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RAY STEVENS
Answers 20 Questions



PATTY
LOVELESS
Life Lessons



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People

MC POTTS AND LORETTA LYNN MEET BACKSTAGE



Making her Grand Ole Opry debut was an exciting moment for BMG/Critique's newcomer, MC Potts. Just as exciting was finding out that her idol, Loretta Lynn, was scheduled to perform on the Opry the next weekend. Asking if she could come back so she could meet Loretta, Potts was thrilled when the Opry said yes, and arranged for the two to meet on the TNN show, *Opry Backstage*. Here Potts and Loretta chat as *Backstage* host Porter Wagoner looks on.

MOVIE STAR AMONGST US

Whadda party! The invitation was as fancy as one I once received for the inauguration of a president. Held at historic and unhillbilly Cheekwood, the event was graced by star of the hour, **Reba McEntire**, who arrived looking like the movie star she wants to be. Yes, I know she's been in a few movies and done a good job, but this ain't that. This is serious stuff. Reba and her hunk-of-a-hubby/manager, **Narvel Blackstock**, have formed a movie production company, Starstruck Films, through MCA Records' parent company, Universal Films, to back their movies and TV projects. Bigtime operators, they've purchased the rights to a book that stayed on the *New York Times* Best Seller list 40 weeks, title unannounced, paying a million George Washingtons. Reba will co-star in this their first attempt at making their own movies. Should you think this is the first time a hillbilly girl has taken a giant step into Hollywood's movie world,

you are dead wrong. Years ago **Dolly Parton** took the challenge, formed Sandollar with her manager, **Sandy Gallin** (Sand for Sandy, dollar for Dolly), transforming herself from mountaineer to millionaire. Read the credits. Dolly isn't in every flick they own.

Reba does promise to record country, something her last album wasn't but her current album is. This album, *What If It's You*, has gone and birthed a Number One hit single, "The Fear of Being Alone," something the last failed to do.

OPRY STARS SHINE

Since the Opry's **Marty Stuart** introduced his best friend, **Travis Tritt**, also an Opry member, to his bride **Theresa Nelson**, it came as no surprise to me that Marty was best man at the Travis/Theresa marriage ceremony. Besides, Marty and Travis brag about being best friends and brothers all the time. Marty met Theresa when she was a Hooters waitress and was hired to be in one of his videos. Sometime later,

Marty introduced the couple at a *Marty Party* a couple of years back. Marty told me that Travis was plumb smitten by Theresa. You do watch the *Marty Party* shows on TNN, don't you? All hip people watch. Then you know the wedding will be a "Marty Party."

Another proud Opry member, plumb perfect **Vince Gill** is sponsored on tour by Kraft this season. Smartest thing Kraft ever did! All you chatty gals, get jealous—not only did Vince wave at me during the press conference at the CMA, he hugged me! Then he came up behind me while I was talking, put his arms around my neck and said, "How you doing, buddy?" The Grand Ole Opry, Music Row, MCA Records, publicists and everyone whose life Vince touches in this hillbilly town love this man. I'd go as far as to say that he is the most loved male star on the scene today. Vince is proud to be an Opry member. He cherishes and respects the Opry members and the history. Whenever he sings, the crowd goes wild, but only I get hugged.

GILL AND GIBSON MAKE MUSIC

Both **Vince Gill** and **Garth Brooks** had lunch at the West End Cooker on the same day but not together. Since neither travels with an entourage, either one can go most anyplace to eat without being bothered. Speaking of Vince, didja know he was presented the Lifetime Achievement Award by Gibson Guitars? Vince quipped, "Are they trying to tell me something, or are they putting me out to pasture?" Vince was truly proud to be recognized by Gibson, the company that made **Bill Monroe's** F-5 mandolin and **Earl Scruggs'** five-string banjo. Upon accepting the award at New York's Hard Rock Cafe, Vince admitted the true basis of his love for "picking." "Only reason I started singing—I thought the girls might like it," said his cuteness. Additional musicians honored by Gibson were **Victor Wooten** (who plays bass with **Lyle Lovett**), **Junior Brown** and our very own marvelous **Mary Chapin Carpenter**. Actor **Kevin Bacon**, who stays as close to country music as he can get these days and nights, served as host for the event.

Reporter: Hazel Smith

Editors: Rochelle Friedman/George Fletcher

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People



Announcing the WalMart/Anderson/CMT concert series are Anderson's Bill Lardie with performers Cledus T. Judd, George Ducas, Deana Carter, Bryan White, Wade Hayes and CMT's Paul Hastaba.

WALMART/ANDERSON ENCORES

Once again the good folks at WalMart/Anderson Merchandising have come through for country music. Getting on the same plate with CMT (Country Music Television) is perfect pairing. You lucky fans who shop at one of the 260-plus WalMart stores where this year's concerts will be held can expect to be royally entertained by primo artists like **Bryan White, Wade Hayes, Deana Carter, George Ducas, Cledus T. Judd** and a bevy of others. As in the past, the concerts will be held in WalMart parking lots. CMT will air an itinerary of who is performing where and when. The best thing for you to do until late fall is watch CMT when you aren't attending a country music concert. They are filming all year long, promising a one-hour TV special featuring highlights of the tour. *You* may be on TV.

OPRY TIDBITS

Porter Wagoner celebrated 40 years as an Opry member by introducing his three children and singing "40 Miles From Poplar Bluff." Wagoner is from West Plains, Missouri. The "Thin Man," as Wagoner is known, can still fit into the same jackets he brought to town when he became a member four decades ago. Somebody said Porter's clothes are older than his girlfriend.

The lovable **BoxCor Willie** is at home in Branson following chemotherapy received after being diagnosed with aggressive leukemia. Box has lost his hair from

the treatments, but not his sense of humor. He says he will not appear in his Branson Theater this summer, but adds with a chuckle that he loves his wife and children more than he ever has. Says he even loves his dog more. **BoxCar**, you're missed at the Opry. Come back soon.

Eighty-eight-year-old **Bill Carlisle** remarked that he gave **Cher Atkins** his first job in Knoxville. Paid him three dollars a day. Bill said he'd hoped Chet would amount to something. All the world knows Chet Atkins is the finest guitar player on this planet. As for his worth, well, you can guess at that.

MORE JACKSON NEWS

As I told you before, the Opry's pride and joy, Newnan, Georgia, native, **Mr. Alan Jackson**, called the long-legged wonder by me, is singing for Ford trucks on TV all over the U.S.A. The initial announcement was made at the Wild Horse Saloon, where party goers filled the room and their plates. During the opening ceremony **Denise (Mrs. Alan) Jackson** announced that they expect their third child in September. It was cold in Tennessee around Christmas when the blessed event was apparently sanctioned. It would be nice if the Jacksons had a son, but another daughter would be fine. Then Alan would be tied with **Garth** with the four most gorgeous females at the house.

Another Alan tip...if you vacation in the Smokies this summer, you will want to look up Alan Jackson's Showcase Cafe in Pigeon Forge near Dollywood. The venture came partly from Alan's cookbook

People

bearing his mama's recipes titled, *Who Says You Can't Cook It All*, sold through his fan club. As Alan traveled across the country by bus, he couldn't find anything fit to eat. He hoped eateries would set up and take notice and cook like mama.

While I'm on the subject of Alan, all you fans out there who have an opportunity to see Alan in concert this year will be royally entertained. Alan's performance at Nashville's new arena was unbelievable. Fans went wild after each song and even wilder when he obliged with an encore. Opening act, **LeAnn Rimes**, suffering from throat problems, never let on she'd been sick. I knew that she'd been to see the hillbilly throat specialist, **Dr. Robert Ossoff**, at Vanderbilt the day before. Sore throat never stopped that singing machine. The 14-year-old sang her butt off. The week before, young LeAnn achieved something only **Garth Brooks** had previously done. Her album debuted Number One on both the country and pop charts.

DOWN UNDER AT THE OPRY

The prize for the Down Under Cane Cutting Champion was a trip anywhere in the world. Winner **Paul Donnely** of Ayi, Australia, beat out 40 other competitors and chose to come to the Grand Ole Opry—this place and country music have made Nashville, Tennessee, a household word around the world. Paul and his wife were thrilled beyond words to meet **Loretta Lynn** and **Skeeter Davis** backstage. Skeeter is not well, of course, but she

managed to smile, laugh and pose for photos. Loretta, on the other hand, never one to mince words, said she was an old fashioned sort of girl. Said she never "burnt" her bra, never marched, never smoked a cigarette and when others ran round without them, she kept her panties on! Tell you what, friends, it looked so good to see a real, down-to-earth country star dressed in a floor-length white gown with rhinestones go walking across the stage of the Grand Ole Opry when Loretta made her entrance.

PATTY READS, AND MORE

CMA Female Vocalist of the Year, the lovely, singing **Patty Loveless**, took time out from an unbelievable schedule to read for the children at Holy Rosary School in Donelson. For this good deed we all should go out and buy a Patty Loveless cassette for our car to show our appreciation to the Opry star. We learned Patty had to get a restraining order on a Texas man who's been harassing her and threatening her with bodily harm. Her management company received over 100 calls from **John Lucio** in two months. Upon contact, **Adelfa Lucio**, the man's mother, said her son "is not all there."

MUSIC ROW PARTIES ON

I knew I was at the right place when I walked into an elevator with a young, handsome man wearing only a terry cloth bath robe acting as elevator operator.

RAISING FUNDS FOR KIDS



In January, the annual Country Cares benefit for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital kicked off once again. To date, country stars have helped raise more than \$50 million through the radiothon and associated events. Tim McGraw visited with St. Jude patient Emily Friede at the kick-off event.

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Knowing full well there was more, I bolted off the elevator and into the party room. Right away I see two girls, beauties they were, seated in bathtubs. Elevated on a higher table above surrounding tables that held fabo rations, the girls in the tubs were *shaving their legs!* Surely they weren't as nude as they appeared. And surely by now you have guessed that we were celebrating with lovely **Deana Carter** the double platinum certification of her album, *Did I Shave My Legs for This*. On the strength of the marvelous "Strawberry Wine" single, Deana has become a major act in country music. Family is so important to me, so I was so impressed when Deana presented the first plaque to her parents, the second to her husband, the third and fourth to her two brothers. Dressed to kill, Deana had chosen an off-the-rack, two-piece platinum suit that fitted her like it was her body with a pair of those "kiss me" platinum high-heeled sandals on her feet. Even her toenail polish was sprinkled with platinum. A real do for a new star.

MARTINA HERE AND THERE

The girl with the most beautiful eyes in show biz, **Martina McBride**, made the official announcement of artists appearing at Nashville On-Stage this season over lunch at the Grand Ole Opry Museum. Along with Martina, there's **Tanya**,



At the double platinum party for her debut album, *Did I Shave My Legs for This*, the lovely, talented and very nice **Deana Carter** spent some time with yours truly.

Sammy, Ricky Van, Oaks, Pam, Patty, Billy Ray, Trace Adkins and others just as great. Fans, you know me, I will see you there. I asked Martina about her recent trip to Los Angeles for **Elizabeth Taylor's** 65th birthday party benefiting HIV/AIDS, where she sang with actor, **Kevin Bacon**, and his brother. "Stars, stars, stars," exclaimed the Opry star. When I asked her to name four of the biggest out there, she said **Madonna, Cher, Michael Jackson** and **Rod Stewart**. I watched the show on ABC-TV, and I'll tell the world that our own Martina's beauty far exceeded any of those Hollywood stars. I am surprised

some mascara company hasn't snatched up Martina and paid her a couple of million to use her eyes to sell eye makeup. That's what I would do.

STARS ARE FANS TOO

Barbara Mandrell was in Hollywood appearing on an episode of CBS-TV's *Diagnosis Murder* with her daughter, actress **Jaime Dudney**, as **Terri Clark** was making her acting debut on the same show. Terri's label, Mercury, knew she was a huge fan of Barbara's, so they clued the Opry star that Terri wasn't aware her second album was Gold. Babs presented a very surprised Terri with the second Gold record of her short career. Terri, who saw every one of Mandrell's NBC-TV shows back in the early 80's, was stunned at the chain of events. While in the area Barbara also did a guest spot on *Baywatch*. Her eleven-year-old son **Nathaniel Dudney** came home with a bevy of autographed posters from all the bathing suit-clad beauties. Congrats, Terri, my friend, and I'm glad you and **Bryan Kennedy** finally got to have lunch together. Bryan, son of legendary record exec/producer, **Jerry Kennedy**, was the first person who told me that Terri Clark was a star. And for the record, Bryan was the first person who ever produced tracks on Terri in the recording studio.

OPRY AT HOME AND ON THE ROAD

John Conlee, who has recorded no bad song, celebrated his 16th anniversary as an Opry member. Remember "Friday Night Blues," "I Don't Remember Loving You," "I'm Only in It for the Love"? Killer songs and all hits.

"They're a darling bunch of kids. It was good to go back there and see why I'm doing this," said songman **Joe Diffie**. Diffie was referring to Duncanwood School where his son, **Tyler**, who has Down's Syndrome, attends. This is the Opry star's fifth annual benefit concert for First Steps. He has raised over a quarter of a million dollars for the cause. Joining Joe this year were **Tim McGraw, Stephanie Bentley, Wade Hayes, Skip Ewing, Ty England, Marcus Hummon, Richochet, Ty Herndon** and **Sons of the Desert**.

The Opry's own **Emmylou Harris** sang the National Anthem before the women's basketball game at Vanderbilt with pals **Marshall Chapman** and **Ashley Cleveland**. Music to die for. **The Whites, Ricky Skaggs, Jeannie Seely** and **Johnny Russell** headlined a Grand Ole Opry Cruise to the Caribbean. Doesn't that sound like great fun. Nobody asked me to go!

TOBY PACKS 'EM IN



My pal **Toby Keith** wowed the packed Green Bay stadium with the National Anthem prior to a game between the Packers and the Carolina Panthers. Toby's pictured here with ABC sports commentator, **Lesley Visser**, and Packers Hall of Famer, **Paul Hornung**. Big Toby recently celebrated **Blue** turning Gold: His fine album, *Blue Moon*, was certified Gold.

The 32nd Annual Academy of Country Music Awards

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- The Nominees for 1997**
- ALBUM OF THE YEAR**
- Blue—LeAnn Rimes
 - Blue Clear Sky—George Strait
 - Borderline—Brooks & Dunn
 - Time Marches On—Tracy Lawrence
 - The Trouble With The Truth—Patty Loveless

- SINGLE RECORD OF THE YEAR**
- Blue—LeAnn Rimes
 - Carried Away—George Strait
 - My Maria—Brooks & Dunn
 - Strawberry Wine—Deana Carter
 - Time Marches On—Tracy Lawrence

- SONG OF THE YEAR**
- Blue—LeAnn Rimes
 - Carried Away—George Strait
 - My Maria—Brooks & Dunn
 - Strawberry Wine—Deana Carter
 - Time Marches On—Tracy Lawrence

- YOUR CHOICE THE WINNER**
- NEW FEMALE VOCALIST**
- Deana Carter
 - Mindy McCready
 - LeAnn Rimes

- NEW MALE VOCALIST**
- Trace Adkins
 - James Bonamy
 - Kevin Sharp

- NEW DUET OR GROUP**
- BR5 49
 - Burnin' Daylight
 - Ricochet

- TOP FEMALE VOCALIST**
- Patty Loveless
 - Reba McEntire
 - LeAnn Rimes
 - Shania Twain
 - Trisha Yearwood

- YOUR CHOICE THE WINNER**
- TOP MALE VOCALIST**
- Vince Gill
 - Alan Jackson
 - Collin Raye
 - George Strait
 - Bryan White

- TOP VOCAL GROUP**
- BlackHawk
 - Lonestar
 - The Mavericks
 - Ricochet
 - Sawyer Brown

- TOP VOCAL DUET**
- Brooks & Dunn
 - Jeff Foxworthy/Alan Jackson
 - Lorrie Morgan/Jon Randall
 - Marty Stuart/Travis Tritt
 - Hank Williams Jr./Hank Williams III

- ENTERTAINER OF THE YEAR**
- Garth Brooks
 - Brooks & Dunn
 - Alan Jackson
 - Tim McGraw
 - George Strait

HOSTED BY



George Strait



Crystal Bernard



Jeff Foxworthy

PERFORMERS

Clint Black, Garth Brooks, Brooks & Dunn, Deana Carter, Billy Dean, Vince Gill, Tracy Lawrence, Patty Loveless, The Mavericks, Reba McEntire, LeAnn Rimes and Bryan White

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BACKSTAGE HOST

Dick Clark



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People

MOST MOVING PARTY

I've been walking these hillbilly streets for more years than I am old. I've been to more parties than Bayer has aspirin. The most moving party I've ever attended was for **Kevin Sharp**. Reason for the party: Kevin's song, "Nobody Knows," bolted to Number One on the charts, where it remained for four weeks. At the same time Kevin's album, *Measure of a Man*, on Asylum, was certified Gold. At the party, his manager presented him with a plaque stating they'd purchased a star in the sky named Kevin Sharp that would be there as long as there's time. Bawling seemed proper at the moment, so I did. After everybody praised Kevin and we were dismissed, why Kevin, whose own story about cancer, the Make-A-Wish Foundation, **David Foster**, et al., you read in last issue's Record Reviews section, allowed he wanted to talk. Not a dry eye was in the room for the man of the hour, who at that moment had tears of joy rolling down his face. His cancer is in remission.

There's a kid in Texas not so lucky. Two days before the party, not knowing Kevin had suffered the same disease, his last wish was to meet the singer of "Nobody Knows," his favorite song. Kevin's bald head made the child know Kevin had been sick, too. We send love and prayers to the child's family.

SEZ SHE

Mrs. John Anderson admitted she and hubby are late everywhere they go. "Not my fault," sez the blonde beauty. The missus claims she is ready, perfumed and waiting by the door while John is still pulling on his...boots. I wiped sweat from my forehead for fear she was going to say his britches.

TANYA THE TEXAS TORNADO

It was Thursday night of the week-long Country Radio Seminar. Epic Records had rented the entire world famous Printers Alley, renaming it Epic Alley, for a night of private fun, food, booze and royal entertainment fit for the cream of the crop from the world of radio. **Ty Herndon** was on stage performing at one of the three rented clubs—Bourbon Street Blues & Boogie Bar—when **Tanya Tucker** crashed the party, uninvited. She bolted through the door and onto the stage with Herndon. Witnesses say Tanya flashed her bosoms twice, then proceeded to make lewd and insulting remarks to Herndon. When asked by

A SURPRISED DARYLE



Daryle Singletary was stunned when his manager, **Lib Hatcher-Travis**, showed up at his concert in Anaheim, California, with her hubby, **Randy Travis**, and actor **Jon Voight** in tow. Being from Georgia, Daryle remembered Voight from the movie, *Deliverance*. I met Voight plenty of years ago in my she-outlaw days with **Willie, Waylon** and the boys.

Epic officials to leave the stage, Tanya refused. She became belligerent and swore at them. Finally, Tanya was picked up and carried out the door of the club onto the sidewalk. As she was removed, the audience of radio people chanted the "na na na na hey hey hey goodbye" chorus usually performed by sports fans when an opposing team are sore losers. Speaking to reporters later, Tanya laughed off the incident, chalking it up to "a Tanya moment."

This unfortunate incident should not have occurred. I feel bad for the audience, as well as Epic Records officials and artists, especially **Ty Herndon**, who turned out to be Tanya's sacrificial victim. Unfair! I do respect Capitol Records, Tanya's label, for apologizing to Epic for something that was out of their hands. Tanya's escort was **Stone Phillips** of NBC-TV's *Dateline*, who was in town shooting a piece for the show. No one said if the cameras were running during the shameful scenario, but Tanya, who's no longer engaged to her landscaper, apparently didn't mind having him around. She told *USA Today*, "If he wasn't married, he wouldn't have gotten back to New York."

DIDJA SEE HER?

Didja see that crazy **Hazel Smith** on *Prime Time Country* with **Gary Chapman**, flapping her mouth about this and that? Rumor has it, being young, thin and sexy like she is, distinctive young men with bulging checkbooks came in droves cast-

ing nets for her favors. The last sentence is a lie from start to finish, but it sure sounds reasonable to me. Yes, I have been on TNN's *Prime Time Country* show a couple of times and enjoyed it. **Little Jimmy Dickens** told me he saw me and thought I was real funny. Little Jim says I am like him. He says the reason I am

A BOLD AND BEAUTIFUL PAIR

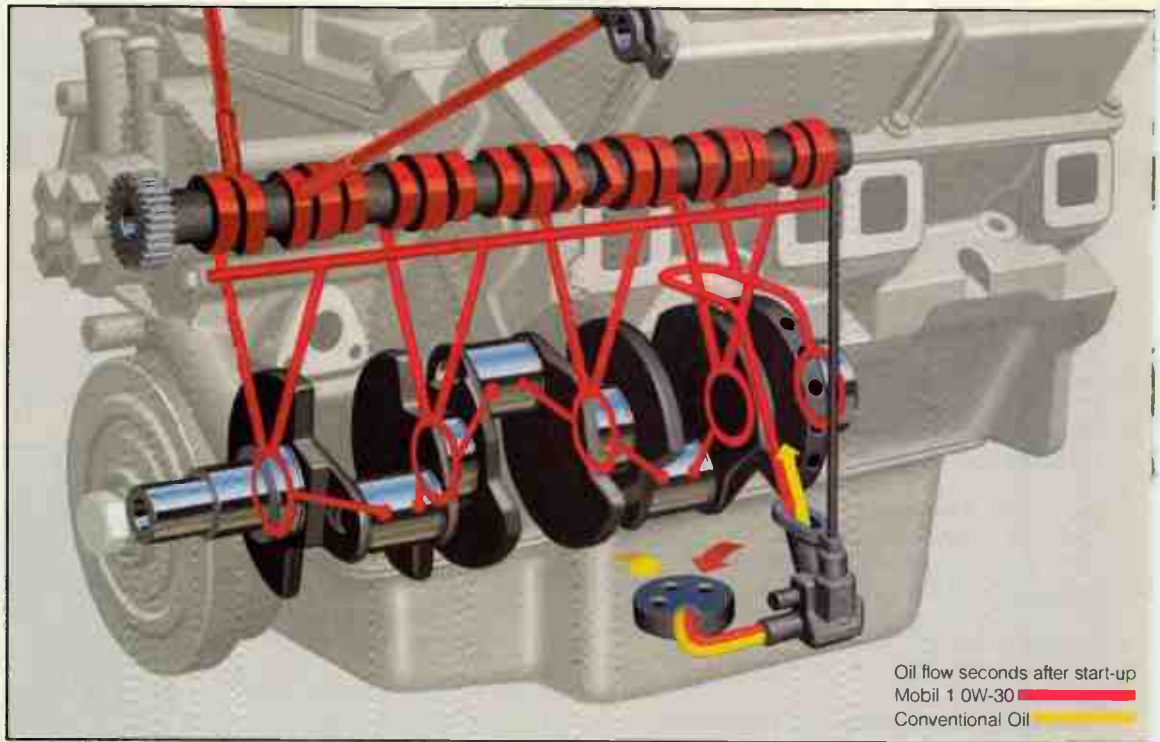


Last issue I told you about **Bryan White's** appearance on the CBS-TV soap, *The Bold and The Beautiful*. There's more to that story.... Also on hand for Bryan's performance on the show was comedienne **Phyllis Diller**, who seems to have taken a shine to young Bryan. It don't take a smart person to pick out which one is the "bold" and which one is the "beautiful" in this photo.

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People

funny is because I laugh at myself, 'cause I think I'm funny. "I didn't know that, Little Jim," said I. Just then he reached up his arm as far as he could and hugged me across my upper thigh. It was at that moment I realized being hugged by a short man sure has added benefits.

GARTH GIVES AGAIN

Garth Brooks not only has sold out everywhere he's booked his current tour, he broke attendance records where country music has not dared to go before. With homes on wheels, like a band of gypsies, they travel from town to town with family, band and crew in buses with a bevy of trucks loaded with equipment. Since our last visit, Garth and **Sandy Brooks** have done many deeds that I am proud of. Recently, they surprised a Charleston, West Virginia, couple, who were GB's two-millionth ticket buyers, with a 1997 Chevy Tahoe and a Caribbean vacation. **Melissa and Ricky Huffman** were asked to leave the "nose-bleed" section of the Coliseum, then were escorted backstage to meet Garth and Sandy. After the show, the couple left driving the Tahoe laden down with other goodies such as a video camera, still camera and piles of GB merchandise. You do recall that last year, at his Denver concert, GB surprised his millionth ticket buyers with a Camaro Z28. Fans, you will want to know this.

THIS 'N' THAT

The St. Peter of Graceland (gatekeeper), **Elvis Presley's** lovable Uncle **Vester Presley**, died. Presley's manager, the colorful **Colonel Tom Parker**, died in Vegas. Colonel Tom resided at the Las Vegas Hilton. When **George Strait** would appear at the Hilton, the Colonel always attended his shows and would meet with George and his manager, **Erv Woolsey**. For the sake of history buffs, it was Colonel Tom Parker who called **Jerry Weintraub** regarding George appearing in a movie. The end result of his call was the marvelous *Pure Country* flick starring Mr. Strait, with soundtrack of the same title that has sold six million records. Bet you didn't know that.

Terri Clark got a "Tootsie's itch," put on her hat and took her guitar back to the world famous Tootsie's Orchid Lounge, where she used to sing for tips. Sometimes it helps to go back and visit old haunts. Keeps you humble.

When the crow that can't fly, **Sheryl Crow**, performed at the Ryman, my pals **Kim Richey** and **Martina McBride**, along with **Trisha Yearwood** and hubby **Robert**



Garth and Sandy Brooks congratulate Ricky and Melinda Huffman for purchasing the two-millionth ticket to a Garth show. The star gave 'em a car and a vacation.

Reynolds of The Mavericks, **Suzy Bogguss** and *Prime Time Country* host delightful **Gary Chapman** and his lovely missus **Amy Grant**, attended. **Emmylou Harris** and **Jakob Dylan**, son of **Bob Dylan**, harmonized with the Crow—it was magic. So much so that **Sheryl** asked Emmylou to fly to New York with her for her concert at Roseland. Emmylou obliged. The music was taped for a future album release. Both Sheryl and Jakob had nothing but nice to say about the Ryman. Jakob must be about the same age his dad was the first time I saw the elder Dylan perform on the Ryman stage with **Johnny Cash** on his marvelous CBS-TV show. That was before **Mindy McCready** was born, and my hair was still black.

RCA's new signee, **Sara Evans**, whom I expect to be huge, had a "sing-in" with a pilot, crew and passengers. Running late. Sara got lucky: A label official convinced the airlines to hold the plane a few for her, and they did. Bolting onto the plane, Sara was stopped by the pilot and asked to sing on the intercom. She complied by belting out **Hank Williams' "Your Cheating Heart."** Sara got a standing ovation and an airplane full of new fans. See Record Reviews for more on Ms. Evans.

TNN is talking about airing a quarterly talk show hosted by **Burt Reynolds**. I don't believe there's any way on earth Burt can pay back all the millions he owes by working four TNN shows a year.

Why is one of the five premieres for *Selena: The Movie* to be held in Music Town, you ask? The slain Tejano star recorded here with **Keith Thomas** producing. Her family members plan to attend. You do recall I met **Selena** at the NARM Con-

vention in San Diego on the Capitol Records boat cruise with **Garth Brooks**, **Tanya Tucker**, **Isaac Hayes**, **Paula Abdul** and me. I met her the first of March. A couple of weeks later, **Selena** was shot dead by her fan club president.

THIS SURPRISE WAS NO BUST

Unbeknownst to **Reba McEntire**, hubby **Narvel Blackstock** took their son, **Shelby**, to noted sculptor **Alan LeQuire**, to have a bronze sculpture made of the six-year-old. The bust was a surprise gift from Reba's record label, MCA, upon her recent re-signing. The presentation was made by MCA's **Bruce Hinton**, who also told the crowd that Reba has become the Number One-selling female country artist of all time—and Number Eight of all time in all styles of music—with sales in excess of 38 million to her credit. She's racked up 25 Number One singles in her career, he added.



Reba with son Shelby in bronze.

People



Juice Newton sings for Tropicana.

FABULOUS DRINK TURNS 50

When Tropicana, the “world’s number one juice maker” (according to the PR), turned 50 years old recently, who better to perform for the orange juice company’s anniversary celebration but “Juice” Newton (well, excepting, of course, “O.J.” Simpson...). The bash took place in the company’s hometown of Bradenton, Florida, and in addition to Juice’s performance, included food, exhibits and giveaways for consumers. Didja know they’ve sold over 5.1 billion gallons of the stuff since 1947? And kept food on the tables of a lot of Florida farmers, I’d bet.

TWITTY BATTLE ENDS

The late Conway Twitty’s four children, following a three-year court battle, ended up with their daddy’s music and the rights to the Twitty Bird logo and his likeness. According to the news, Conway’s widow, Dee Henry Jenkins, bowed out of the fight. I hope it’s over. Conway, a private man, would have hated the notoriety and bickering.

WHADDA DO

BNA invited me to trendy Planet Hollywood to celebrate Mindy McCready’s success. Mindy’s debut album, *Ten Thousand Angels*, is certified platinum, a million sold, something to party about. Always so sure of herself, the star almost wilted and fell as she tried to explain to the packed house how grateful she was. Tears glistened and rolled down her young cheeks; however, tears turned to smiles when the record label presented her with a platinum navel ring. I’d wager that Mindy has the only “precious” belly button ring in

Twang Town. Mindy departed all smiles and jitters because the very next night she was due to perform her first live show opening for George Strait in St. Louis. According to promoter extraordinaire, my pal, King Ben Farrell, McCready did a real good job. Talk was the star was only a video act and studio act, but Mindy proved them wrong.

GALA IN THE FIRST CLASS SECTION

The fourth annual *An Evening of Country Greats: A Hall of Fame Celebration* was bittersweet for me this year, being this was the first since the passing of Hall of Famer, Bill Monroe. The show, filmed for an April showing on TNN, is, as always, one of the finest TV shows the network does all year. Saluting Hall of Fame members this year were fabo Junior Brown, sexy Deana Carter, angelic Alison Krauss, my darling Lee Roy Parnell, hillbilly hunk Billy Dean, cutie pie Marty Stuart, beautifully pregnant Faith Hill, tall and pretty Terri Clark, the ever so marvelous Pam Tillis and that tall drink of good-looking water, Trace Adkins. Hall of Famers in attendance were the great Earl Scruggs with his lovely wife Louise Scruggs, Eddy Arnold and Sally Arnold (his wife of 50 years), Grandpa

Jones and his beautiful bride Ramona Jones, Roy Horton and his marvelous Lilly Horton, Ray Price, whose perfect singing raised the crowd to their feet, and the always classy Frances Preston.

