

**Oral History Interview of
Alan Munde**

**Interviewed by: Andy Wilkinson
December 9, 2011
Wimberley, Texas**

**Part of the:
*Crossroads of Music Archive***

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The Crossroads Artists Project encompasses interviews conducted by the Crossroads of Music Archive Staff members. They hope to document the life, career, and creative processes of artists and songwriters from all across the Southwestern United States.

Transcript Overview:

This interview features banjo player Alan Munde. Munde discusses going to California and playing at Dinseyland. Munde also talks about recording albums with Country Gazette and touring in Europe.

Length of Interview: 02:48:29

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Keywords

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Andy Wilkinson (AW):

All right, this is the latest in a continuing series of what may be—not an endless series, but a long series of talks with Alan Munde. It's the ninth day of December, right?

Alan Munde (AM):

I believe that to be correct.

AW:

2011—in beautiful suburban Wimberley. I think 1972 was where we stopped. You were with—Cochran—was there a Bobby Cochran with the Burrito Brothers? I got an email from him—you know, one of those—

AM:

Not that I know of. Now there were later incarnations of the Burrito Brothers that I wasn't involved in that was led by Sneaky Pete and Gib Guilbeau, and he may have been in that version of it. This is—you know, we'd gone to Europe and come back, and it was the beginning of Country Gazette. When we got back from Europe, like I said, we played a couple of dates on the east coast—I can't remember where—and then we all went our separate ways. Byron and I went back to Oklahoma, and then he and I followed him and his wife out. They drove—they had been home for Christmas. Byron is from near Caldwell, Kansas, and we met up and I followed them back to LA.

AW:

Were you driving the '61 LeSabre?

AM:

No, at this point that had—my dad kept that and sold it for me—and I had a friend, Doyle Butler—who I still am friends with—Doyle was a mechanic for Mistletoe Express in Oklahoma City, which was the E. K. Gaylord's—owned the newspaper, and he also owned this transportation company called Mistletoe Express—Mistletoe is, I think, the state parasite or something of Oklahoma.

AW:

State parasite.

AM:

So it was called the Mistletoe Express—and Doyle found me a car. It was a Dodge Dart of some variety—year, I can't remember the year of it—but that's what I drove out to California—in a two-door Dodge Dart. We drove out there, and I remember the drive out—I'd never been—I'll back up. As a youth, my brother Mike, who I said had came home from the navy and brought a

guitar—well, he moved back to San Diego and married and was living out there but wanted to move back to Oklahoma and go to college. So when I was fifteen or so I took a train west to LA and then San Diego, and then he and I and his wife and child—infant child—took the train back to Oklahoma. So I had been out to California when I was fifteen or so, but this was the first time as an adult on my own to go out there. I can remember driving into LA and immediately, it struck me as in one view, the most beautiful and ugliest place I've ever seen. It was almost like another planet. It had all these plants and flowers that you don't see, but then it had the smog. This would be January of 1972—or maybe February, I can't remember. Anyway, we drove out there—the idea of being in Country Gazette, recording, being in a band with Byron and Roger and Kenny, and making music—that was my plan—or that was the plan. Byron had been living out there for a couple years, I guess, at that time, and he had a lot of contacts and had made a lot of contacts and friends, and had worked a lot in the studio because he was a really, really, really fine fiddle player and was hip enough that he could sit in with an orchestra and they could point to him and he could play. So he had built a life and a career on playing in the studios and then touring with—for a while he was with the Doug Dillard band—Doug Dillard had a band called The Expedition—Doug Dillard and the Expedition. Byron and Roger played in that unit until the Burrito thing came along. So anyway, he had a lot of irons in the fire going, and one of them was he wanted to have his own—be a part of his group—and they had a name, Country Gazette—and so when I got there, I stayed a couple weeks or so with Byron—maybe a month—before I found my own place in north Hollywood. We would rehearse with Roger and Kenny and try to get things going. I met with Eddie Tickner again, and maybe I met Jim Dickson for the first time. At that point, Eddie was the manager of the Burritos prior to them breaking up, and then they had sort of become interested in Byron as a commercial entity. At the time, 1972, it seemed in LA anyway, there was a real interest in sort of the country end of rock and roll, you know, with the Burritos, Poco—

AW:
Credence.

AM:
What?

AW:
Credence Clearwater.

AM:
Credence—the Eagles were just kind of getting underway, and they saw Byron as a potential—as a leader of yet another group that would sort of be the acoustic bluegrass end of the LA country music scene—you know, hip, rock and roll-y young people country music scene. So I think that's what they used to sell the group as a whole to United Artists. That's who they were sort of

zeroing in on—and ultimately signed with United Artists and got money to do an album. I think through Byron, probably, the band Country Gazette got a gig playing at Disneyland five or six days a week for twelve weeks, I think it was—eleven or twelve weeks.

AW:

Which was a good gig, right?

AM:

You know, it was really good.

AW:

The Carpenters, that's where they became known, and there were all kinds of—

AM:

A lot, a lot of great musicians played Disneyland, and we played—we were the—the downside of it is most of the music was atmosphere. They didn't really care about the artistic end of it, they just wanted the music to be clean and wholesome and match the environment they put you in.

We were at—they had opened a new area called Bear Country Jamboree, and so we were a bluegrass band that played in that area. They gave us costumes—sort of mountain man shirts and hats of a certain variety.

AW:

If you get a chance, on YouTube look up the Lewis and Clark expedition. There's a YouTube—taken from a movie clip that's a little earlier than that, where Murphey and Boomer Castleman are wearing a fringe, and jumping up and down like some demented rock and roll group, but wearing these—the same thing.

AM:

Right—so it was good for me in that—you know, going to Europe—and I made a fair amount of money over there, you know, my part of that Burrito Brother thing—I'm going to say a couple thousand dollars, which, in 1972—I mean, I made as much in a month as I had made with Jimmy Martin in a whole year. So it was like really, really good. So I had a little bit of money there, but getting there and working at Disneyland with a regular salary, that helped a lot, too. During that time, we would rehearse the songs we were going to record. We would meet at Byron's house with Jim Dickson and Eddie Tickner sometimes, and kind of talk about what songs we'd want to do—we'd play the songs for them—and they would help pick songs. Jim Dickson suggested some songs, and the ones I remember were “Tried so Hard” —and these were Gene Clark songs—“Tried so Hard” and “Keep on Pushing” were the two I remember that they possibly suggested. Eddie Tickner and Jim Dickson had worked with the Gosdin Brothers, and they had recorded an album for Columbia or somebody, and on there was a song—they did a song called

“Sounds of Goodbye” and I think Dickson or Eddie Tickner liked that, so we started working on that song. And then they would listen to the songs that we suggested and make comments about them and so ultimately we came up with the twelve or fourteen songs we were going to record—and started working on them and arranging them. Dickson would listen to them and he maybe would make a suggestion about something—or if he heard something he liked, he would encourage us to do that, to keep something. The one thing I remember is in “Tried so Hard,” it goes into a chorus and at that point, Roger went from playing in two to play four—a walking bassline. This is the kind of thing that Dickson would point out that was sort of new to me to a certain extent—was that he really liked that because it made this bridge sound different than the verses and chorus of the song. I’d never heard anybody talk about—I mean it seems real simple now, but he sort of would talk about—and I don’t know if he used this word, but I’ll use it—sort of dramatic differences between one part of a song and another part.

AW:

Yeah, building the dramatic curve that you do with all kinds of things.

AM:

Right—so I’d never heard—you know with Jimmy Martin it was always just pick, pick, solos—

AW:

Fencerow to fencerow?

AM:

Right. So there was never—although, that’s not entirely true; he had a different sense of it. So I was—Jimmy was real good about that, too, but Dickson was more articulate about it, where Jimmy couldn’t always say it—where Dickson was real articulate about music. So they would listen to the songs and we would rehearse them and kind of get them to the point where, “This is what we want to do,” and then when we played at Disneyland, we would—

AW:

Would you slip one of those in?

AM:

Oh yeah, all the time. We practiced them all. They never ever edited anything we did.

AW:

Oh that’s cool, because that gave you a great—

AM:

Oh yeah. They would—at Disneyland, you know, they didn’t quite know what they wanted.

They would have us play acoustically out somewhere, and then they would say, “No, that’s—why don’t you move over here and play over here?” And finally they came up with a stage off in a corner and a little PA in the food service area as the place to use us, and that’s where we wound up most of the time. Every once in a while, they would come and say, “Why don’t you play over there?” And I can’t remember our schedule, but it was a—I can’t even remember. It wasn’t like an eight-hour day, but it was five- or six-hour days—thirty minutes on, thirty minutes off kind of thing with maybe a break for lunch.

AW:

That’s a lot of playing.

AM:

Yeah, we played a lot. You played a lot. It was kind of cool seeing the inner—I mean, just at a real nuts-and-bolts level of the operation of Disneyland, and going back into the employees lounge area—and you’d go back there, and there’d be the—some of the guys that were the characters, you know. That was a really hard job—some of the characters more so than others because of the size of the costume.

AW:

Yeah, and I bet it was hot.

AM:

It was incredibly hot—and they had a schedule that was much shorter than—they worked like fifteen or twenty minutes and then took a break because those outfits were really hot—and in the summer. A lot of times—and it was a new experience for me—but a lot of the children were real abusive to those animal characters.

AW:

Really?

AM:

I mean they would run into them and kick them and punch on them—so they took a lot.

AW:

Wow. The wonderful world of Disney.

AM:

Yeah. I think the ones that were more the animal characters are the ones that sort of stirred the kids—you know, like Snow White or—

AW:

—Tinkerbell, they were okay.

AM:

Yeah, the ones that looked human, they probably weren't as abusive to them, but the ones that looked like animals—and we had Br'er Bear and Br'er Fox were the ones I remember. We traveled together—and they were usually college students—college guys—and they had several of them, you know, they couldn't do the same person play the character all week; you'd die. So they had a—and they used, it seemed like, a lot of college kids. It was one of the issues that came up is Kenny Wertz had a beard, and they wanted him to shave it, and he wouldn't do it. They didn't press it very hard. In fact, it kind of looked more mountain man-like to me—

AW:

Yeah, I was going to say, it seems to me like that would be more in keeping with the character.

AM:

It seems so, too, but they had their own—

AW:

Yeah they were afraid, and then Tinkerbell would want one.

AM:

Right. So it was a real good experience. Then we would get scheduled in the studio—and where we recorded was the World Pacific Studios in Hollywood, and that's—World Pacific—I don't remember who owned the label, but it was a bigtime jazz label. I think Dave Brubeck maybe even recorded for them, and Chad Baker—it was a real well-used studio in Hollywood. The engineer was a guy named Dino Lappas, who was Greek. Jim had known him through his career as a producer. He knew Dino, and liked him, and was real comfortable with him—and he was very, very nice man, and had been—I think he actually worked for United Artists and had recorded many, many things at United Artists. Dino went on to do—he was the engineer that recorded “Will the Circle be Unbroken” in Nashville with the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band. So he was a well-thought-of engineer—and he had been around for many, many years, so he was from the era of direct-to-tape, two-track, and then into the multitrack, so he was real—sort of organic understanding of the recording process, and he knew all, kind of where things came from and how things got to be where they were, so he was a real—it was real good to watch Jim Dickson and this Dino Lappas work. This is in the era, certainly, of tape—you know, multitrack, two-inch, sixteen-track—I think, at the time—tape. So we would go in—we'd work Disneyland, and sometimes we would even go in after we played at Disneyland, we would go in and record in the evening. We'd record maybe—again, much different than Nashville, where you had three hours and you just recorded live—however many you could get in three hours—we would have more

than three hours—maybe five hours—but we would go in and record, sometimes—I can't remember the exact schedule—but sometimes we'd only get one tune recorded. We'd work on it—you know, and it's multitrack, so we would—and I'd never done this before, where you'd go in and you'd just play sort of a dummy track. Dickson had a sense of every song was different, so some songs we would try to record live, and then you would overdub the mistakes so that Byron and Kenny and Roger would play and sing live.

