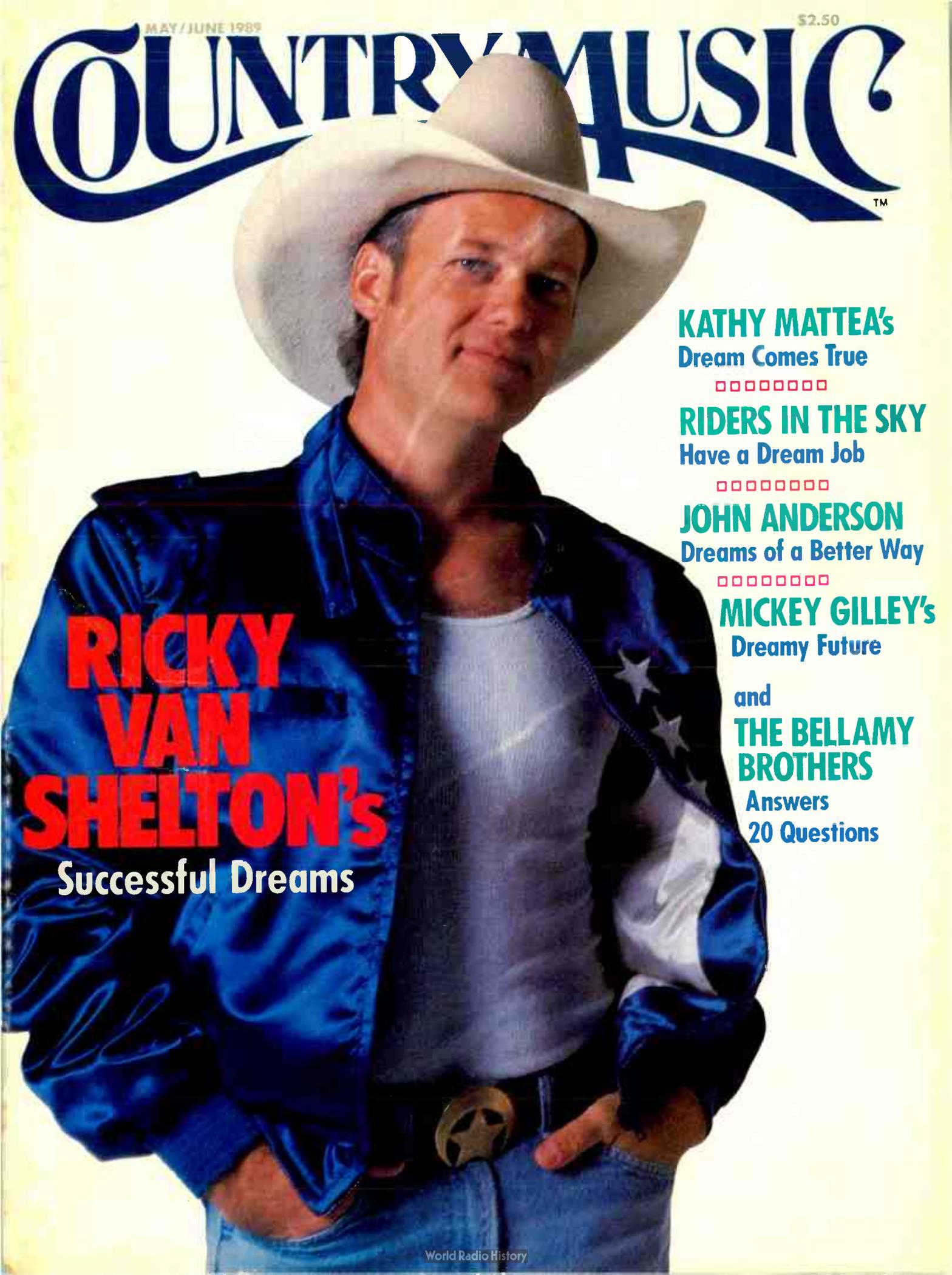


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KATHY MATTEA's
Dream Comes True

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RIDERS IN THE SKY
Have a Dream Job

□□□□□□□□

JOHN ANDERSON
Dreams of a Better Way

□□□□□□□□

MICKY GILLEY's
Dreamy Future

and
**THE BELLAMY
BROTHERS**

Answers
20 Questions

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COUNTRY MUSIC™

4 Letters

Emmylou Harris cover story receives rave reviews. Readers also enjoyed Eddie Rabbitt, Buck Owens and our mistakes on Road Gang. Record facts pointed out and kind stars commended.

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Ricky Skaggs soars, Hank Jr. and Senior reunite, Larry Gatlin gets another brother, a fond farewell to Jethro Burns. *by Hazel Smith*

24 20 Questions with The Bellamy Brothers

Everything you ever wanted to know about the care of cattle and how to last a long time in the record business without really trying. The King of 20 Questions himself meets up with those Florida boys. *by Michael Bane*

30 Ricky Van Shelton: Success Opens the Eyes of the Wild-Eyed Dreamer

Ricky Van Shelton shows Bob Allen how to have fun and still tend to business. The two cruise the latest Country Radio Seminar and talk about fame and fortune and how to arrive there without becoming fame's fool. *by Bob Allen*

37 The Very Professional Kathy Mattea

Kathy toed the line and showed she has what it takes to become a star. No more waitressing for this girl. Her career and her family life are on the upswing now. *by Bob Millard*

40 Riders In the Sky: It's a Great Job and Someone Has to Do It *by Patrick Carr*

Ever wonder where the good old days went? They're alive and well on public radio where Riders In the Sky ride herd on the pure and natural in both current events and cowboy music.

50 Record Reviews

Emmylou Harris, Alabama and Lyle Lovett have hot new albums. J.C. Crowley and Karen Staley debut. Ronnie Milsap and Lacy J. Dalton are heard from again, and Don Williams happens by.

57 John Anderson: Staying Afloat on Country Music's Rough Seas *by Patrick Carr*

John Anderson has had a rough go the last few years. He's happy with his new album and with the way he's stuck to his own style. Carr treats us to his response to the situation.

66 Mickey Gilley: Chin Up and Still Swinging *by John Morthland*

Mickey Gilley rode the Urban Cowboy craze to the top of the charts and then some. His club, Gilley's, helped make him a household word. Several years and a lawsuit later, Gilley is in the clear and on his own. The fate of the famous nightclub is still unsure.

70 Buried Treasures *by Rich Kienzle*

Buck Owens' 1966 live album, two fine reissues for Hank Snow—one a boxed set, a timely reissue on Homer & Jethro, plus Eddy Arnold, Chet Atkins, Connie Smith, The Louvin Bros. and Ole Waylon Jennings—all reviewed by Rich Kienzle.



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The Oak Ridge Boys
"Greatest Hits - Vol. III"

Letters



Emmylou is the Greatest

Isn't she beautiful? I'm referring to the cover picture of Emmylou Harris on your January/February issue of *Country Music Magazine*. This is one Nashville songbird who doesn't need any makeup or designer clothes in order to show her true beauty. I'm so tired of the facelifts and body tucks and everything else that is so unnatural. This woman is absolutely ravishing! The picture of Emmylou on the Contents page reminds me of a very youthful girl playing a guitar. All of your pictures have captured the real Emmylou, the Emmylou that all of us are so proud of! To you, Emmylou, you are truly a beautiful woman!

Gram Parsons died of a heroin overdose in New York City? Ooooh... I can think of many people who won't like that. As an active member of the Gram Parsons Memorial Foundation, I can tell

you that you'll be getting a lot of mail from our organization. But I can't be too hard on you for that error. You'll have an even bigger problem trying to decide which letter to use in response. After ripping them all open, I'd be willing bet Patrick Carr never forgets where Gram died.

Denise Farrell
Norfolk, Virginia

Emmylou and Gram Parsons

Your magazine is the greatest! I have been a subscriber and fan of ya'll for years.

Your interview with Emmylou Harris was fabulous. She is one of my top three female performers. Her mentor, Gram Parsons, is my favorite country star. In your interview you stated that Gram died of an overdose in New York City. I have always thought that he died in a hotel near Joshua Tree, California. Am I wrong or are you?

Keep up the great work!

W. David Killingsworth
Montgomery, Alabama

We are. We regret the oversight. According to numerous sources, Gram Parsons died in Joshua Tree, California. The body was cremated before an autopsy could be performed.—Ed.

Guitars For Stars

That was a very nice article on Emmylou Harris in the January/February issue.

I noticed on pages 30 and 31 that she is holding an Everly Gibson guitar. I was wondering if it is hers? In *Country Music Magazine*, I've noticed more peo-

ple with Everly Gibsons lately and have a good friend who has just ordered his third guitar.

Polly Marsteller
Sparks, Nevada

Emmylou is playing Ronna Rubin's guitar. Ronna is with the public relations department at Warner Bros. Records. Emmylou usually plays a big J-200 Gibson, but she liked Ronna's so much, she may get one.—Ed.

Spiritual Emmylou

About time you got around to Emmylou Harris, the only living singer who makes the little hairs on the back of my neck stand up. It guess that's a spiritual experience.

In your article, you might have mentioned that Emmylou was a member of The Flying Burrito Brothers. She was hired the Friday before the Sunday that the Brothers broke up.

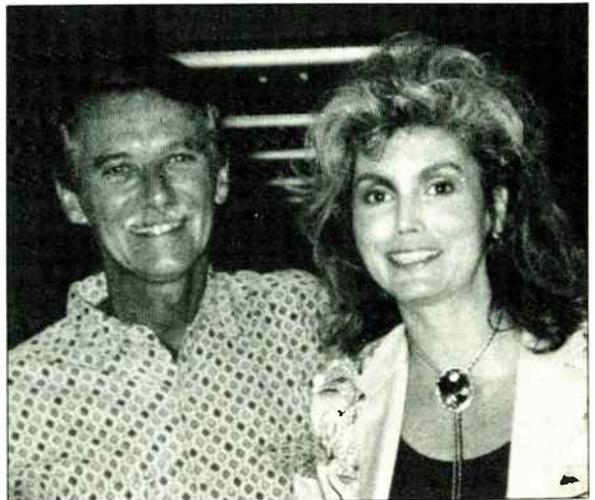
Admittedly, Emmylou's first great solo album was *Pieces of the Sky*. Her first album, though, was *Gliding Bird* on Jubilee Records in 1969 (re-issued by the EMUS label in the mid 1970's) with a fascinating original called "Bobbie's Gone," as well as covers of Hank Williams, Bob Dylan and Burt Bacharach. The story of *Gliding Bird* is also a cautionary tale about a young artist and a double crossing agent. And no, you can't borrow my copy of this one.

I believe Emmylou is originally from Birmingham, although her parents later moved to D.C., and if she wants to call Washington home, it's fine by me. (Of course she called the song "Boulder



Emmylou Harris and her gorgeous mom, caught by Denise Farrell.

The Reverend "Jet" and Emmylou Harris, also by Denise Farrell. According to Denise, the Reverend "Jet" and Emmylou go back a long way. He knew Gram Parsons, taught Frank Reckard and married Barry and Holly Tashian.



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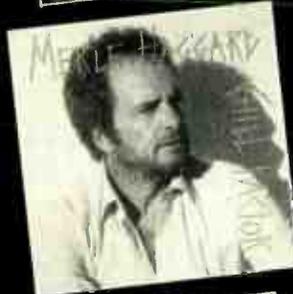
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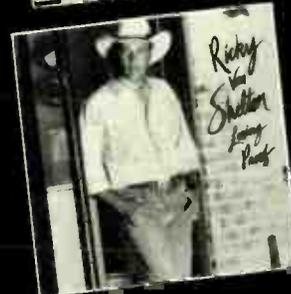
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SHENANDOAH-
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to Birmingham," not "Boulder to D.C.")
Anyhow, thanks for the article on the original, and best, new traditionalist.
Glen Farmer
Greybull, Wyoming
Thanks for all these additions.—Ed.

Boss Buckeroo

A "thousand cheers" for Buck Owens. I got my copy of *Country Music Magazine* for January/February out of the mail box on my way to work. Saw it had an article about Buck in it. I stopped my car and read the complete article right there on the side of the road. I've also got Buck's new album and am waiting for another one by him.

I've been waiting and praying for many years for Buck to return. Thank God he's back!! Everywhere you go you hear people talking about the fact that they wish they could hear some of the traditional country music like Buck Owens and others again. There are thousands and thousands of us out here who are really tired of this so-called country music that is really just country rock, country disco, or better still, there's nothing country about it at all.

Anyway, the "Boss Buckeroo" is back, and now we have some real country music to listen to. Thanks to Bob Millard for the great article on Buck. Man! To be able to actually sit and talk to Buck one on one. Some people have all the luck.

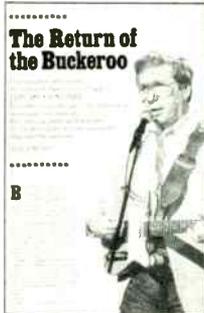
Buck Terry
Bainbridge, Georgia

On the Owens Comeback Trail

I read with interest the article in your January/February issue about Buck Owens' re-entry into the country music field. When I was in college in the early 1960's, Buck Owens was quite popular. It was during this time he had several Number One hits and many songs in the Top Ten. Also during this time, he published his "Pledge to Country Music" in *Country Song Roundup* and trade magazines such as *Billboard*, which stated something to the effect that, "As long as I am recording, I will never record a song that is not a country song." This pledge was touted by DJ's and the country music world in general.

Buck held to that promise until he started recording songs that could pass as country, but were more pop-flavored. When I heard these songs from Buck, I felt that he had broken his pledge to us.

It will take some doing to win back several of us who used to be Buck Owens



fans. I am glad that the younger generation is responding to Buck's re-entry into the country music field.

Bill Reynolds
Palatka, Florida

Star and Carr— This Time It's Tom T. Talking

Dear Patrick,
Thank you for the hard work, good writing, the insight and the endorsement of my professionally dangerous aesthetic meanderings. I think you made subtle note of my effort to stay afloat and still pursue an artistic view of my mission in life. It is difficult to knock the edges off those rough-hewn philosophies, and I commend you for doing that. You have a good eye and a splendid ear. You have done a lot for us country folk with your writing and I am sure that history will make note of it. If not, I certainly intend to.

If I can ever be of service to you, please call or write me.

And thank you again.

Tom T. Hall
Franklin, Tennessee



Tom T. Hall and Rose Nowotarska share a moment at Fox Hollow.

The Essential Tom T. Hall

Just want to say "thanks" for the excellent article on the great storyteller, Tom T. Hall, in the January/February issue of *Country Music*.

I was, for many years, a presenter of American country music over the air waves for *Voice of America* beamed to my native Poland. I had a weekly thirty minute show on Sunday night. The theme of my Nashville/country music program was "Country Is," by Tom T. Hall. The Polish listeners loved this and his other songs as well. The most popular ones were "Old Dogs, Children and Watermelon Wine," "I Like Beer" and "The Year Clayton Delaney Died." But one Sunday, in my show, I introduced the song, "Ballad of Forty Dollars." All hell broke loose, so to speak. My listeners went crazy. I translated what the song was about and letters started to pour in by the thousands! People were trying to return Tom T. the money! He was the Number One country artist in Poland that year, 1984.

Many thanks for the article written

by Patrick Carr, and my best wishes for "The Hemingway of Country Music," the storyteller, the ever-essential Tom T. Hall.

Rose Nowotarska
Washington, D.C.

Special Rabbit

We loved your "Eddie Rabbitt Back on Track" article in 20 Questions in your January/February issue! Being a long-time fan of Eddie Rabbitt, it's interesting that we were born a town apart.

He is a Special Rabbit in my eyes! I mean you can tell by his loving eyes, the man is amazing!

He is a "King of Music." I can't stop playing his songs and I am waiting for his new ones in 1989.

Keep hopping on the good work, Eddie Rabbitt!

Helen Seib
Manville, New Jersey

P.S. I was born in Newark, New Jersey. Eddie was born in East Orange.

Eddie's Birthday

I'm writing in regard to your 20 Questions with Eddie Rabbitt in your January/February issue.

In response to question number thirteen, he states that he was nine or ten years old when he first heard "The Wanderer" on radio. Well, now. According to the *World Almanac*, Eddie was born November 27, 1941. The *Encyclopedia of Folk, Country and Western Music* says it was November 27, 1944. Whatever. Dion's original version of "The Wanderer" hit *Billboard's* pop chart in December 1961. So who's Rabbitt trying to kid?

Frank Patrick
Los Angeles, California

All those years on the road! Some musicians don't even remember past last Wednesday. As for Rabbitt's birthday, sources do not agree.—Ed.

George Strait—Family Man

I just returned from seeing George Strait at Caesar's in Lake Tahoe. The show was just excellent. We were seated along the stage. When the show started, I noticed his wife and son watching the show to the right of the stage. His son was dancing and singing as his wife watched them both with a huge smile.

My hat's off to you, George Strait. You have a beautiful family, and I'm glad through all your stardom you still remain a devoted husband and father. Mrs. Strait, your son is a darling and you're a very lucky woman. Maybe we'll see you all again in Lake Tahoe soon!

Donna Rice
Fallon, Nevada

The Strait Choice

I read the article on George Strait in the September/October 1988 issue of *Country Music Magazine*. I think it was



George Strait at work on the Navajo Nation, caught by Lorenda Begay.

beautifully written and certainly describes the gentleman that George is. He has talent not only in the music industry but also in rodeo sportsmanship. I feel he is quite a beautiful person both inside and out. He is also very popular here on the Navajo Nation.

To George: Thanks for the wonderful songs, and we hope you'll be out in our area again soon.

Lorenda Begay
Pinon, Arizona

British Columbia Loves

Tanya Tucker

I have to agree with what Christie Drake said about Tanya Tucker in the Letters section of the January/February 1989 issue of *Country Music Magazine*.

Why don't people write more about her? Around here she is a household word. We've all grown up with Tanya. She is one special lady with a unique voice. We've seen her in concert three times, and Tanya, here in British Columbia, we love you!

Nanelle Burton
British Columbia

Rerouting Our Road Gang!

Now you've really done it! In your article "Rolling With the Road Gang" in the January/February issue, you've moved a whole town of about seven thousand people from Nebraska into Kansas, more than fifty miles away. Even Superman isn't that good.

My niece, who lives in Lexington, Nebraska, sends you a raspberry, and all the other good people in Lexington, Nebraska, must be saying, "My gosh! He writes so well, how come he can't read a map?"

Love your magazine anyway. Was so happy to see your feature on Buck Owens. He's been missed. May he walk the "Streets of Bakersfield" in good health and success.

D. Kujath
Blue Springs, Nebraska

We deserve the raspberry. See also letter below.—Ed.

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...Strike Two

In your article, "Rolling With the Road Gang," by John Morthland, there were two glowing mistakes. First, KRVN/880 AM is out of Lexington, Nebraska, not Lexington, Kansas.

Second, Charlie Douglas left WWL for the Music Country Radio Network, not Music Company Network as stated in the article.

Dean Smith
Houston, Texas

Thanks to all who wrote in. We regret these errors.—Ed.

Ricky Shelton is Ricky Van

I was reading Rich Kienzle's record review of Ricky Van Shelton's *Loving Proof* in the January/February issue, and I believe Rich is a little confused as to what Ricky's last name is. He refers to Ricky as "Van Shelton," which is incorrect. His middle name is Van and his last name is Shelton.

Jeff Davidson
Nashville, Tennessee

So that's why Hazel calls him Ricky Van! We should have known.—Ed.

Steve Earle, Come Back to Country

I absolutely agree with what Emmylou Harris said about Steve Earle in the article you published about her in the January/February issue. He's a major artist, but the country music world is losing him. Steve's music made me cross over from listening to rock music to listening to country music. I am grateful to him for that. But now, I can't listen to him on the country stations. I have to listen to him on rock stations.

It's our fault. We had a new star shining, who had a promising future, and wanted badly to make it. No one helped to promote his music (requesting his songs, etc.), so he had to try something else. He's now trying out the rock world. He'll probably make it because he's good!

But I'd sure love to hear him once again on the country stations. Please don't let us make an awful mistake like this again.

Ginger Rosenthal
Fremont, Nebraska

For a feature on Steve Earle, stay tuned.—Ed.

Fan Squelches Judd Rumors

I've been reading your magazine for awhile now. It is truly where to get all the latest on country's hottest stars. I love it and look forward to each issue.

All these stories about The Judds hating each other and splitting up simply are not true. I met them three times, and they are two of the nicest people I have ever met. I admire the respect they have for each other. They are



Eddie Davis captures a kiss from Wynonna Judd in South Carolina.

exactly like your magazine...one in a million!

Eddie D. Davis
Union, South Carolina

Willie and His Groceries

I took a double-take when I received my November/December 1988 issue of *Country Music Magazine*. Since I am a new subscriber and a big fan of Willie Nelson, I was so impressed with your cover and photos of him. He is an extremely talented man, singer, actor. In my eyes and heart, Willie Nelson is the true meaning of the word "country." I love the guy from the top of his hat...to the Folgers in his fridge.

Hazel Hoerst
Faribault, Minnesota

Willie and Food for Farmers

Sending clipping from my local paper on Willie Nelson. I saw him recently on a Portland TV program, and on another one with the Kiss gang. Willie got more questions than the Kiss group did.

I enjoy *Country Music* books and songs. I am a member of *Country Music* books—no gripes on any of them. I am from Tennessee and have lived in Oregon 33 years.

Dorothy Whitted
Metalius, Oregon

PAGE 2 THE MADRAS PIONEER DECEMBER 29, 1988 SECTION A

Willie Nelson gives farmers \$5,000

Common Ground, the farm and rural program of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) has received \$5,000 from country-western singer Willie Nelson to meet special holiday needs of Oregon's farm families.

The funds are provided through Farm Aid Inc., the project had by Nelson which holds the attention

"Farm families who raise our food often find themselves at barren holiday tables.

"Through the funds from Willie Nelson and with contributions from the general public, families will be able to purchase needed holiday food and small gifts to share with their children and families," said George, who also reported that many other families will use the funds for their

The Madras Pioneer reports a \$5000 gift from Willie Nelson to a charitable agency in Oregon that distributes money for holiday supplies to needy farm families. Funds came through Farm Aid, which Willie established.

Correction on Tommy Collins

I would like to correct an error concerning Tommy Collins in *Buried Treasures* in your January/February 1989 issue. *This is Tommy Collins* was not his first album for Capitol Records. As an avid fan of real country music and a long-time record collector, I am proud to own Tommy's original Capitol albums. I would like to set the record straight. First was *Words and Music Country Style*, followed by *Light of the Lord*, then *This is Tommy Collins* and finally *Songs I Love to Sing*. Sorry, Rich, I couldn't help myself, but keep up the good work!

Buried Treasures is the first section I turn to each time I receive a new issue. It's good to know that someone hasn't forgotten about genuine country music and its value. I was especially pleased with the Wynn Stewart set I ordered from the September/October 1988 issue. He was one of the greatest.

J.L. Gibson
Lisbon, Ohio

Rich says yes, you're right. Thanks for the correction.—Ed.

Kienzle Can Play This Game, Too

Rich Kienzle would like to correct the following error in his review of Ricky Van Shelton's *Loving Proof* in the January/February issue: Ned Miller, not Roger, was the artist responsible for the 1963 original of "From a Jack to a King."

"Whatever Happened to..."

In the early 1950's there was a country singer named Dusty Owens who did fairs throughout the East Coast of Canada.

What ever happened to Dusty Owens and his band? Is Buck Owens a relative?

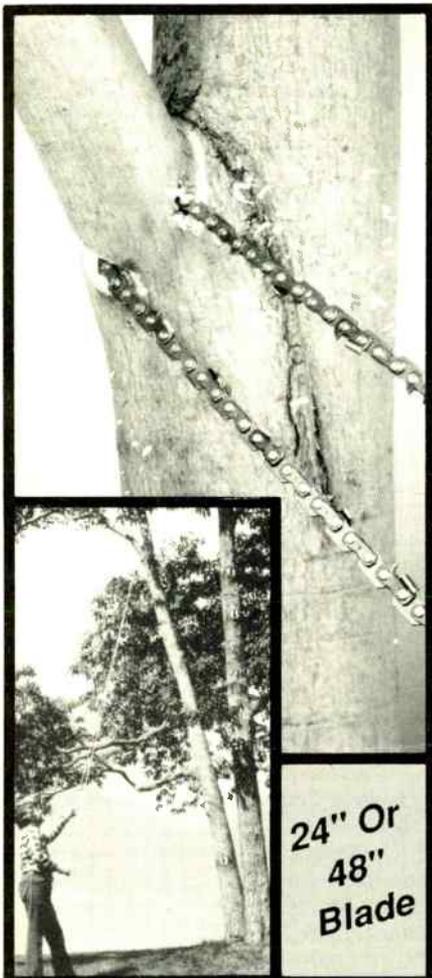
S. Roder
Ontario, Canada

Who knows?—Ed.