MY MAN SAM

I’ve never hidden the fact that I love to hear Sammy Kershaw sing, and I love him as a person. All you Sammy fans know he’s a real man’s man, an outdoorsman who rises early, gets on his own bulldozer or tractor, digs ponds, plows land, pushes up stumps, tends cattle and horses, builds barns and takes care of his farm when he’s off the road. And he drives one of those big Ford trucks. Since I knew all this, I called Sam when I needed some back hoe work to see if he knew anybody who does that. Sammy showed up at the house on a cold Friday morning at 8 A.M., wearing his lined camouflage coat, cap and pants with high-top, laced-up leather boots. Smart men from the country measure distance by “stepping it off.” That’s what Sammy did—he stepped off the length of my yard. My neighbors, noses to windows, were impressed. Mouth of Music Row me, I told it all over town. Go to see Sammy when he’s in your area.

THE 39TH GRAMMYS FROM MY POINT OF VIEW

Country music and Nashville scored a good A-minus at the Grammys. Swell elegant. Thanks to all involved with LeAnn Rimes’ hit, “Blue”: WBAP’s Bill Mack (Country Song of the Year) for writing the marvelous song; the star’s dad, Wilber Rimes, et al., for recording it; Mike Curb who heard talent on the tape and signed LeAnn to Curb; Chris Rogers, director of the fabo video, for making LeAnn look like a young teen and not some sex pot; and TNN and CMT for playing the video. Lastly, thanks to the Grammy members for naming LeAnn in the Best New Artist and Female Country Vocal Performance categories.

Song of the Year went to “Change the World,” first recorded by Wynonna. Co-writer Gordon Kennedy is the son of Jerry Kennedy, who ran Mercury Records for years, signed Reba McEntire and produced her early records, as well as Roger Miller, Johnny Rodriguez, Tom T. Hall, The Statlers and others. Co-writer Tommy Sims resides in Music Town, is a hit songwriter and producer. Third writer, Wayne Kirkpatrick, has written for and produced records on pop/gospel

diva, Amy Grant.

Banjo player Bela Fleck and his band, The Flecktones, took home the award for Pop Instrumental Performance for an Orchestra, Group or Soloist for “The Sinister Minister.” Vince Gill and Alison Krauss earned the coveted Country Collaboration award for Gill’s self-penned “High Lonesome Sound,” written to honor Bill Monroe, which the couple immaculately performed. Vince won Male Country Vocal Performance for “World’s Apart.” Patty Loveless joined Vince and Alison for Bill’s gospel song, “Working on a Building.”

Lyle Lovett was just as surprised at winning Best Country Album as anyone else. ‘Course everyone I know agrees Lyle’s *Road to Ensenada* is a great album, as is all of his work.

The Songs of Bill Monroe by various artists won for Bluegrass Album, Andy Griffith’s direct mail album, *I Love to Tell the Story: 25 Timeless Hymns*, received the Gospel award, and for the 14th time, Chet Atkins received the Country Instrumentalist statue for “Jam Man.” Truly the finest Grammy show for country artists that I recall.

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Record Reviews

Tanya Tucker

Complicated

Capitol Nashville 8-36885

Whenver Tanya Tucker sings now, you can hear all of her difficult life in her voice—the premature stardom, the tabloid romances, the exile from the charts, the single motherhood, the stubborn comeback. It's as if all that hard living has accumulated in her throat as a bluesy rasp, which she uses to convey all the wisdom and weariness she has earned. It makes *Complicated* the best album of her long career.

A handful of singers—Charlie Rich, Ray Charles, Willie Nelson, Wynonna Judd, Arthur Alexander—have used that little growl in the throat to bridge the worlds of country and soul music, and Tucker joins their select company with her new album. Just listen to the way she sings the first single, the Deborah Allen and Chuck Jones song, “It Hurts Like Love,” as if it were an old Memphis soul ballad refitted with fiddle and pedal steel guitar. When she tells a departing lover, “I’m still not sure just what it was, but it hurts like love,” the aching twang in her voice makes it sound as if her heart has been dragged across the parking lot.

In the same vein is another ballad, “By the Way,” which also teeters on the fence between soul and country. Against a simple organ and acoustic-guitar backdrop, she confesses, “By the way, I really love you, just in case you didn’t know,” as if she were overcoming a great reluctance to say such things out loud.

The best ballad of all, however, is Craig Wiseman’s “All I Have to Offer You Is Love,” which in Tucker’s interpreta-



tion becomes as emotionally naked as Bonnie Raitt's version of “I Can't Make You Love Me.” It's the story of a woman who is tired of arguing with her man, a woman who has reached the end of her patience and just wants him to make a decision. If he just wants to go out and party, he can go on his way; but if he wants love, she's got it for him—take it or leave it. It's a song that requires the singer to convey a weariness to her very bones as well as the strength to demand a choice. Tucker delivers both feelings in potent doses. On the verses, her understated whisper seems ready to drop from exhaustion, but on the chorus her voice acquires a hard edge to let him know she's not fooling around.

Complicated is Tucker's first project with producer Gregg Brown, who has also worked with Travis Tritt. On the uptempo tunes, Brown creates Southern rock arrangements that make you

think Tucker has changed her first name to Marshall. When she tackles Delbert McClinton and Bill LaBounty's “Love Thing” (a close cousin of Raitt's “A Thing Called Love”), Pat Buchanan opens and closes the song with Allmanesque slide guitar and pushes Tucker's sassy vocal along with a boogie riff. He does the same on the slinky, funky love song, “What Your Love Does for Me.”

Best of all is her carefree, wisecracking vocal on a rocking version of Al Anderson and Troy Seal's “You Don't Do It.” When she crows, “You wanna spend your life, your love and your money in the fast lane... You don't do it, baby, but you think about it,” she's explaining better than any critic why so many clean-living country fans love to hear drinking and cheating songs.

Tucker was just 13 when she unleashed her big voice on the world with the hit single, “Delta Dawn.” Now that she's 38, she is long past her novelty

status and has to rely on the character of her voice and the savvy of her interpretations to connect with an audience. She does so spectacularly on *Complicated*, which contains the best music of her career. LeAnn Rimes should be so lucky to end up like this.

—GEOFFREY HIMES

Sara Evans

Three Chords and The Truth

RCA 07863-6695

It was inevitable that in the wake of LeAnn Rimes' success, other labels would seek their own Patsy-esque artists. Most are doomed to failure. Besides, the funkier edge of female country, despite abundant talent, hasn't panned out the way it could have. Talent's certainly no guarantee of success. Ask Bobbie Cryner or Shelby Lynne, who've made music almost too good for current audiences. Heather Myles likewise has yet to find her niche. With Reba's slowly declining but still strong emphasis on pop, Faith's consistent mediocrity and Trisha making music for soccer moms, there's been little leadership at the top.

RCA's choice to fill that gap is Missouri native Sara Evans, and their belief in her is demonstrated by the choice of producer: Pete Anderson, world-class collaborator behind Dwight's best work and a sworn enemy of formulas. None of that, of course, would mean diddley if Evans herself was smoke and mirrors. No chance. With Anderson guiding her explosive talents, the result is 1997's first promising debut.

To her credit, Evans is neither a LeAnn nor a Patsy. Any evocation of Patsy is in

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Record Reviews

spirit. Vocally, she owes as much to Loretta Lynn, a fact apparent in her sharp, sassy approach to upbeat material. The result is a style rooted in tradition, yet still original. The type of song doesn't matter. With spare, lean arrangements, she creates her own signature tune with the title song, one of two that she co-wrote. The second original is the disaster saga song, "The Week the River Raged." This dramatic tale of a flood and its impact (the kind of disaster song common 60 years ago) is understandable, coming from one whose home state sits along the Mississippi. Even the modest string section isn't out of place in the soaring arrangement.

"Imagine That" takes her into moodier, 3 A.M. territory, complete with expertly arranged, funky strings (yes, it can be done) sliding around her deep blue vocal. Is it Patsy? No. A similar spirit? Absolutely. When she rocks, as she does on "Even Now" and the Dwight-flavored "Shame About That," the quality and integrity remain. Turning reflective on "I Don't Want to See the Light" and "Unopened," she still generates eminently satisfying results.

It's hardly surprising that she and Anderson added a couple of covers to the lineup. One is Buck Owens' 1965 smash, "I've Got a Tiger by the Tail," the song he wrote with Harlan Howard. A tough song for any vocalist to cover, it doesn't bother Evans a bit. She recorded it on a demo early on, and it got Harlan Howard's seal of approval. The second cover, "Walk Out Backwards," was Bill Anderson's second Top Ten single from 1960. Her no-nonsense version more than does it justice.

It's impossible to forecast the next trend in country music. Things seem in transition at the moment, but in Evans' case, it doesn't matter. We can only hope that her magnificent premiere might—just might—point to the next step.

—RICH KIENZLE



Nanci Griffith
Blue Roses from the Moons
Elektra 62015

Nanci Griffith's "Gulf Coast Highway," which originally appeared on her 1988 album, *Little Love Affairs*, is one of the finest descriptions of the Texas landscape ever put to music. Most country fans know the song from the Emmylou Harris/Willie Nelson duet version; now, on *Blue Roses from the Moons*, Griffith has done her own duet version with Darius Rucker of Hootie and The Blowfish. The collaboration benefits both parties, for Rucker rarely gets to sing anything so well-written, and his full-bodied baritone inspires Griffith to sing more assuredly than usual.

Too often Griffith retreats into an introspective cocoon where her vague, dreamy writing lacks the crisp clarity of "Gulf Coast Highway" and her wispy whisper falls short of the force of her duet with Rucker. She breaks out of that cocoon often enough on *Blue Roses from the Moons* to satisfy her longtime fans but not to win any new ones.

Griffith seems to recognize her own problem, for she has recruited not only Rucker and producer Don Gehman (John Mellencamp, R.E.M., Tracy Chapman) but also three of Buddy Holly's Crickets to help her be more forceful. She first worked with guitarist Sonny Curtis, drummer Jerry Allison and bassist Joe Mauldin when the four of them recorded "Well...All Right" for last

year's tribute album, *Not Fade Away (Remembering Buddy Holly)*. Here she rejoins some or all of them for half of the disc's 14 tracks, including a duet with Curtis on his own composition, "I Fought the Law."

That particular song doesn't work so well, because the overly clever arrangement spoils the perfect union of melody and rhythm, which was the main strength of the hit version by the Bobby Fuller Four. Much better is the bouncy, tongue-in-cheek, honky tonk two-step, "Maybe Tomorrow," which Griffith wrote with her hero, Harlan Howard, who brings out her often-repressed sense of humor. Best of all is the carefree country rocker, "Morning Train," which rides a catchy piano riff to this great kiss-off line to an ex-lover: "Gonna skip my ring 'cross the Mississippi River; when it sinks, I won't feel a thing."

If that last song seems undisturbed by the end of a recent relationship, it's the exception on an album dominated by songs about the difficult task of leaving a relationship where all the magic is gone even if a lingering fondness isn't. We've had a million songs about leaving someone you hate or someone you still love, but very few about leaving someone you like. The best of these is "Not My Way Home," a slow, wistful song about the sad realization that this is not the relationship of a lifetime. Griffith's vocal is a bit underwhelming, but one can just imagine a big voice like Trisha Yearwood's or Kathy Mattea's biting into the poignant melody and these lines: "I don't intend to sound ungrateful; you've given love when I had none. My feet have tread upon the road you're on, and I know it's not my way home." In the same vein is the bittersweet, elegiac "Is This All There Is," which she co-wrote with Tom Littlefield.

Blue Roses from the Moons may try some listeners' patience, for so many of the weak

songs come early in the sequencing. The unfocused lyrics and minimal melody of "Everything's Comin' Up Roses" gets things off to a wobbly start, followed by such underdeveloped entries as "Wouldn't That Be Fine" and "St. Theresa of Avila." The final seven songs, though, include most of the winners cited above and climax in grand fashion with a wonderful version of Guy Clark's "She Ain't Goin' Nowhere." When Ms. Griffith's this good, there's no one better.

—GEOFFREY HIMES



Michelle Wright
For Me It's You
Arista 07822

For all its charms, Michelle Wright's first U.S. release since 1992—*For Me It's You*—is one of those records that almost didn't happen. And considering that it took several years (during which this fine Canadian singer's promising career was more or less on hold) and five different producers to make the album (including Arista label chief, Tim DuBois), it's amazing that it turned out as cohesive, and as good, as it is.

I've always loved Michelle Wright's dusky, R&B-tinged, alto singing style—especially the gutsy way she belted out "Take It Like a Man," the 1992 Top Ten hit which remains her biggest chart success to date.

Now and again Wright comes close to matching this classic 1992 benchmark on *For Me It's You*. Particularly note-

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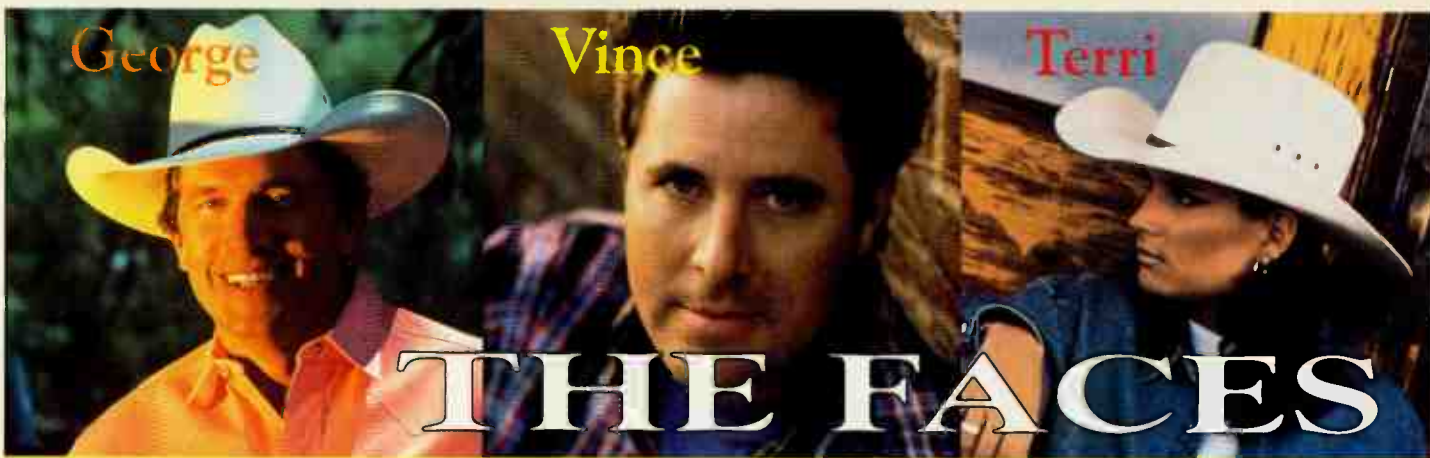
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Nashville) 476•051

Best Of Chris Ledoux
(Capitol Nashville)
476•044

Billy Dean—Grt. Hits
(Capitol Nashville)
476•036

Outlaws
(RCA) 155•465

Sawyer Brown—
Greatest Hits
(Liberty/Curb) 411•363

K.T. Oslin—
My Roots Are Showing
(BNA Records) 168•310



Tracy Lawrence—Aalibis
(Atlantic) 456•558

Marty Stuart—Hillbilly
Rock (MCA) 402•404

Blackhawk—Strong
Enough (Arista) 137•059

**The Best Of Restless
Heart** (RCA) 123•885

Freddy Fender Collec-
tion (Reprise) 430•934

Crystal Gayle—Best
Always (Branson
Entertainment) 461•228

Tanya Tucker—Grt.
Hits 1990-1992 (Capitol
Nashville) 458•935

Brooks & Dunn—
Hard Workin' Man
(Arista) 454•025

Wynonna Judd—
Wynonna (MCA/Curb)
435•909

Steve Warner—Grt.
Hits Vc. II (MCA) 425•957

The Statler Brothers—
Grt Hits, Vol. 3 (Mercury
Nashville) 425•108

Royal Wade Kimes—
Another Man's Sky
(Asylum) 167•320

Foster And Lloyd—The
Essential
Foster And Lloyd
(RCA) 155•366

Neal McCoy—You
Gotta Love That
(Atlantic Nashville)
117•119

Vince Gill—
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(MCA) 402•867

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(Reprise/Sire) 139•634

Reba McEntire—Live
(MCA) 400•739/390•732

Daryle Singletary
(Giant) 130•799

Vince Gill—When Love
Finds You (MCA) 486•308

Alan Jackson—Don't
Rock The Jukebox
(Arista) 420•935

Bill Monroe—The
Country Music Hall Of
Fame (MCA) 416•388

Ernest Tubb—Country
Music Hall Of Fame
(MCA) 416•354

Loretta Lynn—Country
Music Hall Of Fame
(MCA) 416•339

George Strait—Grt.
Hits (MCA) 334•466

George Strait—
Ten Strait Hits (MCA)
432•617

Vince Gill—Souvenir's
(MCA) 155•259

Vince Gill—
I Still Believe In You
(MCA) 448•571

The Oak Ridge Boys—
Greatest Hits Volume
Three (MCA) 383•588

Hank Williams, Jr.—
Greatest Hits 3 (Warner
Bros./Curb) 378•182

Johnny Rodriguez—
Greatest Hits
(Mercury) 160•143

Oak Ridge Boys—
Collection (MCA) 440•412

Jerry Jeff Walker—
Great Gonzos
(MCA) 426•664

Aaron Tippin—I Got
Box (RCA) 139•121

Randy Travis—
Greatest Hits, Vol. 1
(Warner Bros.) 448•654

Randy Travis—
Greatest Hits, Vol. 2
(Warner Bros.) 448•662

Conway Twitty—Final
Touches (MCA
Nashville) 465•607

The Bellamy Brothers—
Greatest Hits Volume III
(MCA/Curb) 383•653

Little Texas—Grt. Hits
(Warner Bros.) 136•838

Travis Tritt—Greatest
Hits—From The Beginning
(Warner Bros.) 136•812

Elvis Presley—
Great Country Songs
(RCA) 169•391

K.T. Oslin—Greatest
Hits—Songs From Ar
Aging Sex Bomb
(RCA) 125•286

Marty Stuart—
The Marty Party Hit
Pack (MCA Nashville)
121•350

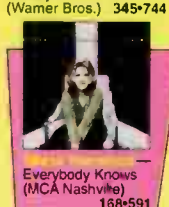
Don Williams—
Flanlans (American
Harvest) 173•351

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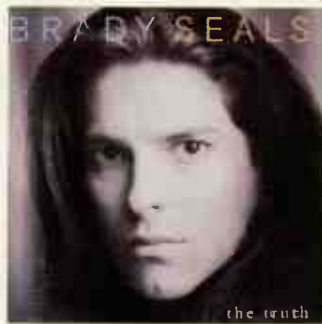
worthy is her sinewy yet soulful performance on Rodney Crowell's "The Answer Is Yes." She's just as inspired on cuts like "I'm Not Afraid" (which is about the strength it takes to offer unconditional love, even in the face of potential heartbreak), the playfully sexy "You Owe Me" (written by Ronnie Samoset and Craig Wiseman) and the sultry-sorrowful "Cold Kisses" (penned by Chapin Hartford and Pam Tillis).

On a few cuts Wright's tough-but-tender purrs and growls do seem a bit under-utilized or over-packaged. "We've Tried Everything Else" (Bob DiPiero, Steve Seskin and Pam Tillis) is a nice enough middle-of-the-road love song that's a little soft with sentimentality in the middle. Wright also struggles valiantly, but to little avail, to breathe life into a cover of "Love Has No Pride," one of those Linda Ronstadt hits of yesteryear that just won't go away—it's one of those songs that's been played so recurrently through the years that it's like a tire with most of the tread worn off.

Fortunately, though, Wright connects way more often than she misses on *For Me It's You*. "Crank My Tractor" is another playful number with a sassy arrangement in which she raves about a certain "Mr. Right" who *doesn't* drive a pick-up, *doesn't* have callused hands and *can't* two-step, yet makes all her cows want to come home anyway. On a more serious side, cuts like "Nobody's Girl" (a haunting anthem of lonely independence written by Gretchen Peters) and "What Love Looks Like" (which Wright co-authored with Christi Dannemiller and Lisa Drew) also effectively showcase Wright's subdued sensuality and impressive emotional range.

With a little luck, understated gems like these will get this classy singer back in the country charts, where she richly deserves to be.

—BOB ALLEN



Brady Seals
The Truth
Reprise 9 46258

You've heard the soulful power-ballad debut single, "Another You, Another Me," and soon you will hear the rockin'-country follow-up, "Still Standing Tall." Brady has been in hit territory before. Formerly a member of Little Texas, he was a writer of "Amy's Back in Austin," "My Love," "God Bless Texas" and "What Might Have Been." And, frankly, I think he kept his best songs for himself.

"Natural Born Lovers" is so Fort Worth R&B-country that I had to check to make sure it wasn't a Delbert McClinton track put in there by mistake. "Kentucky Boy" has a poignancy I admire. The stripped down piano, "Yesterday"-style strings (arranged by pop music whiz Michael Omartian) and gut string guitar of "She" make something entirely different of the first-person positive romantic theme. In fact, the sheer variety of Seals' styles, while not making him entirely eclectic, is impressive. I also love his grooves, doing Mac Gayden's signature wah-wah slide guitar proud in a wonderfully funky romp, "You Can Have Your Way With Me." This again, is running through Delbert McClinton's garden of delights.

Brady Seals comes out of left field, but with Rodney Crowell co-producing, how could he not succeed? Seals has vocal power, even when he's using his soft vibrato, as on "She Doesn't Love Here

Anymore." This could be a smash pop hit, and probably will be by somebody else if Reprise doesn't service this track in that direction on Seals himself. I'd say the only thing on this CD I wasn't totally knocked out by was the pseudo-Rolling Stones clone, "Junkie for Your Love." The press material calls this "rockin' country," but does "Brown Sugar" ring a bell with anyone?

Crowell has said of Seals, "He's just a very soulful guy whose heart is in the right place and who filters a set of influences through country that I've never quite heard before." Ah, something new that's *really new*; that's a worthy find.

Man, I dig this record! Brady Seals, as you may have guessed, is related to Jim Seals (Seals & Croft), Dan Seals, and terrific hit-writer Troy Seals. Brady should have no trouble extending the family tree as a solo.

—BOB MILLARD

Big House
Big House
MCAD 11446

Bakersfield strikes again! One thing I always did admire about Bakersfield was the way its artists make their road bands integral to their recorded sound. Big House writes it all and calls in no generic studio pickers to homogenize their rock-indebted and acoustic-inclined sound. This six-man, roots-rock ensemble fronted by lead vocalist Monty Byrom is a fresh musical wind—but is it country by anybody's definition?

I'd have to say I hear the distinctive vocal sound of 70's rocker Paul Rogers in Monty Byrom's vocal approach. I also hear shades of Lowell George of Little Feat in Byrom's lyric themes; more so than in anything I've ever identified with Bakersfield before. Interestingly, they've been opening for the likes of Travis Tritt and



Wynonna Judd (whose last album seemed a heck of a lot more pop than country, too). Big House's blues harp and slide guitar has probably been finding an audience out there among people already drawn to that inflection. At this writing, the single, "Cold Outside," had landed on *Billboard's* Hot Country Singles chart.

Big House seems, upon closer listen, to be a natural spawn of the original Kentucky HeadHunters' brash rock treatment of bluegrass songs and perhaps one of the few California bands to add something to The Eagles' legacy rather than simply coping licks and harmony shards. They developed their own sound in their one year together, becoming so masterful at what they did that MCA essentially is putting out their demo recordings here, something the label probably hasn't done since it took on Lyle Lovett. As with Lovett, Big House is at very least pushing the envelope of country music, if not completely outside it.

Big House has taken rockin' country many steps farther, or just plain blues-rock one step our way. To do this, they basically start with solid, acoustic, blues rock 'n' roll, and salt it with a smattering of traditional country icons, such as blue tick hounds in the slinky macho single, "Cold Outside." "Amarillo" takes one of Texas-country's favorite town names and makes hot, unplugged rock out of it. Lyrically, this is very nearly a country song.

For the most part, though the lyrics tell stories, they are primarily the stories of the lone, lonesome dude, including

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on "Road Man," the quintessential rugged young individualist who was born on a bus, left at a truck stop and sings "I'm a road man, Lord, take me on a groove." What does that mean to a George Strait fan, anyway, "Take me on a groove"?

Now, having said that this isn't Mainstream Country by any contemporary standard, I have to say that it is fresh, exciting music that many, particularly younger, country fans might like, if they get a chance to hear it. And they probably will; country radio is programmed by ex-rock radio guys now. This is really more blues-based rock than even Alternative Country, but, dadgum, it's good stuff.

—BOB MILLARD

Kim Richey

Bitter Sweet

Mercury 314-534 255

I had the pleasure of seeing Kim Richey perform live a couple of times before her self-titled 1995 debut album came out. In person, her overwhelming, if slightly untamed and meandering voice, coupled with her vivid original songs (the Ohio-born Richey has also written hits for Trisha Yearwood, Radney Foster and others) pretty much stole the show out from under the other celebrated singer/songwriters with whom she shared the stage. But after hearing Richey live, I found her first album tepid by comparison. *Kim Richey*, to my ears, did only a barely adequate job of focusing her great-big wavery voice and her first-rate original material.

Bitter Sweet, Richey's second album, is, by contrast, everything that *Kim Richey* should have been, and more. It's confident, masterful, yet often delightfully quirky—chockful of performances that are exhilarating to listen to.

Bitter Sweet is, in some ways, the result of a fortuitous accident. Veteran producer Ri-



chard Perry, who produced *Kim Richey*, was unavailable when it came time to make her second album. So Richey promoted from within. Hoping to capture the spirit of the live sound she'd been honing while opening shows for Trisha Yearwood and Mary Chapin Carpenter during the last couple of years, she shifted Angelo, her lead guitarist and constant co-writer, into the producer's slot and used the rest of her road band to back her on the sessions for *Bitter Sweet*. She also co-wrote the 12 songs on *Bitter Sweet*—nearly all of them with Angelo.

It was a brilliant strategy of self-containment, and you can hear the immensely satisfying results from the very first power chords of the opening cut, "Every River." There's a lovely tension in the idiosyncratic way Richey subtly bends, slows and draws out the lyrics against the instrumental meter and creates an utterly compelling statement of longing and devotion. "I'm Alright" is another gorgeous song that's full of minor chord momentousness, yet propelled by a jaunty Dan Dugmore banjo rhythm track. Richey's performance here shows how deftly she's able to sustain a bundle of mixed emotions—everything from tentative sadness and a lingering sense of loss to a more abiding faith in the healing power of time and understanding—in just a few deliciously phrased, immensely expressive vocal passages.

You can hear some of Richey's obvious influences—like Linda Ronstadt and Bonnie Raitt—churning around in many of the above-

mentioned songs, as well as in other stand-outs like "Wildest Dreams," "The Lonesome Side of Town" and "Straight As the Crow Flies." But Richey more than does these influences proud and manages to infuse every track on this near-masterpiece with an irresistible charm and magnetism that's hers alone.

—BOB ALLEN

Jack Ingram

Livin' or Dyin'

Rising Tide RT 53046

For the most part, this is my idea of what a modern young country artist could be. Jack Ingram, who's not quite pushing 30 yet, can write songs that make old ideas sound fresh again ("A ghost of a man/she looks right through me/There's nothing left for her to see/A ghost of a man, that's me"). He's best on hard rockin' honky tonk, but given the right material, he also delivers a ballad credibly. He can be smooth and seductive on one track, then come back with a voice as weather-beaten as the West Texas plains, and, yes, he has the rugged good looks to go with those pipes. Snoop Doggy Dogg probably has as good a chance of being played on country radio today.

It's not just that his music is all rough edges and hard times in an era of vanilla feel-good—it's almost as if he purposely set out to make the anti-country CD, so far is this from the mainstream while still being so obviously a country record. It has its flaws; as co-produced by Steve Earle, this Dallas singer-songwriter sounds a lot more like—would you believe?—Steve Earle than he did on his three prior CD's, all indie efforts. I mean, the title track, in addition to flaunting a very familiar-sounding nasal snarl, might as well have been written by Earle. And some of Ingram's ballads ("She Does Her Best," "Don't You Remember") are awfully slight; he has a tendency to overwrite when he slows things down.



But I like it just the same. It's hard to beat the go-for-broke live feel of tracks like "Big Time," "Imitation of Love" and "Flutter." This sounds like real, fallible music being made by real, fallible humans, not something patched together electronically a word or a line at a time. This band plays shuffles you can nearly slam-dance to, with enough twang to vibrate barstools and a steel player (Tommy Hannum) who threatens to swing himself right off the record. And Ingram has good taste in remakes. This version of "Dim Lights, Thick Smoke (And Loud, Loud Music)" is wasted, wounded, aggressive, rumbling; you can hear what the song's about without even listening to the lyrics. Ingram establishes his post-Outlaw Texas credentials with a sparkling version of Guy Clark's "Rita Ballou" that begins ultra-spare and then fills out with a prickly dobro, while this arrangement of Jimmie Dale Gilmore's "Dallas" comes right out of the Hank Williams era (though I don't see why they have to hit us over the head with it by emulating the scratchy sounds of an old 78—the music speaks for itself already). Finally, his set-closing "Airways Motel" just has to be about Jimmy Swaggart.

Best of all, Ingram is likely to only get better; he hasn't even fully found his own voice yet. So I'm satisfied to indulge his occasional excesses and shortcomings. And to keep hoping that, with country radio such a closed shop, there'll be more places opening up for talent as promising as this.