AW:

They'd isolate them, though?

AM:

Right, right, we would be isolated with baffles.

AW:

Yeah, so you could fix the mistakes.

AM:

Right, and we'd go back and fix the mistakes—and this is in the day when they had—you know, once again they're tape, so they had to—like a banjo part that I didn't get quite right—you would have to go back, they would run the tape, and then at the point you wanted to start, they would have to punch the record button.

AW:

I've actually engineered and recorded on when you had to punch and punch out—in fact, it was a—you know, it was an athletic operation. You had to get your fingers limber and—

AM:

You know, and you would have to rehearse it—

AW:

Yeah, "Here's where we're going to punch" —

AM:

Yeah. I would sit there at the board with Jim, and we'd be going along, and I'd go "Right—now" and then "Here's where it goes out—now" and he would have to hit those—and if they made a mistake—

AW:

You had to do the whole thing.

AM:

Yeah, then you had to go back and correct their mistake. So it was kind of a tricky deal, whereas today, digitally—

AW:

Slide it, move it—

AM:

Move it left or right, you know—

AW:

You can set up the automatic in and out on top of it, yeah.

AM:

Right, right.

AW:

I kind of miss, though, the—there was this—I don't know if you did much of it—doing the button pushing—but there was a real sense of accomplishment when you did that right.

AM:

Right—and what was interesting is the mechanics, or the electronics of the button—I think it's something like this—when you push it, it doesn't actually go in—it's when you release it that it engages. So you have to not only push, but you have to release—so it was all just a real quick little tap.

AW:

Oh yeah, yeah—in fact, you developed this little flick that was—

AM:

Right, right—and it was a—but they would do that, and then—so we would—some songs, we would try to record live with Byron and Roger and Kenny all singing and playing all at the same time—try to get all the way through and then fix any mistakes. Other songs, we might do a dummy vocal, and then only get an instrumental track, and then go back and sing—and get the instrumental track—

AW:

Did you use a click?

AM:

We did not use a click track.

AW:

You just didn't want to, or was it not commonly done?

AM:

You know, I don't even remember it ever coming up. I don't even remember that it was even offered, but we didn't use a click track. I remember doing—we did an instrumental that Byron and Roger wrote called Hot Burrito Breakdown, and we did as many as twenty-five takes—now, some of them are false starts, you know, we'd get so far and then it would fall apart—sometimes we'd get all the way through, but it wouldn't be right or feel right. Dickson was a big one on—this is a joke, but it—you know, about the producer going “That was a great take, but could you do it one more time for me?” Well, he wasn't that, but he would interject and say, “You know, I think you've got a better one. It just doesn't feel quite right” so he would interject himself—and even though we had gotten a take, he would say, “You know, I think you've got a better one in you.” Then we'd try it again. I think that one is the only one I remember doing a really large number of attempts until we got to where we did it. I wish I could remember, because Byron plays mandolin and fiddle on that tune—

AW:

Did he switch, or—?

AM:

He must have played—I'm guessing he played mandolin first—

AW:

—and then overdubbed it?

AM:

And then overdubbed the fiddle—but it could have been the other way around.

AW:

That'd make more sense, the mandolin, because it's more of a rhythm—

AM:

Right, it would make more sense, but that doesn't necessarily hold that it's true. But anyway, that was sort of the recording process, and we'd just do one tune and another and another—and also, Herb Pederson, which is a real fixture in LA acoustic country music world as a singer, but also, he was a very, very, very, very fine banjo player—but he played guitar, also. Before I came in

the group, that's who they really wanted in the group—and I think Jim Dickson was hopeful that Herb Pederson would have been in the band, but Herb had just left the Dillards and wanted to try a solo career, and wasn't interested in being part of a band again at that point. So he didn't want to be sort of an official part of Country Gazette, but Dickson was still real interested in using him, so Herb did some of the harmony singing and also played guitar rhythm on some cuts—I'd have to listen to them to see which ones he was actually on—but we also recorded a song he wrote called "Anna"—a real sort of slow ballad song—and I played on that a muted banjo—you can get a banjo mute that clips onto your bridge and it has sort of a—

AW:

Like a violin mute?

AM:

Yeah, very similar—and this one was metal, so there was some resonance that was given to it by the metalness of the mute. I would play—and I think I used fingerpicks—I'd have to listen again.

AW:

So to get it like almost a barrelhouse piano—kind of a "chick, chick, chick" sound?

AM:

Well, it was on real slow songs, so it gave it more sustain and I'm not sure how you'd—it was more of a guitar-like, harpsichord-like—

AW:

I'm not familiar with that sound; I'll have to hear it.

AM:

To me it's identifiable as a banjo with a mute on it. So I did that on this "Anna," and they had another song they had been doing before I got there—I can't remember the name of it, and I didn't play on it at all—or I maybe played rhythm guitar, I can't remember—but there was one song on there I didn't play on at all, but it was a real pretty song. And then we did an old Louvin Brothers song called "I Wish You Knew"—and see, here's another thing that Jim Dickson sort of brought as a listener. He listened to us do it—and once again, Byron is a really great fiddle player, and he can be real active—Dickson really liked what he was doing on this "I Wish You Knew" so he mixed it up pretty loud, like it's almost a—

AW:

A solo sort of a—

AM:

Yeah, almost like an obbligato line behind the vocal—and so it became—and Dickson would hear that and where, in sort of a normal bluegrass setting, you'd go, "Well, you know, the fiddle is kind of loud there" —well Dickson would listen and go, "Yeah, but it's got a lot of energy in it, and let's get it out there to where we can hear it." So he sort of talked about music at that level, you know, of listening to what's happening in the moment and finding sort of the center of the performance and bringing that out. So I really appreciated that, and felt good about what he was doing. So we did that—and I can't remember all the other songs—Byron had an instrumental called "Aggravation" that he and Doug Dillard wrote that we did that was kind of a spunky fun little thing to do. Then "Hot Burrito Breakdown," which I mentioned, and the Gene Clark song "Keep On Pushing" and "Tried So Hard," and we did "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" —kind of an interesting arrangement that Herb Pederson was involved in—that's one song Herb was on—and "Sounds of Goodbye" —and several—you know, whatever else is on there. So that was the music—and we spent a lot of time recording it and a lot of time mixing it—and Dickson had this sort of west coast vocal sound of the Eagles, and whatnot—was this sound where you double the vocals. He said "You know, you can do it electronically," but he had us—when I say "us," not me but the singers—so they would sing a chorus to "I Wish You Knew," then he would have them go sing it again, maybe as many as three times, so it was like a choir doing it, but then not sounding exactly like a choir. You would have one of the sets the loudest, and then the other two progressively further back in the mix. So the result was just like a real big vocal sound, without it being necessarily choir-like. So that was a big difference from any bluegrass ever. I say that; I don't know if that's true or not, but I'll say it's the first one that sort of took that—

AW:

I think you're right.

AM:

—and where it came from was sort of the Eagles and the Byrds, and just west—I'm sure many, many, many artists of the pop variety and all varieties in California, when they discovered that, they sort of did that. So that was part of our recorded sound, anyway. So it made the record sound different. He spent a lot of time mixing it—and once again, as you know, in that medium you got your mix, and if you didn't get it, then you had to do it all again. You'd talk about what you wanted to change, you know, and it's like, "Well the banjo solo needs to come up just a little bit quicker" —

AW:

you have to remix the whole thing so it's all down to two tracks.

AM:

Right. You would use tape—you'd put masking tape down the side of it—

AW:

Write down your levels—

AM:

—and make marks. He would—"Here's the backup level, first verse" you know, "Here's where the solo is" —

AW:

He was downloading to tape.

AM:

To tape. Downloading to paper. So it was all real—you know, it was much as an artful thing as the recording—you know, to move your fingers and adjust those levels—and you also have to watch the levels on the VU meter because you could get into distortion problems—

AW:

Or—and that would be whether it's too hot or too quiet. You're going to have a problem either way.

AM:

Exactly, exactly—because you had to get it into a certain dynamic range to fit. They were concerned—when you go to the vinyl, you know, it's got to fit that dynamic range that fits on vinyl and then they were—

AW:

Yeah, because vinyl—the loudest track can't be the last one because the physical nature of the vinyl means you'll actually bounce a needle out of the track—yeah, towards the center of the record, which—you know, you're talking about song order; well, we've got to think not how we want them, but how does the engineer want them?

AM:

Exactly. There's lots of issues—and then, also, what range—because radio was real important, and you hope to get radio play, so it had to be in a certain range to fit on radio.

AW:

Were they compressing—I don't know—by the time I started recording, twenty years later, the

compressor was a standard feature in a mix—and you compressed it for radio. Did they do that in the early seventies?

AM:

I can't remember if the compression was for radio, but it was—he would like—since Roger played an acoustic bass—an acoustic bass, you know, is such a big vibrating box it's hard to—

AW:

It has a big dynamic range, too.

AM:

Right—and so he would have to compress the bass, but even just doing that—I mean the whole process—you know, you could spend two hours on one song, and you'd spend a lot of time just trying to get the sound of the bass a certain way. Then he would get the guitar and work on the guitar sound—and he might go through it five or ten times, adjusting and listening, and adjusting and listening to where the bass and guitar balanced out nicely—and then he'd get the mandolin and start working on the mandolin—I mean it was kind of—not frustrating, but you wanted it to be quicker, but it never was. So it was a real artful process of making a lot, a lot, a lot of decisions, ultimately based on what Dickson was hearing, and then we'd make suggestions—but most of the time, I think he was okay with the suggestions we made—or if he didn't want to do it, he could explain why not. Then you would build a mix, beginning with the bass and the guitar and the mandolin—just getting the rhythm section going—and then sort of getting the flow of it going. And then he would start looking for solo levels, and then he would mute all that and then just do a vocal mix—get the vocals working without the music—and it would vary from song to song, depending on the complexity of it, or his vision of it. So he might get the vocals going, and then somebody would say, “Well I think my part is too loud here,” or “I think it needs to come up here,” or you know, one thing and another. Then, after he'd get the vocals going, then he'd bring the music up and then set the vocals in there, and get the verses—the solo singer set—so that when all the singers came in it wasn't just way louder and then you'd have to start balancing the solos against—you know, the fiddle solo, you didn't want it louder than the solo vocal part, possibly—or just all these decisions. Then ultimately you'd get it to the point where “I'm ready to try it,” and this may be an hour later, you know, or an hour and a half later. Then it was all the—you know, and it would take ten fingers, and then the engineer pushing another one, or even allowing you to—you know, if I said, “I think my banjo solo needs to sort of drift in a little bit more,” and he said, “Well here, you do it.” So you'd practice it, and you'd kind of get a sense of where you wanted to come in and then move it up—and you'd hit your mark on the tape. So it was a real complicated process—so a lot of times we would get one or two mixes in a session, because it was just—took a long time.

AW:

It's interesting to think, in today's world, how quickly we mix things compared to—because we used to take weeks.

AM:

I know, I know—it was a real process.

AW:

Did you have a sense at the time—because you'd recorded some already with Jimmy Martin and some other things—did you have a sense of what a great producer you were working with—at the time, I mean?

AM:

I thought so, yeah. I really, really, really, really liked Jim Dickson.

AW:

Yeah—I'd love to have—I wish he wasn't gone; I'd like to meet him. Sounds like just the right kind of guy.

AM:

He is, he is. As the story goes on—I won't say we had a falling out—but he became less interested, so it seemed to me.

AW:

Is that—how come?

AM:

I think—

AW:

You weren't getting famous, or—?

AM:

I think that's part of it, and he had some—he had some ideas about how he thought the group could be, and there was some pushback from the group, and I think that he just sort of—"Well, I'm sorry."

