reckon, 'cause from now until he gets ready to move again sometime, Don Williams will be found on Capitol Records. Don's long-time co-producer Garth Fundis will remain in his role. Also, interestingly enough, Fundis has been accompanying Don on-the-road, and I hear tell it's been loads of fun.



Don Williams and Claude A. Clements, President and General Manager of the Coca Cola Bottling Company in the southeast, down a can of Coke from the first case of "Classic Coke" that was made again.

Isn't it wonderful to have one so near normality in this world of "Oh, they're drying out," or "she's on the wagon again," or "he just can't help that he cannot be satisfied with just one woman," and on and on and on. In the midst of all this, here comes that sweet Don Williams, just bent out of shape because of something as normal as wanting his soft drink. He knows it's okay for us Americans to speak up against the establishment, even if the issue is just Coca-Cola, and he acts on that principle. So I hope all you good country music fans appreciate this good man, a prince of a fellow, Don Williams.

LET'S HEAR IT FOR THE HIGHWAYWOMEN

With "The Highwayman" riding high on the singles charts, this could just be the last of the wild frontier. Waylon, Willie. Cash and Kris have put a bunch of miles on their bodies and added a bunch of smiles to many otherwise sad faces with their music. I can't think of four people in the world who have brought more happiness than these. But didn't they go through hell and back to Nashville to get where they are? They've been through booze, broads, drugs, groupies and hangers-on; but they came out with their hearts and vocal chords in the right

tune. Thank God for this. About the only way I can figure for the Mrs.'s to get even with the Mr.'s here is to record "The Highwaywoman" by Jessi Colter Jennings, Connie Nelson, June Carter Cash and Lisa Kristofferson. Course this would probably be the last stand of women who do stand by their men no matter what it costs. Some call it determination... I call it love.

GO STRAIT FOR THE GOLD, GEORGE

Artist George Strait strikes gold with his MCA recordings not once but twice! The handsome, real live cowboy was honored in Los Angeles recently, at a ceremony prior to an appearance at the Universal Theater, for his two certified gold record albums, *Right or Wrong* and *Does Ft. Worth Ever Cross Your Mind*. Rumor has it that George still drives his own pickup truck around his Texas spead; however, the gold is displayed on the walls of his home and he ain't out looking for it in them-thar hills.

GIVE AND TAKE

Life is give and take, and no one knows this better, lately, than J.P. Pennington, lead singer/songwriter with Exile. On July 6th, J.P. and Suzi named their

Reporter: Hazel Smith

Editor: Rochelle Friedman

People

daughter **Jessica Rose**. Less than a week later J.P.'s mother, trailblazer and pioneer **Lily May Ledford**, passed away. 68 years old, she founded and led the **Coon Creek Girls**, country music's premier and most renowned all-girl band. Ledford's career began in 1936. Our sympathy to the entire family of Lily May.

Love and sympathy also to **Eddie Rabbitt** and family **Janine** and **Demelza**. Young **Timothy** passed away in Minneapolis following surgery to replace a diseased liver that had affected him since birth. Timothy was only 23 months old.

To the family of **Wynn Stewart**, dead at 51 at his Hendersonville home, *Country Music* staff and personnel send condolences. Wynn will be long remembered for songs like "It's Such a Pretty World Today" and "Waltz of the Angels."

I ain't trying to preach. Lord knows I ain't good enough. But I think it would be a good thing for everybody to do that reads my column...tell somebody you love them today 'cause tomorrow might

be too late. **Russell**, I love you, honey!

THIS, THAT 'N' T'OTHER

Five members of **Lee Greenwood's** band were hurt when the bus they were traveling in was broadsided by a tractor trailer. Greenwood, traveling behind in another bus (one of three used on the road), was not injured; however, his son **Marc** suffered a sprained ankle, keyboard player **Gene Lorenzo** had a fractured wrist; piano player **Mickey Olson**, rhythm guitarist **Paul Uhrig** and his brother, bass player **Rick Uhrig**, all suffered back injuries. The crash occurred near Madison, Wisconsin, where the group was scheduled to appear. Those injured were treated in St. Mary's Hospital in Madison.

Bill Monroe's new album on MCA (of course) is out now as planned. Titled *Stars of the Bluegrass Hall of Fame*, those performing with the old master mandolinist are: **Jim & Jesse**, the **Country Gentlemen**, **Mac Wiseman**, **Carl Story**, the **Seldom Scene**, **Del**

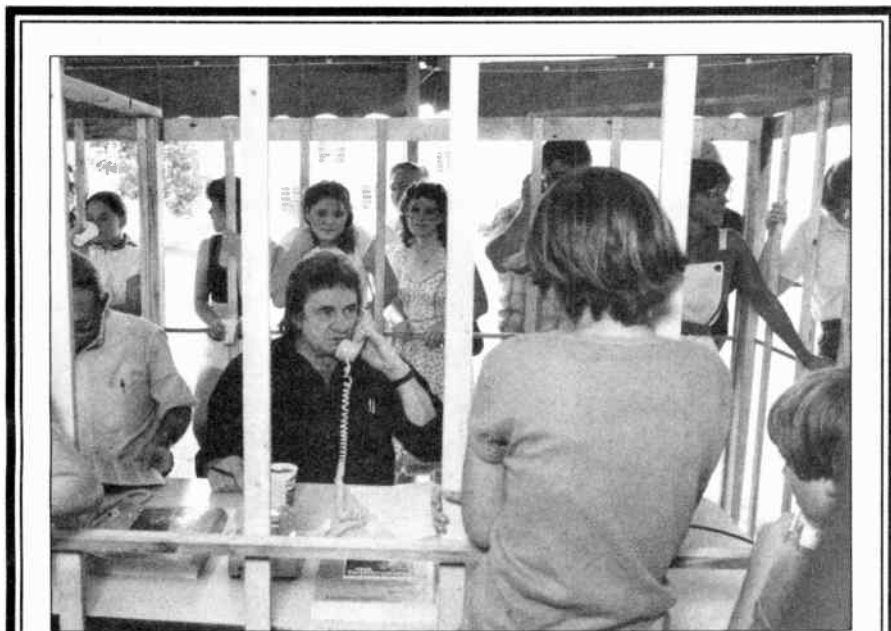


Marty Stuart gets signed.

McCoury, **Ralph Stanley**, **Bobby Hicks** (fiddle virtuoso with **Ricky Skaggs**), the **Osborne Brothers** and of course the **Bluegrass Boys**.

And that cute **Marty Stuart** had a live and in person showcase at **Bogey's**. From what I hear, and it's true, Marty has a recording deal on CBS as a result of the performance. (Ain't that **Rick Blackburn** smart? He already grabbed **Gene Watson** and **Connie Smith**, not to mention that most of your **Walking Around Legends** are already on his label!) Marty started playing mandolin with the late **Lester Flatt** when he was 13 years old and was taking breaks even at that early age. Living with **Roland White**, who was also playing with Flatt at the time, young Marty became fascinated with **Clarence White's** guitar. The late Clarence White, Roland's brother, was such an innovator with the guitar, especially acoustic, and after Clarence's untimely death, Marty more or less "took up where Clarence left off." As fate would have it, Marty started playing guitar, mandolin, fiddle, bass or whatever instrument nobody had in their hands at the time with **Johnny Cash**, and Marty played 'em all good—some of 'em better than good. As reported by yours truly, Marty Stuart is the only hillbilly picker ever asked to perform with the **Paul Shaffer Band** of the famed **David Letterman** TV show, after Cash and **Waylon Jennings** appeared on the show. Marty done good, of course. When he was as young as 13, chicks hung after Marty, and at the tender age of 16, the ladies were sticking to him like white on rice. The prettiest one of all snagged him, beautiful **Cindy Cash**, daughter of the boss man, and sister of star herself, **Rosanne Cash**.

But back to the music. Marty and producer **Curt Allen** (brother of **Rex Allen Jr.** and son of **Rex Allen Sr.**) had



GO DIRECTLY TO JAIL

The ever popular **Highwayman** was served with a warrant for his arrest from the Hendersonville, Tennessee, Police Department with charges of impersonating "The Man In Black." It was all for a worthy cause, to benefit the American Cancer Society's Hendersonville chapter. After being handcuffed and taken away, Cash was placed in a mock jail on the front lawn of Hendersonville High School where he took pledges from across the country. Many fans called to bail Cash out, but others, including **Tammy Wynette**, **Larry Gatlin** and **Barbara Mandrell** gave pledges to keep him incarcerated.

BETH GWINN

The Statlers have some nice things in store for you



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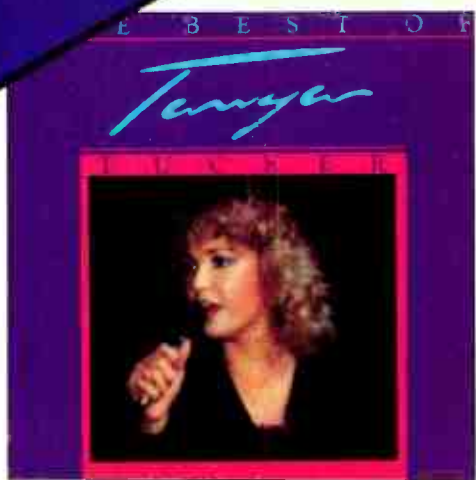


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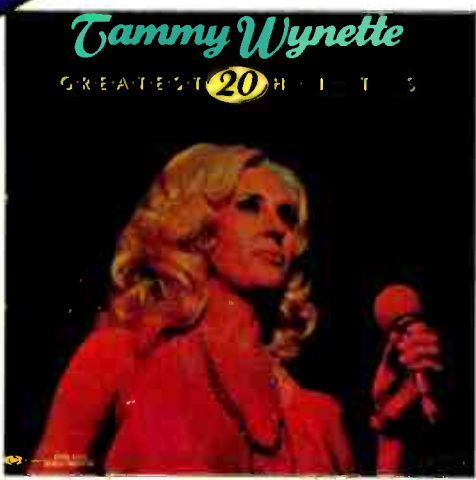
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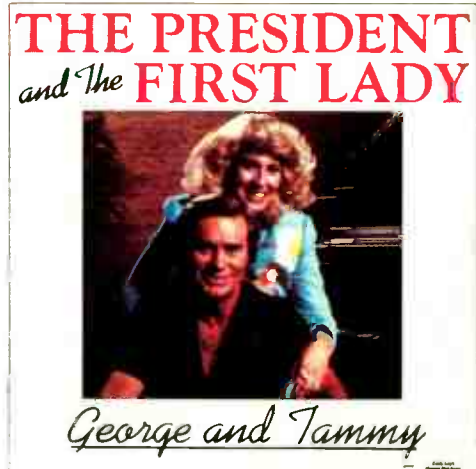
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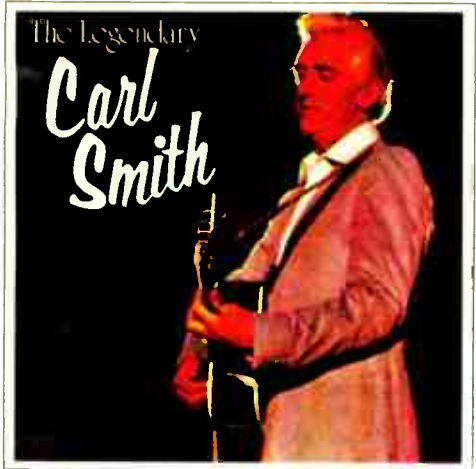
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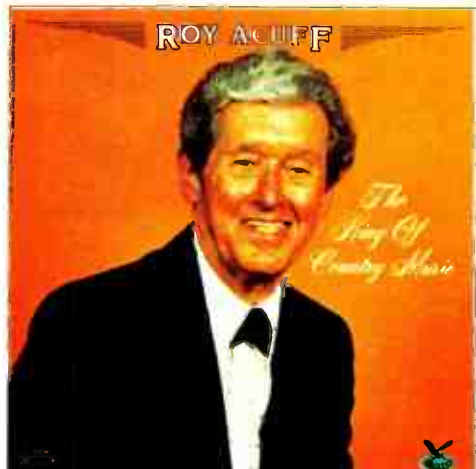
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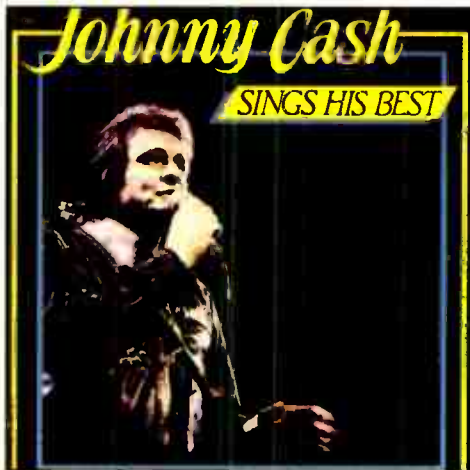
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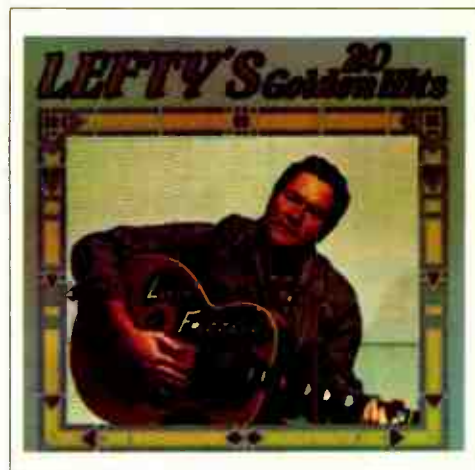
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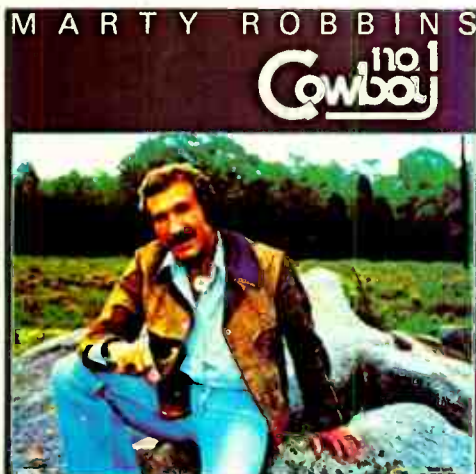
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State _____ Zip _____

A Beautiful Gift For Someone You Love.

People



WASHINGTON VIPS

Second in command, Vice President Bush, greeted Loretta Lynn and her son Ernest Ray, following her performances at the Kennedy Center. Second to no one, Loretta said, "If he ever decides to run for the top job, I'm gonna be standin' right beside him."

been in the studio laying tracks, overdubbing, and all those impressive words one learns while in a making-recordings situation. Curt had pitched the tape of four tunes around Music City. Some said no, some said maybe, and some said let us see the boy live and in living color, which was the real reason for the showcase in the first place.

Marty picked some of the best pickers in town to accompany him, and they would have to be the best to play as good as the kid, Marty. T. Michael Coleman who plays with Doc Watson, played bass; Tony Newman, who plays for Crystal Gayle, played drums; Jody Maphis from Johnny Rodriguez's band played guitar and Anthony Crawford of Neil Young fame played steel guitar, guitar and organ; and to top it all off, the greatest fiddler in Music City, Mark O'Connor. Bogey's was packed with cheerleaders, including Rodney Crowell and Rosanne Cash, Harlan and Sharon Howard and lots of friends, neighbors and label folks. Marty, whatever comes of this, you know what the Smith Brothers, Billy and Terry, Takako, Adam and I think of you as a friend, and how we respect your music. Our love and our prayers go with you, now and forever.

MORE OF THE SAME

Tommy Cash, John's brother, is selling real estate for Folk Jordan in Hendersonville. Tommy Jennings, Waylon's

brother, is producing *Johnny Paycheck* on the AMI label. AMI is a small indy in Hendersonville.

Judy Newby leaves Top Billing to manage *Johnny Rodriguez*. Nashville born Oprah Winfrey's syndicated show out of Chicago will be opposite *Phil Donahue*. This ain't country, but it's a Nashville fact!! Winfrey, formerly with the news department of Channel 5 here in Music City, is presently in North Carolina acting in the Steven Spielberg-produced movie *The Color Purple*. The book with the same title was written by Carolinian Jane Walker, who hails from Durham like John D. Loudermilk and Don Schlitz!! Oprah called daddy (who is a city councilman) and said as of this August she was, on paper, a millionaire. Not bad for a 30-year-old lady!

Mel McDaniel was there singing when O.J. Simpson was inducted into the National Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio, on August 2. Mel's new album on Capitol is called *Standup*. I stand up for you, Mel, you sing good!

Tom T. Hall hosted the National Independent Truckers meeting in Music City in mid-August, and not only provided the entertainment at Brentwood Country Club, but also invited the truckers to his Williamson County home, Fox Hol-

low. I gotta hand it to Tom T., a hillbilly can't do a better favor to nobody than have a truck driver in their home. Truckers, waitresses and farmers are dyed-in-the-wool-fans of country songs and singers. Hats off to Tom.

Mark Gray provided entertainment for *Uptown Hoedown* to benefit the National Kidney Foundation of Middle Tennessee.

The CMA decided to include a new category in this year's CMA Awards. It's **Music Video of the Year**. So now we fans can cheer for what looks good in country music as well as for what's music to our ears. First-round nominations for the award were made by a panel of industry experts; final nominations and winners were decided by vote of the entire membership of the CMA. Haven't we been keeping you posted on what's new in video all year?

In raising my kid, I tried to stress the importance of constructive criticism. Apparently it took! Several issues back, a gentleman from Mississippi wrote *Country Music* saying as how he didn't like Hazel Smith's copy. In the same issue a couple from Maryland declared and allowed that they enjoyed Hazel's copy. My son Terry called to say that we had received the new mags and that my



ONLY IN THE MOVIES

Kenny Rogers got some help from Woody Paul, Too Slim and Ranger Doug, aka, Riders in the Sky, in Kenny's upcoming film *Wild Horses*. Kenny plays an ex-rodeo champ, looking for a new lease on life. The made for TV movie, scheduled for release in November, also stars Pam Dawber, Ben Johnson and Richard Farnsworth.

JAY DUSARD

People



FOLLOW THAT BIRD
Since Waylon's straightened out, you can see him with a whole new set of friends. Newest is Big Bird from Sesame Street. Waylon, who was coaxed by his son Shooter to appear in the movie, *Follow That Bird*, also recorded a duet with the winged fellow. Songs by Alabama, Ronnie Milsap and the cast of Sesame Street will be included on the soundtrack.

copy looked great. He then came upon the letter to the editor from Mississippi and said, "As you always told us, Mama, constructive criticism is the sincerest form of flattery, because folks who don't do nothing can't get criticized anyway!"

HERE COMES ANOTHER GROOM

Dave Rowland said "I do" in Music City to lovely Terry Jo Allen. According to sources who are in-the-know, the Rowlands will honeymoon at a later date, but for now the singing star has got himself booked at about 40 fairs across the country. Being fair, Dave, a Fair is a real good gig.

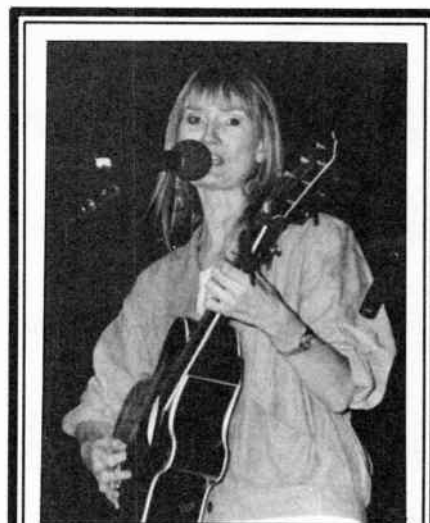
MORE I DO'S AND ME TOO'S

Shelly West's second marriage, to TV director Garry Hood, took place this summer, on July 16. Garry's been associated with various awards shows on TV, including the *Academy Awards*, the *CMA Awards* and the *Music City News Awards*. He's also worked with *Hee Haw*. Good luck to the newlyweds. Following the ceremony, Shelly and Garry set off on a working cruise on board the USS Norway.

