

KERRVILLE

No. 24

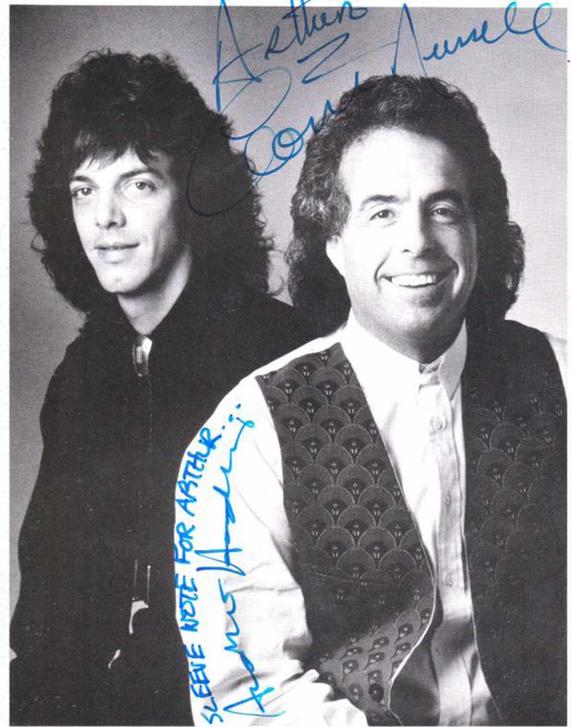
KRONIKLE

10th. Year

Bluegrass Reviews - Claire Lynch/"Legacy - A Tribute to the First Generation of Bluegrass"/Sammy Shelor/Doyle Lawson & Quicksilver/Lautie Lewis/



Marathon Music, Austin, Texas.



Round Tower Music, Dublin & London

Patzicia Hazdin

Tom Russell/

Andy Hazdin

Kwik Kuts

A Kerrverts Festival 50. 

Richard Shindell/Butch Hancock/Frank Tedesso/Niamh Parsons & The Loose Connections/Dougie MacLean/Bill Ward/Tom Pacheco/Jane Siberry/Fred Eaglesmith/Brooks Williams/Bob Franke/Grant McLennan/Rick Lee/Mary Melena/"The Inner Flame - A Rainier Ptacek Tribute"/Michael Martin Muzphey/"The Music of Laura Nyro - Time & Love"/Phil Ochs/John Forster/David Olney/Steve Earle & The Supersuckers/Townes Van Zandt/Paul Brandt/Joan Baez/The Good Sons/Jon Dee Graham/"Big League Babe - The Christine Lavin Tribute Album Vol. 1"/Patty LaZkin/"Heritage - New Interpretations of American Roots"/"One Step Up/Two Steps Back - The Songs of Bruce Springsteen"/Boxcars [Christine Albert/Chris Gage]/Blue Rodeo/David Wilcox/Janis Ian/Clyff Eberhardt/Eliza Gilkyson/"Manuel's Music Festival"/The Original Harmony Ridge Creek Dippers/Sam Baardman/Com Chapin & John McCutcheon/The Burns Sisters/The Bobs/Suzzy Roche/Buddy Miller/Dave Mallett/Bob Miller/Ani DiFranco/Denice Franke/Kate MacLeod/

Kerrville-kompacts, kassettes & other koincidences.

The small circular sticker attached to the cellophane outer wrapper of Richard Shindell's "Reunion Hill" [Shanachie] proclaims, "If there's a contemporary writer who can match Shindell's combination of eloquence, passion and imagination, I haven't come across him or her." Fact is, it precisely pinpoints the truth. "Sparrow Point" and "Blue Divide" were each superbly accomplished projects, yet with "Reunion Hill" Richard has topped even those fine predecessors. While the opener "The Next Best Western" is thematically a road song about driving through the night, it is also a positive prayer, an exaltation for deliverance from the weary highway to the safety and comfort of a Best Western bed. Within the structure of the title track, Shindell entwines the lyric - a tale about war and loss - around a traditional sounding Irish air. The result is sheer perfection. Prevention is preferable to the cure, is the message of "Money for Floods," while "May" relates the tale of a fugitive, who has been betrayed. On the run, he telephones home to check how his wife and family are coping. What's neat about the latter lyric is that the fugitive is not American, although Shindell hints that the runner is considering fleeing to that country. Bravely unconventional, on a couple of cuts the narrator is female. Shindell is certainly alternative in his approach to writing and delivery. Oh yes, and I forgot to mention three fine covers, the last of which is unlisted on the liner. First, there's Jesse Colin Young's late sixties standard "Darkness, Darkness," while the album closes with Townes' "I'll Be Here in the Morning." It is followed rather fittingly, after a few seconds silence, by Merle Haggard's "Sing Me Back Home." Available in your local record store via Koch Distribution.

1997 - what a year. Butch Hancock completes his first year as a Terlingua, Texas resident, reactivates his Rainlight label and releases "You Coulda Walked Around the World," and becomes a father for the first time. The tangible result of all these enriching occurrences is "You Coulda Walked Around the World" - proof, if it indeed it were needed, that the Terlingua years are gonna be classic as far as Butch's music is concerned. I guess it all comes down to the experiencing of fresh horizons and enjoying a new perspective. Throw in the reappearance of Little Johnny Fader [recording engineer], pretty intricate thematic front liner artwork by Hancock and life feels utterly complete and so darned fine holdin' this new CD. Plus, there's thirteen new cuts simply recorded and mainly employing Hancock's voice and acoustic guitar. So here's just a few thoughts about those tracks....."Chase" the lyrically repetitious and amusing opener, balances well with the Terlingua inspired tunes like "Long Sunsets" and "Barefoot Prints".....and there are no superlatives existing which can describe the crystal clear panorama of the title cut. So here's to these and all the future Terlingua tunes.....as for the words to "Roll Around," well that's surely Butch's life theme. And long may he continue to delights us all. Available in the UK via Topic/Direct Distribution, 50 Stroud Green Road, London N4 3EF.

Frank Tedesso rolls his lyrics around his mouth before he delivers them. I guess you'd say that his style of delivery is, different. Unique, in fact. It results in the unexpected

pronunciation of certain words. Tedesso is an alumnus of New York's Fast Folk Songwriting School. "Songs from Einstein's Violin" feature his voice and guitar. Nothing more. Produced by the legendary Will Ackerman for his new label, Imaginary Road, thirteen Tedesso compositions are featured. Using words to create impressionistic portraits, with one image barely complete Frank swiftly and deftly moves on to the next. To say that Tedesso magically weaves words, "in spades," is an understatement. "Margaret" and her baby girl have been abandoned by Vincent - "And all he leaves behind is the blue in the baby's eyes." Bittersweet doesn't even begin to describe that situation, and what's more, it's only the opening cut. In "Stumpy's Last Dance" the wheelchair bound narrator dreams of his getting back his legs and escaping his personal prison. In the dimming glow of life, Lyndon Baines Johnson reflects on the time when he led the world's most powerful nation, while the perfectly placed closer "Vaudeville," is a happy/sad piece about ancestry, time and memory. And also, making that conscious choice to valiantly survive this life. The only sadness - it has taken me a year to catch up with this rather special recording event. Try CDX, The Olde Coach House, Windsor Crescent, Radyr, S. Glamorgan CF4 8AE or E-Mail sales@cdx.co.uk

The liner to Niamh Parsons & The Loose Connections "Loosen Up" [Green Linnet] recommends, file under Celtic/Contemporary. The former accurately pins the genre mix, but hardly scratches the surface as far as the contents of this disc are concerned. And it's not that this aggregation has come up with anything stylistically original within the genres covered, it's quite simply the way this marriage constitutes one natural whole. Everything fits. "Loosen Up" and the Greentrax predecessor "Loose Connections," are satellite projects for Arcady vocalist Parsons. Her bassist husband, Dee Moore, penned most of the material and also arranged and produced this set. "Seeing Things" and the breathtaking speed of the jazzy "Closer to You" are outstanding, while Tom Waits "The Briar and the Rose" is transformed into a traditional sounding Celtic anthem. "Loosen Up" equates to one superb keeper. Available in the UK via Topic/Direct Distribution.

Over a decade ago, on a Texas Hill Country ranch, a couple of local girls sang "Caledonia" [ED NOTE. They were, Denice Franke and Mickie Merkens. Occasionally, they were supported by Hal Ketchum and Brian Wood]. It was a chilling [and very personal] introduction to the work of one of the finest songwriters, from my homeland, ever to tread this spinning orb. Time has confirmed that from the outset there has been a consistently solid familiarity about MacLean's work, which deftly disguises the eye of an acute observer. On Dougie MacLean's latest album "Riolf" [Dunkeld Records], the beguilingly simple "Scythe Song" is a testament to his facility with words as it extends the title theme to focus upon the time it takes to learn the skills of life. "Feel So Near" featuring the voice of Kathy Mattea and taken from last year's BBC documentary "Songroads" is included, as is music commissioned for the BBC TV series "A Mugs Game." Musically, a number of the tracks have the sound and feel of traditional Scottish airs and in the process, they express a haunting native spirituality. Pronounced "reef," "Riolf" is probably the finest of MacLean's works to date. Available in the UK via Topic/Direct Distribution.

Continued on page 8.

Tom Russell

The interview with Tom Russell took place at The Guild Hall, Gloucester on the evening of 2nd April 1992. That tour proved to be the last that Tom would undertake with a full band. During the late autumn of that year, Tom returned to the UK for the first of what has proved to be a regular and ongoing series of duo tours accompanied by guitarist, Andy Hardin. The Round Tower label had just released their first Tom Russell album, the compilation **"Beyond St. Olav's Gate [1979-1992]."** Stateside, late the previous year, Philo had issued Tom's latest solo album **"Hurricane Season."** Thanks to all the folks at Round Tower for helping to set up the interview.

Was it a struggle to put together the track list for the "Beyond St. Olav's Gate" compilation.

No, I think I did it in about ten minutes. I knew the ones that were obvious for people. I just looked at the albums quickly and the ones that people seemed to like the best, and or, I liked the best. Or that somebody had covered. Everybody seemed to like "U.S. Steel," "Road to Bayamon"....."Blue Wing" was a hit in Canada. "Gallo del Cielo" has been a song I've always done and people dig. "Veteran's Day," Johnny Cash did. "Walkin' on the Moon" has probably been my most commercial song. "Outbound Plane" was recorded by Suzy Bogguss and co-written with Nanci Griffith, so that was kind of an obvious choice. It went to No. 9 on the Country Charts actually. Then I wanted three songs, kind of representative of my later period.....the more roots rock numbers, off the new album. The record company liked "Beyond the Blues," and the other two are "Black Pearl" and "Haley's Comet." It's funny that all three are accordion rock songs. The album kind of moves through periods and ends up rocky. Then I wanted two unreleased tracks, so I happened to have one of "The Dance" that I re-mixed and I went in an acoustic studio and cut "The Greatest Show on Earth."



Tom Russell [right] & Andy Hardin: Breedon Bar, Birmingham 20/09/93

Photo: Kerrville Kronikle Katalogue

Is it still the same vocals on "The Dance." [ED. NOTE. The song previously appeared on Tom's 1984 cassette only release "As the Crow Flies"].

I redid my vocal.

Who came up with the idea for a compilation.

It's always been in the back of my mind, because the label kept asking, "Well which album will we start with? Which one shall we put out?" It's always been the problem with the UK.....like, how shall we start. In the end, I said "How about a compilation?" and they lit up....."Oh yeah, that's obvious. Let's do that." I think it's probably the best idea.

Where were the liner photographs taken for "Beyond St. Olav's Gate."

This is taken on top of the drummer's roof [ED. NOTE. Mike Warner] in Brooklyn. On Third Avenue which is kind of a Mafia area.

As far as releasing your albums in the UK, was Round Tower the only label in the frame.

They wanted to act immediately and I wanted to get over here as part of this tour. I think they did a really good job getting the product out. Everybody else was talking about it, but nobody was doing anything.

Where did you meet Round Tower label boss, Clive Hudson.

I met him at the Bitter End in New York when he was on the road with Tom Pacheco.

I'd like to talk about some of the songs on "Hurricane Season," which co-incidentally are also on the compilation. Recently you seem to have been spreading your wings in terms of collaborating with other songwriters. How did you meet Dave Alvin and come to write "Haley's Comet."

I met him through Katy Moffatt. I had wanted to meet him for a while. I was interested in what he was doing. I think his songwriting has gotten really good, especially on **"Blue Boulevard."** I met him and he checked me out, and then he listened to my stuff. He really liked **"Poor Man's Dream."** I said, "Let's try to write one." I told him about this lyrical idea I had for Bill Haley. We wrote the rest of it in a New York hotel room. He called up a friend of his, who was a journalist, who had written a book on Bill Haley to fill in some of the details.

What about the Peter Case and Bob Neuwirth connection.

Peter and I were writing the song "Beyond the Blues," in Peter's house, in Santa Monica one day and Neuwirth came in and said we should "Go watch the sunset on the beach." He threw in a few lines and we included him in the credits for the song. The same song is on Peter Case's latest album.

What about the song "Chocolate Cigarettes" on the "Hurricane Season" album.

I've written a lot of new stuff with Sylvia Tyson in the last two years. I co-produced her next album **"Gypsy Cadillac."** There's five of our co-writes on there and a vocal duet "Remain A Child." I had the lyrics to "Chocolate Cigarettes" and she wrote the music. The lyrics were just sitting there and I didn't like the music I had written, and she's came up

with.....she's, both, a real strong lyricist and writer of music. We've got about ten songs finished.

Do you find producing the records of other artists more difficult than say, producing yourself.

No, because I would only do it with somebody who I thought had ten or twelve really great songs. And I knew them. The bottom line is getting the songs down with a great performance and flushing it out a little....that's my approach. I don't find it that difficult. It's kind of a *nuts and bolts* job, but there's not that many people I'd want to work with. There's not that many songwriters out there.

Are you still writing songs with Ian Tyson.

Yeah. I saw him about six months ago and we did a television show in Calgary. We sang two duets on my cowboy record "**Cowboy Real**," and he said he wanted to get together and write some more stuff. He's thinking about doing an acoustic thing. He listened to my album and thought "*Well, maybe you can do it this way.*"

I noticed on his latest album "I Stood Amazed" that there were none of your co-writes.

We didn't have anything for that album. I haven't been able to get together with him over the last year actually. He's been very successful in Western Canada and I've been touring a lot in the other direction.

Is there a plan to bring "Cowboy Real" out over here.

It's coming out on Munich Records. They have it for the whole of Europe. I sold it to Sonet and Stony Plain and they sold it to Rounder, and Munich Records for Europe. I was hoping to have some here, but I haven't seen any copies yet.

Since I last spoke to you, you won the Canadian equivalent of a Grammy for "Navajo Rug." Was it a surprise to win the award.

No. The song got a tremendous amount of airplay. I was happy that we got that. I mean, it was an honour. Ian, to me, is a top-level songwriter.....one of my influences. The song has been covered by quite a few people. It helped me a bit exposure-wise. I get a lot of airplay in Canada.

Who is Dan Zanes. [ED. NOTE. The song "Under the Gun" on "Poor Man's Dream" was co-written by Tom and Dan].

He was the lead singer of the Del Fuegos. A rock n' roll band. They had a hit record about five years ago. He's from Boston.

Do you think you'll ever collaborate with Carl Brouse again.

[Laughs]. Carl lives up in New Hampshire. He's a honky tonker. He's got a honky tonk band. We don't cross paths. A dangerous guy. I don't drink as much as I used to [Laughs]. I try to stay away from bad influences. Richie Bull. Carl Brouse.

You said earlier that you would only work with songwriters who penned quality material. Are there any songwriters out there that you'd like to work with.
Bob Dylan. Tom Waits. Leonard Cohen [Laughs].

Bruce Springsteen.

Yeah. That's nice. I like Lucinda Williams and I've tried to write with her, but we haven't had the time. I think she's a great songwriter. I've got my hands full really. I don't have that much time.....I mean, Katy and I, whenever we get together seem to be real prolific. We've written twenty five songs. I've just produced Katy's new acoustic record. I'm really happy with that. Round Tower wants to put that out. We've got seven or eight co-writes on there. Rounder will put it out in the States. It's great....I think it's the best thing she's done. I really don't have to look for co-writers. I can write with Sylvia and Ian and Katy and Dave and Peter. Steve Young and I have one now, that's going real good. "Angel of Lyon." We do it in the show. That's a good one.

When you're in New York are you involved much with the Fast Folk organisation.

I just did a show with them at the Bottom Line. I don't feel.....I have a begrudging kinship with the idea of co-operatives. I'm not a social guy. I never felt at ease with those people. Whenever I've brought shows to them, like Steve Young and Ian, they've felt really frightened by actual real songwriters. They should be kneeling at the feet of people like Ian Tyson. I like them.....they're nice people, but they're not top level songwriters. You don't accomplish anything with that approach. You don't write songs co-operatively. Their goals are very well intentioned, but I don't think it has produced a great songwriter.

When you cut "Hurricane Season" you used a different studio in Norway. For years it had been Bel Studios, and now you've moved to Athletic Sound. Was there a reason for that.

I got a good rate.....we spent a tremendous amount of money on "**Poor Man's Dream.**" It was far too much money. We made "**Hurricane Season**" for \$12,000 and that is about what we should spend with this band, because we already know the songs from the road. We went in and did it, as opposed to spending \$50,000 for "**Poor Man's Dream.**" That was the only reason. It was done quickly and cheaper. I don't know if I'll record there again. I cut "**Cowboy Real**" in Brooklyn. Just up the street.

At Hank Bones Studio.

Yeah. At Bones Tones. He's a bass player. You know that Andy's got a Hawaiian band called The Haoles. White Boys.

When did the current drummer, Mike Warner, join the band.

Two years ago, I guess. Almost two years in January. Charlie Caldarola really didn't want to travel anymore. He plays in a lot of New York based bands. About six or seven bands. He likes that. Travelling was pretty tough for him.

How about appearing on "Austin City Limits."

I wish I could. I don't really know whether I'm popular enough yet in the States to do that show. I'm close, but I don't think I have the name yet to headline that show.

What about appearing on the Nashville Network.

I'm close there. We finally have a publicist. Bonnie Raitt's publicist. Rounder arranged it and we finally got in **ROLLING STONE** a couple of month's ago. She also pitched us to David Letterman, so we're close.

When I look at song titles of yours like "Jack Johnson," "The Evangeline Hotel" and "A Dollar's Worth of Gasoline," I get the feeling that you are an avaricious reader of books. Is that the case.