AW:

So that's kind of a different role, because in today's world, you wouldn't think of a producer being a manager—but that sounds like kind of a management—

AM:

Well, he and Eddie Tickner were—

AW:

Oh, so they were kind of the management.

AM:

Yeah. Looking back on it, for my part, I wish I had sat and listened more and just done what I was told. You know, when I was teaching at South Plains College, some students would have an opportunity to do something, and they would ask me for advice—and my only advice was “Shut up and do what you’re told” because you only get these opportunities once, if you’re lucky, and several times if you’re really good. They’re so—sometimes they’re so delicate you can screw it up by trying to be more than you really are. It’s a funny—and we’ve talked about this—“Do you want to be an artist, or do you want to be a commercial success?” —and Dickson, I think, was really, really trying to balance that out. I can only speak for myself is that I think he saw—and I can—when we get to it, I can tell you about it—but he saw us as not going along with the program and sort of screwing things up. What happened is “Down the Road,” which is a song we recorded for the second album—which we can talk about later—we recorded “Down the Road” and “Honky Cat” were both on the same record. “Down the Road” is an old Flatt and Scruggs simple bluegrass song, and “Honky Cat” was an Elton John song that Dickson—and Dickson put a lot of effort into that, and he wanted that to be the single. He felt—we went to Nashville at one point—played in Nashville—and went up to United Artists and visited with the people there, and somehow or another, the guy at Nashville said, “You know, ‘Down the Road’ is the single” and we may have said “Yeah, that’d be fine with us. I don’t care.” We’re just these guys. So “Down the Road” wound up being the single, and Dickson wanted “Honky Cat” and he felt like we had sabotaged that. That’s how I feel, anyway. And I’m not sure we did or we didn’t—at the time, we were probably just trying to get along, go along with this guy in Nashville, but Dickson sort of saw it as us going around him, and so he had high hopes for this “Honky Cat,” and it just didn’t materialize. I think at that point—we worked with him several more times after that—but I think that was sort of the beginning of his disenchantment with it—and then the fact that we probably kept moving down in labels and money and stuff like that would be enough to sort of “Well, these guys—fly little birds, fly—you’re on your own.” But anyway, back to the first album—so we recorded it—got the music—then it came to the cover art—the album cover—and at United Artists, prior to us getting on the label—and I should mention, we were signed at the same time by the same guy that signed Asleep at the Wheel—their first album was on United Artists.

AW:

You know, I think—thinking back to these years—I think my pal, Eddie Reeves, was at United Artists at the same time, but he would have been more in the R&B and pop—

AM:

Yeah. The guy that we worked with on the first album—I can't remember his name—his name may be on the album, I can't remember—anyway, United Artists had had a big hit with Don McLean's "American Pie," and record labels back then were like gamblers. They would gamble on ten things and hope that one would hit. They had a big hit with "American Pie," and were real flush with money. One winner—

AW:

—could pay for a lot of losers.

AM:

Yeah. It makes sort of ordinary A&R guys look real brilliant. It was a real goofy time, I thought. So there was a lot of money at United Artists, and they had just hired an art director by the name of Norman Seeff—S-e-f-f [it's spelled S-e-e-f-f] I think is his name, and he was a South African, and he had worked in Europe and had done the Rolling Stones—I mean he was apparently a very big name—certainly much bigger than Country Gazette—and I'm not sure if our album wasn't the first one he did, but it may have been, but they sort of just gave him free rein on what to do. So when you look at the album cover, none of it is our idea; it's all this Norman Seeff—which is fine. First, they wanted us to be riverboat gamblers.

AW:

That doesn't jive with the name Country Gazette.

AM:

I don't know anything. I don't remember the sequence of all this, but they took us down to an enormous Hollywood costuming/prop company that was an entire city block, five stories high of costumes and props and just—I mean, it was an incredible world. It might have been called Hollywood Costuming, or something. It was a stunning, stunning thing to see. So we were walking through there with these people and they're looking at riverboat gambler stuff—and I should back up. I don't remember where this idea entered the picture, but ultimately, our album cover was based on a Thelonious Monk cover that had won an award. His album—it was called "Underground" —"Thelonious Monk Underground" —and what it was, was him as a French resistance fighter in a barn with hay all around, a piano—he was dressed as whatever a French resistance fighter wore, and he had a machine gun around his shoulder, sitting at the piano. There's a beautiful woman there, and there's a German prisoner tied up.

AW:

Kinky.

AM:

So that—yeah—that's—and he's turning and looking from the piano—and that's Thelonious Monk. It won an award, and they were—so that was the theme for us. So as we're walking through here—and we're going to be riverboat gamblers, and we're doing this—they come upon— (phone rings)

AM:

Oh, that's my phone. I'm going to turn it off.

AW:

That's all right, if you want me to pause it—

AM:

Well, I can't get it down here, anyway. I don't know how you turn that off. I guess I just did. They came upon this sort of Mexican, Pancho Villa, bandoleer, big sombrero'd kind of thing, and that appealed to them. So we would put them on and they would look at us, and, "That's it, that's it," so they'd take this and this and this and this—and "See if this fits." The shirt I had on in the shot, sewn in the collar was the name Charlton Heston. So it was a shirt I guess he had worn in some production. So I put that on, and they dressed us all up—and then made arrangements and built a set on a sound stage in Hollywood, there, and brought us in all dressed up and started taking all these pictures. They hired this very lovely woman to come in and be the lovely woman in our pictures. They had a guy back there in a German—never mind it's Pancho Villa, you know—a German back there sort of tied up. They had some guys overhead throwing confetti down to give it sort of a textured look, and then sat there and started taking hundreds and hundreds of pictures. So there we were. I had a very fine time—I had a fun time. I will say Byron's wife came along, and she was kind of irritated—

AW:

—about the pretty woman?

AM:

—about the woman because—and you can look at the album cover—she doesn't have a shirt on, but she never ever exposes herself. She was incredibly professional. She came, she did it, the instant it was done, she left. That was her gig—because she knew, you know, here's all these guys—and they were—the photographers were all encouraging her to show more, and she wouldn't do it. So they were taking these pictures—and it's basically a party for them—and we're trying—

AW:

For the photographers?

AM:

Yeah, and the crew—and they're saying do this, do this, sit there, move that, try this, do that—you know, so they'd move us around all the time. It was, to me—I mean, I'm twenty-five at the time—it was just real interesting to be there. I didn't—

AW:

It's a long way from Jimmy Martin.

AM:

Exactly. So I was having a really great time. So they took all these pictures, and then—I don't know if it happened this way, but I bet it did—they were all slides. So they all got together—not with us, just the art people and whoever they invited over—and I'm sure they were smoking dope as they were watching these slides. So they got to watching this slides, and they were making up a story. So ultimately they came up with the idea that we'll make a comic book, so we'll have a cover that's like an adventure comic book cover, and then you open it up and there's strips of these photographs with bubbles and we're saying things.

AW:

Yeah. I think about that time the Rolling Stones had an album cover that you opened up and had something similar—not shots, but something in a layout similar to that, so it was probably another idea that was successful.

AM:

It could have been that Norman Seeff, because he had done the Rolling Stones.

AW:

That's right—you just mentioned that.

AM:

So there was—they came up with this story and put it all together. If you read it, it's senseless. There's no nothing to it.

AW:

You know, I don't think I've ever seen this album in vinyl, and I'm going to have to—

AM:

I've got it out here. I can show it to you.

AW:

I'm going to have to see it.

AM:

It's called "A Traitor in our Midst." So you've got this cover, and here's the band, and here's this woman, and here's this German back there. Then, they said, "You need a back cover." So they said "Well, on the back cover on a lot of these comic books is an ad for Charles Atlas." So we needed another session. So they dressed us—me and Kenny and Roger—up as sort of biker guys with biker caps and boots, and they drew tattoos on our arms.

AW:

And you're beating up on Byron?

AM:

Well, I'm not sure. You'll have to look at it and see what you think of it. And then Byron they had in a tiger-skin sort of Tarzan kind of thing, but with cowboy boots on. Then they had this same girl in sort of a leopard-skin thing—

AW:

Like Jane?

AM:

Yeah—and he held her up in his arm, because he's the only one strong enough to have done that. So they made the back of it like the back of a comic book—you know, sort of a Charles Atlas kind of—or you wimpy—if you're a wimpy music lover, then you need to order the Country Gazette's "Traitor in our Midst." The album titles were like a coupon you would clip out and check off and—I mean, it was—

AW:

They were having fun.

AM:

They had a great time, and I did, too. I had a wonderful time just to witness all this—and I did it quietly. I wasn't just "Yahoo, yahoo" about it, but I enjoyed it very, very much. Then the album came out in—

AW:

Wait a minute, did the rest of the band—what was their take on all this? Were they as open-minded about it as you?

AM:

You know, you'd have to ask them. I think Kenny Wertz—in the picture they had a lot of liquor bottles and dynamite and grenades and stuff, but also some roach clips—and I think he was—not

that Kenny never did anything—he was embarrassed, I think, that his mother would see that. Byron probably enjoyed it, but his wife did not like it.

AW:

Especially if he was the one holding up the leopard-skinned girl.

AM:

Yeah. He was. She just sort of resented it, I believe, and just felt it inappropriate. And Roger, I'm not sure—Roger probably enjoyed it enough. Kenny was single and I was single, so I enjoyed it. I was having a good time. To me, it was "Hey, I'm in LA, I'm single, I've got a few dollars in the bank, I'm sitting here on a movie sound stage on this set, wearing Charlton Heston's shirt—

AW:

—with a pretty, naked girl.

AM:

—with a pretty girl—and you know, I mean life is good at that moment." So that was 19—I think—I don't remember when it came out, the date—it seems like by the time we got it recorded and everything, it was September.

AW:

Of seventy—

AM:

'72, yeah. (phone rings)

AM:

Let me turn this off again. That's a funny number. Anyway, in that little red book—it's not red—that I've written down all the dates, I wrote down the recording sessions, also—not very systematically, and may be difficult to decipher, but it has the dates when we recorded what songs. I do think by the end—by September, we were finished with Disneyland and the album was finished. That's the best of my recollection right now. That was that. After that we started trying to play dates and tour and promote the record, and just do all the things we could do.

AW:

How did that go? And another "how did it go" question: how was this album—and particularly this cover, but all the things you were doing—how was it received in the bluegrass community?

AM:

Well, that's a good question. You know, at the time, I'm going to say I didn't care very much,

because I was in California and bluegrass was like a thousand miles away. But then on the other hand, this part of the market you're kind of trying to get—I think the album cover was received in the bluegrass community with sort of raised eyebrows. I can remember—there's a real well-known bass player lady named Missy Raines, and she remembers buying that album and really loving it, but being kind of embarrassed to show her parents. So I think that was how it was sort of received. Now, for a lot, a lot of people, it was their introduction to bluegrass, and in part because of the album cover—because it was just—

AW:

—the kind of thing you'd—because we shopped by covers—if we didn't know the artist, then you'd look at it and go, “Hey, this is interesting.”

AM:

Exactly. You know, it was just a real interesting deal. I don't know—I like it a lot just because I was involved in it. It's not anything brilliant or anything; it just is what it is, and I enjoyed it a great deal. It was kind of shocking to a certain bluegrass thing—and I think the music on it was not shocking, but I think, you know, those things like doubling the choruses was sort of not received well by everybody. That ain't the way Monroe did it.

AW:

Yeah, exactly. Well, I've heard people say, in the bluegrass community, that that album and that band was the beginnings of something very new in bluegrass that you hear people refer to as “progressive bluegrass” or what—and then you think about the later incarnations like New Grass Revival and the pathways taken by the Allison Krausses, et cetera, et cetera—that this was the beginning. Was that a sense on—first of all on your parts in the band—and did you pick up any of that from anyone else, that here's something new happening?

