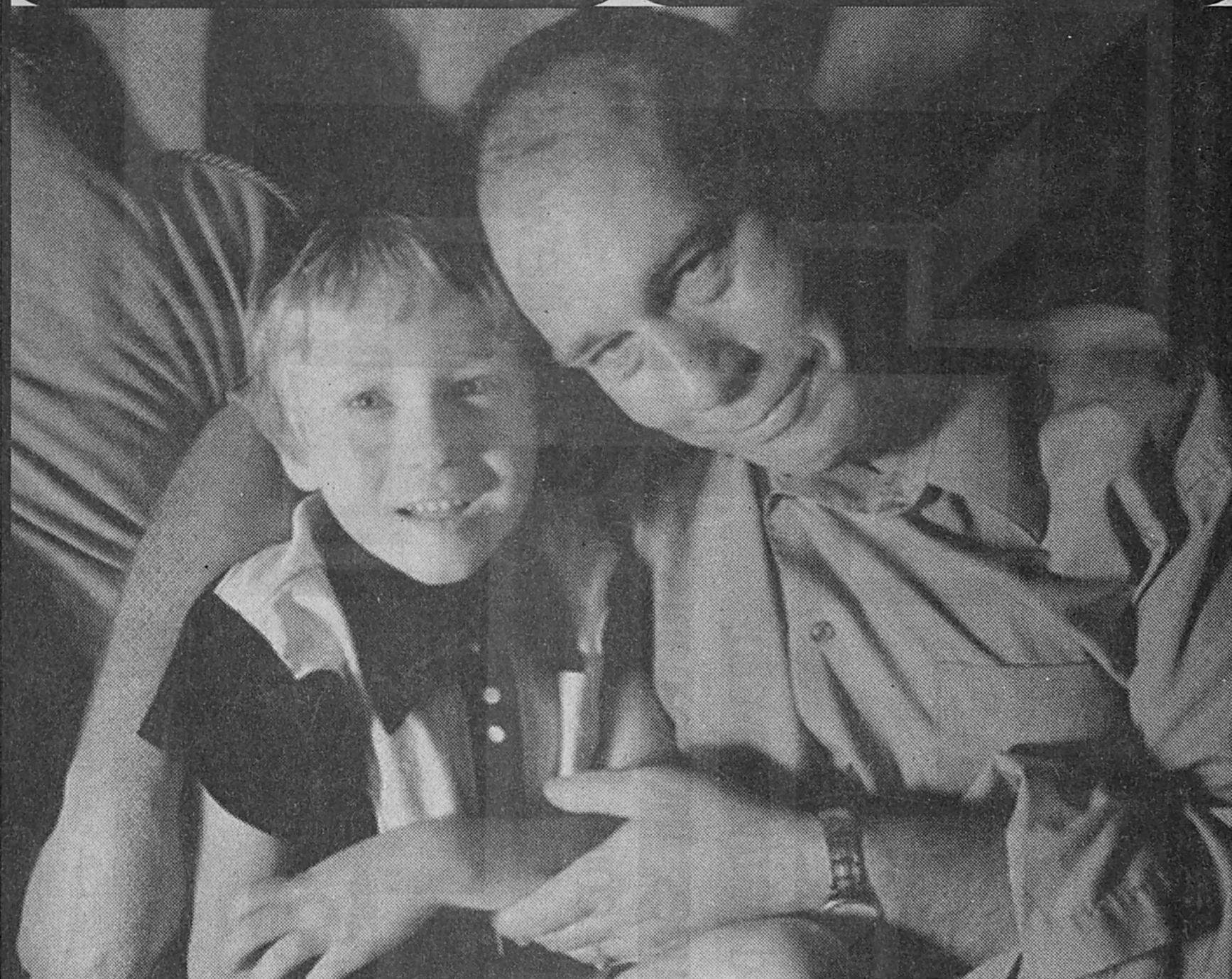


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#108/197 JANUARY 2006



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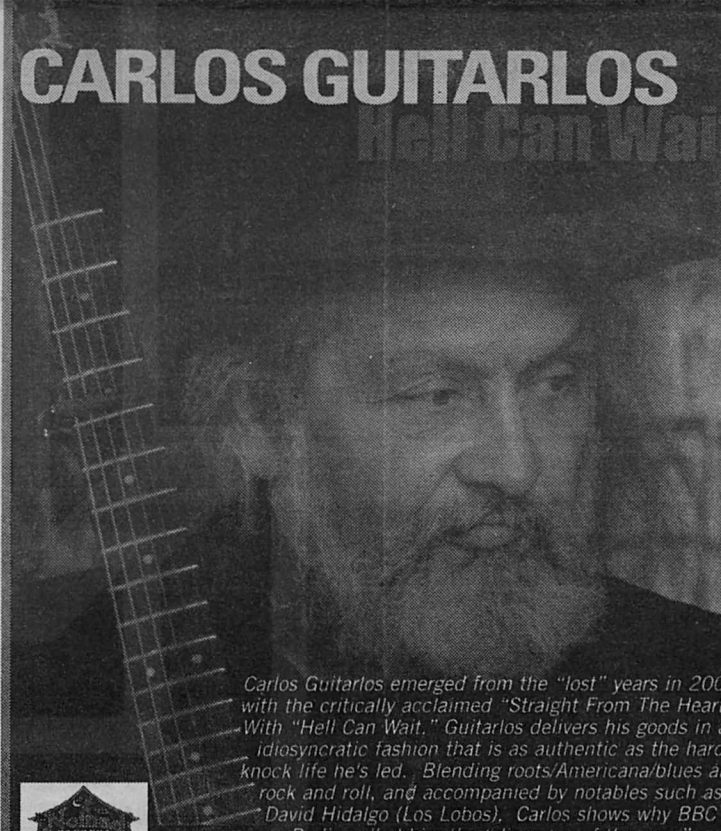
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(Ringo) *DB/*JD/*RH/*T&J/*TA

