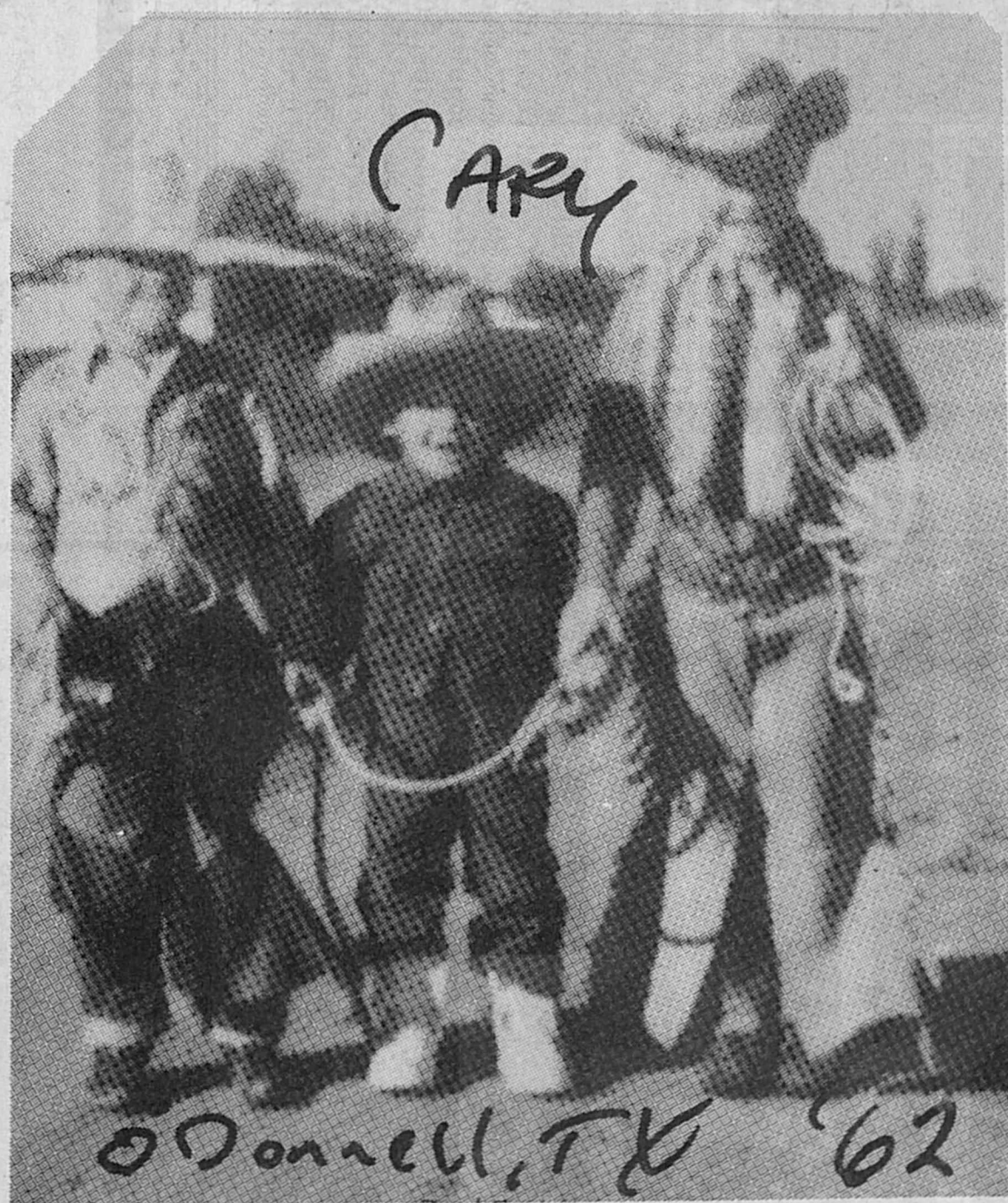


3rd COAST MUSIC

formerly MUSIC CITY TEXAS

CARY SWINNEY

#4/93 MAY 1997



REVIEWS

Karen Abrahams

Terry Allen

The Backsliders

Jeff Hughes

In The Country
Of Country

Frankie McWhorter

Giles Oakley

Red Meat

Steve Riley & The
Mamou Playboys

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Sat, May 10, Central Texas Bluegrass Festival, 4:00 pm, Zilker Park, Austin
Sat, May 10, Saradora's Coffee House, 7:00 pm, 101 E Main St, Round Rock
Fri, May 16, Green Mesquite, 7:00 pm, Barton Springs Road, Austin
Sat, May 17, Buffalo Chips, 5:00 pm, BriarCliff Marina (Deck), Austin
Wed, May 21, Ski Shores Cafe, 6:30 pm, Austin
Mon, May 26, Kerrville Folk Festival, Kerrville
Sat, May 31, Buffalo Chips, 5:00 pm, BriarCliff Marina (Deck), Austin
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art and grit

OK, WE'VE LAID A GUITAR PICK ON BUDDY'S GRAVE. NOW WHAT?

Not that I have a lot of use for Mac Davis, but "Lubbock in my rear view mirror" was a great phrase, and fans of the artists who've defined Lubbock as one of the mythic and mystical sources of great music probably know it's a view most all of them saw as they headed out, leaving Lloyd Maines as the only notable figure with a Lubbock zip code. Last month, I mentioned that Maines was thinking of moving to Austin and he has in fact since put his house on the market, so you might think he'll be turning off the lights as he leaves.

Well, not so fast, my young friends. There's still life, and a flourishing music scene, in the Hub City. Cary Swinney remarks, "Musicians in Lubbock are keeping real busy, and making money. I couldn't have said that ten years ago, even five years ago, when there was hardly anywhere to play, but it's sure changed. There are people playing four or five times a week, and drawing a good crowd every time. I don't know how long this is going to last, but right now it's hot."

A few weeks ago, DL and I got an invite from the City of Lubbock Convention & Tourism Bureau to come on an all expenses paid trip to view the wonders of Lubbock, the irresistible hook being a Stubbs Memorial Concert featuring Terry Allen, Joe Ely, Butch Hancock, Jesse Taylor and The Maines Brothers. Well, when I say resistible, I later found out that the Bureau had specifically targeted the music press for this wingding—and I can't help feeling that if they'd worked their way down to 3CM, they must have been pretty damn comprehensive—but I was the only taker. Let me rephrase that; I was the only music writer happy to have someone else pick up the tab to go to a show like that (for more on which see Honest John). Makes you wonder, don't it?

