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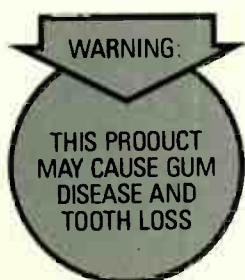
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People

MISTER STEVE WARINER

It started in '97 and spilled over to into '98, the **Steve Wariner** craze. Last issue, we told you about his Number One song, "Long Neck Bottle," which he co-wrote with **Rick Carnes** for **Garth Brooks**. Shoot, yes, we celebrated at ASCAP. Then comes the Number One duet, "What If I Said," by **Anita Cochran** and Steve. The soiree was held at Warner-Reprise and was attended by **Wynonna**, **Lee Roy Parnell**, **Michael Peterson** and **Brady Seals**. What's more, Mister Wariner wrote a new song called "Holes in the Floor of Heaven," sang it for Capitol Records, and they allowed they wanted him on the label. It's a done deal. All I want to say to Steve is, "You go, boy."

SO LONG, COOL CAT

The only time my sons have ever been impressed with anything I've ever done was when I sat beside **Carl Perkins** at the supper table at **Harlan Howard**'s house. It was there I learned that Carl was the same on-stage and off-stage. He was the coolest of the cool cats. After supper, this guitar player from England asked Carl about a note in some tune he was picking on the guitar. "Wasn't that a D-9 7th [or something]," he asked. "Zat what that is?" answered Mr. Carl Perkins, whose gift from the Almighty was he naturally played guitar; and he played it note for note straight from his heart and didn't have to know its name. Over 1,000 attended his service in his hometown of Jackson, Tennessee.

HEY, BABY

The marvelous duo, **Trace** and **Rhonda Adkins**, named their baby girl **MacKenzie**. Wasting no time, **Tim McGraw** and **Faith Hill** expect their second visit from the stork in August. By the time you read this, the lovely **Martina McBride** and sweet hubby **John McBride** will have their second daughter. Award-winning bluegrass mandolinist, **Ronnie McCoury**, and his wife, **Allison**, named their son **Evan Delano**. Delano is for **Franklin Delano McCoury**.



At the ASCAP soiree honoring Garth's Number One hit, "Longneck Bottle," are, left to right, Kevin Lamb (VP peermusic), producer Allen Reynolds, Garth, songwriter Rick Carnes, ASCAP's Herky Williams and songwriter Steve Wariner. At left, Capitol-Nashville prez/CEO Pat Quigley makes like a table as Steve Wariner signs with the label.

Ronnie's dad, a/k/a **Del McCoury**. Travis and the beautiful **Theresa Tritt** named their daughter, born in Marietta, Georgia, **Tyler Reese Tritt**.

DUVALL & OSCAR

Robert Duvall wrote, directed, starred in, sang on the soundtrack of and totally funded his current movie, *The Apostle*, plus was nominated for an Oscar in the Best Actor category for it. It was my privilege to interview him. A lover of country music, Duvall used faves like **Patty Loveless**, **Wynonna**, **Gary Chapman**, **Lyle Lovett**, **Lari White**, **Johnny Cash** and **The Carter Family** on the soundtrack and in-

cluded a very special duet of the wonderful church hymn, "I Love to Tell the Story," by himself and **Emmylou Harris**. Patty's version of "Two Coats" in the movie is worth the price of the record. I knew Duvall had tried to get the film funded for 15 years, which impressed me. I was also impressed that he had the good taste to cast **June Carter Cash** in the movie as his mother. Using country stars and recording the soundtrack in Nashville made me a cheerleader. Giving credit where it's due, Duvall told me he learned a lot watching **Emory Gordy**'s music production in the studio. Duvall doesn't think he's a great singer, but said he loved singing with Emmylou. Since he financed the film in its

Reporter: Hazel Smith

Editors: Rochelle Friedman/George Fletcher

People



At Randy Travis' Country Radio Seminar concert are producer and DreamWorks-Nashville label head James Stroud, Randy, the *After Midnight* radio show's Blair Garner, and the label's Scott Borchetta.

entirety, I had to know if he'd make the rumored \$3 million to \$5 million back, which was all the money he had. Half laughing, Duvall told me he'd already made it back plus "some change." He went on to say he's not greedy, says he's big on substance not spectacle.....tries to separate the chaff from the wheat. Far from the lights and sleaze of Hollywood, the actor resides in Middleburg, Virginia (population 600), where the mountains are high, the air is clean and the music on his CD player is country. As with *Tender Mercies*, when he took Oscar home, I hope he encores. *The Apostle* soundtrack is on the Rising Tide label.

COUNTRY RADIO SEMINAR BLITZ

Did all those witty dudes and dudettes who give us that great country radio drink any more this year than last during the Country Radio Seminar? From observing, I'm really not sure, but I do know we—I mean, they—didn't drink any less. It's amazing. Once annually they flock to Twang Town and immediately become nocturnal for a week. Seminar highlights included Joe Galante's RCA/BNA annual General Jackson cruise down the Cumberland River, where the food is always plentiful and the entertainment top-notch. Young country's Thompson Brothers, Jason Sellers and Mindy McCready gave us a sample of their wares. McCready allowed that she'd done a sitcom pilot for ABC about a 21-year-old in with two brothers trying to make it in

Music City as a singer. A very pregnant Martina McBride brought the crowd to their feet with a stirring version of her Number One hit, "A Broken Wing." Restless Heart confirmed they are back together as an RCA act and will open shows for Vince Gill beginning in June. Dressed in a light blue pant suit with rhinestones, Lorrie Morgan was stunning as always, and was well received by the partyers. Legendary Hall of Fame member Eddy Arnold closed the show with just him and his guitar singing hit after hit after hit, and the crowd went crazy. 'Course, they're not about to play Eddy on the radio....

The brand new DreamWorks label rented the entire Hermitage Hotel, where Randy Travis performed for a standing room only crowd, and he drove 'em wild. His new single, "Out of My Bones," debuted at Number 24. Randy proved he still has "it," and radio recognized the fact. The familiar smile did not leave the face of label head James Stroud, who worked that crowd like a hungry ball player up from the minors who just hit a homer to win the opening game of the season. Good luck, Nashville DreamWorks.

Mercury Records held their soiree at Planet Hollywood where party animals swarmed rubbing sweat to sweat. CRS-ers got to pose with Shania Twain and Billy Ray Cyrus and hear Terri Clark, Kathy Mattea, Mark Wills and newcomer Eric Heatherly perform. Shania wore a leopard print jacket and slacks. Her hair is long, and she wore more makeup than before. Her makeup artist charges \$250 an hour

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COUNTRY MUSIC MAGAZINE

assumes no responsibility for the safekeeping or return of unsolicited manuscripts, photographs, artwork or other material. All such submissions should be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

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People


and is well-known on both coasts, so I hear. Billy Ray wore a hat and beige leather jacket with fringe. Always the classic, Mattea wore a burgundy suit, Mark Wills dressed in black and white, and Eric, like Terri, was in jeans and shirt. Terri donned her ever-present hat. A bevy of my radio folks from WFMS in Indianapolis were there to hear Terri perform.

Sony, once again, held their do at Printers Alley, where the famous **Tanya Tucker** flashings occurred last year. No, Tanya didn't show up and show off; however, some dude wearing a Tanya mask was traipsing through the crowd amusing himself and the audience flashing "fakes." **The Dixie Chicks** added cackle to the Sony show, however. All the attendees left talking about those girls. They're gonna be huge. The New Faces Show also featured **Big House**, **Anita Cochran**, **The Lynns**, **Matt King**, **Sherrie Austin**, **Sons of the Desert**, **Lila McCann**, **Kris Tyler** and **The Ranch**. Artists want to give radio their best, and they did. Everybody did a grand job; outstanding were **Matt King**, **Sherrie Austin**, **Sons of the Desert** and **The Lynns**.

GARTH BROOKS NEWS

Garth Brooks and wife **Sandy** donated \$1 million toward establishing a children's zoo in Nashville, which they named for

STEVE EARLE IN NEW YORK



When Steve Earle played at Tramps in New York City recently, CMM and friends were there. Pictured with Steve are, left, CMM Art Director Kathryn Gray and at right, her sister Pamela Gray, a New York actress who recently appeared in the films *Devil's Advocate* and *Commandments*, and on the TV show, *Law & Order*.

the late **Mae Boren Axton**. A few days later, appearing on *Oprah*, he donated all his earnings that week from sales of his album to Winfrey's Angel Network,

which goes to educate needy children. He later extended the pledge to donate his earnings *each* week that album sales surpass 100,000 pieces. Sometimes angels have wings, but sometimes they wear cowboy hats.

TAKE THAT FIRST STEP



This year's **First Steps Benefit Concert**—the sixth annual such event—raised some \$80,000 for the Nashville-based school program which works with mentally and physically handicapped children. Participating in the all-star concert this year were (front row) **Michael Peterson**, **Pam Tillis**, **Joe Diffie**, **Rhett Akins** and (back row) **Ricochet** (**Junior Bryant**, **Teddy Carr**, **Heath Wright**, **Jeff Bryant**, **Eddie Kilgallon** and **Greg Cook**). **Collin Raye** also performed at the show.

BROOKS & DUNN TAILGATING

Brooks & Dunn rehearsed at the Nashville Arena, and I nosed around and found out that their stage show is a tailgate party. I would not lie to you. It's like the backside of a big ole truck with the drummer and a couple more pickers in the pickup's box. It's gonna be a hat time for the hottest duo in the country this year with that hat-wearing cowgirl, **Terri Clark**, opening shows. Not a boring show.

MY BUDDY

At one time or another, **Buddy Lee Attractions** booked virtually all the "biggies" in Music Town including **Willie Nelson**, **Garth Brooks**, **Waylon Jennings**, **Trisha Yearwood**, **George Strait**, **Sammy Kershaw**, **Lorrie Morgan**, **Bill Monroe**, **Terri Clark**....get the picture? Buddy succumbed to respiratory failure in Houston where he had gone for treatment for lung cancer. Mourners were touched when **Connie Smith's** angelic vocals flowed through the church as she sang "How Great Thou Art." They laughed during **Michael Campbell's** amusing eulogy about a trip he took to Las

People

WHAT A LINE-UP



Matraca Berg put together an all-star cast of some of country music's top female artists for the recent video shoot for her new single, "Back in the Saddle." The video depicts a "girl's night out" gone awry as, left to right, Trisha Yearwood, Martina McBride, Berg, Faith Hill, Patty Loveless and Suzy Bogguss get thrown out of a club and get arrested! Keep an eye out for it on CMT and TNN.

Vegas with Buddy, Ricky Van Shelton and Tony Conway. But there wasn't a dry eye in the house when the great Willie Nelson's voice cracked as he sang "You Were Always on My Mind." Tough as nails, yet gentle as a lamb, how Buddy would have loved his farewell on that rainy, dreary Tennessee morning, especially the scratchy recording of "My Buddy," by Dr. John.

GRAMMY CHAT

I haven't spoken with our illustrious leader, Mr. Russell Barnard, but I know without asking that he was smiling a smile a mile wide when the Grammy for Country Album went to Johnny Cash for his highly acclaimed *Unchained*. Vince Gill wasn't scheduled for a Grammy performance but filled in at the last minute for ailing labelmate George Strait, who had a sore throat. Ironically, it was Vince who took home the Male Country Vocal Performance for "Pretty Little Adriana." The Academy-Award-nominated song, "How Do I Live," recorded by Trisha Yearwood for the movie *Con Air*, got the Grammy nod for Female Country Vocal Performance. Trisha and her duet partner, Garth Brooks, received the trophy for Country Collaboration with Vocal for their hit, "In Another's Eyes." Alison Krauss & Union Station were awarded

three statues for Country Performance by Duo or Group with Vocal for "Looking in the Eyes of Love." Country Instrumental Performance for "Little Liza

Jane" and Bluegrass Album for *So Long So Wrong*. "Butterfly Kisses" was named Country Song. Deana Carter's dress of red, cut clear to her navel, was designed by Richard Tyler and about the most uncountrified outfit I've ever seen. Patty Loveless was stunning in a black silk pant suit designed by Alexander McQueen and as classy as could be. I sure hope next year the female pop performers will remember to comb their hair and shave under their arms!

ALL I KNOW

I did read a press release that Alan and Denise Jackson were separating. Former high school sweethearts, the couple had been married 18 years. That's all I know, right now.

FANS, JUST MOVE

All you fans just may as well move on down to Music City the first week of June and stay until July. This year's TNN/Music City News Awards show has moved from the Opry House to the Nashville Arena, allowing tickets for all of you who want to attend. 'Course most of you will already be in town for Fan Fair. The threat now is Countryfest '98. Last year's event spilled 250,000 into the Dallas Raceway, and the year before same numbers showed up in Atlanta. Fruit of the

THREE WEEKS AT THE TOP



She's sweet, talented, beautiful and pregnant, but that last didn't stop Martina McBride from chart-topping with her recent single, "A Broken Wing." Flanked by songwriters James House, Sam Hogin and Phil Barnhart, Martina's all smiles. And who wouldn't be? It's not every day a girl's song remains at Number One for three weeks.

People

Loom, makers of mighty fine underdrawers, are planning to bring the event to Music City, and on the tail end of Fan Fair. So stay tuned. If this happens, just pack extra threads and hang out. Show 'em your Fruit of the Looms, and they'll let you stay.

THE WILLIE CHANNEL

Several years ago, **Willie Nelson** purchased all those wonderful early syndicated television shows like *The Porter Wagoner Show* with pretty Little Miss

Norma Jean and later **Dolly Parton**; *Pop Goes the Country*; *Nashville On the Road*; *The Dolly Show*; *Del Reeves Country Carnival*; *The Gospel Singing Jubilee* and others. He failed to find the interest he expected from cable companies in programming the shows, and aimed to start his own cable TV network until the IRS jumped into his bank account and whoooooops—it was gone! Now Willie and the Kickapoo tribe in Kansas have joined forces and launched The Outlaw Music Channel, which broadcasts 24 hours daily. Willie will show videos and the Native

GRANDPA JONES: 1913-1998

It was January 3 at the Grand Ole Opry House, where 84-year-old Grandpa Jones finished another performance. It would prove to be his last. Backstage, he became dizzy, the prelude to a devastating stroke. On February 19, barely a week after being moved to McKendree Village, a Hermitage, Tennessee, nursing facility, he died, severing another link to the Opry's past and to the old-timey, pre-bluegrass music era. His eldest daughter, Marsha, had died just days earlier.

Nonetheless, Grandpa's was truly a life well-spent. Born Louis Marshall Jones, near Niagra, Kentucky, on October 20, 1913, he grew up in Akron, Ohio. Singing and playing guitar, he hosted his own radio show at age 16. While he was working for legendary balladeer Bradley Kincaid in 1936, Kincaid chided him on the air for moving toward the microphone "like an old grandpa." Even in his 20's, his natural voice sounded elderly, and with makeup, fake mustache and old clothes, Grandpa was born. Many assumed his famous banjo style was inspired by Opry legend Uncle Dave Macon. He actually learned it from Cousin Emmy at Wheeling's WWVA in 1937.

Joining Cincinnati's *WLW Boone County Jamboree* in 1942, Grandpa met Merle Travis, The Delmore Brothers and Joe Maphis. Along with performing solo, he, Travis and The Delmores sang gospel as The Brown's Ferry Four. Late in 1943 Grandpa and Travis became King Records' first recording artists. In 1946, after two years in the



Recently on the Opry stage.

Army, Grandpa wound up on the Opry and married fiddler Ramona Riggins, who worked the road with him for years. His King recordings of "Eight More Miles to Louisville," "Mountain Dew" and "Old Rattler" became classics (as did King's Brown's Ferry Four recordings). Other releases appeared on RCA, Decca, Monument (where "T for Texas" became his only Top Ten single in 1962) and CMH.

Playing old-time music for aging fans could have forced him into obscurity. Then in 1969, *Hee Haw* made him a household word. He created the show's Gospel Quartet, basing it on the Brown's Ferry Four. His "What's for supper?" routine became part of American pop culture, though he initially doubted it would catch on. Advancing age reduced his need for makeup, yet neither heart surgeries nor a mild 1991 stroke could keep him off stage. An autobiography appeared, and in 1978 he was inducted into the Hall of Fame. He remained with *Hee Haw* until it ended in 1992. In recent years he continued working the Opry, where his funeral services were held February 24.

Mourn Grandpa? Certainly. But feel free to celebrate a man who for over half a century remained true to the music of an earlier, simpler era, yet gained his greatest fame through a high-tech medium that didn't exist when he was born. To the end, he never tried to be anything but Grandpa Jones. It was good enough for him, and for everyone else.

—RICH KIENZLE

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GRANDPA'S FUNERAL

A likeness of **Grandpa Jones** with his trusty banjo stared down from the red barn at the back of the Opry stage as superstar **Vince Gill** sang "My Old Grandpa," a tune he'd written about his granddad, in memory of Grandpa. Superstar **Lorrie Morgan**, her husband **Jon Randall** and two children, **Morgan** and **Jesse Keith**, went to the funeral home in Goodlettsville where they visited with the family. His boots, banjo, hat, glasses and suspenders resting against a wooden chair on the Grand Ole Opry stage reminded us that Grandpa Jones, an original American treasure, was no more. His flag-covered casket sat in front of the stage before his wife, **Ramona**, and their children, **Eloise**, **Alisha** and **Mark**. The *Hee Haw* family was seated behind the Jones family. The Grand Ole Opry family was seated on the opposite side. Close family friend **Marty Stuart** was in charge of the service for Louis Marshall "Grandpa" Jones, a member of the Country Music Hall of Fame, a founding member of the *Hee Haw* cast and a Grand Ole Opry member for 50 years.

The Opry's **Jim & Jesse** performed Grandpa's self-penned "Falling Leaves." **The Whites** and **Ricky Skaggs** sang two of Grandpa's favorites: "Gone Home" and "Come and Dine," on which they were joined by **Larry Sledge** and **Ruth McClain**. The *Hee Haw* cast saluted Grandpa. *Hee Haw* producer **Sam Lovullo** stayed with the family at the hospital until the end. **George "Goober" Lindsay** told how he and Grandpa used to send each other gifts until he received a wooden leg and knew he could never top that—that's when the gift-giving stopped. *Prime Time Country* host, an almost tearful **Gary Chapman**, said Grandpa was his influence and advisor. That precious Marty Stuart played all of Grandpa's favorites on his mandolin: "Eight More Miles to Louisville," "T for Texas," "Mountain Dew" and several more. More than 1,500 mourners were in attendance, including **Garth** and **Sandy Brooks**. Garth left the set of *Saturday Night Live*, where he was rehearsing to co-host the show with actor **Robert Duvall**, and flew in from New York for the service. A very sad Garth told me, "I had to be here." Farewell, Grandpa. Like Garth said, there's nobody who can fill Grandpa's boots. There ain't gonna be another one like him.



Listening in on Wade Hayes' new album are manager **Mike Robertson**, producer/exec **Don Cook**, Sony Senior VP **Mike Kraski**, Hayes and **Carol Harper** of Robertson's firm.

LOVES YOU RIGHT

I like **Wade Hayes**. I also like **Don Cook**. When Don bought the fancy house on Millionaire Row (a/k/a Franklin Road) where renegade producer/record man **Jimmy Bowen** used to hang his sailor cap, I wondered what changes if any were made. So when I got my invitation to the Wade Hayes new release party at Cook's digs, I made plans to go. Cook, songwriter-turned-producer-turned-millionaire, has a living room large enough for Wade to bring his band and perform acoustically. He has a dining room table long enough to properly feed an army of hungry hillbillies. Best of all was Wade's music. Titled *When the Wrong One Loves You Right*, I think this is Wade's finest record of his career. And I enjoyed his performance at Big Don's digs that rainy night.

AUSTIN TOASTING

Delbert McClinton, **Jim Lauderdale** and **Kim Richey** journeyed to Austin for the **Hal Ketchum/Gina Giglio** nuptials. The bride wore a silk dress from the 1930's. During the Austin toasting Hal was heard to say, "Gina is the best thing that ever happened to me."

TENNESSEE RETAILERS

Dolly Parton, **Priscilla Presley** a/k/a the ex-Mrs. **Elvis Presley** (and mother of **Lisa Marie Presley**) and plumb perfect **Vince Gill** are hawking Tennessee tourism this year. In a new ad campaign, the threesome proclaim, "Tennessee Sounds Good to Me."

Thirty-second spots will be on cable. Look for print ads in family magazines as well. Tourists spend a reported \$8 billion annually in the state, and I'd wager a very large percentage of the money is spent by lovers of music. See, Dolly is East Tennessee and Dollywood, Priscilla is West Tennessee with all of the Elvis paraphernalia, and plumb perfect Vince is the token hillbilly, middle Tennessee, Grand Ole Opry and Music Row darling. That pretty much covers the state.

MAKE HISTORY

At the American Music Awards, when actress **Cybill Shepherd** said to fellow presenter, **Julio Iglesias**, "We could make history tonight," I thought she'd done what I'd do under the same circumstances: make a pass at Julio! Not exactly. She was referring to **Alabama**, who were tied at 19 American Music awards with **Kenny Rogers** and **Michael Jackson**. When the group accepted the award for Favorite Country Band, they became the most awarded act in the history of the AMA, with a total of 20 awards. Cybil and Julio and Alabama made history.

And that famous singing group keeps chalking up platinum. So much, in fact, you have to count 'em by threes. Their 1982 release, *Mountain Music*, was certified five times platinum; *Roll On*, their 1984 record, was certified four times platinum; and *Greatest Hits III*, released in the fall of 1994, was certified double platinum. Alabama might be south of Tennessee, but that hillbilly foursome has been close to the heart of Music Town for plenty-some years.



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People

D-I-V-O-R-C-E

Following several months separation, **Pam Tillis** and **Bob DiPiero** did the big "D." Nobody knows why. Nobody knows who got what. Nobody took sides. Everybody wishes the best for the both of them. It was the first Twang Town divorce I recall that you didn't hear, "Well, she did this," or "He did that." All you heard was, "They're both such wonderfully talented people. I hate to hear it." Sending my love and good thoughts to two of Music Row's finest with lots of xoxoxo's.

SAM THE MAN

It was Fat Tuesday in New Orleans. Mardi Gras was in full swing. But my man Sam was not in the swinging city. The great **Sammy Kershaw** was in Houston for his first performance at the Livestock Show, and it was his birthday. Singing, sweating, he generally blew away the

crowd of 50,000. Leaving the arena, the crowd on their feet clapping, Sam tossed Mardi Gras beads and candy into the audience, and they went nuts. The announcer screamed, "Nobody ever did that before."

FAMILY, FRIENDS AND "ROCKY TOP"

Three weeks after having quadruple bypass surgery at Baptist Hospital, **Bobby Osborne**, half of **The Osborne Brothers** duo, returned to the Grand Ole Opry and sang "Rocky Top" with his brother **Sonny** and their hot-shot band for what must have been the millionth time.

Award-winning **Diamond Rio's** bassist, **Dana Williams**, the Osbornes' nephew, came off the Opry stage saying he hoped he got to see his Uncle Bobby and Uncle Sonny. Seems Dana had been so busy on the road with Diamond Rio, he hadn't seen Bobby since his surgery. Country music show biz is just buses passing in the night.

Speaking of "Rocky Top," not only is it an official song for the State of Tennessee, it is the official anthem of the University of Tennessee, where the blood runs bright orange. Our "Strawberry Wine" darling, **Deana Carter**, is a graduate of UT and is as true orange-blooded as you please. Seems Deana was opening a show for the long-legged wonder, Mr. **Alan Jackson**, in Ohio. Barefooted Deana was interrupted during soundcheck by Alan playing "Rocky Top." Deana hauled off to dancing, did not realize the stage was elevated and fell off, tearing ligaments in her ankle. Had to get a cast on her foot.

JOHN BERRY SINGING AGAIN

Three months after vocal chord surgery to remove a cyst, **John Berry** went back into the recording studio. Singer/songwriter **John Hiatt** is producing four sides on Berry. Seems John is a fan of John's singing and John is a fan of John's writing. So the John and John twains met.

CLIFFIE STONE: 1917-1998

On January 16, barely a week after Owen Bradley's funeral, Cliffie Stone suffered a massive heart attack in his Saugus, California, home and died at a local hospital. He was 80.

Stone was, in many ways, the Owen Bradley of the West Coast. His vision, congenial energy and creativity made him the catalyst for the post-war country scene around Los Angeles, and established Capitol Records as a force in country music. In 1935, the Depression forced 18-year-old Cliff Snyder to join his dad, entertainer Herman "The Hermit" Snyder, in singer Stuart Hamblen's band over KFVD radio in L.A. as bassist-comic "Cliffie Stonehead." After work as a country DJ, freelance bass player and record producer, he was hired by Capitol in 1945 as talent scout and assistant to A&R man Lee Gillette.

Cliffie not only helped Capitol land Merle Travis, Tex Williams, Jack Guthrie and Jimmy Wakely (and later, Ferlin Husky), he and Travis co-wrote such classics as "So Round! So Firm! So Fully Packed" and "Smoke! Smoke! Smoke (That Cigarette)." When he asked Travis to record a folk album and Travis protested there were no folksongs that hadn't been recorded, Cliffie suggested he write new songs that sounded old. One of those "new" Travis folksongs was "Sixteen Tons."

At Pasadena's KXLA radio, he created the live noontime *Dinner Bell*



Round-Up and added KXLA disc jockey Tennessee Ernie Ford to the cast as singer and comic. Three years later, Cliffie launched his local *Hometown Jamboree* TV show from El Monte Legion stadium, with Ernie as star. He also discovered Johnny Horton, Molly Bee, Dallas Frazier, Ferlin Husky, satirist Stan Freberg and later, rock singer Tommy Sands.

