

KERRVILLE KRONIKLE

No. 7

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Photo: Richard J. Orton, Orton Photography, Austin, Texas

EVERY WHICH WAY BUT ROOTS

"Heal in the Wisdom" - Bobby Bridger and a cast thousands - Kerrville 2/6/89

Robert Earl Keen, Jr.

Michael Smith

.. MUSIC CITY ..

Kerrville'90 - kassettes
& other koineidences.

Bobby Bridger

Hal Ketchum

The journey continues

POOR RICHARD'S
NEWSLETTER

EVERY WHICH WAY BUT ROOTS

By way of explanation, Peter O'Brien has been somewhat snowed under at his day job of late. Hopefully, he'll be firmly back in the saddle by KK8. In the meantime, here's a series of news snippets from heaven knows where....Hot on the heels of encouraging sales for the CALIFORNIA BLOODLINES/WILLARD MINUS TWO compilation, Bear Family Records of Germany are about to release a couple of other John Stewart CD's. THE PHOENIX CONCERTS double set will include the bonus tracks "Freeway pleasure" and "Let the big horse run", which were included on the IN CONCERT single album. The second CD will pair CANNONS IN THE RAIN with WINGLESS ANGELS. Peter O'Brien penned album liner notes will be a feature of each release....Also sourcing from Germany, are Line Records CD's of TRANCAS, THE LONESOME PICKER RIDES AGAIN and SUNSTORM, with the American version of BLONDES to follow later this this summer....At some point in the future (!), Demon Records are due to release a compilation album titled TRUE VOICES, which includes John Stewart's version of the Tim Hardin song "The lady came from Baltimore"....Now that Panasonic have come up with a video machine which plays NTSC and PAL SECAM versions of VHS tapes on conventional UK television sets, it maybe worth checking out Rhino Records STRAIGHT SHOOTER: THE STORY OF JOHN PHILLIPS & THE MAMAS & THE PAPAS. The machine retails for around £400 in the UK....No doubt MCA will eventually get round to releasing the Nanci Griffith ONE FAIR SUMMER EVENING video other than in the USA....Having finally come by a copy of the Windham Hill folkie compilation LEGACY, one particularly outstanding track is John Gorka's "I saw a stranger with your hair". Currently copies of John's Red House Records debut I KNOW plus the newly released Windham Hill follow up album, LAND OF THE BOTTOM LINE are high priority items on the KK shopping list....The compilation albums STAY AWAKE and SOMEWHERE IN THE STARS are just two of producer Hal Willner's atmospheric works. Vocally, Lori Carson's SHELTER [David Geffen Company] lands somewhere between Joni and Nanci with a large dash of Rickie Lee. Lyrically, Carson comes across as a female cross between Cohen and Ackles. Dory Previn once strode the same territory; Carson will straddle the ninties....KK favourite Tish Hinojosa has just cut her second A&Mericana album. Sharing the production credits were Booker T Jones and T Bone Burnett. Seems like mucho music magic is in prospect....Great to see that since KK6 was issued, Mary

Chapin Carpenter has enjoyed success after success. The lady deserves it all, but what price a full UK tour....Seems that we may be in for some fine country/folk/songwriter viewing over the coming months. Respectively titled NEW WEST [BBC2] and TOWN & COUNTRY [Channel 4], both series have been filmed in the UK. One story goes, that AUSTIN CITY LIMITS is also due to hit UK television screens ere long. At last!....Season 15 of ACL featured Marcia Ball, Beausoleil, Gary Morris, Mary Chapin Carpenter, Stevie Ray Vaughan, Michelle Shocked, Tish Hinojosa, Shenandoah, Waylon Jennings, Lyle Lovett, Marty Stuart, Lucinda Williams and the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band....Terry Lickona, the current producer of AUSTIN CITY LIMITS has a new half hour "in concert" show currently being screened Stateside. Prepare for your tongue to pop out of your mouth. The first season line up of THE TEXAS CONNECTION reads as follows: Asleep at the Wheel, Robert Earl Keen Jr, The Austin Lounge Lizards, a Songwriters Circle with Lyle Lovett, Willis Alan Ramsey and Walter Hyatt, Jerry Jeff Walker, Tish Hinojosa, Hudson & Franke, Townes Van Zandt, Steve Fromholz, Billy Joe Shaver, The Maines Brothers, Guy Clark, Chris Wall, Gary P. Nunn, Christine Albert, Marcia Ball, The Vanguards, Kelly Willis, Hal Ketchum, The Geezinslaws, Ethyl & Methy (aka Chris O'Connell and Maryann Price, former Asleep maidens of a decade ago), Delbert McClinton, W.C. Clark, Darden Smith, Sara Hickman, Paul Glasse, Joe Ely, Jimmie Dale Gilmore and Butch Hancock. Want any more proof that Music City USA is not in the state of Tennessee....John Conquest of MUSIC CITY fame (see pp 26), is compiling an album to be released in the UK by Bedrock Records. With a current working title of GRASSROOTS AUSTIN, and consisting of tracks taken from independent cassettes released by up and coming local acts, the line up will include The Barnburners, Betty Elders, Dickie Lee Erwin, Conni Hancock (of Texana Dames), High Noon, Emily Kaitz, Eric Moll, Jerry Sires & The Stallions, Lillian Standfield and Zydeco Ranch. Two further tracks will appear on the cassette/vinyl versions, and four extra cuts on the CD. Release date ?. You tell me....According to an Austin Chronicle report, *Butch Hancock and Jimmie Dale Gilmore were Jesse Taylor's special guests at the release party for his LAST NIGHT album on Bedrock Records, held recently in London, England.* I caught Jesse's gig at the Kennington Cricketer's on 30/4/90 and know numerous people who are still waiting to buy a copy of the album....Tapes of a new work in progress from Eric Taylor have begun to surface in Texas. The album can't come too soon.

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BACK ISSUES

- No. 1 - Rod Kennedy, Chris Vallillo, Butch Hancock and Guy Clark and more.
- No. 2 - Steven Fromholz, Marce Lacouture, Roger Allen Polson, Lee Clayton, Richard Dobson and more.
- No. 3 - Rusty Wier, Steven Fromholz (Pt. 2), Tom Russell, Andy Hardin, B.W. Stevenson and more.
- No. 4 - Katy Moffatt, Hugh Moffatt, Terry Clarke, Jimmie Dale Gilmore and more.
- No. 5 - Kimmie Rhodes, Joe Ely, Philip Donnelly, Lyle Lovett, Terry Clarke (Pt. 2) and more.
- No. 6 - Mary Chapin Carpenter, Bobby Bridger (Pt. 1), Melissa Javors, Richard Dobson and more.

Robert Earl Keen, Jr.



The interview with Robert Earl Keen Jr. took place on the back porch of his home near Bandera, Texas on Wednesday 7th June 1989. Robert Earl was engaged in painting the concrete surface of his back porch throughout the interview. Thanks are due to Robert Earl's wife Kathleen, for the hospitality and delicious sandwiches. Finally, we must not forget to mention my able assistant, the portable microphone stand - Robert Earl's office chair. (P.S. Hell, like Texas that porch went on forever !).

Can we kick off at the beginning.

I was born in Houston, Texas on January 11th, 1956, I lived there till I was about eighteen. My parents are professional people. My mom's an attorney and my dad's a petroleum engineer. I have one sister and two half brothers. I just went to regular Public Schools, till I was eighteen years old. As far as music goes, I never tried to play an instrument in all that period of time. I was into rodeo and being a cowboy, during my adolescence. I rode horses and all that sort of thing. Then when I went to College at Texas A&M which is North of Houston, and I got interested in playing the guitar. I don't even know how that happened. I think it was just because I liked country music. I originally started out wanting to learn the fiddle. I got, like a *pawn shop* fiddle and figured out that I couldn't play that - real quick. I decided that maybe a guitar would be easier, so I started picking out some songs on one. That was during my first year in College. I just kind of played along for a year or two, trying to learn some basic chords. When I had some of that going - I had a few friends that played by that time. We started getting together in little groups, to play bluegrass and folk music. Because I was a big fan of country music - playing bluegrass music was a real sensible thing. I'd play the guitar and somebody else would be playing a fiddle.

Where did you first hear country music.

On the radio and stuff. I wasn't a record collector. As far as I can tell, with the exception of a few people, even in Nashville - well, particularly in Nashville - I know more country songs and when they came out, than most of the people there do. That's the country music capital, but people came to Nashville because they liked music and it was a music centre - not because they liked country music in particular. To digress for a minute. When I moved to Nashville I was really surprised at how ignorant people were about country music. Like who Wynn Stewart is, and what Jim Ed Brown was doing and how they became known. Not to mention, Johnny Horton and Bobby Helms and all those people from back in the early sixties.

How old were you when you started listening to country music.

My mom and dad would buy records by people like Burl Ives, that always contained a lot of folk songs. When I was a little kid, there was that Marty Robbins gunfighter record. Songs like "El Paso" and "Big iron". I was a big fan of that stuff.

At College, who were the friends that you played with.

One of my room mates was a fiddle player, Brian Duckworth. He just recently dropped out of music. He played with Clay Blaker

- you know those guys ? - for around six years. We played a lot together. There was another guy named Ronnie West. He was a fiddle and banjo player - one of those real good all rounders. As far as somebody that has done really well is concerned, I guess you know that Lyle (Lovett) and I got to be friends about 1975. That was my second year in College. In the summer of 1975, all my friends took off and I stayed at Summer School. I'd seen Lyle around and we ended up in a class together. We lived right down the street from each other. Something like five or six houses away. We just started hanging out together. That's when I really got interested in music, from the point of view of performing in public. Lyle at that point, already had a four track machine. He was making little tapes on his own and was writing songs. I had written a few songs, but when I met Lyle, I realised that *this is a viable alternative to other careers you could pick*. The music I played before I met Lyle, was basically Stanley Brothers and Bill Monroe tunes. A lot of instrumental banjo tunes. I wanted to be a flat picker for a long time, because I really got into Norman Blake's "Red, white and bluegrass" album.

Relative to the music which your parents listened to at home, and what you ended up listening to and performing at College, it almost seems as if you were deliberately seeking out old timey artists and music.

Yes, going back to a more basic style. That's like rock players who get into blues, then bring it out in a modern form. I like the whole simplicity of bluegrass music. What I particularly liked after a while, was the sound of the guitar. It comes through better in a folk or bluegrass situation, than it ever does in a country situation. You can barely hear an acoustic guitar in country music. I got real interested in playing bluegrass, but I wasn't that good, so I went on to writing songs of my own.

Once you met Lyle, what happened.

We became real good friends. He turned me on to his records - back then, he was into Willis Alan Ramsey and B.W. Stevenson and Michael Murphey - all of the Texas guys. I was into Norman Blake and John Hartford. The bluegrass/folk guys. A lot of bluegrass bands - the Kentucky Colonels and Country Gazette. We traded influences. I imagine in that sense, I learned more from him than he learned from me. Particularly, with regard to making things work as a commercial venture. We used to play songs for each other. A zillion times. The one that always kills me is, I remember the time Lyle first played that song "Closing time", which was on his first album. I said "This *unplug them people*" line, is a bullshit line". It turns out that everybody thinks this is a wonderful line. This dehumanisation thing. I'm not into dehumanisation, so I told him "it makes everything seem real cold". He went, "Well, you

don't know what you're talking about". I obviously didn't, because it's a great song. In retrospect I know that now. We did bounce stuff off each other. There's at least some honesty in that kind of thing going on, as far as knowing what we liked and didn't like.



Photo: Arthur Wood, Kerrville Kronikles Katalogue

Robert Earl Keen Jr, Kerrville 2/6/89

As far as writing together is concerned, was there a great body of work.

No. We only wrote a few things together. Every once in a while, I took a few things to Lyle. Particularly, when what I was writing would seem too close to another melody. I'd say, "I've got these lyrics and I had this other melody. I'm not even going to tell you what melody it is, but can you come up with something else". Generally, he'd come up with a tune. That was sort of how we collaborated. Actually, I always think that is the best way to collaborate. To sit down cold, without anything in common with another person, is real hard. It's a lot better to bring something to somebody and say "Fix this".

One thing that struck me about your songs and Lyle's, is that out of all the Texas writers, lyrically, a tremendous humour shines through. Where does that come from.

I don't know where it comes from. I'm real glad that I'm able to project humour in my songs, period. I'm not exactly sure why I do it. One reason I know that I do it, is because one

place that Lyle and I are just exactly on an equal footing, as far as staring out is concerned, is that we both really started out as performing songwriters. Which meant that we would write songs and go out and play some venue, and get a reaction from the audience. At least on humorous things, you get an immediate gratification on that. That was a guide, which said "This line works. This line works. This line doesn't work", when you thought maybe it was OK. It's kind of a feedback manoeuvre.

One of hardest things in life is to be a stand up comedian. To put humour across in a song is probably even harder. You've only got the lyric, no time for asides, no opportunity to ad-lib.

I know. The thing is, I was never into being so heavy. If I was going to perform, I really wanted people to enjoy it. I knew that, just by being in an audience myself. To go hear somebody do serious song after serious song - it waters the whole thing down. Whereas, they might have a great body of work. The thing is, in general, they're saying pretty much the same thing throughout. Whereas, I thought that songs should be projections of different emotions and ideas. You don't have to say the same thing all the time. In some songs I'm projecting like this, *to hell with it all* attitude. Sometimes I'm being real serious. In some songs, I'm poking fun at myself. Self deprecating humour is the least harmful to anybody. I'm not into making real fun of everybody else.

When you attended Texas A&M, what subjects did you study.

English. Originally, I was into Animal Science, because there is a big Veterinary School there. That was a *hold over* from my whole thing with rodeos and horses. To be a Veterinarian or something in the agricultural field. It just wasn't hitting me right. After my second year, I just decided that it wasn't for me. All along, I had always read, been into books and writing. I just thought that "This is the line of least resistance. I like this. This is easy. I'll figure out what to do with it later". I didn't have a *grand plan* at all, in any sense of the word. I just went with something that I liked.

When did you graduate from Texas A&M.

In 1980. I started there in 1974. I got kicked out a couple of times for bad grades, bad attitude and stuff. I spent at least a year out. The last year that I was there, I didn't even go to the classes. I had to enrol, just to make up some credits. I would have graduated in 1979, if I hadn't screwed up.

During that year out of College, did you pursue a career in music.

I only ever performed music, when I was in College. When I was out of School, I worked in the oilfields. I needed the money. Every summer I worked in the oilfields, other than the summer that I met Lyle. I was a roughneck. It was good steady money. When I was kicked out of College, I went back to the oilfields. By then, I had experience in that type of work.

In terms of your English degree, did you ever contemplate becoming a teacher or a journalist,

No, I just wanted to finish. Every semester that I got through, got me a little bit farther ahead. I'm a persevering person, I just hang in there. I'm not necessarily all that original or creative. I just try to make things work somehow. Once I had put in all that much time, it was just a matter of "I'm going to finish". I didn't know what I was going to do, when I got out. The closer I got to finishing, the more I knew that I wanted to play music. There's that part in the "Bluegrass widow" song, about the guy getting fired from the band. All that shit is true. I wanted this bluegrass band that I was in - the last year and a half, that I was at Texas A&M - to really do something. To go to different Festivals and hit all that stuff. I'd started figuring that out. Getting all the sound system together. Those guys wanted to sit around and make every lick sound like Clarence White. Sing perfect Bluegrass Cardinals harmony. We didn't have that kind of talent going on. All we were doing, was pulling off a decent show. I just wanted to get out more. At the end of that, when I got fired from that band - when they said "Well you don't have that high and lonesome sound" and all that bullshit - that was right when I was getting out of school. I said "I'm going to Austin, because you can play a lot in Austin". I moved there, got a job and I started going to every club I could. Playing for free or for tips. Songwriter things - Hoot Night things - playing at Happy Hour. I'd get off at five and I'd be down at a club by five thirty and be playing for two hours, for beer and tips.

Did it take long for you to establish yourself as a songwriter to go and see,

I think it took every bit of the four years that I was in Austin. I finally knew that there was something happening, as far as people recognising me, when I moved to Nashville, and came back about three months later. All of a sudden, my venues were filled with people. People coming along to see what was going on. Mainly out of curiosity. I didn't think it was just because I'd done so well. It was like, "Here's somebody branching out. We'll check him out". I got a lot of press that way. And then, when I came back people were more hip to me. I had a band in Austin too. Two guys. A guitar player and a mandolin player. Tex Sweeney who plays with the Austin Lounge Lizards now, used to play with me. Also a guy named Mike Landschoot, who still plays around Austin. He is a really good, hot flatpicking guitar player. After I did the solo thing for about a year, then they got together with me, and we did the same deal. Just played bars and made twenty bucks here and twenty bucks there. Beer and tips. Had a great time.