While I think the generous and amiable ladies of the Bureau have their work cut out for them selling the idea of Lubbock as a vacation destination, from the rather specialized point of view of the music tourist, it really does have much to offer beyond the obligatory pilgrimage to Lubbock Cemetery. Over the years, I've talked to many visitors to Austin, nearly always Europeans (and, for some reason, usually Germans), who figure on popping up to Lubbock for the day just for that, a notion that's a lot funnier if you've driven the six hours there and six hours back, blessing the powers that be who raised the speed limit to 70.

Anyway, the purpose of this is to make a few suggestions to help justify the trip and hopefully make it a richer experience. From a two day visit, I'm not about to offer myself as an authority on the current Lubbock music scene, relying instead on the infinitely better informed input of three people known to me personally to be deeply involved in it, whose views I trust implicitly. One is the lovely and talented Miz Ayn, herself a formidable chanteuse, though she's cut back, only singing at Stubb's on Sunday nights, whose credentials are summarized by the fact she was handpicked by the organizers to emcee the Stubbs Memorial Concert, the others are Mike & Jack Burk, who for the last 20 years, have been, in Cary Swinney's words, "the center of the subculture in Lubbock," hosting a nonstop after hours party for musicians and their friends at their farmhouse on the edge of town.

So, places to go for music—all parties agreed on Stubb's and Great Scott's, Miz Ayn adding The Depot Beer Garden, the Burks the Texas Cafe ("lot of soul") and Kyle's 88 Key Cafe (best sound). People to see—Cary Swinney topped all three lists, followed by Mojo Hand, fronted by Junior Medlow's son Michael Williams, and Elvis T Busboy & The Texas Blues Butchers, specifically for lead guitarist John Sprott, Mike and Jack added the Texas Belairs (of whom Swinney remarks, "as good as Ely when they don't get into fistfights with each other on stage"), Mike throwing in the blues and country of Robin Griffin, who put out a rather weak CD a few years ago but has, I gather, shifted his ground and improved since then. Mike also seconded Cary Swinney's support of DG Flewellen, a black singer-songwriter. Well, there you have it. A bit skeletal, but more than you knew before, eh?

As a postscript, I'll throw in a totally gratuitous, and I may say unsolicited, plug for the Mean Woman Grill in Levelland, 20 minutes due west of Lubbock. A 10 x 20 foot burger joint operated by the l and t Miz Ayn her very own self, it's only open from 11am to 2pm weekdays.

JC

CARY SWINNEY

Though the special circumstances that acted like a cultural pressure cooker to produce the coterie of West Texas musicians and songwriters who've staked an enduring claim on my regard and affection no longer exist in anything like the same form, nonetheless I've always kept half an eye on Lubbock, just in case. Over the last few years, the name that kept coming up as the single must see artist was that of Cary Swinney, but I don't get up there too often so I only knew him from repute and an intriguing demo tape. Fortuitously, at almost exactly the same time as I was invited to Lubbock, I heard he'd released his debut album, and also, somewhat less fortuitously as he performs somewhere in town two or three times a week, that he'd be playing during the weekend we'd be there.

The Tourism Bureau's program called for us to be at a concert showcasing talent from Don Caldwell's Cactus Theater backed by the Lubbock Symphony Orchestra, but we slid out at the intermission and traded the Municipal Coliseum for Great Scott's, a funky barbecue joint just south of the liquor stores that define the city limits, and an horrendously over the top operatic rendition of *Bridge Over Troubled Waters*, a song I've always detested anyway, for "Jesus is the son of God/he's a middle linebacker/a real nutcracker/on the Deity Squad." Cary Swinney, a bottle of Llano Estacado and good folks like Mike and Jack Burk, Val Schultz of the *Caprock Sun* and Ingried Kaiter (a singer, incidentally Buddy Holly's niece, I have great hopes for, but who's been having some very bad luck). I'd say we got plenty of the best of that deal.

Born in O'Donnell, Texas, Swinney, now 36, came to Lubbock in 1989, long after the people we associate with the Hub City had moved away, and at a time when local music was at a low ebb. However, invited out to the Burk's farmhouse for a picking party, a friend outed him as a closet singer-songwriter and he found himself singing songs he'd only played at home to a gathering that included most all of Lubbock's hardcore aficionados. Among them was Richard Bowden, then with The Maines Brothers (now an Austin Lounge Lizard), who offered Swinney his services; "Pretty soon we had a little following going." As the music scene revived, Swinney found himself at the forefront, Lubbock's local hero. Sixty people, Swinney's average audience, may not sound like much, but there are very, very few Austin singer-songwriters who can draw that many paying customers once a month, let alone three or four times a week.

On one level, there's no obvious continuity between Swinney and the older generation of Lubbock musicians. "I didn't really know anything about them. I mean, I knew their names, but I don't have hardly any of their albums. I wasn't influenced by them, but by John Prine, and Jackson Browne's early stuff." When I told him that Joe Ely had commented very favorably on the album and said he'd try to get to the gig, Swinney was startled. "I opened for him at an acoustic gig in Abilene about six months ago and he asked me to send him a copy, but I didn't think for a moment he'd actually listen to it, let alone like it."

Even absent direct influence, Swinney can still be placed in a continuum with Terry Allen, as he himself acknowledges. "When I finally heard *Lubbock (On Everything)*, I was just blown away, and then we were on the same bill at last year's Buddy Holly Festival and he stuck around to hear me play, which he sure didn't have to do, and was very supportive. He treated me like he was my older bother, which made me feel good. He's the one I really connect with."

One thing Swinney shares with Allen is abrasive humor. An example of Swinney's is his choice of label name; "I don't know if you know this, but up here Johnson grass is a menace. Farmers really hate it. So I thought it would make a good name for what I do."