Some Kinda Wonderful-Davies, Harris, Dalton

I always find something great to read about in *Country Music Magazine* even if I don't always agree with some of the views printed. I'm glad to see you are trying to get in articles about those people whom record companies think are "has beens" (we don't think they are). I especially liked your article on Emmylou in the January/February issue, but I also devoured the articles on Buck Owens, Tom T. Hall and—in the *CMSA Newsletter*—the article on The Louvin Brothers.

I would really like to see an article on Gail Davies, like the one you did on Emmylou. I have all Gail's albums but



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they are hard to find. When Emmylou, Gail Davies, and Lacy J. Dalton did *Austin City Limits*...just sat around picking and singing...it was some kinda wonderful. I wish they'd do things like that more often.

Sheila Richardson
Buckfield, Maine

More on Mack

Plaudits upon plaudits are due Michael Bane's review of Lonnie Mack's *Road Houses and Dance Halls* in Record Reviews in the January/February issue. I would, however, offer a clarification.

Lonnie Mack was indeed late in putting out another album, but not quite as late as the reviewer suggests. Overlooked are two excellent Mack albums on Alligator, a Chicago-based blues label. The first—*Strike Like Lightning*—was released in 1985; the other—*Second Sight*—came out a year later.

Forgiving reviewer Bane for this oversight comes easy. He has Lonnie Mack pegged in calling him the Real Item. He would find the two Alligator releases to be more of the same genuine, salt-of-the-earth roadhouse honky tonk he praised in Lonnie's latest on Epic.

On a somewhat related note, why doesn't some label re-issue Mack's 1971 Elektra album, *Hills of Indiana*, on compact disc? Regarded by many as Nashville's first bona fide country-rock album, it is a lush sonic garden, even today on my very well-used, scratchy copy.

Dan Tackett
Lincoln, Illinois

A New Light on Hank Jr.

I am writing in response to three recent letters published in your magazine, two of which critized Hank Williams Jr.'s recent albums as too rock and one of which disapproved of the behavior of young fans at a Hank concert.

Perhaps in my position as a high school English teacher, I can shed some positive light on Hank's relationship with his younger fans. My classes are full of Bocephus fans; although some are attracted to the rowdy, beer-drinking image, just as many students like Hank's music for the more traditional values he espouses, such as pride in family and love of nature.

For two years in a row, Hank has responded with autographed pictures and responses to letters sent to him by my lower-level classes. His consideration has helped my students gain respect for the power of written communication and improved attitudes about English class. We are thankful Hank took the time to answer us, as we are still awaiting letters from celebrities who are not as kind. We hope one

day he will visit our school.

Although it is difficult for some to understand Hank's new directions in music and concerts, he is serving the best interests of country music in his devotion to young fans.

Jeff Walkington
Corryton, Tennessee



Those beautiful Carter Girls—left to right, June, Helen, and Anita recently.

Mother Maybelle and Those Carter Girls

I sure do enjoy your *Country Music Magazine*. I enjoy all the letters and reviews on the stars. I hope you can use my letter.

I have been a Carter fan from 1968. I was twelve years old and Mother Maybelle became my idol. She was a great lady, and her daughters are right in her footsteps. I have caught several Carter Family shows this past year, and they are just great—Helen, June and Anita, and sometimes even June's daughter, Carleen.

My, it would be nice if you could do a write-up on them sometime. Keep up the good work!

Ronnie Williams
Spotsylvania, Virginia

Nice Guys Finish First—Right, Johnny Rodriguez?

I love your magazine and read it from cover to cover. (I only wish it came more often). My favorite section is Letters. I love reading about people who've had the golden opportunity to meet an entertainer and tell whether that person is nice or rude.

This year I had the most wonderful Christmas gift I've ever had in my entire life. At a well-known country/western club in San Antonio, I met my idol, Mr. Johnny Rodriguez. When I was introduced to him, I actually started crying and shaking. I was in such awe. When he realized how much I admire him, he took my address and offered to send me tickets to his next concert. I am truly amazed at his generosity and



Rosie Martin and that considerate Johnny Rodriguez in San Antonio.

at how down-to-earth he has managed to stay after twenty years in the music business.

Thank you very much and keep up the good work with your great, informative magazine.

Rosie Martin
Culver City, California

Gracias, Rodriguez

I just received my January/February issue of *Country Music Magazine* and went about my usual ritual of thumbing through it page for page in search of a photo or printed mention of Johnny Rodriguez. My efforts were to no avail. Although I applaud your magazine for its features on Johnny in the past, it hasn't been enough! In this reader's opinion, Johnny is another unfortunate case of under-exposure of some mighty awesome talent.

Coming from the humble background that he did, he is a classic example of the boy next door who made good. He has been a real inspiration to his Hispanic roots, while maintaining a powerful appeal to audiences of every race.

Gracias, Johnny!

Colleen Castaneda

Thousand Oaks, California

P.S. I'll be seeing Johnny soon and would love to be able to present him with this letter and have him sign my copy of the magazine.

We love photos of stars reading Country Music Magazine.—Ed.

"My Man" Randy Travis

People can say what they want to about Randy Travis, but my family thinks he's the greatest. My grandson, Jamie, is five years old, and he plays Randy's tapes all the time, and if anybody turns them off, he gets real mad. Jamie has cerebral palsy and can't walk without support.

When Randy was in Charlotte, North Carolina, Jamie got to go backstage to see him. It was worth a million dollars to see his little face light up when he saw Randy. All he could say at first was, "My Man." I think Randy is the great-

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est to take time out for a little boy who thinks the world of him. That was one happy child, and I'll never forget it.

Keep writing more articles on Randy, and I will keep reading your magazine.

Phyllis Wingler
Granite Falls, North Carolina



Randy Travis with Phyllis Wingler's little grandson, Jamie.

Sweet-Smelling Bellamys

Congratulations to Howard and David Bellamy on endorsing Santa Fe Cologne. As Hazel says in the People section in the January/February issue, "Country music stars smell just as good as anybody else...if they take a bath and use deodorant and cologne."

Several years ago my sons helped do the sound and lighting at the Hickory, North Carolina, fair. Several country acts appeared, but out of all of them The Bellamys had one of the best attitudes.

They smelled okay to me when they hugged me after signing the back of my western belt, and they hadn't heard of Santa Fe Cologne yet. My young daughter even said they were sweet. Of course, David messed up and wrote over into the design on the belt, so he had to sign it twice. If that makes me a little off-center, well, that's okay.

Katie Daniels Roth
Hickory, North Carolina

For more on The Bellamys see 20 Questions in this issue.—Ed.

Opry Needs New Spark

I recently attended the Opry for the third time in 28 years, and although I thoroughly enjoyed the show overall, I was truly disappointed in the performance and distinct lack of enthusiasm on the part of old timers, namely Roy Acuff, Hank Snow, Bill Monroe and some others who have been around for many years. These guys' batteries are definitely run down. If they still want to

GIVE CREDIT WHERE CREDIT IS DUE

The last two cover photographs—Emmylou Harris on January/February and Johnny Cash on March/April—were taken exclusively for Country Music Magazine by Christopher Wright. She also took the inside color pictures. We inadvertently left out the photo credit and apologize for this omission.

be a part of the Opry and I'm certain they do, why don't they make just occasional appearances and save their energy, so that when they do appear, they can come out and give the folks their money's worth.

On the positive side, my hat goes off to the likes of Boxcar Willie, a great entertainer, Bill Anderson, Porter Wagoner, Johnny Russell and several others who come out on the stage and perform as though they really, truly enjoy being there. Overall, it was a great show.

Larry Nicholl
Las Vegas, Nevada



Bob Rodthe and his family enjoyed meeting The O'Kanes at a Wisconsin fair.

New Fans of The O'Kanes

My wife and I just got into country music a year and a half ago. The people in country are so friendly—the stars are so down-to-earth. So far we have gotten to meet K.T. Oslin, Ricky Van Shelton, The Dirt Band, Sawyer Brown and The O'Kanes. Jamie O'Hara even let us see the inside of their tour bus.

Keep country cookin'!

Bob Rodthe
KauKauna, Wisconsin

Update on Big Bill Johnson

Thanks for printing my letter and picture in the 15th Anniversary Letters section of your July/August 1988 issue. Since then I have heard from many people, some from as far away as Alaska.

I am releasing a new cassette with a freshly written song on it that just may be a monster, titled "America's Truckers," and another new song about the Truckers Aid Convoy held in Caddo Mills, Texas, just down Interstate 30 from here, on Labor Day last September, titled "We've Got a Convoy." I will have a total of twelve songs I wrote on the cassette. Lyrics to "America's Truckers" are enclosed. My publishing company, Sabine River Music/BMI, has the publishing of "America's Truckers."

Also on the cassette are two songs featuring the great steel playing of Pete Drake, who recently passed away. The titles of those two songs are "Wasted Lives" and "Alimony." The piano player on that same session is Pig Robbins, the producer Tommy Hill, and it was cut at



Big Bill Johnson has kept up with his music over the years.

Starday Studios.

I have never stopped writing songs. Thanks again for your fine magazine.

Big Bill Johnson
Greenville, Texas

For more on Big Bill's life and career since we first covered him in 1973, including the lyrics to his song, watch the CMSA Newsletter.—R.D.B.

Look Who's Reading Country Music Magazine



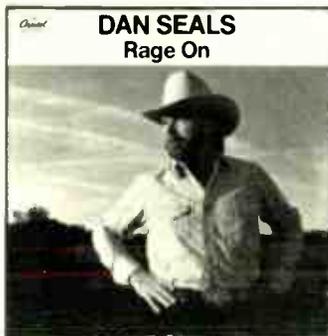
Alta Masher, mother of Willie Stephens of Reno, Nevada, reads every issue from cover to cover. Reba McEntire reads it, too. Hopefully, Emmylou Harris can return the favor soon. Cover story on Rebo coming soon. These photos courtesy of Willie Stephens and Denise Farrell.

Send Letters to the Editor to Country Music Magazine, 342 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10173, Suite 2118. Mark your envelope, Attention: Letters.

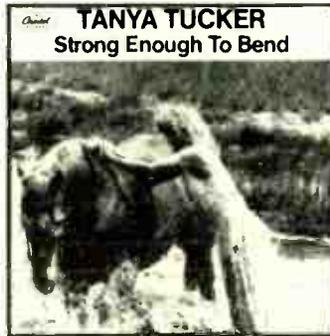
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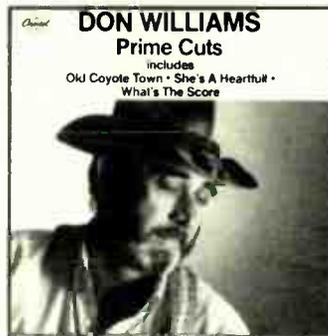
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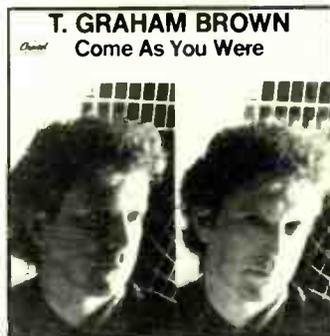
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People

OH, OH, USO

1989's first USO tour was headed up by superstar **Ricky Skaggs** – a 15-day trip that took Ricky and singer **Suzy Bogguss** to Okinawa, the Philippines and an installation in the Indian Ocean. They performed seven shows before thousands of U.S. military personnel and their families. Just so you will know, I spoke with Skaggs from the Philippines. He had just flown from the Indian Ocean into Manila, a flight that takes as long, according to Ricky, as going from Atlanta to London. It was 2 A.M. Philippines time and he was dog tired, but not too tired to say how proud he was to have been fortunate enough to perform for our servicemen abroad. Thanks, Ricky and Suzy, for doing what I and others cannot do for America's elite. For your information, Ricky records for Epic, Suzy for Capitol. Others we need to thank include **Randy Travis**, **Loretta Lynn** and **Charlie Daniels** who performed for the USO in 1988. We also need to thank **Charley Pride** and **The Judds** who have upcoming tours later this year.

All the above make me proud to be an American and to be in country music. God bless our servicemen around the world. And God bless those who entertain our servicemen around the world.

A LETTER TO DWIGHT YOAKAM

Dear Dwight,
Whenever you're in Nashville and get hungry, or whenever Houston turns you away again like they did before because you've got holes in your britches, just call me. We'd love to have you out at the house for supper, holey britches and all.

Love,
Hazel

BAILLIE & THE BOYS MAY DROP THE "S"

Just when **Baillie & The Boys'** singles started to reach Top 10 and their albums were being noticed as different and good, **Alan LeBoeuf** decided he wanted



UP, UP AND AWAY

Seated in a helicopter, **Ricky Skaggs** gets ready for his USO tour of the Pacific. He'll visit with tens of thousands of military personnel and their families stationed in Okinawa, the Philippines and an installation in the Indian Ocean.

a pop solo career and didn't want to be country. As of this writing, he's quit the group. The two remaining members, husband and wife **Michael Bonagura** and **Kathy Baillie**, will continue on with the same group name. There's no point that I can see in changing the name. Their music will not change too much, and the atmosphere may even improve. I've heard that when the group appeared on the Opry, Michael and Kathy were real excited while Alan was quite ho-hum about the whole scene. I figure anybody who isn't excited and humble about their first Opry appearance should get out of the business of country music anyway. The RCA group is produced by **Kyle Lehning**.

MILSAP REACHING FOR HIS COUNTRY ROOTS

RCA mastermind **Joe Galante** told me that **Ronnie Milsap's** wonderful single, "Don't You Ever Get Tired of Hurting Me," is a sampling of Ronnie's new album, *Stranger Things Have Happened*. The old Ray Price recording of the song was classic. So is Ronnie's. Love that song. I've always preferred the country side of Ronnie.

THE WORLD MOURNED ROY

Roy Orbison died at his mother's home in Hendersonville just north of Nashville, on December 6th and the world mourned. He'd had supper that night with friends, Grand Ole Opry star **Jean Shepard** and her husband **Benny Birchfield**. Benny had been on the road with Roy for several months, and the duo was very close. Roy's brother, **Sammy**, called Jean and Benny when Roy was stricken.

Roy's wife **Barbara** was in Germany visiting her family. Their two sons were in school in Los Angeles. Roy's oldest son **Wesley** lives with his grandmother **Nadine**, and his **Uncle Sammy** was in town when his father died. All of you read the papers, so you know that Barbara took Roy's body to Los Angeles where the rock 'n' rollers had a two day "celebration of life" for Orbison. I suppose that's okay; however, I felt that in his heart Roy was a Nashville boy. It must have hurt his mother and his son Wesley.

Even though a service was held in memory of Roy at a Hendersonville church, there was an emptiness in the

Reporter: *Hazel Smith*

Editor: *Rochelle Friedman*

People

REBA & RICKY HIT THE ROAD



Ricky Van Shelton will be Reba McEntire's special guest for part of her 1989 tour. The tour began on the campus of Texas A&M University, where the two stars entertained many a fan.

faces of those who knew and loved the author of "Oh, Pretty Woman." The music business will miss Roy Orbison. He made a mark with his songs and his singing that was unique, original and just plain wonderful. I thank God that I had several opportunities to hear him sing onstage and off. What an honor. What a man. The bayous are blue, and so are me and you.

GOODBYE, HUBERT

Longtime Opry sideman **Hubert Gregory** died at a local infirmary in January. Hubert played with **The Crook Brothers** oldtime band. He was a man who liked to have fun and spent a lot of time backstage at the Opry "goosing" fellow entertainers and getting "goosed" back. Hubert will be missed.

HELLO, HAROLD

Longtime producer, studio owner, businessman and all-around good guy, **Harold Shedd**, has been named head of the Polygram/Mercury Records Nashville office. Harold's plan is to locate and sign new talent. That's what the powers that be want, and that is what **Harold** is good at doing—finding singers like **Alabama** and **K.T. Oslin** and making stars out of them. Harold has my blessings. It is good to know that a good man and a kind man can get a good job like this. Sometimes the fairness in this town amazes me. The other big shot at the label is nice guy **Paul Lucks**. The duo hired **Sandy Neese** to

do their press and publicity. Couldn't find a better person to spread the word, in my opinion.

Some of Polygram's artists are already happening. Take **Kathy Mattea**, for example. Saw Kathy at the TNN Viewers Choice Awards nominations. She looks great and may get a bunch of awards this year. She is nominated for everything but Male Vocalist and Group of the Year.

Larry Boone is nothing to be sneezed at either. The singer/songwriter's second Mercury album is titled *Swingin' Doors, Saudust Floors*. If you ain't been there, you need to go!

Longtime Mercury fave **Tom T. Hall** is off in the wild blue yonder for down-under. Just when he had his bus overhauled and greased and oiled, somebody sent him and the Storytellers to Australia. After many years with Top Billing, Tom T. has changed to World Class for bookings. Good luck, Tom T. **Joanne Berry** is a first-class lady there at World Class.

David Lynn Jones is another favorite of mine at Polygram.

THINGS CHANGE

The highly acclaimed movie *Things Change*, starring **Don Ameche**, was great. My friends **John Hartford** and his lovely wife **Marie Barrett-Hartford** treated me to the movie and dinner. We thoroughly enjoyed the movie's dialogue and the acting. We were listening closely, and we had a real good reason to hear every line—our special friend **Shel**

Silverstein co-wrote the movie. Supper was good too, John and Marie.

GENERAL JACKSON

If you haven't taken a ride on the Cumberland River aboard the General Jackson Showboat, you have missed a thrill. My first trip was for the Viewers Choice Awards announcement. Some stars who showed up for the luncheon event were **Rodney Crowell**, **Kathy Mattea**, **Tanya Tucker** and **Ricky Van Shelton**.

ALL THE GOLD IN MUSIC CITY

Out of the chute, first gold album in Hillbillyland for 1989 was *This Woman* by that woman, **K.T. Oslin**.

BARBARA'S CALENDAR

Thanks to **Jeannie Ghent**, I've got a **Barbara Mandrell** calendar. If you have one, look at the photo of **Barbara**, **Irlene** and **Louise Mandrell** with their mother, beautiful **Mary Mandrell**. Isn't **Mary** just the prettiest of the four Mandrell girls? That lady is as sweet as she is pretty, too.

GRANDPA AND RAMONA JONES PARTY

The annual **Grandpa and Ramona Jones** "Year Out and Year In" party was loads of fun. **Buck White**, **Frazier Moss**, **John Hartford**, **The Smith Brothers** and others picked the old year out and the New Year in.



HOWDY, SADDLE PAL

Two of country music's legendary performers, **Minnie Pearl** and **Roy Rogers**, got to visit backstage at *Nashville Now*, prior to their appearance on the TV show. Bet there are loads of tales that those two could tell.

People

MISTER ACUFF

I still get a jolt whenever I see Mr. Roy Acuff. Like over at Kroger the other night – Roy was obliging some fan with an autograph. The fan got an autograph, and I got a real rush.

IACocca GOING COUNTRY? I SURE HOPE SO

Word I got was Billy Joe Royal and his producer Nelson Larkin visited Lee Iacocca in his home. That's about as big as a body can go unless it's the White House or Sam Walton's, who owns Walmart. As for me, I visited Mama. It wasn't regal and she don't make cars, but she sure does make good biscuits.

EIGHT-CARAT RING

Randy Travis gifted his manager, Lib Hatcher, with an eight-carat diamond ring for Christmas. The setting is so big, I am told, that it just turns around Lib's finger. Set the Travis boy back \$45,000, so I was told. I'd bet that everything Randy's parents, Harold and Bobbi Traywick, own back home in North Carolina ain't worth \$45,000. That's show biz, I guess. Lib and let Lib.

TANYA EXPECTING

The blonde bombshell, Tanya Tucker, is pregnant. I'd heard the rumor, but when I saw her, it was confirmed. Nobody had to tell me. The fact was obvious. I haven't asked Tanya, but again, rumor has it that she will keep the child. I don't care how anybody else feels about this situation, I respect her keeping the baby. I know she loves her nieces and nephews. Besides, she is close to her entire family. So I expect her to be a great parent. Tanya's career is real hot again. I hope the pregnancy doesn't obstruct her progress. She's 30 and has survived the drugs and the Glen Campbell love/hate relationship. The fans did not disown her then. I don't think the baby will make a difference. It shouldn't. I'm still her friend.

NOW WOLFMAN JACK IS GOING COUNTRY

TNRR is a new syndicated radio service out of Nashville. One of the DJs there is longtime pop pusher, Wolfman Jack. Learning that Ricky Skaggs was in the studio producing Dolly Parton, Wolfman took himself to where they were to



Ricky, Dolly and new country DJ Wolfman Jack. Pop music's loss is country music's gain.

bring Dolly an autographed photo.

Wolfman was already hosting *Rock 'n' Roll Palace* on The Nashville Network on Saturday. When the *TNRR* 24-hour-a-day radio show was launched, Wolfman was also on hand. Others to join the lineup include the popular TV team of Lorriane Crook and Charlie Chase, Country Music Disk Jockey Hall of Famer Biff Collie, Grand Ole Opry star Bill Anderson, Dana Christie, Bill Berlin, Chris Taylor, popular TV personality on TNN Shelley Mangrum, Jim Driver, Becky Wight and Wade Jessen. Broadcast live, the show features live interviews with personalities, record reviews and record countdowns.

J.C. CROWLEY

Folks, meet J.C. Crowley. He's a new RCA artist who has an album out titled *Beneath the Texas Moon*. Folks like Glen Campbell have sung about Galveston, but Crowley lived it. So he's one



Newcomer J.C. Crowley

up on the dreamers. He worked the boats in Galveston Bay and lived to write about it. "Paint the Town and Hang the Moon Tonight" sounds like a saga of "I done it, rhymed it, timed it, set it to music" kind of song. He's a kind of skeletal remnant of other blue-jeaned-sweaty boys who go by names like Guy Clark and Rodney Crowell. As for me and my opinion, I'd rather hear a song a body lives any day than hear one with an idea somebody got from TV. The boy been drove hard, put up wet and ain't dried out yet. He will start a fire, and when he does, give him room. And, boy, is he cute.

GUY CLARK'S ON SUGAR HILL

For all you Guy Clark fans, his recordings are now on Sugar Hill, located in Durham, North Carolina. Guy's songwriting is still some of the best around. I like to hear Guy sing, too.

K.T., WANNA LIFT?

The new Queen of Music City Hip, K.T. Oslin, says she inherited the "chin." No matter how much weight she lost, she always looked "heavy" due to the "chin." So the Eighties lady goes into the Nineties with a new chin, looking good but not looking back. On the arm of ace record producer, the ever so handsome Steve Buckingham (producer of such lights as Ricky Van Shelton, Sweethearts of the Rodeo, Russell Smith and Ricky Skaggs), K.T. waltzed into one of the better hillbilly "do's" looking 20-plus-a-half-dozen years old. Friends and acquaintances did not recognize her at first. I'll have to admit, it took me aback. She was always pretty. The whitling has made her a beauty.

Most of us mainliners are still cheer-leading K.T. on up the charts and into

People

BROTHERS



When it comes to singing with brothers, everyone knows that Larry Gatlin's no newcomer. But this time Larry got together with actor Patrick Swayze on KKBQ Radio in Houston to promote "Brothers," a song which Larry wrote for Patrick's new film *Next of Kin*. The two performed the song together in concert, and are collaborating on writing others. The duet "Brothers" will be sung by the pair in the movie.

the hearts of the fans of country. The sideliners still sneer, but they sneer at everything except their own memories, and few they are. Regardless, K.T. is a great songwriter, a great singer and a star. I am proud when she says, "Hello, Hazel."

KITTY WELLS BOULEVARD

When I drive to the post office in Madison, suburb of Nashville, it makes me extremely proud these days. I want to salute the flag and kiss the ground. That particular section of road has been renamed "Kitty Wells Boulevard." The street, formerly Old Hickory Blvd., runs past the *Kitty Wells/Johnny Wright Family Country Junction*. The original "Honky Tonk Angel," Kitty set the pace for the other female singers to follow. There just weren't any honky tonk females before the great Miss Kitty. And the lady is for sure and for certain a kitty without claws. Gentle lady. A great American.

KNOW WHO'S HOT AND GETTING HOTTER?

Ricky Van Shelton come out of the chute with smoke on his tail. He has continued onward and upward, never varying off-course at all. Still, with his first album *Wild-Eyed Dream* reaching platinum status and his new album that found gold two weeks after release, *Loving Proof*, might 'nigh at the plat-

inum stage, he remains the simple man who came to Nashville from Grit, Virginia. Does not feel or act like a star. Does not ever act like a snob. But he sings his butt off and is proud to do it. He will go far and has only just begun.

MINNIE PEARL ALWAYS A MOVER AND SHAKER

Minnie Pearl is moving her museum off Music Row to Opryland. This is good for you fans who visit Nashville. Most of you will surely plan to go to Opryland. This year you will be double-treated with the Roy Acuff Museum and now Minnie Pearl's museum. All of Minnie's special things can be preserved for longevity by the folks out there who are already taking good care of Mr. Acuff's collection.