IN THE SHADOW OF DOLLY

Dolly Parton's elder sister, Willadean, has written a book about her famed sis

titled *In the Shadow of a Song*, starting in East Tennessee and covering (or uncovering?) the story all the way to Hollywood and back. Now don't go out and try to buy Willadean Parton's book cause the book stores ain't got it. They do have a book by Willadean, however. Dollywood (or Dolly-would? Lord knows, I don't know.) Our own Dolly is just so rich and so famous, and I'm so proud of her for more reasons than one. As we read, Dolly is negotiating for the construction of *Dollywood*, a theme park in East Tennessee near her "Tennessee Mountain Home." Whether it's "Dollywood" or "Dolly-would," it don't really matter. She is Tennessee, Dixie, southern, East Tennessee, Nashville, Grand Ole Opry, country music, a queen, a princess, and anything she's done is a credit to the business of music. Dolly is definitely an endangered species and as she celebrates her 40th birthday next year, I feel that we should have the President proclaim Dolly's birthdate Dolly Parton Day for the USA, and declare that we must take better care of this one-of-a-kind.



SUMMER LIGHTS AND GAIL DAVIES

One of the better country, down home, good and real singers is Gail Davies. Shown here performing during the Summer Lights Festival, Gail is singing her controversial single "Unwed Fathers." Gail recently signed with RCA. Here's hoping the songstress will start having the Number One hits she so deserves.

CHARMAINE LANHAM



CHARMAINE LANHAM

Vince and daughter Jenny.

PROUD FATHER

Remember the Academy of Country Music awards when newcomer Vince Gill was named winner of the male Horizon Award? Course you do. Well, do you recall how brave Vince looked when he approached the podium? Course you do. And do you recall as how he started to speak, but couldn't? Yes, yes, yes, you do! Thought my readers would like to see a photo of handsome Vince Gill and young Jenny, his daughter. Vince is managed by lady first class, Mary Martin, just named A&R person at RCA Records. Thank God the powers that be had the good taste and sense to hire a lady of this caliber.

Back to the boy singer—at the awards, Vince started a speech that came out, "Thanks to my wife and my daughter." Choking back the tears, he barely added, "And that's all."

A MUSIC CITY DO FOR A REAL STAR

June Carter Cash was there with all the local celebs from TV, news, specials, etc. Louise Mandrell was hostess at her on-the-lake mansion she shares with songwriting hubby, handsome R.C. Bannon—who by the way was recouping from an injury he incurred during the all-star games the week of Fan Fair. The guest of honor was adorable mom-to-be Barbara Mandrell. Pregnant sis, Irlene Mandrell, co-chaired the event, and even Wonder Woman a/k/a Linda Carter jetted in from the Los Angeles area. Jeannie C. Riley and Shelly West showed up and enjoyed the let's-play-baby games. Pretty Sharon White with her tasty white, burgundy and lavender-purple striped dress was quite striking,

People

as was pretty Lori Morgan. Minnie Pearl and Rose Lee Maphis also attended the do, as did pretty mom/grandma to-be Mary Mandrell. Word is the party was a smashing success. the house was beautifully decorated and the chow was absolutely the best.

ALL RIGHT, I'LL SIGN THE PAPER

Johnny Russell signs the paper while Grand Ole Opry manager Hal Durham looks on. With the signing, in the 60th year of the world-famed Grand Ole Opry, Johnny Russell becomes the Opry's 60th member. He wrote "Act Naturally," which was a monster hit for Buck Owens back in the 1960's and was the only country song sung during live performances by the Beatles. Plus big Johnny boasts of more than 20 million in record sales, overall. He had a big record on RCA, "Red Necks, White Socks and Blue Ribbon Beer," and is also remembered for his incredible performance of "Catfish John," another big record and a great song.

Johnny had wanted to be a member of the Opry since the beginning of his career and was so humbly proud when he



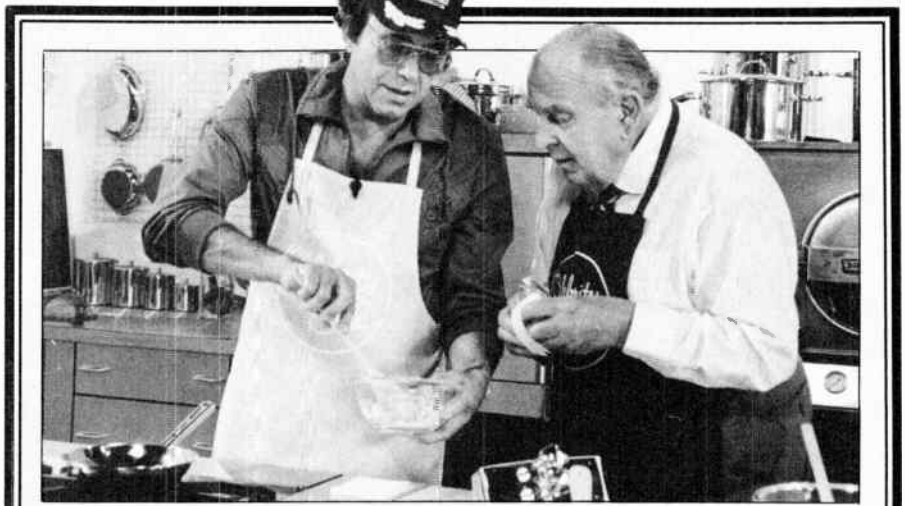
LES LEVERETT

New Opry member Johnny Russell.

was inducted into the prestigious group this summer. The rotund man of sound is a real showman and a great songwriter and singer. The marriage of Johnny and the Opry should be a lasting one.

OLD WATERING HOLES NEVER GO DRY OR THE ORCHID THAT REFUSED TO DIE

World-famed Tootsie's Orchid Lounge closed for good March 20th of this year with media hullabaloo locally and nationally. However, never fear, Johnny Rus-



BARE'S SECRET RECIPE

Bobby Bare was on hand to give Robert Morley some tips on cooking on Morley's *Celebrity Chefs* cable TV show. Bobby dropped by to show Morley how to make squash pie with praline cream. The show, on CBN cable network, is sponsored by Campbell Soup, and mixes a half hour of talk, entertainment, fun and food. It features favorite recipes of the stars served by the celebrities themselves. Host Robert Morley admits he'd rather eat than cook and has been joined by many a star on his show, including Carol Channing, Dick Cavett, Tony Randall and many others. By the way, if you would like a copy of Bare's recipe, write to *Celebrity Chefs Recipes*, Campbell Soup Company, P.O. Box 478, Monticello, Minnesota 55365.

MARY BLOOM

sell is here. Not the Johnny of singing fame, just a Johnny with same last name! In mid-July it was hot and dry in Music City, especially down on lower Broadway. Not many smiles laced the faces of the drunks, derelicts and folks like me and you who occasionally do go to stare at The Ryman Auditorium. Locks were on the door at Tootsie's, but were removed, and the watering hole of such famed vocalists as Willie Nelson, Kris Kristofferson, Faron Young, Tom T. Hall, and Roger Miller was open once more, to quench the thirst of stars and star gazers alike.

The back door of Tootsie's opened directly to the backdoor of the old Ryman and many a thirsty artist would "up and empty" a cool one between their first and second shows at the Grand Ole Opry. Rumor has it that some never made it back for the second show, but that's another story, for another time.

When the Opry moved, lock, stock and stars, out to the new Grand Ole complex near Opryland on Briley Parkway in 1974, Lower Broad became an eyesore to Nashville's Mayor Richard Fulton, and to all the city's powers that be. They

planted a few flowers and the winos used them for a urinal. The area became an after-hours playground of massage parlors and ladies of the evening, and, of course, crime ran rampant. The entire neighborhood, including Tootsie's, became debilitated and dangerous. A major overhaul of the club is underway by new owner Johnny Russell, who has owned other clubs in the lower Broadway area, but he promises the walls of fame with the faded, dated stars' photos will remain untouched.

On the day that Tootsie's re-opening was due, I stopped at the car wash outside Nashville in Madison. As I walked in to pay the attendant, I heard a familiar voice and saw Whitey Shafer. He did not recognize me, so I didn't say anything. When his tires squealed as he drove away, I looked at my watch. It was exactly 10:45 A.M., fifteen minutes from re-opening time of Tootsie's. The car bolted out of sight headed toward I-65, and I couldn't help but wonder if Whitey was headed for Tootsie's for one more round in memory of all the good times he and Lefty Frizzell spent drowning sorrows and dreaming up new songs. ■

20 Questions with

The thing that always strikes one about Whisperin' Bill Anderson is that he has so many things going at once. Recording. Writing. Television. Producing. Since establishing himself first as one of Nashville's premier songwriters and then as a performing artist in the 1960's, Anderson has been a presence in country music. But as the music began to change and other artists from the 1960's began to fade, Anderson kept right on a changin', as the song says, and the results have surpassed even his imagination.

We caught up with Bill Anderson after he'd been on a much needed Florida vacation and convinced him to answer a quick 20 questions.

1

So what's up with Bill Anderson these days?

Mostly I'm trying to juggle three careers. I get up in the morning and look in the mirror and say, "Who am I today?" I'm the host of *Fandango* and producer of *You Can Be a Star on The Nashville Network*—that takes up about one third of my time. I spend about another third of my time working for Po' Folks Restaurants—and believe me, I've learned a whole lot more about the restaurant business than I ever wanted to know! And whatever's left over, I put into the music business.

2

Does it hurt to spend two-thirds of your time away from recording and performing?

Well, the whole business has changed so much. I woke up one morning and found myself an old timer...

3

How has it changed, specifically?

Well, let's go back to the days when I came to Nashville.

When I came, you knew everybody. Knew what everybody was doing. When somebody had a hit, we all knew about it. We all hung together. Nowadays, I don't even know people who are doing a similar thing to what I'm doing.

4

As an ex-journalist, why do you think these changes have come about in the business?

Money is, of course, the underlying thing. It went from Mom and Pop to megabucks. When people realized there was that kind of money in country music, it had to change.

5

Have you had a chance to record any records at all lately?

As a matter of fact, I have a new album just out, called *Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*. It's a double album. On one record, I went back in the studio and recorded all the older songs—in a lower key, that is. On the other I do new material.

6

What was it like doing the old stuff again—not that you've ever stopped doing it on stage, but in the studio again?

It was kind of a head trip. I wasn't prepared emotionally for what those old songs did to me. I'll tell you one thing—I think I did them better than I ever did before. I didn't have to prove anything. I was really relaxed. It was like being in the studio with old friends. Then every old memory came floating back. Where I was when I wrote the song. What happened when I first sang it. It was a real memory trip.

7

Did you get a chance to write any new ones?

Only one, "Pity Party." I was working with Walter Haines, who worked with Owen Bradley, who, of course, did my biggest hits. It was fun, so much like working with Owen. I don't think I can remember an album that was as much fun as this one.

8

Do you miss songwriting?

Let me tell you a story, Michael. I used to look at other songwriters who got too busy to write, and I'd say that's never going to happen to me. Not me. Oh no. Not me. Woops! It happened to me! I guess I could say I never really stopped songwriting for myself. I just got confused about what was acceptable.

9

What do you mean?

Well, I was always an idea writer, a lyric writer. I'd write a song with what I thought was really good lyrics, play it for someone, and they'd say, "Hey, it doesn't have a beat." I'd say, "Listen to the words!"

10

Did you stop writing songs totally?

What I'd do is write a verse or a chorus I really liked and then stick it in a folder somewhere. I never really finished or polished the song. But I kept writing little pieces for myself.

11

So describe for me how you see Nashville today versus Nashville when you first arrived.

Everybody's trying to hit a home run instead of trying to hit singles and doubles—that's the old sportswriter in me coming out. All the Pete Roses of this business who hit singles and doubles, there's no place for them. The offshoot is that loyalty goes out the window. Country music becomes

like pop—you're only as good as your last hit.

12

What's it like working for *The Nashville Network*?

You know, *The Nashville Network* is the biggest culture shock to hit Music Row in years. They laughed at it, and now they're beating down the door to get on it. As a person who believed in it and who has been involved in it from the very beginning, I think that it's wonderful. I did the game show the very first night *The Nashville Network* signed on. I also did an interview after the *Network* signed on, and I said that the night the *Network* started would one day be as important as the night the Opry started. Maybe I exaggerated a little, but let's wait and see.

13

Was it tough to go from being a performer on stage to a game show host?

I'd had the experience of doing just that on the ABC show *The Better Sex* I hosted with Sarah Purcell in 1976-77. But yes, at first it's a real shock. No guitar! Nothing to hold on to! At first that really drove me crazy. Then I just kind of fell into it, started grooving with it. I've always been comfortable talking with people from my days in radio. I knew what to do when they gave me a ten-second countdown.

14

How did you get involved with *You Can Be a Star*?

One of the people I worked with asked me to become involved working with the new artists on a new show. We've had three so far, and all three have had chart records. One of these days one of our winners will become a big star.

15

How did you get involved with the Po' Folks restaur-

Bill Anderson

by Michael Bane

rant chain? Was that your idea?

No, not at all. In fact, the chain was started in South Carolina in 1975 and they didn't know anything about Bill Anderson. Eventually, one opened in Nashville, and everybody told me how they liked my restaurant, or they were going to my restaurant or something like that. It wasn't my restaurant! In fact, it made me a little mad, my name being so associated with the phrase "po' folks" from the song. Finally I called the guy up and said, "Hello, I'm Bill Anderson and I think we ought to talk about working with each other." He was delighted, because he wanted to talk to me and didn't have any idea how to go about it. It's a

clear case of the good Lord looking out after me. He obviously knew playlists were getting shorter.

16

What do you do for Po' Folks now?

I'm their official spokesman, which, since there's 153 restaurants, does tend to keep a person busy. It's been a marvelous experience, partly because I've learned so much about business, which I knew very little about.

17

Who's writing good songs these days?

I don't mean to sound petty, but when me and Tillis and Willie and Harlan Howard and all the rest were writing,

there was only one name on the songs. Now look at them. Looks like a legal firm instead of a songwriting credit. The real test is how many of the songs today will be remembered in ten or 20 years.

18

I think you've touched on an important point here...

Time. I wonder how many artists today want to build 20-25 year careers like we all did when we came to Nashville. I wonder if they really want what we wanted...

19

Quick plug time. You're producing comedy albums?

Yep. Lewis Grizzard from Georgia. I heard him and he just blew me away, and now

the album is the best selling album in the Atlanta area. I'd like to do more of that, 'cause there's a lot of funny people out there. I had a good time with it, although, to tell you the truth, I don't know exactly how I got involved in it.

20

What else would you like to become involved in?

I don't know. I never really have planned what to do. It all just happened. I never really planned ahead for it, and I guess it's been a blessing and a curse. I shouldn't say this, but maybe if I'd been more like Kentucky Fried Chicken and done one thing well, I might have been more successful. But I'll bet I wouldn't have had as much fun. ■



"I never really stopped songwriting for myself. I just got confused about what was acceptable."



"I get up in the morning and look in the mirror and say, 'Who am I today.'"



"How many artists today want to build 20-25 year careers like we did when we came to Nashville?"

COURTESY TNN



ON THE ROAD WITH

ALABAMA

They work more than a 40-hour week most of the time, often far from home, with little time for writing songs: their road show is polished, the magic that binds them to their fans is strong. They are the people's band.

by Bob Allen

It's not like Des Moines, Iowa," Randy Owen, lead singer and guitarist of Alabama would later observe, with deadpan sincerity, of Hollywood.

What Owen meant, as the Alabama Band prepared to wrap up a two-night stand at the Greek Theatre, tucked away in the Hollywood Hills, within spitting distance of Sunset Boulevard, was that he and his band were a bit far afield from their usual territory. Here in the land of sunshine, movie stars, free-ways and orange hair, there were no crowds of 65,000 lining up in the rain to snap up tickets within hours after they went on sale as there were for one of the band's recent shows at the Ohio State Fair.

Instead, on this overcast and unseasonably chilly Southern California evening, there were a mere 10,000 or so on hand plus a smattering of empty seats in this large open-air amphitheatre nestled in the tall pines of Griffith Park. As Owen later explained, "We don't do anything out there in L.A. Our albums don't even go *zinc*. L.A. has never been kind to us."

As the band prepared to take the stage, they had to their advantage an adrenaline high from having just won their third consecutive Entertainer of the Year Award from the West Coast-based Academy of Country Music. But in addition to occasional hostile critics and lukewarm audience response, even nature now seemed to be conspiring



against them. A light drizzle that had begun before the show turned into a hard, steady rain, and then a deluge. Those spectators in the roofless pavilion without umbrellas or coats to put over their heads were soon soaked to the bone.

To make matters worse, just moments before they were to go on, guitarists Owen and Jeff Cook and bass player Teddy Gentry learned that they could not use the wireless guitar amplification microphones to which they were accustomed, because they crossed frequencies with the concessionaires at the L.A. Dodgers game nearby. So the boys, most noticeably Owen, who is used to leaping and bounding around the stage, working the audience like a cheerleader, found themselves hobbled with old-fashioned guitar cords. It was, as Teddy Gentry later observed, "one of those situations where everything that could go wrong did go wrong."

Still, as I watched the show unfurl from out in the grandstand, it was hard to detect the stress band members later said they felt as they battled against the elements, a less than perfect sound system and a city which has never been particularly receptive to their charms.

Alabama's stage show has now been streamlined and updated into a slick, multi-media extravaganza. Before the four band members (plus some additional backup musicians tucked away behind the risers) take the stage, a huge Alabama logo is unveiled in a flood of

light accompanied by stirring aural effects. Synthesizers playing strains of "The Star Spangled Banner" sound like a cross between Aaron Copland and Z.Z. Top.

When the four band members themselves finally make their entrance, they are greeted with a crescendo of cheers. Teddy Gentry, looking tall and reedy behind his bass guitar, is outfitted all in white, with a matching panama hat. Portly Jeff Cook plays his big double-decker guitar. Owen, dressed in a sleek khaki-colored outfit, has his pantlegs tucked into his tall boots, swashbuckler style. He works the stage ferociously, dancing, moving and grooving with the music, seldom stopping during the course of the 90-minute show. Mark Herndon, looking particularly lean and sinewy, flails away furiously, high on the risers, almost obscured by his huge drum set.

The band's stage show in its present inception is nearly flawless, without loose ends or pregnant silences. Granted, there are no smoldering moments of musical brilliance; yet there is also very little self-indulgence or silly stage patter. (Jeff Cook still picks guitar with his teeth now and then, but sad to say, the part where they all line up chain-style and play each other's guitar seems to have been dropped from the routine.) With tight, journeyman precision, they work their way through a spirited set of their famil-

iar hits. As they crank out blockbusters like "The Closer You Get," "Love in the First Degree," "Roll On" and "Lady Down on Love," you can feel the crowd's spirits beginning to shake loose from the chilled, soaked-to-the-bone dampening of the rain. As that mysterious audience-artist chemistry which has always been at the heart of Alabama's huge appeal begins to kick in, everyone in the audience—even those without umbrellas—begins to have a good time.