JC

CARY SWINNEY • HUMAN MASQUERADE

(Johnson Grass, CD)

Like Terry Allen's, Swinney's songs are deliberately provocative philosophical discourses laced with sardonic wit, the affinity between them most evident, miasmic denominationalism being one element of the Lubbock dynamic that hasn't changed between Allen's time and Swinney's, in their interrogations of religion. Having heard what he pulls from his repertoire for a live show, it's clear that his preoccupations with mortality and religion are disproportionately represented, at the expense of his iconoclastic humor, among the 13 tracks, selected, not by Swinney himself, from 40 recorded, though, of course, it can well be argued that humor tends to be ephemeral. From the savage satire of *Country Music Music* to the unrelieved bleakness concealed behind the seemingly innocuous title of *When I Was A Kid*, Swinney's serious side is on display here, his compelling search for truth (in the liner notes, he remarks, "I guess I could have named this project *Convolution Philosophical Bullshit*"). With Richard Bowden fiddle, viola and mandolin, Lloyd Maines pedal and lap steel, dobro and acoustic slide guitar, Alan Munde banjo, Steve Meador percussion and Ingried Kaiter making an appearance as God, Alan Crossland's spare production lets nothing distract from Swinney's acoustic guitar and the nuances his primal vocals extract from his lyrics.

JC

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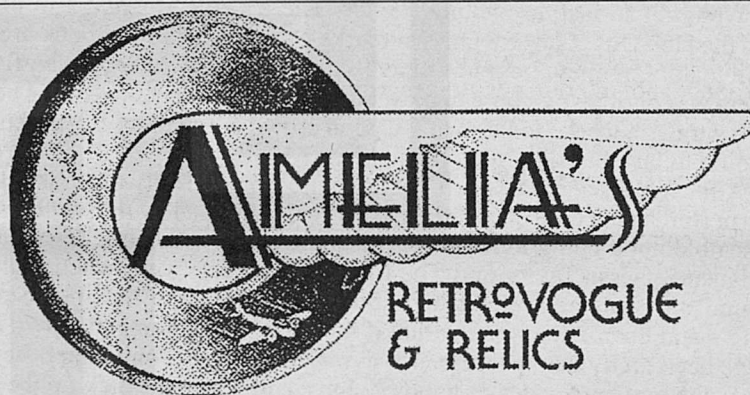
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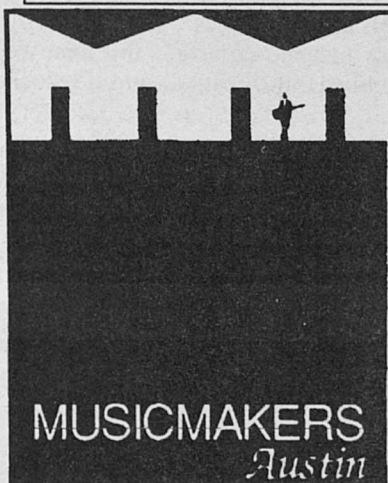
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HONEST JOHN'S MESSAGES FROM GOD

Young and Conquest—subtle we're not. Unless you successfully interpreted a message best described as subliminal, you might have wondered what the hell the back of last month's cover was about. It was, in fact, intended to thank all the people who played at, and the people we knew who were in the crowd for (and apologies to Dan & Tyrell Lourie, Barbara Mates, Cody Nicholas & Deborah and Jimmy Mac for leaving them out), the extraordinary Saturday afternoon bash of March 15th at the **Texicali Grille**, but, subtly being something in which **3CM** has neither expertise nor experience, the attempt kinda blew up in our faces. At the same time, I was chided by several people, wanting to relive the afterglow, for not devoting more space to the event last month, to which I can only say I had a lot of ground to cover. It was, as mail from as far afield as New Zealand, Italy, Ohio, California and Massachusetts testifies, a day that will linger long in the memories of those fortunate enough to be there. The shindig kicked off with country/rockabilly band **Ruthie & The Wranglers**, joined by DC compatriot Bill Kirchen, who stayed plugged in to jam with the **Cornell Hurd Big Band** (15 strong at one point) and their special guests Johnny Bush and Johnny Gimble. Also sitting in were Ms Debbie Hurd, fiddler Howard Kalish of The Pure Texas Band, Bush's steel guitarist Herb Steiner and Wayne Hancock's guitarist Dave Biller, with Roy Heinrich and Walt Lewis getting up for a song or two. Carol Fran and Clarence Holliman, with Mark Kazanoff, came on after, but frankly by that time DL and I were too hyper to do anything but sit and digest that musical feast. And it was all free! God love Danny & Lu Young, and, of course, all those great players.

♦ Many years ago, **Keith Ferguson**, who died on April 29th, went to visit Link Davis frere et fils and was greeted with the words "Whadya want, square?," an incident his older friends never let him forget. The epitome of cool, Jesse Taylor met him in the alley behind a Houston club (don't ask), and on instinct recruited him to replace Jimmie Dale Gilmore on bass in Angela Strehli and Lewis Cowdrey's Sunnyland Express, and, though snubbed by Austin's blues establishment after he was sacked by the T-Birds, he was always without peer as an electric bass player.

♦ In a recent *Statesman* column, Don McLeese joined Fred Schmidt in bemoaning the local music community's failure to support his music-related art gallery **Wild About Music**. Quite why it has to rely on tourists is an interesting question, for me, it just ain't funky enough, but I do have to either take exception to or expand on McLeese's words, "Schmidt and his partners launched the operation a year ago last March." Nowhere in his column is there any mention of **Marian Alexander**, whose brainchild it was. Alexander moved to Austin round the same time I did, for much the same reasons, and, looking for her own role in the music community, came up with the idea of a music theme store. The original Wild About Music, in Bluebonnet Market, concentrated on T-shirts with a sideline in knickknacks with a musical motif. Quite what happened after Schmidt and his partners bought into Alexander's operation may be open to interpretation, but ultimately she found herself out in the cold with little to show for her efforts, least of all the name of what was once her company.

♦ You may, or there again may not, have noticed that the **Births & Deaths** column has been changing. Long devoted to artists from or living in Texas, I first incorporated Louisiana, then expanded again to include just about anybody who fits the 3rd Coast Music definition, which, of course, means whatever I want it to mean. So I now have a monster database, so a) the occasional error creeps in (I made a right mess of Muddy Waters last month—right days but wrong years for both birth and death), and b) I have to make cuts so the column will fit the space available. The criteria are pretty ad hoc, but to give an example, this month **Trini Lopez** is out, but **Isidro Lopez** is in.

♦ Heartily seconding my inclusion of **Gurf Morlix** among the guitarists who set the standards in Austin, Peter Schiffman of Davis, California, tells me he talked to Morlix after a **Jimmy LaFave** show and "Gurf told me that they'd never rehearsed together and he really hadn't listened to Jimmy's records much, but this was the sixth gig of the tour and he'd pretty much gotten the songs down. Unfuckingbelievable. Later Jimmy told me his bass player had called a week before the tour and nervously asked if they shouldn't be rehearsing with Gurf. Jimmy told him Gurf was a pro and didn't need to rehearse."

