

Twenty Questions with Lacy J. Dalton

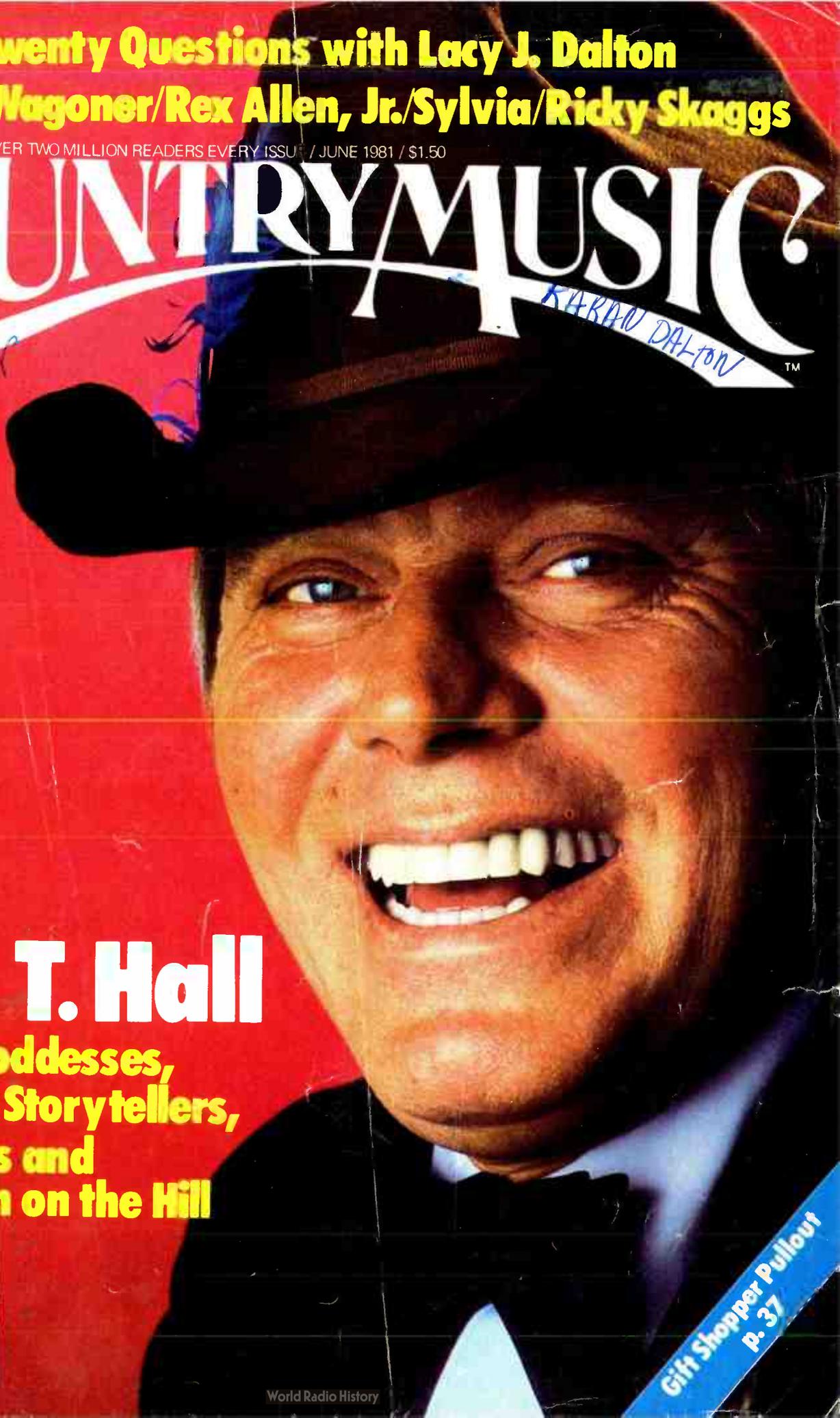
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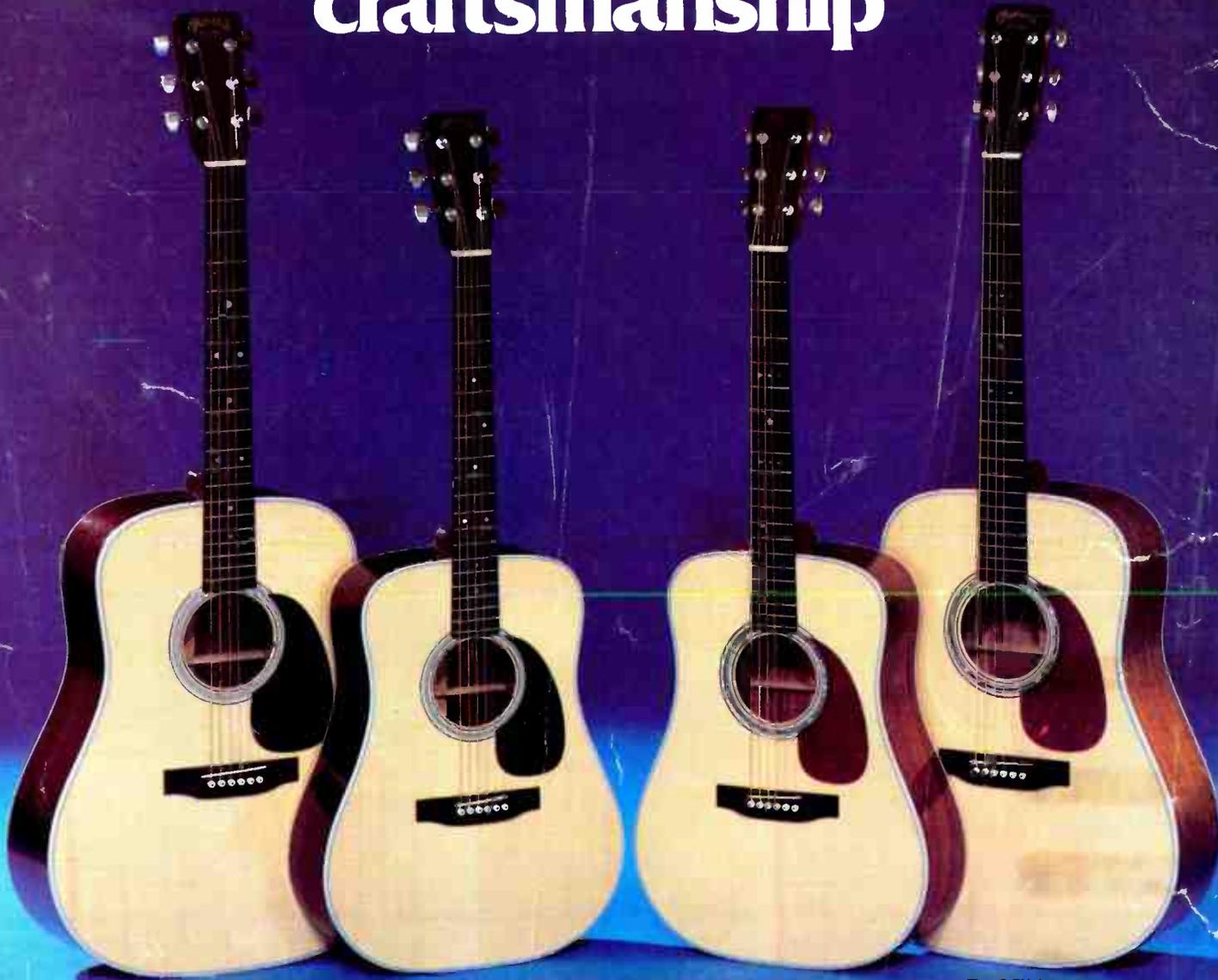
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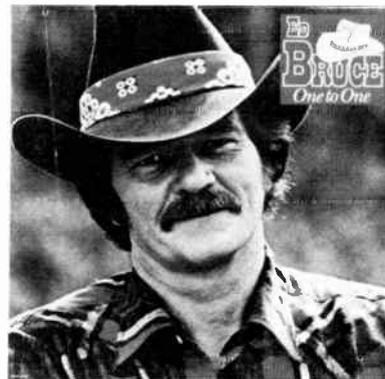
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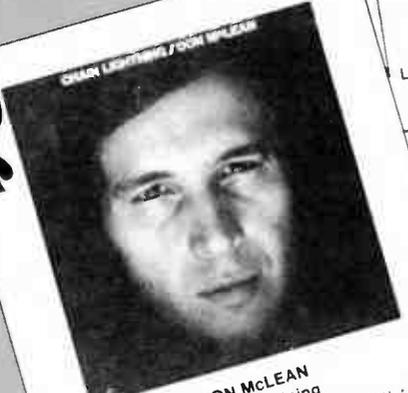
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# Letters

## When You're Hot, You're Hot

After about twenty years, I've finally decided to write to an editor concerning an article.

I agree with a lot of the things that Martie Gray had to say in your March issue, especially about Charlie Daniels. I consider him to be a great personality and a superb musician.

What seems to be the hang-up about Willie Nelson? If I were in Willie's shoes, I'm sure I would be trying to get it all while I could, too. It seems to me that all too soon in the music business, you can find yourself out of the limelight.

If he can cash in on the bucks while he's hot, who's to say he shouldn't? As to his song (*On the Road Again*), if it was that easy to write a song, perhaps I would have a Grammy award sitting in my living room.  
ERNEST AUSTIN  
DOVER, DELAWARE

## The Jerry Reed Style

Jerry Reed is Jerry Reed no matter what he does—talking in an interview, acting on the screen, strumming his guitar or singing his songs. I can appreciate the fact that he wants to excel in all things, and this is to be admired, but he should know his limitations. As an actor, despite the coaching and encouragement of Burt Reynolds, he is simply Jerry Reed up there on the screen, exercising his charm and brashness, and an accomplished actor he is not. His singing is engaging at times, but again, it is the Reed style that seems to make many of his songs sound the same. The one outstanding talent that he does possess is playing the guitar, and I would put him in the same class with two other greats, Chet Atkins and Roy Clark.

In all fairness to Jerry, a man who is not content to rest on his already achieved laurels, and who continues to strive to do better, is one to be admired. More power to you, Jerry!

CHARLES G. GESSNER  
WINCHESTER, KENTUCKY

## Elvis's Songwriters

The interview with Jerry Reed in the March 1981 issue of *Country Music* is fine. I just love him. But Reed is not the only one that has four songs recorded by Presley. I think Mac Davis does also. I remember Jerry when he was on the Smothers Brothers show. Also I remember him when he

was with Glen Campbell. I am a country music nut, and I am from the Southwest anyway. But check and find out if Mac Davis doesn't have four songs Elvis recorded. Reed's songs are *Guitar Man*, *A Thing Called Love*, *U.S. Male*, and *Talk About the Good Times*; Mac Davis's are *A Little Less Conversation*, *Memories*, *Don't Cry Daddy*, *In the Ghetto*. I enjoy my *Country Music Magazine* and my daughter-in-law has the issues from 1972 when you first started. Many thanks.

EMMER AMBERGY  
FALLS CHURCH, VIRGINIA

## A Letter to Tom T. Hall

Since I am one of the oldest living bona fide country music fans alive, I feel free in addressing you as an old friend singing *Old Dogs and Children and Watermelon Wine*. I think I have every record you have ever made. I go way back to the Grand Ole Opry on Saturday nights on a battery radio, and baby chicks being sold from Del Rio, Texas, and Alladin Lamps commercials. I wanted an Alladin Lamp like our grandchildren want fine china, silver, etc. today, to be packed away in their mother's attic. (You KNOW that's where wedding gifts wind up, do you not?)

I have been getting *Country Music Magazine* for several years and keep having it renewed. I go along with the new country-western sound and find myself getting bored with some of the too, too old songs. If anyone knows all about country music it is ME. I keep three radios on our WIVK country music radio station all day and all night. I like to wake up during the wee hours when old ladies can't sleep and lie there and listen to you singing *Old Side of Town*, Moe Bandy's *Take Me Back to Yesterday*, and wonder why these songs do not go higher on the charts.

To make a long letter a little longer, I want to say that what this country needs along with cheaper gasoline is somewhere we can find a list of addresses of our favorite country-western singers. I read where my old friend (via radio and records) Joe Stampley got married, and I would like to congratulate him and tell him (and others) how much their music brightens up the lives of shut-ins and older folk who urp at Lawrence Welk and love The Lone Star Cafe stars on Saturday nights when old eyes get tired watching TV. I had the chance to meet David Houston here once and told him this and he seemed to really

appreciate it. I saw you and Carl Smith at Jake Butcher's rally at our coliseum when he was a candidate for governor.

Do something about addresses, please.  
LENA KREIS  
KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE

## It's Hard on the Eyes

I just received my March 1981 issue of *Country Music Magazine*. I really enjoyed the articles on the Statler Brothers.

The article "America's Poets" by Kurt Vonnegut made me chuckle, even though it was not meant to be funny. Take a look at the lyrics of *Flowers on the Wall*. Notice in the last verse, the poor man must have been walking on his eyes, as they are not "accustomed to this hard concrete."

I believe, when I have heard the Statlers sing the song, it goes, "Anyway my eyes are not accustomed to this light, and my shoes are not accustomed to this hard concrete."

You have a very interesting magazine and I look forward to receiving it. Keep up the good work.

CAROL L. KAHN  
SPRING VALLEY, MINNESOTA

*Thank you for the correction. Two lines were inadvertently omitted from the copy. Ed.*

## One Disappointed Fan

Patrick Carr's article about the Statler Brothers (March '81) was incorrect on at least one point: "The Statlers never leave a gig until every fan who wants an autograph has got one. . . ." This fan (who wanted one) did not get an autograph from the Statlers after their performance at Greensboro, North Carolina on January 26, 1980.

Other than that one point, I really enjoyed reading about the Statlers, who are my favorite country music group.

CATHY HARRIS  
AXTON, VIRGINIA

## They're Houstonians

Please tell Suzan Crane, writer of the "Northfield Bank" (Jesse James) piece in your March 1981 issue, that Vince Vance and the Valiants of "Bomb Iran" fame are *in fact* from Houston, not L.A. as described.

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**"TWILIGHT TIME"** It was the spring of 1958, and it was The Platters second release for that year, and it rocketed to the #1 position. One of the best loved Platters songs, this fantastic recording remained on the hit parade from March to August of that glorious year! Is there any doubt that this amazing vocal group has captured our hearts?

**"ONLY YOU"** This is the song, and the recording that started it all! The year was 1955 when this recording on The Mercury Record Label almost was lost in the shuffle, but after a nine month climb from obscurity into the top ten across the country "Only You" and The Platters made their mark in the fall of '55! The lead style of Tony Williams on this record was, to put it mildly, a shocking thing to hear in a world of such bland and emotionless "pop" recordings. The magic and the wonder had only begun, and The Platters were already recognized as the finest group ever!

**"MAMBO LIGHTS"** This is The Platters first release for the 1960's, and in January of 1960 they stormed onto the hit parade with this sensitive all-time favorite ballad. It was still a hit in the spring of that year! A truly giant favorite of The Platters.

**"MY PRAYER"** In the heat of the summer of 1956 this recording soared to the #1 position all across this country. In August "My Prayer" hit #1, and stayed there, until it was nudged out in September by Elvis' "Don't Be Cruel". Here is one of the single's most powerful and dramatic performances ever captured on record, and it features an ending that never ceases to be spellbinding.

**"THE GREAT PRETENDER"** Here is one of the most simple, yet totally powerful recordings ever achieved in all of recorded history. Time cannot dim the strength, nor hold back the excitement, that lives in this giant hit. The Platters second hit, in a row, and #1 at the end of 1955, and the beginning of 1956! This song was a giant hit on the charts for over 6 months!

**"I'LL NEVER SING AGAIN"** It was the end of the summer of 1961 when The Platters had this hit recording, a beautiful rendition of The Tommy Dorsey song from the 40's. This was the final hit for the original Platters, who had actually separated from their great lead singer a year earlier, although he did sing lead on this track.

**"RED SAILS IN THE SUNDAY"** It was the end of the summer of 1960 when this very fine, highly respected hit recording first came into our lives. It's true that this represents The Platters style, and yet, there is a little extra magic in this performance. No other version of this song can hold a Candlelite Candle to this premier creation from The Fabulous Platters.

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**"SOMEONE GETS IN YOUR EYES"** This incredible ballad first exploded on the hit parade at Thanksgiving in 1958, and continued to go like wildfire through Christmas of that year. At the end of January in 1959, when most records would have been finished, this giant of a performance moved into the #1 slot from coast to coast, and dominated it through March, 1959! A major hit for 5 months, this recording was a smash from Thanksgiving of 1958 into the summer of 1959!

**"THE MAGIC"** Here is The Platters first hit recording of the year 1962, and it's a song that was a hit for five different artists in 1949. They are: Doris Day, Dick Haymes, Gordon MacRae, Tony Martin, and Sarah Vaughn.

**"TOGETHER AGAIN"** Here is The Platters last record release for 1957, and it was the first of The Platters "softer" ballads. It was a chart hit for the Thanksgiving and Christmas seasons of that year.

**"I'LL BE YOUR BOY"** This Platters song broke into the hit parade in September of 1956, and it still was on the hit parade at Christmas of that same year! The Platters dominated the hit parade for over five years, but no year would compare to the great explosion of 1956.

**"MY DREAM"** In the summer of 1957 this hypnotic ballad, based on classical music, was a great hit record. You will be both amazed and delighted with every listen to this song, for The Platters magic is alive and well in "My Dream".

**"GIVE ME SOMEONE TO WATCH OVER ME"** It is no secret that The Platters lead vocalist, Tony Williams, is one of the great stylists of modern music. Here, Tony lends his "magic touch" to a long time favorite.

**"THE WAY YOU LOOK TONIGHT"** This giant hit for The Platters broke onto the hit parade in time for Christmas in 1956, and was still a major hit record in the spring of 1957. This recording is one of the finest of the "big beat" ballads ever made, and it rates among the best of The Platters records. A milestone classic.

**"AM YOU SINCERE"** This song is actually a "country" ballad, that has become a popular ballad, over the years. A big hit from the winter of '58, and several times after that, and in many varied musical formats. Despite all the renditions, The Platters version is one of the two finest ever recorded.

**"THE MAGIC TOUCH"** One of the biggest hits for The Platters, this ballad-with-a-big-beat climbed all the way to the top of the hit parade, beginning in March of 1956. A big hit from March through September of musical history's most golden year. On this recording we see the end of the "Only You" guitar and the "Great Pretender" piano, which gave way to the permanent sound of the "Magic Touch" saxophones.

**"I'M SORRY"** Here is The Platters first single for 1957, and one of their best loved recordings. A tremendous hit for four months, and as a single record in 1957, a chart item for almost 3/4 of the entire year!

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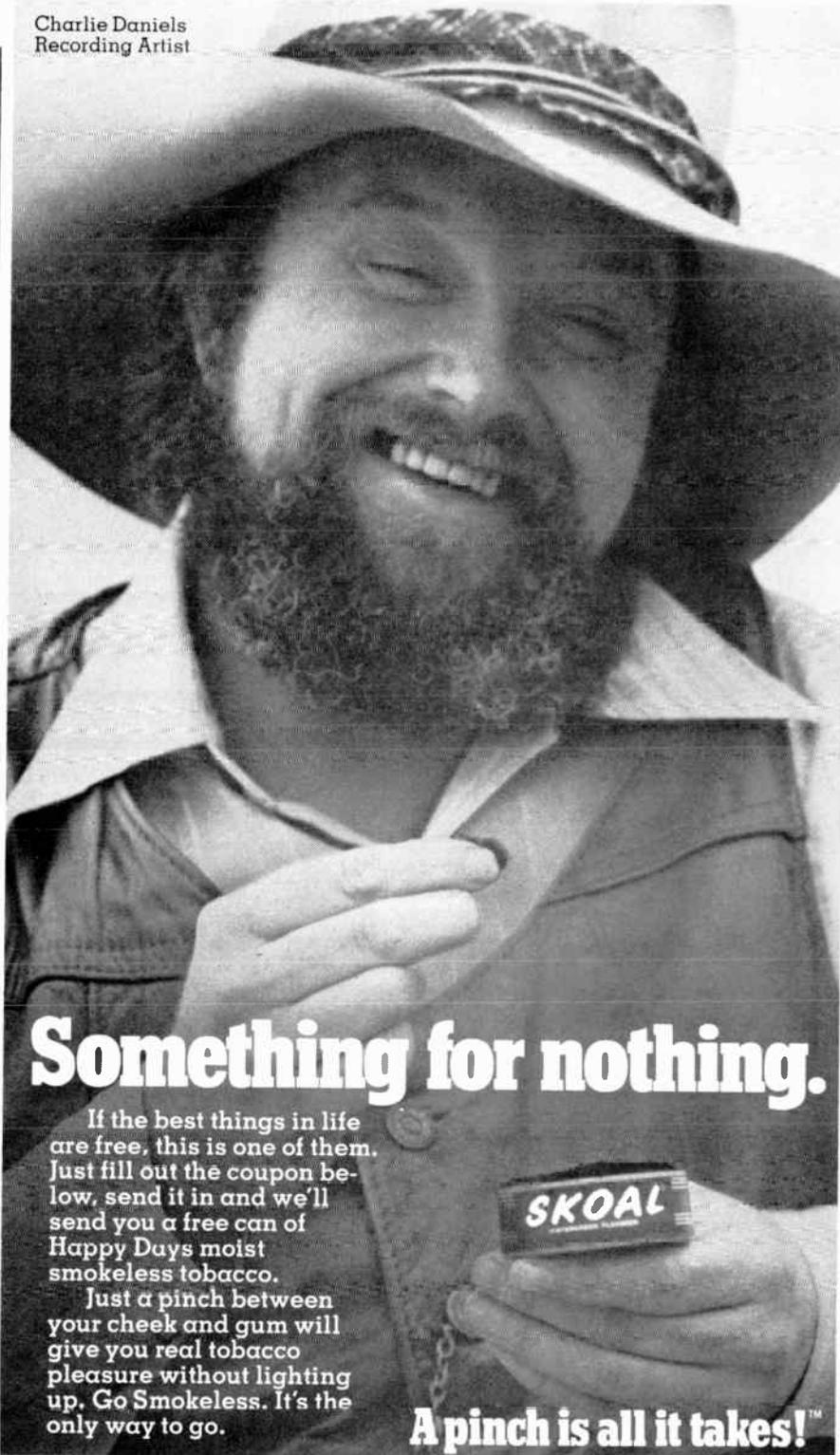
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Greatest Hits

RCA

33231



Bob Seger

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NIGHT MOVES

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43584

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DOUBLE VISION
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WAKE A LITTLE MAGIC
- WAYLON JENNINGS 34320  
WHAT GOES AROUND COMES AROUND
- THE BEST OF ROGER WHITTAKER 14011
- KENNY ROGERS 34357  
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- ABBA 50028  
SUPER TROUPER
- GREASE 33606  
Original Broadway Cast
- SLIM WHITMAN 24478  
HOME ON THE RANGE
- THE DOOBIE BROTHERS 33983  
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- ELVIS' WORLDWIDE Gold Award Hits 1369  
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ENDLESS SUMMER

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- THE BAY 34407
- CRYSTAL GAYLE 43259  
FLAHER CRISTAL
- TODIE RABBIT 24346  
HORIZON
- HANK WILLIAMS 24219  
LIVE AT THE GRAND OLE OPRY
- MEISSA WINCHESTER 21430  
THE WINCHESTER
- FREDDY FENDER 33352  
Before The Next Teardrop Falls
- VAN HALEN 14620
- ELVIS PRESLEY VOL. 2 14466  
A LEGENDARY PERFORMER
- BLUES BROTHERS 33784  
ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK
- DEBBIE MILLER 24597  
SWEET RENAISSANCE
- RONNIE MILSAP 10243  
REALIST HITS
- HERB ALPERT 43467  
BEYOND
- BEST OF THE DOOBIES 43738
- JOHN CONLEE 14639  
ROSE COLORED GLASSES
- PEACHES & HERB 33737  
2 HOT
- WAYLON AND WILLIE 34233
- AC/DC 13772  
BACK IN BLACK
- RAZZY BAILEY 34489  
RAZZY

- PROFILE / BEST OF EMMYLOU HARRIS 13975
- WOMEN AND CHILDREN FIRST 00762
- ROBBIE DU PREE 23753
- COMMODORES 33833  
HEROES
- CONWAY TWITTY'S 23419  
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- PETE TOWNSHEND 23472  
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- JACKSON BROWN 24013  
HOLLYWOOD
- NEIL DIAMOND 32877  
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JUST LIKE RIPE PEPLE
- SUPERTRAMP 53614  
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BARRY
- DOX WILLIAMS 43537  
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- RONNIE MILSAP 33192  
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- CARY SIMON 42220  
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- BARBARA MANDRELL 34375  
MOODS
- SPINNERS 34193  
DANCIN' & LOVIN'
- KOOL & THE GANG 42231  
CELEBRATE!

- GEORGE BENSON 52486  
GIVE ME THE NIGHT
- ALABAMA 33812  
NINE HOMES IN ALABAMA
- THE CARS 10267  
PANORAMA
- WILLIE NELSON 34127  
SWEET MEMORIES
- LARRY GRAHAM 33891  
ONE IN A MILLION YOU
- THE BEST OF THE STATLER BROS. RIDES AGAIN VOL. 2 44203
- DAVE DAVIS 34050
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HOTEL CALIFORNIA
- LAKESIDE 43363  
FANTASTIC VOYAGE
- LITTLE RIVER BAND 33773  
FIRST UNDER THE WIRE
- DOLLY PARTON 43364  
GREAT BALLS OF FIRE
- DAVE & SUGAR 33529  
GREATEST HITS
- BARBARA MANDRELL 24586  
JUST FOR THE RECORD
- WAYLON JENNINGS 30378  
I'VE ALWAYS BEEN CRAZY
- TOM JONES 23674  
GREATEST HITS
- THE BEST OF THE KENDALLS 43477
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CACTUS AND A ROSE
- COMMODORES 13945  
MIDNIGHT MAGIC
- THE MUPPET MOVIE 30405  
ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK
- ANNE MURRAY 23663  
LET'S KEEP IT THAT WAY
- LINDA RONSTADI 24601  
MAD LOVE
- SISTER SLEDGE 33881  
WE ARE FAMILY
- KENNY ROGERS 00770  
GIDEON
- FLEETWOOD MAC 24025  
RUMOURS
- STEVIE WONDER 52852  
HOTTER THAN JULY
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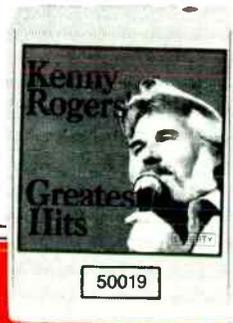
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DIANA
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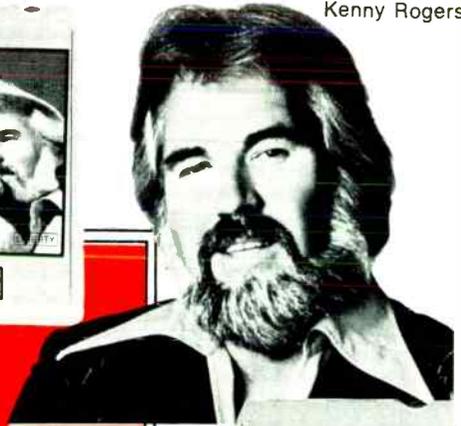
Waylon Jennings



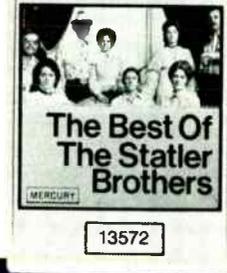
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For instance, David Allan Coe is hardly a new comer to country music. He has been recording some great music for several years, yet I have never seen him even mentioned in your magazine. Any particular reason?

