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BARBARA CLARK

#89/178 JUNE 2004



**CHARLES EARLE's B-Sides
JOHN THE REVEALATOR
FREEFORM AMERICAN ROOTS #58
ROOTS BIRTHS & DEATHS
REVIEWS * * * * * (or not)**

**GLENN ALLAN with KIM MACKENZIE • JANE BOND
FRED EAGLESMITH • JOHNNY EDSON • THE FLATLANDERS
MICHAEL FRACASSO • GINN SISTERS • TERRI HENDRIX
I SEE HAWKS IN LA • MERLEFEST
EVE MONSEES & THE EXILES • JEAN SYNODINOS**

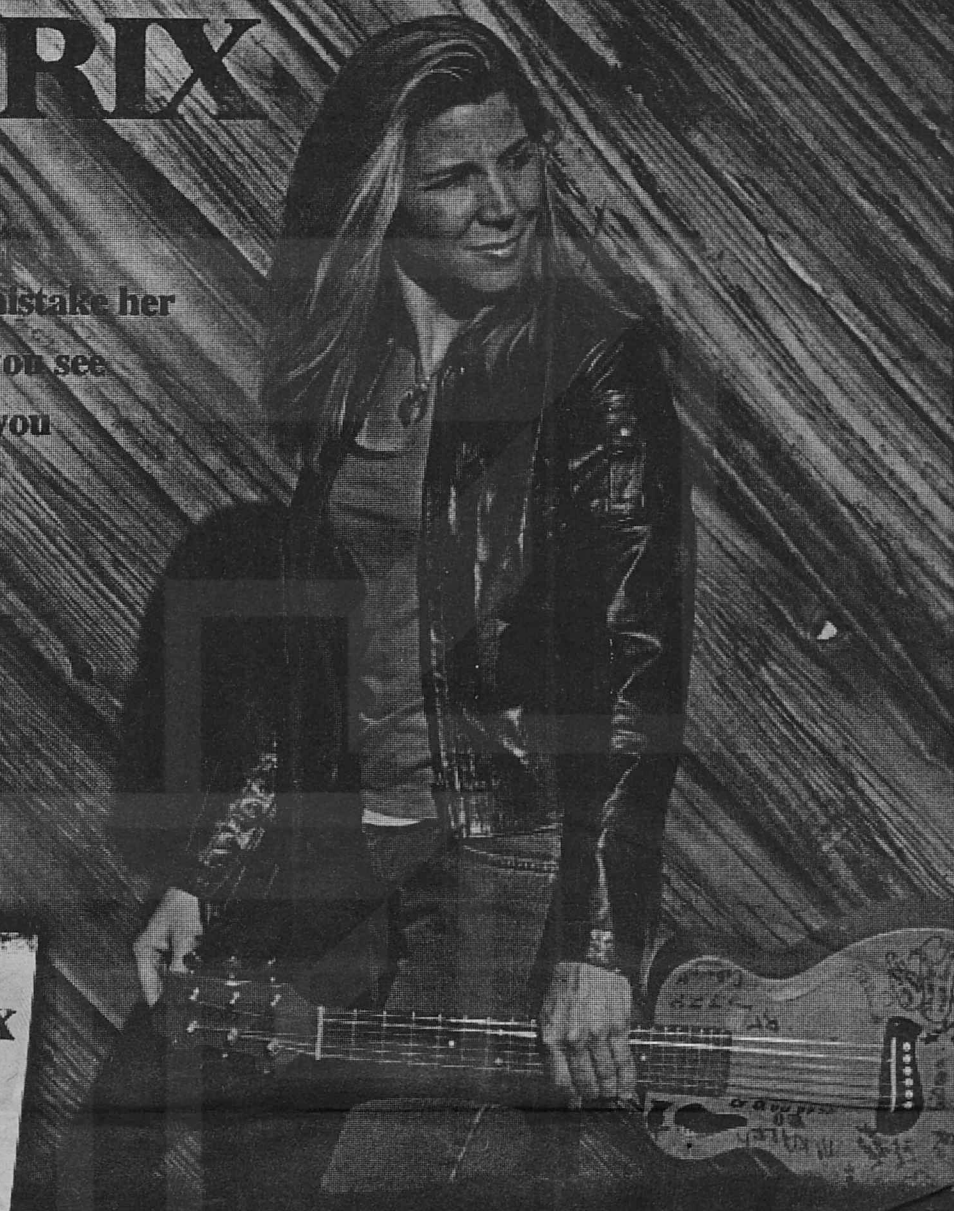
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FREEFORM AMERICAN ROOTS #58

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#1 Loretta Lynn: Van Lear Rose

(Interscope) *AT/*BF/*BP/*JH/*KG/*LC/*NA/*PT/*RS/*S&D/*ST/*3RC

- 2 Jim Stringer: In My Hand (Music Room) *BL/*JH/*KF/*LB/*MB
- 3 Dale Watson: Dreamland (Audium) *BR/*DF/*DWB/*JM/*KR/*MA
- 4 Cornell Hurd Band: Cen-Tex Serenade (Behemoth) *GS/*KD/*RR/*TS
- 5 Gurf Morlix: Cut 'N Shoot (Blue Corn) *FM/*PP/*RA/*TG
- 6 Jon Langford: All The Fame Of Lofty Deeds (Bloodshot) *JQB/*TW/*WR/*XR
- 7 Jim Lauderdale: Headed For The Hills (Dualtone) *AN/*FS/*JB/*ND
- 8 Two Dollar Pistols: Hands Up! (Yep Roc) *OS/*RC/*TH
- 9 Amy Farris: Anyway (Yep Roc) *MDT
- 10 Jolie Holland: Escondida (Anti) *HG/*MN/*UC
- 11 Slaid Cleaves: Wishbones (Philo) *MP
- 12 James Talley: Journey (Cimarron) *BW/*RJ/*TF
- 13 Buckskin Stallion: Blue Ribbon Buzz (Big Bender)
- 14 Eliza Gilkyson: Land Of Milk And Honey (Red House) *SM/*TO
- 15 Ed Burleson: The Cold Hard Truth (Palo Duro) *EW/*TR
- 16 Moot Davis (Little Dog) *MM
- 17 The Woodys: Teardrops & Diamonds (Dynamike) *RW
- 18 Cindy Cashdollar: Slide Show (Silver Shot) *JP/*SC
- 19 Mary Chapin Carpenter: Between Here And Gone (Columbia) *HT
- 20 Jon Rauhouse: Steel Guitar Rodeo (Bloodshot) *DP
- 21= Eddie Pennington: Walks The Strings (Smithsonian) *KC
Rosalie Sorrels & Friends: My Last Go Round (Red House) *MR/*SMJ
- 22= Johnny Paycheck: The Little Darlin' Sounds *SH/*T&L
Hound Dog Taylor: Release the Hound (Alligator) *DJ/*MO
- 23 Blackie & The Rodeo Kings: Bark (True North) *GC
- 24 Graham Parker: Your Country (Bloodshot)
- 25= Jay Farrar: Stone, Steel & Bright Lights (Artemis) *DL
John & The Sisters (Northern Blue) *HP
- 26= Terry Allen: Juarez (Sugar Hill)
Big Al Anderson: After Hours (self) *JF
Tanya Dennis: Apartment # 9 (Paloma) *RT
Mary McBride: By Any Other Name (Reality Entertainment) *JZ
Robin & Linda Williams: Deeper Waters (Red House) *AA
- 27= Steve James & Del Rey: Tonight (Hobemian) *FW
Maura O'Connell: Don't I Know (Sugar Hill) *TA
Railroad Earth: The Good Life (Sugar Hill) *R&H
- 28= BR5-49: Tangled In The Pines (Dualtone) *RMS
Mark Erelli: Hillbilly Pilgrim (Signature Sounds) *JS
Michael Reno Harrell: Closer Home (Dancing Bear) *RH
Open Road: In The Life (Rounder) *CL
- 29= Johnny Edson: A Man's Gotta Eat (Ragweed) *DC
Jimmy Lee Fautheree: I Found The Doorknob (Eccofonic) *MT
Steve Forbert: Just Like There's Nothin' To It (Koch)
Martyn Joseph: Whoever It Was (Appleseed) *WDT

Raul Malo, Pat Flynn, Rob Ickes, Dave Pomeroy:

