

# COUNTRY MUSIC

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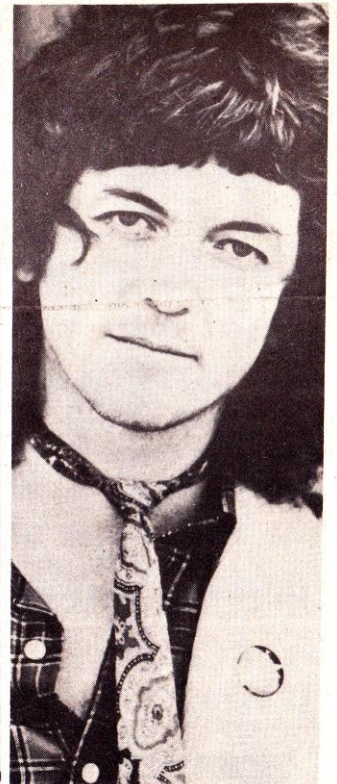
Country Music World

## MAKE WAY FOR A TALENTED TEXAN

Rodney Crowell writes, sings, plays and produces records, as well as guiding the career of his wife, Rosanne Cash. This busy Texan also takes to the road with his band, The Cherry Bombs. Amazing thing is that he had enough time to allow Jo Paul to catch up with his life.



Crowell's wife, Rosanne Cash



Rodney Crowell



Rodney Crowell was born in Houston, Texas, the son of a migrant worker from Tennessee. Music had always been part of family life, and Rodney's grandfather had played bluegrass music on the banjo at community dances back in Tennessee, and a little country band which played the beer joints around Houston at night. When he was ten years old, Rodney began playing drums with his fathers unit.

As he grew older he swapped to playing the electric guitar and opted for the harsher rock 'n roll sounds that were more popular. By the time he left college, Rodney was working as an Everly Brothers type duo with Donovan Cowart, and in 1971 they moved to Nashville. They were already composing their own songs and had signed up with some rather 'dubious' managers in Houston, who helped them record an album in Louisiana.

Eventually, Cowart became disillusioned because nothing was progressing and returned home, initially working on a fishing boat in Galveston Bay.

Guy Clark, another struggling songwriter from Texas, had also moved to Nashville in 1971 after he persuaded Sunbury Music to sign him as a writer. Eventually Guy and Rodney became friendly, the former greatly assisting the latter to develop his skill as a songwriter. Up to this stage Crowell admits he had been a drifter, and hadn't really taken his music seriously, but under Clarke's tutelage the seeds of Crowell's talent were sown.

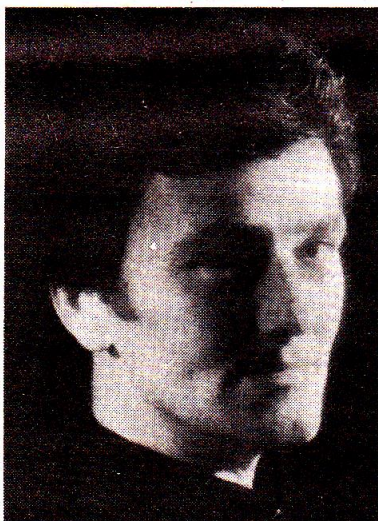
There were many other writers from Texas who were also living in Nashville and they would spend their time hanging around together, writing, drinking, swapping songs and picking up girls. Performing occasionally at places like The Exit / In. On writers' night, they could earn a few dollars by passing round the hat afterwards.

## Getting married

Eventually the scene broke up, Rodney got married, but he still wasn't making much headway career wise, and his weekly income as a writer for Jerry Reed Enterprises was not much more than a hundred dollars.

At the end of 1973 Rodney seriously thought of returning to Texas, even though he had a number of songs already written. True, a 'song slugger' was rushing his numbers around the recording companies, but Rodney himself felt he ought to know a good song producer.

Fate deals many strange hands, and after a chance meeting with Skip Beckwith who played bass in Anne Murray's touring band, Beckwith took Rodney to Toronto to meet Brian Ahern.



*Mickey Newbury*

In the early Seventies, Ahern had launched Anne Murray's career in Canada after he spotted her auditioning for the TV show 'The Sing - a - long Jambouree'. Then Warner Bros signed Emmylou Harris to a recording contract in mid 1974, and Ahern was asked to produce her first album. He began looking around for suitable material and during search he signed up Rodney as a writer.

Emmylou's first album was recorded in Los Angeles with a combination of various well known session players and some members of the Angel Band. Released in early 1975, 'Pieces of the Sky' was acclaimed as a classic album, and was a continuation of the contemporary country music which she had produced with Gram Parsons, until his untimely death in September 1973.