—JOHN MORTHLAND

Record Reviews



Chet Atkins
The Day Finger Pickers Took Over the World
Columbia 67915

I've been a Chet fan for decades. It amazes me that as with his classical guitar idol, the late Andres Segovia, who played well into his 90's, at 72, age has not dimmed Chet's playing a bit. I've complained previously that, to me, he too often takes the laid-back way out, focusing on the already

crowded arena of contemporary fusion jazz. Granted, he does a good job at it, obviously enjoying these contemporary excursions along with many of his fans. And it's certainly admirable that he wants to remain up with the times since, in addition to his deep country roots, he's a child of the Big Band era. His early RCA recordings included many big band favorites.

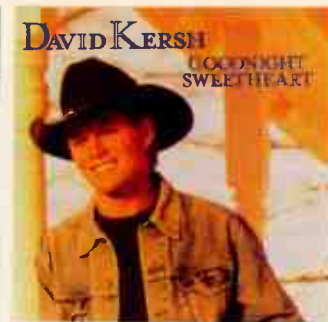
All that said, the one area where no one can touch Chet Atkins is fingerpicking. When he lets fly with the Atkins picking style, the one he created by improving on Merle Travis' picking, he is in a class by himself. That's what attracted listeners to him when RCA signed him 50 years ago this year as their answer to Travis. Put him with a younger musician like a Mark Knopfler, and Chet's laid-back tendencies vanish. This time, he's again teamed with a younger player: gifted Austra-

lian fingerpicker Tommy Emmanuel, who's built his own style on Chet's as Chet did on Travis'. With a crack studio band including pianist Randy Goodrum, Terry McMillan on harmonica and Johnny Gimble playing fiddle, the pair syncopate nicely through 11 numbers.

The leadoff number, "Borsalino," sets the tone with a sophisticated, beautifully focused performance that manages to skirt the edges of fusion without ever becoming boring. The Atkins-Goodrum instrumental, "To 'B' or Not To 'B'," is pleasingly jazzy and light. The light country waltz, "Tip Toe Through the Bluegrass," "News From the Outback," and Emmanuel's own "Dixie McGuire" and "Mr. Guitar" all speak for themselves. Two numbers are novelties. "The Day Finger Pickers Took Over the World" adapts a song originally written about bass players with new lyrics by Chet, who, along with Emmanuel, sings it without a shred of self-consciousness. "Ode to Mel Bay," sung by Chet, pays homage to the man whose guitar instruction books were at one time *the* books for guitar students (I still have mine, someplace). The sole waste of time is "Saltwater," a perfectly performed pop song that basically takes both players into the realm of elevator muzak that Chet can't seem to avoid. We don't need Chet Atkins trying to be Kenny G. (One Kenny G is bad enough.)

The medley of "Road to Gundaghi/Waltzing Matilda" not only shows Emmanuel's command of the basic Atkins style, it returns Chet to straight-ahead fingerpicking. The introspective "Smokey Mountain Lullaby," an Atkins original, closes the album tastefully.

Like I said, there are different schools of thought about what Chet has done over the past decade. Maybe that's the beauty of the man: In the final analysis, there's something for everybody. —RICH KIENZLE



David Kersh
Goodnight Sweetheart
Curb 77848

The publicity sheet for this 25-year-old Texan, and the press kit that accompanies his debut release, say it all. He started singing at age nine in his church choir; he's a "Texas honky tonker," he's had a TNN prime time special, been featured on a Coca-Cola CD and (get this!) has landed an upcoming story in *16 Magazine*. We discover that early in his career he recalled having beer bottles thrown at him, and that his influences are George Strait, Garth and Merle Haggard. A release about the album has one song pegged as a "potential wedding anthem," an amazing bit of audacity. Kersh also takes a nice photograph, clad in the current uniform of hat and jeans. With a Curb record deal, he's got some heavy push behind him. The question is, is there any substance behind all this hype?

If there is, don't expect to find it here. Any talents Kersh has, and it's unclear if there are any, are buried in the generic, boot-scooting production values of Pat McMakin of Sony Tree Music, who apparently graduated from the Don Cook school of production. Every current cliché is duly serviced. Check out the by-the-numbers, macho boot-scooters like "Boys Will Be Boys," "Louisiana Country Mile," "Breaking Hearts and Taking Names," "One Good Reason" and more, all perfect for dance club zombies.

"ONE OF THE BEST KEPT SECRETS IN COUNTRY MUSIC—BLESSED WITH THREE TALENTED SONGWRITERS, THE OYSTER PRODUCES INTELLIGENT COUNTRY MUSIC, STEEPED IN TRADITIONAL STYLES." — PRAIRIE MAGAZINE

Prairie OYSTER

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"ONE WAY TRACK,"
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& "UNBELIEVABLE LOVE."

Produced by Mike Poole and Prairie Oyster
Management: MBK Management

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Record Reviews

In that same vein is the utterly moronic "Things Your Daddy Wouldn't Want Us to Do," a song that's supposed to be "naughty," but could include anything from the obvious to spitting on the sidewalk. The yammering, watery ballads include "Until Now" and his hit single (which says a lot), "Another You," as well as "The Love of a Man" and the title song. All sound a lot like ballads on albums by dozens of other tight-jeans hat acts. "Day In, Day Out" is the kind of rocker a Garth fan could love, but has nothing of its own to offer. Everything here is mind-numbingly derivative, the very kind of thing many artists, fans and critics currently complain about. Curb Records may indulge Junior Brown's individuality, but, based on this effort, they won't hesitate to pigeonhole some newcomer like Kersh.

George Jones and Hag might be among his influences, but there's nary a trace of their spirit in what he does here. —RICH KIENZLE

Regina Regina

Regina Regina
Giant 9 24662

Regina Regina—the name conjures up the 80's pop act, Duran Duran. But that's about the only similarity. These girls are fine country singers, both of whom just happen to be named Regina. They take turns sharing the lead vocals, but their individual vocal signatures are close enough in tone and timbre that their pairing doesn't come across like many multi-lead singer acts that fail for lack of a voice to focus on.

They have more in common than first names, in fact. Both worked for Reba McEntire. Regina Nicks, the brunette, was Reba's personal assistant, while Regina Leigh, the blonde, spent three years backing Reba on the road. Leigh has been singing in country bands since age 13,



and was for five years one of the latter-day "Sugars" in the trio Dave & Sugar. Nicks sang in choirs through junior college, then hit the road wailing in East Texas honky tonks. Interestingly, Nicks got her first Nashville job answering phones and shipping merchandise for the Reebster, just like Faith Hill. (Reba is turning into a formidable source of new female talent, if you discount the yet-to-be-lucky Linda Davis, who is the only one she actually has tried hard to launch.)

Regina Regina puts together the current winning formula of winsome women dressed by a Hollywood clothier, with midriffs and belly buttons prominently displayed. Enjoy or ignore the costumes and pierced navels as your own tastes run, it's their fine Texas-merged-with-North Carolina harmonies that drive their rocked up, contemporary country sound. They are an intriguing mix of Jo Dee Messina, Suzy Bogguss and maybe Patty Loveless, which is only said for categorization. They have a good and easily identifiable sound.

Their material is one hundred percent fine—no filler here. Interestingly, along with songs from proven Music Row hitmakers Mark D. Sanders ("Big Bad Broken Heart"), Gary Burr/Tom Shapiro ("Before I Knew About You"), Bob Regan ("More Than I Wanted to Know"), Susan Longacre ("A Far Cry From Him") and Tim Mensy/Liz Hengber ("She'll Let That Telephone Ring"), Regina Regina makes a country classic out of sullen distaff rocker Patty Smyth's "I

Should Be Laughing." This is a CD filled with positive energy, believable emotion and an attitude of indominability.

I think one of the most endearing things about this act is the genuine rural "country" spin their vocals possess. It's the same reason I love Patty Loveless so much. In the midst of all this big production and booming California country arrangements, a little fiddle, a little steel guitar and a whole lot of genuine Texas and the Carolinas comes through. This CD is worth your money, if you're a real country fan.

—BOB MILLARD

The Burns Sisters

In This World

Philo PH 1198

Every once in a while a lovely little album like *In This World*, packed with beautiful family harmonies and perceptive original songs, drops in my lap out of left field. Then, it's a sheer pleasure to tell the world about it.

To give you some idea of what The Burns Sisters—Annie, Marie and Jeannie—are about, think of the sisterly harmonies of Sweethearts of the Rodeo and throw in a third sister, some great original material and a faint trace of Celtic moodiness for good measure.

There were five sisters in the group back when The Burnses briefly recorded for Columbia some years ago. Now, under the guidance of producer Garry Tallent (former bass-player in Bruce Springsteen's E Street Band), the sisters have scaled down to a trio and brought their captivating vocal magic and inspired composition into vivid focus. (Though, in all fairness, "My Father's Blue Eyes," one of the best of many harmony masterpieces on *In This World*, was produced by The Burnses themselves in an Ithaca, New York, studio.)

In their original songs, The Burnses often display a flair for the unexpected. "Dance



Upon This Earth" (written by Marie Burns and sister Sheila—not currently in the group), for instance, has a message of celebration—but celebration against the odds. The lyrics own up to the immense wisdom and struggle often required to rise above the parade of trials and travails that life continually throws at us.

"The Owl" (written by Annie Burns and Rich DePaolo) has hints of dark mysticism, while "My Father's Blue Eyes" (also by Marie and sister Sheila) and the title song (by Annie Burns and Bret Cartwright) are both moving tributes to a departed parent that are tinged with loss.

When The Burns Sisters turn their attention to romantic love, the results are sometimes a little off the beaten track as well. "Stay Away From Me" offers an ominous warning to a potential suitor if he's looking to forge new love based on lies and concealment. "Can I Walk Away Tonight" is about a woman's deep conflict over whether to steer clear of or succumb to an overpowering love that may have a high price tag of freedom attached.

The Burns Sisters' one cover tune on *In This World* is a rollicking version of Hazel Dickens' "Working Girl Blues" on which they serve up some delightful honky tonk blues with some sprightly yodeling thrown in for good measure.

If you're moved by great, organic family harmonies by folks like Sweethearts of the Rodeo, The Rankin Family or the early Judds, then you'll want to give this fine sisterly trio a good listen, too.

—BOB ALLEN



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Patty Loveless

Life Lessons

Patty's experienced a lot in the two decades that she's been in the music business.

Career ups and downs and personal tragedies are all part of the mix.

A label switch in 1993 brought a renewed commitment and million-selling albums.

Now 40, she's looking forward to the next chapter of her life.

By Bob Allen

“You know that old story about the turtle and the rabbit?” Patty Loveless asks with a shy grin as she sips a cup of coffee in a chic but informal uptown Manhattan lunch spot. “Well, I’m kinda like the turtle. There are other singers like Shania or LeAnn Rimes who sell millions of records right from the start. But it’s never been that way for me. I’m 40 years old now, and when I first came to Nashville in the early 1970’s, I was LeAnn’s age.”

She considers this a moment, stirs her coffee and laughs softly. “But that’s okay. It may take me a little longer, but sooner or later I get there.”

It says a lot about Patty Loveless’ independent streak—her stubborn determination to live life and make music at her own pace and on her own terms—that when she walks from her hotel near New York City’s Lincoln Center to the nearby restaurant, there’s no entourage trailing her. No tour coordinators or publicity reps tagging along.

Nope, just Patty. Dressed in black slacks and a subdued brown leather jacket, she coughs occasionally since she’s a little under the weather from a lingering case of the flu. Though she’s been in Manhattan for the past two days, her

plans to shop for a dress to wear to the Grammys have been canceled, and she’s spent most of her time in the hotel, saving her strength for her two shows at the Bottom Line. Noted music critic Dave Marsh and writer Stephen King will be among the fans who show up at the Bottom Line. Turns out King is a particularly big fan. He’s got all of Loveless’ CD’s and even knows the words to some of her songs.

Flu bug aside, there’s something very fleet, economical and purposeful in the way this small-town Kentucky girl threads her way through the heavy pedestrian, auto and truck traffic along Broadway. Up here, she’s just another face in the crowd.

A little later, as she picks at a soup and salad, Loveless returns to that old tortoise-and-the-hare analogy. She obviously likes it, and there’s a certain quiet confidence in the way she holds it out for consideration.

No doubt it’s a comparison that’s popped up more than once in the last dozen or so years since Loveless made her chart debut with a little-heard 1985 single, “Lonely Days, Lonely Nights.”

For six or seven years, she toiled away at MCA Records and delivered a half-dozen fine albums. She became a favorite





of the music critics, who saw her as a shining example of the sort of vital new talent to emerge in the mid-1980's "New Traditionalist" movement.

Now and again, Loveless even crashed through to the top of the charts with riveting hits like "Timber, I'm Falling in Love," "Chains," "Hurt Me Bad (In a Real Good Way)" and "That Kind of Girl."

Yet during those years, Loveless, the hapless turtle, probably suffered a few bouts of whiplash as she watched the rabbits gain ground and pass her by. Time and again, MCA's mighty female triumvirate—Reba, Wynonna and Trisha Yearwood—roared by and left her stranded in the dust with their platinum-plus album sales that dwarfed her far more modest career numbers.

Back then, nobody disputed that Loveless was a remarkable singer. Her voice—then as now—is fraught with thrilling vulnerability and a compelling urgency that seems an almost perfect marriage of her small town Appalachian roots (she, too, is a coal miner's daughter) with her sharper-edged contemporary stylings shaped by years of singing the latest hits by Pat Benatar and Joan Jett in obscure North Carolina rock 'n' roll bands.

Yet during her MCA years, Loveless earned a lingering reputation as an introvert in an extrovert's business, and a somewhat tentative performer with little flair for self-promotion. ("She just doesn't want it bad enough," was the refrain you'd sometimes hear around Music Row during the years before her early 90's label change.)

At MCA, even with master producers Tony Brown and Emory Gordy Jr. (whom Loveless married in 1989) at the helm, the dots in her promising career never quite seemed to connect into anything beyond the level of well respected journeymanship. Her 1988 album, *Honky Tonk Angel*, did manage to earn Loveless her first Gold record for sales of in excess of half a million. But her worthy follow-up, *Up Against My Heart*, merely slipped through the cracks.

By the turn of the decade, Loveless was in sort of a stall. Her career had slipped into the kind of flat line trajectory that makes record executives' enthusiasm wane. Her chronic voice problems, which had plagued her for some time—and which she mistakenly attributed to stress—were worsening, and she no longer saw much light at the end of the tunnel with MCA.

So Loveless made some major moves. She asked MCA label chief Tony Brown for—and got—her walking papers and went across the street to Epic, which at the time was not so top-heavy with female superstars

Fortunately, she was able to look back over her shoulder with no hard feelings. "Tony [Brown] was great," she says fondly of her ex-producer/label chief. "He and Emory and I were a great team, and it broke my heart when we couldn't work together anymore. But I just knew it was time for a change."



Patty took home the CMA's Female Vocalist of the Year in 1996.

COURTESY W. HUBBARD

With many tears, she also dispensed with the services of her long-time manager: her brother Roger Ramey, whom she'd been singing with since she was a child, and who had practically led her by the hand through her early career.

And finally owning up to the hard truth that she was gradually losing her voice, she sought medical help. Putting her touring and recording schedule aside for several months, she underwent emergency surgery for an aneurysm on her vocal cords.

Finally, when the scars—physical and otherwise—had begun to mend, she resumed work on her first Epic album. This time, Emory Gordy, her guitarist/producer husband, who's worked with everyone from George Jones and the late Bill Monroe to Steve Earle and Jimmie Dale Gilmore, did all the producing.

"I dunno," Loveless shrugs softly and smiles, stabbing tentatively at a spinach leaf with her fork, "I just feel like Emory and I were meant to be together. He just has a way of pulling the best out of me."

The results of all her changes were immediate and remarkable. *Only What I Feel*, Loveless' Gordy-produced 1992 Epic debut album, was

like a revelation—the fulfillment of a long-standing promise, full of emotional connections often glimpsed but never quite sustained on her MCA recordings.

Apparently, many were moved by these musical giant steps Loveless and Gordy so masterfully executed on *Only What I Feel*. Backed by a full court promotional press from Epic, "Blame It on Your Heart," the lead-off single from the album, went Number One, as did the unforgettable "How Can I Help You to Say Goodbye"—another song about coming to terms with loss that has insinuated its way into thousands of people's lives. *Only What I Feel* ultimately became Loveless' first million-selling album, a feat she equaled with her stunning 1994 follow-up, *When Fallen Angels Fly*, which also won the Country Music Association's 1995 Best Country Album award.

Last year's *The Trouble With the Truth*, Loveless' third and latest Epic release, contained two more chart-topping singles ("You Can Feel Bad" and "Lonely Too Long") and was a linchpin in winning her both the Country Music Association's Female Vocalist of the Year award and the Academy of Country Music's Top Female Vocalist award in 1996. *Time Magazine* even picked *The Trouble With the Truth* as one of the year's ten best albums in all categories.

Even more meaningful from Loveless' point of view was an informal magazine survey that named *The Trouble With the Truth* as the album most listened to by other country artists.

Today, like Emmylou Harris, or Alison Krauss, or even Loretta Lynn from an earlier era (Loveless' distant cousin whom she replaced as the "girl singer" for The Wilburn Brothers when she was a teenager), Loveless has emerged as a sort of musical and aesthetic anchor at a time when country's main-

stream is adrift on swirling tides of market-driven fads.

When Loveless is asked to explain her belated creative and commercial breakthrough, she doesn't have to think very hard. A huge part of it, she insists, she owes to her husband, Emory. She smiles brightly and says:

"Emory is such a genius, sometimes I just can't get over him! Yet, he's a shy person—even shyer than I am, though he has come out of his shell quite a bit these days. He's the kind of person who won't give himself credit for anything.

"I think when Emory and I are in the studio together, we're trying to please each other more than anything else," she adds, warming to a subject obviously near and dear to her. "We joke around and get after each other, and it's a fun type thing. But Emory also knows what I've got to give to a song, and if I'm not giving it, he's gonna go back and get it out of me.

"A lot goes through my mind when I'm cutting a song, and it can get pretty intense. I'm always singing hard, always pushin'—even in sound check they always have to tell me to hold back.

"Often when we're recording, I'll come out and whisper in Emory's ear, 'What do you think? Am I doin' that part right?' There's some things I just won't discuss with the other musicians. I just talk to him."

Looking back at the earliest chapters of this love story, back when Tony Brown first brought Emory on board as co-producer of Loveless' earliest MCA sessions, Loveless doesn't recall any *Big Moments*. No bright flashing lights giving due warning that this was the guy she should spend the rest of her life with.

"I wasn't divorced from my first husband then," she says, referring to rock 'n' roll musician Terry Loveless whom she met back in the early 70's when she was singing and he was playing drums for The Wilburn Brothers. "I was still going through that bad relationship," she continues, "so there wasn't any thought of gettin' with this guy or whatever. I just knew that when I was around Emory, I had a lot of fun, and I just loved listening



Onstage and in the studio, Patty and Vince work well together. Their music clicks.

to him talk about the music—how much knowledge and respect he had for country music—he's like an encyclopedia!

"And when I got to know him better, I just saw this person that I couldn't help but fall in love with. He cares so much about people, and I love bein' around those kind of people anyway.

"I think when I met Emory, I was in search of somebody that I could share my life with, somebody that I could be at ease with and not be so concerned about everything."

She pauses and blinks and sips her coffee. "I think Emory had been through things in his life that brought him to me, and I'd been through things in my life that brought me to him. I really do feel like we were meant for each other."

Her utter devotion to Emory ("Patty's got no kids, no pets, just Emory," says one close friend), aside from being a font of inspiration and creative direction, was also a source of acute anxiety last year. Her husband fell severely ill with pancreatitis, an inflammation of the pancreas. He underwent surgery twice, and, according to Loveless, was near death's door at one point.

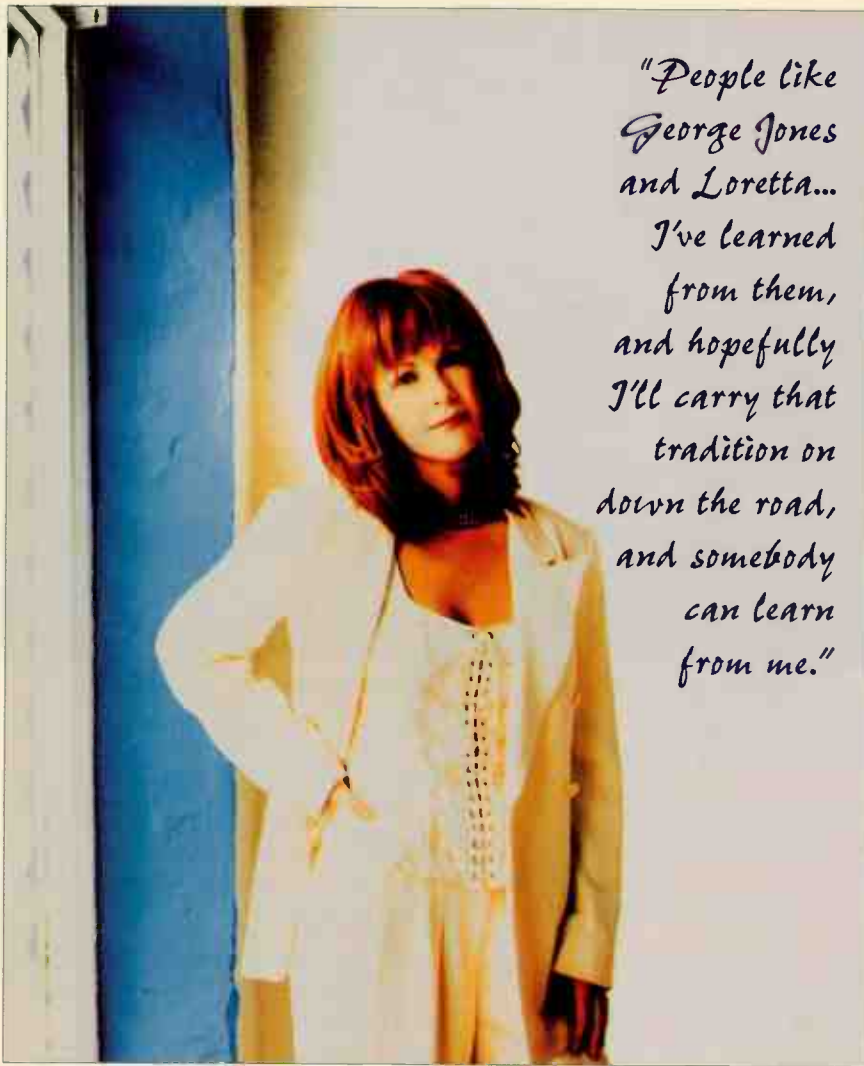
"I remember when I won the ACM award, back in the spring of '96. My sister Dottie, who passed away in June 1996, was still alive, and Emory was out in California with me, feeling good. That was the happiest of times for us," she recalls with a grim, little-did-I-know-what-was-coming look in her eyes. "But I almost lost him last year, too."

Actually, the first onslaught of Gordy's illness had struck earlier—back on Christmas Day, 1995. Loveless rushed him to the hospital and spent three nights there with him. Unfortunately, it was the first of several such emergencies. "It was kind of like a double whammy on him," Loveless explains. "He had a hematoma on his pancreas, and they also had to operate on him for a collapsed lung."

Both Emory and his doctors assured Loveless that it was okay for her to go on and fulfill her concert obligations. But she can still recall the helpless, out-of-control feeling of



The winning team at Sony/Nashville: artists and execs Ty Herndon, Emory Gordy Jr., Patty, Wade Hayes, Don Cook, Allen Butler, Joe Diffie and Scott Siman at last year's ACM awards.



*"People like
George Jones
and Loretta...
I've learned
from them,
and hopefully
I'll carry that
tradition on
down the road,
and somebody
can learn
from me."*

having to do shows way out West and trying to fly back to Nashville on her off days to be with Emory in the hospital. When she finally realized what bad shape he was in, she called her bandmembers, who were still out on the road, and said, "Boys, come on home. I'm shuttin' it down. I'm stayin' here a while."

Once again, she put her road schedule on hold and pushed back work on her next album to stay at Emory's bedside.

"He didn't want me to get a nurse, so I took care of him myself," she explains. "I'd never taken care of anybody like that before, but he needed somebody with him, and I was really afraid of losing him. We're really devoted, because each other is all we have at this point."

Throughout this ordeal, Loveless also had to come to terms with losing her beloved sister, Dottie Amick, who died at age 48.

The Trouble With the Truth is dedicated to Dottie. Dottie, Loveless explains, was one of her earliest inspirations. They'd sung together years ago on hometown jamborees around Pikeville, Kentucky, where Loveless was born. And from the time Patty first came to Nashville as a teenager and was befriended by Porter Wagoner and Dolly Parton ("she's still a dear friend, she has such a great spirit—Dolly, to me, is like a *mortal angel*"), she's always felt it was really Dottie's dream that she was living.

"Dottie was a better singer than me, she truly was," Loveless says flatly. "We shared this dream for a long time, but she chose to get married and have children. But I don't think she was ever fulfilled. All through the years, she only came to see me sing two or three times. I think a part of it ate away at her sometimes."

"I remember when I was about six or seven, somewhere around there, my brother Wayne was in the army, and our whole family went to Fort Knox, Kentucky, to visit with him before he went to Germany," Loveless adds with a wistful smile. "They had this band playing, and my mother got Dottie up to sing with them. I just saw how she mesmerized all these guys when she started singin'. I remember this proud feeling coming over me. That's when I first thought, *'That's what I wanta do.'*"

"Later, when I was 14 or 15 and singing on these small jamborees around home, Dottie used to come out and support me, and I'd get her up on stage and let her do lead, and I'd do the backup singing. I enjoyed singing with her. It felt good to see her get the attention."

"She'd been seriously ill for the last six years," Loveless continues, shaking her head softly. "We all knew it was just a matter of time. I think her body just shut down. She had emphysema and heart trouble, and she was anorexic. When she finally did try to turn herself around, it was too late. Her body had already broken down, and she couldn't get her system back up again."

"There's been times when, if I could have changed any of it, I wish it could have been her instead of me that all this happened to," she adds, staring at her empty coffee cup. "I just wish there was more I could have done for her. But when it comes your time, I don't think there's anything anybody can do."

Fortunately, Emory is well on his way to recovery, and they'll soon be back in the studio again. Still, Loveless sighs almost imperceptibly and braces her shoulders, as if against a blast of chill air. "This whole last

year was rough. It really did a number on me. It's really taken me a while to get up and running again."

Obviously these trying life lessons—losing a sister at a tragically young age and almost losing her husband—have tempered Loveless. They've enabled her to find an even deeper meaning in some of her own songs; they've also given her a heightened perspective on her own longevity.

"I'm 40 now, and I think ten years from now—I guess it depends a whole lot, as far as the songs themselves—if I can still continue to be here—I mean, ten years from now is just around the corner...." She throws up her hands and laughs. "I'm not makin' any sense on that one, am I? It's the antibiotics I'm taking for this cold!"

She falls silent for a moment, then reframes her thoughts: "People like George Jones and Loretta, they're kind of like our sisters and brothers—kind of like our *parents* in the music business," she ventures. "I've learned from them, and hopefully I'll carry that tradition on down the road, and somebody can learn from me."

Another pause. "That's how we have to look at it. I think you can really put yourself into a deep hole, a dark place otherwise. When I look at Faron Young and what happened there, I'm saddened by that. You have to accept your age and, when the time comes, go, 'Well, it's time for me to move aside and let these ones that have such appreciation and respect for what I've done get on with it.'"

She flags down the waitress and glances at her watch. Even as she speaks, time is slipping away, and there's many miles to go.

"I think that's the only way you can look at it," she says. ■

Newsletter

REVIEWS & FEATURES

Glimmers of Hope

While music fans and critics have been lamenting the state of country music, I've found some glimmers of hope lately. Despite the problems (veteran artists ignored, an endless parade of soundalike young hatted male singers), there really is some good stuff out there among the mainstream of contemporary country. Some of it may be pop and rock flavored, but a good song is a good song. For instance, while they haven't been favorites of

mine in the past, I've been impressed with both Reba and Faith Hill of late. Reba's new album is a knockout, and Faith's recent ballads, "I Can't Do That Anymore" and "It Matters to Me," are just plain good stuff. On the "country" side of things, Patty Loveless has really hit her stride, with a string of excellent singles and marvelous albums, while Mark Chesnutt keeps turning out great honky tonk like "It's a Little Too Late." You know, despite it all, I'd say country music is alive and well.

Memories of Fan Fairs Past

Member Paulette Biedenbender, who, in the November/December Newsletter, told us about her Marty Stuart encounter at the Wisconsin State Fair last summer, returns here with a timely piece about her visits to Fan Fair in the 70's. Timely, because this year's Fan Fair is coming up soon: June 16-21. The event has changed quite a bit over the years. Paulette, you may remember, hails from Waukesha, Wisconsin, where she's part of the staff at Trains Magazine.

Not too long ago, while rummaging through various boxes in our basement, I ran across one containing the many photo albums I've compiled of various country music concerts I've attended. I began paging through a couple of the albums, one of which held all the memories of the first Fan Fair I attended.

Fan Fair 1976: the year I graduated from high school. I remember my parents giving me the option of attending the graduation ceremonies or going to Nashville. Need I say more? The same night that I sat in the third row of the Grand Ole Opry enjoying Marty Robbins' antics, nearly 1,000 students and their families were back home, fidgeting in a 90-plus degree gymnasium. I never did regret my decision.

I do regret, however, the changes that have occurred at Fan Fair since the last one I attended in 1985. It was the same year I had decided to settle in Nashville. Between job interviews and apartment



Marty Robbins hams it up with Paulette's stuffed guitar.

hunting, I squeezed in a few moments here and there at the state fairgrounds to take in a show, or get that much-needed autograph for my collection. It was the

second—and the last—time I attended Fan Fair at the fairgrounds.

