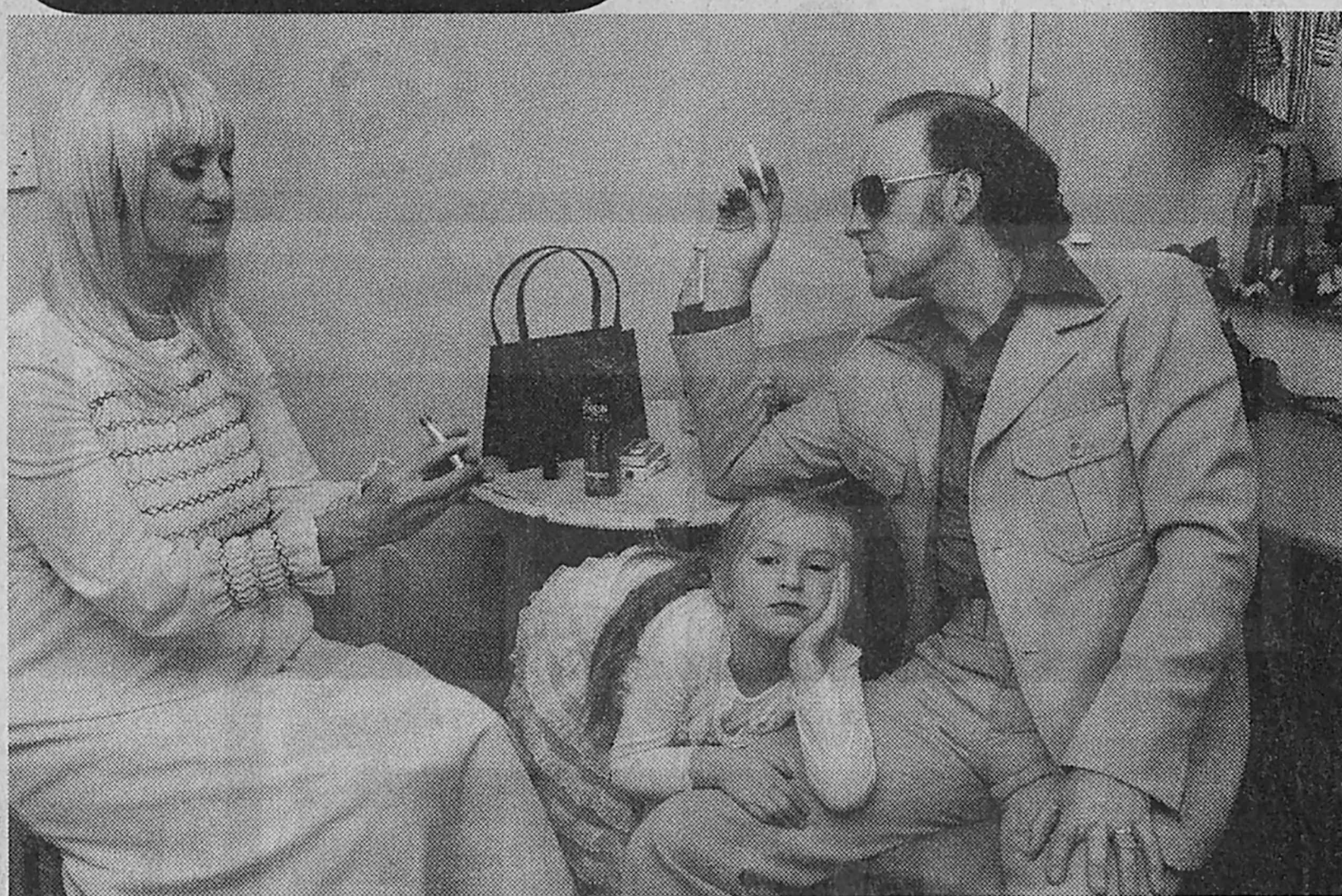


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CLEMENTINE**

#187/276 AUGUST 2012



**LAURA CANTRELL
REMEMBERS KITTY WELLS
JOHN THE REVEALATOR
FREEFORM AMERICAN ROOTS
#156**

**ROOTS BIRTHS & DEATHS
REVIEWS**

******* (or not)**

**KASEY CHAMBERS
RONNY ELLIOTT
THE TRISHAS**

**VA: Even More Songs Of Route 66
TIMI YURO**

**'NONE OF THE HITS,
ALL OF THE TIME'**



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FREEFORM AMERICAN ROOTS #156