After living in Wilmington, North Carolina for nearly four years, I have also enjoyed the music of a very talented newcomer to the field of country music, Mike Cross. The beauty and sensitivity of his lyrics rivals those of similar, more well-known artists such as John Prine or Kenny Rogers, and he is probably the most versatile musician I have ever heard. Mike Cross is becoming extremely popular in the Carolinas, Tennessee, West Virginia, etc., but I've never seen him mentioned, either. As a lover of country music, these oversights disappoint me very much.

I doubt that this letter will see print, but in the event that it does, I am sure you'll hear from others who agree with me. Kenny Rogers and Conway Twitty are doing great things for our music, but how about a little variety?

CHERYL L. KINKLE  
LAKE ORION, MICHIGAN

*Check out our May issue for an interview with David Allan Coe. Ed.*

### Whatever Happened To...?

Enjoyed your January-February issue very much, especially the article on Merle Haggard! Just heard one of his latest releases about Leonard Sykes (Tommy Collins), and it started me to wondering what has happened to him. I remember him from the '50s, with songs like *There'll Be No Other* and *You've Got To Have a License*. Wish you could enlighten me on the status of Leonard Sykes (Tommy Collins). I know you don't make personal replies, so would appreciate something in your magazine.

WADE O. WILLIAMS  
HOUSTON, TEXAS

*Check the People section of our May issue, which mentions some of the things Sykes has been up to lately. Ed.*

### Steel Guitar

Have read and enjoyed your publication for several years. I have particularly enjoyed your features on the history of country music and the important role that individual instruments have played. When most of us think of the "sound" of country music, we automatically hear certain instruments. One of the instruments most often mentioned is the steel guitar. In this particular time, when country music has so many different forms, the steel is often in the background. As an avid steel fan, I would very much like to see the steel front stage and center. I would like to take this opportunity to encourage a feature on steel

guitar in an upcoming issue.

For the past several years, the International Steel Guitar Convention has been held in St. Louis, Missouri. I have been surprised that you have not had a feature article on this event. Although it is not limited to country music, there is certainly a lot of country music played at the convention. Almost anyone of any reputation in steel guitar is a participant. They have their own Hall of Fame, the whole bit. Last year's Hall of Fame inductee was Speedy West. The convention has always been held on Labor Day weekend, and is scheduled at the Chase Park Plaza Hotel this year.

Hope to read more on steel in your magazine.

STEVE PARKER  
MAHOMET, ILLINOIS

*A story on the steel guitar is in the works. Hope you enjoyed the article on the Gibson Company in our May issue. Ed.*

### The Great George Jones

The National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences deserves much praise in awarding George Jones its Grammy for "Best Country Vocal Performance, Male" for *He Stopped Loving Her Today*. This award, coupled with the CMA's "Male Vocalist of the Year" honor given to him recently, shows that the music industry is finally realizing George is a great artist. George Jones ranks among the best of country singers; he will easily be remembered by country music fans generations from now, along with Hank Williams, Hank Snow, Ernest Tubbs, Roy Acuff, and Merle Haggard, as a premier interpreter of true country music. Please note this list of country music greats is not too long, and does not include country singers whose music is indistinguishable from disco.

George Jones is a true song stylist; his honky-tonk ballads are sung with such feeling and intensity that George can often make you cry. I know I do. He is a sincere artist who has changed a bit with the times, but has kept his brand of country music pure and simple and beautiful. His recent album, *I Am What I Am*, is one of the greatest he has ever recorded. But we should remember George has been recording since the mid-1950s, and has many, many beautiful hits over the years. It is a shame this fact must be brought out, but it has to be stated because many country music stations did not play George's music when he was not in the Top Ten of the country charts. I am very proud to say that on my program, "Let There Be Country," we have been playing his music on each show—not only because we want to, which we do—but because our New York-New Jersey-Connecticut audience loves George, too! If possible, could *Country Music Magazine* feature George in a cover

issue soon to talk about this latest phase of his career? Millions of fans of the "ol' Possum" would greatly appreciate it!

On the Grammys telecast, George received a standing ovation from his peers—not because George is making a comeback. He's not making a comeback, because he never went away, he just made a slight detour! The audience gave him a standing ovation because George Jones is a true legend. George doesn't flaunt himself like some other country performers who believe they are stars—George proves he is a superstar each time he walks out on stage.

George, we love you! Keep on performing, keep on recording, keep on being yourself! We need you.

Thank you very much for printing this letter.

DENNIS DA COSTA  
WFUV-FM  
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

### Our Eminent Consultants

Every month on your magazine's masthead, I've been noticing the citation, Board of Editorial Advisors, and the listing of the current members: Tom T. Hall, Johnny Cash, Emmylou Harris, Barbara Mandrell, and Merle Travis. Could you publish an article in a future issue explaining to readers the function and the contributions of the Board of Editorial Advisors to *Country Music*? I really think it is a great idea to have country stars in the capacity of advisors to your magazine since it is about country stars. Thank you.

Also, I'd like to see a feature about Margo Smith.

GAIL HABBYSBAY  
MERCER, PENNSYLVANIA

*The Board of Editorial Advisors was devised to enable the members to air their views on anything related to country music. We feel we are a perfect avenue for them to do so, and are glad that you do, too. Ed.*

### Billy "Crash" Craddock

I'm writing to see if I can convince you to PLEASE do an article on Billy "Crash" Craddock. He is so talented and sexy, and underrated. Could you please tell all those people who put on those award network shows that we, the country music fans, would sure appreciate it heaps if they would have Mr. Country Rock Billy "Crash" Craddock!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! on once in a while. What a treat for we ladies would be in store!

PATRICIA JOHNSON  
SANTA ROSA, CALIFORNIA

*Due to our great volume of mail, we regret we can't answer all letters individually. We welcome your opinions and will publish the most representative letters in this column. Let us hear from you. - Ed.*



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# People

## Barbara Celebrates Roy Rogers' 50th

**Barbara Mandrell** helped **Roy Rogers** and **Dale Evans** celebrate Rogers's 50th anniversary in show business on her *Barbara Mandrell and the Mandrell Sisters* TV show, and Barbara described it as one of the high points of her career. In order to help mark the event, the show's producer **Marty Krofft** went to some trouble. He recalled reading in Roy's biography that he was born on Second Street in Cincinnati, in a building demolished to make way for the Cincinnati Reds' Riverfront Stadium. "Roy was always adamant that he was born where second base is now located at the stadium. In fact last year the Reds made a big fuss about this when Roy attended a game," Krofft said.

Krofft got on the phone to the Reds' management and forthwith asked them for the second base bag, autographed by the entire team. The base was presented to Rogers on the show. "We were delighted to participate," said **Roger Ruhl** of the Reds'



marketing division. "Roy Rogers and Dale Evans are particular favorites in Cincinnati and have attended many of our home games over the years. There is also another

aspect to the affair. In July, 1979, Barbara performed at the stadium headlining one of our country music night events. The stage was built on second base."

**Glen Campbell** and **Tanya Tucker**, the darlings of gossip columnists from coast to coast, have ended their more than year-long courtship. Plans to marry next Valentine's Day have been dropped along with a scheduled British tour.

"**Bo Tucker**, Tanya's father, told me that in the future Tanya and Glen will not mix their professional careers," said an MCA Records spokesman. "He would not comment on the status of Tanya and Glen's engagement." Tanya, however, did not hold her tongue in a recent *People* Magazine article. "I would lay down my life," said Tanya, "for Glen Campbell if I could just make him totally happy for even one day. But he's not the kind to change his mind."

The breakup, caused by rumored fights and disagreements was obviously Glen's idea. After Tanya appeared at a fashionable club in Los Angeles without Glen, and tried to hide it, Glen was outraged. "He says that if I could lie to him about that, I could lie about other things," Tanya said.

But Tanya is not one to let this stop her from pursuing her goals. Her plans for the future include the opening of a boutique in Beverly Hills (originally to be backed by Campbell) and entering the famed Lee Strasberg Theater Institute.

**Rosanne Cash** kicked off her long-awaited second CBS album with a wildly successful mini-tour that took her to Cleveland, Dallas, New York and Los Angeles. Crowds were SRO at every engagement, and included **Linda Ronstadt** and **Rex Smith**, who turned out for her date at New York's Bottom Line, as did **Kurt Vonnegut**. At Sweetwater, near Los Angeles, old friends **Nicollete Larson** and **Andrew Gold** were among the well-wishers. Rosanne and husband **Rodney Crowell** are in the midst of a move from California to

Nashville, where Crowell has production deals set with **Bobby Bare** and **Guy Clark**.

**Dick Feller** booked a two-month tour of Europe this spring, with stops scheduled for England, Scotland and Holland. During a recent tour of Holland, the composer of *Lord Mr. Ford* and *Eastbound and Down* was hailed as being "to music what Steinbeck, F.S. Eliot and Thoreau were to literature" by an enthusiastic critic.

It looks like even **Mickey Gilley** has given up on *Gilley's Beer*, a brew that even Mickey's close friends have a hard time saying nice things about. Gilley is singing the praises these days of a competitor, Schlitz, for whom he recorded five radio commercials. The ads will be heard during the *Live From Gilley's* radio program, a weekly broadcast syndicated on nearly 250 stations.

Louisville's annual Kentucky Derby Festival had a new dimension this year in a kick-off country music concert at the city's 18,000-seat Freedom Hall Coliseum. Featured on the concert bill were **Merle Haggard**, **Lacy J. Dalton**, **Hank Williams, Jr.**, **Johnny Paycheck** and **Asleep At The Wheel**.

**Freddy Fender** has turned his bilingual talents to selling hamburgers. He recorded

## CMF & Franklin Mint: New Partnership

But-Can-You-Afford-Not-to-Own-It? Department: The Country Music Foundation and the Franklin Mint have collaborated on the ultimate country music record collection. **The Greatest Country Music Recordings of All Time** is a 100-album, 50-set package culled painstakingly from the CMF's own 75,000-disc collection and available through subscription only. Featured are cuts ranging from **Fiddlin' Arthur Smith** to **Johnny Cash**—1,100 in all, and all yours for a mere \$9.75 per record, or about \$1,000 for the whole set.

a Spanish-language version of the McDonald's jingle for use in selected markets.

Meanwhile, a Nashville dance group made forays into Fender's Tex-Mex territory. The **Nashville Super Kickers** signed a contract with Mexican promoter **Mario Olmos** for a six-week stint at a Mexico City dinner club. The Broadway.

Club owners **Roberto** and **Arturo Santa Cruz** say this marks the first Mexican appearance by American country music performers. The two-woman group, composed of **Paula Anderson** and **Andi Albert**, plans promotional tours of Acapulco, Guadalajara and Monterrey, and will also be featured in weekly promotional television shows on Channel 13 Mexico.

## 10th Annual Fan Fair: Fun-Filled Week

The 10th annual Fan Fair, co-sponsored by the Country Music Association and the Grand Ole Opry, and still the biggest bargain in country music, will be held this year from Monday, June 8 through Sunday, June 14 in Nashville. Once again, tickets for the entire week of concerts, activities, and special tours cost \$35. The Municipal Auditorium will be the site of most of the festivities, although the celebrity softball tournament will kick off the proceedings on June 8 and 9 at Cedar Hill Park, and the Grand Masters Fiddling Championship will bring the week to a smashing close.

In between, there will be music to tickle the ears of every variety of country music lover. The record companies will showcase their big-name country artists at concerts throughout the week. As we go to press, final arrangements with the artists are far from complete, but here's a sampling of the talent tentatively scheduled to appear: the MCA show, to be emceed by **Jerry Clower**, hopes to bring **Barbara Mandrell** and **The Oak Ridge Boys** to its stage; RCA has made tentative arrangements with **Alabama**, **Sylvia**, and **Leon Everette**. Elektra/Asylum will feature **Johnny Lee**, while Plantation Sun has lined up appearances by **Patti Page**, **Orion**, **Dave Dudley**, and **Jim Owen**. **Earl Thomas Conley** and **Freddie Hart** will perform at the Sunbird show, and **Ray Price** will showcase for Dimension.

One special show which promises to be great fun is **Biff Collie's** First and Second Generation Reunion Show, which will bring together a crew of country music's best-loved old-timers and their offspring. Scheduled to appear: **Patsy Montana** and her daughter **Judy Rose**; **Doyle Wilburn** with his wife **Margie Bowes** and their daughter **Sharon**; **Stonewall Jackson** and son **Turp**; **Kitty Wells** and **Johnny Wright**, with their children **Bobby** and **Sue**; and **Grandpa** and **Ramona Jones**,

## Dolly Returns To Nashville After Las Vegas Debut



**Dolly Parton's** Vegas debut didn't fare quite as well as expected. Though Miss Dolly won enthusiastic reviews from such publications as *Variety* and *The Los Angeles Times*, she was forced to cancel the last few days of her initial two-week stay at the Riviera because of serious laryngitis. Dolly's second two-week engagement at the hotel is reportedly netting her a record \$350,000 a week.

Dolly took a few minutes during a recent trip to Nashville to discuss her bout with laryngitis and her upcoming film with **Burt Reynolds**. *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas*. Dolly attributed the bad throat that forced her to cancel the last few days of her first Vegas engagement to overwork and exhaustion. "We were in Lake Tahoe first and I was already exhausted from working so hard. Plus the air there is so thin that it's hard on your voice. On top of that, if you wear your clothes a little too tight anyway, you have to sing more from your throat than you should."

Dolly spent almost two weeks resting in Los Angeles at her doctor's insistence, where she "stayed in the bed, read a lot and got fat as a pig. It was good for me, though. It was the first time since I don't know

when that I've just been able to do nothing. I got a lot of planning and dreaming done while I had to be quiet."

Dolly has been busy writing songs for *Whorehouse*, including, she said, at least one duet for herself and Reynolds.

"Burt can actually sing pretty good," she said. "He's got a nice, smooth voice. Now, he's not a great, great singer, but he's got a good commercial quality in his voice and we're going to do good together. I guarantee you we'll have at least one hot duet off the soundtrack album."

Dolly also said she planned to get together with Reynolds in the hopes of co-writing a tune or two together. "I'm hoping we can just set together and talk and maybe co-write one of the duets. I'm relying on him to help me with the acting stuff and maybe this will make him feel more a part of the music."

After *Whorehouse*, Dolly said her movie plans are open. "I may do another movie or I may never do another one," she said. "I want to wait a while and see. In any case, if I do another movie of any kind, I'm going to be in control of it. I wouldn't have any desire to do movies at all if I was just gonna be a product."

accompanied by **Mark** and **Alisa**.

**Jimmy C. Newman** will return with another Cajun show this year, and **Bill Monroe** is scheduled to host a bluegrass concert. Preparations are well under way for a songwriters show and a show featuring recording artists from an array of independent labels; at a special international show, artists from foreign countries will perform.

Meanwhile, exhibits and booths will line the lower level of the Municipal Auditorium,

sponsored by record companies, fan clubs, and other organizations with an interest in country music. Fan Fair participants can exchange information and collect an assortment of giveaways at these exhibits, including the autographs of country music artists, who will be dropping by.

The Fan Fair package includes free tickets to visit the old Ryman auditorium, the Country Music Hall of Fame, and Opryland, as well as reservations at two luncheons to be held under tents on the

grounds of the Municipal Auditorium (country music artists will perform), and an invitation to shake a leg at Tuesday night's square dance.

The Grand Ole Opry will reserve tickets exclusively for Fan Fair participants at the 9:30 show on Friday, June 12, and on Saturday, June 13, at both the 6:30 and 9:30 shows. Tickets for these shows can be ordered through Fan Fair, but should be paid for by separate check, made payable to The Grand Ole Opry. Tickets for each performance are \$8.

To register for Fan Fair, send a check or money order for \$35, made payable to Fan Fair to: Fan Fair, 2804 Opryland Drive, Nashville, TN 37214. Further information can be obtained by writing to the above address, or calling 615-889-7502.

## Jamboree In The Hills Scheduled For July

For the past four years, Brush Run Park in St. Clairsville, West Virginia (15 miles west of Wheeling on I-70) has been the site of a tremendous, two-day country music concert/picnic/camp-out. Last year, 42,000 country music fans carpeted the grounds of Brush Run Park to listen to a lineup of country music greats under wide open skies while munching on barbecued chicken and sipping on the liquid refreshment of their choice.

The fifth annual Jamboree in the Hills, sponsored by WWVA Radio and Jamboree U.S.A., will take place this year July 18 and 19, on the 150-acre spread that has become its home. On Saturday, July 18, from noon until 11 p.m., the Jamboree audience will be entertained by **Merle Haggard, Tom T. Hall, Charlie McClain, Mayf Nutter, T.G. Sheppard, Conway Twitty, George Jones, and Tammy Wynette**, among others. On Sunday, from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., **Alabama, Hoyt Axton, Billy "Crash" Craddock, Emmylou Harris, Bill Monroe and the Bluegrass Boys, and Margo Smith** will grace the Jamboree stage.

Concessions and primitive-style camping facilities will be available at the site. Tickets for the two-day event are \$30. Tickets for Saturday only are \$20; for Sunday only, \$15. Children under 12 are admitted free. The fee for camping is \$20 per vehicle, and the campgrounds open Friday morning, July 17. Tickets can be ordered by mailing checks or money orders to Jamboree in the Hills, 1015 Main Street, Wheeling, West Virginia 26003. To reserve tickets or camping space by phone (you can charge them on Mastercard or Visa), or to obtain further information, call the toll-free number, 800-624-5456. (West Virginia residents call 304-232-1170.)

(Turn page for more People.)

## Tom T. Clucks About Tyson Foods

Funky Chicken Department: You've heard him sing the praises of Sneaky Snakes and Old Dogs, and now **Tom T. Hall** will be singing about poultry. Hall has signed an extensive agreement as spokesman for Tyson Foods Country Fresh Chicken line. He and his wife, **Miss Dixie**, will appear in a variety of television, radio and print ads for the company, said to be the world's third largest supplier of broilers. A number of the spots will be done at the Hall's Fox Hollow home.

In preparation for the ads, Hall visited

Tyson's corporate offices in Arkansas and the company's 16 processing plants across the country. Seems Hall couldn't be a more appropriate spokesman for Tyson chickens. "When we first met **Don Tyson** he graciously told Miss Dixie that any time she needed chicken to be sure to call him," said Hall. "I don't think he realized how often we entertain. We've served Tyson fried chicken to everybody from the senior citizens to the Tennessee State Legislature and even took some to **President Carter** at his homecoming."



## 50 Million Watch PBS's Live From The Grand Ole Opry

*Live From the Grand Ole Opry* scored another triumph in its fourth annual Public Broadcasting Service broadcast, looking as fresh and spontaneous as ever. The show reached an estimated television audience of 50 million, who watched more than forty Opry acts perform in a six-hour show.

"It's a real challenge but I love it. All of us who work on the show do," said director **Bob Boatman**, who oversees the broadcast in addition to his chores as director of *Hee Haw*. Boatman's task each year is not an easy one. The Opry's spontaneity is one of its prized characteristics, but can be a director's nightmare. There's no script, nobody knows exactly who will sing what until they sing it, all the patter onstage is unrehearsed, and the talent lineup itself is unknown until two days before the show. Not only that, but all the Opry's commercial spots must be covered for a public television broadcast, so Boatman and his

staff must prepare dozens of "filler" spots for the show. Some of the most successful this year were taped segments in which Opry fans got a chance to ask the stars questions which were then answered on the air. "You'd honestly think some of the fans were working for the *National Enquirer*," said Boatman.

The fact that the Opry continues to be one of PBS's most popular shows year after year doesn't come as a surprise to Boatman, who has spent a lot of years around country music television: "The reason the show is so popular is simply because it's the Opry," he says. "Everyone recognizes what the mother church of country music is. The Opry is the horse that's been hauling the whole wagon and has been for a long, long time. People realize that the Opry, its music and its people, are authentic. People want to get back to the grass roots of country music and the Opry is where the grass roots are."

## Moe • Joe • Boxcar • Tammy

**Boxcar Willie**, in his customary overalls, battered hat and vintage jacket, tearfully became the Grand Ole Opry's 60th member, just weeks after **John Conlee** joined the show. The grizzled hobo singer was introduced by **Roy Acuff**, who described him as "a true-blue country music lover" who had "tried different styles to make his living in country music. But finally he tried being his own natural self, and since then, he's been very successful." Relatively unknown until just a few years ago, "Box," as he is known to his friends, was clearly moved by the honor.

"Mr. Acuff, I had been practicing and dreaming for 40 years of being on the Grand Ole Opry," said the mid-fiftish singer. "I'd been rehearsing my speech that long. And now, I'm speechless."

"C'mon, Boxcar, let's tear into 'em," urged Acuff. "You got 43 years to go to catch up to me."

**Conway Twitty** followed up a concert in Fort Lauderdale with a week-long visit in Florida. Twitty spent most of the week visiting with the **New York Yankees** in their Fort Lauderdale spring training camp and with his own Nashville Sounds minor league team at their camp in nearby Hollywood, Florida. Twitty, who was a promising ball player himself years ago, is a

majority shareholder in the Nashville team.

Twitty wound up his Florida stint with another visit—to the Miami recording studio of Bee Gee **Barry Gibb**. It seems Twitty and Gibb met at the Grammy Awards show in New York and hit it off immediately, prompting Gibb's invitation. Gibb, who wrote Twitty's *Rest Your Love On Me*, also reportedly asked for a copy of the record when it went gold—to add to his collection.

**Alex Harvey**, who wrote such standards as *Delta Dawn* and *Ruben James*, has made strides as a movie star. Harvey filmed *The Long Summer Of George Adams* in Texas with **James Garner**. After co-starring in the made-for-TV flick, Harvey is reportedly being tapped as one of six stars in an upcoming epic movie titled *Catalina*, which supposedly deals with an enemy takeover of the famous island off the coast of California.

Former hostage **Gary Lee** got to meet **Kenny Rogers** backstage after one of Rogers's Las Vegas shows, the fulfillment of a longtime wish. During his 14 months of captivity in Iran, it seems, the only music Lee heard was *The Gambler*, a tune he hoped to one day be able to thank Rogers for.

**Bill Anderson** may be in the running

for **Bert Parks**'s old job. Whispering Bill made his debut as a beauty pageant host at the Miss Texas semi-finals at the Lufkin, Texas Civic Center, where he was a huge hit according to Civic Center spokesmen. Said Bill: "With all my television background, it seemed to flow naturally. After about the first 15 minutes of incredible scenery, I was having a better time than the audience." Incidentally, Bill's syndicated *Backstage at the Grand Ole Opry* went on location recently to the Wembley Country Music Festival in England.

The Nashville Songwriters Association International named **Bob Morrison** its Songwriter of the Year and *He Stopped Loving Her Today*, by **Curly Putman** and **Bobby Braddock**, the Song of the Year at its 14th annual bash. Morrison is the composer or co-writer of such tunes as *Looking For Love* and *Love the World Away*. For Putman and Braddock the award was particularly sweet, coming after their tune won **George Jones** a country Grammy. "I thought the song was too morbid, too down to ever be accepted very widely," said Braddock of the song's success. "I really didn't think it was commercial enough."

The 600-plus songwriters and music industry VIPs (including Doobie Brother, **Michael McDonald**) who jammed the Hyatt Regency for the awards applauded a total of 33 songwriter winners, among them **Ed Penney**, who wrote *Somebody's Knocking* and offered the following advice to struggling young songwriters: "If you believe in yourself, don't quit. Remember that the game goes on forever, and someday it will be your turn."

After the awards dinner, a number of writers adjourned to a local nightery, where among those offering impromptu performances was Michael McDonald. The rock star is no slouch as a country crooner, it seems, and presented a better-than-passable rendition of *I Can't Stop Loving You*.

**Moe Bandy** and **Joe Stampley** got the go-ahead to open their second "Moe & Joe's" nightclub in Shreveport, Louisiana. The first joint venture opened in Houston last August.

They may not look exactly like Boy Scouts, but the **Oak Ridge Boys** have been named national spokesmen for the Boy Scouts of America this year. The affable quartet recently taped television spots at **Bill Golden**'s Hendersonville home with a local Nashville troop, and even dressed up in full Scout regalia for the occasion. "For us, this is a natural tie-in with our other activities for kids," said tenor **Joe Bonsall**. "We like the fact that this stresses the good, not the bad, and that Scouting has got such an optimistic attitude toward kids."

Said one of Bonsall's younger fellow Scouts, a bit more simply: "I just think

### Annette O'Toole Plays Tammy With Visions of Sissy's Success



**Annette O'Toole**, who drew applause for her portrayal of **Tammy Wynette** in television's *Stand By Your Man*, admits that when first offered the role, she just wasn't interested. Not because of Tammy, whom she describes as "a really sweet person," but because of the shadow of another country music star. "When they first sent me the script, I was very busy working on *Vanities* in Los Angeles, and the shooting schedule required me to begin work on the part the day after *Vanities* was over," said the actress. "The image of **Sissy Spacek** as

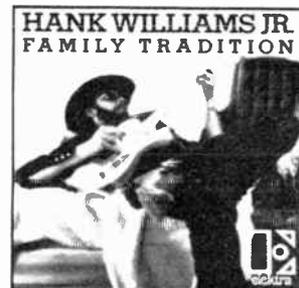
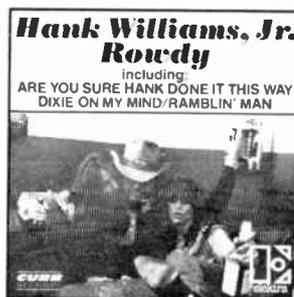
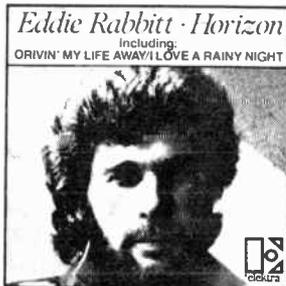
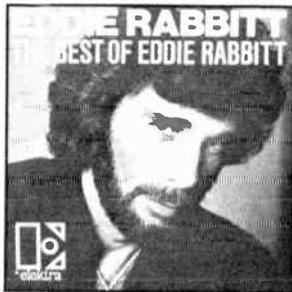
**Loretta Lynn** loomed over me. I didn't want to do less than my best and I was afraid I wouldn't have enough time to prepare properly."