No. "The Evangeline Hotel" was where I met one of my last girlfriends. That was pretty much, a real life thing. She lived in this residence for women in Gramercy Park. "Jack Johnson" was just spurred by knowing a bit about him and hearing an *off the wall* quote from Leadbelly about the captain of the Titanic telling Jack Johnson they weren't hauling coal, so he couldn't get on board as a first class passenger. That's what spurred that. I may have read it or heard somebody sing a snatch of a Leadbelly song called "The Titanic." "A Dollar's Worth of Gasoline" came from reading in a newspaper about that Happy Lands Social Club fire. And watching politicians leap on the bandwagon like they always do, to get something out of it.

Looking back on the last six years, since we talked at Kerrville, do you think this has been the most prolific period of your life.

Probably. I'm taking it more seriously.....I've only considered myself to be a professional songwriter during the last ten years. It's just that now, with all these recordings coming out, it looks that way. I guess I am more prolific. I've always had lots of songs.

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Tom Russell & Andy Hardin

The interview with Tom Russell took place at the Casa Paco Restaurant, in the Fletchers Walk Shopping Centre, Birmingham on 15th November 1995. Tom played a gig in the Basement Bar of Birmingham Town Hall later that evening, accompanied [as always] by Andy Hardin. During the following year, the Town Hall [modelled on the Roman temple of Castor and Pollux and originally opened to the public in 1834] was closed for refurbishing. It is planned that the Hall will reopen during 2001. Thanks to all the folks at Round Tower Records for helping set up the interview. [ED. NOTE. All the replies set out in this interview are Tom's, except where fronted by [Andy]].

The last time we spoke was in 1992. The first thing I wanted to talk about was the Barrence Whitfield albums. Are there liable to be any more.

I doubt it. Even the second one was a bit much. The first one did very well in the States. We toured with Barrence as a trio and that was sort of unique. It sold quite well. The second one was icing on the cake, but I think I'd used up the premise a bit. Then Barrence went off and recorded his own rock n' roll record and we started working on "The Rose of San Joaquin." I think we took that as far as it would go.

Did you do extensive tours in the States with Barrence.

No. Just little tours here and there. We did the U.S. in spots. We did Italy once and a few in England. You know, it was sort of an out of the ordinary combination. It worked for a while. But basically, I felt I had to go ahead on my own.....then I got involved with "Tulare Dust." Then I realised that I'd better do a Tom Russell solo record.

Who picked the songs for the albums you did with Barrence.

Mainly myself. At first he wanted to do a straight country record, and we started on that routine. He wasn't quite.....we couldn't float him really as a straight country singer doing George Jones songs. He got more comfortable when we started adding weirder stuff. Like, Bob Dylan. Richard Thompson. When there was interplay between me and Barrence, that seemed to work. Then he loosened up and got comfortable.

The songs you cut seemed to be a curious mixture. One the one hand you had Jimmy Driftwood and Jimmie Rodgers and.....

He picked some of the.....like the Jimmy Driftwood one. He would make me tapes of stuff he liked, and I would pick something out, and then I would recommend something. Then I would always try to throw in a few of mine and create that kind of mix.

But there's a fairly eclectic mix when you cover Jimmy Driftwood, and then Bob Dylan and Lucinda Williams.

That's why we called them, "Hillbilly Voodoo" and "Cowboy Mambo".....it was supposed to be like a gumbo. Can Barrence Whitfield who is an R&B singer stretch it out and sing country and rock and blues and jazz ? And it worked I think.

Going back to that same time period, is there likely to be a "Cowboy Real II."

I would like to. I mean, I have enough songs. That's just not a real career move to do right now. Not that I'm going to make any big career moves [Laughs]. What I'd really like to do is have either a double album or one album that had some of the best of "Cowboy Real" on it and eight or nine more songs.....like "The Banks of the Musselshell." Some of the new ones I wrote with Tyson. Even "The Sky Above, the Mud Below" would fit on there. So it all would be on one record. On Hightone, maybe, in the States. I'd like to do that.

One of the things I noticed about your new album, "The Rose of the San Joaquin" is that you and Tyson are collaborating again.

When I figured out the idea of a concept record based around "The Rose of the San Joaquin" I threw that at him and we worked from that angle. "Heartaches Are Stealin' (Come Sundown)" we'd written before. It's sort of a follow up to "Cowboy Pride," a song about my brother being involved with two women.....that sort of thing. I think the new record has a modern cowboy element to it.

Half of "Box of Visions" was cut in New York and half in California. There seems to have been a transition there, because most of your subsequent recordings have been made in California. Is there a reason for that.

Sort of a return to where I came from. I really liked working with Dave Alvin on the "Tulare Dust" album. I really liked his album "King of California." When I figured out I wanted to do a thematic album, about the San Joaquin Valley, I thought Greg Leisz and Dave Alvin were the obvious choice of people to work with.

You had worked with Dusty Wakeman on "Box of Visions."

Some people though that record was a little over produced. I don't know. It was not a country record. This new one is more in that roots rock, country vein.....which, if people put me in a bag, it's probably there.

"Coney Island Moon" was on "Box of Visions" and is, I think, the first song written by you and Andy that you've recorded. Have you written any other songs together.

No. Not really. He has a.....I don't know if he told you, but his new record is called "Coney Island Moon." It's guitar instrumentals and is coming out in a couple of month's time. The only two we've written is "Coney Island Moon" and "Northern Towns" with Fats Kaplan. The latter tune is on one of the versions of "Poor Man's Dream." [ED. NOTE. It's included on the version released in the UK by Round Tower].

Who came up with the idea for the "Tulare Dust" tribute album.

Probably me. When Dave was recording "King of California" I think I said "Well, it would be a great idea to for somebody to do the dustbowl songs of Merle Haggard." Dave agreed, because he was getting that vibe on that record. Then we began to develop the idea together about a year and a half, two years ago.

When you started working on the idea, were you aware that there was also a Merle Haggard tribute album being recorded in Nashville.

No. When we found out about it, we were wondering whether we should stop. I talked to the producer Bruce Bromberg, and he said "No. They don't seem to conflict." Of course he wasn't aware that somewhere down the line, this record would *kick ass* so much. The critics loved it and it sold fairly well, because it was such a heartfelt thing. Nobody was doing it for the money. I think that won out against the more plastic one, really. I really enjoyed doing it though. Then we got to play with Merle in March, this year, at the Fillmore West in San Francisco. It featured Iris, Billy Joe Shaver, Peter Case, Dave Alvin and myself and a couple of other people. We got to meet Haggard and sing with him. It was a "Tulare Dust" show and Iris has since been working with him quite a bit. Supposedly, he's going to produce her next record. So we'll see.

Was there just one "Tulare Dust" show.

Yeah, it was just a one off.

Who approached the artists featured on the tribute album.

Both of us. I mean, Dave met Dwight Yoakam in a clothing store and mentioned it to him. I called up Iris at the last minute. Dave knew John Doe. I talked to Billy Joe Shaver's people. Just things like that, and it kind of worked magically.

Once you had firmed up the idea, how long did it take to record.

About four or five months. Some people recorded their contribution on their own. Some at home. Marshall Crenshaw recorded his track at his house [ED. NOTE. In Woodstock]. They sent in their tracks. Robert Earl Keen sent in a real polished, finished track. Other people we recorded with. We produced the Billy Joe Shaver track in

Nashville with his band. I was there. We produced Katy, and Dave and Rosie's track, and my track, all about the same time. It was coming from a lot of different angles.

Were the contributing artists allowed to pick the song they recorded.

Mostly. Yeah. We just didn't want them to be hits, or, we didn't want anything too obvious. We wanted everybody to pick a song that they really liked. And a song that wasn't on the other album, which mostly we were successful with, except for "Silver Wings" which appeared on both records.

Did any of your artists want to record the same song.

No. We were pretty lucky there. That was pretty amazing.

Have you got any other concept recordings in mind for the future, apart from the cowboy album.

I have one in the back of head, for a concept record for me, but it's down the line. I wouldn't be able to talk about it that much. I'm sort of "concepted" out right now. I think the tribute thing has been overdone too. We did a particularly good one. It turns out that it's a record, and of itself it's a listenable record. It's not all concept and no record. It not like, Sting doing Leonard Cohen or something, just for the sake of the concept. I think it worked. I'm not planning much more along those lines though.

When we come to "The Rose of the San Joaquin," the main thing I spotted is that someone else has produced the recording. That must be a first.

Probably. Andy and I still had a lot of input into it. I picked the concept, but I wanted Dave and Greg because I liked "King of California".....his record, so much. I wanted them to more, or less, take over how it was produced musically. I just wanted to be the artist. I worked with Dave a lot on the songs. Actual content of the songs, and what songs made the record. He made a lot of those decisions that I would normally make.

And Greg has worked with Dave for a while.

Yeah. He's also been in k. d. lang's band and he's worked with Matthew Sweet. Who else has he worked with ?

[Andy] He has worked with Joni Mitchell, Rosie Flores.

My first recollection of Greg was as a member of the Funky Kings, who had a 1976 album on the Arista label. That band also featured Jules Shear and Jack Tempchin. What's also interesting, is that Katy sang backing on one track.

Really.

The "San Joaquin" album opens and closes with the Mexican song "Volver, Volver." Did you use an old recording.

No. But it's made to sound that way. Dave took an old forty five out on to the dust of the street in East L.A. and stepped on it. That's actually Chris Gaffney.....he does all the vocal parts at the end and all the accordion. Andy plays the guitar. The Mexican thing was sort of supposed to be about a guy who comes in, like I said in the liner notes....."A guy walks into a bar in the San Joaquin Valley, puts a quarter in the juke box, plays "Volver, Volver" and then he thinks about

the Rose of the San Joaquin".....and bam it goes into the record. Which is loosely a concept about this guy out on the road trying to make it back by "Tramps and Hawkers," and then it ends with a reprise of "Volver, Volver."

"San Joaquin" turns up regularly in the lyrics of the songs.

I think it was meant to be a concept record about the Valley and about the guy out on the road, with lots of exceptions. "The Gardens" takes place in L.A. That's the urban song.

Speaking about "The Gardens," after the opening lines, I took it to be another song about boxing. Initially, I also thought it was Madison Square Gardens.

No, it's a place called Hawaiian Gardens in L.A. where Chris Gaffney grew up. Gaffney wrote that song. He recorded my song "Eyes of Roberto Duran" and I recorded "The Gardens." Dave recommended it, as he thought the album needed some grit. A city song. It's a song about gangs and drive-by shootings. Hawaiian Gardens is a downbeat section of L.A.

The song "What Do You Want." Is the '46 Martin yours.

Yeah, I still have that. It got shot up down in Puerto Rico. A D-18 Martin. I don't take it out much these days, because it's too beat up. We take these Japanese guitars out on the road. It was just a humorous song. Peter Case had a chorus and then I wrote the verses.

How did you meet him.

At a folk festival in Winnipeg about seven years ago. He had just broken up with Victoria Williams. He knew Bob Neuwirth, so we had that mutual friend. We just got together there, and wrote our first song in Winnipeg. We've written about six or seven I think. So far, I've cut "A Little Wind," "What Do You Want?" and "Beyond the Blues." We're going to be playing with him and Dave Alvin in Italy next month. I'm also playing with Dave in London on 29th and 30th of this month.

In recent years you seem to have collaborated with a lot of writers. Many of them being West Coast based. Is there a particular reason for that.

I seem to get along with them the best you know. I don't really identify.....we live in New York, but I don't really identify with those New England based songwriters. Some people call them modern, Elizabethan poets.....I seem to identify and get along more with the Dave Alvin's and Katy Moffatt's.....and Peter Case. That sort of rougher West Coast thing, that I originally came out of. And I like Lucinda Williams stuff a lot. I find myself drawn back there more, these days. I write with more people there. I did write one with Pat Alger in Nashville, for this record.

In terms of collaborating on songs, who does the words and who does the music. Or is it a joint affair.

It's pretty joint. Somebody will have an idea for a hook, or a story, or I'll have a lyric. It's mostly joint. All of these people are pretty strong on both aspects of writing.

You just mentioned Pat Alger. Have you written many songs with him.

No, that was the first time. I wanted a lot of different stuff on the record. I wanted to write with a few people in Nashville. People like, Fred Koeller and Pat Alger. I wanted something.....there's some rough songs on the record. I wanted a nice simple love song about the guy wanting to go back home to his girlfriend, once he's been out on the road too long. I thought Alger would be a good guy, because he's a very melodic songwriter. Very good with hooks. So I just took a shot at it and it came out pretty good.

Was it ten years ago that you first stumbled across him.

I met him at the same time I met Katy actually. Which was at Kerrville in '86. When we were all three judges at the New Folk contest. You know all the history of that.

So that panel of judges has been a pretty productive unit.

Well, what goes around comes around.

I'm a long time Jim Ringer and Mary McCaslin fan. The closing song on "The Rose of the San Joaquin" is Jim's "Tramps and Hawkers." Were you aware of his recordings.

Oh yeah, I've got all of them. I was a big fan. I just got the Folk Legacy album and I already had the Rounder stuff. I saw him several times in California when they were performing together. He was pretty much a.....he drank a lot of Jack Daniels. Let's put it that way. We've since seen Mary quite a bit in Santa Cruz. She's making sort of a comeback. I liked what they did together, and I was in Hardin and Russell, and we liked that sort of thing. They were a sort of rough Ian and Sylvia. He wrote some great stuff and I especially liked "Tramps and Hawkers" which was the title to one of his Philo records. He rewrote a traditional tune, actually. That song was the inspiration for "The Rose of the San Joaquin" because it mentions in the lyrics, the Rose of the San Joaquin.

Going by the liner notes, your uncle was also an inspiration for the theme of the album. Was it a case of tying the two themes together.

No. I only thought about that later. I thought it would be interesting to include that in the liner notes. I really don't think a lot of people, unless they listen to the record three times, know that it is a concept record. It doesn't hit you over the head or anything. It's loosely about this guy and the Rose of the San Joaquin. You don't really get it until you read the liner notes and listen to it, sort of thing.

One of the cuts on "San Joaquin," "Between the Tracks," is about boxing. Have you ever thought about cutting a concept album focusing on that subject.

I probably have enough songs for that by now [Laughs].

Or for instance, an album about sporting heroes.

That's not a bad idea. Now you've given me two new ideas. I was thinking of a long song about Mickey Mantle passing away. There's something about the boxing thing that I like. "The Eyes of Roberto Duran" is a different sort of song, in that it's about a woman with eyes like Roberto Duran. But it uses boxing as a very heavy metaphor. I like boxing somewhat as a metaphor, to describe certain relationships.

If you were given the chance to write a song with someone you really admire, who would it be. [ED. NOTE. Just in case the answer had changed from 1992, here's the only question common to both interviews].

Well, how about Bob Dylan [Laughs]. I mean, that's somewhat obvious. I've tried to write with Lucinda Williams, but she doesn't co-write a lot. We tried it one day. I like her stuff. I love Leonard Cohen's stuff, but I don't think he co-writes. People like that. Basically, I don't want to co-write that much anyway. Really the bottom line is trying to write your own songs. Sometimes you do it out of laziness. You can't finish the song, so you give it to somebody else to finish. I've been successful with Katy, because she is so melodic. She'll make the melodies more sophisticated.

Talking of that little lady, a few days ago, I was given a newspaper cutting from earlier this year that mentioned she was seriously ill.

She had tuberculosis, but is mostly over it now. To her credit, she didn't publicise it a lot. She didn't exploit it. She had it for about a year. It can be treated now. She didn't have a type that's communicative. She's off the drugs now and recovering.....and she toured most of the time. I think she was off the road for a month or so. She's doing fine. We just saw her in Fort Worth a month ago. We're singing with her in Zurich during the first week of December, with Dave Alvin. And we're going to cut a record in January with her. We'll co-produce it for Watermelon.

So this tour is going into Europe and will last until Christmas.

[Laughs] It could have, but we're going to go home for Thanksgiving and try to salvage our relationships. Wash the clothes. We're going to take six days off. Then we come back for London, Zurich and Italy with Peter Case. I think for some of the shows in Italy, Guy Clark is also on the bill. Elliott Murphy is on a couple. An interesting combination of people.

Have you ever thought of you, Rosie and Katy doing a trio tour.

Mmm. No [Laughs]. I like working with both of them. You get out on the road with your friends, you know.....it's hard enough for two guys to be out. I did the band for so many years. It's hard travelling with too many people. Every day. Hotels and cars and blah, blah, blah. That's actually a nice combination you suggested. I like doing it occasionally with Dave and Peter. That's a good combination. It's almost like you've got to all move at once and make sure everybody is ready to go [Laughs]. You really don't want to be waking up five people every day.

Thank you.

Cool. Mention Andy's new record.

[Andy] It's called "Coney Island Moon." It's a tribute to Tom Russell.

So what's the material that you've recorded.

You're on Andy. This is your big chance.

[Andy] About half of it is instrumental versions of songs. Like standard song formats with melodies. There's two Tom

Russell songs on there. There's a Kevin Blackie Farrell song.

Can I guess which one. How about "Sonora's Death Row."

[Andy] No, it's called "Tina Louise." There's a Hank Bones song.....he's the leader of The Haoles, a group that my wife is in. There's an Irish traditional song and there's a song that Ernest Tubbs did from the forties called, "Drivin' Nails in My Coffin." It's western swing. The rest of it is kind of stuff that I made up.

It also features some special guest artists.

[Andy] Amos Garrett and Albert Lee are on it. Playing on a song. Basically it's lots of guitars and a little bit of percussion and bass. It will be released by Round Tower.

It's pretty cool. It starts out acoustically and builds into the electric stuff. So it goes somewhere.

[Andy] It starts out slow and fizzles out altogether [Laughs].

Of course, we all know that Andy has always been his best sales person.

[Andy] That was a Neil Young joke.

Really. I'd better do the promotional work on this record.

[Andy] Actually, it starts of with the more melodic stuff and gets into the guitar jams. That's the way it goes. I tried to do a variety of things. I tried to have a couple of different genre exercises and then there's some impressionistic stuff. I tried to keep it diverse and I tried not to make it too heavy. Too rock n' roll. I tried to keep it pretty light and acoustic.

Which of Tom's song have you cut.

[Andy] "Coney Island Moon" and "The Dance."