- 2 Bobby Earl Smith: Turn Row Blues (Muleshoe) *CS
- 3 Blaze Foley: Wanted More Dead Than Alive
(Waddell Hollow) *CP/*DO/*NA
- 4 Merle Haggard: Chicago Wind (Capitol) *OO/*TR/*WR
- 5 Marti Brom Sings Heartache Numbers
(Goofin' [Finland]) *DT/*JP
- 6 VA: For A Decade Of Sin (Bloodshot) *RV
- 7 Lauren Sheehan: Two Wings (Wilson River) *JA/*TG
- 9 Rick Shea & The Losing End: Bound For Trouble
(Tres Pescadores) *FS
- 10 VA: Our New Orleans 2005 (Nonesuch) *B&C/*TJ
- 9 Hank Thompson: My Personal Favorites
(Thompson Enterprises) *BP
- 10 Dale Watson: Heeah!! (Continental Song City/Koch) *LB
- 11= Dave Desmelik: When Your Eyes Are Closed (self) *MP/*RE
Joy Lynn White: One More Time (Thortch)
- 12= BR549: Dog Days (Dualtone) *DS/*GM
VA: To Kate; An Album for Kate's Sake
(Western Beat) *N&T/*SR
- 13= Jerry Douglas: The Best Kept Secret (Koch) *KR
Tim Grimm: The Back Fields (Wind River) *MF
Donal Hinely: Giants (Scuffletown) *DY
- 14 VA: Hands Across The Water (Compass) *JB
- 15 Jack Williams: Laughing In The Face Of The Blues
(Wind River) *RJ
- 16 Miss Leslie & Her Juke-Jointers: Honky Tonk Revival
(Zero Label)
- 17= Bonnie Bishop: Soft To The Touch
(Smith Entertainment) *KB
Mary Gauthier: Season Of Mercy (Lost Highway)
Jimmie Dale Gilmore: Come On Back (Rounder) *EB
George Jones: Hits I Missed... & One I Didn't (Bandit) *JM
- 18= Bobby Bare: The Moon Was Blue (Dualtone)
Colin Brooks: Blood And Water (Skywater) *PP
DeSoto Rust (self) *GG
Alejandro Escovedo String Quintet: Room of Songs
(More Miles Than Money) *BS
Eliza Gilkyson: Paradise Hotel (Red House) *TT
Jim & Jennie & The Pinetops: Rivers Roll On By
(Bloodshot) *MDT
Marty Stuart & The Superlatives: Souls' Chapel (Superlatone)
The Two Timin' Three: Where Did You Sleep Last Night?
(Vinylux) *TS
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*XX = DJ'S ALBUM OF THE MONTH

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FAR & AWAY 2005

ALBUM OF THE YEAR

- #1 Marti Brom Sings Heartache Numbers (Goofin)
- 2 John Prine: Fair & Square (Oh Boy)
- 3 Caitlin Cary & Thad Cockrell: Begonias (Yep Roc)
- 4 James McMurtry: Childish Things (Compadre)
- 5 Eliza Gilkyson: Paradise Hotel (Red House)
- 6 Rodney Crowell: The Outsider (Columbia)
- 7 Mary Gauthier: Mercy Now (Lost Highway)
- 8 Marty Stuart & His Fabulous Superlatives: Souls' Chapel (Superlatone)
- 9 Dwight Yoakam: Blame The Vain (New West)
- 10 Jimmie Dale Gilmore: Come On Back (Rounder)

DEBUT ALBUM

#1 Miss Leslie & Her Juke Jointers:

Honky Tonk Revival (Zero Label)

- 2 Sarah Borges: Silver City (Blue Corn)
- 3 Amber Digby: Music From The Honky Tonks (Yellow Rose)
- 4 Abigail Washburn: Song Of The Traveling Daughter (Nettwerk)
- 5 Shooter Jennings: Put The O Back In Country (Universal South)
- 6 Hacienda Brothers (Koch)
- 7 Robyn Ludwick: For So Long (Late Show)
- 8 Dave Insley: Call Me Lonesome (self)
- 9 Twilight Ranchers: Who Stole That Train (Cow Island Music)
- 10 Wayne Scott: This Weary Way (Full Light)

VARIOUS ARTISTS/TRIBUTE ALBUM

#1 Los Super 7: Heard It On The X (Telarc)

- 2 Tribute To Billy Joe Shaver (Compadre)
- 3 For A Decade Of Sin; 11 Years Of Bloodshot Records (Bloodshot)
- 4 Elizabeth McQueen & The Firebrands:
Happy Doing What We're Doing (Freedom)

REISSUE/HISTORIC ALBUM

#1 Blaze Foley: Wanted More Dead Than Alive (Waddell Hollow)

- 2 Terry Allen: The Silent Majority (Sugar Hill)
- 3 Bob Dylan: No Direction Home (Sony Legacy)
- 4 Johnny Cash: The Legend (Sony Legacy)
- 5 John Lilly & Ralph Blizard: Blue Highway (self)

FEMALE ARTIST

#1 Marti Brom

- 2 Mary Gauthier
- 3 Eliza Gilkyson
- 4 Elizabeth McQueen
- 5 Audrey Auld Mezera
- 6 Adrienne Young
- 7 Amber Digby

MALE ARTIST

#1 John Prine

- 2 James McMurtry
- 3 Rodney Crowell
- 4 Jimmie Dale Gilmore
- 5 Dwight Yoakam

SONGWRITER

#1 James McMurtry

- 2 John Prine
- 3 Mary Gauthier
- 4 Rodney Crowell
- 5 Eliza Gilkyson
- 6 Tim Grimm
- 7 Cary Swinney

BEST IN THE INDUSTRY

#1 Joe Swank/Yep Roc

- 2 Thais Fletcher/Bloodshot
- 3 Martha Moore/So Much Moore
- 4 Lynn Lancaster & Lindsay Reid/Sugar Hill
- 5 Vickie Lucero/Propaganda Group
- 6 Al Moss & Melissa Farina/Al Moss Promotions



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20th Texas Mavericks, 10pm
26th Craig Tounge
27th Charles Thibodeaux & The Bajou Cajun Band, 10pm

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LUBBOCK LIGHTS

(289 Films, DVD *****)

When Alfred Hitchcock put Cary Grant at that Wisconsin prairie crossroads, he was only setting up a scene, director Amy Maner's initial problem is trying to suggest how the very horizontalness of the High Plains affects people's lives and psyches. The underlying theme of the film is, of course, why Lubbock? However, as Maner relies on a commentary provided by Butch Hancock's paradoxes, Jimmie Dale Gilmore's mysticism, Terry Allen's gnomic philosophy, Joe's Ely's off-kilter common sense—well, when the closest you've got to a regular Joe is Jesse Taylor, you're just naturally going to end up with more questions than answers, and vice versa. However, even if there's nothing approaching a resolution, the film is packed with wonderful segments, tributes to the pivotal roles of Tommy X Hancock and CB Stubblefield, a 1991 film of Ely, Gilmore & Hancock singing *If You Were A Bluebird*, the original Flatlanders performing *The Stars In My Life* at an early Kerrville Folk Festival with a segue to all of them but the late Sylvester Rice picking it up decades later. I have some criticisms, the exclusion of Jo Carol Pierce is inexplicable, indeed inexcusable when the utterly irrelevant David Byrne gets plenty of footage, Cary Swinney would have been a far better illustration than Natalie Maines that the mystery lives on and there was way more Legendary Stardust Cowboy than I have any use for, though I can hardly fault Maner for inadvertently illustrating how much more the Flatlanders reunion could have been. However short on answers, the film did rather pose, in moments evoking one's first magical encounter with The Flatlanders, one fascinating question: how many of us were pulled into the Lubbock mystique not by Ely's showmanship or Hancock's songwriting, but by Gilmore's voice? **JC**

DAVID RODRIGUEZ • PROUD HEART

(Recovery *****)