MEL FELL

Mel McDaniel fell while performing in El Paso, and guess what he was singing? Yep, you're right. He was singing "Stand Up" when he fell. Not to worry, he was only bruised.

PATTY LOVELESS, I'M LOVING HER MORE

Patty Loveless is the newest Opry member. She's hot as a pistol. Her videos are good. Her songs are hits. Her fans love her. And she is country. Her Kentucky mama was visiting Patty and came down with the flu. Patty was on

the televised portion of the Opry and wished her mama well. Between the first and second show, Patty, her brother/manager Roger Ramey and TNN announcer Keith Bilbrey all journeyed out to Patty's house to surprise mama. Mama was uncommonly shocked when she met them at the door in her nightgown with blue curlers in her hair. From one mother to another, I'd chastise those three hillbillies.

LET'S GIVE A HAND TO PRESIDENT BUSH AND LADY BARBARA

A hand to the new prez and the new first lady for having ace musical taste. Some of the Nashville folks who picked and sang at the inaugural gala were Loretta Lynn, Crystal Gayle, Oak Ridge Boys, Johnny Rodriguez, Jerry Jeff Walker, Charley Pride, Shotgun Red, Lee Greenwood, Steve Wariner and Randy Travis. Just so all my relatives will know, I got an invitation to the Presidential Inauguration. My first, and even I was impressed.

ELIZABETH WRITES TO JOHN

If I know anything, I know that Elizabeth Taylor was proud to send Johnny Cash a get-well card following his bypass surgery. Shucks, I just don't think there's a bigger star on the planet than Johnny Cash. Just wondered if Cash wore black pajamas in the hospital and if they had those awful gowns you have to wear in black.

KFDI/WICHITA, KANSAS - THANKS AND LOVE

Following the duo bypass of Waylon and Cash, KFDI in Wichita constructed a huge billboard on the street side of Baptist Hospital wishing a Happy Holiday and expressing Get Well Wishes. Thank God for radio and radio folks.

FRANK MULL'S RADIO SEMINAR IS THE BEST

If you are an artist or buyer or radio person and attend the Seminar, you should thank Frank Mull. Frank works endlessly and tirelessly to make this the success it always is. Some folks who got their start on his *New Faces Show* include Crystal Gayle, Johnny Rodriguez, Earl Thomas Conley, Janie Fricke, The Gatlin Brothers, Mel McDaniel, John Conlee, The Whites, Ricky Skaggs, Vince Gill, Alabama, George Strait and last year K.T. Oslin. Thanx, Frank.

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People

SHENANDOAH MORE THAN A BUNCH OF GOOD-LOOKING JOCKS

The song "Mama Knows" definitely puts Shenandoah in more conversations than any other song they have released. The Top Five record on CBS was taken from their current brand-new album, *The Road Not Taken*. I've listened to the album, and I like it a lot. Muscle Shoals' Rick Hall is producing the group. When he brought the finished tape up to play for the powers that be at CBS, his most important meeting since the birth of his favorite child, he got out of his Cadillac, laid the tape on top of

FINAL BOW: Jethro Burns

Jethro Burns, mandolin-playing half of Homer & Jethro, died at age 68 on February 4th in Evanston, Illinois, after a long struggle with cancer. He and guitarist Henry "Homer" Haynes met as kids in Knoxville, Tennessee, and started working at WNOX Radio there, then in Kentucky before World War II.

After the war they worked in Cincinnati and began parodying country and pop songs, earning themselves the title "The Song Butchers." By 1948 they recorded for RCA (they backed Chet Atkins—Jethro's brother-in-law—on his early RCA recordings). Hank Williams, a fan, gave them written permission to parody any song he wrote, a seal of approval if there ever was one.

Their first hit was "Baby It's Cold Outside" with June Carter in 1948. Others included "Hound Dog in the Window," a spoof on Patti Page's 1953 pop hit "How Much is That Doggie in the Window," and "Battle of Kookamonga," a 1959 spoof of "Battle of New Orleans." Their popularity grew in the 1960's when they starred in Kellogg's Corn Flakes "Ooh! That's Corny!" commercials. Humor aside, both were also outstanding—and exciting—jazz musicians as two early 1960's RCA instrumental albums proved in spades.

Homer died of a coronary in 1971. Jethro performed and recorded country and jazz for the next 17 years. Based in Chicago, he taught mandolin and became an elder statesman of the instrument. Nominated for the Country Music Hall of Fame, Homer & Jethro's induction is only a matter of time. The sooner, the better.

—RICH KIENZLE



Hank Jr. (right) along with son Shelton (left) visit with actor Dennis Stone on the video set of "There's a Tear in My Beer." Stone stands in for Hank Sr. on some segments of the video, but the real accomplishment is the combination of old and new footage that gives the illusion of father and son harmonizing on the same stage. Perhaps some day Shelton will sing with his daddy.

the car, got his briefcase out of the car and proceeded into CBS. When he got into Bob Montgomery's outer office, he couldn't find the tape and was freaking out. In the meantime Roy Wunsch, the mainest power that be, went out to his car, saw the tape, put it in his pocket and went on to his appointment. Wunsch had no idea that he had the tape. Picture this man Hall with his handle bar moustache going nuts. Muscle Shoals is a couple of hours away, and it is meeting time and he has no music to play. Returning from his meeting in the nick of time, Roy gives Rick the tape. You had to be there...fummier 'n' heck. Though for a time it did appear that Rick Hall would go into cardiac arrest. And the boys do have a hit record.

A GREAT JOHN CONLEE STORY

A couple from Kentucky were at the Grand Ole Opry on their honeymoon. John Conlee not only recognized the duo from the stage of the Opry, he had them walk to the front of the stage where he presented the bride with a signatory pair of "Rose Colored Glasses" following his performance of the song.

OPRY'S VIC WILLIS GOT GIRLS WHERE BOYS USED TO BE

Vic Willis and his trusty accordion have been mid-stage and surrounded by hairy-legged-old-boys for a dozen or more years, and before that he was surrounded forever by his two brothers, the late Skeeter and Guy. Vic, who knows a pretty face when he sees one, now has girls for Vic-ends. Pretty girls, too. His musical partners on the Opry and elsewhere are Lorna Greenwood and Kathy Shepherd.

REBA POND-HOPPING

That irresistible redhead, Reba McEntire, will be spreading her coun-

try charm and music into Ireland, Germany, Holland, Switzerland and England this year. Can't think of anybody I'd rather have represent me and country music than Ms. Reba. Her music is second to none and so is her band. She recently hired the best country fiddler in Nashville, Mr. Glen Duncan. Folks, you haven't lived until you see this crazed hillbilly fiddler imitate Bill Monroe. They say imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. If this be true, I can attest that Glen Duncan does Monroe better than Monroe does himself.

CHILLS AND THRILLS

Hank Williams Jr.'s video of "There's a Tear in My Beer," a duo with his late daddy, is just too much. First time I saw it, I had dreams about it. Big Bill Lister found Hank Williams Sr.'s dub of the song in his attic and got in touch with Hank Jr. and his manager Merle Kilgore. The song is reportedly 35 years old, and as far as anyone knows, the only Hank Williams recording never to have been heard by the general public. It took Junior about a heartbeat to come up with the solution to that tape. It will be a big record.

MTM RECORDS IS HISTORY

It was good while it lasted, but MTM Records is history now. MTM exec Howard Stark purchased the entire conglomeration. There's talk throughout the rumor mill that MCA may purchase the recording artists' contracts. Some of these artists are Paul Overstreet, SKB, Holly Dunn, Becky Hobbs, Judy Rodman and The Girls Next Door. There are also rumors that RCA wants Dunn and Overstreet. Matter of fact, Mr. Joe Galante (the real cute one), is very interested in Paul Overstreet as an artist. How do I know? Cause Joe told me so! Stark will keep the publishing company. That was the plan as I heard it.

People

ROLAND JOINS NASHVILLE BLUEGRASS

Longtime mandolinist for the *Country Gazette*, **Roland White** has departed that position and will be playing mandolin and singing with the Nashville Bluegrass Band.

CELEBRATION OF A MARRIAGE

Two giants, CBS Records and Tree Publishing, threw *the party* of 1989 in Nashville recently. Held at the luxurious Opryland Hotel, the event marked the official announcement that CBS had, in fact, purchased Tree. Tree execs on hand for this historic bash were **Buddy Killen** and **Donna Hilley**. This merge makes Donna an international exec, putting her a cut above most females in the publishing arena. Songwriting giants who helped make the Tree roots grow deeper even before the sale and who were present for the affair were **Harlan Howard**, **Curly Putman**, and **Bobby Braddock**.

The affair was by invitation only, and we were told to dress optional. If the girls had silk, they wore it, and all the

guys wore their best but was well represented w *Rolling Stone Magazine* h as the greatest man in the ness, **Mr. Walter Yetnicol** ence made a body feel sor brother had come to Mus NYC label chief **Tommy I** present as were all the po in Nashville. Good folk **Wunsch**, **Joe Casey**, **M tinovich**, **Bob Montgon** **Buckingham**, **Jim Carl** **Brown**, **Don Johnson**, **Ri** **Jack LaMaire** and all the folks like **Kay**, **Margie**, **Areeda**, **Janet**, **Cathy**, **Ky** **Debbie**, **Vickie** and **Rob**, not to mention **Mary Ann McCready**, who has departed the CBS family to pursue a career in money management.

Stars were in focus, too, the likes of **Ricky Skaggs**, **Tammy Wynette**, **Keith Whitley**, **Sharon White** of *The Whites*, **Janis Gill** of *Sweethearts of the Rodeo*, **Lorrie Morgan**, **Crystal Gayle**, **Vince Gill**, **Marty Stuart** and **K.T. Oslin**. Also in evidence were executives such as RCA's **Joe Galante**, Polygram's **Harold Shedd**, BMI's around-the-world head gal **Frances Preston**, Nashville's

company of any size has now been sold. It was historic but a little hysterical, too. Scares you, don't it?

But the party was a winner. I had a grand time. Got kissed by all the good-looking men. Those I couldn't impress with my body, I just stepped down the ladder a rung and impressed with my mind. The funniest sight of the evening was label chief **Roy Wunsch** imitating me walking across the Presidential Ballroom. Wunsch claimed I was slinking. Now that I know how to slink, I am going to do it a lot.

The Spanish moss swings lazily in the light breeze, the live oaks providing a bit of shade for the cattle. Inside the comfortable house, kids dart in and out, chicken is frying, a woman wrapped in a towel makes telephone calls while Frances Bellamy prattles over it all. In their tiny Howard and David the least likely country music in from work tle. It is s farm, the stead bet

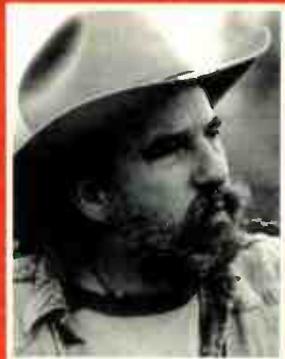
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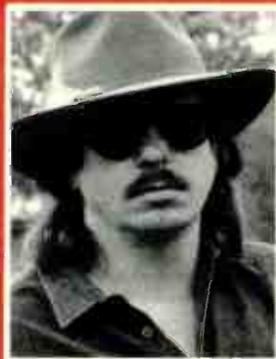
World Radio History

20 Questions with THE BELLAMY BROTHERS

By Michael Bane



Howard



David

...e
...des
...office,
...Bellamy,
...cowboys in
...have just come
...ing with the cat-
...ring at the Bellamy
...e 100-year-old home-
...in rural Florida, and in
...between the farm and the road
...and Europe, the Bellamy
...Brothers have consented to
...answer 20 Questions...

1

Seems like we see you guys everywhere.

David: I guess we're probably busier than we've ever been. We are involved in a lot more things now. I don't know why that is, but we've got a lot of things on the string. We're doing an endorsement deal with these people who make feed—Manapro Feeds. We're doing a national radio show with them: one-minute spots talking about the care of animals. There'll be some TV stuff, too. We're also putting together the third greatest hits album.

2

What were you guys doing with the cattle this morning?

Howard: Well, we were castrating bull calves mainly.
David: Yeah, among other things.
Howard: Yeah. And, you know, you worm the cattle. A couple times a year we worm the mother cows and that sort of thing. It's just their bi-annual check-up.

3

It must be hard, as much as you're on the road, to get any time in on the farm...

Howard: It is, in a way. But in another way it's kind of, well, a getaway to do it. It works out pretty well. We've got a couple that lives on the ranch and takes care of it pretty much, and we come in sometimes and we'll just set a

date to catch up with a particular kind of work we want to do with the cattle.

4

If I remember correctly, the last time we talked, you didn't spend that much time in Nashville.

Howard: No, we didn't.
David: We still have our studio here on the farm, but one reason we are recording more in Nashville is the technology got to the point where unless you wanted to sink about a million bucks a year into a studio, it would be easier to go up there, and less expensive too.

Howard: We actually have a very high profile in Nashville compared to what we used to. Which I think is good. Because Nashville has its little cliques, and it's nice for you to be involved in it. If you're not, you somewhat suffer. So our profile is much higher than it's really ever

been. But this is home.

David: I cannot call Nashville home and never will. This place has been in our family 100 years, and there's just no way to leave here and live in Nashville.

5

Let's talk about cliques. The Bellamy Brothers are probably the most successful unrecognized group in Nashville.

Howard: Uhm hum.

6

You consistently have all these hits, and you've been around since the dawn of time now.

Howard: Yeah, and beginning to feel it.

7

(Laughs) But why do you think that is?

Howard: Well, I'm not sure why. We're probably at fault for some of it—I don't know if

it's a fault or not. I think it might be one key to our longevity. It's not being a hype, splash in the pan, and then everybody sees so damn much of you, they're sick of you.

David: I think you can overdo or underdo publicity. We probably have under-done it a little bit. Not really intentionally, it's just that, by nature, we're a little low key... as far as personalities. But our show is not low key at all. Compared to most other shows, it's very energetic.

8

Do you feel comfortable doing that?

Howard: Uh, if it's the right thing, I don't mind. Seems like I like to talk more now than I used to.

9

I recall you not talking at all. *(Laughs)*

Howard: I don't know why that is, you know. I guess I've just gotten more full of shit after being in the music business for so many years.

10

Yeah, that's one thing that happens. As you get older, you gotta talk quicker.

Howard: I just think that, at this point in our career... we've been more places, we've experienced a lot more. Sometimes you hear a new artist interviewed, and they're just not interesting. I like some of their music, but there's nobody around like Merle Haggard, who went to prison and did all this crazy shit. There's nobody who has a background that's as colorful as some of the older guys.

11

Nobody picked cotton. Instead, they listened to the radio.

Howard: That's right. I saw that piece on Tammy Wynette the other night, *Stand By Your Dreams*. They had some great old footage of cotton pickers pulling the sacks, and some great old stuff of her going back to her old homestead. It was an interesting piece. But she's been through enough at this point to do that. We've been

around and been all over the world a few times. So maybe we've got something to talk about now, too. Earlier, we had to make a lot of things up.

12

You've got some kind of record on award nominations, don't you?

Howard: We went to the CMA Awards this year. You know, we've been nominated 8,000 times...

David: Yeah, we're going to win an award just for getting nominated all those times. We were backstage, sharing a dressing room with a few different people. I won't say who this was because I don't like to say, but I heard somebody in one of the newer bands, say, "Aw, you look nice tonight." He goes, "Yeah, I pulled out my cowboy boots. This is the only time of the year I wear 'em, to go to the awards show." I just thought that was funny. There's nothing wrong with the fact that things change, and I'm all for change. I like things to change and I like them to stay the same. I like the old and the new. As long as you don't stay where you are, I like to go backwards and forward.

13

That comes across in your music. If you look at songs like "Old Hippy" or "Baby Boom," there's a sense of going forward, but hating to let go...

David: I think actually a balance of both is good. Because I don't think you can, you should, let go of your past. If you do, you're letting go of your roots...your heritage. But at the same time, you have to be progressive mentally. You have to go ahead—I don't mean be trendy. I think we both despise trends more than any two people. I mean, the trends to me are just more of the urban cowboy thing. It just blew me away.

Howard: You know, the whole secret of this business is outliving everything. Outliving the record companies, the whole deal. That's the secret in all this. We've outlived quite a few. We've just

endured. That's us. That's the main trick.

14

It's worked well?

David: Yeah. We've done kind of what we wanted to do. We haven't, you know, recorded a lot of things we haven't wanted to record, and that happens a lot of time in this business. We've kind of done it our way. It's cost us in some areas, but it's been very rewarding in others.

15

There must have been some tough points, though.

David: Oh, yeah, there's been a lot of those points. You wish you didn't know as much as you did...about the whole business in the music industry...but it's not just the music business. Every business is so full of politics. The music business is maybe a little worse than most, 'cause there is some big monies involved, and the game stakes are higher. But I just wish everything was legitimate. I would love that.

David: Yeah, believe it or not, we have had legitimately 33, let's see now...let me get this right, we've had 33 chart records and I believe close to 30 have been Top Ten. Fourteen Number Ones. And our first two greatest hits albums were all greatest hits. We didn't put anything new on the release. On the second greatest hits we added the duet with The Forrester Sisters. And on this greatest hits we are doing seven songs that were hits, and we're going to add three new songs, because we are not going to do a studio album until the first of next year. So we just recorded three songs that'll be the next three singles.

16

Fourteen Number Ones? You guys have been amazingly consistent...

David: Yeah, we have. You know what's funny about us? We've had 14 Number Ones, and we've had almost as many Number Twos. *(Laughs)*

Howard: We've probably had 12 Number Twos.

David: Yeah, the biggest insult in the music business is a Number Two.

Howard: You know what we used to tell (producer Jimmy) Bowen, kill 'em at five, don't kill 'em at two. Two is insulting. Five is okay, but two is an insult.

17

What kind of songs have you written for the new greatest hits album?

Howard: The three songs we just cut are actually a little more country than what we've been doing. And I don't really know if there is a reason for that. I mean, I don't know if we ever do anything consciously.

David: I mean, I don't call Howard up and say, "Hey, let's get more country this week." It just sort of happens. We've been writing a lot with Don Schlitz. Me, Howard and Don were writing together. Then we went back and got an old song that me and Bobby Braddock wrote called "Hillbilly Hell." That's almost a take-off on "Hillbilly Heaven."

18

And he wonders why the mainstream slips away from him... "Hillbilly Hell."

David: Actually "Hillbilly Hell" is really a pretty blatant, commercial song. Jimmy Bowen came in the day we were cutting it, and he said it reminded him of the stuff we were doing around the time of "Redneck Girl."

19

You guys doing anything else other than just touring, recording and torturing your cattle?

Howard: Oh, we don't get a chance to do anything else. Did you tell him about our Galapagos trip?

David: No, I didn't mention that.

Howard: We're going down to Galapagos here soon just for something different, to do some filming for *The Nashville Network*. We have a song from years ago called "Endangered Species," and it'll kind of be the theme of the show. It's kind of a sports getaway weekend rather than

fishing, which is what everybody does.

20

It must be great to do as much touring around the world as you guys do.

David: That has been one of the rewards. It's like our career, as far as just looking at it from the standpoint of the States, is rather unusual. It's been a long-lived one. But as far as foreign popularity, we've had more than a lot of acts, probably because "Love Flow" was so big. It was the Number One song in ten countries around the world. And in Germany alone it was Number One on the charts for eight weeks in a row. It just opened up every door for us, that one song. And since then, you know, there was no identity problem whatsoever. We were better known in Europe than we were in the States for ages. And since then we've been going there for years and as people, and it just rounds you out, traveling that much. We've played for the Austrian ambassadors; we played for the queen—she has her own box—and we've gone from that to the littlest honky tonk in Texas. You see quite a variety. It's just amazing. We did Czechoslovakia this past summer...the first time we had ever done that one. We went to Prague and hung out there for awhile. That was really a trip. We had our own little secret service type guys checking us out, and we played for the Communist Party—they promoted the show.

Howard: That was really an interesting date, as memories go.

David: But you want to know what else is really strange? We were in Australia and came back through Fiji and Tahiti. They knew every damn country song. "Stand By Your Man" was like the national anthem. We got off the plane, and there were women clad in, like, wrap-around silks—what they wear there. And they were kneeling. I'll never forget, we walked off the plane, and they were kneeling. One spoke up and said, "Our people are waiting for you." ■



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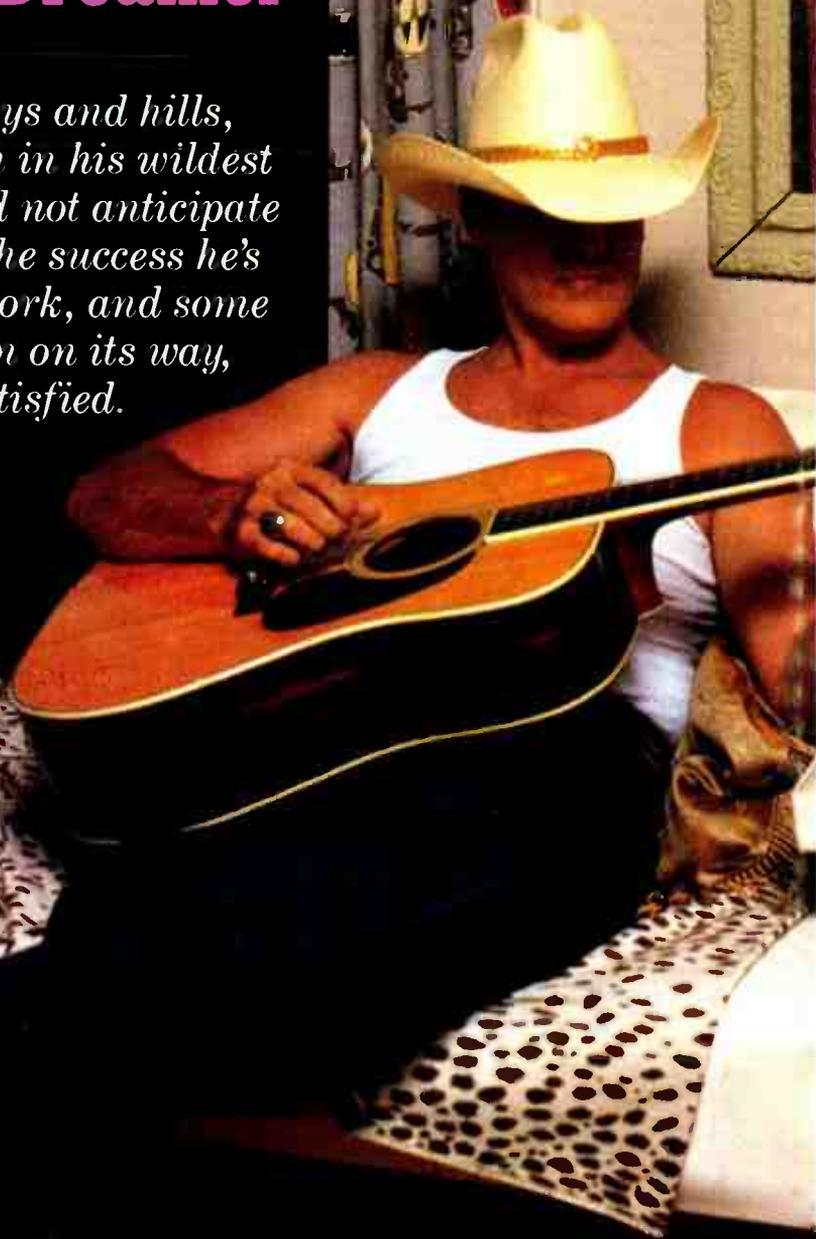
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RICKY VAN SHELTON

Success Opens the Eyes Of the Wild-Eyed Dreamer

Back in the Blue Ridge valleys and hills, dreaming came easy. But even in his wildest dreams, Ricky Van Shelton did not anticipate some of the stranger sides of the success he's now enjoying. It's been hard work, and some surprises. With a third album on its way, he's hopeful and he's satisfied.

by Bob Allen





Nashville's annual Country Radio Seminar is a daunting experience, even for the most stout-hearted of music business veterans—recording artists, disk jockeys and not-so-innocent bystanders alike. The Seminar is a four-day marathon of music, food, drink, general excess and even occasional *business* that rivals the legendary Shriner's Conventions of old.