AM:

Well, for me, by the time 1972 and I got there—actually, the Dillards had already done a lot of what we were doing, but they had sort of moved even farther away. For our stuff—I mean, it's bluegrass, you know, banjo picking, fiddling, mandolin playing—it's pretty straight-ahead bluegrass, where the Dillards had kind of moved into a sort of pop rock kind of thing. So for me—and even people were saying it at the time—that Country Gazette was what the Dillards should have been. I wouldn't say that at all. I think the Dillards—I loved everything they did, and am a big fan, so I can't talk about them in any other way than as a fan—that I really like their music. But they did sort of move away from having a banjo solo on every tune. You know what I mean? If you listen to the—there was a Copperfields and Wheatsraw—let me see, Copperfields and Wheatstraw Suite I think were their two sort of pop folk rock albums. There were banjo solos on there, but not a lot. So for a bluegrasser—I wouldn't have gone to those for banjo picking, where the Country Gazette one, I would have. So it was sort of the same thing—

or similar—but more bluegrass than what the Dillards were doing. So I don't feel like we invented anything—or started anything—we just did it as more of a bluegrass presentation. I hope that was a—whereas a lot of bluegrassers would not listen to those Dillards albums that I just mentioned, they might listen to ours. So in that sense, we were maybe influential because we still played banjos, and there was Hot Burrito Breakdown and Byron's fiddle playing and Roger's bass playing—and just that sort of thing. I don't think we influenced New Grass Revival because they were going along at the same time, but I think a lot of the bands that came after that had—you know, if they were interested in something other than a traditional bluegrass approach, then we gave them an example of how it could be done. I hope some people liked it and took things out of it because there were other things going on in bluegrass at the same time that have turned out to be more influential in bluegrass than what we did.

AW:
Things like—?

AM:
Well, the one was J. D. Crowe and the New South—almost the same time our album came out, he had an album—J. D. Crowe and the New South had Tony Rice and Ricky Skaggs and Jerry Douglas. That was a very highly-influential album among the more traditional bluegrassers. And then, also, Jim Dickson was kind of—I won't say afraid—but there was an album that came out very close to our time called Muleskinner that was Pete Rowan and Richard Greene and Bill Keith and Clarence White—and he was afraid it would garner some attention that we might—

AW:
Was that at the time that Rowan was doing things like Panama Red and this is—

AM:
That may even be on that album.

AW:
I was wondering if it was, because that was an interesting—but I think of that album as more of, like, the folk rock country thing that sort of—that you couldn't really pigeonhole about that era, because you knew where their roots were, but Panama Red, you know, it was quite a different sort of—

AM:
Right, right. Panama Red may have been on Old and in the Way, which is a little later. I'd have to go back and look at that Muleskinner album and see what's on there. But in a sense, it never went anywhere because there was never a band. It was not a band; it was not a tour—

AW:

The Muleskinner? Yeah. Right.

AM:

Yeah. They did a TV show and a couple little things out in California, whereas Country Gazette was geared up to go tour.

AW:

Yeah. What kinds of venues were you playing? Because here's this thing that's a little bit different—it's bluegrass, but it's got a different album cover, and it's vocal styles that are on your recording and all—so are you playing standard bluegrass events, or is there a wider, different market, or—?

AM:

Well, the very first thing we did after the album came out—and I'd have to think about this. I'm not sure if I've got the sequencing right—but we played a place in Denver, Colorado called the York Creek Cafe—and what is interesting about this time—and I'm so glad—you know, many of the things I've done—I think I came along at a time when it was in a transitional period. When I recorded with Jimmy, it was straight, you know, to two-track or whatever—and it's not that they didn't have the technology; it's just that's the way they did it. Then I went to California, and all of the sudden, it was this multitrack, overdub, a lot of time mixing—where Nashville, there was no time mixing. It was done.

AW:

That was it when you put it down, yeah.

AM:

And then the first thing we did was this York Creek Café in Denver, and we played it a whole week. So I think I got in at the last of the period when you book things for a week. Like when I mentioned earlier, the Dillards played the Buddhi in Oklahoma City, I think they were there six weeks. I remember going to see a group up there from California—a bluegrass band called the Spunk Creek Something-or-other—and they played there six weeks. So clubs would bring somebody in and then build an audience rather than—if you play one night, they have to know who you are before you get there, whereas if you play there six weeks, you can play early on, be on some TV shows, get some newspaper stuff going—

AW:

Get some buzz.

AM:

—radio—yeah, get the buzz going so that by the end of the six weeks, you've built an audience. By the time I got to California, it was down to one week, so we played—and I think Monday through Saturday maybe—it may have been Tuesday through Saturday—so you had a little sense of “I want you to go do a radio show Tuesday afternoon, then another radio show Wednesday afternoon, then the newspaper is going to come and interview you on Thursday,” and so by the weekend, you had a chance to have built an audience. So a lot of—a number of our early things were in the west, and we played up in San Francisco at the—

AW:

Was the Hungry Eye still going?

AM:

I can't—it may have been, but that's not where we played—it may have been called the American Music Hall, or something like that. I think it's still going; it's a real venue. I think every place—the farther away we were from the east coast, the more they liked our music. Not that they didn't like it on the east coast, but there was just real entrenched sort of bluegrass. They have a real sense—and I always liked this line—and I think it was from a—is there a Freddy Weller that was with like Paul Revere and the Raiders or somebody, and then he went and tried to have a country music career?

AW:

Yeah, that's a real familiar name, but I can't place it.

AM:

That just came to me. But anyway, somebody of that thing that was in a rock band, then tried to have a country career in the seventies—and he had a song that was a real good song—but it had a line—and it was basically complaining about the resistance of the country music industry and fans of him—but he had a line in there that said, “He didn't eat beans with us.” He didn't eat beans with us.

AW:

Well that was kind of an interesting era, because just before that you have Dylan and “It's All Over Now, Baby Blue,” then you have—a little after that—you have Ricky Nelson and “Garden Party,” so there's a series of these where the entrenched audience is saying “You're not eating beans with us.”

AM:

Exactly—you didn't eat beans with us—and that's sort of how they might have viewed Country Gazette—although Byron had played with Bill Monroe and I had played with Jimmy Martin—

but it just wasn't a sound that convinced them that it was okay. Now, that's not to say there weren't many that were—that said “Oh wow, here's bluegrass, but it's different. We can do different things.” So we were part of a continuum of groups who sort of pushed bluegrass beyond its traditional boundaries, and we were neither the first nor the last, nor the best, nor the worst. We were just another one. But we had this push behind us with United Artists, and we played the very first Winfield Festival—the very first one, 1972—we played there, we played some dates—and I'd have to look at that book again to see exactly where we were. That might be something we could do some time when I come out there, is get that book and I'll look at it, and I'll go, “Oh yeah, I remember this and this and this.”

AW:

Yeah, that'd be a good idea.

AM:

So—and I don't want to keep you tied up too long.

AW:

No, no, no, I'm doing fine. I'm just making a note.

AM:

Because I was thinking this might be a good place to take a break—you know, between the first and second album—because things changed.

AW:

Okay, you want to take a break but come back to it and finish up the second album? Is that going to take a long time, because I don't mind—

AM:

No, no, it'll be—let's go ahead and do it. Here's the deal—is that after that first album came out, and things were going well, life was good, having a real good time, came the oil embargo of 1973—Jimmy Carter. The record labels—everything changed because they use petroleum—

AW:

Oil to make vinyl, yeah.

AM:

—to make vinyl, and all of the sudden, they got real “We have to be more selective,” and I think it just sort of really pushed a movement that was already underfoot, which was the takeover of the record labels by the accountants and the lawyers. So it gave them a really good excuse, now, to cut out all this bullshit, you know, the hippy-dippy A&R guys and the Norman Seeffs

taking—spending all this money and smoking dope and just coming up with all this goofy stuff—and it sort of ushered in the era of if we want to put out a record now, it's not—we don't want to gamble on ten to have one hit; we want to program it to where we put out one, and that's the hit—we know it's going to be a hit before—

AW:

Everything we put out pays off.

AM:

Exactly. And so they became much, much more careful about who they recorded and what they did with it, and who the people were that worked for them, and whatnot. So by the time we got—and I think the only reason we got to do the second album is because it was in the contract. We had a contract for a second album. I think the first album did modestly well. I could not tell you how many it sold, because nobody ever told us, and if they did, I've forgotten. So the second album we started working on—same group, Kenny Wertz, Roger Bush, Byron, and me—this process was very, very similar.

AW:

What year—when did—?

AM:

Well, I think it'd be '74. It didn't seem like very long after the first one that we started working on the second one—the first one came out. The process was real similar, you know, we came up with some songs, Jim Dickson and Eddie Tickner suggested some songs, we'd get together, Jim Dickson would come over and listen to us do them and make suggestions—and that's when he said, "I'd like for y'all to do 'Honky Cat.'" —was an Elton John song—and he gave me—

AW:

That was a fairly contemporary song of Elton John's.

AM:

Yeah, it was contemporary right at that time. He gave—and this is, again, the insight that I think Dickson had—he gave me the recording, and he said, "If you can make the banjo work on this, then it'll work," which is a real insight to what bluegrass is. Bluegrass is—

AW:

Something a banjo will work on.

AM:

Exactly—which is what Monroe said all along, is that bluegrass is the rhythm and not the banjo.

Monroe claimed—if you look at Monroe's—he had his mandolin case that said “Original Bluegrass Since 1939.” Well, Earl Scruggs didn't come in the band until '44 or '46, so there's a gap in there that Monroe was saying “Bluegrass started here,” and he would say it. He says, “Bluegrass has been very good for the banjo.” I think what he's saying is that it's the rhythm, and then the banjo will fit with it—and I kind of tend to agree with him. So Dickson gave me this thing and I went home—fortunately, the Elton John recording is in G.

AW:

Yeah, so you can—

AM:

I mean, that's where the banjo is.

AW:

If it'd been in B-flat, it would have been tougher.

AM:

Right. So he had—on there, he had sort of these piano and horn shouts, you know, that were sort of syncopated—and I tried to imitate those on the banjo and made it work as best I could, and then showed everybody what I had, and then we sort of started playing and putting it together.

Herb Pederson was involved in that song—in fact, he sang it. Dickson wanted him to sing it, because, see, I think Dickson, early on, knew that that was the song he wanted to be the song. So we worked on that, and then he also liked—Don McLean had a song called “Winterwood.”

AW:

Oh yeah, I have that record.

AM:

He liked that, so he wanted us to do that.

AW:

Boy, that sure doesn't strike me as a Country Gazette-kind of song.

AM:

Well, you'll have to hear it and see what it sounds like. I'm trying to think what else is on there that he suggested. I'd have to go back and look at the recording.

AW:

That was an interesting album of McLean's, you know, following on the heels of the record with “American Pie” on it—

AM:
Right.

AW:
—a much different feel and approach to it. Now that you mention it, the parallels—here's a guy, McLean, who was a folkie, you know, and spent—part of his apprenticeship was with Pete Seeger. He'd play on the Sloop Clearwater and up and down the river— and goes from that to this pop success. So I guess Jim Dickson would look at all of you and say "It's another Don McLean, only it's a group."

AM:
Right, and he just liked the lyrics and sort of the flow of the song, and so he had us do that. I'm trying to even think what else is on the record. I want to back up just a little bit, because another thing that Dickson did that was different is—every album that we did with Jim Dickson—or the first three—every one of them began with an instrumental that was Byron, you know, because he thought—and I didn't have any problems with it at all. I thought it was real cool, because very few bluegrass albums that were vocals would start with an instrumental. The instrumental would be down in the record somewhere. He just thought Byron was such a strong part of the group and a strong—and he's absolutely right—a strong musical voice, he would always start with that. So the first album started with one called "Lost Indian." The second album started with a tune Byron wrote called "Huckleberry Hornpipe."

AW:
Is there also—and pardon me for interrupting here—but is there also a sense—was there a sense—that a fiddle instrumental would be more likely to cross over genres than if you started with a banjo instrumental?

