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#88/177 MAY 2004



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amy farris **ANYWAY**



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Though this Austin TX native's enviable career has encompassed violin duties for everyone from RAY PRICE to BRIAN WILSON, AMY FARRIS truly shines on her solo debut, *Anyway*. With nods to classic Brill Building pop, Patsy Cline-era torch songs, western swing and Southern California cosmic country, *Anyway* presents a unique new voice with a profound sense of history.

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FREEFORM AMERICAN ROOTS #57

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#1 Cornell Hurd Band: Cen-Tex Serenade

- (Behemoth) *DN/*EW/*KD/*LB/*NA/*RJ/*RR/*SH/*TS
- 2 Buckskin Stallion: Blue Ribbon Buzz (Big Bender) *HT/*MB/*ND/*RH/*TF
 - 3 Grey DeLisle: The Graceful Ghost (Sugar Hill) *BL/*JB/*S&D/*ST
 - 4 Loretta Lynn: Van Lear Rose (Interscope) *JZ/*MT/*MY/*PT/*SJ
 - 5 Slaid Cleaves: Wishbones (Philo) *BF/*MM/*TT
 - 6 Two Dollar Pistols: Hands Up! (Yep Roc) *DL/*DWT/*SG
 - 7 Eliza Gilkyson: Land Of Milk And Honey (Red House) *AA/*TA/*WR
 - 8 James McMurtry: Live In Aught-Three (Compadre) *BP/*LW/*RA
 - 9 Graham Parker: Your Country (Bloodshot) *JS/*JT/*RC
 - 10 Tom Russell: Indians Cowboys Horses Dogs (Hightone) *BW/*MR
 - 11 BR5-49: Tangled In The Pines (Dualtone) *RMS
 - 12 Gurf Morlix: Cut 'N Shoot (Blue Corn) *BR/*CP/*DF
 - 13 Jon Langford: All The Fame Of Lofty Deeds (Bloodshot) *TJ/*TW
 - 14 Moot Davis (Little Dog) *KF/*TG
 - 15= Blackie & The Rodeo Kings: Bark (True North) *AB
Amy Farris: Anyway (Yep Roc) *BC/*MDT
 - 16 Laurie Lewis & Tom Rozum: Guest House (HighTone) *DJ
 - 17= James Hand: Live at the Saxon Pub (Knight Klub) *JH
Ollabelle (DMZ/Sony)
 - 18 Alecia Nugent (Rounder) *CL/*MA
 - 19 Jon Rauhouse: Steel Guitar Rodeo (Bloodshot) *FM
 - 20 The Woodyys: Teardrops & Diamonds (Dynamike) *GS
 - 21 Sand Sheff: Free On This Mountain (Upheaval Dome) *DB/*JCS
 - 22= Al Anderson: After Hours (self) *JF/*T&L
The Mammals: Rock that Babe (Signature Sounds) *R&H
 - 23= Angel Dean & Sue Garner: Pot Liquor (Diesel Only) *PP
Michael Fracasso: A Pocketful Of Rain (Texas Music Group) *FW
 - 24= Eric Hisaw Band: Another Great Dream Of You (self) *DA
Anne McCue: Roll (Messenger) *DWB
Christine Mims: Perfect For A Rainy Day (Yellow Rose)
 - 25 Terry Allen: Juarez (Sugar Hill) *GC
 - 26= Asylum Street Spankers: Mercurial (Sparks A Lot) *3RC
Jimmy Fautheree: I Found The Doorknob (Eccofonic) *RS
Allison Moorer: The Duel (Sugar Hill) *BS
 - 27= Jolie Holland: Escondida (Anti) *UC
The Subdudes: Miracle Mule (Back Porch) *KR
 - 28= Norman & Nancy Blake: Morning Glory Ramblers (Dualtone) *AR
The Blasters: Going Home Live (Shout Factory) *KC
Anny Celsi: Little Black Dress & Other Stories (Ragazza) *TO
Steve Kaufman: Stylin' (Sleeping Bear) *EB
Leftover Salmon (Compendia) *MF
Kieran Kane & Kevin Welch: You Can't Save Everybody (Dead Reckoning) *KM
Jennifer Whiteley: Hometown (Black Hen) *FS
 - 26= Leti De La Vega: Songs Of The De La Vega Family (Deep South) *QB
Dollar Store (Bloodshot) *BB
Grizzly: Everything But The Smile (self) *JE
Steve James & Del Rey: Tonight (Hobemian) *SC
John & The Sisters (Northern Blue) *DT
Mary Lou Lord: Baby Blue (Rubric) *SR
Kate Maki: Confusion Unlimited (self) *TH
Meat Purveyors: Beans n' Sweepins (Gravy Queen) *HG
Peter, Paul & Mary: In These Times (Rhino) *SMJ
Dave Sheriff: All Alone In Limburg (Starsound) *RW
Tangle Eye's Alan Lomax's Southern Journey Remixed (Zoe) *JW
The Wailin' Jennys: 40 Days (Jericho Beach) *JR



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MICK GREEN 1944-?



You're on a TV quiz show and you're asked, "Who is the greatest British rock & roll guitarist?" I guarantee that, apart from one subscriber in Holland, just about everybody who reads this would have lost out on that Hawaiian vacation, because the correct answer is Mick Green.

Mick who? The problem here is that the British Invasion permanently warped perspectives on British rock & roll, even in Britain itself. The lead guitarists in successful groups, Harrison, Richard, Clapton, Townsend, Page, Beck, et al, became household names, while other, often far better, players were doomed to obscurity. In fact, there are several answers to the question above that would have been an improvement on any of the British Invasion guitarists you picked, Alan Caddy, Joe Moretti, Hank Marvin, Joe Brown, Big Jim Sullivan and Wilko Johnson, just to name the most obvious (well, obvious to me, and Paul in Holland).

However, the self-effacing Green was, and still is, The Man, the best, most influential and, more to the point, balls out rockin' guitar player ever to come out of England. Where other groups had lead and rhythm guitarists, Green developed a complex and revolutionary technique that combined both roles to produce the most explosive, exciting and muscular playing this side of Link Wray. Come to think, they're the only two players for whom I'll even consider breaking out my air guitar.

Green joined Johnny Kidd & The Pirates in 1962, and while he didn't actually play on the original release of the song with which he's always associated, *Shakin' All Over* (that was Moretti), he carved his name indelibly on British rock & roll with his aggressive work on *I'll Never Get Over You*, which later made him a major influence on garage rock and punk. After stints with Billy J Kramer and Cliff Bennett, he spent seven low profile years with Engelbert Humperdinck in Las Vegas. Then, in 1976, the 'classic' Pirates lineup, Green, Frank Farley (drums) and Johnny Spence (bass), who grew up together in the same block of flats in Wimbledon, reformed for a one-off reunion. I didn't even have to fight to cover it. I can't remember what the other guys at *Time Out* were big on back then, but it sure wasn't an early 60s rock & roll band whose leader had been dead for ten years. That gig, up there in my all time greatest memories, got The Pirates a Warner Brothers recording contract, making the reunion semi-permanent.

In 1977, The Pirates released the incredible **Out Of Their Skulls**, but this is not going to be a review because shortly after hearing that Green had had a cardiac arrest, which is why I'm running this (flowers while he's living), I also learned that Westside's double CD, with the 39 bonus tracks, has been deleted, which threw me into panic mode because I only have the original LP, but I called Hep Cat and they had one copy left. It may not have been the last in the entire continental United States, or the world, but good luck finding another.

Last February, Green collapsed while on stage in Auckland, New Zealand, but Bryan Ferry's Kiwi fans included two doctors who took care of him until he got to a hospital. He's since had heart bypass surgery. Over the last 30 years, he's been a guitarist of choice for Paul McCartney, Van Morrison, Bryan Ferry, Robert Plant, and Peter Green, but while you can hear some great picking on their albums, home base is The Pirates, the greatest rock & roll band in the world. The proto-power trio is on hold for a while, but the good news is that he should be back in action soon with more ferocious playing (and bad jokes). I don't do idols or guitar heroes, but as close as I've ever got is Mick Green (oh, and Link Wray).