That seems to be the archetypal Texas move. To leave home, in order to find yourself,

Right. Just like that Jesse Winchester song. When I first moved to Austin, I worked for the State. I did this thing where I played in those little places. I also got involved in this play called "Nashville Road", which was real funny. A lot of the plots in it, turned out to be my life. It was about a

guy and his wife moving from Texas to Nashville, and hitting the streets and trying to get popular. They get involved with different managers and stuff. Eventually they get hooked up with one real, sorry, nefarious character, who steals all his publishing and songs. Later in the play, the singer has a big fight with the manager and a gun goes off. The manager dies. At the end of the play, the singer is exonerated, everybody is happy and they sing "Nashville Road, you're calling out my name". It's real musical. I was in this thing for about seven weeks. It went on for three months in 1981, including rehearsals. That was just sort of an offshoot in my career.

Did the people who wrote the play do anything more with it. It sounds like it would have been suppressed by certain quarters of the music business,

The people who wrote it, didn't have it completely together. It was a good play and should have done more. When I read for the part and got it, I said, "Great, but let me ask you something. Is this serious?". The plot was real corny. It was a TV plot sort of thing. I was thinking "Theatre" and I wanted heavy theatre. The guy said, "Yea, this is dead serious". The part I had - typical of me - I was the dishwasher at this little bar called the Blue Note Cafe, where they had music all the time. It was scary how similar to the play, my whole life became. It was art reflecting, what was going to happen in my future. Which was exactly what happened. However, I didn't get messed up in that kind of criminal deal. I was never happy in Nashville. I had a lot of problems, while I was there.

Did that enable you to reflect on the play, in Nashville, and see how true it actually had been,

Oh yea, I don't know how clear my perspective was, but I do remember a lot of times going, "God, this is no different that play. My wife's really unhappy. I'm unhappy. Nothing is happening. All of the things that are supposed to be happening are all turning out to be bullshit. Total bullshit". They tell you anything, a lot of times in Nashville. Especially when you first go there. You get hip to it after a while.

When did you first play at Kerrville,

I submitted stuff to the New Folk Contest in 1981. Although I didn't make the short list that year, I played at the Ballad Tree. Because I'd entered the Contest, I got some free tickets. In 1982, I wasn't involved in it at all. I attended the Festival, like everybody else. In 1983, I got into the New Folk deal with the forty people, and won the final. That was a pretty good year for me. I was gaining some recognition by then. I had won second in the Austin Songwriters Contest - the Austin Umbrella. At the time, they only had a first place, but I got the *honourable mention*. I have never been into that Songwriting Group deal. I always felt that there was a "let's do it for the good of the group" motive. I always wanted to do it for the good of Robert Keen. I mean I'm all for the Group, but I never have felt safe in that situation.

Did winning at Kerrville in 1983, immediately prove beneficial to your career,

I became a lot more serious a musician, It just turned out to be something, where I could add it to my resume. It was a big emotional boost for me. At the time, I felt like I would win it, I was really ecstatic when I did win it. It was like "this is the right thing to happen, at the right time, I need this" and it happened. After that, I just kept on playing in Austin, I had shows where sixty people would show up and some where two showed up. My exposure level was high, I was playing five nights a week, in different places. I played at Maggie Mae's, which was different back then, Maggie Mae's was the little skinny part where the beer is sold. I only played acoustic music there. Always, One, maybe two nights a week, I played Pee Wee's Bar-BQ, Halapena Charlie's and Zonkers. The only place I never played, that everyone plays, was The Hole in the Wall. I played Gruene Hall in New Braunfels. In San Marcos, at a couple of little places. In Houston, at Anderson Fair. I never had a regular Dallas venue while I lived in Austin.

In 1984/5, you won the Austin Chronicle "Songwriter of the year" Award. Was that for a particular song.

The 1984/5 thing, was because I had put together the album. I decided in 1983, after I won the New Folk Contest that what I needed for more exposure, was a record. Just like when I started - it just came to me. Like deciding I wanted to play the fiddle, because it was out there. I don't know how I ever saw that. Anyway, out of nowhere I decided that I needed an album. In 1983, I started putting it together. I wrote out a bunch of proposals, and sent them to people. This guy Dan Huckabee, who co-produced my "No kinda dancer" record, started helping me out. He came up with the idea of getting people to give me \$100 apiece. I typed out the proposals and sent them out. I collected about \$2100 and recorded the album. Then I went to a banker and borrowed another \$2000 and pressed the album. Immediately, I got results. I got press. More people came to my shows. More people asked me to play. Then I started pushing the album to Rounder/Philo. It came out originally on Workshop Records, which was Dan Huckabee's label. It was an instructional label really. Like "How to play the bluegrass guitar" and "How to play bluegrass banjo". We just used his label because it was convenient, and he was interested in expanding it. However, Dan and I couldn't get along, so I bought him out one day. We agreed on a price to let me out of the deal with him, and then I sold it to Rounder/Philo.

How did Philo become interested in your music.

Well let's see, how was it. When I started making the album, I decided I wanted it to be on Rounder. I was a big Rounder fan, particularly because of the bluegrass records and Norman Blake and all those guys. I called them up, and said "This record is nearly ready. Would you like it". I was real naive and they said, "We'd like to hear it". When I finished it, I sent it to them. They actually liked it and talked about messing with it from the very first. When they heard Huckabee was involved, they cooled down. When I bought him out, I went back to them and said, "Look the record is ready now". At the same time, Nanci (Griffith) was talking to them about her albums. They said, "By the way, do you know this Robert Keen guy". She said, "Yea, this guy is great". I had just received the Austin

Chronicle Award and they thought, "It looks right to us". They gave me a real low, low offer and I said "Sure man, I don't care, I just want distribution, I just want it out there". I took their offer and they printed it.

Between the Workshop and Rounder/Philo versions of the "No kinda dancer" album, was any rerecording or remixing done.

No. The record is out on Line Records on CD only, with two extra tracks. They are recordings of songs that I made when I was in Nashville, at a demo session. I just tagged those on, because it was a CD and they needed more material. They're titled "Lu Ann" and "The coldest day of winter". They're kind of bluegrass songs. Rounder remastered their version of the album. The Workshop master, is still the better one I think. The Philo thing is hotter and a little distorted to me. The Line CD came out last week.

In 1985 you moved to Nashville.

During the summer of 1984, I was playing at Pee Wee's Bar-BQ and this disc jockey girl I knew, brought Steve Earle in to see me. There was nobody there, except this girl and Steve. My attitude was, "I've played to nobody before". I'd just sit up there and play. People would walk in and out and I'd keep playing. When I was finished my set, I sat down with them and he said "Hey man, I like this song and this song". He was real loud, "Why don't you send them to me. I'm doing my new album and it's a big deal". He went on and on. I said, "Sure. Would you take a ghetto blaster version of the songs. They're not on tape". He said, "Sure man" and told me about his whole idea of Austin, Texas and how "If you stay around Austin, you're going to turn into a rich minus". It made complete sense to me. All of a sudden, I said, "I know Rich Minus. He's a great songwriter and stuff, but I know where he's at". He said, "If you stay around Austin, you'll succumb to this manana attitude. It's too close to the border and there's too much cheap dope. Nobody ever gets anything done from here". I said "Hey, not a bad idea". In the Fall of 1984, I went to Nashville with the intent of staying. My sister, right before I left, talked me out of it. She said "Go up there and see what it is like, then come back". I said, "It doesn't make any difference. I'm already ready. I'm already gone. I'm out of here". Then I thought, "But, maybe you're right". I took her advice and stayed there for six weeks. My sister is a great supporter of mine, and has always helped me out a lot. I had already decided that I was going to move there. From January 1985, till June 19th when I moved to Nashville, all I was doing was sitting on my ass. Trying to find excuses for moving. My band disintegrated. My girlfriend disintegrated.

Once you were in Nashville, did you try to get gigs around town.

Man, I tried. That was the number one, first thing that hit me. There was nowhere to play. I was playing a lot of original material. Nashville audiences, are the least hip of anywhere in the world. You know, I can go and see somebody who is just singing bad High School poetry, singing out of tune and being really bad - and still kind of try to get something out of it.

In Nashville, it's like if you don't have the words *heart* and *love* in the first verse of the song, they're like "Hey, this ain't a hit. We don't want to hear this shit. We're out here looking for hits". I'm talking about people's wives, out there looking for hits. The whole town is geared to the industry. They just want hits. Other than that, they don't care. Playing got to be extremely discouraging. I tried to write bad country songs and play them. I realised that they sucked. They didn't have any *heart* in them. Nobody liked them anyway. Even the people who wanted to hear that kind of song. They weren't good songs, in that vein. The people who are good at writing those songs, are just naturally good at them. They write great *heart/love* type songs. They grew up on them or something. I don't know what it is. I got real discouraged at that. I ran out of money. My girlfriend, who is my wife now, moved up there in September. I had to field that. We had no money and were poor. The food is horrible in Nashville. It rains all the time. It really does rain a lot. I'm not into rain. We just stayed there, and man I really tried to keep my attitude up. I kept saying, "Yea, it's great and I'm having a great time. It's wonderful". But it wasn't. I knew it wasn't.

When did you decide to move back to Texas.

I moved here on April 1st, 1987. It has done me good you see, because I know about Nashville. I made a lot of friends while I was there. I sat around here, and wondered what the hell I was going to do with my life. I thought, "I can't support myself on playing alone". I got my shit together, went back to Nashville for three weeks and got a songwriting deal with MCA. That has enabled me to make my whole career blossom and all my ideas work out. The songwriting deal gave me a financial base. I had somebody that was way into my music. Al Cooley at MCA, is the best song plugger in the whole town. He's been my best friend and advocate, in the whole music business. I signed with them on December 16th, 1987. They gave me a six month trial. I just wrote and wrote songs and continued to hang in there. When it came up, they extended it for a year. They just renewed my contract again recently. Since then, everything else has been kind of snowballing, as far as my career goes.

In early 1986 you performed in Washington D.C. on a bill with Emmylou Harris, Tom Rush and Nanci. How did that deal come together.

One of the people I met while I was living in Nashville, was co-producer of that show. He really liked my songs and wanted me on there. He talked to the girl who put the whole deal together - Susan Landers. She said "OK". They had an offset as far as another person that wasn't so well known, Bill - I can't remember his name. He's real famous in the North East. Funny guy. He was there too, because Tom Rush brought him in. They said, "If Tom brings him in, we'll bring in Robert". I'd done stuff with Nanci before. It went OK. I got the best review of the night, from the Washington Post. I was the "*evening's revelation*", which was a big deal for me. And I was, I mean just performance speaking, I was really good.

You also played on "New Country" on the Nashville Network, while you lived there.

I qualified, because I had an album in national distribution, which is what "New Country" requires. Keith Case of Keith Case and Associates, the booking agent, said that he could get me on there. I gave him a copy of the album. He sent back a note saying, "I don't know when this will happen. It will be a kind of an emergency situation, when it does. They'll take you to fill a slot that is lost, at the last moment". He called me on a Friday night and said, "Can you do it Monday". I said, "You bet, but I don't have a band". He got me a band. That's how I got hooked up with Roy Huskey Jr and John (Yudkin). I also had Kenny Malone and Mark Howard, who play on this new album that I've just done. Bruce Bowden as well. That turned out good. Once again, being in Nashville helped there. It would never have happened otherwise.

So that was a positive result of your Nashville experience.

If there is anything positive, I'm not naive about Nashville. I'm not waiting on, "Maybe I'll move there one day". I've done it. If I had to move back there tomorrow, I could handle it. That was the thing about MCA. When it came down to that contract that I made with them. All of a sudden out of nowhere, they decided they didn't want to sign me. They said, "We can't sign you if you're not going to move here". I said, "If you can't sign me living in Texas, then I don't either". I said, "I'm going to find something somewhere. I have to have this and it's going to work, but I'm not going to move here". The thing is, in Nashville now, people know that a lot of my whole writing thing is like, because I live in Texas. I always figure that those stories about Sherwood Anderson and William Faulkner, where Faulkner goes up to New York to see Anderson - and Anderson says, "Man, move back to Mississippi. You're not going to say anything here, that you're not saying there". My environment makes a big difference to me. That's why I wouldn't move back there.

Can we just talk about some of the musicians that you have worked with. On "Swerving in my lane", from your "No kinda dancer" album, Nanci wrote the descant for that song, Where did you first meet her.

I met Nanci through Lyle in College Station, Texas. I'm sure he told you that he was hooked up with the Basement Coffee House and the coffee house circuit thing. I was in it too. He was trying to be President at one time. They had a big election. He lost it. Lyle was interested in bringing these people that he was into, to play there - and to get to know them. He had this little power thing, where he could bring them in. He brought in Nanci and Eric (Taylor) and Fromholz and all these people. He was real hip to the Texas scene, while the other guys were wanting to bring in some offbeat nowhere guys. When I moved to Austin, I got to be pretty good friends with Nanci. We hung out together. She came down to see my shows, every once in a while. She is a big supporter of Texas writers. Nanci is definitely into the music. Nanci made up that little descant on that track. She just came in to sing her part and said "I've made up this little thing. You can check it out. You don't have to use it".

You mentioned playing in San Marcos earlier, Is that where

you met Denise Franke and Doug Hudson,

I played down there and they lived in San Marcos, I would go down there sometimes, and they would have these - I forgot what they called them - *choir nights* or something where they would all hang out at somebody's house. It was always Franke, Doug, Roland Denny and this poet guy named, David Wright. The Beacon City Band really. Nanci came down there sometimes. I went there with Lyle as well. It was just a happening little music scene. We were from other places, so we were into it. They were really into Nanci's songs. Franke did like ten Nanci songs or something. When I did my first album, Nanci came into a show one time that I was doing - somewhere in Austin - I thought it would be nice to get her to sing on that record. I asked her and she said, "Sure, No problem". Came in there and sang. I tried to pay her - I still have a copy of the cheque somewhere - tried to give her a cheque and she wouldn't take it. Franke was the same way. She came in and sang.

Can you tell us something about the "Armadillo Jackal" song.

I kept armadillos when I was a kid, as pets. I had them in a cage. You know what a milk can looks like. I had it filled with grass which would simulate their hole. They aren't good pets, because they're real dumb animals. I used to catch them all the time. I even ate a few of them. Made tamales out of them. All this stuff. So I was into armadillos. I guess I was into them, along with every other Texan at that time. This song was inspired by the Austin American Statesman, which had a front page story one time, about this guy in Hallettsville who had learned how to tan armadillo hides. He made them into boots and cowboy stuff. There's not that many armadillos around anyway. I thought, "What an exploitative sort of bullshit thing". They had this big fat German guy holding up these two dead armadillos. It was a terrible front page story. After I read it, about two days later, I was sitting around the house playing the guitar and came up with the song. Basically, it's a protest song with a lot of description. My favourite way to do any kind of protest, is to make up a story and be as non judgemental about it, as possible. The "ain't it a shame" line in that song, is the only one that is in any way, a judgemental thing. I made up the story - it was basically - this sets up people who go out and kill armadillos. They're useless. They're great to see. They're good for bugs and ranchers and stuff - but they're not any good for making boots and shit out of. I thought that was stupid. I got a letter from the Humane Society, that thanked me for my work in *animal rights*. It's just a fun song. It's my kind of lyric. If I have a certain style, it's that stream of consciousness narrative style.

Where did the idea for the "Live Album" come from.

