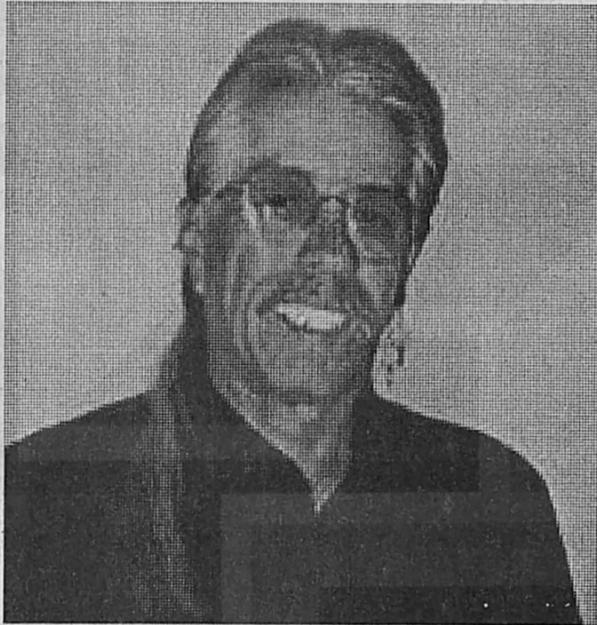


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FREEFORM AMERICAN ROOTS #34

ROOTS BIRTHS & DEATHS

REVIEWS * * * * * (or not)

CORRIDOS y NARCOCORRIDOS • FLORENCE DORE

TERRI HENDRIX • JOSIE KRUEZER • *LOUISIANA MUSIC*

TIFT MERRITT • CALVIN RUSSELL • TOWNES VAN ZANDT

DAVE ALVIN & THE GUILTY MEN

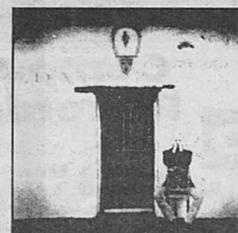
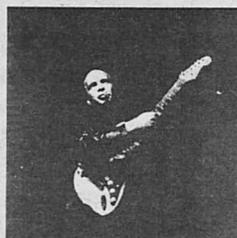
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#1 CORNELL HURD BAND: SONG OF SOUTH AUSTIN

(Behemoth) *AB/*DF/*DN/*KD/*LB/*RT/*SH/*TS/*WH

- 2 Dave Alvin & The Guilty Men: Out In California (Hightone)
*BC/*BW/*RMS/*RP/*RS/*WR
- 3 The Flatlanders: Now Again (New West) *BF/*CP/*DY/*JP/*PP/*SJ/*ST
- 4 Fred Eaglesmith: Falling Stars & Broken Hearts (FSE/Signature Sounds)
*DB/*JS/*MDT/*R&HL
- 5 Josie Kruezer: Beggin' Me Back (SheDevil) *BL/*DA/*KC/*KF/*MP/*RH
- 6 Mike Ireland & Holler: Try Again (Ashmont) *DN/*JZ/*TF
- 7 Tift Merritt: Bramble Rose (Lost Highway) *DWT/*RJ/*SG
- 8 Kelly Kessler: The Salt Of Your Skin (Melungeon) *GS/*TW/*WT
- 9 Jim Lauderdale & Ralph Stanley: Lost In The Lonesome Pines (Dualtone)
*MA/*TH
- 10 James Talley: Touchstones (Cimarron) *RJ
- 11 Jesse Sykes & The Sweet Hereafter: Reckless Burning (BurnBurnBurn)
*JE/*HTR/*VP
- 12 Chris Hillman & Herb Pederson: Way Out West (Back Porch) *BR/*DWB
- 13 The Very Girls: Elsewhere Bound (Recovery)
- 14 Florence Dore: Perfect City (Slewfoot) *JVB/*RD
- 15 Todd Snider: New Connection (Oh Boy) *NA
- 16 Chuck Prophet: No Other Love (New West)
- 17 Lonesome Bob: Things Change (Leaps)
The Meat Purveyors: All Relationships Are Doomed To Fail (Bloodshot)
Daryle Singletary: That's Why I Sing This Way (Audium)
- 18 Cosmic Dust Devils (Little Train) *TO
Doyle Lawson & Quicksilver: The Hard Game Of Love (Sugar Hill) *CC
Christy McWilson: Bed Of Roses (Hightone) *ND
Pine Valley Cosmonauts: The Executioners' Last Song (Bloodshot) *TJ
The Stevens Sisters: Little By Little (Rounder) *KR
- 19 Jim Lauderdale: The Hummingbirds (Dualtone)
Jason Ringenberg: All Over Creation (Yep Roc/Blue Rose)
- 20 Welcome To Porter Hall, TN (Slewfoot)
- 21 A Gentle Evening With Townes Van Zandt (Dualtone) *TG
- 22 One Riot One Ranger: Flat City Nights (Hayden's Ferry)
Don Walser: Dare To Dream (Lone Star)
- 23 Isaac Freeman & The Bluebloods: Beautiful Stars (Lost Highway) *AR
Rodney Hayden: The Real Thing (Rosetta) *EW 11
John Mooney: All I Want (Blind Pig) *DT
Rev Horton Heat: Lucky Seven (Artemis) *RB
- 24 Merle Haggard: the Peer Sessions (Audium/Koch)
- 25 Jason Allen: Something I Dreamed (D) *JH
Dave Carter & Tracy Grammer: When I Go (Signature Sounds) *SMJ
WC Clark: From Austin With Soul (Alligator) *DJ
Jackalope Junction: Just Drive (Shadow Brook) *EGB
Jinx James: License To Twang (Red Rogue) *DC
Ron Jordan: Living And Life (Chaser) *RW
Josie Kuhn: La Luna Loca (Two Hawks) *LG
Jesse Lege & The Southern Ramblers (Acadiana) *PR
The New Orleans Nightcrawlers: Live At The Old Point (Viper) *SC
Troy Olson: Living In Your World (Honky Tonk Hacienda) *MT
The Radio Kings (Dark Skippy) *JR
Kimmie Rhodes: Love Me Like A Song (Sunbird) *GJ
Silkworm: Italian Platinum (Touch & Go) *CZ
VA: Stonewall Jackson; A Tribute () *H&H
Doc Watson & David Holt: Legacy (High Windy Audio) *MR
Wilco: Yankee Hotel Foxtrot (Nonesuch) *CW
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*xx = DJ's Album of the Month

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TOWNES VAN ZANDT LIVE AT THE OLD QUARTER, HOUSTON, TEXAS

(Tomato, double CD *****, oh fuck it, *****)

Unless you're a Brit, you've probably never heard of Roy Plomley, but back in 1942 he came up with the idea of a radio show on which he'd play excerpts from the eight albums that his guests, notables from all walks of life, would want to have with them if they were shipwrecked. *Desert Island Discs*, which celebrated its 60th anniversary last March, has become such an institution that you would be hard put to it to find anyone in the British Isles who has never, for their own amusement, as a parlor game or just killing time on train or road trips, drawn up their own list of the albums from which they couldn't bear to be parted.