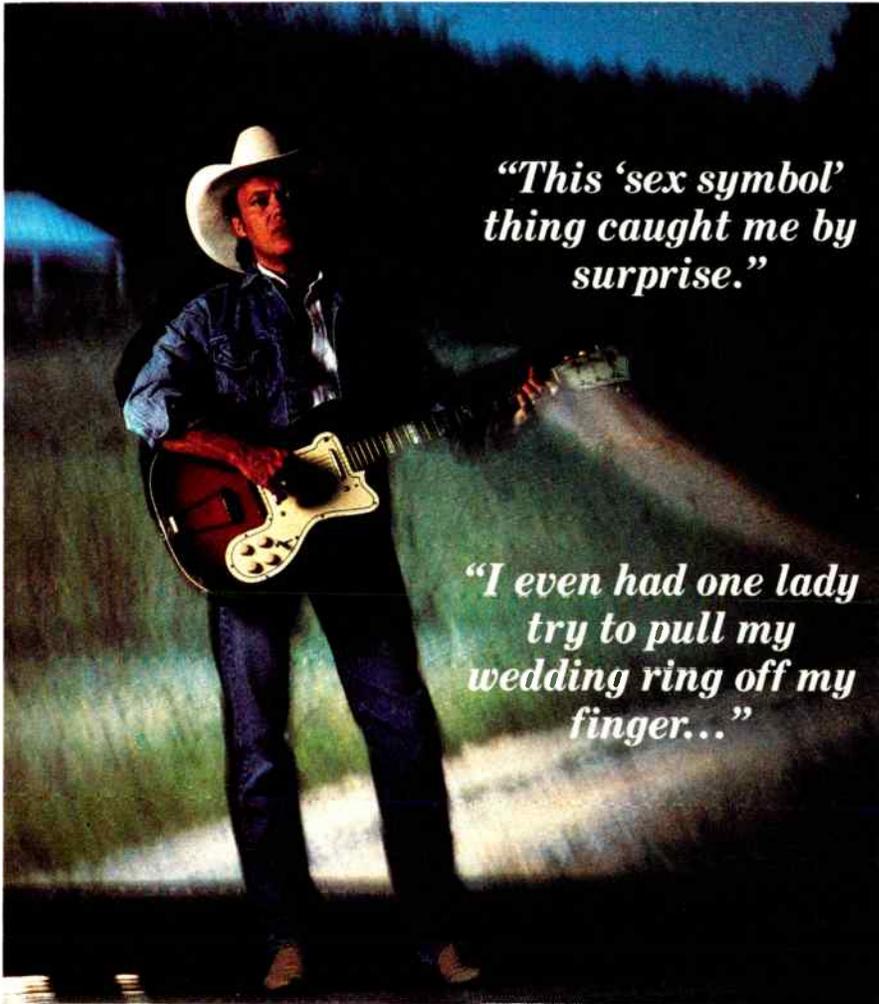
At the seminar each year, the collective tidal waves of the record industry and the radio industry (which are more or less interdependent upon each other for their existence) collide in a great clashing wave of satin and leather jackets, cowboy hats and weird hairstyles. As the executive and creative Mt. Rushmores of self-importance of the record industry commingle with the Monsters from Radio-Land over bourbon and meatball buffets, the huge Opryland Hotel vibrates with the shoulder-to-shoulder frenzy of a well-appointed bus station where the management happens to serve drinks.

Look! Over there! Underneath the giant atrium! That's Wynonna Judd, isn't it!? Naw, that's just some woman radio monster from Idaho who looks like her. And there! Getting out of the elevator! That's Gary Stewart... isn't it!?

And there: moving down the wide hotel corridor in tight formation with his manager and his two publicists, walking with the sort of rolling self-assured gait of one who has wielded his share of sledge hammers, monkey wrenches and jack hammers for a living: it's Ricky Van Shelton! There's that familiar, wide-open, country boy countenance with the prominent chin. His demeanor is at once friendly and standoffish, as he smacks industriously on a wad of chewing gum. He's wearing the black leather jacket, the tight blue jeans with the silver star-and-crescent belt buckle, the double-wide white cowboy hat and matching shirt we recognize from the covers of his two CBS albums. Yes, indeed! I believe we have a real star-sighting here this time!

Indeed it is "His Ricky-Ness," and he seems to be busy asking those in his entourage the proverbial question that comes with his line of work: "Are we having fun yet?"

Shelton moves like a line-backer through the star-gazing crowd in the Opryland Hotel's spacious lobby. He is headed for one of the ball rooms where artist tapings are being held. There Shelton, along with several dozen other artists, will sit in small sound-baffled booths and play host to a long line of radio monsters, each of whom will be armed with hand-held recorders and cue cards containing a few lines of pre-written script, which Shelton and the



"This 'sex symbol' thing caught me by surprise."

"I even had one lady try to pull my wedding ring off my finger..."

other artists will recite into cassette recorders. The idea is that each radio monster will be able to go home with a collection of short personalized greetings from the various stars which contain the station's call letters and can be used on the air.

"Here," Shelton grimaces good-naturedly and proffers his cowboy hat to his publicist, a wary New Yorker who seems in the midst of an uneasy career transition from representing defecting Russian ballet dancers to flacking for hillbilly singers in double-wide Stetsons, "how'd ya like to put my hat on and do this for me? I bet I bite my tongue fifteen times before I get outa here tonight!"

As Shelton takes his seat in the sound booth, a long line of impatient radio monsters is already waiting—disk jockeys, program directors, station executives out slumming. Scattered around the large ball room, seated in identical booths, is about a billion dollars worth of country talent: Asleep at the Wheel, Charlie Daniels, Janie Fricke, Keith Whitley, The Bellamy Brothers, Kathy Mattea, Lorrie Morgan, The Shooters, Gary Stewart, J.C.

Crowley and lots of other artists whose careers are either still sufficiently on the rise or stalled at some mid-level plateau, impelling them to submit themselves to this humbling little ritual, are on hand, busy taping radio spots.

The first radio monster in Shelton's line settles down before the singer. He snaps off a few flash photos and has Shelton sign a couple of black-and-white glossies. Then he hands Shelton the cards on which he's written the lines he wants the singer to read, and shoves the microphone in Shelton's face.

Pretty soon Ricky Van's off and running. Only the line seems to be getting longer instead of shorter.

"Hi, this is Ricky Van Shelton, I think WRTU in Shellshock Oklahoma, is great!..."

"Hi, this Ricky Van Shelton, I spell country WVU..."

"Hi, this is Ricky Van Shelton wishing everyone at WZOO in Podunk, Oregon, a very merry Christmas!..."

"Hi, this is Ricky Van Shelton..."

"Hi, this is Ricky..."

"Hi, this is..."

Through it all, Shelton smiles and maintains an almost unflappable sense

of cool even as The Shooters, a country-rock band whose boisterous members are holed up in the next booth tease him by shouting in unison, "Hi, we're Ricky Van Shelton!..." "I guess I'm just kind of a laid-back person, ya know," he shrugs. "This business don't necessarily make you fidgety." His self-confidence, as usual, is almost Zen-like. "No particular artist ever inspired me," he assures me later that day. "I was inspired when I was born. This is all I've ever wanted to do. I've never wanted to do anything else—not once in my life. I'm not surprised this is happening now. I never wondered whether or not it would happen, or thought it wouldn't, because that just ain't the way my mind works.

"And I made up my mind when this thing got started," he adds with quiet but almost fierce conviction, "that whatever opportunity was there, I was gonna grab it: grab as much as I could without hurtin' myself. I've waited so long, and now it's here for the taking, and you ain't promised no tomorrow... especially not in this business."

Shelton's absolutely right, of course: tomorrow, in the record business, is at best a calculated risk, an intangible possibility against which you try to hedge your best bets. (It's hard to start planning your retirement when your very next single might well stiff in the bottom of the charts.) The pathway is already littered with gifted artists who were hot as firecrackers just a few years ago, but now can't even seem to buy a hit record.

All the same, what young aspiring singer wouldn't all but sell his soul to have a couple of years worth of yesterdays like those Shelton, at age 37, has already had. Consider that as recently as 1984, this south-central Virginia blue-collar sensation was still living back in the Blue Ridge foothills with his wife Bettye, supporting himself with a series of horizontal career moves that included laboring at construction sites, pumping gas, clerking in a grocery store and selling cars.

Consider, too, that as recently as early 1987 Shelton was still just one of hundreds of unknown singers haunting the Nashville clubs by night and passing around three-for-\$1.99 homemade demo tapes of his original songs to whomever would take them. "I always used the cheap tapes," he laughs. "I couldn't afford Scotch, or any of those more expensive brands!"

But then in July of 1987, *Wild-Eyed Dream*, Shelton's debut album, hit the streets. And after nearly 13 years worth of twice or thrice-yearly 500-mile treks from his home community of Grit, Virginia, to Nashville merely for the thrill of getting up on stage in a club

like George Jones' Possum Holler and singing with the house band, Shelton suddenly woke up one day and realized he'd become the sort of singing sensation that he'd been dreaming about being for as long as he could remember.

"I was always getting bad grades in school, because I was daydreaming about music," he recalls with a trace of wistfulness. "It's a wonder I didn't get hurt, all the jobs I was working on, since I was always daydreaming about music. I've savored that dream my whole life."

Yet one could hardly have dreamed up as stunning a debut as Shelton made with *Wild-Eyed Dream*. The album was propelled up the charts by an impressive string of successful hit singles. The title song cracked the Top Twenty, and his exhilarating, sensual, smoldering cut of William Aldridge's and Mac McAnally's "Crimes of Passion" edged easily into the Top Ten. Three consecutive Number Ones quickly followed: "Somebody Lied," his re-make of Roger Miller's "Don't We All Have the Right" and his revival of the old Harlan Howard classic, "Life Turned Her That Way."

The *Wild-Eyed Dream* album, an energetically and thoughtfully performed song collection weighted heavily toward favorites of yesteryear originally recorded by Merle Haggard, Buck Owens, Roger Miller and others, eventually found its way into the Number One spot in the country album charts, and sold almost a million copies. Nearly a year and a half later, well after the release of Shelton's second album, *Loving Proof*, *Wild-Eyed Dream* was still hanging in the Top Ten.

With *Loving Proof*, released in mid-1988, Shelton once again revisited the late 1950's and early 1960's heyday of country music, recycling forgotten masterpieces by the likes of Hank Cochran, Red Lane, Wayne Kemp and The Wilburn Brothers. With songs like Boudleaux and Felice Bryant's "Hole in My Pocket," he re-asserted his flair for countrified rave-ups with a rockabilly flavor. The first two singles, "I'll Leave This World Loving You," and his revival of the 1962 Ned Miller jukebox hit, "From a Jack to a King," reached the Number One spot as did the album itself.

And so, little more than four years after his permanent arrival at Music City's gates, Shelton has attained a level of recognition that many spend half a lifetime in quest of. And if his music isn't a significant enough contribution to the popular culture, let's add on the fact that he has almost singled-handedly inspired a renaissance of the muscle shirt.

Shelton, fine journeyman country-traditionalist singer that he is, has

never quite won the reams of critical praise garnered by the likes of Randy Travis or Dwight Yoakam. But he has, with his robust physique and downhome good looks, inspired near-hysteria amongst the hoards of female fans who are, when all is said and done, the best barometers of an artist's popularity. These "Eighties Ladies" have come together in crowds of record size to worship, adore and/or assault their idol at Fan Fair and other ritualistic country star-worshipping ceremonies. Out on the road too, Shelton's mere presence has at times incited near riots.

"Yeh! That whole thing is somethin' else, ain't it!" Shelton sounds somewhat more wide-eyed than wild-eyed as he tries to come to grips with the effect his sexy country-boy appearance has on these female legions. "Anybody who's never been to Fan Fair don't know what they're missing, do they?" he raises his eyebrows in a combination of wonder and worry. "I really hope nobody gets hurt at one of those things. It's just a bunch of avid, fanatical fans, and lots of 'em, crammed into a small area..."

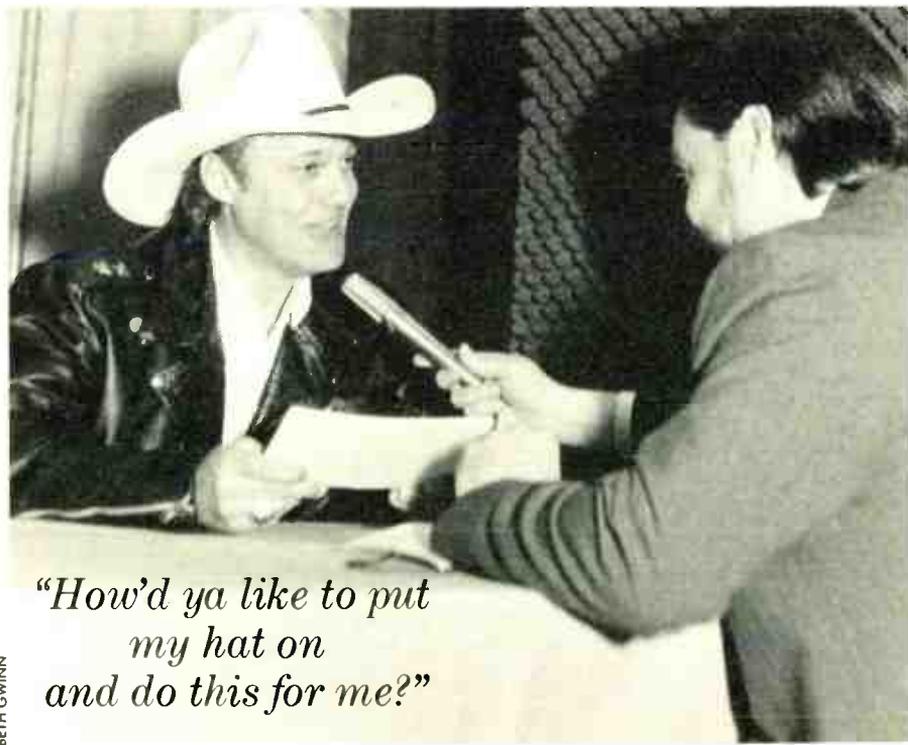
"It spooks me sometimes when people at those things get to tearing at my clothes," he adds, a trace of genuine concern in his voice. "I even had one lady try to pull my wedding ring off my finger... I'll never forget this one night I was playing at this club and they didn't have much security," he continues as he warms to the subject. "We had nine hundred miles to drive that night to the next show, so I didn't have time to sign autographs. By the time I got on the

bus, there must have been a hundred women out there rocking it. I was just inside, holding on for dear life! It freaked me out, ya know!

"Another night I was sitting at this table signing autographs and they had security, but not enough of it. These people started rushing the line. People started pushing up against the table where I was sitting, and they pressed me right up against the wall. There was this pregnant woman, and her stomach was being crushed against the table, and I just thought, 'God! We had to take some quick action that night. A bunch of people pushed the crowd back, and we got the girl out. Then I split!' he shakes his head with a 'never-again' look. "I left!"

As he muses on this and other questions, Shelton has taken refuge from the seminar madness in a suite at the Opryland Hotel rented by his management company. Once again pressed for his reactions to this "country sex symbol" business, he sighs and leans forward in his easy chair. His manner seems by turns bemused, perplexed, embarrassed.

"What would *you* think about it?" he squirms, grins uneasily and scratches his chin. "What would *your* thoughts be? I don't think about image, don't think about myself all that much. I mean, I think about whether or not my zipper's zipped when I get up on stage!" He laughs, then turns serious again. "Beyond that, I'm more likely to be thinking about what channel I'm going to watch on TV or something like that."



*"How'd ya like to put
my hat on
and do this for me?"*

BETH GWINN

His eyes widen: "This 'sex symbol' thing caught me by surprise. I think it's funny... I don't know what I think... I do know you ain't never gonna see me in *Playgirl!* I guarantee you that!"

As Shelton kicks back in the chair, one couldn't ask for a more good-natured, easy-going interview subject. He jokes, laughs and occasionally is even downright forthcoming. He speaks in a lilting, slightly formal-sounding southern Virginia accent that is almost musical in its cadences and displays both a quick mind and a deft sense of humor, even as he routinely commits mayhem with the King's English.

Still, there is a certain tension... a certain jadedness... It's obvious he's been through this dog-and-pony, "tell-me-your-life-story" interview routine many times before and answered all the same questions until he was blue in the face. One gets the impression that if he had his way, he'd be out of here, up on his recently-purchased farm doing an oil painting of a solitary winter landscape or tooling around some back roads in his new four-wheel drive pick-up, listening to the radio.

Meanwhile, Shelton's publicity people seem to be politely monitoring the interview for "damage control." Among themselves they despair he'll be asked the same old questions, but they still want to be sure he won't have any new ones popped at him from over the left field fence that might defile his easy-going, "country-boy-in-the-white-tank-top" image. There is a feeling here that with so much having happened so fast, life is closing in. Shelton himself judiciously holds the lid down on his personal life. Asked about the location of his new farm, he responds abruptly, "It's in Tennessee, let's leave it at that." Later, he begins an anecdotal story about how he first began dating his wife Bettye some years ago back in Virginia. Then suddenly he exchanges knowing glances with one of his publicists and has second thoughts. "Scratch that," he reconsiders. "I don't wanna get into that."

"The loss of privacy is part of this that I didn't know about," he later confesses, in partial explanation of his having been so cautious. "People just pop up at you in all different locations and from all different directions. I'll be sitting on my porch out in the country, and I'll see these cars go by, and flash bulbs go off in the windows. I keep thinking that someone's gonna pop up in my bathroom window and take a picture! It really makes you feel... *strange*." He shrugs, and adds wistfully, "It's like you belong to the *world*."

"When you dream about all this happening, the dream's only made of the good stuff," he adds in a moment of

homespun philosophizing. "The dream's not made of nothing bad."

To hear Shelton tell it, he's been the dreamer since day one. Check out the picture of him on the back of the *Loving Proof* album as a scrawny little kid holding a guitar: you get the eerie feeling that he *has* known where he was heading all along! He was born into the sort of slow-paced, idyllic rural life that only survives these days in Norman Rockwell paintings, or in a tiny crossroads Pittsylvania County community like Grit, Virginia, on Route 29, between Lynchburg and Danville, only 35 or 40 miles from the North Carolina border.

Grit—at least to hear Shelton describe it—is the sort of sleepy place which is, at least for the time being, safely out of reach of the leveling effects of suburbanization: the kind of place where dreaming does indeed come easy.

"This is all I've ever wanted to do."

Shelton's parents were—and still are—the sort of hardworking, God-fearing Pentecostals who "are probably in church more than you're at work, ya know... In the Pentecostal Church they sing a lot of music: a lot of foot-stomping music. My daddy always played bass in church and sang in a gospel quartet. I sang in church myself, always. Sunday mornings, Sunday nights. At Wednesday night prayer meetings, and at revivals several nights a week, fifty miles away, in four directions. That's just the way I was brought up. My parents listened to nothing but gospel on the radio. They've only ever listened to country stations to hear me. There was never no rock 'n' roll allowed around our house."

Oddly enough, it was rock 'n' roll rather than country that captured Shelton's attention as a teen-ager. "I really got into rock 'n' roll and soul music of the late 1950's and early 1960's," he recalls. "Though I wouldn't dare play it around Mama and Daddy, ya know. I was big on the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, Herman's Hermits and Creedence Clearwater Revival. I wasn't into no country at all."

It was Shelton's older brother Ronnie who led him into the country fold. "I wouldn't exactly call him a musician," he chuckles. "He learn't five songs and he can play four of 'em now!"

"When Ronnie was thirteen," Ricky continues, "he bought himself a mandolin, and this friend of his named Gerald bought a Gibson guitar. They loved

country and bluegrass. When they got a little older, every Friday and Saturday night Ronnie would go over to Gerald's house, or they'd go down the road to somebody else's house and beat on them guitars, and tell lies, and play the same song for thirty minutes—that sort of thing, ya know. Well, Ronnie wanted me to come along and sing with 'em one night, but I wouldn't, 'cause I was into the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, ya know. Finally, to get me to come along, Ronnie said he would let me drive his car. He had a '64 Fairlane 289 with four speed that would just *git it*. So every Friday or Saturday night there for a long time, I went along, just to drive his car."

As he got older and grew more intent on developing his musical talents, Shelton discovered that even though there were no clubs in his neck of the woods, there were plenty of other outlets for performing there in the Blue Ridge foothills.

"Except for one little place in Lynchburg, there weren't any clubs to play in at all," he recalls nostalgically. "You'd just go over to somebody's house and sit around the kitchen table and drink beer and play. Or maybe you'd catch a bunch of fish and fry 'em up and get some moonshine and liquor and beer, and have a party down behind somebody's barn..."

"I used to play all the time at a place called the Little Red Barn, which was a big part of my life. These three brothers named the Irbys owned this little red barn down on the river road, near Grit, where I was raised. It wasn't no bigger than this hotel room. But every Friday and Saturday night for twenty-five years, people would come from miles around to play music and listen to it. It didn't matter what the weather was like. Sometimes there'd be fifteen guitars, two-three banjos and a fiddle. They did a whole lotta drinkin' up there, and a whole lotta playin'," he recollects fondly. "Sometimes the music was bad, sometimes it was good. But it was always fun."

Beginning on July 4th, 1975, Shelton made his first of many periodic trips to Nashville. There's a certain intensity in the way Shelton remembers exact dates.

"I didn't knock on a lot of publishers' doors or nothin'," he recalls. "I just came down for the chance to sing in clubs with professional bands, ya know. I have a whole stack of cards from people I met who asked me to come by and audition for them. But I didn't pursue it like I should. I was just caught up in the excitement end of it, not the business. Besides, I was young and hot to trot, and I had girl friends back home. I didn't lack the confidence, I just lacked



Jack Dawson's Service Station and Bar where Ricky pumped gas.

the common sense to go along with it!" he laughs. "I was stupid and naive was what I was!"

After a string of day jobs and a self-described "hippie phase," Shelton settled down with his wife Bettye and got more serious about his music. The day jobs included, in Shelton's words, "house painting, pipe-fitting, refinishing cabinets, farm work, selling cars, working in a filling station, managing an appliance store...work was only something I did on the side so I could play music every day." As for the hippie phase, it was short-lived. "I let my hair go, let myself go, I lived on the edge...but not no more," he avows. At that point, he turned to music and a more settled life-style in earnest. "Bettye used to date my best friend, and me and her got together sort of by accident. We been married three years now. She knew the score from the start; she was behind me and my music one hundred percent."

It was by design that Bettye got a job transfer to Nashville in 1984—"December 27th, two days after Christmas." The exact date is once again on the tip of Shelton's tongue. Bettye took on the task of being personnel director for a large corporation and paying the bills, while Ricky did all the cooking, cleaning and yard work around the little house they rented in rural Davidson County, just a couple of miles from Opryland.

During the day, in addition to the housework, Shelton rehearsed, wrote songs and made home-made demos. About ten or eleven o'clock most evenings, he headed out for the clubs—the Nashville Palace (where he got to know Randy Travis who was then still washing dishes and frying catfish), Reel Country and the Stock Yard.

"It worked out real good. I passed my tapes around and made a lot of contacts in the clubs. My mama didn't go for it, though!" he laughs. "Every time she'd call, she'd tell me, 'Son, why don'cha get you a job? Even in a car wash or a filling station or something would be all right, and you could help Bettye pay them bills!'"

After months of hustling his music around the Nashville night scene, Shelton's proverbial "big break" came by way of a connection made by Bettye. At work, she'd become best friends with Linda Thompson, the wife of Jerry Thompson, a veteran columnist for *The Tennessean*, Nashville's morning newspaper. "Jerry didn't know nothing about the music business," says Shelton, "but he knew everybody in it." Linda Thompson came home with Bettye one day and heard Ricky practicing. She asked for a tape, which she took to her husband.

Jerry Thompson was impressed with what he heard, and the two men eventually became good friends. Every time Ricky and Bettye went over to Jerry's and Linda's for a Sunday cook-out, Ricky brought along his guitar. Finally Thompson prevailed upon his friend Rick Blackburn, then head of CBS's Nashville offices, and CBS staff producer Steve Buckingham to come hear Shelton at the Stock Yard. The two CBS honchos went—reluctantly. The upshot was that two weeks later, Shelton was in the studio with Buckingham working on the *Wild-Eyed Dream* album.

Blackburn later recalled that first night at the Stock Yard. Thompson and Shelton were still amazingly naive about how the music business worked. After hearing Shelton sing, Blackburn told them that, yes, he'd like to record Shelton, and they could get going right away...if Blackburn could charge the recording costs to one of Thompson's

credit cards. Thompson was on the verge of handing over his Mastercard when Blackburn told them he was joking!

No one really expected *Wild-Eyed Dream* to take off as it did. On the other hand, no one worked harder than Shelton to make it happen. Between touring and television appearances, he reckons he was home for about 20 days in 1987. That same year, he netted \$2006 on a gross income of almost \$300,000. "I cleared a little more than that this year, though!" he laughs.

Though the money is a little better these days, the work load is as heavy as ever. Just back from an extended swing across Texas and Oklahoma, Shelton would be back out on the road again in a day or two. The previous day he'd taken advantage of an early March snowfall to shoot the cover photos for a Christmas album which he'll begin recording in May. Then in June, he'll return to the studio to put the finishing touches on a third album, already under way, which he hopes will match the charm of the first two.