JC



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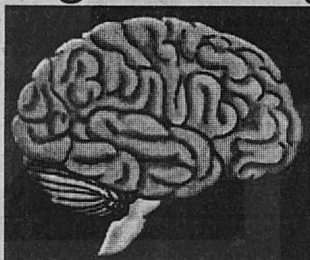


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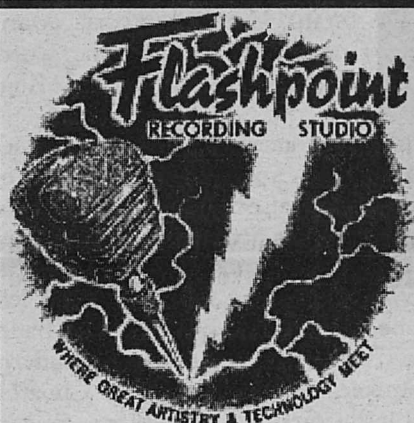
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DALE KEYS

(self ****)

Back when America was losing another war it shouldn't have been fighting in the first place, we Europeans didn't hate Americans, we hated Amerika, and equally I loathe Nashville but not (all) Nashvillians, because there are some good folks there. More to the point, good and consequential folks, I mean, go out to a show in Austin and you might meet some Austin musicians and who gives a shit? Go out in Nashville and, as Keys did, you can meet and make friends with Barry & Holly Tashian, who produced his debut, David Olney, who contributed a liner note, and Mary Gauthier, who both inspired his move from Boise to Nashville and cowrote *Empty Spaces* with him. With the Tashians making the calls, the backings, featuring Sam Bush mandolin, Lloyd Green pedal steel and Richard Bennett guitar, are, of course, immaculate, but it's very much Keys' show. Straddling Americana and honkytonk, his slow and easy delivery draws you in to his songs, then the words hold you. Well, most of the time. Of the 12 originals (plus a fine version of Tashian's *I'm Just Waitin'*), some are outstanding, notably *I Knew I'd Be Singing This Song*, and others are very strong, but the perky *He's My Dog* is simply a mistake, while *Tucson Too Soon* and *Old Kentucky Home* (? I thought Boise was in Idaho) sound like Songwriting 101 truckdriving and nostalgia assignments. Not perfect, but far from a curate's egg. I'm not exactly sure why, maybe something to do with timing and phrasing, but Keys sometimes reminds me of Jimmie Dale Gilmore, or, more accurately, a cross between Gilmore and John Lilly. JC

MARSHALL CHAPMAN GOODBYE, LITTLE ROCK AND ROLLER

(St Martin's Press ****)

Grabbed by Chapman's song *Leaving Loachapoka*, on the companion CD to the Summer 2003 *Oxford American*, which profiled her, I followed up on this new discovery and found this book. The 12 chapters, each about one of the songs on the CD that comes with it, is written in a conversational style, as if one were sitting around the table listening to her talk about her life, and how she came to write each of them. Raised a debutante in Spartanburg, SC, where her father was a mill owner she grew up more interested in rock & roll than high society. Little sidebars and detours, rather than seeming to be random thoughts, actually hold together and fill out the stories—most good ones about creativity aren't linear and it's a tribute to her ability that she's able to do this and have it all hang together. Songs she talks about, including *Texas Is Everywhere*, *Betty's Bein' Bad*, the title track and *Call The Lamas!*, about coming to terms with the death of her brother, were written at different times in her life so we get to see her change and grow. We also get a glimpse into a life in music that has crossed paths with many great people. Then of course there's the CD. It'd be easy to use all the standard rock critics terms like post-modern and what have you and talk about how I hear the influences and touches of one or another well known artist but I don't think that does her justice. She's unique and whether she's playing quietly and semi-acoustically as on the title track, recorded in a women's prison, or rocking out, it's all good stuff. My only complaint is that I didn't find her earlier and that she doesn't seem to tour. Bill Wagman

TOM VICSON • FAVORITES

(self ****.5)

Stepping out from his main gig, lead guitarist with the Orange County music award winning (Best Roots Band 2003) James Theroux Band, Vicson presents twelve originals of which he says, "Some I perform nightly and others have never been heard beyond my back porch." Telling the difference can be easy, the opening *The Joke's On Me* could find a place of honor in any honky tonk band's repertoire, while *Lucky Fishin' Hat* may well appeal to a specialized audience but don't do much for me, though Vicson's extended fishing metaphors on *Your Bait Is Gone* work OK. *Everyone Cries* is a very well done British Invasion pastiche, *Map Of Love* is a rock solid country song but I haven't a clue what *Lookin' At Linoleum* is even about. With members of his Sidewinder Band in support, including Gary Brandin on pedal steel and Dobro, Vicson's songs are a bit erratic, but his picking is first class. Prominent in the credits is a list of guitars, so I called Jim Stringer and read them off and half way through he was impressed, "Where does this guy live? I've been looking for one of those for years." More to the point, Vicson knows what he's doing with them. JC

VA • COUNTRY CROONERS

(Scena ****)

You may not have heard of this one because Scena put it out before hiring a publicist to push its *Live Recordings From The Louisiana Hayride* series (see Johnny Horton/George Jones review). No kidding with the title, Jim Reeves (*Am I Losing You, Have I Told You Lately*), Geroge Morgan (*Candy Kisses*), Jim Ed Brown (*Crystal Chandeliers, Jimmy Brown, Scarlet Ribbons*), Nat Stuckey (*Sweet Dreams Of You*), George Jones (*Walk Through This World With Me, She Thinks I Still Care*), Slim Whitman (*I Remember You, The Twelfth Of Never, Indian Love Call*), Johnny Horton (*Whispering Pines*), Don Gibson (*I Can't Stop Loving You*), Faron Young (*The Shrine Of St Cecilia*), but these live versions, at the Louisiana Hayride (1958-68), are generally less syrupy than the commercial ones. Actually, some of them are really cool. JC

ACCORDION CONJUNTO CHAMPS CAJUN CHAMPS CLIFTON CHENIER • SINGS THE BLUES ISIDRO LOPEZ • 15 ORIGINAL HITS

(Arhoolie)

Freely admitting that there are many Bear Family box sets I lust after, I do get impatient with the label's approach, every fart, burp, wrong note and miscue ever caught on tape immortalized on CD. Outtakes and retakes can lose their appeal real fast. Still, a good argument for including everything is that cherry picking archive material is an art at which few compilers excel. One of them is Chris Strachwitz; if he says this is the good stuff, I'm going to take his word for it—as a gatekeeper, he's never, in my experience, let a dud track slip by yet.

This is kind of useful in some of the areas in which Arhoolie excels. Whether they'd be commercially viable, Beginner's Guides to Conjunto, Cajun and Zydeco would sure be handy because these are not genres that are easy to access from the outside. There are some books on Cajun and Zydeco, but nothing really helpful to anyone who gets interested in Conjunto, so the fallback is sampler albums. Actually, as Benjamin Serrato of Jet Set Zydeco once remarked to me, in these genres, compilations are, as a general rule, always a better bet than single artist albums.

When it comes to Conjunto, Arhoolie is a dominant force, rivalled only by Hacienda, and even then unsurpassed in its historical holdings. **Accordion Conjunto Champs** (****) scores on two fronts, as an overview of Conjunto history and development, from Narciso Martinez to Steve Jordan, and also, with much long out of print material, as a solid addition to a Conjunto collection. 13 of the 21 tracks were culled from previous Arhoolie CDs, the rest coming from Arhoolie LPs and tapes and Discos Ideal, Falcon and Rio singles. The lineup also includes Pedro Ayala, Paulino Bernal, Juan Lopez, Salvador Torres-Garcia (Los Pavos Reales), Fred Zimmerle, Don Santiago, Flaco and Santiago Jr Jimenez, Pedro Ybarra, Tony De La Rosa, Eugenio Abrego (Los Alegres De Teran), Valerio Longoria, Mario Montes (Los Donneños) and Leandro Guerrero (Conjunto Alamo), in other words pretty much every significant and influential Conjunto accordionist except Mingo Saldivar.

I keep meaning to find out whether Scott Billington quit or Rounder just decided to pack up and leave Louisiana, either way Arhoolie is now the major Cajun and Zydeco player aside from Floyd Soileau's Swallow and Maison De Soul labels. To be honest, I'm on much shakier ground here, but again, with Strachwitz as editor and "suggestions from Michael Doucet," I have to figure that **Cajun Champs** (****) is a good 'un, though all 22 tracks come from other Arhoolie CDs, making it less interesting to committed aficionados. The lineup here is Savoy-Doucet Cajun Band, Chuck Guillory & Papa Cairo, Wade Fruge, Cheese Read, Joe Falcon, Luderin Darbone's Hackberry Ramblers, Lawrence Walker, DL Menard, Harry Choates, Cyp & Adam Landreneau, isom Fontenot, Octa Clark, Floyd Leblanc, Breaux Brothers, Dewey Balfa, Austin Pitre, Nathan Abshire, and The Savoy Family Band, so plenty of Cajun greats.

How typical it is I have no way of knowing, but not so long ago the San Antonio Blues Society was roiled by a dispute over whether Zydeco is blues, or, more accurately, whether the organization should support Zydeco acts and include them in its events. My advice to the pro-Zydeco camp is to take this album to the exclusionists and say, "Listen to this, you dumb fucks." When The King of Zydeco **Sings The Blues** (****.5), he doesn't leave much room for argument. Recorded in Houston in 1969, these 12 tracks include Fats Domino's *Rosemary*, Memphis Minnie's *Me And My Chauffeur Blues*, Richard Jones' *Trouble In Mind*, Glenn Miller's *In The Mood*, and Big Maceo Merriweather's *Worried Life Blues*, along with originals and Chenier's variants on traditional blues. Note that this is a reissue of the album released on LP at various times by Prophecy, Home Cooking and Arhoolie, not the out of print Arhoolie CD of the same title, which also included seven tracks recorded in new Orleans in 1977.