♦ Also from the road, Rex Hamann reports that at a poorly promoted show in Milwaukee, **Dale Watson** introduced himself to everyone present during a break, and, having memorized their names, thanked them all individually at the end of the night.

♦ I'd kinda made a resolution to myself to lay off the *Statesman* and the *Chronicle*, as I doubt you give a rat's ass about either one unless you live here and probably not much even if you do, but one **Patrick Beach** came up with a major irritant in a *Statesman* feature on the estimable Waterloo Records' 15th birthday, "... if you live here and care about music (and is it possible to live here and *not* care about music?) ... " Get a fucking grip, Patrick. There are half a million people in Austin and maybe one in a hundred has any interest in any kind of music, including horrible music. Put it another way, in the week prior to the feature, Waterloo, one of the most successful independent record stores in the country, moved 100 copies of the #1 album in its Top 50 chart. Total, the Top 50 racked up less than 1500 units, with the bottom six tied at 16 copies apiece, which is pretty nice business for a record store, but a long way from justifying such idiotic cheerleader rhetoric.

♦ So **La Zona Rosa**'s changed hands—again. New owner is Tim 'You Can't Have Too Many Venues' O'Connor, whose Direct Events already has The Backyard, the Austin Music Hall and an interest in South Park Meadows. While it may just be the circles I move in, reactions to O'Connor's acquisition can best be gauged by another venue operator's remark, "I take comfort from the old saying; pigs get fat, hogs get slaughtered." Thinking of O'Connor, his sponsorship of **Chicago House**, highly publicized at its inception, seems to have been quietly let slide, something I must look into.

♦ Having postponed recording sessions for their bestseller's self-produced album, Watermelon have lost **Don Walser**. He's going into the studio at the end of May, but his new label's still a secret.

LOVED IT, LEFT IT

To begin at the finale, the **Stubbs Memorial Concert** at Lubbock's Fair Park Coliseum on April 18th wound up with Terry Allen, Joe Ely, Butch Hancock, Jesse Taylor and The Maines Brothers shoulder to shoulder belting out Buddy Holly songs. To get to that point we'd had to sit through separate sets by Butch Hancock (and Jesse Taylor), The Maines Brothers (and Jesse Taylor), Terry Allen and The Maines Brothers (and Jesse Taylor) and Joe Ely and The Maines Brothers (and Jesse Taylor). Oh yes, and a short set by Jesse Taylor. It was hell I tell you. Man, that was one goddamn amazing evening. Every time I've seen Ely, Hancock or Taylor playing in Lubbock, I've been struck by how strongly they react to the hometown audience. It's not that they're different, it's that they're themselves but somehow more so. Kind of hard to describe or define, but it's definitely there, and from the number of familiar faces in the crowd, there seem to be people who agree enough to drive all the way from Austin for it. I mentioned this to Ely when I ran into him the next day and he said, "Yeah, we have a different altitude here."

♦ First thing we heard when we got to town was that **Junior Medlow** had died the night before, which cast a shadow over both the concert and our weekend.

Though the man with the big, smoky baritone, best remembered as vocalist with The Cobras and Jesse Taylor's Tornado Alley, which he took over when Jesse moved on, Medlow returned to Lubbock when he was diagnosed with cancer, but held on for a two years, and was still performing up to a couple of weeks before his death.

♦ The concert actually closed with **Miz Ayn**, the world's most vivacious MC. The Code of the Conquests forbids me to comment on a lady's state of sobriety, but next day she confessed openly to us that she had absolutely no recollection of her bravura curtain closing rendition of *Summertime*. Miz Ayn, who started waitressing at the original Stubb's when she was 17 and is still dealing them off the arm at the new incarnation, asked me particularly to mention what pretty legs she has. I can't say I noticed them myself, but DL confirms she does indeed have an exceptional set of wheels.

♦ A **Stubbs Memorial Concert**, with pretty much the same lineup, is, in theory, going to be held on the patio of the Austin Stubb's later this year, though right now there's isn't even an approximate date.

♦ Long time readers may recall the running updates on the status of **Butch Hancock**'s Cherokee, which was impounded by the police in Mexico for many months before being returned with about 25,000 extra miles on the clock. The latest chapter in the saga is that it blew up in Monahans (birthplace of Guy Clark) when Butch was en route to the concert from Terlingua, and he had to spend the next day scouring Lubbock for a new engine. Joe Ely's comment was, "Butch has always had trouble with vehicles. Bad karma, I guess," Terry Allen adding, "It makes people nervous giving him lifts in their own cars."

♦ However, a measure of the Tourism Bureau's eclat, we had some very good karma. They arranged with the Nifty 50s Car Club to ferry us to the concert, so DL and I cruised to the door in an immaculate 1951 **Kaiser Manhattan**. Very cool.

♦ One of the many activities the Lubbock Tourist Bureau crammed into our schedule—we spent two days hurtling nonstop around town from dawn to midnight—was a tour of **Buddy Holly** sites, but I'm not sure I can really recommend the experience—the first stop is an empty lot where the house Buddy was born in once stood. Fascinating. Presumably the building was demolished before Buddy became an official civic icon, and I didn't like to ask when that was. Some of the stops are vaguely interesting, Jerry Allison's house, the Holley home where Buddy and Maria Elena (known in Lubbock as The Brown Recluse) were married, the radio station that used to be KDVA, the first all-country station in America, where Buddy used to play live, and, of course, the grave, but if the schools he attended are a tad marginal, I really draw the line at being shown the building that once housed the office of the doctor who signed Buddy's birth certificate.

♦ Best thing about the tour, in fact, is the accompanying video, in which his brother earnestly testifies that Buddy was a devout Christian while **Jerry Allison** is hilarious on the choice of band name. The gist was they wanted an insect name, in tribute to The Spiders, and went down the alphabet, rejecting possibilities like The Ants and "The Beetles, what a stupid name that'd be," before settling on The Crickets.

♦ It seems an article of faith in Lubbock that Holly intended to come back and build a state of the art recording studio where he would produce records and make the city a major music industry center. Well, who knows, maybe it would have worked that way, but I still remember vividly how horrified my crowd was when *Everyday* came out and I've always suspected Buddy would have wound up in Las Vegas.