"People ask me all the time if I get worried about topping the last album," he grouses. "No, I ain't worried. I ain't a worrier to begin with. Steve and I just chose the songs we like the most, and we think radio will like, and that's all we can do.

"I'm really happy that all this happened," Shelton says as he yawns and looks wistfully out the window—almost as if he can feel that four-wheel drive beckoning. "But I know it would be the worst thing in the world for me to worry about the future. I'm just going to give it my best shot. I love music, and if this all ended tomorrow, I'd still be playing somewhere, come next Friday night—even if it was just back in Grit, on one of my friends' front porches. Because I love it that much." ■



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KATHY MATTEA

After some hard years breaking her way into the music business, Kathy Mattea has her head above water...enough to look around a bit...enough to take a vacation. With a CMA Award behind her, and chart-topping singles, her days of demo singing are over.

by Bob Millard



It's late in the afternoon in a modest South Nashville neighborhood of nondescript bungalows the week after the most colorful leaves have fallen. Kathy Mattea's house stands out. The dark red door radiates welcome out of the deep teal blue clapboard siding. If you had been a kid walking down the street in the twilight of Halloween a few days before this interview, you would have looked around at the hypnotizingly similar houses of white asbestos shingles, clapboard and aluminum siding surrounding this dramatic splash of color in the middle of the block and said, "Whoa, I'm going to this house first."

"Hi, come on in—I'm on the phone," Kathy says as she opens the door, a broad smile on her face.

Inside her cozy living room, on the couch with her shoes kicked off, curling her feet up under her calf-length khaki shirt, Kathy Mattea, singer of 1988's CMA Single of the Year "Eighteen Wheels and a Dozen Roses," is trying frantically to get an appointment for a haircut. From the first day she got to Nashville at nineteen, wide-eyed and determined to make good in music, Kathy Mattea has worked hard for everything she has gotten—including some hairdresser's appointments, apparently.

While she is on the phone, she encourages me to peek around the home she shares with husband/songwriter John. The house is small. There are a lot of rooms, but they, too, are small. There are colorful rugs on hardwood floors, hanging ferns, knickknacks and books on every flat surface. The furniture is a mix of casual-modern and country-style American antiques of primitive oak.

Light scents of potpourri and indoor cats waft warmly through the place. It is unlike most other 'star's homes' I've been in. There are no pictures of Kathy Mattea with other famous people, no music business memorabilia in sight. It's a full ten minutes before I spot the glass, bullet-shaped CMA Award placed on a crowded table top.

Then she hangs up the phone.

"She's harder to book than I am," Kathy says, making a face of comic-serious frustration and amazement. "So, my hairdresser drives a Mercedes—okay? I think she makes more money than I do. But you know what? She's worth it."

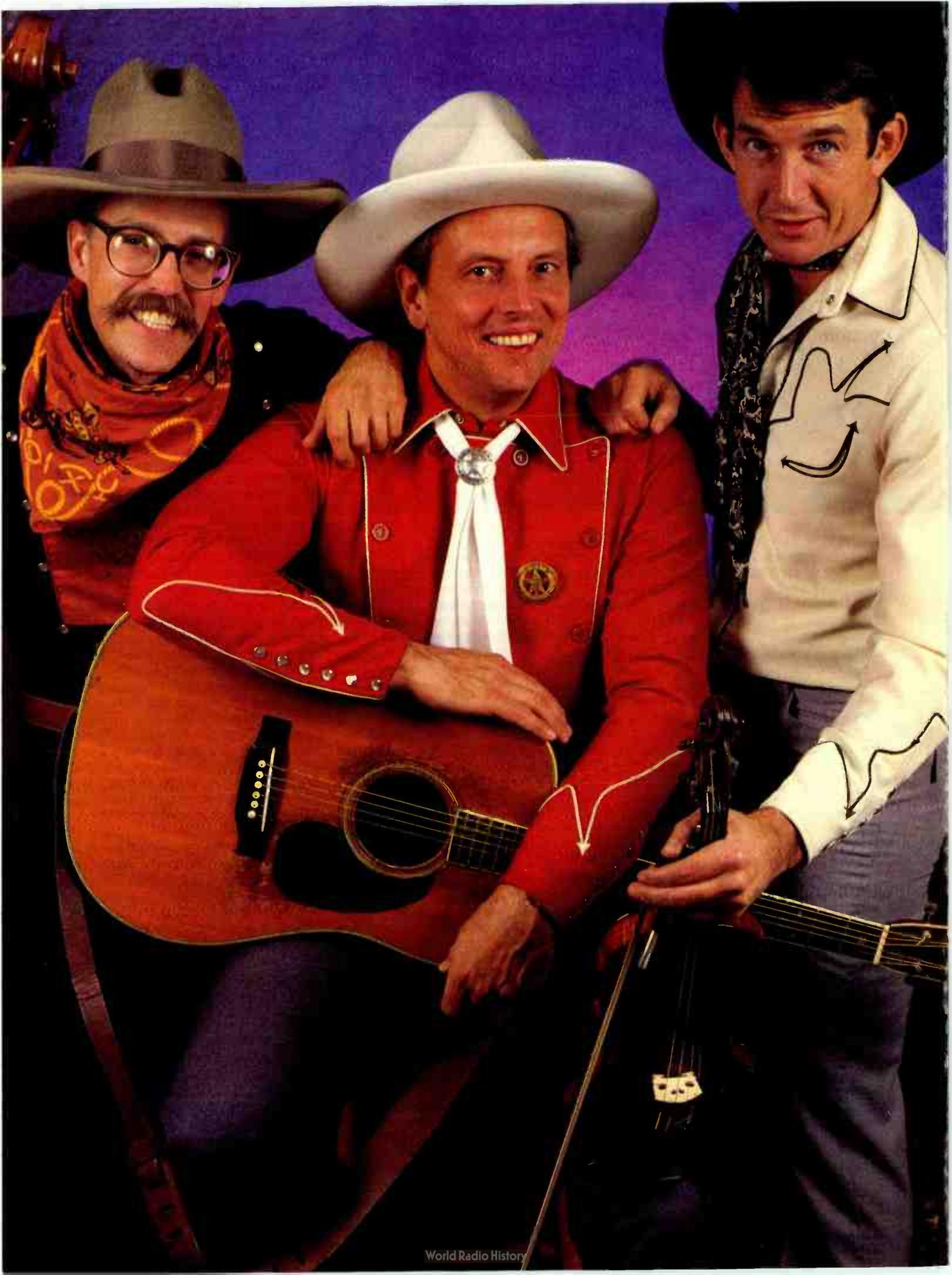
In subtle ways she is even prettier than she was when she landed in Nashville as a fresh-faced hopeful ten years ago. She certainly seems better dressed. "Well, everything I have on I got on sale," she says. "I've tried to learn to look decent and still have an elastic waistband beneath everything, you know, still be comfortable." She shakes her permed tresses and laughs unaffectedly. Self-deprecating humor is one way she has of dealing with pressures accumulating from the rapid changes this past year; a year in which she toured Europe for the very first time, notched her first Number One record, turned a pile of CMA nominations through the years into her first actual award and managed to earn enough money opening shows for George Strait to pay off the debt she'd incurred in the previous four years of career building. Oh, yeah—as if that weren't enough, she got married. Lots of changes in a year.

After years of struggling, she has

arrived. The CMA Award, the chart-topping and Top 10 records, the better bookings all attest to that. A meeting a few days before with her money-managers showed that she was doing well enough to plan the week's ski vacation to Colorado that she and John want to take. It's all small stuff, compared to mega-buck rock stars—or compared to Kenny Rogers, for that matter—but for Kathy it's a point in her career where things are getting easier. A rare day off like this one nowadays sometimes starts her remembering what it was like to be a struggling 'kid' in Nashville, starting with her arrival right after she dropped out of college in 1978.

"I was thinking the other day about when I used to wait tables," Kathy reminisces. "I used to walk home with the cash money in my pocket, count it up at the end of the week and put it in the bank. I always made more money than I needed to live. I was kind of laughing to myself at the difference in my life in just six years. It's really amazing. Luckily, I'm starting to come out ahead this year. I was coming out behind for a while. Everybody, I guess, does in the beginning."

The story has been widely told about how in the late 1970's Kathy Mattea worked for one summer as a tour guide in the Country Music Hall of Fame Museum, but for most of those early, hungry years she was one of the most popular waitresses at T.G.I. Friday's, a popular restaurant in the Vanderbilt University/Music Row area. The waiters and waitresses were encouraged to try and outdo each other by establishing personality-accessories to complement the wait-person uniforms.



RIDERS IN THE SKY

It's a Great Job and Someone Has to Do It

Return with us to the days when cowboys rode the range and sat tall in the saddle. Riders In the Sky takes you there with their music of the Old West and their cowboy tales. Theirs is the cowboy way and they're serious about it.

by Patrick Carr

At the Tennessee Performing Arts Center on a clear cold winter evening, a time warp is beginning. Everything is in place. The radio microphones are ready, and the stage is set.

At first glance the stage's movie-Western theme appears comfortingly familiar to us older folks—it's got the buffalo heads, the horse's skull, the cacti—but when we look a little closer, a certain eccentricity shows itself. The horse's skull is wired together somewhat conspicuously, and beside it stands a placard bearing the legend *De Mortuis Nil Nisi Bonum*: "Nothing good ever comes from dying." The cacti are cheap, cheesy-looking two-dimensional plywood cutouts. Amid an array of disquietingly well-worn props gracing the front of the stage is a Pee Wee Herman doll, wearing a sombrero, mounted on a stuffed armadillo.

Hmm. It would appear that the broadcaster, identified by a hand-painted sign as Mammouth Radio Pictures, might be taking something of a risk with this production, similarly identified as *Riders Radio Theater*. On the other hand, the budget can't be killing them; it probably figures out well below the cost of one day's horse feed over at RKO or MGM, the Singing Cow-

boy industry leaders.

And when the tinseltown cowboys of the *Riders Radio Theater* troop onstage and begin their show, it's apparent that things could be a lot worse than they are. Admittedly, two of these hombres are pretty rank—the weasly-looking little Too Slim character behind a big bass fiddle at stage right comes across as your classic squeaky wheel, while Woody Paul on the fiddle is obviously a few buffalo chips light of a load—but it's okay. The best cowboy heroes always have the weirdest sidekicks, and that's what's happening here; one look at the big guy in the tall white hat at center stage, Ranger Doug, tells you that Mammouth Radio Pictures has a live one on its hands. The serene, golden-throated Ranger Doug is the kind of man they don't make anymore: handsome but not pretty, tough but not mean, kind but not soft, bright but not smart, a man's man and a lady's dream: a straight shooter, plain talker, lifelong friend and protector of women, children and animals. "The Idol of American Youth" in the flesh.

With the help of announcer Texas Bix Binder ("The Voice That Sold a Million Baby Chicks"), another manly sort despite indications that more than a smear of big-city sophistication has

rubbed off on him someplace along the way, Ranger Doug will surely keep his sidekicks in rein and the show on the trail.

He does and he doesn't, as anyone who's been following the progress of *Riders Radio Theater* will gladly tell you; will probably tell you at great length in lurid detail, in fact, for *Riders In the Sky* and their half-hour weekly adventures on some 200 non-commercial radio stations inspire enthusiasm above and beyond the music-fan norm.

You can get really involved with these guys, especially during the suspenseful "Meltdown on the Mesa" portion of the show. In this ongoing saga of the West as it never conceivably could be or could have been, the bumbling best efforts of the virtuous Ranger Doug and his two pards (plus their wizened friend and trail cook Sidemeat, baker of biscuits which are—yes—*The Hardest Substance Known to Man*) seem about evenly matched with the machinations of the evil Slocum and his halfwitted sidekick, Charley.

The questions abound. Some of them are big: Will Slocum and Charley, working for the mysterious Mr. Biggs, succeed in forcing the ranchers, home-

steads and (of course) widows and orphans of Tumbleweed Valley off their land, installing in their place a bargain-basement nuclear reactor surrounded by toxic waste dumps?

Some questions are not so big: Will Ranger Doug's Number Six yodel be powerful enough to pulverize the boulders with which Slocum and Charley have trapped our pals inside an airless cave beneath the mesa, or will he have to resort to his world-shaking Number One yodel, thereby surviving to save Tumbleweed Valley but permanently deafening every man and beast therein?

And, of course, there are tiny, pointless questions. For example, why is Woody Paul the way he is? If it hadn't been for Woody, you see, Ranger Doug wouldn't have had to risk his yodel in the first place, for all the Riders had already been offered their ticket to freedom by a seven-foot genie who appeared, quoting Kahlil Gibran in an accent suspiciously reminiscent of Peter Sellers impersonating a Hindu, when they rubbed an old Spanish coffee pot they'd found in the cave. Ranger Doug and Too Slim made the obvious wish, of course, and found themselves breathing fresh Western air on the open range.

But then came Woody's turn, and Woody was terribly confused. "I don't know what to do," he said. "Oh, oh, oh—I don't know what to wish for. I wish Ranger Doug and Slim were here to help me make up my mind..." Right. Back to square one. Tune in next week for the exciting resolution.

Even more suspenseful questions arise before and after the "Meltdown on the Mesa" segment of the show, when the Riders are just being their singing cowboy professional entertainer selves. Tonight, for instance, a regular commercial sponsor of the show is conspicuous by its absence. Too Slim fills the consequent gap with (appropriately) a pitch for a Mammouth Radio Pictures special offer of reasonably priced audio and video tapes of exciting "Dead Air" from all your favorite radio and TV shows; but why is The Idol of American Youth not speaking tonight for Deadwood Darlene's Prairie Lubricants? Will we hear no more of Darlene's fine products—Udder Butter on a Rope, Saddle Whiz (which ends forever "the humiliation of *Gummy Dismount*" and as of last week was available in both the original lemon and new cheese scents)? Has Darlene moved up in the world, given her business to Autry or Rogers? Is the *Riders Radio Theater* in trouble?

If it is, it wouldn't be the first time; these guys have been low-trailing it for nigh on a decade. That's okay too, though, because they've never compromised themselves for sponsors or anyone else. That, as they'll be the first to

tell you (and tell you again, and again), would have been the easy way, *but it wouldn't have been the cowboy way.*

Ranger Doug, you see, takes his Idol of American Youth legend seriously. Which is not to say that sometimes, like tonight, he doesn't waver.

It was, unsurprisingly, Woody Paul ("the man with an eight-gallon head in a ten-gallon hat") who began it tonight. Woody started talking to the audience like a Major Entertainer—"Thankyou friends, thankyou so much very very much, God bless each and every one of you, thankyou for being here in the studio and thankyou each and every one of you out there in radioland, we love you all all so very very much, you're all beautiful beautiful beautiful" etc., etc.—and that mystified Ranger Doug.

"Wait a minute, Woody. What in the world is all this slimy Mr. Sincere business? This is public radio; people will never believe that stuff!"

"Well, Ranger Doug, that's what all the big name superstar recording artists say. You know, we open for them all the time at the big state fairs and big convention centers all around the country, and they're always doing it."

"I know that, Woody, but so what? What does that mean to us?"

"Heck, Ranger Doug, I figured that if we ever want to have a big hit record on commercial radio and play the big venues across the country instead of the...*(looking around him)* little basement theaters, and make the big money, we're going to have to say what the big name superstar recording artists say."

There's only half a beat of silence before he and Ranger Doug and Too Slim are giving it their all in unison: "God bless you all, thankyou thankyou, you're beautiful beautiful beautiful each and every..."

The Riders are exhausted, as they often are these days—the pressures of writing and recording a weekly radio show while also keeping their act on the road are extreme—but they get themselves at least half way up for a quick group interview.

I try to confine myself to the essentials, beginning with where, how, and why Riders In the Sky came together ten years ago.

Ranger Doug starts it up. "We were all kicking around in various pickup bands, playing the acoustic music underground every town has, including Nashville, and we got together to sing harmony and sing these beautiful cowboy songs that nobody was doing. They were challenging musically, and the songs were appealing because they were about something different from outlaws and falling off of barstools. They were



about the wide open spaces."

Woody: "Right. There was all them outlaws, Willie and Waylon and all, and there wan't any good guys to pin 'em down, put 'em behind bars where they belonged."

Ranger Doug: "The wacky side of our personalities came out the very first show we did. People really laughed. *We* really laughed. So we thought we really ought to go on with this."

Woody: "I didn't have to pay rent where I was, but I did have to eat, and this band helped me do that. I saw a lot of money the first time I met these guys. I was mistaken, but..."

Too Slim: "I did too. I said that early on. I remember the exact words. I called Ranger Doug on the phone, and I said 'America will pay to see this.' Well, actually, he was Deputy Doug in those days."

Ranger Doug: "Patrick knows that. He and I go back a long way, you know. He knew me when I was *Underling Doug*."

It's true. In the old days on the range, when I was the Editor of this magazine, Douglas B. Green was one of the writers on whom I relied. His specialty was his personal passion—historical pieces, particularly about Western and singing cowboy music—and it helped that he was employed at the time by the Country Music Foundation, with the best musical-historical research facility in the world a couple of steps away from his office. But although he had few if any equals as a writer and historian, Doug was always a musician at heart. So while I regretted the disappearance of his copy as he rode off with the Riders, as a friend I was happy for him.

As to the other guys' background, you



"Ten years and 1,873 shows later, it's still challenging and fresh."

and I both have to rely on what they're willing to tell us. Because the Riders prefer to stay in character as far as their public is concerned, it's not much. But it's enough.

Slim: "I'd been a sideman for Dickey Lee when we got together. I hated it. I either had to 'do my own thing', so to speak, or get out of the business. I was doing factory jobs—I was a galvanizer—and I had a singing cowboy storytelling job for kids down at the public library."

Woody: "Well, sir, I've been plying my trade for many years. I've worked for all the greats. But at that particular time, I believe I was working on my own in the back yard, building Volkswagen engines and hiring Ranger Doug on occasion to play the occasional convention or jazz gig. I too wrote cowboy songs. I wrote them because I liked them."

"I understand you have a Ph.D. in physics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Woody," I pipe in. "Did you ever do anything with your formal education?"

Ranger Doug: "That's right. Not many people know this, but many of the great fiddle players—Sam Bush, Johnny Gimble—have doctorates from M.I.T. It's a program they have up there. All the same, I'd say that Riders In the Sky is the most needlessly overeducated band in North America."

The Riders' career has, in fact, been a triumph of avocation over education, with dedication as the cement which held them together. For ten years they've hung in there together, hauling their blend of humor, great old movie-cowboy music, and just as moving original songs through an endless, barely profitable blur of clubs, colleges, state fairs and small auditoriums. They've

made ten albums, eight for the small independent Rounder label and two, the most recent, for MCA. They're members of the Grand Ole Opry. In the last few years they've acquired both professional management (the very well reputed David Skepner) and a sort of non-singing fourth Rider, Texas Bix Binder. Bix hooked up with them when he was producing their *Tumbleweed Theater* TV show for The Nashville Network. His contribution to *Riders Radio Theater* as writer and announcer is great.

Their fortunes, then, have improved very slowly, but very steadily. As Ranger Doug puts it, "Our career, fortunately, has been a gradual building thing all along. It's been no rocket to the top; more like a hot air balloon."

That's an appropriate analogy, for hot air balloons are more fun to ride than rockets. And for Riders In the Sky, the point has always been the journey, not the destination. In our interview it falls to Ranger Doug, the steady one, to hit that nail on the head.

"The band is still just a delight to me," he says. "Ten years and 1,873 shows later, it's still challenging and fresh. You see, what we do is really a great joy. People go through a lot in life, and for them to come for two hours and alternately laugh, crack up and then be really moved by a song like 'Blue Montana Skies' or 'Streets of Laredo' which touch them somewhere and take them away from their mortgage and their marriage and their teenage druggies and whatever else bothers their life...that's a very satisfying job."

So, yes, Ranger Doug loves his work. Like the cowboy heroes who so illuminated his and his sidekicks' childhoods,

he's the guy in the white hat, travelling the nation to bring folks some relief from their troubles, taking them to that mythical place of cool water, clean air and cleaner values, preaching the cowboy way in the age of Rambo, Star Wars, and crack cocaine. It's a wonderful job, and someone's got to do it.

It helps that he and his pards love cowboy music as much as they love the cowboy image. "I still play the Sons of the Pioneers all the time at home, and that music still has so much meaning to me," says The Idol of American Youth. "It still just slays me when I find another Bob Nolan song I haven't heard before. He really was so wonderful; the great poet of the wide open spaces..."

"So, you see, as people we're kind of at one with our music. We're not having to put on an act to promote something that's not really us. We really do love this music. We love the tradition. We love to write in it. We love to dress up and be cowboys; it's like we're six years old again. And I think the audience senses that: both the commitment we have, and the joy we feel doing what we do. That's why we've survived."

Fitting final interview words, those. And so, as the evening fades into night and the Riders' helpers back at the Tumbleweed Valley Orphans' Home soothe their charges to sleep with stirring tales of their benefactors' adventures, we leave Doug and Woody and Slim engrossed in their favorite kind of topic:

Doug: "Well, boys, who *was* the best movie cowboy?"

Slim: "Roy Rogers, or Hoppy."

Woody: "Roy Rogers."

Doug: "You think so? He was kinda wimpy to me. Tex Ritter was my hero. I loved Gene and I loved Roy, but for me Tex was the guy."

Woody: "Nooooooooo. Roy, he had it all. He was the king. He did the best fighting—he looked more real than any of 'em. He had the fastest horse and the prettiest girl. He helped her wash dishes in the kitchen and all. And he had the best clothes."

Doug: "Yup. Great clothes."

Slim: "He had the funniest sidekick, too."

Doug: "Yes, I'd have to grant you that."

Slim: "But what about Hoppy? I liked him as much as I liked Roy."

Woody: "I don't know about Hoppy, Slim. He just didn't have the—well, cool."

Slim: "We're forgetting the Lone Ranger, you know."

Doug: "Yes, the Lone Ranger was a powerful influence."

Slim: "Very strong..."

Ray Price Specials

Check this issue's CMSA Newsletter for an overview of Ray Price's long career in country music, including a classic photo of Ray from the Cherokee Cowboy days with Darrell McCall.

A fair amount of Ray Price material exists in print, though much of it dates from Price's later years. A welcome exception, *The Honky Tonk Years: 1951-1953* (SS-22), includes some of his earliest recordings, along with two unissued numbers. Songs include "Who Stole That Train," "The Way You've Treated Me," "The Road of No Return," "Cold Shoulder," "Wasted Words" and "Slowly Dying." In record or cassette, \$10.98/members' price



\$8.98. In CD, \$18.98/members' price \$16.98.

The 1980 album Ray recorded with Willie Nelson, *San Antonio Rose* (JC-36476), based on an earlier Price album of that same name, captures the essence of Ray's early sound using Willie's band, with Buddy Emmons playing steel guitar and Johnny Gimble fiddling. Willie and Ray take what Rich Kienzle, in his September 1980 record review in *Country Music Magazine* called a "restrained, almost reverent" approach to the material, which includes "Night Life," "Release Me," "San Antonio Rose," "Deep Water" and "Faded Love." Available in CD and cassette only, no records. Cassette price \$5.98/members' price \$3.98. On CD, \$13.98/members' price \$11.98.

Step One, Ray's current label, offers a number of titles for those who want to hear Price as he sounds today. "Pleasant enough," says Rich Kienzle, but don't expect "the intensity of the old stuff, or even the early 1970's material." *Welcome to Ray Price Country* (SOR 0007) includes "Five Fingers," "Lonely Like a Rose," "Just Enough Love" and "Here's to You." Record or cassette, \$8.98/members' price \$6.98. *Portrait of a Singer* (SOR 0009), a double album, features "You're Nobody Till Somebody Loves You," "Sentimen-

tal Journey," "It Had to Be You," "Mona Lisa," "I Can't Give You Anything But Love," "Please Don't Talk About Me When I'm Gone" and more. Record or cassette, \$12.98/members' price \$10.98. On CD, \$17.98/members' price \$15.98.

The Heart of Country Music (SOR 0019), another double album, includes such favorites as "Walking the Floor Over You," "Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain," "Slipping Around," "Today I Started Loving You Again," "There Goes My Everything." Record or cassette, members' price \$10.98. On CD, \$17.98/members' price \$15.98.

An album of sacred songs, *A Revival of Old Time Singing* (SOR 0016), includes "In the Garden," "Precious Memories," "Amazing Grace" and "Rock of Ages." Record or cassette, \$8.98/members' price \$6.98.

Price has three volumes of greatest hits on Step One. Each volume sells separately in record or cassette or fans may purchase a three-volume/two-CD set. *Volume I* (SOR 0012) includes "Crazy Arms," "City Lights," "Heartaches By the Number," "My Shoes Keep Walking Back to You" and more. Record or cassette, \$8.98/members' price \$6.98. *Volume II* features "Danny Boy," "Crazy," "Night Life," "You're the Best Thing That Ever Happened to Me," "I'd Rather Be Sorry" and more. Record or cassette, \$8.98/members' price \$6.98. *Volume III* contains "For the Good Times," "Help Me Make It Through the Night," "It Don't Hurt Me Half as Bad" and more. Record or cassette, \$8.98/members' price \$6.98. On CD, the three-volume/two-CD set, *Vol. I, II, III* (SOR 001234) sells for \$29.98/members' price \$23.98.