The previous ones I had attended were held at the Nashville Municipal Auditorium. My happiest memories of rubbing elbows with the stars took place in that building. They didn't come riding up in big limos, surrounded by numerous security guards, as now. Instead, they made far less conspicuous entrances. You'd see Bill Anderson just walking through, stopping to sign an autograph here and there. Then Barbara Mandrell might come down the next aisle with her fan club president, heading for her booth, and fulfill an admirer's request for a photo. I can still remember what an absolute thrill it was to get Patsy Montana's autograph for my grandfather, who had mentioned how he liked the song "I Want to Be a Cowboy's Sweetheart." I vividly remember a young Tanya Tucker belting out "Lizzie and the Rainman," and Marty Robbins playing with the stuffed guitar that I had every-

one autograph. The baseball games at Fan Fair were always great. Buses would pull into the parking lot one by one, with George Jones exiting his and inviting fans to come up for autographs; or Loretta Lynn coming out ready to cheer on her band, The Coal Miners, as they played ball. Once, I even bumped into Jeanne Pruett in the ladies room, as she fixed her hair in preparation for the games. Talk about Hillbilly Heaven on earth! That was it, without a

In This Issue

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- Country Radio in New York
- More Readers Create!
- Charlie Eich in Legends

Editor: George Fletcher

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Paulette's memories of Fan Fair in the 1970's include songs by a teenage Tanya Tucker, autographs from Bill Anderson, and baseball with Loretta Lynn.



doubt, for me as a teenager. It's not the same at all, now that it takes place in a stadium!

Standing in line for eight or 10 or more hours for an autograph was unimaginable! I adored Marty Robbins (and still do), but I wouldn't have even thought about a ten-hour wait in line then. Meeting your favorite stars, getting their autographs, or having your picture taken to mark the momentous occasion is more exciting and memorable during an unexpected encounter. I realize that for some people, this may be next to impossible, and today's Fan Fair is the only possible way for them to obtain that coveted autograph. Still, I wonder how many of today's Fan Fair-goers were there back in the 70's and early 80's. I'm sure they've noticed these changes, too.

As for you newcomers to country music, I sure wish you could have experienced the real closeness we felt back then. Meeting your favorite star was just that, a meeting, and not a line that you were being herded through. Yes, it is great that country music has gained such popularity, but as far as I'm concerned, the closeness is gone, along with all the Fan Fairs past.

Paulette Biedenbender
Waukesha, Wisconsin

Country Returns to New York

Ever since the owners of the New York City area's previous country radio station, WYNY, pulled the plug on the format in early 1996, the region has been without a full-time country music station. We covered the topic several times in the Newsletter during 1996, and our coverage continues here with some good news: the tri-state area now has two fulltime sources of mainstream country, and one part-time Americana-type outlet. We'll start off our coverage with a request from member Doris Stumacher of the Bronx, New York, then give a short profile of each station.



MORE RADIO INFO, PLEASE

As a CMSA member, I am so excited that New York has another country music station. Finally, those who have not heard country music since February 4, 1996, are getting to hear and know about the artists that other readers already know. If you have any further information about our new country music station, please publish it. Now I'll feel like I'm a part of what all the other fans have been enjoying for the past year!

Doris Stumacher
Bronx, New York

WMJC, 94.3 FM/WGSM, 740 AM
Melville, New York

First out of the chute in providing the metro area with country radio coverage was Long Island's WMJC, which signed on as a country station on May 6, 1996. The FM station, and its simulcasted sister AM, have a range that covers most of Long Island, some of the outer boroughs of New York City, and much of coastal Connecticut. In fact, WMJC is the first (and so far, only) country station we've ever been able to pick up in *Country Music Magazine's* offices. Got it on right now, in fact. Aside from music, the main focus of WMJC is the immediate Long Island market, with traffic and weather reports tailored to that region. Current.

contemporary country is the key word here, with the oldest titles generally coming from the late 80's. As an example of the playlist, here are the songs that made up the hour of 3 P.M. to 4 P.M. on February 18, 1997: Wynonna "No One Else on Earth," Clint Black "Half Way Up," Suzy Bogguss "Drive South," David Lee Murphy "Dust on the Bottle," Hal Ketchum "Small Town Saturday Night," Toby Keith "Me Too," Martina McBride "Independence Day," Paul Brandt "I Do," Terri Clark "Emotional Girl," John Anderson "Bend Until It Breaks," Tracy Byrd "Big Love" and Deana Carter "We Danced Anyway." The station reports it's been happy with the response so far.



Y-107, 107.1 FM
Hawthorne, New York
December 5, 1996, marked the debut of this station—actually three stations in one. Using an interesting bit of technology, the station is "trimulcasting" its signal over three different stations at 107.1 FM, one of them in Westchester County, New York, one in New Jersey, and one on Eastern Long Island. Previously, each of these 107.1's was a separate station, one playing alternative rock, one playing oldies, and one playing album rock. Now the signal is synchronized, and the one big station allows Y-107 to reach a much wider audience than the three stations would have individually. Here in Westport, we are still on the outer fringes of the Y-107 listening area, but they say they're still tweaking the signal, and we may yet be able to pick up a second country station here in the office. Billing itself as "New Country Y-107," the station is focused on contemporary country. Their 3 PM to 4 PM hour on February 18 shaped up like this: John Michael Montgomery "Life's a Dance," Reba McEntire "Why Haven't I Heard from You," Vince Gill "Pretty Little Adriana," Shania Twain "No One Needs to Know," Alan Jackson "Summertime Blues,"

Trisha Yearwood "Everybody Knows," Patty Loveless "Blame It on Your Heart," Restless Heart "When She Cries," George Strait "Blue Clear Sky," Tim McGraw "Don't Take the Girl," Dwight Yoakam "Guitars Cadillac," LeAnn Rimes "Unchained Melody," Garth Brooks "Friends in Low Places," The Judds "Give a Little Love" and Brooks & Dunn "A Man This Lonely." The station's owners say they're happy with early ratings research, and are planning many listener activities.

WFUV, 90.7 FM New York City

This listener-supported, public station at Fordham University has beefed up its daytime program, *City Folk*, which now airs from 6 A.M. to 8 P.M., Monday through Friday. More adventurous than the commercial country stations, "City Folk" most closely resembles an Americana format. This is the metro-area place to hear Cheryl Wheeler, Iris DeMent, Merle Haggard, Johnny Cash, Nanci Griffith, and other rootsy, singer-songwriter types. You won't hear Shania Twain or Billy Ray Cyrus, but you will hear Dwight Yoakam, Lyle Lovett and Willie Nelson. WFUV can be heard in the City, on Long Island, in southwestern Connecticut, and in a good part of northern New Jersey. It comes in quite well in my car around here, but I can't quite tune it in at the office.



Dean Drinkard at the Patsy memorial site.

Remembering Patsy Cline

Member Arabia (Dean) Drinkard, of Camden, Tennessee, sent along a batch of photographs showing the memorial items placed at the location of the plane crash that killed Patsy Cline, Cowboy Copas, Hawkshaw Hawkins and pilot Randy Hughes. The stone carving reads "On This Site/March 5, 1963/Patsy Cline/Cowboy Copas/Hawkshaw Hawkins/Randy



Dean and daughter Sue (left) pose at the rock with the memorial inscription. Below, the rock marks the location of the crash.

Hughes/Lost Their Lives in a Plane Crash/In loving Memory/July 6, 1996." July 6, 1996, was the date the monument was placed. Also located at the site are a marker sign, and a mailbox for visiting fans to leave their thoughts. The photos show the stone, the sign and mailbox, and Dean and her daughter, Sue Kirkwood, at the stone.



Members Top Picks of 1996

Member Karen Oakley of Loves Park, Illinois, contributes her list of her favorite albums of last year. Send in your best of the year, or best of all time if you haven't already!

BEST COUNTRY/BUEGRASS/ AMERICANA OF 1996

Emmylou Harris
Portraits (boxed set)

They left out most of my favorite songs, and included the only one I don't like ("Mr. Sandman"), but it's still the best music I've heard all year.

Sam Bush
Glamour and Grits
Americana? Newgrass? Bushgrass?
Sam's in a category all his own. Brilliant

musicianship, captivating songs and arrangements—as usual.

Chris Hillman and Herb Pedersen *Bakersfield Bound*

Steel guitar fans will love this one. Why aren't these guys on the radio?

Jerry Douglas and Peter Rowan *Yonder*

Simple and beautiful.

Laurel Canyon Ramblers
Blue Rambler 2
Great follow-up to their first album. Ol' Herb's getting pretty good on dobro.

LeRoy Mack and Friends
LeRoy Mack and Friends
You haven't heard "Ashokan Farewell" 'til you've heard it on LeRoy's dobro.

Norman and Nancy Blake
The Hobo's Last Ride
They captured the essence of this CD in the chorus of the first song—"hee haw hallelujah!"

Karen Oakley
Loves Park, Illinois

January 1997 Poll

George Strait	<i>Blue Clear Sky</i>
George Strait	"I Can Still Make Cheyenne"

Make it four in a row now for George Strait as the top pick in both albums and singles. Even more remarkable, George has held the Number One spot in your album picks in all but one poll since July 1995! Who nudged him out that one time? Your other fave, Alan Jackson, of course. (That was the May 1996 Poll, by the way.) Moving on to your other top album picks, Alan lands at Number Two with his latest, *Everything I Love*, while cover star Patty Loveless takes third with *The Trouble with the Truth*. Fourth place is LeAnn Rimes and *Blue*, and Terri Clark's latest, *Just the Same*, rounds out the Top Five. Will George do it again next issue? Stay tuned to find out.

In singles, the same artists turn up, but in a slightly different order: Following George, cover girl Patty comes on strong with your second favorite song, "Lonely Too Long," while Alan's "Little Bitty" takes third place. LeAnn and her latest, "One Way Ticket," nail fourth, and Terri's cover of Linda Rondstadt's "Poor Poor Pitiful Me" is in fifth.

Readers Create

Love and All Its Conflicts

Debbie Kucginski is a member in San Diego, California, where she is the wife of a Navy man. She says she loves country music (Reba and Clay Walker are favorites), and in her spare time writes songs and poetry. Says Debbie, "A lot of people can relate to love songs like this. The confusion of being in love, yet torn between what you want and what you receive. Plus, all of the dreams and emotions that you have at the same time..."

Addie and Erik

Addie opened the door
Of her old pick-up truck
And drove down memory lane
She thought of her love with Erik
And it sorta made her sad
All the things he promised
Then all the things she never had

She yearned for the love
That happens on the screen
And she always wanted more
But got less than she bargained for

Now she's sittin' at a red light sayin'
Don't lead me to a rainbow
If you'd break my heart with the rain
Don't show me the moon and stars
If you're gonna pull my head
Out of the clouds again
And don't promise me forever
When forever ain't that long anymore
Don't say we're great together
'Cause that changes
Every time you walk out the door

Addie pulled over

To her spot by the sea
And she thought of leaving him
She wanted more than Erik would give
And it sorta made her cry
All the words he did mean
Then all the words he lied

She wanted to feel the love
That doesn't fade away
And she always wanted more
But she got less than she bargained for

Now she's standin' on the shore line sayin'
Don't lead me to a rainbow
If you'd break my heart with the rain
Don't show me the moon and stars
If you're gonna pull my head
Out of the clouds again
And don't promise me forever
When forever ain't that long anymore
Don't say we're great together
'Cause that changes
Every time you walk out the door

—Debbie Kucginski

A Poem from Grandma

Member Betty Thompson, of Folsom, Louisiana, wrote this poem to honor her grandson's devotion to Alan Jackson. She says, "Derek is 11-years-old and legally blind, but that doesn't stop him from knowing just what he's going to do with his life—he just like his super-hero, Alan Jackson. Derek was four in 1989 when he heard Alan sing "Here in the Real World" while riding in my car. We heard it a few more times on the drive, and by the time we returned home, he could sing along word for word. He now has all of Alan's CD's, and knows the words to all of them. He's taking guitar lessons. His devotion to his hero prompted this poem."

Derek's Hero

Derek's hero wears a white hat
and holey blue jeans.
He walks very tall
through his field of dreams.

He hails from Georgia, God bless that state.



McEntire Admirer

One of the most popular subjects in Readers Create is Reba McEntire, whose new album, What If It's You, is currently storming up the charts. Member Janice Robertson of Lone Grove, Oklahoma gives us this look at Reba. Okay, Janice.

For sending a man he can imitate,
Without causing our hearts to break.

He don't do drugs, and he's not a boozier,
So I know our Derek will never be a user.

I know this will always be true,
See, Derek would do anything
his hero didn't do.

On career day at school,
when everyone is dressed—
But you're ahead of me now,
as I'm sure you have guessed,

He wore his white hat and holey blue jeans,
He played his guitar
and shared his dreams,

I'm sure one day soon,
with God's loving grace
He'll meet his hero face to face.

Till that day comes, I can only pray
God will protect them till I find a way,

To bring together this boy and this man,
To stand together, hand in hand.

If Derek could live the ideal life and not here
in the real world, he would just lie on the
banks of the Chattahoochee River and not
worry about the summertime blues. He
would lie low beneath tall, tall trees playing
passum. There would be no walls to climb.
He could see the neon rainbow and know
that it was just a short sweet ride away. He
would know that he was home....Who says
you can't have it all?

—Betty Thompson



Another Look at Vince

Last issue's cover star, Vince Gill, is another popular Readers Create subject these days. He inspires quite a few members to try their hand at his likeness, including Mary Jacobs of Glen St. Mary, Florida. Here's Mary's take on Gill.



BROOKS & DUNN
COUNTRY MUSIC MAGAZINE MAY/JUNE 1997

PULL-OUT
CENTERFOLD
OF-THE-MONTH

BROOKS & DUNN Update

Recording Career

Record Label: Arista Records, 1 Music Circle North, Nashville, Tennessee 37208

Albums	Release Date
<i>Brand New Man</i> (quintuple platinum)	1991
<i>Hard Workin' Man</i> (quadruple platinum)	1993
<i>Waitin' on Sundown</i> (double platinum)	1994
<i>Borderline</i> (double platinum)	1996

Number One Singles

- "Brand New Man"
- "Boot Scootin' Boogie"
- "That Ain't No Way to Go"
- "You're Gonna Miss Me When I'm Gone"
- "My Next Broken Heart"
- "We'll Burn That Bridge"
- "She's Not the Cheatin' Kind"
- "My Maria"
- "Neon Moon"
- "She Used to Be Mine"
- "Little Miss Honky Tonk"
- "I Am That Man"

Career Highlights

Awards: Over 25 major industry awards including both the 1995 Academy of Country Music (ACM) and the 1996 Country Music Association (CMA) Entertainer of the Year. Only duo in country music history to hold the honor of Entertainer of the Year. Third highest RIAA certified duo in music history, following Simon & Garfunkel and Hall & Oates, respectively. Highest certified country duo of all time with over 14 million albums sold.

Television Appearances: ACM Awards (hosts 1996), American Music Awards, Blockbuster Music Awards, CBS *This Morning*, CNN *Showbiz Today*, CMA Awards Show, *Entertainment Tonight*, *Good Morning America*, *Prime Time Country*, *The Late Show with David Letterman*, *Tonight Show with Jay Leno*.



Ronnie Dunn

Personal Data

Leon Eric "Kix" Brooks
Birthdate: May 12, 1955
Height: 6'2"

Color of Hair: Brown
Color of Eyes: Blue
Hometown: Shreveport, Louisiana
Residence: Nashville, Tennessee
Family: Wife, Barbara; children, Molly and Eric
Hobbies: Fishing, golf, shooting pool, legends race cars

Ronnie Gene Dunn
Birthdate: June 1, 1953
Height: 6'4"

Color of Hair: Brown
Color of Eyes: Blue
Hometown: Tulsa, Oklahoma
Residence: Nashville, Tennessee
Family: Wife, Janine; children, Whitney, Jesse and Haley
Hobbies: Water skiing, legends race cars, tennis, collecting Southwestern art



Kix Brooks

Quotable Quotes

Kix: "We just do what we do and thank God that a lot of folks are into it. I think the public just sees us for what we are: a couple of buddies making music together that obviously has a fun factor to it. We really have fun at what we're doing, and we want our audiences to jump in and stir it up with us."

Ronnie: "People who come to see our shows are often hard-core traditionalists, combined with contemporary rock fans who are used to seeing big productions. People seem to like to have a visual thing meld with the music. It's icing on the cake, and you have to make sure that it enhances, rather than detracts from the music."

Fan Club

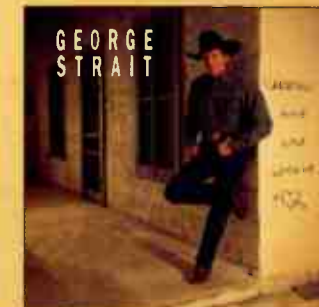
Brooks & Dunn Fan Club, P.O. Box 120669, Nashville, TN 37202. Internet Web Site: <http://www.brooks/dunn.com>

"Carrying
Your Love
With Me"

is

STRAIT COUNTRY

The new album
by George Strait.



Available April 22

MCA
NASHVILLE

www.mca-nashville.com

The Women of Country Music Word Search

Nancy Rich, a member in New Haven, Missouri, came up with this puzzle honoring—as Nancy's title suggests—the women of country music. She's packed a lot of names in here, and says that, "If the puzzle is done properly, the remaining letters of the word-find spell out a message from the Rich family." Nancy says that she, her husband and daughter are all country music fans. The capitalized words in the list are the ones in the puzzle, other words (in most cases, the artist's last name) are provided for information only—you won't find them in the puzzle! Good luck finding all 52 hidden names.

Word List:

- | | | |
|--------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| ALISON (Krauss) | JUNE (Carter) | NAOMI (Judd) |
| ANNE (Murray) | KATHY (Mattea) | PAM (Tillis) |
| BARBARA (Mandrell) | KITTY (Wells) | PATSY (Cline) |
| BECKY (Hobbs) | K.T. OSLIN | PATTY (Loveless) |
| CARLENE (Carter) | LACY (J. Dalton) | REBA (McEntire) |
| CHELY (Wright) | LARI (White) | RONNA (Reeves) |
| CRYSTAL (Gayle) | LINDA (Davis) | SHANIA (Twain) |
| DAWN (Sears) | LINDA (Ronstadt) | SKEETER (Davis) |
| DEBORAH (Allen) | LISA (Brokop) | SUSIE (Luchsinger) |
| DOLLY (Parton) | LISA (Stewart) | SUZY (Bogguss) |
| DOTTIE (West) | LORETTA (Lynn) | SWEETHEARTS (of the Rodeo) |
| EMMYLOU (Harris) | LORRIE (Morgan) | TAMMY (Wynette) |
| FAITH (Hill) | LYNN (Anderson) | TANYA (Tucker) |
| FORESTER (Sisters) | MARTINA (McBride) | TERRI (Clark) |
| GAIL (Davies) | MARY (Chapin Carpenter) | TRISHA (Yearwood) |
| HOLLY (Dunn) | MCCARTER (Sisters) | VICTORIA (Shaw) |
| JOY (Lynn White) | MICHELLE (Wright) | WYNONNA (Judd) |

P A T S Y E I L I R R E T O V E C S O N W A D
 U N T R I K Y K T O S L I N L M H U U S I C P
 M A G T A Z C I N E A B A R B A R A N S D A A
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 Y O R A Y E M Y F A M B V B O R I H T N E E S
 H I N T G E R I S R E A Y B A E T M Y O H H U
 T S T L B A T T E R O L R A N I I D S N I T S
 A I A L I A G A R O L N T Y A I P R P N I E N
 K M Y Y D S A U G O H T E F R S I S R A P E A
 T O T Y L O A V H E L R E T R A C C M O E W S
 J D E B O R A H S R F O R E S T E R I C L S H

Charlie Rich

A talented performer whose best work went unheard by many fans, the Silver Fox leaves a legacy even greater than his biggest hits.

By Rich Kienzle

Today, when new stars appear almost overnight, it's difficult to imagine that not long ago, stardom took years of struggle and an obsessive desire to succeed against setbacks and frustrations. Charlie Rich, a quiet man whose love of music always came first, chose not to play it that way. Everything about him differed: his shyness, his soulful fusions of country, blues, rock and jazz, and the way that career played out.

Though he got his start at Sun Records in Memphis and grew up in the same region as Elvis, Johnny Cash, Conway Twitty and Carl Perkins, resemblance to those artists stopped there. Born December 14, 1932, in Forrest City, Arkansas, he grew up comfortably on the family farm near Colt, Arkansas, in the Mississippi Delta, the land where the blues began. Charlie found himself enthralled by blues, his first musical mentor being black sharecropper-pianist C.J. Allen, who gave Charlie his first informal piano lessons. Charlie didn't stop at blues. As a teenager in the post-World War II era, he was thrilled by the new progressive jazz of that era, more complex than the swing music of the pre-war years. His favorites included Stan Kenton's orchestra and gifted Canadian jazz pianist Oscar Peterson.

Charlie didn't last long at the University of Arkansas before joining the Air Force. Stationed at a base near Enid, Oklahoma, he played music on the side as pianist in The Velvetones, a hip jazz band that included future wife Margaret Ann, who sang with the group. Charlie was 19 when they married; their partnership would become vital to his future since she became a collaborator in his music, the creator of some of his greatest songs. After his 1955 discharge, they moved back to Forrest City, where a wealthy uncle loaned Charlie money to buy a farm.

With Memphis nearby, he started playing clubs on weekends. Margaret Ann taped him singing and playing, and de-



ecided to take the tape to Sun Records. Sam Phillips wasn't available when the Riches arrived; they wound up meeting a man more attuned to their type of music: saxophonist-bandleader Bill Justis, whose 1957 hit, "Raunchy," was an early release on Sun's new Phillips International label. Justis, a gifted arranger who understood Rich's musical genius, also knew what the label wanted. He gave Charlie some Sun rockabilly 45's, urging him to come back when he could play with more guts and less sophistication.

With his blues background, Charlie was able to oblige and was soon working sessions at Sun with Johnny Cash, Warren Smith and Billy Lee Riley, recording demos that took him into a moodier, jazzier area. They weren't released until after his 1970's stardom but show his direction fully formed, especially on the earliest versions of future Rich standards like "Sittin' and Thinkin'," "Who Will the Next Fool Be?" and "No Headstone on My Grave." In August of 1958, Rich recorded two rockers, "Philadelphia Baby" and "Whirlwind." Issued on Phillips International, they got minor notice. "Lonely Weekends" was his first hit single, and his only one of the era. No follow-up hits at Phillips materialized.

In 1963, he was playing lounges and clubs, when Bill Justis, by then with RCA, brought Rich to Groove, RCA's rhythm and blues subsidiary. Charlie

made some magnificent recordings there, including searing versions of "Big Boss Man," "River, Stay 'Way From My Door" and "Old Man River" so soulful that even The Anita Kerr singers and a string section couldn't neutralize the funkiness. He then moved to RCA, where Chet Atkins produced him, but still no success.

The year 1965 took him to Smash Records where, with Jerry Kennedy producing, his recording of Dallas Frazier's goofy novelty, "Mohair Sam," became a Top 30 pop hit. He cut two Smash LP's with Kennedy, the first, *The Many New Sides of Charlie Rich*, becoming a masterpiece. Though it contained more loopy novelties, they were mixed with a tasteful choice of ballads, Charlie's own "Dance of Love," Margaret Ann's compelling rocker, "Down and Out," and a burning remake of "Lonely Weekends." It remains his first great work. When no follow-up hits emerged at Smash, he fared no better with the Memphis-based Hi label in 1966 where he recorded his first overtly country LP: *Charlie Rich Sings Country And Western*.

In 1967, longtime Rich admirer Billy Sherrill, the Epic Records producer responsible for Tammy Wynette and others, signed Charlie to the label. Sherrill, who got his start in recording by engineering Phillips International sessions, including Charlie's, did three excellent LP's with Rich: *Set Me Free*, *Boss Man* and *The Fabulous Charlie Rich*. None sold enough to make any difference to his career, which still revolved around playing clubs and lounges. Nonetheless, among musicians and performers, Rich was a star. He had the advantage of Margaret Ann's incredible songs, among them "Life's Little Ups and Downs" and "Sittin' and Drinkin'." Peter Guralnick, in his groundbreaking book, *Feel Like Going Home*, was quick to capture Charlie's sensitivity, demons (a very serious drinking problem), consummate talent and shyness in those pre-stardom years.

Success came when no one expected it, when Sherrill struck paydirt in 1973 with the romantic "Behind Closed Doors." Despite his disinterest in a country singing career, Charlie Rich was now the "Silver Fox," in tribute to his gleaming mane of hair. In just months, he was a country superstar as the follow-up single, "The Most Beautiful Girl," topped both pop and country charts. In 1974, the year the CMA voted him Entertainer of the Year, RCA, Sun and Smash rushed out much of their older Rich material in new packages. RCA versions of "There Won't Be Any More" (1973), "She Called Me Baby" and "I Don't See Me in Your Eyes Any-

more" (1974) and Smash recordings like "A Field of Yellow Daisies" (1974) competed with Epic hits like "A Very Special Love Song" (1974) and "All Over Me" (1974) on the country charts.

Suddenly, things became very, very complicated. New Charlie Rich fans, many of whom had never heard "Lonely Weekends," "Mohair Sam" or those early Epic albums, loved this wonderfully romantic singer, his music lushly arranged and easy on the ear. Many thought him an overnight success. But Sherrill's increasing control, aimed at appealing to the widest possible audience, had negative effects as well. Charlie's bluesier edge gave way to emphasis on the sappier material that got him on the charts. To make matters worse, Charlie no longer played piano on his records as he did onstage. In the studio, he focused on singing while studio ace Pig Robbins handled the keyboards. In demand in Vegas and other major nightclubs and venues, he found himself being coached to be something he wasn't. To play the game he found himself being taught choreography, so he could walk gracefully on the stages of Vegas, a phoniness alien to all Charlie stood for.

The normally taciturn Guralnick, writing in this magazine in 1976, assailed the compromises Charlie was forced to make, what he called "elaborate orchestrations, soaring choruses, and melodramatic crescendoes" and the "preponderance of sloppy, middle-of-the-road material." He also assailed Sherrill's conflict of interest in selecting songs for Charlie from Al Gallico Music, Sherrill's publishing company. Rich, still riding high, won 1974's CMA Entertainer of the Year Award.

A year later, at the televised 1975 CMA Awards, a visibly drunk Charlie, announcing that year's Entertainer of the Year, sarcastically announced the winner, John Denver, then set fire to the envelope. While his actions thrilled those angry that a lightweight pop-folksinger landed such a prestigious and undeserved award, others on Music Row felt Charlie's behavior an embarrassment to the industry. His music didn't improve when he left Epic for United Artists in 1978 and Elektra in 1979. Though he sang in the Clint Eastwood film, *Every Which Way But Loose*, the low point was his association with Benji, the sickeningly cute dog of 1970's movies: For the soundtrack of the film *For the Love of Benji*, Rich sang "I Feel Love." With his last hits in 1981, the roller coaster stopped.

Though fame troubled his psyche and aggravated his drinking, in the end, it indeed gave him freedom. While the money rolled in at his peak, Charlie made some



good investments, including a new hamburger franchise one Dave Thomas founded and named for his daughter. Over time, his stake in the growing Wendy's chain grew. When Charlie sold it in 1979, the Nashville *Tennessean* reported he received \$4 million. Now, he could pick and choose. As he told Bob Allen in this magazine that year, "I don't imagine I'll [work] really as hard, you know, but I want to stay active...I think once I got away from it, I wouldn't have the confidence to get back in it again. I think I'd lose that confidence....I just want to be able to have the freedom to pick and choose and pace myself to the way I feel."

That's precisely what he did, until private jam sessions with friends led to the 1992 album that his hardcore fans knew was dying to come out: *Pictures and Paintings*. On it, he went from blues to rock, to jazzy lounge fare without breaking stride. Two new songs came from Margaret Ann, as well as a brilliant Bossa Nova version of his 1975 hit, "Every Time You Touch Me (I Get High)," rendering

the Epic version irrelevant. His soulfulness dazzled critics, though few 1970's fans paid it any mind. Minus the lightweight fare and Vegas trappings, he was making music totally on his terms, and it showed, though he didn't make a return to an active performing schedule.

Obviously satisfied, Charlie continued living easily. He and Margaret Ann had stopped overnight at a motel in Hammond, Louisiana, on July 25 1995. There, without warning, he suffered a fatal pulmonary embolism—a blood clot in his lung—as he slept. He was 62. One can take comfort in the fact that he found stardom and that along with his best work over the years, his final artistic statement was in many ways his greatest. Many other artists, even legends, usually decline musically long before their deaths. That, at least, was not Charlie Rich's fate.

Albums Available
See For CMSA Members Only page.

Attention, Members!

All CMSA members are welcome to participate in the Collections section, but please keep in mind the following rules: 1) Membership number *must* accompany entry. 2) Entries *must* be kept to 40 words or less (we may occasionally be *slightly* flexible on this, but only in Information, Please). 3) Entries for Pen Pals from members under the age of 16 *must* be accompanied by a note from a parent or guardian giving permission. 4) Only one entry per member per issue. 5) We reserve the right to edit for space and style. 6) Requests for romance or photos will not be printed. 7) Entries that do not follow these guidelines will be discarded.

Collecting the Magazine

Members help each other complete their magazine collections.

- CMM back issues for sale. SASE for list. **Jennifer Trusty, 13004 Cnty. Rd. 22, Granada, CO 81041.**
- Wanted: December 1974 back issue of CMM. Waylon on cover, contains Johnny Cash feature titled "What Now, John Cash." Also have Cash LP's for sale, Sun and Columbia, all near-mint to mint condition. SASE for list. **Rod Sinko, P.O. Box 523, Marengo, IL 60152.**

Information, Please

Please write each other directly about information or items listed. When corresponding, include SASE. We reserve the right to edit for space and style.