As Ernie's stardom rose, Cliffie, still wearing his other hats, became his manager in 1951 and saw him through the triumph of "Sixteen Tons" in 1956. When Ernie's weekly NBC-TV variety show premiered that year, the original producers didn't understand the star, and

the show floundered—until Cliffie became producer and tailored it to Ernie's strengths, including the closing hymn that launched his gospel career. *The Ford Show* was a hit for five years.

When the show ended in 1961, Cliffie turned Ernie's management over to his assistant Jim Loakes, and focused on song publishing. He and Capitol country producer Ken Nelson owned Central Songs and, after selling it, Cliffie helped manage other publishers and also served as President of the Academy of Country Music for a time. Son Steve produced records for Capitol, while son Curtis was a charter member of the group Highway 101. Inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1989, Cliffie remarried after the death of his wife Dorothy. Second wife Joan Carol became his creative collaborator on songs, a how-to book for composers and occasional *Hometown Jamboree* reunions. And he never quit seeking new talent.

I spent hours interviewing Cliffie about the old days, and when it seemed time had buried a memory, a bit of discussion about a song or record could suddenly unleash vivid, fascinating stories about the artist or song, things he hadn't thought of in years. Though proud of his achievements, he once admitted, "As I look back...we were trying to make a living, not history."

Actually, Cliffie Stone did both—magnificently. —RICH KIENZLE



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ALBUM OF THE YEAR

- ☐ Carrying Your Love With Me *George Strait*
☐ Come On Over *Shania Twain*
☐ Everywhere *Tim McGraw*
☐ Long Stretch Of *Lonesome Patty Loveless*
☐ Sevens *Garth Brooks*

SONG OF THE YEAR

- ☐ All The Good Ones Are Gone *Pam Tillis*
☐ How Do I Live *LeAnn Rimes, Trisha Yearwood*
☐ It's Your Love *Tim McGraw w/ Faith Hill*
☐ Something That We Do *Clint Black*
☐ The Fool *Lee Ann Womack*

VOCAL EVENT OF THE YEAR

- ☐ I'm So Happy *Toby Keith and Sting*
☐ In Another's Eyes *Garth Brooks and Trisha Yearwood*
☐ It's Your Love *Tim McGraw w/ Faith Hill*
☐ What If I Said *Anita Cochran and Steve Wariner*
☐ You Don't Seem To Miss Me *Patty Loveless and George Jones*

SINGLE RECORD OF THE YEAR

- ☐ Carrying Your Love With Me *George Strait*
☐ How Do I Live *LeAnn Rimes*
☐ How Do I Live (from "Con Air") *Trisha Yearwood*
☐ How Your Love Makes Me Feel *Diamond Rio*
☐ It's Your Love *Tim McGraw with Faith Hill*

TOP NEW FEMALE VOCALIST

- ☐ Sara Evans
☐ Lila McCann
☐ Lee Ann Womack

TOP FEMALE VOCALIST

- ☐ Deana Carter
☐ Patty Loveless
☐ Martina McBride
☐ LeAnn Rimes
☐ Trisha Yearwood

TOP NEW MALE VOCALIST

- ☐ Rhett Akins
☐ Kenny Chesney
☐ Michael Peterson

TOP MALE VOCALIST

- ☐ Alan Jackson
☐ Tim McGraw
☐ Collin Raye
☐ George Strait
☐ Bryan White

TOP NEW DUO/GROUP

- ☐ Big House
☐ The Kinley's
☐ The Lynn's

TOP VOCAL DUO/GROUP

- ☐ Alabama
☐ Brooks & Dunn
☐ Diamond Rio
☐ Lonestar
☐ Sawyer Brown

VIDEO OF THE YEAR

- ☐ 455 Rocket
☐ A Broken Wing
☐ Did I Shave My Legs For This?
☐ It's Your Love
☐ How Your Love Makes Me Feel

ENTERTAINER OF THE YEAR

- ☐ Garth Brooks
☐ Brooks & Dunn
☐ Reba McEntire
☐ Tim McGraw
☐ George Strait

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People

READ THE FUNNIES LATELY?

If you've read the comics lately and if you read "Nancy," then you know that we have friends in the funny paper. Seems **Guy Gilchrist**, who scripts "Nancy," is a huge fan of country music. He went to a show in New Jersey where **Martina McBride** was opening for **Tim McGraw**. Gilchrist fell in love with Martina's singing, and in a couple weeks, Nancy's Aunt Fritzie—who apparently wears the same bra cup as **Dolly Parton**—was sporting a T-shirt with Martina's name and face on her bosom. A couple weeks later Auntie Fritzie wore a **Garth Brooks** T-shirt in the funny paper. Seems like the comics makes more sense these days than the headlines.

NEVER KNOW WHO WILL BE AT THE GRAND OLE OPRY

You never know who you'll see at the Grand Ole Opry. **Tom Arnold**, in town to promote his new TV show, *The Tom Show*, got all bug-eyed and smiling backstage at the Opry. Tom, formerly married to TV's **Roseanne**, said he was in love with **Lorrie Morgan**, thought **Vince Gill** was cute and that **Porter Wagoner** was *under-dressed* in his baby blue suit covered in rhinestones and colored studs in the shape of wagon wheels. Tom was genu-

SINGING, RACING AND SNACKING



When MCA/Nashville and Lance Snacks teamed up to go racing, they had to pose for pix. Left to right are MCA's VP of Marketing and Sales **Dave Weigand**, label head **Bruce Hinton**, **David Lee Murphy** (singer, race fan and cracker snacker—like me!), top-notch driver **Jeff Purvis**, and Lance's marketing director **Henry Pully**. Lance and MCA are the corporate sponsors for the Phoenix Racing Team on this year's Busch Grand National circuit.

inely impressed with the backstage camaraderie between the stars. "They actually like each other," he remarked. "That don't happen in Hollywood," he added. We already knew that, didn't we, fans?

SWEET 16 FOR LILA



Teen country sensation **Lila McCann** celebrated her 16th birthday with a bash at the Country Star American Music Grill in Los Angeles. During the festivities, the Asylum Records' artist sang her hits, "I Wanna Fall in Love" and "Down Came a Blackbird." In honor of McCann's birthday, radio station **KZLA** and **Glendale Harley-Davidson** presented her with a motorcycle. Is she old enough to drive that thing? With Lila are **KZLA's Bob Harvey** and the Grill's **Larry Meehan**.

JUSTIN TUBB: 1935-1998

In a continued period of sadness for the industry, Justin Tubb, eldest son of Ernest Tubb and a Grand Ole Opry star since 1955, died January 24 in a Nashville hospital during surgery to repair an abdominal aneurysm. The son of Ernest and first wife Elaine Tubb, Justin Wayne Tubb was born in San Antonio, Texas, in 1935. His own recording career was hardly on a level with Ernest's, but he had three Top Ten singles: "Looking Back to See," a 1954 duet with Goldie Hill, and the solo singles, "I Gotta Go Get My Baby" (1955) and "Take a Letter, Miss Gray" (1963). Decca's Paul Cohen and Owen Bradley tried to make Justin a rockabilly, but despite a few rock efforts, his commitment to singing hard country won out. He had an impressive gift as a writer, penning songs recorded by many artists, including "Lonesome 7-7203" (Hawkshaw Hawkins' final hit) as well as Del Reeves' hit, "Be Glad." In later years, while performing on the Opry, he retained an interest in the Ernest Tubb Record Shops and hosted the *Midnight Jamboree* before selling his interest in the stores. He was buried near his father's (unmarked) grave outside Nashville.

—RICH KIENZLE

Record Reviews

George Strait
One Step at a Time
MCA 70020

At this stage in the game it's both a sheer pleasure and a slightly nerve-wracking challenge to review a new George Strait album—particularly since here of late Strait seems to roll them out about once a year with assembly line proficiency.

Really, after more than 20—mostly excellent—albums (including a multi-million-selling boxed collection, a couple of hits packages and a Christmas album) released in the last 17 or 18 years, what simile has not yet been drawn about Strait? What comparison not yet made, what superlative not yet expended? If I still have to stop right here and explain to you who George Strait is, or what he sounds like, then I venture to politely suggest you maybe got this magazine off the rack by mistake.

All the same, in listening to *One Step at a Time*, Strait's latest, the key to his amazing longevity and vitality strikes me even more immediately than it ever has before.

Sure, Strait's the king—and really one of the last few survivors—of the early 1980's neo-traditionalist movement. And, yeah, he is the archetypal figure that almost single-handedly inspired contemporary country's "Hat" movement, and, in the process, spawned a host of imitators. (The George Strait "look" remains ubiquitous among Nashville's baby-faced newcomers.)

But Strait's enduring appeal, it seems to me, is that he's a sheer master when it comes to singing to the ladies. Indeed, with the bright, emotion-charged vocals and shining



harmonies he brings to *One Step at a Time*, he once again proves to be the near-perfect link between neo-honky-tonk and contemporary country love balladeering.

A good for-instance is the opening cut, "I Just Want to Dance with You." This samba-like, fiddle & steel-injected dance tune, co-written by John Prine and Roger Cook, is about as smooth and uptown as Strait's ever gotten. Yet, true to form, he brings the fiddles and steel right along with the fancy dance steps.

He goes similarly straight (make that Strait) to the heart on "Maria," a lovely Tex-Mex-flavored romantic ballad penned by Robert Earl Keen Jr. "Remember the Alamo" (Gordon Kennedy & Wayne Kirkpatrick) is another Lone Star-flavored heart song that's intensely melodic and imbued with searing emotion. (Here and elsewhere, Strait turns in soaring harmonies with the superb backing of studio singers Curtis Young

and Liana Manis.) The 60's honky-tonk-flavored title tune (penned by Earl Clark and Luke Reed) conveys similar heartfelt sorrow and urgency.

Strait, of course, always has a big head start when he sets out to make a new album: He's got the very best songwriters in Nashville pitching him their top drawer material. Dean Dillon and Royce Porter penned "That's the Breaks," a wrenching lament with a heart-searing melody and deceptively clever lyrics that prove a perfect vehicle for Strait's masterful phrasing. Jim Lauderdale's contribution to this collection is a jittery number called "We Really Shouldn't Be Doing This," which Strait enlivens with a playful rockabilly-inflected vocal.

One of my own personal favorites is "Neon Row," a haunting, old-timey-sounding lament penned by Donny Kees and Jimmy Jay that revisits the timeless theme of a good woman gone bad. It actually

sounds like there's a tear in Strait's eye when he bemoans the sordid red-light district where his love has gone:

Where if you're lonely then you're easy

Them good old boys just pick and choose

And lonely women are in season

For one night stands, and all night blues

You'd think that Strait might now and then feel the pressure of maintaining the remarkable level of artistry he's maintained as he closes in on two decades in the charts. But I hazard to guess he doesn't even look at it that way, but prefers instead to handle it just like the album title says: *One Step at a Time*.

How else can you account for the freshness—the sheer vibrancy and romantic vitality—that practically radiates from these ten fine tracks?

—BOB ALLEN

Mike Ireland & Holler
Learning How to Live
Sub Pop SP 418

Try as I might, I despair of the alt.country "No Depression" school of singer-songwriters and bands expanding beyond cult status to become a major force. I share my colleague Patrick Carr's hopes, given the reality that a running-on-empty Music Row is so bankrupt of new ideas they've been reduced to running the old ones on a tape loop. The question is, what alt. acts can reach the masses? How many are self-centered singer/writers and sloppy bands preaching to the converted, lacking the sense of tradition that every major evolutionary artist in country music has always maintained? Too many alt. artists and fans

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Record Reviews



alike seem clueless about the music beyond the most obvious icons (Patsy, Hank, etc.). That won't work if this music's to catch on.

But if I had to pick one act that could break through, it's Mike Ireland and his trio, Holler. Vocally easygoing and natural, their mix of traditional and cutting-edge individuality, with its fresh, sleek feel, sets him and the band apart and could attract mainstream fans without compromise. Sure, their flair for integrating new ideas into classic formats may be quirky, but it always succeeds. Consider the string quartet on three numbers. On the surface, it's hardly a departure since a lot of strings on Nashville Sound records were nothing more than string quartets.

The difference is in the way Ireland and company utilizes them, particularly on the spooky, desolate opening track, "House of Secrets." As he sings of a man fixing to torch an abandoned home awash in bad memories, the strings are as much a rhythmic foil for his voice as the guitars. On the unadorned honky-tonker, "Worst of All," and the title number, Ireland, like his hero, Billy Sherrill, uses strings the way Sherrill used them when he was producing George Jones for Epic. The raw-rocking feel of "Headed for a Fall," mixed with Dan Mesh's low-string boogie gui-

tar surrounding Ireland's vocal (with Slim Whitman falsetto), as well as the ballads, "Don't Call This Love," "Cold, Cold Comfort" and "Biggest Torch in Town," all reflect decidedly unslick music. So does his jaunty, rocking spin on the traditional murder ballad, "Banks of the Ohio."

Continuing that sense of tradition is Ireland's own evocative "Graveyard Song," a ballad The Carter Family might have recorded 70 years ago, mixing loss of love with awareness of mortality. "Some Things You Lose" has the sharp imagery of the best alt. material. Ireland's Christmas number, "Christmas Past," reflects true, depressing holiday melancholy, obliterating the kinds of generic holiday songs Nashville song factories provide to fill most stars' Xmas albums. Ireland's willingness to ignore boundaries also succeeds, proven by his ingenious cover of hyper-emotional pop balladeer Johnnie Ray's 1952 pop smash, "Cry," a song few, if any, mainstream country singers would ever think to cover despite its versatile message.

The fact that *Learning How to Live* appears on the small Seattle-based Sub Pop label, and was recorded in L.A., ought to make it clear no one busted their hump to grab the mainstream crowd. The fact that this literally perfect record could grab a broader

audience doesn't mean that it will. Still, the fact remains that it could, and that's good enough for me.

—RICH KIENZLE

Melodie Crittenden *Melodie Crittenden* Asylum 62043

Melodie Crittenden's record represents something highly unusual—a country record co-produced by a woman other than the artist herself. Songwriter extraordinaire Stephony Smith joined Byron Gallimore (Tim McGraw, for starters) to bring forth an in-your-face debut on this emotive young lady.

Did you hear her single, "Broken Road"? The writers on this flawlessly delivered piece of sheer poetry are Marcus Hummon and Dirt Band member Jeff Hanna, with Bobby E. Boyd. To it, Melodie brings power and that goose bump factor that separates the hits from the fodder. She also points to "If This Ain't Love," a song she wrote with the beautifully melodic and deeply religiously motivated Austin Cunningham, as the key to her own personality. "In the mood of it, it shows strength, passion, and vulnerability. ...[It] really describes me," Crittenden explains. "I'm glad you want me but baby I want more," the lyric says. It's

passion meeting morality head on; a source of tension for sure.

Crittenden's vocal power connects with her moral grounding like a drumhead stretched across a reservoir of passionate intensity. She comes by it honestly. She grew up in Oklahoma, traveling around singing gospel music with her family. She sang in rock and country bands to earn money in high school, then went to the Music Conservatory of Kansas City, where she didn't quite finish the degree program. "I didn't feel I was heading in the direction that I wanted to go," Crittenden says. She came to Nashville to follow a route it seems more and more would-be country singers follow since Trisha Yearwood made it work: attending Belmont University, getting her degree and singing demos and in the live shows at Opryland theme park. Always, always, she sang. In fact, singing demos was how Stephony Smith discovered her; and her manager worked for her song publisher, where he weekly heard her voice on her new songs for three years.

If you haven't been exposed to Melodie Crittenden, seek her out. She really spans a range. "Never Underestimate a Bored Housewife" is like the Jimmie Webb of fiddle country. Slam-bang wailing fiddles, as well as underplayed statements, and screaming slide guitar, it has unmistakable flavor. And then after all the strong love and independence here, she ends up with a quiet, acoustic-based tune that is pure Austin Cunningham: "With His Arms Wide Open." It's core gospel love, crucifixion and redemption, overt Christocentrism; not just vague, pre-sweetened, Christian pap. It's a risk she chooses to take. It's easy to stand up at the awards shows and thank Jesus while waving to Mama, but harder to say something as overtly religious where it really counts—on the piece you mean to sell. She's a gutsy woman, and a great singer.

—BOB MILLARD

Record Reviews

Robin & Linda Williams

Devil of a Dream
Sugar Hill SHCD-1059

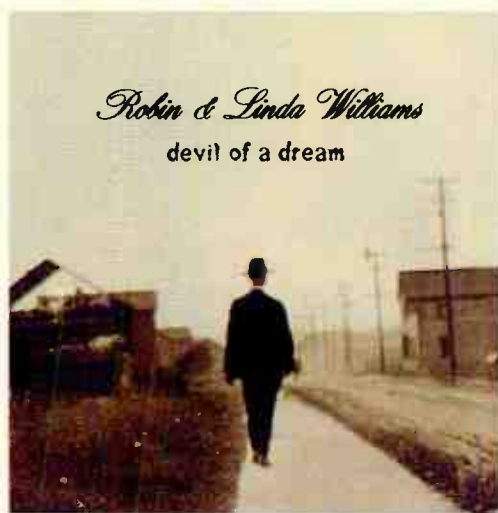
For those of you unfortunate enough to have missed out on the dozen or so albums that Virginia-based husband and wife team Robin and Linda Williams have made these past couple of decades, *Devil of a Dream*, their 14th and latest, is a good place to start.

Over the years The Williamses and Their Fine Group (that's how they were introduced on the Grand Ole Opry one night, and the name just sort of stuck) have nurtured and perfected their own evocative, finely nuanced and highly personalized brand of rural-flavored American music that draws heavily from old-timey Appalachian and contemporary folk influences, with a smattering of bluegrass thrown in for good measure.

Though they've never made much headway on mainstream country radio, Robin and Linda have become a welcome presence in *Gavin's* relatively new Americana (alternative country) charts in recent months. Meanwhile, they've wowed audiences all the way from the Philadelphia Folk Festival to the Grand Ole Opry. Recently, they've opened shows for their pal Mary Chapin Carpenter, and they've been called upon to contribute their fine harmonies to recent recordings by both Carpenter and Iris DeMent.

Though their roughhewn but pristine harmonies are indeed what first jump out at you, Robin's and Linda's songwriting is just as noteworthy. As is par for the course, they co-wrote (along with their perennial co-writer Jerome Clark) 12 of the 13 tracks on *Devil of a Dream*—everything but their delightful cover of Phil and Don Everly's "I Wonder If I Care as Much."

Sometimes dark humor is their musical vehicle. That's the spin on "So, It's Like This, Man...," a tongue-in-cheek, drink-in-hand song about a ru-



Robin & Linda Williams

devil of a dream

ined but unfazed beer-aholic who wrecks his car, then loses his job, his wife and his girlfriend in short order, then casually toasts his losses by sticking around the bar for "just one more beer." "At the Crossroads Again" gives a devilish new twist to the age-old tale of selling your soul to the devil.

Stark, painful loneliness is the emotion sharpened to a fine point by the haunting imagery and plaintive harmonies of "Five Rooms." "Men With Guns" offers a chilling commentary on the squalor and murder that is too often the consequence when small, mean-spirited minds are warped by the forces of paranoia and anti-government propaganda. "The Genius" takes a long, very skeptical look at the way we subtly encourage bad behavior in self-destructive, dope-addled singing stars.

Along these lines, Robin and Linda have seen fit to reprise one of my all-time favorites from their extensive song catalogue: "Rolling and Rambling (The Death of Hank Williams)." Of all the many songs that have been inspired by "Ol' Hank's" jaded legacy, this, along with Waylon Jennings' "Are You Sure Hank Done It This Way," is probably my all-time favorite. And it's one of many reasons I think you'll savor these two fine singers and Their Fine Band on *Devil of a Dream*—one fine album.

—BOB ALLEN



Ruby Lovett

Ruby Lovett
Curb D-77857

Ruby Lovett hails from Laurel, Mississippi, and sounds like it. She's got one of those voices: unabashedly rural, with a razor-sharp glimmer in the tradition of Patty Loveless or Sara Evans but resembling neither. There's a little Loretta and Dolly in there, too, yet it's still all Lovett. Another surprise: the producer of all but one track is Allen Reynolds, never one of my favorites, but one who showed great sensitivity in placing Lovett in the right, organic context. What do I mean by organic? I mean natural. You'll find no studio excesses here. Most of the instrumentation is acoustic, with a refreshing absence of booming drums and overamplified guitars. Even Reynolds' use of strings is well-conceived and in exemplary taste.

The same attention to quality is apparent with the dozen numbers, beginning with Kevin Welch and Gary Scruggs' tough, punchy "True Love Never Dies." Lovett's every bit as good on ballads like the Jim Rushing/Terry Burns "Nothing to Prove." It's no surprise, given her strong traditional bent, that she makes short work of the album's token oldie, Charley Pride's 1969

hit, "I'm So Afraid of Losing You Again," and the smoldering, swampy "Little Bitty Crack in His Heart." Her no-frills treatment of "That Train Don't Stop Here Anymore," the closest thing to a dance song on the record, hits the lyrics just right. Even the token Nashville studio rocker, the Tony Arata/Emory Gordy number, "I Don't Want to Go Out Wondering," never overwhelms her voice. On the rocking "Your Love Speaks Louder Than Words," she lets her Mississippi accent be heard, the kind of Southernness radio supposedly scoffs at. That takes guts.

The shallow ballad, "Crazy Enough," isn't worthy of Lovett. She gives it a better treatment than it probably deserves compared to "Look What Love Can Do," a sensitive tale of underage motherhood and overage adoption. Co-written by Lovett (who proudly proclaims her adoptive status in her notes), its message, close to her own heart, reflects the kind of unfettered humanity heard too rarely from Music Row song hacks. Even the cheating duet, "One of Them's Yours," is outstanding on her part, though one wishes she'd had a stronger partner than the underwhelming Ken Mellons. The two gospel numbers, "In the Arms of Love," written by Chapin Hartford and Jo-El and Bobbie Sonnier, and

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Record Reviews

"When He's All You've Got," another Lovett co-wrote, are both beautifully delivered, with strings nicely arranged on each number but set well back of the vocal.

It's not that often that an album appears nowadays with minimal hype and nonsense, as this one did. Sometimes those are the ones that mean something, unadorned by excessive publicity and special videos sent along in the package. This one is certainly several cuts above, and if Lovett stays this course, and has the chance to be heard, she may be a keeper.

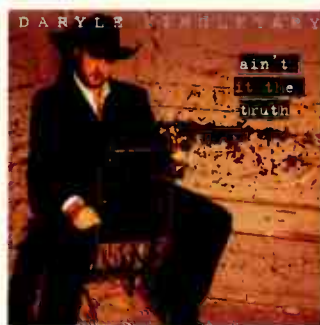
—RICH KIENZLE

Daryle Singletary *Ain't It the Truth* Giant 24696

The Note" has been recorded four times before now. Tammy Wynette, Conway Twitty, Gene Watson and Doug Supernaw all tried it, but it was never released as a single until Daryle Singletary got hold of it. The song, written by Buck Moore and Michele Ray, is the simple tale of a man getting the bad news in the form of a "Dear John" letter, but Singletary, who has spent his whole life singing Randy Travis and Merle Haggard songs in bars, gets the chance to sink his teeth into this honky-tonk melodrama.

Singletary sings the opening lines, "The note was short, but Lord so strong," with the stunned bewilderment of a man who just read the letter for the first time. You can't tell what hurts more—the fact that she's leaving or that "she couldn't tell me, face to face." It's only gradually, as the news sinks in, that the shock wears off and is replaced by sorrow; as it does, Singletary stretches out the aching notes further and further.

Singletary has always had a great honky-tonk voice—a baritone with a deep bottom and a whiskey-tickled purr. But like a lot of great singers who don't write, Singletary is at the



mercy of his songwriters and producers to give him the right material. His 1995 debut album, *Daryle Singletary*, co-produced by Travis, David Malloy and James Stroud, yielded two Top Five singles, but the Stroud-produced follow-up, *All Because of You*, pretty much flopped. When Stroud left Giant Records last year, Singletary's whole career seemed to be in limbo. Doug Johnson, who replaced Stroud, decided that Singletary needed to make an album that was even more hard-core country than his first two efforts.

The pay-off is *Ain't It the Truth*, Singletary's third and best album, which kicks off with "The Note." Produced by Johnson and John Hobbs (Collin Raye), the disc is full of unvarnished country songs. The singer and his producers don't rely solely on the Music Row assembly line; they aren't afraid to dig out old songs that were never quite the hits they should have been. "A Thing Called Love," written by Jerry Reed, was a Number 21 hit for Jimmy Dean in 1968, but Singletary breathes new life into this clip-clop story of a six-foot-six man brought to his knees by love. "My Baby's Lovin'," which was a funky R&B number on Delbert McClinton's 1990 album, *I'm With You*, becomes a boot-scootin' two-step number in Singletary's hands.

Several of the brand-new songs sparkle as well. The second single is likely to be "Love or the Lack Of," a barroom sermon on the theme of "money can't buy you love." Saving it from sappiness is a muscular honky-tonk beat and a terse,



hard-bitten vocal. The third single could well be "That's Where You're Wrong," a last-ditch plea to a departing lover which nicely balances held-back verses against an over-the-top chorus. Dewayne Blackwell, who wrote "Friends in Low Places," contributes a funny parody of every "I'd Die for You" song ever written in "I'd Live for You," where he promises to swim the deepest swimming pool and climb the highest bar stool for her love.