As it turned out, she said, the few weeks she had to get ready for the part were plenty—"any more and I think I would have gotten too scared." Miss O'Toole, who bears a striking facial resemblance to Tammy, said the hardest aspect of the part for her was mastering Tammy's accent. "Her accent is very pretty and I never felt I got it completely accurate," she said.

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## Johnny • Waylon • Jim Ed • Elvis

they're neat. I wouldn't mind them being my brothers." In addition to the television and radio spots the group taped for broadcast this summer, The Oaks will be featured in a *Boys Life* magazine cover story and will make a live concert appearance and hold several workshops at the Scouts annual Jamboree in Virginia in August.

*Jim Owen Salutes Hank Williams Day* is set for Greenville, Alabama, for May 31. An all-day picnic, the event features Owen in his unique one-man tribute to the late singer plus guest artists and friends of Williams. The picnic is planned as an annual event says Owen. This year it will have as one of its primary guests **Taft Skipper**, one of Williams's first cousins with whom

Hank spent the last week of his life.

Tulsa's **Jim Halsey Company** will follow up its string of successful country music television specials (*The Tulsa Country Music Festival*, *The Neewollah Country Music Festival*) with a Home Box Office tribute to **George Jones** this spring. Set to tape the project are **Tammy Wynette**, **Elvis Costello**, **Emmylou Harris** and **Waylon Jennings**. The show will be a production of Tall Pony and the Halsey Company, **Dick Howard** serving as executive producer.

Said **Johnny Paycheck** of his tribute album to **Merle Haggard**. "Of all the dreams I ever had come true, this is the best one of all—cutting an album of Merle's

songs."

**Lee Clayton's** *The Dream Goes On* album for Capitol is full of powerful songs, but one of them is particularly close to Clayton: "I wrote *Industry* for my Dad," said Lee of the tune. "He worked for Union Carbide for 37 years, and I'm kinda using him as an example of all the working men . . . there are two sides to every story, but with these large conglomerates there is a greater degree of the potato chip philosophy of, you know, using them and throwing them away." Friends of Lee's picked *Oh How Lucky I Am* as the smash cut on the album, a song Lee said came to him one day when he was just out walking. "It was a real pretty day and that song just came to me. I like it because I can sing it to myself or sing it to the universe."

Busch Gardens in Williamsburg, Virginia, has been presenting a stellar lineup of talent in its spring *The Old Country* concert series. Featured on the weekly bills—**Mel Tillis**, **Arlo Guthrie**, **Pete Seeger**, **Dr. Hook**, **Debbi Boone** and **Harry Chapin** (he's country?). **Johnny Cash** winds up the park's concerts with a Memorial Day show.

**George Hamilton IV** kicked off his Silver Anniversary year with the longest tour ever undertaken of the British Isles by a country artist. The three-month swing through Great Britain included stops in some 50 cities and towns and ended in Belfast, Ireland. One of the highlights was a charity concert at the home of the **Duke and Duchess of Hamilton** in Haddington, near Edinburgh, Scotland. Following his show, Hamilton and guests were toasted at a midnight supper at their hosts' Lennox Love ancestral home, spent the night and were treated to a guided tour of the area next day. A long way from Hamilton's *A Rose and a Baby Ruth* in 1956.

**The Kendalls** were voted one of country's top groups and **Jeannie Kendall** one of the industry's top female vocalists in *Playboy* magazine's annual Reader's Poll. This is the first year the mag has included a country category in its prestigious roundup.

**Jerry Clower** recorded his latest **More Goodun's** album, his twelfth MCA effort, during performances at the Alabama Cattleman's Association in Montgomery and the Boys' Club in Memphis. The comedian's performance for the Boys' Club Tenth Annual Steak and Burger Dinner raised a record \$92,000 to support Memphis's six clubs.

**Jim Ed Brown** hosted a reception for the Stuttgart, Arkansas Chamber of Commerce at Opryland, complete with full-dress rehearsal and preview of one of the park's most popular shows, *Country Music USA*. Jim Ed, you may recall, annually guests at Stuttgart's Duck Calling Contest.

**Waylon Jennings** may be coming to

### Mama Cash Day Proclaimed at House of Cash

**Mrs. Ray Cash** (Johnny Cash's mama) planned to celebrate her 77th birthday by going to work as usual at her son's office, but when she got there found out she was in for a surprise. A giant banner in front of Johnny's *House of Cash* establishment proclaimed "Mama Cash Day," and a crew of dozens of Cash friends and family members were on hand to help celebrate. "I was completely surprised," said Mama Cash, as she presided over two lavender and white cakes at the party. "I had no idea they were up to something. I even brought my lunch to work in a sack today."

With her husband **Ray**, **Johnny**, **June Carter Cash** and Johnny's and June's 11-year-old son **John Carter** in attendance, Mama Cash was presented with an album containing photographs of her children, 23 grandchildren and 15 great-grandchildren. John Carter's comment: "Where's the cake?"

Mama Cash, incidentally, got a straightforward answer when she relayed a recent interview question to her son. "The lady

asked me why you wore black and I didn't know what to tell her," said Mama Cash. Quipped Johnny, "Well, black is slimming." Over a non-slimming but delicious country style lunch, John said that he was extremely pleased by both the critical and popular response to his TV movie, *The Pride of Jesse Hallam*.

"I loved the movie," Cash said. "It was completely original, not at all like the kind of thing you see all the time on television. The response was very gratifying. We've had lots and lots of calls from people right here at the office and we've gotten a lot of information together to pass along to people on illiteracy."

"It's amazing how people have opened up on the subject since the show was on. It seems nearly everybody knows somebody who has that problem. Just to show you, since they saw the movie, three different people I've known for a long time have come up to me and told me they couldn't read and asked how they could get help. I never even suspected that all those years."



## Chipmunks • Hank, Jr. • Mac • Barbara

your town this summer, thanks to a new booking policy he's adopted. Waylon has decided to take on the state fair-theme park circuit in the next few months and already has a solid string of outdoor dates booked. In the past five years, Waylon has only appeared at five outdoor dates but now seems to have changed his tune.

This comes during a storm of gossip and rumor from Nashville about Waylon's financial situation. According to the gossip, Waylon, who has lots of income, discovered what many businessmen are discovering lately: his outgo was a lot bigger than his income. Again according to gossip, Waylon has taken the reins of his organization and fired it—the people, that is, even severing his long-term relationship with manager **Neil Reshen** and side-kick producer **Richie Albright**. As the rumors go, having reduced his cash outflow to a manageable level. Waylon's new touring activity is aimed at refilling the coffers quickly. Few performers could do that as fast as Waylon.

**Mac Davis** has moved into the ranks of Hollywood's leading men in his second film, *Cheaper to Keep Her*, the long-awaited follow-up to his debut *North Dallas Forty*. Acting, Mac says, is something he's always wanted to do. "The trouble was . . . all the parts I was offered over the years were pretty much the same parts other singers were being offered. With the two films I've done, I've had a chance to act, to be someone totally opposite my image as a singer, to be creative, to learn and have fun at the same time. One thing about acting is, it's hard work. The hours are long and it can be very repetitious, but I love it! It's a mental vacation from 250 one-nighters a year. Acting offers me a chance to jump out of my skin and be

### Hank Jr. Croons For Ma Bell

**Hank Williams, Jr.** has finalized plans to fly to Africa in August for a long-awaited safari vacation. Closer to home, Hank kept busy working with scriptwriters on the TV film of his autobiography, *Living Proof*, bought a new bus and put together material for his new album. Hank was one of several stars who helped kick off Mardi Gras week in New Orleans with a show for 40,000 people at the Superdome.

During his set, Hank was joined onstage by an old friend, **Coach Bum Phillips** of the New Orleans Saints, who aided him in a rousing version of *Family Tradition*.

And yes, that is Hank, Jr. crooning "Reach out and touch someone" on the radio. The singer was hand-picked for the spots by the giant N.W. Ayers Ad Agency, and is one of the few country acts to sing for AT&T on the jingles.



someone else for a change. Who hasn't wanted to do that every once in a while?"

**Barbara Mandrell** joined such heavyweights as **Barbara Walters**, **Nancy Reagan**, **Gloria Steinem** and **Paloma Picasso** in the *New York Times* spring Fashion Supplement, where she was asked about her preferred hem length. The *Times*

reported that, though she frequently bares her shoulders on her television show, Barbara opts for a modest below-the-knee skirt length.

Super fiddler **Mack Magaha** suffered minor flesh wounds when he was shot in a hunting accident in East Tennessee. Fortunately the wounds weren't serious. ■

### Alvin Goes Country with Release of Urban Chipmunk



Newest in the string of pop stars making the trek to Nashville to record a country album: **The Chipmunks**, whose most recent album was the million-selling **Chipmunk Punk**. The Munks, as they are known to their friends, teamed with super-producer **Larry Butler** to record a disc tentatively titled **Urban Chipmunk**, scheduled for release this summer. The album will reportedly contain a number of country standards, but, says group spokesman **Alvin**. "Since our roots are in Americana, we're also planning to showcase a few of our own new songs on the album." The Chipmunks, a trio composed of Alvin and his two more conservative brothers **Theodore** and **Simon**, have the durability country stars are made of. Their first record, *The Chipmunk Song*, was released back in 1958. It sold four million copies in the first seven weeks following its release.

# Tom T. Hall

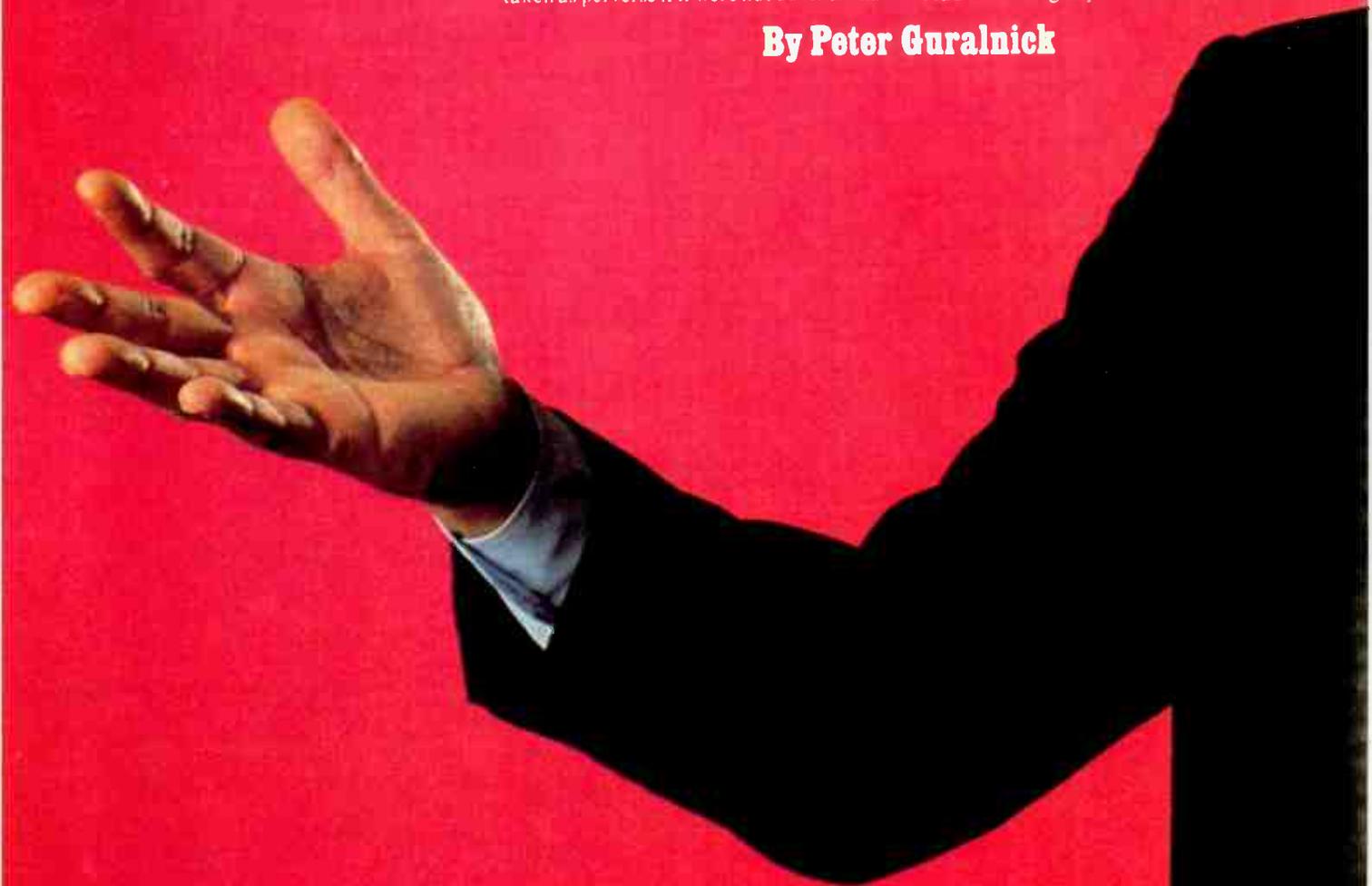
A hillbilly who reads Hemingway  
. . . a humorist who is dead serious.

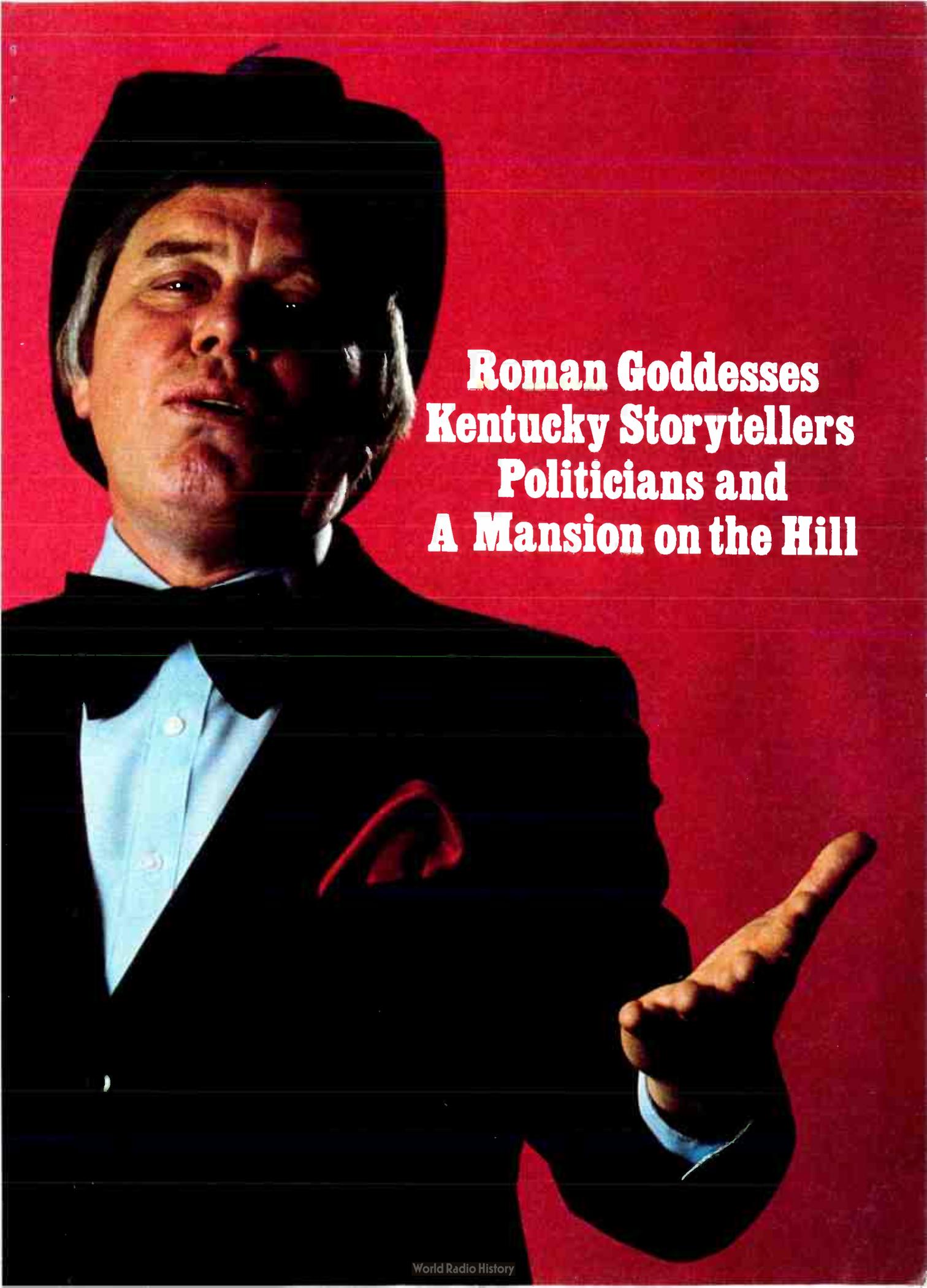
**I**f Tom T. Hall had one overweening source of pride, it might be in the uncategorizable nature of his achievements. Although he has had Number One records and Number One TV shows, although he lives in somewhat baronial fashion (there is a suit of armor, after all, in the hall) on a 60-acre estate that could vie with that of any Nashville superstar, although he hobnobs with presidents, literati, country music legends, and common folk alike, you do not get the impression that he derives excessive satisfaction from any of these visible accomplishments. In fact his reaction to success, and to all the hoopla that surrounds it, might almost be taken as perverse if it were not obvious that

he has worked so hard both to get ahead and to keep his life in some kind of perspective. (This is the man who for years looked at himself in the mirror with a sneaker on his head just to bring himself down to earth). Success may cast doubt on the worth of any enterprise; achievement may cloud endeavor; even as career and ambition continually expand in scope, there is for any committed skeptic the lurking specter of depression. So perhaps it should not be surprising that for Tom T. Hall inconsistency itself—the continuing ability to confound expectations—remains a pure source of satisfaction.

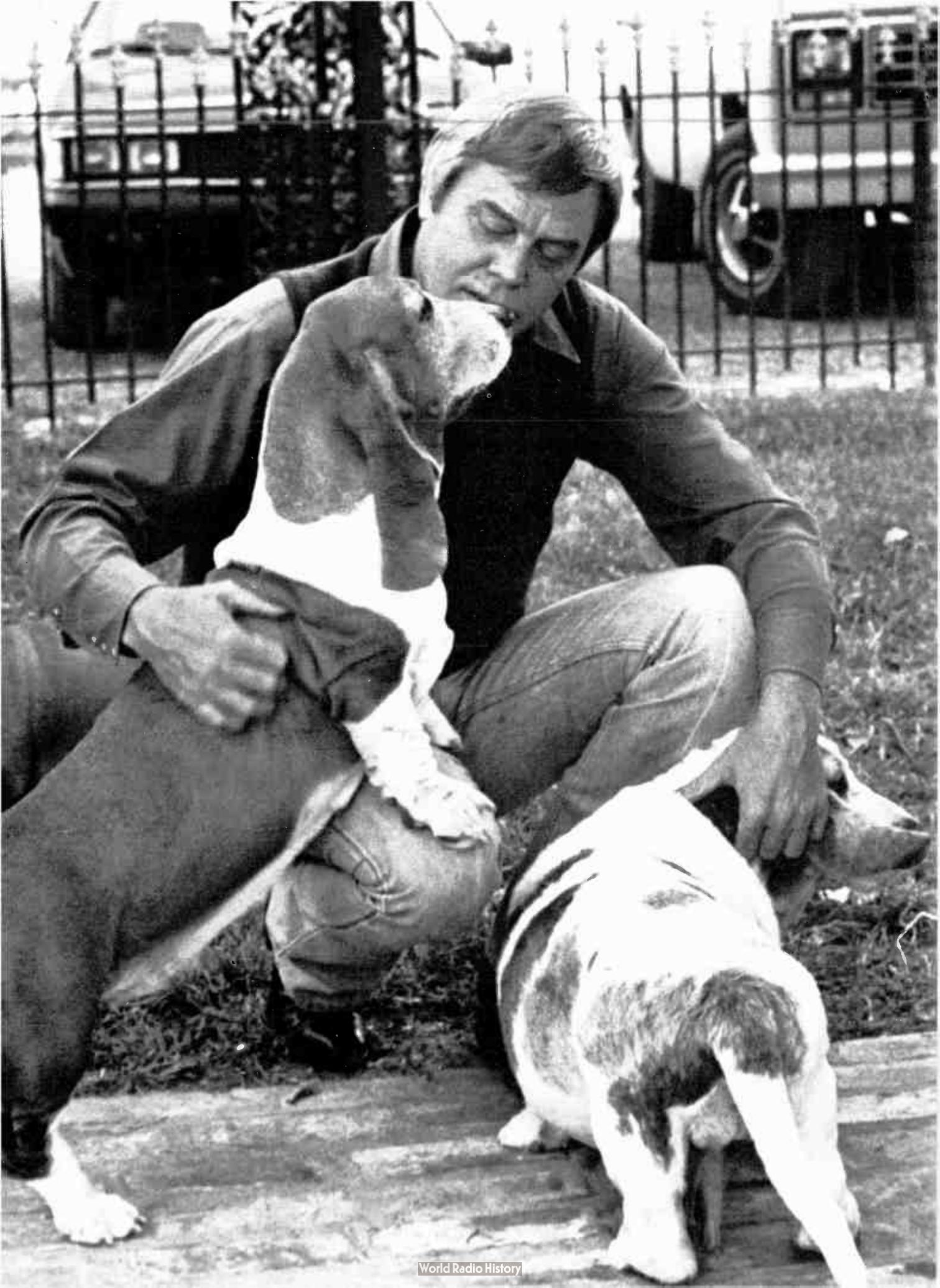
Tom T. Hall is a “hillbilly” singer who reads Hemingway, Sinclair Lewis, and

**By Peter Guralnick**



A man wearing a black top hat, a light blue dress shirt, a black bow tie, and a black tuxedo jacket with a red pocket square. He is pointing his right index finger towards the right. The background is a solid, vibrant red.

**Roman Goddesses  
Kentucky Storytellers  
Politicians and  
A Mansion on the Hill**



Mark Twain, a humorist who is dead serious, a social commentator who denies anything but reportorial motive, a political activist (he orchestrated the country music campaign for Jimmy Carter) who often clings to hermit-like isolation. In a Nashville full of rhinestone suits and company men posing as outlaws, he insists upon his individuality, and yet looks, with his modified crew cut and neat suburban couture, like a high school basketball coach on vacation. As the author of some of the most incisive vignettes in contemporary country music, he forcefully rejects the role of the creative persona and is almost compulsively business-like about his writing habits. The least pretentious of men, he lives amid antebellum decor and Italianate marble goddesses. And despite a warmth that can be infectious and a humanism that infects all of his writing, he can be savagely dismissive in his rhetoric and in his personal relations. For all of which he comes in for a good deal of criticism from his peers and associates. To all of which he responds with a combativeness and a scorn that you sense does not eliminate the hurt. He would probably concede that he is a difficult man. Most of all, it seems sometimes, he is anxious to avoid the stigma of being typed. You get the impression that he is less anxious to inform you of what he is than to let you know what he is *not*.

There seems to be a pattern of positive contrariness running all through Tom T. Hall's life. Even his autobiography, once titled *Glorious Fool*, rejects the usual revelations of origins and intimacy ("I will write no eulogy here except to say that we had great respect for one another," is the closest he comes to describing the bond between himself and his father) for an elliptical, sprung-rhythm, almost oblique view of his life and times. Why, I asked, didn't he speak more of his childhood, of growing up in Olive Hill, Kentucky, one of eight children born to a father who worked twelve hours a day in a brick factory and preached on the side and a mother who died when he was 13? "Well, you know, I didn't spend much time growing up. I was working in a garment factory when I was 15. There wasn't much to do but open your eyes, so to speak, like a puppy. Fourteen years you open your eyes, and you're on your own." And yet obviously for Tommy Hall, growing up in hard scrapple land, it was not an unconsidered existence. Despite his insistence that "my mother's and father's instincts were survival, we'd wake up in the morning trying to stay alive," all through his conversation, and all through the autobiography, there are indications that growing up was more than just living in a primal state. He was acutely aware of, and acutely affected by, his family's poverty. When speaking of being cut from the high school basketball team, he writes with typical obliqueness (and with typically smoldering feelings) that "the coach cut me . . . with the decision that a number of us

'lived too far from school to practice in the afternoons. . . .' So those of us from the hollows and hills, teamed up with the scrawny and uncoordinated fellas, all ended up in the study hall." His father, too, was a source of both embarrassment and pride. "My father was a rarity in those parts. He was a liberal. I admired him for it. I admired him because I thought he understood things as well as I did." In one of the few direct evocations of that period, he quotes without comment the first poem he ever wrote, at the age of eight, to reveal just how lonely childhood must have been.

*walking through fields of snow,  
lonely and dejected,  
while the real Christmas  
shimmered somewhere  
far off  
in the city.*

### **"My father was a rarity in those parts. He was a liberal. I admired him for it. I admired him because I thought he understood things as well as I did."**

It's hard to say what attraction entertainment exerted on the young Tom Hall. At nine he wrote his first country song, and at ten he started playing guitar. He listened to Ernest Tubb every morning at 5:30 coming over the air on WSM, and he always worshiped Bill Monroe and bluegrass music. But the way he tells it, his entrance into the entertainment world was almost accidental. After his mother died and his father was hurt in a hunting accident, Tom Hall quit school and went to work in the garment factory. It was around this same time that he met the first in a succession of "father figures" in his life, a man named Hurley Curtis, who traveled from town to town with a movie projector and a screen on top of a '47 Chevy showing cowboy movies in isolated rural areas throughout the state. He sold "commercial spots" to local merchants. Eventually, after signing on to help out with the equipment, Tom Hall took over as pitchman and then as warm-up act with a bluegrass group, the Kentucky Travelers, which he put together for the occasion.