- Many articles, color pinups, clippings, magazines and books on all your favorites: Alan, BRC, Clint, Dwight, Garth, Kathy, Michelle, Reba, Shania, etc., including materials on film and TV personalities. May trade for Dwight items. **R. Smith, 128 Henry St., Barrie, Ontario, Canada L4N 1E1.**
- Holly Dunn fan looking for *Heart Full of Love* (Warner, 1990) CD, and *Blue Rose of Texas* (Warner, 1989) cassette. **Greg Sassone, P.O. Box 99, Allenhurst, NJ 07711-0099.**
- LP's: have Reba's *Heart to Heart*, sealed, mint condition. Best offer takes it. Also: John Anderson, Loretta, Connie Smith, Fricke, Tammy, Hag, Garth, others. Enclose want list, SASE for reply. **Wilfred J. Lerche, 3123 W. Larsen Rd., Neenah, WI 54956.**
- For sale: Over 1,500 country LP's, 60's-80's. Also CD's, cassettes, press kits, T-shirts, mags and vid-

eos. Send SASE and four loose 32-cent stamps for reply. **Tom Weaver, 406 Winston Ave., Wilmington, DE 19804-1855.**

- For sale: 30 country albums, like new. Alabama, CDB, Mandrell, Skaggs and others. Plus, 14 CD's: Pam Tillis, Randy Travis, Strait and others. Also have eight Elvis collector plates. SASE for details. **F. Seyler Jr., 4614 Hillside Rd., Coplay, PA 18037-2419.**

- For sale: photo buttons and magnets. Several country artists available, or use your own photo. SASE for list/info. **Sylvia A. Mayfield, P.O. Box 72177, Corpus Christi, TX 78472-2177.**

- For sale: private collection of photos (new and old artists), magazines, VHS tapes, photo buttons and keychains. Everything must go. **Robin Garfoot, 808 E. Vine, Sullivan, MO 63080.**

- Selling Oak Ridge Boys 8x10's, LP's, newsletters, etc. Also, sell/trade newsletters of Ronnie Milsap, T.G. Shepard and John Anderson. Also LP's to sell/trade. Send SASE. **Theresa Gay, 2416 S. 13th #611, Temple, TX 76504-7542.**

- Autographs for sale: Garth, Reba, Bryan, George, B&D, Vince, Dolly, more. Also have pop, movie and cast photos. Write for list. **Randy Thompson, 2310 W. Apache #22, Farmington, NM 87401.**

- For sale: concert and offstage photos of your favorites. Also, LP's, magazines, buttons, T-shirts, promo items and more. Name favorites, send SASE for list. **Galen Duncan, 3517 Grier Nursery Rd., Street, MD 21154.**

- Looking for VHS copies of: Lorrie Morgan tribute episode of *Music City Tonight* (2/2/94), Lari White's "Wild at Heart" video, and Martina McBride's "Valentine" video. Also, Suzy Bogguss' self-titled cassette from 1986. **Elvin Moore Jr., 9-531 Rd. B, Rt. 3, Leipsic, OH 45856.**

- Strait fans! Many extras from my collection, 1981-97. Video and cassette tapes, including *Austin City Limits*, plus magazines and pictures. Send three 32-cent stamps for list. **Cheryl Simkins, 4707 E. Oak St. #5, Phoenix, AZ 85008.**

- Will search for anything. Selling new/used LP's, 45's, cassettes, 8-tracks, CD's, videos. Will make listings at nominal charge. Write with SASE. **J.J. Hollin, 2113 Parkdale Ave., Glenside, PA 19038.**

- Free autographed photos of your favorites: The only address directory dedicated to country music fans. Hundreds of updated addresses, how-to information. Send \$10. **D. Luhn, 3504 Westview Rd., Westminster, MD 21157-7735.**

- For sale: concert photos of LeAnn, Reba, Dwight, Neal McCoy, Vince, Strait, Judds and more. SASE for photocopies of your favorite. **Richard D. Moore, 20 Maple St., Hopedale, MA 01747-1116.**

- Records for sale. Bob Wills, Eddy Arnold, Dolly, Loretta, Buck, Tennessee Ernie, Jones, Haggard, Tammy, others. Also, 45's and magazines. Send three 32-cent stamps. **Mary Barker, 17876 Sequoia Ave., Hesperia, CA 92345-4939.**

- Have CD's and cassettes of country and pop artists. Will sell or trade for any Elvis or Osmond recordings. All in excellent condition. Also looking for Elvis movies and concerts on video. Send SASE. **Lisa Bartolotta, P.O. Box 842, Portland, CT 06480.**

- Please help! Alan Jackson performed at the Taj Mahal in Ocean City, NJ, in Feb. 1996. My little girl was onstage with him near the end. Does anyone have a photo? Also, would like to correspond with Tracy Byrd fans. **Debbie Kays, RR 2, Box 383, Mehoopany, PA 18629.**

Pen Pals

Make new friends by mail. Pen Pals is a means of introducing CMSA members who wish to correspond. It is NOT a "personals" column. Physical descriptions and requests for romance or photographs will not be printed. We also reserve the right to edit for space and style. Parent's written permission required for those 16 and under. See additional rules in box at the start of this page.

- 31-year-old, incarcerated country boy looking for pen pals who are big country fans. Love writing and receiving letters. **Lyle Hinkle #181631 7-D-18, Farmington Correctional Center, 1012 W. Columbia, Farmington, MO 63640-2902.**

- Hello! I'm a 27-year-old, single, Texas native. I love country music, dancing, long walks. Faves are Brooks & Dunn, Wade Hayes and many more. Would like to hear from single males, 23-32. No inmates please. **Stacy Saunders, 407 Merrey St., North East, MD 21901.**

- 37-year-old, divorced mother would like some new pen pals! I love country music, NASCAR, travel and lots of other interests. **Cheryl S. Orndorff, P.O. Box 113, Toms Brook, VA 22660.**

- I like country and oldies. Male, 40's, looking for pen pals. First time incarcerated. I like travel, reading, sports, hiking, beach. **Rick Senior, E-52824 P.V.S.P., Box 8503, Coalinga, CA 93210.**

- Hello! Married, 30-year-old mother of one. Looking for pen pals

of all ages. Favorite artists are Alabama, Garth, Bryan White, Vince, Kenny Chesney and more. I enjoy pen pals, NASCAR, cross-stitch, bowling, animals, baseball, camping, fishing. **Myla Jackson, 5504 Byron Ct., Newark, DE 19702.**

- Hi! 36-year-old single male would like to write to cowgirls, women who work as nurses (especially in mental handicap training centers), policewomen, etc., ages 27-37. I love bowling, shopping, camping, rodeos, dancing and more. No men, inmates or married women, please. **Benton Kennedy Jr., 31404 Balltown Rd., Angie, LA 70426.**

- Hello! 33-year-old country boy looking for female pen pals who don't mind me serving time. Interests include country music old and new, animals, bull riding, BBQ's, NASCAR and more. **Michael Rowland, J08318-4B1L, P.O. Box 3481, Corcoran, CA 93212.**

- Single, 31-year-old country girl in the big city. Looking for pen pals who love country music, camping, pets, nature and sports. Prefer to hear from males in early 30's. **Nancy Arlington, 9675 Via Torino, Burbank, CA 91504.**

- Pure country lover seeks pen pals. Favorites are Jones, Haggard, Conway, Lorrie and many more. Enjoy writing lyrics, reading, making new friends. Male or female okay. **Steve R. Bunch #709856, Century C.I., P.O. Box 248-G-115, Century, FL 32535-0248.**

- Hello! I'm 30 years old and love country music and living. Faves are George Strait, Billy Dean, Trisha, LeAnn and more. Hobbies are cross-stitching, reading, pen pals and exercise. Would love to hear from females, 20-40. **Karen Butts, 75 Oak Hill Rd., Fredonia, KY 42411.**

- 48-year-old country boy looking for pen pals. Love country from 50's to 80's. Faves are Conway, Loretta and more. **Allan Haynes #92398 Echo #316, Arizona State Prison Complex-Tucson, 10004 S. Wilmot Rd., P.O. Box 24402, Tucson, AZ 85734-4402.**

Send requests to Country Music Magazine, 329 Riverside Ave., Westport, CT 06880. Mark envelope, Attention: Collections. Entries sent without membership number will be discarded. Collections is printed as a service to readers, and Country Music Magazine assumes no liability for any losses or damages resulting from any Collections page correspondence. Parents, be aware of children's correspondence.

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KING OF THE HILL

SUNDAYS 8:30PM/7:30 CENTRAL & MOUNTAIN



COUNTRY MUSIC

TOP 25

Albums

1. LeAnn Rimes *Unchained Melody/
The Early Years*
2. LeAnn Rimes *Blue*
3. Deana Carter *Did I Shave My Legs for This?*
4. Alan Jackson *Everything I Love*
5. Brooks & Dunn *Borderline*
6. Bill Engvall *Here's Your Sign*
7. Clint Black *The Greatest Hits*
8. Kevin Sharp *Measure of a Man*
9. Trace Adkins *Dreamin' Out Loud*
10. Shania Twain *The Woman in Me*
11. Mindy McCready *Ten Thousand Angels*
12. Reba McEntire *What If It's You*
13. Tracy Byrd *Big Love*
14. Kenny Chesney *Me and You*
15. Terri Clark *Just the Same*
16. Alan Jackson *The Greatest Hits Collection*
17. George Strait *Blue Clear Sky*
18. John Michael Montgomery . *What I Do the Best*
19. Kathy Mattea *Love Travels*
20. Collin Raye *I Think About You*
21. Vince Gill *High Lonesome Sound*
22. David Kersh *Goodnight Sweetheart*
23. Faith Hill *It Matters to Me*
24. Cledus T. Judd *I Stole This Record*
25. Travis Tritt *The Restless Kind*

Singles

1. Deana Carter *We Danced Anyway*
2. John Berry *She's Taken a Shine*
3. Reba McEntire *How Was I to Know*
4. Patty Loveless *She Drew a Broken Heart*
5. Trace Adkins *(This Ain't) No Thinkin' Thing*
6. Diamond Rio *Holdin'*
7. Clay Walker *Rumor Has It*
8. Travis Tritt *Where Corn Don't Grow*
9. LeAnn Rimes *Unchained Melody*
10. Alan Jackson *Everything I Love*
11. Toby Keith *Me Too*
12. Tracy Byrd *Don't Take Her She's All I Got*
13. Kenny Chesney *When I Close My Eyes*
14. Terri Clark *Emotional Girl*
15. Collin Raye *On the Verge*
16. Tracy Lawrence *Better Man, Better Off*
17. Rick Trevino *Running Out of Reasons
to Run*
18. David Kersh *Another You*
19. Lonestar *Heartbroke Every Day*
20. Ricochet *Ease My Troubled Mind*
21. George Strait *One Night at a Time*
22. Lorrie Morgan *Good As I Was to You*
23. The Buffalo Club *If She Don't Love You*
24. Brooks & Dunn *A Man This Lonely*
25. Alabama *Sad Lookin' Moon*



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NEAL McCOY

Finds His Place in the Crowd

Neal McCoy is obviously a regular at the Longhorn Steakhouse, a down-home chop joint just a few blocks from Music Row, and practically across the street from the hotel where the East Texas singer stays when he's in town.

Around midday, he comes bounding through the restaurant's front door. He's wearing a Dallas Cowboys hat and T-shirt, and his bushy ponytail trails out behind him like a rabbit's tail. He waves across the room to a table of acquaintances and hugs a couple of the waitresses. "Y'all sellin' stock in this place?" he asks one of them with a wink and a grin. "I'd sure like to buy some!"

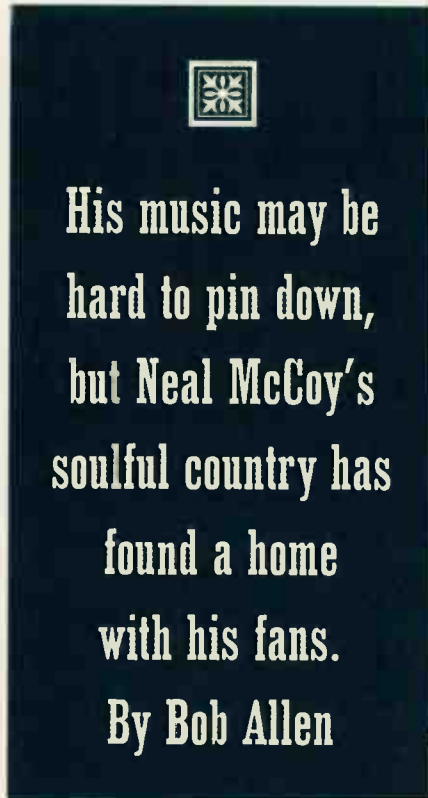
A couple of people from Atlantic Records, McCoy's label, come filtering in, and pretty soon it's like old home week at the Longhorn. Even Barry Beckett, the veteran producer responsible for McCoy's recent career-boosting hits, "Wink" (which became the singer's first Number One in 1994 and stayed at the top of the charts for the better part of a month) and "No Doubt About It" (another chart-topper, which was the title tune from his million-selling 1994 album), shows up. He, too, comes ambling over to McCoy's table to say hello.

There's a lot of glad-handing all around, along with some good-natured sports banter and music business chatter. An Atlantic promo man shouts and gives the thumbs-up sign from the next table, announcing that, "We've got a bunch of new [playlist] adds on your single—in Georgia, Mississippi, Arkansas..."

"Awright!" McCoy raises his fist and grins. "Five weeks in the charts, and we're at Number 24! Awright! That's great!"

As he glances fondly around the Longhorn's rustic interior—at the covers of the vintage Conway and Loretta albums and other music memorabilia on the walls, and at the perdurable jukebox in the corner stuffed with the requisite George Jones, Mark Chesnutt and, of course, Neal McCoy hits—he can't stifle his sense of warm satisfaction. McCoy's here to tell you that, after a whole lot of lean and hungry years spent outside looking in at this goofy record business, it's a whole lot more fun to finally be inside looking out.

"I used to come in here eight years ago, back before I had anything going, and I'd sit here and watch all the singers come



in," the 37-year-old Jacksonville, Texas, native (whose real name is Hubert Neal McGahey Jr.) recalls with a grin. He pauses and hungrily peruses the entree menu before re-counting his calories and grinningly ordering a soup and salad.

"Every once in a while in the old days, I'd see somebody in here who was a big deal," he adds as he stares longingly at a sirloin steak being devoured at an adjoining table. "Now, it's really interesting when I come in here. I'm certainly not a big star or anything, but sometimes I'll see somebody looking at me. It's kind of odd, because I still feel the same," he sips his iced tea and laughs. "I'm still sittin' here, checkin' out the stars myself." He jerks his head and points discreetly across the room: "Say, isn't that the singer from that new group, 4-Runner?"

Somehow, this is indicative of the way that Neal McCoy refuses to take anything about his new-found success for granted. By his own admission, even after a steady string of Number One and Top Five singles and two platinum albums, he concedes that he's "not a superstar, just one of those guys in the pack." Which is to say, he is still grappling to

keep his foothold in that sometimes rocky terrain between newcomer and star.

Yet, McCoy feels that the musical niche that he's carved out for himself on his last couple of albums, with the help of Barry Beckett, has been one big step toward breaking out of the pack.

"I'm not a traditional country singer, and I admit I'm not the best singer in the world either," he explains with typically affable candor. "What I really do best is entertain. I work my butt off on stage, and I guess ever since I was old enough to walk and talk, I've always been a bit of a charmer, in terms of attitude.

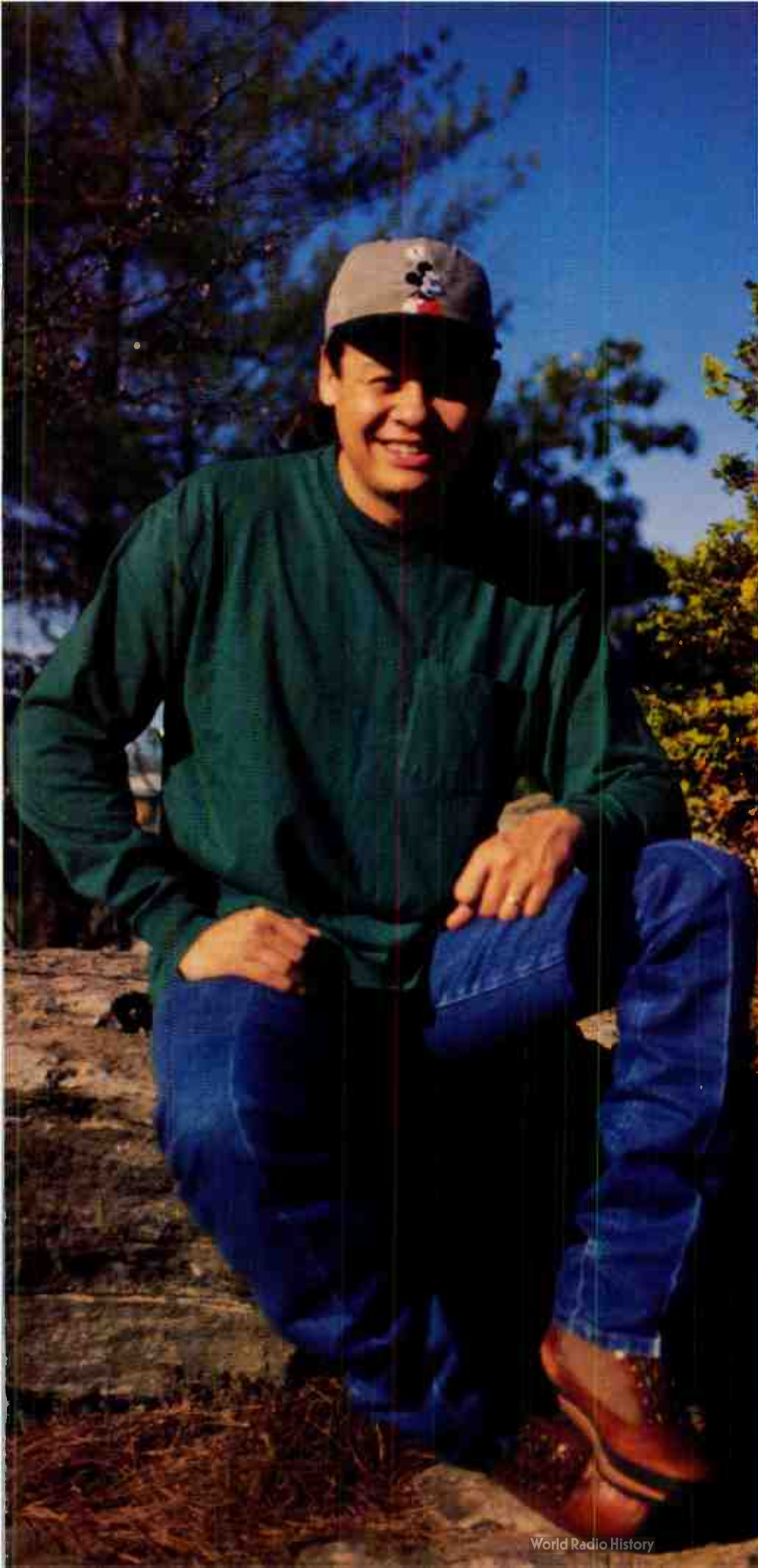
"Fortunately, though, I've also managed to find a little niche out there—a little bit of soulful country, a bit of a blues groove, if you will. That's kinda where we were on the last two albums"—1994's *No Doubt About It* and 1995's *You Gotta Love It*, both of which have been certified platinum. "It sure took me long enough to find that niche, so we sort of ran with it on the new album."

Thus far, that latest album, 1996's self-titled *Neal McCoy*, seems to have fit this niche nicely. Sales are brisk, though it has yet to reach Gold certification. And the first single, "Then You Can Tell Me Goodbye," a soulful remake of the 60's Eddy Arnold hit, reached the Top Five. On *Neal McCoy* the singer has also thrown a special bone to his fans by including "Hillbilly Rap," a high-energy, genre-mixing ditty that's been a crowd-pleasing staple in his live shows for quite a while.

"Like the old cliché goes," McCoy, who also has a *Greatest Hits* CD coming later this year (with a couple of new tracks thrown in for good measure), adds with another lopsided grin, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it!"

No, indeed, if you're Neal McCoy and you spent about 15 years of "rough times and no dollars" before finally finding that elusive musical groove, you sure don't fix it. McCoy, with typical forthrightness, is the first to admit that he's not even sure how he stumbled on to that "soulful country" sound that, at long last, has opened the doors for him. Yet, wherever it came from, and whatever it is, he's happy to embrace it and run with it.

"For a while there, during my first couple years on Atlantic, they just kept releasing single after single on me, and every time I'd be thinking, this is gonna be the one! But none of them were." He



shrugs and stares glumly at his salad. "Finally, it reaches the point where you think, well, maybe I'm just not supposed to be a recording artist. Maybe my voice just isn't right for radio. I even had a producer tell me that once. There were also times when my wife and I got so low on money that we had to move in with her mother.... You know, there are times like that, when things go wrong, and you just start to question everything.

"Believe me, financially speaking, we're still struggling," adds McCoy, who still resides in East Texas with his wife of 15 years and their two kids. "But there's at least a light at the end of the tunnel now."

There's something instantly likable about McCoy. He's outgoing and occasionally even boisterous, in a playful, canny East Texas "good ol' boy" sort of way. He's a real people person who doesn't blow a lot of smoke or strike any poses. For instance, he takes no offense—indeed, finds easy-going humor in the fact—that a lot of country fans out there take a hard look at him and don't quite know what to make of him.

"I've been black, I've been Indian, I've been Mexican, I've been everything!" explains McCoy, whose Irish-American father, a retired civil engineer from East Texas, met his mother, Virginia, a Philippino, while in the service. "Mostly, though, on account of the hat and the long hair and my dark skin, I'm taken for an Indian."

McCoy practically roars with laughter as he talks about the puzzlement he sometimes unwittingly evokes among the fans. "I don't think they are prejudiced towards me as much as they are confused—the only thing anybody ever gave me any grief about was my long hair. But if someone looks and sees me coming down the street when I'm wearin' my ol' Deion Sanders-looking hat that makes me look like some kinda rapper, they often don't know what to make of me. Then, when I open my mouth and they hear that ol' East Texas talk, that really throws 'em! I can almost see 'em thinking, 'I'm not sure what the hell he is!'"

Listening to McCoy's self-effacing, highly entertaining patter and watching the way people naturally warm to him, it's easy to understand why live audiences love him so much. He's the first to admit that the stage is where he really shines, and that he really loves to work a crowd. His live shows even include rock/soul oldies like "The Locomotion" and The Temptations' "My Girl," a big band song or two, and even a hilarious country-rap number based roughly on the theme from *The Beverly Hillbillies*. It's definitely a feel-good approach that he takes.

"Some people believe they can't do a good job on stage if they don't get ner-

EJIANNE HALBERG

vous," he says. "But with me, it's the exact opposite. For me, there's really no transition between regular life, like sitting here talking to you, and going on stage. I don't need any quiet time before a show. I don't do any special exercises. I just do whatever I'm doing until it's time to hit the stage, and I never have a set list. I mean, some people might see my show and say, 'God, ya need some quiet time!'" he adds with a hearty laugh. "But I just feel it's where I belong and what I do best."

Another refreshing thing about McCoy (who admits that in high school he jumped into the disco craze with both feet), is the way he shoots from the hip. As an example, he's the only young singer I've talked to in a long time who doesn't profess to have grown up worshipping at the altar of Hank Williams, George Jones and Merle Haggard.

"Some of these young singers surprise me when they say in interviews, 'Country music's all I ever listened to,'" he says. "Some of 'em may be telling the truth, but some of 'em are just saying it because it's what they're supposed to say."

"The first band I was ever in was an all-black band," adds McCoy. "We did songs by The Whispers and Kool & The Gang. From there, I got an easy-listening gig and played big band music in a Longview steakhouse. I absolutely love the big band sound—Duke Ellington, Glenn Miller, Hoagy Carmichael.... If you go on my bus, I've got boxed sets by Tony Bennett and Frank Sinatra. That was back when they really wrote beautiful lyrics and beautiful melodies."

Considering his initial musical exposure, it was a fascinating and somewhat improbable chain of events that eventually led him to the country charts. Way back in 1981, after attending junior college and selling women's shoes and mowing lawns for a living, McCoy entered and won a local country talent contest that was judged by singer Janie Fricke. At the time, McCoy insists, he hardly knew a single country song well enough to sing it all the way through. But, as he explains, if you're hungry enough, you learn to go with the opportunities that are presented to you. Fricke, a one-time Country Music Association Vocalist of the Year, was then touring with Charley Pride. She was impressed enough with McCoy to bring Pride out to see him the next time he sang in a contest.

"I don't know what Charley saw in me or why he helped me so much," McCoy recalls. "I just know that he and his wife, Rozene, treated my wife and me like their children—maybe even better than their children. We didn't have anything at the time. No money. No nothin'. And Charley started using me to open his shows, even though, 90 percent of the time, he didn't need an opening act. But he'd let me come out and sing a few songs with his band so he'd have an excuse to give me a little check to keep me going. But for six or seven years I got the opportunity to watch his live show from all angles, and I can't tell you how much that taught me about being an entertainer."

Looking back, McCoy also recalls the almost schizophrenic existence he had back in those days as he yo-yoed between opening for Pride in front of audiences of 10- or 20,000 on weekends, then running his own lawn care service in Longview during the week.

"It was very humbling," he recalls with a chuckle as he picks at a tomato. "Every weekend I'd drive a hundred miles or so down to Dallas, and we'd fly to the shows in Charley's private jet. I'd play in front of a huge crowd on Saturday night, then Monday morning I'd be back mowing yards. But I used to love the mowing work. It was ten or 12 hours a day for five years, and it kept me in shape, and, to tell the truth, it also kept me from getting a big head."

McCoy's first brush with the Nashville music industry came in the late 1980's when Pride, who'd by then grown wealthy from his many non-musical investments, decided to attempt a recording come-back with a short-lived label called 16th Avenue Records. Pride, who certainly didn't need the work, made it a condition of his signing that McCoy be signed, too. "I think the only reason they signed me was because Charley told them to," he says of the ill-starred label, which released, but did not promote, two singles on him in 1988 and 1989 before folding up its tents. "They never took me seriously, I don't think," he adds. "But at the time, I was excited. Heck, it was a record deal!"

Fortunately, someone who worked for Charley Pride's publishing company happened to know the people in charge of opening a new Nashville-based country division of Atlantic Records. Thus McCoy was brought to the attention of veteran executive Rick Blackburn when Blackburn signed on as head of Atlantic's then-fledgling Nashville office. Blackburn flew out and caught McCoy's show at a Phoenix nightclub. By now, McCoy had begun touring with his own band on the club circuit. He estimates that, for ten years, he played 200 shows and traveled 10,000 miles a year. The money was barely enough to pay for gas and motels, but the opportunity to hone his skills as a showman was invaluable.

Blackburn eventually signed McCoy. Still, it took the singer three albums and then some to get the ball rolling at Atlantic. By then, everyone's patience was beginning to wear thin, and McCoy recalls that this was when his own worst doubts began to take hold. "See, that was before



ELIANNE HABERBERG

McCoy says he belongs on stage.

Atlantic broke out with John Michael Montgomery and Tracy Lawrence, and they really didn't have much clout, didn't have any stroke," he recalls. "They were still learning by their mistakes, and sometimes I was their scapegoat."

All the singles from McCoy's first two Atlantic albums—*This Moment* (1990) and *When Forever Begins* (1992) fizzled at radio—and two albums is, more often than not, a label's make-or-break point with a new artist. But Atlantic held on—especially after they saw a faint light at the end of the tunnel when "Now I Pray for Rain," the third and final single off *When Forever Begins* inched up to Number 26 in *Billboard* and landed McCoy in the Top 30 for the first time ever. It was less than a hit, but it was at least a start.

But then veteran producer Barry Beckett, who almost single-handedly revived Alabama's sagging recording career and also launched the career of McCoy's Atlantic labelmates, Confederate Railroad, entered the picture. Beckett and McCoy soon proved to be a winning combination.

When asked about the magic formula that he and Beckett concocted for his belated breakthrough at radio, McCoy merely frowns and pushes aside his half-finished salad. "The best answer I know to give you is, I don't know. Looking back at my earlier records, the material wasn't bad, the production wasn't bad, though I do think that some of the previous producers tried to change me and maybe make me a little more country than I really was. Whereas Barry really took the time to come out and see my live show and see what I was all about. His approach was, 'I really like the way you sing, and we're just gonna find some songs that fit you.'

"But, really, I don't know," McCoy adds as he fiddles with the brim of his Dallas Cowboys cap. "I think another part of it is that the music has come around, and some of it matches up perfectly now with what I do. Beyond that, we've just been real lucky here lately," he adds with a relieved grin. "And, by God, I'm glad! I'll take luck any day!"

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MCM22013

K.T. Ostin

An Original Returns

K.T.'s always been one of a kind, and after a four-year absence from the music business, that hasn't changed. With her health restored, she's found a new outlook on her career.


by Patrick Carr

She's still a square peg. A lot has changed in the six years between her last album and the intriguing new work she offers us today, but that hasn't. K.T. is as different as she ever was.

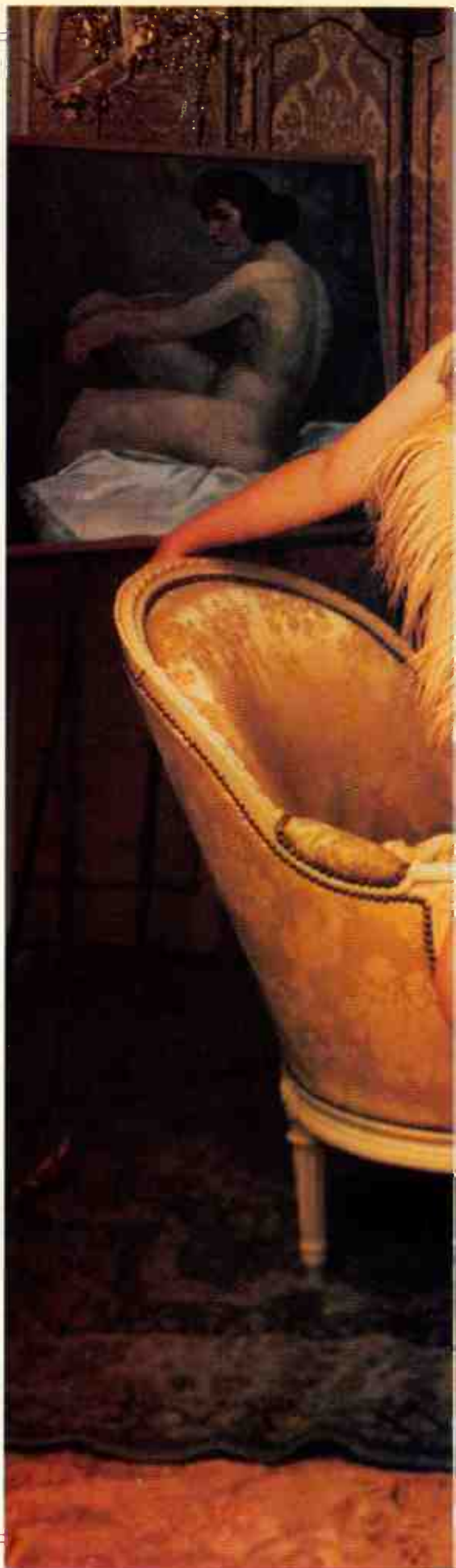
New country fans, and those with failing memories, might need to be reminded just how different that was. Even back in '87, when the country mold was considerably more elastic than it is today, K.T. stood out in bold relief. Coming to country unusually late in life (at 46) after a long career of theatrical and commercial work in New York—everything from off-Broadway theater to jingles and TV ads—she added a whole new perspective to the charts, her "80's Ladies" bringing the lyrics of women's

country songs into tune with the social realities of the decade as abruptly as Loretta Lynn's "The Pill" had in the 70's. "80's Ladies" shook things up, as did the hits with which she followed it through '88, '89, and '90—many of her songs, as Bob Allen put it in *The Country Music Encyclopedia*, being "lovelorn and often angry commentaries on loneliness and discontent in a male- and youth-dominated world"—and her very presence in the country music field suggested possibilities: of women artists writing their own songs and running their own careers, as she did; of grownup music topping the country charts, as hers did. Her very presence on the Nashville scene, meanwhile, added spice to the social stew. Where most others were bland, she was bold: witty, opinionated, fast, frank and funny. You could always count on K.T. for color.