Then, the band shifts gears slightly and launches into a fifteen-minute set of all-new material, songs from their freshly released album, *40 Hour Week*. Oddly enough, the excitement level of the crowd does not subside; instead it rises a few decibels higher towards a mild fever pitch. Remarkably, much of the audience already knows the words to this new batch of songs well enough to sing them right back at the band. Even songs like "Fireworks" and "If It Ain't Dixie, It Won't Do," which sound kind of insipid on vinyl, take on a new life and have a particularly strong impact in this live setting. Soon the entire pavilion is draped in the comfortable familiarity of a Saturday-night square dance.

The Alabama Band has worked its mysterious magic once again.

After it's all over, a good five minutes after the last guitar chords have melted away in the chilly night air and the last roar for encores has faded, Randy Owen and the rest of the group are still on stage, shaking hands with people in the



The boys, in the days when they lined up chain-style and played each other's guitars.

front row, throwing drumsticks and hats out into the crowd and blowing kisses to those further out in the stands. You get the feeling that, if they only could, the four of them would stand out at the door and personally say goodbye to each and every one of the umpteen-thousand people who've turned out to see them.

Later, backstage at the Greek, the Alabama explosion rolls on. Teddy Gentry, Jeff Cook, Randy Owen and Mark Herndon, the three Alabama cousins and the one transplanted Yankee who comprise the Alabama Band, are presented with gold and platinum albums for *40 Hour Week*, which surpassed the million sales mark just thirty days after its release. (There are so many awards to give them that night that it takes three record label people to carry them in.)

And, the album's title song has also shot into the Number One single spot.

After five years, more than 16 million albums and countless awards, this once uncertain commodity known as Alabama has fooled more than a few people simply by proving to be more than just a flashing greasefire in the flickering smoke pot of show biz popularity. And their popularity, despite predictions to the contrary, is not yet showing any signs of receding or withering on the vine from over-exposure.

The band has now won an unprecedented three consecutive Entertainer of the Year Awards from the Country Music Association. They have also racked up three similar awards from the Academy of Country Music, where they

just this year pushed aside the invincible Kenny Rogers to become the all-time ACM award-winners. They have won two Grammy Awards for two of their original songs, "The Closer You Get" in 1984, and "Mountain Music" in 1983. Along the way, they've also cleaned up with ten annual *Billboard* awards and five American Music awards as "Country Group of the Year."

Furthermore, not one of Alabama's six RCA albums has sold less than a million copies. Their commercial high water marks remain their 1981 *Feels So Right*, which has sold nearly five million units, and their 1982 *Mountain Music* which has surpassed four million. Last year's *Roll On* sold about two million, as did their 1980 debut, *My Home's in Alabama*, much of which was recorded hurriedly in a small Nashville studio with the band's own money, long before they'd landed their contract with RCA.

As of mid-1985, no fewer than four of the group's albums were simultaneously lodged in the country Top Seventy-five. While *40 Hour Week* is perched at Number One, *Roll On*, after more than a year, is still at Number 54. After a remarkable 113 weeks, *The Closer You Get* is still at Number 71; and after 166 weeks, *Mountain Music* is still at Number 63.

Their last 17 single releases have all, each and every one of them, made it to Number One in the country Hot 100 album charts.

It's all even more amazing when you consider that just a little over five years ago, Alabama was just another Southern bar band in look-alike outfits and latter-

day Beatle cuts, grinding it out nightly for nickels and dimes in a 250-seat ocean-side South Carolina club.

Somehow this makes the band's rather sure-footed, almost matter-of-fact acceptance of overwhelming fame and popularity even more remarkable. Rather than attributing their success to any particular magic or sleight of hand, they seem, rather, to accept it as the just reward of talent, long years of hard work and their overwhelmingly positive attitude toward their fans and the music industry.

"I would have been disappointed if we hadn't won," Randy Owen noted just a few days after the band walked away with its latest wheelbarrow-load of ACM Awards. "It felt good to be awarded for all the hard work we've done all year. That's really what I think awards are anyway. I think they do help reinforce public opinion. I know one thing: if we hadn't won, a lot of fans would have been pretty upset. I mean, when you add it all up, the total tickets sold, the total albums sold, it's pretty evident.

"Without sounding ungrateful, I personally don't want to belabor our winning so many awards, except to say that we are grateful for them," Owen adds. His cautionary tone suggests he is aware of the cloud that could lurk beneath this silver lining. "I don't want to just keep talking about how *many* we've won. I don't want a keep reminding people and forcing it on them. I want 'em to look at us like we're still hungry. I mean this is only our sixth or seventh album. This is only 1985."

"Yeh," Teddy Gentry adds quietly. "In 1980, we were still playin' for tips in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. We left there in July 1980, so it's been just a little less than five years since we were back there doin' songs for a dollar apiece, doin' requests. It's only now that a lot of people are really becoming aware of who we are."

All along, the fans—the people who buy records, and who, ultimately, really control things—have embraced Alabama wholeheartedly. It has been the music critics and even some segments of the country music industry that have harbored mild skepticism and occasionally even resentment towards the band, often while simultaneously handing them laurels.

A lot of it, I think, boils down to the fact that the industry and the critical establishment—both groups noticeably short on visionaries—like to entertain the idea that they play a major role in shaping public tastes and setting musical standards. But, in fact, both professional schools have always been better at following trends than predicting them. Part of what really seems to nettle them

is that Alabama's populist explosion essentially happened without the help of the critics, and with a minimum of music industry midwifery. In fact, when RCA signed them in 1980, it was with a minimum of hooplah. The label merely hoped that their first album would sell 50,000 or so copies so the company could break even on its investment. It all happened so quickly that much of the

“In 1980 we were still playin’ for tips. It’s only now that a lot of people are really becoming aware of who we are.”

industry was caught sitting on its collective hands, trying to figure out some way to jump on the bandwagon.

And it followed, of course, that the industry paid the band tribute by doing what it does best: imitating rather than innovating. Practically every major label soon rushed to sign a slew of southern rock bands with Dixieish-sounding names and, for the most part, uninteresting music: Atlanta, Mason-Dixon, Exile, Sierra, Sawyer Brown and so on. None of them has yet attained the popular acceptance of Alabama, the trendsetters.

Alabama has also aroused skepticism in some quarters because, unlike your average rock band, or even your average country anti-hero—Hank Jr. or early Waylon and Willie—the group has never been cynical towards the somewhat soul-less industry which supports them, or toward their own followers. Instead, Alabama embraces the music industry, playing music biz politics and receiving and handing out awards within an unabashed spirit of cheerful cooperation.

Then, too, there has often been the perception among critics and industry insiders that Alabama's music, unlike the best efforts of, say, Haggard or Cash, is largely without personal vision. True, “My Home's in Alabama” and a few of the band's other brilliant, early efforts are more than mere Chamber of Commerce commercials set to music. “My Home's in Alabama” is, in fact, a sort of subjective travelogue that gives us a statement about what it's like to grow up in the southern half of these great Unit-



When RCA signed Alabama in 1980 it was with a minimum of hooplah. Today the boys have racked up an unprecedented number of awards.

ed States. Much of the band's more recent material, however, is devoid of such personal emotional statement. It is significant that the new *40 Hour Week* contains no new original material from the band, other than one song co-written by Teddy Gentry. With recent songs like “Forty Hour Week” and “Roll On” the band really seems to be stretching it, reaching out a little too hard, perhaps, to meet their audience's anticipated expectations. The reviewers have, as a result, sometimes been unkind to them and their music: “Formulaic, never remarkable or inspired,” *The Arizona Daily Star*. “Bloodless as a Coke commercial—a Disneyland version of country music,” *The Northwest New Jersey Daily Record*. “Cliche-ridden... country-western muzak,” *Rocky Mountain News*. Not surprisingly, a reviewer from the *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner* chimed in a day or two after their Greek Theatre show, calling them, “oily pretenders” who make “limpid, flaccid, antiseptic music.”

Alabama, knowing that it is, by and large, a people's band, has always done its best to brush off such critical lambastings. But they're certainly aware of them. In an interview the day after the first Greek Theatre show, it was Mark Herndon, perhaps the most outspoken and thin-skinned of the bunch, who was most forthcoming on the subject of bad reviews and the music industry's ambivalence toward the band's success.

“I think Nashville would rather just totally disclaim us, if anything,” said the three-time Entertainer of the Year winner in a manner that was at once sharp-tongued and slightly pouting. “We don't know that many people in Nashville. They don't know us. We really don't make an attempt to be part of the cliques up there. Nothing against the town, and I don't think it's anything personal. We're just not part of what goes on up there.”

“Nashville's getting kind of flaky, too,” he adds. “It's becoming more and more like the other two music industry towns,

New York and L.A. They're getting real... well... kind of *flaky* up there."

"I have to disagree," Owen interjects quietly, as he thoughtfully strokes his beard. "I think Nashville has really accepted us. If anyone doesn't, it is just a result of the friendly competition that you get between record labels.

"People like Roy Acuff, people like that, have been accepting and friendly toward us from the very beginning," he adds. "He just opened his arms to us all the way. It's been the same way with Ralph Emery, Minnie Pearl, Johnny Cash, Bennie Raye and a lot of other established artists and disk jockeys who have great reputations in the industry for being good people. They have all been very good to us. We played the Grand Ole Opry, and I never felt one bit of animosity. I really feel that Nashville has accepted what we've done with open arms, because I think it's also been good for Nashville."

As for the critics, it is again Herndon who seems to react most vehemently, and who seems, beneath it all, to really yearn for critical acceptance. There is one particularly influential writer for one of the major Los Angeles papers who evidently panned the group pretty severely on one of its earlier swings through this town—where Herndon, coincidentally, spends a lot of his free time away from the band. The previous evening, Herndon had been particularly curious to see if this writer had turned out for a pre-show press reception. He hadn't. "I wanted to buy him a drink," he frowns. "I was hoping I could buy him a glass of red wine, and he'd have it on his favorite white suit.

"People don't really read critics that much," Herndon adds with a tone of dismissal in his voice. "If they do, they at least realize that it's just one man's opinion. What matters to me is what the people feel. Like, when we played the Greek last night, some of the stage hands followed me and Teddy out to the limo after the show. They just wanted to tell us how much they enjoyed the show. Those are the people who really mean something. You take the people who sit in their glass towers or whatever, they can just jump where the sun don't shine."

"It's kind of sad," Randy smiles, "when you have some critic who's a scholar and knows what he's talkin' about and does his homework, and people don't really pay any attention to 'im."

"Naw, you can't go by critics," Teddy Gentry halfheartedly interjects. "Sometimes I'll watch those two guys that review movies—Ebert and Siskel. And sometimes they'll set there and say," he affects a stilted, academic-sounding voice, " 'Definitely not the movie to see!' And I've seen the movie and it's great!"

His voice fills with exasperation. "You can't go by 'em."

"A great example of that is Burt Reynolds," Owen offers. "He's never won nothin' as far as awards, yet he's tops at the box office year after year. It's because he does movies that make *sense*. *Entertaining* movies."

As the members of Alabama pause to speculate on the meaning and possible underlying implications of their success, it is a hazy Southern California afternoon. The four of them are sprawled lazily on the sofas and easy chairs in a large suite at the Sheraton Universal Hotel in North Hollywood, just down the hill from Universal Studios, home of "Jaws." The suite has been rented for the express purpose of affording the band a quiet place to conduct a barrage of radio, TV and magazine interviews that have been orchestrated to try and strengthen their thus far modest popularity in the Los Angeles area.

Owen, who is slightly restless in anticipation of their second show at the Greek later that evening, bounces up out of his chair and gazes out the window, at the steady flow of traffic on a nearby freeway and the blurry mist of smog and clouds that shrouds the barren-looking Hollywood hills. Cook, who is spread out in an easy chair, yawns, yanks off the seat cushion and "scrootches up" underneath it, using it as a blanket. The rest of the band hoots playfully at him. "This air-conditioner's freezin' my ass off," he shrugs. "This is the only way I can figger to get warm."

The three cousins and the transplanted Yankee have clearly come of age. The three Alabamians' actual blood kinship is not as close as is often assumed: Owen's father is Gentry's grandmother's brother, making them second cousins, even though when etched by the spotlight from a certain perspective, they actually look more like brothers. Cook, a fourth or fifth cousin, is somewhere a bit further out on the family tree. Despite some genealogists' best attempts, Herndon, as of this writing, remains unrelated.

Owen is handsome, almost rakishly so. He is lithe, athletic, poised, and radiates a good-natured self-confidence that verges at times on cockiness. Jeff Cook, the most laconic of the pack, has apparently managed to shed a few pounds. When you look at photos of the band from long ago, when they were still playing under the name of Wild Country, and Cook had not yet discovered fame or carbohydrates, it is fascinating to note that he was the slenderest one of all. Even so, with his tufty hair, pointy goatee and sharp ears like devil's horns, he still gives the impression he's either on his way to, or just coming from, a



All along, it's been the fans who have



At this year's Fan Fair, a record number came





embraced Alabama wholeheartedly.



out to see them.



food fight. Herndon is wiry and compact-looking. His Goldilocks curls are long gone and a thick stubble of blond beard covers his once babyish face. Gentry, like Owen, is handsome and dark-featured, but with a much more low-key and unassuming presence. He appears to be most unchanged from the days when he grew up on his grandpa's hardscrabble North Alabama farm where the only plumbing was three rooms and a path.

Interviewing Alabama these days can be a bit of an ordeal. After having been interviewed who knows how many thousands of times, they possess an attitude that wavers between abject, unshakable



“People don’t really read critics that much. What matters to me is what the people feel.”



boredom, weary cooperation and mirthful sarcasm. They square off across the room from their interviewer, point-counterpoint style. A stupid question, or merely a clumsily worded one, can evoke either stony silence or loud catcalls.

For instance: when I break the ice and make the uneasy suggestion that the boys look tired from long months of touring and recording, Owen lets lose with a banshee-howl of mock injury. He grins and cackles. “I never felt better in my life! . . . No, seriously,” he adds in a more civilized tone of voice, “I feel great. I’m in the best shape I’ve ever been in my life.”

“It really hasn’t been too bad for us this year,” Gentry adds politely. “We’re working about a hundred and fifty dates, about the same as last year. We’ll probably do less next year, I hope. We’ve been out eighteen days this time, which is the longest we’ve had to be away from home so far this year.”

“This is an unusually long time for us to be away from home,” Owen adds. The three cousins were born and still reside in and around Fort Payne in northeastern Alabama. “But when I’m home, I’m totally home. My wife doesn’t work, she doesn’t have a career. My kids are there. Only problem is that my daughter goes to school on weekdays, and that’s usually when I’m home. But when I’m there, it’s quality time. We do everything together.

We go fishin’ together. We go out in the fields and look at the cows together. . . .”

“Wait till your daughter gets to be about ten like mine is, and she starts goin’ to skatin’ parties and birthday parties and gymnastics and baton-twirlin’,” sighs Cook. “Then you’ll realize how much you’re missing.”

With a little prodding, the conversation comes around again to Alabama’s music and this idea of making a personal statement. Almost as if reciting a press release, Owen explains how the new *40 Hour Week* album is “a definite tribute to the working people, the people we admire the most. We come from people that worked hard for a living. We’re proud of the people who raised us pickin’ cotton and workin’ in the mills.”

Then, almost without prompting, the conversation moves toward some of the more troubling aspects of rural life that lie beyond the benign rustic images of covered bridges, faded tobacco barns and misty sunrises over the corn patch. It soon becomes clear that the boys from Alabama, particularly Owen and Gentry, care very much about a way of life that seems to be fading from the American landscape forever.

Owen on the plight of the American farmer: “If we took care of our politics right, we could rule the world. We wouldn’t have to make no nuclear threats, because we could starve the world to death. But, what I see happenin’ in our part of the country with the little bitty family cotton farmers is what is happenin’ to the rest of the country. The family farms are fixin’ to leave us forever. And when the major corporations start takin’ over these farms, they’ll start dictatin’ what they’re gonna plant and how much they’re gonna get for it. Food will then start being a more expensive commodity out of everyone’s budget. Maybe half a person’s income. I may not see it in my lifetime, but sure as my name is what it is, it’s coming, unless we do something to save the family farm.”

Teddy Gentry, whose grandfather raised Gentry after his parents separated, on the demise of the American family: “There used to be this thing in communities where, if one farmer had a bad year, the neighbors would kind of take care of him. I remember my grandpa telling me about how after my grandma died, he was left with seven kids to raise. He said he couldn’t have made it if the neighbors hadn’t pitched in and helped with the plowin’ and clearin’ the fields. Families used to work together, side by side, on the farm, in the fields. But today you have people growin’ up in the same house that don’t hardly have a chance to get to know each other. To make anything of their lives these days, both parents have to get out and



JOHN REGGERO

The band's stage show is nearly flawless... Cook, Owen and Gentry work the stage while Herndon keeps the beat.

work just to keep the kids from goin' hungry and havin' no clothes to wear."

Mark Herndon on the decline of America's smokestack industries: "I can't get over the Japanese. They've gotten the last laugh. We fought 'em at Pearl Harbor and we beat 'em fair and square. But now, they've come back, and they're beating us to death economically. They've used the old principle of making friends with your enemy and finding his weakness. They've discovered our weakness is little electronic gadgets and technological playthings, and they're killing us economically."

Granted, Alabama has come as close as any country artist on the contemporary scene to making actual *statements* with their songs, with the exception of a few like Hank Williams Jr. who let it all hang out and, as a result, pay the price of not winning any CMA Awards. But then again, they've obviously not lost sleep over the fact that in the business they're in, entertainment and topicality do not easily mix. Consequently, such heartfelt sentiments as those expressed above, if they make it into song at all, do so in watered-down form.

Randy: "We just don't make a big hoopiah about nothin', really. We're not out to teach big lessons or speak philo-

sophically about anything. We don't put hidden messages in our music. If you play our records backwards, you won't hear anything."

Cook adds dryly, "Really! We have enough trouble makin' it sound right when you play it forward!"

In the meantime, we are left wondering just what the musical future holds for Alabama. Success has, in a sense, put them on the same creative treadmill that the rest of the Nashville music and entertainment machine is on: constant touring and constant recording to keep the cash flow flowing, leaving little time for the kind of free-floating creativity that shaped their early material. Has success put them in the artistic bind of merely having to recycle their best musical moments from the past? For instance, it's only too obvious how "If It Ain't Dixie, It Won't Do," a half-baked song on the new album, calculatedly evokes the imagery and emotions of "My Home's in Alabama."

Gentry: "I know that people look harder at every piece of product we put out now, more than they did in the early days. They're more critical of it. There's more pressure on us to keep up the

quality. Everybody's sayin' now, 'Well, what are they gonna do to top that?' We definitely don't have as much time to write. I went through about a two-year period when I didn't write hardly anything, though I'm starting to a little now. Lots of times, even if we do come up with an idea, we don't have a guitar available. We travel a lot by plane, and there's just not room to carry one.

"On the other hand," he adds as if to dispel once and for all the rumors and predictions of the band's imminent creative and commercial demise, "we're so many other things, too: artists, producers..."

And this: "I think right now, we're continuing to grow, and it's only now that a lot of people are really becoming aware of who we are. Just like here in L.A., it seems like people are starting to figure out what we're all about. I think that right now, we've got the best stage show we've ever had, we've got the best concert presentation and we've come further in the studio than ever before. I think the material we're working on now in the studio sounds better than anything we've ever put out before.

"So don't write us off yet, because I think the best is yet to come. I really do." ■

FOR CMASA MEMBERS ONLY



Membership Hits 100,000

CMASA membership reached 100,000 recently when *Country Music* subscribers Mike and Shauna Jones of Logan, Utah, joined. Mike, 33, and Shauna, 31,

are both avid country music fans, so they entered both their names on the membership form. Their musical interests are typical of the average CMASA member. They bought four albums last month. Of these, they like best *The Oak Ridge Boys Greatest Hits II* (by their favorite group), plus albums by Gene Watson and the Sons of the Pioneers. To acknowledge Mike and Shauna as the 100,000th member, CMASA will be presenting them with a Martin guitar.

