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DAVID & KAREN BILLER

#26/115 MARCH 1999



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THE VERY BEST OF BRENDA HOLLOWAY

(Motown)

She was only 17 when she signed with Motown in 1964, but Holloway, who quit a group when she was 12 because she didn't think they were serious, was already a veteran with a string of successful Donna singles, under her own name and with girl group The Watusians (some of which, notably *Echo*, were featured on Del-Fi's recent **Doo Wop** collection). As Del-Fi and the Watts reference indicate, Holloway was from East LA, Motown's first West Coast signing, but even though Berry Gordy was planning to move to LA, where she was already well-known, the label never adequately promoted her torchy and, for Motown, stylistically offbeat, style. When her contract was terminated after only four years, during which her best positions were #13 in the Pop charts and #12 in the R&B charts, Motown claimed they were letting her go because she wanted to sing for God—Holloway's version was somewhat different. This 15 track retrospective of her brief stay at Motown probably has something to do with the fact that Holloway won the 1999 R&B Foundation's Pioneer Award, because their fraught relationship is clearly revealed in the credits, "Slated to be included on the cancelled album **Hurtin' & Cryin'**," "Scheduled as Tamla 54121, then cancelled." Providing an insight into Motown's internal dynamics, two shitcanned singles, both of which, notably the amazing *When Johnny Comes*, a pioneer codependency song, are on this album, were not only written but produced by Smokey Robinson himself. Sort of an upside for Holloway is that her material hasn't been endlessly repackaged and played to death on oldies radio, in fact the Spencer Davis Group's cover of *Every Little Bit Hurts* and *Blood, Sweat & Tears* of *You've Made Me So Very Happy*, which Holloway wrote with her sister Patrice, are better known than her originals. So the magnificent sultry force of *Land Of A Thousand Boys* (another Holloway sisters original), *I'll Always Love You*, *When I'm Gone*, *I've Been Good To You* and *Operator* come across undiminished by overfamiliarity. PolyGram have just cut Motown's staff from 75 to 7, so we can only cross our fingers and hope the promised 'Very Best Of' The Contours, The Originals and The Velvelettes actually materialize. **JC**

DOWNEY BLUES

(HMG/Hightone)

Music historians looking for Americana's Ground Zero may well settle on Wenzel's Music Town, 13117 Lakewood Blvd, Downey, CA, whose patrons included two local boys, Dave & Phil Alvin (I somehow think they didn't rub elbows with neighbors Richard & Karen Carpenter) who got their musical education browsing the thousands of old 45s for which it's internationally famous. It was, in fact, Dave Alvin who turned me on to this 1997 album, which Hightone, I guess figuring it was of limited appeal, didn't promote nationally. It commemorates a period, starting in 1959, when Bill Wenzel opened a studio, now part of the store, and started putting out singles, on his Jack Bee, Downey, Carmax and Midnite labels. Downey's big success was The Chantays' *Pipeline*, but, as the title indicates, this collection concentrates on Wenzel's blues recordings, two each by Chuck Higgins and Little Johnny Taylor, three by T-Bone Walker Jr (T-Bone's nephew), five by Ace Holder and six by Jessie Hill, and they kick ass. I'm not sure why, but for some reason listening to this album of obscure singles, backing musician credits heavily laced with "probably" and "possibly," from an industrial suburb of LA, resolved a problem I've fretted over for many years, occasionally in print. To make no bones about it, I would trade all the white blues ever recorded—and for you Raitt, Clapton and Vaughan fans, I do mean *all*—for any one track off this album. Guess you could say I've finally gone over to the Blues Nazis, but the truth is in the grooves. **JC**

LED KAAPANA & FRIENDS WALTZ OF THE WIND

(Dancing Cat)

My 'Hawaiian Music' section now comprises two CDs, this and *Na Mele O Paniolo* (Songs Of the Hawaiian Cowboy), so it'd be futile to try posing as a purist, but even the label admits this album is somewhat compromised. OK, they phrase it a little differently, "The first recording combining players from Hawaiian, Country and Bluegrass music." In fact, the album, recorded in Nashville and taking its title from the Fred Rose song, is Hawaiian more or less on a technicality, Kaapana being the only islander on it, backed by Alison Krauss, Ricky Skaggs, Jerry Douglas, Sonny Landreth, Sam Bush, Bob Brozman, George Winston and various other haole musicians. Kaapana is certainly very proficient, specializing in slack key guitar and also playing ukulele, autoharp and acoustic guitar, but running a direct comparison with *Na Mele O Paniolo*, an admittedly patchy various artists compilation, I still marvel at the virtuosity of Sonny Lim, also a multi-instrumental slack key guitarist, while Nani Lim Yap, singing in Hawaiian, leaves Alison Krauss for dead. I imagine Dancing Cat are hoping to break slack key guitar playing out of a narrow enthusiasts ghetto, which is fair enough, but if you hear this and are tempted, try finding my Other Album, though there may, of course, well be more out there that are even better. **JC**

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SWAMP GOLD VOLUME 5

(Jin)

Hundreds of Swamp Pop 45s were put out in the late 50s, the 60s and into the 70s on dozens of regional labels, so it was a bit of a worry when the fourth volume in this series sagged from the blistering standard set by the previous three. Though Jin was the most important label and, by dint of survival, acquired the catalogs of many others which fell by the way, such as Viking, for which Johnnie Allen recorded *South To Louisiana*, his adaptation of Johnny Horton's *North To Alaska*, and Guitar Jr's *Family Rule*, both of which are included here, they don't have rights to everything. However, with only two licensed tracks, TK Hulin's *I'll Still Be Your Friend* (Boo-Kay) and Al Ferrier's *I'll Try One More Time* (Goldband), they've rallied strongly. Perhaps the most significant track is Rod Bernard and Clifton Chenier's *Kansas City*, from the 1979 *Boogie In Black And White* LP, never issued on CD, that was an enormous influence on up and comers like Zachary Richard and Wayne Tups. Somewhat anachronistically, Tups himself is included, with The Boogie Kings, singing *I'm Not A Fool Anymore*, better known in Swamp Pop from TK Hulin's version. As always, there's a Cookie & The Cupcakes number (*Trouble In My Life*), with others from Warren Storm (*What Am I Living For* and *The Freeze*), Clint West, Lil Bob & the Lollipops, Rockin' Sidney, Little Alfred, and three new names to me, Jay Stutes, Margo White and Mason McClain. The absence of a few important names, notably Gene Terry and King Karl & Guitar Gable, presumably because of rights problems, keeps the *Swamp Gold* series from being definitive, but if Volume 2 is still my most highly recommended, it's back on top form. **JC**

VAN BROUSSARD • A TRIBUTE

(CSP)

Don't imagine swamp poppers go in much for consulting the *I Ching*, but I'd imagine Broussard would come up with "Perseverance furthers" every throw. Like many swamp pop artists, Broussard only had a few regional hits, but where virtually all his peers packed it in, most during the British Invasion, or scaled back, he kept the faith, putting on a full scale swamp pop show, complete with piano and horn section, to this day. Broussard's sheer staying power alone has ensured him an honored place in the South Louisiana pantheon, however, as if to emphasize that there's more to him than simple persistence, his sixth CD is a 20 cut patchwork that spans most of his 30 year career. 45s were the ideal vehicle for swamp pop and it has to be said that the album's highspots are the original versions of *Feed The Flame* (1968), 1977's *Lord I Need Somebody Bad Tonight* ("cause I just lost somebody good"), pretty much the last pure swamp pop hit, and, featuring Van's sister Grace, of Dale & Grace, *Pledging My Love* (1977). The Broussards also duet *Blues Stay Away From Me*, recorded in 1965, one of a number of 60s and 70s recordings either unreleased or not previously issued on CD, while the 90s are represented by roadtested fan favorites, including a fine cover of Tommy McLain's reading of *Sweet Dreams*. Rather oddly, Broussard doesn't always sing the lead, which, particularly when Henry Broussard fronts *Play That Funky Music*, is not altogether a good idea. **JC**

ROSIE LEDET • I'M A WOMAN

(Maison de Soul)

Album titles can be mystifying, if not downright misleading, but Rosie Ledet's always nail her colors to the mast with simple declarative statements: *Zydeco Sweetheart*, *Sweet Brown Sugar*, *Zesty Zydeco*, *Zydeco Sensation* and now *I'm A Woman*. No messing. Following the John Lafosse tradition of playing the Cajun accordion rather than the piano accordion favored by Chenier disciples, Ledet is a fine player, but her trademark both as a singer and songwriter is her sexuality. With a multihued palette of erotic moods, from the subdued and melancholy to the playful and bawdy, she's outstandingly the best songwriter in contemporary Zydeco. The range of her talent is illustrated here at one extreme by the sad and gentle *Blowin' Kisses In The Wind*, at the other by an aggressive rant at a man who comes home late expecting food on the table, who she tells to eat her dust, only she uses a French word for dust, *You Can Eat My Poussière*. On the previous albums and even more noticeably at live shows, her band, which includes three more Ledets, one of them, bassplayer Morris Ledet, her husband, had a slight tendency to appear halfhearted, but this time round seem much more locked in to what she's doing. **JC**

THE CREOLE ZYDECO FARMERS

... ON THE ROAD

(Maison de Soul)

Five players, fronted by Warren Prejean Sr and Morris Francis, both of whom sing leads and background vocals and both of whom, unusually, play both accordion and scrubboard, who are all from Lafayette, but spend a lot of time out of town, touring America and Europe, and it's easy to see why. From Zydeco standards like Clifton Chenier's *Tee Na Na* and the blues of *You Don't Miss Your Water* to the bounce of *Chanka Chanka Man* to the irresistible pulse of *Zydeco Rumba*, this is a traditional band that's full of life and energy. **JC**

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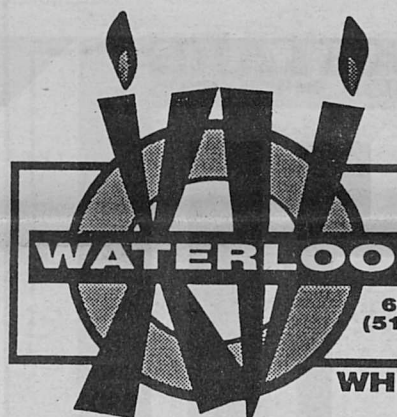
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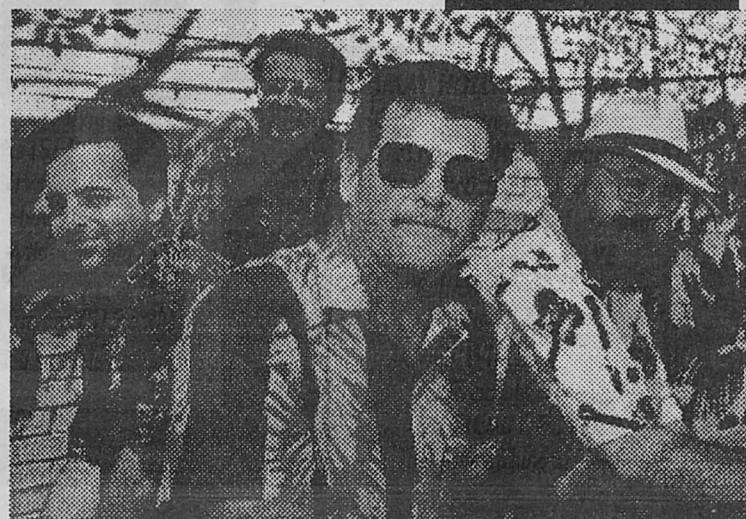
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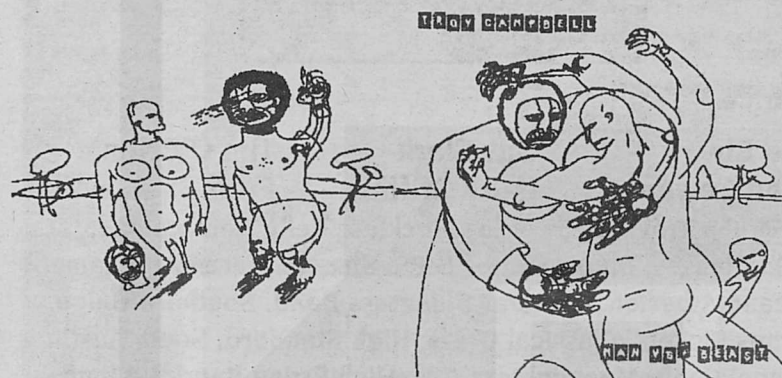
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BILLY JACK WILLS & HIS WESTERN SWING BAND CRAZY, MAN, CRAZY!

(Joaquin)

Right there you have the crucial difference between Billy Jack and his older brother Bob—a Western Swing band covering Bill Haley's 1953 rock & roll hit. The difference wasn't so much musical as generational. As a young man, Bob Wills, like Milton Brown, was a sponge, soaking up every musical form he came across, jazz, pop, swing, blues, country, you name it, reinventing them as Western Swing, but as he got older his receptors closed down, his vision degenerated into a rigid version. Based in Wills Point, CA, Billy Jack, every bit as inquisitive and acquisitive but 21 years his brother's junior, started where Bob left off and, with a band made up of equally adventurous musicians, notably Tiny Moore mandolin, fiddle and arrangements, steel guitarist Vance Terry and Dick McComb trumpet, kept going. Adding postwar R&B, jump blues, bebop and early rock & roll to the mix, he kept Western Swing vital and innovative. His higher register vocals weren't the mellow crooning of Bob's singers but urgent blues shouting (his MGM cover of Roy Brown's *Good Rockin' Tonight* is regarded as a rockabilly classic). Like **Billy Jack Wills & His Western Swing Band** (MCT #87), this album comes from transcription discs made for KFBK, Sacramento, and it includes Wills standards, *Cadillac In Model A*, *Rock-A-Bye Baby Blues*, *Milk Cow Blues*, *Take Me Back To Tulsa*, *I Laugh When I Think How I Cried Over You*, Larry Darnell's *For You, My Love*, *Jelly Roll Blues*, Jimmy Bryant & Speedy West's *Skiddle Dee Boo*, Clyde McCoy's *Sugar Blues*, *Stardust*, *Sweet Georgia Brown*, Merle Travis' *Kentucky Means Paradise*, Tennessee Ernie Ford's *Kissin' Bug Boogie* and *Jazz Me Blues*. Billy Jack's career came to a screeching halt in 1955 when Bob decided to leave Tulsa, take over the Wills Point band and turn its clock back to suit his style. Billy Jack, who died in 1991, never did anything substantial in music again and his players soon moved on, Vance Terry joining Jimmie Rivers' Cherokees and becoming a Bay Area legend. Like a shark, Western Swing has to keep moving forward, but with Billy Jack's ouster, it was dead in the water. **JC**

COWBOYS & INDIANS A Big Night In COWTOWN

(Cowboys & Indians)