So what happened? Why did she drop off the charts and disappear from the scene? Was she simply run over and left in the dust of the 90's stampede towards cute young males in hats?

The answer is yes and no, with perhaps a little more "no" than "yes." K.T. says that she quit recording and touring very much on purpose. Tackling the extreme demands of a country performer's life while also enduring the onset of menopause was not something she wanted to do.

"The menopause thing really affected me," she says. "I couldn't get any sleep. You don't sleep, you never sleep, and you find yourself just kind of walking through the day. And you never have a schedule in this business. You're up at 4:30 one morning for a 7 A.M. show, but the next day you can sleep till ten, and then the day after that, you don't get to bed until three in the morning and you





K. T. vamps it up for her current album cover.

have to get up at six to catch a plane.”

The final straw was a Caribbean tour for the USO in 1992. “When I came off that tour, I thought, ‘This is it. I’m so tired, I’m angry now. I’m pissed off at *everybody*. I don’t want to do *any* of this.’”

So she didn’t. “I kept the band and everybody on retainer for about six months, and then I said, ‘You know what? I don’t know what I’m going to do. Everybody is let go. Please work for somebody else.’ I still had my deal with RCA, and I still had my manager, but I just said, ‘I am going away, and I will let you know when I come back.’”

Unlike many performers, who are so burdened by debt and overhead that they have to stay on the road no matter what, K.T. could walk away from the business without facing ruin. “I’d made a lot of money, and I’d been smart about it,” she says. “I lived way beneath my means.”

For a while life was dandy, but then it started getting hard. As K.T. puts it, “I took the time off, and then I really started enjoying the time off, and *then* I didn’t feel good enough to go back to the business. I just didn’t have the energy.”

The problem, though she didn’t know it, was her heart. “I was getting lower and lower and slower and slower, and more out of breath and more weird and more strange all the time, but I blamed it on other things. I kept thinking, ‘Okay, you’re feeling this way because you’re not exercising and you’re not fit.’ Or menopause. There’s a lot of ups and downs with *that* little noise.”

She didn’t see the writing on the wall until one afternoon in the summer of ’95, by which time she’d already had chest pains and numbness in her left arm and was on medication for (very) high blood pressure. “I have this little strip of lawn that I insist on mowing myself, and I got out there and tried to mow it three times that summer, and I remember each time I got less done. The third time, on a Sunday, I got out there and mowed about the size of a throw rug and thought, ‘I’m going to die!’ I went in the house and sat down and thought, ‘I’m buying the farm here. Should I try to go upstairs and take a shower, so if I die, at least I’m found clean?’”

The crisis passed. The next day, K.T.’s doctor scheduled immediate bypass surgery. K.T. kept resisting the inevitable. “I screamed and yelled about ‘You certainly did whip me into surgery fast! Couldn’t I have done this with diet and exercise?’ He said, ‘You

wouldn't have lived long enough to diet and exercise.' There's something about being young and female that if you have a heart attack, you die. Thirty years ago I would be dead, because they didn't have the technology to save me."

She started feeling better very quickly after the surgery, and soon the idea of a revived career gained momentum. Observing that dance clubs and dance feels had become very popular in country music, she began considering a novel notion: "a country dance album of really old songs."

That demands an explanation. K.T. obliges. "Well, quite frankly, I don't really care for the modern country songwriting, and I didn't want to write anything myself. I tend to write from a personal standpoint, and what I've gone through for the last five or six years is not what I call musical. Not right now it isn't. I don't want to write about that now, or ever. And why would I go out and gather up songs the pack is going after? Most modern country songs are interchangeable—everyone in town could sing them if they could get hold of them—and I don't like that. I won't do that. There's no sense in me adding to the pile of mediocre records. We've got more than enough of those already. So in that position, what do you do? Well, you bide your time until you can come up with something interesting. I thought my idea was interesting."

RCA, in the person of Nashville boss Joe Galante ("my bud"), said okay, and K.T. went to it. She was in charge right from the start. "My previous albums were all my material, but they all had producers, and I allowed the producers to do their producing. When it came down to this thing, though, I told Galante, 'I know what I'm hearing. I know what I want. For me to transfer that to anyone in this town, I don't think it's going to work. I'll get their version of my dream, and I don't want their version. I want *my* version.'"

The first pieces of the dream were of course the songs. K.T. began with just two, The Delmore Brothers' "Sand Mountain Blues" ("I did it when I was a folk singer") and the classic "Down in the Valley." From there on it was a research project, first at the Country Music Foundation, where she found "Pathway of Teardrops" and Jimmy Martin's "Hold Whatcha Got," and then in the personal collection of critic/historian Robert K. Oermann. "I'd go over to Bob's house for a couple of hours once a week," she recalls. "He had some songs in mind, and then we just kind of stumbled around and found stuff. We'd concentrate on different periods. Sometimes we'd just get albums out, and I'd say, 'What's this one?' He'd either know it or go, 'Gee, I don't know,' and we'd play it and find out."

She ended up with ten wildly different songs written between



*"I told Galante,
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For me to transfer
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work. I'll get their
version of my dream,
and I don't want
their version. I
want my version."*



the years 1845 ("Down in the Valley") and 1972 ("A Heart Needs a Home" by English folk-rocker Richard Thompson). Next came the question of how to treat each of them. "I didn't do covers of these songs. These songs were not necessarily hits. I didn't just take the hit version and stick my vocal on it, the way people do. Some of these songs I messed with tremendously. Some of them I didn't touch."

She was aided and abetted in the process by an unusual crew: engineer Rick Will, who came to her without big-star credits but ended up as her co-producer, and musicians recruited by Will from circles outside the session-jock set whose work colors everything on your radio. K.T. did use some well-known names to

touch up the final product—The Jordanares for harmonies, the Jerry Douglas/Stuart Duncan/Sam Bush team for acoustic flavor—but the guys in the studio every day were Wills' men.

"This album is loose," K.T. notes. "These are not studio players. They're not *looking* to be studio players. They have their own bands, they're in bands, some guys are producers. They didn't necessarily know each other, and they had never all played together. 'Pathway of Teardrops' was the first track we cut, and when it was done we went, 'Oh, this is going to be just *fine*. This is going to be a great band.' And it was. Wow, we had a good time. It worked out wonderfully. It was easy. It was almost scary, it was so easy."

"Easy" is a good word for *My Roots Are Showing*, as is "loose." It's almost as if the financial facts of K.T.'s life (which boil down to one simple statement: "I don't have to work if I don't want to") are reflected in her new music. Certainly the album doesn't have the sound or feel of a product targeted at corporate programmers of seamless drive times, and while it's true that nobody involved would be displeased by a major commercial success, it's unlikely that anyone's expecting it. Nobody here is thinking Big Bucks, Quadruple Platinum, Major Venues.

K.T. isn't, that's for sure. *Her* vision is of smallish theaters, selected appearances, reasonable schedules and the like. "It would be lovely to win awards again," she says, "but I've already won them. Been there,

done that. I've already done the tour thing with the big huge arenas. I don't have to go, 'Gee, I wonder what it feels like to do those?'"

"I just need to do it the way I can do it. I've already told them, 'Look, here's the way I will tour, here's the way I will do it. If it can't be done that way, guess what? I won't do it. I won't kill myself for you. I won't kill myself for music. I won't kill myself for any of it. I do it only for the fun and for the creativity, and if it isn't fun and it isn't creative, I won't be there. That's all.'" ■

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Please read all rules carefully, and then sign your name in the space provided. If entrant is under 18 years old, the signature of a parent or guardian is required.

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- Check or money order for \$30.00 per song (U.S. currency only) payable to John Lennon Songwriting Contest. If paying by credit card, \$30.00 per song will be charged to your account.

Entries must be postmarked no later than 8/15/97.

- 1 Each song submitted must be contestant's original work. Songs may not exceed five (5) minutes in length. No song previously recorded and released through national distribution in any country will be eligible. Contestant may submit as many songs in as many categories as he/she wishes, but each entry requires a separate cassette, entry form, lyric sheet, and entrance fee. One check or money order for multiple entries/categories is permitted. (Entrance fee is non-refundable. JLSC is not responsible for late, lost, damaged, misdirected, postage due, stolen, or misappropriated entries.)
- 2 Prizes: Twelve (12) Grand Prize Winners will receive \$2,000 in cash, \$5,000 in Yamaha project studio equipment, and a \$5,000 advance from EMI Music Publishing. One (1) Grand Prize Winner will receive \$15,000 for the "Song of the Year" courtesy of Maxell. Thirty-six (36) Finalists will receive \$1,000. Seventy-two (72) Winners will receive portable CD players.

- 3 Contest is open to amateur and professional songwriters. Employees of JLSC, their families, subsidiaries, and affiliates are not eligible.
- 4 Winners will be chosen by a select panel of judges comprised of noted songwriters, producers and music industry professionals. Songs will be judged based upon originality, lyrics (when applicable), melody and composition. The quality of performance and production will not be considered. Prizes will be awarded jointly to all authors of any song. Division of prizes is responsibility of winners. Void where prohibited. All federal, state, and local laws and regulations apply.
- 5 Winners will be notified by mail and must sign and return an affidavit of eligibility/recording rights/publicity release within 14 days of notification date. The affidavit will state that winner's song is original work and he/she holds all rights to song. Failure to sign and return such affidavit within 14 days or provision of false/inaccurate information therein will result in immediate disqualification and an alternate winner will be selected. Affidavits of winners under 18 years of age at time of award must be countersigned by parent or legal guardian. Affidavits subject to verification by JLSC and its agents. Entry constitutes permission to use winners names, likenesses, and voices for future advertising and publicity purposes without additional compensation.
- 6 To insure anonymity for judging purposes, entrant's name should appear only on the entry form. Do not put name or address on cassette or lyric sheet. Cassettes and lyrics will not be returned. Winners will be determined by December 15, 1997.

I have read and understand the rules of The John Lennon Songwriting Contest and I accept the terms and conditions of participation. (If entrant is under 18 years old, the signature of a parent or guardian is required.)

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Townes Van Zandt

Remembering a Troubadour

By Bob Millard

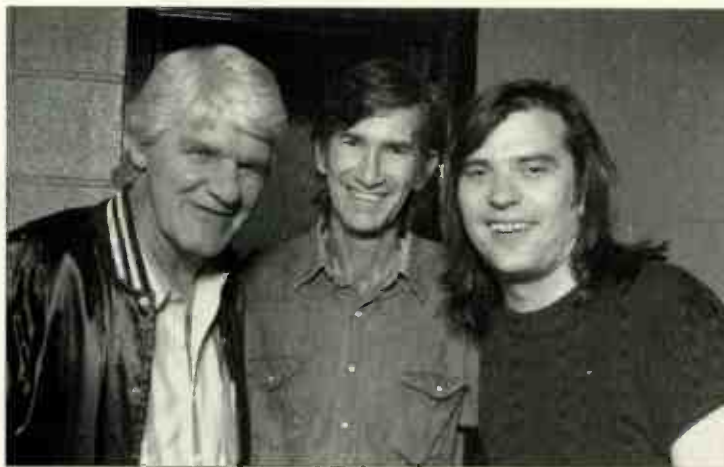
The Charismatic church on Music Row had its own plexene-contained drum set on stage. Amy Grant's religious home, it was built for music, but not, I suspected, for the likes of Steve Earle, Guy Clarke, Nanci Griffith, Lyle Lovett, Emmylou Harris, Rodney Crowell and others who gathered there on a cold afternoon in early January to sing uncompromisingly secular tunes of the Blue Highway; tunes of their friend, Townes Van Zandt.

No way had Townes ever been in that church. Having died of a heart attack at 52, on New Year's Day evening 1997, and been cremated, he was not there now, either. But his spirit filled the place, no doubt accompanied by that white angel he always said was at his side when he managed to finish a set without tumbling drunkenly from his stool.

Townes—born March 7, 1944—was one of the founding fathers and continuing deans of what historians of country music know as the Austin School of singer-songwriters, writers for whom the musical life and the songs meant more than commercial cuts. Actually, he was the Philosopher King-Clown Prince of the Austin School all wrapped into one. He was deep, simple, literary but unpretentious; too brilliant not to write and yet too scattered to often write commercially or to attend to his own business.

Townes was a figure of great sadness with a laugh twinkling in his eye. "Great to see you, Townes. You look good," I once greeted him at a New Year's party at his manager John Lomax's house. Townes straightened his rail-thin body, stood up and leaned into my face. "I never looked good a day in my life; you take that back," he scowled, then laughed and handed Steve Earle the bottle.

His songs usually went deeper into the pain-zone than those of fellow Austin School demi-gods Guy and Susanna Clark, Jerry Jeff Walker, Michael Mar-



In days gone by: Harlan Howard and Steve Earle with Townes at the listening party for Townes' Sugar Hill album, *At My Window*.

tin Murphey, Walter Hyatt and David Ball of Uncle Walt's Band, and even Willie Nelson, who turned Townes' "Pancho and Lefty" into a huge hit single with Merle Haggard; certainly more so than Don Williams, who sang Townes' "If I Needed You" to the top of the country charts. Townes subjected himself to a more painful life, it always seemed, and he didn't cease living that life until he ceased living.

Starting off the memorial, Steve Earle read a taut and passionate recollection of his mentor that was ecstatic Beat Poetry, Texas-style. Earle remembered his own worst days of substance abuse, when Townes showed up on his doorstep to try to reel him in. "Man, if they sent *you* to talk to me, I must really be screwed up," said Earle, who soon set about turning his life around.

Emmylou recalled thinking when she first saw Townes, "My God, it's the ghost of Hank Williams...but it was just another dark angel on his own Blue Highway."

"Townes always greeted me with kindness," recalled Lyle Lovett, avoiding the otherwise ubiquitous subject of Townes' self-destructive habits. Susanna Clark spoke for years to Townes each morning at 8:30. They talked about dogs, guitars, religion, philosophy, poetry and, invariably, alcohol. When Susanna warned him he was drinking too much, he replied with dry wit, "Hey, babe, there's sober people in India."

Guy Clarke spoke most plainly about the inevitability of this day. when Townes

Van Zandt's friends would have to sing at his wake. Strapping on a borrowed guitar, he sighed audibly and said, "I hope I'm up to this. I ought to be; I signed on for this gig 30-some years ago." And then, great soul that he is, Guy chuckled. To be Townes' friend was to love a wildflower that by choice grew on the railroad tracks; you knew you'd almost certainly outlive him.

The first time I met Townes was about 1976, in the dressing room of a long-defunct Nashville folk music bar-in-an-old-

house, Sam's Pizza Place. Townes was accompanied by the most beautiful strawberry blonde I think I had ever seen, and was surrounded by hangers on. A bunch of us hitless young songwriters hung around him, taking a nip from his bottle. If memory serves, it was unknowns like Don Schlitz, Steve Earle, Alan Rhoady, David Olney and myself—among others—who took a pull in between Townes' own deep drafts on the whiskey.

There were no fewer than five of us who could brag to each other and our friends after that night, "Man, I drank from Townes Van Zandt's bottle; and he played my guitar on stage—he broke half the strings off it!" Townes was blind running when he hit the stage, but the white angel stood behind him that night, as on many others, and he kept his seat.

And so, a great soulful songwriter is gone; the brilliant repertoire is closed. Townes Van Zandt lived the honky tonk beatnik life with an all-consuming soulfulness that rivaled Hank Williams. Townes lived what he sang and sang what he lived, and listeners got to go along for the ride without paying full fare; Townes paid it for us. His end, while somewhat longer in coming, was just as premature, just as tragic, and probably just as predictable. As friends, family and admirers of the man's work filed out of that Music Row church, the sentiments heard were much the same: It was a shame how he lived, but, man, weren't those songs incredible?

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by Cindy Shafer

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by Cindy Shafer

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Letters

More Vince Gills

Thank you for making my day. Received my March/April *Country Music Magazine* issue today and seeing my fave, Vince, on the cover really perked me up. What a great article about a great guy. I saw Vince at the Garden State Arts Center in New Jersey last June, and he was absolutely fantastic.

It's nice to know that anyone who has ever met Vince or written about him always says the same thing—that he truly is a nice guy who cares about those around him and is not “out there for himself,” like so many others. The world could use a few more Vince Gills, don't you think? P.S. How about doing an article on Vince at home with his family sometime?

Mary Anne Shepard
Norwood, New Jersey

Sweethearts and Boys

Thank you very much for “One of the Boys.” It's about time. I love the story on Vince Gill. It made my day. I don't care if Vince is bald, fat, toothless or has hair down to his toes—just keep singing and writing songs. He is one of the best songwriters in the world today. I hope one day Vince and Janis do an album together. I am a big fan of Vince Gill and his family and Sweethearts of the Rodeo. Vince and Janis are a great couple.

Patricia F. Gosser
Winter Garden, Florida

From Hot to Cool

Thanks for the totally cool cover and story with Vince in the March/April issue. I just love hearing about the hottest stars in country. I also love the Bryan White pull-out poster in the November/December issue. Could you please do a cover and story on the great Garth Brooks, he's the coolest!

Jeanne d'Arc Jacques
Chicopee, Massachusetts

Vince Connects

I was reading my *Country Music Magazine* (March/April). Thank you so much for the story on Vince Gill (“One of the Boys”). He is a special person to me. His songs always hit home. In July 1995 my husband and I found out he had incurable cancer. Our daughters gave us our 50th Anniversary party in August 1995. Our song was “Look at Us.” All grandchildren, children and great-grandchildren



were there. My husband passed away October 1995. My girls played Vince's song, “Go Rest High on That Mountain,” at their daddy's funeral. I don't know if you will print this or not. I just wish I could tell Vince this. He is from Oklahoma, too, like I am. That in itself is good people.

T. L. Sumpter
Phoenix, Arizona

Midnight with Dolly

I'm sitting here all night at work, and I found the January/February 1997 issue of *Country Music*, and I just read it cover to cover, every word, and it was alright. I liked it. I'm a country/western music

Help Us Celebrate Our 25th Anniversary

September of this year marks the 25th Anniversary of our first issue. Help us celebrate. Drop us a note about country music or *Country Music Magazine*. Don't just pat us on the back. Of course, we like that, but we'd rather hear about some specific memory important to you from your experience with country music or CMM. We'll publish a special Letters section in our Anniversary Issue. Write to: 25th Anniversary Letters, Country Music Magazine, 329 Riverside Avenue, Westport, Connecticut 06880.

fan—I'm 45, and when I was a teenager, I saw all the great legends of country music in concert at the Toronto Stadium.

I still love the country hits and country singles of 1950 to 1970 especially, and I just haven't found many I like on today's radio—it's “unlistenable” as your Final Note says. Now, Dolly Parton, she's carved out her own legendary niche. I have her albums, saw all her movies, and I even *met* her at the fairgrounds just two years ago, and I felt moved to complain to you tonight that although the story article was okay....that cover was awful! She doesn't look like that! She's *still* soft, elegant and gorgeous in face and form and what to speak of her uniquely extraordinary clothes—on my list of favorite things is “Dolly Parton's clothes”! Did she see that photo first?

Lastly, a funny story. A friend of mine told me his wife “wouldn't let him look at Dolly Parton. As soon as Dolly Parton comes on a variety show, it's ‘Oh, no, you don't—the TV goes off *now!* Don't you even say her name!’” And this is the *only* such rule they have at their house!

Don Delaney
Alachua, Florida

WSEV/WDLY Sets Record Straight

In late January I began receiving mail addressed to WFTV and WDOY from concerned Dolly fans. They referenced an article in *Country Music Magazine*. I have a copy of your January/February interview and have enjoyed reading it. I did want to clarify some points with you. Our call letters are Hometown Radio AM 930 WSEV and FM 105.5 WDLY Dolly's station. We pride ourselves as being the best *little* radio station in the Smokies. We play hot new country artists, old-time favorites and, yes, lots of Dolly.

Does it help having a famous star own us? Of course it does!...but I can assure you we are not just a way for Dolly's music to get air play. We are part of her commitment of “giving back” to the hometown folks, whom she has never forgotten, by providing jobs, sponsoring community events and helping educate children. We invite you to stop by the next time you're in the area. We're located off Dolly Parton Parkway on Middle Creek Road. Just look for the pink fire truck!

Susan Gentry
WSEV/WDLY Radio
Sevierville, Tennessee

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QUIZ

Answers to these questions can be found by reading this issue of *Country Music Magazine*. Answers will be published in the July/August 1997 issue.

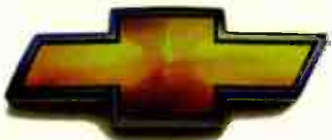
1. What was Patty Loveless' first single?
2. How many years were there between K.T. Oslin's last album release and her current one?
3. Which country legend gave Neal McCoy his start?
4. When did Brooks & Dunn release their first album?
5. Townes Van Zandt wrote which duet hit for Willie and Merle?
6. When did Hank Thompson make his first record?
7. What brand of truck do the cowboys in the ad on the inside front cover of this issue rely on?

ANSWERS TO LAST ISSUE'S QUIZ:

1. playing golf
2. Jon Randall
3. nine
4. Webb Pierce
5. Meridian, Mississippi
6. August 1946
7. Chevy's S-10 is the only compact truck offering a third door.

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National Treasure

Great to see Dolly back on the cover of *Country Music*. The woman should be declared a national treasure. Still cranking out great music, still as smart and witty as they come, and still could stop traffic in a gunny sack. Wake up, country radio! Keep Dolly on the air waves before she says to hell with country. P.S. When are you going to put that *red hot* Shania on the cover?

Sheldon Olson
Stratton, Ontario, Canada

Face It

Total shock and surprise that the person on your January/February cover was someone I should have recognized—Dear Dolly, whatever were you going for to allow the facelift that changed you so? You should know by now how very much *you* are loved—only if I hear you sing would I ever believe in this latest image you posed for. Please, Dolly, enough already. I love you as Dolly and the wonderful way you were.

B. Bolt
Dallas, Texas

Chattin' 'Bout Chesnutt

I applaud the article on Mark Chesnutt in the March/April issue. I have always liked his music and personality. He's just a down-to-earth kind of guy. I agree with him that he doesn't need all that fancy stage show stuff and lights. Not only does it keep the cost of the tickets down, but personally, when I go see a particular artist, I want to see them, not smoke, lights and fireworks!

I was privileged to catch one of his shows a couple of years back in middle Georgia. Before the show, I was at a local steak house, and in walks Mr. Chesnutt, just a few feet away. I leaned over and told my husband, "There's Mark Chusnutt." He must have heard me, because he looked at me and grinned as if he was surprised that someone recognized him.

Needless to say, he put on a great show that night (and he didn't even have fireworks). Believe me, I know, I was there in the front row enjoying every second!

Cindy Christian
Macon, Georgia

Musin' 'Bout Morgan

I was going to write you and thank you for the article on the magical Lorrie Morgan in the March/April issue—it should have been a cover—but since you never print my letters, I don't think I'll bother. P.S. For two years the CD's playing on my CD player were 99 percent Lorrie, one percent G.S., C.B., R.V.S., V.G., Wy, T.Y., O.T.O., M.C.C., T.K., M.McB., Hwy 101, R.C. & R.A.C., but since I discovered Dwight several months ago, it's been 60 percent Lorrie and 40 percent Dwight.

Tim Moule
Grass Valley, California

Can't Find K.T.

I was so excited to receive my March/April issue when I saw the name K.T. Oslin on the cover. She is one of my favorite entertainers, and I wanted to read all about her. *However*, after going through the magazine, page by page, six times, darned if I could find anything on her. What gives? Miss the deadline? *Please*, let me know what you did with the K.T. Oslin article!

Bonnie Foster
Bellingham, Washington
Tryin' to trick ya. See this issue.—Ed.

Fabulous Faron

Just wanted to let you know I receive your *Country Music Magazine*. In your March/April issue, I read your article (letters) about Faron Young. Just wanted you to know how much my (deceased) husband and I loved Faron. My husband looked so much like Faron that in 1958 when we were married, we came to Nashville. Of course, then we purchased our tickets at the Ryman.

While standing on the sidewalk right outside the Ryman, three young ladies approached us and asked my husband for an autograph. They thought he was Faron. Needless to say, he was so thrilled. My husband was killed in an auto accident in January of 1985. By all means, I also think Faron should be in the Hall of Fame.

Doris Hopkins
Bonaparte, Iowa

No Fudgin' on Faron

I've never written a "fan" letter before. After reading your eulogy to Faron Young in the March/April issue, however, I'm compelled to voice my appreciation. You handled a difficult life compassionately and nonjudgmentally. As a copy editor I also appreciate such technicalities as your construction of the final sentence. And the phrase "Never known for his racial enlightenment..." is a masterpiece—it says what's necessary so very gracefully. It's a pleasure to read good writing.

Patricia Ferenbach
Ramsey, New Jersey

Happy 'Bout Herndon

I just wanted to write and say what a great centerfold of Ty Herndon in the March/April issue. I saw Ty in concert at the Mountain Arts Center in Prestonsburg, Kentucky, on February 15, 1997. It was a great show.

Also thanks for the story on Lorrie Morgan. I'm a fan of Keith Whitley's. I also saw Keith's brother, Dwight, in concert at MAC on March 1, 1997. He put on a good show too.

This is one of the best issues of *Country Music* I have received. Keep the good stuff coming.

Priscilla Marsillett
Prestonsburg, Kentucky

Heavenly Innocence

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Mark Knopfler and Chet Atkins correct, above, and, left, as was, in People section last issue, inadvertently misprinted.

What's Wrong with This Picture?

Who says you can't teach an old dog new tricks? I see Chester and Mark both picking left-handed nowadays. Strange.

Leonard Wright
Ada, Ohio

Everyone here knows that Chet Atkins and Mark Knopfler are not left-handed guitar pickers. So how did this photo get "fopped"? Some say a teeny little gremlin who lives in one of our computers did it. Some say our sharp-eyed editors need a vacation. I say maybe they just need to be taken out and shot!—R.D.B.

More Scolding

What a shame some editor let the photograph of Chet Atkins and Mark Knopfler in the People section in the March/April issue be published in such a manner as to have them appear "left-handed." Any good country music fan knows that Chet is *right-handed*. Also you did Faron Young a disservice by only one page of coverage when you give as much cover to just an album. Faron was one of the greats of our music.

I would appreciate your magazine doing some articles on the old-time country music artists such as Roger Miller, Carl Smith, Don Williams, Sonny James and others, plus Webb Pierce, Lefty Frizzell, George Morgan, Sam and Kirk McGee, Red Sovine and other true country sing-

ers and musicians. It would be good for us old codgers. I remember when Ferlin Husky was "Terry Preston," and Ted Daffan's band along with Cliffie Stone, Jimmy Wakely, Tex Williams and other greats of country music.

Thank you for your time, and I do like your magazine and await each issue and share it with my bi other (also an old-time country music fan), and he likes it also.

Lester C. St. Andrie
Weatherford, Texas

Correx on Clay Walker

CW's people called to tell us that Clay Walker's Fourstar Blowout Tour includes Emilio not David Kersh as reported in the People section, March/April.

HighTone Feature

I continue to enjoy reading each edition of your fine publication. January/February especially caught my attention with its articles on HighTone Records and Patrick Carr's feature on the last page.

These two articles brought to my attention one of the finest country artists I've heard in ages, Dale Watson. It also makes me wonder out loud, why haven't we heard any of his music on the radio or on CMT? His voice is second to none, and the writing, production and instrumentation easily rival if not surpass anything you can hear on today's limited mainstream playlists!

Jeff A. Warner
Mills, Wyoming

David Lee Murphy Fan

I have just subscribed to CMM and was thrilled to find the article on David Lee Murphy in the January/February issue.

My friend and I are two of his biggest fans. He has more talent than anyone I can think of (as a songwriter and singer). We don't go to many concerts, but we made sure to see him three times last year when he played in Missouri. He is just as the article said, a redneck and proud of it. You gotta love him.

We'll be counting on CMM to keep us up on his success.

Wanda Isenberg
Jefferson City, Missouri

Marty Brown Deserves

I just wanted to thank you for having Marty Brown in the January/February issue of the magazine. If anyone has ever tried, Marty has. So give him a chance. Thank you.

Edith West
Columbus, Ohio

Daffy 'Bout DeMent

Thanks to Bob Allen for the excellent review on *The Way I Should* by Iris DeMent in Record Reviews in the March/April issue. She's one of my favorite artists, and I love to listen to my copy of her album. I got to see Iris in person in Asheville, North Carolina, last October. Mr. Allen's review put it into better words than I can, so I'll say I agree with every word he wrote.

I've been a country music fan for many years, but have tired of the so-called country music of today. I listen to a lot of bluegrass. Give a listen to Del McCoury, and Jim and Jesse. Bluegrass is very popular now because real country music is hard to find.

Wilma Kennison
Asheville, North Carolina

Clappin' for Carter

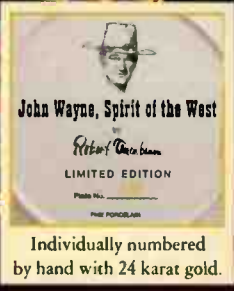
I'm a big fan of Deana Carter. She has a wonderful voice and I love her songs: "Strawberry Wine" and "We Danced Anyway." My friend and I freak out whenever we hear her songs on the radio. I wanted to thank *Country Music Magazine* for having something on Deana Carter in the March/April issue (Record Reviews). It would be nice if you could have her on the centerfold soon or maybe an interview? Thanks again.