The Carter Family in Texas

The many CMASA members who are interested in the Carter Family's historical contributions and musical influence on two generations of country music performers will be interested in Old Homestead's seven-record series *The Carter Family in Texas*, which presents radio transcriptions of 145 songs made in Texas from 1939 to 1943. These radio shows were broadcast mostly over Mexican stations, like XERA, which were permitted much greater power than U.S. stations, so these programs were widely heard all over the southern and central states.

The Carter Family—A. P. Sara and Maybelle—of course was famous by then, but some of these shows include the second generation: Maybelle and E. J. Carter's daughters Helen, June and Anita and A. P. and Sara Carter's daughter Janette.

In addition to dozens of their own hits like "Keep on the Sunnyside," "Worried Man Blues," "Will the Circle Be Unbroken," "Don't Bury Me Beneath the Willow," "Gold Watch and Chain" and "Single Girl, Married Girl," there are dozens of songs performed that many Carter Family fans will not have heard them perform on any other records. Plus, they sing many songs popularized earlier by other famous performers, such as the Delmore Brothers' "Beautiful Brown Eyes" and Riley Puckett's "I Only Want a Buddy, Not a Sweetheart." Also included are many Carter Family songs

which were later made famous by other stars, such as "I Wonder How the Old Folks Are at Home" and "You Are My Flower," later done by Flatt and Scruggs, and "Are You Lonesome Tonight," which Elvis made one of his standards.

For the serious country music history buff and any Carter Family fan, these records make a great collection. CMASA members can get the entire seven-record series at a special price of \$39.95, postage and handling included. (The records are regularly \$8.98 each, which, with postage extra, would usually make the whole series around \$70.) Send your check to Country Music Society of America, Dept. 1112, 450 Park Avenue South, New York, New York 10016. We may be able to offer these records one at a time later, but the price per record will be higher.

John Morris of Old Homestead Records is to be commended for making these records available and for paying royalties to the Carters.



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How many records? _____ How many cassettes? _____

2. Which ones did you like best? List performer and album title.

- a. _____
 b. _____
 c. _____
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3. To vote, list the numbers of your top 5 favorites from the Top 25, page 66.

Albums (list 5 numbers)

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Who were the stars you saw?

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 b. _____
 c. _____
 d. _____

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Elvis Presley and Nancy Sinatra shift into high gear for love, laughter and excitement in the thrill-a-minute world of stock car racing. Six great songs, including the smash title tune. Color. (1968). 90 min.

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Experience the magic of Elvis's stage extravaganzas and get an intimate look at the man behind the legend. Including performances of "Love Me Tender," "Burning Love," and footage of the early Elvis. Color (1972). 93 min.

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Ronald Reagan, Errol Flynn, Olivia DeHavilland. Four West Point cadets are caught in the fury of John Brown's insurrection in Kansas. (1940). 110 min.

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James Stewart, Donna Reed and Lionel Barrymore in Frank Capra's classic film about a man who decides to end it all, only to have a change of heart after a visit from a bumbling "heavenly messenger." (1946). 130 min.

● HIS GIRL FRIDAY

Cary Grant and Rosalind Russell in a wildly funny screen version of "The Front Page." You'll find yourself holding back the laughter in order not to miss any of the hilarious, rapid-fire dialog. (1940). 92 min.

● THE 39 STEPS

What Music Hall secret threatens the British Empire? Excellent early Hitchcock film. Robert Donat. English. (1935). 86 min.

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Roy Rogers, Dale Evans, Bob Nolan and the Sons of the Pioneers. The young daughter of a wealthy rancher is being influenced wrongly by a city dude. Song-filled action adventure.

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Country Bands Come of Age

■ *Spearheaded by Alabama's success, record companies are now giving the big push to country bands.*

Once overlooked as troublesome and expensive, bands are now the wonder children of Music City, bringing with them an alternative to the Nashville sound.

by Kip Kirby



Exile

EXILE... a good-time, high-spirited
blend of gospel, pop and country

Those of you who can remember back before *Urban Cowboy* may recall that there was indeed a time after Jimmie Rodgers, The Carter Family and Hank Williams and before Alabama. In that time you could count the bands in country music on one hand. The Nashville establishment wasn't exactly against bands; but the record companies just weren't pursuing them. Developing bands took work; bands were cumbersome; it cost more to keep their Silver Eagle tour buses rolling; they expected to play their own instruments in the studio (which took up considerably more time than using session men); and according to Nashville ideology, groups lacked identity. Fans had no difficulty identifying with one lead singer; but with two, or three, or—heaven forbid—four, the focal point tended to get blurry.

In rock 'n' roll, faceless bands might well dominate the charts. But no one ever pretended country music was like rock. In country, everyone understood it was strictly one-on-one: how is your wife, how are your kids, please sign this autograph and will you pose for my Instamatic? Also record company minds worried—would the band break up just when they were on the verge of success? So, until the Alabama Explosion in 1980, major record companies weren't particularly interested in developing groups. Economics ruled—and bands took more money to promote. It was easier to concentrate on a solo artist whose sound would distinguish itself on records and who could be plugged into any publicity campaign the label might propose.

There were the old reliable vocal groups then: The Statler Brothers, and The Oak Ridge Boys, and The Bellamys, and every once in a while another group would emerge from the shadows. But the possibility that one day a *band* would stand on the Opry House stage and hear its name announced as CMA Entertainer of the Year seemed as remote as Conway Twitty moving to Antarctica.

Back in 1980 when Alabama appeared on the Country Radio Seminar's *New Faces Show*—the first *band* ever to do so—the group's members were not permitted to play their own instruments nor could non-singing Mark Herndon appear with them on drums. That night, the industry witnessed the birth of the Alabama phenomenon with only three-fourths of the band—and minus its instrumental power. Today, this seems crazy, especially when Alabama is nominated for almost every award.

Even though, in the days before Alabama, the country music industry didn't seem to take bands seriously, bands, by contrast, took country music seriously for years. Acts such as The Grateful Dead, Buffalo Springfield, The Byrds, Poco, The Flying Burrito Brothers, New

Riders of the Purple Sage, The Ozark Mountain Daredevils, Pure Prairie League, The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, The Eagles, The Allman Brothers, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Marshall Tucker and The Charlie Daniels Band all bore witness to country's influence on rock, folk and country/rock, and borrowed from other music like bluegrass and cajun, too.

These groups, direct musical descendants of Elvis, Jerry Lee, Conway, Cash, Orbison and those other rockin' rebels from Sun Records in Memphis, failed to permeate the country market with any consistency, shut out by an industry as afraid of change in the 1970's as it had been in the 1950's. Ironically, it was the fans of these bands who later brought about the "Urban Cowboy" movement and widened the popularity of Nashville music.

When the baby boomers raised on country/rock discovered mainstream country music, they found something

Record companies,
once gun-shy, now
fall over themselves
trying to sign up
the "next Alabama."

deeper than the shallow fashion of Levi's on Madison Avenue, something expressed by Alabama—and, in time, by other bands as well—with their unique blend of tradition, energy, youth and vitality.

So now, in the Year of Our Lord 5 A.A. (after Alabama), bands have become popular at last...their way paved by the enormous success of the boys from Ft. Payne. New groups have emerged whose members could just as well have seen their names up in lights as rock stars but chose instead to make their mark in country music. Radio execs, who once claimed that listeners couldn't tell one band from another and refused to play their records, now admit that bands have brought needed change to country radio. Record companies, once gun-shy about signing bands, now fall over themselves trying to sign up the "next Alabama."

Alabama deserves credit for leading the collective charge. Their success is unrivalled. But the door is open for challengers. Among those poised for the battle, Exile, The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, Sawyer Brown, Restless Heart

and Southern Pacific represent the cutting edge of today's country band movement. All have forged an audience for themselves, most in relatively short order. They are the best of breed in the Era of the Country Band.

■ **EXILE** This Kentucky-based group defied critics who scoffed at the sincerity of their publicized conversion from rock. Exile cleverly chose a soulful country tear-jerker called "The High Cost of Leaving" as its calling card, and any remaining detractors quickly fell silent as the single shot up the charts in 1983, paving the way for a ribbon of subsequent Number One's, including "Woke Up in Love," "I Don't Want To Be a Memory," "Give Me One More Chance," "Crazy For Your Love" and "She's a Miracle."

The five-piece band, fronted by lead vocalists J.P. Pennington and Les Taylor, relies on easygoing humor combined with well-executed harmonies and integrated arrangements onstage. Members Pennington, Taylor, Sonny Lemaire, Marlon Hargis and Steve Goetzman share a rapport that makes going to an Exile concert like going to a frat party with friends. Exile doesn't disparage the rock 'n' roll elements of its background—when it launches its trademark Motown medley, few feet remain immobile—but the group's affection for country is overriding.

Exile's move into country didn't come casually. It required more than a year of thankless gigs in small Kentucky clubs for cash while finetuning the band's country licks. It demanded a redirection of efforts and deciding upon a sound. That sound, a good-time, high-spirited blend of gospel, pop and country, has been so successful that some see a threatening formula-like consistency emerging in each successive album.

But it is this sound that has made Exile a favorite with fans and radio alike and has, in only two years, given it a permanent place in country music. Exile's favorite theme is love as a cure-all: upbeat love, a motif from which it rarely strays. Not surprisingly, the group's fans are overwhelmingly female.

Ironically, it was Exile's material rather than its records which helped ease the group into country music. While Exile was still polishing its direction back in Kentucky, songs its members had written were getting picked up by established acts. In fact, if the group has made any mistakes, it just might be in giving away hit songs. Among Exile originals "that got away" are "Take Me Down" and "The Closer You Get," both cut by Alabama and both Number One records; "It Ain't Easy Bein' Easy," picked up by Janie Fricke; "Heart and Soul," on which Huey Lewis & the News basically used the same arrangement as



The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band

NITTY GRITTY DIRT BAND... *custodian of an acoustic legacy that combines jug band music, bluegrass, folk, rock and country*

Exile's; "Stay With Me," cut by Dave and Sugar; "Take This Heart," recorded by Kenny Rogers; and "Don't Leave Me This Way," done by Sheena Easton. J. P. Pennington and bassist Sonny Lemaire now do the majority of the group's writing, although several of Exile's best-known "giveaways" were penned with ex-Exiler Mark Gray, also on CBS.

It was producer Buddy Killen, occasionally referred to as "the fifth Exile," who put finishing touches on the band's career. Killen claims to have been an Exile fan back as far as "Kiss You All Over" days; it was Killen who convinced Epic to take a chance on the group. The gamble paid off handsomely as the band proved itself oblivious to vague industry allusions about "rock 'n' rollers who use country when their careers are dried up."

Today, no one doubts Exile's sincerity—or the group's uncanny ability to target a sound and freeze-frame it. "Kiss You All Over" was, after all, 1978; and Pennington, the only remaining original Exile member, admits that even at the height of Exile's pop stardom, something was missing. Today, the only thing missing is time to relax, as the band finds itself in heavy demand—and, inevitably, starting to square off against Alabama at awards shows.

To be fair, Exile has not yet taken the kinds of chances with its music that Alabama has, nor do its sales come anywhere close to Alabama's. Exile is

still feeling its way and playing it safe. But the band's irresistible pop/country personality and instrumental proficiency stamp it as a leading entry in Nashville's new wave of bands.

■ **NITTY GRITTY DIRT BAND** After nearly 20 years together, a platinum album—the landmark 1972 country opus *Will the Circle Be Unbroken*—a name change to The Dirt Band and a stylistic shift from country to pop and back. The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band is by no means a new kid on the block. Among today's successful country bands, they are the exception to the "Johnny-come-lately" rule. In fact, with typical candor, they're likely to tell you they're just happy to be *here* at all, since only The Grateful Dead and The Beach Boys have had a longer continuous recording history in contemporary music.

NGDB is genuine Americana. It is custodian of an acoustic legacy that combines jug band music, bluegrass, folk, rock and country. Its roots are traditional, its instrumentation and arrangements as down home as shoo-fly pie. Its material sketches vignettes of rural farmlands, replete with old-fashioned imagery and gems of front-porch folklore. Plus, their tracks are patchwork quilts of virtuosity, thanks to John McEuen on fiddle, banjo, lap steel, six- and 12-string guitar; Jeff Hanna, lead vocalist and guitarist; Jimmy Ibbotson, lead vocals and bass; Jimmie Fadden on

drums, guitar and harmonica; and Bob Carpenter on keyboards.

NGDB's official re-entry into country music came with a 1983 album Capitol called *Let's Go*, containing, among other things, a sleeper called "Dance, Little Jean." The album should have been slightly schizophrenic, sharing as it did two producers and two sites, Los Angeles and Nashville. But the Dirt Band pulled off the project with flair. "Dance, Little Jean," sung by Jimmy Ibbotson, caught the attention of radio, and sent the band up the country charts. Shortly thereafter, the Dirt Band moved to Warner Bros. Records. Their first album recorded for Warner Bros. contained their first-ever Number One record, "Long Hard Road (The Sharecropper's Dream)."

McEuen, unquestionably the most colorful and free-associating member of the band, believes that if "Mr. Bojangles"—their signature song and best-known record—were released today, it would be a country hit, too.

"We haven't changed," McEuen asserts. "It's radio that's changed. We've always held onto a country sound in everything we've done." Thanks to shrewd management by Chuck Morris of Feyline Presents, and production by Marshall Morgan and Paul Worley who know how to capture the band's eclectic sound on vinyl, The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band is finally achieving mainstream country stardom. "We were the first

*In spite of heart-
ache, and memories
which both sadden
and sustain her,
Loretta still goes on.
Away from the music
scene for several
years, she's writing
songs again and
back with a new
album. Home to her
is and always will be
her Silver Eagle
touring bus.*

For many years, Loretta Lynn, like male counterparts George Jones and Merle Haggard, has stood in the popular imagination as one of those artists symbolic of all that is right, good and real in country music.

Unlike a newer generation of women country singers, Loretta did not grow up listening to the Beatles or Bobby Vee in a suburban tract home. No indeed, when you get down to calling in credentials, her pedigree is about as certifiably rural and down-home as they come. All the fine-line details are right there for anyone who cares to seek them out. You can find them in her best-selling autobiography, *Coal Miner's Daughter*, or in the award-winning feature film that it spawned.

Literally and figuratively, Loretta wrote the book on rags-to-riches country legends. She was born into poverty in Appalachian Kentucky, which was the only world she'd ever seen until she left home at 14 to marry a coal miner and ex-moonshiner named Oliver "Mooney" Lynn, Jr., and moved with him to Washington State. Her tiny home place of Butcher Hollow, has since, on account of her fame, become as celebrated and widely known as other southern dots-on-the-map like Plains, Georgia.

She was a mother of four by age 18 and a grandmother by 29. She picked up a guitar one day while living in Washington State and began writing songs as relief from the boredom of hauling water from the well and washing her babies' diapers. At a relatively late age for a singer, 28, she was pushed headlong into a music career by her domineering husband, Mooney, a man who sometimes drank too much and often didn't come home when he should, but who nonetheless believed wholeheartedly in her talents long before anyone else did.

If there is anyone who has since earned the title of "Queen of Country Music," it is surely Loretta. Even so, she herself demurs: "When I think of the 'Queen' of country, I guess I think of somebody like Kitty Wells," she insists. Queen or not, Loretta has had more than 20 years' worth of hit records, and has just celebrated her twentieth year in show business. She's won a Grammy Award with former duet partner Conway Twitty. She was the first woman singer to win the Country Music Association's Vocalist of the Year award, in 1967, the year the awards were started, and its Entertainer of the Year award, in 1972. She has since gone on to rack up a total of seven CMA awards. Her picture has stared out at us from the cover of *Newsweek*, and she's shown up in Gallup Polls as one of the most respected and admired women

in America. She's been profiled on *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*, and she's performed at the White House a time or two.

Her 1977 autobiography, *Coal Miner's Daughter*, written with veteran *New York Times* writer George Vecsey, made the national best-seller lists, with more than a million copies in print. The film version, with Sissy Spacek and Tommy Lee Jones, won an Academy Award for Spacek, and was second only to *Star Wars* at the box office in 1980.

Still, it seems that in the last few years the country music industry has not been kind to its more tradition-spirited royalty. Just why is hard to say. Maybe the present state of affairs is due to management decisions, Loretta's personal problems, bad timing or changing musical tastes. But the fact of the matter is that in the wake of the massive popular appeal of *Coal Miner's Daughter*, Loretta's professional career has, instead of blossoming, wilted mysteriously. Prior to her new album, *Just a Woman*, produced by Nashville's ubiquitous executive/hitmaker Jimmy Bowen, she had not even been in the recording studio for over three years. Even before that, her records had begun reaching the charts—only to fade quickly off. It seemed as if the 53-year-old singer, who over the years had turned out sassy anthems of domestic strife and protest like "Out of My Head and Into My Bed," "Don't Come Home A-Drinkin' (With Lovin' on Your Mind)," "You Ain't Woman Enough (To Take My Man)" and "The Pill," had simply run out of creative steam. To make matters worse, her career had become mired in a multi-million-dollar lawsuit stemming from several supposed "lifetime" contracts she'd hastily signed as a newcomer to Nashville. This in itself stifled much of her incentive to write and record, since to do so might put her in the unenviable position of earning money for these former business associates and friends who'd now squared off against her in the courtroom.

In the meantime, Loretta, along with Tammy Wynette and other front-rank contenders of her era, was being slowly and surely overtaken by a new breed of smoother, more urbane and suburbanized singers like Barbara Mandrell, Janie Fricke, and, ironically, even Loretta's own little sister, Crystal Gayle.

Even back in the days when her records were still selling like dollar-twenty-five-a-dozen blueberry hotcakes, life at the top was never any bed of roses for "ole Loretty." Her life was—and to a great extent, still is—plagued with minor tragedies and physical and psychological afflictions: high blood pressure, ulcers, hypoglycemia, migraines, and strange blackouts and "seizures," all brought on to some extent by over-work

by Bob Allen



Loretta Lynn
Home
Is
Where
The
Heart
Is



Loretta and husband Mooney in happy times in front of their home near Nashville.

and chronic exhaustion. There was also a “nerve pill” (librium) dependency which she managed to kick on her own several years ago.

In addition to longstanding disorganization in her professional life, her personal life has often been perfect grist for the grocery store tabloids. It inspired Ronee Blakley’s portrayal of a babbling, pill-popping, country-singing neurotic in Robert Altman’s 1975 film, *Nashville*. The rag-picker press had a real field day not long ago when one of her twin daughters eloped at age 15, just a year older than Loretta was when she took the plunge. And a few times when she’s appeared in public with bruises on her face, these same gossip magazines have been quick to jump to the conclusion that it was husband Mooney who put them there—a conclusion that she indignantly and heatedly denies.

“Doo (short for ‘Doolittle,’ one of several affectionate names that she has for her husband of 30-odd years) is a good man, but he’d always drink,” says Loretta, whose ups and downs with her man have admittedly been fuel for many of her best original songs. “Instead of goin’ out and runnin’ around, he’d take a bottle to bed with him. The more I was away,” she sighs, “the more he drank.”

But in late 1984, Loretta’s life took a dark turn that made all the previous maladies seem like mere hypochondria. It was late that year when her oldest son, 34-year-old Jack Benny Lynn, died near Hurricane Mills, her huge rural Tennessee ranch and estate. He met his death in what is still a largely unexplained drowning accident. For Loretta, his death was followed by months and months of grieving, a process that obviously hasn’t ended yet. It was a time

that she now looks back on as “the worst year of my life.”