Swing band or Country band? The material and attitude say one thing, the instrumentation and dance rhythms something else. In the title track, C&I pay homage to Bob Wills and Milton Brown, but Western Swing isn't really a comfortable fit either. The problem is neatly posed by *Stompin' At the Sons*, when Erik Swanson, also the principal songwriter, sings "Put on your boots and grab your hat," words one does not immediately associate with trombones (Swanson and Jim Lehnert), saxophone (Lehnert) or trumpet (Brandon Lisk). However, it's just as neatly resolved by a reference, again in the title track, to "hillbilly jive," a description it would be hard to improve on. Cowboys & Indians, who've been making their own offbeat brand of music for 15 years, have seen the fashion wheel turn to their advantage, and found a warm welcome in trendy swing clubs, mainly, I'd imagine, because over those years they've really figured out how to make people dance, while at the same time being far more original than bandwagon swing bands which cop their licks off reissues. **JC**

JIMMY TARLTON • STEEL GUITAR RAG

(HMG/Hightone)

Hightone really ought to hire Dave Alvin to do their publicity because this is another low-key release he told me about, and I'm here to tell you both Third Coast Music Network and I think it's a stone monster. Tarlton was born in 1892 and these recordings were made between 1963 and 1965, but for all he was over 70 years old, any musician, in any genre, who listens to this album and claims he or she would have no problem following his act is simply full of shit. Tarlton is an 800 pound mountain folk and country blues singing and picking gorilla. Born in Chesterfield County, SC, he taught himself to play banjo and guitar and between 1927 and 1933 cut some 75 songs for Columbia, Victor and ARC, notably the very first recording of *Columbus Stockade Blues*, but, when 'rediscovered' in 1963, hadn't played professionally in 20 years. I don't know his early recordings, but on this album his voice is strong, clear and forceful, his slide guitar playing endlessly inventive and, though he hadn't played banjo in over 50 years, he sure hadn't forgotten how. On many numbers, you hear him urging himself, "Come on, Jimmy, make it pretty," but the overwhelming impression isn't of pretty but of raw, circuit-blowing power. **JC**

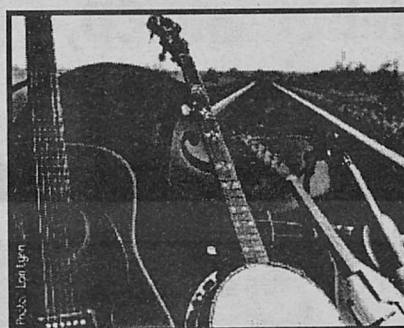
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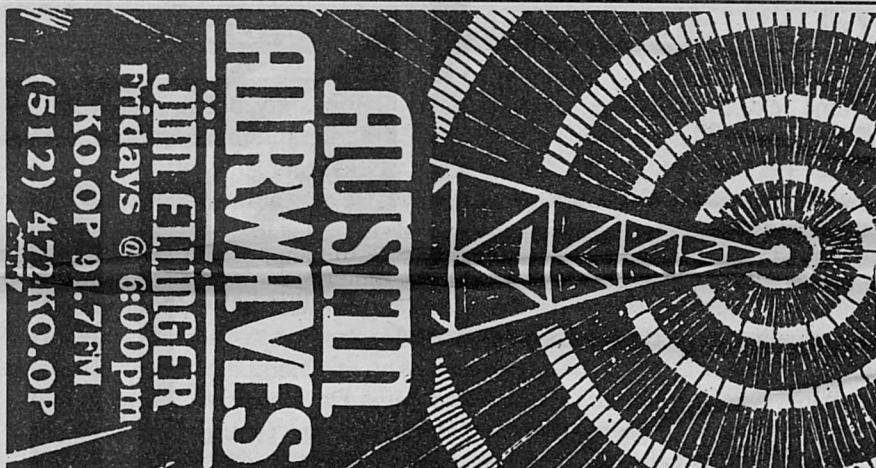
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MARTI BROM & HER JET-TONE BOYS

LASSED LIVE!

(Goofin' [Finland])

Secrets are an Austin staple, but if many are very well kept, perhaps the best kept is that you can, in theory, make a superlative album, with an outstanding producer, free, gratis and for nothing. The trick is that you have to be able to do it live and you only get one pass at each song. This, of course, is enough to eliminate most bands and discourage many more, but KUT's *Live Set*, with engineer Walter Morgan producing on the fly, has been the source of albums, from bands up to the challenge, that stand comparison with those from any formal studio. Certainly, it's hard to see how Brom, backed by Shaun Young on drums, Kevin Smith upright bass, Todd Wulfmeyer guitar and Chris Miller steel guitar, could have done any better than she does here. 'Lassoed,' as I remarked when this first came out on Squarebird cassette in 1995, has misleading country overtones, misleading because although Brom deals very handily with Patsy Cline's *Gotta Lot Of Rhythm In My Soul* and the standard *Fool Such As I*, she is, at least for my money, outstandingly the best female rockabilly singer the revival has produced. For the most part she pays tribute to such Golden Age greats as Janis Martin (*All Right Baby*), Jo-Ann Campbell (*Really Really Love You* and *Beachcomber*), Wanda Jackson (*Funnel Of Love*), The Collins Kids (*Rock Boppin Baby*), Linda & The Epics (*Gonna Be Loved*), Wayne Walker (*All I Can Do Is Cry*) and Glen Glenn (*One Cup Of Coffee*), with Wulfmeyer contributing *Dirty Dog* and Billy Poore, who put out Brom's first singles on Renegade, *I Still Can't Forget About You*. Though Brom's sensational singing still dominates the proceedings, her backing, which sounded oddly weak on the cassette, now comes across far more effectively, particularly Miller's steel. One *Live Set* problem is that no matter how many people were in the KUT studio, it always sounds like only two or three of them were clapping and cheering. In Brom's case, go to any show and you'll find out different. **JC**

RONNIE DAWSON • MORE BAD HABITS

(Yep Roc)

Come next August, The Blonde Bomber will turn sixty, but you sure couldn't prove it by this album, his first made in America studio recording since the 60s. Also his first ever in stereo, but let's not hold that against him. As always, he rock & rolls harder than kids a third his age. He also defines rockabilly guitar for them and one of the big advantages of this album is that you can really hear what a great picker he is. I have to admit, I've never heard of his backing players, and kinda wish he'd recorded with his all-star Texas band (Mencher, Smith & Pankratz), but they do a real good job keeping up with his adventurous shifts and sly humor. If nothing else, after No Hit/Upstart's disastrous, low-rent *Just Rockin' And Rollin'*, it's good to see Dawson not being nickel and dimed on production. Afraid the lesson here is that though Dawson owes Barney Koumis a whole lot for getting him back into action, he was equally held back from reaching his full potential and this album is a giant step forward for him. **JC**

SANDBLASTERS • CACTUS STINGRAY

SURFIN' SENORITA

(both Wildebeest)

Many people might regard an all-instrumental, big guitar, surf trio album, billed as "A potent soundtrack for the Sci-Fi Space Cowboy adventure movie that lives in the backs of our minds as we blaze full throttle down the Mother Road at 2am with the headlights off," as a living dinosaur. Far below the media radar flourishes a surf/intro subculture, to which Sandblasters, Mark Stultz guitar, Spencer Clarke drums and Dave Shuller bass are Austin's main, through far from only, contribution. The 15 tracks, all originals, of which the spaghetti western-ish *Big Sky* has become a surprise listener request hit on KSYM, demonstrate that this is trio which could hold its own in any All Time Surf Fest. ♦ Herb Alpert and surf bands have had a long, if onesided, relationship, dating all the way back to 1963 when The Ventures cut *Lonely Bull*, though The Challengers were perhaps his most assiduous disciples. Since then, Tijuana Brass numbers have become a standard source for surf/intro bands, from The Shadows to Laika & The Cosmonauts. Celebrating this connection, 15 groups, including the simply named cover band Herb, pay tribute to Alpert. Some numbers, such as *The Work Song* (Herb), *A Taste Of Honey* (Halibuts), *South Of The Border* (Pollo Del Mar), *The Third Man Theme* (Slackmates) and, of course, *Lonely Bull* (3 Balls Of Fire) are well established, but others have rarely, if at all, been recorded as surf instrumentals. These latter are *Bittersweet Samba* (Space Cossacks), *Surfin' Seniorita* itself (Insect Surfers), *Spanish Flea* (Sir Finks), *Mexican Shuffle* (Slacktone), *Whipped Cream* (Exotica), *Struttin' With Maria* (Herman The German), *Memories Of Madrid* (Sandblasters), *Green Peppers* (Satan's Pilgrims), *Wade In The Water* (Squid Vicious' Overdose) and a fabulous ukelele duet version of *Tijuana Taxi* by Donna Ho.

♦ It's been decades since instrumentals made the charts on a regular basis, but these guys don't seem to care. They've got reverb, and they're gonna use it. All instrumental? Try it, you might like it. **JC**

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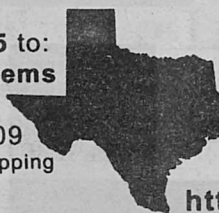
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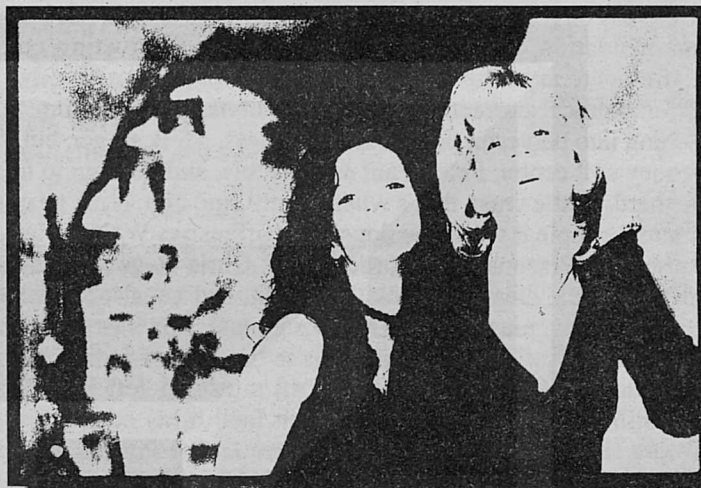
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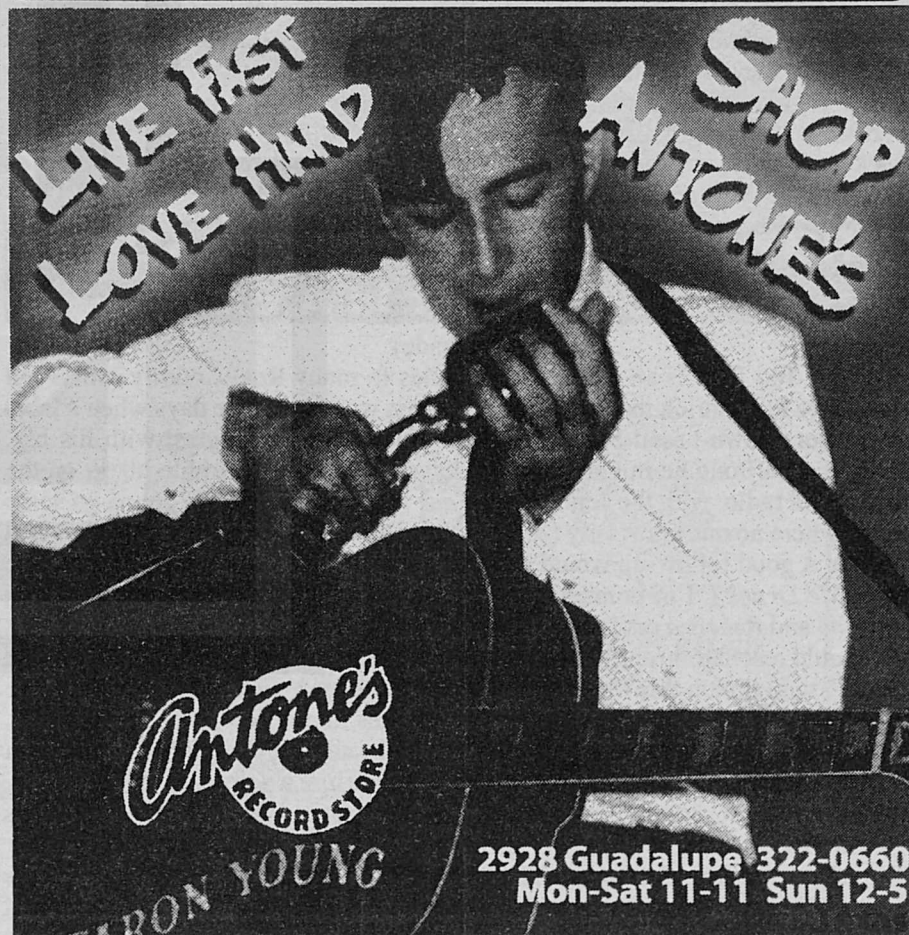
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WILLIAM JAMES IV

LOVE IS THE POWER

(WJK/Club De Musique [Italy])

Eleven albums, eleven reviews, and I'm running out of ideas on how to sell the concept of William James IV. Even if I could offer soundclips, it really wouldn't help because he doesn't offer much in the way of quick grabbers, you have to listen to an entire album, even the entire canon, to understand, or at least get an inkling of, what this is all about. Put at it simplest, James' albums are the soundtrack to his ongoing psychodrama, which, of course, is not in itself much of a recommendation, but his ferocious intelligence, riveting command of language, from literary allusion to scatological insult, sardonic humor, utter disregard for political correctness and brutal honesty enable him to turn just about anything into powerful poetry. He is, I guess, a folk singer, but if you start at folk's gooey soft center, Peter, Paul & Mary say, and go right to the far outer edge of the hard, brittle crust, that's where you'll find him. It isn't a comfortable place, for some people it would be downright offensive. With the latest version of The Borderline Personality Disorder Band, Chris Gage guitars, accordion, piano and B3, Darcie Deaville fiddle, mandolin and vocals, Dave Heath bass, Johnny Benoit drums, plus Marvin Dykhuis guitars, The East Side Flash dobro and Joseph Colarusso flute and saxes, this is the first of James' albums to be actually produced, by fellow Corpus Christi musician Jeff DeVille, but, if punchier, it still has the trademark let's do it feel of his others. Rather oddly, James is more successful with DeVille's *Love Is The Power*, one of the very rare non-originals on any of the albums, than DeVille was himself. A welcome development is that this is being simultaneously released in Italy, welcome because, as I've remarked before, James seems to me to be potentially much more of a European taste than an American one, though I was recently chastised by Checkered Past because they had to learn about James from Gurf Morlix, who's played on his albums, so maybe there's hope yet. **JC**

GAIL DAVIES

LOVE AIN'T EASY • GREATEST HITS

(Little Chickadee/Koch)