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**Kerrville-kompacts,
kassettes & other
koincidences.**

It hardly seems like yesterday since I was introduced to the music of Houston based Bill Ward, via the cassette only "William is Our Name." In truth six years have passed since that fine day. Far too long a lapse. Of course Bill contributed to the aggregation recording "Circle of Friends," but this self titled set is, finally, his second solo effort. "Appomattox" and "Sherman's Chimneys" are lessons in American history. In the latter part of "Sherman's Chimneys" Bill reflects personally on the three decades which have elapsed since he fell in love with his ancestral Georgia. By the way, this track is an absolute classic running out at six and a half minutes of perfection. For modern day tales located closer to [his Texas] home, there's the gentle "Hill Country Winter." Farther afield, you find "Maine or Montana." As far as "Hard Luck Avenue" is concerned, I can already hear Jerry Jeff Walker's cover of this track. William it's our pleasure to have you back.....just don't leave it so long the next time ! Available from Songdog Records, P.O. Box 680426, Houston, Texas 77268-0426.

The liner notes for Tom Pacheco's 2CD, 34 track collection "**Bare Bones & Barbed Wire**" were penned by yours truly. Released by Road Goes On Forever, the set features nine new alongside twenty five reinterpretations of previously recorded songs. *It hardly seemed appropriate that I should review the set.* What follows therefore are two reviews, by other writers, one from each side of the great pond.

Before I go, "**Bare Bones & Barbed Wire**" is available in the UK via **Topic/Direct Distribution**.

First up is my New Jersey pal, Tim Blixt – perpetrator in his home, along with his wife Lori, of the mouth-watering **Log Cabin House Concert Series**. Check their Web Site at :
<http://www.whitetail.nji.com/~logcabin>

It is relevant for you to know that Tim and I are both lunatics, partaking in an endless voyage, in search of the next perfect song. Here's Tim's transmission.....

If you're a fan of singer-songwriters who, like me, puts the name Butch Hancock, at or near the top of your list then there should only be a small group of pretty special talents who follow in quick succession. If Tom Pacheco is not on this list, you now have a golden opportunity to rectify that. If you are already a fan of Tom's then your musical ship has come in! Tom's "**Bare Bones & Barbed Wire**", like Butch's latest, finds this brilliant artist in the studio accompanied with nothing but his guitar and thirty four of the best songs anyone's ever written. Maybe no songwriter has a broader palette than Tom. From songs dealing with political as well as environmental assassination, to others concerning the heartland as well as the heart, they all share a passion and urgency instilled by a songwriter who *lives* through his work. The guitar-vocal arrangements used here bring a depth and power to Tom's lyrics that have, in the past, been occasionally obscured by over powerful studio productions. A songwriter's work lives or dies in a stripped down setting. These *bare* songs truly stand tall. The highlights of this set are too numerous to mention, just be assured that many of Tom's old favourites are included. Those include, "Jessica Brown," "Hippie On The Highway," "Long Gone," "You Again," "Just A Little Bullet," "Robert and Ramona," "Minnesota Blue," "The Soul," "Trust Your Heart Always," and the powerful "Last Blue Whale In The Ocean". Long time fans will be amply rewarded with brilliant new songs. "Yellow Ribbons" the tale of a returning Vietnam veteran, is one of those. And there's also a couple of song styles that Tom accomplishes better than anyone else, particularly when it comes to delivering a demonic twist ["Who Was Sam McGuire"], or highlighting an American tragedy ["Turnpike Truckstops"]. In short, this collection is the mother lode Tom fans have waited for. If you want to make the musical acquaintance of one of the best contemporary singer-songwriters, you simply must own this two disc set.

Tim Blixt

Next up, is a local West Midlands pal and fellow scribe, Steve Morris [aka Editor of **THE BEAT**].

Not entirely satisfied with the production on recent albums Tom Pacheco decided to recut his favourite songs, unplugged. To do this he took producer/engineer – and one time Radiator From Space – Pete Hoidal, "*one acoustic guitar and a plastic grocery bag filled with some candy bars, a couple of cokes, a pack of Silk Cut and about a*

hundred Xeroxed copies of song lyrics" into Dublin's Sun Studios. The pair hit the record button at 11.00pm one night last August and by the breaking of dawn had over 30 songs mastered. They left the studio "*punch drunk and joking about a famous drummer who took 10 twelve hour sessions just to get the right snare sound for one song.*" Make no mistake, "**Bare Bones & Barbed Wire**" is no cheaply recorded re-run of former glories, rather it's a hugely successful re-focussing on the songs. They stand here nakedly honest, intensely emotional and crystal clear in their intent. Pacheco is without doubt a major league writer able to incisively examine politics both personal and communal with a clear eye and an artist's intellect. His ultimate mastery though is to communicate that intellect not in a self mystifying lyrical 'art' but with emotional clarity. He also writes damned fine tunes. And if you don't believe me, ask Levon Helm, Rick Danko and Garth Hudson – The Band. Floundering since the departure of Robbie Robertson, they've asked Pacheco to join 'em. Remember the last singer/songwriter they chose to help ?

Steve Morris

You can never predict whether the next Siberry album is going to floor you, or leave you cold [and disappointed]. "**Teenager**" was an obvious launch for her Sheeba label - a simple acoustic, *starting over* involving early and previously unheard compositions. It didn't ring too many bells. During late 1996, from mid October through mid December to be precise, Jane performed a show at monthly intervals at New York's Bottom Line. Each of the three shows took a different musical theme. The double CD collection "**Child**" taken from the final date and subtitled *music for the Christmas season*, is a 104 minute *tour de force*. It merges Siberry originals and well known seasonal anthems. For added seasoning, there's a generous smattering of obscure *end of year* items. Featuring the 12 Musicians of Christmas, their voices [merge, soar and give you the chills] and the instruments create fare which encompasses experimental, jazz, pop and folk and just about every other standard Siberry musical stop between. A tasty twenty two track treat, no less. Siberry's eventual aim is to release a trilogy of recordings from those Bottom Line shows. *Truly perverse, the last appears first !!!!* Available in your local record store now. On the other hand, if you have access to the Web check out the Sheeba site on a regular basis. If you buy direct from Sheeba, Siberry usually autographs her new recordings for the first month or so following release. The Sheeba E-Mail address is sib@sheeba.ca

Of late, Fred Eaglesmith's recording career appears to consist of the precept, *a new album - another record label*. This time around it's New York based independent, Razor & Tie, and the album is titled "**Lipstick, Lies & Gasoline**." That the album has appeared on Razor & Tie has much to do with the drive of his current management team, Young/Hunter. Eaglesmith's unique genre bending results in hybrid music best described as, electric bluegrass/rock. Fred is supported, as ever, by Ralph Schipper [bass] and Willie P. Bennett [mandolin]. The hard edged rockers "Bell" and "Pontiac" sandwich the gentle country influenced ballad "Drinking Too Much." The latter cut comes complete with a duet vocal from fellow Canuck, Lynn Miles. The latter trio of compositions are prime examples of the wide stylistic spread that Eaglesmith indulges in. For instance, in a historical context Hank, Elvis, Janis, Gram and Jimi appear

in the lines of "Alcohol and Pills," while the set closes with a Springsteen [lyrically] tinged *road ballad* "Water in the Fuel." Try **CDX**.

Although the album title sources from "*part of the Holyoke Mountain range*" near Brooks' Northampton, Mass. home, there's also a numerical significance relative to the title of Brooks Williams' "**7 Sisters**" [Green Linnet]. Discounting this year's mainly guitar led duet "**Ring Some Changes**," with Jim Henry, on the Signature Sounds label, "**7 Sisters**" is Brooks' seventh solo set. While 1995's "**Knife Edge**" was endowed with a lyrically dark view of life, the burbling title cut which opens this album unsentimentally describes the beauty of the mountains that the glaciers created way back when - and the *natural* rebirth which came when trees began lining the rocky slopes. For that matter, let's not forget the gushing water filled creeks rich with salmon, and the coyotes who roam this wilderness. I can't quite peg the seeming familiarity of the gentle rhythms that beat out "Nothing At All," and although it subjectively deals with the break up of a marriage, it constitutes Williams' most precious contribution among this quality set of originals. "Winter Moon" which appears later, closely tails the latter tune in the *classy song* stakes, while Hugh Marsh's violin takes a trajectory that streaks skyward. As ever Brooks' guitar work retains an incredible fluidity, the buoyant "Jane" being a prime example. While never failing to acknowledge his blues roots on a number of tunes, "**7 Sisters**" proves beyond doubt that Williams' grasp of the contemporary song poet genre is nothing less than inspirational. Available in the UK via **Topic/Direct Distribution**.

Languid and graceful, a landscape portrait, the opening song on Bob Franke's "**Long Roads, Short Visits**" [Daring] "The Roads are Long in Canada" sets the tone for this set of eleven originals from Stateside folk legend. Along the way, there's the acoustic blues "I Won't Feel Lucky," "Je T'Adore" the amusing diary of a visit to France, and then there's the story of that year zero birth in Bethlehem, "Straw Against the Chill." Curiously, Franke's vocal presentation almost marks him as English, particularly on "William the Streak" - the unlikely tale of a retired greyhound who takes up groundhog chasing on a local farm. Available in the UK via **Topic/Direct Distribution**.

Opening with the title cut, tracks two through four lull you into the belief that Grant McLennan's latest solo outing "**In Your Bright Ray**" [Beggars Banquet] follows in the generally acoustic footsteps of the superb 1994 double "**Horsebreaker Star**." With "Malibu 69," shades of the electrically driven sounds of Jack Frost and The Go-Betweens creep into the equation. The succeeding tracks remain in that groove, until the mysterious "Lamp by Lamp." In another era, the latter song could have been a Nick Drake outtake. I guess I was hoping for even more "wall to wall" perfection with this album. Sadly it doesn't exist here. Then again, subsequent visits to this disc may pay bigger dividends. Time will tell. Available in your local record store now.

I first stumbled across Rick Lee earlier this year, on the "**Waterbug Anthology 2**." "**Natick**" [Waterbug] is a thoroughly folk founded, fifteen track, recording which merges a handful of Lee originals, with a couple of tunes by the album's producer, Andy May. The remaining material is

drawn from a divergent series of sources, including our own Jez Lowe. The set also features a number of traditional songs, arranged by Lee. His vocal tone and style of presentation is reminiscent of the late Stan Rogers. There's also shades of Bill Staines voice in the final mix. Standout tracks on this appealingly laid back set include the title track, which recounts the early history of Natick - a Massachusetts town [founded 1651], Chuck Hall's "Love Comes to the Simple Heart," and "Quabbin Moon." Darned fine covers it. Available from **Waterbug UK, 2 Woodhouse, Shilbottle, Northumberland NE66 2HR**.

From the opening note, Mary Melena's "**Something Passing Through**" [Waterbug] fills the room with a frail gentleness and grace that is utterly addictive. On the night before her seventieth Christmas Day, Evelyn can hardly contain her excitement relative to the forthcoming celebration. A few hours later, in "Evelyn's Polaroids," Father Christmas uses her camera to shoot a self portrait. For dreamers everywhere.....simply, believe. Lest Melena's lullabies leave you permanently stranded in some magical nether world, she interjects with some superior acoustic guitar picking - there are three instrumental cuts. Pierre Bensusan's "Au Jardin d'Amour," Hugh Blumenfield's "Brothers" and "The Island" by Paul Brady complete the selection of covers, while Melena contributes a decade of tasty originals. Available from **Waterbug UK**.

Rainer Ptacek was born in East Berlin of Czech bloodstock. Raised in Chicago's Southside, he has lived in Tucson, Arizona since the early seventies. During 1996, brain cancer was diagnosed. The recording and release of this fourteen track compilation "**The Inner Flame - A Rainer Ptacek Tribute**" [Atlantic] featuring Ptacek originals and collaborations, is the direct result of the efforts of Howie Gelb [Giant Sand] and Robert Plant. The principal aim of the disc, being to raise sufficient funds to cover Ptacek's medical bills. However humanitarian that gesture may be, sad to relate, the material featured is rhythmically simplistic and lyrically ordinary. Artists featured include Emmylou Harris, Victoria Williams & Mark Olson, Kris McKay and Rainer. Try **CDX**. [ED. NOTE. Sad to relate Ptacek died on November 12th 1997].

The album title "**The Horse Legends**" [Warner Western], reveals all. Moving on from his quartet of *cowboy song* recordings, Michael Martin Murphy has cut a decade long tribute of subjectively equine material. The songs range from older numbers such as Jimmie Driftwood's "Tennessee Stud" - a duet with Johnny Cash, through more contemporary compositions by Dan Fogelberg ["Run for the Roses"] and Gordon Lightfoot ["The Pony Man"], to six self penned or co-written tunes. The latter includes Murphey classics such as "See How All the Horses Come Dancing" and "Wildfire," as well as less familiar works. The latter includes the breakneck pure-bred racing rhythm that is "The Running Blood" as well as the gentler "Palomino Days." Try **CDX**.

Sadly gone but not forgotten.....the fourteen song, all female, compilation "**The Music of Laura Nyro - Time & Love**" [Astor Place] features many of the jewels which Nyro shared with us during her allotted time....to be honest, they're all drawn from her early recordings. Personally, I find that a rather sad reflection. The now defunct Roches harmonise on what is probably one of

Nyro's finest -- "Wedding Bell Blues," while Sweet Honey in the Rock, the only other aggregation on this set, perform "And When I Die." Other contributors include Jane Siberry, Suzanne Vega, Rosanne Cash, Beth Nielsen Chapman, Patty Larkin and Jonathan Brooke. Many of the contributors express, in a short liner paragraph, their personal feelings about Nyro.....a *pathfinder for female songwriters*. Quirky as ever, Siberry's track is titled "When I Think of Laura Nyro," a song segue of four of Laura's titles. Try **CDX**.

As far as Phil Ochs is concerned, timing counts. Concurrent with the release of the two CD set "**American Troubadour**" [A & M Records] compiled by Sid Griffin, Rhino have released a quadruple set Stateside - "**Farewells and Fantasies**" - which draws together recordings from the full extent of Phil Ochs career. "**American Troubadour**" only draws upon Phil's A&M years, but incorporates a selection of hard to find single cuts as well as previously unreleased material. Available in your local record store now.

Four years on from taking great delight and insatiable pleasure in "**Entering Marion**," John Forster is back with his own brand of Tom Lehrer inspired musical satire. The opening and album title cut, "Helium", expounds *the high* that is a *gas, gas, gas*. Forster's [latest] odes also focus on subjects as diverse as, composing national anthems; "The Tragic Kingdom" that is Disney's French experiment; a Prince *Charming*, his mistress, a cellphone and a tampon; and finally, the tale of the demon barber of Seville, Figaro Todd. Snakebite humour..... Available in the UK via **Topic/Direct Distribution**.

One thing you're got to *realise* about David Olney - he is not a Top 40 hit seeking, Nashville based songsmith. Far from it. He is a chronicler of life, past and present. The ghost of actor Lionel Barrymore, those outlaws Robert Ford and Jesse James, and artist Leonardo DaVinci, pace through the lyrics of "**Real Lies**" [Philo]. Olney also expounds, in song, his love for basketball and baseball. The only collaboration in this set is with Gwil Owen on the rather ordinary "Death, True Love, Lonesome Blues, and Me." This album, his sixth for Rounder/Philo is a workmanlike addition to his already solid catalogue. Available in the UK via **Topic/Direct Distribution**.

The Steve Earle & The Supersuckers five track, self titled, *mostly high octane, occasionally acoustic* ep only features three songs ! There are two interpretations of The Supersuckers "Creepy Jackalope Eye," with Steve Earle taking the lead vocal on one version. The Supersuckers return the favour on Earle's "Angel is the Devil." "Before They Make Me Run" penned by our own Glimmer Twins completes this set. Available from **Village Records, 12156 West 63rd Street, Shawnee, Kansas 66216, U.S.A.** E-Mail : **musicvil@gvi.net**

Stretching the technology to the limit, "**Documentary**" [Normal] is a seventy six minute long recording which features Austin, Texas based DJ Larry Monroe and the late Townes Van Zandt in conversation. Townes talks about his early years. About how he became interested in music and started to write songs. About touring with the Cowboy Junkies, meeting Lightnin' Hopkins and some of his adventures with the legendary [and late] Blaze Foley. Included on the twenty two cut selection are ten songs,

including the previously unreleased duet with Barb Donovan "I'll Be Here in the Morning." Available in the UK via **Topic/Direct Distribution**.

On the front and rear liner photographs, this callow pretty boy, Paul Brandt, is wearing a hat. Like a badge, an emblem, an indication of the musical clan to which he bears undying allegiance - a person of the country [music] persuasion, and no mistaking. Producer Josh Leo has been around soundboards long enough to know how to capture a slick, pop flavoured product. After one complete circuit, there's no doubting that this decade long song trip, "**Outside The Frame**" [Warner Reprise], is one of those. Numerically, it features half a dozen Brandt writing collaborations and one, yes one, song penned entirely on his own. A trio of covers complete the head count. Qualitatively, this is totally innocuous stuff - all ribcage and no meat. Way beyond any *frame* of reference that would qualify it for the accolade, memorable. As for the final cut which features a four minute reprise of the album contents, including snippets of session conversations, *silly* comes to mind. Eject. Available in your local records store now.

Reinvention is a skill that few of us possess. Normally, it's a case of those statutory fifteen minutes of fame prior to eternal oblivion. For Joan Baez remaining in the frame has been a four decade long crusade, founded on her skill as a finder and interpreter of songs. The crossroads have been many, with paths not taken and political battles won or valiantly fought. Mid-career Joan turned her hand to songwriting, though it is not her strongest suit. "Lilly," her only composition on "**Gone From Danger**" [Grapevine], was co-written with Sharon Rice and the album production duo, Wally Wilson and Kenny Greenberg. They were also responsible for her 1992 Grapevine set, "**Play Me Backwards**." The other nine tracks on "**Gone From Danger**" source from five song poets, four of whom are working musicians Stateside. Ireland's Sinead Lohan, the exception to the latter, is in my opinion, a writer still searching for an identity. "No Mermaid" and "Who Do You Think I Am," the latter being the title of Lohan's 1995 Grapevine debut, are the most vague and least focused contributions here. Betty Elders, one of the support acts on Joan's most recent UK tour, supplies an ominous tale about child abuse, "Crack In The Mirror." Dar Williams and Richard Shindell [also a UK tour support act] tunes are respectively covered on two and three occasions here. Dar and Richard currently have three solo albums each in print, and are two of the finest wordsmiths currently working in the folk genre. Dar's bittersweet love song, "February," and Richard's "Reunion Hill" are fitting examples of their work. Mark Addison from Austin's The Borrowers completes the Stateside quartet of scribes, with "Mercy Bound." If imitation is one of the greatest forms of flattery, maybe it's worthwhile recalling that, once upon a time, Joan was one of the first channels by which planet Earth discovered the writing of Robert Zimmerman. Available in your local record store now.