Her mind turns to matters both recent and long past on this sunny summer day in Nashville. Loretta is seated on a sofa in her publicist’s small Music Row office, in the same building that houses the headquarters of the Country Music Association. “It’s real convenient when it comes to winning CMA awards,” someone quips. She is sipping a diet Coke, which is supposed to compensate for the big bag of Brock’s Banana Candy that she had for breakfast late that morning. Her weight has been known to fluctuate between 130 and a bone-scrawny 95, depending on what kind of stress she’s under, but for the time being she seems merely slender, comfortably settled into the middle range.

The atmosphere here in the small office is one of loose ends and mild disorder, and seems somehow symbolic of the perpetual disjointedness of a life and career lived almost constantly in motion. Though she now has homes in Hawaii, Nashville and nearby Hurricane Mills, she confesses that she feels most at home in her tour bus, where she still spends most of her time.

Our interview, which was supposed to have ranged over most of a leisurely afternoon at her new Nashville home, is shortened when Loretta comes rushing in 45 minutes late and heads to the bathroom to apply makeup before facing a couple of waiting photographers. Next there is a brief photo session and some pressing messages from her booking agency to be intercepted. When the interview does belatedly get underway, there are still frequent interruptions by various people from her manager’s office

upstairs who pop in the door with little pieces of business demanding immediate attention.

Next, her manager himself, Dave Skepner, pops in. He’s an odd, portly-looking creature with a smirking, tight-lipped Bob Hope profile and a portable radio phone on his belt that makes it clear he’s very much wired into some weird wavelength all his own (which may account to some degree, for the present state of his artist’s career).

But Loretta, though clearly frazzled, is obviously no stranger to this sort of loose-ended chaos. In the midst of all the interruptions she is chatty and at times almost effervescent.

True, every now and then traces of spookiness and weariness creep into her eyes; and shadows of darkness and resignation flash through her reminiscences. These are reminders of the troubles that have at times visited her, and of the price that is sometimes paid for a professional and personal life so fully, hectically and openly lived. Her reflections at times take on a freewheeling stream-of-consciousness quality. Often, her answers to questions posed about her recent past spiral suddenly off into more poignant recollections of her long-ago childhood in Butcher Hollow. One gets the impression that those early years and her unchanging memories of them still stand as a reference point of sanity and tranquility amidst the confusion of the more turbulent years that have since rolled by so fast.

“That was all I knew,” she admits. “And when I left it, it was such a change. I went from such a happy childhood to motherhood so fast. I had to be thirty-five years old at fifteen. I was just a kid when I got married, just a baby with babies.” Today she has seven living children and ten grandchildren. “It was more or less like me playin’ with ‘em, like dolls. I had it hard. No runnin’ water, washin’ diapers on a washboard...”

Loretta then absently lapses into a fervent discourse on the virtues of real diapers versus Pampers. “Them that uses Pampers all the time oughta go out and get ‘em some of them old diapers and wash ‘em and just use Pampers when they go out and need these... I don’t know, that’s how I feel about it, but I guess it’s none of my business what they... Oh!” She suddenly snaps herself off the subject and back into the here and now. “Now *what* were we talkin’ about?”

Just as telling as what we do talk about, perhaps, is what we *don’t*. “Under threat of me losing my job,” her publicist warns that we are to avoid touching on the death of her son. Even so, it is obviously very much on Loretta’s mind, and she herself makes occasional oblique references to it. It seems that just a day or so earlier one particularly

bird-brained and tactless reporter had bombarded her with questions on this topic and her belief in reincarnation, and any possible connection between the two. It obviously rattled Loretta rather badly.

It was July 1984 when her oldest boy's body was retrieved from the Duck River where it runs near Loretta's Hurricane Mills dude ranch. He had apparently fallen off his horse and drowned while attempting to ford the normally shallow and slow-moving river. At the time Loretta was hospitalized in Mount Vernon, Illinois, having collapsed with a "nervous seizure" while on tour. Hospital officials removed the TV from her room when her doctors decided that she was not in a fit emotional state to have the news broken to her.

"I guess, when they found Jack, I was in intensive care, and they didn't want me to know," she later told a reporter from *McCall's* magazine. "I think the seizure was God's way of saying He was helping me. He's really not letting my mind cope with it yet. . . . If a person could just hurt and die—if your heart could just break and you could die, I would have."

"I'm trying to cope with the situation," she told another reporter not long afterward. "I have really worked hard—worked a little too hard. But it keeps me from thinking, and I believe I can take the physical work more than I can the mental.

"Being down on the ranch, I would walk the floor and I would eat and I would watch the door and windows to see if Jack was coming in. . . . I don't know if I'll ever get over it. . . . I try to stay in town," she says, referring to the old house she and her husband recently bought in Nashville, which Mooney is personally helping to renovate, "because when I go down there, no matter where I look, I'm looking for Jack, and I can't take it."

As fragile as Loretta can sometimes appear when you see the look of a spooked horse cloud her eyes and her the slight tremor in her robust voice, there is something, at heart, indomitable about her. It's no accident that her friends call her the "Iron Lady," marveling at her ability to push herself to her limits and then beyond. You can tell from talking to Loretta that what drives her to survive in her chosen profession is not so much enjoyment or gratification or money. The money, she'll tell you, ceased being an issue a long time ago; multimillionaire status is old hat to her. Rather, it seems to be the sheer need to endure, to survive, which may stem from her impoverished, if sometimes blissful, child-

hood. The need to keep on putting one foot in front of the other, despite all obstacles, to keep moving, sometimes at the expense of all else, seems to be Loretta Lynn's deepest motivation.

As our interview began, I asked her about these and other matters. What follows are my questions and Loretta's characteristically frank answers.

You've been three years or more without any new music, without an album. Why so long?

I let my contract with MCA run out. Things *should* have been worked out before the contract was up. But they weren't. I ended up negotiating with a whole bunch of different record labels. Then after my son died, I didn't bother with it for a long time. But then I started back in. I waited until I got the deal that I felt best with.

You have three new original songs on this new album. They are also the first songs you've actually written in quite a long time, aren't they?

When I first hit Nashville, I didn't know any better and I signed all these contracts. *She feigns a voice of childish joy.* It was, "Look! Oh, everybody wants me!" And I was just signin' my name to every lifetime contract that was thrown down. Everybody wanted me! Mooney thought it was great, too. Neither one of us knew any better. Then, when I got ready to leave Surefire Music, they didn't want me to go. They had me under some lifetime contracts too. So when I left, they sued me for five million dollars. So I quit writin'. I didn't even own my own songs anymore. I'd get up and be writin' a hit song, and I knew they were hits. I'd write it down to the last three or four lines. *Gestures with her hands.* Then I'd just watch myself tear it up. I tore up so many good songs, I could just kill myself now! But what it did for me was the same that it would do for me when I'd get mad at Doolittle and write a song about him. I'd say in a song what I couldn't walk up to Doolittle and say. *Tearin' them songs up for me was the same feeling.*

I didn't write anything there for a long time, and it got to where I didn't have any confidence about it. Owen Bradley would jump on me about that. If he was down or a little bit blue about somethin' he would *really* jump me! He'd say, "You're just cuttin' your nose off to spite your face!" He'd really get upset with me. And Owen and I were so close that when he'd jump on me like that, I'd go pout. Go cry about it, just like a kid.

There were so many things goin' on right then. I was tryin' to heal my mind, but there were so many things in a package that got me down. But now that I'm back to writin' I don't think there's anyone that's prouder of it than Owen is. I've got a lot of songs I've written that I think are just a little outdated. . . . that I wanta update. Like today, if you wrote about "The Pill," it wouldn't be no big thing at all, would it?!

You've got Jimmy Bowen, MCA Records label head and staff producer, producing this new album. He's Nashville's latest young hotshot producer. Quite a change for you, I would imagine.

Hey! How can you fight success? Whatever he's doin', you know there's a lot of hard work and thought goin' into it.

At first Jimmy wanted Conway Twitty to produce me, because me and Conway have this thing. We try and outdo each other. When we hit the stage together, there is somethin' else there that nobody else has. Even though Conway's kinda backward and bashful, he'll just kinda look up at me. And I try to embarrass him. *Laughs.* I try to do everything I can to make Conway laugh. It's very hard to make Conway smile. But there's just something there that Conway and I have that no other couple I have ever seen on stage have. And this picks up on camera and on tape. And Jimmy knows this, and he wanted Conway to record me. Me and Conway talked about it, and Conway wanted to.

But I always go with my feelings. There's no doubt in my mind that Conway and me could have come out with a hit album. But I decided I wanted this album to be something that Conway and

"I didn't write anything for a long time, and it got to where I didn't have any confidence about it."





“My childhood was rough, but I didn’t know it. I didn’t have nothin’, but I didn’t think nobody had nothin.’ ”

me wouldn’t be. I wanted something that Jimmy Bowen would do.

Is the new album any sort of departure for you?

I think three or four of the songs are really modern, not real *real* country. But you can still hear Loretta in there. I don’t wanna just straddle the fence between country and pop. I want to be on top. Hey! If they’re gonna buy over here... *She gestures...* then I’ll kinda teeter-totter that way. But I don’t wanna be just straddlin’ the fence and not knowin’ what I am.

I think I do have a few songs in this new album that will maybe sell in a different direction, but I think it definitely is country. It’s nothin’ but me with a good sound on it. Of course, right now, I don’t have to worry about anything. I don’t have to prove anything. I’ve had Number One records for twenty years in country music, and that’s a good record.

I just wanta make good records.

It’s been more than three years since you’ve had any kind of hit, though. And you’re not alone. It’s been as long for Tammy Wynette, another veteran. In the meantime there are all these new singers coming in who, when you get right down to it, don’t sound nearly as country as you do.

I think that’s what hurt country music: that the records started gettin’ too far out. Like Crystal. Hey! *Snaps her fingers.* She had that great “Here I go down that long road again!” That’s one of my favorites she’s ever done! And then she had “Don’t It Make My Brown Eyes Blue.” That record took off in every direction—pop, country. But it was still country. People couldn’t say that song was too far out. Some of her songs I think have been. But them two I didn’t think were.

I think the ones that was really pop will do themselves out, though. I think the ones that has kept it country and still have that great sound are the ones that the country folks want to hear.

Let’s face it: who could be more country than Mr. Ricky Skaggs? He scooted

right in on top of all of them that were pop.

How is it that you and Crystal are sisters, yet your singing styles are so utterly different?

Everybody asks this same question. I’m the second oldest of eight children and she’s the baby. I was born and raised in the mountains of Kentucky. The year I left was the year that Mommy had Crystal. Crystal and my two twins are the same age, I married so young. When Mommy had Crystal, they moved to Wabash, Indiana, so Crystal knows nothin’ about the hills. Nothin’. And I think Crystal, at one time, would listen to people make fun of me talk, and a lot of times I think she would overdo a word pronunciation because of this. People sometimes accuse her of puttin’ on, and I know how that makes her feel, because she’s my sister. She gets nervous about things like that. They will come up to her and say, “Who’s puttin’ on? You or Loretta?” I don’t like people botherin’ her like that! When they ask me that, I tell ’em, “Hold it! Neither one of us is puttin’ on.”

Crystal really went on to do well for herself, and there is no one prouder of her than me. There was some lies goin’ on a while back that there was bad blood between us, because she was after my ole man. Well, that was just pure baloney! For one thing, Crystal’s the baby, and if anything like that had of ever happened, I’d a *whipped* her! I love Crystal. She and I, right now, are tryin’ to get up a family reunion back at Butcher Holler. We’re gonna go back home for a reunion. We should have done it long before now, but we don’t wanta waste any more time.

I understand that you and writer George Vecsey are about to start working on a sequel to Coal Miner’s Daughter. You’ve indicated that there were a lot of things that were left out of the first book, and that your childhood back in Kentucky was actually a lot rougher than you let on.

Yeah. I’d been takin’ notes on a new book for about two years. But then when I lost my son, I just left everything. I have

started takin’ notes again now.

My childhood was rough, but I didn’t know it. I didn’t have nothin’, but I didn’t think nobody had nothin’. I didn’t know there was any other life. I didn’t know there was these other places out there. *Laughs.* Maybe I would have been in better shape if I’d never a known.

You said that there was an earlier episode, a rather grim one, out of your early life that you left out of the book. The time the doctors gave you up for dead?

I had mastoids, which is somethin’ kids don’t get too much now, but I remember some died from it back then. They kept my head shaved and drilled little holes in my skull and filled it full of cotton. They give me up to die three times. We had no money. Who were *we*? We were nobody! Now I go up there and give a show for their hospital and cut the ribbon when they open a new one.

I don’t remember no pain from it, but mama would pull that cotton out ever’ day, and there would just be ole green stuff on it. I just remember Mommy and Daddy carryin’ me back and forth to the hospital, twelve miles there and twelve miles back, once a day, every day for four years. But I don’t remember no pain. I don’t remember bein’ sick. I remember Mommy and Daddy carryin’ me in the ole quilt that was made of ole sheets and overalls that had wore out.

But Mommy knew I was dyin’, and she wanted me to have a new pair of shoes. That’s the only thing Mommy ever stole. It was from this place called Murphy’s Five and Ten over in Paintsville, Kentucky. She said she asked the man in the store, “Can my little girl have a pair of shoes. I’m scared if she gets any colder



BETH GWINN

she's gonna die." He told her no, and we went back out. Well, Daddy was real bashful and backwards and Mommy just told him, "Go on and take the baby, and I'll be right behind you." She went back in the store and picked up these little red shoes for me. Mommy always liked red. She didn't tell Daddy at first. We was almost all the way home when she pulled these little red shoes out of her pocketbook. She put them shoes on me, and Daddy ran off and went home. He just knew the police was gonna pick us up! Mommy said that was the only thing she ever stole. Had it been me, I would have stole one pair a week. Now what was wrong with him, not givin' a pair of shoes away!? I give lots of things away, every day. I couldn't see why he couldn't have done it. Neither did Mommy. *Laughs.* That's why she stole 'em.

Those childhood years still seem to be the most vivid part of your life.

I guess that's because everything since then happened so fast. That's why when I hit 35 I was still havin' to learn things I should have known at 15. I never had much education, because I went to school in this little one-room schoolhouse, and we'd have four or five different teachers a year, because the bigger kids would whup the teachers and run 'em off. The only things I ever learned was what I learned from Mommy.

Then later, Mooney wanted me to sing. He said that after about a couple of years we'd have the money to buy a home and kinda get away from it and get out of it, so I wouldn't have to be away from my kids anymore. I don't blame it on Mooney, though. He didn't know any more about this business than I did, even though he's the one who put me in it. But

then in two years we were in debt, and I was pregnant with the twins, and we was wonderin' where we was gonna get our next penny from. We didn't have insurance to have the babies delivered. We had it rough. Pretty soon it got to where it wasn't that I didn't wanta quit. I *couldn't* quit. I was very hurt that I was havin' to be on the road, and my babies was startin' to walk, startin' to get away from me.

I got very disgusted about it for a long time. I got to thinking like, "I'm gonna have to be out here on the road forever," and I got very depressed about it. It was like, "You're makin' a heck of a good livin' for everyone, Loretta! And everyone is enjoyin' it except you!" It got to where I was gone all the time. I'd be home one or two days a month and be gone the rest of the time. I was like a money machine. I remember one day cryin' and sayin' to Doo, "I'm not comin' home anymore! It's like all I'm good for around here is a money machine! I'm like a tree you all just pick the money off of. All of you, that's all you want!" And thinkin' this was makin' me even more depressed.

Is that when you started taking valium?

I never took no valium! You'd hear anything about me! But I never took 'em. They'da drove me outa my mind. I had been offered valium, and I had taken one. That's when I knew I couldn't take 'em. I went nuttier than a fruitcake! I was talkin' and sayin' things that I didn't even know I was sayin', and doin' things I didn't even know I was doin'. I never took another one, even though they was offered to me.

The first time I ever took a librium was when I hit the witness stand when I

was sued, which was one of the hardest things I ever went through. It was just so hard on me. I'd get to feelin' like I was gonna cry and I'd take a librium, feelin' it was gonna help me. Then it got to later where I'd take two, and I'd still be shakin'. It got to where I'd just get up and do my show, and then I'd say, "Hey! I don't wanta think about *nothin'*. And I'd just take a librium and go back to sleep. I never took no "uppers," whatever you call 'em, that keeps you from eatin'. Dope, I guess. I guess the "downer" would have been librium. And I was guilty of takin' them. As many as I wanted, whenever I wanted. But then if nothin' bothered me, I wouldn't take one for a month. I guess if I'd a really been hooked on 'em, I couldn't of stopped like I did. But what got me was all them people sayin', "Ole Loretta's on pills!" But even though I wasn't eatin' right and wasn't sleepin' right, I still wasn't takin' no valium or no "uppers."

What do you do these days when you're feeling blue?

Today, I'm feelin' a lot better about myself. If I do get a little depressed, I'll go out in my garden and pull weeds. That's real good therapy. Or I'll go out and fool with my rock garden. I like to be alone. That is the most precious thing I have. Mooney's got his own little problems, and he likes to be alone too. Sometimes when we're together, he don't even know I'm there. I'm doin' my thing, and he's doin' his. He don't bother me, and I don't bother him. But we know if we need each other, we're there.

Sometimes when I'm home, though, I just long to get in the bus so I can start goin' down the highway and be by myself. There's always so many wantin' to get on that bus and go with me. All the time. This weekend I'm goin' to Florida, and I bet there's ten that's already asked me. *Sighs.* It's sad. It's really sad.

Just how long do you intend to keep working so hard, to keep putting yourself through so much?

Well, the kids, being away from them was really what had me down for a long time. I finally faced the fact that there was nothin' I could do about it. You can't stop them from growin' until you get your debts paid. But now the kids are grown up, and they're with me some, and I'm with them. I can work now if I want to, and I don't have to if I don't want to. But I still do work, and I work hard. It's because I *want* to. If I work a whole bunch of dates next year, it's because I want to. If I stay home, it's because I want to.

I can tell you one thing: I ain't ready to quit! *Smiles.* Like I said, I don't wanna be just straddlin' the fence. I wanta be on top!



"Sometimes I just long to get on the bus so I can start goin' down the highway and be by myself."



BETH GWINN

Kathy Mattea Can't Complain

by Bob Allen

In many ways, Kathy Mattea is representative of a new generation of country singers and the product of a new and changing country music industry.