Patricia Gail Dickerson, from Broken Bow, OK (sorry, couldn't resist throwing that in, it's about the perfect name for a country singer's birthplace), racked up some hits but overall was always bigger with critics, seduced by her luminous intelligence and stylistic daring, than with the record buying public. With both rock and jazz singing in her background, Davies was always ahead of the curve, making her mark on country music history by being the first woman to write, arrange and produce her own records, but paid the price of being a pioneer by seeing others reap the benefits of her groundbreaking. After bouncing round the majors, Warner Brothers to RCA to MCA to Capitol, she came out on her own label with 1995's adventurous and much admired *Eclectic*, and this follow up could equally well be called *Eclectic II*. With some songs by Keiran Kane and others, and Dylan's *Tonight I'll Be Staying Here With You*, but mainly originals, Davies' production keeps her country, blues and rock elements coherent. To be honest, my admiration for Davies is a touch theoretical. *People* made a good point when they said, "She's always been a favorite of folks who like their country music a little on the cerebral side," but it's really country-pop, and even her version is low on grit. This comes out rather too strongly on the *Greatest Hits* package, which is distinctly inferior to such well-realized album projects as *Where Is A Woman To Go* and *Wild Choir*. **JC**

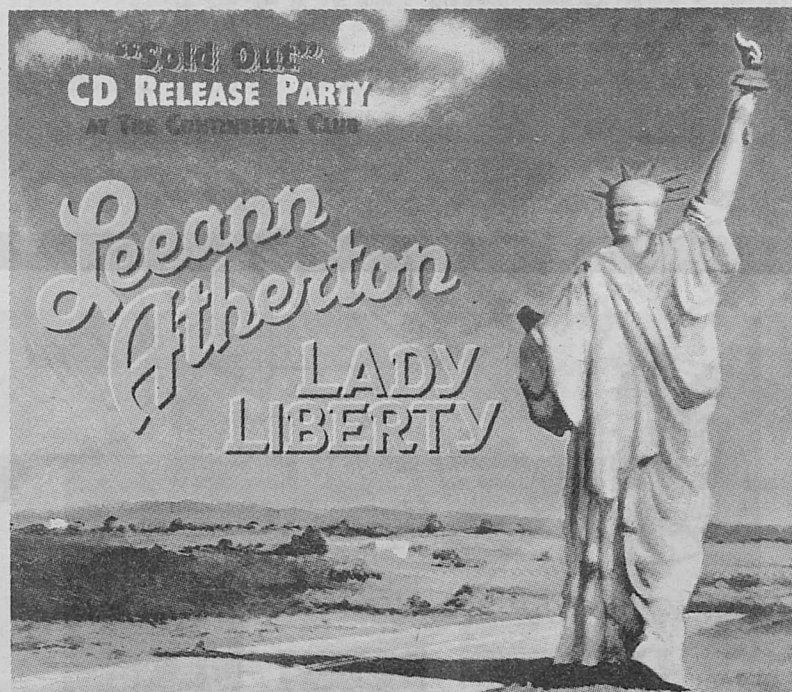
ROY HEINRICH & THE PICKUPS

SMOKEY NIGHT IN A BAR

(Stockade)

Born Too Late is an epithet that applies to many Real Country artists but more to Heinrich than most. Had he been working in the days when a label like Georgetown-based Stockade could put out viable singles, with his big, mournful baritone he might very well have made a considerable mark, on the charts and radio, with the Jones-ish *A Face In The Crowd* ("I'm gonna go some place where no one knows my name, with a jukebox playing cheating songs real loud"). A good follow-up would be *Heads You Win* ("tails I lose again"), while *Take Me Drunk* ("I'm home again") has the makings of a honkytonk jukebox favorite and *Rebecca* could have been one of those songs that might not be a hit but would resonate strongly with certain people, a perennial radio request. Were he able to maintain this kind of songwriting standard, an album would be little problem, but assembling ten originals stretches him a little thin. Nonetheless, the strong points are strong and one can only admire Heinrich's integrity in sticking to the honkytonk shuffles that have made him a perennial, if little noted, favorite on the Central Texas bucket of blood circuit. Cut at Don McCalister's Biscuit Boy studio, with Alvin Crow on fiddle, Texana Dame Traci Lamar accordion, Mickey Coover pedal steel and one of the best country guitarists around, Boomer Norman, this, pace the title, is bluecollar country, heedless of fashions and trends in mainstream country and alternative country alike. **JC**

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TROY YOUNG CAMPBELL MAN VS BEAST

(M-Ray and Blue Rose [Germany])

Ten years ago, The Highwaymen, or, as they were affectionately known, The Wayhighmen, came to Austin from Ohio with rock & roll exuberance, panache and, most importantly, sheer volume, just as True Believers, Austin's till then premier noisemeisters, were beginning to fall apart. As I remarked at the time, the best seats in the house when The Highwaymen played Big Mamou were the stone wall on the other side of South Congress, but then a remarkable thing happened. Their drummer went off on tour with another band and, rather than replace him, frontman Troy Campbell decided to spend the summer of 1990 playing acoustic gigs at El Chino, at which he was revealed as a quite exceptional songwriter, something until then obscured by decibel count.

♦ Fast forward through the intervening years in which The Highwaymen became Loose Diamonds, the volume came way down so Campbell's words could get across, they released a great cassette, two crappy, OK, I'll stretch a point, disappointing, Dos CDs and a far better EP on Freedom, guitarist Scrappy Jud Newcomb developed his own ambitions as a singer and songwriter and the band, though officially on 'hiatus,' basically dissolved. Which sets the scene for Campbell's apotheosis as a singer-songwriter.

♦ Point is, I have a lot of history with Campbell, a man for whom I have enormous admiration and affection, and this is a development in his career I've been keenly anticipating. An obvious source of personal conflict is when people I like make albums I don't, but this time the conflict is in the album itself. The root of the problem is that of the 11 tracks, four were produced by Craig Ross, three by Chet Himes, two by Mitch Watkins and one each by Chris Feinstein (Iodine) and Danny Levin, and I will go on record right now as saying I cannot tolerate Craig Ross' shit. The album opens with two Ross-produced song and it wasn't until Feinstein's *Nobody* that I even recognized Campbell, a man whose voice is nothing if not distinctive. One redeeming feature is that there alternative versions of two of the songs Ross produced, *Sleeping Man* and *Just Who's Driving*, and one wishes the same were true of *Hazel* and *A Little More Every Day*.

♦ Campbell once remarked to me that he tried to sing every song as if it were for the last time, an emphasis that was very evident on The Highwaymen's *Live Texas Radio*. This approach still surfaces on some tracks, but not on those Ross was responsible for, and one can only wish Campbell had stuck with any one of his other producers, for choice Danny Levin, whose *Somewhere*, on which Levin plays piano and cello and Patty Griffin sings harmony, is outstandingly the most successful track, though Feinstein's *Nobody* speaks well of him too. Bottom line, a real curate's egg: basically good albums with four so-so tracks are common enough, but this one has four I find very hard to listen to interspersed with killers. Guess I need to make a custom tape.

JC

STEVE FORBERT BE HERE AGAIN (LIVE SOLO 1998)

(Squirrelmad)

Guess it goes back to Bob Dylan teaming up with the Band, but there seems to be an irresistible impulse among singer-songwriters to set themselves up as rock or country or country-rock or folk-rock frontpersons. For some, Jimmy LaFave for instance, this works out just fine, while others, notably, in my experience, Butch Hancock, seem equally adept at both electric band and acoustic solo formats, but there are a number for whom less really does seem to be more. In this latter class I'd put people like Michael Fracasso, Beaver Nelson and, bringing us to the matter in hand, Steve Forbert. The brutal economic realities of touring aside, Forbert, one of the elite group of performers who rates two consecutive nights at the Cactus when he comes to Austin, is simply better artistic value as a solo act than he is with a band. In what seems a tacit acknowledgment of this, Forbert reprises his *Be Here Now/Solo Live 1994*, also on Squirrelmad, with another album aimed at his fan base, and pretty much only available at his shows (Forbert seems bent on becoming the last self-recording artist without a web site). Recorded at Calgary Center for Performing Arts last November, and clocking in at just over an hour, this is another impeccable verité snapshot, showcasing his songs, old and new, his offbeat taste in covers (*Stardust*, *Honey Don't*, *Jamaica Farewell*, *Sea Of Love*, *Goodnight Irene*), his distinctive (what a useful word that is) vocals, guitar and harmonica work and his inimitable rapport with the audience. Opening with *What Kinda Guy*, other 'Greatest Hits' spanning his 20 year career include *Goin' Down To Laurel*, *Complications*, *Midsummer Night's Toast*, *Thinkin'* and *Romeo's Tune*, with more recent favorites like *Good Planets Are Hard To Find* among the 22 tracks.

JC

ADAM CARROLL • SOUTH OF TOWN

(Down Hole)

Ran out of time and space, but I'll get back to this one next month. Meantime, I'll just say that when I heard the opening *Red Bandanna Blues*, I rang Barbara Roseman at Lubbock Or Leave It and said, "Is it just me, or am I listening to Baby Butch?" Which turned out to be her reaction too. Can't be bad.

JC

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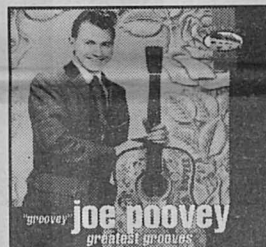
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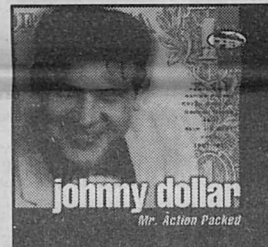
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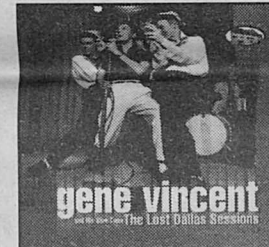
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gene vincent

and His Blue Caps

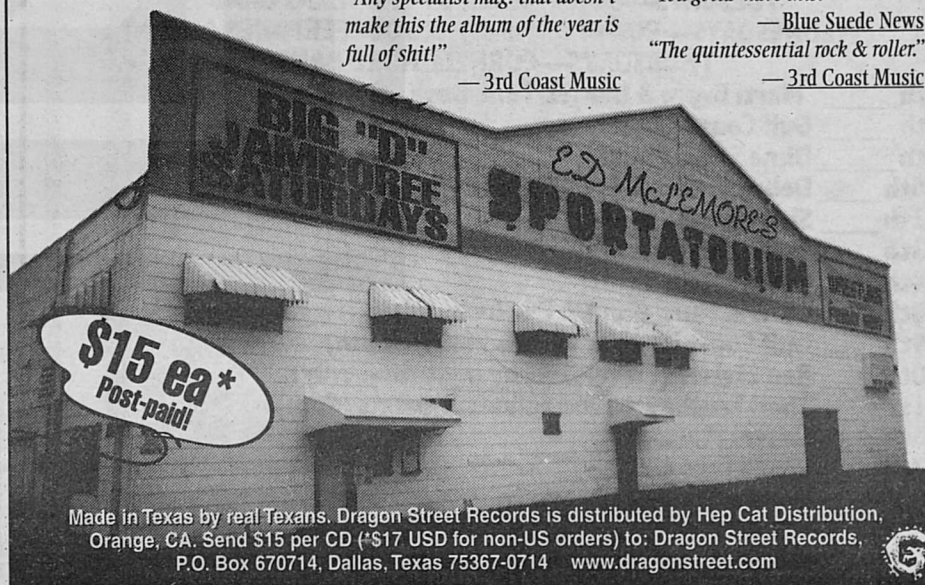
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|-----|------------|-------------------------|-------------|------------|
| 1 | 0:00:02:15 | I Can't Say Goodbye 2U | 0:04:46:06 | 0:04:48:21 |
| 2 | 0:04:50:21 | Gain to Manila | 0:04:37:02 | 0:09:27:23 |
| 3 | 0:09:29:23 | Ben Franklin is still a | 0:04:14:11 | 0:13:43:35 |
| 4 | 0:13:45:35 | Betty Ford Dropout | 0:05:54:10 | 0:19:39:45 |
| 5 | 0:19:41:45 | Under Assistant MPM | 0:03:11:47 | 0:22:53:18 |
| 6 | 0:22:55:18 | Leopard & Vine | 0:04:48:49 | 0:27:43:67 |
| 7 | 0:27:45:67 | Wake Up Jackie | 0:04:04:20 | 0:31:50:13 |
| 8 | 0:31:52:13 | Love is The Power * | 0:05:22:69 | 0:37:15:07 |
| 9 | 0:37:17:07 | TLC 1 | 0:04:44:02 | 0:42:01:10 |
| 10 | 0:42:03:10 | Full Moon in the Bluff | 0:05:01:55 | 0:47:04:65 |
| 11 | 0:47:06:65 | Yesterday's Prophet | 0:01:29:26 | 0:48:36:17 |
| 12 | 0:48:38:17 | I Got to Go Fawn | 0:02:33:23 | 0:51:11:40 |
| 13 | 0:51:13:40 | Red White & Busted | 0:09:11:38 | 1:00:25:04 |
| 14 | 1:00:27:04 | Godiva Coffee *X | 0:04:23:23 | 1:04:50:27 |

* Written by Jeff de Villez
Published by World Music Artists Music (ASCAP)
Arranged by James

** Written by James + Sarah Norris
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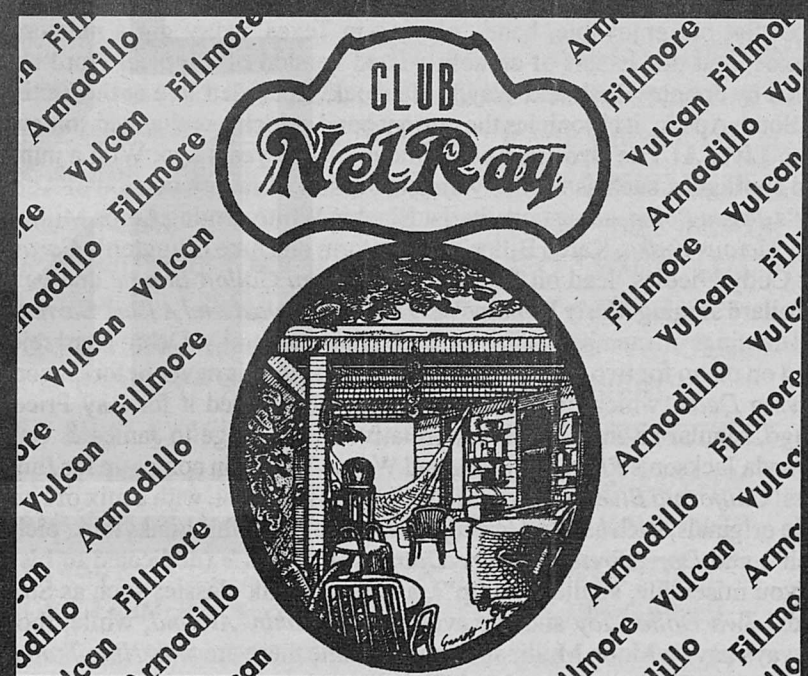
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THE TEXAS REUNION

(Skinny)