Alto sax player and bandleader Isidro Lopez's **15 Original Hits** (****) brings together two of the great men of Tejano music, though with Discos Ideal's Armando Marroquin one should much further because he was incomparably the greatest Texas music man, as label executive, A&R man and producer, of all time, regardless of genre (or ethnicity). Lopez, known as 'El Indio' (his mother was a full blood Mescalero Apache), learned to play saxophone in high school (Bishop, TX) and got his first gig in the early 50s with Narciso Martinez before becoming a Discos Ideal session player. He was also writing songs and when the singer failed to show up at a session, Marroquin suggested that, as they were supposed to recording some of Lopez's songs, he should sing them. Afterwards, he told Lopez, "forget the other singers, you record from now on." He started currying singles under his own name and most of them were best sellers. These 15 date from 1954 to 1961, including rancheras, boleros, a polka and rock & roll. While Beto Villa is known as the 'father' of Orquesta music, Lopez, though also recording with orquestas ranging from seven to 15 members, featuring some of the best Tejano musicians of the day, including Henry Cuesta, Joe Gallardo and Max Bernal, also used accordion conjuntos, bolero combos and mariachis, and thus laid the groundwork for a Tejano music that drew on all these traditions. JC

You Know This Guy

Chances are you've seen the name Gurf Morlix on a CD or two in your collection, maybe more. Check the production credits on your Slaid Cleaves, Lucinda Williams, Ray Wylie Hubbard, Robert Earl Keen, or Mary Gauthier CD's. Yup, there it is.

Gurf's making records on his own these days in addition to producing them for other folks. "Cut 'n' Shoot" is his debut for Blue Corn Music. Gurf draws on the classic country songs of the 50's, 60's, and 70's for "Cut 'n' Shoot's" inspiration and the result is nothing short of brilliant. He shares writing credits on a couple of songs with old pals Jim Lauderdale and Billy Swan. Rick Richards plays drums, but otherwise it's 100% Gurf throughout.

If your idea of country music includes great songs, great singing and great playing with a sense of humor on the side, "Cut 'n' Shoot" is the record you've been waiting for.

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KERRY POLK • HARDTOP JUBILEE

(Iuka ****)

Polk, Barton & Towhead was a duo, Towhead being an imaginary friend, but anyone expecting any such whimsy from Polk's solo debut is in for a disappointment. The word that comes to mind is 'stately.' This may sound a little fanciful, because, of course, on any singer-songwriter album, the voice and words are, or anyway should be, the focus, but Polk, rather like Iris Dement, isn't just the core round which everything else revolves, she's so contained and concentrated on her lyrics that she seems almost oblivious to what's going on around her. The effect is a little unsettling, which is all to the good when so many singer-songwriter albums can go in one ear and out the other without leaving any impression. Having got one's attention, she holds it with thoughtful songs, full of evocative, often Southern rural, images, her tour de force being *Jukebox '59*, about the power of music, with an interpolation of Jimmy Reed's *Baby What You Want Me To Do*. Producer Mark Hallman, who also plays drums, piano and electric, acoustic, slide and 'whacka whacka percussive' guitars, provides a subtly unobtrusive but elegant backdrop, featuring Elana Fremerman violin, Karen Mal mandolin and Jane Gillman dulcimer and harmonica. JC

COWBOY JOHNSON • A GRAIN OF SAND

(Moonhouse ****)

Given that a singer-songwriter album is released every three minutes and a Various Artists tribute album every half hour, a one-man 'Collection of Mickey Newbury Songs' is, if nothing else, unusual. Kent Johnson, who had 'Cowboy' tattooed on his chest 30 years ago, has found solace in Newbury's songs, though alcoholism and addiction (he's been clean for 24 years), four divorces and losing his parents, since 1970. This may not make him unique, but the hand in glove combination of his voice and Newbury's words almost certainly does. The opening track, *She Even Woke Me Up To Say Goodbye*, to some extent suggests Lonnie Mack, perhaps because the guitarist is the immaculate Chris Gage, who also produced, and plays keyboards, dobro, percussion and, with Christine Albert, provides harmony vocals, supported by Scott Walls steel, Ron Knuth fiddle, Glenn Fukunaga bass and Eddie Cantu drums. Almost prenatally attuned to Newbury's songs, including *Sweet Memories* with a previously unrecorded last verse, Johnson brings more depth and sincerity to them than most singer-songwriters can bring to their own material. JC

ERIC TAYLOR • THE KERRVILLE TAPES

(Silverwolf ****)

You can't think about musicians' reactions when you're reviewing them. Some are going to be pleased or pissed, some are going to read praise as criticism because you didn't say they were the greatest thing since clumping cat litter, and some claim they never read their reviews, usually with good reason. However, Eric Taylor is a special case, because I really don't want to write *that* review yet again, the one he's been reading since 1981's *Shameless Love*; this guy is an amazing singer, songwriter and guitarist, how come he isn't a Texas singer-songwriter giant like the Houston scene people he used to open for, Guy Clark and Townes Van Zandt, or used to open for him, Lyle Lovett and Robert Earl Keen? Part of the answer is that though he's pretty active these days, in fact playing San Antonio on May 3rd at Blue Star Brewing, for many years he limited himself to a couple three shows a year at Houston's Anderson Fair, one at Cactus Cafe in Austin and, of course, Kerrville Folk Festival, which is perhaps when he should have released a live album, so people would have something to tide them over between those rare shows. The liner notes are, shall we say, somewhat minimalist, but the ten songs, nine originals, including *Sweet Sunny South*, *Texas, Texas*, *Hemingway's Shotgun* and *Strong Enough For Two*, plus Townes Van Zandt's *Where I Lead Me*, were recorded in different years, a few featuring Denise Franke on harmonies. More consistently than Van Zandt, Taylor is a compelling performer, or, as my friend Charlie Hunter of Flying Under Radar Productions says, "An audience instinctively knows to shut up and pay attention," and that applies whether listening to him in a club or to this album at home. JC

BUCKSKIN STALLION • BLUE RIBBON BUZZ

(Big Bender ****.5)

Kinda have to give this four flowers, a country-rock band that takes its name from a Townes Van Zandt song, is based in Boulder, CO, microbrew world capital, but references Pabst in its album title, and kicks off with an accordion, I'm only a minute into it and already what's not to like? To a large extent, this is really singer and songwriter Troy Schoenfelder's album as there are so many Front Range guest musicians, including guitarist Greg Schochet and pedal steel guitarist Bret Billings of Halden Wofford & The Hi-Beams, that one gets little idea what the core band sounds like. Indeed, Schoenfelder closes the album with a solo acoustic track. However, Schochet, who also produced, marshals the troops to great effect, though the bluegrass covers, *Jack Of Diamonds* and *Pretty Peggy-O*, don't really gel, let alone fit in with the infectious roots rocking of the originals. Incidentally, the album was mixed by James Tuttle, a name once routine on Austin album credits, now doing bidness in Boulder. JC

ELIZA GILKYSON • LAND OF MILK AND HONEY

(Red House ****.5)

During a break at the Cactus Cafe release party, Jeff Plankenhorn, who was in her band that night, remarked, "Eliza has bigger balls than anyone I play with." Later, he embellished this with "and still her politics and opinions are always framed with style, grace, and eloquence. I think that's why Jimmy LaFave calls her 'Grandma Dynamite.'" The truly remarkable thing about Gilkyson, as she demonstrates with the stupendous opener *Hiway 9*, is that she doesn't preach, but she's never ambiguous. One could easily construct a metaphor from her love of fly fishing to describe the way she dances her words over a room, though, of course, most of her audience happily rises to the bait (mind you, if you don't like *Hiway 9*, you're really going to hate *Tender Mercies*). However, politics isn't really the dominant theme as much as personal politics, and here again, Gilkyson is fearless. I have to admit that I got wrong-footed early on, first I thought she was a New Ager (well, she did record with the ghastly Andreas Vollenweider), and then heard a couple of albums that were a little too folk-pop for my taste, and, what with an innate distrust for people who change their names, didn't fully tune in to her razor sharp intelligence until *Hard Times In Babylon*. Now, there are few singer-songwriters in Austin I admire more. Producer Mark Hallman's one song at a time quilt approach—there are more musicians involved in this one than you can shake a stick at—doesn't always work, but was ideal for this project, particularly the closing track, Woody Guthrie's *Peace Call*, featuring Patty Griffin, Mary Chapin Carpenter and Iris Dement. This could have been just another cringe-worthy clusterfuck, but comes off amazingly well, considering that, Guthrie or no, it's actually a pretty crappy song (I invite you to consider the possibility that there's a reason it's never been recorded before). You may have deduced that the album title has a certain element of irony, and as this is a CD rather than an LP, which would have made the point rather more clearly, the cover is a 1991 Charles Ommaney photograph of a boy going swimming in a smelting plant waste pool on the Albania/Kosovo border. JC

TOM RUSSELL • INDIANS COWBOYS HORSES DOGS

(Hightone ****.5)