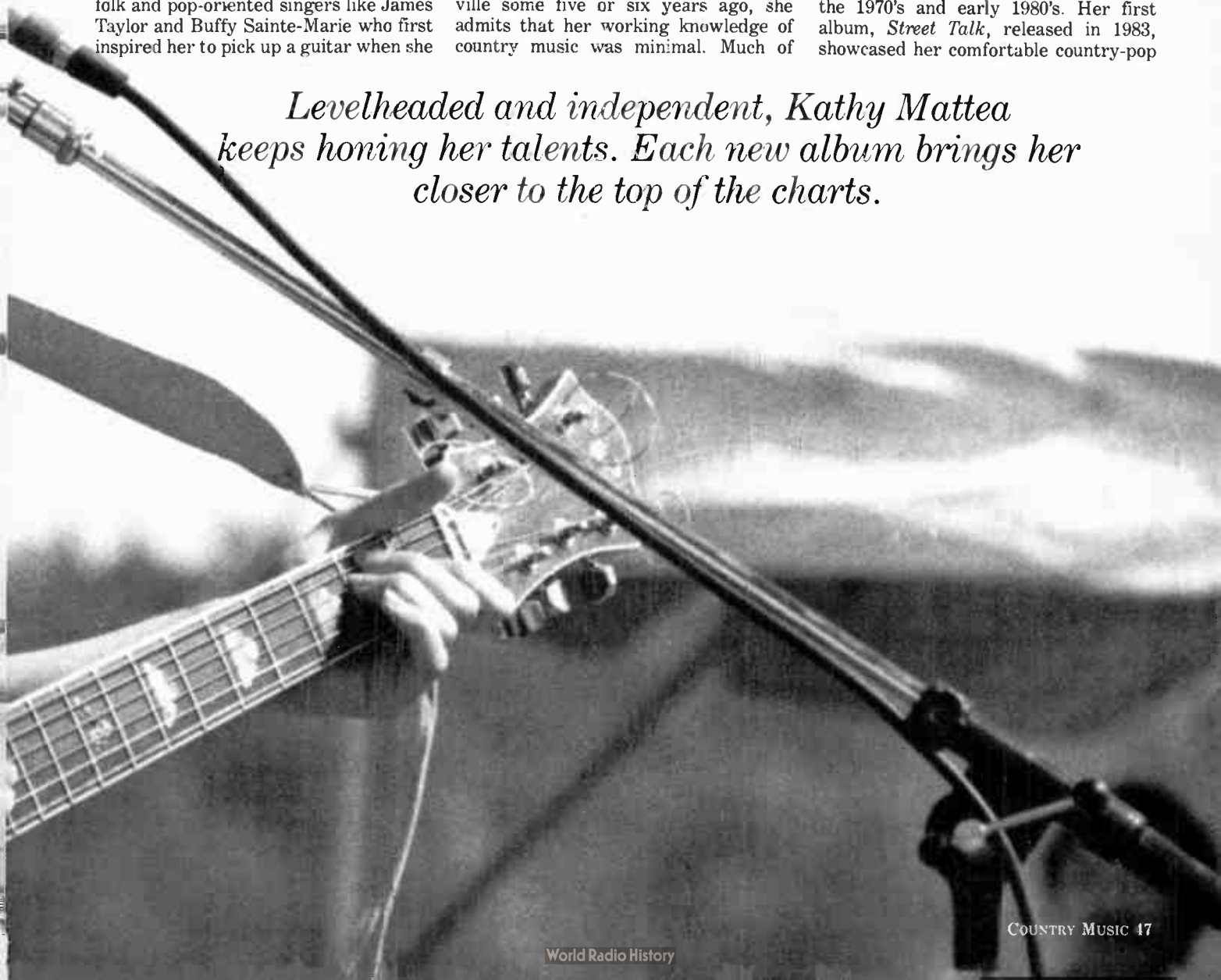
Though she's a native of West Virginia, the 25-year-old singer's background is really more suburban than rural. It was folk and pop-oriented singers like James Taylor and Buffy Sainte-Marie who first inspired her to pick up a guitar when she

was in junior high school. Before coming to Nashville, she had begun preparing for a more conventional career, studying engineering, education and various other subjects at the University of West Virginia, where she pulled down a very respectable A-minus grade point average. Even when she did arrive in Nashville some five or six years ago, she admits that her working knowledge of country music was minimal. Much of

what she's since learned about it, from a historical point of view, she picked up in a job she landed as a tour guide at the Country Music Hall of Fame.

Her vocal style—with its warm, husky, middle-of-the-road quality, which has often drawn comparisons to Anne Murray's—also reflects musical influences of the 1970's and early 1980's. Her first album, *Street Talk*, released in 1983, showcased her comfortable country-pop

Levelheaded and independent, Kathy Mattea keeps honing her talents. Each new album brings her closer to the top of the charts.



musical inclinations. The album also resulted in four chart singles, including the title song, "Someone is Falling in Love," and "It's Easy for You to Say." The critical and commercial acceptance that followed *Street Talk* also won her accolades as "Best New Female Vocalist" for 1983 from both *Billboard* and *Cashbox Magazine*.

But Mattea feels that her last album, *From My Heart*, and the first single from it, "It's Your Reputation Talkin'," produced by Allen Reynolds (whose past production credits include Crystal Gayle and Janie Fricke), both show a determined move in a more "country" direction.

"It's more country than the first album," she explains. "It's much more acoustic, and there are no strings, except for a string quartet on one song. I really like my first album, but I've grown and made a lot of progress as a singer since then," she adds, pointing out that the dozens of shows she's opened for artists like The Oak Ridge Boys, David Allan Coe, John Conlee, and Hank Williams Jr., have taught her more about her own strengths and limitations.

She also feels that the new album will finally put an end to the all-too-frequent Anne Murray comparisons. "I think the comparison is natural, because there aren't a lot of women singers who have low voices. I love the texture of her voice, and I consider those comparisons a compliment. But I think there are a lot of differences between what she does and what I do. One of the things that Allen Reynolds said to me when we finished this album was, 'No one is ever going to compare you to Anne Murray again.'"

As one of Music City's most promising new vocalists, Kathy Mattea has certainly come a long way, particularly when you consider that as recently as six or seven years ago, she had never given more than a passing thought to the idea of someday singing professionally. The whole process got underway rather uneventfully back in 1976 when she and some friends who'd been singing together formed a "newgrass" group called Pennsboro. The group became a favorite on the University of West Virginia beer hall circuit. Then when another member of the group, a close friend with whom she'd begun writing songs, decided to move to Nashville, she decided—over her parents' disapproval—that she would go with him.

"Even then," she recalls, "it wasn't that clear in my mind that I wanted to be a singer. I just decided to come to Nashville and learn what I could about the music business and learn to write songs as best I could.

"After a year in Nashville, the two of

us hit a real low point," she continues. "We weren't doing much, and neither one of us was real motivated. You know: you come down here and you find that you're just one of thousands who roll in, and you didn't expect that. You go from being *the* hot band in your own little town to being *nobody*."

Eventually, her friend decided to return home and go back to school. "I knew that if I was going to stay on alone, I needed a pretty good reason for doing it," she

"You find that you're just one of thousands who roll in, and you didn't expect that."



BETH GWINN

explains. "So I spent about a month alone, doing some real hard thinking, and finally I decided to stay and go for it all the way. I got a voice teacher and spent a whole year practicing my singing."

By day, she supported herself with the Hall of Fame tour guide job, and later as a secretary for an insurance company, and as a waitress.

Finally, when she felt she'd gotten her voice into top form through singing lessons and frequent stints performing at local clubs on "Writers' Nights," she spent her own money on a demonstration tape of songs that she felt best showcased her vocal strengths. Soon, she landed work singing for a small jingle

company. She also began recording demonstration tapes for other struggling songwriters who were trying to shop their songs around but didn't feel they could sing themselves. "I'd usually do it for free, just to try and get my voice heard around town by the different music publishers."

The doors really started to swing open for her when she landed a job singing demos for the powerful Combine Music Corporation, which publishes the songs of Kris Kristofferson and dozens of other leading writers.

"I'd always heard that Combine was a closed shop, that they already had all the singers they needed to sing their demos," she recalls. "It was a total coincidence that one day I was with Bob Oermann, a Nashville music journalist and friend of mine. He had to stop to see Al Cooley, who works at Combine as a song plugger. I remember it was very late one afternoon, and the office was empty except for the three of us. We were all sitting out in the lobby, and Bob told Cooley that I was a singer and would be good on demos. I was embarrassed, and I just told Bob to be quiet," she smiles. "But then Cooley said, 'It just so happens that our demo singer just moved to Los Angeles, and we're looking for somebody.' He asked me to drop a tape off for him—and of course, I had a copy of the one I'd made right in my purse! I remember he looked at me and said, 'You've gotta be fast in the studio, and you've gotta be able to sing a lot of different styles.' And for the first time in my life, I just looked back and said, 'I can do it.' I wasn't bragging. But I had worked so hard with my singing that, by then, I just had that much confidence."

The exposure that came her way from singing Combine's demos soon afforded her a fulltime living as a demo singer. It was not much longer before her talents came to the attention of executives at Mercury/Polygram Records, who signed her to a contract in 1983.

Those who—like this writer—have watched Mattea's rise through the ranks of struggling singers at close range attribute some of her success to her level-headedness, her practical business sense and her general good-naturedness. In addition to her obvious vocal talents, Kathy has her feet on the ground. She sums it up in her own words:

"I suppose I was lucky in that nobody ever came up to me and said, 'You're great! I'm gonna take you under my wing and make you famous!' I was forced to keep working and learning on my own and doing more and more. And I certainly can't complain about the way things have turned out so far!" ■

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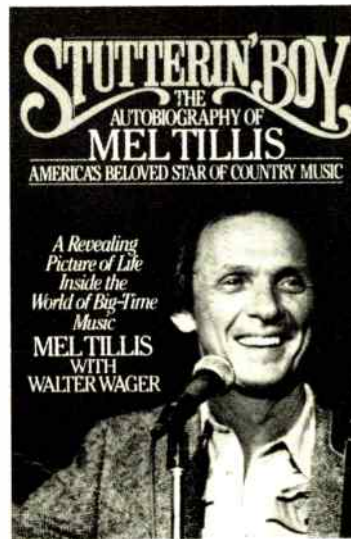


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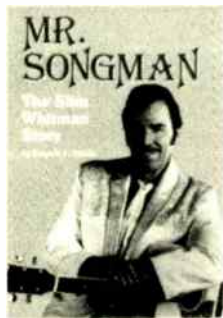
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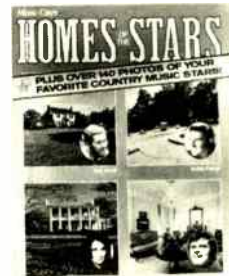
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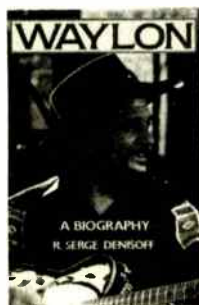
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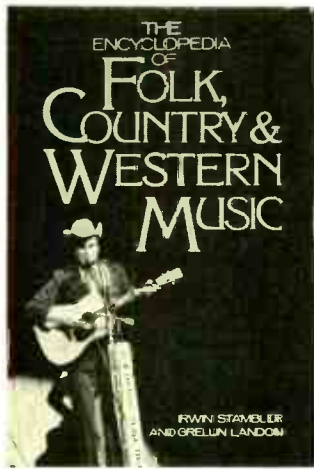
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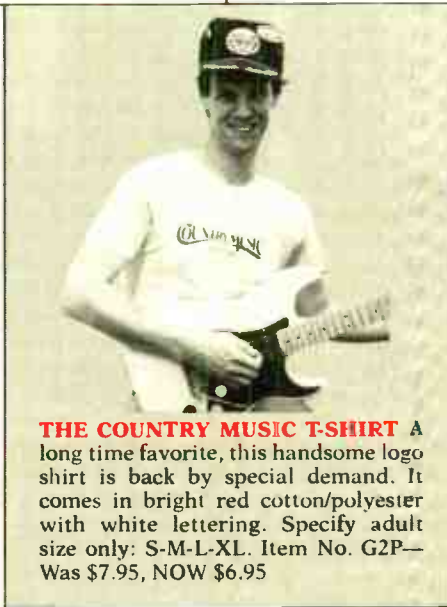
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Record Reviews

Bill Monroe

Bill Monroe and Stars of the Bluegrass Hall of Fame

MCA 5625

Hey, buddy—wanna buy a bluegrass record? I got a good one for ya here. Top-of-the-line model, brand new, digital recording, major American label—none a that off-brand merchandise at *this* store, pal; this is a genuine, full-price, quality product—an' it's even got Jap technology! Sure, it ain't Alabama, but ya ain't country if ya ain't got a bluegrass record, ya know. An' ya *really* can't go wrong with this one; it'll last ya a lifetime, and it's all yer ever gonna need. Whaddaya say?

What I say is, "Hell, yes! Gimme two!" I didn't even have to listen to it before transferring it to my permanent travelling tape collection; just stuck it on the turntable and started rolling tape. Bill Monroe with Jim and Jesse, Ralph Stanley, The Country Gentlemen, Bobby Hicks, Mac Wiseman, Del McCoury, The Osborne Brothers, The Seldom Scene, Carl Story and Bill's very own Bluegrass Boys, all on one real, studio-recorded, official record? Doing pure, mainline Bill Monroe songs? Are you kidding? Saying that these guys and their music are "good" is like saying that Gettysburg was a disagreement, and saying that the result of their union is just another record is like saying that what happened at Appomattox was just another chat.

It would also be absurd to



imagine that anything other than a great album could emerge from such a series of meetings, and, in this case, this particular piece of vinyl, the repository of fifty-plus years of ultra-dedicated master musicianship with another few hundred years of Anglo-American folk tradition behind it, is quite possibly the best bluegrass record ever made.

That is, of course, a close call—Bill's past work with Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs is awful hard to beat, as are some of the early Stanley Brothers' records (and Jim and Jesse's, and Mac Wiseman's)—but on this modern album, the sheer latterday experience of these singers and pickers overcomes the usual problems of conventional multi-star albums as if they just didn't exist. Which they probably didn't; these are, after all, the world's very best blue-

grass musicians, and the cumulative musical instinct they have developed over decades of perfecting that exacting form with each other and just about every other hot acoustic musician under the sun results in music which is amazingly complex, beautifully fluid, and utterly clear.

The success of this album is all the more impressive when you think about the fact that it was recorded without the use of earphones or overdubbing. In other words, the musicians played together just as they do on stage, and the studio personnel recorded the results as accurately as they could, period. With the aforementioned Jap technology, the Mitsubishi X-800 32-track digital system which receives a credit all its own in the liner notes, such miracles are now possible. Bluegrass is "live" music—it really can't be constructed track-by-track in the

manner of most modern records and come out sounding anything like as wonderful as it does when the pickers are actually playing together—so this technology is the real-life, right-now answer to a dream which has occupied the attentions of bluegrass professionals for years and years. It works.

Whether or not we will hear more records like this is another question. There is not, so they say, a great deal of money to be made from bluegrass music, and the small studios where most bluegrass is recorded cannot afford such high technology. But for now, it reflects well on the folks at MCA Records that this project has seen the light of commercial day.

Encourage 'em. Buy this album. You'll be supporting the most skillful, dedicated traditional musicians this country has ever produced, and you'll be getting yourself a *very* hot record.

—PATRICK CARR

Loretta Lynn
Just A Woman
MCA-5613

It's been nearly four since Loretta Lynn leased her last studio. A combination of bad rment, personal problem, a protracted dispute with longtime record label, spirited to derail her career, and left some the ing if she'd ever ret studio at all.

But with *Just A Woman*, Loretta her new album, emerged has, happy to say, with flying color, practically everything about

Record Reviews

this album, from the exquisite cover art, all through the music, right on down to the last cut, practically bristles with renewed energy.

The icing on the cake is two new originals from Lynn. "Adam's Rib" is the sort of robust, spunky anthem that is reminiscent of some of her most outspoken musical commentaries from years gone by. "Wouldn't It Be Great," on the other hand, is a wistful, soul-baring confessional that holds its own among material by Bobby Braddock, Dave Loggins, Jerry Foster, Bill Rice and others as one of the best songs on *Just A Woman*.

Co-produced by Lynn, MCA head Jimmy Bowen, and Chip Hardy, *Just A Woman* is redolent with sparkling, yet understated arrangements (everything from autoharp to synthesizer) that succeed in contemporizing the overall sound without impinging upon Loretta's dyed-in-the-wool and largely unreconstructed vocal charm.

On cuts like "One Man Band," Bobby Braddock's catchy "Stop the Clock" (listen to her hearty inflections on this one!), and "(There's a Name for You) I Can't Say It on the Radio," we once again hear the sassy, but sultry, Loretta of old.

Yet there are other cuts, such as the lovely title song, and the pop-flavored but similarly moving "When I'm in Love All Alone" (which, at first listen, sounds more like something her sister Crystal would do) which mark a bit of a departure. These selections seem to be a subtle acknowledgement, on Loretta's and co-producer Bowen's part, at times and tastes have changed; and that no matter how rooted one is in one's own defined musical style, comes a time when changing tastes must be acknowledged and accommodated.

Remarkably, even when new g into this slightly Loretta'n mode for her. breathless ers over nary a note. There is,



simply, not a bad song on here.

It's great to have Loretta Lynn back again; it's even better to have her back with as much style and vigor as she exhibits on *Just A Woman*.

—BOB ALLEN

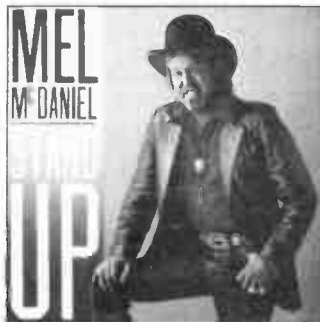
Mel McDaniel *Stand Up*

Capitol ST-12437

Confession time: I hated "Baby's Got Her Blue Jeans On." To me, it set a new standard of banality equalled only by countless numbers of past and future Levi's ads. I have now said my piece on that one and shall remain silent forevermore. What about this album?

Frankly, I haven't heard an album whose opening burned as much as this album's title tune since Delbert McClinton's *Victim of Life's Circumstances* nearly ten years ago. This engaging piece of hillbilly bop, penned by Sonny Throckmorton, Ricky Rector and Bruce Channel—of "Hey, Baby" fame—isn't quite Sun Records, but it kicks as hard as any of Delbert's old stuff with a hook that merits hit status. Lionel Delmore's "Thank You, Nadine," only slightly less hard-hitting, opens side two with a roar, with some furious guitar/piano interplay and a hot Pig Robbins piano solo.

Not that the whole album goes that direction. "Reminders" and "Make It With the Blues" are both clever enough and McDaniel's smooth/rough



voice is more than up to the task. McDaniel and producer Jerry Kennedy, one of several Kennedys who worked on this session, blew it in only two places—on "If You Want a Fool Around," which consists of nothing but silly puns, and "Worn Out Shoe," a poor boy/rich girl ditty which isn't even funny the first time. "Shoestring" is one of those delightfully screwball hobo numbers that could've come out of Bobby Bare. The chorus of "Doctor's Orders" ("I really oughta be in bed") will displease the same people who want to rate rock albums, but who cares? Those turkeys could find satanic messages in "Wabash Cannonball."

The crowning glory of the album is the final number, McDaniel's version of Bob McDill's "Whatever Gets You Through the Night," one of McDill's best compositions in some time. Aside from the throwaways, which could have been avoided, McDaniel and Jerry Kennedy caught the brass ring on this one, and either "Stand Up" or "Whatever Gets You Through the Night" or both deserve any success they may have if they're picked as singles.

—RICH KIENZLE

The Bellamy Brothers *Howard and David*

MCA 5586

I am in a penthouse suite in Atlanta, with a collection of high speed people discussing high speed things. How to keep people from stealing air-

planes, how to take back hostages from recalcitrant folks, things like that. On the bed is the distinctive form of an Uzi submachine gun, alongside two Walther pistols and a Beretta, fitted with fat, black, sausage-shaped silencers. The person I'm with is short and blond, freckles and curly hair and too much sun. She's in her 30's, and the word that comes to mind is "cute," very cute. What she does is sell laser-sighted submachine guns to police departments. (Most embarrassing experience: "When I went to Chicago, and my M-16 went to Dallas...") She is sitting on the floor, Indian-style, her skirt tucked around her legs. It is late, and as the conversation swirls around us, she looks up at me and sighs.

