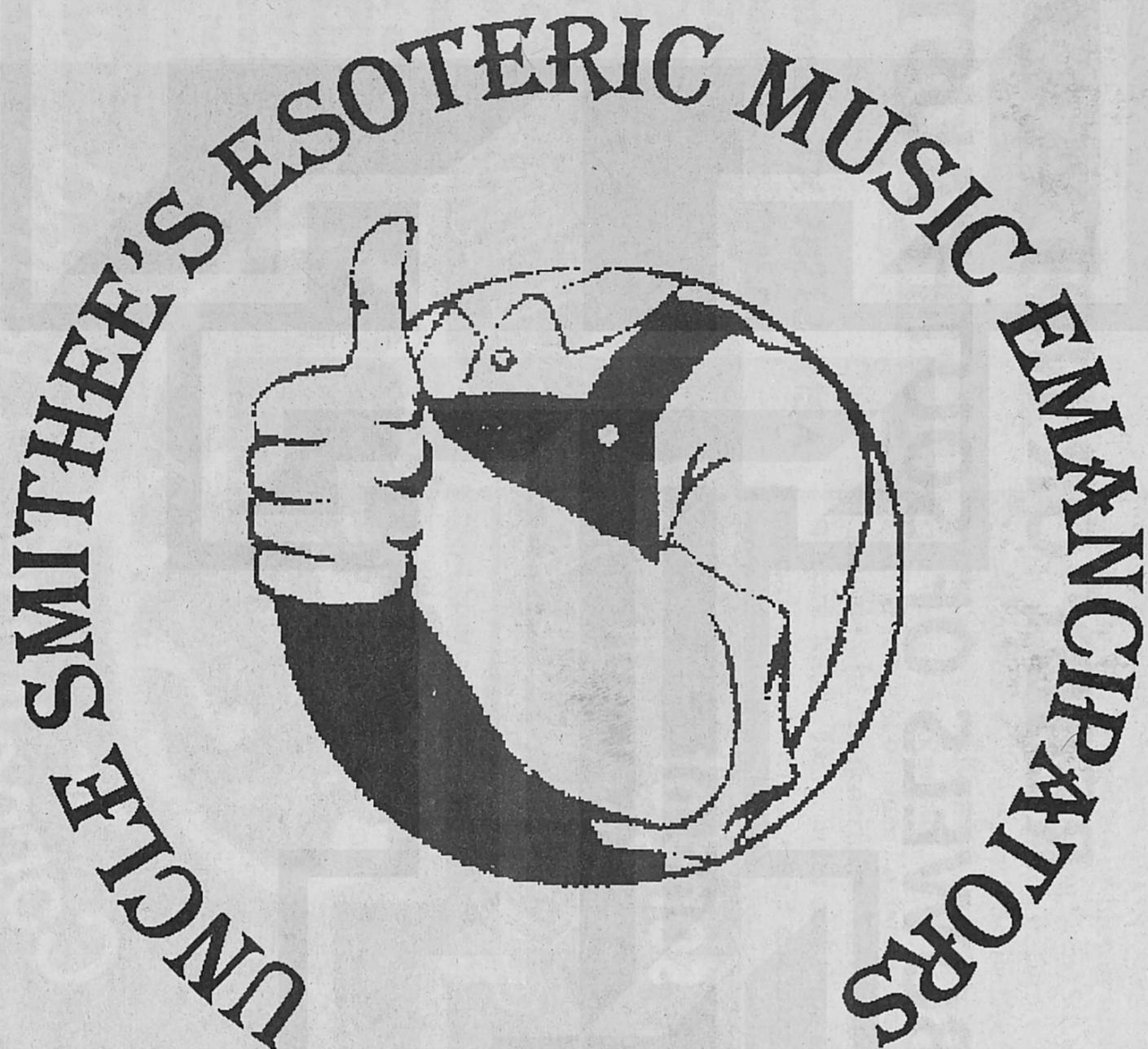


3rd COAST MUSIC

#64/153 MAY 2002



CHARLES EARLE's B Sides • JOHN THE REVEALATOR

FREEFORM AMERICAN ROOTS #33

ROOTS BIRTHS & DEATHS

REVIEWS * * * * * (or not)