Goes to show you can never write anyone off. Much as I admired Russell's 1984 debut, *Heart On A Sleeve*, he's spent many years at or near the top of my 'I Don't Get It' list, but this time he seems to have emerged from the alternate universe in which he's America's greatest living songwriter and made a good, solid and, most importantly, unpretentious album. What's more it's an album of Border and Western songs, which, despite the adoration of many critics (maybe that's the problem, he's been believing his press), he's never before been able to pull off convincingly, at least not for an entire album. Evenly balancing covers, Bob Dylan's *Seven Curses* and *Lily, Rosemary & The Jack Of Hearts* (sung by Eliza Gilkyson and Joe Ely), Marty Robbins' *El Paso*, Peter La Farge's *Ballad Of Ira Hayes*, Woody Guthrie's *East Texas Red* and Linda Thompson's *No Telling*, with originals, of which my favorite is *The Ballad Of Edward Abbey* ("If a man can't piss in his own front yard, he's living too close to town"), and supported by Andrew Hardin (of course) guitars and drums, Joel Guzman accordion and Hammond B3, Elana Fremerman fiddle and Mark Hallman bass, Russell sounds relaxed and convincing. Maybe this works because he isn't trying too hard. JC

VA: PARKINSONS VOLUME ONE; 38 SONGS OF HOPE

(Parkinson Foundation double CD ****)

Not that it wouldn't be awful for anyone, but I think people who rely on coordinating their minds and fingers, songwriters and journalists for instance, have a particular dread of Parkinson's Disease, the word Terri Hendrix, whose *Charlie Brown* opens this 38 track Lloyd Maines-produced epic, and I both used is "terrifying." Which may explain why Rob Litowitz had so little difficulty putting together this double CD to benefit research into Parkinson's. Inspired by the success of fundraising concerts in honor of his mother, struck by Parkinson's in 1991, and father, who also had to deal with it, he hit up everyone he could think of, and before acknowledging those who came through, as they deserve, I'll just say that while most all the contributions are available on other albums, this is a terrific compilation even aside from its worthy cause. You have my assurance that it's emotional but not grindingly inspirational. OK, in order of appearance: Terri Hendrix, Greg Brown, Caitlin Cary, Chuck Prophet, Hot Club Of Cowtown, Pete Sears, Neko Case, Jen Chapin, Stone Coyotes, Lucy Kaplansky, Crosby & Nash, Dave Alvin, Florence Dore, Alejandro Escovedo, eastmountainsouth, Ana Egge, Tom Freund, Catie Curtis, Sara Hickman, Bonnie Raitt, Eliza Gilkyson, Grey Eye Glances, Richard X Heyman, Last Train Home, Amy Farris, Cindy Kalmenson, Alice Peacock, Michelle Malone, Kim Richey, Steve Forbert, Amy Rigby, Jonatha Brooke, Tom Russell, Dar Williams, Utah Carol, Little Pink, Kelly Willis and Lowen & Navarro. JC

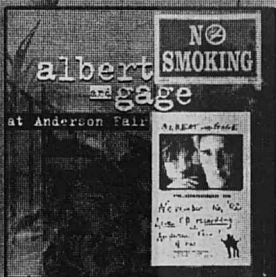


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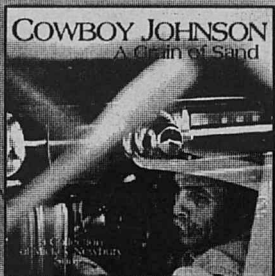
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JOHNNY HORTON • GEORGE JONES LIVE RECORDINGS FROM THE LOUISIANA HAYRIDE

(Scena ****/Scena ****)

Though his reputation has waned since his death in 1960, when he was only 35, these 1956-60 appearances at the Louisiana Hayride, where Horton, the only star who didn't defect to the Grand Ole Opry, was a particular favorite, demonstrate that he was a sensational live performer. Backed by Tommy Tomlinson guitar and Tillman Franks bass, he delivers great versions of his straight country hits, *Honky Tonk Man*, *One Woman Man* and *Honky Tonk Hardwood Floor*, but the almost rockabilly feel of his 'folk' songs, *Rock Island Line*, *Battle Of New Orleans*, *Sink The Bismarck*, will make you rethink them. I have no idea why, but the sound quality is the best yet in this series.

♦ George Jones doesn't do as well on sound, but this album is unique in his enormous catalog because, spanning 13 years, 1956-69, it charts his development as a singer, performer and songwriter, from hillbilly to honky tonker to balladeer, and also predates his first live album, released in 1985, by a healthy margin. Starting out as a Hank Williams disciple, though with strong original material like *Nothing Can Stop My Loving You* and *I'm Ragged But I'm Right*, by 1968 he'd created his own confident style, showcased by *White Lightnin'* and *The Race Is On*, and was evolving into the master performer who defined the country ballad, with early versions of *She Thinks I Still Care*, *Things Have Gone to Pieces* and *Walk Through This World With Me*. A must for lovers of hard country.

JC

THE WOODYS • TEARDROPS & DIAMONDS

(Dynamike ****)

Michael & Dyann Woody's eponymous debut (Rounder, 1998) was a tad too MOR for me, but six years of country music degeneration later, MOR starts to sound pretty darned good. Though he'd had songs recorded by Steve Earle and Chris Hillman among many others, Woody had pretty much given up hope of being a recording artist himself, but then Dyann Brown, with whom he'd had one date in college, decided, ten years later, to move to Nashville. Singing together they transcend the weaker material—there's only so much you can expect from a title like *Sweet Destiny*—and make the better songs really riveting. Reviews of their debut routinely cited The Everly Brothers, which sounds like a cliché except that the Woodys really do have that extra dimension and warmth that blood brings to harmony singing. Though they pay tribute to the hard country duet tradition with *Honey I'm Wrong*, their forte is a sweeter, more romantic version of the Parsons & Harris/Burrito Brothers country rock style, particularly effective on the title track, *Every Minute Counts* and Steve Earle's *Heart Don't Break* (the album also includes their own version of Michael's main claim to fame, The Desert Rose Band's 1987 #1 hit *He's Back And I'm Blue*). Dyann's vocals could usefully have been tweaked a little brighter in the mix, and giving her a lead or two wouldn't have hurt (mind you, at least she shares the billing, unlike Emmylou), but if this isn't the most exciting album you'll ever hear, it is immensely likeable.

JC

DAYNA KURTZ • POSTCARDS FROM AMSTERDAM

(Kismet/Munich, DVD ****.5)

Say what you like about us, Troy Cambell and I can read an audience, so when Dayna Kurtz was supposed to finish her solo set at the 2003 Threadgill's NotSXSW, we just let her keep going. Kurtz is, quite simply, the most charismatic and mesmerizing performer I've ever seen and I firmly believe that had she chosen any regular genre, from jazz to country, she would now be a queen in it. Instead, she's carved out her own musical territory to which no one can attach a label, my best shot, fortified by the one cover, Jean Lenoir's *Parlez-Moi D'Amour*, a Juliette Greco staple, being postmillennial cabaret. Her voice is a force of nature, and she's an incredible acoustic guitar player (I particularly admire the skillful way she uses pauses). With much of the material of *Postcards From Downtown*, a couple of tracks from *Otherwise Luscious Life* and four new songs, this is that real rarity, a DVD that's worth the extra money, because you have to see Kurtz in action (at The Paradiso, Amsterdam) to realize that what you're hearing is the real, if almost unbelievable, thing, with no studio gimmickry.

JC

ROSIE FLORES • BANDERA HIGHWAY

(Hightone ****.5)

Hightone's distillation of its Jimmie Dale Gilmore albums (*Don't Look For A Heartache*, reviewed in March) sounded crisper than I remembered but not enough to excite comment, however Bob Stone has really worked wonders remastering 12 tracks from the label's three Flores releases. The night and day difference between Greg Leisz and Dusty Wakeman's muddy production and Stone's crystal clear reworking makes this worth having even if you already own *After The Farm* (1992), *Once More With Feeling* (1993) and *Rockabilly Filly* (1995). Not surprisingly, a full half of the selections come from the last, the best realized of the three, with guest appearances by Wanda Jackson, Janis Martin and Rocky Burnette, the others splitting the remaining six tracks evenly and pretty much skimming the cream off the top. If only these albums had sounded this good the first time round.

JC

GURF MORLIX • CUT 'N SHOOT

(Blue Corn ****)

First time I saw Morlix singing lead was in the early 90s when Don Walser called him up on stage one Monday night at Henry's and he did Lefty Frizzell's *Mom & Dad's Waltz*. I tell you this not to brag on how far back I go with Morlix as a frontman (well, OK, there's a bit of that) as to illustrate that for all his long association with country-ish singer-songwriters, from Blaze Foley to Mary Gauthier, he's got pure country in his soul. Shifting gears in a rather radical departure from his two Catamount albums, well, let's put it this way, the only cover among the 13 tracks is Marty Robbins' *They're Hanging Me Tonight* (from his 1959 classic *Gunfighter Ballads & Trail Songs*) and it fits right in there among the originals, any of which, as singles, could have gone into Henry's jukebox. Setting the honky tonk tone with *Yesterday She Didn't* ("but today she does") and the Buck Owens style *Were You Lyin' Down?* ("when you stood me up"), Morlix, who produced, engineered, mixed and mastered, plays guitars, steel, bass, percussion, banjo, mandolin, organ and, on three totally solo tracks, even drums, with Rick Roberts stepping in for the rest. Otherwise, the only other credit is for Linda McRae's harmonies on Morlix & Jim Lauderdale's *Where There's Smoke*. Economy of scale in the studio, but plenty of heartache and heartbreak in the grooves.