Opening with "Angels in the End," a power chord driven tribute to Roddy Frame, the third album from The Good Sons, "**Wines, Lines and Valentines**" [Glitterhouse], finds leader and sole songwriter Michael Weston King, ploughing a rich furrow of roots oriented country material. Imagine a cross between Wilco and The Jayhawks, but with English reserve and [when necessary] a dash of true British grit. A line in "Mathilda" furnishes the album title, as the narrator yearns for his old love but isn't willing to give up his new life

of fame. Pacing the track list with fast and slow numbers, for instance, respectively "Romeo Hit the Road" and "Cosmic Fireworks," it's a testament to their international appeal that this Lancashire band has scored deals in Europe with Glitterhouse and in the States, with the Austin, Texas independent label, Watermelon. Darned fine pardner. Available in the UK via **Round Tower Records**.

Formerly of Austin's True Believers, more recently support guitarist to Calvin Russell and Kelly Wills, Jon Dee Graham finally launches his solo career with "**Escape From Monster Island**" [Freedom]. Kris McKay cut a memorable version of Jon Dee's "One Moment to Another" back in 1990 - by dint of that one cover, this set is long overdue. Vocally possessed of a breathy gruff growl, and co-produced by Graham, guitarist Mike Hardwick and engineer Andy Traub, this decade of Jon Dee originals were laid down at Austin's Hit Shack studio in March last year. Outstanding cuts include the heartfelt and soulful "When a Woman Cries," "Mockingbird Smile" a languid slow bluesy shuffle, and the hard rocking appeal to "*not to grow quickly*" - "Soonday." The chorus and backbeat of the lyrically surreal closing number "Airplane," smacks of an anthemic song that will be a radio play staple for years. Available from **Village Records**.

What a line-up. "**Big League Babe - The Christine Lavin Tribute Album Vol. 1**" [1-800-PRIME-CD] features Van Ronk, Gold, Wilcox, Wheeler, McDonough, Roth, Shindell, Kessler, Gilbert, Eberhardt, Christian, Olsen, Werner and Zweiman. From an elder statesman to a young doe, America's folk/contemporary songwriters have been drawn together to celebrate the work of the unique and only, Christine Lavin. Heaven knows she deserves the accolade, for the way she has selflessly promoted the careers of her contemporaries by collating and persuading independent labels to release a [seemingly] endless stream of compilation albums. Lavin is such a unique writer and interpreter of her regularly comic and occasionally deadly serious material, that the cuts here add nothing new to these already familiar songs. Let's not detract from the quality of the singing, but.....in a nutshell, "*Lavin on Lavin*" is the only way to hear her tunes. If there's an exception to the latter conclusion, it comes with Cheryl Wheeler's original contribution "Christine Lavin Could Do It" aided by the introductory explanation of how she came to write the song. This project seemed like a good idea at the time..... and it's only Volume 1! Available from **CDX**.

Subtitled "*Plucked, thumped, and sampled on stringed instruments*" Patty Larkin's seventh solo album, "**Perishable Fruit**" [High Street Records], finds her sailing farther and farther into a musical sea of electronic sounds and jazz influenced extemporisations. At turns vocally ethereal and rhythmically energetic, then vice versa, you can depend on Larkin to deliver the unusual. For accessible cuts try "Rear View Mirror" and "Coming Up For Air." For the more lyrically testing, segue to "The Book I'm Not Reading." Guest contributors include Canadians Bruce Cockburn and Jane Siberry, as well as Jennifer Kimball [formerly of The Story]. The jury is still out on this one..... Try **CDX**.

Subtitled "*New Interpretations of American Roots Music*," Darol Anger has gathered together an unbelievable array of American musicians while book-ending his project,

"**Heritage**" [Six Degrees/Island], with the traditional standard "Shenadoah" [isn't it akin to America's unofficial national anthem?]. The musicians?.....well, there's the voices of *the sainted* Siberry, John Gorka, Dar [Williams], Mary Chapin Carpenter, Willie Nelson, Tim O' Brien and Mavis Staples. Now if that ain't a *vocal rainbow*, I don't know what is. In a support capacity [sittin' n' pickin' and a grinnin'], there's David Lindley, Bela Fleck, John Jennings, Jerry Douglas, Edgar Meyer, David Grisman, Vassar Clements, John Hartford and Michael Manning the circle is truly unbroken. As for the songs, there's the already familiar "Are You Tired of Me My Darling" [Mickie Merkens Wood introduced me to this tune nearly a decade ago, as "Answer Only With Your Eyes," and Nanci later included it on Vol. 1 of "**Other Voices, Other Rooms**"], "Pretty Polly" [McGuinn cut a version for his 1976 "**Cardiff Rose**"], "Hard Times Come Again No More" and "The Water Is Wide." They are balanced perfectly by lesser known songs such as "While Roving On A Winter's Night" and "Down In the Willow Garden" and more. This album oozes love out of every single groove..... never, never, never forget your "**Heritage**." Available via **CDX**.

There are fourteen tracks on each of the two CD's which compose "**One Step Up/Two Steps Back - The Songs of Bruce Springsteen**" [The Right Stuff]. Ten of the fourteen tracks on the second disc were composed by *The Boss*, but have never appeared on any of his *official* releases. Think of another latter twentieth century performer who can engender total [and admiring] respect, while being backed by one of the hottest rock combos ever to play planet Earth. Someone who can also take the [international] stage armed only with his acoustic guitar and command silence and enwrapped attention. You got it, there is only Bruce Springsteen. This compilation pays respect to a unique personage whose deeds of humanity are multitude, and unpublished, while the proceeds generated by this recording will aid World Hunger Year. Taste, for, not only is this compilation good, it is essential. Try **CDX**.

New York State born, country girl, Christine Albert has added a soul/blues edge to a number of the cuts on her latest recording "**Jumpin' Tracks**" [Flatrock Records]. Now teamed with former Jimmie Dale Gilmore guitarist Chris Gage, as Boxcars, they are aided on this recording by two of Austin's most popular suspects - Dave Heath [bass] and Paul Percy [drums/percussion]. The fare is a selection of covers including, appropriately, Butch Hancock's "Boxcars." Albert has come up with a pair of originals, as well as four collaborations. Meantime, Gage co-wrote "Now That You're Gone" with Jimmie Dale and Paul Percy. Try **Village Records**.

"**Tremolo**" is Blue Rodeo's seventh effort, and the first of their Sire Records deal. Hailing from Toronto, Canada, the principal songwriting team, of Greg Keelor/Jim Cuddy, remains intact a decade on from the band's debut "**Outskirts**." The country tinged material ranges from the gentle and reflective "Falling Down Blue," through the single verse and mostly instrumental seven minutes that is "Frogs' Lullaby," to the high speed closing wall of sound "Graveyard." There's even a flavour of *no depression* country about "No Miracle, No Dazzle." Try **CDX**.

I was less than impressed by David Wilcox's "**East Asheville Hardware**," his *in concert/bringing my career up*

to date recording of two years back. This set is a mixture of improvement and disappointment. The likes of "Secret Church" and "Waffle House" can be assigned to the latter category, while "Glory" and epitaph to all the J's.....James [Dean], Jimi [Hendrix], an un-named girl and Jesus retains some focus. Lest you should fall asleep two thirds of the way through "**Turning Point**," the jazzed up "Right Now" complete with machine gun drum beat, slap bass and funky trumpets is guaranteed to wake you up. Maybe next time....since this is *the "Turning Point" in time*. Available in the UK via **Koch Distribution**.

Forget all the hype, relative to one cut, "Searching For America," having been produced by Ani DiFranco. The real treasure lies hidden elsewhere. Janis Ian has reinvented herself musically on more occasions than I would care to remember.....initiate the, *I was there syndrome*.....as it ages her, it also ages me. With tracks four, eleven and twelve on "**Hunger**" [Windham Hill], she has once more grasped *the grail*. "Getting Over You" [there are versions, with and without strings] and "Shadow" are the songs in question. While both lyrically relate to personal relationships [in one instance, the legal ending of one; the other, the wish to grow and strengthen the friendship], each are given heartfelt interpretation, and in the case of "Shadow" an almost spoken one, by Ian. The bitterness expressed in the words of her recent recordings have given way to a realisation that life must go on, and that revenge even when successful is in truth a hollow victory. Try **CDX**.

After one album for Windham Hill and two discs for Shanachie, the ever tuneful and acoustic Cliff Eberhardt joins Minnesota's Red House imprint with "**12 Songs of Good and Evil**." Self produced and containing a dozen original compositions, it's hard to pick particular standouts. You can't go wrong with a disc full of undiluted Cliff. Let's settle for the well measured anti-drug song "Joey's Arms," the wish for a real and lasting love "Valerie" and the pop driven *Beatle-ish* foot tapper "Someone Like You." Available in the UK via **Koch Distribution**.

Being grounded in reality helps. Once upon a time, from "**Pilgrims**" to "**Through the Looking Glass**" [1987 to 1993] Eliza Gilkyson delved, deeply into the spiritually mystical. Some less kind individual would say, too deeply. Many thought her writing flaky. Of course it might have been, a defense mechanism, a reaction to her surroundings. With "River of Gold" on "**Undressed**" [1994], also included here, Eliza flowered and realised that time was passing and attested "*I don't want to be some ornament wife*." Walking away can be a courageous act. Redemption can be the reward. It may even yield catharsis. "**Redemption Road**" [Silver Wave Records] finds Gilkyson enjoying a stable relationship [with Mark Andes, ex Spirit and Firefall], with her thoughts firmly back under the influence of gravity, love and reality. "Sleeping" and "Prayer 2000" talk of the deep affection, the lyrics of "Rose of Sharon" are adapted from the Old Testament's "Song of Solomon" [a truly ancient love song !], while anyone familiar with 20th century American poets will know the source of the title of the reflective [and autobiographical ?] "Road Not Taken." Grounded. Sorted. Try **CDX**.

This nineteen track charity CD, "**Manuel's Women's Festival**," was released in celebration of the annual four-day festival of the same name. That is, Manuel's aka The

Avenue Café, Congress Avenue, Austin. The beneficiary of this release being Austin's Centre for Battered Women. The spectrum of music featured, is a testament to the strength of Austin's female music community. Rock, pop, jazz, country, folk, singer/songwriter, you name the genre. The proof.....well known local performers such as Kris McKay, Christine Albert and Betty Elders, rub shoulders with current rising stars Kim Miller and Ana Egge. Available from **Waterloo Records, 600-A North Lamar, Austin, Texas 78703, U.S.A.** E-Mail : mailorder@waterloorecords.com

A Classic

The Original Harmony Ridge Creek Dippers consist Mark Olson [ex Jayhawks], Mabel Allbright [aka Mrs. Mark Olson nee' Victoria Williams] and Mike "Razz" Russell [fiddle]. This self titled, ten-track album was cut during February 1997 and appeared Stateside toward the end of last year. To say that the liner is bereft of recording details is a gross understatement. Lasting some thirty two minutes, I can only conclude that the stripped down instrumentation of acoustic guitars, mandolin, harmonica and fiddle, augmented by human voice, is a reaction by Olson to the million dollar excess which resulted in "**Tomorrow the Green Grass**" - his final recording with The Jayhawks. Vocally there's a resigned feel to all the songs, laced with an air of melancholy.....heart rending beauty in my book. Track by track, all the songs are outstanding. Had it appeared earlier in '97, this set could have been a powerful contender for my Album of the Year.....*eyes are the window to your soul*, Mr. Olson. Available by mail order from **P.O. Box 342, Joshua Tree, California 92252, U.S.A.** [ED NOTE. Williams latest album for Atlantic is titled "**Musings of a Creekdipper**".]

Sam Baardman hails from the heartland of Canada. Manitoba to be precise, where he retains veteran status particularly among the local Celtic music community. And there is more. A time served festival performer, workshop teacher and event organiser to boot, he's also a sometime member of Celtic quartet, Ten Bones. Given those musical credentials, it's only natural that Sam's debut, solo recording "**Kicking The Stone Home**" should feature eleven of his own contemporary slanted tunes, topped off by a *toe tappin'* interpretation of the traditional "The Cuckoo." Most of the tracks are constructed upon a foundation of drums, bass and percussion, or permutations of the same, with the melodies delivered by acoustic guitar, banjo, mandolin and fiddle. Baardman's material is probably best pegged as soft folk rock. Lyrically, he reflects upon the human condition. In the process Sam exposes some of our foibles, how we deal with the environment we've created, that ageless male/female impasse and that ancient conundrum, growing old. Standout cuts are "Hearts & Hands" and the addictive and repetitious "Soft Grey Glove." Available from **390 Scotia Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba R2V 1W9, Canada**.

The late Harry Chapin's brother Tom, and John McCutcheon first shared a stage together in the Fall of 1988. During that weekend they discovered, to their mutual delight, that they were *brothers in song*. The live album, "**Doing Our Job**," cut in St. Louis and Arkansas City during December 1996, is a celebration of their *from time to time* stage partnership. Supported by Bobby Reid's keyboard, saxophone and clarinet and Michael Mark's bass and concertina, the fare is a mix of traditional songs, folk

standards from Pete Seeger and Woody Guthrie, as well as originals penned individually by Tom [some with Si Kahn] and John. Topping of this fifteen song collection are three tunes co-written by the duo – “Hard Cider,” “Heaven Help” and “The Older I Get.” That they instrumentally lean on both the traditional and the contemporary, the addition of McCutcheon’s hammered dulcimer makes for a number of interesting combinations of sound. And when you’re looking for the lyrically powerful, try McCutcheon’s bluesy “Dead Man Walking,” inspired by the Sr. Helen Prejean book of the same name. The song dates from 1994. Available in the UK via **Topic/Direct Distribution**.

“**Tradition**” is an acoustic album of Christmas songs, drawn together from a diverse number of sources, by the Burns Sisters and their offspring. Well known Christian hymns [“O Come, O Come Emmanuel” and “Silent Night”], a traditional Irish carol [“Golden Cradle”], an African/American spiritual [“Children Go Where I Send Thee”] and an Israeli prayer for peace [“Shaloo Shalom Y’Rushalayim”] rubs shoulders with a “Tibetan Prayer For Peace.” Augmenting this thematic recording, is a pair of Burn Sisters originals – Marie’s “Songs We Love” and Annie’s “This Christmas.” The latter song and the unlisted bonus track feature the Bab[il]es of the Burns Sisters performing “Joy to the World” and “O Little Town of Bethlehem” [to be honest, I don’t recall hearing the latter song]. In conclusion, this is a unique blend of holiday songs old and new. A celebration centred round the first, and every subsequent family. Available in the UK via **Topic/Direct Distribution**.

As long as your name is Bob, you get the gig. Even when your name is really, Lori Rivera. “**I Brow Club**” album five from this quartet - “we travel light, as our instruments are our bodies and vocal chords,” is a humorous concoction of offbeat stories featuring swingers from the sixties, heart transplants, a nose ring [in a plate of soup] and wearing a leisure suit to the Prom. Everyone deserves to live through at least one album by The Bobs. I survived to tell this tale, and you can too..... Available in the UK via **Topic/Direct Distribution**.

With The Roches a thing of the past, Suzzy is the first sister to hit the solo trail. “**Holy Smokes**” is the name of her first solo outing. Maggie [Roche] turns up on backing vocals, as does Jules Shear. Apart from the lyrics to “Eggshell” – actually a poem by Jude Roche – the material is all Suzzy’s own work. She even co-produced the twelve songs with Stewart Lerman, and the supporting cast of pickers includes Stuart Smith [guitar picker, bar none] and one of my all time heroes, David Mansfield. Lerman also produced the final, [and now] prophetically titled 1995 Roches disc “**Can We Go Home Now.**” Suzzy the Roche, isn’t the good humour girl that she was when teamed with her siblings – except for maybe, “Pink Ballet Slippers.” On reflection, the mostly melancholic edge that pervades this album is an honest new direction. After all, would a solo retread of The Roches be palatable ? For that special moment of aching beauty, taste “Losing.” Available in the UK via **Koch Distribution**.

On his second Hightone release, “**Poison Love**,” Buddy Miller delivers original, git’ up n’ go honky tonk country tunes, slow burning blues [Roosevelt Jameson’s “That’s How Strong My Love Is”] and a song concerning landmines

and misery they bring, when detonated – “100 Million Little Bombs.” Supported by hordes of high-class pickers, the star turns include Emmylou Harris [a former boss], Steve Earle, Jim Lauderdale, plus Tammy Rogers and Sam Bush. The latter pair come complete with their ever present fiddles. And of course let’s not forget the multi-talented Mrs. Miller – Julie. Available in the UK via **Koch Distribution**.

Following an eight year long sojourn in Nashville, Tennessee selling his songs, Dave Mallett returned home to his native Sebec, Maine a couple of years back. “**Parallel Lines**,” recorded in concert, is essentially a career wide selection that teams six previously unrecorded selections and eight oldies. “You Say That the Battle is Over” which closed Dave’s only other live recording, 1981’s “**Hard Light**,” is included here, along with classics from his catalogue such as “Phil Brown,” “Summer of My Dreams” and “The Garden Song.” “My Old Man” remains a pivotal song [in Mallett’s career], and is probably his most heartfelt and fondly regarded. The new “Nothin’ But A Long Goodbye” will in time attain equal status. “**Parallel Lines**” observes a consummate and tuneful, master craftsman at work [and play]. Available in the UK via **Topic/Direct Distribution**.