The album opened with 'Bluebird Wine' which became a firm concert favourite among her fans, and was the first of many Crowell songs she has subsequently recorded.

Emmylou started gigging with the Angel Band, but in their live shows they could not match the quality of the playing on the album, and the band was reluctantly sacked.

## Have a hot band

Eddie Tickner, Emmylou's manager, persuaded Warners to put up some money, and hire a 'hot' band of well known players. Warners agreed and the first aggregation of the Hot Band featured Glen D. Hardin (piano), James Burton (guitar), John Ware (drums), Emory Gordy (bass), Hank De Vito (pedal steel) and Rodney Crowell (guitar, vocals). All were experienced session players except Crowell. Although he had been signed by Ahern ostensibly as a writer, Rodney, nevertheless, grasped the opportunity to become a member of Emmylou's road unit.

The Hot Band made their debut at the Boarding House in San Francisco, in April 1975 and immediately the music press was full of praise for Emmylou and her new players. Her career which had faltered slightly after the release of 'Pieces of the Sky' was now well established.

Emmylou first came to Britain in November of that year, and the show, from the London New Victoria was later broadcast on BBC's Radio 1's 'In Concert' series.

Crowell was even featured as a solo performer on the song 'Cry (one more time)'. The band returned for a triumphant ten city tour of Britain in the February of 1976, which closed with two sell-out shows in London.

In the meantime, Emmylou's second album, 'Elite Hotel', had been released. With Ahern still at the controls, it included two classic Crowell songs, 'Amarillo' (co written with Emmylou) and 'Till I gain control again'.

By this time, Crowell had moved his wife and family to Los Angeles, where the band had their base.

Emmylou and Brian Ahern were married in January 1977, the month which also saw the release of her third album, 'Luxury Liner', including two Crowell songs, 'Tulsa Queen' another concert favourite, co-written with Emmylou and the rather weak 'You're supposed to be feeling good' it nevertheless advanced the song writing career of Rodney.

Easter that year saw Emmylou and the Hot Band play their first Wembley Country Music Festival, and they were also



featured on an 'Old Grey Whistle Test' TV Special.

Later that year, Rodney decided it was time to take a shot at a solo career, but not before he had worked on the sessions for what became the 'Quarter Moon in a ten cent sky' album. Two of his songs were featured, 'I Ain't Living Long Like This' and 'Leaving Louisiana in the Broad Daylight', the latter having been written with his old partner, Donovan Cowart.

## Carlene Carter

In the autumn of 1977 he was introduced to Carlene Carter, Johnny Cash's step daughter, who is now married to Britain's Nick Lowe, of Rockpile and solo fame.

Rodney later introduced Carlene to Eddie Tickner after one of Emmylou's concerts, and by late 1977 a recording deal was arranged for her with Warner Bros. The album, 'Carlene Carter' was recorded in England in December of that year. The first single taken from the album was Rodney's song, 'Never Together but Close Sometimes', and although it received a fair amount of airplay, it failed to make the charts.

Having helped to launch

Carlene, he began to concentrate on his own career, under the guidance of Eddie Tickner.

His first solo album, titled 'Ain't Living Long Like This' was finally released in the States in the autumn of 1978, and featured nine tracks, six of which he had a hand in writing. The backing musicians who played on the album, read like a Who's Who of 'ace' players.

The Dallas Frazier song, 'Elvira' opened the album and although it was only a minor country hit in late 1978 for Rodney, it has recently been a Number One pop and country success story for the Oakridge Boys. 'Leaving Louisiana' which had been on Emmylou's fourth solo album, and also on Rodney's album, was taken to number one in the country charts in February last year by the same group. It certainly seems that the Oakridge Boys owe Rodney a debt of gratitude.

In late 1978 Rosanne Cash moved in with Rodney, after his first marriage broke up. They had met a year earlier at a party at Waylon Jennings's house! Johnny Cash wasn't too happy with the 'live in' arrangement and so they got married.

While doing some recording work for himself, Rodney also produced a demo tape of Rosanne

singing a couple of songs. During a trip to Germany, Rodney played the tape to some friends and this resulted in Rosanne signing a record deal with Ariola, who now issues her albums in Britain and Europe.

## 1978 release

Her first, released in late 1978 was titled 'Rosanne Cash' and was only made available in Europe. Although she doesn't like the album, it certainly shows promise and included two of Rodney's songs and three of her own compositions.

Back in the States their first child, Caitlin Rivers Crowell, was born in January 1980, and they had also moved to a new house in Beverly Hills.

On the strength of her first European album CBS offered Rosanne a contract for the States, and Rodney took full control of the production work this time.