The Nashville Acoustic Sessions (CMH) *AB

- 30= Amazing Rhythm Aces: Nothin' But The Blues (self) *DS
Brown Brothers: Songs From The Lost Generation (Treehorn) *QB
Jim Bryson: The North Side Benches (Factor) *KM
Bobby Charles: Last Train To Memphis (Proper) *TJ
Bob Cheevers: One Man One Martin (Inbred) *RE
Elliott Brood (Electro Photo) *SR
Tim Eriksen: Every Sound Below (Appleseed) *AR
Bobby Flores: Just For The Record (Yellow Rose) *RM
Great Big Sea: Something Beautiful (Zoe) *DO
Blu Hopkins: Canyon Wind (Silver Creek) *BS
Hot Club of Cowtown: Continental Stomp (HighTone) *LG
Christine Kane: Right Outta Nowhere (Firepink) *LW
Ken Layne & The Corvids: Fought Down (Scrub Jay) *BB
Lisa O'Kane: Peace Of Mind (Raisin' Kane) *MF
Poppa Chubby: Peace, Love & Respect (Blind Pig) *DT
Sue & The Flaming Stars: Riding On The Highway Of Love (Rarity) *BC
- VA: Dylan Country (Shout! Factory) *SF
VA: Frank Slide; 100 Years From Them (Hijinx & Capers) *JCS
The Wilders: Spring a Leak (Rural Grit) *DA
Josh Williams: Lonesome Highway (Pinycastle) *JT
Doug Wilshire & The Capers: Love In Disguise (Rhythm Bomb) *DV



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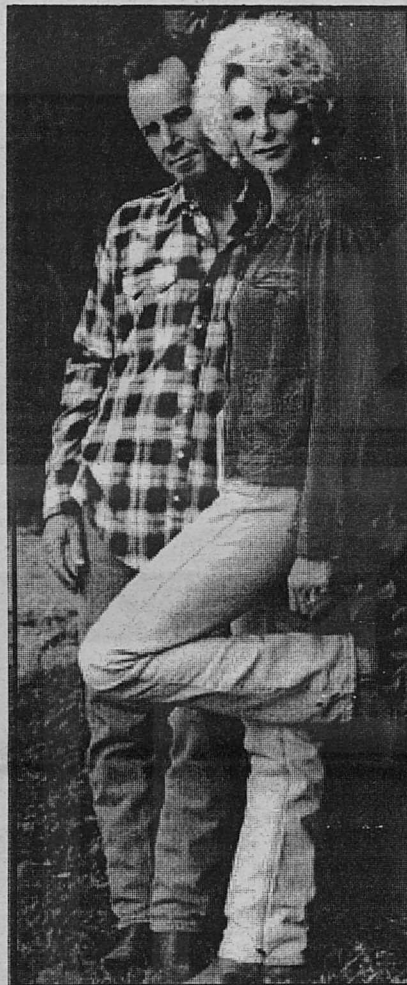
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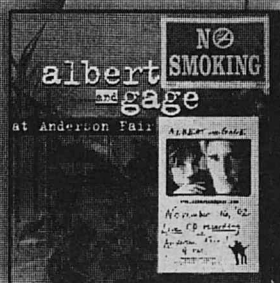
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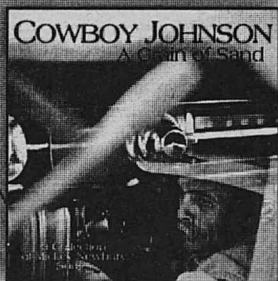
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THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF OPEN MIKES

Barbara Clark having put me in a reminiscent mood about those long lost days at Chicago House Open Mikes, this originally appeared in MCT #22, June 1992 (later reprinted in the *Austin American-Statesman*).

THOU SHALT NOT

*Claim to write and sing and play an instrument
unless thou art able to do at least one of them reasonably well.*

*Take more than 15 seconds to set up, including tuning,
if thou be not of the tribe of Rodriguez.*

*Commit banjo, mandolin, autoharp, zither, ukulele or balalaika,
for such are an abomination unto the audience.*

*Tell any story about a song unless it be genuinely interesting, unusual or
erotic, and that goes double for any story thou hast already told.*

*Ask the audience to participate in any way,
especially singalongs on the fucking chorus.*

*Commit songs more than 13 minutes long for verily,
thou art not Butch Hancock.*

*Commit political or ecological statements for verily, nothing worthwhile
doth rhyme with 'rainforest,' neither doth 'they' or 'them' mean jackshit.*

*Commit covers, especially of Bob Dylan songs, unless they be incredibly
obscure, for lo, the audience hath already heard them a million times.*

*Commit the words "Well, I woke up this morning,"
better thou hadst died in thy sleep.*

*Wear any garment that hath been defiled by tie-dying,
for such are loathsome in the audience's sight.*

While I'm about it, this accompanied The Ten Commandments. There was also a rundown, now of purely historical interest, if that, on Austin's Open Mike scene as it then was, but these general comments still stand up pretty well. The feature was headlined *Where The Weak Get Killed And Eaten; A Beginner's Guide*.

OK, you've mastered one chord, feel pretty confident about another; you've got a pocketful of sensitive lyrics to share with the world; you're ready to take the first step on the road to stardom. Probably the last one too, sucker, because it all seems a lot different when four perfect strangers watch stony-faced as you struggle through your three songs. Welcome to the wacky world of Open Mikes, Gateway to Fame and Fortune, ha, ha.

New faces are always regarded with mixed emotions by Open Mike goers. Optimism, because they live in hope (or they wouldn't be there) and they've got nothing against you—yet. Suspicion because they know from bitter experience that you have to kiss a lot of frogs before you find a prince. As you mount the stage for your public debut, do not be discouraged by their sullen indifference. If you're any good at all, they'll take you to their hearts. If you're not, well, they've survived worse than you.

Try to make a good, or at least neutral, first impression. Some people treat open mikes as a form of low-cost psychotherapy, but veteran audiences can recognize them at a glance (Spot The Loony), and while open mike hosts and audiences are incredibly nice and generous people, they are not your support group, nor are they obliged to take your delusions of talent seriously. Obey the Commandments and try and look and act halfway normal. If you can't, at least hold the angst down to a minimum.

For the sake of your own sanity, learn to distinguish the fine gradations between the bare minimum of Polite Applause (pat, pat, pat) and manifestations of Real Enthusiasm (stomp, stomp, stomp). Compare your reception to that accorded to the host.

OMs tend to informality, but etiquette definitely frowns on the practice of arriving punctually for your slot and leaving immediately after it. Apart from being bad manners, it wins no friends. A substantial part of the audience is made up of other performers who will feel no obligation to clap you if you weren't or aren't going to be there to clap them. And if you ever arrive a minute late, you'll be dead meat. The host will happily pay you back by giving your slot to a standby.

The alternative to hands are feet. People going out to the patio after your first song is a bad sign. People drifting off during your first song is a very bad sign. The host leaving at any point during your set is a message from God. The writing is on the wall, sunshine: You Suck.

JC

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Levee Dixieland Band * Mike O'Daniel

Cindy Horstmann * Johnny Todd

Darlene & The Blues Slobs

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"WELL WHEN I DIE

DON'T YA

BURY ME AT ALL

JUST HANG MY BONES

UP ON THE WALL

BENEATH THESE BONES

LET THESE WORDS

BE SEEN

THE RUNNIN GEAR

OF A BOOPIN MACHINE "

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FRED J EAGLESMITH THE OFFICIAL BOOTLEG SERIES VOLUME 1 LIVE SOLO 2002

(A Major Label ****.5)