I wanted to do another record, and tried to get Rounder involved. They said, "OK. We need to hear some of your songs on tape". I scored some speck time at this studio. Got some players together, did the tape and told them, "This is not the album. It is something that I want to do. Your input is necessary in this project. Please tell me what is going on". It cost me a lot of money. Anyway, I made this tape. When they

got it, they never called me back. All of a sudden, they weren't interested in the project. I'd gone to a lot of trouble and a lot of expense, when I didn't have all that much money available. I freaked out. It shut me down on any kind of album project or anything, at that time. I was confused. I didn't know what was going on. I didn't know how to survive anymore. Jim (Rooney) came to me. Jim was always real nice to me, and I called him a lot of times for advice about things. He's the greatest advice giver. He really knows. He knows the bullshit. He's always going to give me an honest approach. He's always going to tell you if you're being naive, or you need to be a little bit less esoteric about yourself. Whether you need to be more plainspoken. He'd seen me play, maybe ten - twenty times probably, at different little places in Nashville. He came up to me one night and said, "What you need to do - your whole thing is a personality thing. You have a personality". You know, like Nanci and Lyle. He'd seen them and he knew that we were friends and stuff. He said, "They have a creative visualisation of themselves. An artistic vision of themselves. That's why their thing works. Why your thing works, is because you have a personality. You just project this personality, and you need to do a live album". I thought, "This is a good idea". He said, "What do you think about the idea". I said, "Let me think about it". I called him back a couple of days later, and said "How do we do it". He told me how we should do it. Once again, I called Rounder. I said, "Look you guys, Rooney wants to do a live album with me. How does that sound". They said, "Great idea. We love Rooney. Everything is wonderful". I get it all together. All the flights straightened out, the hall, the trucks, the sound deal. My money once again, I went down and borrowed money from a bank and stuff. The month before we were due to cut it, they cancelled. Backed out on me. I freaked. This was right in the middle of my dealings with MCA and trying to get that done. I decided at that point - I sat around for about three days - I didn't know what to do. I decided that I had to make the deal work, because I needed a record. Jim and everybody else was on my side. I knew people - particularly the "Nashville Road" people - they came to the exact same point one time, with one of their projects where somebody backed out on them. Rounder did it very graciously. They were wonderful about it, but I always thought that was a mistake. I stuck with it and it worked out. Initially, I couldn't get anybody interested in the project. Within a month of having to sell everything and do all kinds of crazy things, Sugar Hill came along. All of a sudden Bruce Kaplan at Flying Fish said, "Hey, I can do it". We had a little bidding thing going on. Not really. I went with Sugar Hill, because they gave me the first offer. It wasn't the best offer, but I thought it was better label.

You mentioned earlier, about not playing many clubs in Dallas. Why did you cut the album there.

When I moved to Nashville, Dallas became a real strong place for me to play. This radio station KNON. They play the shit out of my music. I've created a giant audience in Dallas, through KNON radio. The Dallas room was really good. The audiences are like funlovers. I knew they'd be shouting and screaming. Now Austin is my favourite audience, because you can't put any bullshit over on them, and they really enjoy

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themselves. It was a foolproof thing, to do it in Dallas. I knew that these people would show up and they'd be screaming. Ranger Rita is the DJ on KNON, The Sons of Hermann Hall is the same place where they filmed that movie "Robocop". The Sons of Hermann Hall thing is actually a German fraternity. When they first came over here, a hundred to one hundred and fifteen years ago, and at the turn of the century particularly - a lot of Germans settled in Central Texas. Some in South Texas - in Fredericksburg as well, of course. They opened these clubs, so they could get together and talk about what they were doing here. Talk about back home. What they are now, is basically beer joints, where you can get a steak every once in a while. They have one in Hondo, about twenty miles down the road. They have them all over. It's not like German food or anything. You can get beer and hamburgers and stuff.

You co-wrote one song on the "Live Album" with Fred Koller. How did you meet him.

In Nashville, Fred is really into performing. More and more so. I know now looking back at it, Fred was always headed that way. Performing is a way to get your name out. It's like, not only do you get more songs out, but more people know your name. Associate you with being a songwriter. He knew that I had been playing in a lot of different places. He saw me play one time, and said "Hey man, this is real good". We got to be good friends. We lived in the same neighbourhood. I used to go over to Fred's house. It's a marvellous man. He's got tons of shit. He's a huge record collector. He has got 10000 records. A very smart person. Really high on the IQ scale.

Have you written songs with anyone else.

I've written songs with Peter Rowan, and with both Foster & Lloyd, Lisa Silver and Louis Anderson, as well - most of these guys are MCA staff writers. I wrote songs with people that I don't even want to remember. They were dreadful, horrible songs. Co-writing, is sometimes just about as dreadful an experience as you can go through. If you get with somebody that just doesn't have any idea - any of the same sensibilities that you have - then it's a really unhappy experience. All you do, is know that it ain't going to work. You want to get out of there quick, but you're trying to find a diplomatic way to say, "Hey, see you later". You don't want to continue, because it's a waste of time. I hate to start writing a bad song on my own, much less with somebody else. And you have an obligation to them in a co-writing situation. Co-writing is not my thrust. Co-writing is Fred's thrust. Fred is one of the best that there is. I know that.

How do you class your songwriting style.

I'm not a disciplined songwriter. I tried to write songs around ideas I had, but that didn't work either. I don't have a particular, set time to write. I try to sit around and play the guitar, say three or four times a week. Some people are very successful at that, just like novelists. They sit down for three or four hours a day. I don't see anything wrong with that style. Every day is different for me. I get up anywhere from six thirty in the morning, till eleven. Every morning is

different. I can't ever keep any schedule going. I get real bored with routine. That's probably why I write the way I do.

Have you had many artists cover your songs

No, just the ones that Lyle and Nanci did. I've had some interest and some holds on other songs, but nobody ever recorded them. However, that's a game in itself. It's like you really have to be in there. You must keep hanging in there, till it happens for you. When it happens, it happens a lot more. It doesn't just happen in little spurts. It happens quite a bit. My thing, is really trying to write songs and get them recorded, if I can. Some of them will be recorded. Some of them won't. I mean, I can tell you that right now, I know just by the quality of the material, what is going to happen.

On the "Live Album" why did you cut the traditional song "Stewball".

I had never heard any of the original recordings of that song. Peter Rowan came over to my house one time, and we were having a party. He was sitting there and played the first verse of the song, over and over and over. For two hours straight. The next day, I just woke up with it in my head. I called him up and said, "Peter are there any more verses to that song". He said, "I don't know them". I made up the second and third verses. Then I found the last verse, which is like that Bill Monroe/"Molly and Tenbrooks" thing. That's probably the one song that I get the worst reaction from, off the "Live Album". Most people don't like that song. There's also a few people, that said they thought it was an interesting version.

Tell us about the third album, which you have just recorded.

We started May 15th this year. It's a Sugar Hill album. Barry Possett put up the money to do it. Rooney produced it, and we used Roy (Huskey) and Jonathan (Yudkin) again. We used Mark Howard, Jerry Douglas and an accordion player named Joey Misculin, plus a drummer named Pat McInerney. He has played with Nanci and Don Williams. He's an Irishman. Had Lisa Silver, this friend of mine that I write songs with in Nashville, sing on one cut. We recorded the album in two days and mixed it in another two. Now, all we're trying to do is work out the title and the cover. I had one title and I'd go with it, but some people aren't crazy about it. There are eight of my songs on the album and I did three covers. I did Fred's "Jennifer Johnson and me", because I sing that a lot on my stage shows and people always ask me for it. Fred wrote that song with Shel Silverstein. I also did "Sonora's death row", which is a Blackie Ferrill cowboy song.

You sang that song the other night at Kerrville. Is it a true story.

I don't know. Blackie Farrell is a cowboy songwriting fanatic. All his songs sound just like he has either listened to the same Marty Robbins records that I've listened to, or he has read a million Louis L'Amour novels. They're just really true cowboy songs. They all have that - *put you right there*, feel to them. I loved that song from the first time I ever heard

it. I met Blackie one time, and he gave me a tape of it. I learned it and I've always liked doing it. When it came to this album, I'd always had this fancy in my mind, about someday doing an album of narrative cowboy songs. Just because I like those songs. I thought man, this song will fit in with this album. There's a lot of that South West sort of shit on the album. A lot of that *sun and desert* sort of deal. It came out great, and it's one of my favourite cuts on the record. The third cover song, is by Bob McDill. It's called "Don't turn out the light". It is the most country song on the album. I wanted to cut a straight country song. It's a real uptempo number as well. The song is about drinking and driving and hanging out. That's why I decided to do it. Besides, it's my own little fantasy thing, that every once in a while, I like to sing a normal song.

Where did you record the album, Was it at Jack Clement's Studio.

No, I recorded it at a place called The Sound Shop, which is right next to the Hall of Fame in Nashville. It was a real hip studio about 1975. A *state of the art* studio back then. Now it's like a regular old studio, and is kind of neat. I liked it, because it had a lot of colour in it. It seemed like one of those places, that if you saw a travel magazine about Nashville and a studio, it would look just like one of those. Somewhere, where everybody is supposed to be sitting down playing. Like a picture on the inside cover of the first "Will the circle be unbroken" album. It was a big, big room. Big old baffles. Everybody sat around on chairs. We cut it pretty much live. There are hardly any overdubs on it. It has a real good feel to it.

Your song "Leavin' Tennessee", almost seems autobiographical.

It is. That's the summation of my whole Tennessee experience. I actually wrote that song, right before I did the album. That is a brand new song, as is "The road goes on forever", which is what I was going to title this album. Some people said, that the fact that there are drugs involved in the song, wasn't a good thing - I don't give a shit if there are drugs - it's just a story, you know.

During your set the other night, you also did a song titled "Mariano".

It's also on the new album. It's about a guy that I worked with, when we first moved here. Originally, we rented this house. We've been able to buy it since. The wonderful thing about being here, is that the cost of real estate is low. I didn't have anything to do, anywhere to play. I didn't want to start into a new career. I was still writing, but I didn't have a deal with anyone. I didn't have any income. My father in law, had these guys working for him, so I started working with them. That's where that song came from. This guy was an incredible worker. He'd get up at dawn and work every day until dusk and never, never stop. An incessant worker. And not any kind of *bust your ass* thing. It was just the pace he maintained. He was amazing. I got to where I talked to him a

lot. We talked about his home and stuff. He was a real proud sort of guy and had nine children. I gave him a tape of the song, but he didn't understand it. He didn't speak any English. He's fifty years old. I guess we were OK friends, because everytime I've been around Mariano, we always talked about all kinds of stuff.

Have you got any tours planned to support the albums release.

Well, I'm going to Germany during September/October for sure. We're trying to tack on a week in England. The album probably won't be out, when I go to Europe. I'm going there on the 23rd or 24th of September. I'll be there for two weeks. When I come back, I can really concentrate on a lot of touring, as the album should be out. In the North East of the United States, for instance, I really need to go to New England, because I haven't been there. I've had a lot of airplay around there. I've had a lot of interest and a lot of calls from there. I'm kind of scared of the North East. I've put off going there, just because it's never been like a break even situation. My whole attitude in touring and stuff, is like, if it's worthwhile - if it really moves me on and does more for my career, I'm happy to break even. If I can't break even, I can't take a loss. If you're in a money bind all the time, in this business, it really hurts you. Some people need that misery, but I work better when I'm in a happy situation.

Can we close, by telling the folks about "Copenhagen".

Copenhagen Snuff is a tobacco product. I got into it, when I got into rodeo. All the cowboys do *Copenhagen*. I started chewing tobacco, when I was twelve years old. I chewed tobacco till I was fifteen or sixteen. Then I began using *Copenhagen*. It's a habit man, like smoking. It's a working man's tobacco. It's nothing special. I know guys who go to tobacco shops and buy specially cut snuff. I wrote the song, just because it's sort of neat. I know some people don't really think that I do it - that I'm just making fun of it. The other reason I wrote the song, is because I do it all the time and get a kick out of it. I have people come up to me, to sign their cans. Actually, this guy sent me a *Copenhagen* cap and jacket and two rolls - rolls are like, ten cans. He saw me in Fort Worth and said, "I love that shit man". One time, I wrote to the *Copenhagen* Company and sent them a tape of the song. They said that they didn't ever want to hear that song played in public. They even had a lawyer call me.

Finally, where does the Keen family name come from.

I understand that it's a Scottish/Irish name. My parents have a genealogy book called, "The history of John Walker". The Keen name comes from that family. In the States, they came down to Texas through Kentucky. A lot of Keen's first settled there. There's a place called The Keenland in Kentucky. It's the last racetrack in the state, without an electric P.A. - they still use a big megaphone. I never had anybody ever explain somebody being Scottish/Irish, because I thought they were two different islands. My mom's name is Puckett, which I believe is an English name.

POOR RICHARD'S NEWSLETTER



Fall is quickly slipping by us, the season of golden light and vivid changes. We picked the last of the tomatoes, green peppers, and jalapenos around the first week of October. The leaves came into their full glory by mid month, with the hillsides blazing yellow, orange, red and bronze. We slipped away whenever we could to get down on the Harpeth in Townes' canoe, where we could usually count on picking up enough bass and panfish for a good dinner on the two-hour float down to Bellevue. With cooler weather my thoughts turned to hunting and the chance of killing a deer and putting some meat in the freezer this Fall.

Time, measured by decades rolls on as well. A slew of newspaper and magazine reports back in September marked the twentieth anniversary of the Woodstock gathering. I was living in Manhattan at the time, tending bar at Max's Kansas City and working on a book. I was a closet picker then, still a few years away from playing on stage. Glenn Heim, my old college roommate and I were sharing a shotgun flat above a go-go bar on a seedy lower stretch of Avenue of the Americas. I remember we drove up in the drizzling rain. We got to within a few miles of the festival but decided not to walk in, thus missing our chance to join history.

I don't see any Woodstock on the horizon in these closing days of the decade. Thanks to MTV and videos, not to mention the DUI laws keeping people home. Nor does the club scene seem to be what it was, or maybe we're not getting out as much nowadays. There is a feeling of unease, that nothing much ever trickled down during the Reagan era, that what we did manage to accomplish we did mainly on our own, and with the help of those close to us.

I remember ten years back, when I was living in Galveston, Rodney Crowell had a song called "Here come the eighties", also a quote from Bob Dylan around that time to the effect that "Everyone had better have his hand in". Mine's been in the whole way; through good times and hard travelling, and four LP's including HEARTS AND RIVERS, a project that held State of the Heart together through some rough days last winter. I haven't run into Rodney lately, nor seen any word from Dylan concerning what may lie in store for us in the nineties. But we're in for the next round, and I believe we've drawn ourselves a winner this time.

It took a light frost and a couple of days of rain to strip the trees of most of their brilliant colors, with the remaining leaves a uniform brown and the skies turning to pearl and oyster in the short afternoons. In the woods the fallen leaves make for noisy walking, and you can hear the squirrels feeding and the deer whistling their alarm calls as they run crashing off through the brush.

Steve Earle warned against the seduction of country living, that it would keep me from taking care of music business, and I have to admit he was right. But you have to consider what the woods give back, the pleasure to be gained from study of the whitetail and the raucous music of crows....Or for that matter, the timeless

pull of the sea, and all those wasted days and nights we spent working out on the blue water.

The truth is, while we might have done better, we did what we could given the time, equipment, and money available. But the truth is never what we think it is. Truth is fiction, willful fantasy, selective omission, maybe even lies. Truth is making hard decisions and doing what you believe is right. Truth is never easy. We may wish it to be pristine and clear, but truth is the muddy flow, swift, and a mile across at Memphis.

Wednesday, the day before Thanksgiving, I had two new tires put on the truck and drove thirteen hours to Dallas for family dinner at my sister's home, leaving early Friday for Roxy and Judy Gordon's camp at his grandmother's ranch near Valera, out in Coleman County about four and a half hours further west. Old friends Roxy and Judy are multi-faceted artists who run a small publishing company out of their home in Dallas.

The country along US HWY 67 southwest of Dallas looks much the same as the Texas of my youth, with long vistas and two-lane blacktop roads cutting through the mesquite and prickly pear scrub. I arrived at camp early in the afternoon with the feeling of having completed another circle. When night fell, we took up where we had left off a year ago, sitting around the wood stove with songs and stories beneath the hissing lantern. Roxy talked about his great grandfather who was a Texas Ranger, about indian wars and the coming of the railroad and doomed attempts at dryland farming on the plains. We drank, feasting on deer meat spiked with chiles to make you weep and hyperventilate.

I could have stayed longer but it was enough, and it was with a sense of renewal that I left Sunday after a second morning on the deer stand, where I watched a trio of wild turkey gobblers feeding. I had missed an easy shot at a six-pointer the evening before, but Roxy and Judy gave me some venison to take home. We caravanned back to Dallas along with their son, Quannah, who had to be back in school Monday morning.

I left out of my sister's house just before daylight, pulling into the HWY 100 house about eight-thirty that evening, just short of a week and some eighteen-hundred miles on. The truck ran pretty well except for an oil leak, about what you might expect from an old road warrior of nearly two-hundred thousand.

In the end the passing of a decade is just a game of numbers. We are all changing, growing and moving on, a process not requiring clocks or calendars. Mike Dunbar says we mark time in units of ten because that's how many fingers we have. I'm not counting on my fingers, but in the last decade we lost some friends and we made some. We made do and we got by. We changed partners and the dance went on.