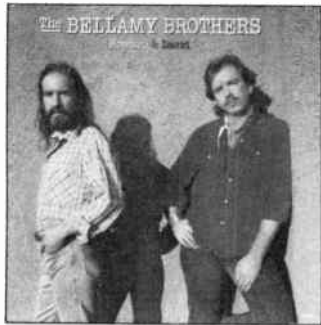
Remember, she asks, what it's like to be in a protest demonstration? To go to a pop festival? To be trapped in a riot? So she and I swap stories from the 1960's, and pretty soon we notice no one else in the room is talking. They are all watching us, as if we just arrived from another planet. We are the oldest people in the room, and for the players in this game, the decade of the 1960's is extraterrestrial stuff. We just smile and sit on our impeccable credentials.

What brought this to mind was the Bellamy Brothers' newest single, "Old Hippie," off the *Howard and David* album. It goes like this:

He turned 35 last Sunday, in his hair he found some gray. But he still ain't changed his lifestyle, he likes it better the old way...

Don't spread this around, but I turned 35 this year. The person who cuts my hair (very short these days) likes to emphasize the gray ("So distinguished, ya know?") I'm not unhappy that I turned 35; I was unhappy when I turned 29. Mostly I think I'm surprised, maybe a little bemused. David Bellamy is about my age, which is prob-

ably why "Old Hippie" seems surprised and maybe a little bemused. Even 20 years later, it's hard for us children of the 60's (by the 1960's we actually mean about 1965 to 1974) to look back with any kind of objectivity. It's all tied up with coming of age in a crazy time, with a war we're still trying to understand and a peace that made even less sense. It's equal parts of sex and drugs and rock 'n' roll, short skirts and the searing vision of napalm on a too-green landscape. It's peace and love and war and honor, Woodstock and Khesanh. The 60's shaped its children and, to one extent or another, changed us all. We have loved strangers and seen our friends die, and no matter how well we've done in the



years since, sometimes it's hard to, well, take it *seriously*.

He was sure back in the 60's that everyone was hip. Then they sent him off to Vietnam on his senior trip. And behind each wave of tragedy he waited for the joy. Now this world may change around him, but he just can't change no more...

"Old Hippie" touches those feelings without pounding them into the ground. It's funny and it's light-hearted and it rings so true it's scary. This song reminds me just how good a country song can be, how it can reach out and touch your life, trip chords you'd forgotten. The Bellamy Brothers are like that, though. They've done a lot, been a lot

of places and covered a lot of miles. Unlike the usual freeze-dried cowboys from Nashville, they *think*, and it shows in their music.

Howard and David is a whole record of thoughtful country music. It drifts from intelligent ballads (Mac McAnally and Tom Brasfield's "I'm Gonna Hurt Her on the Radio") to honky tonk country rockers. My favorite is "Jeanie Rae," which sounds like it should have been written around 1956. I also love "You're My Favorite Waste of Time," which gives Howard and David a chance to show off their voices, and "Everybody's Somebody's Darlin'," which is, I think, what country music is all about.

This is country music for thinking people, and it just doesn't get any better.

—MICHAEL BANE

Rosanne Cash
Rhythm & Romance
Columbia FC 39463

It's been a while since Rosanne Cash put out an album, and it sounds like she's been through a lot—but then Rosanne *always* sounds like she's been through a lot; a highly intelligent and perceptive young woman, she has always written and sung about the pains and problems and perils of life with or without a partner (a/k/a "love," "romance," or, if you prefer, "relationships") with unusual respect for reality. There are no primrose paths or sensual sunsets, no dreamboats or cutie-pies or happy-ever-afters in Rosanne's songs; there are instead (like the man said) lots of bad cases and lots of sad faces and folks with their backs to the wall on the many and various issues of "romance," and the lady does a whole lot better than most in voicing the full complexity of their feelings.

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Marty Robbins Pieces of Your Heart: Ribbon Of Darkness—Title Song—I'm Not Ready Yet—I Feel Another Heart-break Coming On—Too Far Gone—Not So Long Ago—Ain't I Right—My Own Native Land—Girl From Spanish Town—Never Look Back—Kingston Girl—And One More, LP No. BFX15212 (No Tapes) (X) ★



Marty Robbins In The Wild West Part 1: Big Iron—Cool Water—In The Valley—Running Gun—El Paso—The Master's Call—The Little Green Valley—Feleena (From El Paso)—El Paso City—A Hundred And Sixty Acres—Billy The Kid—They're Hanging Me Tonight—Utah Carol, LP No. BFX15145 (No Tapes) (X) ★



The Best of Skeeter Davis (Extended 20 Song Collection): The End Of The World/My Last Date (With You)/I'm Saving My Love (I Can't Help You) I'm Falling Too/I Forgot More Than You'll Ever Know/I Can't Stay Mad At You, more! LP No. NL89522 Cass. No. NK89522—(O) ★



The Best of Connie Smith (Extended 20 Song Collection): Once A Day Then And Only Then/Baby's Back Again Run Away Little Tears/Ribbon Of Darkness I Can't Remember If I Talk To Him You And You're Sweet Love, more! LP No. NL89523 Cass. No. NK89523—(O) ★

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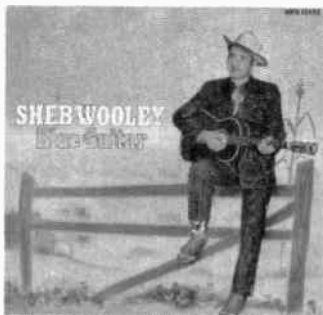
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Record Reviews



pect from Rosanne in subject matter—it's about an impressively wide spectrum of real-life relationship-related feelings—but in style it's not quite the product a lot of people must have been expecting. "Rhythm" is right there in the album's title, next to a picture of Rosanne in her new spikey hairdo, and what you see is what you get: a bright, crisp, cymbal-splashy, electric-guitar-based sound. It works well—adds a little zip to the proceedings, gets her out of the just-another-ballad-singer business—and if you think about it, it's really not that surprising. Rosanne lives and records in Nashville, and her last name is Cash, but like a lot of other youngish singers who are plainly not English, black, or punk- or heavy-metal-oriented, her identification as "country" has always been more of a marketing ploy than anything else.

The "new" Rosanne, then, isn't that different from the "old" Rosanne. She is, however, a little older and, if not wiser, more knowledgeable. That shows in several songs on this album, particularly "My Old Man," a very caring message about and to her dad, and "Halfway House." This is not the song about her recovery from drug abuse my TV and newspapers tell me it is, but a clear, clever and moving piece about the re-building of a shattered relationship. It sounds as if she's singing about her own life here, so I guess she *has* been through a lot, but the song could apply to many of us out here—and that's the trick.

—PATRICK CARR



George Jones
Who's Gonna Fill Their Shoes
Epic FE 39598

Sometimes I can't help but wonder if a singer like George Jones who's been at it so perilously long still really enjoys recording and performing all that much. Lately, for instance, George has gotten a new reputation as the "45-minute wonder" for the remarkable brevity of his live shows.

I mean, could it be that for someone like him facing live audiences night after night or setting to work on yet another album is no less drudgery than going to the office, the factory or the typewriter at eight A.M. is for the rest of us mere mortals?

Who's Gonna Fill Their Shoes, Jones' newest album, makes me wonder about this even more. Not that it's a bad album by any means; it just more or less sounds like a half dozen others he's cranked out in the past few years. It is essential but certainly not *vintage* George Jones. And as such, it's nothing much to get excited about—something which Jones, producer Billy Sherrill, and everyone else involved obviously didn't do while they were in the studio making it.

Just what's missing? Jones himself is in decent enough voice. In fact, the album is full of his trademark vocal histrionics. And there are even a few songs where he lives up to

his old standards and ventures effectively into familiar territory.

On "If I Painted a Picture," for example, he once again invokes his endearing musical persona of the mournful, moonstruck lover which we've heard before in hits like "The Grand Tour" and "A Picture of Me Without You." On "Somebody Wants Me Out of the Way" and "If Only You'd Love Me Again," he is once more the whiskey-bloated, angst-ridden and self-pitying drunk of yesteryear.

One of the obviously missing ingredients, though, beyond the above-mentioned songs, is a lack of good material. Too much of *Who's Gonna Fill Their Shoes* is filled out with cute but eminently forgettable novelty songs ("Call the Wrecker for My Heart," "The One I Loved Back Then"—The Corvette Song", and "Whole Lotta Trouble for You"), with a couple of similarly disposable duets thrown in for good measure. (There's one with Lacy J. Dalton that's not bad, and there's another with Lynn Anderson who sounds like she wandered into the wrong studio.)

But what's really missing is *ferver*—a word that, in the past, has often been used to describe Jones' best music. On far too many of these cuts he sounds like he's merely imitating himself or singing in his sleep. Longtime producer Sherrill and the usual lineup of session musicians also rise—or rather sink—to the occasion with arrangements so predictable and uninspired that they could have been programmed by a computer.

At the risk of repeating myself—and for the sake of the hardcore George Jones fans whom I know I've already enraged with this review—I have to reiterate that this is not actually a bad album. In fact, it's an *almost* good one. What's bothersome about it is the feeling that with a little more care and inspiration, it could have been a great one.

I really don't know what

Jones is drinking these days, or if he's drinking at all. But the next time he and Sherrill go in the studio to make a record they might try splitting a bottle of Geritol. It sure couldn't hurt much.

—BOB ALLEN

The Judds
Rockin' with the Rhythm
RCA AHLI-7042

Somehow it seems important to like The Judds, to find them exciting. They're—well, they're *important*, not just cute. As new blood in a tired circulation system, they are evidence that the promotional heart-pump of country music may not, after all, have finally failed under the strain of far too much pressure for far too long (or, for that matter, succumbed at last to the toxic side effects of all the weird, watered-down, mixed-up, or downright alien fluids that have been run through it over the last twenty years). Right now, the system is clogged with burned-out superstars and bright young comets so quickly extinguished that nobody ever really got to know who they were or how to tell them apart, but The Judds are different: they're a real-life walking, talking, living, breathing, singing-doll success story! They are, in short, a sign of life.

Well, I don't know about that. If I were the surgeon in charge of Nashville's case, and all I saw happening were The Judds, I'd be alerting the coroner and packing my bags. Another way of saying that is to venture the opinion that although The Judds are a pleasant enough act, they're about as *exciting* as your average afternoon nap.

All the ingredients are there in their records—the bop-swinging tunes, the squeaky-clean production, the

(Continued on page 62)

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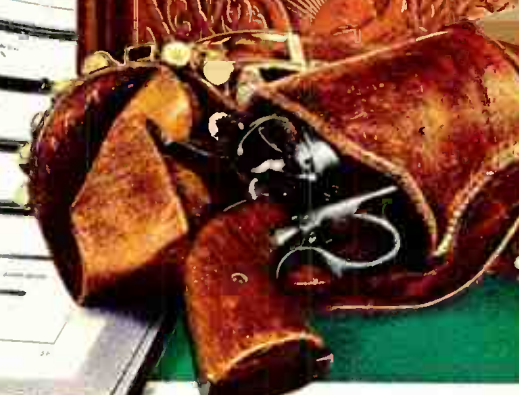
Frank (left) and Jesse James invented the daylight bank robbery in America and tested the idea for the first time in Liberty, Missouri, on Valentine's Day, 1866.



Missouri Hist. Soc.

Cole (left) and Jim Younger serving with Frank James in a Confederate guerilla unit. Cole was said to have tried out a new Enfield rifle on Yankee prisoners.

By the 1870s, Jesse James (far left) was secure—and vain—enough to pose for a photographer summoned to the gang's cave hideout in Missouri. For 15 years the James gang held sway, imitated, but never equaled, for notoriety and hell bent originality.



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Record Reviews

(Continued from page 58)

(love this phrase) "seamless harmonies"—and this new one is no exception. The only problem is that the record has no soul. None at all.

It may be silly of me to think it might, of course, but still, I *like* a little soul. I really enjoy hearing singers

who are actually feeling something more than "the joy of music," whose emotions are actually involved with what's going on in the song. That doesn't seem like a lot to ask—does it?—but it's getting harder and harder to hear in modern country music, and in The Judds' records it's just

not there. It's not even anywhere nearby.

This album, for instance features a version of Lee Dorsey's "Working in a Coal Mine" which, when you think about it, is just plain ludicrous. The song itself has nothing whatsoever to do with anything remotely

bright or bubbly—or, for that matter, anything female. It's about getting up at five in the morning to go do heavy manual labor in a *coal mine*, for God's sake. But no matter, it's got a nice swinging tempo, and The Judds go at it as if it's a Junior League pep tune written by The Chip-

Hits or Misses?

Exile

Hang On To Your Heart
Epic BFE 4000

Sawyer Brown

Shakin'

Capitol St 12438

Chance

Chance

PolyGram/Mercury 826 029

Dan Seals

Won't Be Blue Anymore
EMI America ST 17166

Wonder Bread used to have a catchy advertising slogan about building bodies eight different ways.

The slogan was one of the great advertising ironies of all time: by managing to be both spectacularly bland and inoffensive, Wonder Bread ended up removing nearly every ingredient of nutritional value. What was left was a sponge-like substance with marshmallow-like properties, bearing scant resemblance to real bread.

It wouldn't be inaccurate to say that country music is in a Wonder Bread phase. In its eagerness to please, country is not only losing its identity, it's coming up with a music form that isn't particularly appealing to anyone. Certainly not to anyone whose dollars could mean a discernible difference at the cash register.

In Exile's case, no one is likely to accuse the group of



lyrical overreach. But a little thought behind the songs, a little tension to balance the tedious tepidity of the lyrics, would have produced a far stronger effort than *Hang On To Your Heart*, their newest album.

Maybe it's all those Number One records which have made Exile afraid to work without a safety net. Whatever the reason, *Hang On To Your Heart* is both risk-free and boring.

Titles like "I Got Love (Super-Duper Love)," "She's Too Good to Be True," "Proud to Be Her Man" and "She Likes Her Lovin'" speak for themselves. In an excess of exuberance (which too frequently comes across as sappy sentimentality), the group has repositioned itself squarely on Ronnie McDowell's turf. Surely Exile's members are savvy enough to sense that women today (even in country, the last hold-out of female traditionalism) are neither gullible nor naive enough to swallow endlessly shallow platitudes—especially hokey tributes that dwell only on the physical. Compliments tend to lose meaning when reduced



to token contrivances.

If Exile is going to spend its albums eulogizing female charms, then it should do so with better-written material. Singer J.P. Pennington has proven himself a very good composer in the past, but he and bassist Sonny LeMaire let themselves fall into the trap here of writing every song. Thus, the 10 songs sound too much alike: as if they were written to fill up an album rather than because the writers had any real emotions to communicate.

Success is giving Exile a sense of premature security. The group—unquestionably one of country's best—now hovers on the brink of unredeemed repetitiousness. Only the members' contagious energy, skillful musicianship and finely tuned harmonies manage to make *Hang On To Your Heart* palatable.

No one is likely to accuse Sawyer Brown of lyrical grandeur, either, but with its second album, *Shakin'*, the band has crystallized its incredible on-stage formula into vinyl-venerated vigor.

Shakin' steps right out and demands attention. This is a group that is quickly figuring out what makes it tick: not for nothing are crowds flocking to Sawyer Brown concerts, and the band clearly has no intention of shortchanging its record-buying public.

Sawyer Brown shuns those sad songs, choosing instead to rip up the floorboards and beat you over the head with a message of fun and frivolity. *Shakin'* is a revival meeting of rocked-out country, delivered with surprisingly contagious humor. Sawyer Brown obviously knows it isn't performing music for the ages, but it's having one hell of a good time—and it's going to make sure you do.

With a dynamic mixture of numbers such as Marshall Chapman's "Betty's Being Bad," "When Your Heart Goes (Woo, Woo, Woo)"—yes, Virginia, that really *is* the title—the beautiful ballad, "Heart Don't Fall," and "The Secretary Song," Sawyer Brown romps across the turntable in rakish high fashion. This latter number, by the way, has lyrics not often heard in country, lines like: "All those creepy suits, with wing-tip shoes walking all over you... You weren't made to be just a secretary, you were made to love."

(One can already envision endless promotional plug-ins possible here. Might want to hold up on releasing this one, guys, until National Secretary's Week rolls around.)

Record Reviews

munks. There they are in the coal mine, looking swell and sounding just great, and everything's fun-fun-fun! Wynonna keeps *squeaking* all the time. What happened? A mousey ran across her toes? No, it can't have been that bad. Oh, giggles!

The rest of the album is

nowhere near as ridiculous as this particular track—in fact, it's rather soothing in a gee-that's-nice-and-would-ja-gimme-another-diet-cola kind of way, and these women *do* sing okayish tunes very much on key. But when it comes right down to it, I get the creepy feeling that the lights may be

on *chez* Judd, but there's nobody home. Listen to any Judds record, then listen to any Kate and Anna McGarrigle record, and you may hear what I mean.

But that might be difficult. Kate and Anna can't talk anybody into letting them make a record these days, and nei-

ther can any other country-ish woman singer with something interesting to say. I wonder what relationship that fact bears to the ailing health of the patient: is it an effect of country's systemic high-pressure low-sales disease, or could it be a cause?

—PATRICK CARR

Notes on Review by Kip Kirby

A final note: this album is more rock 'n' roll than Sawyer Brown's debut; but that should prove no surprise to the group's long-time fans, who have already seen them cut loose this past year on tour with Kenny Rogers.

Chance, making a debut on PolyGram/Mercury with *Chance*, is a five-man Texas group that avoids the liability of writing all its own songs. But it fails to come up with anything distinctive enough in content to stand apart from the rest of country's new breed of bands.

Almost every song is slick, commercial (read "cross-over") and forgettable once the chorus fades. Chance has an impressive lead singer in Jeff Barosh; the group is obviously seasoned, with nicely-honed harmonies. But, unfortunately, it takes more than just good singing and playing these days to create an identity: it takes powerful material, a "sound," if you will, to distinguish one group from another.

Chance's potential is heard on the last cut of the album. Written by writer Keith Palmer, the number is titled "Call It What You Want To (It's Still Love)," and it manages to radiate everything missing from the other cuts. The lyrics ring with the kind of craftsmanship that differentiates memorable songs from merely acceptable ones. Chance needs songs like this to prove

it's more than just an amiable band cruising country's cloudless skies.

Saving the best for last is easy when what you're saving is as good as Dan Seals' latest album, *Won't Be Blue Anymore*. Seals isn't the kind of entertainer who usually stirs souls; in the past, he's relied on pleasant, if laconic, tranquility. Reminiscent of James Taylor's legendary *J.T.* album, *Won't Be Blue Anymore* is a collection of musical magic that requires total artistic re-evaluation (not to mention admiration).

Like Ricky Skaggs, Seals sounds as if anything he writes and sings could have been played on country radio two decades ago; like Skaggs, his arrangements are purely and acoustically contemporary.

The production marriage with Kyle Lehning (Seals' original producer when he and John Ford Coley reigned on the pop charts) is inspired; an association based on artistry, not economics. Together they make music *they* like, rather than music they hope every programmer in the Western Hemisphere will like.

Seals' own three contributions—"Headin' West," "I Won't Be Blue Anymore" and "Everything that Glitters (Is Not Gold)" co-written with Bob McDill—are among the best songs on the record. When Seals sings "Everything that Glitters," you can hear the ache, the wisdom,

the wistfulness in every line.

He can deliver a wry, kick-'em-off-and-dance number like "Bop," then turn around and paint personal, colorful images into a verse about planting fields. On the John D. Loudermilk chestnut, "Tobacco Road," Seals sidesteps the typical interpretative hill-billy stridency, opting instead for a rich low-keyed passion, played out against a decep-

tively upbeat acoustic track.

Rarely has Seals sounded more resonant—or more resolute. Rarely has he been given a better group of songs on which to strut his stuff, nor more carefree, imaginative tracks to play against. *Won't Be Blue Anymore* is a personal milestone in Dan Seals' career, and belongs in the record collection of any country music lover.