My problem wasn't getting hold of a copy, Steve Buschel, 'Project Coordinator,' gave me one during NotSXSW, and Fred asked if I had it when we saw him at Gruene Hall. No, the problem was prizing it out of the CD player in DL's motorcar. Fortunately, it's a double CD, so I was able to swipe one at a time without her noticing (as long as I put it back the next day). Recorded live from the soundboard at The Tin Angel, Philadelphia, the 36 tracks brilliantly showcase Eaglesmith's twin talents, as a singer-songwriter and as a raconteur, and, frankly, it's hard to say which he does best. Having a band may be a necessity (many clubs won't book solo performers), but Eaglesmith, like Joe Ely, Michael Fracasso and Steve Forbert, is, for my money, even more dynamic and compelling when he's on his own and as for the stories and jokes, well, many years ago, Griff Luneburg of Cactus Cafe and I dreamed up a show, Arlo Guthrie, Townes Van Zandt and David Rodriguez, at which nobody would notice if they only sang one complete song each, and Eaglesmith can outdo all of those noted bullshit artists. Putting the jokes on an album isn't always wise, apart from using them up, they usually get a bit tiresome after you've heard them a few times, but, apart from the hilarious content, Eaglesmith's delivery is so superb that you can listen to them over and over. In fact, if he'd decided to become a stand-up comedian, he might well be even more famous than he is. Obviously, I'm not going to go into any specific detail of the contents of the two CDs, but with tons of staples, no Fred collection is complete without this. JC

JEAN SYNODINOS • Lucky

(Fortunate ****)

Once again, I come, cap in hand, to apologize to Ms Synodinos. It took me a full year to get to **Drive**, the 1999 album by The Nonchalants, a duo of which she was half, perhaps because of the rather unfortunate artwork, and about the best I can say for myself is that it hasn't taken me quite as long to get to her solo debut, which came out last October and has been on my short list ever since. Thing of it is, I am actually a fan, I think Synodinos is amazing, even if I have to think about it every time I type her name. She has some excellent moves as a songwriter and is an accomplished acoustic guitarist, but her big gun, and I'm talking .50 caliber made by badass Hellenes, is the marvel that is her voice. The simplest demonstration of her dynamic power is the only cover, a song that most female singers would, sensibly, steer well clear of, *Ode To Billy Joe* [sic, it should be *Ode To Billie Joe*], the Twin Peaks of 1967. Compared to the original, which was not only written but arranged and produced by the formidable Bobbie Gentry (who, incidentally, was Portuguese), there's way too much production getting in the way of the music, but Synodinos still emerges with considerable personal credit. In a major shift from The Nonchalants' spare production, this album features all the bells and whistles you can think of, from a horn section to cello to vibraphones (and you thought vibraphones were extinct), but for the most part the big, jazzy arrangements, featuring Chris Searles, Earl Poole Ball and Glenn Kawamoto, are a good fit, and anyway it would take more than a dozen odd musicians to overwhelm that voice. Where most artists make albums that are sort of more or less kinda like the live show, Synodinos, whose natural habitat is coffeehouse, house concerts, folk festivals and songwriting competitions, has boldly opted for one that lets her cut loose in dramatic style, and I apologize to you for taking so long to bring it to your attention. JC

I SEE HAWKS IN LA • GRAPEVINE

(Western Seeds ****)

Sadly, I don't know who should get the prestigious award I just invented for Least Readable Artwork of 2004, I'm sure his or her name is there somewhere but I'm damned if I'm going to try and find it. Just figuring out what label this is on almost blinded me. As you'll have figured from the name, which can be read as intriguing or pretentious or a bit of both, this is a La-La Land outfit and, winners of the *LA Weekly* Best Country Artist award 2003, has been hailed as a resurgence of Southern California country rock. Conceived in the Mojave, the group has that hard to define but easy to recognize high desert sound, or, as one critic says, "the finest cosmic cowboy music since the Burrito Brothers," though they rock out more than on their eponymous 2001 debut. With two tremendous instrumentalists, Paul Lacques, guitar, lap steel and Dobro, and fiddler Brantley Kearns, behind him, singer Robert Rex Waller Jr puts real punch into the band's poetics, but perhaps the most truly defining member is bassman Paul Marshall, whose resume includes Strawberry Alarm Clock and Rose Maddox. While *Hitchhiker* is a bit irritating—truckdriver as spirit guide!—the songs, mostly by Waller & Lacques, with one cover, Clarence Carter's *I Stayed Away*, are always interesting and I can see the elliptical *Humboldt* becoming a DJ favorite—any station bureaucrat who objects to it will be displaying a suspicious familiarity with California drug culture. With dashes of country, garage rock, folk, gospel and bluegrass, I See Hawks In LA have, at the very least, fashioned a distinctive and unusual sound, though, of course, having said that, someone will tell me that they sound exactly like some group I don't know. They're supposedly hitting the road this summer and are well worth checking out. JC

GLENN ALLAN WITH KIM MACKENZIE PARADISE, TEXAS

(Al & Mo's ****.5)

Snakebit music writers learn to approach albums or songs that have 'Texas' in their titles with extreme caution, you just can't be too careful with the little buggers if you value your sanity. What's more, Allan, who wrote all ten of the songs, kicks off with *Goin' To Mexico*, and any mention of the Border is also an ominous danger signal. Spitballing, I'd say the chances of this combination turning out to be listenable rather than toxic were about 20:1, but, what the hell, Allan & Mackenzie host a songwriter night once a month at Casbeers, so they must be righteous with Steve & Barbara. OK, out with the tongs, slide this into the player and whaddya know, it ain't half bad. Phew, now I can take off these damned lead-lined gloves and enjoy it. On the folk side of country, with a couple of Flaco Jimenez fueled Tex-Mex excursions (*Spanish Town* and *Adios Corazon*), this is very much a Texas album, but Allan doesn't beat you over the head with his Texas pride, and there's no starch in his jeans. With Mackenzie playing fiddle and mandolin, and support by Jack Barber bass and Stephen Hartwell drums, Allan, who plays guitars, pedal steel and bass, also produced, and either he has a flair for it or had a very tight budget, either way he didn't overthink it. There's an engagingly comfortable feel to the playing, the vocals, the harmonies and the songwriting, as if they worked the album up on the back porch, cut it in a studio and managed to get the best of both worlds. JC

MICHAEL FRACASSO • RETROSPECTIVE

(Texas Music Group ****)

Normally, you'd expect a career retrospective to cover a little more ground than three albums all released in the 90s, but Fracasso had the good fortune to be on two of that decade's outstanding Austin-centric labels, Dejadisc and Bohemia Beat, and the ill fortune to have both fold up under him, so the bulk of his recorded work has been unavailable or hard to find (the Bohemia Beat CDs should, in theory, still be around) but, in any case, not being promoted, for some time even as his reputation has grown. With 21 tracks to play with, he pulled four off **Love & Trust** (Dejadisc, 1993), six off **When I Lived In The Wild** (Bohemia Beat, 1995), one from a doomed and mercifully short-lived collaboration with Iain Matthews and Mark Hallman, Hamilton Pool's **Return To Zero** (Watermelon, 1995), and five from **World In A Drop Of Water** (Bohemia Beat, 1998), topping them up with three previously unreleased originals and covers of The Temptations' *Just My Imagination (Running Away With Me)* and Ewan McColl's *Dirty Old Town*. So, I called Michael to ask, "Where's *Tender Dilemma*?" His showstopper when he first came to Austin was a medley of that and *Thing About You*, but only the latter made the cut. His answer was, "I made arbitrary decisions based on absolutely nothing. I wish I'd had somebody else do it." Guess you can't please everybody, personally I'd have picked *One That Got Away*, the only really successful song on **Return To Zero**, but if you missed out on those early albums, this is a good way to play catch up.