JC

JIM STRINGER & THE AM BAND IN MY HAND

(Music Room ****)

Stringer's outfit, T Jarrod Bonta piano, Carl Keesee bass and Jon Hahn drums (with assists from Ricky Davis and Tommy Detamore steel and 'Rufus Otis' accordion and percussion), illustrates one of the central Austin dichotomies—you'd have a hard time putting together a band this good anywhere else, but if you could, it'd be the biggest thing in town. Stringer is primarily a guitarist, indeed a guitarist's guitarist, on this album wielding electric, acoustic, baritone, steel and lap steel, 6-string and tic tac bass and mandolin, but he can more than hold his own as a vocalist and songwriter, and it's this side that's emphasized here. Thing about Stringer is that he can play just about anything, and while his songs are basically country, he can infuse them with western swing, rockabilly or jazz. *I'll Give You Miles*, for instance, is soul in a country setting. Strategically located covers and duets, Joni Mitchell's *Raised On Robbery* with Karen Poston, his own *Three Wishes* with Stacy Walters and Johnny Mercer's *I'll Remember You* with Susanna Van Tassel, almost divert attention from the central question, posed in *Easy To Love (Hard To Trust)*, which so many of us have had to ask at one time or another: "You were out with your sister/but how could she be/out honkin' tonkin' with you/when she was sleeping with me?"

JC

THE ERIC HISAW BAND ANOTHER GREAT DREAM OF YOU

(self ****.5)

He's working on his third full-length album but this five song EP detours into Hisaw's honky tonk bar band rather than singer-songwriter persona. *Out On the Highway* is a new one built on his many long trips down I-10's empty spaces, the title track was inspired by a night of playing Gary Stewart singles on a Kerrville jukebox, *Kindness* is "very loosely based on a kid I met on a Greyhound ride between Flagstaff, Az and Fayetteville, Ark... a warning against making eye contact with strangers... Of course the kid probably thought I was the crazy one," and *Gypsy Davy* comes from Woody Guthrie's version. Something of a surprise is *Thing About Trains*, the title track of his first CD and his Greatest Hit, "I was never satisfied with the production or performance." Because he lives in Austin, Hisaw is usually referred to as a Texas singer-songwriter, but he's from Las Cruces, so Santa Fe FARster Steve Terrell claims him for New Mexico. Either way, he's one to watch.

JC

WILDSANG • SKY DIRT SPEAK OUT TRUTH

(Wildsang ****.5)

When I commented a while back on the scarcity of young black roots musicians, I fully expected, indeed hoped, to get jumped on by people saying "Shows how little you know if you've never heard of..." Didn't happen, and it's taken that long for me to flush out another, but on the other hand, she was worth the wait. Hillary Kay, whose granduncle was King Oliver, father a classical composer and mother a onetime Freedom Rider, with her partner, harmonica player Kate Freeman (a self-styled 'anti-Popper'), brings such a raw intensity to Delta and Piedmont blues that, willy nilly, she reignites the endless debate over blues authenticity. The fuel here is *Ain't No Strange Fruit*, Kay's radical reworking of the Billie Holiday classic, which could not possibly be performed by a white woman, and while rape and revenge (*Josie*), a young mother cast out by her family (*Biscuits*) or a woman abandoned by the father of her three children (*My Baby*) may sound race-neutral, Kay is quite clearly speaking from the black experience. A formidable slide guitarist, she and Freeman, who are in the process of moving to the Bay Area (I'm guessing there's not a lot of call for a female blues duo in Coyote, New Mexico), stake out their territory with two covers, Howlin' Wolf's *Smokestack Lightnin'* and Willie Dixon's *Spoonful*, but it's Kay's originals, her passionate vocals and Freeman's spot on dirty harp playing that make this a real find for anyone who's given up on bar blues.

JC



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AWARDS SEASON Flameworthy Recap ACM Predictions

There was a moment during the CMT Flameworthy Awards last month that left me scratching my head. I've joked in previous years that the name of this silly, contrived awards show makes it sound, well, gay. And so when right in the middle of this year's telecast one of the guys from *Queer Eye For The Straight Guy* came out to riff with host Dolly Parton, it seemed perfectly suited to the evening's events.

Wait a second...has country music really become gay-friendly? I'm as liberal as they come, and I hope all of my gay friends can one day get married (it doesn't seem fair to rob gay men of the chance for bridal registry!), but I really had to sit there and wonder what the reaction of your average hillbilly was to having a gay man joking about being the real "flamer" on that evening. Gay characters are abundant in mainstream TV shows these days. The aforementioned *Queer Eye* draws big ratings on cable. Is country music now ready to forgive kd. lang and invite her back to become a regular on the Grand Ole Opry?

Okay, maybe the industry hasn't become that tolerant. But seeing a *Queer Eye* cameo does indicate that we've come a long way. I watched the awards with a friend who worked on the *Row* for a number of years. We had fun joking about the old days in country, when the only gay people in the industry were the hairdressers/makeup artists and Randy Travis. Just seeing an openly gay performer on the show is, I suppose, a sign of some change.

But if change was what you were looking for, the list of winners wasn't too exciting. Toby Keith won two awards, Kenny Chesney won two, Rascal Flatts and Shania Twain each took home a trophy, as well. Old news on all accounts, quite frankly. Only a win from newcomer Dierks Bentley in the Breakthrough Video category kept it from being a night entirely made up of the usual suspects.

But one performance in particular did spark a bit of conversation and controversy. Sheryl Crow, who recently relocated to the Nashville area, offered an acoustic take on her cover of *The First Cut is the Deepest* backed by a twelve string guitar and mandolin duo. A handful of folks in Nashville, including some who felt motivated to write the local paper, were upset that a rock artist was part of our local show. They said that Crow "just wasn't country". I find this tan interesting criticism. Martina McBride can get up and wail on a sappy power ballad, all the while mugging for the camera and crowd like a high school pageant contestant, and she is considered "country" because she's on a Nashville label. Rascal Flatts can sound like Journey and still get the same nod from the locals. But Sheryl Crow can offer up a folk song with an arrangement that gives it a bluegrass feel, and she gets a bunch of grief. Oh well, I've never led anybody to believe that country fans are the bellcows of the musical herd.

So now we turn our attention to the Academy of Country Music Awards, which will be broadcast live on CBS from the Mandalay Bay Resort & Casino on Wednesday, May 26th. As you may have read in this column before, I have a major thorn in my paw over the ACMs. For starters, the show is a Dick Clark production, which gives it an immediate air of

CHARLES EARLE's B-Sides

superficiality and schmaltz, as well as representing a major lack of integrity. And did I mention that they are held in that country music hotbed of Las Vegas? We used to joke about Nash Vegas because cheesy acts like Kenny Rogers were spending all of their time in Nevada instead of Nashville. Now, Dick Clark brings things full circle by moving one of our awards shows there. And finally, it should be mentioned that the show will be hosted by that Hokey Okie, Reba McEntire. Seeing Reba do just about anything turns my stomach. And she is at her best/worst in terms of being annoying in an awards show setting.

But since this is one of the annual industry shindigs, it is my job to talk about it. So here we go with some fearless predictions:

Entertainer of the Year It hasn't been so long ago that we were seeing a few women in this category. But the Dixies spoke their minds, and Faith and Shania each made very disappointing records. So, we're left with Brooks & Dunn, Kenney Chesney, Alan Jackson, Toby Keith and Tim McGraw. Given the pathetic lot he is competing against, I'd love to see Alan Jackson win, but this is a Dick Clark event, so always go with the cheesiest choice. I'll take Kenny Chesney.

Top Male Vocalist Again, I wouldn't mind an Alan Jackson win here. It would also be nice to see Keith Urban take home the statue, but I'm guessing it'll be Toby Keith. And I'm guessing he'll try to get in another cutesy comment about Willie Nelson "rolling a fattie" at this show, just so the self-admiring Keith can show everybody what a "rebel" he is.

Top Female Vocalist Given the choice of Terri Clark, Sara Evans, Patty Loveless, Shania Twain and Martina McBride, the only one with any artistic merit is Patty, but again, Dick Clark has his filthy mitts all over this thing, so figure on Martina McBride to be the winner.

Top Vocal Group Picking a winner here is like choosing which method of capital punishment you would prefer to be used on you. Alabama is retired, but they keep nominating these bumpkins for awards. Diamond Rio ought to retire. Rascal Flatts, Lonestar and Trick Pony are all so godawful that I can't believe we claim them in Nashville. But somebody has to win, and I think it will be Rascal Flatts.

Top New Artist Ideally you should be able to look at this category and see the future of the genre. So what do we have here? Well, first off, there are no women among the five nominees, which doesn't speak too well of the future that the fairer sex has in our industry. You also have Josh Turner and Jimmy Wayne. Now folks, I do pay attention to country music, but I wouldn't recognize either of these guys if they were jumping up and down on my front porch wearing T-shirts with their names on them. That leaves Pat Green, Buddy Jewell and Dierks Bentley. I'm sure some of you folks in Texas would like to see a Pat Green victory [no, Charles, we wouldn't. JC], and I can agree with that given the competition, but I don't think he has much mainstream acceptance among folks in Nashville. Buddy Jewell wouldn't be here without the Nashville Star TV show. Hell, for that matter, nobody on Music Row would have given Jewel the time of day without that moronic show. The only guy left, Dierks Bentley, will win this category.