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DURING JULY 2012

#1 JP Harris & The Tough Choices: I'll Keep Calling

(Cow Island) *BL/DG/*JA/*MP/*RJT/*SH

2 VA: Even More Songs Of Route 66: From Here To There
(Lazy SoB) *CP/*GS/*TG/*TR

3 Zoe Muth & The Lost High Rollers: Old Gold
(Signature Sounds) *JM/*KC/*RV

4 VA: Kin: Songs By Mary Karr & Rodney Crowell (Vanguard)
*MW/*N&T/*PT/*RH

5 The Old Crow Medicine Show, Carry Me Back (ATO) *GV/*TL

6 Great Recession Orchestra: Double Shot (NewTex) *GF/*TB

7 Ronny Elliott: I've Been Meaning To Write (Blue Heart) *BR/*PP

8 Leyla Fences: Itty Bitty Twang Twang (self) *EW/*OAM

9 The Deadfields: Dance In The Sun (self) *CTS/*HT

10 Moot Davis: Man About Town (Highway Kind) *DA/*LMG

11= Kelly Hogan: I Like To Keep Myself In Pain (Anti-) *DT

Marty Stuart: Nashville, Vol.1: Tear The Woodpile Down
(Sugar Hill) *ATC/*BS

Rachel Harrington: Makin' Our Home A Honky Tonk
(Skinny Dennis) *BF

12 Marley's Ghost: Jubilee (Sage Arts) *AA/*TF

13 Tif Ginn (self) *TA

Trailer Radio (Moonshine Martini) *MN

14= Elizabeth Cook: Gospel Plow (31 Tigers) *JP

15 JD McPherson: Signs & Signifiers (Rounder) *RMP

16= Corb Lund: Cabin Fever (New West) *RF

Billy Joe Shaver: Live At Billy Bob's Texas
(Smith Music Group) *MT

Andy Vaughan & The Driveline: Searching For The Song (self)
*DWB

17 Ravenna & The Magnetics: Rockabilly Fools/
Tennessee & Texas (Part)

18 Jimbo Mathus: Blue Light (Big Legal Mess) *SS

19= The Blasters: Fun On Saturday Night (Rip Cat)

The Carper Family: Back When (self) *KR

Mark Evans Pawn Shop Guitar (self) *MB

Hot Texas Swing Band (self) *LB

20= Bill Evans: In Good Company (Native & Fine) *AG

Ray Wylie Hubbard: The Grifter's Hymnal (Bordello) *BW

Ed Romanoff (self) *GN

21= Captain Greenbud: Volume 3 (self) *JT

Brandi Carlile: Bear Creek (Columbia) *AH

Ronnie Dawson & High Noon: The Carnegie Hall Tour

(Bear Family) *MT

John Fullbright: From The Ground Up (Blue Dirt) *OO

Rhett Miller: The Dreamer (Maximum Sunshine) *DS

Town Mountain: Leave The Bottle (Pinecastle) *TM

† KITTY WELLS

Many people, if they know her at all, only know the 'first thing' about Kitty Wells: that she was the first female artist in country music to have a chart-topping single, *It Wasn't God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels* in 1952. This one achievement would have been a remarkable calling card for a female artist of that era, but Kitty Wells, and her husband Johnnie Wright of Johnnie & Jack & the Tennessee Mountain Boys and Owen Bradley of Decca Records were determined to see what good they could build upon that first, surprise success. So they found and wrote more songs from a uniquely female point of view, crafted her sound, pitching the songs way up high to show off her natural vibrato, and defied the contemporary wisdom that said a woman's name couldn't top the bill on a touring show. Along the way, she topped all the polls of the day and had an unsurpassed 38 top ten hits in a 15-year stretch. It was a full decade before any other female artist came close to her commercial or chart success. For the female icons who emerged in the 1960s, Patsy Cline, Loretta Lynn, Dolly Parton and Tammy Wynette, none had to bust down the door to success for a female artist, Kitty had opened it and left it swinging, waiting for them to follow.

But for all of that significance, what I find sticks in my mind about her was the sound of Kitty Wells' voice in her youth as it was caught on record and in the old radio shows that she sang on with Johnnie & Jack when they weren't famous, just scratching for a chance to entertain you on the radio. That voice was high and plaintive with something ancient and visceral to it, but still well suited to cut through the hard surface of 1950s honky tonk. Wells managed to transform those old cheating and heart songs into soul music by resisting the overplay of emotion; her drama remains all pent up in that voice, painfully curtailed, both sentimental and stoic like the country folks who were her rural audience. She also had an inherent empathy for the characters she drew; in song, she could convey the anguish of the single girl who couldn't claim to be an angel, or the bereft resolve of the young soldier's widow walking the cemetery to "come to the place where [her love] is sleeping" knowing the shudder of grief that awaits her.

The times I met her, Kitty was delightfully no nonsense and unassuming but also poised and slightly opaque. She had been called the 'Queen of Country Music' for decades, and she could carry that title with an easy grace, though her realm seemed an older world where music business was done between individuals and independent operators, venues were modest, the fans were paramount, the bus got parked in the driveway, and having a cook book to sell on the merch table was a good thing. I remember loving her speech accepting the Grammy's Lifetime Achievement Award in the early 90s, she was so modest and sweet, saying that the Grammy's were acknowledging something she "loved to do: to sing and perform" as if all that breaking down of gender bias against female artists was just a footnote. To paraphrase Cliffie Stone, the great LA based country music impresario, maybe she and Johnnie Wright weren't trying to make history, just a living. Whatever their intent, I'm glad that Nashville girl and he Tennessee Mountain Boy made all that music.

Laura Cantrell



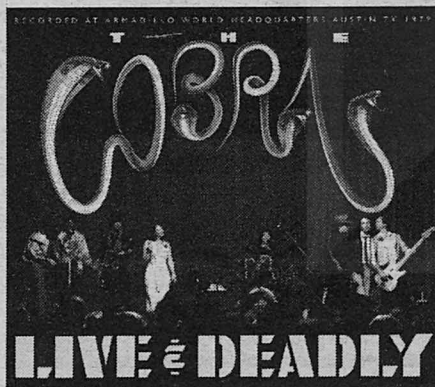
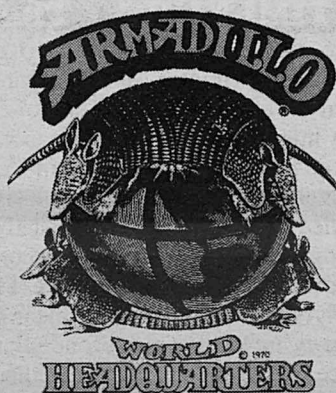
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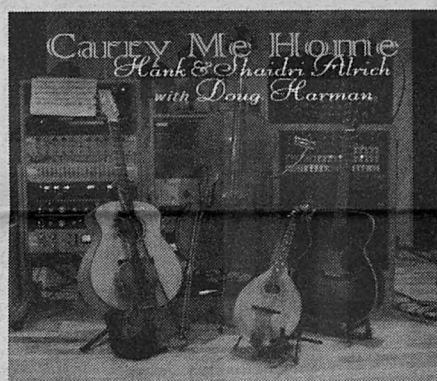