Though you can't tell from the packaging, there's also a bonus CD, **Back To Oklahoma**, recorded live at The Blue Door, Oklahoma City, with Charlie Sexton. This was originally released in 2000 by India, which seems to have been particularly flaky even by indie label standards. The 15 songs, including a couple I expected to see on the retrospective, *Wise Blood* and *Brazos River Bottom* (but not *Tender Dilemma*!), showcase Fracasso as the dynamic and compelling performer he's always been. JC

JOHNNY EDSON • A MAN'S GOTTA EAT

(Ragweed ****)

Musicians' websites rarely deviate from an obvious pattern, pages for Bio, Band, Discography, Press, Mercantile, Pictures, Contact, maybe Downloads and Links. However, one you'd think would be universal, but you won't find on Johnny Edson's, is Shows. There was a time when Edson was out there, with The Rio Snappers in his hometown of Beaumont, TX, and fronting Uncle Uh Uh & The Uh Uhs and Dad Gum Swing in Austin, but that was by no means yesterday, or even the day before. Since 1995, his calendar has been, in his own words, "too meager to list." This may change, a recent show in Beaumont has reenergized him and there's talk of a Dad Gum Swing reunion, but since 1994, when **Johnny Edson** came out, he's serviced a small but loyal following for his literate and lively brand of "rhythm and jive in a swing groove" with a steady supply of albums, of which this is the fourth, following **Hob Nobbin' With The Hoi Polloi** (1997) and **A Spread Misere** (2001). Austin seems an odd destination for someone whose musical idol is the self-effacing Freddie Green, Count Basie's acoustic rhythm guitarist, and who loves the love songs of Cole Porter, the Gershwins and Jerome Kern, but if he's far outside the mainstream, he sure knows his Austin musicians. Once again, he's rounded up A-list players, many of them returnees, including Gene Elders, Floyd Domino, Dave Sanger, Cindy Cashdollar, Tony Campesi and James Fenner, to make up small combos behind eleven new songs and a cover of *I Miss You So* by Jimmy Henderson of The Cats & The Fiddle. Though more serious than its predecessors, even tracks that sound like they might be novelties, *Dog In A Pick-Up* or *Sodbuster's Serenade*, are as reflective as the standout *Always Wondered*, this won't disappoint Edson loyalists and perhaps the opening *Got A Show To Do* is a sign that more people will get to hear this idiosyncratic singer-songwriter. JC

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THE FLATLANDERS • LIVE '72

(New West ***)

Specifically June 8th, at The One Knite, Austin, TX. It has to be 15 years since I first heard, from Jim Yanaway, then with Amazing Records, that Gary Oliver, one time owner of The One Knite, had a stash of board tapes in his Alpine, TX, home that included such legendary acts as Freda & The Firedogs, Storm, The Cobras and, to me the most intriguing, Jimmie Dale Gilmore & The Flatlanders. Whether those tapes were any good in the first place and how well they'd survived the passage of time were questions to which no one, up to now, had an answer. Of course, the fact that this one existed at all is something of a miracle, the group only ever played about 15 gigs, few of them in clubs, but it has to be said the only potential market for this slice of history is diehard, long term fans. Although Gilmore sings lead on all but two of the 16 tracks, I can see where lopping 'Jimmie Dale Gilmore &' off the group's original name is an obvious marketing ploy, but I can't imagine anyone who came to The Flatlanders through **Now Again** or **Wheels Of Fortune** tolerating the lo-fi sound quality. So what do the hardcore get? Well, only two of the songs, Butch Hancock *You've Never Seen Me Cry* and *The Stars In My Life*, or three depending which version you have (Al Strehli's *I Know You* was on Charly's but not Rounder's) were on the original album. However, of the rest, only Strehli's *So I'll Run*, with John Reed sitting in, which both Gilmore and Hancock have recorded since, comes from the West Texas songbook, leaving a hotchpotch of covers, Hank Williams' *Honky Tonk Blues* and *Settin' The Woods On Fire*, Jesse Fuller's *San Francisco Bay Blues*, Tex Ritter's *Long Time Gone*, Leon Jackson & Johnny Bryant & The White Oak Mountain Boys' *Love, Please Come Home*, the traditional *Long Snake Moan* and *Hesitation Blues*, Townes Van Zandt's *Waitin' Around To Die* and *Tecumseh Valley*, Bob Dylan's *Walkin' Down The Line*, Sam Cook's *Bring It On Home To Me* and Harry Choates' *Jolie Blon*. A wonderfully eclectic set, but, well let's just say that some of them could have used a couple three more rehearsals. Still, at least you can hear Steve Wesson's saw. You may notice in the credits, under 'Also Available,' a listing for **Live '74**. This isn't out yet, New West call it "coming soon" and hope to have it finished sometime later this year. JC

JANE BOND

VOLUME II: LIVE FROM THE CONTINENTAL CLUB

(Luther ****.5)

No other singer comes to mind who could manage the insouciant throwaway delivery of "If I broke your heart last night, gee, I'm sorry 'bout that" with quite the essential nuance, finely poised between nonchalance and indifference, that Bond brings to Nancy Sinatra's *Sorry 'Bout That*. I've never been able to figure out quite how talented Bond is as a singer because—and I know I'm not alone in this—her quirky, flirtatious mannerisms are so distracting and engaging in performance. While the three studio tracks, of excellent songs by Mark Ambrose, Bond and Bond/Hubbard, with which the album opens, don't mercilessly expose shortcomings as a vocalist, neither do they leave one panting for more, but before her range gets called into question, she jumps over to the Continental, and one thing this clearly demonstrates is that Bond comes to life in front of an audience. Mind you, miking the audience reaction between songs would have helped prove there was one. For the next ten tracks, Bond smolders through blues (from Mance Lipscomb's *Ella Speed* to Billie Holiday's *Long Gone Blues*), 80s pop (Jackie DeShannon's *Break Away*), jazz (Roc Hillman's *Wasted Tears*), bluegrass (Bill Monroe's *New River Train*) and hillbilly (the Armstrong Twins' *8.30 Blues*), with *Sorry 'Bout That* as the gloriously elegant finale. I still don't know how good a singer Bond is, but she's so stylish, who cares? JC

THE GINN SISTERS • GENERALLY HAPPY

(self released ****.5)

Know why Barbra Striesand never gives autographs? Because she doesn't know how to spell her name. To be honest, I never thought I'd find myself writing about people called Tiffani and Brittani, jeez, just typing that gives me the willies, but here we are. Now, you're may be thinking, 'They can't possibly be heavyweights,' and, if so, you'd be right, but on the other hand, the Ginn Sisters' music isn't the utter fluff their given names and album artwork—they have serious image problems—would suggest. Originally from Schulenburg, TX, they have quite a few things going for them, one of them being the blood tie that blends their harmonies together, heard to great effect on *Hugo*. Another is that Tiff really can write a distinctive, offbeat song, *Insignificant*, *Advice Of The Bartender To The Urban Cowboy Blues* and *String 'Em Along* being her best moments (also, I really admire the retro credit for *Glare Of Contempt*, "Music by Tiffani Ginn, lyrics by Bill Passalacqua," a distinction hardly anyone bothers with anymore), plus she has a strong, appealing voice and is as versatile with it as her classically trained sister is on flute. Well produced by Darcie Deaville, who also plays fiddle, mandolin and guitar, this is an album that grows on you, but I think people would take them more seriously if they did something about those cheerleader spellings. One interesting tie-in with this month's theme is that Tiff is the current host of Cactus Cafe's Open Stage night. JC

TERRI HENDRIX THE ART OF REMOVING WALLPAPER

(Wilory *****)

Every album confronts musicians who've succeeded in building a substantial fanbase but want to develop as artists with a problem. The innate conservatism of fans, who like them just the way they are, creates a tension between holding on to that fanbase and moving forward, making personal growth a pocketbook issue. Is it safer to stick to a formula that obviously works, or risk losing some fans by trying to take them places they don't want to go? However, if anyone can gauge how far and how fast her devotees can adjust to her own evolution, it would be Terri Hendrix, whose steadily upward path, apart from the minor redundancy of **Live In San Marcos**, has been a series of gradual progressions that have led them gently, but inexorably, forward. However, the bold title of her eighth album (counting **Two Dollar Shoes** twice for the original and Lloyd Maines' later remix), not to mention her rather dramatic and sexy new image (so long, dungarees!), are, in themselves, signifiers that this is no minor upgrade but a whole new version of Terri Hendrix, one who deals with anomie (*Breakdown*), the meaning of life (*Enjoy The Ride*), religious hypocrisy (*Judgement Day*), Clear Channel's blanding down of the airwaves (*Monopoly*) and, though she's nowhere near it, middle-age desperation (*One Night Stand*), winding up with the acceptance of *Long Ride Home* and the gospel-y *Hey Now*. My only problem is with the one cover, LL Cool J's *I Need Love*, not because I'm hostile to Old School, I just have a problem with any song it took five people to write (and it is pretty sappy). Once again produced by, and, of course, multi-instrumentally featuring, Lloyd Maines, this introduces a considerably more demanding artist and while (eat your hearts out, singer-songwriters) Hendrix covered her recording costs in prepaid orders before the album was even pressed, some of her new material, particularly *Judgement Day*, may well shake up and even shake out her fanbase somewhat. Still, any empty seats will be filled by people who used to think her music was a little too girlie, but can tune in to the full-grown woman. JC