Singletary is not one of those great talents like Merle Haggard, George Strait or the less-known Buddy Miller, who's going to persevere no matter what happens in the music industry. He's one of those solid singers who needs help to make good records. If you can judge the health of country music by whether or not such journeymen singers are flourishing, *Ain't It the Truth* is a good sign indeed.

—GEOFFREY HIMES

Ray Condo and His Ricochets *Swing, Brother Swing!* Joaquin JR 2502

Patrick Carr's outstanding essay on Austin's Cornell Hurd band ("Garth's Worst Nightmare") a few issues back leaves the door open for similar nominations. Mine is Ray Condo and His Ricochets, a quintet who couldn't create homogenized Music City sludge if their lives depended on it. You can't line dance to them, nor do they steal their song ideas from old Eagles or

James Taylor LP's. The only smoke onstage during their performances comes from cigarettes in the clubs they play. They're not from the gang at Nashville's Dead Reckoning, nor do they hail from Austin or our West Coast. Their home base is Canada's West Coast, specifically Vancouver, B.C.

Condo used to sing rockabilly as leader of The Hardrock Goners. The Ricochets write few songs, preferring to cover many old and obscure Western swing, rockabilly and jazz tunes. Joaquin Records owner Jeff Richardson produced Western swing LP reissues on the Rambler and Western labels in the early 1980's, records devoured by the Condo group, which sort of brings them full circle. Their sound, however, avoids imitation. Whether swing, rock or blues, the energy fairly pulses from the speakers. Steel guitarist Jimmy Roy (who plays a vintage non-pedal Fender), guitarist-arranger Stephen Nikleva, bass slapper Clive Jackson and drummer Steve Taylor (who uses only a snare onstage) sound like a much bigger band behind Condo's hyperactive, passionate vocals and muscular saxophone work.

Their Western swing skills come alive with Hank Penny's 1952 "Hadicillin Boogie." This Pee Wee King-Redd Stewart novelty satirized the cure-all elixir, Hadacol. They follow with a jumping version of "Loud Mouth," the 1937 recording by the Texas band, Smoky Wood and his Modern Mountaineers. "Strathcona," the sole original, features its composers, Jimmy Roy and Nikleva, reviving the spirit of the old Jimmy Bryant-Speedy West guitar-steel instrumentals.

Rockabilly gets a fair shake as well, with such obscurities as "Sunset Blues," Carl Perkins' "Rockin' Record Hop" and Lew Williams' "Something I Said." Condo turns Glenn Barber's "Ice Water," a Starday recording from the 1950's, into a ranting, raving mass of energy. Ruth Brown's "Teardrops from My Eyes" and Larry Darnell's

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Record Reviews

moody blues ballad, "What More Do You Want Me to Do," demonstrate their R&B mastery. Even more impressive is their skill at adapting 1930's small-group jazz into their sound without imitating. "Swing Brother Swing" was originally recorded in 1935 by trumpeter Wingy Manone. "Tain't No Use" and "It Ain't Right," sung with urgency and fervor by Condo, come from virtuosic jazz fiddler Stuff Smith, whose 1930's versions recorded with his Onyx Club Boys were devoured by Western swing musicians of that day.

Retro bands run a risk that such revivals will result in pale imitations. The Ricochets' sound and approach precludes that by reaching into the past, bringing it into the present, and keeping it exciting. No doubt the number of units sold do matter to Condo (and to Joaquin). The difference? The music matters more.

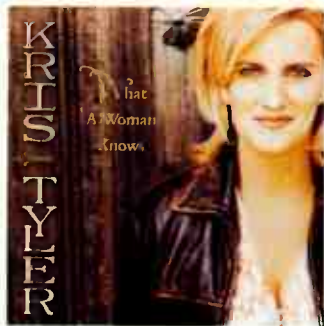
—RICH KIENZLE

Kris Tyler

What a Woman Knows
Rising Tide RTD-53045

Kris Tyler has been bubbling under around Nashville a couple of years as a signee to the quirky new label in town, Rising Tide Entertainment. I saw her in a showcase for her talents as singer and songwriter at the famed Bluebird Cafe early on in the process that led to this CD, and I was not terribly impressed then. What she has brought to record is much better than that lackluster girl-and-a-guitar performance, but I'm not sure I believe that either her voice or her songs have the legs to get up and walk very far.

She seemed then, and still seems, too oft-hurt and a tad too edgy, if not embittered by love. "What a Woman Knows" is an isolationist view of men: "No one knows what a woman knows, so you don't understand it..." starts the title track. Well, I feel excluded, how about you? Experienced country hit-writer Sharon



Rice collaborates to bring Kris' angst into a more accessible vein, as Emory Gordy's production delivers the musical backing required to connect with "She's Only a Cowboy (When It Rains)": "She rides too fast and she plays too hard, And she pushes her limits 'til she goes too far." Here is the side of this artist that is most likely to grab an audience, I feel; at least a big enough audience to make it in today's go-go, high-dollar country music business.

Here's the problem: The best of country these days is real unique and real strong. This effort is unique in a Texas folkie kind of way, but I can't say Kris Tyler is as strong as the competition she faces. She explains her own emotions, but doesn't get out in front of herself to project them into me. I want to experience something viscerally from music. Tyler somehow lays it out there academically, yet keeps it to herself at the same time.

—BOB MILLARD

The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band

Bang Bang Bang
Rising Tide RTD-53050

A lot of California/Colorado country-rock bands have tried to become Nashville country-pop acts, but none has crossed over as convincingly as The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band. It's tempting to attribute this achievement to The Dirt Band's respect for the pre-Beatles traditions of country music as exemplified by their landmark set, *Will the Circle*



Be Unbroken. In fact, though, the band's success probably owed more to Nashville's post-Urban Cowboy traditions. In other words, The Dirt Band knew how to find someone else's good song and how to dress it up with the right blend of hillbilly twang, California harmonies and rock 'n' roll punch to sell it to country radio.

After a string of 16 Top 10 country singles in the 80's, the band's formula stopped clicking in the 90's. But they may be back on track with the new album, *Bang Bang Bang*, which serves up strong songs by Jim Lauderdale, Al Anderson, Mac McAnally and Gillian Welch in versions much sunnier and bouncier than the authors themselves could ever manage.

The album's title track, for example, was penned by Anderson and Craig Wiseman and boasts one of those killer choruses where the melody and rhythm are so tightly tied together that you can't tell where one ends and the other starts. On Anderson's 1996 solo album, *Pay Before You Pump*, the song was delivered with a garage-rock guitar riff and a grizzly-bear growl. By contrast, The Dirt Band delivers the same rocking tempo with a sweet dobro and airy three-part vocal harmonies. The Nitty Gritty version isn't necessarily better, but it's no worse either, and it's definitely more radio-friendly.

The Lauderdale song, "If This Ain't Love," was co-written with Gary Nicholson, and features a chorus hook whose jumpy giddiness captures the new infatuation described by the lyrics. The Dirt Band reinforces that connection by mak-

ing the melody swing with joyful abandon. The McAnally song, "Down the Road," is a story-song about a man who remembers courting a neighborhood girl and now finds a neighborhood boy wooing his daughter. On McAnally's 1990 album, *Simple Life*, the song was more of a folk number with the emphasis clearly on the words. The Nitty Gritty vocals and Dan Dugmore's steel guitar bring out the seductive melody more than McAnally did and strengthen the words in the process.

Welch, who is best known for stark, bleak portraits of Appalachia, contributes a comic portrait of a "Dry Town" that wouldn't have been out of place on a Roger Miller or Jerry Reed album, and The Dirt Band puts the punch into the punch lines. Even wittier is "Forget the Job (Get a Life)." The Steve Bogard and Rick Giles song is a finger-wagging bit of advice for every ambitious yuppie who works 60 hours a week in the foolish belief that it will lead to a better life. The album's only original, Jimmy Ibbotson's "The Monkey Song," is a Jimmy Buffett-flavored invitation to return to our simian roots.

Not every track on *Bang Bang Bang* is so successful. Dennis Linde and John Bunzow each contribute a pair of songs, but not even The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band in top form can do much with the sentimental lyrics and humdrum music. One of Bunzow's songs, "It's About Time," is a duet between Nitty Gritty singer Jeff Hanna and his wife Matraca Berg, but the producers would have been much smarter to use one of Berg's own compositions. Despite these low points, however, *Bang Bang Bang* serves up half a dozen possible singles, and that's enough to make it the best Nitty Gritty Dirt Band album of the decade.

—GEOFFREY HIMES

Editor's Note: As we go to press, Rising Tide Records has shut down. Plans are to release this album on Decca.

Record Reviews

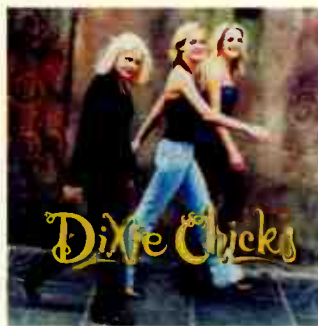
Dixie Chicks Wide Open Spaces Monument NK 68195

When you see three good-looking blondes in their mid-20's suddenly burst upon the country singles chart, it's easy to assume the trio was cobbled together by a cynical Nashville exec with one eye on CMT and the other on the casting couch. The Dixie Chicks, who have scored a hit with their first major-label single, "I Can Love You Better," were not created in a Music Row conference room, however. Teenaged sisters Emily Erwin and Martie Seidel co-founded the group nine years ago, replacing a former lead singer with Natalie Maines in 1995.

The Dixie Chicks slogged their way through three small-label releases and plenty of club tours before hitting the major leagues as the first album

project from the resurrected Monument label. Along the way they changed their sound from cowgirl-swing to bluegrass-pop to their current incarnation as a pop-country act. The Chicks' new album, *Wide Open Spaces*, isn't earth-shattering in any respect, but it's perfectly enjoyable and may be the answer to Nashville's long-standing quest to establish an all-female group other than The Judds.

One reason the trio sounds like a real group and not just a publicist's fantasy is that the three are all seasoned musicians. Dobroist Erwin and fiddler Seidel have been in bluegrass bands since junior high, and Natalie grew up listening to her daddy Lloyd play pedal steel guitar for every top country singer in West Texas. Erwin and Seidel play all the dobro, banjo and fiddle tracks on the album, and Lloyd plays most of the steel. As a result, one can hear a give-and-take between the vocals and instru-



mental tracks that doesn't always happen when the pickers shake hands with the singers for the first time on the morning of the recording session.

The call and response between Natalie's belt-it-out vocal and Erwin's sliding dobro licks, for example, give "I Can Love You Better" a signature sound that separates it from all the similar cheerleader songs given to young women in Nashville these days. On "Never Say Die," written by Radney Foster and George Ducas, the ballad theme is passed around

from Lloyd to Natalie to Seidel and back again as if the steel and fiddle could express the weary romantic optimism as eloquently as the vocal.

Like a lot of young Nashville acts, The Dixie Chicks borrow a lot from 70's and 80's California pop-rock; unlike a lot of their peers, The Chicks go to the originals for their material, and cover songs written by J.D. Souther, Maria McKee, Tom Jans and Bonnie Raitt. For all the good things The Dixie Chicks do on their breakthrough album, however, their limitations are exposed on their version of Raitt's "Give It Up or Let Me Go." Neither the singing nor the picking comes anywhere close to the ominous threat and smoldering sexuality of Raitt's original. Until they can make a song crackle with danger and lust, The Dixie Chicks will merely be a pleasant but inconsequential diversion.

—GEOFFREY HIMES

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The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band has changed very little over the past 32 years, yet they never go out of fashion. The current line-up features Jeff Hanna, Jimmie Fadden, Jimmy Ibbotson and Bob Carpenter. Hanna and Fadden have been with the group the entire time; Carpenter and Ibbotson for as long as the group's been commercially recording. As drummer Jimmie Fadden told a reporter when their landmark album, *Will the Circle Be Unbroken*, came out in 1971, "We make American music."

Maybe that's why they are so enduring. They don't define themselves by current styles and never let go of their jug-band roots. After a several year hiatus, The Dirt Band put out an acoustic album in 1994 and last year a Christmas album. Now they are once again on country radio with the title track, "Bang, Bang, Bang," from their new album. Mindful of radio's penchant for dismissing any act that goes off their radar screen for a while, Rising Tide Records shipped the single without identifying who the artists were. "Bang, Bang, Bang," said the colorful CD single on its face, "We'd tell you who this is, but then we'd have to shoot you..."

Though they never really went away, The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band is back with a vengeance. 20 Questions caught up with Jeff Hanna in Nashville early one morning and got him to fill us in on what's been happening.

1 Did you all write anything on this record?
We wrote one, "The Monkey Song."

2 Your publisher tells me you have a catalog full of great songs, but he has to pitch them to you because you don't remember them...
That's true. But we kind of did a blindfold test with the songs on this record, and the authorship wasn't as important to us as the songs themselves. We have written a lot of stuff in the past, but that wasn't really the issue.



From left, Jeff Hanna, Jimmie Fadden, Bob Carpenter, Jimmy Ibbotson.

20 Questions with The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band's **JEFF HANNA**

By Bob Millard

3 So you have been on the road for 32 years now? Yeah, it is a little rare.

4 You guys don't actually hate each other, do you, and don't speak except on stage?

No, we actually do talk off stage. See, bands are a lot like

some kind of weird, dysfunctional family, you know. You go through periods. Obviously, this hasn't been without its stresses or trials and tribulations for this many years. But I think that we've all gotten comfortable with our roles in the band. And I think we all appreciate how great it is to

have something like this that seems to just keep getting better.

5 Bands so often self-destruct when the hits slow down, but you guys went on when John McKuen left. Perhaps that's because he left for creative reasons instead of bad feelings?

Yeah, that's how it was. And then, when you hear somebody saying thus and such a band is breaking up, I always understand why. I think that's a premature decision that people make a lot of times. Although I have to say that it'd be a lot tougher starting out today than when we did, as far as being given a little bit of time to develop. The music business seems sort of short on that kind of patience right now....

6 You guys never run out of great songs to put on your records. You never seem to run out of Nitty Gritty Dirt Band material. How do you do that?

Maybe it helps that we have a few different places we go musically within our band. We've two or three lead singers and that part of it might keep the boundaries more transparent.

7 Yeah, but even the songs you've had massive radio successes with still have a little bit of your jug band roots in them somewhere. "Dry Town" on this new CD has a lot of that feel.

"Dry Town" is the song on *Bang, Bang, Bang* that reminds me the most of what we did when we first started out. It's partly because the band always makes me play washboard on at least one song on each record.

8 Oh, yeah? That's what makes it sound like that? Yeah, that's part of it. But it's got that finger-pickin', walkin' blues vibe to it. It's not unlike some of that stuff we cut with Merle Travis on that first Circle record [*Will the Circle Be Unbroken*, Volume 1].

9 You guys have remained almost radically boundary-less, if that's a word. Do you

have a pet theory about how *The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band* avoided that common pitfall of limiting yourselves musically early on. What keeps you guys creative?

That's a really good question. I think on the one hand... You mean, how do we reinvent it all the time?

10 Yeah, style is a matter of perfecting your limitations, really, without letting yourself be limited by them. I like that; I'll have to remember that. But with us it is that we have several styles within the style of what we do. I think, believe it or not, even though I think there is a "Dirt Band sound," that the four guys who are in the band all go off and listen to different kinds of music. There are some influences that we all have in common, but if you were to check the CD collections of each one of us, you would probably find some pretty vastly varying kinds of music. That might be what happens in the creative process. I think you hear something you think is going to fit, and so you try it. I think the willingness to try different things has served us really well. It hasn't always served us well commercially, but it has kept things interesting for us, and I think that's what has helped keep the band together.

11 You all must have a broad base of fans whose loyalty has let you keep on doing it that way. If you had just hit some narrow niche, you'd have had to stick with that 'til it played out.

For example, we'd still be playing jug band music, because that's how we started. Or, we'd have become a hard-core bluegrass band, or a pop-song machine. So, there's lots of different hats that we've worn without really wearing hats. Although I did wear one, a long time ago.

Truthfully, I have people tell me that even though the songs are 10 years apart, that "Bang, Bang, Bang" is sonically and musically a logical follow-up to "Fishing in the

Dark." It's been 10 years between those songs, but as long as somebody can see the logic, I'm happy for that.

12 I think "Bang, Bang, Bang"—the single—is a big radio hit. Are you going for radio again?

Yeah, I think so too, though I don't want to jinx that by talking about it. But, we've released it and radio is playing it already. Radio serves a really great function, which is that more people hear your music.

13 The label hasn't sent you out to do midnight at the Wal-Mart promotional performance tours?

Well, they haven't done it yet... Truthfully, going back to our earliest days, we used to open shopping centers and stuff, so it isn't as though we haven't done that. Actually we had a great big True Value hardware store that had us in for some kind of great big gig about 10 years ago. We set up to play and about six people came by, and most of them were asking where the Phillips-head screw drivers were. It was a Spinal Tap thing.

14 So you are looking to kick back into some kind of high gear here then?

Yeah, we're raising our profile; that's a good way to put it. I'm surprised that I've lived in Nashville 13 years, and one of my favorite things is when a passing acquaintance comes up to me in a grocery store and says, "Well, how long are you in town for?" I say, "I live here." But we've been out there touring all the while; it's not like we stopped. The nature of the business has been pretty brutal in country music the last several years, and we've just kind of been out there working. We left Liberty Records back in '95. That was the end of Jimmy Bowen's reign there, and we had reached a point where we didn't feel like it was a mutually beneficial relationship anymore.

We hit the street and realized that there wasn't a really favorable climate for The Dirt Band getting another record deal. So, we just kind of laid

low. We went out and toured, learned some new songs, and in the meantime got to take part in two projects that really helped us keep our creative juices flowing. That was the Olympics project and the Buddy Holly tribute. The neatest thing about that Olympics project is that I got to sing a duet with Karla Bonoff, who is like one of those all-time favorite female singers of ours. We've done that periodically, you know, like with Linda Ronstadt and the late Nicolette Larson...

15 Yeah, and tell us who is the female singer dueting on the song "It's About Time" on the new CD.

That's Matraca Berg. They finally let me sing with my wife. I was really happy about that. And actually she's returning the favor. I sang on three or four tracks on her record a while back.

16 You guys don't tour together, do you?

We haven't yet, but as a matter of fact, before Matraca and I even dated, she was the opening act on a three-act tour we did in 1991 that we did with Clint Black. That's how we got to know each other; actually. I have gone out and met up with her on tour and played guitar on some of these little acoustic things that she's done. That's a neat thing; I really enjoyed doing that.

17 And then there was the Buddy Holly tribute...

Yeah, that really sort of opened the door for us and Emory Gordy Jr. [the band's current producer] to work together. That got the ball rolling in a lot of ways for this whole Rising Tide Records deal for us. First we got to work with Emory, and it was frustrating because it was only one song. Then he took this gig as head of A&R over at Rising Tide. Then Ken Levitan [who heads Rising Tide] was actually our lawyer for a while. To make a long story short, when it looked like it was going to work for him, he said, "Hey, do you guys want to make a record

here?" And we said, yeah. The nice thing is that we had a common vision. You know, there are record deals and there are record deals. Sometimes you just do them for all the wrong reasons, and you're bound to butt heads, and we haven't had any of that with these guys. It's been great.

18 Have you considered doing another Circle album?

We have, but it hasn't been high on our list. You can't just do *Will the Circle Be Unbroken* projects on a regular basis. It's not just that so many of those folks are now dead, but that the whole concept of doing a record like that has now become cliché. That's kind of a drag, but tribute records and community efforts with lots of guests get done all the time. So many get made that we kind of steer clear of it. To answer your question: Yeah, we'd love to do another one, but it's a matter of when and where.

19 To get back to your roots, I notice a goodly amount of West Coast folk-country guitar jangle on this new effort.

Yeah, that might be one of the elements that identify us with that time and place. I like that.

20 But the freshness of it is always there....

Yeah, and I think one of the negative developments in country music was that they wanted you to sort of pop out a new album once a year. If you want it to be really fresh, give it at least 18 months. But I think record companies have finally started to get that. I see where they'll go five or six songs deep on an album now with singles. It gives you a longer time to round up those songs. I think that's why you are finally starting to see Alan Jackson recording outside material on his records. You certainly couldn't write all the songs on your records and tour like that for more than three or four records in a row before you run out of gas. Physically, there just aren't that many hours in the day. And it's hard to find those songs, much less write them.



CARL PERKINS

1932-1998: A Rockabilly Legend Dies

~: Rich Kienzle ~:

On January 23, 1998, George Harrison, a 54-year-old ex-Beatle, came to Jackson, Tennessee, with about 650 other mourners to bury his friend of over 30 years. Among them were Garth Brooks, Jerry Lee Lewis, Wynonna, Billy Ray Cyrus, Ricky Skaggs, Vince Gill, Razy Bailey, Memphis bluesman Rufus Thomas and 60's rocker Johnny Rivers. They did it with music, from gospel to songs from Carl's own pen. Carl's minister led the group in "Give Me That Old Time Religion," and Harrison led everyone, including Garth, in Carl's rockabilly favorite, "Your True Love." He would have loved it.

As the most gifted of the first generation of rockabillys and one of country's most incisive composers, Carl Lee Perkins was a true fountainhead, his death ending a remarkable life that saw him triumph over adversity time and again. When Carl, the second son of Buck and Louise Perkins, was born on April 9, 1932, near Tiptonville, Lake County, in northwestern Tennessee, the Perkins family was the only white sharecropping family on a local plantation. Carl had an older brother, Jay, and a younger one, Clayton. By age six, he was picking cotton, tough work for an adult, backbreaking for a kid already contending with stark poverty.

At home, Carl shared his dad's love of the Opry and became hooked on Ernest Tubb and on Bill Monroe's churning bluegrass rhythms. After making do with a homemade cigar box guitar, he received a beat-up Gene Autry model from his dad. A neighbor, "Uncle John" Westbrook, an elderly black cotton picker who sang blues and field hollers, showed "Carlie" some guitar licks. Determined to become a star and create his own style, Carl annoyed his dad and brother by sneaking blues licks into Roy Acuff songs. By 1946, he and Jay were playing guitars together, and when the family moved to the Jackson, Tennessee, area—while holding day jobs—the boys played rough local honky tonks at night as The Perkins Brothers. Soon Clayton joined them on bass.

The great Rockabilly Myth is that Elvis stumbled on the sound alone. Truth is, a number of obscure Southern singers, Carl among them, were creating similar music at the same time. In the honky tonks, he alternated honky tonk ballads with blues tunes, often with a bluegrass beat. In the summer of 1954, Carl's wife Valda heard Elvis' Sun recording of "Blue Moon of Kentucky" on the radio, and exclaimed to her husband, "It sounds like you!" Carl, who also sang that song onstage, saw a door opening.

That fall, he and the band traveled to Sun's Memphis studio, waited for owner Sam Phillips to show, and successfully pleaded for an audition. Phillips wasn't impressed until he heard Carl sing his own ballads. Seeing him mainly as a ballad singer, Phillips released "Turn Around" and the rocker, "Movie Magg," on his Flip label. Carl, Elvis and Johnny Cash became friends, and Cash urged Carl to write a song about a story Carl told about blue suede shoes. As it goes, while playing a college dance in Jackson, Carl overheard a dancer telling his girlfriend, "Don't step on my suedes." Early the next morning, Carl awoke in the family's modest Jackson flat, walked downstairs, grabbed his guitar, created the lyrics and wrote "Blue Suede Shoes" on a potato sack.

Carl knew he had something and so did Sam Phillips, who'd just sold Elvis' contract to RCA. Anointing Carl as Sun's new rocker, on January 1, 1956, he released "Blue Suede Shoes." Its success led to an invitation to appear on Perry Como's NBC variety show in New York. But it never happened. While

enroute, their driver fell asleep at the wheel in Delaware. Their car hit a poultry truck; the collision killed the driver and severely injured both Carl and Jay. By April, "Blue Suede Shoes" was Number One and about to become a million-seller and Carl was unable to exploit it. Elvis was on top, and *his* cover version of "Blue Suede Shoes," which was recorded after Carl's hit Number One, became the one everyone remembered.

Back in Memphis, Carl and the band tried to pick up the pieces. Often fortified by a bottle, he recorded brilliant material at Sun that didn't sell. With Elvis on top and Jerry Lee Lewis Sun's new wonder boy, Carl signed with Columbia in 1958, but none of his releases sold. Things got worse. Jay Perkins died that year of a brain tumor. When Carl signed with Decca in 1962, even Owen Bradley, who produced Patsy Cline's hit version of Carl's "So Wrong" that year, couldn't get him a hit. An accident involving his left hand nearly ended his guitar playing, and shortly afterward, a hunting accident left him with a shotgun wound to one foot. He had to fire Clayton, whose mental problems made him violent on the road. No wonder his drinking worsened.

On a trip to England in July of 1964, Carl met The Beatles. Ecstatic to meet their hero in person, they invited him to a recording session the next day, where he watched them record two of his songs. In 1965, Cash asked him to join his touring show. In 1968 on a California beach, Carl threw away his bourbon, and as Cash became a household word, a newly sober Carl also got attention. He wrote "Daddy Sang Bass," giving Cash one of his biggest hits.

He was playing and singing better than ever, though he didn't sell records. He faced tragedy again when Clayton committed suicide in 1973 but held firm, leaving Cash in 1975 to resume a solo career. Backed by sons Stan and Greg, Carl revived The Perkins Brothers' spirit for a new generation. Still living in Jackson, he was so touched by a news article about a local child who died from abuse that he started raising money to open a center, later named for Carl, to aid abused children.