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RONNY ELLIOTT • I've Been Meaning To Write

(Blue Heart ****)

For all I know, Tampa/St Pete is a hotbed of 3CM-type music, but I can't help noticing that the two outstanding local musicians of whom I'm aware, singer-songwriters Ronny Elliott and Rebekah Pulley, seem to be circling the wagons. While there's no mention of Elliott's band, The Nationals, on this album, the lineup includes his long time associate Steve Connelly, guitar, pedal & lap steel, bass, who's also one of Pulley's Reluctant Prophets, as is bassplayer Rob Pastore, while Pulley herself contributes vocals and piano, wrote two of the 13 songs and cowrote another with Elliott (who wrote all the others apart from Primer 55's *Something Bad*). Elliot gets a lot of good press, but reviewers frequently, in fact almost invariably, compare him to some combination of Townes Van Zandt, Guy Clark, Butch Hancock, Terry Allen, Butch Hancock and/or Billy Joe Shaver, with one calling him "geographically challenged" because he lives in The Big Guava, though, like most of those Texans, Elliott is still "A cult artist in the best sense of the word," a description which he displays proudly on his home page. If you've come across any of his ten previous albums, you might expect literate half-spoken half-sung lyrics, sardonic humor (the album title plays on the five year gap since *Jalopypaint*), biting emotional observation (one song is titled *Women Leave*, another says "I want nothin' to do with a heart that can't be broken"), odd corners of pop culture (*Handsomeness Harry The Hipster* is about proto-rock & roller Harry Gibson, blacklisted for Dr Demento fave *Who Put The Benzadrine In Mrs Murphy's Ovaltine?*) and offbeat sociology, as when he and Pulley describe how girls wrecked a sub-culture by abandoning *Boys In Hot Rods* for boys with guitars. If so, you won't be disappointed. Like all his albums, this was produced by Elliott, Connelly and Nationals' bassman Whit Bucklin, and, like its predecessors and *Pulley's Back To Boogaloo*, produced by her and Connelly, the sound is pretty damn close to immaculate. **JC**

VA • Even More Songs Of Route 66; From Here To There

(Lazy SoB ****)

Fourteen years after *Songs Of Route 66* and eleven after *More Songs Of Route 66; Roadside Attractions*, Dave Sanger finally rolls out the conclusion to his trilogy. Between being Asleep At The Wheel's drummer, partner with Freedom's Matt Eskey in a disc manufacturing business and the father of two small children, it's rather amazing that he managed to find time over the last three years or so to produce, and play on, these 13 new versions of his favorite songs about "the American dream of movement." Though none of them, except the almost obligatory version of Bobby Troup's *Route 66*, here sung by Mike Barfield, specifically reference the legendary highway, there's a gas pedal in every one. Opening with Curtis Mayfield soundalike William DeVaughan's 1974 hit *Be Thankful For What You've Got* (the original title was *A Cadillac Don't Come Easy*), by Emily Gimble, the selection covers a lot of time, space and Austin talent. Seth Walker does Wee Willie Wayne's 1955 *Travelin' Mood*, Bruce Hughes the Doobie Brothers' *Rockin' Down The Highway*, Dale Watson Merle Haggard's *White Line Fever*, Elizabeth McQueen NRBC's *Little Floater*, Claire Small British pop star Albert Hammond's *99 Miles From LA*, Carolyn Wonderland Canned Heat's *On the Road Again*, Tim Curry Percy Mayfield's *Hit The Road, Jack*, Jason Roberts Dale Watson's *Truckin' Man* (eerily reminiscent of The Cowboy Twinkies' *I'm A Truck Driving Man*), The Band Of Heathens Little Feat's *Willin'* and Matt the Electrician Danny O'Keefe's *The Road*. Fitting rather awkwardly into this lineup, Slaid Cleaves sings Jason Eklund's *Pickin' California*, which sounds like it belongs on another album altogether, and with three vocalists The Band Of Heathens still seem overawed by Lowell George, as well they might be, but if Best In Show belong to McQueen and Curry, everyone else does a fine job of trading in some emptied out spaces for some speed and that good ol' American Dream. **JC**



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TIMI YURO • The Complete Liberty Singles

(Real Gone ****)

Rosemarie Timotea Auro was kind of the female Bobby Charles—when she appeared on TV after the 1961 release of *Hurt*, people were stunned to discover that the owner of this huge, emotional voice was white. Not only that, but female, under 21 and less than five feet tall. However, again like Charles, Yuro's first R&B single was her only big success, mainly because Liberty insisted on marketing her as a pop singer—her first LP was titled *Soul!* (1962) but consisted entirely of standards like *Stardust*. After a couple of years of this, during which she recorded with Phil Spector (*What's A Matter Baby*) and cut a country/blues album, *Make The World Go Away* (1963, incidentally, Yuro was an early supporter of Willie Nelson), she moved to Mercury, but was invited to return to Liberty in 1968. This second stint did nothing to revive her flatlined career but did produce one of the 45s that made her a Northern Soul goddess, *It'll Never Be Over For Me/As Long As There Is You*. Yuro's frustration with lazy Liberty didn't prevent her from delivering epic renditions of often inappropriate and sometimes iffy material, all too often with arrangements that were dated even before the records were released, but if Mercury gave her better songs, including *Can't Stop Running Away/Get Out Of My Life*, another Northern Soul classic, Quincy Jones also balked at unleashing her full power on what was still overall her best album, *The Amazing Timi Yuro* (1964). Unlike Philips [UK] and producer Johnny Franz, who propelled Dusty Springfield to stardom in 1963, Liberty and its revolving door producers had no idea what to do with first—and best—female blue-eyed soul singer, so this collection, all in the original mono apart from three tracks released in stereo (one was a single sided jukebox promo), is as much a study in a major label's failure of vision as a reminder of Yuro's singular talent. **JC**