"I just did that out of necessity. That was a thing that had to be done, and I was there. It was show business, and I guess I was attracted to it. But Uncle Curt, the man that I worked with, was a very intelligent man, he was a philosopher and a thinker and I learned a lot from him—a very colorful guy. So if it had been another person doing what he was doing, I don't know if I'd have gone along just for the show business kick. . . . I remember every day he had . . . it impressed me . . . he had a pressed shirt and a tie and a sweater, and every day he was very neatly dressed and all that sort of thing. And very polite and well-informed. I think I spent my time with him more for that reason than because I did the announcements. Then he thought a live band would attract people, so I got a

band together so we'd have the band with the show. We moved from there, and then the natural progression, we moved to a radio station. So we could have more credentials than just our ability to pick."

Maybe this is simply self-deprecation, but Tom T. Hall has always insisted that he has never been "entertained by entertainment." Instead what seems to have interested him has been the potential for communication and perhaps the opportunity for influence within an ever-widening sphere. When he was growing up, he says, "I admired people with a good vocabulary and good manners mostly. I don't know why I'd be attracted to them, but I was. My father was a gentleman. We used to have these front porch debates, and old people would have quite a bit of authority, because they had been out there on the world stage.

if you can say that. They literally knew where all the bodies were buried. They knew the history of the town, they could tell you things about your grandfather, your aunt—they knew the way some people came to a very sad end, and they also knew the way people came by their prosperity. And of course they were great storytellers. They would tell their stories for years, they polished them and honed them to such perfection that they were just masterpieces of monologue. They could just keep you right there and practice that punch line."

Obviously these "storytellers" have served as a touchstone all through Tom T. Hall's career. The other touchstone has been his own restless ambition, an unconventional ambition to be sure (his current aim is "to become a respectable old fellow—not adored or revered or any of that sort of thing, but just respectable"), but one which has never permitted him to rest on his previous laurels or achievements. When he had gone about as far as he could go as a disc jockey in Morehead, Kentucky ("I guess I was the hottest thing there, but that was a nothing thing"), he enlisted in the Army. He obviously made the most of the Army—he finished high school, read voraciously, and traveled all through Europe—and he was at home enough there to consider re-enlistment. "I liked the Army because you didn't have to wonder what you were going to wear every day. Or decide on where you were going to eat. And your purpose was obvious. You were organized to fight a war and that sort of thing. You knew what you were doing all the time. I liked that because it was orderly, but then it dawned on me why we were organizing, and I never did want to get shot."

When he got out, he worked successfully as a DJ at a number of stations, but



## Reviewing Tom T.'s Book Without Reading It

by Kurt Vonnegut

I make this friendly prediction about the novel which Tom T. Hall has written, which I have not read: It will not grab you by the lapels and insist that you come inside for all kinds of goodies and fun. The front door will be slightly ajar. You can come on in if you want to.

enrolled at Roanoke College to become a novelist. Even his songwriting career followed the same considered progression. He came to Nashville only after first writing hits for Jimmy Newman and Dave Dudley, and he was persuaded to become a committed recording artist—and Tom T. Hall at the same time—only after writing the Number One smash, *Harper Valley P.T.A.* It is almost as if he has been prodded to do the things he has done—to move into Democratic politics, to buy a radio station, to take on Ralph Emery's syndicated TV show—not so much out of overweening ambition as out of obligation to his own sense of growth. . . .

*Genius is perseverance in disguise.*

—An old coach's saying

Tom T. Hall acts as if he has believed in the truth of this saying from the very beginning of his professional career. Tom T. Hall today is no different than the Tom Hall who arrived in Nashville on January 1, 1964, cold, scared, and with \$46 in his pocket. He is still a daily writer, almost grimly committed to a regimen of putting words on paper irrespective of "inspiration." "For one long year," he writes, "I wrote eight hours a day for five days a week. I really didn't know of any other approach. I was *determined* to be a songwriter. It was a job that I had. . . . I guess this is what got me the reputation of being an oddity of sorts. . . ." This reputation is obviously one that he is sensitive to, and in his autobiography he raises the point several times, most notably in speaking of an old friend, Kris Kristofferson, whose writing methods clearly differ from his own. "At one point in my young career," Hall writes, "Kris Kristofferson told someone I

was 'impersonating a hack.'" Obviously stung by the criticism, Hall goes on to say, "People unfamiliar with literature thought he was saying something original [in his lyrics]. Kristofferson, who was well read and had acquired a good education, put several quotes from great writers in his songs and used them conversationally. I knew Burns, Cummings, Kipling, and Holmes when I heard them quoted—and I was not impressed."

Nor has he altered his working methods. He still writes best in the early hours of the morning, from 3 a.m. to 9 a.m., during the four months of the year he takes off from the road simply to recoup and recharge his creative juices. He writes regularly, if not quite as compulsively as during that year-long stretch. "Somebody said when inspiration strikes, you're probably better off to get up and go some place and do something else besides write. When everything is going great guns, I like to be aware of the fact that labor and creativity have an association." He doesn't have dry spells, he doesn't seem to worry about his creative purpose, and he no longer feels obligated to wear a sneaker on his head to attain humility. "Writing is a part of my life, and it may sound like a cliché, but as long as I'm alive I feel that I should be writing. Now I may not be writing what pleases people as much as what I wrote yesterday. But it's still saying what I want to say at this time in my life."

He is, he says without disingenuousness, pretty much "oblivious to success." While this may be true, it seems to cut both ways. If he is oblivious to the pitfalls of success, and finds no greater pleasure than taking off with his brother Hillman on a fine day to build a fire and eat "an onion and some mayonnaise and some wienies and hot dog

buns and a carton of milk under a tree in the woods." Tom T. Hall is equally oblivious to its rewards. Obviously he is ruled by internal moods not necessarily prompted by external circumstances, and he makes sidelong attempts to acknowledge the occasional bleakness of his outlook in the autobiography and interviews.

Perhaps one of the most serious flaws in his writing, in fact, can be laid to his unwillingness to confront the sources of this discontent or even openly acknowledge its existence. While his songs are by no means unremittingly cheerful (think of *Trip to Hyden* or *Homecoming* for that matter), they are self-conscious attempts to present an ordered view of existence. His two great artistic breakthroughs in a sense almost reinforced this sense of emotional distance. The first came with *A Week in a Country Jail*, when he began to write from his own experience in a straightforward journalistic style, "not exactly creating, more relating." The second came with a trip back to Kentucky, literally "in search of a song" (that was the album title, too), when he discovered that he could write about "Clayton Delaney" and "the little lady preacher" and other memorable characters from his past life. It was obviously a painful task to come face to face with his roots, and one which had a profound effect upon him personally. "There was no joy in writing those first songs about my heritage. . . . I still had the haunting feeling that no one cared, that these days of life were not important, and that I was writing them out into songs only as a mental purge of my misgivings about my inherited circumstance. . . . I was, at the same time, proud and ashamed." It caused him to realize, too, that "I was and would always be a 'hillbilly' in some imponderable part of my being," but instead of examining these conflicted feelings in the songs, he wrote about the "characters." He created sharply etched scenes, striking vignettes in which the author is the objective observer. As he has progressed from the specific to the homiletic, from *Old Dogs—Children and Watermelon Wine* and *Faster Horses* to *I Love and Country Is*, he has attempted more and more, it seems, to present an ordered view of existence, to occupy the role, moral and aesthetic, which the storytellers of his youth occupy in his value system. To a large extent, he has undoubtedly succeeded, but at the same time, he himself seems to harbor lingering doubts. "My best songs were never successful—things like *Pay No Attention to Alice*, *Homecoming*—most of my big hits have been inspirational. Sometimes somebody would ask me to write a song about so and so, and I would just sit down and write them a song. It would be a big hit, but to me, even though it made money and everything, it just seemed like sort of a waste of time."

There is another side to it, too, of course. Unlike your average country music singer—unlike roistering Jerry Lee or George

Jones or Merle Haggard, each of whom in his own way reveals himself in every note that he sings—Tom T. Hall is almost constitutionally averse to revealing his emotional inwards. Perhaps it has something to do with craft (this is a writer to whom “one of the great compliments is that Tom T. Hall writes like he talks”), but there is a curious neutrality, both musical and emotional, in nearly all the songs that he writes. It is not that they are cold, but rather that they attempt to communicate “objectively”—without “whining.” And they are very consciously not “experimental.” “The trick is to write beyond criticism. I think a good writer knows when he’s leaving his bare foot stuck out in traffic. I really believe that. You know, we all have a tendency to kind of walk out there and take a shot at it—but it’s dangerous. It’s better to stay with what you know, and write true and good and honest and simple, and not leave yourself open to criticism that you deserve. You know, if you don’t want to get your hand caught in the proverbial cookie jar, just don’t reach in there. Do the best you can, do it honestly, and do it sincerely. And that’s what I call doing things beyond criticism.”

Perhaps it is the need to test this innate conservatism that has led Tom T. Hall to seek the various challenges in his life, to force himself out of a safe place with which

he is obviously comfortable for new and uncharted waters. In music one feels he would never have left bluegrass if it had not been for the intellectual need for a challenge. “The only thing you can say about bluegrass: you do it right, or you don’t do it at all. Bluegrass is whatever it is; it’s been around so long, you don’t have to wonder what it is anymore. Country music continually surprises me. Bluegrass doesn’t surprise me. It entertains me, but it doesn’t surprise me. I don’t like surprises. I’m famous for that. Life has enough surprises.” Let it be noted: despite his distaste for surprises, Tom T. Hall plays country music, not bluegrass. He left the Opry for similarly mixed reasons. “Because they moved it. They tell the stories about all the horns [it was said that the Opry refused to accommodate his whole band]. That had nothing to do with it. The thing of it is, when they moved the Opry, I didn’t move with it like furniture. I didn’t go. I had worked hundreds of places like Opryland, so I didn’t move.”

Even when he rejoined the Opry recently, it had more to do with a sense of tradition (Ernest Tubb asked him to, and as Tom T. says, when someone like Ernest Tubb asks, you don’t refuse) than a sense of remorse.

Whatever the rationalization, he has always maintained forward motion. This winter he finished up his first novel, taking

up the career that he dropped when he became a songwriter 20 years ago and seemingly as bemused with the novel’s acceptance by Doubleday, his book publisher, as with any other occurrence in his creative life. Nonetheless, he approached the writing in the same systematic way that he has always approached hard work, charting it out beforehand, typing away on his Remington 25, which sits on an austere writing table, surrounded by dictionary, writing magazines, the usual appurtenances of the writer’s trade. It is perfectly obvious that he has no interest in being taken for an oddity, a “hillbilly” singer who writes books. He wants his novel to be accepted on its own terms. Despite his talk of the company of writers—not only of mentors like Hemingway and Mark Twain but of such friends and contemporary writers of the South as Miller Williams, William Price Fox, James Dickey, and James Whitehead—there is always that sense of wary aloneness that appeared in his first childhood poem. In speaking of his novel’s projected publication, he reveals both that hidden insecurity and the unflinching honesty of his artistic commitment. “The odds are,” he says, “that people will have absolutely no opinion about it at all. That’s what frightens me. You’re better off to be severely criticized than to be ignored. My fear is to be ignored.” ■



# Porter Wagoner “There’s Too Much Sadness in Country Music”

By Patrick Carr

**T**o most country music fans, and to many country music insiders, Porter Wagoner must seem to possess a relatively simple identity. Porter, that gnarled, long, super-hillbilly stick of a man, lit up in public jewels and colors like a state fair at midnight, is the Opry stalwart, the man who raised Dolly Parton to fame, and, since Dolly moved on to Hollywood, the fading voice of a glittering past.

To others, he is somewhat more complicated. He is, it is true, the hillbillies’ totem pole, the Opry’s most vibrant light show, and Dolly’s abandoned mentor, but he is also The Sound Man. Back in the late 1950s, he was the first Nashville artist to produce his own records successfully. Over the course of his seven-year relationship with Dolly, he created around her a recording method which was technically brilliant and emotionally stunning. Since then, in the studio which he built for Dolly and expanded after her departure, he has branched out into the production of non-country musical forms—disco, soul, pop—while also perfecting the studio itself and, with Merle Haggard and others as his raw material, cutting some real country records for which the complimentary adjective “clean” is almost inadequate. And there is more: throughout this long career (27 years), Porter has been as sound in his profession as he has been professional in his sound. A multi-millionaire whose wealth derives as much from non-musical investments as from the proceeds of musical work, he is renowned as one of Nashville’s sharpest and most reliable business heads. Porter is much more than an echo. Perhaps, then, it is not necessary for the fans to mourn his passing.

On the other hand, perhaps it is. Since Dolly left the Porter Wagoner Show, the man has cut his personal appearances (apart from his weekly Opry shows) to no



Porter, at the Opry with James Brown.

more than ten per year. In national media circles, his reputation has been tainted, rightly or wrongly, by his now-concluded lawsuit against the new, “Big Deal” Dolly. But most significantly, his infrequent records have failed to soar to the high reaches of even the country record charts. He may be very busy, and he may be a mogul of sorts, but there is a big double-barrelled question about him: Is he happy, and what is his future as a recording artist?

**P**orter is in his element at his office/publishing company/recording studio on Nashville’s 18th Avenue South. Still a rail of a man, he looks in real life almost normal; that golden Afro which adorns the crest of this hillbilly totem pole in public is an undisciplined, white-streaked tangle stuffed into a baseball cap, while the totem pole itself is

dressed in regulation denim. Still a sharp and professional fellow, his first moves are a few small-talking remarks, followed in short order by the playing of his latest product.

Product One is a track from an album he is producing by Joe Simon, the black soul singer. It is wild and fluid, all soprano moans and funky sighs and syncopated, mixed-to-perfection fills and trills. Very nice, very modern. Soul and glitter skillfully combined.

Product Two is himself. It’s a pure, deep-country cut of *The Rose*, the title song from Bette Midler’s recent movie.

Frankly, I am taken aback. Porter’s good—he’s a fine ham, a skillful singer, a great producer—but this track is *deep*. It’s careful and curly and simple and clear; it’s moving, and Porter sings it beautifully. It’s about as good as a country track can be, and it’s modern. These days, the best real country tracks, as a result of constantly-improving recording equipment and technique, are very clean and subtle indeed. Unless you want to, you don’t *have* to cover the subtleties of the human voice and the acoustic guitar and the unamplified fiddle with extraneous noise. You can let them come through clearly, shaded here and there with whatever else fits the track, and they’ll end up sounding as full as the Boston Symphony (or, for that matter, Billy Sherrill’s now-defunct synthesizer banks). This, apart from singing his heart out, is what Porter has done. The result sounds wonderful.

“That’s about the best record you ever made, Porter,” I say.

“I think so, too,” he replies.

There is a pregnant pause, and to break the silence, I ask him why he decided to work with Joe Simon. Such a venture is not, after all, very common in the Nashville region.





**Porter has branched out to produce disco, soul and pop. His album on Joe Simon . . . all soprano moans and funky sighs . . . soul and glitter skillfully combined.**

"I love country music," he says. "I've made my living at it for 27 years and I'm very dedicated to it, but I think that adding new dimensions to the music—if they're good—makes the music healthy. You can't stay in the same place all the time. I'm as proud of all my old hits as I ever was, but I have to keep trying new things, new projects, or I'd go nuts."

We talk for a while about soul recording technique and the flexibility of Nashville musicians (Porter used the same musicians on both his own record and Joe Simon's, and the musicians loved it), and then Porter ventures a thought.

"There's too much sadness in country music," he says. "I mean, I like the beat of disco and soul music, the happiness it reflects. Really, I think that if Hank Williams were to come along today with the songs he hit with in the '50s, he wouldn't hit with them today unless they were done in a completely different manner. I think people have enough sadness today. They don't want to cry in their beer anymore. They can cry over their gasoline, they can cry over the economy; they've got *lots* of things they can cry over. I just can't picture people going to a store and buying a record that's going to make them cry, when they can watch the six o'clock news and get that same effect. A ballad today, if it's going to be a success, has to be very light. It can't be a hard-core thing about 'You left me, now I'm gonna kill myself as soon as I find someone to shoot me,' you know?"

Maybe, maybe not. George Jones isn't

doing badly these days. That aside, however, it is obvious that Porter is not "into sadness." There does, however, remain the question of his commitment to soul music. Last year, for instance, he invited James Brown, the King of Soul Music, to appear on the Grand Ole Opry. James appeared, and not a few of the Opry regulars were greatly annoyed. I ask him how he felt about that. He stiffens.

"I don't think that the Opry people are as close as they used to be," he says. "They used to be like a family, but they aren't that way anymore. I don't know why it happened, but it did.

"Like, with James Brown, it really disturbed me, because the reason he was on there was to add another milestone to the Grand Ole Opry. From him being on there, we would get world-wide news coverage—"The King of Soul Music Appears on The Grand Ole Opry!" I felt like it would add prestige to our business if people knew that country music was not so selfish that it wouldn't accept great artists from whatever field. To me, that's what it's all about. If you were a pop act, that wouldn't preclude you from being a friend of mine because I'm a *country* act. It wouldn't mean that you couldn't appear on my stage, or I couldn't appear on yours."

Porter is growing increasingly intense. He continues:

"Now, I didn't invite James Brown onto the Opry to help Porter Wagoner. I did it to help the Grand Ole Opry. In that situation, certain people were questioning my

loyalty to the Opry and to country music. But there's *nobody*, from Roy Acuff on down, who is more loyal to the Grand Ole Opry and country music than I am. I'm probably the only man out there who has enough pride in the Opry to hire a hairdresser and a makeup artist to come out every Saturday night and make me up. I want to look good, because the Opry's the greatest show in the world. I wouldn't go on the stage of the Opry with anything but the best, because I respect it that much. So when people question my respect for the Grand Ole Opry and my loyalty to country music, that's a very tender area for me."

The bit now firmly between his teeth, he strides on. He is speaking slowly and deliberately.

"Now, when I add disco music into my line of work, it's not because I'm disloyal to country music. It's because I'm trying to *improve* country music. When I die, I'd like to know that I have contributed something back into the industry that made it possible for a sixth-grade-education boy from the hills of Missouri to become a multi-millionaire. . . . I mean, my personal commitment as a recording artist is to the pure country music area, but this other way improves my knowledge of how to record country people better. I *learn* from these other areas."

He goes on about this subject for a while in great detail—discussing mixing techniques and drum sounds and all the other intricacies of record production—until I stop him and pop the question: Does he think that the Opryites' reaction to James Brown's appearance was more a matter of racial prejudice than musical prejudice?

"That could have been a factor," he says. He seems reluctant to admit it. "I mean, I'm sure that if they *knew* James, they wouldn't have felt that way. James Brown is one of the greatest men, one of the most *professional* men, that I have ever met.

"So, I have thought about whether some of the Opry people's objections were a race thing. Let's just say that I hope they weren't."

**W**e have hit upon an area of sadness here. Porter seems to believe in the encouragement of happiness, but obviously, there are certain frustrations along the way. Confronting the question, therefore, I raise the deadly name: Dolly.

No, says Porter, he has not talked to the lady lately. No, he says, he does not dislike her personally, but he does feel that the lawsuit and the reasons behind it were "such a useless, childish way to handle things. As much as we'd been through together, and as much as I'd contributed to her career, I felt that it was so foolish for us to have to settle our differences with lawyers." He agrees with me that perhaps he and Dolly should have a chat sometime soon, but adds, "I don't believe that I'm the one who should instigate that. I believe that she is." Then he goes to some lengths

to convince me that he *wanted* Dolly's success. He says that he knew that she couldn't become a giant star without leaving his organization, because his organization was not capable of promoting her into the TV networks, the movies, and the *National Enquirer*. What upset him was the manner of her leaving, not the act itself.

The waters in this area are very, very murky. Dolly has her side, and Porter has his, and there is really no point—no objective truth—to be found in statements by either of them concerning matters of fact. We must, therefore, limit ourselves to issues of emotion, and, since this is an article about Porter, we must further limit ourselves to Porter's emotions, alone.

Porter, for instance, is distressed by certain aspects of Dolly's current career. Although he feels himself too personally and professionally involved to comment on the quality and direction of her post-Porter-produced records, he does feel free to speak out about an article which appeared in *Rolling Stone* at the time of the release of the movie *9 to 5*. The article told of Dolly engaging in a fit of "mooning" and running naked around her limousine. On that subject, Porter states, "I felt that it was a little cheap of her, because in my mind, she's a much better person than that. I understand why it was done, to stimulate the advertising for the movie and all that, but it embarrassed me for her family and her friends. That was really cheap, man. It really was. If you're great at what you do, you don't have to stoop that low. And Dolly is great at what she does."

God only knows. The complexities of Porter and Dolly's relationship must be infernal in the extreme. I ask no more, and Porter caps it all off professionally by saying that if the last album of Dolly's he produced hadn't gone to Number One, he'd have had trouble living with himself. With a sigh of mutual relief, we move on.

**T**ime for easy questions. What does Porter do with himself when he's not working? He doesn't party. He can't stand smoke-filled rooms and social chit-chat. He has "a beautiful home" and two golden retrievers who are "like children."

After working in his studio, he gets himself home and takes his dogs into "the fresh country air, and it blows things out of my head." He is not married, and has no close friends outside the studio circle. His greatest joy comes once a year when, for two months in the summer, he disappears to his houseboat on Center Lake, 85 miles from Nashville, and lays himself very far back indeed. The solitary life, he says, makes him that much more eager to get back into the company of people and work. In the old days, when he was working the road all the time and coming back to Nashville to deal with the piled-up mountains of work awaiting his return—riding a bus on which he couldn't sleep, watching out for Dolly, the band, the crew *and* business in Nash-



**Porter says he knew Dolly couldn't become a giant star without leaving his organization. What upset him was the manner of her leaving, not the act itself.**

ville—he found himself going in circles. He quit the road when Dolly left, he says, because he was tired (and therefore inattentive to the fans), because he didn't want to go through the enormous hassle of replacing Dolly and the band, and because "as far as I know, my health's still all right. I want to keep it that way."

Porter seems hale and hearty and determined, too, but there is in his manner a certain sense of loss, something about having been badly treated, something about retreat and the edge of half-angry, half-maudlin disappointment which always accompanies a rear guard action. Some of Porter's statements during the interview have been almost peevish.

The root of it, perhaps, is the plain and evident fact that Porter himself is no longer a big, bright star. He has his studio fortress and his producer's brilliance, and he *knows* that it was he who helped Dolly up, but hell, what about *him*? The Opry audiences salute him every Saturday night, and on those ten outside gigs a year, he makes damn sure that his show's the best, but where are the hits he had back then—before Dolly, before production expertise, before interracial recording?

Maybe it's a temporary problem, but then again, maybe it's not. I ask him about it, and he says that he's decided to find out.

"Look," he says, "I have just cut, sung, and produced the best damn country single of my life, and it's going to be a real test. I'd love to record more, but only if I can do what the people want to hear. *The Rose*

will be a good barometer of that. I had a single out last year, *Everything I've Always Wanted*, and I thought that was a great song, but the lawsuit was going on at the time, and RCA didn't get behind the record because they didn't know how the lawsuit was gonna turn out. Now, all that stuff's settled, so it's just RCA and me. I hope the company gets behind *The Rose*, but I just don't know if they will."

And if they don't?

"I really don't know. If it isn't a hit, I'll feel that RCA really isn't for me. If they can't sell this—or if they don't want to—I don't feel that I could make a product that they *would* sell."

Somehow, Porter seems not to have conceived of the idea that if RCA isn't for him, there are always other labels. He seems to think that if RCA rejects him, he'll have to get his pleasure in the studio and on the Opry. This notion, like my idea that Porter has always seemed to choose the role of the producer over that of the star, leaves a very inconclusive impression about the nature of his character. When he says to me, "I'm trying to be very honest with Porter Wagoner these days, but I *do* want to give him a good shot. I owe some things to myself now, and I'm trying to pay some of those debts to myself, and I'm happier this way," I don't quite know what he means. I get the sense that he doesn't, either.

*As this issue went to press we learned that RCA dropped Porter from their label. Ed.*



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# Larry Butler

## Award Winning Producer

### Goes For The Song

**I**t is late afternoon on a cold day in Nashville. In his private office, on the second floor of a richly decorated Victorian house that serves as his office headquarters, Larry Butler is hosting a small birthday party for the wife of one of his employees. During the course of light conversation, brightened by champagne and ice cream cake (which is slowly melting on Butler's nice coffee table), Butler looks comfortable among friends. I am the only stranger here. But no one seems to mind, least of all Butler. I'm here to talk with him about doing a story. But for the moment, my piece of business must wait. The lady of honor, having already received a gift of a quart of fine Scotch whisky, is showing everyone a card containing two green bills distinguished by the fatherly face of Benjamin Franklin, courtesy of Butler. After the party, which lasts maybe an hour, Larry assures me we will soon get together. "Sure, come hang out with me. I'll give you all the time you need. Whatever you want, you got." I leave with instructions to call back in a couple of days. But I had a few things to learn about Larry Butler.

Lesson one: he has precious little time to sit still for serious business, much less talk to some fool writer who wants to know why you do this and how come that. Butler means what he says: in fact, sincerity, I learned, is one of his finer traits. He is simply a wanted man. So after several weeks, a few cancelled appointments, threats from my editor, and an eventual long-distance phone interview from Las Vegas, I took a good bead on the life of Larry Butler. But what else can one expect from a man who last year won a coveted Grammy Award for Producer of the Year—not *country* producer of the year, but the top producer for every kind of music? He is the only record producer from Nashville to ever win that award. The records he produced last year sold more copies than those of any other record producer in the world. More than 50 gold and platinum singles and albums decorate his home and office. He is largely responsible for the huge success of Kenny Rogers, and his musical tastes have profoundly changed, and continue to change, the scope of country music and the image of Nashville as a musical community. Not bad for a

Pensacola, Florida boy who arrived in Nashville in 1963 "with \$3.50 in my pocket and the clothes on my back." Today, he moves in the same rarified circles as Paul Anka and Frank Sinatra. As the fast-talkers in L.A. would say, he is *hot*.

Butler is so hot, in fact, that I laid eyes on him only once after the birthday party and then only a passing glance. I got wind of his whereabouts and talked to him on the phone, but I've yet to really see him. Several days after the birthday party, I called his office and talked to Nancy Michon, vice president of Butler Productions. Nancy is the main cog in the Butler business wheel. "She probably knows me better than any other person; she's my right hand," Larry told me. For some reason, Nancy and I couldn't coordinate a meeting that week, so we decided to shoot for the following week. Then Butler caught the flu. Scratch that week. By this time, I was looking over my shoulder for irate editors. Explaining that I needed an interview soon, I talked to Nancy the following Monday and we worked out an iron-clad plan. Tuesday night, Larry would be going into the studio with singer/songwriter Diane Pfeifer. I should be there at 6 p.m., Nancy said. A guard would be at the door, but my name would be on the list; I could watch Larry work in the studio. And on Wednesday afternoon, I had a definite appointment with Butler.