♦ One idea I had for Lubbock flavoring this issue was to talk to **Peggy Sue Gerron**, immortalized in the Buddy Holly hit whose title was changed from *Cindy Lou* because Jerry Allison wanted to make points with her. However, as the current *Blue Suede News* features a long interview with the lady, I'll refer you to that.

ANA EGGE • KIM MILLER • LINDA LOZANO

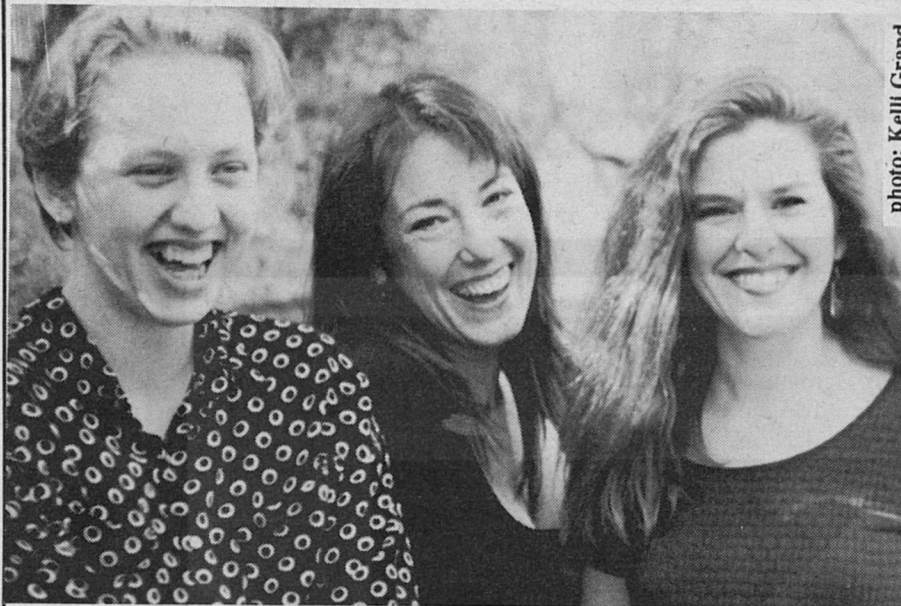


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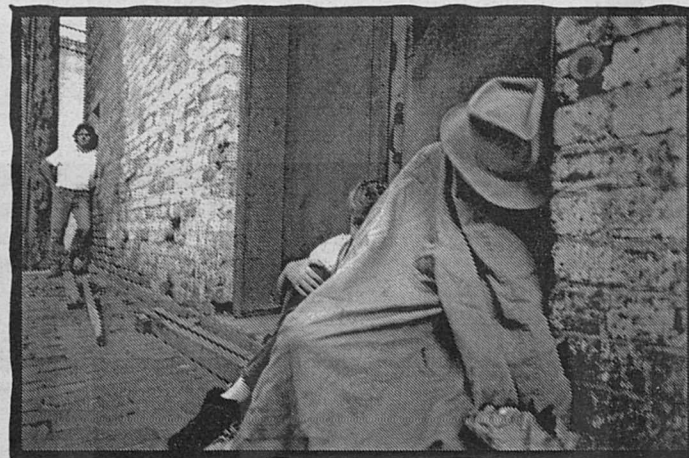
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3CM RECORD REVIEWS

TERRY ALLEN & THE PANHANDLE MYSTERY BAND SMOKIN' THE DUMMY/BLOODLINES

(Sugar Hill, CD)

Both these albums have, of course, long been available, or at least as available as any of Allen's albums, which he himself says were "Not so much released as snuck out," separately on LP and CD from his own label, Fate, **Dummy** originally released in 1980, **Bloodlines** in 1983, but they've not simply put together in one convenient package, both having been extensively remastered for this release, of particular benefit to **Dummy**, which Allen told me was made on "very fucked-up equipment." The downside is that two of the songs on **Dummy**, *Cocaine Cowboy* and *Cajun Roll*, had to be cut to get the whole package to clock in at 77 minutes. However, that still leaves, their original mixes untouched, a whole bunch of Allen's best songs, *The Heart Of California*, *Whatever Happened To Jesus (And Maybellene)?*, *Helena Montana*, *Texas Tears*, *Red Bird*, *The Lubbock Tornado (I Don't Know)*, *Gimme A Ride To Heaven Boy*, *Cantina Carlotta* (though personally I prefer the **Juarez** version), *There Ought To Be A Law Against Sunny Southern California*. And, of course, the credits are still a Who's Who of West Texas musicians, featuring Lloyd, Kenny, Donny and LaTronda Maines, Richard Bowden, Jesse Taylor, Joe Ely, Ponty Bone, Don Caldwell and Jo Harvey Allen, among others. Allen has been a major figure in my personal pantheon for so long that I tend to think that trying to persuade people, 3CM readers in particular, of his extraordinary talent, intelligence and significance is redundant—anyone who hasn't got it by now, isn't going to, regardless of anything I may say—but if by some misfortune you haven't discovered him yet, or not got round to him, do yourself a monster favor, though, come to think, you might want to start with **Lubbock (On Everything)**, his chef d'oeuvre. Still, if I was ever called on to explain 3CM's motto, this would do just as well as an example of Allen's unfailing ability to score ten out of ten on art and grit. One thing that's always puzzled me is that other writers seem invariably to categorize Allen's music as 'country,' John T Davis once going as far as to describe it as "boot-scootin,'" when it seems perfectly obvious to me that Allen is sui generis, and that to put any label on him, except perhaps 'West Texas,' is sloppy and misleading. JC

GENE VINCENT & HIS BLUE CAPS THE SCREAMING END; THE BEST OF . . .