EVE MONSEES & THE EXILES

(Serpent****.5)

San Antonio has a long tradition of Texas garage rock & roll, from Doug Sahm and Freddy Fender to The Swindles, but it's always seemed to be a missing dimension in Austin music. Ms Monsees didn't set out to fill this void, but while Antone's Record Shop, where she now works, would seem a natural hang out for a 15 year old transplanted Houstonite interested in blues, it actually impelled her in a whole new direction because she fell in with Mike Buck, the drummer in the original (or, as many of us would have it, Real) Fabulous Thunderbirds, and through him veteran bassman Speedy Sparks and guitarist Grady Pinkerton, whose experience (and record collections) opened up a whole new world for her. They're now her band, so she starts out with a lot going for her right there. Kicking off with the very early Jagger/Richards *Surprise, Surprise* (the B-side of The Stones' first single), the covers include Sugarboy Crawford's *Ooh Wee Sugar*, Jackie DeShannon's *Needles And Pins*, Nathaniel Mayer's *I Had A Dream*, Dorothy Brown's *From Now On*, Earl King's (*Those*) *Lonely, Lonely Nights*, George Torrence's *Lickin' Stick* (not to be confused with James Brown's), another Jagger/Richards, *Stupid Girl*, Magic Sam's *Everything's Gonna Be Alright* and Bo Diddley's *Deed And Deed I Do*, but the track I'd pick first to play on the radio is Monsee's own *Don't Ever Say Goodbye*, in which she takes another page out of the San Antonio music book, Swamp Pop Texas-style. Her two other originals, *Never Let You Go* and (*I've Got A*) *Thing For You* also hold their own. Monsees' voice, and guitar playing, aren't as seasoned as her band, but whether she's getting expert advice or has good instincts, she and the material make a comfortable fit and my guess is that if she can keep from falling into the Austin blues rut, she'll get even better and more interesting. JC

MERLEFEST LIVE! THE BEST OF 2003

(MerleFest/Welk Music Group ****.5)

Should you ever be invited to play at MerleFest, founded in 1988 in honor of Doc Watson's son, Eddy Merle, who died in a tractor accident in 1985, I can offer you one solid piece of advice: Do NOT follow Vassar's Jam. The lucky acts among the 16 represented on the 18 tracks (Doc Watson appears three times, *Roll In My Sweet Baby's Arms*, *Make Me A Pallet On Your Floor* and *Match Box Blues*), are those sequenced before #7, an almost nine minute version of *Orange Blossom Special*, featuring Clements, Sam Bush, Bela Fleck, Tony Rice, Bryan Sutton, Mark Schatz and Peter Rowan. The unlucky ones come after it. OK, it's not really that simple. In the lead up, Asleep At The Wheel do well, thanks to singer Haydn Vitera, with *Before The Next Teardrop Falls*, and Jimmie Dale Gilmore turns in a solid *Go To Sleep Alone*, but The Whites' *San Antonio Rose* and Nitty Gritty Dirt Band's *An American Dream* are pretty redundant, while in the follow up, Guy Clark (*Black Diamond Strings*) and Ralph Stanley & The Clinch Mountain Boys (*A Robin Built A Nest On Daddy's Grave*) more than hold their own. Of the others, I can't work up any interest in Mountain Heart, Ricky Skaggs, Hot Rize or Doyle Lawson & Quicksilver under any circumstances, but Red Stick Ramblers, Rhonda Vincent & The Rage and Donna The Buffalo come across as sounding young, unseasoned and simply thin after Clements and his gang of veterans have torn the place up. Of course, Doc Watson just goes on being Doc Watson, another act I personally would rather not follow. JC



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ANATOMY OF A BAD COUNTRY RECORD REVISITED

FIVE YEARS LATER, CHELY WRIGHT'S ALBUM STILL SEEMS AWFUL

Five years ago last month, I wrote a column for the now defunct *Nashville In Review* about an album called **Single White Female** by Chely Wright. I'd been driving around listening to it for a week or two. It was a lousy record, but I kept listening. Finally, I figured out why—this album was the whole rotten country music industry in a microcosm. You could find evidence of most of what was wrong on Music Row right on this one record.

Back then, a controversial story in our weekly would result in six or seven letters from readers. This column generated more than 60, a slight majority being in agreement with my thoughts on the record. Several people said I was their hero. Some said they hated my negativity. One lady said that people like me were the reason for the Columbine shootings. [JC: and I ran it in **3CM**, thus starting a relationship that outlived *Nashville In Review*].

In the weeks after the column came out, I would often enter recording studios or independent label offices and see it posted on bulletin boards. Also, I considered changing my email address after getting some very nasty personal attacks from Chely's fans. I now think it was just the sort of slap in the face that much of Music Row needed, though I am sure plenty of people in the industry dismissed it.

Since five years have passed, I thought this column was worth another visit. The album sold a sold a little bit better than the numbers I projected, but Wright did get dropped from her label just as I predicted.

In all of the talk last week surrounding our city's first poorly received Fan Fair, it occurred to me that everyone seemed to be missing the point. While the local daily seemed to be laying the blame on some stars who chose not to be in town for Fan Fair or others who were not present in booths at the fairgrounds for autographs, the real culprit went unmentioned. Nobody wanted to talk about the hideously mediocre product coming off The Row these days.

So now all the hillbillies have left town and we can talk without worrying about them, let's stop kidding ourselves about what the problem is with country music. The average album made these days on Music Row is so instantly forgettable that they've all just started to run together into one big, annoying piece of background noise. And even though everyone seems to know it, nobody who has any genuine clout in the industry does anything about it.

Things being the way they are, I thought I'd spend this week's ink breaking down the elements of a typical new release from Music Row so that we can collectively see why things are so horribly bland. I should say in advance that Chely Wright's **Single White Female** is certainly not the worst Music Row record of the year, that honor belongs to Andy Griggs. It is, however, a perfect example of why people 20 or more years from now will remember so little country music from the last half of this decade.

The Album Title

Country music album titles seem to fall into two categories these days. There are seemingly bold but ultimately meaningless statements or questions such as 'When My Dreams Come True' or 'What If It's You?' Then there are the worn-out pop culture phrases that we hope to never hear again. Chely Trite, er, Wright chose to go with a cliché for her album title. Granted, there is a song on the record entitled *Single White Female*, but I can't help but wonder how things would have turned out if there had been songs at the same publishing house called *You Go Girl* or *Talk To The Hand*.

The Producers

Tony Brown, Buddy Cannon and Norro Wilson—man, you really went out on a limb with those guys Chely! Seriously, if you want to make a record that conforms to the blasé sound of 1999 country radio, call in some of the architects who helped build it over the last ten years. As a collection of music, **Single White Female** doesn't break from the herd by any means. It's a whimpering veal cow of an album, just waiting for slaughter. The songs lack any subtlety, there are lame pop-rockers masquerading as country songs and over-produced power ballads that couldn't get a tear out of manic-depressives who'd lost their mate and Lithium prescription in the same week. What there isn't, mind you, is one hint of experimentation. You genuinely have to wonder if Tony Brown is even conscious anymore when these bland albums for mid-level stars are being made. "Vince Gill isn't coming in today? Okay, just wake me when it sounds like everything else."

The Lyrics

Songwriters are somehow held up as being sacred in Music City, but in truth they are actually becoming the biggest villains in this process. How else can you explain something so awful as *She Went Out For Cigarettes*, a whiny ballad where a wife up and leaves her husband for the unpardonable sin of paying too much attention to football. Really! That's why she leaves! I'm sure the songwriters intended a deeper meaning, but the football thing is ultimately all they gave us (and I'm sure this one will be a big hit with UT fans).

Or how about *It Was*, which boasts the following lines, "It was cool as a breeze, It was warm to the touch, It did all of the things love does. That's how I knew it was." Finally, somebody has written the musical equivalent of the old "looks like dog shit, smells like dog shit" joke.

Or how about *Unknown*, a song that is actually a series of personal revelations. In it, Wright sings about how she talks in her sleep, burns candles when she's alone, loves old movies, gets nervous in crowds, believes in god, etc... This would actually be the best song on the album and one of the more inspired cuts from a Nashville female this year except for one thing... Wright didn't pen one damn word of this thing. What a bunch of garbage it is to hear Chely Wright pour her heart out about the things that make up her personality, and then pick up the liner notes and find out that it's just another Gary Burr co-write.