Once in a Lifetime

Is autosuggestion the product of a disturbed mind ? It was his name that I noted first. A case of, canine word association. Visually, the black and white liner cover shot of Bob Martin’s “**The River Turns The Wheel**” gave the impression of a world weary, benevolent old uncle sat pickin’ his guitar. Frizzed barnet, receding hairline and a bushy moustache. A couple of tracks into “**The River Turns The Wheel**” and Martin’s story songs had me hooked. If you’ll excuse the pun, Bill’s third recording possesses all the qualities of a Crufts Supreme Champion. That one quarter of the twentieth century has elapsed since his debut set appeared, hardly qualifies him for the accolade, prolific. Then again, quality counts and this fifty something has dealt it *in spades* on “**The River Turns The Wheel.**” Possessed of a slightly raspy delivery, Bill’s solidly structured words create images of late night subway trains and post midnight mean streets, hobos jumpin’ trains, fishin’ from an abandoned [train] trestle, a failed economy, long abandoned textile mills and so much more. We even learn about Jack Kerouac’s third and final wife, Stella [Sampas] Kerouac. “American Street Dream,” the opening track, kicks off with the lines “*Sunlight peels like dead paint on the church of the Italian saint.*” As my jaw dropped open at the power of Bob’s imagery, I had little doubt that something special was afoot. Martin’s lyrics mark him out as someone who has been round the block more than a few times, and is well familiar with the highs and lows of everyday life. His portraits are painted from real-life experience with nary a hint of bitterness. The former cotton mill town of Lowell, Massachusetts and the River Merrimac [which flows through that town] are central themes to this suite of songs. By the way, Kerouac was born and raised in Lowell. The copyright date stamped on this pressing may be 1997, but the contents are timeless. One of the most honest and truthful records it has been my pleasure to listen to. Forget the imitators, this guy is undoubtedly The Bob. Available from **Riversong Records, P.O. Box 2130, Salem, New Hampshire 03079, U.S.A.** or via Bob’s Website at <http://www.riversong.com>

It can't be. Can it ? Is the mega prolific wunderkind of American folk, Ani DiFranco, actually a reincarnation ? There are certainly hints of Lisa's voice. Minelli, that is. A mere twenty seven years of age, and a legendary and vocal self promoter, with nigh on a dozen albums already under her belt, DiFranco is supported on this set by her current band, Jason Mercer [bass] and Andy Stochansky [drums]. Former bass person, on the road, Sara Lee, is also featured along with well known session players such as Jerry Marotta [drums] and Jon Hassell [trumpet/trombone]. "Little Plastic Castle" opens with the title cut, as a gently strummed guitar supports DiFranco's lyric, wherein she alleges that every facet of modern life in every city, in every country, is now universal. A proven case of national identity devoured by that insatiable beast, mass marketing. When the brass section finally enters the fray, the track adopts a somewhat convulsive, faster, rhythm. The lyrical fire in the semi-spoken "Fuel," relates to a day by day series of events. Some ordinary. Others extraordinary. They're leavened, as you would expect, by extracts from Ani's personal philosophy. Recorded and self-produced at Congress House in Austin, Texas studio owner Mark Hallman delivers the spoken *pontifications* during "Deep Dish." It's worth noting that when it comes to song titles, DiFranco struggles to come up with anything in excess of three words. Five of the twelve cuts here are single word titles. She whispers, screams, shouts, growls, shares her personal insights with the listener, uses electronic effects as well as acoustic instruments and even sings. Compared with those short [and punchy] song titles, DiFranco has never dealt in succinct lyrics. For a worked example, try the fourteen plus minutes of the extemporised "Pulse" which closes this set. Much as I tried to stay aloof and immune, DiFranco broke down the barriers. A case of quirky and opinionated, equating to really listenable. The prescription to be repeated, as necessary. So let's hear it for the [former] punk priestess of [avant-garde] folk.

The decade of Denice Franke compositions featured on her second solo recording, "You Don't Know Me," source from two distinct periods. Six songs were penned between 1987 and 1988, while the remaining quartet are 1996/97 vintage. Longtime pal Eric Taylor [one of the greatest songwriters in the universe], has masterminded the production of this project without adding his voice or guitar to the final product. A deliberate strategy, I detect. The depth and breadth of [mostly acoustic] sounds embraced, is breathtaking. Supported by the cream of Austin and Houston pickers, Franke's performances span the rainbow from, upbeat and optimistic through to haunting and despondent. They are, without doubt, ten gems which each shine in their chosen setting. From the fragile opening lines of "Saints" – "You smile and reach for my hand and say hello..." this CD screams, winner. My personal favourite for the replay button is the near six minutes that is the mini-movie "Rainy Night Detroit." By the way, those players including Paul Percy, Glenn Fukunaga, Gene Elders [incredible fiddle work, as usual], Ian Matthews [OK, Scunthorpe isn't in Texas, but he gets the vote by residency] and Mike Sumler. Available from **denICE GIRL Music**, P.O. Box 540682, Houston, Texas 77254-0682, U.S.A.

Kate MacLeod blows a pretty mean harp, picks her acoustic guitar and bows a violin, sings, writes tunes as well as Nanci Griffith once did around a decade ago. Vocally, MacLeod even [occasionally] sounds like and

phrases her words as the Texan would. "Constant Emotion" is Kate's second recording for the Illinois based Waterbug label. Although the supporting musicians count bluegrass aficionados Peter Rowan and Sally Van Meter, Kate's material is a mix of firmly founded traditional and contemporary sounding folk music. The one cover here, is Buffy St. Marie's "The Piney Wood Hills." A recording that rewards the careful listener. Available from **Waterbug UK**.

RETURN TO PLANET BLUEGRASS

Claire Lynch's latest, "Silver and Gold" [Rounder], features a dozen cuts, of which a quartet are her own compositions. The self-composed title cut possesses country chart entry potential, while the closing cut "Fair Shake" is a previously unheard Bill Lloyd, Radney Foster and Guy Clark collaboration. Just fine. Available in the UK via **Topic/Direct Distribution**.

Just when you thought that Sugar Hill were intent in kickin' over the bluegrass tracks, they flood the market with a swathe of new high speed pickin' product. "Legacy – A Tribute to the First Generation of Bluegrass" is dedicated to the music peddled by those first generation stars that gave bluegrass its brand identity. Of whom do we speak ? Why no less than the late Bill Monroe, Flatt & Scruggs and The Stanley Brothers. Artists featured on this fifteen track compilation include such younger genre luminaries as Byron Berline [with Vince Gill], Peter Rowan and Marty Stuart. Two-time IMBA Banjo Player of Year, Sammy Shelor, debuts as a solo act with "Leading Roll." The dozen cuts being a mix of instrumentals and songs, contemporary and traditional, with a dash of the blues added for good measure. If your favourite fix comes down to that good old "Praise the lord and pass the plate" brand of bluegrass, then "Kept & Protected" from Doyle Lawson & Quicksilver should have see you in seventh heaven for around forty minutes. The foregoing trio of titles, are available in your local record store via **Koch Distribution**.

Across the way at Rounder Records, they've compiled twelve cuts from Lawrie Lewis' trio of albums for the Flying Fish imprint, added a quartet of previously unreleased tunes and titled the set "Earth & Sky – Songs of Laurie Lewis." Before Ms Krauss captured the contemporary pop/bluegrass crown Stateside, Lewis was the title holder. Thankfully Lewis, has of late, found a new career niche with a series of genre bending experimental recording projects. Available in the UK via **Topic/Direct Distribution**.

Patricia Hardin

The interview with Patricia Hardin Long took place during May 1997 via that electronic process known as E-Mail. Many thanks to Patricia for her time in answering my questions and to her family for allowing me to "steal" her time.

You were born in Texas, but when and where ? Describe your hometown. Did you only live there, or did your family move around ?

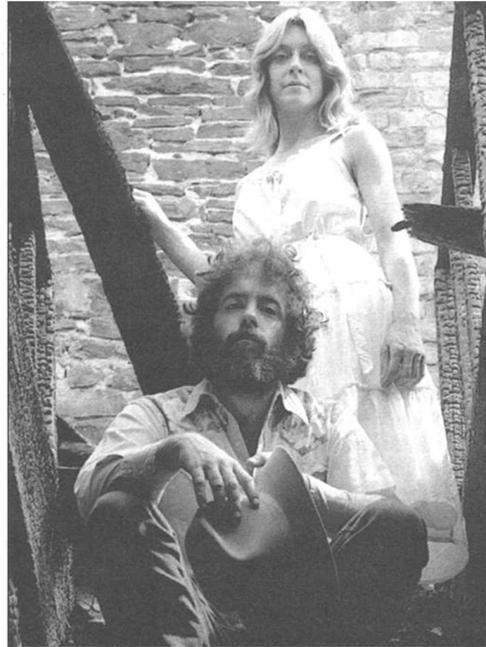
Waco, 1943. It was a pretty intense year, right in the middle of U.S. involvement in World War II. By the luck of the draw, I was born in this normally bland, deathly-quiet town. At the time, it had about 60,000 mostly conservative inhabitants. Waco, also called "The Heart of Texas," is the original home of Dr. Pepper, Baylor University, and more recently the

infamous, late David Koresch of the Branch Davidians. And in case you're wondering -- No, I did not know that guy nor any members of his cult ! But Waco isn't really my hometown, or if it is, it's only one of three. I'll explain: My first seven years our family (I'm the second of five children) lived on a large, beautiful farm in the rolling hills just outside of Crawford (pop. 400). Crawford is 18 miles west of Waco and 7 miles north of McGregor (pop. 5000). If you draw a line connecting these three towns, what you get is an almost perfect little isosceles triangle with a perimeter of 43 miles. This is important, because although my first seven years were mostly stable, everything changed when I turned eight, and for the next five years we moved more times than I want to count, but only back and forth in this triangular pattern connecting Waco, Crawford, and McGregor. Humorously now, I call this unsettling chapter of my childhood "*Nomadic Wanderings Within the Isosceles Triangle.*" The incredibly complicated and colorful story of why my parents moved us around so much would make one helluva fine novel. I might try to write it someday, but not now...[Laughs].

What else do you recall of your early childhood growing up in Texas ?

My memory goes all the way back to age two, the year my uncle came home from the war. He was captured in the Battle of the Bulge and spent nine months in a P.O.W. camp in Holland. He was listed as missing in action all that time and my parents feared him dead. I didn't understand all this till later, of course, but I do recall very clearly the dramatic moment my mother received his letter that said he was alive and coming home. I had never seen her laugh and cry all at the same time, and this was my first vivid, up-close shot of what was really going on in the world outside. From that time on, I think I began to notice a lot of sharp contrasts all around me. Of things particularly Texan; I remember hot, motionless summer days interrupted by the shrill buzzing of cicadas; at night, the cool, wet sounds that came from the creek below our house, like the high-pitched choruses of small frogs accompanying one giant bullfrog soloing in deep bass tones; all the delicious sensations that came with an autumnal weather phenomenon that we in Central Texas call a "blue norther"; warm wavy oceans of wildflowers in the spring, and every few winters a huge amount of snow (or so we thought) that fell suddenly and then melted to mud the next day. I also have contrasting memories of things not so natural, like a time when neighbors still helped neighbors thresh wheat and build haystacks. A custom, soon replaced by huge rolling machines that did it all; crank telephones that quickly gave way to the fancy dial type; "**Dick and Jane Books**" in Mrs. Richardson's first grade class, and "**My Weekly Reader**," which told of the coming of Halley's Comet and futuristic electric automobiles; nickel bags of popcorn at the movies and films in black and white that are now collectors items: Flash Gordon, Boris Karloff, Abbot & Costello, and fantastic newsreels of current events in faraway places. We made frequent trips, when I was very young, to a nearby tiny general store that carried everything one needed to sustain a simple life on the farm, contrasted by occasional car trips to Dallas, where everything to me seemed extremely large, shiny, fast-moving, and marvelously abundant. I remember vividly the old-style country funerals in which the deceased person lay in state in his own home, and small children, such as I, were lifted up by their parents to look into the coffin. Maybe a day or two

later someone would throw a huge lawn party where everyone you knew was there and looked much more alive than they ever did at church, especially the children, who seemed on these festive occasions to run wild. Sometimes at these parties I would suddenly start feeling like an alien and would plead with my parents to take me home. I didn't know then that my real home was on Neptune !



Patricia Hardin & Tom Russell [Circa 1978]

Marathon Music, Austin, Texas.



What about your teenage years ?

Oh god, another novel to condense! McGregor in those days (late 50's and early 60's) was just like that town in "**American Graffiti.**" Teenagers all over the place hot-rod-ning up and down Main Street and around the Dairy Queen. On the jukebox, all that great Chuck Berry and Buddy Holly rock 'n roll. I was in the middle of all the typical stuff, but I felt more like an observer. I was so serious about my classical music, that I was afraid to let it be known that I was really nuts about The Platters and Elvis Presley. In a way, as a teenager, I led a double life. My parents, who had divorced when I was eight, re-married and divorced each other again when I was thirteen. Through my teen years, my home and personal life was a wreck and highly unorthodox, but I kept it all to myself. Our house, with five very active kids, was always noisy, but I escaped as often as I could to my books and my sanctuary, the piano. I got really good at playing Bach and Mozart, etc., and swore to my closest friends that one day I would play Carnegie Hall. At school and in public, though, I was the all-American girl - very visible as church pianist, homecoming princess, class officer, and drum major of the McGregor High Band. Even so, I felt alone and desperate half the time - like the day when I was seventeen that I sped off down an icy road in my '52 Ford, lost control of it and rolled the thing three times. No one else witnessed the accident, but the car was demolished beyond recognition and I walked away without a scratch. It's a miracle I made it out of my teen years alive.

What sparked your interest in music and at what age ?

It was sparked by many things, but one particular event

stands out in my memory: When I was about four years old, my mother took me to see the great pianist Arthur Rubinstein, the night he played Waco Hall. We sat no more than ten feet from the stage. My eyes and ears must have been wide open because I still remember, as if it were today, the sight and sound of his hands meeting the keys of the huge Steinway Grand. I was completely captivated and I began to crave to play like that. There was always music in my home when I was very little: my mother singing German songs, my father whistling out of tune, Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys on the radio, and my favorite Schubert symphony (No. 8) on the record player. I loved it all. I can't remember a time when I wasn't intensely interested in music and language, so it must be in my genes. My maternal grandfather played the organ, sang beautifully, and loved to play with words. My mother sang and played violin and sometimes a bit of barrelhouse piano. When I was just a toddler we had an old upright piano, and they say as soon as I was able to climb onto the piano stool and stay there without falling off, I began to pick out little tunes. When I was three my mother sold this piano - my favorite toy - so that, as she said, I wouldn't learn to play by ear. But I did anyway - with my imagination and the wide windowsill in our parlor that became my make-believe piano. Those were great sounds my ten little fingers made on that windowsill, and I recall being confused and frustrated when on our neighbor's real piano my playing never sounded that good. My mother must have finally seen my desire and decided when I was five to buy another piano and get me to a teacher. Her name was Mrs. Bennett, the only piano teacher within 20 miles of our house, and she was wonderful ! I loved the lessons and learned to read music, but secretly I kept right on playing by ear. Mrs. Bennett's elaborate recitals - the ones she threw for her 10 to 15 pupils on the stage of Crawford High School auditorium - gave me my first taste of great music being performed in a show-business atmosphere, footlights and all! She liked and taught all kinds of music. Her son Maurice would play some fantastic Chopin polonaise and then someone would accompany me on piano as I walked daintily to and fro across the stage singing "In My Sweet Little Alice Blue Gown." A classical concert and vaudeville all mixed together, these were not ordinary recitals ! I continued to study piano through my high-school years in McGregor. Winnie Isbill, who was a friend of Van Cliburn's mother, was my real mentor and saw to it that I won a place in the statewide Young Artists Series each year I entered. My high-school band and choral director was very encouraging, too. And there was my grandfather Paul Hintze who offered to send me to live with relatives in Germany and study music there, but my mother wouldn't let me go because, she claimed, she would miss me too much. So immediately after high school I ran away from home - to Houston where I worked for a year as a secretary before finally putting myself into college at Baylor University, back in Waco. I continued my study of music and piano through my sophomore year (1964) until I disastrously failed to win a concerto competition held in Amarillo. I'll spare you the details, but I was so shaken by the experience that I changed my major to English and History and vowed to myself never to play piano again. I took my B.A degree in 1966, and by 1968 I was married and the mother of a little girl we named Dorion. In 1970 I taught school in the Rio Grande Valley, where I began to yearn again for a piano - I literally hadn't touched or gone near one for seven solid years ! Once I re-united with my piano, things began to change rapidly for me. It was still too

painful to resurrect my Bach and Beethoven, so I began to improvise with blues and pop stuff. It was 1971 and for several years I had been listening more closely to people like Bob Dylan, The Beatles, Paul Simon, and The Band. I was crazy about Joe Cocker and really liked the piano styles of Leon Russell and Chris Stainton of Mad Dogs and Englishmen. I thought Grace Slick had the strongest and classiest rock vocal I'd ever heard and I still think so today. I listened to everything I could get my hands on and spent hours playing along with favorite records that had or could use a piano part. The upshot of it all was that I suddenly didn't want to teach English anymore. I declined the offer to renew my teaching contract, and moved to Austin. I came here, in 1972, simply because I liked the town and still do. I didn't know I was about to begin my professional career as a singer/songwriter, but one thing led to another and within a year that's what happened. Fate, timing, and a ton of hard work. Mostly the latter.

Tom refers in the liner notes of "The Early Years" to a country band you were a member of in 1974. How and when did you join this band, and were you composing original material at this stage?

I've always composed original material. I started when I was six years old, when I committed my first composition to paper. But then in 1972 I began to write a lot of songs; I was writing constantly. I had a little secretarial job at U.T. and on my breaks and at lunch I would go out onto the fire escape and jot down original lyrics, take them home in the evenings and sing them, laying in the chords on piano. I realize now how green most of those early songs were, but ironically I've recently come across one or two that almost sound as if they could have been written by Kurt Cobain. Anyway, by 1973 I had a whole batch of folk and country-type songs I thought were good enough to perform in public, and I made up my mind to start a band. I auditioned a string of people and nothing came of it. Then one day I met this guy Wayne Gustafsen, who was looking for a piano player for his four-piece country band. He did most of the vocals and played rhythm guitar. The group was newly organized but already had some bookings, so I auditioned and they signed me up.

Who were the other members of the band ? Are any of them still playing music professionally ? What was the name of the band?

I lost touch with all of them, but to my knowledge none of them continued on professionally. Right after the band dissolved, Wayne took up plumbing and Ronnie the bass player went to work as a carpenter. I can't recall the drummer's name or where he went, but I'd love to know what became of Randy Brand, the lead guitarist. Randy was really talented, had an interesting vocal, and wrote strange and compelling songs. The name of the band - ugh - I had hoped you wouldn't ask me that. When I joined the group they had already named themselves "Happy Daze." I thought it was a sappy name and it bothered me a lot. I didn't like the word 'happy' and I thought 'daze' implied we were a little out of our heads. To me, "Happy Daze" sounded like a band that might not be too keen on intelligence or whose brains got fried back in the '60s. I told the guys as nicely as I could that we needed to change that name, but they didn't agree. I painted a big poster to hang on my piano that read: "...and The Great Depression." With the band poster at center stage and the

piano and my poster at stage right, the band name now read: "Happy Daze...and The Great Depression." Now that, I thought, had a ring to it ! This is when I think those guys starting hating me, and they began to do stuff like tune up without me. But I didn't care, because I knew my piano was the only thing that was ever in tune anyhow. Then they complained that I played too many notes and my harmony vocals sounded too much like Peter, Paul & Mary. Well, I thought the notes I played were of just the right number, and as for the Peter, Paul & Mary bit, I took that as a compliment.

Did the band only play in Austin ? How long did it last ?

Yes. About six weeks. That was it.

Did that band play any original music ?