(Razor & Tie, CD)

Couple of months ago, I was talking about Skizmatic's very likeable tribute album, but this compilation reminds one that Vincent and Cliff Gallup were not only incomparable, but inimitable. Proudly proclaiming "Contains Only Original Mixes," this does include *Woman Love* and *Pink Cadillac*, along with *Be Bop-A-Lula*, *Race With The Devil*, *Who Slapped John*, *Jump Back*, *Honey*, *Jump Back*, *Bluejean Bop*, *Bop Street*, *Jumps*, *Giggles & Shouts*, *Crazy Legs*, *Cat Man*, *Cruisin*, *Hold Me*, *Hug Me*, *Rock Me*, *B-I-Bickey-Bi*, *Bo-Bo-Go*, *Red Blue Jeans & A Ponytail* and *You Told A Fib*, all recorded in Nashville in 1956 by the original Blue Caps, with Gallup, of course, on lead guitar and 15 year old drummer Dickie Harrell. The 20 tracks are topped off with Bobby Darin's *Wear My Ring*, *Lotta Lovin'* and *Dance To The Bop*, cut at the Capitol Tower, Hollywood, in 1957 with completely different Blue Caps, including Johnny Meeks on lead, Buck Owens on rhythm guitar. In his liner notes, Bob Hyde quite rightly unloads on the staggering fact that Vincent still isn't in the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, which, when you look at the dorks they are inducting, tells you everything you need to know about those wankers in Cleveland. However, though I'm sure Hyde's right when he says that "99 of 100 rock fans have never heard of Gene Vincent, which is a sad tribute to revisionist history," this, and the Skizmatic album, do at least go to show that the other one in a 100 will never forget sweet Gene Vincent, the quintessential rock & roller. JC

LARRY WILSON & THE SPACEHEATERS ENJOY THE RIDE

(Self-released CD)

When Joe Ely came back to England with his mid-80s lineup, British audiences made it very clear that David Grissom was not an acceptable substitute for Jesse Taylor, and in a fascinating parallel, an Italian journalist, and longtime supporter of Jimmy LaFave, told me recently that Italian audiences just don't like LaFave as much without Larry Wilson. However, though I know LaFave gets lobbied pretty constantly by hardcore fans, and Wilson has cleaned up the problems that, to be fair, did make him very erratic and earned him the elbow, I can't see that wonderful combination ever being reunited. The problem for LaFave is that his guitarists have to live up to the standards Wilson set when he was on, and Night Tribe was just about as good as it gets; the greater problem for Wilson is that his vocals and songwriting have to live up to LaFave's. Though his blues-rock album has a track dedicated to Stevie Ray Vaughan, it's more an attempt to establish himself as a singer and songwriter than a guitar workout, but though his vocals, helped by atmospheric production, are at least adequate and the songs, seven of his own, three cowrites with Michael Elwood, of which *Red Dirt Speed Shot* is very Elwood, plus covers of Willie Dixon & Howlin' Wolf's *Howlin' For My Baby* and Bob Childers' *Enjoy The Ride*, are solid enough, this would come across as a sideman project, albeit a distinctly superior and intelligent one, but for the idiosyncratic *Blue Feeling*, which firmly dispels any nagging suspicion that Wilson needs LaFave even more than LaFave needs him. JC

FRANKIE McWHORTER THE RANCH DANCE FIDDLE

(Fiel Publications, CD)

Now 65, McWhorter is the genuine article, a working Panhandle cowboy who started out on the famous JA Ranch, founded by Charlie Goodnight, and is foreman of the 17 section Malouf Abraham Ranch, near Lipscomb. Raised in a homegrown music tradition, before electricity came to the High Plains—"We had a radio, but we only played it for the news to keep from running down the batteries"—he was encouraged to take up the fiddle by the JA's wagon boss, studied under Eck Robertson himself, and has spent his life seeking out and learning old tunes. In 1996, McWhorter and Lanny Fiel, a Lubbock DJ and fiddler who's produced several albums of traditional material, notably with leading cowboy poet Buck Ramsey, were awarded a Texas Folklife Resources Master/Apprentice grant, of which this is the tangible fruit. With a band that includes three former Texas Playboys, Tommy Allsup, who also played with Buddy Holly, on guitars and bass, Curley Hollingsworth piano, and Leon Rausch vocals, plus Tommy Morrell dobro, Larry McWhorter clarinet and Fiel mandolin and flat pick guitar, McWhorter glides magisterially through 20 tunes that may well strike a primordial chord of recognition in many. Clearly bearing signs of its passage from the British Isles to the Panhandle via the Appalachians and the South, McWhorter's music, while far from simplistic, has the elemental simplicity, purity and grace of an artifact that perfectly matches form and function—few of the tunes are longer than three minutes, several less than two. You don't see the word 'roots' much in these pages, because I think the weasels have overused and abused the concept, but this truly is roots music, McWhorter a living link with Texas history and tradition. JC

STEVE RILEY & THE MAMOU PLAYBOYS FRIDAY AT LAST JO-EL SONNIER • CAJUN PRIDE

(Swallow, CD/Rounder, CD)

Riley's move to Swallow, after four splendid albums on Rounder, seems, unless I'm being bullshitted, which is, of course, quite possible, less to do with the label's ability to sell the country's leading young Cajun band than with Riley's own desire to work with the Louisiana company up the road that specializes in the music—certainly plausible, if it was up to me, Swallow would be given a monopoly on contemporary Cajun (and Arhoolie on historic). Cut in the La Louisianne studio, while lacking the fiery energy of **Live!**, for which, come to think **Friday At Last** would have been a better title, the Mamou Playboys being very much a dancehall act, this mellow exploration of their roots still reaffirms their standing at the forefront. Opening with Riley's thematic *Mamou Playboys Special*, whose very title testifies to the band's affinity to tradition, the 17 tracks include Dennis McGee's *Adieu Rosa*, Wayne Perry's *Wayne Perry Blues*, taken from a 1934 Lomax field recording, Dewey Balfa's *Enterre Moi Pas* and *La Valse Du Bombacheur*, Sidney Brown's *Traveler Playboys Special* which Riley performs solo, as he does *La Valse Que J'Aime*, a Joe Falcon and Cleoma Breaux song, a Lawrence Walker medley, Canray Fontenot's *Allons Danser* and *Bee De La Manche* and Aldus Roger's *Comment Je Vas Faire*, ending with fiddler David Greely's title track, *Vendredi Enfin*. Outstanding even in this company is Camay Doucet's *C'Est Tout Fini*.