◆ Were I, by some bizarre quirk of fate, invited to be on the show tomorrow, my selection would be:

- 1 Townes Van Zandt: Live At The Old Quarter, Houston
- 2 David Rodriguez: The True Cross
- 3 John B Spencer: Out With A Bang
- 4 Art Pepper Meets The Rhythm Section
- 5 Sandy Denny: The BBC Sessions 1971-73
- 6 The Pirates: Out Of Their Skulls
- 7 Terry Allen: Lubbock (On Everything)
- 8 Mary Coughlan: Tired And Emotional

◆ Now if I'd got the call 10, 15 or 20 years ago, that list would have been a bit different. Hell, it might have been different last week and, if Abdullah Ibrahim (Water From An Ancient Well), Annie Ross (Sings A Song Of Mulligan) or CCR (Willy & The Poor Boys) fight their way back into one of the slots, might well be different next week. However, you'd have to go all the way back to early 1978 before you'd find another album occupying the #1 position. For me, **Live At The Old Quarter** is not just an album, it's *the* album.

◆ Most of you, I imagine, can point to certain key recordings, ones that sent you down new musical paths or became your archetypes. Mine were Miles Davis' *Ascenseur Pour L'Echafaud*, Buddy Guy's *I Was Walkin' Through The Woods* and, though I quickly outgrew it, Ray Charles' *Modern Sounds In Country & Western Music*, but while they irrevocably altered my tastes and standards, none of them changed my life like the double LP, released in 1977, an American friend had brought back from a trip home to Dallas. There were other factors, Joe Ely, Butch Hancock, Terry Allen, Wes McGhee, but it was Townes Van Zandt who started me on the path that eventually led to Texas.

◆ Though, of course, I didn't know this when I first heard it, **Live At The Old Quarter** was the archetypal **3CM** album, a great record made under somewhat less-than-optimal conditions, indeed what most people in the music business would call impossible conditions. Houston is barely habitable in July *with AC*, but when Van Zandt came to Rex Bell's joint (since reincarnated in Galveston), in July, 1973, for a week of solo acoustic shows, the AC had broken down, though, on the plus side, this may explain why the packed house in what I'm told was normally a rowdy bar was so quiet and attentive. In any case, there no intention of his making an album while he was there, ergo no provision for doing so, but one night the club decided it wanted some memento for its own archives. That soundboard tape, made on a sweltering evening, when he didn't know he was being recorded, turned out to be Van Zandt's masterpiece, beyond argument his most indispensable recording, which right there puts it among the great albums of all time, even if you don't rate it quite as high on the cosmic scale as I do.

◆ While many people think Tomato benefited more than Townes from their relationship, this superbly remastered reissue is worth having even if you already own a copy of the British bootleg CD, or have most all the songs on other albums. If you don't, it's quite simply essential. I do rather wish Tomato had taken this opportunity to put back the few songs that were edited out because of things like dropped beer mugs, but the 27 tracks, which include a few covers, Merle Travis' *Nine Pound Hammer*, Lightnin' Hopkins' *Chauffeur's Blues*, *Cocaine Blues* and Bo Diddley's *Who Do You Love?*, and some of Van Zandt's comic relief such as *Talking Thunderbird Blues*, include definitive versions of much of his best material, including *Pancho & Lefty*, *Don't You Take It Too Bad*, *If I Needed You*, *White Freight Liner Blues*, *To Live Is To Fly*, *For The Sake Of The Song*, *No Place To Fall*, *Loretta*, *Waiting Around To Die*, *Tecumseh Valley* and *Lungs*.

◆ Later in his life, going to see Townes Van Zandt was a risky business, but one could nearly always catch at least a glimpse of his genius not just as a songwriter but as a performer, and sometimes, with luck, even a complete show (at least until the break) where he was in full control. However, **Live At The Old Quarter** captures a well-nigh perfect Van Zandt performance. God bless soundman Earl Willis for hitting Record, thus earning himself producer and engineer credits and the eternal gratitude of music lovers worldwide. Not to mention changing my life. **JC**

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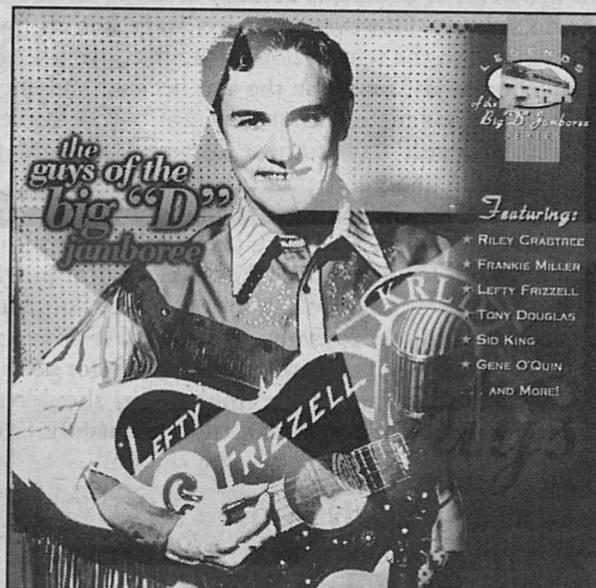
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TERRI HENDRIX • THE RING

(Wilory ****)

For all musicians, the first problem, of course, is actually creating an audience and a pretty fair number never do solve it. However, the next stage has its own built-in dilemma—who's the boss? Many yield to the temptation not to mess with whatever puts bums on seats or boots on dancefloors, just fine tune the act, because audiences tend to be conservative, wanting to hear familiar material not new stuff—Ray Wylie Hubbard still has to cater to knuckleheads who only want to hear *Redneck Mother*. As for radical innovation, Bob Dylan or Joe Ely, for instance, are proof that if you take fans round too sharp a bend, some of them will fall off. Beyond her remarkable talents as a singer, songwriter and, above all, entertainer, Hendrix has always taken pains to ensure that not a single fan ever feels neglected or taken for granted, so I assume that in putting out an album that's so much more complex than those on which she's built her flourishing career, she's confident that her audience will allow her to evolve as an artist. This is a pretty safe bet because, while her crowd quite clearly has its favorites, they're in it for her personality, style and delivery as much as for her material, so the Golden Girl shouldn't have any trouble selling the darker shades she's added to her palette, though I'm curious to see how she'll fit the difficult *From Another Planet* and *Nightwolves* into the set. JC

JOSIE KREUZER • BEGGIN' ME BACK

(SheDevil ****.5)