Christina Rice
La Mirada, California
See also People this issue.—Ed.

Searchin' for Seals (Brady, That Is)

I am writing in regards to where I can get a CD of Brady Seals, *The Truth*. I cannot find it in Maine. I had a friend of my daughter, in Tennessee, look for it. But she could not find it down there, either. I hear the song, "Another You, Another Me." It is very pretty. I remind me of my late husband and myself. Also, my youngest daughter has been in love with Brady ever since she saw him in one of the vid-

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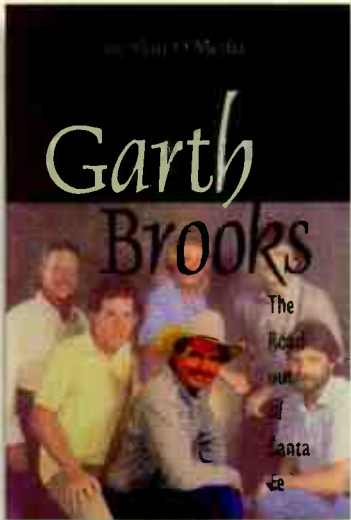
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Dolores Withee
Oakland, Maine

The CD's out now. Check local stores and see Record Reviews this issue.—Ed.

Wantin' More Watson/and Rimes

It made me so angry recently to hear Gene Watson tell of sending his new single to radio stations, only to learn that they wouldn't play it, even just to hear it for themselves. The popularity of new artist—with an *old* country sound—LeAnn Rimes is proof of what country fans want to hear. And there is a whole roster of artists who *created* that sound. Radio stations claim that they play what their listeners request. Why, then, when I call in to request George Jones or Don Williams or Waylon Jennings, am I told, "Oh, we don't play them. Nobody wants to hear them." Well, I do, and so do others. Don't we matter?

Lucille VanDusen
Wrightstown, New Jersey

Beggin' for Bear Family

As an avid fan of traditional and classic country music, I am constantly purchasing CD's by artists such as Lefty Frizzell, Gary Stewart and Johnny Horton that contain only three or four songs which I haven't already purchased on other CD's. While reading *Buried Treasures* in your March/April issue, I noticed mention of a comprehensive Frizzell boxed set from Bear Family. Recently, I had been made aware that Bear Family also had similar sets by Merle Haggard and The Louvin Brothers. Could you please provide information on how to obtain a catalog from Bear Family and any other company that specializes in sets from similar artists.

Kent McLamb
Dunn, North Carolina

For catalog, write Bear Family, Achtern Dahl 4, D-27729 Vollersode, Germany. The ET Record Shop in Nashville and Record Depot stock Bear Family.—Ed.

Barkin' at Bob 'n' Bob

I just received my January/February 1997 issue of *Country Music Magazine* and was reading the record reviews. Mr. Bob Millard has no idea what he is talking about (John Michael Montgomery/Paul Brandt), and what he said was wrong and cruel. Those are two of my favorite singers, and I don't enjoy people trashing and slamming them and their music. They probably don't like it either.

And to Bob Allen and his review of Kevin Sharp, it goes the same for you. Critic and review is one thing, trashing, slamming and cutting down is another!

Also, thank you for putting the poster of Bryan White in your magazine. He is one of my favorite country music stars.

Could you try to put one of David Kersh, Paul Brandt or Ty England in your future issues? Thank you. Love your magazine.

Jennifer Steffen
Milan, Michigan

He's for Hanks

Regarding Rich Kienzie's review of the *Three Hanks* album in the January/February issue, I think he is out of line. I have been a Hank fan since 1950, and I am glad I had listened to the album before I read his review.

Apparently he is a member of the new country group, for he sure doesn't know about real country music. I also think Hank Jr. has every right to do what he feels like with his daddy's music. As for Hank III, I am waiting to hear more from him.

Dan Wright
Hanford, Georgia

Coolidge, Monroe, CMM

I have read that Rita Coolidge has moved back to Nashville from California, and I was wondering and hoping that she might be trying to get a record deal and start putting out some new music. Do you know if she's planning to make a comeback or not?

By the way, I really enjoy your articles. I like the way you write them and get in the personalities and behind the scenes happenings—it makes it a *lot* more personal and interesting for the rest of us. I especially appreciate your article on Bill Monroe in the November/December 1996 issue. The angels surely sang when he came home. Thanks for everything.

Marty Lou Tydings
Enid, Oklahoma

Hazel says Rita is gathering material for a new album.—Ed.

Awesome Terri

Watch out, Shania Twain, here in Arizona Terri Clark is the new sweetheart of country music. Since her debut single in 1995, "Better Things to Do," she's been a huge favorite. She's got a voice that will blow anyone away. Terri has a lot of talent, and her new album, *Just the Same*, should be album of the year. Her songs are fantastic. I think Terri Clark, Reba and Patty Loveless are the best country singers of 1997. And the beauty is awesome in concert! I've found my favorite singer! P.S. This is the fifth letter I have sent in and none of them have been in your mag. Maybe this time I'll be lucky.

M. Giles
Phoenix, Arizona

Early Eddy Arnold

I am not a writer, so I beg you to look over my misspelled words and so on. I'm an old guy of 69 who has loved good hillybilly and later on good honest country music that came from the heart of the artist, but I just cannot stand what you

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URGENT! SONGS, POEMS NEEDED. Radio, TV, royalties. Hollywood Records, 6000 Sunset, Studio M, Hollywood, CA 90028.

WANTED COUNTRY GOSPEL song poem hits! \$5,000 cash advance royalties information! Top Records, Box 23505-K, Nashville, TN 37202.

POEMS/LYRICS NEEDED by hit songwriters. Win awards! Free evaluation! Send poems: Edlee Music, Box 15312-CMM, Boston, MA 02215-5312.

POEMS WANTED FOR MUSICAL SETTING and recording. We pay above costs on selected poems. Jeff Roberts Publishing, 299 Newport Avenue (CM), Wollaston, MA 02170.

HOLLYWOOD RECORDERS makes song demos for songwriters. Free information, samples. 603 Seagaze, #138, Oceanside, CA 92054. (760) 757-7446.

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PRODUCER - ACCEPTING SONGS, poems, lyrics! Studio 3, P.O. Box 120145, Nashville, TN 37212-0145.

CALL FREE, Nashville singer and songwriter information. Free publisher's list. 1-(800) 345-2694.

YOUR OWN SONG! Write just lyrics or lyrics and music. Nashville singers and musicians will bring your song to life. Visa/Master accepted. Information and sample available. Nashville Digital Demos, 113 Catawba Court, Nashville, TN 37013. 1-(800) 484-8581, Code 3631.

AWARD WINNING SONGWRITER/recording artist credited with 8 chart records, offering co-writing on accepted material. Send best song lyrics to: Ramsey Kearney, 602 Inverness Avenue, Nashville, TN 37204. 1-(615) 297-8029.

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING INFORMATION

Rates: Regular classified ads are \$6.50 per word. Minimum ad 10 words. All advertisements are set uniformly. They are set solid with the lead words set in caps. Abnormal capitalization, type variations, illustrations and borders are not permitted. The classified display rate is \$340 per column inch. The magazine will pub-set most regular type faces at no charge. The column width is 2.25 inches including border. For ads using either an illustration or halftone, send negative film, 133 line screen.

Payment: All classified advertising must be prepaid with order. Make check or money order payable to *Country Music Magazine*. For credit card orders (Visa or MasterCard only), include account number, expiration date, signature and the amount you authorize *Country Music Magazine* to charge your account.

Closing Date: *Country Music Magazine* is published 6 times per year. The next available issue is July/August, which closes May 15th; the September/October issue closes July 15th.

Mail advertising copy, payments and production materials for display ads to: *Country Music Magazine*, Classified Department, P.O. Box 570, Clearwater, Florida 34617-0570. For overnight courier service send to: 1510 Barry Street, Suite D, Clearwater, Florida 34616. Telephones: 1-(800) 762-3555 • International (813) 449-1775 • Fax (813) 442-2567 • E-Mail RPIads@aol.com



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people call today's country. Give me the 40's, 50's and 60's and, yes, even the 70's. But forget today's stuff that the music companies are pushing into our head. But I also have something to say about a great singer that started out back in the 40's—Eddy Arnold, then known as the Tennessee Plowboy. At one time I had everything that Eddy recorded.

I have lost many of my 78 rpm records from playing them so much. Even a good many of my old Eddy Arnold 45's are going bad. And now I have read in your *Country Music Magazine*, Buried Treasures, September/October 1996 issue, that Eddy doesn't want the old standards released. I have in the past written to RCA to ask them to release a box set of every one of Eddy's songs, not remakes but the real thing, but never have I received one word from RCA.

Through Bear Family Records in Germany, I have just bought a very beautiful box set of all of Columbia's records of George Morgan. I also am a proud owner of Bear Family's Marty Robbins—three separate box sets. I have asked Bear Family if they were going to have any releases of Eddy Arnold. They at least took the time to answer, saying that they had nothing planned at this time. What a shame. To you, Eddy, in case this letter falls into print, I'd like to say you were the best ever. You have many fans that would rush out even today to buy every one of your original songs.

Bill Lawrence
Bend, Oregon



Recent Sweeps winners Ferguson...



...Babin with granddaughter and great-granddaughter...and Williams. Congrats, all.

Sweeps Winner Says Thanks

First of all, let me thank you so much for the check from the sweepstakes prize. It is being put to good use, brightening my life, which I really needed. My husband passed away two years ago with Alzheimer's, and I was very depressed when I got the news that I had won.

I really like *Country Music Magazine*, and I learn so much about the artists I enjoy. My favorite is Tracy Byrd with Vince Gill a close second. Then comes Alan Jackson and George Strait. I enjoy a lot of the other artists too. I would love to go to Nashville, but I don't think it will stretch to that kind of visit. Maybe one of these days! Thank you again.

Rachael Babin
Gibson, Louisiana

Another Thank You

Received your letter with the \$1000 check. I thank you very much. That was the first thing I've ever won (and I am 64 years old). I used some to buy a new TV set. The rest I'm saving for a little padding later. Of course, I made sure I had your magazine paid up.

Thank you very much. I read the magazine from cover to cover and enjoy every bit of it.

Robert D. Ferguson
Laurel, Florida

New Winner Responds

Enclosed is a picture of myself (don't laugh!). Also, I'm sending you a note telling you what I did with some of the money (\$1000) I won! I gave \$100 to the church! I sent \$15 to the Disabled Veterans. I bought the spouse a little something! P.S. I also renewed my membership to *Country Music* for another two years. Thank you \$1000 times. God bless all.

Warren Williams

Gaffney, South Carolina
Warren won our December 1996/January 1997 \$1000 Renewal Sweepstakes.—Ed.

Send Letters to the Editor to *Country Music Magazine*, 329 Riverside Avenue, Westport, CT 06880. Mark your envelope, Attention: Letters. We reserve the right to edit for space and style. Sign your letter!



BRAND NEW BOOK RELEASE!

GEORGE STRAIT

THE STORY OF COUNTRY'S LIVING LEGEND

People Magazine listed him as one of the 50 Most Beautiful People of 1995.

He broke Elvis Presley's record for consecutive sold-out performances at the Las Vegas Hilton.

He holds the record for the longest list of Number One hits of any male country music star, with 22 hits and 17 top-selling albums.

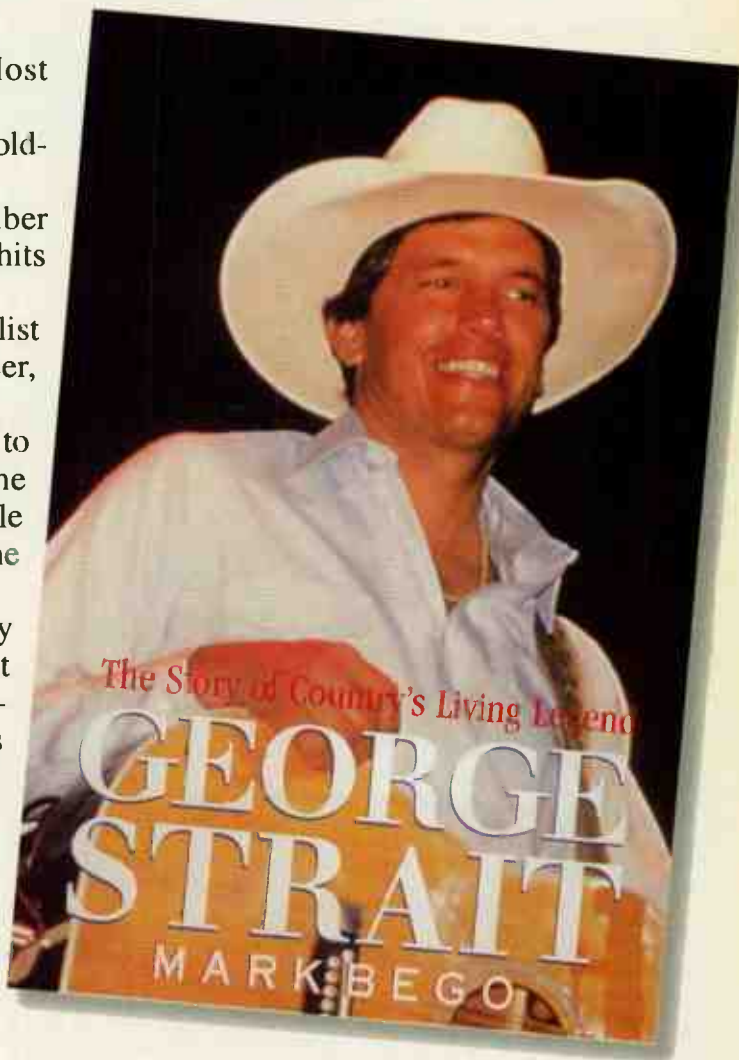
He's George Strait and, in this biography, journalist Mark Bego presents the story of his dazzling career, both on the stage and behind-the-scenes.

It's the story of a small-town Texas son, groomed to take over his father's ranch after he got out of the Army. But George was bitten by the music bug while stationed in Hawaii, taught himself how to play the guitar, and was on his way to stardom.

After kicking around local dancehalls and honky tonks with his own Ace in the Hole Band, he set out for the capital of country music, Nashville, Tennessee, and was signed by MCA Records. After his 1981 debut album, *Strait Country*, the rest is music history, with hit album after hit album.

This is one story you don't want to miss!

Hardcover, 304 Pages, 16 Pages of Personal and Performance Photos, Complete Discography, \$22.95



FREE CASSETTE WHEN YOU ORDER IN THE NEXT 10 DAYS!

Order in the next 10 days and you'll also receive George Strait's MCA album, *Strait From the Heart* ...FREE! This bestselling cassette features ten hits including "Fool Hearted Memory," "Amarillo by Morning," "Marina Del Rey" and "A Fire I Can't Put Out." Available on cassette only.

MAIL TO: Nashville Warehouse, Dept. 0506971,
P.O. Box 292553, Nashville, TN 37229

YES! Send the George Strait Biography for \$22.95 plus \$3.45 postage and handling. Be sure to include my **FREE** Cassette. (B9G/39315)

Check enclosed.

Instead charge my:

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FOR CMSA MEMBERS ONLY

VOTE

MEMBERS POLL/MAY 1997

Your opinions can help influence record companies, radio stations, record stores, concert promoters, managers and performers. As a CMSA member, you have a way of making your opinion known, by filling out the Poll. We'll publish the results, and forward them to those involved in the business of country music who are interested in what fans are thinking and doing.

Bought Any Good Records Lately?

1. Did you buy any albums (records, cassettes or compact discs) in the last month? Yes No
How many records? _____ cassettes? _____ CD's? _____

2. In the boxes below, write the numbers of any of the albums on the Top 25 list in this issue which you bought in the last month.

3. For any albums you bought in the last month not on the Top 25 list, write performer's name and album titles in the space below. (Attach a separate sheet if you need more room.)

Your Choice for Album of the Month

4. List numbers of your five favorites from Top 25 in this issue.

Singles (list 5 numbers)

Albums (list 5 numbers)

Do You Read These Magazines?

5. Which of the following magazines do you read on a regular basis? Please check all that apply.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Family Circle</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Field & Stream</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Outdoor Life</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>B.A.S.S. Times</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Country America</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Ladies Home Journal</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Good Housekeeping</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>New Country</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Country Weekly</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Woman's Day</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>People</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> None of the above |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Organic Gardening</i> | |

Demographic Information

6. Are you male or female?

- Male Female

Who Can Vote

Only CMSA members are eligible to vote. If you are a member, write your membership number here _____

If you are not a CMSA member but would like to join and vote immediately, enclose your check for \$16 for a one-year CMSA membership (you get an extra year of *Country Music Magazine*, too).

Fill out poll and mail to: March Poll, *Country Music Magazine*, 329 Riverside Avenue, Suite 1, Westport, Connecticut 06880.



Charlie Rich in Legends

While there are several good reissues available on Rich, the single best package out there is Legacy's two-CD set, *Feel Like Going Home: The Essential Charlie Rich* (Sony Legacy 64782). Its 36 tracks include 20 from his Epic years, and 16 early cuts. From the early years come "Lonely Weekends" (his first pop hit), "Break Up," "Sittin' and Thinkin'," "River Stay 'Way from My Door," "Big Boss Man" and "Mohair Sam" (his second pop hit). The Epic era features the obvious tunes like "Behind Closed Doors" and "The Most Beautiful Girl," but also includes fine tracks such as "Stay," "I Almost Lost My Mind," "Set Me Free" and "Life's Little Ups and Downs," written by Charlie's wife Margaret Ann. These have lost none of their power. It ends with two great performances from his 1994 album, *Pictures and Paintings*: the title song and "Feel Like Going Home." The package includes thorough notes by *CMM* contributor Peter Guralnick. A two-CD set. Regular price \$24.98. Members' price \$22.98.

Buried Treasures Special

CMSA members are entitled to a discount on all of the products featured in this section. Take

\$2.00 off the price of each item featured here except for the Bear Family boxed sets. On the Grandpa Jones box, members deduct \$40.00—pay just \$125.00. On the Hank Locklin box, members deduct \$27.50, and pay \$82.50. Include membership number if taking discount. See ordering instructions in *Buried Treasures*.

Essential Collector Special

Members also get a discount on anything featured in *Essential Collector*: take \$2.00 off the regular price of each item. This time out, Rich reviews books on George Strait, Elvis and country music's history. He's found some fine recordings, too: two volumes of train songs, and an instrumental album by Jim Campilongo. Include membership number if taking discount. See ordering instructions on the *Essential Collector* page.

Classic Photo

Charlie Rich worked closely with Epic producer Billy Sherrill in the 1970's, producing such hits as "The Most Beautiful Girl" and "Behind Closed Doors." Though they were commercially successful and brought him great fame, Rich wasn't as fond of his Epic recordings as he was his earlier, more blues-drenched material. In this early 70's photo, Rich confers with Sherrill (right) in the Epic studios. Rich Kienzle details the life of Charlie Rich in the *Legends* feature in this issue of the *CMSA Newsletter*.

How to Order

To order items listed on this page, send check or money order to Nashville Warehouse, Dept. 050697N, P.O. Box 292553, Nashville, TN 37229. Include \$3.00 postage/handling per order. Canadian orders, add \$3.00 additional.



1935 FORD PICKUP



Shown approximately actual size (Scale 1:24; 7 1/2" in length).

A collector-quality replica, handcrafted of die-cast metal from over 135 precision parts.

The 1935 Ford Pickup was much more than just a utility vehicle. With its rakish sloping grille and handsome cab, it was simply beautiful to behold. Now, you can own an authentic die-cast metal replica of this true American classic...the 1935 Ford Pickup.

Meticulously crafted; hand-assembled.

This handsome replica is reproduced in large 1:24 scale from over 135 individual parts. Each precision part is inspected multiple times before the replica is hand-assembled and hand-waxed to a glowing finish.

Shown smaller than actual size (Scale 1:24; 7 1/2" in length).



© MBI

Look at the distinctive chrome front grille, crowned with the "V-8" emblem. Lift the hood to see the painstakingly reproduced 85-hp, 221 cubic inch V-8 engine.

Attractively priced; satisfaction guaranteed.

The original 1935 Ford was the lowest-priced vehicle in Ford's 1935 line. Your 1935 Ford Pickup replica is also attractively priced — at just \$111, payable in four convenient monthly installments of \$27.75.

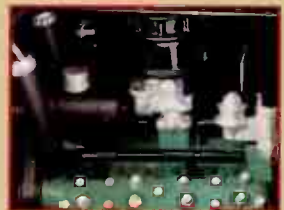
Your satisfaction is guaranteed. Mail your Reservation Application today!



The deluxe interior features authentic seats and miniature dashboard dials and gauges.



The tailgate, held by two support chains, swings down freely. Note the authentic ribbed truck bed.



The miniature engine is a precise replica of the original 221 cubic inch, 85-hp V-8.

Ford trademarks used under license from Ford Motor Company.

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Norwalk, CT 06857

Reservation Application

Send no money now.

1935 FORD® PICKUP

Yes! Reserve my 1935 Ford Pickup. I will pay for my replica in four monthly installments of \$27.75*. If I am not completely satisfied, I may return my replica within 30 days for replacement or refund.

*Plus any applicable sales tax and \$1 shipping and handling per installment.

Name _____

Please Print Clearly

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City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Signature _____

(Orders subject to acceptance.)

Allow 4 to 8 weeks after initial payment for shipment.

8281F1M1

Buried Treasures

by Rich Kienzle



Grandpa Jones: It's been all but impossible for anyone to license any of Grandpa Jones' essential King recordings, due to the owners' reluctance to work with all but a few labels. The five-CD *Everybody's Grandpa* (Bear Family BCD 15788) is, instead, the complete collection of Grandpa's 13 years with Fred Foster's Monument label, from 1960 through 1973, a total of 140 songs that encompass all 26 singles and eight LP's.

The set begins with "Make the Rafters Ring" from 1961, recorded with old friend and performing partner Merle Travis (uncredited) on guitar. A 1962 session features Grandpa backed by the vocal trio of wife and performing partner Ramona Jones, Mother Maybelle Carter and Maybelle's daughter Helen, on Jimmie Rodgers' "T for Texas"; it became a Top Five hit single. That success led to *Yodeling Hits*, included here, an entire LP centered around Rodgers songs, followed by Grandpa's LP of folk-oriented material.

Also included in the box is Ramona Jones' ultra-rare 1964 solo single and the gospel LP, *Grandpa Jones Remembers The Browns Ferry Four*, which again reunited Grandpa and Travis. As members of the original Browns Ferry Four (with The Delmore Brothers), Travis and Grandpa recorded for King. Here, they re-created their old songs in a style that became the keystone of *Hee Haw's* Gospel Quartet. Points of interest among the later Monument material in-

clude a 1971 single with old friends Joe and Rose Lee Maphis, the 1969 *Grandpa Jones Live LP* (recorded onstage in Cincinnati) and the last LP, *What's for Supper?*, trading on his *Hee Haw* fame. The 28-page booklet features a comprehensive session-by-session discography and excellent new notes by Charles Wolfe, based on new interviews with Grandpa and Ramona (who doesn't hesitate to register her opinion that the live LP wasn't up to snuff).

Homer & Jethro: In the early 1950's, most country artists felt a song wasn't a bonafide hit until it had been "butchered" (parodied) by guitarist Homer Haynes and mandolinist Jethro Burns. Hank Williams must've considered their "Jambalaya" spoof, "Jambowl-Liar," a unique honor. The pair haven't gotten a fair shake from reissuers. Aside from a CD collection available by mail-order only, no career survey has been attempted. Razor & Tie Music picks up the gauntlet with the 20-cut *America's Song Butchers: The Weird World of Homer & Jethro* (RE 2130-2), covering most of their best-known parodies and novelties from 1949 through 1965 (as with Grandpa Jones, their King recordings can't be licensed).

The set begins with "Tennessee Border No. 2," and moves to their hit version of the pop hit, "Baby It's Cold Outside," with June Carter. Their best-known numbers included novelties like "The Billboard Song," but most were parodies of country hits, including "I'm Movin' On No. 2," "Don't Let the Stars Get in Your Eyeballs," "Sixteen Tons" and "The Battle of Kookamonga" (a spoof of "Battle of New Orleans"). They also demolished such pop hits as "You Belong to Me" (a hit for Jo Stafford), "Mister Sandman," "Hart-Brake Motel" ("Heartbreak Hotel"), "Let Me Go, Blubber" ("Let

Me Go, Lover"), "I Want to Hold Your Hand" and "Misty," with an arrangement that clearly influenced Ray Stevens' 1975 hit version. One never-issued number is included: the novelty, "She Was Bitten On the Udder By an Adder," featuring a brilliant mandolin solo by Jethro. *Journal* contributor and Homer & Jethro authority Dave Samuelson, who compiled and did much of the production coordination for this set, picked songs to provide a complete overview, and the collection certainly does that.

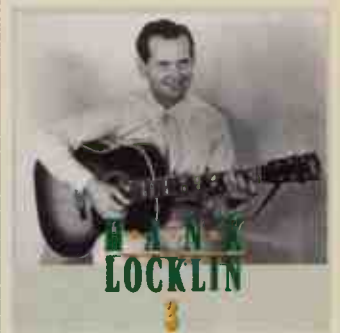


Tommy Duncan: I annotated both volumes of this collection, so just facts. After being fired by Bob Wills in 1948, former Texas Playboy singer Tommy Duncan, band vocalist from the original 1933 Playboys, assembled The Western All Stars, a top-notch band largely made up of ex-Texas Playboys and his brother Glynn Duncan. But after a Top Ten Capitol single in 1949, a cover of Jimmie Rodgers' "Gambling Polka Dot Blues," Duncan's career stalled. Except for a two-year reunion with Wills later on, he kept working clubs and ballrooms, but never achieved wider success.

Bear Family's two-volume Duncan retrospective begins with *Texas Moon* (BCD 15907), a 26-song overview of Duncan's 1949-1950 recordings, including all his Capitol recordings, a single recorded for his own Natural label and four 1950 Cormac recordings featuring Glynn Duncan sing-

ing with the All-Stars, called the "Bar B Boys" on the label. These cuts were made just before Tommy (who plays very bad bass on the songs) disbanded the group. The disc ends with Tommy's first two 1951 sessions for Intro Records, which featured more animated performances since the backup band was Ole Rasmussen's Nebraska Corn Huskers, a band that followed The Playboys' sound.

The second volume, the 28-track *Beneath a Neon Star in a Honky Tonk* (BCD 15957), picks up the ball with his 1951-1953 sessions for Intro, including two previously unreleased songs. This material features his 1953 version of Willie Mae Thornton's R&B classic, "Hound Dog," the first recording any white singer did of the song Elvis made his trademark in 1956. Though his Coral recordings of the mid-1950's aren't included, the set reissues Duncan's ultra-rare 1956 single for Bakersfield-based Fire Records, with Buck Owens on guitar.



Hank Locklin: Bear Family has already dealt with Hank Locklin's early RCA career with the *Please Help Me, I'm Falling* boxed set. Now, picking up the pre-RCA days of 1948 through 1954 is the three-CD, 66-song *Send Me the Pillow That You Dream On* (BCD 15953). This one begins with Locklin's first recording for the tiny Gold Star label of Houston in 1948 and his two 1948-49 singles for the tiny Royalty label, plus one song

for the DJ label. From there, it runs through his complete Four Star recordings, including the original recording of "Send Me the Pillow," recorded unsuccessfully for Four Star nine years before his hit RCA version. Locklin recorded all kinds of material with his band for Four Star, from ballads and gospel to raw honky tonk and love songs. None of it sold.

He didn't do any better after he started recording in Nashville for both Decca and Four Star. Though he started recording in Nashville with Chet Atkins and even with Hank Williams' Drifting Cowboys after Hank's death, sales simply weren't there. It wasn't until Atkins got him onto RCA and put him into the Nashville Sound mold that Locklin found true success. Along with the three superb-sounding discs is a 31-page book by Kevin Coffey. Based on interviews with Locklin and others involved in his career, it takes a hard look at the business chicanery of Four Star owner and founder Bill McCall. Complementing the notes are a dazzling set of rare photos, including one showing Locklin with a relatively young Pappy Daily (Locklin gave him his enduring nickname), long before the days when Daily discovered George Jones. Other photos were apparently taken at an actual recording session, still others at personal appearances.

Joe Maphis: I also annotated this collection, so facts only, again. Joe Maphis recorded vocals and instrumental solos for a variety of labels throughout his career, but his most important body of instrumental recordings were done for Columbia from 1955 through 1960 (he and wife Rose Lee Maphis recorded vocals for Columbia from 1952 on). Except for his guitar solos with his protégé, Larry Collins of The Collins Kids, Joe's own Columbia instrumentals, featuring him with the *Town Hall Party* band, have never before been reissued in any form. *Flying Fingers* (Bear Family BCD 16103) features 22 of Maphis' instrumentals recorded for

Columbia through those five years and a 1960 single for Republic Records.

Included is his multi-instrumental signature tune, "Fire on the Strings," as well as "Guitar Rock and Roll," "Town Hall Shuffle," "Flying Fingers," "Twin Banjo Special"



and The Carter Family's "Sweet Fern." The four 1957 Maphis-Larry Collins sides, "Early American," "Rockin' Gypsy," "Hurricane" and "Bye Bye" are here, as well as seven instrumentals that Joe recorded in 1959 and 1960. The set closes with both sides of the Republic single. Included in the booklet are a number of rare mid-50's color shots of Maphis from the photo session for the *Fire on the Strings* LP cover, most of which were never published before.

Johnnie Lee Wills: Bob Wills' younger brother, Johnnie Lee, never became as legendary as Bob, though he continued the Wills presence in Tulsa after Bob left for California in 1943. Johnnie Lee (and, later, Leon McAuliffe) pretty much owned

Tulsa, Johnnie Lee continuing the daily KVOO broadcasts until Bob returned in 1958, when the brothers co-hosted the show and shared the band until the daily broadcasts ended that year. Johnnie Lee made his own contributions to the business, including the definitive version of "Milk Cow Blues" recorded for Decca in 1941, and the Wills original, "Rag Mop" (a country hit for Johnnie Lee, and a pop hit for the Ames Brothers in 1950). His bands were always somewhat smaller than Bob's, never with quite the same stellar lineup, though he always had a few great sidemen (some of whom stayed with him for years). Surprisingly, only one decent Johnnie Lee reissue exists, and it covers his rather uneven early 1950's period on RCA Victor.