Much as I love to see any David Rodriguez album become generally available again after way too many years, I have to admit that **Proud Heart**, originally released by Continental Song City [Holland] in 1996, would not be my first, or even second, choice for rerelease. Probably biased by the fact that I was there when it was made, and, indeed, financed the original cassette release, and anyway have a general prejudice in favor of live recordings, my preference would be for Rodriguez's debut, **Man Against Beast** (aka The True Cross), and of his other four CDs, I'd incline towards **The Friedens Angel**, if only for the fabulous live version of *Constant War*. The problem with **Proud Heart** is not so much that the material isn't, overall, as strong as those other albums, we're talking about David Rodriguez, so none of it's weak, and the title track, *Out Of Range* and *The Other Texas*, at least, are among his best songs, as that Ad van Meurs, who performs as 'The Watchman,' which has always made me a little uncomfortable, takes himself rather too seriously as producer. Of course, this takes us into the same dispute as that between admirers of **Live At The Old Quarter**, **Houston** and Townes' studio albums, and I hardly need tell you where I stand on that one. Still, if I don't think it's his best, this is nonetheless a fine album by a great singer-songwriter. **JC**

ERIC TAYLOR • THE GREAT DIVIDE

(Blue Ruby *****)

Back in the late 60s, 70s and 80s, if you wanted Texas singer-songwriter action, Houston was where it was at. Among the giants who emerged from that scene was Eric Taylor, but unlike contemporaries such as Townes Van Zandt, even the painstaking Guy Clark, or proteges like Lyle Lovett and Nanci Griffith, who've put out two or three times more, this is only Taylor's fifth album in the 25 years since his 1981 debut. While Clark, Lovett and Griffith were building their careers and recording for major labels, Taylor was wrestling with personal demons, but if he lost unrecoverable momentum, he found himself, by the early 90s supporting a new family as a qualified counsellor to people dealing with the same drug and alcohol problems he'd overcome. For many years, he only played once a year in Houston and Austin but in 1995 recorded his second, eponymous, album and since then has kept up a relatively normal pace, **Resurrect** following in 1998, **Scuffletown** in 2001 and the live **Kerrville Tapes** in 2003. One problem I've come across with Taylor is that it's a really bad idea to read his press while working on a review, because he has a way of making writers and other songwriters stretch themselves, crafting commentary worthy of the subject and raising the bar for the next guy. So I'll just say that this, produced and arranged, with minimal backings, by Taylor himself, is another collection of 11 of this great songwriter, singer and guitarist's intense chansons verité, soundtracks to fascinating unmade four minute movies. **JC**

NANCY APPLE & ROB McNURLIN RIVER ROAD OR RAIL

(Ringo *****)

Ten odd years ago, Jim Beal Jr and I were cohosting a *Third Coast Music Network* show and after playing Redd Volkaert's version of Ronnie Milsap's *The Girl Who Waits On Tables*, agreed that while we detested Countrypolitan at the time, it was starting to sound pretty good compared to contemporary Nashville product. Seems we were ahead of our time, now that musicians like Marti Brom are mining this seam. Off at a bit of a tangent, 'The Cadillac Cowgirl' of Memphis and the 'Beatnik Cowboy' of Kentucky marry a Conway Twitty & Loretta Lynn duet style, with a far better grasp of the basic concept than Caitlin Cary & Thad Cockrell, to offbeat original material and, come to that, a cover of Leon Payne's *Lost Highway*, that no Countrypolitan act would have touched. Though they slightly cripple their album by closing with two Christmas songs, there's a wonderful, warm, homemade feeling to Apple and McNurlin's collaboration that makes one wonder how much more effective Twitty and Lynn could have been if slickness hadn't been Music Row's priority. **JC**

FERN JONES • THE GLORY ROAD

(Numero Group *****)

Ray Wylie Hubbard concludes his intro to *When She Sang Amazing Grace*, "I came to find there wasn't much call for honky tonk gospel music." Over 40 years ago, Fern Jones came to find there wasn't much call for rockabilly gospel music. After 20 years of performing in tents and churches, the ordained Pentecostal minister recorded a sensational album in 1959, but today the players on it, Hank Garland, Floyd Cramer, Buddy Harman and Jerry Zinkan, who'd backed Elvis Presley on his 1958 sessions, are far better known than she. How Jones might have done given half a chance is now impossible to know, but shortly after releasing her LP, **Singing A Happy Song**, Dot folded its gospel division, leaving her without a single and, therefore, no airplay. After a two month promotional tour, she quit performing entirely. The story behind this reissue is almost as amazing as the album itself. When Gulf + Western bought Paramount, it ordered the entire Dot catalog to be deleted, but somehow Jones' tapes survived and, after the ten-year lease expired, she spent 15 years badgering successive owners until MCA returned them in 1983. In 2004, her daughter heard Numero Group's heads on NPR discussing another release, contacted their mastering engineer, Jeff Lipton, and asked him to transfer her mother's almost 50 year old masters. "The tape played as though it had been recorded the week before. Not a hiccup or a drop out." Featuring several originals, notably *I Was There When It Happened*, a Johnny Cash standard from the beginning of his career, along with arrangements of Sister Rosetta Tharpe's *Strange Things Are Happening Every Day* and *Didn't It Rain*, Thomas Dorsey's *Take My Hand*, *Precious Lord* and other gospel standards, the original album is supplemented by four tracks originally released on 78s which Jones and her preacher husband sold at meetings, and all I can say is that the label's 'Patsy on Jesus' tag is by no means farfetched. If you're into rockabilly or vintage gospel, let alone both, you're going to love Fern Jones. **JC**

ROBYN LUDWICK • FOR SO LONG

(Late Show *****)

Fifteen odd years ago, two brothers, one kind of an arrogant asshole with stage presence and the other a nice guy but a terminally boring performer, were seen as comers in Austin country. Charlie Robison never lived up to the promise of his 1996 debut, **Bandera**, and Bruce Robison's success came from other people covering his songs, but the family had a reserve waiting in the wings. When she hung out with her brothers at Henry's Bar & Grill, Robyn Ludwick was a pretty, bubbly girl, now she looks like the ideal toughly handsome model for a 'Don't Mess With Texas Women' ad campaign and, while sharing the singing and songwriting ability of both, her low key assurance strikes a balance between one brother's cockiness and the other's self-effacement. Though her 13 originals get off to a slightly rocky start with the opening *What Do I Know*, she hits her stride with a string of winners, *El Dorado*, *Virginia*, *Stranger*, *Morning Comes*, the title track and *I Am*. Produced by Danny Barnes, who also plays guitars, banjo and mandolin, and featuring her husband John Ludwick on basses, Warren Hood fiddle, Chip Dolan B3, Marty Muse pedal steel, Jon Dee Graham lap steel, Rich Brotherton mandolin and harmonies by Bruce Robison, Kelly Willis and Carol Young, Ludwick's album is something of a sleeper, there's a certain sameness about the sound and, like many debut artists, she seems to be holding back, but it doesn't take long for her melancholy restraint to mark this as a keeper. **JC**

CHIP DOLAN • RIGHT NOW

(Noah Bamboa *****)