Rockabilly filly is a phrase I truly detest, but I'm going to run with it just this once. Had I, circa 1997, been handicapping the Millennial Queen of Rockabilly Stakes, the odds-on favorite would've been Martí Brom, with Josie Kreuzer and Kim Lenz taking show and place. But which way round? Ah, not so easy. With plenty of fans to cheer them on, both women had fine style and seemed well capable of going the distance, and if Kreuzer stumbled at the first obstacle, Lenz getting better backing from her Jaguars than Kreuzer did from Hot Rod Lincoln on their debut albums, she made up the ground on their follow-ups. However, while those albums were released almost simultaneously, this time Kreuzer's on her own, as Lenz faded out to become a mother. Whether she'll ever get back into the race remains to be seen, the history of women in rockabilly is littered with the wreckage of promising careers cut short by marriage and children, but she'd have to hit the ground running because Kreuzer's really found her pace. While I preferred her pulp gun moll image to the current farmer's daughter look, musically it's pretty near impossible to fault her 12 originals on style or delivery and if she blasts through them in just over 20 minutes, well that's rockabilly. Recording on analog and tube equipment, and with rock solid backing by a guitar, upright bass and drums trio, Kreuzer's effortlessly clears the dreaded third album hurdle, and if this punter is still backing Brom, that's very far from being a criticism. JC

TIFT MERRITT • BRAMBLE ROSE

(Lost Highway ****.5)

How do you create 'buzz'? Many people would like to know, but for a case study that might shed light on how it works, I'd suggest Tift Merritt. She's done almost nothing outside North Carolina, other than record an EP of duets with John Howie of Two Dollar Pistols and hit the industry showcase circuit, but her name's been bandied about for some time as a singer to watch. Well, crunch time's here. Merritt says her role models are early Linda Ronstadt, Emmylou Harris and Bonnie Raitt, and though the album was recorded live without overdubs, there's certainly an element of Ronstadt's clinical perfection in her work. She, and her musicians, hit all the right notes but though she has a gorgeous voice, and is apparently a pretty fair guitarist, the passion is all in the lyrics, little seeping over into the delivery, which is rather odd as she wrote all 11 songs, on her own some at that, and some of them are really excellent. Is Merritt the Next Big Thing in Americana? Maybe, but I can't help thinking that more than one major label will clock her photos and wonder if she has anything against Nashville that she'll never get over. JC

FLORENCE DORE • PERFECT CITY

(Slewfoot ****)

Quoted in the *Cleveland Free Times*, the Kent State professor of American Literature said "I'm always looking for soul in music and also in academics. If it's not there, then it wanks, and I'm like 'Fuck it, I'm not interested.'" Dr Dore, you will already have surmised, is a woman after my own heart, not to mention vocabulary. Her day job notwithstanding—American academics can be pretty dim and are rarely capable of writing comprehensible English—Dore's intelligence is palpable and her use of words, wielded with economical authority (she is, in her own words, "emotionally articulate"), can be devastating. Singing like a one-woman Freakwater, combining Janet Bean's sweetness and Catherine Irwin's ragged edge, she easily bears comparison with Lucinda Williams, indeed her debut is stronger and more consistent than *Essence*, and with a more sympathetic producer (Jay Sherman-Godfrey springs to mind) could have been a real monster. I long to lay my hands on Eric Ambel's tapes and remix this sucker, but though handicapped, Dore's raw talent cannot be denied. For those with good memories, this is a repeat of my review of the original Miss Ruby self-release (#57/146) because Dore really is remarkable and her album is still worthwhile. I'm glad to see Slewfoot getting behind it, I just wish they'd sprung for a remix and remastering while they were about it. JC

CALVIN RUSSELL • REBEL RADIO

(Pedernales/Freefall ****)

Even though it has nothing really to do with the music, I find it rather revealing that the splendid packaging of the original release, by the French label DixieFrog, emphasized images of Russell, and his tattoos, but there's not a single picture of him anywhere on the plain jane US version. My experience is that people who look like bozos almost invariably sing/write/play like bozos, but one look tells you that Russell is someone you need to take very seriously, which I'm convinced was a factor in making him such a cult figure in Europe, where he's released 12 albums. However, though his face, once described as "a road map of hell," has loomed on billboards in Paris, France, apparently it'd be a turn off in Paris, Texas. There is, however, a certain logic to this because Russell's image matched his raw, gritty, hardedged roots rock rather better than it does this relatively polite and restrained reinvention as an Americana song stylist. With only three originals, the album is dominated by Russell's readings of Townes Van Zandt's *Still Lookin' For You*, *I'll Be Here In The Morning* and *Ain't Leavin' Your Love*, Gillian Welch's *Barroom Girls* and *Pass You By*, Gary Nicholson's *Shadow Of Doubt*, Stephen Bruton's *It Is What It Is*, Jagger & Richards' *No Expectations*, Willie Nelson's *I Never Cared For You* and Kimmie Rhodes' *Wild Roses*. Though this solid country/roots rock/blues album, featuring Lloyd Maines, Bruton, Richard Bowden, Riley Osbourn, Jon Blondell and Freddie Krc, never really catches fire, I have to admit it's more accessible than Russell's flinty and unforgettable covers of Van Zandt's *Nothin'* and Blaze Foley's *I Should Have Been Home With You* on the fantastic *Crack In Time*. If there's an element of compromise in his first US release, anything that introduces Russell to the American market has to be welcome, trouble is I'm not sure whether to say, 'work your way back, it just gets better' or 'it's a European thing. You wouldn't understand.' JC

VA • CORRIDOS Y NARCOCORRIDOS

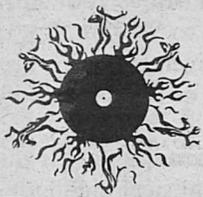
(FonoVisa ****)

Unless your grasp not just of Spanish but the Mexican vernacular is considerably better than mine, I won't claim this companion to Elijah Wald's gripping book *Narcocorrido* (reviewed #63/152) is essential. However, if Wald has piqued your interest in "the music of drugs, guns and guerrillas," as FonoVisa, the dominant Latin market label, evidently hope he has since they've included a booklet in both Spanish and English, in which Wald notes that "This music is far more popular than most English-speakers can imagine," it's the obvious place to start. With eight tracks by the legendary Los Tigres Del Norte, trendsetting giants of the style for over 30 years, including the seminal *Contrabando y Traición*, *La Banda Del Carro Rojo*, *El Circo* and *Pacas De A Kilo*, though regrettably not *Jefe De Jefes*, the other eight are by Monterrey's Luis y Julian, Grupo Exterminador, brother and sister solo acts Jenni Rivera and Pedro Rivera from LA (where one of the top five radio stations plays nothing but corridos and narcocorridos), El Canelo De Sinaloa y Los Dos Del Sitio, the late genre-defining 'Chalino' Sánchez also from Sinaloa, Hermanos Jiménez from Michoacán and Los Pajaritos Del Sur from Guerrero. If nothing else, this album demonstrates how crappy America's gangsta rappers are as musicians. JC

RICK KOSTER • LOUISIANA MUSIC

(Da Capo paperback *)