Townes and I were canoeing on the Piney River a couple of years ago when I happened to glance up just at the instant a great old tree fell, standing Lord knows how many generations, until we glided by, the chances of our being there exceeding a million to one....Or was it waiting for us....The tree fell with a mighty sound, and we went on down the river.



Hal Ketchum



The interview with Hal Ketchum took place in the front seat of a Buick Regal Custom, Reg. No. 273 URQ, in the top car park of the Kerrville Theatre on the evening of Saturday, 10th June 1989. Thanks for the suggestion Mickey !

Let's start right from the beginning.

I was born in upstate New York in 1953, in a town called Greenwich. About sixteen hundred people live there, and it's in the foothills of the Adirondack Mountains. New York City is about two hundred miles to the south. I was born on my grandfather's farm and lived there for three or four years. Then we moved into town. My father's been in the newspaper business for years. Initially, he was a linotype operator and moved up through the ranks in the business. My mother worked all of her life. She was a secretary in the office at Miller Livestock. She passed on about five years ago. She played Hawaiian slide guitar. My father plays five string banjo and my grandfather Ketchum was classically trained, at the Troy Conservatory in upstate New York, but played square dances and country dances. He had a band called Doc Scanlon's Rhythm Boys. There was always live music to be heard in my home.

Do you have any brothers or sisters.

I have a brother Frank, who is three years older than I am. We started a bluegrass band when I was maybe, thirteen or fourteen. I played five string banjo and he played guitar. We had a bass player, gigged locally and sang a lot of harmony. He's a great singer and taught me a lot about harmonies. We used a lot of traditional material. During that period, I was simultaneously playing drums in a rhythm and blues band. I've always had a fairly broad interest in music and think it is because I was raised around a fairly broad spectrum. The predominant recorded music which we listened to in our household, was Buck Owens, Merle Haggard certainly, Carl Perkins - people of that nature. I remember hearing Marty Robbins songs. They made an extraordinary impression on me. The first time that I ever actually registered the fact, "Hey somebody actually thought this and wrote it down, and sang it", was with Marty Robbins.

This would have been during his gunfighter ballad period.

Yea, during that period. "El Paso", "Devil woman" and stuff. That sparked my interest in songwriting. My brother started writing, long before I did. We were bravely performing four or five of his songs a night, and getting away with a couple of them. I have a sister Janie, who is nine years younger than me. She lives in Vermont. She doesn't play at all.

If you were so active musically, did do any recording work.

I have some head on two tracks that were done with the rhythm and blues band - a three piece. A guy named Bob Warren was in the band. He wrote great songs. Had a Philo deal briefly after that. We went in and did a four song demo with him. This was

in a small recording studio in Fort Miller, New York - backing him, with a rhythm section. That would have been around 1969. I guess I was sixteen or seventeen, and I was a good drummer. I started playing drums, when I was eight years old. My father had played drums for years, as well. The banjo is also a very percussive instrument, as far as I'm concerned. There's a direct correlation there. The rhythm and blues thing really interested me. I liked singing that stuff and the expressive freedom of playing it. The live performance aspect, where, if it's cooking, it can be ten minutes long. What I was involved in very early, was playing music with people whose intent it was, to play their own material. Whose intent it was, to stretch things as far as they could. They realised they were in a growth situation that could basically continue, as long as they wanted to play music. There was an early realisation that that's what it was about. It was evolutionary. As I got out of High School, I was still playing a lot in that r&b band and making my living playing drums. We had floating names for the band, that were all adolescent and cute. We were Dean Modal and the Oriental Cha Cha's, for probably the longest period of time. A great band. We did a lot of wonderful country blues as well. Stylistically, a really broad thing. A lot of the stuff that Bob Warren was writing was really straight ahead rock n' roll. And good songs. Really confidently performed songs.

Did you branch out, in terms of where you performed.

We never went to the city with it. I don't think we had ambition or aspiration enough, at that time, to even consider that as a possibility. I never felt musically that tight early on, to do it. I had a high enough respect for the craft of musicianship, that I didn't feel like I was quite there. I've always been kind of a late bloomer. I like to be able to nail it. I don't like to show it, until it's absolutely there. The record took two years to make, for the reason that I wasn't ready to release it.

Did you have a day job as well.

I started as a carpenter's helper at age seventeen. I moved to the West coast of Florida around 1975. Lived down there for two years and had a great band. I won't say it was an r&b band, but the incredible thing about it was, that it featured five players who wrote. That's what really kicked it in for me. I had dabbled with songs. I've got recording of songs that we did with this band in Florida. A song called "Table rock" that I wouldn't perform in public again. I played on a five string banjo with the band, and it was an extraordinary little song. These five members were writing. We had a percussionist, who also played mandolin. I played drums, five string banjo on two or three songs, and also harmonica. Sang a lot of backup. We had a guy who played rhythm guitar and lead vocals. A great bass player from Detroit, named Donny Day. A young Canadian player from around Montreal, named Jack Firmin, who had lived in D.C. with Jim Thackery and the Nighthawks. He had extraordinary hands and played a Les Paul. A very good band.

We just played around the islands, up and down the West coast of Florida, I was still driving nails, but what it has been for years with me, is a supplemental situation, I've bought both of these crafts along, so that I'm still capable of jumping out, driving nails and paying the bills. The quality of the work has gotten to a point, where I can do it for myself. I've got a good reputation for that. I've have yet to really make the break, I still have to drive nails,



Photo: Arthur Wood, Kerrville Kronikles Katalogue

L to R: Mickie Merkens, Roland Denney and Hal Ketchum, Kerrville 10/6/89

What brought you to Texas,

The Austin music scene, I moved back to New York in 1977, to the same town, and was spending a lot of time in Saratoga Springs. It's about thirty miles from where I grew up and is a great music town, I had friends there and immediately started a band upon returning to New York state. We played country blues stuff, I bought a guitar and decided I was going to be a rhythm guitar player. Started fooling with the guitar. There's a coffee house in Saratoga, called Cafe Lena. A great coffee house. I began going in there and doing openers. For the first time, really started showing some of my own writing to other people, in that kind of environment. I was constantly meeting people, who had played Austin and musically knew the place. My sister in law had lived in Austin, and had sold jewelry on the drag for five or six years. Raised her kids there. She knew a lot about the town. There were similarities in the two towns. The main difference was, that Austin is probably ten times

bigger - or five times bigger than Saratoga. Musically, I knew that "Austin City Limits" existed. I knew that there were some extraordinary things happening in Austin. I knew very little about the early wave. The early seventies thing. I knew from the people that I talked to, who were musicians that I really appreciated and trusted, that it was a good place to come and really try to make a living, as a writer and a performer. That has really been the goal, right along, since day one. Initially, I moved to San Antonio because I had a job waiting there. This was in 1978/79. I started getting into Austin to play as much as possible. It wasn't that often, because it was simply too far. We moved to Gruene in the New Braunfels area, which is thirty five miles out of Austin and much more convenient, about seven years ago. I started really hitting it hard about three, maybe four years ago. Going into Austin a couple of nights a week. Picking up whatever gig I could get.

I remember seeing you here in 1986, on New Folk and playing around the campgrounds. You had this harmonica belt,

Yea, I prided myself on being a harmonica player. I sent a tape to New Folk in 1984 and got it back. I also entered in 1985 and was a finalist that year. I won the contest in 1986. I first came up here to a Bluegrass Festival, to see Jim and Jesse specifically. This would maybe have been in 1984. That was the first time that I met Jimmie and Butch. They have been a major influence in terms of encouragement. Philosophically, a major influence. Stylistically, who knows. I mean that's not for us to evaluate. Jimmie and I have had - I could call him any time, day or night and we would simply hash it around. Where we were with it. What we were doing with it. Why we were doing it. What we loved about it. What we found silly about it. Just developed a mutual understanding.

Yesterday in the Threadgill Theatre, at John Stewart's Songwriters Workshop, Butch did this five minute monologue about what "it" was,

Oh no, God bless him. He and I played a solid three hours from three to six am this morning. Beautiful stuff happened. I mean we could put it on the road. It was so sweet. It was a lot of fun. The real gratification for me, since I've always had this perfectionist mentality, is that I've finally arrived. I am a member of this community, and it's an incredible feeling. This is the first year that I have felt it.

What's the most significant event in your career so far,

Definitely the New Folk win, was a great part of it. It gave me a peg to hang my hat on. The year I won it, was the first time that I could say to myself, "Yea, OK I am a songwriter". In what I consider to be the true sense of the word. That's someone who is accepted as such, publically I guess.

The next decision was to cut an album. Did you put up the money yourself for the sessions,

Oh yea, I started in the summer of 1987. Put enough money together - had a woman, a dear family friend of ours say, "You've been talking about this too long. Here's \$1000. I

don't know how far it will get you, but roll". Beautiful, God bless her. Found that I had enough friends in a position to really help on that level. To do it for us, We recorded it in 1987. The two inch masters sat under my bed, for eight months. From the Spring of 1988 to October of that year, I didn't have any money to mix it. We had recorded all the tracks, I'd gone in and recut some of the vocals, because I felt more confident about my vocal style. Finally, I went to the bank and borrowed \$3000 and said, "I've got to get this thing mixed".

The other thing that struck me, looking at the album liner, is that you had a "Who's who" of local players helping you,

Well, the motivation has always been, peer respect first and foremost. I firmly believe that that has to be true, in every craft. In every artistic endeavour that I'm ever going to be involved in, in any way, I require that. We set up short term goals for ourselves. Even when we don't necessarily have the means to see something all the way through. Right now the short term goal for me, after seeing these players play in various environments over three or four years and learning who they were, and developing the ability to perform with them in some capacity - I was coming at it, from admiring the hell out of individually hearing these people - how these people approached their craft. Their love. Their music and having them be knocked out enough by my songs, to play them brilliantly. It was as close to an ensemble production as you can get. To be perfectly frank, what I had, was those guys coming in - we laid the rhythm tracks and then for instance, I sent a tape to John Inmon. When John arrived to do his parts - when I had enough money to bring him in, to Loma - I had specifically asked him to play on two cuts. I asked him to play an acoustic lead on "Twenty years" which he did brilliantly, first take. He had other songs which I had not asked him about, on the tape I sent him. He said, "Listen I really love this song, and I could do this volume pedal thing. I think it will be great. If it doesn't work, no big deal". It was great. And it was brilliant. It was his direct interest in liking that song enough, to want to join in the celebration of performing it. A lot of that kind of stuff went on. It became an extended family situation.

Why did you choose to record your album at Loma Ranch,

I picked Loma, because Brian Wood had worked there. Brian had recorded there on a variety of projects. He helped with the production of Nanci's "Poet in my window" record there. John and Laurie Hill have a strong acoustic instrument sensibility. They have great ears for acoustic music. Brilliant people. A husband and wife team, who do the engineering out there. Also the environment was such - it's an old farmhouse, with a horsebarn out back - the studio is in the horsebarn. It's out in the Texas Hill Country. Brilliant, brilliant starlit nights. When you block time out there, you get room and board. We blocked a four day weekend. There are guest quarters all over the property. Just a nice setting, especially to approach the first record in. Looking back on it, I'm very happy that I did it there, for a lot of reasons. They allowed me to learn a lot about the process, without feeling like some asshole was looking at his wrist watch every ten minutes.

In terms of sharing the production chores with Brian, was it something that you felt comfortable with. Did you feel that Brian could give you a perspective on your songs,

By all means. And it was necessary. Brian had heard these songs before just about anybody else. He and Roland - Roland Denney and I have been dear friends for a long time now. To the degree, that I used to use those guys as a barometer. I'd throw a song at them and if they grabbed a hold of it, then I knew it was a keeper. Then I'd shelve it and work on it, or present it to somebody else with a different interest.

Where does the album title, "Threadbare Alibi's" come from,

It's the first two words from a song called, "I miss my Mary tonight" which is not on the record. "Threadbare Alibi's" to me, is just being out of excuses. I didn't have any excuses not to release this album. It had reached it's time. Kind of, this is what we did in 1987 and 1988.

Where did you shop the album, because you ended up on the German label that did Jerry Jeff's "Gypsy Songman" album,

They've also done albums by Guy Clark, Townes Van Zandt, Robert Earl Keen and Gary P. Nunn as well as Jerry Jeff. I had the album either passed on, or just not heard *per se* by many American labels. I've developed a good working relationship with some people in Nashville, who think that the second record will be an American record and will be easier, at least to finance. It couldn't have been any more pleasant to make. I enjoyed making this first record and feel that it is really going to travel well. I think it has a unique sound. I mixed it with the intent of pulling it up a notch from where it was, when it was recorded. It had a wonderful warmth and sensitivity, but a lot of the edge was laying too far from the surface. I took it to Larry Seyer, who mixes Asleep at the Wheel. Larry and I made a pass at a song, mixed it, and then took it out and put it in the car cassette. Listened to it and thought about dynamics from different sorts of environments and how it would convey. Larry wasn't even familiar with the material. I sat at the board beside him, and told him that I would definitely holler any time I heard something that I did not like, or that I felt should be dealt with. We had a real good working relationship and rapport. Consequently we got a real hot mix. It's exactly what this record should be.

What has been the most significant songwriting influences in your life. Say from the aspect of other writers,

Harlan Howard, John Prine, Jesse Winchester - a guy named, Malcolm McKinney. A lot of story writers, I guess. I found that that has been the safest ground for me. I like to develop short stories and then set characters in certain places. Those are the kind of writers who sort of do that. I've just started to really understand to some degree, how extraordinary Harlan Howard's work is. It always moved me. He labelled me a poet. He considers me a poet, first and foremost. I've spent a fair amount of time around him, and I've just really seen a side of writing, that I wouldn't necessarily see otherwise. He's sort of mainstream Nashville, and it has given me the option of

considering whether or not, I'd even like to try that. That decision remains to be seen. Definitely, Merle Haggard too. I should mention Merle Haggard. He is a latecomer too. I mentioned early Buck Owens and Marty Robbins stuff, and I think we are probably talking about the same writing style. Haggard, I always appreciated the honesty that he writes with. I think that he is that person and has dealt with his male ego with extreme sensitivity.

Can we talk about a couple of the songs on the album, and the inspiration behind them. How about "The Belgian Team".

My grandfather had a team of Belgian horses. As a small child, I remember them vividly. They were monster animals. I was thinking a lot about him one night. I'd had a conversation with my brother - my brother has attempted to make a living as a dairy farmer, off and on for years. Finally, he went under for the last time about three years ago. This song in essence came from his experiences and is sympathetic to his condition. It's a farmers song.

What about "Better left unsaid".

Basically, I thought about writing a song from a general condition of loneliness, but from the perspective of three different people. It's a narrative, in that I tell you about this first person Gina and her situation. Then I tell you about Monte in the second verse, then I tell you about me in the third verse. I went into it conceptually, with that in mind. I didn't know who the characters were immediately. Gina had introduced herself to me in another situation entirely.

If "The Belgian Team" is almost like the Ketchum family story, do you always write from true life experiences.

No. Not by any means. I can draw on emotion. You know we all have that gambit. I have the capability of drawing some of it up. Particularly sadness and melancholy. Joy, I suppose too.

You have a song called "Baby I'm blue".

That song is not on the record, but we can talk about it. That song is interesting to me, in that it is the first song that I ever wrote, where the melody line and the lyric came to me simultaneously. There is no formula to songwriting. It is more a matter of reception. Just allowing yourself to tune in. Somewhere there's an analogy that someone else has used, and I don't recall who - I heard this a long time ago - basically, it's like there's this radio station and there's a frequency that I seem to pick up. Writers hear different things. All these characters parade themselves by, and if I'm alert enough and attentive enough, I can catch them on their way by and ask them who they are. Maybe develop a story around them. And perhaps I can do that with an emotion as well. "Baby I'm blue" is basically just a general emotion. I like writing question songs too. I like asking a lot of questions in songs - without necessarily providing the answers. It's a Bob Dylan technique. That's also a Dylan Thomas technique. It was probably some village storytellers technique, before that. Wasn't that Socrates technique. An argument where he would just ask

questions. Make the person he was talking to, have just enough rope to hang himself.

Isn't that a Butch Hancock technique.

Exactly. Butch is always throwing loops.

Are you a prolific writer.

Oh yea, I've got a lot of songs. I think the ones that make it to the stage certainly are ones that are *keepers*. I was hoping to do one more song tonight. A new song called "You loving me". Griff Lundberg from the Cactus Cafe said, "Man that's an anthem". I'm not sure I know exactly what that means, but it's that kind of song. The first time people hear it, they're singing along. They've never heard the song before, yet they're just drawn into it. I'm trying to develop an exercise of simplicity, allowing it to be just constant thought. Those songs I can categorise. Those songs are a certain kind of experiment in writing. An experience, versus the story song which is another thing entirely.