Credits, particularly on Austin debuts, can be useful reference points; the presence of certain names providing some assurance that the album will, at the very least, sound good, and that the marquee artist or artists know their way around the scene well enough to hire the best. One such name is that of Chip Dolan, who's played accordion and keyboards on more sessions than you can shake a stick at, and, of course, most of the time he works alongside his peers, so when he came to make an album of his own, he had the best players in town on speed dial, and the credits on it are simply breathtaking, Marvin Dykhuis production, acoustic and electric guitars, mandolin, bass, lap steel, percussion and backing vocals, George Reiff bass and Rick Richards drums are just the core band. Additional players include Eamon McGloughlin fiddle and viola, Glenn Fukunaga and Chris Maresh upright bass, Robby Gjersoe dobro, Gene Elders fiddle, Warren Hood fiddle and mandolin, Paul Percy percussion and drums, Gabe Rhodes electric guitar, Kim Deschamps pedal steel, Mike Hardwick electric guitar and lap steel, Erik Hokkanen fiddle, mandolin and electric guitar, Floyd Domino piano, Dan Terosian clarinets and saxes, Rich Brotherton mandolin, David Carroll bass, Sara Hickman, Kelly Willis and Bruce Robison harmonies and, rather enigmatically, "Bucktown features Cyril Neville, Marcia Ball and Ruthie Foster," presumably background vocals. With 12 originals and a cover of Guy Clark's *Baton Rouge*, Dolan describes his music as "Americana Folk, Boogie-Woogie piano, Irish-American," and one can hear traces of The Grateful Dead, The Band, The Meters and The Pogues side by side on an album that transcends the usual limitations of a sideman project. And, of course, it sounds great. Mind you, Chip, 'accordion'? Who proofed this thing? **JC**

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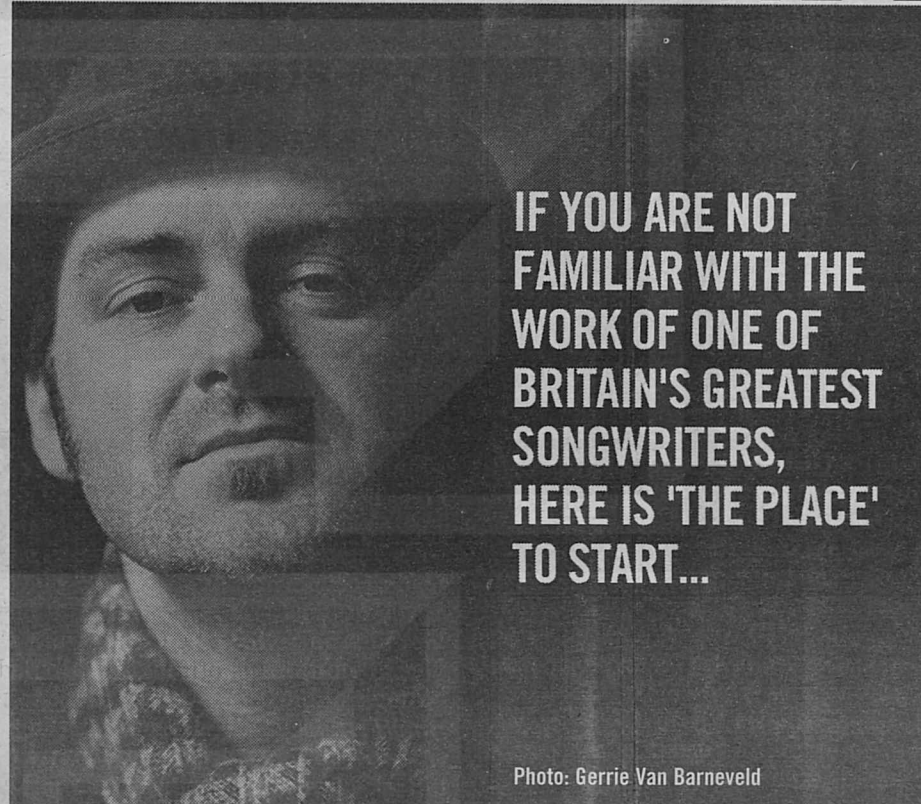
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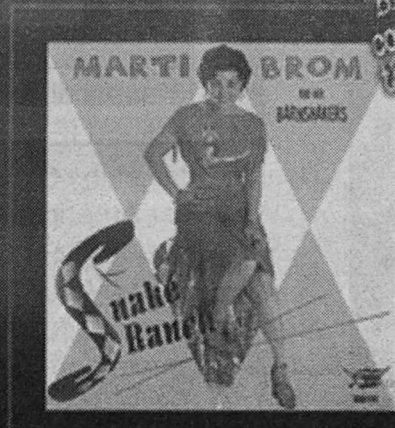
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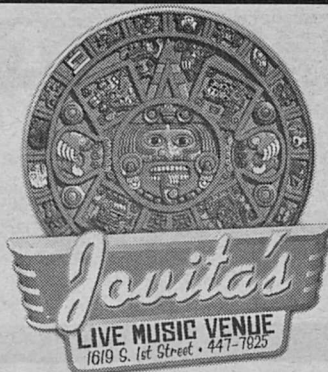
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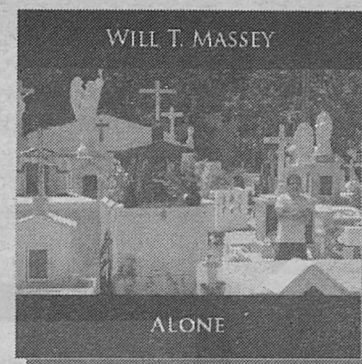


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The Long-Awaited Release of Blaze Foley's Third Studio Album is Now!!



A few months before he was shot to death on Feb. 1, 1989, Blaze Foley and a band comprised of steel player Charlie Day and the Waddell Brothers, bassist David and drummer Leland, recorded ten tracks at the Bee Creek Studio in Driftwood, Texas.

Whatever happened to Foley's final studio work? The word was that the master tapes were destroyed in a fire and the rough mix cassettes, and subsequent burned CDs given to band members, couldn't be found.

The Bee Creek sessions seemed destined for a similar fate until July 2005 when Leland Waddell received a call from an old friend in Indiana. The guy said he'd been cleaning out his car and found an unmarked CD. He played it to see if it contained anything and he thought it sounded like Blaze. Excitedly, Waddell asked the friend to overnight the disc and, sure enough, it was the rough mixes of those 1988 sessions.

Michael Concoran, Austin American Statesman

Now, 17 years later, Waddell Hollow Records proudly presents ten songs - Fully restored with Pro Tools by John Sheppard. This is the album that Blaze wanted to make, including "If I Could Only Fly", "Clay Pigeons" and two songs thought to be lost forever - Calvin Russell's "Life Of a Texas Man" and Jubal Clark's "Black Granite."

Available now from www.waddellhollowrecords.com and Waterloo Records. Listen, and you won't believe your ears.

JOHN THE REVEALATOR

Seems there were even more nits to pick in last month's review of **Raw Vision** than I realized. Patrick Hurley (who, incidentally, makes a cameo appearance in *Lubbock Lights*, see reviews) writes from Ireland, "Not only that but—because it's a Philo compilation—there is nothing included from two of the best albums **The Tom Russell Band** did make, **As The Crow Flies** (1985) and **Joshua Tree** (1986), commercially available cassettes which still have not made it to CD, except for one track which is on **Museum Of Memories: 1972-2002**." Also, though I could find no mention of it anywhere, David Obermann, *Folkways*, KUT, Austin, tells me he has a copy of the American LP of **Heart On A Sleeve**, released by End Of The Trail Music.