Or how about *The Fire*, a song where Wright is singing about an ex who left her because she was "rough around the edges". In a city where guys like Steve Earle and George Jones have "taken the edge off" more times over the years than sandpaper, Chely Wright is not somebody you think of as having rough edges.

The Album Photography

Even this is pretty lame. Wright is shown in various different poses, each representing the least complicated mood or emotion possible. It's cute, whimsical, deep in thought, pouty or romantic for Wright when she's in front of a camera, and this is just one more predictable element of a most unremarkable album.

When I finished listening to this album, I was left with one image in my mind. It was the thought of a meeting that most certainly took place at some point

this past spring. At the meeting were Brown, Wright, Wright's manager and a few more bigshots from the label and the Wright camp. When the finished product was played for the first time to everybody, there was probably much hand-shaking and back-slapping. Everybody hugged Chely, and a few people said things like "It'll be a smash" or "There are five hit singles on that record." It's a shame that everybody has gotten so good at blatantly lying to one another on the Row. It's a shame somebody couldn't have said, "Chely, there are two or three songs that may crack the top 20 on there. The album might sell 350,000 copies if you're lucky, but you'll probably end up getting dropped from MCA for making the record that your label head wanted you to make." Of course, we just aren't that honest with ourselves in this town or we would have fixed the whole industry a few years ago.

Album Score: D

Entire Country Music Industry Score: F

HANDING OUT THE HARDWARE

The country music industry has more awards shows than Kosovo has bomb craters. Last week's version was the TNN/Music City News Country Awards. Naturally, it wouldn't be fitting to have a post-awards B-Sides column without some awards commentary:

I don't care if she won 50 awards; Faith Hill is the worst vocalist in country music. Her performance of *This Kiss* was breathless and flat, just like every other awards show performance during her career. If it weren't for the backing vocalists who hit all of the high notes for her, it would have been a total disaster for Hill. Shania spent the first year or two of her career avoiding live performances. Hill should do the same. This mediocre excuse for a karaoke singer should stick to cosmetics advertisements and stay away from live microphones. Any other singer in this town with that voice and an average face would get laughed off of Music Row.

Seeing Bill Engvall and Jeff Foxworthy on the same stage was like attending the World's Least Funny Comedian finals.

Aren't awards shows more pleasant without the Dixie Chicks? They can stay in Europe for all I care. I'm guessing they stayed away because they couldn't come up with outfits ridiculous enough to top the ones they wore at the Grammy and ACM ceremonies.

Alan Jackson and Vince Gill were spectacular. These guys are championing the cause of real country music on the Row these days. And why not? Nobody else seems to have the balls to do it.

Jackson's *I'll Go on Loving You* is one of the top 10 Music Row songs of this decade. *Little Man* isn't far behind.

Who is this Toby Keith guy? Is he famous or something? Ditto for Mark Wills.

There's been a Deana Carter sighting. Though it seemed like silly little Miss Barefoot had quit the business and left town after Capitol Nashville virtually abandoned her, she actually showed up to be the window dressing acoustic guitar player for the Charlie Daniels tribute.

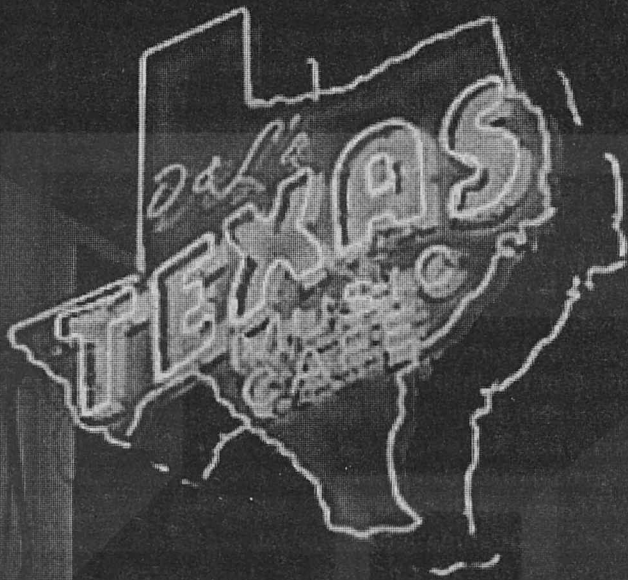
Speaking of, the Daniels tribute was long overdue, but couldn't they have gotten a better drummer than Bryan White? And by the way, have you ever noticed that he just never seems to get around to marrying that soap opera actress? Hmmm. Why is that?

Can we all chip in and make a donation to help the Sawyer Brown guy with his twitch?

It's a shame that smoking guitar player Anita Cochran would use her two minutes of air time to do a wussy power ballad. Methinks I smell a record company rat behind the scenes.

Hey Luke Perry, lose the cowboy hat. You look like a dumbass. Your attempt at being a Marlboro Man made Jay Leno look like Gene Autry.

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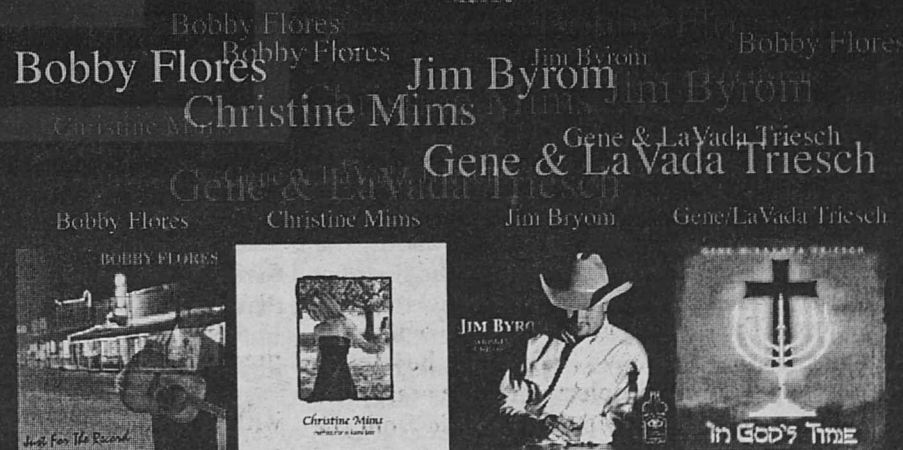


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JOHN THE REVEALATOR

My alma mater, the University of Manchester, has awarded honorary degrees to Robin, Barry and (posthumously) Maurice Gibb of **The Bee Gees**, and if I had any idea where my degree is, I'd send it back. I'm pretty sure I packed it when I left England, but I haven't seen it since. Actually I don't think I could part with it for sentimental reasons, one of my favorite cats chewed up a corner 30 years ago, and those little punctures are all I have to remember Rastus by. Still, while they were about it, Manchester could have given honorary degrees to Philip Pope, Angus Deayton and Michael Fenton Stevens, who did fabulous pop music parodies on the wonderful British comedy show *Radio Active*, one of the high spots of which was **The Hee-Bee-Jee-Bees' Meaningless Songs In Very High Voices** (using hair dryers instead of mikes).

♦ A footnote to the review of **Eve Monsees & The Exiles** is that Eve also plays electric guitar and I couldn't help but notice on her website that at an early May LeRoi Brothers' gig, "Eve Monsees will be filling in for **Casper Rawls** on guitar." Now those are words with which to conjure. In a town where you can hardly throw a rock without hitting a guitar player (and another on the rebound), being picked to deputize for Rawls sounds like a pretty good validation, but Ms Monsees says you shouldn't read too much into it, "I was standing where he normally would."

♦ Last month, Jim Beal Jr and I got an email from the Texas Commission on the Arts announcing that it was seeking nominations for the position of **Texas State Musician**, and, as Jim remarked, "There might be some interesting nominations from **3CM** readers." Trouble is, the clock is running—all nominations must be postmarked by Friday, June 4. Seems this one-year appointment, along with those of state poet laureate, state two-dimensional artist and state three-dimensional artist, was created by SB 1043 of the 77th Legislature. Selection of the four positions will be made by a committee appointed by the governor, lieutenant governor and House speaker (ie Republicans); nominees must be native Texans or five-year state residents, and must have received recognition for high levels of excellence and success. Also, they also must have received critical reviews in state, regional or national publications—see, and you didn't think that **3CM** review was worth much (note, it says "critical," not favorable). In addition, state musician nominees must have at least two nationally available records, or 20 years formal teaching experience, or receive the majority of their income from musical endeavors (that one narrows the field right there, good thing they didn't make it household income). Any Texas citizen may make up to three nominations per category, but self-nominations will not be accepted. They can be submitted online (www.arts.state.tx.us/stateartist). OK, I'm going for **Ray Wylie Hubbard** as he's already written the State Anthem if you know what I mean, and I think you do.