AM:
It could be. I'm not sure he ever said it that way. My sense of it was always that Byron was just such a strong player of an instrument that it was a crossover instrument. I don't remember him ever talking about "Well, the fiddle might attract lots of different places," but it was just that Byron—his musical personality was so powerful, which is absolutely right. So we did that instrumental, and on this record we did "Down the Road," which Byron and Roger had been doing for many—several years—going back to the Doug Dillard Band; they were with Doug Dillard. What we did differently on that—and by "we" I mean the singers—is—Flatt and Scruggs had recorded this song, and it's just a really simple little play party-kind of a song, you know, the lyrics don't have a great continuity. It's "Old man Flatt, he owned the farm from the hog lot to the barn, from the barn to the rail, made his living by carrying the mail." That's a verse—and that was all. Then there would be an instrumental solo, and then another verse. Somehow they—I think they got from Doc Watson—added a chorus, which was "Down the

road, down the road, got a little pretty girl down the road.” So Byron and them added that chorus, but they did it with a real high baritone and sort of a churchy intro—an acapella intro—with the real high baritone, and then it would come in with the banjo solo kicked it off. We did it at a much faster tempo than Flatt and Scruggs did it. So it was a real—you know, it was a really good performance of that song for the most part. I heard—I can’t remember his name—he’s a piano player-singer—somewhere in the world, some pop artist did some song, and they actually used our “Down the road, down the road, got a little pretty girl down the road” sort of the vocal treatment as part of his thing. So it was ripped—and I thought, Well, that’s pretty cool that they liked it. Anyway, so “Down the Road” was on there, “I Don’t Believe You Met My Baby,” which is another Louvin Brothers song. We had done a Louvin Brothers song on the first album, so we did one on the second album. Byron’s “Huckleberry Hornpipe”—Byron and I wrote a tune—an instrumental—called “Snowball,” which we wrote in Boulder, Colorado. We played a place called Tulagis—

AW:

Uh-huh—on the Hill—Tulagis on the Hill

AM:

Yeah—and it’s kind of a well-known place to play, and we played there in the winter, and it was real snowy. We wrote this tune, and Byron called it “Snowball.” I’d have to look at the album to see what else we did. We did a gospel-y kind of tune that’s called “Singing All Day and Dinner on the Ground” that incorporates two or three standard gospel tunes in there—in it. It’s kind of interesting—I don’t think Dickson really wanted us to do that one, but he let us do it because, you know, we’re the band. But for him, he didn’t—I don’t know why; I thought it was pretty good—but I just remember him being somewhat reluctant to do it.

AW:

And that’s a little surprising, because at that same time—1974 or so—the southern rock guys were doing things that were very gospel-influenced. Crosby, Stills, Nash, you know—I mean, they had that musical element, and even in some of the original material, so it seems like it was kind of becoming the hip thing to do.

AM:

I don’t know, you know, I think Dickson had some prejudices against Roger Bush. I think he liked Roger—the bass player—but he would rather have somebody else sing the songs. So there was this—I don’t think it was anything personal, it was just—Dickson was always about doing the best—having the best singer for a song. He felt Roger could sing certain kinds of songs, but not others. So I don’t know if that was an element in this or not. But anyway, there was that. On “Honky Cat” and “Winterwood”—which were Dickson’s choices—he got Clarence White to come in and play guitar—play a Spanish Dobro guitar on “Winterwood,” and then on “Honky

Cat” he had Clarence do acoustic guitar, but do a lot of rhythmical stuff. Then he also hired—on all the Roger—on a lot of the stuff, part of the sound was Roger’s slap bass. So on “Honky Cat” he had Roger slap the bass, but in addition to that he brought in a really incredible bass player whose name escapes me right now [**Leland Sklar**]. But he played—it was like Jackson Brown’s bass player.

AW:

Just playing a Fender Precision or something?

AM:

Yeah, some electric bass—really, really active, you know, and real funky and poppy and just real hip-sounding on “Honky Cat.” On “Winterwood” he had him play bass, but it was more normal, but still expressive, not just timekeeping.

AW:

Not just one and three, but—

AM:

Right. So he worked real hard on those two tunes. He was real interested in those. I think in his mind, that was “Side A” and “Side B” of the single that we ultimately screwed up. So there was that—and we spent the same amount of time recording and mixing as we did the first time, but if you look at the album cover, it’s really plain jane.

AW:

You didn’t do the guy tied up and—

AM:

No. It was real—here’s a picture of the band on the front, and then here’s individual shots on the back.

AW:

That is pretty plain.

AM:

Yeah. It was very, very plain—and it was okay, though. We called that “Don’t Give Up Your Day Job” and who named it—by then, the guy we were working with, with United Artists was a really, really fun guy and good guy names Daniel Bourgeois—and that’s like “bourgeois,” but he pronounced it.

AW:

Yeah, later married Emmylou and produced her.

AM:

Oh he did?

AW:

Yeah.

AM:

Oh, I didn't realize that. Huh. Anyway, Daniel was a really fun guy; I enjoyed him a great deal. He would come down and hang out with us while we were recording, and had a good time. I don't know where he came up with that line—we may have said it, and he picked up on it. He thought it was real funny. So he thought that'd be a good name for it, "Don't Give Up Your Day Job." So our second album was called "Don't Give Up Your Day Job," and for a lot of people, they think that's our first.

AW:

Yeah, that's the one—if someone had said, "Well, what's their first record?" that's the one I would have—

AM:

Right, right. Well, it—

AW:

Although when you talked about "Traitor in our Midst," as soon as you mentioned that, I went "Oh, yeah. I know that record." But I would have put—

AM:

The other way around.

AW:

Yeah, I would have reversed them—maybe because of the album cover, you know, you think "Well, this is the plain one to get them started."

AM:

Yeah, it very well could have been. But anyway, it was fun to do. Again, we used Dino Lappas as an engineer, recorded it at the same studio, and same sorts of stuff—used Herb Pederson and Clarence White—we added Clarence White and this bass player whose name escapes me—we can look on the record and see. It got—I remember it's review in *Bluegrass Unlimited* or

somewhere was basically, “The only tune on there that was any good was ‘Huckleberry Hornpipe,’ but it was worth the” —

AW:

Worth the record?

AM:

Yeah. So they just didn’t like the singing. I think it’s—and the production quality was not—

AW:

—too slick?

AM:

Too slick, you know, too west coast, too poppy—but “Down the Road” did come out as the single, and I believe “Winterwood” may have been the flip, but I’m not sure.

AW:

Although you didn’t know exactly what the first one sold, did you get the sense that this one sold better, worse, same?

AM:

Probably less is my guess. So we only did those two albums for United Artists. Right after we recorded that album, Kenny Wertz wanted to quit, because he just didn’t like traveling, and he had a sailboat down in San Diego and wanted to go sailing—he just wasn’t cut out for traveling. He enjoyed traveling with the Burrito Brothers because they made money, where we were—

AW:

But traveling very tight, where you had to live on a budget, was not—

AM:

Yeah, yeah, it was a different thing.

Kitty Ledbetter (KL):

Pay no attention to the man behind the screen.

AW:

Yeah.

AM:

So at some point after that second album was recorded, Kenny told us he wanted to quit, and so

we started looking for a replacement. I'm trying to remember the sequence of all this. '72, '73, is this—?

AW:
'74.

AM:
Did I say '74? This is probably '73, so it's got—

AW:
So it was only a year.

AM:
Yeah. It's got to be '73.

AW:
I was going to say, again in that era, it was pretty much at least one a year for contract.

AM:
So Clarence had been on that album, and Clarence had been with the Byrds and had been real successful and made money and lived in a nice home out in Palmdale, California because that's where his parents lived and he lived out there. Byron and I and some others would get to go out there and pick with Clarence—I'd never met him before—and played music with him, and then he was on this album I just described. So Clarence, at this same time, was trying to get his solo career going, and he was also working with Eddie Tickner and Jim Dickson. Jim was going to produce his record and Eddie was going to manage him—and they were real excited by that, to have Clarence White. They put together a tour—and I should back up a little bit. Clarence's brother, Roland, who I knew in Nashville, had been working with first Bill Monroe and then Lester Flatt—and I think when Clarence quit the Byrds and was going to have this solo career, he may have talked to Roland about "Come and be a part of whatever group I put together." So Roland quit Lester Flatt and came and visited California—he's still living in Nashville but visiting out there—and we all got together and recorded some stuff that was going to be part of Clarence's album. I was on banjo on some of it—and it's almost—it's all this same little wad of people. It was me and Byron and Roger—because Roger had played with Clarence and Roland in the Kentucky Colonels—and then Herb Pederson and Clarence and Roland—and we recorded about four or five tunes as part of Clarence's project, and he was going to do some others without sort of the bluegrass-y feel to it. Eddie Tickner put together a tour of Europe for Roland and Clarence and Herb Pederson and another brother named Eric White. So it would be Roland, Clarence, Eric, and then Herb Pederson—and they went over to Europe. Almost immediately I got a call from Eddie, who was over in Europe with them that Herb Pederson had left and they

needed a banjo player. I knew Clarence, I knew Roland, and Eddie probably said, “What about Alan Munde? He’s available now, I know, because Country Gazette isn’t working right now.” So I loaded up and flew over to Europe and played two or three weeks—a couple of weeks anyway—traveling with Clarence and Roland and Eric—had a great, great time. So that would be 1973, early. Man, this is weird. All the dates are jumbled up here; I’m not sure.

AW:

They’ll be in the book.

AM:

Yeah, they will be. So I traveled over there with them and had a really great time, and once again, we went to Amsterdam and stayed with the Boddy’s at their Hotel Weichmann, and we would tour from there out, you know, and then come back in the evenings—because Holland is not very big. I remember playing over there one time at some little town that was maybe thirty minutes outside Amsterdam. A guy asked me while I was at this place thirty minutes from Amsterdam; he said “Is this the first time you’ve ever played in the northern part of central Holland?”

AW:

Thirty miles made the difference, huh?

AM:

Thirty miles, yeah. I said yes. It’s not unusual because you’re a—and even like Amsterdam, even though it’s very small—it’s still provincial, you know. They have parts of it that speak a different language.

AW:

I was struck just in London how east side, west side, they’re two different—and there might as well be a wall.

AM:

Yeah—well, there’s a river.

AW:

Yeah, there’s a river. But it’s like, Well, you can’t go over there. If you’re from here you can’t go over there. Only a tourist can go between the two.

AM:

Right. So it was a real intrigue, and fun thing to do. Then we went to England and when we got to England, there was a character there named Martyn Smith—M-a-r-t-y-n—who was a Welsh

guy who worked for United Artists. When Country Gazette had toured with the Burrito Brothers and we went to Amsterdam—and we also played in England—and met Martyn. Martyn ultimately, later on, moved to the United States, to LA, and he and I had an apartment together. But he was a real swell guy—I loved Martyn. He would drink and get bubbly giggly; he was just a real joyous little man from Wales who loved music. He actually told the story of driving—he and a buddy drove from Wales to London to see the Rolling Stones. They found a place they thought they could just camp out for the night, and it turned out to be like the Queen's garden, you know, and they immediately got hauled off. The Welsh—the little bit I've met of them—you know, the British are what they are—but like the Welsh and the Scots—and I've never met the Irish—but they're sort of more American. They seem more fun-loving and just—

AW:

And they don't necessarily like the British.

AM:

I understand.

AW:

Which is interesting.

AM:

So anyway, Martyn Smith was part of this entourage, and when we got to the hotel in London, they passed out all the keys, and I went up and opened my room and it was this—in Europe, you know, most of the time back then, anyway, you had a room and then the toilet and shower were down the hall—so I got into this room and it had a bathroom and a nice big room and had French doors that opened out onto a balcony, and I went, “Boy, when you travel with Clarence White, you go first class.” So I was getting set up and then there was this (makes knocking sound)—this knock at the door. I go and there's Clarence—

AW:

Yeah, you'd gotten his room.