♦ Leslie Lindley of Miss Leslie & Her Juke Jointers writes, "**'Little' Joe Carson** is phenomenal and **Hillbilly Band From Mars** has some great music on it. We love the band and his voice both. He has some great material on there, *Forbidden Wine* and *Helpless* are a couple of our favorites. Jake Hooker and Darrell McCall cover some of his stuff and we do Joe's arrangement of *I Gotta Get Drunk*."

♦ Reviewing Lindsay Lohan's **A Little More Personal (Raw)** for *All Music Guide*, Stephen Thomas Erlewine may have redefined the expression 'damning with faint praise' when he calls it "the most interesting album yet recorded by a teen starlet in the new millennium."

♦ I have to say that I agree with CMT.com's Craig Shelburne when he says, "While most independent country albums sound stale—from relying on what worked in the 1990s—[Todd] Fritsch's self-titled release sounds as contemporary as anything on the major labels these days." Where we differ is that I'd intend this as an insult.

♦ Associated Press recently reported "Hard-line President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has banned Western music from Iran's radio and TV stations, reviving one of the harshest cultural decrees from the early days of the 1979 Islamic Revolution." However, the story continued, "Songs such as George Michael's *Careless Whisper*, Eric Clapton's *Rush* and the Eagles' *Hotel California* have regularly accompanied Iranian broadcasts, as do tunes by saxophonist Kenny G." Horrible syntax, but if these are examples of what will be banned, I have to say that this strikes me as a very progressive development, though I fear Kenny G's noise could slip through the net because Iranian censors may not recognize it as music.

♦ One of the great virtues of Country used to be that once an artist had reached a certain level of acceptance, he or she was pretty much guaranteed a lifetime career. Now that Country has become yet another genre that eats its young, cycling ever younger and prettier performers through a revolving door, a welcome reminder of the old school is **Ray Price's 80th Birthday Concert**, which will be held on January 12th in Lufkin, TX. Born near Perryville, TX, in 1926, Price cut his first single in 1949 and created one of the classic sounds of country music, the 4/4 shuffle still known as 'the Ray Price beat,' with *Crazy Arms* in 1956. Fifty years later, he and The Cherokee Cowboys are still at it. God love Ray Noble Price.

♦ In last month's column, I said I'd be coming back on a couple of items, but after poking round 'Faith Hill returns to roots in concert special,' I decided the juxtaposition had enough meat on it for an editorial rant about the meaning—or lack of meaning—of the word 'roots,' but I have other fish to fry this month, so that one's on hold. Further consideration of the other topic, **Charlie Kaye's** article in the December issue of the British magazine *Maverick*, in which he described my coverage as "Texas root music... rather than the more popular Texas New Wavers, who he generally has a fairly indiscriminating contempt for on principle," adding later in the piece, "But times move on and contempt can be misplaced or pointless if it misunderstands

change it dislikes... It is now the inevitable turn of a new generation doing things in new ways," has been rather derailed by Kaye himself. "No thought you are missing out! Your life is unlikely to be significantly improved by extended exposure to Bob Schneider, Pat Green, etc any more than mine. More a case of let listeners whose bell gets rung by these guys get on with it. I'm not one of them either."

♦ What's January without some Best O' lists? Elsewhere, you'll find FAR & Away, the annual *Freeform American Roots* reporters' consensus on 2005. Well, consensus is may be too strong a word. When voting closed, there were 824 nominations in the eight categories, 229 for Album Of The Year alone, of which the bottom 100 collectively got fewer votes than **Martí Brom Sings Heartache Numbers**. The top point scorers, by a considerable margin, were **Martí Brom** (Female Artist) and **Blaze Foley: Wanted More Dead Than Alive** (Reissue/Historic Album), who monstered those categories.

♦ Below, as a) I don't get to vote in FAR & Away and b) this here is my deal, are my own picks. There is, of course, some synch with the FARsters, most obviously Martí, Blaze, Sarah Borges and Miss Leslie, but some major divergencies. **Michael Weston King** hasn't done a full court media press, print or radio, in the US, that's planned for 2006, but I was surprised that only one DJ, Tom Jackson of Chicago, joined me on **The Detroit Cobras**. On the other hand, I thought **Los Super 7: Heard It On The X** was pretty flat and had very little use for Caitlin Cary & Thad Cockrell's **Begonias**.

JC's BEST OF 2005

ALBUM OF THE YEAR

- 1 **Martí Brom Sings Heartache Numbers** (Goofin')
- 2 The Detroit Cobras: *Baby (Bloodshot)*
- 3 Michael Weston King: *Absent Friends (Murdered With Kindness)*
- 4 Rick Broussard's *Two Hoots & A Holler (Stag)*
- 5 Miss Leslie & Her Juke Jointers: *Honky Tonk Revival (Zero Label)*
- 6 Bobby Earl Smith: *Turn Row Blues (Muleshoe)*

DEBUT ALBUM

- 1 **Amber Digby: Music From The Honky Tonks** (Yellow Rose)
- 2 Sarah Borges: *Silver City (Blue Corn)*
- 3 Miss Leslie & Her Juke Jointers: *Honky Tonk Revival (Zero Label)*

VA/TRIBUTE ALBUM

- 1 **Elizabeth McQueen & The Firebrands: Happy Doing What We're Doing** (Freedom)

REISSUE/HISTORIC ALBUM

- 1 **Blaze Foley: Wanted More Dead Than Alive** (Waddell Hollow)
- 2 The Very Best Of Wynn Stewart & Jan Howard (Varese Saraband)
- 3 Clifton Chenier: *Louisiana Blues & Zydeco* (Arhoolie)

FEMALE ARTIST

- 1 **Mary Ramirez** (Detroit Cobras)
- 2 Martí Brom
- 3 Amber Digby

MALE ARTIST

- 1 **Michael Weston King**
- 2 Chris Gaffney
- 3 Bobby Flores

SONGWRITER

- 1 **Blaze Foley**
- 2 Michael Weston King
- 3 Sarah Borges

BEST IN THE INDUSTRY

- 1 **Bob Brom** (Squarebird)
- 2 David & Leland Waddell (Waddell Hollow)
- 3 Darrell Anderson (Hightone)

THE READERS WRITE

Next April, I'll be putting out the 200th issue of *Music City/Music City Texas/3CM* and, apart from big doings during NotSXSW, I'm inviting long time readers to let me know what they like (or not) about the mag, why they keep reading it and, most of all, which favorite artists and albums they first, perhaps only, learned of in these here pages. Email me at john@3rdcoastmusic.com.

