



AL DEXTER



GENE AUTRY

# DEATH OF THE HILLBILLY . . .

ON OCTOBER 4, 1943, TIME Magazine (Vol. 42 No. 14) had the following to say about the then current hillbilly boom: —

"The dominant popular music of the U.S. today is hillbilly. By last week the flood of camp-meetin' melody, which has been rising steadily in the juke joints and on radio programmes for over a year, was swamping Tin Pan Alley. Big names in the drawing art of country bowboy balladry, like Gene Autry, The Carter Family, Roy Acuff and Al Dexter were selling on discs as never before. Top-flight songsters like Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra were making their biggest smashes with hillbilly tunes. A homely earful of the purest Texas corn, Al Dexter's 'Pistol Packin' Mama,' had edged its way to first place among the nation's juke-box favourites. Even many of Tin Pan Alley's best-sellers, such tunes as 'You'll Never Know', 'Comin' In on a Wing and a Prayer', 'There's a Star Spangled Banner Waving Somewhere', were fragrant with hillbilly spirit. All over the country were the Appalachian accents of the geetar and the country fiddle.

## REVOLUTION

"All this constituted the biggest revolution in U.S. popular music taste since the "swing" craze began in the middle 30's. Public demand was shifting from Afro-American stomps and blues to a much simpler (and often monotonous) musical idiom that was old when nostalgic 'Fortyniners' were singing 'Clementine.' Hillbilly music is the direct descendant of the Scottish, Irish and English ballads that were brought to North America by the earliest white settlers. Preserved in the U.S. backwoods by gen-

erations of hard-bitten country folk, the old hillbilly ballads are sometimes of rare, melodic beauty. But most of them hew closely to a few homely, four-square formulas. The songs get their quality, if any, from their words — long narrative poems evolved by generations of backwoods minstrels."

## COMMERCIAL

That article could hardly be applied to the "country music" of today, with its lush orchestral arrangements and highly commercial lyrics. Has "commercialisation" killed off the hillbilly performer of yesteryear, or does he still have a place in the highly competitive field of country music? To answer such a question we must first face the fact that performers who rely solely on material "preserved in the US backwoods", are a dying breed and country music has no young blood capable of replacing them. Country Records, a label specialising in classic re-issues from the early string band era, are enjoying healthy sales with a series of albums comprising such notables as: Charlie Poole, Riley Puckett, Clayton McMichen, Leonard Rutherford, The Blue Ridge Highballers, The Leake County Revellers and Lowe Stokes — but most of these artists have been dead for a number of years. New Orleans Jazz is experiencing a similar crisis, with many of its "originators" dying off at an alarming rate. No one is interested in playing the "raw" music any longer — and if they are, no one wants to record them. These are the problems facing the country music industry today. The accent now is on the hit parade where quick profits can be made. Only amongst staunch collectors and a few surviving performers does any interest lay in the authentic "backwoods" sounds of America.

Of the few modern groups to successfully re-create the earthy sounds of the 20's and 30's, the New Lost City Ramblers are perhaps the best known in the UK — but even they have been forced to disband due to a slump in bookings and general dis-interest in "old time" country music. To the record company executives, who are ever conscious of past, present and sometimes future trends, "hillbilly" music, as applied to artists in the vein of Roy Acuff, Grandpa Jones, Stringbean, The Stanley's, Elton Britt, Ernest Tubbs, The Louisiana Honey-drippers and The Lonesome Pine Fiddlers, is strictly "out" and completely unworthy of further exploitation as a future best selling commodity.



LOVE SCULPTURE

At this stage we can now return to the question of commercialisation and its effects on the old time hillbilly performers. Yes, commercialisation, combined with the usual high morality rate amongst such members of the community, is killing off old time country music. The process of time alone seems to remain a "specialist" style.

## UNRELEASED

The purists need not however, mourn the total passing of authentic country music. Two recording companies, RCA Victor and Columbia, alone, possess massive collections of hitherto un-released material. Enough in fact, to satisfy the bona fide collector for many years to come. Other much smaller labels operating from the United States are currently building up a wealth of valuable material for eventual release to specialist collectors. We may mourn the passing of the "hillbilly" as a "live" entity but his recorded music, at least, will live for ever. And, who knows, maybe one day in the far distant future, musicians may re-discover the secrets of the raw musical charm of Charlie Poole and his legendary contemporaries. Until such times we must be content to wait and accept that the "live" country music presented to audiences in the United Kingdom will be that performed by such artists Johnny Cash, Charlie Pride, Slim Whitman, Hank Locklin and Bill Anderson.

Brian Chalker, 1968

# FLEETWOOD MAC FROM AMERICA . . .

FLEETWOOD MAC are number 4 in Record Mirror's chart this week. Fore-runners of the British Blues Boom, they are first again to have a single in the charts. Currently on a two and a half month top line concert tour of the States, Peter Green took time out to ring RM and chat about their hit single.