◆ Sonnier started recording when he was 13 (one of his early labels in fact being Swallow) and nearly 40 years later, his career can best be described as checkered. Three major labels, Mercury, RCA and Liberty, tried to make the 'Cajun Valentino' a star, the Cajun element diminishing with each signing, but, rather amazingly he seems to have come out of the south end of the beast with his integrity intact. Featuring Michael and David Doucet, veteran fiddler Tony Thibodeaux, Filé pianist David Egan and Mamou Playboy bassman Peter Schwarz, and recorded at Dockyard Studios in Maurice, this seems fairly obviously intended as an 'I'm Back' coda to his highly regarded **Cajun Life** and **Cajun Roots**. Like Riley, Sonnier leans heavily on traditional material, *Lake Arthur Special*, *Lawtell Two Step*, *La Valse De Grand Mamou*, Nathan Abshire's *Pine Grove Blues* and *French Blues*, Lawrence Walker's *Mamou Two Step* and *Midnight Waltz*, Aldus Roger's *Step It Fast*, along with his own *Juste Une Affaire* and *Jolie Fille* and a rather picayune French version of *Johnny B Goode*. Sonnier's high spirited accordion playing and vocals are as impressive and infectious as ever, but the standout tracks, *Pine Grove Blues*, *Midnight Waltz* and *Step It Fast* owe much to the distinctively Louisiana style pedal steel of Junior Martin, an original member of Lawrence Walker's Wandering Aces. JC

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3CM RECORD REVIEWS

IN THE COUNTRY OF COUNTRY PEOPLE AND PLACES IN AMERICAN MUSIC

(Compass, CD)

So far I haven't been able to blag a copy of Nicholas Dawidoff's book of the same title, to which this CD is an audio companion, but having seen what he himself selected to exemplify the performers he covers, I'm redoubling my efforts. Jimmie Rodgers; *TB Blues*, The Carter Family; *Motherless Children*, Kitty Wells; *It Wasn't God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels*, Patsy Cline; *I Fall To Pieces*, Bill Monroe; *I'm On My Way To The Old Home*, Stanley Brothers; *The Fields Have Turned Brown*, Flatt & Scruggs; *Flint Hill Special*, Louvin Brothers; *When I Stop Dreaming*, Doc Watson; *Blue Railroad Train*, Johnny Cash; *Big River*, George Jones; *He Stopped Loving Her Today*, Chet Atkins; *A Taste Of Honey*, Rose Maddox; *Sally Let Your Bangs Hang Down*, Buck Owens; *Excuse Me (I Think I've Got A Heartache)*, Merle Haggard; *I Take A Lot Of Pride In What I Am*, Iris DeMent; *Easy's Gettin' Harder Every Day*, The Flatlanders; *You've Never Seen Me Cry*, Emmylou Harris; *Orphan Girl*. When you've only got so many pages, and a mere 18 tracks, to play with, a classicist approach to country music history is almost inevitable—some people, and sub-genres, just have to be represented (Hank Williams, in case you're wondering why he isn't on this, is never available for compilations), but the inclusion of The Flatlanders, and a chapter on Jimmie Dale Gilmore in the book, not to mention the pointed selection of DeMent and Harris in preference to lightweight but better selling contemporary 'stars,' make it obvious that Dawidoff really knows his stuff. Most books on country music might as well have been dictated by major label flacks, but simply on the strength of this album, I may have to go mad and actually buy a copy of Dawidoff's.

JC

KAREN ABRAHAMS • STILL FEELING BLUE

(Mozo, CD)

From Taft, Texas, Abrahams was gone for many years, spent mostly in Florida, where she racked up awards as a Bluegrass, Country and Blues performer, and her diverse taste is reflected in her choice of versatile musicians. Among the players are Austin Lounge Lizards Tom Pittman, Richard Bowden and Boo Resnick, along with Cornell Hurdsmen Paul Skelton and Bobby Snell and their former colleague Terry Kirkendall, plus Mike Landschoot, Mike Kearney, Gene Elders, Ivan Brown, Ron Erwin, Mike Maddux and Stan Smith, who follow her clear, powerful voice unerringly through her equally eclectic material. Backing up her growing reputation as a strong and engaging live performer, five of the 12 tracks, including Gram Parsons' *Brass Buttons*, Uppity Blues Woman Gay Adegbola's *Middle Aged Blues*, Johnny Cash's *Big River* and Townes Van Zandt's *White Freightliner*, are taken from a KUT Live Set performance, while the originals *I Miss Texas* and *Chilipin Creek*, Parsons' title track, the Nashville *I'm Here To Tell You* and Helen Phillips' *Texas Blues* were cut at Flashpoint, while *Dirty Blues* was brought back with her from Florida. Gutsy, down to earth, been round the block roots music.

JC

GILES OAKLEY THE DEVIL'S MUSIC: A HISTORY OF THE BLUES

(Da Capo, paperback)

First published in 1976, as a companion to a gripping five part BBC documentary of the same title that Oakley co-produced, this is a reprint of the 2nd (1983) edition, with an added afterword, of one of the classics of blues literature, a probing and very readable account that balances sociological analysis of the music's origins and development with striking anecdotal material from his many interviews. Oakley is, of course, English, as is Frank Scott, supervisor of the *Down Home Guide To The Blues* that I cited in last month's editorial, which I feel I ought to mention because, apart from one reference to "grandstanding by white bands on the make, hogging the limelight," he simply ignores white blues as if it wasn't there and never existed. Even in his rather gloomy afterword, the only new artists he introduces are Robert Cray and Keb'Mo. Oakley is even dubious about middle class white dominated 'heritage' organizations and events, clearly approving far more of Willie Dixon's grassroots Blues Heaven operation (though he does give Bill Clinton, as Governor of Arkansas, credit for ramrodding the creation of the Delta Cultural Center in Helena). Without going so far as to say all Britons take one side, all Americans the other, on the question of whether or not white blues constitute cultural imperialism, a rip-off of one of the most dramatic markers of black identity, there does seem a clear imbalance between. For example, when Eric Clapton vented his long rumored racism in public, the infamous 'Powell is right' speech, endorsing a nationalist politician's plan to send West Indians back where they came from, he lost his British audience overnight, but the incident seems either unknown or discounted in America.

JC

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THE BACKSLIDERS THROWIN' ROCKS AT THE MOON

(Mammoth, CD)

From the confident three guitar, three chord twang of *My Baby's Gone*, you know you're in good hands here, but as the 11 tracks unfold it becomes clear that this quintet from Raleigh, North Carolina, has something very special going for it. By and large, I rather despise the current crop of Gram Parsons influenced bands, but The Backsliders, apart from writing much better songs, seem not so much influenced by Parsons as to be actually coming from the same place. Indeed, Chip Robinson often sounds uncannily like Parsons. Marrying his sensitivity and loyalty to classic country themes with the harder rock & roll edge of John Hiatt, Tom Waits and Steve Earle, Robinson and guitarist Steve Howell cowrote all but one of the bluecollar poems which give their group a tremendous range, from the subdued, stately, and very Parsonesque *Crazy Wind* to flatout rockers like the title track and *Paper Doll World*. With wellcrafted old-fashioned country nods to Webb Pierce (*Lonesome Teardrops*), Buck Owens (*If You Talk To My Baby*) and George Jones (the tremendous, accordion flavored, honky tonk barfly biography *Broken Wings*), the album's climax is probably the eloquent, elegiac *Last Train*. The atmospheric hillbilly death ballad *Hey Sheriff* is neatly balanced by the white trash humor of *If I Was King Of The World* ("I'd order you to be my girl, I'd even marry you, hell, I'd get a job and keep it too") and the raucous self-mockery of *Cowboy Boots*, by Dallas country legend Donnie Ray Ford. Well produced by Pete Anderson, the album's appeal is summarized by the liner photo of a sign reading 'Ugly But Honest.' These sure ain't purty boys, in fact from the publicity shots, you wouldn't want to run into them down a dark alley, but their songs and playing stomp the living crap out of every current Nashville group, if you know who I mean, and I think you do.