LOOSE DIAMONDS #21

A DJ's PRIVATE STASH CARRIE DELZOPPO

I'm a list making type of a gal. I have a huge book of lists for my radio programme, *The Cowboy's Sweetheart*, BayFM 99.9 (Byron Bay, New South Wales, Australia, www.bayfm.org). Lists of songs in themes—space travel, telephone, droughts, floods, the devil, the big kiss off, spelling lessons, guitars. Lists of songs with various artists—songs that Fats Kaplin plays on, EmmyLou harmony vocals, etc etc. So when John asked me to write a Loose Diamonds, I thought it would be fun. Another list! You can't have too many lists.

So standing in front of the shelves I made a list of albums I would be really unhappy never to hear again. The kind of albums that you would stuff in your backpack when the flames are licking your rear end. A short list of 87 as it turned out (note to self: buy bigger backpack). Many you wouldn't get an argument about, George, Merle, Patsy, Lefty, Willie, Townes, Guy Clarke, Steve Earle, Greg Brown, The Doc, Billy Joe, Jimmie Dale... the usual suspects. But what's probably of more interest are the more obscure gems that made it into that speedy scan of my collection. I'm not saying these are all great, I'm saying that the songs in them have become part of my life, offer insight or just simply make me feel good. I'd miss them. Sometimes an album can take a long time to pass from instant attraction to treasure. I like albums that release their gifts slowly.

Chris Wall & Reckless Kelly: Tainted Angel (Cold Spring, 1998) For the poetry and storytelling. Listen to *God's Own Jukebox*.

Bobby Valentino: You're Telling Me (Vireo, 1996) Fabulous. I rarely think a cover is better than the original but BV's version of Merle Travis's *Sweet Temptation* is.

J Byrd Hosch: Cat O' Nine Tails (Dirty Bird, 1999) Great songs and the most delightful broadest Southern accent I've ever heard in song (maybe this is an Australian thing).

Skip Gorman: Lonesome Prairie Love (Rounder, 1996) High lonesome cowboy soul.

Don McCalister Jr: Love Gone Right (Biscuit Boy, 1996)

Jack Williams: Across The Winterline (Wind River, 1999)

The Piners (Orchard, 2000)
For that haunting song about Jimmie Rodgers, *The Loneliest Yodel*.

Bap Kennedy: Domestic Blues (E Squared, 1998)

Dave Alvin: King Of California (Hightone, 1994)

Steve Young: Primal Young (Appleseed, 2000)

James Talley: Nashville City Blues (Cimarron, 2000)

Wylie & The Wild West: Ridin The Hi-Line (Rounder, 2000)

Dave & Deke Combo: Hollywood Barn Dance (Heyday, 1996) For the sheer fun.

Ray Condo: Swing Brother Swing (Joaquin, 1996) For same.

And speaking of lists, I have one of 92 Songs about Hank Williams. I've been collecting these wonderfully maudlin pieces of tribute for a couple of decades. If anyone else has a similar passion for these songs, I'd love to hear from you—carolyn@mullum.com.au

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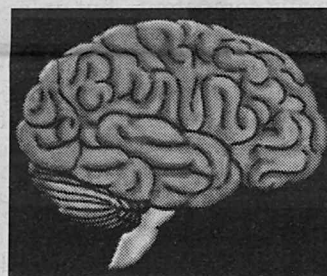
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THE SINGER NOT THE SONG

Saying 'It all begins with a song' may be a cliché, but let's face it, without material, the greatest musicians in the world would be stuck playing variations of John Cage's 4.33. However, in the record reviewing game, much of the time it doesn't begin with a song, it begins with a songwriter, and I'm here to tell you that singer-songwriters are about the toughest part of this gig. The problem is that one can apply more or less objective technical standards to, say, a country act—the singer has to be able to carry a tune, the fiddler and steel guitarist must be minimally competent—but unless they're obviously and hopelessly derivative, which, of course, many are, singer-songwriters must be treated sui generis, the only useful context being their own earlier work, if any.

Again, there's generally a fair consensus among competent reviewers whether, and why, a country album is good, bad or indifferent, but with singer-songwriters, all too often, one critic's trash is another's treasure, from an unknown's debut to the latest from a legend, and it's a very lame album indeed that can't garner a favorable review or two. The same holds true for DJs, more often than not country-orientated FAR reporters spontaneously rally behind certain albums, while the folk-inclined are rarely united in their approval, and all too often their #1 albums are things nobody else reports at all.

The odd thing is that, until the early 60s, there really wasn't any such critter as a singer-songwriter, apart from Woody Guthrie. There have, of course, been many performers who wrote some, even much, of their material, Hank Williams and Chuck Berry being obvious examples, but, overwhelmingly, the labor was divided between songwriters, who tried to write songs that would be hits no matter who cut them, and singers, who tried to make the definitive, bestselling versions. Major stars like Frank Sinatra and Elvis Presley never wrote a song in their lives and it didn't seem to bother them one bit.

Fast forward to 2005 and even airheads like Britney Spears and *American Idol* runners-up now feel obliged to claim, however laughably, that they write their own material. A while ago I quoted an interview with The Dixie Chicks in which they said that, having realized that Susan Gibson was making all the money, their next album would be made up of original material. Right, and while they're about it, they'd make their own instruments and equipment. This anecdote graphically illustrates how songwriting has been devalued over the last 40 years. From being the realm of a limited number of professionals, some of whom had their fingers so firmly on the zeitgeist that they could churn out hit single after hit single, it's become something that, like the Chicks, far too many people just decide to do. The fact that very few have any grasp of the craft—just in recent months, I've heard several singer-songwriters I actually admire making amateurish mistakes that would never have escaped the Brill Building—seems no impediment.

What has changed in the last 40 years, apart from the need to write songs in batches of 12 or so rather than one at a time, is that 'original' has come to suggest a meaningful and personal communication, as against slick off the shelf Tin Pan Alley product. Unfortunately, meaningful and personal isn't the same as better. Very few singer-songwriters can write lyrics that affect and stay with you as much as, say, Johnny Mercer's, because they're simply not as good at it. Of course, 90% of songs have always been crap, the difference is that back when the shit generally didn't get recorded, except as obvious filler, and now it does, if only by the writer. On the other hand, the singer-songwriter movement has brought us Jon Dee Graham, Eric Taylor and David Rodriguez. Separating this wheat from the chaff shouldn't be all that difficult, but too many reviewers let singer-songwriters put the 'next Dylan' frighteners on them.

JC

BIG SWEET LIFE THE SONGS OF JON DEE GRAHAM

(Freedom, CD + DVD *****)

First time I laid eyes on Jon Dee Graham was 18 odd years ago, in the twilight days of The True Believers, when he was one of the three guitarists powering perhaps the most inexplicable of Austin's long line of Next Big Things that somehow didn't work out. The Trubes' main songwriter was Alejandro Escovedo, and though Graham contributed a few numbers to their albums, it was still something of a surprise when, the best part of ten years after the band's final demise, spent as a sideman for Joe Doe, Michelle Shocked, Calvin Russell and many others, and a brief retirement from music, he reinvented himself as a singer-songwriter of enormous power and passion with *Escape From Monster Island* (Freedom, 1997).