Meantime, his own songs were beginning to be taken up by other performers. Bobby Bare made the Country Top 50 in July of 1979 with 'Till I Gain Control Again', and found enough time to duet with Rosanne on Rodney's song, 'No Memories Hangin' Round', which made the Country Top 20 in November of the same year.

## Regular gigs

Later he co-produced his second solo album with Craig Leon, and 'What Will The Neighbours Think' was released in the early summer of last year. The album contained seven new Crowell compositions. By this time De Vito and Emory Gordy joined Rodney's road band, The Cherry Bombs, and they gigged regularly in the middle of last year. Playing, singing and writing now being second nature, to this energetic and very successful Texan.

With these two offerings under his belt, Rodney has now moved to Nashville to produce Bobby Bare's latest album, 'As is'.

*The intriguing question still remains posed. Will Rodney Crowell return as a songwriter, player or as producer? At the moment it's anybody's guess. But one thing is certain, remembered he will be. ●*



*Lynn Anderson had a hit with a Crowell song*



# CLASSIC TRACKS

## SWEETHEART OF THE RODEO

**THE BYRDS.** CBS 63353. You Ain't Goin' Nowhere / I Am A Pilgrim / The Christian Life / You Don't Miss Your Water / You're Still On My Mind / Pretty Boy Floyd / Hickory Wind / One Hundred Years From Now / Blue Canadian Rockies / Life In Prison / Nothing Was Delivered.

It hardly seems like thirteen years since this eponymous album was unleashed by the

Byrds. Through their previous five albums, the group had explored folk-rock, acid-rock, raga-rock et al and had shrunk from the original five members, until only Roger (Jim) McGuinn and Chris Hillman were left. For the recording of their sixth album, Hillman recruited his cousin, Kevin Kelley as drummer, while Gram Parsons was hired as a 'jazz' pianist.

Gram Parsons' influence on

the group was immediate however, and he formed an 'alliance' with Hillman and producer Gary Usher to steer the group in the direction of recording a country album, while McGuinn wanted to record an album of electronic music.

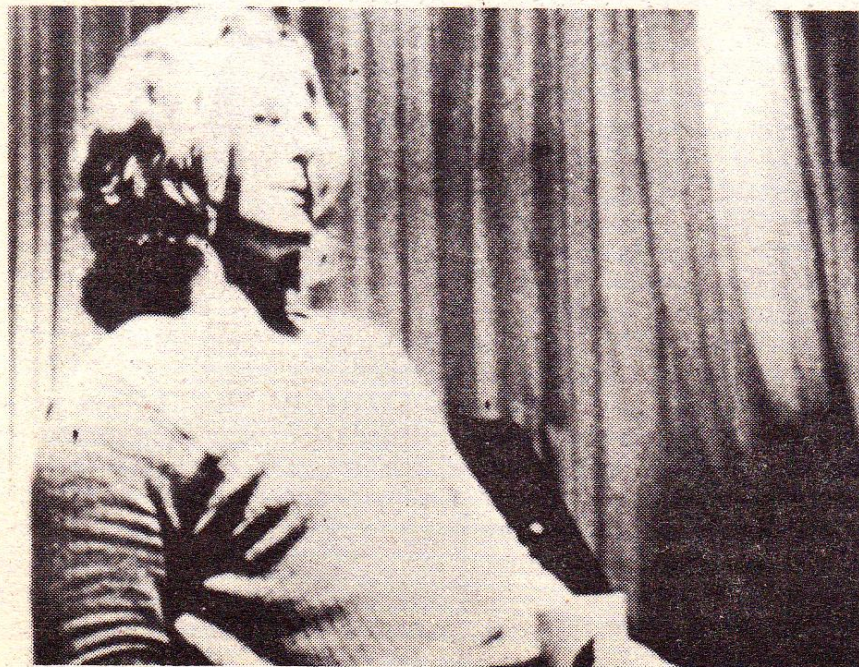
Parts of *'Sweetheart Of The Rodeo'* had to be recorded twice, since it was discovered after most of the tracks were recorded that Gram Parsons was still under contract to another label. To avoid a costly law suit, *Columbia* instigated the re-recording of the vocals by McGuinn, much to Parson's chagrin.

Whether the original versions were more ethnic, considering Parsons' background, will never be known, but the album was most definitely in the vanguard of 'country-rock'.

The Byrds retained Bob Dylan as a source for two of the songs but the majority were contributed by standard country writers. Parsons actually had two of his songs on the album, such was his influence on the group during his five-month career with them.

The album was a poor seller but, in retrospect it is an excellent recording, probably due to Parsons' original vision. For anyone interested in tracing the rise of country-rock, this album is an essential starting point ●

JO PAUL



*Roger McGuinn*