None to speak of, and I didn't push for doing any of mine. I was just trying to learn to play and sing with a band. We did mostly cover tunes - from Johnny Rodriguez to The Eagles and a couple of songs by The Band and The Grateful Dead. The bass player sang a plaintive version of "Ripple" that would rip your heart out. I tried without success to teach them John Prine's "Angel from Montgomery," but we never could get the rhythm right. Wayne insisted on ending every show with this cowboy song Roy Rogers used to sing called "Happy Trails," and I always wanted to duck out during that one.

Did you also have a day job at this time ?

No, I completely threw myself into my work as a songwriter and performer.

Did Tom Russell join this band, or did you leave and form a duo with him ?

Both. It was 1974 and Tom had just moved to Austin from Vancouver. His move was purposeful and he was looking for a band. Randy, our lead guitarist, had just given notice he was quitting. We were playing the Broken Spoke one night when Tom walked in and approached me after listening to a set. I invited him to our next rehearsal. Sure enough, he showed up with his guitar and self-confident vocal, and I could see right away that this guy knew what he was doing. He knew by heart every country song we could name and about a thousand more, plus it was obvious he was a good writer and knew something about the business. So everything clicked, Randy was out, and Tom was in. It wasn't long before he and I knew the two of us were singing well together and seeing eye to eye on where we wanted to go. We wanted to do a more interesting repertoire with lots of originals. We didn't need this particular band, and we decided to work a while as a duo and then go from there. We named ourselves "Hardin & Russell" (alphabetical order), and we were off and running.

What were your main musical influences at this stage of your careers ?

Too long to list. I'll just say Tom introduced me to Woody Guthrie and Hank Williams, and I introduced Tom to J.S. Bach and Franz Schubert. We met somewhere in the middle. That's partly why our songs had that strange blend of

folk, country, and classical.

What was your concept, musically and lyrically, when you formed the duo with Tom?

We definitely were not interested in cheesy love lyrics or Barry Manilow-type music ! But seriously, that was so long ago, and there's been a great deal of work along the way and it is continuing even now. I'm sure I would have said it somewhat differently back then, but I do know that it has always been my artistic concept to create something unique and honest that will stand the test of time. I think that's exactly what Tom and I accomplished together in those early recordings - which are still being sought after, 20 years later. And I'm sure that's what we're each doing today, separate and apart.

Which year did you enter the Kerrville Festival Emerging Folk Songwriters Competition as a solo artist ? Did you win ?

Yes, in 1975. Tom and I both entered individually that year, and we each took away a New Folk Award. In June the same year, I won Grand Prize at the Kerrville Country & Western Songwriters Competition. Tom was a semi-finalist.

"Hardin & Russell" appear on the 1976 and 1977 Kerrville "Live Highlights" albums. What do you recall of the Festival in those days ?

I've lost touch with the festival over the past few years, but I was invited back to do a solo set in '87. It seemed then to be pretty much the same as it was in the '70s. Rod Kennedy is still doing a tremendous service to new talented songwriters, although this older one went out there a couple of years ago and he didn't seem to know me. I guess he's lost touch with me, too.

In 1976 you recorded "Ring of Bone" at Odyssey Sound in Austin. What are some of your recollections of recording that album ? Any particular stories ?

It was an adventure and not quite like anything I had done before. Between high hopes and a low budget, we pulled it off in three days with everything we could give it and a little help from our friends. Aside from preparing for it musically and collaborating with Tom on the concept and the song arrangements, I came up with part of the financing and the major investor Michael Creswell, who was an old friend of mine. Mike Mordecai, now a big name in the Austin music scene, helped us put together the right local musicians. John Mills, who did such a beautiful job playing flute and sax on a number of the tracks, recently got his Ph.D in Jazz. I've continued to work with him over the years. For my first major project in a recording studio, I thought everything went very smoothly except for the night we cut "Mrs. Zeelsdorf's Garden." We wanted it to sound punchy and energetic with the vocals, piano, and guitar recorded live. We had been in the studio all day and I hadn't eaten since breakfast; I was running out of fuel and this track required high octane. We burned six takes and it still wasn't there, and the clock was ticking away our funds. I was starting to hallucinate from fatigue and lack of oxygen from belting that zany chorus so many times, and I kept getting the words all turned around like 'snattlerake' instead of 'rattlesnake.' Everything was

turning into total absurdity, and suddenly I just started sobbing. The engineer looked helpless and Tom was sweating. I wasn't about to stop now, so I said *"If I can't do this funny song smiling, I'll just do it crying...right now...roll the tape."* That next take was the one we kept and it was really good and sounded hilarious, but tears were pouring down my cheeks and spilling onto the piano keys right through the very last chord. One more story - I have to tell you about the assistant engineer. I won't mention his name, because he might not think it's funny, but I did. This guy never said anything, just moved about the studio and did what he was supposed to, and I always wondered what was going on under that funny cap he wore. But I think there must have been some wild, entertaining stuff happening in his mind all the time, because he had this look in his eye as if he were watching some kind of monkey act, and I guess he'd seen a lot of them come through that studio. The day we started the mix-down he's the one who set up the board and filled in all the data for the various tracks. Instead of asking us for the exact song titles, he just made up his own, based on what he had apparently remembered from the lyrics, and jotted them down on the chart. I guess his mental process (Who knows?) was to take some of our images and mix them all up with other parts of the song and then condense all this into a short descriptive phrase. All his temporary titles for our songs sounded like something that goes with a surrealist painting, like "Mouse and Cockroach Dancing," "Floating a Loan in Brass Coffins," "Rabbits and Coyotes Having Visions," and last but not least, "Drunks at Mass Leaning from Brooms." Sometimes I think I'd love to do a satire album just so I could use some titles like that.

Whose idea was the "Old Women Suite" ?

I can't remember, but it was obvious to both of us that "Mrs. Zeelsdorf's Garden," "Old Lady Blues," and "Coffins on the Brazos" should segue into each other. Lyrically and musically, they worked well as a set within the birth-and-death concept of the album.

Was "Mrs. Zeelsdorf" a real person ?

Absolutely, all our characters were real. Practically everybody I've ever known has, at some point or other in childhood, lived next door to an old crabby lady; Mrs. Dawbritts was mine and Mrs. Zeelsdorf was Tom's. These crabby ladies always have scary names, they live in creepy gray houses, and they despise little children. Of all the songs Tom and I wrote together, "Mrs. Zeelsdorf's Garden" was probably the most fun and maybe the best loved by our fans.

The piano interlude leading into "Old Lady Blues" - Is that a classical piece ?

It's the Chopin "Prelude in A Major." The intentionally unsophisticated performance I gave it for the album was what I call 'the Victorian Parlor Rendition.' It was just the right touch for "Old Lady Blues" and was musically descriptive of the mood and setting of that song.

"Coffins on the Brazos" was based on the Texas storms and floods of '57. What was "the town" in your lyric ?

McGregor, Texas. The long drought broke that year on Good Friday. By sunrise Easter morning we had had eleven inches

of rain, and the low-lying cemetery had washed up. Graves were empty and several coffins were found floating on the Brazos River 18 miles downstream. The town was hushed and it was a gruesome scene for days. I was 14 years old; the event made a deep impression.

"Look at Us Now" - was it a hard decision to drop it from the CD?

No, I never liked that song very much, especially the way we produced it for the first album. Too fast and too much beat; it was supposed to be an easy-going folk ballad.

Is the lyric to this song personally true, as in "I'm still afraid of the dark" ?

I guess so. I have to be able to see a spot of light somewhere at all times, or I get panicky. But that's just neurotic junk, something left over from dark nightmares I had as a child. I'm not really scared of anything except being scared. That's why I made myself parachute out of an airplane for my 40th birthday, because I was so scared of heights. Since then, I'm not scared of heights anymore. Sometimes when I look at birds it almost scares me that I can't fly, but I try not to think about it.

Did you consult Tom on which tracks would be included on the CD ?

Yes, we consulted each other on everything. I dropped one of my songs from the first album and he dropped one of his from the second, in order to meet space limitations. It was all very sensible, reasonable, and democratic.

Who was Lew Welch, and what precisely is a "ring of bone" ?

Lew Welch, the missing mystic poet from the "Beat Generation" and author of a collection of poems called "Ring Of Bone." One day in 1971, in a deep depression, he wrote a farewell note, took his revolver, and walked away into the forest. His body was never found, but much of what he wrote is still alive. And what precisely is a "ring of bone?" You're very brave to ask that. I doubt that even Lew Welch could or would answer that question in one sentence. One has to read his book "Ring Of Bone" and then listen to the Hardin/Russell song by the same title. I should warn you that in Welch's collection you won't find one poem titled "Ring of Bone" or any containing those three words. However, in his Preface he does give some clues as to what he was after: *"The shape of RING OF BONE is circular, or back and forth. Naturally such a form never ends."* Personally, I think Lew Welch as a poet bit off more in his Preface than he was able to chew in the poems that followed. He threw a strong image out there and then surrounded it, or maybe forgot it, with a compilation of mostly weak poems. What Tom and I did in our song "Ring of Bone," and in the concept of our album, was to bring to life (both lyrically and musically) some of the possibilities in that image. So think of circles, cycles, birth and death and rebirth, and then you tell me what is a "ring of bone."

Were there ever any H&R songs in which Tom wrote the music and you wrote the lyrics ?

No, not entirely; although we sometimes advised each other on both. But it was almost always his lyrics and my music. That's how we worked best. Tom could put a new lyric in front of me and I would just sing it, improvising the chords as I went. It was magic.

By 1979, were there any unrecorded H&R co-written songs?

Yes, a few, like "Yoruba Girl," which is a real gem. We never found a place for it, but somebody definitely should. People who listen to Paul Simon would love it.

Who is the 'old guy' on the front cover of the "Ring of Bone" vinyl album?

It's kind of a mystery. We think he was a homeless transient. Our photographer Ron Dorsey found him down on South 1st St. in Austin and asked to take his picture. One day after our album had been out a while, Ron got a phone call from a man who said he thought that might be his father Jesse, whom he hadn't seen or heard from in years. We were never able to track it down.

When Hardin & Russell released "Ring of Bone," you were virtually unknown. How did you manage to get this first album reviewed in ROLLING STONE?

It was a miracle! Now that the album was released, the question was how to get some effective publicity on it. My old friend Stephen Harrigan quietly came to the rescue. He liked the album and sent it to Chet Flippo, a friend of his who wrote for ROLLING STONE. Tom and I thought it was a long shot because ROLLING STONE never reviewed albums on labels as small as ours. Well, lo and behold, this one they did! Flippo's review, which appeared in the August 26, 1976, issue, was very favorable. After that, other major music magazines like BILLBOARD and CRAWDADDY followed suit, as did a string of smaller ones. I think my friend Stephen, who is now a successful novelist, was greatly responsible for our receiving this early publicity and for providing a big boost at that time to both our careers.

In 1977 Hardin & Russell relocated to San Francisco. Why?

Because of the publicity and all the gigs we played around Texas, we sold the initial pressing of "Ring of Bone" pretty quickly, prepared for another, and began thinking about our next step. We didn't want to become just a local phenomenon, so we headed to San Francisco with the idea of eventually putting a band together and gaining a wider audience. San Francisco was an attractive alternative to living in L.A., but close enough to allow us to pound the pavement there for a record deal. And the performance opportunities all over the Bay Area were good. We played everything from steak & lobster houses to The Great American Music Hall.

You recorded the theme song to the movie "Sweet Creek County War." How did that come to pass?

We were doing a songwriters' showcase at a club in L.A. Richard Bowden, the composer of the film score, was there scouting for someone to write the lyrics for the theme song

and sing them on the soundtrack. He followed us out as we were leaving the club and offered us the job. Needless to say, we took it. One night, six months later, while our song was receiving a standing ovation at the gala premier of the film in Tuscon, Tom and I were across the border at the dog races in Nogales placing a two-dollar bet on a tired-looking hound. Our dog won.

You also scored the travel film "California Image." How did that come about?

We scored about half the material in that film. The producer Bernie Krause, who later produced our second album, heard us at a club in Menlo Park and, the next thing we knew, we were working on this slick project. Writing to order, bits and snatches of clever stuff about tourist spots in California. It was fun, easy, paid well, and taught me something about scoring for film. Years later in Chicago, after Hardin & Russell, I wrote and produced a score on my own for a short TV drama called "The Price of Daffodils."

Then came the offer of a Vanguard Records deal. What happened there?

In 1977 we were ready to record another album and began contacting major record companies. Vanguard liked what they heard and offered us a contract. All the parties were ready to sign and Tom and I were packing for New York when, at the last moment, the whole exciting deal came crashing down. Our lawyer, without our OK, came on too heavy with the Vanguard attorneys about a minor point in the contract and Vanguard pulled the plug. They thought we were going to be too hard to work with and never gave us a chance to explain the misrepresentation. We were devastated. Of course, all lawyers aren't as injudicious as ours was, but I never let one do my talking for me again.

What happened after the Vanguard deal went down?

We went back to our usual grind. After we recovered from the shock of it all, we decided to record the next album just the way we had the first - on our own label. This time we wanted an outside producer, a full back-up band, and no investors.

So who financed this album "Wax Museum?" I read somewhere that you did, through the sale of your family farm.

I financed the album, but it's a bit of an exaggeration that I sold my "family farm" to do it, which would have been really dedicated of me but not altogether smart. What I actually sold was a few acres out of one of the farms my paternal grandfather left me in his will, and I've never regretted it a day since. You'll notice on the back cover of "Wax Museum" the 'special thanks to Charlie Matilage and The Burton Place' - that's my grandfather and the farm I'm referring to.

You recorded "Wax Museum" in 1978. The liner notes don't name the studio.

That was a gross oversight. It was Wally Heider Recording Studios in San Francisco.

Who picked the backing musicians for this album ?

Our producer Bernie Krause did, with our approval. He knew all the best studio musicians in the area.

I'd like to talk about some of your songs on the album, like "Who is Franz Rummel?" Who is he ?

Franz Rummel was an English-born classical pianist who toured the U.S. in 1898. His main claim to fame here, is that he played the initial performance opening a new wing of Carnegie Hall that year. You have to dig hard to find that it was a great performance because the one review that appeared stressed only that "the hall was well-lit." This story is only half of the basis of my song "Who is Franz Rummel?" The other half involved a framed pencil drawing I once bought from an antique store. It depicted a sad-looking bearded man in rugged work boots playing a piano. I gave it to a friend whose house had strange, amazing stuff on every wall. One day I found this beautiful drawing, I've just described, hanging from a nail behind a door where she kept her brooms. The ironies in these two stories come together in my song "Who is Franz Rummel?"

Fae McNally, who played that remarkable piano solo at the end of that cut - where did you find him ?

I asked our producer for a piano player who could improvise something snappy and to my surprise Bernie said he knew a jazz and ragtime pianist who could pull rabbits out of hats. So when it came time to record that piano track, in walks Fae McNally looking all tired and unhappy. Tom nudged me and whispered something like "This ain't gonna work; this guy is totally wiped out." But I had a strong hunch because - and here's some more irony - McNally looked just like the guy in the pencil drawing ! So we let him hear the song and he played along with it, a little too conservatively, I thought. So I said, "Fae, for your piano lead just let go and play something demented." Well, he did, and all of us in the control room were tapping our toes and grinning. But Fae had one more rabbit in his hat: When the song stopped, he just kept on playing - an unexpected solo tag, and it was brilliant ! I was ecstatic and, instrumentally, that's still my favorite cut on the album. Three weeks later, Fae McNally died of cancer, which none of us knew he had at the time of that session. He was a true talent, a jazz virtuoso, and this was his last recording.

What's the real story behind your song "The Phantom of Balance" ?

I don't usually divulge the stories behind my songs, but this is an exception because it involves one of the most beautiful and courageous human beings I've ever known. At the time I wrote the song, his story was only partly told. When I first met Elvin Bale in 1977, he was a highly-skilled trapeze artist with Ringling Brothers & Barnum & Bailey Circus. He had another starring spot called "The Phantom of Balance" in which he walked blindfolded on a huge gyrating wheel. Both of his acts were unforgettable, but the subject of my song was "The Phantom of Balance." Several years after I wrote the song and the album was recorded, I learned that he had invented a new act shooting himself out of a cannon-like device, calling this daring stunt "The Human Rocket." One night something went wrong and he overshot the net, landing

across the circus arena in the upper-balcony seats. This horrible accident left him a quadriplegic and, of course, ended the career of a gifted athlete and performer. When last I spoke with him, he was in seemingly good spirits and commented that in his line of work he had always known it was just a matter of time before something like this might happen. I remembered his telling me when I first met him back in '77 that sometimes he dreamed about falling. I had used his quote in one of the lines of my song.

In "Stampede," you mention Randolph Scott. Was he a particular favorite of yours or just western movies in general?

He was one of the many cowboy actors I saw at the movies when I was a little kid. I remember them all, but Lash LaRue entertained me most, because he always acted so stupid. Randolph Scott was less interesting and more dignified, but only he could have delivered a line like "Where there's a stampede, the safest place is up a tall tree."

Was "Wildhorse Annie" a real life character ?

Yes, and one of the American West's modern legends. Her real name was Velma Johnston. She led the drive for the protection of wild horses in the western U.S. and was the impetus behind the "Wild Horse Annie Law." She died in 1977 in Reno, Nevada.

What inspired the Hardin & Russell songs "Wind on the Buffalo Grass" and "The Hindenburg"?

Ah, the forbidden question, or at least the wording. I always run from the word "inspired." Tom and I never asked each other where we got our inspiration. The songs had to speak for themselves. All I can tell you is Tom wrote the lyrics to those two songs and I wrote the music, and the songs themselves will answer your question.

Where did the front-liner painting to "Wax Museum" come from ?

We found the original painting, by Jesus Helguera, in a bullfight museum in El Paso.

Were there two different pressings of this album?

Yes, just as there were for "Ring of Bone." And now there's the double-album CD.

On the vinyl-album insert for "Wax Museum there's a "Sgt. Pepper" style collage of famous people: Hemingway, Townes Van Zandt, Joe Louis, Gram Parsons, Hank Williams, Bob Dylan, Marilyn Monroe. Is there anyone else I should have spotted ?

Oh, too many to list, but don't overlook Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, Amelia Erhardt, Babe Ruth, Elvin Bale, Artis the Spoonman, and my famous dog Pig.

Who are the little girls playing lute and fiddle?

That's my daughter Dorion and Tom's daughter Jessica. Actually, what my daughter is holding in the picture is not a lute but an old German guitar, a family heirloom. Both of

those beautiful little girls, who are now successful young women, were among the background singers for the song "House of Wax."