Though he's since released three more critically acclaimed albums, the life of Austin performers of any kind, let alone singer-songwriters, eking out a precarious living by selling CDs to each other, is tenuous at best and in 2004 disaster struck the Graham household with a double whammy. Jon Dee & Gretchen Graham's son was diagnosed with a rare childhood bone disease, Legg-Perthes, an "avascular necrosis of the head of the femur, resulting in the degeneration of the hip joint." Some children make a full recovery, others have lifelong difficulty, but, two months after the diagnosis, the Grahams' health insurance carrier filed for bankruptcy, leaving Willie with a pre-existing condition and thus uninsurable.

Initially resistant to Scrappy Jud Newcomb's suggestion of a benefit to help with Willie's medical treatment, "I said a bunch of stuff about self-sufficiency and those more-in-need and so on," Graham relented when Newcomb asked him how many benefits he'd played over the last 25 years. "Hundreds maybe. Good point." The 16 tracks on the CD were recorded at a benefit show held at The Continental Club last June, while the DVD contains 12 videos and a rather shallow interview with Graham, shot on the rooftop of Austin's News 8 in July and August, plus archive footage of Graham doing two songs on his own, another with The Resentments, 100% of the proceeds from the package going to the Willie Graham/Legg Perthes Fund.

Though it wasn't a benefit, an obvious parallel is with *Across The Great Divide; The Songs Of Jo Carol Pierce*. Graham's description of his work as "personal and eccentric and downright uncoverable" applies equally, if not more so, to that of Pierce, but, like Graham's, it was covered, more or less effectively, by a host of fellow Austin musicians. In both cases, there is an unspoken subtext: that the writers, however much loved and admired, are not necessarily the best sales reps for their songs. Pierce's vocal style can best be described as unique, while Graham's press kit contains a riverbed's worth of references to gravel, and while I personally prefer their original takes, I have to admit that were I was trying to persuade an antipathetic audience of Graham's merits as a songwriter, I'd soften it up with The New Hot Damn's version of *Butterfly Wing*, the CD's outstanding track, which Graham says "made it impossible for me to do that song in clear conscience ever again."

One difference is that *Big Sweet Life* contains some double-dipping, The Resentments also do *Butterfly Wing*, Bob Schneider and James McMurtry both cover *Laredo* (Graham describes Schneider's "deconstruction" as "scarifying," which I'm sure he intended as a compliment but you can take any way you want), Ian McLagan & The Bump Band do *Something To Look Forward To* on the CD, which Graham performs on the DVD and Ray Benson and The Resentments both play *I Hate Christmas* on the DVD. Other contributors to the CD are Matt The Electrician, Beaver Nelson, Walter Tragert, Kathy McCarty, Steve Poltz, Honky, Ray Wylie Hubbard, Charlie Sexton, Alejandro Escovedo and The Willie Graham Players, led by Jon Dee, performing his son's composition *Rock & Roll*. The DVD also features Terri Hendrix & Lloyd Maines, David Garza, Patti Griffin, Darden Smith, Tosca String Quartet with Scrappy Jud Newcomb, Kelly Willis, Bruce Robison, Jeff Klein, Jack Ingram, Elizabeth McQueen and The Gourds.

The album represents, as Graham says, "an amazing outpouring of unsolicited help, music and goodwill by some large-hearted folks," but, as with all such projects, the most sympathetic music lover has to ask if it's really worthwhile or just a premium for making a contribution to a worthy cause. Apart from Patti Griffin, dramatically shot against the night sky, and Graham's own tracks, it has to be said that the DVD is pretty boring, with fairly intense competition for the title of Least Charismatic Performer. With its live ambience, the CD is much more successful, despite mildly awkward moments, such as Ray Wylie Hubbard asking just a little too much in the way of audience participation on *Freeway Jesus*.

Still, even with a few weak spots, the CD and DVD are underpinned by the songwriting of Jon Dee Graham. With a modesty uncharacteristic of Austin singer-songwriters, Graham observes, "Other people singing my songs was an overwhelming and humbling affair. I think of myself as a pretty good writer, but at the same time, I feel like you can't throw a rock in Austin and not hit someone better. Lots better. The thing that moved me most was the interpretations, how other musicians read my songs. I have a fair sense of my place in Texas Music; there's a Greek saying about the major works of the world being built on the backs of the minor players... I am a character actor compared to Ray Wylie Hubbard's leading man, and I am fine with that, but it sure was fun hearing some big shots sing my songs." Apart from helping Willie, hopefully these somewhat more easily accessible versions will lead some people to Graham's searing originals.

