

BRUM

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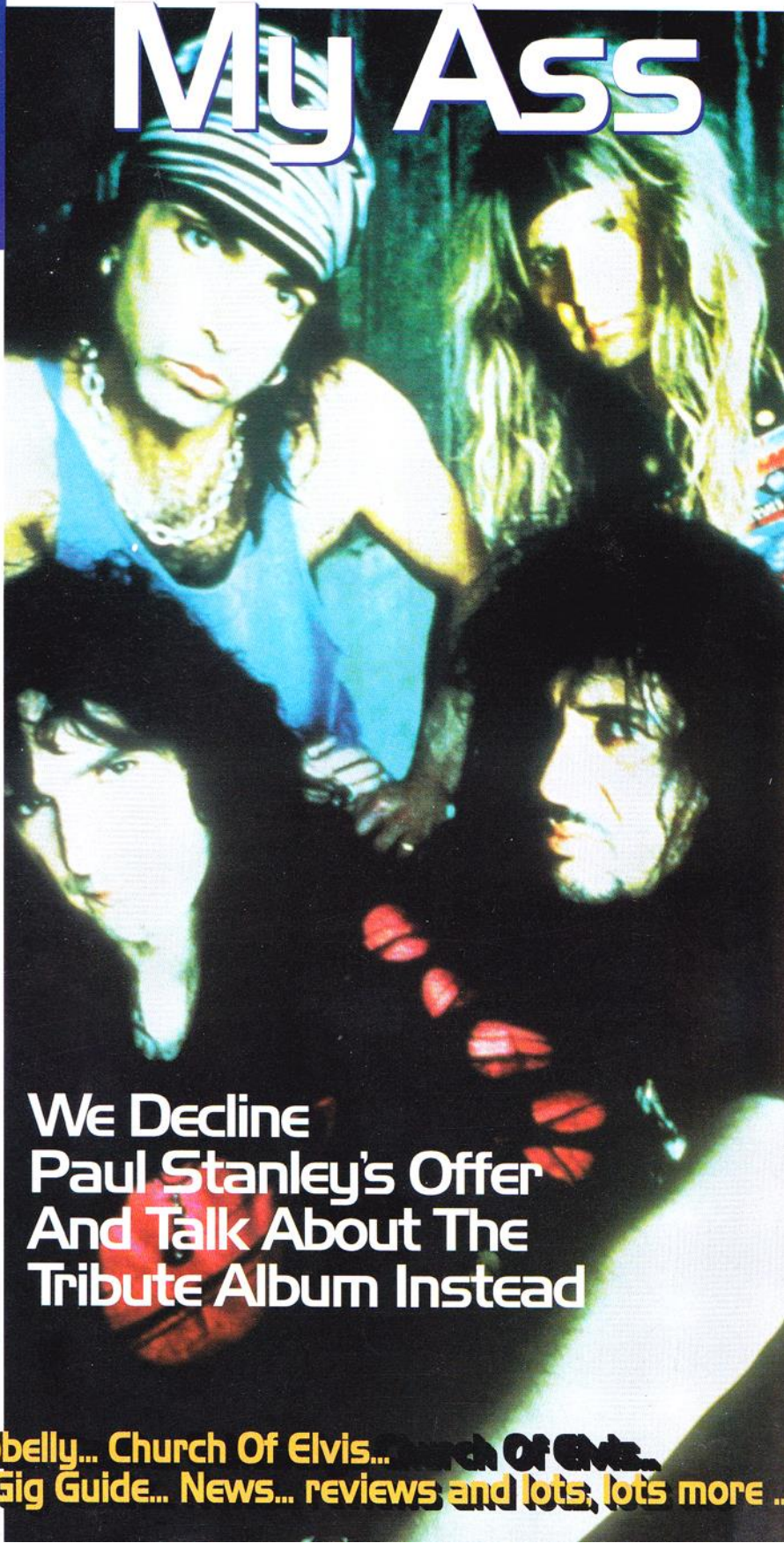
The Midlands Music Monthly and more!