AM:

Right—Clarence says “I think you got my room.” “Oh, okay.” So we traded keys. I went down to my room, opened the door, and the room wasn't much wider than the door. There was about twelve inches between the wall and the bed to squeeze by—and the TV was mounted high up on a wall because—

AW:

Because you couldn't put it on a—

AM:

There was no place to put it.

AW:

I think I stayed in a room like that in London one time that—I tried, and one direction you could touch the walls standing there—both of them.

AM:

Right, right. I thought that was a fun little moment—

AW:

“You’ve got my room.”

AM:

Yeah. I thought man, I had arrived—and Clarence got it. We had a real—we played a place there called the Nashville—what might it be called? Nashville East. So it was a country place with a bar and a dance floor, and we played there. We played the London School of Economics concerts, which Country Gazette had done, and the Burritos, I think, had done. In a sense, it was a lot of the same places that we had played as either Gazette or the Burrito Brothers. I’ve skipped over—actually, the Burrito Brothers with Country Gazette went back over to Europe a second time, and it may—if we went over there the first time in ’72, the second time may be just at the end of ’72, you know, after our album came out. We went back and did a lot of the same things, but with Sneaky Pete as the steel guitar player, and that was really fantastic because I hadn’t been home very long—you know, a month or two—before I went back over again with Clarence in like May. It was probably May of ’73 —’74 —with Clarence, because the weather was nice. That was a big difference because being in Amsterdam in January and then maybe November was just always cold. But to be there, and the sun shining—I can remember sitting at a little café on a corner, and I had some croquets and was sitting there—a window that faced out on the canal, and there’s a little bridge that goes over the canal, and then the canal runs down there—it was just beautiful.

AW:

Yeah, I know. England in the summer is a whole other world than England in the winter. I’ve never been to Amsterdam, but I can imagine it’s the same.

AM:

Amsterdam is real cool in that—London is London, it’s Britain—but Amsterdam is European, and it’s just a different sensibility, plus it has the canals, which add a whole new dynamic to just the sense of the place. But I really enjoyed that trip with Clarence and Roland and Eric because it was—the weather was nice. So we went to England and did some things there, and Martyn sort

of escorted us around. We did that, and then we went up to Stockholm, Sweden, and did a show there at the Kitt-Kat Club that was owned by a guy who was a big fan of Eartha Kitt.

AW:

Hence the Kitt-Kat Club?

AM:

Kitt-Kat, yeah. It was called the Mosebacke, and we played there—and I don't know how it came to be, but somebody recorded it—and we knew they recorded it, and it's a nice reel-to-reel machine and recorded it. Had a real good time there, and—

AW:

Was that released commercially?

AM:

Eventually, yes. Interestingly—I'll talk about it after a while. I'm trying to stay in order. Then we came back to the United States—Roland and Clarence and Eric had a date on the east coast at a festival—and I couldn't do it because Country Gazette had a gig, so I had to go back to the west coast. So they played a festival in Maryland, I believe—and there's photographs of them playing there—oh, thank you.

KL:

Uh-huh.

AM:

—playing there, and they used—

AW:

Thank you, Kitty.

KL:

You're welcome.

AM:

They used a guy named Jack Hicks on the banjo, who was playing with Bill Monroe, and then he just sort of helped out on those sets. I went back to California and did whatever I had to do with Country Gazette. Then in July, I believe it was—I mean Clarence came on back to California. Roland probably went back to Nashville, and Eric was living in LA or the area. Roger would get—man, I can't remember the sequence of all this. Possibly, after we came back from Europe, Eddie Tickner and the booker for the Burrito Brothers tours—I think his last name was Levin,

and he was based in New York. Eddie and Jim Dickson and this Levin guy put together a show, and I believe it was called "The Hot Burrito Review." It was a lot of the people that were associated with the Burrito Brothers, and just this sort of west coast country rock bluegrass mix. There were about ten musicians in the deal. Eddie Tickner had become involved with Graham Parsons, so there was Graham Parsons, Emmylou Harris, Clarence White, Sneaky Pete, Skip Battin, who had been the bass player with the Byrds, Gene Parsons, who had been the drummer with the Byrds, Country Gazette—there's four of us—and then Eric White and I'm going to say that may be it. So there was maybe twelve of us, musician-wise. So Graham Parsons—Graham Parsons and Emmylou would do a set that was backed by Sneaky Pete and maybe Clarence—I'm not sure—and then the drummer and the bass player, Skip Battin and Gene—then Clarence would come out and play, backed by that same electric band, then Country Gazette would play bluegrass, then the Kentucky Colonels would do a set of Clarence-Roland music—so it was booked as that, and we played only two places like that. This was going to be sort of Eddie and this booker-guy's and maybe Dickson's—this is our big deal. We've taken all these people that we've worked with and made this west coast sound of sort of country-rock-bluegrass—and Graham Parsons was recording an album with Emmylou—you know, that first album of theirs. It was just sort of this—it seemed like a really, really wonderful thing. We played a place called McGonagall's by the Sea, which was near Baltimore, and then we played a theater in Philadelphia. It seemed to go over well.

AW:

Well it sounds like a terrific lineup, man, it's just like a dream—sort of a dream team.

AM:

I know, and that's what they thought, and that's what I thought—it's what everybody thought. Then we go back to California after this, and the first thing that happens is Graham dies. There's a funeral out in the desert.

AW:

Did you go to it?

AM:

I did—was—and Clarence and Chris Hillman and several others sang "Farther Along," I think is what they sang—some songs. Then, not long after that, I was at the beach—Roger Bush would go down and rent a little cottage at the beach for a week or two—and I went out and was visiting him at the beach. I remember sitting—Roger and I were sitting out at the beach, and Roger's wife came running down just in a panic and said, "Clarence has been killed." He'd been hit by a car the night before up in Palmdale. He and Roland—

AW:

How soon was this after Graham?

AM:

Not long at all. I'd have to—you'd have to look at the dates—a month, maybe. **[Clarence White died on July 14, 1973 and Graham Parsons died two months later on September 19, 1973]**

AW:

I didn't have it in my head that it was that quick. Gosh, that had to be devastating.

AM:

Yeah. Well, I mean—of course—there's Clarence, Graham is dead—I'm not that hip to Graham. I knew him and met him and—

AW:

He may have grown in stature some since—

AM:

Since his death, yeah. Basically, what I thought of him was he was a fairly nice guy who was just stoned all the time. I remember one—we played some little place out in—it was called the Sundance Saloon in—I can't remember the little town north of LA—anyway, and Graham came out and he asked me if he could look at my banjo, so I handed it to him and I turned to listen to the music, and the next thing I hear is this "Oh, God, I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to do that," and he had spilled beer on it. It was—to me, it's not a big deal, but he was just crushed that he had spilled beer on my banjo. It did make a big streak across it, but it dried out and I kept playing. He was a nice guy, but, you know, on one of these trips with this McGonagall's by the Sea or the theater in Philadelphia—I think it was in Philadelphia—the booker, whose name is on an album—it seems like it's Levine, but I can't remember his first name—was sitting there talking to us, and Graham was sitting on the bed, and Graham was complaining about something—I don't even remember. As he's complaining—and he complained all the way down, you know, just until his head hit the bed—he was sitting on the bed and just passed out. He never stopped talking until his head hit the—and it's like "Gah." He just was a real sad character, I thought. So the death of Graham—and certainly the death of Clarence—put an end to that whole Hot Burrito Review thing, which was a real—for all of us—I mean, it's certainly terrible to lose Graham—and for me, especially Clarence, because he was really, really incredibly special. Graham I didn't know so well, but Clarence, I did. I knew him through his music and I knew him personally from that trip I did over to Europe with him—had a really wonderful time; he was a very pleasant man—good sense of humor, quiet but laughed a lot and appreciated things, and was basically a pretty straightforward guy. Then, to have it sort of take down this really good thing for all of us—so it seemed—was disappointing. That was all by July, I think—and once again, we could

look at the dates—but July of '73, Clarence, is when he died—June or July of '73. That's the end of a lot of—you know, that and the oil thing, and then Graham and then Clarence just really sort of put the damper on a lot of possibilities. So there was Country Gazette, and we're still playing dates—and once again, we could look at that book to see where we played.

AW:

Had you gotten somebody to replace—

AM:

Kenny Wertz, okay. You know, this all is happening at the same time. We finished our album, I went to Europe, Kenny quit, Clarence died, and Graham died. Well, actually, while—we knew Kenny was going to quit—Roland was interested in—well, let me back up. He wasn't. So we were looking for a guitar player. When we went to this McGonagall's by the Sea, we paid for Tony Rice to—Tony Rice said he was interested, and he flew up to audition with our band and basically went with somebody else and hung out somewhere else. We saw him once, and he wouldn't even sing a song with us. He said, "My throat is bothering me," or something. He was an incredible disappointment. We had paid for him to be there, and he just took advantage of us and just blew us off. So we're still looking around, and then Clarence dies, and that sort of leaves Roland at loose ends. So Roland asks if he could be in Country Gazette. So Roland comes into Country—and replaces Kenny Wertz. So that's '73. In '74, we go along—we're going along, playing dates, trying to make a living. We don't have a record deal anymore, and Eddie and Jim cook up a deal for a live album, and they get a European label that has an American subsidiary—and I think it's called Island Records.

KL:

Can't stop—I can't stop.

AM:

Island Records—I believe that's correct—to take this live album. So we rehearse just like before, with Dickson help picking out songs and trying to arrange things and talking about what a live album would do that a studio album wouldn't do. We recorded two nights at McCabe's in Santa Monica, and they hired a mobile multitrack unit that was in a truck—parked it out in the alley and ran the cables inside, and we recorded the live album with Roland and Byron and Roger and me—and then also a Dobro player on a few tunes by the name of Skip Conover. Skip Conover Byron had met, and Skip was a radio actor—you know, a voice—he'd been a DJ—

AW:

Voice talent.

AM:

—but he did voice. His dad—Skip Conover's real name, I think, is Hugh Distelhurst, and his dad had been an announcer. The only one I can name is he was announcer on "You Asked for It" for Skippy Peanut Butter. So Skip Conover—

AW:

Took his name from Skippy?

AM:

—Skippy Peanut Butter—and Skip was a radio DJ, voiceover, commercial guy—and he played Dobro, and he was a good Dobro player. Byron enjoyed him a lot, and he was friends with Byron, and that's how I met him. So he played on that, also—and we recorded it live, you know. It turned out real well, I think, it's very, very good, although we did go back in the studio and do some vocal enhancements.

AW:

What was the album called?

AM:

I think it was called "Live" —"Country Gazette Live"

AW:

So this is '74?

AM:

Yeah, the end of—I'm going to say November of '74.

AW:

I'm hoarding these cookies. Do you want one?

AM:

Yeah, I want one.

AW:

Kitty, is the coffee for moi, or is this—are you coming back to claim it?

KL:

No, that's for you if you want it. You don't have to eat it—drink it.

AW:

No, no, I'd love to have it.

KL:

It's this morning's, so it's not fresh.

AW:

That's all right.

AM:

So we recorded the live album, which was a lot of fun. You know, I might mention, we played McCabe's several times, and even prior to this live album and prior to Kenny quitting—

KL:

These are actually low-fat.

AM:

—we had played there with Linda Ronstadt. She wanted to do the show with us, so we did a show with—she came over to Byron's and we rehearsed.

AW:

What was she like to work with?

AM:

She was real pleasant.

AW:

I've heard that she was real professional.

AM:

Yeah, she knew how it went. You sing songs and you have harmony parts and kickoffs—she may have played guitar a little bit; I can't remember. She didn't certainly play with us—and in the bands I saw her play, I never saw her play guitar.

AW:

I have a whole stack over here.