JC

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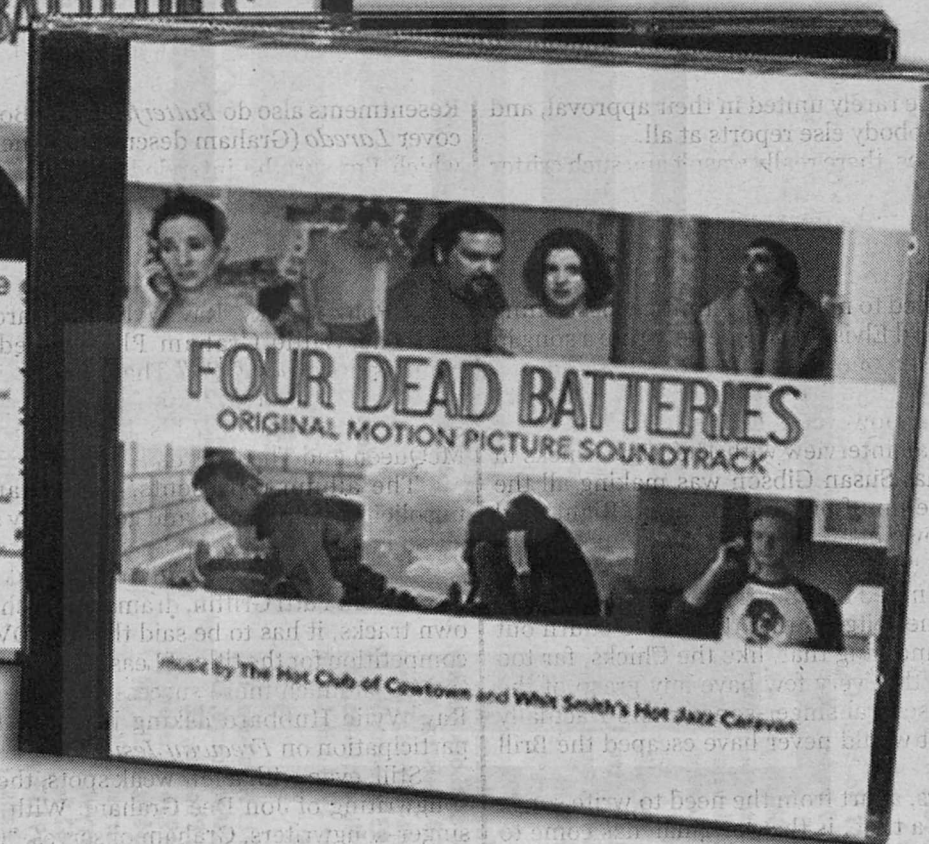
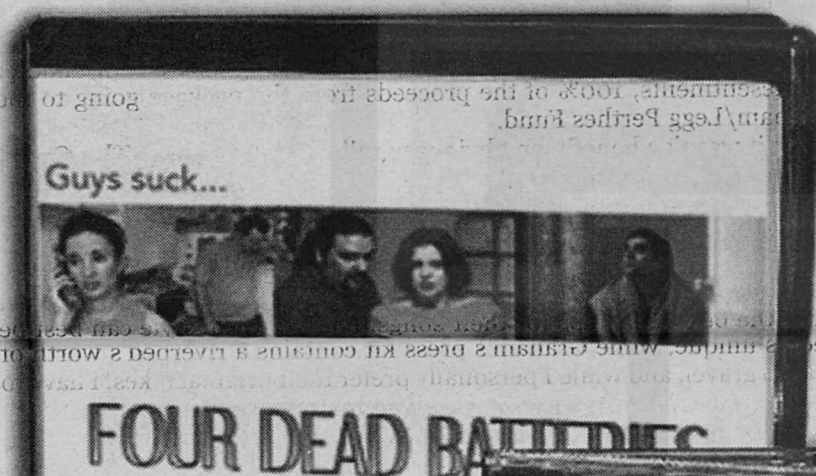
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- 1st -- David Rodriguez • 1952 Houston, TX
 ----- Hank Williams † 1953
 ----- Townes Van Zandt † 1997
- 2nd -- Roger Miller • 1936 Fort Worth, TX
 ----- Speckled Red † 1973
 ----- Tex Ritter † 1974
- 3rd -- Leon McAuliffe • 1917 Houston, TX
 ----- Gene Summers • 1939 Dallas, TX
 ----- Amos Milburn † 1980
- 5th -- David Halley • 1950 Oklahoma City, OK
 ----- Iris Dement • 1961 Paragould, AR
- 6th -- Earl Scruggs • 1924 Cleveland Co, NC
 ----- Sandy Denny • 1941 London, UK
 ----- Johnny Moore † 1969
- 7th -- Jack Greene • 1930 Maryville, TX
 ----- Gene Terry • 1940 Lafayette, LA
 ----- Leona Williams • 1943 Vienna, MO
 ----- Larry Williams † 1980
 ----- Carl White † 1980
- 8th -- Leon 'Pappy' Selph † 1999
- 9th -- Jimmy Day • 1934 Tuscaloosa, AL
 ----- Buck Ramsey • 1938 Lubbock County, TX
 ----- Katie Webster • 1939 Houston, TX
 ----- Roy Head • 1943 Three Rivers, TX
- 10th -- Ronnie Hawkins • 1935 Huntsville, AR
 ----- Cyril Neville • 1948 New Orleans, LA
 ----- Alejandro Escovedo • 1951 San Antonio, TX
 ----- Howlin' Wolf † 1976
 ----- Zeb Turner † 1978
- 11th -- Tommy Duncan • 1911 Hillsboro, TX
 ----- Slim Harpo • 1924 Baton Rouge, LA
 ----- Lou Whitney • 1943 Phoenix, AZ
 ----- Robert Earl Keen • 1956 Houston, TX
- 12th -- Fred McDowell • 1904 Rossville, TN
 ----- Tex Ritter • 1905 Murvaul, TX
 ----- Ray Price • 1926 Perryville, TX
- 13th -- Rick Broussard • 1962 Seguin, TX
- 14th -- Luderin Darbone • 1913 Evangeline, LA
 ----- Billy Walker • 1929 Ralls, TX
 ----- Allen Toussaint • 1938 New Orleans, LA
 ----- T-Bone Burnett • 1948 St Louis, MO
- 15th -- Alan Lomax • 1915 Austin, TX
 ----- Queen Ida • 1930 Lake Charles, LA
 ----- Earl Hooker • 1930 Clarksdale, M
- 16th -- Mac Curtis • 1939 Fort Worth, TX
 ----- Barbara Lynn • 1942 Beaumont, TX
- 17th -- Grady Martin • 1929 Chapel Hill, TN
 ----- Steve Earle • 1955 Fort Monroe, VA
- 19th -- Leo Soileau • 1904 Ville Platte, LA
 ----- Sleepy Hoffpauir • 1931 Crowley, LA
 ----- Charlie Waller • 1935 Hendersonville, TX
 ----- Phil Everly • 1939 Brownie, KY
 ----- Janis Joplin • 1943 Port Arthur, TX
- 20th -- Leadbelly • 1889 Mooringsport, LA
 ----- Whistling Alex Moore † 1989
 ----- Buster Benton † 1996
- 21st -- Smith Ballew • 1902 Palestine, TX
 ----- Snooks Eaglin • 1936 New Orleans, LA
 ----- Wolfman Jack • 1939 Brooklyn, NY
 ----- Jackie Wilson † 1984
 ----- Charles Brown † 1999
- 22nd -- Sam Cooke • 1935 Chicago, IL
 ----- Jimmy Day † 1999
- 23rd -- Django Reinhardt • 1910 Liverchies, Belgium
 ----- Tom 'Wildcat' Courtney • 1929 Waco, TX
 ----- Lisa Pankratz • 1968 Austin, TX
 ----- Paul Robeson † 1976
- 24th -- Tuts Washington • 1907 New Orleans, LA
 ----- Jack Scott • 1936 Windsor, Canada
 ----- Doug Kershaw • 1936 Tiel Ridge, LA
 ----- Aaron Neville • 1941 New Orleans, LA
 ----- Tex Thomas • 1951 Littlefield, TX
 ----- Gene Austin † 1972
- 25th -- Jimmy Wyble • 1922 Port Arthur, TX
 ----- Speedy West • 1924 Springfield, MO
 ----- Etta James • 1938 Los Angeles, CA
 ----- Laura Lee McBride † 1989
- 26th -- Dennis McGee • 1893 Bayou Marron, LA
 ----- Huey 'Piano' Smith • 1934 New Orleans, LA
 ----- Lucinda Williams • 1953 Lake Charles, LA
 ----- D'Jalma Garnier • 1954 St Paul, MN
- 27th -- Joe Shelton • 1911 Hopkins Co, TX
 ----- Elmore James • 1918 Richland, MS
 ----- Buddy Emmons • 1937 Mishawaka, IN
 ----- Moon Mullican † 1967
 ----- Mahalia Jackson † 1972
- 28th -- Carl White • 1932 Dallas, TX
 ----- Carolyn Hester • 1938 Waco, TX
 ----- Mary Cutrufello • 1970 Meriden, CT
 ----- T Texas Tyler † 1972
 ----- Al Dexter † 1984
- 29th -- Al Stricklin • 1908 Antioch, TX
- 30th -- Ruth Brown • 1928 Portsmouth, VA
 ----- Mance Lipscomb † 1976
 ----- Warren Smith † 1980
 ----- Professor Longhair † 1980
 ----- Lightin' Hopkins † 1982
- 31st -- Chuck Willis • 1928 Atlanta, GA
 ----- Slim Harpo † 1970

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