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Bought Any Good Records Lately?

1. Did you buy any albums (records, tapes or compact discs) in the last month?

Yes No

How many records? _____ cassettes? _____ CD's _____

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

- a. _____
b. _____
c. _____
d. _____
e. _____

Your Choice for Album and Single of the Month

3. To vote, list the numbers of your top 5 favorites from the Top 25 in this issue.

Singles (list 5 numbers)

Albums (list 5 numbers)

4. Check any one of the following owned by you or anyone in your household:

- Stereo Equipment Any 4-wheel Drive Vehicle
 Compact Disc Player (CD) Outboard Motor & Boat
 Video Cassette Recorder (VCR) Roto-tiller
 Riding Lawn Mower
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5. Check the appropriate amount of the combined annual income of everyone in your household. Be sure to include all salaries, wages, interest, rent and profits from business or farming.

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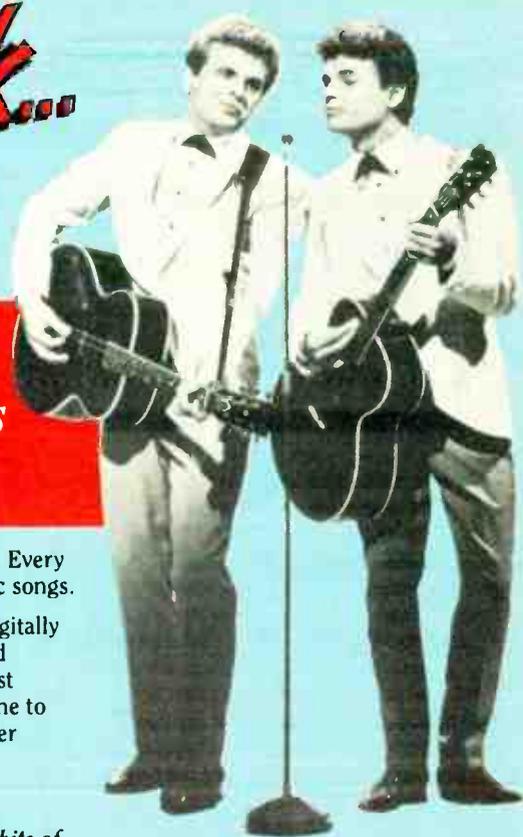
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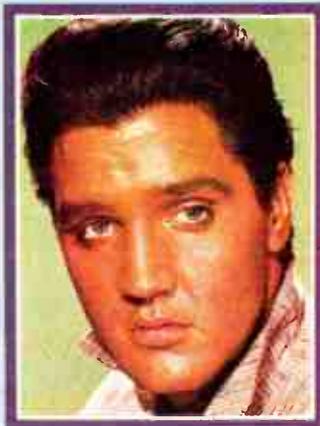
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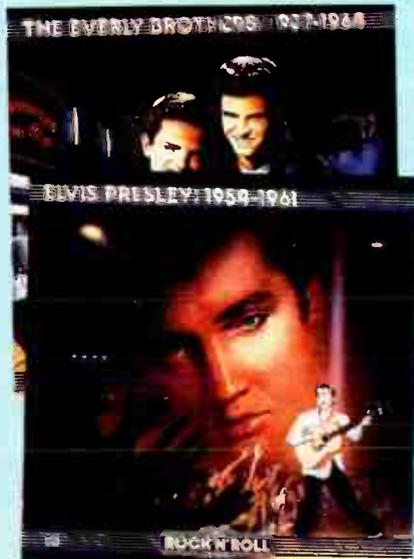
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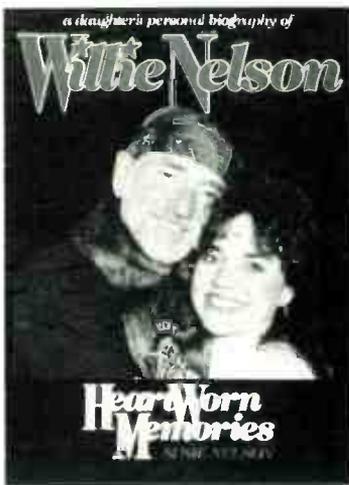
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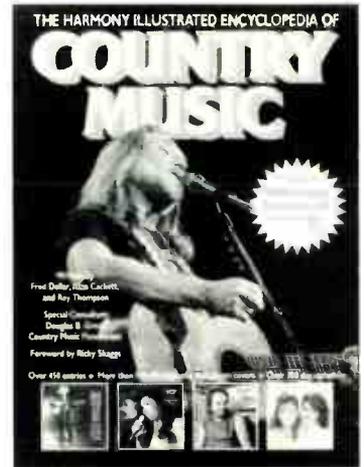
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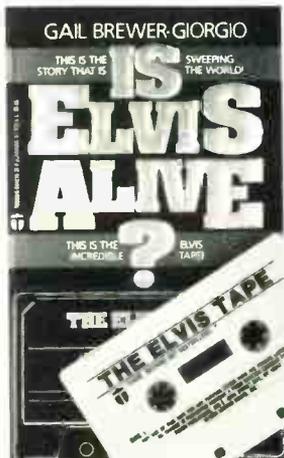
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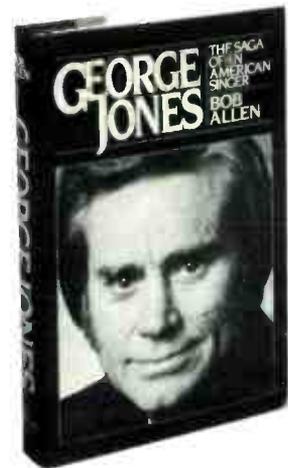
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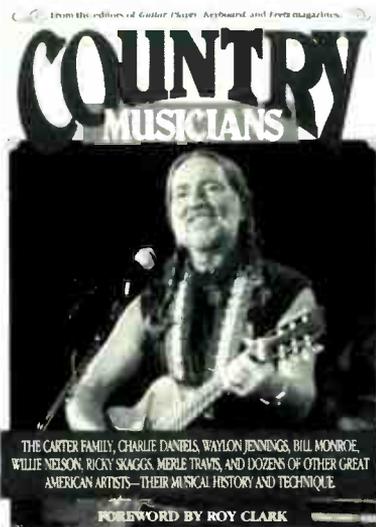
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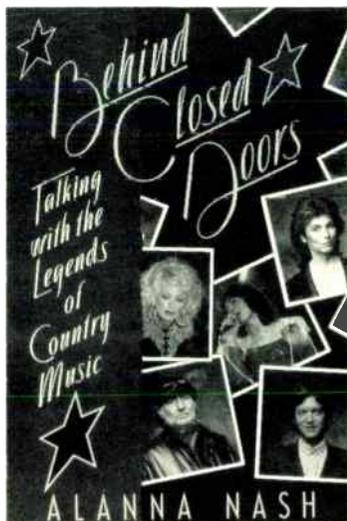
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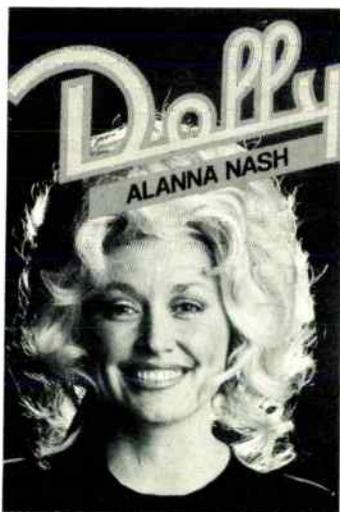
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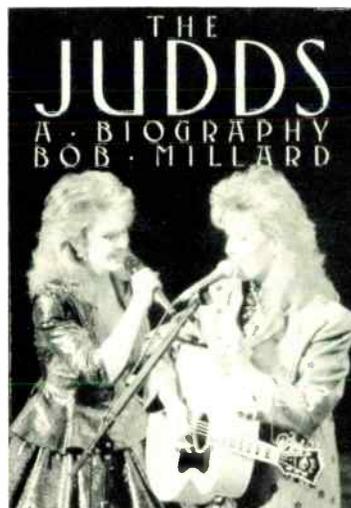


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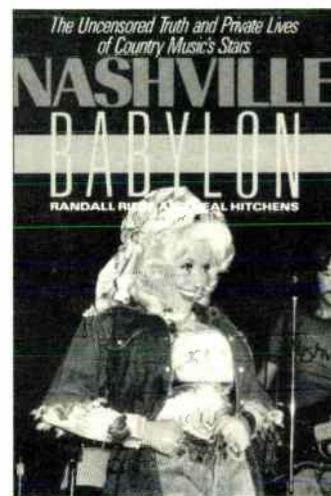
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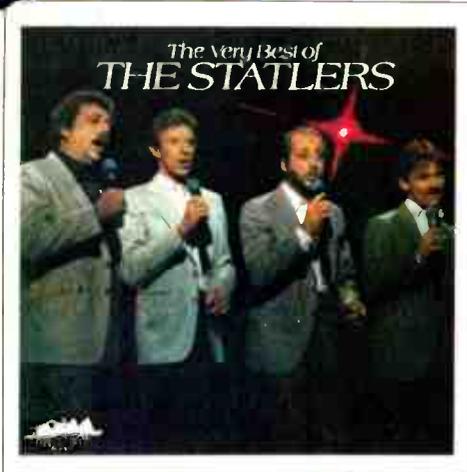
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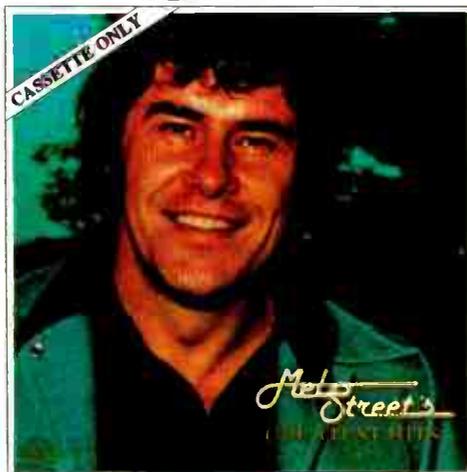
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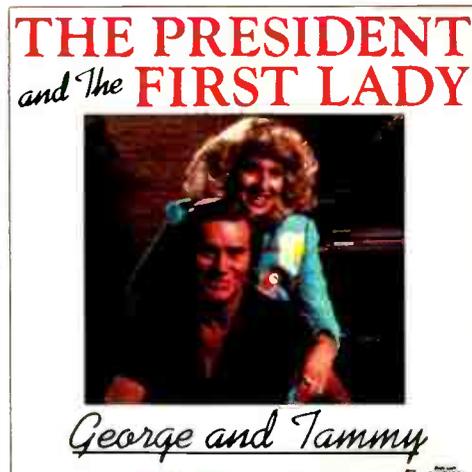
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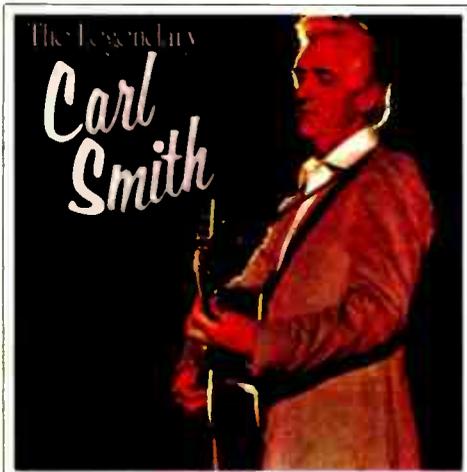
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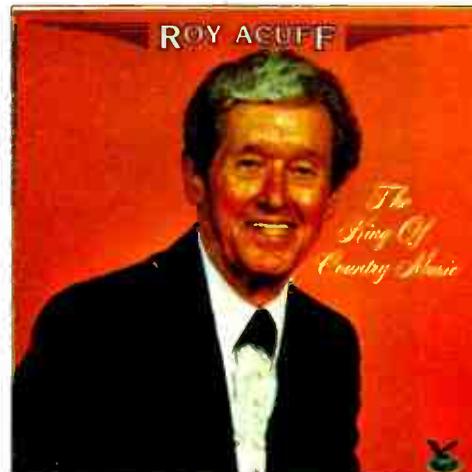
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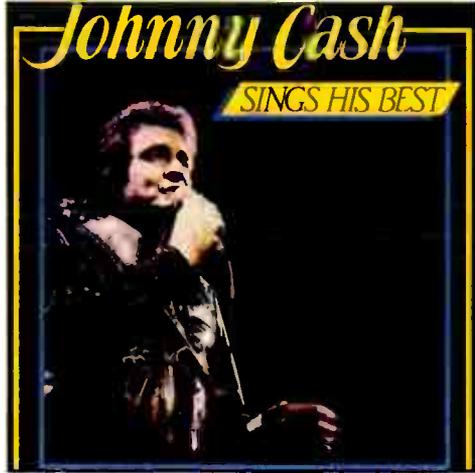
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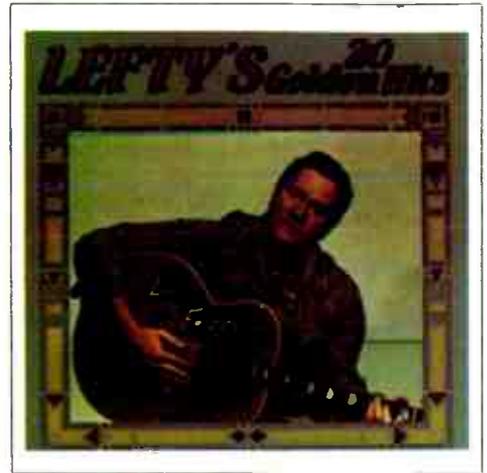
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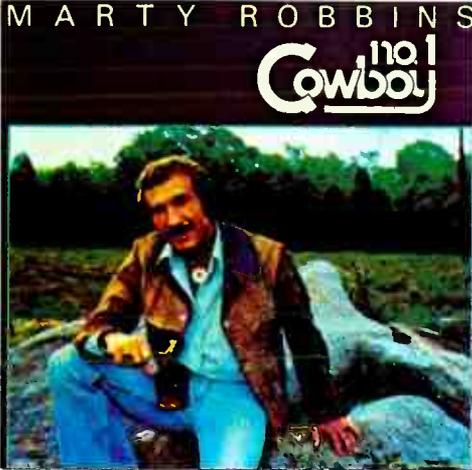
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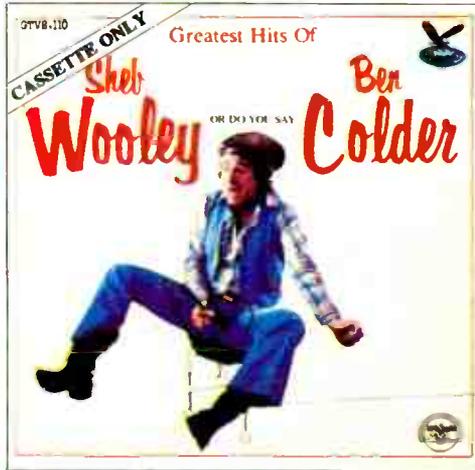
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Record Reviews



he wrote or co-wrote all but two of the songs here—and bandleader capable of moving with effortless and intuitive ease across a wide stylistic and emotional range.

Great Texas honky tonk singers are a dime a dozen in this day and age. Crowley, with finely crafted, inspirationally performed saloon roof-shakers like “Paint the Town and Hang the Moon Tonight” and “Boxcar 109,” proves he can hold his own with the best of them.

But it's Crowley's medium-tempo heart songs and romantic ballads like “Beneath the Texas Moon,” “Right as Rain” and “Beyond the Great Divide” that linger longest in the memory. And it's on these that his haunting voice shines with brightest emotional clarity. These songs also show that Crowley, like most country artists of his generation, has been influenced by voices from all across the AM and FM airwaves—the ghosts of everyone from Jerry Lee Lewis to Joe Ely, from The Eagles to B.J. Thomas, echo through the music on *Beneath the Texas Moon*. Ex-Eagle Timothy Schmidt is, in fact, a

guest vocalist.

Beneath the Texas Moon is a magnificent debut. If Crowley can sustain such an inspired level of musicianship for a few more albums, the sky will surely be the limit for him. —BOB ALLEN

Karen Staley *Wildest Dreams* MCA-42112

Karen Staley is a Music Row songwriter and a former Reba McEntire backup singer, and, boy, does her debut album reflect that. There's plenty of craft here, but it's hard to see just where it's leading.

First of all, she's a textbook songwriter. Her material is well-stocked with strong hooks and the melodies usually sound kinda familiar even when you can't quite place them. A song such as “Looks Like Rain” is pretty catchy even if the lyric and the musical themes are standard stuff; a song like “Now and Then” is forgettable for precisely those reasons. It's hit or miss.

As a singer, Staley's got a husky voice that serves her well on cuts like “So Good To Be in Love” or “Only the Heart,” but she is hardly a distinctive stylist. She hits the notes and that's pretty much that. More of a personality will have to emerge before she becomes one of those artists whose new song you recognize the instant it comes on the radio.

As produced by Jimmy Bowen, *Wildest Dreams* is not wild at all, but casts Karen in a variety of settings. “Tumbleweed” has an easy swing to it and she gives it a loose reading; it also stamps her as a sucker for a happy ending, and her material will undoubtedly be appreciated by those with a similar bent. “Give Me One Good Reason” has a jazzy flavor; “He Thinks He's James Dean” expresses the sentiments of a starry-eyed romanticist; “Only the Heart” is her version of the blues; and the overwrought “Keep Walkin' On” is her entry in the Christian pop sweepstakes.

In short, there's a little bit of everything here, and the jury will probably remain out

for another album or two. There's sufficient promise, especially for listeners who lean towards middle-of-the-road-oriented country, but let's wait a while to see what she does with it.

—JOHN MORTHLAND

Lyle Lovett *Lyle Lovett and His Large Band* MCA-42263

I never was quite as enthused about Lyle Lovett's first two albums as everyone else. They both showed promise, but were flawed enough to leave me doubtful. Folk-country singers have never exactly been my cup of tea, and it took some convincing to make me think Lovett was any different from some of those “Austin Sound” bozos who emerged 14 years ago, got enthusiastic writeups in this and other magazines and then faded into oblivion.

Not this time. In letting his eccentric, quirky vision run wild, he's created what may turn out to be a classic.



Record Reviews

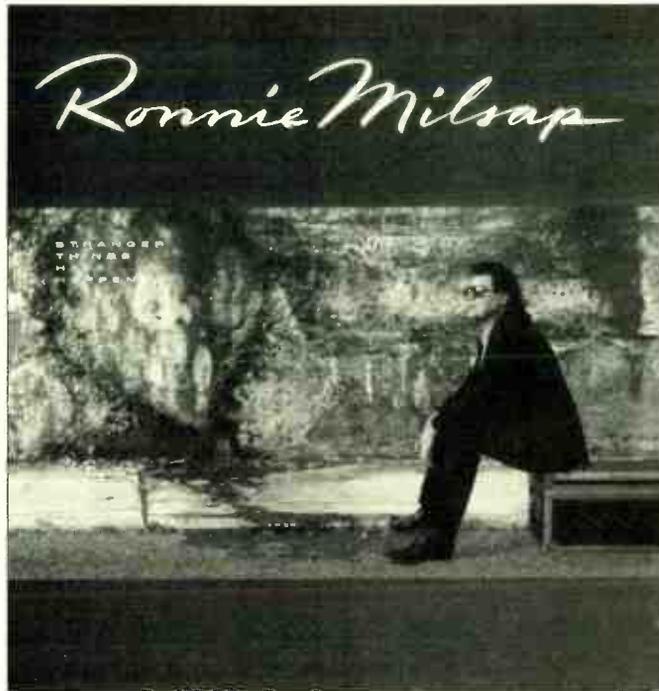
Nothing here is totally as it seems: lyrics, music and even the cover photo are deliberately skewed, yet none of it seems the slightest bit phony. The music's eccentric as well: country, blues, folk and bebop—sometimes all at once.

He's not kidding about the bebop, audaciously kicking off Side One with a churning big-band instrumental version of bop trumpet legend Clifford Brown's "The Blues Walk" and then moving into "Here I Am," a careening, half-spoken, half-sung blues that showcases his witty, stream-of-consciousness lyricism straight out of some 1930s/1980s Fats Waller-Slim Gaillard-Randy Newman time warp, alternating blues verses with spoken lines like,

*If Ford is to Chevrolet
What Dodge is to Chrysler
What Corn Flakes are to
Post Toasties
What the clear blue sky is to
the deep blue sea
What Hank Williams is to
Neil Armstrong
Can you doubt we were made
for each other.*

Those lines set the tone for the remainder of Side One, which consists of a number of 12-bar gems like "Good Intentions," accentuated by Lovett's grainy voice. The after-hours love ballad, "I Know You Know," is arresting, its deep blue textures straight out of a Count Basie-Joe Williams collaboration. Only "What Do You Do/The Glory of Love," combining Lovett's song with a mere fragment of the old pop standard, seems somehow incomplete. What was the point?

Side Two makes a complete—abrupt—transition to honky tonk country and folk. Twin fiddles and steel guitar dominate "I Married Her Just Because She Looks Like You," but contrast with the song's wry sarcasm (with which George Jones could have a field day). Lovett deftly turns Tammy Wynette's 21-year-old plea to women to "Stand By Your Man" into a heartfelt, dis-



tinctly male cry for understanding without once mocking or undermining the spirit of the original.

"Which Way Does That Old Pony Run" takes a cynical view of a ruined relationship, while "Nobody Knows Me" and "If You Were to Wake Up" are the only two straight-ahead love songs on the record. The final number, "Once Is Enough," is loaded with the cynicism that results from one bad relationship too many.

Stretching the barriers the way Bob Wills and Elvis did always keeps things interesting. Lovett's style has depth and promise, in the post-Outlaw era. He's not a poor man's George Strait or Randy Travis, and that's why this album is already on my Top Five of 1989. —RICH KIENZLE

Ronnie Milsap
Stranger Things Have Happened
RCA 9588-1-R

Never in my 14 years with this magazine have I

reviewed a Ronnie Milsap album. Fact is, I've never wanted to. I always considered him a dynamic singer-pianist who wasted his talents on bland music. Sorta reminded me of those Long John Silver seafood ads hyping "fish that doesn't taste fishy." Ronnie was country for people who hated country. I don't eat at Long John Silver's, either.

But times change. Milsap is no longer functioning in a world where everything has to sound like Perry Como or Neil Diamond, where the rock 'n' roll refugees who run much of country radio can force their 1960's and 1970's tastes on everyone. Suddenly it's "in" to make country records again, and this has been described as Milsap's first country album in years.

Is it? Well, nice as it is to hear a vocal chorus and steel guitar filling the spots where the violins and cellos would normally go, don't get excited thinking he's stomping away on a passel of rockers, Randy Travis ballads or George Strait twin-fiddle stompers. Milsap's been locked into country-pop

a long time, and you know what they say about old habits.

The title track, a flat and undistinguished crossover number, does not differ much from Glen Campbell's oldie, "Wichita Lineman." Nothing horrid, but certainly nothing great. However, Milsap moves from the mediocre to the sublime with his hit remake of Ray Price's old hit, "Don't You Ever Get Tired of Hurtin' Me," better than anything he (or Price, for that matter) has done in many moons. The intensity of "I Hate You," "The Girl Who Waits on Tables" or other early Milsap masterpieces is back with a vengeance.

Likewise, the Tex-Mex pop simplicity of "A Woman in Love" balances well with "You Snap Your Fingers," not New Traditional, but Old Traditional. But if things seem to be getting better, wait: these songs are followed by "Starting Today," lightweight filler straight out of his old albums.

"Roll the Dice," with its raw, swampy arrangement, harkens back to Milsap's rhythm-and-blues background, but the rest of the song is empty macho swagger without a bit of grit or muscle. From the silly lead-in (a fake dice game and voices straight out of *Amos 'n' Andy*), it just doesn't ring true. He tries so hard to create a gutbucket feel that the whole thing winds up sounding as spontaneous as a movie soundtrack.

The bluesy ballad "I Feel Like I'm Cheatin' On You" unleashes Ronnie more successfully, the sparse arrangement giving his voice the room it needs. Ditto "I Never Expected to See You," a song of memories, hope and anticipation that really conjures up the old Milsap. Unfortunately, "Houston Solution" is little more than a string of clichés, no way to end the record.

Maybe I expected too much. Granted, there's every

and, y'know, all that other stuff."

Okay. No avoiding it now. I take the plunge, and for the next hour or so I get our story of the "other stuff": how John Anderson, one of the distinctly more exciting songwriters and record-makers of the early 1980's, an artist who had just as much or more creative fire and commercial appeal as any of the competition, comes to find himself trying to make what amounts to a career comeback in 1989.