Top Vocal Duo Let's see...Montgomery Gentry is marginally successful at best. The Bellamy Brothers haven't had a major label deal since the Reagan administration. The Warren Brothers are only on here due to their role as judges on Nashville Star, and they've had to take a break from playing the Bunganut Pig Pub in Nashville to be on cable TV. Blue County would have to assassinate somebody important for any of us to have any idea who they are. That leaves Brooks & Dunn (Shocker!).

Album of the Year There could be a scenario where *Honkytonkville* by George Strait gets some integrity votes. Oh wait, Dick Clark is involved in this. That means that Toby Keith will win for *Shock 'N Y'all*. Has anybody other than Haliburton made more money off of the current war than Toby Keith?

Song of the Year This is a weak year in the songs category, with the Alan Jackson/Jimmy Buffet fluff duet *It's Five O'Clock Somewhere* getting a nomination. I'm going to go with *There Goes My Life*, a big hit for Brad Paisley.

Vocal Event of the Year I'd love to see Vince Gill and Emmylou Harris' *Young Man's Town* get the hardware in this category, but the combination of Jackson and Buffet will be unbeatable. Just for kicks, it's worth mentioning that one of the nominated songs is a duet between Phil Vassar and Huey Lewis. I don't know which one to feel sorry for the most.

Video of the Year Johnny Cash should win here for *Hurt*, one of the most penetrating pieces of music video in the history of the genre. I don't even want to think about anything else in this category.

So there are my prognostications. I'll do my best to stay sober enough while I'm watching this mess to have some post-show observations next month.

FROM THE POLICE BLOTTER . . .

Carlene Carter is in a Nashville area jail after failing a drug test and violating her probation in the process. This is a heartbreaking situation for a talented woman who comes from a family that has suffered enough over the last year.

FROM REHAB...

Country artist Jo Dee Messina has checked herself into a treatment facility to dry out as a result of what she and her manager have described as an alcohol problem. Nashville industry folk were surprised, as few had ever seen Messina under the influence. However, I have maintained over the years after watching Messina dance in music videos and on awards shows that no white person ever jumps around like that unless they are loaded.

BACK FROM THE GRAVE...

It seems *Music City News* is being revived without the former owners being able to say a word. Publishing giant Gannett scuttled the publication back in 2000, and a trademark is deemed as abandoned if it hasn't been used in three years, so the name was up for grabs. That meant David Mills, a small time internet entrepreneur from Florida, could claim a recognizable name for basically nothing. Good for him. An issue should be coming out later this year. I'll keep you posted.

AND FINALLY...

From the dopey names department in Nashville comes a new duo...Big & Rich. Yep, there is now an act on country radio operating under that name. It seems that one John Rich, a former Lonestar member (there's one for the resume), had bounced around Nashville for a while looking for a major label gig. It appears to me that his claim to fame is that he looks perhaps even more like the gay cowboy in the Village People than Tim McGraw does, but somebody thought he might work as half of a duo. Enter a guy named Big Kenny, who had played around town doing rock and r&b for a while. He also couldn't get a gig. But when you put the two of them together, well, you get Big & Rich. Somebody at Warner Brothers thought they would be able to knock the Bellamy Brothers or the Warren Brothers out of the Duo category at an awards show, and all of the sudden the guys had a deal. Is it any wonder I have such a love/hate relationships with this town?

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Jam with Claude 'Butch' Morgan

Sat 1st • The Blazers

Tue 4th • The El Orbits

Thu 6th • The Healthy Music Experiment

w/Rusty Martin and Boxcar Satan

Fri 7th • Dale Watson

Sat 8th • Willie Jay

Sun 9th • Mother's Day Gospel Brunch

Miss Neesie & The Earfood Gospel Orchestra
noon-3pm

Sun 9th • Mother's Day Serenade

The Blazers and Sisters Morales

5-9pm

Tue 11th • Rusty Martin

Thu 13th • Dana Cooper

Fri 14th • Susan Gibson w/Jon Roninger

Sat 15th • 6th Annual Crawfish Boil

Miss Neesie & The Earfood Orchestra

Tue 18th • Songwriters Open Mike

w/Glenn Allen & Kim MacKenzie

Thu 20th • David Lamotte

Fri 21st Guy Forsyth

Sat 22nd • Sisters Morales

Mon 24th • Bob Dylan's Birthday Bash

The Infidels, True Stories, Troy Campbell & more

Tue 25th • Rachel Bissex & Stephanie Corby

Thu 27th • JOHNNY BUSH (acoustic)

Fri 28th • Omar & The Howlers

Sat 29th • Los #3 Dinners

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JOHN THE REVEALATOR

Not that I want to gloat over another genre being in even worse shape, financially and culturally, than roots music, but I recently came across an end-of-2003 article in which columnist **Norman Lebrecht** predicted that "the year 2004 will be the last for the classical record industry." Citing the accelerating decline in new releases, the shedding of classical music divisions by major labels and the failure to document important contemporary performances, Lebrecht concludes, "The day of classical recording is done." Of course, from our side of the street we could offer a few survival tactics, at least for smaller outfits, string quartets say, the honking behemoth symphony orchestras and opera companies are on their own, but whether classical musicians, coming out of a long Golden Age, in which every label routinely had its own catalog versions of every major work, can adapt to grassroots, hardscrabble solutions such as niche indie labels and self-releasing is another matter.

♦ An irony here is that, if correct, Lebrecht's forecast means that the CD, whose own demise is also being predicted, will have lost its original function. Developed specifically so that it would be possible to put a complete classical work on one disc, the first CD racks and shops were 100% classical and it was assumed that 'popular' music would go on using vinyl. Then the record industry worked out a) that you didn't actually have to use all 76 minutes and b) that even though CDs are cheaper to produce, non-classical punters would not only pay more for a CD than an LP, they'd actually buy CDs of albums they already had on LP.

♦ According to Gary Himelfarb of RAS, quoted in the *Jamaica Observer*, **Bob Dylan** was "a voice of the oppressed in the 1960s, just as Bob Marley was a voice of the oppressed in the 1970s." Now would that be the same Bob Dylan who's currently campaigning on behalf of oppressed Victoria's Secret models?

♦ One night at Henry's, **Don Walser** spotted a face in the crowd and during a break asked me what that feller's name was so he could call him up to do a song with The Pure Texas Band. Now Don, God love him, knew the words to hundreds of songs but, as he'd tell you himself, couldn't remember anyone's name for five minutes. Anyway, I told him it was **Gurf Morlix** (see reviews) and offered to write it down, but Don figured he was set. Anyway, it was a bit longer than five minutes before they went back on and you wouldn't hardly believe what an unrecognizable mess he made of Gurf's name. I guess Gurf had some previous experience with this problem because after Don had taken a few wild swings at it, he came up and sang *Mom & Dad's Waltz*.

♦ At least one radio station I know of has ruled that **James McMurtry's** *Choctaw Bingo* must no longer be played. Now, you're scratching your head and wondering what the problem is because you know there aren't any bad words in it, but that's because you're not a PD. McMurtry's sin was "hardon." At other stations, **Tom Russell's** *Ballad Of Edward Abbey* (**Indians Cowboys Horses Dogs**) has been banned because of the line "If a man can't piss in his own front yard, he's living too close to town." Neither 'hardon' or 'piss' are FCC violations under current regs, but the threat of the **Broadcast Decency Enforcement Act**, which would jack up fines and enable the FCC to revoke licenses, has galvanized radio into a frenzy of self-censorship even though it's generally acknowledged that it can't get through the Senate and anyway couldn't survive legal challenge, considerations which made it easy for Congressmen to show white feathers in the culture wars by voting for it. In the meantime, as Darrell Anderson of Hightone says, "Apart from the Pacifica words, you can say anything you can say anything you fucking want on radio, except 'anything you fucking want.'"

♦ While listening to **Live At the Louisiana Hayride** (see reviews), I was thinking what a pity it is that I've never come across a decent collection of **George Jones'** Starday material. I have a really shitty bootleg LP called **White Lightnin'**, that was obviously made by rerecording singles (very cool sleeve though), but I've never found a legit replacement, and as far as I can make out from the discography, there's never been such a thing. One or two of the many, many Jones repackagings include a couple of tracks, but that's it. If you know of a Starday collection, drop me a line.

♦ The obvious word association with **Jim Reeves** is 'Gentleman.' Even if you didn't care for his brand of country-pop, the man was enormous and no one had a more clean-cut image. If you know something about his career, you might also think 'good provider,' because, apart from the money he made while he was alive, he left his wife tapes that produced no less than six posthumous #1 hits and other songs that were still making the charts 20 years after his death, while royalties from hits like *He'll Have To Go* still bring in around \$400,000 a year. However, in light of recent revelations in *The Tennessean*, you might start to think 'frozen cats.'