Simplicity is sometimes the hardest thing to capture.

Exactly. They wear well. Most of the great songs that I've ever loved are extraordinarily right. You know what the next line is going to be. That's what a good song is. Or you're pleasantly surprised if you don't know.

Do some songs come quickly.

Yes. I'm afraid that the ones which seem to take a long time to develop - it's like you're trying to resuscitate somebody - sometimes you just have to let them pass on. Rewriting a song never seems necessary. Some ideas just don't hold up. I think that there are some things - Harlan Howard says that "Yea, there are some songs that if I had a little more time, they would have turned out great". Not just good but great. He has reached a point with his craft - he has written thousands of songs - where he can perspectiveally do that. To me it's still a matter of being struck by the emotion first. Then determining how I can best convey that emotion. Some of the best ones I've written - that song "I miss my Mary" was written in about a minute and a half. It was frightening. It was so familiar to me by the time that it was actually on the paper. I'm sure I had written it over the course of two or three weeks. In a subconscious sense, I had written the song - cause man, it was just like BOOM. Picked up the guitar and was working it up - what I generally do is rough - it's not really roughing a song in, because lyrically they remain intact. I guess the safety net for me and the place where I can have my fun, is in phrasing this line and conveying that line. I might sing a line three times and then determine that this word would be better if it were "for" rather than "as", or if it were just not there at all. If the gist of the song has been truly conveyed, right from the *get go* up front, then I find that I have the leisure of letting words back in and insinuating what the completion of the thought should be. I'd almost rather let people determine the solution themselves. A song like "Someplace far away", where the kid gets up to start a fire

Kerrville'90 - kassettes & other koineidences.

All the cassettes mentioned below, are featured in the current KERRVERTS FESTIVAL 50. Their chart position is indicated after the title of the recording thus [], in each review.

Shake Russell's recording career stretches back to the late seventies, when he collaborated with Dana Cooper; the latter being Nashville based these days. Shake has worked out of Houston, for a number of years. Since the mid eighties, bass player Jack Saunders has been a regular in Shake's road band. The 1988 SRB album "Denim & Pearls" was cut in Midland, Texas at No Mountain Studios, as was this cassette only duo release. Enlisted for the "Pilgrim's Highway" [20] sessions were recent RCA signing Clint Black (vocals, harmonica) and Jimmie "Nitty Gritty" Fadden (drums), plus the lovely Therese Brunelle (vocals). Of the twelve tracks on offer here, Saunders wrote "Don't do that" on his own and shares the credits on four others with Shake. Russell meantime, had at least partial or total input on eleven songs (some with Black), and takes the lead vocal on most of them. Shake's trademark, is surely his distinctive hoarse vocal style. "Pilgrim's Highway" is a finely balanced set of uptempo melodies - *the rocking opening, title cut - and ballads - "Mother loves the radio" and "River of innocence"* - pitched in that cross over country/blues territory, which Russell has made his own. There's nothing particularly intense about Russell's or Saunders' lyrics, but this will long remain an essential cassette for the car. Music for cruising S/West along Hwy 290.

Touted in Austin's "Music City" magazine by (Englishman) John Conquest as his "Tape of the year"; on first hearing, it took till the fourth track, before I could find anything redeeming in Elders' work. What I wasn't prepared for, was the panoramic view of her thirty odd years which Elders embraces, on many levels, in the lyrics of "Daddy's Coal" [18]. Raised in a North Carolina mining family, the song is an exposition of personal insights. Past memories, present uncertainties and future hopes. With "Daddy's Coal", Elders encompasses the entire human experience. The acoustic simplicity of Betty's acoustic guitar, John Hagen's cello and Hal Michael Ketchum's harmony vocal, are welded into a joyous celebration of life; topped only by the telling chorus line - *"Pleasure springs from simple things and freedom from the truth"*. Elsewhere on this self produced, nine track tape of her songs, "Welcome home heart" is reminiscent of that late night smoky sophistication at which Cline excelled, while "A drifter's prayer" tells of brother, Charles Hugh Pruett III; another young American who failed to return from Viet Nam. Viewed now from a position of greater familiarity, this second (cassette only) folk/country set from Elders, places her firmly in Nanci Griffith territory and can only assist in gaining major label recognition. The sooner the better, that is.

The Barnburners are an Austin based bluegrass trio, who formed about three years ago; "I heard that !" [13] being their first commercially available recording (cassette only). Since performing together, J.D. Foster, Rich Brotherton and Danny Barnes have established an awesome local reputation; both as a trio, and as backing musicians with other local artists and



bands. On stage and in the recording studio. In the latter capacity, artists like David Halley, Freddie Krc, Alejandro Escovedo and Tish Hinojosa spring quickly to mind. The recent 1990 Austin Chronicle Readers Poll, saw the Barnburners come fourth in the Best Folk Band category. Foster was named Best Bass Player and Album Producer (David Halley and our own Terry Clarke), while the title of Best Acoustic Guitarist went to Brotherton. Banjoman Barnes, landed fourth position in the Best Miscellaneous Instrument Player category. The upshot of this, as if further clues were needed, is that the Barnburners are a triad of red hot pickers. "I heard that !" is a ten track compilation of band originals, traditional numbers and more familiar tunes such as, Jesse Winchester's haunting "Biloxi" and David Halley's paen to the rock n' roll lifestyle "Hard Livin' ". From the high speed opening chords of "I know you're married but I love you still" through to the final, band composed cut "Uncle Lucias", the Barnburners debut bodes well for a trio ably ploughing a specialist musical furrow.

The inner liner of Chris Wall's "Honky tonk heart" [14] features dedications by country music luminaries, Harlan Howard and Jerry Jeff Walker. The Tried and True label which issued the recording, is owned by JJ and wife, Susan. Recorded in Meridian, Idaho with assistance from Pinto Bennett's Famous Motel Cowboys, Wall wrote all ten tunes. Superficially, the lyrics appear set firmly in that drinkin' and cheatin' mould, typical of the honky tonk genre. "Rodeo Wind" and the tongue in cheek "Trashy woman", were among three Wall originals, featured by JJW on his "Live from Gruene Hall" (Tried and True) set last year. What places Wall apart from other honky tonk writers, is the poetic twist in his rhymes. I mentioned earlier, about covering the usual territory; classic lines like *"Crazy idea about the windshield and the mirror, One's the future, one's the past"* from "The empty seat beside me", squarely hit the spot. He may have gone down in history as the man responsible for the cowboy's regular headgear, but with "I wish John Stetson made a heart", Chris draws a comparison between the cowboy's seemingly indestructible headgear and the fragile nature of the human heart. Wall pens lyrics, which avoid that all too common descent into maudlin sentimentality. "Entourage" amply proves that Wall possesses a wicked eye for caricature. With an *entourage* which features *"air head floosies, eight blonde bimbos, a nine foot goon for a bodyguard and a guy who just gets paid to say how great I am"*, certain elements of the whole show business circus, are given a deservedly appropriate treatment. Rykodisc recently issued a CD version of this recording Stateside.

Jesse Taylor was the first in a series which subsequently featured Charlie Sexton, Mitch Watkins and David Grissom. Got it yet ? Yes, he was the original lead guitarist in the Joe Ely Band. Till somewhere around the early eighties anyway. Jesse subsequently dropped out of the music business for a couple of years; went home to Lubbock and according to one tale, sold shoes in a chain store. A few years ago, Jesse moved to Austin and Butch Hancock quickly recruited him for his high octane rock band, the Sunspots. Loud n' Lubbock or leave it !. Spurred on by performing in the Sunspots, Jesse put together a band of his own, Tornado Alley. "Last night" [25] was recorded at Don Caldwell's Lubbock Studio and

features ten hard edged blues/R&B pieces. Unfortunately, the cassette liner contains no details about the song composer(s). Some of the songs, I believe may be standards of the genre. I wouldn't even try to pretend to be an aficionado of the blues, or the Texas school of guitarists, which includes players of the stature of Johnny & Edgar Winter and Stevie Ray Vaughan; Jesse's "Last night" sources musically from that mould. It may not be pure country, but it surely rocks. Bedrock Records should release this album in the UK, soon.

Produced by another former Joe Ely Band alumni, Lloyd Maines; who is prominently featured on guitars (of all sorts), "Slow study" [6] is Will T. Massey's third cassette only release in as many years. No doubt, it was instrumental in gaining Massey his recently inked eight album deal with MCA. In six months time, we shall know whether MCA have accomplished another sanitising job. Going by the evidence on "Slow study", and the earlier "Kickin' up dust" and "Pickin', poker and pick up trucks", they'll find that Massey is a downright headstrong young man. He knows precisely what he wants and how to achieve it. Massey penned all ten tunes, including one with Peg Miller (co-owner of Austin's Chicago House); being the ballad, "Long distance love". That Austin folk/singer-songwriter venue also garners a well deserved plug on the inner liner of "Slow study". To underline further, how prominently the club features in Will's esteem, he donated his old sound equipment to the venue, on the strength of his MCA advance. Good guys still walk the planet, huh. For "Slow study" Massey recruited the cream of Texas players - Jesse Taylor (the guy in the previous paragraph), Paul Percy and Roland Denney (Darden Smith's Big Guns), Kenny Maines (Maines Bros.), Ponty Bone (solo and ex-Ely), Gene Elders (George Strait - also *Betty's husband*). I saw Massey perform the title track, armed only with an acoustic guitar, at a late night '89 Kerrville campfire. Marked it down at the time, as a rather fine ballad. A year on, and "Slow study" has been transformed into a powerhouse number, complete with boogie woogie piano break; even Jerry Lee would approve. "Long distance love" opens with the lines *"We're lifestyles apart, we're inches away, I'm a highway heart, you're a heart here to stay"*; a tale of a love affair determined to survive, even through forced separation. The wonderful Tish Hinojosa, provides the harmony vocal and takes the lead vocal on one verse, *Visions of heaven*. Elsewhere on this outing, Massey balances the rockier statements and sentiments of "The hell you raised" and "Highway hearse", with lush ballads "Closin' down my heart" and "Mr Johnson's Store". The latter number (and closing track) being a particularly fine paen, dedicated to the rapidly disappearing world of small town America. Massey's MCA debut, is currently one of 1990's most eagerly awaited events here at KKHQ. Remember where you heard about him first.

These largely *private enterprise* cassettes and others, can be obtained via Flying Record Service, P.O. Box 402088, Austin, Texas 78704. They cost \$8.00 each, to which add a min. of \$2.00 to cover Air Mail postage of each cassette. For Surface Mail, add half that figure per cassette. The FRS also mail out CD's at \$14.00 each plus postage. Fast, fair n' reliable. While we're on the subject of sounds by mail, Danna Garcia at Canadian River Music, 4106 Tyler Street, Amarillo, Texas 79110

has a new catalogue available, featuring the Kerrville '87 and probably '88 cassettes. Drop her a line with a couple of IMO's. Support the music you love, the big guys won't/don't.

Tim Keller's classy debut album "No stranger to wishes" (1988) was amply covered in issue 41 of OMAHA RAINBOW. Two years on, since his muse had been extremely productive of late, Tim decided that another commercial release was an appropriate career move. Uncle Calvin's (Second Rate Coffee Emporium) is located in the Northpark Presbyterian Church, Dallas, Texas and has been an acoustic music venue for around seven years. On November 3/4th last year, Tim cut this eighteen track (78 minute, cassette only) set of original tunes [19], at the venue. Supporting Tim on harmony vocals were Emilie Aronson and Sally Thomas. The opening track "Hired Hand", finds a truck driver embracing the desperation of barely surviving above the poverty line with his young family, while retaining the hope that in post WWII America, a *new deal* may come. Having worked for numerous employers, including figuratively his family and country, the "driver" cherishes a dream of freedom in *"working for himself"*. The harrowing "Starvation Peak", based on a true story about the Santa Fe Trail, is introduced with the quip "this song is about America's first Anti Litter Campaign". The redman's revenge on a wagon train of palefaces, being to drive the immigrants to seek refuge and subsequent death by starvation on a nearby mountain. While the subject matter of the foregoing tracks may seem somewhat serious, with "Fence me in" (the antithesis of the cowboy classic "Don't fence me in"), Keller focuses on modern man's religion, Consumerism. The song being a sharply focused and humorous summation of our taste for personal folly. Elsewhere on the tape, Tim penned a couple of songs for his daughter Darcy. "Mister Moon has a smile" being a rocking lullaby, while lyrically, "Do you believe" is an intensely personal poem which exposes the pain of family separation. Of course anybody who co-writes a song (with Bernice Lewis), while camped out at Kerrville, deserves a five star rating straight off. Memories of many a "Clear Texas Morning", make this love song a personal favourite. Copies of this cassette can be obtained direct from Tim at Chamisa Records, P.O. Box 8, Serafina, New Mexico 87569 for \$10.00 plus \$3.00 (Air Mail) or \$1.50 (Surface) to cover postage. Tim plans to move to the Dallas area later this year, where he hopes to assemble a band and eventually "go out on the road" performing more rock oriented material. Bon voyage.

CHECK THIS OUT

T-SHIRTS T-SHIRTS T-SHIRTS T-SHIRTS T-SHIRTS T-SHIRTS T-SHIRTS

Butch Hancock and Jimmie Dale Gilmore T's [L & XL]. Colours: black on white OR white on black. Two styles: Butch one side, Jimmie other OR Butch n' Jimmie on front, with NO TWO ALIKE dates on back. From recent UK tour and available for £7.99 ea. incl P&P from GOLDRUSH RECORDS, 9 Kinnoull Street, PERTH. Telephone (0738) 29730. Essential beach posing attire !. Mmm.

Bobby Bridger



As the first part of the Bobby Bridger interview came to a close (Issue 6), our hero was relating how he spent two years working for Desert Dance. Having honed his survival skills in hostile terrain and become more personally aware in the process, Bridger decided to return to the music business. This time around, Bridger planned to be totally in charge of his affairs, backed up by an organisation of his own people.

If the "The call" on your second album, seven years earlier, was your first spiritual song, [then you went into "the desert"]; there's little doubt that the songs on the "Heal in the wisdom" album have a similar inspiration.

That's right, the whole album is about healing. It was terrifically misunderstood. The born again Christians thought, "Why didn't you just come out and say Jesus". The country people thought I'd become a born again Christian. It was just totally misunderstood. It was to write, in a sense secular hymns, and to talk about what I'd been through. About losing it all; about getting into "the word games"; going crazy and running out into the night. Coming out of that, "Rise and shine" and all that, "Letting it go". Learning how to let it go. Discovering that we're really all the same. "Arrows of light" and all that stuff. It was to make that kind of statement. You see I learned, because I was producing again, and the business side of me said, "What is it that you like about Nashville. What do you want to do in Nashville. What can you go back there and heal with". I needed to go back and see Fred and work with him again. I also knew Joe Osborn was in Nashville, and I love the way he plays bass on my open tunings. It drives him crazy, but he loves it at the same time. I knew that the procedure in Nashville was, you go in for a three hour session - you cut three songs. The place is a conveyor belt. The way I figured my budget, I was settled on doing one song in three hours. I knew Nashville was the best place for cutting rhythm tracks. There isn't a place in the world, where you can beat the Nashville rhythm sections. By that point, the whole country rock thing was obvious to everyone. I had a chance of getting a great band together. That's where I brought the wild card in, with Bill Ginn, the jazz player - the Passenger guy. I wanted to mix him up with that good solid rhythm section in Nashville. Now the Austin scene, is where the best singers are. So I thought, "I'll go back and get my mates in Austin to do all the vocal things". But you see, I learned something about Austin and I learned something about background singers too. On my other albums, I had done all the background singing. Except for a couple of black chicks that I brought in to do that traditional black sound. (ED, NOTE, Julia Tillman and Maxine Willard on the "And I wanted to sing for the people" album). They had worked with everyone. God, they were the traditional black chick singers in L.A.. I decided that I wanted to get away from that sound and get more of a background vocal blend. I wanted to showcase a lot of my friends in Austin, who were great singers. Austin is an ego town. In Nashville they don't have any ego. They want blend and the factory line. When I got to Austin, I spent most of the record budget money, healing fights with people. It took me forever to get those vocals right. That's why, bless her heart Julie Chistensen was just - God, what a singer that girl is. I met her when she was part of the Austin jazz

scene. In those days, I was playing with jazz musicians in Austin. I had heard her there. I was trying to blend folk and jazz. That's what I'm still after doing. The Muscle Shoals Horns were in Nashville, doing some dates. I had the chance to get them and I couldn't miss out on that. I wanted to see what would happen on the "Lighten up and let it go" track with them. They also played on the opening track, "Eternally new".