Carl's voice and guitar still smoked, and so did his pen. In 1982, Dolly Parton scored with his "Silver and Gold." The 1986 *Rockabilly Session With Carl Perkins and Friends* TV special uniting him with George Harrison, Ringo Starr, Rosanne Cash, Dave Edmunds and Eric Clapton was a mere prelude to his 1987 induction into the Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame. The Judds took his "Let Me Tell You About Love" into the Top Ten in 1989, while Mark O'Connor and the New Nashville Cats (including Ricky Skaggs and Vince Gill) made a hit of "Restless" in 1991.

Later that year, doctors discovered throat cancer. Surgery and radiation left him drained and depressed, but he beat the disease, slowly regained strength, and eventually returned to the studio and the road. He was thinner, hair grayer, wearing glasses, but his fire intact. His autobiography appeared, and TNN profiled him in their *Life and Times* documentary series. On it, a somber, sentimental, often visibly moved Perkins sang, played and reflected, almost as if saying goodbye. Too often, honors and veneration come to many great talents only after their death. It's satisfying that Carl received his while alive, healthy and able to fully appreciate them. In fact, that may be his ultimate triumph. Not only did he remain among us long enough to savor over four decades of victories and achievements, but that poor West Tennessee farm kid left behind music that will outlive us all. ■

Now in the third decade of her career, Reba's come full circle. With business ventures consolidated and the emphasis back on her music, she's looking toward the future. The seasoned pro has the experience and maturity and money to enjoy what's coming up next.



Reba McEntire

Still Learning After All These Years

First impressions are—well, very impressive. Reba's building is nothing short of magnificent. Standing imperially athwart a prime Music Row intersection, four full stories high, several lots wide, half a block deep, built of granite, soaring skyward like a combination of church and corporate command center, it's an emphatic, absolutely unmistakable declaration of wealth, power and independence. Reba McEntire, Number One. She's up there in her tower right now doing her business, almost ready for our audience.

It's odd, getting processed through to the elevator and riding up to her top-floor office. Big record companies specialize in the kind of stunning receptionists, marble halls, exotic woods, soft leather seating, soaring skylights, and general sumptuousness you encounter *en route* to Reba—it's one way they intimidate their singers—but most friends of the friends and neighbors, no matter how rich, prefer an understated approach to their business premises (homes of course being another matter entirely); I'm used to finding major country stars holed up in rabbit warrens or bear caves, not great bright angular temples of commerce.

Why dwell on this? Good reasons. Firstly, it's hard—make that impossible—to ignore. That's the point, after all; Reba could be running her empire from digs infinitely less ostentatious than a top-drawer temple slap bang in country music central, so you really can't interpret her choice as anything less than a statement. It may or may not be personal, "Look how far *I've* come!"—but there's no doubt whatsoever that her building performs the traditional role of the showcase corporate headquarters: "Look how solid *we* are! Your money will grow with *us*!"

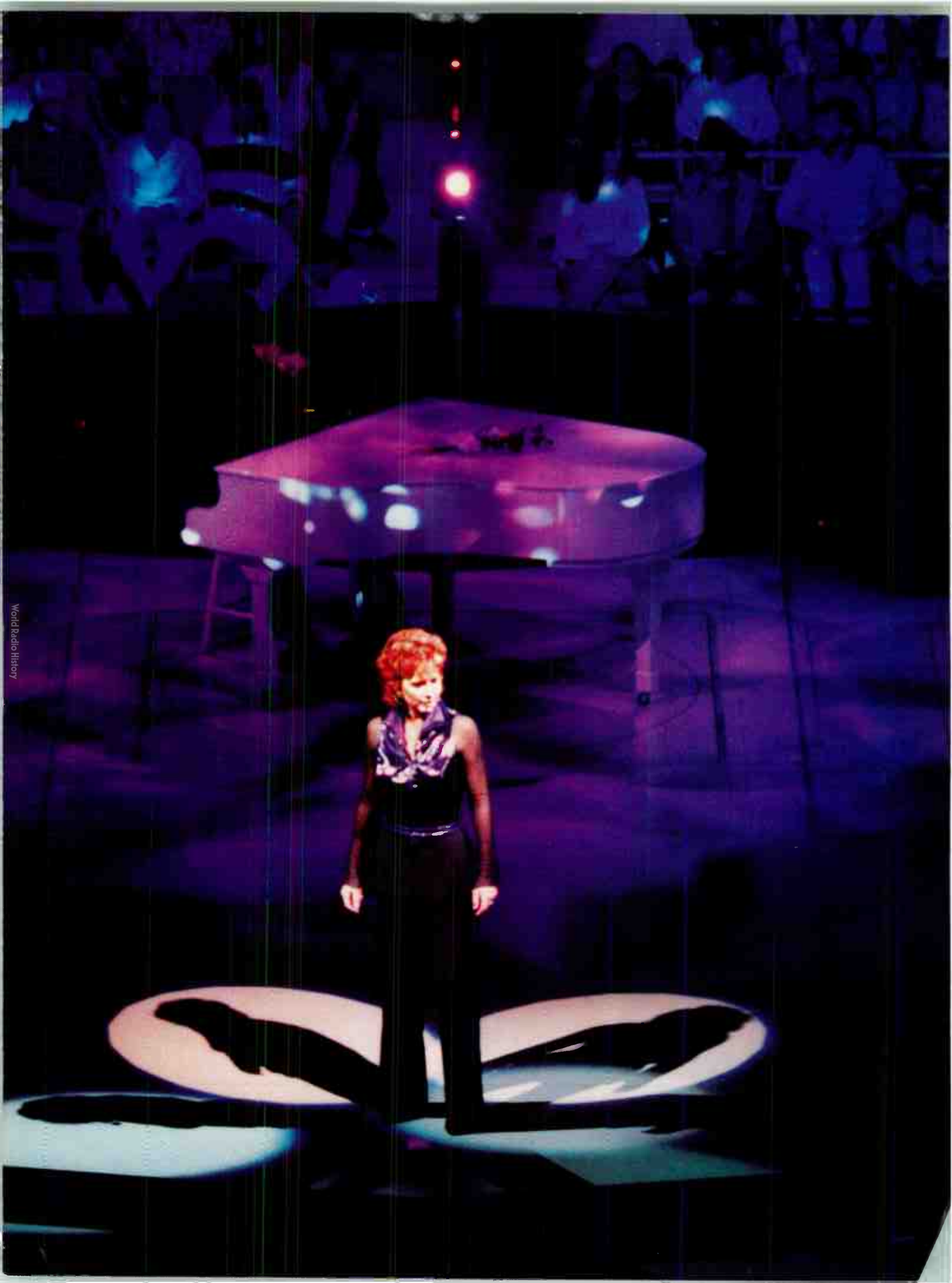
The building, quite apart from knocking one's socks off, confirms that Reba is indeed in the third stage of her career. First a scrappy contender in a bad marriage, next a hard front runner taking power and fighting through tragedy and catharsis, she is now regal: a happy wife and mother so far ahead of any other woman in her field that her status (though never her throne, or anyone else's) is assured forever.

Her full parking lot and busy switchboard also remind one that while she alone does the singing, in most other respects the former Okie cowgirl is definitely a "we." Quite famously and very proudly an entrepreneur and employer, a businesswoman and a boss, Reba is a leader linked intimately and interdependently with a team.

She herself, in person in her office—a very grand, expansive affair—is quite a shock, though not really a surprise. Given the dramatic flair she's exhibited in recent years (that famous red dress, those production numbers, that *voice*), her new change of image is startling, but very much in character. It's a good look, too: short, much straighter hair in a kind of modified page-boy cut, and a smart, beautifully tailored, muted dark-brown trouser suit. She could pass quite easily for the Chairwoman of Revlon or some multinational's VP of marketing—if only, at 40-plus, she didn't look quite so improbably young. She seems fresh, fit and full of beans, projecting herself the way, I'm told, she always does ("Reba is Reba 24 hours a day," as Tony Brown once put it): headlights on high beam, hands on the wheel, slowpokes beware.

We settle down and get to first things first: Shelby, her and husband/partner/manager Narvel Blackstock's

by Patrick Carr



son, now eight. He's doing great, Mom says, swimming like a fish, golfing nicely, even shooting pool pretty well; a very athletic boy. They take him along with them as much as possible, especially when it comes to places like Australia and events like mutton busting in Texas (that's sheep riding, for all you non-cowpersons; Shelby won a trophy at it).

I too have an eight-year-old boy, and as coincidence would have it, Reba acts in one of his favorite movies, *Tremors*, delivering a hilarious portrayal of a deadpan little survivalist making mincemeat of giant, truck-eating earthworms. I convey my appreciation of her performance, and she acknowledges the compliment graciously, with a nod and a poised and simple "thank you." Which isn't at all surprising, given the volume of praise, awards, and accolades she's had to accept.

All right. To business. How about her new music? What does she have to say about it? If the production style of her last, *What If It's You* album was like "a crisp mountain stream, not an ocean" (her words), where in that range does her new work fall?

Somewhere in the middle, she says. "It's a little closer to the mountain stream than the heavy production, but it's not as stripped-down. I've got a new producer, David Malloy, who's produced Kenny Rogers, Dolly Parton, Eddie Rabbitt, Crystal Gayle, Mindy McCready. He's a singer's producer. He's very open, he's not opinionated, he'll listen, and he gives his opinion in a friendly way, and I really love working with him."

And the songs?

"It's a real mixture, everything from, like, a Jewel number, one of her songs, to a very traditional song like I would have done 20 years ago, to a very fun, up-tempo Mutt Lange song. So it's a broad stream. And David and I, we've been recording for almost six months now. Since I have my studios here, if there's an opening and I'm available and we can get the musicians we like, we'll just

"If we get through recording and somebody runs in with a demo tape—'This is the best song I've written in my life!'—we'll say, 'Let's listen to it.' And if we like it, we'll go back in the next week and cut it."



go in and record. We've done 16 songs, and just played with them. I'll go back in one afternoon and sing, and David will listen and say, 'Your voice isn't opening; it's not there.' I'll just say, 'okay,' and go do something else. The next day I'll come back out and sing, and it'll be, 'Oh, yeah, your voice is on today.'

"So it's the freedom I've never had during recording. The way I've done it before is to find all my songs, then go in and lay the tracks down Monday through Friday. The next week we'd do vocal overdubs and harmonies, overdubs with the musicians, and vocal comps, and then we'd mix. It was all in one month. Now we spread it out, and have the versatility so that if we get through recording and somebody runs in with a demo tape—'This is the best song I've written in my life!'—we'll say, 'Let's listen to it.' And if we like it, we'll go back in the next week and cut it.

"It's great this way," she concludes, and it certainly is. It's one of the benefits of having all the basic resources under your own roof, all the reins you want in your own hands. Reba's building—actually owned by Starstruck Entertainment, the McEntire/Blackstock umbrella corporation—features such conveniences as two recording studios and a publishing company for 20-plus professional songwriters. She continues to keep her own publicist, her own booking agent, her own art director, her own stylist, and a goodly number of other essential music business personnel in addition to the small army of band and crew members she takes on the road, and is now able to say, accurately, that the only major segment of her business she doesn't control directly is the manufacturing and distribution of her tapes and CD's. So she and Narvel have done a bang-up job of building as self-contained an operation as any country superstar could wish for.

According to Reba, they've also survived the pitfalls of over-diversification without dire consequences, pulling out of ventures like managing other artists' careers and selling services—most visibly charter aviation—to clients in and outside show business. For a while there, it was looking as if Starstruck might end up running half the country music business.

There came a point, though, when "the focus got too thin. You spread out, and then you realize your hot property is getting neglected. That was a big decision for Narvel to make. He felt that he was avoiding—no, not avoiding, maybe not paying enough attention to my career.



Always the showperson, Reba belts it out on stage. Inset, a scene from her video, "What If."

Now, since he's dissolved the management partnership with ten other acts, the focus is back on me. It's like, if you fill the funnel with all this different kind of stuff, just keep fillin' it and fillin' it, you never know what's going to come out the other end. And if you just put all your eggs in one basket, then you've got to work on that basket."

That's what's happening now; the focus is on Reba. "We're doing lots of different things," she says, "whether it's television, movie scripts, touring Australia, thinkin' about going to Brazil, going back over to Europe. Oh, yes, we're busy. The holiday coming up? We're working. We're shutting down the office, but everybody will still be here working; we need a day without the phones ringing. I mean, everyone's just swamped."

As to Starstruck's somewhat predictable abandonment of business empire-building—country music history is strewn with the Chapter 11 filings of singers so busy putting out fires at the office that they forgot to attend the funeral of their recording career—Reba claims no regrets.

"You've got to learn, and it was a great learning experience," she says. "Besides, it gave me a great rest. I was about fried. To have all the other entities going, that took me out of the limelight, the spotlight, the hot seat, and I got a rest. I mean, last year was easy. Eighty-six dates. Easiest year I've had in my life. Now I'm hungry again, like I was 15 years ago."

The question, of course, is whether the focus got shifted back onto the core product quite quickly enough. Behind that, other musings lurk. Is Reba nearing the end of her rule? Is it all (slowly) downhill from here, or does she have even higher peaks of multi-platinum yet to climb? Will her career conform to the laws of time and gravity that seem to govern the rise and fall of stars, or are those laws changing, or illusionary? Can today's Number One singers—Garth, herself—reign for more (in her case much more) than the traditional decade at the top?

That-all is what's going through my mind when I ask how many Number One singles *What If It's You* generated.

"I should know, but I don't," she says. "I really have no idea. I'm focusing on the future, instead of what's going on right now. And the charts, I used to know exactly what the number was when my single or my album was released, and every week after that, but now it's like, I'm trying to get a broader sense of 'How is it affecting other genres of music? Is it going to the pop world? Are we getting exposed? Is my music *passionate*? Is my music something that my fans are loving like I'm loving it?' So I'm not so much on the business side as I am, 'How is this affecting people? Are they enjoying my music? Am I giving them what they want?' And I'm listening to them more, on the Internet, in the questions I'm getting from my fans."

Read what you want into Reba's responses to these questions: security or insecurity, real confidence or a very bold front, complete openness or expert information management. I personally have no way of figuring it out. I'm tempted to guess that she's being frank, but then again, that might be because I like her. Her no-nonsense, wham-bam, what-you-see-is-what-you-get, Okie-cowgirl way wins me over just as effectively as it does several million other country fans. And it's pretty obvious that whatever she's really got going inside, she's got it together.

So what of sales, I ask. Did *What If It's You* succeed as well as its predecessors?



Reba's new album, due out June 2nd, will feature a duet with Brooks and Dunn. At left, in the studio with David Malloy, her co-producer. Starstruck's building is home base for all Reba's activities. Right now, she's out shooting a movie.



GEORGE FLETCHER

"No, it didn't sell as much as three albums back."

"Why not?"

"I don't have the faintest idea. I really don't know. So what I do is, I just keep working and try to find the best songs I possibly can and promote it the best way I can—but basically find the songs that I am passionate about, that touch my heart. Maybe I chased radio too much on the last album. Maybe I was too business-oriented with it. But I'm back to what's the most important thing, which is being passionate about the music. Everything else, it will either fail in place or it won't, and if it won't, it wasn't meant to be. But at least I'm proud of the material I'm releasing. I'm passionate about it. I'm madly in love with these new songs. I'll let them see where they fall."

This would seem to require no further question or comment.

We skip around for a while.

How's Pake?

Well, she says, he's just fine. His eldest daughter, Reba's niece, is at Belmont College in Nashville, going for a music business degree.

That whole idea still blows me away—you go to college to be a country singer?—and it impresses Reba as ironic, too. "Sure ain't the way I did it," she notes.

Does she still collect all the toiletries from the hotel rooms she stays in, and take them with her when she checks out? Yes, she does. "I give 'em to the Salvation Army, the school, anybody that needs them. I don't leave them."

How are her allergies, long a curse? Not bad, she says. She has a chiropractor who's done her a lot of good; between that and other kinds of help, her sinuses are in better shape than they've ever been.

I wonder about something she once told Tom T. Hall: "When I get famous, all I'm gonna do is bitch and sing." Has that come to pass? She just laughs and says, "Every time Tom T. sees me, he asks, 'Reba, are you bitchin' and singin' yet?'"

Humor aside, is she "hard to work with," as people say when they really mean something uglier? For instance, is her history of changing producers every so often—David Malloy is number six so far—evidence of business/creative savvy, or something more unsettling?

"My greatest talent, besides singing, is surrounding myself with people who know how to do things," she says. "But the other thing that I really do rely on and trust is my gut feeling. When I know I'm supposed to do something, I do it, and there's not much that can steer me away from it. I really lean on my instincts, because I feel like they're messages from God telling me what to do. If you just listen, you'll get that message. So with changing producers, I knew it was the right time to leave Tony Brown, just like I knew when to leave Jimmy Bowen. They were both great for me, and there was no bad feeling between us; I just knew it was time."

Overall, she says, "I know I need direction. I need help. I can't do it all myself. I don't want to do it all myself. As big as Starstruck is, we still bring people in from New York, from L.A., from Chicago, anywhere, for ideas. We need fresh ideas. I don't expect anyone here at Starstruck to think up everything, but I do expect them to go find people who will."

So, I ask, she doesn't make personnel changes for the sake of it—to keep people on their toes, for instance, or have a fresh face on stage?

"Oh, no," she says. "There have to be much deeper reasons than that. If they're not moving on stage, if they're hitting too many bad licks, if they have a bad attitude on the bus, if they're having personal problems—you can't imagine with a bunch of people on the road, as many as we've had this past year, how many personal problems you have to work through. It's a counseling session out there, it's a family, it's Momma and Daddy and a bunch of kids, and then it's friends, and then it's your best friends, and it's like, if you've got a problem, let's talk about it. And it's not a one-session deal, it's days of it, it's months of it, it's years of it, and you can either turn your back and walk out on people that have helped you and stayed with you and counseled you, or you can stay with them. So most times, it's a mutual understanding and agreement when somebody leaves. Like Joe McGlohon, who was my band leader; when he left, he wanted to stay home with his family. He got out of the music business totally, took over his father-in-law's company, moved out of town. Now he wants to get back in it. He's moving to Paris with his whole family to work for



Reba and TV's Ray Romano co-hosted the People's Choice Awards show recently.



"My greatest talent, besides singing, is surrounding myself with people who know how to do things. But the other thing that I really do rely on and trust is my gut feeling."

EuroDisney. What an experience that'll be! That took guts. I'm so proud of him."

Like it or not, that reminds us of the circumstances under which McGlohon became band leader in the first place. He was the only one of Reba's musicians not on the plane which crashed into a California mountainside on March 16, 1991, killing everyone on board. It fell to him to rebuild her band.

The crash was seven years ago, I say to Reba, but I'm sure it often feels like yesterday. Or today. She just nods, then says, "Sometimes I wonder when it's going to quit hurting—when you're supposed to quit hurting over something like that."

Well, I say, you're not. That's the secret. You'll take that grief to your grave.

She nods again. "I really think you're right. And to deal with the parents, every time you see them, it's like, 'Okay, take the heart out of me and chop it up, then stick it back in.' Your arms ache, and your throat hurts, and your back starts cramping, every time you think of it."

It's time, after an appropriate pause, for a change of subject.

"Are you a perfectionist?"

"No." Emphatically.

"You said that awful fast."

"Well, I'm not. I'm sure not. On a song we're recording, if I'm off, or somebody misses a note, if it had a great feeling, I'll go with it in a heartbeat. I go for the feeling, the heart, not perfection."

"You know what? I've got a niece who's a chromosome-defective baby. Her little hand comes out of her elbow, she can't walk and she can't talk, but she is just the most precious thing. She's not perfect, but she's got the heart. If everyone had her heart, this would be a perfect world."

"So I learned from her: I went, 'Well, whew, great! I love her, but she's not perfect—so why am I trying to prove that I am, and who am I trying to prove it to?' When I finally discovered that, it was just like a million pounds lifted off my shoulders."

"When was that?"

"Oh, about two years ago."

"So in your own eyes, have you succeeded? Are you good enough yet?"

"In my eyes, I'm very content. I'm very happy with me. I'm doin' it all for fun. I'm not doing it for money, I'm doing it for the passion, I'm doing it for the challenge."

"You didn't have that attitude when you were, say, 30, right?"

"No." Emphatic again.

She pauses a beat. "Maturity is one of the greatest gifts God gives us," she declares. "I think when you hit 30, you get a little smarter. Then 35, you mellow out and you start to get happy with things. And 40—well, it's the best. And Momma says 50, 60, and 70 are even better."

A big, wide grin on that one. She looks about 16. ■



PULL-OUT
CENTERFOLD
OF-THE-MONTH

ALAN JACKSON

Update

Personal Data

Given name: Alan Eugene Jackson
Birthdate: October 17, 1958
Birthplace: Newnan, Georgia
Family: Wife, Denise; daughters, Mattie Denise and Alexandra; mother, Ruth; father, Eugene; sisters, Diane, Cathy, Carol and Connie

Vital Statistics

Height: 6'4"
Weight: 180 lbs.
Color eyes: Blue
Color hair: Blond

Record Label

Record label: Arista Records, 7 Music Circle North, Nashville, Tennessee 37203
Alan signed with Arista Records in 1989. He remembers, "I hoped it would be just huge, you know, but I also was very realistic about what happens in this business. I'd observed it for several years and watched a lot of artists come and go, so I knew when I got my record deal that it was a huge step for me. But I also realized that I may have one or two hits and disappear. Or I may not hit at all and get dropped from the label in six months. I knew what the realities were, which made it a lot more comfortable for me."

Touring History

Alan first began touring in 1990 with The Judds. In 1991 he toured with Randy Travis, and, a year later, Alan began headlining. Some opening acts have included Patty Loveless, Pam Tillis, Faith Hill, Diamond Rio and Billy Dean. Wade Hayes, Junior Brown and LeAnn Rimes are a few artists who performed on the 1996 Alan Jackson Fruit of the Loom Country Comfort Tour. Alan has consistently been one of the top-grossing country touring acts of all time.
Band: The Strayhorns
Robbie Flint: *steel guitar*
Danny Groah: *lead guitar*



Monty Parkey: piano, harmony vocals and band leader
Bruce Rutherford: drums and harmony vocals
Tom Rutledge: acoustic guitar and banjo
Tony Stephens: tour manager and harmonica
Roger Willis: bass
Cheryl Wolff: fiddle and harmony vocals

Television Appearances

Grand Ole Opry 65th Anniversary Special, All Star Country Fest, Alan Jackson: One Night in Austin, Day in the Life of Country Music, A Festival at Fords: A Celebration of Country with President Bush, Academy of Country Music Awards, American Music Awards, Arista Records 25th Anniversary Special, The Arsenio Hall Show, Burt Reynolds: A Conversation with..., CNN Showbiz Today, Cable Ace Awards, Country Music Association Awards, Disney's Countdown to Kids Day, Entertainment Tonight, 1996 ESPY Awards, Geraldo, Grammy

Awards, Home Improvement, The Late Show, Live with Regis & Kathie Lee, Music City Tonight, TNN/Music City News Awards and The Tonight Show.

Musical Facts

- Jackson sold over 24 million albums, and is the RIAA's second most certified male artist in all music this decade.
- Jackson has had 23 Number One hits in six years, and he wrote or co-wrote all but six of them.
- His 1995 *Greatest Hits Collection* sold over three million units and spawned three Number One singles. Each of his five previous albums is multi-platinum (not counting holiday releases).

Fan Club

Alan Jackson International Fan Club, P.O. Box 121945, Nashville, Tennessee 37212-1945.
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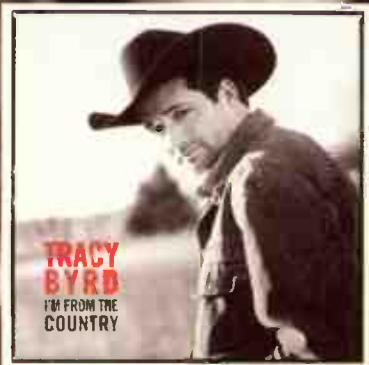
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TOBY KEITH: Home Is Where His Heart Is

Success has found Toby Keith in terms of hit records, a new business venture and award nominations. And though he's enjoying it all, Toby still feels like going home.



By Geoffrey Himes

Toby Keith is a big fella. At six-foot-four, he towers over the managers and publicists who hover about him as he paces impatiently in his dressing room at Opryland in Nashville. His broad shoulders fill out his big white shirt (the one with brass, star-stamped buttons and "TK" embroidered on each cuff) and his big white cowboy hat makes him look even taller. It's easy to see how he worked as an oil rigger, rodeo hand and semi-pro football player before becoming a full-time country singer.

Right now, though, he's not doing anything so messy; no pipe grease is likely to stain his gray-and-black vest; no 30-yard-line tackle is likely to muddy his hand-tooled cowboy boots. Instead, he's waiting to walk out on the set of the *Prime Time Country* TV show and sing his recent Number Two hit, "I'm So Happy." Keith has already sung "We Were in Love," the other Number Two single off his current Mercury album, *Dream Walkin'*, earlier in the show.

Keith fidgets in the dressing room, picking at the platter of Mexican food flown in from his Phoenix restaurant, the Hatch Valley Chile Company. He encourages a reporter to try some, and the chile con carne has that fresh-produce flavor that comes from using New Mexico chiles

right off the vine rather than powder.

Why is Keith so restless? It's not, he explains, because he's nervous about singing on television. Hell, he's sung in a lot tougher joints than Opryland, and his big, deep baritone has never failed him yet. No, he's simply anxious to climb back on the band bus and point it southwest toward home, sweet home: Oklahoma City. And, as soon as he finishes this TV shoot and this interview, that's just what he's going to do.