Does Wayne Hancock being Butch's younger brother ring a bell? It was my favorite among the many, many sins of omission and commission in Koster's 1998 *Texas Music*, and from spot checks on areas with which I'm most familiar, I can only conclude that his second state survey is at least equally slipshod. In the chapter on Louisiana Country, Koster covers Hank Williams Jr, Tim McGraw, Kix Brooks and Trace Adkins, but makes only passing mention of Faron Young (gasp!) and, even more inexplicably, Jimmie Davis, not only a Country Music Hall of Famer but a two term Governor of Louisiana. Well, I already knew that Koster knows shit about country, so let's try Swamp Pop. Bad mistake. Koster dismisses this unique, distinctive, quintessentially Louisianan genre in five pages and though he refers to Shane Bernard's book, didn't register that Steve Riley is not a "seminal" swamp popper, that Dale & Grace had a national #1 hit with *I'm Leaving Up To You* and that Cookie & The Cupcakes didn't score "the genre's biggest hits." I could point out many other weaknesses, from the crappy index (if you want to look up Memphis Minnie or Queen Ida, you better know their real names) to the endless enlistment of anybody halfway famous who spent more than ten minutes in Louisiana, but Koster's partiality for commercial success is summed up by his reference to the "astonishing achievement" of the Kentwood, LA, native who "will probably end up being the largest-selling Louisiana artist ever." Right, the very first person you think of when Louisiana music is mentioned—Britney Spears. What a wanker. JC



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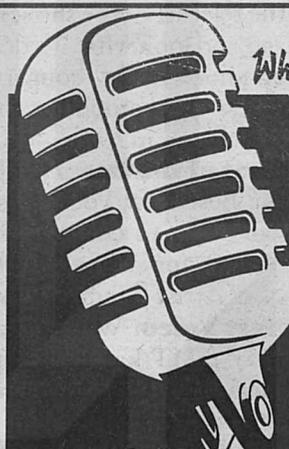
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CHARLES EARLE'S B-Sides

ACM AWARDS

A NIGHT TO FORGET

I didn't watch the Academy of Country Music awards live on May 22, and no, it wasn't because celebrity boxing was so enthralling. I was in a chair at Lone Wolf Tattoo getting some rather unfortunate body art covered up (don't ask, it's a long story).

I had a friend tape the thing for me, as I suppose it is my job to know what happened and have something to say about it. But when it came to sit down and watch, I found myself doing everything I could to stall.

"The Braves are on and they're murdering the ball for a change. Hey look, the neighbor is out walking her dog. I'll bet there is one article left in that travel magazine I haven't read. I think I'll call my brother."

But when I realized that the chances of me finishing this column before I left town for Memorial Day were getting thin, it was time to sit down and suffer through the ACM Awards. Sigh.

The end result of the show was kind of interesting. At the CMA awards, **O Brother, Where Art Thou?** won all the big stuff and the Grammy's threw Music Row a complete shutout, but the ACM's brought decidedly different results. Patriotism ruled the day, as Alan Jackson, whose *Where Were You (When the World Stopped Turning)* was a huge hit, and Brooks & Dunn, who waved the flag with *Only in America*, were the big winners. Fans in the audience waved little American flags as Toby Keith lumbered through a cliché, shake-your-fist-at-the-foreigners anthem. Several winners during the evening made sure to ask God to bless America. Oh yeah, Music Row was back in charge.

O Brother did take home two awards, but you could see a great example of the backlash it has created with the mainstream country crowd. A grimacing Trace Adkins, the bulky giant of a country singer from Nashville, said he was going to give **O Brother's** ACM to co-presenter Tara Lipinski because that album has, "already won enough anyway."

On the whole, there were a few highlights and plenty of forgettable moments during the ACM telecast. Here are some random observations:

Reba McEntire: The cornpone cowgirl was positively annoying as the evening's host. She cranked up the exaggerated Okie accent when telling jokes about Harleys at church and roasting pigs in the green room, and then made it disappear when talking about the deaths of Chet Atkins and Harlan Howard. All the while she smiled in a way so perky that aspiring high school beauty pageant contestants all around the country are now on Paxil.

The Home Depot Humanitarian Award: I have a problem with giving awards to celebrities who donate their time to charity. They are all rich as sin and they have lots of time on their hands in the first place. They certainly need the tax breaks and they do get lots of good press for helping out, so why not pitch in and give a little? Instead of giving this award to a celeb, why not give it to country music fans nominated by friends for their charitable efforts. You could narrow it down through Home Depot and then have the music nominees and ACM members vote from five finalist letters. That way you could recognize somebody who doesn't already have a swelled head. Oh, and is it any shock that Reba won this award since there was voting on line throughout the show and her smarmy little mug was on the tube all night?

Dick Clark: Having this guy announce the nominees for a humanitarian award strikes me as being similar to letting the Catholic church pick the staff for the

department of child services. Clark is the embodiment of every slimy, gross thing about the entertainment industry. They should issue our Nashville folks biohazard suits before shaking hands with him next year. Hell, I was tempted to put on a condom just to watch the guy on television.

Brooks & Dunn: This pair of underwhelming talents became the all-time leaders in ACM Awards last week, passing Merle Haggard. Of course, they did this by winning the completely irrelevant Duo category numerous times, where their competition usually includes two or three acts that don't even have major label record deals. I also have to say that it was interesting to see these guys joined on stage by former Prince drummer Sheila E. This prompts the obvious question; what do Prince and Brooks & Dunn have in common? Neither act plays country music.

Rascal Flatts and Ty Herndon: Having these guys present an award together is like watching Will & Grace without Grace.

Jo Dee Messina: Nashville really does owe the rest of the country an apology for this one. I mean, she's like a stray that came around and we kept feeding her until we just couldn't get rid of her. I still think her fame is perhaps the most inexplicable phenomenon since crop circles or the Easter Island statues.

Joe Galante: Lots of folks in Nashville have joked over the years about the Sopranos-like ties of this guy. It's good for a laugh, but did you notice that Kix Brooks referred to him as Mr Galante during an acceptance speech, while calling everybody else by first name?

Trick Pony: I hate this band more than God hates sin. I hate their music with the fire of 1,000 suns. They are such over-polished phonies that they make local TV news personalities look like homeless people. Since they are nothing more than walking stereotypes, can we just start calling them The Cowboy, The Tart and The Goofball Rebel?

Phil Vassar: The Best New Male Vocalist is nothing more than Collin Raye lite. Wait, is that possible?

Alabama: They announced their farewell tour during the telecast of the show. Hey, Ozzie did that a few years ago and look what it's done for him. Note to CMT: set up shoot in dry country of Ft Payne, Alabama and follow band around as they talk with inbred rednecks. Big ratings in store.

Sons of the Desert: These guys were nominated for the Best New Vocal Group trophy, even though they had a top 20 country hit four or five years ago. In a related story, some Irish band called U2 is up for a Best New Artist Grammy next spring.