BEAT

JUNE 1994

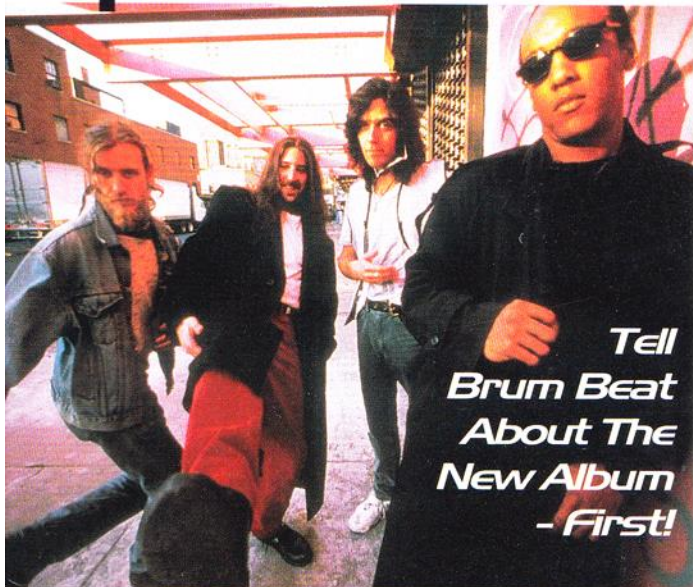
ISSUE: 161

KISS My Ass



We Decline
Paul Stanley's Offer
And Talk About The
Tribute Album Instead

Spin Doctors



*Tell
Brum Beat
About The
New Album
- First!*



**Julia
Fordham**
Too Radical
For Michael
Bolton

Brodsky Quartet
Causing A Classical Commotion



PLUS:
Echobelly... Church Of Elvis... Church Of Elvis...
The Gig Guide... News... reviews and lots, lots more ..

In the late summer of 1977 none other than Mike Davies played me an album with a simple pencil sketch of the performer's facial profile on the sleeve. The songwriters were listed as Joe Ely, Jimmie (Dale) Gilmore and (George) Butch Hancock. With Joe Ely, for his debut set was that revelatory record, my feet alighted on the yellow brick road to the heart of Texas music - seventeen years later I haven't even sighted the end, and what's more, I earnestly hope I never do ...

Through the late seventies and into the eighties the pages of Peter O'Brien's now defunct fanzine, Omaha Rainbow, detailed the exploits of numerous singer/songwriters who made their home in central Texas. Subsequently, I came by a copy of Jan Reid's 1974 expose of the Austin, Texas music scene *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*. In context, it was kind of like reading the Book of Genesis.

What follows may be seen as indulgent, but the recent UK release of one particular album rekindled the zeal of that initial conversion ...

Let's go back to Thursday, December 3rd 1992: The release of the debut, nineteen track recording by an independent Texas label - Dejadisc. The title of the recording? *Across The Great Divide*. Quite frankly, it is one of the finest collections of words and music to appear in the firmament in this decade, or any other for that matter. Subtitled, *Songs of Jo Carol Pierce*, this release by the small San Marcos based label, is a compilation album featuring, principally Austin based musicians. That Jo Carol Pierce has to date, never issued any recordings of her work, makes this tribute to her skill as a song writer all the more Texan in concept and execution.

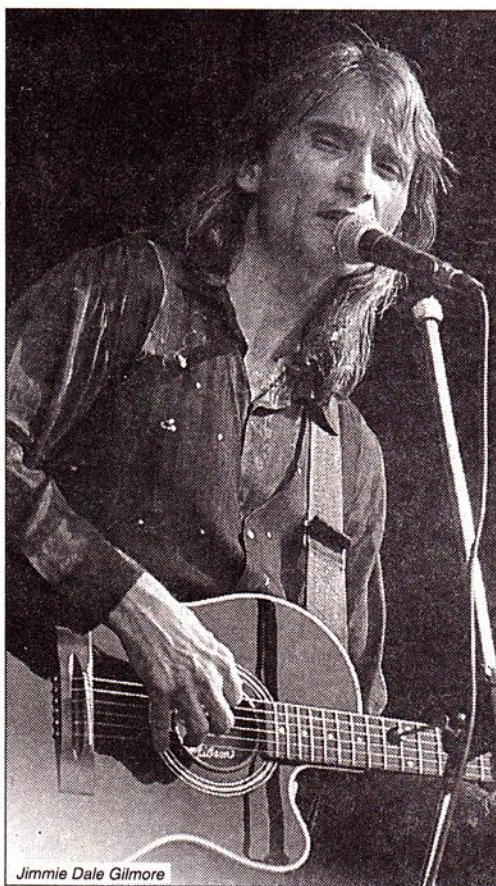
So who the hell is Jo Carol Pierce?

She was born on the flatlands of the Llano Estacado, in the town of Wellington to be precise. Her family later relocated to Lubbock, where she grew up - alongside Joe Ely, Jimmie Dale Gilmore, George Butch Hancock, Kimmie Rhodes, Terry Allen, David Halley, Jesse Taylor and innumerable others who now make Austin their occasional or permanent base.

Following a performance of the lady's stage creation *Bad Girls Upset By The Truth*, in Austin during November 1991, Michael Hall (ex-leader of the Wild Seeds, a member of the studio combo The Settlers, and a solo act with two albums to his credit) and Troy Campbell (leader of Loose Diamonds) stumbled into one another while partaking of a comfort break. It transpired that both musicians had separately, considered organising a project to immortalise Jo Carol's songs. By midnight, the boys' room proposal was unfolding into a physical reality. Which brings us neatly to the end result ... an amalgam of folk, country, blues, rock and even dare I say punk rhythms. The thing is, it all fits. Perfectly.