The Band's A-Rockin' (Krazy Kat CD 18) attempts to rectify that problem by reissuing his complete Decca and Bullet recordings, 27 songs, all in one spot. All his 1941 material, including the definitive version of "Milk Cow Blues" with Cotton Thompson on vocals, appears. The musicians of this early Tulsa band included some future Texas Playboy greats, including pianist Millard Kelso, guitar wildman Junior Barnard and Bob's and Johnnie Lee's younger brother, bassist Luke Wills. Also included are all six of the nearly-forgotten 1947 Decca recordings that Johnnie Lee and the band recorded in Los

Angeles. The strongest material of all, however, is the 1949-1951 recordings the band did for Nashville's Bullet Records, including "Rag Mop," the driving "Boogie Woogie Highball," "Tom Cat Boogie," the blazing "Coyote Blues" and "Levee Blues." Dave Sax's liner notes get the job done nicely. The sole drawback is that the sound is simply not on a level with, say, Bear Family's—Bear Family tends to spoil a listener with its clear, warm digital remastering.



Patsy Cline: What's that, you say? How can RCA release *The Essential Patsy Cline* (RCA 66983) when she never recorded for the label? Well, it's both simple and simple-minded as well. They licensed some of her early material from the 1950's, songs she recorded for Four Star that were released on Coral Records, material that's out on various labels (including Rhino) in many forms. Why? I guess RCA simply wanted Patsy product in their catalog, but repackaging readily available Patsy material when so many other seminal RCA artists need reissuing is absurd.

If you missed out on reissues of this material (and I can't imagine many who have), the 20-track package includes "Walkin' After Midnight," "A Church, a Courtroom and Goodbye," "Lovesick Blues," "Three Cigarettes in an Ashtray," etc., etc. It also includes some of the worst graphic design I've ever seen on a reissue, since some graphic artist not thinking of anyone reading Wade Jessen's notes decided it would be clever to reproduce them in sepia ink over sepia-toned photos of Patsy, making them all but indecipherable.

How to Get These Treasures

Available in formats shown at prices shown: Grandpa Jones, *Everybody's Grandpa* (BCD 15788), a five-CD boxed set, \$165.00/Homer & Jethro, *America's Song Butchers: The Weird World of Homer & Jethro* (RE 2130), \$13.98 cassette, \$17.98 CD/Tommy Duncan, *Texas Moon* (BCD 15907), CD only, \$26.95/Tommy Duncan, *Beneath a Neon Star in a Honky Tonk* (BCD 15957), CD only, \$26.95/Hank Locklin, *Send Me the Pillow That You Dream On* (BCD 15953), a three-CD boxed set, \$110.00/Joe Maphis, *Flying Fingers* (BCD 16103), CD only \$26.95/Johnnie Lee Wills, *The Band's A-Rockin'* (Krazy Kat CD 18), CD only, \$18.98/Patsy Cline, *The Essential Patsy Cline* (RCA 66983), \$12.98 cassette, \$18.98 CD. Send check or money order payable to Nashville Warehouse, Dept. 050697, P.O. Box 292553, Nashville, Tennessee 37229. Add \$3.95 postage and handling. Canadian orders, add an additional \$3.00 postage. **CMSA Members, see For Members Only page for discounts.**

Offer expires September 30, 1997

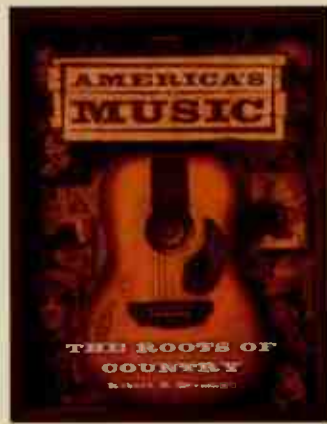
Essential Collector by Rich Kienzle

▪ Books ▪

America's Music: In June of last year, Turner Broadcasting aired *America's Music: The Roots of Country*. This six-hour documentary, produced by Tom Neff and Diandra Douglas (wife of Michael) and narrated by Kris Kristofferson, attempted to document the music's evolution. It was a textbook example of a great idea tackled by the wrong people. It was disjointed and distorted, rarely accurate, and startling in its omissions and misconceptions, one of which was that the entire country music world had always revolved around Nashville. At the time, I had trouble believing Robert K. Oermann, the series' writer and a fine historian, concurred with the main points of the TV production. The jury's still out on that, but, in fact, Oermann did produce the one credible and useful by-product of this misadventure: a book version of *America's Music*.

In chapters that run parallel to those in the documentary but with better, more logical chronology, appear various quotes from the artists themselves illustrating the music's development in an oral history form. The narrative generally flows well through each chapter. Among the most telling comments come from Patsy Stoneman about her father, Ernest "Pop" Stoneman, and his pioneering recording efforts in the 1920's. Particularly amusing is Jimmie Davis' recollection of certain political opponents in Louisiana trying to derail his 1944 gubernatorial campaign. They held a rally and played some of the raunchy records he'd recorded years earlier, only to stand by, shocked, as the crowds started dancing to the music.

Chet Atkins recalls meeting Hank Williams and trying unsuccessfully to write songs with him. Waylon and Willie individually recall what



started the Outlaw Era, while Faron Young, no shrinking violet in his heyday, discussed having to dump a too-wild Johnny Paycheck from his band. Asleep at the Wheel's Ray Benson recalls the night in May 1975 when he heard that Bob Wills had died, and so forth. Oermann has assembled these quotes in a readable and coherent style that Neff and Douglas should have heeded when assembling the television documentary.

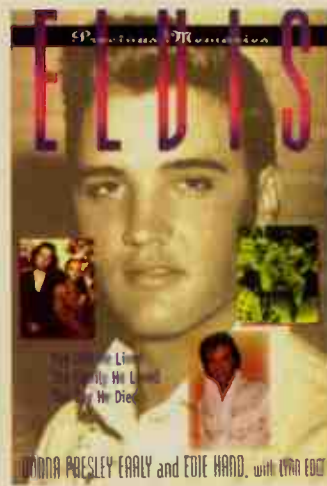
Fans of Studs Terkel's oral histories will find some similarities here, though the quotes are generally much shorter than in Terkel's books. Accompanying photos mix the rare and the common, and the beautiful production throughout makes this a truly worthwhile and revealing work.

Elvis: To date, numerous Elvis memoirs have been penned by cooks and nurses, stepbrothers, Memphis Mafia pals and various and sundry others, not to mention meaningful books like Peter Guralnick's *Last Train to Memphis*. This tally doesn't even count the junk being hacked out by individuals analyzing both real (and imagined) aspects of Elvis' outer and inner psyche. Still, as it turns out, Elvis' cousins haven't been heard from—until now.

Elvis: Precious Memories was written by two of his cousins: Donna Early and Edie Hand, the latter an enter-

tainer, with writer Lynn Edge. Donna was the daughter of Elvis' late aunt, Nashval Presley Pritchett, youngest sister of Elvis' father, Vernon Presley. Hand is a far more distant cousin. The book is based on both their first-hand experiences and "Aunt Nash's" unpublished memoirs. That mixture of viewpoints causes a constant shifting back and forth between Donna's and Edie's memories and the insights of Aunt Nash, an Assemblies of God minister.

In places, the authors simply advance opinions on known events in Elvis' life. In others, they tell funny anecdotes involving fans trying to get into Graceland, Elvis' hu-



mor and his colorful grandmother, Minnie Mae Presley, better known as "Dodger." Though Elvis is center stage, at times the focus shifts to the writers' own lives. As far as photos are concerned, some candid shots are interesting, yet there are too many of Edie Hand and still other cousins who are barely mentioned. A 1979 photo of family members (including Donna and Elvis' daughter, Lisa Marie) cutting up at Elvis' gravesite was a poor choice in general.

The great revelation is Vernon Presley's belief, carried to the grave and shared by Donna, that Elvis was mur-

dered, despite no evidence to prove anything but what's been reported: a "heart attack" (the coroner's report) or overdose. That's one view. Here's another: an Elvis stepbrother has speculated in print about suicide, but then some continue to see Elvis at McDonald's, too. Presenting Vernon's view was proper, but providing nothing but supposition to support it skews the book's credibility.

George Strait: A qualifier before beginning this review: Reviews and articles from this magazine, including one video review from this column, are quoted in this book. My review of the book, however, will not be affected by that.

Author Mark Bego is a celebrity biographer who's cranked out book-length bios on Bonnie Raitt, Michael Jackson, Madonna, Bette Midler, Patsy Cline and Alan Jackson. He now gives us *George Strait: The Story of Country's Living Legend*. That unimaginative title bodes ill for the book itself, since the author is not a country journalist. His books are heavy on quotes from secondary sources (magazine and newspaper articles, liner notes) and interviews with individuals who have some connection to the star:

Nonetheless, after writing three books on country stars, Bego should possess a decent insight into the music. He doesn't have it. Insight and knowledge take a back seat to a bland, formulaic construction of widely known facts, surrounded by padding and inaccuracies.

He tells the story of Strait's life, but too often seems to be just filling space instead of providing insights. Explaining that Strait recorded "Unwound" on Ground Hog Day (February 2, 1981), Bego stumbles through the following clumsy analogy: After discussing the holiday's significance in predicting the future of winter, he equates the

ground hog coming out with Strait going "into the studio that day to record the one song that was going to predict his future." Pretty lame stuff. He features extensive interviews with two men who maintain Internet Web pages for the star, one of them a brother of one of Strait's band members.

Continuing to fly off the subject, Bego wastes ample space on a worthless interview with obscure Nashville producer Mick Lloyd, who lacks any direct connection with Strait. Bego's explanation of Bob Wills' music and its influence on Strait is shallow and inaccurate (Wills did not introduce Western duds to the Opry, for example). I'm certain that Hank Thompson, who's built his career in Texas and Oklahoma, will be stunned to find himself described by Bego as a "classic Nashville performer." The best extensive work on Strait is Paul Kingsbury's essay in the MCA boxed set, *Strait Out of the Box*. Strait's immense talents, and his fans, deserve better than this ill-prepared mess.

■ Recordings ■

Railroad Songs: Rounder Records' new two-volume, 28-song anthology of traditional and modern railroad songs attempts to use material recorded from the 1930's to the present to show the railroad's place in American song. It mixes classic older recordings with newer recordings, some from the Rounder catalog, others from various smaller labels, to show how the traditions continue. Some of the choices are a bit obvious, and I'm bothered by the excessive reliance on material by Rounder artists, but the intentions were noble enough.

Volume 1, *Steel Rails* (Rounder 1128) brings together Roy Acuff's classic 1947 interpretation of "Wabash Cannonball" (he did not sing on his original version a decade earlier), The Johnson Mountain Boys' version of "Orange Blossom Special," folksinger Utah Phillips' "Daddy, What's



a Train," Jimmie Rodgers' "Jimmie the Kid," Kieran Kane's "Ramblin' Man," Alison Krauss' "Steel Rails," "Trainwreck of Emotion" by Del McCoury, "Slow Moving Freight Train" sung by Hugh Moffatt, Tom Russell's "Lord of the Trains," Peter Rowan's "Last Train," a version of "Nine Pound Hammer" teaming David Grisman with Doc Watson and Alan O'Bryant, The Sons of the Pioneers' "When the Golden Train Comes Down" from 1937, Guy Clark's original 1975 recording of "Texas, 1947" and Kate MacKenzie's version of "Pan American Boogie."

Volume 2, *Mystery Train* (Rounder 1129) continues with Johnny Cash's "Casey Jones," The Whitstein Brothers' "Freight Train Boogie," the late Steve Goodman's "City of New Orleans," "Mystery Train" by Sleepy La Beef, "The Cannonball" by The Carter Family, Flatt and Scruggs' "Big Black Train," The Delmore Brothers and Wayne Raney's obscure "Red Ball to Natchez," Bob Wills' "Take the 'A' Train" (a lame

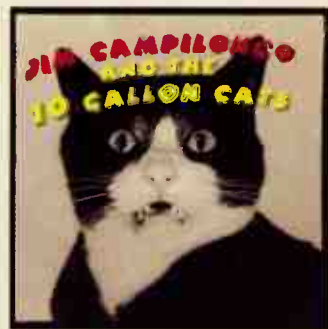


choice since it's hardly a railroad song), Hank Snow's rendition of Jimmie Rodgers' "Waiting for a Train," Patsy Cline's version of the old favorite, "Life's Railway to Heaven," Tony Rice's "Old Train," "Bringin' in the Georgia Mail" by Jim & Jesse, The Stanley Brothers' "Train" and Mary McCaslin's "Lost Cannonball."

Jim Campilongo: Three or four decades ago country instrumental LP's on major labels were common. Those days, of course, are long gone. Except for those by Chet Atkins (see Record Reviews this time), Mark O'Connor and a few more, such albums are about as rare as gospel albums by today's superstars. Even rarer are country-jazz instrumentalists in the tradition of the West Coast pedal steel-lead guitar duo of Jimmy Bryant and Speedy West. In California, a few younger musicians carry on the tradition, including San Francisco guitarist Jim Campilongo and his band, The Ten Gallon Cats. Their self-titled CD on their own Blue Hen Records shows

Campilongo, a dynamic, inventive and swinging player, working closely with pedal steel guitarist Joe Goldmark, a steel guitar historian who understands both past and present. Bassist Chris Kee and drummer Ken Owen are a capable rhythm section.

The wild, uninhibited opening number, "Splitsville," features Campilongo and Goldmark furiously playing off each other, feeding off one another's ideas. The stops-out country jazz of "Billy's Bird" features Campilongo's fiery passages complemented by Goldmark's cool, jazzy playing in the spirit of Buddy Emmons and Curly Chalker. "Snakestretcher" allows Campilongo to rip licks from his Telecaster that contrast with Goldmark's beautifully warm tone.



"Joe Camel" is a Middle Eastern flavored freakout again featuring the synergy of Campilongo and Goldmark. "Night in Serramonte" (the track named for a street in a San Francisco suburb) is a wonderfully tacky, Latin-South Seas flavored number. Three songs, the rhythmic "Big Bill," the witty, stop-time "Swingin' with the Cats" and the sizzling "Blue Hen," reflect the happy adventurousness of the old West-Bryant instrumentals. "Twangin'" has a dark, rainy-night feel that explodes with Campilongo's echoey, tremolo-drenched lead.

By releasing this project on his own label, Campilongo keeps control. For those who fear that this is a one-shot, take heart. The band's just released a second album we'll be reviewing soon.

How to Get These Collectibles

Books: Robert K. Oermann, *America's Music: The Roots of Country* (B8S), \$24.95/Donna Early and Edie Hand with Lynn Edge, *Elvis: Precious Memories* (B8A), \$24.95/Mark Bego, George Strait: *The Story of Country's Living Legend* (B9G), \$22.95. **Recordings:** Various Artists, *Steel Rails: Classic Railroad Songs, Volume 1* (Rounder 1128), \$12.98 cassette, \$18.98 CD/Variety Artists, *Mystery Train: Classic Railroad Songs, Volume 2* (Rounder 1129), \$12.98 cassette, \$18.98 CD/Jim Campilongo & The Ten Gallon Cats, *Jim Campilongo & The Ten Gallon Cats* (Blue Hen 1), CD only, \$17.98. To order, send check or money order to Nashville Warehouse, Dept. 050697EC, P.O. Box 290216, Nashville, Tennessee 37229. Add \$3.95 postage and handling per order. Canadian orders, add \$3.00 extra for postage. **CMSA members, see For Members Only page for discounts.**

Offer expires September 30, 1997

We're all familiar with those skewed masterpieces from the imagination of country music's comically demented genius: "The Streak," "Ahab the Arab," "Would Jesus Wear a Rolex," "It's Me Again, Margaret," "Jeremiah Peabody's Poly Unsaturated Quick Dissolving Fast Acting Pleasant Tasting Green & Purple Pills".... For the last four decades Ray Stevens has been tweaking our funny bones while also occasionally catering to our deeper emotions with Grammy-winning "serious" songs like "Misty" and "Everything Is Beautiful." Stevens' gently outrageous imagination seems, in fact, to never stop ticking. When we caught up with him in his Nashville office, he was in high gear, as usual—even a little breathless as he rushed through on his way to yet another comic video project, pausing only long enough for a quick 20 Questions.

1 Ray, someone just pointed out to me that this year marks your 40th anniversary as a recording artist 1957-1997. Wow! Somehow that doesn't seem possible, does it?

No, I know what you mean. But I got an early start. I was still in high school in Atlanta when I got my first record deal. I came to Nashville in 1957, and my first record was released on Prep, a subsidiary of Capitol. (Laughs.) Then they folded Prep up a few years later!

2 When you look back, has that 40 years gone by quickly?

Oh, gosh, yeah! It seems like maybe just ten years ago that I did all that!

3 How old are you now? If you don't mind my asking. I'm 58.

4 Well, you still seem very...very youthful.

Well, thanks. I'll tell you, I don't feel any different. I just love what I do, and hope I can keep on doing it for quite a while longer.



20 Questions with RAY STEVENS

By Bob Allen

5 I get the impression, from all the irons you currently have in the fire, that you're as busy as ever.

Yeah. (Laughs.) Seems like I can't let myself take a vacation here. I don't know what it is—I think I've got a death wish or something! I just finished the new album, *Hum It*, and we just completed the first video from the album down at the Huntsville Space Center. It's of a song on the

album called "Virgil and The Moonshot." It's about a clean-up guy at NASA who sneaks aboard a rocket and takes off. (Laughs.) Okay, I know. It's kinda far-fetched, but after all, this is humor!

Then we're fixin' to go down to Florida and start on the second video, which will be for a song called "Too Drunk to Fish." Then after that I'll start on a Christmas album that will be out by Christmas of '97,

hopefully. And hopefully do a long-form video around it, as well—much like *Comedy Video Classics*, which was such a big seller for me through direct marketing a couple years ago.

6 Big seller, indeed! Two million copies, as I recollect. Then you turned around and made a video of your live show in Branson, which sold another million. Then, your comic movie, *Get Serious*, went double platinum just through being marketed on TV. Sounds like you're not just on a roll, but you also saw around a corner that all the executive "visionaries" in the Nashville music establishment hadn't even noticed was there: Until you tapped into this gold mine, the Nashville labels merely viewed videos as promotional tools—not something that could actually be marketed and sold, like CD's. Right?

Right. But I just thought the time was right, simply because prior to then the consumer was still in the process of gettin' the hardware—ya know: VCR's were starting to proliferate. And I thought it especially made sense in my case, because comedy songs maybe lend themselves to videos a little more than your normal love song.

7 It says a lot about your popularity that you were selling millions of videos at a point when you not only weren't getting played much anymore on country radio, but you weren't even signed to a major label.

Yeah, I did it all outside the sanction of the so-called "established" record business. You know the record bidness... (Laughs.) They've got blinders on most of the time. The bean counters have gotten in control. You know what I'm saying? The Wright Brothers aren't in charge of the airline bidness. It's the bean counters.

8 Are there any particular standards in your song catalogue that get the biggest

response in your live shows after all these years?

Oh, yeah! "It's Me Again, Margaret" has been a big request item ever since it came out. "The Mississippi Squirrel," "Misty." "The Streak" has, of course, always been very much requested. And "Everything Is Beautiful," a ballad.

9 *That's one of your Grammy-winners, right? One of your "serious" songs? Yeah. It's sort of become my theme song.*

10 *It's always been a little bit of a secret that the "real" Ray Stevens is often a deadly serious person—someone who is sometimes driven, as both an artist and a businessman. Someone who often frets long and painfully about the state of the world. (Laughs.) Oh, yeah! Sometimes I have to fight bein' too serious!*

11 *How do you manage to set all your pressures and preoccupations aside when you do go onstage and reassume the wacky "public" Ray Stevens persona?*

After a while you learn to blend those two sides—I say two, but actually there are a lot more than two sides to everybody. But if you just wanta break it down to the comic and the serious, you learn to blend them. And even though you've got problems, when you go onstage, you click on to the humorous side of things, and it works itself out. It's amazing, really. The human mind is truly an amazing thing.

12 *A lot of your songs are about everyday situations run amock—predicaments that make the jump from the mundane to the fantastic. Like a NASA janitor who accidentally launches himself into orbit. Or the husband and wife gospel singers who accidentally undergo a sex change in "Mama Sang Bass." Where in the world do those ideas come from?*

All over the place. I first started trying to write songs

when I was 14, and at some point I just unconsciously started training myself to look for ideas.

I find them everywhere. I can be walking down the street and see a billboard, I can hear somebody say something or hear something on the radio. In the case of "The Streak," I saw an article in *Newsweek* about a college kid who took off his clothes and ran through a crowd. They called it streakin'. I said, "Whoah! There's an idea!"

13 *There are a lot of great country songwriters to come down the pike, but there's only a relative handful—people like you and Roger Miller—who've found their true muse within a humorous context. What first inspired you to start writing from that skewed perspective? Gosh, I dunno. (Shrugs.) It's always fun to do somethin' weird. I was always a big fan of The Coasters, ya know. Lieber & Stoller wrote a bunch of hits for them back in the 1950's and 60's: "Yakety Yak," "Along Came Jones." Those songs were a huge influence on me....And I've always loved humor. Ya know, I just love to see people laugh. Everybody does! Everybody likes to tell a joke and get a big laugh, whether he's on stage or just down at the supermarket talkin' to some friends.*

14 *Tell me about your "Branson Years." You built a 2,000-seat theater out there, spent several seasons, played to 1.6 million people in 17 months. But then you shut things down and sold your theater. What happened?*

Whew! By the end of the '93 season I had to get out! I do love to perform...but six days a week, two shows a day for six months? I just had to get a life!

Don't get me wrong—it was a wonderful experience, and Branson's a great place, and I plan to go back and work there from time to time. But I was beginning to feel like, "Been there, done that." I had

a lot of other things I wanted to do—like making records and videos—which, if I had stayed in Branson, I wouldn't have had time to.

15 *You've described the last few years—during which you've started recording for a major label (MCA) again and have re-immersed yourself in video projects—as a period of creative renewal for you. Evidently when you finally got back in the studio, the ideas started flowing and haven't stopped since.*

Well, I don't think it was quite that drastic—but due to the fact that I'd been in Branson so long—and when I wasn't in Branson, I was on the road doing other performances—I had not been able, time-wise, to get into the studio very much.

And that's where I love to be. It's funny, but if you get away from the studio for too long, you have to sort of readjust your feel for it. It's an intuitive thing—you have to get back in the groove of re-discovering how to play the whole instrument, the studio being that instrument. So it was fun to get back into the flow of making records again, and I'm still very much in it.

16 *Got any other projects on the front burner you can tell us about?*

Well... (Laughs.) I've got one I can't tell you much about! I'm working on a TV show right now. I wanta do a pilot, maybe a syndicated show that I'll be in and hopefully produce as well. It could jinx it to say too much about it this soon, but if it flies, it'll be pretty different, pretty wild. A whole lot of fun. If it turns out as good as I think it will, it'll be like, "Whoah, here we go!"

17 *I wish people could hear your enthusiasm when you're talking about these things! You almost sound feverish—like some kid who's just getting his first break in the music. I know it's crass of me to mention it, but you obviously don't need the money at this point....*

Hey, I didn't need the money when I first started, Bob! I don't do this for money! (Laughs.) Not that I was wealthy when I started, but I wasn't doin' it for the money, even then.

You don't do this for the money. The money is something that hopefully comes along, and it's nice—don't get me wrong! But, gosh, if I had gotten into this for the money, I probably would have done somethin' else. My dad still asks me when I'm gonna get a real job!

18 *Why am I not surprised by that? I've even heard you say that you love making records so much that even if a record label didn't sign you, you'd still make records on your own and just invite your friends over to your house to listen to them.*

Yeah! (Laughs.) That's right! I'd play 'em for me, too! I'd just take 'em home and play 'em!

19 *The standard question I ask every country artist of your generation: Does it ever bother you that you don't get played on radio much these days? This seems to be a general problem.*

Well, I think the most aggravating thing is that most of the time there's no reason for that. It's the result of a mind set among record companies and radio programmers that maybe has some basis, but not enough to carry it to the extreme that they've carried it.

20 *Yet your live shows continue to sell out. The Ray Stevens bandwagon keeps rolling right along. Is there ever gonna come a time when you slow it down some? Take a vacation?*

Oh, yeah. I slow down some now and then and play some golf—I feel like I need to play some right now! But I'll tell you, I have no plans to retire, as such. This all becomes a way of life. I hope I can be like George Burns and keep doin' this until... (Shrugs and laughs.) Until it's over.



Dreaming My Dreams

I'm dreaming. At first, I'm sipping an organic fruit shake with the infamous Jimmy Bowen on Maui, glorying in his retirement and chuckling about how his new book is going to ruffle country music professionals hither and yon.

I mean, really, talk about biting the hands you've fed on. Talk about a messy eater, too, and a big tipper: Bowen's decade as country's top executive/producer left Nashville's soul like a restaurant after an orgy of drunk millionaires—everything smashed, but money all over the place.

Me and Jimmy, though, we're not thinking about that. We're just admiring Maui's pure holistic beauty and digging the perfection and synchronicity of absolutely everything good and natural. All of a sudden, though, we're assaulted by a terrible, clattering, thrumming din, and the air begins to shake and shimmy all around us, and then a cold, dark, fearsome shadow falls over us, and we look up, and—"NO!" screams Bowen, his very beard a-tingle with terror. "It's—AAAAAARGH!!!!—It's DARTH!!!!!"

And indeed it is, or at least it's Darth's "people," four accountants and a labor lawyer, in Darth's helicopter, DB One, the gold-and-platinum-plated job with the great big loudspeakers, the decals of Barbara Walters wearing devil horns, and the little neon sign that flashes *Sorry, Sandy. Hi, Sis!*

"BOWEN!!!" roar the speakers in a huge, horrible, "Shameless"-style Darthvoice. "WE NEED YOU. COME BACK IMMEDIATELY, OR WE'LL PUBLISH YOUR FAX NUMBER!!!"

I watch Bowen turn green, then white, then scarlet, and start muttering something about "last straw" and "call the Boss" and "Frank" and "Vinnie the Reaper" as he reaches for his cell phone. I don't know how it all works out in the end, though, because I'm already in the bushes, running as hard and fast as I can, until...

I'm in a cool, quiet, monstrous warehouse piled to the rafters with billions and billions and billions of brand-new, shrink-wrapped country CD's. Somehow I understand that this, at last, is It: the real Hillbilly Central, the place where everything from the very beginning is At, where all the very best country music ever recorded anywhere in the universe can be had instantly, for nothing, if you can only Find the Way.

A path begins to glow, sort of like it does on an airliner when the engines quit and



Jimmy Bowen lands in Paddy's dreams.

you start nosing over, and as I'm drawn along the path towards a distant corner of the warehouse, I begin to hear the most beautiful, fabulously familiar music. It's Gary Stewart in 1973 in the old RCA "Nashville Sound" studio with Roy Dea on the board, Reggie Young on guitar and Weldon Myrick on steel. Gary's howling—howling—the sad, fierce, terrible opening line of that first killer hit—"I've got this...DRINKIN' thing...to keep from THINKIN' things"—and I can hear Hank crying up in Heaven, laughing down in Hell. Bowen sure put a stop to that kind of crap, didn't he? "Artists" got professional once he'd taken over.

What's that, though? Somebody's knocking? Must be. Now I'm at a recording session in a thoroughly modern, technologically up-to-the-digital-nanosecond studio (thank you, Bowen), and all the musicians are staring at the back door, looking frightened. They're the top guys, Nashville's triple-scale finest, trained to a T in New York and L.A. (thanks again, Bowen)—wow, this must be costing a bundle; it's a good thing a CD goes for \$15-plus these days—and the singer, I'm deeply impressed to note, is Emmylou Harris.

That knocking is really loud. The door's shaking. Now it's actually caving in, and—holy Consultants!—across its splintered remains stomp seven big guys in matte-black body armor, wielding heavy metal and yelling at the top of their lungs.

"MELODY POLICE!!!!" Everybody down! DOWN!!!!"

Okay, I'm down, I'm down. Sucking on the \$30,000 Persian rug, I'm thinking, *Man, wouldn't you know it?* Just my luck. I show up, and that's the day they decide to bust her? I mean, Emmy's been murdering perfect melodies for decades, changing a vital note here, a key phrase there, and nobody's done a thing. So why now?

I look to my left and there, on a toppled music stand, is the answer: "Yesterday" by Paul McCartney. Now I understand. I guess the goon squad can hang back while singers mess with some of the biggies—"Save the Last Dance for Me," maybe, or even "Tennessee Waltz"—but there's a limit. You gotta draw the line somewhere.

I watch them lead Emmy off with real regret. The kid just needed guidance, is all.

Hmmm...Maybe Bowen *should* come back. Nah. That'd be like having the baby make us drink the bathwater. We've already done that.

Now I overhear the goons say they're going after Travis Tritt. That figures. He's cutting a new Steve Earle song over at MegaSound, and after what he did to "Sometimes She Forgets," I guess they can't take any chances. Should I warn Travis? What would you do?

Whoa. A sudden change of scene, and I guess a pretty dramatic time shift, too. Now I'm suspended in the center of this big, circular, throbbing, luminous room, a gallery of some sort, and as my vision clears, I see that the walls are lined with ten-times-lifesize, holo-movie closeups of male posteriors, all clad in tight denim—one blue, some black—and all gyrating to the same thundering beat, but each one slightly different as to contour, protrusiveness, etc. There are names under each bumping bottom, but they're way too small for my old eyes—small enough, in fact, that even healthy youngsters would have to get their noses right up in there to know for sure whose buttocks are whose.

I drift over to a window. I see people lined up outside in their breathing bubbles—this place must be popular—and then I look around at the neighborhood. Wow. The gallery, I realize, is right in the heart of the Music Row Entertainment Production Zone, just about exactly where the Country Music Hall of Fame used to be...

Editor-at-Large Patrick Carr has been with CMM since September 1972.

MISTY

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'N
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