Best Video: Who knows how to vote for this thing since CMT has ratings that fall somewhere between the Ethiopian Food Channel and the Fat People Having Sex Network?

Lonestar: What does it say that these guys are doing a television special with Marc Anthony and Celine Dion? What does it say about Nashville that we keep giving these guys awards for country music?

Kenny Chesney: I know the chicks think this guy is the new country hunk. But if he wasn't famous and you saw him hustling drinks at a gay bar, would he look the slightest bit out of place?

Tim McGraw: He rose out from under the stage in a cloud of fog and sang from a podium that had him raised five feet above his band. Can a six-week run at The Mirage in Vegas be far away?

The Tony Awards Advertisement: It's a good thing that this ad that ran during the telecast was an in-house thing from CBS. If it wasn't, then I think somebody had seriously missed the target audience.

Waylon Jennings: Perhaps the most redeeming feature of the night was the tribute to Waylon. It was a thrill to see so much prime time given to such a great artist. Next year let's honor a few of the legends who are still alive.

Willie Nelson and Lee Ann Womack: Their duet on *Mendocino County Line* was the musical highlight of the evening. It was much better than the Willie/Sheryl Crow train wreck last fall at the CMAs.

Hank Jr & Kid Rock: I can't believe I'm admitting this, but I kind of like their duet on *The F Word*. It was pretty cool.

CAPITAL OF COUNTRY MUSIC?

ARBITRON BEGS TO DIFFER

According to the latest Arbitron ratings for radio stations here in Music City, us locals don't seem to care very much about the awful excuse for country music being produced by our very own Music Row. Soft rock, mainstream pop and two urban contemporary/hip-hop stations hold down the first four spots in the market. Country finally appears in fifth place, tied with a talk radio station that specializes in excellent sports chat and blowhard Republican bullshit.

The biggest gainer is WSM, which specializes in classic country. Earlier this year, Gaylord Entertainment talked about changing the format of the longtime home of the Grand Ole Opry to 24 hour talk. However, the AM station has jumped six spots from the last Arbitron book while both the mainstream country FM stations dropped.

What does it say about a place that claims to be Music City when our #1 radio station plays soft rock? Talk about embarrassing. I'm writing this because it's my job, but I am mortified to tell people of this state of affairs. We're not rednecks, we're ... mediocre. Few things in this world suck more than soft rock stations. People who listen to soft rock are the reason that O'Charley's is still in business, and you can bet most of them have email addresses that end in aol.com. What a sad, pathetic bunch, and they're the now most targeted group for radio advertisers in town because there are apparently so freaking many of them.

As for the country music aspect, folks in Nashville had long thought that WSIX was untouchable. The station was on top of the books for years and locals always tuned in to hear the latest country music and info about the big stars who live in our midst. But now that WSIX has dropped to fifth and the other mainstream country stations couldn't break the top eight, it looks like even Nashville has lost interest in Nashville. Throw in the fact that WSM is climbing the chart with classic country, and you start to wonder if this may not be the final straw in getting Music Row to realize that their current polished, overproduced sound is a dying entity.

Also interesting is that urban contemporary stations occupy the second and third spots in the market. When you combine their total listenership, you have to kind of figure that the most popular music in Nashville is now hip-hop. That says an awful lot in itself about our city. Apparently we're not immune to having schools and malls full of dopey, pop-culture addicted white kids who wish that they were born black, just like most other American big cities.

Like most of the rest of the country, we're part of the dumbing down of American musical culture. You can still tune in to a few eclectic, interesting radio stations in Nashville that exist separately from the shitty corporate radio stations, but if current trends continue, you have to wonder if they'll still exist in five or ten years.

Now, if you need me, I'll be home listening to the new Garrison Starr disc at full blast and avoiding radio altogether.

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JOHN THE REVEALATOR

Out of idle curiosity, I once checked the *All-Music Guide* entry on **Don Walser** and was surprised to find a Bear Family album called **Sings Pure Country** in his discography. When I mentioned this in last month's review of **Dare To Dream**, I misremembered it as **The Archive Series**, but it turns out that I'd have been wrong anyway. Though the Guide is far from 100% reliable, there's nothing inherently unlikely about the German label reissuing Walser's 1991 tape, **Sings Pure Texas**, even less the Archive Series, and though the difference between the titles should have been a warning, the corroborative details of a three star rating and a link to Bear Family's website gave it reasonable verisimilitude. My apologies to anyone who tried to track down this nonexistent CD, though I will take this opportunity to say yet again that should you ever come across a copy of either volume of the **Archive Series**, grab it.

◆ Cornell was pretty nonchalant about it, "there's a lot of information to process with our albums," but, for the record, I lost track when picking out my favorite cuts on **The Cornell Hurd Band: Song Of South Austin**. The vocalist on Herb Steiner's *Nyquil Blues* is, in fact, Blackie White, not Cornell.

◆ After I devoted a fair amount of space last month to the stupidity of proposed amendments to Austin's noise ordinance, the point almost immediately became terminally moot when **Austin City Limits** announced that it's launching an annual open air music festival. While the logic seems a touch shaky—Austin's last big music festival, Aqua Fest, which shared ACL's 'every season must have bigger stars than the one before' philosophy, went bankrupt—the emergence of a such a prominent player ensures that the amendments, which would instantly torpedo ACL's plans, will be quietly forgotten, much to the relief of organizers of smaller events and owners of patio venues over whom the council could have trampled roughshod.

◆ A British reader has a question, and as he sent \$30 with it, I feel he's entitled to an answer. Why do I spell 'Revealer' with an 'a'? Well, at first I spelled as it usually appears, 'Revelator,' but then another reader (as I've discovered over the years, **3CM**'s following may be small, but it's incredibly knowledgeable) told me that on the very first recording, by The Bessemer Sunset Four, the title was given as *John The Revealer*. I rather liked the look of that spelling, so there you go.

◆ Another reader urges me to start a bimonthly 'Predict The Next **No Depression** Cover Story' competition, but while I'm intrigued by the notion, I don't think it's workable. I mean, if I'd started such a deal in April, I'd have had to give out thousands, if not tens of thousands, of prizes when *ND*'s May/June issue came out, because **The Flatlanders** were a no-brainer. So the best I can come up with is that when you read this, apply common sense or summon occult powers and take a stab at who you think will be on the cover of the July/August issue. My guess is **Tift Merritt**.

◆ Oh yes, mention of **The Flatlanders** reminds me that several readers and DJs, who had no problem with my review of **Now Again**, were curious to know how I squared it with a four flower rating, and I have to admit they have a point. I can only say that I was hoping for a five flower album, so four was kind of a compromise. Also, while I've criticized things that Joe Ely and Jimmie Dale Gilmore have done in the past, I find it very hard to drop the hammer on anything that involves Butch Hancock. Though I have no particular need for validation, I did think it was interesting that an album that should have been a shoo-in for #1 in the FAR chart never even got close.