THE TRISHAS • High, Wide & Handsome

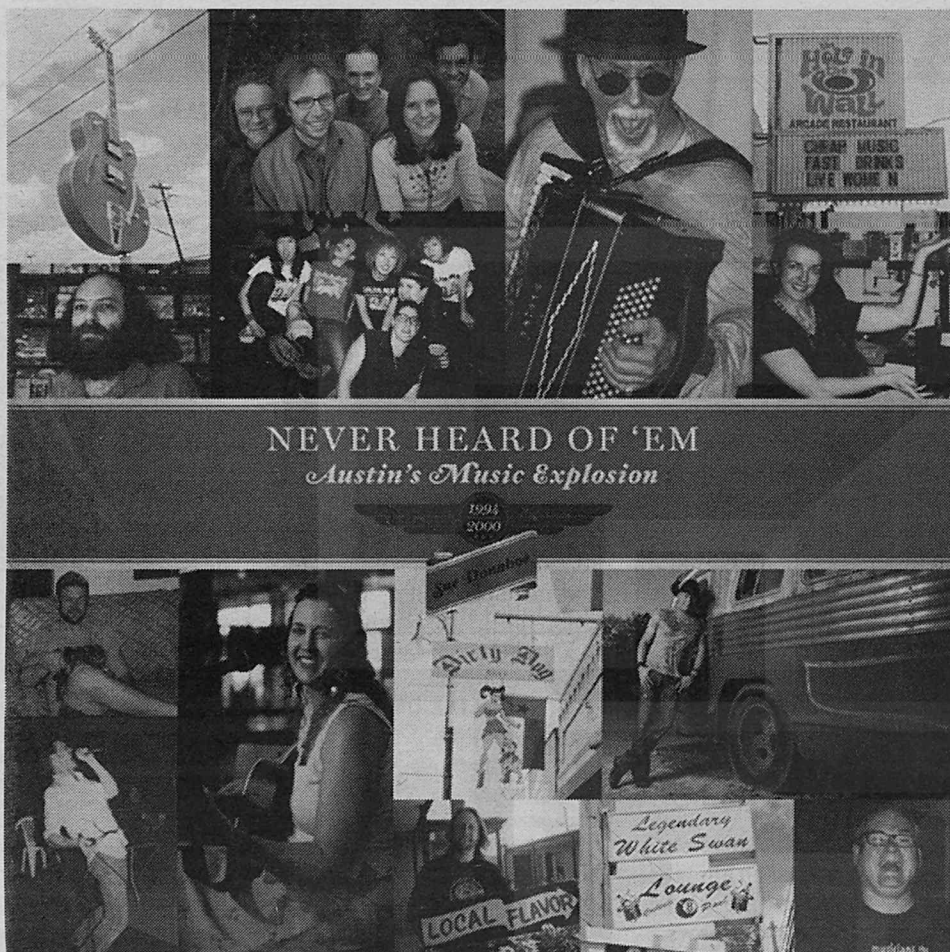
(self ***)

Some time ago, I read that the Dixie Chicks, having discovered that Susan Gibson was making more than them, threatened to write all the material on their next album themselves. Words to make the blood freeze. Guess someone, maybe Kevin Welch, told The Trishas—his daughter Savannah, Jamie Wilson, Liz Foster and Kelley Mickwee—that royalties are where the money is because one or more of them had a hand in all but one of the 14 tracks, the exception being Courtney Patton's *The Fool*. The problem is that, while they had help from Jason Eady, Bruce Robison, Kevin Welch, Savannah's brother Dustin Welch and Owen Temple (also Jim Lauderdale on a downloadable bonus track), the songs don't exactly stick in the mind, I sure ain't hearing any jukebox hits, or even anything I really want to hear again. Multiple songwriting credits always bother me (to be fair, Wilson managed to write *Looking At Me* all on her lonesome) and this album makes a good exhibit for my case against them. That said, I've heard the four women, who came together at a tribute to Kevin Welch, covering a Trish Yearwood hit that Welch had written, hence the group name, and who I once heard sounding like they weren't ready for an Open Mike and another time like a band of angels, seem to have settled down on the angel side of the equation (their version of *She Ain't Goin' Nowhere* was one of the few standouts on the Guy Clark tribute *This One's For Him*). Great singing, shame about the songs. **JC**

KASEY CHAMBERS • Storybook

(Sugar Hill *)