Hope I remember the details right, but I once read the leader of a Japanese Noh theater troupe is the guy standing second from the right in the back row of the chorus. It's very typical of 'Skinny' Don Keeling that he's put out an album on which his name only appears in alphabetical sequences, between his Pure Texas Band colleague fiddler Howard Kalish and onetime PTB twin fiddler Jason Roberts. Dubbed by Mark Rubin 'the dean of Texas country bass players,' Keeling has brought together many of the musicians he plays with, or has played with over the years, from Grassfire, one of the first bluegrass bands in Texas, reunited on Lester Flatts' *I'll Stay Around*, to The Pure Texas Band, of which he's been the rock solid mainstay for 15 years. The personnel shifts around, Jimmy Day plays on six of the 12 tracks, including an instrumental twin steel guitar version of Ray Price's *Just Out Of Reach* with Scott Walls, Floyd Domino piano on four, Phil Fajardo drums on five, Howard Kalish fiddle on eight, Rick McRae lead and rhythm guitar on four, Jason Roberts fiddle on four, mandolin on a fifth, and Scott Walls steel guitar on seven, with contributions by many others, including Ernie Durawa. Keeling, himself sings lead on three tracks, Webb Pierce's *Cowtown* and *More And More* and Sonny Burns' *Blue House Painted White*, otherwise handing off the microphone to Don Walser (PTB standards *Green Snakes On The Ceiling*, very effectively rearranged here by Walls in the Johnny Bush style, and *Columbus Stockade Blues*), Sherri Barr (Conni's Smith's *The Other Girl In Town*, Jimmy Day's *Things I Can't Bring Back* and *I'll Stay Around*), Justin Treviño (Johnny Bush's *Loud Music And Strong Wine*) and Jason Roberts (Tommy Duncan's *Time Changes Everything*). Rather less successfully, he has one of his sons, Clay, sing *I'm Only Human*, but another son, Cliff, does a very fine job of producing. Walser's tracks sound like they come from the album I've been waiting for, Treviño, who regularly substitutes for Walser, is, as always, in great voice and Roberts, who went from Walser to Jody Nix to Asleep At The Wheel, is a man you'll be hearing more of when he decides to strike out on his own. However, even among this wonderful company, if anyone deserves an MVP award it's Sherri Barr, once vocalist with Jim & Jesse, whose big, strong, clear voice should strike terror into the hearts of most female country (so-called) singers. Without wanting to imply any ulterior intent, this album provides rather conclusive proof that Ray Benson's reluctance to use Keeling, and, come to that Kalish and Walls, on Walser's recordings says more about his shortcomings as a producer than about their's as musicians. I think Keeling will be mighty surprised by how many copies he'll sell on the strength of the respect and affection in which he's held by Walser fans, but for lovers of oldfashioned, straightup country music, this would be well worth having even if you'd never laid eyes on him.

JC

THE CORNELL HURD BAND

AT LARGE

(Behemoth)

You sure get value for money from The Big Guy. Though the numbering on the booklet runs up to 38, there are actually 'only' 24 tracks (in case you're wondering, this means Hurd is bearing in mind DJs, who want particular numbers but not the intros and are constantly getting tripped up by labels which don't think things like this through). The Cornell Hurd Band is one of the best, not to say most flat out enjoyable, bands playing in Texas, every gig a memorable experience, and this is sort of an abbreviated version of a typical Hurd show, enhanced by Johnny Bush and Wayne Hancock. Recorded live at the Texicalli Grille, South Austin, it chronicles the current band, which has changed somewhat from the *Live! At The Broken Spoke* lineup of five years ago. With a number of band spotlights, such as fiddler Vanessa Gordon's bravura version of Adolph Hofner's *Jessie Polka*, acoustic guitarist Blackie White singing Amos Milburn's *Vicious, Vicious Vodka*, Karen Biller's drum storm on Duke Ellington's *Caravan*, pianist Cody Nicolas' lead on Pee Wee King's *Ten Gallon Boogie* and bassist Mark Pollard singing Marty Robbins' *A White Sportcoat And A Pink Carnation*, Hurd also brings on members of his extended musical family. Debra Hurd rejoins the band on piano for two numbers, Johnny Bush sings his never before recorded *The Living Dead*, which he hasn't sung since he demoed it for Ray Price 35 years ago, regular sit-in Mitzi Henry (relative by marriage to James & Gayle) does Wanda Jackson's *Right Or Wrong* and Wayne The Train comes up for Jimmie Rodgers' *California Blues*. Otherwise, it's business as usual, with a mix of Hurd's sardonic originals, such as *The Garbage Man* ("I'm out in this honkytonk, picking up trash") and *Don't Pretend You're Doing This For Me* (dedicated to his ex-wife, "you miserable, soulless tramp"), and honkytonk classics such as Stoney Edwards' *Two Dollar Toy* and the evergreen *Bummin' Around*, while, though they always have a Moon Mullican song, this time there are two, *Nine Tenths Of The Tennessee River* and *I'm Mad With You*. Nobody would argue that the Texicalli is an optimal recording space, especially for a band this big, but if Hurd was trading a theoretical loss of sound quality against a very real capturing of the spirit and musicianship of his band, he came out way ahead on the deal, and so do we.

JC

DAVIS RAINES • BIG SHINY CARS

(Crossfield)

Clobber the bastards with the first song, I always say, and Nashville-based Raines does just that, coming straight out of the chute with *Hell For Breakfast*, which is as hardcore as country songwriting gets, a theme song to go with the grim morning after a night of whiskey-sodden honky tonking. It's so powerful it carries the album, and it takes a while to appreciate that if Raines has at least one great A side—for a single that'll never be released, and if it were would never be played on country radio—he's also got some B sides. Covering an awful lot of country territory, he does good with gospel (*Hills Of Cedron*), drinking (*Whiskey For Me*) and itchy feet (*Leavin' Train*), even a song about being in a band (the title track) and a novelty number (*The Sheik Of Mountain Creek*), and he's especially fine when it comes to prison (*Limestone Chain*), hunting down fugitives with dogs (*Last Hard Man In Elmore County*) and policemen (*Working Homicide*), but truckdriving (*Truck Driver From Mars*), Louisiana (*Cajun Dick*), and The War Between The States (*Black And Bloody War*) find him on much shakier ground. There's a lot of Johnny Cash influence in Raines, but unlike the Man in Black, he's spent serious time behind bars—as Captain of the Guards at Jefferson Correctional Facility, Alabama. This would be a pretty funky background—as his label puts it, "from Death Row to Music Row"—at any time, and sure makes him stand out in modern Nashville. Being produced by a woman, actually two women, may not be a Nashville first, but is still sufficiently unusual to merit attention, and Tricia Walker and Suzanne Elmer-King do very nice work, getting somber shades and textures out of sparse instrumentation, with Walker also playing acoustic guitar and Elmer-King very effective on tic-tac drums. I often wonder why people like this bother living in Nashville, where this album seems doomed to be filed under No Commercial Potential, but *Hell For Breakfast* is as good a Hard Country song, or as hard a good country song, as I've heard in quite a while.

JC

REX ALLEN

THE LAST OF THE GREAT SINGING COWBOYS

(Bloodshot/Soundies)

Kicking off a new line, in partnership with transcription experts, is the rather unlikely combination of the Insurgent Country warlords and the clean cut B movie star. Frankly I think Bloodshot screwed up their schedule a bit. They should have led with the next artist in the series, Spade Cooley, Nashville's worst nightmare, who actually was what Robbie Fulks only pretended to be (but I'll get into all that next month). There's a lot to be said for Allen who, unusually, had been a working cowboy and rodeo star before becoming a singer, songwriter and actor. Following in the footsteps of Gene Autry, Allen auditioned for Chicago's WSL Barn Dance in 1945, rising to top billing with the departures of Red Foley and Curt Massey, and these 22 previously unreleased tracks come from transcription discs cut during this period, with Allen backed by WSL regulars. They're pretty close to being live recordings because, as Allen, who's still with us, the last surviving star of the singing cowboy era, recalls, he and the band learned numbers on the spot and would cut 20 sides a day after a few minutes of run-throughs. I have one small problem here, which is the Gene Autry box set, pretty much all the singing cowboy music I really need in this incarnation, but for a representative album of a very distinctive sub-genre, this'd hit the spot.

JC

RALPH EMERY

THE VIEW FROM NASHVILLE

(Morrow, cloth)

Run the name of Ralph Emery past people who aren't part of the star making and maintaining machine and the general consensus would be that he's a complete idiot. Stories of Emery making a fool of himself on camera are legion (my favorite faux pas is still his asking Emmylou Harris what Gram Parsons was doing; she replied, "Well, he's still dead"). However, reading his latest, sort of an annotated anthology of interviews from his TV show *On The Record*, I think dumbness is not his most important attribute. He may or may not be the brightest crayon in the box, but the key to Emery's success on country radio and TV is that he appears to have absolutely no taste of his own, or, if he does, he never lets it show. Put it another way, Emery never met a star he didn't like, in fact he never met a star who didn't become a close personal friend. This utterly uncritical attitude enables him to pull off really quite extraordinary, if far from admirable, feats of equivocation, such as treating Faron Young and Barbara Mandrell as equals or taking Brooks & Dunn seriously, though perhaps his most breathtaking achievement is being the last person left on the face of the planet who still thinks Olivia Newton-John is a country singer. The most telling line in the book, part of what opens as an obituary of Owen Bradley and develops into a eulogy to the Nashville Sound, is when he approvingly quotes a motto on Bradley's office wall: "Vanilla outsells all other flavors." If Emery has a motto on his office wall, I imagine it would be along the lines of "Nothing succeeds like success."

JC

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THE UNOFFICIAL GUIDE TO NOT SXSW

HOT TIPS

Recently, the *Austin American-Statesman* described the emerging SXSW lineup as "weak" and "repetitive." To be honest, I've had neither the time nor the inclination to pay much attention, hell, any attention, to the official festival, but I'm here to tell you that if the unofficial NotSXSW has a certain amount of repetition—and how terrible is it having James Intveld et al back in town?—Weakness is definitely not something it can be accused of. In fact, it's developed the same problem as SXSW (well, maybe not SXSW this year), the constant need to be in two or more different places at the same time.

♦ One aspect of NotSXSW that is new this year is the emergence of the loose, informal coalition of four of my favorite places in Austin, Texicalli Grille, Threadgill's World Headquarters, Jovita's and Under The Sun, working together under the banner 'South X South Austin.' Far as I can see, you can keep yourself occupied pretty good for three days just running an Oltoft, South First, Riverside and South Congress circuit, but, however much ground you cover, I think anyone who springs \$65, let alone \$95, for a wristband is a mug. I'm still fine tuning my own program, but here's a few places you're guaranteed to find me:

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WEDNESDAY 17TH

Troy Campbell + Shelley King ABCDs, 5pm
David Waddell + Lyn Cody + Southern Sky + Frank La Monica Wild About Music, 4pm, \$0
Champ Hood & Threadgill's Troubadors + Jimmy LaFave + Troy Campbell + Ruthie Foster + more Threadgill's Old #1, 6.30pm, \$0
Courtney Audain & Fuze Cheapo, 7pm, \$0
Dale Watson Threadgill's World HQ, 7.30pm, \$0

SXSCongress: Killer Bees + Paul Quinn + Kevin Christopher Shaggy's, 7.30pm, \$0
Ponty Bone & The Squeezetones Jovita's, 8pm, \$0

THURSDAY 18TH

Robbie Fulks + Jive Bombers + Horton Brothers + Split Lip Rayfield + James Intveld + Dusty 45s + T Jarrod Bonta + Tony Maserati + Billygoats Cheapo, noon-9pm, \$0

James Hand + Justin Treviño + Roger Wallace + Teri & The Tagalongs Under The Sun, 3-7pm, \$0

Jim Franklin's 'Unusual Hour' with Leean Atherton & friends + Wes Jeans + Sheri Frushay & David Waddell + Jorge Palomarez + Frank La Monica Wild About Music, 3pm, \$0

Shiva's Headband + 3 Balls Of Fire + Whitey Ray Huitt ABCDs, 4pm, \$0

Don Walser's Pure Texas Band + Chaparral Threadgill's World HQ, 7.30pm-midnight, \$0

Cornell Hurd Band + Ex-Husbands + Trigger Gospel Jovita's, 5-10pm, \$0

81/2 Souvenirs Cactus Cafe, 9pm, \$?

SXSCongress: Jimmy Lee Hannaford + Hayter's Beach + Colin Leyden Shaggy's, 8pm, \$0

FRIDAY 19TH

Bloodshot Party: Waco Brothers + Sadies + Meat Purveyors + Split Lip Rayfield + Trailer Bride + Handsome Family + Grievous Angels + Neko Case + The Blacks + Devil In A Woodpile Yard Dog, noon-6pm, \$0

American Standards + Stephen Lee Canner + Wanda Jackson (autograph session) + Piners + Hillbilly Idol + Vic Volare Orchestra + Dallas Wayne + Eric Hisaw Cheapo, noon-8pm, \$0

Hazeldine + Trigger Gospel + Ruthie & The Wranglers Threadgill's, 2-5.30pm, \$0

Bad Rodeo + Bart Trotter + Lance Keltner + Patrick Matera + Psychic Cowboys + Jorge Palomarez + Deb Yager + Jimmy George Wild About Music, 1pm-10pm, \$0

Ponty Bone & The Squeezetones + Mandy Mercier Texicalli, 4-8pm

Hadacol ABCDs, 5pm, \$0

Teddy Morgan + Roy Heinrich & The Pickups + Dale Watson + Steve James + Hot Club Of Cowtown + Karen Posten & Her Crystal Pistols Under The Sun, 5-9pm, \$0

The Night Of The Living Accordion: Jet Set Zydeco + Joel Guzman's Los Aztex + Los Hermanos Cruz + TBA Threadgill's World HQ, 6.30pm-midnight

Gulf Coast Playboys + Los Pinkys Jovita's, 6pm, \$5

Karen Posten & Her Crystal Pistols Central Market, 6pm, \$0

Jimmy LaFave + Eliza Gilkyson + Steve Forbert + Burns Sisters Cactus Cafe, 9pm, \$?
SXSCongress: Quatropaw + Floramay Holliday + Shelley King Shaggy's, 8pm, \$0

SATURDAY 20TH

Red Dirt Rangers Threadgill's World HQ, 10am, \$0. Kids' show

Cornell Hurd Band & Friends + The Hollisters Texicalli, 11am/ish-3pm/ish. With special guests including Johnny Bush, Doug Sahm, Clay Blaker, Rip Masters, Howard Kalish, Ruthie and Kelly Spinks

Checkered Past Party: Johnny Dowd + Lonesome Bob + Tommy Womack + Paul Burch & WPA + Hadacol + Silos + Flatirons + Old Joe Clarks + David Schramm + Tom House Yard Dog, noon, \$0

Chrome Addicts + Hot Head Swing Band + TBA + Three Cent Stomp + Paul Burch + Honey Dogs Cheapo, noon-6pm, \$0

Cornell Hurd Band + Wayne Hancock + Billy Bacon & The Forbidden Pigs + The Hollisters + Neil Mooney + James Intveld + Ruthie & The Wranglers + Kim Lenz & Her Jaguars Under The Sun, 1pm, \$0

Red-Headed Step Child + Aaron Chesson + Eve Monsés & Gary Clark + Damian Green Threadgill's World HQ, 1pm, \$0

Picadilly Circus + Shelley King + Brad Tretola + The AM Band + Soulshaker + Danny Click + Rockin' Highliners + David Gogo + Ray Baker Wild About Music, noon-10pm, \$0

No Depression/Miles About Music/Tractor Tavern Party: Bob Egan + Continental

James Hand (Under the Sun, Thursday). Hard country at its finest. Hand recently came out of retirement and it's as if time stopped somewhere in the early 60s.