◆ Failure to grasp the concept: according to the Americana Music Association, the headliner at the Third Annual **Fred Eaglesmith** Weekend 'Roots On The River' Festival, June 7th-9th, in Bellows Falls, VT, will be Mark Erelli. According to Charlie Hunter, the organizer and thus a somewhat more reliable source, the star of the show will, amazingly enough, be Eaglesmith, supported by Mary McBride Band, Jon Dee Graham, Robbie Fulks, David Olney, Willie P Bennett, Washboard Hank and Josh Ritter, with no mention of Erelli. I know it's real short notice, but you can get more info at www.flyingunderradar.com.

◆ My contempt for the **Rock & Roll Hall of Fame**, assuaged only slightly by the perennial reliability with which it provides material for mockery and derision, notwithstanding, I urge you to sign Betty Ritter's petition to have **Doug Sahm** inducted. Apart from anything else, this will be an acid test of whether the Eagles-fixated bastards really know or give a shit about rock & roll. You can find the form at www.PetitionOnline.com/dws/petition.html.

◆ From time to time, I think about trying to set up an **American Roots Hall of Fame** just to honor people like Doug, preferably while they're still alive. It would have nothing to do with record sales and there wouldn't be any stinking awards show. Drop me an email if you have any thoughts on this notion.

◆ Exposing the dirty linen the radio world, particularly Clear Channel, would rather went unwashed is something of a speciality of **Salon.com**, whose latest communique concerns the corruption of National Public Radio. Last year, eight NPR stations in major markets were invited to report their weekly playlists to *R&R*'s AAA chart, which means labels now have to take their airplay into account. The way the system works in the commercial world is that independent promoters pay stations an upfront fee to represent them, getting their money back from labels willing to pay \$800-\$3000, depending on market size, to get a record onto a claimed station's playlist, ie pay-to-playola. This costs the industry some \$150 million a year but nobody complains because it shuts out everyone but the majors. The fear is that perennially cash-strapped noncommercial stations, already airing mainstream music, will find it hard to resist payouts of up to six figures, and according to programmers, Michele Clark, an aggressive indie who dominates commercial AAA, is already trying to stake out noncommercial stations. Eric Boehlert's sources seemed divided between those who fear the system will eventually co-opt public radio and those who are already seeing it happen, such as the station staffer who told him, "During fund drives we make a big deal about listeners' active participation and feedback. But it's all a crock of shit because we're going to play whatever Michele Clark wants us to play."

◆ According to *The Tennessean*'s Brad Schmitt, the New York producers of the first **CMT Flameworthy Music Video Awards** show, on June 12th, have decreed that anyone who wants to sit in one of the 200 odd spare seats at Nashville's Gaylord Entertainment Center must be between 20 and 25 and slender. I deduce from this that someone from Bill Bain Productions has actually been to Fan Fair, when the entire city tilts to one side from the assembled tonnage. Interestingly, and almost too ironically, in the same week, the RIAA released figures showing that, despite all that hot, new and young garbage, country's audience actually aged during the last ten years, record buyers over 45 going from 12.2% in 1992 to 23.7% in 2001, while 20-29 year olds bought 6% fewer albums and 15-19 year olds 5% fewer. What's a poor Nashville VP to do?

† JOHN B SPENCER

During the 80s, I reviewed both Spencer's brilliant albums and his hardboiled crime novels. We got to be good friends, sinking many a pint in his West London hangouts, and he played at my going away party when I left England. After including his wonderful **Out With A Bang** (1986) among my all-time favorite albums (see elsewhere), I ran an Internet search to see what he's up to these days and was appalled to find an obituary in *The Guardian* announcing his death, from endocarditis, on March 25th, age 57. With his gravelly voice and pub rock ethos (one of his bands was called The Louts), John was never an exemplary musician but he had an exceptional mind and wrote some amazing songs. As far as I can make out, none of his albums are still in print, which makes me even sadder.

† SHARON SHEELEY

Backstage at a concert, Dion saw Eddie Cochran's fiancée and remarked to him, "Man, she's somethin' else." The teenage Sheeley, who met and started dating Cochran when he cut her *Love Again* as the B side of *Summertime Blues*, took the phrase and made it into one of Cochran's most enduring hits. Injured in the wreck that killed Cochran, she's best known for Ricky Nelson's 1958 hit *Poor Little Fool*, based on her relationship with (married) Don Everly. Originally an album track, it was released as a single because of pressure from DJs, and made Sheeley the youngest woman ever to write a #1 hit song. She also wrote Ritchie Valens' *Hurry Up* and, in partnership with Jackie DeShannon, The Fleetwoods' (*He's*) *The Great Imposter*, Brenda Lee's *Dum-Dum* and Irma Thomas' *Break-A-Way*. Sharon Sheeley died on May 13th, age 62, following an aneurism.

† OSCAR TELLEZ

Known on Europe as the 'Frito Bandito' from his trademark moustaches and among South Texas musicians as Los Dedos Quemados (fiery fingers), Laredo-born bajo sexto player Oscar Tellez performed with the Texas Tornados and Flaco Jimenez' conjunto but mainly in Mingo Saldivar's Tremendos Quatro Espadas. An outstanding player and a gregarious jester who loved sharing conjunto music with the gringos, Oscar Tellez died May 26th, age 56, in a vehicle rollover near Cotulla, just a few days after Randy Garibay's death. "The Lord's got a terrific band up there," says Saldivar, "but this is terrible for us."

† OTIS BLACKWELL

Encouraged by Doc Pomus, Blackwell started writing songs to make extra money and one day in 1956 turned in a batch of six demos that included *Don't Be Cruel*. Released as the B side to Lieber & Stoller's *Hound Dog*, it went on to become the bigger hit, simultaneously #1 on the Pop, Country and R&B charts. Elvis Presley, who stuck close to the style and arrangements of Blackwell's demos, also recorded his *All Shook Up*, *Return To Sender*, *One Broken Heart For Sale* and *Easy Question*. Other major beneficiaries of Blackwell's talent were Jerry Lee Lewis (*Great Balls Of Fire* and *Breathless*), Peggy Lee (*Fever*), Dee Clark (*Just Keep It Up* and *Hey Little Girl*), Gene Vincent (*Lotta Lovin'*) and Jimmy Jones (*Handy Man*). Blackwell's career as a performer in his own right never really took off, though he cut some great sides in the early 50s with a killer combo that included Sam 'The Man' Taylor and Mickey Baker, but through his writing he became one of the defining voices of rock & roll. Famed for spending his royalty checks as they came in—he told one interviewer, "I wrote my songs, I got my money and I boogied"—Otis Blackwell died in Nashville after suffering a heart attack on May 6th, age 70.