JC

JEFF HUGHES • CHAPARRAL

(Boar's Nest, CD)

Had you told me, when I first came to Austin in 1988, or anyone else following the local country scene, that it'd be almost ten years before Jeff Hughes would come out with an album, you would have met with polite incredulity, if not derisive laughter. At that time Hughes, and Chaparral, the band he pays tribute to in his album title, had just got started, but his vocals and songwriting clearly established him as a comer. Indeed, by 1992, overtaking Willie Nelson and Asleep At The Wheel, Chaparral was voted #1 Country Band in the *Chronicle* poll. So what happened? In a nutshell, Hughes took off for Nashville with visions of record and publishing contracts in front of him and a bunch of pissed-off Austin musicians behind him. The wrong man in the wrong place at the wrong time, he eventually returned, if not sadder, certainly wiser, to do what he should have done five years ago, get a goddamned record out. Unfortunately he may have made his move too late. Recently, a *Chronicle* writer described Hughes as the catalyst of what he dubbed "the Chaparral generation" of honky tonk purists, but while he was spinning his wheels in Nashville, that generation was taking care of business in the clubs and studios, and, for all his album's many charms, Hughes' music, inhabiting a grey area between mainstream and alternative country, now sounds somewhat passé. Hughes is still one of the best country singers in Austin, and his backing, Mike Hardwick, who also produced, rhythm, baritone and steel guitars, Casper Rawls, John Inmon and Chris Miller guitars, Michael Ramos Hammond B3, John Ludwick bass, Merel Brigante drums, with Kelly Willis and Bruce Robison harmonizing, continues the Chaparral tradition of hot musicians, but the ten tracks all have the bright-eyed sound of songs that hope to grow up to be hits.

JC

RED MEAT • MEET RED MEAT

(Ranchero, CD)

Not messing with majors, most of the time I deal with people who have a personal, not merely financial, investment in their records, and one of the benefits is that amazingly often they're not just blowing smoke in their press releases. A case in point is Ranchero's Owen Bly saying (for better or worse) Red Meat "don't just claim the influences of Buck Owens, the Stanley Brothers and George Jones; you can actually hear those influences." Based in San Francisco, the core of the six piece band, Scott Young vocals, guitar, fiddle, and Smelley Kelley "vocal artistry," who were previously in an acapella group the Genuine Diamelles, and Wholesome Jill Olson bass and vocals, are originally heartlanders from Iowa, other members are from Oklahoma and Nebraska, and they handle honky tonk with an easy familiarity, in Ron Bleetstein's happy phrase, "like a '57 Ford fueled with Jack Daniels." Young wrote all 12 songs and while he has a fine touch with standard themes, as in *14 Hours From Tulsa*, *Highway Of Heartaches* and *One Glass At A Time*, it's the wry humor of *Nashville Fantasy*, *Inner Redneck* ("I've got to get in touch with the redneck inside me") and the witty observations of *Phone Tag* and *12 Inch 3 Speed Oscillating Fan* that are immediately endearing. A very stylish combo—apart from anything else, the artwork is outstanding.

JC

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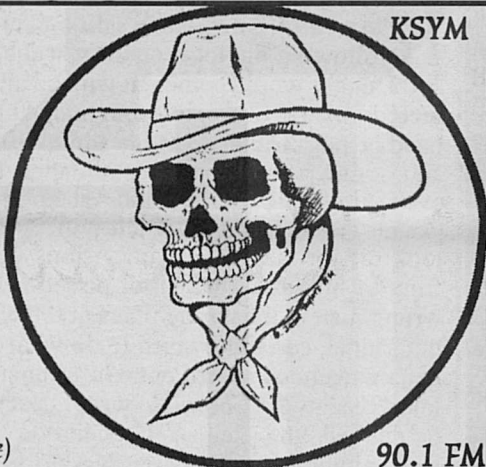
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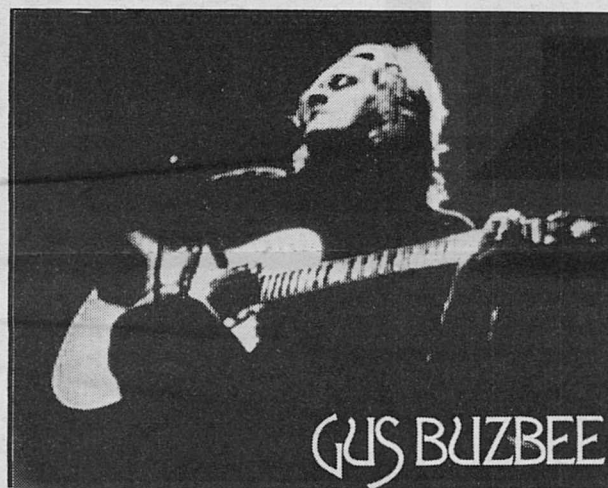
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Don Williams • 1939 • Floydada, TX
Jesse Dayton • 1966 • Beaumont, TX
Bob Dunn † 1971
28th **T-Bone Walker** • 1910 • Linden, TX
Sonny Burgess • 1931 • Newport, AR
John Fogerty • 1945 • Berkeley, CA
Don McCalister Jr • 1955 • Ventura, CA
29th **Danny Young** • 1941 • Defiance, OH
30th **Johnny Gimble** • 1926 • Tyler, TX
Bill Carter • 1950 • RI
Dooley Wilson † 1953
Lil Son Jackson † 1976
31st **Lydia Mendoza** • 1916 • Houston, TX
Augie Meyers • 1940 • San Antonio, TX
Johnny Paycheck • 1941 • Greenfield, OH



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