Perhaps the most essential question of the story is stated by John himself as a cool breeze blows softly across the pastoral beauty before us. "Now and again when I'm out here, or down in the woods with my dogs or whatever, it just kind of pops into my mind: Who did I tick off, and how did I do it?"

I am, I must confess, weary of this kind of story. A few too many of my recent days have been spent grappling in one way or another with the issue it raises: why people who make the kind of country music which excites me have such a hard time with the business end of Nashville.

In my job I seem to have been interviewing a large number of such people—Steve Earle, Dwight Yoakam, Marty Stuart, Gary Stewart, Johnny and Rosanne Cash, Emmylou Harris, John Anderson—while at home the results of the problem have been frustrating me personally. I've been trying to put together a personal-listening ninety-minute tape of really great country stuff from the albums that have come through my door recently (a pleasant little habit of mine), and I haven't been able to; there simply haven't been enough new tracks that make the cut. There's been plenty of nice stuff, and a fair amount of pretty good stuff, but I haven't been able to find the requisite couple of dozen examples for *great* stuff, songs and performances to give a lifetime of pleasure, among all the albums which have come out of Nashville in the last four months.

And y'know, I've been having this problem for quite a while now. Since the beginning of this decade, the music which really lights my fires—rock-abilies-abilly-country-country, real roots music with a real creative edge of more or less any kind—has been either absent or non-Nashvillian. If it's come at all, it's come from the California branches of the big-time record companies or from one of the small, independent labels operating all over the nation.

I suspect that this has been happening for two reasons. Firstly, the big Nashville companies have been concentrating almost exclusively on producing music aimed at a suburban market; if a record isn't playable on the 150 major-

market (metropolitan) radio stations whose reports to *Billboard Magazine* create the country charts, it's not worth spending good money on. So any kind of nonsuburban music and nonsuburban fan—anything and anybody really hardcore in one way or another—has been out of mind and out of luck on Music Row. This issue gets very complicated when you try to figure out why those 150 radio stations have ended up controlling Nashville's output, how the system could be changed, and why it hasn't been.

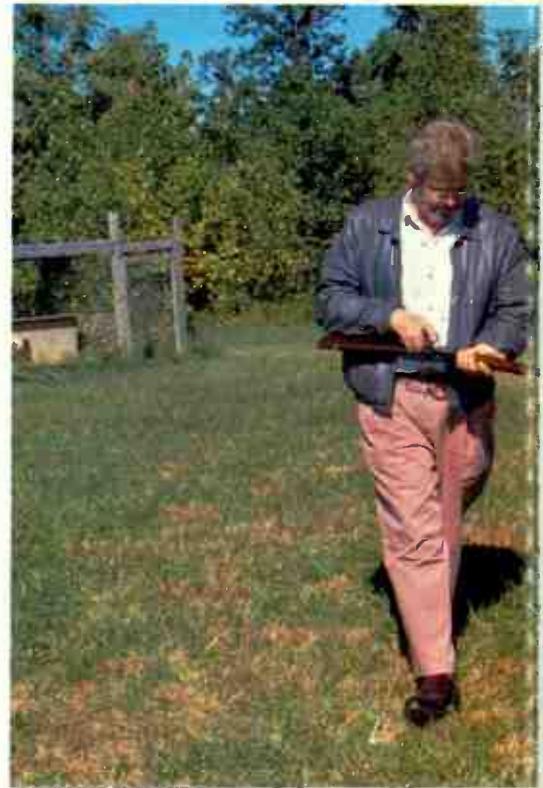
The second reason, to my mind, unfortunately, is very simple. By and large, Nashville record company executives really like to be bosses. They really don't like artists who don't do what they're told. They had a very hard time of it in the 1970's, when Waylon and Willie and the boys and girls got some creative control away from them, so once the "outlaw" wave had crested commercially, they saw to it that such anarchy stopped. In the 1980's they've been in charge again, and what they've been telling "their" artists to do is make music that makes it on those major-market radio stations, or go do something else somewhere else.

The result is that there are no more sharp edges in mainstream Nashville music, or at least no new ones; virtually all the new artists contracted and promoted with any real effort by Nashville record companies in the past decade have been *a)* well behaved towards the bosses, and *b)* unlikely to offend the consumers in a "soft" marketplace with music that is too hard in any way.

Now, I hate all this. I hate having to think it, I hate having to write it. Life's too short to keep bitching about things I can't change, and moreover I keep thinking that I may have it all wrong. Maybe something else, or all sorts of somethings, has been going on in the business and in the careers of the artists capable of producing hard-edge music.

As John Anderson tells me his story, that does appear to be the case. The first part of his chronicle is more about his own professional naivete, and some badly timed accidents, than anything else.

The worst accident happened at the worst possible time: just as "Swingin'" was becoming his first chart-topping single in 1983. He had done what one does to get to that point—served his time in the honky tonks and songwriting rooms, honed his road show and writing craft, connected with a powerful major-league record company (Warner Brothers), made three solidly commercial albums and worked some singles respectably far up the charts—and here was the reward, one great big



national radio-rotation Number One hit from album number four. Things were just where they should have been for a 27-year-old up-and-comer like him.

Right then, though, right out of the blue, his professional world shifted. Warner Brothers' command center in



"I just had to get away from the traffic, the stress, and, y'know, all that other stuff."

Los Angeles embarked on a major re-vamping of its country operation, and virtually the entire staff of its Nashville office, from boss Frank Jones on down, were "let go."

That, says John, is where his professional naivete came into play. "During

that time the band and I were out on the road—in those days we were doing 220 dates a year, mostly honky tonks, which is what we'd been doing for years—and frankly, we just didn't realize what a big record 'Swingin' was. It didn't dawn on us that we should quit what we were

doing and change the way we did things; go for bigger dates, pay attention to what was going on with the record company, all that stuff."

And really, it was the very worst of times to be thinking that everything was just fine, that his ducks were in a row and his record company was doing its thing, because things weren't fine at all. First he started hearing from the new radio promotion people that radio wasn't perceiving the all-important new hit singles in his work. Then, belatedly, he started hearing that this might have been the case because the promo people themselves had a low opinion of his music. Then he started hearing that their bosses felt likewise. Finally he discovered that his own manager agreed with them.

By the time all this information reached him, it was too late. The fire which had started burning with "Swingin'" had died for lack of stoking, and he had become that most untouchable of all untouchables, a one-hit wonder.

Quite naturally he reacted to this situation with some annoyance; he remembers feeling that the people who should have been his allies had let him down rather badly, if only by failing to communicate their misgivings about his music quickly and directly to him, in time for something to be done.

He made his feelings known, and thus he moved into an even more thoroughly shunned class of entertainer, the artist who is "hard to work with." It was under the dark cloud of this characterization that he made two more albums for Warner Brothers, neither of which rendered significant radio hits, before taking his business elsewhere.

So far in John's story, then, what we seem to have are some unfortunate coincidences and run-of-the-mill screwups, the sort of music business bad thing that can happen to a good but unsavvy young man anytime, anyplace; an non-Nashville-specific set of circumstances, in other words.

The story, however, is not complete. Some fine, uniquely modern-Nashvillian details are missing. There is for instance a point that John makes: that *All the People Are Talking*, one of his albums which was perceived as a failure—a career setback because it didn't yield big radio singles—sold fully 300,000 copies.

Now, I don't know what planet *you're* from, but most Earthlings of my acquaintance would conclude that any system which views sales of 300,000 albums without hit singles as a failure, while interpreting success as an album which contains one or two big radio hits but may or may not sell more than 50,000 units in the stores (a not infre-

quent occurrence in the country music business), should be abandoned, forever, this instant. Any executive who believes in it should either be sentenced to five years working as Jerry Lee Lewis' piano tuner, or (this being a kinder, gentler nation) given \$500,000 a year for the rest of his life on condition that he never work in the music business again.

There is another detail of John's "failure" which bears some scrutiny. It's about his image: the non-designer blue jean outfits, the long natural hair, the untrimmed beard. As John tells it, he just kept hearing about that from the folks who mattered as they tried to, ah, set his, ah, failing career on the, ah, right track.

"John, you just look so *plain*," they'd say. "Get yourself some rhinestones, John, get your hair styled; at least get your hair *cut!* Modern country stars just don't look like you do."

John, probably quite correctly, figures that this was an important issue, because, "Well, I wouldn't do anything along those lines, and so they went and got artists who would. They found guys that *would* cut their hair, and wear rhinestones, and change their names, and they figured that was just fine because sure enough, those guys were 'easier to work with'. And those were the guys they spent their money on. Right now they're at the top of the charts, and I'm working 300-seaters."

Okay. Let's try to capture the logic here.

You're the head of a major Nashville record label, okay? You've got this artist who's screwing up. He sings real good and works hard enough, but he's selling far too many records to the wrong people, a bunch of backward hard-core shitkickers and too-sophisticated college graduates who don't listen to the right kind of radio station.

That's something you just can't have happening, so you call him into your office and tell him that, and he looks at you kind of strangely and mumbles some sort of irrelevant stuff about how much money he's making for you and who cares where it's coming from? Maybe he even gets belligerent.

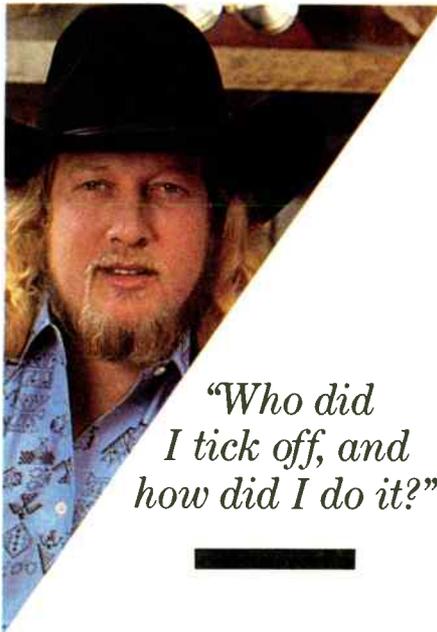
Whoa, you think, Bad news! This boy's a troublemaker!

Being a diplomatic sort, you back off, try another tack. *Son, you tell him, you look all wrong for the right kind of people. Might I suggest some minor alterations? Maybe if we start there, we can get this thing turned around before it's too late.*

But now you've really lost him; he's gone off the deep end, just doesn't see the point at all. He's obviously highly unstable, maybe even dangerous.

What do you do? Well there's only one thing you *can* do: Kiss this guy off, take the loss of your investment like a man, and find new guys who'll prove they aren't crazy by agreeing with your logic.

You do that, and it all works out fine. The new guys sound like the old guy well enough, but because they look right and do what you tell 'em, pretty soon they're selling about as many records as the crazy guy did, but *Hallelujah! They're selling them to the right kind of*



"Who did I tick off, and how did I do it?"

people! And (here's the beauty of it), all it cost was a few million bucks' worth of contract fees and promo money! So mission accomplished: You've done your job superbly, right?

Right. And I personally would like to express my deep appreciation for all that extra investment and effort. It's just great that for the past few years I've been able to listen to the big country radio station in my personal major-metropolitan market, and hear at least half a dozen guys singing John Anderson's kind of music almost as well as he does, without actually hearing John Anderson himself. I sleep a lot better knowing that Music Row has been protecting me from scruffy dressers and singers who do not know their place.

John was fortunate. After leaving Warner Brothers, he found a home at MCA Records and people willing to stick with him through the rebuilding of his compromised career. As he and I talk, his second MCA album, *John Anderson 10*, has just been released.

John likes the album, and so do I. It has the John Anderson touch that's been

there all along, a supple blend of road-house rockabilly blues power and crystalline country traditionalism, and it's given me personally an exceptionally high yield: at least three and perhaps four tracks for the all-time-keeper tape I'm still trying to make. I don't think I'd be exaggerating to say that in the context of its competition, it's clearly outstanding.

So okay, the music's definitely there, which is the main thing, and therefore it's not surprising that John is in pretty good personal shape. He's turned the life corner of 30 in the healthy direction ("I've quit going through a week and forgetting half of it; I'm into having a good family life, staying fit, and enjoying myself every day"), he and his wife Janie seem to like each other, and his sense of humor is in order. He seems like a pretty well-balanced individual and a pretty nice guy.

My visit to the Anderson household is therefore a pleasant affair. After the interview Janie cooks us good burgers for lunch, and then John and I play for a while; go say howdy to his dogs, check out the rose garden he maintains with loving care, expend a little .22 Magnum ammo into the treeline of his 135 acres, talk about mutual friends and the home he left and I've found in Florida. When it's time for the drive back to Nashville, then, I depart with some reluctance.

As I drive, I'm aware of two main impressions. One is that John seems to have survived the damage to his career in better personal and professional shape than a lot of other victims of Nashville's suburban-music imperative. He's not as bitter as he might be, he's done a very good job of keeping his music together despite it all, and he's still a significant player in the country music game.

My other notion is less pleasant. It's that basically, nothing in the game has changed. John's MCA environment may be more supportive than his situation at Warner Brothers after that staff change, but his future in the big leagues still hinges on a single question: will he or will he not achieve hits in the major-metropolitan radio market? And that is still the wrong question for Music Row to be asking about John Anderson and many of its other best and brightest hopes.

I wonder, as I've wondered for some twenty years, why the people who run the Nashville record companies don't realize that their choice isn't either/or—that they can produce and sell music for country-politans one way, and music for hillbilly/rockabilly/roots-music lovers another, thereby achieving true happiness by doubling their money (and doubling our fun). Somehow the penny just never drops, does it? ■

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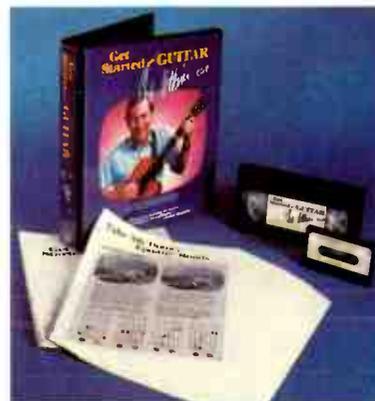
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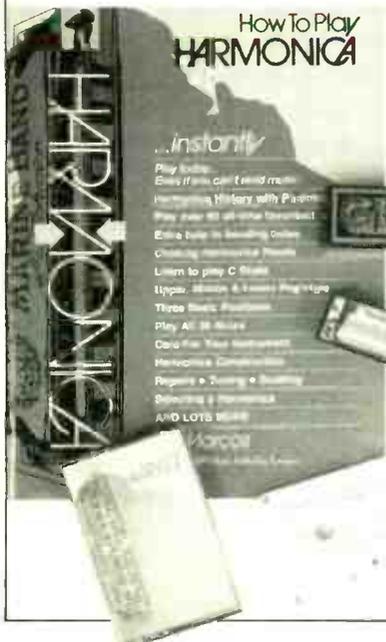
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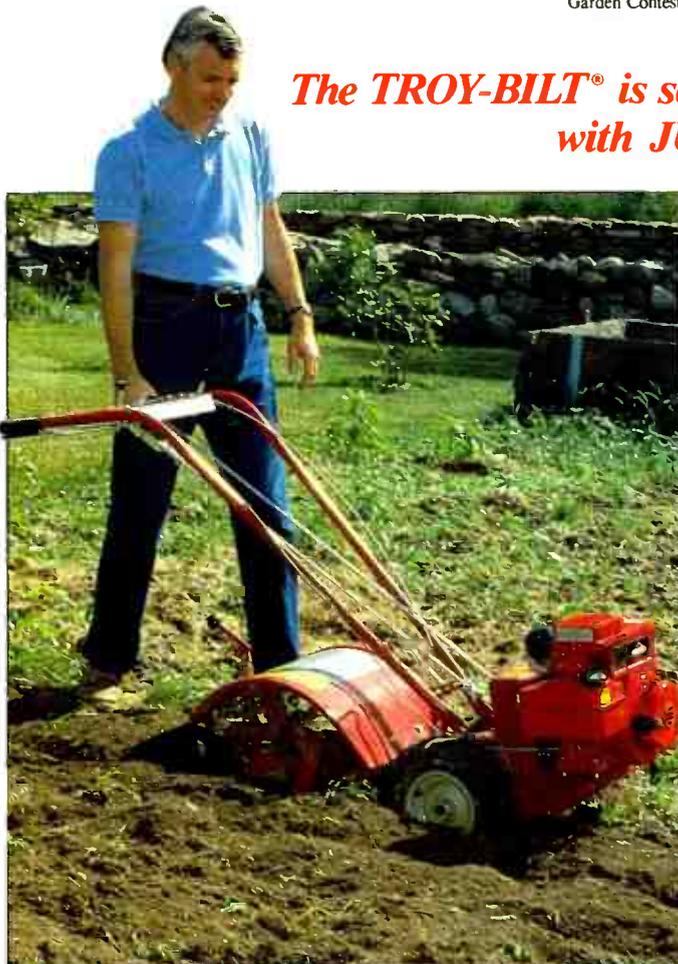


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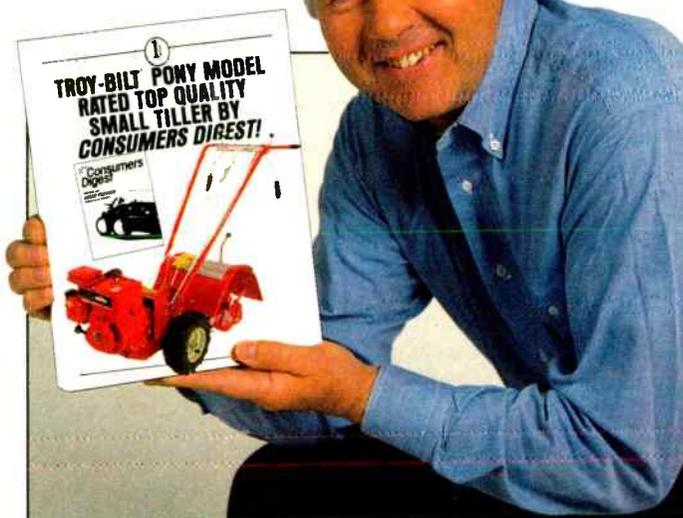
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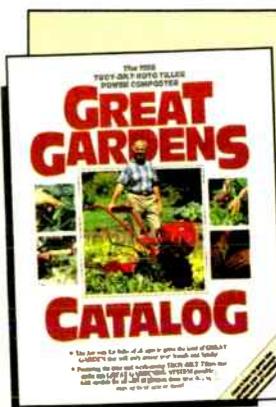
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MICKEY GILLEY

Chin Up and Still Swinging

Mickey Gilley survived the highs of the Urban Cowboy craze—and the lows of its aftermath. Now he's out with a new album, a new independence and high hopes for the future.

by John Morthland

And how did you spend *your* summer of 1988? For Mickey Gilley it was (with apologies to Dickens) the best of times and it was the worst of times. It was the tenth anniversary of the original "Urban Cowboy" article in *Esquire Magazine* that set Gilley up for the bigtime, the article that was made into a John Travolta movie which took country music places it had never been before and made Gilley's name a household word. But as the summer of '88 began, Gilley was preparing—albeit with great optimism—to cut a new album (since released as *Chasing Rainbows*) for a new Nashville independent label, which is always a risky move. Meanwhile, he was working a lot fewer road dates, though he was making more money by doing so. And most significantly, he was going to court to break up his longstanding partnership with Sherwood Cryer, his manager and the co-owner of Gilley Enterprises, including the legendary Gilley's honky tonk in the Houston suburb of Pasadena.

In July Gilley won a \$17 million judgment on that one. But before it was resolved, the lawsuit took its toll on Mickey. When I visited him at his home/office complex scant blocks from the club, he spoke of Cryer in terms that would invite definite libel action if they were to be printed. During a casual lunch conversation with friends from outside the music biz, he repeatedly changed the subject to refer to the suit; he prefaced all remarks about his plans—even simple plans, like when he might

take a golf vacation—with "When this suit is over..." and "If I win this suit..." He could talk of little else.

Clearly, this was more than a situation in which two show-biz figures who had banded together out of financial expediency and were now having a falling-out; each man had a lot of emotion invested in the other. It was Sherwood, after all, who had launched a club in 1971



The good old days—when Sherwood Cryer, Mickey Gilley and manager Sandy Brokaw enjoyed the success of Gilley's.

named after the local journeyman piano player and built it into the biggest and most notorious honky tonk in the world, with Gilley fronting the house band. It was Sherwood who rode herd on Mickey's recording career after the freak 1974 hit "Room Full of Roses," Sherwood who had presided over the glory days of Gilley's-the-club and Gilley-the-artist during the Urban Cowboy boom. More than once, Gilley had likened Sherwood to a father. So the split, when it came, was a bitter one, a

very bitter one.

According to Mickey, the trouble began "back in '83. I started getting a lot of complaints on the road about the club. Actually it started in '82, but I was working so hard I didn't pay any attention; '83-'84 it was coming to a head. People complained about how they were treated, how the drinks were mixed, how the beer wasn't cold, the prices were exorbitant, the lighting system, the sound system, the dance floor, the ladies restroom, the people were



rude, the place was filthy, the parking lot was notorious for potholes, you name it. Everything you could think of. I told Sherwood, 'You got a K-Mart operation at 7-Eleven prices.'"

Because the club bore Mickey's name, he says he felt responsible even though he spent most of his time on the road and had nothing to do with the day-to-day operations of Gilley's. This had always been true: the two men sealed their initial deal with a handshake and the understanding that Mickey would take care of the music and Sherwood would take care of the business and they'd split everything 50-50 and that would be that.

Still, Mickey figured, all these complaints were bad for business—at the club, on the road, in the record stores, everywhere. So he went to Sherwood with the notion that the place had to be fixed up. And Sherwood, according to Mickey, said in effect that he didn't tell Mickey how to sing so Mickey shouldn't tell him how to do business. And there was little Mickey could do because, irony of ironies, he didn't, in this case, even own rights to his own name! Sherwood had copyrighted the Gilley's logo that adorns the club and the various other souvenirs and businesses the two men shared.

At the root of the argument, it

appears, was a dispute over what the joint was—or rather, what it had become in the wake of the Urban Cowboy movement. To Sherwood, it was the same old Texas honky tonk and watering hole for blue-collar locals; they didn't mind a little dirt or bad manners and besides, the Texas economy was way down, business was way off, and there wasn't money to fix the place up. But to Mickey, Gilley's had become a tourist attraction that drew most of its business from visitors to the area, people who had more money to spend and expected something a little tonier in return.

The argument quickly spread into all areas of their relationship. Sherwood

said he would keep Gilley's name on the club without making improvements, and would also keep it on the souvenir store in Nashville, which Mickey considered a blight on Music Row. Gilley contended that Sherwood had never paid him his half of the revenues from the club, beyond the \$1,000-a-week salary he'd drawn for serving as house band (he also said, rather naively, that until recently this hadn't bothered him because he was content with just the amount of money he was making on the road). Gilley claimed that Sherwood held back on the split of revenues from food, drinks, mechanical bulls, video games, pool tables and the like. The recording studio was bringing in more money he was being shut out of, he said, and most importantly of all, Sherwood eventually took over (from Mickey's wife Vivian) the souvenir business, including t-shirts and the like, which was actually the most lucrative aspect of the operation. Gilley also claimed that Sherwood's management contract on him had run out and Sherwood had not picked up the option.

Sherwood countered that the management contract was still binding, and that he had plowed his money back into the club while Mickey was still living high on the hog from concert fees he didn't split with his manager. On July 12, following the unanimous verdict of a Houston jury in favor of Gilley, State District Judge David West awarded the singer \$8 million in actual damages caused by Cryer and Gerard Willrich, the accountant both men shared. West further ruled that Mickey should receive \$8 million from Cryer and \$1 million from Willrich in punitive damages because the pair willfully or recklessly breached their financial duties to Gilley. And the judge terminated any consent Gilley had given Cryer to use the singer's name commercially. For Gilley, it amounted to complete vindication. Basically, the judge and jury said, the manager had been taking the star to the cleaners for years and would now have to make restitution.

The award, as more than one Houston wag pointed out, amounted to a lot of bumper stickers.

But it's not over 'til it's over, as yet another wag noted in yet another context, and this one is not over yet. The judge's ruling to terminate any consent Gilley might have given for Sherwood to use his name commercially means that the club name will have to be changed—but because the decision is on appeal, Sherwood retains the right for now. The club near Gilley's home and office still bears his name even though, as he says, "It makes me sick to my stomach every time I drive past and see it there."