♦ Basic facts. Reeves died in an air crash in 1964. In 1969, Mary, his widow, married Terry Davis. In 1996, she sold the estate, including royalties and the Jim Reeves Museum in Nashville, to carnival operator Ed Gregory, convicted of bank fraud in 1982 but pardoned by Bill Clinton in 2001. The same year, her niece filed a claim that Davis and Gregory had taken advantage of her aunt's diminished mental capacity. In 1999, Mary died of Alzheimer's. In 2002, Gregory filed for bankruptcy. In 2003, Davis was arrested on animal cruelty charges after authorities found 114 dead cats stacked in freezers at his home (and more elsewhere).

♦ Reeves' museum, closed since 1995, is boarded up and its 15 acre grounds is the home of a pack of feral dogs, his estate has been tied up in litigation for eight years and may be worthless. And that whirring sound you'd hear if you drove past his abandoned grave in Carthage, TX, is one of America's classic squares spinning in his coffin.

♦ One mildly odd thing about Amy Farris' career is that while I've seen her backing many other artists, I never saw her in either of her main gigs over the last seven odd years, as **Kelly Willis** and **Bruce Robison** are way up there in the Austin version of my 'I Don't Get It' list. #1 has long been perennial *Austin Chronicle* Music Awards winner **Bob Schneider**, but Gurf Morlix recently told me that he'd recorded an album with Schneider that would make me change my mind. So when he played a free show at the Borders round the corner from us, we sloped along and all I can say is that if he has written any decent songs, he didn't open with one of them. Two lines and we were headed to the nearest bar. DL thinks he's cute—but not that cute.



Son, someday you will make a girl very happy, for a short period of time. Then she'll leave you and be with new men who are ten times better than you could ever hope to be. These men are called musicians.

♦ Oh yes, scoopette: **Amy Farris** let drop that she and **Elana Fremerman** of Hot Club Of Cowtown have a twin fiddle side project called **Screech & Scratch**, and plan to put out an EP sometime soon.

† RAY CONDO

Born (May 16th, 1950) and raised in Hull, Quebec, Condo, who died, age 53, of a heart attack on April 15th, made his recording debut at 16 but drifted in and out of music until 1984 when he formed The Hardrock Goners, two of whose three albums, **Hillbilly Holiday** and **Come On!**, were reissued last year by Fury (UK). In 1994, Condo formed The Ricochets, based in Vancouver, and in 1996 joined Billy Jack Wills and Jimmy Rivers on the roster of Joaquin Records, a label up to then dedicated to preserving classic Western Swing by West Coast artists who, if not dead, were no longer active. Neither Joaquin or Condo ever claimed that **Swing Brother Swing!** (1996), **Door To Door Maniac** (1997) and **High & Wild** (2000) were any match for the (kickass) live shows, but while rhythm guitarist/alto sax player Condo relied more on panache than technique for his vocals, the band's energy, style and superb taste in Western and big band swing, rockabilly (how could you not love a group that had a Glen Barber song on every album?), R&B, instrumental jazz, blues and vintage pop made them standouts among the martini/cigar bar opportunists that cluttered the 90s swing fad. However, after **High & Wild**, Joaquin (whose catalog was being ripped off by the British label Proper) quietly faded away, though all the Joaquin CDs are still available from various sources, and Condo took a three year break, but had formed a new group and was planning US, European and Australian tours at the time of his death.

† DAVE KIRBY

Every 3CM reader knows at least one of Dave Kirby's songs, *Is Anybody Going To San Antone?* (which sat on a shelf at Pamper Music for three years before Charlie Pride cut it in 1970). Born in Brady, TX (which holds an annual Dave Kirby Celebration), on July 10, 1938, Kirby, a nephew of Big Bill Lister, had songs recorded by scores of country stars, including Merle Haggard (*Sidewalks Of Chicago*), and Ray Price (*You Wouldn't Know Love*), and played lead guitar on countless 70s and early 80s sessions, also recording in his own name for Capitol, Monument and Dot. In 1985, he married Leona Williams and toured with her for many years. After he became ill in March, the Brady-based Heart Of Texas Records was hoping to surprise Kirby with the May 15th release of **Mr Songwriter**, but, sadly, he died on April 17th in Branson, MS.

LOOSE DIAMONDS #4 A DJ's PRIVATE STASH KAY CLEMENTS

G M of KWMR, Point Reyes, Marin County, CA, Kay hosts her own show, *Roadhouse Twang*, and also co-hosts *The Mary Kay Show* on KPFA, Berkeley, CA.

"This proved to be more of a nail biter than I thought. If you were asking where I go for R&R, it'd be different (Charline Arthur, Charlie Feathers, Connie Smith) but these are ones I think deserved a bigger run and I'd put the first three in my Must Have. I started into this music in a big way right as we were founding KWMR, so my stacks only reach back about seven years."

The Shots: King Ludd (self)

VA: Coal Mining Women (Rounder)

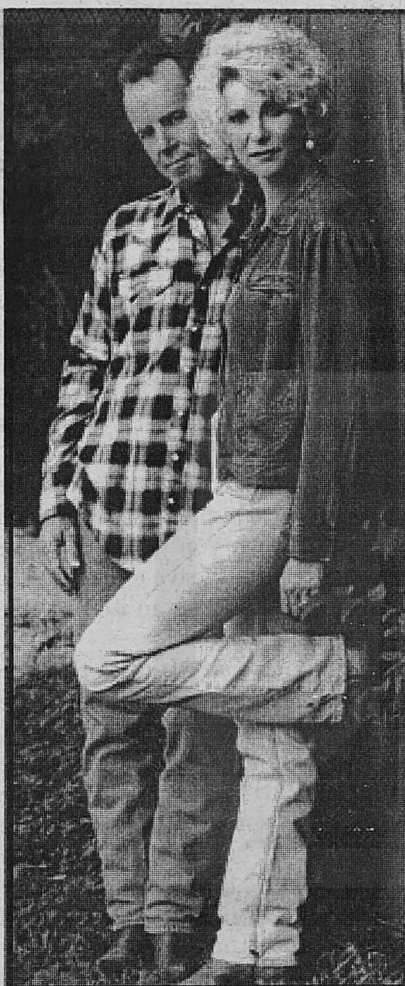
Onie Wheeler: Onie's Bop (Bear Family)

Diane Craig: Fortune's Told (self)

Kings County Queens: Big Ideas (Rubric)

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Polecat Creek: Salt Sea Bound (Yodel Ay Hee)



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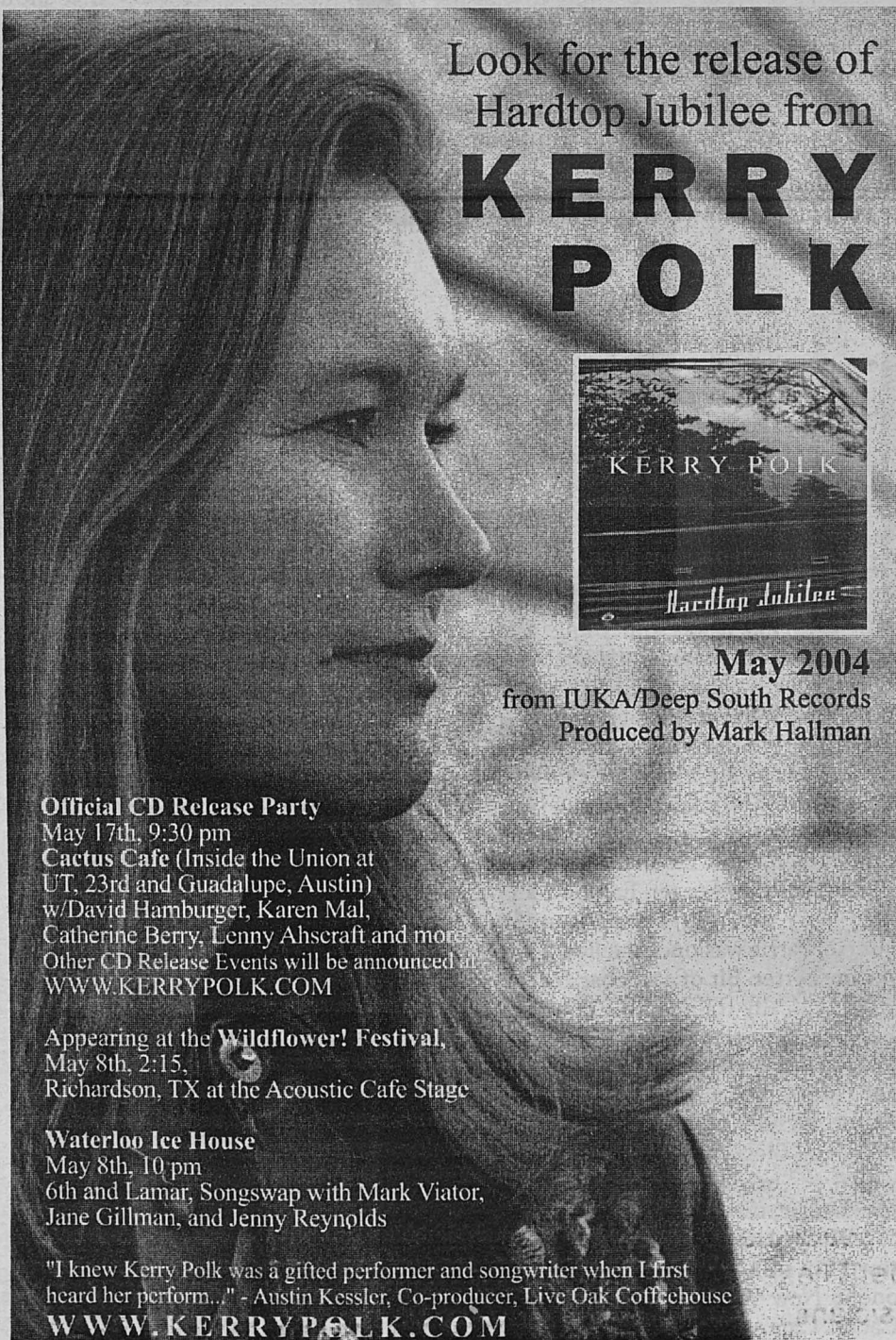
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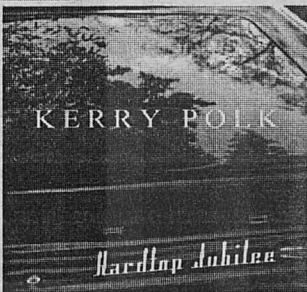
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AGAIN WITH THE COVERS