♦ For a little musical fun, Dave Ludwig, Third Coast Music Network's FryDave, recommends going to www.chthoniconic.net/bile/default.asp, where you can enter your favorite album, band, singer or song, hit go and get a mercilessly scathing computer-generated review, totally trashing the album, band, singer or song as worthless shite. This, of course, works just as good, maybe even better, when you enter an album or whatever that you can't stand. Dave pulled up reviews of an act he knew a friend really liked and another he knew she really disliked and she thought the first one was written by an idiot and the second by a genius. After a while, you'll realize that the program is shuffling a fairly limited deck of invective, but it's still good for some laughs. Even if you don't figure it out from the vocabulary, it should be obvious that there's a Brit behind this. Here's a sample:

"The lyrics of *Come Away With Me* would make better sense written on a urinal wall—at least you could piss on them. *Shoot The Moon* should never be played in intelligent company if you want to retain your friends. On second listening, *Painter Song* starts sounding a little better, a bit more muffled and a little less like that bloke in your office who hums to himself continuously oblivious to the number of people who plot to fill his mouth and nose with cement on a daily basis. Or is that because I've strapped a twelve tog duvet around my head to block out the evil nastiness? You decide. *Nightingale* is so so. So, so, so fucking awful, that is. Sticking my fingers in my ears made *Cold, Cold Heart (Live)* sound a whole lot better, but not as much as putting an axe through my CD player. In fact, I wish **Norah Jones** had never been born."

♦ While you're online, check out www.pythonline.com/plugs/idle/FCCSong.mp3 for **Eric Idle's FCC Song**. "Here's a little song I wrote the other day while I was out duck hunting with a judge... It's a new song, it's dedicated to the FCC and if they broadcast it, it will cost a quarter of a million dollars," says Idle. You'll soon find out why it'd be so expensive.

♦ Now it can be told, but first, a little exegesis. The 'classic' Monday and Wednesday night **Chicago House Open Mikes** ran from 8pm to midnight, with the host, Jimmy LaFave or Betty Elders, playing for half an hour at 10pm. People who wanted to play would call in after 7pm to sign up for a 15 minute slot, and, fairly obviously, the most desirable ones were those immediately before and after the host/ess, the least desirable those at 8pm and 11.45. OK, so one night I remarked to Lorrie, the bartender, how good the club's Open Mikes were compared to the competition and found out there was a Reason. She made me promise not to tell Peg Miller and Glynda Cox, the owners, but as their much-missed joint has been closed for almost a decade, I think the statute of limitations has run out on this one. See, Lorrie answered the phone, and after a while, she'd heard most every singer-songwriter in Austin, so when the calls came in, she'd give the ones she liked the good spots, the ones she didn't much care for the early and late ones, and if she really detested someone, she'd tell them the evening was booked solid. So if you have fond memories of Chicago House Open Mikes, and ever wondered how come they were so much better than others of their kind, now you know why and who to thank. Ditto if you've ever wondered how come there were never any slots available no matter how early you called. Street music criticism at its finest.

♦ As a couple of this month's ads may indicate, the festival season is upon us. Actually, if you follow the **'2004 Texas Music Events Calendar'** link at www.governor.state.tx.us/music, you'll see that the festival season is year round in Texas, but the summer school vacation is, obviously enough, the peak period, when every city, town and county in the state throws a party or three. Unfortunately, the Texas Music Office's calendar is strictly chronological. You can easily find out what your options are on any given weekend, but narrowing things down by musical genres or geography, within 100 miles of San Antonio, say, actually, with the gas prices the way they are, let's make that 50 miles, is another matter.

So, plugging through the calendar, naturally the most interesting sounding events are in impossible places, like Wichita Falls (**Legends of Western Swing Music Festival**, June 3rd-5th), and the ones that are handy usually don't give you much to go on and often don't have a website, so you can't find out what this year's lineup is, which is pretty crucial, or at least would be if you recognized any of the names. As far as I can make out, there are bands that exist solely to play the festival circuit, preying on gullible organizers

who don't know much about music or don't have much of a budget, usually both, and there's a good reason you've never heard of them. Some of the lamest music, country, blues, cajun, zydeco, you name it, I've ever come across has been at Texas festivals.

Anyway, after eliminating the ones that are too far away and the ones that sound too dreadful, or, as in the case of Belton's 'God & Country' festival, which only offers 'Christian' and 'Patriot' music, too far away and too dreadful sounding, you aren't left with all that much. Frankly, my advice is: if they don't advertise in **3CM**, fuck 'em, and if they do, patronize the hell out of them.

One word of warning, particularly for visitors from abroad, who take the ready availability of decent beer for granted, is that the big brewers are moving ever further down the food chain, buying the exclusive concession rights (and souls) of the smallest and humblest of festivals, so Shiner's **Bocktoberfest** is about the only one left where you can get an adult beverage rather than being forced to choke down gnat's piss. One handy tip though; if you're in Historic Downtown for Podunk Pioneer Days, there's a good chance there'll be a real bar inside the festival grounds and open for business. I learned this the hard way when trapped inside Budweiser Hell at Conroe Catfish Festival one year, and it was a fucking lifesaver. Sadly, the bar inside the grounds of San Antonio's La Villita closed down, which rather put the mockers on the last International Accordion Festival.

♦ One thing I will say for the **Austin City Limits Festival** is that it's sponsored by Heineken. Not that that does me much good because I have this little quirk about having to listen to, say, Billy Joe Shaver, with one ear and some poxy alternative rock band with the other. One rather odd thing I came across recently is that, although tickets are already on sale, ACL won't say who'll be playing, even though a number of acts, from Sheryl Crow to Joe Ely, have posted Festival dates on their summer tour schedules. This is seriously messing up a friend in Scotland, who can get her radio station to pay her way if, and only if, she can show them there's enough country and Americana on the bill—which so far there simply isn't—to justify the trip.

♦ Don't know how widely it's being aired, but **Guy Clark** can be seen on local TV pimping for Taco Cabana, singing "San Antonio, I love you" to the tune of *Let Him Roll*.

LOOSE DIAMONDS #5 A DJ's PRIVATE STASH TOM JACKSON

When FAR veteran Tom Jackson, who hosts the doubleheader *Somebody Else's Troubles* and *New Orleans Music Hour* every Saturday on WLWU, Chicago, IL, celebrated his 50th birthday at The Hideout, his headliner was Anna Fermin's Trigger Gospel, meaning he's a man of fine taste and discrimination. These are the albums he wishes you all had.

Chip Taylor's Last Chance (Warner Brothers, 1973/Gadfly, 1997). When this one started hitting the cutout bins, I used to buy 'em up, so I could turn people on to what is still one of my Top 10 albums of all time.

Bobby Charles (Bearsville, 1972/Stony Plain, 1994). His first solo album. Without a doubt one of America's best songwriters. His songs have sold millions and his own albums should be better known. The recent **Last Train To Memphis** (Beans 'N' Rice, 2004) has a bonus disc of songs from some of his other albums.

Jesse Winchester (Ampex, 1970/Stony Plain, 1994). An album with some beautiful songs whose power has not faded.

Ray Wylie Hubbard: Loco Gringo's Lament (Dejadisc, 1995/Misery Loves Company, 2000). A songwriter who keeps improving his craft with each album. Not his first album, but the first one that blew me away.



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HIGH, LOW & IN-BETWEEN

Calling it a 'dirty little secret' might be going too far, but one very real aspect of music you hardly ever see mentioned, let alone discussed, is the career plateau. This isn't about record sales, or audience turnout, almost every artist or act hits a peak after which those decline, no matter what they do. It's about art, about growth, about development, about personal goals. When you look at many careers, you're looking at a flatline, at albums and concerts that basically don't change for years or decades on end.