DAVE ALVIN • EARL POOLE BALL • CAITLIN CARY

CAVE CATT SAMMY • JOAQUIN DIAZ • THE FLATLANDERS

CORNELL HURD BAND • WES MCGHEE

TOWNES VAN ZANDT • DON WALSER



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FREEFORM AMERICAN ROOTS #33

REAL MUSIC PLAYED FOR REAL PEOPLE BY REAL DJs DURING APRIL 2002

#1 CORNELL HURD BAND: SONG OF SOUTH AUSTIN

(Behemoth) *BL/*CM/*DF/*JH/*KD/*RR/*TS

FRED EAGLESMITH: FALLING STARS & BROKEN HEARTS

(FSE) *AB/*CD/*DWT/*DY/*KF/*KR/*MP/*ND/*WT

- 2 James Talley: Touchstones (Cimarron) *BW/*MR/*RH/*TF
- 3 Ronnie Elliott: Magneto (Blue Heart) *DB/*EGB/*JS
- 4 The Flatlanders: Now Again (New West) *CP/*LW/*TG
- 5 Nathan Hamilton: All For Love And Wages (Steppin' Stone) *BP/*GS/*MM
- 6 Doc Watson w/Frosty Morn: Round The Table Again (Sugar Hill) *AR/*LG
- 7 Porter Hall, TN: Welcome To Porter Hall, TN (Slewfoot) *TW
- 8 Don Walser: Dare To Dream (Lone Star) *NA
- 9 Meat Purveyors: All Relationships Are Doomed To Fail (Bloodshot) *JE
- 10 Catlin Cary: While You Weren't Looking (Yep Roc)
- 11 Pine Valley Cosmonauts: The Executioners' Last Song (Bloodshot) *PTT
- 12 Star Room Boys: This World Just Won't Leave You Alone (Slewfoot) *RD
- 13 The Tennessee Twin: Free To Do What? (Mint) *EE/*VP
- 14 Cave Catt Sammy: Love Me Like Crazy (Rubric) *BC/*RMS
- The Damns: Where It Lands (Joy-Ride)
- Lonesome Bob: Things Change (Leaps) *CW
- 15 Christy McWilson: Bed Of Roses (Hightone) *TO
- 16 John Cowan: Always Takes Me Back (Sugar Hill) *RJ
- Steve Earle: Sidetracks (Artemis) *WR
- 17 Kasey Chambers: Barricades & Brickwalls (Warner) *LH
- 18 Florence Dore: Perfect City (Slewfoot) *JVB
- Jim Lauderdale & Ralph Stanley: Lost In the Lonesome Pines (Dualtone) *KC
- Gurf Morlix: Fishin' In The Muddy (Catamount)
- Josh Ritter: the Golden Age Of Radio (Signature Sounds) *HTR
- VA: Mama's Hand (Rounder) *R&HL
- 19 Hillbilly IDOL (Slewfoot)
- Charlie Sizemore: The Story Is . . . The Songs of Tom T Hall (Rebel) *CC
- 20 Honky Tonk Confidential: Your Trailer Or Mine? (Too Many Dogs)
- John Trudell: Bone Days (Daemon) *DT
- VA: Caught In The Webb; A Tribute To Webb Pierce (Audium) *MA
- Hank Williams III: Broke, Lovesick & Driftin' (Curb)
- Tommy Womack: Circus Town (Sideburn)
- 21 Cosmic Dust Devils (Little Train) *DA
- Nitty Gritty Dirt Band: Will The Circle Be Unbroken? (Capitol) *EB
- One Riot One Ranger: Flat City Nights (Hayden's Ferry)
- VA: Evangeline Made (Vanguard) *SC
- Joe West: The Lamp Sessions (self) *PP
- 22 The Bottle Rockets: Songs Of Sahn (Bloodshot)
- Ed Bruce: This Old Hat (EBR) *H&H
- Charlene Condray Hancock: 50 Years From There To Here (Akashic) *RM
- Mark Erelli: The Memorial Hall Recordings (Signature Sounds) *SG
- Patty Griffin: 1000 Kisses (Ato) *CS
- Rodney Hayden: The Real Thing (Rosetta) *EW
- Los Dos Equis: Austin Tea Party (Akashic) *MT
- Lisa Mednick: Semaphore (Texas Music Group) *MDT
- David Olney: Woman Across The River (Strictly Music) *DJ
- Texas Redemptors: Milagros (Catfish) *JR
- Josie Kruezer: Beggin' Me Back (She Devil) *DC
- 23 Longview: Lessons In Stone (Rebel)
- VA: A Tribute To Robert Altman's 'Nashville' (Mint)



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*xx = DJ's Album of the Month

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THE FLATLANDERS • NOW AGAIN

(New West ****)

Every problem I have with this album would pretty much disappear if it was billed as Ely, Gilmore & Hancock (permutate any way you want). Thirty years ago, they created something far greater than the sum of its parts, though it's worth noting that few Americans have heard the original album in its entirety, as Rounder cut four tracks, including originals by Gilmore and Al Strehli, on their version. However, while resuscitating the name may be a great marketing and publicity ploy, there's little evidence that the three men tried to recreate the original dynamic. The first release, on 8-track, was as Jimmie Dale & The Flatlanders, for the very good reason that Gilmore's voice was the glue that unified the album, but this time they switch the leads around to sometimes jarring effect. With the exception of *Tonight I Think I'm Gonna Go Downtown*, by Gilmore & John Reed, the songs on the original album were all solo efforts, including four by Hancock and two each by Gilmore and Strehli, but apart from Hancock's *Julia* and a cover of Utah Phillips' *Going Away*, the new songs are Ely/Gilmore/Hancock cowrites. Even setting aside my general prejudice against the practice, cowriting is not something one associates with Hancock, or Ely, and has served Gilmore poorly over the years. Finally, while it's good to see original member Steve Wesson back on musical saw, I'd feel better if there were some other flatlanders present. Much as I admire guitarist Rob Gjersoe and accordionist Joel Guzman, Jesse Taylor and Ponty Bone might have helped give this album something that the original had in abundance and this one almost entirely lacks—the sense of a unique vision. On the other hand, even if there's some very iffy material (*All You Are Love* is as banal and sappy as anything out of Nashville), this is Joe, Jimmie Dale and Butch, so, while it's no more than the sum of its parts, it still has plenty enough magic to be pretty irresistible. **JC**

DAVE ALVIN & THE GUILTY MEN OUT IN CALIFORNIA

(Hightone ****.5)

Back in March, I aired a friend's theory that Tom Russell sucks the rock & roll out of everyone he works with, but, in this instance at least, we're happy to be proven wrong. Alvin's riposte comes in the form of 10 full band cuts with The Guilty Men plus Brantley Kearns, Juke Logan and Chris Gaffney, recorded live at the Blue Café, Long Beach and Lobera Theater, Santa Barbara, wrapped round three acoustic ones, with Kearns, Rick Shea and Greg Leisz, recorded at Pasadena's Neighborhood Church, and they prove that he's a rock & roller who happens to be able to double as a folkie. Though *Andersonville*, *All'Round Man* and *Blue Boulevard* are easy enough to take, I make no bones about the fact that, Grammy or no, I much prefer Alvin plugged in—great rock & rollers are far harder to find than traditional folksingers. Apart from *Highway 99*, his tribute to Roy Nichols, Buck Owens and Merle Haggard, there's nothing new here, but Alvin's reinterpretations of *American Music*, *Little Honey* (segued with *Who Do You Love?*), the title track, *Haley's Comet*, *Abilene*, *Wanda And Duane* and *Fourth Of July* are so definitive that you wish he'd thrown in some more of his catalog while he was about it. A really satisfactory take of *Every Night About This Time*, for instance, would be very welcome. Plus the recording quality is infinitely superior to *Interstate City*. The other tracks are *Don't Let Your Deal Go Down*, *Everything's Gonna Be Alright* and an unlisted one which features a song you may have heard requested at gigs by someone who's had a few too many. **JC**

WES MCGHEE • MEXICO

(Terrapin ****)

Know how some guitarists have beaucoup acoustic and/or electric guitars lined up on stands and switch between them but you don't really understand why because they all sound pretty much the same? Well, maybe they sound different in the monitors but most of the time it's really just muso bullshit. However, when McGhee switches guitars—and he plays 12 different ones on this album, electric, acoustic, Spanish, 12-string, B-bender, hi-strung, 6-string bass and bajo sexto—he doesn't do it simply to justify owning a roomful of the damned things. You can actually hear the purpose. These days, being a brilliant and versatile picker is what puts groceries on McGhee's table, but when I first came across him in 1982, he was not the only Briton playing country music, specifically in the Tex-Mex idiom, but he was patently the best and I was not the only writer who thought he deserved and might achieve some measure of international success. Well, that fizzled out, along with virtually the entire British roots scene, leaving some residual bitterness ("I keep hearin' it's my turn next. Well, it's been twenty years comin', I wouldn't take any bets"), but it hasn't hurt his playing any. It's been eight years since the amazing *Border Guitars*, and while there isn't a killer track like *Monterrey*, McGhee is still as good as it gets, even if he's from Far East Texas. **JC**