You also reunited the Lost Gonzo Band.

That was real hard to do. They weren't working together at the time. Layton DePenning had been a fringe Gonzo for a long time. He had also worked with Rusty Wier. Layton has a wonderful voice. That's why "Arrows of light" is one of my favourite cuts on that album. Julie and Layton were on that. Also "Something in the words" - Layton has a beautiful harmony part on that. That album was an attempt to fuse and heal all of those other things and then come back at it. The problem was, by the time I finished that album, the style went through this huge shift in the centres. I had a lot of powerful A&R men wanting to sign the record, but things had shifted to - The Police, the new wave. In a sense, I think Christopher Cross probably made the last real statement of that production value. I had cut the album in a style that was basically becoming a dinosaur. The folk people were just pissed at me. I had overproduced a record and all this stuff. They didn't really realise that was the style I had always cut in. Everyone wanted me and a guitar. That was all they wanted. That album was so eclectic, and it was misunderstood in a lot of production routes. It was also understood in others. It got great reviews and it sold very well. It still sells, because of the "Heal in the wisdom" song. Jimmie's been wanting to cut that song, for a long time. I hope he'll cut it soon. I think Nanci may cut it. The one I've been trying to get to cut it, is Willie. I think Willie would have a phenomenal hit on that song. As a matter of fact, people around Willie have taken it to him. I feel like the groundwork on that song is phenomenal. It was used on the first two Martin Luther King birthday celebration. When I got to Kiev with it last year - in Russia, people knew it. They thought the song had been around forever and ever. It actually has, because the melody is an illusion to the old Baptist hymn "Farther along" which Emmylou and Dolly and Linda did. It hints at it and then it goes away from it. The bridge is absolutely away from it. Which is the hook on the song anyway - on the chorus. That song has confused me, because it has all the earmarks of a big, big hit. Everyone knows the song and yet it had never been a turntable or a commercial hit. I've accepted the fact that the hit is going to come from someone else.

I saw this film one time - I don't remember the title - it was about this young Indian who had visions. One was that he

was a bird soaring through the air, "Long wing feather" reminds me a lot of that film,

That is what it was about, because you see on the album, "The hawk" is right after that. Where I learned the song, was in the desert. On that trip with the five men and five women. The woman who originated Desert Dance - the woman who was David Sleeper's partner - had a terrific influence on me. Particularly with music. Her thing was to not use any instruments at all. She made music with rocks and sticks. She was really aboriginal. She taught me the tune. We'd sing it at the campfire at night, when we were living out there. Everyone would do it as a round. I was fascinated with the echo in the canyons. We were in these deep canyons in Mexico. Five hundred feet deep. I said, "When I get out, I'm going to do that song as a round". Also get the echo effect that I heard in the canyons. Ironically, that's been the biggest airplay song on that album. It's a mathematical thing. In the rounds, I sang the song through - then I did four part harmony around it - then I did four part harmony around the four part harmony. It begins to develop exponentially. Six is the sacred number of the Lakota's. I said, "I'll do it six times and allow the six and the four to develop". Midway though, I lost track of what was really going on. I had to ping pong tracks to get it in. We cut that whole song in about four hours. Now, it has become a new age kind of classic. Everyone does it. It's actually an Arapaho song.

Tell me about the first Kerrville Folk Festival.

I was the only one there with a record contract. It was really funny. Rod had already booked the Festival and he didn't have a slot for me, so the New Folk thing happened. He was the producer of shows in Austin at the time. It was his way of getting me on the bill, at the last minute. I think now, Alan Damron, Bill & Bonnie Hearne and I, are the only ones who have played all the Festivals. I nearly missed one when I was doing "Shakespeare and the Indians". I had to fly from Connecticut. Fred was due to take my spot on the Festival that year. I got there in time, on the last night, to close the Festival down and sing "Heal in the wisdom".

In 1974 the Festival moved out to the Quiet Valley Ranch. When did you come up with the idea of the Ballad Tree.

Well, again that was something between Rod and I, Steve Young and Townes and I - you know each year he has different artists judge this contest. I was absolutely opposed to having a contest with songs. It just didn't make sense. None of it. When we sat in that room and tried to pick a winner, it was real difficult. Then those two guys copped out on me and I had to go announce the winner. The losers were ready to hang me by my thumbs. Rod was up on the stage speaking about peace, love and granola - how this was all wonderful song sharing. I said, "You're fooling yourself. This thing has turned into a big time career launch. I don't want to have anything to do with it. I don't believe in competitive songs". He said, "Well Mr Smarty Pants, what's your solution". I said, "Well you know, up there on that Chapel where you have the services with the priest and everything. I look at it, like we're all songbirds

and we fly in here to that tree every year. Everbody sings a song. One is not better than the other. It's just different". He said, "What do you think we should do about that". I said, "I think you ought to start the Festival off at that tree every year. Just have a guitar passed around. If someone hitchhikes here like Michele Shocked, then you ought to give them a chance to be heard that way". That was the start of the Ballad Tree. My next big thing was, how I got to be a Director. I had brought David Amram in. David was a friend of mine from New York. I said, "You've got to come to this Festival". Everyone was going, "You know David Amram!". David was this big time classical composer. Rod brought him down as a guest. David just fell in love with Kerrville and vice versa. The next year, David called me and said, "Rod promised me I could come back and now he doesn't have room on bill". I was about to resign from the Festival. On stage, I wouldn't speak to him. He'd walk in and I'd look the other way. Then he said, "Do you want to become a director?". I said, "What does a director do". He said, "Argue with me and keep me in place". I said, "What does a director get?". He said, "Well you can bring a guest artist every year". I said, "Does that mean I can bring David back next year". He said "Yes". I said, "OK, I'll become a director". Then I went to Canada, to the Edmonton Festival, and I was so impressed with what was going on there, that I tried to convince Rod he ought to exchange and he did. He brought Stan Rogers and Connie Kaldor in. The one I wanted him to bring down was Bim. I'm a Bim freak. I think Bim is one of the great unknown secrets of the western world. Then I wrote "Heal in the wisdom" around 1979. I was playing it backstage for some folks. Kind of trying it out and seeing where it was going. He came by and heard it. He said, "Who wrote that song". I said, "I did". He said, "I want that song to be the anthem of this Festival. That song says exactly what I want to say about this Festival". That night, I changed my set and went out and did it. People just went nuts and claimed it. That whole relationship has been wonderful and very good. I feel that the directors need to have more say about what happens with that Festival.

Management by committee was tried at Newport. It didn't work.

I don't want to conflict with Rod's vision, because what he has created is very important and magical. It has not been easy. It has taken a pound of his flesh. I just feel, that for twenty years we've all been working hand in hand with him. We need to have more say so. What Kerrville is, is a statement of the power of the songwriter. That is the formula - the song, the singer and the production. That's the progression. After Fred played Kerrville he said, "I've got to give it to Kennedy, he's the only promoter I've ever known, who could get away with such a thing. We do it out of love. As each of our careers has grown, it is really amazing that it has stayed as clear of those ego trips as it has. I think it's a bit like my career. There's always that road not taken, that Frost wrote about. It could have gone any number of directions. I think he has been very wise in the sense of the political thing. To keep politics out of it. That's what destroyed Newport. In those days, everyone had an axe to grind.

to be continued

Michael Smith



The interview with Michael Smith took place in the forecourt of the Lyttelton Theatre, which is part of the National Theatre Complex on the South Bank, London on Saturday, 24th June 1989. In that endless field of dreams this was my ultimate possibility.

You were born in New Jersey. What was the date.

September 7th, 1941, I'm a Virgo, It was three months before Pearl Harbour, In a sense, New Jersey is sort of a suburb of New York, Where I lived, was in a place called the Oranges - small towns, named West Orange, East Orange, and Orange, I lived in all of them at one time or another, Where I was born, was in Newark, which is a pretty big city in New Jersey, And it's a poor city, A lot of blacks and Italians lived there, The people I grew up with were mostly Irish, black or Italian, At around the time I was 15, it was a tough neighbourhood, with a lot of gang activity, I attended Catholic Schools, It was essentially an urban environment, with not much in the way of fields or meadows or anything like that, Or advantages for the kids who grew up there, It was pretty much a lower middle class area,

You've been quoted as saying that Elvis was an early musical influence, Were your parents musically inclined,

No, Nobody in my immediate family was musical at all, that I recall, I'd heard that one of my uncles played the violin, but I never saw him play, There was really no music in our house, There wasn't much of anything of an art nature, I didn't like music very much, when I was a child, We had classes in it, and I was always graded very poorly, In music and art, I had a lot of problems, Mostly, I think it was because there was *music in school*, and then there were the things I liked, I liked the songs from Roy Rogers and Gene Autry movies, Songs I heard on the radio, What they were trying to teach me in school, was to read notes and to be in a Glee Club, Sing along with songs which they had selected, I did not enjoy it, And then there were a lot of Catholic hymns, Catholic hymns are awful, They're just bloodless, you know, Palid, We didn't even do Gregorian chants, which would have been fun, What we did mostly, were these hymns - and the hymns weren't that old, With the Episcopelians for instance, or even the Baptists, there's a quality of age to the hymns, And there's a beauty, The harmony is beautiful, What they used to call four square harmony, I thought I didn't like music, I thought music was for men who were effeminate and whose parents could afford lessons, You could almost say I threw up a barrier to music, Despite what was happening at school, some things were getting through, I always loved the radio, I loved, what I now understand were adult love songs, I loved Cole Porter, when I was a little kid, I didn't know that it was Cole Porter, All these songs that I thought were wonderful, like "Night and day", "Begin the beguine", "In the still of the night" - all those tunes were my favourites, when I was ten years old, It was almost like I didn't know that I was allowed to like them, But I did, I liked them secretly, There were also a lot of novelty songs, when I was a kid, "The thing" was one, when I was ten [Ed. Note, As performed by Phil Harris, a bandleader whose discs generally had a comedy flavour],

(Sings) "Get out of here with that boom, boom, boom, before I call a cop",

It was a big hit, I memorised that and "Ghost riders in the sky", That was another favourite of mine, The songs that I liked - there was no reflection in them, of what was around me, They were almost like songs from another world, Then seeing Elvis on television, was a real big thrill, I would have been in about seventh or eighth grade by then, Around the time that I saw Elvis, I was staying at my aunt's house at the seashore, My great aunt Gladys had a ukelele, which she used to play, She would do "Me and my shadow" and "Sweet Sue", Old songs, I'd sit and try to play her ukelele,

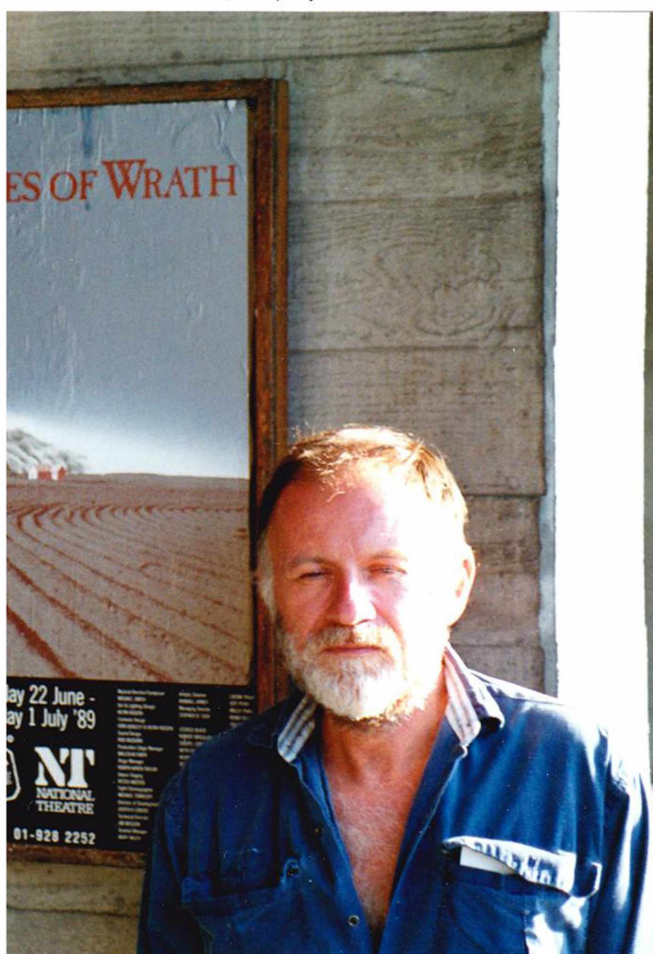


Photo: Arthur Wood, Kerrville Kronikles Katalogue

Michael Smith, National Theatre, South Bank, London 24/6/89

Did seeing Elvis justify "the cause" - that as a teenager, you automatically had to rebel,

It did, I think however, that I'm closer to the Beatles generation, That is, I'm the same age as the Beatles, so the things which they liked, I also liked, I was really nuts about Gene Vincent, whom I understand was a lot bigger over here, than he was in the United States, In the States, Gene Vincent

had about two hits. Then he disappeared for all practical purposes and was never heard from again. I was really crazy about him and Elvis too. Also the Everly Brothers - they were a big Beatles influence. A lot of early Beatles songs are just like "Cathy's Clown". Carl Perkins was another artist that I was really nuts about. The thing that was interesting to me - I think when I was about twelve or thirteen, I had the purest, truest sense of what was good in music, that I've ever had. It wasn't guided by what people told me. It was like I couldn't be fooled by the *ethics* and *codes* at that point. I remember thinking when Elvis came out with "Love me tender", which was his fourth record. The first RCA single was "Heartbreak Hotel"/"I was the one" and the second record was "I want you, I need you, I love you" backed with "My baby left me". The third record was "Hound dog"/"Don't be cruel". At that point, I was through with Elvis. I had bought the Sun Records. The ones he did with a small combo. Elvis played rhythm guitar with an electric guitar player, a bass player and sometimes a drummer. Those records came out as Elvis Presley. The first RCA Victor album - the tracks were actually originally recorded at Sun Studios. Those records were wonderful. I was crazy about them. "Mystery train", "I'm left, you're right, she's gone", "Cow, cow boogie", "Let's play house", "Just because", "Lawdy Miss Clawdy". Those were great, great recordings. I knew when I was thirteen, that he was through. At that point, they put the Jordanaires behind him. They got in a big band. It was awful. I stopped buying his records. I clung to Gene Vincent and Carl Perkins. Then I started getting into doo wop. There were a lot of Italian doo wop groups from the streets around where I grew up.

Dion and the Belmonts.

In fact, Dion is a friend of mine. That's a thrill to say. I was a big fan of his, when he first started recording. I guess I was fifteen at the time, and he was maybe sixteen. I joined one of those groups when I was fifteen. That was the first musical experience that I had, playing with other people. I was at a Catholic Youth Order club and there were these two brothers, who sang doo wop music. By that time, I'd started going to public school. CYO was the way that the Church tried to keep your faith alive. By having weekly dances and things. Outside on the street, when I was fifteen, one of the kids said "Your voice is real deep". It had changed with the age I was. He asked me if I would like to sing bass in his group. I said, "Fine". We didn't think of it as doo wop. I think that was a later term. We started singing on the corner. Under the street lamp, kind of thing. It was lots of fun. It turned out that these brothers had a guitar, which they were willing to sell me for \$5.00. I was thrilled to get it. About the same time as I got that guitar, Harry Belafonte became very popular in the United States, with a calypso album. The big song was "Banana Boat (Day-O)". I thought, "I want to play calypso music". [Ed. Note, Belafonte's RCA album, simply titled "Calypso", was reputedly the first 33 r.p.m. disc by a solo artist to achieve seven figure sales. A gold disc was awarded in 1963]. I turned away from the doo wop thing and went toward calypso music, because Belafonte had used acoustic guitars, which is what I had. I was capable of making similar sounds. When the Kingston Trio came out, I had just turned sixteen.

Then I saw that what I was doing and what was happening there, was really similar - then I started working in folk groups and we performed Kingston Trio songs.

Were you performing in public.

Yes, but we weren't getting paid for it. It wasn't even *pass the hat* - it was a group of young people who went around hospitals, insane asylums and country fairs, playing for free. This woman organised us and we would do, like a variety show. There was a tap dancer, an accordion player and a violin player. I played guitar and sang with various partners, some of whom played and some of whom just sang. I didn't start work till the age of seventeen, and at that stage, I began playing High School dances with a rock n' roll group.

Were you still living in Newark.