How did he come to pick "Albatross", their first instrumental single, as a contender for the charts?

## LP TRACK

"I didn't write it with the charts in mind," replied Peter. "We booked the studio to cut tracks for a new album. 'Albatross' was one of the first ones recorded and on hearing the first play-back, Mike Vernon our producer and Clifford Davis, our manager, and the rest of the group were knocked out. We decided then and there to release it as a single, before we left on our American tour. Actually I'd like to say that any credit for its success goes to Mike and Richard Vernon at Blue Horizon and our Manager."

What were his comments on the fact that only Hugo Montenegro and Love Sculpture had instrumentals in the charts, besides them?

## WHY "ALBATROSS"?

"Obviously lyrics are important. But I think that with an instrumental, you can make your own story—I called it "Albatross" because that's what it meant to me. It can mean something entirely different to each individual. Like some modern paintings, that don't have titles because you see what you want to see in them. "Albatross" is very simple and I think that's its appeal. After our Dee Time appearance, people wrote in for the sheet music — one was a concert violinist."

They have been referred to as an underground group, did Peter agree?

"I definitely disagree, we don't categorise ourselves, the way everybody else does. We play what we enjoy doing. When we record, we have no preconceived ideas about what will be an album track and what will be a single, except in the case of the single before last which was "Black Magic Woman." We just go into the studio and work on our ideas. If that makes us underground, then okay. But I don't like being called an underground group."

I ventured to suggest that as a blues group, Fleetwood Mac was a pale imitation of the



PETER GREEN'S FLEETWOOD MAC

American Negro Music. Did Peter feel that what they were doing was musically valid?

"We're not a pale imitation of anything. We are a group of five musicians, each with a definite approach to his own thing. Jeremy does his thing and we back him. The same with Danny Kirwan and myself. Having three lead guitarists gives us this variety. I agree that we were influenced by American blues to begin with. But why do we have to be categorised? We are known as a blues group because some of the music we play is blues. But we play mainly our own compositions and some rock and roll too. I would never call Danny Kirwan a blues man. And "Albatross" isn't blues. You'll see what I mean when you hear our new album. It should be released in mid-February."

What in Peter's opinion, was the difference between the American and British blues scene today?

"With respect to people like Canned Heat, they are blue influenced pop groups. As far as real American blues is concerned I would give you one name and that is the B. B. King Band. The American conception of contemporary blues is very different to ours. For instance, they regard Jeff Beck as a blues group. This is why I think we go down well out here. The Americans thought British Blues was a wailing kuitar before."

What did Peter feel about out-and-out pop groups like Dave Dee etc., The Casuals and Sly and The Family Stone?

"I appreciate that it takes all sorts of music to please all sorts of people. I am not involved with pop music, but I've got nothing against it. I live and let live."

And finally, how had the first part of their American tour, the second this year, gone?

## BRIAN AND JULIE

"So far we've played New York and Texas. After a night at the Fillmore East in New York, Brian Auger and Julie Driscoll called round after the show. Our first night was a drag because our equipment was playing up. But it seems okay now. Slim Harpo came to The Scene in New York to see us. And Lightning Slim, who was on the same bill, requested "Walk On The Water" again, which knocked me out. Jimi Hendrix came down and sat in with us for a bit. After the first show in Houston, Texas — you know Texas is really as big as they say — about a third of the audience came round to the stage door and we all chatted. There were lots of them with imported copies of our "Mr. Wonderful" album, which isn't available over here. We all got cramp signing them. Arthur Brown was with us in Houston."

Peter then had to go, as they were about to leave for their night at the Boston Tea Party. "Send everyone our love and thank them for making Albatross a hit. Merry Christmas, Happy New Year and see you all in February," he said.

IAN MIDDLETON

# Releases from Decca

lose every door' and it's really something. Make sure you're among the first to know what The Joseph Consortium is all about. The single is on the Decca label, number F 12866.

RAYNE FARO'S SCHMALTZ AND sound very un-schmaltzy indeed, act their new single on the Deram label quite a groove. The fuzz guitar intro leads into some crazy organ and a funky gal. 'There's still time' has a message delivered, and makes use of the current trend towards longer records to get this message across. DM 222.

new TOBY TWIRL single is a rightforward, basic, down-to-earth number, with more to it than meets the ear. 'Movin' in' is very strong, with infectious chorus and some amazing

things happening with the guitar. Should catch on in a big way. On Decca, number F 12867.

THE GOOD RATS have a style as distinctive as their name, and their new single on the London label is worth a close listen. The title is 'The hobo' and it's a racey bit of ravery. Number is HLR 10237.

Don't miss next week's info.



45 rpm records

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