In 1979 you and Tom split up. Had the team of Hardin and Russell run its course ?

Yes, in some ways, but I think that would be putting it too simply. I've never told that story publically, but I don't think what I'm about to say here will hurt anyone. The loss of the Vanguard contract had taken its toll on both of us, but after that, we began working harder than ever - recording the second album, touring, putting a band together, and maintaining a heavy performance schedule. We were working up new material constantly, plus dealing with all the business that went with a band. We were trying to do everything ourselves and waited too long to hire a road manager and equipment people. Tom and I were both under a great deal of pressure from all this and more, but I think the main problem was that I never got any rest. I was running all the time. I was divorced and a very single parent. Between the rigors of my career and the responsibilities of being a good mother, I don't know when, if ever, I slept. It's impossible to give 100% to a demanding profession and be a Super-Mom, too, but that's what I was trying to do. It all began to catch up with me in the spring of '79, and I finally had a total collapse from physical and emotional exhaustion. My doctor told me I had two choices: stop and rest until I was completely recovered, or keep going and die. My daughter was waiting for me, but the band couldn't, so Tom and I decided to call it a day. The entire band dissolved a month later.

How did you create the Hardin & Russell photograph on the rear liner of the CD ? I presume the fact that you were facing but not looking at each other, was deliberate ?

Yes, but don't read anything into that. If you're thinking the photograph is a composite, it isn't. We took that picture in about 1975 when everything was going fine. The pose itself was deliberate, though. We never liked to look as if we gave a damn for each other. We thought smiling pictures were sappy, and smiling at each other would have been even worse.

Was the 1975/1979 gravestone in the photo specially made ?

The gravestone was real, but our CD's graphic artist John Yuelkenbeck lettered it in. Oh, heck, I cannot tell a lie - We found that gravestone, as is, in a pawn shop ! Ain't it weird ?

So after Hardin & Russell split up in '79, when did you move to Nashville ?

A few months later, I decided to launch an all-out effort to get some songs published. So I packed up my daughter and our dog, loaded everything we owned into a 12-foot U-Haul trailer, and went straight to the so-called "Music City."

Did anything happen for you in Nashville?

During the year I was there, something was always happening for me as a songwriter, but most of it was one

great big exciting illusion. I did manage to get several songs under publishing contracts very quickly, but ironically, the song no publisher would take was the one that got cut by none other than Ronnie Dunn, now of "Brooks & Dunn." That was in 1981, and Ronnie Dunn was still a relatively unknown singer/songwriter. The name of the song was "**Somewhere Tonight,**" which had previously won me an award at the American Song Festival. Dunn was recording an album for, I believe, Churchill Records and my song was slated to be the single. It was a beautiful production (I still have a cassette copy of that cut). But somehow his record deal went down and, with it, my song. Twelve years later, Ronnie Dunn emerged a superstar. So that's as close as I ever got to writing country hits. Now I think it's just as well, because if that song had been a hit, I might not be creating as artfully as I am now. I probably would have stayed in Nashville and kept on pumping out songs like that. Hit writing can lead to greed, and greed can kick art right out the door. I really believe now the best single thing that happened to me in Nashville was that I got to meet and visit with the late great George Burns. I'll never forget how he took my hand in both of his and said, "*Pat, don't ever give up.*" Coming from George Burns, that advice had a great deal of impact.

Did you perform as a solo artist the year you were in Nashville ?

Only once, the second week I was there, on the nationally-broadcast Ernest Tubbs Midnight Jamboree. I didn't want to perform in Nashville; I was there to pitch songs.

Once you left Nashville, what was your next destination and what did you do?

Just before the Ronnie Dunn cut, in early '81, I married my life-long friend Austin "Monty" Long and moved to Chicago with him - actually Oak Park. We lived just down the street from Ernest Hemingway's boyhood home. Oak Park is where our son was born, Austin M. Long, IV, who is now 15, writes great stories and plays classical piano, jazz trumpet, and rock guitar. Soon after his birth, I went into self-imposed artistic seclusion and became a full-time mother. But during those seven years in Oak Park, I wrote a whole ton of stuff and just filed most of it away. I started penning dark poems and short stories and continued writing songs of all sorts, from blues and country to artsong. I had always heard lots of harmonies in my melodies, and it was during this period that I began to try my hand at choral composition. One of those choral pieces, a Christmas carol I wrote in German, made its way through a friend of mine to Cologne, Germany, where it was performed by a nun's choir one Christmas Eve. Friends joked that, as a songwriter, I had one foot in smokey bars and the other in cathedrals. I didn't know where I was; I just kept on writing whatever came to me. All during this time, I was trying to shed my stage name, Patricia Hardin, but I can see now it really stuck.

When and why did you move back to Texas ?

1987. I had had it with Chicago winters ! Sometimes I call that period "The Seven Winters of our Discontent." I needed to get back to someplace warm where you could see the sun once in a while. And I sensed, somehow, that professionally I needed to go back to Austin. So in the spring of '87, my son graduated from kindergarten, my daughter went off to

college, and my husband accepted a great job offer from the University of Texas. We headed back to what I call home. In May of that year I did a solo set at the Kerrville Folk Festival but didn't tell anyone I was playing because I really didn't want to return to the stage. The following year, I did my last public performance - with Peter Yarrow on the steps of the State Capitol. Peter accompanied me on a song I wrote for the children of war-torn Nicaragua.

In 1990 you wrote your 9-minute musical poem "Bald Eagles at Buchanan Lake." How did the writing and recording of that piece come about ?

My friend Charles Tischler, who is a photojournalist and environmentalist, was planning to do a documentary film on the migratory bald eagles at Lake Buchanan. He wanted a song written for this documentary, and he asked me to do it. After researching the whole thing and watching those eagles with my own eyes, what I came up with was, not exactly a song but, a 128-line narrative poem to be read conversationally to a music track of my invention. Everyone agreed it was the perfect thing for the film, and I got ready to record. Then came a series of setbacks: For the narrator of the poem and the voice of Max the Fisherman, I contacted the distinguished humorist John Henry Faulk. He was ill but he liked the piece and said he would do it if his health allowed. Unfortunately, his condition worsened shortly thereafter and he passed away. Speaking of his death makes my story about this project seem insignificant, but I'll continue: We were hard pressed to find someone who could fill the shoes of John Henry Faulk, but then the funding for the documentary fell through, and I got to wrestle with that problem by myself. I felt that what I had written was too good to abandon and could stand alone. If for nothing else, I just wanted it for my file, so I decided to produce the recording of the piece on my own. With production and arrangement help from John Mills, I recorded the basic tracks with some of the best musicians in Austin. And because Stephen Fromholz is a very fine storyteller and was a friend of John Henry Faulk, I asked him to do the narrative vocal. He and all the musicians really did a beautiful job. And you'll never find a better engineer than Spencer Starnes. I had everything in the can except for some overdubs and the mix, when I was, you might say, rudely interrupted. So I didn't release the finished little product till almost two years after I started.

This "interruption" was your bout with cancer. Do you want to comment on that?

Sure, I don't mind. In late 1991 I was diagnosed with breast cancer, fortunately in the earliest stage detectable. I underwent bilateral mastectomies and a year of therapy and reconstructive surgery. I was pronounced cured, but my brush with cancer changed my outlook on life. All good things have become really precious and I've realized in a deeper way that no matter how smoothly it's going, we've never got it made. Though I was so fortunate compared to some, the whole ordeal left me with about half the physical stamina I once had. But the loss of physical stamina has just made me work harder with my mind. In '93 I went back to school - Univ. of Texas at Austin. Since then I've added another major to my B.A. degree - Music - and I've been accepted into a graduate program in Music History. I've come full circle musically, classical to classical, but now I feel I'm just beginning to synthesize everything I've ever

learned about music of all types. I'm composing with a great deal more substance. And I did finish and release the "**Bald Eagles at Buchanan Lake**" tape. It's a gem, and I still have a bunch of unsold copies, if anybody wants one.

Before I ask you what you're currently composing, tell me when and why you decided to re-master the Hardin & Russell tapes for a CD release.

Personally, I tried to put this early music to rest years ago, as did Tom, when we began heading in separate directions. But, in spite of that, it seemed gradually to take on a life of its own through limited but continuing demand for it showing up in my mailbox. In 1993 I had only a few of the original vinyl albums left. The master tapes were aging and already in danger of deteriorating. I knew that once the vinyl and the tapes were gone, there would be nothing to show for that period of hard work. So my main reason for wanting to put the albums on CD was a very practical one: simply to preserve the recordings for the historical record. I had no thought or hope of seeing this CD released in Europe or anywhere else, with major distribution. The Demon Records contract and release came, after all this time, as a pleasant surprise.

How did the release on Demon come about ?

When I contacted Tom in '93, he agreed that we should re-master the albums to one CD. We decided at that point to split the cost of a limited run, to be sold by mail order through his management Dark Angel. We negotiated the project over the phone and through the mail over the next year, and in '94 we released the CD. One thing led to another, and as I have it from Tom, John Lomax heard of the CD in '96 and asked to show it to Demon Records in London. Demon liked it and offered us a distribution deal.

You're currently composing a choral/orchestral work to celebrate the turn of the millennium. Would you elaborate on that ?

Yes, I've just completed 4 of 5 items utilizing the basic structure of a Mass Proper, with the text taken exclusively from the Psalms. I'm at work now on the fifth item and when finished, the whole thing will involve adult chorus, boys' choir, pipe organ and orchestral accompaniment. This work might become my next CD-length recording.

Do you have plans for it to be performed in public ? If so, when and where ?

Carnegie Hall, New Year's Eve, 1999 ! Just kidding, of course, but it would really sound good in there. Where in reality remains to be seen, but you can be sure I'll let you know. I'm expecting this work to be performed a lot.

Do you still write songs like your earlier ones ?

Yes, but I think I keep getting better at the craft. I've written some of my best songs in the past ten years. I can't seem to get around to publishers, though. I'll have to do something about that pretty soon, but right now I'm too busy writing. Maybe someday all this stuff will get discovered under a rock.

Incidentally, are you or were you ever related to Tom Russell's guitarist Andrew Hardin?

No.

One more question: The organization you've put together to handle your music enterprises is called Marathon Music. Why that name?

Doesn't it seem to you that, musically, I'm some kind of long-distance runner?

[ED. NOTE. Copies of Patricia's tape "Bald Eagles at Buchanan Lake" can be purchased for \$8.00 each from 207, Bulian Lane, Austin, Texas 78746. Make cheques payable to MARATHON MUSIC. For residents living outside the U.S.A. add \$1.00/item for postage. Texas residents add 6% Sales Tax.

Kwik Kuts

Stretching CD technology to the absolute time limit, the seventy seven minutes duration of "Smokin' the Dummy"/"Bloodlines" [Sugar Hill] has resulted in the omission of two cuts from the original version of "Smokin' the Dummy." When it came to inventing the term "true original" they thumbed through the dictionary and alighted at the entry, Terry Allen. Texas has got a lot to answer for. Basically, the latter equates to the rest of planet owing that state a vote of thanks for its fertile crop of pioneering folk/country/offbeat songwriters. Available in your local record store via Koch Distribution.

Tom Russell

Stateside during 1997, Tom Russell witnessed the simultaneous release of two new albums. First, there was the part studio, part live recording career retrospective "The Long Way Around." The second disc was only available by Mail Order originally. The title of the latter, fifteen cut set is "Song of the West - The Cowboy Collection." The Irish based label Round Tower released "The Long Way Around" in the UK earlier this summer. Tom was in the UK for a short promotional tour during late July 1997 and we caught up with him at Round Tower's London office.....

Tell us about "Off Broadway"

Well, that is probably one of our best venues. It's in St. Louis - you know, in the middle of the country. The Gateway to the West. For some reason we've built up a big fan base there. I think it has to do with radio. They have a really aggressive little public radio station and a couple of really good independent record stores. We've got a lot of airplay in the Central Mid-West and a lot of press. The Mid-West has become one of my better markets. Kansas City, St. Louis, Chicago - places like Columbus, Ohio even. It was a comfortable place to record. We did two nights with Dave Alvin and Katy Moffatt sitting in. I listened to the tracks - there were probably about sixty and I culled six or seven I thought were representative. Then I filled the album out with new studio recordings - some old songs, a few new ones.

Why cut a part studio, part live album at this stage in your career.

I just wanted the record to represent my favourite contemporary cuts of the songs. The way we do them now. I wasn't looking to do a complete live album, because frankly

they bore me. I didn't want a record that had 12 or 15 or 18 live tracks with rapping on it. I do a bit of rapping between songs in the show. I think those albums aren't as enduring, except where you use just a few live tracks to give people the idea of what you sound like live. I also wanted to get Iris [Dement] and Nanci [Griffith] on the album. Some of the new songs like "Big Water" I wasn't doing live at the time. I thought the balance worked, and then we ended it with "Box of Visions" which is a studio track. I don't know about you, but I don't tend to listen to live records that much.

Am I right in thinking that the "Beyond St. Olav's Gate" album, which was also a compilation, was only released in the UK.

Correct.

The way I looked at "The Long Way Around," was that it was a Tom Russell Greatest Hits package.

It was. Really what it's meant to do along with its brother album, the cowboy compilation called "Song of the West," - in the States, it was primarily meant to update a lot of people who did not know what I did or who I was. Hightone has been a more aggressive label for me in the States - the deal is, these are the songs the guy is known for, as well as some new ones, and this is the way he performs them now. This is who he is. And there are a lot of liner notes, because a lot of the Rounder recordings have maybe fallen by the wayside. Thankfully, some of them are out over here on Round Tower. It is a summing up period with these two current records.

Maybe it's already obvious, but why title this record "The Long Way Around."

[Laughs]. Because that's the way I'm headin.' That's a line from "Beyond the Blues." It's kind of like I think I've taken a long way around, as opposed to maybe moving to Nashville twenty years ago. I would have had to beat my head against the wall to become a star. Or I could have married a movie star. As you know, I ended up working a long time in Norway. In fact, I worked all over the world in weird spots.

In retrospect, almost as a historic document, do you regret that you never released a live album featuring the Tom Russell Band.

Yes and no. I have a lot of stuff on tape that eventually could surface. We did a lot of TV. We did a lot of live radio. I'm sure in the vaults somewhere there's a live album with the band. As I say, I'm just not that big a fan of live records. It worked acoustically this time, I think.

The only live band recordings that I'm aware of are the cuts featured on the Bear Family compilation "International Singer-Songwriter Festival - Frutigen, Switzerland - Live 1987."

Right. That's probably true. I didn't think about that album.

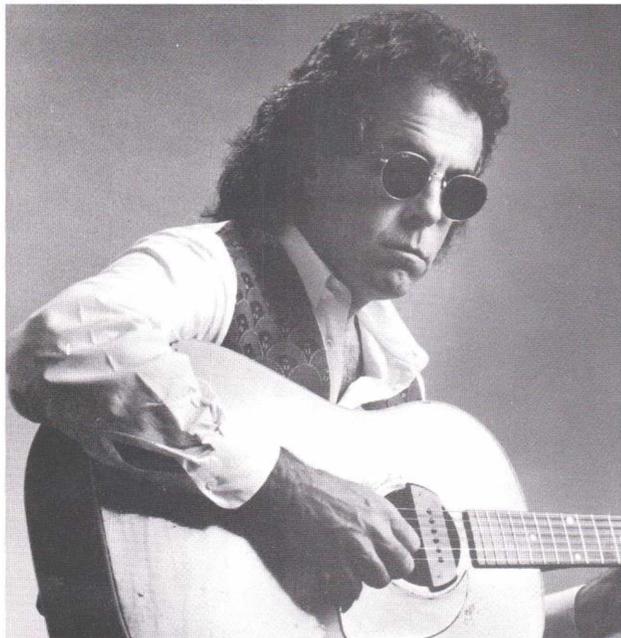
Can you tell us about one of the new songs "Big Water".

It's a song I wrote a couple of years ago when there was quite a bit of flooding around St. Louis and Kansas City, on the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers. They've had flooding this year, in North Dakota. Up near the Canadian border. I had written it and felt that it could sound like a Band song. A Levon Helm/Rick Danko thing. I wanted to get that feel. We

cut it live in the studio in Kansas City with Iris – and she added, as I say in the liner notes - a voice right out of Steinbeck or Falukner. Like a modern hillbilly voice full of realism.

Was it through working on the “Tulare Dust” album that you got to know Iris.

No, she actually opened a show in Kansas City for us about five years ago when I still had the band. She opened as a solo act. I think she had just recorded her first album, but she was still an unknown. As would happen, with Nanci too, within a year her career had taken off. She hit pretty well. The “**Tulare Dust**” thing helped her career a bit, because Haggard became so enamoured by what she did. For a while, he was supposed to produce her third record.



Round Tower Music, Dublin & London

Tom Russell [circa 1993]

Almost two decades on from “Coffins on the Brazos,” “Big Water” revisits the subject of floods.

Yeah, I didn't think about that. I was writing something else recently, when I thought about that image. I cut a picture out of the St. Louis newspaper about a year ago that showed coffins coming up out of the graveyard and floating down the river. A startling image.

My recollection is that you've sung “The Eyes of Roberto Duran” in shows for quite a number of years.

A little bit. I don't do it that much. It's three or four years old. Actually it's more, it's five or six years old. It was more of a band song, because it's got a rock beat. I forgot about it, then I played it for Dave Alvin once and he thought it was right for Chris Gafney. Chris Gafney recorded it for Hightone. Then I recorded a Chris Gafney song on my last record. Kelvin Henderson recorded it over here.

You're a big fight fan.

The fights are so corrupt now. Actually, I had Terry Allen and his wife over to our new house out in El Paso to watch the Tyson fiasco when he bit off Hollyfields ear.

Is “Mineral Wells” an older song.

It's four or five years old. Again, it's another song I never recorded, yet I would do it occasionally as a duet with Katy. It always went over quite well. Katy being from Fort Worth grew up near Mineral Wells. The main image being that big old hotel out there in the middle of nowhere, that has been boarded up for twenty years.

I hear that you've written a screenplay about “Mineral Wells.”

Yes, a treatment with Sylvia Tyson that we've flogged around a little bit and it follows the story of the song. It's a very visual piece. This big old, overweight guy – in fact, my daughter who works in a restaurant in Hollywood says she has seen the two actors that could play the main characters in the movie. They come into her restaurant every night. An ageing Grade B movie star, and a big overweight chauffeur.

Over the years you have collaborated with a large number of other songwriters. Is there anyone new that you've been working with lately.