Couple of months back, I was chewing on the subject of magazine covers and it kinda came and bit me this last month when DL asked, "If Eliza Gilkyson's album is the best you've got, why isn't she on the cover?" Which is a very good question. Don't get me wrong, Amy Farris' album is terrific, but Gilkyson's (see reviews) is sensationally great, so, yes, how come 'Grandma Dynamite' isn't on the cover? Every time I try to formulate a rationale that would explain why I went with Farris, it falls apart on me.

Going back to the beginning, the cover of *Music City Texas* always featured Austin musicians. Except when it featured non-Austinites (Kimberly M'Carver #11) or non-musicians (John Kunz of Waterloo Records #13). OK, but at least we stuck to Texans, or anyway Texas residents. That actually lasted quite a while, right up to Mary Costello (#63), not only a DJ, but British. Then there was Bobby Charles (#71), Dewey Phillips (#77), Fred Eaglesmith (#80), Robbie Fulks (#85) and the Swamp Pop issue (#86), hell, you can see the whole thing unraveling and with #90 I dumped the name and switched to **3rd Coast Music**.

Looking through my back issues, I could give you some kind of halfassed explanation of the thinking behind each choice, though there was one where I actually had to read my own feature because I simply couldn't remember who the fuck Evangeline were, let alone what the hell they were doing on the cover. Most of the time, of course, it's pretty straightforward, someone puts out an album I really like and I dream up a hook for the story, which is not always that easy. Of course, there was the time I did a cover story on an album that wasn't much good (but could have been, the hook was 'Didn't anybody notice?').

Ah, the hook, the McGuffin. Now we're getting somewhere. There are various different ways of handling a story, the easiest, and dullest, being the Q & A interview which I loathe and despise. There may well be people who yearn to read about an artist's upbringing, career, relationships, children, hobbies and how much they love horses but they've come to the wrong place here. I find that crap ballsachingly tedious to read and I'm sure as shit not about to write it. Just as easy, and equally dull, is the common practice of rewriting the press kit. What I like to do is find a way of going from the general (this month, for instance, sidepersons becoming the main attraction) to the particular (Amy Farris). Basically, I like to have a reason, but 99 times out of a hundred, the album is the ding-an-sich, once you've reviewed it, there's really nothing left to say, if, indeed, you find *anything* to say about it.

Still, that doesn't really resolve the Gilkyson issue, because there's plenty to say about her, but then, of course, a lot of it has already been said, and that's really the crux. Eliza Gilkyson, who achieved escape velocity long ago, doesn't need any help from me, but Amy Farris, who's still on the launching pad, needs all the support she can get, and right now. I would never pretend that **3CM** is *Rolling Stone* (it's much better), but after 177 issues, I can point to scores of truly wonderful musicians who have never been, and may never be, featured on any other magazine cover. Of course, that leaves me with no real way of explaining a Townes Van Zandt or Dave Alvin cover story...

What can I say? Rule One: there are no rules. OK, here's a rule that I promise to follow: I will never knowingly run a cover story on anyone who plays golf. **JC**

AMY FARRIS ANYWAY

(Yep Roc *****)

What do Amy Farris, Sarah Elizabeth Campbell and Calvin Russell have in common? Well, as far as I know, they're the only three Austin musicians who were actually born in Austin (I'd like to say that they're also three of the six people who live in Austin who were actually born there, if only to make Jim Beal Jr laugh, but Farris is currently resident in LA). Another common denominator, I guess, is that, after years of playing behind Austin recording artists, Farris has joined their ranks by putting out an album, but then who hasn't?

It always makes me nervous when I get an album that puts a sideperson in the spotlight. I long ago heard a line that's always stayed with me, supposedly said by an A&R man to an aspiring performer, "You've got something, you just don't have enough of it," and in a world where so many frontpeople don't have enough of it, one doesn't expect much from accompanists. As I once said about an Ace In The Hole Band album, there's a *reason* you work for George Strait.

Still, you can't help but sympathize with ambitious musicians. It's one thing to play behind a major talent, but during the bread and butter gigs, there has to come a moment when many of them look at the back of the frontman/woman and think, "How hard can it be if this clown can do it?" Even so, the few feet between the side of the stage and the center is a steep slope that's very hard to climb—I say slope because, on the plus side, the worst that can happen is that you wind up back where you started, maybe having to apply balm to a wounded ego, but still, as Roy Acuff once said to a would-be star, "There's always work for a good bass guitar player."

So when I got Farris' CD, apart from wondering if Gurf Morlix had started some kind of trend, my first thought was to remember another wonderful fiddle player, Andrea Zonn, whose debut, with Big Name firepower in support, fizzled out a couple of years ago. Well, all I can say is that if you didn't know that she'd spent 12 years working ("if you define free beer as getting paid") with Ray Price, Ray Wylie Hubbard, Dave Alvin, Alejandro Escovedo, Kelly Willis, Bruce and Charlie Robison, Tish Hinojosa and many others, you'd never suspect. From the first notes of Bruce Robison's *Drivin' All Night Long*, Farris sounds like she was born a star.

"I'd been thinking about it for years, but not seriously until Kelly had her first child and the touring wound down. I got real restless and wanting adventures." A fan of Dave Alvin since she saw him with X, Farris decided, "If Dave will do it, I'd be crazy not to. He'd be the guy who'd get me." After hearing some demos, Alvin quickly came on board but it took two years to organize schedules and funding, and, cut in LA with Alvin's A-Team players, there was no budget for including any of Farris' Austin friends.

Along the way, Farris got an education in songwriting. "Dave's very exacting about meter and rhyme, very precise. It was heaven for me. I was very shy about it, but there's nothing like being validated and encouraged by your favorite songwriter. I figured, OK, well, I'd better stop this silly insecurity thing and get on with it." Farris and Alvin ended up cowriting ("equal parts his and my words and melodies") three of the album's eleven songs, alongside three Farris wrote alone, Charlie Shavers' jazz standard *Undecided* (taken from Django Reinhardt's version, "I copied Stephane Grappelli's solo, there was no way to improve on it"), X's *Poor Girl*, the torchy *Hard To Say* by Dan Marcus, a friend of Ben Vaughn, with whom Farris has been playing, and Scott Walker's *Big Louise*.

"I feel like it was something inside me since I was a kid, waiting to bust out. Of course, I never dreamed I'd get to work and write with Dave Alvin, but I felt like I didn't have a choice, I had to try. I was nervous, but now the fear is dissipating because I'm having so much fun—I'm getting addicted to my own shows!"

It pretty much goes without saying that Farris is a hot player (rather charmingly, she's credited for 'violin' on every track except the Farris/Alvin *Pretty Dress*, a Ray Price style shuffle on which she plays 'fiddle'). Austin is a fiddle town as much as a guitar town, in which the standards are set by (deep breath) Gene Elders, Elana Fremerman, Erik Hokkanen, Alvin Crow, Howard Kalish, Richard Bowden, Lee Mahoney, Tracy Seeger, Eamon McLoughlin, OK, that's enough for now, but there are plenty more. By comparison, San Antonio has Bobby Flores (with whom, of course, Farris was once a fellow Cherokee Cowboy), and your town probably can't do any better. Bit of a sidebar, but before hiring her, Bruce Robison, who knew she was classically trained, was dubious about Farris' ability to play country, to which her tart rejoinder was "Tell him I was country enough for Ray Price."

However, that simply begs the sidewoman issue, the crucial question is, does she cut it as a singer? Yep Roc, for some curious reason, invoke Nanci Griffith and Alison Krauss, but Alvin puts his finger unerringly on the right comparison, the immortal Blossom Dearie. After hearing a spate of recent female singer albums on which the originals sound like covers, it's really wonderful to hear someone who, like Dearie, can make even the covers sparkle.

With plans to tour "aggressively" ("I love waking up and not knowing what town I'm in"), Farris is lining up LA, Austin and Nashville bands ("still got to find one in New York!") for her CD launches in May, including two in Austin, one, at Cactus Cafe, a doubleheader release party with Kerry Polk (see reviews). **JC**

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