Had I a much stronger stomach, I'd dig out Deanna Carter's *The Chain* and Rosanne Cash's *The List* so I could determine how Chambers' thematically similar album—covers of 15 songs that inspired her—ranks against those formidable stinkers. I don't think there's an absolute conclusion, whichever one you're listening to at any given time is always going to seem worse than the others, so I'm just trying to figure out which of Chambers' heroes and heroines is most maltreated. Trouble is they're very likely to among yours and mine too, so if I single out her travesty of *If I Needed You* it's probably because Townes Van Zandt is rather more important to me than Lucinda Williams (*Happy Woman Blues*), Gram Parsons (*Return Of The Grievous Angel*), Suzanne Vega (*Luka*), Steve Earle (*Nothing But A Child*), John Prine (*Leave The Lights On*), Hank Williams (*I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry*), Matthew Ryan (*Guilty*), Gillian Welch (*Orphan Girl*), Cyndi Lauper (*True Colours*), Fred Eaglesmith (*Water In The Fuel*), Nanci Griffith (*I Wish It Would Rain*), Paul Kelly (*Everything's Turning To White*), James McMurtry (*Too Long In The Wasteland*) or Patty Griffin (*Top Of The World*), but I'd sure understand if you felt differently and loathed and despised a different track (the Eaglesmith and McMurtry songs are particularly noxious). Chambers gets sterling support from a group that includes her father, Bill Chambers, on dobro and slide guitar, but she's taking on material that's way above her pay grade. **JC**



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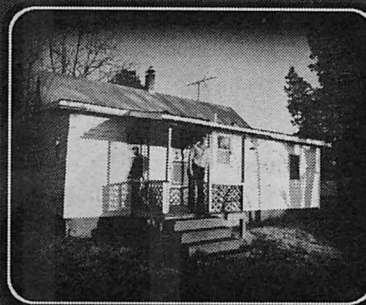
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JOHN THE REVEALATOR

Even as I wrote it, I knew the last sentence in the **Ravenna & The Magnetics** cover story, while generally true, wasn't totally accurate, but that was not the time or place to go into the intricacies even if I'd had the space. Though Marti Brom has cut four albums for Finland's Goofin' Records, Jonathan Strong revived the dormant **Ripsaw Records**, a DC rockabilly (and more) powerhouse in the 80s and 90s, especially for the occasion of her last one, **Not For Nothin'**, a farewell tribute to Washington, DC, where she and Major Bob had been living since he was recalled to the USAF post 9/11. While the world owes Goofin's Pete Hakonen a huge debt of gratitude for his support of Marti, I owe Strong an apology for over-simplifying her discography.

- Strong was one of several of you who pressed me on the first single I ever bought, and as I've come clean to them, I might as well admit publicly that it was **Danny & The Juniors' At The Hop**. Hey, it could have been a lot worse.

- Had I thought to ask Marc Bristol of **Blue Suede News**, who, as a Pacific Northwest and rockabilly diehard, had a vested interest in Ravenna & The Magnetics ("I actually reviewed **Rockabilly Fools** in the first issue, even though it'd been out for six years, because [The Magnetics] certainly were Seattle's great contribution to the revival"), I would have avoided what may (or may not) have been a couple of minor errors in last month's cover story. In *BSN* #40 (Fall 1997), Dennis DeWitt interviewed Magnetics' guitarist/leader (and Freda Johnson's husband) Tom Berghan, now a Baroque lute player who contradicts the **Rockabilly Fools/Texas To Tennessee** liner notes, which held that Johnson later sang in a couple of other bands, saying, "After she left The Magnetics she never sang in a band again or did any live performing." However, he also says that "Freda and I moved to New Orleans to play the blues," which implies the contrary. There's a fairly strong revisionist whiff in the interview (as he dissolved the band, saying she "left" it is somewhat disingenuous), and Bristol's recollection is that Berghan and Johnson were in different bands in New Orleans. Who knows? Incidentally, there are no hi-res pictures of Freda Johnson/Ravenna to be had, which Part Records weren't too happy about, but I thought last month's cover pic turned out pretty well considering (it looked terrific in the PDF version).

- Bristol also pointed out that while **Ronnie Weiser's** ancestry was German/Jewish, he and his family emigrated from Italy, and he has an Italian, not German, accent.

- British music equipment manufacturer Audio-Technica's survey of 1000 "music fans" made some headlines with a couple of its results. One was that 40% of those surveyed couldn't remember when they last purchased a physical CD, though 20% had downloaded music in the last week. The other was that a full 49% believed that it was acceptable to download music free of charge. Rather more heartening, at least to the ink-stained wretch crowd, was that 60% said that they would read reviews before deciding whether to purchase music and more than 50% said that a bad review would discourage them. So far so good, but then came a bit of a bombshell—"More than two thirds (67.3%) of people confirmed they had read music reviews and thought that they could do a better job than professional music critics."

- PR BS of the Month: while the headline '**Chelsea Bain Teams Up With Coca-Cola To Perform At Upcoming NASCAR Events**' translates in 3CM speak as 'Delete Me Right Now,' this fluffery caught my eye "**Rockin' That Trailer** is the first single from Bain's forthcoming album, **All-American Country Girl**, which is due for release in 2013. The single also captures some of what makes Bain's style so unique and alluring among modern country artists—Bain frequently combines big rock guitars and textbook rock attitude with her more traditional leanings, for a captivating, head-bobbing audio thrill ride encompassing a lifetime of musical influences." That's 'All-American Country'? Stone the bleedin' crows. And where do they get "unique," let alone "alluring," from?

- A PR email about a video release from a former *American Idol* contestant, one **Deanna Brown**, contained the chilling words "The video was shot on location in the US Virgin Islands." This, as **Kelly Willis** might have warned Brown, from her own early 90s experience with MCA, is shorthand for "let's all go on vacation, Deanna's treat!" Videos are among the many recoupables that artists eventually have to pay for, and, with her albums not selling worth a damn to offset the expense, that video left Willis in the hole for \$250,000. Fortunately, MCA decided to drop her, which meant writing off the debt.