Three months after the decision, in

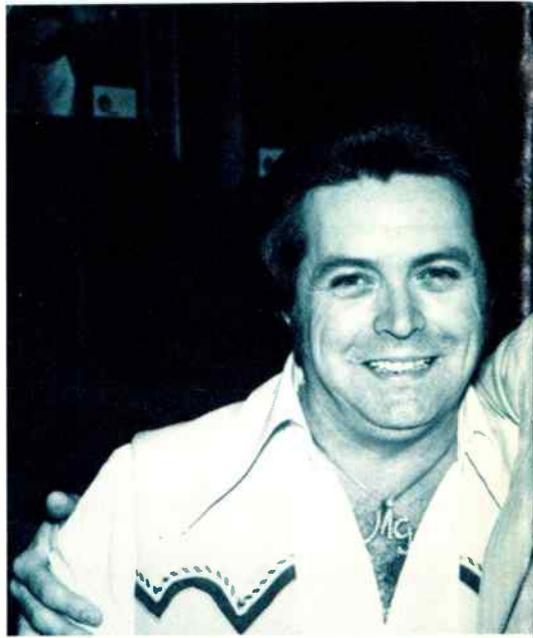
fact, Gilley was still less disturbed by the fact that his businesses were in receivership until the mess could be sorted out than he was about the fact that his name might remain on the club for some time. "I was elated, thrilled to death, jumping up and down at the judge's decision," he declared. "But I feel that the issue of the bankruptcy is completely separate from the issue of the club's name, and I'm distraught that the judge has kept them together for the appeal."

Still, life goes on, and for Mickey Gilley there's plenty of change in the air, as there has been on a regular basis for the last decade, ever since that fateful *Esquire* article. Last May, as he waited impatiently through numerous trial postponements, he was anxious to talk about that, too. Many of the fruits of the Urban Cowboy phase were in evidence. The office we sat in was a converted house on 20 acres of land that it shared with two other houses (one for Gilley's family, one for his mother-in-law), a well-stocked fishing pond and a few putting greens. Gilley was dressed casually in gray shorts and a polo shirt, but he was all business as he sat at his desk in a room decorated mainly with photos of the star with various other stars, including popcorn magnate Orville Redenbacher, Glen Campbell, then-President Reagan and then-veep Bush, Patti Page, Vanna White, Lee Majors, Brenda Lee, Morgan Fairchild, Kenny Rogers and many others.

"The one thing that now stands out most about Urban Cowboy days," he was saying, "is the way the dress codes and everything changed after that movie hit. And how country music was accepted more widely across the board. People didn't look down their nose anymore because you liked country music."

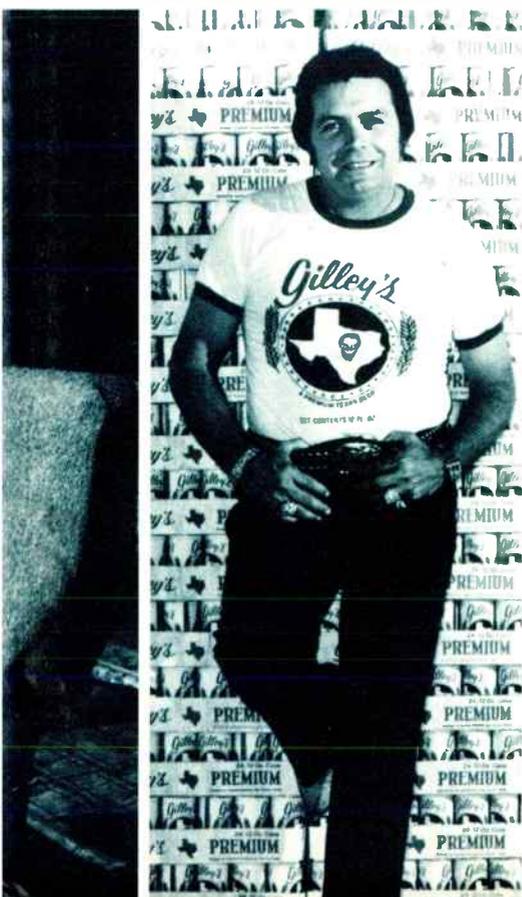
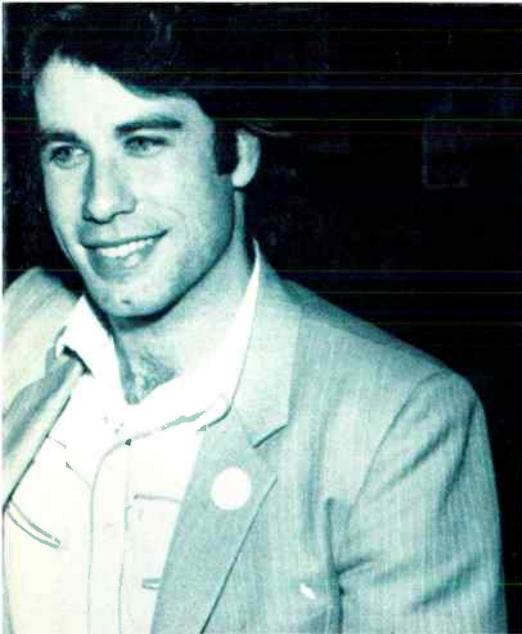
As for Mickey Gilley himself, well, "I was just a honky tonk bluesy piano player at that time, working for \$3500 to \$5000 a night with a little country band and one bus on the road. Played every little venue that'd have us. *Urban Cowboy* enlarged me to \$15,000 to \$25,000 a night. Johnnie Lee (Mickey's warmup act) had 'Looking for Love' and I had 'Stand by Me' and we were two of the hottest acts in the business. People were bidding for us, and I'd never had that happen to me before. I remember talking to acts when they came into Gilley's who said they didn't play clubs anymore and I said, 'What do you mean you don't play clubs?'—I thought that was the only thing *anyone* played! But when we got hot there was not a club big enough to book us. We couldn't play clubs."

Needless to say, this was heady stuff for a man who had made his first record in 1958 and had gone until 1974 without a



A whole new world opened up to Mickey Gilley during the Urban Cowboy days, including hobnobbing with movie stars like John Travolta, riding mechanical bulls and even marketing his own brand of beer.





bona fide hit single. When Gilley entered into his partnership with Sherwood to open the club, his plan had been to give up records *and* the road, to just front the house band at the club, take care of his local enterprises like the TV show, and relax, enjoy life on a modest level. Yes, he says, you bet stardom on an Urban Cowboy level was fun at first. The money didn't hurt, either. But things started going wrong, too. If his road money, the one source of revenue he had complete control over, was hitting \$3 million a year, where was it all going? Well, it was going towards some pretty serious partying, for one thing, but even that was small pickings next to the real drain: at his 1980-83 peak, Mickey was traveling in a private plane, while also paying the tab on two buses, an 18-wheeler and 24 people on the road.

As much as he enjoyed his fame at first, even that got out of hand, and Mickey is not the kind of person who feels comfortable when things are out of hand, out of his control. "You never had time to go out and hit a golf ball and say 'Look, I'm gonna forget about this for a while,' you know," he recalls. "First thing you know your attitude starts to change and people say, 'Hey, what happened to *that* guy?' you know? But I can guarantee you that if you have a guy start walking down the street and people start picking and pulling at him every step of the way and somebody's saying 'Hey, do this and that,' well, he's gonna have a different attitude than he started with by the time he gets to the third block. And that's what happened. At one point, me and Johnny were just screaming at each other; it was just too hectic."

The one thing that stayed solid throughout that period, he feels, was the music. The music, he figures, just got better and better, as *Urban Cowboy* opened up new artistic possibilities for him. His producer at that time, Jim Ed Norman, read the situation perfectly and stepped in to exploit those possibilities.

"I feel like I'm the guy that turned his career around more than anybody else," Mickey declares, "but Jim Ed picked songs for me like 'That's All That Matters to Me,' 'You Don't Know Me,' 'True Love Ways,' 'Stand by Me.'" These type of songs is what really busted Mickey Gilley into the forefront of the music scene today. Because they were songs that gave me a lot more credibility besides just being a clone of Jerry Lee Lewis. All I was before Jim Ed Norman was a boogie bluesy piano player, honky tonk piano player, and those type of songs took me out of that vein."

But the record sales eventually went into decline. Gilley feels it was the fault

of his label, Epic, which had inherited him when it bought up Playboy, his original label. "Due to the fact that I wasn't their discovery, I never got any attention," he explains. "They gave attention to the acts that they had signed, because nobody could become a hero for having signed Mickey Gilley. And when my record sales started to subside, they just let 'em completely die." Though he had cut 17 Number One singles for Playboy and Epic over nearly 15 years, and had averaged sales of 150,000 to 250,000 albums each time out, by mid-1987 he sensed Epic had lost interest in him completely. He asked for, and received, a release from his contract.

Mickey refuses, understandably, to entertain the notion that he rode the crest of fad and that he was bound to take a fall. *Did* his sales decline solely because they were artificially inflated and thus bound to taper off after the Urban Cowboy craze faded? There's no way of calling that one, but he points to the fact that to this day he works as often as he wants—about 125 dates a year. And he could work a lot more, he claims, except he made a conscious decision to limit dates by keeping his price high. Combine that fee with a streamlined organization—no more plane, smaller crew—and he's taking home better money than ever, he insists. What does that say about his continuing popularity?

Shortly after he won his victory over Cryer, Gilley released his first album on Airborne, a fledgling independent label which gave him and his producer, label A&R man Larry Butler, stock as part of their deals. If signing with an untested indie sounds, in this era of the major-label big-bucks deal, like the last ploy of a man whose career is indeed gasping to catch a second wind, consider the situation from Gilley's point of view: "I had several Number One records with Playboy," he points out. "I don't care what kind of label it is; the main thing is if it's in the groove and if they got enough distribution."

Since initial results were inconclusive, both the groove and the distribution questions remain up in the air. But one thing is certain: Mickey Gilley remains an optimist. You know that old saw about how the only way to overcome fear of a horse after being thrown is to climb right back into the saddle? Well, listen to this guy, talking just weeks after finally extricating himself from the whole Gilley's imbroglio:

"I'm thinking already about doing another Gilley's and this time doing it right," he cheerfully admits. "Only this time I'd get people who know how to do it. I don't want to run a club myself, but I am interested in there still being a Gilley's club." ■

Buried Treasures

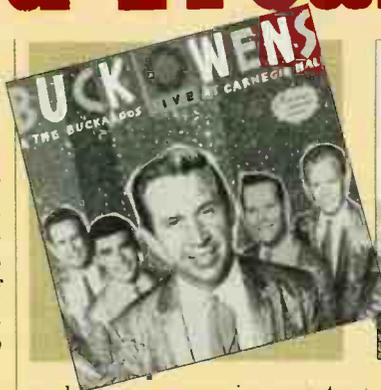
Reissues,
Rarities and the
Hard-to-Find

Buck Owens: With the Buck Owens revival so hot, thanks to his influence on and association with Dwight Yoakam, you may wonder why you can't find Buck's big hits for Capitol. The reason is that when Buck renewed his contract with Capitol in the early 1970's, the ownership of his classic hits reverted back to him, a deal only the top artists have the clout to get. By the 1980's virtually nothing was available, and despite persistent rumors that he's made a deal with this or that label to reissue his hits, there's no indication yet when or if any of them will be available. But all is not lost.

Last year Buck donated the master tapes of his 1966 live *Carnegie Hall Concert* album to the Country Music Foundation, which they've reissued as *Buck Owens and His Buckaroos at Carnegie Hall* (CMF 012). Recorded when Buck was at his absolute peak with his best-ever group of Buckaroos (Don Rich, guitar and vocals; Tom Brumley, steel; Doyle Holly, bass and Willie Cantu, drums), it may not be the original hits, but it reaffirms the power of his music in performance.

And if you're expecting hits, you won't be disappointed. Some are done in medleys, but everything from "Tiger By the Tail" to "Act Naturally," "Together Again," "Buckaroo" and "Love's Gonna Live Here" are included as well as medleys of earlier hits such as "Hello Trouble," "Second Fiddle," "Only You Can Break My Heart," "Don't Let Her Know" and "Cryin' Time." A couple of comedy spots deleted from the original album have been restored, including a Beatles spoof where Buck and Don (both fans of the pre-psychedelic Beatles) take off on "Twist and Shout."

The sound is excellent, but the liner notes are dry

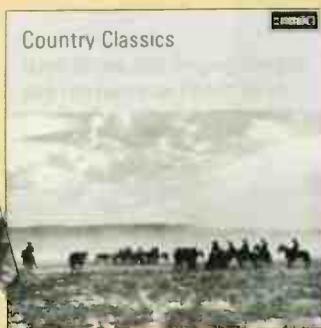


and, in one case, inaccurate regarding a controversy over Buck's use of drums on one of his hits. What I can't figure is why Buck provided the CMF with a monaural tape. Having heard a stereo tape copy of the original 1966 album, it's clear the CMF recording is in monaural. It's no big deal, of course, given the quality of the record and the scarcity of Buck Owens material, but I'm quite surprised the CMF never mentioned this anywhere in their packaging.

Hank Snow: Several years ago, Hank Snow's nearly 50-year association with RCA Victor ended amid much bitterness. Snow's opinion that he's been mistreated is well known and not without merit. The British Stetson, Detour and RCA International labels have reissued some of his work, but nothing on the level of what a member of the Hall of Fame deserves. With 35 Top Ten and six Number One records in the U.S. since 1949 (23 Top Tens between 1950 and 1955), the man clearly deserves something big.

And he's gotten it with *Hank Snow: The Singing Ranger* (Bear Family BCD 15426), a four compact disc boxed set covering the 105 RCA Victor recordings he made from 1949 through 1953, when, after a long success in his native Canada, he finally broke through to stardom in the Lower Forty-Eight.

The set begins with two March 1949, sessions in Chicago that produced some undistinguished material



including "The Blind Boy's Dog," one of the most soppy and maudlin of all World War II ballads, and his first U.S. hit, Jenny Lou Carson's "Marriage Vow." His next session took place in March 1950, in Nashville with better songs and a streamlined instrumental sound. The result: "I'm Movin' On," his first Number One and the song that saved him from falling back into obscurity in the U.S. Nearly every subsequent session produced one or more hits: "Rhumba Boogie," "The Golden Rocket," "Bluebird Island" (with Anita Carter), etc. He also recorded an excellent series of Jimmie Rodgers songs that show the Singing Brakeman's undeniable influence on him.

Snow's music was among the most varied and imaginative of any artist of the day. He tackled Hawaiian songs (writing some of them himself) and Christmas songs, surrealistic novelties ("Honey-moon On a Rocket Ship") and songs built around other artists' hits ("When Mexican Joe Met Jole Blon"). Several songs became hits for both Hank and others, the most notable being "A Fool Such As I," a 1952 country hit for him, then a 1960 pop hit for Elvis. Given his track record at the time, it's little wonder that only five numbers ever remained unissued and all of them are included here.

As usual for Bear Family, the remastered sound is incredible, retaining the spirit and feeling of the original recordings without the

cold digital sound that can make compact discs annoying to listen to. The tunes actually *sparkle*, given the incredibly precise vocals and strong acoustic drive in Hank's music. Even the few titles recorded on acetate discs sound comparatively good. Charles Wolfe's liner notes, set in a book loaded with rare photos and various color reproductions of Snow memorabilia, deal in detail with the creation of the Snow sound, built around Joe Talbot's steel and Tommy Vaden's fiddling. After seeing the package, Snow gave it his official blessing.

Remember, this set is available in compact disc *only*. It is *not* available on records, nor will it be. However, if you've been looking for only Hank's biggest hits and have a record or cassette player, don't despair.

Stetson recently reissued *Country Classics* (HAT 3084), Snow's first Greatest Hits album issued in 1955, on both records and cassettes. It includes all the essentials from 1950 on, from "I'm Movin'" and "Rhumba Boogie" to "A Fool Such As I," "Golden Rocket" and several hits not on previous album packages, such as "Unwanted Sign Upon Your Heart," "Marriage Vow"—his first hit from 1949—and a non-hit, "With This Ring I Thee Wed." It's only a fraction of what's on the box, but this is the essential stuff. And it also picks up several numbers that appeared between 1953 and 1955, past the time frame covered by the boxed set.

Homer & Jethro: It's almost certain that one day soon Homer & Jethro will be inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame. It's a shame it didn't happen while Jethro was alive to savor it. As in the case of Hank Snow, despite 28 albums (not counting their earlier King recordings), U.S. RCA has kept none of the duo's records in

print. Bear Family, however, has compiled all their rock 'n' roll parodies, which constitutes some of their funnier work, on *Homer & Jethro Assault the Rock and Roll Era* (BFX 15281).

The "song butchers" were in rare form spoofing Elvis ("Hart Brake Motel" and "Hound Dog"), Charlie Rich ("No Hair Sam"), the Beatles (screwy versions of "I Want to Hold Your Hand" and "She Loves You") and 1950's hits like "Green Door" ("Screened Door") and (their biggest) the 1959 "Battle of New Orleans" parody, "The Battle of Kookamonga." It was a tribute to the era's Nashville studio musicians that they so capably reproduced the sound of the original hit records to frame the duo's parodies. Dave Samuelson's excellent notes are supplemented by Jethro's own comments on the material, provided some months before his death last February.

Chet Atkins: After over 30 years of recording his music, it's amazing that RCA has kept nothing by Chet Atkins in print. And that makes Stetson's reissue of *Chet Atkins in Three Dimensions* (HAT 3083), his first 12" LP (not his first LP), released in 1955, all the more important.

The album makes a couple of things clear: first, Atkins was experimenting beyond country 34 years ago. Second, the fire in his playing (he was about 30 when this was recorded) and his smooth technique make this an important record. Chet now plays in a more relaxed and refined style than he did back then. On the album he tackled five classical numbers, four pop tunes (including a hot version of the jazz piano standard "Little Rock Getaway" and "Blues in the Night") and folk songs including "London-derry Air" (aka "Danny Boy") and "Dark Eyes," all played on electric, not acoustic, guitar.

Eddy Arnold: Ever wondered how Eddy Arnold sounded before RCA drowned him (with his blessing) in orchestrations? Or if

you know the early records with Little Roy Wiggins on steel, have you ever lamented the fact you can't find them? Look no further. *Anytime* (HAT 3086), another 1955 package like the Atkins one reviewed in this column, has the originals of several of Eddy's biggest 1940's and early 1950's hits, done when the only strings on his records were the ones on the guitars, Wiggins' steel and the bass fiddle.

"Bouquet of Roses," "It's a Sin," "Don't Rob Another Man's Castle," "Molly Darlin'," "Texarkana Baby" and "That's How Much I Love You" embody the plaintive sound on which his reputation was based. Frankly, I've always liked this stuff better than the later things, for the performances had more warmth and intimacy than Arnold ever achieved with the gushing strings and choirs.

Connie Smith: When I interviewed Connie Smith for the CMM Update feature that appeared in the September/October 1988 issue, she talked about the fact that most of her early recordings for RCA weren't available, and that she was looking for copies of her old records for fan club members who wanted them. Well, most are still tough to find, but Stet-

son recently reissued *Best of That Smith Girl* (HAT 3089), her first album, available again in an import from Barbados in the Caribbean.

It's centered around her first three hits, all of which were written by Bill Anderson, who discovered her (and wrote the original liner notes). Right now it's the only way to get "Once a Day," "Then and Only Then" and "Tiny Blue Transistor Radio," all performed in the pure, unadorned country style that's marked her entire career.

Louvin Brothers: The Louvin Brothers have always been particularly popular with Buried Treasures readers. Recently tapes of a Sunday performance in April 1956, at New River Ranch, a popular bluegrass music park in Rising Sun, Maryland, were rediscovered and released as *The Louvin Brothers Live at New River Ranch* (Copper Creek CCLP-0105). The performance dates from the period when they were cutting many of their magnificent Capitol albums and gives a good idea as to how their music transferred from studio to stage.

Onstage The Louvins sounded much as they do on records, though don't expect the sound quality to be anything like the Capitol record-

ings. They mixed sacred songs ("Born Again," "The Family Who Prays") and secular numbers. They'd recorded two of their best known tunes, "I Don't Believe You've Met My Baby" and "Childish Love," just six days before this concert. Among their versions of other artists' hits are a slick boogie-woogie version of Jimmie Rodgers' "In the Jailhouse Now" and a good-natured version of The Carlisles' hit, "Is Zat You Myrtle." Ira's hot mandolin version of "Listen to the Mockingbird" and Paul Yandell's guitar instrumental and between-song banter capture another, rarely heard side of the brothers.

Waylon Jennings: Though U.S. RCA has ignored the legacy of Hank Snow, Chet Atkins and Homer & Jethro, it's only fair to give credit where credit is due. They recently revived, although to a modest extent, the early music of Waylon Jennings with *The Early Years* (RCA 9561-1-R), a collection of a dozen of his early numbers. Some years ago Bear Family released the complete early Waylon pre-Outlaw sessions from 1965-1972: 15 albums (still available) with a total of 245 songs.

The RCA album brings together 12 essentials showing his folk, rock and country roots mixed together, everything from "The Only Daddy That'll Walk the Line" (written by guitar legend Jimmy Bryant, early favorites such as "Love of the Common People," Mel Tillis' "Mental Revenge" and Harlan Howard's "Time to Bum Again," and Gordon Lightfoot's folk standard, "For Lovin' Me." Though Chet Atkins' production was slick, the music doesn't differ radically from Waylon's later rough-edged sound, and he was clearly heading that way even then. His comments about the early RCA days, printed on the back of the album, are far more charitable than what he said about the same material in the mid-1970's. The boy must be mellowing.

—RICH KIENZLE

How to Get These Treasures

Available in compact discs only: Hank Snow, *Hank Snow: The Singing Ranger* (BCD 15426), 4-disc boxed set, \$85.98. Available in records, cassettes, and compact discs: Buck Owens, *Buck Owens and His Buckaroos at Carnegie Hall* (CMF 012), \$9.98 record or cassette, \$16.98 compact disc/Waylon Jennings, *The Early Years* (RCA 9561-1-R), \$10.98 record or cassette, \$17.98 compact disc. Available in records or cassettes: Hank Snow, *Country Classics* (HAT 3084), \$10.98/Chet Atkins, *Chet Atkins in Three Dimensions* (HAT 3083), \$10.98/Eddy Arnold, *Anytime* (HAT 3086), \$10.98/Connie Smith, *Best of That Smith Girl* (HAT 3089), \$10.98/The Louvin Brothers, *The Louvin Brothers Live at New River Ranch* (CCLP-0105), \$9.98. Available in records only: Homer & Jethro, *Homer & Jethro Assault the Rock and Roll Era* (BFX 15281), \$14.98.

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TOP 25

Singles

1. George Strait *Baby's Gotten Good At Goodbye*
2. Keith Whitley *I'm No Stranger to the Rain*
3. Michael Martin Murphey *From the Word Go*
4. Vern Gosdin *Who You Gonna Blame It On This Time*
5. The Bellamy Brothers *Big Love*
6. Don Williams *Old Coyote Town*
7. Shenandoah *The Church on Cumberland Road*
8. Emmylou Harris *Heartbreak Hill*
9. Reba McEntire *New Fool at an Old Game*
10. Hank Williams Jr. *There's A Tear In My Beer*
11. Billy Joe Royal *Tell It Like It Is*
12. Nitty Gritty Dirt Band *Down That Road Tonight*
13. K.T. Oslin *Hey Bobby*
14. George Jones *I'm a One Woman Man*
15. Foster and Lloyd *Fair Shake*
16. Roy Orbison *You Got It*
17. Lee Greenwood *I'll Be Lovin' You*
18. Lacy J. Dalton *The Heart*
19. Patty Loveless *Don't Toss Us Away*
20. Highway 101 *Setting Me Up*
21. The Judds *Young Love*
22. Baillie and the Boys ... *She Deserves You*
23. Randy Travis *Is It Still Over*
24. Restless Heart *Big Dreams In a Small Town*
25. Rodney Crowell *After All This Time*

Albums

1. Hank Williams Jr. *Greatest Hits III*
2. Alabama *Southern Star*
3. George Strait *Beyond the Blue Neon*
4. Ricky Van Shelton *Loving Proof*
5. Randy Travis *Old 8 x 10*
6. K.T. Oslin *This Woman*
7. Reba McEntire *Reba*
8. Dwight Yoakam *Buenas Noches From a Lonely Room*
9. The Judds *Greatest Hits*
10. Lyle Lovett *Lyle Lovett and his Large Band*
11. Steve Earle *Copperhead Road*
12. Randy Travis *Always & Forever*
13. Dan Seals *Rage On*
14. Tanya Tucker *Strong Enough to Bend*
15. Emmylou Harris *Bluebird*
16. Rodney Crowell *Diamond & Dirt*
17. Roy Orbison *Mystery Girl*
18. Patty Loveless *Honky Tonk Angel*
19. Vern Gosdin *Chiseled In Stone*
20. Ricky Van Shelton *Wild Eyed Dream*
21. Restless Heart *Big Dreams In a Small Town*
22. The Oak Ridge Boys .. *Monongahela*
23. Billy Joe Royal *Tell It Like It Is*
24. Rosanne Cash *Hits 1979-1989*
25. Kathy Mattea *Untasted Honey*

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