

## Williams Legend Revived

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sional and as a friend of Hank. All of a sudden I realized that I was being carried away with it. Jim was credible, believable. He did a great job of acting, but I don't think he was acting. I think he actually felt it."

On Jan. 1, 1953, when the news of Hank Williams' death flashed around the world, Jim Owen was 11 years old—and he cried. Though he never met Williams, Owen started digging for facts about him, a hobby that became an obsession. Emulating Hank's songwriting profession, Owen moved from his home town of Henderson, Ky., to Nashville where he wrote such songs as "Louisiana Woman, Mississippi Man" for Conway Twitty and Loretta Lynn and "Southern Loving" for Jim Ed Brown.

Through makeup, clothing that matches one of Williams' favorite outfits, and a painstaking survey of Hank's physical habits, Owen walks, talks and sings with an authenticity that creates an eerie, haunting feeling.

Sixteen songs are included as the play focuses on the final three years of the singer's life—from the time he hit Nashville until his death on the last day of 1952. After the closing of the play, Owen returns to the stage for a half hour to answer questions about the life of Williams.

Now booked by Sound Seventy Productions, "Hank" played to 4,100 persons in Akron, Ohio, who braved 11 inches of snow and zero weather—and success stories continue to follow the show. Hank's stepdaughter Lucretia called Owen

and told him the show made her "very sad" but very happy at the same time—and she wanted to see it again.

Hank Williams Jr.—both haunted and heightened by the consuming legend of his father—hasn't seen the Owen performance. But his friends have told him about it and he told Owen, "You've taken a tremendous load off me. All my life, people wanted me to be my daddy. I just want to be me. Now you be Hank and let by me be Hank Jr."

Part song and part dialog, the play sparkles with brilliant and touching moments—and poignant observations: "I don't just write these songs, I live 'em. Country songs are just life set to music. Miss Audrey and me, we ain't married anymore. New Year's Eve, I took four shots at her and she said that was the final straw. I don't know why she got so upset 'cause I missed her all four times. I used to be a better shot than that."

The show ends with some excellent ironic lines as Williams views his Jan. 1 date in Akron—a performance that death pre-empted: "I can't stay with you much longer 'cause I gotta go and I can't wait. Things really have been rough and I sure have been down, but it's over now. I've got a whole lot better life in front of me than I've got behind me. I'm gonna get me a shot to ease this back pain, then I'm gonna curl up in the back seat of that Cadillac and just put all this behind me. . . ."

After playing the role of Hank Williams night after night, does Owen feel a bit of Hank coming out in him? "Yeah, but I think it always did. It comes out in every songwriter or everybody who grew up loving him and his music. Maybe through osmosis, being near that material, they adapt certain things he did. He was a very blunt man. He didn't have a lot of time to beat around the bush with you. He'd go straight to the point and say, 'What do you have to say?' I've always done that anyway."

Perhaps the Hank Williams mystique—which grows year by year—is best epitomized by the woman who approached Owen after his performance in Williams' home town of Montgomery, Ala. She told him, "The reason that Hank has been so alive is that he has never rested. He never really got to reach the people he wanted to. Television was just getting started, country music was just moving into the North, and he never got to achieve the things he wanted to achieve. If this show continues to grow, his spirit will become much more rested."

"I wonder if that's true?" Owen ponders.

### Luman Improving

NASHVILLE—Bob Luman's condition has improved following successful surgery to relieve pressure on his esophagus—and the Epic artist is now listed in fair condition in St. Thomas Hospital.

Luman suffered a ruptured blood vessel and was hospitalized in Texas Feb. 28. Officials are uncertain when Luman will be released or when he'll be able to resume performing.

### A Gold Watch For Mercury's Kennedy

NASHVILLE—Jerry Kennedy, Phonogram/Mercury vice president of a&r, didn't have to wait until retirement to receive the proverbial gold watch from the company.

Irwin Steinberg, president of the Polygram Record Group, flew to Nashville to personally present Ken-

## Bluegrass Stressed On New Label

LOS ANGELES—Country Music veteran Martin Haerle and Arthur Smith are pairing behind a new contemporary label, CMH Records, which will emphasize bluegrass in its early releases.

Haerle, one-time general manager of Starday Records in the early sixties and more recently manufacturing chief of UA Records and Smith have corralled an impressive array of exclusive talent. First six two-pocket LP and twin pack tape packages, both listing at \$9.98, will be new recordings by Mac Wiseman, Grandpa Jones and Ramona, Don Reno, Bill Harrell, Lester Flatt and the Nashville Grass, the Brown's Ferry Four, Carl Story and Benny Martin. Each album will have 20 songs.

Haerle, based here, will handle sales, promotion and administration, as president, while Smith as vice president will handle a&r from his Charlotte, N.C., recording studio.

Haerle will announce an independent distributor lineup shortly. The first release was set for Thursday (15). CMH will issue approximately 25 albums yearly.

## Kerrville Sets Festival Acts

KERRVILLE, Tex.—A wide spectrum of native American music will be covered in this year's Kerrville Folk Festival, set for July 27-30 at Rod Kennedy's Quiet Valley Ranch.

Several Houston-based artists are on the bill, including Don Sanders, Wheatfield and Chubby Wise, which runs the gamut from barrelhouse pianist Robert Shaw to Patsy Montana, Harmonica Frank and contemporary composer David Amram.

The lineup for the four evening concerts, all beginning at 6 p.m., is as follows:

Thursday—Bill Staines (1975 national yodeling champion), Bill Haymes, Bill Moss, Bill Neeley, Shane and Kitty, Robert Shaw, Chubby Wise with Grassfire, Carolyn Hester and Milton Carroll.