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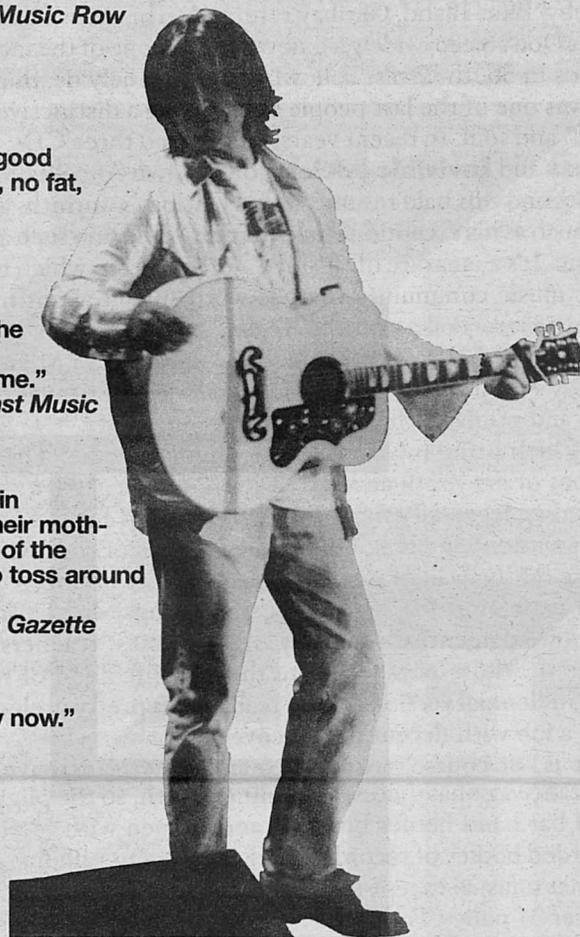
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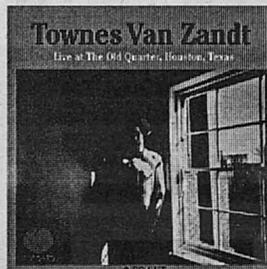
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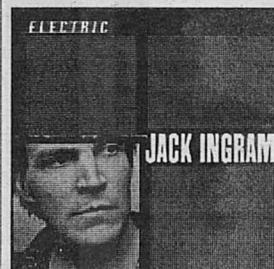
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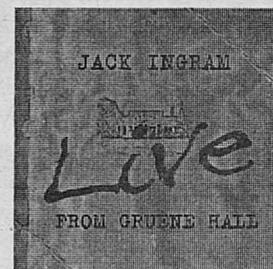
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Any pretence at fairness, objectivity, balance or fact checking is explicitly disavowed. However, every effort will be made to ensure that each issue contains a reference to Faron Young. It's his world. We just live in it.

SHAPESHIFTER

Fortunately for the writers of the one-sheets that are sent out with promos, by the time they get to make an album, most bands and artists have a past. How much of it they're willing to divulge or what spin they put on it, is another matter. For instance, Roger Wallace freely confesses to starting out as a bar bluesman, but I imagine The Derailers would prefer to draw a discreet veil over their early days as a Ted Nugent cover band. However, one phase which few roots/retro/Americana/alt country artists seem embarrassed to acknowledge is punk, a word that crops up persistently in bios. Sometimes it's a badge worn with pride, sometimes it's an almost diffident admission of youthful folly, but quite commonly it's thrown in as being a perfectly normal way station, a natural stage in musical evolution.

◆ Maybe it is. To be honest, I didn't have all that much use for punk first time round, apart from the extraordinary talents, charisma and integrity of Slade The Leveller (Justin Sullivan) and Joolz of New Model Army and the sheer esprit of Eddie & The Hot Rods. Compared to MC5, punk rockers struck me by and large as a bunch of whiney poseurs. Just like the protest folkies at the other end of the spectrum, they acted like their angry songs could bring down the government but couldn't wait to be co-opted by major labels.

◆ However, one could argue that there's an affinity between punk and roots in that they only work while they're marginalized. By the time the mainstream world gets to hear of and embrace punk or roots artists, ie when they get signed to major labels, they're playing a compromised, cartoon version of the music and have usually been cut loose by their original grassroots audience. Success is the deadliest danger—Steve Earle, in his first flush, could have been speaking for every breakout roots or punk (or, come to that, rap) artist when he said, "All I have to write about is riding around in a bus that cost more than most people's homes and who gives a shit?"

◆ Whatever draws onetime punks to roots music, I've heard albums, many albums, which reeked of calculation and superficiality, strongly suggesting that, a la Spinal Tap, some bands which have worn out their welcome in the punk world, or maybe just got tired of it, look around for alternatives and figure roots, honky tonk or alt country shouldn't be too demanding of their minimal talents. One can only hope that they're just passing through on their way to the last resort of failed bands of every genre, Christian Music.

◆ At the same time, I must admit I've also come across a fair number of albums by ex-punks who've taken to roots or hillbilly music as if born to it, such as that by Porter Hall, TN (see Reviews), who got me thinking about this in the first place. Even more remarkably, one occasionally comes across artists who can keep a foot in both camps, most obviously Jon Langford of The Waco Brothers and The Mekons (though the latter always did have a taste for country music), or Diana Quinn, who fronts both the marvellous Honky Tonk Confidential and an all-girl punk band in DC. Oh yes, and Johnny Cash is on a punk label. So there really does seem to be some kind of cosmic connection between punk and roots. Pity it's so unreliable. **JC**

† RANDY GARIBAY

This started out as an editorial on the importance of supporting benefits for musicians unable to work because of ill health or injury, with specific reference to those being held for Randy Garibay this month (which we'll get to in a minute). However, there was always a danger that Randy might not be around for them and on Thursday, May 23rd, he succumbed to lung cancer.

◆ The longevity of 'The Chicano Bluesman,' who celebrated his 62nd birthday last December, can be measured by the fact that his early bands were called The Velvets, The Pharaohs and, the most successful, The Dell-Kings, later Los Blues, which spent a record 280 weeks as the house band at Las Vegas' Sahara Hotel, backing a host of major stars. Equally famed as a guitarist and as a singer, often compared to Bobby 'Blue' Bland, Garibay returned to his native San Antonio in 1974 and formed Cats Don't Sleep, widely acknowledged as one of the most proficient and entertaining bands in South Texas. Following the untimely death of his old friend Doug Sahn, he was one of the last people still putting a distinctive San Antonio twist on blues, R&B and soul. In recent years, he released three CDs, **Barbacoa Blues**, **Chicano Blues** and **Invisible Society**, on his own Angelita Mia label.

◆ Beyond this bald resumé, it was Garibay's warmth, vitality, humor and generosity, as much as his exceptional talents, that made him such a central figure in San Antonio music. It's a measure of the love and respect in which he was held in the city's tight-knit music community that, as word spread about his passing, you could switch from Güero Polkas on the Tejano station KEDA to the Americana show *Third Coast Music Network* on the college station KSYM and hear different examples of Randy's music. KEDA, in fact, abandoned its regular programming to pay honor to him and promote the various planned benefits.