- And they call me a curmudgeon. This is a review, on savingcountrymusic.com, by 'The Triggerman' of an album by someone called Justin Moore, which makes me very glad that I don't get sent any Nashville product. "**Outlaws Like Me** is the worst country music album I have ever heard, EVER. Worse than Taylor Swift, worse than Trace Adkins, even worse than Billy Ray Cyrus... I can't even believe this album exists. Literally, when listening to it, I had to double check to make sure the whole thing wasn't a joke. Without making any changes to the music, you could repackage this into a parody album, and it would fly. And not only fly, it would be a damn good one."

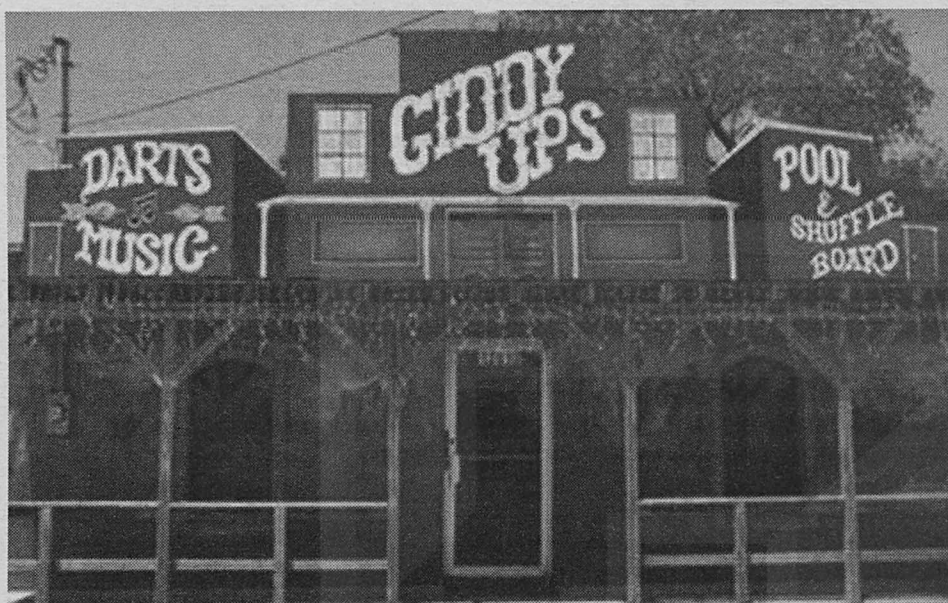
- You may have heard that a legendary call sign, **KOKE-FM**, was resurrected this July. Well, sort of. In 1974, *Billboard* named KOKE, which went off the air 25 years ago, the most innovative station in the country, but, unless I was really unlucky the few times I tried tuning in, the first word that comes to mind to describe the new version, headed by two former KVET hosts, is certainly not "innovative." Tracks I could identify were Jason Boland's wretched *Comal County Blues*, George Strait's horribly perky version of Guy Clark's *Texas Cookin'* and The Pistol Annies' loathsome *Hell On Heels*, not exactly material that would induce me to preset the station, or even tune in ever again. come to that. According to Internet chatter, Bob Cole and his colleagues started out with the gift of a thumb drive containing 600 country, rock and pop songs! This zombie version of KOKE gets beaten into the dirt by KOOP. In fact, when I got too pissed off to listen any more, I picked up Jason Eady singing *AM Country Heaven* ("FM country hell") on KVET, a welcome spin but rich in irony.

- Thinking of legendary radio, **Gilbert Klein** has a book out, of which more next month, called **Fat Chance** about Santa Cruz's KFAT ("We were the last gasp of the sixties and the birth of Americana music, but was America ready for us?"). Klein pointed me to kfat.com, "the only dead radio station you can listen to on your computer."

† SUSANNA CLARK

Many people expressed concern about Guy Clark's health, but sadly it was his wife of 40 years who was in even worse shape. A former art school teacher and painter (the cover of Willie Nelson's **Stardust** is her work), Clark, who initiated the couple's move to Nashville in 1971, was a successful songwriter herself, and also, as far as I know, the only person with whom Townes Van Zandt ever co-wrote (*Heavenly Houseboat Blues*). I only met her a couple three times and the only real visit we had was rather tense as, a little out of it, she sat down with Troy Campbell and myself and proceeded to harangue us on the uselessness, pretentiousness and insularity of Austin singer-songwriters. I'm not saying she was entirely wrong, but Troy and I were perhaps not the most sympathetic audience to such a broad condemnation of our community. Born March 11, 1939, in Augusta, TX, Susanna Clark died in her sleep during the night of July 18th/19th, aged 73.





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** Why did they bother? * Piss on this noise

YOU KNOW, IT DON'T SEEM RIGHT

So, I started out thinking about Songs That Should Never Be Covered By Anybody Else Ever Again For Any Reason Whatsoever, which is a pretty fuckin' huge subject—I'm sure every one of you has some very definite opinions on this one, and I'll maybe come back to it down the road. However, when I started out with obvious candidates, I got sidetracked by a striking oddity about a very early candidate.

On **Never Look Back**, Tom Gillam asked *Where Is Bobby Gentry?* This, on one level, is a rather good question, nobody knows for sure, not even her fan club, though the general consensus is that the JD Salinger of country music has been living somewhere in LA since she dropped out of sight in 1979. However, there is one problem—that's not how you spell Roberta Streeter's stage name. Jill Sobule asked the same question as Gillam, on **California Years**, but got it right, **Where Is Bobbie Gentry?**

Then there's her most famous, million-selling, multiple Grammy-winning song, which knocked The Beatles off the top off the charts. Do a search for *Ode To Billie Joe* and you'll get almost 200 results, covers by everyone from Ray Charles to Megan Mullally. However, a search for 'Ode To Billy Joe' will net you another 150. This might be forgivable on the self-release level of, say, Jean Synodinos, whose version was actually rather good, if misspelled, but you'd think someone being paid to work on a Frank Sinatra or Tammy Wynette album would take the trouble to check the song title and writer credit against ASCAP's database, but like many others, those albums list Bobby and/or Billy.