Right around six o'clock on Tuesday, I pull into the parking lot of Sound Emporium Recording Studio, which Butler owns along with Roy Clark. There is a Studio A and a Studio B. Tonight's session will take place in Studio B, Butler's favorite recording room. As soon as I walk in the door, I can tell something is wrong. Nobody is in the studio setting up instruments, and someone says Butler is in conference with the musicians. Suddenly, the musicians, along with Butler, file out of a back room and parade out the door. Larry shoots me a look that says, "Sorry, man, I'll catch you later." While I'm trying to absorb what is going on, and watching my prize subject vanish again, Diane Pfeifer appears and stares for a moment. "Don't I know you from somewhere?" she asks. This innocent question scatters my thoughts, but it appears we had met at some Christmas party

By Bob Campbell



Butler with new colleague Paul Anka.



...with Debby Boone & Jim Williamson.



...hanging out with Earl Scruggs.

a few weeks before. Now Diane, if you will, is an extremely attractive lady with a plugged-in personality. She loves to talk and radiates a sunny disposition. But this is not her day. She was due to record at six, until her record company called at the last minute with "suggestions" that severely iced the mood and kinetic energy necessary for good recording work. So Butler cancelled the entire session. Diane offers a rather novel metaphor to explain her disappointment. "I feel like when you are expecting someone to come make love to you and they don't show up, you know? It's kind of like getting cold water thrown in you face." Diane invites me to hear some of the songs she had planned to record, and the night is not a total loss.

I wake up with a sharper impression of



week. Just him and a driver. But Nancy says she will try and get Larry to call me from the road somewhere.

So that day at five o'clock, I learn Butler will call me in an hour from Roger Miller's house in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Five hours later, I am still by the phone and no Larry. (Later I find out Roger and Larry were off having fun running up and down the mountains which hang on the edge of Santa Fe.) Two days later, at five o'clock sharp on Saturday, I get my call. By this time, Butler is safe and warm at Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas.

"Hello, this is Larry. I'm sorry, man, about all the delays."

"That's all right, are you settled enough to talk?"

"Man, I'm laying back on a big bed with

**Studio work has always been and remains his one unbending passion. . . . "I think there is a Larry Butler sound . . . each producer has a certain approach to recording . . . I like to place a lot of emphasis on rhythm."**

Butler, thanks to Diane. The previous night, she had talked to Larry again by phone and realized his decision to cancel the session was sensible under the circumstances. She told of first meeting him, and how pleased she was to work with Larry. (Butler has produced one album on Pfeiffer.) Echoing what I would come to hear time and again, Diane said that Larry really cared about her music and cared about making good records. And that he was easy to work with in the studio. I look forward to talking with Butler about his production work at our appointment that afternoon. But when I call at noon to confirm the appointment, Nancy is not there. I learn that my appointment has been cancelled because Larry is leaving that afternoon for California in his Silver Eagle touring bus. About the same time, a nice lady from the New York office calls wondering when she can expect the story on Larry Butler. I immediately ring Butler's office and say I have to talk to Nancy. An hour or two later, Nancy calls from Butler's house. I will hear from him before he leaves, she says. By nightfall, still no word.

"I'm sorry Larry couldn't call," Nancy explains the next day. "We were trying to take care of last minute things and he had to go. Listen, he gets so many calls, he has to get away sometimes. People call me night and day. I get calls at home all the time, and it is worse for him. Everybody wants him for something. He gets on the bus and nobody knows where he is." Nancy is not even real sure just where Butler is going, but he plans to be gone a

cigarette and a drink and ready to go."

One thing about Larry Butler: once you get his attention, he will talk. Enthusiasm is another of his finer traits. He says he likes to take off in the bus because he hates to fly and he can see the country. He enjoys stopping at truck stops and tourist traps. The bus, with no phones, also affords him a rare chance to write (along with co-writer Chips Moman, Butler won a Grammy in 1975 for Country Song of the Year with *Hey, Won't You Play Another Somebody Done Somebody Wrong Song*). Although he has been slumming in Santa Fe with buddy Roger Miller, and enjoying the humorous company of Don Meredith, who also owns a home in Santa Fe, Butler allows that he has come to Las Vegas strictly on business. Tomorrow he will meet with Frank Sinatra and discuss the possibility of producing an album with the legendary entertainer. Butler recently produced Paul Anka in Nashville and Anka recommended Butler to Sinatra. "It would be great, he [Sinatra] has never recorded in Nashville. It would be quite a thing for the town," Butler says. "Paul asked me if I would be interested and I said, 'Lord, gosh, oh yes, I've been wanting to do that for a long time.'" (As of this writing, the Butler-Sinatra project looks good.) Butler also basks a little more in the glow of last year's Grammy Award. "The main thing is that it was such an honor to win it, being from Nashville. I never in my wildest dreams thought I would ever be selling the number of records I am now. Every day I wake up, I still ask myself if this is really happening."

**I**n prominent view on the wall of the upstairs hallway in Butler's Nashville office building hangs a large, framed photo of Kenny Rogers. The photo is a promotional poster for the American Cowboy TV Special he taped a year ago. Inscribed to Larry in Rogers's handwriting, it reads, "It all started with a dream, Kenny Rogers." But dreams have their own lifespan. The only apple in the barrel that might upset the ebullience of Butler is his apparently disintegrating relationship with Rogers. Rogers has decided to let Lionel Ritchie (who produced the single, *Lady*) produce his new album. After that, who knows what will happen? Larry claims he is in the dark himself. In a February issue of *Billboard Magazine*, Rogers said, "Larry will someday produce some things for me again because he is a good friend and great producer. But I think this breathing space will give him a chance to step back and look at me a little more objectively and see that maybe we did get in a rut."

Five years ago, when Butler was running United Artists Records in Nashville, he signed the then-struggling Rogers. With Butler selecting the songs and producing, and Kenny crooning away, the two formed one of the most lucrative teams in musical history. Butler produced eight Rogers albums, including *Classics* with Dottie West and *Gideon* with Kim Carnes, and every album except *Love Lifted Me* has gone gold or platinum. *The Gambler* LP has reached quadruple platinum, which means it has sold at least four million copies. Rogers's *Greatest Hits* LP is around six million copies in sales. Rogers sold more records last year than any other artist or group in the world. So, if the two are splitting their relationship for good, it surely must bother Butler.

"The only thing I can say is this," Butler allows. "I have no idea what is going on. I have heard he is doing another album with somebody else. It looks as though I'm not producing his next album."

"Surely you have a contract?" I ask.

"I'd rather not get into that," Butler laughs, intimating some possible legal entanglement.

"Did you and Kenny have a close personal as well as professional relationship?"

"I thought we did," Larry says.

"When did you last talk to Kenny?"

"The day he called me and told me somebody else was going to produce his next album," Larry says, adding that was around the first of the year.

"You haven't talked to him since?"

Hesitating a minute, Larry answers, "I did talk to him three or four nights ago, but we didn't talk about business. I just asked him where to send the Christmas presents."

**S**omehow the impression lingers that Butler is not one to brood over a matter that will eventually work out in the best interests of those concerned. No, Butler's thing is making rec-

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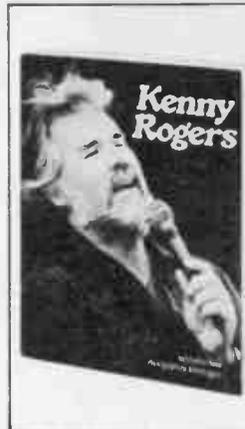


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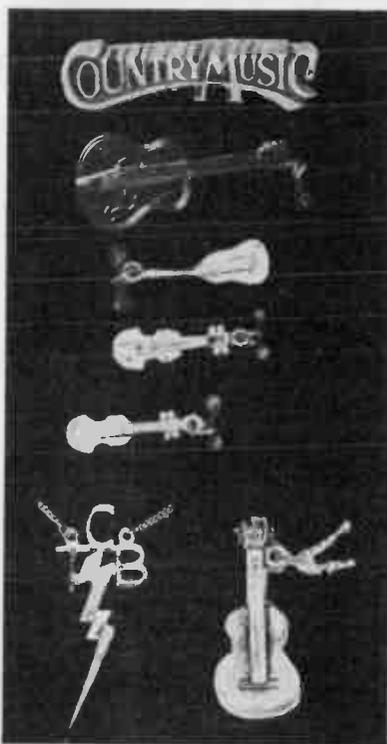
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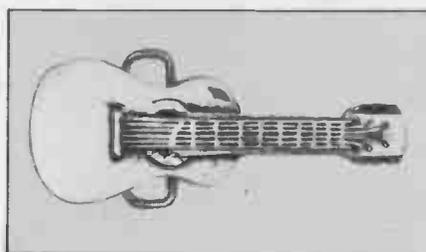
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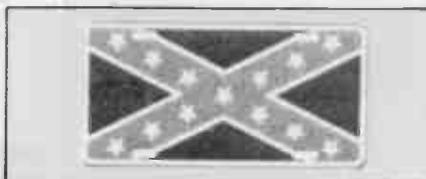
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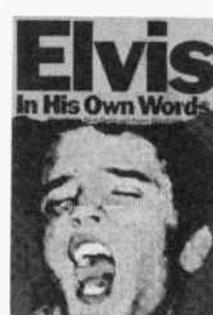
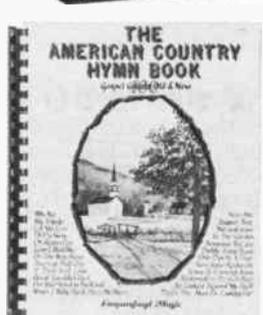
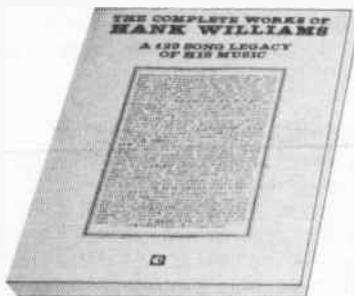
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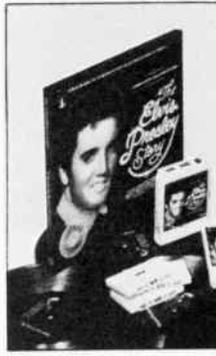
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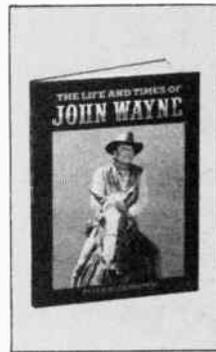
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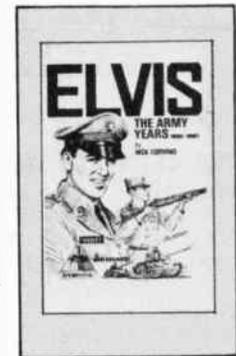
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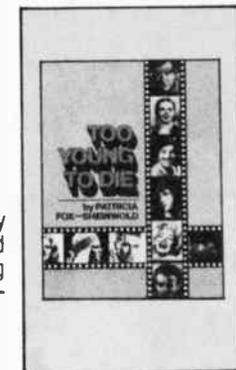
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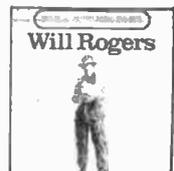
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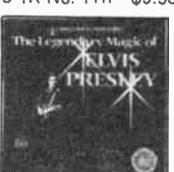
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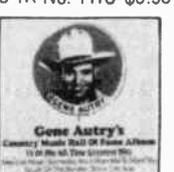
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ords. Studio work has always been and remains his one unbending passion in life. The first record he produced, *Seven Lonely Days* on Jean Shepard back in the '60s, reached the Top Ten, and Butler has been pushing buttons and turning knobs ever since. In the past year, in addition to Rogers, Butler has produced albums on Bobby Goldsboro, Debby Boone, Mac Davis, Roy Clark, Don McLain, B.J. Thomas and Anka. In the past he has worked with Johnny Cash, Charlie Rich, Donna Fargo, Hank Thompson and The Earl Scruggs Revue. At 39, Larry has carved a permanent niche for himself in the Nashville music sound, just as Chet Atkins did years ago. The signature on Butler's music lies in the rhythm.

"I think there is a Larry Butler sound," Butler says. "It's hard to describe, but each producer has a certain approach to recording. I like to place a lot of emphasis on rhythm. I do different things with rhythm. I'll use different techniques of rhythm, instead of playing the same style or whatever. I believe in a very full rhythm section underneath the record. Like the foundation of a house, I think the foundation of a record should be strong. I use the same guys, basically, all the time. They are versatile and can play any kind of music. That is one of the reasons I refuse to record anywhere else. Not that I don't think LA doesn't have excellent recording facilities, but why should I change what I've got going?"

"I go for the song," Butler continues, warming to his subject. "To me the song is the most important part of the record. You take a great singer with a bad song and you'll have a bad record. I don't care how good the singer is or what the producer does to it, you will have a bad record. I spend most of my time looking for songs. I look for emotion in a song. We are in the business of emotions. We entertain people through records. I was asked what I try to teach people. Nothing. I try to entertain 'em. If you don't get emotions in a record—by that I mean a song that conveys emotion, a singer who can convey the emotion that a writer wrote, and a producer who knows how to complement both of those with music—you've failed. If you fail, your records don't sell. I don't look for a great singer, I look for someone who can convey emotion through a two-and-one-half-inch speaker."

On the subject of songs and music, Butler takes a dead-level shot at the boogey man of the music business—charts and categories. Nobody likes categories, but they will probably be here long after Butler and I are gone. "I think they ought to take the top of the charts and rip 'em off. There ought to just be records. I go into the studio to cut a record." According to the Butler logic, categories have stifled the growth of Nashville, a situation he is trying to change.

"For so many years, you heard, if you



**Larry Butler has been gearing for success since he was a child. He likes to tell of going to the piano at the age of four and surprising his folks by picking out melodies.**

want to cut a country record, go to Nashville. That's wrong. You can cut any kind of record you want here. I defy anybody in the world to put together a better rhythm section than you can in Nashville. It can't be done. It is the finest in the world. I want more people like Paul Anka to come into Nashville and see what is here. It makes me proud when I expose what is here."

Speaking of Anka, as the conversation with Butler winds down, Butler asks casually if talking with Anka would help the story. "Certainly," I reply. Butler says Anka will be coming to Vegas tomorrow and I should expect his call. In light of the past three or four weeks, I'm not holding my breath.

Sure enough, on a Sunday, right in the middle of the Pro Bowl telecast, the phone rings and out comes that unmistakable voice. "Hello, Bob, how are you?" Since writing and recording the multi-million selling *Diana* as a teenager in the mid '50s, Anka has enjoyed a full, distinguished career. He wrote *My Way* for Frank Sinatra, wrote *Having My Baby* for himself, and he performs 20-25 weeks a year in the finest Vegas showrooms. He owns a house in Vegas, along with one in Carmel, California. Anka is also unpretentious, friendly and a big fan of Butler.

"I was aware of Larry when I was with United Artists," Paul says. "And I very much liked the sound of his records. I had been writing some with Michael Jackson, who wanted to produce me, and I was

working with Pablo Cruise. I had many different requests to produce me, but I was assessing the direction I wanted to go and I wanted a change of environment. LA is a little too slick and I wanted to go to Nashville. I was very much aware of Nashville and knew about the relaxed atmosphere there. Larry and I met about nine months ago, and he said, 'Let's go in and cut a well-produced album with good material.'"

Cut in one week in January, the album more than met Anka's expectations. He and Butler have become friends as well as business partners, and he is coming back to Nashville for his next album.

"I was so elated with Larry, I said, 'I'm giving you extra points,'" Anka continues. "He cares about the art and he cares about the project. He is not involved with any publishing hanky-panky—he didn't even play me one of his songs. He wanted me to do the best songs available. That is the kind of philosophy I believe in. We have made a commitment with each other over a period of time. We are going into business and exploring areas we can get into and deliver—publishing, motion pictures, and anything that revolves around music. It is Larry Butler's time now. He is on top and it is up to him how long he wants to stay there."

**L**arry Butler has been gearing for this level of success since he was a child. He likes to tell of going to the piano at the age of four and surprising his folks by picking out melodies. He was on television for nine consecutive years as a youth in Florida. He studied classical piano and entered competitions. When he worked at Tree Publishing in the early '60s, he literally ran down the street to Capitol Records when he heard about a job opening for producer. Butler got the job and has been on the move ever since.

When I last talked to Butler (on a Saturday afternoon, remember), he said he planned to be back in Nashville the following Thursday. On Thursday, I dropped by his office for a minute and casually inquired if Butler had returned. "No," said Sharon, a lady who helps run Butler's business. "He said he might be back Friday, but I don't know. We haven't heard from him. He might be back tomorrow or he may not come back for a few more days. I don't know where he is."

So, when he is not tied down in the studio, Butler fades in and out of view like an afternoon shadow moving across the wall, enjoying solitude on his private bus, hanging out with Paul Anka in Vegas, and dropping in on old friends like Roger Miller in Santa Fe. Butler is both an open and closed book. Like most good books, I suspect the real Larry Butler can be discovered somewhere between the lines, or more appropriately perhaps, between the grooves of those best-selling records he carefully packages with taste, imagination and good musical sense. ■

# Rex Allen, Jr. Not Just a Son of a Singing Cowboy

By Bob Allen

In recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in the Western music and cowboy music of the 1940s and early 1950s. At least some of the credit for putting the "Western" back into country must go to Rex Allen, Jr., son of the famous singing cowboy star of yesteryear.

This is not to say that Rex, Jr. is any sort of musical clone, riding across the airways doing revival shows of his father's greatest hits. Far from it. Rather, he has overcome the burdens and stigmas that can come from being a "junior" in the music business; and he has used the musical heritage and remarkable vocal talents that he inherited from his father to forge a style of his own that calls on a number of more contemporary musical influences. The result is both country and urbane, traditional and contemporary.

Allen's talents and musical development seemed to reach a new plateau in 1980 with the release of *Oklahoma Rose*, a lovely "concept" album. Through the individual songs on *Rose*—many of them written or co-written by Rex, Jr.—the story unfolds of a fictional young woman who leaves Oklahoma for Hollywood in search of dreams that never quite materialize. The story is told—and sometimes merely inferred—eloquently, through the words and melodies of songs that range in origin and influence from traditional cowboy to contemporary country-rock. On *Oklahoma Rose*, Rex, Jr. also makes his debut as producer.

The winner of *Country Music Magazine's* 1979 "Bullet Award" for Entertainer of the Year, Rex Allen, Jr. first gained significant attention as a recording artist in the mid-1970s with the release of *Can You Hear Those Pioneers*, his first major hit. His career with Warner Brothers Records now spans seven albums and numerous hit singles, including *The Great Mail Robbery*, *Me And My Broken Heart*, *Two Less Lonely People*, and *I'm Getting Good At Missing You*.

Allen, who is now 33, began his recording career in Los Angeles in 1966 with Liberty U.A. Records. But this association was cut short when he was drafted into the Army. He was headed for advanced infantry training, but at the last minute he was rerouted into the Special Services, where he worked as an entertainer.

Back in Los Angeles a couple of years later, he resumed recording and worked the thriving small club circuit in southern California. But, as he recalls, "I knew I couldn't stay there. I would have gotten caught in a trap like too many artists do. I would've ended up playing the Palomino Club once every six weeks for \$100 a night for the rest of my life."

In 1971, with his wife Judy and their shared savings of \$600, Allen moved to Nashville, and the going for the first few years was not particularly easy. "It was six or seven months before I played my first date," he recalls. "My income that first year was less than \$3,000."

After recording unsuccessfully for producer Shelby Singleton's Plantation Records, Rex moved on to Jack Clement's short-lived JMI Records where he met with a similar lack of success. "That was at the time that he had all those great people over there who were just starting out: Bob McDill, Wayland Holyfield, and Don Williams. We were all trying to develop the sound that Don Williams finally came out with."

After leaving JMI, Allen hit a low point where, "I said to my agent, 'Look, we're going to have to come up with something or I'm going to have to give up and become a studio engineer or start pumping gas in this town!'"

At that point, producer Larry Butler and Dial Records, the production arm of Tree International Music Publishers, came into the picture. "We did a demo record, and within ten days, it was sold to Warner Brothers. *The Great Mail Robbery*, my first single, actually was recorded in that

first demo session."

Today, when he's not touring, Rex, Jr., Judy, and their recently-arrived son, Rex Wyatt Allen (born April 12, 1980), lead a quiet life in Nashville. "I'm one of those people who likes to go to bed at eight o'clock and get up at five," he laughs. "It's a well-kept secret that I've lived in Nashville for ten years now. I keep an extremely low profile. I'm not part of the 'Nashville Society.' And I don't care to be."

I really hadn't had an opportunity to talk to Rex since around the time he won *Country Music's* "Entertainer of the Year Award." So when we did finally sit down for this interview, at Warner Brothers' Nashville offices, it was sort of like catching up on old times.

## What kind of year has 1980 been for you?

A really busy one! I don't know what it is, but it seems like during a recession, my business gets better. From July 24th through October 15th, I was home six days. In 1980, I worked over 150 shows. I worked clubs, private gatherings, cock-fights! [laughs] I was just workin' everything! In fact, it finally got to the point where I was out too much. I finally looked at what I was doing to myself and said, "I believe I've enjoyed about as much of this as I can stand!"

My life had gotten to be just like the lyrics to that song, *You're Gonna Be A Star*, that I wrote for the *Oklahoma Rose* album: "You're gonna be a star/you're gonna have your name in lights/you're gonna have an unlisted phone/a face that is known . . . /and no life of your own." I had been singing that song in my shows for about six months before I finally realized that those lyrics were like a Freudian slip! I realized just how personal the song was, and that my life had become just one bus tour and one airport after another. I was falling into the same trap, and there for a

while, I felt like I was losing my personality. Finally, I just had to sit down and reorganize everything.

**Did having a son have something to do with that decision, too?**

Yes. That changed my priorities considerably. Having a son is the greatest experience I've ever had! [smiles] Judy and I were married 13 years before Wyatt was born, and he's a pistol! It's a great experience being a father. Nobody can tell you until you experience the first day when your child learns how to smile, and then the day he first learns to laugh. It's really fun! Judy and I put off having a child for a long time because of the way my business is. Hell, when you're gone six or seven months of the year, that's no time to have kids! All it would come to is I'd come home some day and my kid would look at me and say, "Well, it's Uncle Daddy!"

**What else have you been up to since we [Country Music] last spoke with you?**

Since the last time I did an interview with you all, I was building the proverbial big white house on the hill—what every star is supposed to do. Our dream house. Then later, I found out my dreams were nightmares! [laughs] I got moved into it and realized I didn't want to spend the time and energy it takes to keep up a 4,500 square-foot home. Mowing lawns and all that. So Judy and I sold it and moved back into town [Nashville] into a nice-sized home in a nice area. And that's given us the freedom where if we want to live in L.A. or Tucson for three months out of the year, we can do it. And this way, I can also do what I really want to do, which is have about a 40-foot boat parked someplace down around Freeport. I'd like to do that in the next few years . . . I don't know. . . . Do other entertainers that you talk to have five-year plans and ten-year plans? Really, I'm curious about that. . . .

**I don't know. Some of them do, but then the next time you talk with them, they've usually all been changed around anyway.**

Well, I try and make plans. I mean, as much as I love Ernest Tubb, I would hate to be E. T.'s age and still have going on the

Rex, in the studio with Margo Smith.





When he's not touring, Rex enjoys family life with his wife Judy and their son Wyatt. His father, Rex Allen, Sr. (pictured with Rex in middle photo) was a famous singing cowboy in the 1930s and 1940s western movies (photo left).

road as my only hobby. For a long time there, if somebody asked me what my hobby was, I'd tell them I didn't have any. Just music. But hopefully, from 1981 through 1985, I'm going to have the time to cultivate some hobbies again. I'd like to learn to play golf again and to become a pretty good sailor. Maybe get another airplane and become a really good pilot. And enjoy my life again.

It's not that I haven't enjoyed going on the road. I still love it: the roar of the greasepaint and the smell of the crowd! [laughs] But there are other things in life

that should be more important than that. And finally, I think, after 33 years of life, I've maybe grown up a little bit and become aware of that. I think so.

**Do you still intend to do some live shows in 1981?**

Yes, but I only plan to do about 70 shows a year from now on, and spend more time writing and recording. I want to get more involved with my publishing business along with my brother Curt, and look for some outside interests, quite possibly producing some other artists. I had dinner with Minnie Pearl. Mrs. Cannon, I call

her, and she was cute! [grins] She said, "Rex, there's only one thing you need to do: you need to get involved in some businesses outside of this one." And she's totally right, as she usually is. You need to go into something else part time, not so much for financial protection as for your peace of mind. You need something to occupy your time that is not involved with whether or not your record is on the charts on KLAC in Los Angeles, or whether this is happening or that is happening.

**I read somewhere that you were going to join the Grand Ole Opry.**

No, I tried to. Through Minnie, I tried to do some work for the Opry. But it never worked out. I'm not going to bad-mouth anybody. It's just that they... [hesitates then grins sadly]... they just never called. I guess I'm not a big enough act for them. **What sort of plans do you have for this year in terms of records? *Oklahoma Rose* was a concept album. You recently made the statement: "To me, 95 percent of all country albums — including my own, except for maybe *Ridin' High* — lack any kind of direction or statement or credibility." I guess from that statement, we can assume that your new album, *Cat's In The Cradle*, is a concept album, too.**

It's a concept album, yeh. You've got to know this real fast: from now on, I'm not going to do any more albums that are not concept- or theme-oriented. My albums, as well as about 99 percent of all other country albums that are released are basically composed of two or three single records and the rest filler cuts. The exceptions are my *Oklahoma Rose* album, Willie Nelson's *Red Headed Stranger*, and maybe one or two others. Mickey Newbury's made some concept albums, but they're so totally out in left field that it's hard to tell what they're about unless you talk to Newbury!

**Did you really used to have that attitude when you went into the studio yourself? You know, just find six or seven half-way decent songs to fill in around the singles?**

Yeh, I did have that attitude. And I feel that way about my albums. You know, I had this same conversation with Bill Anderson about a year ago, and he said, "You're right. We should do something about it. We should change." And I said, "I'm doing it, but I shouldn't be. You're the one who should be doing it. You're the one who's been in the business for 30 years. You're the one who's one of the highest-grossing songwriters of all time. You should be leading the way. Not me." And he said, "You're absolutely right. Please don't listen to my new album!"

But I was right! Any album that I record or produce from here on out will have some kind of theme to it. As far as I'm concerned, it's senseless for a major recording artist to go into the studio and do an album without having something to say. And I think that will change. It will have to change.

**What's the theme of your new *Cat's In The Cradle* LP, then?**

It's about another fictitious person like [Oklahoma] Rose. I'm not going to talk about this new album in the press much, like I did with Rose. If you want to know what the concept's about, then buy the album.