No. I bumped into Joe Ely recently and gave him some lyric ideas for a song. He said he might work on it, so that would be something new. Dave Alvin and I just co-wrote a new song called “California Snow” that I would imagine he will put on his new record. It's very much in the Haggard vein and is about a border patrolman down near the San Diego border in California. That's a good one, I think. It's written through the eyes of the guy – he's an ageing cop. It's based on a true story. He finds a couple frozen to death up in the mountains – 'cause the Mexicans aren't aware that once you cross over and you go up into the high mountain range the weather can drop down to zero immediately. A lot of them end up freezing to death up there. It's told through the eyes of this ageing cop, who has seen too much of this stuff.

How is life in El Paso.

Oh, I love it. It's hard to get to from here. It's not as easy to get back home, as it was to New York. I've only been there since April and I've really been on the road most of the time. I go home as much as I can. It's really unbelievable. We have a place outside of the town with a view of the mountains and a couple of acres. It's an old adobe house. It's outrageous really. It's a real welcome change for me.

After all these years, I thought that you'd become a native New Yorker.

No. No, I never quite assimilated. I liked where I was for a while, because I was in a Spanish speaking neighbourhood. There was a lot of that culture there. Dominican. Puerto Rican. A lot of Mexicans were moving in. Also, there were a lot of yuppies up the street. It just became loud and boring after a while. We happened on this house while when we were out visiting during Christmas. You know, El Paso is seventy per cent Mexican and we're ten minutes from Juarez. There's a lot to explore there. We've probably met more artists and musicians since we left New York, than when we lived there.

Can we talk a little bit about “Song of the West” Are the tracks on this new album which also appeared on “Cowboy Real” the same studio cuts.

No. They're all new. Again, Hightone has been so good plus we've also gained this new alternative cowboy audience. It's growing out west. We've played the Elko Cowboy Poetry Gathering. That is a big deal. It takes place every year, in

the middle of Nevada. At the end of January they gather about 10,000 people, and it's centred round western folklore, poetry and cowboy songs. We've done it the last two years and we're doing it again this coming year. The people who attend the gathering buy a lot of these records and tapes. In September, we're doing a few more gatherings. I wanted to update and do the more definitive cowboy record, so I gave Hightone a two for one deal this time. They're actually releasing "**Song of the West**" to the stores in September. But it's mail order meantime.

But as long as you know about stores like Village Records, there's a chance of buying it.

Yeah, they've been flogging it. It's hard and it's out of my hands.

You've covered "Prairie in the Sky" on "Song of the West." It's probably the definitive Mary McCaslin cowboy song. Have you been familiar with her work for a long period.

Oh yeah, I'm a big fan. She was at Elko last year playing in a bar. She's been a big influence on a lot of people, including Ian Tyson. He claims she excited his interest in getting back into writing cowboy music. Yeah, I have all those early Mary records. We usually see her when we're in Santa Cruz. I always thought the song was incredible – almost a prayer you know.

There's also a lot of innocence in the lyric, because she had this idealised image of the Wild West taken from movies and television shows. The body of work that she has produced –

Is pretty amazing.

And you've got to remember that she literally disappeared nationally, as a recording artist, for ten years.

I always loved what she does and also what Jim Ringer did.

Tell us about Fraser and DeBolt. I'm sure I've heard you play "Dance Hall Girls" live.

We used to do it at sound checks. I don't do it live that much. I thought it loosely fitted the cowboy thing. It was an excuse to put it on a record. Also "John Bull Tin" isn't specifically speaking a cowboy song. A lot of people wanted it on a record, and I thought "*Well, loosely based I can sneak it on a cowboy record because it's about a tobacco tin.*" Daisy DeBolt, I think, still records in Canada for Festival Records. I don't know what happened to the guy, Alan Fraser. They did two records for CBS back in the early seventies. They were a very bizarre duo. "Dance Hall Girls" is about the straightest thing they did. The rest was very jam like, folk jazz. They did a really good version of The Beatles "Don't Let Me Down." Very jazzy and spacey. "Dance Hall Girls," their original cut, is really bizarre. It's also great, with a honky tonk piano and a trumpet on it.

On the liner to "Song of the West" there's a credit to a number of people whose names I didn't recognise. Who is Casey Tibbs.

He was a bronc rider – a saddle bronc rider from North Dakota, who was quite a legendary figure back in the fifties and sixties. He won the World Champion All Around Cowboy about five times in a row. He was one of these guys

who wore purple chaps and purple shirts. Ian Tyson wrote a song about him. He was just a colourful figure. One of the all time legendary rodeo guys. I met him a few times and he gave me a great signed bucking horse picture.

What about Peter La Farge. It sounds like another name I should know.

Peter La Farge is a real interesting one. He wrote "The Ballad of Ira Hayes" and cut three or four albums of songs about Native Americans. They came out on Folkways in the sixties. He was also the first topical songwriter to be signed by CBS. He died or committed suicide, I think, in 1967. He was a compadre of Dylan's. Dylan, in fact, mentions him in the liner notes of one of the box sets. Dylan read a short article I did on Peter La Farge years ago and ordered one of my records because of it – because he was into thinking of the old days and Peter. Johnny Cash – the main thing about Peter that people would know, would be that Johnny Cash recorded a whole album of his songs called "**Bitter Tears**" that Bear Family has reissued. A very interesting guy - a very interesting biography. Do you know Peter O'Brien, the Omaha Rainbow guy.

So that's where I've seen it –

Yeah, I wrote the article that Peter printed years and years ago. If you're ever in touch with Peter you could probably get a copy.

Those old Omaha Rainbows are an integral part of my archive.

There you go.

The artwork on "Song of the West" – did you do all of that.

I worked with a guy in New Jersey, when I was living in New York – a graphic artists who also did the Barrence Whitfield covers. I supplied him with the material and he put it together – the deal I have with Hightone, is that I deliver the records and the artwork – they virtually put it out. That way, I can work more closely with the graphic artist.

It's an incredible piece of work.

[Laughs]. Larry Sloane, the head of Hightone said it was the biggest booklet he has allowed so far. For a cowboy record it was nice. I just wanted it to look good and be, historically, a valid piece. The people that buy the records, especially the western people, really care about that.

Was "Hallie Lonnigan" penned as a tribute to your mother.

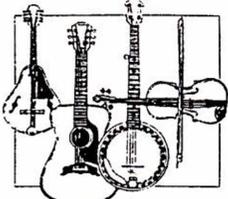
No. It's a new song – probably more dedicated to my brother Pat's ex-wife, who is a ranch lady who does a lot of the work around the ranch. It's just for the ladies of the west. It's a fictional woman in the song.

Personally, I think "Song of the West" is your best album ever.

That's good to hear. A lot of people are slowly getting into it. I put a lot of work into the album. I think Hightone have decided to release it, because the reaction has been very strong. That market is building. There's about five or six glossy cowboy magazines in the U.S. now. So that's a growing market.

A Kerrverts Festival 50.

There is a reason, There is a rhyme,
There is a season, There is a time,
and then, there's the latest KERRVERTS FESTIVAL 50.

1. The Dutchman **ROBERT JAMES WALLER** "The Ballads of Madison County" Atlantic 7567-82511-2 [1993]. #
 2. The Way To Calvary **ROD MACDONALD** "Highway To Nowhere" Shanachie 8001 [1992]. #
 3. Years **BETH NIELSEN CHAPMAN** "Beth Nielsen Chapman" Reprise 9 26172-2 [1990].
 4. Reunion Hill **RICHARD SHINDELL** "Reunion Hill" Shanachie 8027 [1997]. # 
 5. Sherman's Chimneys **BILL WARD** "Bill Ward" Songdog Records sdr 1001[1997]. #
 6. Yarrington Town **MICKIE MERKENS** "Texas Summer Nights, Vol. 1" Potato Satellite PS2-1000 [1983]. #
 7. Barefoot Prints **BUTCH HANCOCK** "You Coulda Walked Around the World" Rainlight RLT-37 [1997]. #
 8. Feel So Near **DOUGIE MacLEAN** "Riof" Dunkeld DUNCD 021 [1997].
 9. America Come Home **JOEL RAFAEL Band** "The Joel Rafael Band" Reluctant Angel RAM 0420 [1994]. #
 10. Margaret **FRANK TEDESSE** "Songs From Einstein's Violin" Imaginary Road 314 532 840-2 [1996]. #
 11. Run with the Ponies **THE ORIGINAL HARMONY RIDGE CREEK DIPPERS** "Same" [No label or index no.] [1997]. #
 12. The Next Best Western **RICHARD SHINDELL** "Reunion Hill" Shanachie 8027 [1997]. #
 13. Meanwhile the Rain **JOEL RAFAEL Band** "Old Wood Barn" Reluctant Angel RAM 0423 [1996]. #
 14. The Time is Now **STEVE FISHER/JAMIE BYRD** "Waterbug Anthology Volume 2" Waterbug [no index no.] [1997]. #
 15. Closer to You **NIAMH PARSONS & THE LOOSE CONNECTIONS** "Loosen Up" Green Linnet GLCD 1167 [1997]. #
 16. American Street Dream **BOB MARTIN** "The River Turns the Wheel" Riversong Records RS1A [1997]. #
 17. Oh Shenandoah **DAROL ANGER/SIBERRY** "Heritage - New Interpretations of American Roots" Island/Six Degrees 314-524 434-2 [1997]. #
 18. Boxcars **BOXCARS [CHRISTINE ALBERT/CHRIS GAGE]** "Jumpin' Tracks" Flatrock Records 3121 [1997]. #
 19. Are You Burning, Little Candle ? **JANE SIBERRY** "Child" Sheeba SHECD003 [1997]. #
 20. Trust Your Heart Always **TOM PACHECO** "Bare Bones & Barbed Wire" Road Goes On Forever RGF/TPDCD 040 [1997].
 21. Little Plastic Castle **ANI DIFRANCO** "Little Plastic Castle" Righteous Babe [No index no. - promo copy] [1998]. #
 21. Replaced **SUSAN WERNER/VAR.** "Big League Babe - Christine Lavin Tribute Album Vol.1" Prime CD PCD 037 [1997]. #
 23. Carnival Girl **CLIFF EBERHARDT** "12 Songs of Good and Evil" Red House RHR CD 105 [1997]. #
 24. Stoney End **BETH NIELSEN CHAPMAN** "The Music of Laura Nyro - Time & Love" Astor Place TCD 4007 [1997]. #
 25. Nothin' but a Long Goodbye **DAVID MALLETT** "Parallel Lives" Flying Fish CD FF 670 [1997]. #
 26. Blue Norther **LOUISE TAYLOR** "Ride" Signature Sounds SIG 1241 [1997]. # 
 27. Helium **JOHN FORSTER** "Helium" Philo CD 1214 [1997]. #
 28. Who Knows Where the Time Goes **JUDY COLLINS** "Forever - An Anthology" Elektra 62104-2 [1997]. #
 29. If I Was the Priest **ALLAN CLARKE** "One Step Up/Two Steps Back - The Songs of Bruce Springsteen" The Right Stuff 72438-59780-2-9 [1997]. #
 30. Water in the Fuel **FRED EAGLESMITH** "Lipstick, Lies & Gasoline" Razor & Tie RT2831-2 [1997]. #
 31. Angels in the End **THE GOOD SONS** "Wines, Lines and Valentines" Glitterhouse GRCD 427 [1997]. ^
 32. Milo **DENICE FRANKE** "You Don't Know Me" de niCE giRL DF002 [1997]. #
 33. Rose of Sharon **ELIZA GILKYSON** "Redemption Road" Siver Wave Records MTI-397 [1997]. # 
 34. Thirty Coins of Gold **DAVID OLNEY** "Real Lies" Philo CD 1204 [1997]. #
 35. Lightning Storm **SUZZY ROCHE** "Holy Smokes" Red House RHR CD 104 [1997]. #
 36. Tape from California **PHIL OCHS** "American Troubadour" A&M 540 728-2 [1997].
 37. Love Grows Wild **BUDDY MILLER** "Poison Love" Hightone HCD8084 [1997]. #
 38. The Roads are Long in Canada **BOB FRANKE** "Long Roads, Short Visits" Daring CD 3031 [1997]. #
 39. Getting Over You **JANIS IAN** "Hunger" Windham Hill 01934-11274-2 [1997]. #
 40. Heart's Companion **2 MUSES** "Reunite the Heart" 2 Muses [no index no.] [1996]. #
 41. Mockingbird Smile **JON DEE GRAHAM** "Escape From Monster Island" Freedom FR1013 [1997]. # 
 42. My Best Dress **CATHY BONNER** "Same Blood" Rideout RDEPR100 [1997].
 43. Pancho & Lefty **TOWNES VAN ZANDT** "Documentary" Normal 211 CD [1997]. ^
 44. Good Times Tomorrow, Hard Times Today **SID GRIFFIN** "Little Victories" Prima SID007 [1997].
 45. I Go Out Walking **HART ROUGE** "Beaupre's Home" Red House RHR CD 102 [1997]. #
 46. The Running Blood **MICHAEL MARTIN MURPHEY** "The Horse Legends" Warner Western 9 46584-2 [1994, 1997]. #
 47. Illegal Smile **JOHN PRINE** "Live On Tour" Oh Boy OBR 015CD [1997]. #
 48. The Cuckoo **SAM BAARDMAN** "Kicking the Stone Home" [No Label] spb-3883-1 [1997]. #
 49. Creepy Jackalope Eye **STEVE EARLE & THE SUPERSUCKERS** "Same" Sub-Pop [1997]. #
 50. Heal In The Wisdom **BOBBY BRIDGER** "Kerrville Folk Festival - Live 1986" (cassette only, no index no.) [1987]. #
- waitin' their turn - Nothing At All **BROOKS WILLIAMS** "7 Sisters" Green Linnet GLCD 2125 [1997] # ; Tattoo **SONIA** (of disappear fear) "Almost Chocolate" Philo CD 1207 [1998] # ; Secrets and Lies **JONATHA BROOKE** "10 cent Wings" MCAD-11706 [1997] # ; Rose in the Vine **CHERI KNIGHT** "The Northeast Kingdom" E Squared 1057-2 [1998] # ; Natick **RICK LEE** "Natick" Waterbug WBG0016 [1995] # ; See Breeze **GRANT McLENNAN** "In Your Bright Ray" Beggars Banquet BBQ CD 192 [1997] ; A Hundred Years of Solitude **THE WOODYS** "The Woodys" Rounder CD 3149 [1998] # ; Tucson **CHRISTINE KANE** "A Thousand Girls" Bridge BRO06712 [1997] # :

NOTE. All albums released in the UK, unless marked otherwise. US releases marked #. European marked ^. Japanese marked *. Introductory rhyme taken from the Bobby Bridger song, "Heal In The Wisdom" - The Kerrville Folk Festival Anthem.

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Editorial.

Over the next six months, or so, Charly Records hope to reissue on CD the Townes Van Zandt catalogue of albums, from "For the Sake of the Song" through to "Flying Shoes." It will be the first occasion that the former, 1968 title has been available in the UK. Each CD will each come complete with a specially written liner note, with a full TVZ biography presented across the eight titles. Penned by yours truly, the notes have been edited by the man who first inspired me to take up the pen, John Tobler. "The Late Great Townes Van Zandt" was reissued toward the close of last year, without liner notes. The next pressing of that title, will include liner notes. I also understand that the full "Live at the Old Quarter" set will be available on this occasion, as a 2 for 1 set. Rush out and buy the lot.

Since it's not too far into 1998, here's my selection of the 'Best of '97.....'

Albums

Richard Shindell "Reunion Hill" Shanachie [Import]. Quite simply - album three is a, to date, career crowning winner.
Tom Russell "Song of the West - The Cowboy Collection" HMG/Hightone [Import]. Originally intended as a Mail Order only pressing, his second cowboy song collection subsequently received a, thoroughly deserved, full scale commercial release.
Niamh Parsons & The Loose Connections "Loosen Up" Green Linnet [Import]. This satellite project for Arcady vocalist Parsons and bassist husband, Dee Moore, is a marriage of many musical genre's which constitutes one natural whole.

A few more recommended titles

Wilco "Being There" Reprise - Even though it was released Stateside in late '96.
Jane Siberry "Child" Sheeba [Import] - A wonderful two CD collection of unconventional Christmas songs.
Terry Clarke "The Heart Sings" Transatlantic - Quite simply because, he's the best songwriter we have and someday the nation will know it.
Tom Pacheco "Woodstock Winter" Mercury [Import] - Worth it

for the title track alone, and you get a dozen other songs to boot.....

Compilation Album of '97

"Memorial Day - American Impressionist Songwriters - Volume II" Waterbug [Import] - Twenty pieces of a jigsaw that map out America's future folk heritage.....

Gem of an album discover in '97 and released in '96

Frank Tedesso "Songs from Einstein's Violin" Imaginary Road [Import] - An usual voice, but oh what a mind. Tedesso paints beautiful landscapes and relates wonderful tales, as he conjures with words.

Most Fun Song of '97

"(These Eggs Were) Born to Run" by Rob Carlson on "Christine Lavin Presents, Laugh Tracks - Volume 1" Shanachie [Import] - For Broooce fans and diner customers everywhere.

Song[s] of '97 [Recorded]

"The Time is Now" by Steve Fisher on "Waterbug Anthology 2" Waterbug [Import]
"American Lipstick" by Terry Clarke/Rosie Flores on the formers "The Heart Sings" Transatlantic
"Sherman's Chimneys" by Bill Ward on "Bill Ward" Songdog Records [Import]
"Are You Burning, Little Candle" by Jane Siberry "Child" Sheeba [Import]

Unrecorded Song of '97

"The Moon Over Tucson" sung by Carrie Newcomer during her Wulfrun Hall, Wolverhampton gig supporting Alison Krauss.

Gig of '97

Wilco in all their sloppy, superb, magical glory, at the Wulfrun Hall, Wolverhampton way back at the beginning of this year.

Record Label of '97

Waterbug

Publication of '97

Dirty Linen, yet again

Sad "so longs" of '97

Townes Van Zandt, Nicolette Larson and Laura Nyro.

A few wurdz about the year of '97

Dreams do come true. I finally got to see Eric Taylor in concert. And there's more. Gene & Betty Elders + Richard Shindell played Birmingham Symphony Hall.

Regarding the contents of this issue, and in no particular order, thanks are due to **Rod Kennedy, Tom Russell, Andrew Hardin, Patricia Hardin and family, Tim & Lori Blixt, Steve Morris and Alpha Ray.** This issue is dedicated to the memory of the late, Nicolette Larson.

You can also find us at :

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11 November 1998

Kitty Barringer died today.
She danced right off the world
In a two-step waltz;
Kitty-i, kitty-o, kitty-ru-ru-ru



Alpha Ray