AM:

Okay, but she—I'm sure—played guitar a little. So we played McCabe's several times, and did that live there. We did more instrumentals, I think, on the live album than we did on the studio

albums. We did a tune Byron and I wrote called “Holland Holliday” from being in Holland, and then some real “Black Mountain Rag,” “Sally Goodin,” some real showcases for Byron—and a guitar instrumental that Clarence did—I mean that Roland did that Clarence had done called “The Laughing Guitar,” and I did an instrumental version of an old sort of pop folk song called “Look Down, Look Down This Long Lonesome Road,” and that went over real well, I always thought.

AW:

Was there a particular reason that there were more instrumentals on the live—?

AM:

Well, I think Dickson wanted it, because it was more of a—a live setting was more of a showcase to get the excitement of an instrumental—

AW:

The crowd.

AM:

—the crowd, and whatnot. And once again, Byron’s fiddle playing is so powerful that it’s—and “Sally Goodin” is sort of his tour de force—and he recorded that and “Black Mountain Rag.” I think that’s also the first time we ever did a John Hadley song.

AW:

Really? What did you do?

AM:

We actually maybe did two of them—did maybe “Roses for a Sunday Morning” maybe is the name of it, and then another one called “The Only Way Home.” I’m scared of “The Only Way Home.” So that was the beginning of Country Gazette doing a fair number of John Hadley songs. I knew John, you know, from Oklahoma, and he would give me tapes of his songs and I would pass them on to Roland, and Roland liked them, so he would do them.

AW:

Hadley—did I tell you I spent a day with Hadley doing an interview? Quite an experience to spend a day with John Hadley.

AM:

In a good way?

AW:

Oh yeah, he's terrific.

AM:

Yeah, John's a really—

AW:

We talked a little bit—we mainly looked—they had a—and Judy, I guess, had rescued this family of squirrels, the mother of which had gotten squished by a car, and they were bottle feeding squirrels. I guess it was a typical day in the Hadley household.

AM:

Yeah. That place they live is like a little compound.

AW:

It is, it's a—

AM:

You get back there and it's like you're not in Norman, Oklahoma anymore.

AW:

No, it's like a museum of sorts. Plus I got to see his songbooks—the Hadley songbooks. Have you ever seen one of those? They're remarkable. It's art, it's—

AM:

Oh yeah.

AW:

—and it's confessional, you know. He says, “Here's a time when I went crazy and they had to put me in the hospital” and he's showing me all the drawings, and how they changed. I went “Oh, yeah, it's pretty clear.”

AM:

He's quite a character.

AW:

Well it's interesting that—well not interesting, I mean they're good songs, but still—I think of Hadley and the LA crowd, and it's sort of like “Wow, that's a nice connection.”

AM:

Yeah it is, and I think we liked him, and I think we did a pretty good version of him. I don't think we made him any money ever, but we always did his songs. So that was the live album. I'm trying to think of anything unique about it that was—or memorable, I should say. I just remember doing it and liking it a lot. That was, like I say, in November of 1974.

AW:

Was that your last project with Dickson?

AM:

No. There's at least one more. But what happened after that is I went back to Oklahoma for Christmas, after we recorded that, and then I came back to California—and maybe even at McCabe's—I went down there to get some strings or something and saw somebody there that I knew, and they said, "Oh, I hear you're breaking up," and I said "Not that I know of." So I heard it a couple of times, and what it was, was Byron had decided to leave the group because—you'd have to talk to him to get the because—what it felt like to me was that Byron felt like the group—with Roland, possibly—was not going the way he wanted it to go, and that he was losing money by traveling because he was losing all this session work that he might be able to do otherwise. I think what he wanted was a group that was more—would fit more into his schedule.

AW:

His group.

AW:

Yeah, his group, so that he could sort of engineer how it went—which was kind of hurtful to me, because Byron and I were real good friends, and he never ever said anything to me about it. It was just out of the blue. I don't think he ever really even told us that he was leaving. I think it was Eddie Tickner that told us. So it was disappointment. I remember Roger calling me and telling me, you know, "I've talked to Roland, and I just want you to know that we're interested in keeping the group going if you are," and I said "Sure, I don't got anything else to do." In a sense, I was in LA with nothing otherwise. So I said "Sure, let's do that." So we knew this fiddle player in Texas named Dave Ferguson who played very, very much like Byron. He was even as big as Byron. He was a real, real good player—real good musician.

AW:

So if you'd have had a jacket, he'd have fit it.

AM:

Yeah, right. If it was a forty-two long, he'd have fit.

AW:

You want another cookie?

AM:

Sure. Just hand me one, it's okay. So we got Dave Ferguson onboard, and told Eddie that we were going to continue on and he—I don't remember what his response is. He had made the point to me one time, he says, "You know, the only reason groups exist is because they want to. They don't exist because the work or the money or lack of it—they exist because they want to." I took that to mean—

AW:

That's another profound moment.

AM:

Yeah—I thought that to mean—there was a sense of encouragement. So we continued on—we got Dave Ferguson, and one of the first things we did was go back to Europe and play now just as the Country Gazette—no Burrito Brothers or anything. So we toured over there and Dave, bless his heart, he's this big ole guy from Fort Worth, Texas—really fine musician, fiddle player—but he sort of struggled, being in Europe. Some people, it's just hard. If you're not willing to give up—surrender, and say "I'm in a foreign country."

AW:

Yeah, and "I like it," or "I'm going to learn something."

AM:

Yeah, "I'm going to learn something." He sort of struggled the whole way. When we got off the plane—and the first thing we did—he and I did—was go to the bathroom. While he was at the urinal—this is a European bathroom—there's a woman mopping at his feet, around his feet.

AW:

And that was not like Fort Worth.

AM:

It was not. They don't do that in Fort Worth. It sort of—he couldn't—he was like "What is this?"—and sort of unfortunately, but where we went first was to Switzerland, rather than England at least where they'd speak English. We're in Switzerland and we're playing the Montreux Jazz Festival.

AW:

Whoa. Big deal.

AM:

Oh yeah. Once again, Martyn Smith, who we had met in England, had moved—I don't remember if he and I were living together at this time or not, but he was involved in booking this European stuff. So we played the Montreux Jazz Festival and it was called, maybe, "A Day in the Country" and they had sort of country artists. The only other one I can remember is Loudon Wainwright III. I can remember being up—

AW:

Is that when he had his dead skunk hit?

AM:

Yeah. I can remember being up in the room of the hotel we were in, overlooking Lake Geneva, and then the Alps in the background.

AW:

Oh my goodness.

AM:

There was people in the room—and there's a girl there—there's probably several girls, but this one is trying to attract Loudon Wainwright III's attention. She was over at the window or the balcony and said, "Oh, Loudon, come look at the scenery. It's so beautiful," and he said "I hate scenery."

AW:

I hate scenery. What an odd remark.

AM:

Yeah. We played the Montreux Jazz Festival, and among the tapes that I think I've given to the museum is a multitrack tape of our performance at the Montreux.

AW:

I can't remember the inventory, but—

AM:

Yeah, I don't either, but it's there. It may be terrible—I've never listened to it. I remember the show being hard to do because the sound was not good.

AW:

Yeah, that always makes it a job.

AM:

Somewhere in my scrapbooks that I left there, too, is part of a magazine I cut out that had all the artists that were there that day. So it's in the museum somewhere. So we played there, and then we—I can't remember where else we played—seems like we maybe played in Germany. Martyn Smith was with us this whole trip, and I remember taking a train—being on a train that's going along the Rhine. It's late at night, the train has stopped for some reason, and I lift up the blinds, and I look out on the opposite side of the river we're on, and there's castles. There's a castle, there's another castle, there's another castle—it was just like, Am I awake?

AW:

What part of town are we in?

AM:

Yeah, right. What part of Fort Worth is this? So it was a real spectacular sort of view. On one of these train trips—poor Dave—Dave is struggling with Europe. There's a guy going by, selling stuff off of a cart, and Dave does his best to buy something from him—which he does—and then he realizes, “I need a cup” —maybe he bought a beer, and he wanted a cup. The guy had, on his cart, a little dispenser with cups at the bottom—you pull them out the bottom—and the guy would go by and just ignore Dave. Finally he went by one time and Dave just reached over and got a cup, and the guy turned around and slapped Dave—and Dave just roared out of his seat and grabbed the guy. Dave is two hundred and fifty pounds and 6'4” —and just grabs the guy and pins him against the something. I think Roger and Roland leap up, “Dave, Dave, don't do this,” and he says, “The guy slapped me” and we, you know, just “Let it go, let it go.” I don't know—Dave had probably pissed the guy off somehow or another—I don't know what he did for the guy to turn around and slap him.

AW:

Well that was pretty dumb—a guy that's that big.

AM:

I thought it was sort of suicide. Another time—poor Dave—we were—we had a day off in Switzerland, somehow, and “Let's just take a train trip.” So we do our best to study the schedule—and they're complicated—and we go somewhere and spend an hour or two, and then we go to catch the train. “Oh, there's the train and it's about to leave, so let's get on it,” so we all rushed and got on the train. As the train is pulling away, we turn and look, and there's Dave standing down on the platform, just—you know, like this.

AW:

“I'm lost!”

AM:

"I'm lost."

AW:

"And I'm in Switzerland."

AM:

Right. But you know what? He actually got there before we did—he took another train—because we had gotten on sort of the local—

AW:

Yeah, the milk stop—

AM:

Right—and he had gotten on the express and actually got back before we did. So he survived that real well, but it was like—I thought, Oh, God, that looked terrible. And there's nothing you can do. The train is moving, and there he is. So we played a couple weeks in Europe—I'm not sure where all we played—probably Amsterdam again in a lot of the same places the Burrito Brothers had played, and then Country Gazette—because we went over there twice in '72, I went over in '73, we went over in '74, you know. We were over there a lot in the early seventies. Then from Europe we went to England and played another week there in England—and enjoyed it. It was a lot of fun, and the music was good with Dave and—

AW:

Roland?

AM:

—Roland, yeah, thank you—and Roger. We played in England, and once again, Dave—not to pick on Dave, but it was just too funny. Our first day in England, we go out on the street, and we're walking, and there's a lady selling ice cream. She's got a cooler and then you open it up and she just dips out ice cream. Dave says, "I want to get some ice cream." Okay, so we go over there—and Dave had just spent two weeks in Europe, where nobody—he couldn't get anything. So he does—and I did it, and everybody does it—is you talk slow and loud in hopes of something getting conveyed. So he turns and he goes to this lady on this street in London and says "I would like some ice cream," and she says "One dip or two?" and he turns to me and says "How do I make her understand I want some ice cream?" and I says, "Well, you just tell her. She's speaking English," and he went "Oh, oh!" He had just totally quit listening. So it was like a little shock to him—it's like, Oh, God! So it was real fun. Dave—he didn't handle the traveling real well, but we played—so we did England, and I'm not sure where we played or what all we did. Every once in a great while, somebody in Europe or somewhere will send me a picture—you

know, "I've got a picture of you in Breda, Holland in 1974," and they'll show it and it'll be Dave and Roland, and I'll go, "Oh yeah, I know what's going on, but I don't remember the place or anything." It was quite an adventure. So Dave replaced Byron—and I think it was in Europe that Roger talked to—somehow in my mind I have it that Roger called Byron. You know, I can't remember the—but ultimately Roger talked to Byron, and Byron said, "I'm not going to be in the group anymore." I don't know why I think it was from Europe.

AW:

Yeah, because Dave was already with you.

AM:

Yeah, because Dave is already there, so—

AW:

Did Dave do any recording with you?