**Maybe I can get somebody here at Warner Brothers to give me a copy. . . .**

No. [laughs] I'll tell you! The entire album is based around the Harry Chapin song, *Cat's In The Cradle*. I don't want to end up like the guy in that song, you see. The guy has a son, and the son grows up before he realizes that they've never had any time to get to know each other.

**You and your brother Curt handled all the production on this new album. How did you manage to get the leverage to do that?**

I've always been involved with the production of my albums, to some extent, even though I didn't really get an album liner credit for it until *Oklahoma Rose*. I first worked with Larry Butler, and he was a great producer. But his approach was, more or less, "We'll do it my way and don't open your mouth except to sing." That went well until my wife and I had written *Can You Hear Those Pioneers*. Around that point, Larry and I came to a disagreement as to what direction we were going with my music.

Then I started working with Norro [Wilson], and that was when I began having some creative input into my music and started looking for songs myself and trying to make my records sound better. Then finally, this time around, they agreed to let my brother and I produce the album ourselves. It remains to be seen how successful it will be; but I feel that the album is more well-rounded and it has more of me in it. It speaks from the heart and soul of the way I want my music to sound. And Warner Brothers was very good about the whole thing—especially since we came in about \$10,000 under budget!

**You actually had quite a bit to do with the production of *Can You Hear Those Pioneers*, which was a big hit for you a few years back. I understand you had a lot of difficulty getting that song released.**

That's right. I had worked a date in Indianapolis, and I'd driven up alone from Nashville and was coming back. I wasn't making enough money to pay for a hotel [laughs], so I had to drive back after the show! It was late at night. For years, I had always done Western music in my shows, and people would always say to me, "Gee, I wish you could do more songs like that," or, "I wish you'd do more of your dad's old songs and the Pioneers' old songs," and so on. Well, I was driving back this particular night, and you know how you sort of flip across the AM dial late at night? I was doing that and I heard this announcer on a station way off in the distance—and to this day, I wish I knew who it was. And he played Eddy Arnold's *Cattle Call*, and

after the song was over, he said, "It sure would be nice if somebody could put a little 'Western' back in the country sound." And that was the line that I had been waiting for for four years! I literally started writing the song on napkins and finished it up on a coffee cup from McDonald's.

After I got back home, I got up the next morning and played it for Judy, and she says, "Yeh, it's good . . . but you left some things out." She said I should make it more about my dad and more about Gene [Autry], and that sort of thing. And so the two of us sat down and rewrote it.

Then I sat on that song for two years trying to get it released! I pitched it to the Statler Brothers, and they didn't want it—thank God!! Then I cut it two different times myself before I could convince anybody to release it. Larry [Butler] recorded a version of it in a Western swing style, which was totally against the way it should have been done. Then I convinced him to go back and recut it with me, only this time it came off too slow.

So at this time my brother was working as an engineer in Jack Clement's studio, and I got him to run off a copy of the master recording of it for me. And at my own expense, I took the tape out to California and rented a studio on my own. First I sped the master up a tone and a half, and then I got the original Sons Of The Pioneers to come down to the studio and I put them on the record. Then I got my dad to come down and sing on it. He does the yodel at the end. Then I brought it back to Nashville and put Wade Ray playing all the original fiddle licks. The music on the record is very similar to the way it was played in those days. All the licks are similar. It was all done very precisely. When I got it all together, I *knew* I had a hit record. But Warner Brothers *still* wouldn't release it. But finally, after two and a half years of struggling, I did convince them to release it. And it was my biggest hit ever.

**Growing up as the son of one of America's most famous singing cowboy stars could have been a sort of fantasy childhood for you. Was it?**

No, it wasn't. First of all, Dad never worked there in southern California where I was raised. And he was pretty much finished with pictures by the time I was old enough to know what it was all about. To give you an idea, I never saw one of my dad's movies in a theater. I was too young. I do remember going on the road with him to rodeos, and not understanding it all, and not understanding why people wanted his autograph. He was just Dad to me. Later, he always impressed upon me that it was a *business*, that it was the way he made his living. Consequently, unlike a lot of entertainers today, I have *always* looked at what I do as a business.

**How did your father feel when you let him know that you had decided to go into show business yourself?**

I know for a fact that my parents proba-

bly did not want me to become what I am today. The only reason why is that they understood that the life style involved can be very damaging to both an individual and that individual's family life. Let's face it; if you're a doctor, you can always go out and practice, because there's always someone looking for a doctor. But there isn't always somebody looking for another hill-billy singer! [laughs]

**Do you feel that being a "junior" in this business has helped you or hindered you?**

Well, look at it this way: I'm the only "junior" in the business who's made it whose father is still alive. The only one. I don't think being the son of Rex Allen meant a whole lot in Nashville. But in the beginning, at times, it was difficult to overcome. Especially with old-line radio people. I think sometimes they would tend to think, "Don't play his record. Don't give it to Rex Allen, Jr., because he's already got it made anyway. He's got nothing to worry about." But I was the one who had all the car payments and everything!

I remember when I had my first record out, my mom and dad sat down with me and told me, "If you're going to change your name, now's the time to do it." Because, at that point, I had been thinking for some time that I would change it. I was going to become Duke Allen, because that was a nickname my parents had for me when I was growing up. I was all set to try it that way when one day I was driving down the L.A. freeway, listening to the radio, and a record came on and the announcer said, "This is Buddy Allen, son of Buck Owens." So right then, I realized that it didn't make a lot of difference whether I called myself Rex, Jr. or Duke Allen. Sooner or later, everybody was going to find out who I was, anyway.

**Do you eventually want to become involved in movies yourself, like your father was?**

There's a possibility I'll be doing one early this year. There are some people talking to me right now about doing a picture in Arizona and California in the coming months. It would be a musical picture, more than likely, a Western. And if it all works out, I would be the tentative star. Paul Williams would also be in it as my sidekick. I haven't signed any contracts yet, but if it comes through, it sounds like it could be great.

If that happens, it's going to make for a busy year. I've got my album to finish—in fact, I've got to be at a session in fifteen minutes! Then if we do the movie, we'll have a soundtrack album to go with it. And then, because of the duet I just had out with Margo Smith [*Cup of Tea*], they [Warner Brothers] want me to do a duet album with her early in the year. . . . So, I just don't know how in the hell I'm going to do it all! [laughs] I was just telling you a little while ago how I was trying to slow down. But now look! If it all works out, I'll be so busy in 1981, I won't know where I am! ■



# 20 Questions with LACY J. DALTON

By Michael Bane

1.

Your voice has practically become a trademark, but what did you think the very first time you heard your voice on tape?

I wanted to quit! I *hated* it! I thought, "Oh God, is that *really* what I sound like?"

2.

It's not your basic woman country singer voice. . . .

Well, it isn't. It's unusual, and after all these years of being crazy and living the way I do, there's even more *character* in it. I like it better now than I ever did before. It used to be a lot shriller. . . .

3.

All those nights on the road have taken some of the shrill out of it?

All those nights mellowed it out, yes. There was a time in my life when I was turned down by a producer in California because I sounded too much like Joan Baez! I'm not kidding! My

voice has changed a great deal—a lot of it because I wanted it to change. I wanted to get more texture in it. I was tired of the flat, kind of pure sound it had. I started out with a very pure, clear, folk singer type of voice.

4.

How long ago was that?

I've been singing for 14 years. Sometime during the first five or six years, I got sick of listening to it that way. So I started singing weird things, like psychedelic rock 'n' roll. *a*

5.

How would you describe your style now?

There sure have been a lot of different influences in my singing, and I think that I pick up a little bit from every one that I loved. And I love lots of singers. And I've learned a lot from many *good* singers. . . .

6.

Who comes to mind quickly?

The woman I learned the most from was an obscure New

York City folkie by the name of Karen Dalton, from whom I borrowed my name. She started out singing country blues, but she had a voice more like Billie Holiday. But what set her apart and made her such a great teacher was that she knew about phrasing and things.

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**Who's your favorite female singer, then?**

My favorite? Karen Dalton, always will be. There's nobody better. There's nobody whose phrasing is better. I also like Nina Simone very much.

**8.**

**Is phrasing what you zero in on in a vocalist?**

Yes. I love vocalists who phrase well. You know, I love Dolly Parton for a completely different reason. Dolly Parton really *feels* the melody. She has a wonderful sense of melody. Some people learn licks; Dolly feels them. When she sings those little trills and things . . . well, I've been learning some of her songs, because I'm going to be standing in for her on a television show. There's one song: [*breaks into song*] "Old friends can't hold a candle to you-ou-ou" [*with Partonesque trill at the "ou-ou-ou"*] . . . Those are not learned licks. Those are *felt* licks. Some singers tend to copy licks, and I think they're very predictable. But not Dolly. I used to love Bonnie Bramlett. I used to think Bonnie Bramlett was incredible, but I haven't heard her in a long time. I liked Tracy Nelson, and I liked Maria Muldaur because she explored her voice so well. She did so many things unusual with her voice. I like singers who do unusual things.

**9.**

**Did you listen a lot to blues or r&b?**

Yes, as a matter of fact, I did. Several of my boyfriends were blues collectors. Back in the 1960s, I had one friend who was not only a wonderful bluegrass musician but a great blues record collector as well. And it was due to his actually sitting me down and *forcing* me to listen to people like Robert Johnson that really turned me on to the blues. When I first heard the old country blues, I just didn't *understand*. I couldn't understand

what those people were doing. The music was out of time and out of tune sometimes. You know how it is for somebody who's only heard country and western music all her childhood. But the more I listened, the more I began to understand, and the more I began to love it. He had a wonderful collection of ethnic old folk singers and really obscure blues people, and I got a real good dose of listening to that. Then the leader of my next band, who was also my sweetheart, was into rhythm and blues, and he did the same thing for me. My career and my education has been a lot due to the people around me educating me—saying sit down and listen to this. Most of them told me I was awful, too. They said I shouldn't even *try* to sing, unless I got some of this background. But that kind of criticism just made me try all the harder.

**10.**

**If all my sweethearts kept telling me I couldn't sing, I think I'd be discouraged. . . .**

Well, it's just that I always thought I could sing. It did make me feel bad, and it was good that it did, because it made me grow. I've come to find out in later years that growth always hurts.

**11.**

**How do you feel about the whole image of "lady outlaw?"**

I think it all misses the mark. In the first place, I don't know who I am from one day to the next. I don't. I really don't. One day I want to wear the frilliest dress in the world and set my hair, and the next day I want to wear dirty blue jeans that haven't been washed in two weeks and ride a horse all day. I'm not really comfortable with any . . . and it's really unfortunate, because it's much more comfortable to be a product than to be a person. If you can say, well, I'm a lady outlaw, or I'm this or I'm that, it's easier. But I don't know what the hell I am. Do you know what you are, really?

**12.**

**C'mon, writers don't count. Does the "outlaw" image bother you the way it bothered Waylon, for instance?**

At least outlaw is kind of vague these days. I mean, if they

can call me an outlaw—I don't even smoke pot! I don't! I'm the most boring person I know. All I do is drink beer. . . .

**13.**

**Do you have any other vices the world should know about?**

Yea, I eat too much. But I don't think I need to tell people that. I think they know already. I like to drink. Don't like drugs. I'm too old to do that anymore. . . .

**14.**

**How old are you, anyway?**

Thirty-four.

**15.**

**Thirty-four! Should we bring in a wheelchair?**

I feel great, though. People always say, "Aren't you a little *old* to be starting your career?" Lacy Dalton, the singing grandmother, strikes again! My manager tells me over and over, "Don't talk about how old you are in interviews!" My manager just *dies!* "You're not that old. Quit saying you're old." I don't *feel* old, but thirty-four is not nineteen. Thank goodness it isn't. I was *so* miserable when I was nineteen.

**16.**

**Since you were nowhere near as successful when you were younger, you must be doing something right. . . .**

I'm really glad it didn't happen then. It *could* have—there were a couple of times when it almost did. In fact, at one point about ten years ago, I made a soundtrack for a movie that was never released. And I was offered a record contract at that time, but only if I would leave my band. It was a band I really cared about—a magic band. Friends, and I didn't want to leave them. And I'm really glad I made that decision then. I didn't have the experience then; I didn't have anything to write about. I hadn't *lived* enough. I mean, I'd lived a lot at that time, but I hadn't *lived*. I had no wisdom at all to give. I think it's nice to have something to give, and what little I have, I'm giving . . . in my declining years."

**17.**

**You've gotten reviews that are nothing short of phenomenal; a couple of times I thought you were going to be canonized. Are**

**you ever afraid that all the publicity is going to backfire?**

You know, that bothered me. It kind of scared me. God, I didn't want everybody to think I'm hype! Up until the last year, I'd never been on a concert stage with 30,000 people [*in the audience*]. I still haven't quite made that transition. I still can't be as warm and *loving* and as on top of it on a big stage like that. I haven't quite done that, and I'm afraid . . . I don't want people to expect *miracles* out of me. I also don't want people to think I'm hype. I've worked too long and too hard and I care too much.

**18.**

**Sometimes in all the media blitz, the artist gets caught in the middle.**

I had an interviewer ask me, "People are saying you're all hype. How does that make you feel?" I didn't know that's what they were saying until he told me!

**19.**

**A person at your record company told me that such a question would not be appreciated. So answer it—are you all hype?**

[*laughter*] It was weird, you know! I mean, what do you say when somebody says that? All I finally ended up saying to the guy was, "Well, when you've worked 14 years for something, and you've worked as hard as I have, you don't care what *anybody* says! If they think it's hype, then it's their problem."

**20.**

**What do you feel when writers keep comparing you to Janis Joplin?**

Well, I liked her, and it's a compliment. I hope that I don't sound too much like *anybody*, even though we all borrow from everybody out there. I still like to feel like there's something different in what I do. About Janis, in a way, it's a great compliment, because I loved her—her energy, the amount of sheer intelligence. I never saw Janis as a pathetic figure. Having met her several times, she was a big, strong woman, and she was bright and knew exactly what she was doing. . . . Those people were very hip, aware people, and what they wanted to do was live hard, die young, and be beautiful. ■



# Sylvia's Plan to Make Her Dreams Come True

By Bob Campbell

**T**he big, gray, two-story house sits on Music Square East, snuggled right next door to MCA Records and smack in the middle of the hustle and bustle of Nashville's Music Row. The building is the newly remodeled home of Pi-Gem Music, the publishing production empire Tom Collins has built in a few short years. Collins is a distinct leader of the new Nashville breed — bright, well-dressed, personable and full of business savvy. He has produced Ronnie Milsap, Charley Pride, Jim Ed Brown and Helen Cornelius, Barbara Mandrell and so on and so on. A

new member of his recording stable is 24-year-old Sylvia Kirby-Allen, a former secretary in his old office down the street. Sylvia combines a rare mixture of talent, beauty, and brains, and she recently finished her first album for RCA. This afternoon, just as I arrive, she is busy rehearsing for a short radio promotional tour she will begin tomorrow with Bill Anderson, Bobby Bare and Alabama. She leaves for Springfield, Missouri, tonight at midnight on Anderson's bus.

The back stairs of the Pi-Gem building lead down to a sitting area surrounded by a

whole bunch of small rooms — writer's rooms they are called. From nine to five most every day, Pi-Gem staff writers sit with guitar or piano and churn out some of the catchy tunes you hear on the radio. In one room, Sylvia and the rhythm section of Anderson's band are rehearsing. The band will back Sylvia on the short gig. It is 2:30 and they are nearly finished.

"Let's do it a little faster," Sylvia says, following one run through. "It's good to do it faster than the record — gives it an edge."

The band picks up the tempo and Sylvia sings *Tumbleweed* one more time, this ver-

sion more crisp than the previous try. "Yeh, that's it," says Sylvia after they finish. The next song is *Drifter*, her current single and the title tune of her album. The guys and Sylvia make it through *Drifter* with no problem and the rehearsal session is over.

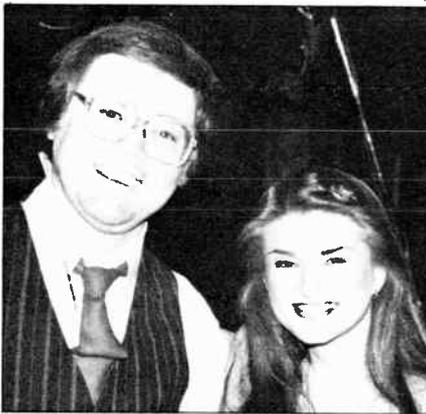
"Hey, this is it. This is all we've got to do," Sylvia says, grinning and looking for approval from the band. "Everybody knows *Johnny B. Goode*, I think. We don't need to do that now. Say, you guys are quick. You have the songs down pretty good ... I'm singing through my nose, though. I've got to get this cold cured by tomorrow. I'm already loaded up on antibiotics."

Sylvia says the antibiotics are making her light-headed and even more talkative than usual. But her conversation is hardly distracting. Sylvia absolutely bubbles with energy and apparent goodwill toward everybody. She is what we Southerners call "sweet"—not syrupy, but down-to-earth and unaffected. With her willowy frame, and her long brown hair framing dark eyes, she turns heads when she walks down Music Row. But Sylvia honestly fails to notice all the fuss. "I don't see myself as pretty. I mean I have to put on my makeup just to look decent. You ought to see me in the morning when I get up. I wouldn't go anywhere without my makeup."

Actually, Sylvia wears little makeup, but she does pay close attention to her appearance. (Immediately after the rehearsal, she tries to make an appointment to get her nails manicured and repaired before she leaves on the road.) Sylvia pays attention to *everything* concerning her career. She has followed a blueprint for success ever since she was a young girl growing up in Kokomo, Indiana. Thousands of kids in one-horse towns all across America go to sleep at night with dreams of stardom dancing across their pillows. Most of those dreams burn away quickly in the harsh light of day. Sylvia polished her dream and waited.

By all rights and good sense, Sylvia should never have made it to Nashville, much less corralled a recording contract. She had too much going against her. She was a plain Jane growing up, a shy girl who wore no makeup and was overweight. She never even went on a date until she was 19 and living in Nashville. Her parents were poor, and she led a sheltered life under the strict rules of her father. As a teenager, she saw only one movie, *Romeo and Juliet*, and that was with her high school English class as a school project. So she escaped into the never-never land of music. She loved to sing, and would practice in front of a mirror, pretending to be on stage. Sylvia swears that from the time she was a small girl, she knew she would be a singer.

"I always wanted to be a singer," Sylvia recalls, now finished with rehearsals and phone calls and comfortable in front of a tape recorder in yet another small cubicle



**Tom Collins was Sylvia's first "boss" in Nashville. Now he's her producer.**

at Pi-Gem. "I have thought about it a lot, and ever since I can remember, I have always known what I was gonna do and what I was gonna be. I knew it. I can remember back to two years old. My mom taught me how to tie my shoe at two and I can remember. I can remember her teaching me how to sing *You Are My Sunshine*. I pushed me. Nobody ever pushed me. My parents said, 'Do what you want to do.' I always knew I would do it and be successful at it."

What Sylvia didn't know was how to go about this business of becoming a singer, particularly since she didn't know anything about the music industry or anyone who had anything at all to do with it. The place to start, she figured, was at *The Little Nashville Opry*, in Nashville, Indiana, about a two-hour drive south from Kokomo. Many of the top country artists performed there each week. Now Sylvia could draw: she had a natural gift for art. So when she was 15, she sketched Tanya Tucker and Dolly Parton and talked her family into driving to *The Little Nashville Opry* so she could give each singer her drawing. Her determination overshadowed her shyness and she met both artists and gave them her work. Sylvia holds fond memories of her meeting with Dolly.

"Dolly was great," Sylvia remembers. "I knocked on the back door of her bus and she came to the door. This was about 1972. I told her I had drawn her picture and she said, 'Come on in.' We talked for a few minutes and she said, 'Oh, that's beautiful. Lots of people draw my picture, but this is one of the best ones I've had.' She showed me through her bus and I told her I sang and wanted to know how to get started. She said, 'Honey, all my brothers and sisters are trying hard to get started. Even with my help, it's real hard.' Dolly was real nice, though, and sweet."

Sylvia says she ran into Dolly at RCA not too long ago and reminded her of their first meeting. Dolly failed to remember Sylvia, but she asked, "Was I nice?" When Sylvia told her she had been sweet, Dolly sighed "whew."

Sylvia soon realized she needed to go to Nashville, and again persuaded her parents to make the trip. Those first trips were fruitless, to say the least. "We would drive around Music Row and say, 'Well, that looks like a publishing company, or that looks like a record company. Let's go knock on the door.' The first few times we came, my parents and everybody would go knock on doors and they would think, 'Look at these squirrels!' At first, I didn't even know what to say. I'd go, 'Hey, I sing.' 'That's nice,' they'd say."

Learning to operate on a business level was not the only stumbling block in Sylvia's way. There was the matter of her voice, upon which she was betting her future. She didn't know how to sing. Even that didn't discourage her. "When I first heard my voice, I was in tears. I couldn't believe how bad I sounded. I thought that was the most horrible voice I had ever heard. It didn't discourage me because I knew I wasn't ready yet. I knew it was in me but I had to keep working. I figured by the time I was 30, I ought to be singing about right."

Finally, a few doors opened. In late 1975, she met Collins and songwriter Walter Haynes (*Country Bumpkin*), both of whom encouraged her. She had heard Haynes's name on *The Ralph Emery Radio Show* back in Kokomo. "I always listened to Ralph Emery. I took down every name I heard. It was like a course you study in school. I took notes and I also went into record stores and copied down producers' names off of albums."

Collins told her he would call if he needed a female singer for demo work, but Sylvia knew that would probably never happen. So she up and moved to Nashville on the day after Christmas in 1975, a lonely, naive girl in the big city. In early January, she went back to Collins's office.

"I walked back into the office and Tom and a few people were sitting in the front room," Sylvia recalls. "I remember Janie Fricke was there (Collins's secretary at the time). They said, 'Oh, you are back for another visit?' I said, 'No, I've moved down.' There was this silence, and Janie was the first one to speak. She said, 'Are you sure you have done the right thing? It was like, 'oh dear.' They were very worried about me."

Nashville was not quite prepared for the resolve of this Indiana girl. She knocked on doors, met "everybody in town" and ended up as part-time secretary for Collins. Fricke left and Sylvia soon took over as full-time secretary. She was 19 and never been kissed, so to speak. But in February, 1976, Sylvia met Mike Allen, a photographer, whom she married the following year.

Sylvia began working demo sessions at night, gaining needed vocal experience. In 1977, she went on the road with Fricke, singing backup vocals. Normally, she only traveled on the weekends, but Sylvia still

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got a sharp taste of road life. "One night we played a high school auditorium and they didn't have dressing rooms. Janie and I ended up dressing in a stall in the ladies' restroom. People were coming in and out and there we were trying to dress and get ready for the show. I learned what the road was really like. It's kind of neat that people think it is glamorous. It really isn't, but it's fun."

During this period, Sylvia auditioned for a vacant spot in Dave and Sugar and came in second to Sue Powell. Producers began noticing Sylvia's voice on demo recordings and started calling Collins, wondering if he planned to record her. Actually, Collins had taken her somewhat for granted. But RCA head Jerry Bradley and Charley Pride noticed her. One day, Collins received two calls from producers and he called Sylvia into his office. He immediately produced a demo on Sylvia and took the tape to Bradley at RCA. Bradley signed Sylvia in early 1979. Her first single, *You Don't Miss A Thing*, was released in the fall of 1979 and reached the Top 40. She started touring with Pride. Her next single, *It Don't Hurt To Dream*, also reached the Top 40 and then she cut *Tumbleweed*, which caught a lot of ears as a slow dance favorite in country discos. The next single, *Drifter*, followed in the same vein—melodic, westernish and sensual like wind across the prairie.

Sylvia can be pleased with herself, and indeed, she radiates a well-scrubbed enthusiasm. She enjoys her life. She likes her record company, likes her music, likes and respects Collins, likes her writer friends at Pi-Gem and loves her husband. And there lies the rub. Her only worry is maintaining a close relationship with husband Mike. She has seen a few show business marriages firsthand, and hopes to avoid the pitfalls that seem to strike many otherwise strong relationships. For instance, her time is consumed more and more by her career, and she wants to insure that Mike maintains his own individuality.

"He depends more on me now and I used to depend more on him," Sylvia says candidly. "If it weren't for him, I wouldn't have eaten a lot of the time. But we talk about it. He needs to keep his identity. He photographs car shows and is giving up work now to go on the road with me. I am getting more fan mail than I can answer and he is helping me with that. More and more things are taking up my and his time. Mike is 35 and almost a father figure to me. Anything I ask him, he has an answer.

Awareness is a gift within itself, and Sylvia will probably handle well any problems that enter her life. She is a planner as well as a dreamer ("I have my whole life mapped out"), and seems to have skipped the craziness stage that throws most of us off-track at some point in our lives. Hey, her idea of a good time is going to the movies... she has to catch up on all the flicks she missed back in Kokomo.