◆ Which bring me back to my original theme. The sad fact is that the musical heroes of my youth and early adulthood are getting on in years and most of them, including legendary figures, are ill-prepared for the normal vicissitudes of old age, even without any long term consequences of rock & roll lifestyles. Someone once wrote on the wall of the original Black Cat Lounge, "It's a pretty useless musician who can't find his wife a decent-paying job." Unfortunately, this left-handed acknowledgment of the army of waitresses, teachers, receptionists, lawyers, you name it, whose paychecks are the very lifeblood of roots music, needs updating. The millennial version should read, "It's a pretty useless musician who can't find his wife a job with decent health coverage."

◆ It is, of course, true that many Americans have inadequate or nonexistent insurance against illness, accident or death, so the plight of musicians, not just your local bar band heroes but men and women with international reputations, highly regarded bodies of recorded work and bulging albums of press clippings, would not be that unusual except that their lack of access to even the most basic coverage is a matter of policy. For decades, every branch of the music industry has resisted all attempts to introduce any system that would protect the actual musicmakers, the RIAA being notably aggressive in its stance. Of course, as the industry detests handing over money owed to healthy, active musicians, it's only to be expected that they'd really hate the idea of paying out to those who are too old or sick to work.

◆ It has to be said that the failure of most musicians, especially in Texas, to join the American Federation of Musicians, plays into the industry's hands. Though there a few locals with enough clout to oblige those who hire their members to contribute to health plans, for the most part the AFM can only envy the strength of their counterparts in Canada and Europe, where union membership and collective bargaining are the norm.

◆ The upshot is that for most musicians, unless they married wisely, the closest thing they have to medical benefits is benefits, the willingness of other musicians to rally round and hold fundraising concerts. As I've said before, these are the only kind of benefits of which I really approve. All too often, the musicians performing at benefit s are the *only* people who are not being paid, but when they turn out for a sick or injured colleague, they're not just looking after their own, they're taking out some karmic insurance, for the day that may, most likely will, come when they must rely on the same generosity. It's a pretty stupid and shortsighted musician who refuses to participate.

◆ During June, there will be benefits for Randy Garibay in both Austin, featuring Sisters Morales, Joe King Carrasco, Tary Owens & Maryann Price, Ernie Garibay & Cats Don't Sleep, West Side Horns and more, at Jovita's on Sunday 2nd (4-9pm), and in San Antonio, at Alzafar Shrine Center, 901 N Loop 1604 West (between Blanco & 281), on Friday 14th (7pm-midnight). The lineup's still being worked on but includes Ray Liberto, Sauze Gonzalez & the West Side Horns and, if health allows, Freddy Fender. The fact that Randy is no longer with us doesn't change the fact that Virginia, his widow, needs your help to pay medical and other expenses.

◆ The American Federation of Musicians would like you to support the Universal Health Care Plan sponsored by Congressman John Conyers (D-MI), which the AMF backs because it would solve the catastrophic problems faced by people like Randy & Virginia Garibay. You can find details at www.house.gov/conyers. **JC**



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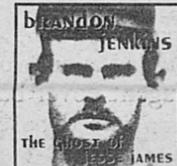


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- 1st - Johnny Bond • 1915 • Enville, OK
 - Shelly Lee Alley † 1964
- 2nd - Carl Butler • 1927 • Knoxville, TN
- 3rd - Memphis Minnie • 1897 • Igiers, LA
 - Joe Bonsall • 1921 • Lake Arthur, LA
 - Boots Randolph • 1927 • Paducah, KY
 - Deke Dickerson • 1968 • St Louis, MO
- 4th - Texas Ruby • 1908 • Wise Co, TX
 - Freddy Fender • 1936 • San Benito, TX
 - Rabon Delmore † 1952
- 5th - Narciso Martinez † 1992.
- 6th - Gary US Bonds
 - 1939 • Jacksonville, FL
 - Joe Stampley • 1943 • Springhill, LA
 - Clarence White • 1944 • Lewiston, ME
 - Steve Riley • 1969 • Mamou, LA
 - Adolph Hofner † 2000
 - Smokey Montgomery † 2001
- 7th - Wynn Stewart • 1934 • Morrisville, MO
- 8th - Adolph Hofner • 1916 • Moulton, TX
 - Alton Delmore † 1964
- 9th - Les Paul • 1915 • Waukesha, WI
 - Jackie Wilson • 1934 • Detroit, MI
 - Slaid Cleaves • 1964 • Washington, DC
- 10th Howlin' Wolf • 1910 • West Point, MS
- 11th John Inmon • 1949 • San Antonio, TX
 - Bruce Robison • 1966 • Houston, TX
- 12th Charlie Feathers
 - 1932 • Holly Springs, MS
 - Junior Brown
 - 1952 • Cottonwood, AZ
 - JE Mainer † 1971
 - Angelais Lejeune † 1974
 - Johnny Bond † 1978
- 13th Clyde McPhatter † 1972
- 14th Wynonie Harris † 1969
- 15th Tex Owens • 1892 • Kileen, TX
 - Leon Payne • 1917 • Alba, TX
 - Waylon Jennings
 - 1937 • Littlefield, TX
 - Art Pepper † 1982
- 16th Iain Matthews
 - 1946 • Scunthorpe, UK
 - Bob Nolan † 1980
- 17th Red Foley • 1910 • Blue Lick, KY
 - Henry Zimmerle
 - 1940 • San Antonio, TX
 - Dewey Balfa † 1992

- 18th Marti Brom • 1961 • St Louis, MO
- 20th T Texas Tyler • 1916 • Mena, AR
 - Brian Wilson • 1942 • Hawthorne, CA
 - Ira Louvin † 1965
 - Louise Massey † 1983
 - Boudleaux Bryant † 1987
- 21st Clifford Scott
 - 1928 • San Antonio, TX
 - Paulino Bernal
 - 1939 • Raymondville, TX
- 22nd Kris Kristofferson
 - 1936 • Brownsville, TX
 - Jesse Ed Davis † 1988
- 23rd Zeb Turner • 1915 • Lynchburg, VA
 - Elton Britt † 1972
 - Wade Fruge † 1992
- 24th Lester Williams
 - 1920 • Groveton, TX
- 25th Clifton Chenier
 - 1925 • Opelousas, LA
 - Eddie Floyd • 1935 • Montgomery, AL
 - Link Davis Jr • 1947 • Port Arthur, TX
 - Jody Nix • 1952 • Big Spring, TX
- 26th Big Bill Broonzy • 1893 • Scott, MS
 - Chris Isaak • 1956 • Stockton, CA
- 27th Nathan Abshire • 1913 • Gueydan, LA
 - Clay Blaker • 1950 • Houston, TX
- 28th Lester Flatt • 1914 • Overton Co, TN
 - Groovy Joe Poovey • 1938 • Dallas, TX
 - Lloyd Maines • 1951 • Lubbock, TX
- 29th Johnny Ace • 1929 • Memphis, TN
 - Bill Kirchen • 1948 • Bridgeport, CT
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