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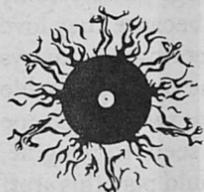
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THE CORNELL HURD BAND SONG OF SOUTH AUSTIN

(Behemoth ****.5)

Hebrew according to one dictionary, ancient Egyptian according to another, but both agree that 'behemoth' means 'enormous beast,' an apt description of this atavistic throwback to the days of territory bands. I could chew up plenty of space just listing all ten players, eight guests and 23 tracks (Hurd's motto is 'More is more'), but, of course, the first thing that has to be identified is the obligatory Moon Mullican number: *She Once Lived Here*. While Hurd alternates oldies like Mullican's, Ernest Tubb's *Pass The Booze*, Wanda Jackson's *Because I Do*, Pee Wee King's *Ten Gallon Boogie* and *Maypo*, an early 60s Bay Area hit by The Panics, with his own and Joe Dickens' originals, it's his generosity with the mike, and shrewd sequencing, that turns what could have been a rather overlong CHB album into an always engaging variety show. Even the highlights make up a formidable list, Blackie White's version of *I've Gotta Lotta Livin' To Do*, Marti Brom's of Dave Dudley's *Maybe I Do*, bassplayer Justin Treviño singing Hurd's *Don't Pretend You're Doing This For Me*, Hurd singing steel guitarist Herb Steiner's Western Swing classic *Nyquil Blues*, famed as the only song ever to rhyme antihistamine, Johnny Bush guesting on his *Jealously Insane* and Hurd's own *The Garbage Man* ("Here in this honkytonk, picking up trash"). However, pride of place has to go to Hurd's *Rubboard Playing Man*, about, and featuring, Danny Roy Young, 'The Lord of the Board.' Like all their albums, this is a pretty incontestable argument for making sure your trip to Austin includes a Thursday night, so you can experience the Cornell Hurd Band at its Jovita's residency. **JC**

CAVE CATT SAMMY LOVE ME LIKE CRAZY

(Rubric ****.5)

Music, so I'm told, changes with changing times, an inexorable and healthy process, to which my question is always, fine, but does it *improve*? In the case of rockabilly, at least, the answer is perfectly clear. Perfectly balanced between 50s hillbilly, jump blues, gospel, R&B, Western Swing and pop, it cannot be moved in any direction or changed in any way without immediately losing its essence and becoming something that, whatever it is, is no longer rockabilly. Its fans are, by definition, purists because the music doesn't give them any choice. Fortunately for them, for all its fragility, it's also robust and vital, and survives because in every generation there are people like the four young men of San Antonio's Cave Cat Sammy, who return to the primal source and start over from scratch. Listening to their third album, I'm reminded of the glory days, ten odd years ago, of High Noon, the last great new American rockabilly band, and in fact Cave Cat Sammy compare very favorably with that classic trio. High Noon's strengths were Sean Mencher's guitar picking, Kevin Smith's world class upright bass playing and an enormous repertoire, but upright bassplayer Beau Sample is a consistently superb rockabilly songwriter—11 of the 14 songs on this album are originals—and his vocals are rather more distinctive. Touring their butts off, playing everything from major league festivals to buckets of blood, Cave Cat Sammy are already giants in their field, and, still all under 21, they're barely hit their stride. As long as Sample keeps channelling Gene Vincent, there's no limit to how far they can go. **JC**

A GENTLE EVENING WITH TOWNES VAN ZANDT

(Dualtone ****.5)

Christ, what a shagging awful title, rendered even more ridiculous by the fact that this rediscovered recording of a 1969 Poppy Records showcase at the Carnegie Hall includes, among its nine tracks, *Lungs*, *Tecumseh Valley* and *The Ballad Of Ira Hayes*. Gentle my ass. However, this curious and uncharacteristic bit of bungling aside, it's still something of a gem. Van Zandt was only 25 in 1969, with three years professional experience and two albums behind him, so the concert captures him at a time when he was still young, and in great voice, but had already pretty much reached full maturity as a live performer. The tenth track may be new to some, but the style of delivery will be all too familiar to anyone who ever heard Townes crack a joke. Eight of the songs here will already be in any respectable Van Zandt collection, the others being *Like A Summer's Thursday*, *Second Lover's Song*, *She Came And She Touched Me*, *Rake* and *Talking Thunderbird Blues*, but, like every posthumous Townes album it includes *one previously unreleased track*, in this case *Talking KKK Blues*, which automatically makes it a Must Have for all us completists, that is if you can bring yourself to ask for it in a record store without gagging. **JC**

EARL POOLE BALL & HIS BAND LIVE ON THE RADIO AUSTIN TEXAS

(Tin Tube Tunes ****)

Even knowing his resume, Gram Parsons' International Submarine Band, The Byrds, The Flying Burrito Brothers, Merle Haggard, Wanda Jackson, Buck Owens, Marty Robbins and, for some 20 years, Johnny Cash, it's still somewhat surreal to hear pianist and producer Earl Poole Ball casually drop such names during a Larry Monroe hosted KUT *Live Set* while introducing numbers like *Honky Tonk Song*, *You're Still On My Mind* and *Folsom Prison Blues*. Ball and his band, the late Mambo John Treanor drums and fellow veterans BB Morse (Freddy Powers) standup bass and guitarist Pete Mitchell (Ernest Tubb's Texas Troubadors), who, like Ball, moved to Austin for the music rather than Branson for the money, are men with nothing left to prove. They play old country and rock & roll standards, drawing on Jerry Lee Lewis, Charlie Rich, Webb Pierce, Cindy Walker, George Jones, Johnny Cash, Chuck Berry, John Lee Hooker, Moon Mullican and Carl Perkins, because they love them, and they play them with nonchalant mastery. Walter Morgan's engineering is, as always superb—*Live Set* continues to be the best recording deal in town. Ball, the only acceptable substitute for Don Walser, for whom he pinch hits when necessary, teaches two things, one is that the band's there for the audience, not, as so many Austin groups seem to imagine, the other way round. The other is, don't fuck with these old farts, they could play this stuff in their sleep better than any young hotshots. **JC**

DON WALSER • DARE TO DREAM

(Texas Music Group ****.5)