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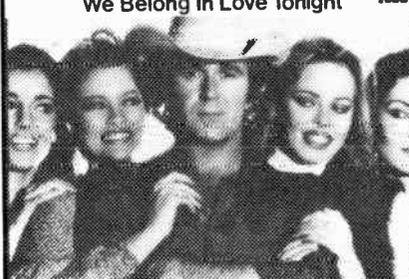
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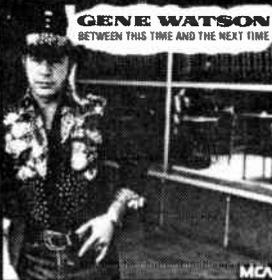
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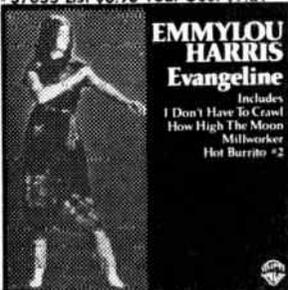
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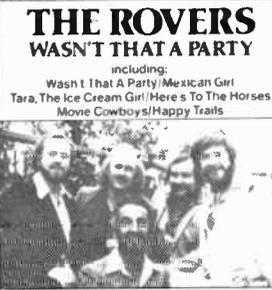
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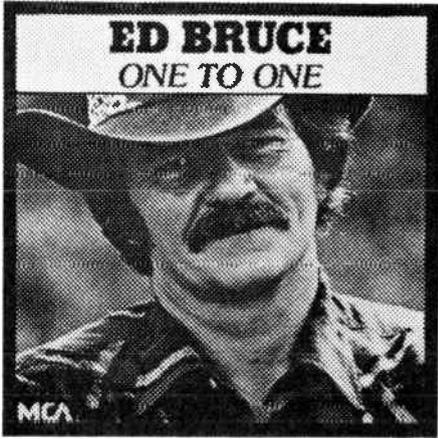
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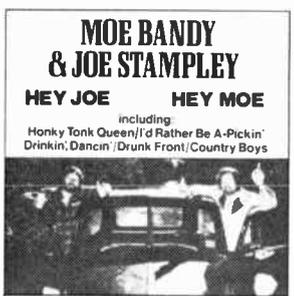
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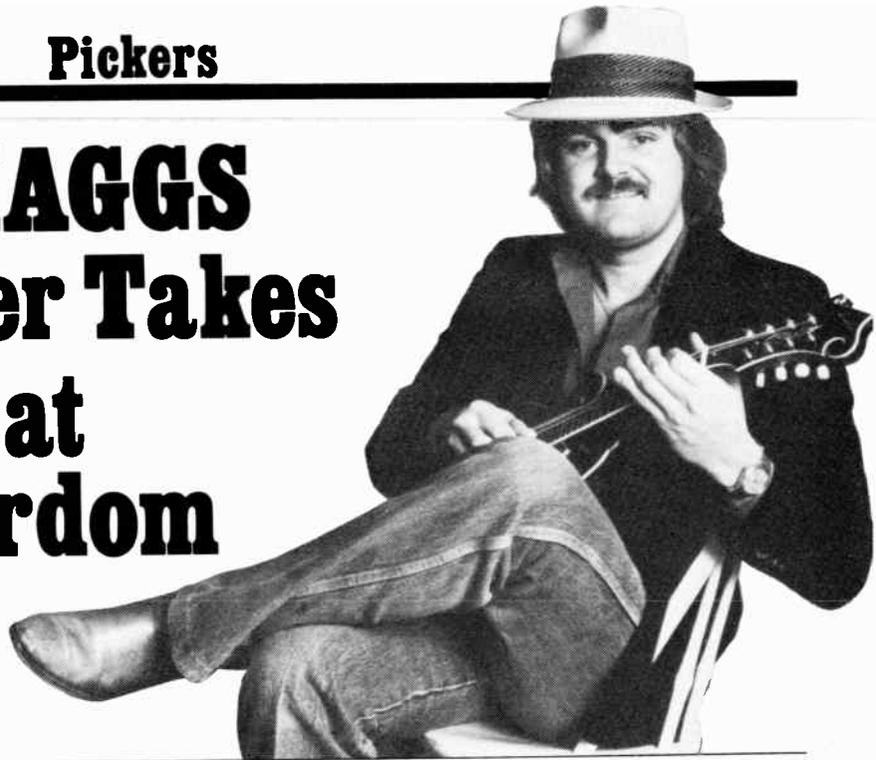
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# RICKY SKAGGS A Superpicker Takes a Shot at Superstardom



By Rich Kienzle

**R**icky Skaggs has been busy the past few days, wrestling with details in meetings with his attorney, getting ready to sign his first big record deal, to emerge from his place as instrumental jack-of-all-trades with Emmylou Harris and Buck White, from his peerless reputation within the bluegrass field where he started, into the mainstream of country music. It hasn't been easy arranging this interview. Studio dates conflicted; last-minute delays cropped up before the connection was finally made.

For sure, it is something new to Ricky; he's dealt primarily with small labels in the past. This time, the spotlight will be following *him* across the stage, and the records will be in *all* the stores, not just those specializing in bluegrass or having a good bluegrass section. CBS/Epic, his new label, is gearing up for that; his first single's due out in less than two weeks. It seems like something out of the past: a plain-spoken young man from the mountains, raised on the traditional values, holding close to the simple country religion he grew up with, still worshipping the traditional music he and his parents played together for years, suddenly finds himself in the big time of Nashville. The scene's been acted out before, and while some have succeeded, many others have not, and never could have.

But that would be selling Ricky Skaggs short. A child prodigy in bluegrass music, he was a professional musician by the age of 15, working with bluegrass legend Ralph Stanley. From there, despite a setback, his career gradually inched upward as his abilities on fiddle, mandolin and guitar became known and more people heard his pure mountain voice with two top bluegrass bands. His recording and concert work with Emmylou Harris as a member of her

Hot Band drew acclaim from people who knew Bill Monroe as but a plaque in the Hall of Fame; it gave Emmy's tradition-based music true authority, reaching a peak with her *Roses In The Snow* LP of last year—a superb example of traditional, undiluted bluegrass that succeeded commercially beyond anyone's expectations and brought Skaggs even greater recognition. Two of his solo albums on the small Sugar Hill label also garnered glowing reviews, particularly the searing album of vocal duets with bluegrass/jazz guitarist Tony Rice in the classic tradition of the Louvin Brothers and the Blue Sky Boys. And now, with the Big Guns behind him, he's ready to bring his traditional music into the 1980s with a minimum of compromise.

Ricky was born in 1954 in Cordell, Kentucky, a tiny hamlet no longer on the map ("the post office fell in the creek about five years ago," he says). It was mountain country in eastern Kentucky, close to Loretta Lynn's home turf, and far from any major city. His parents, Mr. and Mrs. Hobart Skaggs, had a deep love of traditional mountain music, and by the age of three, Ricky was singing harmony with his mother. One time, when Ricky was five, Hobart Skaggs, a welder by trade, was snowed in in Ohio where he was working. He returned home with a tiny, flatback mandolin for Ricky, who took to it immediately and began learning basic chords. Hobart, a guitarist, renewed his own enthusiasm for playing and soon the Skaggs family was performing at theaters, churches and local schools.

Ricky began listening to the radio, particularly to Cincinnati's 50,000 watt

WCKY. "CKY was a hillbilly station," Ricky says today. "They played bluegrass, which wasn't called bluegrass at the time. The Stanley Brothers were kings on there, man, and Bill Monroe, Jimmy Martin and the Osborne Brothers. It was all on records, but it had a real big listening audience." He became enthralled with the haunting vocal harmonies of the Stanley Brothers, one of the first bluegrass bands to emerge following Bill Monroe in the forties, an interest which would influence his future.

As Ricky approached his seventh birthday, the Skaggses picked up and moved to Goodlettsville, Tennessee, not far from Nashville, hoping they could help Ricky further develop his obvious talents. He appeared on the Flatt and Scruggs syndicated TV show and received encouragement from Jim & Jesse, among others. His dad tried to get him on the Opry, and got some help from their contacts. "Everybody that we talked to really wanted me to, you know they were pullin' for me. Flatt and Scruggs and Jim & Jesse," he recalls. But Ott Devine at the Opry, recalling problems with the Musicians' Union over using underage pickers, vetoed it. "They said, 'He shouldn't be singin' truck drivin' songs and baby, I'm in love with you. He should be singin' kid songs,' and my dad just didn't go for that at all."

The Skaggs family stayed in Goodlettsville for three years, then began a series of moves as Hobart's welding work took them around the country. While in Nashville, Ricky had started playing guitar, and at the age of 13, inspired by his father's cousin, Eulas Wright, he began playing fiddle. Ricky was still in high school, but his goals were becoming clear.

"I guess I was about 13 or 14, maybe even 15, before I really took it serious and

said, "I would love to make a living out of this and do this professionally. . . ." I just decided I was going to make it if I could at all, if I could just hang in there, and things just kept growin' and gettin' better," he reflects. At age 15, he and his folks were back in Kentucky, and were playing at a high school near Ezel, Kentucky, when he met guitarist Keith Whitley. The same age as Ricky, Whitley had also grown up on the Stanley Brothers. Soon Ricky, his dad, Whitley and his banjoist brother began playing together. They went to a club one night to hear Ralph Stanley (Carter Stanley had died in 1966). When Ralph was late, the club's owner coaxed them up onstage. Ricky and Keith were singing the Stanley harmony when in walked Ralph Stanley ("we just about fainted"). In the summer of 1970, when Ricky and Keith were on their summer vacation, Ralph Stanley took them on the road as part of his act. They went over well, recreating the Stanley harmonies for audiences who had never expected to hear them again. After the pair graduated from high school in 1971, they went on the road with Stanley full-time, Ricky on mandolin, Keith on guitar.

The two kids quickly earned the respect of Stanley's fans, recording with him and making it possible for him to dig back into his repertoire for old numbers. Ricky learned a lot. "Ralph wouldn't tell you what to play, but if you played something that didn't fit he'd tell you so you knew." But by 1972, the road was getting to him, and the money wasn't good. "I wasn't makin' any money with Ralph. At that time Ralph just wasn't hardly makin' that much money. I was just goin' in the hole." He also was getting married (he's since divorced), and needed something steadier. He left, moved to Manassas, Virginia and got a job with a power company. For the first time, he was out of professional music.

"It was the worst thing in the world. I don't know anything that's any worse. I was a high pressure boiler operator, and Good Lord, all these heat pumps and water pumps down in this boiler. It was so noisy all the time. I prayed real hard, and said 'Lord, if you want me back out on the road you better show me a better way than I had.'"

Redemption came with a phone call from Bill Emerson, banjoist with the widely respected Washington, D.C. group the Country Gentlemen. Since Ricky was living near D.C., and the Gentlemen liked his fiddling (they'd never used a fiddle), he was invited to record with them. Six months after he'd quit the road, Ricky was a member of the band, whose bluegrass repertoire included contemporary tunes by Bob Dylan and others. It was during that stint that he met Emmylou Harris, who was living in the area, and Linda Ronstadt at a pickin' party. Both loved traditional music, but had never heard anyone sing it up close as authoritatively as Ricky.

Keith Whitley - SHARON & CHERYL



A child prodigy, Ricky became a professional musician at age 15. He played mandolin in Ralph Stanley's Band with Keith Whitley on guitar (middle photo). After a stint with Emmylou Harris' Hot Band (above), Ricky joined Buck White and The Down Home Folks (right).

In 1974 he joined another progressive group, J.D. Crowe and the New South, and a year later he started his own group, Boone Creek. Now he was in charge. The group cut 30 songs in Nashville, and all but ten of them were pop-oriented. Some big labels were interested in what they were doing, but all the potential deals fell through. "I'm just so thankful now that the guy who was tryin' to get us the deal was asking [for] so much money, because it might have turned my life so completely around from what I'm doin' right now. I might have ended up tryin' to be an Eric Clapton or Jeff Beck. It felt like the Lord said 'Look, you're gonna get up there and do what you think is right, but I'm gonna keep my eye on you and make sure you don't do the wrong thing.' I didn't enjoy doing the pop stuff--I did to a certain

extent, but I was always ashamed to take it home and play it for my dad." Two Boone Creek albums of straight bluegrass were released. The pop experiment crumbled.

Emmylou had been trying to get him to join her Hot Band from the beginning. He worked on her first album, and she kept asking. He was reluctant to become a sideman, playing his mandolin, guitar and fiddle and not singing much, but Boone Creek was disintegrating due to internal problems. Though it hurt him to do it, he left in early 1978 to join the Hot Band and the group disbanded. He recalls some of the transitions he had to make, going from small bluegrass clubs and tiny PA systems to the elaborate sound systems Emmylou's band used. "It was hard for me to get used to the electronics onstage," he recalls, "[with] amplifiers, pluggin' in, pluggin' my

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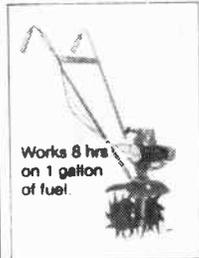
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acoustic guitar in and running it electric. . . . But finally I could hear what I was singin' and playin' [through the monitor system]. I liked that."

For the next two years, Ricky worked with Emmy, recording on all of her LPs except *Elite Hotel*. Originally, it was only his fiddle and mandolin work that she wanted, but soon Ricky became a familiar sight next to Emmy at a mike, a Martin acoustic in his hands. Now for the first time he could concentrate on his guitar playing, rather than alternating between the two other instruments as he did with his former bands. Since he was playing fiddle on tour with Buck White and the Down Home Folks between Emmy's tours, it balanced.

### "I was givin' people a reason to listen to bluegrass...."

"We didn't want to use fiddle and mandolin for everything, and I didn't want to walk offstage [between songs], and she needed another backup acoustic rhythm player. That gave me another instrument to work on, and get brushed back up on. When I was with Emmylou I got down on my fiddle playing, because of the guitar; workin' with Buck White got my fiddle playing back up."

The tours with the Hot Band had mutual benefits. Ricky was acclaimed far beyond the bluegrass circuit, and Emmy's music grew as well. "She asked me to teach her things," he says. "We learned a lot from each other. She learned a lot about the acoustic bluegrass part of the music and I learned a lot of the country kind of thing." With quiet, but forceful pride he adds, "I think *Roses In The Snow* shows what my input in the band actually done as far as the acoustic bluegrass kind of sound that she came out with." Asked what his best recorded work with her was, his reply is quick. "*The Darkest Hour* was my greatest endeavor with Emmylou's music. [I played] most of the acoustic guitar, all the fiddles and mandolins. I felt it was some of the finest work I ever did."

Ricky left the Hot Band amicably last year; it happened in part because of scheduling problems and other commitments, including a government-sponsored Middle East tour with Buck White and the Down Home Folks that made it impossible for him to work with Emmylou on anything but records. "We're still great friends," he adds. "We went through a lot together, we made a lot of great records and sang a lot. But she knew it was time. The bird had got enough wings, it was time to leave the nest. She knows that."

Ricky has more than just the Hot Band under his belt. Two of his albums for the small Sugar Hill label in North Carolina, *Sweet Temptation*, an excellent country bluegrass LP featuring help from the Hot Band, Buck White and Emmy herself, and the *Skaggs & Rice* LP garnered excellent

reviews. The former was even earthier than *Roses* had been, and Emmy's fans and bluegrass purists alike loved it. Unlike Earl Scruggs, who'd been pilloried by many for leaving traditional bluegrass, Ricky's experience was different. "Ninety-nine and nine-tenths of the people I knew understood and loved Emmy's music. They figured I was doin' the best thing for bluegrass that had been done in years. I was givin' people a reason to listen to bluegrass music, takin' it out of the D.C. area where it's so big. I'm not sayin' I'm the only one that done that, but I do feel like I had a big hand in helping with it."

So now Ricky feels he's ready—the stints with Ralph Stanley, the Gentlemen, J.D. Crowe, Boone Creek, Emmylou and Buck White have been crammed with lessons, and he's got them all under his belt. He feels he knows what he wants to do, and his plans are plenty ambitious. His instruments will remain traditional. He is using an 000-21 acoustic, two Gibson mandolins, including an original F-5 from 1924 and a new model made by Tom Ellis of Austin, a five-string fiddle made by Arthur Conner of Virginia, and a Fender Telecaster with Music Man amp, to play rockabilly.

Rockabilly? What is Ricky Skaggs doing with rockabilly? It is but one part of his plan to make tradition popular. "I'm trying to build my audience, build 'em with rooted American country music like it was originally laid down years ago, but with a commerciality factor of the '80s, bein' able to produce it and present it in a way that's fashionable and acceptable by 90 percent of the buying public. I feel I can sing and play, doin' traditional music, but with an '80s approach." Two albums are ready. One, for Sugar Hill, is bluegrass-oriented, while *Waitin' For The Sun To Shine*, his first LP for CBS, reflects his new approach, with a rockabilly version of Flatt and Scruggs' *Don't Get Above Your Raisin*, and country ballads, a waltz and some Western swing. He's put together a new band, featuring fiddle legend Bobby Hicks, British lead guitarist Ray Flacke, ex-Lacy J. Dalton steel player Bruce Bouton, bassist Jesse Chambers and drummer Rodney Price, formerly of the Bellamy Brothers band, and pianist Mickey Merrick.

Session work, however, will not be a big part of his future. "It's just gonna be to a bare minimum, for special friends and projects I really want to do. I hope I don't have to turn to that for a living," he commented.

So in the early summer of 1981, Ricky Skaggs is trying to bring tradition to the marketplace at a time when it's being embraced, when Boxcar Willie's 1950s country has made him a minor god. His life has never really left the Kentucky hills. "There's nothing like starting at letter A," he reflects. "That's the best place to start from. I learned *so much* when I went back. That has kept me traditional in lots of ways. My music is real and pure, and I think I can do it." ■

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**PATTI PAGE - CS-9326 ALBUM \$3.98**  
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**RAY PRICE - CS-8866 ALBUM \$3.98**  
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8 TRACK TAPE - 18C-00094 \$4.98

**CARL SMITH - CS-8737 ALBUM \$3.98**  
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8 TRACK TAPE - 18C-00110 \$4.98

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**ERNEST TUBB - MCA-84 ALBUM \$2.98**  
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# Everyday People

The names of Jane Wilson, the widow of a Vietnam War veteran and others in the following narrative, have been changed to protect their identities.

**W**henever a post-Viet Nam picture such as *Friendly Fire* is on television, Jane Wilson always watches. Her reasons vary, but mostly she watches because in many ways her life story is played out before her on her living room TV set. She was only 22 when she learned that Carter Thompson, her husband of only two years, would not come home alive from Thailand. Overall she thinks Hollywood has done a good job in its various result-of-the-war portrayals but, she sighs, no one else can ever fully know what it's really like.

"I was 14 when I started to date Carter," she began. "My parents wouldn't let my sister date unless she double-dated, so her date fixed me up with Carter. We started dating regularly, though at first I was doing it more or less as a favor to my sister. It was on again, off again; we both dated others during that time. But gradually I began to see characteristics in him that I admired, and I guess he saw some things in me, and we just fell in love. We got married in March, 1968. He had graduated from college and was working as a cameraman at a local TV station. His first love was always photography. In addition to his regular job, he had had several still photography displays which had been well received. So he was very happy and I was happy for him.

"Then he got his draft notice in the spring of 1969. He enlisted in the Air Force so he wouldn't have to go to Viet Nam. At the time I just accepted it, never thinking of any possible alternatives. I was brought up to believe that all men served their time in the military. He was trained in communications, and worked in radio and television for the Air Force in the States. Then he was sent to Thailand in January, 1970.

"He resumed working in radio and communications in Thailand. We wrote regularly and he always said how much he enjoyed his work over there and for me not to worry about him. Our second anniversary, March, 1970, he even called from there and reassured me that there was no action anywhere near, that he was safe and would be home this time next year.

"Less than a month later a plane that had been shot up was coming in to the landing strip at his base. The pilots apparently thought they couldn't make it. They ejected and let the plane go. It crashed into the radio station, killing eleven men. One

By John Pugh

of them was Carter."

*Bobby had a brother  
He got killed in the war  
I asked him*

*But he didn't know what for . . .*

*Strawberry Farm—Tom T. Hall*

"A chaplain came and told me he was missing in action. For two days I didn't know his official status, but in my heart I knew he was dead. That Sunday afternoon I was at my next door neighbor's. I looked out and saw two men in uniform coming up the walk to our house. I knew instantly what they were going to tell me. I went to meet them, got about halfway, then just turned and fled."

*They met upon a blue moon  
And they parted on a cloudy day  
They were so in love and out of school  
But he was going far, far away.*

*I'll Be True To You—Alan Rhody*

"When his body was brought home, I tried to get the military to open the casket, hoping against hope that they might have misidentified him. When they wouldn't open it, I became very paranoid about that. Later I realized they were right not to open it. If they had, my last mental picture of Carter might have always been a mutilated corpse. At least now I can always remember his black, wavy hair, his smile.

"They gave him a big military funeral, which was nice, but all the guns, taps, flags and honor guards seemed kind of inappropriate. He wasn't a soldier, he wasn't killed in action. His death was just an accident that happened to occur while he was in the Air Force. I just wanted them to dispense with all the military trappings and conclude the service. Then right at the end they took the flag off his casket, folded it and handed it to me. Suddenly I experienced a feeling of finality that left me totally devastated. It was as if someone had taken my own heart out and handed it to me."

*Send the cable  
While you're still able  
He's been shot  
No, you better wait  
I think it's too late  
Give him a purple heart . . .*

*Freedom In the Yard—Ronnie Self*

She stares out the window, trying to find a way to express her feelings. She is an open woman with an abundance of good

ole down-home friendliness, and yet she possesses a certain amount of what has always been described as "classic" beauty, with a long, straight nose, large, hazel eyes and shoulder length blonde hair. She has gained a few pounds since her days as a high school pompon girl, but she carries them reasonably well. Her voice does not crack or lapse into a lifeless monotone while recalling her experience, but retains a general conversational tone.

**A**fter Carter's death, I lived with my parents," she continued. "But gradually I realized I had to get out of my shell and not let them protect me the rest of my life. I enrolled in college in September 1970. My freshman year I was just trying to get through life. I didn't date at all; I even still wore my wedding band. My sophomore year I went out two or three times in a pinch if a girl in the dorm needed to fix someone up with a date. On Christmas break of that year I got a call from a boy named Ray Wilson that I used to date some in high school, asking me out. We began dating, but still I was always clinging to Carter's memory. One night Ray told me, 'Look, he's dead. You've still got your whole life ahead of you. Are you just going to cry and moan the rest of your life away? I thought I had never heard anything more hard-hearted when he said that, but I soon realized he was right. It really jolted me out of my self-pity and I became serious about him. We got married in the summer of 1973.

"The longer we're married, the more I see how special he is. I really love Ray. He's a strong, assured person and I'm very assured in his love. At that time in my life I needed stability, and he was there then and continues to be the strong, stable influence in my life now. I guess it was just the Good Lord looking after me when He threw us together.

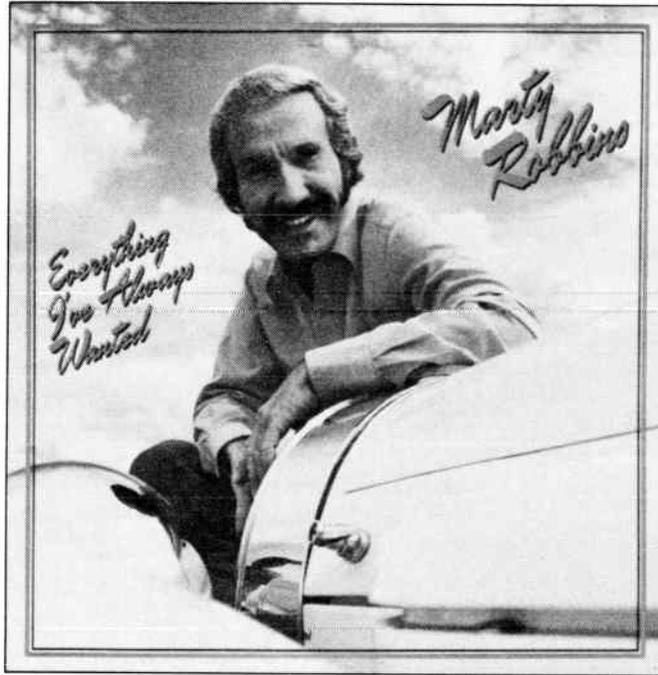
"You know, when Carter died, so many people said, 'Time heals all wounds.' After I heard that for the thousandth time, I'd just want to scream. I'd think, 'Can't they think of anything to say but the oldest cliché in the world?' But I guess the reason it's such a cliché is that it's so true. But even more than that, I'd say love heals all wounds. My heart doesn't ache now when I talk about Carter. I've got a great husband, a nice home, a good job. But if I didn't have somebody like Ray to love, talking about Carter would still break my heart." ■

# Record Reviews

**Marty Robbins**  
Everything I've  
Always Wanted  
Columbia JC 36860

**T**he Marty Robbins voice and delivery are almost unbelievably good. Couple them with the strong production of Eddie Kilroy, who seems to get precisely the effects that many Nashville producers strive for but never quite achieve, and you have a first-class album.

Since I favor traditional country music, I was especially glad to find two revivals on this disc. *There's No Wings On My Angel* was an early hit for Eddy Arnold, who broke the word *no* into a beautiful falsetto each time he sang it. Marty uses the same trick here with equally beautiful results. The other revival, *I'll Go On Alone* was an early hit for Marty (and for Webb Pierce, too). Today's version is as good as the original, though a bit smoother and creamier, in keeping with today's Robbins touch.



The trend back to traditional country also has its effect in the album's newer songs. In *Completely Out Of Love*, in which two lovers have reached their final parting after

weathering many a storm, you hear a dash of Roy Wiggins-like steel as part of a countrified approach which generally prevails throughout the album. And *Gene Autry, My*

*Hero* brings back memories of Saturday afternoons at the picture show with the old singing cowboys.

The remaining cuts employ solid country themes. *Another Cup Of Coffee*, for example, belies a replaced lover's desire to patch things up, despite his protestations to the contrary. He just comes back to get something he'd left behind, stays for a cup of coffee, drags the visit out, then contrives to come back in the future. *The Woman In My Bed* is latintinted stock Robbins a la *El Paso City* and very easy on the ear. *My Greatest Memory* is a bit of a production number in which the instrumentals alternate between softness and nicely disciplined crescendos. The effect is quite good. *An Occasional Rose* is handled in a similar fashion, while *Crossroads Of Life* gets a smooth treatment that verges on over-schmaltz in a few places but is saved by Marty's skillful delivery and Kilroy's good taste. ART MAHER

**Ray Stevens**  
One More  
Last Chance  
RCA AHLI-3841

**R**ight off the bat, I had doubts about this album.

I was wrong.

*One More Last Chance* is more country-flavored than his past couple of albums, and a steel guitar sings in and out of at least half of the cuts. But for sure, this LP is no *Urban Cowboy* ripoff. No, Ray Stevens has crafted another well-defined record. Looking back on his long history of recording work, since the days of *Ahab The Arab*, Stevens has consistently released tasteful albums that reflect his musical direction at the time. He hopscotches back and forth between parody and serious music. This new disc is straight-ahead music, blending country

with his trademark bluesy-pop style.

The most glaring difference between *One More Last Chance* and most Ray Stevens albums is the lack of any original songs by Ray. He has written most of his big hit songs and usually stocks his records with his own songs. But how much can a person do by himself? Ray not only arranged and produced the entire LP, he also played piano, synthesizer, horns and added percussion—close to a one-man show, folks. But the tunes Ray chose are excellent and suited to his versatility as a singer.

If a hit song is hiding on the record, it would seem to be the title cut. *One More Last Chance* is country, yet sophisticated, with interesting chord changes and a full production. A steel guitar, rarely heard on a Ray Stevens record, whines away right from

the start, but it blends well with the melody. The harmony (Stevens with Nashville session vocalist Lisa Silver) is full and musical. *Night Games*, the last cut on the album, could generate a chunk of air play. The song begins with a biting acoustic guitar intro and quickly (that means up tempo) tells a barroom story . . .

The only qualms I have with Stevens is that he tends to get cute every so often with production. For sure, he takes chances. On the old classic *Pretend* ("Pretend you're happy when you're blue . . ."), he comes up with some kind of weird Mexicali-type intro that is confusing and harsh. I don't understand it and it completely distracts from the song. He also slips in a clever lick on *Melissa*, a neat song about a musician on the road meeting a school teacher. There is a line that goes, "We've got a mutual



friend who's a fellow plays cello."