Friday—National yodeling contest, Kurt Van Sickle, Jimmy Johnson, Kenneth Threadgill, Don Sanders, Hardin and Russell, Allen Damron, Patsy Montana and Steve Fromholz.

Saturday—Harmonica Frank, Bill and Bonnie Hearne, Red River Dave, Carol Cisneros, Guy Clark, Red, White and Blue (Grass), Lee Clayton and Peter Yarrow.

Sunday—Mark David McKinnon, Bluegrass Ramblers, Rick Dinsmore, Terry Waldo, Mike Williams, Dee Moeller, Rick Stein, Bobby Bridger, Wheatfield and David Amram.

In addition to the evening concerts, there will be New Folk Concerts Friday and Saturday afternoons and an award winners show Sunday. In addition, various workshops, a folk mass celebration and the Texas State Arts and Crafts Fair provide additional entertainment.

ned with the gift, marking his 15th year with the record firm.

Kennedy handles such artists as Tom T. Hall, Cledus Maggard, Johnny Rodriguez, the Statler Brothers and Faron Young. Five LPs and six singles he produced are presently riding the country charts.

## EASTERN STATES CONCLAVE

# A Catskills Caper For Country Folk

By GERRY WOOD

MONTICELLO, N.Y.—"She'll sing you a song about New England/Northern mountain home/It's just as country as Dixie/though the winters sure get cold. . . ."

The lyrics from "New England Song"—an original tune by Coco Kallis—winner of the most promising artist award with her group, the Lonesome Road Band—typify the creativity, talent and thrust of the annual convention and awards show of the Eastern States Country Music, Inc.

Held at the Catskill resort, Kutsher's Country Club, April 9-11, the confab drew more than 200 registrants from 10 states and Canada.

Through the talent showcases, penetrating panel discussions, informative workshops, membership and board meetings, and the awards show, the convention served notice on the country music community that country music is not only surviving in the Northeastern states, it's beginning to prosper.

Based on the balloting of the membership, the annual awards show honored recording artists who appear extensively in the Northeast. Bob Wood won entertainer of the year, Mickey Barnett was top male vocalist, and Bobbi Northrup scored as best female vocalist. Most promising artist awards—based on performances during the confab's talent show—went to Coco and the Lonesome Road Band, male vocalist Mike White, female vocalist Roseanne Tracy and the duet of Tom Walker and Sue Brainard. The King-DJ award honored Gene LaVerne of WFGL, Fitchburg, Mass.

Election of new board members saw three-year terms coming for Bobbi Northrup, Bob May of Countryopolitan Records, Jim Foederer of WSCP, Sandy Creek, N.Y. and Bob Wood of Jamboree U.S.A.

Lee Arnold of WHN, New York City, keynoted the Saturday night banquet presided over by Duane Wilson, president of

Eastern States Country Music, Inc.

Others performing on the showcase of Northeast talents were Rich Sliter, Ron Sliter, Mary Jane Brine, Dave Wright, Larry Miller, Grace Knudsen and Gary Flagg.

The "Strings And Things" workshop, conducted by artist-producer Bob Wood, explored the world of guitars—both musically and mechanically.

A panel discussion on the direction of country music was a highlight of the convention. Moderated by entertainer Doc Williams, the panel featured Gerry Wood of Billboard, Betty Cox Larimer of Music City News, and Laura Lee McBride, representing the Assn. of Country Entertainers. Spiced by poignant questions and remarks from the audience, the panel centered on such subjects as the trend toward suggestive lyrics in country music, problems facing regional entertainers and companies, automated radio stations, playlist length, charts and cross-overs.

Other events included a golf tournament and the Eastern States Country Music, Inc. country show before 6,000 fans at Monticello Race Track, Doc Williams and Chickie Williams led a talented corps of entertainers at the awards show, emceed by Reid Northrup in Kutsher's Stardust Room.

The 11th annual convention of the group brought together country music artists, promoters, deejays, agents, recording companies, and fans from Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Virginia, New Jersey and Tennessee. The nonprofit organization promotes country music and artists throughout the Northeastern states.

Seeking fund-raising ventures, organization officials announced that Ovation Guitars plans to donate a 1776 model Patriot guitar—a limited edition collector's item—to the group which will sponsor a drawing.

## QUICK TO TURN GOLD

# RCA Execs To Nashville; Fete Stars Of 'Outlaws'

NASHVILLE—With sales on "The Outlaws" LP surpassing gold record status and reaching an estimated 580,000 total sales, RCA winged its top brass from New York—president Kenneth Glancy and Mel Ilberman, division vice president—to Nashville for a reception honoring the stars of the album—Waylon Jennings, Willie Nelson, Tompall Glaser and Jessi Colter.

Joining with RCA-Nashville vice presidents Jerry Bradley and Chet Atkins, Glancy and Ilberman presented the four entertainers with their RIAA gold album award plaques at the Nashville fete Monday (12), Jennings, Colter, Nelson

and Glaser all were present for the event.

Released on Jan. 19, "The Outlaws" quickly hit the country chart where it's tracked at number four this week—and it climbed the pop chart to the number 10 position.

Pulled from the album, "Good Hearted Woman" by Willie and Waylon topped the country singles chart and "Suspicious Minds" by Waylon and Jessi has been rushed into release as a new single.

Success of the LP resulted in "The Outlaw Music Festival," featuring the album artists. It's booked heavily for the spring/summer season.

And it sent RCA into a promo-

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Howard Sherman photo

**NEW SOUNDS—Michael Urbaniak and wife Ursula Dudziak are seen at Dick Charles Studios putting finishing touches on "Body English," pair's first Arista LP. May release features the Lyricon, new electronic woodwind instrument, and vocals by Dudziak.**

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