"The community you're raised in and the people you're around all the time affect the kind of work you do," he points out, "and it's important not to lose touch with that. I've thought about moving to Nashville; I even went so far as to look at property. But I could never pull the trigger on a deal; I could never see myself living anywhere but Oklahoma. I mean, Oklahoma has a smaller population than Houston, but look at how many good artists have come out of the state—Garth, Reba, Vince, Joe Diffie, Wade Hayes, Bryan White."

Keith has had a lot of success in Nashville, where he does all his recording and business dealing. Since he signed with Mercury Records in 1992, the 36-year-old singer has enjoyed a dozen Top 10 singles, including seven Number Two hits and a pair of Number Ones. In 1996, he was in-

ducted into the "Walkway of Stars" at the Country Music Hall of Fame, and this year he received his first Grammy nomination, for Best Country Collaboration with Vocal for "I'm So Happy."

Yet, for all that success, Keith decided against buying a second home in Music City. Instead he splurged on a 160-acre spread just outside of Oklahoma City. He bought it in September, and after clearing the brush off it, he hopes to move his wife, three children, registered cattle and race horses onto the property this year.

"I've always had visions of living where I was raised," he says. "This new property is five miles southeast of where my parents' farm is. I've always fished the Little River, which runs through my property. I never leave on an airplane where I don't lean over, look out through the window at the countryside and recognize everything around here. There's not





another place on this planet that feels like home to me like that 10-mile radius around my ranch.

"You're still close enough that you're only half an hour from downtown Oklahoma City, where there's everything you need, but you're also far out enough that you're on the edge of wilderness. There's deer, quail and fish around there. More importantly, there are great people. The guys I went to school with are taking over their dads' dairies and farms, so I know the people in the neighborhood. It doesn't take much to acclimate myself once I get there."

Finally the word comes that they're ready for Keith on the set. Sting, who wrote "I'm So Happy" and sang the duet part on the record, is not at Opryland today, so *Prime Time* host Gary Chapman sings that part. It doesn't matter; Keith's fat, glowing baritone steamrollers

Chapman as easily it did the former leader of the English pop band, The Police. No sooner is he back in the dressing room than he says, "Let's do this interview, so I can get these boys back home." Well, there's a good place to start—why is he so anxious to get out of Nashville and back to Oklahoma?

"There's a real advantage to living somewhere other than Nashville," he claims. "If a song hits really big in Nashville, all of a sudden you'll see that type of artist popping up at every label, and you'll hear that kind of song all over the radio. Like when Billy Ray came along with 'Achy Breaky,' you soon saw a bunch of guys with hair like Billy Ray and singing to that same Southern-rock beat. It's hard to be original here, because when a big trend comes along, it sweeps up everyone in its wake.

"Out in Oklahoma," he adds, "it's easier

to be yourself, because you're not surrounded by the industry and the latest trends. When I co-write, I prefer to have writers fly out there and stay at my place, rather than me flying to Nashville to write with them. I've done those Nashville writing sessions where you go in and write from nine to noon, but I don't like it. It's too prefabricated; there's not enough soul in those little cubicles.

"Some guys have written some great songs that way," he admits, "but that's not me. If I get a good idea for a song, I can't finish it up in three hours. I like to labor over it. It may take weeks, but you've got to sit and think about the song and put some feeling into it. They're like your kids; the world would never have heard of them if you hadn't created them. You've got to pick them when they're just right; you can't pick them too early or too late."

"So you take a chance and open up a little, and when that's okay, you open up a little more, and soon you learn to let it all hang out. If you can think of the last thing a guy would say to his wife in front of his running buddies, then you have a smash-hit song."

Everything Keith does today is shaped by his experiences growing up in Oklahoma. He really did work as a roughneck in the oil fields. He really did test-ride bulls and broncos for rodeos. He really did play for the Oklahoma City Drillers in the United States Football League. He really did headline on the dance-hall circuit from Arkansas to New Mexico before he ever had a record deal.

Keith's very first single for Mercury, "Should've Been a Cowboy," went to Number One in 1993. Though the lyrics were tongue-in-cheek, it's obvious that Keith could easily have become a cowboy. He's from cowboy country; he's got that cowboy look; he's had cowboy jobs. And yet what's fascinating about the big galoot with the strawberry-blond goatee is how he defies the stereotype of the strong-but-silent, tough-as-nails, macho John Wayne type. For some of Keith's most successful songs have been those where a man reveals not only his vulnerable emotions but also a poet's ability to describe their workings.

"After 'Should've Been a Cowboy' was a hit," Keith recalls, "the label wanted to release 'A Little Less Talk and a Lot More Action' as the next single. I begged them to release 'He Ain't Worth Missing' instead. I knew it wouldn't be as big a hit, but I wanted to prove I could do romantic pop, too, so I wouldn't spend the rest of my career singing cowboy songs."

Keith's pop-romantic side is obvious on the first three singles from his current album, *Dream Walkin'*. "We Were in Love" is a Bob Seger-flavored tribute to teenage romance ("You with your hair in the wind and me with that crazy grin under a summer sky"). The Sting-penned "I'm So Happy" is the confession of a divorced father: who only sees his kids on weekends. The album's title track is about a man who finds that a one-night stand turns into a haunting memory that won't leave him alone.

At first it seems strange to hear such emotional confessions coming from a bronco-bucking, pipeline-wrestling, quarterback-tackling Okie, but ultimately, it's Keith's macho image that gives the songs their credibility. After all, no one's going to call him a wimp.

"In my own life," Keith admits, "I was never one to speak out and show my emotions; I always tried to be the tough guy.



Every generation's been raised that way. I don't know too many guys who would talk romantically in public; it would be like showing a chink in your armor. When a guy's at work and his wife calls to find out when he's coming home for dinner, and she says, 'I love you,' he'll never say, 'I love you, too,' in front of his buddies. All he'll say is, 'Yeah, me too.' That's what that song, 'Me Too' is all about.

"But when I started writing songs," Keith continues, "it allowed me to say some things I might never say in real life. As a songwriter, you have the license to write about anything and say anything, and if anyone gives you a hard time, you can just say, 'Aw, it didn't happen to me; that's just what the song called for.' It's like a safety net. So you take a chance and open up a little, and when that's okay, you open up a little more, and soon you learn to let it all hang out. If you can think of the last thing a guy would say to his wife in front of his running buddies, then you have a smash-hit song."

The song on *Dream Walkin'* that ev-

eryone talks about may never be released as a single. "Tired" is a pop-country lament about a married couple working so many jobs to pay the bills that they're always exhausted. Keith's vocal is so world-weary that his factory-worker character sounds like the son of Merle Haggard's construction crews and the grandson of Merle Travis' coal miners. The *Chicago Tribune* devoted a whole column to that one album cut, and reviewers everywhere have cited it as the highlight of Keith's career. He agrees.

"That's a songwriter's song," he insists. "You wait all your life to write one great song, and if 'Tired' ain't it, I can't wait to hear what it is. I can't tell you where I was when I wrote a lot of songs, but I can tell you exactly where I was when I wrote 'Tired.' It was late February 1997, and we were on the bus about three hours north of Orlando coming back to Nashville. We had played a benefit golf tournament; I had taken a short nap, and I woke up around 10:30 at night, still feeling tired. That was what I said, 'I'm tired.'"

"My songwriting partner, Chuck Cannon, was with me, and I told him, 'I've got a song idea that just hit me in the heart.' He picked up his guitar, tuned it to D, and when I sang, 'I'm tired,' he sang back at me, 'I woke up tired.' He came up with, 'The raise I got two months ago don't make much of a living,' and I said, 'That's great, but what about making it, 'Don't meet the cost of living'?' I sang, 'Selling my body in these hard times,' and he said, 'What about 'Selling my body for these nickels and dimes'?"

"That's why I like writing with Chuck, because I don't want a yes man sitting across from me. I want someone who thinks he can write a better song than I can. When I come out with my best line, I want someone who'll come out with an even better one. There's not a better feeling than sharing a great moment in creating a song. If you're by yourself, that moment is like hitting a hole in one and not having a foursome with you. But if you're with someone and you share that moment, you'll never forget it."

Keith can write a song like "Tired," because he's lived the life. Before he got his record deal, he went through some lean times. "I've got a blue-collar side,"

he says. "I've been three months behind on my house payments while I was trying to get my music career together. I know what it's like to be one paycheck away from losing your home and having to move back to your parents' home."

Before "Tired," the song that best summarized Keith's working-class roots was the title track from his second album, *Boomtown*. The song is based on Elk City, a little farm town in Western Oklahoma that became an overnight oil-industry center in the early 80's. Keith gave up the chance to go to college when he learned he could make \$15-20 an hour as a 18-year-old kid in Elk City. For four years, the money flowed as thick and fast as the petroleum; then it all dried up.

"It was a wild scene," he remembers. "You had people who were making good money living in tents because there just wasn't enough housing available for everyone. As soon a house got built, someone would pay cash for it. You had a bar on every corner, and nearly every bar had live music. You'd pull up to a nightclub and see a lot of Mercedes and Jaguars parked out front. Now most of the clubs are boarded up, and those that aren't have nothing but broken-down pick-ups out front. The oil fields dried up; the Republicans took over the White House, and the whole thing collapsed in a hurry."

"It was a shock to me, because I thought it would be like that forever. I didn't know any different. In a weird way, the crash was the best thing to happen to me, because it forced me to get serious about my music. Before that, it was just a hobby, because I was making so much money in the oil fields. The crash wasn't a good thing for a lot of people, though."

Keith formed the *Easy Money* band and started playing the competitive dance-hall circuit of the Southwest. It wasn't all that different from punching a time clock. You worked regular shifts (four sets between nine and two); you put out the expected product (covers of George Strait and Randy Travis songs), and you worked for a paycheck not for fame (rare was the applause in those singles bars). After nine years, Keith and his guys had built the business up to where they were making a pretty good living.

"We'd play our own stuff on the slow nights," he remembers. "Tuesday night would be Ladies Night, so you'd start the week off with a bang, but Wednesday night would be slow because Tuesday had been so big. So on Wednesdays, we wouldn't say anything and just play our own stuff. I'd place them strategically right after a cover of a brand new hit that had the crowd rocking. As late as 1992, I was still in the clubs, and I'd play 'Should've Been a Cowboy,' and people wouldn't get up and dance to it. A year later, it went to Number One, and the people in those same clubs couldn't get

enough of it. I mean, if you can't get away with 'Should've Been a Cowboy' in those dance halls, what are you going to get away with?"

When the record deal finally came along, it was for Keith as a solo artist, not for *Easy Money* as a band. "There has never been one bit of animosity," Keith insists. "They said, 'You're the singer and the songwriter; you deserve the deal. Besides, we'd rather be riding down the highway in a big, air-conditioned bus than cooped up in a small van.' I've kept them as my road band the whole time, because they're like my brothers. They were fighting the good fight with me, back when we were making \$300 a night."

"I do use the Nashville studio guys on the records, because they're the best in the world at what they do. But for a live

ground where we live. We live about 110 blocks from the Murrah Building, and that's way too close to home when you fly across the United States every day to make a living. It made me feel very vulnerable."

When Keith finally got home, he called his pal, Larry Jones, the head of Feed the Children, and asked how he could help. Jones gave him a list of supplies that the firefighters and medical personnel were requesting. Keith bought out every hardware store he could find and loaded up a National Guard jeep.

"They took me in right down to the corner across from the building where even the media couldn't go," he notes. "I pretty much stood alone on that corner and watched. Being in front of that nine-story, concrete-and-steel building and seeing



Not just a cowboy. Keith duetted with English rock singer Sting on "I'm So Happy" at the 1997 CMA Awards Show. The song, written by Sting, appears on Keith's *Dream Walkin'* album. Their performance was nominated for a Grammy this year.

show, a road band is the way to go. Studio guys play like clockwork because they're so used to concentrating on meter; but road guys will let it all hang out. It might be a little faster tonight than it was last night because the crowd is hotter; but the feel will be there. The road guys are as close to gypsies as you get these days."

Keith was in a Nashville studio on April 19, 1995, when someone said a bomb had gone off in Oklahoma City. At first, the singer assumed someone had just stuck a pipe bomb in someone else's muffler, but when he saw the images of the Alfred P. Murrah Building on CNN, he knew this was no ordinary bombing. And when he heard the bombers were Americans, members of a right-wing, racist, anti-government group, Keith felt sick to his stomach. He knew he had to get home as quickly as possible.

"It was like a nightmare," he recalls. "I tried to call home and I couldn't get through because everyone in the world was trying to call Oklahoma City to find out what was happening, if everyone was safe. I finally got through on my wife's cell phone, and she said it had rattled the

that all that was left was a three-sided shell, I realized the TV pictures never did it justice. You wonder how anyone could put enough explosives into a Ryder truck to cause a blast like that. I could have crossed the street and walked up to the rubble, but that was too eerie a feeling—there were 100 bodies still in there."

"But it really brought people in Oklahoma City together," he adds. "They announced places where people could drop off donations, and the lines of cars were longer than you could see. For once, you didn't get honked at if you sat through a red light. There was no anger, because there had been so much anger that no one wanted to add to it."

"You sit and watch the news every night—murder on the east side, murder on the west side, robbery on the north side, rape on the south side—and you think the world's going to hell. But when you see people come together like that, it restores your faith. It taught me that no matter how bad it gets, when it comes to crunch time, Americans can unite. If they could do that all the time, we'd be a much different country." ■



Martina McBride

Singer, Producer, Mother & Wife



Martina McBride stands on the stage of a rehearsal studio in an East Nashville industrial park. The cavernous building is all exposed poles and girders, but it provides room enough for the singer and her musicians to spread out as if they were on stage at your local basketball arena. It soon becomes clear that McBride is not just the star; she's also the boss. She even has the sleeves of her white shirt rolled up as she gives instructions before yet another run-through of the country-rock arrangements of Bill Monroe's "Blue Moon of Kentucky" and The Everly Brothers' "When Will I Be Loved."

This interview was done in the midst of putting together Martina's current Gold-selling album, *Evolution*, and once, twice, McBride is called away to attend to urgent business with her record company and management. Each time she makes the trip between the stage and the phone, she stops by to kiss and coo with her two-and-a-half-year-old daughter, Delaney, who is playing on a couch with a babysitter. As soon as rehearsal is over, McBride heads for the door.

She won't be able to do the *actual* interview part right now though, she explains, because she has to go to the Money Pit Studio to cut some overdubs. Then she has to go to the airport to pick up her husband, John McBride, who has been working in Ireland as Garth Brooks' production manager. Then, after a quick dinner, she has to go to the Sound Stage Studio for a mixing session. Maybe we could talk after that.

She fixes me with a stare from her intensely blue eyes and says, with a laugh, "Welcome to the circus of my life. It's a three-ring circus right now, because I'm working in two different studios and this rehearsal hall."

Three rings might be underestimating it a bit. McBride is not just the vocalist on the new album; she's also the co-producer, which means she needs to sit in on every rhythm-track rehearsal and every remix. She's also whipping her road band into shape for a season of steady touring. At the same time, she wants to be the best wife and mother she can. (Speaking of motherhood, McBride recently took a few months off to have a second baby, but expects to be back on the road by June.)

In trying to juggle all these roles, McBride is no different from a lot of women in her generation (she's now 31). She does get extra help in the form of managers, babysitters and assistants, but she also shoulders extra

burdens. No one can do vocal sessions or video shoots for her. And most women don't have a reporter chasing them all over Nashville in search of an interview.

It's not until 9:30 that night, after she has finished the mix on "Wrong Again," that McBride has a moment to sit down and talk. Her reddish-brown hair is cut short, but her high cheekbones and dark eyeliner make her as striking in person after a long day of work as she is on her album covers. And when you finally get her attention, you have it all.

"The only way I can deal with all the things I have to do," she explains, "is to focus on whatever that one thing is that I'm doing at the moment. If I'm talking to you, I have to concentrate on that, because if I'm thinking about something else, I don't get this done and I don't get the something else done either. So you zero in on one thing, get that done and then move on to the next thing."

"I write a lot of to-do lists. That way you can see what things you've done and crossed off and what things you still have to do. If I sat down and thought about all the things I'm trying to do, though, they'd probably have to put me away." Her pinched face breaks into a big smile. "It helps a lot to laugh at things."

One reason McBride is so busy is that she takes her role as co-producer very seriously. For her, the title is not just a status symbol won as a contract concession. She didn't get the credit until her

second album, but even on her debut, she showed up for every session—from rhythm tracks to overdubs to mixes—and was liberal with her advice to producers Paul Worley and Ed Seay.

"It's the only approach that ever made sense to me," she says. "If I were to just come in and sing my parts and let Paul handle everything else, then how would my record be any different from the other four he produces each year? Plus, it's a lot of fun for me. I'm not a songwriter, so it's my chance to be creative—it's like taking a blank canvas and turning it into something."

"When I was making my first album, I didn't even realize it would be an issue. I just showed up every day at the studio. They'd say, 'The fiddle player will show up tomorrow at 2 P.M. to do overdubs, but you don't have to be there.' And I'd say, 'What do you mean? If I'm not there, how do I know it's the way I want it?' It turns out that because I'm not schooled in the usual way of doing things, I come in with fresh ideas. Luckily I have a pro-

Taking a hands-on approach to all she does makes Martina's world a bit hectic, but she wouldn't have it any other way.



By Geoffrey Himes

ducer who's willing and able to turn those ideas into sounds."

"Still Holding On," McBride's Grammy-nominated duet with Clint Black, has been a Number One hit, but the version on *Evolution* is slightly different from the single. "I took the tracks he cut in L.A.," McBride reveals, "and added a new guitar track and changed the bass line a little to make the song fit in more with my sound. I'm a great admirer of Clint, but we're very different artists. I had had Dan Huff play guitar on every other cut on the new album, so it made sense to use him on this one, too. His sound is a large part of the whole project. And Joe Chemay has been the bass player on all my albums. When they come up with a part, it's not just a normal Nashville part; it's like a second melody line."

"If there's one thing that ties this project together," she adds, "it's that all the songs and all the arrangements are very melodic. I've always been drawn to songs with strong melodies, because that's the first thing to hit you as a listener. Melody is primal. The lyrics come later; they're more cerebral. When they come together, that's when the magic happens."

"Melodic" is another way of saying "pop," and *Evolution* is very pop-oriented. "Happy Girl" quotes Linda Ronstadt's "Poor, Poor, Pitiful Me"; "Wrong Again" was co-written by "You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin'" author Cynthia Weil; two songs feature vocal harmonies from The Rembrandts' Danny Wilde. "Valentine," a collaboration between McBride and pianist Jim Brickman, has already been a Number One adult-contemporary hit, and Martina's country remix is moving up the charts as we go to press. Whether the songs are fast or slow, happy or sad, McBride and her musicians push the melody as far as it will go.

"My first album was very traditional country," she points out, "while the second one had more of a pop flavor and the third one more so. That seems to be what works for me. I've done traditional country, but for whatever reason those aren't the songs fans and radio have responded to. But that's what's different about this generation of country musicians and fans; we grew up in the age of multi-media where you're exposed to so many kinds of music. I grew up on 70's and 80's pop—The Babys, John Cougar, Tom Petty—and a little bit of R&B, as well as country. That's why we called the album '*Evolution*,' because it reflects the development of my sound." To get across that evolutionary concept, the album begins with a low-fi tape of McBride singing the Little Jimmy Dickens' hit, "I'm Little But I'm Loud," when she was seven years old in 1973. "That was recorded at a 4-H convention in Manhattan, Kansas," she explains. "My dad was playing guitar, and my mom taped the song from the seats. There were maybe 700 people in the hall, but at that time, it was the largest audience I had ever performed for."

"When I found that tape again, I was surprised that over the years it hadn't gotten lost or destroyed. I'd always meant to put it on an album, and I felt this was the right one, because it shows where I came from—my 'evolution' in country music. It was a song I was known for when I was young, because back then I was real little and I was real loud." She pauses and chuckles. "In fact, I still hear that comment a lot."

McBride grew up on country music in Kansas; "I didn't even know there was another kind of music until I was in high school," she claims. Like her grandfather and great-grandfather, McBride's dad farmed 400 acres of wheat and cow pasture. "Every night," she recalls, "my sister and I would walk down the lane to the pasture and round up our 30 cows and walk them up the lane to the barn." After that, there wasn't much to do but music. "We only went to town once a week; we only had three channels on

TV; there wasn't a Quik Trip nearby. There were a lot of instruments in the house, however, so that's what we did. Maybe it was isolated and not very worldly, but we grew up never putting on airs, because there was no one to put on airs for."

When she was seven and still known as Martina Schiff, she joined the family band, The Schiffers, that included her dad on flat-top guitar, her kid brother Marty on pedal steel and her mom on the sound board. Martina played keyboards and sang the latest hits and the most popular standards by the likes of Reba McEntire, Juice Newton, Patsy Cline and Linda Ronstadt; her dad handled the Ernest Tubb and Waylon Jennings numbers. "We'd rent out the old, abandoned high-school gym in Isabel, Kansas," she remembers, "and throw a big wing-ding. They'd come from all over and just dance for four hours. We had them all—teenagers, little kids, grandparents."

She stayed in the band until she graduated from high school, and the rehearsals at her dad's carpentry shop in town taught her how to pick a song apart and recognize all the different parts. It was a skill that stood her in good stead when she started co-producing her own records. She and husband John McBride moved to Nashville in 1990 without any specific jobs or contacts. He was an experienced sound technician, though, and soon joined Garth Brooks' tours. Martina signed on as a T-shirt salesman, then graduated to opening act and finally to Brooks' duet partner on her debut album, 1992's *The Time Has Come*.

She didn't really break through, however, until her second album, 1993's *The Way That I Am*, and its landmark single, "Independence Day." That Gretchen Peters song told the story of a battered wife who finally took her vengeance. "I knew it would make a difference," McBride recalls, "because women would hear it and know they weren't alone, that someone else had been through

the same thing. It's funny, though; sometimes the biggest songs aren't the Number Ones. Everyone assumes it was a Number One hit, but it only went to Number 12."

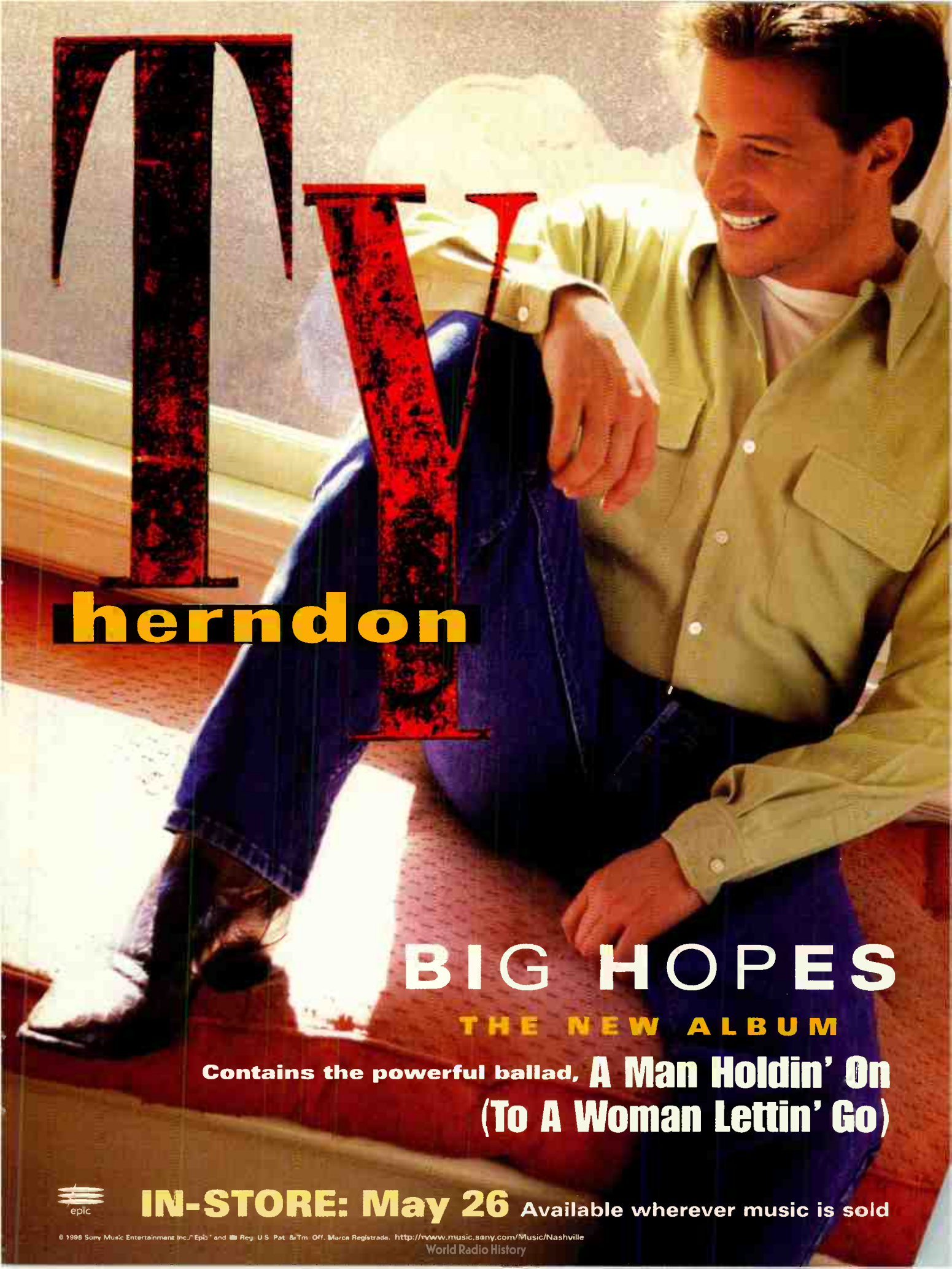
McBride returns to a similar theme on *Evolution* with "A Broken Wing"—and it did go to Number One. This time the problem isn't physical but psychological abuse ("She'd tell him 'bout her dreams/He'd just shoot 'em down/Lord, he loved to make her cry"), and the solution isn't vengeance but leaving. But when McBride belts out the hook-laden chorus, "With her broken wing, she carries her dreams, man, you ought to see her fly," it sounds like a day of independence just the same.