AM:

Yeah. The next album we did, Dave was on—but he had already actually quit. He was only with us maybe seven months or so because he had a wife and kids—Dave did not always behave himself—or take care of himself well when we traveled. He drank a lot, and I think it got to him that he wasn't doing right, and he had a wife and two kids. He just decided, This isn't as much fun as I thought it would be, and I'm drunk all the time, you know, just—he wasn't doing right by himself. He wasn't taking care of himself. We played around the United States quite a bit, and once again, we'd have to look and see if—at some point, I quit writing down the dates, but I don't remember when it was. Dave always loved this story. We would rent cars and drive places. Roger and I lived in California, Dave lived in Fort Worth, Roland lived in Nashville—because after Clarence died, there was no reason for Roland to move back to California. So Roger and I would rent a car in California—a station wagon—drive to Fort Worth, pick up Dave, drive to Nashville and pick up Roland, or drive somewhere and Dave and Roland would fly and meet us. So it would be like that. So I was always in rented cars, and Dave smoked, Roland smoked, Roger smoked, so we would stop at a truck stop and we'd go in and do whatever we'd have to do. Roger, Roland, and I were in the car waiting, and Dave's not there, Dave's not there, Dave's not there—finally, ten minutes later Dave shows up, and he's kind of sheepish looking—he tells this story, he says, "You know, I came out and I looked around and found the rental car and went over and got in—and I lit up a cigarette, and I was just sitting there, waiting for you all, smoking a cigarette, and I turned and looked, and there were these two sets of bare feet sticking over from the back seat. I turned and looked, and there were these two kids back there just—"

AW:

Scared to death.

AM:

Just scared to death—"Oh, this is what mommy and daddy told us about." And Dave said, "Oh, I'm sorry!" and got out of the car and came and found us. But he had gotten in a car that was the same car—same make of car—and I always just think, What an incredibly funny scene, to have this huge man get in your car, light up his cigarette and be smoking, and just casually look—and finally look around, and there's these two kids in the backseat.

AW:

It must have been sad to lose Dave. It sounds like he was entertaining.

AM:

Yeah, yeah, Dave is a nice guy. I like Dave a great deal.

AW:

Does he still play?

AM:

Yeah. Yeah he does. He's up in Fort Worth—he's an insurance salesman, and has slimmed down—really nice-looking, slimmed way down and taken care of himself. He came to a Country Gazette reunion sort of thing a couple of times, and I've seen him three or four times over the last five or so years—yeah, real good fiddle player, good musician. I have a video—I don't know if I—I may have given it to you all—and it was when—a lot of times we would gather up in Fort Worth. We had a lot of friends in Fort Worth—Doc Hamilton, again, who I met earlier. We would stay with Doc. We played gigs around Fort Worth—we played a place called The Hop, which is the House of Pizza, I think is the—and we'd play at the Hop a lot. Dave got us a show on KERA there in Dallas, and they had a program—and I forget what it was called—I'm making this up, but it may be called like Homewood, or some sort of rustic name for a local music show. It would just be "Our special guest tonight is Country Gazette," and then it'd be an hour. It's really, really good. Of the TV shows we've done—and it may have been that they recorded it on multitrack and Dave was there when they mixed it or something, but it turned out really nice.

AW:

I'll look to see if we have that, too.

AM:

Yeah, and it's in a box. We tried to get it from them and they wanted like two hundred and fifty or three hundred dollars. I met somebody from KERA and told him that, and he said, "Oh, that's bullshit. I'll get you a copy." So he got us a copy—and it may be in a box that says KERA on it or something.

AW:

Yeah, well they should do it. We're helping them out and giving them some footage of something—I can't remember now what we're—

AM:

Yeah, but it's really good and it's real, real—it's a really good presentation of what we were doing at that time. We'd start with—Dave would do—because he could play just like Byron—we would do “Lost Indian,” then we would go into “Never Ending Love” —“Lost Indian” from the first album, “Never Ending Love” from the live album, “Look Down That Long, Lonesome Road” banjo instrumental from the live album, “Honky Cat” from the second album, “Winterwood” —Roland sang “Winterwood” —and “Laughing Guitar,” we would do that on that show—a Flatt and Scruggs song, I forget—“I Know What It Means To Be Lonesome” from the live album, and Dave would do “Sally Goodin” from the live album, just like Byron—I mean it was just almost like having Byron there. Dave was really attuned to that at the time—and plus he sang the parts and did a real good job. It's really good—the KERA show is real good. That's probably—what would that be—'75 or—'75 it would be.

AW:

Yeah, I'll look for that, too.

AM:

Yeah. And then we got back and Dave eventually quit. Roland had been playing guitar and decided he'd like to be the mandolin player. He just felt like guitar wasn't where he was. The mandolin was his instrument, and could we look for a guitar player/singer. I don't know how this came to be, but somehow Kenny got back in touch and wanted to come back into the group. So Kenny Wertz came back and I don't remember how it happened—maybe Roger called him. He says, “Yeah, I'm not doing anything. I'll do it,” so he lasted another year and quit, also—but with that configuration—with Kenny Wertz on guitar, and then Roger on bass, and Roland on mandolin and me on banjo—we recorded one more album with Jim Dickson and Eddie Tickner.

AW:

What was that one?

AM:

It was called “Out to Lunch,” and that's because we had an instrumental that I don't like at all that I wrote called “Out to Lunch.”

AW:

Is this, what—'75, '76?

AM:

Well, it probably must be the end of '75. See, here's another sticky spot with Jim Dickson. He wanted us to use Byron on the record.

AW:

Even though you weren't—he wasn't touring with you?

AM:

He wasn't touring with us, and it was still—felt bad. He never talked to me about why anything happened, and it just—I felt—everybody's got an ego, and I just felt bruised by it. I just thought, God, we were such good friends in college, and he never ever, ever, ever, to this day has said a word about it—that I can remember, anyway. I don't care—now I don't care. I play with him and I love him and admire his music—and that's all so long ago—but at the time, it just stung. I think Roger and Roland felt a bit—you know, just how it went down. It wasn't just that he quit, but he never told us. Eddie Tickner told us. I heard from friends, you know, "Oh, I heard the band is breaking up," "No, not that I know of. I never heard," while Byron was telling—

AW:

Yeah—makes you look really smart, yeah.

AM:

Yeah—Byron was telling people, and it just—and now I don't care at all. It's just too long ago. So we wouldn't do it, and we insisted on using Dave. In the end it would have been a better record with Byron—and I think that was probably the—besides the group not having that much going for itself—and then not doing what we're told—Dickson was probably, "Enough is enough." So they put together a package and sold it to Flying Fish in America, and then in Europe they sold it to Antilles, I think, was the label. It's funny, in Europe this label, Antilles, had a group called Out to Lunch. So they wanted to change the name of—so they called it "On the Sunny Side of the Mountain," because that's a song that was on there that Roland did. We did, you know—what did we do—we did another John Hadley song called "Melody for Baby," which was real graceful and really pretty song—really outside for bluegrass. I mean, it was—I don't know—it just seemed real different—and we did it all the time; we would do it live. Then I did an instrumental called "Uncle Clooney Played the Banjo" which is one of the first sort of totally my compositions that I had recorded—a fiddle tune "Forked Deer" that Dave did. We did a song called "Time Left to Wander," which is sort of about a time traveler—and Roland sang it, but he hated it and wouldn't ever do it again. We did "Last Thing on my Mind" turned out really, really well—and I played guitar on it and played the melody sort of on the low—on the bass end, which made it kind of attractive, and then we had Al Perkins on the steel guitar. Dickson was still very interested in the music, and we recorded it at Emmylou Harris's—the same place Emmylou Harris recorded her first album, which was a house on Laurel Canyon that they had a

mobile unit on a truck. I've got a picture out in the office I can show you of us sitting there, listening to the playback. It was a semi that had the recording console against the wall, and then you sat against the other wall—and there wasn't much space. It wasn't like the ideal place, and I never quite liked the sound of that album, but—I mean, it's not bad—but it's just—so anyway, we recorded at this house in Laurel Canyon. I should also back up and say, in 1975 I also got back involved with Slim Richey—Mike Richey. Slim had since—when he left Oklahoma, he moved to Seattle and lived up there for a year or two, and then ultimately moved back to this area and wound up in Fort Worth, and began running a discount mail order instrument sales called Warehouse Music Sales. Slim would be an interesting interview, because among the many, many things he did in his career, he is one of the first people who sort of broke the back—and they'll hate him for this—of the retail sellers selling at list, because he now put out a catalogue and had these ads for, you know, twenty percent off Martin D28—and so people would take it in there and show it to the dealer, you know, and say, "Look, I can get it for 20 percent off," and they got very, very angry at Slim and contacted Martin, and Martin tried to cut him off. How Slim did it is intriguing—he should tell the story. When he was in Fort Worth, what he did was work for a company that was called—and the name was like B&D Nut and Bolt—but what they did is they bought and sold everything. If you wanted something, you would contact them and they would find it. So if you needed—"I need two million of this certain kind of nut that only fits such-and-such a thing"—and they had their suppliers, and they would call around until they could find it. So they were sort of like brokers.

AW:

Yeah, they were ahead of the internet.

AM:

Right, exactly. So when he got into the instrument sales he did the same thing. Somebody would say, "I'd like to order a Martin D18," then he would start calling around, and he says there were always dealers—even though Martin threatened to cut them off if anybody sold to Slim Richey—they'd have a D18 that they'd had in there for two years and couldn't sell, and Slim would buy it. So he became like a—some things he could get direct from the dealer, but like Martin guitars and Gibson banjos and mandolins he couldn't get.

AW:

He'd get them in the back door.

AM:

He would find them, you know, and he would just—he's a wheeler dealer.

AW:

So how'd you get back involved with him?

AM:

Well, he called me. I think he must have told me he was here, or we played in Fort Worth and I saw him, or he came out to visit and told us what he was doing—but ultimately, he had this Warehouse Music Sales, says “I want to start recording—have a record label. Would you record an album for me? I’m going to have a label called Ridge Runner,” so I talked to Jim Dickson and Eddie Tickner, and they didn’t have any interest in it and didn’t see anything about it, so I told him yes. So the Country Gazette that featured Dave Ferguson recorded this album called Banjo Sandwich, so it was me and Roger Bush, Dave Ferguson, Roland White, and then I got Doc Hamilton to play guitar because Roland had been the guitar player, and now it was—I wanted him to play mandolin, so Doc Hamilton played guitar—and Doc was living in Fort Worth. We recorded it in Fort Worth at a studio—and we recorded it all there, but I took it back to California—

AW:

To mix it?

AM:

—to mix it—and I asked Jim Dickson to recommend somebody, and for some reason Dino Lappas was not available—or maybe he had retired or something—or was doing something. So a guy whose name was Bogart—it looked like Bogart, but he pronounced it—worked at A&M, so I took it down to A&M studios—I think his name was Dick Bogart—maybe it was Bogart, I can’t remember—but he and I and a friend of mine out there at the time named John Delgado—do you know that name at all?

AW:

Yeah, it’s real familiar, what—

AM:

He has, now, Sierra Briar Record Label, and puts out a lot of west coast rock stuff. John went with me to A&M Studios, which is the old Charlie Chaplin Studios in Hollywood, and we mixed it over a couple of days.

AW:

What year would this have been?

AM:

This is ’75.

AW:

Still ’75.

AM:

Yeah—pretty heady times, huh?

AW:

Yeah—moving along.

AM:

So—and it was called “Banjo Sandwich”—and it came out in either late ’75 or ’76; I can’t remember. And it did well and got reviewed well. It was more bluegrassy, so they liked it—you know, more straight-ahead, bluegrassy stuff. Then we recorded, also, the “Out to Lunch” in ’75, I would say. So is that a good place to stop?

AW:

Probably so, because I’m about to run out of card space, and I need to hit the head, too.

AM:

It’s a good place to stop, yeah.

AW:

So we’ll put a fork in it and call it done for the time being.

AM:

You know what would be real good—is maybe we can get together when I come out there and to have that book.

AW:

Yeah, I’ve got a note to do that.

AM:

Yeah, that’s a good idea.

AW:

All right, we’ll stop it here.

End of interview