Hazeldine (Threadgill's World HQ, Friday). See Reviews. I just love this band's albums and can't wait to see them live. I'm real proud of this 3CM Presentslineup, which also includes Ruthie & the Wranglers (DC) and Trigger Gospel (Chicago).

Cornell Hurd Band (Texicalli Grill, Saturday). Be there or be hopelessly unhip and out of touch. Cornell's annual extravaganza is a must.

Wayne Hancock (Under the Sun, Saturday). Wayne's always great, but an added inducement is that Hank Williams III will be playing with him. Williams is quoted as saying, "Nashville can take a flying fuck," from which we can, I think, safely assume he's fallen under the spell of Wayne The Train.

The Red Elvies (Jovita's, Saturday). CD release by invitation only. Hint: invitations are not impossible to come by.

Jimmie Dale Gilmore (TU Ballroom, Saturday). Been too long. And maybe Hazeldine too (still to be confirmed), and maybe an ultra-special guest.

Drifters + Hayseed + Hazeldine w/Neal Casals + Damnaions TX + Cisco Broken Spoke, 2-6pm, \$0

Free Radicals + Red Dirt Rangers + Floramay Holliday ABCDs, 3pm, \$0

Jimmie Dale Gilmore + Hal Ketchum + Hazeldine (tbc) Texas Union Ballroom, 8pm, \$?

Jimmy LaFave + Betty Elders + Gail Davies + Burns Sisters + Red Dirt Rangers + surprise guests Threadgill's World HQ, 6.30pm, \$0

Red Elvies Jovita's, 8pm, CD release, by invitation only

Roy Heinrich & The Pickups Little Longhorn, 9pm, \$0. CD release

Austin Lounge Lizards Cactus Cafe, 9pm, \$?

SXSCongress: Darrall Gleason + Michele Solberg + Darcie Deaville + Anny Land Shaggy's, 7.30pm, \$0

SUNDAY 21ST

Asylum Street Spankers' Gospel Brunch Threadgill's World HQ, 10am, \$0 (reservations required)

Panhandlers + Herman The German & Das Cowboy + Esquires + Jim Stringer & The M Band + Ponty Bone & The Squeezetones + T Jarrod Bonta Under The Sun, 1-7pm, \$0

Sheri Frushay + Raul Salinas Jovita's, 4pm, \$0

VENUES

ABCDs • 4631 Airport Blvd #110 (454-1212)

Broken Spoke • 3201 South Lamar (442-6189)

Cactus Cafe • 24th & Guadalupe (475-6515)

Cheapo Records • 10th & Lamar (447-4499)

Flipnotics • 1601 Barton Springs (322-9750)

Jovita's • 1619 South First (447-7825)

Little Longhorn 5434 Burnet (458-1813)

Shaggy's • 1600 South Congress (447-5375)

Texicalli Grille • South Austin

Threadgill's Old #1 • 6416 North Lamar (451-5440)

Threadgill's World Headquarters • 391 West Riverside (472-9304)

Under The Sun • 1323A South Congress (442-1308)

Wild About Music • 721 Congress (708-1700)

Yard Dog • 1510 South Congress

OTHER USEFUL ADDRESSES

Antone's Record Shop • 2928 Guadalupe (322-0660)

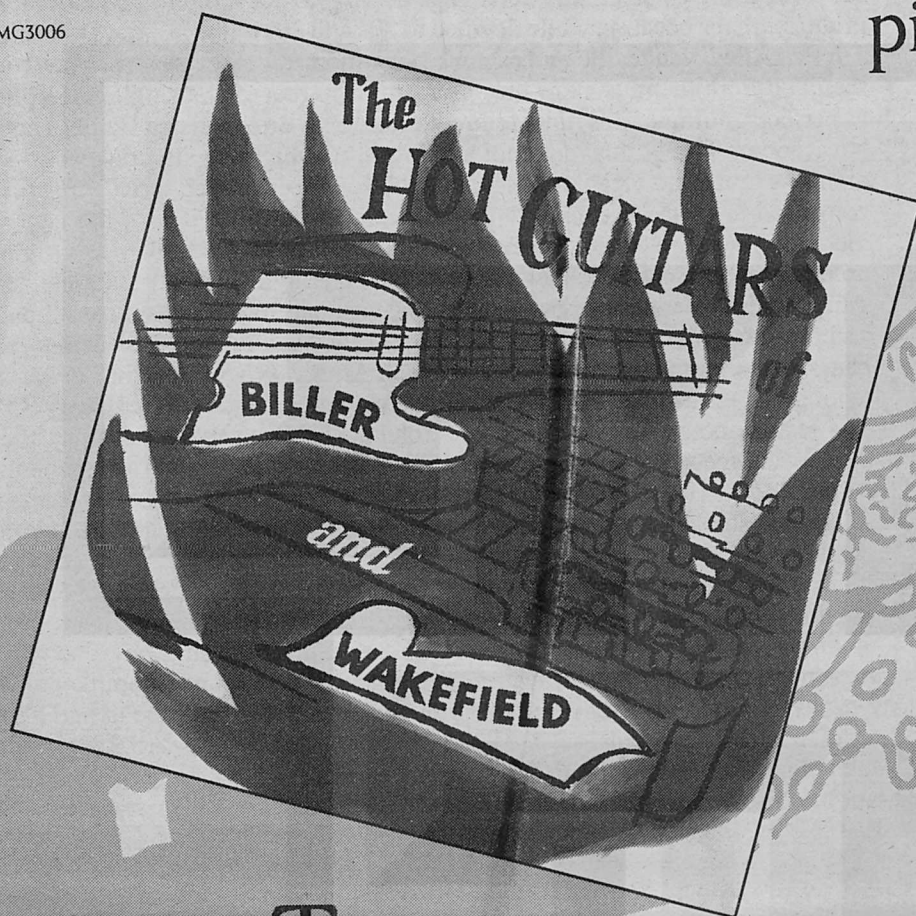
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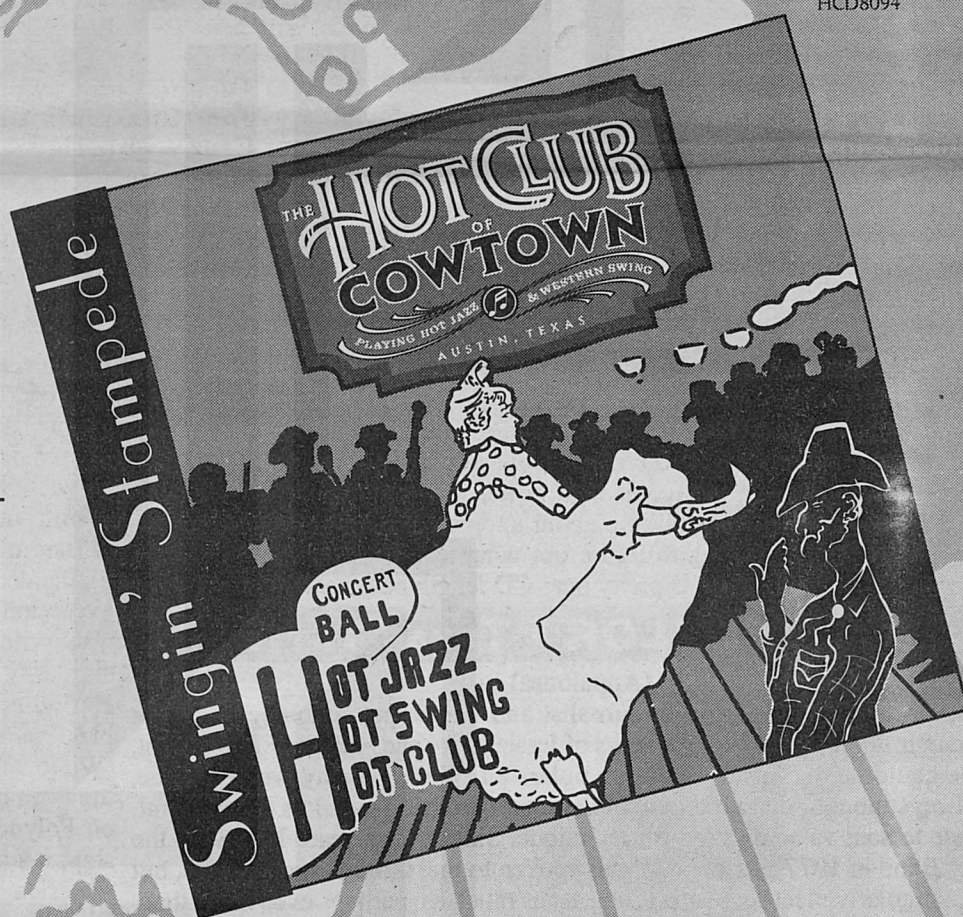


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Deke Dickerson & The Ecco-fonics - **Number One Hit Record** (CD & vinyl)

Kim Lenz & Her Jaguars - **Kim Lenz & Her Jaguars** (CD & vinyl)

Big Sandy & His Fly-Rite Boys - **Feelin' Kinda Lucky** (CD & vinyl)

Travis County Pickin' - **Travis County Pickin'** (CD only)

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TERRY ALLEN • SALIVATION

(Sugar Hill)

Much as I love Sugar Hill, they're reaching a bit when they describe Allen's last album, 1996's **Human Remains**, as "nearly perfect." Uh-huh, guys, **Lubbock (On Everything)**, **Smokin' The Dummy** and **Juarez** were as nearly perfect as anything can be in this naughty world, and by those standards, **Human Remains** was rather iffy. An inscrutable fate dealt Allen, for whom music has always been a sideline, some very strong cards when he first went into a studio with a neophyte producer and a scratch band of musicians he'd never met, let alone played with, before, but with The Panhandle Mystery Band she gave him a pat hand. Trouble is, the essence of a pat hand is that you can't improve on it, but on his last two albums Allen, for what I'm sure seem like perfectly good reasons to him, has called for a fresh deck and a new deal and I have mixed feelings about the outcome. On the one hand, taken individually, *any* Terry Allen album is going to be worth having, and infinitely superior to 99.99% of the albums released in the same year, however, reality is, most all the people who buy his albums can put them in the context of his entire body of work, and I think I speak for many Allen aficionados when I say I'm not in this for musicality, but for what's inside his head. Without wanting to impugn the abilities of the players on this album, such as Mark Rubin, Glen Fukunaga, Charlie Sexton, Guy Clark, Ian Moore and Marcia Ball, or go into West Texas mysticism, The Panhandle Mystery Band had an elemental *rightness*, and though Lloyd Maines, who co-produced with Allen and plays more instruments than you shake a stick at, Richard Bowden (fiddle, cello, mandolin and trumpet) and drummer Davis McLarty form the album's backbone, that rightness is diluted. Having said that, this is much stronger than **Human Remains**, no David Byrne content for a start, and much more recognizably vintage Terry Allen, iconoclastic, acerbic, sardonic, all that good shit. With ten originals, including *Cortez Sail* from **Juarez**, plus *Flatt & Scruggs' Give Me The Flowers*, this is a Must Have for many people, no matter what, but in my crusade to turn the entire world on to Terry Allen, one innocent at a time, I'll still rely on those "nearly perfect" albums. **JC**

BUTCH HANCOCK • DIAMOND HILL

(Rainlight)

Nearing completion of his back catalog CD reissue project, Hancock gives us the 1980 album which is among his very best. Looking through the songlist, you don't see too many of the "Greatest Hits," as it were, but as soon as you put the album on, all nine tracks will spark instant recognition among those who've been to a more than a couple of his shows. It isn't simply that they're memorable—with Hancock that's a given—these one are downright catchy. Produced by Hancock and Lloyd Maines, with David Halley guitars, Richard Bowden fiddle and cello, Don Caldwell sax, Bill Gamill piano, and Maines on pedal steel and hi-strung acoustic guitar, with his brothers Kenny and Donnie on bass and drums, Hancock is in good form even for him. The songs are *Golden-Hearted Ways*, *You Can Take Me For One*, *Neon Wind*, *Diamond Hill*, *Corona Del Mar*, *Ghost Of Give And Take Avenue*, *Some Folks Call It Style*, *Her Lover Of The Hour* and *Wheels Of Fortune*, and every one's a winner. For Hancock fans, a welcome addition to the collection, and if you're looking for an 'introduction' record for someone who needs initiating, this is certainly a contender. Next up, Butch is talking about an entire album given over to the *Split & Slide* saga and trying to figure out what to do with *Last Long Silver Dollar*, which, at 35 minutes, is pretty near CD length on its own. **JC**

JESSE TAYLOR • TEXAS TATTOO

(Appaloosa)

Another Austin-based music journalist and I once got seriously into it, at length, about the respective merits of Jesse Taylor and Another Ely Guitarist, and we could hardly have been more polarized. While he may well disagree, I've always thought that argument boiled down to the visceral vs the cerebral, response to soul vs admiration for technique. Since I first heard him, with the Joe Ely Band in 1977, Jesse Taylor has spoken to me, through his acoustic, but more particularly electric, playing, at least as much as, perhaps even more than, any other guitarist. With no arena rock, genius is pain posturing, Taylor gets up there and, on a routine basis, knocks out some of the most dazzling and innovative playing you'll ever hear. The only drawback about his second album is that he tends to get in his own way. While his vocals have improved markedly since **Last Night**, singing is still not his forte and, if not as actively painful as, say, Sue Foley's, his voice distracts attention from his playing. By way of contrast, when he's backing landmen Butch Hancock, Joe Ely and Jimmie Dale Gilmore, swapping verses on Hancock's *Naked Light Of Day*, the absolutely stunning guitar lines shine through. Had he asked Toni Price, Terry Clarke, Don McCalister, Kimmie Rhodes, Ely and Gilmore to sing lead instead of harmonies on the other tracks, this would have been a stone killer, because Taylor is a player with extraordinary empathy towards vocalists and lyrics. With Glenn Fukunaga bass and the late Donald Lindley drums, except on two tracks featuring David & Leland Waddell, this is in some ways a missed opportunity, but if you can tune your ear to the guitar, Jesse Taylor is as good as it gets. **JC**

ASYLUM STREET SPANKERS HOT LUNCH

(Coldspring)

Conceptually, I loved Mark Rubin's atavistic approach, on **Sparks For The Memories**, to resolving the paradox of recording a band that really is acoustic, using no electricity at its gigs, but in practice it didn't do justice to the group, perhaps because, while devoted to 20s and 30s hillbilly, jazz, Delta blues, Tin Pan Alley, vaudeville and ragtime, they themselves are several generations removed from the musicians they emulate, who regarded a single microphone as perfectly normal. This time, fellow-thinker Bob Brozman and Daniel Thomas have gone a totally conventional studio route, which has its drawbacks—the album is much too clean, and come to think, it's also much too *clean*, at least compared to their last outing, **Nasty Noveleties**—but does have the very real merit of allowing a clear appreciation of the band's musical brilliance. Originals predominate among the 16 tracks, four by Pops Bayless (vocals, ukulele, tenor guitar, slide whistle), five by Wammo (vocals, harmonica, washboard, bongos and odds & ends), two by Christina Marrs (vocals, ukulele, tenor guitar, tenor banjo and crosscut handsaw), one by Josh Arnson (vocals, rhythm guitar and tenor guitar) and one by coverguy lead and rhythm guitarist (Dave) Leroy Biller. The rest of the group are Mysterious John (vocals and kazoo), Stanley Smith (vocals, clarinets and ukulele), Eamon McLoughlin (fiddle, violin and mandolin), Adam Booker (string bass) and John Salmon (drums), with assists by Brozman (National steel, slide, National Hawaiian and rhythm guitars, ukelele and charango), Glover Gill (accordion), Sara Nelson (cello) and Rick White (trumpet). It's possible that there simply is no ideal way of recording Asylum Street Spankers but this is, if nothing else, much more radio-friendly than their previous albums, an important consideration for a band whose main ambition is never to play in Austin, or rather for Austin wages, ever again. My only real complaint—and I'm saying this mainly because everyone in the band expects me to and I don't want to disappoint them—is NOT ENOUGH CHRISTINA MARRS. Usually I then plead for a Marrs album, but it seems Coldspring may grant my wish in the not too distant future. Watch this space. **JC**

HAZELDINE HOW BEES FLY • ORPHANS DIGGING YOU UP

(Glitterhouse [Germany]/All Swell/Glitterhouse and Polydor [cancelled?])