By my count, with a 500 song repertoire, Don Walser had some 40 great country albums in him. Unfortunately, none of them were recorded. However, Anthony Johnson & Stuart Colman's remastering of 20 tracks taken from his *Watermelon* and *Sire* albums, along with others from *The Horse Whisperer* and various compilations and a 1964 version of *Rolling Stone From Texas*, at least begin to suggest what he was capable of, not to mention revealing what a bollocks his producers, particularly Ray Benson, and labels made first time round. Despite health problems, Walser is still in business (though his Jovita's residency has always been on Tuesday, not Wednesday as the liner notes state), and plans to do more recording, so this retrospective will, one hopes, not be the last chapter in his career. Maybe next time he'll find a producer and label worthy of his talents. Incidentally, Bear Family has, apparently, reissued *The Archive Series*, still the best albums Walser has made. **JC**

CAITLIN CARY • WHILE YOU WEREN'T LOOKING

(Yep Roc ****)

Though I didn't like to ask him if the overrated Ryan Adams really is a prick or just leaves a real unfortunate impression, Thad Cockrell, who sings harmony on three of Cary's songs, tells me I'm not the only person who's said in print that she was the best thing about Whiskeytown. The album title presumably refers to Cary's growth during the years since 1994 when, the only other constant element in the band, she was overshadowed by Adams, but that growth has been in a rather curious direction. Cary is positioning herself as a British-style folk-rocker, so obviously that some misguided critics have gone as far as to compare her to Sandy Denny, which is not merely heresy but exaggeration—citations of Linda Thompson and Christine McVie are rather more realistic. Cary has a couple three problems with her full length debut, she's still finding herself as a songwriter—she only managed to write one of the eleven songs on her own—and she and her cowriters, mainly ex-Whiskeytown multi-instrumentalist Mike Daly, tend to slow, somber numbers that, not helped by Chris Stamey's jangly, layered pop production, lack contrast. Cary is a wonderful singer, and, though it's not emphasized here, fiddle player, but she and Stamey took two years to make this album, the kind of self-indulgence one normally associates with burnout, and I can't help feeling that this would have been a much better album if they'd shaved off 22 months instead of giving themselves that much time to overthink it. If you're lucky enough to find one of the early copies with the bonus four song mini disc, you may well wonder why the main album doesn't sound more like that. **JC**

JOAQUIN DIAZ • MERENGUE ALEGRE

(Arhoolie ****)

Diaz's first set at the International Accordion Festival last September had a decent enough crowd. The second filled up pretty good with all the same people plus their friends, the third was packed shoulder to shoulder with all the same people and their friends plus their friends' friends, a really remarkable illustration of the power of word of mouth, and Naomi Shahib Nye is witness that I did my part. From the Dominican Republic, A sensational accordionist, Diaz is now based in Montreal (her name's Ghyslaine), and, post 9/11, most of his sidemen refused to fly to San Antonio, so he had to use a pickup band of local musicians, but still emerged as the Festival's biggest sensation, huddling with at least two record labels between sets. The album title is a masterpiece of precision—Diaz plays merengue faster than you'd believe possible. However, his mode isn't the refined urbanized compromise between Rafael Trujillo, who made merengue his country's official music, and polite Dominican society, which detested the traditional African influenced grassroots style, but the long marginalized rural version known as *tipico* or *perico ripiao*. So if you've think you've already checked out merengue, prepare for something much gutsier. **JC**

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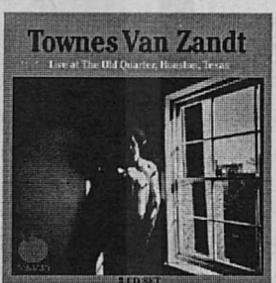
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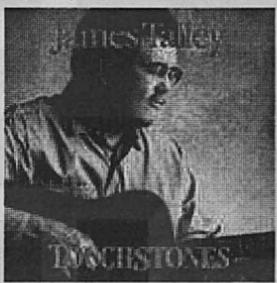
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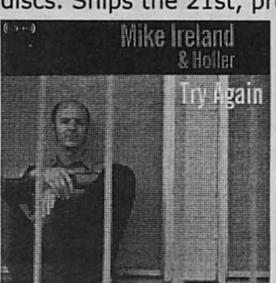
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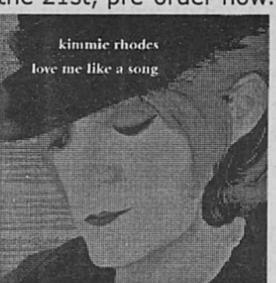
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CHARLES EARLE'S B-Sides

THE MAN BEHIND 'THE SOUND' HAROLD BRADLEY

DISCUSSES HIS LIFE IN MUSIC

No matter who you are, you have no doubt heard the work of Nashville session guitarist Harold Bradley. Whether it's his famed records with Elvis or country music greats such as Tammy Wynette, Patsy Cline and Loretta Lynn, you have certainly tapped your feet to Bradley's work. And even if you managed to miss these recordings, you've likely been exposed to the fruits of his labor with musical pioneers such as Roy Orbison, Buddy Holly, The Everly Brothers, Marty Robbins, and Hank Williams or pop artist such as Perry Como and Henry Mancini. If all else fails, you've certainly shared holiday cheer with friends and family to his trademark lick at the beginning of Bobby Helms' *Jingle Bell Rock*. Suffice to say that Harold Bradley's work is part of the very fabric of American music.

Brother of the late producer/pianist Owen Bradley, Harold was the behind the scenes architect of the famed 'Nashville Sound.' He has been a studio musician for 55 years, playing on four of the 40 most popular jukebox songs in history, including Patsy Cline's *Crazy*, the all time number one. Colleagues in the industry acknowledge him as 'the most recorded guitarist of all time,' and he has the session timecards to prove it.

Now that you've read some of his resume, you can truly see that value that this gifted, dedicated picker has within Nashville's musical history. Bradley is currently the president of the 3,500 member Nashville chapter of the American Federation of Musicians. I sat with him in his office recently and talked about his experiences over the years. Here is what he had to say: **CE:** I know so much about your life in music, but I don't know much about where you grew up. You and Owen came from the same house, so there must have been a lot of music there.

HB: My brother Owen was born in Westmoreland, Tennessee. My daddy was a farmer who eventually moved to Nashville. I was born in Nashville after my family moved. I went to grammar school and high school in Nashville and attended Peabody College on the GI bill after World War II. We grew up with two kinds of music. I heard the Grand Ole Opry every Saturday night. There was nothing else to do at the time. We didn't have television. But Owen was a pop musician at that time. He worked for 50¢ a night in the gambling joints. He also played on the local radio stations for sheet music, so our attic was full of pop sheet music.