Though Gentry, for many years, refused to shed any light on OTBJ, that did not stop everyone and his/her uncle/aunt having a theory about it, though if you go to, say, the Songfacts website, which offers dozens of competing and contradictory analyses, these offerings are peppered with mentions of 'Bobby' and 'Billy,' often in the same screed, which does little to enhance their credibility.

Of course, the most glaring screw up was the 1976 movie *Ode To Billy Joe*, which not only spelled McAllister's name wrong but, with no evidence whatsoever, posited that his suicide followed a drunken homosexual encounter. However, while I thought Gentry never offered any explanations, in *Invisible Empire*, Griel Marcus quotes her, with no attribution (other than "years later") as telling *Billboard's* Fred Bronson, "The song is sort of a study in unconscious cruelty. But everybody seems more concerned with what was thrown off the bridge than they are with the thoughtlessness of the people expressed in the song. What was thrown off the bridge really isn't that important."

Now you may think that in the great scheme of things, 'y' for 'ie' is no big thing, any more than such liner note perennials as 'accordion' or 'saxophone,' and I freely admit I've seen worse, a favorite being a long defunct Austin music magazine's two page feature on Patsy Klein. Still, whenever I see 'Bobby' Gentry or *Ode To 'Billy' Joe*, it really chaps my hide. Not to mention that Gentry wrote dozens of other fantastic songs that nobody can be bothered to revive. Incidentally, the Tallahatchie Bridge collapsed in 1972.

JC

MY DARLING CLEMENTINE How Do You Plead?

(Five Head *****.5)

Hang about in this bidness long enough and albums will start to come round again like boomerangs, you really feel your age when someone's long ago debut returns as 'The Early Years.' For instance, if you'd been a music writer in 1968, by 2008 you could have reviewed four distinct releases of Johnny Cash's **Live At Folsom Prison**. However, Michael Weston King & Lou Dalglish, aka My Darling Clementine, have thrown three different versions of **How Do You Plead?** at me over rather less than 40 years, three to be exact. In 3CM #148/237 (May 2009), I reviewed their barebones self release, and in #182/271 (March 2012) the remastered and much more elegant UK release on Drumfire, which featured one added track. Now I have the US release, which adds yet another new track, George Harrison's *It's All Too Much*, plus a demo of the opening *By A Thread*. If the project got off to a slow start, it's certainly made up for it this year.

Ask most any American, or Brit come to that, to name the best ever British country album and the response is likely to be 'Say what?' British music writers would probably name Elvis Costello's **Almost Blue**, but I have a problem with this as it was a) an anomaly and b) all covers. I'd favor almost any of Wes McGehee's Tex-Mex flavored albums, particularly **Airmail** and **Landing Lights**, or even the satirical recordings of the all-star Mark II version of The Hank Wangford Band. However, there's no denying that **Almost Blue** was Britain's version of **Modern Sounds In Country & Western Music** or **Sweetheart Of The Rodeo**, turning a generation, up to then indifferent, if not hostile, on to country music.

"Lou and I were, and still are, huge fans of Costello," King says, "but that album opened up a new world of music for me. From there on it was Harlan Howard, Merle Haggard, George Jones, Gram all the way. It took Lou a little longer as she was still entrenched in Jazz and Pop in the 80s and 90s but living with me, she had no choice but to listen to country." Dalglish adds, "When I heard **Almost Blue**, I realized there was country music out there that wasn't twee and embarrassing—having said that, I've come to love the twee and embarrassing quite a lot!"

King first made a name for himself in the 90s as leader of alt-country band The Good Sons ("My ideal was to try and write songs in the vein of Townes Van Zandt as if performed by The Jayhawks"), but since 1999 he's risen steadily through the ranks of British singer-songwriters. Meanwhile, Dalglish, with four albums of her own, had a totally separate jazz club career. "This meant we hardly ever saw each other. As Michael was alt country and I was jazz-pop, there wasn't much chance of us doing the same tours. When our daughter came along, only one of us could really be doing any touring, so that tended to be Michael. As his writing started to ease away from Alt country into solo singer songwriter, mine started to veer away from jazz-pop towards a more country folk feel. Our genres had begun to merge and it struck us that it might make good sense to work together instead of separately. Suddenly it was the most natural thing in the world. Before we knew it we had an album full of original songs which echoed our lives perfectly."

Almost Blue notwithstanding, King & Dalglish went much further back for inspiration. "There's no country rock in this. There's no Americana. With this record, the influence has been pre-Gram Parsons," says King. "George & Tammy, Dolly & Porter, Loretta & Conway, Johnny & June, this was the well from which we drank. These are songs written by 'older' people for 'older' people... people in their 40s and 50s who have been through life, and all its ups and downs."

Plans to record in Nashville ran into financial reality, just as well if you ask me, and the album was recorded in London with veteran musicians, most of whom I saw in various pub rock bands back in the day, playing concept-appropriate instruments like Martin Belmont's 1963 Stratocaster and Fender V1 baritone guitars, Geraint Watkins' 1966 Hammond A100 organ and drummer Jim Russell's 1967 Ludwig Super Classic kit. Producing was Neil Brockbank, famed mainly (and rightly) for his production of Nick Lowe's albums since 1994's **The Impossible Bird**.