Yes. At that time "American Bandstand" had become quite popular. The Dick Clark show. There were a lot more teenage dances, than there had been in the past. Monstrous ones sometimes, where there would be thousands of kids in these enormous halls. They'd have five or six bands. Those were the kind of situations, where you'd go and play three or four songs. That was real interesting, because it was the first time I heard people play live with electric instruments, loudly. I didn't understand it. What I did was, I worked with a rock n' roll group, but I'd go up there and play acoustic guitar. Of course you'd never hear me in a million years, but it was good in a way, because I got to practice without actually being responsible for the sound. That happened till I was about nineteen. By that time, I was working with rock groups in bars. These were bars that were kind of "get down" places, where they even had women that fought. Bars in the middle of the woods, where they'd have fights while you were playing. Or you'd be playing in a situation where it was a circular bar, and the stage would be up in the middle of the bar.

Any wire cages.

No. No wire cages. When I heard about the wire cages, I thought "Oh, I'm glad I missed that one". I think it was because I was playing in the North. Now, probably in the South and South West, they had the wire cage thing. The North East was comparatively civilised. At the age of nineteen, I started going to College. I'd worked in a factory for a couple of years before that, where they manufactured navigational parts for missiles. It was a high tech defense situation. I'd gotten the job, because my dad worked there. He died suddenly, when I was seventeen. When I went looking for a job, people with whom my dad had worked remembered me. They asked if I wanted to work there. So I worked in a factory for a couple of years, and saw that it was not what I wanted to do. I subsequently went to College in Florida. While I was in College, I organised a folk group which was kind of modelled on the Kingston Trio. I also worked in a coffee house as a single performer. By that time, I had become very aware of the recordings of the Weavers and Theodore Bikel.

The early Vanguard and Elektra recordings.

Yes, I liked Theodore Bikel and the idea of singing in a bunch of different languages. I decided that was what I wanted to do for a while. For a couple of years, in fact. I'd guess you'd say it was what you would call a false detour. I think now for instance, when I read about the Beatles - when I read about their constancy, in their love for the kind of music they liked - I envy that kind of dedication and commitment. I can see now, that Lennon and McCartney had an ability to focus on what it was they wanted to do, from a very early age, and never waver from that vision. It made them extraordinarily knowledgeable, by the time they were twenty. When they came to the United States, I was twenty two. They were so good that I couldn't even comprehend how good they were.

But surely The Beatles were very much a case of "taking coals to Newcastle".

I read one time that Paul said, "What does the USA want with us". What we got with them, I see now, is a consolidation of the music on one hand. On the other, the sense that people our age could do it. Elvis was five years older than me. Previously, that gap had seemed insurmountable.

But contemporary music has always been a continuous, evolutionary process. One artist twists slightly what has gone before and creates something seemingly new.

I think the important word there is *slightly*. To make the twist and do it *slightly*, because that is all we can do without being ridiculous. I went through periods where I thought you had to do it exactly the way you heard it, on the one hand, or you had to do it extraordinarily different to the way you heard it. The reality was, The Beatles had a kind earnest quality to their music - they were fans - they knew about the music, and they cared about the music. They knew what they liked. I envy that, because I didn't have that. I vassallated an awful lot. I still do. I still don't know exactly what my path is, at the age of forty seven. I'm still not sure, what it is that I do.

The people who played with you in that folk group, did any of them become well known.

No. None of them were committed musicians. In general, I find now that when I think about the people that I worked with, through my youth - most of them, if not all of them, left the business. My feeling is - how do I put this - I was always better than the people I worked with. I wish I had been instead, not as good as the people I worked with, because I think it would have taken me farther, alone.

Once you left College, did you head somewhere else.

There were a lot of coffee houses in Florida at that time. This was about 1962. As a matter of fact, there were coffee houses all over the United States. It was the tail end of what they called the *beatnik era*. A lot of them had started around 1959. I had been to the Village [Ed. Note. Greenwich] a fair

amount, when I was living in New Jersey, because it wasn't that far away. I'd go and see Pete Seeger and other folksingers in those *pass the basket* houses. About the age of twenty one, I went on the road travelling with a Canadian fellow who was a very good singer. His name was Sam Cancellia. He had arrived from Nassau. He was married to a British lady, who had been a nurse in Tanganyika. They were a cosmopolitan kind of couple. He was older than I was. We travelled throughout the United States, working in coffee houses for about a year and a half. At the end of that time, he'd had enough of the States, and I was stranded without a partner. I thought that what I was supposed to be, was in groups. By that time, we had evolved a showbizzy approach to singing. It was almost like a lounge act. We dressed alike. We had these little routines which we did. Once the coffee houses started to pale out, we started working in lounges and bars. Up and down the East coast of the United States. They were loud bars, where, unless you were doing a funny song, they wouldn't pay attention to you. Soon, it was almost like a vaudeville show. That was unfortunate I think, in some ways. When that situation came to an end, I was really hungry. I didn't know what I wanted to do. I had a wife and child at this point. We were living in Miami. I found a coffee house to audition at. This was a place where, if they hired you, you played there continually. Anyway, I went there. My dream at that point - I remember thinking, "If I could only get a job at this coffee house and make \$80.00 a week, I'll never ask for anything again". I went down, auditioned and the man said, "I don't think you're a very good singer, but I think you're very funny. Do more funny songs and I'll hire you". I went home and wrote ten or fifteen funny songs, went back to see him and he hired me. I worked there for four years. The place was called "The Flick", because they showed movies there on occasions.

This takes us to the point, where as far as I'm aware, your songs were first recorded. "Commercial" and "It ain't necessarily Bird Avenue".

Absolutely. And that was where I met Spanky and Our Gang. Various members of the group had sung as singles, at "The Flick". I submitted a bunch of songs to them. I had started to write songs when I was fifteen. As soon as I got my first guitar, in fact. Back then, I wrote one or two songs a year. I didn't think of myself as a writer, until I got to "The Flick" - then in Miami, I had to write so many songs that it became clear to me that I was a songwriter. Before that, I hadn't considered the subject much.

Were those Spanky tracks the first songs you had recorded.

Yes. "Bird Avenue" was the first thing I had recorded, and I did that arrangement for them. What happened was, I gave them maybe ten or fifteen songs to consider. "Bird Avenue" was way down on the tape. I didn't even think that they would like it. For me, it was very sincere love song that I had written to this girl. She was from South Africa, and travelled around a lot. They picked that song and I was amazed. I thought "Why do they want to do this?". I had so many, what I thought of as, better songs. One day we got together in Miami and I taught them all those harmonies. They took the harmonies and didn't

change them, when they went in to record it, I was thrilled and thought "this is the way it always is". You teach them the song and they do it exactly as you have in mind. (Laughs)

Did you ever contemplate joining that group.

As a matter of fact, Spanky and Our Gang asked me to join them, right after they started. I knew them all individually, and I liked them. I thought they were wonderful people, but they all smoked dope. At that time, I didn't. The traditional wisdom was, that you weren't any good if you smoked dope. That is, you may think that you can play well, but you can't. Because of that I thought, "Well, they'll never get anywhere". In a way, although my reasoning was faulty, I'm glad that I didn't join. I think it would have been a certain kind of road to go, that from a musical point of view, wasn't valid. I was better off on my own. At one time, I was asked to join the Kingston Trio. I was about thirty, and the original Trio had disbanded. One of the fellows who was in the original group - in fact there's two originals back now. At the time, one was there. Bob Shane. He asked me to join. I said, "No". It was on the same principle, that I thought I needed to pursue my own career. After working in "The Flick" for four years, I formed a trio with people who had worked there with me. A lady who became my wife, Barbara Barrow and fellow named Ron Kickasola.

Was that his genuine name.

Yes, isn't that an curious name. I don't know where - it might be a perversion of another name. He was an interesting man, and a folk song scholar. He did a lot of English ballads. He had read music. Things that I had never come up against before. We started travelling around as a trio. We called ourselves the Baker Street Regulars, after Sherlock Holmes. Then we got a letter from the Baker Street Regulars, who were a fan club, I guess - it turned out like that, more or less. Anyway, we changed our name to Juarez.

Was there a reason for naming the trio, Juarez.

From the Dylan tune "when you're lost in the rain in Juarez, and it's Easter time too", "Tom Thumb's Blues" was the name of the song. We used to perform that song, every once in while. We went on to Los Angeles and started working at "The Ice House" in Pasadena. It was a very famous club at the time. The Smothers Brothers came out of there, Steve Martin and Pat Paulsen. Bud and Travis worked there a lot. The Dillards. The Stone Poneys - Linda Ronstadt's band - they were all there. It was a nice scene. A very exciting scene. It was a comedy, folk room. We were very successful there. We got a recording contract almost immediately with Decca, which is now MCA.

Can I backtrack a little. At one stage, you almost went to work for John Denver.

Yes, John Denver came to see me at "The Flick". One of The Brothers Four had seen me, and had been very impressed. I was really in that commercial folk vein, at that point. Denver was reorganising the Chad Mitchell Trio and wanted some other people. Two of the original members had left the Trio. It was

going to be him and two other guys. I don't recall who he wanted me to replace - the person who finally got for the job, turned out to be Michael Johnson. Johnson now records in Nashville. Denver and I met in a hotel. For the audition, he gave me a Tom Paxton tune that I had never seen written down. He said, "Play this". I now see it as a rather dry and unpleasant way to audition. We should have gotten together and played a little, sung a little, and seen what we could do together. I couldn't cut it. I wasn't very good at keeping in tune at that time. I remember when he played, I was very impressed. I felt, "He's very tuneful". Now when he plays, I find him insipid and wimpy. At the time I thought, "He's hot stuff". That gives me a sense of where I was. I was pretty raw. He said, "Well if we can't get in somebody else, we'll use you". It was kind of like that. I didn't like him at all. I thought he was an unpleasant person. Then of course, we were both very young.

You went to Viet Nam to entertain the troops.

That was with Juarez. Right before we did our record, our manager called and said, "Would you like to go to Viet Nam?". Our picture of things was, it would be like a Bob Hope tour - the soldiers will be so grateful, and they'll thank us for coming over. The reality was, that you don't ever want to play music in a war zone. It was just out of the question. These people were near death and they knew it. They were very, very unhappy. The whole country was unhappy. We were supposed to be there for six months. I had I think, the equivalent of *battle fatigue*, after about a week, I literally would not speak. I was totally shocked by the whole experience.

In hindsight, is it something that you're glad you did.

Yes. It was an awful ordeal. It simply taught me, don't play for the Army. They're not interested. They're in the Army and music has nothing to do with the Army. As they used to say, military music is a contradiction in terms.

Were the songs which appeared on the "Juarez" album, an intended concept.

Yes they were. What we were thinking of, was The Beatles. Totally, The Beatles. What we had in mind - for one thing - all of those songs were mine. Immediately, there was a thread in that. Most of those songs were about me.

"Donna from Mobile" opens the album, and the lyrics mention "St. Mary's Railroad", which is also the title of the closing track.

That was because we had gone through the state of Georgia. In Georgia, there's a St. Mary's Railroad. We thought of it consciously - we talked about it as such - St. Mary's Railroad was a symbol for breaking free. To do what you wanted to do. When we went on the road, it was an act of courage. I left my wife and child. We didn't know what we were embarking on. We knew that we were on a little odyssey, as it were. We definitely felt that the St. Mary's Railroad concept was very important to us. "Donna from Mobile" was me. I couldn't say,

"Oh, I'm a guy and I left my wife and kid". That sounded unpleasant. But if I said I was a woman, then it was alright. Originally what happened - when we passed the St Mary's Railroad, I'd said to myself "St. Mary's Railroad, that's easy to ride" which is like "the Rock Island Line, it's a mighty good road". That was about me and the things I needed to have the opportunity to say, about travelling.

"Lauderdale Rain" is obviously totally biographical. The song has a Spanky/Mamas and Papas feel to it. There appear to be numerous personal clues in the lyrics.

Peter is my middle name. The summer child was my wife, Barbara Barrow. "The Pegasus" was a coffee house that we used to go to. That was the first place I ever played, where I really felt like I belonged in the milieu. Melinda was my first wife. "The Catacombs" was another coffee house in Fort Lauderdale. Freddie was Fred Neil, who wrote "Everybody's talking". Fred had been to California, and when he came back, he was a big star. He was also something of a wildman, in the sense, that he seemed to be like the folk equivalent of Charlie Parker. There was a lot of talk about Freddie Neil's drug habit and Freddie Neil's, this and that. I idolised him. I thought of him as being a trailblazer, and he was. Absolutely. The house on Langdon Street, was where I grew up in Orange, New Jersey. When I looked back on that, I had a feeling of time passing in a certain way. There was a quality to time when I was nine or ten, up to the time I was about twelve to thirteen. It was a time which was very *evenescent* I would say, for me. A sense of things that were going to happen and things which were no longer going to happen. I felt it at the time and used to get very melancholy.

There are two very short tracks on the "Juarez" album. One seems to have a reference to drugs.

That was just a joke. We definitely thought of it as being a reference to drugs. I think at the time, what it was - we'd heard other, I guess, maybe Beatles things - where they'd have little titbits of songs in the middle of tracks. I don't know whether the "White Album" had come out by that time, or whether it was later. I'm sure that it had already come out. (Sings) "Can you take me back where I came from, brother can you take me back" and "I love you honey pie". Those little short things, so we thought we would put some on our record too.

What about the "Kyrie" track.

That was simply because the third member, Ron Kickasola was a scholar. He had introduced us to various kinds of songs he thought we should do, that were a little more unusual.

It seems strange that the make-up of some sixties groups ran in parallel. Prior to the Mamas and Papas, John Phillips was in the Journeymen with Scott McKenzie and Dick Weissman, Weissman was the scholar.

Dr Dave Guard with the Kingston Trio. With good successful groups there is that kind of *mirror of quality*, where one

group member excels at one aspect of things and the others at another - Lennon and McCartney did that, for sure.

There is a definite connection between the closing track of "Juarez" which I mentioned earlier, and the cover of your current album "Love stories".

The people on the "Love stories" cover is Juarez, the group. That is the band on the cover. McNulty, the artist, was a lady who lived in Colorado. After the record was done, the trio immediately broke up. Barbara and I saw in the process of making the record, that we didn't want to work with Ron any more. He was too folk based. We really wanted to get into pop music. We organised a rock group. Got a bass player, a guitar player and a drummer and went out on the road, as Juarez. We worked in California most of the time. It was the acid period. We liked Jefferson Airplane and people like that, so we played a lot of long involved jams. That was our thing. We were almost like the Incredible String Band, in the sense that we wanted to combine folk with that jamming, rocking quality. We played a lot with that band. We were very successful with it, and I wish we had recorded the band. We never did. The other players all came from the San Francisco area. Ostensively we went out promoting our record. We hated it. We didn't really like it. Decca mixed that record. We had mixed it ourselves and went on the road. Decca said "We don't like this mix, so we're going to mix it again". They did, and we thought it was awful. Then they put it out. We were so angry with them. When we went out to promote the record, we'd tell people "Don't buy this record. It's awful". There were awful mistakes made on it. Things like "St. Mary's Railroad" - that's at the wrong speed. We'd recorded it at a half tone below where we wanted to pitch it, because we wanted to do some higher voices. We didn't know how to do that, so we recorded it lower. We'd heard The Beatles sped up and slowed down their records - when Decca mixed it, they didn't know about this, so they made a mess. "Langdon Street" has three or four drum tracks, where there should have been one. Here's something that you might not know. "Starfisher" was written for Malcolm Hale, and it was in fact a Eulogy. I'd heard that he had died. A day later, I wrote the song. In the process of touring with Juarez, we travelled in the West a lot. We played a lot of ski lodges and met this lady who was good friends with the drummer. She did a drawing of us. I'm in the front with the hat. Barbara is on the train. Behind us, the fellow playing the mandolin was our guitar player. The fellow with the ram, was the bass player. Then there's the drummer. Originally, the artist had only drawn the ram, as representing our bass player. She thought of him as being kind of visceral. He resented it, so she said "Ok" and drew him in. She also left the ram in the sketch. As far as the telegraph poles are concerned, I think she was thinking that they were something you often found stretched out, parallel to railroads (Ed. Note. In the sketch, Barbara is looking out of a train, with the logo "St. Mary's Railroad" on the carriage). At the time, we performed a song that the Dillards recorded, which was "She sang hymns out tune (and carried a yellow balloon)". So she stuck that in. With "Love stories", I thought it would be a nice thing to kind of harken back to that. The photograph on the back of "Love stories", was me when I was about four or five. As a band, Juarez lasted

for around two years. Then Barbara and I settled in Detroit, because we'd been working a lot there. We liked it. We were working as a duet by then. That was the period, around 1971 and 1972, when it was kind of *in the air* that people were settling down, getting a bunch of animals and relaxing. We did that. It slowed down our careers a whole lot. We continued working locally. Then we went to down Miami and worked some. We'd been down there on vacation. While we were working there, this gentleman who is now with the New York Musicians Union, Artie Kornfeld approached us about doing a record. He got us a contract with Bell Records. That was the first time we worked with studio musicians. No, No, No. Not the first time. I'm sorry. We had Hal Blaine, Larry Knechtel and Joe Osborn on "Juarez". That was kind of interesting, because on our first album, James Burton played slide guitar on "Donna from Mobile". A fellow named Larry Bangheart produced "Juarez". About three quarters of the way through recording it, he just left. It was his first LP and he was terror stricken. Went to another city and just left us with this album. We finished it ourselves. The second album we did in New York with Hugh McCracken. Good folks, Good players. Very sophisticated and professional players. That for Barbara and I, was closer to what we had in mind.