CE: How old were you when you started playing?

HB: When I was 12 years old my dad gave me a guitar. At first, I wanted to play the banjo because it had a happy sound. But Owen told me that the banjo was going out, and that I needed to play guitar.

CE: Tell me about your first professional work.

HB: Well, in 1943, when I was a junior in high school, Owen called me and said that I should go out on the road with Ernest Tubb that summer. At the time, I told him I didn't want to play that corny old country music. That's really what I said. But he said he thought it would do me a lot of good. So I went on the road that summer and ended up becoming lifelong friends with Ernest. And I learned that I couldn't play some of that corny old country stuff.

CE: You went in the Navy right after graduation. What did you do while you served?

HB: I became a radioman, but I still played while I was serving.

CE: You and your brother built one of the first recording studios in Nashville. What was the reaction of people in town at the time? Did they see that as the start of something in Nashville?

HB: No, absolutely not. There had only been a few recordings made in town prior to that time and there were no commercial studios. I was basically starving at the time. It was 1952 and I had just gotten married. So Owen said we should start a studio, and we rented a space downtown for \$25 a month. After a year, the man tripled the rent and we had to move.

CE: You've played sessions for more than 50 years. What do you think when you hear that you are the most recorded guitarist of all time?

HB: Well, I know it's true, although I wouldn't mind if somebody would come out and challenge me. I started keeping my books in 1959. *Guitar Player* used to have articles by Tommy Tedesco, a West Coast guitar player. They said in the magazine at the time that he was the most recorded guitar player, but then a music historian called me. He was getting ready to do an article for *Guitar Player*, and he told them that he thought I was on more records than Tommy. So they sent a guy here to look over my logs, and he told me that I was the most recorded guitarist. I'm really proud of that. It was hard work, but I really enjoyed it.

CE: You are credited with being part of the 'Nashville Sound' that has been talked about so much over the years. I know the records that have been cited as having this sound. What, to you, is the Nashville sound?

HB: I've heard people talk about the Nashville Sound for years. But it's not a sound. It's sounds, plural. Every artist we worked with back in those days had their own sound. I worked with Ernest Tubb and Brenda Lee and Eddy Arnold and Jim Reeves, and they all had their own sound. If we'd had just one sound, we'd have gone out of business a long time ago.

CE: But what is the Nashville Sound that so many people have talked about?

HB: Chet Atkins used to jingle the coins in his pocket and say that was the Nashville Sound (laughs). But it's just so many different things.

CE: I want to go through and talk about some of the great artists you've played with and some of the unforgettable songs that feature your work. First off, tell me about playing with Buddy Holly.

HB: That was 1956. He did three sessions here, I was on the last one. Owen played piano on it as well. It's rockabilly stuff and we didn't really have a clue what he was trying to do. I remember we'd be playing and he'd come over and tell us how to play. We thought, gosh, we know how to play country and we'll make you rich and famous doing that. So why was he bugging us? But of course you don't say that. We said yes sir. Owen got really upset when he saw **The Buddy Holly Story**, because Buddy punches somebody out in the Nashville sessions. Well, Buddy was at the session without any of his other band members, and we'd have killed him (laughs). I was big and young and strong in those days and there was no way he'd have punched Owen.

CE: What about your sessions with Hank Williams?

HB: I didn't play on any of his most famous stuff. The guitar player from the big band at WSM had an ulcer, so I went to play the session with him one day. I had seen Hank almost every day at WSM when I was playing down there. We knew each other, but I hadn't played much country at the time. Anyway, that day he came over and to me and he told me he was glad I was on the session. Then he told me the song was going to be a big hit. I asked him how he knew that, and he said it was because it came from a really good bottle.

CE: What about Jim Reeves?

HB: You're talking about a guy who was very serious about his music. He never really considered himself a country singer. He considered himself a pop singer, and he had the voice to back it up. It was always a pleasure to work with him.

CE: What about The Everly Brothers?

HB: They're great guys. I wasn't on their first hits. I got connected with them later on in their career. I'm still friends with them today. Back when I worked with them, people here in town didn't accept them because they were rock & roll.

CE: Naturally, I've got to ask about working with Elvis.

HB: I worked with Elvis starting in 1962 when he came out of the Army. I did a lot of hits with him, a lot of million-sellers. The first time I worked with him, we started on a Sunday. I got to RCA Studio B early and set up. Then I heard all of this racket outside. I'd just bought a new station wagon, and there were kids standing on the hood. I thought at the time that I didn't care how big this guy was, because that was my new car. I went back inside and met him. My first impression was that, and I don't know if he was wearing makeup or anything, but his face shined like a new penny. Then I noticed he wore lifts on the heels of his shoes, and I thought, aw, this guy's a sissy. Later on I figured out that, like all of us who are under six feet, he just wanted to be six feet tall. But I ended up feeling like he was a really nice guy. I loved working with him.

CE: Everyone in Nashville was sad to lose Chet Atkins last year. Tell me about your old friend Chet.

HB: We were great friends. We never felt like competitors, even though we were. But he was also a producer and he played concerts. He wasn't in the trenches everyday like we were, but he was a wonderful guitar player. I met him in 1947 backstage at the Opry. I was sitting there practicing *Blue Skies*, and this tall, skinny guy comes up and tells me that I sounded pretty good. That was my first introduction to Chet.

CE: Tell me about playing on *Jingle Bell Rock*.

HB: There was a little trick to that song. Hank Garland and I did something with the guitars and Owen approved it. If you hear the song live, it never sounds exactly right. That's because Hank and I did this: [Bradley proceeds to play two separate guitar parts that were played in unison to make up the single lick that begins the recorded version of the song] The two parts gave it that bell sound that you've always heard. Owen didn't say anything, so we just kept playing it that way.

CE: Tell me about playing on *Only The Lonely*.

HB: *Only The Lonely* was cut live at RCA Studio B. Anita Kerr had written the arrangement. Bob Moore, the bass player on the session, all of the sudden said, "This goddamn thing is out of meter." A pall fell over the room, because we were hillbillies and we didn't want to say anything. So we played that song for thirty minutes for Bob trying to put it in meter. And finally Roy went in the control room, and then he came back out and said in his quiet Roy Orbison voice, "Bob, I think we ought to do it like Anita wrote it."

CE: Tell me about playing on *Crazy* with Patsy Cline.