Some years ago, I was in a bar in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and during the break got to talking with the band, of which, as I recall, the guitarist/leader was a dairy farmer, the singer a UNM ethnology lecturer, and got an hilarious account of keeping a band together in a town where there was only one gig and you had to drive hundreds of miles, in any direction, to find another. The crux was that anyone with serious professional musical aspirations had no choice but to leave. It's extraordinary enough that any band from Albuquerque should be so consistently strong that it gains a national, or to be more accurate international, reputation, but Hazeldine throw in yet another dimension, it's fronted by three ax-wielding, singing and songwriting women, guitarists Shawn Barton and Tonya Lamm and bassplayer Anne Tkach, and all three are pretty damn amazing. Even if Lamm moved there from Athens, Georgia, I think of Hazeldine as The Flatlanders of Albuquerque; just as in Lubbock, a similarly isolated city, three exceptional talents (to be fair, four, counting drummer Jeffrey Richards, who also writes and sings) fused into one extraordinary and unique gestalt. Another similarity is that, just as The Flatlanders' album was first released in the UK, Hazeldine made their debut in Germany, to an equally rapturous reception, the band being voted Best New Artist of 1997 by German *Rolling Stone* readers (Wilco were runners-up). **How Bees Fly** is still only available in Europe, as is the even more impressive **Digging You Up**, which was scheduled for release on Polydor this Spring, but don't hold your breath because, though ready to ship, it's on indefinite, and probably permanent, hold. So all that's available in America, apart from *I'm Lonesome Without You*, the outstanding track on Bloodshot's **Straight Outta Boone Country** compilation, is an album of covers they put out on their own label, intended to keep fans happy while they waited for **Digging You Up**. Even if it'll have to do that job a little longer than they thought, Hazeldine covers, whether of Gram Parsons (*A Song For You*) or Genesis (*Cuckoo Cocoon*), Hazel & Alice (*Mining Camp Blues*) or Thin Lizzy (*Whiskey In The Jar*), are better value than most band's originals, though it's a bit of a worry that they got John Anderson's *Wild And Blue* from The Mekons and Hank Cochran's *It's Only Love* from John Doe. Nonetheless, **Orphans** is a stopgap, hardly to be compared to the sensuous glories of **Digging You Up**. 'Sensuous,' I may say, is a word that crops up frequently in Hazeldine's European press, and, much as I would have like to come up with something original, it's unavoidable, le mot juste. I'm not going to get into it too much, as, unless Polydor get shitty about the masters, which they're perfectly capable of doing, this will be coming out sooner or later. Meantime, of all the bands playing NotSXSW, let alone SXSW, this is the one I really, really want to catch. **JC**

DAVID GOODMAN • MODERN TWANG

Having already raved at some length (#15/104) about David Goodman's **Modern Twang: An Alternative Country Music Guide & Directory** when he originally self-published it last Spring, and made it my 1998 Music Book Of The Year, there doesn't seem much I can do with the 2nd, revised edition except repeat myself. So, to mark its publication, by Dowling Press, sometime soon—they hoped to have it out in time for SXSW, but it probably won't be available until early April—here's an excerpt, edited slightly, mainly to match 3CM house style, from Goodman's introduction. Also, to illustrate the 'big tent' scope of Goodman's work, which, by the way, jumps from 300 pages to 432 in the new edition, I've attached his 'Terms,' though without his explanations of what they imply.

◆ Nothing to do with the merits of his enormously valuable work, but for those of you have seen, or will see, Goodman's references to dancing, he and the lovely Jane lived in Austin in the mid-90s, (they're now in Lancaster, PA), and I first met them when I was putting on dance contests and they were winning prizes. Also nothing to do with the merits etc, but David and Jane are two of the best people you could ever hope to meet. Over to you, my man. **JC**

By 1994, the number and variety of alternative country acts and fans drawn to them world wide had increased dramatically. For the first time, the term alternative country was being used regularly to describe the music (Gregory Himes may have been the first to use it as a separate category in the 1994 edition of *Blackwell's Guide to Recorded Country Music*). Several other names were suggested including 'No Depression,' 'Insurgent Country,' 'Twangcore,' 'Western Beat,' 'Rural Contemporary,' 'Hillbilly Noir' and 'Y'alternative.' And while 'Americana' (see Terms) ran a close second, 'Alternative Country' became the most widely accepted term and over the next few years, predominantly under that label, the music really began to take off.

◆ This fourth wave of alternative country benefited from an even larger upsurge in Americana and a growing disillusionment with Nashville's pop country imperialism (an associated phenomenon was the rise of interest in 'Redneck'/'White Trash' culture that generated a number of musical acts and events celebrating and/or exploiting this stereotype). Pioneer fans and musicians from alternative country's first three waves joined with a whole new generation of converts (influenced mainly by Uncle Tupelo and its offshoots, Wilco and Son Volt) and built nearly three decades of tradition into a full scale movement.

◆ They accomplished this through an ever expanding grassroots network that used a variety of strategies. Compilation CDs which had been important during the third alternative country cycle in spreading word of local and regional scenes became an even more vital marketing technique for independent labels that handled alternative country. Bloodshot Records, out of Chicago, with lots of inspiration and guidance from Jon Langford (Waco Brothers) led the way in 1994 with the first (**For A Life Of Sin**) of its series of landmark 'Insurgent Country' compilations, but other labels quickly followed suit with anthologies for Atlanta's Redneck Underground (**Bubbapalooza**), Austin (**Austin Country Nights**, **True Sounds Of The New West**), St Louis (**Out Of The Gate Again**) and North Carolina (**Revival**). Closely related were widely publicized tribute albums to country's greats (Jimmie Rodgers, Woody Guthrie, Merle Haggard, Willie Nelson) showcasing a variety of old and new alternative country performers.

◆ Overseas, the UK's Vinyl Junkie and Sweden's Sound Asleep labels produced several alternative

country collections with both veteran and new artists while Germany's Glitterhouse issued a number of CDs filled with the music of many of alternative country's best singer/songwriters past and present (Glitterhouse also increasingly became Europe's leading label for a host of established and up and coming American and European acts). Several rockabilly labels in North America and Europe put together compilations with new hillbilly boppers like High Noon, Big Sandy, Ray Condo and The Barnshakers while Rounder made available first-rate collections of the best in contemporary old-time, bluegrass, cowboy/Western, Cajun and Tex-Mex. Finally, acknowledgment by the new crop of alternative country performers of the influence of alternative country pioneers and a general upswing of interest in alternative country's history led to the reissue/and or first time release (on CD) of material from the key figures in its evolution.

◆ Alternative country also grew through the proliferation of radio shows on stations around the globe. Many alternative country related programs, including general Americana and bluegrass, old-time and classic country shows, had been on continuously for twenty years or more, but their ranks swelled greatly in the 1990s. Individual alternative country programs came on the air while some stations offered a variety of Americana and alternative country programming throughout the day; in 1996, Gavin, the long time radio information clearinghouse, allowed Rob Bleetstein to create an Americana section and sponsored a growing list of Gavin Americana stations. And though most of the stations offering alternative country and Americana were at the lower, less powerful end of the broadcast spectrum, their range was greatly increased through the introduction of services like Bitcaster and RealAudio which allowed online broadcasting on the World Wide Web.

◆ An expanding list of independent labels (Bloodshot, Hightone, Checkered Past, Freedom, Dead Reckoning, E-Squared, Little Dog, Watermelon) devoted themselves to alternative country acts while many performers took advantage of advances in CD recording technology to do-it-themselves and get their music to the public in a completely unique way. Articles, interviews, reviews and other information appeared in an ever growing number of publications beginning with pioneering American roots music magazines like *Blue Suede News* and *Music City Texas/3rd Coast Music* in the late 80s through early alt. country periodicals such as *Twangin'*, *Maybelle*, *Cornfed* and *The Feedlot* in the early 1990s down to the first landmark issue of *No Depression; The Alternative Country (Whatever That Is) Bi-Monthly* in 1995. The latter grew out of a discussion group on AOL devoted to Gram Parsons, The Jayhawks, Uncle Tupelo et al and was a reflection of the power of the single most important factor in the growth and development of alternative country in the last five years. Through web pages (band, company, fan), mailing lists and discussion groups, RealAudio, e-mail and more, alternative country fans, musicians, promoters, writers and others interested in the music linked up in an unprecedented way and, as the *All Music Guide to Country* has observed, the shorthand 'alt.country' vividly demonstrates "the role the Internet has played in the growth and publicity of the movement."

◆ Still, there was debate over just what to call this music and some, including a few of its most prominent names, rejected the label altogether or dismissed it as nothing more than another musical fad. However, for an ever growing number of fans and performers the name stuck., and there were many

AN ALTERNATIVE COUNTRY MUSIC GUIDE & DIRECTORY

signs in the late 1990s that alternative country was here to stay: more acts and labels emerging all the time; alt. country artists signing long term contracts with independents and an increasing number of majors; big labels setting up alternative country subsidiaries; independents and larger companies making distribution deals; more feature articles on alt. country and individual artists in music magazines in the US and overseas; wider radio coverage and TV programs; movie soundtracks involving alt. country artists; constant new events and festivals; planned tributes, compilations and other projects involving big names in both alternative rock and alternative country; ongoing collaborations between several generations of alt. country artists; a steady stream of reissues and anthologies of pioneers in alt. country; and exponential growth on the Internet.

◆ Heck, even Nashville has emerged as a twang center with acts like Paul Burch, BR5-49, Farmer Not So John, Tom House et al. Given the vagaries of musical trends and the music business, it is hard to predict just how far and how long alternative country will go. But, as a fan of alternative country for more than thirty years, I am more excited and optimistic about its future than ever before. **DG**

MODERN TWANG TERMS

Alternative Country

Americana

Austin Sound

Bakersfield Sound

Cajun

Close Harmony

Country Rock

Cowboy/Western

Cowpunk

Desert Rock

Gay Country

Gothic Country

Grain Belt Rock

Grange Rock

Hillbilly Bop

Honky Tonk

Hot New Country

Insurgent Country

Lo-Fi Country

Lubbock Mafia

New Old-Time

Newgrass

No Depression

Okra

Outlaw

Progressive Bluegrass

Psychocountry

Punkgrass

Redneck Underground

Rig Rock

Rockabilly

Roots Rock

Singer/Songwriter

Tex-Mex/Conjunto

Tobacco

Town South of Bakersfield (TSOB)

Twangtrust

White Trash Parody

As you see, Goodman covers a lot of ground. He also uses a number of one-off thumbnail descriptions, such as 'Zen Country' for Jimmie Dale Gilmore. The only new term in the 2nd edition is 'Hot New Country,' which means I'm going to have to go through the whole book to discover what on earth he found in HNC worth listing under Twang. **JC**

S.A.S.S.

MEET THREE OF THE SOUTH AUSTIN SOUL SISTERS

Shelley King

Floramay Holliday

Beth Richard
of Quatropaw



SHOW DATES

Wed. 3/17

ABCD's6pm

Thu. 3/18

Rhythm House8pm

Fri. 3/19

Shaggys-SXSCongress8pm

Sat. 3/20

Babe's-Humbletime Songwriters
Showcase2-6pm

Sat. 3/20

Wild About Music Showcase.....8pm

Sat. 3/27

Border's Books & Music8-10pm

Shelley's CD "Call of My Heart" is available at
Waterloo, Tower, Local Flavor, Lubbock or Leave it,
Borders Books and Music, ABCD's, Encore,
Sundance (San Marcos), CD Warehouse (San
Marcos), The Country Rock Specialist (Sweden).

www.shelleyking.com

SHOW DATES

Thu. 3/4

Saxon Pub9pm

Fri. 3/5

Cactus Cafe9pm

Fri. 3/19

Shaggys-SXSCongress.....9:30pm

Sat. 3/20

Saxon Pub9pm

Floramay's self-titled CD is available at
Waterloo, Tower, and Local Flavor.
(localflavor@austinmetro.com or call 888 304-2967)

SHOW DATES

Thu. 3/18

The Spot-SXSW 'Austin Rocks'
Showcase10pm

Fri. 3/19

Shaggys-SXSCongress.....11pm

Tue. 3/30

Shaggys9:30-12pm

"Red" from Quatropaw is available on CD at
Waterloo, Local Flavor, and ABCD's.

www.quatropaw.com

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JOHN 'STEELBAR' CONQUEST

Well, that's the chance I took—turns out last month's **George Strait** story wasn't true. Apparently it originated on the Internet and got widely circulated because, as a friend, who's either paying off or adding to his karmic burden by reviewing mainstream country, remarked, "The trouble is, it *sounds* like an authentic George Strait story." As the Italians say, "Se non e vero, e molto ben travato." However, one thing I discovered in all this is that there's actually an entire *book* of Strait stories (not to mention plenty of people who say they could write second and even third volumes). Back in the 70s, San Marcos guitarist the late Ron Cabal advertised for a singer to join his Ace In The Hole Band and Strait got the job. A while later, Cabal had not only lost his band, Strait, with the help of MCA lawyers, even got the band name. So Cabal sat down and wrote down his experiences, published as **A Honky Tonk Odyssey: My Eight Years With George Strait**, and apparently it's a riot. I say apparently because, long out of print, it's also very hard to find and people who have copies don't loan them out—my best offer was from a friend of a friend who offered to photocopy the entire thing and mail it to me from Hawaii. So I may be getting back to you on this one.