Most of the other tunes, *It's Not All Over* and *Take Your Love*, for instance, are nice and easy on the ear, but not particularly memorable. Actually, the whole album is nice on the ear but not particularly memorable. *One More Last Chance* is one of those albums you can slap on the turntable while you are taking care of mundane chores around the house—good company, you see. BOB CAMPBELL



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## ... Dottie ... David Allan Coe

bluegrass isn't, you'll probably like this record.

There's a jam kickin' version of *Big Mamou* to start things off. The *Fiddlin' of Jacques Bordeaux* and *Colinda* are two more high spirited tunes. All three were big regional hits.

Frenchie and the Soundmasters are mainly a Texas dance band, and play 70 fairs and 30 rodeos a year. If you want to hear one of the many ways they do it in Texas, and like foot stampin' dance music, this record is well worth checking out. PETER STAMPFEL

### Dottie West Wild West Liberty LT 1062

**T**he Dottie West situation makes pretty good sense. Or does it? She has turned her career around just like Hank, Jr. And she has kept the chart toppers coming, with or without Kenny Rogers. There ought to be a way to learn something about stability and success from a lady like that.

A large part of it, I'm sure, is the now familiar Dottie West beat. That is composed of a



tight mix of keyboards and percussion, coming together like musical handclaps. The new style clicked, generating Number One records and a bigger name for Dottie.

*Wild West* opens with *Make a Plan*, about a relationship that is out of balance and badly in need of reconciliation. The

bottom line is stated in an early verse: "We've got one wheel on the shoulder and we're about to lose control."

She loses the guy on *Are You Happy Baby*, and tries to push the unhappiness off on him by saying nobody could love him better than she can. She gets him back on *What Are We*

*Doing In Love?*, a duet with Kenny Rogers revealing that this couple goes together like "satin and cinders, paper and matches, roses and switches."

Sin is not the issue on this new version of *Right Or Wrong*. It ends with the same couple still trying to figure each other out. Then on *Choosin' Means Losin'* the truth comes out. The woman is trying to keep two guys on a string. She admits it to one of them, ending one side of the record with the sadly worded conclusion, "Baby I just don't know."

Parting becomes inevitable on side two, with titles like *Goodbye, Sorry Seems to Be the Hardest Word*, and *Please Remember Me*. After scattering blame and hurt all over the place, the mixed up pair finally had the sense to call it off. But at the very end, the lady comes on with *I Wish That I Could Hurt That Way Again*. Oh well. Songs aren't supposed to be logical. Love isn't supposed to be logical. Women aren't supposed to be logical. The only thing that makes sense is all the Number One records for Dottie West.

BILL OAKLEY

### David Allan Coe Invictus (Means) Unconquered Columbia JC 36970

**I** hate to keep saying it with each new David Allan Coe record, but this is a really great record, and had it come from anyone but David Allan, they'd probably be passing out cigars at the Grand Ole Opry. In fact, this may be David's best record yet, and he's made some gems. **Invictus (Means) Unconquered** is David at his wacky, high-quality best. For a start, there's a great version of Tammy Wynette's *Stand By Your Man*, with a totally successful recitation written by David in the middle. Normally, a song like *Stand By Your Man* totally defies any attempt at reinterpretation—the Wynette version is truly a definitive version. But David has taken the song and,

amazingly, made it his own (going from a woman's song to a painfully sad male version). In fact, that's the case with all the cuts on the album, from Gary Nunn's *London Homesick Blues*, the long-time signature song from Jerry Jeff Walker, to Shel Silverstein's *Someplace To Come When It Rains*. There's also one stone-cold masterpiece on this record—*The Purple Heart*. On first blush, the song sounds like your basic country weeper: "I should get the Purple Heart for loving you. . . ." But the closer you listen, the more you come to realize that the song is working on two levels. Not only is it a weeper, but it's a slick satire on every country weeper ever written. And let's not forget the Coe/Guy Clark contribution, *I Love Robbing Banks*, dedicated to John Dillinger and thoughtfully including on the dust jacket a list of Dillinger's bank robberies and the amounts of money taken.

Listen, in these grisly times of pabulum country, the world needs a David Allan Coe to remind it that things are weirder

than any of us can imagine. David, my hat's off to ya—again.

MICHAEL BANE



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What you see on this page is news of a fantastic crash loss program—the remarkable London University super slim-down diet—that speeds up your body's rate of fat burn-off so that, IN JUST A MATTER OF HOURS, you start to burn away clinging layers of fat break down bulging pockets of flab... drain away excess puffy fluid, just like hot water melts down ice... so that, in just the first 48 hours, excess flab, fluid and fat gets melted away at such a staggering rate of speed you:

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**GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL LOSES 10 POUNDS IN JUST 72 HOURS—**

So effectively does this London University's wonder "crash-loss" diet step up your system's rate of fat burn-off, that:

■ When tested at one of medical science's foremost research centers on scores of grossly overweight men and women... they lost as much as 7 lbs. of excess fat, flab and fluid IN JUST THE FIRST 72 HOURS ALONE... and as much as another 3-5—even 7 POUNDS MORE the next 14 days!

■ Even more amazing... when tested not on ordinary overweight people but on the most extreme cases of obesity... IT EVAPORATED up to 10 POUNDS OF FAT, FLUID AND FLAB IN JUST 3 DAYS TIME!

**AS MUCH AS 50% OF ALL EXCESS WEIGHT GONE IN JUST 14 DAYS!**

■ But most mind boggling of all... when tested on average overweight people... who for years lugged around a "spare tire" bulge of 10, 15 or even 20 extra sagging pounds... IT ACTUALLY MELTED AWAY AS MUCH AS 50% OF ALL EXCESS WEIGHT IN JUST 14 DAYS!

Yes, stepped up their body's rate of fat burn-off and melted away hard set fat with OVER 20 TIMES THE SPEED OF EVEN BRUTAL EXERCISE!

**TURNS YOUR ENTIRE BODY INTO A SUPER FAT-BURNING FURNACE!**

In fact, based upon Calorie Burn-Off Research From California's Leading Medical School, the calorie-deficit created in your system by this "crash-loss" high-burn program, (a staggering deficit of as much as 2,400 calories a day off required daily intake) works with such breathtaking speed you actually:

**BURN AWAY MORE FAT EACH DAY than**

- Running 1000 Miles A Week
- or—over 3,000 sit-ups and push-ups a day
- or—10 Solid Hours of Weight-lift workouts
- or—even 15 hours of non-stop Marine Corps calisthenics!



**IF YOU READ NOTHING ELSE, READ THIS**

This program involves a high-speed crash-loss diet that lowers caloric intake, essential to the reduction of body weight. Such results cannot be achieved solely through the use of the capsules. The more

overweight you are, the higher caloric requirements, the more you should lose the faster you should lose it. Before starting this weight-loss program consult with physician to be sure you are in normal health, that your only problem is excess weight and simple obesity. Individuals with high blood pressure, diabetes, heart, kidney disease, thyroid problems, or pregnant or nursing women should not use except on advice of a physician. Do not exceed recommended dosage.



as much as  
**4 SIZES SMALLER IN JUST 14 DAYS!**

**WAKE UP SLIMMER THE VERY FIRST MORNING!**

What is this amazing fat-destroyer wonder program that helps to burn away fat by the hour—carve away inches by the week?

Briefly stated... it is London University's crash-burn diet, a remarkably simple way to take special combinations of high-burn foods and create what doctors call a "hypocaloric effect" to take place inside their bodies... that turns their system into a GIANT FAT BURNING MACHINE! Yes, actually reverses your body's fat build-up process as you COMPLETELY STOP EXCESS fat-builder calories from entering your system... or being absorbed by your body and turned into fat like in the past! So obviously, down go the calories, up goes the rate of fat-burn-off and off come the pounds and inches at a rate that absolutely staggers the imagination!

Yes, a TOTAL FAT-DESTROYER program that literally "ignites" a fat-burning chain-reaction inside your system... "revs up" your body's rate of fat burn-off... and ACTUALLY SHRINKS YOUR BODY'S FAT CELLS starting in just hours.

Think of it! With each tick of the clock, your body burns away a steady flow of fat-builder calories... melts down even the most stubborn fatty bulges... so you lose weight like never before... **LOSE IT BY THE HOUR**... all starting the very first day. In fact, of all medically sound reducing programs, **ONLY TOTAL STARVATION WORKS FASTER!**

Because, quite obviously... since this London University ALL OUT ASSAULT ON FAT lowers your system's rate of caloric intake... raises the level of caloric burn-off... "revs-up" that rate of body-fat burn-off... pounds and inches vanish at a rate that in plain simple talk is **ABSOLUTELY MIND BLOWING!**

**AMAZING "FURNACE-IN-A-CAPSULE" HELPS TRIGGER THE MOST DYNAMITE FAT-BURN SPREE OF YOUR LIFE!**

Now comes the most exciting news of all. Because, now from London, England comes the thrilling announcement and release to the American public of a wondrous reducing-aid formula that not only works before meals to reduce hunger, but after meals sup-

plements this London University "crash-loss" diet and helps you keep the fat-burning chain-reaction going in your body non-stop all day long.

Called "BIO-THERE/100," these amazing time-release capsules work in your body from morning 'til night to help you lose weight with a 2-stage all-out attack.

**STAGE 1:** Turns off your hunger drive... that maddening urge to eat, just like you turn off a light switch. Makes it easier to lower caloric intake.

**STAGE 2:** Throughout the day, releases into your system tiny grains of a special bio-extract that safely, surely, **TURNS UP** the level of your fat-burning metabolism after every time food enters your body on this London University wonder diet program.

Meaning the food you take in, the calories you enjoy are burned away even more quickly by your own stepped-up metabolic system. Yes, metabolized and oxidized in as little as 2 to 3 hours after eating!

World's Leading Medical Authority on Obesity Reports:

**'...as much as 50% of all excess fat gone in just 14 days.'**

**THE FOOD YOU EAT NO LONGER TURNS TO FAT!**

So, obviously, since it takes far less food to satisfy you, lowering calories is a lark. And since the calories you do take in on this "crash-loss" diet program are burned right out of your body after every time you eat... you start to **TURN SLIMMER**, not only the very first day... **BUT**—after the very first meal—and every meal thereafter! as excess fat and fluid start to disappear—**GET OXIDIZED BY THE HOUR!**

**PROVE EVERY LOST OUNCE,**

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Right now, look at your figure in the mirror and ask yourself these questions—the solution to which is right now within your grasp.

How would I look one week from today as much as 5 to 10 pounds lighter?

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**BUT DON'T STOP THERE**—if you need to lose still more inches, then continue the London University "crash-loss" diet, continue to take **BIO-THERE/100** until you've reached the figure of your dreams:

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- 6 INCHES OFF YOUR STOMACH... ANOTHER
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## Billie Jo . . . Stephanie . . . Bob Wills' Original Texas Playboys

### Billie Jo Spears Only The Hits

Liberty LT-1074

**B**illie Jo Spears, gifted country vocalist that she is, has been, in career terms at least, rather cold in the past few years: she's kept an extremely low profile, and an alarming amount of time has passed since she was last seen at the top of the charts.

Maybe *Only The Hits* is one way to get her back up there. It's hard to see how . . . but *maybe*. But then again, recycling well-worn pop and country standards of recent years is such a low-risk, low-return career move that it's really hard to fail too badly; and I suppose it does save a lot of time you would otherwise have to spend looking for exciting new material.

Quite expectedly, *Only The Hits* is a successful, if somewhat predictable, LP, strengthened by Larry Butler's tasteful production and the fact that, despite her recent obscurity, Billie Jo is in top form, vocally. Even though it was not seen fit to include any of Billie Jo's own past hits on *Only The Hits*, she nonetheless does particularly fine versions of *Your Good Girl's Gonna Go Bad* and *I Never Promised You A Rose Garden*—lively, defiant songs that come to life under the spell of Billie Jo's sassy, hands-on-hips vocal style and her choppy, rushed phrasings.

*Bridge Over Troubled Waters* and *I Fall To Pieces* similarly demonstrate her considerable vocal range and power, as do *What The World Needs Now* and *Broken Lady*.

But really, you can hear good, convincing interpretations of most of these songs on any Saturday night in just about any Holiday Inn Lounge, or on any one of a dozen or so *Country Hits Of The Seventies* record packages offered on late-night TV.

Though *Only The Hits* is a solid enough album, it would be much nicer to have Billie Jo Spears bounce back with some brand-new hits rather than simply retreading some old ones.

BOB ALLEN



### Stephanie Winslow Dakota

Warner Brothers BSK 3529

**T**he first thing I read about *Dakota* came by way of one of the many "newsletters" we writers constantly find in our mailboxes. Somewhere in there it said "many DJs are finding the cover of Stephanie Winslow's new album one of the best they have seen this year." What that means, I discovered, after looking at the cover, is that Stephanie is one good looking woman and there is ample cleavage showing front and center on the album. Now what is wrong with that, one might ask? Well,

nothing. And what does that have to do with an album review, one might ask? Well, it means that Stephanie's husband producer Ray Ruff is up to his old tricks. He doesn't miss a lick in promoting one of his artists. He is trying to do the same thing he did with his former wife and artist, Susie Allanson—take a good looking, sexy girl with marginal talent and turn her into a popular artist through hype and decent covers of old hits.

It's not that *Dakota* is a terrible album and Stephanie a terrible singer. As albums go these days, it is not bad. It is simply boring because it is contrived and stilted. There is no

### Bob Wills' Original Texas Playboys

Faded Love  
Delta DLP-1124

**Y**ears ago when I heard Bob Wills for the first time, he and the band were playing live on some radio station in northern California. I really didn't like what I heard. It sounded like Lawrence Welk meets the Hollywood cowboys, like that awful slush I heard Spade Cooley do in southern California.

Many years later I found out who Bob Wills was, and heard

the recordings he made in the '30s and '40s. Sure was different from the stuff I heard in the car in 1960. There was drive, there was punch, there was excitement, there was a whole new direction for country music. Bob was in his thirties then. By 1960, Bob was in his mid-fifties, and the drive, punch, and excitement were long gone.

Twenty years later, Bob passed on six years ago at the age of seventy. Here are the original Texas Playboys under the direction of Leon McAuliffe, who sings and plays steel guitar with the band. He is

tension or excitement on the record. The songs are alright, but I get the feeling Ray Ruff hounded the poor girl and made her sing every note exactly the way he wanted it. Either that or she hasn't yet learned her way around a studio. As a result, she sounds stiff. Stephanie has a good voice, but she has no real style; a vanilla combination of Linda Ronstadt with a touch of Emmylou Harris thrown in for good measure. In fact, on *I Really Did*, one of the better cuts, she sounds exactly like Ronstadt.

On the bright side, Stephanie's hit, *Baby, I'm-A Want You*, is the best cut—fresh and appealing in a country-pop sort of way. *Will This Be The Last Time?* is also decent. But here again, it's a Linda Ronstadt sound-a-like. It all comes back to everything pretty much sounding the same. Ruff is an excellent technical producer, but he calculates too much instead of following his heart.

Maybe I'm being too critical. After all, a great deal of work goes into the production of any album, and *Dakota* will stand up to any test of modern production standards. And I am sure Stephanie Winslow is a nice lady. And maybe in California, where it was produced, this is those folks' idea of a good country album. But any way you cut it, *Dakota* lacks good ol' soul, and that makes the difference between an average record and a good one.

BOB CAMPBELL

also one of the composers of the *Steel Guitar Rag*, which is on this record, along with *Faded Love*, *Take Me Back To Tulsa*, *San Antonio Rose*, and other well known Wills/Playboy favorites.

Thing is, this is not the best place to hear those songs. They all sounded better in the '30s and '40s when western swing was new. If you're gonna get a record by Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys, get a re-issue of the old stuff. Many fine re-issues are available. If you're gonna listen to Bob and the Playboys, do it right.

PETER STAMPFEL

Hank Wilson Rick Secoy B.J. Clark of your Extra Dancer Mike S. Jones

## Leon Russell . . . Burrrito Brothers . . . Leon Everette

### The Burrrito Brothers Hearts On The Line

Curb JZ 37004

**T**he problem with the Flying Burrrito Brothers—oops, excuse me! The Burrrito Brothers, sans Flying—is that they're an idea whose time has passed. The original Flying Burrrito Brothers, of which only "Sneaky" Pete Kleinow remains, was one of the first groups to seriously pursue the country/rock synthesis, with an emphasis on the country part of the equation. The group, led by Mississippi visionary and former Byrd, Gram Parsons was years ahead of their time (they were formed in the late 1960s, when revealing to even your closest rock and roll friend that you'd once accidentally heard a Dolly Parton record was grounds for getting kicked off the bus), but their powerful

music helped set the tone for much of rock and roll in the 1970s, a la the Eagles and La Ronstadt. Through it all, the Burrritos have held on by their fingernails, running through a staggering number of personnel changes, record companies and fine tuning a musical style that is, frankly, better done by other people. There's nothing at all wrong with *Hearts On The Line*, except that it isn't particularly interesting. Producer Michael Lloyd has pushed the group in the direction of one of his other clients, the Bellamy Brothers, and the Burrritos have suffered for it. Face it, the best of the Burrritos music—such as *Bon Soir Blues* or the incomparable *White Line Fever*—has always displayed a certain skewed perspective, as if the group was genuinely stuck between two worlds. There's nothing even remotely like that on this album. The best cut on



the album is *That's When You Know It's Over*, and I think the Burrritos should contemplate that.

MICHAEL BANE

### Leon Russell & New Grass Revival The Live Album

Paradise Records PAK 3532

**H**ere's a modern little package—a live album that will soon be followed by a live videotape of the same concert. There's Leon Russell, one of a



growing number of headliner musicians who like to make records with other top billed musicians, and the New Grass Revival, one of the country's finest progressive bluegrass bands.

The story goes that they met a little over ten years ago when Leon heard them play one of his early songs, *Prince Of Peace*, and introduced himself. They've

been playing together on and off ever since.

Leon kicks things off with a solo version of *Somewhere Over The Rainbow*, a song Jerry Lee himself recorded a ways back and the title of Willie's new album. Then the band joins in on a swift version of the Beatles' *I've Just Seen A Face*. Next up is my special favorite, *One More Love Song*, a tough beauty of a number Leon wrote himself.

The fourth song is an example of a trick Leon pulls four times on this album—take a traditional style country standard, change the title and a few words, bend a couple of the chords in a black gospel or minor direction, and take credit for a brand new song. At the new royalty rate of 4¢ a song, that's good for an extra \$10,000 or so on this album for Leon. I don't mean to sound like that bothers me; in most cases I find Leon's new versions more interesting than the originals.

There's one distinctly old-fashioned touch in this modern little package—the generous amount of music on it. The 14 songs time in at over 42 minutes, which is almost 50% more music than is found on most records nowadays. Almost

enough to make you believe in Santa Claus.

One thing about this record I didn't like. Sometimes the greased lightning express speed of some of the arrangements was just too rapid. Notes were coming at a rate more suited to machine gun bullets. But thanks to the principals involved, progressive bluegrass with a black gospel touch is a combination that works real well.

PETER STAMPFEL

### Leon Everette If I Keep On Going Crazy

RCA AHLI-3916

**T**hat group of college researchers that came up with the report on country music driving people to drink will probably be at it again pretty soon. Who was it that started all these songs about going crazy? Maybe it was Waylon and Willie. The old Patsy Cline song that Willie wrote seemed harmless enough. The word "crazy" just meant being foolish.

But then a few years ago Willie came back with *I'd Have to Be Crazy*, and Waylon answered with *I've Always Been Crazy*. The Bellamy Brothers incited



others to join in with their album called *You Can Get Crazy (With Me)*. Now Leon Everette has gotten into the act, and he makes it sound simple and painless. On *If I Keep On Going Crazy*, he says, "I'll get there by and by. Getting there's so easy. I don't even have to try." And the reason? To escape from a busted up romance, using a remedy that is perhaps cheaper, though slightly more embarrassing, than hitting the bottle.

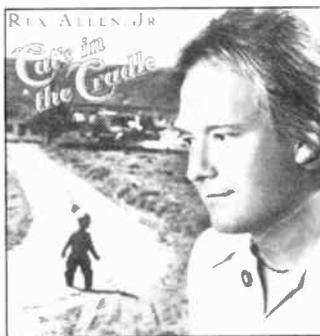
After hearing Leon Everette so many times on Bob Kingsley's *American Country Countdown*, I'm not surprised that he is advancing rapidly as an artist. Three of the songs included here were sizable hits as singles: *Giving Up Easy*, *Over*, and *I Don't Want to Lose*. Leon has not yet pined himself down to

## Rex Allen, Jr. . . . Austin Country . . . Traditional Bluegrass

an exclusive style. The four people jointly credited with producing the album threw in a healthy blend of banjos, fiddles, some awfully good steel, and a fair balance on the strings.

He seems very comfortable on fast moving, rambling-gambling type songs, leading me to believe that he probably covered that territory thoroughly while paying his previous dues. *I Love That Woman (Like the Devil Loves Sin)* goes down a little more smoothly than *Champagne Dreams*, although Leon's strength with a ballad can be felt on *Over*. Hard country fans should be pleased with *Shadows Of My Mind*. It's got the perfect elements for mental escapism. The sort of thing that could drive a person crazy.

BILL OAKLEY



Rex Allen, Jr.  
*Cat's In The Cradle*  
Warner Bros. BSK 3530

**R**ecording artists can leave an impact on their listeners in several different ways: through their feeling and delivery of a song, through good arranging and (if necessary) or-

chestration and selection of material. Any one of these things can make a successful record, though more often than not it's a combination of these traits. Most successful albums or singles have at least some of them.

This album could have worked quite well, but it lacks some of these attributes, and as a result, is but a shadow of what it could have been. The problems crop up in several areas. One obvious problem is Rex's delivery of the material, which seems almost mechanical. He obviously loves and feels these songs deeply, yet that rarely shows through. The arrangements and orchestrations trail off into the extremes of Nashville overproduction, everything letter perfect, but totally lacking in spontaneity, empathy

with the songs or with Rex's singing, or any real variety.

There are problems with the material, too. The three songs that should have worked, Wayland Holyfield's *The One I Sing My Love Songs To*, *Cup of Tea* (a duet with Margo Smith), and Bob McDill's excellent *She's In Love With A Rodeo Man* wither because of their delivery. The overwrought pretensions of Neil Diamond's *Play Me* don't do Rex justice. The title tune, Harry Chapin's pop hit, fails because nowhere does Rex put his own stamp on it, but reprises Chapin's performance. Rex has already set the standards for himself in the past, and doesn't quite meet them here. But considering what he's already done, this is, at worst, a minor setback. RICH KIENZLE

## BURIED TREASURES

by Rich Kienzle

Looking back to the seventies, which weren't that long ago, it seems almost bizarre to review the musical events, in a historical context, that transpired around Austin, Texas. Yet the Austin phenomenon is, for better or worse, history now. It gave us Willie, Doug Sahm and Jerry Jeff Walker, while other much heralded acts like Marcia Ball, Asleep At The Wheel and Alvin Crow, despite critical acclaim, never really came across to mass audiences. In other cases, the hype outweighed any real talent. Yet there was some fine music back then, much of which went virtually unnoticed. **For The Record: Austin Country 1973-1978** (Maverick LP-001) brings together some rare single recordings from that period, and includes some local classics, like Marcia Ball's legendary rendering of *Cowboy's Sweetheart*, the old Patsy Montana hit, as well as Doug Sahm's driving *Henrietta* and his original version of *Country Groove*, the honky-tonk of Jon Emery and The Missouri Valley Boys, the respectable Western swing sound of the Reynolds Sisters

and the New Osos Band, and the Texas polka of *Meet Me in Seguin* by Carolyn Meyers (Augie's wife) & The Western Head Band. Since many of these acts are now history, this is a fine survey of the Austin scene at its peak, and a collector's item to boot.

Steel guitar albums never get much notice most of the time. They're unprofitable for the major labels and, right or wrong, are often noticed only by other steel players. Chuck Caldwell's **Country Swing Steel Guitar** (Priority PRS-407) is just such a record. Caldwell came out of Western swing, but never achieved the legendary status of a Buddy Emmons. Unlike most steel players he uses a flat pick to play impressive renditions of *Cold Cold Heart*, *I Love You Because* and jazz standards like *Stomping At The Savoy* in a mellow, swinging style.

Buzz Busby, bluegrass mandolinist and vocalist extraordinaire, has long enjoyed an underground reputation, particularly around Washington D.C., where his singing and Monroe-style mandolin have been popular for years (he and Jack Clement were once part of the

Bayou Boys there in the early '50s). Serious personal problems plagued him, but his recent comeback has produced the excellent **Traditional Bluegrass** (Webco-0101). Solid, driving music, particularly the brilliant versions of *Warm Red Wine* and *Long Black Limousine* and such originals as *Running Away*, a mandolin tour-de-force, make this album well worth having.

Though most of Hank Thompson's Capitol classics are available on budget LPs, he also did some fine radio transcriptions, now available on a German LP, **Country Stars of the Past** (Castle LP 8017), part of the same series as the Ernest Tubb LP I mentioned last month. The sound quality is respectable on the 16 tracks that include *Breaking The Rules*, *Chills And Fever*, and the classic *Hangover Heart*.

I've generally avoided the sort of "greatest hits" packages that are advertised on TV, but I've come across one that's not been advertised and well worth mentioning: the three-volume **16 Country Legends Sing Their Original Hits** (CML 1-3). This inexpensive set, 16 songs a record, includes 1950s material from top artists, including Patsy Cline (*Walkin' After Midnight*),

some early Webb Pierce recordings from the 4-Star label, some early Johnny Horton (some of his first work), early Jimmy Dean (*Bummin' Around*), hits by Dave Dudley, Ferlin Husky, Floyd Cramer, and *Rhythm and Booze*, an incredibly rare Buck Owens rockabilly performance.

Josh Graves, the dobro legend, whose work with Flatt and Scruggs helped set the standard for the instrument in the fifties, has taken a modern approach in recent years, one that manages to preserve the basic integrity of traditional bluegrass. **King of the Dobro** (CMH-6252) combines his virtuosity with a super-charged rhythm section as he rips through invigorating versions of *Earl's Breakdown*, *Jamboree* and a haunting, sparse version of the traditional *Little Rosewood Casket*, along with the unique *Dobros in Scotland*, in which overdubbed dobros mimic bagpipes.

The *Country Legends* set is \$14.17 postpaid, the Thompson \$12.18 postpaid from Down Home Music, 10341 San Pablo Ave., El Cerrito, CA 94530. The Austin LP is \$8.48 postpaid from Maverick, 808 W. 19th St., Austin, TX 78701. The Caldwell is available from Keith Kolby, 6604 Chapel Lane, Fort Worth, TX 76135. ■