HB: Well, I think that's the magic session out of all of them. There have been a lot of magic sessions, actually. I'd say *Crying* with Roy Orbison was also one. But when we went in to do *Crazy*, Patsy had been in an automobile wreck a few weeks before, so she just couldn't sing the song. She does her best and we play the song. But since she can't sing it right, Owen keeps fooling with the arrangement. It took us four hours, when a normal session in those days was three hours and you did a few tracks. We only got the one track in four hours, and that made me think they were going to take us out and shoot us. But it was nobody's fault, and Patsy came back two weeks later and sang it in one take. It ended up being the song everybody's heard so many times.

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gratuitous photo of
Doug Sahn
because we couldn't find
one of him with any of this
month's performers

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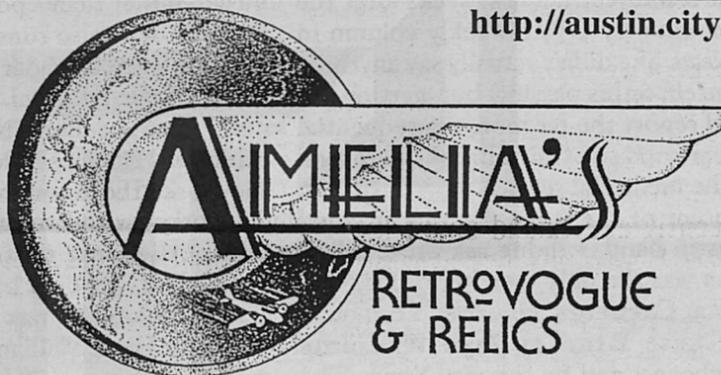


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JOHN THE REVEALATOR

An old publishing maxim states 'When the facts conflict with the legend, print the legend.' While I won't claim to have invented it, a corollary might be 'When the facts conflict with the facts, print the version you like best.' This, at any rate, is my approach to the various 'corrections' I was given about last month's features on **Keith Ferguson**. Let's deal with the easy ones first; the fact that Keith did once, while in California, have a driver's license and own a Rambler is irrelevant. When he was made President of an East Austin lowrider club he had neither. Pictures of him at the wheel of a lowrider do not constitute proof that he must have had a license. On the contrary.

◆ The Origins story is rather knottier. When I checked to make sure I remembered it right, **Jesse Taylor** warned me I'd hear different accounts, starring other people in the role of Keith Ferguson's discoverer. Well, sure enough. So far I have three contenders, which one am I going to believe? I'll give you a hint: Jesse was my best man. Even if one of the others could produce irrefutable proof that it was he who brought Keith to Austin, I'd still go with Jesse, just because his story is so cool, so quintessentially Keith.

◆ Guess it wasn't safe to assume you'd have heard of **Harlan Howard**'s death. In an email titled 'Media In the Heartland,' a subscriber in Ohio tells me that he only learned about it indirectly, a few weeks after the event, from a local country DJ's biweekly column in the *Dayton Daily News*. She didn't actually say anything about Howard himself, or his passing, but, getting her priorities right, did report the far more consequential news that Trisha Yearwood and Garth Brooks were seen holding hands at the memorial service.

◆ As the whole point of the story was that it could have been any Austin band, I didn't ask Steve Silbas who exactly said he was the only member of his band who'd never played at **Casbeers**. However, I can put a name to him because **Bradley Jaye Williams** recognized the exchange, and by the way, Steve, The Gulf Coast Playboys would still like to play at Casbeers, and the other guys can show Bradley how to get there.

◆ Usually I try to avoid British usages, unless the meaning is self-evident or a British word or phrase simply has essential nuances. There are, for instance, American equivalents of 'wanker,' but none convey quite the same degree of contempt. Last month, however, I stumbled into a truly alien terminology. **DIY** has been British shorthand for 'Do It Yourself' for as long as I can remember, but apparently means nothing to Americans. Anyway, what I was trying to say was that Sophie Best ran out of assembled **Git** albums and at one point I saw her hand over the component parts, CD, jewel case, insert and J-card, to an impatient customer who was willing to put them together herself, ie a DIY kit.

◆ Useless as he is, I can't help but feel a bit sorry for **Bob Schneider**, the *Austin Chronicle*'s Man of the Millennium. Back in December 2000, he was all over the papers when a private plane carrying him and then girlfriend Sandra Bullock crash landed. However, Bullock has since given him the elbow, so when the National Transportation Safety Board finally put out its report on the accident, he was downgraded in news reports to "another passenger."

◆ When it was launched, I commented that I would be somewhat surprised if **Texas Music** put out two issues and absolutely amazed if it got to three, words that its editor has thrown back at me in #10. Fair enough, I was wrong, no two ways about it. At the time, I figured that a full color newsstand glossy was a nonstarter because I couldn't see where they'd find the

readership, let alone the advertising. A long-defunct monthly once claimed a state-wide circulation of 25,000, of which another local publisher remarked, "You couldn't give away 25,000 copies of a music magazine in Texas if you pinned a dollar bill to every copy," and *Texas Music* was trying to *sell* copies. However, unlike a magazine not entirely dissimilar to the one you have in your hands, *Texas Music* had a business plan: stick with success. Cover stories so far have stayed well behind the curve with acts like The Dixie Chicks and Destiny's Child, Pat Green for the latest, people who really, really need and deserve more coverage. Still, I can't fault them, that's where the money is. There sure as shit isn't any in trying to be anywhere near the cutting edge.

◆ It's a measure of how dominant blow job journalism is in America that when **David Crosby** said that 'N Sync and Britney Spears "are about as deep as a birdbath," this utterly innocuous remark was widely reported as if it was somehow controversial and newsworthy. My problem is that "deep as a birdbath" strikes me as a pretty good description of Crosby, Stills & Nash. I'm inclined, for sentimental reasons, to cut CSN&Y more of a break, even though the age old question still remains, CSN&Why?

◆ Fear not, gentle readers of the *Journal Of Country Music*. The current 'Texas Music' issue seems to be a hiccup rather than a portent. The new editor, **Jeremy Tepper**, who also runs Diesel Only Records and used to publish a trade paper for jukebox operators, inherited much of the editorial content, most of which would never have got past Chris Dickinson, from an interim caretaker. However, the next issue, due out in June, should see the magazine back on track, with a Johnny Cash cover story, an article on Jean Shepard by Robbie Fulks, the first installment of a two-parter on Springfield, MO, an overview of Townes Van Zandt albums by John Lomax III and a Chet Flippo survey of books on Hank Williams.