Halfway through the opening cut, *PSYCHOMOTOR's Sacrificial Island Tombstone*, you'd swear that every power pop band from The Beatles through The Raspberries to Klaatu and beyond, had reformed. Lyrically, Pierce pegs this song as one of her most frightening break-up songs. Every sound which emanates from your speakers on Queen of Heaven was committed to tape by the

Arthur Wood Looks Across The Great Divide And Declares THAT'S WHAT I LIKE ABOUT TEXAS



Jimmie Dale Gilmore

man who first sparked my enduring and voracious interest in Texas music, JOE ELY. An acoustic ballad, full of haunting imagery about an imaginary queen who rides a horse named Las Grimas, it was co-written by Ely, Pierce and T.J. Nabors. Former Wild Seed and subsequent Arista solo artist, KRIS McKAY, adds her vocal chords to the title cut, the tale of a fantasy lover. If you missed Kris's 1990 Arista album *What Love Endures*, I'd simply ask yourself one question. Why?

LOOSE DIAMONDS weigh in with Ruby featuring Troy Campbell's plaintive vocal. The lyric of the latter ballad being about a lost love, recalled with the faintest tinge of regret. Following some patchy studio work over the last couple of years, DARDEN SMITH nails the sucker to the wall, with his rendition of *Scratch Upon Her Windowpane*. The latter song hails from that region where a cold tingle runs up your backbone each time you listen to it. Heartache can be a bejewelled source of lyrical inspiration. It's neat to observe that the boy is finally enjoying a modicum of commercial popularity, his own *Loving Arms* having recently reached No.10 on the Pop Singles Chart, Stateside. Cranking up the pulse rate and the decibels once

more, are the LORDS OF LOVE, featuring Jesse Guitar Taylor. Clocking in at just over six minutes, Jim Henry Henley is the longest cut on the set. Producer, guitarist and songwriter Spot, leads the trio SPOT REMOVAL. This tale of a college kid who is crazy about engines, whatever they may be powering, crams as many words as possible into every single second; with

Spot's growl leaving the listener breathless by closing time. One small crib, the final mix on the vocal track could have been a little cleaner.

JIMMIE DALE GILMORE is invited to the Reunion, wherein the protagonists / former lovers part in this life, in the certainty that they will be reunited on a more ethereal plane. (By the way, circa 1963-67, Jo Carol was Mrs. Jimmie Dale Gilmore.) Jimmie subsequently recut this song as a duet with Lucinda Williams and included it on his 1993 Grammy nominated Elektra album, *Spinning Around the Sun*.

LISA MEDNICK'S rendition of *Buttons of Your Skin* has received unanimous and deserved plaudits. John Conquest named it, best single track in his Music City Texas review. Pierce's lyric is as haunting and spiritual an analysis of a love affair, as you're ever liable to hear.

Hearing DAVID HALLEY perform *Loose Diamond* at The Junction in Harbore back in April 1992 was one of those very special moments. Here he is joined by RICH and KATHY BROTHERTON for the album version. THE NAMEDROPPERS meantime, provide the only out of town contribution. All the way from Tucson, Arizona and care of Dan Stuart from Green On Red. In the circumstances, it's appropriately titled *Secret Dan*, and was co-written by Jo Carol and Jim Henry Norman.

The supporting players on TERRY ALLEN'S cut *I Blame God* boil down to an amalgam of family / Lubbock players. In the former vein, son Bukka (piano) and wife Jo Harvey (mocking vocals), are joined by Lubbock bred stickman Davis McLarty (Joe Ely Band). Allen spits out every word and line of this narrative with the heavenly one with undisguised relish. ROBERT JACKS was Pierce's stage partner when *Bad Girls Upset by the Truth* played in Austin. He is joined by former Reiver KIM LONGACRE for the closing cut *Apocalyptic Horse*, as Jo Carol's psyche takes flight along the Great Divide once more.

So there you have it. Nineteen songs (sadly there wasn't space to enumerate all) which will forever enrich your life. The album, and other Dejadisc releases, is available through Topic / Direct Distribution.

Some closing footnotes:

Last Fall, Jo Carol in the company of David Halley, Michael Fracasso and Jimmy LaFave, took part in a month long expedition along the eastern seaboard of the US as part of an Austin Songwriters on the Road tour. Her monologue with music *Bad Girls Upset By The Truth*, continues to enjoy occasional airings in Austin. Resurrection of her own solo album project may be somewhere in her hand of cards, or even among that infinite carpet of stars that is the future ...

Truly, the road goes on forever, and the party never ends....