◆ Early last month, my telephone buddy Eric Babcock of **Checkered Past** Records, a name you may have noticed in these here pages, pretty much always in a positive context, was in Austin, and, as his visit coincided with my First Saturday shift on KSYM, in the interests of helping him write the trip off for tax purposes I invited him to be my guest on Third Coast Music Network. We did a sort of Checkered Past showcase, with Eric talking about the artists and the albums, which was different if nothing else. Anyway, a few days later, Babcock, from Chicago, Illinois, was in Nashville, Tennessee, and ran into a DJ from Providence, Rhode Island, who'd heard him on the show, broadcast in San Antonio, Texas. We are, of course, talking about the miracle of computer technology. I kinda knew TCMN was being netcast, but somehow, not really believing this applied to me, it never sank in that mine was a mumble heard around the world, which is actually a pretty scary thought.

◆ To make sure I've got this right, I'm going to quote direct from **Third Coast Music Network** Webmonster Paul Daly. "KSYM started live broadcasting mid-October 1998. They're using the RealAudio live encoder, so you need the RealAudio software to listen to it, but RealAudio is pretty much the standard for Internet radio, so it's easy to get. They're on 24/7, barring network problems—whenever the Alamo Community College District network is slowed down, the broadcast feed slows down. Also, with the software they have, only about 60 people can listen at a time. TCMN has loyal listeners in Australia, Yugoslavia, Seattle, Ohio and even Congressional aides in DC (who got hooked when they listened to the show while in town). I've gotten calls from Japan while I was on the air! You can get to the live feed from the TCMN front page (www.accd.edu/tcmn)."

◆ Joining my NotSXSU venues this year is **Cactus Cafe**, and, at least for one night, its upstairs expansion hall, TU Ballroom (see *No Stinking Badges*). Booked, as usual, to be SXSU showcase rooms, they were abruptly dumped mid-February, which was kind of a pain in the ass for **Griff Luneberg**, who has to make special arrangements to open the Student Union building during Spring Vacation. The official line, or at least what SXSU told Griff, was that they didn't have any acts to offer him, but then I got a flyer from Rounder Records, whose roster is in and out of the

Cactus like a fiddler's elbow, and their Philo showcase (Ray Wylie Hubbard, Lynn Miles, Slaid Cleaves et al) is going to be at the **Iron Cactus**, a 6th Street bar which doesn't normally have music. Griff obviously doesn't buy SXSU's line, I mean he's not the idiot they seem to think he is, but shrugs it off as an irritating but understandable ploy to concentrate the showcases downtown. However, I think the real explanation is that somebody at SXSU simply fucked up, confusing the Cactus with the Iron Cactus, and they were too embarrassed to admit to it. If they want to get the Cactus back next year, it'll be interesting to see how they manage to persuade Griff of their sincerity.

◆ Looking at the **Steve Forbert** (see Reviews) discography, it occurred to me that he's a pretty good representative of a breed that seems doomed to extinction. Forbert has, by my count, put out 13 albums, which is a pretty good clip over 20 years, especially when you take into account a six year gap when Columbia tied him up in legal wrangles, but a complete set would feature seven labels, including his own Squirrelmad, Nemperor, Columbia/Legacy, Geffen, Giant, Paladin/Revolution, King Biscuit and Warner Brothers. What you're seeing at work here is the 80s and early 90s boom years war between A&R and accounting. A&R guys loved Forbert because he was so obviously, inarguably, talented, accountants hated him because, equally inarguably, he didn't make any money. If A&R won many skirmishes, they always lost the battles and now they've conclusively lost the war. The basic message of recent developments is that the majors are now out of the artist development business. You could find even better examples than Forbert—I doubt Doug Sahm could tell you offhand how many labels he's been on (I make it 23, but I'm sure I've missed some)—but you're not going to be seeing their names, or those of people like them, on major labels again.

◆ After last year's **Old Settlers Music Festival**, at which Saturday's show, headlined by Rosanne Cash and Shawn Colvin, cost \$37 at the gate, the organizers surveyed people who'd attended and the basic message they got back was "We'd rather pay less and not have Shawn Colvin." OK, I'm paraphrasing here, but the unmistakable essence was that big, ergo expensive, names weren't working for them. In fact, a reliable eyewitness, to wit DL (I was in San Antonio doing the show), tells me the park emptied out during Cash and Colvin's sets. So this year, they've worked on bringing the ticket prices down, but if they've done it at the expense of talent buying, you couldn't prove it by me. **Joe Ely** (Fri, April 9th), **Guy Clark** (Sat, April 10th), **Fred Eaglesmith** (Fri & Sat) and **Patty Griffin** (Sat)—talk about paying less and getting more! Not sure yet when it'll be, but look out for the Songwriters Workshop with Clark, Eaglesmith and Slaid Cleaves. The best break on prices (\$30 for a weekend pass) is buying tix, either by mail or over the web (www.bluegrassfestival.com), before March 15th. Thoughtfully, they've scheduled it for the second weekend of April, so we'll see you there.

◆ Just thought, in case you missed it, I'd mention **Performing Songwriter's** December 1998 issue, which was given over to a 'Salute to Texas Troubadors.' Included were feature interviews with Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, Lyle Lovett and, as a producer, Lloyd Maines; memorials to Buddy Holly, Roy Orbison, Townes Van Zandt, Walter Hyatt, Stevie Ray Vaughan and Janis Joplin; Joe Ely's tour of Texas dancehalls; and spotlight interviews with Marcia Ball, Clay Blaker, Brave Combo, Guy Clark, Alejandro Escovedo, Sue Foley, Rodney Foster, Kinky Friedman, David Garza, Butch Hancock, Sara Hickman, Tish Hinojosa, Ray Wylie Hubbard, Robert

THE MAN THEY CAN BEND, BUT NOT BREAK

Earl Keen, Jimmy LaFave, James McMurtry, Michael Martin Murphey, Willis Alan Ramsey, Kimmie Rhodes, Billy Joe Shaver, Darden Smith, Eric Taylor, Jerry Jeff Walker and Kelly Willis. You can tell from some of the inclusions—Sue Foley, for fuck's sake!—and even more from glaring omissions—Terry Allen, Troy Campbell, Betty Elders, Michael Fracasso, David Rodriguez, Cary Swinney—that the magazine has a somewhat superficial grasp of the subject, but while hardcore Texas Music buffs won't learn anything much new from it, this issue's worth adding to the ephemera collection.

◆ Another 'Young Country' station bites the dust. After plummeting to #25 in the local market, San Francisco's **KYCY** canned its on-air staff and switched to automation in early February. As Y-93, the station is shifting to a format featuring "older country hits," which doesn't exactly mean what you might think. Their definition of "older" is "hits since 1993." Ah yes, those classic golden oldies of our youth. What a world.

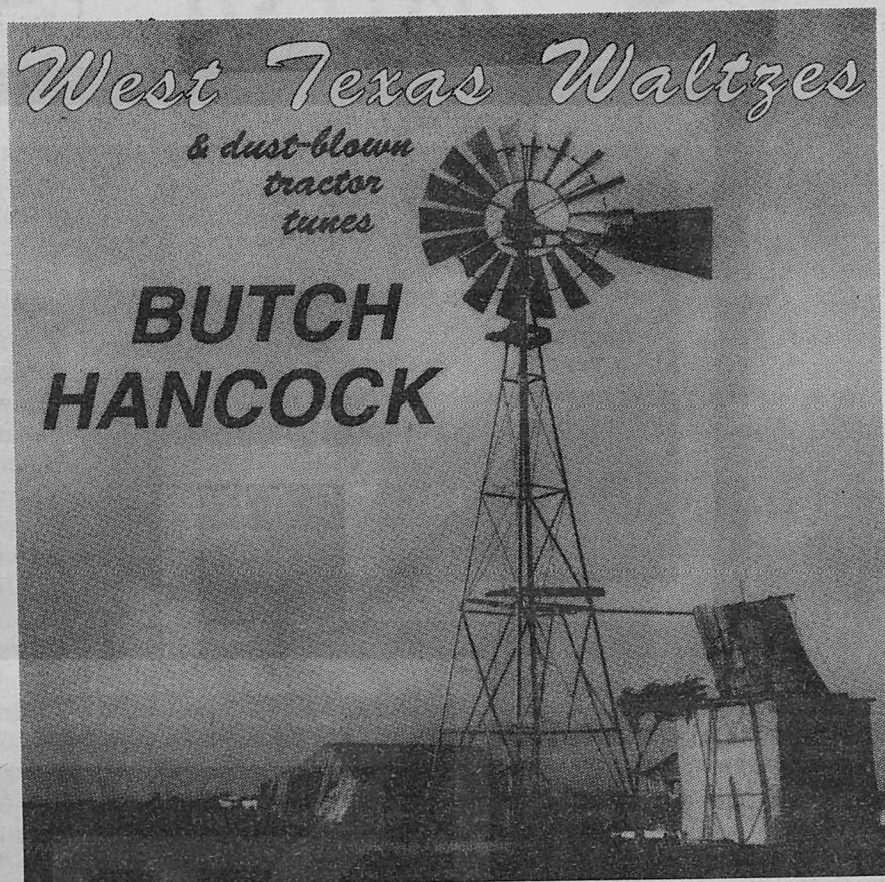
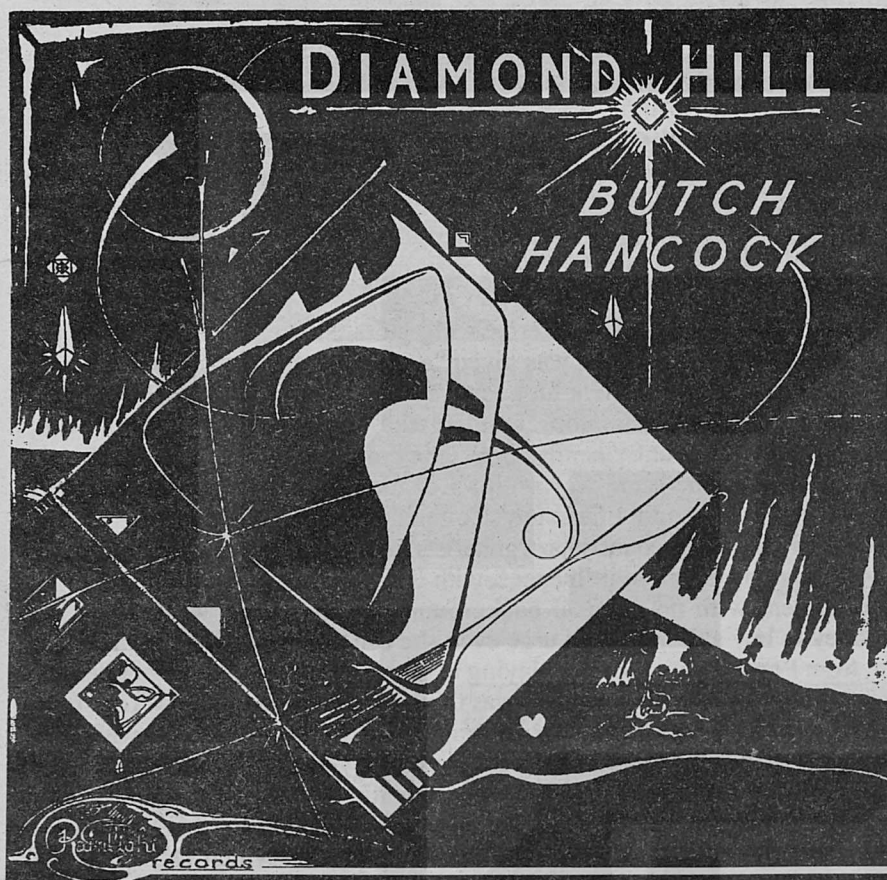
◆ If you hung out at La Zona Rosa back when it was still the real La Zona Rosa, you may recall utility man, at various times booker, barman and dancefloor waxer, and always all round good guy, **Pete Smyke**. Pete's out of the music biz now, working at West Lynn and "being a South Austin slacker otherwise," but he's looking to the music community for help with a project dear to his heart. "The little people of Austin desperately need mentors and tutors. If you can see your way to spending an hour a week hanging out with a kid at their school, you'll not only help save the world, you'll have fun doing it. All it takes is a willingness to share and listen—then see if your new friend doesn't teach you as much as you bring them. A small contribution of time really can make a difference, because one consistent adult in a child's life is all it takes for them to believe in themselves. The Austin music community (artists *and* fans) is known worldwide for its heart. Let's extend that caring and concern to the kids in our own community who really need it. Call **Judith Martin** at Communities In Schools (916-2957) to volunteer or get more info. Remember, every neighborhood has a school in it." I hope Pete gets some response from this, though if you ask me, a lot of Austin musicians could use a mentor themselves.

◆ I'll have to take a closer look next time I'm there, but Pete says **Cheapo Records'** papier-mache bust of **Elvis** bears a striking resemblance to **Mark Rubin**. Check it out.

† BUDDY KNOX

Born Wayne Knox in Happy, TX, 4/14/33, Buddy Knox died on February 14th, of cancer. He formed The Rhythm Orchids, with Jimmy Bowen on bass, at West Texas State University in 1955 and in 1956 they recorded *Party Doll*, which Knox had written in 1948, and *I'm Stickin' With You* which Knox wrote but Bowen sang, at Norman Petty's Clovis, NM, studio, using a cardboard box because Petty didn't know how to record drums. Released on their own Triple-D label, it was picked by Roulette, who put the two tracks out as separate singles and both made the charts, *Party Doll* going all the way to #1, *I'm Stickin' With You* peaking at #11. If his name, when remembered at all, is always associated with *Party Doll*, it's worth noting that Knox had as many hits as Buddy Holly did in his lifetime. These included *Ask For You*, on which Holly in fact appeared. His last chart entry was 1959's *I Think I'm Going To Kill Myself*, with a great Sonny Curtis guitar solo and Bobby Darin on piano, banned by many radio stations. Knox later moved to Canada, and ran nightclubs in Vancouver for many years.

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CONGRATULATIONS, IT'S A BABY

Making an album is like having a baby. Well, that's what I've heard over and over from musicians and it's one of those lines that sounds reasonably plausible, but for some reason I got to wondering if it's really true. Never having done either, in fact being physically incapable of the one and artistically incapable of the other (though, come to think, that doesn't seem to stop a lot of people, hell, it doesn't even slow them down), I figured I'd consult someone who's made both babies and albums, and done a damn fine job all round, Ms Betty Elders. And she said "Identical. I had two breach births and my albums came out sideways too. Equally painful and equally exhilarating."

◆ Straightforward enough, but then I thought, sure as I take Betty's word for it, I'll get other musician moms telling me that having a baby is far harder than making an album, or maybe vice versa, so I sounded out others who could speak with authority on this subject. Leeann Atherton, two babies, two albums, was firmly with Betty. "Definitely. Not as physically painful of course, but emotionally exactly the same." So was Martí Brom, "Yup," though adding, "Having a baby is much more rewarding," which was pretty much what Jo Carol Pierce, while going along with the developing consensus, thought. "Babies last better." Finally, Christine Albert, who either thinks faster on her feet or has already pondered the question, closed my survey with, "It's true, for the very short term. You go through very similar stages, including deep postpartum depression, but soon you see a record for what it is, you detach from it, while a child will always at the center of your life."