McBride herself has been happily wed for more than nine years, and she doesn't want to sound like an advocate for busting up marriages. In fact, *Evolution* contains several songs about how to keep a long-term relationship going. "In 'Some Say I'm Running,'" she explains, "it would be real easy for the woman to listen to her friends and her family who are urging her to give up because it's so hard to hang in there. I'm not one for hanging in a relationship if there are serious problems, but any relationship takes work; that's human nature. You have to respect what the other person wants and needs, the way they live their life and who they are. You have to really listen to the other person and not hear what you think they're saying or what you want them to say but what they're actually saying. I've been married nine and a half years, and I know how much work is involved."

As if on cue, John McBride pops his head in the studio office where we're talking and gives a wordless look that says, "Can I have my wife back now?" Martina gives me a similar look. I glance at my watch; it's 10:30 P.M. It's time for her to move on to the next item on her to-do list. She scoops up the half-asleep Delaney in her arms and walks out with John into the Nashville night. ■



Martina sang the smash, "A Broken Wing," on Rosie O'Donnell's show.



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Sister Act

When The Lynns signed to a major label after a two-year run at Tootsie's, the Warner Brothers executives knew they had something special. Just how special was another story...



By Michael Bane

Okay, okay, I say, let me make sure I've got this straight. My two interview subjects lean forward and nod their heads, in unison. You two women are Tammy Wynette's kids?

"No," says Peggy Lynn, pointing at her twin, Patsy, across the table. "She's Tammy Wynette's daughter; I'm..."

"You're what?" says Patsy.

"Cloned," says Peggy.

It's the future, I say. If they can clone sheep, they can clone anything.

"They cloned sheep?" says Patsy. Peggy and I nod. "Nobody told me."

Let's have a little time out here while I explain that Peggy and Patsy Lynn are neither cloned nor the secret love twins of Tammy Wynette. Rather, they're Loretta's twins, daughters of Loretta and Mooney Lynn, who have emerged from no less hallowed ground than Tootsie's Orchid Lounge on South Broadway to shake up Nashville all on their own...

"...This town is full of star babies," says Peggy, butting in on the time out...

"...But that's not what we are," chimes in her sister. Ignore them, or we'll never get anywhere. Anyway, the twins were born straight into country music mythology, almost nine months to the day after Loretta and Mooney got lost one day looking for a new house. That was the day that Loretta found a dilapidated, long-deserted antebellum mansion and, having just seen *Gone with the Wind*, declared it to be her Tara. The pair couldn't find out anything about the house, so they spent the night outside, on the porch.

"The funny part of the story is...nine months later..." says Patsy.

"Oh, gee, I hope it ain't twins..." says Peggy.

As we return to the regularly scheduled interview, Peggy and Patsy are discussing—animatedly—the difference between "hill-

billy" and "redneck." All right, it may have started as a discussion, but it quickly degenerates into "twin talk," which is about one step removed from smacking each other over the head with pillows.

"I'm not a redneck," says Peggy. "I'm a hillbilly."

"How do you figure you're not a redneck?" retorts Patsy.

"A hillbilly is a totally different thing from a redneck," Peggy says.

"What's a redneck?" asks Patsy.

"Jeff Foxworthy is a redneck," says Peggy. "People who have Waffle House credit cards are rednecks!"

"And what's your favorite restaurant?" ask Patsy sweetly.

"Waffle House! Waffle House," says Peggy.

"It's the only restaurant open at 3 A.M.," says Patsy, deftly switching sides. "You gotta eat after a show. And thinking about it, if this music thing doesn't work out, I'm going to buy a Cracker Barrel franchise in New Mexico."

"They don't have Cracker Barrel restaurants in New Mexico?" asks Peggy.

"No," exclaims Patsy. "They don't."

"How much do you think it would cost to do that?" Peggy says. "Michael, how would you like to go into the restaurant business with The Lynns?"

"That's where we signed our record contract," adds Patsy. "Over chicken and dumplings and hash brown casserole."

And while "Biscuits and Gravy King" has a nice ring to it, I thought I'd fill you all in on how The Lynns got into the music business in the first place. Well, actually, how could they not? They made their debut on the Grand Ole Opry when they were three weeks old. By the time they were three years old, the twins were dancing and singing on the bar at Tootsie's while Mom was onstage at the Opry.





The Lynns: Peggy, left, and Patsy, right.

Mooney would have a drink with Ernest Tubb, while grand old Tootsie Bess gave the twins Coca Cola and Dentyne chewing gum for entertaining the regulars. One of their play pals was Little Jimmy Dickens, who, because of his stature, was assumed to be a little kid like them. "We were a little mad to find out he was really a full-grown Opry star," recalls Patsy. The twins sang behind their mom for a while, but eventually drifted apart; well, a few miles apart. Peggy left Hurricane Mills to look for an elusive solo career, while Patsy stayed home. It was, predictably, Loretta who bought the twins back together as a duet. "I believe our mother knew what she was doing all along," says Patsy.

"It took us so long to get a record contract," says Peggy (or maybe Patsy; I'm a speck confused here).

"So long..." says Patsy.

"And we always heard stories about signing parties, with shrimp and all these little things," Peggy continues.

"Shrimp," echoes Patsy.

"Well, when we got our contract, it was in a plain envelope," she says.

"No, a manila, in the mail," says Patsy.

"Yeah, right," says Peggy. "There's no party. There's no leather-bound contract case. There's no shrimp. So I get to the Cracker Barrel to sign the contract—Patsy was a little late, so I order a hash brown casserole for us to split. And here we are, the dream of a lifetime..."

"We high-fived each other at the restaurant," says Patsy.

"Every time one of the waitresses walked by, we'd say, hey, we got a record deal!" Peggy says. "And the waitresses were looking at us, like, you girls really need a life..."

"Really..." Patsy echoes.

Not surprisingly, when The Lynns decided it was time to be heard, they chose Tootsie's as the perfect venue. But Tootsie's, like the rest of country music, had changed and changed again since Mooney and ET sat in its darkened crannies and waited for the Opry to wrap up. The legendary backroom at Tootsie's had become a haven for alternative country acts, acts rebelling against what *Billboard Magazine* critic Timothy White refers to as the Nashville of today, "the bland leading the bland." Patsy and Peggy decided that the best way to showcase their increasingly eclectic Opry-styled honky tonk music (not to mention the wacky sisters act) was to avoid the obvious, and shut up and sing. They called themselves The Honk-A-Billies, and went to great pains not to mention their lineage. Not surprisingly, given their harmonies, their excellent songwriting skills and their overall honkin' delivery (they still think ET is somewhere in the corner, and maybe he is), the Honk-A-Billies were soon packin' 'em into Tootsie's, two Thursdays a month.

Meanwhile, we're still stuck on the Cracker Barrel Signing:

"I mean, really, you would think as much money as our aunt, Crystal Gayle, made Warner Brothers, we would have at least gotten one of



The twins at home with Loretta and Mooney at Hurricane Mills.

those cool jackets," Patsy (or maybe it's Peggy) is saying.

"I would have liked a Dwight Yoakam jacket," says Peggy.

"I would have liked to keep the pen or something," says Patsy.

You may gather that the twins are relatively comfortable with the media. This is true, since they were probably interviewed for the first time in the womb. What an odd life, I think. Of course, all that early exposure helped The Honk-A-Billies retain some level of anonymity at Tootsie's. Everyone in country music knew that Loretta's twins were...little kids, right? By the end of their two-year run at Tootsie's the fire marshal was routinely coming in and threatening to shut the place down for being too crowded.

"He'd say, 'I'm gonna shut you down, girls. I'm gonna shut you down!'" says Peggy. "I mean, people were everywhere! It was great! But we didn't tell 'em who we were. I mean, I've met more star babies than you can shake a stick at."

"Not us," says Patsy.

"Daddy didn't raise us that way," says Peggy.

"We were farm girls," says Patsy.

"The worst thing that happened to Daddy when we left home was that he lost his little hay balers," says Peggy.

"It's kinda funny, about nobody knowing who we were," says Patsy. "Somebody said the other day, how can that be true? Well, why can't it? There's so many new people coming into Nashville. Peggy and I knew it was important that we have our own music, what we do. Not what we are. We just wanted to go play."

Is that, I hazard a question, all you both ever wanted to do? To play music?

"Well, I think when you grow up every day with music when you're a kid, the last thing you want to do is be a singer," says Patsy.

"I think me and Patsy both are workers. You put a mountain on the road in front of us, and we'll go over it or around it to get to our dream," Peggy says. "Music's our reality."

Your karma, I ask.

"Our karma," says Peggy. "It's gotta be. It's like Tootsie's; we were family there. Two little girls raised out in the middle of nowhere, and we'd walk in the door and it was like, 'Hello, world!' It was weird when we came back as adults. Tootsie's was kinda run down, and it was a lot smaller than I remembered it to be."

"It's so weird that Tootsie's would be the place where we got our record deal," says Patsy.

"Isn't it funny that no matter how far you go, you always come back?" says Peggy.

"We didn't want to hear, 'They don't sound like their mom,'" says Patsy.

"Or 'They do sound like their mom,'" says Peggy.

"Or 'They had it so easy with their mom and all,'" says Patsy. "That's why they got a record deal."

"That's a bunch of crap," says Peggy.

They got their recording contract the old-fashioned way. Someone from Warner Brothers, having heard the buzz about this girl group playing down at Tootsie's, moseyed on down to hear what the buzz was all about. The Warner exec liked the two enough to haul in Doug Grau from A&R to listen to The Honk-A-Billies. He liked them enough to ask for a demo tape. He decided to offer The

Honk-A-Billies a contract.

"The night before we were supposed to go in and finalize the deal, I told Peggy that we had to tell 'em," says Patsy.

"So we go in, and the Warner people are telling us all about the label, how much they'd done and why it would be good for us to sign with Warner Brothers," says Peggy. "So I finally said, 'We know a little about your label. Our aunt Crystal Gayle was with you for about ten years.'"

The temperature in the conference room plummeted.

Grau said, "Your aunt, Crystal Gayle?"

"If your aunt is Crystal Gayle," he began, "then your mom is..."

"Peggy says, 'Before we go any farther, we've got to tell you something,'" says Patsy.

"Then Patsy says, 'We're Loretta Lynn's daughters,'" says Peggy.

Dead silence.

"We thought, 'Oh, no, there goes the deal,'" says Peggy.

"It closed the meeting down," says Patsy. "And it was about two weeks before they called us. When they did, though, they said the words I'll never forget—'We love your music... We don't care who your mother is.'"

The first Lynns album—Warner may not have cared who their mom was, but they're not complete idiots, either—is climbing up the charts. It features an impressive array of Honk-A-Billy material, from "Nights Like These," an homage to their mom's discovery of her own personal Tara and the launching, so to speak, of what would ultimately become the twins' career, to a moving tribute to their father, Mooney Lynn, who died of diabetes-related problems last August. The last thing Mooney Lynn saw was Loretta, and he said, "I won't leave this world unloved."

"We want to keep our music as real as Dad's words," says Patsy.

If this whole story sounds like a country song, well, it's because it is. Loretta Lynn's life is a song that she found the words to sing; it's not too surprising that there's another verse waiting to be sung.

"I personally feel that my mother's name has been nothing but an asset to me," says Patsy. "She taught me about music, she taught me about life. The only thing that's...what's a good word here?...sort of iffy, is that people think we got things because our mother's Loretta Lynn. You know what I got? I didn't get my mother. I shared my mother with millions of people. I can remember my dad being the loneliest man I've ever met..."

"We got to see more and do more than anyone else," says Peggy, "but Mom had to sacrifice. She sacrificed."

"But it's time for us to come out of the shadow," says Patsy. "Judge us for our music."



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by Patricia Rose

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Letters

From Chesnutt to Alabama

We want to thank you all for a great *Country Music Magazine*. We enjoy every copy, but January/February was outstanding! Really enjoyed the article on Mark Chesnutt. He is so down to earth. We first saw him at a concert at Hunter Mountain, New York. He was opening for George Jones. We have every one of his cassettes. Enjoy his music so much.

Also enjoyed the article on Alabama. They are a great group. Was happy to see that they received another award. They sure do deserve it. We just wish them a lot of luck and hope they continue to tour. We really enjoy "Dancin' on the Boulevard." We have been loyal subscribers for about ten years.

Richard and Catherine Megnin
Waldwick, New Jersey

Mad About Mark

First of all, I want to say that I love your magazine and have been reading it since I was 11 years old. I never thought I would ever have a reason to write until I received the January/February 1998 issue. Thank you so much for putting the real entertainer of country music on the cover. It was about time. To me Mark is the best singer there is and always will be. Bob Millard did a great job on the interview too.

I wish I knew what was wrong with those so-called boards of the CMA and ACM awards. Hello, people! Have you all ever heard of Mark Chesnutt, or just don't know the greatest Country Superstar when you see one? Mark deserves to be nominated and win every award there is except Female Vocalist. Mark Chesnutt rules!

Laquita Hughes
Tchula, Mississippi

Best Country Boy

I was just writing to let you know I greatly appreciate the article about Mark Chesnutt in the January/February issue. I, personally, think he's the best country boy and own every CD/tape he's on. I really hope that his dream of singing at the CMA's or ACM's comes true. He surely deserves it. Of course my dream is to meet him personally one day, but I think he's got a better shot at his dream. Anyway, keep up the good work at CMM and congrats on the 25th anniversary.

Amy Dierks
River Falls, Wisconsin



Letters on this issue will appear next time.

Chesnutt Country Chills

Great cover of your CMM (January/February). I also enjoyed the article on the "Boys Night Out." I am a big fan of M.C. He is country all the way from his first to the latest, *Thank God for Believers*. It shows he's country all the way. My son and I went and saw him in concert in Huntsville, Alabama. I have seen a lot of concerts, but his was great. The more he sings, the better he gets. He is one of the Texans I really enjoy listening to. I would love to see him get the recognition he deserves. There is something about his voice that moves me. Brings chills down my spine. I read your CMM from front to back. "Good"—keep up the good work. Way to go, Mark.

Glenda Duncan
Owens Cross Roads, Alabama

Thanks for John Denver

In regards to the January/February issue ("John Denver Revisited") by Michael Bane: A wonderful tribute to John and beautifully written. I thank you, Michael, for your thoughts and words. It really touched my heart. He was truly a wonderful artist. I love your magazine and will be looking forward to another article soon on Neal McCoy. Keep up the good work, and am looking forward to remaining a satisfied subscriber for a long, long time.

Joan Metlock
John Day, Oregon

Carl Smith and Goldie Hill

I was very happy to see the article about Carl Smith and wife Goldie in the People section in the January/February issue. My opinion is, this man should be in the Hall of Fame. And I wonder why he isn't. How about a cover story on him? I'm 63 years old, and I do love to hear some of the newcomers. But we still love the old ones. Carl was the greatest ever as far as I am concerned, and I had wondered about him and his wife Goldie. Don't they still look great? Thanks again for your article.

Mary C. Penley
Asheville, North Carolina

More Carl and Goldie

I just received my copy of *Country Music* January/February 1998. I was so surprised and thrilled when I saw Carl Smith and Goldie Hill's picture in the People section. And that they were celebrating their 40th Anniversary. I have often wondered about them and where they were. Carl was one of my favorite singers. I didn't realize he had been married for 40 years. Please print more about him. Is he still performing?

Louise Estep
Parker City, Indiana

Chesnutt, Strait, Ferlin...

I've been a subscriber for a few years now, and enjoy *Country Music* very much. And love it when you have George Strait covers and pull-out posters (pull-out poster, November/December 1997). Also enjoyed January/February 1998 cover with Mark Chesnutt.

Would love to see something about Ferlin Husky. He is a very great entertainer—and a good person. Enclosing picture of my husband, Ferlin Husky and me taken in Branson, Missouri, at Box Car Willie's.

V.A. Scott
Smithville, Oklahoma
For Ferlin Husky, see April 1998 issue of *The Journal*.—Ed.

Anderson and Joss

Thank you for recognizing the immense talent of Pete Anderson in Final Note in the January/February issue of *Country Music*. Also for recognizing Scott Joss' album, *Souvenirs*, as a real delight. Shows you *do* listen to all country music.

I have enjoyed your magazine immensely over the years as you always

Dale Earnhardt

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CHEVROLET presents the COUNTRY MUSIC QUIZ

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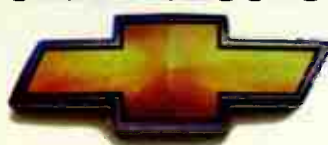
1. Reba McEntire is working with a new producer on her new album. Name him.
2. Who collaborated with Martina McBride on her recent single, "Valentine"?
3. Sisters Peggy and Patsy are the twin daughters of which country legend?
4. What was the name of Toby Keith's first single?
5. What's the name of Alan Jackson's road band?
6. The best long-term quality belongs to which brand of pickup?

ANSWERS TO LAST ISSUE'S QUIZ:

1. Tim McGraw
2. October 25, 1994
3. "roughneck," an offshore oil rig worker
4. "The Note"
5. making plans
6. Veteran stuntman Fred Cly relies on his Chevy S-10.

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praise Dwight Yoakam's music as one of the best. Keep up the good work, the observant and honest reviews.

Pat Boyd
Ft. Myers, Florida

McBride Evolves

Evolution: McBride's full circle. I thank Bob Millard for such a great record review on Martina McBride's new album, *Evolution*, in the January/February issue. His review not only solidifies McBride as the premier modern and true woman of country music, but also recognizes McBride's greatest strength: Intelligence. No other woman in any music format can match McBride's class and sophistication. Accompanied with her distinguishable independent voice, Martina delivers an album of maturity: A rarity these days. The uniqueness of this album may lie with Martina's personal insertion of Past, Present, and Future. This is a common theme of country music, as well it should be. It is these threads that the "country artists" sow; makes country music the Number One format.

Bob Ly
Iowa City, Iowa
More on Martina in this issue.—Ed.

LeAnn for the Ages

About Rich Kienzie's review of LeAnn Rimes' album, *You Light Up My Life*, in the January/February issue. He says it's a "package with little reason to exist." I disagree.

After the great success of "Blue," done when she was barely 13, people naturally wondered how that tremendous voice developed. So, I believe, LeAnn and Curb Records did what no one to my knowledge had ever done before—they quickly released two albums that showed the evolution from an 11-year-old with a great voice to a young lady who can master any style, and any vocal range. Maybe, someday, when her voice has matured completely, she will produce a boxed set, composed of those plus some newer material.

Opinions about Miss Rimes seem to be strongly polarized, but, if given a real chance, I believe she will go down in history as one of the truly great voices of the era.

Doug Hodges
Parker, Arizona

Kienzie Calls It

Thanks to Rich Kienzie for calling it like it is in his review of LeAnn Rimes latest, *You Light Up My Life*, in the January/February issue. It takes guts to give an honest assessment of everyone's new teenage heroine, but the review gave me the confirmation that it wasn't just me who was extremely disappointed with this album. LeAnn Rimes is obviously a prodigy. Her natural talent is obvious in everything she does. This is why I am dis-

tressed to see her unimaginative cookie-cutter productions resembling the local karaoke machine more than cutting-edge Nashville. The first album, *Blue*, showed some thought and at least a bit of originality in production. This latest effort seems thrown together. As an indie producer/engineer myself, I hear many things in the quality of the production which disturb me, not the least of which is that annoying, omnipresent wall of reverb which separates the listener from the intimacy of LeAnn's voice. This is a production trend from 25-30 years ago! LeAnn Rimes is a magnificent talent; I would like to see her nurtured rather than exploited.

Doug Benson
Thurmont, Maryland

Youth for Hank Jr.

I am only 16 years old, but I know a little about country music, I also know I don't like much of what's going on today. Ask me a question about Hank Williams Jr. and I can answer it. He is the king of country music and still after 40 years in the business has a hell of a lot of rowdy friends! Let's see what some of these so called "hot chart toppers" are doing after 40 years. I don't never look or care who's on the Top Ten, I think about Ol' Bocephus in Tennessee, Montana or Alabama hunting and fishing. I think it's time for everybody to take their hat off to Hank, so let's see some more of Hank in this magazine.

Vincent McDonough Jr.
Charlotte Court House, Virginia

Hank Jr. Started It All

I think that it is about time that Hank Williams Jr. start getting the credit he deserves. As the leader of the young-country movement, and five time Entertainer of the Year, it was Hank Jr., not Garth Brooks, who was the first to incorporate a stage show with rock-type lighting, attitude and presentation. Garth is a good showman, but having seen both, I was more impressed by Hank Williams Jr. Flashier is not always better.

Pushing the envelope is fine, just as long as you know where you have been, and where you are going.

Hank Jr. is a great vocalist, great songwriter, great musician and a great performer. I like a few of the newer acts, but a lot are Bocephus-wannabes that end up coming across as cheesy caricatures. As Hank Jr. has said, he "Ain't goin' peacefully." Keep kickin', Bocephus, all the way into the Country Music Hall of Fame.

Jimmy Swanson
Haskell, Oklahoma

25th Anniversary and Cash

Congratulations on your first 25 years. I look forward to each and every issue. I would like to thank you for the ten covers

It's Her Picture Day!



Marie

Doll shown smaller
than actual size of 21".
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Like many of you, one of Marie Osmond's most treasured traditions is to dress her children in their "Sunday best" for their annual picture day, just as her mother did with her. "Baby Marie Picture Day" is an exquisite vignette of Marie's childhood picture day memories, as it is sculpted, created, named, and dressed after Marie as a toddler. (You see, being the only girl with eight brothers, Marie was *always* dressed in pink!)

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featuring Johnny Cash. He was my favorite artist back in 1972, and he remains my favorite today. I look forward to cover number 11!

Also congratulations to Johnny Cash for *Unchained* being nominated for a Grammy award in the country album category. Thank you, Johnny Cash, for continuing to record, for the 42 years of great music you have already given us and for just staying true to your music. You have been a tremendous inspiration to me.

Ron Grimm
Astoria, Oregon

Unchained won the Grammy award on February 24th.—Ed.

Cain's Academy

What is Cain's Academy? This is a question that has been asked of me many times lately, the last time was just the other day. This is really a shame! Hardly any of the younger music fans or even the younger artists know any of the history about this great institution.

Cain's Academy (established 1924) has more country and Western swing history than can be imagined. If Cain's could talk, what stories it could tell. Well, of course, Cain's can't talk, but the owner, Mr. Larry Schaffer, sure can, and I think your magazine could do a great service to all its readers and country music fans if you could do a story on Cain's Academy. In the early 30's Bob Wills performed there almost on a regular basis. When I was in Oklahoma (Navy 1944-45), Bob was off making movies, and his brother Johnnie Lee Wills was playing Cain's on Saturday nights.

Herbert E. Norris
Vienna, West Virginia

Station to Station

I read in Letters in the January/February issue, that a reader wanted to know what stations carry country music. For FM radio stations there is a book published that has information about each station. Write to FM Atlas Publishing, Box 336, Esko, Minnesota 55733. The cost is \$16.95.

For AM radio stations, there is a publication that is three-hole punched for standard binders. It has information about each station. Cost is \$22.95. Order from NRC Publications, Box 164, Mannsville, New York 13661.

Gary L. Houdek
Munden, Kansas

Eddy Arnold, Johnny Cash, Strait

I love country music. As a child, I listened to Eddy Arnold sing "My Daddy Is Only a Picture." The words to that song brought tears to my eyes as my Daddy died just a couple of months before my third birthday. As a teenager, I listened to Johnny Cash. (Everyone else listened to Elvis.) In the 1980's I went to five or

six of Johnny's shows and was never disappointed. The Man in Black knows how to entertain! My sincere best wishes go out to him and his family during this difficult time.

Since 1981, I've been listening to the real cowboy from Texas, George Strait. His devotion to his family and his great voice endear him to millions. Please continue to include articles about George as often as possible. Congratulations, George, you deserve all those awards.

Wanda S. Vermeers
Bremerton, Washington

Loaves Shania and More

I love Shania and all her music and the story on her in the November/December 1997 issue was great. And she is *not* the only one with a bare navel. Mindy McCready's one that comes to mind—she flashes hers more than Shania, and has a stone!

Your magazine is great. I've been subscribing to it since I was at Opryland in 1972 when I got a free issue there. I just renewed until 2001. Love *The Journal* in CMM. P.S. How about another story on Alan Jackson?

Carolyn Taylor
Sardinia, Ohio

Catch Alan in the centerfold.—Ed.

Faron's Death Date

We received our copy of the 1998 *Country Music Magazine* calendar. I was checking some dates and see you have December 9th the day Faron Young died. That is not correct. Believe me, we know, as we were friends of Faron and the family. He shot himself December 9, but Faron died on December 10th of 1996. Was *close friend* for over 30 years and had a singing voice *no one* will ever equal. Hope you will correct date.

Betty J. Smith
Toledo, Ohio

The error will be corrected.—Ed.

Combo, Calendar and More

I have just received my January/February issue of *Country Music Magazine* and *The Journal*, and I think you are doing a great job combining both in one magazine. But I would like to make a suggestion about the yearly calendar. Why not combine a CMM calendar with a *Journal* calendar like you do with the magazines, with photos of the old time country stars with the newer stars. I miss the *Journal* calendar, as I know a lot of other readers must, too.