Hot Off the Press

Lee Greenwood, *Streamline*, MCA 5622

Few artists have Greenwood's chameleon-like ability to slip smoothly between country and pop, and make both styles sound so consistent on one disk. The buried treasure on this latest by last year's CMA male vocalist is a Steve Diamond/Dave Loggins gem, "The Will to Love."

Brenda Lee, *Feels So Right*, MCA 5626

Lee shows there's nothing dated about her music—or artistry—as she belts her way through a strong package with plenty of hot sauce. New producers Emory Gordy Jr. and David Hungate turn up the heat with surprising results.

Gary Morris, *Anything Goes*, Warner Bros. 25279

Morris' full-bodied vocal style is suitably showcased here. Although some of the songs seem chosen more for their drama and vision than for their commercial appeal, no one in country could do a finer job of delivering material with serious social content than Morris. Highlights: "Dragging the Lake for the Moon" and "Anything Goes."

Lacy J. Dalton, *Can't Run Away From Your Heart*, Columbia FC 40028

Dalton's grit and rough-hewn approach to country are somewhat toned down here, thanks to her new team of producers and some new creative licks. However, she still needs a great song.

Joe Stampley, *I'll Still Be Loving You*, Epic FE39960

Unlike sometime-partner Moe Bandy, Stampley alternates between good ol' boy country and crossover in his styling. Working here with longtime country producer Jerry Kennedy, he favors a blending of the two expressed through such songs as "When You Were Blue and I Was Green."

BURIED TREASURES

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

Columbia Records' *Historic Edition* series is the only domestic major-label reissue effort today. Though far less comprehensive than, say, Bear Family albums, CBS deserves credit for hanging in there despite limited sales potential. Their three newest collections deal with two certified legends and one cult favorite.

Without question, the strongest of these is *Floyd Tillman* (FC 39996). CBS did release an excellent Tillman anthology nearly ten years ago, but it quickly went out of print. Tillman, who would be a legend if he had done nothing more than write "Slippin' Around," "I Love You So Much It Hurts" and "It Makes No Difference Now," is also an achingly expressive vocalist, whose phrasing influenced Willie Nelson and many other singers. He played jazzy electric guitar solos on his records in the late 1930's, long before anyone else did, and never let success mess up his music. His big hits, "Slippin' Around" and "I Love You So Much It Hurts," are here, along with his lusty versions of Jerry Irby's "Drivin' Nails in My Coffin" and Ivory Joe Hunter's rhythm and blues chestnut "I Almost Lost My Mind." "There's Blood on the Moon Tonight," one of two previously unissued tracks, overflows with brutal anguish. Just one gripe: with only 12 tracks, the instrumental "Westphalia Waltz" doesn't belong here. Instead, Tillman's dark, lesser-known ballad "Some Other World" should have been included.

The release of *Roy Acuff* (FC 39998) marks the first time in several years that CBS has had an album of Acuff's classic Columbia recordings in print. This one, with 16 numbers, covers Acuff's entire tenure with the label from 1936-1952. Naturally, Acuff's standards,



*Roy Acuff, Floyd Tillman,
The Maddox Brothers and Rose,
Jimmy C. Newman, Wesley Tuttle,
George Long, Grand Ole Opry Transcriptions*

among them "Wabash Cannonball"—the original that he himself did not sing on, "Low and Lonely" and "Freight Train Blues" show up, though, inexplicably, "Great Speckled Bird" does not. Also included are five previously unissued tunes. Today, Acuff symbolizes the Opry's past, and many young fans don't understand that he was the Willie Nelson of the 1940's, selling millions of records and selling out concerts everywhere he appeared.

Surprisingly enough, some of the 1936 numbers were primitive attempts at pop crossover—"You're the Only Star in My Blue Heaven," for example. That phase didn't last, and from that time on Acuff's music changed little. "Steel Guitar Blues," with Oswald Kirby's playful, snappy dobro, the somber gospel tune

"Drifting Too Far From the Shore" and Acuff's churning version of "Ida Red" are examples of his varied repertoire. "Weary Lonesome Blues," one of the previously unissued numbers, features Oswald, with his famous gulfaw, singing close harmony with his "sister" Rachel Veach. It bears witness to the Smoky Mountain Boys' gift for hillbilly comedy. Once he found his groove, Acuff stuck to his guns musically. The 1951 recordings are almost indistinguishable from the early ones, stylistically, although mechanically they do have better sound.

The Maddox Brothers and Rose, who'd made wild records for Four-Star, toned down a bit when they joined Columbia in 1951. They disbanded in 1956, and from then on Rose recorded solo. *The*

Maddox Brothers and Rose (PC 39997), CBS' collection of 13 numbers, overlaps the two Bear Family Maddox/Rose albums mentioned in previous issues, but is still an effective introduction to the group.

In the CBS collection, "I've Got Four Big Brothers" and "Ugly and Slouchy" retain the pulsing hillbilly madness of the earlier Four-Star sides. "Dig a Hole," the one previously unissued number included on the album, overflows with bizarre, violent imagery that explains why it stayed in the can for 30 years. "Rusty Old Halo" features some of Rose's finest singing, and her performance of "Bringing in the Sheaves," done after the Brothers split, is nearly as good. The satirical "Death of Rock and Roll," a takeoff on "I Got a Woman," is odd in view of the pulsing rockabilly sound the Maddoxes had nearly a decade before Elvis. It isn't good satire, and their campy version of Mickey and Sylvia's rock hit "Love Is Strange" is far funnier.

More than any other Cajun performer (including Doug Kershaw, in my opinion), Jimmy C. Newman has managed to maintain his Cajun purity. He played straight country while on Dot and MGM, but with Decca, under Owen Bradley's direction, he went back to his Cajun roots and managed to present that music in a way that appealed to mainstream country audiences. *Alligator Man* (Charly CR 30240), 16 of his best 1961-1966 numbers, reveals how skillfully he and Bradley managed to integrate coonass into the Nashville Sound.

His first hit, in 1961, "Everybody's Dying for Love," was straightforward country and western, but things changed after that. "Alligator Man," done later that year, showed the synthesis at its best, as did "Bayou Talk," the followup, in 1962. He did other Cajun classics like "Jole Blon," "Big Mamou" and "Good Deal, Lucille," that weren't hits, but were excellent anyway. "Pretty Texas Girls," which came out in 1963, was purer yet, em-

phasizing accordion and fiddle. His sole Top Ten hit with the label came with his version of Tom T. Hall's "D.J. for a Day" in 1963. This song brought Tom T. his first real success as a songwriter.

Cajun music is even more acceptable today than it was in the 1960's—note the success of "My Toot Toot," so Newman can now purify the strain even more if he cares to. At any rate it's great to see these important sides available again, even if Adam Komorowski's amateurish notes mar the packaging.

Wesley Tuttle was a 1940's West Coast singer who has been all but forgotten in recent years, and that's unfortunate. One of the smoothest and most expressive country singers of that era, he still performs religious music in the Los Angeles area. Cattle

Records of Germany has a superlative collection of Tuttle's best material out on *Tennessee Rose* (Provincia 0765). The best-known track here is "Detour," a Tuttle hit. "Excess Baggage" has an appealing vocal with a surprisingly jazzy piano break. "Rainin' on the Mountain" teams Tuttle and longtime buddy Merle Travis in a delightful hillbilly duet. "Friendly Love" and two other tracks feature Wes' wife Marilyn. The two still sing together today, though concentrate on gospel. My sole question: why no liner notes?

With all the reissues out today, it's not surprising that even some of the more obscure acts are being re-released to the public. Binge's Cattle Records recently issued *Singing and Swingin' Western Style* (Cattle 75) by

George Long and the 101 Ranch Boys. Older readers in Eastern Pennsylvania will remember this group, since they worked in that area for 15 years. They walked a fine line between western and western swing, with a repertoire ranging from a cover of "Smoke! Smoke! Smoke!" to "Double Steel Boogie," featuring Leonard T. Zinn's pungent steel guitar. They also had a fine version of Tim Spencer's "Timber Trail." Look for these on the album.

Hundreds of Grand Ole Opry shows were transcribed in the 1940's and 1950's for airplay over Armed Forces Radio, including shows featuring Hank Williams and other legends of the era. Few attempts to issue them have been made, but Radiola's *Grand Ole You-Know-What* (Radiola MR-1156) is a laud-

able effort. Two entire Opry shows from 1950 and 1951, hosted by Red Foley, are included, with comedy by Rod Brasfield and Minnie Pearl. 1950 was the Opry's 25th Anniversary year. Foley's own music, with Grady Martin backing him, is slick and jazzy, and his version of "Peace in the Valley" remains a gospel classic. Carl Smith, then a new artist, sings "Let Old Mother Nature Have Her Way" to an enthusiastic audience a month before the record hit it big on the charts. There's pre-Elvis Jordanaires, and appearances by Uncle Dave Macon and George D. Hay. The final program features three Marty Robbins Opry performances from 1953, when he first joined. I hope Radiola plans on more of these. We need them. —RICH KIENZLE

The Essential Collector

Tex Williams, Wanda Jackson, Bluegrass Hall of Fame

In addition to the Jimmy C. Newman album mentioned in *Buried Treasures*, there is another, more Cajun album which was released on the British Flyright label a few years ago. *Jimmy C. Newman and Al Terry* (Fly 73) compiles Newman's earliest recordings for the Crowley, Louisiana-based Feature Records from 1949. Newman was moving between honky tonk and Cajun then, bridging the gap much as he did later. Newman sings "I Made a Big Mistake" in both English and French.

Tex Williams, he of the 1947 million-seller "Smoke! Smoke! Smoke! (That Cigarette)," is seriously ill with cancer, and it is all but certain his performing days are over. Sadder still is the fact nobody has yet issued the many outstanding 1940's Capitol recordings he made with his superb Western Caravan band, made up of Spade Cooley sidemen who quit Cooley with Tex. However, *Tex Williams & The Swin-*

gin' Western Caravan (AFM 711) draws on the band's Capitol Transcriptions from the late 1940's and, as such, are the next best thing. This version of "Smoke! Smoke! Smoke!" is nearly as hot as the Capitol release. However, it's the instrumentals like "Andrea's Capers," "South" and "Steel Guitar Rag" that best demonstrate the group's smooth, sophisticated ensemble work. With the brilliant, troubled Joaquin Murphey on steel, along with harp (that's *classical* harp) by Spike

Featherstone and Ossie Godson on vibraphone, the Caravan had a sound none of their contemporaries could match. Smokey Rogers demonstrates his banjo abilities on "Scale Boogie," and Tex's "The Big Print Giveth" is in the "Smoke! Smoke! Smoke!" talking blues tradition.

Wanda Jackson was the 1950's country scene's answer to Madonna, at least in the looks department. Where Kitty Wells and others relied on demure appearance, Wanda's looks—and music—were brassier than anyone else's at that time. Her first records were done for Decca, from 1955 to 1957; then she went to record stops-out rockabilly—at Elvis' urging—and country for Capitol. Bear Family's

Early Wanda Jackson (BFX 15109) reissues many of those early records, some done with Hank Thompson, some with Billy Gray. Even in that pre-rock era, Wanda's voice had an edge that Kitty and her contemporaries couldn't match. "You Can't Have My Love" with Gray and her solo "Lovin' Country Style" are the high points, but the entire album is outstanding.

For those just getting into bluegrass through the music of Ricky Skaggs and The Whites, Gusto's *The Bluegrass Hall of Fame* (SLP 181) is a decent introduction to many fine artists besides Bill Monroe and Flatt and Scruggs. The 16 tracks include classics from both Starday and King, with a bit of pre-bluegrass music thrown in as well. In addition to the Stanley Brothers' incredible "Rank Stranger," there are Flatt and Scruggs' original "Foggy Mountain Breakdown" from Mercury, Reno and Smiley's "Home Sweet Home," Grandpa Jones' original "Old Rattler," "Run Mountain" by Mainer's Mountaineers and Jim and Jesse's "Let Me Whisper." Sam and Kirk McGee are also represented. —RICH KIENZLE

How to Order These Albums

Mail your check to Country Music Magazine, Dept. 112, 450 Park Avenue South, New York, New York 10016. Add \$1.95 postage and handling for one album, \$.95 each additional. (CMSA members deduct 20%; write CMSA Number on your check.)

Columbia Historic Editions of Roy Acuff, (FC39998), *Floyd Tillman* (FC3996), *The Maddox Brothers and Rose* (FC39997) and Gusto's *Bluegrass Hall of Fame* are available on records and cassettes at \$8.98 each. *Doug Kershaw's Alligator Man* (CR 30240), and *Grand Ole You-Know-What* (Radiola MR1156), *Early Wanda Jackson* (BFX 15109) are on records only at \$11.98. *Tex Williams & The Swingin' Western Caravan* (AFM 711) and *Jimmy C. Newman & Al Terry* (Fly 73) are on records only at \$9.98.

TOP 25

Singles

1. **Ronnie Milsap** *Lost In the Fifties Tonight (In the Still)*
2. **Waylon Jennings** *Drinkin' and Dreamin'*
3. **Conway Twitty** *Between Blue Eyes and Jeans*
4. **Marie Osmond (with Dan Seals)** *Meet Me in Montana*
5. **Charly McClain (with Wayne Massey)** *With Just One Look in Your Eyes*
6. **Juice Newton** *You Make Me Want to Make You Mine*
7. **The Oak Ridge Boys** *Touch a Hand, Make a Friend*
8. **Eddie Rabbitt** *She's Comin' Back to Say Goodbye*
9. **Ronnie McDowell** *Love Talks*
10. **Vince Gill** *If It Weren't For Him*
11. **Steve Wariner** *Some Fools Never Learn*
12. **George Jones** *Who's Gonna Fill Their Shoes*
13. **The Forester Sisters** *I Fell in Love Again Last Night*
14. **Crystal Gayle** *A Long and Lasting Love*
15. **Eddy Raven** *I Wanna Hear It From You*
16. **Exile** *Hang On to Your Heart*
17. **Alabama** *Can't Keep a Good Man Down*
18. **Merle Haggard** *Kern River*
19. **Loretta Lynn** *Heart Don't Do This to Me*
20. **Gary Morris** *I'll Never Stop Loving You*
21. **John Schneider** *I'm Gonna Leave You Tomorrow*
22. **Louise Mandrell** *I Wanna Say Yes*
23. **Barbara Mandrell** *Angel in Your Arms*
24. **Sawyer Brown** *Used to Blue*
25. **Ed Bruce** *If It Ain't Love*

Albums

1. **W. Jennings, W. Nelson, J. Cash, K. Kristofferson** *Highwayman*
2. **Ronnie Milsap** *Greatest Hits Vol. 2*
3. **Hank Williams Jr.** *Five-0*
4. **George Strait** *George Strait's Greatest Hits*
5. **The Statler Brothers** *Pardners in Rhyme*
6. **Rosanne Cash** *Rhythm and Romance*
7. **Alabama** *40 Hour Week*
8. **Merle Haggard** *Kern River*
9. **Willie Nelson** *Me and Paul*
10. **Restless Heart** *Restless Heart*
11. **The Oak Ridge Boys** *Step On Out*
12. **Jimmy Buffett** *The Last Mango in Paris*
13. **Lee Greenwood** *Greatest Hits*
14. **Rockin' Sidney** *My Toot Toot*
15. **Nitty Gritty Dirt Band** *Partners, Brothers and Friends*
16. **Charly McClain** *Radio Heart*
17. **The Judds** *Why Not Me*
18. **Sawyer Brown** *Sawyer Brown*
19. **The Bellamy Brothers** *Howard & David*
20. **John Schneider** *Trying to Outrun the Wind*
21. **Gary Morris** *Anything Goes*
22. **Ray Charles** *Friendship*
23. **Dan Fogelberg** *High Country Snows*
24. **Janie Fricke** *Somebody Else's Fire*
25. **John Anderson** *Tokyo, Oklahoma*

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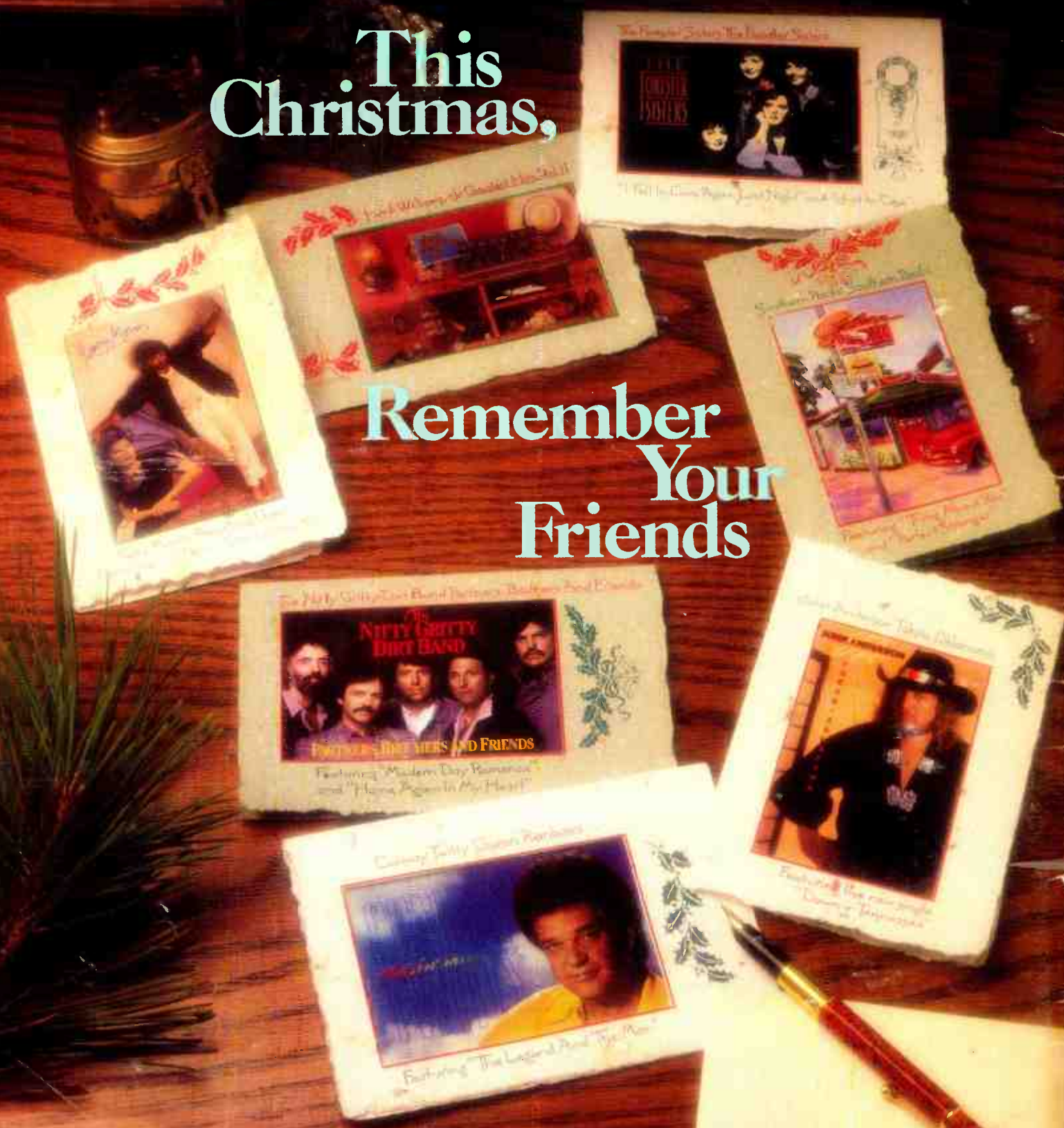
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