The "Mickey and Babs get hot" album has a very basic feel to it.

Yes, especially compared to "Juarez". For one thing, with "Juarez" we spent an awful lot of money. This was kind of, "You've got to do it in a week, or forget it". "Juarez" took eight months to record. Those were the days when you thought it took that length of time to make a record. The Beatles were taking that long, so we thought it applied to us too. We definitely had *carte blanche* with "Juarez".

to be continued



.. MUSIC CITY ..



In the last issue of the Kronikle, we featured a piece about "Tornado Trails and Tumbleweed Tunes" an Austin based newsletter, dedicated to the latest/future exploits of Butch Hancock, Jimmie Dale Gilmore, Jesse Taylor and the Texana Dames. First the sad news, then numerous pieces of good news.

Sad to say, the people associated with TT&TT have decided to call it a day. With the [musical] participants regularly playing in foreign parts these days, the monthly "local" gig calender began to consistently look bare, to say the least. In addition, the economics of keeping the newsletter afloat, became an uncomfortable financial burden to the participants. I reckon that Eve & Erin McArthur and all the others associated with TT&TT, deserve a resounding vote of thanks for all their efforts; it was a great publication while it lasted and as we shall see, despite it all, *the road goes on forever*.

And now, the good news. Hopefully at some point this side of 1/1/91, Virgin Australia will release a single "live" duo

album by Butch Hancock and Jimmie Dale Gilmore. No doubt copies of the recording will find their way to the Northern half of the sphere, ere long. Jesse Taylor should have his "Last night" album available in the UK soon, via Bedrock Records. There are no additional tracks relative to the original cassette release, reviewed elsewhere in this issue. I believe the tracks have been remixed, however. Jesse was in the UK during late April/early May with Butch and Jimmie, and hopes to return in the Fall with his full band Tornado Alley, including new vocalist Junior Medlow. Hope that tour happens. Bedrock also plan to issue an Austin independent artist album titled "Grassroots Austin", which John Conquest has compiled. Butch's first attempt at a "No two alike" concert series [a marathon of Hancock's own original songs c/w "no repeats" and special guests], was scheduled to take place at the Cactus Cafe in Austin, January 31st - February 4th 1990. In the end, a sixth (February 5th) and seventh night (April 1st) were added. Joe Gracey taped the entire Texas event and the recordings may appear yet, as a fourteen instalment "Tape of the month" club. In the UK, Demon's Blackmail outlet would seem ideal for executing that scheme. If new Hancock musings and mindscapes, such as "Welcome to the real world, kid", "One kiss" and "Rawhide" are anything to go by, the sooner these recordings see the light of day, the better. At the moment, Joe Ely and the Texana Dames are scheduled to play this year's Cambridge Folk Festival (July 27-29th). Nice to think it may all happen, but we'll see. Funny how my prejudices surface, considering that I just failed to mention another famous "Texan" appearing at Cherry Hinton this year.

Meanwhile back in Austin (as if I ever leave), a new "free" monthly music publication took to the streets last September. Chief conspirators in launching MUSIC CITY, were Eve McArthur (TT&TT), John Conquest (an Englishman living out *my* dream, by residing in Austin) and Sylvia Benini (who worked with JC on an earlier publication titled "Oasis"). Regular contributors to MC, have included Erin McArthur and Ric Shreves. For those of us not lucky enough to reside in Austex, the current cost of an annual subscription:- North America (USA & Canada), \$10; all other locations/continents on the planet and elsewhere in the universe \$20. A snip at twice/thrice the price, from MUSIC CITY, 600 South 1st #123, Austin, Texas 78704 [Tel No (512) 441-7423]. Among a rather comprehensive series of contents, MUSIC CITY regularly includes reviews of local and major label releases by Austin/Texas musicians; *Music City Dossier* focuses on career and other information about a local performer, as does *MVP (Most Valuable Player)*; another monthly feature is the song exposition, *Texas Hymnal* which appropriately kicked off with Wes McGee's "Texas # 1". *Great studios of Austin* is a recent departure, while the main thrust of the publication is a "Day to day guide to live music" in Austin, for the forthcoming month. Rather than ending up with an endless list to sort through, separate sections for Texas, Folk/Acoustic, Zydeco, Cajun/Country/Rockabilly, Blues/R&B, Rock/Pop/Reggae, Jazz, Open Mike and Radio/TV allow you to check quickly on your favourite flavour of licks. Simple huh !.

Personal MC highlight is Conquest's pithy, take "no prisoners" and "let's debunk the bullshit" style of writing. To observe your life drift by, totally wasted - miss this publication.

A Kerrverts Festival 50.



There is a reason, There is a rhyme,
There is a season, There is a time,
and then, there's the latest KERRVERTS FESTIVAL 50.

1. The Dutchman MICHAEL SMITH "Michael Smith" Flying Fish FF404 [1986], #
2. The dance CARL BROUSE "American Hotel" DTI DT-3214 [1983], #
3. The wing and the wheel Nanci GRIFFITH "Last of the true believers" Philo PH1109 [1986], #
4. Buddy's waiting on the flatland road TERRY CLARKE "Call up a hurricane" Minidoka MILP001 [1990], #
5. Yarrington Town MICKIE MERKENS "Texas Summer Nights" Potato Satellite PS2-1000 [1983], #
6. Long distance love WILL T. MASSEY (c/w TISH HINOJOSA) "Slow study" Floree/Signal Songs (cassette only, no index no) [1989], #
7. I'm not from here JAMES McMURTRY "Too long in the wasteland" Columbia CK 45229 [1989], #
8. Just a storm BUTCH HANCOCK (& THE SUNSPOTS) "Own & own" Demon FIEND 150 [1989], #
9. Every heartbeat LORI CARSON "Shelter" David Geffen Company D2-24256 [1990], #
10. Language of the heart DAVID WILCOX "How did you find me here" A&M Americana CS5275 [1989], #
11. The lonely one DAVID HALLEY "KLBJ FM94 - Local Licks Live 1989" (charity compilation CD, no label or index no) [1989], #
12. Swim against the tide JAY TURNER "Movements in Architecture" Gypsy GYPC/004 [1990], #
13. Raglan road THE BARNBURNERS "I heard that !" (cassette only, no label or index no) [1990], #
14. Entourage CHRIS WALL "Honky tonk heart" Tried and True Music TTMC 2226 (cassette only) [1989], #
15. Let me remember TISH HINOJOSA "Homeland" A&M Americana CD 5263 [1989], #
16. Cambodia JAY TURNER "Movements in Architecture" Gypsy GYPC/004 [1990], #
17. When it comes to you DAVID HALLEY "David Halley" (cassette only, no label or index no) [1990], #
18. Daddy's coal BETTY ELDERS "Daddy's coal" Whistling Pig WP 1216 (cassette only) [1989], #
19. Clear Texas morning TIM KELLER "Live at Uncle Calvin's" Chamisa 102 (cassette only) [1989], #
20. Mother loves the radio SHAKE RUSSELL & JACK SAUNDERS "Pilgrim's Highway" Jalapeno NMR-072 (cassette only) [1989], #
21. The dream goes on LEE CLAYTON "Another night" Provogue PRD 70082 [1989], #
22. Help me now JERRY JEFF WALKER "Five years gone" Linea/Line LECD 9,00952 [1990], #
23. Something about trains JANE SIBERRY "Bound by the beauty" Reprise/Duke Street 7599-25942-2 [1989], #
24. The fisherman JOHN McCORMICK "Blue plate" Phantom (cassette only, no index no) [1990], #
25. Gangster of love JESSE TAYLOR "Last night" Tornado Alley 42127 (cassette only) [1989], #
26. The road goes on forever ROBERT EARL KEEN JR "West Textures" Special Delivery SPOCD 1032 [1989], #
27. Playin' fool KATY MOFFATT "Child bride" Heartland HLD 009 [1989], #
28. Robert and Ramona TOM PACHECO "Eagle in the rain" Ringsend Road TPCD 1 [1990], #
29. Sometimes I think about Suzanne JAMES TALLEY "Got no bread.../Tryin' like the devil" Bear Family BCD 15433 [1989], #
30. I wish I were a princess SARA HICKMAN "Equal scary people" Elektra 60903-2 [1989], #
31. I just drove by KIMMIE RHODES "Angels get the blues" Heartland HLD010 [1989], #
32. He went back to Texas JAMES TALLEY "Love songs and the blues" Bear Family BCD 15464 [1989], #
33. Somewhere in Kansas HUGH MOFFATT "Troubadour" Cuppamore 07-3CD [1989], #
34. Something to believe in SHAWN COLVIN "Steady on" CBS CK 45209 [1989], #
35. If ever you need me KRIS McKAY "What love endures" Arista APCD 8586 [1990], #
36. Sail, sail away MARILISA NIEBUHR "Sing along with the aliens (Greetings from the San Marcians)" (no label or index no) [1989], #
37. When I grow up PIERCE PETTIS "While the serpent lies sleeping" Windham Hill WD-1087 [1989], #
38. My name Joe DAVID MASSENGILL "Legacy - A collection of new folk music" Windham Hill WD6-1086 [1989], #
39. Berliners ROY HARPER "Once" Awareness AWT 1018 [1990], #
40. Fifty fifty chance SUZANNE VEGA "Days of open hand" A&M 395 293-2 [1990], #
41. Only open on Sunday PETER BELSTEN "Peter Belsten" (cassette only, no label or index no) [1990], #
42. Alabama summertime JAMES TALLEY "Black Jack choir/Ain't it something" Bear Family BCD 15435 [1989], #
43. Brother Warrior KATE WOLF "An evening in Austin" Kaleidoscope K-36 [1989], #
44. Leave heaven alone EXENE Cervenka "Old wives tales" Rhino R2 70913 [1989], #
45. I saw a stranger with your hair JOHN GORKA "Legacy - A collection of new folk music" Windham Hill WD6-1086 [1989], #
46. Heartland STEVE GILLETTE "American songwriter" Compass Rose CRM-1 (cassette only) [1989], #
47. Enchanted forest BILL WARD, VICKI FOWLER & SUSAN MARTIN "Conroe 1990 Spring Fling" C.A.L.M. (no index no) [1990], #
48. Metropolitan Avenue CHRISTY MOORE "Unfinished revolution" WEA WX104 [1987], #
49. Wild side of life RAY CAMPI (c/w ROSIE FLORES) "Taylor, Texas 1988" Bear Family BCD 15486 [1989], #
50. Heal in the wisdom BOBBY BRIDGER "Heal in the wisdom" Golden Egg BB 1001 [1981], #



All albums released in the UK, unless marked, US releases marked #, European releases marked S. Introductory rhyme taken from the Bobby Bridger song, "Heal in the wisdom" - the Kerrville Folk Festival anthem. Entry No. 11, only 1000 CD's pressed (already sold out). Entries 36 and 46 are cassette only recordings. Lack of space precluded entering full titles for both entries.

Edited and published by,
Arthur Wood,
127, Pinewood Drive,
Bartley Green,
Birmingham B32 4LG,
England.

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Editorial.

In the last issue, I indicated KK 7 would appear around early January 1990. Many things conspired to defeat that possibility. In this age of rampant privatisation, the last nine months in the Water Industry (my day job), have been excessively hectic. The Thatcherite theorem of "*screwing the maximum output for the minimum input*", has permeated British working life like a pernicious cancer. Time no doubt, will prove the wiser. Of course, realistically there is no other sensible alternative. It's the insensitive excesses which leave the bad taste.

While we're on the subject of economics, 320 copies of Kronikle issues 1 to 5 had to be sold, to break even. The current sales figures stand respectively at 309/239/240/239 & 203 copies. By issue 6, the goodwill of my printer evaporated by +£200 (60% price increase). Break even point on issue 6, rose to around 480 copies. Sales to date stand at 475 copies, including casual sales. If it had not been for Peter O' Brien/DR, issue 6 would never have appeared. With issue 6, 100 subscriptions became due for renewal. Thirty people responded positively. Arithmetically the guaranteed sale of 380 copies at £1.25, compared with a £550.00 print bill, should explain why this issue has been photocopied. 125 subscriptions are due for renewal with this issue. Anticipating a response ?, I'm being realistic.

Copies of issue 1 to 5 sent to Kerrville, prior to last year's Festival, produced a total sale of 24 copies, during the eighteen day event. It barely covered the postage costs. The old "coals to Newcastle" adage appeared to be true. Sue Medley (Kerrville/Bridger Productions) & Danna Garcia (Canadian River) continue to bang the drum saleswise Stateside. Thanks girls.

With average sales of 250 copies/issue, and a market research proven 6% rate of reply to advertisers, a regular income from that source would have been hard to maintain. Lack of response would have meant new advertisers being continually sought. Many KK featured musicians, are barely scraping a living, while purveying their art. Additionally, taking adverts and chasing the £, would have been another claim on that precious commodity - time. A magazine content free from influence by others, remains a primary KK ideal. Artists with something to say musically, get into the pages of the KK. Bullshit may baffle some brains; good taste should lodge firmly between your ears.

While wrestling with the problem of financial solvency and insufficient time, I even considered *packing up this delusion* entirely. In the end, I concluded that continuing with a smaller magazine (from issue 8), was a better solution. At the moment, it is planned to base future KK's around approx. 20, A5 photocopied pages. Existing subscriptions will be honoured on a two for one basis, where financially possible. New subscription rates are given on page 2. You will automatically be notified when your subscription is due for renewal. As for content, future issues may become more new release/news orientated. Has the dreaded interview format become a dinosaur ? Time will tell. Time in fact, is the other half of this conundrum. Anyone with an Amstrad PCW 8256 or 8512, an interest in transcribing interview tapes and lots of spare time, please get in touch !.

I trust from the foregoing, that you will understand why any subscriber wishing to drop me a line in future, enquiring about the KK/buying albums, tapes etc, should enclose a SAE. A reply is guaranteed. Otherwise, an interminable silence will ensue.

You may recall reading about Ben Blake's, Kingston Trio biography in OMAHA RAINBOW. Ben is now up to issue 2 with his latest project, "Old Ben's Newsletter". It regularly features news about a guy called Stewart, who seems to send some of you out there, slightly *gaga*. Costs two dollars for four issues (US only). I'd suggest that you double that figure, if you live outside the North Americas, otherwise someone else will catch a financial *cold*. Essential reading here at KKHQ.

Apart from the Massey and Ketchum major label debuts mentioned elsewhere, the excellent Christine Albert has an independent album released at the end of June in Austin and titled "You are gold". Details in Issue 8 without a doubt.

Regarding the contents of this issue. In no specific order, thanks are due to: Rod Kennedy, Peter O'Brien, Robert Earl & Kathleen Keen, Bobby & Melissa Bridger, Hal Ketchum, Alpha Ray, Brian Wood, Mickie Merkens, Michael & Barbara Smith, Ben Blake, Richard Dobson and the entire MUSIC CITY mafia. This issue is dedicated to Gabriel Bridger (born 7pm on 7/11/89, weighing 7 lbs), all my *family* at Camp C.A.L.M. and those Kronikle readers who have stuck with the magazine since those heady days of innocence, only two short years ago. For the potential print date of Issue 8, don't hold your breath for too long. Heaven knows what will happen between now and then. In the meantime, keep your eyes wide open and your ears clear of wax.

SALE OF ALBUMS, SINGLES ETC

Her indoors, has dictated that the crammed shelves of vinyl etc at KKHQ are due for another clear out. A list of what is available, should be ready shortly after issue 7 is posted out. Folk, pop, country and rock. Some sale titles will no doubt blow my credibility. If you want to receive a copy of the list, then send me a SAE. TODAY. By tomorrow, you'll have forgotten.