Eugene H. Muntz
Poughkeepsie, New York

More on "What'll You Do"

I am writing because I noticed in your Letters section in the January/February 1998 issue you had a correction on the song "What'll You Do About Me." You had that Randy Travis originally sang the

song. In all actuality, John Schneider recorded the song in 1984 for the album *Too Good to Stop Now*. I like the other two versions (Randy Travis and Doug Supernaw), but I thought I would try to set the record straight.

Candi Creamer
Bowmansdale, Pennsylvania
Your information is correct. Sorry we didn't get to the bottom of this the first time around. Apologies to John.—Ed.

Cover for Clint

I have just finished reading your 25th Anniversary Issue (September/October 1997) of *Country Music Magazine*. I really enjoy your magazine. I can usually find all the information about all my favorite stars. But as I was looking through all the covers you have done through the years, I found only one of Clint Black. He has been around since 1989, and he is one of the best performers I've ever heard! Please try to do more articles on Clint. He is *the best around!*

Sheila Tipton
Childersburg, Alabama
Actually there are two covers for Clint. For more, stay tuned.—Ed.

CMM, Fricke and More

You have the very best country magazine on the market. I once was receiving five different ones, I am down to only one now. Your 25th Anniversary issue September/October 1997, showed the covers of all the issues from 1972-1997, and like all the other magazines, you guys had Dolly Parton, Johnny Cash, Tanya, Loretta, Tammy, Willie, Reba on more covers than they deserve.

From 1977 till 1993 Janie Fricke, she put out 22 albums and 36 singles. I saw her in upstate New York at a fair this summer, and she was sensational. Tell me how come this lady didn't make the cover of one of your issues.

Ray King
Oakdale, Connecticut

Priceless Ray Price

I really enjoy getting and reading *Country Music*, but I am also disappointed in that I rarely find anything written about Ray Price. The man is a living legend, after all. I remember hearing him for the first time in the very early 50's, and I became an instant fan. He, especially during the 70's, moved country music to new heights using orchestral music to get across his country message. Even today his voice is still as silky smooth as ever. Please write something, anything, about Noble Ray Price.

Gail Bostic
Rushville, Indiana

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before in my life, and this has been a thrill
for me. I've told everyone I know about
your Sweepstakes. I plan to continue be-
ing a good *Country Music* customer in
the future. Thank you again for making
me a very happy customer.

When your notification arrived, I read
it six times before I convinced myself it
was real. This has made me a believer.

Terry D. Frye
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Happy Winner

What a great surprise winning the
sweepstakes. Thank you so much! I plan
on using the \$1,000 on a cruise for my
husband and myself. *Country Music*
Magazine is my favorite magazine. I look
forward to every issue.

Dorothy Jackson
Homestead, Florida

Sweeps Winner Announced

The winner of our December 1997/Janu-
ary 1998 \$1000 Renewal Sweepstakes is
C.R. Davis of Orange, Texas.

...And Replies

Thank all of you for my winning sweep-
stakes check. First of all I gave my tithe
to my church. The balance will be used for
a vacation to see my great-grandson
in Florida. Then I plan to use some of the
money on new fishing tackle. If anything
is left, to donate to The Shriners' Hospital
Fund for Children. We operate three
burns hospitals and 19 orthopedic. This is
a humanitarian effort. Thanks again,

C.R. Davis
Orange, Texas

Send Letters to the Editor to *Country*
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- ☐ 102 Professional Landscaper
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- ☐ 69 COBOL*

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Patty Loveless

Country Music Album



Bryan White

Paul Brandt—
Outside The Frame
(Reprise) 230•615

Joe Diffie—
Third Rock From
The Sun (Epic) 489•260

The Tractors
(Arista) 488•551

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

Tracy Byrd—
No Ordinary Man
(MCA) 484•758

"B Seconds"—Ong,
Sndrk. Reba McEntire,
Vince Gill, etc. (MCA
Nashville) 475•483

Patty Loveless—
Long Stretch Of
Lonesome (Epic) 228•676

Alan Jackson—Who I
Am (Arista) 486•233

Reba McEntire—
Read My Mind
(MCA Nashville) 479•717

Reba McEntire—It's
Your Call (MCA) 450•361

**Great Wedding
Songs**—Various Artists
(Warner Bros.) 477•448

Jeff Foxworthy—You
Might Be A Redneck
H... (Warner Bros.)
474•833

Jason Sellers—
I'm Your Man
(BNA Records) 225•680

Delbert McClinton—
Honky Tonk 'N' Blues
(MCA Nashville) 475•970

Mavericks—What A
Crying Shame (MCA
Nashville) 474•403

Alan Jackson—
A Lot About Livin'
(And A Little 'Bout Love)
(Arista) 447•458

Collin Raye—In This
Life (Epic) 447•268

Toby Keith—(Mercury/
Nashville) 458•315

The Kinleys—
Just Between You
And Me (Epic) 223•271

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

Billy Ray Cyrus—
Some Gave All
(Mercury/Nashville)
441•451

Lyle Lovett
(MCA/Curb) ★ 353•755

Faith Hill—
Take Me As I Am
(Columbia) 473•728

**John Michael
Montgomery**—Kickin' It
Up (Atlantic) 473•157

Lorrie Morgan—
Shakin' Things Up
(BNA Records) 222•677

George Strait—#7
(MCA) 345•389

Big House (MCA
Nashville) 186•759

Collin Raye—
Extremes
(Epic) 473•025

**Mary Chapin
Carpenter**—
Come On, Come On
(Columbia) 440•560

Nanci Griffith—
The MCA Years
(MCA) ★ 470•971

Bryan White—
The Right Place
(Asylum) 220•418

George Strait—Easy
Come, Easy Go (MCA)
467•308

The Ranch (Capitol
Nashville) 188•425

Longview
(Rouder) ★ 221•762

Conway Twitty—Final
Touches (MCA
Nashville) 466•607

**The Essential
Marty Robbins**
(Columbia) 432•252/392•258

David Lee Murphy—
We Can't All Be Angels
(MCA) 221•713

Highwayman—
Jennings, Nelson,
Cash, Kristofferson,
(Columbia) 335•067

Bob Woodruff—Desire
Road (Imprint) 182•121

**John Michael
Montgomery**—Life's A
Dance (Atlantic) 453•746

"Pure Country"—Orig.
Sndrk. George Strait
(MCA) 448•753

Regina Regina
(Giant) 179•143



Vince Gill—High
Lonesome Sound
(MCA Nashville)
168•567

Delbert McClinton—
One Of The Fortunate
Few (Rising Tide) ★
225•698

**Legends Of Country
Music**—The Best Of
Austin City Limits—
Chet Atkins, Loretta
Lynn, more. (Columbia/
Legacy) 227•777

Matraca Berg—Sunday
Morning To Saturday
Night (Rising Tide)
★ 224•717

Sawyer Brown—
The Dirt Road
(Curb Records) 433•656

**John Michael
Montgomery**—What I
Do The Best (Atlantic
Nashville) 166•603

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

**Mary Chapin
Carpenter**—
A Place In The World
(Columbia) 167•858

The Brenda Lee Story
(MCA) 432•757

Michael Peterson
(Reprise) 214•544

Sara Evans—Three
Chords And The Truth
(RCA Nashville) 210•211

**Dolly Parton/
Tammie Wynette/
Loretta Lynn**—
Honky Tonk Angels
(Columbia) 467•712

Chely Wright—Let Me
In (MCA) 221•457

Toby Keith—Dream
Walkin' (Mercury)
217•950

**Mary Chapin
Carpenter**—
Shooting Straight
In The Dark
(Columbia) 411•876

Reba McEntire—
Rumor Has It
(MCA) 411•538

Alan Jackson—Here
In The Real World
(Arista) 406•785

Vince Gill—
When I Call Your Name
(MCA) 402•867

**Lyle Lovett And His
Large Band**
(MCA) ★ 378•935

Brooks & Dunn—
Brand New Man
(Arista) 429•969

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

Amazing Grace 2—
John Berry, Bryan
White, more. (Sparrow)
222•786

The Raybon Bros.
(MCA Nashville) 219•667

Trisha Yearwood—
Hearts In Armor
(MCA Nashville) 444•042

Anita Cochran—Back
To You (Warner Bros.
Nashville) 188•813

Clay Walker—Rumor
Has It (Giant) 186•692

Eddie Rabbitt—Beatin'
The Odds (Intersound)
★ 223•107

George Strait—Does
Fort Worth Ever Cross
Your Mind (MCA) 330•704

David Allan Coe—
For The Record—
The First 10 Years
(Columbia) 329•813/399•816

Johnny Cash—
At Folsom Prison/
At San Quentin
(Columbia) 230•730

Rocky Mountain High—
Tribute To John Denver
(CMH) ★ 230•532

Steve Earle—El
Corazon (E Squared/
Warner Bros.) 225•706

**The Flying Burrito
Brothers**—California
Jukebox (Ether)
★ 223•594

Kenny Chesney—
I Will Stand
(BNA Records) 221•267

River Road (Capitol
Nashville) 212•639

Patsy Cline—Live At
The Cimarron Ballroom
(MCA Nashville) 216•861

Reba McEntire—
Grt. Hits Vol. Two
(MCA) 467•316

George Strait—
Grt. Hits, Vol. II
(MCA) 361•006

**Charlie Daniels
Band**—Super
Hits (Epic) 456•608

Kenny Rogers—
20 Greatest Hits
(Reprise) 444•885

Hank Williams, Sr.—
40 Grt. Hits (Polydor)
423•863/393•868

Dwight Yoakam—
Just Lookin' For A Hit
(Reprise) 389•718

Lorrie Morgan—
Grt. Hits (BNA
Records) 132•480

Allison Krauss—
Now That I've
Found You: A
Collection
(Rouder) 120•345

Willie Nelson—
Grt. Hits (And
Some That Will Be)
(Columbia) 311•001

**The Best Of
Billy Ray Cyrus**—
Cover to Cover
(Mercury) 217•968

Diamond Rio—
Greatest Hits (Arista
Nashville) 214•627

Pam Tillis—Greatest
Hits (Arista
Nashville) 211•441

Aaron Tippin—
Greatest Hits... And
Then Some (RCA
Nashville) 188•532

Vince Gill—Souvenirs
(MCA) 155•259

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

Alabama—Grt. Hits,
Vol. 3 (RCA) 123•513

Steve Earle—Ain't
Ever Satisfied (Hip-O)
★ 174•110/394•114

Mark Chesnut—Grt.
Hits (Decca) 173•476

John Anderson—
Grt. Hits (BNA
Records) 169•409

**The Essential
Waylon Jennings**
(RCA Nashville) 159•160

**The Essential Keith
Whitley** (RCA
Nashville) 159•020

Best Of Lari White
(RCA Nashville) 179•291

Merle Haggard—
Vintage Collection
Series (Capitol
Nashville) 149•054

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

Mark Chesnut—Grt.
Hits (Decca) 173•476

John Anderson—
Grt. Hits (BNA
Records) 169•409

**The Essential
Waylon Jennings**
(RCA Nashville) 159•160

**The Essential Keith
Whitley** (RCA
Nashville) 159•020

Best Of Lari White
(RCA Nashville) 179•291

Merle Haggard—
Vintage Collection
Series (Capitol
Nashville) 149•054

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

Mindy McCready—
If I Don't Stay The
Night (BNA
Records) 227•652

**Common Thread:
Songs Of The Eagles**—
Clint Black, Vince Gill,
Trisha Yearwood, more.
(Giant) 469•999

Collin Raye—
All I Can Be
(Epic) 431•445

**Stone Country: Country
Artists Perform The
Songs Of The Rolling
Stones**—Deana Carter,
Blackhawk, more.
(Beyond Music) 230•607

Dean Miller (Capitol
Nashville) 220•277

Freddy Fender
Collection (Reprise)
430•934

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Reba McEntire

Trace Adkins—*Dreamin' Out Loud* (Capitol Nashville) 159-582

Dwight Yoakam—*Guitars, Cadillac, Etc.* (Reprise) 344-614

Clare Lynch—*Silver And Gold* (Rounder) 221-754

Tim Ryan—*Ted, True And Tested* (Warner Western) 221-747

Tom T. Hall—*Homegrown* (Mercury) 221-739

Wylie & The Wild West—*Way Out West* (Rounder) 221-697

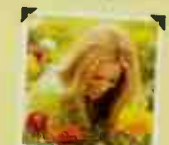
James Bonamy—*Roots And Wings* (Epic) 214-718

Ricky Skaggs—*Life Is A Journey* (Atlantic Nashville) 214-643

Sherrie Austin—*Words* (Arista Nashville) 214-635

George Strait—*Blue Clear Sky* (MCA) 168-583

Lester Flatt & Earl Scruggs—*Tis Sweet To Be Remembered* (Columbia/Legacy) 179-085 399-089



Deana Carter—*Did I Shave My Legs For This?* (Capitol Nashville) 166-397

John Anderson—*Takin' The Country Back* (Mercury/Nashville) 214-569

Michael Martin Murphey—*The Horse Legends* (Warner Western) 214-551

Reba McEntire—*What If It's You* (MCA) 172-973

Dwight Yoakam—*Under The Covers* (Reprise) 214-528

Ricochet—*Blink Of An Eye* (Columbia) 212-761

Chris LeDoux—*Live* (Capitol Nashville) 212-647

Sons Of The Desert—*Whatever Comes First* (Epic Nashville) 211-391

Asleep At The Wheel—*Back To The Future Now* (Lucky Dog/Epic) 211-169

Little Texas (Warner Bros. Nashville) 188-821

John And Audrey Wiggins—*The Dream* (Mercury/Nashville) 188-722

Lonestar—*Crazy Nights* (BNA Records) 214-676

Kevin Sharp—*Measure Of A Man* (Asylum) 173-641

The Essential Hank Snow (RCA Nashville) 188-664

The Essential Charley Pride (RCA Nashville) 188-656

Dolly Parton—*I Will Always Love You & Other Greatest Hits* (Columbia) 153-932

Robert Earl Keen—*Picnic* (Arista Austin) 188-540

Tammy Graham (Career Records) 188-516

Holly Dunn—*Leave One Bridge Standing* (River North Nashville) 186-775

Jack Ingram—*Kevin Or Dyin'* (Rising Tide) 166-734

Tanya Tucker—*Complicated* (Capitol Nashville) 185-108

Gram Parsons—*GP/Grievous Angel* (Reprise) 185-090

Johnny Cash—*Unchained* (American) 184-929

Slim Whitman—*Vintage Collection* (Capitol Nashville) 182-808

George Ducas—*Where I Stand* (Capitol Nashville) 173-242

The Deleventos—*Postcards From Along The Way* (Capitol Nashville) 214-593

Brooks & Dunn—*Waitin' On Sundown* (Arista Nashville) 102-277

Tracy Lawrence—*I See It Now* (Atlantic) 182-582

Trisha Yearwood—*Everybody Knows* (MCA Nashville) 168-591

Lefty Frizzell—*Look What Thoughts Will Do* (Columbia/Legacy) 179-036 399-030

Kathy Mattea—*Love Travels* (Mercury Nashville) 178-970

Joe Ely—*Honky Tonk Masquerade* (MCA Nashville) 175-786

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John Berry—*Faces* (Capitol Nashville) 165-738

Travis Tritt—*The Restless Kind* (Warner Bros.) 164-822

Jeff Foxworthy—*Crank It Up—The Music Album* (Warner Bros.) 164-806



Lila McCann—*Lila* (Asylum) 213-611

Ty Herndon—*Living In A Moment* (Epic) 164-079

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Jeff Foxworthy—*Games Rednecks Play* (Warner Bros.) 133-322

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TOP 25



Albums

1. Garth Brooks *Sevens*
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4. Brooks & Dunn *The Greatest Hits Collection*
5. Martina McBride *Evolution*
6. Trisha Yearwood *(Songbook) A Collection of Hits*
7. Tim McGraw *Everywhere*
8. Sammy Kershaw *Labor of Love*
9. Clint Black *Nothin' But the Taillights*
10. LeAnn Rimes *Blue*
11. John Michael Montgomery *Greatest Hits*
12. George Strait *Carrying Your Love with Me*
13. Deana Carter *Did I Shave My Legs for This?*
14. Collin Raye *The Best of Collin Raye—
Direct Hits*
15. Alan Jackson *Everything I Love*
16. Dixie Chicks *Wide Open Spaces*
17. Lila McCann *Lila*
18. Trace Adkins *Big Time*
19. David Kersh *If I Never Stop Loving You*
20. Wade Hayes *When the Wrong One
Loves You Right*
21. Clay Walker *Rumor Has It*
22. Bryan White *The Right Place*
23. The Kinleys *Just Between You and Me*
24. Anita Cochran *Back to You*
25. Michael Peterson *Michael Peterson*

Singles

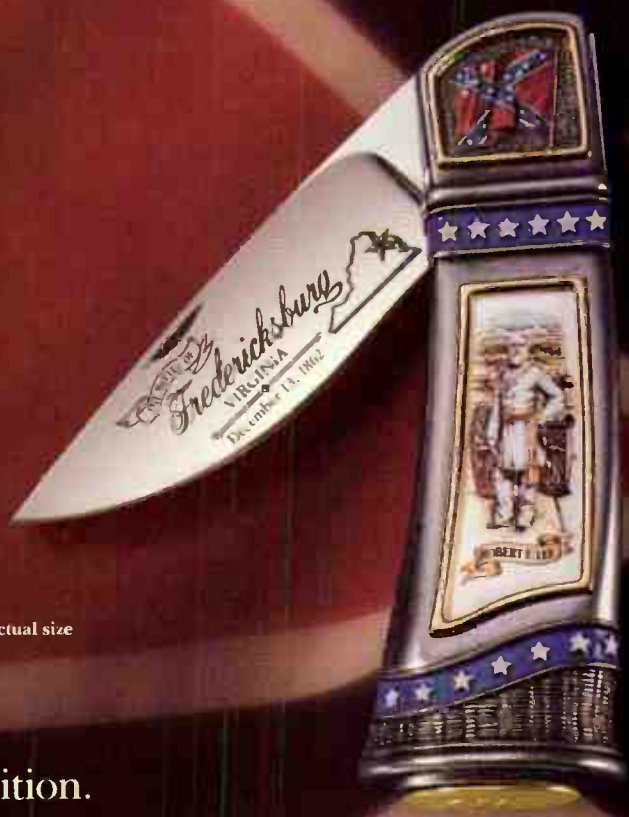
1. George Strait *Round About Way*
2. Garth Brooks *She's Gonna Make It*
3. Lee Ann Womack *You've Got to Talk to Me*
4. Anita Cochran/Steve Wariner *What If I Said*
5. Clint Black *Nothin' But the Taillights*
6. Collin Raye *Little Red Rodeo*
7. Tim McGraw *Just to See You Smile*
8. Wade Hayes *The Day That She Left Tulsa
(In a Chevy)*
9. Trisha Yearwood *Perfect Love*
10. Sammy Kershaw *Love of My Life*
11. David Kersh *If I Never Stop Loving You*
12. Dixie Chicks *I Can Love You Better*
13. Lila McCann *I Wanna Fall in Love*
14. Clay Walker *Then What*
15. The Kinleys *Just Between You and Me*
16. Wynonna *Come Some Rainy Day*
17. Martina McBride with
Jim Brickman *Valentine*
18. Kenny Chesney *A Chance*
19. Jo Dee Messina *Bye Bye*
20. Trace Adkins *Lonely Won't Leave Me Alone*
21. Alan Jackson *A House with No Curtains*
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23. Shania Twain *You're Still the One*
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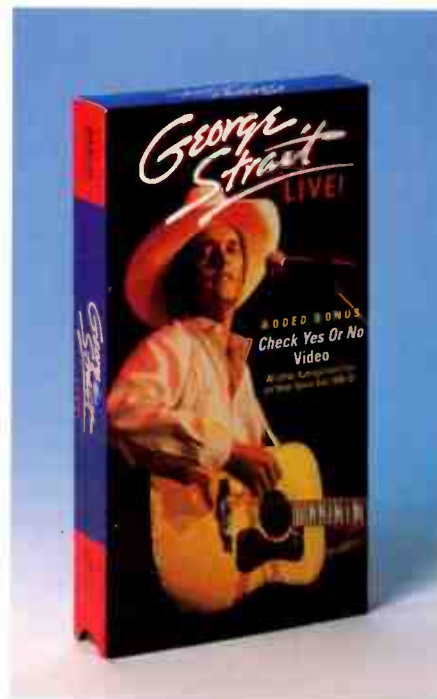
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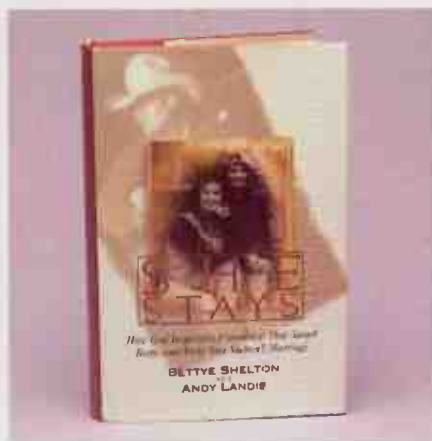
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by Rich Kienzle

Black Experience in Country

Music: It's no secret to music historians that just as Southern whites respected, performed and recorded black blues, Southern blacks were playing country songs decades before Charley Pride. Given that fact, it's amazing no one thought to compile a collection covering black country recordings of the past 70-odd years before, so we owe a debt to black country singer Cleve Francis. The Virginia-based cardiologist, whose own recordings were lost in the shuffle a few years ago, has made a great contribution as the driving force behind the Country Music Foundation's *From Where I Stand: The Black Experience in Country Music* (Warner Bros. 9-46428).

The 60 numbers, spread over three CD's, are arranged to cover three distinct areas, and the music itself is all of the highest quality. Disc One covers pre-World War II recordings, mostly by black blues artists, emphasizing those that became country standards. Among these are three tracks by pioneer Opry harmonica virtuoso DeFord Bailey, Bo Chatmon (with Charlie McCoy) on "Corrine Corrina," The Mississippi Sheiks' "Sitting on Top of the World" (more blues than country, though Western swing bands often covered it), and Leadbelly's "Midnight Special" and "Rock Island Line." The white string band, Georgia Yellow Hammers, are included since black fiddler Andrew Baxter recorded "G Rag" with them. Disc Two focuses on R&B covers of country tunes, starting with Wynonie Harris' 1950 cover of Hank Penny's "Bloodshot Eyes." Ivory Joe Hunter is represented by his 1959 version of Ray Price's "City Lights" and the 1973 "He'll Never Love You" recorded live at the Opry. Other worthy inclusions include Willie Nelson's "Funny How Time Slips Away" by Joe Hinton,

THE CARTER FAMILY

Gold Watch and Chain
THEIR COMPLETE VICTOR RECORDINGS
1933-34



Arthur Alexander's version of "Detroit City," and so on.

Disc Three focuses on black country singers, kicking off with four Charley Pride classics, and three by the late Stoney Edwards. One track each goes to O.B. McClinton, Linda Martell, Ruby Falls, Cleve Francis, bluesman Ted Hawkins, Aaron Neville (doing George Jones' "The Grand Tour"), and Dobie Gray and The Pointer Sisters, whose "Fairytale" broke the country Top 40 in 1974. Another inclusion is octogenarian Herb Jeffries, the 1930's big band jazz vocalist who, in 1938, became the movies' pioneer black singing cowboy. Also welcome is a rare track by R&B vocalist Otis Williams, who led an all-black honky tonk band called The Midnight Cowboys in the early 70's, and cut an LP produced by Pete Drake.

If Ray Charles seems underrepresented with just one tune (his Atlantic recording of "I'm Movin' On"), it wasn't by choice. The CMF tried licensing three of his landmark ABC-Paramount country recordings to no avail. Other omissions make less sense. Where's the legendary Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown, who's long straddled country and R&B, and recorded an LP with Roy Clark? How about Sylvester Weaver's "Guitar Rag," which inspired Leon McAuliffe's "Steel Guitar Rag?" Of the essays, those by Ron Wynn and Claudia Perry, black music writers well-versed in country, are full of



life, knowledge and enthusiasm. They easily outclass CMF Executive Director Bill Ivey's introduction, which reads like a sociology lecture, and Bill Malone's lifeless appreciation of Charley Pride.

Someone should have reined in the booklet designers, whose enthusiasm for eyeball-assaulting pages was indulged at the expense of the text. In places they superimposed black text on brown graphics (or background), making certain pages impossible to read.

Charley Pride: It was coincidental, but as *From Where I Stand* appeared, Koch International re-released an album many consider Charley Pride's finest: *In Person* (KOC CD-7984). Originally released by RCA in 1968, it was recorded live at Panther Hall in Fort Worth in front of a highly enthused audience, co-produced by Felton Jarvis and Jack Clement. Pride was scoring by this time, just starting his ride in the upper end of the Top Ten. In addition to his first hit, the Jack Clement original, "Just Between You and Me," the recording captured his versions of "Streets of Baltimore," "Six Days on the Road," "Lovesick Blues," "Kaw-Liga" and the early Conway Twitty hit, "The Image of Me." Two other numbers, "Got Leavin' on Her Mind" and "I Know One," were likewise from Clement's pen.