Reviewing the British release, Duncan Warwick of the UK's *Country Music People* concluded, "Ladies and gentlemen, I give you the best British country record of original material—ever!" This is an interesting formulation, as it ducks direct comparison with **Almost Blue**, but I have no problem taking out the phrase "of original material" because that's the element that makes this superior to Costello's album. That and the question mark—have you ever noticed how often song titles that are obviously questions fail to include the ecphoneme?

JC



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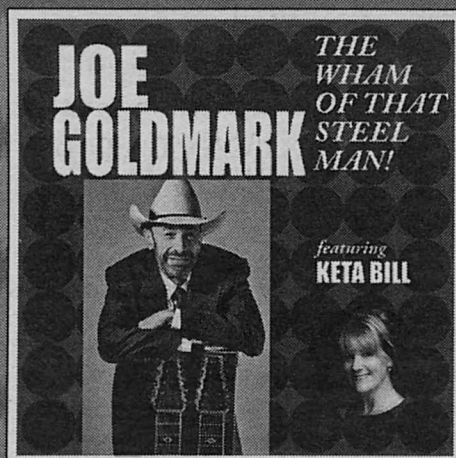
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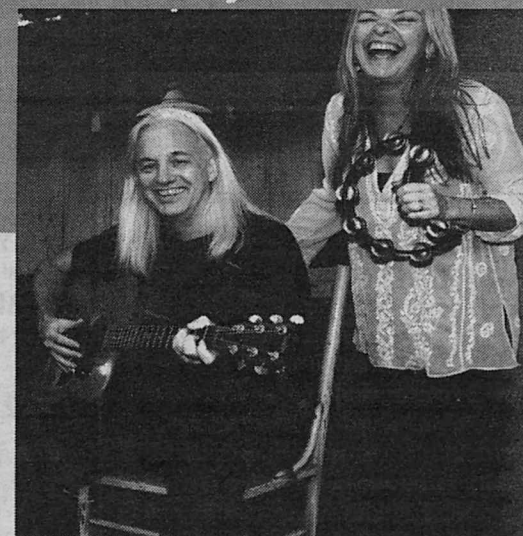
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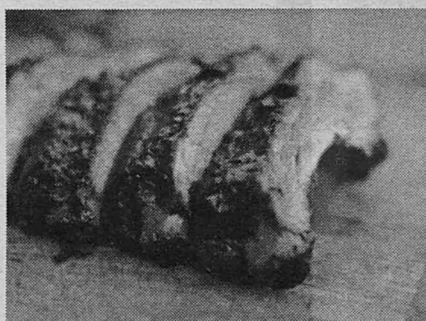
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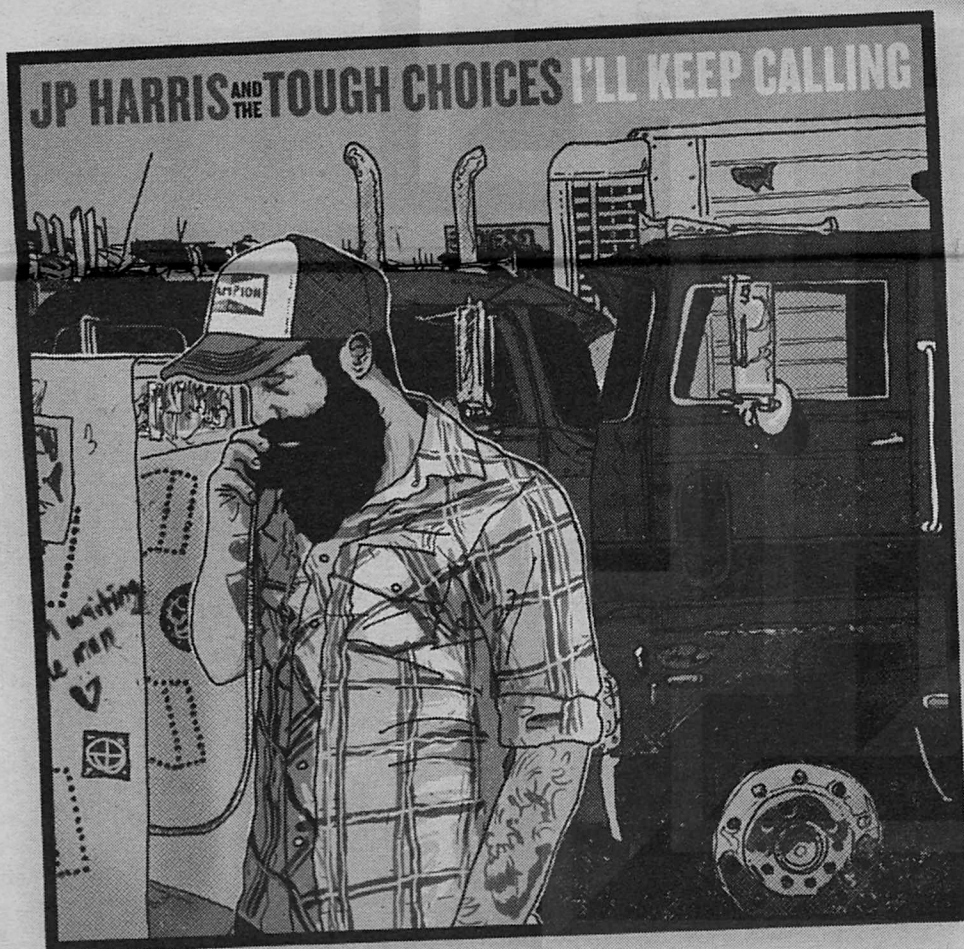
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