To say that someone has hit a plateau is, in itself, by no means derogatory. The Butch Hancock of **West Texas Waltzes**, for instance, is pretty much the same Butch Hancock of **You Coulda Walked Around The World**, 22 years later, and nobody's the worse for that, on the contrary. Equally, while they might improve how well they do it, you don't expect, and certainly don't want, a crackerjack honky-tonk band like The Starline Rhythm Boys to change what they do. When you're as talented as Hancock or as proficient as the Boys, plateau is good.

However, when you see words like 'dependable,' 'consistent,' 'tried and true' and 'trademark' in reviews, or, worse still, publicity material, you're looking at code words for 'stalled out,' 'coasting on empty' or 'If I change the song titles, I could pretty much recycle the review of the last album.' In other words, a plateau situation—this is as good as it gets and it's unlikely to get any better.

There is, of course, an upside, for plateaued artists at least, in that they can keep going almost indefinitely with only minor, cosmetic changes to the set, unlike the crash and burn crowd who go from nowhere to #1 to trivia question with one single or one album. Nonetheless, it's rather depressing to see people doing the same thing over and over, year after year. An old joke was that Hawkwind (and if you've never heard of them, don't worry about it, you haven't missed a thing) only ever made one album, but reissued it in a different sleeve with a different title every couple of years, and you could make the same crack about far too many acts.

Part of the problem, especially in roots music, is the first album, you know, the good one, the one everyone liked. I can't attribute the observation (Elvis Costello?) that musicians have their whole lives to prepare for their first album and 18 months for the second, in other words, you blow your best, certainly most road-tested, material on your debut and then you have the problem of maintaining the standard you've set yourself. What's more, success only gets in the way. As Steve Earle remarked to me when he was touring **Guitar Town**, "What am I supposed to write about, that I'm travelling around in a bus that cost more than most people's homes? Who gives a shit?"

Some acts try doing something radically different to break the pattern, but that's a risky business. In the immortal words of Otis Williams, when told that Motown wanted The Temptations to make an album of Burt Bacharach songs, "What's that going to do for us apart from piss off all our fans?"

Then there are the artists who grow and evolve, slowly enough to bring their core audience along with them, fast enough so that each new album is a revelation. Ray Wylie Hubbard is one such, Terri Hendrix (see reviews) another. Of course, they'll always have people hollering for *Redneck Mother* or *You Mangled My Dog*, but that goes to show that fans can plateau too and get left behind.

JC

BARBARA CLARK WHOLE HEARTED

(Hapi Skratch ****.5)

One category of cover story I didn't mention last month was the blinder, the feature its subject didn't know was coming, mainly because I'd only ever done that once, but this is the second time, which I guess is enough to make it a category. Back in July 1992, James & Gayle Henry, the patron saints of Austin country music, were about to celebrate their 36th wedding anniversary, so I put them on the cover, dropped copies face down on their table and about a minute later Gayle flipped hers over and let out a terrific shriek.

Unfortunately, I won't get to hear Barbara Clark's reaction, unless I hand-deliver a copy to her home in Fort Collins, CO, where she, her husband and son moved in 1993. Coincidentally, I reviewed the original cassette release of **Whole Hearted** in the very same issue (MCT #35) and at one point I was thinking of making her the cover story, but she wouldn't let me, which was kind of a relief because I really wanted to do something for the Henrys. However, this time, to mark the somewhat unexpected CD release of her one and only recording, I didn't consult her.

Now some of you, especially musicians, indie label types and publicists may be thinking "She wouldn't let you? Huh?" and the fact is that, while they might yearn for the cover of a national glossy or three, most anybody with an album to promote will take anything they can get. In 3CM's 15 years, Barbara is the one and only person who's demurred, even though my name led all the rest in her liner note 'thank you's.' What you have to understand about Barbara is that of all the singer-songwriters who have ever played in Austin, she was quite possibly the only who had absolutely no interest whatsoever in creating a name for herself or building a career, let alone making money out of music. She played maybe a couple three shows as a featured performer, but really what she liked doing was coming down to Chicago House open mikes occasionally and singing songs she'd written.

Another thing you have to understand about Barbara was that she could write and sing circles round virtually all the other singer-songwriters at those open mikes, and if that sounds like the most ambiguous compliment you ever heard, bear in mind that these were no ordinary open mikes. Hosted by Jimmy LaFave and Betty Elders, which right there guaranteed that the evening wouldn't be a total loss, and used by many established artists as a testbed for new material, they were reliable enough to become part of my routine, and if there were some, OK many (many) painful moments, they were amply compensated for by David Rodriguez, Terri Hendrix, Barb Donovan, Michael Fracasso, Slaid Cleaves and Beaver Nelson, all of whom I first saw at Chicago House on a Monday or Wednesday night. As Don McLeese, then music editor of the *Austin American-Statesman*, remarked round that time, "There are people playing open mikes in Austin who would be stars anywhere else," and, of course, some did go on to become stars, or at least the Austin equivalent.

Even so, regardless of who all else might be playing, Barbara Clark was always special. One thing that's stayed with me is the way she'd stand a good two feet back from the microphone and though her voice was soft and light, with a husky, confiding undertone, every word was clear as a bell. I'd happily have listened to her sing the phone book, but she also wrote wonderful songs, elegantly structured, deceptively simple, usually slow and sinuous, and mostly about love.

The early 90s were also a golden age for Austin cassettes and while some have been reissued on CD, many, Jimmy LaFave's **Highway Angels . . . Neon Rain**, Will T Massey's **Kicking Up Dust** and Butch Hancock's **No 2 Alike** series, for instance, remain treasured but vulnerable artifacts. Frankly, I never thought to see **Whole Hearted** resurface but when a subscriber in Ireland, who'd bought a set of back issues, asked me whether there was any hope of locating a copy, I tracked Barbara down, with the help of Fort Collins FARster JC Shepard, and found that she'd been toying with the idea of a CD reissue as she'd started playing out locally a bit. Maybe having Patrick standing in line waiting for a copy helped tip the balance.

Quite why Barbara recorded the album in the first place I can no longer remember, and I can't ask her until after this issue comes out, but I know Peg and Glynda and I were among many who encouraged her to make one, which sounds so much nicer than saying we bullied her into it, though that's probably more accurate. In any case, cut at Flashpoint with Scott Neubert, who also produced, on guitars, Dobro, mandolin and harmony vocals, Erik Hokkanen violin and David Heath acoustic bass, it's a country flavored gem. Ten songs may seem on the short side, but you have to remember, Barbara didn't write 'material'—she didn't need to fill a set, because she didn't have one. So every song is there for a reason.

My dictionary defines 'Amateur' as "one who engages in an activity for pleasure rather than for financial benefit," not an easy concept to explain in the modern world, especially America, where amateur is more likely to be defined as 'not good enough to turn professional.' The fact is, there are plenty of professional singer-songwriters who don't have one tenth, one hundredth, the talent, as either singer or songwriter, of Barbara Clark. I, for one, am simply grateful she found the time to put this CD out among the priorities she long ago decided to place higher than making music.

JC

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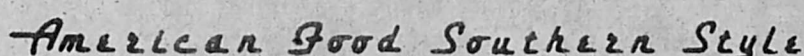
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5th - Narciso Martinez † 1992
6th - Gary US Bonds • 1939 • Jacksonville, FL
----- Joe Stampley • 1943 • Springhill, LA
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12th Charlie Feathers
 • 1932 • Holly Springs, MS
----- Junior Brown • 1952 • Cottonwood, AZ
----- JE Mainer † 1971
----- Angelais LeJeune † 1974
----- Johnny Bond † 1978
13th Clyde McPhatter † 1972
14th Wynonie Harris † 1969
15th Tex Owens • 1892 • Kileen, TX
----- Leon Payne • 1917 • Alba, TX
----- Waylon Jennings • 1937 • Littlefield, TX
----- Art Pepper † 1982
16th Bob Nolan † 1980
17th Red Foley • 1910 • Blue Lick, KY
----- Henry Zimmerle
 • 1940 • San Antonio, TX
----- Mike Buck • 1952 • Fort Worth, TX
----- Dewey Balfa † 1992
18th Marti Brom • 1961 • St Louis, MO
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