◆ From the possibly sublime to the definitely ridiculous, I offer you a recent *Austin American-Statesman* article by **Oliver Franklin** on Lubbock's new music museum: "Back in the '40s, local boys The Mayfield Brothers had dancers cutting rugs all over town . . . Waylon Jennings and Roy Orbison both hailed from the plains area . . . The Champs (remember *Tequila?*), Townes Van Zandt, Jimmie Dale [Gilmore], Joe Ely, Butch Hancock, Jesse Guitar Taylor and his neighbor down the street by the name of Delbert McClinton all crawled out from under the big sky." Depending on how hardass you want to be, I count five errors in this. The obvious one, which I assume you all spotted immediately, even if the *Statesman* didn't, is Townes Van Zandt—no possible spin can excuse this boner. The Mayfield Brothers had me stumped for a moment until I realized Franklin actually meant the original Maines Brothers (Lloyd, Donny & Kenny's father and uncles). Orbison was from Wink, 165 miles from Lubbock, which played no part in his career. The Champs, a Hollywood studio group which failed to survive one disastrous tour, did include two Texans, but neither were from anywhere near Lubbock. Finally, McClinton was born in Lubbock but left when he was about a day old to be raised in Fort Worth, with which city he will always be associated. The only unassailable facts that emerge from this is that the *Statesman* doesn't employ factcheckers but does hire nitwits.

◆ In a recent *Blue Chip Report*, Bill Miller says, "Don't tell anyone because it's supposed to be a secret, but MCA is working on a **Patsy Cline** tribute album. We can expect to hear Lee Ann Womack, Rebecca Lynn Howard, Chely Wright, Trisha Yearwood and maybe

Reba. Nothing's official, so the lineup will be announced later. Can't wait to hear Womack's version of *She's Got You*." Well, Bill, I have to part company with you on this one. As far as I'm concerned, Womack, Yearwood et al are the dandruff on Patsy's collar.

◆ We're not good with dates; only two years after the release of **Spanker Madness**, the Texas chapter of NORML announced that the **Asylum Street Spankers** have been named the organization's Band of the Year 2002. The Spankers were honored "for their commitment in both music and deeds to ending the senseless prohibition of cannabis in this country."

◆ Happy endings are rare enough, in the snakepit of radio they're almost unheard of, but FARsters **Roz & Howard Larman**'s *FolkScene* is back in its old Sunday night slot on KPFK. 17 months ago, the station, which has since changed hands, claimed ownership of the program's content, forcing the volunteer couple to quit after 30 years, during which they had become an LA institution. As KPFK's GM Steven Starr put it, "They are legends in this field. Their show has been a stopping-off point for just about every single name in folk music in the last 30 years. They are the folk music radio equivalent of the Grand Ole Opry." The three Internet versions of the show that the Larman's set up while in exile will continue to exist (reachable through www.folkscene.com) and they'll use the facilities they set up at their home to prerecord some live guest performances, a *FolkScene* trademark since 1970, enabling them to get round scheduling conflicts.

◆ 'The Live Music Capital of the World' is an official City of Austin slogan, but the music community should demand the council rescind it because all they ever do for live music is fuck with it. The latest development is a proposed revision of the city's **noise ordinance** that will effectively end music in any "commercial property that is not fully enclosed by walls and a roof," from open air festivals to patios. The crux is a reduction of outdoor sound limits from 85 to 75 decibels until 10pm weekdays, 11pm at weekends with one permit, 70 dBs until 2am with another. Also, instead of being taken at the venue entrance, levels will be as measured "at any point along the property line" which makes an enormous difference. Before we get to decibels, the late night extension permit is a beauty. You can't have more than seven a year, must apply 45 days in advance and, for each permit, must notify, by certified mail, the property owners and tenants of all buildings within 200 feet of the venue's property line. Then there are the as yet unspecified fees.

◆ OK, **decibels**, "the most misunderstood measurement since the cubit," as one mathematician put it. The decibel is not a unit in the sense that you can go to the National Bureau of Standards and look at one, but my grasp of algebra, iffy enough on my best day at school, is far too shaky to attempt any explanation of the bugger. The essential point, however, is that decibels are not linear but logarithmic. Pearl Jam playing at 120 dBs, coincidentally the pain threshold, aren't twice as loud as 60 dBs (normal conversation) but 1000 times as loud. In other words, lopping a few points off the top is a much bigger deal than it may seem. Some rules of thumb illustrate the problem the City of Austin is creating: 85 dBs, the current limit, is equivalent to using an electric razor; 75 dBs, the proposed early limit, is the noise level at a downtown street corner; and 70 dBs, the proposed late night limit, is what you'd hear inside a car on the freeway. To put it another way, the typical home stereo listening level is 80 dBs, considerably louder than would be permitted at any time at any outdoor events.

◆ Not that there will be any if this ordinance passes as it stands. By way of comparison, a baby screams at 90 dBs, but given the Austin City Council's dismal record, the music community will probably have to reach 180 dBs (space shuttle at ground zero) to get heard.



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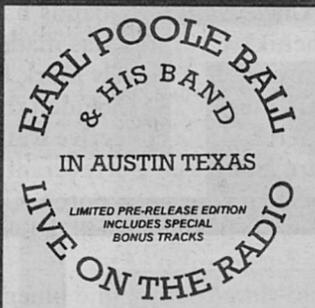
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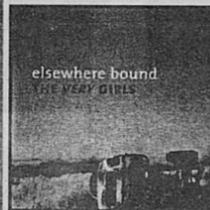
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UNCLE SMITHEE'S ESOTERIC MUSICAL EMANCIPATORS

Among the materials I was sent to help prepare this feature was a thumbnail description: "Uncle Smithee's Esoteric Music Emancipators is a loose collective of Austin acoustic music groups devoted to the promotion and dissemination of traditional, vernacular and roots music, from Blues to Tex-Mex, from Hokum to Klezmer, and the cultivation of venues and audiences for these fun and vibrant musical styles." Technically, this is a little out of date as one of the original nine members, Don Leady's Tex-Mex trio Los Cadillos, have dropped out because, with all their other commitments, they didn't feel they could devote sufficient time and energy to the work of the collective.

◆ For the remaining eight members, who we'll get to in a moment, the word 'roots' has a rather different meaning than the normal usage. While no more clearly defined than Americana, and employed with, if possible, even less rigor, 'roots' has, over the last several years, gained currency in music journalism because it implies, however misleadingly, that the artist or band under discussion can be linked to a musical tradition and history, that, in short, the music has roots in the past. Despite frantic efforts by generations of local music writers to find The Next Big Thing, Austin has always been best known as a hotbed of 'roots' music with, shall we say, somewhat limited commercial appeal. However, Uncle Smithee's Esoteric Musical Emancipators oblige me to confront an unaddressed ambiguity in this convention, to which I freely admit contributing, because the fact is that the 'past' that's being invoked is virtually always the decade or so following the Second World War.