Between songs, you can hear Pride indulge in the self-deprecating humor he used to defuse white audiences in his

early days, though it's a bit unsettling to hear Bo Powell's introduction, informing the audience, "A little over two years ago, this boy was a virtual unknown. Today, he's one of the greatest." Bear in mind, three decades ago the very fact that conservative white Southern audiences, unnerved by racial integration, bought Pride's records and loved his voice was revolutionary in itself. Imagine telling those folks 30 years ago there'd someday be a collection of black country music. Pride's remains a classic live album, and reflects a wise choice for Koch's increasingly aggressive reissue series.

Jimmy Dean: Last year, TNN recognized Jimmy Dean's contributions on *The Life and Times of Jimmy Dean*. This hour-long documentary undoubtedly educated those who know him mainly through his sausage line, unaware of his achievements in music and TV. Dean stood out from the early 1950's, when he hosted the Washington, D.C., TV show, *Town and Country Time*, featuring himself, his Texas Wildcats band (with Roy Clark on guitar) and a cast which included Winchester, Virginia, hopeful Patsy Cline. Until now, a Dean CD compilation didn't exist, and, while incomplete, Sony Legacy's *Jimmy Dean's Greatest Hits* (CK 65256) is the only best-of out there, done as a straight reissue of the 1966 LP of the same name.

Dean's seven biggest hits are among the dozen numbers. The collection begins with "Big Bad John," and features the Cold War number, "Dear Ivan." Also here is the "John" follow-up titled "The Cajun Queen," plus "To a Sleeping Beauty," "Little Black Book," "P.T. 109" and "The First Thing Ev'ry Morning (And the Last Thing Every Night)." The remaining five selections, "Steel Men," "Sam Hill," "Harvest of Sunshine," "The Farmer and the Lord" and "I

Won't Go Huntin' With You Jake (But I'll Go Chasin' Women)," weren't hits. It's unfortunate the CD format also omitted his one other Columbia chart hit: a cover of Hank Sr.'s "Mind Your Own Business." It also could have been a bit more comprehensive had they managed to license Dean's first chart hit, "Bummin' Around," a hit on Four Star Records in 1953. The notes included are the ones from the original LP.

The Carter Family: Rounder Records' nine-volume reissue of the early Carter Family's complete 1927-1934 Victor recordings, which began in 1993, will come to a close later this spring with two final volumes covering the year 1934. The seventh compilation, *Gold Watch and Chain* (ROUN 1069), takes in 1933 and 1934 sessions. Some of these, particularly the 1933 tracks, "Will My Mother Know Me There?" and "Is There No Kiss for Me Tonight Love?" are rarities. Some, like "Poor Little Orphaned Boy," were never released at all until they appeared on LP's.

During this time A.P., Sara and Maybelle recorded "I Loved You Better Than You Knew," a song later associated with The Delmore Brothers; the title song, now a country and bluegrass chestnut; and "I'll Be All Smiles Tonight," which became a Carter standard featuring Sara on lead vocal. Also recorded during this time were "Over the Garden Wall," "See That My Grave Is Kept Clean," "School House on the Hill," "When the Roses Come Again," and the morose "Darling Little Joe," another recording never released until LP's came along. The music here remains the essence of folk and country. Charles Wolfe's excellent notes (a prelude to his planned definitive book on The Carters) explore the pedigree of each song, some of them traceable to the mid-19th century.

Another pre-war Carter project that continues is *The Carter Family on Border Radio Volume 2* (Arhoolie CD 411). The 26 numbers here were transcribed in 1939 for

broadcast on the high-powered Mexican border station, XET, in Monterey. Many of these numbers dip into sides of the Carter repertoire never captured on commercial recordings. This line-up of The Carter Family still featured A.P. and Sara (who would later separate), along with Maybelle and the next generation, including Sara's daughter, Janette, and Maybelle's three girls, future stars Helen, June and Anita. The performances are varied. The kids are featured on "Sourwood Mountain." "It's Hard to Please Your Mind," "Polly Wolly Doodle" and "Corina." Fans of Maybelle's guitar picking can hear her in her glory on three instrumentals—"The Fatal Wedding," "Sugar Hill" and "Shortning Bread," accompanied by Sara on guitar. A.P., can be heard doing "I Can Not Be Your Sweetheart" and "Diamonds in the Rough." The remainder feature the original trio on a mix of traditional and gospel tunes such as "Church in the Wildwood" and "You Are My Flower."

The Country Gentlemen: The Country Gentlemen, still in existence over 40 years later, began on the Fourth of July, 1957, with John Duffey, Charlie Waller, Bill Emerson and Eddie Adcock, all of whom went on to distinguished bluegrass careers. So did such later alumni as Ricky Skaggs, Doyle Lawson, John Starling and J.D. Crowe. The original performers were in the vanguard of the vital bluegrass scene that emerged around Washington, D.C., in the 1950's. In

that time, as musical trends (and personnel) changed, they were innovators in another way as well: adding songs from the repertoires of Tin Pan Alley ("Bill Bailey"), honky tonk singers and folk-rockers like Bob Dylan. In the 1950's they recorded for Starday and Folkways, and in 1962 joined Dick Freeland's Rebel label. That era of their career is covered in a four-CD, 110-song boxed set titled *The Country Gentlemen: The Early Rebel Recordings 1962-1971* (REB-4002).

The set begins with their first Rebel single, a Christmas recording done with a music-reading vibraharpist. Reflecting their diverse repertoire even more was their 1965 album, *Bringing Mary Home*, which featured Dylan's "Girl From the North Country," the previously unissued "Swing Low Sweet Chariot," "Banks of the Ohio" and "Spanish Two Step." The core personnel of Waller, Duffey and Adcock remained consistent until 1969, when the sessions for the *New Look, New Sound* album included Jimmy Gardreau in place of original member Duffey. Adcock would be replaced in 1970 by banjoist Bill Emerson. By 1971 Mike Auldridge was added on Dobro, and the repertoire continued to expand, encompassing Crosby Stills Nash & Young's hippie anthem, "Teach Your Children," and Don Gibson's "Sea of Heartbreak." They never abandoned tradition, however, recording The Stanley Brothers' immortal "The Fields Have Turned Brown" at their final 1971

Rebel session. The excellent packaging includes an LP-size box (a size rarely used anymore) and a beautifully illustrated book with exhaustive notes by producer Gary Reid.

Billy Swan: Late in 1974, Billy Swan's "I Can Help" on Monument Records topped both pop and country charts, infusing a dash of 1950's style rock 'n' roll and rockabilly into the scene at a time both rock and country music needed such a jolt. It was a fresh, no-nonsense performance that still holds up today. At the time, Swan was working as the keyboard player for Kris Kristofferson's band, and the single's success led to an LP full of rock chestnuts that topped the country charts for two weeks early in 1975. He had another Top 20 single that year, but wouldn't get any more prominence until he joined Epic in 1981.

With Monument now owned by Sony—which owns Epic—it made sense for Sony Legacy to compile *The Best of Billy Swan* (EK 65218). The 16-song compilation, beginning with "I Can Help," takes most of its material (11 songs) from the Monument period, mixing originals from Kristofferson ("Stranger") with Swan's own originals, like "Everything's the Same (Ain't Nothing Changed)," his Top 20 single from 1975. He also recorded "Lover Please," an earlier composition that had been a huge hit for R&B singer Clyde McPhatter in 1962. Also included are his covers of rock classics like "Shake, Rattle and Roll," a remarkable, slow-tempo version of "Don't Be Cruel" and the Buddy Holly/Waylon Jennings original "You're the One."

After leaving Monument for A&M Records, where he managed one Top 30 single (not included here), he re-signed with Epic. There, he headed in a more country direction and landed three Top 20's in a row. All of those singles appear here. Swan wasn't particularly profound, but he was always entertaining, making this an enjoyable collection. Brief but excellent notes by John Morthland put Swan's career and the music in context.

How to Get These Treasures

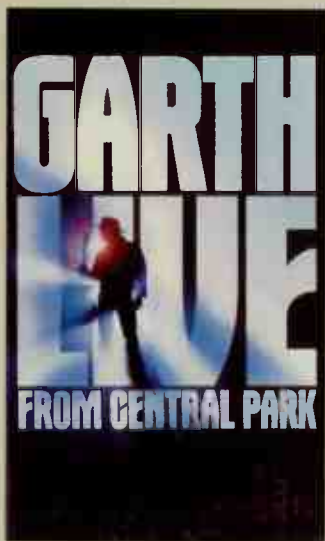
Available in formats shown at prices shown: Various Artists, *From Where I Stand: The Black Experience in Country Music* (Warner Bros. 9-46428), a three-CD boxed set, \$59.98/Charley Pride, *In Person* (Koch CD-7984), CD only, \$14.98/Jimmy Dean, *Greatest Hits* (CK 65256), CD only, \$12.98/The Carter Family, *Gold Watch and Chain* (Rounder 1069), \$12.98 cassette, \$17.98 CD/The Carter Family, *On Border Radio, Volume 2* (Arhoolie CD 411), CD only, \$17.98/The Country Gentlemen, *The Early Rebel Recordings 1962-1971* (REB-4002), a four-CD boxed set, \$59.98/Billy Swan, *The Best Of* (CK 65218), CD only, \$12.98. Send check or money order payable to Nashville Warehouse, Dept. 050698. P.O. Box 292553, Nashville, Tennessee 37229. Add \$3.95 postage and handling. Canadian orders, add an additional \$3.00 postage. **CMSA Members, see For Members Only page for discounts.**

Offer expires August 31, 1998

Essential Collector by Rich Kienzle

• Videos •

Garth Brooks: Whatever one thinks of his music, Garthmania swept America with his 1997 tour. Fans loved it. Media reaction was mixed. I saw one newspaper country "critic" turn Garth concert coverage into a virtual fan club newsletter, while a nearby paper's rock critic gave the Man in the Hat a far less enthusiastic review. Still, no one can deny his onstage energy, even if the arena-rock inspired lights and smoke machines can easily bore many non-Generation-X'ers.



His 1997 apex was the Central Park Concert in New York, recently released on video in its entirety. "We just came here to play music. We came here to raise some hell and have some fun," he says early in the show. Bear in mind, that at any such show, no matter who the star, music is never the point. Like Elvis' *Aloha From Hawaii* special, these are *events*, notable for their occurrence alone. Like the Elvis concert, Garth's featured slick camera cuts from stage to audience, fireworks, the Statue of Liberty and the Manhattan skyline. All his moves (jumping into the audience, etc.) were brilliantly captured by the cameras. His blissed-out duets with "sur-

prise" guests, 70's pop icons Billy Joel and Don McLean, speak volumes about Garth's real musical roots. While the concert undoubtedly delighted millions, I'd love to see him take some risks next time. Thinking back to his tremendous performance of "Deep Water" on the *Asleep at the Wheel* Bob Wills tribute LP, perhaps he could try a no-frills country concert where music, not staging, gets priority. And wouldn't it be nice to hear him duet with some of the country legends to whom he pays so much lip service?

Legends of Country Guitar:

Not as well organized as their previous video collections, Vestapol Videos' *Legends of Country Guitar* features a grab bag of 1970's and 1980's material by Chet Atkins, Merle Travis and Doc Watson, with two earlier, rare clips of pioneer Kentucky thumb-picker Mose Rager, one of Travis' musical mentors. The first one shows Rager being interviewed by legendary folklorist D.K. Wilgus. Another Rager segment comes from *The Everly Brothers'* documentary of some years ago (not 1975 as listed—the brothers were estranged then). Since Rager was not well documented on record, these clips afford a chance to note both similarities and differences between his funkier picking and Travis' smoother style. The Atkins performances are largely from the old syndicated *Pop Goes the Country* shows, featuring a blazing duet with Jerry Reed on "Jerry's Breakdown" and an impressive "Rainbows" with longtime guitar partner Paul Yandell from *Austin City Limits*. The Travis cuts with Merle's son, Thom Bresh, come from *Nashville Swing*, a Canadian show Bresh hosted in the late 1970's, while the Watson material hails from a 1987 Iowa public TV special. The final Travis material come from Thom Bresh home videos showing Merle singing with



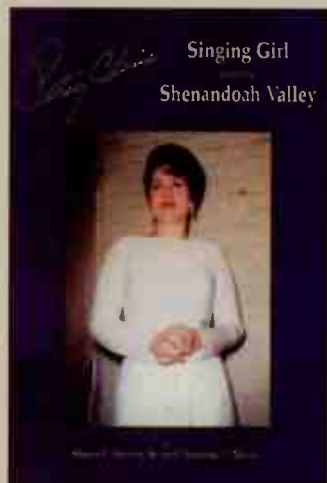
Lane Brody and Bresh. The biggest drawback is the accompanying booklet by Western swing researcher Cary Ginell, which is laden with factual problems. The section on Travis, for instance, includes errors regarding album titles, recording dates and his military service (he was in the Marines, not the Army). The late Cliffie Stone never headed A&R for Capitol in the 1940's (he worked for A&R head Lee Gillette), and the Travis hit, "Merle's Boogie Woogie," was recorded in 1947 and issued in 1948, not 1946. The Atkins section has a number of similar problems. He speculates that Chet lost radio jobs in his early days because he was a sideman and not a soloist. Not so. Some station management thought he played too smooth for country while others thought him too country. Only rarely did problems with "bandmates" result in his losing radio jobs.

• Books •

Patsy Cline: While Margaret Jones' *Patsy* remains the definitive biography for the foreseeable future, Stuart Brown and Lorraine Myers' 110-page hardcover *Patsy Cline: Singing Girl from the Shenandoah Valley*, published in her native Vir-

ginia, merits wider distribution. The authors' foreword clearly states "[the book] is not meant to be even a partial biography." Despite a color cover photo taken shortly before her death, the focus is on rare candids of Patsy in her youth and pre-stardom adulthood, along with photos of her ancestors and of Patsy's own residences around Virginia's Shenandoah Valley from childhood on.

A few shots here have appeared in print, but most haven't. They reveal a side of Patsy that posed publicity photos don't. She's seen in 1948 with a co-worker at the Winchester Greyhound Bus Terminal, and at an amateur show. Various photos of her playing area honky tonks, dressed in the fringed cowgirl outfits that were her early trademark, reveal a clear self-confidence compared to the pickers surrounding her. A 1951 photo shows her on a trick horse, while a 1954 candid shows her singing at a party. Dressed in a



cowgirl outfit, she rides in the 1956 Apple Blossom Parade, billed as a star of Washington D.C.'s *Town and Country Time* TV show. Riding in the same parade a year later, she's now dressed in an evening gown, the banner calling her "Decca Recording Artist and TV Star," reflecting her appearances on *Arthur Godfrey's Tal-*

ent Scouts and her hit, "Walking After Midnight." Near the end of the book, following photos of her 1957 wedding to Charlie Dick, is a reproduction of a five-page letter written in her Madison, Tennessee, hospital room, mailed to an old friend back home after her near-fatal 1961 car crash.

Nashville's Unwritten Rules: Journalist-songwriter Dan Daley took on a huge task trying to explain Music Row, based on research done from 1994 through 1996, in *Nashville's Unwritten Rules: Inside the Business of Country Music*. To his credit, the author talked to many movers and shakers old and new, and did extensive research to support his view that Nashville is an insular culture. Daley's main problem is trying to cover too much ground too fast. The reader must digest rapid-fire facts and figures presented in a competent but stiff style. He lists none of his interviews, dates, etc., in an appendix and admits to consulting only eight source books, some of them notoriously unreliable.

Still, at times Daley can be dead on discussing more recent events, like a section on Dwight Yoakam and indie labels. By contrast, chapters on Jimmy Bowen and Tony Brown reveal nothing new. He can discuss historic events incorrectly on one page, and correctly on another, such as his page 23 comment that the late Owen Bradley became Decca's head of country A&R in the "early 1950's." Then, on page 34, he correctly states that it occurred in 1958. Who told him Gaylord Entertainment "purchased the Grand Ole Opry and relocated it to a theme park"? WSM's original owner, National Life, did that years before the Gaylord purchase. While Daley correctly states that country print media is fawning and gushy, catering to Nashville publicists who want no controversy or criticism of artists, there are exceptions (you're reading one right now). On page 12 Daley writes, "When I first began explaining the concept of this book in

Nashville, I generally got two responses: 'Great idea,' and 'Make sure you get it right.' Not quite, I'm afraid.

Shania Twain: As with Garth, no one can argue with Shania Twain's success, even if others scorn what they believe to be mediocre songs, excess hype and the obnoxious production of her rock-music producer/husband Mutt Lange. It's no surprise that we now have a full-length biography: Canadian writer Dallas Williams' *Shania Twain: On My Way*. Despite some nice photographs, it fits into the hype nicely. Drawing on previously published articles, Williams is long on flowery rhetoric, short on insight. Consider Chapter



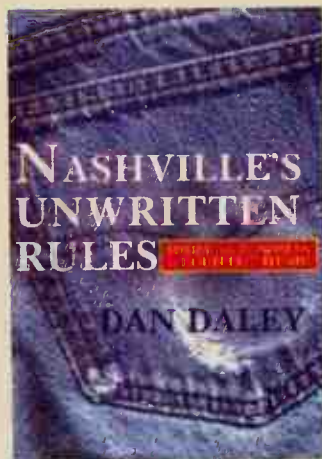
Two, dealing with Twain's impoverished youth, which begins, "Rags. A fact of poverty. It's a brutally cold winter morning and Shania has a full day of school ahead." Chapter Three informs us "Pasta dishes and desserts—all kinds, but peach pie gets special mention—are the foods she loves

best." Clearly, we're not talking Pulitzer Prize-quality material here.

Top Country Albums: I'll readily admit, as will anyone who does serious music research, that the Joel Whitburn reference volumes, based on the *Billboard* charts, are never far from my desk, particularly *Top Country Singles 1944-1993*. There's long been a need for a comparable guide to country albums, and Whitburn has now given it to us with *Top Country Albums: 1964-1997*. Why is there nothing earlier? Because *Billboard* didn't include a country album chart until 1964.

Everyone who had an album that charted is here, information organized alphabetically by artist, the information including short bios. Each entry contains the date the album first charted, peak position, weeks on the charts, and, in the case of Top Ten albums, complete track listings as well as approximate dollar value (most real rarities aren't included because most of them didn't chart). It's no surprise that the veterans racked up the most charted albums, the highest being George Jones, with Conway, Willie, Dolly, Hag, Cash and Loretta behind them. Some surprise entries include Tom Jones, Ringo Starr (the Pete Drake-produced *Beaucoups of Blues*), Roger Whittaker, John Cougar Mellencamp and Dean Martin. Biographical gaffes are few, though the text again insists Hank Sr.'s name was "Hiram King Williams" when it's really "Hiram Hank." Other mini-

bios are quite candid, mentioning Ty Herndon's and Tracy Lawrence's arrests. For anyone interested in having reliable facts at their fingertips, this book is essential. I'll wear mine out.



■ Recordings ■

Waylon: Digital Compact Classics, who reissued the Eddy Arnold collection mentioned in *Buried Treasures*, have also gone back to 1977 to reissue *Ol' Waylon* (DZS-147). This is a straight, remastered reissue of his 1977 RCA album, which spent 13 weeks at Number One, and over 63 weeks on the charts and went platinum as well (see how the Whitburn book helps?). This was Waylon at his peak, when he was roaring around the country with The Wailors (including Richie Albright and steel guitar master Ralph Mooney) and making music that's generally stood the test of time.

It includes, of course, "Luckenbach, Texas," "If You See Me Getting Smaller," "Lucille," Neil Diamond's "Sweet Caroline," the immortal "I Think I'm Gonna Kill Myself," and the Elvis medley "That's All Right"/"My Baby Left Me." There's also his spin on "Till I Gain Control Again," "Brand New Goodbye Song," the cover of Jeanne Pruett's "Satin Sheets" and "This Is Getting Funny (But There Ain't Nobody Laughing)." Given Waylon's recent health woes, it's worth going back to this material and seeing just how well it's held up over the years and will in the future.

How to Get These Collectibles

Videos: Garth Brooks, *Live From Central Park* (V8X), \$19.95/Various Artists, *Legends of Country Guitar* (V5Y), \$29.95. **Books:** Dallas Williams, *Shania Twain: On My Way* (B8V), \$16.95/Stuart Brown & Lorraine Myers, *Patsy Cline: Singing Girl from the Shenandoah Valley* (B6T), \$19.95/Joel Whitburn, *Top Country Albums: 1964-1997* (B9W), \$49.95/Dan Daley, *Nashville's Unwritten Rules: Inside the Business of Country Music* (B8Z), \$27.95. **Recordings:** Waylon Jennings, *Ol' Waylon* (DZS-147), CD only, \$12.98. To order, send check or money order to Nashville Warehouse, Dept. 030498EC, P.O. Box 290216, Nashville, TN 37229. Add \$3.95 postage and handling per order. Canadian orders, add \$3.00 extra for postage. **CMSA members, see For Members Only page for discounts.** Offer expires August 31, 1998



alt. country culture clash

Being a cutting-edge old fart has its rewards and advantages, but sometimes it can be very disorienting. Like when I stayed up past bedtime recently and dropped into a club in the party part of town to check out a local alt. country band. There I was, grooving along to an Ernest Tubb tune cranked through a big black stack of rock 'n' roll amps and sung sorta punky, the way I like it sometimes, when suddenly I realized that people were looking at me funny. The junior clubbies around me were sliding their eyeballs my way, then yanking them off me the instant I looked back. The bouncers were watching me the way Secret Service agents eyeball guys in the crowd wearing big, overstuffed combat jackets in August in Alabama.

Gee, I thought, how about *this* for odd? Here I am, surrounded by kids who groom for the I-shoot-dope-straight-into-my-eyeballs-with-a-dirty-needle look and dress for dumpster-diving, watched over by guys with bodies made of bowling balls who guzzle steroids by the pound, and they think *I'm* dangerous?

The thing is, they're right. I'm a line crosser, the worst kind of animal in the jungle of identity. Dressing for success in your chosen tribe means you can, and have to be, a shape shifter—hair this way this year, goatee thataway next, bouffant now, biker boots later—but the lines are firm and everybody knows them. This year, for instance, alt. country fans may wear cowboy hats, but said headgear must be either black or dirty. Western clothing may also be worn, but it must be retro. If you show up in pressed jeans, snakeskin Tony Lama's, and a big, beautiful, beige Resistol, you're going to look like a man maybe looking for a fight. You'd be a stereotype with a past, too; you'd remind the alt. country kids' parents of the dude in the "Redneck Mothers" song who's "kickin' hippies' asses and raisin' hell."

Culture clash, culture clash: I'm sick of it. It serves such a soft, needy part of us. We want to belong here, so we'll fight them over there. You want to try something *really* tough, punk? Try getting along with people. (Just thought I'd throw in a public service announcement before getting back to the point.)

The point? It's that having music orga-

nized according to who's supposed to like it and who isn't—who's supposed to actually *dislike* it—gets to be a real pain after a few decades on the job, even though the whole business *is* just very human and entirely understandable. After all, the only factor which genuinely distinguishes alt. country from just plain country is the audience at whom it's aimed (or whom it attracts). Witness an early characteriza-

RIG ROCK JUKE BOX A Collection of DIESEL ONLY Records



Patrick's favorite drive-around disk lately.

tion originating from Bloodshot Records, Grandpunk of the alt. labels: their acts were "musical upstarts with too much twang for Indie Rock and too much attitude for Country." You can call that a declaration of independence if you like, but you could also say it's painting yourself into a pretty small box (and being proud of it). The irony is that inside the box, there are the same basic musical parameters as other musicians find inside the (bigger) mainstream country box: your communal style pool is anything within the arc running from Jimmie Rodgers and The Carter Family to early Chuck Berry and Bill Monroe and late George Jones, and basically you differ only in how you supplement that pool. Mainstream country musicians add soft rock and post-'70 pop, while the alt. people add hard rock and post-'75 punk. Otherwise it's all in your attitude, or Attitude, if you know what I mean. If you don't know what I mean, you don't have Attitude. You probably don't have many pierced body parts, either, or pay through the nose for clothes

that look already worn-out, or smoke Camels for the image more than the addiction, or want to grow up to be Dennis Leary.

Don't know that name? You lucky thing, you! Like the man says, you might just be a redneck. Or an old fart like me. Either way, or in any other case where fate hasn't familiarized you with alt. country's inner landscape (and that's a lot of cases), you're missing out on some pretty good country music. Which is where the cutting-edge type of old fart comes in handy. I'm going to clue you in.

Right now? Well, 'fraid not. In the past year or two, so much new music has been springing up that a) I believe we're now at a ratio of about 2.5 alt. country musicians for every alt. country fan, and b) I have to work up a big feature story if I'm going to do the subject, and you, any justice at all. That's underway. In the meantime, consider this column a pre-publication introduction. Also, if you're feeling bold, check out some names at your local alternative record store, Net source, or other emporium for off-brand tastes.

Here are some of the acts, culled from dozens, that I recommend wholeheartedly: Kate Campbell (*Moonpie Dreams*, Compass Records, Nashville); The Hollisters (*The Land of Rhythm and Pleasure*, Freedom Records, Austin); The Hangdogs (*East of Yesterday*, Crazyhead Records, New York City); Ed Pettersen and the High Riders (*Somewhere South of Here*, Tangible Music, Merrick, New York); Kevin Gordon (*Cadillac Jack's #1 Son*, Shanachie Records); and Mike Ireland and Holler, reviewed in this issue. If you're curious but cautious, go the big-bang-for-a-buck route with *Rig Rock Jukebox*, a 16-track compilation of first-generation alt. country twang-rockers put together way back in 1992 by the Diesel Only folks in big bad ole New York. That's my favorite drive-around disk right now.

Okay? We cool? Even if we're not, I'm gone. Got to get down to the mall, buy another pair of boot-cut Levi's and a new eyelid ring. I'm out of Geritol again, too.

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



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