◆ So there you have it. Which means that the line of work which chose me—hey, I'd be Steve Jobs if I got to pick—basically consists of going around looking into prams and saying stuff like, "Jeez, that little booger's homely as a mud fence" or "Well, I've seen prettier babies." Not only that, pace Albert's remark, I'm doing it at a time when musicians are at their most down and vulnerable. Hell of a way to make a living, ain't it?

◆ The problem is that while the *process* of making a record is, as I think we've established, similar to having a baby, even the proudest parents don't, as a general rule, go around trying to charge total strangers \$14⁹⁹ for the privilege of taking a clone of snookums home with them. Dunno how other people see reviewing, but I've always figured the whole point is to help people evaluate whether their money would be well spent or totally wasted. If that means insulting the fruits of people's blood, sweat and tears, tough fucking luck.

◆ Babies and albums, albums and babies, some of them are just as cute as they can be, some of them are uglier than homemade sin, and most of them are somewhere in between. Now trying telling parents/artists that. The big difference is that babies might improve, so you can afford to cross your fingers and tell a little white lie, but albums ain't never going to get any better than they are when they roll off the press. OK, there are occasional remixed and remastered reissues, and aberrations like 81/2 Souvenirs three different versions of *Happy Feet*, but basically an album is what it is, for better or worse.

◆ The detachment Christine mentions isn't a constant. Even postpartum, some artists are tough enough to take whatever's thrown at them, however negative, most do indeed get over it eventually, and some just never do, in fact you could fill a fair-sized hall with Austin musicians who are never going to talk to me again, which by and large is no skin off my nose. Way I look at it, they entered a beautiful baby contest and lost, or, put it another way, you want good reviews, make a good record. **JC**

DAVE & KAREN BILLER

Sitting in the 'Hot' pile for the March issue were three very different albums with one common denominator, the name of Biller in the credits. They are:

1. *The Hot Guitars Of Biller & Wakefield*, featuring Dave Biller on guitar, Karen Biller on drums.

2. *Asylum Street Spankers: Hot Lunch*, featuring Leroy Biller on guitar.

3. *The Cornell Hurd Band At Large*, featuring Karen Biller on drums.

◆ There are, in fact, only two Billers in this lineup, 'Leroy' being the name Dave goes by as a Spanker, and they are husband and wife. This alone makes them pretty unusual, musicians for some reason rarely seem to marry musicians, most seem to prefer a little more security (as the famous Black Cat graffiti put it, "It's a pretty poor musician who can't find his wife a decent paying job"). On top of that, though they have played in a band together, for the last few years they've been in different ones, making individual names for themselves.

◆ Dave, the grandson of a country/Western Swing guitarist from whom he took the name Leroy, started out at 14 when he was given "a piece of shit guitar with only one string." After messing around with rock for a few years, he moved from Michigan City, Indiana, to attend college in Bloomington, "It didn't take." Playing seven nights a week, Biller found himself in two country bands, three jazz groups and a blues band. "I used the same gear and played the same way with all of them." But if "the country guys complained I was too jazzy and the jazz guys complained I was too country," he was finding his own sound, counting country-jazz guitarists like Jimmy Bryant, George Barnes and Jimmy Wyble among his main influences, with Roy Nichols the biggest.

◆ Meanwhile, Karen, with no musical background or experience, was saving her babysitting money to buy a drum kit, an urge even she can't explain. She too moved to Bloomington, from Fort Wayne, Indiana, playing in IU classical and jazz ensembles and "learning by osmosis." In 1990, when Dave was thinking of moving to New York to be a jazz guitarist, he met Karen in a music store and put his plans on hold while she finished her degree. Married in 1994, they spent their honeymoon in Austin looking for jobs and a place to live. Dave's first experience was getting fired from a country band after a week for "sounding too much like Don Rich and not enough like Fleetwood Mac," then he and Karen joined The Reissues, a blues band in which Dave and Joel Hamilton were "the Telecaster wankers" and their wives were the rhythm section, playing at Joe's Generic and Bate's Motel, "averaging \$5 a night. It was a rite of passage." After a few months, they went their separate ways, Dave after sitting in with Dale Watson and getting hired on the spot, "three days later I was in the studio trading licks with Jimmy Day," Karen after meeting Jim Stringer and Sharon Ward at a jam session and joining them in Git Gone.

◆ Since then, Karen moved on two years ago to join Cornell Hurd, who dubbed her 'the Venus of the traps,' while Dave spent some time with Wayne Hancock, plus stints with Ted Roddy's Tearjoint Troubadors and Susanna Van Tassel, before being tricked into auditioning—"I don't do auditions"—for Asylum Street Spankers, with whom he's been for the last year, while also playing with The Panhandlers. Between Watson, Hancock and the Spankers, "Dave's been on the road pretty much the entire time we've been married. One year with Dale, he was gone for ten months—people get divorced because of stuff like that. Even when he's home, I'm working, then he's off to one bar and I'm off to another. Days go by when we don't see each other and the only time we can talk is when he calls me at work. It's a very different lifestyle, it takes a high level of trust. We can't plan anything, we still haven't had a real honeymoon and the only vacation we've been able to take together, we went to LA to work on the record!"

◆ Dave adds, "I'd like to change this, but there's not enough session work here to keep you going. I had this great job at Strait for a couple of years, but it got to where I was gone more than I was there and they had to let me go. We both understand this is the way it is if we're both going to be musicians, and we can't imagine being anything else. We're through the toughest part, we've even managed to buy a house, though I'm still sure how we pulled that off."

◆ Biller and Biller strike me as very typical of an Austin breed, "musicians' musicians" who, though far more talented than many much better known players, quietly go about their business, making great music. Now if we can only figure out some way they can spend more time together . . . **JC**

THE HOT GUITARS OF BILLER & WAKEFIELD

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Very obvious shades of Jimmy Bryant & Speedy West in this mainly instrumental album spotlighting the teamwork of Dave Biller ('53 Telecaster) and Jeremy Wakefield ('54 Bigsbee steel guitar). That's two very large pairs of shoes to fill but I think even Bryant/West diehards would concede that Biller & Wakefield's evocation, while consistently cooler and softer-edged, rings true. The two met in Wayne Hancock's band, discovered a mutual love of hillbilly jazz, jostling each other in used record stores, and were encouraged to record together by roots guru Deke Dickerson, who produced the album. With Karen Biller on drums, Wally Hersom/Brent Harding bass, Ashley Kingman/Dave Stuckey rhythm guitar, Carl Sonny Leyland piano, and vocals by Big Sandy (*Steel Crazy*), Dave & Deke (*Guitars On Fire* and, with Biller & Wakefield, *I Don't Mind*), the 14 cuts include six originals by Biller, five by Wakefield. Perhaps not reincarnations, but two very stylish pickers keeping a great tradition alive. **JC**



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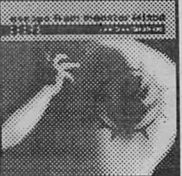
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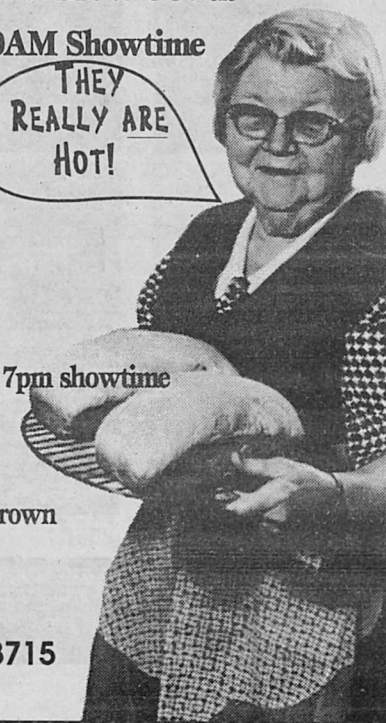
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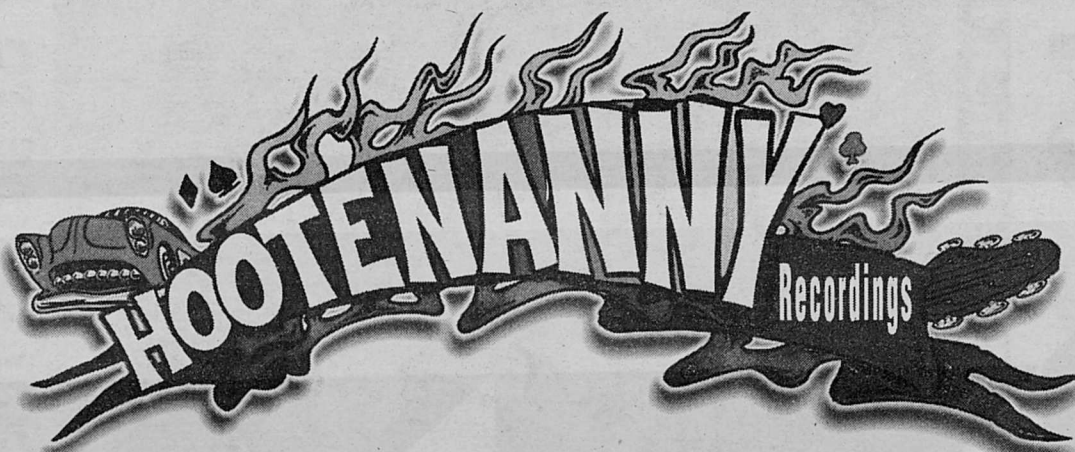
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MARCH ARRIVALS & DEPARTURES

- 1st _ Ray Frushay • 1944 • Los Angeles, CA
- 2nd _ Doc Watson • 1923 • Deep Gap, NC
- _____ Eva Ybarra • 19?? • San Antonio, TX
- _____ Charlie Christian † 1942
- _____ Roy Hall † 1984
- 3rd _ Jimmy Heap • 1922 • Taylor, TX
- _____ Hadley Castille • 1933 • Leonville, LA
- _____ Pearl Butler † 1989
- 4th _ Tom Shaw • 1908 • Brenham, TX
- _____ Betty Jack Davis • 1932 • Corbin, KY
- _____ Catherine Irwin • 1962 • New Haven, CT
- 5th _ Willis Alan Ramsey • 1951 • AL
- _____ Patsy Cline † 1963
- _____ Cowboy Copas † 1963
- _____ Hawkshaw Hawkins † 1963
- 6th _ Bob Wills • 1905 • Limestone Co, TX
- _____ Doug Dillard • 1937 • East St Louis, IL
- _____ Jerry Naylor • 1939 • Stephenville, TX
- _____ Kimmie Rhodes • 1954 • Wichita Falls, TX
- 7th _ Townes Van Zandt • 1944 • Fort Worth, TX
- _____ Roxy Gordon • 1945 • Ballinger, TX
- _____ Bradley Jaye Williams • 1961 • Saginaw, MI
- 8th _ Johnny Dollar • 1933 • Kilgore, TX
- 9th _ Lloyd Price • 1933 • New Orleans, LA
- 10th _ Heuy P Meaux • 1929 • Kaplan, LA
- _____ Dave Alexander • 1938 • Shreveport, LA
- _____ Johnnie Allan • 1938 • Rayne, LA
- 11th _ Flaco Jimenez • 1939 • San Antonio, TX
- _____ Joe Crane • 1946 • Conroe, TX
- _____ Darden Smith • 1962 • Brenham, TX
- 12th _ LC Williams • 1930 • Crockett, TX
- _____ Bill Payne • 1949 • Waco, TX
- _____ Traci Lamar • 1960 • Lubbock, TX
- 13th _ Liz Anderson • 1930 • Pine Creek, MN
- _____ Toni Price • 1961 • Philadelphia, PA
- 14th _ Robert Pete Williams • 1914 • Zachary, LA
- _____ Les Baxter • 1922 • Mexia, TX
- _____ Phil Phillips • 1931 • Lake Charles, LA
- 15th _ Lightin' Hopkins • 1912 • Centerville, TX
- _____ Clarence Green • 1929 • Galveston Island, TX
- _____ Tommy McLain • 1940 • Jonesville, LA
- _____ Sheryl Cormier • 1945 • Grand Coteau, LA
- 16th _ Sean Mencher • 1961 • Washington, DC
- _____ T-Bone Walker † 1975
- 17th _ Jubal Clark • 1929 • Crosby Co, TX
- _____ Hugh Farr † 1980
- 18th _ Wilson Pickett • 1941 • Prattville, AL
- _____ James McMurtry • 1962 • Fort Worth, TX
- 19th _ Clarence Henry • 1937 • New Orleans, LA
- _____ Richard Dobson • 1942 • Tyler, TX
- 20th _ Sister Rosetta Tharpe
- _____ • 1915 • Cotton Plant, AR
- _____ Dewey Balfa • 1927 • Mamou, LA
- _____ Marcia Ball • 1949 • Orange, TX
- _____ Jimmie Vaughan • 1951 • Dallas, TX
- _____ Jimmy Donley † 1963
- _____ Kenneth Threadgill † 1987

- 21st _ Charlie Poole • 1892 • Alamance Co, NC
- _____ Son House • 1902 • Riverton, MS
- _____ Hoyle Nix • 1918 • Azle, TX
- _____ Billy Joe Hunter • 1919 • El Paso, TX
- _____ Juke Boy Bonner • 1932 • Bellville, TX
- _____ Pete Mayes • 1938 • Anahuac, TX
- _____ Chris O'Connell • 1953 • Williamsport, MD
- 22nd _ Uncle Dave Macon † 1952
- _____ Stoney Cooper † 1977
- _____ Bill Neely † 1990
- 24th _ Nathan (Williams) • 1963 • Lafayette, LA
- 25th _ Tommy Hancock • 1929 • Lubbock, TX
- _____ Johnny Burnette • 1934 • Memphis, TN
- _____ Nick Lowe • 1949 • Woodbridge, UK
- 27th _ Johnny Clyde Copeland • 1937 • Homer, LA
- _____ Janis Martin • 1940 • Southerlin, VA
- _____ Mandy Mercier • 1949 • Philadelphia, PA
- 28th _ Arleigh Duff • 1924 • Warren, TX
- _____ Charlie McCoy • 1941 • Oak Hill, WV
- _____ Big Boy Arthur Crudup † 1974
- 29th _ Moon Mullican • 1909 • Corrigan, TX
- _____ Camille Howard • 1914 • Galveston, TX
- _____ Van Broussard • 1937 • Prairieville, LA
- _____ Robert Gordon • 1947 • Bethesda, MD
- 31st _ Joe Holley • 1917 • Lone Camp, TX
- _____ Lowell Fulson • 1921 • Tulsa, OK
- _____ Lefty Frizzell • 1928 • Corsicana, TX
- _____ John D Loudermilk • 1934 • Durham, NC

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