◆ There is a good reason for this. Few people, least of all Americans, appreciate quite how limited leisure time and disposable income, concepts still utterly alien to most of the world's population, were, even in the West, until fairly recently. Deep into the 20th century, performers of American vernacular music were either amateurs, playing for friends and neighbors, or socially marginalized professionals, little more than buskers. This had begun to change even before the Depression, at least in jazz, but WW2 was the real watershed. For the first time, millions of working Americans, including women and blacks, many from The South, had money to burn and what they wanted to spend it on wasn't middle class swing or big band jazz, both dead in the water by 1946, but honky tonk, jump blues and bebop.

◆ Thus began the Golden Age when American music was driven by a free-spending and adult market rather than by marketing, an age of hip indie labels and their regional and jukebox hits, crucial factors in the later rise of electric blues, R&B, rockabilly, modern jazz and rock & roll. It lasted about 15 years before the major labels, harnessing the spending power of malleable teens and sub-teens, were able to bring it all under control. The commodification of music has been an unmitigated disaster, a cultural tragedy which has impoverished the lives of millions. Small wonder that so many people, musicians and music lovers, look back to the vitality of the 40s and 50s for inspiration, for roots.

◆ However, the Uncle Smithee's collective are living reminders that those roots themselves had roots. Most obviously, honkytonk and jump blues were urbanized and electrified evolutions of prewar hillbilly string bands and country and Delta blues. Of course, these sprang from 18th and 19th century Appalachian folk, gospel music and field chants, which in turn can be traced back to the British Isles and Africa, but the main emphasis of the Uncle Smithee's bands, from jug band to gypsy jazz, hokum to fiddle breakdowns, is on the 1920s and 30s, the immediate roots of what we call roots music.

◆ Mind you, just because I'm being serious here, doesn't mean the Uncle Smithee's bands are when they perform. These musicians, including such well known figures as Mark Rubin, Dave Biller and Pops Bayless, are not on a mission of musical education—there will not be a test after the show—or conservation, nor are they interested in preaching to the old timey music choir. While they are exploring music history, they picked up on these various neglected strands because they enjoy playing them and they think you might enjoy listening to them. If, in the process, you learn something about the origins of your favorite kinds of music, or even get inspired to explore even further, well, how bad that can that be?

◆ With so many groups to juggle, it seemed safest to let each of them provide their own description of their music. However, a few points are worth adding. Pops Bayless and Mysterious John were founding members of Asylum Street Spankers, and their band Shorty Long hews closer to that group's original concept than the current Spankers themselves, as evidenced by their terrific album **Chicken Boxer** (reviewed #48/137). Various other Uncle Smithee's bands have albums either out or in the works, though the Rubinchik's Orkystr's was made in a very different incarnation (I hope they've both got over it, but the day Mark Rubin and Rachel Rhodes broke up was a sad one for Austin music). I've included the various websites at which you can find out more, and there's also a collective website at www.unclesmithee.com.

◆ **Boxcar Preachers** are an oft-times irreverent old-timey string band bringing music from On-High direct to your back porch. Complete with a jug, tenor banjo and wicked harmonies, Boxcar Preachers will deliver you to salvation ... one pint at a time. [www.boxcarpreachers.com]

◆ **Dark Holler** mixes old-time country and bluegrass music with shades of blues, folk, western swing, Appalachian string band music and gospel standards. Tight harmonies drive the band's melodic arrangements of traditional and original songs. [www.darkholler.net]

◆ Carrying on the tradition of the lone, early 20th century Americana songster, **Memphis T** brings to life a variety of original and traditional finger-picked tunes, from Delta, Piedmont and down home blues, to Hawaiian, Ragtime, Hokum, and old time Country. Memphis T, songwriter, multi-instrumentalist and purveyor of American roots musical stylings. [www.memphistornado.com]

◆ **Les Niglos** (The Hedgehogs) is a 5 piece acoustic band, led by Dave Biller, devoted to playing 'jazz manouche,' the music of Western European Gypsies (particularly Django Reinhardt), in an authentic manner. We try not to be pretentious or too 'ethnic' sounding, but rather, we try to express the fun and even sometimes humorous elements of the music. [www.unclesmithee.com/les-niglos.htm]

◆ Inspired by a conversation with Texas Swing legends Deacon Anderson, Johnny Gimble and Don Walsler, former Bad Livers founder Mark Rubin decided to gather an ensemble true to the original roots of western swing. **The Ridgetop Syncopators** are mostly acoustic and drummer-less, hot fiddle driven with string bass, lap steel, guitar and tenor banjo accompaniment. The repertoire comes, as it did in the 30s, from old-time fiddle breakdowns, Tin Pan Alley ballads, blues, minstrel show routines and the requisite waltz. Rubin plays the banjo and sings lead. [www.markrubin.com/ridgetop.html]

◆ Founded in 1995 by Mark Rubin (using the closest English spelling of his family's original name), **Rubinchik's Orkestyr**, aka Rubinchik's Yiddische Band, has the mission statement, 'Destination, fun' and a 'no amplification' policy. Though the group membership has evolved over the years, the idea is about the same: quality Jewish party music without the cliché Israeli numbers (a Hava Nagilah free zone, if you will). Currently, the ensemble features Mark Rubin (tuba, cello, string bass), Don Weeda (accordion) and Ben Saffer (clarinets). [www.unclesmithee.com/rubinchiks-orkestyr.htm]

◆ **Shorty Long** is a six-piece string band with roots in the novelty/jazz styles of the 20s, 30s and 40s. Using a veritable arsenal of acoustic instruments, combined with an immense repertoire of originals and covers, Shorty Long serves up a heady mix of hot jazz and energetic showmanship. [www.shortylong.com]

◆ **The White Ghost Shivers** are a young modern band playing old string band music of the 20s and 30s. The styles range from hot jazz, hokum and jugband blues, to western swing and hillbilly, armed with banjos, ukes, fiddles and kazoos. [www.whiteghostshivers.net]

◆ If there's a unifying theme in the Uncle Smithee's collective, it's relevance. Some forms of music die out because their context has simply gone, sea shanties for instance (if you've never heard folksingers rollicking away at them, you've missed a truly ghastly experience), but others have simply fallen into neglect even though they still have the visceral power to reach across the years. These are the stock in trade of the collective. Give this guys a listen, it's all great music. **JC**

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